



AAC Publications

Thompson Pass, Probable New Routes

Alaska, Chugach Mountains

GOOD CONDITIONS PREVAILED throughout 2018 in the Chugach Mountains around Valdez and Thompson Pass. Living and working year-round in Valdez, I was able to climb five probable first ascents with numerous partners.

Through the end of February we had excellent powder skiing even at sea level, until Dumpsters started blowing across the parking lots in town from a 100mph wind event that lasted for a week. These major winds destroyed the skiing but created ideal alpine climbing conditions with firm snow.

On March 31, Tim Stephens and I climbed the complete northwest ridge of Mt. Dimond (7,202'). We encountered difficulties up to M4 with 3,000' of climbing over the course of the 1.8-mile ridge traverse, passing multiple large gendarmes. I had previously attempted this ridge the weekend before with Jason Stuckey and Chad Diesinger, but we turned around just shy of the summit under impending darkness, after battling stiff 40–50mph winds all day.

Tim and I doubled up on a snowmachine and drove it to the base of Mt. Dimond via the snowcat track that is set by the Tsaina Lodge for skiing [Editor's Note: According to the USGS Names and Places, Mount Dimond is originally named after Anthony Dimond, Valdez Mayor and Alaska Senator from the 1920's-1940's, although some versions of the USGS maps have the peak labeled as Mount Diamond.]. From our parked snowmachine by the toe of the glacier at 4,200', it took us five hours to summit and another two hours to descend the north face back. The ridge required multiple rappels that were already established from the weekend before, and the only section that we roped up for was a large gendarme on which we did three pitches of M3–M4. The rest of the climb was 4th and easy 5th class mixed knife-ridge. The rock encountered on this climb was very good quality for the Chugach and took good gear. The full northwest ridge of Mt. Dimond is the largest alpine feature in the Thompson Pass arena and is a classic alpine climb. The only technical ascent we could find documented in the area was a Paul Turecki route up the main gendarme on the ridge back in the 1990s.

On April 15, with no new snow and excellent alpine conditions prevailing, Ryan Sims and I chartered a ski plane from Tok Air Service for a bump to the head of the Worthington Glacier at 5,000', from which we climbed unnamed peak (ca 6,600') via the northeast ridge at M3—this very aesthetic ridge featured good rock, and the peak doesn't appear to have any ski lines off the summit that might have brought skier traffic to it. After downclimbing and rappelling the ridge, we skied out the Worthington Glacier and back to the Richardson Highway.

On June 11, during the last good freeze of the spring, I left the trailhead at 4 a.m. and was able to solo the west ridge of Girls Mountain (6,134'). I traveled up the Worthington Glacier and took a heavily glaciated pass to drop down onto the Hoodoo Glacier and reach the base of the west ridge. The ridge, with its giant cornices and steep rock steps, resembles a miniature French Ridge on Mt. Huntington, though it gains only about 1,000' of elevation, with two cruxes of around M1. As I summited it started to sprinkle rain, and I was able to ski perfect corn off the summit, down the steep standard route on the north side of the peak.

From July 28-29, Jessica Young and I did an overnight camping mission in order to climb the northeast ridge of Peak 4,700' in the Mt. Dimond arena. From behind the Tsaina Lodge on the Richardson Highway, we took an old trail through the brush to get up into the alpine. The climbing on

the peak involved wading through a scree and talus slope before gaining the more solid and technical northeast ridge. We roped up for 5 pitches of climbing with difficulties up to 5.7. Three single rope rappels directly off the summit block took us to the large scree and talus slope.

After a month of straight rain in August, September dawned with an Omega block high-pressure system, with above average temperatures and sun for the entire month. On September 8, Mat Brunton and I made a complete traverse of Sapphire Peak (6,300'), up the west ridge and down the southeast ridge. We made quick time navigating the 3.5 miles to the back of the Worthington Glacier in order to gain the ridge. The west ridge featured good greywacke rock with a few pitches of 5.6 and good gear and anchors. This route is a classic Alaskan alpine climb with its easy roadside access, thoughtful glacier travel, and spectacular climbing and position.

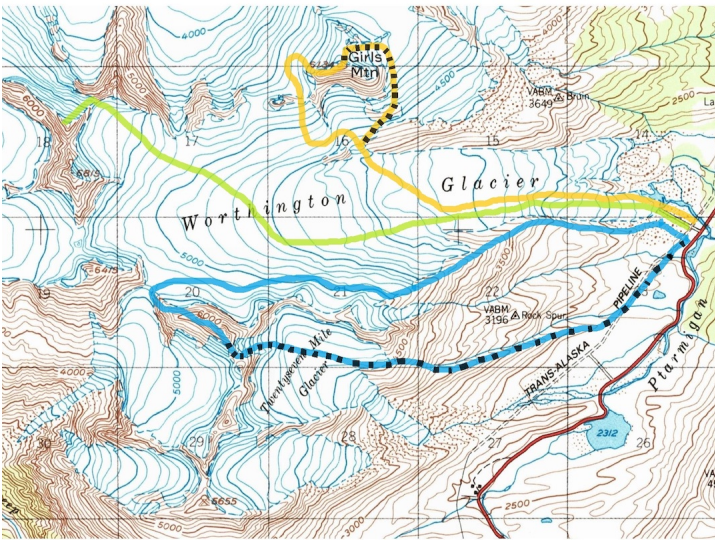
As the sunny weather prevailed, Mat Brunton and I climbed the complete northeast ridge of Mt. Dimond on September 15. From behind the Tsaina Lodge on the Richardson Highway, we took an old trail through the brush to get up into the alpine. We gained the northeast ridge by scrambling up peak 5,132' and then continuing along the 1.5-mile ridge, climbing up and over many gendarmes, with technical difficulties up to 5.6. At a few points we donned crampons and climbed sections of 50° alpine ice. We did not use a rope, for it would have just dislodged loose rocks onto the second. Seven hours after leaving the road, we summited in building clouds and light snowfall.

With diminished visibility and wet rock, we decided to descend the 4th- and 5th-class east face, which required us to partially circumnavigate Mt. Dimond and climb back up and over peak 5,132' in order to reach the trail back down to the highway. It was a long day at 12 hours round-trip, with approximately 7,000' of elevation gain and loss.

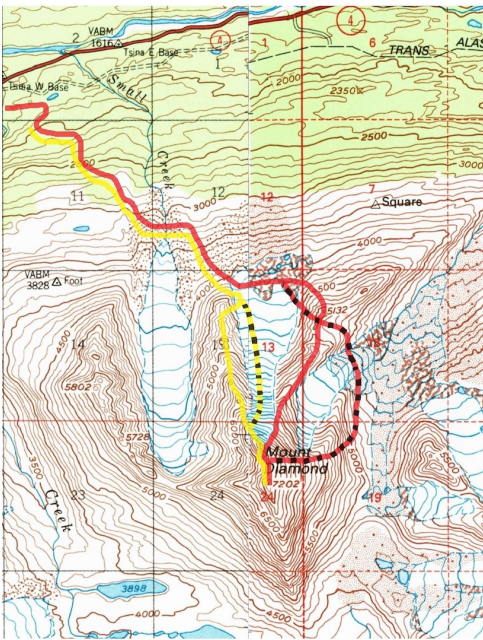
– Taylor Brown

Summary: First known ascents of the complete northwest ridge (3,000', M4, steep snow) and complete northeast ridge (3,500', AI2 5.6 R/X) of Mt. Dimond (7,202'); northeast ridge of unnamed peak (ca 6,600', 1,600' of gain, M3 and steep snow); west ridge of Girls Mountain (1,000', M1 and steep snow); northeast ridge of Peak 4,700' (5 pitches, 5.7); and traverse of Sapphire Peak (1,100', AI3 5.6) via the west and southwest ridges.

Images



Topo map of probable new routes done by Taylor Brown and partners above the Worthington Glacier in 2018. The west ridge of Girls Mountain (1,000', M1, steep snow) is in orange. The northeast ridge of an unnamed ca 6,600' peak (1,600', M3, steep snow) is in green. The traverse of Sapphire Peak via the west and southeast ridges (1,100', AI3 5.6) is in blue. Dotted lines mark the descents.



Topo map showing the northeast ridge (in red, 3,500', AI2 5.6 R/X) and the northwest ridge (in yellow, 3,000', M4, steep snow) of Mt. Dimond (7,202') in the Chugach Mountains near Valdez. The dotted lines mark the descent taken after each climb.



The complete northwest ridge of Mt. Dimond (7,702') above the Richardson Highway near Valdez, Alaska. Taylor Brown and Tim Stephens make the likely first complete ascent of this ridge on Brown's second attempt in March 2018.



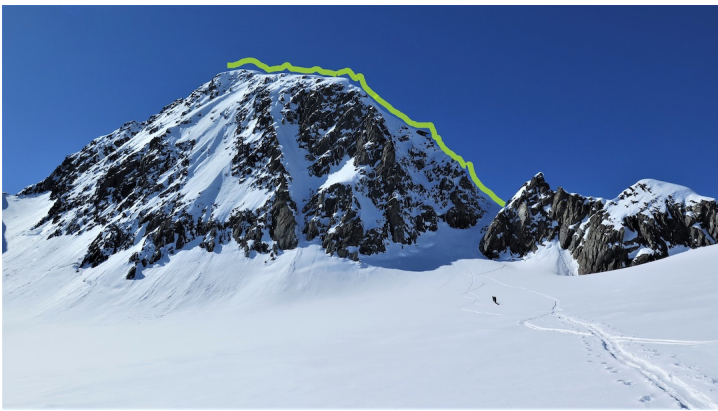
Mat Brunton below the complete northeast ridge of Mt. Dimond above the Richardson Highway near Valdez, Alaska, in dry summer conditions. Taylor Brown and Brunton made the likely first complete climb of the ridge in September 2018.



Sapphire Peak (6,300') from the Worthington Glacier, showing the traverse of the peak made by Taylor Brown and Mat Brunton in September 2018. The two climbed from right to left, up the west ridge and down the southeast ridge.



The west ridge of Girls Mountain (6,134'), above the Worthington Glacier in the Chugach Mountains near Valdez, Alaska, from the southwest. Taylor Brown soloed the first known ascent of this ridge, the upper section of which he says is reminiscent of a mini-French Ridge on Mt. Huntington, in mid-June 2018.



The northeast ridge of an unnamed peak (ca 6,600') at the head of the Worthington Glacier in Alaska's Chugach Mountains, near Valdez. Taylor Brown and Ryan Sims made the first known ascent of this ridge in April 2018.



Mat Brunton on the summit of Sapphire Peak, in the Chugach Mountains near Valdez, Alaska, during his and Taylor Brown's complete traverse of the mountain in September 2018.



Mat Brunton climbing moderate terrain on the west ridge of Sapphire Peak, in the Chugach Mountains near Valdez, Alaska. Brunton and Taylor Brown made the first known traverse of the mountain in September 2018, going up the west ridge and down the southeast ridge.



Ryan Sims climbing up the northeast ridge of an unnamed peak at the head of the Worthington Glacier, in the Chugach Mountains near Valdez, Alaska.



Tim Stephens on the summit ridge of Mt. Dimond (7,202') during the first known ascent of the complete northwest ridge (3,000', M4, steep snow). This was Brown's second attempt on the ridge after being turned back below the summit in high winds the week before.



Tim Stephens just past the bergschrund during the descent off Mt. Dimond (7,202') in the Chugach Mountains, looking back at the large gendarme that was traversed during the ascent of the complete northwest ridge (3,000', M4, steep snow).



Peak 4,700', near Mt. Dimond in the Thompson Pass area near Valdez, Alaska. Taylor Brown and Jessica Young made the likely first ascent of this rock ridge in July 2018, climbing five technical pitches up to 5.7.

Article Details

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