



AAC Publications

Devils Paw, Northwest Ridge of North Summit, Black Roses

Alaska, Coast Mountains

During May 18 and 19, Simon Gietl and I completed a new route on the north summit of Devils Paw (2,616m). Our ascent took 19 hours, including a short bivouac below the summit, and the downclimb took another five hours. We named our route Black Roses (1,000m, 6c A1 M4) after the rose-like black lichen covering much of the rock.

[Editor's note: Devils Paw (a.k.a. Boundary Peak 93) is a four-summitted mountain in the Boundary Ranges, part of the Juneau Icefield, on the border of Alaska and Canada. The massif has walls up to 900m tall. The main summit, immediately south of the north summit climbed by Scháli and Gietl, was first climbed by its northeast side (**Griscom-Michael-Putnam, AAJ 1950**). The southernmost summit was climbed by its south couloir (**Beckey-McCarty-Tackle-Zaspel, AAJ 1977**). It's likely the main summit has not seen a second ascent, though a strong attempt was made up an icefall on its northeast aspect (**AAJ 1984**). Additionally, some of the prominent, snowy couloirs have been climbed and/or skied (**AAJ 2012**).]

I first became interested in Devils Paw through Heli Putz, who talked of it often and knew it well from ski guiding. Devils Paw is indeed a majestic peak, located about 30km east of Juneau. Heli and Ed Shanley joined Simon and I on our trek to base camp below the peak.

For our climb we had wonderful spring weather. However, after an initial look we realized that this imposing, vertical wall, somehow reminiscent of Cerro Torre with its plastered snow, was not going to be a walk in the park. We returned to base camp and prepared small backpacks, reducing our gear and food to a minimum, while keeping our fingers crossed that we wouldn't have to spend more than one night on the face!

We started climbing the morning of May 18. We were faced with difficult route-finding challenges, tough climbing that was often wet or covered in snow and ice, and large loose blocks that made us constantly nervous. By late evening we had surpassed two sections of steep rock and began trudging through a tiring and dangerous stretch of deep, wet snow toward the summit. We decided on a short, cold, and wet bivouac before continuing to the top.

At sunrise on the 19th we reached the summit of the north tower. It was a very special moment for me, since the tower was likely unclimbed. After a happy embrace, Simon and I sat down to let the moment sink in. Almost three years had gone by since Simon and I found ourselves together on Arwa Spire in India, and here I was again with my "little brother," as I call Simon, sitting silent and breathless on a summit.

We made our way back down via steep snow on the north-northeast side of the Devils Paw. Ed and Heli welcomed us with chocolate and tea at our base camp. This had been a real "museum day," as I call the very special days that I put into the museum of my life memories.

– Roger Scháli, Germany

Images



Black roses.



Simon Gietl leading on the Devils Paw.



Simon Gietl belays on the snowy upper part of the climb.



Base camp below the Devils Paw.



The Devils Paw massif from the west. Black Roses (1,000m, 6c A1 M4) climbs the prominent northwest ridge on the north summit (left skyline of left most tower). The central couloir was climbed to the saddle in 2011 and then skied. The prominent right-hand couloir was climbed en route to the south summit (right-most tower) in 1976; it has also been skied.



A foreshortened view of the route Black Roses (1,000m 6c A1 M4), up the northwest ridge of the north summit of the Devils Paw.



Roger Schäli on the north summit of the Devils Paw massif.



Simon Gietl leading a wet corner on the Devils Paw.



The Devils Paw massif from the north. Black Roses climbs the prominent tower in the center.

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