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Washakie Lake, Big Chief Buttress, The Non-Obvious Garden Tour

United States, Wyoming, Wind River Range

In August 1993, Lorna Corson and Norm Larson climbed one pitch up Big Chief Buttress, an unclimbed 900-foot tower in the Washakie Lake cirque. They descended after that first pitch, as they felt the climbing was not within their ability.

Twenty-three years later, Big Chief was still unclimbed when Norm and Lorna showed Kate Rutherford and me a picture of the buttress, asking if we wanted to go in and climb it. We said yes without hesitation.

In late July, the four of us, along with Jason Thompson and Ken Etzel, made the 13-mile approach into Washakie Lake. Loaded with climbing gear, fly rods, whiskey, and good food, we made our camp for seven days on the beautiful lake below the buttress. Kate and I spent a total of three different days on the tower, trying to find the best line to the top.

During our first two attempts, we found very loose rock, thick black lichen, and dead-end crack systems. We wanted a line that followed a clean crack system and had the potential to go free, so we kept the bolts in the duffel back at camp and continued looking. Finally, on the third attempt, our perseverance paid off and we made it to the top of the buttress after climbing 12 pitches of varied rock, including run-out slab at the start and steep cracks and exposed face climbing higher up on the wall. Although our route was not the splitter, clean line we were hoping for, it was still a wild adventure in a beautiful alpine setting, filled with some intense gardening (deserving of a jungle grade) and rope shenanigans.

In retrospect, the experience was more about Norm and Lorna's story than that individual climb. Norm has done more than 160 trips into the Wind River Range, and together Norm and Lorna have put up over 30 first ascents there. While Kate and I were adventuring on the Big Chief Buttress, Norm and Lorna were attempting a new route in a nearby area. After Norm took a good-size fall, they decided to back off and instead climbed a route called the Obvious Crack, which they had put up many years before. This trip represents the essence of climbing for me—sharing passions across generations and passing the torch to enable progression. As a play on Norm and Lorna's nearby climb, we named our route the Non-Obvious Garden Tour (IV 5.11 C1 J1).

– Anne Gilbert Chase

Images



Anne Gilbert Chase builds a belay at the top of pitch 10, after unlocking the final question mark on the first ascent of the Non-Obvious Garden Tour.



The Big Chief Buttress above Washakie Lake, showing the line of the Non-Obvious Garden Tour, climbed in July 2016 by Anne Gilbert Chase and Kate Rutherford.

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