



AAC Publications

Bear's Face, Ménage Trout

Montana, Beartooth Mountains

In early August, Matt Cornell, Jackson Marvell, Austin Schmitz, and I set off for a two-week base camp-style trip up East Rosebud Canyon to complete a line on Bear's Face that Jackson, Matt, and Justin Willis had started in 2020. The road to East Rosebud Lake was still closed due to historic flooding the previous summer. We used bicycles and a bike trailer to haul hundreds of pounds of gear and food up this 3.5-mile dirt road to the trailhead. Then, after hauling loads seven more miles up East Rosebud Creek, we established base camp in a protected cave—a clutch move, as it rained heavily for much of the following week. Our extracurricular activities during these damp days included fishing, swimming, packrafting East Rosebud Creek, cooking steak over the fire, and drinking wine.

Killing time in these ways was hardly a chore, but we were eager to be up on the wall. The only known route up the vertical to slightly overhanging, northwest-facing main wall of Bear's Face was a line climbed by the late Alex Lowe and Andrew McLean in August 1998, named *Ursus Horribilis* (9 pitches, VI 5.10 A4). [A topo of the 1998 route is included in the media gallery below.]

With just a few days left on our trip, the weather cleared and it was time for us to get to work. On day one, we climbed ground that Jackson and Matt had climbed three years earlier—wandering, often dirty, blue-collar climbing up to 5.10+, located climber's right of *Ursus Horribilis*. This brought us to a big ledge, from which we fixed lines to the ground. The following day we hauled loads to the comfortable bivy ledge, which we would call home for the next few nights. That second day we climbed an additional three pitches (also from the 2020 attempt) up a beautiful left-facing dihedral system, with a traverse that led to a slightly overhanging, left-facing dihedral with a lot of exposure. We fixed lines and rappelled back to our ledge, where we were greeted by our friend Chris Kulish; he had jumared up to deliver essentials, such as LED party lights for the ledge hang. He then opened a new BASE jump exit off our ledge—an incredible thing to witness.

On day three we jumared back up and opened three more rope-stretching pitches at 5.10 A2+. The following day, we Micro Traxioned up those pitches, freeing as much as possible. We climbed one more long new pitch, after which we joined the final two pitches of *Ursus Horribilis*. The second of these was a steep, long 5.9 chimney with great exposure and physical climbing that brought us to the top of the face.

We made a quick trip to the summit in the early evening light, collected some dead wood, bundled it up, and started rappelling and cleaning our fixed lines in the dark, which—due to the steepness of the wall and how much our route traverses—was a bit of a task. We celebrated with a small campfire under the stars on our five-star ledge and descended the next morning.

Though we ran out of time on this trip, we plan to return and free climb our new line. As it stands, Ménage Trout is 13 pitches and comes in at 5.10+ R A2+. The rock quality is generally pretty good, but not always. There is a mix of bolted and gear anchors. We did a phenomenal amount of cleaning on this route and got rid of the vast majority of loose, dangerous blocks.

— Chantel Astorga

Images



Bear's Face, with Giant's Foot behind, in early August. The line shows Ménage Trout (13 pitches, 5.10+ R A2+), climbed in 2023. The original route up Bear's Face, Ursus Horribilis (1998), took a direct line up the face to the left of Ménage Trout; the two routes share the last two pitches.



Jackson Marvell climbing the sixth pitch of Ménage Trout, high above East Rosebud Creek.



Jackson Marvell climbing the sixth pitch of Ménage Trout on Bear's Face.

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