



AAC Publications

New Ice and Mixed Climbs

Colorado, San Juan Mountains

The growing popularity of ice climbing was a source of increasing frustration before I discovered the potential for mixed first ascents in the San Juan Mountains. In January–February 2015, Grant Kleeves and I dedicated ourselves to trying a new route every weekend—easy for me, on break from seasonal work, but psychologically taxing for the gainfully employed Grant.

We started on January 24 by climbing a deep gash to the right of the Calling (700', WI4 M4) on the south-facing Outward Bound Wall in Eureka. We found five pitches of interesting climbing on ice and rock, hidden in the depths of a chimney system. At a certain angle this line appears to have been sliced into the rock by the Kleeever (700', WI4 M6). Expect loose rock, an obligatory squeeze chimney, and no fixed gear to mark the way.

On January 31 we tried the rightmost of several prominent chimneys dividing the “21 & Up Buttress” on the south side of Camp Bird Road. An initial pitch with moderate climbing led to treed slopes and a snow gully stretching up to the base of a pair of chimneys. We steered clear of the flared squeeze on the left and chose the more sensibly sized chimney to the right. After 350' this system ended, so we made an exposed traverse into the left chimney. This chimney then widened and split into two separate cracks. We finished on the right-hand of these, which ends in a strenuous left-facing corner. In honor of Bird Brain Boulevard, we named this looser version Thick Skull Thoroughfare (1,000', M6).

Our nerves were beginning to fray, so for our third weekend we recruited Drew Smith and Lance Sullins to join us for a leapfrogging, party-of-four adventure in the Sneffels Range. On February 6 we skied into the basin beneath the imposing north face of Peak 13,134' (a.k.a. “Dark Horse” or “Sneffels 9”) and bivied. The next morning we began up the prominent left-trending weakness, believing it to be unclimbed. We enjoyed the usual San Juan choss, thin ice, and unstable snow for over 1,000' to the top. Afterward, we were impressed to learn that Jared Vilhauer and Dave Ahrens had made the first ascent of this line in October 2006: Ski Line (1,600', 5.8 R WI3 M5, AAJ 2007). Despite pleasant temperatures, we are guiltily calling our climb the first winter ascent of the face and what may be the second ascent overall.

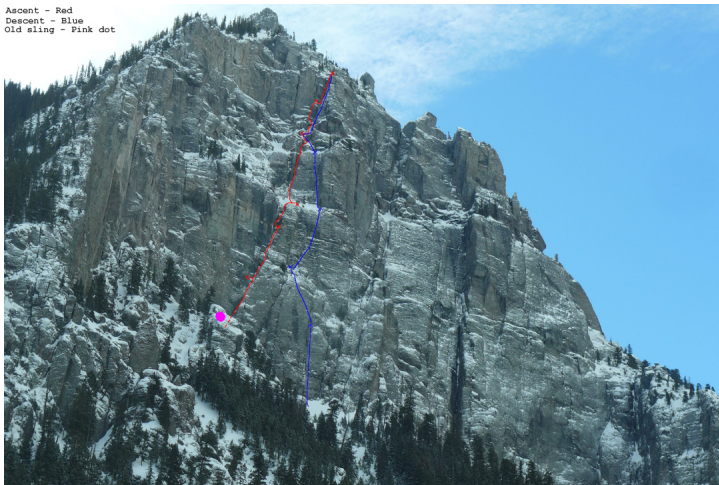
For the final escapade, Drew Smith replaced Grant, and we returned to Camp Bird Road on February 10. We decided on a distinct right-angling weakness to the left of Tasty Talks (1,400', 5.8 M5 R, AAJ 2013), on the buttress of the same name. We were rewarded with the best route of the bunch. It featured engaging climbing on good rock for the first four pitches. Higher up, the line regressed into the usual choss, but potential variations to the left could produce a sustained, high-quality route. Bring good fist-crack skills for your visit to Dr. Toboggan (900', 5.9+ M5). All routes were climbed ground-up, free, and without bolts.

– Jack Cramer

Images



Jack Cramer following the chimney of Dr. Toboggan (900', 5.9+ M5) on the "Tasty Talks" buttress, Camp Bird Road. The route climbs a distinct right-angling weakness to the left of Tasty Talks (1,400', 5.8 M5 R).



Dr. Toboggan (900', 5.9+ M5) is marked in red on the "Tasty Talks" buttress. The route climbs a distinct right-angling weakness to the left of Tasty Talks (1,400', 5.8 M5 R, Wellborn-Wortmann, AAJ 2013); descent in blue.



Thick Skull Thoroughfare (1,000', M6) marked in red; descent in blue. The route ascends the "21 & Up Buttress" on Camp Bird Road.

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