



The High-Altitude Section of the Colorado Mountain Club

THIN AIR

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Inside this issue:

The Alps	1,3,6
Expedition seeking members for Denali	2
Muztagh Ata, China	1, 2
Gran Paradiso, Italy	1, 4
2007 Call for submissions for climbers list	4
Trip Calendar	5

“GRUSS GOTT!” HAMS TAKES THE HIGH PEAKS OF THE ALPS

Our HAMS “throng” visited Chamonix, France and Zermatt, Switzerland in July with plans to take on the infamous Jewels of the Alps, Mont Blanc and the Matterhorn. Despite weather conditions thwarting our attempt on the Matterhorn, we were able to make ascents of a number of 4000 meter peaks, including the Alp’s two highest, Mont Blanc and Monte Rosa. In addition to achieving successes in the mountains, we were able to enjoy many other fine European experiences, including visiting famous historical sites, taking leisurely (or not so leisurely) hikes through magnificent mountain scenery, enjoying tasty meals at outdoor cafes, and meeting other travelers from around the world.

This outing attracted high demand from the moment it was announced – so much so, in fact, that a second trip was quickly added with Kurt Wibbenmeyer as leader.



Descending from the summit of Monte Rosa. Matterhorn is in background to the right, Breithorn in mid-distance in center, Mont Blanc in far distance just left of center, and northern slopes of Lyskamm at left. Photo by Bill Blazek.

Alps. Continued on Page 3

UPCOMING HAMS SPONSERED TRIPS

Muztagh Ata, China, 7546 meters (24,758’)
July 1-Jul24, 2008 \$5480
Leaders: Steve Bonowski / Andy White

We are all very excited about this expedition to China, the first ever High Altitude Mountaineering Section trip to that country.

Muztagh is located in far northwest China, near the borders with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and despite its gentle slopes, is the 43rd highest mountain in the world. The area is increasingly frequented by climbers from around the world, and the mountain is located near Silk Road ruins and other cultural sites. The standard route on the mountain involves minimal exposure to crevasses and low angle snow climbing in the upper 1,000+ meters of the climb. Summer weather on the mountain is generally benign, although snowfall can occur at any time of the year.

The trip is being led by Steve Bonowski, long time HAMS expeditions leader, and Andy White. Prospective participants should have previous climbing experience above 18,000’ and preferably camping experience at 15,000’ or higher. Climbers not known to the leaders will be expected to provide a climbing

Muztagh Ata, Continued on Page 2

Gran Paradiso, Italy: Park & Peak (13,324’)
August 24-September 4, 2008
\$4,280 + \$380 for optional peak climb
Leader: Steve Bonowski

Please join the High Altitude Mountaineering Section for a new type of international outing: a hybrid trip. We will trek in very scenic Gran Paradiso National Park located in far northwest Italy, just southeast of the Mont Blanc area. The trek involves hiking from small town to small town, from hut to hut. Hiking is with a day pack, although participants will need to carry a few more things when we are staying in huts without road access for the baggage taxi.

For the final day on trek, the hikers will descend while the climbers utilize an alpine start to do a roped glacial climb on low angle ice & snow of the Peak itself. After a successful visit to the picturesque summit, we will follow the climbers down to our last night on the trek in Pont.

Prospective trek participants should be in good hiking condition, and able to hike at the "C" or easy "D" level for several consecutive days. Those who plan to try the

Gran Paradiso, Continued on Page 4

PRIVATE EXPEDITION SEEKING MEMBERS

“TEAM COLORADO — DENALI 2008”

June 2-June 30, 2008 West Buttress Route

Team Training and Preparation: December 7—May 8

Team Leader: Dave Altieri (719) 233-2527



INTERESTED IN LEADING YOUR OWN TRIP, TREK, OR EXPEDITION??

If interested, contact Jim Rickard [jrickard@arber.com]

Muztagh Ata, Continued from Page 1

resume and references. Preference will be given to graduates of a CMC High Altitude or Advanced Mountaineering School, or to instructors in those schools. Equivalent experience to the Schools is acceptable, but must be fully described in the climbing resume.

Cost of the trip includes international air fare to Kashgar; hotel in Kashgar; transport to Base Camp and return; airport transfers; all permits & liaison officer fees; full board at Base Camp; guide service on the mountain; Chinese visa; limited leader expenses; and CMC fee. Cost does not include rental or purchase of equipment; food on the mountain above Base Camp; evacuation or other insurance; any use of porters; souvenir purchases; or bar tab. Final cost may vary slightly depending on air fares and currency exchange rates (guide cost is priced in Euros).

Participants will be asked to attend a planning meeting in late January, 2008. The leaders will arrange a series of training and get acquainted climbs beginning in March.

For an application packet, please contact Steve at P.O. Box 280286, Lakewood CO 80228-0286 or via e-mail at nztrekker@earthlink.net . No phone calls please.

If an application is submitted, please include a deposit check for \$300 made out to CMC and noting "Muztagh/China Outing" in the remarks line. The check will be returned if the applicant is not accepted for the trip; otherwise, the deposit is non-refundable subject to the trip cancellation policy contained in the packet.

Alps, Continued from Page 1

Several trip members brought family or friends along, too, and our planned group size of 8 mushroomed to 21 as we tried to coordinate transportation and lodging for our swelling group. Adding to the planning burden was the fact that I was organizing the trip from Montana, so we handled a lot of the coordination via the Internet. In addition to using email for communication, we established a group web site that allowed all members to contribute to our knowledge base on the routes and peaks we intended to climb, supply links to various information about the cities and countries we would visit, coordinate pre-trip training climbs, and other preparation activities. I highly recommend the use of such trip web sites to future trip leaders!

Since Europe is a significant cultural and historical destination, many in our group spent extra time before and/or after our planned trip dates to do additional sightseeing or climbing. As a consequence, we arrived in Chamonix, France via a number of different routes; remarkably, we all met up at our base at the Auberge de Jeunesse (Youth Hostel) on the scheduled trip start date, and were able to get ourselves organized for our climbing activities that commenced the following morning!

We began by catching the telepherique to the summit station of the Aiguille du Midi, which whisked us about 10,000 vertical feet to the 12,000+ foot summit of the Aiguille in about 20 minutes! Ah, .. who says approach marches are long and difficult?! From the summit station, a short but exposed ridge walk dropped us below the Aiguille which we contoured underneath to reach the Refuge des Cosmiques, our mountain base for the Mont Blanc attempt – barely more than an hour from leaving the valley, we were lounging over lunch and a beer in the hut and taking in the “big screen” view of our first obstacle for the following morning, the northwest face of Mont Blanc du Tacul, from the hut’s deck. After our multi-course dinner, we hit the bunks to await our 1 AM breakfast call.

Leaving the hut about 2 AM, we followed the human ant column across the Col (saddle) du Midi to the base of the Mont Blanc du Tacul face. Perhaps it was just as well that it was dark and we could only see as far as the circle of light provided by our headlamps – we knew there were large seracs above us, looming over our route up the face. One of our party quickly got an insider’s view of the mountain, falling several feet down a crevasse before being arrested by his rope-mates and assisted out of the hole by a nearby team. As we reached the top of this initial 2,000 foot wall as dawn approached, the winds swirled ground blizzards of snow around us, and we were glad to drop over the ridge crest and onto more sheltered slopes approaching the Col du Mont Maudit. Beyond the Col, we started up the second Mont of our Tres Monts (three mountains) route, the Mont Maudit. This section was the steepest of the climb, with the final hundred feet to Mont Maudit’s NW ridge being particularly steep and icy – many parties anchored in to belay this pitch. Among those who didn’t was a young Floridian named Thomas, who was climbing solo. Thomas had befriended our group the previous afternoon in the hut; he was only 21, with no real experience on snow and ice (he’d borrowed his axe, crampons, and some biners from a friend), but he was fit and determined to make a try for the summit. At the base of this slope, Thomas stopped to rest, and we were sure he’d opt to turn back rather than risk a fatal fall on this section, but we later discovered that he’d taken on and surmounted this obstacle, too.

We made a long contour above the SW face of Mont Maudit, crossed the Col de la Brenva, and tackled the final snow slopes (still more than 1,500 feet of vertical remaining!) up the NE shoulder of our final “Mont”. While the winds weren’t as strong as along the ridge of Mont Blanc du Tacul, they were still noticeable, and swirling clouds often limited our visibility as we trudged the last couple hours up to the summit. The summit was anticlimactic, as we were only able to see about 20 meters from the top.

After about 15-20 minutes of descending, we encountered another (German?) party headed up to the summit – and there, tagging along at the end, was Thomas! We offered a brief greeting and headed on down, but a little while later, I looked back and saw that Thomas had joined us. I was impressed that he’d been able to get up to the summit and back down to catch up with us so quickly – we definitely weren’t going very fast (the other rope teams from our group were far ahead of us), but it seemed he’d made a half-hour round trip in just 5 or 10 minutes. Later, I learned that he’d foregone the summit (he’d been so close!) and decided to try to hook up with us, as he was concerned about the descent of the steep ice slope from the ridge on Mont Maudit, and didn’t want to try getting down it on his own.

When we reached the steep slope, we performed a linked series of rappels to get our team, Thomas, and some climbers from following parties down the icy stretch. The remainder of the descent went uneventfully until we began our descent down the long face of Mont Blanc du Tacul. There, an approaching thunderstorm sent a bolt of lightning down, to a point directly between us and the hut, which we could now plainly see across the Col du Midi basin. Despite the urgency we felt, we had to take the descent down this steep section slowly, and it was tedious! Finally, we reached the flat section below the face and made haste back to the hut – we were already late for dinner! We accelerated our pace and made it in time for the second serving!

The following morning, we bid Thomas “adieu”, leisurely returned to the Aiguille du Midi cable car station, and descended into Chamonix. The remainder of this day and the following one were used to restock our climbing food supplies, do laundry, explore Chamonix, neighboring villages or local trails, or just hang out and enjoy a free Saturday, munching croissants at sidewalk cafes.

Sunday morning we boarded a train, crossed over the pass into Switzerland, and arrived midday at our next base in Zermatt. Early Monday found us again in cable cars, headed up to the Schwartzsee station on our way to the Hornli Hut at the base of the Matterhorn. At the top station, the winds gusted strongly, and we took respite for a meal in the Schwartzsee guesthouse. The high winds forced the cable car to shut down for most of the day, and some of the non-climbers in our group were only able to get back down to town on the cable car during a short window of lessened winds when they briefly re-opened the lift. Luckily, the winds weren’t as severe for us as we hiked the 90-minute path on up the lower portion of the Hornli Ridge to the hut, but the clouds were quite low, with fog and light rain occasionally enveloping us as we trekked upward. We’d known the weather forecast wasn’t promising, but clearing was expected to start the next day, so we planned to reconnoiter the route on Tuesday and make a summit bid on Wednesday. The small number of other climbers in the hut indicated the local guides didn’t think much of conditions, and we were disappointed to wake up to a couple inches of snow and a socked-in mountain. The expected clearing didn’t appear to be materializing, and the new snow wasn’t melting off fast enough – would we be able to try it the next day? A few made some exploratory sojourns up the initial pitches and reported it didn’t look good – we might need crampons the whole way up. So the group gath-



View of the Matterhorn with new snow, as we take the Gornergrat train towards Monte Rosa. Photo by Gary Hellinga.

SUBMIT YOUR OWN HIGH PEAKS

Call for Submissions for the 2007 HAMS "Climbers List"

It's time to submit your name and climbs for the third annual list of higher or "exotic" peaks climbed by HAMS members.

Submit your climbs to HAMS.Expeditions@cmc.org (or mail to the CMC, attention: HAMS), please include, as a minimum: Your name, peak name, summit elevation, location, & date climbed.

This is similar to "The 14'ers List" and "Beyond the 14'ers," published annually in the Trail and Timberline, but a bit more -- well -- arbitrary. The rules, such as they are, include:

- 1) Climbs must be submitted by January 31 2008.
- 2) Only climbs during calendar year 2007 will be listed.
- 3) An effort will be made to recognize valiant attempts that failed to reach the summit. If this describes your climb, please also indicate the approximate elevation reached, and reason for turning back.
- 4) For all climbs, commentary and/or photographs are appreciated, and may be published at the discretion of the editor as space permits.
- 5) Finally, what constitutes a "higher or 'exotic' peak"? This is where it really gets arbitrary:
 - a) No Colorado peaks. Colorado has lots of peaks and routes which clearly deserve to be called "exotic," but HAMS doesn't want to be in the position of deciding which are, and which are not. If you've climbed one of these, you are invited to write an article for Thin Air.
 - b) Any peak outside of Colorado of 14,000 feet or more.
 - c) Lower peaks outside of Colorado that present a degree of difficulty, either in climbing or access. For example, Granite Peak (12,745) Montana, counts, Mount Sunflower (4,039) Kansas, probably doesn't. Unnamed 3,353, the highest point in Gabon, does.

Gran Paradiso, Continued from Page 1

Peak should be recent graduates of a CMC basic mountaineering school, or possess recent equivalent experience or training. Climbers not known to the trip leader should provide a climbing resume.

Cost of the trip includes round trip air fare to Geneva; transport to/ from Geneva and from Chamonix to Le Tri and return from Pont; all lodging with half board; most lunches; guide fees; luggage transfers; leader expenses; and CMC fee. Cost does not include a few meals; souvenir purchases; bar tab; any kind of evacuation or other insurance. Final cost may vary slightly depending on air fares and currency exchange rate (dollar vs. euro).

Participants will be asked to attend a planning meeting around March 1. The leader will arrange a series of training and get acquainted hikes and climbs beginning in early summer. Those who do the technical climb of Gran Paradiso may be asked to attend a short skills refresher session.

For an application packet, please contact Steve Bonowski at P.O. box 280286, Lakewood CO 80228-0286 or via e-mail at nztrek-ker@earthlink.net . No phone calls please.

If an application is submitted, please include a deposit check for \$300 made out to CMC and noting "Gran Paradiso Outing" in the remarks line. The check will be returned if the application is not accepted for the trip; otherwise, the deposit is non-refundable subject to the trip cancellation policy contained in the packet.

Upcoming Trips

Upcoming trips approved by the ExCom, as well as tentative trips in the planning stage are listed below. For more information, and for other trips offered by Adventure Travel, be sure to check listings on the CMC website at www.cmc.org/events/events.

To request an application for approved trips, or for even more information, contact the leader at the phone number or email shown.

Don't forget to submit your story to Thin Air!

You do not have to climb an exotic peak in a foreign country to be eligible for a submission! Please submit your latest adventure or other article to

spykerd@comcast.net

APPROVED HAMS TRIPS

Climbs in Ecuador December 08th to December 22nd, 2007 - STILL A FEW SPOTS OPEN !

\$1350 Land Cost plus \$900 Airfare (Airfare is only estimate)

Greg Olson and Lisa Herter C: 303 587-2847 email: gpolson2@comcast.net

Still a few spots open. Register now to get a spot on this exiting adventure to South America.

See last years trip online: <http://systems.cs.colorado.edu/~schelleg/Photos/ecuador/index.html>

OUTING DESCRIPTION: Climb Peaks in Ecuador in December. We will be back by Christmas. Experience the culture on the Equator. Climbs that are included will be Guagua Pichincha (15,728ft) Iliniza Norte (16,817ft), Cotopaxi (19,347ft) and Chimborazo(20,703ft). We will be staying in a hotels, huts and one night in tents. Includes our own bus, guide and a cook while climbing. Also includes 2 nights at the beautiful Papallacta Hot Springs. All meals while climbing and breakfast at hotels are included. Other BMS and HAMS graduates or equivalent experience necessary for the Difficult D-E trip. Maximum 12 participants plus leaders; so sign up early. Participation in conditioning trips, including an overnight trip and crevasse rescue practice, is required. Climbs subject to change dependent on route conditions. Contact leaders for trip packet.



August/September, 2008

Gran Paradiso National Park, northwest Italy, 13,300'

Steve Bonowski will lead another Alps trek in this historic national park in the Italian Alps. The end of the trek will feature an optional climb of Gran Paradiso itself. The climb requires low angle roped glacier travel skills with ice axe and crampons. The summit block requires either an easy rock scramble or a little mixed climbing if snow is present.

July 2008

EXPEDITION TO: Muztagh Ata, China

Upcoming is the first ever HAMS expedition to western China. Trip leaders will be Steve Bonowski and Andy White. This will be a 21-25 day expedition with multiple camps on the mountain. Approximate cost at this time, subject to change, is about \$3,600 plus \$1,800 air fare. As the leaders are still researching outfitters, this amount may change a little.

Participants will need prior experience climbing above 18-19,000' and camping above 15,000'. A climbing resume, with references, will be helpful, and will be required if a member is not known to the trip leaders.



ered that afternoon to assess the conditions and reached a consensus that we should look at another objective that might be in better condition (i.e., a snow route). We decided to descend to town first thing next morning, catch the Gornergrat train, hike up to the Monte Rosa Hut, and try climbing Monte Rosa and descending back to town on Thursday. This plan was quite ambitious, as the climb of Monte Rosa involved a summit day ascent of over 6,000 feet, not to mention a couple-hour descent to catch the last train back to town. Some opted to stay Wednesday in Zermatt, and try alternate peaks as dayclimbs – and they were successful in reaching the summits of the Breithorn (by 2 different routes), Castor, and Pollux – all 4000 meter peaks.

In the meantime, the rest of us enjoyed a pleasant train ride and hike (the weather was now wonderfully clear, as had been forecast) up to the Monte Rosa Hut. Another big dinner (with ice cream for dessert!), and another early AM breakfast, and we were again out amongst a large number of climbing groups headed toward an Alpine summit in the middle of the night! We somehow managed not to get lost in the jumbled boulder fields above the hut, and after somewhat more than an hour, we strapped on crampons and headed up the lower reaches of the Monte Rosa glacier. As it became light, we continued our trudge up the glacier, then hit the final snow slopes leading to a saddle on the summit ridge of the Dufourspitze, the highest of the several summits of the Monte Rosa massif. The ridge soon became very narrow, providing exciting exposure on both sides as we moved higher. Unfortunately, it also caused traffic jams as we ran into other groups who were slowed significantly by the increasingly exposed and technical terrain. One chimney, in particular, became a logjam as everyone waited their turn to access the fixed rope running up the chimney. At long last, we popped over the last steep step and joined the many groups on the summit. We made our stay short, so as to get a jump on the other teams departing the summit and thus not get caught up behind slower parties again. We were mostly successful at this, and were soon back down to the saddle and able to take a longer break and enjoy the brilliant sun and extensive views. We had clear vistas to the many high peaks surrounding us – Lyskamm, Castor, Pollux, Breithorn, Matterhorn, Dent Blanche, Allalhorn, Finsteraarhorn, and many others ... even great long-distance views of Mont Blanc! This was the type of day to soak in the best of the Alps – and plant seeds of desire for returning again in the not-too-distant future!

The descent was long, but not too tedious, as our rope team engaged in a friendly race down the glacier with another team from our group (in the end, we lost – badly!!). We even managed to find a couple short sections of slope where we could glissade; I noted that I did not see any European climbers glissading anywhere that we climbed – I wonder why? The boulder field below the glacier's toe was, if anything, more difficult to navigate than it had been in the dark, but we all eventually found our way back to the hut. We grabbed a quick mid-afternoon rest break, then resumed our descent and long contour back to the Rotenboden train stop to catch our train down into town. We arrived at our hostel base just in time for dinner – a good meal to top off a long, but satisfying, day in the mountains! We later heard that 3 climbers who'd attempted the Matterhorn while we were on Monte Rosa or other peaks had fallen to their deaths – hard as it had been, we'd made the right choice.

On Friday morning, our group departed in a number of directions – most headed by train to Geneva for flights home on Saturday or Sunday. A few others headed off to continue their European vacations, while another subgroup remained in Zermatt for a few more days of climbing in this wonderful mountain playground.

In general, we had a great trip, to a great pair of destinations, and I for one plan to go back as soon as I can! But the time in Europe wasn't the whole story of this expedition – we had some great training trips that allowed others to help with organizing and planning, and provided exciting climbs in their own right. These included trips up various challenging routes on James, Grizzley, and Pacific Peaks, The Citadel, and Sawtooth Mountain in Colorado's high country, rock climbing on the Flatirons and on the North Ridge of Spearhead in Rocky Mountain National Park, an ascent of Montana's Granite Peak, and a climb of the Grand Teton – always a classic! I hope the coming year yields as many fun and adventurous outings, and look forward to getting back up among the peaks with the friends I made on this outing! Story by Gary Hellen



The High-Altitude Section of the Colorado Mountain Club

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