

North American Classic Route

Description



Peak 11,300', Southwest Ridge

Alaska Grade 3, 5.8, AI3 (ice to 65 degrees)

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General Considerations:

I have never climbed a route that was harder to describe than the Southwest Ridge of Peak 11,300. From a vantage point at the foot of this 4000' ridge, making out the route is nearly impossible. The ridge itself is poorly defined most of the time, and is heavily mixed snow and rock. You will encounter corniced ridges, mixed climbing up gullies, short (20') rock pitches, and a squeeze chimney where climbing with a pack would be very difficult. The upper half of the ridge is not visible from the base, except for the obvious 700' snow cap topping the peak. However, while on the route, the route finding is generally obvious. There are several good campsites:

- 1) About one-third of the way up, a spacious dome to the climbers' left.
- 2) Under the Grey Rock, a rock big enough to be seen from base camp. From base camp it appears to be below the final 700' of ice below the summit. This is the most sheltered place on the route.
- 3) "The Notch" at the halfway point: Requires chopping, and is exposed, so you might want to stay tied in. Once past the Notch, it is easier to go up than to retreat.
- 4) Four rope lengths higher in a bowl on the right side of the ridge. The area has some fantastic cornices hanging off the left side.
- 5) The summit

The Route:

The northwest side approach (left side of ridge) requires a 20 to 30 minutes ski to the base. To locate our path, note that there was no rock to our left, only steep snow. You can cache your skis at the base of the ridge, and retrieve them on the descent of the SE Ridge.

Boot up the initial 600' snow slope to the ridge, and then hike the horizontal ridge for several hundred feet. The corniced ridge stops and you start gaining elevation. Snow to the right will take you to your first easy rock step and an old sling after a rope length. The next rope length angles slightly right over mixed terrain, then up and left on steep snow to a boulder with rappel slings.

Continue on the ridge proper on easy snow for 2 rope lengths to a right-angling snow ramp. This steepens a little and requires you to exit left onto slabby rock for a couple of moves and then up and left. From here you could go straight up through a V notch, but this requires a boulder move through a V-notch that will feel overhanging, especially with a pack. A better option is to angle left a few hundred feet to the left of the "V notch" through a short rock step. Then zig-zag around boulders for a rope length to the ridge. There are two possibilities here. To the left will only be snow. To the right brings you to a 8' mixed rock step that is easy and fun.

A snow arête will bring you to a headwall. Go left on snow for half a rope until you see the "Squeeze Man's Chimney". 20' of snow, thin ice and then some steep snow will bring you to a steep snow arête which can be passed *a cheval*. The short arête brings you to a scramble over a rock (fixed piton). Belay a little higher, to minimize rope drag on the next pitches, which contain some of the harder rock climbing around the corner to the right. One may then ascend a corner (good pro), or slabs to the right (poor pro), depending on snow conditions. Then meander up to the next, easier step to a belay.

This is the Snow Dome campsite area. Rappel slings can be found farther out to the climbers' right. From here, you can see the Grey Rock campsite which is roughly 6 rope lengths away. Drop down into the first col, cross the bergschrund, then up to a boulder (piton). Another 25' puts you on the rising arête. Before the headwall, drop off to the left and up to the couloir towards the Grey Rock.

Climb the couloir to a rock headwall 300' above the Grey Rock site. Hike along its base up and right for about 25' to a tiny col. Cross it and down-climb 10'. Hike around to the left climb up a short distance. Go to the right before you come to the end of a short couloir to look for rappel slings. The couloir ends on top of a cornice overhanging the north side of the ridge. Before rappelling, inspect the next pitch from this good vantage point. The rappel into the notch is 80'. If you want a return escape route, don't pull the rappel rope yet; the entire ridge below here can be rappelled. You will have to chop a platform for your tent to camp here.

The pitch above the notch goes straight up snow, then a little snow covered slabby rock puts you under a roof. Climb up and left through "The Slot" onto a ramp covered with snow and ice. This is much easier without a pack. At the end of the ramp, go up towards a large rock, which is passed on the left on steep snow to gain an arête. It is roughly three rope lengths to the arête from the notch. Cross a snow bowl on the corniced arête (possible bivouac site), ending at a headwall. Rappel to the right (southeast) of a large flake with slings. We rapped off a short cliff into a couloir, but are not sure if this was the best way. The climbing was somewhat strenuous on snow covered rock, bad snow, and some loose rock, for about 250'. Above was snow to a short snow arête leading to a broad snow gully full of large boulders. Past the last boulder is the final snow/ice dome - two rope lengths on 60 degree snow covered ice, then the angle decreases over another rope length to the summit, which is huge and flat.

The descent:

Descend the Southeast Ridge. From the summit, be careful of a crevasse before starting down the ridge. Follow the ridge down, staying to the right to avoid the cornices. V-thread rappels are possible on the steeper sections if you are not comfortable down-climbing. Arriving at a more rocky section, we found rappel stations (slings around rocks) for 10 diagonal rappels, to stay with the ridge. Around 9,400' we made 3 more rappels down to the short glacier that leads to the West fork. One V-thread was needed.

The short glacier has a large serac hanging above it that unloaded while we were 600' below the summit. It cut loose again 24 hours after we got back to base camp. The debris crossed the glacier and climbed up the satellite peak at the base of the SE ridge. Move quickly through this area and watch for crevasses.

Considerations:

The climb took us $2\frac{1}{2}$ days round trip from our base camp, but we are aware of round trips varying from 11.5 hours to 5 full days, depending on route conditions and the strength of the party. April and May probably see the most activity.

Talkeetna Air Taxi is the only flight service that will fly into the West Fork of the Ruth Glacier IF

conditions permit. If you start from the Sheldon Amphitheatre, the ski up is 6 to 7 miles; a full day with sleds. If you want to fly out from the West Fork, be prepared for ideal conditions as it is harder to take off a fully loaded ski plane. Have skis or snow shoes to pack out a runway (30'w x 1100'to 1500' in length). You may have to ski down to the Mountain House area, where the flight services land frequently.

CB radios are no longer used by pilots. You cannot pick up the Denali nightly report from this location, so a small AM/FM radio might be the best option. You can receive several radio stations including KTNA which can give a general report of the weather.