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The Bond: Survival On Denali and Mount Huntington

By Simon McCartney

The Bond: Survival on Denali and Mount Huntington. Simon McCartney. Mountaineers Books, 2016. Paperback, 304 pages, \$19.95.

Standing beneath the north face of Alaska's Mt. Huntington, one cannot help but feel an overwhelming sense of terrifying awe. There is disbelief that such precarious seracs can cling to a wall so steep; disbelief that nature can produce something so beautifully sinister; disbelief that anyone was once mad enough to climb it; and, ultimately, disbelief that they survived. The 1978 climb of the Timeless Face, as it came to be known, remains one of the most legendary ascents in Alaskan climbing history. Yet, for more than three decades, almost nothing was known about it.

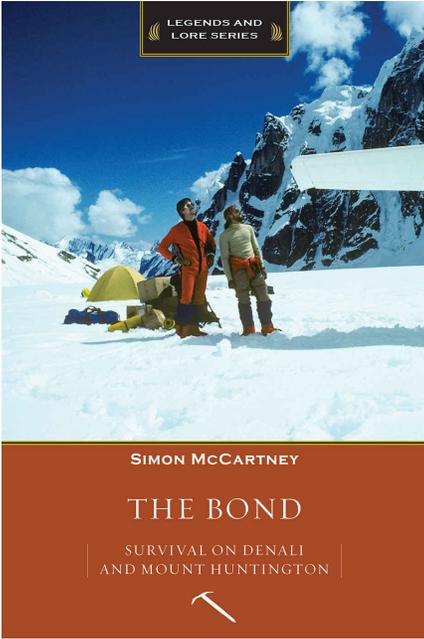
The brief but explosive partnership of Jack Roberts and Simon McCartney has been at the center of Alaska climbing lore, but other than a few AAJ entries, few details have ever emerged to separate truth from hearsay since their short marriage in the mountains. Certain accomplished alpinists doubted that Roberts and McCartney had actually climbed Huntington's north face at all. Perhaps to not give the doubters a stance, Roberts was reticent in his own defense. No one knew what happened to Simon McCartney. Many figured he had died.

When McCartney resurfaced nearly four decades later with his mountaineering memoir, I was elated to find the answers to such an astounding mountaineering mystery. Credible sources proved without a shadow of a doubt that Roberts and McCartney had indeed climbed the Timeless Face, and the ascent is chronicled here in terrifying detail. After his two monumental Alaska ascents (the other being Denali's southwest face) McCartney did the one thing that is perhaps hardest for an obsessive climber: He stepped away completely. Roberts continued climbing at a high level until his death in 2012, while McCartney moved to Australia and China and built a very successful lighting company. He did his best to put the life-changing experiences in Alaska as far in his past as possible. In the age before cell phones and email, he and Roberts lost touch.

As someone for whom alpinism is still the driving force in life, I've always wondered how one could suddenly walk away from it all. *The Bond* answered those questions for me. Simon McCartney knew he wanted to live life to the fullest, but the trajectory of his climbing most likely would have cut his life short. All of McCartney's emotions from his timeless adventures resurfaced in his late-50s, and the result is one of the most refreshing works of mountaineering literature to appear in the last few decades. To climb the futuristic routes that he and Roberts climbed took a strength and vision that I struggle to comprehend. To walk away at one's peak is a strength that I only now understand after reading *The Bond*, a magnificent account of partnership, indescribable trials, and one man knowing when he had reached the end of his rope. [Editor's note: This book won the 2016 Boardman-Tasker Award.]

– Clint Helander

Images



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