



AAC Publications

Sahale Peak, West Spur, Klone Kalitan

Washington, North Cascades National Park

THE CONVOLUTED west spur of Sahale Mountain (8,681') in North Cascades National Park is plainly visible in profile from the standard route up the Quien Sabe Glacier, a popular initiatory alpine climb.

The spur rises from around 7,500' to 8,200', where it merges once more with the contours of the glacier below Boston-Sahale Col. I have spent many hours of my working life as a guide staring at the gendarmes, crack systems, and horrific choss intrusions of this charming little spur, and always thought it would be fun to explore. I know other guides have wondered about it, but I think we'd all been discouraged by the four-hour walk and lack of known, quality cragging in the basin.

In early July, after establishing a camp on slabs and taking in an evening of cloud play, Scott Rinckenberger and I slept soundly and set off to attempt the climb after coffee. We gained the glacier and kicked steps up to an initial triangular face, which offered a set of clean 5.8 cracks on the right-hand side. From there we kept almost entirely to the ridge crest, which varied dramatically in character. Clouds enclosed us much of the day, alternating between greenhouse stagnation and anxiety-inducing cool currents. Scott likes to sing, as I do, and I think at one point we startled some climbers out on the Quien Sabe. At the top, the spur delivered us neatly onto the glacier, where we roped up for a while, then wandered back down toward camp.

As anticipated based on the view from the Quien Sabe, the route included clean, solid cracks, knife edges of white Skagit gneiss, and loose blocks mortared weakly in place by garbage. The climbing was very, very fun, particularly the initial triangular face, which certainly has good cragging potential as well. Climbing on the spur barely reached 5.8 in difficulty, and belay ledges presented themselves at convenient 30m intervals. Trundling the many loose blocks we found provided the real workout—humans just can't resist turning stone into projectiles.

Some years back, I named another micro-feature in this area, the little spire on the divide between Boston Basin and the Taboo Glacier. Because of its shape when viewed from below, I started calling it l'Aiguille de l'M after a famous escarpment in Chamonix; the name stuck, at least among working guides. I regret that now—these mountains have beauty and history of their own, and have given life to people for thousands of years. Given the chance, I would prefer names that honor the deeper human history of this land, to which the cultures of mining, alpinism, and national parks are so far just a brief, brutal addendum.

Although I don't believe this feature on Sahale risks popularity and really doesn't need a name, I did have an abridged dictionary of Chinook Jargon in case it turned out to be a classic. Chinook Jargon is a nearly extinct trade language combining words from Chinook and Nootka languages as well as English and French, and was in widespread use throughout the Pacific Northwest through the end of the 19th century. The place names Sahale and Boston both came from Chinook Jargon, meaning "high" and "American" respectively. Chinook Jargon, of course, was not the language of the Skagit people, but it remains an accessible linguistic bridge backward for those curious about the colonization of the Pacific Northwest. Klone Kalitan (roughly "three arrows")—for the three arrowhead-shaped points along the spur—seems as good a name as any. Archaeological digs at Cascade Pass show it was a summertime hangout where, among other things, people turned stone into projectiles.

– Forest McBrien

Editor's note: McBrian and Rinckenberger also climbed a clean corner system on the wall above the Quien Sabe Glacier, just to the right of the gully accessing Sharkfin Tower, via two 30m pitches of clean, mostly solid rock. "The second pitch is an immaculate 5.10 three- to four-inch corner crack," McBrian wrote, adding that, "if you are heading up to climb Sharkfin Tower, this side trip is well worth adding an extra number 3 and 4 to your rack."

Images



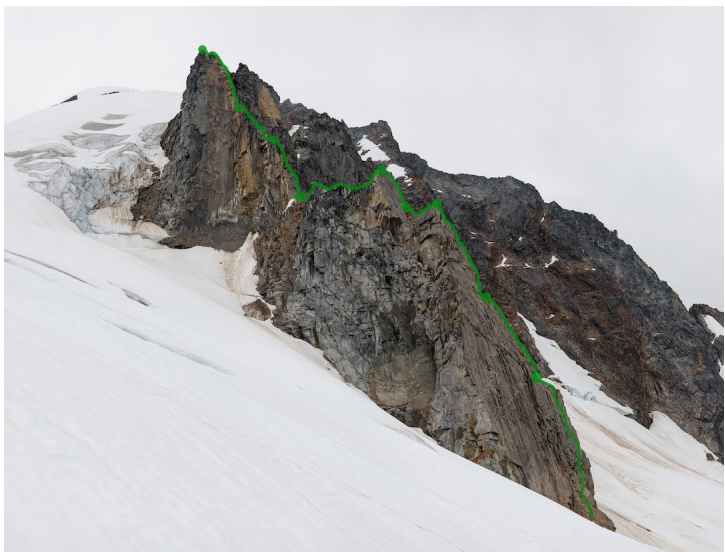
Forest McBrian approaches the toe of the buttress at around 7,600' on the Quien Sabe Glacier, west of the summit of Sahale Mountain. The climbing route ascended the series of towers on the climber's left side of the massive spur.



Forest McBrian coming up the fourth pitch of Klong Kalitan (5.8, 230m) as swirling fog obscures the Quien Sabe glacier and Boston Basin below.



The route line for Klone Kalitan (5.8, 230m) on the west spur of Sahale Mountain in Boston Basin.



A panoramic shot of the route line for Klone Kalitan (5.8, 230m) on the west spur of Sahale Mountain in Boston Basin.



Forest McBrien probes some free-floating Jenga blocks on pitch eight of Klone Kalitan as he works to unlock one of the two ridge traverses linking the better climbing on the towers' arêtes.



Sahale Peak New Route

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