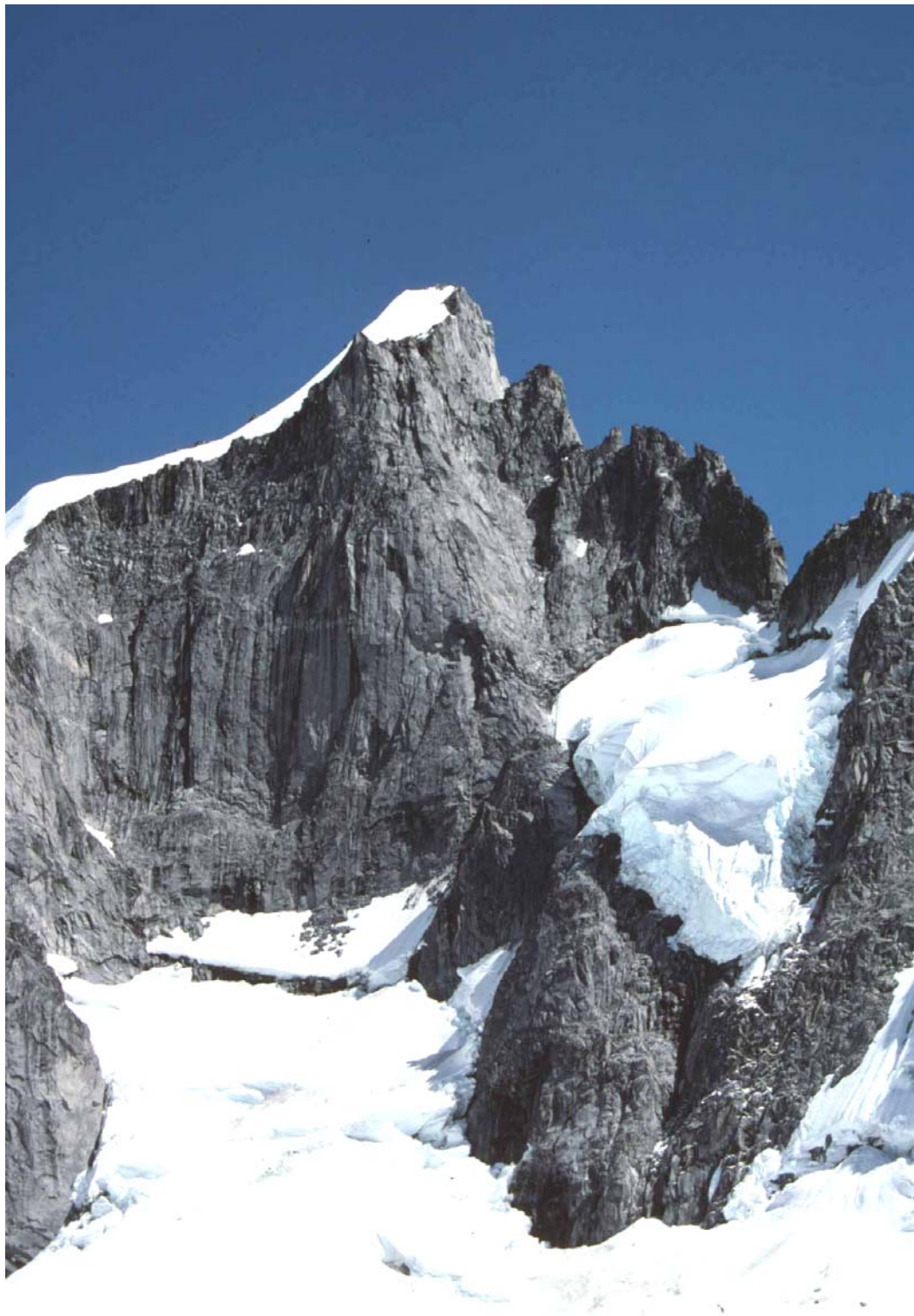


Scottish Coast Range Expedition 2002



**West Pillar, Mount Gilbert
(Photo: Simon Richardson)**

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**Mt Raleigh, The Cleaver, Mt Gilbert (l-r)
(aerial photograph from the west)
(Photo: Bivouac.com)**

1. Introduction

The primary aim of the expedition was to climb a new line on the unclimbed, 3000' south face of Mount Gilbert (3098m), situated in the Coast Range of British Columbia, Canada at Lat. 50° 52.0'N, Long. 124° 16.0'W. Secondary objectives included investigating a potential line on the west face of Mount Gilbert as well as other lines on adjacent mountains.

2. The Team

Chris Cartwright 39 yr, British, Human Resource Professional

Scottish Winter: Approx. 150 new routes, mostly Grade V and above with numerous Grade VII and harder. Highlights include Fubarbundy (VIII 7) on Liathach, Magic Bow Wall (VIII 8) on Sgurr an Fhithleir, The Crack (VIII 8) on Ben Nevis, The Link Direct (VIII 7) on Lochnagar.

Alps: Highlights include ascents of many summer classics plus first ascents of the South Pillar Freney Direct, Crystal Tripper on Aiguille Jardin and winter ascents including the Dru Couloir.

Expeditions to Himalayas, Alaska and numerous trips rockclimbing throughout the world.

Simon Richardson 43 yr, British, Petroleum Engineer.

Scottish Winter: Approx 300 new routes (140 Grade V and harder, 30 Grade VII and harder). Highlights include first ascents of The Cardinal (VIII,8) Beinn a'Bhuird, The Crack (VIII,8) Ben Nevis, Magic Bow Wall (VIII,8) Sgurr an Fhithleir, Redemption (VIII,7) Lochnagar.

Alps: Approx 100 routes (25 ED1 or harder). Highlights include Walker and Croz Spurs, Colton-MacIntyre, East Face Grandes Jorasses, Freney and Brouillard Pillars etc. Several first ascents including South Pillar Freney Direct and SW Pillar Aig Sans Nom

Expeditions to India, Nepal, Karakoram, Alaska, Peru and Canadian Coast Range Highlights include first ascents of Agyasol and Chomchior (Kishtwar), first alpine style ascent S Ridge Hunter (Alaska), Salathe Wall (Yosemite), Taulliraju (Peru) and first ascents of SE Ridge Asperity, S Pillar Tiedemann, W.Pillar Gilbert (Canadian Coast Range)

3. Gurus , Climbing Literature and Maps

Although Mount Gilbert is the closest 10,000' peak to Vancouver it is in fact rarely visited. Access is difficult, best approached by helicopter from Bluff Lake, which is itself 500 miles by road from Vancouver.

We took local advice from the Coast Range “guru” Don Serl and from Bruce Fairley, the most recent climber to have visited Mount Gilbert (first ascent of “The Friendly Giant”, the south-west ridge of Mount Gilbert, 1989). Don Serl is the author of a recently published guide book to the Mount Waddington range, the first climbing guide to any area within the Coast Range since Dick Culberts guide of 1965.

Also of great help was the archive of the Canadian Alpine Journal. These contain reports on much of the activity in the Coast Range including the first attempt on Mount Gilbert in 1952 (reached the slightly lower North summit) and the first successful attempt on the 13th of August 1953 by Dr. Neal Carter and his team.

The Mount Gilbert area is covered by the Canadian Government 1:50,000 topographical sheet 92K16.

4. Climbing

We flew into Vancouver from Glasgow via Montreal on the 2nd of August. After picking up a hire car we bought most of our supplies from a local supermarket and commenced the 500 mile drive to Whitesaddle Ranch near Bluff Lake. We slept in the car that evening and arrived at the helicopter pad at Whitesaddle around midday on Day 2. Despite very mixed weather we were packed and flying within thirty minutes, being deposited on the upper reaches of the Raleigh Glacier, on the west side of Mount Gilbert, after a further forty minutes.

We knew that this trip was always going to be a gamble as the existing information is very sketchy. The only photograph we had of our primary objective, the south face, was taken from a long distance away down the Filer Glacier. We had suspected there might be a granite wall on the west side. As we relaxed after setting up camp we could only congratulate ourselves on our luck as we stared at the magnificent 2500’ West Pillar rearing up in front of us.

That evening it started to snow and this was to continue over Days 3 and 4, depositing over two feet of snow. Despite the snow we waded up to a col on the south west ridge overlooking the Filer Glacier and had our first look at the South face. We immediately realised that our small photograph did not show the bottom section of the face. Debris at the base showed that much of this section was exposed to ongoing rockfall from snow basins higher up. In addition the face itself was very broken with no logical, standout line.

On Day 5 the snow stopped and the weather improved showing the West Pillar to be plastered in fresh snow. However we packed quickly and set off to climb the North-West Shelf route, first climbed in August 1983 by Bruce Fairley and party. This brought us to the summit via a long glacier approach and a fine snow arête to the final summit slopes, overlooking the West Pillar, and to the summit itself. Descent was by the route of ascent.

The weather remained cold and the West Pillar was clearing slowly. On Day 6 we set off northwards across the Raleigh Glacier to a point overlooking the Southgate River and a view over to the immense Homathko Icefield to the north west. This allowed us

access to the North-West ridge running down off the unclimbed Peak 8900ft. Easy climbing brought us to a col allowing a good view to the nearby peaks of The Cleaver and Mount Gilbert's bigger brother (by about 150'), Mount Raleigh. Peak 8900ft then treated us to a fine traverse, an ever steepening rocky ridge leading to a series of un-trodden summits interspersed with sharply scalloped, corniced ridges. We eventually descended to a deep notch separating Peak 8900ft from the north-west ridge of Mount Gilbert and a short abseil into the lower reaches of North-West Shelf route.

