



AAC Publications

Mt. Malaspina, North Face to East Ridge

Canada, Yukon, Kluane National Park

On August 4, Natalia Martinez and I, as part of our Uncharted Project (which has focused mostly on the Cordillera Darwin and Cordillera Sarmiento in southern Chile), flew into Kluane National Park.

We landed on the Seward Glacier close to Mt. Saint Elias. After traveling 12km we established a base camp (ca 1,862m) near the base of Mt. Malaspina (3,776m), our objective. To our understanding, this peak was owed the title of “highest unclimbed officially named mountain of North America.” [There may be higher unclimbed summits that are unnamed.] Regardless of title, it was without doubt one of the most prominent and attractive unclimbed summits on the continent. We believe it has been attempted only once, in 1976, by a Polish-Alaskan expedition via its west ridge (AAJ 1978).

After three days exploring the heavily crevassed Malaspina Glacier, our only option was to follow a short section on the very edge of the glacier where avalanche debris had filled in the crevasses. Crossing that section in the early morning, we established a high camp below the north face of the mountain on August 9. Due to bad weather and high avalanche risk we quickly abandoned that spot. Several sites nearer the wall seemed safe, but the seracs 1,000m above were capable of launching large ice and snow projectiles over the entire area.

Once the weather improved, we started a summit push from base camp on August 14, just after midnight. After three hours we reached our old high-camp cache and then continued east toward the col between Mt. Baird (3,550m; AAJ 2001) and Mt. Malaspina. The access to the col was extremely exposed to avalanches and rock and serac fall. Access to the col begins diagonally under a hanging glacier with 300m of snow and ice (45–60°), which we simul-climbed. Above this step we belayed two pitches of 55–65° ice to finally reach the col. After resting, we climbed a ramp for 350m to Malaspina’s east shoulder. This consisted of a very sustained slope, involving nine belayed pitches on 50–65° snow and ice, with a final cornice that presented short vertical steps. We reached the shoulder (ca 3,377m) shortly after midnight and built an igloo-like bivouac shelter surrounded by the breathtaking spectacle of a northern lights storm.

On August 15, at 10 a.m. we started toward the summit, covering easy snow slopes and some technical steps to overcome a few bergschrunds. After a false summit, we finally summited at 2 p.m. with the GPS reading 3,756m, relatively close to the recognized elevation. The view was dominated by the overwhelmingly large Malaspina Glacier, the largest piedmont glacier in the world, Mt. Saint Elias to the west, Mt. Logan to the north, and Vancouver, Augusta, Cook, and Fairweather to the east. We descended our route, which entailed 15 rappels and downclimbing through clouds and spindrift. We reached base camp again at 8 a.m. on August 16 after 55 hours on the mountain. We graded our 1,900m route TD A12 55–65°.

– Camilo Rada, Chile

Images



The view from the bivy on Mt. Malaspina's east shoulder.



Camilo Rada and Natalia Martinez during the flight into Kluane National Park.



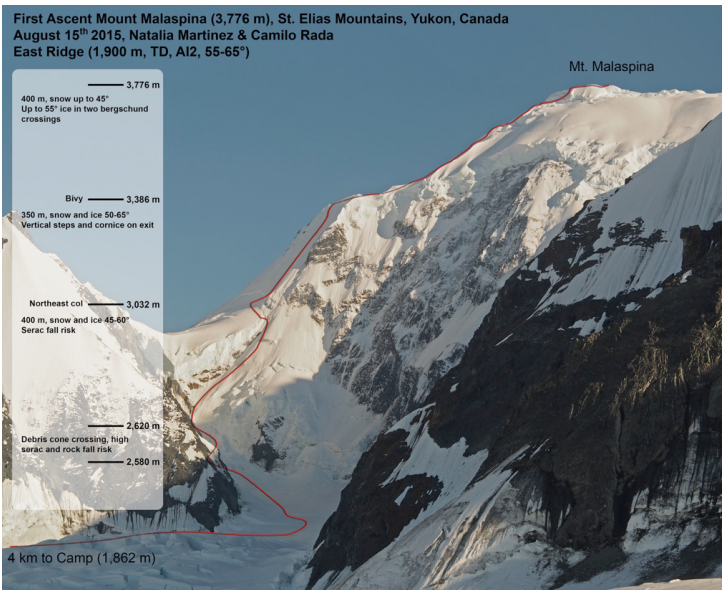
Navigating the heavily broken-up glacier below Mt. Malaspina.



Navigating the heavily broken-up glacier below Mt. Malaspina.



The serac-laden north wall of Mt. Malaspina.



A photo topo of the first route up Mt. Malaspina. The route starts on the north side and then joins the

east ridge.



Looking down the ramp leading to Mt. Malaspina' east shoulder at sunset.



Looking up the sustained ramp leading to Mt. Malaspina's east shoulder.



The scary north wall of Mt. Malaspina.



Natalia Martinez on the summit of Mt. Malaspina, with a view out toward the Pacific Ocean and the terminus of the Malaspina Glacier.



Leading up toward the col between Mt. Malaspina and Mt. Baird.

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