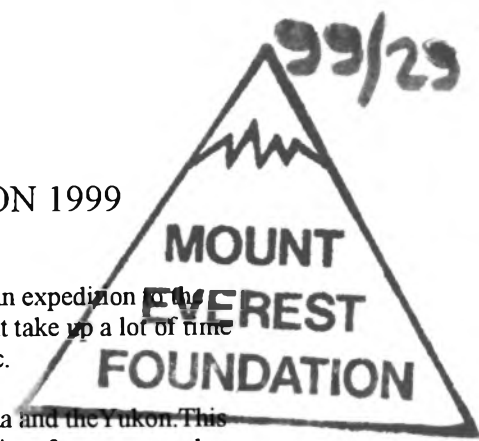


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THE BRITISH POLICE ALASKAN EXPEDITION 1999

During the summer of 1998, two Metropolitan Police officers began planning an expedition to the greater ranges. As both of us have very young children, not to mention jobs that take up a lot of time we felt we could not afford the money or the time for a lengthy Himalayan epic.



After doing some research we decided on the St. Elias mountains of S.E. Alaska and the Yukon. This appeared to offer an area with lots of potential for exploration with the possibility of new routes that although committing and strenuous would not be too technical. After much research we decided on the Cathedral glacier with Kennedy, Alvestone and Hubbard at it's head. There are numerous possibilities for adventurous climbing from this glacier but we decided that the plums had to be a new line on Hubbard, the south ridge and South Kennedy Peak (possibly the highest unclimbed North American summit.) Additionally we believed that Kennedy had never been climbed from the east.

Our team went through several changes of personnel. Eventually we settled on three Brits; Jonathan Wakefield, Geoff Hornby and Paul Vardon, and one American, Mike Smith. We did not have the time in the months running up to the expedition to attempt to raise any commercial sponsorship. (I know from previous experience what a weary task this can be.) However we were helped by the Mount Everest Foundation, the British Mountaineering Council and the Metropolitan Police to whom we are very grateful.

The St. Elias mountains are very easy to access however their close proximity to the coast means they enjoy terrible weather. By choosing an area set back from the ocean and by going in the month of May we hoped to avoid much of the bad weather. Sadly this was not to be the case.

We flew out from Heathrow on the 8th of May to Seattle, giving us superb views of the Arctic. After a night in Seattle we caught the "slow plane" that shuttles between Seattle and Anchorage again giving us fantastic views of snow-covered mountains along the Canadian coast. We alighted in Yakutat, a fishing village that can only be accessed by boat or plane.

Upon arrival we were told that we had timed our arrival just right as the bad weather over the mountains was just ending. Looking forward to the next day we met Kurt, our glacier pilot and enjoyed a good dinner in the Yakutat Lodge. Nowadays camping is officially not allowed in Yakutat so expeditions are forced to stay in the very nice but rather expensive Yakutat Lodge.

The next morning, the 10th May saw equally fine weather and we were flown up onto the glacier by Kurt of Gulf Air Taxis. We were told that we were very fortunate to be flying in to the mountains so soon after arriving. We were dropped onto the glacier at a height of approximately 2,400m., certainly enough to feel the effects of the altitude. After a short ski we made our base camp at about 2,440m. The next day was spent eating and drinking.

The following morning dawned clear but bitterly cold. Plumes of snow were flying off the tops and the wind had picked up around base-camp. With this in mind we decided to sit out the day at and fortify our base-camp. The wind continued to pick up throughout the day and following night, ruling out any movement on the next day.

By the 12th May we had a nice base camp with strong walls but unfortunately the end of the strong winds saw some very heavy snow fall. The snow continued for the next four days, at it's worst putting down almost a foot an hour but by the 16th it was starting to clear. With the weather forecast looking good for the next few days we left base-camp on the morning of the 17th. With the unclimbed peaks on the west side of the glacier and South Kennedy as our objectives we climbed a broad couloir on the east side of the glacier that appeared to lead up to a plateau. The fresh snow made going hard and it was not until midday that we were approaching the top. The upper slopes were a lot more complicated than had appeared from camp being a maze of crevasses and seracs. With snow bridges starting to collapse underneath us we decided we would make a cache of gear and return the next day. Accordingly two tents, food, fuel and some gear were dug into the snow and we descended the couloir that had now become dangerously loose.

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Sadly the weather broke up over the night and the following day saw more snow. The next ten days saw our team become ever more frustrated as we saw a typical Yukon blizzard blow in. Our couloir avalanched on an almost daily basis but our cache appeared safe. However we were able to keep fit and keep up morale by carrying out a thorough exploration of the glacier on skis.

The next break in the weather came on the 27th. On inspecting the lower slopes of our couloir we decided it was too dangerous and avalanche prone so we regretfully gave up. Sadly this meant we had to abandon our rather valuable cache. South Kennedy however was still our main aim so we decided to try to get near it from the north east. Early on the morning of the 28th we skied up to the col between Kennedy and Hubbard and attempted to traverse on to the plateau out of which South Kennedy rises. Again we had to turn back due to unstable snow conditions and falling seracs (we had left our small tents at the top of the couloir.)

We skied back down to base camp at midday on the 28th. still fairly hopeful of making an attempt on South Kennedy. We were now very fit and acclimatised and felt that we were now in a position to reach our peak in one push from base-camp. Sadly yet again the high pressure of the morning disappeared and clouds started filling up our little valley. By the evening it was again snowing hard.

The next brief window in the weather came on 2nd June and Kurt, our intrepid glacier pilot managed to get us out just in time. We then enjoyed a couple more nights in Yakutat, waiting for our flight to Seattle and then home.

We were not too down-hearted at having not submitted. We had enjoyed a month away from work in absolutely stunning surroundings and the four of us will certainly climb somewhere again.

In spite of the fact that we did not get up anything I would thoroughly recommend the St. Elias mountains and the Cathedral glacier in particular. Yakutat is a great little place to visit, there is loads of climbing to be found on the glacier but sadly we were just unlucky with the weather. This fact was confirmed by the local weather station who agreed that the St. Elias had enjoyed particularly bad weather over the last two years, possibly as a result of the El Nina/La Nina hurricanes. The Yakutat weather station can be contacted on 907 784 3322 or accessed on the internet at www.Alaska.Net/-NWSAR/.

New route possibilities include the peaks on the east side of the glacier, with the best one being South Kennedy. Hubbard has not been attempted from the south and appears to offer two obvious ridge lines. Kennedy itself has not been climbed from the south or the east. The pyramid-shaped south summit would make a very hard but spectacular rock climb. An enormous route would be a first ascent of South Kennedy followed by a first ascent of Kennedy from the east. (We never got to see how possible this would be.) Finally, behind our base camp was a large rock spire, that with a bit of imagination looks a little like the Petit Dru. For a team who had packed their sticky boots and chalk this would make a great little day out. See the photos that follow for a better idea of these possibilities.

Should anybody wish to view any more photos of the Cathedral glacier or if they have any questions I can be contacted at 5 Everthorpe Road, London SE 15 4DA or on 0181 2991866

The authors of this report and the expedition members agree to the copying of any part of this report for private purposes.

Jonathan Wakefield.



Unpacking the plane near to our base-camp with the south summit of Kennedy and the Petit Dru of the Yukon behind.



Unclimbed peaks on the east side of the glacier. Our couloir runs up between the two vertical rock bands in the foreground.



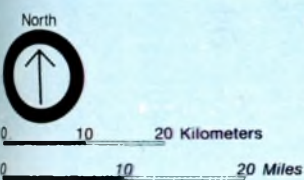
The first summit of Hubbard , from the south(true summit out of sight). The skyline ridge and the ridge in the centre are both unclimbed.



The nearest we got to the (still) unclimbed South Kennedy.



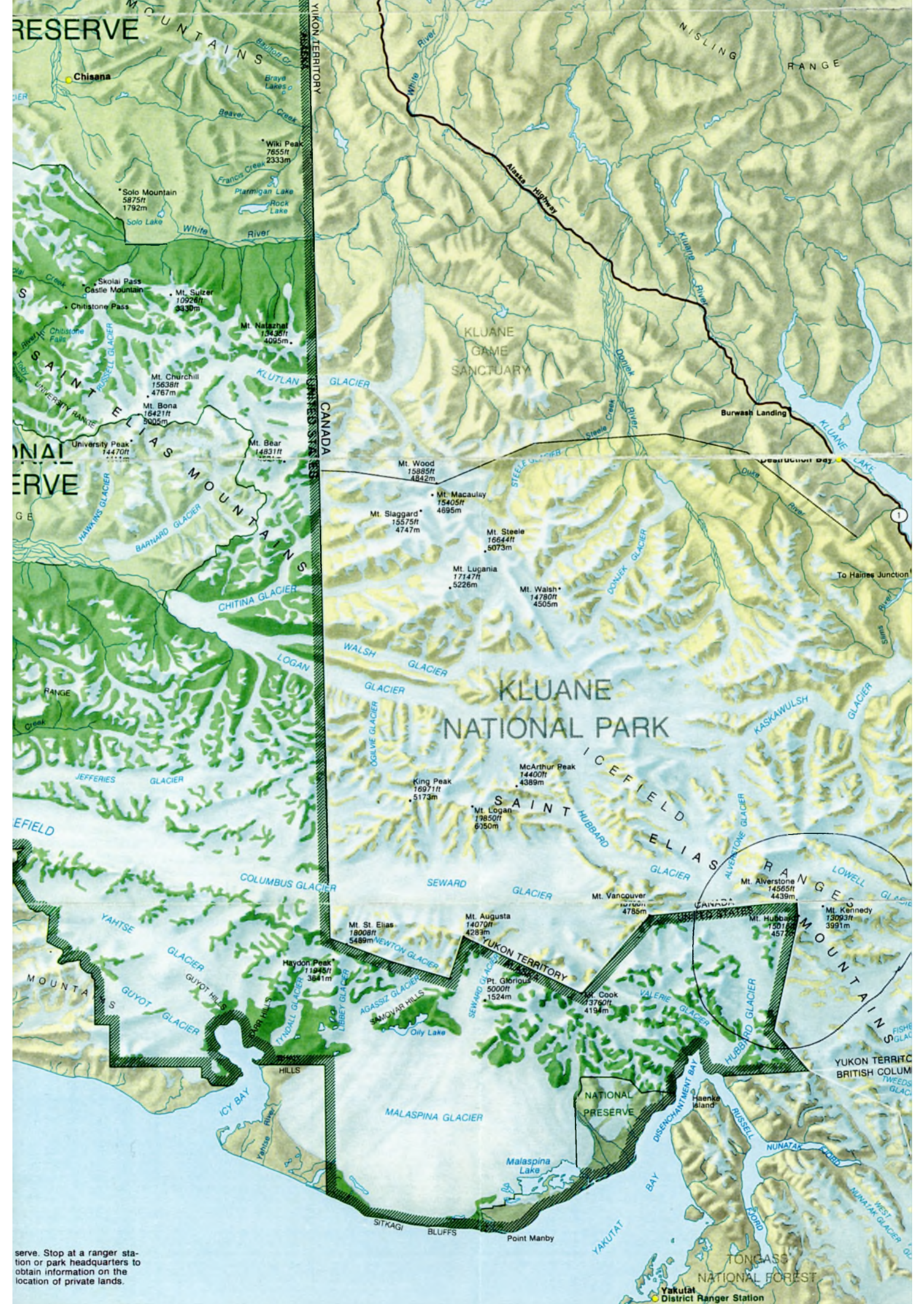




- Wrangell-St. Elias National Park
- Wrangell-St. Elias National Preserve
- Unpaved road

Please respect private property rights and obtain permission before entering the 1 million acres of nonfederal lands within the park/pre-

GULF OF ALASKA



serve. Stop at a ranger station or park headquarters to obtain information on the location of private lands.

