



AAC Publications

Peak 12,878', north face, Stalker

Colorado, Indian Peaks

In early October, Jonathan "JD" Merritt and I climbed a long ice and mixed route on the north side of Peak 12,878', a sub-peak just northeast of Shoshoni Peak (12,967') in the central Indian Peaks. I first scouted the route after a deep two-day freeze in mid-September. On October 2, Phil Wortmann and I tried to make an attempt, but with gale-force winds, snow, and intense cold we never geared up. With a forecast for two days of melt-freeze conditions following, I hoped this moderate-looking route would reach perfect condition.

JD and I started our five-mile hike around 6 a.m. on October 5 out of the Long Lake Trailhead. We battled over the Continental Divide via Pawnee Pass in strong winds and fog, and then descended around 1,000' into the west-side basin to reach the base of our intended line. With a low cloud ceiling obscuring the peaks it was impossible to see the route, but we submitted to faith and the climbing unfolded flawlessly for the next 1,100'.

After climbing 100' of steep snow to the base, I snatched the first lead, which had impeccable mixed climbing up a series of steep corners with ice no more than a few inches thick or wide. Above this, JD begged to lead an incredible ice smear. The smear led to easier climbing and past a thick, yellow ice roof shaped by strong updrafts.

We simulclimbed the middle of the route (600' of continuous low-angle ice with some short steps up to WI3) in one long "pitch." To our surprise, the most technical climbing came in the final 400'. First, a fantastic, iced-up, Chamonix-style corner, then a steep groove and corner system up compact, rime-covered granite leading directly to the summit plateau. We topped out on the summit of Peak 12,878' around 3 p.m., a mile southwest of Pawnee Pass. In all, I walked about 30 miles to find this route in condition: Stalker (1,100', WI4 M5). The double meaning of the route name comes from the film of the same name by Andrei Tarkovsky. Make sure to seek this one out in early season before the Brainard Lake road closes.

– Erik Rieger

Images



Erik Rieger leading up the icy upper corner system.



Part way up the icy corners on the first pitch of Stalker.



Erik Rieger following the second-to-last pitch.



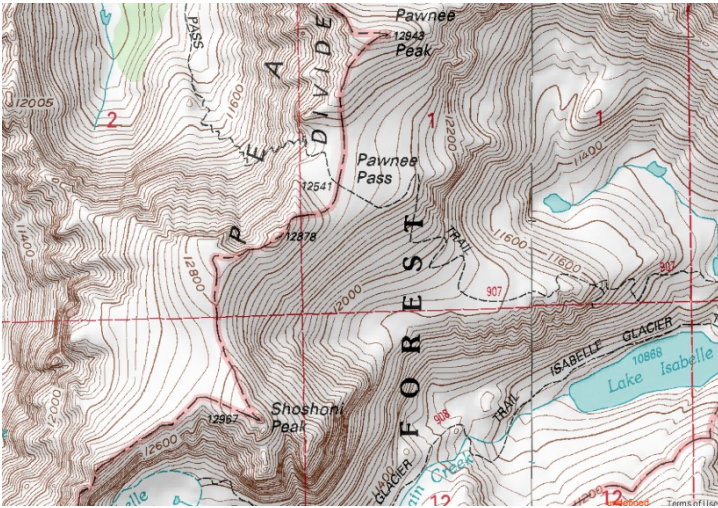
Climbing moderate and thick ice above the steep smear.



A close-up of the upper corner system.



Erik Rieger (left) and JD Merritt (right) atop Peak 12,878 after making the first ascent of Stalker.



An overview of Shoshoni Peak and Peak 12,878'.



The north aspect of Peak 12,878' (a sub-peak of Shoshoni Peak), showing the route Stalker (1,100', WI4 M5) in mid-September conditions. Fill in the blank spots with ice and you'll get the idea.



JD Merritt leading Stalker's money pitch.

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