



AAC Publications

Moose's Tooth, East Face, Illusions of the Raven

Alaska, Central Alaska Range

From May 2–7, Alik Berg (Canada) and I established a new route on the east face of the Moose's Tooth (10,335').

Our route starts on the ramps of Arctic Rage (Gilmore-Mahoney, AAJ 2005) and then takes a steep and direct line up the massive upper headwall. At the start of the headwall, our line breaks right from Bird of Prey (Arnold-Lama, AAJ 2014), climbing terrain approximately 500' to the right before joining that route again on the upper snow slopes.

Alik and I flew in to the Buckskin Glacier on April 23. The east face appeared ominous and intimidating, a formidable feature that caused my stomach to do somersaults. After carving out home base on the glacier, we did a reconnaissance trip up the lower snow slopes to check conditions and assess the bergschrund. The results were promising: solid névé and a stable snow bridge. The towering granite above fractured with a beautifully obvious line, which held great promise but had a few blank sections. Alik remarked, "We can always drill a few bat-hooks or rivets if need be," confirming that we were thinking in a very similar way.

After four days at camp we packed up five days of food and fuel. In 12 hours we were 2,000' up the lower slopes of Arctic Rage—a fabulous mix of committing snow, rock, and ice. Our first bivy was at Beak Camp, named for its structural integrity, with our tent secured by a single beak! The next morning we awoke to a grim-looking low-pressure system. Six inches of wet snow fell overnight. We pulled the plug and rappelled the lower snow gully in very demanding conditions. Eight hours later, we reached the base. At base camp we recharged for two days.

On May 2 at 3:30 a.m. I woke to the horrible sound of my watch alarm. A three-mile flat ski brought us to the lower snow slopes at 6:30 a.m., and we were back in Beak Camp by 8 p.m. The next day I set out on new ground, branching left from Bird of Prey. The first pitch was cerebral and challenging. The A3 climbing took me a grueling six hours to complete. This took us to within a pitch of Arnold and Lama's bivouac site on Bird of Prey, halfway up the face at the base of the headwall—a spot precariously perched atop a giant snow mushroom. Before making camp, Alik was excited to make more progress. Like a boss, he quickly dispatched a right-trending pitch to reach the bivy and then charged up two more pitches. Alik put some of his El Capitan speed climbing tactics to good use, short-fixing while I jumared. Fixing lines, we returned to the bivy spot, which was luxurious and safe feeling.

We awoke at 3:30 a.m. and squeezed the lactic acid from our bodies by drinking instant coffee and relishing a dehydrated breakfast. The 300–400m headwall loomed above, often overhanging. We'd hoped the climbing would be mostly free drytooling, but the rock was too steep, loose, and gritty, and it forced us to aid climb. Luckily, Alik and I have climbed over 30 El Cap routes each and are right at home on the hard aid. The climbing hovered right around A3/A4 for the entire headwall, with the rock reminiscent of shark's teeth: sharp, jagged, and broken. On an A4 pitch I wondered if it was getting too dangerous and perhaps time to quit. But with patience the puzzle was revealed!

At 1 a.m., 19 hours after starting from the mushroom bivy, we were perched at a hanging belay. "I think we should keep pushing," said Alik. However, I lobbied for a quick bivy in the lightweight bat hammocks we'd brought along. We crawled into the single-point hammocks, cursing and wrestling.

After a terrible attempt at sleep we agreed to continue the climb. The two-hour “bat nap” had somehow left us fairly rested, and I proceeded to climb an A3+ pitch, which took four hours. After this Alik took over and led a crazy A4 pitch, which sent him for a 40’ winger.

We topped out the headwall 33 hours after leaving the mushroom bivy. Amazingly, the crack system connected and we didn’t drill a single bat-hook or bolt for the entirety of the route. It was 4 p.m. on May 5 and snowing lightly. From atop the headwall, engaging ice and snow led us to the summit by 4 a.m. With the weather improved, we relished the moment, taking in the panorama. Rappelling and downclimbing from the summit, we rested our battered, sleep-deprived bodies atop the headwall for a few hours. We then made 26 rappels over the next 27 hours. We were hallucinating something fierce. What is the limit? I wondered. Perhaps we could have gone three more days without sleep! By the time we made it back to base camp we’d been on the move for 80 hours.

As casual conversations transpired the following day, we realized we were both hallucinating ravens throughout our descent. Thus we’ve called our route Illusions of the Raven (1,500m, 5.9 A4 WI4 R [approximately 400m new terrain]).

– Skiy DeTray

Images



The impressive east face of the Mooses Tooth: (1) Southeast face [approximate location, Gilmore-House-Mahoney, 2000]. (2) The Beast Pillar [direct start to Dance of the Woo Li Masters. Bridwell-Pfinsten, 2001]. (3) Dance of the Woo Li Masters [Bridwell, Stump, 1981]. (4) Terror [Adamson-Wright, 2013]. (5) Bird of Prey [Arnold-Lama, 2013]. (6) Arctic Rage [Gilmore-Mahoney, 2004]. (7) NWS [Adamson-Tapley, 2013]. (8) There's a Moose Loose About This Hoose [Bracey-Helliker, 2008, not to summit]. (9) Magic Mushrooms [Bonniot-Dall'Agnol-Moulin-Revest, 2012]. (10) Illusions of the Raven [Berg-DeTray, 2015].

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