

Barkley Ridge; Wrangell St Elias 2010 Expedition

Final Report - MEF Ref: 10/09 BMC Ref: 10/19

Intended Area: Barkley Ridge, Wrangell St. Elias

Area Visited: Upper Granite Creek and Jeffries Glacier, Wrangell St. Elias

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Outcomes:

1. Ascent of Peak 8329(ft) Mapped Spot Height 8320(ft) Upper Granite Creek;
2. Ascent of Peak 7679(ft) Mapped Spot Height 7656(ft) Jeffries Glacier;
3. Ski Ascent of Peak 7178(ft) Mapped Spot Height 7230(ft) Jeffries Glacier;
4. Attempt of Peak 7890(ft) Upper Granite Creek.

We have followed a convention of previous Alaskan MEF reports and will say that all are probable First Ascents. This is based upon the knowledge of Paul Claus and own research. Heights given in feet as per local measurement convention. UIAA Alpine classifications have been used to give an indication of grading as we have no experience of the Alaskan Grading System.

Summary:

Mixed feelings result from this trip. Certainly, the ascents we made of the first two peaks matched our expectations prior to the trip. Both peaks were of a similar height and offered routes of similar length and complexity as that we intended. The ascent of Peak 8329ft offered a lengthy Alpine day in the remote Upper Granite Creek. Once gained, a ridge of almost 4km in length offered interest with a series of Gendarmes offering short slabs and walls. The second, Peak 7679ft offered an obvious looking spur line. This looked difficult once the col below it had been gained but solutions to short difficult sections proved reasonable. In both cases, the looseness of the rock was the greatest concern.

In terms of Objectives, both would have been excellent choices prior to the trip. Peak 8329ft and its ridge dominates the left flank of Upper Granite Creek, while Peak 8329ft sits at the junction of the Glacier which leads from Upper Granite Creek and links up with the much greater Jeffries Glacier. In both cases Paul Claus is confident that the peaks were previously unclimbed as he is only aware of climbing activity in the Granite Range, North of the Granite Creek, together with mainly hiking activity in the lower Granite Creek, West of where we were.

But in some ways there is a feeling of 'unfinished business' as the original objectives East of Mt Miller remain untouched. As you will read below there were good reasons for a change of area and the advice of Paul Claus was not to be taken lightly. A ski ascent of a minor peak on the Bagley Ice Field side of the Jeffries Glacier also supported his information.

Looking across from this to the Barkley Ridge, there was a dramatic increase in the quantity of snow, much of it serac laden, and the high night time temperatures and low altitude would not suggest of a good quality. But with exploratory trips, the unpredictability of weather and snow conditions must be accepted and dealt with accordingly. There remains clear potential along the Barkley Ridge and the flanks of the Jeffries Glacier.

Reasons for change of area:

1. Unsettled weather patterns in the coastal area at that time led to the suggestion by our bush pilot that it may be a few days before he could drop us and a one week contingency at the end was recommended at this time. From an 18 day trip this would drastically reduce our time in this area.
2. Further recommendation by our bush pilot - also a mountaineer, that weather during the previous four weeks suggested that snow conditions would be extremely poor in that area, the majority of lines being snow gullies and ridges.
3. Final recommendation by our pilot that although the lower Granite Creek had been climbed in, he was unaware of activity in the upper, glacial section. He suggested that this area would offer reasonable conditions and allow exploratory routes and first ascents to both sides, and also a link to the Jeffries Glacier. We were satisfied with this alternative as we have no reference to this area in our trawl through the alpine journals and literature when researching the expedition.

We accepted his advice as a mountaineer and the considered expert of this region. He and his father have flown the majority of people into this area and he has lived and climbed within the park boundaries for all of his life.

Thanks to MEF/BMC:

The trip was initiated following previous exploratory climbing in Greenland (Not MEF) and Kyrgyzstan (MEF 07/21). Both myself and Dave realise that our objectives and ascents are not of a high profile or of a particularly difficult nature. But we both appreciate the opportunity to research the potential of unclimbed peaks and then explore the options they offer with little prior knowledge of what conditions or situations we may find. This adds interest and a pleasure which cannot be afforded by the contents of any guidebook. The financial costs however can be high, and with families to consider, we again thank the MEF and BMC for their support which allows us to do this.

Background:

The Wrangell-St. Elias National Park is the largest U.S. national park and includes nine of the 16 highest peaks in the United States. Mt. St. Elias, at 18,008 feet, is the second highest peak in the United States. An initial overview of that region was made using Summitpost.com to gather thoughts and ideas. At the same time a trawl through past copies of a range of magazines, resulted in an article 'The St Elias Range' (High Mountain Issue 246). This provided information about the area and people to contact, but focused Mt St Elias itself. Initial searches through online MEF reports then directed us to an acquaintance, Paul Knott, also an AC member, who we then contacted for general advice pertaining to information gathering for Alaska. He advised that the obvious sources of the

American Alpine Journal together with reference to past MEF reports were the best starting points. A number of hours in the AC library was then arranged and we spent time reading all available MEF reports together with the editions of the AAJ of the last 30 years. Although the area is visited regularly it is clear that the majority of trips focus upon a series of particular peaks. These involved Mt Blackburn, Mt Bona and Mt Churchill, University Peak and Mt Foraker together with infrequent ascents of Mt St Elias itself and only two ascents of Mt Miller. No other reference to activity in the Bagley Ice field or the Jeffries Glacier was to be found. This was encouraging as it helped to confirm that this is an area which holds exploratory potential. Contact was then made with Paul Claus of Ultima Thule Outfitters. Paul has lived in the area for many years as both a Bush pilot and a mountaineer himself with an extensive number of first ascents. Paul indicated to us that he has flown "99% of the mountaineers into this area over the last 30 years" and as such is confident that he "knows what has been done and has not". One common thread which we found amongst MEF reports was that their authors were confident, but never quite certain that a first ascent had been made. We felt that due to Paul Claus' almost exclusive knowledge of the area, his awareness of unclimbed potential could not be bettered and could be relied upon.

Travel:

Flights were made from London Heathrow to Toronto. From Toronto to Denver and finally from Denver to Anchorage. Although there are alternative options this combination proved to be the most cost effective. The first two flights were made with Air Canada and the final one with Air Alaska. The key to our travel arrangements was Paul Claus of Ultima Thule Lodge. Paul collected us from the hostel in Anchorage and flew us from the nearby airfield of Palmer to his lodge and then onto Granite Creek. On the return journey we returned to the lodge and then flew to a small airstrip in the small mining town Chitina. From here a 4 hour truck drive returned us to Anchorage.

Palmer to Ultima Thule Lodge.	Plane: Cessna 185 Skywagon
Lodge to Granite Creek.	Plane: Piper PA-18 Super Cub
Ultima Thule Lodge to Chitina.	Plane: De Havilland DHC-3 Otter

Climbing Ascents and Attempt

1. Ascent of Peak 8329ft (8320ft) (AD-)

From our Drop off point, the lengthy ridge which leads up to and sweeps around to this peak dominated the left flank of the glacier. As such it suggested a good starting point for the trip. The ridge is initially gained by loose scrambling through and around a series of low buttresses. The ridge itself undulates and having reached a high point upon it one has to drop 600ft before resuming the final section towards the peak summit. This final section - almost 1km in length - gave the most interest upon the route. Several gendarmes offered easy slabs and short walls, with two gendarmes being turned on the left each time. Never difficult in nature, the route offered interest at all times before finishing with a short snow slope to the top. The route gave a great mountain day as it involves 1100m of ascent and the ridge itself is almost 4km in length. Of particular note along the route, was the extensive amount of loose scree and boulder debris which lay upon ground of all angles.



Peak 8329ft seen from along the ridge.



Looking across to Jeffries Glacier from Peak 8329ft.

