

BRITISH MOUNT FORAKER EXPEDITION

Expedition Report Summary

1.1 Expedition Members

Jonathan Preston
Roy Ruddle

1.2 Objectives

First alpine style ascent, south-south-east "French" ridge of Mount Foraker (5302 m).

1.3 Achievements

Mountain	Route	Remarks
Hunter	W ridge	Retreat from 9000 ft due to severe avalanche danger
	S face	First ascent of face: climbing 5500 ft in 17 hours to the summit plateau (12000 ft) and junction with the SW ridge. Descent via the SW ridge after storm prevented summit attempt.
McKinley	W buttress	Insufficient time for serious summit attempt. High point Denali Pass (18200 feet, Preston).

1.4 Finances

Income		Expenses	
Personal contributions	4240	Transport	1585
MEF	600	Food	380
BMC	200	Equipment	2565
		Sundries	510
TOTAL	5040	TOTAL	5040

1.5 Dates

Leave UK 15 May 1989
return 20 June 1989

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2. INTRODUCTION

Alaska is extremely accessible and has many mountains which are feasible objectives for UK based expeditions of three or more weeks' duration. Our advance planning worked to perfection, landing on the Kahiltna glacier's west fork just 36 hours after taking off from Heatonrow.

Our tactics called for one acclimatisation/shake-down route before we made a serious attempt. After our premature retreat from Mt. Hunter's west ridge this shake down turned into two routes, the second of which was the first ever ascent of Hunter's south face, via a route we named 'Eroica'.

Subsequent to the south face of Hunter the weather closed in completely to give light but persistent snow for eight days. After this we were forced to abandon our plans for any route on Mt. Foraker as the 1200 foot snow slopes that give access to the 'French' ridge were avalanching and the whole of the middle section of the south east ridge (our original, proposed descent route) was one huge avalanche zone for 3000 feet. It was with great regret that we turned our attention to Denali (Mt. McKinley) at the end of the trip in order to do something safely.

The 'French' ridge is certainly a feasible alpine style objective but is one that demands tremendous commitment and some luck with the weather - go for it!

Apologies for all the imperial measurements used in this report (the USA is still not metricated) and also for the occasional metric measurements (slips of the authors' pens - we are metricated!)

S. H. T. HUNTER - WEST RIDGE

Our game plan called for an acclimatisation route and general snake-down before we made a serious attempt on the French ridge. During our first two days on the Kasiltna glacier we explored on skis and discussed the alternatives, settling for a known route, the west ridge of Mount Hunter, instead of a reconnaissance on the French or south east ridges of Foraker.

At 6.30 a.m. on 20th May we left our base camp for Hunter, carrying six days food. An hour and a half's skiing took us the three and a half miles to the base of the ridge. Here one of Roy's skins fell off and he continued up the first 700 feet of the snow slopes on foot, behind Jonathan on skis. At the base of a small icefall (7200 feet) we both resorted to our feet and climbed to reach the crest of the ridge (8000 feet) where the route broadens to an icefield.

A serac wall barred progress and was climbed direct in one pitch by Jonathan. From the top of the serac wall progress was barred by a huge icewall. We tried to breach this by steep slopes on the right but Roy, investigating, decided that nine inches of powder snow bridging a deep six foot void wouldn't hold his weight! Our only other chance of gaining the snow slopes above the icewall was to traverse to the left. After 150 metres, on the very lip of the hanging glacier, Jonathan found an easy way through and we trudged upwards in debilitating heat to the foot of a granite gendarme at 9000 feet (3 p.m.)

The route here drops 300 feet to a col and then continues for a long way up over a series of rising summits, until more good camp sites are found. Accordingly we cut a tent platform and settled down to a leisurely afternoon brewing and eating.

At 9 p.m. the weather closed in, the wind rose and it snowed continuously until 6 p.m. next day.

Our 4 a.m. alarm on 22nd May brought clear weather and, leaving the tent at 6.30 a.m., we made two short abseils before down-climbing two pitches to the col. Here we watched two climbers, retreating from the north west variant on Hunter and only a few hundred metres from us, trigger a fresh snow avalanche in a narrow couloir. Luckily their belays were solid and somehow they remained unscathed. Our own route followed snow slopes up the ridge to point 9550 and was also looking rather avalanche prone. Jonathan led one pitch and established a good snow stake belay but as soon as I began to follow we both heard a huge crack and the "whomp" of settling snow.

We retreated rapidly, climbing over the gendarme and down our ascent route of two days before to reach the base of the ridge by mid-day. On the way down we triggered a small, harmless avalanche which served to confirm our decision that the west ridge was in a very dangerous condition.

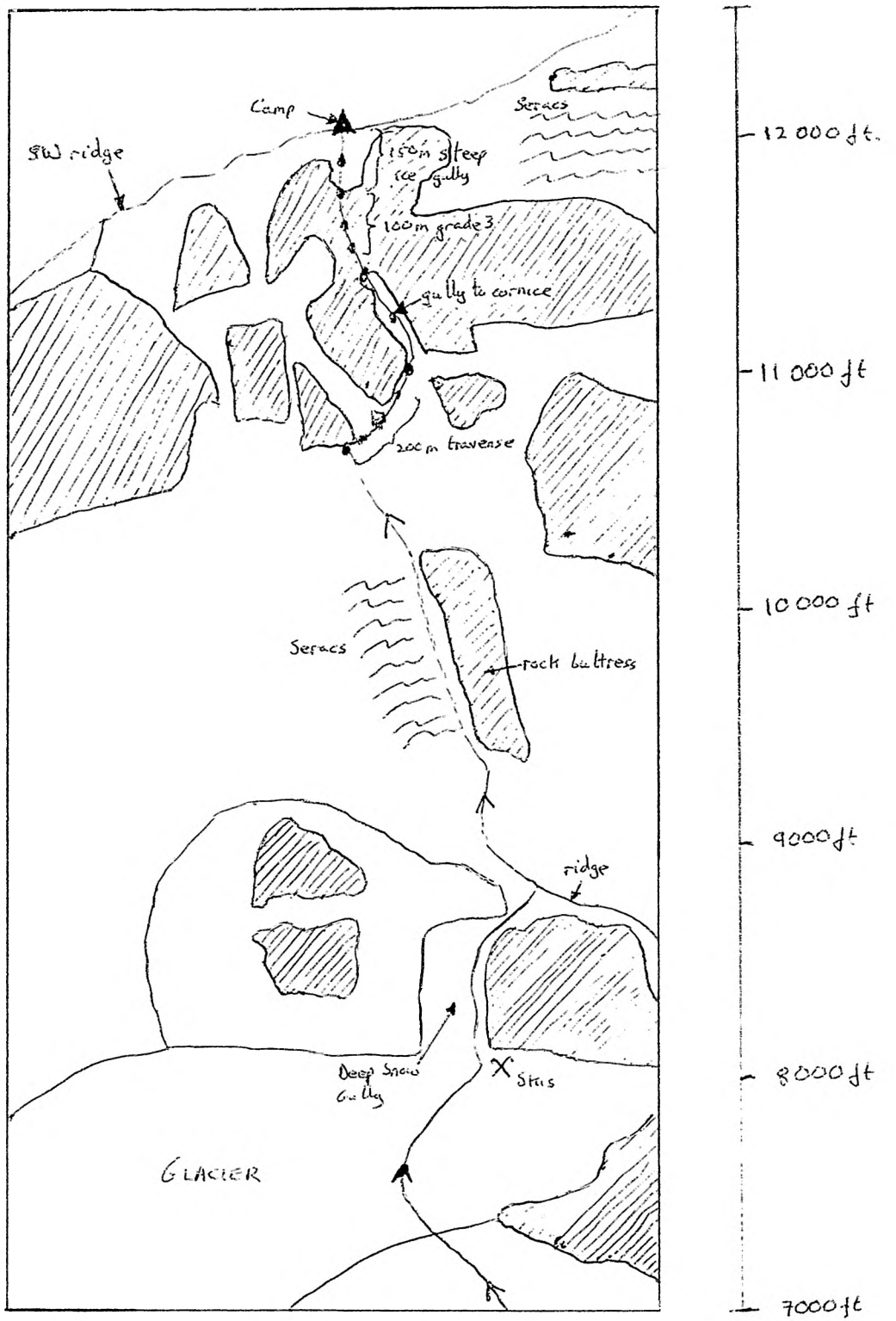
4. M.T. HUNTER - SOUTH FACE

On 24th May we packed up food and fuel for eight days and set off from base camp, towing sleds for six miles across the Kahiltua glacier to the base of the south west ridge of the south peak of Mt. Hunter. Here we set up the two-man Bibler tent at 6500 feet on a tributary to the main glacier. The following day, 25th May, we spotted a likely line on the south side of Mt. Hunter, seemingly the only safe way through a series of hanging glaciers. The weather was fine, hot and sunny for the fourth day in succession and, wanting to make the most of this, we decided to set off as soon as possible. We waited for the sun to move off the face and eventually set out at 9.30 p.m., taking three days food with us.

Conditions were warm at first and having left the skis at 7500 feet, we ploughed up through knee and thigh deep snow to the crest of a well defined ridge. The snow here was of good quality and we moved together up a Grade 2-ish gully for about 1500 feet, between a steep, broken glacier on one side and a rock buttress on the other. The snowy crest of another ridge led to a big glaciated icefield which we traversed first left, then right, finally taking a belay below an enormous area of rock buttresses that led up to the south west ridge.

Thirteen pitches of Grade 3 mixed and ice climbing followed, with good rock belays throughout, except for one on ice. Route finding was fairly intricate throughout as we traversed right for four pitches to avoid steep rock. The light was quite strong enough to climb by throughout the night. It was cold through the early hours of the morning especially when windy (alpine winter type temperatures) though we did not need to put on duvets. We eventually pulled onto the south west ridge at 2 p.m. on 26th May, having climbed flat out for 17 hours. We pitched the tent virtually where we emerged on the ridge, coincidentally close to a four-man American team's camp. They reached the south summit that day, having climbed the south west ridge. This site was at 12000 feet so we had come up 4500 feet from the point at which we left our skis. The weather had held while we were climbing, but deteriorated during the afternoon and it began snowing overnight and continued for 36 hours.

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"Eroica" - Mt. Hunter, South Face

We sat out the storm until the morning of the 28th when the wind dropped and it stopped snowing. Continuing to the top of Mt. Hunter's south peak was unfortunately now out of the question as over a foot of fresh snow now loaded the slopes above. Despite the fact that visibility was still poor we elected to descend with the Americans. The descent involved six 50 metre abseils off ice screws and snow pickets to a col where a 2000 foot curving couloir led back down to the glacier. From here it was a short walk along to the foot of our route to pick up the skis. It took a full day to descend the south west ridge and we spent the night on the tributary glacier before returning to base camp the following day (29th).

From 30th May onwards the weather became very unstable and it snowed fairly solidly for eight days, with only a few breaks.

5. M T. M c K I N L E Y

Though pleased with our efforts on Mt. Hunter, we were now very fit, keen and eager to attempt our main goal, the south-south-east ridge of Mt. Foraker. Unfortunately, after eight days of snow, the mountain was obviously totally out of condition, especially since our intended descent route lay down the avalanche prone south east ridge.

On 6th June, with just ten days left until we were due to fly out, the best option seemed to be Mt. McKinley as at least the West Buttress route could be relied upon to be safe. So once the temperature had dropped we set off with ten days food to ski up the Kahiltna glacier overnight. An enjoyable ski with superb midnight views of a well-lit Mt. Hunter brought us to the north east fork of the glacier. We camped a little way up the fork and set out through the icefall early the following morning (8th) to the foot of the Cassin ridge. The weather had been good for two days now, but through patchy cloud we could see that the route was still loaded with snow from the previous week's storms. There was nobody else on the route and reluctantly we decided that we did not have enough time to wait for the snow to consolidate or to sit out bad weather if need be, so we returned to 8000 feet where the north east fork branches off the main glacier. It again snowed all that night and the next day. The following day (10th) the weather improved and was hot during the day. We waited until the cool of evening before setting off up the well tracked West Buttress route at 6 p.m. We stopped at 13000 feet at 2 a.m. to put up the tent as it had started snowing. It snowed the rest of the night and most of the next day, clearing around 2 p.m. We continued up to the large 14300 feet camp, stopping here two nights to acclimatize.

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On 13th June Jonathan set off, lightweight and alone at 3 a.m. as Roy was not sufficiently acclimatized to try to get to the top and back in one push. The 'rescue Gully' led straight up to the 17000 foot camp. There were fixed 7 mm ropes throughout and the good hard neve was 45 degrees at the steepest point (only one ice tool was used). It took three hours to reach 17000 feet and another two up to Denali Pass at 18200 feet. Here, a violent wind was blowing in from the east and despite digging a snow hole and sheltering for over an hour in the hope that the cloud and swirling snow would abate, the weather continued to be unfavourable and the only option was retreat. The 14300 feet camp was reached at 3 p.m., where warm, calm conditions prevailed.

We packed up and started down the next day (14th) in mild, cloudy conditions and skied the entire 16 miles back to base camp, calling in at the permanently manned camp on the south east fork of the glacier to confirm our fly-out date. The 15th was spent clearing up base camp and on the 16th we flew out in clear conditions.

6. CONCLUSION

The weather in Alaska this year has been rather strange. The coldest winter on record in many places and little snow in the Alaska range gave place to superb climbing conditions by early March. Then heavy snow and intense sun produced high avalanche risk, turning the underlying neve to hard blue ice. April and early May had bad weather, causing the Rangers to call 1989 the worst spring for many years.

On average the weather was excellent for almost 50% of the time we were in the range (16th May - 16 June). Unfortunately seven of our sixteen good days occurred during the first ten days, when we were acclimatising on Hunter, and all the other good days were in the ten-day settled spell which followed the eight-day storm, right at the end of the trip.

Temperatures were generally high, with only a handful of -20 degrees Celcius nights and there was little wind on Hunter or the glaciers. Towards the middle of June it was becoming too hot and in future we would both plan an expedition to end at the beginning of June.

Overall the trip was certainly a great success; after all, we had tremendous fun, came back with all our faculties intact and succeeded on a superb new route. All that remains is to suggest that you go there yourself. No, on second thoughts, don't! I want Alaska all to myself!

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As with all expeditions there are a number of people who have given valuable advice and help, and without them the whole trip would have run less smoothly.

In particular we would like to thank the following:

Research:

Simon Richardson (Mt. Hunter 1986)
Isabelle Agresti
(1st ascent, 'French' ridge of Mt. Foraker 1975)
Julie-Ann Clyma (Mt. Foraker 1988)
H. Adams Carter (SE ridge of Mt. Foraker)
Bradford Washburn (Photographs and maps)

Advice on gear and food:

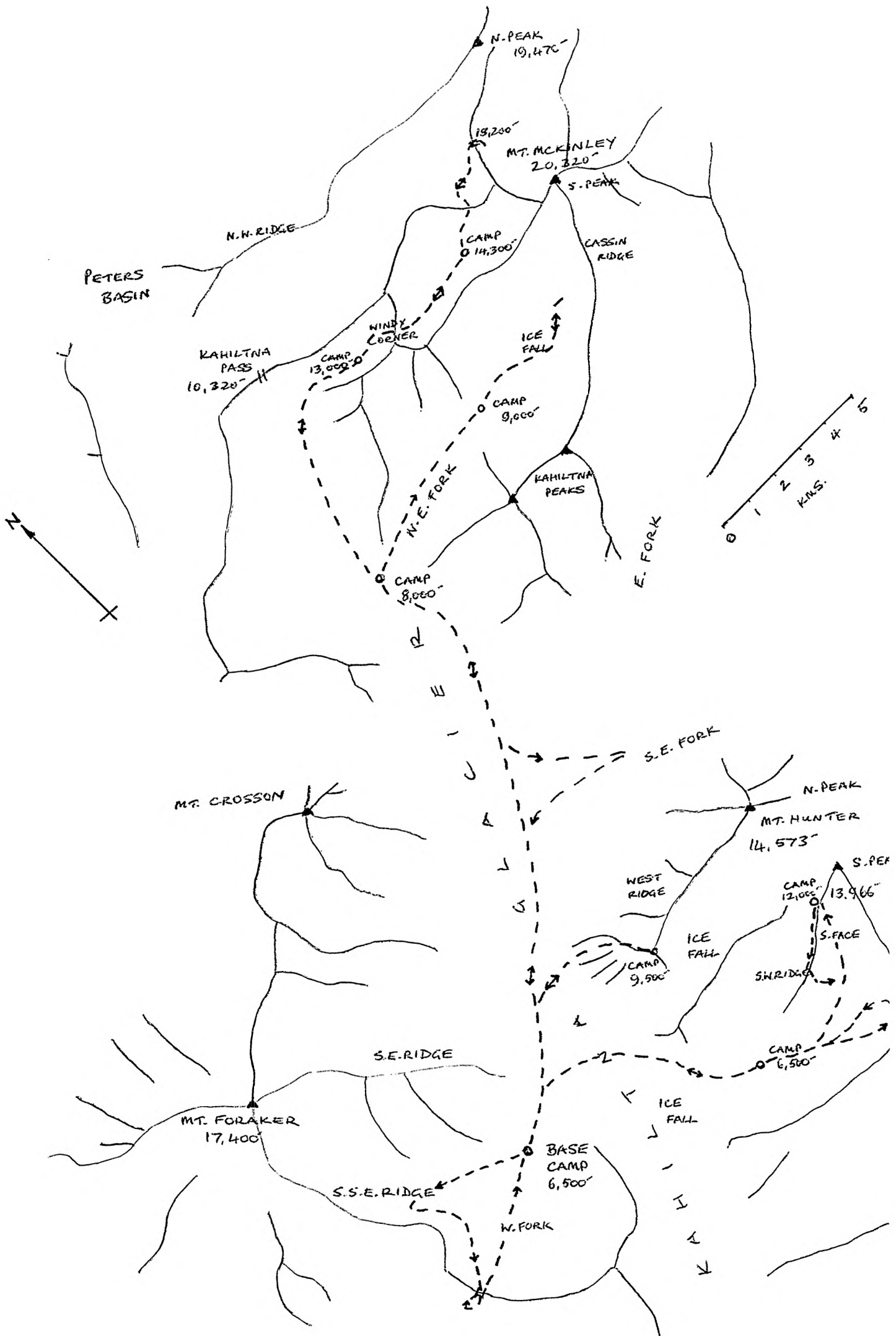
Jerry Gore
Andy McHee (Cotswold Camping)

Sponsorship and Grants:

Mount Everest Foundation
British Mountaineering Council

Discounts on gear:

Andy Perkins (Troll)
Grivel crampons and Troll Whillans
Expedition harnesses
Mrs. Gillian Gray (Javlin)
Super S salopettes and neoprene overboots
Rob at Centresport - for dealing with the remainder
of our gear order at short notice.



APPENDIX 1: MEDICAL

We took a fairly comprehensive assortment of first aid equipment with us. The majority of this stayed at base camp as we carried a light weight package for emergencies whilst actually climbing. Jonathan has had first aid training in the form of Dr. I. Jones' Mountaineering first aid course.

Fortunately none of the equipment was needed.

Base camp kit:

- 3 crepe bandages (4.5m)
- 2 elastocrepe bandages (4.5m)
- Assorted plasters (including butterfly suture steri-strips)
- Antibiotics - Stretotriad; Septrim Forte; Erythrocin.
- Ronicol - circulation booster
- Frusene - diuretic
- Savlon - antiseptic cream
- Paracetamol
- Aspirin
- Copraxol - distalgesic for muscular pain
- Temgesic - strong pain killer
- Strepsil throat lozenges
- Caloromycetin - eye ointment
- Glucolyte - powder for fluid loss replacement
- 3 Sterile gauze swabs
- 3 Antiseptic Tulle Gras dressings
- 1 triangular bandage
- Normison - sleeping tablets

Climbing kit:

- 2 crepe bandages; plasters; temgesics; Copraxol;
- Frusene; Ronicol; strepsils; aspirins.

APPENDIX 2: FOOD

We planned the food on the basis of an average daily intake of just over 3000 kcal. We took in food to last a total of 35 days, eventually spending half this time on routes and half at base camp.

Example of typical base camp menu (per person):

Breakfast: Porridge (with dehydrated milk,
brown sugar, raisins & cinnamon) 75 gms. 300 kcal

Biscuits 100 gms. 400 kcal

Tea / fruit juice

Lunch: Soup

Oatcakes

Cheese 100 gms 400 kcal

Peanut butter 100 gms 600 kcal

Crunch bars

Dinner:

Soup

Pasta / Smash / Rice

Meat / fish 150 gms 550 kcal

Cheese 100 gms 400 kcal

Dried fruit

Custard

Hot chocolate

Biscuits / crunch bars 100 gms 400 kcal

Total

3050 kcal

Route food varied only in that we took no peanut butter or meat / fish with us while climbing.

Bearing in mind the generous baggage allowance on flights to the States, it is possible to take a considerable amount of food from the UK. Most items were available in US supermarkets, though we could not track down any fruit cakes (Dundee type) which we had been hoping to buy. The food we took out with us included the catering packs of Batchelors dehydrated food (beef curry), cupasoups, crunchy bars, custard powder, nuts & raisins and chocolate biscuits.

Total food transported to glacier:

Cranca bars	800 bars
Porridge	5 kg
Biscuits	32 pkts
Cheese	7 kg
Pasta / Smasn	8 kg
Rice	2.5 kg
Soup	80 pkts cupasoup
	40 pkts minestone
Margarine	2 tubs
Peanut butter	1 large jar
Jam	2 jars
Oatcakes	7 pkts
Dried fruit	5 pkts
Nuts & raisins	12 pkts
Condensed milk	3 tins
Evaporated milk	4 tins
Tomato paste	4 tins
Fish - tuna	8 tins
Fruit	6 tins
Vegetables	5 tins
Custard powder	20 pkts
Meat - dehydrated	2 pkts
Vegiburger mix	4 pkts
Assorted spices - salt, pepper, curry powder, mixed herbs, garlic salt.	

