



# BULLOCK UNCHAINED

BY ED DOUGLAS

## *The Making of an Alpinist*

If you were searching for the moment when Nick Bullock's life changed, you might think holding another man's broken head while cerebral fluid leaked through his fingers would be it. Then again, it could have been staring into the eyes of a spitting, raging maniac desperate to head-butt him into oblivion. That would certainly do it for me.

Yet after spending months trying to understand what motivates one of the world's most successful alpinists, I don't think it was either.

I think it was the moment Bullock realized he couldn't breathe.

He was then in his early 20s and hadn't yet discovered the passion for climbing that transformed his life. He knew nothing of the mountains that have made him one of the biggest names in hard-core alpinism—with ascents of fluted Andean titans like Jirishanca and Quitaraju, and Himalayan giants like Chang Himal, whose north face he climbed in 2009. He had never heard of North Stack at Gogarth, the wild Welsh sea cliff that became another psychological station on his pilgrimage.

Instead, Bullock was a newly trained prison

officer working at Gartree in the rural county of Leicestershire, in central England, far from the mountains. At the time, the mid 1980s, Gartree was a maximum-security jail housing some of Britain's most notorious criminals: murderers and terrorists, wife-killers and pedophiles.

Even though he was adjusting to a world of violence and rage—and constant anxiety—Bullock's life appeared from the outside to be going well. After a false start in his teens, his career was back on track. He had just bought his own house, in a quiet village deep in the countryside. For a young man with no ties, he was making a decent living.

The problem was that a lot of his cash was spent on beer and cigarettes. He took his lunch breaks in the officers' mess, chain-smoking or dozing, waiting for his shift to resume. He didn't realize what was happening to him until, quite literally, the alarm rang.



That alarm bell had come to dominate Bullock's life. It meant that somewhere in the prison, in some painted cell or corridor, a colleague was in desperate trouble. It meant whatever he was doing, Bullock had to react and help—before things got really out of hand. I'm guessing if he heard that alarm bell now, Bullock would be off and running again. Perhaps in his dreams he still occasionally hears that bell.

After pounding down the corridor to offer assistance, Bullock found himself dizzy and breathless, as though suffering from altitude sickness: "A senior officer who was a keen runner saw me red-faced, out of breath and sweating, and knew exactly what was going on. He told me I needed to sort myself out."

Still nauseous and with his heart racing abnormally, Bullock locked himself in the bathroom and sat on the toilet as the gray walls and linoleum floor spun around him. Lots of Bullock's colleagues drank to excess. Bullock now understood that he had joined them. Drinking seemed the accepted way to cope with the pressure of guarding some of the most violent people in Britain.

The life expectancy of a retired prison officer in the U.K. is less than two years beyond employment, and it's the same in the United States. An investigation by the U.S. National Institute of Corrections found that the life expectancy of the average correctional officer after 20 years of service was just 58. Bullock

had just been served warning.

"At that moment," he says, "I vowed to do something with my life before I joined the other burnt-out wrecks working towards alcoholism and their first heart attack."

The next day, during his lunch break, instead of heading for his favorite armchair for a smoke, Bullock stepped into a gym for the first time in seven years. In doing so, he reignited a passion for physical fitness that had dominated his teens. He spent a lot of time throwing up, but Bullock was on his way, and this newly kindled determination would see him break out of the prison walls and ultimately escape for good.

**A** quarter of a century after Nick Bullock realized his life had to change, we're standing in—where else?—a pub in Derbyshire's Peak District. Bullock is celebrating. He has just published his first book, entitled *Echoes*, and since I edited it for him, I've been invited, too.

Bullock's characteristically broad grin is wider than ever. He has one of those open faces, especially when he smiles, that you trust immediately, and soft brown eyes framed with brown curls, giving him a professorial air. But when he frowns, he looks sharper—and harder—like a welterweight. Think Jason Statham with hair and glasses. Right now, he's bantering with the poet and climber Mark Goodwin, who helped start him as a writer.

Everything Nick does, even conversation, he does with intensity; and in company, especially with climbing buddies, he's the life of the party.

His publisher, John Coe field, snaps a shot of Bullock with his arm thrown around the shoulders of Paul Pritchard, an iconic figure from the North Wales climbing scene of the mid 1980s, a time and place now recognized as an engine of creativity and new directions. Pritchard is a two-time winner of the Boardman Tasker Award, and has spent the last 15 years coming to terms with a traumatic head injury he suffered while climbing the Totem Pole off the coast of Tasmania.

Pritchard's first book, *Deep Play*, now stands as one of the great climbing autobiographies, a series of essays that Bullock regularly acknowledges as one of the inspirations for his own writing. Paul wrote the foreword for *Echoes*. Because he now lives in Tasmania, the two men haven't known each other long, but it's clear they have a lot in common.

Both are what Pritchard calls in the foreword "full-timers," living on next to nothing so every moment's potential can be fulfilled. They are both restless and inquiring. They are also somehow different than the rest of us. They have something extra—or maybe something missing—that compels them to hunt around in the darker corners of their minds.

"A few RPs short of a full rack," is how Pritchard terms it. Then again, as Pritchard also says, "We need 'characters' in climbing."

Left: Bullock climbs a Stevie Haston E5 called *Hung Like a Hamster*. "Loose rock, loose top out, but one of the more 'normal' climbing experiences on Craig Dorys" on the Lleyn Peninsula in North Wales.

Below: Poet Mark Goodwin on the left, and Bullock "having a big hair day!"

Bullock is sipping his beer as I pass him on my way out, and I take the opportunity to cuff him gently in his gut. I'm almost shocked by its condition. His midriff is like corrugated iron, ridged and unyielding. At 47, Bullock is more than a year older than Pritchard, whose voice seems that of a past generation. Bullock, on the other hand, seems in the best shape of his life.

Even aside from his apparently unquenchable thirst for climbing hard routes, he keeps up a punishing schedule of running, cycling and circuits. I know first hand how tough that is in your 40s. From where does the motivation for such intensity come?

"From being locked up," he tells me when we meet again in Wales a few days later. "From being locked up with other prison officers who seemed to be trapped in a life they couldn't leave. They went through repeated divorces, break-ups. They were shagging around, dissatisfied. When you've got all that in your life, and then you get away from it, there's no way you're taking your foot off the gas, because you might drift back."

Bullock is sitting in an armchair in a friend's house, stroking her cat. Although he still has his place in Leicestershire, it's been rented out for years. For much of the time, he's either dossing in his van, sleeping in climbing huts or camped in the mountains. In 2012 he spent a month in Alaska, where he made the first British and sixth overall ascent of the *Slovak Direct* (Alaska Grade 6 5.9) on Denali, the route Steve House claimed was his first truly world-class climb. After that he spent two months in Nepal attempting a new line on Chamlang.

Just now he's housesitting and has walls around him that don't shake in the wind, but in essence Bullock is a middle-aged dirtbag, surviving on the modest rental income that his property brings him and some small sponsorship deals. His life is organized to allow him to do exactly as he pleases, and requires exceptional self-reliance and quite a few sacrifices. There is, for instance, no Mrs. Bullock.

"It's not through choice," he says. "Or, at least, it is a bit. I'm still quite driven in how I live my life. It would be quite selfish if I got into a serious relationship and started a family and then kept bugging off."

How people live is a constant theme in the popular blog Bullock writes. It's as though, having wasted so many years looking for his purpose, he needs to keep reminding himself of the gray misery he left behind. He has a near-pathological fear of what he dubs mediocrity,

the kind of bland suburban consumerism that he feels has become the default of Western culture. He speaks bluntly on the subject and this can (and does) cause friction.

It also makes him an easy target. A short online film, funded by his sponsor to coincide with the publication of his book, catches Bullock typically railing against the tedium of modern life. A dissonance was obvious: "We are told that consumerism is negative," one comment runs, "[while] we are being persuaded to buy various anoraks. It's the epitome of consumerism: to sell products by referring to a lifestyle shunning consumerism." Another post says: "He just seems to think he is now better than the rest of us."

Bullock is used to the charge of elitism. "I'm a long way from perfect," he says. "I'm just offering a different slant on things. I see it as my place to put another side out there." He continues, "Deep down, I don't actually think that what I do is that elite. I think it's average. Although I do quite like being included in that group, I also feel like an impostor."

What Bullock says he fears most of all is compromise, as though the idea itself could melt the wax in his wings, and bring him, like



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Icarus, crashing back to earth.

"I think Nick is more caring, understanding and sensitive than many people think," says Kenton Cool, an alpine guide from the U.K. "As long as being those things doesn't get in the way of climbing."

Cool fondly recalls evenings with Bullock at Cool's house near Chamonix drinking cheap red wine in front of the fire, and arguing about climbing's true path.

"Nick always struggled a little with the fact

that some of us in Chamonix were trying to combine a life of earning a living as guides with climbing and skiing," he says. "This didn't make sense to Nick. He was there to climb and nothing else. Anything that got in the way of that was considered an evil."

Having climbed with Bullock, Cool says, "There is no one more reliable. He is totally up for anything." It's a view shared by all of Bullock's partners I managed to interview. Andy Houseman, with whom Bullock climbed Chang Himal (6802 meters) in 2009, says the only time to worry is if Bullock runs out of espresso. "It would take a brave person to go on a trip with him and not take enough."

Also known as Wedge Peak, Chang Himal, in eastern Nepal, had been climbed only once before Bullock and Houseman arrived, from the south. The north face, tucked away on the approach trek to Kangchenjunga's base camp, leaped to prominence after *Alpinist* magazine included it in a list of great remaining objectives in the Himalaya. What better way to make your mark?

The two climbed the route in four days, with the crux pitch on day two, a shallow, overhanging corner at more than 6,000 meters "sprayed with



a sheen of ice"—and a full 60 meters.

"It was one of the most impressive leads I've seen in the mountains," Houseman recalls. "He shouted down, quite casually, 'Watch me!' before slowly tapping his way up through an overhanging bulge on very thin and rotten ice. His stubbornness and determination really pay off in the mountains. I've yet to see him not get up a pitch he starts."

In 2007 Cool and Bullock attempted the north face of Kalanka, but were turned around



Left: Bullock on the first ascent of *Homeward Bound* (VIII/8), Argentiere Glacier, Chamonix, France. Bullock describes it as: "Pretty scary. Thin ice, loose rock and not a lot of protection."

after three bivouacs by rotten ice.

"On the hill there is no one more reliable," Cool says. "He is totally up for anything and capable of climbing virtually everything. We came across some very steep, shitty snow on the first day's climbing. It looked horrid to me, but Nick lapped it up."

Bullock eased his way up the foamy, unconsolidated ground, Cool recalls, by shifting his weight from foot to foot, "gaining a few inches here, a few more there, until the rope came tight. Of course, there was no belay. I found it petrifying to second, but for Nick it seemed run of the mill."

Bullock and Cool now stand at opposite ends of mountaineering's spectrum, despite being

old friends. Cool has become well-known in Britain to a non-climbing public and courts the mainstream media with his yarns from Everest. Bullock regularly teases him about it, often in public.

"Nick isn't jealous of me," says Cool. "I don't do enough climbing for him to be that. But on the media front, well, that's a different story. Despite the fact that he's a climber's climber, living in his van on a shoestring, there is nothing Nick likes more than being mentioned in the press."

The contradictory pressures of modern climbing seem unusually strong in Nick Bullock. He distrusts the media, yet frequently engages with it. He dislikes consumerism, but

as a sponsored athlete jets around the world on permanent vacation. He's emotionally intelligent and likeable, but often seems angry.

And while climbing partners attest to Bullock's steady judgment in the mountains, he has a reputation for recklessness. Who else would fall off Gogarth's most famous chop route, *The Bells! The Bells!* (E7 6b)—testing the route's only piece of meaningful gear, a weary, crumbling peg—and walk away from it?

The man himself looks a little uneasy when I mention the widely held perception that he would be lucky to survive to old age. "*Fear and Loathing* (ED3 VII 6+ A2) was a bit too wild and scary," he agrees, referencing the new route he climbed in 2003 with Al Powell. This heart-in-mouth adventure weaves a line through the darkly Gothic architecture of Jirishanca's southeast face, arguably the most captivating mountain aspect in the Andes.

"Apart from Jirishanca, I don't think I've been that reckless," he says. "People perceive what I've done as being so—that I'm crazy. But actually it's never felt that way to me. I'm not as wild as people imagine."

*Echoes* recounts several nasty accidents Bullock has suffered, like splitting his kneecap falling 30 feet in the slate quarries near Llanberis in North Wales. Bullock didn't bother with a hospital, he just packed the knee with frozen peas and started training again, only getting an x-ray a week later. After the doctor saw the break, Bullock was in a cast for six weeks.

Far more serious was the accident he survived during his first attempt on Jirishanca with Powell, in 2002. Climbing the initial gully to gain access to the main face, Bullock and Powell were hit by an avalanche. Bullock, out in front, was plucked off the mountain and hurled hundreds of feet to its base, the avalanche working him over like a boxer pummeling the heavy bag. Within days, and rattling with painkillers, he soloed the northwest face of Ulta, just to get something out of the trip.

