

North American Classic Route

Description



Mt. Huntington, Harvard Route

Grade VI, 5.9A2, mixed - Alaska Grade 5

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Disclaimer: No written description is a substitute for route-finding skill. Use your own judgment in all cases rather than depend on the information here, for which neither the author nor the publisher makes any claims of accuracy or usefulness.

Note: (This description is from a climb in 2005, with dramatically low snow depths compared to normal.)

The Approach:

There are several ways to gain the Harvard Route.

1. The original start is to climb the entire Stegosaur. After seeing this feature from above, I would attempt other options first, because of obvious cornice and avalanche danger.
2. Climb one 65m stretch of ice (up to 70 degrees) above the bergschrund. This requires good timing, as the bergschrund opened up while we were on the route and I would think it would become increasingly difficult. This option is well to the right of the largest cornice on the Stegosaur. With little snow on the ridge in the 2005 season, the usual avalanche conditions were not an issue.
3. The "Modern Start" is a large gully/couloir to the left of a large pear shaped rock that sticks out of the side of the Stegosaur. This 6-pitch start takes you to the Alley pitch. The angle is about 55 degrees with a near vertical ice step on pitch 2. There are some anchors (fixed pins) in the rock to the left for belays. There was a good bit of ice in the couloir when we rapped it.
4. The Puryear-Westman (2000) variation joins the Harvard one pitch above the Dihedral pitch: hike up towards the West Face Couloir Route. Before getting to the couloir, traverse right below the headwall and follow the most obvious weakness up and right.

The route:

The Alley pitch is supposed to be a casual 20' rock step but the lack of snow made it look challenging with verglased holds. We found easier mixed terrain 12' to the right that led to snow above the Alley rock step.

Two pitches of 35 degree snow led to the first bivouac at a large rock with a fixed pin. In the wrong conditions, these pitches could be very dangerous.

Half a pitch of snow leads to a belay to the left of the dihedral pitch. This pitch was longer than usual due to the lack of snow, and contained some very challenging climbing. The old belay stance at the top of the pitch is now missing which made for a semi-hanging belay.

Climb a 5.8 rock step with 3 fixed pins, then easy mixed terrain up and left. Belay here for a short pitch, or continue up and right. Rope drag could be ugly.

More moderate snow up and right brings you to a couple options.

- An icy chimney (5.9) goes up for 20' and jogs right and out of sight above. This is lower angled at start but steeper above. Hauling a pack could be troublesome.
- Angle up and right on what is usually 65 degree snow (but not in this dry year) or behind a large flake onto a ledge. A fist-sized crack right of a triangular block angles up and right for 20'. We aided this. We noticed on rappel that it also looks possible to avoid the flake by traversing around its base.

Mixed terrain for a pitch leads to a snow couloir that leads to the Nose bivouac. The couloir was about 3 pitches of 55 to 60-degree snow with some easy rock steps mixed in. The Nose bivouac requires a little excavating. There are several bolts on the wall, but some were out of reach due to lack of snow.

Next comes the Nose pitch, which we opted to climb and fix for the summit day. It starts with a beautiful finger crack that leads to two fixed pins. Climb twin cracks up the overhanging upper wall (C1) to a fixed pin. After the pin, the pitch goes up, traverses left for around 10', then continues up a vertical crack to the belay (4 pitons).

Traverse out left over easy mixed terrain (or all snow some years) to a snow & ice ramp, which is taken to the junction of the Harvard Route with the West Face Couloir.

Traverse right to the Aviary, following the path of least resistance. Then you should be able to see the Upper Ice Field which is reached over mixed terrain. Now follow the path of least resistance to the summit ridge in about 4 pitches.

The summit ridge consists of huge cornices that deserve respect. We found two obstacles of note: a good-sized crevasse running roughly parallel to the ridge, and the 30'+ vertical ice step. From the top of the step the ridge to the summit is obvious. I used 2 pickets above the ice step, the only time they were used on the route.

The Descent:

V-threads and fixed pins were used all the way down the route. After crossing the crevasse, we angled down sooner on the upper ice field. Three rappels over sometimes vertical to overhanging snow and ice brought us back to the mixed terrain before the ice field. The afternoon sun made the snow on the traverse very non-user friendly.

Six more rappels take you to the base of the West Face Couloir, where we cached our gear. Then two or three more rappels took us within 20 minutes of base camp. From the Nose bivouac, expect 6-8 hours to descend to base camp.

Gear Recommendations:

- One set active cams up to #3 Camalot, with doubles of 0.5, 0.75, and 1.0
- One set of nuts
- (Many fixed pins are in place, especially at belays)
- 8 ice screws
- Sling material for V-threads

Additional Notes:

The upper ice field has turned around many people because of avalanche conditions. The Tokositna is known for bad weather. The flight services might be flying everywhere in the range while you are shoveling freshly fallen snow. Plan for long waits before conditions are right for flying into or out of this relatively isolated area. The runway needs to be 20' wide and 1100' to 1300' long with a large teardrop shaped turn-around. This is a tight spot, and there are only a few pilots who will attempt

to land there (we used Talkeetna Air Taxi.)

VHF radio may work, but range is limited because of geography. SAT phone is a better option. I was able to get 9 radio stations with my Sony Walkman.

Joe Puryear has written a guidebook for the Alaskan Range that will contain a description of this route. It should be available on www.supertopo.com in the summer of 2005.