



AAC Publications

Hard Mox, First Winter Ascent

Washington, North Cascades

Hard Mox (8,504') is considered the most difficult of the Bulger List (Washington's 100 highest peaks) and was previously unclimbed in winter. [Hard Mox is the southeastern of the two Mox Peaks and is less than four miles south of the Canadian border.] Over the past three years, I've made six scouting trips and practice climbs to figure out the best winter route. Nick Roy and I previously made two unsuccessful attempts (in January and February 2023). On our third trip, the stars aligned.

On December 27, we double-carried my Zodiac boat, an outboard motor, and a week of supplies one mile to Ross Lake (which has no road access) in the North Cascades, then motored 15 miles up to the outlet of Little Beaver Creek, where we took out the boat and hiked in to Perry Creek. The bushwhack up Perry Creek the next day was challenging—I dislocated my shoulder in a fall and we broke all four snowshoes. It rained all day.

On the third day, we climbed up the Perry Glacier, then swung leads up the five-pitch WI2 M5 west ridge, which was plastered with rime ice. This route (5.5 in summer) was first climbed by brothers Fred and Helmy Beckey in 1941 for Hard Mox's first ascent. Nick led the cruxes. Our hexes were lifesavers; we pounded them into icy cracks that wouldn't hold cams. We topped out exactly at sunset, then rapped back in the dark for an 18-hour push.

We later climbed Mt. Spickard (8,980') and then bushwhacked back out. The boat motor wouldn't start, so we ended up paddling eight hours back down the lake, fixing a broken oarlock on the way. We then triple-carried the gear back to the trailhead.

— Eric Gilbertson

Images



The two Mox Peaks (foreground). The ascent of Hard Mox followed the 1941 Beckey Route on the upper west ridge.



The line of the first winter ascent of Hard Mox in the North Cascades.



The ascent of Hard Mox followed the 1941 Beckey Route on the upper west ridge. The winter grade

was WI2 M5, which fails to convey the full difficulties.



Eric Gilbertson starting pitch four during the first winter ascent of Hard Mox in the North Cascades.

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