



AAC Publications

Spearpoint Lake: New Routes and Potential

Wyoming, Wind River Range

In mid-August, Scott Kice and I spent a week exploring the extensive walls above Spearpoint Lake in the southern Wind River Range. The formation is identified as Chess Ridge in the Joe Kelsey guidebook. Untold hours of surfing the Web had convinced us the cirque was a treasure trove of untouched rock; to our knowledge, no routes had been climbed on the sheer cliffs directly above the lake.

After an outfitter deposited our gear at trail's end, we spent the better part of the next day scrambling up the final two steep miles to our destination. [Spearpoint Lake, elevation ca 10,620', is located in a very isolated cirque about five miles, as the crow flies, north of the Cirque of the Towers.] Viewed from the lake, the cirque has three fairly distinct formations, each approximately 1,200–1,500' tall and a quarter mile wide. The leftmost (or southeastern) wall, directly above neighboring Lake 10,682', is dark and vertical to overhanging, chaotically streaked with dikes and fissures, reminding us of the Painted Wall in the Black Canyon. The center formation consists of fairly solid, light-gray granite, easily identified by the black streaks running down from the top of the cliff. The wall on the right is steep and has few obvious weaknesses. In general, all three walls seriously discourage would-be suitors.

Scott and I first set our sights on the middle formation. The center prow, a few hundred feet to the right of a deep chimney system, is one of the only direct lines in the cirque offering less than vertical rock. Nevertheless, the climbing was slow going, requiring substantial cleaning and a pendulum early on. Foreseeing the likelihood of an unplanned bivy, we bailed at a 10–15' overhang about 350' up. For more patient climbers, this line should offer a good reward.

The next day we headed for more moderate terrain on the periphery of the cirque. The Southeast Ridge (600', III 5.10+) above Lake 10,682' presents spectacular positioning for six pitches, mostly 5.5 with occasional 5.7 and 5.8 moves. Near the top we were rewarded with perfect hands in a beautiful 60-foot dihedral, though this crux pitch could easily be avoided. Due to its position near the Washakie Lake Basin, I would guess this ridge has been climbed before.

We then turned our attention back to the middle formation. A deep gash/gully system separates the left and middle formations. Our route Cheddar and Whisky (1,200', IV 5.8) heads up the vast, nondescript wall immediately to the right of the gully for 12 pitches.

Starting 50 feet up the gully, we followed good crack systems on a rounded prow for the first couple of pitches. We pushed left over the next few pitches, avoiding being sucked into steeper territory to the right. Nonetheless, all the crack systems seemed to lead eventually to a sizable bulge at three-quarter height. I searched without success for a way to avoid the roofs. Just when it looked like we might be shut down, salvation presented itself in the form of a short chimney leading through the heart of the steepest section. While no destination route, Cheddar and Whisky generally offers solid rock and ample protection in a spectacular setting.

In general, the walls above Spearpoint Lake are too big, blank, and steep for mere mortals like Scott and me. Our lines were really sideshows to the main event. Undoubtedly, this beautiful and seldom-traveled cirque will deliver world-class lines in years to come for stronger and bolder climbers.

– Josh Drexler

Images



Josh Drexler at the base of the technical climbing before he and Scott Kice attempted the center prow above Spearpoint Lake. The two climbed about 350' before bailing below a large overhang.



Josh Drexler enjoying sunny granite during the possible first ascent of the Southeast Ridge (600', 5.10+) above Lake 10,682'.



Josh Drexler on the crux pitch of Cheddar and Whiskey (1,200', IV 5.8). The route goes up the wall to the right of the gully system that separates the left and middle formations above Spearpoint Lake.



The start of Cheddar and Whiskey (1,200', IV 5.8) in the morning light.



The walls above Spearpoint Lake, referred to as Chess Ridge in Joe Kelsey's guidebook, showing Josh Drexler and Scott Kice's routes and attempt from August 2016: the Southeast Ridge (600', 5.10+) on the left, and Cheddar and Whiskey (1,200', IV 5.8) on the right. Their attempted line on the central prow is hidden behind the short butte in the center of the photo.



Scott Kice below the left and central buttresses that rise above Spearpoint Lake, showing the line of Cheddar and Whiskey (1,200', IV 5.8). The formation is referred to as Chess Ridge in Joe Kelsey's Wind River Range guidebook.

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