



## AAC Publications

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### Hearth Mountain, Southwest Face

Alaska, Kenai Mountains

**On April 7, Laron Thomas and I set out to explore a likely unclimbed 3,500'-plus couloir that slashes up the southwest face of Hearth Mountain.** Standing at 6,182', Hearth is located up the South Fork of the Snow River in the Kenai Mountains.

We set out on snowshoes at 5:30 p.m. from the snowmachine pullout across from the Meridian and Grayling Lakes trailhead. Despite a late start, there was a relatively good crust on the trails, and we made excellent time to a campsite seven miles up the riverbed.

We woke to overcast skies and set out at 6 a.m. There was increasingly heavy snowfall as we ascended the drainage to the bowl below the right side of the southwest face, and it seemed the day might turn into a reconnaissance mission. However, a fortuitous break in the clouds above Hearth's summit gave us hope. Roping up with a Petzl RAD Line and armed with three pickets, we left our snowshoes and started up a 1,000' avalanche-strewn slope before entering the narrow, rock-walled couloir.

Two bergschrunds proved to be the main challenge. One was at least five feet across and seemed like over 100' deep in places. Fortunately, we discovered a snow bridge that allowed us to tiptoe across. The conditions in the couloir alternated between firm snow and powder, with the final stretch being almost knee-deep. The steepest parts were a bit over 60°. Battling fatigue, we reached the summit at midday.

After a quick refuel, we started down the couloir amid deteriorating weather. Small sluff avalanches kept us on alert, and inside-the-ping-pong-ball whiteout conditions made navigation difficult. At camp, we took a longer break before embarking on the arduous trek through soft snow. Despite post-holing, we completed the hike out in roughly the same time as the approach, wrapping up a 14-hour summit day.

We believe ours to be the third ascent of Hearth Mountain. The first was by Willy Hersman, Rick Maron, Mike Miller, and Todd Miner in 1989, via the Fireside Glacier on the northwest side; the second was by Harold Faust, Tom Gillespie, Dano Michaud, and George Peck in 2008, going up the east side from the Billiken Glacier. Thanks are due to Michaud for suggesting this couloir climb.

—Joe Nyholm

## Images



Joe Nyholm heads up the route after the first bergschrund on the southwest face of Hearth Mountain.



The southwest face of Hearth Mountain (6,182'), climbed by the prominent left-slanting couloir that starts on the right side of the face.

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