



AAC Publications

Mt. Edwards, Northwest Face, Jedi Gordon Edwards

Montana, Glacier National Park

Glacier National Park is a wild and remote place with sizable alpine terrain, full of possibility and uncertainty. Alpine climbing here often involves dodgy or nonexistent beta, long approaches, bushwhacks, bear encounters, and creative anchor-building in the sedimentary rock. Combine that with the often fickle weather and tricky avalanche conditions, and you have a place that, well, attracts only a few alpinists.

It is, however, a perfect place for adventure climbing. On November 7, Stefan Beattie, Kevin Oberholser, and I set out in the dark for the northwest face of Mt. Edwards (9,072'), looking for just that kind of thing.

At 8:45 a.m. we stepped onto the northwest face at about 6,200'. Easy snow slopes gave way to steeper rock slabs and short vertical steps draped with a thin but climbable layer of ice and snow. The climbing was delicate and scratchy, and was often supplemented by a dosing of gentle spindrift from above. Screws were useless, but the knifeblades came in handy.

About a third of the way up the face, our progress was blocked by a formidable cliff band. Earlier that morning, on the approach, a single white pillar bisecting this headwall had caught our attention—it appeared to be the key to the upper face. But instead of an agreeable pitch of ice, our “pillar” turned out to be a thin veneer of rotten snow delaminating from the steep rock. Unwilling to climb this—or to head down—we made a lengthy traverse to the right on a snowy ramp, finally reaching the base of a continuous weakness in the headwall. More steep snow with sections of rolling ice and mixed climbing led to a steep ice curtain at about 7,800'. This was an excellent pitch that was easy to protect with screws, and a welcome relief from the consistently thin ice lower on the face.

Above the ice our route crossed the upper west face, which was first climbed in winter by locals Nathan Sande, Don Scharfe, and the late Scott Sederstrom in the early '90s. I drafted off Kevin and Stefan as they kicked steps up a planar snow slope and the three of us ascended into the clouds. The terrain steepened once more near the top, and some deliberate moves over rime-plastered rock put us on the crest of the west ridge at 8,700'. With limited visibility and only an hour and a half of daylight remaining, we began our descent, feeling our way along snow ledges and over rock towers. We dropped out of the cloud deck in time to take advantage of the last rays of alpenglow, which illuminated our route down to the Sperry Glacier Trail. Once off the mountain, the harnesses, helmets, and crampons came off, the headlamps went back on, and this superb day concluded with post-holing and hiking seven miles back to the car.

Despite a tradition of unreported new routes in Glacier, after checking with several longtime locals we believe our route is a first ascent. We named it Jedi Gordon Edwards (2,500', IV WI3 M3), a reference to one of Glacier's pioneering climbers and to the mountain.

– Adam Clark

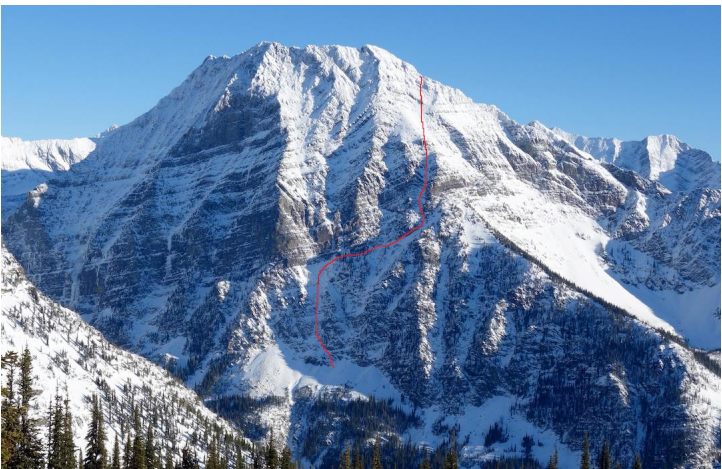
Images



Adam Clark climbing thin ice and mixed terrain during the first ascent of Jedi Gordon Edwards (2,500', IV WI3 M3).



Adam Clark tackling a well-protected steep pitch of ice around 7,800' on the first ascent of Jedi Gordon Edwards (2,500', IV WI3 M3).



The north/northwest aspect of Mt. Edwards in Glacier National Park, showing the line of Jedi Gordon Edwards (2,500', IV WI3 M3), climbed in November 2016 by Stefan Beattie, Adam Clark, and Kevin Oberholser.

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