



AAC Publications

Warbonnet Peak, Who's on First?

Wyoming, Wind River Range

In late August, Andrew Andraski and I hiked into the Wind River Range on a blind date of sorts. With time off between working courses at Outward Bound, we decided to go on an alpine granite adventure, despite never having tied into a rope together. With vague intentions and no real plan, we hauled heavy packs, laden with a double rack to number 6, two ropes, plus seven days of food, from Big Sandy Trailhead to the meadow under Warbonnet Peak.

The next day we warmed up by climbing Brown Cow (5.11b). Intrigued by a series of corners and cracks on the far right side of the east face, and egged on by a couple of Jackson-area climbers camped nearby, the next morning we romped up with a light pack, rope, and rack to explore. From the gully that accesses the base of Black Elk, we followed a 3rd/4th-class ramp up and right to the base of the east face.

From the toe of the buttress, we climbed two moderate pitches following a prominent arching corner system. We found an ancient piece of webbing halfway up the first pitch and a single piton halfway up the second, but otherwise saw no signs of previous passage, and the preponderance of lichen and obvious loose holds led us to believe that nobody had climbed beyond these first two pitches. From the first of many small but comfy ledges, we climbed straight up through a series of corners and roofs for several pitches, including two excellent 5.10/5.11 pitches.

Above, we ducked around to the right and scrambled down the large, loose gully on the northeast side of Warbonnet to access a semi-independent tower we had spotted from the ground. Our attempts to access a splitter offwidth crack system through a series of roofs fell short when Andrew was faced with a long, unprotected traverse, so we "settled" for climbing a prominent left-facing corner. I may or may not have giggled the entire way up the corner, a 200' 5.9 pitch on high-quality, featured granite.

The next morning, feeling inspired and rejuvenated, we decided to ditch our plan to climb Black Elk and instead ran back to the Big Sandy Trailhead, drove to Pinedale, and bought a set of wire brushes and gardening tools, planning to go back and clean up some of the lichen and surface graininess we encountered on the FA. We reclimbed the route, brushing out the most important holds as we went. More significantly, we added a direct finish to the route: Instead of dropping into the gully toward the tower, we stayed left for two more pitches, including a beautiful overhanging corner. Andrew did one of the most impressive leads I've seen in the alpine, onsighting this 5.11+ corner while scrubbing lichen out of key holds. The top of this pitch took us to almost the exact spot where Black Elk and Brown Cow top out.

After quoting Abbott and Costello back and forth for most of the day, plus the uncertainty of who actually climbed the first two pitches, we decided on a name: Who's on First? (8 pitches, III 5.11+).

For me, climbing, especially alpine climbing, is as much about the exploration and partnership as the actual climbing. In the wake of a tumultuous summer in my personal life, embarking on unknown exploration up Who's on First, rather than an established route, was perhaps a reflection of my own uncertainty. But given excellent partners and a blank canvas, cracks emerge, holds appear, and ultimately, the turmoil achieves a manageable rhythm. All it takes is a bit of courage and humility.

Oh and the big number 4 through 6 cams we carried all that way in? They never came out of the packs.

– Matt Zia

Images



Matt Zia tackles the pitch-seven squeeze during the first ascent of Who's on First? (8 pitches, III 5.11+) on Warbonnet.



Matt Zia follows the first 5.11 pitch of Who's on First, with Arrowhead Lake far below.



The northeast buttress of Warbonnet Peak, near the Cirque of the Towers in Wyoming's Wind River Range. Who's on First? (8 pitches, III 5.11+), climbed in 2016, is marked. The popular route Black Elk climbs directly up the face to the left.



Andrew Andraski heads into the crux last pitch of 5.11+ stemming and fingers on Who's on First? (8 pitches, III 5.11+) on Warbonnet Peak.



Andrew Andraski after pulling through an excellent corner on pitch six of Who's on First? (8 pitches, III 5.11+) on Warbonnet Peak.

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