

Silvestre Graham Revelation Mountains 2015 - Expedition Report



Team members:

Ben Silvestre - British - 25 - Leader

Peter Graham - 28 - British

Duration: March 25 until April 13 (2015)

Location and brief summary:

Revelation mountains, Alaska. First ascent of the East face and East summit of Jezebel (9450 feet). This summit could well be considered the highest unclimbed peak in the range, as it is a distinctly separate summit from Jezebel's true summit.

Our initial objective was to climb the central couloir on Pyramid peak. We then found out we wouldn't be able to land on the revelation glacier and chose to attempt the unclimbed North face of Jezebel from the fish glacier, but found a more suitable and inspiring objective on the also unclimbed and more easily accessible (from our base camp) East face of Jezebel. Having climbed our route we discovered that we'd unintentionally made the first ascent of the east summit.

Attempts and endeavours:

- 1 failed attempt and 1 successful attempt at climbing the same line on the East Face of Jezebel.
- Successful passage from the fish glacier to the north side of Jezebel via the col northeast of Jezebel
- Unsuccessful passage from the East to South side of Jezebel via a col. The attempt was thwarted by bad snow conditions, but if possible would make a viable route to the fish glacier from the south side as there is an easy gully on the south face of Jezebel, which would be by far the easiest descent.

Expedition Diary

23/3 Fly to Anchorage, Stay in Super 8

24/3 Shop for supplies and gear in Anchorage. Get taxi to Talkeetna. Stay in TAT office.

25/3 Breakfast at Road Inn (highly recommended). Fly to Fish Glacier. Set up camp. Learn to ski.

26/3 Skin up to col to look at the North Face of Jezebel. But too cloudy to see anything. Walk back down to leave trail. Ski up fish glacier to look at objectives on East face.

27/3 Ski up Fish Glacier to climb up to col but bad weather/ snow conditions. Look at more objectives on East Face. Decide to attempt the central couloir the next day.

28/3 Wake up at 6. Snowing so go back to sleep. Weather improves during the day. Decide to try again the next day.

29/3 Wake up at 6 to clear skies. Difficult slog up cone to bottom of first step. First step looks hard. Steep thin ice. Ben tries but comes down. Pete tries, thinks it's possible, but needs more strews and it's getting late. We abbed off and ski around to check out the face some more.

30/3 Wake up to more snow. Laze around in tent.

31/3 OK weather but bad forecast. So sat around then went back to look at the face some more.¼

1/4 Same as previous day. Pack bags for 2.5 day attempt next day.

2/4 - 4/4 Climbed central couloir on East Face. Named route "Hoar of Babylon"

5/4 Eat lots, sleep lots, listen to good tunes, bask in success and relative warmth.

6/4 Same as previous day. Storm begins.

7/4 Storm lots of snow. Have to dig out tent repeatedly.

8/4 Storm lots of snow. Have to dig out tent repeatedly. Decided that we don't have enough time for snow conditions to become safe enough to climb another route. Ring Paul to ask to get picked up asap.

9/4 -11/4 Dig tent out. Repeatedly rebuild runway. Ring Paul. Wait in vain for weather to improve enough to get picked up.

12/4 Get picked up. Fly back to Talkeetna. Lots and food and beer in the West Rib. Stay in TAT bunk house.

13/4 – 14/4 Enjoy more food and beer in Talkeetna.

15/4 – 22/4 Get Taxi back to Anchorage. Hire car and explore Kenai peninsular.

23/4 Peter flies home. Ben flies down to Utah to thaw out.

Detailed summary of expedition by Peter Graham:

We flew into the range on the 25th of march and landed on the Fish glacier to the south east of Jezebel directly below the east face. We had never even seen any pictures of the east face before and were very impressed and excited to be dropped below such an amazing face that we didn't even know about and had never been climbed before.

We did not direct our attention away from the north face straight away. On our first day after landing we skinned up to the col to north east of Jezebel to try and get a look at the north face. It took us 4 hours to reach the col and by the time we got there cloud and snow blocked our view of the face.

On our way back down to base camp we decided it would make much more sense to try a line on the east face as it looked as good if not better than the north face and would not require an approach day.

The next few days were mostly mediocre weather, but we managed to ski up and down the glacier to check out potential lines on the east face. The face is quite complex with lots of couloirs and pinnacles, so it took a lot of viewing from different angles to pick out our line. Our main concern was what we thought was a small step at the start of the couloir.

After one false start due to bad weather, we made our first attempt on the line with 1.5 days food and 8 ice screws. We climbed around 180m of steep snow to get to the base of what we thought was the small step. The small step however turned out to be a 30m+ pitch of vertical and overhanging ice which weeped around a roof. With three screws in the belay we only had 5 screws to climb the pitch. We both had a go at climbing the pitch, but realised that we would need more ice screws and more food to climb the route, so we abseiled off. Lesson 1: things in Alaska are bigger than they seem.

We spent a few more days waiting out bad weather to get on the route again, but eventually got a good enough forecast to make another attempt. With 14 screws the first hard pitch still put up a good fight and turned out to be the crux of the route being very steep with quite a lot of hollow organ pipe type ice and some structural dubiousness, not something I'd

be running back to lead again, but an awesome pitch none the less. The next pitch also required care with an over hanging section up a fin of ice , like the wing of an aeroplane tilted 95 degrees, which screws went in and out the other side. After that was a steep chimney pitch filled with overhanging snow that required a good 2 hour effort of stubborn excavation, precarious back and footing and convoluted aid techniques from Ben. This put us into the couloir proper. A few hundred metres of more straight forward gully climbing up this, lead us to an excellent bivi on a prow to the right of the couloir, which we reached at around midnight.



