



AAC Publications

Devils Leap, The Fall of Satan

Wyoming, Bighorn Basin

In early May, Zach Lentsch and I set our sights on a massive and unclimbed sandstone cliff near the town of Shell, just west of the Bighorn Mountains. Standing roughly 700' tall, Devils Leap is certainly the largest sandstone cliff in Wyoming, and the top 200' of the feature is separated from the hillside behind it by a cavernous chimney. However, with rock reminiscent of Utah's Fisher Towers, we were ill-prepared on our first try. After one grueling pitch, we realized we needed more gear, more ropes, and more time.

We returned a week later and started up one of the largest weaknesses on the south face of the buttress. Zach dispatched two excellent leads up to 5.10+ C3 on very soft rock. I took the lead for the next two pitches through extremely steep terrain, with wild open-book climbing and lots of sand. At dark, we left our ropes fixed and slept at the car, just a half mile away. The next morning we jugged back up, eager for what looked to be enjoyable cracks. Though the rock improved for a short while, the quality quickly declined and we found ourselves, again, climbing daintily over extremely loose ground.

Before too long, we arrived at the base of the final chimney separating the "tower" from the hillside behind it. As I began up, I saw something white sticking out of the back of the chimney. Lo and behold, it was an American bison horn. We realized the Leap may have been an ancient bison jump—a location where Native American tribes of the region would, on horseback, funnel bison herds to the top of a cliff and run them off as a means of efficient food gathering. A bison must have fallen into the chimney, where it has remained for well over 100 years. I continued on, making sure to not touch or disturb the horn.

The rock again became atrocious. Both sides of the chimney's final 15' consisted of overhanging stacks of sharp limestone blocks the size of footballs. Feet dangling in space, I jammed my body through the rubble and squeezed to the top of the tower, where I could find not even the remotest possibility for an anchor. I climbed back into the chimney and gave Zach an uncomfortable body belay, yelling to him to please not fall. Zach, being the choss-wrangling expert that he is, did not fall.

Luckily, the descent was casual: We were able to simply step over the chimney that separates the tower from the hillside and walk back to the car.

We would like to go back and free the route someday. Each anchor is bolted, and we placed a few protection bolts where absolutely necessary. Meanwhile, The Fall of Satan (700', 7 pitches, 5.10+ C3) is an excellent adventure in a wild setting.

— Justin Willis

Images



Justin Willis leading steep terrain on some of the highest quality rock on The Fall of Satan, Devils Leap, Wyoming.



Justin Willis following a 5.4 X section on the second-to-last pitch on the Devils Leap.



The ancient bison horn that Justin Willis came across while starting up the final pitch chimney on The Fall of Satan, the first ascent of Devils Leap. The climbers speculated the Leap might have been an ancient bison jump, where Native Americans forced bison over cliffs as a means of efficient food gathering.



The Fall of Satan (700', 7 pitches, 5.10+ C3) on Devils Leap, Wyoming. Zach Lentsch is barely visible at the top of pitch one.

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