



AAC Publications

Mt. Owen, Northwest Face, Renny Take the Wheel

Wyoming, Grand Teton National Park

On July 25, Michael Gardner and I set out from the Exum Mountain Guides office to take a look at the northwest face of Mt. Owen (12,933'). We departed around 6 a.m. and briskly hiked up Cascade Canyon, walled across the creek, and bushwhacked our way up Valhalla Canyon to the alpine meadow below Mt. Owen and the Grand Teton. Once there, we took our time to establish our intentions on the wall above.

To this point, we simply had a vague notion of clean rock and proud position somewhere up on the west face, based on an encouraging tip from our friend and Teton legend Renny Jackson. We had only decided to head up in this direction at midnight the night before, because we both had the day off from guiding. We sat in the meadow and gazed upward, tracing an independent line up a very prominent, clean-looking golden face to a crack splitting an upper headwall. We took a low traverse to access the start of the line, which began about 1,000' lower and quite a bit left of Serendipity Arête, Owen's west ridge.

The lower portion of the climb went well and we were constantly able to sniff out weaknesses. When we reached the headwall, a major thunderstorm rolled over the top of the Grand Teton and unleashed its fury as we hung in our harnesses below the crux pitches. During a brief lapse in the storm, we quested up steep and wet climbing. The final two pitches went through vertical to overhanging black rock and into a beautiful golden splitter crack, ranging from offwidth to fingers. We arrived at the summit in time to catch an incredible sunset through squalls. The climbing was high quality and completed all free, with a single 60m rope and a double rack.

We named the route Renny Take the Wheel (1,500', 8 pitches, IV 5.11) in honor of our friend, who had tipped us off to this zone and kept tabs on our whereabouts throughout the day.

We descended the West Ledges route back into Valhalla Canyon. After wading through Cascade Creek and making it back onto the trail, we stripped off our wet clothes and walked back to the trailhead in our undies through the dark forest. In total, our round-trip time was around 16 hours.

— Michael Hutchins

Images



Michael Hutchins high on the golden splitter crack in the upper part of Renny Take the Wheel (1,500', 8 pitches, IV 5.11) on the northwest face of Mt. Owen.



Michael Hutchins low on the wall, with a view of the overhanging black rock and upper splitter above during the first ascent of Renny Take the Wheel (1,500', 8 pitches, IV 5.11) on the northwest face of Mt. Owen.



Following the start of the golden headwall splitter during the first ascent of Renny Take the Wheel (1,500', 8 pitches, IV 5.11), on the northwest face of Mt. Owen.



Michael Gardner casting off into overhanging and intimidating black rock of impeccable quality, high on the northwest face of Mt. Owen during the first ascent of Renny Take the Wheel (1,500', 8 pitches, IV 5.11).



The northwest face of Mt. Owen, showing the approximate line of Renny Take the Wheel (1,500', 8 pitches, IV 5.11). The traverse in to the base of the route is out of frame below.



A view of the upper headwall pitches of Renny Take the Wheel (1,500', 8 pitches, IV 5.11) on the northwest face of Mt. Owen, taken from the north ridge of the peak.

Article Details

Author	Michael Hutchins
Publication	AAJ
Volume	63
Issue	95
Page	
Copyright Date	2021
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions