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Ice Chandeliers PHOTO BY MIKE MULLINS

THE CRUX

SPRING
2011

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Ross Bronson

BY STEVE ANGELINI

Ross and I probably first met back in the late '60s when in 1967 I took the Appalachian Mountain Club fall rock climbing program. Ross would have been one of the instructors by then having begun climbing a year or two earlier. But our first real shared experience wasn't until 1973 when Ross and I and about six other AMCers gathered at Titcomb Basin in the Wind River Range of Wyoming for an incredible week of ascents in magnificent surroundings. This was my first trip with Ross and we couldn't have chosen a more idyllic destination. Most of our ascents were over snow and ice at which Ross was particularly more adept and skilled than I. When Ross was in the lead he never balked at the difficulties or the dangers. He could always be depended on to pull through any situation.

On another trip west to the Rockies of Colorado, Ross and I attempted the Flying Buttress on Mt. Meeker in Rocky Mountain National Park. The guidebook rated this climb at 5.8 A2. It was while leading the A2 pitch that a piece of aid gear fell out of a tiny crack and I fell about twelve feet. Ross' belay stopped my fall but not before I'd broken an ankle. We were three or four pitches up the route and above a couple of hundred feet of snowfield and five miles from the road. It was a desperate situation. I was unable to walk or even stand up. Ross had to belay me down the rock pitches and the snow fields where I eventually stopped to bury my foot in snow to reduce the swelling while Ross retreated to the tree line to fetch a

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Sight Unseen

BY MYRIAM BOUCHARD

First outing

As soon as he stepped out of the county bus, I greeted him and he looked in my direction. He confidently walked the few steps towards me and we shook hands. We walked to my car and I showed him the door. He got in, collapsed his white cane, and closed the door.

Andres, who lost his sight when he was twelve, requested to be guided for a day hike. On the way to our destination, I asked him why. He said nobody wants to take him hiking as they are worried he might slip, fall, and get hurt. He works out almost every day. Andres is a fit and slender man who recently turned fifty and decided to work on his dream list. He is a case manager for the homeless in New York City and commutes from his home by bus. On weekends, he cares for his two teenage boys while his wife works as a nurse.

We got out of the car, leaving his cane behind. "Wouldn't you rather follow the sound of bells, like Erik Weihenmayer, the famous blind mountaineer?" I asked, after he tied a handkerchief to my day pack. "That would be too annoying. Besides, this way, I can follow you up and down and around obstacles," was his reply. As he walked briskly behind me, we conversed about anything and everything while I did my best to give him body language instructions about the terrain, sometimes exaggerating the movement as I would go over big rocks so as to have him anticipate the challenge. "To our right, there is a gentle slope that leads to a creek, can you

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hear that?” “We are now crossing a more moist forest floor. Can you smell the difference?” Every now and then, I added some warnings when I could squeeze in a word, “Low branch to the left.” “Big rocks coming up front.” I had to concentrate much harder than ever to make sure I accommodated his needs, and yet, he just talked a mile a minute through it all. I couldn’t quite figure out how he did it.

At times, I had to interrupt him to describe a steep drop just adjacent to the trail, but he wouldn’t miss a beat, both in his stride and storytelling about work, life, family, and his outdoors aspirations after this hike. I described some of the native trees, like the month-long glorious flowering of the Mountain Laurel in June, and the blueberry and huckleberry bushes found on the ridge. I had him touch and smell the fragrant ferns as we passed by them. I talked a bit about the human history of the Shawangunk Ridge, such as the Native American tribes and then the colonies of French, Dutch, and English that populated the area. We soon passed by an old hamlet and I had him touch the foundation of what used to be the barn of a family of settlers who survived there for many decades over one hundred years ago.

Every now and then, Andres would take his digital recorder out and make comments or have me do the talking. He said that he’d listen to it at a later time and remember the day. We passed a small waterfall and listened to the water. When we entered a hemlock grove with its distinct smell, he noticed the difference immediately. After a minute he asked, “Where are the dogs?” “The dogs? I can’t hear any dogs,” I sheepishly replied. Five minutes passed before I could hear the dogs who caught up to us with their owner. I was amazed at how acute his sense of hearing was.

At our mid-way point, we made it to one of my favorite spots, with views of the Hudson Valley floor on one side, and the Catskill Mountains on the other. He asked me to take a photo of him and added, “Please make sure we don’t see the road.” Of course, he could hear the cars go by below us,

which I hadn’t even noticed. The photo he took of me in return was spot-on, as I am centered and the horizon is perfectly aligned.

