



AAC Publications

Mt. Hooker, Northeast Face, Cache Pirates

Wyoming, Wind River Range

Some 15 miles of rolling forest and open grassy meadows lead from Big Sandy Opening to the boulder-strewn base of Mt. Hooker in the Wind River mountains. In August 2018, Nick Mestre and I met up to explore some crack systems on the left side of the impressive northeast face. We camped in the boulders immediately below the intimidating wall; Nick emerged every morning from his gloomy coffin-size bivy pretending to be Gollum as I brewed him coffee and hoped for a passageway through the granite above.

Over a couple of days we climbed three fun crack pitches and hand-drilled two anchors, but then ran out of time. We retreated below an intimidating, six-inch-wide overhanging crack, which loomed in our minds over the next year as we made plans to return and see what lay above.

We shouldered our packs in August 2019 with a number 6 Camalot and hopes of pushing the route higher. The wide crack yielded wild and sporty, yet surprisingly reasonable climbing at 5.10+. Over the next few days we pushed the route out a long diagonal crack and negotiated a face section with tension traversing, hooking, and a couple of bolts placed on lead. We found incredibly clean rock, amazing features, and more quality crack systems, leading up a total of eight pitches before work required us to head home. It was now clear we had found something special, so we made the committing decision to leave ropes fixed to our high point to facilitate a return.

A couple of weeks later, we marched back in for our third visit, fueled by curiosity and an odd desire for further toil. Nick led the wandering pitch nine at a snail's pace, which is a good speed when you don't know where you're going. Finally, established at the base of a promising corner, we were poised for a push to the wall's upper ledge, Der Major, which traverses right to the summit plateau. Commuting up and down our fixed ropes was becoming a chore, but we used these passages to clean and equip the route, in hopes of creating a new-age classic.

I led the pitch 10 corner onsight, pawing at grainy rock and fighting for tricky gear amid lichen and discontinuous cracks. I was forced to free climb some gear-less terrain as I fought pump and uncertainty, hoping for a path higher. After nearly 60m I arrived at a ledge near Der Major, our logical ending (for now). In disbelief, we heard friendly calls from below while descending. Not many people can sniff out 1,200' of perfectly rigged fixed line on a north wall deep in the wilderness, but our friends Greg and Hans are a special breed of hound dog. The following morning, our friends enjoyed a Mini Traxion lap for the ages before Nick and I stripped the fixed lines once and for all.

We had but one more day to free the route. Battered and sore, with little skin remaining, we went for it and eventually found ourselves lying on grassy Der Major, having established Cache Pirates (10 pitches, IV 5.11+).

– Paul Kimbrough

Images



Lounging on grassy Der Major ledge, high on the northeast face of Mt. Hooker, after completing the first ascent of Cache Pirates (10 pitches, IV 5.11+). Grave Lake is below in the sun.



Looking up at the intimidating offwidth roof crack of pitch four on Cache Pirates (IV 5.11+) on Mt. Hooker. This was the high point of the 2018 attempt.



Nick Mestre coming up pitch six of Cache Pirates (IV 5.11+) on Mt. Hooker, in Wyoming's Wind River Mountains.



The northeast face of Mt. Hooker from the base of the wall, showing the line of Cache Pirates (IV 5.11+). This new route, completed by Paul Kimbrough and Nick Mestre in summer 2019, climbs ten pitches to reach Der Major ledge.

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