

ALLEN FORREST

Big Sur Landscape #8, 2014

Ink and watercolor, 9 x 12 in



COURTESY: THE ARTIST

JOHN SMELCER

Savage Mountain

Brothers Sebastian and James Savage have summited at 16,237 feet on Mount Sanford in Alaska's interior, and are on their way back down.

The tent walls were flailing hard when the boys awoke. They took their time getting up, their muscles stiff and sore. Both had headaches from mild dehydration. After a leisurely breakfast of pancakes, powdered eggs, and instant coffee, Sebastian got dressed and crawled out from the tent and stretched.

He stood on the ledge and surveyed the world.

The cloud cover seemed denser than it had been the day before. Sebastian studied their ascent route, which looked less perilous than the knife-sharp ridge they had climbed the day before. The snowy slope was steep, but not technical, meaning that it could be climbed without establishing a main line with pitons. He couldn't see what lay above the slope, but he knew from the map that they'd be within a couple thousand feet of the summit once they got beyond whatever lay hidden from view. His only concern was the snow load, which looked heavy. He could see an overhang at the top and where little avalanches had already slid down the chutes and runnels, natural gullies that channeled avalanches like a riverbed.

James crawled out from the tent and stood beside his brother on the narrow ledge, looking at the perilous 3,000-foot drop.

"First step's a doozy," he joked.

"That's for sure," replied Sebastian.

"Whew! Chilly," said James, pulling on his wool cap over his ears.

"Where do we go from here?" he asked.

"I think we can summit today. We'll work our way over there, around that snow chute, and then cross over to there," replied Sebastian, tracing their proposed route in the air with his index finger. "Once we make it above this slope, we should be able to reach the summit in an hour or two."

"We gonna pack up camp?" asked James.

"No. We'll leave it here. We should be able to make summit and climb back down just in time for dinner, with maybe an hour or two to spare. We'll travel light and fast, carrying our packs with just our climbing gear and some quick-energy snacks."

"Speaking of lightening the load," said James, unzipping his pants and whizzing over the edge, the stream of pee traveling over half a mile to the bottom of the cliff.

Sebastian joined him.