



AAC Publications

Boston Basin, Boston Marathon

Washington, North Cascades

SOMETIME IN THE SUMMER OF 2017, Kyle Willis told me about his idea to do a technical circumnavigation of Boston Basin in the North Cascades. That August, we packed for a couple of days and prepared for a lot of scrambling. We approached up the Sahale Arm and proceeded up the normal route to the summit of Sahale. Reaching the top, we had our first glimpse at what we were getting into. Realizing we had grossly underestimated the endeavor, we turned around and ran back to the car.

Come July 2018, the stoke was high. We packed for four days out and planned to start at the Hidden Lake Trailhead and traverse the ridge clockwise (from west to east), the opposite direction we originally intended, tagging all the major peaks to Sahale. Then we would cut across Cascade Pass and tag the Triplets, Cascade, and Johannesburg, cut across the summit ridge, and drop down the southwest slopes to the Eldorado Creek Trailhead.

On day one we busted up the Hidden Lake Trail, taking the turn-off for Sibley Pass. Once on the main ridge, there is a faint climber's trail generally used to access Marble Creek Basin. Our first objective, however, was the Triad. With the limited published information on the Triad, it was unclear if anyone had done a complete west to east traverse of the mountain. Much of this terrain was serious and exposed 4th-class and low 5th-class scrambling. The west face of Middle Triad provides both the best rock and the crux of the Triad Traverse (5.6 R).

After tagging these three summits, we dropped off the ridge and made our way across snow slopes to the flanks of Eldorado Peak (8,868'). A quick jaunt up the glacier brought us to a low point in the south ridge of Eldorado (5.6). While not described in any guide, this ridge provided some of the best climbing on the traverse, with a handful of legitimately classic pitches along the knife-edge ridge. Rambling down Eldorado's east ridge, we realized the sun was setting, so we decided to take advantage of the super-cush camp at the base of this ridge.

On day two, we quickly made our way across glaciers and scenic climber's paths to the Torment col. In trying to keep the traverse as pure as possible, we opted to try the obscure northwest ridge of Mt. Torment (8,120', 5.8). We headed up the ridge with relative ease and soon found ourselves on the summit. We had climbed the south ridge of Torment the previous year as a reconnaissance mission, and now we were psyched to be in familiar terrain. From the summit we headed east onto the classic Torment-Forbidden Traverse (V 5.6). Wet rock and seasonal snow made things slightly spicy at times, but the generally easy terrain was welcome. We arrived at the Forbidden col at the same time as a storm and fought the wind to get the tarp pitched. It rained for a solid 16 hours.

We awoke soaking wet in whiteout fog. We waited out the rain and then started up the west ridge of Forbidden Peak (8,815', 5.6) sometime in the early afternoon. Visibility was still extremely limited, and after a quick celebration on the summit, we continued down the east ledges in dense fog. After reaching the east shoulder of the mountain, we realized we couldn't figure out where we needed to go in these conditions, so we set up camp.

Day four brought sunshine and our first good view of the likely unclimbed northwest ridge of Boston Peak (8,894'), but getting there via Sharkfin Tower was quite involved. Walking and scrambling southeast to the terminus of Forbidden revealed incredibly poor rock. Short of driving a steel pike into

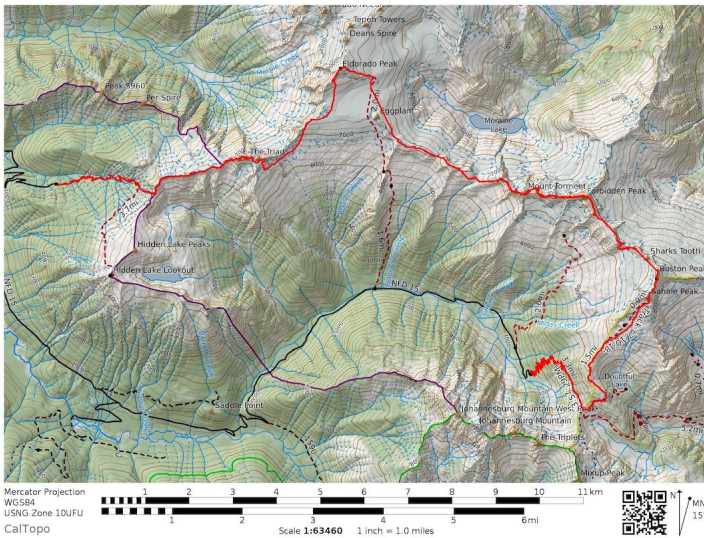
the ground, there appeared to be no reasonable way to rappel and stay true to the ridge. So we backtracked a few minutes and located a narrow, steep and incredibly chossy couloir. A handful of rappels and a remarkable amount of sketchy downclimbing from the ridge proper brought us to the northern edge of the Quien Sabe Glacier. Fighting the clock a bit, we opted to skip the unnamed subpeak west of Sharkfin Tower and traversed a steep hanging snow slope directly to the base of the tower's west face.

We headed up some variation of the undocumented west face and the southwest ridge of Sharkfin (5.8). After a bit of rappelling and traversing we found ourselves deep in virgin choss on the northwest ridge of Boston Peak (5.5 X). The most memorable part of this ridge was a two-pitch *à cheval* across rock the consistency of feta cheese. Another 1,000' of climbing that's best forgotten led us to the summit of Boston.

A relatively casual jaunt brought us over to the summit of Sahale and down to the Sahale Glacier and Sahale Arm. Out of food and out of time, we decided to head down the Cascade Pass Trail, leaving Johannesburg for another day. We arrived at the Cascade Pass Trailhead haggard and hungry—and bummed to remember a road closure would mean a few more miles of walking. When we finally arrived back at our vehicle at the Eldorado Creek Trailhead, our GPS fittingly read 26.2 miles. With 26 pitches up to 5.8 R, 26 rappels, and over 20,000' of technical terrain (mostly soloed), the Boston Marathon is a proper Cascades adventure.

– Sam Boyce

Images



Boston Basin, in Washington's North Cascades, showing the west-to-east traverse made by Sam Boyce and Kyle Willis in August 2018, which they named the Boston Marathon (VI 5.8R). The traverse generally circumnavigates Boston Basin (to the south of the traverse line) and includes the mega-classic Torment-Forbidden Traverse.



Approaching the downclimb to the Quien Sabe Glacier, between Forbidden Peak and Sharkfin Tower, during the Boston Marathon (VI 5.8 R). Sam Boyce and Kyle Willis completed this mega ridge traverse that circumnavigates Boston Basin in August 2018.



The team's bivy on the east shoulder of Forbidden Peak during the Boston Marathon traverse (VI 5.8 R), after climbing the peak in whiteout fog.



Kyle Willis walking the final steps of the east ridge of Eldorado Peak to the summit in the setting sun, during the Boston Marathon traverse (VI 5.8 R) in Washington's North Cascades. The traverse circumnavigates Boston Basin, featuring more than 20,000' of technical ridge climbing.



Kyle Willis following pitch four on the northwest ridge of Boston Peak. Here Willis and Sam Boyce encountered extremely chossy rock that they called the consistency of feta cheese. Sharkfin Tower and Forbidden Peak, which they crossed earlier in the traverse, are in the background.



Climbing along the classic knife-edge terrain of the Torment-Forbidden Traverse in unsettled weather during the Boston Marathon, a mega ridge traverse that circumnavigates Boston Basin in Washington's North Cascades.



Looking down the chossy and complicated northwest ridge of Boston Peak during the Boston Marathon (VI 5.8 R), a massive ridge traverse that circumnavigates Boston Basin in the North Cascades.



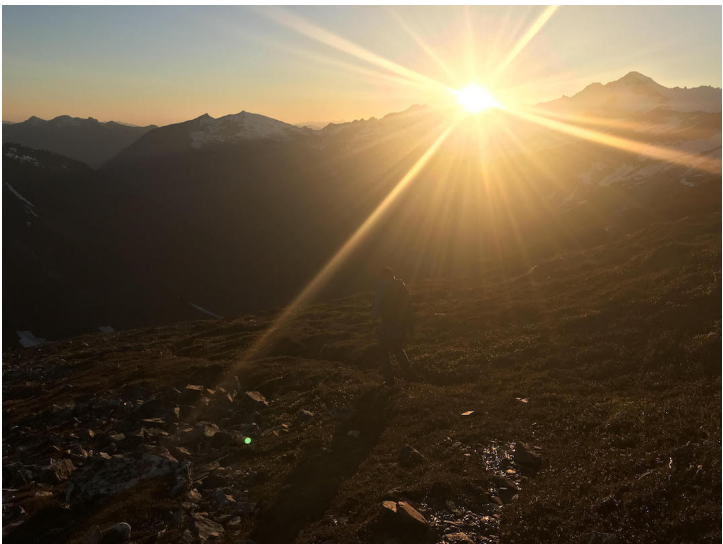
Starting up the first technical pitch on the northwest ridge of Boston Peak during the Boston Marathon (VI 5.8 R), a massive ridge traverse that circumnavigates Boston Basin in Washington's North Cascades.



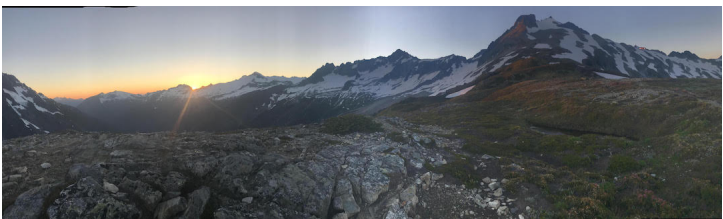
Traversing the Quien Sabe Glacier to the base of the west face of Sharkfin Tower during the Boston Marathon traverse in Washington's North Cascades.



Soloing through the clouds along the west ridge of Forbidden Peak during the Boston Marathon, a massive circumnavigation of Boston Basin climbed by Sam Boyce and Kyle Willis in August 2018.



Sunset in Boston Basin after completing the technical climbing of the Boston Marathon, a massive ridge traverse that circumnavigates the basin.



The view looking back at the Boston Marathon (VI 5.8R) from Sahale Arm. This ridge traverse circumnavigates Boston Basin and features over 20,000' of technical terrain.

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