



## AAC Publications

---

### **The Citadel, Northwest Face, Agent of Chaos**

Alaska, Neacola Mountains

**On March 29, Ryan Driscoll and I flew into the Neacola Mountains. With a sustained high-pressure system in place, we hoped to avoid the prolonged storms for which the range is known.**

As soon as we landed, we went on a recon ski and decided the most inviting objective was an unfinished line on the Citadel (8,305'), attempted by a team in 2016 [see AAJ 2017]. They had reported good climbing but challenging snow conditions on a line they called the Sliver, an obvious couloir on the right side of the northwest buttress. [Editor's Note: The 2016 party ascended about 3,000' up the couloir, reaching the corniced ridgeline atop the northwest buttress before retreating below the upper headwall.]

Ryan had only been in Alaska for 24 hours and was feeling tired from traveling, so we decided to get a late start, leaving camp around 10 the next morning. An hour later and a two-mile ski away from base camp, we tied in and started climbing the initial snow. Four pitches of steep, snowy simul-climbing with occasional rock gear put us at the base of the deep couloir.

The day had warmed by this point, and spindrift avalanches were rather continuous. We found harder mixed climbing than the initial attempt reported, potentially due to lower snow levels, which made for some difficult climbing through several rock steps. Ryan had to pendulum out of one crack system to gain a snow ramp, but I was able to climb the pitch clean while following. The hardest mixed climbing we encountered was a pitch of M5+, and we climbed some pitches of water ice that would be classic at any crag.

At the top of the couloir, as the sun was setting and the winds were picking up, we were met with a double-corniced ridgeline that we had to traverse to gain the buttress above. The higher buttress provided good anchors for a bivy and we set up our tent on a small snow ledge we stamped out, but we stayed tied in for the night while sleeping.

The next morning, we did one 70' rap to access a rightward traverse on snow to the base of an upper couloir. Three pitches of ice and mixed climbing and an interesting traverse under a large cornice put us on the snowy summit cone, and we walked up to the top. We descended the southeast ridge to a glacier that led down to the north fork of the Pitchfork Glacier, where we walked back to our skis and then back to camp. Our most pressing concern on the walk back up-glacier was the state of our camp, as our skis and poles had been chewed by a wolverine. We were relieved to see that, despite many tracks pacing around our camp, our post-climb carnis had been spared. We called our route Agent of Chaos (3,500', V M5+ AI4 A0).

– Elliot Gaddy

## Images



Ryan Driscoll on the summit of the Citadel (8,305') after climbing the Agent of Chaos (3,500', V M5+ AI4 A0). The high peak in the background is the Mt. Redoubt (10,197').



Ryan Driscoll climbing an aesthetic ice pitch on the upper northwest face of the Citadel, during the first ascent of Agent of Chaos (3,500', V M5+ AI4 A0).



The northwest face of the Citadel, showing the line of Agent of Chaos (3,500', V M5+ AI4 A0), climbed by Ryan Driscoll and Elliot Gaddy in March 2019. This line had been attempted in 2016 by David Fay, Craig Muderlak, and Drew Thayer, who reached the ridgeline adjacent to the big rock tower. A direct route up the rock tower, the northwest buttress, was attempted in 2016 by Jon Bracey and Matt

Helliker.

## Article Details

Author	Elliot Gaddy
Publication	AAJ
Volume	62
Issue	94
Page	0
Copyright Date	2020
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions