



AAC Publications

Cloud Peak, East Face, In Honor of Crazy Horse

Wyoming, Bighorn Mountains

THE BIGHORNS ARE LESS KNOWN by climbers than the more popular ranges of the Wind River Mountains and the Tetons. Route activity on Cloud Peak (13,166') reflected this, showing only a few routes. Until 2016, in fact, the large east face only had one route on it, the one I did with Steve Petro in 1986: *A Shimmering Abstraction*. [Editor's Note: One other route was put up on the face in 2016 that begins to the left of *A Shimmering Abstraction* and joins that route high on the wall (see AAJ 2017).] This lack of activity spurred me to investigate the possibility of doing another route on the face.

That process started in 2015. I partnered with Jeff Loda and we approached the face from the east. It was a 13-mile approach with the last half being very difficult, with no established trail. We camped on a knoll on the east side of Glacier Lake, within a one-hour hike of the face. Jeff and I pushed the route halfway up the wall, where we hit a blank section. We probed possible ways around it but ran out of time and descended. During our time on the wall, we were concerned about being able to find a way around a 30-foot roof that appeared to block the exit to the summit.

In 2016 we decided to approach from the west, starting at the West Tensleep Lake Trailhead. This approach is also 13 miles, but with an established hiking route to the summit of Cloud Peak, mostly on trail but with tedious talus and boulder scrambling for the last few miles. We intended to camp near the summit so we could access the wall from the top. Doing this would allow us to examine whether we could find a feasible exit for our line. We rappelled in, cleaned some loose flakes, and indeed found an exit. We then descended to the blank section we'd found the previous year—it looked possible to free climb, but would need some bolts to protect it. We ran out of time and bolts, though, so we climbed out and decided to come back the following year.

In 2017 we had the bright idea of using an ATV for the first half of the eastern approach, where there was a trail and ATVs were allowed. However, several axle bolts came loose and fell off when we were close to Cloud Peak Reservoir, deep into the backcountry. Jeff hiked out to get repair parts and tools, which delayed us two days. We fixed the ATV, continued a short distance, and parked. Then we hiked the difficult last half of the approach to Cloud.

We camped on the south side, below the Merlon formation. The first day, we hiked to the summit, rappelled down the route to the blank section, and added bolts. We worked the pitch on top rope and were able to work out the beta and do it free. After a rest day, we approached the wall from the east for a continuous attempt. We freed all the pitches up to the bolted blank section, but couldn't free it this time. The weather was unsettled and by evening we were caught in a storm two pitches from the summit. We descended. We were out of food and exhausted, so we hiked out, leaving it for the following year.

In 2018, Jeff wasn't interested in returning for another attempt, so I partnered with Taimur Ahmad, a boulderer from the Washington, D.C. area. Taimur's bouldering skills would come in handy for freeing the crux pitch.

We approached from the west in early August and camped literally 30 yards from the top of the route. The weather window we had was great: sunny skies and little chance of rain. The first day we rappelled to put in a couple bolts, creating an intermediate belay at the top of the blank, crux pitch.

Then we spent some time to improve our beta for free climbing it and climbed out.

We rested the next day and then rappelled to the base of the wall, where a fourth-class black-dike ramp meets the start of the technical rock. The lower pitches went quickly, and by midday we were at the crux. This pitch has a lower and upper crux, the upper one being more difficult. I led through the lower crux and fell on the upper crux. I worked on it from a no-hands stance in the middle of the pitch, trying several times until I did it free at 5.12a. I rested a short time, continued climbing a 5.10 section that finished the pitch to the belay, got pumped, and fell. It seemed I'd focused so much on the 5.12 crux that I didn't pay enough attention to the easier climbing or rest long enough to regain my strength.

I lowered back to the belay so Taimur could lead the crux pitch, which he did quickly. Taimur was pleased because he felt that free climbing this pitch would be his major contribution to our success—and it was! We climbed the rest of the pitches and arrived on top after sundown. It was a long day, but we succeeded.

I'm somewhat disappointed by my mistake but happy that I persevered four years in a row to see the project to completion. Suffice to say that Taimur and I did the first full ascent and Taimur did the first free ascent. I can be happy with that. I named the route In Honor of Crazy Horse (1,200', IV 5.12a) as a tribute to the Lakota Sioux who had struggled to preserve their hunting grounds, the Powder River Basin, that lies east of the Bighorn Mountains. Hoka Hey!

– Arno Ilgner

Images



The ill-fated ATV used by Arno Ilgner and Jeff Lodal to approach Cloud Peak in 2017. A broken axle cost the team two days of the trip.



Jeff Lodal climbing the last pitch of what would become In Honor of Crazy Horse (1,200', IV 5.12a) in 2017. This was the third year of attempts on the route.



Jeff Loda following the first technical pitch of In Honor of Crazy Horse (1,200', IV 5.12a) during the 2017 attempt. That year Loda and Arno Ilgner freed everything up to the blank bolted crux pitch but were shut down by storms.



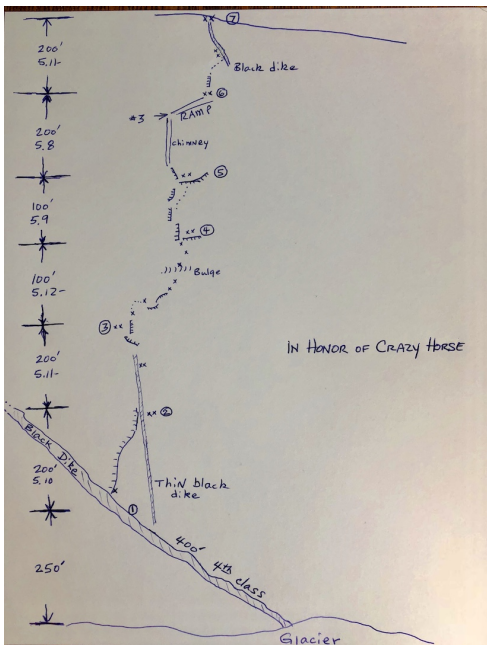
Taimur Ahmad beginning the crux pitch of In Honor of Crazy Horse (1,200', IV 5.12a) during the successful redpoint of the route in 2018.



Taimur Ahmad following the final slab of pitch six of In Honor of Crazy Horse (1,200', IV 5.12a) on Wyoming's Cloud Peak.



Taimur Ahmad and Arno Ilgner at the summit after completing the first ascent of In Honor of Crazy Horse (1,200', IV 5.12a) on Cloud Peak in the Bighorn Mountains of Wyoming. Ilgner spent four trips putting up this new line, his second on the wall after A Shimmering Abstraction (Ilgner-Petro, 1986).



Topo for In Honor of Crazy Horse (1,200', IV 5.12a) on Cloud Peak in the Bighorn Mountains of Wyoming.



The massive east face of Cloud Peak in the Bighorn Mountains of Wyoming, showing the line of In Honor of Crazy Horse (1,200', IV 5.12a). The route took four seasons to complete and was Arno Ilgner's second route on the wall. The two other routes on this face, both of which lie to the right, are Medicine Crow (Gray-Marine, 2016), and A Shimmering Abstraction (Ilgner-Petro, 1986).

Article Details

Author	Arno Ilgner
Publication	AAJ
Volume	61
Issue	93
Page	0
Copyright Date	2019
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions