



## AAC Publications

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### **Mt. Hayes, Southwest Face, Ski Descent**

Alaska, Alaska Range, Hayes Range

**On May 3, Adam Fabrikant, Beau Fredlund, Clark Henarie, and I made a ski descent of the southwest face of Mt. Hayes (13,832').**

We began our trip on May 1, flying out of Talkeetna with Paul Roderick. While initially skeptical of our plans, Paul was happy to fly us into a well-positioned base camp at 7,000' on the upper Susitna Glacier, with 14 days of food. Originally, we had planned on attempting the south buttress of Hayes, but I had done quite a bit of research and had thought the southwest face to be a possible back up option after seeing a grainy photo in an old AAJ.

As we approached by plane and closed in on the mountain, all of us made eye contact with the southwest face and a gigantic couloir that just beckons to be skied. With just a few hand gestures, we agreed this was the proudest line on the south side of the mountain. We spent the next day skiing around the area and scouting potential options. The snow felt good, and the visceral feeling of being back in the big mountains is always special. It quickly became apparent that the South Buttress was not a viable route for ascent or descent, as the glacier was shedding at an alarming rate. One such calving event sent us running for cover during our scouting mission.

With the south buttress out, we focused our attention on the southwest face. A group that included Fred Beckey first climbed the southwest face in 1976 (see AAJ 1977) ascending the enormous couloir feature we had spotted to the saddle between Hayes' north and south summits; however, they did not continue to the top. In our experience, moderate snow climbs like this often make for good ski mountaineering runs in the right conditions.

Launching casually the next morning from our camp, we found easy travel up to the base of the couloir and made good time across the bergschrund. Once in the couloir, we climbed steep neve for 3,000' until it was possible for us to exit climber's left. We had good photos from our flight in that showed a path to the 13,000' saddle plateau, through a feature we named the Smile Face. However, what we couldn't see in our photo was a panel of steep alpine ice that separated the couloir from the Smile Face. Three horizontal pitches of ice (AI2/3) brought us into the mouth of the face, where interesting glacial route-finding landed us on the plateau. From here, easy travel led to the higher north summit of Hayes.

Building clouds made for in-and-out views, but standing on top of Mt. Hayes is a fantastic position, with views to the tundra in almost all directions.

The upper summit headwall skied well, and we made the glide across the sastrugi-ridden plateau. Wild skiing through the serac-riddled Smile Face brought us back to the ice traverse. To return to the couloir, we made a few diagonal rappels on good V-threads and completed a single traversing pitch. We had a spooky moment on the rappels, when I was rigging the next V-thread with the boys above, and a serac 50' below them and right next to me calved off. The Smile Face was drooling, so we hurried up to get over to the top of the couloir, where we clicked back into skis.

We had hoped for some softening of the névé in the couloir, but the clouds kept the snow firm. No matter, Adam dropped in first and in jest proclaimed the conditions to be great. In reality they were—we skied firm but edgeable neve for 3,000', down one of the most aesthetic couloirs any of us had ever skied. The angle stayed in the 50° range for almost the entirety of the run—fantastically sustained and enjoyable steep skiing. Popping over the bergschrund at the bottom, we all knew what a special line we had just skied. Back at camp we celebrated with cheese burgers and tequila.

With good conditions, we spent the next week touring around the upper Susitna and adjacent valleys. There is enough ski potential on the glacier to occupy any level of skier for well over a week. The military is very active in this part of the range, and we would be greeted most days by fighter jets and sonic booms, or Chinooks hovering overhead. Every day we'd see new wolverine tracks, but never actually saw one ourselves. They are intrepid creatures, dodging crevasses and scaling mountain passes, and our skin tracks would often follow theirs.

After ten days on the glacier, we called for Paul to pick us up, and a few hours later we were all drinking beers in the hanger.

— **Billy Haas**

## Images



The southwest face of Mt. Hayes, showing the line climbed and skied by Adam Fabrikant, Beau Fredlund, Billy Haas and Clark Henarie in May 2021. The green section is the ice traverse into the Smile Face.



Adam Fabrikant, Billy Haas and Beau Fredlund on the summit of Mt. Hayes before making the first ski descent of the peak's southwest face.



Adam Fabrikant making steep turns in the large couloir that defines the lower portion of the line on the southwest face of Mt. Hayes.



Leading across the large exposed ice face above the main couloir. The Smile Face and the 13,000' saddle between Mt. Hayes two summits can be seen in the background.

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