

## **West Face Celeno Peak Expedition 2016**

Location: Saint Elias Range, AK, USA

Dates: May 6th to 17th 2016

Aim: FA of the West face of Celeno Peak (13,395')

Expedition Reference: 16-14

Author: Graham Zimmerman

Year: 2016

## Introduction

Graham Zimmerman and Chris Wright spent May 6th-17th on a fruitful and very enjoyable expedition to the Saint Elias Range of Alaska. They experienced an amazing one week weather widow during which they made the first ascent of a route up the center of the West Face of Celeno Peak (13,395').

## Expedition Members

Graham Zimmerman

(30yo, NZ/USA, Geophysical Surveyor)

- 2014 Finalist, Piolet d'Or (France)
- 2010 NZ Mountaineer of the Year (New Zealand)
- FA Southwest Ridge (M6, 90°, 6000') of K6 West (7040m), Pakistani Karakoram, August 2015
- FA Changi Tower (6500m) via the North Ridge (M6, 5.10 A2, 2,800'), Pakistani Karakoram, Aug 2015
- FA West Face of Titanic Peak, Revelations Range, Alaska, May 2014 (V, M6, 5.8, 50 degrees, 4,000')
- FA Bossanova, Aguja Guillaumet, Argentine Patagonia, December 2013 (IV 5.11+, A2, 1,200')
- FA East Buttress of The Angel, Revelations Range, Alaska, July 2013 (V, 5.10, 50 degrees, 3,700') FA East Face of Mt Laurens, Lacuna Glacier, Alaska, May 2013 (V, M7, WI4, A1, 4,700')
- FA 'The Canadian Club', Stiletto Peak, Waddington Range, BC, Canada, Aug 2012 (5.11, 1,500')
- FA Vitalogy, SW Buttress of Mt Bradley, Ruth Gorge, Alaska, April 2010 (V, WI5, M6+, 5.9, A1 4,600')
- FA Central North Buttress, KyzylMuz (5100m), Pamir Alai, Kyrgyzstan, July 2008 (V, 5.10, AI3, 5,600')
- 'Nosferatu', Vampire Peak, Southern Alps, New Zealand, November 2007 (NZgr 6, WI5+, 2,450'), 3rd Ascent
- Multiple 1 day ascents of El Capitan and other major walls in Yosemite Valley as well as many in Zion, UT and WA
- Numerous other FAs in Alaska, WA state, CO state, British Columbia, Patagonia and New Zealand Ascents of 5.12, M9, WI6+ and A3+

Chris Wright

(33yo, UK/USA, Mountain Guide)

- IFMGA Mountain Guide (93rd American), February 2014
- FA West Face Direct, (M6 5.10x A2+ 95°, 6,000'), Celeno Peak (13,395'), Saint Elias, AK May 2016
- FA Night Crosses the Crown (V WI4+ M6 R 2,500'), Vågakallen, Lofoten Islands, Norway, Feb 2015
- FA Daily Bread (III WI5 M6 1,200'), Falkfjorden, Lofoten Islands, Norway, March 2015
- Schmid Route (TD WI4 M5 4,200'), On-sight solo in 4 hours Hörnli to summit, Matterhorn, Switzerland, Oct 2014
- FA (route and peak) Purgation (VI WI6+ M6 3,600'), Pangbuk North (6,589m), Khumbu, Nepal, Oct 2013
- FA (route and peak) Open Fire (V WI5 M3 3,300'), Lunag West (6,507m), Khumbu, Nepal, October 2013
- FA Terror (VI WI6 M7 R/X A2 5,000'), Mooses Tooth, Alaska, April 2013
- FA Awesome Show, Great Job (III WI4+ M3 1,200'), Peak 5,777m, Nepal, October 2012
- North Selkirks Ski Traverse (9 days), Selkirk Mountains, Canada, May 2012
- FA (route and wall) Wright-Pond (III 5.11 R 800'), Cutthroat Creek Wall, WA, August 2010
- FA (route and peak) Ladies' Couloir (III AI3+ 2,800'), Mantok II, Alaska, April 2010
- Guided ascents up to 6,300m and Grade V/ED-, including the Grand Capucin, Arête des Grands Montets, Liberty Crack, and Denali
- Multiple repeats and first ascents throughout the US and abroad, including the FA's of Burning Churches (5.12c), Smith Rock, OR and Ha Dov (M8 WI4+) and Ephemeral Cortex (WI5 M7) Ouray, CO
- Ascents of 5.12, M9, WI6+ and A3+

## Adventurous Activities

Zimmerman and Wright departed from their home in Bend, Oregon on the 6th of May and traveled to the small town of McCarthy, AK by way of Anchorage. They arrived in McCarthy in the late morning of the 8th and were picked up by Jay Claus from the Ultima Thule Lodge who flew them into the Canyon Creek Glacier. The Canyon Creek is nestled into the Western side of a group of peaks within the Wrangells known as the Twaharpies. Rising from the head of the glacier is the West Face of Celeno Peak, the climbers' objective.



Jay Claus flying the team into basecamp

Jay Claus made the first ascent of the peak in April 2012. It was fortuitous that he flew Zimmerman and Wright into the glacier. As they flew, he was able to provide very precise beta on the best descent options from the peak. Zimmerman and Wright are very thankful to Claus for this beta as well as for the flight into basecamp.



Wright seconding on the first day

This was both climbers' first trip into the Saint Elias Mountains. The stunning beauty of the peaks and the expanse of range impressed them immensely; alongside the Wrangell Mountains, these peaks continued to the horizon in every direction during the flight into the glacier.

In basecamp, a storm pounded the range the evening of the 8th and the 9th before clearing on the 10th. A forecast then showed a week-long weather window, prompting the team to launch on a direct line up the West face of Celeno Peak at 1 am on the 12th after waiting two days for the mountain to clear.

The route began with 2,000ft of snow and ice climbing to 70 degrees, which the climbers ascended unroped. A small section of this climbing had to be completed while exposed to objec-



Wright leading the crux rock band

tive hazard from above. With an impetus placed on climbing quickly, the team spent less than 15 minutes exposed the hazard. This placed them on a mixed spur they planned to climb directly to the summit of the peak.

Zimmerman led the day's first block of pitches through fantastic mixed climbing, sustained at M4 to M5 with a stout M6 chimney crux. Wright then led two moderate, yet extremely loose, pitches that placed them at 3,000ft above the start of the route. There, they stopped in the late afternoon to bivvy. They dug a platform into a thin snow ridge on the crest of the spur, which offered a relatively comfortable bivvy free of objective hazard.

100 feet above this bivvy was a geological contact between the granitic lower half of the route and the metamorphic rock that defined the upper half. This metamorphic rock presented above the team's bivvy as a severely overhanging headwall.

Wright continued his block on the morning of the 13th, leading two moderate pitches that led to what appeared to be a weakness in the wall above. He then spent 3+ hours

leading the route's crux, a wildly steep and loose pitch of 5.10X A2+ that can only be described as totally f\*%ked and a very compelling reason for this route to not be repeated by future parties. The culmination of the pitch came while he was making the final aid moves through a roof and dislodged a large section of rocks, damaging one of the ropes and crushing a carabiner lower on the pitch.

After dealing with the damaged rope (fortunately the core shot was close to one of the ends), Zimmerman took the lead and carried the team through two more loose but moderate pitches of rock climbing to the top of the rock



Wright climbing during the third day on route

band and a 3x4ft platform on which they melted water and sat out the heat of the day. While this day resulted in less than 500' of progress, it allowed access to generally low-angle climbing above.

Departing their small perch at 2 am, Zimmerman led through a final two high-quality pitches of easy mixed before the route changed in nature from rock and mixed climbing to steep snow and ice. The team simul-climbed to the top of the spur before cutting hard right to reach an iced gully that led to the summit. A short section of of this traverse was subject to exposure from a medium-sized serac and the team moved through this section as quickly as possible. The day's climbing consisted of approximately 2,500' of sustained 70 degree ice with short sections of 90 to 95 degree ice and snow as they crossed over flutings and between runnels. During this time the weather deteriorated, resulting in visibility being reduced to ~100'. It came as a huge relief when they reached a large flat snow ledge just below the summit in the early afternoon. Due to fatigue and the lack of visibility, they bivied on this ledge for the remainder of the day and evening.

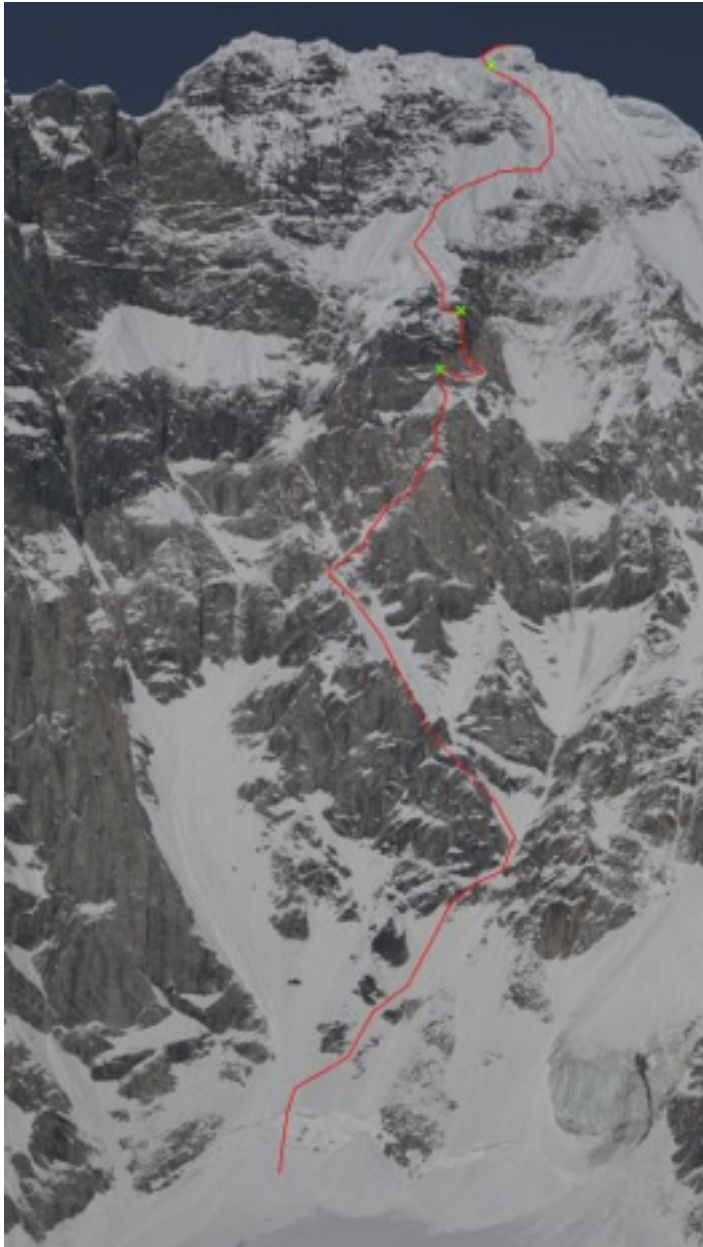
On the 15th the climbers once again started before sunrise and made their way up 200' of moderate snow to the summit of the peak under clear skies. As the sun rose over the range, they marveled at the stunning ocean of mountains surrounding them with Mt Logan, Mt Saint Elias, University Peak and the Atna Peaks standing predominate.



Left: The final slope to the summit  
Right: Wright and Zimmerman on the summit

The rest of the day was then spent following the first ascent route down the Northwest ridge to a couloir that provided access to the glacier below. The 3 miles of ridge climbing proved stunningly elegant, reminiscent of sections of the West Ridge of Mount Hunter in the Central Alaska range. Reaching the couloir at around 1 pm the climbers waited until the evening to rap and

downclimb the 4,000ft couloir to the glacier below. This section was unpleasant and rather dangerous due to the low quality of rock that comprised the walls of the couloir.



The West Face of Celeno Peak with 'The West Face Direct' marked (green x's denote bivies).

Finally at 11:30 pm, they reached their skis on the glacier below and at 12:30 reached basecamp exhausted and hungry.

The following morning the weather was still fair but the forecast was deteriorating significantly, so they called Jay Claus for a pickup. He graciously came out nearly immediately and picked up the team, dropping them off in McCarthy in the early afternoon. Zimmerman and Wright rallied back to Anchorage and on home to Oregon.

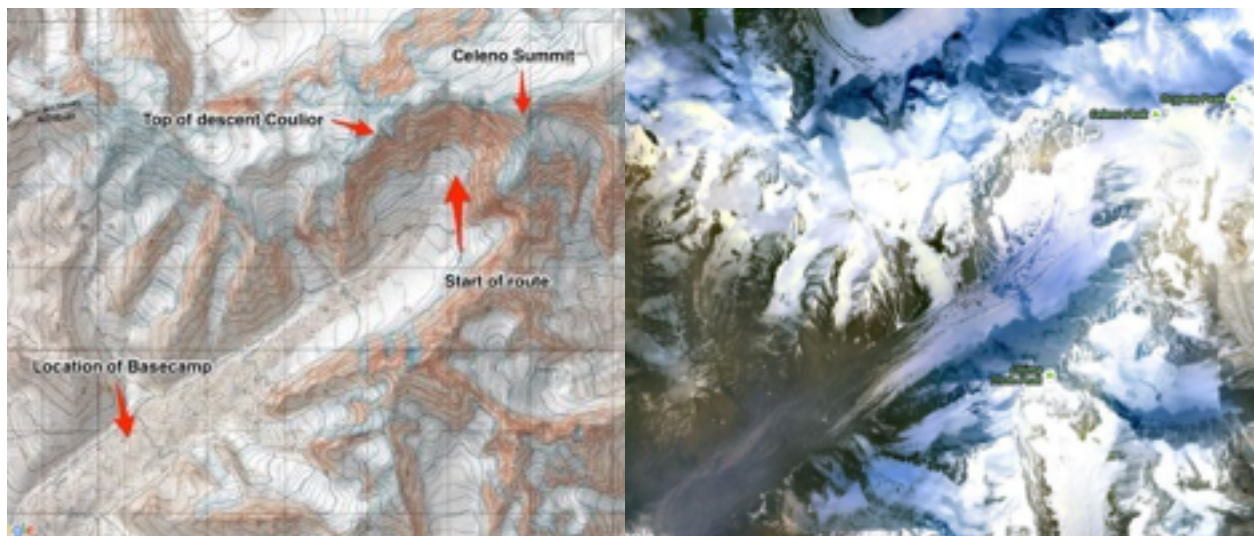
It has not been mentioned in other reports for privacy's sake but a death in the family also gave a strong reason to leave the glacier early.

