



AAC Publications

Peak 13,100' (Reality Peak), east face, The Reality Face

Alaska, Central Alaska Range

Jared Vilhauer and I spent all day skiing up and down the West Fork of the Ruth Glacier and looking for an inspiring, safe line to give our all. Our original objective was sporting a new look—its summit snow slopes had cracked open to reveal a hanging serac that might, just might, sweep our route clean were it to cut loose. Surprised and a bit bummed, we kept scoping for something that wasn't so threatened. Jared's little black book led us up another fork of the glacier and under the 4,000' east face of what we would later nickname Reality Peak. [Reality Peak is a ca 13,100' satellite peak of Denali, located on its southeast spur, rising above the West Fork of the Ruth Glacier to the north of Mt. Huntington and northwest of Peak 11,300'.] One "safe" line existed in an otherwise chaotic landscape of ice cliffs, snow mushrooms, and soaring granite walls. After a few pictures we glided back to camp to meet our friend Seth Timpano, who was due to fly in that evening.

We gathered in the rapidly chilling evening. "What do you guys want to climb?" said Seth. Jared explained what we had seen that day and put in his two cents. I fidgeted as we broke down the details. "I think the route on Reality Peak has a fair amount of danger, but no more than what we've already accepted by coming to climb big routes in the Alaska Range," Jared said. He was right. High fives sealed the pact before an icy, down-glacier breeze sent us crawling into the tents.

The Reality Face: A new route in the Alaska Range from Max Hasson on Vimeo.

The next afternoon we donned crampons and stashed skis as shade crept over Reality Peak's east face. "I can get us started," Jared said, already clipping gear to the loops on his harness. The following 17 hours were filled with ecstasy and torment. Crisp snow, flowing ice runnels, and one-swing sticks were balanced with dehydration and exhaustion. A cramped and foggy bivy stalled us at ca 12,000' for nearly a full day. When the clouds parted we attacked the final 1,100' to the summit. Of course, the ridge climbing was steeper, longer, and scarier than expected. The exposure, although camouflaged with misty clouds, made the ridge feel like a monster swaying just below our boots.

Three days earlier I had been indecisive and fearful. At the top, peace filled me. I had made my choice and was living with the beautiful consequences. After downclimbing the ridge, we brewed, ate, and then broke down our high camp and started 4,000' of rappels. A powerful sun caught us while rappelling. Snow mushrooms clung inexplicably to the granite walls above, and ice chunks tinkled down the grooves in the steep couloir we were descending. If something fell from above there was no place to hide.

Once past the 'schrund, I pulled the ropes and heel-plunged down one last slope. Within moments of clicking into our skis, Reality Peak fell far behind.

[Editor's note: The Reality Face (5,300', AI5, Holsten-Timpano-Vilhauer, 2013) topped out on 13,100' "Reality Peak" on the southeast spur. Two earlier routes had reached this satellite summit and followed the southeast spur to Denali's south buttress, then continued up by the 1954 route: the Southeast Spur (Cochrane-Everett, 1962) and Reality Ridge (AK Grade 4+, 5.5 A2, Florschütz-Metcalf-Stoller-Thuermer, 1975). The 2013 team descended their route from the satellite summit.]

Jens Holsten

Images



Seth Timpano entering the goods midway up the Reality Face. The route contained numerous sections of well-formed and steep waterfall ice before gaining the ridge.



Leading a step of vertical ice.



Looking down the upper part of the climb.



Climbing steep and deep snow on the upper mountain.



Climbing the final ridge to the summit of "Reality Peak."



The southeast-east aspect of Denali, showing (A) Reality Peak and (1) The Reality Face. (B) Reality Ridge. (S) Thayer Basin. (C) Southeast spur. (D) Denali, main summit. (E) South buttress and (2) Isis Face. (F) Ridge of No Return.



Thinly iced mixed climbing low the route.

Article Details

Author	Jens Holsten
Publication	AAJ
Volume	56
Issue	88
Page	142
Copyright Date	2014
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions