



## AAC Publications

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### **Thunder Mountain, South Face, Thunderstruck; Mt. Providence, South Face, Outside Providence**

Alaska, Alaska Range, Tokositna Glacier

**The reports began trickling in before we even got on the plane to Anchorage—shoulder-deep snow on the glacier, rivers of spindrift, and helicopter evacs due to avalanche danger. The snowiest spring in recent memory had left the Alaska Range buried, and the extended forecast didn't look promising.**

Kim Hall and I quickly sidelined the large, funnel-shaped face that was our primary objective and scrambled for a backup plan. After much debating over beers in Talkeetna, we hopped in Paul Roderick's plane and flew to the southwest fork of the Tokositna Glacier on April 11. Much to our surprise, during our two weeks on the glacier we had stacks of bluebird days and primo conditions, and we climbed three routes on the south faces of Mt. Providence (11,200') and Thunder Mountain (10,920').

Upon landing we immediately spied a pyramidal rock buttress on the left side of Providence that looked to be split by an aesthetic mixed couloir. The next day we had a leisurely breakfast, clicked into our skis around 9:30 a.m., and skinned up to the central bowl that funnels Providence's expansive south face. Encouraged by cold temperatures and no visible instability or sloughing, we crossed the bergschrund around 11 a.m. and began climbing up the leftmost couloir toward the triangular rock formation.

After approximately 1,500' of simul-climbing up 50–70° snow, we took an obvious left exit out of the main couloir, over a small fluting, and up a left-trending snow ramp toward the base of the buttress. The end of the ramp revealed the beautiful, narrow cleft we had seen from base camp. Three stellar, rope-stretching pitches of mixed climbing followed, including some rolling ice and névé, a bouldery step, and a slightly terrifying bout of unprotected vertical trenching through sugar snow. We arrived at the prominent notch at the top of the buttress, slightly detached from Providence's heavily corniced west ridge, around 6 p.m. and began our descent from there. Despite not going to Providence's summit, Outside Providence (800m, IV M5 WI4) is an aesthetic line with quality climbing—a perfect warmup for bigger and harder routes in the area.

After several days of rest and a quick ski up the glacier, we turned our attention to the south face of Thunder Mountain, where we saw a narrow, possibly unclimbed system that looked to be choked with ice.

Crossing the bergschrund at 7 a.m. on April 15, we climbed 1,000 feet of steep snow before branching right on a steep, rising traverse to gain the ice system, where several rope lengths of simul-climbing brought us to the meat of the route. After an easy mixed choke, several 70m pitches of steep, wild, and difficult ice steps brought us to some blue-collar sugar trenching with decent rock gear that took us up and out of the gully. From a spectacular belay on top of a fluting, we headed right up a narrow, moderate mixed slot, after which a short yet spicy step of vertical ice led to more unprotected trenching and the ridge. We traversed several hundred feet east to a corniced high point at 10,850', beyond which lay a massive blank gendarme and large overhanging cornices. We descended from there. Thunderstruck (1,000m, V WI5 M4) shares its start with Maxim (Huisman-Isaac, 2004) in the major couloir system just left of Ring of Fire (Cordes-DeCapio, 2001).

After a week of base camp lounging, many sausage breakfast sandwiches, and a pair of nasty head colds that almost had me throwing in the towel, we recovered enough to load our packs for one more outing. On April 22 we repeated Deadbeat (Cordes-DeCario, 2001) to the base of the 60-foot summit cornice, which looked ready to part ways with the mountain, in 20 hours round-trip from base camp. Finding pitch after pitch of challenging ice and mixed climbing and a direct, aesthetic line to the summit, we agreed this route alone was worth a trip into this rarely visited fork of the range. Having exhausted our supply of Stoppers and tat, we spent a few more days eating cookies and working on our tans before winging it back to Talkeetna.

[Editor's note: Geoff Hornby, long believed to have made the first ascent of Thunder Mountain with David Barlow in 1993, via a snow couloir on the left side of the south face and the western summit ridge, now says it's unclear whether they climbed beyond a corniced high point to the true summit, as they were climbing in a whiteout with no altimeter. If that is the case, then the first ascent of the peak likely was completed by Kelly Cordes and Scott DeCario in 2001, via their route Deadbeat.]

– Andy Anderson

## Images



Kim Hall skiing below the south face of Mt. Providence.



Kim Hall beginning the crux mixed pitch of Outside Providence on the south face of Mt. Providence.



A view of Mt. Providence's south face from the air, showing the line of Outside Providence.



Kim Hall comes up a tenuous pitch on the upper mixed buttress on Deadbeat (Cordes-DeCapio, 2001).



A view of the left side of Thunder Mountain's massive south face, with the line of Thunderstruck marked.



Andy Anderson rappelling Thunder Mountain in fading daylight.





Andy Anderson on the summit ridge of Thunder Mountain with Mt. Foraker in the background.



Andy Anderson beginning the crux ice pitch on Thunderstruck, Thunder Mountain.

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