



AAC Publications

New Routes on Red Tower, Sacajawea, Elephant Head, and the Buttruss

Wyoming, Wind River Range, Titcomb Basin

In July 2015, I joined a team of Salt Lake City climbers who were returning to Titcomb Basin with some unfinished business on Fremont Peak. Unlike them, I had no agenda. Luckily for me, my friend Greg Troutman was in the same agenda-free boat, so we teamed up to make a couple of first ascents.

On July 17 we met the horse packers from Mule Shoe Outfitters at the Elkheart Park trailhead and began our single push to Island Lake, 12 miles down the trail. Our base camp, the Crow's Nest, was a prime centralized launch point for a variety of objectives.

On July 19 we opened a new route on the Red Tower, which sits just below Fremont's west face. Starting at the lowest point of the tower, we climbed an independent line on the left side, staying just to the left of Red Tower Arête (Jenkins, AAJ 2012). After a steep, balancey start to get to the main crack system, we found solid rock and moderate cracks and corners, going practically straight up for five pitches. The final pitch was the crux at 5.9+, stepping left into a thin corner, past some intricate flakes, to an amazing steep finish that put us on the summit ridge. We found one rappel anchor, then downclimbed into a loose gully and traversed back under the tower to the base. We named our route Red Eye Gringo (700', 5.9+) for the foreign feeling we had while climbing for the first time in Titcomb Basin.

The next day we went into Indian Basin to look for route potential on the north face of the Elephant Head. According to our old guidebook, the wall was home to at least three routes, none being harder than 5.9. We were keen to find something a bit harder. Our six-pitch route, Poachers (5.10), starts to the left of the routes in the guidebook, beginning with a thin 20-foot splitter that is the crux of the route. The second pitch moves up and out a spectacular 5.10 tight-hand crack through short roof. Three more pitches of 5.8 got us up to the final juggy chimney. We walked off to the south.

On our third day in a row of climbing, Troutman and I attempted to repeat Indian Paintbrush (Deshler-Jenkins, 5.10, AAJ 2012) on Sacagawea's west face. Halfway up the wall, we got off route. We decided to just push forward, hoping to find a new way to the top. After a few bold pitches that linked some epic crack features, we hit an impasse. We bailed by traversing right and then rappelling over to and down what we believe is West Face Right (Kennedy-Landry, 1976). We left a few nuts and one cam to get down. Judging by what we saw and experienced, there is definitely potential for hard, exciting routes on the upper face of Sacagawea.

Troutman had to leave, but another partner in our massive rotating crew, Kevin Chuba, was psyched to do some climbing after a solo ascent of Gannett. After a couple days of cragging around camp and climbing the classy North Arête (Beckey-Callis, 1970) on Ellingwood Peak (a.k.a. Harrower Peak), we walked into Titcomb to have a look at the east face of the Buttruss for new-route potential. This formation sits near the head of the basin, directly across from the intimidating west faces of Helen and Sacagawea. After enduring so much shade on this trip, we were happy to be climbing in the sun!

From the bottom of the wall we noticed a wide crack/chimney feature at about three-quarters height that we dubbed the Buffalo's Mouth. This was the feature we used to guide us up the wall. We named our possible new route Out of Oats (8 pitches, 5.9). The climbing goes as follows: smooth slab (5.5), nice corner (5.7), easy slab and crack stopping at a green crack (5.4), up the green, lichen-covered crack to the base of a roof (5.7), move right around the roof to a finger crack corner (5.9), a little runout to the base of a wide crack (5.8, the Buffalo's Mouth pitch) to a nicely protected chimney (5.9). Easy but very loose climbing leads to the final gully, where we unroped for the scramble to the top. We descended toward Summer Ice Lake.

On July 29, our last full day of the trip, I teamed up with Mark Evans to give Sacagawea another shot. Its west face was way too impressive not to attempt again. Mark somehow dropped one of his digital cameras into the latrine after breakfast; nonetheless, we got an alpine start and set off one last time into Titcomb Basin.

We arrived at the base of Sacagawea around dawn and headed up the first four pitches of Indian Paintbrush. At the top of the chimney, where Troutman and I had gotten off route, I spotted the fixed nut with a purple sling described by Jenkins in [AAJ 2012](#), so I stopped and set up a belay. Mark took the next lead, the "obligatory 5.10 traverse" mentioned by Jenkins, heading up and left, and passing the fixed nut (which we left as a route marker) to a ledge about 25 feet away. From here, we believe the original line continues left to a larger left-facing corner system. Instead, Mark climbed straight up, passing a large flake, then up a left-leaning, slightly overhanging layback corner to a belay below a steep wall with many cracks. I continued straight up the "Bloody Knuckles" pitch, climbing fantastic hand and finger cracks and flakes, then up some exposed stemming moves below an overhanging corner. After continuing to push myself into the unknown, I had to rest on a cam in order to finish this sustained pitch. Mark followed the pitch clean and felt that it was about 5.11-.

The next pitch was an amazing find by Mark. It was a bit traversing and indistinct, but always headed up. He climbed right, then up over some roofs, disappearing and reappearing a few times, yelling with determination to find a way to continue up the wall. He built an anchor on a small ledge below a nice left-facing corner. I was happy to lead another great, solid 5.9 pitch that headed up and a little right as we neared the top of the wall. Mark climbed another long pitch to a large ramp feature, then disappeared right, around the corner, to the huge, southwestern final headwall. Here we believe we might have joined existing routes for the final pitch to the summit.

We topped out in the alpenglow with bloody hands and fingers and tired feet. The views were absolutely spectacular. The glaciers on the north side of Fremont were enormous, and we could see all the way to the Tetons. We scrambled down the north side of the peak, navigated back to our packs, and began the long slog back to the Crow's Nest for a final night of hot drinks and dinner rations. We called our route/variation No Obligations (10 pitches, 5.11-) because we had diverged from Indian Paintbrush on the so-called obligatory 5.10 traverse, and also for how I felt: free of intentions and expectations, and now completely fulfilled on a fantastic trip to the Wind Rivers.

– Jake Frerk

Images



Jake Ferk heading into the chimney pitch low on the route Indian Paintbrush (Deshler-Jenkins, 2011).



Looking down the face traverse, the pitch above the crux on No Obligations on Sacagawea.



Jake Frerk nearing the top of Mt. Sacajawea.



Jake Frerk on the summit of Red Tower after the FA of Red Eye Gringo.



Jake Frerk beginning the crux pitch of Red Eye Gringo (5.9) on Red Tower.



Jake Frerk on the last pitch of Poachers (5.10) on the Elephant's Head.



Jake Frerk on the summit of Mt. Sacajawea after climbing No Obligations.

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