



AAC Publications

Dean, Southwest Face, Spirit Walker

Alaska, Coast Mountains, Boundary Ranges

Though it was an objective long coveted by Juneau locals, the prominent couloir on the southwest face of Dean (5,883')—whose name appears on official maps without any modifier such as Peak or Mountain—had, to my knowledge, never received a proper attempt. In February 2024, Kelson Rounds-McPherson and I figured we'd take a crack at it. Having been stiffed by flooded muskeg and thick understory before in Davies Valley, the approach route southwest of the peak, we decided that just completing the approach would qualify as a success.

We left the car at 7:30 p.m. on February 7, skis underfoot. The first several miles we knew well from previous water-ice missions. We deviated from the standard approach after the third meadow and gained elevation to a bench on the looker's left side of the valley. We followed this feature through old spruce trees before bootpacking up an avalanche path to the base of Dean's southwest face, where we started climbing at about 4 a.m.

A web of thin ice smears between compact granitic slabs stretched for two pitches. The climbing was moderate, though delicate moves with marginal gear made for achingly slow progress. Our lone Spectre ice piton proved indispensable in this terrain. The sun finally arrived and, as expected, so did the avalanches; we traversed right to a comfortable ledge to wait for darkness and the face to firm back up.

About seven hours later, at nightfall, we continued. Half-frozen moss and thin ice brought us to lower-angle snow in the couloir. Mellow ice steps broke up the post-holing as we simul-climbed for several hundred meters. We exited the couloir via a mixed chimney, the technical crux of our route, to reach the west ridge.

Dean has four summits—the true summit is the easternmost of the four, and the couloir is on the westernmost—but we did not tag any of them. Instead, we descended snow on the north side of the west ridge to reach the Dean Glacier, before walking back to our skis in the avalanche chute, where we stopped for a nap. Fresh snow woke us after a meager two hours of rest on our makeshift ski-and-rope mattresses. After burning the last of our fuel and eating our final bars, we skied back to the car, arriving around 1:30 p.m. on February 9 to cap a 42-hour round-trip effort on Spirit Walker (500m, V WI3 M5+).

An alternative start to climber's right of our direct line may provide easier access into the couloir. Additionally, following the couloir proper all the way to the ridge would likely be less difficult than our exit chimney pitch.

— Cameron Jardell

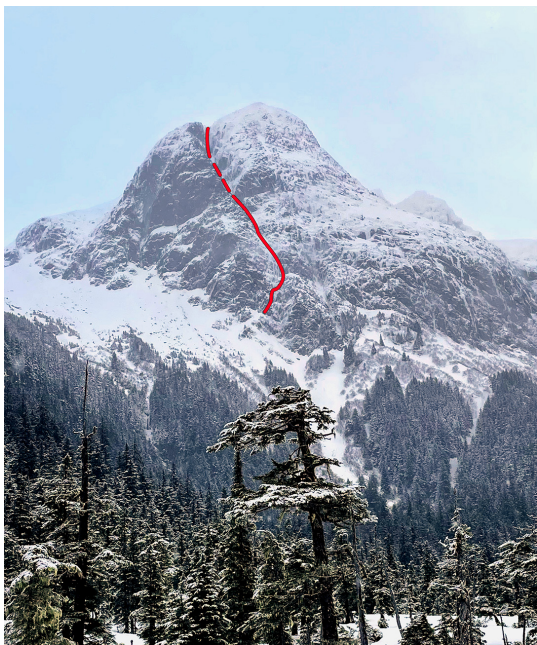
Images



Kelson Rounds-McPherson during the Davies Valley approach to the southwest face of Dean (5,883').



Cameron Jardell tackling the exit chimney pitch to the west ridge of Dean (5,833').



Spirit Walker (500m, V WI3 M5+) on the southwest face of Dean, about 30 miles north of Juneau in the Boundary Ranges of Alaska.

Article Details

Author	Cameron Jardell
Publication	AAJ
Volume	66
Issue	99
Page	
Copyright Date	2025
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions