

British Buckskin Expedition 2005

Supported by:

Mount Everest Foundation

British Mountaineering Council

UK Sports Council

AIMS OF THE EXPEDITION

We intended to make the first ascents of:

1. North Buttress of the Mooses Tooth
2. North Eat Face of Bear Tooth.

THE TEAM

Paul Ramsden (36), British, Health and Safety Advisor.

Rich Cross (33), British, Mountain Guide.

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PREPARATION

This is a very straightforward area to climb in. The area is a National Park and there is a small fee is payable to the National Park Service. This is an entry fee as no climbing permit is required.

There is no need to take any food or fuel from the UK as all can be bought in Anchorage or Wasilla. The fuel of choice is White Gas, which is available through whatever ski flight service you use.

This expedition was originally planned for the spring season but due to various personal problems for myself and my climbing partners we decided to delay the expedition to the autumn. This was a risky

decision as relatively little mountaineering has occurred in the Central Alaska Region during this period. There have however been several notable successes one actually taking place on the East Face of the Mooses Tooth so we thought it would be worth a try

The theory was that warm summer winter would strip off the hazardous snow mushrooms so common from these faces and the wet summer weather would allow for the formation of superb ephemeral ice lines!

TRAVEL TO BASE CAMP

The flight from Gatwick to Anchorage was straight forward with a short stop in Minnesota. Arriving in Anchorage late we stayed at one of the many motels near the airport. In the morning we had planned to arranged a pick up with Denali Overland who run a shuttle bus up too Talkeetna. However local enquires showed that it was cheaper to hire a car for the duration of the expedition rather than use the expensive shuttle service. This was quite a surprise but cars are cheap out of season.

We stopped in Wasilla at Carr's supermarket to do all our expedition food shopping. Everything you might want and more is available.

We arrived in Talkeetna in the afternoon, delivered direct to the TAT office. They have a bunk house her where you can stay for free before your flight into the mountains.

That afternoon we checked in at the Ranger Station to pick up our permit. When they realise you are half competent this is pretty low key.

Prior to our arrival there had been four weeks of storm and heavy snowfall. A Russian team were stranded on the Upper Ruth Glacier in bottomless powder and a group of American climbers had been waiting in town for eight days to fly into the mountains.

Fortunately the next day dawned fine and we were able to fly in straight after the yanks.

Our plan was to land on the Buckskin Glacier but our pilot Paul Roderick of Talkeetna Air Taxi had flown over the glacier and thought it unsafe. There was very deep powder laying on unbridged crevasses.

This was a product of a very hot summer followed by a major autumn storm. He thought the only safe landing spot would be the Mountain House strip in the Ruth Amphitheatre. With little choice we agreed to this.

As we flew in we saw that the Ruth Gorge glacier was in very bad condition so glacier travel to the various route options in the area was going to be problematic. In addition the mountains themselves were buried in powder snow with constant snow snuffs on most faces.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE EXPEDITION?

On landing at the mountain House on the 25th September 2005 we made a reconnaissance of the approach to the Gorge and found it to be quite tricky. However the weather was good so travelling light the next day we skied on down the glacier intending to get straight on a route. The travel however proved slow so we only made a few miles before camping in our lightweight bivouac tent.

That night the weather closed in and we were buried. After a miserable night we retreated in a white out to our base camp up in the amphitheatre. We remained tent bound for several more days.

When the weather cleared we headed back down the glacier, this time with all our supplies and a big tent.

The weather remained good for a few days so after setting up ABC below Mt Dickey we set about exploring the many faces and side valley for something in climbable condition. In this we failed.

We looked at routes in every orientation and of every type we could get to but everything was unfortunately in appalling condition with avalanche hazards, threatening seracs, bottomless powder or loose rock.

While nothing was in condition we did however spot some incredible lines beginning to form that should hopefully be in condition by the spring so I will be going back.

After more bad weather and yet more exploration we eventually called it a day and hauled our kit back up to the Mountain House to be flown out on the 14th October 2005.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE AUTUMN EXPEDITIONS.

The weather in the autumn from our experience is no worse than the spring season though definitely not better. The temperatures we experienced were not excessive in fact we had rain on one day.

The essential precursor to an autumn trip would be a wet cool summer to keep the mountain nice and moist. A long hot sunny summer will generate the very poor conditions that we experienced. However the change towards hotter summers in Alaska seems to be norm these days.

The main problem with a dry summer is that it strips the gully lines of snow so that only the rock routes remain. These however are not practical following any significant snowfall.

The autumn season however should not be discounted altogether. In the right year it could be very good.

ACCOUNTS

Expenditure

	£
Flight to Anchorage	1400
Anchorage to Talkeetna	300
Ski plane flights	450
Insurance	260
Permits	40
Fuel/Food	450
Accommodation	150
Miscellaneous Items	250
Total	3400

Income

	£
British Mountaineering Council/UK Sports Council	1500
Mount Everest Foundation	450
Personal Contributions	1450
Total	3400

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