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Subject: **Mt. Temple in Under Three Hours or
"How to Travel at Light Speed"**

Instructional Support

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Technical Note

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Last Autumn, after one of the most rewarding summers of guiding I can remember, I spent a few days climbing with Yves Carignan. After aborting an attempt on Mt. Abraham without even getting out of the car, we headed off to look at the East ridge of Temple. Arriving far too late to realistically start the route, we decided to ramble up the "Tourist" route, which is a long scramble to the summit of one of the highest peaks in the Rockies. Much to our surprise, we managed to pass all but two of the dozens of people on the mountain that day, most of whom had left untold hours before us. Even more surprising was the fact that I had gotten up in two hours and forty five minutes and Ziggy (a.k.a. Yves) was hot on my heels the whole way. After a half hour on top we departed for the car for a total, all inclusive, round trip time of four and one half hours.

Recounting the tale to one of my friends, he proclaimed that it appeared that I made a habit of climbing many routes at light speed and asked for my secret. Until that day I had always known that I managed to make some moderate length climbs into very short days, but had never paused to determine how I had done it, particularly in light of the fact that I don't consider myself that great a climber compared to many of the bright lights around. As a matter of fact, I often think of myself as mediocre when compared to the world class talent now climbing in Canada.

Having said that, please forgive me if the endless listing of routes and times that follows

seems self indulgent and egotistical. The intent is not to blow my horn but rather show what an average Joe can do with a little exercise, technique, experience and preparation. I have related many of the "not so secret" secrets to particular climbs that illustrate specific points. Here then is a summary of the conclusions I reached and the advice I can offer on reaching light speed while still earthbound.

Bugaboo Spire from camp at the toe of the Vowell Glacier - 9 1/2 hours return: With two clients (affectionately known as Thumper and Bambi), one of whom had never really climbed a mountain before, we managed to set a camp record that stood for the entire General Mountaineering Camp (GMC for short). The next fastest time was two hours longer. Key elements on this day were pacing and conditioning. The pace on the way up was steady and never to the point of sweating or breathing hard.

We ate and drank at regular intervals to keep the batteries charged. (By the way, one of my pet peeves is people who bring elaborate lunches that require two hours to prepare on a long alpine climb. Save the gourmet cuisine for the short easy climbs or better yet, the valley.) Our strategy left plenty of reserve for the end of the day when all three of us lit out like rockets on the last section of the way home. It didn't hurt that both of my guests were known to be in good shape for endurance activities like marathons, although Charles (his real name) had just celebrated his fortieth birthday.

Mt. Temple - 2 hrs. 45 min.: The key to easy climbs or scrambles is to avoid carrying too much junk. In some ways, this is also the key to many alpine climbs. Before the climb, we made sure that neither of us had equipment that was unnecessarily duplicated. We also compared equipment to be sure that the items we did carry were as light as possible.

We had the 10 essentials, but they were as light and compact as they could be. I trimmed my normally massive first aid kit down to include only those items we might have needed on this climb. I left behind my ice axe as we knew all the snow was off the mountain and I wore my lightest pair of hiking boots. I often take a ski pole along on hikes or climbs. I have found this to be a great knee saver, especially on long days, but for some reason I left even this behind. I took my smallest rain jacket, lightest wind pants and even took my teeny tiny little day pack which now fit all of my gear with room to spare. I then took along my handheld ham radio with microphone because my pack was light enough that I thought I could afford the luxury.

Mt. Louis - 1/2 day: Sandra and I spent one and a half hours sleeping on top and still got down by early afternoon. It is not uncommon for people to spend the night on Louis. Key element: A few days before, we had traversed Mt. Edith and spent a good deal of time looking at the route on Louis. This then led to us having the entire route memorized with the subsequent routefinding being a breeze. We used double 8.5 mm ropes and on the descent we could make double length rappels. Sandra and I concentrated on making the rappels smooth and safe, with no time wasted with tangles, confusion, etc. Despite this, all of our rappels were belayed.

East Face of Chinaman's Peak - under 4 hours return: Several vital elements came into play to allow this rate of ascent. I was familiar with the route. Pierre climbed quickly, knowing he had a top rope for the whole time. No point in wasting time when you have nothing to lose. I was barely able to pull in the rope fast enough. Also, Pierre would hardly stop to remove protection which, by the way, was often placed with both security AND ease of removal in mind.

Lastly, the belays were arranged efficiently, with forethought as to how to get Pierre clipped in quickly and economically without having to cross over or under him to start the next pitch. Rope

handling at the belay stations was always a priority to avoid tangles and the related awkward situations on lead. Long sessions untangling a rope salad are never a treat on a long climb. I am convinced that on technical climbs, more time is lost routefinding and at belays than anywhere else.

Bugaboo Spire - 21 persons passed on ascent and again on descent: Sandra and I cruised past everyone on the mountain that day. I knew the route by now, which helped, but Sandra was in poor shape and hadn't climbed in a year. (With so many people on the mountain, I also climbed a few harder variations to go around people.) We made sure all of our gear was organized in a way that left important items within easy reach on the rack or at the top of the pack.

I cut the gear rack down to the bare essentials. I only took six pieces of protection, and that was too much. Another major element was our ability to move together on easy terrain. The moral here is, "If you don't know how to short rope, LEARN." On the way down we down-climbed whenever possible. Sandra almost always faced out and only faced sideways or in when absolutely necessary. This is a skill that only comes with practice. Down-climbing smoothly and quickly can save hours of frustration and needless rappels.

Skyladder on Andromeda - 1/2 day: Despite the route being almost totally blue ice on the day of our ascent (requiring exacting technique) Dave and I were back at the car and asleep well before noon. We had completed almost the same feat on the North Face of Athabasca a week or two before in a blinding storm where we had to crawl along the summit ridge due to high winds! We used a long rope which cut down on the number of belays. We used only one instead of two hand tools and only placed our tools as hard as required so that we didn't have to fight to get them out. We ran the rope out a fair amount so that an excess of protection wasn't required.

When seconding, we used the axe sparingly and climbed as quickly as we could comfortably go without getting winded. I had the lightest axe on the market, with a titanium pick. This allowed effort free swinging all day long. Our pre-dawn

start had us coming down the mountain while conditions were still optimal rather than having to wade through slush or worry about avalanches, rockfall, etc. Pre-dawn starts also tend to be best to avoid the crowds of late rising Americans and make stream crossings a bit more manageable.

Mt. Farnham - 12 hours from high camp and return to base camp: Another ascent time at a GMC that remained unchallenged all summer. I took a light simple harness that went on and off quickly, and step in crampons to save valuable minutes if necessary. We split our group of four into two teams of two. A single rope of four travels painfully slow on technical terrain. Keep your party numbers down as routes become harder. I did the routefinding while Chuck led the second rope and helped break some trail low down. As people slowed down, I moderated my pace. Up higher on the mountain, I kicked all the steps myself as I had the most reserve. (Let your stronger party members do the majority of the bull work to save the slower members.) Rest assured that I constantly assessed the snow to try to find the best and easiest step kicking.

On the way down I lowered everyone on the ice covered technical rock pitch and only I rappelled. Unfortunately, many people resent being lowered, albeit not this group. Some people think that they are somehow being demeaned when they are lowered. Lowering is almost always faster than rappels if done correctly. Get comfortable being lowered on a rope and realize that the time you save can sometimes mean the difference between a cold night out on a mountain and a warm night with a cold brew in the valley.

Farther down on the mountain we all glissaded over a thousand feet of snow. Plunge stepping or heeling down a snow slope is secure but much slower than a controlled glissade. On Mt. Maye, with a large mixed group, we managed to glissade over 3000 feet in under thirty minutes. Quite a time saving. Practice this skill every chance you get.

The Death March - Roche Ronde at 30 degrees Celsius: Although not an example of speed, this route was an example for me of what mental endurance can do. Despite brutal heat

and little water, Morgan, Arnie and I were all capable of pushing ourselves mentally and physically. The mind plays as much a part in fast climbing as the body. All three of us were running back to the car even after we were drained from the blazing sun. Work on breaking your mental barriers. Every once in a while, push your body to find it's limits. The day will come when you will need that inner strength to keep you going.

