

The Cirque

Cirque of the Unclimbables, Northwest Territories, Canada

Created: Sept 4, 2011

Everything

you need to know about
climbing the Lotus Flower
Tower

Southeast Face

2000 feet

19 pitches up

10 rappels down

5.11

Grade V

WRITTEN BY
Mark Smiley
PLEASE DO NOT REPRODUCE
THIS INFORMATION IN
ANY WAY WITHOUT
ASKING MARK
FIRST

Introduction

This document is designed to help you with the logistics of getting to the Cirque of the Unclimbables. I had the pleasure of climbing in the Cirque in August of 2011, and here is what I learned.

You will find that the logistics of getting to the Cirque is quite an adventure. The Lotus Flower Tower is an amazing climb, but it is only part of the whole experience. First, I will define some of the locations used in the description.

Here are the important locations that will be referenced.

If you need more information you can contact Warren at info@inconnulodge.com. Please read this document before contacting him.

WHITEHORSE- Capitol of the Yukon Terr. Population 30,000. It has all the amenities you might need to prep for the trip (cheapest groceries, gear store, car rental, internet, etc). Biggest airport in the area. If you take the ferry up the Alaska Marine Highway, or are coming from Alaska, or are flying to Whitehorse, this will be your last stop for groceries.

WATSON LAKE- Last city you pass through if you are driving North from the States. Three hour drive on dirt roads from here to Finlayson Lake. If you fly into Whitehorse you will not pass through here at all.

FINLAYSON LAKE- the small lake where you get picked up from in the floatplane for those that drive (97% of climbers). You can park here for the duration of your time in the Cirque. No cell service.

INCONNLU LODGE- Warren LaFave's fishing lodge. This is fly in only, no road access. Included in the price of your flight is a night stay at the lodge and all meals for the day (does not include alcohol). You can do laundry, shower, wifi, but no cell service. Warren is also the owner of Kluane Airways.

KLUANE AIRWAYS- Warren LaFave's air charter service, which includes a Beaver float plane (seats 4 people plus gear), and a helicopter (seats two people and gear, or 4 people and no gear). They are parked at the Inconnlu Lodge, and used to fly climbers into the Cirque, fisherman to remote lakes, and miners to their claims.

GLACIER LAKE- the lake you land on at the base of the Cirque. It is a 5-10 hour hike through mosquito-land and then a steep nasty, loose, boulder field to Fairy Meadows campground. There is a little cabin right on the lake where you can store extra food/supplies, so you do not need to haul it all in the same trip.

FAIRY MEADOWS- The main campground in the Cirque. Has bear boxes (for rodents), a pit toilet (bring your own TP), and huge boulders you can put your tent up under. It's about 1-1.5 hour hike to the base of the Lotus Flower Tower from this campground. Beautiful location. Located in the Nananni Park.

NAHANNI NATIONAL PARK- As of 2011 the Cirque of the Unclimbables is located within this Park, which is Federal Land. You are required to have an annual pass if you plan to stay longer than 5 nights. The cost as of 2011 is \$147.20/person. You must fill out paper work prior to entry. The Cirque is located just across the Yukon boarder, in the NW Territories.

STEP ONE: GETTING TO THE YUKON

Options:

A- Dirtbag) Drive to Finlayson Lake:

1,466 miles north of Seattle, Gas in Alberta is cheaper than in BC, Bring your passport

B- Desk Jockey) Fly to Whitehorse (\$1000), rent a car (\$700-800), and drive 8 hours to Finlayson Lake.

C- Daddy Warbucks) Fly to Whitehorse, then have Warren pick you up in his floatplane from Whitehorse and fly you directly to the Cirque (2.5 hour flight one-way).

STEP TWO: GETTING TO FAIRY MEADOWS

Options:

A- Dirtbag) Floatplane from Finlayson Lake to Glacier Lake (one hour flight), hike up the talus field to Fairy Meadows (5-10 hours). A group of 4 people makes the flight most affordable. Round trip from parking lot to parking lot is \$3,465 Canadian total (up to 4 people)

B- Desk Jockey) In a group of 4-6 people, float plane and helicopter fly the group from Finlayson Lake to the Cirque. This requires two pilots. They fly to the Cirque together with everyone at the same time. The helicopter lands right at Fairy Meadows, and then floatplane lands on Glacier Lake. Then the Helicopter shuttles the people from Glacier Lake to Fairy Meadows (3 min flight). So you can bring a lot of heavy supplies, and not carry it, very nice, but more expensive.

C- Daddy Warbucks) Same as option B, with two people. The only difference is fewer people divide the cost of the flight.

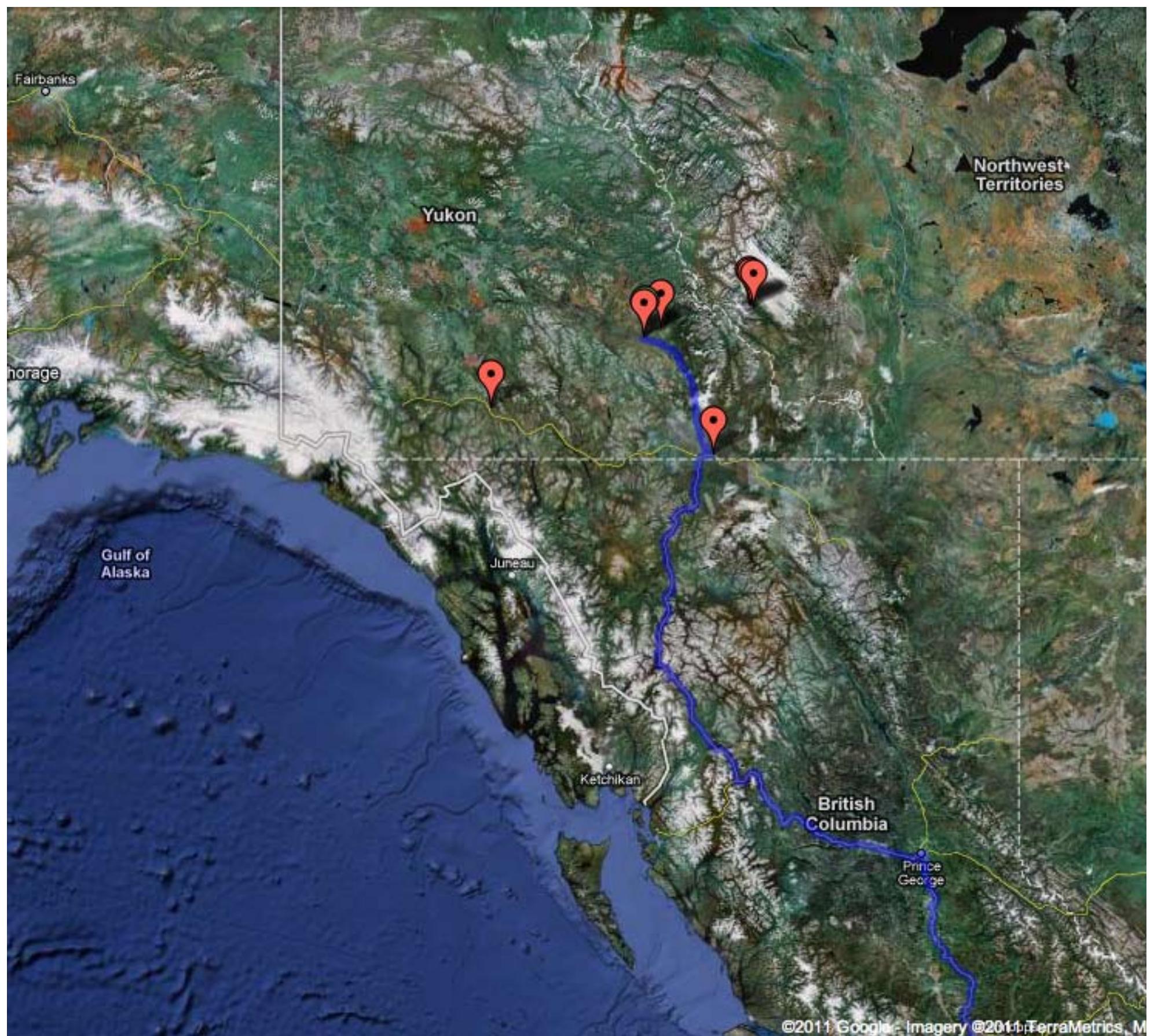
STEP THREE: CLIMBING THE LOTUS FLOWER TOWER

A- One day) One hour hike to the base of the wall through meadows and talus. Start early, as the daylight hours are long that far North. The bottom 10 pitches go much faster than the top 9, so plan accordingly. You can bail off the route easily from the top of pitches 1,2,3, 4, and 10-19. Bailing off while in the chimney pitches (5-9) will yield a lot of lost gear and snagged ropes. If you are a 5.12 crack climber, plan on 10-12 hours to the top. 5.10 crack climbers plan on 13-15 hours to the top. 5.9 climbers, plan on two days. 5.8 climbers, get some more experience under your belt before coming up so you can be a solid 5.10 crack climber when you arrive.

B- Two Days) Same as Option A, only you stop at the top of pitch 10 at the best bivy ledge in the world. Day two, climb pitches 11-19 and all the way down.

C- Three Days) Fix the first three pitches day one. Day two, jug those pitches and climb to the bivy ledge. Day three, top out, and descend.

Most bring one #4 BD camalot, and use it. As for the rest of the rack, my recommendation is: 2 each, #00-#3, and 3 each of #.4-#1, and a set of stoppers. Two cordellettes, two double-length slings, 5 alpine draws and 6 single-length slings. The pitches on the headwall are long, and splitter. On the 16th pitch I believe I used most of this heavy rack. You do not need to build anchors (except in the chimney), but might want to beef them up. Bring knee pads for the upper headwall, all belays are hanging, and painful from pitch 12 and up.



THE MAP- You can view this interactive Google map by clicking here: <http://g.co/maps/nj5m>

ORDER OF THINGS

here is what you need to do before the start of your trip.

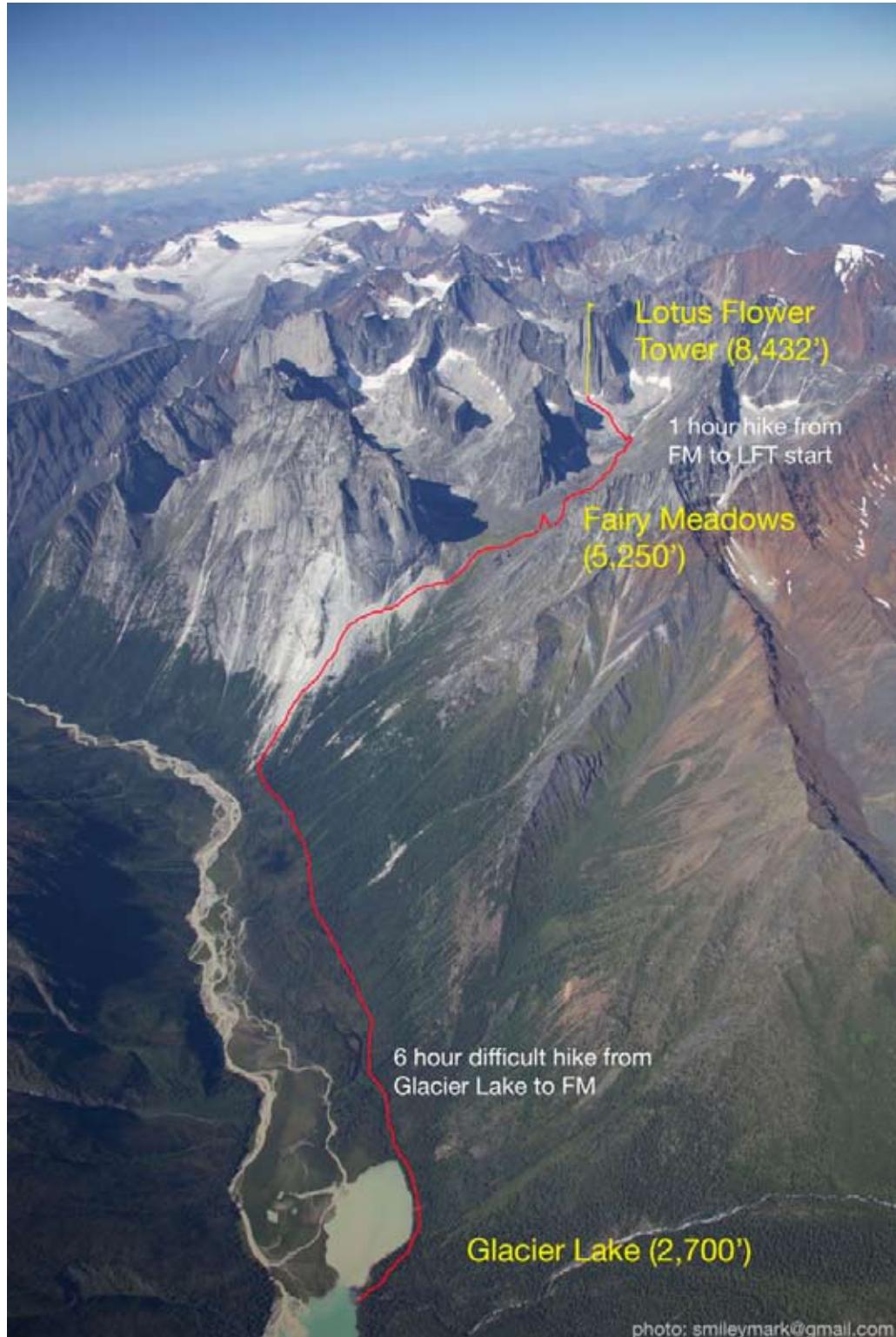
1. Contact Warren LaFave to schedule your flight into the Cirque: info@inconnulodge.com
2. Get a passport
3. Register for a backcountry permit with the Nananni National Park (\$147.20/person) email: nahanni.info@pc.gc.ca
4. Find another team of two to help split the cost of the plane ride in.
5. Watch this video for beta: <http://www.vimeo.com/28475428>
6. The weather up there is a crap shoot, just have to roll the dice. July and August I think are best.
7. Start saving your pennies, this is a spendy trip, but totally worth it.

