

## North America 1998

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1998 saw a continuation of trends from previous seasons across North America. Very difficult free climbing was accomplished throughout the land, including notable achievements on the big walls of Yosemite. The evolution of mixed climbing standards continued in centres such as Vail in Colorado, Hyalite Canyon in Montana, and the Rocky Mountains of Canada. Light and fast was the word on big northern mountains and exploration of the very big walls of Baffin Island continued. New routes of a high standard were discovered in the familiar terrain of the Tetons and the peaks of Rocky Mountain National Park, while forays in Mexico tantalised climbers with glimpses of new areas of vast potential.

The most significant continuing trend in North American climbing, however, was that of increasing access problems to the climbing areas themselves. New rules at Hueco Tanks in Texas effectively eliminated all but a fraction of the climbing there. On a national level, the US Forest Service banned fixed protection from the Wilderness Areas they administer, affecting climbing in numerous beloved places. This decision impacted more than bolted sport routes: all gear left in place for any reason was outlawed, including traditional pitons, nuts, slings, and bolts. Because of concerted political action by the public, the outdoor industry, the Access Fund, and the American Alpine Club, implementation of this ban was rescinded until a 'negotiated rule-making process' occurs, but the threat continues to loom large.

Meanwhile, in a more subtle threat to our sport, it became increasingly evident that the congressionally mandated 'fee demonstration program' was being used by public-land managers to confront the outdoor user at every turn with new fees and attendant rules and regulations that further reduce the freedoms climbers once enjoyed.

One small battle was won in Yosemite, where lawsuits brought by climbers and others halted, for now at least, construction in the Camp 4 and Swan Slab area. Also, thanks to the preservation efforts of climbers, Camp 4 has become eligible to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places. But access problems appear certain to remain a dominant theme on the continent in the years to come, and friends of North American climbing are urged to contact the American Alpine Club ([www.americanalpineclub.org](http://www.americanalpineclub.org)) and the Access Fund ([www.accessfund.org](http://www.accessfund.org)) for updates and ways to help.

## Alaska

The weather phenomenon El Niño was blamed for the very poor season in Alaska; reports of bad weather were common throughout the northern mountains. On **Denali** in May, it appears that few, and perhaps no, parties made it to the summit.

Earlier in the season, however, 'Jonny Blitz' Carpenter, Steve House and Mark Twight ascended a 3200ft gully system on the S Face of **Mount Bradley** in the Ruth Gorge to the ridge crest 400ft short of the summit. *The Gift (That Keeps on Giving)* yielded 23 pitches and was climbed from 7-10 March. In the Delta Mountains of the East Alaska Range, Jeff Benowitz and Rick Studley did *100 Years of Solitude*, a three-day route on the 3000ft E Face of **The Thorn (Peak 9200)**.

In the Kichatna Spires, Mike Houston, Jed and Doug Workman made the first ascent of the E Face of **Mount Nevermore**, climbing *The Call of the Raven* (VI 5.9 A2+) over 16 days in June and July.

In the Wrangell-St Elias area, Brendan Cusick and Jim Earl ascended *The Swansong* (Alaskan IV 5.8 A1), a route on the 5000ft NE Face of a 10,800ft peak above the Hawkins Glacier which they called **Mount Swanson**. They stopped on the ridge crest about 600ft from the summit. Joe Reichert and Nancy Juergens made the probable first winter ascent of the *Carpé Ridge* of **Mount Fairweather**, summiting 18 March. They and two others had begun their approach from the ocean.

## Canada

Climbers had an active season on **Baffin Island**: new big walls were climbed and previously unknown areas visited for the first time. The Stewart Valley, just north of Sam Ford Fjord on the east coast, had its first recorded big-wall climb when Greg Child, Alex Lowe, Mark Synnott and Jared Ogden plus photographer Gordon Wiltsie and videographer John Catto succeeded on the 4000ft NW Face of **Great Sail Peak**. They climbed the A4+ route in 20 days.

In the Sam Ford Fjord area, Russell Mitrovich, Mike Libecki and Josh Helling spent 36 days climbing the 4200ft *Mahayana Wall* (VII 5.10 A4) on the N Face of the **Walker Citadel**, becoming the first to visit the true summit. Aimée Aucoin and Sean 'Stanley' Leary opened up a third line on the 2800ft S Face of the **Great Cross Pillar**, taking 15 days on their 20-pitch, VI 5.11 A3+ route. Also in Sam Ford Fjord, Basque climbers Natxo Barriuso, Mikel Berazaluze, Txus Lizarraga and Raul Melero made the first ascent of *The Fin via Nanuq* (VI 5.10 A3) in 12 days.

In Auyuittuq National Park, the prominent NE Buttress of the N Tower of **Mount Asgard** was ascended in a 43-hour push by Sean Easton, Rich Prohaska and Jia Condon. The 4000ft *Line of Credit* (5.10 A1) went up with no bolts and only three pins. Easton, Prohaska and Condon made a 36-hour round-trip climb on the Central West Buttress of **Mount Overlord**, location of the 1975 Rawlinson/Blake ascent. Old fixed lines were found on the lower portion of the climb, though no evidence of passage was seen higher up. **Mount Asgard** was also the scene of the south-facing *Polar Thievery* by Grant Statham, Mark Klassen and Tom Fayle. The eight pitches went all free at 5.11-, unusual for Baffin Island. Fayle and Larry Stanier also made an early-season repeat of the

1972 *Scott Route*. On **Mount Thor's** W Face, Jason 'Singer' Smith made the second ascent and first solo of *The Midguard Serpent* (VI A5). He was alone for three weeks and took three 40ft falls during the climb.

Like Alaska, the Yukon experienced the bad weather blamed on El Niño, especially during the first half of the season. In Kluane National Park Reserve in June, Joe Josephson and Steve House climbed the SW Face of **King Peak**. The route, *Call of the Wild* (5.6 WI6+ 7,100 feet), was the 6th ascent of North America's 9th highest peak. Another 6th ascent was made, this one of **McArthur Peak (4342m)**, via the *Fred Said Buttress* on the S Face. The three-day climb was accomplished by Rick Clements, Chris Kettlse and Troy Jungen with Fred Beckey in support. A mile and a half NW of Mount Alverstone, the RH of a pair of buttresses, Point Blanchard, yielded *Pugilist at Rest* (5.10 M2 A3, 24 pitches) to Barry Blanchard and Mark Wilford. The pair also added a climb of the gully between the buttresses, *The Wilford Couloir* (5.10 WI5). Meanwhile, in May, Martin Minarek made a solo traverse of **Mount Logan (5959m)** over two weeks.

In the Vampire Spires area of the Northwest Territories, Matt Childers, John Young and Harrison Shull climbed *Freebird* (VI 5.9 A2+) on the E Face of the **Phoenix**. Childers and Cogie Reed did *Cornerstone* (V 5.10 A2+) on the Fortress, and Childers, Reed, Young and David Coleman climbed *Golden Wing* (III 5.10 A2+) on the W Face of Golden Wing Buttress.

Joe Josephson reports that a number of hanging glaciers in the Canadian Rockies have become unsafe, threatening such routes as *Slipstream* on **Snow Dome**, *North Glacier* on **Deltaform**, *Photofinish* on **Andromeda**, the *Hourglass Route* on **Athabasca**, the *Elzinga/Miller* on **Cromwell** and the *Lowe Route* on **Mount Alberta**. On **Mount Quadra**, Alain Massin and Steve Pratt made the long-awaited second ascent of *Gimme Shelter* (WI6); due to changed conditions the route is no longer as technically extreme as it once was, but now suffers from a horrific sérac hazard.

The N Face of the **Saskatchewan Mountain massif** was climbed in April by Joe Josephson, Barry Blanchard and Steve House via *The Silver Lining* (IV 5.9 WI6R). Dave Thompson and Sean Isaac established a number of hard mixed climbs: *Mixed Monster* (IV 5.11+ M8) is on **Mount Wilson**, while *Teddy Bear's Picnic* (V M8 WI5), *Uniform Queen* (V M7 WI5R), *French Toast* (V M7 WI5+) and *Fiasco* (V 5.12a M8- WI5+) are at the Stanley Headwall area, as is *Blind Eye* (V 5.10+ WI5), which was climbed by Rafael Slawinski and Chris Geisler.

In July-August the British-Canadian St Elias expedition led by Dr Alan Hubbard (with Jeremy Frimer & Dave Hildes from Canada, John Millar Jr from UK and David Persson from Sweden) climbed **Mount SE Macaulay, 4420m**, the highest unclimbed peak in Canada. They were flown in to the Trapridge Glacier, and in an 18-day traverse – mainly on ski trailing 'Krazy Karpet' roll-up sleds (a very cheap local innovation) – they climbed Mount Wood, 4798m, Mount Macaulay, 4690m, Mount SE Macaulay, 4420m, **Mount NW Steele, 4220m**, and Mount Steele, 5073m. Of these, NW Steele and SE Macaulay were previously virgin. The 20km route from Mount Macaulay to Mount Steele via its N Ridge was also unclimbed, and had previously been described as 'the ultimate high-level project in the St Elias range'.

## Continental United States

On Mount Baring in the North Cascades of Washington, Brian Burdo's determination resulted in *Vanishing Point* (VI 5.12-). The 18 pitches ascend the N prow of the Dolomite Tower and were worked out in efforts over the last ten years. Burdo led all the pitches on the final three-day ascent, with Scott Stanton seconding. A remarkable almost entirely free route on **El Capitan** in Yosemite was established when German brothers Alex and Thomas Huber climbed *El Niño*, a 30-pitch 5.13c A0 line that roughly follows the North America Wall. The only aid was a short rappel where Alex served as the anchor. Thirteen pitches were rated 5.12 or harder; six were rated 5.13. The route was repeated amazingly quickly by the British pair Leo Houlding and Patrick 'Patch' Hammond, who called the hardest pitch E7 6b. Meanwhile, the Hubers made a one-day free ascent of the Salathé Wall via *Freerider*, which involves a four-pitch variation to the headwall that allows the entire route to go at 5.12d. Alex had first rope-soloed the four pitches in 1995. Elsewhere on El Cap, Warren Hollinger and Bryan Law put up Ned's *Excellent Adventure* (VI 5.10 A3), Jim Bridwell and party climbed *Heavy Metal* and *Tinker Toys* (PDH/X), and *Highway to Hell* (VI 5.9 A5) was done with some controversy by Thomas Tivadar and Gabor Berecz from Munich. A traverse consisting of 63 climbing pitches and 11 rappels was strung by Chris McNamara and Mark Melvin and named *The Girdle*.

On the Firefall Wall of **Glacier Point**, Eric Rasmussen and Mike Zawaski did *A Sad State of Affairs* (VI 'sleazy 5th' A3+), while Eric Kohl and Bryan Law put up *Hurricane Jingus Clusterfuck 2000* (5.9 A4-) on the Upper Yosemite Falls Wall. Speed ascents continue to be of interest in the Valley: Dean Potter and Jose Pereyra hold the new standard on the *Salathé Wall* at 7:33 and **Half Dome's** NW Face at 2:54. Earlier in the season, Potter had soloed the NW Face in 4:17, using his rope only for the pendulum.

In Nevada's Red Rocks, on the Rainbow Wall, Kevin Daniels, Tony Sartin and Dave Evans ascended *The Big Payback* (VI 5.10 A3), while Roxanna Brock and Brian McCray established *Brown Recluse* (5.11, 9 pitches) and made the FFA of *Sergeant Slaughter* at 5.12b.

Zion National Park in Utah was the scene of *Back Where It All Begins* (VI 5.10+ A3, 16 pitches) on the **West Temple** by Drew Spalding and John Rzezycki. Near the Emerald Pools, Amanda Tarr did the solo first ascent of *Leaving Llamaland* (V+/VI 5.7 A3-) in four and a half days.

In Wyoming's Tetons, Jim Beyer rope-soloed the 12-pitch *South Buttress Drifter* on **Mount Moran**; in the same area John Kelly put up a IV 5.10x route. Kelly also rope-soloed the Central Dihedral of the Grand Teton's **Second Tower** (IV 5.11). Two routes on remote **Mount Hooker** in the Wind Rivers were established: *Northwest Passage* (VI 5.9 A3) by Ryan Hokanson and Kirby Spangler, and a line by Clay Wadman and partner.

A number of activists were busy in Colorado's Rocky Mountain National Park with numerous new climbs discovered. They included *Left For Dead* (VI 5.7 A3+) on The Diamond of Longs Peak by Dave Sheldon, Peter Takeda and Shane Wayker and a host of shorter hard routes scattered throughout the peaks with Doug Byerly, Kath Pyke, and various partners being particularly busy.

### Mexico

With access problems plaguing the United States and Baffin Island now a known entity, if not a greatly explored one, Mexico is emerging as a last frontier for long new routes on limestone and granite big walls. Development continued in the Potrero Chico area, where Kurt Smith, Jeff Jackson and others put up long, bolted routes on tufted limestone. Elsewhere, Cecilia Buil and Carlos Garcia Ayala of Spain did a 25-pitch route on El Gigante in the Sierra de Chihuahua, about 350km west of Chihuahua. *Simuchi* was rated 5.11b A4 and is the first climb in an area that is encouragingly described as having inexhaustible potential.