



AAC Publications

Camp Bird Road, Dark Side Wall, Pride Is the Devil

Colorado, San Juan Mountains, Ouray Area

Across Canyon Creek from Camp Bird Road, above Ouray, is a forbidding wall, up to 425m high, that locals affectionately call the Dark Side. It never sees the light. Legends such as Steve House, Hayden Kennedy, Jeff Lowe, and Charlie Fowler all left their marks on this wall. More recently, Noah McKelvin, Phil Wortman, and Scott Turpin upped the ante with their 2021 testpiece, Drop the Mic (10 pitches, V 5.11- M8 R, [AAJ 2022](#)). Since 2021, I'd climbed three new routes on the Dark Side, but all toward the margins, where it's shorter. For a while I had been eyeing a long, faint system of corners just left of the classic Bird Brain Boulevard (IV WI5 M5, Fowler-Lowe-Wilford, 1985). On February 20, 2023, with an okay window in the avalanche forecast, I convinced Jonathan Zaugg to attempt the line. His only condition was that I lead every pitch.

The route begins to the left of BBB's chimney system in the right-hand of two vertical orange grooves. Moderate climbing up a left-facing corner and across a run-out face brought us to a right-facing dihedral. Pitch two was wonderful: 45m of turf sticks, jamming, and a steep, pocketed finish.

After traversing right from the pitch-two belay, I quested up a snow-filled groove for around 30m before finding a decent piton placement. I pulled rightward through a bulge, slung a dead bush, tooled further right, slung another dead bush, and scanned the face above me: no gear in sight. Deep breaths and some tenuous sticks in thin, semi-frozen, dinner-plate-sized blobs of turf plastered to the wall took me to the end of our 70m rope. Jonathan followed and remarked upon reaching the anchor, "I'm glad I'm not leading any of this!"

Pitch four was a right-facing dihedral and ramp system. I placed two pieces in 35m and then, in a hole big enough to sit in, slammed home five more for an anchor, relishing the security of feeling solidly attached to the wall, if only briefly. Jonathan followed and I soon launched into pitch five. I ran it out about seven meters up a slab, chopped choss out of the crack to create a poor #3 cam placement, and then another seven meters later found myself standing on a ledge... looking up at the most terrifying terrain thus far. A bottomed-out seam in a dihedral ran for at least 10m before I could see pods that might take some small gear. I relied on all the gear trickery I'd ever learned to climb that dihedral. At the top of it, I peered over a snow mushroom at the face above and could see nowhere to build even a meager anchor. I considered sinking my tools as best I could into the frozen moss and rapping off those, but thought better of it. Instead, still below the mushroom, I gingerly carved through it, hoping I might find some gear beneath. Without warning it gave way, almost taking me with it. In the newly exposed section of rock, I found a short crack that would take an okay #1 and #.75, as well as a bad Specter. I glanced at my harness: The only three pieces of gear I had left were a #1, a #.75, and a Specter. Maybe there is a God...

By the time I finished pitch five, the crux of the route, it was dark. To save time, Jonathan juggled the pitch. He was stoked to be moving again after over two hours of freezing, but the respite was brief. As I climbed the next pitch—once again horribly run-out; I got just one piece of gear in 35m—he endured a miserable and scary hanging belay, as spindrift funneled down on top of him. The seventh and final pitch was a 20m chimney choked with a car-sized snow mushroom and a cornice topout. When he followed, it took Jonathan just three light kicks to send the entire mushroom down.

We rappelled the treed buttress left of the route (standard BBB rappels) and, after a few hours of stuck ropes and shivering, got back to the car at 2 a.m.

Assigning a grade to this climb seems futile: While it might be able to capture the physical difficulty, it could never speak to the insecurity or seriousness. Forced to give it a mixed grade, I would call it M6 X. For reference, not one of the pitches on Man Yoga, an M8 testpiece on the Stanley Headwall in the Canadian Rockies, took me half as long to lead as the crux of this route. It probably shouldn't be repeated without a bolt kit. I called the route *Pride Is the Devil*, a reference to the J. Cole song whose name and lyrics I reflected upon after the experience. [In February 2023, Faust and Jay Karst also put up a 220m line on the same buttress, called 3 Nil. The route is poorly protected and not recommended.]

— **Charlie Faust**

Images



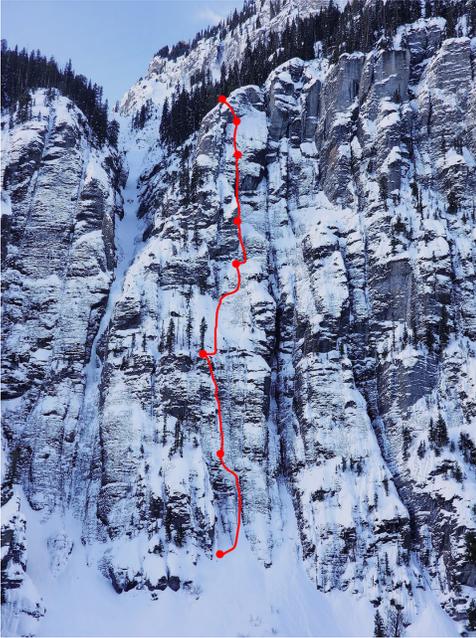
Charlie Faust leads pitch two of Pride is the Devil, one of the few sections of the route with well-protected climbing.



Charlie Faust leading pitch five, the crux of the route, which involved dangerously run-out climbing and a collapsing snow mushroom.



Jonathan Zaugg following the first pitch of Pride is the Devil.



Pride is the Devil (310m, 7 pitches, V 5.9 M6 X) on the Dark Side Wall, above Ouray, in Colorado's San Juan Mountains. The classic Bird Brain Boulevard (Fowler-Lowe-Wilford, 1985) ascends the chimney system just to the right. The Ribbon ice climb is to the left.

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