



AAC Publications

Hyder Peak and Other Summits

Alaska, Coast Mountains, Boundary Ranges

Mark Robson and I have made several trips to the Coast Mountains of British Columbia and were keen to visit the Stikine Icecap, which straddles the USA-Canada border farther north. Despite the area's notorious reputation for poor weather, we dreamed of climbing one of the spectacular granite spires.

Our primary aim was to make the second ascent of Oasis Peak (7,925', see AAJ 2001) via a new route from the north. This had been attempted a couple of times in the 1970s by teams visiting in midsummer, and our plan was to visit in early May, hoping to find more stable snow, ice, and mixed climbing conditions. We helicoptered into the North Baird Glacier from the fishing village of Petersburg on April 30. As far as we could tell, we were the first documented climbing expedition to visit this glacier for over 40 years.

As soon as we arrived, it was immediately clear that any technical climbing would be unlikely. All the mountains were heavily snowed up, draped with enormous cornices and unstable snow mushrooms. But more significantly, it was not freezing at night and there were (literally) hundreds of avalanches falling. After a week of this, we abandoned plans for Oasis Peak and moved our camp down the glacier to a point where we could access the north arm of the North Baird Glacier.

Finally, on May 9, the weather improved enough for us to climb through the icefall guarding entry to the north arm. We were probably the first mountaineers ever to visit this part of the icecap and were surrounded by over a dozen unclimbed peaks. The big prize was Peak 7,180', which lay 8km away at the head of the adjacent Dawes Glacier. [Editor's note: This mountain, located at 57.36970, -132.84810, is named Hyder Peak on Bivouac.com, though the origins of the name are unknown.] This massive and isolated mountain, with a steep, rocky summit triangle, lies on the western edge of the Stikine Icecap. We made the 5km-long and 1,200m ascent of the northeast ridge and southeast face the following day, during a 24-hour weather window, via a combination of post-holing through deep snow, skiing where possible, and then mixed climbing on the summit triangle. The view from the precarious and massively corniced summit, looking east to all the major peaks of the Stikine, was breathtaking.

During the trip, we ascended four other summits. Peak 5,800' and Peak 5,720' lie west of Turkey Peak (6,570') and were climbed by their south flank and east ridge, respectively, on May 1. We climbed Peak 5,910' by its long southwest ridge on May 9, and Peak 5,919' by its east ridge just before flying out on May 12. Peak 5,910' and the shapely Peak 5,919' lie on either side of the North Arm.

Alaskan climbers are notoriously modest about publicizing their achievements, and there are no records of previous ascents of any of the peaks we climbed. Hyder Peak was possibly one of the highest unclimbed summits (with over 3,000' prominence) in Southeast Alaska.

Overall, we only had three days when it was not raining and the visibility was good enough to climb. Snow conditions remained soft throughout, avalanches took place constantly, and we experienced considerable cornice difficulties. Despite all of these challenges, it was an extremely rewarding expedition. The climbing was rarely technical, but picking safe lines and negotiating the beautiful corniced summit ridges made it very exacting. (We had one huge cornice collapse, but fortunately we both stayed upright on the solid side of the fracture line!) And above all, when the rain stopped and the fog lifted, we were treated to some of the most beautiful and pristine mountain landscape either

of us had ever seen.

– Simon Richardson, Scotland

Images



Mark Robson on the summit ridge of Peak 5,910'. The triangular Peak 5,919', which Robson and Simon Richardson climbed via its east (left) ridgeline, is the pointy summit just left of center.



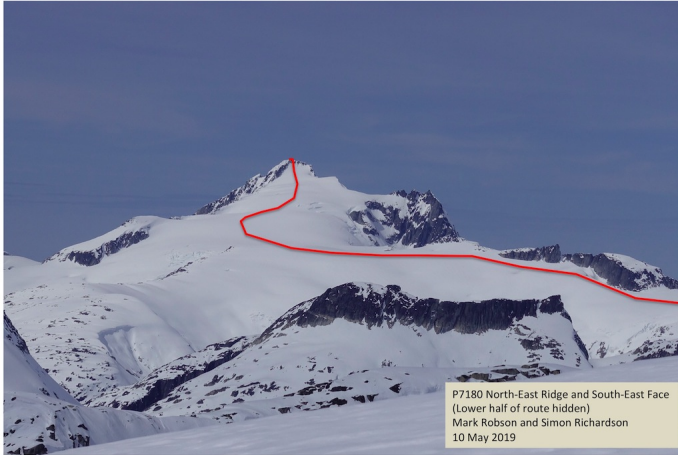
Mark Robson post-holing up the steep upper slopes during the first ascent of Peak 5,919' on the Stikine Icecap.



Mark Robson traversing above the clouds and below the cornice during the first ascent of Peak 5,919', above the north arm of the North Baird Glacier. This was one of a handful of peaks climbed by Robson and Simon Richardson in May 2019. The high peaks on the right skyline are across the border

in Canada and are Noel Peak (3,062m), Mussell Peak (3,065m), and Mt. Ratz (3,090m). Ratz is the highest peak in the Stikine region.

Stikine Icefield, South-East Alaska
P7180



Previously unclimbed Peak 7,180' (a.k.a. Hyder Peak), showing the line of ascent taken by Simon Richardson and Mark Robson in May 2019.



Mark Robson approaching the summit tower during the first ascent of Peak 5,720', one of a handful of unclimbed summits he and Simon Richardson climbed in May 2019.



Mark Robson on the summit of Peak 5,910'. This was one of several peaks near the Stikine Icecap that were likely unclimbed before Robson and Simon Richardson climbed them in May 2019.



Mark Robson coming up Peak 5,910' during the mountain's first ascent. The cornice to his left collapsed while the two were descending, though they luckily remained on the right side of the fracture line. Peak 5,919', which they also climbed, is the striking triangular peak in the background.

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