Towards the end of our seven-mile day, it started to rain, and the roots and rocks got a bit slippery. Yet, through fatigue and less-than-perfect conditions, his momentum was still perky. “Loose hips,” he would say every now and then, to remind himself to stay relaxed, despite being tired. Being relaxed allowed him to go with the flow, even if the trail was uneven, with small rocks and roots everywhere. This was a skill I learned from him and that I have used at times while doing long hikes.

Utterly satisfied, he sat in the car, with a broad smile across his face. “What’s next?”

Second Outing

A few months went by before I heard back from Andres. We set our eyes on Breakneck Ridge, a very steep rocky escarpment overlooking the Hudson River. This time, I had to short-rope him so that if he slipped, it would arrest his fall.

Andres was like a kid in a candy store. I couldn’t keep up with him! I had to go first, set myself up for a solid hip belay, and then he was supposed to follow. I constantly had to say, “Wait!” “Not now!” “I am not ready yet!” He impatiently tried to contain his energy for the few seconds it took me to set myself up safely.

Rock scrambling was very easy for him as he could “see” the rock with his hands first, then put his feet where he memorized the holds. We made it to the top in record time.

“What’s next?” He asked, glowing. “Rock climbing!” I replied.

Third outing

After I picked Andres up at the bus station, we went to the shop so we could gather the rock climbing gear he needed. Once we got to the base of the cliff, he sat down on a big rock, and began to gear up while I ran with the rope to set up the anchor above.

We reviewed the basic safety measures and the key words we would be using to communicate. Exhilarated, he climbed quickly to the top, where I reminded him that the destination is

the journey. He could take his time if he wanted to. When he was ready to be lowered back to the ground, I asked, “Do you feel the empty space that lies beneath you?” “Oh yeah, I do!” He hollered back.

I would only help him out if he asked. Otherwise, he climbed on his own. In fact, he climbed so well and with such ease that at times I would forget that he was blind and wonder, “Why doesn’t he put his foot on the big ledge next to him?” Only to be reminded that it was out of his “vision” range. I would then offer, “Do you want to put your left foot down and rest?”

What amazed me the most was how confident he was in his footwork. He would put his foot on the rock and if it stuck, he would put his weight on it and commit to moving his body up, even if what held him was a mere pebble, not that he knew. He was 100 percent confident as he climbed, regardless of the level of difficulty.

Most inspiring was the fact that he never let his disability become an excuse as to why he couldn’t do a move. It was never an option, or at least, he never verbalized it. At times, he would even go as far as to say, “I can’t see the next hold!” His skill set went completely beyond his lack of vision. His greatest gift to me during all these outings was to expand my idea of what I need to see to climb. Now, when I can’t find a hand hold, I sometimes close my eyes and feel the rock as it reveals features I would have never thought to be good enough to help me climb.

At the end of the day, he had climbed all the routes on the small cliff we were stationed at. “What’s next now?”

Andres did a few more rock climbing outings with me, each time challenging himself a bit more. He also found a hiking buddy with whom he goes out with every other weekend. He’s hiked many of the Catskill peaks, most of the peaks around his home in Orange County, and has successfully climbed Mount Lady Washington (13,245 feet) in Colorado as a fundraiser event for families with children battling cancer. ■

Myriam Bouchard is a guide in New York’s Hudson River Valley

something pushing on my back, a familiar sensation! So, I peeked out. Darn! My cocoon was covered with fresh snow. It was not spindrift. Snow had accumulated between my back and the rock wall. I decided to go back to sleep and hoped that the snow would later stop. Paul woke at the sound of my movements. He had the same thought and said, “Let’s wait another half hour to see if the snow stops.” A half hour later, the snow was falling harder. Visibility dropped to a few hundred feet. My dream of reaching the summit was shattered, and then a dark shadow of fear came to my mind. It was the worst fear in my life – like walking into a death chamber!

We discussed our options. A possible descent route on the rock ridge at the western edge of the ice face seemed very steep. With a single rope there was little chance of success. We had absolutely no contingency plan for a retreat or rappelling down the North Face. Retreating the route would require twenty rappels to reach the glacier. We might run out of gear for making anchors. As an alternative, we could stay at the bivouac site for one more night, and then, on the next day we could proceed to the summit if the weather improved. However, I felt I would be less energetic on the following day if we had to sleep in a sitting position for another night. We had better move either up or down today. Climbing up would be a bad choice since there was no visibility, and the weather conditions would be worse at the higher elevation.

