



AAC Publications

Chitistone Valley, Peavine Palace

Alaska, Wrangell Mountains

The line of Peavine Palace (3,000', IV WI6 M7), high above the Peavine Cabins in the Chitistone Valley, Wrangell Mountains. Photo: Ethan Berkeland

Jonathan Koenig and I first acquainted ourselves with the Chitistone Valley in March 2022 and quickly realized the immense potential in the area. After repeating the unbelievably classic Star Babies (WI5+, Breitenberger-Comstock-Dial-Tobin, 1987), we attempted a big new route directly above the palatial Peavine Cabins, which are operated by the National Park Service.

The route starts up a snow gully and consists of many steps of steep limestone separated by snow slogs. We surmounted the first few limestone bands via M3 mixed on solid rock. After 1,500' of steep snow, we encountered a beautiful but brief WI5 pillar, followed by another short WI3 step. Above another rock step, we came to the crux of the route—surely one of the most impressive pitches of mixed climbing in Alaska: an ice curtain we dubbed the Dangler. It is visible from the valley floor 3,000' below.

A head-on view of the two crux pitches of Peavine Palace. Photo: Ethan Berkeland

On our first attempt, I reached the Dangler by run-out, difficult mixed climbing, during which I placed one bolt on lead. After finally hooking my tools into the bottom of the Dangler, I looked up to see several ice roofs beyond. I decided to bail rather than get in over my head.

Jonathan and I returned to the Chitistone Valley in 2023 but did not attempt to complete the prior year's route. Instead, we made the first ascent of Hot French Grotto (3,500', IV WI4+) on Chitistone Mountain, with Elias Antaya and Tristan O'Donoghue (see AAJ 2024).

In March 2024, we returned to the Chitistone for a third time. After completing nearly a dozen shorter new routes in the area, Jonathan, Elias, and I turned our attention to the Dangler. With perfect névé coating the majority of the snow slope, we quickly gained our previous high point. I then spent nearly two hours leading the beautiful but terrifying crux pitch. It ended in a steep runnel of thin ice protected by beaks in adjacent rock, with overhanging moss climbing to reach a belay cave. It was nearly dark by the time Elias and Jonathan arrived at the belay; spindrift was hammering down the gully. I waited for a lull in the flow and quickly dispatched the final WI5 pitch during twilight.

We rappelled from a V-thread in the highest ice in the gully and continued descending our line by downclimbing and rappelling. The slopes were constantly sliding; mercifully, only five inches of snow had accumulated thus far, making the slides alarming but nonthreatening. The next morning, we awoke to over a foot of wet, heavy new snow outside of the cabin, but inside we were warm, dry, and utterly exhausted from our effort on Peavine Palace (3,000' of vertical gain, 500' of technical climbing, IV WI6 M7).

—Ethan Berkeland

Images



Ethan Berkeland on the WI6 M7 crux pitch of Peavine Palace, dubbed the Dangler.



The line of Peavine Palace (3,000', IV WI6 M7), high above the Peavine Cabins in the Chitistone Valley, Wrangell Mountains.



A head-on view of the two crux pitches of Peavine Palace.



Elias Antaya leading the first WI5 pitch of Peavine Palace (3,000', IV WI6 M7) in the Chitistone Valley, Wrangell–St. Elias National Park, Wrangell Mountains.



Ethan Berkeland on the Dangler, the W16 M7 crux pitch of Peavine Palace.

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