


# C R A G P R O F I L E

HYALITE | JOE JOSEPHSON

# THE HOUSE OF HYALITE



CHRISTMAS EVE, 1994: A white sliver of light glowed above a shaggy, dark forest. Only few miles across the valley, the icefall looked impossibly distant, unattainable. But even from here, I could see the stark, horizontal fracture line that extended to the right of the main pillar. A few weeks before, Alex Lowe was attempting a free-hanging dagger when the ice broke off, nearly crushing two climbers below. After a thirty-five-foot fall, he alighted on his feet, uninjured except for a gash where the adze of his axe had struck his forehead. The accident was already a legend. It seemed part of another time and world.

I COLLAPSED IN THE SNOW, wondering what I'd missed. I was back in Montana for a family holiday visit. Although I'd grown up nearby, I hadn't started ice climbing until I moved to Alberta. I was still fixated on the north faces, thrust-faulted limestone and long, azure waterfalls of the Canadian Rockies. This was my first day in Hyalite Canyon. I'd imagined it as a woodland hollow on the edge of Bozeman, sparkling with a handful of flows—a backyard excursion, nothing more. That morning, I'd stopped by Alex's house to ask what trade routes might be good. Ever willing to assist visitors, he'd suggested that I try Mummy 3 and 4, "a brilliant two-pitch mixed line."

Thus far, I'd spent most of the day lost amid dense woods. Every turn revealed another tier of cobbled cliffs and ledges. Nothing matched the pictures in my head. Directly above, some phlegmy ice appeared on a rotten-looking cliff, which I thought might be Mummy 4. If Mummy 3 existed, it must be covered in snow, or else I was in the wrong place. The bright sky deepened the shadows of the evergreens. Tinsel lines of ice glittered down copper-colored rockbands. Each one seemed just out of reach. I was unprepared for struggle and mystery, and so I turned around.

At sunset, I stood on the threshold of Alex's house under a tattered prayer flag. He insisted the line by Cleopatra's Needle would go, despite the missing ice. "There is a big cobble up there I think we could stand

on and drive in a Spectre." He grinned, and the lines at the corners of his eyes deepened, accentuating the rugged, stitched-up wound. "It's only an hour approach," he said. But an hour for Alex might be immeasurably longer for a mortal like me, so when he suggested we leave at 2:00 a.m. to be back by noon for "family stuff," I said I had to go Christmas shopping. "Maybe you're right," Alex said. "I'll go sledding with the kids." His smile still quivered. I knew he was just being magnanimous, accepting my excuse for laziness.

That January, the ice dagger blossomed into a full pillar. Doug Chabot and Jack Tackle finished the route and named it "Airborne Ranger" after Alex's fall. Over the years, the tale became one of the most well-known Hyalite epics. But the picture that stays most in my mind is that of Alex's wide grin, inviting me, as he had so many others, into an ongoing story. When I walked off his porch, I had no idea that I'd move to Bozeman to explore more passages of this quiet, frozen world. Or that after many winters, there'd still be icefalls that eluded me, and enigmas that I failed to solve.

But perhaps what I felt on that initial, bumbling excursion were the first stirrings of true *bewilderment*, in the archaic sense of the word: I was "led astray and lured into the wild." And in that moment, I began a journey to understand why Hyalite *is* so much more than any one thing you can say about it.

## The Anticipation of Ice

EVERY CLIMBING AREA HAS ONLY ONE CARDINAL MOMENT when someone first turns a corner and recognizes the potential. Of course, pioneers may push deeper into the periphery or bring an emerging vision or a new ability to previously known terrain. And in the process, they might "find" new routes of consequence. Yet none of these experiences replaces that inaugural instant when a climber's mind, with a climber's purpose, sees a place that's entirely unclimbed. For Hyalite, as for many places, this moment came by accident.

In 1968, in the midst of Yosemite's Golden Age, Pat Callis left California to take an assistant professorship at Montana State University, the backwaters of the climbing world. Here, Pat says, he found "miles of unclimbed crags" and "an instant bond with the small climbing community." In the late 1960s, Bozeman remained a deeply conservative town, its Main Street lined with cowboy bars and saddle shops. "You didn't want to stand out," the climber Doug McCarty (then a long-haired teenager) recalls. "Once, some cowboys threw me up against a wall and pulled out a pocket-knife to give me a haircut."

Nonetheless, a few rebellious youth had formed the Wool Sox Club, modeled after the Creagh Dhu, a Scottish mountaineering group famed for its strict climbing ethics and social nonconformity. At age thirty, Pat had already made first ascents of major alpine routes like the North Face of Mt. Robson in the Canadian Rockies, and he quickly became a mentor to the younger, exuberant Wool Sox. "The anticipation of ice climbing was in the air," he recounts. Yvon Chouinard had begun designing chrome-moly crampons with sharp frontpoints and axes with curved picks. Although the first non-step-cutting ascent of Pinnacle Gully on New Hampshire's Mt. Washington was still two years away, Billings climbers Chad Chadwick and Wally Hunter were using *piolet traction* on true waterfalls in Montana's Beartooth Range.

In the autumn of 1969, "frustrated by the apparent dearth of steep water ice" eighteen-year-old Clare Pogrebra invited Pat, along with MSU backcountry ski instructor Peter Lev, to check out a 100-foot, forty-five-degree ice sheet he'd created by running sprinklers down Butte's Montana Tech football stadium. "We were on the spot," Pat says, "the veteran alpinists, summoned to perform for the edification of the eager young bucks." Peter brought Austrian-forged dagger-like crampons, a ninety-centimeter ice axe with extra teeth filed in its straight pick and a

shorter North Wall hammer with a re-forged curved pick. Pat had a traditional long axe. "After getting our legs under us, so to speak," he says, "I recall running down the ice without using an axe." Peter explains, "Clare's climb wasn't steep, but it was water-ice hard. On Robson, the [alpine] ice had more air in it."

Intrigued by the different medium, Pat continued to "fiddle around" on granite cliffs west of Bozeman, looking for more water ice. For a while, all he found were roadcut flows. Local climbers generally assumed the closest "real" waterfall was several hours away in the Beartooth Range. The entrance to Hyalite was only a few miles distant from campus, but the roads were roughshod even in summer. After the first big storms of winter, the snow sealed off the canyon until May, hiding its vast domains of ice.

## A Semi-Secret World

SITUATED ALONG THE NORTHERN rampart of the Gallatin Range, Hyalite Canyon stands as both guardian and gateway of a proposed wilderness area that extends over fifty miles into Yellowstone National Park. Here, 34 to 56 million years ago, the Absaroka Volcanic Supergroup routinely coughed up enormous pyroclastic clouds of hot ash and rock. Subsequent mudflows, known as *labars*, cut into the more ancient stone, carrying sand, pebbles and chunks of old lava. Vents allowed new bursts of silica-laden andesite to thicken the layers, forming a convoluted architecture of tiered rockbands, narrow shafts and knobby buttresses. Glaciers carved new valleys, etched with hidden lakes and cascades.

A late nineteenth-century lumber mill left behind a network of primitive roads and trails across lush stands of old-growth timber. In 1951 the town finished building a reservoir amid the wrinkled, palm-like hills that spread out ten miles

above the lower canyon. Deeper in, fingered cirques reach southward to the Gallatin crest. The largest drainage, Main Fork, rises like a pointed index and culminates in Hyalite Peak (10,298'). The East Fork wraps like a thumb around an oval amphitheater, known as Flanders, where sweeping rock fins funnel winter spindrift down blue-ice pillars, avalanche slopes and stark clumps of trees.

Just as the unique power of the human hand is best expressed by the gap between fingers and opposable thumbs, the mystery of Hyalite persists most within these spaces between the ridgelines—a maze-like geography of forest and cliff that is no longer quite true wilderness, but still intricately, profoundly *wild*.



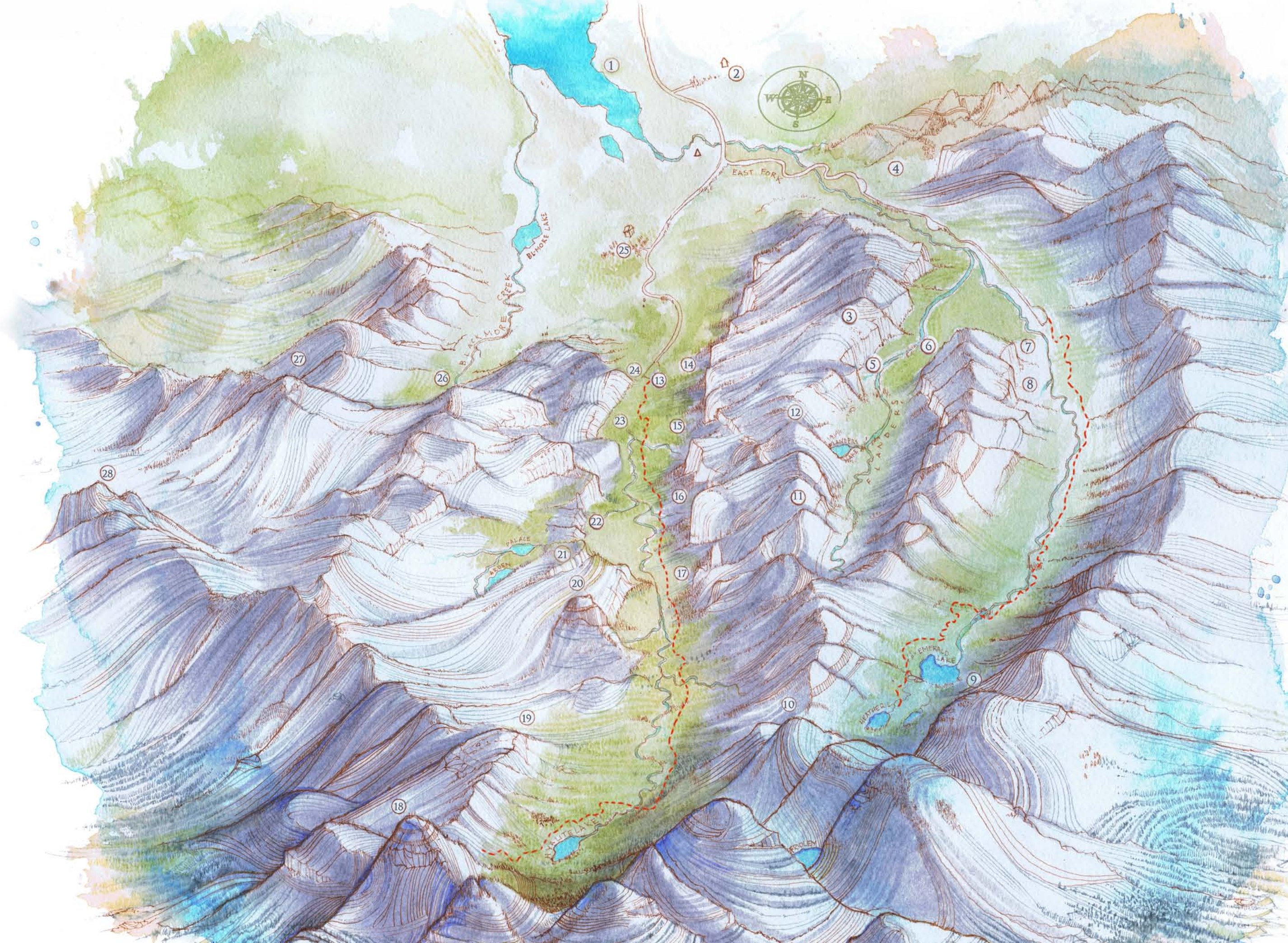
[Opening Spread] Tyler Jones on Omega (WI5, 30m, FA Unknown), Hyalite Canyon, Montana. Several mixed variations exist (M4–M7), including a piton-protected one by Meg Hall, who says "I have a tendency to see if I can do things without any preplaced/fixes gear." Jason Thompson | [Facing Page] Kyle Dempster on Airborne Ranger (WI6, 85m,

Chabot-Tackle, 1995). During the first ascent, the pillar formed to the ground. Andrew Burr | [This Page] Doug Chabot next to the broken Airborne Ranger. The day after the pillar shattered, causing Alex Lowe's famous fall, Lowe returned with Chabot to retrieve his gear. For the rest of the story, since Chabot's account in *Alpinist* 32. Lowe collection

# HYALITE CANYON

BOZEMAN, MONTANA

- ① HYALITE RESERVOIR
- ② MAXEY CABIN
- ③ SLEEPING GIANT MTN.
- ④ PALISADE FALLS
- ⑤ THE BIG SLEEP
- ⑥ CHAMPAGNE SHERBERT
- ⑦ COMET ALLEY
- ⑧ HORSETAIL FALLS
- ⑨ CHISOLM PEAK
- ⑩ OVERLOOK MOUNTAIN
- ⑪ FLANDERS MOUNTAIN
- ⑫ MUMMY MOUNTAIN
- ⑬ GROTTO FALLS PARKING
- ⑭ GENESIS AREA
- ⑮ MUMMY COOLER AREA
- ⑯ WINTER DANCE AREA
- ⑰ DRIBBLES AREA
- ⑱ HYALITE PEAK
- ⑲ DIVIDE PEAK
- ⑳ MAID OF THE MIST
- ㉑ PALACE BUTTE
- ㉒ TWIN FALLS/CLEOS
- ㉓ UNNAMED WALL
- ㉔ BLACK MAGIC WALL
- ㉕ WINDOW ROCK CABIN
- ㉖ ELEPHANT MOUNTAIN
- ㉗ MT. BLACKMORE
- ㉘ ALEX LOWE PEAK
- HIKING TRAILS





## 1969–1975 Carpe Diem

PAT CALLIS

THE COLUMNS AND CASCADES OF ice—seemingly everywhere—were almost certainly never before scrutinized in such a way, by a human with joyous adventure in mind, a creature who desired to know them intimately, to name them, and use them as exhilarating pathways to nowhere. It was November or early December 1970. Charles Caughlan and I had cross-country skied into Hyalite Canyon. I don't recall expecting to see ice that day.

I returned with Brian Leo in his father's little jeep (the only climber-vehicle combination I trusted at the time for the unplowed foot of fresh snow and the newly discovered treasure of steep ice) to try some short, moderate climbs. It was a new world, requiring an adjustment of technique and mentality. Even with the new Chouinard tools, the short, near-vertical step of Willow Gully was surprisingly unnerving. But by the end of our second trip several days later, we'd established what is now named Mummy I, and I felt satisfied that many elegant ice lines lay ahead.

ALTHOUGH I'D DONE numerous alpine snow and ice routes before I moved to Montana, I hadn't foreseen so much technical ice climbing in the state. I didn't know about Chad Chadwick and Wally Hunter's early waterfall ascents near Red Lodge. In Bozeman and Butte, however, I met a small band of young, passionate climbers who'd begun to establish rock routes on the vast archipelago of unclimbed crags. Our bond was instant.

During an evening gathering in the autumn of 1969, Clare Pogrebra sat off by himself in a corner. He seemed to be absorbed in something vexing, as evidenced by the frequency of accompanying epithets. We clustered around to watch while he finally succeeded in making

Chouinard's adjustable rigid chrome-moly platform crampons fit his boots. Not long afterward, frustrated by the apparent dearth of steep water ice, Clare flooded part of the Montana Tech football stadium, thereby creating a fine sheet of forty-five degree ice. He proudly called Peter Lev and me to have a go. I recall feeling a bit nervous as we stood at the base with traditional axes and crampons. Several pairs of young eyes waited to see two veteran alpinists perform. My memory is that we lived up to their expectations.

That winter, Clare and four companions lost their lives in an avalanche on the west face of Mt. Cleveland. My parting words to Clare were "be careful of avalanches." What I should have said, I learned in hindsight: even if there are only six inches of powder at the base of a thirty-five degree slope, a minefield of dangerous slabs will cover the face above timberline, just waiting to be triggered.

AS BRIAN AND I CLIMBED those first little Hyalite icefalls, we thought about Clare—how much he would have loved being there for the inception of Montana's water-ice era, the coming of which he'd predicted so well. My younger companions caught on quickly, and they began making bold ice ascents in Hyalite and elsewhere in Montana.

In February 1971, when the Hyalite road became inaccessible, Brian asked whether I knew of other places with ice. Near Livingston, Peter and I had recently discovered two exquisite 300-foot ice slots shining in vivid hues of aquamarine: the unclimbed Blue and Green gullies. Both lay at the bottom of long avalanche chutes. With the Cleveland accident on my mind, I gave Brian paternal orders to stay away. (I admit I may have been trying to keep the climbs for myself, too.) In total defiance and disrespect of their elder mentor, Brian and Davey Vaughan accomplished the first ascent of Blue Gully. Jim Kanzler and I were thus forced to go after the longer, steeper Green Gully immediately—even though we were not yet mentally prepared for

it. Our lack of readiness, of course, rendered the successful climb all the more satisfying.

Meanwhile Doug McCarty had fumed at having sat at the base of the Blue, watching his high-school buddies on the historic ascent, because he didn't have the right crampons to join them. A few weeks later, properly equipped, he pioneered The Dribbles, one of Hyalite's great classics. Back then, Doug was not the extroverted, animated PhD geologist he has now become. When Davey first dragged him into my University office, Doug squirmed with self-consciousness and could barely speak. But he proved to have an engaging storytelling ability. I still have images in my head from the slideshow of his first ascent of Horsetail Falls: Doug swung a ninety-centimeter classic axe on the glass-smooth vertical tube, while the entire creek streamed down the middle, and the ice screws protruded into the water, emitting a whistling sound.

Those early few years were golden, glowing with memories of the latest climbs. I'd sometimes lie awake, tormented by the realization that this was a special moment in our lives and wondering how I could better *carpe diem*, so to speak. Often, I thought about techniques. I relied on the little Chouinard alpine hammer to make a starter hole for the somewhat dull Salewa screws and then to apply exhausting, time-consuming force to lever them fully into the ice. I came up with wrist straps, an obvious aid that hundreds of people may have thought of simultaneously.

Yet I count as one of Hyalite's greatest gifts the pleasures of treating many people to their first day of ice climbing. There was something special about driving up that sketchy road with a car full of passengers exuding the anticipation and the apprehension of an unknown wild experience, about seeing their unbelieving faces when we arrived at the base of a frozen waterfall, and then about returning in the same car, late in the day, thick with the radiant atmosphere of chatter of individual satisfactions that come with accomplishing the unimaginable.

Come to think of it, not much has changed.

## Fearsome Spectacles

IN THE WINTER OF 1970, Pat set off with another professor to go cross-country skiing around the Hyalite reservoir. When they reached the upper canyon, Pat was shocked at what he saw: "The columns and cascades of ice—seemingly everywhere—were almost certainly never before scrutinized...by a human with joyous adventure in mind...who desired to...use them as exhilarating pathways to nowhere... It was a new world." These cascades were steeper than the bleachers in Butte and bigger than his small chunks of practice ice. As the first local guidebook author Ron Brunckhorst later wrote in *Big Sky Ice*, "the first few outings were learn as you go."

Pat returned with Bozeman high-school student Brian Leo and some of the latest gear: a Chouinard curved-pick ice axe and hammer, front-point crampons and Salewa tube screws. They headed for the nearest icefall they could find. Only ten feet off the ground, Pat became terrified: "Fearsome spectacles kept appearing in my mind, such as the whole sheet peeling off as an ice piton is inserted, and...getting impaled on of the many sharp devices with which I was...bristling." Nonetheless they made first ascents of Willow Gully and Mummy Cooler I without the occurrence of any "fantasized catastrophes" (*Summit*, April 1972).

Today, unless you borrow antique tools, it's difficult to imagine the real challenges of the earliest routes. Most climbers overlook these thirty-to fifty-foot WI2s, which seem like mere bulges, glimmering under the shadows of branches and the mask of snow—faint reminders of a time when every detail of this frozen world appeared uncharted, isolated, unpredictable and new.

## Let It Be Known

WATERFALL-ICE CLIMBING has an annual visceral excitement that may be unique to the games we play. When the fading autumn daylight casts a crisp shine across the forests, and white frost sprinkles everywhere like salt, climbers stir with an irresistible, almost frenetic energy. *What's happening?*

The Wool Sox Club dissolved in 1969 after Clare and four others died in avalanche on Mt. Cleveland. Two years later, a new band of adolescents started the Dirty Sox Club in the same spirit, a loosely organized group that included most of Montana's few climbers. According to Davey Vaughan, meetings often "involved a day or two of climbing and horribly wild and debauched parties," consisting of such activities as roasting stray pigs, attempting (disastrously) to ski down Doug McCarty's apartment stairs and seeing (with more success) how many people could smoke a hookah in his bathtub. "The only club rules were 1. Have fun (at any expense); 2. Discuss climbing; 3. Go climbing. Simple" (*Big Sky Ice*).

Pat was still puzzling out modern ice-climbing techniques, and he passed on what he could to his younger friends. But many of the Dirty Sox youth couldn't afford fancy gear. They either borrowed the new equipment, made their own, or else managed with older axes, ice daggers and coat-hanger screws. "Often courage and tenacity were the

[Facing Page] Steve Jackson on the first ascent of Champagne Sherbet (WI4, 60m, Callis-Jackson-Kennedy, 1974). Joe Josephson says, "Pat Callis can easily be considered the grandfather of Hyalite ice climbing. But he claims it was the younger Brian Leo, Doug McCarty, Steve Jackson, Terry Kennedy and Jim Kanzler who were really 'all over it'."



best tools one had," Davey concluded. "Foolishness, in some cases, was the greatest motivator of all." But the *bewilderment* was as irresistible to them as it was to me. Peter recalls:

*I doubt that any of us would have been ice climbers if we had to read a book about it. Certainly part of the appeal was that it was a new thing, an adventure, and we were all young. Some of us made mistakes, tragic ones. A few of us were overt anti-establishment types, like Doug. For many of us, our climbing world was the only thing that existed. Pat was the only one with*

Pat Callis | [This Page] Callis on the first ascent of Mummy Cooler II (WI3+, 45m, Callis-Kanzler-Lev-McCarty, 1971). Peter Lev recalls, "These features have been there forever. The culture made it possible for climbers to emerge. In another day, they may have been explorers. The whole thing was discovery and adventure." Pat Callis collection

*a regular job. But Pat never talked about the outside world that I remember. Climbing takes you to separate spaces. The setting can assist with that journey. Hyalite is one of those places. No one bothered us. We were so few. No one even knew what we were doing. The [Vietnam] war media frenzy might as well have been shouts from the moon. We could just live in this alternative universe.*

There was a singular urgency to those early winters. Pat lay awake at night, “tormented by the realization of this special moment in our lives,” and plotting how to seize as much of the “golden” days as possible. In 1971, as the autumn chilled again, Pat, Peter, Jim Kanzler, Doug McCarty and an eccentric friend called “Igor” continued up the longer icefall of Mummy II. Pat fantasized about extending the Mummy gully to the top of the ridge, “Scottish style,” complete with bivouac. Over Thanksgiving weekend, he and Jim climbed a thin, high-angle flow that coated the smooth andesite on the next tier of rock. The first ascent of Mummy III occurred with no recognition, locally or otherwise. And yet it was as difficult as New Hampshire’s Black Dike, one of the most famous and feared routes of the era.

The fourth pitch of Mummy never seemed to touch down. (It took another vision, a decade later, to realize that a smear didn’t have to reach the ground to be climbed.) In the meantime, Davey wrote, “Most Montana ice climbers were surprised to find that they were at the forefront of the ‘ice age’” (*Big Sky Ice*). Pat’s modest *Summit* article in April 1972 established him among the pioneers of North American waterfall ice climbing, partly for his improvised wrist loops. When the Dirty Sox members’ arms grew tired on steeper ice, they had trouble maintaining their grip. Influenced by Nordic skiing, Pat brought the leash across the palm and between the thumb and forefinger to provide support. This technique, however, although good for pushing off a ski pole, drew his hands away from the axe shaft as he pulled down.

In 1975 Jeff Lowe joined Pat and Jim for an attempt on Robson’s Emperor Face, and he stopped at Pat’s house on his way home to Colorado. Jeff showed the Montanans that it was better to put your wrist directly through the leash and twist. Although Pat’s article finished with a welcoming proclamation—“Let it be known that one can be virtually assured of finding good ice climbing in Montana from mid-November to the end of April”—most traveling alpinists bypassed Bozeman. Hyalite’s rugged, unplowed roads stunted new-route development, while its complex micro-topography forced aspirants to slow down and hunt for its secrets, one by one.

## Into the Woods

LIKE THE MINERAL HYALITE, the icefalls are precious, opalescent, and often hard to notice, but if you learn just how to look, abundant, and in places you least expect. When you enter the canyon for the first time, your attention is easily drawn to the uppermost cliff bands. High above the trees, flanked by buttresses of bronze and ash, these are the dream factories, with tantalizing drips like Cleo’s and Mummy 4 that remind us of our alpine aspirations. When Hyalite became my home crag, after I moved back to Montana in 1998, these areas seemed closer to my early impressions of ice climbing, formed by the vast sweeps of Canada’s Icefields Parkway.

As I grew more familiar with the canyon, I found myself lured into the more obscure regions hidden in the valleys. Much of Hyalite is a woolly place, covered with a thick montane forest of old-growth spruce, lodgepole and Douglas fir. Limbs draped with neon green lichen conceal





stepped cliffs, complicated ribs and gullies. One precipice of mottled conglomerate in the middle of nowhere looks like all the rest. As Robert MacFarlane wrote in *Wild Places*, “Woods...kindle new ways of being or cognition in people, can urge their minds differently.” The forest awakens your imagination, provoking a desire to see what lies around the next corner. Blue and white light flickers between the trees like foxfire, enticing you farther and farther from the main trails, with the hint of what might just be *ice*.

[Previous Spread] Nick Wakeman on Mummy III (WI4-, 35m, Callis-Kanzler, 1971). “While following [Kanzler]’s lead up the early season ice,” Callis says of the first ascent, “I said to myself ‘this is hard.’” Joe Irons | [This Page] Climbers on the headwall of The Dribbles (WI4, 155m, Harder-Leo-McCarty-Rose-Stuart, 1972). McCarty remembers, “I grew up reading

Finding your way requires a rare closeness that creates as much adventure in hiking as in climbing. The early ice climbers began by exploring the waterfalls already named on official U.S. Geological Survey maps. Many were students like Doug who had the freedom to skip class and to wander. One of Doug’s first routes, Horsetail Falls, requires a lengthy ski even today. Halfway up the mountainside in the East Fork, the cascade arcs over the edge of a cave, like strands of white hair. In winter, the suspended water creates a hollow, free-standing tube. When Doug led it in the autumn of 1973, his screws punched through a few inches of shell. Past the threads, the rushing water sucked air back through each hole. Too exhausted and frightened to keep going, he hung from one screw while holding it in place with his hand.

His belayer noticed that Doug seemed to be losing confidence. It was only George Ochenski’s second ice climb. He yelled, “Burst for the top.” At first, Doug scolded him for failing to realize the seriousness of the situation. George kept shouting, “Burst for the top! Come on, man, burst for the top!” with such unrestrained enthusiasm that Doug laughed. Doug kept laughing while he inched upward, clutching the screws as he clipped them, kicking a foot through the shield of ice to rest his calves before the final “burst for the top.” Skiers later reported hearing a sound “like a flute that changed pitch with each hole.”

Because of the poor conditions on the first ascent, Horsetail Falls carried a reputation that surpassed its modest grade of WI4. Yet by the end of the decade, there were only about thirty routes established in all of Hyalite. Many of the youngest climbers drifted off to college or to other pursuits, leaving room for a new generation of local teenagers to sweep across the ice towers, the rock and the wood.

### Cleopatra’s Needle

TIME IS ANOTHER ELEMENT that hides and reveals. During short intervals, changing temperatures and oozing moss create startling metamorphoses, turning nearly invisible dribbles into white towers—but only for those who happen to be present on the right day. Jack Tackle, who grew up in Bozeman, later wrote, “I don’t remember how many times I slogged up the hill to Twin Falls before I realized there was another slender piece of ice yet to be climbed nearby” (*Big Sky Ice*).

One of the first routes to come in each October, the broad, high-volume Twin Falls gleams as unmistakably as its blue name on the USGS maps. Doug and Brian climbed it back in 1971. To the right, an overlooked wall rose in a band of swirled brown and gray hues with a variety of smeary ice that eeked out over its lip. Sometime around Thanksgiving, Cleopatra’s Needle transforms from unconnected, translucent nothings to a fully formed collection of wax-like drippings. But it took years before anyone skied that far up the canyon late enough in the season to notice the full glory of its architecture. It must have been a number of additional years before anyone found the courage to venture up those vertical, chandeliered columns.

In the winter of 1977–1978, as snowdrifts covered the road, Jack and Gary Skaar skied in from Langhor Campground, some eight miles

*Annapurna* by Maurice Herzog, so I thought that was what climbing was supposed to be like. *We don’t have Annapurna here, I thought, but there are these frozen waterfalls... That’ll work.*” Kristoffer Erickson | [Facing Page] McCarty partway up *The Dribbles* in 1972. “I still have those crampons and even use them,” he now says. Doug McCarty collection

# 1972

## The Dribbles: Before and After

DOUG MCCARTY

WHEN I STARTED ICE CLIMBING at age sixteen, my mother thought I was brain damaged, not because of the activity, which was beyond her comprehension, but because of the stupid things that went with it. Late one Saturday night, for instance, I returned from Hyalite Canyon and threw my waterlogged clothes and frozen leather boots into the dryer to ready for more climbing the next morning. Of course, the boots broke all the plastic fins to pieces. My single mother was supporting the two of us by cleaning motel rooms, and she did not appreciate the expense. After I backed her car down the icy hill at Pine Creek, and a boulder snapped off the open passenger door, she had even more regrets.

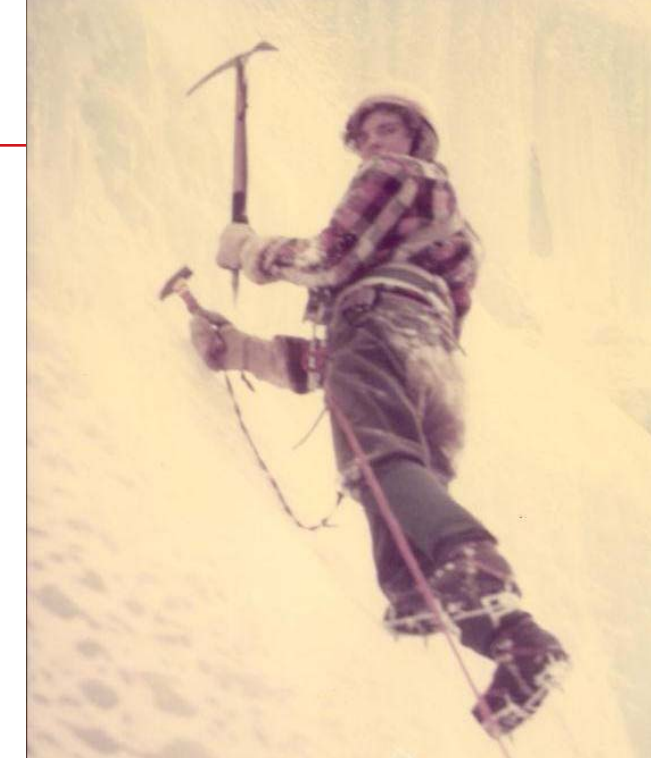
A history of poor decision-making was part of a meandering path that led me to the icefalls in the first place. During junior high school, my mother feared she couldn’t control my juvenile delinquent leanings, so she sent me to NOLS for “summer camp” and to Seattle to stay with my older brother. I returned after these stints without any improved respect for authority, but with abundant enthusiasm for climbing and bohemian culture. Between what I’d gleaned from my NOLS instructors and from a beatnik federation of Seattle climbers, I was ready to practice anarchy at home. Even in a small place like Bozeman in 1971, the tyranny of school principals and the nightly news of the Vietnam War could weigh on a young person’s soul. Climbing seemed like an appropriately nonconformist activity for the “drop-out” times. Once past the trailhead, nature was an effective tonic.

In the summer, Hyalite felt like the Alps with moist air, misty waterfalls and fern-filled grottos. Successive igneous episodes had deposited lava and mudflows that eroded into a mosaic of steps and clefts, gullies and chimneys. Long, exposed ledges linked different sectors of cliffs along canyon walls too loose and friable to climb. In the winter, Hyalite became another world—a white ether of suspended animation. Ice traced fleeting connections up steep precipices, like secret passageways to otherwise inaccessible places.

One of the pioneers of this frozen land, Pat Callis, lived just a few blocks from my house, and he didn’t seem to mind my constant chatter. A generous mentor, he taught by example, climbing at the highest standard and disguising his lessons for youthful retention. His wife, Gayle, helped me move out of my mom’s house to an upstairs apartment across the alley from their place. The landlord, a retired mathematics professor, emphasized the need for responsible behavior and warned me not to disturb the young family below. I reassured him that I studied all week and spent the weekends climbing, a schedule that left little time for misdeeds.

At the word *climbing*, the landlord’s stern eyes lit up, and he requested verification that I indeed meant “mountain climbing.” It turned out he was the same Dave DeLap who’d made the second ascent of the Grand Teton with two friends in 1923, wearing football cleats with horseshoe nails and carrying nothing more than a geology hammer, a blueprint map, and an extra pair of trousers. I went by Dave’s house every month to pay rent in person just to hear that story again. By the time the downstairs tenants started to complain about the sounds of hookah-inspired revelry and stomping feet, Dave and I had become friends. He answered, “Doug has a right to live a normal life.”

It was the best apartment I ever had. The same could not be said for the other tenants. Even when I wasn’t hosting beer-shooting parties, they often heard me staggering up the stairs late at night. Back then, just to get in and out of Hyalite, you skied for hours up the snow-covered road, fought with stuck cars and shuffled back to town in the dark. The climbs near the mouth of the canyon were usually the practical limit for a day trip. But on one outing in 1972, Brian Leo, Bo Stuart, Chuck Rose and I saw something shimmering through the trees, and we headed uphill by dead reckoning until we broke out of the timber. A broad cascade flowed over a long curtain and down a series of steps. We climbed to the base of the headwall and paused. This icefall seemed steeper, wider



and longer than anything we’d done before.

The late hour made the decision easy. We traversed to look for a walkoff or a suitable rappel anchor, so we wouldn’t have to leave any of our precious Salewa ice screws. (Many years and funky rappels later I learned about V-threading.) Finally, as night fell, we looped the ropes behind a giant boulder. One by one, we spun around in a long free rappel over a cave. When we reached the ground, Brian became our hero for prussiking back up the line over the dark maw to unstick the rope, so that we could stumble home.

Brian and I eventually returned to the icefall with my Seattle friend, Don Harder. I’d been thinking about that upper section for a while, and I was ready when I drew the lead. I only remember that I made it, and it was good—not overly stressful. I recall my relief when the angle eased off and how darn cool it was to climb such a beautiful uncommon thing in that crisp Hyalite air, isolated and insulated from the commotion and confusion of modern life. I didn’t come up with the name, and at first I thought the climb deserved a better one. Yet the discovery of that route, just a short way beyond where others were climbing, pushed me to slog on through the steep deadfall and talus-strewn hillsides to look for more. Many good climbs soon followed, and we drooling Dribblers were among the lucky ones to find them.

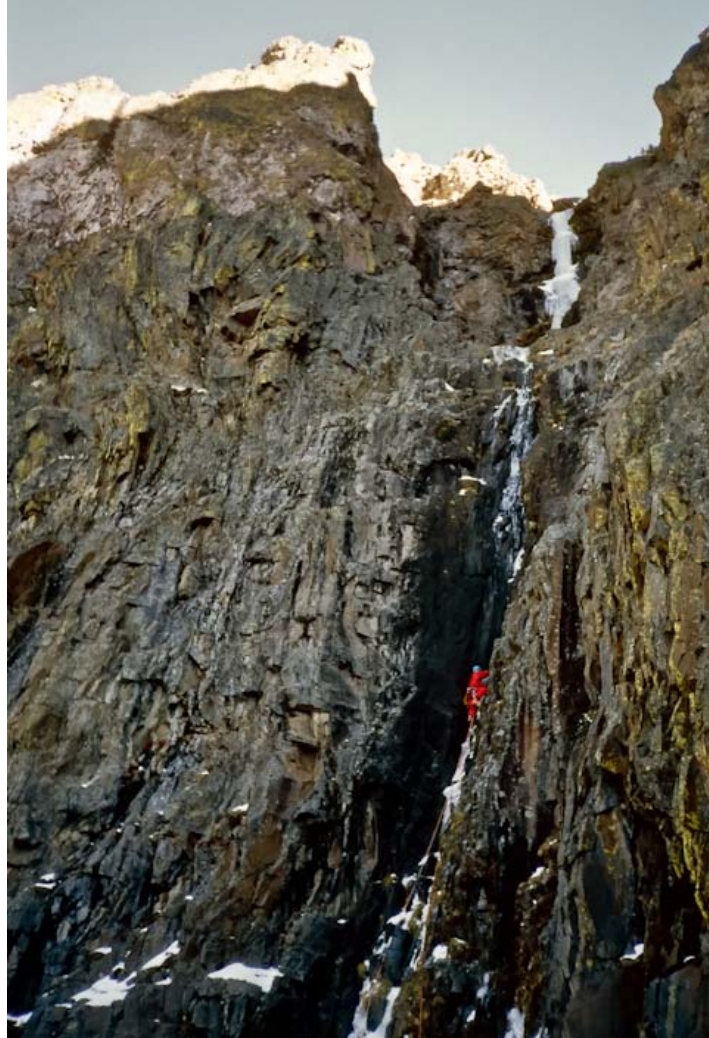
away from the usual parking lot. They arrived at Cleo's, "sweating like whores in church" (as Jack likes to say), just in time for nightfall. On their second venture, Gary started up the snow-covered shield that forms below the overhanging icicles. The surface broke, and he fell, unharmed, into the drifts of powder at the base.

Shortly thereafter, Jack recounted the epic in a local gear shop. Two of his listeners had just learned to ice climb that winter. "Neither of us had acquired the experience to feel that confident," Stan Price recalls, "but there was always a willingness to give anything a try." Since Stan and his partner didn't own enough gear to outfit even one leader, they borrowed some crampons, an axe and screws. The next Saturday, a deep freeze encased the town. Stan rallied his station wagon all the way to the trailhead. Along the road, the two climbers paused to rescue some nearly hypothermic hikers who'd crashed their car after a party the night before.

The air got warmer. In those days, there still wasn't much collective knowledge about the changing forms of waterfall ice. Stan and his friend assumed that Cleo's could only be climbed when it was brittle hard. Under the sun, the surface glistened soft and wet. They waffled. Stan suggested they try the first pitch. And thus he experienced the joys of plastic ice for the first time—that is, until he reached the plated area that had expelled Gary. Stan raked through eggshell fragments searching for the one-swing sticks he'd only moments before learned to expect. His last screw was far below. He later wrote, "It didn't take long for me to fall the length of the pitch" (*Big Sky Ice*).

Stan stopped a mere body length from the ground. As he looked into his belayer's eyes, he wondered what kind of luck he had, first to fall and then to survive. Both men were too shaken for the steeper second pitch. But the screws were still stuck in the ice, and the gear belonged to their friends. At last, Stan's partner climbed back up past the highpoint to the belay cave so he could clean the screws on rappel. The upper one (a fancy new Chouinard design) proved to be too mangled to remove. "Being useless," they reassured each other, "it was not worth returning."

On the drive to town, they encountered two men who'd been paid to tow out the hikers' car. After more digging and pushing, the four of them managed to get the vehicle free of a snow bank, mangling a door in the process. "Oh well," said one of the men, "we still get the \$10." Night had fallen by the time the climbers got home. So went Alex Lowe's first day of Hyalite Canyon ice.



## Hyalite Rodeo

THE NEVER-ENDING CARNAGE of stuck vehicles used to provide as much uncertainty as anything else in the canyon did. My initiation to the "Hyalite Rodeo" took place in early January 1999. Jack and I squirmed his SUV thirteen and a half miles to the parking lot despite the blustery winds and the drifting road. After post-holing to and from Responsible Family Men (named because Alex and John Wasson had gotten up at 3:00 a.m. to make the first ascent and return home in time for lunch with the kids), we threw our packs in the truck as a pastel glow spread across the evening sky. "And we are back before dark," I said. Jack responded, with his classic, cagey mumble, "We aren't out of here yet."

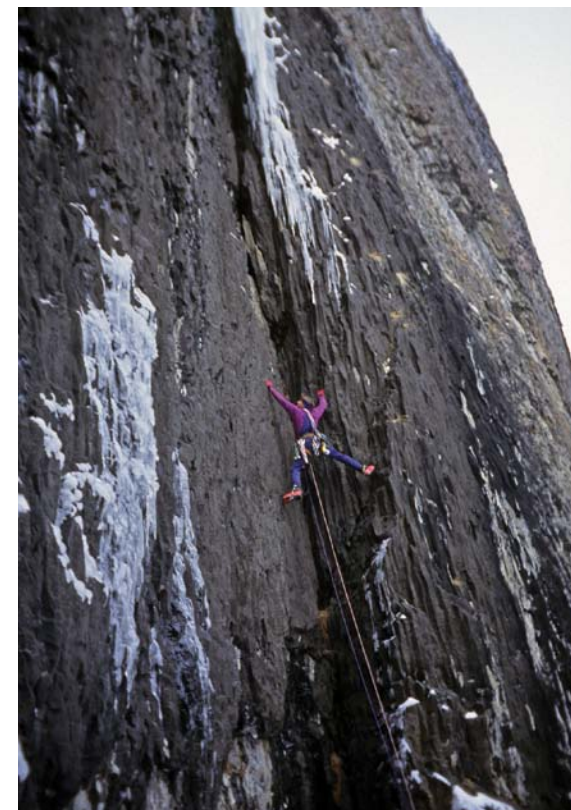
Down the road, a Seventies-era camper van stalled out, up to its fenders in snow. The two young men conducted a lengthy safety meeting, and then pulled the van from the ditch with a come-along. Once we jumpstarted their rig, they got enough momentum to stay afloat in the thin ruts that cut the drifts like veins. Meanwhile, they decided to let their husky run alongside the van for exercise. Each time they braked to avoid hitting the dog, the battery sputtered, and Jack and I had to jumpstart it again. After four or five times, I told the kid with the longest dreadlocks to "put the dog in the damn van."

Well after dark, we came around another turn: a massive truck splayed across the ruts. Three or four rigs piled up behind it. The truck had a broken rear axle, and it wasn't moving. The owner had spent the day ice fishing with his wife, two preschool children, a newborn baby and a black lab puppy. Hours later, we finished shoveling a track around their vehicle and packed the entire family and the dog into Jack's SUV. Like so many before and after us, we rumbled into town long past midnight.

## The Wall with No Name

PERHAPS IT WAS IN THIS OBSCURE CANYON that Jack developed the tenacity that made him famous in Alaska and the Greater Ranges. A year after Gary and Stan's spectacular tumbles, Pat belayed Jack while he completed the second pitch of Cleo's—despite taking a twenty-five-foot fall near the top when "that crappy tube pick rotated out on an easy traverse." Ice climbing had evolved into a more commonplace activity. During the 1980s, the number of routes nearly tripled. Jack and various partners authored most of what are now considered the canyon's classic WI5s.

For the first decade, Hyalite climbers had focused on the fat crystalline waterfalls. Tinged with slight regret, Pat recalls, "It never occurred to



[Facing Page] Pete Tapley on Zach Attack (WI5 5.7, 175m, Gambino-Tapley, 1998). Gambino recalls sleeping in Tapley's gear room while he was unemployed: "I quickly became a piece of Pete's gear. Pete would grab his pack, rack, rope and partner (me). We named [the route] after Pete's son. The best part was we beat Jack Tackle and Alex Lowe to the FA. They came up to do it the very next morning." Josephson calls it a "modern-day classic." Dan Gambino | [This Page, Center Top] Lowe on Black Magic (WI5 5.9, 45m,

Callis-Lowe, 1986). Lowe collection | [This Page, Clockwise from Top Right] Rob Williams making an early attempt on Come and Get It (WI6+ M7 5.11, 50m, Lowe-Sciolino, 1996); Lowe on Expanding Horizons (WI7 R M8 5.11+, 40m, Earl-Erickson-Lowe, 1998); Lowe on Smear Today, Gone Tomorrow (WI6+ 5.11, 50m, Erickson-Lowe, 1997); Lowe on The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (WI6, 80m, Chabot-Erickson-Lowe-Sciolino, 1996); Lowe on The Matriarch (WI7 5.10+, 65m, Erickson-Lowe, 1997). Kristoffer Erickson (all)

# 1979

## Cleopatra's Needle

JACK TACKLE

GARY SKAAR'S PICKUP IS ASS-DEEP in snow. *We'll have to park it here. Jesus. Three miles below the dam and seven from the route.* Gary and I reluctantly put on our skis and start the slog to an unclimbed pillar of ice tucked away near Twin Falls. Hours later, we've beaten through thick brush and trees over the last 1,500 feet from Hyalite Creek to the base of the route. Our labored breaths cast white smoke like steam engines. It's 3 p.m. when Gary starts the first pitch. Within moments, the thin, hollow veneer has calved off the initial curtain, and he's surfing the falling ice midair. To my surprise, he lands unharmed into the snow beside me. *Maybe we should go home?*

DECEMBER 1979: Pat Callis has named the slender and elegant second pitch, "Cleopatra's Needle." Two years or so after Gary's fall, it's still intimidating, alluring, and yet to be climbed. After numerous attempts by myself and others, Pat and I decide to give it another go.

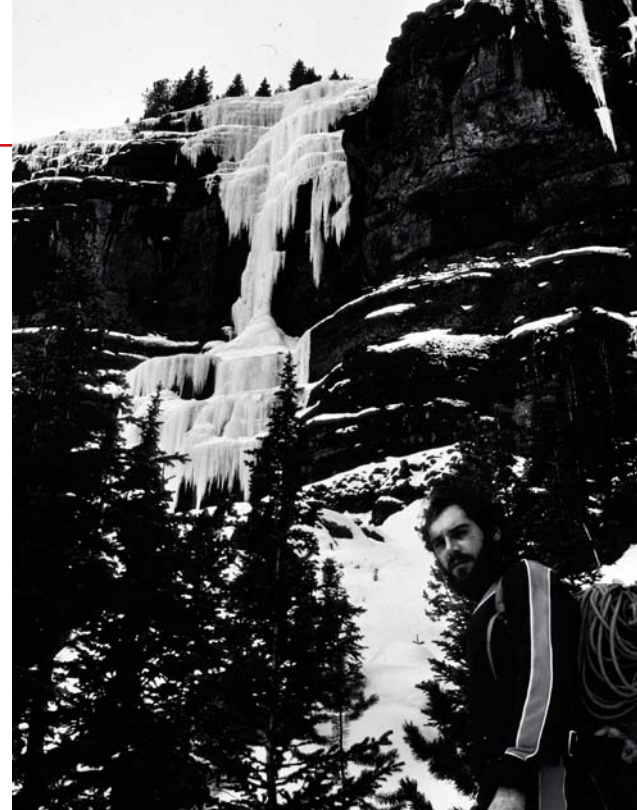
Since the early 1970s, Montana ice climbers have put up a flurry of routes in Hyalite. After many of the obvious features were established, our relatively small group of Bozeman locals

began looking elsewhere in the range for more technically challenging routes. When Jeff Lowe's Hummingbird hammer and axes came out, they seemed perfect for the brittle ice of the steeper unclimbed pillars—like Cleo's.

The exceptionally dry winter of 1979–80 allows us to drive to the end of the road. *No more skiing from below the dam!* With Pat and my new tools, I'm filled with calculated confidence. As often, the bottom of the valley is butt-cold. Then gradually as we ascend to higher ground, the inversion kicks in and the temperature rises. I'm feeling proud of my new hot lash-up: a Hummingbird axe with a new Elephant pick and two Hummingbird hammers with tube picks. Tubular screws are still hard and time-consuming to place. So my plan is to start a hole with the tube pick and then pound a Snarg in quickly. *Who cares how long it takes the second to get it out? He's on a toprope.*

Pat and I solo the first pitch (this time, the ice is blue and thick). Right in the middle of it, my new pick snaps in half. I'm so infuriated that I hurl the bastard off into the snow, carefully watching where it lands. Like a gunslinger, I whip out my second hammer from my harness and continue upward. I intend to recover the tool later and return it to Lowe with a less-than-diplomatic letter.

To this day, I don't know why I got the crux second pitch. Pat is older and wiser, more experienced and skilled. Perhaps we drew straws. Nonetheless, I recall staring up at the slightly overhanging groove on the left side of the main pillar and asking myself whether I have enough arm strength to lead this thing. "Into the breach," I say to myself, as I launch out from the protected belay behind the pillar. By stemming and resting on small bulges, I'm amazed that I can keep going and even pound in three Snargs over the first seventy feet. Up until now, the tube picks have indeed made the steep and friable ice less difficult. Above the crux, I start traversing from my rest stance with my hammers placed low—around mid-body. *Bad idea, Jack.*



All of a sudden, as if I've been dropped out of the bottom of a plane, I'm airborne. I've placed my tube picks too low. The pillar is so steep I fall twenty-five feet without hitting anything. The last Snarg stops me well below the crux. *Now I have to climb it again. Pat must be wondering WTF my problem is falling off past the crux?* As I launch upward again, I'm diligent to place my picks at the proper height. I re-climb the last part again without incident while he patiently belays and encourages me once more. At the end of that long second pitch, I find a blue-ice cave for the belay with a flat floor that feels like a safe haven. I can still remember how the azure texture was as smooth as glass and almost transparent.

Pat, of course, seems to float up the pitch without any difficulty. *The Wizard*, we call him, with respect. *Gandolf*. He passes me at the anchor and calmly takes the lead of the third pitch, disappearing with grace and style up what is still a long way to the top. When I reach Pat's belay amid the trees, we gaze across the valley in the arctic chill and watch the red glow at the end of our Camel Straights. *At least something is warm.* Soon we realize we're almost out of daylight and we scurry over to the top of Twin Falls to rap off. I try to find my broken axe in the snow and the dark, without success. Years later, I learn that some enterprising youth hiked up in the summer and recovered the tool.

us, back then, to start rock climbing to reach the ice." Throughout 1984, Jack and Alex partnered for the flows and drips that lined a sunny half-mile-long andesite cliff near the parking lot. Jack says, "From the very beginning, Alex looked up at the tantalizing icicles on the Unnamed Wall and imagined them as routes. But either natural gear wasn't there or we just had too many ice routes still to do." Then in 1986 after partying all night at a B.B. King Concert, Jack scampered up a loose chimney with David Gerhard to reach the gradually thickening ice of The Thrill Is Gone. Although easy by today's standards, the route epitomizes traditional mixed climbing. Even on the rare occasions when the doublewide chimney chokes with ice clear to the ground, you spend more time looking behind you for features than facing the narrow hose before you.

Nearby, another thin line poured out of a shallow gully in one consistent smear, only to end at a small roof. A tiara of yellow icicles dangled off the edge above a corner of dark-brown andesite. That same winter, Alex skied through the early morning dark to try the route with his wife Jennifer ("Jenni") and Pat. In her memoir *Forget Me Not*, Jenni recounted that just as the stars flickered out, a great horned owl floated by, and Alex declared it was a good sign. He gripped the stone with bare hands and plastic boots, "whooping and exclaiming about how much fun it was, while Pat belayed with a bemused smile...making quiet comments as I'm

glad I'm not leading." At the no-hands rest halfway up, Alex stopped to put his crampons. "The magic happened as you moved left and gingerly switched from climbing rock to hooking axes in the thin curtain of ice."

They named the route Black Magic. With this new vision, Hyalite climbers noticed more of the evanescent streaks amid the dark walls of the canyon—as if some enchanted writing had indeed become legible. For years, locals had gazed up at the pitch above Mummy III, wondering. At last, in 1986 Alex craned his head back at the right moment: above the decomposing wall of overhanging cobbles and moss, the hint of ice had grown into a wildly chandeliered column. Soon he and Canadian alpinist Perry Beckham added one more segment to Pat's original dream. Perry and Alex had a family Christmas to attend, so they turned back after Mummy IV. But Alex told Perry there might be even more ice above.

### Scatched and Clawed into the Rock

IN 1993, AFTER WANDERING from the oil fields of Wyoming to the slopes of Mt. Everest, Alex settled back in Bozeman with Jenni and their sons. He and Doug Chabot bought a snowmobile to access Hyalite after the road closed. Between February and April, they hunted for previously



[Facing Page, Left] Jack Tackle on the Scepter (WI5, 30m, Black-Tackle, 1980/81). After an ice chunk fell and injured his hand during the first ascent, Tackle gave the crux to Donnie Black. Leading WI5 in the days of the old screws was an exhausting experience. After needing both hands to get a Snarg in, Black finished the rest of the pillar

without protection for many feet. "I had one Snarg left, but felt that to place it would sap needed energy" (*Big Sky Ice*). Kristoffer Erickson | [Facing Page, Right] Tackle in front of Cleopatra's Needle (WI5, 80m, Callis-Tackle, 1979) Pat Callis | [This Page] Dylan Taylor and Kevin Brumbach sunbathing on Land of the Lost (WI4, 60m, FA Unknown). Chris Hamilton





unknown, late-forming routes in an almost-empty canyon. To the right of Cleo's, Kris Erickson recalls, "Chandeliers of ice dangled down the overhung sections until each drip fell into space, leaving the bottom dry. A new route would have to be scratched and clawed into the rock." In December 1996, Kris, Alex and talented visitors like Barry Blanchard and Mark Wilford attempted the line. No one could get past the first ten meters of questionable rock and nonexistent gear.

Alex spent January climbing in Antarctica and thinking about the route. On February 11, he phoned Kris from the Denver airport. Within hours of arriving in Bozeman, he and Kris jumped on a snowmobile and rushed out into the cold, dark canyon. As the morning sun touched the wall, the rock warmed just enough for Alex to climb it without gloves. "This time," Kris remembers, "Alex danced through the lower moves with newfound confidence." Water dripped from above. Alex rock climbed with one hand, delicately aiming his axe with the other. "It was the only option," Kris says. "Too much swinging onto the ice and it would all come crashing down." Alex tied off chicken-head cobbles for protection while he crept up. "Mid-swing, as he was about to weld the axe into some solid ice, his foot slipped, and out of reflex he threw his free arm around the tiny column of ice, feet dangling and scratching against the wall." Alex sunk his tool into the pillar and yelled down, "Now that's what I call a self-arrest."

The Matriarch (5.11 WI7 R) had pushed the ground-up, natural-gear style as far as it could go at the time—and as perhaps only Alex could have done, with his uncanny strength and talent for finding hidden placements. It thus ended a quest that he'd started a decade earlier and precipitated another.

