



AAC Publications

Bonanza Peak, West Face of Southwest Summit, The Cascadian Route

Washington, North Cascades

In late August, Sam Boyce and I took a three-day weekend to climb a new route on the west face of Bonanza Peak's southwest summit (9,320'). The Cascadian Route (V 5.10+) gains over 2,000' in 16 pitches and 2,800' of climbing.

Our route is looker's right of its established neighbors to the north, the Soviet Route (1976) and the Oregonian Route (2,200', V 5.9+, Bonnett-Keena, 2013), both of which ascend the southwest peak's northwest buttress. (This has also been called the west buttress and, in the report on the Soviet Route, the north face.) The two older routes meet near an 8,700' pinnacle before continuing on mellower terrain up the northern aspect. Our route ascends the west face directly, with difficulties finally easing upon reaching the ridge just south of the true summit.

We did most of the time-consuming approach on August 25: a long drive, a ferry from Chelan to Lucerne, a bus to Holden Village, and finally more than 11 miles of hiking to a camp at 7,000' near the North Star–Bonanza col. The next day, we finished the approach over talus and began climbing.

About 500' up the route, on our fourth pitch—after the first of several heinous choss bands but before the most technical climbing—we found a 2.5" Trango Flex Cam in a crack with a carabiner attached to it. This late 1990s or early 2000s cam was in a textbook placement and came out easily; its sling was weathered, having sat there for perhaps 10 to 20 years. A search for past attempts or climbs of this feature turned up no information. Finding no evidence of passage above this, we surmised that perhaps this cam had been used to bail.

While there were enjoyable stretches of climbing on our route, there also was plentiful choss. The technical highlights were five pitches of 5.10. Three of these—pitches eight, nine, and 13— sported steep, fun climbing, but the other two—pitches 11 and 12—were loose, run-out affairs. A full bag of tricks was necessary to find passable protection.

The rest of the route ranged up to 5.9 on varying rock quality; any given hold might be permanent or portable. We had been concerned about passage through roof systems near the top—bailing would have been fraught and difficult—but such worries proved unwarranted.

We descended back to camp via the Isella Glacier, scrambling and downclimbing a "walkway" of steep rock (low-fifth-class cruxes) and mellow moraine that horizontally splits the glacier at approximately two-thirds height. Shortly after exiting the glacier, we crossed westward through a notch in Bonanza's south ridge. The next day, we hiked out.

Climbing of the variety found on the Cascadian Route can be extremely engaging and stimulating (Sam and I certainly enjoyed it), but it might not be to others' tastes.

— Eric Wehrly

Route Description

P1 (5.4 220', 5.4) - Scramble up white slabs to a good stance below the large, steeper band of darker

rock. You are aiming for an obvious, large open book for the next pitch.

P2 (190', 5.8) - Head up into the open book, climbing to its top. Traverse left back into low fifth class terrain to a talus-covered bowl.

P3 (260', 5.6) - Climb the rib to the right of the bowl, past a bunch of scrambling, to another large talus ledge.

P4 (140', 5.9 R) - Climb through a heinous choss band into a gully with better rock.

P5 (230', Low fifth class) - Scramble up the gully to a solid belay.

P6 (150', Low fifth class) - Gully.

P7 (100', 5.7) - Start up the face. Trend left to a left-facing corner. Follow this to a good ledge on the prow.

P8 (110', 5.10a) - Climb the face past a roof and up a ramp to a second roof. Belay on a good ledge.

P9 (200', 5.10) - Climb the thin right-facing corner to a ledge. Then a short steep section takes you to a ramp. Follow this to a right-facing corner. Climb up this to some scrambling that leads to a large ledge.

P10 (180', 5.7) - Climb the low-angle loose face to a shit belay.

P11 (150', 5.10 R) - Quest up the face to a decent ledge with a tricky anchor

P12 (180', 5.10 R) - Another vision-quest pitch to the notch on the shoulder of the ridge.

P13 (60', 5.10+) - Climb the overhanging splitter to a chossy ramp.

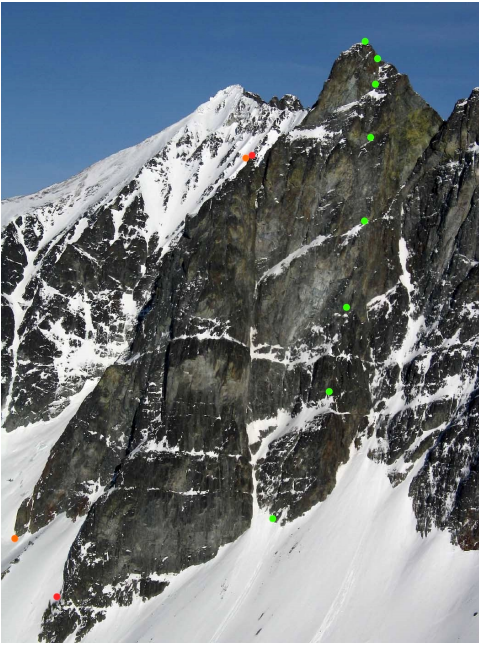
P14 (170', 5.9) - Start up a nice, varnished corner that eases to chossy mid fifth class.

P15 (110', 5.8) - Traverse to the ramp on the right. Follow it to the south ridge

P16 (250', Fourth class) - A short scramble takes you to the southwest summit.

Descent: From the summit, descend south through the Isella Glacier, which (as can be seen on satellite imagery) is split at approximately two-thirds-height by a magically continuous, undulating walkway comprised of steep rock and mellow moraine. We were able to walk and downclimb (low-fifth-class cruxes) the walkway's giant steps to roughly 6,900' without rappelling or touching snow, then used a notch/gully to drop through the peak's south ridge before circling back up to our 7,000' camp near the North Star–Bonanza Col. Near the col above the bivy, there remains a small snow patch that provides water, even near the end of this hot and dry summer of 2023.

Images



The Cascadian Route (2,000', 16 pitches, V 5.10+), in green (each dot represents roughly three pitches) on the southwest summit of Bonanza Peak, North Cascades, Washington. The bottom red dot marks the start of the Soviet Route (1976), while the bottom orange dot marks the start of the Oregonian Route (2,200', V 5.9+, Bonnett-Keena, 2013). The upper red and orange dots are the 8,700' pinnacle where those two routes meet before continuing to the southwest summit on the northern aspect.



The Cascadian Route (2,000', 16 pitches, V 5.10+) in green (each dot represents roughly three pitches) on the southwest summit of Bonanza Peak, North Cascades, Washington. The red dot is the 8,700' pinnacle where the Soviet Route (1976) and the Oregonian Route (2,200', V 5.9+, Bonnett-Keena, 2013) meet before continuing to the southwest summit on the northern aspect. This photo was taken from the North Star-Bonanza Col.



Eric Wehrly climbs through a heinous choss band on pitch four of the Cascadian Route on the southwest summit of Bonanza Peak.



Sam Boyce follows some 5.10 on the pleasant rock of the Cascadian Route's eighth pitch, which climbs through two roofs.



Sam Boyce follows some 5.10 on the pleasant rock of the Cascadian Route's eighth pitch, which climbs through two roofs.



Sam Boyce above a 5.10 corner on pitch nine of the Cascadian Route, which climbs the west face of Bonanza Peak's southwest summit.

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