



## AAC Publications

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### **Mt. Owen, North Ridge, Directissima**

Wyoming, Teton Range, Grand Teton National Park

**Perhaps the most striking long line in the Tetons is the 1,000m north ridge of Mt. Owen (12,928'), leading into the north ridge of the Grand Teton.** The only routes that compare would be climbs on the south buttress of Mt. Moran continuing to its summit.

This Owen–Grand line is most prominent when viewed from the mouth of Cascade Canyon near the Callis Slabs (named after Exum guide Pat Callis). I enjoyed teaching climbers to move over stone at this spot in part because it is surrounded by the achievements of so many legendary climbers. When teaching someone how to tie a bowline around their waist, I could point out Symmetry Spire, where Jack Durrance put up his eponymous route in 1936 before the modern harness was invented. When coaching a 5.8 move, I could point up to the Direct North Face of the Grand Teton, where Richard Emerson made similar moves in mountain boots in 1953.

I commonly told my guests, “The biggest and best climbs were done in mountain boots, with just a handful of pitons and a rope tied around the waist.” The statement wasn’t entirely true, however—some climbs could be improved. The most obvious example was right behind me: the north ridge of Mt. Owen.

The original North Ridge Route was climbed in 1951, by William Clayton and Richard Emerson, at IV 5.7 A1 (free at 5.9). This route angles in from the left, then follows a huge corner left of the ridgeline; it doesn’t hit the actual crest until near the Great Yellow Tower at around 12,400’.

Unable to beat the style of climbing the ridge for the first time, I was determined to climb a line staying as true to the crest as possible. In July 2020, Matt Meinzer and I made it roughly halfway up, where a headwall, split by an offwidth crack that stretched farther than we could protect with the gear we had, stopped us in our tracks. Chuck Pratt would have put the rope up, but I would not.

We escaped the ridge by wandering onto the north face and continuing up to the summit by what we called **Escape Route**, detailed in *A Climber’s Guide to the Teton Range* (4th edition, 2023). We climbed pitches up to 5.10, watched the Neowise comet from our bivy, and slaked our thirst at the upper snowfields. Matt once again got us through a climb where I had bitten off more than I could chew. The next day we walked out through Valhalla with a deeper friendship.

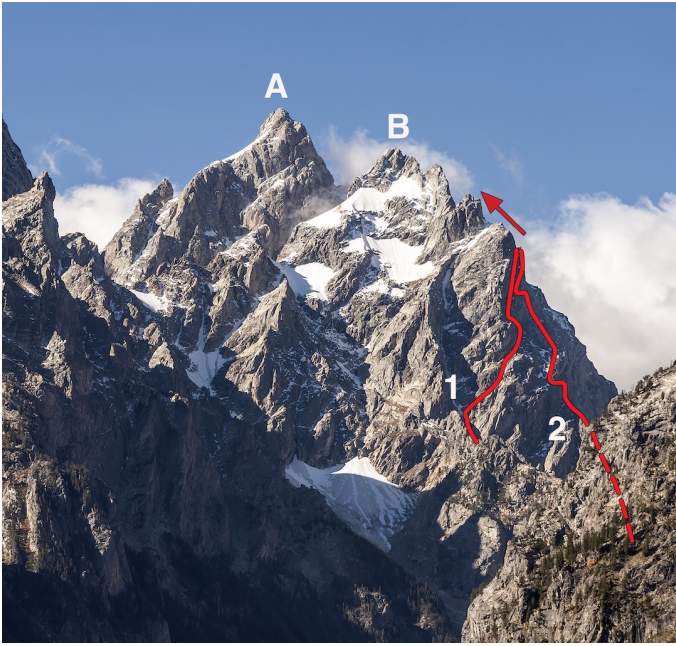
In August 2023, I returned with three “friends”: Karen Kovaka and numbers 4 and 5 Camalots. We quickly reclimbed the lower north ridge and continued up through the offwidth crack, a full pitch of 5.10. Confident that I had unlocked the key to the route, we wandered up easy ledges for a few hundred feet to the next headwall—this one completely devoid of cracks. We bivvied below it, uncertain once again, but next morning found passage via a 60m 5.10 traverse to the left. Another rope length put us on the edge of the ridge, just to the right of the original route’s corner system, and we continued to the top of what is now the Directissima (V 5.10).

Later that day, on the top of Mt. Owen, we decided that we would not be the first to climb the most striking route in the range by continuing up the north ridge of the Grand Teton. We would go home.

Climbing a direct line up the north ridge of Owen had also been the goal of my friend Nate Brown, who, along with partners Tobey Carmen and Eric Draper, climbed a route in 2001 that they named the North Ridge Direct. Although it's documented in the 2023 guidebook, the description relied on a somewhat vague AAJ report. I remember Nate telling me that his line joined the big dihedral of the original North Ridge Route, and that the rock out on the are te (where we climbed) looked "pretty good." It's quite possible our routes share terrain—maybe a lot—in the lower part.

— Michael Abbey

## Images



(A) The Grand Teton. (B) Mt. Owen. (1) The original North Ridge Route (1951). (2) Directissima (2023). Both routes continue up the long ridge to the summit of Mt. Owen.

## Article Details

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