



AAC Publications

Mt. Hayes, Northeast Face to South Buttress, Thicker Than Thieves

Alaska, Hayes Range

It was only by chance that I teamed up with Jason Stuckey, a Fairbanks climber, an upcoming alpinist Angela VanWiemeersch, to climb the east face of Mt. Hayes (13,832'). I had met Jason a few seasons earlier on the remote Nabesna Road in interior Alaska but had only managed to hook up for one day of climbing prior to this trip; I had never met, or even heard of, the other third of our trio, Angela. Jason had met her during a trip to the Central Alaska Range the previous year, and now we were all off to attempt an unclimbed face with new, untried partners. However, Jason's picture of a thin line of ice plastered in the back of a wide chimney had lit the same fire in all three of us simultaneously. It was the perfect recipe for a grand adventure.

We met in Delta Junction in mid-April. Our pilot, Jim Cummings, had to shuttle us to the mountain one at a time in his tiny Super Cub. On the Trident Glacier we finally glassed the route in person. The 6,000' face was a major garbage chute and well beyond our level of acceptable risk. Lacking the bold Euro-blood for the generally hazardous east face (seracs, falling ice, etc.) we decided to take a less steep but safer line on the southeast (far left) end of the wall.

On April 22 we left camp at first light, and by 7 a.m. had crossed the bergschrund. An easy 1,800' of couloir climbing brought us to a short rock band. One pitch of fun, easily protected 5.8 climbing led us to a steep snowfield, which then led to a pitch of boilerplate alpine ice. Above that loomed another steep rock band. A blind, engaging traverse (M5 R) provided the only reasonable path. Luckily this deposited us on another snow and ice slope, and a few more pitches (up to AI4) brought us to the knife-edge ridge atop the wall. Well past dark, we searched for a bivy from behind the feeble beams of our headlamps. The whole affair looked quite bleak until I noticed an overhung cornice, which allowed us to shovel a plush camp in the most unlikely of locations.

The next morning, feeling a bit hammered, we began traversing the knife-edge ridge toward the south summit of Mt. Hayes. The typical Hayes Range winds concerned us, growing more powerful as we wound through an incredible maze of crevasses, cornices, snow bridges, and seracs. Our progress was much slower than anticipated. Still far below the south summit, but with night fast approaching, we found another bivy site among the seracs and drifted off to sleep with a spectacular vista.

We awoke on the third day with a strong desire to finish our route and get off the mountain—and back to our whiskey supply. Quickly reaching the south summit, we joined the South Buttress and headed toward the main summit. [The South Buttress has been incorrectly dubbed the "south ridge" in past AAJs. See [AAJ 2011](#) for a photo of the South Buttress]. By 2 p.m. we were taking cheesy summit photos, completely psyched to be on top of Mt. Hayes.

Unfortunately a 7,000' descent still separated us from our whiskey. A building storm chased us off the summit and down the east ridge. Some highly involved route finding ensued, and we finally made it back to the whiskey at 5 a.m., having completed Thicker Than Thieves (7,300', VI 5.8 AI4 M5). It is worth noting that Sam Johnson, an Alaskan climber, made the same descent solo ([AAJ 2014](#)), a fact that was the source of some consternation during our own downclimb—he obviously possesses that elusive, bold Euro-blood.

[Editor's note: This marks the first time the south buttress of Mt. Hayes has been reached by the Trident Glacier, rather than the Susitna or Turkey glaciers. In all, the trio climbed around 3,000' of new terrain on

the northeast aspect of the mountain before reaching the south summit of Mt. Hayes and then continuing up the South Buttress. From the south summit they gained another 1,300' over 4 miles to reach the main summit of Mt. Hayes, and then descended its east ridge back to the Trident Glacier, completing an approximately 15,000' traverse of the peak.】

John Giraldo, with additional information from Jason Stuckey and Jeff Benowitz

Images



The Hayes Range from Delta Junction. From left to right: Peak 9,400, Mt. McGinnis, Mt. Moffit, Mt. Hayes, Mt. Deborah, Mt. Hess.



The eastern peaks of the Hayes Range from Delta Junction. From left to right: Mt. McGinnis, Mt. Moffit, Mt. Hayes.



The east and southeast face of Mt. Hayes.



The new route Thicker Than Thieves. X's denote bivy sites.



Angela VanWiemeersch low on the face.



Angela VanWiemeersch simul-climbing on steep snow, halfway up the northeast face.



John Giraldo negotiating the first rock band on the northeast face.



Jason Stuckey and Angela VanWiemeersch below the first rock band.



Jason Stuckey and Angela VanWiemeersch simul-climbing towards the ice fin.



Late during the first day, Jason Stuckey leads the last ice pitches to the top of the ridgeline.



Looking down at the northeast face and the cornice bivy.



Angela VanWiemeersch climbing onto the knife-edge toward the south summit of Mt. Hayes.



Angela VanWiemeersch and John Giraldo climbing toward the south summit of Mt. Hayes.



John Giraldo and Angela VanWiemeersch route-finding around seracs and giant crevasses.



Jason Stuckey and Angela VanWiemeersch trying to find a way around the crevasses.



The view from the ice cave bivy, looking out at Mt. Moffit and Mt. Shand.



John Giraldo and Angela VanWiemeersch on the upper slopes of the south buttress.



John Giraldo and Angela VanWiemeersch on the summit plateau, heading toward the main summit on the third day.



Angela VanWiemeersch and John Giraldo on the upper slopes of the main summit.



Summit photo: John Giraldo, Angela VanWiemeersch, and Jason Stuckey.



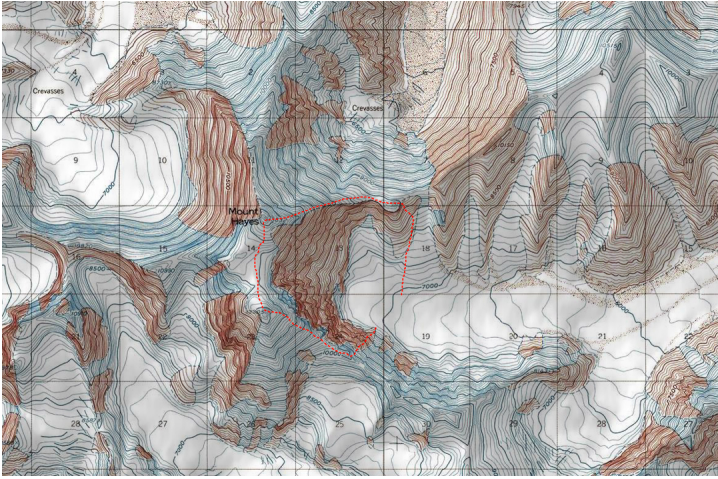
Angela VanWiemeersch heading down the cracked up east ridge.



Angela VanWiemeersch and John Giraldo downclimbing the east ridge.



Jason Stuckey descending the east ridge.



Topo map of route.



John Giraldo and Angela VanWiemeersch look down the northeast aspect of Mt. Hayes from their cornice bivy.



VanWiemeersch leads toward the initial rock band.

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