Yukon District Ranger Station

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KENNEDY

GLACIER

THE GREAT SHELL

MOUNT KENNEDY

PARC

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2400

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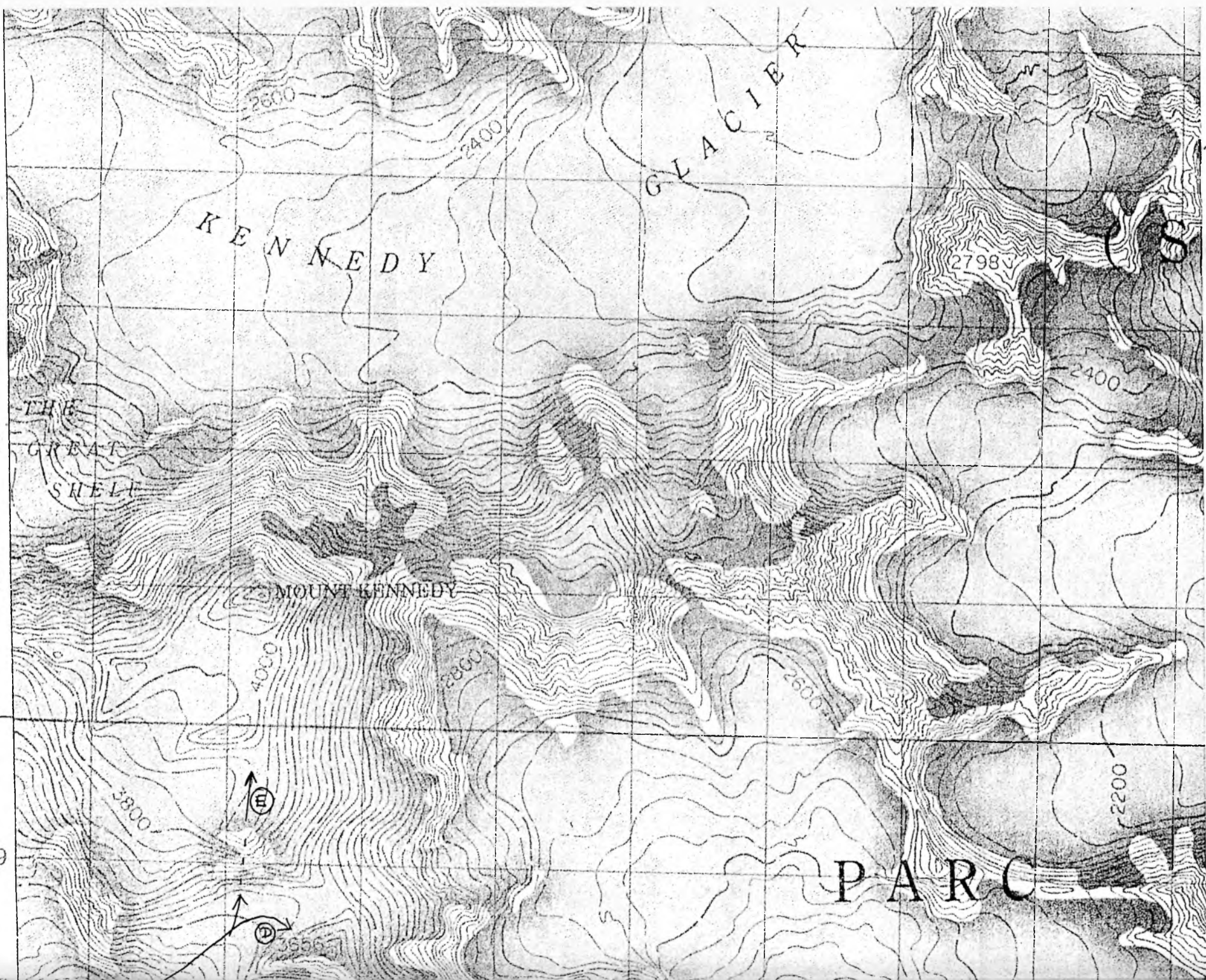
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T. D.



SE ridge

87
 4220 (E)
 3656 (D)
 BASE CAMP
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 85
 3551 (A)
 3480 (B)
 3420 (C)
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 of our
 couloir.
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