



Capitol steps

TALL ORDER

ASPEN'S TED MAHON COMPLETES COLO. 14'ERS PROJECT

TEXT BY TIM MUTRIE
PHOTOS BY AL BEYER

Ted Mahon is basically a professional skier, except nobody gives him money or free skis. He moonlights as a waiter in an Aspen, Colo. restaurant, and spends his days teaching skiing. At 36, he's come a long way since first skiing at Okemo, Vt. in 1977. He moved to Aspen in 1994, and recently became the third person to ski all 54 of Colorado's 14,000-foot mountains. Between shifts this spring, he tackled the 10 tallest peaks in

the Aspen neighborhood, including first descents on the southeast face of Thunder Pyramid (13,932 ft.), and the last of his 14'ers projects, 14,130-foot Capitol Peak (south and west faces).

Recently Ted shared his thoughts on the 18-hour car-to-car effort on Capitol, which he completed with partner Al Beyer of Aspen.

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go BIG...



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GOLDEN
COLORADO

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Connect the dots...

“The exposure was so intense, and it only got greater the further down you went.”

Backdrop: “Al and I got to the trailhead at 2 a.m. on April 20. It wasn’t supposed to be too warm, and it was going to be windy, so we knew we weren’t racing the sun. But there was greater uncertainty. We never *knew* we were going to pull it off. We had some aerial photos, but they don’t tell you everything.”

The Devil You Don’t Know: “If there was one straight-forward route [on Capital], it wouldn’t have been left until last in my case, and it would probably be skied more often. People say, ‘How did Lou [Dawson] do it? How did Chris [Davenport] do it?’ Then you look at those two routes, and none of them really leaves you feeling too good about it. So you end up reconsidering and weighing all the options, what the pros and cons are of each. And that’s why we ended up evaluating the west side. It was a chance to explore something new, and the photos looked pretty good.”

Upper Ramparts, Summit Ponderances: “At no point was it comfortable climbing. The snow was very thin, and our crampons were often on rock just below the surface of the snow. And as I got to the top, I knew that I couldn’t go back down that. I’d probably thought about how to do Capitol for five years, if not more, and then there I was on top, in April, with my skis—exactly where you think you’d want to pop champagne and then ski down. But I was completely unnerved, just not sure how to get off this thing. I actually thought for a minute I might have to down climb it.”

Getting Down: “We had two lengths of rope totaling about 100 feet. We both tied in. We had a bunch of slings and gear to build anchors. There was a way we could ski down—different from our ascent route—and it was pretty much comfortable skiing, side slipping. The exposure was so intense, and it only got greater the further down you went. Al’d ski down the ridge a bit and sling a big rock that we’d just assume was fixed to the mountain. [Laughs] And then I’d descend to the next anchor; we swung leads like that down to the south and west.”

Turning the Corner: “We came to a corner that required a really hairy, rocky traverse, skis on our feet, tied in—which would’ve had a swinging fall, really bad. But if Al could just get to me, then we were on our old boot track. We were only maybe 200 feet below the summit, maybe 300 feet west, but it was huge. From there, it was just a standard couloir. Well, steep and rocky, and you didn’t want to fall, but we unroped there and finally felt like we had it. As far as aesthetics go, it’s just under 2,000 vertical from there, fall line to upper Avalanche Creek. In a ski mountaineering sense, it’s a pretty fun descent—that is, once you’re off the upper ramparts.”

Reflections: “I went about it more as something I *had* to do, rather than something I was excited to do. I’d recommend it to anyone who looks at the other completed routes with some concern, as I did. But seriously, mid-April, after one of the biggest snow years recorded, it’d be hard to see that route as filled in as it was then.”