



AAC Publications

Boston Peak, First Winter Ascent

Washington, North Cascades

Eric Gilbertson on Boston Peak's summit ridge during the peak's first winter ascent. The summit is visible in the background. Photo by Nick Roy.

By 2024, Boston Peak (8,883') was likely the tallest peak in Washington that had never been climbed in winter. Located in North Cascades National Park, it is usually climbed in summer via the fourth-class east face. I'd photographed all sides of the peak in winter during other climbing trips, and the west face appeared to hold the best prospects for a winter route. The west face was first climbed in September 1956 by Keith Anderson and John Shonle, but, other than the starting point, their exact route is not described in their report.

Cascade River Road, the approach to Boston Peak, is notorious for being blocked by many large fallen trees during the winter. In early February, I chainsawed out trees on the road to prepare for a quick approach. On February 10, Nick Roy and I started shortly after midnight from the Eldorado gate. We strapped skis on our bikes and Nick towed me (on my regular bike) behind his e-bike to snowline, about three miles up.

We skinned six miles to the Quien Sabe Glacier at the base of the west face of Boston Peak, then climbed steep snow to the higher of two gullies (the next gully farther east and above the start of the Anderson-Shonle route). We then climbed five pitches of steep rime ice and snow, using rock protection on the walls of gullies and occasionally hooking rock edges with our tools. Our route crossed to the north end of the face to a rock overhang, then ascended directly up to the north ridge. We followed the exposed—but thankfully uncorniced—snowy ridge to the top. We did 200m of roped climbing.

With a shovel, we dug out the enormous, aluminum-clad summit register that dates to the 1960s and signed in. (It is the oldest register in place on a Bulger List peak—Washington's 100 highest peaks.) For the descent, we decided against the standard south ridge rappel route because of the expected difficulty of excavating anchors buried under the snow. Instead, we downclimbed our ascent route, staying roped up and placing protection. We then skied down the Quien Sabe Glacier and to our bikes, arriving back at the trailhead at sunset.

—Eric Gilbertson

Six More First Winter Ascents: Boston Peak was one of seven first winter ascents of peaks on the Bulger List that Eric Gilbertson completed with various partners in 2024. The others, all climbed from January to March, were Monument Peak, Blackcap Mountain, Horseshoe Peak, Mt. Rahm, Mt. Custer, and Flora Mountain. As of the end of 2024, Gilbertson had completed 73 of the 100 Bulger peaks in winter.

Images



Eric Gilbertson approaching the west face of Boston Peak in February 2024.



Eric Gilbertson on Boston Peak's summit ridge during the peak's first winter ascent. The summit is visible in the background.



In red, the first winter ascent and possible new route on the west face of Boston Peak, completed on February 11, 2024, by Eric Gilbertson and Nick Roy. In green, the beginning of the 1956 first ascent route of the west face; the exact route followed in 1956 is unknown.

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