



AAC Publications

Ptarmigan Towers, Tower Five, Between the Blinds

Colorado, Rocky Mountains, Rocky Mountain National Park

While reading Richard Rossiter's guidebook to Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP), I dug deep into the section on the park's less-frequented side—west of the Continental Divide—and in particular, the two pages on Ptarmigan Mountain (12,324') above Lake Nanita. Ptarmigan forms the westernmost point on a ridge attached to the better-known Mt. Alice, as well as the opportunity for an above-treeline traverse to Andrews Peak (12,565'). Per Rossiter, no routes had been reported on Tower Five of the imposing Ptarmigan Towers, which rise on Ptarmigan's east flank. The long approach (10.5 miles to the lake) has likely kept climber interest low, with only a handful of documented climbs on the towers.

In early May 2022, I pitched the idea of a short expedition in August to my friend Michael Alessi. We had met at a gym in Denver a few years earlier and have since climbed many alpine routes in RMNP together. When we reached the base of Tower Five on August 20, after a steep approach from our campsite, we found a path of least resistance up the unclimbed southeast face—what would become Between the Blinds (4 pitches, 5.9).

The 200-foot first pitch went at 5.9 through a hand-crack system to delicate face climbing, and then through multiple roofs to a ledge. We then followed obvious crack systems to the top on easier terrain, with some thoughtful and exposed moves. The rock quality was good and held gear well. The route took us around five hours, and the descent was via a walkoff down the north side and then a fourth-class gully on the west side of the face.

The west side of the park is remarkably different from the main areas of RMNP. There did not seem to be any evidence of previous climbs on the southeast face of Tower Five, and the other Ptarmigan Towers seem to have plenty of unclimbed terrain as well.

— Nic Lazzareschi

Images



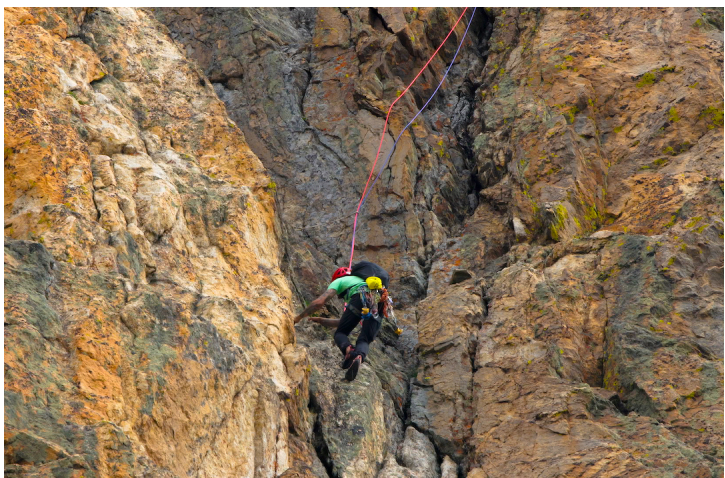
The impressive Ptarmigan Towers from Lake Nanita. Tower Five is on the far left. Only a few climbs have been documented on the towers' flanks, with room for plenty more for those willing to brave the nearly-11-mile approach.



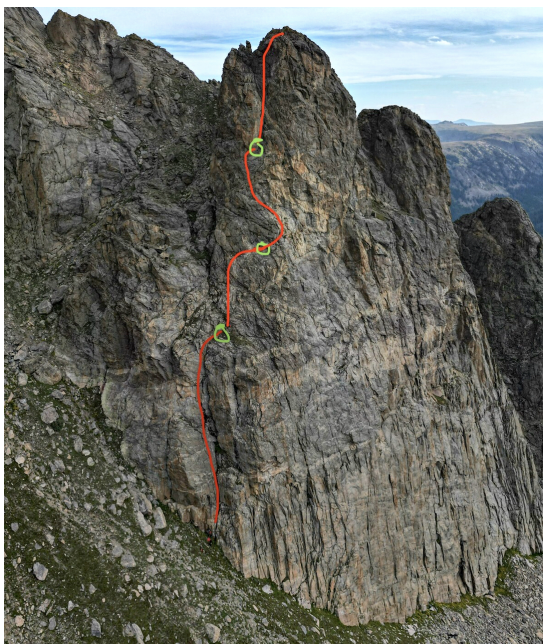
Michael Alessi and Nic Lazzareschi looking up at the Ptarmigan Towers in Rocky Mountain National Park.



Michael Alessi following pitch one (5.9) of Between the Blinds.



Nic Lazzareschi seconds pitch two of Between the Blinds.



An overview of Between the Blinds (4 pitches, 5.9) on Tower Five of the Ptarmigan Towers, Ptarmigan Mountain (12,324'), Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP), Colorado. The belays are represented by the green circles.



Another view of Tower Five in the Ptarmigan Towers, showing the potential on its crack-lined walls.

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