



AAC Publications

Nenana Mountain, Inflation Tower

Alaska, Alaska Range, Hayes Range

The relative ease of access to Nenana Mountain, at the western margin of the Hayes Range, makes it well suited for smash-and-grab trips during short Alaskan high-pressure systems. On August 1, Tristan O'Donoghue and I returned to Nenana Mountain (7,881') for the third time, following trips in 2020 and 2021. We flew into the Hotel Glacier, on the south side of Nenana, with Temsco Helicopters.

We quickly got to work. After walking to the head of the glacier, we climbed two 70m pitches on the slabby flank of a previously unclimbed tower on the southeast side of Nenana. The granite was clean, the climbing engaging but never too difficult (up to 5.9). We resolved to return the next day.

Early the next morning, we re-led the first two pitches, then encountered the crux: run-out, difficult climbing that traversed up and right. The pitch finished on a striking arete that led to easier ground. The next two pitches went up and left over a chockstone, through a grovelly and poorly protected crux, then into a beautiful arching crack that was considerably easier than it looked. Wrapping around an arete to the left brought us to a brilliant corner, pitch six, that led onto the tower's south face. We climbed two pitches up the center of the face, finishing on the sharp summit of Inflation Tower (12,200', IV 5.10a PG-13). We rapped the route without issue.

The next day we attempted a striking feature near camp, but rappelled after five pitches. Rather than get scooped up by Temsco, we planned to hike and packraft out of the bush. Over two days, we hiked six hours and paddled 17 miles on the Yanert Fork and Nenana River (with class III whitewater in which I took a dramatic swim) to arrive back at the Temsco base. Soon we were clinking beers at 49th State Brewing in Healy. This trip was supported by a Mountaineering Fellowship Fund Grant from the AAC.

— Ethan Berkeland

Images



Inflation Tower (1,200', IV 5.10a PG-13) on the southeast side of Nenana Mountain, Hayes Range, Alaska Range.



Tristan O'Donoghue starting up Inflation Tower (1,200', IV 5.10a PG-13) on the southeast side of Nenana Mountain.



Ethan Berkeland leading the first pitch, a shallow corner with splitter 5.9 fingers, on Inflation Tower (1,200', IV 5.10a PG-13).

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