

ALASKA

A climb with bite

A perilous
air drop,
then onto a
treacherous
path to a
coveted peak



BRIAN IRWIN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE (ABOVE), KEVIN MAHONEY (TOP)
Paul Roderick (nearest the plane) pioneered landing on Root Canal Glacier in the Alaska Range. Ben Schmidt, above, a California teenager, descends the summit of Mooses Tooth.

BY BRIAN IRWIN | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

ANCHORAGE — “Talkeetna one-niner, what are the winds doing?” inquired Paul Roderick, a pilot for Talkeetna Air Taxi, one of a few bush plane operators that ferry mountaineers deep into the glaciated Alaska Range that skirts Mount McKinley, the highest peak in North America.

“Gusts kicking up out of the northwest,” the tower replied from the dilapidated hangar that is its office in Talkeetna.

“Hope all that training pays off,” Roderick said as he turned and shot me a cocky smile. He was flying me and my climbing partner, Conrad Yager, in a 1975 cherry-red, eight-passenger, single-prop Otter that wore skis instead of wheels. Twenty-five gut-jostling minutes later we weaved through 4,000-foot-deep

gorges carved by a maze of moving ice rivers. Giant walls with thin, ephemeral runnels of ice framed the view as Roderick banked the plane steeply, directly into a blind-ending pocket glacier. Our landing spot was flanked on the right by a ridge, straight ahead by peaks known as the Eye Tooth and the Bear Tooth, and on the left by our objective, one of climbers’ most coveted peaks: the Mooses Tooth.

Lacking an apostrophe because of a still-uncorrected cartographical error in nomenclature, the Mooses Tooth, was first climbed in 1964, by a German party. In 1975 Jon Krakauer, who would go on to write “Into Thin Air,” and friends made the first ascent of the most direct and safest line to the summit, a 2,500-foot groove of ice, rock, and snow they named Ham and Eggs.

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Emergencies are their specialties

By Shira Springer
GLOBE STAFF

When Gabrielle Bartusiak and her staff learned of a US citizen desperate for help in Quito, they gathered information and developed a rescue plan with military efficiency. Within hours, Bartusiak boarded a flight for Ecuador’s capital. Prepared for complications on the ground, she brought a bag of medical supplies.

Bartusiak is president and CEO of Rescue Nurse International. She traveled to Quito to rescue an elderly woman who had broken her hip on vacation.

Rescue Nurse International handles about 30 emergency transports per month — the college student who fell from a second-floor window in Barcelona, the man who suffered heart problems in rural Vietnam, the woman who struggled with respiratory issues in Utah. Nurses fly anywhere at a mo-

EMERGENCIES, Page M3



ILLUSTRATION BY GENEVIEVE SIMMS

INSIDE

LA to Newark, London to Dublin, arts adorn your destination. **M2**

EXPLORE NEW ENGLAND

For fishing or floating, rafting or camping, here’s your river. **M4**

In West Hartford, Conn., toddlers and animals meet up. **M4**



Currents



KARI BODNARCHUK/FILE

Machu Picchu is a World Heritage Site in Peru.

Travel like Croesus

Spend 22 days exploring more than a dozen World Heritage sites on Smithsonian Journeys' Around the World by Private Jet Tour, Oct. 28-Nov. 18, 2011. You'll see the Taj Mahal, the Great Barrier Reef, Egypt's Valley of the Kings, and visit the famous ruins at Machu Picchu and Angkor Wat. Your private, chartered Boeing 757 has just 88 VIP-style seats. Onboard expedition staff will create customized excursions tailored to your interests. Rates are \$62,950 per person, based on double occupancy, and include round-trip travel from Orlando, Fla., accommodations, baggage handling, gratuities, emergency insurance, and all meals, ground transportation, excursions, and activities. 866-903-7650, www.smithsonianjourneys.org/privateair

Fare deal: more fiords

Explore Norway's fiords for 12 days on a Hurtigruten cruise for the price of a seven-day voyage. This special, which must be booked by Sept. 30, applies to Norwegian Coastal Voyage cruises departing Oct. 5-Dec. 31. The journey takes you to 34 ports along Norway's 1,250-mile west coast, from the charming Hanseatic port of Bergen to the town of Kirkenes near the Russian border. You'll visit Trondheim, one of the country's oldest cities; Tromsø, the largest European town above the Arctic Circle; the Lofoten archipelago; and Alesund, which was destroyed by fire in 1904 and completely rebuilt in the Art Nouveau style. Prices range from \$1,533-\$2,140. Solo travelers are not charged single supplement fees, and AARP members receive an onboard cabin credit of up to \$100. 800-323-7436, www.hurtigruten.us

Mexico, Costa Rica deals

The all-inclusive Occidental Grand Cozumel, on one of Mexico's finest beaches, and Occidental Grand Papagayo, on Costa Rica's northern Pacific coast, are offering every other night free through Oct. 31. Two children age 12 and under can stay for free with one paying adult. Rates start at \$146 per person per night at the Cozumel resort and \$174 in Costa Rica, and include all meals, drinks, sporting activities, the Kids Club, nightly shows, live entertainment, taxes, and gratuities. 800-858-2258, www.occidentalhotels.com

KARI BODNARCHUK

Destinations

ARTS

A show starring Dennis Hopper

THROUGH SEPT. 26
LOS ANGELES
“**Dennis Hopper Double Standard**”: For more than half a century, Hopper was the wild man of Hollywood, appearing in movies as varied (and influential) as “Rebel Without a Cause” and “Blue Velvet.” He also directed, acted in, and helped write “Easy Rider.” And further, Hopper, who died in May at 74, long ago earned himself a small yet distinctive place in art history. A very good photographer, he also painted, sculpted, did assemblages, and was a discerning collector. This extensive survey of Hopper's art career mounted by the Geffen Contemporary is the first such show a North American museum has devoted to him. It includes more than 200 of his artworks, dating from 1955 to the last decade. The Geffen Contemporary is part of Los Angeles's Museum of Contemporary Art. 152 North Central Ave., 213-626-6222, www.moca.org/museum/moca_geffen

THROUGH DECEMBER
LONDON
“**Swinging Away: How Baseball and Cricket Connect**”: Lord's Cricket Ground is that sport's most sacred site. What better place for this exhibition that shows the many linkages between cricket and baseball. Items on display include the bat Babe Ruth used to hit his last home run and the earliest known cricket uniform. Those unable to make it to London should be patient. “Swinging Away” opens at the Baseball Hall of Fame, in Cooperstown, N.Y., next April. St. John's Wood, 011-44-20-7616-8500, www.lords.org

THROUGH JAN. 9
PHILADELPHIA
“**An Eakins Masterpiece Restored: Seeing ‘The Gross Clinic’ Anew**”: Thomas Eakins's “The Gross Clinic” has been called the greatest American painting of the 19th century. A notably insensitive retouching of the canvas in the 1920s was decied by his widow. Now the painting has been cleaned and restored. The results of that 10-month-long process can now be seen, along with Eakins's studies for the painting, X-radiographs of the canvas, and a documentary video. 26th Street and Benjamin Franklin Parkway, 215-763-8100, www.philamuseum.org

SEPT. 3-NOV. 21
DUBLIN
“**Gabriel Metsu: Rediscovered Master of the Dutch Golden Age**”: Although not as well known as such contemporaries as Rembrandt and Vermeer, Metsu was one of the leading lights of



THE ARTIST AND TONY SHAFRAZI GALLERY

Dennis Hopper's image “Double Standard” (1961) at Geffen Contemporary in Los Angeles.

17th-century Dutch painting. This retrospective includes 40 of his paintings. After Dublin, the show travels to the Rijksmuseum, in Amsterdam, and the National Gallery, in Washington. Merion Square West and Clare Street, 011-353-1-661-5133, www.nationalgallery.ie

SEPT. 15-JAN. 2
NEWARK
“**Gustav Stickley and the American Arts & Crafts Movement**”: Entrepreneur rather than artist, Stickley owned a furniture factory and magazine, The Craftsman. He became the foremost promoter of the simple lines and elegant shapes we associate with the American Arts and Crafts Movement. This Newark Museum exhibit includes furniture, metalware, lighting, textiles, and architectural plans from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when the movement transformed American design. 49 Washington St., 973-596-6550, www.newarkmuseum.org

SEPT. 16-DEC. 5
OXFORD, ENGLAND
“**The Pre-Raphaelites in Italy**”: The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, as they called themselves, were inspired by early Renaissance artists and com-

prised the foremost school of painting in Victorian England. Its members included Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones, and William Holman Hunt. This comprehensive exhibition at the Ashmolean Museum includes some 140 paintings and examines these artists at work in the country they claimed as spiritual home. Beaumont Street, 011-44-1865-278000, www.ashmolean.org

PLAN AHEAD

NOV. 20-APRIL 17
SAN FRANCISCO
“**How Wine Became Modern: Design+Wine 1976 to Now**”: In the first such show of its kind, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art has looked at how design, architecture, and media have contributed to, as the museum puts it, “transformations in the visual and material culture of wine over the past three decades.” 151 Third St., 415-357-4000, www.sfmoma.org

MARK FEENEY

Events are sometimes canceled, rescheduled, or sold out; check online. Mark Feeney can be reached at mfeeney@globe.com.

Crevasses, gorges, peaks, overhangs, and Ham and Eggs

► ALASKA
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The climb was remote, requiring weeks of hiking to reach it. Roderick, seeing an opportunity in shortening the approach to 30 minutes by dropping his plane onto this frozen bowl, pioneered the area for paying customers. Today, this one-shot-or-death landing strip known as the Root Canal Glacier is how almost everyone gets to the climb. Weather permitting, this once extreme adventure can now be done in a weekend from Anchorage.

 **CLIMB BIG**
Go to new heights in Alaska at www.boston.com/travel.

Our plane drifted over deep crevasses just a hundred feet below, onto the smooth belly of the glacier, and coasted to a stop. Five minutes later we sat next to 200 pounds of gear and 10 days' worth of food as the Otter took off, spraying us in dry, cold powder. We were left to melt snow for drinking water, pitch tents, and start erecting protective walls of snow bricks in the event of a storm. We weren't alone on the glacier. A few other parties had already dug in, waiting for good weather. Three of the teams consisted not of climbing partners like us, but rather of climbing guides and their clients.

Successful ascents of climbs like Ham and Eggs are considered milestones by many climbers. Ham and Eggs has steep snow, up to 70 degrees, which can collapse or avalanche under a climber if tested in unsafe conditions. There is technical ice climbing that at times is not just vertical, but overhanging. Ham and Eggs isn't a trail to the top of the Mooses Tooth. It's not a winding glacier trek like the guided walks up Mount Rainer or Mount Baker. It's an intense, technical ice climb, complete with two-ice-ax climbing, groveling, and twisted and tangled ropes. It's 20 full rope lengths and typically takes 24 hours to get up and rappel down. There's no other safe way off the Tooth.

Kevin Mahoney flew in the day after we arrived, the third guide to set up camp. He and I happen to live in the same New



KEVIN MAHONEY

An unknown climber ascends the final stretches of Ham and Eggs, with Ruth Gorge behind him. The intense, technical ice climb typically takes 24 hours to get up and rappel down.

Hampshire town, but this was no neighborhood party. Mahoney was working. His job: Cook tons of food, get his charges safely to the top of the Tooth . . . and get them back down. His clients were a father and son, Dale and Ben Schmidt of Berkeley, Calif. The next week Ben had his prom. He was 17 and his attendance at the dance was more important than the slot of ice that loomed above him as he ate a chicken and cheese quesadilla. His father had climbed the Tooth five years ago; his mother, Dori, climbed it last year.

Guided mountain adventures have exploded in the last few decades. Price tags of \$60,000 are common for the few hundred climbers that scale Mount Everest each year, a climb that takes 70 days. A guided climb up Ham and Eggs would range from \$3,500 to \$5,000. Domestic one-day hikes cost about \$275. Guiding agencies are available to advise clients on how to train for big climbs and to take care of logistics, from warm bottles of tea to fresh fish and wine in base camp tents.

