

Note; This article was called "Dirty Little Secrets" when it was published in Rock & Ice Magazine, #140, March 2005. The article run there does not resemble what you will find below. The article below, although not as edited, is much longer, features more routes, and includes a lot more of the unique local history. Enjoy!

Dirty Sox and Beyond

Eight routes that define an evolution of Montana ice

By Joe Josephson.

Climbing is everywhere. Not in a pop-culture way but, literally, everywhere ... except, perhaps, North Dakota. Yet despite this geographical all-pervasiveness, it is often the same old Meccas or the crag of the month that garner the attention. Indeed, in a sport that places a premium on size, quantity and BIG grades, it is easy to overlook the smaller, local areas that define the climbing experience for most of us.

Ice climbing in south-central Montana presents a fine example of how a relatively small climbing community can evolve outside the spotlight to create a legacy as rich as any in North America.

The once-strong Montana tradition of no guidebooks has passed down an aura of legend, if not outright mythology, about the innovation, tenacity and sheer talent of our pioneers, most of whom still rummage around in the hills in quest of some new route that's been on their mental tick list for decades. Despite the many great routes established and the many great climbers to come out of Montana, the defining feature of the area as explained by pioneer Chad Chadwick has always been an "us" mentality of a close group simply doing good routes; not a me-me-me competition of the latest and greatest.

This community synergy began as early as 1971 when four youngsters, Brian Gary, Brian Leo, David Vaughn and Dougal McCarty started the "Dirty Sox Club." Inspired by another social climbing club from the 1960's called the "Wool Sox Club," this "new" generation wanted to revive the spirit of climbing often, living large, and partying hard. Quickly enlisting the surviving members of the earlier Wool Sox like Jim Kanzler and Pat Callis, the Dirty

Sox also informally "recruited" the rest of the best and enthusiastic emerging climbers from around Montana, including Chadwick, Gray Thompson, Wally Hunter, Jack Tackle Rob Hart, Peter Lev, Terry Kennedy and many others. Many of these names read as part of the who's-who of mountaineering around the state, Glacier Park, Alaska and elsewhere.

In this low-economic, sparsely-populated state, where self-reliance and a scrappy ability to eek out a living has always been defining qualities, local climbers have developed a seemingly high tolerance for suffering and unwaivering stoicism.

Thus, the tenacity of the climbing by the Dirty Sox is perhaps only matched by the resolve of their parties. Most notable was their seemingly unquenchable hankering to acquire free meat for their frequent BBQs at the base of crags. Wild chasing (and butchering) of pigs in front of 60+ family members, deviant plots to relieve the local pound from their overpopulation of stray dogs, to cattle rustling were but a few of their epic ideas.

This same determination has long carried over to the winter crags and mountains where Montana climbers are forced to endure long approaches, remotness, horrific downfall, finger-numbing cold, and typically disasterous snow packs.

Although the Dirty Sox energy started to dissapate as early as the late 1980s, the torch would be picked up almost single-handedly a few years later by the unwaivering enthusiasm and mentorship of Alex Lowe. And since his untimely passing in 1999, it is a spirit many in the community are striving hard to keep alive.

Yet, in a time when we all face the loss of access at our crags, we also risk losing history like this; which is so common to many remarkable, and ubiquitous, local areas. As generations grow up and grow old, the legacy of the last 30 years, often preserved solely through oral tradition is on the verge of extinction.

The routes here represent a small portion of Montana's rich ice history as defined by some of the best, seminal and most popular climbs in the state.

The Mummy Cooler

600-plus feet of ice, WI 5+

FA Mummy I: Pat Callis, Brian Leo. January 5, 1971.

FA Mummy II: Pat Callis, Jim Kanzler, Dougal McCarty, Peter Lev. November 6, 1971.

FA Mummy III: Jim Kanzler, Pat Callis. November 26, 1971.

FA Mummy IV: Alex Lowe, Perry Beckham. December 1986.

By the late 1960s, having climbed frequently on the big alpine climbs in Canada and the Tetons, Pat Callis and Jim "Rat-Hole" Kanzler were already experienced ice climbers. Sadly, the longest piece of local ice they and the other Bozeman climbers could find was at the Montana Tech College, where early Wool Sox member Clare Pogeba would flood the football stadium to provide a marvelous 45-degree frozen sheet. Considering the floppy, 10-point crampons, unwieldy ice axes and "coat-hanger" ice screws available at the time, it's no wonder they weren't too interested in anything more committing.

Everything changed with Yvon Chouinard's new generation of 12-point, rigid crampons and shorter ice hammers. In late 1970, eager to test the limits of the new gear, Callis skied into the most prominent canyon just south of Bozeman to find "dozens of ribbons hanging off basalt cliffs like so many chandeliers." Named for the rotten volcanic rock common to the area, Hyalite Canyon would quickly become, and still remains, the epicenter of ice climbing in the entire region regularly attracting journeymen climbers from as far as Boise and Seattle.

Callis headed to the nearest ice (a short WI 2-3 called *Genesis*), and recalls, "Fearsome spectacles kept appearing in my mind, such as the whole sheet peeling off as an ice piton is inserted." Although such concerns seem dated today, these climbers didn't have much outside perspective from which to draw as did climbers in the rapidly evolving ice scenes of Colorado, New England and Canada, where ice climbing was five or six years ahead of the curve on its way to becoming a legitimate climbing endeavor. For most of the Dirty Sox crew of the early to mid 1970s, waterfall ice remained only something to do when it was too cold to rock climb or when the skiing was bad.

It was Callis and Kanzler, however, who purposefully took to tackling progressively steeper flows each weekend. As they began to feel more at ease on steeper ice, Callis found that losing one's grip on the tools was a limiting factor. Borrowing the concept from cross-country ski poles, Callis fashioned crude wrist loops allowing one to pull without really gripping the handles. At the time, wrist loops weren't yet ubiquitous and this seemingly obvious, yet ingenious, solution allowed Callis, Lev and others to finally tackle the classic ice flow *Mummy Cooler II*. This pitch and its companion, *The Scepter*, have since become merit badges for ice aficionados and represent the most popular WI 4 and 5 combo in the state.

Green Gully

200 feet, WI 3+

FA: Pat Callis, Jim Kanzler. February 1971.

As much as any sport imaginable, climbing is identified by its literature. *Annapurna*, *The White Spider*, *I Chose to Climb*, *Yosemite Climber* and *Fifty Classic Climbs* are only a few of those seminal books that have inspired generations. Yvon Chouinard's 1978 tome, *Climbing Ice*, was another such pivotal volume, dog-eared and pored over by any one with a passing interest in ice climbing, before it went out of print.

Featured in a Linda Lee Kanzler photo as the only double-truck color plate in Chouinard's book, *Green Gully* became one of the most famous ice climbs in North America. Although the technical difficulty of the route was only above average in 1971 and considered easy by today's standards, there would be few people willing to climb it with the rudimentary and home made gear being used on the first ascent in 1971.

Callis may have been the most natural talent of the early Dirty Sox Club but it was "Rat Hole" Kanzler (a nick name borne after his 4-year old son Jamie once asked his mom Linda Lee, "Why does everyone call daddy rat hole?") that lived the Dirty Sox life to its fullest. Too poor to buy the "fancy" new tools, Rat Hole first climbed *Green Gully* with old 1960s straight picked tools he would heat up himself and pound a droop into it over the nearest rock.

The pair would soon use the confidence built on climbs like *Green Gully* on four annual attempts at the then unclimbed *Emporer Face* on Mount Robson.

On their third attempt in 1974, Callis and Kanzler reached the high point yet established on this monster until 1978 when Mugs Stump and Jim Logan finally cracked the upper wall.

With modern gear today and far less snow than they used to get, *Green Gully* is now routinely done in 4 to 5 hours round trip from nearby Livingston and hardly seems training for something as major as the *Emperor Face*. However, the early 70s, before winter visitors were common and there were few established trails, it was a different era altogether. These routes required several hours of skiing, on pre-historic randonee gear, just to reach the base. And in those days of shorter ropes and an attitude that maintained a route wasn't a route until it went to the very top of anything climbable, *Green Gully* was one of the longest climbs in the state at three pitches. Today, it is considered complete after one 60-m ropelength. And though most recent enthusiasts have little to no knowledge of the *Climbing Ice* or of the area's long history, *Green Gully* maintains its place in the pantheon of America's great ice climbs.

California Ice

2,900 feet; WI 4

FA: Chad Chadwick, Mark Chapman, Ed Barry. December 1978.

FA of complete route: Unknown.

By the time Chad Chadwick first climbed this route he had already been ice climbing for over a decade. After years of suffering with homemade equipment, Chadwick bought the first pair of rigid Chouinard crampons ever sold in Colorado in 1968. Along with Marwa screws, these implements finally allowed Chad and others to challenge the numerous ice flows hidden in the nearby Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness. *California Ice* is the culmination of that exploration.

In 1977, Chadwick and Jim Williams were attempting to crown a productive season in the East Rosebud with the first ascent of the route. Chadwick lead the long first pitch then Williams suffered a broken foot from a short cartwheeling fall leading the second.

The following year in Camp 4, Williams told Yosemite hardmen Mark Chapman and Ed Barry about "Break-a-Leg Falls" (Chapman had made the first ascent

of the Valley's ephemeral *Widow's Tears*--WI 5--a few years prior). After spending a long day getting to the base, Chapman and Barry decided it just wasn't right to bag the climb without Chadwick. The trio came back and Ed led the first pitch before setting up a bivi. The next day they carried up the crux flow in two more pitches. After the second pitch (Chad's lead) the Californian's had a bad case of burning hands and were ready to go down. Chad convinced Mark to go up "just another 15 or 20 feet" to check it out. It was just enough prodding to keep them going to the top of main ice flow.]

On the second ascent of the route, in the early 1980s, Chadwick, Mal Han, Stu Briggs, and Charlie Manfriedi pioneered what is now the standard approach, directly up the ice gully. Early season, before the gully drifts with snow and avalanche debris, it is possible to start ice scrambling less than 500 feet above the trail. The main climb (250 feet of sustained WI 4 followed by two pitches of WI 3) begins some 1,500 feet off the deck. With a convenient descent gully, most parties head down after three or four pitches. But if your legs and snow conditions allow, you can continue up "miles" of rolling ice. This rarified line might be the longest in the lower 48, with almost 3,000 feet of pure ice climbing. For comparison, the Canadian Rockies' classic alpine-ice route *Slipstream* (WI4+) has about the same gain but less technical terrain (not to mention crevasse and serac hazard).

Cleopatra's Needle

260 feet, WI 5 with two variations up to WI 6+.

FA: Jack Tackle, Pat Callis. Mid-December 1980.

FFA: Pat Callis, Dave Stutzman. January 10, 1981.

The prevalent Montana attitude throughout the 1970s was that ice climbing was little more than a great means of practicing skills intended for bigger alpine challenges to come. In 1979 this was the tradition Stan Price and his college bud, Alex Lowe, took to a slender, aesthetic pillar in Hyalite that Pat Callis had already named *Cleopatra's Needle*. Yet, in what might be considered a portent into the soon-to-change attitude toward ice climbing, it was only their third day out on ice using early MSR ice tools and adjustable crampons on floppy hiking boots. Even Alex admitted, "Good it was awful." Almost reaching the safety of a cave below the crux, pencil pitch (WI 5), Price was face with a scary mantel onto a snow covered ledge. Price remarked, "It didn't take long to fall the full length of the pitch." Dragging

Lowe through the snow, Alex stopped the fall less than a body length off the ground on their borrowed (and now bent) ice screw.

The antics would continue that same year when two young Dirty Sox Club members Jack Tackle and Gary Skaar attacked the route. This time Skaar rode the entire bottom curtain into the deep snow at the base and escaped unhurt.

Success on these early ascents required a gumption not commonly seen in today's North American ice scene. The gear challenges were amplified by the much tougher access of the era. Before global warming, there was considerably more snow and since a VW was considered the trendy SUV of the era, vehicles rarely made it far up the road. Tackle and Skaar had attempted it the year before Skaar's joy ride by skiing 12 miles up the valley before turning around in the dark as they finally neared the route. With a two mile hike today, the route is typically done before noon.

Third time's a charm as Tackle finally finished *Cleopatra's Needle* in late 1980 this time accompanied by Pat Callis. Yet even then, Tackle had a tool pop near the top and took a 25-footer after climbing through the crux. A few weeks later, Callis returned and led the crux clean. "*Cleo's*" remains sought-after, and is widely considered the most classic of over 100 routes in Hyalite Canyon.

The West Rosebud Pipe

Largely overlooked in winter, the West Rosebud is the most popular trailhead into Granite Peak (12,799 feet), the state's highest point. Little do most climbers realize this was an early epicenter of ice climbing in the northern Rockies. With names like Pat Callis, Chad Chadwick, Brian Leo, Gray Thompson, and Dougal McCarty attached to them, explorations of the nearby *Spillway Falls* below the Mystic Lake hydroelectric dam in 1971 and 1972 read like a "Who's Who" of Montana mountaineering.

By 1975, bolstered by a second generation of steep-ice gear such as Lowe Footfangs and Hummingbird tools, and a few seasons of experience, climbers took notice of the pipe that traverses the canyon for several miles. Most of the valley is talus slopes except for a series of impressive cliffs, corners and buttresses--a roadcut on steroids--just above the trailhead. A 56-inch

diameter, wooden pipe was remarkably engineered directly across the top of the cliffs, but most importantly, the pipe leaked--like a sieve. Decades before the Ouray Ice Park or any notion of ice farming, dozens of reliable ice lines up to three pitches, with countless mixed variations, made this one of the premier, although completely off-the-radar, destinations in North America.

Chadwick, Mal Han, Rob Hart, Charlie Manfriedi, Wally Hunter, Bill Dockins and many others in the Billing and Red Lodge communities had West Rosebud to themselves for over a decade. then, circa 1986, the utility company replaced the vintage 1924 pipe. In the years hence, the cliffs are dry, and younger generations have been left with only rumor and imagination. Chadwick's pictures of "The Pipe Climbs" are published in a magazine here for the first time.

The Unnamed Wall

Every area in the country has them—those melting-pot crags where ethics and generations clash. Averaging only 130 feet high with almost two dozen ROUTES SPREAD over a half-mile of basalt conglomerate, The Unnamed Wall was Hyalite's touchstone during the changing tides of the late-1990s.

Here, locals like Alex Lowe, Pat Callis, and Jack Tackle waited, for over a decade in some cases, for the right conditions to tick the routes on-sight. The earliest routes, *The Thrill is Gone* (5.6 WI 3) by Tackle and *Black Magic* (5.10 WI 5) by Lowe, remain two of the best pitches anywhere. For over a decade, Lowe was the only person to lead *Black Magic*, and ranked it with the short climbs he later established in Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado, (now considered M8-9). **(JoJo's Note: during the 2004-05 season, Black Magic formed as well as it ever has. It received countless ascents and was confirmed as one of the best single-pitch routes anywhere.)**

Ten years later, just as dry tooling was becoming the style *du jour*, areas from Colorado to Canada saw an unfamiliar emergence "new" drips and smears. It was like a "perfect storm" for mixed climbing, and Hyalite was no exception. For the decade prior to 1996, only one new route was established on The Unnamed Wall. In the last four years of the century, however, 10 high-powered mixed lines were established, triggering the requisite controversy.

Interestingly, however, the best line established in that era, and the only one now considered a classic, is an all-gear route. In 1996, Kris Erickson and Rob Williams were working *Come and Get It* (5.11 WI 7-) but kept blowing the redpoint. Lowe asked if he could have a go, and on-sighted this spicy pitch. back then, it was a bit of a psychological leap to call anything Grade 7; also, not one to overrate, Alex added a minus to the ice grade.

Never one to totally dismiss evolution, Alex would go on to employed a power drill and hooks to "establish" lines, only to return for a redpoint attempt. With a smile, Alex would refer to routes like *Grassroots Revival* (5.10, WI 6+), "Yet another pointless exercise in loose rock and appallingly small blobs of ice. Fun though."

Yet even Alex was human and missed the redpoint on some of the toughest lines on The Unnamed Wall. *Smear Today, Gone Tomorrow* (5.11, WI 6+), *Smears for Fears* (5.11, WI 6+), and *Expanding Horizons* (5.11+, WI 7) are a trifecta of mixed gear and bolted routes that all await a free ascent. A successful red point of *Expanding Horizons* by Pete Tapley was dashed well above the crux on moderate ice when Pete, using prototype "clip-on" leashes, fumbled a tool while placing a screw. Not knowing of Alex's hang and the potential FFA in front of him, Pete decided to lower off. Recent attempts have considered the line to be M9 or harder.

As ice climbing began to experience the exact same ethical storm of rock climbing 15 years earlier, Alex's insistence that Hyalite remain a "ground up" venue was challenged by provocateurs like Will Gadd who declared the first "modern" route in Hyalite with his redpoint of *Juvenile Delinquents* (M9) in 1998. As the guy who bolted *Delinquents* and one of the first local "M" climbing converts, it was Tapley, however, that bore the brunt of the changing ethos. Having "complimented" his ground up bolts on *Delinquents* with two on rappel, Pete was interested more in exploring the upper grades of overhanging mixed climbing than waiting for the right conditions or worrying about squeeze jobs. Pete's bolts and enthusiasm for new routes stirred a virtual holy war around Hyalite and Pine Creek with projects getting poached and at least one route getting chopped even though it wasn't done on rappel. The overhang behind The Unnamed Wall route *Bingo World* (WI 6), a dicey free-hanging icicle which had seen only two or three

ascents in ten years, was the culmination of Hyalite's "rise" to the world of M-climbing. Tapley's *Bulldog World* (M9) is now considered a classic of its genre.]

