



AAC Publications

Laurel Knob, Two New Routes

North Carolina

Alex Willis on pitch two of Hostis Humani Generis (1,100', IV 5.12 R), Laurel Knob. Photo by Dylan Valvo

In June, I climbed the Dike Hike–Monster Groove (5.11a; Brown-McDowell, 2012) on Laurel Knob—the tallest monolith east of the Mississippi—to get a look at the mountain’s last major unclimbed feature: the full base-to-summit groove of the classic Groover (5.8+; Gaskin-Gaskin, 1980). Groover angles in from the left and only climbs the top of this feature.

Chad Gardner and I returned at the beginning of July and established a 200' pitch up the groove, above Dike Hike, in oppressive heat. I later broke this pitch into two, because I wanted to prevent any need for repeat ascensionists to simul-climb—a bad idea given the difficulty and tenuousness of the terrain. (The ethic at Laurel Knob is bolting on lead; we used a power drill but drilled all bolts on this route ground up, from stances.) While rappelling the wall, I noticed that the bottom of the groove and the face just below it, which I had presumed to be blank, had usable holds. Without bothering to stop and clean it or rehearse any moves, we continued rappelling to the ground.

I returned to the route three more times, twice with Scott Basso and once with Alex Willis, and found a way through those bottom two pitches and a fourth pitch above the rope-stretching pitch three. All four of these pitches, totaling approximately 700' of new climbing, are in the 5.11 and 5.12 range. Above these, the route joins the final three pitches of the classic Groover. I named the route Hostis Humani Generis (IV 5.12 PG-13), a.k.a. HHG. The route climbs on amazing textures and formations, from water streaks to quartz jugs to dragon-spine dikes.

While climbing HHG, I had leaned out and seen several thin dikes way off to the left, weaving about the wall like a network of veins. I enlisted my buddy Zeb Hammerly to explore them. The result was another stellar new route, called Pipsisewa (1,000', IV 5.13 R). As with HHG, we drilled all the bolts from stances, with the exception of one bolt installed from a hook.

The first pitch (5.12) has no pro in the first 40', which has three V2/3 sequences. The 180' second pitch presents the first crux: a cryptic V6/7 sequence through a bulge, followed by sustained slab climbing. Pitch three is another exciting off-vert encounter—trust in one's feet is the name of the game. The fourth pitch, a short, steep headwall, had been tried by legendary Southern climber Shannon Stegg, who accessed it by climbing the first three pitches of Groover, but he abandoned it in 2011. Two sequences of low-percentage moves, each clocking in around V7/8, lead to a faint runnel that provides a final V5-ish boulder problem. This friction-dependent pitch took many visits (some solo) to free. Pitch five (5.11) was the most difficult to establish, not because of the climbing, but because the lack of positive holds made for difficult drilling. The final two pitches are much easier.

Pipsisewa has some of the most difficult stance drilling I've done. Drilling one bolt required three separate attempts. I took big falls on the first two tries, and in one of these the battery ejected from my drill and fell to the forest floor. (The battery was retrieved!) Despite having several fully bolted pitches, the route is far from a sport climb, with runouts between 20' and 40'. Approach this route with a good headspace and you'll manage.

— Dylan Valvo

Images



Alex Willis on pitch two of Hostis Humani Generis (1,100', IV 5.12 R), Laurel Knob.



Dylan Valvo establishing the fourth pitch of Hostis Humani Generis (1,100', IV 5.12 R), Laurel Knob.
Scott Basso



Zeb Hammerly on pitch two on Pipsissewa (1,000 feet, IV 5.13 R), Laurel Knob, North Carolina.



Zeb Hammerly pitch three Pipsissewa (1,000 feet, IV 5.13 R), Laurel Knob, North Carolina.

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