



## AAC Publications

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### **Nenana Mountain, Squidward Direct**

Alaska, Alaska Range, Hayes Range

**On August 25, Ethan Berkeland, Matt Capp, Brons Gerrish, and I flew with TEMSCO to the Hotel Glacier to attempt a new route on a satellite peak of Nenana Mountain (7,881').** Acknowledging that our weather window was tight and having landed in over a foot and a half of fresh snow, our expectations for attempting our originally planned route were rather quickly abandoned.

With morale low, we opted for smaller objectives to test the conditions. Brons and I went to attempt the first few pitches of the South Buttress (1,500', IV 5.8; see AAJ 2005) while Ethan and Matt explored an area where we'd done some cragging during a trip to the glacier the previous year (AAJ 2021), to the left of the South Buttress. With both parties finding conditions to be quite good, albeit snowy and/or wet, our enthusiasm was reinvigorated.

The next day, Ethan and I went back to the route he had climbed the previous day, knowing that more climbing was possible above the first rope length. Swapping leads through three more pitches of quality and varied climbing brought us to the base of a wonderful looking fingers-to-chimney crack that had a discouraging volume of water flowing from above.

Having agreed during the pitch below that if there was an appealing crack above, it would have to be climbed, Ethan set off with little regard for the ensuing spray. Above this pitch, the angle of terrain mellowed to 4th- and 5th-class scrambling, luring us higher up the mountain.

Agreeing that rappelling from there would be less than ideal due to the indirect and low-angled line, we agreed the best option would be to continue to the summit and attempt the descent taken by Jed Brown and Kevin Wright after their ascent of the South Buttress. Described as "loose but quick," we encountered neither of those descriptors on what we imagined to be their descent route. Eight 70m rappels brought us to the top of a snow gully where we had witnessed multiple avalanches the previous day from our base camp. As our descent stretched deep into the night, the more stable snow conditions were a welcome silver lining. Back on the glacier, we were elated and proud to have completed a quality new line to the summit of Nenana mountain via its southwest buttress: Squidward Direct (1,800', IV 5.10+).

After a short but restful night, we awoke to high winds rattling our summer tent and a sunny cloudless sky. As it was our last full day in the valley, we thought not to waste it even after our big day. While Ethan and Brons set off to climb more of the South Buttress, Matt and I established a splitter finger corner we'd spotted near the southwest buttress; we dubbed it Chef's Kiss (5.10b).

The next morning we again awoke to high winds whipping our tent, with the addition of rain and rockfall from the walls above. Base camp was hastily broken down, and we took shelter under a large boulder until our pilot came to retrieve us. We left happily, knowing the gamble on a late-summer weather window in the Alaska Range had rolled in our favor. Our trip was partially funded with an AAC Mountaineering Fellowship Grant.

— **Tristan O'Donoghue**

## Images



The south face of Nenana Mountain in Alaska's Hayes Range, showing the line of Squidward Direct (1,800', IV 5.10+). The South Buttress (1,500', IV 5.8) climbs the obvious prow to the right. The descent follows the left-hand ridgeline to the obvious large snow gully.



Ethan Berkeland looking up at the fifth pitch of Squidward Direct (1,800', IV 5.10+) on the south face of Nenana Mountain in the Hayes Range.



Ethan Berkeland overlooking the vast sea of granite east of Nenana Mountain from the summit ridge.



Tristan O'Donoghue searching for the path of least resistance to the summit ridge of Nenana Mountain as daylight fades.



Tristan O'Donoghue making the first ascent of Chef's Kiss (5.10b), a splitter cragging pitch at the base of Nenana Mountain.



Tristan O'Donoghue walking toward the summit of Nenana Mountain in the last few minutes of daylight.



Tristan O'Donoghue following the first pitch of Squidward Direct (1,800', IV 5.10+) on the south face of Nenana Mountain in the Hayes Range.

## Article Details

|                |                        |
|----------------|------------------------|
| Author         | Tristan O'Donoghue     |
| Publication    | AAJ                    |
| Volume         | 64                     |
| Issue          | 96                     |
| Page           |                        |
| Copyright Date | 2022                   |
| Article Type   | Climbs and expeditions |