1. Ascent of Peak 7679ft (7656ft) (AD)

This second peak sits snugly in the upper corner of a branching glacier which connects Upper Granite Creek and the Jeffries Glacier. A col connects it with a smaller tent like peak and the snow slopes below this were used to access the col. From here a spur rather than a ridge leads directly to the summit of the peak. Although it looked regularly angled from afar, once on the col it could be seen that a number of towers and buttresses punctuated a ridge. These proved to be excellent as throughout the climb there were continual options as to how to climb or turn these. Although many of these consisted of sound Granite, the

consistent characteristic of the ridge was that of looseness and holds needed to be continually checked before being used. But an enjoyable and obvious line to the snow capped summit, approx 500m in length.



Peak 7679ft seen from the Jeffries Glacier. (Note, photo taken from camp positioned 4km from the Peak itself).



The spur line on Peak 7679ft is shown where the light meets the shade.

2. Ski Ascent of Peak 7178ft (7230ft) (F)

From our camp on the Southern edge of the Jeffries Glacier, a peak with a short sharp rock pinnacle suggested a good objective. Choosing the snow flanks on it's Western side, these were ascended on skis with full length skins fitted. Other than the negotiation of a series of crevasses, these flanks led easily to the rocky summit.



Moving across the Jeffries Glacier to set a camp . Peak 7178ft behind.



From Peak 7178ft. Looking across the Bagley Ice Field to the lower Eastern section of Barkley Ridge.

3. Attempt of Peak 7890ft

Our final Peak was situated beside the col which acted as our entrance onto the Jeffries Glacier. After weaving through a series of crevasses on its snow flank, a loose and broken rock ridge was gained. This was followed to a point which was only 150m below where the ridge appeared to level. But at this point a large wall blocked our way. No option to the right, slightly overhanging and exceedingly loose rocks option straight on and an unpleasantly loose traverse to a blind corner were on offer. Impressions were not good and a closer inspection confirmed that this was not good ground at all. Descent followed.



Moving together on the lower section of Peak 7890ft

GPS Data:

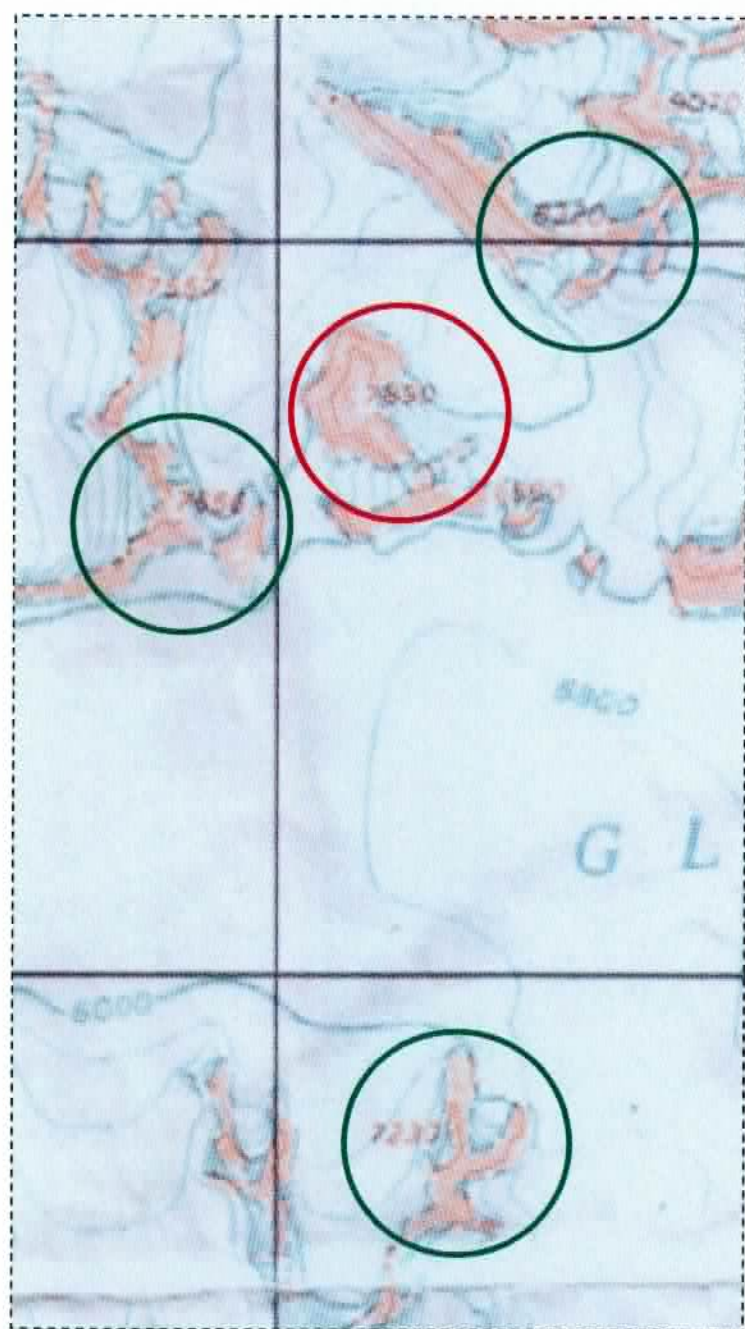
Location	Reference	Altitude
Pick Up/Drop Off	N60° 44' 16" W141° 57' 11"	3014ft / 919m
Morraine Camp	N60° 42' 26" W141° 48' 51"	4854ft / 1480m
Peak 1	N60° 41' 52" W141° 42' 32"	8329ft / 2539m
Glacier Camp 1	N60° 40' 37" W141° 47' 59"	5772ft / 1759m
Peak 2	N60° 39' 52" W141° 49' 07"	7679ft / 2341m
Jeffries Camp	N60° 36' 35" W141° 44' 05"	5807ft / 1770m
Peak 3	N60° 35' 10" W141° 45' 08"	7178ft / 2188m
Peak 4 High Point	N60° 40' 02" W141° 44' 48"	7371ft / 2247m



Pick Up/Drop Off  Morraine Camp  Glacier Camp1  Jeffries Camp 

See Below for Zoom of Area





Weather and Conditions:

The majority of climbing in the Wrangell St. Elias takes place in May and June, although there is undoubtedly no issue with climbing there later in July and August, particularly upon the higher and more popular peaks. We did find the snow conditions to be rather soft but not unmanageable. The night time temperatures were never low and barely fell below freezing, often not doing so. The coastal range of the Barkley Ridge still offers much potential, but as we found, if there has been extensive recent snows, the low altitude and warm temperatures does not make this an ideal time to visit. Although much of it was sound, there were extensive sections of exceedingly loose rock upon all ridges attempted.

Environmental Notes:

We limited impact as a small team of two who used minimal packaging and were dropped off by plane on a sand bar below the moraine, being collected at the same point. All packaging was returned to Anchorage for disposal. Remaining fuel was brought to Anchorage and left as the hostel for others to use. On both moraine and glacier, pits were dug and human waste buried. A range of Alpine plants were displayed on the upper rocky slopes, three of four particular varieties. At the pickup and drop off points below the moraine, a distinctive purple plant was prevalent together with a short shrub with willow-like buds. Bears are present below the ice and snow line and precautions should be considered in these areas. Prints and scat were seen between our Drop off point and the snout of the Glacier.

Medical Notes:

Do not allow your Dentist to leave a wisdom tooth problem until after you return. Dave was in agony for several days - but continued as normal, resisting the co-codamol tablets we had with us.

Other than that, no medical issues arose.

Equipment:

Nothing unusual to note.

We used an MSR XGK stove and Coleman Fuel was purchased at REI (see below). Despite warnings from Air Canada that any stoves or fuel bottles would be removed if they were anything other than unused and in their original packaging, we did not have any issue with taking our usual stove. Rather than taking a used fuel bottle, We did purchase a new one in Anchorage. Teams have mentioned the removal of these from their luggage in previous MEF reports.

Skis and Skins. These were rented from Paul Claus and were extremely beneficial given the soft snow conditions. Movement would have been prohibitively difficult without at this time of year.

Small plastic sleds - not pulks - were given to us by Paul Claus for load carrying. We did not subsequently use these though. Although they would work fine on the upper snowed areas, the lower sections of 'dry' glacier proved to be rutted with runnels. This simply meant that the number of load carrying days increased.

A Pepper Spray was loaned to us by Paul Claus but only required at the Pick Up/Drop Off point.

Food:

The US Customs would not allow our usual food packages to be transported or freighted into the US. We would normally pre-bag dried foods which we obtain from the manufacturers, together with rice, milk powders and such. We would then freight this ahead of time. We were strongly advised that this would most likely be disposed of at entry into the States. Any food must be sealed in it's originally purchased packaging with a clearly defined ingredients listed, as you may see in a supermarket. Even then, should there be an ingredient which they are unhappy with, the food would be destroyed. All foodstuffs were therefore purchased at Carrs Supermarket, details below.

Breakfast: Tea, Porridge, Powdered milk.

Snack: Saltine Crackers. Plastic Pot of 'tinned' Salmon (cheap!). Raisins and Dried Apricots. Oat bar.

Main Meal: Soup Powder. Rice. Beef Jerky or Tuna. Granola. Hot Chocolate.

Water:

A glacial stream was adjacent to the Pick and Drop off location. Similarly the moraine camp allowed access to melt water runnels nearby on the dry" sections of glacier. No filtering of grit was required from either of these sources. Camps beyond that however required melted snow and so allow for the necessary fuel. A black bin bag successfully melted snow on one particularly sunny day, but our movements and clouded weather did not allow for regular use of this technique to conserve fuel.

Money:

Us dollars are easily available using ATMs throughout Anchorage. The nearest to the Hostel mentioned below, is a bank located on Northern Lights and in front of REI. The Hostel itself only takes cash.

Payment to Paul Claus for his piloting was made by digital bank transfer prior to the trip. A further payment for ski hire was made to him and cash was preferred.

General Information for future trips:

Flight into the National Park:

Paul Claus - Ultima Thule Lodge

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

For access into the Wrangell St Elias range, Paul Claus is the undoubted expert. He is an experienced mountaineer, has grown up within the park and is considered to be one of the best if not the best bush pilot in this area. We used Paul for transportation only. The cost of staying at the Lodge itself prohibitive to many.

Accommodation in Anchorage: Although there are a range of choices, We do recommend the 26th Street International Hostel. This is located 5 minutes walk from the bus route to

and from the Airport. It is also 5 minutes walk from AMH and REI (both large climbing and outdoor stores), Anchorage Sat. phones, and 10 minutes walk to Carrs Supermarket.

26th Street International Hostel
1037 West 26th Avenue
Anchorage, AK 99503-2415
1 (907) 274-1252

Food and General Supplies:
Carrs Supermarket - Junction of Northern Lights Blvd and Minnesota

Fuel and Climbing Equipment:
REI - Junction of Spennard Ave and Northern Lights Blvd
AMH - Spennard Ave, close to REI.

Satellite Phones:
Anchorage Satellite Phones - Opposite REI on Northern Lights Blvd
<http://www.anchoragesatellitephones.com/> 1 (907) 272 7368

Finances:

Alaska 2010 - Income and Expenditure

<u>Income</u>			<u>Expenditure</u>	£ Sterling
Grants	MEF	£1,450.00	Deposit for Paul Claus	£765.00
	BMC	£500.00	Flights to Anchorage	£1,620.00
	Total:	£1,950	Balance for Paul Claus	£832.00
Personal Contributions:	DAS	£1,321.87	BMC Insurance (SMH)	£163.09
	SMH	£1,321.87	Cordellete	£10.00
	Total:	£2,643.74	BMC Insurance (DAS)	£181.68
			Hostel Booking	£8.94
	Total:	£4,593.74	Sat.Phone Rental	£309.66
			Cash \$US (UK)	£275.73
			Carrs Food	£133.99
			REI	£47.74
			Wal Mart Food	£20.43
			Cash \$US (AK)	£205.48
			Medical	£20.00
			Total:	£4,593.74

N.B. The \$US taken out in the UK and US were used for the hire of Ski's and Skins from Paul Claus and the payment of hostel fees in Anchorage together with food while in Anchorage.