

# Jackson Hole

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## *Conquering the stigma*

Two weeks ago Skier-Mountain Guide Bill Briggs, 39, of Jackson became the first person to attempt and succeed at what has been called the impossible -- the first ski descent of the 13,770-foot Grand Teton.

"It's not that difficult," Briggs remarked in an interview with the NEWS. "It's very similar to climbing the Matterhorn for the first time -- it has the stigma of the unknown and keeps frightening people off."

Briggs spent the night prior to the descent at the hut on the lower saddle 2,000 feet below the summit. With him were his wife, Sabra, Jeanne Winters and back-up party Robbie Garrett, George Colon and John Bolton.

The four men left camp at 5:30 a.m. heading up the route planned for the descent. Garrett intended to accompany Briggs on the ski descent, and the others were to climb up, carrying some of Briggs' equipment and breaking trail, and come down the regular route without skis.

Upon reaching the couloir adjacent to the Otter Body Snowfield, the rest of the party decided it was too hazardous and turned back. Briggs, however, thought, "It seemed a shame to turn back."

Briggs began the climb up the steep, top snowfield alone, taking three steps at a time then stopping to catch his breath. He carried a pack with slots for his skis and two 150-foot ropes. It was freezing and windblown on top and Briggs stopped only long enough to eat half a candy bar. He started down about 2 p.m.

The top slope at 45 degrees made him "a little uneasy," Briggs said, as well as an overhanging cliff at the foot of the slope, which he noted "would be difficult for anyone to handle."

On this steep snowfield he had the first of three falls, flipping over quickly and getting his skis beneath him.

Breaking through the soft snow, Briggs said he started small avalanches with each turn, causing snow to spew sometimes 10 feet in the air.

"It was just an incredible scene," he remarked.

In order to keep the avalanches to a minimum, Briggs said, he would ski across the snowfield cutting the surface snow loose, then back up and turn where it had slid.

About half way down the Stetner Couloir Briggs encountered a large chock stone which blocked his route. With skis still on he made a 150-foot rappel, then skied down in haste, taking another fall which he described as his worst moment during the descent. Garrett, Colon and Bolton were camped in ice caves in the couloir. Briggs said he fell just above them and feared that he "would wipe them out."

Upon reaching Teepee's Glacier, where he had a good run down, Briggs took another fall when his right ski went up the hill and with his fused hip he was unable to recover.

By 6 p.m. he had run out of snow and had reached the last switchback on the trail up Avalanche Canyon.

Briggs said it was easier skiing alone because he had no responsi-

bility for anyone.

"If someone froze up how in hell would I get him down?" he remarked. Briggs added that he told no one about the date of the attempt because of the pressure of knowing that he would be watched.

Briggs agrees that the success of the ski descent took ability, knowledge of the mountain and control of his head.

He proved his ability several years ago when he accomplished the first ski descent of Mt. Moran down the Skillet Glacier. And having guided in the Tetons for 10 years with the Exum Mountaineering School, Briggs estimates he has climbed the Grand Teton about 100 times.

As for control of his head, Briggs said he had very little fear. A student of Scientology, which is a scientific philosophy, Briggs said he had practiced a branch of Scientology that erases unwanted fears.

"I had drawn the conclusion very quickly that the climb was damn hard," he explained, "so I just turned the intention around and said 'It's not hard, it's easy.'" Briggs said that prior to the climb he had spent two months in Los Angeles taking Scientology courses and had just completed, "the intention to be able to do something."

Skiing the Grand had long been Bill Briggs' dream. His wife, Sabra, who watched his descent, said, "Bill has been talking about this since before we were married -- I just got used to it. And I believed in his frame of mind as well as his ability."