



**BRITISH
MOUNT KENNEDY
NW FACE EXPEDITION
2004**

**YUKON
CANADA**

RICH CROSS AND JON BRACEY

Supported by:

Finance

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Rab
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BRITISH MOUNT KENNEDY NW FACE EXPEDITION 2004

EXPEDITION REPORT

Compiled by Rich Cross

SUMMARY

In late spring 2004 Rich Cross and Jon Bracey visited the Kluane National Park, Yukon Territories, NW Canada. Their objective was the 2000m NW Face of Mount Kennedy (4234m) which had not received a complete ascent to this point. Over 3 days in mainly OK weather the pair climbed the face following the Jack Tackle/Jack Roberts line, then finished direct on new ground through the upper rock band. A descent was made onto the lower Cathedral Glacier on the South side of the mountain, from where an air pickup took them back to Kluane Lake.

TEAM MEMBERS

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EXPEDITION DIARY

- 1 May Flew Heathrow to Vancouver. Overnight stop in Vancouver.
- 2 Flew Vancouver to Whitehorse. Arrive early pm. Expedition food shopping.
- 3 Taxi to Kluane Lake 3 hrs. Stopped at Ranger station in Haines en route.
- 4 Flew into Dusty glacier 5pm. Sun/strong N wind.
- 5 3.5 hour ski to face. Scoped route and camped. Sun/cloud.
- 6 Started climbing at 4.30am. Bivvied at 5pm. Threatening cloudy start then sun.
- 7 Started climbing at 6.30am. Bivvied at 6.30pm. V cloudy start then inversion.
- 8 Climbing by 7am. At summit 4.30pm. Descended to Cathedral glacier. V windy
- 9 Away by 9am and walked to a flat pickup area by 11.30am. No pickup. Sunny.
- 10 Waited for pickup. Flyby but no landing due to mist.
- 11 Descended further 7km to lower Cathedral glacier. Pickup at 11.45am. Sunny.
- 12 Left Kluane Lake 9am changed flights to Vancouver. Hitched to Squamish pm
- 13-19 Rock climbing at Squamish in the sun!
- 20 8pm flight back to UK.
- 21 Arrived back in Sheffield pm.

PLANNING

Planning a trip to the Yukon is a simple affair with minimal red tape and easy communications, making it an ideal venue for low stress trips. Rapid access means that trips can be run over short timescales, given good weather. The main things to consider are:

- **Travel.** There are two principal routes into the Yukon, either through Alaska or Canada. We chose the latter, which involved a flight to Vancouver, then an internal flight to Whitehorse, the capital of the Yukon. From here a three-hour taxi ride takes you to Kluane Lake, from where a charter plane takes you into the Kluane National Park and the glacier of your choice.
- **Accommodation.** There are cheap hostels and hotels in Whitehorse, and a climber's bunkhouse by the airstrip at Kluane Lake.
- **Permits.** Mountaineering permits are needed to enter the National Park, as are landing permits for each aircraft landing. If you are in the area for more than 2 weeks it is cheaper to get an annual permit at \$56 CAD dollars per person. Landing permits are \$30 CAD.
- **Grants.** These are available to suitable expeditions through the BMC and MEF, there are also several other organisations that may be able to offer support: Nick Estcourt Award, Polartec Award, and Alpinist B Team Award etc.
- **Visa.** Not required for British Citizens.
- **Other.** Food and equipment is available in Whitehorse. Gas is sometimes in short supply in Whitehorse but Coleman fuel for MSR stoves is available.

TRAVEL

We flew Air Canada, with a stopover in Vancouver. The Vancouver to Whitehorse leg is very expensive and in peak season another local airline called Air North operate Vancouver to Whitehorse. It may be cheaper to buy a return to Vancouver (around £250) and get the V/W leg separately over the NET. This was suggested to us by some locals on our way back, as we were complaining about the transatlantic 8hr leg costing the same as the internal 3hr leg. Baggage allowance on both flights was excellent at 64kg per person.

The easiest way to get from Whitehorse to Kluane Lake is to hire a taxi. The best deal (surprisingly) in town is a company called Royal Limos owned by a fur trapper called Woody. You pay \$250 CAD each way but this does get you a stretch limo complete with drinks cabinets etc! Woody will collect you from the airport, wait while you do your food shopping for the trip, and wait in Haines whilst you register with the Ranger service. No stress. The price is for the whole limo and it can take 4 plus gear. Normal taxis are more expensive. There are also about 3 buses a week but these only take you as far as Haines Junction which is still 45mins short of Kluane Lake.

We used 'Icefields Discovery' to get onto the glacier. This is a small outfit with just one plane owned by a Welsh expat called Andy Williams. Flights onto the Dusty glacier cost \$1200 CAD return for the whole deal. Andy is a super experienced and cautious pilot, he's very old, and got that way for a reason. Weather can hold teams at bay in Kluane for several days at a time, and likewise on the pickups on the way back out. Patience is required as Andy does all the flying himself and it can be a popular service with Mount Logan teams/ski tourers etc.

ACCOMMODATION

In Whitehorse we stayed in a friendly hostel called Jeckyl on Hyde. This cost \$10 CAD per person per night, bed only. It's situated at one end of town and is well known by everyone we spoke to, all the taxi drivers etc knew of it. There is one other backpackers hostel in town called the Bees Knees, which is a few doors away. At Kluane Lake there is a bunkhouse owned and run by a French family. Manu is a piano bar singer/pianist who lives/works in Lyon during the winter, and the Yukon in summer. Manu built the bunkhouse himself and there are several levels of accommodation available ranging from a \$3 shed to \$20 private rooms. There is also a well-equipped kitchen and hot showers.

OTHER LOGISTICS

- Food for the trip can be bought from one of several large supermarkets in Whitehorse. We planned on 12 days hill food and 10 base camp food to give us good flexibility and comfort margins for our 3-week trip. It was found that the cost of living in Canada was quite cheap in general, for example, all the food for our stay in the mountains cost only £138.
- Last minute gear can be found in Whitehorse if necc, where there is a well stocked specialist shop and a general camping shop. The camping store sold Coleman fuel, but we found it at half the price in a DIY superstore called Canada Tire. Screw on gas (for MSR burners) was very hard to come by and after a lot of hunting we found what was possibly the last few cylinders in town gathering dust in Canada Tire.
- There is an excellent specialist book/map shop in Whitehorse with every sheet to the Yukon and beyond, with expert staff. The maps we bought were basic affairs compiled by the Canadian government, costing \$12 CAD each.
- We took a sat phone in to the mountains with us, which we hired in Whitehorse from a company called Total North Communications. This worked on the Global Star system and the handset was reasonably small and light, so we took it and a spare battery up the route with us so we could call for a pickup on the backside of Kennedy. Hiring the phone in Whitehorse turned out to be cheaper and less hassle than taking one from the UK, and the company carry good stocks that may be reserved on the NET.
- Permits can be arranged by contacting the Kluane Park ranger station by email.

WEATHER

The weather in the Yukon is notoriously bad, and it can snow/storm for days at a time even in the prime season. The weather blows in most commonly from the south off the Gulf of Alaska, bringing miserable clag and snowfall but moderate temperatures. The other predominant weather system is the Northerly airflow that can bring savage storms, high winds, extreme cold and heavy snowfall. Be prepared to wait even to get into the mountains as Andy wont fly even in slightly dodgy weather. Also be prepared to make up your own mind about when to get on the hill, as the weather can be so temperamental and localised that sat phone forecasts from Andy can be unreliable and irrelevant. Its wild out there!

Having said all that I think we were very lucky. During our trip we had mixed sun/cloud and only one savage day (summit day) when it was really windy and cold.

GEAR

We climbed as an alpine style pair with a very lightweight approach. We carefully considered our tactics for this huge face as it was obviously going to require at least two bivouacs (Jack Tackle had used a portaledge when he was on the face), but we had been told there were no ledges and the hard lower section was severely affected by spindrift. This led us to work with Outdoor Designs and Al Powell to create a specialist bivvy tent. This weighed only 1.2kg but could be hung vertically on sitting bivvies to give us some headspace and allow cooking even in bad weather. On the route it worked brilliantly, and over the back of the mountain whilst waiting for our pickup it could be pitched as a tent on the glacier and proved quite comfy.

We also had specialist down bags, originally made by RAB for our Foraker trip in 2003. These have a water resistant shell and liner, cope with -15°C and weight 1.4kg. We used a homemade hanging stove that worked really well. This was a Trangia pan drilled to make a windshield, suspended by bathplug chains, with a titanium Outdoor Designs gas stove bolted onto the base. Combined with a titanium Outdoor Designs pan this made an excellent lightweight cooking system.

Other stuff used was as you would expect for cold weather multiday mixed climbing: Merino/synthetic base layers, fleece/pile midlayers, Event/Goretex shells, down jackets, all by RAB and Srayway. Outdoor Designs gloves and gaiters etc. Berghaus 50l sacks (stripped down Cyclops Lites, 700grams). Scarpa Vega boots. Outdoor Designs (Goretex Exchange Lite) tents for basecamp, very breathable. Two 60m x 8mm ropes (Beal Ice Lines through the Lyon Award) and one spare (Mammut Revelation 9.2mm). Full rock rack with pegs and screws (excellent new Laser Sonic screws from Petzl/Charlet). DMM ice tools and crampons.

THE HISTORY

Mount Kennedy is a beautiful mountain with Himalayan scale ridges and faces. The NW face is one of the most challenging in the Yukon, being 2000m high with some very uncompromising terrain. The lower half is the crux section comprising a steep 1000m wall, above this an ice field leads to another steep 300m rock band, from where another ice field leads to the summit.

The most obvious line on the face by far is the Jack Tackle/Jack Roberts line (A Pair of Jacks) climbed on the third attempt in 1996. The pair spent 9/10 days on the face with a portaledge, enduring cold weather, arduous hauling and very thin ice conditions to produce one of Canada's hardest alpine routes. Bad weather and a dropped crampon forced a halt some 300/400m short of the top, so a lengthy abseil retreat down the north ridge ensued, and the face remained unclimbed. The route was widely acclaimed as an outstanding effort nevertheless, being sustained at a high standard for the first 1000m, with pitches up to M7 and WI5+, up hostile terrain exposed to avalanches from the snowfields above.

In 2001 Andy Cave and Mick Fowler went to attempt the face but suffered bad snow conditions. Instead they made the first alpine style ascent of the immense North Ridge, bounding the left hand side of the face. There have been no other known attempts. To us, as to Tackle/Roberts, the face presented a fantastic challenge that would hopefully give some hard quality mixed/ice climbing, and a very committing alpine style adventure.

THE ROUTE

We landed on the Dusty glacier after an extremely rough flight through strong winds but clear skies, during which we were both convinced the end was nigh... Landing on the Kennedy glacier was apparently out of the question due to a surge (this was where the Tackle and Fowler teams had their basecamps), so as the planes engines faded we found ourselves some 6 miles from the face, and feeling very lonely. Jon looked like he needed a sit down after the stomach churning flight, so I set to work on a shovel up for our base camp. It was a bizarre feeling suddenly being dumped in the middle of this huge glacier, such immense calm and not a soul in sight, so different from the Kahiltna scene. After a few hours of hard labour we had a perfect storm proof base, and with promising skies decided to sort our gear for a recce the next day.

Next morning, the feeling of isolation hit hard as we stepped out of the snow hole onto the vast glacial plain. Threatening skies brought indecision, but the face was out of sight and we at least wanted to see it for ourselves, and best take the gear also just in case... Nearly four hours skiing later we were under the face. Strangely it didn't look quite like the photos, and that's when we realised how enormous it was, even a km away it was grossly foreshortened! With the day drawing on we decided to do some more homework and settled down with the telescope. This did nothing to calm our nerves but we were hooked, this face had to be climbed, next day we would definitely go for it, that's what we were here for...

Our previous photo studies had hinted at potential for independent lines, but on closer acquaintance the face seemed to be remarkably devoid of obvious natural features apart from the fantastic central ice smears taken by Tackle/Roberts. Steep overlapping boilerplate slabs guard much of the lower face with only limited possible breaches. To us the choice seemed obvious, the Pair of Jacks was holding much more ice than during the Tackle ascent (as apparent from their photos), and it deserved to be finished.

At 4.30 the next day we started apprehensively under cloudy skies, but decided to just get on with it and see what happened. A steep shrund pitch and some 60-degree moving together saw us to the base of the lower wall in good time. The real stuff started here. After 40m of enjoyable mixed climbing I came to thin ice drooling down steep boilerplate slabs. Through the scope we couldn't quite tell if this section would link through, so I was elated to find it did and decided to stretch the pitch. After 4m of delicate tip toeing I rounded a bulge and saw icy slabs stretching far above. Not sure if the ice would thicken enough for a belay, I hung around with an uneasy feeling in my stomach and had the classic mental debate. 'If you think it do it', was the motto that won through and an awkward down climb saw me belayed back on better ice and apologising to Jon for my amateur behaviour. Seconds later a familiar terrifying sound filled the air and a single falling rock pounded the icy slabs above the bulge and just cleared my belay. This was the only rock fall on the entire route, and one of the most memorable parts of the climb for me.

The rest of the first day involved some excellent ice and mixed up to Scottish 6, with one very hard section of mixed Scottish 7. This was a variation to the Tackle line and proved to be the crux of the route, up an exhausting steep groove line filled with unstable snow mushrooms. By 5pm we had reached the site of Tackles last portaledge camp, where we found the ledge and haul bag frozen into the ice (from here they launched out without them). A couple of hours hard chopping gave us a delightful bum cheek sitting bivvy ledge on a 55-degree ice ramp.

Next day we were off by 6.30am climbing mainly ice up to Scottish 5/6 to the lip of the lower wall, from where a brilliant mixed section led through to the first ice field. As usual this proved to be much longer and more laborious than it looked, and after what felt like years we arrived at the base of the second rock band. We bivvied here on a similarly uncomfortable perch but enjoyed a spectacular cloud inversion as the sun set.

