



## AAC Publications

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### **Peak 8,900'+ ("Mt. Gannon"), North Ridge**

Alaska, Central Alaska Range, Dall Glacier Area

**On May 6, Paul Roderick, Charlie Sassara, and I made what we believe to be the first ascent of Peak 8,900'+, a pyramidal mountain approximately 5.5 miles to the southwest of Mt. Russell in the Alaska Range.**

Paul is the longtime glacier pilot and owner of Talkeetna Air Taxi and is also my brother-in-law. Paul had been looking at this peak for years, and we'd had loose plans to try it. COVID-19 had shuttered his business and altered my own plans for the spring, so we finally had some free time to go check it out. Being family, Paul and I were in the same COVID pod and well quarantined. Charlie is a longtime Alaskan local (and climbing legend), and he needed no air travel or subsequent quarantine to join us.

After landing on a small arm of the Dall Glacier at 6,000', about a mile east of the mountain, we skied for an hour up through an easy icefall, passing crevasses on the right. We reached the base of the col north of the mountain, put on crampons, and climbed several hundred feet of snow and ice (up to 45°) to reach the col. From here we ascended the north ridge more or less directly. Some large crevasses and ice formations midway up the ridge were easily passed to the left (east) side, which involved simul-climbing some ice up to 50°. After a short knife-edge section, the angle eased. After navigating through some crevasses and wind-sculpted rime formations, we reached the summit only three hours after leaving the landing site.

The top was a small dome that was perfectly split by a large crevasse. With clear skies in all directions, the view to the southwest encompassed nearby Mt. Dall and the Kichatnas, standing out among a sea of unnamed and unknown mountains. The lakes and rivers of the tundra shimmered below to the northwest. We downclimbed the ridge, making two short rappels off zero threads (V-threads with no slings left behind), then endured classic survival skiing through the now-shaded icefall, the snow surface a frozen sun crust overlaying mashed potato snow. We reached the plane five hours after having departed it. After a quick hot drink and snack, Paul fired up the airplane and we returned to Talkeetna, following a scenic, twisting course past Russell and Foraker in beautiful evening light.

We have informally dubbed the peak Mt. Gannon, after our longtime friend Ted Gannon, who passed away at age 84 in 2019. Ted was an eccentric and influential character in our lives. He joined the Peace Corps in 1963 and spent a significant part of his life living in remote villages in Nepal, becoming fluent in Nepali and deeply connected to their culture. An avid climber himself—he had climbed Denali and extensively in Washington's North Cascades—Ted in his later years was a fixture at Talkeetna Air Taxi. He often could be found helping out around the airport, eating cinnamon rolls at the Roadhouse, or talking to anyone who would listen about eastern philosophy, relationships, ending violence, and the inner workings of the human mind, always wearing his characteristic pastel-colored sweats and a large straw hat. We're calling the north ridge of Mt. Gannon the Straw Hat Ridge. Ted would have enjoyed both the climb and the conversation. We'll miss you, Ted.

– Mark Westman

## Images



The east face of Peak 8,900', named Mt. Gannon by the first ascensionists. Paul Roderick, Charlie Sassara, and Mark Westman climbed the peak via the eastern icefall and north ridge, which they named the Straw Hat Ridge. The peak lies about 5.5 miles southwest of Mt. Russell.



The west face of Peak 8,900', named Mt. Gannon by the first ascensionists. Paul Roderick, Charlie Sassara, and Mark Westman approached the peak from the east and gained the col north (left) of the mountain. From there they climbed the north ridge to the summit. The peak lies about 5.5 miles southwest of Mt. Russell in the Alaska Range.



Looking southwest from the summit of Mt. Gannon. Mt. Dall is the prominent peak on the left, and the Kichatna Spires are visible center and right.



Paul Roderick on the summit of Mt. Gannon after making the peak's first ascent. In the background is Mount Russell (far right), Mount Foraker (peeking up just left of Russell), and several unclimbed 9,000' peaks to Paul's right.



Ted Gannon in Lukla, Nepal, in 2000, sporting his characteristic straw hat.





Mark Westman and Paul Roderick high on the north ridge of "Mt. Gannon."

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