



AAC Publications

Mt. Muir, North Face

Alaska, Coast Mountains

On April 28, Nathan Lane and I launched my 16-foot inflatable Achilles boat (the HMS Marmot) in Whittier, Alaska, hoping to make the first ascent of Mt. Muir (7,605') via Harriman Fjord. I had been studying topographic maps of Mt. Muir and the approach since trying to access Harriman Fjord a year earlier—we were turned back on that trip by stormy weather. With a great weather window and free time, Nate and I launched at 5:30 p.m. and were drying out in the Pigot Bay Cabin that night.

On April 29 we motored into Harriman and were not disappointed. From our first look at Muir in person, we immediately knew it was possible. However, we noticed an obvious problem with our intended route: a massive icefall on the Colony Glacier, regularly puking ice downward. We made camp on the southwest shore of Surprise Inlet that day and just stared up at the route in question for some time. Thinking it best to take a quick hike up the Serpentine Glacier for a better look, we found a 2,500' snowfield with possible access to the Colony Glacier.

The next morning we loaded our packs, donned neoprene boots, and started the half-mile boulder traverse up toward the Serpentine. From the shore we angled up toward a narrow avy-chute that we climbed toward to reach skin-able terrain. After 500' of gain, the angle lessened and our skis came off our backs. We zigzagged up a 2,000' snow slope while eyeing the massive seracs and icefall to our left. Once we hit the Colony Glacier we were relieved to see a fairly easy and flat ski across it toward a little glacier flowing down the northeast side of Muir. This was our first glimpse of the mountain up close, and we instantly felt a little put off by the huge seracs dangling from the north face, where we hoped to find a route.

As we skied closer, I noticed two possible routes up the north face. The first would zigzag around, underneath, and then on top of the seracs; the other shot up the left end of the face: a direct line to the summit. We skied up to a good camp spot safely tucked below the face. With an alarm set for 4 a.m., we fell asleep to hard wind gusts and icy condensation shaking down the tent walls.

We left camp just after 6 a.m. on April 31. The climbing on the glacier below the face was steep, and we encountered firm alpine ice that made front-pointing and two-tooling necessary. Once in the couloir the ice was even firmer, and as the angle steepened we slowed down to place our tools well. The angle stayed at a consistent 60° until the last 60', where it steepened quite a bit. The entire face was about 800' long, and we were able to simul-climb the first 500' or so before setting up a belay.

At the top, I was stoked to see the last 500' to the summit was a mere walk-up. The air soon warmed to jacketless temperature. Close to the summit I plunged chest-deep into a hidden crevasse but was able to climb out. After pointing Nate around the crevasse, we reached the summit of Mt. Muir within minutes. It was 10:30 a.m. and the entire Prince William Sound unfolded below. [Editor's note: Mt. Muir had been attempted previously and noted by climbers for its mountaineering potential as early as the 1930s, though weather and crevasse issues have thwarted other known attempts.]

Due to the warm air, we didn't linger on the summit long and quickly descended our line of ascent. By 1:30 p.m. we were back at the tent and gave each other our first true congratulatory hug. That afternoon we trudged down the Serpentine Glacier and finally hit the shoreline right around high tide.

The beauty of a sea-to-summit climb is being able to say you completely earned every foot of that mountain.

Ryan Fisher

Images



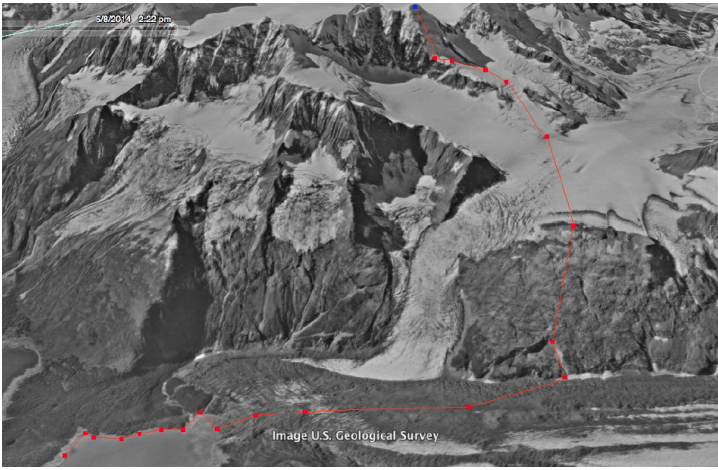
Ryan Fisher starting the beach trek to the Serpentine Glacier on the first day of the climb.



Ryan Fisher climbing the last 50' of Mt. Muir with the view to the north-northeast in the background.



Ryan Fisher points out the route on the north face of Mt. Muir.



The route up Harriman Fjord and the north face of Mt. Muir.

Article Details

Author	Ryan Fisher
Publication	AAJ
Volume	57
Issue	89
Page	0
Copyright Date	2015
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions