



AAC Publications

Grand Teton, Wish You Were Here

Wyoming, Teton Range

In the Teton Range, it's hard to assume that any feature you see wasn't already climbed decades ago. But several years ago, after spotting a line on a clean swath of an east-facing wall on the Grand Teton, just right of the classic route Gold Face and left of the seldom-traveled It's Not A Chimney on the Burgette Arête, it appeared I had found just that. A series of cracks ran through a shield of golden rock toward a massive roof, followed by more crack systems that ended at the base of the Golden Stair on Exum Ridge—and there was no documented route there.

The line of Wish You Were Here (III 5.10-) on the Grand Teton, as seen on the photo-topo for the Gold Face route in the Climber's Guide to the Teton Range.

In July, during an extended stay in the Tetons, the stars aligned in that special way you can never really plan for. Sitting in Lupine Meadows one evening, sipping scotch and telling stories with friends, Renny Jackson and I discussed this mysterious section of wall while scrolling through my old photos. The closest documented route in the vicinity was a variation to It's Not A Chimney, put up by Mark Whiton and John Berry in 1990, but that was presumably far right of the cracks I pointed out. Renny wasn't saying this section of wall was unclimbed (how could he know definitively?), but he agreed the rock was probably excellent and he didn't know of any attempts. That was good enough for me.

That night, I sent a text message to my good friend Michael Gardner, explaining my idea for a new route on the Grand. The last time we had roped up together was in 2019, to finish his own new line on the Grand, Wooden Ships (III 5.10- R), a memorial route to his father, George Gardner. Wooden Ships added four independent pitches left of Lower Exum on the south face of the Grand Teton. This time I hoped to establish a route as a memorial to my own father, J Lincoln Zeilman, who passed away in a paragliding accident in 2020.

On July 24, we met at the Lower Saddle, drank some coffee, and sorted through the rack. It was heavy with the addition of a bolt kit, a hammer, a handful of pins, and a tagline. We pulled my phone out and examined the pixelated features of the wall, then shouldered the packs and trudged uphill. We passed beneath the approach ramp for Lower Exum and scrambled into the large, bowl-like feature below the Beckey Couloir and the beginning of Burgette Arête and It's Not a Chimney. Our line would be on the east face of the Exum Ridge.

Some hours later, Michael and I sprawled out on the spacious ledge at the start of Upper Exum Ridge, having just climbed three rope-stretcher pitches of new terrain. In general, the rock quality was exceptional and the climbing remained engaging, yet relatively moderate. During our ascent, we found no evidence of prior passage and left no fixed pitons or bolts. We named the route Wish You Were Here (III 5.10-) in memory of my dad. From the top of our new line, we scrambled up Exum Ridge and summited just one day shy of the 100th anniversary of Paul Petzoldt's first climb of the Grand.

As fate would have it, this also ended up being the last day I ever spent with Michael. A few months after our ascent, he passed away on Jannu East in Nepal. I miss you buddy, and I wish you were here.

— Vic Zeilman

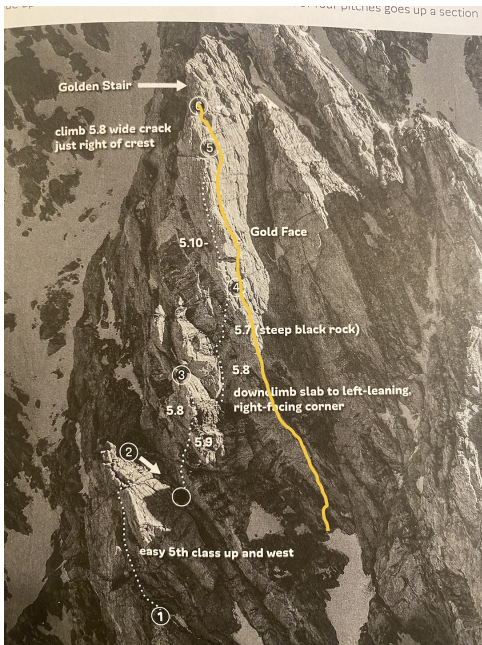
Images



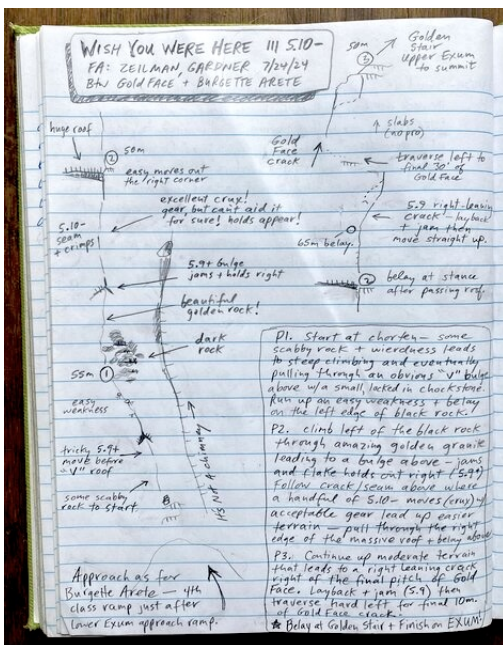
Michael Gardner leads the 5.10- second pitch of Wish You Were Here (III 5.10-) on the Grand Teton, Teton Range, Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming.



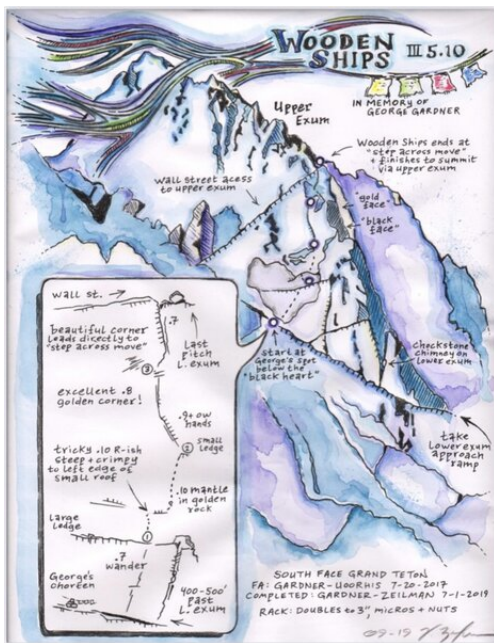
The line of Wish You Were Here (III 5.10-) on the Grand Teton.



The line of Wish You Were Here (III 5.10-) on the Grand Teton, as seen on the photo-topo for the Gold Face route in the Climber's Guide to the Teton Range.



Topo for the route Wish You Were Here (Gardner-Zeilman, 2024) on the Grand Teton.



Topo for the route Wooden Ships (Gardner-Zeilman, 2019) on the Grand Teton.

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