

**I**t is an ironic but timeless truth that we often require a pilgrimage to Patagonia, Pakistan, or Papua New Guinea, in order to discover the treasure that has long awaited us in our own home, hidden behind our own hearth. Adventure is either in our hearts and minds, or it is nowhere at all.

The way of adventure invites us

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to define ourselves through action, not just words. Adventurers insist on the steepest, most direct path up the mountain. You get there faster, they are likely to explain, and the process itself invigorates. The way of adventure encourages us to experiment, to press onward and upward to discover how the view just keeps getting better. The true adventurer knows that the edge is where the view is best, where all growth and learning take place.

A case in point concerns my own experience with fellow climbers Randy, McAndrews, and Noel. We had come to Patagonia to scale Mount Don Bosco. Thirty-five days after departing Estancia Cristina we established an advanced base camp, a snow cave feverishly dug in the face of a great

tempest that bore down on us from the north. Buried ten feet deep in the snow beneath the rock towers of the ice-cap peak called Mount Murallon the Fortress the four of us lay hip to hip, shoulder to shoulder, shivering in a space that was the equivalent of a household refrigerator. We had no choice but to wait for the storm to pass. We waited for two weeks.

By day, time crawled slowly. The

diffused light was enough to read by. At night, our cave felt like a group coffin; darkness was absolute.

As each night's blizzard deposited additional feet of snow on our hatchway, each morning's foray to the glacier for water required an additional half hour of digging to reach the surface. Once topside, you never knew what to expect. One morning, blowing winds of a hundred miles an hour dropped Randy and McAndrews to their knees, propelling them forward like a two-man luge. It took them an hour, crawling face to the snow, pulling themselves arm over arm with their ice axes, to regain the entryway.

Another morning, Noel and I emerged into total stillness. An

erie whiteout blended the horizon and sky into one seamless dream. All that was visible were the tips of our toes. All that was audible was our breathing.

Each day we sank deeper beneath the drifts. A flickering candle let us know that death by asphyxiation was not yet imminent; there was still oxygen enough to keep us alive. We bickered for lack of anything else to

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do. Though it was April, we sang Christmas carols through chattering teeth.

One week passed.

Then another.

It was McAndrews, returning from the surface with the morning weather report, who woke us from our state of suspended animation. "It's been so long that I'm not sure, but I think those tiny lights in the sky would have to be stars."

The unclimbed mountains that waited across the ice cap seemed a long, long way from where the four of us sat in the pitch-blackness pondering our next move. We had consumed much of our fuel and food while waiting for a break in the weather. Was it prudent, we wondered, to pack up our ropes, climbing metal, and already

waterlogged down gear to begin skiing deeper into terra incognita?

But there was a mountain to climb.

Rising above us, Mount Don Bosco, the mountain within whose flanks we had established our snow cave, had but one recorded ascent. The British explorer Eric Shipton and his team summited in 1961 at the conclusion of a fifty-two-day trek along the ice cap. We suited up,

grabbed ropes, ice screws and axes, and emerged into the starlight of the waning ice-cap night. The second ascent would be ours.

First light found us flailing waste-deep through powdery snow, breaststroking toward the East Ridge. The rising sun poked over the glacier's edge, illuminating the ice with a fire of brilliant amber. Atop the ridge, thin sheets of verglas crumbled into crystals, filling our path with rainbows.

Hours passed unnoticed. There were moments of grace as our axes and the front points of our crampons chomped repetitively into the vertical ice and held fast. At other times our efforts degenerated into slapstick. We stood on each other's shoulders, hauling and pushing each other over collapsing snow-