



AAC Publications

Mt. Logan, Solo Ascent and Rescue

Canada, Yukon Territory, St. Elias Mountains

In 2017, Canada's 150th anniversary, I tried to reach the summit of Mt. Logan via the King Trench with a partner. We were able to reach the summit plateau but had to turn back because my partner was no longer able to continue the climb. I was disappointed not to climb my country's highest mountain (19,551'/5,959m), but the experience allowed me to become familiar with the mountain and I kept in mind the memories of an extraordinary place. Stimulated by my desire for freedom and strengthened by my experience in 2017, the project to climb Logan alone grew in my mind and finally took shape.

I was flown to base camp on May 15 and immediately I took note of the unique and unexpected situation in which I found myself. I was completely alone at base camp, a big contrast with the previous year, due to it being the year after Canada's 150th. Before I left base camp, another team of two climbers were dropped off, but I left first and broke trail all the way up, mostly on skis.

My climb went well until Camp 2, when things got more complicated. I had a very difficult day while carrying equipment to camp 3 during acclimatization. While descending on that day, I was suddenly caught in a whiteout and, to make matters worse, I fell into a crevasse, which I was able to escape with much difficulty. Later, I found myself in a dead end and had to jump down a serac, continuing after a rather brutal landing. I finally returned to Camp 2, but this very hard day, which was followed by a six-day storm, forced me to barricade myself in my tent and reflect on whether I should continue the ascent. I was able to regain my motivation and set out again.

Due to a very limited weather window, I adopted a "light and fast" strategy, but still took my high-altitude boots with me because it was very cold. I went up the icefall, and at one point barely avoided being dragged into an avalanche but finally managed to set up my Camp 3, using a simple bivouac tent, at 4,838m. From there, I knew I would have to progress quickly because the weather window was limited. I decided to bypass camp 4 and carry on to the Camp 5 site on the plateau (5,100m) before the summit.

On the morning of May 30, I decided to launch my final push. It was very cold and my feet were frozen. About 300m below the summit, I stopped to assess the situation because the top of the mountain was cloudy and a storm or a whiteout could be fatal during the descent. But I noticed there was no wind, so I decided to take advantage of these stable conditions to climb to the top. I followed the most direct and steepest route toward the top, using crampons and ice axe poles. At 2:38 p.m. I reached the summit of Logan alone! No sign of life for kilometers around. My heart took flight in the immensity at this, the highest point of my grandiose country.

During the descent, I was very concentrated on my skiing due to dangerous ice patches, so I descended too low and realized that I had to go up a 300m subsummit to find my tracks. My stress levels increased because a storm was approaching and the batteries of my GPS were very low (this device was essential because there is no precise map of the Logan plateau), but I managed to find my way back to my tracks and to my camp. On the day I reached the summit, I covered a total of 18km in 14 hours at high altitude. Exhausted, I found my bivouac tent again around 1:30 a.m., but I had to spend hours melting snow and eating before I could rest.

The next day, I continued on to Prospector Col (5,500m), still in a hurry from the approaching storm,

but I was exhausted and the batteries in my GPS were depleted, so I decided to take the time to recharge the batteries in my devices. I realized after a few hours that the cables were broken due to the cold. I decided to spend the night near the col and leave early the next day. During the night, the weather worsened and I became stuck.

At this point, I realized that the situation was becoming critical and that continuing in the storm with zero visibility, without a GPS, and while tired would not be possible. I recognized a deteriorating situation and knew that continuing in these conditions would be reckless. Before going past the point of no return, I made the decision to call for help.

Since the options available to the authorities were limited due to my position, they asked the two climbers below me, who were at Camp 3, to come and help me get back down to Camp 4, where an evacuation could take place. Once there, I was able to hydrate and eat. About 45 minutes later, a helicopter came to evacuate me, taking advantage of a brief opening in the weather. I was happy to have made this decision, and to have kept the flexibility and energy necessary to not be much burden to the rescuers. I am very grateful to everyone who contributed to my evacuation, especially climbers Stéphane Gagnon and his son Guillaume Gagnon, and to the Parks Canada staff who coordinated and carried out the evacuation.

I will always remember this as an epic expedition. I had to break the trail from base camp to the summit and from summit back to Prospector Col under hostile conditions. The exceptional isolation, the extreme cold, the terrain covered with crevasses and seracs, the risk of avalanche and terrible weather conditions were all factors that allowed me to test myself like never before.

Mt. Logan is an extraordinarily wild, immense and hostile mountain and I was able to take the full measure of it during this solo expedition, which was the highlight of my entire mountaineering life.

– Monique Richard, Canada, translated by Guillaume Cossette

Editor's Note: In May 1995, Canadian Derrick Stanbury made the first solo ascent of Mt. Logan, via the King Trench route. Richard's ascent was the first solo to the summit by a woman, though her subsequent rescue leaves the door open for a woman to make a complete solo ascent and descent. In 2017, Natalia Martínez (Argentina) attempted to solo the east ridge of Logan but was evacuated by helicopter from 3,700m after an earthquake rendered the terrain above and below her camp unstable.

Images



Richard in front of King Peak.



On the summit.

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