

# OASIS PEAK EXPEDITION 2019

## Stikine Icefield, Alaska



# OASIS PEAK EXPEDITION 2019

## Contents

1. Introduction
2. The Team
3. Climbing Literature and Maps
4. Expedition Summary
5. The Climbing
6. Diary of Events
7. New Route Possibilities
8. Notes on Travel, Accommodation and Communications
9. Acknowledgments and Contact Details
10. Expedition Account

The compilers of this report and the members of the expedition agree that any or all of this report may be copied for the purposes of private research.

Note on Units: Heights on the US map are given in feet, so this height unit has been used for summit elevations throughout the report. Distances are quoted in kilometres.

*Cover photo: Mark Robson skiing down P5910 after the first ascent. P5919 lies in the background.*

## 1. Introduction

The Stikine Icecap straddles the USA-Canada border and lies between the Stikine River and the coastal waters of Frederick Sound in South-East Alaska.

Spectacular granite peaks rise from a myriad of glaciers that cover an area equivalent in size to Wales. It would be the perfect alpinist's playground if it were not for the weather, which is truly atrocious. To the west lies the Gulf of Alaska, a malevolent, tempestuous sea responsible for most of the precipitation that strikes the Pacific Coast of North America. Consequently the Stikine is one of the wettest places on earth and has been described as a 'rain icecap'.

Unsurprisingly this makes climbing in the area extremely challenging, and the Stikine Icecap is rarely visited by climbers. It is one of the wildest and least known mountain ranges in the world.

The Devil's Thumb (9077ft) is the most celebrated mountain in the Stikine Icefield, and sees two or three visits a year. The rest of the range is almost completely neglected. Approximately 25km to the north-west of the Devil's Thumb, at the head of the North Baird Glacier, lies the impressive Oasis Peak (7925ft). This little visited spire has only been summited once. Together with The Devil's Thumb and its satellite Burkett Needle, it is considered to be one of the most spectacular mountains in South-East Alaska.

The huge granite monolith of Oasis Peak rises 4000ft from the Oasis Glacier to the south. The only line of weakness on this side is the South Ridge, which was line of the first ascent by a Canadian team in July 2000. This was a difficult route climbed by two of Canada's finest alpinists.

The imposing West Face potentially holds the key to the most natural route up the mountain, as it is cut by a deep couloir that leads to mixed ground and the summit ridge. This was the line followed by in July 1976 by a Canadian party, but they were unable to climb the summit ridge due to unstable snow conditions late in the day. Our primary objective was to complete the 1976 attempt route to the summit of the peak. By visiting the area in the spring (early May) we expected to encounter more stable snow, ice and mixed conditions than those encountered in mid summer.

Within a 12km radius of Oasis Peak, and accessible from the North Baird Glacier, there are at least 60 defined summits, but only 20 have recorded ascents. These are typically the higher peaks close to the Canadian border to the east. There exists considerable exploratory potential in the ridge of mountains west of the North Baird Glacier (possibly last visited by the Alaskan Boundary Commission in late 19<sup>th</sup> Century) and the group of summits due north of Oasis Peak. Some of these peaks may offer non-technical ski ascents suitable for poorer weather days.

As far as we could tell, we would be the first documented climbing expedition to visit the glacier for over 40 years. **The expedition had two objectives:**

- 1. Make the first ascent of West Face of Oasis Peak**
- 2. Explore unclimbed mountains north and west of Oasis Peak.**



## 2. The Team

*Simon Richardson, 58, British, Mountaineer and Writer*

Active Scottish winter climber with over 600 new routes to his credit. Has climbed extensively in the Alps (18 first ascents in Mont Blanc Range). Successful expeditions to the Andes, Himalaya, Karakoram, Alaska, Caucasus, Greenland and St. Elias Range. Recent ascents include a 16-day ski traverse of South Georgia climbing new peaks along the way (2016), first ascent of 1300m-high SW Pillar of Monarch Mountain in Canada's Coast Mountains (2017), first ascent of Perfect Storm (ED1) on Miage Face Mont Blanc (2018).

*Mark Robson, 49, British, IT Manager*

Experienced British mountaineer with Scottish first ascents in summer and winter. Has climbed big walls in Norway (including the Troll Wall) and in USA (including a one-day ascent of The Nose, El Capitan, Yosemite). Many classic routes in European Alps and Dolomites. First ascents in Coast Range, BC, Canada. and North Liverpool Land, Greenland. Experienced ski tourer in Scotland and Norway. Ultra-runner – completed 2017 Berghaus Dragon's Back Race 315km along mountain spine of Wales. Member of Dundonnell Mountain Rescue Team.





### **3. Climbing Literature and Maps**

Earle Whipple and Steve Gruhn published a guidebook to area in 2018 - *The Alaskan Panhandle and North British Columbia: A Climber's Guide*. It is a remarkably comprehensive document can be downloaded from the following site < <https://kootenaymountaineeringclub.ca/mountain-info/guidebooks.html>>

Mountaineering from the North Baird Glacier has been documented as follows:

#### **1974 American Expedition**

During 16 days in July, this four-man team climbed five new peaks (P7118 (Fig Peak), P7436, P6570 (Turkey Peak), P6770 and P6835). Their attempts on Oasis Peak and Palm Peak failed.

*Ref: American Alpine Journal 1975, p124.*

#### **1974 Canadian Expedition**

During 16 days late July/early August this six-man team travelled up the North Baird Glacier to cross the border ( Rambler Pass) to attempt the unclimbed Noel Peak (10440ft). They were unsuccessful, but on their return they made first ascents of peaks each side of Rambler Pass (c7000ft) – P8030 (Rambler Peak) and P8012 together with P8200 and P8140 in the vicinity of Boundary Peak 73. They only had five days suitable for climbing during the 16 they were based on the glacier.

