



AAC Publications

Mt. Steller second ascent, northwest ridge variation

Alaska, Chugach Mountains

On April 22, Jason Buttrick, Jay Claus, Paul Claus, Ruedi Homberger, and I climbed and skied Mt. Steller (10,515'). This was the peak's second ascent after first being climbed over a 10-day period in 1992 [Jacobs-Anderson-Bowling-Wesson, AAJ 1993].

Mt. Steller is the high point of Waxell Ridge, an isolated and convoluted mass sandwiched between the Bagley Icefield and the Bering Glacier. While not particularly high in elevation, its relative stature provides staggering views. To the south it falls over 8,000' to the Bering Glacier and, within a few miles, the Gulf of Alaska. Its nearest higher neighbor is over 20 miles away. In a landslide in 2005 an estimated 65 million cubic yards of ice and rock calved off the southern face of the peak. It reverberated with the equivalent of a magnitude 3.8 earthquake, and the debris tumbled eight miles out onto the glacier. Seismic stations around the world felt it; Paul and Ruedi were the first people to see the aftermath, only hours afterward.

Our route began at ca 7,000' on the north flanks of the horseshoe-shaped massif that makes up Steller. We started on a spur left of the first-ascent route. From base camp, we ascended a direct line to join the northwest ridge. The ridge is a ski mountaineer's dream: massive cornices, troughs, and sub-peaks rise above tremendous exposure. Following this leg of the horseshoe ever southward brought us to about ca 10,000' and a high glacial basin under the summit. Here, the first-ascent team chose to follow the northwest ridge to the summit. We chose a more ski-friendly route by crossing under the summit and traversing southwest to a rime-blasted col with dizzying views of the Gulf of Alaska. We booted the final few hundred feet to the summit, reversed our route on the descent, and arrived back in base camp 12 hours after starting (IV AI3 70°).

Images



The new variation up Mt. Steller.



Skinning up the corniced ridge on Mt. Steller. The team climbed two variations to the original route up the northwest ridge.

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