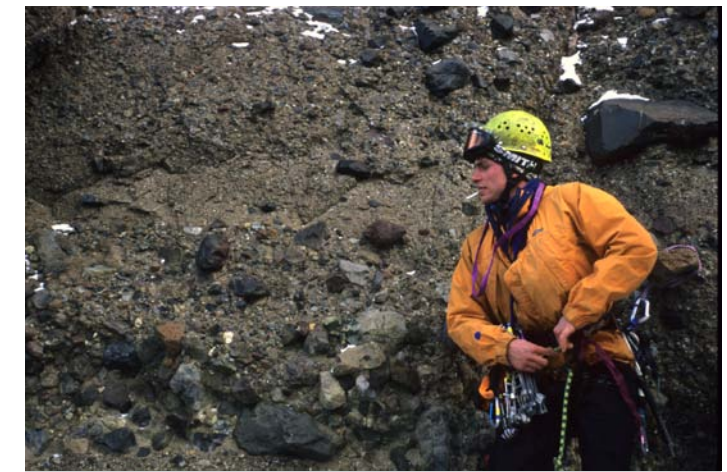
### The Barrel Book

AT THE FRONT DESK of the Barrel Mountaineering store, Alex left a logbook with the words inscribed, "Dedicated to Brent Bishop, Barrel Mountaineering, Climbers Past, Present and Future and the spirit shared by all those who love the hills—to share your love, for climbing is a gift—write down your events."

From 1995 until March 1999, nearly every Bozeman climber made regular pilgrimages to check the "Barrel Book." You might run into someone who'd just been on the cover of a magazine. Or else a pack of college kids would be vying over a glance at the loose-leaf binder. The entries recorded everything from canyon road reports to the conditions of the most popular WI3s. Alex's distinctive script dominated the pages, each sentence neatly written in exuberant all caps. He'd refer to some of the era's hardest mixed routes as "another fine treat" (The Matriarch), "Trust no holds," (The Big Sleep Direct), "Protection on a fat ice day may consist of Spectres, stubby screws and a strong head" (Smear Today, Gone Tomorrow).

By the late 1990s, Alex's international achievements had earned him the moniker of "the best climber in the world." What he really did with this book was to help all Hyalite climbers feel as if they were part of something with him. A community of active mountaineers and skiers lived in Bozeman, returning to the canyon between expeditions to higher ranges

[Facing Page, Top] Hilary Eisen on The Thrill is Gone (WI4 M4, 35m, Gerhard-Tackle, 1986). Josephson says, "I've been to no other area where I can climb a short route like The Thrill is Gone and be happy for the day. There is something about the forests, the colors in the rock, the hidden gemstones of ice." Jay Beyer | [This Page, Top] Jack Childress on



and vaster snows. Every December, Barrel hosted one of the country's first national ice festivals, with famous alpinists like Mark Twight and Barry Blanchard as a draw. Each year, the book's pages filled a little more.

### Smear Today

AND YET THE MAGIC OF ICE is such that no first ascent is ever really final. Pick holes vanish as the surface thaws and freezes. Established classics morph into different forms. New climbs form out of nothing, evaporate into the air and take generations to be seen again. In April 1994, a singular alchemy of cold, sun and precipitation left two lines that glittered like layers of frost down the unvisited north end of the Unnamed Wall. Smear Today, Gone Tomorrow and Smears for Fears weren't as hard as the Matriarch, yet the andesite proved too compact for any rock protection. Alex decided to drill a few bolts on lead, connecting patches of fragile ice. Nonetheless, the lines remained seriously runout. Only Gone Tomorrow has ever reappeared. The true influence of these ephemeral routes turned out to be the confidence they instilled, in Alex's words, to "Get Industrial."

Directly across from Cleopatra's Needle, thousands of feet above the

Pitch 1 of Rocket Boy (WI6+ 5.10+, 60m, Childress-Earl-Saari, 1998). Wearing goggles (because of choss) and tying off cobblestone anchors are typical Hyalite procedures, the photographer says. | [This Page, Bottom] Lowe on the thirteen-mile approach in 1997, a decade before the county began plowing the canyon road. Kristoffer Erickson (both)



valley, an immense icicle glowed against a sweeping wall of black rock. Higher than anything else in the canyon, it's the only Hyalite ice line visible from town. "It's been hanging over our heads long enough," Alex wrote in the Barrel Book. From years of watching, locals knew the icicle came in early, only to sublimate quickly in the deep winter winds that sweep off the Gallatin Crest. In late December 1997, it was bigger than anyone had ever seen.

During Alex's second attempt, his partner Doug Chabot stumbled and broke a leg. Since Kris had plans for New Years Eve, Alex invited Jim Earl, who'd just moved to Bozeman. Jim re-led the first pitch, where drips had created a series of mushrooms, bonding the choss together and filling in cracks. Then Alex set off with the power drill to aid up an overhanging headwall of bonded ash and cobbles. At the end of the twelve-bolt ladder, they felt as if they'd opened a door into another world. Wild, wind-driven drops had formed what Jim called, "massive knobby features that can only really be described as big dick-looking things."

Although Alex clearly wanted the crux ("he was jumping with excitement at the belay"), he didn't question that it was Jim's turn. "He just sent energy up the rope," Jim says. Despite some anxiety, Jim climbed up the mushrooms, at times knocking some of them off, standing on top of others to rest, before swinging out over great roofs of ice, perched beyond imagination on concave prehistoric ash. All around him, the valley melted away into a mesh of forest, stretching farther and wilder

[This Page] Jim Earl on the first ascent of Rocket Boy. Kristoffer Erickson | [Facing Page] Lowe during his trip to Palisade Falls (W13-4+, 45m, FA Unknown), with his wife, Jennifer, in 1996, wearing a hat that she'd knitted. In 1999 on Shishapagma, shortly before his death in an avalanche, he wrote, "I appreciate why I come to the mountains: not to

below than ever before.

"Love it!" Alex concluded in the Barrel Book. "The formation has been referred to by the egregiously overused name, 'Fang.' We've called it Winter Dance."

### More Alpine Than Most

JUST AFTER CHRISTMAS 2004, PETE Tapley and I were desperate to get up Winter Dance. In the arctic cold, the ice retreated up the wall like a ship over the horizon. As I aided the second pitch, I struggled to top step, holding on to ashen edges, drytooling sloping cobbles. I even constructed a crude cheater stick out of my axe—anything to help me reach ever so high to the next bolt.

At the hanging belay, I held the rope while Pete tested vibrating, brittle icicles. I recalled Alex telling me this was "the most spectacular route" he'd ever done. Wind buffeted us. Memories of great North American icefalls flowed through my mind, one after another—The Terminator, Polar Circus, La Pomme d'Or, Bridal Veil Falls, Ames Ice Hose—and I could only believe that I was partway up one of the best routes on the continent if not in the world.

That day, the ice wouldn't support body weight, and we bailed. Afterward, it was no longer the relative smallness of the canyon that struck me. It was the immensity. As Will Gadd says about Hyalite, "Don't let the trees fool you—the place is more alpine than most alpine areas. Just full-on if you want that, or ridiculously friendly."

### Expanding Horizons

ALEX RETURNED TO WINTER DANCE a week after the first ascent to lead the rest of the pitches. Energized by success, he, Jim and Kris established other hard mixed routes in a similar style, drilling a few bolts as they hung from tools or hooks placed amid cobbles and moss, tapping their way up small nodules of ice. As Jim explains, they didn't worry too much about "needing to redpoint." Ice climbing always had a slight air of artificiality to it, and mixed climbers were still using leashes. What mattered more was the psychological adventure of heading into unexplored terrain and puzzling out the protection as they went. They gave their lines ecstatic names like Expanding Horizons. "We were confident with that style," Jim says, "and [for] anything you could possibly climb, ground up was a viable alternative to rappelling down to place bolts."

Jack Childress remembers belaying Jim on December 26, 1998 while he placed screws in ice puddles to set three bolts on the second pitch of Rocket Boy. Above the last bolt, Jim launched onto a quivering pillar. Even before he reached the point where the column might snap, he was already risking a ground fall. "You got that feeling in your stomach watching someone lead one of those things," Jack says.

At the same time, on crags around the world, "M-climbing" was beginning to look almost like a form of winter sport climbing: climbers had started to rap-bolt and work the gymnastic moves of harder routes in preparation for redpoints. Since the early days, Hyalite climbers had maintained a strong traditionalist culture. In 1996 Pete Tapley had

conquer them, but to immerse myself in their incomprehensible immensity...to better comprehend humanity and patience balanced in harmony with the desire to push hard; to share what the hills offer; and to share it in the long term with good friends and ultimately with my own sons" (See Jennifer Lowe-Anker's *Forget Me Not*). Lowe collection



1996

Expedition Hyalite  
JENNIFER LOWE-ANKER

donned our leather boots, waxed our new skis and bid Miss Unreliable good-bye. Light snow was falling. Temperatures were in the mid-twenties. Few other ski tracks appeared, but a packed snowmobile trail made the dozen miles to the reservoir easygoing and brought us there before noon.

Here, we entered an expanse of Montana winter in its most pristine state. Skis sliced through snow. Birdcalls punctuated the rhythm of nylon shells swishing. Distant peaks poked from clouds, and cliffs were adorned with drizzles of ice. A pillow of snow covered the thick frozen surface of the lake. Our lonely tracks bisected it perfectly, crossing trails of rabbit, deer or coyote. Sunlight sprang forth from a cloud to create a cascade of sparkling snowflakes in the white amphitheater. We peeled layers of clothes. The whine of snowmobiles grew louder until they blew past us, with friendly waves and unpleasant fumes. I'd always distained the gas-guzzling, fume-belching machines. I tried not to feel hostile, but I couldn't help thinking that I liked it better without them.

Past quiet campgrounds where picnic tables hosted only mounds of snow and occasional squirrels, Alex broke trail to the base of the falls. We sat beneath a canopy of pines to eat lunch, change into our climbing boots and strap on crampons. In the summer, Palisade Falls' tiers of water cascade over pillars of volcanic rock, attracting picnickers and Sunday strollers. On that winter day, we were the only humans within miles of this frozen castle.

Alex stomped over stair-steps of ice to a more vertical section. He was dressed in a blue and yellow hard-shell, and his long arms and legs gave the appearance of a colorful spider ascending with graceful confidence. Before long, he grinned from a hanging belay. "You're going to love it, Jen! It's totally exciting." I wasn't sure what he meant by "exciting." It looked easier than waterfalls we'd climbed in Colorado.

Water roared behind a thin curtain of ice and shot through holes from Alex's axes. My wool

mitts were soaked within minutes. I shook out numb hands, mesmerized by the wall of rushing water inches from my face. The temperature was dropping. I needed to go up or down. I rationalized that Alex had made a safe stance above, and I gingerly hooked my tools into the holes, climbing as quickly as possible. We hurried to descend and slipped our hands into dry mitts amid much stomping and flinging of arms.

By the time we were halfway across the lake, I wished that a snowmobile would come by and offer us a tow. My hair was coated in white frost, and frigid air stung my lungs. Movement was the only means to keep warm. I shuffled woodenly as darkness fell. Alex spoke to me often, peering at my face with his headlamp and warming a white spot on the tip of my nose.

At last, the shadow of Miss Unreliable appeared. We sank into crisp cold seats and stared ahead as Alex turned the key. If the engine refused to start, we'd have to keep going another few miles to the nearest house for help. She gave a few worrisome cranks, then powered up with a roar. Alex and I cheered, embraced and thanked the mountain gods. Although I'd endured plenty of cold snaps, that day was my first experience of a fifty-degree variable within hours. I suffered a nip of frostbite on my nose, but all fingers and toes remained intact.

We didn't yet know that a good portion of our life would be spent in Hyalite. Years later, after our sons were born, I got talked into owning a snowmobile. "I need to have access to the ice when the road is closed," Alex said. "Plus, we can drag a sled and take the kids winter camping." After brisk, loud rides into the canyon, we all played in the snow, minutes from some of the best ice climbing in the world.

Those memories became precious when Alex died in the autumn of 1999, and the boys and I have carried them forward. After Conrad Anker and I married in 2001, we added more with him. In 2005, just one drainage away from Hyalite Canyon, a mountain was christened "Alex Lowe Peak." It was a fitting memorial.



established Shores of Pluto, with Jack Childress, a “good fun, don’t fail” smear that tapered to a thin hose and gained him a reputation for boldness. Two years later, he made multiple ground-up efforts to establish a direct start to Responsible Family Men, up an overhanging wall of loose, mossy rock, before placing the last bolt on rappel.

Overnight, he found himself at the center of a brief ethics war. Will Gadd, who redpointed the route with Pete, used the M grade here for the first time and declared Juvenile Delinquents the “first modern route in Hyalite.” Alex was still wearing a knee brace after a full ACL knee reconstruction. But he was intrigued enough to hike up with Pete to attempt the climb with a rock shoe on the foot of the injured leg and a crampon on the other. Pete recalls “getting raked over the coals by my hero” about rap-bolting.

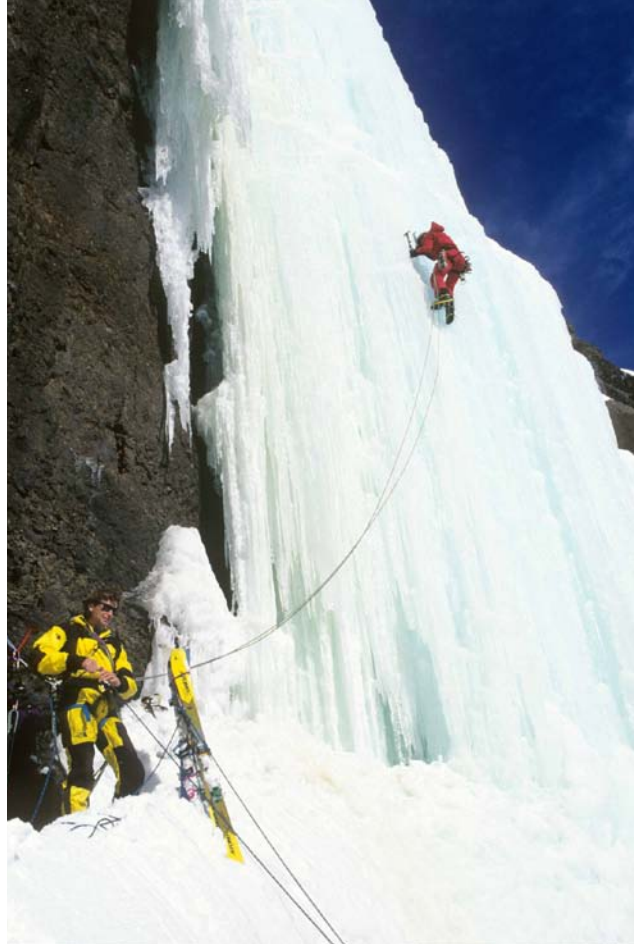
At least one of Pete’s bolted routes got chopped. Gradually, however, perspectives cooled. Today, some of his lines, like the stone roof and ice dagger of Bulldog World, are considered classics. Traditional and “sport” mixed climbing now occur side by side in Hyalite amid an atmosphere of acceptance. More than any other word, it’s intimacy that crystallizes as the spirit of the place. The passageways amid the woods and gullies both disperse climbers and bring them together. At the 2010 Ice Fest, I introduced Jim to some of the new youths. Craig Pope had just added a direct start to Rocket Boy, and he asked whether he could place one or two more bolts on the route to make it safer and speed up a first free ascent.

“His response left me with a new respect for the canyon,” Craig says, “and [it] led to a mindset that induced a couple of my most personally significant ascents. In short, Jim reminded me of the nature of Hyalite cobblestone climbing, and the mental purity a ground-up style demands. I cannot count how many times I returned on skis with binoculars to scope the conditions—praying for a more stable, larger diameter icicle.”

## Lost in the Woods

IN OCTOBER 1999, ALEX DIED in an avalanche on Shishapangma. The Barrel staff replaced his original binder with a photocopy for fear someone would steal it. With the advent of Web forums, conditions reports and beta, for many climbers the written history of the book faded into memory.

Traces of the missing linger in these woods. In 2001 Hans Saari, who



was with Alex on Shishapangma and with Jim on Rocket Boy, slid to his death on Mont Blanc du Tacul. A day before the 2009 Ice Fest, near Dribbles, a burst of powder snow took Guy Lacelle away. This past spring, Jim Kanzler was gone. I like to think that Hyalite’s geography is too intricate for forgetfulness, that nothing fully vanishes. There’s too much to evoke memory: the sound of distant climber’s call refracted in the air, the flap of a raven’s wing, the light shining through a shower of snow. At times, it seems as if the threshold narrows between past and present, as if I might turn a corner and see Alex smiling at the base of an icefall again.

When I first arrived, I was intent on bagging the best routes, preferably new ones. Over the years, Hyalite turned me into a collector of history. In 2003, after I found myself unemployed (fired by the very magazine I now write for) I looked to the dusty Barrel Book for something to do with my life. I started to work on my own guidebook, investigating as many drips as I could, now matter how insignificant they seemed. Through a series of otherwise non-notable smears and gullies, I found the enchantment of Hyalite far below its famous classics. I began to shy away from the common perception that only the big, hard routes are meaningful. My friends and I climbed fun pitches that no one seemed to know about. Without exception, the topouts had several generations of rappel slings around a tree, bearing witness to an experience lost, yet shared.

Over a quarter of the routes in the Main Canyon are still recorded as “FA: Unknown.” To provide reference points for the guidebook, *Winter Dance*, I gave them provisional names and grades. I wanted to encourage others to see the canyon as more than just the testpieces of famous climbers, to gain an appreciation of something wider, more mysterious and at the same time more inclusive. The layers of silent history went deeper than any of us, perhaps, had thought.

## Toward the Roots, Again

SOME GATHERING SPOTS ON THE CLIMBING LANDSCAPE seem to hold more power than most. All members of the tribe eventually journey there, and, sooner or later, you run into people you’ve only encountered as names in stories. Camp 4 and the Lower Saddle of the Grand are such places. Toward the end of the twentieth century, Hyalite’s Genesis I had developed an unavoidable magnetism. Next to Willow Gully, the

named II...or ‘That really good-looking one.’” Some of the names stuck. Jason Thompson | [This Page] Dave Manning on Cleopatra’s Needle, with Lowe belaying. The goal, that day, was to access the skiing above the climb. Erickson | [Facing Page] Winter Dance (WI7 5.9 A1, 135m, Earl-Lowe, 1998; FFA: WI6+ R M8, Erickson-Magro, 2007). Sam Magro

# 2007

## Winter Dance: The First Free Ascent

WHIT MAGRO

IT WAS THE MIDDLE of October, and winter was moving into the high country. In town, the smell of decomposing leaves mixed with the cold air, filling my senses with excitement. I’d just returned to Bozeman from Yosemite, and I couldn’t wait to disappear into the quiet, wooded mountains of Hyalite Canyon. I ran up the trail, making perfect tracks through a dusting of fresh snow and trying to brush off my nervousness. Winter Dance hangs by itself, two thousand feet above the valley floor against a wall of dark, volcanic mudflow. I wanted to be the first to free it.

Two hours later, I stood alone below the climb, my shoes soaked and sweat pouring down my face. I could almost hear the slow drops of water releasing from the end of the hanging ice, 120 meters above. Up close, the dark rock looked angular and chunky, with a false appearance of durability. From a previous ascent, I knew the stone was barely good enough for climbing. But I remembered something Alex Lowe had written in the logbook that used to be at Barrel Mountaineering: the bolt ladder “might go free on a warm day in rock shoes.” That statement gave me the idea to drytool the pitch.

Back in town, I called my friend Kris Erickson. “How’s your schedule looking for the next few weeks, jerky?” I asked. Kris didn’t even let me finish my explanation before he answered “Yes.” He’d joined one of the initial attempts, prior to Alex and Jim Earl’s first ascent in 1998. Kris wanted to see the route come into the modern realm of mixed climbing. We stepped out of the car before dawn. A deep breath of cold air suffused me with life. Kris aided the bolt ladder and lowered. We worked out the moves and cleaned the loose rock on top rope, discovering perfect divots for hooking and little cobblestones for footholds.

The third pitch of ice usually reaches down to the top of the bolt ladder, creating a massive enchainment of pillars. Although it remained unformed, I left that day feeling optimistic: *It must be growing*. Days later, Kris and I labored back up the hill to find the ice had turned sick and pale. Water was dripping faster. Kris cursed the

warm weather. “To hell with Winter Dance,” I said. We bailed, without much hope this time.



CLIMBERS TEND TO FORGET the unpleasant aspects of our adventures. After a few weeks, I called Kris again. If anything, the ice had shrunk even more. Yet the air was colder and the dripping had slowed. The third pitch was still mostly bare. The exposed rock looked dusty, as if had never been touched before. I wondered how it would react if I tried to climb it? *First focus on the second pitch*, I thought.

“Yeah, Whitney,” Kris yelled when I clipped the anchor at the top of the second pitch. His voice echoed across an amphitheater of choss. Kris followed, breathing heavily and grinning. He wanted nothing to do with the third pitch. While I racked up, I felt as if I were back in October, standing by myself below Winter Dance once more. Beyond the hanging belay, I found a little split in the soft rock. I pounded in a Spectre, and as it rang deeper and deeper, I nodded at Kris. “Yeah, buddy.” I hooked cobbles through an overhang, praying they wouldn’t blow.

Ten meters above me, beads of water fell

from the end of the gangly ice fang, whizzed by and disappeared under the steep wall. “If only I can get into that ice,” I shouted. I hoped Kris might think of some way to avoid the next stretch of runout cobble climbing. His voice shivered as he yelled polite words of encouragement, implying, *Hurry up*. I nailed a beak and put a cam between two stones. The rock appeared porous and spongy. I inched up and down what felt like a few hundred times before committing to the next series of moves.

Finally, I got a good inverted screw deep into the belly of the overhanging ice. I looked down: I was directly above Kris. I warned him of certain bombardment. He used his pack like a shield, deflecting each falling chunk just in time. Three hours later, when I arrived at the top of the third pitch, I was beside myself. Each move had required calculated sequences of tenuous footholds, rotten ice, and loose rock.

Kris’s teeth chattered, and his smile was gone. He led the final pitch with a determined focus, reaching the top while night swallowed our day. Giddy with exhaustion, we started laughing: we’d succeeded in free climbing the whole ridiculous, unformed route, only to be stranded here without headlamps or V-threader. I guess neither of us had believed that when we left the ground we’d actually get to the top. In the total darkness, we groped to thread bits of cord around little icicles for the first rappel. Fortunately, the others were fixed. At last, we were hooting and hollering down the long ridge to the valley floor. A feeling of complete warmth came over my tired body. For the first time all day, I was comfortable.

A few days later, I stood in the parking lot again, two thousand feet below Winter Dance. Its massive hanging dagger looked smaller and more emaciated than ever. It felt good to gaze up at it now. Maybe that sensation is what keeps us coming back. We’re always striving to reach that euphoria when we climb at our limit and just barely pull it off. Enough words here: It’s time to get back into the canyon and get lost in the woods.



location of the canyon's first ice climb, G1 evolves from mid-November through March into a forty-meter-wide complex of ever-changing architecture, a collection of moderate flows, introductory mixed routes and difficult pillars.

Back in November 1997, Whit Magro was tying in below G1 for his first ice lesson when he looked up and noticed a familiar-looking instructor. Whit had spent his childhood running around the forests of Ohio, climbing saplings hand over hand, until he found he needed bigger woods and taller objectives. Four years earlier, he'd saved enough money from working in his family's machine shop to take a trip out West and up the Grand Teton. His guide, Jack Tackle, advised him to keep climbing. With that encouragement, Whit abandoned his opportunity to wrestle for Ohio State, and he enrolled at MSU. And now, there was Jack beside him, cocking his head and saying, "I know you."

During the next few years, Whit spent every November and December day in Hyalite, as long as the road stayed open. He remembered something Alex had written in the Barrel Book: the twelve-bolt ladder on Winter Dance "might go free on a warm day in rock shoes." On November 27, 2007, after years of dreaming, he and Kris free climbed all four pitches. Although the third pitch hadn't formed, Whit wove up and down in a delicate aerial dance, committing to each rock form one at a time, until he reached some fragile ice. Taking three hours to travel eighty feet, on sight, with natural gear, Whit climbed the route in marginal conditions that even Alex hadn't considered.

Recalling Pat's original vision, Whit has also continued up some of

the biggest gullies, past the point where the earlier climbers stopped. His partner Tim Seipel led the short final pitch of Mummy V, a mixture of turf, rock and ice patches all pasted together, extending the line to the ridge at last. Harkening back to the exploratory spirit of the pioneering era, Whit and his friends have begun tracing natural winter rock lines on the highest defining buttresses. A mysterious peak called Maid of the Mist stands alone at the southern end of the concentrated ice area. In 2005 Nate Opp had climbed a squat, yet blatant icicle in the heart of its large, scooped northeast face. Just a few hundred meters to the right, a buttress forms a dark, obvious edge, lashed by wind and rain. Here in November 2008, Whit and Adam Knoff set off for their Maiden Voyage, an 800-foot journey of cobble pinching, stone slinging and turf climbing, up the longest route in the canyon and into an alpine realm of their own. "It's almost like the kind of mountaineering line," Whit says, "that maybe should have been done much earlier, before any of the ice was climbed."

### Figures in the Trees

"THE TREES ARE MY FAVORITE PART of Hyalite," Whit says, "running under that canopy. You often can't see anything through them. You have to guess where you're going and then fire up until you find it." Today, the woods still awaken unexpected mysteries, drawing quiet climbers on private quests. On Boxing Day 2010, Whit and his brother Sam decided to try the second ascent of the Matriarch only to find two strangers

already racked up at the base. Luke Evans and Axel Nilsson conceded the route to the Magro brothers. Instead, Luke added his own X-rated, mostly rock line called Isis. Sam reported on [Montanaice.com](#) that they watched Luke lead a "thirty- to forty-foot runout to get to the ice that hung like a temptress high on the wall."

Luke had learned to ice climb along the shores of Lake Superior. When he was young, his brother took him to the Canadian Rockies, where he met some Slovenian alpinists and became entranced by their tales of "lesser-known climbers doing great things in the mountains." He spent the 1990s in Valdez, Alaska, reading poetry, snowboarding obscure peaks and climbing new lines, ground up, with a Slovenian friend. When I asked Luke what drew him to Hyalite, he replied: "A mystical vibe, like my first time in the Scottish Highlands, with the purity of lines and friendships I've found in Alaska and Slovenia. It was special for me to climb in a beautiful historic spot on all natural gear in the traditional Hyalite style. I like that old quote by Alex Lowe: 'Identifying and overcoming natural fear is one of the pleasing struggles intrinsic to climbing.'" Six weeks later, Luke made the third ascent of The Matriarch, after taking a fifty-foot fall from a soaking wet cobble as the ice around him dissolved.

To me, it seems like a classic Hyalite example of unknown climbers

walking into the forest and ascending whatever looks good to them, without any fanfare. I wonder how many like Luke might wander these woods.

### Parking Lot

IN WRITING CLIMBING STORIES OR GUIDEBOOKS, I've always felt the urgency to piece words and images together in way to express the worth of wild places. In certain cases, it may make sense to hold off publicizing areas of still-pristine wilderness. But any landscape is only truly valued—and it will only be protected in the future—if *it is loved*.

In spring 2007, tired of stuck cars, Forest Service officials planned a winter closure at the bottom of the road, some thirteen miles from the nearest ice. Local climbers had spent nearly four years trying to educate them about the importance of road access and just how great the ice was in Hyalite. Now, for the first time, we had to come up with a convincing, quantitative value for this resource. As I counted up the routes, I realized the canyon was more than just a backyard playground for a small group of locals. With over 215 climbs in a 3,350-acre area, Hyalite represented the most concentrated ice arena between Banff and Ouray, with some of the most reliable conditions anywhere in America.

On December 26, 2007, the county made an experimental plow

**top, and I have some memory...that some folks had tried toppling this back in the day. Otherwise I don't think it had been climbed before despite being so close to the most popular ice routes." Tapley waited to make the first ascent for over a decade.** Ross Lynn

[Facing Page] **Dave Collins on The Fat One (WI3, 45m, FA Unknown).** Joe Irons | [This Page] **Hans Johnstone on Home Field Advantage (M6+ WI5 25m, Tapley-Schmitz, 2009).** Josephson reported on [Montanaice.com](#), "There was a very old sling on a tree at the

to the end of the road. Climbers, skiers, ice fishermen, hikers, snowboarding teenagers and sledding Scout troops flocked to the canyon's deep snows and thick ice. We called it the great Hyalite Love Fest. All at once, the county recognized the community's overwhelming attachment to this place. The road is now plowed from December 1 to March 31, contingent on funding. The ice season is no longer a six-to-eight-week frenzy for those who lack snowmobiles or the time for expeditionary approaches. There have been fifty new routes since then, in every imaginable style, from once-ignored ice smears to M9+ bolted routes and more of those big winter chossaineering lines.

In March 2010, Sam Elias climbed a roof that angled down for fifty feet, then turned the lip onto another hundred feet of dripping, chandeliered, and gloriously untouched ice. Inglorious Bastards, a project begun by Conrad Anker and Pete Tapley, is among the hardest mixed routes in North America. But as Sam gazed out across the valley, he stopped thinking about the technical difficulties: "For me, Hyalite is a special place shrouded in the mystique of legendary routes and climbers. I might be romanticizing and embellishing, but I feel an electricity in the air in that canyon."

Like Sam, I've realized that the essence of Hyalite represents more than its collection of icefalls, rocks and trees. There's an essential feeling that can never be turned into a commodity—that can only be traded through common bonds and shared adventure. The road is one part of that experience, not because it makes the canyon more accessible, but because it brings all its climbers, at one point or another, to the same destination: the Grotto Falls parking lot.

It's there that you see both friends' and strangers' cars, the engines long cold, and wonder what grand adventure they might be on. As the blue lines along the white ridges turn to dark—coalescing from the far corners of the canyon—locals, visitors, pioneers, famous and obscure climbers will share tales, laughs and beers. And often they'll leave without ever knowing who their new friends are, or understanding why they care so much about this moment, about each other, and this place.

In an age of guidebooks, websites and social media, this gathering place keeps the oral tradition alive. History resides in its rightful home, the canyon.

## The House of Hyalite

DESPITE THE PLOWED ROAD, a midwinter quiet still descends upon the



canyon's hidden places. Nearby parties vanish quickly behind stands of trees. Skiers leave their ice gear behind once the snow gets good. Far from the classroom atmosphere of Genesis I, the seldom-visited areas of the East Fork and Flanders contain untouched treasures for those willing to return to earliest days of Hyalite exploration, skiing for miles after vague glimmers.

But perhaps that's what we're all looking for here, whether we realize or not—vestiges of some lost, unwritten time when all the world was wild and wood. "The deepwood has vanished," Robert MacFarlane explains, "but we are still haunted by the idea of it." Lying awake in our houses at night, we think of the canyon darkening the edges of our town, filtering into our dreams. At times, we dawdle with unlimited fascination over the smallest details of its ice; at others, we dash as fast and high as we can, our visions outstripping our current understand-

ing. Gradually, we begin to remember something children know: that the *Unexplored* doesn't just mean faraway summits and arctic lands. Each detail of our existence awaits to be rediscovered.

I think of what Kelly Cordes experienced when he shattered his leg during a freak 2010 accident on the The Thrill Is Gone. He looked across the canyon to the Genesis area, where he'd first learned to climb. He remembered how he'd hugged Pete Tapley in the parking lot that morning, after not seeing him for a long time. And then he thought about how he'd once bivied there in his rustbucket car as a young climber and heard Alex's voice outside ("all I ever wanted in life at that moment was to meet Alex Lowe, and he made me feel like I was somebody worthwhile, just like Jack Tackle did the first time I met him")—and about how, years later, he'd finally got to the point where he, too, could climb Winter Dance, which remains the best ice route of his life:

*I remember sitting broken in the snow, my leg flopping off to one side, knowing that my life has just taken a big shift and seeing all of that, and Winter*

*Dance, and the snow blanketing the canyon, light flickering down, ice flows rolling and hanging and spattered throughout, and memories past and forming and all changing, and even with the pain of my destroyed leg, I looked across Hyalite and smiled, and felt grateful for every last bit of it.*

"Hyalite provides," as the saying goes, for those who choose to accept the canyon for what it is. Like the backyards of our childhood, each drainage beckons us deeper and deeper into the woods. Perhaps that's why ice climbing here feels so much like coming home. You open the door, and find the world has been re-enchanted with ice and snow. Step across the threshold. Everything is inside. ■

**a human being. As Barry Blanchard says, 'Describe hard ice climbing? OK, it's weird man, it's about as weird as it gets, and being good at it doesn't mean you're good at anything else in life.' Ice climbing is weird and bad and wonderful."** Sam Magro



[This Page] Tapley on Chicken Dance (WI5, 20m, YEAR TK, NAME TK). Jay Beyer | [Facing Page] Kyler Pallister on Pitch 4 of Winter Dance. In "Fragments" (1993), Mark Twight wrote, "To do hard Grade 6, to even conceive of being able to do it is a strange trait in