The second rock band was all new ground and we decided to follow the general line of a broad depression containing ice runnels and delicate mixed terrain. Five pitches up to Scottish 6 mixed were needed to break through onto the top ice field, and our ticket to the summit. Nothings ever easy though, and after 60m of 60 degree snow I was struggling to find a belay, forced to dig deep for ice. 4 feet down and all I had was a mountainside of buried sugar, I suddenly began to feel uneasy. A bucket seat 1600m up seemed like an unpleasant option, so I dropped one of my ropes to Jon so he could tie them together. The rope provided psychological protection for this runner-less 120m pitch, but I managed to reach an isolated rock outcrop and the makings of a belay. The upper section of the North Ridge was eventually reached after more 100m pitches of steep snow, and our reward was a savage wind that chilled us to the bone. Three more pitches and some moving together up the ridge saw us finally on the summit at 4.30pm.

The wind made lingering impossible, so after a few snaps we headed off down the west ridge to the upper Cathedral glacier over straightforward ground, to a sheltered bivvy below a col. Next day we continued down the Cathedral glacier passing some very crevassed terrain via a central valley system, where the slots were compressed and narrow. This lucky (or good!) route finding took us safely to a flat pickup spot by 11.30 am. Unfortunately it was claggy in Kluane Lake so Andy couldn't take off, yet we were in blistering sun! We only really started to get bored by the next day so that was fine, and it was sun all round so we would definitely get picked up. Andy came for us sure enough, but as he was coming in to land a solitary wisp of cloud drifted across the glacier and he had to abort. After three more tries he flew back to Kluane, and minutes later the mist drifted away leaving us staring at the sun! We were now practically out of food...

Deciding we couldn't leave things to chance, next morning we descended another 7km onto the lower Cathedral glacier from where we were collected at 11.45 am. We were flown back to Kluane via a stopover to strip our basecamp, but unfortunately couldn't collect our skis/telescope from the bottom of the face.

In all we had spent 7 days in the mountains, climbed over 40 pitches, and summited exactly a week after leaving the UK. With nearly 2 weeks to kill we changed our flights for an earlier return home, but managed to sneak in 7 days climbing at Squamish on the way. Splitter cracks in the sun, a perfect end to a perfect trip.

OTHER TEAMS/NEW ROUTES

There were no other teams climbing in the area at the same time. The NW face of Kennedy holds potential for some very hard mixed routes to the left of the Pair of Jacks on the lower wall, but will involve hard sections on blank slabs that will need ice build up. To the right there is a line up a broad couloir cutting the extreme right of the face, but this is very exposed to icefall from the seracs that cap the right hand side of the wall. We saw a couple of impressive avalanches down this. The best, most natural line on the face is definitely the one we followed. We were not in the area long enough to scope the potential on neighbouring peaks.

BUDGET

Expenses

Flights	1576
Glacier flights	525
Other travel	239
Permits	70
Accommodation	90
Camera film	77
Mountain food	138
Food	105
Miscellaneous	108
Fuel	45
Sat phone hire	250
Insurance	475

Total 3698

Income

MEF Grant	575
BMC Gant	1100
Personal contribution	2023

Total 3698

THANKS

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Mount Everest Foundation
British Mountaineering Council

For financial assistance
For financial assistance

RAB (Rich) For providing excellent technical clothing and sleeping bags
Sprayway For providing excellent technical clothing (Jon)
Outdoor Designs For providing excellent gaiters, gloves, stoves/pans and hats. Also for the single skin basecamp tent they provided, but most of all for the prototype bivvy tent. This was a new product to test, worked brilliantly and was crucial to our success.
DMM For excellent ice tools and crampons (and rope).
Scarpa For Vega boots (supplied previous year).
Berghaus For excellent rucksacks (supplied previous year).
Lyon Equipment For giving us a Lyon Award equipment grant. This was used to obtain Petzl/Charlet gear such as the excellent new laser sonic ice screws and the new myo headtorches.
Rocca Ropes For abseil cord.
Outside As usual, for bits and bobs.

We are also grateful for the help of the following people who gave advice:

Jack Tackle, Andy Cave, Mick Fowler, Brian Hall, Paul Ramsden

METRIC/METRIQUE



BASECAMP.

APPROACH

KENNEDY

GLACIER

ICE

2798

2200

2000

2600

2400

2400

4000

2600

2200

89

01

700

99

98

97

96

95

94

93

92

91

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For Royal Limos transfer service email Andy Williams and he will pass on the number.

The compilers of this report and the members of the expedition agree that any or all of this report may be copied for the purposes of private research.