

FAST AND LIGHT

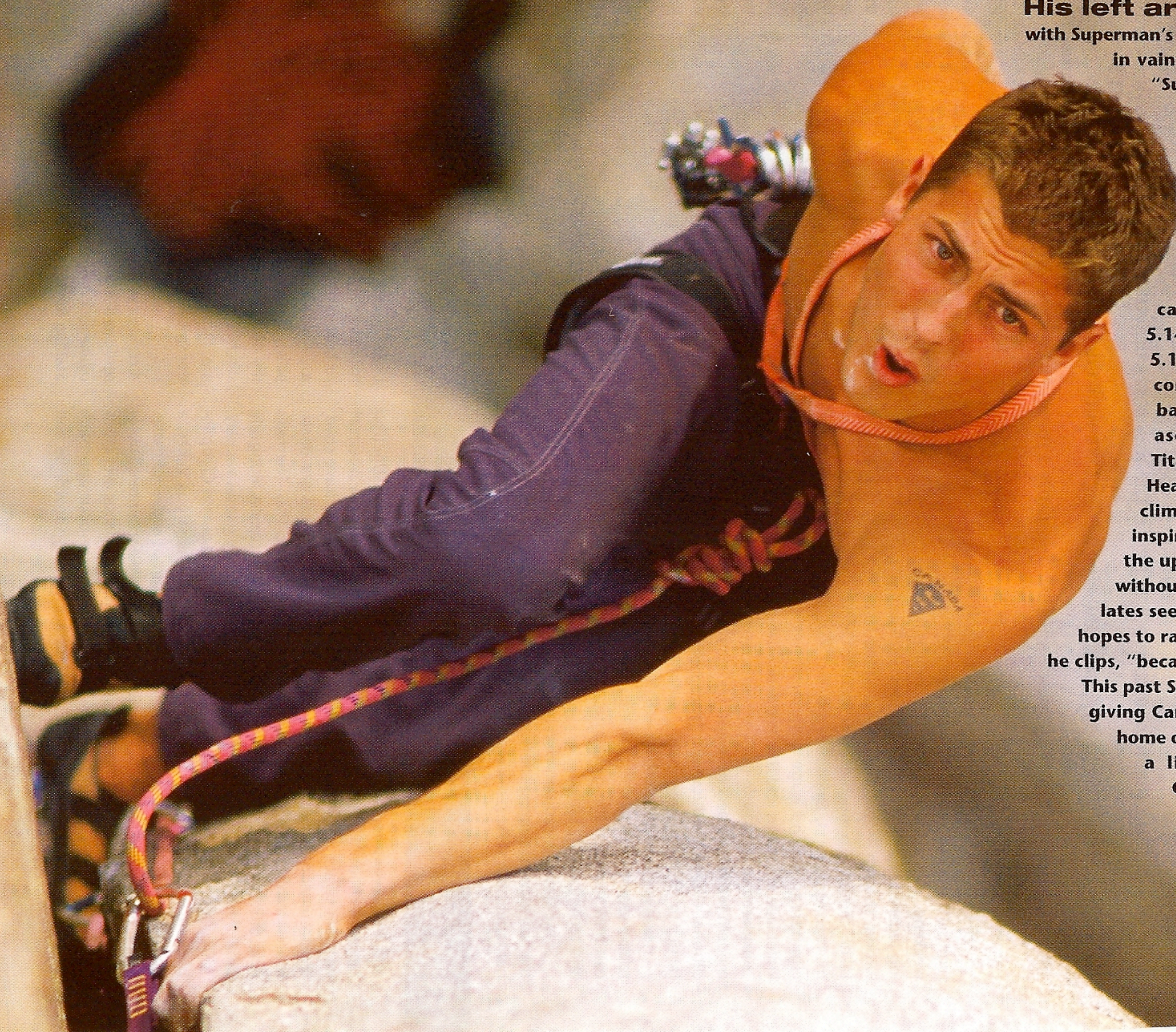
sonny trotter

A 5.14 VISION FOR THE GREAT WHITE NORTH *by Stephanie Forte*

His left arm is inked
with Superman's capital S insignia, not
in vain but for Canadian pride.

"Superman is a Canadian hero,
but no one knows it," says 22-
year-old Sonnie Trotter of New
Market, Ontario. His unwavering
patriotism is catalyst for his mission,
"I want to make a difference in Canadian
climbing," he says. "I don't know how,
maybe by just climbing as hard as I can."

No problem there: In his five-year climbing
career, Trotter has ticked 26 5.14s, including a
5.14c and Smith Rock's Just Do It (America's first
5.14c, now consensus 5.14b). Trotter is especially
conscious of focusing at least some of that effort
back home. In June of 2000, he made the first
ascent of eastern Canada's premier 5.14a,
Titan, a 140-foot abandoned project in Lions
Head, Ontario, that he rebolted. "It's about
climbing hard, but it is also about being an
inspiration," says Trotter, whose quick rise to
the upper echelon of sport climbing left him
without a mentor. His motivation, he says, esca-
lates seeing local kids trying his routes. Trotter
hopes to raise the standard with each 5.14 anchor
he clips, "because inspiration goes a long way."
This past September, Trotter inspired again by
giving Canada its first 5.14c. Near his new
home of Squamish, B.C., he redpointed
a linkup of several lines in
Cheakamus Canyon, calling
the route, what else?
Superman.



the turning point

After taking up climbing at age 17, Trotter spent just two long, Canadian winters daydreaming about American climbing hot spots before he quit hockey, sold his snowboard and headed for Rifle, Colorado, with girlfriend Lisa Dumper. "I was like, 'Where is Tommy Caldwell?' I was waiting to see all these famous people," he laughs. It was Trotter, however, who made the stir. ■ As Trotter watched Dumper, who was barely climbing 5.10 when she arrived at Rifle, throw herself at much harder climbs — she redpointed a 5.13a by the end of the summer trip — he began to wonder whether he wasn't aiming too low with his own project, Fluff Boy (5.13c). "[Lisa] opened my eyes," says Trotter, who admits he had a tendency to try routes well within his abilities. "I started trying hard." By the time he left Rifle, Trotter redpointed two 5.13ds, Simply Read and Soup Nazi, and Yellow Card, Zulu and Don't Trust Whitey, all 5.14a. Oh yes, he sent Fluff Boy, too.

faster than a speeding bullet

Thanks to a lightning-fast style, Trotter hardly knows what "project" means. Eleven months after his initiation into climbing in a gym, he stood upon the winner's podium at the Canadian Junior Nationals, already having redpointed 5.13a — on his second try. At Rifle, in a feat of stunning endurance, he onsighted The 8th Day (5.13a), hanging all 23 quickdraws in the process. And his first 5.14a, Yellow Card, took him just four tries. In fact, only three routes have made Trotter tie in more than 10 times: 21 attempts on Bionic Spaceboy (5.13d), at Old Baldy; 16 on The Crew (5.14b), at Rifle; and 16 on Down System (5.14a), at Squamish. The former competitive gymnast admits these routes meant the most, "I have fun when I try hard. That's what motivates me."

the talisman

"It's like Tinkerbell's pixy dust or Popeye's spinach," says Trotter, explaining a certain blue quickdraw he carries on his harness. Given to his girlfriend when they first began dating, the 'draw became the center of a ritual — the couple exchange it whenever they separate. At Mt. Charleston last summer, when the draw vanished, Trotter's stream of good climbing came to a halt. ■ Four frustrating days later, when he organized his car to move on to Utah, Trotter found the quickdraw amid the mess of clothes and gear. Clipping it to his harness for one final day of climbing, Trotter made his way to the crag, where he flashed Urban Decay (5.12c) as a warm-up, repeated Closing Down (5.14a) and redpointed Facile, the route's 5.14b extension. "I was so in the zone," he recalls. Next, he redpointed Screaming Target (5.13c) and its extension Direct Hit (5.14a). "The draw gives me an extra boost because I know someone behind it loves me," says Trotter. He finished the day with Run for the Border (5.13b).

superblunder | superhero

"I made the biggest mistake a sport climber could make," recalls Trotter, describing the dreary winter day in 2000 that the rope holding his climbing partner, Steve Townsend, slipped through his hands and the GriGri, leaving Townsend airborne for over 50 feet. "I caused him a potential death fall," says Trotter. ■ Instinctively, Trotter judged Townsend's landing and dove beneath his partner, breaking his fall and saving his life. Miraculously, neither climber was seriously injured. In the following months, safety-conscious Trotter became a sought-after spotter in Fontainebleau. "If he can break a fall from 50 feet..." joked his friends.

home again, home again

"Climbing is about choosing your own direction and fate," says Trotter. So, in spite of frigid Canadian winters, a dollar that plummets in value across the border, life out of a 1984 Chevy Van and a job as line cook, Trotter chooses to continue living in Squamish. "I just want to give back to Canada," he says. Trotter sees his life changing one day — a gifted artist, he intends to eventually study art or film. But not before freeing the Grand Wall in Squamish and ticking Peter Croft's unrepeatable Ontario roof crack, The Monument (5.12d). Who knows? He might even leap a tall building in a single bound (in Winnipeg or Québec, of course). ▲

GOOD LORD! CANADIANS KNOW HOW TO PLACE GEAR, TOO? TROTTER THE TRADSTER ON THE CITY OF ROCKS' CRACK OF DOOM.