



## AAC Publications

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### **North Triple Peak, Northwest Face, No Country For Old Men**

Alaska, Kichatna Mountains

**Alaska is a land of superlatives. It's big, wild, and hairy—and, as the joke goes, so are the girls of Talkeetna.** I'd heard so much about Alaska that I knew sooner or later I'd end up there. And I did, after Twid Turner and I hatched a plan to climb something in the Kichatna Mountains. [Editor's Note: Twid Turner has visited the Kichatna Mountains many times to climb numerous new ice and mixed routes. See past AAJs for more info.]

We arrived in Talkeetna in early May. Paul Roderick met us a day later. He was enthused by our "little" expedition and told us it was to be "just like the good old days." We shoved all our kit into a single-engine Cessna and set forth. The flight was a vomit-inducing, bumpy affair, and at one point my foot hit the roof—this, all before descending in a violent spiral toward the Tatina Glacier.

On the ground we soaked up the atmosphere of this wild place. The first day or two were spent battening down the hatches, scoping the immediate area with binoculars, and going for a recce to Monolith Pass. After climbing over the pass to Monolith Glacier, we discovered that our primary objective simply hadn't formed this year. However, we glanced alternative possibilities on North Triple Peak.

Wanting to do a route and actually getting up out of bed each day are two very different things. With unsettled wind and snow, days turned into a week as we ate like champions in the tent. Finally, we got a weather break and ferried a load of kit up to Monolith Pass. Back at camp, the weather was awful and it looked like we might just have an expensive camping trip. Thankfully, the next dawn was clear and we set off for our gear cache.

Not expecting a bivouac, we packed pretty light and set off up the northwest couloir (Ellsworth-Sennauser, AAJ 1979) to reach weeping ice smears on the wall above and right. The couloir proved technically straightforward, but annoyingly insecure and slow (we roped up for its first six pitches). From below, much of our route seemed *there*, though we would find a few ominous steep and blank bits, and the climbing would become vague near the summit.

Twid set off into the maelstrom on what seemed to be pretty good, thin ice. These initial pitches were around AI4+/5—fun and technical, without being too desperate. As we approached the obvious crux, though, it looked trickier: An overlap in the rock was barely iced and had vertical ice leading up to it. I took the lead here. The vertical section was classic AI5+, with good ice and protection. At the overlap I encountered rotten ice and spent an age trying to fiddle in protection. Eventually, I placed a screw in an ice patch, breathed deeply, shouted "watch me," and pulled through to the end of the 70m pitch (AI6).

The rest of the climbing was a blur. We climbed pitch after pitch of good ice up a gully-like feature to the final snow gullies. The temptation to finish just below the top was strong, as the cornices resembled grotesque meringues and had the consistency of sugar. However, after spotting a crevasse-like crack, I entered it and then back-and-footed upward. With a bit of heavy breathing and levitation, I found myself with no more up. My first Alaskan summit, by a new route. I buried my ice axe and gave Twid a body belay to the top.

On the summit we used our satellite phone to call for a pickup and set a bollard to begin our descent. All that was left was a familiar routine of abseils, threads, and checking anchors. I can't remember exactly the timing of the descent, but we were probably quite tired by the time we reached Monolith Pass again on May 19. Our rack was certainly lighter. On our ski back to base camp, loaded with all our kit, I was happy but weary from No Country for Old Men (800m, 17 pitches, ED AI6).

– Tim Blakemore, U.K.

## Images



Basecamp



North Triple Peak's north aspect. The northwest couloir is the prominent, steep gully on the right, and the new route No Country for Old Men (800m, 17 pitches, ED AI6) climbs the ice smear and gully indicated by the arrow.



Climbing up the initial part of the northwest couloir.



Twid Turner pulls onto the initial ice smear of No Country for Old Men (800m, 17 pitches, ED A16) after climbing six pitches up the northwest couloir.





Twid Turner climbs through the spindrift on the initial ice smear.



Twid Turner rests his calves on No Country for Old Men (800m, 17 pitches, ED AI6).



Steep and solid alpine ice in the gully of No Country for Old Men (800m, 17 pitches, ED AI6).



Twid Turner following high on the route.



Late-night rappels on North Triple Peak.



North and Middle Triple Peak.



Twid Turner and Tim Blakemore atop North Triple Peak.



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