



## AAC Publications

---

### **Glacier Peak, Catch-a-Sunrise**

Montana, Beartooth Mountains

**Intending to have a nice, somewhat leisurely outing to complete my goal of climbing all the 12,000' peaks in Montana, Elaine Kennedy and I set out to climb the prominent Beckey Couloir on the north face of Glacier Peak (12,340') on August 17.** [Editor's note: Fred Beckey and Dave Beckstead made the first ascent of the face via the prominent central couloir and several rock pitches on the headwall. see AAJ 1965) What ensued was a bit more than we bargained for, all stemming from what could be the biggest navigation blunder in my menial climbing career.

The 11.5-mile approach originating just beyond Cooke City took us past Goose Lake, over Iceberg Pass and back down, and around the west face of Glacier Peak across a heinous rock glacier. The talus hopping in the Beartooths, as usual, didn't disappoint. We bivied below the west face at the base of the rock glacier, and finished the approach to the base early the next morning.

Entering the small basin below the north face, I spotted an obvious couloir, assumed it was the Beckey, and we began climbing without giving it second thought. Booting up the perfect 55–60° degree snow, we made excellent time. However, as the couloir began to bend to the right after about 600', the snow ended and we hit rock sooner than expected.

From here we trended up and left. Fourth-class rubble turned into 5.7 face, followed by two pitches in a dirty, wet chimney, then out left onto some runout 5.6 slab, followed by two more pitches of 5.7/5.8. I hadn't brought my rock shoes to save weight, and I need to work on climbing in my bulky size 16 boots. At this point, we were pretty sure we were not on the Beckey.

We found ourselves in a somewhat improbable location where the only climbable way was a scary 5.8 rightward traverse with little pro. The following 70 meters of rubble-strewn 5.4 went quickly, but the crux was still above us.

Elaine took the lead and attempted to attain the top of a rib above and left of us. Everything left looked hard, so we continued up the easy ramp as far as possible, to where it curved into a dihedral. Unfortunately, multiple microwave-size blocks teetered on the brink of freefall. Elaine took a wicked fall here and was lucky to be unscathed—she's a tough girl. I climbed to where she fell and built an anchor, and after some TLC, we were both above the looseness without knocking anything down.

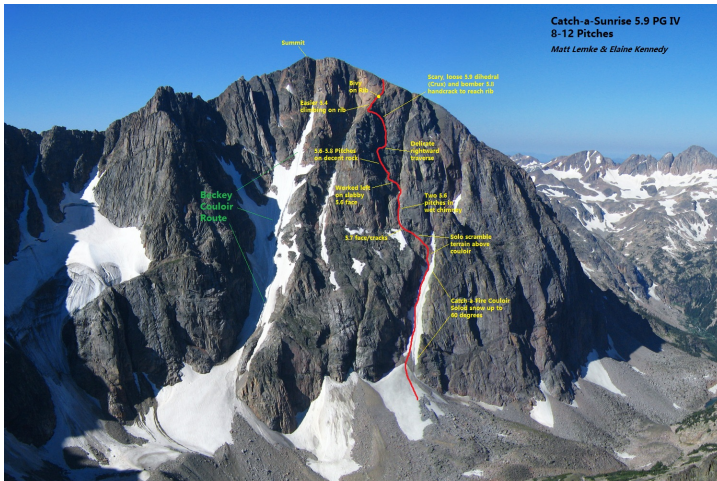
I searched for a way up the final 40 feet to easier ground and rounded a large boulder with some serious air. Amazingly, I found a bomber 5.8 hand crack. With darkness nearing, we did one more long 5.4 pitch and found a place to bivvy. That night was magical, as we lay on a knife-edge ridge under clear skies with dazzling meteors. Throughout the night, I recalled past trips to this mountain range for which I have an enduring fondness.

The morning sunrise behind Granite was the perfect energizer, and we finished the climb with one class 4 pitch up the rib to the summit plateau. Upon summiting, I realized definitively we did a route nowhere near the Beckey Couloir, as we were way off to the west. We were ecstatic with our accomplishment, though, and probably still a bit scared, and we had a lot to talk about during the 10-mile hike back down the south slopes and past Aero Lakes.

After returning to civilization, we did some research and determined we had initially started up the Catch-a-Fire Couloir, which eventually ends at a notch in the ridge and has been skied several times. No one we spoke to seemed to have any knowledge of any summer climbing routes in the vicinity of the couloir. We named the route Catch-a-Sunrise (2,000', III/IV 5.9 PG-13).

– Matt Lemke

## Images



The north face of Glacier Peak, in Montana's Beartooth Mountains. The line of Catch-a-Sunrise (2,000', III/IV 5.9 PG-13) is shown. Elaine Kennedy and Matt Lemke completed this likely new route in August after intending to climb the Beckey Couloir, but mistakenly starting up a couloir farther west. The route is named in relation to this chute, known as the Catch-a-Fire Couloir, which fills in with snow in the winter and has been skied several times.



Elaine Kennedy topping out the snow in the Catch-a-Fire Couloir on the north face of Glacier Peak in Montana's Beartooth Mountains. Kennedy and Matt Lemke thought they were climbing the Beckey Couloir farther east. From here they trended left up rock ribs and slabs, and summited the next morning after bivying a pitch from the top.



Elaine Kennedy climbing a dihedral pitch midway up Catch-a-Sunrise (2,000', III/IV 5.9 PG-13) on Glacier Peak in Montana's Beartooth Mountains. Kennedy and Matt Lemke completed this likely new route after intending to climb the Beckey Couloir but starting up the wrong tongue of snow.



Elaine Kennedy reaching the summit plateau after a bivy on the mountain's north face. She and Matt Lemke completed Catch-a-Sunrise (2,000', III/IV 5.9 PG-13) over two days in late August.





Sunrise over West Granite Peak (12,745') and Granite Peak (12,799') from high on the north face of Glacier Peak (12,340') in the Beartooth Mountains.

## Article Details

Author	Matt Lemke
Publication	AAJ
Volume	60
Issue	92
Page	0
Copyright Date	2018
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions