



AAC Publications

THE MOUTH, HIGH PLAINS HOEDOWN AND THE EAST FACE

Wyoming, Absaroka Range

Start of the East Face. Photo: Curtis Baird Collection

In the autumn of 2021, along with Rachel and Gabe Skiera, I headed to Clarks Fork Canyon in the Absaroka Range to check out an area called the Mouth, about 25 miles north of Cody, where a crew of climbers had recently developed several bolted multi-pitch lines (AAJ 2022). That fall and in April 2022, we established two long routes.

Over October 27–29, 2021, we put up High Plains Hoedown (1,500', 12 pitches, 5.10), between M11 (22 pitches, 5.11c C0) and Colter's Rib (12 pitches, 5.10a, Lightner-Lilygren-Vail), the former also climbed that same fall. Due to the nature of the rock, most of the protection is bolts, but a light rack could help with some of the runouts.

On April 7, 2022, Gabe and I were back in Wyoming, with an eye toward climbing the wall looming beyond and above the established Mouth routes. To our knowledge, the wall had never been climbed to the crest of the ridge. Our plan was to climb the first ten pitches of High Plains Hoedown and then break right, following complex terrain of third and fourth class, to reach the base of the east face slab. (This slab is behind a tower called Colter's Spire.) Attempting it in alpine style, we brought bivy gear. After quickly dispatching High Plains Hoedown, we found our way to the base of the east face.

Here we found significantly different rock—a lot more choss. We had brought a limited supply of bolts, so we tried to stick to natural features, placing bolts where absolutely necessary. We climbed a slabby corner that terminated on a big ledge. The rock in the corner was terrible, so we climbed the face to the left and onto the big ledge. Gabe led another pitch, and as he was hauling the bag with supplies, it got stuck under a lip and I used the other end of the rope to help move it. By some twist of fate, the rope pinched open the magnetic locking carabiner on the bag. The next thing I knew, I saw the bag hurling toward me. I watched in disbelief as the bag with our bolts and approach shoes fell 500 feet.

We discussed what to do. Gabe had two bolts left on his harness, and we decided to climb as far as they would take us. I felt confident that we were within one rope length of the ridge crest. I cast off, trending left. After what felt like an eternity of chossy slab climbing with zero protection, I finally placed some questionable cams. I continued, wanting to save those two bolts. I slung a small tree, and then finally reached the crest of the ridge. I put in the two bolts and brought Gabe up to me.

On our rappel, we found our haul bag in a patch of snow at the base of the upper face. The force of the fall had scattered bolts everywhere—and, worse, disintegrated our pack of cigarettes—but the extra drill battery and our approach shoes were intact. We salvaged the bolts and continued rappelling. By the time we reached the truck, we had completed 2,000 feet of technical climbing and 800 feet of scrambling in a 14-hour round trip. The East Face (5.7) is a sometimes run-out adventure climb up a previously overlooked formation.

—Curtis Baird

High Plains Hoedown 5.10 (5.8 R)

FA: October 27-29, 2021, Curtis Baird, Gabe Skiera, Rachel Skiera

Gear: bolts, optional single rack, two 60m ropes

P1: Start up and move left under a small overhang, then move back right. Continue up and follow a weakness right to anchors.

P2: Traverse right around the roof feature and up through easy ground to an anchor on a ledge, on the left side.

P3: Climb straight up and slightly left over some amazing slab, passing several bolts, to an anchor on a ledge.

P4: Traverse left from the anchor and up into a left-facing slab corner. Follow it up and find anchors to the right on a big ledge.

P5: Climb up a small arête for about 30 feet. Cut right and traverse past a bolt. Continue right into a short left-facing feature with another bolt. Move up to anchors on top of a ledge with some junipers.

P6: Head right and up over the path of least resistance, passing a bolt. Aim for a left-facing feature with some junipers above. Climb up and over junipers to find the anchor in a recessed area at the base of a groove.

P7: Climb up into the groove and exit right when it angles back. Trend up and right, passing another bolt, then cut back left into the groove. Pull an overlap and find anchors at a stance at the base of a big groove.

P8: Climb the deep groove, then move left, finding a bolt on the right-facing wall. Pull some steeper moves and trend left to the anchors on the slab.

P9: Climb up and over some awesome slab, passing a couple bolts, to anchors near a big group of trees, where the slab stops at anchors. From here, scramble up the scree for about 50 feet to find anchors at the base of a slab. To the left will be a massive, cave-like tunnel.

P10: Climb the slab, passing bolts, and move left to anchors at the top, on the right-facing wall under a juniper. From here, move up for a few feet and find a ledge trail. Move right on the trail, going down a bit, and find a big slab with several bolts.

P11: Climb the slab, then take the path of least resistance up and left, and belay from a tree.

P12: To the left will be a little spire. The last pitch goes up the side facing you. Climb past bolts to the summit.

Descent: Rap directly over the front of the spire, back to the walking ledge. From here, scramble down to the P10 anchors and rap the route. Rap with two 60m ropes. Refer to topo.

The East Face (5.7 R/X)

FA: April 7, 2022, Curtis Baird, Gabe Skiera

Gear: bolts, single rack, tat for tree anchor, two 60m ropes

From the top of pitch 10 of High Plains Hoedown, walk right on a ledge until you can start heading up the massive gully system. Hike/scramble up this for a long time. If it becomes 5th class, you've gone the wrong way. Your goal is to make it to the bottom of the massive slab, on the left side of a massive corner system with a tree ledge on top of it. (Refer to photo.)

P1: Climb up the right side, crumbly weakness, with one bolt and gear. Anchors on a ledge.

P2: Climb up and then traverse right on a small ledge system. Aim for the huge left-facing corner. Find anchors at the corner.

P3: Climb up the slab beside the corner, passing the occasional bolt. Move around to the left and top out on a ledge. Belay on a tree.

P4: Climb off the left side of the ledge and slab up to an anchor on a ledge.

P5: From the anchor, move left and up, aiming for a shallow right-facing corner. Follow this weakness up to a small tree (sling for pro). Move up and left to anchors at the top of the ridge.

Descent: Rappel the route, scramble back down, and rappel High Plains Hoedown.

Images



Clean slab on High Plains Hoedown.



Cool limestone cave on High Plains Hoedown.



High Plains Hoedown in white, The East Face in red.



High Plains Hoedown topo.



High Plains Hoedown slab.



Looking down the first pitch of The East Face.



Start of East Face.



Top of High Plains Hoedown: Rachel Skiera, Curtis Baird, and Gabe Skiera.

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