



AAC Publications

Denali, Slovak Direct, Single-Push All-Free Ascent

Alaska, Central Alaska Range

Thirty-eight years after the first ascent of the 2,800-meter Slovak Direct route up Denali's south face, we climbed the route all free and in a 40-hour push with no bivouac. Originally, we had planned to bivouac on the face, but while climbing the West Buttress route, we learned that American mountaineers Matt Cornell, Jackson Marvell, and Alan Rousseau had just climbed the route in 21.5 hours! That encouraged us to climb light, with thin sleeping bags, a stove, and a total of 20 energy bars, a dozen gels, and a bag of dried meat for the two of us.

We started up the Slovak Direct at 6:30 a.m. on May 25. A dry period with extreme heat had significantly changed conditions on the face. In the lower part, there was no ice, which slowed our progress. Higher up, the conditions were better and the climbing excellent. Our stove was not working properly, and in the evening, when we stopped to prepare water, it would not work at all. Unfortunately, this was just below the hardest pitch, but nevertheless Richard led it onsight at M8. [Editor's Note: This rock pitch, which had not been freed previously, is a variation to the original route that was found by Ben Gilmore and Kevin Mahoney during the second ascent; this is the line now followed by most parties who repeat the Slovak Direct. In 2013, Rémi Sfilio and Hélias Millerieux freed a different crack line just to the right of this pitch.]

After 20 hours of climbing, we were above the last hard sections and facing the long marathon via the Cassin Ridge to the summit. We had gone without water almost all day, and this slowed us tremendously. At first glance it looked like easy terrain, but below the thin layer of snow there was tough ice with bad protection. At around 10:30 p.m., after 40 hours of climbing, we were on the summit, totally tired and dehydrated, but happy that we did this beautiful and difficult climb.

— **Richard Nemeč and Michal Sabovčík, with information from Vlado Linek, Slovakia**

Images



Richard Nemeč leading on the lower part of the Slovak Direct route on Denali's south face.



Richard Nemeč onsighting the M8 rock pitch near the top of the main wall on the Slovak Direct.



Traversing above the main wall on the Slovak Direct route to join the upper Cassin Ridge.



Michal Sabovčík (left) and Richard Nemeč on the summit of Denali, 40 hours after starting up the Slovak Direct.

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