*Refs: American Alpine Journal 1975, pp124 – 125, Canadian Alpine Journal 1975 pp101 – 103.*

#### **1975 Canadian Expedition**

This non-documented expedition made the first ascent of P7057 (west of Fig Peak) and P7760 and P8405 on the Canadian-Alaskan border.

#### **1976 Canadian Expedition**

This very successful nine-man expedition made first ascents of P8526 (Boundary Peak 73), P7676, Palm Peak (7500ft), P6600 (Coconut Peak), P6600 (Newton Peak), P6363. They failed on the summit ridge of Oasis Peak (7925ft). They also made second ascents of P7436, P7118 (Fig Peak) and P6570 (Turkey Peak)

*Ref: BC Mountaineer 1976, pp12 - 21.*

This was the last documented climbing expedition to the North Baird Glacier.

#### **2001 Canadian Expedition**

Oasis Peak was finally climbed by Jon Walsh and Kelvin Vale from Canada in August 2000. Their route started from the Oasis Glacier and climbed the South Ridge. There have been no further ascents of the peak.

*Refs: American Alpine Journal 2001, pp225 – 226, Canadian Alpine Journal 2001 p113.*

We downloaded relevant sections of the US 1:62,500 Topographic Survey Map from <[www.peakbagger.com](http://www.peakbagger.com)>

#### **4. Expedition Summary**

We flew into the North Baird Glacier from the fishing village of Petersburg by helicopter on 30 April.

As soon as we arrived it was immediately clear that any technical climbing was unlikely. All the mountains were heavily snowed up, draped with enormous cornices and unstable snow mushrooms. But more significantly, it was not freezing at night and there were (literally) hundreds of avalanches. So after a week we abandoned plans for Oasis Peak and moved our camp down glacier to where we could access the North Arm of the North Baird Glacier.

Finally, on 9 May, the weather improved enough for us to climb through the icefall guarding entry to the North Arm. We were probably the first mountaineers ever to visit this part of the icecap and were surrounded by over a dozen unclimbed peaks. The big prize however was P7180 (also known as Hyder Peak), which lay 8km away at the head of the adjacent Dawes Glacier. This massive and isolated mountain, with a steep rocky summit triangle, lies on the western edge of the range. We made the 5km long and 1200m ascent the following day during a brief 24-hour weather window via a combination of post-holing through deep snow, skiing where possible and then mixed climbing on the summit triangle. The view from the precarious and massively corniced summit looking east to all the major peaks in the range was breathtaking. During the trip we were also successful in making first ascents of P5910, P5720, P5800 and the shapely P5919 before flying out on 12 May.

Overall, we only had three days when it was not raining and the visibility was good enough to climb. Snow conditions remained soft throughout, avalanches took place constantly and we experienced considerable cornice difficulties. Despite all of these challenges, it was an extremely rewarding expedition. The climbing was rarely technical, but picking safe lines and negotiating the beautiful corniced summit ridges made it very exacting. We had one huge cornice collapse, but fortunately we both stayed upright on the solid side of the fracture line! And above all, when the rain stopped and the fog lifted, we were treated to some of the most beautiful and pristine mountain landscape either of us had ever seen.

Alaskan climbers are notoriously modest about publicising their achievements, but according to climbing historian Steve Gruhn (co-author of *The Alaskan Panhandle and North British Columbia: A Climber's Guide*), there are no records of previous ascents of any of the peaks we climbed.

**In summary, the second of the expedition's two objectives was achieved. Five new peaks were climbed to the north and west of Oasis Peak, including P7180, which was one of the highest unclimbed peaks in the range.**

*A note on prominence: P7180 (prominence 3030ft) has the fifth highest prominence on the Alaskan side of the Stikine Icecap (after Kate's Needle, Mount Burkett, Devils Thumb and P7325 - climbed in 2008). In Canada there are more significant unclimbed peaks, but Iceweb Peak (2779m altitude, 1094m prominence) is the only one that has a prominence greater than 3000ft.*

## **5. The Climbing**

A total of five new summits were climbed.

01-May-19, P5800, South Flank, (400m and 1km)

01-May-19, P5720, East Ridge and South Face, (200m and 3km traverse)

09-May-19, P5910, South-West Ridge, (400m and 1km)

10-May-19, P7180, North-East Ridge and South-East Face, (1200m and 5km)

12-May-19, P5919, East Ridge, (400m and 1km)

The following diary entries by Mark describe the key events:

### **Monday 29<sup>th</sup> April**

We arrive in Petersburg after a long, but straightforward journey from the UK, the last section of which involved a series of spectacular short 'hops' north from Seattle along the coastline of the Alaskan Panhandle in a Boeing 737. The weather over the couple of weeks preceding our trip has been poor, but today is a beautiful bluebird day. So it's a mad rush to meet Wally, a pilot from Temsco helicopters who's going to fly us in to the mountains, then to buy stove fuel, do a supermarket food shop, return to Temsco for a weigh-in (our payload for the helicopter flight is limited to 240kg including our own combined bodyweight), before we can finally collapse at our B & B, Das Hagedorn Haus, for the night in Petersburg.

### **Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> April**

By 6:45am we're back at the Temsco Helicopters hangar, ready for an early flight in to the North Baird Glacier whilst the weather holds good. Wally gives a short pre-flight briefing and we set off, skimming low across muskeg and out over the sea towards the snout of the North Baird glacier. En-route Wally points out the changes wreaked by the rapidly changing climate in this region – the glacier terminus now broken by bodies of water containing huge chunks of floating ice, making the prospect of an approach to the N. Baird by boat (the way previous expeditions have got in) tortuous if not altogether impossible.

