



## AAC Publications

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### **Cutthroat Peak, East Face, The Swarm**

Washington, North Cascades

**On July 3, Alex Perz and I set out to climb a new route on the east face of Cutthroat Peak (8,050'), near Washington Pass.** We hiked two miles from Highway 20, then cut right into the large basin to the east of the peak. Alex, having never climbed a new route, graciously offered to go into support mode for the day.

The first two pitches were low fifth class and ended at the large ledge system at the base of the main headwall. From here, the quality of the climbing improved drastically.

For the first 30' of the main wall, we climbed a shallow, left-facing dihedral. This was the only part of our route that shared terrain with the Southeast Corner (IV 5.11c), also known as Firefighter, a route put up by Bryan Burdo and Andy Cairns in 1985. [Editor's Note: Dale Bard, Yvon Chouinard, and John Cunningham established an earlier route farther right on the face, in 1976, simply called the East Face (6 pitches, III 5.10).] At the top of the dihedral, where the 1985 route continued up and right, I stepped down left to the base of a long, perfect splitter that was completely full of plants. I aided through the plants for 30', then cleaned them all out of the crack with a nut tool as Alex lowered me. From the stance at the base of the splitter, I then pulled the rope and freed this excellent pitch. It began with perfect finger locks and gradually widened; at a point where it suddenly pinched down, I reached right and transferred to yet another perfect splitter that took me to a small stance.

The climbing above this pitch was consistently difficult but on good rock with ample protection. The crux pitch was in a large dihedral. While leading it, I stepped out of the corner in desperation and couldn't get back in. Here, I placed the only protection bolt of the route, then climbed the dynamic crux moves with the heavy drill hanging from a sling around my shoulder. Subsequent parties reported that staying in the dihedral was easier and safer.

A couple easier, adventurous pitches took us to the top of the South Buttress. We tagged the summit of Cutthroat and then descended the South Buttress route.

Alex and I climbed The Swarm (850', 5.11c) in a single day, including placing bolted anchors on lead for every pitch above 5.9 and cleaning loose rock and vegetation. It is a high-quality route that avoids the crowds just south at the Liberty Bell group.

— Justin Willis

## Images



Photo-topo for The Swarm on the east face of Cutthroat Peak.



Alex Perz following the splitter on pitch three of The Swarm (850', 5.11c) on the east face of Cutthroat Peak.



The Swarm (850', 5.11c) on the east face of Cutthroat Peak. Two prior routes climbed the face farther to the right.

Article Details

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