



AAC Publications

Pete's Pile, Belly Dancer Traverse

Oregon, Hood River Valley – East Fork Crags

Climbers tend to snort when I suggest we visit my favorite crag. The slur “Pete’s Pile” was first hurled at this dirty, lichen-encrusted collection of basalt columns back in the late 1980s, when it was being developed by a scruffy ski patroller of that name. But my motto is that if you can’t be with the rock you love, love the rock you’re with. In the mid ’90s, when I was the crag’s primary developer, I led a doomed movement to rename it Pete’s Pillars. After all, the view across the East Fork of the Hood River to nearby Mt. Hood is stunning, the air crisp and cool even on a hot summer’s morning, and the rock solid enough for my non-particular taste. Best of all, under all that grunge are loads of virgin cracks just waiting for a sturdy brush and a strong arm to set them free.

The cliff is only 200 feet high, more and less, so even after a decade as the AAJ’s editor, I never thought of my beloved Pete’s as being AAJ-worthy—she simply wasn’t tall enough. Then, some 20 years after first brushing Pete’s flanks, I had an epiphany. My fair crag might be short in stature, but she’s wide in girth. Would her full belly yield to my lustful embrace?

John Inglis and I first teamed up to go sideways in 2014. We launched vertically at the left outside edge of a black wall that’s closed to climbing due to rare plants (the “closed” signs have now rotted). This took us to an obvious horizontal weakness halfway up the cliff (at roughly 80 feet) that we called the Belly Band. From there we moved leftward for four roughly 80-foot pitches, until we reached a vertical route named K9 Shanghai, about halfway across the traverse. Out of time, we lowered to the ground. We returned some months later and climbed up K9 Shanghai to complete the rest of the traverse, finishing on top. Each half took us four to five hours.

We then attempted to combine the two halves, expecting them to yield faster with familiarity. They didn’t, spitting us off halfway again. Inglis was not available for my next attempt, which fared no better. Finally, in June 2016, Inglis and I teamed up again for an all-day effort. We finished at dusk some nine hours after launching.

The route takes so much time because leader and follower must climb equally cautiously. All the protectable cracks rise straight up between columns, which means that if the leader falls while rounding a pillar, he pendulums backward, potentially slamming hard into one or more column walls. (We clipped a few existing bolts but placed none of our own.) If the following climber falls just after removing a piece of gear, he faces his own slam-dance pendulum in reverse. We brushed only on lead and only when hand or footholds didn’t otherwise reveal themselves. You’ll find the line nearly as dirty now as when we began, and almost as adventurous (we did knock off a few dangerous blocks).

The vitals: one upward pitch to reach the Belly Band, then eight pitches sideways (about 600 feet). The route reveals itself as you go—on each attempt we took exactly the same line of weakness, varying from 60 to 80 feet off the ground. Each pitch is short in distance (70–80 feet) but long in effort. Half the pitches went at 5.9; the other half at 5.10. Belly Dancer Traverse: 5.10+ PG-13.

– John Harlin III

Images



John Inglis follows the first horizontal pitch of Belly Dancer Traverse on Pete's Pile. The bolt is an old 1/4-inch Rawl. No bolts or pins were placed on Belly Dancer, but the traversers clipped several anchor bolts on previously existing routes.



John Inglis on the third horizontal pitch of Belly Dancer Traverse.



John Inglis in the second half of the Belly Dancer Traverse.



Pete's Pile is renowned for its beautiful flowers and lichens. John Inglis avoids what he can at the start of the sixth horizontal pitch of Belly Dancer Traverse.

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