



AAC Publications

Otis Peak, South Face Spires, Many New Routes

Colorado, Front Range, Rocky Mountain National Park

Otis Peak is a 12,486' mountain along the Continental Divide with a broad south face that hosts a plethora of spires along its east to west axis. After climbing Zowie, a tower at the eastern end of Otis Peak, I spotted some uncharted terrain to the left of the standard routes. In 2006, my wife, Liz Donley, our friend Chris Ferguson, and I completed the first ascent of Green Chili (4 pitches, 5.10) on Zowie. But it was not until a few years later, when I started doing my annual first-of-the-season ski run down Andrews Glacier, that I discovered Otis Peak's full potential. Spire after spire came into view, little gems amid the rubble-strewn south flank.

In 2009, Andy Morgan and I went to the west end, making the first ascent of Otis Flower Tower. Fallen Hero (4 pitches, 5.10+ R) is a route dedicated to our late friend Jonny Copp.

The next year I completed four new routes on four unclimbed spires. We never found any gear or cairns along the way or on the summits. The first route that season was Piton D'Or (4 pitches, 5.9) on Piton Spire, with Jason Maurer and Aaron Miller. I had spray-painted a knifeblade piton metallic gold while getting our gear together in my garage. This piton ended up protecting the traverse over a very dangerous fall at the start of the route. The route is moderate and on good stone, which made for a wonderful day in the mountains.

Next up, I completed Smoky Birthday Climb (4 pitches, 5.10 R) on the Otis Power Tower. My partner Eric Malmgren and I share the same birthday. Usually we would go solo together, but this seemed like an equally good adventure. We found good stone and fine cracks for climbing. Then there was the Fire Tower and the route I Thought You Had It (4 pitches, 5.10- R). This formation gained its name because of the wildfire we could see in the distance, and the route name came from my partner Thom Engelbach: When I didn't see the climbing rack, I asked him if he had it. "I thought you had it," he said.

After naming my dog Zowie, after the Otis tower, I had to do something for his brother, Cosmo. Later that summer, my wife and I climbed a broad spire basically beside Zowie. The Path (4 pitches, 5.6) is a lovely route up the south face of Cosmo tower.

In 2015 there were still a few more unnamed formations to surmount. Jason Maurer and I ascended Thrill Tower. We named our route The Thrill's Not Gone (3 pitches, 5.8+) in honor of our friend Wayne Crill (a.k.a. Dr. Thrill), who suffered a bad climbing accident in 2014. The next week I returned with Andy Downin to complete the two final obvious towers in a one-day push. As you get to the western end of Otis the routes get a bit shorter, offering only two to three pitches. Hidden Spire's Trundle Bunny Warehouse (3 pitches, 5.8+) and Forgotten Spire's Clean Up Crew (3 pitches, 5.10- R) made a fun link-up for the day.

In total, I climbed nine first ascents and named five of the formations—hard to believe in this Front Range mecca. Many more adventures are possible on these formations. We never took bolts, just a few pitons, a hammer, extra stoppers, and cord. We just hoped for the best and it always worked out well on the perfectly featured granite high up in Rocky Mountain National Park.

– Cory Fleagle

Images



Cory Fleagle ascending the first pitch of Fire Tower.

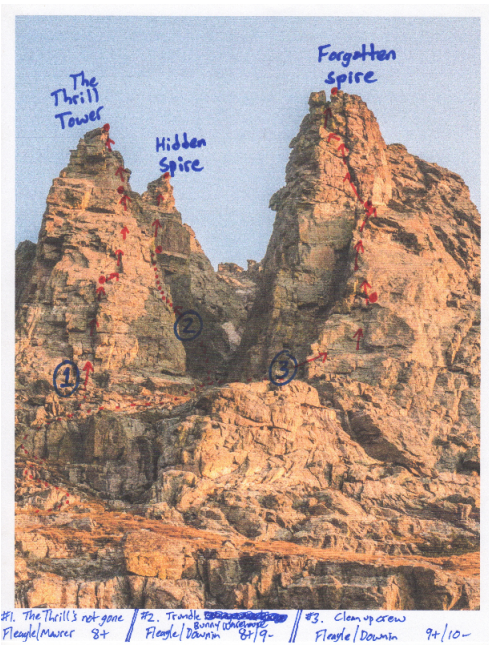
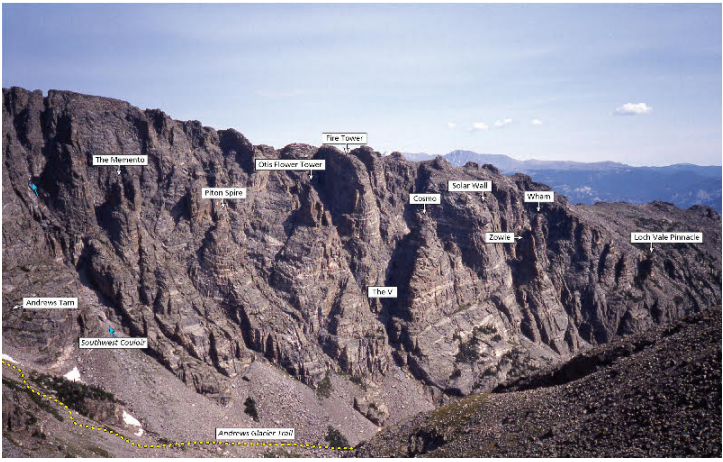


Photo-topo of Thrill Tower, Hidden Spire, and Forgotten Spire, the final three spires to be climbed by Cory Fleagle and partners on Otis Peak.



The south side of Otis Peak, showing a number of the spires climbed by Cory Fleagle and partners.

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