

# the SCREE

## Mountaineering Club of Alaska

August 2015

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Peak of the Month: Hale-Bop

**Monthly meeting: 6:30 p.m., Tuesday, August 18, at the McHugh Creek Trailhead  
CHANGED VENUE and FORMAT.**

*"Mountains have a way of dealing with overconfidence."*

*- Hermann Buhl*



## “Black Roses” – First Ascent on Devils Paw’s North Tower

Text by Roger Schäli

May 23, 2015

Roger Schäli and Simon Gietl completed the first ascent of “Black Roses” on Devils Paw’s North Tower in British Columbia. The climb up was accomplished in 19 hours, the down-climb in 5 hours. The name of the route comes from the big, black flecks both climbers noticed on the wall.

Throughout the years, my friend Heli Putz had often talked excitedly about Devils Paw, which he knows well from his years as a ski-guide in this region. Devils Paw is the majestic frontier mountain between Alaska and Canada, about 30 kilometers east of Juneau. This time he managed to persuade us to go and give it a look.

Together with my friend and climbing partner, Simon Gietl, and with the support of guides Heli Putz and Ed Shanley, a warm, generous, and friendly local guide, we walked to Devils Paw, where we set up our base camp.



*Roger Schäli below Devils Paw's North Tower.*

*Photo by Simon Gietl*

our bivouac gear while keeping our fingers crossed that we wouldn't have to spend more than one night on the face!

The next morning, Monday, the 18th of May, the adventure started. We were faced with difficult route-finding challenges,



*Simon Gietl climbing "Black Roses" on Devils Paw's North Tower.*

*Photo by Roger Schäli*

tough climbing sections that were sometimes wet, sometimes covered in snow and ice, and large, loose blocks, which made us constantly nervous. By late evening we left the first two rock walls behind us and began tracking through a tiring and dangerous stretch of deep, wet powder toward the summit. We decided on a short, cold, and wet bivouac before continuing to the top. And with the first morning light we reached the summit of Devils Paw's North Tower: a very special moment for me, since it was very probable that no one had been here ever before. After a happy hug, Simon and I sat down silently, letting the moment sink in. Almost three years have gone by since Simon and I found ourselves together on Arwa Spire, and here I was again with my “little brother,” as I call Simon, sitting silent and breathless on a summit.

But the strong morning sun and steep snowfields prone to wet snow avalanches wouldn't allow for a long rest. We made our way back down the steep unknown descent through the west wall of Devils Paw to our base camp, where Ed and Heli welcomed us with chocolate and tea. This had been a real “museum-day,” as I call the very special days that I put into the museum of my life memories.



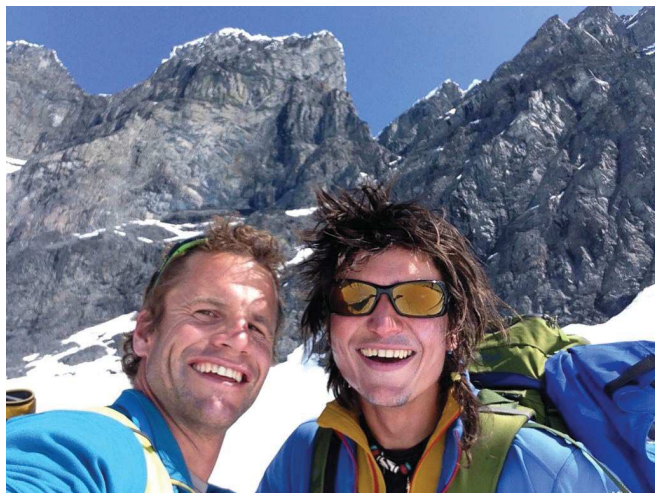
*Simon Gietl ascending Devils Paw's North Tower.*

*Photo by Roger Schäli*



## **“Black Roses” on Devils Paw’s North Tower**

Text by Simon Gietl



*Roger Schäli and Simon Gietl below the west-facing rock walls of Devils Paw's North Tower.*

*Photo by Roger Schäli*

In May 2015, together with my friend Roger Schäli and Heli Putz, I traveled to Juneau. Two months previously, when Roger had asked me whether I had the time and the desire for a new project with him on Devils Paw, I couldn't refuse. It had already been some time since I had traveled with Roger, and I looked forward to more good times with him.

From Juneau, with a 20-minute flight over the gorgeous white glacial landscape, we reached our destination, where we set up camp. We were impressed with the northwest edge of Devils Paw and decided that afternoon to check out the ascent and climb the first few meters. After a comfortable, hour-long ski tour, we reached the bergschrund, where the climbing began. After climbing up and over a crumbly divide, we arrived right at the pitch. After about 150 meters of easy climbing, we decided to end our investigations and climb back down to camp.

After a starlit night, a new day greeted us. We set forth again with our project and planned to ascend the beautifully formed, unclimbed edge over two days. Because we wanted to reduce the weight we carried to a minimum, we took only a light tent for bivouacking and left the sleeping bags behind.

Above the slab terrain, we finally reached the beginning point of the tower. There the climbing really began. Again and again we had to ponder the situation and figure out which way would best lead us upward. Zigzagging, we ascended further through cracks and narrow dihedrals. So as not to endanger the belayer, the lead climber had to watch out especially for loose pieces of rock, some of which were as large as a refrigerator, only waiting for a chance to fall. Having arrived on the top of the first tower, we took a break and discussed the further course of the

route. The first third of the tour was already behind us. The temperature was perfect, so after the break we moved quickly. In the middle of the tour, the sun began to shine down on our faces from a bluebird sky. Since the last part of the edge was covered in snow and ice, rivulets of water were always streaming down over the cliff. These complicated the climbing. Twice we had to cross a small waterfall, which gave one of us a pretty nice shower.

When we finally reached the top of the second tower, we stood in the snow, but in less complicated terrain. In a suitable spot, we took the opportunity to dry ourselves out a bit in the sun and to fill our water bottles.

In very wet snow, the route continued further until we finally decided to bivouac 120 meters under the summit. We dug a small platform, where we finally set up our tent. The day ended with a fairy-tale sunset. The view was grandiose and we were overwhelmed with astonishment. Just as it started to become darker, we zipped up our tent and wished each other a good night. We slept in moist clothing, without sleeping bags, which was not exactly cozy. Hardly had we fallen asleep, when the alarm went off. It was 2:00 and we started to move very slowly. We boiled water and treated ourselves to a real man's

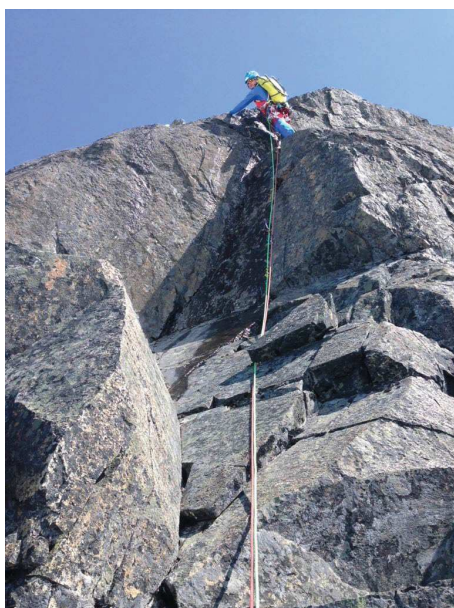


*Base camp at the foot of Devils Paw.*

*Photo by Simon Gietl.*

breakfast: our last chocolate bar and some gummy bears that Heli had given us.

Hard to believe, but it took an hour and a half before we were ready to begin. The day had already begun, so we didn't need our headlamps anymore. A long traverse to the right led us finally to a little chimney, which offered us a place to rest in the steep summit wall after two pitches of mixed climbing. For the first time, we thought we might actually be able to make it to the summit!



*Simon Gietl ascending Devils Paw's North Tower.  
Photo by Roger Schäli*

traverse, we didn't remain long on the summit. We descended the first 50 meters backwards until the terrain became steeper and we decided to rappel down. After 60 meters of rappelling, we descended again, simultaneously, until we reached the lower end of the rise and we stood on the glacier. Carefully, we sought the best way through the crevasses, until we finally ended up in a dead end. An 8-meter-high crevasse prevented us from continuing, and so there was only one possibility to go on. We buried a bag filled with snow above the overhanging lip of the fissure and rappelled ourselves slowly downward. After a few suspenseful snow bridges, we stood again on a part of the glacier with few crevasses, which bode well for us. We came directly to the southeast notch,

It was with tremendous joy, which was written on our faces, that at 6:30 we finally stood a short time later on the highest point and embraced each other! Berg heil!

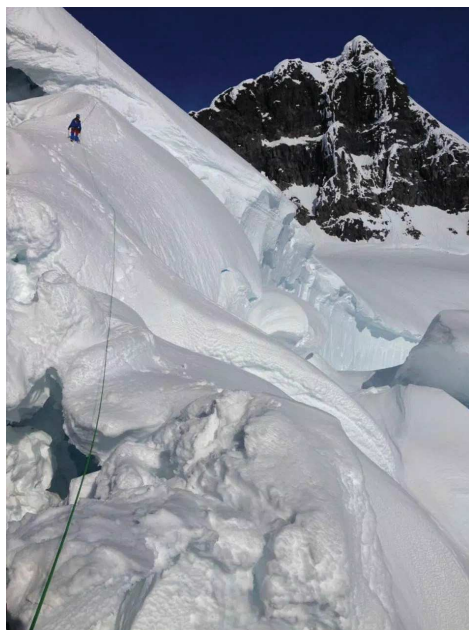
Since it was clear to us that the descent on the other side of the mountain would also be challenging, and the sun already shone on the eastern slopes, which we would later have to

where we had planned our further descent.

From above, we couldn't see whether the ridge led to the foot of the wall, near to where we had set up camp. We chose the only possibility for the descent and climbed slowly down the frozen ridge of snow, without a rope, with intense concentration. We did not allow

ourselves any false steps. Small stones, which fell without obstacle down the steep, 800-meter ridge clearly foretold the possible consequence of a mistake. The conditions became steeper until we finally set two hooks with which to rappel ourselves down. Then we set forth again with the descent over the snow and after further rappelling, we finally reached level ground. We were overjoyed.

In this moment it was clear that we had achieved our goal. We were greeted with a bar of chocolate by our two friends, Heli and a local named Ed Shanley.



*Simon Gietl descending the glacier below Devils Paw's North Tower.  
Photo by Roger Schäli*

Again and again, I caught myself looking in the direction of Devils Paw and could hardly believe that roughly six hours earlier we had been standing on the summit!

#### **Route information**

*Route:* "Black Roses"

*First ascentists:* Roger Schäli and Simon Gietl, on May 18 and 19, 2015

*Character:* Crack and dihedral climbing

*Difficulty:* 6c/A1 M4

*Protection:* The route was secured with two hooks, which were set into the wall exclusively with removable protection.

*Climbing time of first ascent:* 19 hours, 5 minutes



*Route of "Black Roses" on Devils Paw's North Tower.  
Photo by Roger Schäli*