



## AAC Publications

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### **Mt. Titanic, West Face**

Alaska, Revelation Mountains

**Fred Beckey shifted conspicuously in his chair, looking over his shoulder as if someone were about to steal his most prized possession: Before me lay Beckey's "Black Book," a file of tattered photographs of unknown mountains scrawled with hand-drawn lines.** I had long heard rumors of such a folder, packed with scrupulously kept notes of unclimbed objectives. I gleaned through the information as if it contained heavily guarded nuclear launch codes.

At age 91 Fred Beckey still dreams of first ascents. The peaks he visited in Alaska's Revelation Mountains several decades ago are no exception. Sitting alongside, I helped him identify the few peaks he hadn't yet labeled. One photograph showed a sprawling granite wall simply labeled "unclimbed," but I recognized it immediately. "What do you think of the west face of Titanic?" he asked. "Looks like good granite."

Beckey had made the only ascent of Mt. Titanic (ca 9,300') in 1981 by its east face (Beckey-Hogan-McCarty-Tillery, AAJ 1983), three years before I was born. Of the west face, he wrote in the *American Alpine Journal*, "Facing us was a major granite wall, a climbing opportunity we did not have the time to undertake."

Mt. Titanic had always been at the front of my own "black book," and I felt more than a little guilty when I admitted to him that I had intentions on the craggy monolith. The west face had inspired me since my first trip to the Revelations in 2008. From atop many peaks to the south, I vowed that one day I would venture north for a look. If Beckey thought it worthy, there was no question.

On April 17, Graham Zimmerman and I flew toward Titanic on a halcyon day. Our pilot, Conor McManamin, dropped us off in a small hanging glacial valley in the northern Revelations, above and east of the south fork of Big River. We set up a base camp beneath the southwest ridge of Jezebel Peak (9,620'), which was climbed by Ryan Hokanson and Kirby Spangler while Beckey sauntered around at their base camp (AAJ 2001). From camp we scouted various objectives, but the west face of Titanic beckoned.

We awoke in the dark cold of April 21 to a glorious display of the aurora borealis dancing above Titanic. We took it as a sign and trudged away from camp at 4:30 a.m. with daypacks. Scaling teetering moraines, we made the 2.5-mile approach to the shadowed face in predawn light. Down low the rock quality was poor, but we weren't concerned. On the upper buttress, gorgeous white granite caps everything below.

For 1,300' we kicked steps up a prominent, crescent-shaped snow couloir before the real climbing began. At the top of the couloir, we downclimbed several meters over a notch and I led a long section of simul-climbing over mixed snow, rock, and ice in a gully. Above, we encountered another 1,000' or so of high-quality mixed climbing. Graham started things off on the upper mountain by scratching up a brilliant chimney (M6), and then we swapped leads on generally excellent granite, often hand-jamming without gloves while our crampons scratched for purchase.

In the evening we found ourselves near the top of the face after many pitches of engaging climbing. After a quick brew stop on the upper snowfield, we strolled up the final ridge to the summit and

reveled in the evening light. This was the second ascent of Titanic: the west face (3,500', 5.8 M6 50°).

From the summit, we downclimbed the north side to the northeast face and then rappelled over a cold, shadowy, and serac-laden icefall. A long slog under the northeast face and over a steep pass led us down a glacier under the northwest face of Jezebel Peak. After 5 miles of foot travel, a final, brutal crawl around Jezebel's southwest ridge landed us at camp at 2 a.m. Utterly exhausted from our 22.5-hour push, we imagined Fred Beckey would be proud.

With our story on Titanic finished, we were excited to turn the page to other objectives in in our ever-growing black book of the Revelations. After a few days of rest we headed off to try another climb; however, bad conditions forced us to turn around. During the ski descent back to camp, Graham plummeted into a hidden crevasse and injured his knee. After extracting him, we made our way back to camp and were able to fly out.

A few months after our climb, I received a call from ol'Fred inquiring about another Revelations peak. After discussing our route on Titanic, I asked if he was planning a trip. He sputtered, "I don't know about this year, I'm getting pretty ancient. Maybe next year."

Clint Helander

## Images



The ca 3,500' west face of Mt. Titanic in the Revelations. The new route up the west face climbed the left side of the face by the approximate line shown (the first part of the climb is out of view behind a buttress, and the climb continues up an easier snowfield to the summit).



Fred Beckey (left) and Clint Helander (right).



Graham Zimmerman leading mixed ground on the west face of Titanic.



The unclimbed, ca 3,700-foot north face of Titanic (ca 9,300') on the left and the now climbed west face on the right. Fred Beckey and team made the peak's first ascent in 1981 via the east face.

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