



AAC Publications

Bear's Face, Dancing Bears

Montana, Beartooth Mountains

While approaching the classic California Ice route in East Rosebud Canyon in late November, I noticed ice pouring down the upper left shoulder of the mythical Bear's Face. In an area known for either very compact or very loose rock, and a scarcity of routes on the most impressive formations, I knew that a winter ascent of this northwest-facing wall would likely take some work.

Charlie Faust and Paul Shaughnessy joined me on a scouting mission, which then led to not one, not two, but three failed attempts on the line. We tried forcing a line through the roofs halfway up the face, dreaming of Stanley Headwall-like multi-pitch dry-tooling. Twice, about 600' up, we were foiled by unprotectable slabs above the roofs—not ideal terrain for crampons. The slabs also would have required way more bolts than the ground-up onsight style we prefer.

Up to this point, we'd ignored the path of least resistance leading to the ice: a dark vertical dike system cutting a groove through the wall left of the roofs. On our third attempt, we took a stab at this, reaching it via an easy leftward traverse from our second-pitch anchor. However, an intensifying storm brought near-constant spindrift and, after I battled for two hours up this third pitch, we decided to return in better conditions.

Confident that we'd unlocked the route and tired of hiking overnight loads up the five-mile approach, on our fourth attempt, Charlie, Paul, and I opted to climb the route car-to-car. On December 31, 2023, we got an early start from the trailhead. The first two pitches went smoothly, thanks to our practice runs. Pitch one starts in a dihedral just right of the dike system, with a faint crack system on the slabby panel forming the right of side of the dihedral. This leads to a torque crack and a thin sequence of face moves out right around an arête, ending at a perfect belay ledge. Pitch two is also long, with good protection and classic alpine mixed climbing, and a deceptively steep but short crux.

This time Charlie led pitch three's corner, which turned out to be the route's crux, a delicate and loose M6 R. Paul's and my doubts steadily crescendoed as Charlie inched upward for over two hours, but they instantly evaporated when he finally called, "Off belay!" He'd extended the pitch to a full 60m, belaying at the base of an iced-up corner interrupted by a roof. This quality corner pitch was yet another rope-stretcher, bringing us to a short traverse onto the treed ledge directly below the start of the glorious ice headwall.

Paul took over here, navigating thin and delaminated ice, and skirting left on rock briefly to avoid a detached curtain. His 65m lead (pitch six) brought us to a tree and a surprise final pitch featuring a "V4" boulder problem on tools. (Going left looked like it could offer an easier alternative.) A lower-angle groove led us to the trees that mark the top of the route.

The unknown descent included a handful of rappels from trees. At one point, a small snow runnel avalanched on Paul; thankfully, we'd kept the rope on. When we hit the easy snow couloir between Bear's Face and Giant's Foot, we unroped and stumbled back to the car, reaching it 19 hours after setting off the previous year.

While there are a couple of summer lines farther right on Bear's Face—Alex Lowe and Andrew McLean's 1998 route *Ursus Horribilis* (9 pitches, VI 5.10 A4) and the new route *Ménage Trout* (13

itches, 5.10 R A2+; see story here)—we believe this to be the wall's first winter ascent.

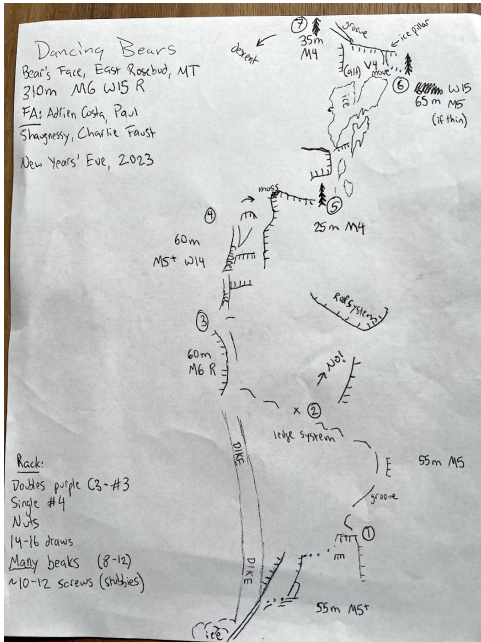
We named our route Dancing Bears (310m, WI5 M6 R) for the amount of time we spent dancing around the face's various features as we tried to piece together a line, and for our collective love of music and good times in the hills with close friends.

— **Adrien Costa**

Images



Dancing Bears (310m, WI5 M6 R) on the Bear's Face, East Rosebud Canyon, Beartooth Mountains, Montana. The large formation behind is the Giant's Foot.



The topo for Dancing Bears (310m, WI5 M6 R) on the Bear's Face.



Charlie Faust following the traverse to the belay ledge at the top of pitch one on Dancing Bears.



Paul Shaughnessy starts up pitch two on his, Adrien Costa, and Charlie Faust's third attempt to climb Dancing Bears. They succeeded on their fourth try.



Charlie Faust leading the crux third pitch of Dancing Bears (310m, WI5 M6 R) on the Bear's Face. He spent two hours leading this 60-meter pitch.



The fourth pitch ice hose of Dancing Bears, with Adrien Costa on the lead. "This fun ice hose was interrupted by a brief roof with a good crack for cams," said Costa.



Paul Shaughnessy navigating the thin and delaminated ice headwall on Dancing Bears. This feature, visible from the ground, was what enticed Adrien Costa, Charlie Faust, and Paul Shaughnessy to try the line for multiple attempts.

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