Not only have guided climbs become more popular, but their difficulty has increased. Routes like Ham and Eggs, a proud achievement for an average climber like myself, are being scaled by clients with few peaks

under their harnesses. And they're doing so safely.

The mountain guiding industry has had its dark days. Tragedy has struck guided parties on the mountains of every continent. Perhaps no accident is more notorious than the one on Everest in 1996 that claimed eight lives, and which made Krakauer famous. A member of the climbing team, he was working on a story for Outside magazine about the commercial guiding industry on the mountain. He later expanded the article into his bestseller.

But here on the Root Canal, at the base of the route Krakauer first climbed, mass-scale organized guiding and a summit-or-death attitude are absent. Guiding here is different. It's personal.

Mahoney runs his company out of his barn. His style is uniquely fun and rugged. He offers beginner climbing programs and seminars, but it's on big alpine routes like Ham and Eggs where his confidence emerges, smoothing for the Schmidts what is a serious climbing route into a seriously fun vacation.

Mahoney, 41, has been guiding for 16 years. He has established two new routes on the Mooses Tooth and climbed it five other times on Ham and Eggs. One of his climbs is a harrowing route named Arctic Rage that was nominated for the Piolet

d'Or, or Golden Ice Axe, the world's most prestigious climbing award for the best new route. For Mahoney, in terms of difficulty, Ham and Eggs is a field trip.

When the alarm's annoying ring went off at 4 a.m. so we could start the climb, it didn't feel like a field trip to me. Yager and I roped up, silently double- and triple-checking our knots — and each other's. The sun was starting to rise. In late May there are only a few hours of darkness in Alaska. It was below zero.

There is a certain apprehension starting a big climb. It reminds me of being a young boy and preparing to jump off the high dive when you know the water's cold and you are a little nervous. Yager led up the first pitch, scratching steel ice-climbing tools against the cold stone, trolling in little cracks for firm enough purchase to pull his body up a few inches, where he would repeat the move. Firmer ice followed, as we planted our picks into the blue substrate and gingerly crept up the giant wall. I quickly realized how big this peak was. Ham and Eggs was no snack.

Far below I could see the glow of the stove in Mahoney's cooking tent. The Schmidts were enjoying a hot breakfast, after which Mahoney would happily

stroll them across the Root Canal and up into the narrow gully that was the route. Dale would suffer cramps and turn back to camp, but Ben continued on, swiftly following Mahoney's lead up the slot and rapidly gaining on Yager and me.

We moved up carefully but efficiently, scaling rope length after rope length of hard ice, sugary snow, and gristly rock. Yager, an accomplished New Hampshire guide, led the two of us up a thrilling, overhanging curtain of rotten ice, suffering the barrage of snow crashing down on his head as he pulled through the difficult moves. More of these sections followed, alternating with steep, insecure snow climbs. Scrappy rock sections interspersed the frozen medium, our steel crampons skating on granite and releasing a spark and puff of ozone with each desperate move. Far below, I heard laughing.

It was Mahoney. As if hiking up an easy trail, he eased over the icy countertop and shouted down to Ben, who was out of sight. “Come on up, buddy. You're on belay. It's super fun.”

For the remainder of the climb we were just ahead of, or just behind Mahoney and Ben. The pair eased up the gully smoothly, smiling when the sun poked through, laughing when the heavy downpour of sloughing snow filled their hoods from above. Ben was plugging along, picking his way up thousands of feet of snow and ice.

At around 8 that evening Yager and I sat at the top of Ham and Eggs. Looking down at the whirling glaciers, I sipped stale water and forced down an energy bar. I tried to mentally prepare myself for an evening's worth of rappelling, any one of which could, if not executed properly, result in the last and longest slide of my life. On the snowy summit ridge above me I heard Mahoney's characteristic cackle, followed by Ben's cheer.

Ben had touched the crown of the Tooth. He made it back home, safely, just in time for prom.

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