



## AAC Publications

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### The Enduro Traverse: Skiing the Teton Skyline in a Day

Wyoming, Teton Range

Reaching the summit of the Grand Teton, the fifth peak of the Enduro Traverse, looking south over Middle Teton, South Teton, Mt. Wister, and Buck Mountain (extending along the crest above and left of the climber). Photo by Michael Gardner.

**Traversing multiple peaks in the Teton Range** started in 1932, with Fred Ayres making a solo summertime traverse from the Middle Teton to Nez Perce. Moving across the skyline has been a part of the range's unfolding history ever since. In 1950, the seeds of the hyper-classic Grand Traverse, from Teewinot to Nez Perce, were sown, but it wasn't until 1963 that John Evans, Richard Long, and Allen Steck completed the traverse, moving from south to north, the opposite of today's usual route. In the 1965 AAJ, Steck wrote, "Any route or time of day is acceptable, however, only be sure to finish within 24 hours." For the Enduro ski traverse of the Tetons that I envisioned, sub-24 hours was our sole metric, as Steck had laid it out for us.

Skiers got on board early with long Teton traverses, generally crossing through mountain passes and avoiding climbing and skiing the high peaks. This changed in 1993, when Stephen Koch and Mark Newcomb linked the Grand Teton, Middle Teton, and South Teton on a June tour in roughly 17 to 18 hours. In 2003, Jimmy Chin completed the Grand-Middle-South link-up, solo, in 14 hours, and in 2008 he bested his time to finish in just under 11 hours. Most of the early versions of this traverse involved the easiest or most efficient ski routes. Brendan O'Neill most likely has the current record, with a time of 8:43 for the three peaks.

In 2019, I completed the first wintertime Grand-Middle-South link-up with O'Neill. In just over 12 hours, we skied the Grand via the traditional Ford-Stettner route, Middle by descending the east face to the Ellingwood Couloir, and South by the southeast face. This was a large deviation from most outings, where the Southwest Couloir on Middle is descended and the Northwest Chute and/or the east ridge of the South Teton is used as an egress. By taking on some of the steeper lines, the goal was to improve style, add more vertical, and overall make it more about the descents, not just tagging summits.

The Grand-Middle-South link-up continues to captivate ski mountaineers as a fantastic day of moving through the mountains; I enjoy this tour multiple days every season as a training outing and a proper challenge.

The Enduro Traverse linked Buck Mountain (far left) and Mt. Wister, continued over the South, Middle, and Grand Tetons (center), then finished over Mt. Owen and Teewinot Mountain (far right). Photo by Michael Gardner.

In 2021, Sam Hennessey and I embarked on the "Cathedral on Skis," linking the Grand Teton, Mt. Owen, and Teewinot—a link-up known as the Cathedral Traverse in summer, done in the opposite direction. We took the path of least resistance and avoided most technical challenges. After climbing and descending the Grand Teton via the Ford-Stettner route, we continued into Glacier Gulch via the Dike Snowfield, then ascended the Koven Route to the summit of Owen. After some 5th-class downclimbing, we skied the east ridge to the Diagonal, the original descent route on Owen's northeast face. We then climbed the North Couloir up Teewinot and skied from the summit down the classic east face.

This felt like the next step in Teton ski traverses and much more challenging than the Grand-Middle-

South.

In March 2023, Sam, Brendan O'Neill, and I were at it again during a great stint of high pressure. The goal was to ski the Cathedral peaks by their most technical routes. After soloing up the Grand by the Ford-Stettner, we pointed our skis down the east face and into the Hossack- MacGowan Couloir on the north face. After crossing the bergschrund, we contoured over to the Koven Couloir and climbed to the summit of Mt. Owen. For our descent, we chose the Northeast Snowfields, one of the range's finest descents on skis. We finished our outing on Teewinot's east face—this was another fine adventure that we labeled the "Skier's Cathedral."

To me it seemed logical to bring all of our experiences together in a much longer traverse—to see how far we could go in under 24 hours. In the Alaska Range, I have enjoyed moving under the midnight sun for 24, 30, hell, even 64 hours—why not see how this would work back home? It gets darker in Wyoming in the spring than in Alaska, but we have headlamps.

In April 2024, Michael Gardner, Brendan, and I embarked on the Enduro Traverse. The idea was to enchain the Teton skyline from Buck Mountain in the south to Teewinot, crossing over Mt. Wister, South Teton, Middle Teton, Grand Teton, and Mt. Owen along the way.

At 6 p.m. on April 22, with the day's heat still in the air, we started skinning up Death Canyon in wet, sloppy snow. Under an endless sunset, we climbed the east ridge of Buck Mountain (11,938') and clicked in on top for our first descent at 9:15 p.m. (A full moon allowed us to complete all the climbs sans headlamps, but we did use the lamps for our descents.) We skied down Buck's hyper-classic east face and used a piece of terrain called the Buckshot to drop into the South Fork of Avalanche Canyon.

Leaving their gear at the highest skiable point, the team scrambles to the summit of Mt. Owen, the second-highest peak of the range. Photo by Michael Gardner.

The next climb was the South Headwall of Mt. Wister (11,490'), which flows into the upper east ridge. We reached Wister's summit at 10:53 p.m. This was the lowest peak in our traverse, yet it packed a punch. The northeast face offered up some proper steep skiing—it felt engaging via headlamp—and deposited the three of us in the North Fork of Avalanche Canyon.

Our next ascent took us up the South Teton's Amora Vida Couloir (much more fun to descend than ascend), and here we encountered our least efficient travel of the day, with heinous breakable crust and soggy snow engulfing our entire legs. From the top of the South Teton (12,514'), the descent by the Northwest Chute was fast and uneventful.

Now in Garnet Canyon's South Fork, we began our climb up the Middle Teton's Southwest Couloir, where efficient cramponing put us on the summit rather quickly. The descent down the east face into the Middle Teton Glacier route was rather harrowing on the refrozen undulating snow left by skiers who had descended in the warm days before us. But we were not there for the ski quality, rather for the continuous movement.

From the North Fork of Garnet Canyon, we made quick work of the Ford-Stettner route, topping out the Grand Teton (13,770') at 6 a.m., 12 hours into our journey. The sun was beginning to rise above the horizon, and it felt great to embrace its warmth again.

Skiing down the north side of Mt. Owen. There are few skiing photos from the traverse because much of it took place at night. Photo by Michael Gardner.

With a long block of daylight ahead, the three of us were confident as we descended the Ford-Stettner, with some thoughtful downclimbing in the Chevy Couloir, which is normally rappelled. (To save weight, we did not carry a rope and chose lines that would go without one.) We made our way into the Dike Snowfield and down to Glacier Gulch, where we donned crampons once again and

slogged up the Koven Couloir, feeling the heat, as we carried minimal water. We continued up the east ridge and the Koven Chimney to the true summit of Owen (12,928'). After some downclimbing, we were sliding again, down Owen's east ridge and into the Diagonal. From the Owen-Teewinot cirque, we began our final ascent, with rather benign climbing up the Northwest Couloir to the summit of Teewinot Mountain (12,325').

Starting down the upper snowfields, we encountered other mountain travelers for the first time of our outing. We let them cautiously navigate the narrows, the most hazardous and technical challenge of Teewinot's east face, and once they were through we descended to the valley floor, leaving the alpine behind.

We finished at the Taggart Lake trailhead in early afternoon, 20 hours and 12 minutes after starting, well within Steck's 24-hour metric. In all, the Enduro Traverse covered 24 miles and roughly 19,000 to 20,000 feet of vertical gain. (GPS apps often don't agree in the Tetons' steep terrain.) A memorable day of walking across the Tetons' skyline.

This would prove to be my last day in the high peaks with Michael Gardner, as he would lose his life in October 2024 on Jannu East in Nepal. I am grateful he happened to be home to join for the day, as we etched our way across the slopes in the twilight. The Tetons were always Mike's home mountains, and winter and summer he would use his creativity to draw new lines, whether on rock, ice, or snow. His inspiration lives on among the high crags of the range.

**—Adam Fabrikant**

## Images



The Enduro Traverse linked Buck Mountain (far left) and Mt. Wister, continued over the South, Middle, and Grand Tetons (center), then finished over Mt. Owen and Teewinot Mountain (far right).



Michael Gardner heading up Death Canyon toward Buck Mountain, the first peak of the Enduro Traverse. Starting the tour at 6 p.m. on a warm April evening, the team opted for a "night naked" style, planning to travel throughout the night and carry only minimal clothing and equipment.



Reaching the summit of the Grand Teton, the fifth peak of the tour, looking south over Middle Teton, South Teton, Mt. Wister, and Buck Mountain (extending along the crest above and left of the climber).



Adam Fabrikant (right) and Brendan O'Neill on the Grand Teton at sunrise, prepping for another descent. The team reached the summit around 6 a.m., 12 hours after starting the traverse.



After descending from the Grand Teton, Brendan O'Neill strides toward the Koven Couloir (center), the start of the climb up Mt. Owen.





Leaving their gear at the highest skiable point, the team scrambles to the summit of Mt. Owen, the second-highest peak of the range.



Skiing the Diagonal on the northeast side of Mt. Owen.



Adam Fabrikant on Teewinot Mountain with the north face of the Grand Teton just to his right and the snowy northeast face of Mt. Owen at far right.



Strava track of the Enduro Traverse, moving clockwise from Death Canyon in the south to the Taggart Lake trailhead in the north. The route covered approximately 24 miles and 19,000 to 20,000 feet of vertical gain.



Michael Gardner on the summit of Mt. Owen, looking back at the north face and north ridge of the Grand Teton.



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