



AAC Publications

Extended Traverse of Towers of the Virgin

United States, Utah, Zion National Park

The Towers of the Virgin are a series of jagged summits that loom above Oak Creek to create a gigantic sandstone amphitheater. Dan Stih and Ron Raimonde envisioned and executed the first traverse of these towers in 1998, climbing south to north over the course of three days. The climbing begins on the 1933 southwest ridge route up the West Temple (7,810') and continues across the Sundial (7,532'), Witch Head (7,350'), Broken Tooth (7,242'), Rotten Tooth (7,390'), and finally the Altar of Sacrifice (7,505'; 5.9). Except for the West Temple, Stih and Raimonde had made the first ascents of all of these towers the year before. They finished their 1998 traverse by rappelling into Oak Creek between the Altar and then unclimbed Meridian Tower.

In the spring of 2021, Arthur Herlitzka and I spent three days on the second ascent of the traverse and extended it by six additional summits. On the first day we made it past the Witch Head. The next day we climbed the Teeth, the Altar, and Avalokiteshvara Temple (7,285'), before descending into Birch Creek to bivvy near water. On day three we linked Meridian Tower (7,462'), Chameleon Peak (7,224'), the Point (7,144'), Big Red (7,200'), and lastly the Beehive (6,909'). That same day we took the Streaked Wall descent route back to the Zion Human History Museum. (The first known ascents of several of these summits include: Avalokiteshvara Temple in 2015, by Courtney Purcell; Meridian Peak in 2017, by Stih and Matt Mower; Chameleon Peak in 2008, by Stih and David Everett; the Point in 2019, by Stih; and Big Red, in 2019, also by Stih, via a route graded 5.9 A3.)

We climbed with a double rack of cams, nothing too big or small, and also had a rack of pins that we never used. We rated our extended traverse VI 5.9 R. There are no bolts, and we left very little tat behind. Expect countless rappels and downclimbs, and be prepared for soft, loose rock.

— Mike Dunn

Images



Arthur Herlitzka on the south ridge of the West Temple at dawn on the first day of his and Mike Dunn's traverse of the Towers of the Virgin.



Arthur Herlitzka rappelling off the West Temple toward Sundial.



Mike Dunn and Arthur Herlitzka beside the summit cairn of the Sundial.



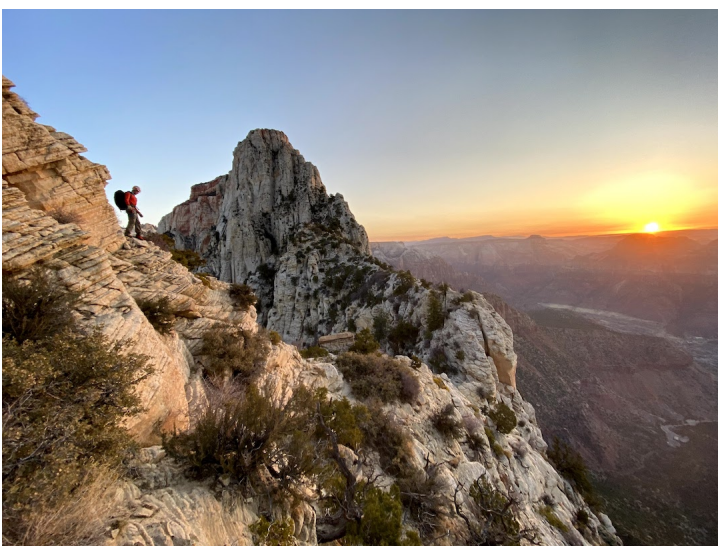
Arthur Herlitzka in front of the Sundial, one of the summits on the Towers of the Virgin Traverse, of which Herlitzka and Mike Dunn did the second ascent and to which they added six summits.



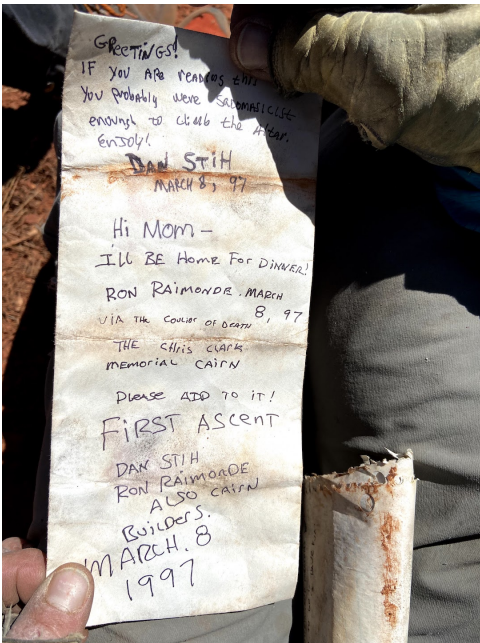
Looking back on the West Temple, Sundial, Witch Head, Broken Tooth, and Rotten Tooth from the Altar of Sacrifice.



Arthur Herlitzka on the summit of the Altar of Sacrifice next to the remnants of the cairn built on the summit by the first ascensionists in 1997.



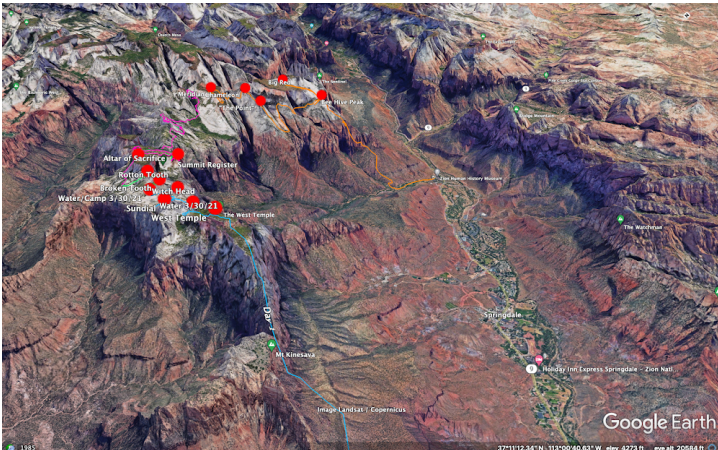
Mike Dunn on the south ridge of the West Temple during the first morning of his and Arthur Herlitzka's second ascent of the Towers of the Virgin Traverse, to which they added six new summits.



The summit register on the Altar of Sacrifice, showing Dan Stih and Ron Raimonde's entry after their first ascent of the peak in 1997.

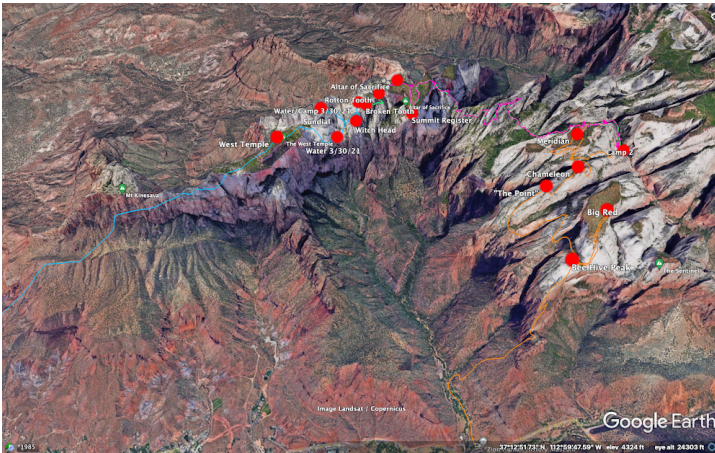


The Towers of the Virgin. The traverse went from left to right.



View of the Towers of the Virgin Traverse from the southwest. The peaks added to the traverse in

2021 are at the top.



The Towers of the Virgin Traverse from the southeast. The peaks added to the traverse in 2021 are shown at right.

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