



AAC Publications

Mendenhall Glacier, Suicide Basin, New Routes

Alaska, Coast Mountains, Boundary Ranges

Between 2012 and 2020, I teamed up with several partners, including the late Ryan Johnson, to complete three long ice routes on the committing Suicide Wall, comprising the eastern wall of the Suicide Basin, a tributary of the lower Mendenhall Glacier. Utilizing foot, ski, and helicopter access, we were able to make the most of limited weather windows to climb Bathtime with Toaster (400m, WI5), Path of the Fallen (330m, WI5), and Infinite Jester (350m, WI6 M6+).

Alaska is entering its third generation of ice and mixed development, with motivated locals slowly working out access, strategy, and conditions to find and complete large, high-quality objectives. The Suicide Wall is just one such location, with the complexity and difficulty of backcountry access presenting a major homefield advantage for ongoing development efforts.

Bathtime with Toaster was completed in 2012 by myself, Tim Banfield, and the winter climbing visionary Ryan Johnson, following Ryan's first ascent of Tide Line (420m, WI6) in Tracy Arm, also near Juneau, with Tommy Lanagan and Jason Nelson.

Path of the Fallen, completed with Ryan Johnson in January 2018 and named in homage to fallen climbers Scott Adamson, Kyle Dempster, Hayden Kennedy, and Inge Perkins, is accessed by a sprint under the Suicide icefall, followed by a moderate free solo to a snowfield and four excellent pitches of thin and/or steep water ice. It was Ryan's second-to-last first ascent prior to his death in the Mendenhall Towers in March 2018.

Finally, in March 2020, following a backyard warmup making the second ascent of my route Blood Moon (240m, WI4 M7) and the first ascent of Varcolaci (240m, WI4+ M6+ R), both near Seward, Ryan Sims and I returned to the Suicide Basin to climb Infinite Jester (named in honor of Johnson), which takes the wall's line of strength through thin ice and rime to access the final pitch: a steep pillar and mixed roof that finishes with a mantel over a classic broken-pillar eyebrow to access the top of the wall. In my mind, this was the last major independent route on the wall. There are smaller independent routes (still large by continental USA standards) and variations to be completed by a motivated party.

– Samuel Johnson

Images



Ryan Johnson on the summit pitch of Bathtime with Toaster (400m, WI5) on the Suicide Wall near Juneau in March 2012.



Ryan Johnson at base camp below the Suicide Wall in 2018, two months before his passing. Path of the Fallen is clearly visible on the left, with the continuous ice line of Bathtime with Toaster visible in the center of the wall. In this photo, Infinite Jester (climbed in March 2020) presents as a discontinuous series of daggers and smears that climb up, then right, and then back left, with the final daggers unformed.



Ryan Sims working past the final ice eyebrow on the summit pitch of Infinite Jester (350m, WI6 M6+).



The Suicide Wall heavily rimed after six weeks of precipitation, showing routes completed between 2012 and March 2020: Path of the Fallen (330m, WI5, 2018) in blue, Infinite Jester (350m, WI6 M6+, 2020) in yellow, and Bathtime with Toaster (400m, WI5, 2012) in red.

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