



AAC Publications

Mt. Stuart, King Kong

Washington, Stuart Range

On September 9, I made a free ascent of King Kong (IV 5.11+), a line on the west face of Mt. Stuart that I had completed the week before, after five years of attempts. This linkup climbs the first four pitches of Gorillas in the Mist before moving left and climbing two pitches of Gorillas Direct. From here King Kong climbs a two-pitch direct finish up an aesthetic splitter crack on the headwall.

During the first ascent of Gorillas in the Mist in 2009, Jens Holsten, Blake Herrington and I endured an unplanned bivy high on the mountain in stormy conditions. The next day, after summiting and making it back to the trailhead, we ran into friends Joe Puryear and Max Hasson, who were on their way to rescue us after my wife woke up that morning in an empty bed and sounded the alarm. When Joe died the following October while attempting a new route on Labuche Kang in Tibet, I made the decision to complete this direct finish in his honor. Joe often talked about the great influence that Mt. Stuart, a peak visible from his childhood home, had on his climbing career.

I made numerous attempts at the direct line. In August 2011, Jens Holsten, Mark Westman, and I traversed left from Gorillas in the Mist onto new ground, but we ran out of daylight before reaching the headwall and finished more easily to the left (Gorillas Direct, 5.10+). Over the following years, I kept working on the "direct direct" finish, but the difficulty of reaching the headwall pitches and the necessity of cleaning the cracks delayed a full ascent. In early September, Tyree Johnson and I finally completed the 60m headwall crack, but not before I took an 8m whipper from the last move. A week later I returned with Jon Gleason and was able to climb the crack clean.

King Kong likely holds the hardest pitch of rock climbing on Mt. Stuart, and a complete ascent to the summit will likely be the longest climb in the range. With the short days of September we did not complete the line to the summit, descending the west ridge from atop the 900' wall.

– Sol Wertkin

Images



Sol Wertkin on the crux 5.11+ splitter of King Kong, on the west face of Mt. Stuart. The route adds a difficult direct finish to Gorillas in the Mist (IV 5.11-, Herrington-Holsten-Wertkin, 2009) and Gorillas Direct (5.10+, Holsten-Wertkin-Westman, 2011). Mahting Productions



The west face of Mt. Stuart, showing the full line of King Kong, a.k.a. the Joe Puryear Memorial Route (IV 5.11+).

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