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**REPORT**



**LIGHTNING SPUR '99**

Thunder Mountain - Alaska

Supported by Mount Everest Foundation and British Mountaineering Council Expedition Grants

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## Introduction

The Lightning Spur 99 Expedition was to be a big wall / alpine style attempt on a major unclimbed line on the South Face of Thunder Mountain.

The expedition was supported by grants from the Mount Everest Foundation and the British Mountaineering Council. We are very grateful to all our benefactors for their financial and material help.

## Aims and Background

The expedition took place from May 29th - June 18th 1999. The aim of the expedition was to make the first ascent of the Central (Lightning) Spur on the South Face of Thunder Mountain in the Central Alaskan Range in Alaska.

Thunder Mountain (Peak 10,920') is situated on the southwest side of Mount Hunter in the Central Alaskan Range. It was first attempted by Alan Kearney and Steve Mascioli in the late 70s who reached a high point to the west of, and below, the main summit. In 1993 Geoff Hornby climbing with Dave Barlow made the first ascent of Peak 10,920 from the south, climbing a broad open gully on the western side of the South Face and descending the same way. In 1997, Nick Lewis, Jim Hall and Paul Ramsden made the first ascent of the central couloir on the South Face, naming it 'Dream Sacrifice'.

Since then the face has received greater attention and two further gully lines were climbed in April 1999. Two weeks prior to our arrival in Talkeetna Jim Donnini and Malcolm Daly were attempting the left branch of the Central Couloir when Daly fell high on the route, stripping the pitch and breaking both legs, also injuring Donnini in the thigh resulting in a major rescue incident.

## Preliminary Details

Six months before going we contacted the Denali Park Rangers in Talkeetna to inform them of our aims and to get additional information on Thunder Mountain and the surrounding area. We registered with the Park Rangers upon

arrival in Talkeetna and although there is no formal regulation with other peaks as currently for Denali and Mount Foraker, everyone visiting the area is encouraged to do so for rescue/administrative purposes.

We chose to fly into our base camp below Thunder Mountain with Talkeetna Air Taxi since they have the reputation of being one of the best operators in the area and the owner Paul Roderick is known for his considerable skill in getting into and, more importantly, out of difficult access areas. We knew that he had flown to beneath the route before having dropped the British 1997 team there.

For the area surrounding Thunder Mountain we used photocopied sheets of the main map of the area which we obtained from the Ranger Office in Talkeetna.

## Food

We bought the vast majority of our food at Carrs Supermarket in Anchorage, which is reasonably priced, has immense choice and is ultra-convenient for when you step off the plane.

We used the usual MSR's to cook in base and ran them off normal white gas purchased from Talkeetna Air Taxis. We used this in preference to Coleman fuel as other trips have reported problems with Coleman fuel at altitude.

We were to use propane cartridges in a modified Epigas/Markill Stormy to do our cooking on the face. A supply of these still remains cached with TAT in Talkeetna.

## Gear

At base camp on the glacier we used a Terranova Quasar tent and we had a Gemini with us for possible use on the route - however it proved an excellent food storage tent on the glacier.

Peter Hutchison Designs, who appear to be the people who know their business in

this field, supplied sleeping bags for the route! These consisted of 900 grammes fill goose-down in a Drylight shell with vapour barrier liner and light Gore-Tex bivvy bag.

We took assorted static ropes for fixing and 2 x 8.5 Mammut everdry 60 m. ropes for leading and also 2x 10.5 mm ropes for hard aid sections.

We took a full aid rack plus ice gear including haulsack.

Clothing and other equipment was down to personal preference.

### Account of the trip

We arrived in Anchorage via St. Louis on May the 29<sup>th</sup> and made our way via taxi to the Puffin Place Motel located close to AMH and REI climbing shops and Carrs Supermarket plus several good eating houses and bars.

2 days were spent acquiring equipment and food in Anchorage and then we took the Talkeetna Shuttle Service to Talkeetna.

On arrival in Talkeetna we stayed at TAT's office / bunkhouse for four days due to the weather conditions being unsuitable for flying.

On the evening of the 4<sup>th</sup> June the weather cleared sufficiently to allow us to be flown into the Tokositna glacier where we set up Base Camp in the early hours of the morning.

The next two days were spent reconnoitring the glacier and studying the face to establish a suitable line of attack. Due to excessive snowslides and rockfall during daylight hours, we decided the best plan of attack would be to approach the spur during the early hours of the morning and fix a line from the base of the spur down the snowslope and over the bergschrund. This would then allow us safe access to the base of the rock.

