



AAC Publications

Peak 8,505', First Ascent

Alaska, Neacola Mountains

On May 3, 2017, Barry Smith and I touched down on the southernmost prong of the Pitchfork Glacier in the Neacola Range of Alaska. Our goal was to climb two adjacent virgin summits, peaks 8,908' and 8,505' [see AAJ 2016], as well as to survey the climbing potential of the valley.

We shuttled loads to a base camp higher on the glacier and waited for a weather window. During the first break, we attempted an east-facing couloir on a feature we called the Gnome. We climbed 800' with difficulties up to WI4 before bailing just short of the summit due to poor rock.

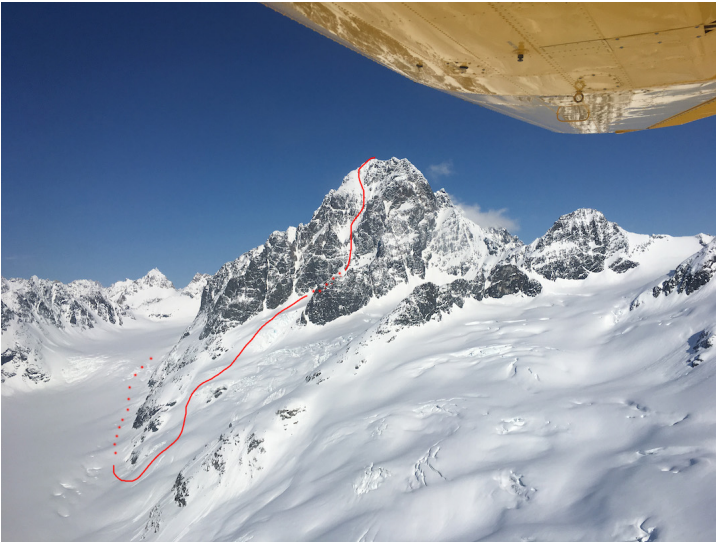
Two days later we headed off to attempt Peak 8,505' via its southeast flank. After 2,000' of climbing we descended due to unstable conditions and increased avalanche activity. We rested in basecamp for the remainder of the day and returned the next night to continue to the summit (3,000', 55° WI2) when conditions were more stable.

Shortly after this we had one final weather window in which we attempted the Gnome once again, this time from its northern side. We were turned around after several loose and unconsolidated mixed pitches on the upper ridgeline. We flew out on May 20.

While there is much potential on the southern prong of the Pitchfork Glacier, it seems as though the middle and northern prongs are where the good rock and aesthetic lines are to be had. Unfortunately, the solid granite of the northern two prongs did not present itself further south.

– Tess Ferguson

Images



Peak 8,505' in Alaska's Neacola Mountains, showing the line of ascent taken by Tess Ferguson and Barry Smith on the mountain's first ascent. Though much climbing potential exists on this prong of the Pitchfork Glacier, the first ascensionists reported poor rock quality in comparison to the middle and northern prongs. Barry Smith

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