



AAC Publications

Jiehkkevárri, Southeast Face, First Ski Descent

Norway, Lyngen Peninsula

On the approach to the southeast face of Jiehkkevárri, with the line of the ski descent. Photo by Hamish Frost

In the early morning of April 28, Eivind Jacobsen and I made the first ski descent of the 1,100m southeast face of Jiehkkevárri (1,834m, 69°28'9.87"N, 19°52'53.19"E), the highest mountain in the Lyngen Alps. The line we skied had been climbed only twice, the first time solo, in 1979, by Dave Nicholls. [Nicholls was a highly talented U.K. alpinist and officer in the Royal Marines, who during the 1970s was a group leader of the Mountain and Arctic Warfare Cadre in Norway.] This was also the last remaining face on the peak without a ski descent.

In Sjur Nesheim's guide to the Lyngen Alps (published by Friflyt), the line is described as 55° snow and ice with a pitch of M4 guarding the last 30m to the top of the face, above which gentle slopes lead to the summit. I am unaware of any other parties having climbed on this face, but the south ridge is ascended now and again, and the southeast ridge, separating the northeast couloir from the southeast face, has an established route.

On the 27th we left Lyngsdalen with bivouac gear, so we could get a look at the face that evening before an early start. To make sure conditions were suitable for a ski descent, we first climbed the route from the glacier at its foot. It is a line with plenty of exposure and objective danger, so ideal conditions are crucial to climb and ski it safely. The first part of the route, slanting up a ramp, is exposed to serac fall, and much of the route lies above cliff bands and below large cornices.

The year 2020 was unusually good for snow in the Lyngen Alps, and the forecast for the previous several days was for moist fresh snow before a drop in temperature, then remaining overcast without much wind. Our hope was the snow would stick to the steep, icy face and then "dry out." This would give us a short window in the middle of the night and early morning of the 28th to ski the face in good powder before the sun increased the risk of avalanches and cornice collapse.

We started at 2 a.m., finding the hoped-for conditions, with about 20–30cm of fresh snow. This made for an exhausting bootpack, but we were able to climb the whole route without using the rope. Apart from a few icy patches, and a sun crust on the last 50m to the top, we found superb skiing conditions. We used the rope to belay while we removed the cornice from above, before skiing the whole line clean. While I have skied several other steep lines in the region, this is by far the steepest, most sustained, and most significant that I am aware of in northern Norway.

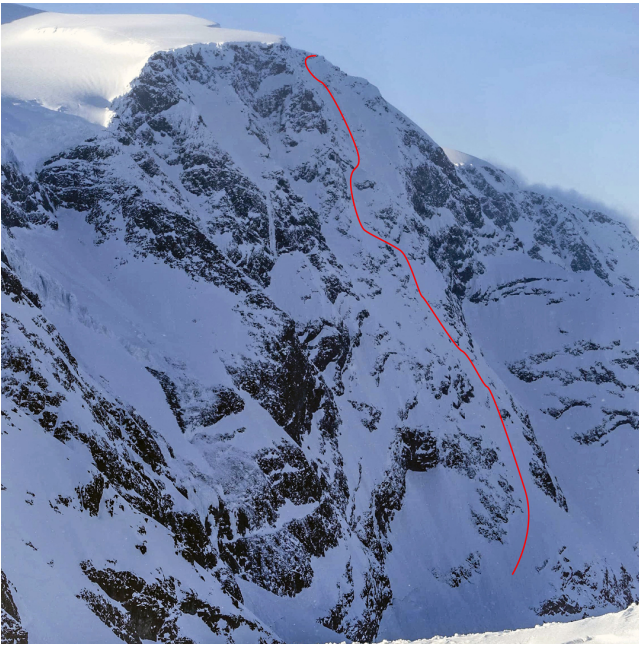
The name Jiehkkevárri comes from the Sami language, where "Jiehkke" means glacier and "várri" mountain. The summit is one of the most classic spring ski tours in northern Norway via the normal routes from the west, either over 1,666m Holmbuktind or up the Blåisen Glacier. Steep lines have been skied on other facets of the mountain, with the northeast couloir now a modern classic, seeing a couple of descents each winter, as foreseen by the late Andreas Fransson. The Swede had referred to the southeast face—then unskied—as the Brenva Face of the Arctic.

— Finn Hovem, Norway

Images



On the approach to the southeast face of Jiehkkevárri, with the line of the ski descent marked.



The southeast face of Jiehkkevárri and line of the ski descent, as seen from Balgesvárri a week or so after the Hovem-Jacobsen descent.



The southeast face of Jiehkkevárri with the line of the 1979 Nicholls route, skied in 2020.



Eivind Jacobsen skiing the upper southeast face of Jiehkkevárri.



The exit point at the top of the southeast face of Jiehkkevárri.



Eivind Jacobsen during the ascent of the 1979 route on the southeast face of Jiehkkevárri, which he and Hovem then skied.



Partway down the southeast face of Jiehkkevárri. The glacier visible below is where Hovem and Jacobsen spent the night before their ascent of the route.

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