



AAC Publications

Spectre Peak, South Ridge, Spirited Away

United States, Washington, Cascade Range

Wayne Wallace is a legend of the Cascades, and out of all his exploits, none may be more epic than his solo first ascent of the mile-long Mongo Ridge—the south ridge of Mt. Fury’s west peak—deep in the Northern Pickets. Lani Chapko and I both had aspired to this epic climb for years.

In July 2022, over five days, Lani and I made the third ascent of Mongo Ridge. (Jeff and Priti Wright did the second ascent in 2021.) We also made the second ascent of the Pole of Remoteness, a gendarme on the ridge that was pre-named by longtime Cascades climber John Roper, who imagined it to be the hardest-to-reach point in the Lower 48. Like Wallace, we climbed it from the back (northeast) side via a 100’ pitch of super-chossy 5.7; the Wrights bypassed the Pole. In many ways, Mongo Ridge felt like a graduation climb in the Pickets for Lani and me. I was ready to go in search of my own Mongo.

As soon as we got back to civilization, I started hounding friends to join me for a potential first ascent. I had a short list of ideas. My old friend Joe Manning responded to the call, and the option that most interested both of us was the south ridge of Spectre Peak (7,880+’), on the western slope of the Northern Pickets.

Like Mongo Ridge, Spectre Peak demands a two-day approach. We went in via Hannegan Pass and Easy Ridge, and bivvied near the summit of Easy Peak. The next day we dropped to the Imperfect Impasse, then hiked up through Challenger Col, which provides access to the western slope of the range. From there it was a relatively straightforward cross-country traverse to the base of the west ridge of Phantom Peak (8,000+’), where we bivvied again.

We woke super early on the third day and finally reached the base of our climb as the sun was rising. From where we roped up, we mostly followed the ridge crest and found generally good gneiss, with short sections of extremely poor exfoliating rock. The crux came on the second pitch with a short bit of overhanging 5.9 choss blocks.

The most memorable part of the climb came after around 1,600’ of pitched climbing, where we had to weave in and out of narrow and bulbous, hoodoo-like towers that threatened to fall off and take us with them. They were soft and chalky, and felt eerily like being in Utah’s Fisher Towers. This section ended with a distinct tower, from which we made a 30m rappel. Next, we scrambled over to a ramp and simul-climbed mostly 4th and low 5th class (to 5.6) for another 600’ to the summit of Spectre Peak.

For the descent, we rambled down steep snow slopes to the east, benefiting from a heavy snow year and early season conditions. Our inspiration for the route name—Spirited Away (2,000, IV 5.9)—was the delicate ridge of hoodoo-like towers near the top of the climb. For a brief moment, it felt as though we were surrounded by spirits.

— Sam Boyce

Images



Joe Manning traversing slopes on the approach to Spectre Peak, with the west face of Crooked Thumb Peak (8,129') above.



Joe Manning starting up the first pitch of Spirited Away (2,000', IV 5.9), which climbs the south ridge of Spectre Peak in the Picket Range, North Cascades, Washington.



Joe Manning hanging out at a comfortable belay ledge above the third pitch during the first ascent of Spirited Away (2,000', IV 5.9) on the south ridge of Spectre Peak.



Joe Manning following pitch seven of Spirited Away (2,000', IV 5.9) on the south ridge of Spectre Peak. In the background, left to right, are Mt. Triumph (7,240+'), Mt. Despair (7,296'), and Mt. Crowder (7,082').



Joe Manning following pitch eight of Spirited Away (2,000', IV 5.9). Wayne Wallace and Mike Layton's 2006 route Haunted Wall (IV 5.9+) is visible at the top of the frame.



Joe Manning weaves between small hoodoo-esque gendarmes on pitch 12 of Spirited Away (2,000, IV 5.9).



Sam Boyce traversing below the west ridge of Phantom Peak. The west face of Spectre Peak is beyond, and the south ridge, taken by Spirited Away (2,000', IV 5.9), is near the right skyline.

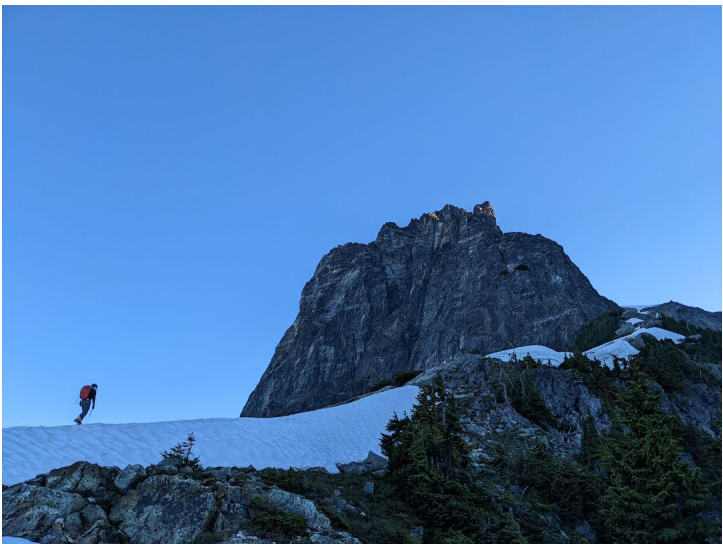


The west face of Spectre Peak in the Northern Pickets. The 2022 route generally followed the right

skyline (the south ridge).



Sam Boyce hanging out at the Phantom Ridge camp with the Southern Pickets in the background.



Sam Boyce making the final approach to the base of the south ridge of Spectre Peak.



Sam Boyce starting up the first pitch of Spirited Away (2,000', IV 5.9), which climbs the south ridge of Spectre Peak in the Picket Range, North Cascades, Washington.



Sam Boyce starting up the second pitch of Spirited Away (2,000', IV 5.9).



Sam Boyce leading the sixth pitch of Spirited Away (2,000', IV 5.9), with a false summit in the background.

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