In the early hours of the morning of the 8<sup>th</sup> June we approached the face via the couloir to the right of the spur, hoping to make use of the coldest hours to avoid objective dangers.

With Dave Green in the lead we moved together up the initial snow cone below the schrund. Dave crossed the bergschrund and carried on climbing until Sandy was in position to cross the bergschrund. Dave then began kicking a stance to safeguard the crossing. At this point a number of rocks fell down the couloir, one of which struck Sandy on the helmet with considerable force, knocking him unconscious and creating a sizeable head-wound.

This necessitated a retreat from the face to Base Camp in order to treat the wound and assess the seriousness of the injury. On removal of Sandy's helmet it became obvious that he had received a serious head injury and that examination and treatment at a medical facility would be required.

The following morning the weather had closed in such that flying was impossible and the evacuation would have to be delayed until the weather cleared.

This occurred the following afternoon when a plane flying overhead spotted our 'SOS' signs, coloured with Tang drinks powder to increase visibility in the snow. Evacuation was then swift and efficient.

**Note:** We were carrying a CB radio, but this proved to be useless as pilots simply flying overhead are virtually never tuned into the CB channel.

### Budget

#### Costs:

Flights to US	£1600
Input flight	£400
Road transport (UK & US)	£330
Food	£350
Equipment	£1500
Insurance (annual)	£590

Miscellaneous	<u>£50</u>
	<b>£4820</b>

**Income:**

MEF Grant	£1000
BMC Grant	£2300
Personal Contributions	<u>£1520</u>
	<b>£4820</b>

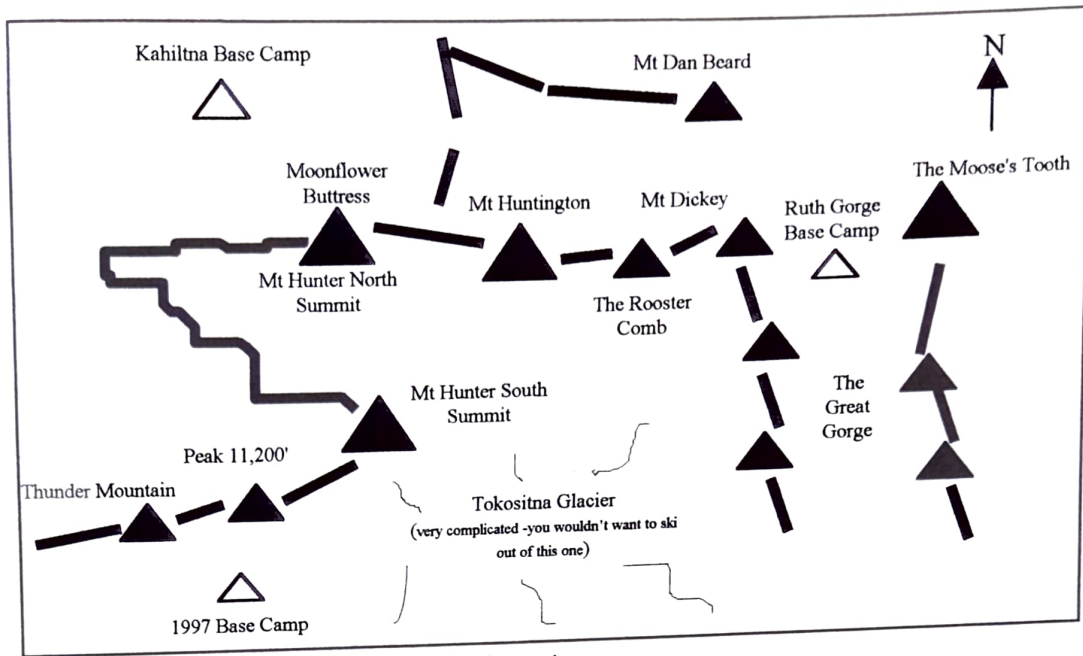
### **Acknowledgements**

Thanks to Bill Ruthven and the panel of the Mount Everest Foundation and Andy Macnae and the panel of the British Mountaineering Council for the awards we received.

Thanks also to the staff at Outside, Llanberis; Marion Wintringham for clothing, Ken Lockett at HB climbing equipment for assorted hardware and Karen Mottart for medical kit and supplies. Thanks also to Nick Lewis for information gleaned about the Face. A special thanks to Talkeetna Ambulance Service who were total stars!

All the help was much appreciated.

## A very simplified sketch of the Thunder-Hunter-Ruth area



From the Thunder Mountain 1997 Report.

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