



Prusik Peak, Prayer for a Friend, Free Ascent

Washington, Stuart Range

Photo by Victoria Kohner-Flanagan

Prayer for a Friend, a striking line on the southwest face of Prusik Peak, had been waiting for a free ascent for 20 years, ever since Fitz Cahall opened the route at 5.12- C1 in 2003, along with Becca Cahall and Aaron Webb. The only pitch that didn't go free then was the striking headwall splitter, a feature that anyone who has climbed Prusik's

West Ridge (4 pitches, 5.7) has goggled at: beautiful, black-and-white-checked rock, speckled with bright green and orange lichen, slightly overhanging—and split by a singular finger crack. I first saw it in 2019 as I was downclimbing the West Ridge; I took a picture and kept it as my phone background for the next four years.

The lower pitches on the route are stellar in their own way—mostly technical 5.11 and one pitch of 5.12—but all ten days I spent on the route, spread over two seasons, were consumed by the final splitter. Lots of this was spent top-rope soloing, trying to figure out exactly how to hold each of the sloping locks. The pitch begins with some exciting 5.11+ up to a bolt and a crimp, where you can shake out, followed by 19 hand movements and three gear placements. Some final easier stemming leads to the top.

Fitz established the route with minimal bolts, but it was made safer (with Cahall's permission) by Nik Berry, who worked on freeing the route and added a number of solid bolts in 2018. Even with these in place, the route still has a heads-up feel.

My free ascent was in imperfect style: I started from the ground, supported by Will Vidler, on October 5 and sent all the pitches to the base of the crux (onsighting except for a foot slip on a 5.11 pitch), and then gave the headwall a go in the sun. I two-hung it. We topped out and went back to camp.

The next day, we soloed up the West Ridge and rapped in to the crux pitch. I tried it two times, placing all the gear on lead, and sent on the second try. Obviously the best way to do the route would be a single-day push, but this was the best I could do at the time. I am excited for someone to improve upon my style. Prayer for a Friend (600', 7 pitches, 5.14a) is an experience not to be missed for those up to it.

—Adrian Vanoni

Images



Adrian Vanoni on the crux sixth pitch of Prayer for a Friend (600', 5.14a), on the southwest face of Prusik Peak.

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