



AAC Publications

Branscomb Peak, New Route; Mt. Dolence, East Ridge and Traverse

Antarctica, Ellsworth Mountains, Sentinel and Heritage Ranges

Alex Honnold on Mt. Dolence. Photo by Esteban Mena

In January 2023, Sam Hennessey, Alex Honnold, Esteban “Topo” Mena, and Nate Opp ascended the last obvious unclimbed couloir on the west face of Branscomb Peak (4,520m), a subpeak of the Vinson Massif around 2km northwest of the main summit. The four started up at 10 a.m. and topped out on Branscomb eight hours later before continuing in two pairs to the summit of Vinson (4,892m).

The route was mostly steep snow and never more than 50° except for a short mixed section, and the group climbed unroped throughout. This was the first new route on Vinson in a dozen years.

Honnold and Mena had reached the summit of Vinson the week before via the normal route, and then repeated one of the variations on the south face of Mt. Shinn (4,660m), finishing via the upper southeast ridge.

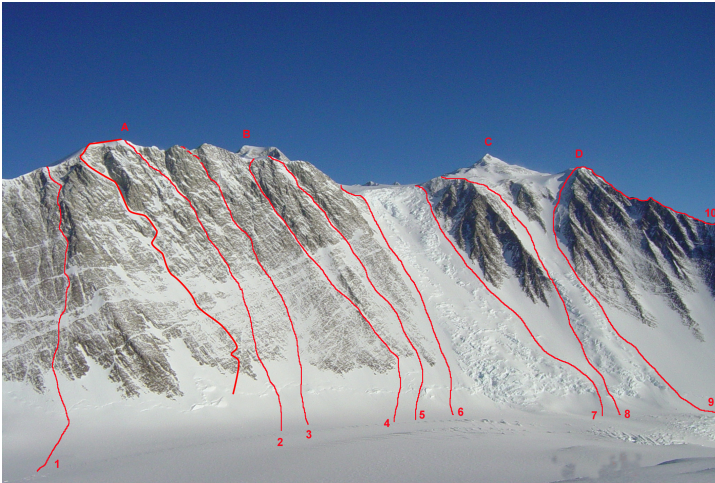
After climbing in the Vinson Massif, Honnold and Mena made the first ascent of the east ridge of Mt. Dolence (1,950m, 79.8500°S, 83.21667°W) in the Heritage Range. This rocky pyramid is about 6km south of the ALE Union Glacier camp. The upper east ridge, accessed by a couloir on the north side, had been attempted in December 2012 by Americans Tom Nonis, Jeff Previte, and Seth Timpano. These three stopped at a minor top some distance east of the summit, having found the convoluted ridge too slow to climb in big boots and poor weather.

Honnold and Mena started much farther east, at the beginning of the ridge. They passed the rappel anchor left in 2012, continued to the summit, and then traversed the entire mountain by descending the west ridge and going over a rocky peak to the northwest, inscribing a giant horseshoe. The pair took 12 hours from start to finish, covering a distance of around 10km. There was lots of scrambling and sections up to 5.6, which they climbed unroped; they made two short rappels.

Mt. Dolence was first climbed in January 2011 via the north face, by Klaus Tscherrig and client Markus Ineichen from Switzerland. This took place after the relocation of the ALE base camp from Patriot Hills to Union Glacier, which gave much better access to the peaks of the Heritage Range.

— Damien Gildea, AAJ

Images



A. Branscomb Peak (4520m) B. Mount Vinson (4892m) C. Silverstein Peak (4790m) D. 'Asturias Peak'

1. Chilena-Slovak Route (Maria Paz Ibarra- Jarmila Tyril 2007) 6. Rudi's Runway (Rudi Lang 1991)
2. Linear Accelerator (Jay Smith 1994) 7. West Face Ice Stream - Right (Conrad Anker 1998)
3. Conjugant Gradients (Jed Brown 2006) 8. Heavenly Father (Jay Smith- Jo Smith 1993)
4. Purple Haze (David Morton - Todd Passey 2005) 9. Asturias Route (Manolo Alvarez- Ramon Portilla 1995)
5. Banana Friendship Couloir (Miguel Angel Vidal 2004) 10. West Ridge (Conrad Anker 1999)

An overview of the routes on the west face of Mt. Vinson. (1a) is the 2023 route. Off picture to the left is the 2011 route Tak Tak.



The west face of Branscomb Peak. From left to right: Chilena-Slovak Route (2007), Hennessey-Honnold-Mena-Opp (2023), Linear Accelerator (1994), and Conjugant Gradients (2006).



During the 2023 route on the west face of Branscomb Peak.



Alex Honnold climbing the east ridge of Mt. Dolence. Beyond the summit, the continuation ridge is visible to the right.



Alex Honnold on the east ridge of Mt. Dolence.



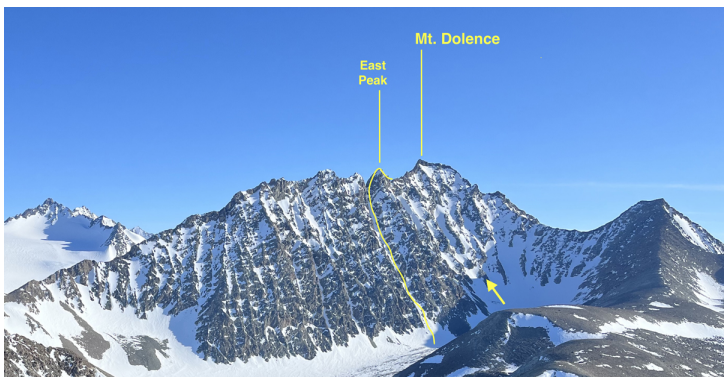
Alex Honnold on Mt. Dolence.



The Dolence "horseshoe." The east ridge of Mt. Dolence falls toward the camera. From the summit, Alex Honnold and Esteban Mena descended the ridge to the right, over the prominent lower northwest top, then down the ridge almost parallel to the east ridge.



Esteban Mena toward the end of the Dolence "horseshoe" traverse. Mt. Dolence is the high rocky peak at the back. The traverse started off picture to the left, continued along the entire east ridge of Mt. Dolence, over the top, down and over the dark pyramid to the right, then along the rocky terrain to the camera position.



The north face of Mt. Dolence. The line to the east peak is that followed by American climbers in 2012. The arrow marks the approximate start of the 2011 first ascent route.

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