



## AAC Publications

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### Seahpo Peak, Tanuki Ridge

Washington, North Cascades

**The southeast ridge of Seahpo Peak is one of the longest continuous ridges in the continental United States.** Sprouting out of the Cascadian jungle, it rises more than 4,000' over 1.5 miles of horizontal travel before reaching the summit of 7,441' Seahpo (also known as Cloudcap Peak), east of Mt. Shuksan. The ridgeline continues on from there, becoming the Jagged Ridge (V 5.6), which leads directly west to Shuksan's ice cap. Considered together, the full ridge crosses roughly three miles of technical terrain and nearly 5,000' of vertical gain.

Despite its scale, this ridge—which is the southern of two distinct eastern ridges on Seahpo—is only visible from a couple of remote vantage points. I first saw it in 2022 on a trip into the Northern Pickets. I immediately made plans with my partner Lani Chapko to mount an attempt.

Our first try on what we came to call Tanuki Ridge was in September 2022. We approached via the Crystal Creek basin, where the underbrush had all been trampled as if dozens of bears had rolled through. This and the epic smoke that summer gave the valley a desolate feeling, reminding us of the animated film *Pom Poko*, which features the Japanese raccoon dogs called *tanuki*, known to be tricksters. It felt like the *tanuki* were messing with us. Foiled by a late-season heat wave and the intense wildfire smoke, we bailed after climbing around 800' of the lower ridge.

In July 2023, we tried again, this time from the north, via the Ruth Mountain–Icy Peak Traverse. Unprotectable slabs (which looked like 5.10 X) prevented us from reaching the toe of the ridge; instead, we tried to find a way up the north side, only to find more featureless and unprotectable rock. We bailed before even touching the ridge crest.

We set aside more time in late August for a third attempt. The Cascades had an extremely thin snowpack, so we were not expecting to find water or snow on the route. For this reason, we recruited a third climber to distribute the water load during the climb. We convinced Lani's friend Nick Gonzales to come with only a couple days of notice and once again set out.

Starting our approach from the south, we headed up the Baker River Trail to the fork with Crystal Creek. From here it was a mild cross-country bushwhack up into the Crystal Creek basin. We followed occasional remnants of an ancient, decommissioned trail—a huge help. Once in the basin, we quested uphill through thick undergrowth to a nice bivy immediately below the toe of the ridge.

The first 2,000' of the climb ascended a distinct tower, which we named Tanuki Tower. It was the definitive crux and most “Cascadian” part of the route. There was plenty of 5.9 R jungle climbing, reminiscent of nearby blue-collar classics such as the 1957 Northeast Rib of Johannesburg or the north face of North Index.

Beyond Tanuki Tower, the ridge backed off for a long section of scrambling with occasional steep pitches in and out of notches. This lower-angle section brought us to a large gendarme that marked the start of the more sustained upper ridge. We found a comfortable bivy that miraculously granted access to a glacier on the south flank of the ridge, providing a much-needed water source.

The upper route had sustained, moderate, and classic ridge climbing on clean rock. We made it to the

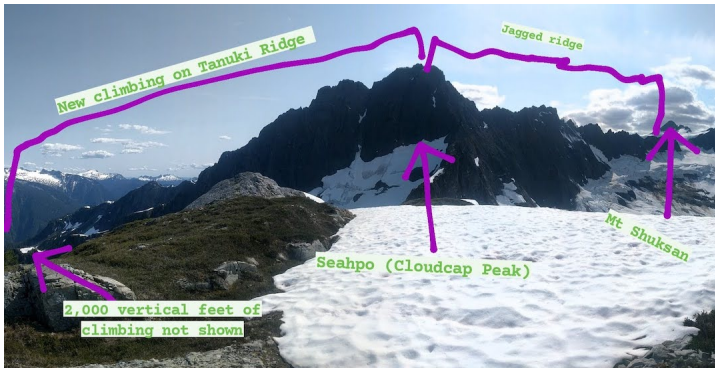
summit of Seahpo around noon on our third day. We had a long debate about whether to continue along the Jagged Ridge or to descend Seahpo's standard east ridge route. Our biggest concern was icy glacier conditions, given our minimal snow equipment. We decided to continue, accepting that we might have to pitch out or rappel terrain that we would normally run across with the appropriate kit. That day we made it about halfway along the Jagged Ridge, stopping at an exposed bivy that was just big enough for the three of us.

On day four, the rest of the Jagged Ridge went smoothly, though the sections that are normally snow traverses were instead extremely loose gravel slopes. Once at the ridge's terminus, we decided it would be foolish to head to the top of Shuksan with our minimalist gear. The glaciers were almost entirely blue ice; even the Sulphide Glacier looked to be an ice climb. We traversed slabs below the Crystal and Sulphide glaciers to reach the Sulphide Glacier route and eventually the Shannon Ridge Trail, at the end of which Nick kindly offered to run the eight miles back to the Baker River trailhead to retrieve the car.

We climbed 30 pitches on Tanuki Ridge (V 5.9 R) to the summit of Seahpo, and another eight pitches on the Jagged Ridge traverse. Climbed together, they are a solid Grade VI. I feel it is one of the proudest lines in the Cascades and recommend it wholeheartedly for those in search of an adventure.

— **Sam Boyce**

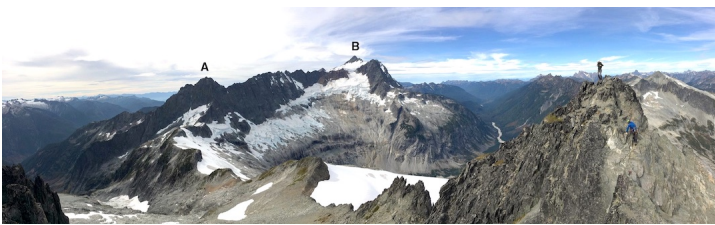
## Images



The Tanuki Ridge (V 5.9 R), leading to the summit of Seahpo Peak, and the Jagged Ridge (V 5.6), leading to Mt. Shuksan, in the North Cascades, Washington.



Lani Chapko following one of the 5.9 pitches on Tanuki Tower on her and Sam Boyce's first attempt of the ridge in September 2022.



View from Icy Peak showing the full Tanuki Ridge, starting with the southeast ridge of Seahpo Peak. Beginning in lower left, the ridge gains more than 4,000 feet to reach the 7,441-foot summit of Seapho (A). From there, the Jagged Ridge continues west to the ice slopes below 9,131-foot Mt. Shuksan (B).



Lani Chapko and Nick Gonzales on the summit of Tanuki Tower, about to begin the long scrambling section of the Tanuki Ridge.



Lani Chapko leading pitch 18 on the upper part of Tanuki Ridge.





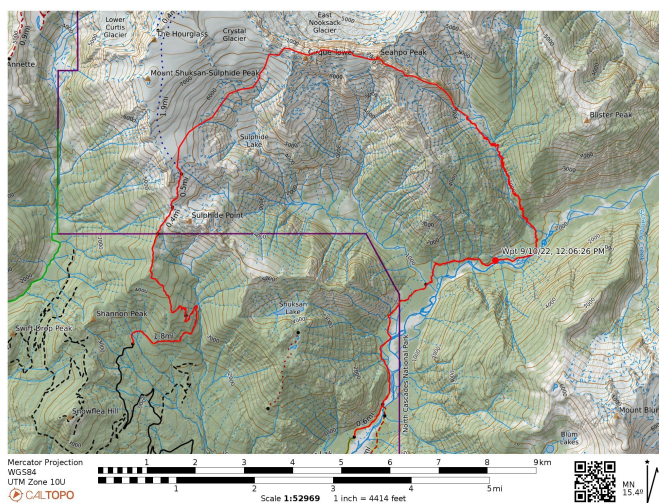
Lani Chapko following one of the many knife-edge traverses on the upper part of Tanuki Ridge.



Looking across to the start of the Jagged Ridge traverse, seen from the bottom of the rappels off Seahpo Peak.



Sam Boyce leading pitch 17 on the upper part of Tanuki Ridge, with Nick Gonzales belaying.



Map showing the approach and descent from the Tanuki Ridge and Jagged Ridge.

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