



AAC Publications

Zoroaster, Southeast Face, First Free Ascent

Arizona, Grand Canyon National Park

In April 2015, I finally convinced Flagstaff climbers Jeff Snyder and Blake McCord to visit Zoroaster Temple and try to free the southeast face with me. This had been a “serious” project of mine ever since Mathieu Brown and I established the route in 2012 (AAJ 2013). Neither of my partners had ever climbed Zoroaster, so it was fun to do a trip with them in full awe of the experience of climbing in the Grand Canyon. I also figured that if I couldn’t free the route, my strong partners likely could.

I was able to link and free pitches one and two first try, combining roof liebacking and face climbing, at 5.11 R. After that I got psyched that the free ascent might actually happen. I knew the third pitch was going to be the crux of the route, requiring desperate friction in a corner, but after falling twice I was able to free the pitch (5.11+). The fourth lead starts with a thin fingers crux (5.11+) and stays challenging the whole way. The view on this pitch was truly memorable: As the late afternoon light richened, the rainbow of colors and shadow evolved into an explosion of inspiration. Building the anchor atop this pitch, after having thought about freeing this route for three years, was an amazing feeling. With four pitches of 5.11 climbing, it isn’t that hard by modern standards. However, the location and the quality of the climbing make for a very memorable route (520’, III 5.11+ R).

The following day we enjoyed a romp up the classic Screaming Sky Crack (see Mountain Project for more info) and replenished the stash of whiskey in the summit register. For anyone who likes remoteness in his or her adventures, the Grand Canyon does not disappoint. While lacking the rock quality of popular desert destinations, it offers endless miles of terrain to fantasize about and the occasional gem.

– Zach Harrison

Images



Line of the southeast face of Zoroaster in the Grand Canyon.

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