



AAC Publications

Mt. Huxley, Northeast Ridge to Northwest Ridge (Super-Hux)

Alaska, St. Elias Mountains

IN EARLY JUNE, Scott Peters, Andrew Peter, and I completed the second ascent (and the first complete ascent from base to summit) of Mt. Huxley (12,216') in the St. Elias Mountains. Mt. Huxley is approximately eight miles west of Mt. St. Elias (18,008').

Paul Claus, who made the first known ascent of Huxley in 1996 by landing his plane on an adjacent snow dome, landed us in his turbine Otter at 8,800' on the Columbus Glacier to the north of Huxley, with a stunning partial panorama of the Bagley Icefield, Mt. St. Elias, Mt. Logan, and many sizable peaks in the St. Elias, Chugach, and Wrangell ranges. "Big" does a disservice to the locale. Paul's son, Jay, had suggested Huxley after it became obvious our original objective was not accessible; good journeys commonly include changes to the original plan, and flying to a completely different range is a "change of plan"—especially with little/no prior knowledge of the new destination.

After caching gear and food, we skinned southwest up the glacier until we intersected a set of wolverine tracks—evidence of our straight-line proximity to food sources at Icy Bay and also of wolverines' humbling intrepidity and stamina. We made what we dubbed Wolverine Camp, and the following morning we continued south, along Huxley's eastern flank, to get eyes on the peak's southeast ridge. Our reconnaissance suggested it would go, but it seemed neither easier nor more appealing than the northeast spur, which we chose for our attempt.

Scott led us off on the morning of June 3, I followed in the middle, and Andrew took the tail end. Scott and I had learned from a cold bivouac on the north ridge of University Peak in May 2017 that having one sleeping bag per climber is worth the extra weight (we shared a single sleeping bag between three of us on University), so we each carried a single Z-Rest, one sleeping bag, snacks for two days, two liters of water, and no stove.

After 30 minutes of booting through shin-deep snow, we hit the base of the spur leading up to the northeast ridge. The spur involved about 2,000 vertical feet of sustained 45–65° snow and ice, up to AI2+ ,with solid screw and picket placements. Visibility deteriorated as we ascended, but wind was negligible. We reached the shoulder and found an overhanging rock shelter in virtual ping-pong-ball conditions. After much discussion, we began a long traverse under the summit pyramid's north-facing hanging glacier. Twenty minutes after we'd set off, the clouds opened to almost perfect bluebird skies. Lucky or good, we accepted the weather window with smiles.

The north face traverse involved some interesting routefinding and led us to the col connecting the northwest ridge of the summit pyramid with the adjacent dome (what we believe was Paul's 1996 Cub landing site). The crux of this ridge was an AI3+ corniced step on fragile sn'ice. A short snow traverse led us to the tiny, corniced summit; we managed to get all three of us on the summit proper without a collapse, though we had anchored our packs to the traverse to minimize the applied load. We left the summit around 8 p.m. and returned to the col around 10 to settle in for a pretty comfortable bivy: 5° to 10°F and virtually still.

The next morning we began the traverse-in-reverse under bright skies and reached the top of the spur at around 1 p.m. Five rappels took us to terrain we could downclimb, and we returned to Wolverine Camp in the early evening of June 4. We named our route Super-Hux (3,400', Alaska Grade 3-, AI3+).

Additional days on the mountain allowed perma-grins for the skiers as mind-blowing vistas and knee-deep powder created “better than being in the office” conditions. Alaska continually reminds you of her grandeur, and this was no exception.

– Ben Iwrey

Images



Looking back down the northeast ridge from the summit of Mt. Huxley. Mt. Logan (19,551'), the highest point in Canada, is in the distance.



Wolverine Camp on the Columbus Glacier below Mt. Huxley, named for the wolverine tracks the team encountered while approaching the peak. Mt. St. Elias is in the background.



Enjoying “better than being in the office” conditions after making the first ascent of Super-Hux (3,400’, Alaska Grade 3-, AI3+) on Mt. Huxley (12,216’). The western flank of the Mt. St. Elias massif is visible in the background.



Bivy with a view—the northwest ridge and summit of Mt. Huxley (12,216’) on the right with Mt. St. Elias (18,008’) in the background.



Mt. Huxley (12,216’) in Alaska’s Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, showing the line of Super-Hux (3,400’, Alaska Grade 3-, AI3+). The route gained the peak’s northeast ridge and then traversed to the northwest ridge to reach the summit.



Andrew Peter enjoying a spectacular position just below the summit of Mt. Huxley (12,216'). Ben Iwrey, Scott Peters, and Andrew Peter made Huxley's second ascent via the northeast ridge and northwest ridge in June 2018.



Traversing below a serac on the north face traverse of Mt. Huxley during the first ascent of Super-Hux (3,400', Alaska Grade 3-, AI3+). The Bagley Icefield is in the background below.

Article Details

Author	Ben Iwrey
Publication	AAJ
Volume	61
Issue	93
Page	0
Copyright Date	2019
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions