



AAC Publications

Dall Glacier, Mt. Mason and Mt. Stansfield, First Ascents

Alaska, Alaska Range

“Zach, I just learned that Mason Stansfield died in a crevasse fall in AK.” I read and re-read the message on my satellite phone. Aside from the steady purr of a white gas stove, there was a somber silence in our kitchen tent. Four days prior, my two climbing partners and I had flown on the same plane as Mason and his partner Tessa, dropping them off on the Eldridge Glacier before we headed to an area south of Mt. Russell and established a base camp on the Dall Glacier. As I ruminated on the news, I stared at two unclimbed peaks through the tent’s window, now drenched in gold as the sun rose higher.

That 2021 expedition came to a close shortly after hearing of Mason’s passing, and I was grateful to be able to make it to his memorial in Ouray, Colorado, to celebrate his life with our San Juans community. A year later, my friend Joseph Hobby and I climbed both of the aforementioned peaks, naming them Mt. Mason and Mt. Stansfield.

On April 15, 2022, Joseph and I flew into the Dall Glacier, roughly four miles south of Mt. Russell (approximately at 62.74494, -151.88208), and spent the first day making camp and assessing conditions. The next day, we set our sights on one of the two unclimbed peaks, which was approximately 9,200’ high and northwest of camp. (The summit’s coordinates are 62.77669, -151.94310.) We reached the start of our planned route in an hour, traveling southwest of camp for about two miles. We began climbing friendly névé, generally working our way up the peak’s south ridge. While moderate, this route proved to be lengthy, with chossy rock and overhanging cornices to navigate.

We reached the summit in approximately seven hours and we descended the route, skiing roughly 60 percent of the line. (Changes in aspect and elevation caused abrupt shifts in ski conditions from wet snow to ice, so we aborted our original plan for a “center punch” descent down the peak’s south face.) Due to the lack of a good fall line on the south ridge, we would briefly ski the south face before periodically traversing back to the ridge, which proved amenable apart from one desperate traverse on skis through a cliff band on wet, deteriorating snow.

Eleven hours after starting out, we reached the base. We named this peak Mt. Stansfield and the route Chamo (3,700’, 70°) after Mason’s dog, who undoubtedly would have beaten us to the bottom of the route on the descent. Most of the route was climbed ropeless, aside from a few hundred feet of crevassed terrain near the summit.

After a few days of drying gear and skiing north-facing terrain near camp, we focused our efforts on our next peak, with a summit listed at 9,680’ on the USGS topo. (This peak is immediately west of Mt. Stansfield.) On April 19, Joseph and I left camp and approached our proposed route on skis, gaining 2,100’ and traveling four miles to the start of the peak’s west ridge, which was almost entirely coated in rime.

We cached skis and began simul-soloing névé with intermittent ice sections steepening briefly to 70–80°. After 1,000’ we reached a series of friendly crux steps as the ridge narrowed. These short steps involved mixed climbing on excellent granite and navigating through small, overhung rime formations. The remainder of the route went relatively quickly, and we roped up for a final stretch of ice that put us almost directly on the summit.

We descended the route of ascent with a series of rappels on the upper mountain and otherwise used belayed downclimbs and down-soloing for the majority of the descent. We named this peak Mt. Mason, and our route was dubbed Busta-Rime (3,000', M4 80°). While I only listened to Busta Rhymes a few times with Mason, I'm sure he'd appreciate the climber/rapper pun.

We spent our final days of the trip soaking up powder skiing and introspection. These routes weren't cutting edge nor did they put us at our limit, but they were climbed with a lot of laughs and quickly enough to enjoy beers afterward—the exact sort of trip Mason would want us to have.

— Zach Lovell

Images



Joseph Hobby descending Chamo (3,700', 70°) after making the first ascent of Mt. Stansfield (9,200') on the Dall Glacier.



Joseph Hobby following a pitch on Busta-Rime (3,000', M4 80°) during the first ascent of Mt. Mason (9,680') on the Dall Glacier.



Joseph Hobby high on Mt. Mason (9,680 ft) during the mountain's first ascent via Busta-Rime (3,000', M4 80°).



Joseph Hobby leading ice on Busta-Rime (3,000', M4 80°).



Joseph Hobby booting up a steep snow slope partway up Chamo (3,700, 70°) on Mt. Stansfield.



Joseph Hobby on an exposed section of Chamo (3,700', 70°), which climbs the south ridge of Mt. Stansfield.



Joseph Hobby traversing a steep slope partway up Chamo (3,700', 70°), which climbs the south ridge of Mt. Stansfield.



Mt. Mason (9,680'), showing the approximate line of Busta-Rime (3,000', M4 80°), which generally follows the peak's west ridge. Joseph Hobby and Zach Lovell climbed and named this peak in honor of their friend Mason Stansfield, who died in a crevasse fall in Alaska in 2021.



Mt. Stansfield (9,200') showing the approximate line of Chamo (3,700', 70°), which roughly climbs the

peak's south ridge. Joseph Hobby and Zach Lovell climbed and named this peak in honor of their friend Mason Stansfield, who died in a crevasse fall in Alaska in 2021. The peak to the left also was climbed and named Mt. Mason.

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