



AAC Publications

Bear Tooth, Beastiality; Shark Tooth, Shark Fishing

Alaska, Alaska Range, Buckskin Glacier

In early May, Greg Boswell, Lindsay Yule, Paul Prentice, and I flew to the lower Buckskin Glacier with food for three weeks. It was a trip with no set objectives, but with lots of ideas and flexibility in mind. Aware that we had flown in during a huge high-pressure system, we set about climbing immediately. Over the next 10 days, Greg and I climbed two new routes, including the first ascent of a mountain.

Our first objective was the obvious huge fault line splitting the southeast face of the Bear Tooth, which, other than this chimney system, is a big wall of compact rock straight out of Yosemite.

The first day we climbed a couloir and thin connecting ramp that bypasses a dangerous icefall below the chimney. This made the route safer and better than running the gauntlet under seracs. We then had a luxury bivy on the lip of a crevasse on the hanging glacier, beneath the 900m headwall. [Editor's note: In 2007, Jesser Billmeier, Zach Shlosar, and Jared Vilhauer climbed directly up this icefall and connected into a couloir system to the left of the chimney climbed by Boswell and Sim. The 2007 ascent ended just below the cornice on the southwest ridge. See AAJ 2008.]

Day two was slow, absorbing, and stressful as we navigated up and around the fault line. Rotten and blank rock forced us out right onto the face for eight or nine pitches. This felt a bit like climbing on El Cap in crampons, but was extremely fun and engaging—the whole time we were unsure if it would be possible to re-enter the chimney.

A make-or-break last lead of the day saw me up a nerve-wracking pitch to a point where I reckoned we could access the chimney again. I fixed a line so we could lower to the only bum-seat bivy in sight, and then we had an uncomfortable few hours of continually slipping off the ledge in our sleeping bags.

On day three we miraculously managed to re-enter the chimney and had one of the most amazing days ever on sustained, sometimes thin, five-star ice, all the time pinching ourselves that the route was actually going. We topped out into a windless sunset, strolled to the summit, and bivied again. The next day we rappelled the line, which went surprisingly without a hitch!

Beastiality (1,400m) had roughly 30 sustained pitches, with some of the best and most sustained technical climbing I've ever done on a big route—it was simply Alaskan perfection.

After two days of rest, there was no sign of the good weather leaving us, so we decided to try a smaller but very technical line up the center of an unnamed pyramidal mountain directly across the glacier from the east face of the Bear's Tooth; we'd been eyeing this line during the four days on our route. We were unsure what tactics to employ, but in the end it did require a bivy, despite only being about 600m and 15 pitches. All the pitches had some spice: scary, thin ice, snow mushrooms requiring careful clearing, and just hard climbing. As on Beastiality, we were blown away by the quality of climbing—the kind of route where you lean back on the belay after leading and can't stop smiling about how outrageous the last 40m had been.

We named the route Shark Fishing (600m), as the colors and shapes of some of the granite features

resemble the markings of a great white shark. We found some tat from a previous attempt at the top of pitch two, but nothing above. To our knowledge, this peak was previously unclimbed, and we gave the mountain the unofficial name of Shark Tooth, keeping in line with the local animal and dental names.

We haven't put any grades to either of our routes, as we felt like it wouldn't enhance our experience, nor do the climbing justice, and would just be random numbers plucked from the sky! One person's M6 is another's M9; one season a granite seam is a streak of ice. I don't think I have ever done a mountain route anywhere in the world where a number has done a good job of explaining the difficulty. All the climbing on our two routes went free, and featured sustained ice and dry tooling.

The Buckskin Glacier is perhaps the most impressive place I've been in Alaska for big granite mixed faces. I hope that in years to come, when people are climbing incomprehensibly hard, routes such as Arctic Rage and NWS on Moose's Tooth, and Bear Skin and Beastiality on Bear Tooth, will be often-repeated classics, so that more people can see the incredible quality of climbing on these walls.

– Will Sim, United Kingdom

Images



Greg Boswell climbs a spectacular steep ice runnel high on the new route Beastiality (1,400m) on the southeast face of Bear Tooth. Boswell and Will Sim spent three days on the route, bivied on the summit, and rappelled on the fourth day.



Will Sim on a steep ice pillar inside the massive chimney system that defines his and Greg Boswell's route Beastiality (1,400m) on the southeast face of Bear Tooth. Sim and Boswell spent several weeks on the Buckskin Glacier and completed two new routes.



Will Sim leaves the chimney feature on the Bear Tooth's southeast face, hoping to outflank a rotten and overhanging section of the chimney. Sim and Greg Boswell climbed 30 sustained pitches and topped out their new route Beastiality (1,400m) after three days of climbing.



Greg Boswell high on his and Will Sim's new route Beastiality on the southeast face of Bear Tooth, just before they re-entered the prominent chimney system that defines the route.



Will Sim seconding a tricky mixed pitch on day two during the first ascent of Beastiality on the southeast face of Bear Tooth. Sim and Greg Boswell spent three days on the route, and a fourth day descending back to the Buckskin Glacier.



Greg Boswell climbing amazing mixed terrain on his and Will Sim's route Shark Fishing. Their route was the first known ascent of the formation, which they named the Shark Tooth to keep with the theme of surrounding peaks.



A foreshortened view of the Bear Tooth above Alaska's Buckskin Glacier, showing the line of Beastiality (1,400m). Greg Boswell and Will Sim completed the line over four days in May 2017. The 2007 route House of the Rising Sun (Billmeier-Shlosar-Vilhauer) climbed the icefall directly and continued up the obvious cleft to the left of Beastiality as far as the southwest ridge. The prominent buttress to the right of Beastiality is the southeast pillar, climbed in 2002 by a Polish expedition (You Can't Fly, Fluder-Golab-Piecuch-Skorek). Other routes ascend the faces to the right. At far right is the Moose's Tooth.



The Shark Tooth on Alaska's Buckskin Glacier, showing Greg Boswell and Will Sim's new route Shark Fishing (600m). Their climb was the first known ascent of this formation, which they named to keep with the animal and dental theme of surrounding peaks. The ridge to the right is the shoulder of the Broken Tooth.

Article Details

Author	Will Sim
Publication	AAJ
Volume	60
Issue	92
Page	0
Copyright Date	2018
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions