



AAC Publications

Mt. Huntington, The Technicolour Superdream

Alaska, Alaska Range

The 2007 summer edition of *Alpinist* magazine contained a profile of Mt. Huntington (12,240') in which Clay Wadman described the peak as part of what he called *The Realm*, “a place savage, yet fragile, so sublime it existed completely beyond human experience.” Fifteen years after first reading those words as a 17-year-old, I was ready to experience it for myself.

In the late spring of 2022, I received a photo of Huntington’s superlative west face from my good friend Dane Steadman. Upon it he had traced a line beginning at the base of a massive buttress about 200m right of the Colton-Leach (1981) and 100m right of the lesser known Count Zero, an 18-pitch direct start to the Colton-Leach put up by Bruce Miller and Clay Wadman in 1992. Dane’s line followed a perfect path up ice-plastered striations. It seemed too good to be true.

A year later, in mid-April 2023, Dane, Zac Colbran, and I bowed our heads in the abrasive wash of Paul Roderick’s plane as the legendary pilot took off after dropping us on the Tokositna Glacier. We watched as the plane grew small, banked left, and vanished into the mountains. In the sudden silence, we turned our gaze to Huntington. With the west face towering over us, our hopeful eyes strained, searching the face and praying that our intended route hadn’t been a photographic anomaly. And there it was—a thin line of gray ice soaring up the granite buttress.

After setting up camp, we set off to investigate the start of the route. Zac won rock-paper-scissors and began the first pitch. He carefully climbed 10m up a snice-filled corner before the ice disappeared and he hit overhanging snow mushrooms—the exact type of terrain we’d been worried about. We had known it would take some luck to get the conditions we needed; without enough ice, the route wouldn’t be possible (for us, at least). After building a small nest of gear, Zac drytooled far to the right, delicately tiptoeing across the granite to a thin, barely there sheet of ice. He tapped his way slowly up the sheet, eventually sank his first screw, and shortly after built a good anchor to bring us up. Dane took over and led a largely Pecker-protected pitch, linking smatterings of ice and pick-torquing cracks up a steep wall to rejoin the corner system. At least for now, it looked like the route might go. We rapped down, stripping our ropes as we went.

Two days later, we left base camp at 5 a.m. Dane took the first block and cruised up the pitches we’d already done. Next, he excavated his way through a traversing snow pitch to reach great ice in the main corner system. A few pitches later, that ice petered out—and we were back to snow mushrooms. Zac and I watched as Dane put on a master class in mushroom dismantling, carefully slicing chunks away to access the steep rock behind.

The Technicolour Superdream (1,300m, VI AI5+ M6+ A2) on the west face of Mt. Huntington. The route climbs 700 meters of new terrain to the right of the Colton-Leach (1981) and Count Zero (1992), then finishes on the upper Colton-Leach.

The mushroom ordeal over, Zac took over and led an incredible block of pitches up a massive ice hose we had seen from the ground. The hose ended with steep, wildly featured ice lasered into a corner that arced into the sky. With nowhere to shelter from falling ice, Dane and I erected a backpack force field above our heads and huddled beneath it.

Above us, a large swath of granite beckoned. From the ground, the only real feature we had been able to pick out at this spot was a roof; we were unsure whether it would go. This was my block, and I moved left across a slab and up into the overhang. Switching to aid and pulling through it, I found a perfect finger crack leading upward. Dane followed the pitch free at M7. Above this, I linked several chimneys and small snowfields. We had hoped to be done with the steep terrain and to have reached an obvious fin of snow by the end of the day, so that we could dig in and set up our tent. But with darkness lapping at our heels and more blank-looking granite ahead, we were forced to bivvy sooner. Our only option was a small, triangular patch of 70° snow plastered to the rock. We hacked out a two-foot butt ledge in the ice before hitting rock and settled in for a cold night.

In the morning, we watched the sun explode over the south face of Mt. Hunter. My feelings of gratitude for the light after a long night were mixed with apprehension of the pitch to come—another blank-looking slab. Twenty meters above our bivvy ledge, I placed a few pieces and set off to the right, uncertain what I would find. Peeking around a corner, I saw that what had looked blank from the ground turned out to be a perfect, pick-torquing seam leading toward a ramp system above. Lucky again! I strung up a few more pitches, and then Dane took over to lead us up a series of ramps and chimneys peppered with steep ice bulges. Above these, our new route intersected with the Colton-Leach.

We had climbed 700m to this point. After a quick brew stop, we simul-climbed the amazing ramp system of the Colton-Leach. As the sun set, we kicked our way up the gold-washed summit icefield. Darkness and exhaustion caught up to us before we could tag the top. To our surprise and relief, we found a perfect tent platform already chopped into the snow. A little excavation and we were able to pitch the tent for an all-time bivvy, deeply appreciated by all after our prior evening's accommodations.

The following morning, we traced a line up the summit ridge to put the finishing touches on The Technicolour Superdream (1,300m, VI A15+ M6+ A2). Standing on tiptoe atop Huntington, we could just catch the sun on our faces as it streamed over the cornice from the east. With the Central Alaska Range spread out before me, it felt as if I had stumbled into The Realm that Wadman wrote of 16 years earlier. We descended the West Face Couloir (1,000m, V 85° ice, Nettle-Quirk, 1989) and arrived back in camp around 2 p.m. on April 21.

We would like to thank the John Lauchlan Award for their support to help make this trip possible.

— Grant Stewart, Canada

Community College Couloir and Nose Free: On April 24, three days after returning to base camp, Dane Steadman and Grant Stewart went back for seconds on Huntington's west face, having spotted a right-angling ramp system between the West Face Couloir and the Harvard Route that they believed to be an unclimbed line. They later learned that it was first climbed in 2009 by Chris Thomas and Rick Vance, who named it the Community College Couloir. Steadman and Stewart climbed this line to where it intersected with the Harvard Route (1,000 m, VI 5.9 A2 70° ice, Bernd-Hale-Jensen-Roberts, 1965) just below the 100-foot "Nose" pitch—an overhanging crack that was the only section of the route that had yet to go free. Steadman managed to free the pitch at M8. He and Stewart then traversed left and rappelled the West Face Couloir. An integral free ascent of the Harvard Route remains up for grabs.

Cutting Edge Podcast: The three climbers and AAJ assistant editor Michael Levy spoke about Mt. Huntington for episode 57 of the AAJ's podcast:

The Cutting Edge · A Beautiful New Route on Mt. Huntington: Zac Colbran, Dane Steadman and Grant Stewart

Images



Zac Colbran about to begin a thin ice traverse to avoid snow mushrooms on the first pitch of The Technicolour Superdream (1,300m, VI AI5+ M6+ A2) on Mt. Huntington's west face.



Grant Stewart searching for a path across snowy slabs at the end of the first day on The Technicolour Superdream on Mt. Huntington.



Zac Colbran climbing a pitch of the steep ice runnel on the new route up Mt. Huntington's west face. The dreamy quality of this runnel inspired the route's name: The Technicolour Superdream.



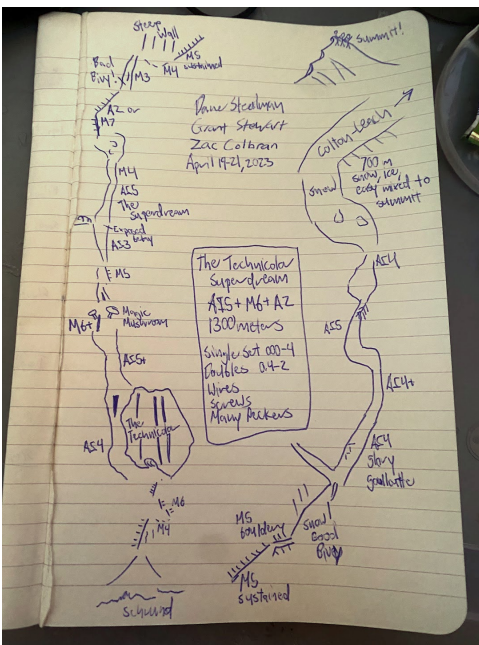
Zac Colbran climbing a pitch of the steep ice runnel on the new route up Mt. Huntington's west face. The dreamy quality of this runnel inspired the route's name: The Technicolour Superdream.



Grant Stewart climbing Mt. Huntington's summit ridge on the morning of the third day of the team's climb.



(Left to right) Zac Colbran, Grant Stewart, and Dane Steadman on the summit of Mt. Huntington, with Denali in the background.



Topo for The Technicoulor Superdream (1,300m, VI A1S+ M6+ A2, on the west face of Mt. Huntington. The new route joined the Colton-Leach (1981) about 700 meters up the face.



The Technicolor Superdream (1,300m, VI AI5+ M6+ A2) on the west face of Mt. Huntington. The route climbs 700 meters of new terrain to the right of the Colton-Leach (1981) and Count Zero (1992), then finishes on the upper Colton-Leach.



Dane Steadman freeing the Nose pitch (M8) on the Harvard Route of Mt. Huntington.



The west face of Mt. Huntington (12,240'), showing (1) Start of the Colton-Leach Route (1981); (2) Count Zero (Miller-Wadman, 1992); (3) The Technicolour Superdream (1,300m, VI AI5+ M6+ A2)—the route joins the Colton-Leach at the big horizontal snow band; (4) West Face Couloir; and (5) Community College Couloir (Thomas-Vance, 2009). (N) is the general location of the Nose on the Harvard Route. Other routes not shown.

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