

North American Classic Route

Description



Moose's Tooth, Ham & Eggs

Grade IV, AI4

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Getting There: Commercial airlines fly a regular schedule to Anchorage. From there, rent a car, or prearrange a shuttle to Talkeetna. In 2000, this was about \$40/person. Companies include Denali Overland Transport, Mahay's Talkeetna Express, Talkeetna Shuttle, and Alaska Backpacker Shuttle. A web search will turn up recent information and contact information. Once in Talkeetna, fly to the Ruth Gorge using one of several bush plane services (arrange in advance, or just show up). Companies include Talkeetna Air Taxi, K2 Aviation, Doug Geeting Aviation, Hudson Air Service, and McKinley Air Service. All are good, and all have web sites - search by name. The flight takes about 45 minutes. If you are planning to land up on the hanging glacier below the route, inquire in advance with the air service - not all pilots are willing to do this. Otherwise, fly to the major landing site at the base of the Moose's Tooth in the main Ruth Gorge, and plan on a day to ferry gear to the base of the route via the heavily crevassed glacier just south of the main south-facing escarpment of the Moose's Tooth.

The Climb: You can camp almost at the base of the couloir, but of course go far enough away to allay the fear of avalanches. Approach is only 45min-1hr in any case. The route is completely obvious, consisting of long ramps of snow and ice up a couloir with short steps of steep ice, then a finish to the summit via the upper West Ridge. Most of the protection can be arranged on the rock walls of the couloir, so take a modest rock rack in addition to a half-dozen screws. The route faces south, so you'll want a very early start, even to climbing the entire couloir at night. You need to be on the ridge with enough time to make the summit before the snow turns to mush. The upper part of the ridge is moderate in angle, but huge cornices hanging well out to the left dictate careful route finding, and a lot of fairly steep side-slope climbing. A few pickets or flukes might be handy here.

The Descent: Return via the same route. When you reach the top of the couloir, consider the snow conditions carefully. Waiting at the top for nightfall and refreezing before rappelling and down-climbing the gully back to camp is a common tactic. A 20-hour round trip will be typical. It is also possible to descend the complete West Ridge, but this will take you back to the floor of the Ruth Glacier, and is a very adventurous exercise on infamous cornices with rappels and steep climbing out of notches. Not recommended.

Returning to Civilization: Take a radio (can rent from the flying service), and get instructions from them on calling a passing plane. Traffic is frequent in the usual season in the Gorge, and you can probably do without a radio if you just hang out and wait for a plane to land for another party. Ask the pilot to alert your flying service that you are ready to fly out. Another option is to ski up the gorge to the Mountain House amphitheater, where the plane traffic rivals Anchorage International. This is about a half-day trip, is very scenic and worthwhile in itself, and guarantees you can get a plane quickly.