



AAC Publications

Esmeralda Peak East, Moonlight Serendipity

United States, Washington, Cascade Range

On November 21, Kyle McCrohan, Michael Telstad, and I approached an obscure and improbable line in the Cascades that Kyle had noticed on a condition reports webpage. The approach was fairly long for a route about which we had no further knowledge. In all likelihood, we would just be taking the gear for a walk, but a clear forecast beckoned. Off we went to poke our heads around in the Teanaway area.

About five miles before the Esmeralda Trailhead, we encountered some new deadfall covering the paved road into the area, so we parked and strapped our boots on. As we hiked up the Esmeralda Basin Trail and finally got an unobstructed view of our intended line, it was clear we wouldn't be getting on it that day. The ice appeared dangerously unstable, and the remaining approach was more than we had time for. However, we were struck by a nearby line that looked even more interesting. The northeast face of Esmeralda Peak East (ca 6,500', labeled as Esmeralda Peak–East Peak on some maps) looked like a classic alpine blend of thin ice, clean rock, and thoughtful mixed terrain. The abundance of possible rappel trees also caught our attention.

After crossing the North Fork Teanaway River and completing a steep treed approach, we pulled the ropes and pointy things out of our packs. A few pitches of ice with only sparse protection and easy mixed terrain led to a snow ramp. From here, we accessed a wide chimney that made for fun climbing on solid rock. Two more pitches of low-angle mixed climbing brought us to a headwall. The most plausible and direct line through it was a mixed corner. The rock deteriorated as we started up, crumbling beneath our picks and crampon points. Protection was hard to find on this pitch, but the climbing wasn't unreasonably difficult.

At this point we had run out of daylight. I didn't want to get into any dicey climbing in the darkness, so looked around a corner and found a perfect narrow snow ramp that led us to the snowfield above. Three more pitches of run-out mixed terrain brought us to the summit of Esmeralda Peak East.

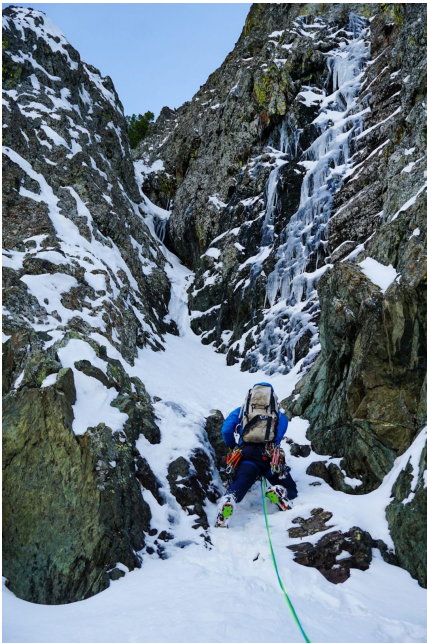
Michael led the way for most of the descent, giving Kyle and me time to ogle the silhouettes of the surrounding peaks in full moonlight. I couldn't have been happier to be in such a beautiful position, especially after having my expectations for the day wildly exceeded. With that in mind, we named the route Moonlight Serendipity (1,200', WI3 M5).

— Kurt Ross

Images



Michael Telstad and Kurt Ross started up Moonlight Serendipity (1,200', WI3 M5), on the northeast face of Esmeralda Peak East, knowing that they were unlikely to finish in daylight. Sure enough, they topped out by headlamp.



Michael Telstad, Kyle McCrohan, and Kurt Ross followed this left-facing corner—with a couple of M5 steps—to its end; they believe the ice smear above could make for a more direct and high-quality variation in fatter conditions. This was the only pitch where the trio encountered poor rock on Moonlight Serendipity (1,200', WI3 M5), on the northeast face of Esmeralda Peak East.



The upper northeast face of Esmeralda Peak East. Moonlight Serendipity (1,200', WI3 M5) follows obvious ice runnels, angling up ramps to the right near the top.



The entire line of Moonlight Serendipity (1,200', WI3 M5) can be seen in this shot of Esmeralda Peak East (taken in summer).

Article Details

Author	Kurt Ross
Publication	AAJ
Volume	64
Issue	96
Page	109
Copyright Date	2022
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions