



THIN AIR

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Mt Columbia - Canadian High Points Project

—Rich McAdams

Standing on the summit, Kurt carefully probed toward the edge of the cornice... and then he was gone.

Several days earlier the team of four departed the CMC for a week of climbing in the Canadian Rockies. Wayne Herrick, Kurt Wibbenmeyer, Sharon Crawford, and myself

had the specific goal of reaching the summit of Mt Columbia, the undisputed high point of Alberta. If all went well we might also tackle the high point of the Saskatchewan province as part of our drive home.

The group was laid back and compatible. Each member offered their experience, good nature, and great conversation as we did the initial 1200 mile drive to Jasper National Park. In hindsight, with three alpha navigators and an alpha driver on board, all with differing opinions as to direction and distance, and all with varying attention spans, the drive should have been eventful, but somehow was not.



Sunrise on Mt Columbia, (photo: Rich McAdams)

Mt Columbia, , continued on page 2

Canadian High Points Project

Barbeau Peak, Nunavut Territory, Canada

With the challenging and successful ascent of Mt Columbia (the high point in Alberta) now completed, the next peak on the To Do List for the Canadian High Points Project is Barbeau Peak.

Barbeau is the high point in the new Canadian territory of Nunavut. It is the furthest north, sitting some 900 miles above the Arctic Circle on Ellesmere Island. The good news is the peak resides in an area that is considered dry, has little precipitation, and during the climbing season the weather is considered comfortable by climber standards.

Canadian Highpoints project, continued on page 4

After checking in with the Jasper Park rangers to receive the weather forecast and their comments on route conditions, our departure from the trailhead to anticipated High Camp would follow the Riviere Saskatchewan Nord over a faint trail. The rangers said the initial river portion of the backpack was “sketchy” so we were prepared for some degree of trail intermittency as we hiked along. What was unexpected was the complete loss of the route altogether. We wandered along obscure game trails, did a bit of 4th class exposed backpack scrambling, worked through some serious route finding challenges, then capped it all off with the risk we would slip into the river gorge as it cut vertically into the side of the mountain. Several days later, as we made our return back to the trail head, we discovered the correct route. It turns out a seldom used jeep road was, in fact, the standard route. It seems that for the park rangers “sketchy” was an old jeep road; for us sketchy morphed into 4th class backpacking hundreds of feet above Shear-Death-Gorge. I guess it’s all in the eyes of the beholder.



The summit cornice that broke off - Photo: Rich McAdams

As we continued up the river valley now on easier terrain, we reached the toe of the Saskatchewan Glacier. For those that have experienced getting up onto a real glacier, you will recall that the glacier does not always seamlessly taper down to its stream bed. One first has to survey and find a route that could/might go, and then negotiate the transition up over black ice, dirt on top of black ice, then god-awful mud on top of dirt on top of black ice. Sharon exited that ordeal looking like a mud encrusted tar-baby. However, once up on the glacier it was again better going. The lower section was rather benign and we were able to move quickly, but as we gained elevation and the route became more dubious our pace slowed as it became apparent we would need to rope up.

As Kurt disappeared from sight he made not a whimper. He was quickly on his way to certain demise, yet maintained that proud and defiant demeanor suggesting that if it was his time, he was ready.

The backpack in was much longer than anticipated, so the decision was made to stop early. Entering potential Camp 1, we quickly probed the area and flagged a perimeter so we would not inadvertently set up camp over a hidden crevasse. Not good when one’s late night prostate-induced wee wee becomes an express elevator ride to the basement floor. Considering the consequences, we probed and probed until comfortable with the conditions. We then went to work building snow walls to protect the tents from strong winds, established a level tent platform so we could truly get our beauty sleep, and constructed the Taj Mahal of all open pit latrines. It never ceases to amaze how much effort a team will devote to their toilet area. The Taj had an official corner for big potty, another corner for little potty, shelves for toiletries, and walls to shield and protect those body parts that need shielding and protecting. Life can be good.

The next morning we moved to Camp 2 (aka High Camp). Arriving a bit early, we had a chance that afternoon to reflect on the first portion of our trip. We had originally intended to hike up the Athabasca Glacier, which was supposed to be a hard seven miles over broken terrain, infested with crevasses, and with the companion risk of rock fall and avalanche. The park rangers strongly encouraged us to use the Saskatchewan Glacier route instead as it was less technical (although not our big concern) and would allow us reach High Camp faster (now that got our attention). However, as with the earlier “sketchy trail” advisory, the Saskatchewan route proved more troubling as it measured out at 15.5 miles, and with more elevation gain since it started lower in the valley. Our planned one day backpack to High Camp had now required two days, so it was understood that we had just consumed our extra summit day should we encounter bad weather.

July 5th: Our anticipated summit day. After some debate the team agreed to a 1:00am departure time. As Wayne pointed out, other than personal comfort there was really no down-side to an early departure; it could only improve our chances to summit. The obvious rationale was that we needed to be on the summit shortly

2009**High Altitude Mountaineering Seminar**

7:00 - 9:30 PM

Colorado Mountain Club, Foss Auditorium, 710 10th Street, Golden**Tentative Schedule**

October 7	Introduction to Seminar Introduction to HAMS Section Introduction High Altitude Mountaineering School Equipment for High Altitude/Cold Weather Trips
October 14	High Altitude/Cold Weather Nutrition Slide Show
October 21	High Altitude/Cold Weather Medical Issues
October 28	Team Dynamics Lessons Learned
November 4	Acclimatization and Fitness Training for an Expedition How to Plan for an Expedition
November 11	How to Gear Up - From Orizaba to Denali Lessons Learned from High Glaciated Peaks

Cost for all six nights is:

\$45 for Non-Members and Members who do not pre register

\$40 for CMC Members who pre register

\$8 for individual evenings, payable at the door

To register, sign up on line with your credit card, call the CMC office, or send your name, address, phone number and check made out to "CMC" to the CMC office. Please note "HAMS Seminar" on your check.

For more information, contact Michele Graves at hikinggirl@me.com or Margaret Turner at paskaturn@msn.com.

Join us for the third annual HAMS Summer Rendezvous

September 18 - 20, 2009

Winfield, Colorado

(Car camp in the meadow with outhouses across the bridge from town)

This informal gathering of HAMS members and friends will feature mountaineering, socializing, storytelling, and an opportunity to plan future climbing trips. Come for the weekend, or just one day, as your schedule permits.

Informal climbs will be organized on the spot by those interested, or you may sign up through the CMC for Club climbs of La Plata and Huron led by Steve Bonowski.

Contact Jim Rickard at HAMS.Expeditions@cmc.org for directions or other information.

Interested in up-to-date information about HAMS ?

Go to the HAMS website for the most recent HAMS information as well as electronic copies of "Thin Air" with color photos.

www.cmchams.org

Canadian Highpoints project, continued from page 1

Jack Bennett, the author of the Canadian high points book *Not Won in a Day*, and the first person to have completed all 13 Canadian high points, is in the process of organizing a second trip to climb Barbeau scheduled for June 2010.

Tom Bennett, Jack's son, has only this last peak to complete and he will have finished all the Canadian high points as well. Father and son, numbers 1 and 2; both American.

We call ourselves The Musk Ox Team (our second goal is to find and photograph musk ox) and currently there are eight Musk Ox'ers on the Go List. We have seats available for two more on the Twin Otter charter flight, but can easily schedule a second charter if there is sufficient interest.

Our plans are to have the charter flight drop us a few miles from Barbeau, and from this base camp do a one day straight-forward ascent of the peak since it is not considered difficult. The remainder of the trip will consist of some 12 days snow-shoeing/skiing and hiking the 50 miles south to our pick-up rendezvous.

At this point it is estimated that the per-person cost of the round trip commercial flight to Canada, and the charter flight to Ellesmere Island, will range from \$6000 (if the charter flight returns full) to \$11,000 (if the charter flight returns empty). If you can get past the cost of transportation, any additional money for backpack food and equipment upgrades would be chump change.

So, if this one-of-a-kind, one-time adventure interests you, and you choose not to put your life on hold waiting for the economy to someday improve, please contact Jack Bennett (bennettje@windstream.net) or myself (rich.mcadams@hp.com) for additional information. Please bear in mind that for a trip of this nature, the trip logistics will remain in-progress for some time so there will not always be answers to all questions... but isn't that how an adventure is supposed to go?

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

UPCOMING HAMS TRIPS



MT ELBRUS

18,510'

AUGUST 17-29, 2010

\$3097 (not including air-fare to Russia)

Here is the 7th High Altitude Mountaineering Section trip to Russia and the spectacular Caucasus Mountains of southern Russia, between the Black & Caspian Seas. The mountain is one of the fabled 7 Summits and offers strenuous, but not overly difficult, climbing. The climbing requires basic knowledge of ice axe, crampons and roped travel. The trip will use the standard southern approach from the Baksan Valley and pass the ruins of the famous Priut (Hut) of 11 that burned in 1998. Extra days are allotted for acclimatization and summit at-

Cost includes domestic air fare within Russia, all lodging and most meals, ground transport, guide fee in Valley, Russian visa & permit fees, leader expenses and CMC fee. Final cost may vary slightly depending on air fares and currency exchange issues. Participants must have good physical conditioning and be recent graduates of a CMC advanced mountaineering school (HAMS, AMS, etc.). Preference will be given to instructors in CMC advanced and basic mountaineering schools (BMS). Recent BMS grads may be taken depending on instructor recommendation. Equivalent experience will be considered on a case-by-case basis and will require submission of climbing resume or certificate of recent graduation from a commercial snow climbing course. Climbers not known to the

To obtain the trip itinerary and application, contact Steve Bonowski at nztrekker@earthlink.net or P.O. Box 280286, Lakewood CO 80228-0286. Trip packet is available only by regular mail (due to e-mail

after daylight so we could be back down the steep snow slabs before the sun had a chance to warm the pack. As the rangers mentioned earlier, the east ridge of Columbia was 2,000 feet of steep wind packed snow, which was beginning to let loose as the weather warmed.

The team went into an immediate self arrest. As anchors were installed and the z-pulley set up, Wayne edged over to the lip of the cornice to check on Kurt's condition. Not only had one entire side of the summit broken off, but the whole cascading enchilada fell into some sort of colossal moat that ringed the summit bulge. As Sharon monitored the prusiks, pulleys, and anchors, Kurt was expeditiously extracted and safely brought back from the edge of death. All in all, the entire unpleasant event ended up being nothing more than a 20 minute footnote in my travel log... but then I wasn't the one that fell in.

All told it was a very satisfying trip. We worked through all the assorted difficulties that this mountain offered; we summited a moderately challenging peak in a respectably challenging way. We also traveled through an environment that allowed us to experience a degree of remoteness, solitude, and beauty that is seldom experienced in our lower 48. At times we felt like true explorers.

Mt Columbia, the high point of the Alberta province, was the first ascent for the Canadian High Points Project. As hoped, during our return to Denver the team also visited Cypress Hill, the high point of the Saskatchewan province.

As a climbing note, Cypress Hill also had its own set of challenges. The navigation and route finding should not be underestimated, nor should the objective dangers of slime-mud on the approach road, barbed wire at the trail head, and a cow pasture summit riddled with flops. As we dallied, discussed, and debated the location of the true summit, impatience and/or resignation begin to set in. But, after much trial and error, Sharon's focus and commitment to the true summit paid off. Cypress Hills was ours. We think.



Homemade bride crossing—Photo: Rich McAdams

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The High-Altitude Section of the Colorado Mountain Club

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