

“Speaking careers can start in some pretty unusual places”

by John Amatt

My career began in the summer of 1965 when, as an ambitious 20-year old rock climber, I teamed up with two companions to make the first ever ascent of the 5,000-foot Troll Wall in Norway. At the time, this was the highest unclimbed rock face in Europe and it was said to be overhanging for all of its height. In fact, stones dropped from the summit would touch nothing until they landed in the valley floor one vertical mile below. It was said to be impossible by more experienced climbers, who had turned their backs and walked away. But with the idealism of youth, we were determined to try and prove that the impossible is indeed possible with courage, resolution and resourcefulness.

The climb was eventually accomplished over a 10-day period, with the first attempt being abandoned after a 2-day storm, which soaked us to the skin causing hypothermia and a retreat to our camp in the valley. Three days later, we returned and our journey into the unknown was completed over a further 6-day period, with nights spent standing upright on tiny footholds or sitting on minute ledges with feet dangling over a drop of thousands of feet of thin air. There was never any doubt about which side of the bed we should get out of in the morning!

This accomplishment was later described by the world-renowned climbing icon, Joe Brown, as “... *one of the greatest ever achievements by British rock climbers*” and it led to invitations for me to lecture on the climb before prestigious audiences throughout the British Isles. Now, since moving to the Canadian Rocky Mountains in 1973, I have been fortunate enough to deliver over 2,000 presentations to audiences in 48 countries, in almost every case relating my experience on the Troll Wall as a metaphor for the “mountains” we must climb in a rapidly changing world. Looking back in retrospect, there can be no doubt in my mind that our success on the Troll Wall was a life changing event, which opened up a crack in the door of possibility that years later would take me to Mount Everest as a leader of the first Canadian team to climb to the top of the world.

Unknown to me at the time was this - immediately after our Troll Wall experience, my climbing companion, Tony Howard, sat down to write the manuscript for a book telling the story of our climb, but subsequently shelved it when he became involved in other projects. Intriguingly, 45 years later he was approached by a group planning a climbing museum in Romsdal, the famous Norwegian valley dominated by Trollveggen, the local name for the mountain. They wanted to know if he had any unpublished material on our 1965 ascent. Indeed, he did, and the manuscript once again came to life and was rushed into publication under the title, “**TROLL WALL: the Untold Story of the British First Ascent of Europe’s Tallest Rock Face**” (ISBN 9781906148287).