The Matriarch

215 feet, 5.10+, WI 7 R

FA: Alex Lowe, Kris Erickson. February 12, 1997.

In typical understated fashion Lowe characterized this route as "another fine treat," subdued words indeed for one of the most serious mixed routes in North America. RARE TO form, the route pours over the wall just right of *Cleopatra's Needle*. Success relies on very particular conditions: a very cold night to adhere the ice to the rotten cobbles beneath followed by a day warm enough to facilitate the rock climbing but not disintegrate the thin ice.

As Lowe reported, "Serious cranking on Hyalite pebbles leads to very thin and delicate ice. Continue on gradually thicker ice to a good fixed-pin anchor. Rock gear includes lots of slings for tying off cobblestones."

Erickson remembers a slightly more gripping tale: Alex, in ground-fall territory, SNAPPED a chicken head. He instinctually threw a tool, snagging thin ice just in time to catch himself. Having LAUNCHED the broken cobble with the other hand, he was able to lunge for a small icicle just as his tool popped. After getting both tools back in the ice, Alex hollered down with a smile, "Now that's what I call a self-arrest." (JOJO—THIS IS AN INCREDIBLE ANECDOTE/MINI-STORY, AND THE MORE OF THESE YOU CAN COME UP, OR FIND SIMILAR INCIDENTS TO SLIP INTO THE OTHER ROUTE DESCRIPTIONS, THE STRONGER THE PIECE WILL BE, FOR SURE. THIS IS JUST A GREAT LITTLE YARN!)

Winter Dance

440 feet, 5.9 A1 WI 7

FA: Alex Lowe, Jim Earl. January 1, 1998.

As the most obvious piece of ice in all of Hyalite, this dramatic hanger taunted climbers for years. A few parties had even made the long slog around to drop a rope down "The Death 'Cicle." Only once in recorded history has it formed enough to warrant a lead attempt.

(JoJo's Note: Less than a month after I wrote this in October 2004, *Winter Dance* formed again. It received no less than three additional ascents as well as several other attempts. With these additional experiences it has been corroborated that, due to its history, position, and architecture, *Winter Dance* is one of the TOP TEN winter routes of the world.)

Lowe, after a number of determined efforts, finished the route which received three known ascents that season. Alex called *Winter Dance*, "The most spectacular ice climb I've ever done," no small statement. A week later, this claim was backed up after the second ascent, by Kelly Cordes and Scott DeCapio, no strangers to some of the hardest ice routes across the continent, Cordes wrote, "A true, true mega-classic. I can't think of a better route anywhere." The third ascent came the same month by Lowe, Vera Wong and Kris Erickson.

Any description is best left to the words of Lowe himself. "Finally ... Jim [Earl] and I finished her up on New Year's Day 1998. A few sketchy rock moves off the belay and a move right to the highest blob of ice precede a 12-bolt ladder up the overhanging wall to the tip of the 'Cicle proper. It might go free on a warm day in rock shoes. All the bolts are 3" or more by 3/8" with hangers. I'll be frank—some went into the rock like drilling into chalk. Most are 100%, but 2 in particular went in really soft?!?"

. (JoJo's Note: Despite it being a "bolt ladder," the second pitch is still challenging in its own right. If you ever have the privilege to get on this pitch, it is wild to imagine that Alex was able to establish this pitch taking only 6 minutes clip-to-clip, drilling the holes and placing the bolts - as timed by Jim Earl on the first ascent. It is suspected the bolt ladder will go free somewhere around M8 but Alex's characterization of the rock quality is not an exaggeration. It's debatable how "fun" a free ascent would really be.)

"Belay on a mind-numbing mushroom feeling real happy clipped to four good bolts in the wall behind. Go ice climbing! Wild location, classic climbing for two pitches with a secure cave belay in between. Love it! The formation has been referred to by the egregiously overused name "Fang." We've called it:

Winter Dance."

Joe Josephson, a native of Montana, lives in Bozeman. His recent guidebook Winter Dance: Select Ice Climbs in Southern Montana and Northern Wyoming (Cody) covers all the areas in this article and is available at www.firstascentpress.com.