

Niall Mueller on the second pitch of Friday's Fool (M4),  
West face of the Telecom Tower.  
Rupert Gardiner



## Spotlight on THE WEST FACE OF THE REMARKABLES

by DAVE BOLGER

The west face of the Remarkables is truly spectacular. Often photographed by mesmerised tourists sitting in Earnslaw Park, the face is dissected by a prominent ledge system known as the Queens Drive. This feature broadens out into a boulder field around the south-west face of Double Cone. As the history of the routes below the Queens Drive is very complex and in some cases quite vague, I have decided to focus this spotlight article on the more recent winter technical lines on the Telecom Tower and the west face of Double Cone.

Pete Moore was possibly the first person to venture onto the upper west face of Double Cone in winter, this would have been sometime in the early 70's. Pete was active in the Queenstown area during that period, although he often found it difficult to find climbing partners. In those days there was no access road to 1600 metres like there is now. To access the routes on the upper face, you basically had to climb from lake level and go directly up the lower west face. Obviously this approach added to the length and seriousness of the routes. On one particular ascent during mid-August, 1973, Pete managed to find a keen beginner to climb with him. His friend Steve Subritski, a keen hang-gliding pilot, accepted Pete's invitation—as he thought it would be a good chance to check possible flying locations. The line they climbed is close to the route *Return of the King*. Pete led all the pitches and the route took two days with the pair having a cold bivvy on the top of the Petit Couloir. On the second day they descended down the north side to the warmth of the sun in the Alta Cirque area and from there all the way down to the Kawarau river and a cold pint back in Queenstown.

Pete returned to the face the following year with Gordon Hill in mid-July. This time the approach was different, as both climbers were accomplished mountaineers and very fit at the time. Pete's second route follows a ledge system moving right from the original route and into a steeper gully and again traversing to the top of the Petit Couloir. Pete suggested the climbing felt about Mount Cook grade 4+ and it was generally on mixed terrain with little ice. They again descended over Double Cone and down to Lake Alta and all the way down to the road in a single day. This was an amazing effort, especially considering that most climbers struggle to do this in a day starting at the ski field car park at 1600 metres.

The next recorded routes in the west face area were in 1998 by Steve Carr and Mark McLaughan. They climbed the super classic *Friday's Fool*, which has become popular and is a must-do in the area. This particular route is located on what is known as the Telecom Tower. The Telecom Tower is a steep portion of schist that rises 200 metres to the Telecom communication tower, and is located along the



Florian Kobieska on the summit of Single Cone in winter, looking north towards the two peaks of Double Cone. The West Face drops off the back of this ridge, towards Lake Wakatipu.

Derek Chinn



ABOVE *The west face of the Telecom Tower.* Photo by Guillaume Charton

**a** *Number One Gully* (M3), Tony Burnell and Sally Ford **b** *Saturday Morning Special* (M3/4), Tony Burnell, Sally Ford and Aaron Ford  
**c** *Growling Dog* (M5), Dave Bolger and Greg Larkin **d** *Minge Kunt* (M3), Andy Mills and Rupert Gardiner **e** *State of the Nation* (M5), Rupert Gardiner and Niall Mueller **f** *Friday's Fool* (M4), Steve Carr, Mark McLaughlan **g** *Unnamed* (M4), Andy MacFarlane and Des Smith  
**h** *The Fastest Indian* (M5+), Jono Clarke and Kester Brown **i** *The Clearances* (M4), Andy MacFarlane, Mark McLaughlan and Steve Carr  
**j** *The Notch Route*, first ascent unknown **k** *The Enforcer* (M3), Dave Bolger and Rupert Gardiner **l** *Equinox* (M5+), Tony Burnell, Sally Ford and Aaron Ford

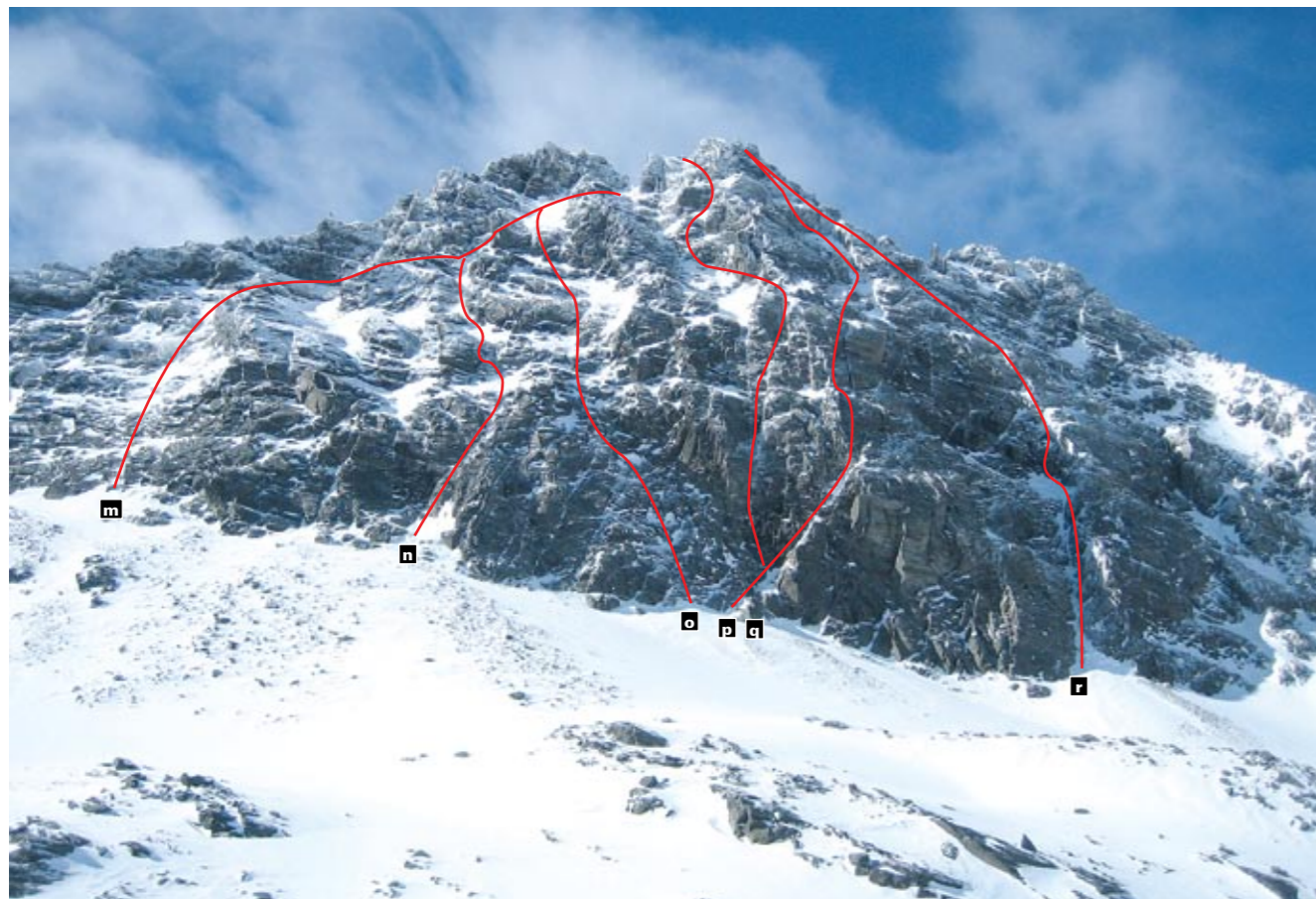
ridge to the west of Double Cone. This area has great ambiance and easy access via the Remarkables ski-field and Shadow Basin. After reaching the col above Shadow Basin, you can begin to enjoy the exposure along the Queens Drive and can reach the Telecom Tower area in about an hour from the carpark. Steve and Mark returned with Andy MacFarlane in 2000. Andy initially tried the route known as *The Fastest Indian* (subsequently climbed by Kester Brown and Jono Clarke in 2006), but due to steep dry tooling and no ice he decided to focus his attention on the next wee gully over to the right, which became *The Clearances* (M4). *The Clearances* was a superb addition

to the area and requires sound dry tooling technique. Generally people bail after the first three absorbing pitches, which finish on a large ledge. The route does top out onto the ridge however, and requires some clever route-finding to keep difficulties manageable. The direct finish to this route has yet to be climbed, although I have no doubt it will be climbed in the future.

Also in 2000, Andy and Steve decided to traverse past the Telecom Tower and have a look at the west face of Double Cone. As expected, this driven pair climbed a new route and called it *The Final Frontier*. The route was mostly ice although there were some mixed sections. This route has

special significance as it was the last alpine route Andy climbed before succumbing to melanoma. To my knowledge this route has never been repeated.

In 2004 the realisation that this area was a potential modern mixed climber's paradise started to take momentum. Rupert Gardiner and Dave Bolger started to scope lines and possibilities. First it was the Telecom Towers then the additional hour walk to the west face of Double Cone. One particular route on the west face of Double Cone, *Warthog*, was named after Rupert found that the only sound placement on the runout M4+ first pitch was Dave's warthog. Rupert became the driving force in new route development



ABOVE *The west face of Double Cone.* Photo by Aaron Ford

**m** *The Return of the King* (M3), Dave Bolger and Rupert Gardiner **n** *Warthog* (M4+), Dave Bolger and Rupert Gardiner **o** *The Final Frontier* (WI4+), Steve Carr and Andy MacFarlane **p** *Sumo* (M6), Aaron Ford and Rupert Gardiner **q** *Ikon* (M6), Aaron Ford and Rupert Gardiner **r** *Chasing Shadows* (M5), Andy Mills and Rupert Gardiner

and his superb fitness and excellent technical skills saw him take the routes on the face to the next level. Rupert teamed up with Aaron Ford, a burly rock and ice climber with strong ethics. Their first raid to the face together saw them create the classic eight-pitch route *Ikon* (M6) (See Rupert's account on the following page). Their second route, *Sumo* (M6), has some crazy all-traditional mixed climbing. It was done completely on sight. *Sumo* was completed in 2008 and is the last known new route on the west face of Double Cone. However, there are still many more challenges ahead. The climbing on the face is technical, although

generally well protected, with good rock gear to give you the confidence to commit to hard moves.

