



AAC Publications

Cirque of the Moon, New Routes

Wyoming, Wind River Range

Longing for a true wilderness experience, in August I made two trips to the Cirque of the Moon, a desolate cirque approximately four miles east of the Cirque of the Towers. The result was three new routes of varying difficulty and quality.

On August 2, Adam Ferro and I left from Big Sandy to embark on the 16-mile approach. Upon arrival, we found a series of north and east-facing buttresses that hosted a variety of unclimbed natural lines.

First we climbed a 13-pitch nightmare on the beautiful, prominent east-facing buttress in the cirque. Unfortunately, Mare Frigoris (IV 5.11 R A1) ended up being an extreme exercise in choss tolerance. [Editor's note: In 1979, Dave Baltz, Mike Head, and Paul Horak, attempted a route on this formation, which they called Cowcatcher, retreating from the base of the upper headwall. The two climbers were part of a small group that climbed four routes in the cirque in 1978 and 1979.]

Our route follows the obvious left-leaning system that begins at the bottom of the formation. From the middle of the wall, a leftward traversing pitch gains a striking system that is predominantly composed of fist cracks. The second to last pitch seemed to be the crux, and we placed one pin. The last pitch is 5.11 offwidth. This route was hard to grade accurately because it is horrendously loose and lichen-covered. Mare Frigoris, the "Cold Sea," is a region on the Northern Hemisphere of the moon and refers to the open bivy that occurred atop the climb. While the route awaits a free ascent, I would strongly discourage it.

After a rest day, we then climbed an incredible 10-pitch line that was the exact opposite in quality. Space Ghost (IV 5.10+ C1) goes up a natural, leftward-curving line on the main north-facing wall of the cirque. [Editor's note: Early climbing parties in the cirque named this the Tycho Wall.] The route begins up an aesthetic, left-facing dihedral (hands), goes through a roof, and then quickly turns to offwidth. After one more short pitch, we reached the crux. One bolt was placed here, and this pitch will likely go free at 12a. Above, the route follows a moderate yet amazing leftward-trending system.

At the end of August, I recruited Garrett Reigan and returned to the cirque to climb the prow to the right of Space Ghost. On day one we climbed eight pitches, requiring much cleaning and trundling. On day two we climbed back to our high point in six pitches, involving flakes, chimneys, a 70-foot corner protected by number six cams, and two awesome 5.11- crack/seam pitches. The desperate crux pitch follows a laser-cut seam through a series of three roofs. We placed two pins, and just above the last roof the crack briefly terminated and one bolt was placed from a hook. I took two whippers trying to free the pitch with no success—it will likely go at solid 5.12. After the crux, a traversing pitch takes you to an amazing hands corner that leads to an immaculate slab. On this pitch, Garrett quested into a 40-foot runout over 5.10 terrain. He then traversed into a right-facing corner to access the summit, completing Moonquakes (V 5.12- R/X A1).

– Andy Hughes

Images



The right buttress of Tycho Wall, showing the two routes complete by Andy Hughes and partners in August 2016. Red: Space Ghost (IV 5.10+ C1). Blue: Moonquakes (V 5.12-R/X A1).



Cirque of the Moon's prominent east-facing buttress, showing the line of Mare Frigoris (IV 5.11 A1 R). A route on this buttress was attempted in 1979, but the party retreated from the base of the main headwall.



Near the top of Mare Frigoris.



The runout slab pitch near the top of Moonquakes.

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