Steep delicate ice on the crux pitch.



The snow filled chimney pitch

The next day a couple of easy pitches led us to the base of an excellent steep ice chimney. This was maybe the best pitch of the route. A 50m pitch of steep good ice in the back of a tight chimney reminiscent of Exocet in Patagonia. A few more pitches up mixed ground led us to the top a tower we had jokingly named the “tower of commitment” while

checking out the line, because we could see that there was an easy couloir behind and to the left of the tower, but we were unsure of whether we would be able to easily descend into the couloir without horribly committing ourselves. We were slightly disappointed to find a steep rock wall between us and the couloir, but we could see that there was only easy climbing remaining up the couloir to the summit. Fortunately our 60m ropes just reached the easy couloir so we fixed one of our ropes and abseiled into the couloir leaving the rope in place so we could reascend it on our way down. We continued up the rest of the route with one rope. We topped out on the east summit of Jezebel just before dark and descended a few pitches to a chopped out sitting bivi.



Approaching the ice pencil

We then abseiled and down climbed the rest of the route the next day, reascending our ropes to regain the “tower of commitment.” We reached the glacier in bad weather just after dark, feeling very relieved to be back on the ground.

A short elated glide on skis led us back to our tent, where we gorged ourselves on fried food and booze until the early hours. A fitting end to an awesome adventure.

We spent the next 3 days getting repsyched to climb something else before a big storm hit dumping over a metre of snow and we realised it was time to escape. We had another 5 tent bound days with occasional trips outside to dig our tent out of the rapidly building snow, before we could get picked up.

General information for climbing in the Revelations:

There is a lot of great information in Clint Helanders article here:

<http://publications.americanalpineclub.org/articles/13201212387/Recon-Revelations>

We flew to Anchorage from Manchester and spent a night in a Super 8 motel without a booking. The following day we bought a load of food from Walmart, and rang <http://www.gopurpleshuttle.com> who picked us up two hours later despite having no booking and ferried us with all our bags to Talkeetna. The drive is around two hours. Go Purple were friendly and cheap, and we would recommend them although it would be worth

booking in high summer. They said they often stop for climbers to buy their food supplies en route to Talkeetna. There are no major food outlets in Talkeetna and everything should be bought beforehand.

In Talkeetna we spent a night camped on the floor of Talkeetna Air Taxi's office (they have a free bunkhouse which we stayed in on the way out, but wasn't open yet on the way in). Alternatively there are many hostels etc. Though a small place, Talkeetna has many great bars and eateries that make staying there rather enjoyable.

Paul Roderick, TAT's climbing expedition supervisor, was extremely helpful prior to and during our expedition. It was an extremely low snow year and the fact that we managed to land at all is a testament to Paul's 30+ years experience

flying in the Alaska range. The flights were \$1600p/p with 250lbs of luggage per person, and a charge of \$1 per extra lb. We brought a lot of canned food which added a lot of extra weight and thus cost. In future we would bring more freeze dried food.

Talkeetna is situated approximately 140 miles from the revelations which means that predicting landable weather conditions can be very unreliable. We were extremely lucky to get flown in immediately. Rob Jones from <http://www.randrhunting.com/RRH/Home.html> has a hunting lodge near the range, and flying into the range via a stay in the lodge would be a far more reliable way of getting in/out, as weather windows can be quite short. Rob quoted us \$4500 all in.

A few points to note:

- The prime time to climb is from the Middle of March to late April. Temperatures before the middle of March can reach -40C but then quickly rise to -20C+. We had no thermometer but the coldest nights reached -18C on the forecast. Most days were cloudy and thus considerably warmer, and we could often relax in base camp without gloves.
- It snowed a lot. Of our 19 days on the glacier there were only two during which it didn't snow at all. This is normal weather in the revelations.
- The granite on the east face of Jezebel is of the highest quality and there would be countless rock objectives, but getting there in summer would necessitate a long and expensive helicopter flight as the glaciers dry up. Rob Jones might be able to work something out.
- The most reliable glaciers to land on are the east facing ones, due to snow conditions. TAT no longer land on the revelation glacier due to dryness in recent years. Rob Jones seemed more confident in that respect (he has a smaller plane).
- We were camped in a sheltered northeast facing valley, and except for a few violent days experienced next to no wind. Clint Helander, at a similar time, was buffeted near constantly by violent winds. He was camped in an adjacent northwest facing valley, South of Jezebel. We were told the prevailing wind was westerly but the evidence suggests otherwise. That said, we may have just been lucky.
- The revelations are outside of the Denali national park and so no permit is necessary for climbing there.
- We downloaded some very accurate and free maps from <http://www.usgs.gov>

Budget:

Income	Expenditure
£1650 - MEF grant	£1500 - Flights to anchorage
£1200 - BMC grant	£535 - Excess baggage
£1000 - Austrian Alpine club UK	£500 - Insurance
£600 - British Alpine club	£2300 - Air taxi
£2085 - Personal contributions	£550 - Food
	£400 - Travel and accommodation in Alaska
	£250 - Sat phone rental
	£500 - Fuel/equipment/other
Total - £6535	Total - £6535

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