As we fly up the glacier we get our first views of the mountains we've come to climb. It's clear that there's been a lot of snow in previous weeks. Everything is plastered. Oasis Peak is adorned with huge cornices and all around there's evidence of avalanches, including one of the biggest crown walls I've ever seen. Under blue sky and blazing sunshine, we establish basecamp at a safe spot on in the middle of the glacier beneath Oasis Peak. Later in the day we take a short ski trip to the high point of the glacier to recce our new surroundings and, just 2km from camp, we come across some 'goat tracks' we'd spotted during the flight in. They are in fact the tracks of a Brown Bear. That night I go to sleep with ski pole and ice axe in easy reach.

### **Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> May**

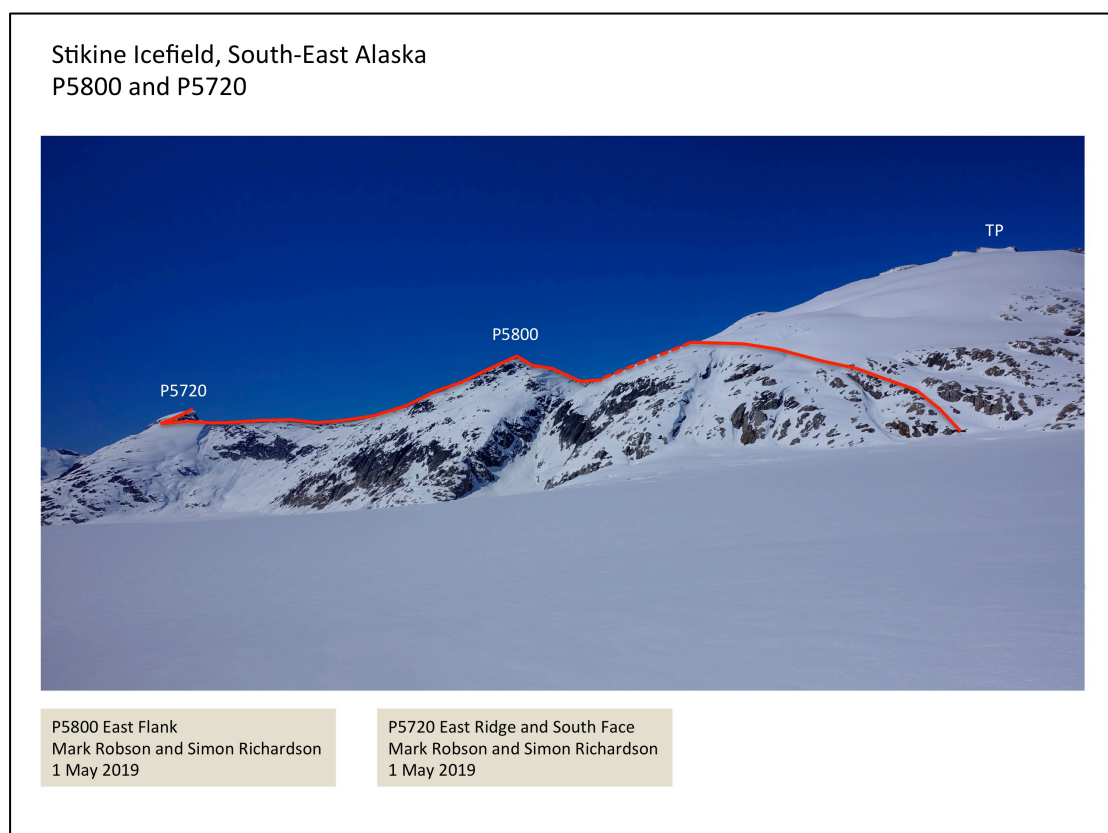
The alarm goes off at 3.30am and we're away just before 5.00am.

We rapidly ascend the lower slopes of nearby Turkey Peak which are criss-crossed by yesterday's bear tracks, before breaking off west above a crevassed area and then descending slightly to a col. From here we're able to gain the



summit of P5800 (our first unclimbed peak) before continuing westwards along a broad ridge to a point where we stash rucksacks. The sun is strong now and 2km of softening snow separates us from P5720. As we get closer it's apparent that gaining this summit could be challenging. Fortunately, by following a snow terrace, we're able to access the South face which leads readily to the top. We make a quick photo stop, not daring to step too close to the massive cornices that surround us.

The return is a reverse of our route of ascent. By now the snow has softened to the consistency of porridge and crampons are no longer needed. Eventually we regain skis down on the glacier and change boots for the short ski back to basecamp. A long day - 16km in total and mostly spent post holing through soft snow, but with two new peaks in the bag we're quite content.



### Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> May

We awake to the sound of Simon's alarm in the early hours. It's 3am, we're surrounded by thick mist and the snowpack hasn't frozen overnight. In a way I'm quite relieved as I feel awful – a combination of the travel catching up with me and yesterday's ferocious sunshine that left my eyes sore and puffy despite sunglasses.

Simon checks a couple of times in the intervening hours, but it doesn't clear up and he leaves me slumbering until 10am. Eventually the weather improves marginally and we decide to lay a ski trail to the base of one of the unclimbed ridges on Turkey Peak. This could give us an option for another not-so-good weather day.

The 1.5km ski across the glacier was about enough for me and, after recording a waypoint on our GPS, we return to basecamp in fog and light snow. The forecast for the next couple of days has always been bad, so we spend time putting up snow walls around the tent and ensuring skis, fuel etc are secure before retreating inside as snow and rain set in properly. We're hopeful that rain followed by a decent freeze might sort out the snowpack and improve climbing conditions.

Nb – Today we figured out why Turkey Peak is named such - judging by the racket, there's a big colony of nesting seabirds somewhere up there.

### **Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> May**

More fresh snow overnight. At 7am we phone Wally for a prearranged check in. He reports the forecast is generally poor until next Thursday. We spend the entire day in the tent, listening to avalanches pouring down from Oasis Peak. We're both skilled when it comes to festering and don't bother to venture out of the tent out at all today, but next Thursday is a long time away.

### **Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> May**

With the ridge on Turkey Peak still in mind we take a quick look outside at 3am to see whether anything's frozen. The temperature has obviously dropped for a short time as the tent guys now have icicles hanging from them, but it's not frozen properly so we go back to sleep until 7ish.

Despite the poor forecast it's quite a nice morning with patches of cloud and fog, but also some sunshine and clearer sky in between. We decide to explore the Baird Glacier northwards to try and gain a better view of an attractive pointed mountain that lies behind Turkey Peak and, after a couple of hours spent finding a route around crevasses, we reached a huge lateral moraine around 5km north east of basecamp.

We enjoy lunch on a large flat boulder on the glacier (nice to be off the snow for a while) and take in the views before the cloud drops.

We're back at camp by 2:30pm and retreat into the tent as snow/light rain starts again.

### **Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> May**

We wake to a stuffy tent. Several inches of snow have fallen overnight and we need to be careful as it's sealing the tent fly with drifts. It's also windier than it has been so far and the cornices must have been growing overnight because today's chorus of avalanches starts earlier than usual.

We surface around midday and, after first clearing drifts from the latrine, decide to ski west up the Baird glacier to plot a route through the crevassed section that we'll need to negotiate when Wally flies back in to collect us (he's made it clear that, in anything less than perfect weather, it's unlikely he'll be able to reach us at the point we were dropped off). This turns out to be surprisingly

straightforward - a long shelf that Simon had seen from the air leads easily through the most heavily crevassed area, though mist and flat light make navigation a challenge.

We spend a while listening to avalanches coming down cliffs at the side of the valley before turning around to record a GPS track of the return journey for future reference. The snow is very soft today and our skins are wet by the time we get back to basecamp after what amounts to an 8km round trip.

### **Monday 6<sup>th</sup> May**

By now we're fed up with the conditions. The Stikine icecap is notorious for poor weather, but we'd hoped for better than this and our dream of finding perfect 'Scottish' winter climbing conditions in Alaska is fading.

We discuss options. It's very apparent that Oasis Peak is too dangerous to go near whilst it's like this and, with the forecast as is, that's not going to change for the foreseeable future. Therefore we agree to spend the next couple of days of bad weather relocating basecamp to a spot where we'll have alternatives. Somewhat buoyed up by a fresh plan, we set out in snow and poor visibility to ferry half of our kit to a point where the North Baird Glacier splits into a North Arm. Here we bury a cache (we'd spotted fox tracks on the way) and turn around. We get back late after a tiring 15km round trip in wet snow, fill up on Firepot Mushroom Risotto and quickly fall asleep.

### **Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> May**

It's still snowing, but we pack up the tent regardless and are away just before midday. Today's load is even heavier than yesterday and the going is tough from the outset. Spotting our tracks from the previous day is tricky and Simon does a good job of picking out the route through the crevassed area.

Initially we struggle to find yesterday's cache, but we eventually locate it with aid of the GPS and set up our new basecamp safely out of range of the valley sides. The snowpack is soft and wet and we can't even remove skis to put the tent up, despite having first stamped out a platform.

As we settle down for dinner we can hear avalanches on all three sides at the same time, but the forecast is still for a spell of much better weather after tomorrow. So we pack a minimal climbing rack, food for 4 days, plus our tiny Rab single-skin bivi tent, before going to sleep.

### **Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> May**

Unfortunately it's still raining when we wake up and we spend the morning listening to more whopping avalanches rattling down a huge gully close to camp. There's a col above the glacier approximately 1.5km north of our camp and whenever we get a clearing in the weather we do our best to spy a view through binoculars. We're hopeful that the route to the col won't be too heavily crevassed and that it'll unlock the secrets of the North Arm of the North Baird Glacier. If so we'll probably be the first mountaineers to visit the mountains to



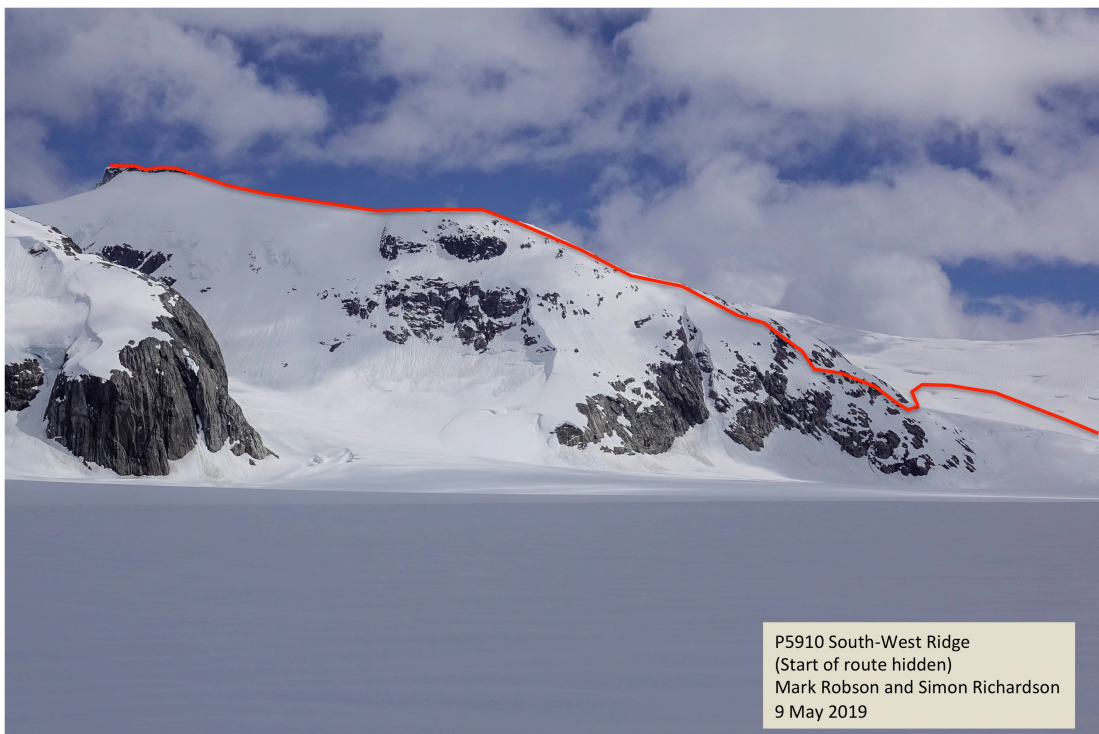
the north and stand a chance of getting close to the prominent P7180, one of the highest unclimbed summits in the South-East Alaska.

### Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> May

At last, our break arrives and we're off. Even better, the route over the col proves to be straightforward and, despite the best attempts of the sledge I'm towing to restrict any upwards motion, we're soon looking down onto the North Arm. To our east is a chain of unclimbed peaks. We ditch the sledge and overnight kit on the glacier and weave a careful route through crevasses to the base of the South-West Ridge of P5910. Already the snow is soft and we move together, roped up, keeping the skis on as much as possible despite steep slopes and big drops to the glacier beneath. As the ridge levels out we speed up and, after 1km and 1200ft of ascent, reach a final rocky summit ridge that's very heavily corniced. Swapping skis for crampons we continue to the summit feeling that at last our luck is changing. This fact is confirmed moments later when, reversing our steps, there's a massive 'whoompf' as a huge chunk of the cornice breaks off just inches from my feet, narrowly avoiding taking me with it.

The rest of the descent passes without incident and before long we're back at the sledge and able to continue the journey first northwards, then west to the head of the Dawes glacier. Eventually, after an 18km day, we establish a fine bivi under the shelter of glacier scoured golden granite crags at the base of P7180 - Simon in the tent, me choosing to sleep outside for an unbroken view of the Alaskan night sky.

Stikine Icefield, South-East Alaska  
P5910



P5910 South-West Ridge  
(Start of route hidden)  
Mark Robson and Simon Richardson  
9 May 2019

## **Friday 10<sup>th</sup> May**

After a much colder night, dawn finds us already 1500ft above camp, post holing up steep mountainside; crampons on ski boots, skis strapped to rucksacks. As we gain altitude the snow finally begins to firm up and I begin to wonder why on earth I'm carrying a pair of skis: the lower slopes were far too steep and technical to ski, given our limited ability, whilst up here it's too exposed with a drop of a couple of thousand feet to the glacier and a crust too icy for skins. And then we see - a plateau lies ahead, extending for almost 2km. Clipping into our bindings, on safer terrain at last we're suddenly able to make rapid progress towards the summit of P7180.

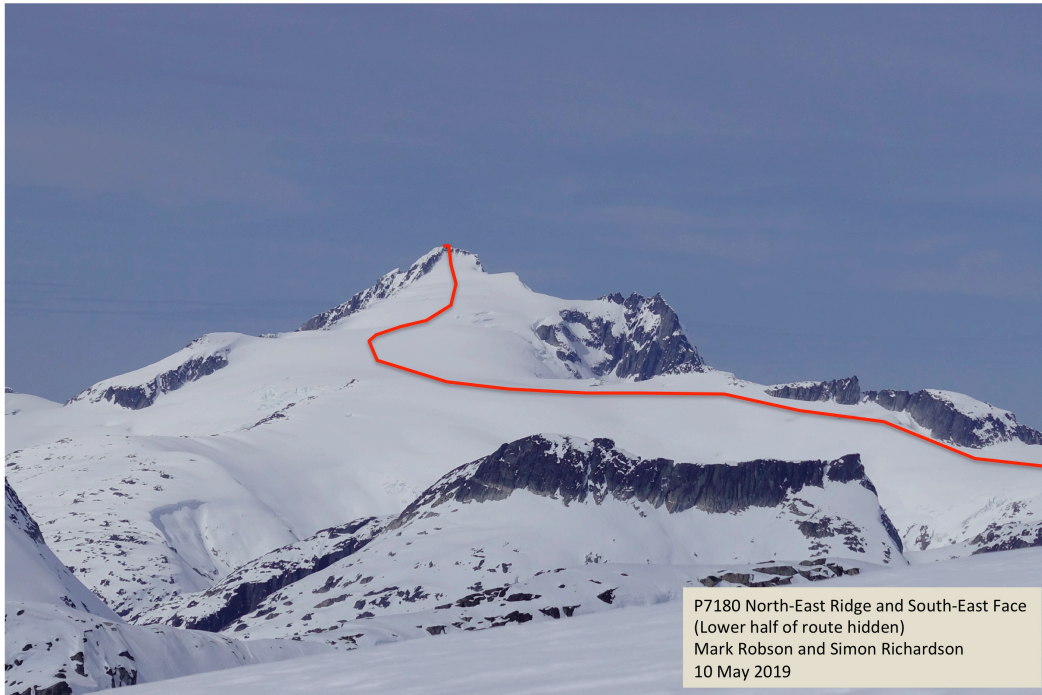
When the angle increases, we pause to stash skis and then the all too familiar punching steps in deep snow begins again. The ground is steep and I'm concerned - there's old avalanche debris all around us here, nothing secure and absolutely nothing to belay from. Simon runs out a full 60m of rope, continues still further and eventually manages to place some rock gear to calm our nerves. I take over for a short pitch onto a summit ridge draped with curling snow formations. Still mindful after yesterday's excitement, I hack away at the snow to reveal a view right through a massive cornice. We're under pressure now as our agreed cut off time of 8am has passed and the longer we spend up here, the more dangerous the ground we have to descend beneath the plateau will be. But we're very close.

Tentative steps out left onto snow-ice that's (hopefully) glued to a rocky slab lands me on the final section of ridge and, soon after, I'm perched on the summit. I take in the rope with one hand whilst readying the anchors for an abseil with the other. Simon quickly joins me and, without pausing, we begin the descent. Two quick abseils, then we're able to descend more easily to our skis. The return across the plateau is fun - the pressure off momentarily; the view an endless expanse of unclimbed mountains. The lower section is not fun; skiable for as long as we dare, then thigh deep in snow that sloughs off and doesn't stop sliding until it hits the glacier below.

By 11:30am we're down. We spend the afternoon relaxing in the sunshine; relieved, delighted to have summited.

Rain followed by snow is forecast for the evening. It's late arriving and, before we retire, we make a quick call to Wally to arrange a helicopter pickup on Sunday afternoon whilst the weather's still good enough to fly. Overnight it rains heavily and, despite my tiredness, I lie awake listening to a growing waterfall on nearby rocks, worrying that perhaps we're not sufficiently protected here and maybe should have camped further out from the mountainside after all.

Stikine Icefield, South-East Alaska  
P7180



### **Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> May**

As has been the pattern throughout the trip, the weather is slow to clear this morning so we stay hunkered down in our tiny tent until it's finally good enough to retrace our tracks from Thursday.

We opt to stop close to the col leading back to basecamp as tomorrow, Sunday, is forecast to be another fine day. Enticing peaks surround us and we've taken to calling one of them (P5919) 'Pointy Peak'. We're very keen to climb Pointy Peak if only the snow would firm up again. It's been quite a bit colder this afternoon, which is good news, but as I prepare to doss out in the open, hoping for a frosty night and another view of the stars, conditions suddenly crap out forcing us both into the tent for another cramped night.

### **Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> May**

Our last day and it starts early as Simon has set the alarm for 2am. After a couple of false starts he manages to persuade me that the snowpack has firmed up sufficiently to attempt Pointy Peak and we leave our temporary camp on skis, arriving at its base as dawn breaks.

Skis off and we're back to punching through crust. This wasn't the plan, but Simon's determined and we're here now, so we persevere. After negotiating the bergschrund, our route of ascent follows a wide ridge with an absolutely massive cornice on its north side, then several hundred feet of moderately steep snow. We move as quickly as we can, but it's exhausting work and I'm become increasingly anxious that it won't be long before the face we're on turns to mush

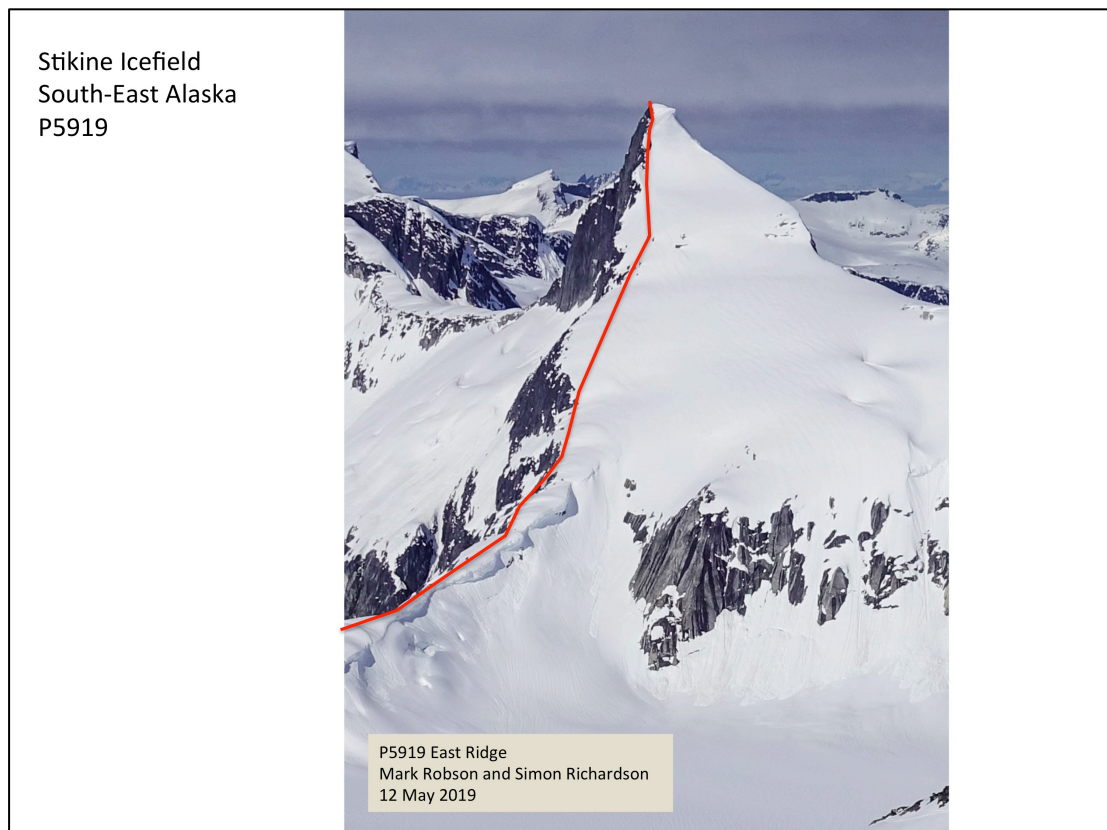


as it faces due east and will soon be in full sun. Seeking out security offered by isolated outcrops of rock wherever possible, at last we reach a final steepening and some welcome rock gear in a sidewall. After that it's just one easy pitch to another fine summit. There's no time for celebration and we beat a hasty retreat – a quick abseil, followed by a rapid descent the rest of the way back to our skis. After packing up our makeshift camp, we make a leisurely return journey to basecamp under blue skies and blazing sunshine.

At 1:30pm, shortly after dismantling basecamp, we hear the sound of Wally's small helicopter coming up the glacier to collect us.

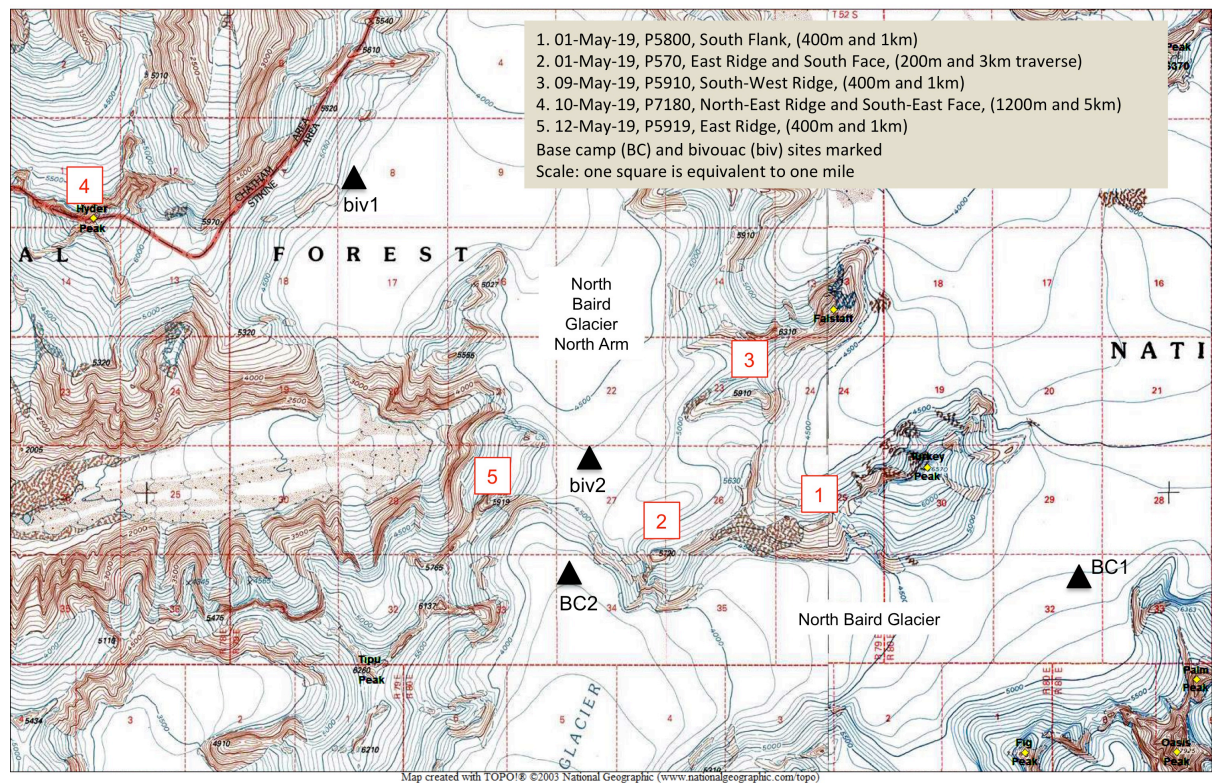
### **Monday 13<sup>th</sup> to Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> May**

The remainder of our time in Alaska is spent drying kit, wandering the harbour, exploring the trails around Petersburg, or in the Harbor Bar reflecting on our achievement – the five new peaks we've climbed were not quite what we came for, but a resounding success nonetheless.



## 6. Diary of Events

27 April	Fly Scotland to London
28 April	Fly London to Seattle
29 April	Fly Seattle to Petersburg
30 April	Helicopter to North Baird Glacier
1 May	Climb <b>P5800, P5720</b>
2 May	Poor weather. Mark GPS trail to Turkey Peak.
3 May	Poor weather. Tent bound.
4 May	Poor weather. Explore east extension North Baird Glacier.
5 May	Poor weather. Mark GPS trail through lower icefall of glacier.
6 May	Poor weather. Move camp to new position lower down glacier.
7 May	Poor weather. Complete camp move.
8 May	Poor weather. Wait for forecast break in weather.
9 May	Access North Baird Glacier North Arm. Climb <b>P5910</b> .
10 May	Climb <b>P7180</b>
11 May	Poor weather. Return to col at head North Baird North Arm.
12 May	Climb <b>P5919</b> . Helicopter to Petersburg.
13 May	Petersburg
14 May	Petersburg
15 May	Petersburg
16 May	Fly Petersburg to Seattle
17 May	Fly Seattle to London
18 May	Fly London to Scotland



## **7. New Route Possibilities**

Our look out for new lines was limited by routes that we felt might be possible in the conditions we encountered. Objectives from the North Baird Glacier:

### *Oasis Peak, West Face*

The West Face of Oasis Peak remains the stand out objective from the North Baird Glacier. It will provide a very worthwhile ascent in conditions of frozen snow and when cornices and snow mushrooms are not present.

### *Turkey Peak, South-East Ribs*

There are two ribs on the South-East Face bounding the snow slopes climbed on the first (and second?) ascent. The left rib looks straightforward and would be a good poor weather option. We got up early a couple of times to attempt it but the snow never froze. The right rib looks a little more difficult and leads to the north-east summit, which is probably unclimbed.

### *P6385 South Face*

An attractive couloir runs up the south face to a finish up the exposed west ridge. The couloir can be accessed from a subsidiary branch of the North Baird Glacier. The only other ascent of the peak was via the east face.

### *P6000 North Rib*

Surprisingly this mountain is unclimbed, and the north rib is a very attractive steep snow line. Rather worryingly there had been a huge slab avalanche on the east face just to its left. We could see the crown wall from base camp three miles away. Understandably this put us off attempting the route.

### *P6137 East Ridge*

In summer conditions, the lower pillar and upper East Ridge would provide a magnificent technical alpine route. It was covered with huge cornices and totally out of the question during our stay.

North Baird Glacier North Arm objectives:

### *P5630, West Flank*

This was our back up option if we were unable to climb P5919. The west flank would be a straightforward (albeit steep) ski ascent.

### *P5919, North Summit (5500ft)*

There is a very attractive steep snow spur that runs up the north-west side.

### *P5555, East Spur*

A safe looking line leading to a small pointed summit.

### *North Arm East Flank Traverse*

A south-north traverse from P5910 (which we climbed) over P6310, P5910, P6280 and finishing over P5610 would result in a magnificent 8km traverse. It could be accessed over P5630 from the col between P5800 and Turkey Peak. This was our original intention after giving up on Oasis Peak.



Stikine Icefield, South-East Alaska  
Oasis Peak – Unclimbed West Face



Stikine Icefield, South-East Alaska  
Turkey Peak – Unclimbed South-East Ribs.  
The original route climbed the glaciated face between the two ribs.



Stikine Icefield  
South-East Alaska  
P6385

Unclimbed South Face



Stikine Icefield, South-East Alaska  
P6000 – Unclimbed North Rib on right





Stikine Icefield, South-East Alaska  
P6137 – Unclimbed East Ridge in profile



Stikine Icefield, South-East Alaska  
P5555 – Unclimbed East Spur in centre



## **8. Notes on Travel, Accommodation and Communications**

### **Travel**

The only practical way to access the range is by helicopter from the fishing village of Petersburg located on Mitkof Island. Petersburg is served twice daily by Alaskan Airlines from Seattle. Previous expeditions to the North Baird Glacier approached by helicopter, or via bush plane landing on the glacial flats below the snout of the glacier. It is not possible to access the glacier from this point any more, because the glacier has retreated and entry is barred by glacial lakes surrounded by ice cliffs. Note that Alaskan pilots will not fly over the border into Canada and vice-versa.

There is only one helicopter in Petersburg, which is flown by Wally O'Brocta from Temsco Helicopters. Wally has flown a helicopter from Petersburg for over 20 years and knows the area well. Quite sensibly he is cautious about flying climbers, because in the event of an emergency, he will be on the front line of the rescue effort. Expect to be questioned about your mountaineering experience by Wally before he agrees to fly you in, and be prepared to show your climbing CV.

Wally flies a Hughes 500, which is the smallest commercial helicopter. It has a payload of 240kg, which equates to two clothed climbers plus about 80kg of gear and food, which is modest for a two-week expedition, so pack accordingly. Wally flies about two or three climbing parties in the range each year, and almost all are bound for the Devil's Thumb. They typically adopt a 'fast and light' approach, flying up from Seattle on a good weather forecast, and then being dropped at the bottom of the route and pulled out at the finish. Longer expeditions like ours appear to be few and far between although a number of end-to-end ski traverses have been completed. The Hughes 500 can only fly in perfect conditions. This means good weather, no wind and bright sunlight to maximise the contrast on the glacier. Accordingly, our two finest weather days were spent flying in and out by helicopter.

### **Accommodation**

It is essential to have a base in Petersburg as there will be downtime waiting on weather to fly in, and also waiting for the scheduled flight back to Seattle. Past expeditions have stayed with local climbers, but when we were organising the trip, we knew of no climbers resident in Petersburg. We were lucky to find Das Hagedorn Haus B & B of Grant and Lila Trask who provided us very friendly accommodation on arrival in Petersburg, and then let us camp in their garden on our return from the mountains when their accommodation was full.

### **Communications**

Key to the success of the trip was rental of a satellite phone. This allowed us to communicate with Wally (our pick up would only be possible in good weather), and also allowed us to receive long-range weather forecasts [www.yr.no](http://www.yr.no) from the UK by SMS. These forecasts were found to be accurate for the North Baird Glacier region and enabled us to position ourselves exactly for the very limited weather windows, and it is fair to say that we used every hour of good weather.

## 9. Acknowledgements and Contact Details

The expedition would like to pay special thanks to the following whose help and support was gratefully received.

The Mount Everest Foundation (grant aid)

The Neil McKenzie Trust (grant aid)

Firepot

Inverness Travel

Steve Gruhn

Dieter Klose

John Scurlock

Don Serl

Grant and Lila Trask

Roger Webb

Earle Whipple

Neil Wilson

### **Contact Details:**

The Mount Everest Foundation

< <https://www.mef.org.uk> >

The Neil McKenzie Trust

< <https://theneilmckenzietrust.com> >

Temsco Helicopters

1502 Haugen Dr, Petersburg, AK 99833, USA

Phone: +1 907-772-4780

< <http://temscoair.com>>

Grant and Lila Trask

Das Hagedorn Haus B & B

400 2nd St, Petersburg, AK 99833, USA

Phone: +1 907-772-3775

< <http://www.dashedornhaus.com> >

## 10. Expedition Account

<b>EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>£</b>
<b>Travel</b>	
Travel to London	504
Flights London – Seattle - Petersburg	1790
Excess baggage	199
Helicopter charter	1220
<b>Insurance</b>	750
<b>Accommodation</b>	
Seattle	191
Petersburg	250
Communal meals	190
<b>Supplies and Equipment</b>	
Expedition Food	623
Satphone Rental	562
Stove Fuel	19
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>6298</b>
<b>LESS INCOME FROM GRANTS</b>	
Mount Everest Foundation	2400
Neil McKenzie Trust	300
<b>TOTAL GRANTS</b>	<b>2700</b>
<b>NET COST OF EXPEDITION</b>	<b>3598</b>