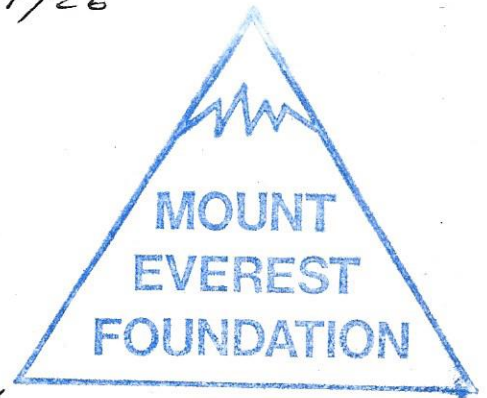


REPORT OF :THE BRITISH EXPEDITION TO THE RUTH GLACIER
ALASKA, 1981.

MEF. Ref. 81/26

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1. AIMS :

To attempt the first ascent of the East ridges of Mounts Johnson and Bradley.

2. EXPEDITION ACTIVITY : (1981)

- 17 JUNE Flew to Anchorage, Alaska.
- 18, 19 " M. Sharp withdrew from expedition for personal reasons and returned to U.K.
The remaining pair, Young and Milward, bought provisions and travelled to Talkeetna.
- 20 " Flew into Ruth Glacier.
- 21-24 Good weather. Moved base and attempted Mt. Johnson. The route proved too long, too hard and logistically impossible for two

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25 JUNE

→ 1 JULY

2, 3 JULY

climbers, given our limited fixed rope.
Base camp was moved to Mt. Bradley.
Bad weather. White out and 24" snow.

Good weather - attempted Bradley E. ridge.
Withdrew due to bad rock and snow
avalanche risk.

4-18

"

Bad weather. Rain, whiteout etc. During
this period, moved base to foot of peaks
on East side of the glacier. These were
lower and more suitable for ascents in the
very short good spells experienced.

A food and equipment dump was placed
at a col. 1200 ft. above the glacier in
preparation for an ascent on the 5th., but
on 18th. it was retrieved in bad weather.

19

"

From 19th. onward, due to low food, moved
to base on landing strip waiting to make
radio contact to be flown out.

20-27

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Weather continued mixed with no days
really good enough to make climbing
practical. No radio contact, no planes
flying over, and generally poor flying
conditions.

28-30

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Main diet ran out. Drastically reduced
rations until:-

31

"

Accidental radio contact in poor conditions
and flown out in a hurry leaving all

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equipment behind. Flown out under thick cloud with cloud ceiling down to 50 ft. above the glacier at the worst point.

3 AUGUST

All equipment retrieved by plane during 3 day spell of good weather.

3 COMMENT :-

3.1 WEATHER :- Of 42 days spent on the glacier only two spells of 3 and 4 days gave climbable weather. At glacier level (4000 / 4500 ft.) only one or two nights reached freezing. Rain and mist predominated and the result was that the glacier and peaks were in a constant thaw. Glacier travel was very dangerous, and snow and ice on peaks was continuously avalanching. During July and August, it appears that bad weather is usual, though, quite unpredictable fine spells of a fortnight have been known.

March, April and early May are the most settled time of year, though the weather is then fine but very cold, making the rock climbing in this area impractical (because of the very high standard and the icy conditions) This year apparently, the winter fine spell continued right through until late June. However, the July was ~~the~~ one of the wettest since records began.

3.2 OBJECTIVES :- The objectives on both sides of the Ruth Glacier are many, and generally of first

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quality, both in line and difficulty. The area considered is the four miles of glacier south from Mt. Dickey to Glacier Point. There are six peaks which rise directly from the Ruth Glacier from between 4300 ft. to 5050 ft. vertical interval above the glacier. From the North, they are Mts. Dickey, Bradley, Wake Johnson, Grosvenor and Church. Church being 8233 ft. the large corner peak where the glacier is displaced to the east. All these peaks rise on the west side of the glacier. All routes tend to be very steep, and there is scope for very high standard big wall climbs on all of these peaks. The major objectives are as follows:

- Dickey - 3 pillars on the S. face: high standard rock
Steep ice couloir on the S.E. corner. Finer, harder
and bigger than any ice route in Europe!
- Bradley - East ridge mixed, complex, but not too difficult.
Rock pillars and ice gulleys at S.W. side.
N. face - future challenge since it present appears
seriously threatened by serac fall.
- Wake - Interesting ice couloir on N. side.
Excellent mixed/ice ridge at N.E. corner.
Very exciting E. ridge. Rock and mixed.
N. face - future challenge - serac fall.
- Johnson - E. ridge direct. Extreme rock - prime objective
E face. Ice and mixed upper face
N. face. Extreme rock some icefall danger.
- Grosvenor - E ridge and face hard mixed rock and ice.
- Church - Several excellent ice couloir lines on the

⑤

North face.

On the East side of the glacier the main peak is point 7500 ft. This presents a complex set of faces and couloirs at various standards up to the hardest grades and up to 3500 ft. vertical interval. The descent round the rear of the peak (east) and down an easy couloir on the South W. of the peak makes this peak particularly suitable for preliminary climbs before tackling the major lines on the other side of the glacier.

3.3 TYPE OF CLIMBING:

Rock climbing is generally very hard. The biggest walls have sections which are approximately vertical for stretches of over 3000 ft. The rock is granite, and generally glacier smoothed. Even easy angled sections can provide extreme free and aid climbing. Crack lines therefore provide the only feasible routes. Since these also form drainage and avalanche lines, several days of fine weather are required before the lines are practical. In other words the really major lines will only be climbed during the occasional unpredictable two week fine spells in the summer.

Snow and Ice climbing is only practical (because of the low altitude) in the winter/spring season. The lines are excellent and potential great. In summer, all snow and ice is very avalanche prone and simply

⑥ out of the question.

Mixed snow, ice and rock is also only practical in spring or winter since, even if on a ridge and not being avalanched upon, the snow itself will be lying on polished granite and will be prone to sliding off when climbed upon. The only major route of middle difficulty in this category will be the East ridge of Bradley.

3.4 FOOD AND RESCUE :

Because of the infrequency of planes overflying the area, and unreliability of CB. radio, we consider it essential to carry 2 weeks extra food and to strictly ration consumption accordingly. There are no super efficient rescue helicopters for bad weather. If the ordinary commercial planes do not fly nothing else will ~~it~~ even though a party may be in an emergency situation. On McKinley CB. will reach base camp and from there Tolketna can be contacted. In the Ruth Glacier, radio will only work line of sight and therefore communication gaps of up to two weeks are normal.

3.5 ACCESS :

For British teams an overland approach is generally out of the question because of the time involved. A flight in is easy and quick and will leave them

⑦ centrally placed in this area. If dependent on an airlift out, the only operable landing strips after mid July are on the S. side of Dickey in the side glacier, or right up in the amphitheatre near the Sheldon memorial hut (two days walk from the area described). In the summer the walk out would be difficult and take about one week. If big wall rock gear is carried, there is no way a team could evacuate everything and walk out in one go. The amount of equipment would either necessitate a dump, a walk out, and then an air return to retrieve the dumps, or simply wait for evacuation by air. Hence the importance of correct provisioning and two weeks extra food.

The more attractive prospect in every way would be to restrict objectives to snow and ice, with the appropriately reduced weight of equipment, and fly in in winter/spring and ski/sled out. In this season it is possible to ski directly down the Ruth Glacier and out to the highway in 3 or 4 days.

4 SUMMARY:

A team of two, Milward and Young, spent 42 days on the Ruth Glacier during which time there were only 7 days of climbable weather. Numerous major lines up to 5000 ft. were

8 identified and two attempted. However, the unsettled weather coupled with the high standard of the climbing removed any chance of success.

5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

The scope for new high grade climbing in this area is tremendous. The rock climbing available is excellent, but really requires summer warmth. As such we feel it is best left to locals who are available to take advantage of the rare and unpredictable fine summer spells of weather. Even then the big rock routes will fall comparatively rarely.

Because of the weather and the access problems we recommend that non-locals i.e. British expeditions concentrate on winter/spring and the excellent ice climbs outlined above. We would particularly recommend the fly in - ski out approach to this area for its independence. If air transport in and out is chosen, we regard two weeks extra food as essential.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

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INDEX FINANCES

N.B. Exchange rate £1 = 1.96 \$us.
 Money changed on 13 June '81.

<u>INCOME</u>	£
Mount Everest Foundation	300.00
British Mountaineering Council	200.00
Personal Contributions: 2×350.07	870.14
1×170.00	
	<u>1370.14</u>

<u>EXPENDITURE</u>	£
Postage, maps, UK organisation	25.40
First aid kit.	6.30
Air fare to Anchorage return (for 3)	810.00
Insurance (for 3)	105.00
Transport round Anchorage and to Talkeetna :	\$us. 81.00
Lodging and food at Anchorage (for 2)	52.95
Expedition food and fuel (for 2)	300.20
Flight in + out to Glacier (for 2)	<u>350.00</u>
	784.15 → 423.44
	<u>1370.14</u>

N.B. Messrs. Sharp, Young, and Milward flew to Anchorage
 Only Young and Milward continued to the glacier.