



## AAC Publications

---

### **Storm Dome, Northeast Face, Two Free Routes**

Idaho, Salmon River Mountains

**I first heard whispers about an unclimbed backcountry granite wall near McCall, Idaho, in 2019.** The sheer 275m northeast face of Storm Dome (8,758') is located in a hanging valley perched above Loon Creek, a strenuous eight-mile hike from the Twenty Mile Lake Trailhead. The few climbers who had seen the wall speculated that any free routes would be as hard as 5.14.

Longtime Boise locals Doug Colwell and Ted Vavricka had attempted a route on the shorter, right side of the wall over the course of more than a decade, from the early aughts to the early 2010s. They were unsuccessful due to the long approach, the lack of continuous crack systems, and the difficulty of hooking and drilling up blank sections of rock. On a scouting mission in July 2021, I ran into two local climbers (whose names I don't recall) who had just attempted a line even farther right, but they were shut down after a few pitches due to poor gear and dangerous belays. From the few photos I had seen and based on my scouting mission, the wall seemed devoid of continuous crack systems but highly featured. The open question was whether these features could be linked at a reasonable difficulty. There was one way to find out.

After pushing two pitches ground-up in July 2021 with Zach Cook, following the most obvious features left of center on the tallest part of the wall, it was clear the face held diverse climbing—edges, dikes, flakes, and cracks—and could go free at an approachable grade. I returned for 11 days in late August with Duncan Ralph and Abe Rigeby; we brought the extra hardware and ropes we'd need to push the route to the top. I free climbed wherever possible and drilled bolts from stances, with some sketchy mixed aid and free climbing on and above marginal gear. In its native state, the rock was lichenous and sometimes exfoliating. The cracks were dirty—we had to excavate them before placing gear. Once on top, we started cleaning and scrubbing the route on rappel, revealing very solid granite beneath the dirty surface. We moved bolts when necessary to yield the highest quality free route we could create.

In early September 2021, Zach hiked in to meet Duncan and me with some extra hardware. We bolted a superb 5.12 thin-face variation to pitch one the next day. On September 12, all three of us freed every pitch of the route, including two different variations to pitch nine. Milwaukee's Best (9 pitches, IV 5.12 PG-13) was born.

In 2022, we opened another route linking subtle features up the proud center of the wall. After hitting some dead-ends trying to go ground-up, Zach found most of this new route on rappel during July and August. Duncan and I then spent a week in September bolting, cleaning, and working out the moves. Duncan had to drive home to Seattle for a long-postponed shoulder surgery, but Abe generously volunteered to support me on a free ascent. On September 24, I redpointed Heart of Diamond (7 pitches, IV 5.13 PG-13) in seven hours. I fell once on pitch two and once on pitch four—both more difficult than expected—but pulled the rope and re-led each cleanly. The route was a hard-fought battle, replete with arm-numbing undercling traverses sans footholds, equally footless hand- and finger-rail traverses, and intricate face climbing on flakes, edges, and dikes in between. Pitches two, four, and six are all low- to mid-5.13, and most of the rest is in the 5.12 range. Pitch three is the easiest lead at 5.11+.

All of the bolts on our Storm Dome routes are  $\frac{3}{8}$ " or 10mm stainless steel. Both Heart of Diamond and Milwaukee's Best can be rappelled using a single 70m rope. We made sure to avoid leaving tat, fixed

wires, or fixed pitons on the routes. We encourage future developers to respect these standards when opening new routes in this beautiful area, and to leave plenty of space between existing lines.

— **Michal Matyjasik**

## Images



Abe Rige at the top of pitch one on Heart of Diamond (230m, 7 pitches, IV 5.13 PG-13) on the northeast face of Storm Dome, Salmon River Mountains, Idaho.



Abe Rige at the top of the second-pitch traverse on Heart of Diamond (230m, 7 pitches, IV 5.13 PG-13) on the northeast face of Storm Dome, the second route to the top of the wall, freed by Michal Matyjasik on September 24, 2022.



Michal Matyjasik questing up the ninth pitch “Blue Pill” finish of Milwaukee’s Best (275m, 9 pitches, IV 5.12 PG-13) during the first ascent.



Michal Matyjasik cruxing on pitch eight—“Meaner Leaner”—of Milwaukee’s Best (275m, 9 pitches, IV 5.12 PG-13), Salmon River Mountains, Idaho.





(Left to right) Zach Cook, Michal Matyjasik, and Duncan Ralph on the summit of Storm Dome after completing the first free ascent of the northeast face via their route Milwaukee's Best (275m, 9 pitches, IV 5.12 PG-13).



Zach Cook face climbing around a dike on the second pitch of Milwaukee's Best (275m, 9 pitches, IV 5.12 PG-13), dubbed "Dike Vision."



Zach Cook on the sporty ninth pitch, which the first ascensionists dubbed the “Red Pill,” of Milwaukee’s Best (9 pitches, IV 5.12 PG-13), Salmon River Mountains, Idaho. “Red Pill” is one of two options for pitch nine.



Duncan Ralph on pitch one of Milwaukee’s Best (275m, 9 pitches, IV 5.12 PG-13), named the “Trad Dad Slab,” Salmon River Mountains, Idaho. Milwaukee’s Best was the first ascent of the northeast face of Storm Dome.







The northeast face of Storm Dome, showing (1) Milwaukee's Best (9 pitches, IV 5.12 PG-13) and (2) Heart of Diamond (7 pitches, IV 5.13 PG-13).



Article Details

Author	Michal Matyjasik
Publication	AAJ
Volume	65
Issue	97
Page	
Copyright Date	2023
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions