



AAC Publications

Mooses Tooth, east face, Terror

Alaska, Buckskin Glacier

After leaving a balmy spring in the Oregon desert, Geoff Unger and I headed for the east face of the Mooses Tooth. We shared the flight with David Lama and Dani Arnold, who were gunning for a line up the middle of the face, while Geoff and I were after a drip out to the right. When we landed on the Buckskin and found Scott Adamson and Pete Tapley already there, we were more than a little bummed to hear that our drip was actually a longtime project of Scott's. Geoff and I began looking for something else to climb: A thinly iced corner system on the left side of the face was the next best thing. With David and Dani set to launch up the middle, and Scott and Pete set to launch up the right, we got set to launch up the left.

On the morning of April 12 we set out for the wall. We were held up by a tricky 'schrund crossing before gaining the face's lower slopes. We then moved slowly on funky snow before reaching what we called the Racing Stripes: parallel lines of 75–90° névé that link the lower snowfield to the upper headwall. We weren't able to find belays or gear on the steep, at times insecure névé. It took us all day to reach the corner system at the start of the headwall, and we bivied below the first hard pitch. After trying the pitch the next morning, we decided to bail. We had moved far too slowly, and Geoff was suffering from an elbow injury.

With the perfect blue skies gnawing at me every minute I spent sitting in camp, I was keen to go back; coming to terms with an injury, Geoff was not. After a few days of rest, I managed to convince Scott Adamson, who I barely knew, to have a go with me instead. Having just completed the first ascent of NWS [see feature article in this edition] in a single push, Scott was excited to get some more climbing in before flying out.

We left camp at 3 a.m. on the morning of April 18, and planned to go as fast and light as possible. Where Geoff and I had bivied below the upper corners, Scott and I decided to try and climb through them and gain the large snow patch on the peak's southeast shoulder, about halfway up the headwall. We were happy to find that this time the snow conditions had improved, and we gained the Racing Stripes by about 6 a.m. Knowing that they were unprotectable, we decided to keep soloing until we reached the headwall. We roped up there, and Scott led one long pitch of ice until we could simul-climb on easier ground. We arrived at our previous bivy ledge around 8:30 a.m., fired up the stove, drank some water, and set off up the corners.

Six pitches and 14 hours later, we reached a big snow patch in the dark. A biting wind and serious fatigue had us both feeling completely shattered. All of the corner's pitches had been difficult, sustained, and hard to protect, with each pitch somewhere in the M6/7 and W15/6 range, with the occasional short section of aid. By the time we climbed another pitch to the top of the snow shoulder, we were both as strung-out as either of us could remember.

After a 2:30 a.m. bedtime and a night of strategic lying down, we coaxed ourselves awake around 8 a.m. We downclimbed a short pitch before moving rightward, and after one of the few easy pitches on the route we again encountered hard, steep climbing with marginal pro. Five more pitches, which included Scott's impressive lead of a hard, dry pitch on rotten rock, as well as a funky ice and mushroom traverse, found us at an airy bivy on a snow rib near the top of the headwall.

After another 2 a.m. bedtime and a much more comfortable night at the Dr. Seuss Bivy, we traversed

left to gain a weakness, and then climbed straight up on fun mixed terrain for two pitches toward the top of the face. One more pitch led around some monster cornices and onto the ridge, and a short walk led to the summit plateau, where we ditched our packs and set out for the top. A very Alaskan traverse on the corniced summit ridge brought us to what we thought was the top at around 3 p.m. Fearing that the next point on the ridge might be higher, we continued the traverse, only to find ourselves cursing as we looked back and realized we had already summited. After a few words and a few pictures, we retraced our steps to the top of the face.

We rappelled using anchors that Scott had just installed during his descent from NWS. After traversing and downclimbing toward the 'schrund, one more rap brought us back to the glacier. The descent had taken only four and a half hours. Exhausted, we rifled through the food that Geoff and I had cached before our attempt. At 10:30 p.m. on April 20 we arrived back at camp to whiskey and a warm dinner, coming in at a total round trip of about 67 hours. I estimate we climbed about 22 belayed pitches, with most being harder than WI4 or M5. Our new route, Terror (1,500m, VI WI6 M7 R/X A2), was without doubt the hardest, scariest climb of my life, but I wouldn't change anything—except maybe just a few more pieces of gear.

Chris Wright

Images



Chris Wright starts up the first pitch of the crux corner system on his initial attempt on Terror.



The impressive east face of the Mooses Tooth: (1) Southeast face [approximate location, Gilmore-House-Mahoney, 2000]. (2) The Beast Pillar [direct start to Dance of the Woo Li Masters. Bridwell-Pfinsten, 2001]. (3) Dance of the Woo Li Masters [Bridwell, Stump, 1981]. (4) Terror [Adamson-Wright, 2013]. (5) Bird of Prey [Arnold-Lama, 2013]. (6) Arctic Rage [Gilmore-Mahoney, 2004]. (7) NWS [Adamson-Tapley, 2013]. (8) There's a Moose Loose About This Hoose [Bracey-Helliker, 2008, not to summit]. (9) Magic Mushrooms [Bonniot-Dall'Agnol-Moulin-Revest, 2012].



Scott Adamson leading the second M7 pitch of the crux corners on his and Wright's successful ascent.



Chris Wright cleaning another hard pitch in the crux section of Terror.



Scott Adamson at the end of the first pitch of the second day of climbing, one of the only easy pitches of the route at WI4.



Chris Wright leading the second pitch of the second day of climbing, which involved 5.10 crimping with bare hands and a WI5+ overhang in the same pitch.



Scott Adamson following the tension traverse section of second pitch of the second day of climbing.



Scott Adamson leading a sustained M7 pitch on the most rotten rock encountered on the route.



Chris Wright enjoying some morning sun before leaving the "Dr. Seuss bivy," near the top of the headwall on the team's third day on the route.



Chris Wright leading another mixed pitch to begin the third day of climbing.



The true summit of the Mooses Tooth.



Chris Wright leading a thin runell.



Chris Wright leading thin cracks.

Article Details

Author	Chris Wright
Publication	AAJ
Volume	56
Issue	88
Page	149
Copyright Date	2014
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions