



## AAC Publications

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### **London Tower, Prelude Gully, Historical Ascent**

Alaska, Central Alaska Range, Ruth Gorge

**In May 1983, Ernie Borjon, Dan McCabe, and I climbed the prominent west-facing gully that rises above the Ruth Glacier between London and Werewolf towers.** [This gully was climbed again 13 years later by Manu Guy and Manu Pelissier (France), who named the route Freezy Nuts and until now were credited with the first ascent. The route has since become quite popular, albeit exposed to serious avalanche risk.] **This route seemed like an obvious line that we had not heard about. We understood that Gary Bocarde and partners had done the first ascent of London Tower by a gully to the south.**

The route went very easily on the initial snow slope, with a minor crux of a short 60° ice pitch. The climbing crux was the cornice at the top of the gully. We went on to climb the snowy eastern side of the ridge to the summit of the peak north of the col (London Tower). We descended along the east side of the towers and down the gully to the south of Prelude, presumably the one previously climbed by Bocarde.

The climb was supposed to be a warm-up for an attempt on the Elevator Shaft of Mt. Johnson, hence the name Prelude. We only made it one pitch up the Shaft before our retreat.

Prelude Gully was a fun, relatively straightforward climb of modest grade. I think that previous descriptions seem reasonable: 2,000', Grade II AI3.

— Robert O'Brien

Aerial view of London Tower (T) and Werewolf Tower (W) above the Ruth Glacier in September 2013. The arrow marks Prelude Gully, first climbed in 2003. The route was repeated in 2016 and called Freezy Nuts, the name by which it is commonly known today. The broader gully at far right was used for the first ascent of London Tower (then called Grandes Asses) in 1979. The peak in back is the Balrog. Photo by [TravelingOtter/Flickr.com/Creative Commons](https://www.flickr.com/photos/travelingotter/)

**Historical Notes on London Tower (Grandes Asses):** London Tower (Peak 7,500') likely was climbed first in May 1979 by Gary Bocarde, Charlie Head, John Lee, and Jon Thomas. Bocarde wrote in AAJ 1980: "Since several days of snowfall had filled with snow the main ice chutes we had planned to ascend, we settled for the safer southwest couloir.... The couloir went fast, and above it...we followed the south ridge up steep snow and one pitch of rock to the corniced summit ridge." The couloir they followed is believed to be the straightforward gully south of Hut Tower, which has since been descended by other teams, including the 1983 party. They called the mountain Grandes Asses because of its resemblance to the Grandes Jorasses in the French Alps. It's not clear when the name London Tower became more commonly used, but it dates back at least to the early 1990s.

Lou Butera, Steve Markiewicz, Charlie Sassara, and Tom Smayda repeated the Bocarde route a few days later in 1979. The following year, Dave Grimes, Dave Johnston, and Brian Okonek climbed Peak 7,500' (London Tower) from the opposite side, starting from the Coffee Glacier, via the southeast ridge (see AAJ 1981). The 1983 climb via Prelude Gully was likely the fourth ascent of the peak.

## Images



Climbing the lower snow slopes on Prelude Gully in May 1983.



Robert O'Brien above the crux ice step on Prelude Gully in May 1983.



The corniced exit from Prelude Gully, between London and Werewolf towers, in May 1983.



Robert O'Brien moving up the summit ridge on London Tower after the first ascent of Prelude Gully in May 1983.



Aerial view of London Tower (L) and Werewolf Tower (W) above the Ruth Glacier in September 2013. The arrow marks Prelude Gully, first climbed in 2003. The route was repeated in 2016 and called Freezy Nuts, the name by which it is commonly known today. The broader gully at far right was used for the first ascent of London Tower (then called Grandes Asses) in 1979. The peak in back is the Balrog.

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