



## AAC Publications

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### Rock Peak, Northwest Face, Two Routes

United States, Montana, Cabinet Mountains

**Winter access in the Cabinets is notoriously onerous. Climbers cannot drive to most summer trailheads, and many areas are in designated wilderness, preventing snowmobile access.** As a result, some big objectives wait for spring, when there's a delicate balance between waiting until the forest roads have melted out enough, but not waiting so long that higher-elevation ice conditions have deteriorated. As spring 2022 came around, I was eager to reconnoiter some ice I had noted a few seasons before on the northwest face of Rock Peak (7,580'), believed to have no prior ice routes.

On April 8, my half day of work ran late, giving my partner Trey Dufrene and I a discouragingly late start from town. We were hoping to drive to within a mile or two of the St. Paul Lake summer trailhead, but many sections of the road had yet to melt out, leaving us farther away than anticipated. By dusk we had only managed to hike and ski to the trailhead itself, where we made camp. Several inches of snow fell during the night. The next morning, we got an early start skiing up into the St. Paul Lake cirque. Terrible skinning conditions improved with elevation as snow continued to fall. Full winter weather limited our visibility.

Once below Rock Peak, we easily crossed a bergschrund-like slot in the snow and started up some ice right of center, swinging leads. The first four pitches were a mix of plastic WI3 and wallowing up snow ramps, with the occasional coniferous protection point. On pitch five, I led us through deeper snow into the clouds; angling up and left, I cliffed out but thankfully found a short ramp behind a large block covered in technically easy but deep and exhausting snow. Our rack of nuts, cams, screws, pickets, and pitons all proved futile at the top of this pitch, as I tried to make a sound belay in either the powder snow or the classic Cabinets choss. I settled for slinging a wimpy pine and stamped a platform. After bringing up Trey, I led off into the sixth and final pitch, swimming through vertical unconsolidated snow. Tunneling through the smallest portion of cornice brought us to the west shoulder, which we followed to the summit.

Although we had bouldered together in the gym, Trey and I had never roped up until Rock Peak. We named the route New Friends (330m, IV WI3 70° snow), and rappelled it on slung pines and Abalakov threads. As we packed up our camping gear at the summer trailhead and started the long walk out to the car, dreaming of clean T-shirts and carbonated beverages, the day inched closer and closer to type 2+ fun.

Within a few days, we were already planning our return. We were hopeful about linking the lower ice with a more direct upper line to the summit. On April 22, we were able to drive in at least a mile further before switching to fat bikes.

This time, we started on the leftmost flow of ice on the lower face. The first 55m pitch offered thin, at times delaminated WI3+ ice atop overlapping rock slabs. Our second pitch brought pleasant frontpointing on 60° alpine ice and névé for about 125m, until we were below the upper headwall. We skirted a band of loose rock via a 50m left-trending snow ramp, which brought us to the crux pitch: an M4 mixed corner with just enough ice for the leader—much less for the follower—followed by a runnel of ice that intersected with the upper snowfield. It was an amazing bit of climbing, with patches of blue sky streaming overhead and the whole cirque visible beneath us. Some moderate snow climbing then took us to the summit.

We descended the upper west shoulder and rappelled New Friends. With lighter packs, more daylight, and bikes to coast out on, we stayed firmly in type 1 fun territory. Acknowledging the bond this latter experience had cemented between us, we dubbed our second line Old Friends (350m, IV WI3+ M4 AI3 65° snow).

– **Jonathan Klaucke**

Old Friends (350m, IV WI3+ M4 AI3 65° snow), in blue, and New Friends (330m, IV WI3 70° snow), in orange, on the northwest face of Rock Peak.

## Images



Trey Dufrene about to be hit with a wave of spindrift while leading the WI3 second pitch of New Friends (330m, IV WI3 70° snow) on the northwest face of Rock Peak, Cabinet Mountains, Montana.



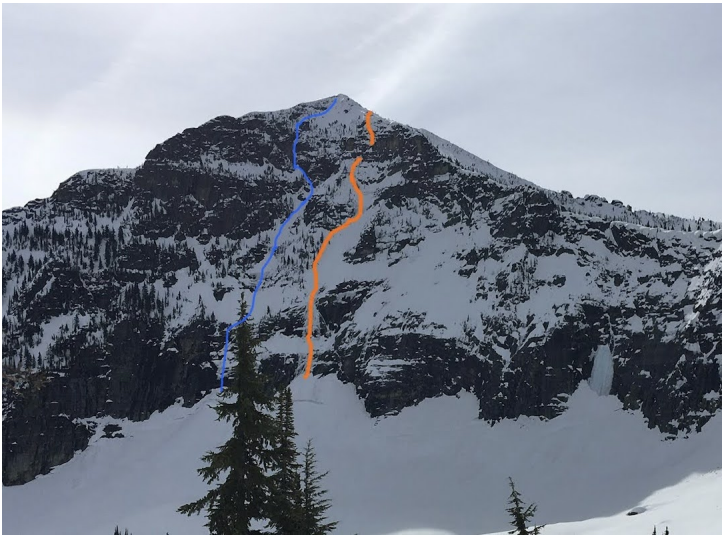
Trey Dufrene leading the WI3 fourth pitch of New Friends (330m, IV WI3 70° snow).



Trey Dufrene surmounting the crux M4 corner of the fifth pitch of Old Friends (350m, IV WI3+ M4 AI3 65° snow) on the northwest face of Rock Peak, Cabinet Mountains, Montana.



Trey Dufrene topping out Old Friends (350m, IV WI3+ M4 AI3 65° snow) on the northwest face of Rock Peak, with the Cabinet Mountains stretching to the north behind him.



Old Friends (350m, IV WI3+ M4 AI3 65° snow), in blue, and New Friends (330m, IV WI3 70° snow), in orange, on the northwest face of Rock Peak, Cabinet Mountains, Montana.

## Article Details

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