This year has seen a flurry of activity on the accessible Telecom Tower. The old rock master Tony Burnell teamed up with Sally and Aaron Ford and climbed some of the moderate gully climbs and the testing *Equinox* (M5+). Dave Bolger sniffed out some new ground with Greg Larkin and created *Growling Dog*, (expect some scary slab dry tooling or clawing on this one). Rupert Gardiner and Naill Mueller completed the superb route to the left of *Friday's Fool*. Rupert named the route *State*

*of the Nation* and I'm sure this route is going to be popular with all the climbers who have climbed *Friday's Fool* and are looking to step it up a grade—just remember the first pitch is the crux, enjoy!

The whole upper west face of the Remarkables is a superb area. It certainly lacks the commitment and seriousness of an area such as Mount Cook. But it does have easy access to some interesting climbing, with a broad range of technical difficulties and limited objective danger. Enjoy this special piece of real estate and don't forget that this spotlight was just focussed on the winter routes!

## IKON

by RUPERT GARDINER

June 2007—Double Cone has its winter coat on. Time to sharpen the tools and begin the mixed climbing season. Aaron Ford, Andrew Mills and myself stand at the base of the west face debating how climbable our chosen line will be. Aaron has gone so far as to draw a topo on a photo, with pitches and possible belay spots included, but we have no idea how hard it will be.

All this debating wastes precious time, and it's 11.00 am before Millsy takes on the first pitch. Halfway up he decides the climbing is too hard for him and plugs in a belay. Aaron and I soon join him. I take the lead and scratch my way up a tricky step, trusting a slippery knee press and then running out a short snow gully to arrive below what looks to be the prize pitch.

Millsy decides to rap off from here and heads home. I'm skeptical about our line but Aaron grabs the rack and shows the way forward. Hooking and torquing his way up a steep crack to arrive at the crux, swinging his tools at barely formed snice. 'C'mon just one effin'g stick,' I hold the rope a little tighter. Something must eventually hold because he doesn't fall off and soon it's all 'wahoos!' from the next belay.

Next up I get the pitch I deserve, a grovelly snowed up overhanging offwidth/chimney that chews up big gear. At one point I am so well wedged in, both my front points blow out but I don't go anywhere. I paste them back on and the same thing happens again!

Eventually they stick to something—permitting upward progression. That only takes care of the first half though, crouching on a small ledge underneath the next bit of overhanging chimney I have to tie my pack to the wall so I can fit into it.

To start with it is foot and back but it soon narrows to heel and ass. Never relenting, always grovelling. Time is running low and the pitch never lets up. I use up the last of the rack making a belay. When Aaron arrives we consult his topo. A rounded slab leads to what becomes known as the 'cat-walk'. Aaron shows great poise as he runs it out along the foot wide ledge. Facing a ledge-dive, he scratches his feet up on some dime edges and mantles his way into a short-lived snow gully.

Alpenglow sets as I lead what we guess will be the last pitch. I climb

up to a chockstone and battle away trying to find good pro. In the end I equalise a number 4 cam to a 4.5 cam, jamming it nut-style to create one runner to protect the crux pull into some thin snice.

I sling a horn for the belay and glimpse the lights of Queenstown twinkling far below. This brings me back to reality. The light is going fast and this pitch isn't the last. I scan the route ahead. By the time Aaron arrives it is time for the headlamps. Since I've seen the way I take this pitch. Running it out on easy meandering mixed ground, I keep reminding myself not to make any mistakes.

I run out of rope at the bottom of the last pitch of *Chasing Shadows*, we are back on known ground. Last year, while leading this pitch I took a winger, so I am now happy for the change in leads. Aaron will solve this last puzzle himself. I give what beta I can but the overhanging corner is stacked with rime. In the dark I can hardly make out his shadow. Hard moves at the end of the day have Aaron pushed. The last thing we can afford is a fall. After some up and down climbing, he commits to the steepest section. Moving quickly through the crux he soon has his tools hooked in the ridge at the top of the route. 'What's the belay bro?' he yells 'Ah ... counter-weight on the other side,' I reply. With that he makes one more tricky mantle onto the ridge, about 20 metres south of the summit. Seconding, I fall on the steep part, trying to climb in a hurry.

From here, being modern climbers, we reply to text messages from worried friends—saying we'll be down soon to eat lunch/dinner. An hour or so later we stumble like drunks around a yet-to-freeze Lake Alta, arriving at the car at 10.30—happy, exhausted men—and to a note saying that our climbing partner (Millsy) is in hospital with a broken leg. We were not the only ones to have had an epic that day!

The route's called *Ikon*. It's a classic and it's in full view of the thousands of tourist who flock to admire Double Cone.



PHOTO THIS PAGE

Rupert Gardiner battling with the steep frozen chimney/offwidth on pitch four of *Ikon*.

Aaron Ford