



AAC Publications

Peak 7,400', north face, Gangster's Paradise (no summit); Thunder Peak, north face, Kearney-Mascioli variation

Alaska, Ruth Gorge

On April 25, Eitan Green and I flew into the Ruth Gorge with a good forecast and three weeks to get something done. Our first five days in the range were productive: We set up camp in the Root Canal, knocking off Shaken Not Stirred and Ham and Eggs on back-to-back days. After a rest, we finished with the Japanese Couloir on Mt. Barille. These climbs afforded us perspective on other objectives in the region, and we decided to set our sights on the north face of Peak 7,400', where several enticing ice smears seemed to link snowfields and steep rock. [Editor's note: Peak 7,400' is an unnamed summit located on the east side of the Ruth Gorge, across from Mt. Bradley.]

A storm then dropped two feet of snow, delaying our plans for several days. Eventually, we started up the left side of the north face of Peak 7,400', enduring one scary spindrift incident and constantly questioning our decision to continue. The first half of the route contained moderate climbing, but soon we were committed, as the compact rock made anchor-building difficult and the ice smears that had excited us days earlier turned out to be unprotected névé.

In the upper third of the route, awkward climbing around a snow mushroom led to a pendulum to overcome steep, blank rock and reach another corner system. Night fell and four more pitches of challenging mixed climbing, aid up overhanging corners, and an exciting finish up unconsolidated snow mushrooms and cornices brought us to the summit ridge. A shovel and pickets were critical for forward progress on the final pitch. Shivering, we were happy to find the morning sun at the top of the face, and we elected to immediately descend toward the Coffee Glacier rather than complete the route to the summit. We slogged over Cavity Gap and back to our skis, returning to camp after about 30 hours on the move. We named the route **Gangster's Paradise (V AI4 M6 A2)**. [Editor's note: Two other routes ascend terrain on the northwest and west aspects of Peak 7,400': the Bibler-Klewin (1989), which climbs the prow formed by the north and west faces, and the Optimist (Amano-Masumoto-Nagato, 2010), which climbs the west face, possibly sharing some terrain with the earlier route near the exit.]

The next morning saw us frantically packing up camp and dragging it a half-mile to the airstrip to meet Paul Roderick, who flew us to a small fork below the north side of Thunder Mountain on the Kahiltna Glacier for our final week in the range. It immediately lived up to its name, as we saw numerous, enormous serac avalanches, including several that seemed to threaten our intended line on Mt. Providence. We settled for our Plan B, which turned out to be a very enjoyable climb up the far right side of Thunder Peak's north face, leading to a prominent col, and then up snow slopes on the peak's west ridge to the summit.

We climbed the first part of the route to the col in 14 pitches with some moderate mixed climbing through rock bands (AI4 M5). After a comfortable bivy at the col on the ridge, a traverse toward Thunder Peak led to 50° snow slopes and roughly 1,800' of elevation gain to the summit. We chose to downclimb and rappel the route, which was straightforward and deposited us back at camp after 30 hours away.

[Editor's note: The route climbed by Green and Hennessey on "Thunder Peak" ascends a line just right of the Kearney-Mascioli (1983), then joins that route on the west ridge to the summit. It should be noted that "Thunder Peak" (Peak 10,600') is a separate summit from the slightly taller "Thunder Mountain" (Peak

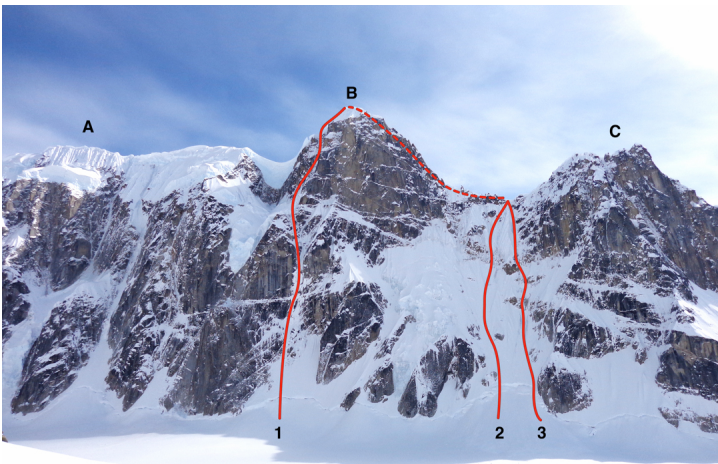
10,920'). The two names have been used synonymously and incorrectly in the past. See photo caption for further clarification.]

Sam Hennessey

Images



The north face of Peak 7,400' showing Gangster's Paradise on the left and the Optimist on the right; the Bibler-Klewin route climbs just left of the latter. See AAJ 2011 for another photo of the right-side lines.



The north side of the "Thunder Mountain" massif, showing (A) "Thunder Mountain" (a.k.a. Peak 10,920'), (B) "Thunder Peak" (a.k.a. Peak 10,600'), and (C) an unnamed peak. "Thunder Peak" was first climbed in 1983 by Kearney and Mascioli, who ascended a line (2) to the prominent col, then up the west ridge (right skyline) to the summit; they did not climb "Thunder Mountain." The summit of "Thunder Peak" was reached again from the north by Tackle and Smith via a new route, Tangled Up In Blue (1), in 2009. Green and Hennessey completed a new variation to the right of the Kearney-Mascioli route leading to the prominent col (3), then repeated the first-ascent route up the west ridge to the summit. "Thunder Mountain" has never been climbed from the north side but has seen a number of ascents and attempts from the south. It was first climbed by Barlow and Hornby (AAJ 1994) from a couloir on the south side [see AAJ 2001 for a detailed route line photo of the south face]. Peak (C) has been mistaken for Peak 9,070', which lies further west; Peak 9,070' was also climbed by Barlow and Hornby from the northwest (AAJ 1994).

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