Our choice of equipment was based mainly on personal preference and what we already possessed. It had to cope with temperatures ranging from a super cool (minus 20 C) to very hot (30 C). All our equipment performed well and my only comment is that it would be worth taking loose fitting, light coloured 'tropical' wear for the roasting days when skiing on the glaciers.

The gear worth special mention is listed below:

Troll expedition Whillans harness:

A superb, ultra light weight version of the classic 'Whillans' harness. This version is constructed of much thinner width tape than the normal version and, as a result can be worn comfortably and unobtrusively under a rucksack hip belt. The buckled crotch strap is worth highlighting too as it enables one to have a crap without removing the harness or untying. The single buckle design is far quicker to use than harnesses with adjustable leg loops.

Crampons:

Roy used Grivel 2F crampons while Jonathan used Messner Scissors. The Grivels were by far the superior, the 'meaty' front points giving excellent, confident purchase on the crux pitches of Hunter's south face. The Messners by comparison seemed to require excessive concentration to use. This is due to the small front points and far back first set of vertical points, supplemented by the large size of both our pairs of boots.

Javlin Super S salopettes:

Quite simply, very warm and comfortable.
How did I ever survive without them?

Javlin neoprene overboots:

Although we never used them, I would certainly use a pair for any future route on Denali. Both the Grivel and Messner crampons fitted securely over these boots without any adjustments. (Both crampons had step-in bindings.)

Socks:

Our configuration of merkalon inners, Chouinard VBL and Helly Hansen pile socks, kept feet warm. The VBL's kept our pile socks and inner boots dry but do not appear to last for more than one trip (5 weeks). Wear may be better if the VBL socks are not used when skiing.

Asolo AFS Expedition boots;

Very warm and comfortable, although we never climbed in the ultra-cold temperatures which may occur. The inner boots do appear to wear out quickly - something which is being investigated by Chris Watts, the UK distributor.

Tents:

We used a Bibler I tent on the routes and a North Face VE25 in base camp. The former is very and good light (3½ pounds and the VE25 has a number of thoughtful features which enhance an already good tent.

Snow Shovel:

Contrary to what we were told, it seems almost imperative that a light-weight shovel is carried, even on routes, in order to build walls around the tents and avoid the type of wild, airborne ride down the mountain that was experienced by one Denali west buttress team this year. They left their tent anchor points (and a few fragments of tent) at 16000 feet and fell to below 15000 feet.

VBL liners:

We intended to take these but Jonathan's got lost as we packed up and Roy's arrived two days after we left!

General:

We used MSR XGK stoves, 4 gallons of fuel (US spelling for US gallons!), redline sleeping bags and touring skis.

A P P E N D I X 4: USEFUL ADDRESSES

- | | |
|---|---|
| Doug Geeting Aviation | Box 42, Talkeetna,
Alaska 99676
Tel: 010-1-907-7332366 |
| Denali Overland
Transportation Company | Box 330, Talkeetna,
Alaska 99676
Tel: 010-1-907-7332384 |
| H. Adams Carter | 361 Centre Street
Milton, Mass.. U.S.A. 02136 |
| Dr. Bradford Washburn | c/o Museum of Science
Boston, Mass.. U.S.A. |

A P P E N D I X 5: TRANSPORT

Alaska is the easiest high mountain area to get to that I have climbed in. We flew to Anchorage, via Seattle, with British Airways (64kg baggage allowance each is standard) and returned on a direct flight to London.

In Anchorage we were met by John Rowland (working for Denali Overland) and whisked straight to Talkeetna via Tom Waite's house for some caribou stew (we were hungry) and a 24 hour supermarket to top up our food supplies (we thought we might get hungry).

Thirty-six hours after leaving Heathrow, we landed on the west fork of the Kahiltna glacier (c/o Doug Geeting Aviation) after a mind-blowing hour's flight in, in crystal clear weather.

A P P E N D I X 6: FINANCE

IN	Personal contributions	£4240
	N E F	£ 600
	B M C	£ 200

		£5040
OUT	International flights	£1180
	Insurance	£ 190
	Food	£ 380
	Flights & transport in USA	£ 405
	Equipment	£2565
	Film	£ 135
	Accomodation	£ 105
	Sundries	£ 30

		£5040