STRATEGY

Most plan on being in the Cirque for 12-14 days. 21 days is overkill if you only plan on doing one or two climbs. 14 days of food is a crushing load to hike up the talus slope, so most bring up 7 days of food, and leave 7 days in the shed at Glacier Lake (see photo below).

I recommend scoping out the approach to the base of the route from Fairy Meadows during the day, it is easy when you can see, not so easy by headlamp. July has 24 hour of daylight. Early August gets dark for a couple hours. To climb in one day, leave camp at 2:30AM, that will put you on the wall by first light. Plan on wet cold cracks for the first three pitches. P1-10 go fast, P11-19 take much longer.

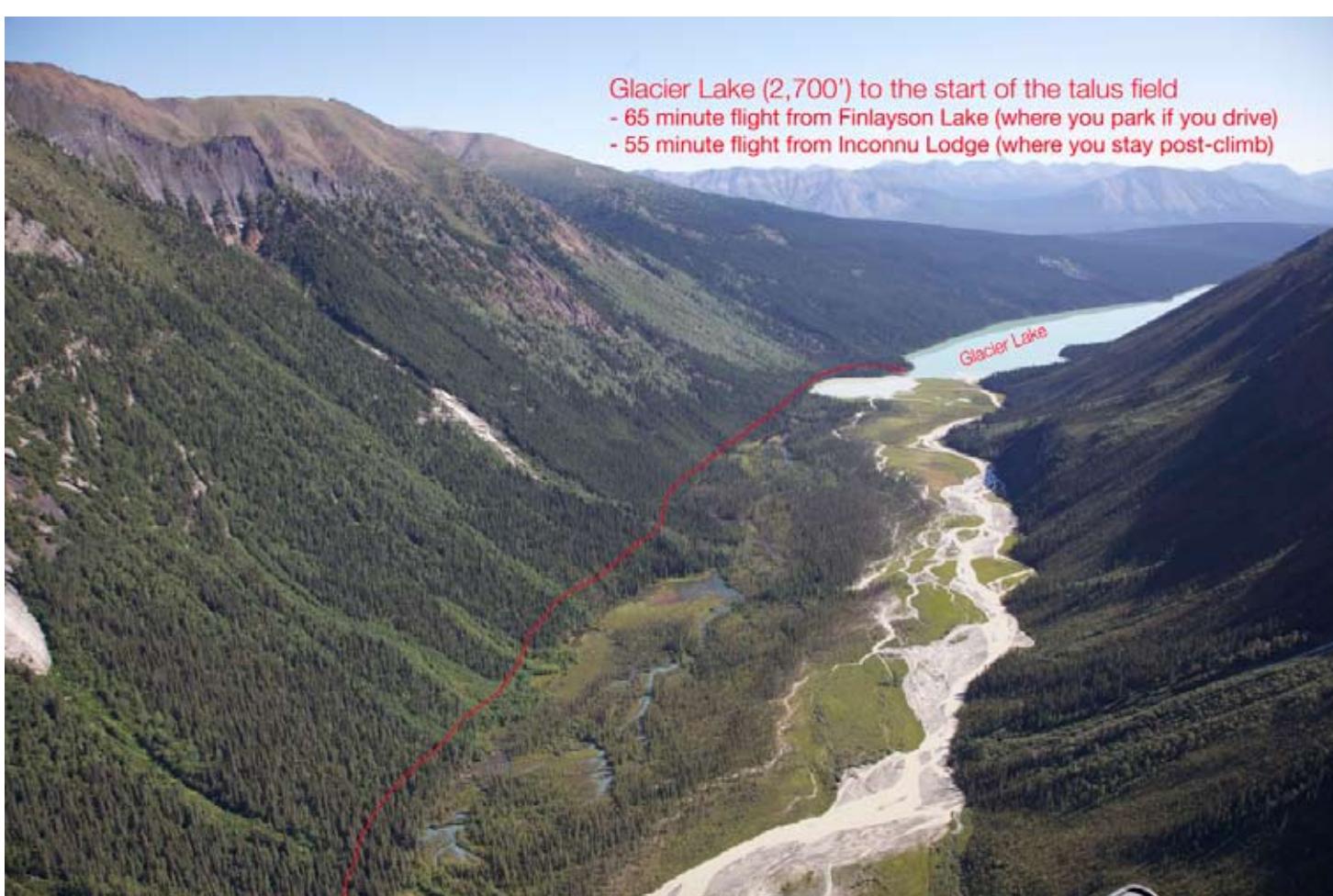
BETA PHOTOS- If you are interested in more photos of the area for 1st ascent purposes, I have several high res shots taken from a helicopter all over the Cirque. Email me at smileymark@gmail.com



Here is the overview of the entire Cirque. If you take the float plane (Beaver), then you will land at Glacier Lake.



This is the loose talus field you get to go up and down if you take the float plane. Be careful!



Where the float plane drops you off to hike to the Cirque. Looking back from the talus field. To hike from the lake to the edge of the photo is one hour.



Warren LaFave



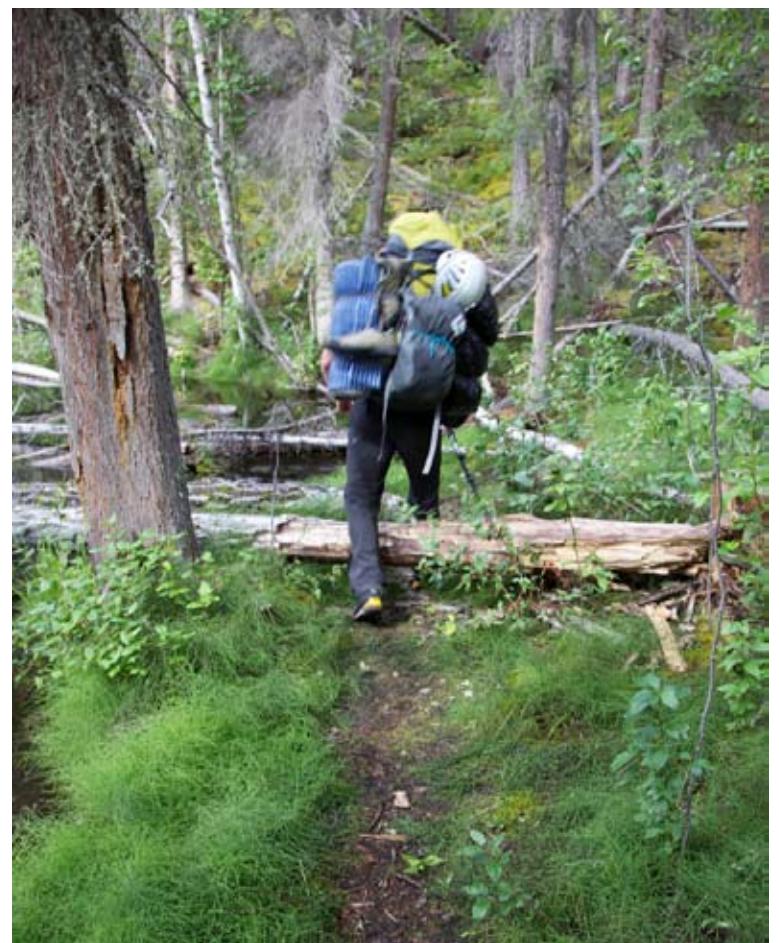
Start of the Talus Field, Mt Harrison Smith above



Cragging in Fairy Meadows, please dont bolt worthlessly



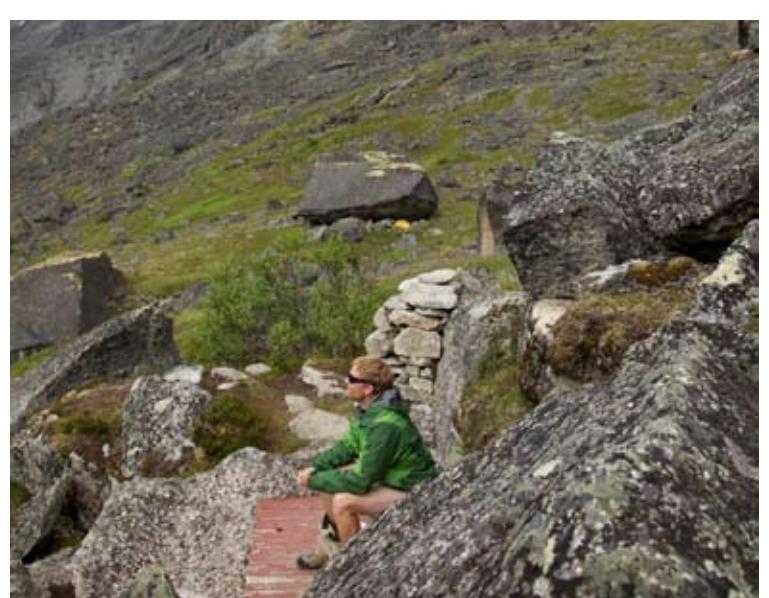
Camping under a boulder, hang your food and packs



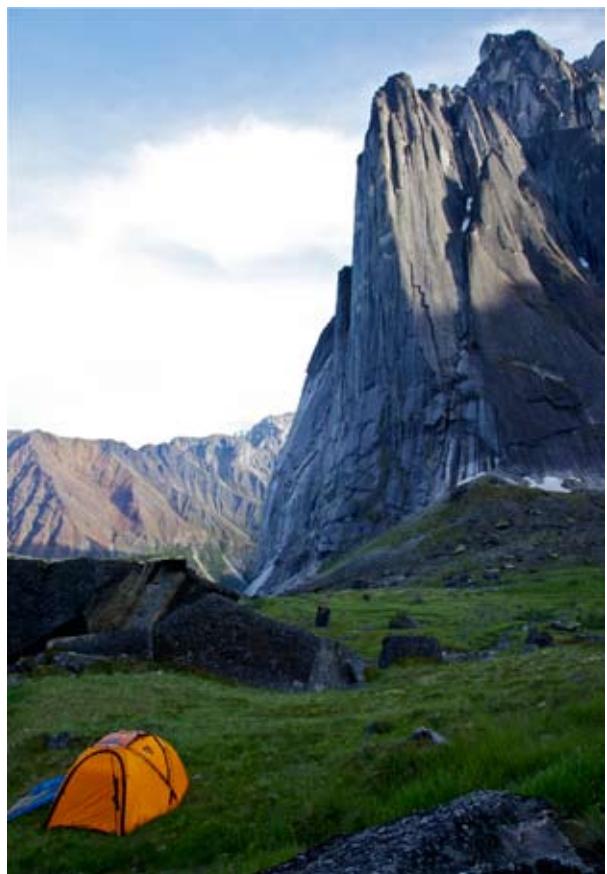
Hiking in from Glacier Lake



Fairy Meadows, Mt Proboscis in the background



Pit Toilet, use it! Bring your own TP



Many camping options in Fairy Meadows



View of the Lotus Flower Tower from camp



Pitch 4, easy, grassy, a little loose



One of the "chimney" pitches.



Bivy Ledge. Top of P10. Sleeps 4-6 people, no water



Under the crux 5.11 roof, P16



Lots of crack protected face climbing on knobs



Looking down from P12, bivy ledge below



On the summit after 14 hours of climbing!



Back at Glacier Lake, you can leave extra food and supplies in the tan shed in the background. Its only four hours round trip from fairy meadows with a light pack



Inside the tan shed on Glacier Lake



Back at the Inconnu Fishing Lodge. Where you can do laundry, eat, shower, check email and play billiards. That is included in the price of the flight to the Cirque!

Helpful Links:

Google Map: <http://g.co/maps/nj5m>

Video of the climb: <http://www.vimeo.com/28475428>

George Bells site (route info): <http://home.comcast.net/~gibell/cirque/>

Warren LaFave's site (flight services and lodge): <http://www.kluaneairways.com/>

More info: www.summitpost.org and www.mountainproject.com

Creator of this document: Mark Smiley smiley_mark@gmail.com www.saltmountaineering.com