



THEMENDOUS pressure within the ice causes natural upheavals such as the pressure ridge (above) extending far across the ice fields, and gaping crevasses (below) that reach hundreds of feet to form great deathtraps.

## Crevasse Junction and the Train

Major Merle "Skip" Dawson's advance trail party tackled ice chasms in earnest November 18.

First the electronic crevasse detector was pushed cautiously forward to detect concealed flaws in the ice. When its graph indicated a snow-covered void men probed with rods. Maybe it would be a crevasse, maybe just soft snow, so sensitive was the machine.

Demolition charges were planted and exploded, opening large and small craters cleanly so tractors could bulldoze snow to fill them, then pack the snow with their 54-inch pads. Cracks too large to fill were detoured.

A helicopter flown from Little America by Marine First Lieutenant LeRoy Kenny made 97 flights in the seven-and-a-half-mile area, laying out flags to mark dangers and fuel drums to mark the direction of safest advance. Trailblazers found that very often a crevasse symptom can be seen from a hovering helicopter that would go undetected by a man standing on the snow or riding a snow-vehicle. (In November the sun's elevation is so low it tends to cast long shadows which can be seen from the air but not from the surface.)

The battle for trail safety was waged foot by foot in an effort to insure that no tractor or its driver would meet the fate of Max Kiel who died the preceding March at Prestrod Inlet while bridging a crevasse.

Even as church services were held at Little America, Navy airmen loaded more and more dynamite into B4Ds and an Otter plane to make ski-landings at Crevasse Junction. The rate of dynamite expenditure averaged 800 pounds per mile of bridged crevasses.

The trail party reached what appeared an impasse. Previously ice chasms could be bridged or bypassed with safety. Now two crevasse systems converged at a point ahead. It couldn't be detoured.

The choice was to abandon all the work that had gone before, or to blast the giant cavern open and attempt to fill it. Meantime the season grew late.

They blasted. They filled. Opened, the chasm looked like a minor Grand Canyon. Two D-8 tractors bladed 105,000 cubic yards of snow (more than 700 standard hears full) into the canyon. Still the walls of the valley were twelve feet above the trail, but the 30-foot-wide trail was safe.

Crevasse Junction passed its final safety examination December 4, 1956 when a loaded sled was pulled to the safety of the Rockefeller Plateau by a 38-ton tractor.

Attainment of the plateau by the advance party was the signal for departure of a six-tractor two-sled train from Little America under Chief Warrant Officer Victor Young who rode shotgun in a weasel.

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