



AAC Publications

Liberty Bell, The Dark Side of Liberty

Washington, North Cascades

"It's amazing granite and it's 20 minutes from the road," Mikey says emphatically, leaving no room for debate as to whether the climbing on the east face of Liberty Bell in Washington Pass is worthwhile. Over the last decade, Mikey has freed or established multiple routes on Liberty Bell: Thin Red Line (2008), Liberty and Injustice for All (2014), and A Slave to Liberty (2016). In spring of 2018, his eye was on another line that traveled the steep and untouched northeast side of the formation. In May that year, we climbed the neighboring Barber Pole route in somewhat alpine conditions and rappelled into the potential line, drilling anchors at 40m intervals at good stances along the way. We were excited to find swaths of lichen-dotted, high-quality granite through the steep faces, dikes, and splitter crack systems.

In the summer of 2018, we set to work, initially fixing lines from the top. The first four pitches held the majority of the hard climbing, and most of our attention was directed toward cleaning these pitches, figuring out moves, and discussing bolt placements. Our excitement about the route was tempered by the smoke from the heavy fire season in the Pacific Northwest that year; in Washington alone, over 400,000 acres were affected by wildfires. We kept showing up each day, unsure of whether the smoke would preclude our efforts. Most days, we were lucky, however, we eventually realized it would take another season to finish the route. Before leaving, we equipped all of the anchors and placed all of the protection bolts.

In August 2019, we returned to Washington Pass, excited to simply climb now that most of the toiling was behind us. We spent multiple days Micro Traxioning the first five pitches and fine-tuning our beta. The first pitch (5.12+) had a baffling and steep crux leading up to the anchor. The second pitch (5.13-) was one of the stunners, with face climbing on a vertical orange dike that led into a roof, followed by some insecure climbing to a small stance. The third pitch (5.11) offered somewhat of a respite before the crux—a 5.13+ pitch that started with some bouldery face climbing into a 5.12 corner crack and finished with a V9/V10 boulder problem. Of the remaining six pitches, three were fun and sustained 5.11 climbing, and the remainder were rompy 5.8–5.10 climbing on somewhat mediocre rock.

Pretty soon after we began lead attempts, Mikey redpointed each of the first four pitches, and I had redpointed all but the crux pitch on lead. On Monday, August 19, we got a late start due to a work call, and our main goal was to see if I could send the crux pitch on the sharp end. When I sent it on my first try of the day, we decided to capitalize on the opportunity and take it from there to the top. The 5.11 hero climbing was extra enjoyable now that the crux pitch was behind us, and we made it to the top of the route just as it got dark.

As a nod to the darker undertones of the current political landscape, climate change, and to the aspect of the route, we dubbed our climb the Dark Side of Liberty (1,100', IV 5.13+).

– Shanjean Lee

Images



Mikey Schaefer climbing an intricate dike on the second pitch the Dark Side of Liberty (1,100', IV 5.13+), a new free route on the northeast face of the Liberty Bell at Washington Pass.



Mikey Schaefer in the meat of the crux boulder problem on the fourth pitch of the Dark Side of Liberty (1,100', IV 5.13+), on the northeast face of the Liberty Bell.



Shanjean Lee climbs a stunning 5.12 finger crack leading into the crux of the Dark Side of Liberty (1,100', IV 5.13+). She and Mikey Schaefer pioneered this all-new free route on the northeast face of the Liberty Bell over the course of two seasons, making a free ascent in August 2019.



With the pitch four crux behind her, Shanjean Lee enjoys 5.11 hero climbing on the fifth pitch of the Dark Side of Liberty (1,100', IV 5.13+) on the northeast face of the Liberty Bell at Washington Pass.

Dark Side of Liberty

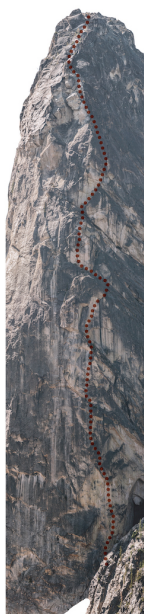
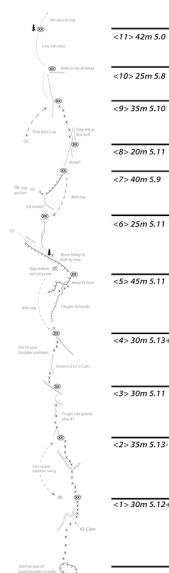
5.13+ 350m

F.A 8/2019

Shanjuan Lee

Mikey Schaefer

Rack: 2x Green C3 to #2
Single #3 10mm slings
1 set small to med. nuts
8 quick draws
4 shoulder length slings



Topo for the Dark Side of Liberty (1,100', IV 5.13+) on the northeast face of the Liberty Bell at Washington Pass.

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