



AAC Publications

Flinsch Peak, North Face, Loaded for Bear

Montana, Lewis Range, Glacier National Park

Loaded for Bear (IV 5.8) on north face of Flinsch Peak. Photo by NPS / Jacob W. Frank.

It started with a photo taken on a gray day during an overnight ski trip in March 2021. A friend and I had skinned into Old Man Lake. While the skiing wasn't great, the north ridge of Flinsch Peak (9,225') hung over our camp dramatically. As the clouds scuttled across the sky, I snapped the shot. Not long after, I sent it to Adam Clark.

Fast-forward to October 2024. Despite talking about it for a few years, Adam and I had never gone up to Flinsch. A great trip to Canada in August proved we had a partnership built for this: both dads (me a new one) with similar risk tolerances, plus a simmering obsession with what that ridge might be like. So we made a plan, met up at 3 a.m. on October 6, and drove over to the Two Medicine area.

Climbing a north face in October means some serious guesswork when selecting gear. Adam probably hoped the face would be covered in ice, while I still clung to notions of rock shoes. We left the car with a double rack of rock gear plus crampons. The pile led Adam to quip, "We're loaded for bear."

We approached six miles up the Dry Fork Trail. The Old Man Lake campground was closed due to bear activity, so we detoured early, crossing the creek and gaining ground along the south side of the lake.

The pillars and steep terrain on the northeast ridge of Flinsch looked menacing, so we refocused our attention onto the adjacent north face. We headed for a weakness on the left side, pulling out the rope as the angle kicked up. Three pitches of talus ledges and short steps got us to the main show: the algal reef. (Anyone familiar with climbing in Glacier knows this formation: a limestone band in the mountain landscape that, on many ascents, proves to be the steepest section of the route.) We followed a left-trending weakness through the reef at well-protected 5.8.

From there, we simul-climbed right to reach a large dihedral system. The climbing was engaging, occasionally wet, and required at least one step over Jenga blocks that mercifully stuck together. After four more pitches up to 5.7, I belayed Adam up to the summit cairn, still Loaded for Bear (IV 5.8). We went down on the standard trail on Flinsch's south face.

Adam has a good bead on the undocumented and oral history of alpinism in northwest Montana and has high confidence that ours was the first line on the north face of Flinsch.

—David Steele

Images



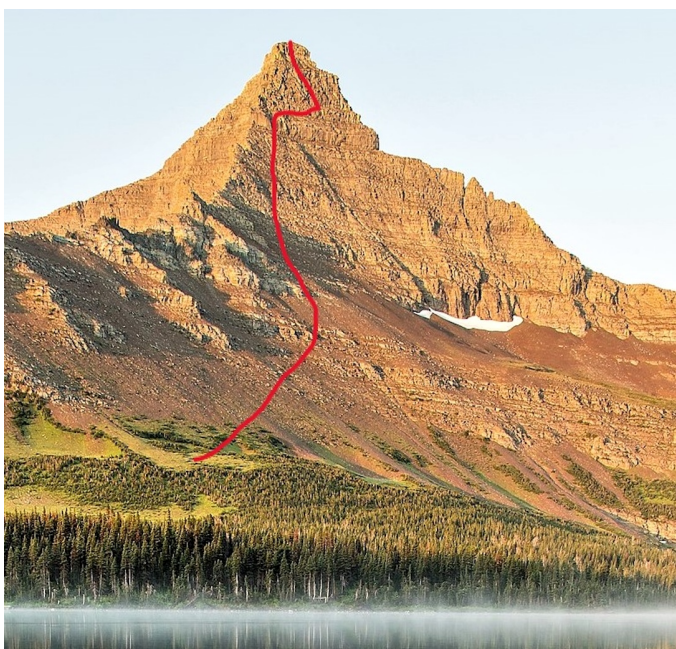
David Steele leads a pitch through the algal reef formation on the north face of Flinsch Peak during the first ascent of Loaded for Bear (IV 5.8).



Loaded for Bear (IV 5.8) on north face of Flinsch Peak, from Oldman Lake, in Glacier National Park, Montana.



Adam Clark approaching the north face of Flinsch Peak, in Glacier National Park, climbed by David Steele and Adam Clark on October 6, 2024, via a line they named Loaded for Bear (IV 5.8).



Loaded for Bear (IV 5.8) on north face of Flinsch Peak, from Oldman Lake, in Glacier National Park, Montana.

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