



AAC Publications

Australia, South Face, Ask and You Shall Receive

Alaska, Brooks Range, Arrigetch Peaks

On August 6, under clear skies and with dreams of first ascents on remote peaks, Tess Ferguson, Anina Friedrich, Jessica Keil, and I flew into Alaska's Gates of the Arctic National Park. Wild and remote, with no roads or trails, it is one of the United States' last great wildernesses. Our diverse team of four had convened in Fairbanks, where we boarded a 4WD shuttle for the eight-hour ride north along the Dalton Highway. We disembarked at the town of Coldfoot, where we'd start our flight into the Arrigetch Peaks.

Landing on a small gravel bar approximately 12 miles downstream from our climbing objectives, we spent the next five days carrying our 20 days of supplies up Aiyagomahala Creek to our base camp, over hip-deep creek crossings, up steep banks, and through thick brush.

Moments after reaching camp, we received a forecast showing 24 hours of good weather before ten days of solid rain. We departed immediately for an ascent of the west ridge of Shot Tower (IV 5.9 C2, Roberts-Ward, 1971), the most classic and popular route in this valley. Climbing through the night in two teams of two, we made a camp-to-camp ascent in 21 hours.

The weather forecast delivered as promised, bringing sustained wet and cold conditions to the range. While our base camp only received rain, snow accumulations were seen on many of the peaks. During the entirety of our remaining weeks in the Arrigetch, we only were able to climb one more day.

Splitting into teams of two, we attempted separate objectives. Tess and Anina attempted a new route on Battleship Peak, but after finding much loose rock, increasingly difficult climbing, and one near miss with a falling block, the choice was made to descend. Meanwhile, Jessica and I ascended the previously unclimbed south face of Australia. Our route, Ask and You Shall Receive (150m, III 5.9), follows the face's obvious central line of weakness, climbing over continuously worsening rock. It was completed in trying weather conditions and took over 20 hours, camp to camp. Once we reached the summit ridge we cruised climber's left (west), hitting a number of the smaller summit blocks as we weren't sure which one was actually the true high point. [Editor's note: Australia lies along the ridge east of Badile, between Disneyland and Tasmania, both climbed in 1971 by a Hampshire College expedition, see AAJ 1972. A report from the NPS reports the climbing history as unknown, and it is possible this was the first ascent of the peak.] We descended via working our way climber's right (east), across the summit ridge, and made three rappels to get back to the base.

Only a few days later, with more snow coming, we began the hike out to the landing zone. In a process that always feels simultaneously too slow and too fast, we were dumped back into the civilized world on August 25. While we did not get to climb nearly as much as we had hoped, witnessing such a vast, raw, and untamed wilderness first-hand is always an experience to be treasured.

– Alan Goldbetter (USA/Finland)

Images



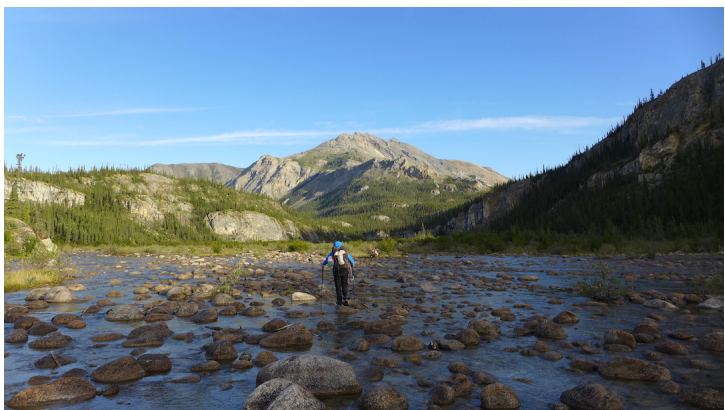
Jessica Keil traversing the summit ridge of Australia after the first ascent of Australia's south face via Ask and You Shall Receive (150m, III 5.9).



Tess Ferguson approaching Shot Tower. The classic west ridge route (Roberts-Ward, 1971) follows the right skyline. Marshal, first climbed in 1976 (Lehner-Lehner) is to the left.



Prepping the plane in Coldfoot, Alaska, for the flight into the Arrigetch.



Jessica Keil enjoys one of the mellow sections of the arduous approach up Aiyagomahala Creek. It took the team five days to shuttle their 20 days worth of supplies up the valley.

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