



AAC Publications

Mt. Bradley, Southeast Face, Sports

Alaska, Central Alaska Range, Ruth Gorge

The long left-trending ramp at the start of Sports (4,660', Alaska Grade V, 5.10 A1 AI4 M6 90° snow) terminates in a cave that pinches down to a chimney. Michael Telstad aims for the light on the other side. Photo: Eli Spitulnik

Michael Telstad, who has become a close friend and go-to partner over the past couple of years, has a knack for finding potential new routes. Before I could make sense of the line he'd envisioned on the southeast face of Mt. Bradley, I found myself entranced as Paul Roderick's plane blasted us with cold early April air and fresh snow as he took off down the great Ruth Gorge. The snow was so deep and our five-week supply of food, fuel, and gear was so heavy that we set up base camp right where we unloaded the small plane, between Bradley and Mt. Dickey.

Over the next week or so, we attempted On the Frozen Roads of Our Incertitudes (Constant-Mercader, 2003) on the west face of London Bridge, but were turned around by aerated, rotten, overhanging ice. The next day, we climbed Prelude Gully to the summit of London Tower, then for several days we shoveled out our tents, Sisyphus-style, through unremitting snowfall and relentless wind. High pressure returned on April 16, and we attempted Shaken, Not Stirred on the Mooses Tooth in a 24-hour push from our base camp, turning around shortly below Englishman's Col.

On April 19, with a promising four-day weather forecast, Michael and I skied to the base of Mt. Bradley's southeast face. In late afternoon, we started up a long, left-trending ramp that was also the start of Mark Allen and Graham Zimmerman's route Vitalogy (4,600', Alaska Grade 5, 5.9 R WI5 M6+ A1), established in 2010. We climbed the first 1,500' of Vitalogy that night, encountering an overhanging snow mushroom and several difficult mixed pitches up to 5.9 R M6. We reached the 2010 team's Prow Bivy on the upper snowfield by morning.

Sports (4,660', Alaska Grade V, 5.10 A1 AI4 M6 90° snow), a new route on the southeast face of Mt. Bradley, established by Eli Spitulnik and Michael Telstad. The bivouac sites are marked. The first day on the route was shared with the first 1,500 feet of Vitalogy (Allen-Zimmerman, 2010). Photo: Eli Spitulnik
After resting during the warmest part of the day, we took off in late afternoon and traversed steep snow, passing by the gully up which Vitalogy continues and instead aiming for the center of the upper face. [The 2024 line zigzags up the broad face between Vitalogy, on the left, and Season of the Sun (Ichimura-Sato-Yamada, 2007), on the right.] **A splitter finger and hand crack granted access to the upper face and warranted another switch from boots and crampons to rock shoes—then back again, of course. Night fell again, and we kept climbing. Techy M6 mixed and steep snow brought us to a long, airy pitch of aid. Steep sn'ice, snow traversing, short mixed steps, a rappel, and a long snow and mixed gully dropped us off at a somewhat protected snow ridge in late morning. We chopped our second bivy site with 3,000' of mountain below us.**

We rested again during the sunny hours and began our third day of climbing in the afternoon shade. A blur of steep, R-rated névé through rock bands, vertical steps of ice, and long simul-climbing blocks deposited us on the spindrift-plagued upper face. Around 1 a.m., we found a short overhanging rock band and settled in beneath it for our third bivy.

On April 22, my 25th birthday, we summited Mt. Bradley (9,101') after two more long blocks of simul-climbing. We made quick work of the descent, picking our way down the west ridge, traversing into the Wake-Bradley col, then rappelling and downclimbing to the base of the route, where we had left

our skis—only to find they had been hit by an avalanche from the north face of Mt. Wake. After some searching, we hobbled back to base camp with three skis and two skins between the two of us. Three days later, we found the missing ski and skins, hundreds of feet from where we had cached them.

We called our route Sports (4,660', Alaska Grade 5, 5.10 A1 AI4 M6 90° snow): an homage to the song by the Viagra Boys that we listened to a mind-numbing number of times during the trip, and also a nod to the impossibility of describing the spectrum of experience that is alpine climbing.

—Eli Spitulnik

Images



The aurora borealis seen over the London Tower group during Eli Spitulnik and Michael Telstad's first night of climbing on Sports (4,660', Alaska Grade V, 5.10 A1 AI4 M6 90° snow) on the southeast face of Mt. Bradley.



Sports (4,660', Alaska Grade V, 5.10 A1 AI4 M6 90° snow), a new route on the southeast face of Mt. Bradley, established by Eli Spitulnik and Michael Telstad. The bivouac sites are marked. The first day on the route was shared with the first 1,500 feet of Vitalogy (Allen-Zimmerman, 2010).



The southeast face of Mt. Bradley, showing the lines of (1) Vitalogy (Allen-Zimmerman, 2010), (2) Sports (Spitulnik-Telstad, 2024), (3) Season of the Sun (Ichimura-Sato-Yamada, 2007), (4) Friehe-Johnson variation (2010), and (5) East Buttress (Jochler=Orgler, 1987).



Michael Telstad psyched to be on the Ruth Glacier. Mt. Bradley is directly behind the plane.



Michael Telstad skinning to the base of the southeast face of Mt. Bradley with the lower part of the line, shared with Vitalogy (Allen-Zimmerman, 2010), marked.



Michael Telstad traversing the upper snowfield toward the center of Mt. Bradley's southeast face, with the line showing part of the complex route of Sports on the upper face.



Michael Telstad leading mixed ground on Sports (4,660', Alaska Grade V, 5.10 A1 AI4 M6 90° snow).



Michael Telstad skirting a snow mushroom on day three on Sports, the new route on the southeast face of Mt. Bradley.



The long left-trending ramp at the start of Sports (4,660', Alaska Grade V, 5.10 A1 AI4 M6 90° snow) terminates in a cave that pinches down to a chimney. Michael Telstad aims for the light on the other side.



Michael Telstad wrapping up his lead block on day two with a long pitch of aid in the dark.

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