



AAC Publications

East of Logan: Four New Routes Above the Hubbard Glacier

Canada, St. Elias Mountains

Before we arrived in the Yukon in mid-April 2021, Mt. Logan (5,959m) and the St. Elias Mountains already occupied a distinct place in my psyche. In the literature, the desolate, silent expanses of snow and ice were juxtaposed against the fiery human spirit of those pushing higher and harder on the complex, serac-ridden mountains. Every ascent seemed to chronicle a profound experience, pushing climbers to the edge of reason, ration, and survival, battling against fierce storms and the sheer vastness of the landscape. “The most out there you’ll ever feel!” they said. I was intimidated, yet comforted by the combined experience of our team of four and the casual attitude we would bring into this stunning yet hostile environment.

Alik Berg, Pete Hoang, Maarten van Haeren, and I arrived in Whitehorse on April 6. We stayed busy for two weeks of COVID-19 quarantine by collecting daily drive-thru groceries, sharing meals, staying fit with beer-induced ski races, and prepping six weeks of meals for what turned out to be a delicious base camp culinary experience. We were released from quarantine in the midst of an unusually long high-pressure system and flew to our base camp on the Hubbard Glacier on April 22. Our ultimate goal was a new route on the south side of Mt. Logan, and we had planned enough time to acclimatize well and to explore the mountains around camp.

The next afternoon we were skiing toward the east ridge of Logan with 10 days of food. We spent eight days on this classic route, pushing higher under clear skies and calm wind, and reaching the upper plateau at around 5,000m before descending to base camp in deteriorating weather to a delightful dinner of chicken vindaloo.

Over the next week, the weather was mixed but afforded us some opportunities to climb on the lower peaks surrounding our camp. On May 2, Alik and Maarten established Bogdar (1,000m, 5.3 AI4 50°) on the southwest face of Mt. Logbard (3,609m). A short section of snow led to a 60m one-pitch-wonder of WI4, above which easier snow slopes and mixed terrain brought them to the knife-edge southwest ridge and eventually an ice face leading to the summit. (Poor sedimentary rock on this aspect makes snow and ice recommended over rock climbing.) They possibly made the second ascent of the peak. [The first ascent of Logbard was by the west face: John Chilton and Rich Prohaska climbed and then skied the face in 1993; see the 1994 Canadian Alpine Journal.] To descend, Alik and Maarten followed the north ridge until they gained easy access to the west bowl, staying hard skier’s right to avoid almost all overhead serac hazard.

After another two days in camp, Maarten and Pete headed to the last prominent unclimbed spur on the south face of McArthur Peak (ca 4,360m), the easternmost obvious buttress. Conveniently located directly above base camp, their route was Basecamp Buttress (1,000m, 5.8 AI3 60°), which they climbed in a long day. They found mostly good rock climbing, which would have been more enjoyable if they had thought to bring rock shoes instead of 6,000-meter boots. The two did not continue to the summit of McArthur, which was likely farther away horizontally than what they had climbed vertically! After gaining the high point of the buttress (just before joining the east ridge of McArthur), they descended the broad couloir directly climber’s left of the buttress, making two rappels at the bottom.

Steep ice on Big in Japan, south face of McArthur Peak. Photo by Ethan Berman
On the same day, Alik and I headed to a snowier buttress on the south face of McArthur, intent on

repeating AstroFloyd (Kay-Statham, 1992), following a system of snow ramps and ice steps up the buttress. After slogging up snow slopes all morning, we arrived at several pitches of steep ice, increasing in difficulty as we got higher. As Alik spent an hour methodically cleaning a vertical pillar of rotten ice, I doubted we were on AstroFloyd, but rather an independent line to the right. After following him up the steep pitches, I broke trail to the top of the buttress, a bump on the long east ridge of McArthur, and without hesitation we began our descent. We traversed the east ridge of McArthur away from the summit until reaching a long, mellow snow slope on the south face, which we downclimbed. After 23 hours on the move, we were happy to find Pete and Maarten had beaten us back to base camp by a couple hours, and therefore won the honors of leaving us some tasty quesadillas. Big in Japan (1,500m, AI6 50°) was a fun addition to the “alpine cragging” on McArthur.

(I also envision that the many spurs and ridges of Logan could be attractive for climbers focused on speed and endurance on moderate ground. For example, a link-up of the east ridge of McArthur, continuing over Dak Tower and Catenary Peak (4,097m), and following the Catenary Ridge (AAJ 1968) all the way to the east summit of Logan, would be a worthy objective for the right team.)

The weather looked mixed for the next week, so we decided to do another trip up the east ridge of Logan to further acclimatize; this would still leave us two or three weeks to attempt our main objective on the south face of Logan. We made good progress back to the plateau in three days and found ourselves above the poor weather, once again basking in sunshine. The next day our intended recon resulted in pushing to the main summit under blue skies and cold wind. After a rest day on the plateau, we descended to base camp where Pete, who had elected to stay behind, had endured snowstorms for the week.

With 14 days of total acclimatization on the east ridge, Maarten, Alik, and I felt well prepared to transition to the Seward Glacier and poke our noses into the south walls of Logan. Coincidentally, two friends were flying in to climb the east ridge (we hadn't seen a soul since arrival), so we luckily got a bump flight to the Seward, saving us many hours of glacier slogging, and Pete, who was not well enough acclimatized to join us for the Logan attempt, got a flight out. We rigged a modest ABC and set off to attempt the second ascent of I-TO (Okada-Yokoyama, 2010) on the southeast face. Although we had been interested in trying a new route, the south and southeast faces of Logan are mostly serac-ridden, and we couldn't envision an independent line that didn't look suicidal.

Maarten van Haeren and Ethan Berman at their high point on I-TO (Okada-Yokoyama, 2010) on the south face of Mt. Logan. Photo by Alik Berg

We started up in good weather, but on the second day, although it was still bluebird, we somehow found ourselves in a snowstorm, a most unusual and unfortunate microclimate. We reckon the heat on the south face, perhaps combined with the humidity from our fairly close proximity to the ocean, forced a very localized release of precipitation—precisely where we were on the mountain! We made slow progress, and as we entered a big gully system halfway up the face, with spindrift pouring around us, we decided to bivvy and then retreat, not overly optimistic about the forecast. After a full day of rappelling, we reached ABC and woke up later to a foot of fresh snow (from an actual storm system that had moved in). After a rest day, we snowshoed back to base camp, cutting the epic journey from the Seward to the Hubbard in half by making use of a col we had spotted in the Hubsew Ridge, which we named “Sneaky Pete's Pass” (2,175m, 60°31'46.40"N, 140° 6'33.09"W).

Slowly deteriorating weather defeated any hopes of another attempt on the Logan face. During one break in the clouds, Alik and Maarten spent the day of May 26 making the first ascent of the southeast face of Hubsew Peak (1,000m, AI3 50°). They found just enough steep terrain to keep it interesting and noted the potential for 1,000m ski descents—possibilities that seemed to be quite plentiful around the range. Their descent (on foot) was via the blunt south-southwest ridge, until a large open snowfield facing east could be joined back to the start of the route. This is possibly the third route climbed on Hubsew Peak, after the east ridge (1995) and southwest face (2000).

Although we were thwarted on our attempt at the big show, and definitely spent more time walking

and eating than climbing, we were satiated with six weeks of existence in some of the most remote and spectacular mountains around. We extend a huge thanks to the John Lauchlan Memorial Award for supporting this expedition.

Editor's Note: The 2022 *Canadian Alpine Journal* includes an article by Maarten van Haeren with in-depth technical descriptions of the routes climbed.

Images



Maarten van Haeren during the first ascent of Bogdar (1,000m, 5.3 AI4 50°), a new route up the southwest face of Mt. Logbard (3,609m). The peak in the center distance is Mt. Cook (4,196m).



A major buttress on the right side McArthur Peak's south face, showing (1) AstroFloyd (Kay-Statham, 1992) and (2) Big in Japan (1,500m, AI6 50°, Berg-Berman, 2021). The summit is off picture to the left.



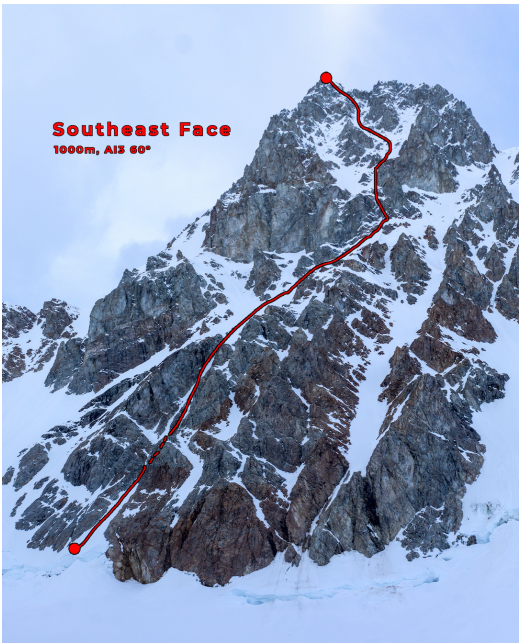
Steep ice on Big in Japan, south face of McArthur Peak.



Maarten van Haeren and Ethan Berman at their high point on I-TO (Okada-Yokoyama, 2010) on the south face of Mt. Logan. The team bailed in the morning with a deteriorating forecast.



Alik Berg leading steep ice on Big in Japan (1,500m, AI6 50°) on the south face of McArthur Peak.



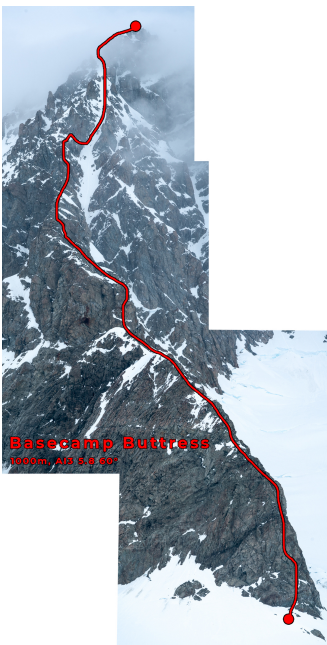
The southeast face of Hubsew Peak (1,000m, AI3 50°). The descent was to the left.



The line of Bogdar on the southwest face of Mt. Logbard.



Maarten van Haeren climbing on Basecamp Buttress (1,000m, 5.8 AI3 60°) on the south face of McArthur Peak.



Basecamp Buttress (1,000m, 5.8 AI3 60°) on the south face of McArthur Peak.

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