By all means I wanted to avoid descending the north face. However, the descent was our only option. It would be one of the most risky descents in the three-decades of my alpine career. I was pessimistic about the descent – how could we execute all 20 rappels safely under the poor ice conditions? I realized why the helicopter checked on us the day before. How I wished not to be here. How I wish to be working in my cubicle. I was quite dismayed, but I had to be optimistic for the outcome. Although I could not avoid the feeling of how serious the situation was Paul was very optimistic about our chances for a safe descent.

At the end of the second rappel, we were on the centerline of the huge ice field. There we received bombardments of mini-avalanches and spindrift. There was no escape to the right or left since the centerline held the better ice. However, it was far from ideal being soft and thin. Because of this most of the ice screw placements were not in perfect conditions, but they were acceptable. Sometimes the ice screw flexed as Paul put his weight on it.

After several rappels we were able to move close to the exposed rocks, which sometimes offered rappel anchors. We had to rappel from rock gear since we had only a dozen ice screws. Paul was very resourceful in finding rappel anchors – a sling over rock horns or sometimes wire nuts or pitons in rock cracks. When our supply of slings became low, Paul made a rappel anchor with nylon shoelaces. He wanted a double-loop, but I had him make a quad-loop with a knot in the center.

Finally we stood at the upper edge of the bergschrund. It would be the last rappel; the one I had had the most fear of since yesterday morning. Paul looked at the hard snow wall in front of us, and then he started to screw in our last 17cm ice screw. It was a brand new Black Diamond Express that Paul’s parents gave him at Christmas. I asked him, “Is it hard to turn?” “Yes! It is hard to turn.” He bit his jaw hard as he turned it. This time there was no back up screw. We could not make any backup even with the ice axes. So, I stepped back away from the ice screw in case it popped out. I knew he would not take a chance with his life, but I had an uneasy feeling. Paul slowly put his weight on the rope, and then he started descending. Miraculously the ice screw did not flex or move. The ice, or snow, whichever was holding it, was strong enough to grip it tight. He rappelled slowly and disappeared under the overhanging snow.

My eyes were still glued onto the ice screw. Paul yelled “Off-rappel” with his happy voice, and then he glissaded down on the safe snow slope. I gazed back at the ice screw, and thought about twisting it to see how tightly it was placed. However, I let the temptation pass since such an

action might weaken the bond between the snow and ice and the ice screw.

When I rappelled and passed the edge of the snow roof over the bergschrund, mistakenly I stopped and looked down the dark bottomless bergschrund. I should not have stopped. Suddenly the rope above me cut through the snow roof, and I was sucked under the roof. Now it was difficult to reach onto the other side of the bergschrund. I did not want to jerk the anchor, but I had no choice. I kicked and swung, and simultaneously let some of the rope run at the right time. Miraculously I landed on the other side of the bergschrund. Whew! It was one of the happiest moments in my life. I gripped one end of the rope and glissaded down. Paul cheerfully said, “I knew we could get off safely.” “Yeah, I knew it because I had confidence in you, but I was really worried about rappelling over the bergschrund this morning.”

Darkness was imminent, and we looked for another bivouac site near exposed rocks on the glacier. We fired up the stove for supper. It was so comfortable to lay down flat again. The snow stopped that evening. “This was exactly what I needed for my vacation,” said Paul. “Me too, it quenched my alpine fever.” That evening Paul confessed that the last ice screw placement wasn’t hard at all, and he had faked it. I thought he might be faking. However, I didn’t want to know at that time. That was another reason that I did not touch it. That was the greatest gamble I ever made in my climbing life.

On the next day an Italian party attempted to climb the North Face; got caught in an avalanche, and got injured. They had to be helicopter-rescued. What would have happened to us if we had continued to the summit on the next day? We had won all the gambles that the North Face gave us – this time! ■

SPRING 2011 CLIMBING SCHEDULE

Be sure to contact the weekend coordinator to reserve your place, coordinate rides, etc. First come, first served. **Please Note: these non-instructional weekends are not AMC trips and we don't find partners for you.**

May 13-15 New Seconds — The Gunks
Contact Ed Pavelchek or Ron Birk

May 26-30 Memorial Day Weekend
Acadia National Park, ME
Contact Ron Birk

EDITORS' NOTES

The Crux is a publication of the Mountaineering Committee of the Boston Chapter of the AMC. We publish three issues per year in Spring, Autumn & Winter. The editors are Al Stebbins and Nancy Zizza and regular contributor, Nancy Savickas.

