



## AAC Publications

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### **Whatcom Peak, South Buttress, Castle in the Sky**

United States, Washington, Cascade Range

**Everything Sam Boyce and I had heard about the unclimbed south buttress of Whatcom Peak (7,574') in the Northern Pickets made it sound like we'd find nothing but chossy 5.11 if we ventured out there, but we wanted to see for ourselves.** Sam had taken a photo on an earlier mission that seemed to show a weakness in the steep lower buttress, with 1,000' of ridge climbing beyond. We decided to give it a go in July. We only had three days off work—a short window for the Pickets—but we were motivated. We did the 16-mile approach, with 6,000' of gain, in one day. After passing through the Imperfect Impasse, we camped below the route.

We awoke just before sunrise to frigid temperatures and, with morning shade on the route, recalculated our plan about six times before deciding it would probably be fine to start the climb at 9 a.m. A slab with fun, well-protected climbing led us into the corner system we'd seen in Sam's photo. A few pitches of enjoyable but somewhat run-out 5.8/5.9 climbing on good rock brought us to a second open-book feature. Up close, this looked unappealing, so we quested right around the corner; we remembered seeing cracks out on the face in the photo. We traversed a well-protected 5.10 slab and found a beautiful splitter waiting for us. The crack led up through a 5.10 roof, and we were all smiles. A final wandering 5.9 pitch brought us to a large gully leading to the upper ridge. From afar, this had looked loose and miserable, but it was lined with clean, water-polished rock.

Once on the ridge, the bulletproof gneiss gave way to your standard compact and shattered Pickets rock. About 1,000' of loose scrambling (up to 5.4 with minimal gear) brought us to the summit around 4 p.m. We basked in our good luck and the expansive views before romping down the standard descent, with snow and third-class scrambling. We named our route Castle in the Sky (2,000', IV 5.10b). To our knowledge, it is the only route in this entire cirque.

— Lani Chapko

## Images



Castle in the Sky (2,000', IV 5.10b) on the south buttress of Whatcom Peak, Picket Range, North Cascades National Park, Washington.



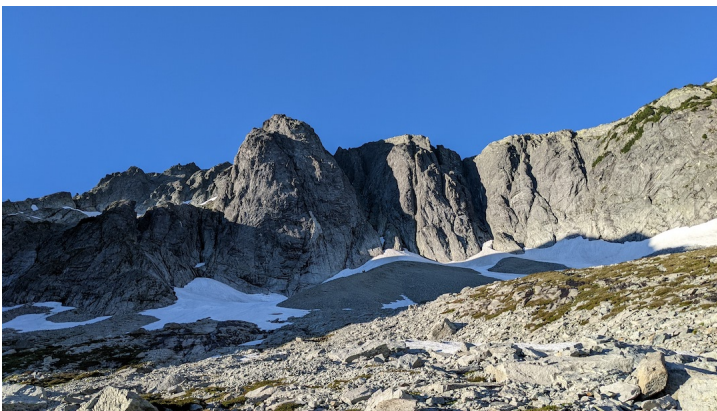
Castle in the Sky (2,000', IV 5.10b) on the south buttress of Whatcom Peak, Picket Range, North Cascades National Park, Washington.



The south buttress of Whatcom Peak as seen from the west.



Castle in the Sky (2,000', IV 5.10b) on the south buttress of Whatcom Peak, Picket Range, North Cascades National Park, Washington. The large feature on the left side of the frame is the unclimbed southwest ridge of Whatcom Peak.



Castle in the Sky (2,000', IV 5.10b) on the south buttress of Whatcom Peak, Picket Range, North Cascades National Park, Washington. The large feature on the left side of the frame is the unclimbed southwest ridge of Whatcom Peak.





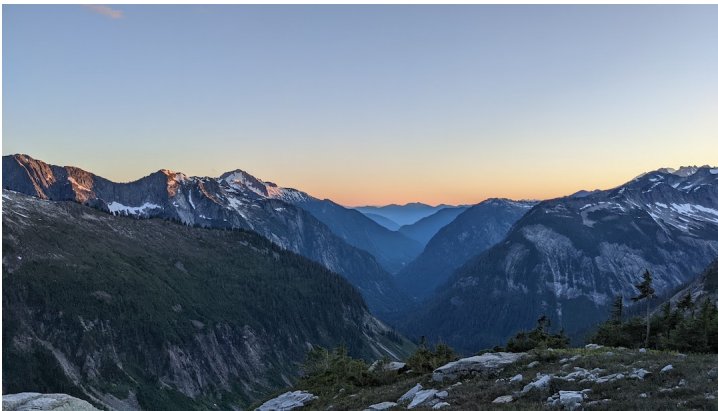
Lani Chapko following pitch two of Castle in the Sky (2,000', IV 5.10b) on Whatcom Peak.



Lani Chapko starting the 5.10b slab traverse on pitch four of Castle in the Sky (2,000', IV 5.10b) on Whatcom Peak.



Sam Boyce heading toward the 5.10- roof on the fifth pitch of Castle in the Sky (2,000', IV 5.10b).



Looking southwest down into the headwaters of the Baker River. Sam Boyce believes there are upwards of "a dozen unclimbed big walls lining the upper Baker River."

## Article Details

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