



AAC Publications

Lake Ann Buttress, Central Pillar

Washington, North Cascades

With world-class alpine climbing right out the back door, my enduring curiosity about the Lake Ann Buttress struck friends as lunacy. The comments included “The rock is choss” and “Beckey said it’s repulsive.” But after staring up at the 1,000’ buttress year after year during trips to guide the Fisher Chimneys route on Mt. Shuksan, I couldn’t hold back—I had to check it out.

One of the larger subalpine walls around, the south-facing Lake Ann Buttress on Shuksan Arm gets passed each summer by hundreds of climbers en route to the Fisher Chimneys and by thousands of hikers, yet there is little information about the few prior routes. The first recorded ascent, according to Fred Beckey’s *Cascade Alpine Guide*, was by Les MacDonald and Elfrieda Pigou in 1960. He refers to it as the Center-West Route—“British grade V; difficult; 20 pitons used on first attempt.” Per the guidebook, MacDonald added a second line in “1964 or 1965” called the Yellow Slab Variation, named after “a route on [Scafell] Pike in the English Lakes District.” MacDonald told Beckey, “We Britishers never give up, importing ideas, tea, and sentimental names of climbs.” Beckey and Tom Stewart put up the only other known line on the wall, the Center Route (1,000’, III 5.8 and some aid), in 1965.

After a couple of scouting hikes to identify potential new lines, on September 10, 2021, I was joined by Timmy Rickert at the Lake Ann Trail head for an overnight trip to make our first attempt up what I had taken to calling the Central Pillar. We scrambled up fourth-class terrain for 150’ to reach the start of the first pitch. From there, we free climbed six pitches up to 5.10a/b before clouds moved in and rain forced us to retreat to our camp near Lake Ann. Though it is difficult to tell based on the limited information available, I believe our first pitch follows the same “open-book” feature Beckey identified as the start of Center Route, after which we exited the corner left and entered new territory.

My next attempt, with Matt Stahlberg, was in October 2021, but we retreated from the top of pitch three due to a preexisting joint injury Matt had sustained when he was a professional strongman competitor and bodybuilder.

Success finally came on October 4, 2022, in a single-day outing with Nate George. We completed the route by adding five additional pitches. Too tired to send the most difficult of these new pitches, we French-freed sections that felt like they would be about 5.10b. Relying on trad gear, pitons, and natural anchors, we rappelled the route to the top of pitch five and then continued rapping down climber’s left of the original line to reach the ground.

The Central Pillar (1,000’, 10 pitches, IV 5.10b R A0) contains mostly good rock, washed clean by runoff down the cliff. There are some moderate runouts, but nothing death-defying.

— Jere Burrell

Images



The Central Pillar (1,000', 10 pitches, IV 5.10b R A0) on Lake Ann Buttress, a prominent wall to the northeast of Lake Ann, near Mt. Shuksan. Jere Burrell and Nate George climbed the route, the fourth on the wall, in October 2022. The route likely shared the first pitch with Center Route (Beckey-Stewart, 1965) before breaking left toward the main buttress.

Article Details

Author	Jere Burrell
Publication	AAJ
Volume	65
Issue	98
Page	115
Copyright Date	2024
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions