



AAC Publications

Gargoyle, Beauty and the Beast; Tooth Traverse, second ascent

Alaska, Ruth Gorge

When Alex Bluemel and I (both Austrians) arrived in the Ruth Gorge on May 19 it was wintertime. However, things began to change immediately as an extraordinary weather window lasting more than a month established itself. The mountains started to shake off their winter jacket.

We were alone the first week. It was quite a tough time, as we had no information about conditions. Several of our attempts were forced down by icefall and avalanches. "Winter is definitely over here!" we thought. But the rock was far from dry. Having investigated the area in detail, we discovered that other Austrian alpinists had played a big role in the history of Ruth Gorge climbing. Andi Orgler left big routes on almost every important summit in the Great Gorge, including the Wine Bottle on Mt. Dickey and the Pearl on Mt. Bradley. Previously unknown to us, he seems almost forgotten over in Europe. We hoped to leave our own mark.

Our first target for a new route was a big system of cracks and corner systems on the Gargoyle, supposedly unclimbed. After being driven off the climb, we gathered motivation and gear again and forged a new line on May 29 with one bivy sitting in the middle of the wall and one on the summit (to give the snow time to freeze for the descent). Two days later we returned to free three remaining aid pitches. Afterward, only one aid pitch remained because of chossy rock, overhanging snow, and running water combined with very poor protection (A3). In such conditions this 30m pitch was a tough, psycho fight, and we agreed it would provide hardly any more pleasure if dry.

The name Beauty and the Beast (650m, 7a+ A3) was easy to decide. "The Beauty" was found lower on the route in the form of finger cracks, roofs, and flakes, all on perfectly solid rock; "The Beast," well, you can guess. For the record, we placed one bolt on the aid pitch and left a few pitons in situ.

After two weeks of high pressure, the amazing weather window was interrupted by a few bad weather days, affording us time for socializing with our neighbors Freddie Wilkinson, Renan Ozturk, and Alex Honnold. Sitting in the tent with the American climbers, we got more and more psyched on trying the Tooth Traverse, which was only completed last year after a few attempts by Freddie and Renan. We decided it was ridge season, as the time for couloirs and ice was long over and it was still too early to rock climb.

When the high pressure returned we set off on June 6 at 10 p.m. toward the Sugar Tooth and reached the summit around lunchtime the next day. After a nap we continued to the Eye Tooth, following the Talkeetna Standard up the south ridge. Following a 24-hour climbing day, we were happy to establish a bivy below the summit of Eye Tooth. From there, a 12-hour day brought us to the Bear Tooth, where we bivied for the night. The third full day was a long one again. We rappelled the White Russian (AAJ 2005) from the Bear Tooth and climbed the Swamp Donkey Express up the Mooses Tooth, taking about 14 hours. However, the day was not over. A long descent down the west ridge of the Mooses Tooth proved tricky at times, with cornices waiting in the dim light.

We were so happy to realize the Tooth Traverse for the second ascent, just one year after the first ascent. We reached our base camp at 9 a.m. on June 10, 83 hours after setting off. Special thanks to Renan and Freddie for the inspiration and good beta.

Gerhard Fiegl, Austria

Images



Alex Bluemel leading steep and sunny cracks on the Gargoyle.



Leading a rotten pitch on the Gargoyle.



Alex Bluemel enjoying perfect weather and rock on the Gargoyle.



The south-southwest aspect of the Gargoyle, which is located just west of the Mooses Tooth massif at the north end of the Ruth Gorge, showing (1) Beauty and the Beast and approximate lines of (2) New Mother Nature (Medara-Spauling, 1996) and (3) Electric View (Holden-Kalland-Lund-Mjaavatn, 2004). See AAJ 2006 for another view of these earlier climbs from the southeast.



Making the second ascent of the Tooth Traverse.



A rough overview of the Tooth Traverse.

Article Details

Author	Gerhard Fiegl
Publication	AAJ
Volume	56
Issue	88
Page	152
Copyright Date	2014
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions