



AAC Publications

Chisana Glacier, First Ski Descents

Alaska, Wrangell Mountains

AFTER WATCHING a constant barrage of storms strafe south-central Alaska in the late spring of 2018, Mat Brunton and I headed into the Wrangell Mountains hoping to visit a semi-protected area of storm shadow on the drier side of the range. On May 15, Zack Knaebel of Tok Air Service dropped us off at approximately 8,300' on the upper Chisana Glacier, where we set up base camp. This area had been visited on multiple occasions by Danny Kost, who did numerous first ascents of nearby peaks (see AAJs 1999, 2000, and 2001). Our primary objective was to make first ski descents of some of these peaks and seek out unclimbed summits.

The day after we arrived, May 16, provided our best weather and ski conditions of the weeklong trip. Mat and I made a beeline north up the glacier to a peak named Little Deborah (10,522'). We ascended the eastern slopes to a col and then the steep south ridge, climbing deep 50° snow, with the summit pyramid featuring AI2 rime and alpine ice. We skied our line of ascent on Little Deborah back to the col and proceeded to climb up the north ridge of neighboring Peak 10,091', a.k.a. Little Debbie. From the summit we skied off the steep and technical 50° east face, made our way down the glacier, and then climbed and skied the beautiful knife ridge of Peak 9,400' (AI2 50° snow). Kost had named this Sarah's Peak. It is likely that these were all first descents (all had previously been climbed by Kost and partners).

After a down day in base camp due to a windstorm, on May 18 we climbed and skied two peaks about 9,300' high, just a short distance east of camp. The peaks provided some nice alpine ice on the way up for climbing and excellent powder skiing down their steep northern aspects. We continued traveling northeast up the glacier and climbed and skied the steep and icy southeast ridge of Peak 9,605', which we dubbed Megamid Peak. We then made quick time in deteriorating weather to climb and ski the 50° southeast face of Peak 9,400'. We believe that all these peaks are first ascents and ski descents.

In the late morning on May 20, another windstorm dissipated and we had a leisurely start as we skinned through an icefall to gain the col between peaks 10,630' and 10,565', the two larger peaks in the upper Chisana Glacier. We left our skis at 9,500' and climbed the east face of Peak 10,630' via 60° snow and alpine ice. This was the only peak on the trip that we did not ski, and this peak and route had been previously climbed by Danny Kost.

With questionable visibility on May 21, we ascended our route back north toward the Little Deborah basin and ascended and skied the heavily crevassed northwest ramp of Peak 9,500'. This put us in perfect position to ascend the aesthetic knife-edge east ridge of the neighboring 9,500' peak and make a ski descent of the steep south face. We then crossed the valley and ascended and skied the steep south ridge of Peak 9,310' before getting shut out by weather. We believe that these were all first ski descents, though the peaks had previously been climbed by Kost and partners.

The next morning, we got word from our pilot Zack that the weather would be deteriorating further, and we decided to fly out that day before another strong series of storms. Given the stormy weather that Alaska received in the spring of 2018, Mat and I feel very fortunate to have been able to get on top of 11 peaks in the eastern Wrangell Mountains.

– Taylor Brown

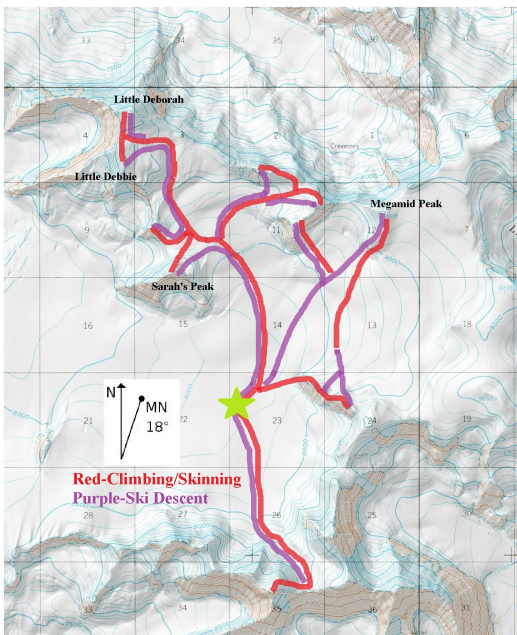
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Mat Brunton on the summit of Peak 10,630' above the Chisana Glacier in the eastern Wrangell Mountains of Alaska. Of the 11 summits he and Taylor Brown climbed in a weeklong trip, this was the only one they did not ski from the summit. Mt. Blackburn (16,390'), the highest peak in the Wrangells, is visible in the distance.



Taylor Brown and Mat Brunton's base camp on the Chisana Glacier. In the spring of 2018, the pair made 10 likely first ski descents of peaks above the upper Chisana, in the eastern Wrangell Mountains of Alaska. The north faces of peaks 10,630' and 10,150' (both first climbed by Danny Kost solo in 2000) are above camp.



A topo map of the climbs and ski descents made by Taylor Brown and Mat Brunton in May 2018. Many of these peaks had been previously climbed by Danny Kost, solo and with various partners, but Brown and Brunton believe their 10 ski descents were all firsts.



Mat Brunton climbing the steep south ridge of Little Deborah (10,522'), a peak first climbed by Danny Kost in 1998 and named for its resemblance to Mt. Deborah in the Alaska Range. Brown and Brunton likely made the first ski descent, via the south ridge.



Little Deborah (10,522') and neighboring peaks as seen from Peak 10,630' in the eastern Wrangells of Alaska. Peak 9,400' had previously been climbed by Danny Kost and named Sarah's Peak.



Mat Brunton skiing toward the steep and icy southeast ridge of Peak 9,605', which he and Taylor

Brown dubbed Megamid Peak after making the likely first ascent and first ski descent.



The northeast face of Peak 9,400', named Sarah's Peak by first ascensionist Danny Kost. Taylor Brown and Mat Brunton likely made the first ski descent of the peak via the beautiful knife-edge ridge right of center.

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