Submissions

We encourage you to submit climbing-related articles of 1,500 words or fewer. We may edit for length and clarity. We do not accept material that has already been published elsewhere. Unless your name is Laura Waterman, articles are accepted only as MS Word or plain text files. Drawings, cartoons and photographs are also welcome in jpg or tif formats (300 dpi, Please!) or hard copies, which will be scanned and returned.

Please e-mail articles to:

Artwork may be sent to:

All materials for the next (Autumn 2011) Crux must be received by Friday, August 1, 2011.

CLIMBERS' NIGHT — SUMMER 2011

Climbers' nights are the first Thursday of the month unless otherwise noted. They always start at 7:30. Bring slides to show, lies to swap and your favorite beverages.

June 2: Al Stebbins & Nancy Zizza

July & August: Summer Haitus. No Climbers' nights until September

ANNUAL AAC DINNER

The annual NE Section American Alpine Club dinner was held at Henderson House in Weston, MA on March 19. NE Section Chair, Nancy Savickas ran another successful event including auction and guest speaker, Freddie Wilkinson. PHOTOS BY SUSAN CLARK



Ross Bronson, Continued from page 1

stout limb for me to use as a crutch to assist in crossing the boulder field and along the five mile trail out to the road.

Once we reached the trees Ross retrieved both of our packs from the campsite where we spent the previous night. With his pack on his back and my pack on his chest including all the climbing hardware and the rope he shepherded me, ever so slowly, the five miles out to the car and from there to the hospital. You could count on Ross for safety and reliability as well as compassion.



There were many climbing experiences Ross and I shared but not all were on rock. At a very young age Ross discovered a great love of trees. In particular he loved climbing them. Perhaps this interest stemmed from his grandfather's influence. Ross' grandfather had cleared land in Lincoln, MA for the family's first home. With the fallen timber he built a cabin which still stands today behind the current family home. Ross and his sister, Janet, would work a two-man saw together to cut up logs for their grandfather. Ross was less than ten at the time. Perhaps this experience explains the prodigious physical power Ross later exhibited so easily.

After his years at Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School, Ross began a tree and landscaping business with his tree climbing skills. Whenever he had a tree job that was too big for one person he would enlist my help. In return he would give me the harvested wood. It was a marvel to watch Ross engineer the take down and removal of a massive tree that loomed over a house with hedges, lampposts, fences, sheds

and other obstacles without putting so much as a scratch on any of the customer's property. As with many of his endeavors Ross would appear to be slow to get organized and under way each time he attempted something. However, Ross was extremely thorough. He never left the ground until all the gear was set and ready and his plan was definite in his mind. Once up in the tree, however, Ross worked methodically, steadily and relentlessly until the job was done. Ross could exasperate me with his pokiness at the start of the day but then run me into the ground with his drive and relentless endurance that could extend into the night.

Up in the trees he would spin an amazing web of rope using one strong fork of the main trunk as an anchor for the rope that would hold the limbs as he cut them. Have you ever tried working with a chain saw up in a tree? It is extremely dangerous. Once the ungainly limbs were cut they would swing with calculated control above and away

from all the obstacles. My job was to lower the cut limbs and feed them into the chipper. The last and potentially deadliest part of the job was when the main anchor trunk had to be dropped one segment at a time. Ross would tie the rope around the section to be cut and anchor it to the trunk below the cut. Once cut the massive log would pendulum past and, hopefully, clear of Ross. We held our breath with every cut. I never witnessed an accident working with Ross. Back on the ground Ross' job was not over. With arms like forklifts he would lift each weighty log (a log I could barely roll) and toss it into his truck. Watching Ross at work was an impressive show of skill, strength and daring. More than all of the climbing experiences I shared with Ross whether they were on rock or in the trees I remember him for his dedication to our friendship. The thing I respected about him most was his high moral standard. It was a code of ethics he committed himself to and one which he expected of others. He was forthright and honest to a fault. It wasn't

that he would put himself above you but that he simply expected you to behave at his level. It always felt like I could not live up to all of his expectations, but I tried. He was so Christianly good in the many times and ways he helped people out of the goodness of his huge heart. It wasn't for personal gain that he helped so many so often. He did it because his help was needed and it was the right thing for him to do. Ross thought of others, not of himself. If he sensed I had a need or a task he would appear suddenly one day unannounced with whatever was needed to get the job done. He helped his neighbors clear snow, leaves, trees, gutters and whatever work required manual attention. This was no ego trip for Ross. He did not place himself first ever.

It was hard to put a finger on what was so great about Ross Bronson but everybody who knew him felt it and everybody loved him. He inspired help and sympathy from others for the mental troubles he experienced in the years since his father's death. But even as physically and mentally disabled as Ross became he held onto his code and continued helping those in need. I really loved Ross and will miss him dearly. ■

Editors Note:

Ross Bronson died in late December of 2010. He was for many years a fixture in the Boston climbing community, teaching generations of aspiring climbers the joy of movement over rock, ice, and snow.



Gambling on the North Face Of Les Droites March 2002

BY YUKI FUJITA

I thought my luck was over!

All of a sudden a mini avalanche struck knocking me down. I was hanging from a precarious belay anchor. I kicked hard several times, and finally my front-points caught the ice under the thick, running, talcum powder. At least some of my weight was transferred on to my front points, but my belay line was still alarmingly tight. The avalanche continued. Would the anchor hold up? Paul Cleary and I were hanging from the anchor made with two ice screws set into thin ice. When the avalanche finally stopped, I shook the snow off my body, repositioned myself, and checked the anchor. It was fine. Paul was still at the end of the rappel rope looking for better ice for the next rappel anchor. A few minutes later, another avalanche came down. The snow quickly accumulated on my rucksack, arms, shoulders, and everywhere else on my body. This time, my ice axes and my front points gripped the ice. The avalanche stopped. As I shook my body, piles of snow fell off and silently slid down to the glacier 1,200 feet below. Then, there was spindrift blown up from below, and it was painfully cold against my face. Instinctively I closed my eyes. Within a minute my eyelashes froze shut. I lost a few eyelashes as I scraped the frozen snow from them. A few minutes later, another avalanche came down followed by spindrift. It was repeated assaults from heaven and hell. As we descended, avalanches became bigger and lasted longer. Our anchors on the thin ice so far had held against the onslaughts of falling snow.

We had been rappelling on the huge ice face since we got up from our bivouac site. I couldn't remember how many rappels we had done so far, but the glacier was still far below. Everywhere I looked was white and gray. Our vivid colored Gore-Tex shells had been faded out in the avalanches and spindrifts. Between the assaults, I gazed at Paul. He was hanging at the end of the rappel rope and

steadily working on the next rappel anchor. On the thin ice, trustable anchors were not easily built, and it consumed more time to look for a better ice screw placement. Any haste would slip us into death. I had full confidence in him finding safe anchors. He would not compromise with mediocre ones. It was best not to talk to him. I just quietly waited for his call. He would announce one word, "Safe!" when he tied into a new anchor. And that was the signal for my turn to rappel. No other words were needed. Between his words, it was very quiet, almost soundless. A world without sound and color seemed like another planet, perhaps in heaven, and we were lost in space and time. On each occasion of the assaults I envisioned my frozen corpse on the icy planet below.

A few days earlier, I had arrived in Genève and met Paul from the UK. Since it was our first winter Alps trip, we chose a route that was not "in" in summer. We casually decided to climb the North Face of Les Droites. Once upon a time, it was known to be one of the hardest ice routes in the Alps. Although the angle of the ice is not steep, it is still regarded as a difficult climb. The 2,000-meter (6,000 ft) climb ends at the 4,100-meter (13,500 ft) summit, and a long descent is on the south side of the summit. There is slim chance for escape from the North Face, and thus it requires a commitment. As a result, there have been more epics on this climb than any other climb in the French Alps. However, we did not really expect it would happen to us. When we got there, because of the thin ice conditions, nobody was climbing on this face. The thin ice conditions would add another challenge that I wouldn't mind taking. My over-confidence on thin ice masked a hidden but a subtle difference in climbing speed, which I discovered later. Whether being bold or not, our super-confidence made us attempt the climb lightly equipped. We had

only a three-day supply of food and a 50-meter-long 8.5 mm rope. Our plan was to take a pair of double ropes, but I forgot to pack one of them. We made a conscious decision to climb with one rope since the descent on the south side required only one rappel. Our rock and ice gear was a bare minimum that opted for a speedy ascent. We did not have any spare warm clothes; all we had were worn during the climb. To lighten my rucksack, I carried a summer down sleeping bag.

