



## AAC Publications

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### **Mt. Gabriel, First Ascent, and Mt. Laurens, Complete West Ridge**

Alaska, Alaska Range

**For the past year we had been planning a trip into the Revelations, for which we had won a McNeil-Nott Award. But after waiting almost a week to fly in, with low clouds sitting over some key passes, our pilot suggested an alternative destination: a seldom-visited area on the southwest side of Mt. Foraker.** This turned out to be a lucky break, because if we had made it into the Revelations we would have been one of five teams based out of the Fish Glacier, some of us vying for the same objectives. Not really the remote experience we were looking for.

Instead, on April 4, Chad Diesinger, John "The Poodle" Giraldo, and I flew onto the Yentna Glacier and set up base camp at the edge of the wilderness boundary. The Yentna certainly delivered as far as remoteness went, and the only signs of life we saw for 10 days were a couple of birds and two planes that flew over briefly.

After some scouting, we climbed a 3,000' route on an unnamed 8,535' peak above our base camp by the east face and north ridge. On the first day we simul-climbed snow and broken mixed terrain down low, roped up for some steeper rock pitches up to 5.7, put the ropes away for some moderate terrain in the middle of the face, and then roped up again when we joined the north ridge, where we encountered steep snow and moderate ice up to AI3. We stopped about 600' below the summit and bivied for the night.

The next day the terrain ahead turned out to be quite complex, with a series of gendarmes that blocked our way to the summit. A rappel off the first gendarme put us at a notch in the ridge. At this point Chad wasn't feeling psyched, so he decided to downclimb a straightforward snow couloir below the notch and head back to base camp. The Poodle and I continued, with the plan of heading up and over this peak, down to a col below the west ridge of Mt. Laurens (10,042'), and then on to the summit of Laurens.

We traversed across rock and deep, unconsolidated snow for several time-consuming rope lengths before finally reaching the summit of the 8,535' peak. Beyond this, we continued simul-climbing toward Laurens along the crest of the ridge. The Poodle suggested it might be faster to put away the rope, then quickly reconsidered as a giant piece of the ridge broke away at his feet. I was really happy we'd stayed roped up when I broke off an ever bigger cornice about an hour later.

We stopped at a broad snow shoulder on the ridge about 1,500' below the summit of Mt. Laurens and bivied for the night. An incredible sunrise greeted us as we set off for the summit. We simul-climbed the ridgeline, which was heavily corniced and steep, making sure to stay well below the fracture line. After a few hours we reached the summit plateau. A steep traverse with over 4,000' below our heels took us to the central summit. Looking across the plateau at the east summit, we could see that it was a few feet higher, so we headed that way. About an hour later we were on top. We basked in the sun and took in the grandeur for over an hour before beginning our descent the way we'd come.

Several hours later we reached our bivy site, packed up the gear we'd left there, and then continued on the ridgeline back to the col, from which we made several traversing pitches until we intersected a large snow slope. An hour or so of downclimbing and we were back at our skis, and back in base camp shortly after that. We packed up camp and flew out the next day, satisfied with our adventure.

Once back in the world of computers we contacted Steve Gruhn, chronicler of Alaskan ascents and former editor of *Scree*, the Mountaineering Club of Alaska's monthly publication. To the best of his knowledge, our ascent of the 8,535' peak was the first time the mountain had been climbed. We decided to name the peak Mt. Gabriel, in honor of a dear friend that had passed away a few weeks prior to our trip. Steve also informed us that upper west ridge of Mt. Laurens had been soloed by Austrian badass Thomas Bubendorfer back in 1997, which we'd missed in our research of the AAJ archives. [Bubendorfer made the first ascent of Mt. Laurens via the north face and upper west ridge, and reportedly named the peak after his son. Graham Zimmerman and Mark Allen made the peak's second ascent in 2013 via the northeast buttress (4,650', V AI4 M7 A1, see AAJ 2014). The 2017 climb was likely the third ascent.]

Overall, our climb was three miles from the bergschrund to the summit of Mt. Laurens, with 6,000' of vertical gain, 2.5 miles of that being new terrain. We called our route the Cleveland Steam (5.7 A0 AI3 60°). We'd like to thank the McNeill-Nott Award for the generous support and funding they provided us on this trip.

– Jason Stuckey

## Images



Jason Stuckey climbing low on the east face of Mt. Gabriel during the team's first day of climbing. John Giraldo and Stuckey completed the first ascent of Mt. Gabriel (8,535') and traversed into the west ridge of Mt. Laurens over several days in early April.



Jason Stuckey climbing along the ridgeline below the summit of Mt. Gabriel. This 8,535' peak above the Yentna Glacier, adjacent to Mt. Laurens, was previously unclimbed.



The team's first bivy along the north ridge of Mt. Gabriel (8,535'), which was previously unclimbed. The summit is visible in the background.



After completing the first ascent of Mt. Gabriel (8,535'), Jason Stuckey continues down to the col between Gabriel and Mt. Laurens (10,042').



Jason Stuckey traversing across the summit plateau of Mt. Laurens.





John Giraldo heading along the ridge between Mt. Gabriel and Mt. Laurens (behind) on day two of his and Jason Stuckey's traverse. At right is Mt. Red Beard, first climbed in 2001 by Jim LaRue and Jamal Lee-Elkin (see AAJ 2002).



John Giraldo traversing complex mixed terrain on his way toward the summit of Mt. Gabriel on day two. The pair was joined on the lower part of Mt. Gabriel by Chad Diesinger, who descended a snow couloir partway up the mountain. The upper part of Mt. Laurens is visible at left.



Mt. Gabriel (8,535'), showing the line of the Cleveland Steam (5.7 A0 AI3 60°). After making the first ascent of Gabriel, John Giraldo and Jason Stuckey continued traversing along the ridge to the summit of Mt. Laurens (10,042', out of frame), making that peak's third known ascent.



Mt. Gabriel, First Ascent

## Article Details

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