

## Susan & Tor's Mountain Sagas

### Mnt. Blanc du Tacul (4248m) -- Left Edge of North Triangle Face

AD -- 350m from base -- 3hrs estimated time

**“One of the nicest routes on the face -- sustained mixed climbing”**

5/31/97 (Saturday) S&T

Beautiful day!! We had planned a short easy climb before trying to do a ski ascent of Mnt. Blanc the next day. We took the 1st (8:30am) Aig. du Midi telepherique with Carl and AnnaMarie who were visiting. Hung out with them at the top looking at the view until 9:30 or so -- after all a 3 hour climb, who needs to rush! We descended to the Mer de Glace from the Aig. du Midi without plummeting to our deaths, although after starting Susan decided that she wanted to wear crampons. Skied to below the Triangle face, left our skis and walked to the base of the route at about 10:15. There were two people ahead of us just starting the route and several people headed up the easier North Couloir (should have followed them!)

Our route headed up a couloir headed right with ice at the base and snow at the top. We started moving towards were the previous party had crossed the bergshrund (sp?) -- a small (1 foot diameter) rock dropped from the left-hand (upper) rock buttress, skidded across our path 50m ahead, and into the snow below. No problem -- if it had been closer we could have easily dodged it and even if it hit one of us it probably would have only left us severely maimed and not dead or anything (fortunately we were not wearing helmets since they would not have been much good against such a rock). We continued up. Five minutes later another rock fell from the same place. This was slightly larger -- the size of two or three Chevy minivans. It skidded down the ice for probably 100m towards us -- we ran. We probably covered 3m before it passed 5m away or so -- it dug a trench 2-3m depth and 50m+ long when it hit the snow. Tor was covered with the plume of snow that it kicked up. Yikes! It missed one of the two people ahead by about 2m -- he was anchored, could not move and



*Susan entering the gully at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> snow slope.*



*Blue ice on the final slope while the clouds rolled in.*

probably was less than happy! I guess we were too late and too warm in the day!

We moved right away from the fall line and climbed the ice under the right-hand rock buttress where we anchored. While Tor lead the next pitch up ice and snow, the other party came rappelling down “we do not want to die

today!” Continued moving up the couloir using rock belays and into the very soft and mushy snow -- thank god for the deadman (it was the only easy protection to get in). About three pitches (with some simu-climbing) up the couloir to the ridge with one hardish (i.e. 5.6) rock move onto the broad ridge. Climbed up through mixed rock, snow, and ice on a series of short ice gullies using the occasional ice screw for protection until we arrived at a wide expanse of ice 30m high. Although not steep, it was difficult because the ice was very brittle and we had our old axes and hammers. Finally, up more ice gullies to easy snow and rock. Summited (about 4000m) at about 5 pm in clouds and snow flurries and finally stopped to eat and drink -- we felt pushed all day because we were so slow. In retrospect,

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conditions were not ideal, we unnecessarily belayed every pitch (about 11), and we were using lousy gear -- we ended up buying two new axes and one new hammer before our next climb.

The direct descent looked difficult and uncertain in the fog, but in retrospect was probably all right. We continued up towards the summit for about 1 hour until it was possible to traverse right and reach the standard descent/ascent. Reached our skis at about 8pm and the Cosmique hut about 8:20pm. They gave us dinner even though we were 2 hours late!! We were too exhausted to consider ski plans for the next day. Thank god it started to snow! Awoke to 1 foot of new snow and had a interesting ascent up the ridge back to the telepherique in snow, wind, and Susan tottering on the ridge as Tor tried to put her crampons on! Last rental of randonnee skis which we used for about 1 hour during the whole weekend!

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## Aiguille de l'Index (2595m) in Aiguilles Rouges

IV -- 150m from base -- 1.5 hrs estimated time

7/6/97 (Sunday) S&T with Glennys and James



*Susan climbing up to the 2<sup>nd</sup> belay of rope spaghetti*



*Glennys and James cold while waiting to start*

It was a rainy Saturday again (with snow up high) but Sunday was expected to be better. We decided to do a simple rock climb in the Aig. Rouge with Glennys and James, her 10 year old son. We took the Flegere telepherique but then could not take to next chairlift because of the dogs. Thus, we walked from 1877m towards the top of the chair. The morning looked good with potential for clearing in the afternoon! Wrong! During the hike, we decided to climb the Index rather than the longer and more difficult Chappel since it seemed that

Glennys and James might be a little slower. We got to the base around noon, left the dogs in the scree and started up a short snowfield to a ledge that traverses the block to the start of the climbing.

We probably started climbing around 1pm with Glennys and James going first. The route was quite easy, about 150m (ideally 3 pitches!!) and mostly 5.4ish. Unfortunately, Glennys was a little slow! We did about 6 or 7 short pitches and got to the top around 5 pm -- wow!! During the climb, the weather varied continuously, from

brief sunshine to rain to snow to sleet and wind and back to rain. Much of the time we could see the Aig. du Midi, Mnt. Blanc du Tacul, and Mnt. Blanc drifting in and out of the clouds and sunshine. It was great fun although the pace was very frustrating and sometimes we got pretty cold waiting! Finally, we had to descend from the top into a snow gully with rotten rock. It was more than a full 55m rappel but we downclimbed the last 10m to the snow. The rappel started as a vertical or overhanging descent and then we had to traverse right across wet and verglassed rock -- it was pretty tough. James did fantastically throughout but this was different stuff from what he and Glennys were used to. We got to the dogs about 6pm -- they were very patient -- had obviously missed the last telepherique down and finally got to the bottom about 8:30pm after descending 1545 meters. Tor's ankles, which are never very happy, were miserable.

# Susan & Tor's Mountain Sagas

## La Tour Ronde (3792m) -- North Face

AD+/D- -- 350m from bergshrund -- 4 hrs estimated time

**"Established classic ... provides a good introduction to steeper alpine faces"**

7/12 -- 7/13/97 S&T

The beginning of trips planned at the last minute! It had been bad weather most of the week and the weekend was not looking good. We awoke Saturday to a beautiful day and a good forecast for Sunday -- what is it with the weather predictions around here? We called and reserved space at the Torino hut for that night -- we were there!



*Susan climbing the snow slope after exiting the gully*

9pm. Unfortunately, there was a central staircase and we were awoken at midnight, 3am, and got up at 4am for breakfast. We walking at 4:40am and were able to move headlamps. The snow was well frozen and approach took about 1 hour. There were at parties ahead of us, one on the steeper ice using headlamps and another pair of just above the bergshrund.

We climbed up the snow face -- climbing with a full rope length between us 80m to a first belay below the ice gully. climbing had been easy (no gear) but the looked harder and the party ahead was down a constant shower of ice chips, pieces -- thank god for the helmets. They a belay on the right-hand rocks midway up the gully. Tor lead up the center of the gully but quickly reached the level of their belay stance. The climbing was not difficult; he placed a screw and Susan started simu-climbing. The other party cut right about 30m above their belay to get out onto the snow but we stayed in the couloir, placing two more screws and finally a stopper in some rock before reaching the snow. The snow above was easy going but there was little protection. At this point, Susan was in the middle of the ice section and was getting tired -- oops we should have set up a belay somewhere.

We first thought to go early and climb the Aig. du Midi and then walk over to the Torino hut but the morning was getting late and we decided to go to the Intersport and buy helmets -- everyone (other than Tor) seems to think they are a good idea. We got to Chamonix around noon and there was a huge crowd of people at the Midi telepherique. We went up to Snell's to get Susan's new crampons fixed and ended up buying her a new pack. At this point it was probably too late to walk across the glacier so we headed for the Mnt. Blanc tunnel (using 2 more of our 10 trip pass) and took three very rickety telepheriques up to Hellbronner from Courmayer. We got to Hellbronner at 2:30 or 3 and walked through wet snow over to the base of the route (about 90 minutes). It looked good -- snow at the top and bottom with steeper ice in the middle.



*Susan finishing the final snow slope and starting on the ridge to the summit block*

We had a private room at the hut and went to bed around 1am, 2am, began without the least two section climbers

simu- for about The ice section sending chunks, and had placed

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The upper snow slope was probably 100m long. Tor kicked steps up the snow for about 50m, heading right, until he join the "trail" created by the previous parties. Although the going was easy and the steps were very solid, the snow was sugary and thus the axes did not offer much support. He belayed at the top of the snow slope and Susan lead off descending along the rock cap of the summit until she could traverse over to the normal route which we followed for the final 30m to the top. We arrived around 8:30 after 3 hours climbing. We followed the normal route on descent, got back to the hut around 11am and then back to the car around noon.

## Susan & Tor's Mountain Sagas

### Mnt. Blanc (4807m) -- Traverse via Tacul and Mnt. Maudit

PD -- about 1600m from Mer de Glace -- 6 to 7 hrs estimated

7/20 -- 7/21/97 S&T

We had been told that one of the greatest routes a co-worker at CERN had done was Mnt. Blanc by full moon. It had the advantage of hard ice/snow, few people, and stark beauty. Sounded good -- we didn't really want to join the 300 plus people reported to head up the regular route every day. The timing looked good to try it first thing on our two week vacation in July -- the full moon was Saturday. Unfortunately, the weather did not look like it was going to cooperate -- the forecast for the weekend was poor -- and both of us still had work to finish before leaving. We ended up working all day Saturday and then left Sunday around noon for Chamonix.



*Tor on the shoulder of Mnt. Blanc de Tacul during sunset*

we could only see about 30 feet in the fog. followed a trail through the snow that towards Mnt. Blanc du Tacul (we did -- the clouds lifted briefly as we started shoulder of Tacul so that we could see the Triangle face. As we continued up shoulder, we broke through the clouds and the Aig. du Midi drifting in and out of the top of Mnt. Blanc du Tacul was lit up alpenglow -- took lots of pictures of the

We got up to the shoulder of (roughly 4100m) at about 10pm. The sun but there was still plenty of light and we the moon rising next to the rock cap of After Susan peed, we started down base of Mnt Maudit. By this time the pretty strong. All of the previous tracks blown in but the route down was pretty Unfortunately, it was not obvious how to get up Maudit -- Tor though he saw tracks and a reasonable route on the left edge -- thank god we did not follow his suggestion!

We wandered around Chamonix looking for another deadman but could not find one anywhere! Instead we ate ice cream and went to Patagonia. Finally, took the 4pm telepherique up to the Aig. du Midi which was in the clouds. We set off for the Cosmique hut following the obvious trail down the ridge and through the snow but could not see more than 30 feet in the fog. The hut dude actually complimented us on our french -- wow, I think that was first! Actually, he must have remembered us from our Mnt. Blanc du Tacul trip where we were so tired we could barely speak english much less french! We had dinner next to a British couple planning to climb Aig. du Midi the next day and the traverse to Aig. de Plan the day after. I think they thought us a little nuts when we explained that we were only staying for dinner and wanted to climb Mnt. Blanc by moonlight -- the hut dude seemed to echo that thought and wished us "bon courage" when we left at 8pm.



*Looking back at the Aig. de Midi near the sunset*

There was still plenty of light when we left but We headed (thought). It up the North towards the could see them while with the sunset.

Tacul was down could see Tacul. towards the wind was had been obvious.

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The ascent of Maudit was supposed to cross under the seracs of the north face and then head up. We headed across occasionally stumbling across some old tracks -- the climbing was straight-forward but the wind was strong and cold and the visibility was not so great because the moon was hidden by the peak. In addition, the old tracks had been filled in with snow, making trail trail breaking slow and exhausting. We continued up to the Col de Maudit -- some ice but mostly snow at most 50 degrees -- arriving at around 12:30am. From the col we could see the whole expanse of Mnt. Blanc -- it was beautiful with spindrift flying off the ridges in the moonlight.

After eating and drinking we started down to the Col de Brenva. Here the wind was fierce and really cold. We were getting plastered with spindrift and we pretty tired and were getting afraid about frostbite that we could not see in the moonlight. We continued up looking for a place that might be more sheltered. We climbed the Mur de la Cote to about 4400m looking for crevasses or cornices that we could hide behind. The wind had really filled in most reasonable places that seemed safe. Finally, we found some avalanche debris on the shoulder of Mnt. Blanc -- probably at around 4500m at 2:30am. We piled some chunks up to form a windbreak and dug a trench behind it, lay our packs down and then tried to fit the two of us into our single bivi sac. This was something that worked just fine on our living room floor but didn't work so well up there. Oh well! After a few tries, first sitting, then enlarging the trench to lie down, we got reasonably protected and comfortable and got a few hours sleep. We started moving again after sunrise (hoping erroneously that it would provide warmth) at around 5am and after an hours climb were on the summit!



*A bit cold on top of Mnt. Blanc with strong winds and our 11 mm rope trying to emulate spaghetti*

When we started after the bivi, we could see people starting to come through the Col du Maudit -- we learned later that some had started at midnight and were climbing all night ugh! When we got to the top at 7am (after about 7 hours climbing) the wind was actually less than on the shoulder. We started down the standard route and saw an almost continuous line of people headed up. Susan was leading and it was a little annoying that the people climbing never yielded the trail. The ridge was wide enough to pass on either side, not very steep and in many places

level, but many of the groups were large and led by a guide and very focused on their (slow) ascent to the top.

We had been planning to descend the Grand Mulets route to go back to the Aig. du Midi telepherique but the snow was warm and nobody had been down towards the hut since the last snow four or five days earlier. The guide warns that the route passes under some dangerous seracs and across some potential avalanche slopes so we opted against that route. Tor wanted to descend the north ridge of the Gouter dome to the Mulets hut which was described as slightly more difficult but objectively safe but Susan voted for descending the Gouter route and then taking a bus back to Chamonix -- mistake!! Of course, Susan's vote won and we continued down -- ugh!

We had passed probably 100 people coming up while we descended but it had been easy to go around them. We got down to the Gouter hut around 10am, but, unfortunately, after passing the Gouter hut, the trail descends a rock spur that has a series of fixed cables for protection. People both descending and ascending were frequently roped together and sometimes clipped into the cables -- it was very difficult to pass and a complete bloody nightmare. Finally, we cut right onto some steep snow and front-pointed down -- it was a little exciting as the snow was poor and not very deep over the rocks -- in retrospect, we probably should have roped up for that! Unfortunately it did not really save us any time and some fat people started yelling at us for some unknown reason. We finally got down to the Nid d'Aigle train station at 2400m at about 2:30pm. It was about an 8000 foot descent but it had taken us 7:30 hours -- never again on the Gouter route!! Too many bloody people!

# **Susan & Tor's Mountain Sagas**

## Susan & Tor's Mountain Sagas

### **Breithorn (4165m) -- Arete du Trifti (North ridge)**

**AD -- about 1300m from Gandegg hut and glacier -- 8 hrs estimated**

**"Mixed; rock II to III and ice to 55 deg. -- large scale classic ridge"**

*7/22 -- 7/23/97 S&T*

We were tired from Mnt. Blanc and were not sure about the weather but the Breithorn has the advantage of a trivial approach. Thus, after debating at home all morning, we took off for Zermatt at about 1pm and arrived in town at about 4pm. The guides office claimed good weather for the next day. Thus, after frantically looking for a decent gear shop (most are just tourist places with a smattering of gear) we bought an extra no-name ice screw and ran to catch the telepherique up to Trockener Steg -- it was a 30 minute walk to the Gandegg hut from there. The hut is really nice -- small with beautiful wood interior. There were two others that were planning to do the climb, Doris and Stefan, her guide, from Germany.

We awoke at 2am the next morning (Stefan's suggestion) but had slept badly (eaten too much!) and were disorganized and very slow. We left the hut at about 2:45 just after Stefan and Doris, wearing our sneakers for the one to two hundred meter descent to the glacier -- our feet still hurt badly from the descent of Mnt. Blanc in our boots. When we got to the glacier, the snow was soup -- it hadn't frozen during the night. The glacier was mostly bare ice so the crevasses were visible but we were worried about the route. While crossing the glacier and before traversing over to the base of the route, a couple seracs broke and produced some impressive ice avalanches, coming close to the route. We did not know what was ahead and were apprehensive of both the weather (incoming clouds) and the upper part of the route which we thought snaked though a series of seracs. Thus, we decided to turn around -- it probably did not help that our only guide was a picture book written in french 25 years ago and we had forgotten a compass to aid in a cloudy descent!

By this point, Stefan and Doris were way ahead of us and had reached the base of the route. By the time we had descended to Trockener Steg (after a cocoa at the hut) it was after 7am and they had gone left onto an upper face that leads onto the saddle -- this looked like some intricate wandering through seracs -- and the top of the mountain was in the clouds. We learned the next week that one of the hut workers had spoken to them after their ascent and descent and they had not "had a positive experience".

### **Barcelona (10m) pop. 1,700,000 -- Spain**

*7/24 -- 7/27/97 S&T*

We were bummed by the Breithorn and the incoming weather -- it had poured rain all the way home. The weather was supposed to be bad for three or four days. After a good night's sleep, we went to CERN where Tor talked briefly with JPD to make sure he understood all the messages from last Saturday. Then we went to the travel agent at the train station and asked about a four day trip to Terrife or Barcelona -- they only had week long trips to Terrife but Barcelona was possible -- we made a plane reservation for 6:30 that evening -- it took some convincing of the agent that, yes, she could put a package together for us in the intervening four hours. We ran home and packed -- rock climbing gear, shorts, t-shirts, and bathing suits!

We arrived at our hotel around 9pm and wandered down the Rambla which was packed with people. Went to the harbor with a fantastic monument for Chris C. and then went back to the Placa Reial and found a place for dinner. Got to bed around 1am that night -- there seems to be something about Spain that says you cannot eat or sleep until at least three hours after normal people would.

The next day we first bought Susan a Euro pack (i.e. a silly little thing that hangs half-way down your back but was perfect for carrying all our stuff) and then to the central cathedral. After this, we went to the Picasso museum, and then the park next to the zoo where we ate lunch. Then, we went to the aquarium and later saw two Imax films (which were great but the sound track must have been busted because they were speaking some funny sounds that we could not understand). Followed this by climbing up Mont Juic to the Castle. We had thought to go to the amusement park but there were few people there and it looked a bit sleazy. Instead, we wandered back towards the harbor and found a

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great place to eat (Emperador Restaurant) near the Placa de Pau Vila. Afterwards ice cream in the Placa de Catalunya and we got to bed early (around 12:30).

Our second day, we headed off for the train station to see about a trip for the next day. We had thought to head up to the Pyrannees but this looked tough because it was 3 hours one way. Instead, we decided to head south along the coast and find someplace to get off that looked reasonable. After the station (which was beautiful, clean, and spacious) we headed off for Parc Guell on the edge of the city -- this was designed by the architect Gaudi in the early 1900's as a nouveau housing development. The guy either did serious drugs or had a fantastic imagination. Mushroom shaped houses, beautiful tiled amphitheaters and benches, and frogs spouting water. The park was above the city and had a great series of trails that would duck in and out of caves and tunnels and looked across Barcelona to the Mediterranean. We bought a book describing his life and projects and then headed to the hotel for a quick nap (this tourist stuff is difficult!!)

We left around 8pm for a nice looking restaurant in Placa de Reial that we had seen the first night. They opened at 8:30 and already had a line about 30m long. Well, don't be a lemming -- the place didn't have great food and was rushed. We left around 10:30 and wandered up to the Placa de Catalunya for ice cream again. Listened to a band for a while but they shut down at 11:30 and then we headed back for a another early bed-time -- this stuff is much tougher than climbing!

The third day we caught the 10am train headed south and got off at Tarragona around 11:30. Tor was bummed because we had past many beautiful beaches on our way south and the Michelin guide described Tarragona as a port town "with various industries, in particular petrochemical, developing in the outskirts" and aside about some roman ruins. The whole bloody town was one big archaeological museum. There was a amphitheater from 200AD on top of which the Christians built a church in the 12th century, a wall 1km+ long and 4 to 6 meters wide and 12 meters high that was built in 200 BC, ruins of roman pillars and buildings all over the place. We explored until about 3pm when we headed down to the beach to swim in the Mediterranean which was warm and clear. We caught the 5:30pm train back to Barcelona, got our stuff from the hotel, took the 7:15 bus to the airport, and caught our 8:30pm flight back to Geneva. Great trip!! -- and the weather looked like it was clearing over the alps which we passed over on our way home.

## Susan & Tor's Mountain Sagas

### Lenzspitze (4294m) -- North-East Face

**D -- 950m from Mischabel hut -- 4 to 6 hrs estimated**

**“Classic ice face with sections of 55 degrees”**

### Nadelhorn (4327m) -- Southern Nadelgrat

**AD -- traverse from Lenzspitze -- 2 to 3 hrs estimated**

**“An exposed alpine ridge with some rock to III”**

7/28 -- 7/29/97 S&T

After sleeping late (we got home pretty late from Barcelona), we checked the weather which looked good and made reservations at the Mischabel hut out of the Saas Fee valley. With Susan's super driving of our car without brake lights, we got to Saas Fee in about 2 hours (uninjured but shaken) and took the Hannegg telepherique up to about 2200m. Started hiking around 2pm and got up to the hut (3300m) around 4pm. We had hiked up in shorts, t-shirts, and sneakers as our feet still hurt from all the walking around Spain. After checking in, we put on heavier clothes and boots and headed up the rocky ridge to look at the beginning of the route. The approach followed the ridge for one to two hundred meters and then cut off across the glacier towards the north-east face. Looked pretty steep from our angle.

We ate dinner next to a nice pair of young German climbers on one side and a father and son from Holland who had walked up from Saas Grund. Have talked mostly with the Dutch couple who were great but it was strange because they made many negative comments about Germans -- I guess there is a lot of history around here. Got to bed early (early by real people standards, i.e. 9pm) with plans to get up at 3am for breakfast. The hut keepers looked and acted like grandparents -- “don't worry, we'll wake you around 3am for breakfast if the weather looks good”. We managed to get up on our own (along with about 15 other people) -- it was cold and clear. We started the approach using headlamps at about 3:30am -- we had been the first people headed out that hour and when we roped up at the glacier, we met Stefan (a mathematician from Zurich -- not the guide) who was planning to solo the route. He asked if he could join us for the approach but we were too slow getting our stuff together and the snow was solid so he took off.



*Susan about half way up the face – hard solid snow made it fast easy cruising*

When we headed off we met another group of three headed for the easy route up the Nadelhorn -- the guide and clients were all from Wales -- Tor made the mistake of calling them British! The approach to the bergshrunn went quickly although we needed headlamps most of the way. We arrived just before Stefan but he passed us while we were getting our gear out. Headed up the face at about 5am -- it was easy (hard) snow at the bottom and roughly 50 degrees -- we were separated by roughly 8m for the start with the thought that we would separate further if we needed to start placing gear.



*Looking across the face of the Lenzspitze*

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The climb was great -- big open concave face that started at about 50 degrees and got steeper



*Exiting the top of the face onto the summit ridge of the Lenspitz*

as we climbed with maybe 60 degrees at the top. The length was about 500m. We stayed on the right side of the face following Stefan and a party who had probably started an hour ahead of us. Tor tried to convince Susan to head further left to come out directly on the summit but ... At the top, there was only a few inches of snow over the ice but there was 3 or 4 inches of air and rotten ice under the snow before we found solid ice. Thus, the climbing got slower up higher. Probably we should have set up a belay for the last section, but both of felt pretty solid so we kept going without gear although moving slowly and

carefully.

Got to the ridge and climbed about 30m to the top. We arrived at about 7:30am and then headed back along the ridge towards the Nadelhorn. At the beginning, the ridge was mostly snow and ice with some rock but very narrow and sheer. After a few hundred meters, it was mostly rock with some snow between. We stayed about 8m apart and kept our crampons on during the climb. The hardest stuff was supposed to be 5.4 but felt easier. Ended up having to do two rappels off of short towers as we crossed the ridge. At the second, we met Stefan waiting for us (he had been able to climb around the first but was worried about the second) -- he had been waiting about 30 minutes and was pretty cold. Unfortunately, high clouds had blown in and the wind was really cold on the ridge -- had a

great view of the Matterhorn with it top cloud shrouded.



*Susan on the ridge heading to the Nadelhorn*

7500 foot descent (it took us longer to descend from the hut to Hannegg than it took to walk up), and started looking for a hotel. The tourist info gave a few -- Susan picked the one with a sauna. We spent 20

It was lots of fun climbing in crampons -- again the climbing was easy and we put in occasional pieces of gear to protect our running belay. We got to the top of the Nadelhorn around 10:30am talked with Stefan, took pictures, and talked with the party that had been behind us. Headed down the North-east ridge of the Nadelhorn - - easy going. Got back to the hut in about 2 hours at 12:30. There Stefan bought us a beer and we talked with a couple of young Swiss-German climbers before heading back down to Saas Fee.

We got down to Saas Fee around 4pm, after a



*Sunrise while climbing the face of the Lenspitz -- not nicest day but it was spectacular*

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minutes looking for it -- a 3 star hotel at 140 CHF for two called the Happy Lodge. Finally, figured out that it was now called the Alps Inn and catered to snowboarders -- the place was a wreck! Headed back to the tourist office and found the Domino hotel (nearby thankgod). Dumped our stuff, showered, and had an enormous meal at the Spagetteria complete with Sambuca (thanks Peter) at the end.

We had decided to head up to the Breithorn again the next day, but because the approach was so easy (30 minutes from the telepherique) we did a short hike in Saas Fee (the Carl Dickmayer memorial Vanderveg) and then went to the Saas Fee baths/saunas. It cost 12 CHF/person and the tubs were cold (well maybe luke warm) -- bad idea. After buying lunch at the grocery store, we headed off at about 2:30pm for Zermatt.

# Susan & Tor's Mountain Sagas

## Breithorn (4165m) -- Arete du Trifti (North ridge)

AD -- about 1300m from Gandegg hut and glacier -- 8 hrs estimated

“Mixed; rock II to III and ice to 55 deg. -- large scale classic ridge”

7/30 -- 7/31/97 S&T

Got to Zermatt around 4pm (again) and caught the 5pm telepherique up to the Gandegg hut. There were some high clouds but the forecast was good for the next day. We ate dinner and then went to bed early again. This time we were sharing a room with four older (40's) Germans. They were planning to walk from the hut up the Breithorn by the normal route to acclimatize -- that sounded like a pretty harsh way to do so -- the normal route now goes up ski slopes next to the Klein Matterhorn and then around and behind to ascend the south west ridge of the Breithorn. The whole thing is covered with ski lifts and groomed slopes.



*The Breithorn from the Gandegg Hut*

There was another party (a father and son) the same route who also got up at 3am. not spoken a word to us when they arrived throughout breakfast despite our attempts slightly civil.

We started out again (just ahead party) in our sneakers to get down to the where we put on our boots and roped up. crampons while Tor did not for the start.

and son passed us while roping up but we passed them again walking across the glacier -- they still had not spoken to us. We traversed down around some rock outcroppings and through some seracs using headlamps until we could easily traverse across to the based of the route. Then we started up easy snow with a couple of short steeper sections (50 degrees maybe) using mostly an axe and a ski pole. Got up the edge of the Trifti ridge where the incline steepened and saw that the others had taken a more direct route and where right behind us again -- still no communication - wow!

We front-pointed up a couple of slopes and then got up to a large plateau below the main peak. There were two basic options: go left and thread through some seracs to arrive on the saddle between the east and west peaks or go right and the climb the mixed snow, ice, and rock to arrive at the top of the west peak. We chose the later but then rather than follow a couple of relatively clean

The night started fine but then the Germans arrived in the room -- we have never heard noises like that come from human beings. One of them sounded like he was throwing up all night long. Another would take two normal breathes, two light snores, two medium snores, two load snores, and then 50 snores that would have busted the windows had they been closed. We slept (or tried to) with their pile jackets and extra pillows wrapped around their heads.



*Climbing up the north face of the Breithorn*

The re was so much noise going on that we missed our alarm clock at 2:30am which we noticed at 3am. We hurriedly got up and when downstairs to breakfast. They had and did not to be at least

of the other glacier, Susan used The father

and son passed us while roping up but we passed them again walking across the glacier -- they still had not spoken to us. We traversed down around some rock outcroppings and through some seracs using headlamps until we could easily traverse across to the based of the route. Then we started up easy snow with a couple of short steeper sections (50 degrees maybe) using mostly an axe and a ski pole. Got up the edge of the Trifti ridge where the incline steepened and saw that the others had taken a more direct route and where right behind us again -- still no communication - wow!

## Susan & Tor's Mountain Sagas



*Susan about halfway up the route*

(although steeper) snow and ice couloirs, we chose to follow the tracks which wandered through more mixed terrain. From the bottom it had looked like two or three pitches would yield the summit. We started simu-climbing, separated by the full rope length and placing the occasional ice screw or slinging rock horns (we had not brought any rock gear for the climb). The climbing turned out to be much longer and more intricate than we expected. Tor would lead, placing almost all the gear while simu-climbing, and then set up a belay and collect all the gear from Susan again. We did this twice before summiting; the belays were probably 150 to 200 meters apart. The route zigzagged up the face, following snow gullies between rock bands. It was a really really good route.

We summited around 10:15 to meet a crowd of people who had come up the standard route from the Klein Matterhorn. The other party summited a few minutes behind us -- still did not speak to us -- I wonder what

incredibly offensive thing we must have done or said in German that freaked them out so much! The descent was extremely fast and easy (down 300 meters on easy snow along the ski area to the



*On top of the Breithorn – great climb*



*Partway up the north face of the Breithorn*

telepherique) except Susan really had to go to the bathroom which added some urgency!

## Susan & Tor's Mountain Sagas

### Neuchatel (440m) pop. 33,000 -- Switzerland

8/1/97 S&T

We awoke on Friday morning after sleeping later than 3 am (actually about 12 hours) to overcast skies and drizzle. We were still very tired (and unmotivated!) after our adventure on the Breithorn. Weighing the day's options, which included sitting on the couch all day and reading, traveling by the Swiss rail system to somewhere new and exciting, or trying to motivate to go through our mail and finish our taxes, we opted for the Swiss Rail option. We had read about Neuchatel, located an hour and a half from Geneva, on a large lake, in the French speaking Swiss Jura. We were especially intrigued by the Papillorama, a tropical garden (under a dome) filled with butterfly's, tropical plants, birds and bats that was located in the small town of Marin, next to Neuchatel.

We arrived a bit after 11am, and wound our way from the train station down the hill into the center of town. Despite being 1 August (Swiss Independence Day), the tourist office was open. They assured us that the Paipillorama was open and we could get there by bus. It seemed that the Papillorama was probably the only attraction open within light years of Neuchatel, because it was PACKED! This of course included many small children who operate at knee level. Despite the overcrowding, the dome was a total kick. You walk into a a hot, humid and lush space and immediately stop to watch the butterflies and birds. Then you walk another 3 feet and get distracted by yet another group of butterflies. It was great! We have probaly never spent so much time so satisfied in such a limited space. Finally, the humidity set in and we moved onto the nocturnal animal exhibit. In contrast, this dome was dark and blue and smelled manky. In each open (but fenced) exhibit, there were animals (supposedly in their nocturnal state). Sometimes it was interesting (the sloths, some monkeys, the cat, .....) and sometimes the animal was clearly not pleased and hid in the corner (the skunk). The final highlight was finding butterfly stickers in the gift sop for our climbing helmets (they were so boring in just plain red and white).

