

## Gaining

Cold calling has its place. In 1996 I saw a picture of Kitty Calhoun climbing a dazzling ice wall in an exceptionally fetching one-piece suit, and I decided she and I should climb together. Never mind that I was twenty and had never summited anything harder than Pyramid Peak in the Sierra and that Kitty was thirty-six and had just made a serious attempt on the sheer, ice-glazed north face of Thalay Sagar. She was a woman; I was organizing a group of intermediate female mountaineers up the Muldrow Glacier, Denali. Clearly, we had a lot in common.

Kitty was encouraging about the trip, though she gave me the nicest *no* I'd ever heard—which made me want to be like her even more. Back then, she and two other women comprised my list of possible expedition leaders. By 2002, when *Alpinist* first hit the shelves, I had a few more female rock-climbing partners, but still not enough female alpine partners. Today, my original list would have a multiplier of fifteen.

In the past year, I've put up a twelve-pitch new route on grass-hummocked granite slabs in Mozambique, summited Fitz Roy under two and a half feet of fresh snow, launched off broken rock en route to ice at Lake Willoughby and woven together

hollow pillars in the Canadian Rockies—all with different women (and sometimes with men, too). In the next decades, some of these partners will be among the women pushing standards of difficulty, discipline and style, farther than I can fathom.

Women have long pursued every path the climbing world offers—and charted new ones. In 2009 Kei Taniguchi became the first woman to win the Piolet d'Or for her alpine-style ascent of the southeast face of Kamet (7756m). This February, Brette Harrington made the first free solo of the 750-meter Chiaro di Luna on Aguja Saint-Exupéry. Jewell Lund and Angela Van

*But what meant the most was the intense bond that formed between me and my partners when we worked together through incredible hardships.... Climbing at my limits keeps me humble.* — Kitty Calhoun, *Alpinist* 11

Wiemeersch will leave soon to establish new lines in the Ashat Gorge of Kyrgyzstan. Ali Criscitiello and her all-women's team just finished a self-supported ski traverse of the Eastern Pamirs, documenting the impact of border fences on migratory wildlife.

Men and women, alike, struggle with questions of how to balance a focused pursuit with a full life that might include responsibilities to careers, communities and families. Alpinists often reach their peak potential for big objectives in their thirties. That's exactly when many are deciding how those other pieces can best fit. Climbing stories often deal with questions of how to craft a meaningful existence, but realistic, human answers are far more varied, complex and at times more elusive than any simple slogans to *follow your passion* or *pursue your dream*. We'd all benefit from more diverse examples of what alpinism can be.

In 1996 I'd yet to learn how to weight my pick in a half-inch of ice, trust my intuition to choose retreat, or feel the wonder and fear of charting a way up the unknown. I just knew I wanted to climb—with anyone who'd have me. And as for Kitty and me? We're hatching a plan for ice climbing next year.

—Majka Burhardt