The weather deteriorated again and confined us to basecamp on Days 7 and 8. However it was not as cold and no more fresh snow was being deposited on the West Pillar. Day 9 dawned clear and bright and our small transistor radio indicated a good forecast for the next few days. We debated, packed, debated and repacked throughout the day, eventually allowing for three days on the West Pillar and prepared for an early start on Day 10.

The West Pillar is guarded by a large bergschrund. Access is further complicated by hanging seracs and an ice couloir that regularly spew rock and ice down the approach slopes. The whole approach would be unjustifiable if it were not for the Little Tower, a steep rocky crest that shields a narrow segment of the approach slopes from ice fall. The base of the pillar itself is undercut by a series of roofs, but these are breached on their right side by The Beak, a prominent prow with a corner running up its left side. The only weakness up the smooth, middle section of the Pillar is the Great Flake, a hanging left-facing flake system that leads through seemingly blank walls to the exit chimneys and summit snow slope.

The bergschrund proved to be quite straightforward and was followed by three rising pitches across the Little Tower to join the ice couloir. A delicate traverse across and up the couloir brought us to the base of the Pillar proper. A change into rock boots and the first steps onto the pillar confirmed that the granite was of an excellent quality, cracked and featured. As the sun warmed the rock we started to unravel the secrets to the Pillar, climbing up and through the corner of The Beak, and delicately linking across the seemingly blank walls to the Great Flake via a series of cracks, dykes and chickenheads. The Great Flake itself succumbed to delicate but forceful climbing, followed by very enjoyable climbing to below a steep wall. Once again the solution fell to a combination of delicate yet forceful climbing, threading a line leftwards and through a roof on hidden flakes and chickenheads. We had made very good progress during the day and, driven by the sight of poor weather heading our way from the direction of Mt Waddington continued to push for the top. This forced an uncomfortable bivouac in a series of exit chimneys, before daylight saw us reach the top on the morning of Day 11.

We descended to basecamp via the North-West Shelf route. That afternoon we re-ascended to the notch between Peak 8900ft and Mount Gilbert and contacted Whitesaddle ranch by radio and arrange our extrication by helicopter for Day 12.

5. Conclusion

Although our primary objective was not deemed suitable once encountered face-to-face both team members felt that our secondary objective, the West Pillar, was a much superior objective, an irresistible challenge to any climber.

Combined with our ascent of Mount Gilbert by the North-West Shelf route and the ascent of the unclimbed Peak 8900ft, and given the very mixed weather during our time on the Raleigh Glacier, we both deem this to have been a very successful expedition.

6. Diary of Events

- 2nd August Depart Edinburgh, via Montreal, to Vancouver.
Pick up hire car in Vancouver.
Purchase all supplies in Vancouver.
Commence drive to Whitesaddle Ranch, nr. Bluff Lake.
Sleep overnight in car.
- 3rd August Arrive Whitesaddle Ranch.
Pack all equipment and supplies and load helicopter.
Fly-in and dropped off on upper reaches of Raleigh Glacier below west face of Mount Gilbert.
Erect basecamp.
- 4th August Confined to basecamp due to snowfall.
- 5th August Snow continuing to fall.
Climb to col on south west ridge of Mount Gilbert to gain vantage point for south face.
- 6th August Climb North-West Shelf route to summit Mount Gilbert
- 7th August Traverse Peak 8900ft by ascending north-west ridge and descending to south-east ridge to notch with Mount Gilbert.
- 8th August Weather poor, confined to basecamp.
- 9th August Weather poor, confined to basecamp.
- 10th August Dramatic improvement in weather. Pack and prepare to climb West Pillar following day.
- 11th August Climb 2000' of West Pillar to bivouac in the exit chimneys.
- 12th August Complete ascent and descend North-West shelf route back to base camp.
Climb to Peak 8900ft – Mount Gilbert notch to gain radio reception and request helicopter
- 13th August Extricated by helicopter at approx. 1700hrs.
Spend night at Whitesaddle ranch.
- 14th August Drive back to Vancouver.
Stay with Don Serl in Vancouver
- 15th August Climb on Stawamus Chief, Squamish
- 16th August Climb on Stawamus Chief, Squamish
- 17th August Climb on Yak Peak, BC
- 18th August Depart Vancouver for Edinburgh

7. Expedition Accounts

Income		Expenditure	
MCoS expedition grant	£600	Flights	£1616.78
Personal contributions	£2966.95	Hire car	£337.56
		Helicopter hire	£1200.00
		Climbing Insurance	£134.00
		First aid kit	£38.61
		Food and basecamp supplies	£140.00
		Fuel	£100.00
Total	£3566.95	Total	£3566.95

8. Acknowledgements

The expedition would like to pay special thanks to the following whose support was gratefully received.

The Mountaineering Council of Scotland

Alex Runciman and Lawrence Hughes at Mountain Supplies, Perth and Aviemore

Don Serl

Bruce Fairley