



## AAC Publications

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### **Mt. Frances, north buttress, Scratch and Sniff**

Alaska, Central Alaska Range

In May, Andres Marin and I made a short but exhilarating expedition into the Central Alaska Range. Our goal was to explore the East Fork of the Kahiltna Glacier for new routes. Despite its proximity to Kahiltna Base Camp in the Southeast Fork, the East Fork receives little traffic. Based off several photographs Andres had seen, we decided to take a look. After much reconnoitering we found a hidden gem we had initially overlooked.

Unseasonably warm temperatures made climbing on nearly every aspect at lower elevations questionable. We first skied past the south faces of the east and west Kahiltna Peaks, where Vince Anderson and Barry Blanchard established several lines in the early 2000s. Further up glacier, we scouted Mt. Andrews, a prominent sub-peak on Denali's South Buttress. Feeling slightly disheartened about the conditions, we skied back to our camp under the east ridge of Mt. Frances. It didn't freeze that night. As we weighed our next move, I suddenly found myself tracing a line up a rocky buttress on the north side of Frances. Although significantly shorter than any line we were hoping to climb, it seemed like a worthy consolation and a fun day out.

The next morning we left at the leisurely hour of 11 a.m. and began wallowing through deep slush over the bergschrund. We enjoyed some simul-climbing up a right-trending snow ledge that led to a weakness in the first steep rock band. Andres then lead an amazing 65m pitch up a steep corner and then up a wide, left-facing chimney. Above that, almost every pitch contained a technical 5m to 15m crux of engaging M5/6 climbing. Just as one option closed, another opened. As the sun set we found ourselves near the top, but the climbing remained stiff. After about nine hours we topped out on the pointed, ca 9,000 summit of the north buttress.

Several rappels on rock gear led to an easy descent down an adjacent ice gully, where 11 rappels got us back to camp. While we were unable to attempt any of the intimidating and challenging climbs we had planned on, we discovered that big things come in small packages. Our new route, Scratch and Sniff (1,200', IV M6 5.8) on "Stubbs' Buttress" (named in honor of Talkeetna's world-famous cat mayor), contained 12 pitches of incredible climbing on a previously untouched feature, less than two hours from Kahiltna Base Camp.

Clint Helander

## Images



The north side of Mt. Frances, showing Scratch and Sniff (1,200', IV M6 5.8) on "Stubbs' Butte" (red line) and the descent (green line).



Andres Marin just visible as he spans a large gap.



Andres Marin on lead on Scratch and Sniff.

## Article Details

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