



AAC Publications

Uyuraq, North Ridge, and Exploration

Alaska, Hidden Mountains

This expedition had its beginnings in 2013, when I completed a 21-day snowboarding and climbing trip in the Tordrillo Mountains. During an initial recon flight and subsequent ground travel in this range, I became increasingly aware of its alpine rock climbing potential as we walked past beautiful orange granite. It was incredible to me that these glaciated and craggy peaks, world-renowned for heli-skiing, were relatively unexplored for rock climbing. I told myself I'd return for a closer look in the summertime.

It wasn't until June 2015 that I got the chance to do another recon flight; this time I had an eagle eye for the big rock walls. Flying low and slow, we circled and soared around numerous pinnacles, close enough to the rock to feel like we were climbing. In doing so, we scoped an incredible amount of terrain; however, rapid snowmelt alongside crevasse-riddled landing zones and approaches discouraged us. We continued our flight, looking for a less glaciated area. Our search brought us into the neighboring Hidden Mountains, and what we found was absolutely stunning: a set of gorgeous granite pyramids that upon further investigation proved to be unnamed, unclimbed, and little explored.

The Hidden Mountains are small group of peaks bound by the Tordrillo Mountains to the east, the Revelation Mountains to the west, and the Neacolas to the south. They have only seen a handful of expeditions, mostly unsuccessful, and it was very apparent why: The rugged and remote nature of these peaks seems to repel any sort of serious effort. Fred Beckey once lined up a trip here that cost a fortune in flying logistics alone. [Editor's note: In 2010, Fred Beckey, Richard Baranow, and Zach Shlosar flew to Snowcap Mountain (8,350'). Baranow and Shlosar made the successful first ascent. See AAJ 2010. Snowcap Mountain is located northwest of Merrill Pass and the area described Zach Clanton in this report.] **This year, with summer temperatures a month advanced, a ski plane-accessed, base camp-style expedition was out of the question. We had to find somewhere free of snow. These mystery peaks were perfect for the occasion.**

After weeks of logistical nightmares, I finally figured out what it would take to approach these peaks. We launched our expedition from Nikiski, flying 70 miles across the Cook Inlet and into the mountains. Our pilot, Doug Brewer, and I took off in a Super Cub, using that as a recon/shuttle aircraft, while my partners, James Gustafson and Tim Plotke, followed behind in a Beaver floatplane flown by Tom Thibodeau. With high winds and water in all directions near the shore of Chakachamna Lake, we struggled to find an LZ appropriate for both the floatplane and Super Cub, so Doug and I continued toward our objective. After extensive searching and multiple bear sightings, the closest we could land was 12 miles from our destination, on the muddy west bank of Chakachamna Lake. The terrain we had to travel looked like serious bush-bashing along the Another River, but we were very committed at this point.

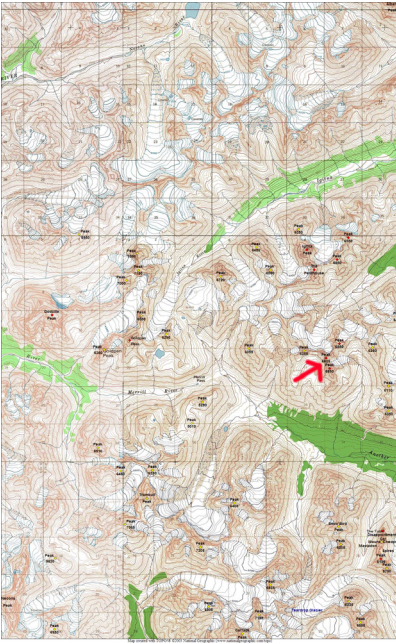
From Chakachamna Lake, Doug shuttled in James, Tim, and the rest of our gear. It took us five days to travel those 12 miles. Incessant mosquitos and alders blocked our path, and a machete was required to cut our way through the denser areas. Some days I would throw down my pack at the end of an exhausting 14-hour effort and see that we had gone as little as 1.8 miles. Some bears were indifferent to our passing, but others showed signs of curiosity and aggressiveness. On one occasion our only option was to spray buckshot from our 12-gauge to deter them.

Eventually, we made it into the rocky cirque that we had begun calling Talliktok (a native word for Hidden). The cirque is located directly east of Merrill Pass. We made ourselves at home by pitching our Mega-mid on a flat rock. In the weeks that followed, we made the first ascent of Uyuraq (6,625', native word for "Brother"), via its north ridge (Silver Linings, 4 pitches, 5.7). We also made multiple attempts at a direct line up the west face of Talliktok (6,850'), climbing corner systems up to 5.10, which ended in dangerously loose rock and very questionable belays. On "halfway" weather days—when we weren't tent-bound from the constant downpours—we had the chance to explore the extensive bouldering potential in the cirque. On our hike out, we were able to check out another untouched climbing venue we dubbed the Bear Slabs. After 24 days, retracing our path out, we arrived back in civilization for glorious burgers and beers after the wildest adventure of our lives!

The peak we've called Talliktok is still out there, lurking in the clouds of the Hidden Mountains, awaiting its first ascent. Who will be up for it?

– Zach Clanton

Images



The red arrow indicates the location of the Talliktok cirque, located east of Merrill Pass. You can see a larger overview of the area with this map: <http://www.mytopo.com/maps/?lat=61.4541&lon=-153.6313&z=9>



The two granite pyramids of the Talliktok cirque, with Uyuraq on the left and Talliktok on the right. The team made the first ascent of Uyuraq's north ridge (left skyline) and made multiple, unsuccessful attempts on the prominent west face of Talliktok.



Tim Plotke on the summit of Uyuraq with the unclimbed summit of Talliktok in the background.



Tim Plotke starting up the 5.9 first pitch of an unfinished line on the west face of Talliktok, day six in the cirque.



The west face of Talliktok.



Tim Plotke exploring the bouldering potential in the Talliktok cirque.



Tim Plotke crossing Another River on our exit. The water was considerably higher the second time around!



Bushwhacking through alder on the five-day approach into the Hidden Mountains.



James Gustafson on the north ridge of Uyuraq.



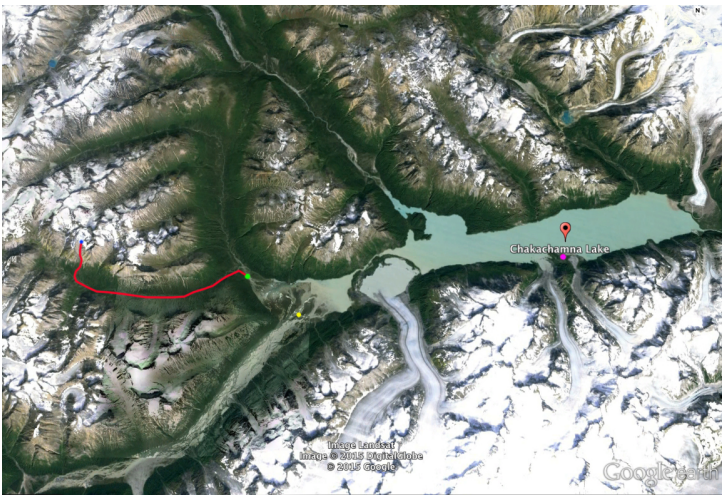
Tim Plotke and James Gustafson looking back down the Another River drainage on day four of the approach.



Tim Plotke hanging out in the Talliktok Jacuzzi on day 20.



Tim Plotke bouldering in the Talliktok cirque. Zach Clanton



The red line indicates the team's 12-mile approach, where they began hiking into the Talliktok cirque. The yellow dot indicates where the Super Cub landed on a muddy bank of Chakachamna Lake and the purple dot indicates where the floatplane landed.

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