



AAC Publications

East Temple Peak, Northwest Face, Drought Year

Wyoming, Wind River Range

“We’d be climbing 90° water ice right now if it were only winter,” I said to a very moist Casey Elliot as he mantled onto moss on a tiered ledge system. We were halfway up the northwest face of East Temple Peak, in the Deep Lake area of the Wind River Range. It was day two of our trip, and we were both pretty sodden, having just climbed the semi-epic third and fourth pitches, each of which featured a dripping wet offwidth chimney followed by a committing run-out. But we were nothing like the engorged sponges we’d become in a few hours time.

Casey grabbed the hand drill and started to work on the anchor, evidently unsurprised, since such comments were starting to define the climbing on the face. Exclamations like, “Man this thing on the left would be a crazy techy finger crack without all that moss!” or “That looks like you would invert right there if it were dry!” echoed from the face like an audible shadow.

Even in summer, the northwest face of East Temple is cold and streaked with runoff. It receives direct sunlight only briefly before the sun sets, and thus rarely dries out completely. In the first four pitches we had followed the incredible splitter cracks and slab traverses of the original 1961 route (Chouinard-Gran, see AAJ 1962). Our research had revealed no attempts to free or even repeat this route, so to encourage future ascents and possible variations on the wall, we decided we would do some extra grunt work to equip the route with rappel stations, so one might bail from the long ledge more than halfway up the face.

Less than 20 minutes later, on the halfway ledge and with a bolt half drilled, the sky erupted. The wettest hail either of us had ever experienced began peppering our stance. The rain didn’t let up for a full hour, by which time I was wiping drops from my glasses as I tapped in our second sleeve. The stance beside our anchor was now a fully flowing waterfall. With one anchor down we were slowly becoming hypothermic and so we orchestrated a complex bail.

We returned the following day for our “rest day” of installing another three sets of anchors below our first. We hand-drilled one bolt per station (and two on the ledge, five bolts total), making use of the plentiful Chouinard relics and ample availability of bombproof nut placements.

Day three saw us jugging back up the first two pitches, then free climbing once again to the ledge, beyond which lay the tantalizing unknown. I led a traverse right, following the ’61 route, and found myself beneath the gaping wet maw of the route’s upper chimney system—full of slime and pinching down to horizontal number 4s after a series of slick black streaks. It honestly looked unclimbable in its current condition.

Casey led up a thin crack to the left of the chimney, but was forced to downclimb after half a rope length. We could have aided through the muck to get to the top, but we were still committed to the idea of a free route. Together we then settled on an alternate path. We reversed our last pitch and I belayed, rather flinchingly, as Casey followed a series of hollow flakes directly above the ledge, hoping for continuous features above. Atop this slightly scary pitch, we traversed right on a catwalk ledge to rejoin the original line below its crux aid pitch. This wide corner was wet as well, so after an initial 20’ of offwidthing, we took an impressive splitter heading right, eventually taking us to the top—Drought Year (1,000’, IV 5.11+).

At times I could barely climb for laughing at the improbability of the line, as it followed broken flake systems, perfect laybacks, wonky ledges, splitter hands, and a final committing slab, with not a crux harder than 5.11. Our variation awaits a complete one-day free ascent, and we agreed that we'd love to return for it, if ever Wyoming experiences a drought year!

– Cassidy Bindrup

Images



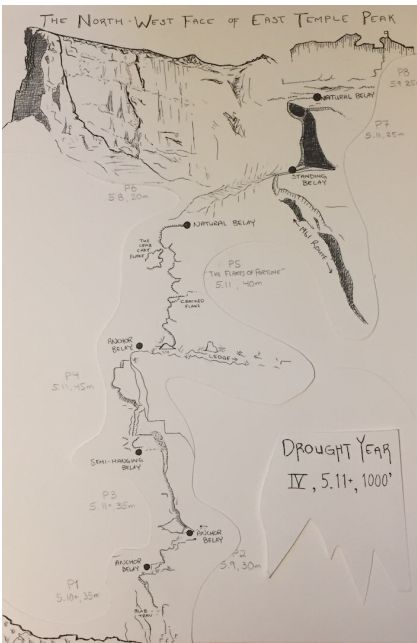
Cassady Bindrup hikes back to camp as the last light of the day illuminates the northwest face of East Temple Peak. The original Northwest Face (5.9 A3, Chouinard-Gran, 1961) follows two prominent left-facing corner systems in the center of the wall, connected by a long traverse ledge in the middle. Bindrup and Casey Elliot completed Drought Year (IV 5.11+), which frees the lower portion of the original route then strikes off above the ledge on new terrain, reconnecting up higher and following discontinuous flakes and features to the top of the wall.



Cassady Bindrup follows a juggy horizontal crack near the top of Drought Year (IV 5.11+) on the northwest face of East Temple Peak.



A fist bump for Casey Elliot near the top of Drought Year (IV 5.11+) on the northwest face of East Temple Peak.

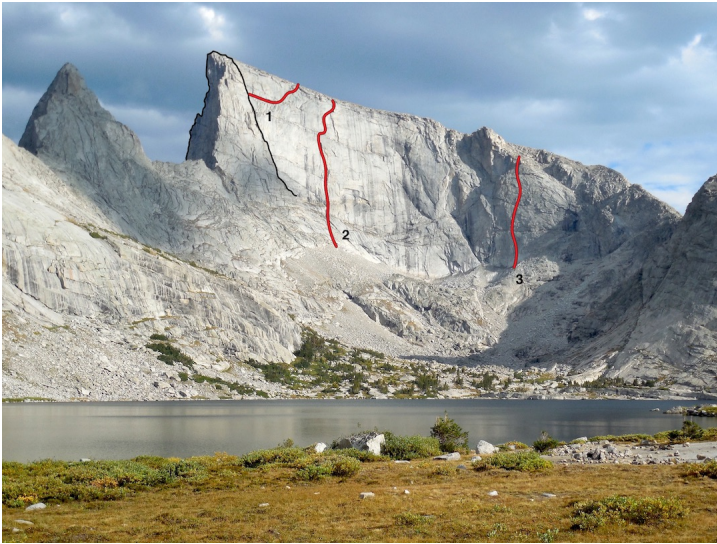


Topo for Drought Year (IV 5.11+) on the northwest face of East Temple Peak in the Wind River Range. This route, completed by Cassady Bindrup and Casey Elliot in August 2019, frees the lower portion of the original 1961 route, then climbs mostly new terrain above the halfway ledge.



Cassady Bindrup follows discontinuous flakes and features on the fifth pitch of Drought Year (IV

5.11+) on the northwest face of East Temple Peak. He and Casey Elliot freed the lower portion of the original Northwest Face (5.9 A3, Chouinard-Gran, 1961), before climbing mostly new terrain above the route's halfway ledge.



Afternoon light on the northwest face of East Temple Peak. The left margin is obscured by Lost Temple Spire (outlined), whose right side hides the classic Southwest Arête. During their enchainment of peaks around Deep Lake, Jack Cramer and Grant Kleeves climbed this route, rappelled into the notch, then snuck across a 5.7 traverse (1) to top out on East Temple. The original Northwest Face (5.9 A3, Chouinard-Gran, 1961) followed corner systems in the center, connected by a traverse ledge. (2) Drought Year (1,000', IV 5.11+, 2019) freed the lower portion of the original route then struck off on new terrain. (3) Thieves in the Temple (700', IV 5.12a, 2019).

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