



## AAC Publications

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### **Rotten Monolith, North Ridge, Too Late to Say Sorry**

Idaho, Sawtooth Mountains

**The legendary duo of Fred Beckey and Louis Stur made the first ascent of Rotten Monolith in 1961 via its 150' west face.** In a report for the AAJ, Stur described decomposing stone and wrote that the "conspicuous tower...presents a formidable impression from the east" and rises "at least 500 feet, smooth, perpendicular and holdless all the way." I read these words ten years ago, after the east face first caught my attention from Idaho Highway 75, and they were enough to make me forget about the mountain for a decade.

In May, when Brad Ward and I stood on the summit of nearby Mt. Heyburn (10,229'), I finally got an up-close glimpse of the east face of Rotten Monolith. What we saw was beautiful Sawtooth stone, more like 1,000' tall than 500', and split by multiple crack systems.

Returning in September, I made a solo trip to shuttle gear for an attempt. Four hours after stepping off the Redfish boat shuttle, and after a 4.3-mile and 3,300' vert approach, I stood at the base of a true Sawtooth gem with no established routes—possibly due to Stur's discouraging words, possibly because of the difficulty of reaching the base.

On September 28, Brad and I returned with more gear and bivvied at the base. The next morning, we started up a crack system that generally followed the north ridge; this seemed like it had a better chance of leading to the summit than options more on the face. We found pitch after pitch of excellent crack climbing, mostly in the 5.10 to 5.10+ range, on quite good rock. The fifth pitch was the crux; I aided a short section, but Brad followed it free and suggested 5.11a. The sixth pitch traversed climber's right for 60' and was the only time the route left the ridge.

After nine quality pitches, we finally encountered the horrendous ball-bearing rock to which Stur had alluded. Our tenth pitch was intense and gearless, although not steep. I scooped away sand and gravel, and sometimes kicked steps. I wished I had ice tools. The pitch finished at a small gendarme on the ridge, around 200' below the summit. Although the sandy summit pitches appeared climbable (likely with aid), they did not look appealing in the late evening light. We chose to call it a route. We rappelled our line with some difficulty and reached camp in the dark.

Brad had failed to ask many questions before agreeing to try the route—which, based on other things I've gotten him into, might be some sort of mental defense mechanism. I waited until we were committed to the approach trail before sharing the trials of Stur and Beckey—the insanely bad rock, the 3,300' slog, the lack of water where I planned to camp. And by then it was, well, Too Late to Say Sorry (800', 10 pitches, IV 5.10+ C1).

— Matt Ward

## Images



Too Late to Say Sorry on the north ridge of the Rotten Monolith, Sawtooth Mountains, Idaho.



Brad Ward climbing the first pitch of Too Late to Say Sorry.



Brad Ward finding excellent rock on the third pitch of Too Late to Say Sorry (800', 10 pitches, IV 5.10+ C1).

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