



AAC Publications

Mt. Owen, Ski Descents

Wyoming, Grand Teton National Park

Mt. Owen (12,928') is the second-highest peak in the Teton Range, but it sees minimal ski mountaineering action due to its relatively remote location in the winter and extremely technical nature. The north aspect, most specifically the Northeast Snowfields, have been among the range's testpieces since they were first skied in 1980. The standard ski route involves a 60m rappel to escape the snowfields. In 2017, Beau Fredlund and I were able to ski a new variation to the snowfields and avoid the use of a rappel on the lower choke by trending skier's right into some rocky terrain—we called this the Freddy-Fab variation. On that descent, we only did one short 10m rappel from the summit block and skied the rest of the East Ridge into the Northeast Snowfields, the most complete descent known to date.

On March 25, 2019, Brian Johnson, Brendan O'Neill, and I climbed up the Koven Route southeast side of Owen to roughly 200' below the summit and then skied down the upper Northeast Snowfields. After skiing the bulk of the snowfields, we put our crampons back on and climbed about 500' to the North Ridge at roughly 12,100'. Here, we began our ski descent down into the Run Don't Walk Couloir (ca 2,000', WI4 M4). [Editor's Note: The Run Don't Walk is one of the Tetons' major ice routes, first climbed in 1972 in difficult summer conditions that required a pitch of A3. Now done most often earlier in the season as a pure alpine ice route, the climb features two pitches of WI4. See AAJ 1973.]

We found it imperative to click into our skis as high on the mountain as possible to make our ski descent in the best possible style. Without style and ethics in the mountains, what do we really have?

Nearly 50 years after the route's first ascent, in 2019 it was one of the few remaining couloirs in the range left unattempted by skiers. The upper couloir provided sustained 50° jump turns in an incredible position, and we were able to ski a few hundred feet more than we thought based on scouting photos. Three 40m rappels got us through the ice pitches, where we were once again rewarded with scenic hop turns in the bowels of Mt. Owen. Another rock band guarded the lower couloir, forcing us to do one more 10m rappel. The final crux was another short rock band where dry skiing techniques allowed us to descend with our skis on and without the use of a rope. The lower couloir was first descended in 2010 and is more of a classic freeride tube feature.

After safely negotiating the hazards of the upper mountain, we enjoyed sunlit carefree powder turns before the 10+ miles back to the Taggart Lakes trailhead. Like many first ski descents of this era, this descent was built on the foundation of an ice climb from a previous generation. Making turns down the alpine ice routes of the '70s and '80s has become something of a rite of passage for the modern ski mountaineer.

— Adam Fabrikant

Images



Beau Fredlund making turns down the upper east ridge of Mt. Owen during he and Adam Fabrikant's 2017 descent.



Mt. Owen from Cascade Canyon showing the two first descents completed by Adam Fabrikant and partners—the East Ridge to the Northeast Snowfields via the Freddy Fab variation (2017) on the left, and the Run Don't Walk Couloir (2019) on the right.

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