



AAC Publications

Ostler Peak, Siren Song

Utah, Uinta Mountains

The sound echoed off the cliffs, intermittent yet consistent. I kept hearing it over and over but could not place it. Something natural yet foreign, like whales talking. Matt finally reached me, and I asked if he heard the sound as well.

"I don't hear it...wait, I do now. What is that?"

Finally it dawned on me.

"It's the lake."

Amethyst Lake, more than 1,000' below, was just coming into the sun. Partially frozen over, the ice was reacting to the heat and started to sing. The lake kept up its symphony for over an hour while we climbed.

A few days earlier, in October 2017, I had hiked 13 miles round-trip into Amethyst Basin to scout for ice. I'd long thought there might be something to climb on the northeast face of Ostler Peak (12,718'), but the aspect visible from the road kept the gully systems from view. At first, it looked like another long hike for nothing, but as I traversed the base, I could start to see into the corners. Ice flowed down narrow crevices only to end a third of the way up the mountain. Traversing some more, I spotted another gully with ice starting a little above where the first ice ended and continuing all the way to the ridge. A small ledge would allow a traverse between the two gully systems, linking them into what looked like a fun, moderate line.

Once I got home, I got ahold of my friend Matt Tuttle, one of the few partners willing to go out for a long-distance first ascent in the Uintas with me. We made plans to climb two days later.

We met at 4:30 a.m. and started the six-mile approach, reaching the base of the wall much earlier than expected. We built a campfire to stay warm while we waited for the sun to reveal our route.

Low snow coverage made navigating the talus below the face slow and tedious, but we still arrived at the route in decent time. We decided to simul-solo as much of it as we could and set off swinging. The first 400' went quickly—fun alpine ice in gullies and corner systems. I started up the next section, intending to solo, but brittle, dinner-plating ice caused me to back off and pull out a rope. A steeper pillar on the left of the gully had blue plastic ice, so I switched over and brought Matt up. The route could have continued up the same gully, but there would only be 100' more technical climbing before it was all hiking to the ridge.

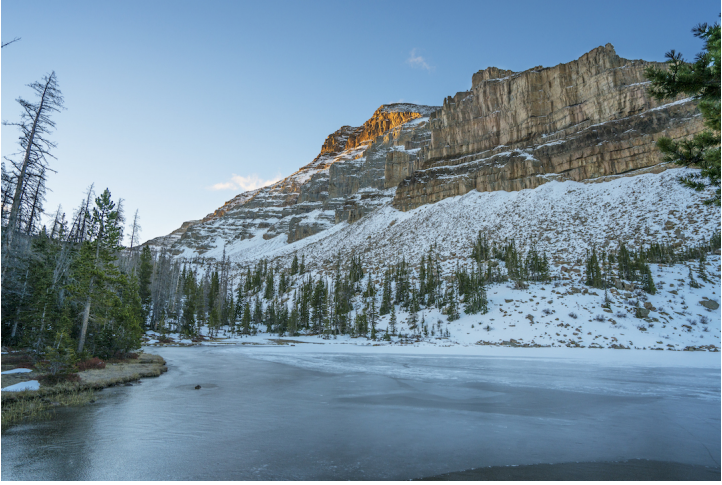
We unroped and traversed left along a ledge to reach the other gully. Unfortunately, the first pitch wasn't quite in, so we decided to try a mixed variation to the right that I had spotted on the way up. It looked like 5.2 or 5.3 on rotten rock but ended up more like 5.6/5.7 on horrible rock. Matt did a great job weaving in and out of precarious stacked blocks. Once I followed, I realized just how bad this section was—there was almost no pro, and a fall by either of us would have been catastrophic. Luckily, neither of us fell.

After 100' back in the gully, a fun vertical pillar led to lower-angle ice and snow before a final ice step. We unroped for a final scramble to the summit ridge at almost exactly 12,000'. As neither of us had summited Ostler—and any good new route should go to the summit—we left the packs in the talus and continued to the top.

The descent was agonizing over snow-covered talus, one slow and careful step after another, but we were thankful to still be in the last of the day's sun. We reached the trail just before complete darkness, happy to switch back into trail runners for the marshy slog out. Two hours later, we were back at the cars, tired but psyched to have completed one of the longest alpine routes in Utah: Siren Song (1,600' climbing distance, WI4- M4 R/X).

– Nikki Smith

Images



Sunrise on Ostler Peak from Amethyst Basin in Utah's Uinta Mountains.



Matt Tuttle post-holing to the base of Siren Song (1,600', WI4- M4 R/X) on Ostler Peak in the Uinta Mountains. Smith and Tuttle hiked 13 miles round-trip to make the first ascent of the route, which is one of the longest alpine climbs in the state.



Matt Tuttle soloing easy ice low on his and Nathan Smith's new route Siren Song (1,600', WI4 M4 R/X) on Ostler Peak in the Uinta Mountains.



Matt Tuttle following the first crux of Siren Song (1,600', WI4 M4 R/X), a WI4- pillar approximately 400' to 500' up the route.



Matt Tuttle traversing easy snow slopes from the first ice gully to connect into another corner system during the first ascent of Siren Song (1,600', WI4 M4 R/X).



Matt Tuttle climbing chossy rock to avoid poor ice in the main gully system during the first ascent of Siren Song (1,600', WI4 M4 R/X) on Ostler Peak in Utah's Uinta Mountains.



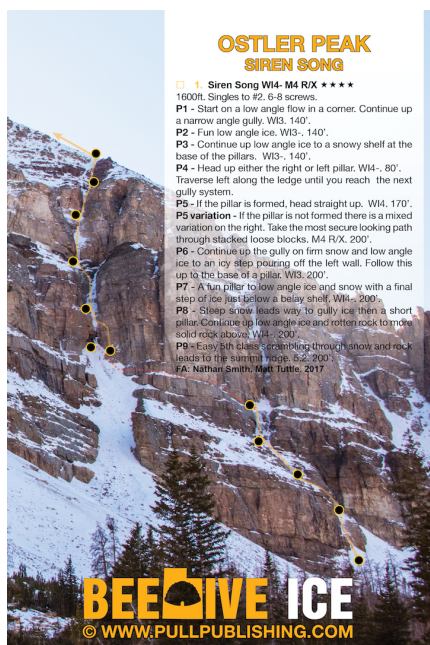
Nikki Smith on the first crux of Siren Song (1,600', WI4 M4 R/X), a steep WI4- pillar.



Nikki Smith on a short ice step near the top of the technical difficulties on Siren Song (1,600', WI4 M4 R/X), on Ostler Peak in Utah's Uinta Mountains.



Nikki Smith exiting the gully system onto the summit ridge during the first ascent of Siren Song (1,600', WI4 M4 R/X).



Topo for Siren Song (WI4- M4 R/X), on Ostler Peak in Utah's Uinta Mountains. At 1,600', the route is one of the longest alpine climbs in Utah.

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