

FREE KNOWLEDGE EXPEDITION

ALASKA 2004

Index

Content	Page
Expedition Summary	1
Team Members	1
Expedition Details	3
Thanks	6
Budget	



Expedition Summary

The objectives of our expedition were the free ascent of "The Knowledge on the North Buttress of Mount Hunter (14,4ft) followed by a new route on the South East Face of Mount Foraker (17,406ft). Continual unsettled weather meant that despite attempting both routes we made minimal progress barely making it off the glacier. You win some you lose some and we lost big style.

Expedition Members

Ian Parnell. 35 year old Brit writer and photographer. Numerous winter, alpine season and expeditions to India, Nepal, Patagonia, Greenland and 4 trips to Alaska.

John Varco. 30 year old Yank carpenter. Leading crack climber and alpinist with numerous ascents including first ascent of South West Ridge of Annapurna III (7555m).

Expedition Details

This was my fourth trip to the Central Alaskan Range following 3 successful previous trips (New route on Mount Hunter, new route on mini moonflower, new route on Denali, second ascent of Denali Diamond and repeat of Moonflower Buttress). This year we arrived on the Kahiltna Glacier slightly earlier than usual on the 4th May hoping to have time to acclimatise and then be ready when the slightly warmer weather started from mid May onwards. My previous trips had all found a relatively settled period around the 3rd and 4th week of May.

Unfortunately on arrival it quickly became obvious that conditions were all ready much warmer than usual, with temperatures already approaching those of June and summer. Hoping things would cool down we headed up to the 14,000ft camp on the classic West Buttress route of Denali. We stayed here for several days both of us scoring very highly in blood/oxygen saturation tests being held at the medical tent. While acclimatisation was obviously going well the weather wasn't with no settled periods and snow most days. Bearing in mind our high ambitions we felt we needed a forecast that at least gave a hint of a settled period (the Foraker route would require a minimum of 3-4 days good weather and the Hunter one 6 plus days).

Eventually more out of frustration than any real hope we skied up to the North Buttress of Hunter and climbed the initial easy pitches, dragging up a haul bag of

provisions. We then retreated for a refuel back at base camp. At which point it dumped snow for 36 hours. Climbing a route on Hunter in traditional anything goes style might have been possible but to pull off free leads of what would be at least Scottish VIII ground wasn't possible unless the face cleared of spindrift and it stopped snowing. After the weather showed no sign of improving we returned to the face and rescued our haulbag.

Eventually blue sky broke through and we set off for Foraker, we hoped that because this route would be faster we might get a chance. We camped about half a mile from the face and spent the day observing the many seracs that threaten the face. I had looked at this potential route in 2002 with Kenton Cool and we had decided against an attempt due to the dangerous nature of this first third of the route. This year things looked a little better and we opted to set off that night. Leaving at 11pm we found the approach a little more involved than expected and eventually reached close to the base of the route at 4am. This was crunch time however as we were deliberating snow flakes began to fall and so I opted to call a halt to our attempt.

We were unable to make any more attempts on either route due to continuing poor weather. I do feel however that in the right conditions, with settled weather and crucially the right frame of mind the South East face of Foraker presents an exceptional challenge, probably the best one left unclimbed to date in the central Alaskan range. I hope to return at a future date.

Thanks

Our thanks for the grant support from the Mount Everest Foundation, UK Sport and the British Mountaineering Council. We also received valuable equipment support; many thanks to Arc'teryx, Crux and Mountain Hardwear.

Budget

In		Out	
Flights	£1400	MEF	£350
Air taxi	£550	BMC	£300
Food	£400	Personal contributions	£1525(x2)
Peak Fees	£200		
Taxis and Buses	£210		
Equipment	£150		
Insurance	£500		
Accommodation	£240		
Fuel	£50		
Total	£3700		£3700