



## AAC Publications

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### **Abercrombie Mountain, Moonlight Mile**

Alaska, Chugach Mountains

**As Jed Brown observed in a report about his and Colin Haley's first ascent of the southwest face of Abercrombie Mountain (7,037') in 2007, good spring alpine conditions around Valdez are hard to come by.** The mountains begin at sea level and rise to a mere 7,000', so spring usually comes on fast; alpine ice routes come into condition only briefly before melting out. In March, however, August Franzen phoned me to say conditions were shaping up favorably to give Abercrombie a go.

I drove from Palmer to August's house in Valdez on March 30, and the next day, August drove his snowmachine to the lake that sits at the toe of the Valdez Glacier, where I met him with our packs. I hopped on behind him and we pattered across the frozen lake and onto the glacier. We cruised about eight miles on windboard before running into heavily crevassed terrain. There, we parked the machine and hiked the last half mile to the base of Abercrombie, where we set up our tent in the early afternoon of March 31.

It was windy but sunny, and the entire southwest face was clattering with small rocks and ice chips. We took naps and ate dinner to wait for cooler conditions. Unable to sleep more, we left the tent at 11:30 p.m. under a nearly full moon. With the sun off the face, it was silent. After an hour of snow climbing, we reached an ice flow approximately 150m to the right of Jed and Colin's line and began climbing.

The bottom half of the route presented about 2,000' of sustained but straightforward WI3, with a couple of steeper pitches mixed in. A significant snow bench separates this lower part of the face from the upper half. Above the bench, we took a gully to the left of where Jed and Colin climbed on the south ridge. (Based on Jed's report, I suspect they were attempting to climb the couloir feature we followed, but passed it in poor visibility while traversing the snow bench and ended up at the ridge.) The upper half of our route was another 2,000' of sustained, firm 40°–60° snow, punctuated by several 30m–60m headwalls that we climbed via small ice flows.

We simul-climbed much of the route, belayed a couple of pitches, and built approximately ten anchors in total. A few of those anchors were in rock and, as Jed observed in his report, the stone seemed unusually good for the Chugach. The crux of the lower half was a sunbaked WI4 pitch, and the upper crux was a run-out section of M4 involving very thin ice. Had we climbed the route a few days earlier, those two pitches likely would have had more ice.

Near the top, we wove between rime towers and reached the false summit at 10:30 a.m. on April 1, about 11 hours after beginning. We traversed over the true summit and started down the east ridge. We then downclimbed a gully into a large bowl on the southeast face, crossed a hanging valley, and downclimbed another gully below the south ridge to arrive back on the Valdez Glacier. We returned to camp at 3 p.m., making for a 15.5-hour round trip. After snacking and dozing, we drove the snowmachine back to August's house in time for dinner.

Ours was likely the second ascent of the face. The route is direct and has quality, sustained climbing—I would compare it favorably with other classic alpine ice climbs in Alaska, like Ham and Eggs on the Mooses Tooth. We calculated the vertical gain at 5,280', and we climbed the route almost

entirely by moonlight, so we called it Moonlight Mile, after the classic Rolling Stones song. A grade of W14 M4 seems consistent with the local standard.

– **Simon Frez-Albrecht**

## Images



Moonlight Mile (5,280', WI4 M4), in red, on the southwest face of Abercrombie Mountain (ca 6,950') in the Chugach Mountains. The route climbed by Jed Brown and Colin Haley in 2007, the first ascent of the southwest face, is in blue. This photo was taken on a scouting mission in February, and it shows snowier conditions than those during the first ascent of Moonlight Mile from March 31 to April 1.



An overview of August Franzen and Simon Frez-Albrecht's spring 2023 ascent of Abercrombie Mountain. From a campsite on the Valdez Glacier, they climbed the southwest face of the peak; traversed over the summit; descended via the east ridge, then a plateau below the southeast face, and a couloir to the west; and finally circled back to the west to return to their camp.



The start of the 2023 route on the southwest face of Abercrombie Mountain. August Franzen is in the foreground.



Simon Frez-Albrecht on the southwest face of Abercrombie Mountain during his and August Franzen's nighttime first ascent of Moonlight Mile (5,280', WI4 M4).



August Franzen (left) and Simon Frez-Albrecht on the summit of Abercrombie mountain. They

descended via the east ridge and a hanging valley to the south.

## Article Details

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