



AAC Publications

Mt. Wood, First Winter Ascent

Canada, Yukon, St. Elias Range

Lonnie Dupre en route to Happy Camp (Camp 1) at 11,200 feet on the east face of Mt. Wood in the St. Elias Mountains of Kluane National Park and Reserve in Canada's Yukon. Photo by Pascale Marceau

On March 11, at 3:10 p.m., Pascale Marceau and I reached the summit of Mt. Wood in wind chill of -45°C. Located in the St. Elias Mountains of Kluane National Park and Reserve, Mt. Wood is Canada's sixth-highest peak at 15,912' (4,860m). This was not only the first winter ascent of the mountain, but also made Pascale the first woman to reach the summit of a major subarctic peak in winter.

We flew from Burwash Landing, from our pilot's personal ranch, on March 4, landing on an arm of the Hodgson Glacier at 9,800' (very high for a Piper Super Cub). We skied a short way uphill from the landing and set up base camp near the base of the mountain's east face.

On March 7 we established Camp 1 at 11,200' after three precarious carries up the most technical section of our route (some sustained 60° ice slopes). We had supplied Camp 2 at 12,500', with two carries, by the 9th. Our first summit bid on the 10th was thwarted by high winds and driving snow just a couple of hours from the top.

On the morning of the 11th, tired, disappointed, and with a poor weather forecast, we prepared to descend the mountain. But by 10 a.m. the weather appeared to be stabilizing, so we decided to make a fast push for the summit. With good traction over hard-packed snow, and with a significant part of the route already wanded from the previous day's attempt, we reached the peak of Mt. Wood in just over five hours, then quickly descended, grabbing the gear at Camp 2 and scurrying on to Camp 1 in a race against darkness. The next day, we cautiously worked our way back to base camp.

Wood was first climbed in 1941 from a base camp southeast of the mountain. Wood's east face had previously been climbed in the spring/summer several times, though the exact lines followed are not known. We felt our 6,000' ascent was Alaska Grade III, mainly due to its numerous crevasses and the initial difficulties reaching Camp I. We spent a total of nine days on the climb.

While the subarctic zone (50–70° north latitude) and calendar winter are easily defined, what makes a peak "major" is a matter of opinion. But in the North American subarctic, the most obvious "major" peaks that come to mind are Denali, Foraker, and Hunter in Alaska, and Logan, St. Elias, Lucania, King, Steele, and Wood in the Yukon). We are certain that none of these had been summited in winter by a female climber previous to Pascale's ascent.

– Lonnie Dupre, USA

Images



Lonnie Dupre en route to Happy Camp (Camp 1) at 11,200 feet on the east face of Mt. Wood in the St. Elias Mountains of Kluane National Park and Reserve in Canada's Yukon.



An aerial photo of the east face of Mt. Wood (15,912'), taken during a reconnaissance flight in early March 2019, showing the route up the east-northeast spur climbed by Lonnie Dupre and Pascale Marceau. They summited on March 10.



The route line for Pascale Marceau and Lonnie Dupre's first winter ascent of Mt. Wood (15,912') via the east-northeast spur (Alaska Grade III).



A summit selfie with Pascale Marceau and Lonnie Dupre after making the first winter ascent of Mt. Wood in the St. Elias Mountains in Canada's Yukon.

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