



Dragontail Peak, North Face, Left Hand Freeze

Washington, North Cascades

Over the weekend of April 25–26, Craig Pope and I teamed up to attempt a new route on Dragontail Peak in the Enchantments—Craig’s idea. He had started up a variation of what we would end up climbing the weekend prior and was eager to see it through.

On the 25th we leisurely made our way to the far side of Colchuck Lake. We bivied on exposed rocks below the approach to Triple Couloirs. From there we eyed our intended line: the thickest ribbon of water ice above and left of Triple Couloirs’ initial ice step. I had never tried a new route and was a bit intimidated though excited.

We departed camp at 3:30 a.m. on April 26 and reached the base of the wall by 5 a.m. We soloed up the first pitch of Triple Couloirs and then wallowed up snow about 60m to the start of our route. Craig offered me the first pitch and off I went, climbing about 70m of ice in the WI4/5 range, most of it just thick enough for ice screws.

Craig led the second pitch, which was steeper and thinner than the first (WI5/5+). In all he climbed about 80m, using a mix of ice and rock gear. Above this, a short pitch of WI3 brought us to a sheltered hanging belay behind a nice chunk of granite. It was during this transition, while Craig took an awkward hanging shit, that I dropped a glove; however, we decided to continue. Craig took the fourth lead, which was mostly bare rock and rather cruxy. He took a 15’ fall while traversing under a roof, but he nailed it on the second try. Some thin, rotten ice up a narrow gully capped the 50m pitch (WI5 M6+).

The fifth pitch involved less severe ice as we continued up the narrow gully. Eventually we popped over a ridge to our right to gain low-angle ice and snow slopes—again, probably about 50m. All things considered, we had made decent time to this point, but it was 2:30 p.m. and the headwall above looked pretty daunting. At a semi-hanging belay we ate and then opted to traverse right toward easy couloirs, simul-climbing about two pitches. With some more climbing, we eventually gained the Triple Couloirs about 50m below that route’s final ice step. From here we unroped and continued to the summit, reaching the top around 4:30 p.m.

The descent off the back side was painless, and we quickly descended Asgard Pass back to camp, arriving around 6:30 p.m. We reached the trailhead again at 11 p.m. We called our route Left Hand Freeze (360m, WI5 M6+), with about seven pitches of new terrain. We hope to complete a direct line through the headwall when the ice comes in again.

– Kirsten Gardner

Images



Craig Pope leading a narrow ice groove on pitch five.



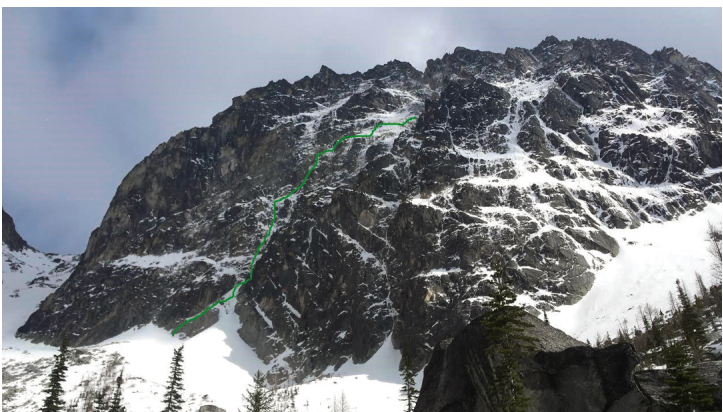
Kirsten Gardner on the easy traversing toward the Triple Couloirs on the upper part of the climb.



Kirsten Gardner leading the first pitch of Left Hand Freeze, after starting on Triple Couloirs' first ice step.



Craig Pope leading the crux fourth pitch.



The north face of Dragontail Peak with Left Hand Freeze (360m, WI5 M6+) marked in green. Triple Couloirs climbs a partially hidden gash right of the new route. The climbers originally hoped for a direct finish on the upper wall, straight up from where their route traverses hard right.

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