Our plan was to complete the climb in less than four days; the first night at Argentiére Hut, the second night on the face hopefully near the summit, and possible third night in Couvercle Hut on the south side. In our earlier discussion we looked for a descent route on the north side, so we could approach by skis. An English language guidebook deceptively suggested the ski approach to the base and a possible descent near the western edge of the north face. Monsieur Kanda, a 30-year resident of Chamonix, told us that unless we carried skis on the ascent, we'd better not take skis. He firmly warned us, "Don't even think about descending on the north side that would be an extremely serious undertaking!"

By 8 AM we stood at the base of the North Face and looked down a huge bergschrund, which created a 25-foot gap between the glacier and the North Face. Fortunately there was a snow bridge, but it looked very fragile. Crossing snow bridges often gives me nightmares because you never know when they might collapse. However, Paul did not hesitate and started crossing it. If the snow bridge collapsed and consequentially he fell into the bergschrund, I would jump down on the steep snow slope behind me where we just came up. This was the only choice we had since there was no anchor. Cautiously he climbed up the intricate snow bridge, and reached the other side of the bergschrund.

There he was confronted with a

30-foot, vertical, hard-packed snow wall. He climbed six feet up the wall. Suddenly his ice axes started cutting through the snow like butter. He screamed, "Falling! I'm falling!" Somehow he managed to get down to the base of the wall. It was not like him not to succeed, and he seemed to be defeated. I suggested it might be my turn to tackle the wall.

Before crossing the snow bridge, Paul gave me a warning, "Yuki, don't fall in because my belay anchor here is no good." There was no guarantee for the bridge to hold up. All I hoped was it would hold up for one more person to cross. If it collapsed, both of us could be sucked into the deep gap and be covered with tons of snow. Then, nobody would find our bodies until the end of the next ice age. Two frozen mummies wrapped in Gore-Tex would be a fascinating museum exhibit for future centuries. Carefully I followed Paul's footprints to his psychological belay station. I looked up the vertical snow wall. It didn't look too bad. Being lighter in weight I had an advantage over him. After struggling for a few moves I passed Paul's highest point. Eventually the snow became much harder, and it turned into soft ice. About 30 feet up, the angle decreased. I made an anchor with two ice screws and belayed Paul.

After a couple of snow and ice mixed pitches, we arrived at the mouth of a left-inclined diagonal gully. In the gully the ice became harder and turned into blue ice. Alternating leads brought us to the top of the gully. There we were at the bottom of a huge fan shaped ice face. Unconsolidated snow was on most of the ice, but from where we stood there was a very long narrow ice shoot running up to the

upper rock band. Disappointingly the ice turned to the much-distrusted hue of gray-white. It was softer and thinner. We often had to tie off ice screws. We consumed more time on finding better ice for anchors, and our progress slowed down to half speed.

The base of the head wall appeared to be about four pitches away. As we kept climbing, however, the head wall



Photo of Les Droites showing the attempted route.

seemed to move away from us. Paul's movements became noticeably slower and he took frequent rest stops. Shockingly he said he was very tired. This was the first time I had ever seen him tire before me. Not surprisingly he gladly accepted my offer for leading the rest of the day.

Suddenly a black helicopter appeared from the east, and passed us. Immediately it flew back and hovered at my eye level. It was the French

High-Mountain Police. When I got eye-to-eye contact with the pilot, I extended my right arm to 45 degrees. Recognizing my signal, it quickly took off sideways down to the valley. Then, I realized that it was already late afternoon, but we were not half way up the North Face yet. Perhaps the pilot thought we needed assistance.

The sun was a few inches above the western ridges. Our hope for bivouac at the base of the headwall was sinking. To find a bivouac site before dark I decided to climb diagonally right to a rock rib which could be reached within a pitch or two. The rock rib extended 300 feet or so down from the head wall. When I got on the rock rib whenever my ice axe or crampons struck rocks it emitted reddish orange sparks. All I found were two small ledges side by side, one higher than the other. Each ledge was about the size of a kitchen chair. These ledges had to be our bivouac site. Paul, who was weary, seemed to be happy when he arrived at the site.

At our tiny cubicles we brewed tea first, and then, our usual freeze-dehydrated dinner followed. Fully clothed with harness and boots, but no crampons, we wiggled into our sleeping bags. Suddenly warmth surrounded me. It was an amazingly cozy cocoon, as if I were in a recliner. My view was a

great panorama of jagged mountains and valleys in the dark star-lit sky. This bivouac was what drew me to the Alps. It was a very happy moment — a feeling of supreme contentment. Some hours later I felt mist on my face. Perhaps, it could be spindrift from above. So, I zipped up the cover.

When I awoke it was light and the valley floor was visible, but the sky was completely gray. Shortly after that I felt

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