



AAC Publications

The Citadel, Northwest Face, and Rise and Shine

Alaska, Alaska Range, Kichatna Mountains

Joseph Hobby on the summit ridge of the Citadel after the first ascent of the Borealis Face (2,000', 85° ice). Photo by Zach Lovell.

Time is often an unhelpful metric when weighing the value of a trip in the mountains. Even a few days can gift the richest of experiences when partnership, conditions, and luck line up. From April 18 to 21, Joseph Hobby and I were fortunate to do two new routes on back-to-back days in the Cathedral Spires of the Kichatnas, during a brief period of good weather amid a stormy spring.

On April 18, Paul Roderick of Talkeetna Air Taxi deftly pioneered a new landing on the Shelf Glacier, with Joseph and I along as eager passengers. We hopped out and spent the rest of the day assessing conditions and enjoying as much sun as we could find in an otherwise shaded amphitheater.

The next day, we skied to the base of the Citadel (8,520'), aiming for the northwest face. In 1966, Arthur Davidson, David Johnston, Pete Meisler, Richard Millikan, and David Roberts would have gazed upon this face from their advanced base camp on the Shelf when they planned to try the Citadel. They experienced three days of poor weather and descended to base camp having never made an attempt. After first seeing the Citadel's northwest face in 2021 from a neighboring ridge, I did a substantial amount of research; this face has very likely remained unclimbed, despite holding an obvious line. I believe this is simply because of the difficult access—which, prior to Paul Roderick's opening of the Shelf Glacier landing, would have been from the Shadows Glacier or the Cul-de-Sac Glacier.

Our route began with an overhanging bergschrund that gave way to snow climbing and ice runnels. These offered quick and secure soloing conditions. Halfway up, we broke out the rope and simul-climbed through high-quality but thin alpine ice, with sections up to 85°. On the upper face, conditions were more variable, with steep, fluted snow and ice-covered rock slabs. Our line wandered slightly but had beautiful exposure. We reached the Citadel's breathtaking summit in four hours and switched into matching summit outfits—bright red tank tops emblazoned with unicorns—discovered on a sale rack in an Anchorage Walmart.

Our three-hour descent had challenging anchor building in crackless rock. We generally reversed the ascent route, with several rappels and downclimbs near the top and bottom of the route. Borealis Face (2,000', 85° ice) is well worth a visit from future parties seeking an off-the-beaten-track ice and snow route.

An AI5 ice hose in the back of the Superfly Couloir (1,700', AI5 M6 A2) on the Rise and Shine formation. Photo by Zach Lovell.

On April 20, we woke to the chirp of my satellite phone receiving the latest weather forecast. Our plans to take a rest day needed to change if we wanted to get another climb in before flying out.

We headed to an easterly couloir on an unnamed formation immediately south of the Riesenstein. After skinning over the bergschrund, we donned crampons and simul-soloed until we reached more difficult climbing: an incredible 60m AI5 ice hose with a few mixed moves at the top. The crux of the route came on the following pitch: a snowy, overhung chockstone that required extensive snow excavation, creative aid, and an exciting mixed exit. After reaching the col, we climbed a rope length to one of the formation's many subtle summits as the sun was setting, roughly seven hours after leaving camp. We descended our route quickly, with bountiful options for rock-gear rappel anchors

and secure downclimbing on lower-angled ice and snow.

Round-trip from camp, we climbed Superfly Couloir (1,700', AI5 M6 A2) in about 10 hours. There are no other reported routes on this formation (even from the Cul-de-Sac Glacier), and we named it Rise and Shine. Rise and Shine has a plateau-esque top with a few subtle summits that are at similar elevations, all between 7,300' and 7,400'.

After two days on the go, Joseph and I finally had a moment to soak in our experience. The northern lights came out when we got back to camp. An explosion of phosphorescent green illuminated the sky as we drank half-frozen beers. Despite the early morning hour, we were wide awake and briefly impervious to the cold tugging at our faces. When we both finally fell asleep, it was only for a few precious hours before the sun came up again and we began packing up camp to fly out.

– Zach Joseph Lovell

Images



Zach Lovell low on the Borealis Face (2,000, 85° ice), the northwest face of the Citadel in the Cathedral Spires area of the Kichatna Mountains.



Joseph Hobby simul-climbing on Borealis Face (2,000, 85° ice), the northwest face of the Citadel in the Cathedral Spires area of the Kichatna Mountains.



The northwest face of the Citadel (8,520'), with Joseph Hobby and Zach Lovell barely visible in the upper half of the central couloir in the center of the photo. The photographer, Mark Twight, happened to fly by the peak with Talkeetna Air Taxi's Paul Roderick and a friend, Blair Speed, at this moment.



Joseph Hobby on the summit ridge of the Citadel (8,520') after the first ascent of the Borealis Face (2,000', 85° ice) with Zach Lovell.



Joseph Hobby (right) and Zach Lovell on the summit of the Citadel after making the likely first ascent of the northwest face, via a line they dubbed the Borealis Face (2,000', 85° ice). Upon reaching the top, they changed into the matching tank tops bought in an Anchorage Walmart for summit photos.



The Borealis Face (2,000', 85° ice), the probable first ascent of the northwest face of the Citadel, in the Cathedral Spires area of the Kichatna Mountains, Alaska Range.



The entrance to the Superfly Couloir (1,700', AI5 M6 A2) at the base of the previously unnamed formation just south of the Riesenstein. Joseph Hobby and Zach Lovell dubbed the subpeak Rise and Shine.



An AI5 ice hose in the back of the Superfly Couloir (1,700', AI5 M6 A2) on the Rise and Shine formation in the Cathedral Spires area of the Kichatna Mountains.

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