



AAC Publications

Argonaut Peak, North Face, Chad Kellogg Memorial Route

Washington, North Cascades

Vern Nelson Jr. and I climbed a new route on Argonaut Peak (8,451'), just east of Mt. Stuart, on April 26. Our route starts in a major left-facing corner system on the sheer north-facing wall between the northeast buttress and the northwest arête. It was the culmination of several failed attempts, as the long approach and ephemeral nature of the route made for a challenging project.

We approached the wall by the Mountaineers Creek drainage in predawn blackness. At ca 7,000', beneath the peak, we climbed a long snow slope to the base of the route. The first pitch tackled thin ice before giving way to a bit of mixed climbing and a steep, skinny ice runnel. This pitch was very long and enjoyable. Pitch two was shorter, but it featured a steep and rotten step of ice that almost caused us to pull the plug. However, I managed to commit to the sketchy maneuver, pull the bulge, and find a belay we had used two years prior.

The third pitch was the question mark, with steep and compact granite peppered with white crystals. From the anchor, I moved out across a slab of good ice before gaining a vertical groove that I dry-tooled up. This pitch was thrilling, long, and ended with a desperate search for a belay. Eventually a perfect slot for finger-sized cams appeared and I could bring up Vern. On the fourth pitch, Vern led up easier but thoughtful mixed ground to a belay on a small snow slope. On the fifth pitch I headed left, out of the major corner system (now a rotten fault line), and climbed a full rope length of good *névé* and spectacular ice runnels.

Pitch six was easy mixed, and we thought we had overcome the difficulties—of course, a sting in the tail awaited. The seventh pitch climbed a steep rock wall that looked to be about 5.10 from below. I free climbed until a loose flake exploded in my hands, sending me for small fall onto a large cam. I aided the rest of this wall, finally gaining the summit snow slopes by making a leftward tension traverse. Vern broke trail to the summit while I struggled to keep up—I was tired!

We began our descent in the last bit of light and then downclimbed in the darkness to the base of the route. We picked up what we had left there and then slogged out to our car. In all we climbed 800' of new terrain on the Chad Kellogg Memorial Route (1,250', AI4 M6 R A1). Chad Kellogg was killed while descending Fitz Roy with me in 2014. We miss him every day.

– Jens Holsten

Images



The Chad Kellogg Memorial Route (1,250', AI4 M6 R A1) on the north face of Argonaut Peak, as seen from an aerial recon. The route climbed 800' of new ground left of existing summer rock climbs on the northwest face. It crossed the northeast buttress to reach steep snow leading to the summit ridge.



On the steep seventh pitch.



On the fifth pitch, climbing left from the corner system to reach better ice and rock.



Vern Nelson Jr. following pitch one.



Leading a thin slab of ice on the opening pitch.



Leading the third-pitch crux section.



Vern Nelson Jr. and Jens Holsten on the summit of Argonaut Peak.

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