Back in Neuchatel, we found a pizza place that looked out on the Place Pury. We ordered their open bottle of Merlot and were disappointed when it tasted like slightly sour and fermented grape juice. We reached an all new low for European red wines -- which haven't been all that great to start.

After lunch, we walked up to the castle with its ramparts, the cathedral, and the prison tower. All with great views of Neuchatel, the lake and the hills (cloaked in mist). Unfortunately, many of the shops were closed and the city was very quiet. There are beautiful parks and walkways along the lake shore - and a band was setting up for the evening festivities. We caught the 6 pm train back - exhausted and ready for an early and long night in bed! God our feet still hurt!

## Susan & Tor's Mountain Sagas

### **Grand Combin (4314m) -- North-West Face of Combin de Valsorey D-/D+ -- about 700m from glacier -- 5 to 7 hrs estimated plus 2 hr approach "Ice to 60 degrees"**

8/9 -- 8/10/97 S&T

The weekend -- it was looking very nice but we weren't sure that was a good thing. Sitting at home through a rainy weekend was sounding pretty good. Friday night we decided to climb the Grand Combin -- a more remote peak located between Zermatt and Chamonix -- with a 4000 foot hike to the hut and a 4000+ foot climb from the hut. We also argued about the route -- Tor wanted to do the north face of the Valsorey and Susan was opting for something easier -- claiming that she didn't want to be stressed out for the whole climb again (again when??). We compromised on delaying the decision until we could see the options -- hah!

After waking up and again debated the necessity of this trip -- Tor suggesting not and Susan arguing that the next weekend was going to be easy and the weather (unreliable at best!) was perfect now -- we tied the dogs up, gave them lots of food and water, and left for Bourg St. Pierre around 10am. We stopped on the way to buy food and gas (minor details) and got to Bourg St. Pierre around noon. Managed to drive up a single lane road about 200 meters above town and then started hiking from the Plan du Pey (1827m). Like our previous trips, we hiked in sneakers, shorts, and t-shirts, carrying our boots and gear: underwear (Tor only - Susan hikes in hers!), goretex pants and jackets, pile jackets, down jackets, 1 bivy sack, 1 55m 8.8mm rope, harnesses, 7 ice screws, 1 deadman, a couple of tcu's and some stoppers, 4 quickdraws, 7 or 8 slings, many free biners, lunch, and 3 liters of water (only 2 of which we would take on the climb but Susan gave Tor an extra liter to carry to the hut so we didn't have to buy so much -- thanks! - 6CHF or about \$4 for 1.5 litres!).

We walked to the split in trails to the Valsorey hut and the Velan hut, had lunch, and then continued to the hut. There was a fun section climbing up a wet gully that had been built with ladders and chains. Got to the Valsorey hut (3030m) after about two and half hours hiking around 3pm and then headed up the rock spur to look at the beginning of the approach climb up to the Col de Meitin (3610m) -- didn't look trivial with 45 to 50 degree snow.

The hut was relatively small (60 beds) but pretty full -- what was this about a remote mountain? Actually, there only 2 or 3 other climbing parties plus some massive Outward Bound-like group of probably 15 kids plus guides who spent a lot time shouting. They spent their time sharpening ice axes and crampons and discussing crevasses rescue and belay techniques -- we spent our time reading the Times Tribune while bemoaning our fate (probably should have joined them -- we might have learned something!).

The hut warden (an ex-ski bum who had spent a season or two in Ketchup Hidaho) told us that breakfast would be at 3:30 -- 3:30 why so late? We guessed that he and his wife wanted to get some sleep also. Went to bed around 9pm -- most of the others (maybe twenty people in our room) came in around 10pm but, unbelievable, the night was silent although it got pretty warm because somebody shut the window!

We got up early (3:15), moved our packs outside and were the first at breakfast. Got going just before 4am, just in front of two of the other groups (one of 3 and another of 2) and well ahead of the OB-group (thank god). There was no visible moon and we climbed by headlamp. We hiked up the rock spur, put on crampons and climbed low angle snow to a narrow in the coulior where it steepened. Here, we roped up and then climbed to the Col de Meitin, arriving around 5:30. It was just starting to get light and we could see the Glacier de Corbassiere 200m below us -- our route was supposed to start from there. The group of three following us headed up the West ridge -- the other party was a ways behind.

We descended partway down to the glacier and then traversed across the slope towards our route. Our traverse crossed lots of debris from the seracs above but we felt quite safe since it was quite cold and the sun was still far from rising. We headed for some rocks that we thought were the left edge of our intended "route". In doing so, we had to cross one gully (30m wide) that most of the huge seracs above funneled into -- we did this quickly! Just before arriving at the rocks, Tor realized that (a) we had traversed well beyond the north face of the Valsorey and were actually on the north

## Susan & Tor's Mountain Sagas

face of the Combin and (b) we had been intending to do different routes! When he urged returning to the base of the more interesting route, Susan demurred. After more strident urging, Susan finally agreed on the condition that we place lots of gear (Tor's arms still hurt).



*Climbing on the Combin de Valsory in solid conditions*



*Susan climbing steep snow on the Combin de Valsory*

We survived re-crossing the avalanche chute and started up the route. The bottom was 50 degree snow and we simul-climbed (without gear) up towards some rocks on the left-hand side of the face. We set up a belay and then traversed up and right, below the rocks, for a couple of long pitches.

Below the rocks, we were mostly climbing on ice which was slower. On the "pitches" Tor would place an ice screw after 30 or 40 meters, at which point Susan would start cleaning the belay. Susan would start climbing and Tor would place another screw before she got to the first and then would hack out a stance and set up a belay before Susan got to the second screw -- throughout the gear was excellent. In this way, our pitches were usually about 100m long.



*Tor on the top of the Combin de Valsory before wandering to the top of the Grand Combin*

After two pitches, we were able to get out onto the left side of the main face and into very hard snow. This made the climbing much easier but the gear placement became much tougher. The snow was 20 to 30cm deep and it had a surface layer of poor ice that had to be cleaned before we could put in a screw. The climb was straightforward -- up this beautiful 55 to 60 degree face. Around 9am and about 200 meters from the top, we saw the three members of the party behind us that started up the West ridge. They were on a saddle, above the right edge of the face and about 100m above us. The sun had

just lit it and they had stopped to rest and waved to us. It was beautiful seeing them traverse across the saddle, brilliant clothing in the sun with sky behind and steep snow or ice below -- should have taken a picture but couldn't.

We discussed traversing across to the right-hand exit or continuing up the steeper coulior on the left. Susan opted for the later while Tor liked the idea of the sun. Continued up -- although steeper, the climbing got easier because the snow softened a little and we could kick small steps. Got to the top

## Susan & Tor's Mountain Sagas

around 10:30am (about 6 hours from the hut) and the wind was really strong. Susan headed down and around a ridge which was a little more sheltered. We put the gear away and headed down to the saddle between the Valsorey (4184m) and the Combin (4314m). The climb up the Combin easy plodding -- we got up around 11:15 and headed down at 11:30. Going up, we met a climber from Poland who had soloed the west ridge -- he asked us about trains back to Neuchtel -- we offered him a ride to Lausanne but he was going to be down well before us.

Going down we met the other party of two who had started with us -- they had climbed to north face of the Combin. We also saw nine members of the OB-like group on the saddle between the Valsorey and the Combin resting before the final climb. They had also climbed the north face of the Combin and another five who had climbed the west ridge. We also spoke with the party of three that we had seen on the west ridge from the face -- they said that the west ridge was in great shape -- no snow.



*Descending from the Grand Combin by the north face*

We descended the north face of the Grand Combin. The route was quite easy but it weaved through the serac band and was really pretty. We had to climb 200m from the glacier back up to the Col de Meitin -- that was tough. Got to the top around 1:30pm and started down the 600m to the hut. The snow on this south face was mush. A miserable descent with Tor's crampons balling up every other step and the snow too soft to really get an axe in -- memories of the Marroon Bells! We arrived to the hut around 2:45pm, changed to sneakers and shorts, and got a huge pot of tea.

Started down for the car around 3:30pm and got down at 6pm -- why does it take us as long to hike up as it does to descend??

It was a 4500 foot climb and 8000+ foot descent. Susan drove back while Tor moaned about his shoulders, knees, and feet because his pack was too heavy and his arms because he had to put in too many ice screws. Susan reminded him that his pack is old and never intended for mountaineering - and she'd be happy to buy him a new one if he would just shut-up and agree to go shopping! Got back to Gex and after trying to drive the car onto the sidewalk, we got two pizzas from the pizza van (which was very busy), got home, freed and fed the dogs, ate, showered, and slept. Took Monday off to recover!

# Susan & Tor's Mountain Sagas

## Mt. Baker (10781 feet) – North Ridge

Grade III+ – 70+ degree snow and ice – 3 to 6 hrs from the base

“one of the best snow and ice climbs on a Cascades volcano”

June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1998 Susan & Tor

We had flown into Seattle Saturday morning, planning to make the approach to the Coleman Glacier in the early afternoon. After waiting 2+ hrs in the airport for United to find our bags and then finding that the Saturday traffic on I-5 was worse than the weekday SF Bay area traffic, it was late afternoon before we started hiking. We got up to the base of the Coleman Glacier in about 3.5 hours. Wandered up towards the North face before it got too late and we returned to cook dinner.



*The top of Mt Baker – nice climb but a bit crowded!*

Started out at 3:30 am the next morning heading up towards the North Ridge. There were two parties in front of us – one party of five or six and another party of three. They all headed towards the toe of the ridge. We were worried about getting slowed down at the ice headwall so we decided to pass them by cutting up early through a snow gully that lead up towards the ridge. Sounded good but the snow was pretty deep in the gully and we were working hard to break trail. After sloggng up about 200 feet, we stopped to put on crampons and Tor

dropped his – idiot. It skittered down and dropped into a crevasse – end of trip!



*Susan heading back to camp*

Actually, it had only dropped in about twenty feet so we went down and got it but probably lost about an hour of time. We headed back up the gully and topped out to find the two parties that had been ahead of us just below eating. Lucky us. We wandered up the ridge towards the ice fall just in front of another party of two who had followed us up the gully. We got to the ice fall and had to wait for 10 to 20 minutes for a party ahead of us to finish up – it was pretty cold waiting and the guys behind us were really not looking forward to the delay.

Tor led up the ice, placing a screw on the way. The step was a little less than a single rope length and there were a lot of features on the ice where one could easily stand and rest but it was steep ~80 degrees. We were tired from moving up the ridge and it was steeper than we had expected. It probably took us 20~30 minutes apiece and the guys behind were really unhappy by this point.

After the ice step, everybody was well separated which was nice. We wandered up easy snow towards the top. Susan had to take over leading because Tor started feeling nauseous. Could it be the altitude – not possible, He had never felt altitude sick before and we were not even high. However, this trip was a hard way to get in

shape – he had been teaching all spring and had not gotten out at all. Anyway, he was stumbling about being dragged along by Susan (like the rest of our life together). At one point, he tried to short cut the path she was breaking and almost plummeted into a crevasse.

## **Susan & Tor's Mountain Sagas**

We got to the top at 10am. It was crowded with people coming up the normal route and so, after the obligatory photos, we headed down. It took about 2 hrs down and we were wishing we had skis or board like most of the others headed down. It was a beautiful day. We ate some lunch and took a nap in the sun and then packed up and headed down to the car. Fun route!

## Susan & Tor's Mountain Sagas

### Mt. Buckner – North Face Couloir (9080 ft)

Grade III – 40 to 50 degrees

**“great scenery, moderate climbing, and an unparalleled alpine ambience”**

*June 1998 Susan and Tor attempt*



*On the approach to Boston Basin – we did we wear boots! Straight up, pulling our way through the trees.*

This was the classic Cascades experience. Drove up to the North Cascades highway and then into the North Cascades Park. Beautiful place and great day. We packed up and started hiking up the “trial” which was just a few miles. It was desperate! Very steep unmarked muddy track. We were just pulling up on trees for 500 vertical feet in the middle and some of the stream crossings were really exciting.

Got up to Boston Basin at about 6pm. There was another party of two in the obvious camp site and it was hard to find others. There was still a lot of very wet melting snow in the basin and there was little protection from the wind. We ended up on a rock ledge below a short buttress which was protected but not very convenient. We got up early to head off to Buckner but the weather was completely socked in and we were still tired from the Baker so we decided to hang for a day. Got up late and it started clearing at about 10am. We decided to head up and check out the approach which involved climbing up the glacier, dropping over a steep ridge and then crossing another glacier for a few miles. Tor also brought a rock rack to try the XXX which had a few pitches of 5.10 climbing.

We started up the glacier towards the col but the snow was really wet. Both hard going and we had no interest in getting into a wet slide. Back down to the XXX – whoops Susan is no longer interested! Why did we carry a rock rack, shoes, etc all the way up here?

Anyway back down to camp. This was a very good choice. As the afternoon developed the clouds just kept moving in. It started drizzling and we decided to head down. After packing up and getting down through the treed mud slide, it start pouring. Dripping all the way back to the car.

We checked the weather – it was supposed to rain for the next three days! Ahhh! After a heartbreaking argument, trying to make plans, we ended up heading out to one of the Islands in Vancouver Bay for two days while the weather cleared.

## Susan & Tor's Mountain Sagas

### Mt. Adams – Stormy Monday Couloir (12,276 ft)

Grade III – 50 degrees

June 1998 Susan and Tor attempt



*Susan headed back with Adams in the background.  
Stormy Monday goes up just left of the Adams Glacier  
route.*



*Camp at the base of Adams with Rainer rising to the north*

## Susan & Tor's Mountain Sagas

### **Polemonium Peak – V-Notch Couloir (14,000 ft)**

**Class 5 ice – 50 degrees**

**“best gully ice climb in the Sierras from most climbers”**

*August 1998 Tor solo*

After our trip to the Cascades in June, we decided to head into the Palisades with both rock and ice gear. The goal was to climb the V-notch Couloir and then the Sun Ribbon Arete on Temple Crag. We drove up through Tuolumne and Tor wanted to stop “oh so badly” to climb a route or two. Fortunately Susan prevailed and kept us moving because we had started late and had a ways to go. We started hiking mid-afternoon but for whatever reason it took us a long time to get up to the meadow by Sam Mac lake. Perhaps it was the ridiculous amount of gear! Ice boots, rock shoes, crampons, two axes apiece, two 9mm ropes (so that we could do the Sun Ribbon on Temple), full rock rack, tent, sleeping bags, enough food for a week, etc. etc.

Got up early the next morning and hiked to the based of the route – 1000 feet up through talus slopes and then across the “glacier”. The worst part was negotiating the heavily sun-cupped snowfields towards the base.

The bergshrund at the base of the route was pretty large. We opted to climb a short rock rib (25 feet) which looked like easy 5<sup>th</sup> class that was just to the left of the gully and then traverse across to the center. We kept our crampons on and slotted our axes down our backs which was good because the rock climbing was easier than it looked from the bottom. Tor anchored at the top of the rock rib and belayed Susan up. Unfortunately, Susan had a change of heart! She rapped off and Tor took off.



*Looking back at the V-notch*

The climbing was easy – solid snow/ice which gradually got steeper towards the top. Maybe 55 degrees max. After topping out, he wandered up to the top of Polemonium peak and then started searching for the descent. The guide had some directions that did not make a lot of sense but there was a series of ramps a bit to (climbers) left of the peak which dropped out onto snow above the bergshrund about 200 feet left of the V-notch. After exploring a bit, there was a narrow part of the bergshrund with a 10 foot hop down onto snow that seemed reasonable.

After meeting up, we both returned to camp, packed up and headed down – maybe the Sun Ribbon another time although if we ever come up here again, we should definitely go lighter!

## Susan & Tor's Mountain Sagas

### Mt. President (3138 m) – From Emerald Lake Lodge

August 2000 Susan, John, and Tor



*Hiking up the gully to the toe of the glacier – notice the debris!*



*Toe of the glacier*

We arrived at the Emerald Lake Lodge after driving from Calgary in the late afternoon. The lodge was really nice – we were sharing a great, large room with John and Annie (who was 6 month pregnant). At Annie's suggestion, as a pre-dinner walk we decided to wander out to Hamilton

Lake, just a bit above the lodge. It turned out to be about 4 miles one-way and a 2000 foot climb. Supposedly the hotel stopped serving dinner at 10pm but they didn't seem to care when we returned at 10:30. The next day, we headed off for a loop out towards Burgess Pass and then over to Yoho Pass and back – really pretty trip where we saw a number of big-horned sheep up high but not exactly a relaxing pre-climb day with 12 miles and 3000+ foot gain.



*Hiking up the upper snowfields with the Emerald Lake in the background*

The following day, we got up at 3am and headed out around the lake hiking in shorts and sneakers. As we left the lake and started up towards the base of the President, the trail got pretty overgrown. John and Susan volunteered to let Tor go out in front and scare off any bear that might be using the trail – he started singing which decimated the wildlife population within a 100 foot radius.

We got to the bottom of an 800 foot snow gully and changed into bibs and boots. The gully was littered with rock debris that had fallen from a steep rock wall on the left but was very quiet early in the morning. We got up to the toe of the glacier at about 7am – this was one rope length of blue ice with a short section of 50 to 60 degrees. Tor headed up, placing two screws, and then belayed up John and Susan. After this, we stayed roped for a bit until the crevasses were thoroughly covered.

The route was long but not very steep and so we hiked on up using a ski pole and an axe apiece. We reached the col around 10am. The ridge to the top was more exciting – it

## Susan & Tor's Mountain Sagas

was relatively narrow and steeper with a few rock moves along the way.



*Looking back at the President with  
Tor, Susan, John, and Annie*

We stopped for lunch at the col on the way down and then glissaded rapidly back down towards the lower glacier. The lower part was a mess! It was a warm day and the ice and snow was melting quickly causing lots of rock fall. Fortunately, nothing was coming from above the glacier and the stuff close to the toe was all quite small. Susan rappelled down quickly, replacing the screws the Tor put in on the way up. John, the father to be, borrowed Tor's helmet and then followed. Then Susan belayed and John scanned for rocks as Tor down-climbed – a bit more exciting than we anticipated! We then wandered down the rock rib next to the snow gully as far as possible to avoid potential rock fall from the wall above the gully. Once we were fairly low, we found a traverse back into the gully and glissaded down rapidly. The descent was quite fast and after changing back into shorts and sneakers, we were back at the hotel in the early afternoon.

The next day, we packed up and headed up towards Jasper for more fun.



*Unpacked after getting back to the  
room*

# Susan & Tor's Mountain Sagas

## Edith Cavell (3363 m) – East Ridge

Grade III – 5.3 rock – 5 to 7 hrs estimated plus 2 hr approach  
“the most recommended route on the mountain”

August 2000 Tor solo

The plan was to meet at the Tonquin Valley Backcountry Lodge which is 11 ~ 12 miles from the road along the Amethyst Lakes under the Ramparts. Susan, John, and Annie were going to hike in over the McCarib pass while I was going to get dropped off, climb Edith Cavell, and then meet them at the lodge. Unfortunately, Annie did not want to carry a pack (she was 6.5 months pregnant) so I was given my clothing plus my share of the food we were bringing for the next couple of days – dear Susan, my sweet wife, refused to listen to reason and take my portion of the load.



*Looking up at the ridge from the bench*

We left Jasper and Susan dropped me off at the Edith Cavell parking lot at about 5am. I headed off for the East Ridge hiking in my sneakers and underwear towards the col at the base of the ridge. The first real snow was at the base of the col and I changed into boots, bibs etc. Wandering up to the col, I passed a couple of kids that were headed to same way (unfortunately these days, to me, kids are anybody under the age of twenty-five).

Once at the col, you could see the lower portion of the route stretching up. The bottom was just wandering up the ridge through talus. When this got steeper, I put on crampons and went left to get in a nice snow gully that shot right up to the flat bench. With hard solid snow, the gully went really quickly. I had pulled out both axes but frequently didn't use them and just front-pointed on up. There was a bit of ice, right at the top but pretty straightforward. The sun had come up and it was looking like a fantastic day.

Once on the bench, you could see the second half of the route going up in steps – it looked great. The party behind me was getting onto the snow and seemed to be moving pretty quickly – after the Alps and the Cascades, it was just great to be out there on an excellent route with

only one other party around! I stowed the crampons and one of the axes and dropped the other axe down my back so I could get at it quickly. After walking across the bench, there was a short ridge of snow leading up to the rock on the ridge. The drop off the north face was impressive – had to be 2000 feet straight down – but, fortunately, the sun had warmed it enough that I could make good steps and didn't need crampons. The rock was great – easy climbing in 50 foot steps followed by short stretches of snow. In many places you got great views down the north face which was really impressive.

I got to the summit at about 10am – it was really warm. I hung out for 30 minutes, ate some lunch and then started looking for the West Ridge descent. After descending some easy snow to the southwest, I started back across the west face. The sun was not near the face yet and I ended up on some fairly steep scree with ice rivers running down it. This was pretty messy and took me a while.

After I got down to more reasonable ground, I traversed toward the north as suggested by the guidebooks and hoped on a snowfield shooting straight down. Great! I was going to



*Looking down the ridge towards the bench*

## Susan & Tor's Mountain Sagas

be down to the meadow in 30 minutes. Wrong! The book warned against starting down too early – oops. After getting back up, I descended a talused ridge heading north-west to a col where I dropped down a gully heading down to the meadows on the west. I found some good snow in the gully and was able to make decent time down.

Got down to the meadow at about 12:30. Took my boots off and changed into shorts and sneakers and started down to the Astoria river trail that heads into the Tonquin Valley. Met a couple of hikers headed up to the meadows but there were not many people around. I had spoken with a ranger that I met wandering in Jasper about the trip and his only warning was about a grizzly that was hanging out towards Amethyst Lakes. Naturally, I spent the rest of the trip panicked by every small sound in the woods – at some point I even started singing which made me quite secure – my singing will drive away, if not outright kill, any known life form.

Finally around 4:30, I dropped over the pass and could see the lakes and the valley below – really pretty place. I saw a lodge right in front of me between the two lakes but had my hopes dashed when they pointed to a building at the far end of the other lake, a mile or two away. Oh well. I got in just after 6pm as everybody was sitting down to dinner. Good trip – great climb!

# Susan & Tor's Mountain Sagas

## Tour Ronde (3792m) -- North Face

AD+/D- -- 350m from bergshrund -- 4 hrs estimated time

**“Established classic ... provides a good introduction to steeper alpine faces”**

9/7/2002 *Tor solo*

I had a meeting at CERN (Geneva) and then in Lausanne, Switzerland during the week of 9/2 and then another meeting at DESY in Hamburg, Germany, the following week. To keep myself sane, I decided to head down to Chamonix during the weekend between the two and for fun I brought a bit of climbing gear. The 1<sup>st</sup> meeting ended Friday at 1pm and so I got in the car and took off. I went down the west side of the lake and up and over the Col de Montets – really pretty drive although a bit slow. Arrived in Chamonix and hopped on the telepheric to Helbronner. On the way across the glacier on the Helbronner telepheric, one could see gullies where recent snow had funneled down the couloir up the north face of the Tour Ronde. I had not had time to pack up or change, so after carrying a bag of gear off the gondola, I put on my bibs and boots and stuffed my good clothes, sneakers, etc into my pack. It was 5:30 by the time I got to the Torino hut.

The weather all summer had been quite unsettled and we had had a bunch of rain in Lausanne so I



*The Tour Ronde from the telepheric across to Pt. Helbronner – the route heads up the right edge of the lower snow field, through a gully and onto the upper snowfield*

asked people what the conditions were like. Turns out most of the people staying in the hut were there for a big race the next day which started from Courmayeur, ran up to the Torino hut, skied across to the Aiguille de Midi and then who knows – crazy!

Anyway, most of the advice was “don’t go” which is what you expect from guides when you are not paying them. I also met a woman who was waiting for her boyfriend who was leading a group on the Dent de Geant. She said that the weather had been pretty good for the last two days so I figured I’d get up early and go look at the route.

I slept terribly due to pre-climb jitters. It was the first time at altitude all summer and I could not breathe – I had never had that problem before at 10,000 feet or whatever the hut is at but we all get older. I headed out at 3:30 am and hiked across the glacier to the base of the route. There had not been too many people since the last snow and the usual approach trail broken by a thousand people didn’t exist but instead a number of smaller trails had been established by a few people. Thus, the hike took a while because I was being really careful with crevasses and backtracked a number of times, trying different trails.

I finally got to the base at about 5:30 and climbed up the bergshrund right below the couloir. Unfortunately, the bergshrund was about 5 feet high and it was snow above. The snow was solid enough so that I could not get the axe shaft in but the picks would just pull through. Fortunately, I had brought two short axes and the snow was hard enough so that I could hang off the adzes however I did not have the confidence (or stupidity) to try and walk them up with my feet dangling.

It was starting to get pretty light and I could see that off to the right the bergshrund looked much smaller and then I could traverse under the rocks onto the main face. This went easily. The snow under the rocks was pretty solid – I would kick in 6 inches or so and there was ice below although I unusually used the adzes of the two axes for support. At the end of the traverse, I was right at the base of the couloir. I waited a bit to see what, if anything, was coming down (and to rest) but it was fine and I could not find a reason to delay further. Most of the couloir was good ice. There were some places where it was snow or thin layers of ice and snow but I was able to avoid most of those.

## Susan & Tor's Mountain Sagas

After climbing up the main part of the couloir, I headed right to get onto the snowfield however I was not very happy there. There was an icy crust that was too hard to get the axe shaft through but below the snow was looser and deeper. Although I didn't think there was a chance of it sliding, I didn't really want to check and I did not feel very secure. Instead, I went back into the couloir and climbed out the top. There was a bit of rock to climb over or around but it went pretty well and the snow above was much better than what was out on the face. By this time, my legs were really tired and so I stopped a number of times on the way up.



During the climb up to the couloir, I was below the clouds and there were patches of blue that came through. However, while I was in the couloir, the clouds moved in and, once I was back out on the face, the visibility decreased to a hundred feet or so. Fortunately, there was not any option regarding the route finding and it was no problem climbing but the views sucked. I got up to the little ridge below the summit block at about 8am and took my time climbing around the side. The view of the summit block was pretty well obscured!

Given the views, the snow, and my out-of-shape body, I started down once I hit the normal route rather than go to the top of the summit block. It was an easy trip down and I got out of the clouds about halfway. As I headed back

*Looking up at the summit block from the top of the snow slope – ugh!*

to the hut, I could see these pairs of people roped together skating across the glacier as part of the race. I got back to the hut around 10:30, got my work clothes and sneakers and took the tram back to Chamonix. Looking back at the climb, one can only see the bottom half but you could also see the crowd of racers skiing across the glacier.



*Looking back at the Tour Ronde from the telepheric – the dots below the left edge of the bergshrunn are the pairs of ski racers*

# Susan & Tor's Mountain Sagas

## Mount Hood (3792m) – Leuthold Coulior

*5/31/03 John, Annie, Tor*

The goal was to head up to Portland and climb the Sandy Headwall where we would fly up the day before and then hike up to the Illumination Saddle to spend the night so that we could get an early start. Because time was tight – mainly due to childcare issues – we wanted to do the route and fly back to SFO that evening.

Unfortunately, the weather had been awful. We arranged free mileage tickets so that we could change the dates if the weather was clearly poor but we also had to arrange for childcare. This turned out to be more constraining than the flights. We left SFO Friday afternoon on a 1pm flight (delayed of course) with an interesting side note. After we arrived, Tor discovered that he did not have his driver's license. Panic! With only a Stanford Faculty ID, he did not think there was much chance of getting on the flight. Wrong! They just sent him to a special line for a more intensive security search. He entered the line and met John who had remembered his license but it was two weeks out of date!

The special line was not much slower than the normal line and we both got through quickly. We arrived in Portland around 3pm and had the next problem – Tor had reserved the car and, surprise, they would not rent it to him. The car was transferred to Susan's name and we took off – a bit late but still moving the right direction.

Unfortunately, the weather was not looking ideal. As we drove out Route 26, it went from not ideal to pouring rain! Rather than turn around and find a bar (Tor's suggestion), we decided to head up to the Timberline Lodge on the mountain. Before driving up to the Timberline, we had to decide whether to stop for gas for our stoves which we needed if we were going to spend the night at Illumination Saddle. The weather was so clearly terrible that we decided to skip and just look around the lodge. But as we drove up the weather started looking much better – the road was even dry in places.

The lodge is at 5900 feet and is a beautiful old building. We wandered about and decided to eat dinner there. While eating we met a couple and daughter who were taking the year off – they had sold their adventure travel business based out of Juno and were living in Portland so their daughter could attend a Mandarin school. School was out so they were traveling.

During dinner the mountain started to appear. We could look all the way up the normal route and Illumination Point appeared occasionally. We decided to camp in the parking lot and make a try in the morning. Got to bed around 9:30 with our alarms set for 1:30am.

Ugh! We got up, packed up and got started at about 2:30. There was a huge line of head-lights ahead – turns out this was the anniversary of an accident where a helicopter crashed trying to rescue people off the normal route. We climbed up to the Siloux hut at about 7000 feet. Susan and Annie were lagging a bit so we stopped at the hut to wait. Turns out that the hut is being maintained by a climbers group who was there with food and drink and taking donations – it was a neat old place. They had water, hot chocolate, tea etc. and we spent about 30 minutes hanging out.

Unfortunately, Susan was not feeling well – terrible is probably a more accurate word – she had taken Diamox but it was not sufficient. We started again and climbed up to the top of the Palmer lift. At this point we were headed for Illumination Point and separated from the stream of people headed up the normal route. The hike was easy a but long slog with the only excitement occurring when John and Annie were almost run over by a snow cat – oops!

From the top of the Palmer, we headed across to the saddle. At this point, Susan dropped way back. She was really feeling badly. After a bit further, she decided to turn around. It was just starting to get light and was promising to be a beautiful day – wow, big bummer for Susan. Unfortunately, the digital camera failed at this point so no more photos.

Without Susan, we continued up to the saddle. Stopped quickly to eat something (it was about 5:30 by this time) and roped up. We decided to stay high above the glacier, traversing across some gullies, and then cut into the Leithold just below the narrows. It was fun – we managed to pick a route that was non-trivial and Annie got her first taste of 60 degree snow (didn't phase her at all). Probably the most

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difficult part of the traverse was crossing some of the runout trenches/gullies which were sometimes 6 feet deep and about as wide. Given the safe runout and the difficulty, we didn't bother with belay's. We arrived below the narrows after an hour and found a secure place to re-group.

The climb through the narrows was made narrower by a deep runout gully that cut through. We stayed on the right side. In the first section, we were pressed against the rock wall and had to climb up some thin ice. The gully then cut left and we climbed up a steep (maybe 70 degrees) snow flute with a deadman for protection before heading left. The gully then opened up into a huge bowl. As we were simu-climbing and there was no gear in the bowl, Tor dropped into the runout gully and put in a good screw before heading up toward a rock buttress that looked like a secure place to stop. This section was only about 300 feet.

From here, we walked up the bowl and onto the ridge leading to the summit. Easy climbing but long and we were all fairly tired of walking. Got to the top and walked along the summit ridge above the West Cater Rim route – this looked nice (even as a descent). Went over the normal route anyway and descended. It was no longer very crowded although people were still coming up including a couple of dogs! Got back to the parking lot at about noon, met up with Susan, and headed back towards the airport. Nice route although lots of effort for little technical climbing.