



AAC Publications

Mendenhall Towers, West Tower, The Fall Line

Alaska, Coast Mountains

In October, during a rare high-pressure system, Gabe Hayden and I managed an interesting new line in the Mendenhall Towers, outside Juneau. In an attempt to further promote the “hike in, hike out” approach ethic, we opted to hike from Montana Creek over Grandchild Peak. This is not a recommended approach route for this time of year.

We had no idea what to expect. October is generally not a good climbing month in southeast Alaska, because it is uncommon to see a single day without precipitation. We packed for bear—a big-wall rack, ice screws, etc. The north faces were out of condition, so we opted for a line on the west side of the West Tower, starting on the west ridge and leading onto the west face. The west ridge has been climbed several times since Scott Fischer and party made the first ascent over 20 years ago.

Gabe and I made our camp in the moraine on the south side of the towers to escape the wind. From there, we skied to the western toe of the tower and began our ascent. The first few thousand feet climbed steep snow slopes with some crevasse navigation. The meat of the climb began as we gained the saddle between the Rabbit Ears and the West Tower. From there, a fun pitch of M5 dumped us onto the west face. The rest of our line probably only makes sense in the conditions we had. A wind crust covered the rock, adding some stability to many of the difficult sections. We simul-climbed the face in three pitches before reaching the windy, knife-edge summit ridge. We called our route the Fall Line (1,110m, 65° M5).

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Images

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