



## AAC Publications

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### **Mt. Laurens, northeast buttress**

Alaska, Central Alaska Range

Mark Allen and I had an excellent and fruitful expedition into the Central Alaska Range in May, making the probable second ascent of Mt. Laurens (10,042') via a new route on its northeast buttress (4,650', V AI4 M7 A1).

Mt. Laurens is a prominent peak located along a ridgeline that runs south from the Fin (ca 13,300'), between the Yentna and Lacuna glaciers. Mark and I sighted the very impressive east face of Mt. Laurens during our first ascent of Voyager Peak (ca 12,213', AAJ 2012) in 2011, dubbing it the "Mastodon Face." Other peaks in the area include the Bat's Ears (ca 11,044', Wilkinson-Turgeon-Gilmore, AAJ 2009) and another unclimbed peak (ca 10,020').

Paul Roderick alerted us to a prior ascent of Laurens by Austrian climber Thomas Bubendorfer, who he flew into the Yentna Glacier in 1997. [Bubendorfer reportedly spent 16 days alone in the area and soloed the peak by the north face and west ridge in an 11-hour push. He named the peak for his son. In 1983, Bubendorfer set a speed climbing record for the north face of the Eiger that stood for 20 years, among other impressive climbs and solos.]

In early May, Paul flew us to a new landing strip in the Ramparts, located between the Lacuna and Kahiltna glaciers. We then approached for two days on skis up the Lacuna Glacier to the confluence with its southwest fork (ca 14km). Between May 9–15, Mark and I made two attempts on the very precipitous east buttress of Laurens, getting turned around both times after 1,500' of climbing, due to blank, overhanging walls and very dangerous climbing on an unformed ice hose.

On the evening of May 20 we started up the northeast buttress instead. The first half of the route comprised difficult mixed climbing, separated by long sections of excellent, steep ice and snow climbing. After this initial section we bivied on a beautiful prow. The second half of the route gained a steep snow arête that we ascended to the confluence with the north ridge. We continued up this ridge to a short second bivy. This bivy site was superb, affording excellent views of the Alaska Range, including Foraker and Hunter. The entire ridge provided wild, unprotected climbing on steep snow, both over and around huge gargoyles, and eventually led us to the summit plateau.

On the summit we were caught in a very cold windstorm that forced us to hunker down for three uncomfortable hours in our tent. With the coming of the sun the wind died, and we were able to climb one final pitch of 70° snow to the summit. Our GPS and altimeter showed the summit elevation at 10,042'.

We descended along the southern end of the east face, following a series of couloirs. We made 12 total rappels on ice, snow, and rock, and were then able to downclimb steep snow for another 2,000' to the glacier. The route took us a total of 67 hours—59 hours up and eight hours down. We rested for a day and a half before skiing back to the landing strip. A combination of an adventurous approach, exploratory alpinism, marvelous position, and challenging climbing gave the trip a fabulous flavor.

Graham Zimmerman

## Images



Graham Zimmerman leading up beautiful granite on an earlier attempt on the face.



Mark Allen on the final ridge traverse to the summit.



Mark Allen Traverses through the second rock back on the successful climb.



he northeast buttress of Mt. Laurens as climbed by Allen and Zimmerman from the Lacuna Glacier. The line reported by Bubendorfer on the north face lies on the other side of the peak, starting from the Yentna Glacier. The attempted east buttress lies left of the line shown.



Mark Allen climbing ice on the northeast buttress.



Graham Zimmerman at the second bivy.

## Article Details

Author	Graham Zimmerman
Publication	AAJ
Volume	56
Issue	88
Page	144
Copyright Date	2014
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions