



AAC Publications

Tatina Spire, Mt. Neveragain, various summits and possible first ascents.

Alaska, Kichatna Mountains

The Equipe Nationale d'Alpinisme Masculine is a group of young climbers selected by the FFME to learn the skills of high-level alpinism over a three-year period, culminating in an expedition project. Our team of Philippe Batoux, Thomas Vialletet, Jonathan Crison, Olivier François, Sebastien Brugalla, Dimitri Munoz, Helias Millerieux, Zsolt Ozstian, and me represent the 16th advancement of this group. For our expedition project, we chose the Kichatnas, as they appeared wild and ripe for exploration, especially in early season.

On March 9, we established our base camp in the middle of the Tatina Glacier, affording us a magical playground. On March 10, half of our team went to the south end of Tatina Glacier to have a closer look at the beautiful north face of North Triple Peak, while the others attempted what appeared to be perfect melted snow runnels on the east face of the aptly named Flattop Peak. For both teams, the enthusiasm was short-lived. Triple Peak was full of snow and huge cornices, and the perfect-looking runnels on Flattop were only powder snow over rock.

On the 11th, we split into three teams and headed in different directions. Dimitri, Helias, and Zsolt attempted a big gully just left of Mt. Jeffers' north summit. The climbing was serious with scary, runout sections on very thin ice, and they were forced to bail below the summit. Philippe and Thomas found a nice *apéritif* on the west side of Tatina Glacier: a big snow slope with mixed climbing. The route reached a rocky summit, possibly unclimbed before. They suggested naming the summit "Pointe Olive" in memory of our friend and teammate Olivier Bernade, and named the climb Alaska Warm Way (800m, 3R M5). Meanwhile, Jonathan, Olivier, and I spotted a perfect gully heading up to a nice summit. The 800m climb was easy, mostly 40° to 60° snow, with a short section of vertical ice and two big chockstones that provided some M5 climbing. By the time we all returned to base camp, we were already thinking about the next day's projects.

On March 12, Philippe, Thomas, and Seb left for the right side of the east face of Tatina Spire, where some very thin gullies looked attractive at the top of the face. But, once again, what they expected to be ice was revealed to be inconsistent snow. They were forced to climb on the rock, and bailed due to lack of protection. The same day, Jonathan, Olivier, and I headed for a mostly rocky line on the southwest face of Mt. Jeffers' south peak. We found some old gear in the middle of the climb—likely the Fitschen-Raymond-Robbins route (1969). About half of our route deviated from the original line, and the climb was enjoyable, with nice featured granite, some scary belays, unreliable flakes, and, again, astounding views from the top (800m, 6b M5 A2).

According to our weather report, March 14 was supposed to be the last day of sun, so we all left camp highly motivated. Philippe, Thomas, and Sebastien are definitely not ardent hikers; they chose to explore an evident gully just above camp, on the west part of the glacier. Their new route alternates boring deep powder sections with interesting mixed climbing. As the weather changed, the wind increased and they sometimes felt like they were climbing in a large ventilator, so they named their route *Vive le Vent* (800m, 4 M5+). In the next valley to the south, still on the west side of the glacier, Dimitri, Helias, and Zsolt reached the top of Tatina Spire. A long snow gully brought them to a notch before climbing up the mixed west ridge to summit. They named the route *Arête Bernade* (800m, WI3 M5). Jonathan, Olivier, and I went into a parallel valley further to the south, where we climbed a very nice gully with perfect steep, *couik* snow, followed by moderate ground that led us to the top of Mt. Neveragain. We didn't see any gear on the route, and did not see any information about previous

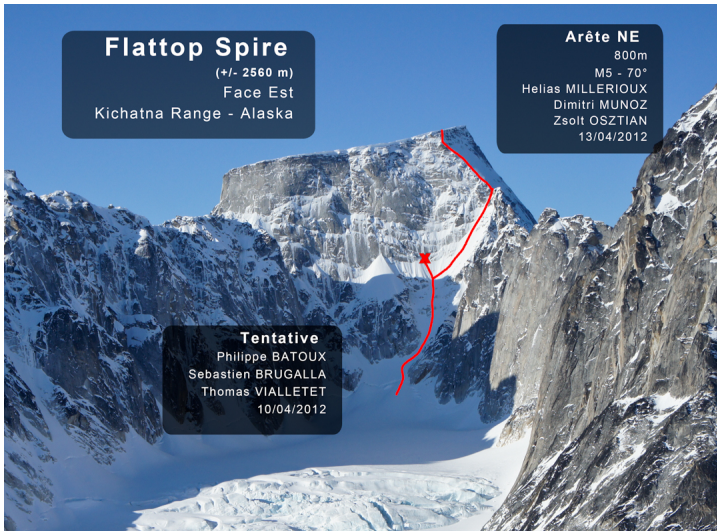
ascents. We named the route I'm Comin' Again (800m, WI5+). No doubt, in the Alps this route would become a "classique."

The next four days reminded us that we were in the Kichatnas: bad weather, snow, wind, and a lot of time to maintain our new American-size bellies. On March 18, though, the weather improved, and on the following day we left camp with high ambitions. Philippe and Seb went back to the east face of Tatina Spire, but this time a bit farther on the right. We called them the Russians, as they attacked a direct line up the middle of the steepest part of the face! It looked hard, but they found the way. After two days of climbing, they fixed three pitches of high-level aid and mixed climbing. The route above looked awesome, but the weather deteriorated so they descended. During this time, Jonathan, Oliver, and I started a new project on the huge west face of Mt. Jeffers. We fixed the first 200m: a pleasant line of mixed climbing with a run-out pitch masterfully lead by "Air" Olive. A portion of the route reminded us of the Eiger's "God Traverse," which brought us to the foot of an amazing line heading straight to the north summit of Mt. Jeffers. With a bad weather forecast for the coming days, we decided to bail and try this king line during a better window.

On March 20, Jonathan, Oliver, and I returned to Mt. Neveragain, where we spotted a nice gully to the left of our previous route. It was mostly solid snow, but we faced the strange experience of climbing vertical, unconsolidated powder. This new route joined its right twin sister at the top of the steepest part. But, being French—read: cowards and lazy—we didn't go back to the summit, and by an easy traverse we descended to the right. We called the route Oups, I Did It Again! (400m, WI5).

The next three days were classic, bad Kichatna weather. We had only two remaining days to finish our projects. On March 24 and 25, Philippe, Seb, and Thomas finished their king line on Tatina Spire with beautiful, hard, and airy mixed climbing, followed by powder snow over smooth granite slabs. They reached the east *antecime* of Tatina for what they called the Directe Française (700m, 5R M7 A3); no doubt, this is the hardest line our team established during our trip. Jonathan, Oliver, and I faced uncertain weather on our own project, and the collapse of a big snow mushroom a few meters away caused us to bail from our final attempt on Mt. Jeffers. On March 26, the planes of Talkeetna Air Taxi arrived for our rendezvous, bringing us back with all our garbage, dreams, and souvenirs of this amazing and wild place.

Images



Flattop Spire, east face, Northeast Arete topo.



[Left to right] Middle Tripple, Mt. Nevermore, Mt. Neveragain, Flattop Spire, Tatina Spire



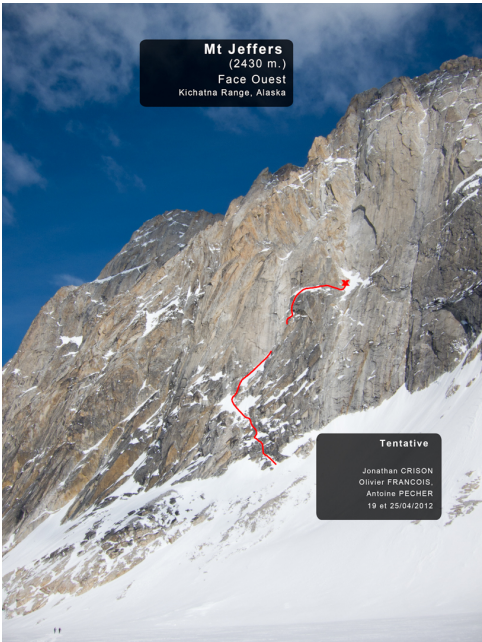
Mt. Jeffers, Robbins Variation topo



Unfinished line on Mt. Jeffers topo.



An unfinished line on Mt. Jeffers.



Mt. Jeffers, unfinished line on Mt. Jeffers.



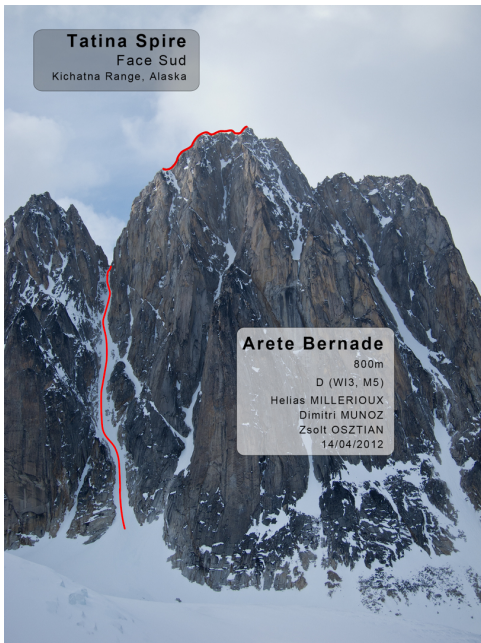
Mt. Neveragain: Oups, I Did It Again! (left) and I'm Comin' Again (right), two routes established on the French expedition.



The highpoint that the team called Point Olive, with Alaska Warm Way (left) and Vive le Vent (right).



Tatina Spire, showing Directe Française, the hardest route established by the French team.



Possible new route, Arete Bernade on Tatina Spire's south face.



The view of Middle Triple Peak from base camp.



The view of Mt. Jeffers from base camp.



Sebastien Brugalla leading the A3 pitch of the Directe Française.

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