## Administration and Logistics

### *Destination Area*



Southern Alaska denoting area of detail shown below.



Left: Topo maps of area with landmarks labeled  
Right: The same view but as a satellite image

The West face of Celeno peak rises off of the Canyon Creek Glacier in the Saint Elias Range of Alaska. It is part of a small grouping of four peaks known as the Twahrpies.

GPS coordinates of Celeno Peak Summit -  
61° 20' 19" N; 141° 58' 19" W

### *Research materials and Information Sources*

The research for this trip was thorough and took place through the American Alpine Journal and direct contact with alpinists who had been in the area including Sheldon Kerr and Carlos Buhler.

These resources provided a very strong idea of what the team should expect in terms of costs, timing, logistics and weather. The route itself remained fairly unknown as it had not been attempted. The closest attempt was made by Buhler and Charlie Sasara who made an attempt on a predominate buttress on the far left side of the Western aspect of the Celeno. It was beta from Jay Claus that allowed the team confidence in the descent from the peak which was via Claus's first ascent route.

### *Training*

In order to prepare for the expedition the team members adhered to a rigorous training regime which involved aggressive circuit and cardiovascular training as well as time in climbing gyms. Training in the form of climbing itself was of course also undertaken by the team. This included ascents in Canada, USA and Europe.

### *Permission and Permits*

No permissions are required for climbing in this part of the Saint Elias Range.

### *Transportation*

The team flew to anchorage from their home in Bend, OR, rented a van and drove to the landing strip in McCarthy. At the landing strip they were met by Jay Claus from Ultima Thule Lodge who flew them into basecamp.

### *Insurance*

The team members maintain insurance through Global Rescue.

### *Travel Transport and Freight*

All equipment was carried with the team members on their plane flights.

### *Food and Accommodation*

All food was purchased either in Bend or Anchorage. New Sagaia and Fred Meyers provide excellent shopping locations in Anchorage.

### *Communications*

The team carried a Iridium Sat phone for forecasts and in case of emergency.



### *Medical Arrangements*

On this expedition Graham was appointed the medical expert due to his experience as a EMT on the Yosemite Search and Rescue team.

An extensive medical kit was carried that included equipment and medicine for dealing with both trauma and sickness.

### *Environmental and Social Impact Assessment*

A strict 'leave no trace' policy was followed on the entire expedition.

### **Diary/log**

5/6 - Flew to Anchorage

5/7 - Shopped in Anchorage

5/8 - Drove to McCarthy (approx 8 hours), picked up by Jay Claus and flown to basecamp

5/9 - Bad weather in basecamp

5/10 - Clearing weather in basecamp

5/11 - Rested in Basecamp while mountain shed

5/12 - Started up route

5/13 - Second day on route

5/14 - Third day on route

5/15 - Summited and descended

5/16 - Flew back to McCarthy and drove to Anchorage

5/17 - Flew back to Bend, OR

### **Conclusions**

The team is extremely happy with their expedition and the resulting new route. They feel that the Saint Elias Range offers incredible opportunities for for new routes and serious adventures.

As a final note, this trip was a litmus test for Zimmerman and Wright, testing their partnership with an eyes towards larger trips to the Karakoram. They are very psyched to report that they got along extremely well and are already in the process of planning their next expedition.

## Appendix 1 - Budget

### Transportation

Anchorage Flights \$1836

(Note: high due to last minute itinerary change on return)

Ultima Thule Flight \$1800

Ex Baggage \$475

Gas in AK \$79

AK Car Rental \$649

### *Lodging*

Hotel in Anchorage \$237

### *Food/Equipment*

Meals in Transit \$185

Food/Gas purchased in Anc \$468

Food purchased in OR \$233

Supplies \$482

**Total \$6444**