Ogre Canyon - It's Great to Be Young and Insane (5.10, 150 meters) 1 hour return: Morgan and I took only that which we knew was required, down to the lightweight slings and lightweight carabiners. Each long sling was made ready to clip into the next belay before we left on a lead. We leapfrogged pitches and carefully bagged the rope at the end of each pitch to avoid snarls. First priority after seconding each pitch was to clip into the anchor immediately. In this way we could rapidly start to get ready for the next bit. Before each lead, the gear was arranged in the order we thought we would need it.

With good protection we attacked the leads rather than meditating over each move. With bombproof protection that is well spaced, you might as well be aggressive. We used the rope bag to good effect on the five rappels and amazed even ourselves with our time. The only time I have climbed a route at Ogre any faster was when Peter and I soloed the Layback route in ten minutes from bottom to top. Soloing is a powerful experience if you are ready for it, but the perils are real. (The next time you go out to solo a route, ask yourself who was tied in with Tobin Sorenson when he died; or John Lauchlan; or Bugs McKeith; or...)

Meisner's Ridge - 12 hours return: Although not a fast time, this was respectable, as neither Vic nor I had done the route before, the conditions were poor (lots of snow), and we had a bit too much junk with us. Short roping and quick belay set ups saved our bacon. A long 15 foot sling proved invaluable for belaying off boulders, and the like.

Rapid belays and short roping also proved their worth on another day when Dan and I took a party of 13 up Pigeon spire, including a 70 year old gentleman and a young lady of sixty -

something. On two ropes of six and seven respectively, we managed to pass a team of two young rock climbers in Lycra and rock shoes. Short pitches and belaying off natural horns and spikes allowed us to travel at a good speed, given our party size. We kept pace with all of the other smaller parties on the mountain that day.

I could go on with examples of other lightning ascents, like ten people up and down Roche a' Perdrix before noon, or a romp up and down the SW face of Morro peak in under 2 hours, but the stories begin to repeat themselves. One common theme with many of the above climbs was that the weather was often good. On those kinds of days, it is much easier to take less clothing and feel comfortable.

Planning your clothing is important. I like to start the day slightly cool, so that I sweat less and don't have to stop in a few minutes to take off clothing that was unnecessary to begin with. On all climbs, it is vital to keep an eye to the weather and make decisions accordingly. Efficient climbing is even more important when the weather turns sour half way up a climb.

Each of the climbs above was done in better than average time with mere mortal participants. There were no Olympians or Amazons; no smoke or mirrors. All that made these climbs special was application of simple rules that my mentors taught me over my 20 years in the mountains. Pacing and good fitness go along with regular refueling. Trimming weight in all areas is vital. Efficient rope handling at belays and rappel stations saves time. Short roping, lowering, down-climbing and glissading are valuable skills that must be learned and practiced. Simple and efficient equipment and technique are a must. No magic, no secrets, just good sense.

None of the routes discussed involved all out running up and down a mountain. We often stopped to smell the flowers and savor the vistas on many of the climbs. Efficient technique allows this luxury. Climb efficiently and fast will come by itself. Rather than complicating a climb, your ideal should be to simplify it and waste as little time in meaningless activity as possible. Try a few of these ideas out and see how long it takes you to, "make the speed of light outta this place." Just remember, climb safely, wear a helmet and obey the speed limit!

This article originally appeared in Mountain Safety, Search & Rescue - Selected Articles and is reprinted courtesy of Cyril Shokoples. Cyril is an internationally certified Mountain Guide and has been a member of the Alpine Club and Edmonton Section since 1975. He became a Senior member in 1979 and received the Silver Rope Award in 1988. He currently resides in Edmonton and is the proprietor of the firm Rescue Dynamics, which is involved in climbing, rescue and safety instruction, as well as mountain guiding. Further information on courses as well as additional copies of this and other technical notes in this series can be obtained directly from Rescue Dynamics. On the Internet, visit the Rescue Dynamics World Wide Web Site at - <http://www.compumart.ab.ca/resqdyn/>