



AAC Publications

Mt. Dan Beard, South Face (Possible Variant) and East Face (Repeat); Peak 11,300', Northeast Buttress (New Routes)

Alaska, Ruth Gorge

I had visited Alaska several times, but this time Junji Wada and I—"Team Wasabi"—had the extreme luxury of not seeing anyone during our seven-week stay on glacier (April 21–June 6). This was a real treat that gave us significant time to face each other, nature, earth, and the mountains around the Don Sheldon Amphitheater more directly. Without any noise, we chose unclimbed lines in this severe and beautiful place by pure sensation.

We completed four climbs in all, three of them new, which we called the "Wasabi Quartet." On April 28 we began with the Wasabi Prelude (V 60°), which wove up a possible new variation on the south face of Mt. Dan Beard (10,260'). [Editor's note: The south face of Mt. Dan Beard was first climbed in 1976 (Boardman-O'Donovan, AAJ 1975) and many "variations" have been reported on its south face over the years so it's difficult to know if the line is new.] The line took us approximately seven hours from base camp. We started up the right (east) side of the south face, and the climb was comprised of a snow and ice gully with some climbing through a rock band. Near the top we climbed the right side of a rock headwall, crawling through a chimney to reach an icy plateau leading to the summit. We descended the same route.

On May 9 we progressed to the Wasabi Concerto (AI4+ M5+ R) on Peak 11,300', climbing the northeast buttress in 18.5 hours. The route faces directly east and is plainly visible from the Sheldon Amphitheater. The lower couloir was choked with rotten ice, rock, and dry snow. When the sun rose and shone upon the upper wall, avalanches began to release periodically through the couloir. The upper rock wall contained six pitches of wide cracks, slabs, chockstones, loose rocks, and ice—a very enjoyable mixed passage. The last part was snow and ice climbing all the way to "Point KJ" (ca 10,500'), which is the highest point along the northeast buttress of Peak 11,300'. We bivouacked on the summit of Point KJ and descended our route the next day with downclimbing and eight rappels.

On May 13 we wove our way up the east face of Dan Beard in 12 hours (WI4 AI5 M5). Avoiding seracs, we found a way up a V-shaped couloir on the far right (north) side of the east face. Trending left, an ice gully led to distinct sections of rock and snow and then up to the icy northeast ridge. On the very top part we needed to cross a huge crevasse, which we did by climbing a steep pitch of ice—the "Alaskan way" we quite enjoy. To descend, we revisited the Wasabi Prelude on the south face and descended under a full moon. [Editor's note: It's likely that Taniguchi and Wada climbed the same line or intersected the route Sideburn Rib (Hughes-Scott, AAJ 2008). The large wall left (south) of this line is still unclimbed and very seriously threatened by objective hazards. The southeast ridge has been climbed to the summit (Kerr-Woolums, AAJ 1980).]

To complete the quartet, we climbed the Wasabi Sonatine (WI4 M4) in 10 hours, ascending the east side of the northeast buttress of Peak 11,300', north (right) of Wasabi Concerto. The route we climbed is invisible from almost anywhere, and we researched it heavily and made several reconnaissance trips. These were needed to help us understand the avalanche intervals. The route proved to be a very beautiful ice line up a couloir with rocks on either side. From the top of the ice couloir, we continued along the ridgeline for five fun pitches of mixed climbing. Again, we topped out at a logical high point above the route rather than the main summit—this one we called "P3."

[Editor's note: Taniguchi and Wada describe the northeast buttress of Peak 11,300' as having four distinct

summits. They dubbed these unofficially, from right to left (north to south), as Point 1, Point 2, Point 3, and Point KJ. A very sharp, corniced, and knife-edged ridge separates Point KJ and the northeast buttress from the main mass of Peak 11,300', making the buttress almost a distinct entity.]

Kei Taniguchi, Japan, with additional information from Mark Westman and Vivian Scott

Images



Junji Wada approaches the icy gully on Wasabi Concerto, Peak 11,300'.



Kei Taniguchi leading an ice pitch early on Wasabi Concerto, Peak 11,300'.



Kei Taniguchi leading a traverse on Wasabi Concerto, Peak 11,300'.



Junji Wada leading steep mixed climbing on the upper part of Wasabi Concerto, Peak 11,300'.



Junji Wada leading up a serac on the upper part of Wasabi Nocturne, Mt. Dan Beard.



The line of Wasabi Nocturne on the east face of Mt. Dan Beard.



Junji Wada leading on Wasabi Nocturne, Mt. Dan Beard.



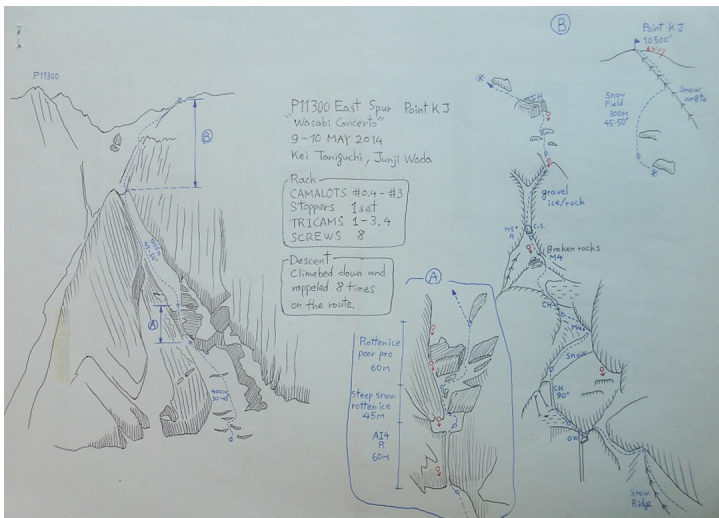
Looking down the upper snow ridge on Wasabi Nocturne, Mt. Dan Beard.



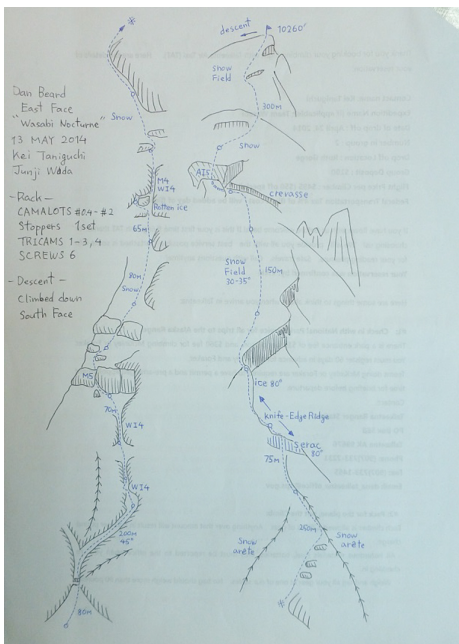
The Wasabi Prelude on the south face of Mt. Dan Beard.



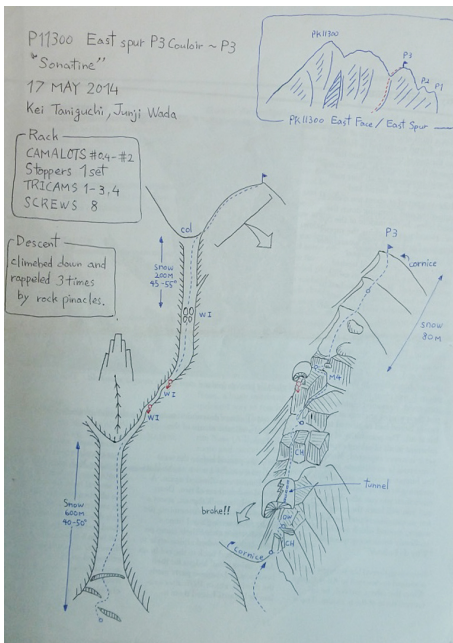
The east face of Peak 11,300', showing the routes Wasabi Concerto (left) and Wasabi Sonatine (right).



A topo of Wasabi Concerto, Peak 11,300'.



A topo of Wasabi Nocturne, east face of Mt. Dan Beard.



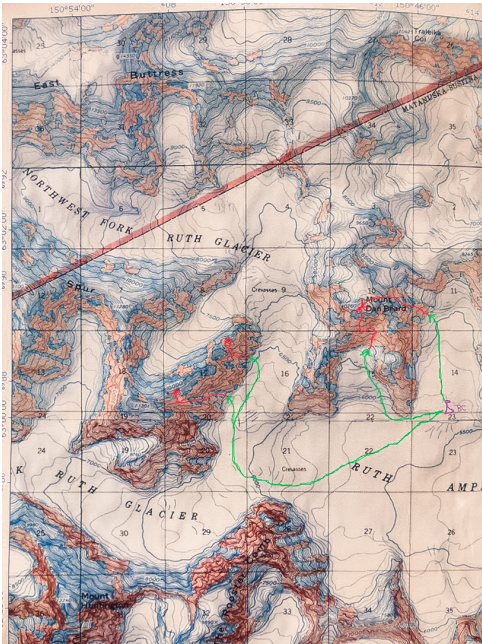
A topo of Wasabi Sonatine, Peak 11,300'.



Junji Wada leading an M4 pitch on the upper part of Wasabi Sonatine, Peak 11,300'.



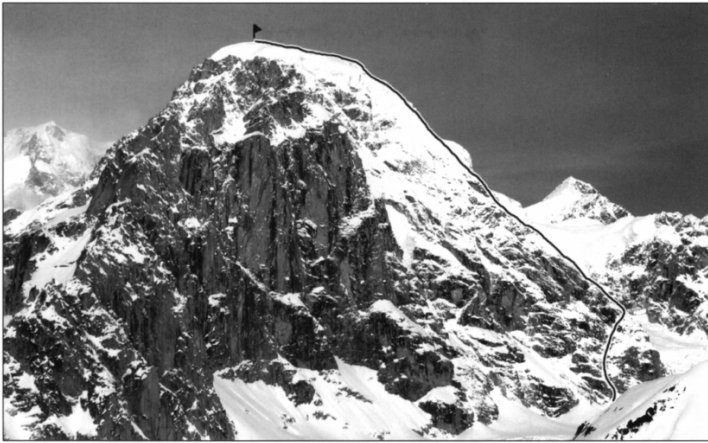
Juni Wada prepares to tackle a uniquely Alaskan snow mushroom on Wasabi Sonatine, Peak 11,300'.



A map of the northwest fork of the Ruth Glacier, providing an overview of the team's climbs.



Kei Taniguchi and Junji Wada celebrate their long stay on the glacier.



Sideburn Rib on Mt. Dan Beard. Vivian Scott

Sideburn Rib (Hughes-Scott, AAJ 2008) on the right (north) end of Mt. Dan Beard's east face. Vivian Scott said in an email, "It all looks very similar to our line -- both the photo and their description, though sounds like they possibly had less snow/ice than we did as we found the climbing pretty straight forward -- mostly steep snow, with a couple pitches through a mid-height rock band, and the summit serac crevasse was a shoulder height step. Overall, as I think we noted in AAJ, it's about the only reasonable line on that main face as the rest is very seriously threatened. Still surprised no one has gone back to finish the couloirs leading to the southeast ridge... Think a US team attempted a couple of years back but got thinned/mushroomed out like us."

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