

BRITISH BUCKSKIN
GLACIER EXPEDITION
2008



The British Buckskin Glacier Expedition 2008

Climbers: Jon Bracey and Matt Helliker

Aims: To make alpine-style first ascents of ice/mixed climbs on the East face of Bear Tooth, Buckskin Glacier, Alaska

Supported by: British Mountaineering Council
The Mount Everest Foundation

Assistance from: DMM
Scarpa
Mammut
Patagonia
Osprey packs
Adidas Eyewear
Maximuscle



Jon Bracey leaving the bivouac at the start of day two. Credit Matt Helliker

Summary: The team arrived in Talkeetna on the 27th April just after a severe storm had swept across the entire Alaska Range depositing three feet of fresh snow. Thankfully the weather cleared and the following day Paul Roderick of Talkeetna Air Taxi was able to land us on the Buckskin Glacier.

Over the 3rd and 4th of May a new route was climbed on the right-hand side of the East face of Mooses Tooth. After gaining the North ridge easy ground was followed towards the summit. Unfortunately c.100m below the summit a dangerous overhanging serac barred the way. The team decided to retreat from here, and not risk traversing under the precarious ice feature. After a swift abseil descent the team regained the glacier late on the same day.

Following a rest day the team flew over to the Kahiltna glacier and on the 10th May attempted to make the first repeat of 'Luna' on the NW face of the Mini Moonflower. After some very hard and serious climbing the team encountered a band of unstable rock c.80m below the summit and a decision was made to descend. We later found out that we were climbing new ground to the left of Luna.

Team members:

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Expedition Diary:

April 25	Fly London Heathrow to Anchorage.
26	Buy food and supplies in Anchorage.
27	Road transfer to Talkeetna. Briefing with Park ranger Service
28	Air taxi to Buckskin Glacier
29	Recce North, South and West forks of the Buckskin Glacier
30	Ferry all equipment to suitable base camp location
May 1	Pack for an attempt on a new route on Mooses Tooth East face
2	Waiting – bad weather
3	Day 1 climbing Mooses Tooth
4	Day 2 climbing and descend route on Mooses Tooth
5	Rest
6	Air taxi transfer to Kahiltna Glacier
7	Rest
8	Rest
9	Rest
10	Attempt line on Mini Moonflower buttress
11	Air taxi to Talkeetna
12	Sign out with ranger Station
13	Road transfer from Talkeetna to Anchorage
14	Fly Anchorage to London
15	Arrive London Heathrow

Climbing Details:

We arrived on the Buckskin glacier on the 28th April in three feet of fresh snow. Due to lingering cloud on the glacier we were dropped in a dark and frigid corner of the south fork of the glacier, which received a pitiful four hours of daily sunshine. Hence the next two days were spent moving camp 6 km down the glacier. A reconnaissance of the south and west forks of the glacier revealed poor ice conditions on our original intended objectives on the East face of Bear Tooth. Thankfully a big unclimbed fault line on the Mooses Tooth appeared to be in good condition. Christophe Dumarest and Aymeric Clouet attempted this line in 2006.

Setting off early on the 3rd May we soloed 400m of snow and ice before arriving at the foot of steeper ground. A pitch of 75-degree ice followed by a snow choked vertical chimney gave access to 150m of easy ground before the line narrowed and became sustained. At this point a continuous flow of spindrift began to flow down the line making progress almost impossible for about 2 hours. After several pitches of 85-degree ice we reached a small bay capped by a 2m roof guarding access to the line above. A determined effort was needed for this section, with hard mixed, thin ice, and a short section of aid climbing. Another difficult mixed pitch above led us to a small bivi site out to the left of the gully. Tired after an 18 hour day we brewed up and rested for 3 hours before continuing.

The morning brought probably the hardest technical section of the climb with a sustained overhanging wall of crumbly rock. 4 pitches later we gained the north ridge and continued up snowy terrain towards the summit. Unfortunately about 100 vertical metres below the summit a dangerous overhanging serac guarded the way. We could have traversed under the feature but considered it too dangerous and so started to descend. Eight hours of down climbing and abseiling later we regained the glacier.

Although disappointed not to have reached the summit, we considered it appropriate in our eyes to report the climb as a new route. The main reason being that the technical difficulties end at the point of the north ridge and this seems to be the norm for many climbs in the Alaska range as in the Alps.

On the 6th May we flew over to the Kahiltna glacier and rested during a period of bad weather. We then headed up to the Mini Moonflower's NW face to attempt the first repeat of Luna (fa Marko Prezelj and Stephen Koch). A long and hard days climbing with two very serious and difficult pitches of mixed climbing brought us to about 80m below the summit at 9pm. Here a band of broken rock stopped our progress and we made an abseil retreat. We later found out that we were climbing new ground to the left of Luna. A team finding better snow and ice conditions on the top of the face should be able to get past the loose rock.

It should be noted that neither of the two existing routes on this face ('Luna' and 'Kiss me where the sun don't shine') have been climbed to the summit. Luna was climbed to the summit ridge and Kiss me stopped on the face 100m below the summit.



'There's a Moose Loose About this Hoose' climbs the big fault line on the right hand side of the East face of the Mooses Tooth.
First Ascent Jon Bracey and Matt Helliker. 3rd and 4th May 2008
1400m, ED 4, M8, A2, AI 6



The photo below shows the line we took on our attempt on the Mini Moonflower.



Travel:

Continental airlines offer competitive flights from London to Anchorage with the additional benefit that it is fairly easy to change your outbound leg of the journey.

Talkeetna Shuttle picked us up from our B&B in Anchorage and took us to Talkeetna. This is often more expensive early season unless they have more than 4 people (we paid \$200 per person return). Denali Overland Transport offer a similar service.

Talkeetna Air Taxi (TAT) offer a brilliant flight service into all locations of the Alaska Range. The cost of glacier flights have gone up significantly due to fuel price increases. Baggage allowance is 125lb per person and excess costs \$1 per pound.

Accommodation:

Earth Bed and Breakfast in Anchorage offers a comfortable and well priced service (\$35 per person per night). Very friendly and hospitable.

In Talkeetna we stay at TAT's free bunkhouse, which is quite basic, but has a shower and small kitchen.

Other Logistics:

All food can be purchased at one of the huge supermarkets in Anchorage (Sears, Carrs, or Walmart).

Climbing equipment, books, maps, butane/propane canisters, and dehydrated hill food can be bought at **REI** or **AMH** in Anchorage

TAT in Talkeetna supplies Coleman white gas for MSR stoves.

Anchorage Satellite Phones and Rentals, which is located across the street from REI hire Iridium and Globalstar satellite phones. Iridium has good coverage and reliability in Alaska compared to the Globalstar which is highly unreliable!

Permits: If climbing on Denali or Foraker a \$200 National Park permit is required which needs to be applied for 60 days in advance unless you have previously registered, in which case you only need to apply 7 days beforehand. For climbing elsewhere it cost \$15 to register and you need to go down to the ranger station in Talkeetna for a short briefing and to pick up a 'Clean Mountain Can' for human waste.

Gear:

We climbed in lightweight alpine style making use of the very long days and short nights.

Rack: One and a half sets of wires, 1 set cams, 5 pegs, 8 ice screws, 10 extenders

Ropes: 2 x 60m x 8.5mm half ropes. (Mammut Genesis)

DMM Rebel axes, and DMM terminator crampons

Scarpa Phantom 6000 and Omega boots

Base camp: one 3 man tent plus an igloo. Two MSR petrol stoves (2 gallons of white gas)

Approach skis used for glacier travel

Budget:

Expenses		Income	
Flights to Anchorage (rtn)	£1228	BMC Grant	£1600
Air Taxi (TAT)	£802	MEF Grant	£650
Accommodation	£105	Personal contributions	£1034
Transfer to Talkeetna (rtn)	£215		
Satellite phone hire	£106		
Taxis in Anchorage	£40		
Food	£315		
Equipment/supplies	£138		
Insurance	£294		
National park Permits	£16		
Excess baggage	£25		
Total	£3284	Total	£3284

Thanks

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The Mount Everest Foundation

British Mountaineering Council

DMM

Mammut (Jon Bracey)

Scarpa

Patagonia (Matt Helliker)

Osprey Packs (Matt Helliker)

Adidas Eyewear

Maximuscle

Useful Email Addresses

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