



## AAC Publications

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### **East Twin Needle, North Buttress**

United States, Washington, Cascade Range

**Sam Boyce and I climbed the North Buttress of East Twin Needle—also known as the Thread of Gneiss, a name coined by John Roper in 1981—on July 31. The buttress rises 1,800' and required nine pitches of roped climbing, most of which were 250' or more with simul-climbing.**

I had tried this relatively remote and appealing line in the Southern Pickets before. A decade ago, Rolf Larson and I began on the buttress' left side, as had a handful of other unsuccessful parties over the years, but we bailed at a band of rotten rock several pitches up. In 2022, Sam and I started to the right of the buttress' toe.

After a bit more than six miles and 6,000' of vertical from the Lower Goodell Creek trailhead on day one, we made camp at a col near the Chopping Block on July 30. A lingering snowpack made the remaining approach relatively easy—for the Picket Range at least. The next morning, after traversing the snow, slabs, and talus of Crescent Creek Basin, we cramponed up to the Ottohorn-Himmelhorn col. Descending to the Mustard Glacier required one single-rope rap from an established station 150' below the col.

Gawking up at the steep and intimidating summit spires, we figured we would need a lot of time—and perhaps some aid—to find a way up. As a result, our route-finding choices down low favored efficiency. As it turns out, our concerns were largely unfounded.

Our climb began 100' below the mouth of the gully splitting the East and West Twin Needles. [This gully is a line called Thread of Ice (III A13), established by Steph Abegg and Wayne Wallace in 2009.] After belaying across a small crevasse, we gained East Twin Needle's North Buttress on its right side. A long simul-climbing pitch on glacial-flour-covered mid-fifth class was followed by another one with nasty gully travel and some fifth-class work-arounds. This landed us at a notch above the first tower on the buttress. Future parties should take the rib to the left of the gully to the top of the first tower; a very short rappel to the notch might be required.

With the price of admission paid, long stretches of solid and clean Skagit gneiss appeared, with the striking subsummit spire looming menacingly above. Pitches four through seven entailed enjoyable simul-climbing up to 5.8. A direct assault on the steep spire was tempting but looked difficult and time-consuming. I chose the line of least resistance: I climbed a chimney, made a leftward, rising traverse of a face, and then worked around and up an exposed are te to finish near East Twin's true summit. This long pitch was the proverbial sting in the tail, requiring careful and sometimes lichen-coated 5.9 moves—spicy and fun. Sam then scrambled to the summit at perhaps 5.6. We savored the stupendous views for a few moments, but were anxious to figure out the descent.

Getting down the 1,200' south face was moderately complex, but went faster than expected. We downclimbed and rappelled to Eye Col, the notch between East and West Twin Needles, then connected steep south-facing gullies via fourth-class down-scrambling, rappelling, snow travel, more scrambling, rapping, scrambling, and a final rap to gain Crescent Creek Basin. Once there, it was a quick romp back to our Chopping Block col camp.

The North Buttress (2,000', 5.9) on East Twin Needle offers a complete alpine experience. I highly recommend it.

– **Eric Wehrly**

## Images



The North Buttress (2,000', 5.9) of East Twin Needle, Picket Range, North Cascades, Washington.  
Jason Griffith



The North Buttress (2,000', 5.9) on East Twin Needle, Picket Range, in winter snow.



The North Buttress (2,000', 5.9) of East Twin Needle, Picket Range, North Cascades, Washington. The route follows the lower skyline on the left, and, where the rock steepens, travels left and up (out of view) behind the spire.



The toe of the North Buttress of East Twin Needle. Only the first three and a half pitches of the new route (2,000', 5.9) are visible.



Eric Wehrly begins pitch four on the North Buttress (2,000', 5.9) of East Twin Needle. The subsummit spire looms in the background.



Eric Wehrly on pitch six of the North Buttress (2,000', 5.9) of East Twin Needle. From his position, the route takes an exposed 5.7+ ramp leftward.



Eric Wehrly gains the airy 5.9 arête of the 60-meter eighth pitch, after climbing a chimney and making a rising traverse of a face mid-pitch.



Sam Boyce follows a few moves of 5.9 on pitch eight of the North Buttress (2,000', 5.9) of East Twin Needle, with the remote McMillan Creek Cirque in the background.



From the sharp summit of East Twin Needle, Sam Boyce enjoys the views of the Picket Range. The west and east summits of Mt. Fury flank him in the background.

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