"I probably have been reckless as a rock climber," he says. "I tend to press on. That attitude works well in rock climbing. If you're fit and confident, it'll work out if you slap for a few holds. There has been the odd occasion where that's backfired. But over the last decade I seem to have learned something."

Whether or not Bullock deserves his reputation as a daredevil, the places he chooses to climb say a lot about him. He made a specialty of Gogarth's North Stack Wall, a marginally off-vertical quartzite sea cliff of iconic status in British climbing and favored

Right: Bullock approaches the buttress at the start of the West Ridge of Kyashar, Hinku Valley, Nepal. Andy Houseman, his partner, says, "Every tool and crampon placement felt like a gamble."

Below: Bullock's guidebook, open to the North Stack Wall pages, shows a bunch of ticked E7s; *The Angle Man* remains.

by the brilliant and slightly mad, including the artist John Redhead.

"You can tell he's an artist," Bullock says. "There aren't many shit Redhead routes. Everything about them works: the moves, the boldness, the names and the mood of the crag. That's what I bought into."

"It's not because the climbing on North Stack is super-hard," says Ray Wood, a Llanberis-based photographer. "In sport-climbing terms, the routes are not that demanding. It's the nature of the rock. In the back of your mind there's always the fear that something might snap, and the gear is often horrendous."

"My greatest asset," Bullock says, "is either having very little between my ears, or what there is being under control."

Bullock climbed almost all the famous testpieces at the North Stack—*The Bells! The Bells!*, *The Hollow Man* (E7 6b), *A Wreath of Deadly Nightshade* (E7 6b)—and in the process illustrated the kind of groove he wanted to chase; hard 5.12 climbing over bad gear. Technical brilliance is fine, his resume implies, but exploring the recesses of the psyche—that's really what he's interested in.

"It's why he's so good at mixed climbing," Wood says. "He's best on delicate, runout ground. He just seems to switch a gear and become incredibly precise. There's no flapping or waving his tools around."

Wood cites as proof Bullock's first ascent of the hard mixed line *Cracking Up* on Clogwyn d'ur Arddu, graded IX, 9. Climbing it in 2006, before user-friendly leashless axes, Bullock torqued his way up this overhanging offwidth, shafts flexing, feet pasted to the edge of the crack, a single cam far below him, before his placements failed and he took a long fall. No matter. He got back on and finished it.

"He likes his mind games," Wood says.

Solving a complex and risky puzzle like *Cracking Up*—or Chang Himal, for that matter—seems the only time Bullock's restless brain is still. In *Echoes*, he writes that discovering climbing when he was already in his late 20s and working at Gartree, was like finding the psychological key to a lock he couldn't open.

Bullock's father, he says, worked jobs he didn't much enjoy—bricklaying, night shifts in the local textile mill and then social work—before setting up his own stationery business. He was a working-class Tory, who hated the unions and watched every penny. When he



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got a phone installed in the family house, he fixed it so the family couldn't make outgoing calls. Anyone who was liberal or open-minded, Bullock says, was dismissed as "wishy-washy."

His father's uncompromising outlook, however, was balanced by his mother's parental dedication. She worked as a bookkeeper and then also started her own business, and, unlike Bullock's dad, was generous to a fault.

"If the money had been left to her, we'd have been destitute," he says. The fact that she could be found under the family car with a set of wrenches when he got home from school

might have something to do with Bullock's disdain for chauvinism. But until he worked in prison, he'd pretty much absorbed his parents' political outlook.

"I went in as someone who was right-wing," he says. "I was looking for security. Or at least I thought I was."

Despite his years in the prison, Bullock's sense of himself has always been wrapped up with nature. As a boy growing up in Cheadle, a small town in Staffordshire with countryside nearby, he was always knee-deep in mud, damming streams, hunting birds' nests and climbing trees.



Left: *Angel Dust* (E6 6a), Blacksmith's Zawn, Gogarth. "The rock is kinda OK on this," Bullock says. "Sometimes with a bit of talc powder, making you grip even more and get even more pumped but generally its OK." Below: Juggling out of Red Wall at Gogarth after getting hosed by a "mega storm."

As a teenager he was passionate about that quintessentially northern tradition of ferreting for rats and rabbits. He had his first shotgun at 14 and used it to hunt crows, pigeons and rabbits. His life's path was set; Nick would become a gamekeeper at 16, managing the shooting estate of someone far richer than a person from his own background could imagine.

