



AAC Publications

Illusion Wall, The Epic Tail of Sir Norbert

Washington, Darrington

In late 2015, Matt Leslie, Jeremy Luscher, Alan Semrau, and I finished a three-year project on the Illusion Wall, in the Squire Creek area of Darrington. Darrington is home to some of the best multi-pitch routes in Washington, but the 2,000'–3,000' granite walls are guarded by dense rainforest draped over third- and fourth-class terrain. Most people steer clear of the area due to its notoriety for long, intimidating, and run-out sport routes, not to mention the “schwack factor” of getting to the base in the first place. That leaves miles and miles of amazing climbing for those with a keen sense of adventure.

Every epic tale involves doing something that will ask more of you than you thought possible, yet, throughout the process there is a calling that won't let you stop, and, in the end, you find that it was all worth it. While climbing at Darrington in 2012, we had dreamed of finding a more traditional line through the towering faces, and after days of climbing and staring up at this wall, we discovered the line that would become our epic tale.

The route began as a ground-up project, during which, on our first attempt, we made it to the top of pitch three. After several attempts on the fourth pitch, we decided that to create the fun and safe route we were hoping for, we would be better off continuing the process from the top down. We spent the next two years cleaning and bolting the route to create it in its current form. We overcame the tough approaches, a few broken bones, and forest fires, and completed the route, from the ground up, in the fall of 2015. And, in completing the route, we even introduced a few others to our addiction for the adventure climbing to be found in Darrington.

When we were putting the route up, we were surprised to find some old bolts on various sections of the wall (some of which we replaced and used as protection). Darrington has a rich history of climbing, most of which has been passed on through stories shared while bivying high above the valley floor. There is one man, who wishes to remain anonymous and we refer to as the Godfather, who has spent over 40 years of his life climbing here. After some serious sleuthing, we were able to identify who he was and ask him for permission to climb and document the line. To our knowledge, this in the first time this line has been done in its entirety, but it is hard to say which sections had been climbed previously.

The Epic Tail of Sir Norbert (IV 5.10+) follows the prow of the wall to its highest point, with only 12 protection bolts over 10 pitches and 1,500' of climbing. The route has everything from delicate slabs to knobby face climbing, as well as clean cracks from fingers to fists, and even a short squeeze chimney. The route is relatively sustained, with nine of the 10 pitches rated 5.9 or harder. Sticking with the medieval theme of valley and other routes in the area, such as Excalibur, the Page, and Search for the Holy Greyall, we found it only fitting to name the route after my benighted dog, Sir Norbert.

- –Chris Hagen

Images



Chris Hagen leading out on the exposed fifth pitch of the Epic Tail of Sir Norbert (IV 5.10+), a beautiful knobby face that leads into clean cracks from fingers to fists.



The Illusion Wall, in the Squire Creek area of Darrington. The line of the Epic Tail of Sir Norbert (IV 5.10+) is shown.



The route's namesake helping to design the topo.



Jeremy Luscher coming up the perfect hand jams at the top of pitch five on the Epic Tail of Sir Norbert (IV 5.10+). The route takes a direct line up the Illusion Wall at Darrington, and provides a more traditional route than the mostly bolted lines in the area.

The Epic Tail of Sir Norbert

5.10+ 10 Pitches Grade IV 400m

Standard Rack to 9' Bolts: 2, 3* and 1 set of C2's Optional #5
2 X 60m Ropes

Chris Hagen, Jeremy Lancher, Matt Leslie, Alan Semura



The topo for the Epic Tail of Sir Norbert (IV 5.10+), a 10-pitch line on the Illusion Wall at Darrington.

Article Details

Author	Chris Hagen
Publication	AAJ
Volume	59
Issue	91
Page	0
Copyright Date	2017
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions