

4TH MAY

We were up at 9.00am to do our carry to 16,400ft. After a big breakfast we started up the headwall, a 2,000ft wall of snow and ice that leads you up to the knife edged ridge that takes you to our high camp at 17, 200ft. The weather was actually quite warm as we followed Clark straight up the face of the headwall towards last years fixed lines (Clark dosent believe in traversing up this slope due to constant slack in the ropes) actually it was a good move on his part. As we approached last years fixed lines (we were so early in the season, the new ropes hadnt gone in yet) i saw Clark suddenly slowing down substantially and then when it was my turn i knew why. It was sheer blue ice and it was really hard to get a grip even with crampons. I got into a bit of a panic as i began to slip and i actually had a bit of a blonde moment when i asked Clark if i could jummar our rope line!! anyway, i got a sharp NO and i soon recovered to continue up towards the actual fixed lines. We took a break here and then started up the fixed lines. It was really hard going due to the whole upper slope just being sheer blue ice and your arms ended up doing way more work than usual. By the time i reached the top of the headwall my achilles tendon and heels were burning in pain and i was tired.. my arms look muscely but in fact are pretty weak so i found hauling myself and my load up the headwall really tiring. We tood a break at the top of the ridge and enjoyed the breathtaking scenery around us. We then continued up to where we would be leaving our stash (i know everyone calls it a cash, but i prefer to call it a stash!!) En route we met an Italian guy who was returning from reaching the summit solo. He was the first man to summit Denali this year and he seemed delirious with fatigue.. apparently according to a group from Quebec who got to 18,000ft and turned back, there are two big ice crevasses on denali pass that are very hard to navigate. Clark says he has never seen Denali this icy or difficult in terms of the route. We arrived at 16,400ft and took a break whilst Clark and the boys dug a hole and buried our loads. The wind had picked up by this time and we were soon headed back down to our camp at 14,200ft. Clark decided to belay Greg and i down the top of the headwall because of the ice which was a little more time consuming but in my mind worth it and i felt much happier this way. As soon as we got beneath the blue ice i decided to make up for lost time and ran back down to camp much to the delight of Mark and Clark on my ropeteam.

Back at camp we had the best dinner of burritos (them and altitude are not the best combo!) got into our tents to fall into our usual fatigued slumber. Its by now on a mountain climb that you start looking really rough, my hair had started to form dreadlocks for those people that think i take a hairdryer on my climbs - i have proof of my new "do"!! Tomorrow is our first rest day and i was longing for it - a day without packs!! Its still around minus 30 at night so its pretty cold.. Greg and i both wear big fur hats with our eye shades - greg looks like biggles!