He was also, at one point, a punk, mooching around Cheadle in red jeans, Doc Marten boots and a green combat jacket with the names of bands—The Slits, The Sex Pistols—scrawled on it. This was his uniform, whether he was catching rabbits or buying records. Hardly surprising, then, that when Bullock discovered climbing in his late 20s, Mark Twight's punk-alpinist manifesto—*Kiss or Kill*—would be such a profound influence.

"His writing was so powerful," Bullock says. "The anger. That grabbed me. It's anti-heroic and anti-establishment. It appealed to my punk-rock youth. I'm not going to play nicely because you want me to; I'm not going to fulfill your expectations of what I should be. He seemed not to care what people thought about him."

Bullock also admires Twight's intense dedication. "I would never put myself in his league, but in a way I can relate to him," he says. "He isn't an absolute natural and he's worked really hard. That's the kind of person I've always associated with."

Life as a gamekeeper didn't work out for Bullock. Serving an apprenticeship in North Wales, living a strange, isolated life, he found himself at 16 and 17 being bullied by his

boss's wife. The process dismantled his self-confidence: "I was psychologically scarred. It made me concerned what people were saying about me." Finally, he called his parents and came home with his dream shattered.

For years Bullock drifted, working in a warehouse at a theme park, dating a girl who loved him and whom he resisted marrying. Finally, bored with life and at his father's suggestion, he applied for the prison service. "What he didn't see, or neglected to mention, was the effect it would have on my personality, the horror it would introduce to my life."

Violence and aggression are constant themes in *Echoes* and they have left their mark on Bullock. "I'm a lot more relaxed now but I still walk around cities conscious of who's around me. It's like part of my brain has been sensitized."

What prison ultimately taught him was to question everything he was brought up to want:



the steady job, the safe option. "I went in as someone who was right wing. I was looking for security, or at least I thought I was."

Instead, it began to dawn on him that there wasn't a lot of difference between some inmates, those doomed by a bad education or a violent father, and his own situation.

"I wanted climbing," he writes in *Echoes*. "I was prepared to put in the time and effort to gain the experience. But then, for repeat criminals, there's also the thrill of the chase, the uncertainty, the tension, the excitement—how much is that part of their drive? Crime or climb? Were they just two intoxicating drugs to get some of us through the sterility of modern life, the consumerism we learn in our schools, from parents and on TV?"

Stepping into the gym and quitting cigarettes,

he shored himself up with the discipline of exercise and then saw the chance for a new life as a physical-education instructor. It was like a cell door swinging open. That's when he discovered the mountains, during the outdoor segment of his PE training course, at Plas y Brenin, the prestigious national training center in North Wales. That's when he started breathing again.

Bullock has seen a lot of violence and corruption in his life. He has lived with a lot of people going nowhere. The memory of holding another man's broken skull at the prison will, I guess, never lose its horror for him. He has a pretty low opinion of the legal system, having watched lawyers lie to get their clients off. He's witnessed a lot of moral degradation. So it's not surprising that the freedom of the hills means quite a bit more to him than the rest of us.

"Injustice and dishonesty anger me," he says.



## STEPPING INTO THE GYM AND QUITTING CIGARETTES, HE SHORED HIMSELF UP WITH THE DISCIPLINE OF EXERCISE AND THEN SAW THE CHANCE FOR A NEW LIFE.

"Mountains are morally neutral. They are big inanimate objects. That's what appeals to me—their purity. What you put in is what you get out."

There are a few signs that the rage and appetite are starting to fade a little. Bullock was back at North Stack last summer after a couple of years' break. "It was like coming home. The sun was shining. Seals were popping their heads up. I looked around and thought, 'I'm just glad to be here.' It was as much as a reason to be there as the climbing. I thought: 'I must be getting old.'"

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# OVER THE TOP

THE SLOVAK DIRECT ON DENALI HAD SEEN ONLY FIVE ASCENTS IN NEARLY 30 YEARS WHEN TWO BRITISH ALPINISTS TOOK IT ON.

BY NICK BULLOCK

"It's really windy up high," Houseman said.

It was 3 a.m. on the Slovak Direct. Setting out, we traversed the ice slope. In my mind, the granite tower blocks swayed—twisting under the force of the wind, the sky between the monoliths streaked red. Plumes of spindrift ripped from the summit slopes and flushed the gutters between the skyscrapers.

Andy Houseman, my alpine partner of many years, led us beneath a high, huge and beautiful corner draped with continuous dribbles and overhanging blossoms of ice. As he gained about 70 meters, I peered up, trying to see into the corner.

"What's it look like?" I called to Houseman.

"Scary." Uncertainty echoed within the word.

A hundred meters up the corner, I took the lead, pounding Houseman with loose snow. We were getting somewhere, but beyond, a porcelain arete pointed the way to the most technical pitch of the route.



Kevin Mahoney, one of the second-ascent team, in 2000, had told an aspirant Jesse Huey this A2 pitch would go free at about M8. On his ascent, in 2010, Jesse attempted to free the pitch but ran out of gear, then back-cleaned and aided.

Picks twisting in flared cracks and crampon points sparking, with biceps already drained from the pumpy corner below, I fought nearly to the top of the pitch. I could see that only 10 feet of hard climbing remained, but with several

more difficult moves and very few footholds.

I had run out of cams. I had spent too long on this pitch already. I had pushed and run it out, risking breaking an ankle or worse, and we were at the point where getting off this climb would turn into an epic, especially if someone was injured. I reversed to my last gear.

"Take."

Houseman lowered me and took over using whatever style necessary to get us back on track, and in an hour or so we were both above the crux. I sneaked along an undercut gangplank of granite and, more than any other time on the climb, accepted that we had now reached the point where it was better to go up and over than reverse.

Repeatedly over the years I had placed myself in committing places, but a shadow in my mind called this the most committing yet: with no way



**IPULLED MY HEAD FROM THE FROZEN SLEEPING BAG. THE WIND HAD DROPPED. IT WAS NOW OR MAYBE NEVER.**

down, and the Denali weather exactly as savage as people had told me it would be. The weather and altitude were in combination more debilitating to me than anything I had ever experienced, even in the Himalaya.

**HOUSEMAN BATTLED OUT FRONT**, thrashing through the avalanches pouring down the final technical pitch. We had now been on the go for about 22 hours, with thousands of feet still to climb.

By 6 a.m., 27 hours had passed, not counting the two-day approach and the nine hours to reach the first bivvy. My feet were blocks of ice—I needed to stop and warm them. Reaching the Cassin Ridge at 17,500 feet, we found a flat spot behind a large boulder. The bullying gales prevented us from threading our tent poles, and we crawled into the bag that should have been a tent. The stove refused to start in the suffocating cellophane sticking to our bodies. I felt shrink-wrapped.

At last we managed to light the stove and melt some water. I warmed my feet and then crawled into a fetal curl. It was six hours before we set out again.

"Let's go, we need to keep going," Houseman said.

Three thousand feet remained. Up and over the top in one final push, that's what we wanted, but we were shut down at 18,500 feet by the gales, and set up the tent.

Sixteen more hours passed as we lay in it, and neither Houseman nor I talked about the specter of being pinned down until weakness took over. I lay in the little single-skinned tent and watched it buckle. I thought of Al Rouse, who died of exhaustion on K2, and Iñaki Ochoa de Olza, dying high on Annapurna.

**"LISTEN," HOUSEMAN SAID.**

I pulled my head from the frozen sleeping bag. The wind had dropped. It was now or maybe never.

Thigh-deep, avalanche-prone snow made the "easy" part of this climb anything but easy—but, six days since leaving 14,000, we were slowly balancing on Denali's summit ridge. As I stepped onto that highest point in North America, I thought of something Ian Parnell once said to me, "We both know that the crux of any route in the mountains is the final step onto the summit." Reaching that non-technical final step means resisting the chances to escape, means being committed, and that is the most challenging part.



## ASCENTS OF THE SLOVAK DIRECT THE MOST DIFFICULT ROUTE ON DENALI

1. *Slovak Direct*, Grade VI WI6 M6+ A2 2700m. FA: Blazej Adam, Tono Krizo and Frantisek Korl, over 11 days, 1984.

2. Kevin Mahoney and Ben Gilmore, over seven days, May, 2000.

3. Steve House, Scott Backes and Mark Twight. 60 hours, single push, June 24-26, 2000.

4. Katsutaka Yokoyama, Yusuke Sato and Fumitaka Ichimura, linking with Isis Face, May 2008.

5. Jesse Huey and Mark Westman, 80-hour effort, June 2010.

6. Andy Houseman and Nick Bullock, 84 hours, June 2012.

ANDY HOUSEMAN