



## AAC Publications

---

### **Whiteside Mountain, Southeast Face, Spearfinger**

North Carolina, Blue Ridge Mountains

**In late September 2020, while exploring the main southeast face of Whiteside Mountain, Brian Barwatt and I discovered and climbed two phenomenal pitches high on the wall**, left of Route Doctors (700', 8 pitches, III 5.12 R, Bayne-Heuermann, 1994) and right of New Diversions (10 pitches, III 5.10d, Kelly-Rotert, 1982). After climbing these two new pitches—a 5.12 that we hung on and a 5.11 that we both flashed—the line appeared to end; we traversed right on a ledge to finish up the day on Route Doctors. A couple months down the road, I was hanging around a campfire with legendary Whiteside climber Chad Gardner and described the two random pitches we'd found high on the headwall. He looked at me with a stern face and said, "Oh, y'all found Spearfinger."

Chad explained that the line of Spearfinger was a vision he and Jeff Wethersby had had almost two decades earlier. They'd put in a monstrous effort, but after many epic days, some scary falls, and struggles to connect the dots, life took over. Both men had families, successful occupations, and other passion projects; the project sat dormant for at least 15 years.

After hearing the tale of their battles and the lore of Spearfinger—a shape-shifting monster in Cherokee culture who calls Whiteside Mountain her home—I was fired up at the idea of finishing the route. Chad's excitement was rekindled, too, and we made a pact to get it done. In 2021, the two of us made it out a couple of times, but we both had packed schedules and made little progress in route-finding or redpointing.

In 2022, Chad and I again had high levels of stoke. It's hard to count how many times we hiked to the base of the wall and climbed past our high point, only to rappel and make the steep hike out. But eventually we punched a hole through the greenbriers and rhododendrons at the top of the wall.

The pitch by pitch breakdown of Spearfinger (800', 7 pitches, IV 5.12 R) is: 5.8, 5.11, 5.10+, 5.12, 5.11, 5.12, and 5.10. It is the first new full-length independent route on the main face of Whiteside Mountain in over a decade—the last was Schadenfreude (IV 5.12, Shull-Stracker) in 2011—and a phenomenal climb, in my humble opinion. Spearfinger has a little bit of everything, from a slab boulder problem to crack climbing; from steep cranking to tricky beta; from climbing high above your gear to great belay ledges. We spent time cleaning and equipping the route in such a way to make it suitable for other Whiteside enthusiasts to enjoy repeating. Completing Spearfinger was a vision quest for us. I feel blessed to have had the opportunity to partake in an experience like this with a warrior, mentor, and friend like Chad.

— Dylan Valvo

## Images



Dylan Valvo leading the marathon second pitch, a 70m 5.11, on Spearfinger (800', 7 pitches, IV 5.12 R).



Dylan Valvo, belayed by Alex Willis, leading pitch four of Spearfinger (800', 7 pitches, IV 5.12 R), Whiteside Mountain, North Carolina.



Brian Barwatt following pitch five of Spearfinger (800', 7 pitches, IV 5.12 R), Whiteside Mountain, North Carolina.



Dylan Valvo, belayed by Zeb Hammerly, leading the start of pitch six of Spearfinger (800', 7 pitches, IV 5.12 R), Whiteside Mountain, North Carolina.

## Article Details

Author	Dylan Valvo
Publication	AAJ
Volume	65
Issue	97
Page	175
Copyright Date	2023
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions