



AAC Publications

Little Tahoma Peak, North Face, Lawless

Washington, Cascades, Mt. Rainier National Park

I first became interested in Little Tahoma Peak (11,130'), a satellite peak on the east side of Mt. Rainier, while talking with Matt Christensen, my stepfather, about his first ascent of the west ridge with Paul Cook in 1980. We found it interesting that the third-highest peak in Washington has had only a few significant ascents, and only two routes on its north face (see AAJ 1960 and AAJ 1980). Curious about this face, I teamed up with my friend Jay Lyons, who had been wanting to climb something on the north side of the peak for a while.

At 3:30 a.m. on March 3, we started walking from camp at around 8,800' on the Cowlitz Glacier. We crossed below Cathedral Rocks and got onto the Ingraham, then started to head west up-glacier. The Ingraham was covered in a thin, windblown snow crust, which made glacier navigation difficult. I punched into a crevasse and went in up to my head. I remember looking down and seeing a lot of open space below my dangling boots.

From that point, Jay graciously took the lead. Eventually, we made it to the start of the west ridge and descended the Winthrop Glacier to below the north face of Little Tahoma. By that time the sun was fully out. We didn't have too much beta to go off as we scanned the north face for a weakness. We chose a line beginning on the right-hand lower snowfield, to the right of the original north face route. We encountered a significant bergschrund, which took two rappels using V-threads to get across and to the base of our route.

The climb started out on lower-angle snow and ice leading to the second pitch, featuring fun AI4 up a thin runnel. The next two pitches were AI3 M3/4 and really enjoyable. Pitch five was more serious: steep mixed climbing with a thin layer of snow over what appeared to be cement mix with cobblestones protruding from it. I was able to find a pin placement low on the pitch, but the majority of the lead was unprotected.

Jay took the crux sixth pitch: a short crack system down low leading to difficult moves pulling around an overhanging bulge. This pitch had some loose blocks, and my belay was directly exposed below. I had my fingers crossed that Jay would not pull anything off. At the top of the sixth pitch, we gained the west ridge, where we started to climb a series of gendarmes. At this point we were able to put away the ice tools and do some fun alpine rock climbing. There were a few large loose blocks, but most of the pitch was on good rock. From there we reached the last major gendarme on the west ridge, and we rappelled into a notch between the gendarme and the final buttress of the west ridge.

By that time it was dark and weather had moved, in causing whiteout conditions. We were not expecting to bivy and our gear was limited, which would have made for a very cold night. We made the decision to bail on our original plan of climbing the distinct vertical chimney system that cuts directly up the final buttress to the summit. Instead, we traversed around to the south face until we found a large couloir, where we climbed 65–70° snow to a short pitch of AI3. Here we joined the standard route up the east ridge. We were only about 150' below the summit, but being exhausted and frankly grateful to have made it as far as we had, we decided to descend from there. We returned to camp almost exactly 24 hours after departing. We named our route Lawless (1,400' climbing distance, 11 pitches, V AI4 M6 5.8).

– Ryan Dougherty

Images



The south face of Little Tahoma, showing the upper portion of the 2020 route Lawless in green. The climbers started on the north face and crossed the west ridge to the south face. They did not reach the summit.



The north face of Little Tahoma, showing Mahre-Prater Route (1979, pink line), Lawless (Dougherty-Lyons, green line, 2020), and the west ridge (yellow).



Mixed terrain on the north face of Little Tahoma.

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