



AAC Publications

Pope's Nose, East Face, Second Winter Ascent and First Solo

New Zealand, Southern Alps

On July 18 I took advantage of excellent local conditions to make the second winter ascent of the east face of the Pope's Nose (2,700m) in Mt. Aspiring National Park, but failed to link it with the northeast face of Mt. Aspiring (3,033m). Had I been successful, this would have resulted in the super-route of the Southern Alps that has been the dream of a generation of New Zealand climbers.

A poor winter had dampened enthusiasm for climbing in the remoter areas of the Alps, but conditions were excellent at Aspiring, with lots of melt-freeze creating awesome ice conditions at mid-altitudes. Access was never going to be easy but finally was resolved with a long slog around the Maud Francis, Avalanche, and Hood glaciers. Conditions on the face were excellent—certainly far better than those experienced by the first ascensionists. In such conditions the climbing is classic rather than technical. A difficult passage on the northeast face of Aspiring forced my retreat on day five of the trip, but trained climbers with a rope would have succeeded.

Guy McKinnon, New Zealand

Editor's note: The first ascent of the east face of Pope's Nose, by Brian Alder, Lionel Clay, Nick Cradock, and Dave Fearnley, took place in the winter of 1996. The four men helicoptered to the foot of the face and spent two days climbing their route (VI 6). With helicopter access now illegal, Guy McKinnon approached the face "on its own terms." McKinnon began the ca 14-mile approach on July 14, and after a hoped-for shortcut into the Kitchener Cirque did not pan out, he did not reach the foot of Pope's Nose until July 17. On July 18 he completed the first solo of the 650m face in five hours, roughly following the 1996 line (18 pitches during the first ascent). After a bad bivy in a crevasse on the Upper Volta Glacier, McKinnon climbed about 250m up the northeast face of Aspiring (Bell-Bogie, 1978) before poor ice on a bulge prompted his retreat. In a whiteout, he made his way across the Bonar Glacier on the southwest side of the peak and then down to the shelter of the French Ridge Hut.

In March 2014, McKinnon did the first solo ascent of the 750m east face of Fastness Peak, generally following the Svetitsic-Dickson Route, an alpine rock climb (IV 5, 1990).

Images



Line of Guy McKinnon's ascent on the Pope's Nose.



Mt. Aspiring and the Pope's Nose from the Matukituki Valley. (1) The 650m east face of Pope's Nose (lower face hidden). After soloing this face, Guy McKinnon attempted the northeast face of Aspiring (hidden on right side of the peak). (2) Shooting Star (Dare-Joll, 2014).



Looking from Pope's Nose to Aspiring, with the northeast face on the right.

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