

WASHINGTON PASS CLIMBING

Ian Nicholson

Over 55
Climbs!





Washington Pass Climbing

By Ian Nicholson





Acknowledgements

First and foremost I want to thank my wife Rebecca for her consistent support and unwavering motivation. I can't thank her enough for climbing all the loose routes that no one else was willing to do. Of course none of this would have been possible without Chris McNamara. Thank you for your encouragement in this project, your vision and your patience.

Big thanks to Ryan O'Connell, Graham Zimmerman, and Graham McDowell for the hundreds if not thousands of routes we've climbed together over the years and the early adventures we've shared.

Also I can't thank enough all the people who have ever shared a rope with me and helped me climb all the routes in this book. My thanks goes out to Andy Dahlen, Jason Broman, Tino Villanueva, Chris Petry, Alan Rousserau, Dave "Alpine" Ahrens, Joel Kauffman, Amos Galpin, Rob Schiesser, Seth Hobby, Jaya Sa, Eric Dalzell, and all the clients I've ever climbed with in the Washington Pass region.

A huge amount of thanks must be given for the folks who gave me beta, cool history, photos, feedback and more. Thanks to Larry Goldie, Scott Johnston, Mark Allen, Bryan Burdo, Colin Haley, Dale Rensburg, Eli Helmuth, Jens Holsten, Mikey Schaffer, Brooke Sandahl, Max Hasson, Roger Strong, Dylan Johnson, Sol Wertkin, Wesley McCain, John Conner, and of course The Man himself, Fred Beckey.

For catching mistakes big and small, thanks to my first round copy editor Margaret Bishop, working hard at all hours

of the day. Also thanks to Steve McNamara for reviewing everything in such detail, especially when I change something and he is forced to go over it again.

Much gratitude is owed to the following people who contributed to many of the awesome photos included in this book: Andrew Burr, Kurt Hicks, Tim Matsui, John Scurlock, Scott Bennett, Tyree Johnson, and Steph Abegg. Additional appreciation to Blaine Miller, Tom Savelle, and all the folks at La Sportiva for their support. Thank you to Dave Haavik for your and Petzl's contributions to the project.

I want to thank my Dad, Jonathan Nicholson, and Kenny Phayaraj for their wonderful advice and encouragement. Special thanks to my in-laws, Detmar and Susan Schroeder. I couldn't have done it without them. Thanks to my mother. I wouldn't be the man I am today without her, may she rest in peace. I also want to give a big shout out to Josh Brewer and Alex Chew for being my friends and listening to me whine about how much work this book was. Thanks to Elise Lufkin for her continued input and insight into the project.

Also a huge amount of thanks to Greg and Paula Shaw for their continued support of me and my endeavors. Thanks to Paula Shaw for being so adaptive to my constant changing of the. Thanks to my grandmother "TuTu," my sister Mackenzie and my former teacher and still friend Doug Mitchell. If I have forgotten anybody, I am sorry but am still grateful.

Warning!

Climbing is an inherently dangerous sport in which severe injuries or death may occur. Relying on the information in this book may increase the danger.

When climbing you can only rely on your skill, training, experience, and conditioning. **If you have any doubts as to your ability to safely climb any route in this guide, do not try it.**

This book is neither a professional climbing instructor nor a substitute for one. **It is not an instructional book. Do not use it as one.** It contains information that is nothing more than a compilation of opinions about climbing in Washington Pass. **These opinions are neither facts nor promises.** Treat the information as opinions and nothing more. Do not substitute these opinions for your own common sense and experience.

Assumption of Risk

There may be errors in this book resulting from the mistakes of the author and/or the people with whom he consulted. The information was gathered from a variety of sources, which may not have been independently verified. Those who provided the information may have made mistakes in their descriptions. The author may have made mistakes in their conveyance of the information in this book. **The author cannot, therefore, guarantee the correctness of any of the information contained in this book.** The topographical maps, photo-diagrams, difficulty ratings, protection ratings, approach and/or descent information, suggestions about equipment, and other matters may be incorrect or misleading. Fixed protection may be absent, unreliable, or misplaced. **You must keep in mind that the information in this book may be erroneous, so use your own judgement when choosing, approaching, climbing, or descending from a route described in this book.**

DO NOT USE THIS BOOK UNLESS YOU [AND YOUR ESTATE] PROMISE NEVER TO TRY TO SUE US IF YOU GET HURT OR KILLED.

Disclaimer of Warranties

THE AUTHORS AND PUBLISHER WARN THAT THIS BOOK CONTAINS ONLY THE AUTHOR'S OPINIONS ON THE SUBJECTS DISCUSSED. THEY MAKE NO OTHER WARRANTIES, EXPRESSED OR IMPLIED, OF MERCHANTABILITY, FITNESS FOR PURPOSE, OR OTHERWISE, AND IN ANY EVENT, THEIR LIABILITY FOR BREACH OF ANY WARRANTY OR CONTRACT WITH RESPECT TO THE CONTENT OF THIS BOOK IS LIMITED TO THE PURCHASE PRICE OF THE BOOK. THEY FURTHER LIMIT TO SUCH PURCHASE PRICE THEIR LIABILITY ON ACCOUNT OF ANY KIND OF NEGLIGENT BEHAVIOR WHATSOEVER ON THEIR PART WITH RESPECT TO THE CONTENTS OF THIS BOOK.

Published by
SuperTopo
2 Bradford Way
Mill Valley, CA 94941
www.supertopo.com

Copyright 2012 by SuperTopo

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, or by any electronic mechanical or other means, without the permission in writing from the publisher.

Design by David Safanda Design Solutions, Inc.
Layout and editing by Steve McNamara, Chris McNamara and Ian Nicholson
Topo layout by Devin Chance
Copy edited by Steve McNamara and Margaret L Bishop

Cover photo: Ryan O'Connell on Pitch 5 of the Direct East Buttress of South Early Winter Spire. *Photo by Andrew Burr*

Back cover photo: Kate Rutherford leads Pitch 3 as she and Mikey Schaefer make the first free ascent of Thin Red Line. *Photo by Tim Matsui*

Page 2: Ryan Daudistel on the East Face of Lexington Tower. *Photo by Andrew Burr*

Contents Photos:

Page 8: The Liberty Bell group viewed from the East.
Photo by Ian Nicholson

Page 9: Wine Spires and the West Face of Silver Star peak as viewed from the West. *Photo by Kurt Hicks*

All uncredited photos by Ian Nicholson

Nicholson, Ian
Washington Pass Climbing: SuperTopo



Contents

Introduction	11	Concord Tower	88
Getting There	11	North Face	90
Seasons and Weather	12	North Face Directismo	92
Equipment	16	Tunnel Route	94
Overview Map	24	South Face	96
		Patriot Cracks	98
Black Peak	28	Lexington Tower	100
South Ridge	31	East Face	102
Northeast Ridge	32	North Face	106
		Tooth and Claw	108
Cutthroat Peak	34	North Early Winters Spire	110
South Buttress	37	The Flycatcher Buttress	112
West Ridge	40	West Face	114
North Ridge	43	Northwest Corner	118
Cauthorn-Wilson	46	Early Winters Couloirs	122
		Labor Pains	125
Liberty Bell	50	Chockstone Route	128
Liberty Crack	54	South Early Winters Spire	130
Thin Red Line	59	Direct East Buttress	132
Freedom Rider	64	Mojo Rising	136
Freedom or Death	68	South Arête	140
Becky Route	70	Southwest Rib	144
Rapple Grapple	74	Northwest Face	149
Overexposure Route	76	The Passenger	150
Northwest Face	78	The Hitchhiker	154
Remsberg Variation	80	Southern Man	158
Serpentine Crack	82	Southwest Couloir	161
The Girl Next Door	85		



Liberty Bell Group	163	Chianti Spire	225
Liberty Bell Traverse	163	Rebel Yell	227
Minuteman Spire	165	Chablis Spire	230
East Face	166	East Face	232
Poster Peak	168	Whine Spire	234
Blue's Buttress	169	Gato Negro	236
Kangaroo Temple	172	Silver Star Mountain	240
South Face	174	Silver Star Glacier	242
Big Kangaroo	176	Appendix	
Beckey-Tate	178	About the Author	244
Kearney-Thomas	180	Routes by difficulty	245
West Face	184	Index	246
Le Petit Cheval	186		
Spontaneity Arête	188		
First Amendment	190		
Vasiliki Ridge, Juno Tower	193		
Clean Break	136		
Wine Spires Overview	200		
Paisano Pinnacle	204		
West Ridge	206		
Rampage	209		
Burgundy Spire	212		
North Face	214		
Action Potential	218		
Ultra Mega OK	222		



Introduction

Welcome to Washington Pass, one of the best alpine rock destinations in North America. Washington Pass has something for everyone, from glacier climbs and short, easy, multi-pitch scrambles to difficult, big wall test pieces. In the Cascades, Washington Pass has some of the shortest approaches to a variety of small and large alpine routes on quality rock in a dramatic setting. Nowhere else can you walk one hour from your car and get on a Grade V.

I have been on every single route in this book and have gone to painstaking lengths to gather as much detailed information as possible. In many cases, I climbed routes multiple times just to make sure I have the beta dialed. I've included newer routes and quality unknown classics as well as known and well established climbs, giving climbers more choices and perhaps reducing the crowds on the more popular routes. Thanks again for buying this book, and enjoy the climbing.

Getting there

From the west, there are two options with no more than five minutes difference in duration.

From I-5 South

Option 1: If driving I-5 northbound, take exit 230 toward Burlington, Sedro-Woolley and turn east onto Washington State Highway 20. Follow Highway 20 east for 102 miles to Washington Pass at milepost 162. Marblemount, at milepost 106, is the last place to buy food and gas until Mazama, 74 miles on and 18 miles further east of Washington Pass.

Option 2: From I-5 take exit 208 onto state route 530 toward Arlington. Take a right onto Washington State Highway 20 and drive 56 miles to Washington Pass.

From I-5 North

If driving I-5 southbound, take exit 232 with signs for Cook Road. Follow Cook Road for four and a half miles until it runs into Highway 20. Take a left onto Highway 20 in the town of Sedro-Woolley and drive 98 miles to Washington Pass near milepost 162. Marblemount at milepost 106 is the last place to buy food and gas until Mazama, 74 miles on and 18 miles further east of Washington Pass.

From the East

From the east, follow Washington State Highway 20 to Washington Pass. Washington Pass is at Milepost 162, 17 miles west of Mazama and 30 miles west of Winthrop.

Average Driving Times

Start	Time (hours)	Miles
Seattle, WA	3:10	159
Tacoma, WA	3:40	192
Bellingham, WA	2:30	125
Leavenworth, WA	2:45	145
Mazama, WA	0:25	18
Spokane, WA	4:00	216
Portland, OR	6:00	332
Bend, OR	8:30	447
Vancouver, B.C.	3:30	175
Boise, ID	9:45	545
Bozeman, MT	10:00	613
Sacramento	15:30	911
San Francisco, CA	16:30	966
Salt Lake City, UT	15:00	882
Boulder, CO	20:30	1,297

Air Travel

Bellingham and Wenatchee offer slightly closer airports to Washington Pass, saving you 30-40 minutes of driving, but airfare is at least \$50-100 more. Instead, consider flying into Sea-Tac airport in Seattle. Sea-Tac also offers more affordable car rentals with more vehicle options. If you arrive by air, you need to rent a car. There is no bus transportation to or from Washington Pass.

Gas

The closest gas to Washington Pass is at the Country Store in Mazama, 18 miles to the east. In Winthrop, there are a few gas stations. Their gas can be a few cents cheaper per gallon than in Mazama but they are another 14 miles to the east. If traveling from the west, there is NO GAS for the 70 miles from Marblemount to Mazama. As a result, the gas in Marblemount is expensive, so filling up in one of the towns before Marblemount, like Sedro-Woolley, saves you some money.

When to Climb

Highway 20 typically opens in late April or early May and closes sometime in middle to late November or early December. The most popular time for ice and mixed routes is the first two to three weeks after the highway opens and the final two to three weeks before it closes. For most of the rock climbing routes, the best time of year is midsummer—late June through early September. For the warmer, south facing routes, the slightly cooler temps of June and then September into early October can nice.

Weather Trends around Washington Pass

Late April – Late May

The highway opens. This is the best time to ski and climb ice routes. You can climb some of the more moderate south and west facing routes, but expect them to be slightly wet and certainly to have some snow-covered ledges. Expect to climb most routes

in mountain boots. Ice axe, crampons, skis or snowshoes are often recommended for the approaches. The weather can be hit or miss and the highway might close for a day or two if it snows enough

Mid-May – Late June

This is a big transition time for the pass as the snow begins to rapidly melt away. By late May many of the south and west-facing routes start to dry out. Boots are typically worn on the approach. However, snowshoes or skis are no longer required to reach the base of the routes. Crampons or an ice axe can be helpful in the shady gullies when the snow is firm. During this time the weather is getting much better. More than half the days are sunny and by the end of June you can comfortably climb in the shade.

Late June – Early September

This is the best time of the year to rock climb in the Washington Pass region. Starting in late June or early July, depending on the snow year, you can make many of the approaches in hiking shoes. The routes are usually dry, and by mid-July, you can comfortably climb routes in the shade. On warmer days, you might even seek it out. Most days are sunny, and if there are storms, they are usually short lived.

Early September – Mid-October

North facing routes get a little colder. Ice and snow can linger on north faces for a few days after a storm. Climbing in the shade generally requires climbing in a puffy. But climbing in the sun is still likely to be pretty nice. The weather is still decent, with more than half the days nice enough to climb. Storms can move in for one to three days, often dropping snow on higher elevations, but this quickly melts and dries on sunnier aspects.

Mid-October – Late November

The ice and mixed routes start to come back into shape; snow lingers on the approaches and on ledges even in the sun. Rock climbing, even in the sun, is a little chilly and climbing in the shade is often



uncomfortable. Boots might be needed for more of the approaches as the storms continue to roll through, and consider bringing an ice axe and crampons. Nearly all routes have some lingering snow and wet sections.

Late Nov – Late April

The highway is closed and there is generally a lot of snow after mid-December.

Climbing near Washington Pass during these months is pretty uncommon and several routes in this book have never seen a winter ascent. During these months, many skiers make the 16-mile journey along the snow covered road on a snowmobile to go touring. There is a Heli ski operation – North Cascade Heli Ski – that flies in this area during the winter months.

Weather

The weather at Washington Pass is better than on most of the peaks west of the crest. It is not uncommon to have full-on rain all the way to Rainy Pass and then dramatic improvement in the short distance to Washington Pass where you get mostly

sunny skies. There can be a few afternoon thunderstorms in Washington Pass but with nowhere near the consistency as in the Tetons or Colorado Rockies.

Where to Stay

Camping

There are three campgrounds within 18 miles of Washington Pass.

Lone Fir campground is the closest campground to Washington Pass. It is seven miles east of Washington Pass and 11 miles west of Mazama at 3,600 feet, Lone Fir has 26 sites, 22 for tent, car or RV and four for tent only. Cost is \$12 per night. Lone Fir Camp ground is laid out in a loop and has a nice mix of sites, from denser trees in new growth forest to more wide open sites with camping options in full sunshine. Unlike many of the other campgrounds in the area, the maximum stay is five days. Also because of Lone Fir's higher elevation, it is sometimes noticeably cooler than Klipchuck or Early Winters campgrounds.





Klipchuck campground is 19 miles west of Winthrop at 2,900 feet and has 44 sites. The cost is \$12 per night with \$5 per additional vehicle, and two vehicles maximum per site. Klipchuck is one mile off Highway 20 on NF 300, consequently it doesn't have much highway noise. There are some group sites. Abundant new growth gives Klipchuck a little more privacy than most in the area.

Early Winters campground is located on both the north and the south side of the highway, 16 miles east of Washington Pass and two miles west of Mazama, just off Highway 20 at 2,200 feet. The cost is \$8 per night, and there are 12 sites, six on each side of the highway. While its smaller size is appealing, this campground is right next to the road and suffers from highway noise. Sleep in your car or in a tent. There is one bathroom on each side of the road.

Up Lost River Road there is Gate Creek campground, Ballard campground, Rivers Bend campground and Rattle Snake campground. Climbers generally don't camp at these locations because they are just too far away, adding ten to 30 minutes to the drive up to Washington Pass.

Lodging

The Mazama Country Inn offers 18 guest rooms, each with one or two beds and private bathrooms. Prices range from \$95-\$160 during the spring and summer months. Rooms with dining and breakfast options are available.

1-800-843-7951

webinquiry@mazamacountryinn.com

mazamacountryinn.com

15 Country Road Mazama, WA 98833.

The Mazama Country Ranch offers accommodations for larger group. Their main room sleeps 13 and their smaller Long Horn and Wing rooms sleep two to four. Prices range from \$115-\$365 during the summer months.

509-996-2040

Mazamaranchhouse.com

10 Country Road, Mazama, WA 98833

Backcountry Camping

There is no permit or fee to camp in any of the backcountry locations described in this book.

Storm Days

When it's raining or snowing at Washington Pass it can often be sunny, or at least climbable, just 16 miles to the east down in the crags near Mazama. The Mazama area, with several hundred sport climbs to choose from, is a worthwhile sport climbing destination on its own. One of the more famous features in the area is the Goat Wall, which hosts a half dozen 5-14 pitch routes that are over 1,000 feet tall. Popular crags include the Fun Rock, Canine Crag, the Rhino Zone and Prospector crags. A good book for the area is Mazama Rock by Bryan Burdo, often available at the Mazama store or from North Cascade Mountain Guides.

Rest Days

If sport climbing in Mazama isn't what you're looking for, there is a swimming hole across from the Prime Rib parking area below the Goat Wall. The Mazama store has great coffee along with all kinds of tasty treats and is a nice place to hang out for the afternoon. Drive to Harts Pass, the highest road in the state and the only place you can drive above tree line, for spectacular views of the Cascades from the east. The western

theme town of Winthrop has many shops, stores, and restaurants to cruise through.

Food

Food is available at the Mazama store in Mazama, 18 miles east of Washington pass. While it's a little expensive, the offerings are high quality and often made in the store that morning or grown in the Methow Valley.



The closest full-on grocery store is another 14 miles east of Mazama in the town of Winthrop. Red Apple grocery store is on the east side of town right off Highway 20. The town of Winthrop also offers a variety of restaurants and bars. If coming from the west on Highway 20, consider stocking up at the Haggen grocery store in Burlington right off the 230 exit or the Food Pavilion in Sedro-Woolley before you get to Washington Pass.

Climbing Gear

The closest gear shop to Washington Pass is the Goat's Beard, 18 miles east of the pass in the small town of Mazama. While small, the Goat's Beard has a pretty solid selection of climbing equipment including a variety of ropes, rock shoes, ice axes, helmets, chalk, tents, and most other things you might need. The next closest climbing shop to Washington Pass is Winthrop Mountain Sports in the town of Winthrop right off Highway 20, 32 miles east of Washington Pass. While they don't have as much climbing specific gear they have more general outdoor gear available ranging from hiking books to Nordic skis.

Seattle has the most impressive selection of climbing and outdoor shops of any metropolitan area in the country. If you are going to Washington Pass via Seattle, you have more than a dozen shops to choose from.

Second Ascent offers new and used gear with tons of closeouts and great selection. Feathered Friends is most famous for their selection of high quality down sleeping bags and parkas, but they also have an impressive array of higher end technical gear. The Seattle flagship REI is huge—the size of a two-story Costco—and filled with more outdoor products than you could imagine. Other outdoor shops in Seattle include Pro Mountain Sports, Outdoor Research factory store, The North Face store, The Mountain Hardwear store, the Patagonia store and Marmot Mountain works in Bellevue.

If you are travelling up the east side of the Cascades on Highway 97, the Leavenworth Mountain shop in

Leavenworth has an excellent selection of shoes, harnesses, mountain boots and other climbing equipment.

Guided Climbs

I work as a mountain guide and strongly believe that whether you are a novice or an expert climber, going out with a guide can be an enriching way to experience an area. For a beginner or intermediate climber, a guide can be a great way to literally learn the ropes, and there are few people who have nothing to learn from a guide. Hiring a guide can also allow you to get the most out of a short trip. From choosing the objective that's right for the conditions and your abilities, to helping you succeed on a challenging route, one you may have only dreamt of doing, a guide can add great value to your experiences.

When hiring a guide, consider the following questions. Who is your guide? Has he or she had training from the AMGA? Is he or she certified? Does he or she have experience in the area? Hiring a guide is all about your trip and you having a good experience.

There are three guide services permitted to guide in the Washington Pass area.

Mountain Madness,
1-800-328-5925
info@mountainmadness.com
3018 SW Charleston St.
Seattle, WA 98126

North Cascade Mountain Guides,
509-996-3194
ncinfo@ncmountainguides.com
2 Country Road,
Mazama, WA 98833

American Alpine Institute,
1-800-424-2249
info@aai.cc
1515 12th Street
Bellingham, WA 98225



Animals

Goats. North Cascade mountain goats, also known as Mazamas, are usually found at higher elevations. They are sure-footed climbers, often resting on rocky cliffs too precarious for predators. The goats around Washington Pass are afraid of people and generally mind their own business. They can be slightly more aggressive early in the summer when their offspring are young. There have been rare occurrences in Washington State of a mountain goat killing a person. The goats are typically after salt and have been known to eat backpack shoulder straps, pole leashes or anything else sweaty and salty. Keep in mind there is salt in urine. Do your best to go around a goat, even if it means going off trail.

Pikas. These are small mountain mice that live high in the western mountains of the United States and like to make their homes in rocky slopes. They are famous for chewing holes in your pack, tent or jacket pocket to get at food. Leaving your food in the middle of your tent (far from the walls) covered by a sleeping bag can be a good deterrent for these small creatures.

Bears. There are black bears in the North Cascades but they tend to be further away from the road than most of the peaks at

Washington pass and are rarely seen in this area. If you do run into a bear, avoid startling it. Bears are curious and may want to “check you out.” Try to avoid direct eye contact, which a bear may see as a threat. Generally, if you just stand your ground, the bear will soon leave. Wild bears rarely attack unless threatened or provoked. Talking in low, soothing tones may help keep you calm. Do not panic. Do not come between a bear and her cubs. If the bear stands up, it is to better identify what you are, not to threaten you. If a bear approaches you, do not scream or run or make sudden motions. You cannot outrun a bear, and screaming may increase the danger of the situation. Do not shoot the bear. A wound is likely to do no more than anger the animal and will greatly increase the danger to you. If a black bear attacks you, fight back with rocks, sticks, equipment or your bare hands if nothing else is available. Aim for the bear’s eyes or nose.

Loose Rock

While the Washington Pass region is known for its high quality granite, and it has its fair share of routes that feel like your local crag, these are alpine rock climbs and there are still some loose rocks sitting on ledges or precariously clinging to the wall. Be



aware of other climbers above and below you. If something feels loose, be careful before committing to it. On less climbed routes, climb more conservatively. Place a little more gear than normal; you never know when a broken hold could send you hurtling downward. Test suspect flakes and blocks. If trundling loosing rock, be 100 percent SURE NO ONE is around you.

Staying Warm

On hot days, especially if you are climbing in the sun, Washington Pass can feel less like alpine climbing and more like any other cragging area. But high on a route, late in the day it can be very cold standing around at belays or even while climbing. For routes in the shade or grade III's or longer it can be a good idea to pack a light puffy coat, or at least a wind shirt, to minimize shivering during the down time. Earlier or later in the season, bringing a light puffy coat is pretty mandatory, and you'll likely spend a fair bit of time climbing in it.

Anchor Conditions

Washington Pass's climbing history dates back to the 1930s with a lot of routes going up in the 1960s and 1970s. The ASCA and local climbing guides have been working hard to replace old bolts, especially at rappel stations. That said, many old ones still remain. Inspect the anchor you're rappelling off, and if in doubt, back it up. Just because the last person rapped off it without any problem doesn't mean you should blindly use it. There are also many old pitons and slung blocks for anchors. Inspect the webbing, wiggle the pitons or kick the block before blindly trusting your life to it. Leaving an extra sling is well worth not becoming a paraplegic or worse.

Cell Phones

There is no cell phone reception from any carrier in the Washington Pass region. In Mazama, 18 miles east of Washington Pass, there is some AT&T coverage. A few Verizon customers can pick up one to two bars near the Mazama store. Once you drive 4-6 miles east of Mazama, you will find stronger and more reliable signals.

Ratings

Ratings are used to compare one route to another to help climbers gain perspective on the difficulty of a route. In most cases, I have kept the original or general commitment grade and the Yosemite Decimal System grade. However, there are a few exceptions, routes where I felt the grade misrepresented the route or wasn't a consistent comparison to other routes in the area and might be misleading.

Commitment grades

While commitment grades are no longer used exclusively for the commitment level of a climb, they are generally used in North America to define how long the average party takes to climb the route, not including the approach or descent time. Just because someone can climb Liberty Crack in three hours doesn't make it a Grade II, or conversely, if a few parties take all day to climb the Beckey Route, that doesn't make it a grade IV. It's the amount of time the average party takes on the route that determines the grade.

Grade I – Less than an hour; often a one-pitch route.

Grade II – A route that takes a few hours (typically 2-3) to climb. The route is often two to four pitches in length. Examples include the Beckey Route on Liberty Bell, Rampage on Paisano Pinnacle or any of the routes on the North Face of Concord Tower.

Grade III – Half a day to climb the route. Routes can be 10 or more pitches in length with easier climbing, or can be shorter, 4-7 pitch in length with more challenging and sustained technical difficulties. West Face of North Early Winters Spire or the Southwest Rib of South Early Winter Spire are good examples.

Grade III+ – Routes that take a little more than half the day, but don't quite warrant the whole-day Grade IV rating. An Example would be the South Buttress of Cutthroat Peak.

Grade IV – An entire day of technical climbing. Routes are almost always eight

itches or longer and tend to be more sustained at a given grade. Examples include Direct East Buttress on South Early Winters Spire or the Fly Catcher Buttress on North Early Winters Spire.

Grade IV+ – These are big days, longer or harder Grade IV's, with potentially more problematic route finding. Start early and plan to possibly finish the route near dark. Examples include Gato Negro on the Whine Spire or Clean Break on Juno Tower.

Grade V – These routes take most parties more than one day to complete. The solution for these routes is either a bivy on route or fixing a few ropes the first day and then returning the second day to finish the route. Most Grade V routes take the average party two days to complete but are still attainable for fast, fit, and competent parties to complete in one long day. Examples include Liberty Crack, Freedom Rider or Thin Red Line on the east face of Liberty Bell.

Grade VI – Three to ten days of technical climbing. Examples include all routes on El Capitan.

Grade VII – More than ten days of technical climbing on a remote and difficult

big wall. Examples include Great and Secret Show on Baffin Island or the Grand Voyage on Great Trango Tower.

Yosemite Decimal Scale

This rating system for rock climbing is the most commonly used in the western hemisphere.

1st class – Walking up a steep, rocky hill. Seldom used.

2nd class – Mostly walking and scrambling up a steep hill with occasional use of your hands to go up or for balance. Often no risk of serious fall.

3rd class – This is where most people's definition of scrambling starts. Ascending still easy rock, using your hands often but not continuously. Potential for a serious fall.

4th class – Scrambling with near continuous use of your hands but not quite difficult enough for the average party to break out a rope. However, some parties will rope up for 4th class. Serious fall consequences.

5th class – An open ended rating system that defines all roped climbing broken up into subcategories from 5.0 (easiest) to

Alex Hall follows on the Hitchhiker on South Early Winter Spire. Photo by Larry Goldie



5.15 (hardest). At 5.10 and above, a further sub-classification of a,b,c, d is used to more precisely denote difficulty. For example 5.11a is easier than 5.11c. A + or – sign can also be used to denote finer gradations of difficulty. For example, a 5.9+ is a harder than an average 5.9 and a 5.10- might be easier than an average 5.10.

R and X ratings

R ratings refer to dangerous fall potential, whether that comes from a long distance without protection, ledge fall potential to swing into a corner, and/or the sharp rope-cutting edges. X ratings refer to pitches where a fall is going to have potentially fatal results.

Note: Just because a pitch doesn't have an R or X rating, doesn't mean you can't be injured or killed on it.

Aid Ratings

“C” – This pitch goes hammerless; hooks, cam hooks and HAND placed pitons are okay.

“A” – This pitch generally requires a hammer to place pitons or copperheads.

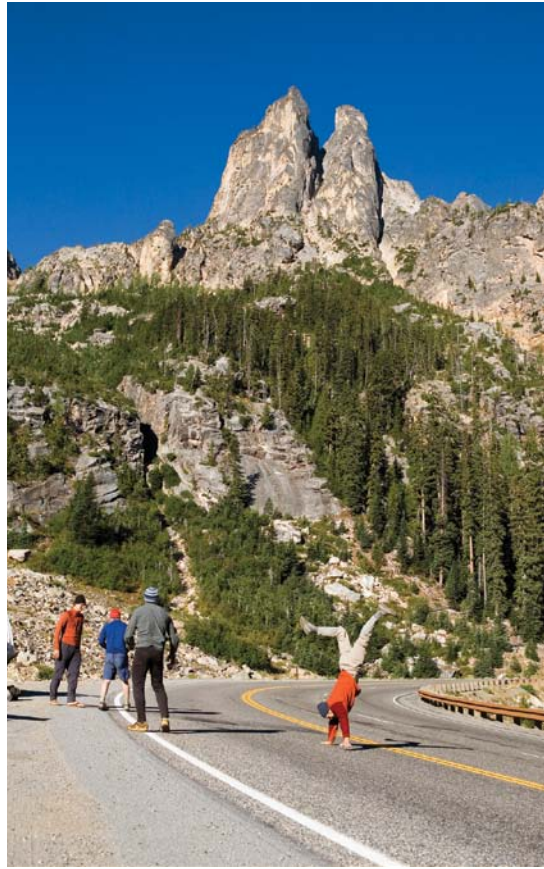
“F” – This pitch typically goes hammerless, but relies on fixed gear of some sort.

AO – No aid; pulling on pieces for progress, generally while in free climbing mode. No aiders are typically used, just pulling on gear and stepping on bolts or in slings. An example is Direct East Buttress of South Early Winters Spire.

AI or C1 – Easy aid; all placements are bomber. Little danger of falling except through pilot error. Most A1 pitches take 1-2 hours. Some examples are aiding the headwall pitch on the Southern Man, Mojo Rising's Pitch 2 or the first and second pitches of Liberty Crack.

A2 or C2 – Moderate aid; one or two body weight placements over bomber gear, 5-30 foot fall potential. Most A2 pitches take one to three hours. Some examples are Pitch 3 on Liberty Crack or many pitches on Thin Red Line.

A3 or C3 – Hard aid; three to five body



Prepping for adventure at the hairpin. Photo by Andrew Burr

weight placements in a row. Thirty to 50-foot fall potential. Most A3 pitches take one to three hours. Some examples are Pitch 2 of Thin Red Line, Pitch 4 of the Golden Arch on the Upper Town Wall of Index or many pitches on the Shield on Yosemite's El Capitan.

A4 or C4 – Serious aid; six to eight body weight placements in a row with 50 to 80-foot fall potential. Most A4 pitches take more than three hours.

A5 or C5 – Extreme aid; An entire pitch of body weight placements with no manufactured placements. That is, no bolts, rivets, bat hooks and so forth. More than 80 feet fall potential. Most A5 pitches take more than four hours.

“+” Indicates a tricky or strenuous section. Found on either strenuous terrain (Lithuanian Lip on Liberty Crack) or deep corner or groove feature (Mojo Rising’s Pitch 2) or an unusually tricky aid boulder problem such as an expanding flake or huge reach. Pitches marked with a + are often more thought provoking and time consuming than other pitches of the same grade.

Water Ice and Alpine ice grades

WI1/AI1 – No one uses this grade. Some say a frozen lake, others say climbing to 60 degrees.

WI2/AI2 – A pitch with short sections with difficulties of up to 80 degrees.

WI3/ AI3 – Sustained ice or firm snow up to 80 degrees requiring experience placing protection and belays. This grade can also have shorter, steeper sections with good rest in between.

WI4/ AI4 – A sustained pitch of off vertical or a shorter length (30-60 feet) of

vertical ice. The ice might begin to have more technical features or be thinner.

WI5/ AI5 – A full pitch of near-vertical or vertical steps of up to 20 metres, sustained climbing requiring placing multiple protection screws from strenuous stances with few to any good rests.

Current Conditions at SuperTopo.com

View the [Washington Pass Route Beta Page](#) before your climb to see conditions reports and if the route has changed at all.

After climbing the route, share your adventures in a [Trip Report](#) or post updated beta to the [Route Beta Pages](#).

Mikey Schaefer leading Pitch 5 on the first free ascent of Thin Red Line. Photo by Tim Matsui









Ref Size*	BD Camalots C4/C3's	CCH Aliens	Metolius Cams	Trango Big Bros	Wild Country Friends
0.3"	000 gray	.33 black	00 gray		Zero #2-#6 covers .28-.94"
0.4"	00 purple				
0.5"	0 green C3	.375 blue	0 purple		0 red
0.6"	1 red	.5 green	1 blue		.5 orange
0.75"		.75 yellow	2 yellow		
1"	.3 blue C4/2 yellow C3 .4 gray	1 red	3 orange		1 yellow 1.25 purple
1.25"	.5 purple	1.5 orange	4 red		1.5 sky
1.5"	.75 green	2 purple	5 black		1.75 green
1.75"		2.5 gray	6 green		
2"	1 red	2.5 clear	7 blue		2 pink
2.5"			small grey		2.5 royal
	2 yellow				
3"					3 navy
	3 blue				3.5 purple
3.5"			medium maroon		4 black
3.5-4.5"			large dark blue	1 red	
	4 grey				4 silver
4.5-5.5"				2	
	5 purple				5 red
5.5-7"				3 green	
	6 green (7.6" max)				6 green (7.6" max)
7-8"				3 green	
8-12"				4 blue	

*"Ref size" is the optimal crack width for a given camming unit. It is not the max range given by the manufacturer.

Topo Symbols

Right-facing corner		Roof		bolt	x
Left-facing corner		Ledge		Face climbing	--
Straight-in crack		Slab		Rappel anchor	
Groove		Belay station			
Arête		Pitch length			
Chimney		Optional belay			

Notes on Rack

- “nuts” refers to any nut, stopper, or chock. “micro”= #1, 2; “sml”= #3-5; “med”= #6-8; “lrg”= #9-13
- for cams, “2 ea .75-1.5” means bring two sets of all sizes between .75” and 1.5”. Check the cam size chart to see which cam corresponds to which crack size.

Notes on Topo

- “belay takes .6-1” means, while leading the pitch, save enough .6-1” cams and nuts to build a natural anchor.

Topo Abbreviations

- ow = offwidth
- lb = lieback
- Fp = fixed piton
- r = runout (dangerous fall)

Star Ratings

- ★★★★★ - undisputed classic
- ★★★★ - excellent climb
- ★★★ - good climb
- ★★ - okay climb
- ★ - barely included in this book

Metric System Conversions

- 1 inch = 2.54 centimeters
- 1 foot = 0.305 meters
- 100 feet = 30.5 meters
- 50 yards = 45.7 meters

Cutthroat Peak

Cutthroat Peak (8,050 feet), one of the highest peaks in the area, offers spectacular views of the surrounding peaks and the rest of the Cascades. There are no short routes to the summit. The granite is a little more weathered, and you will find some gravely “kitty litter granite.” It is slightly mislabeled on many maps, including USGS. The actual summit is 8,050 feet, but a 7,865 foot peak to the north is sometimes labeled Cutthroat. Other than the first ascent in 1937, Cutthroat Peak sat largely neglected until Highway 20’s completion.

Approach – Southeast Side (Washington Pass side)

Drive approximately 1.5 miles west of Washington Pass to a long pullout on the north side (the Cutthroat Peak side) of the road (5,100 feet). Park at the east end of the long guardrail. Northwest Forest Pass is required and your car must be pointing the right direction or you may be ticketed.

South Buttress, West Ridge and North Ridge:

Before you start, take note of where the climbers trail is on the hill side above the river. It is easy to lose track of the trail in the brushy creek. From the highway, look for one of many climbers path and cairns leading downhill into the forest. This area can be muddy early and late in the season. Once across the creek, ascend the hillside up a steep but well trodden trail. At around 6,500 feet, the vertical gain mellows in a large basin to the south west of the South Buttress.

South Buttress

From the large basin, head into the large left-most gully leading to a notch on the low angle ridge extending from the South Buttress. This is the easiest and best gully to take. There are two short, low 5th class sections in this gully (roping up optional).

These gullies are loose, and it’s a bad idea to be below another party. If there is another party in the left-hand gully, ascend

the gully immediately to the right of it. This gully is a little steeper and has more 3rd and 4th class climbing, but it is preferable to climbing the left-hand gully below another party. From the right-hand gully, once you gain the ridge crest, climb over a small bump in the ridge. There is typically a fixed anchor here to rappel (short) to the same notch the left-hand gully reaches.

Cauthorn-Wilson

When the route is in shape—typically earlier in the season—snowshoes or skis are often required. Take South Buttress approach until just below the large basin. At 6,100 feet, traverse hard right (northeast) and contour around the lower angle ridge extending from the South Buttress. Head north and into the basin below the large, east face of Cutthroat Peak. The route starts in the large, obvious east-facing couloir on the right (north) side of the face.

West Ridge

From the basin at 6,500 feet, head up and left (west). Just left of and below the terminus of the west ridge, there are two gullies divided by a rock ridge. The right-hand one looks more direct but is steeper and less pleasant with more difficult travel. Instead, go to the left of the rock ridge. It’s sandy at first, and you cross one 2nd-3rd class step near the top of the gully. Once atop the gully, traverse right and around the corner, which leads you to a broad, sandy bowl (snow in early season). Ascend left side of the bowl to the West Ridge start.

North Ridge

Follow the approach as for the South Buttress, until just below the large basin. At 6,100 feet, traverse hard right (northeast) and contour around the lower angle ridge extending from the South Buttress. Head north and into the basin below the large, east face of Cutthroat Peak. Continue past large boulders and the East face of Cutthroat Peak, aiming for the low point in the ridge and the nasty looking depression that gains that ridge.



Approach – West Ridge and Northwest side (Rainy Pass)

North Ridge

Park at Rainy Pass near milepost 158 or at a pullout just west of Rainy Pass. Turn into the Pacific Crest Trail parking area around 4,904 feet. Follow the Pacific Crest Trail into Porcupine Creek for around .5 miles to a small waterfall around 5,030 feet. Go uphill on cross country travel (some bushwhacking required) the climbers left side of the creek until you reach a clearing leading into a basin. Ascend in general the direction of the notch in the North Ridge. Gain the North Ridge notch well out of the south of the notch on the west face. Climb up an easy left-leaning ramp around a small tree, then up to the ridge crest. (2-3 short pitches, 4th class some 5.0)

West Ridge

Follow North Ridge approach until the basin. Ascend scree and talus up the basin until the sandy notch and the West Ridge.

Descents

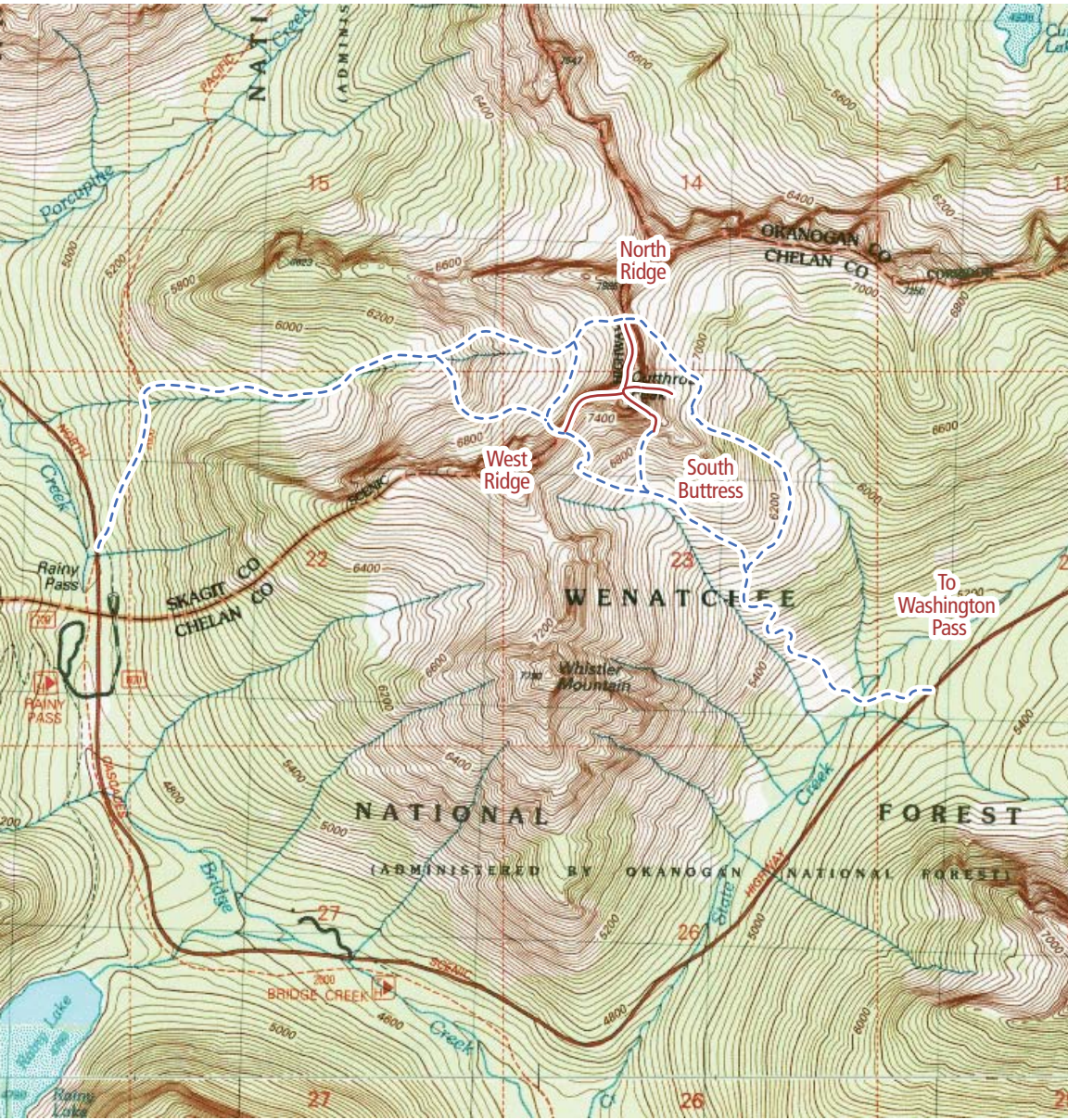
West Ridge

Descend the West Ridge, heading west a bit to bolts and chains down a corner system on the north side (there is an older destroyed set further to the southwest; don't use these). Make one 30m, slightly westerly

diagonal rap to a station on a thin ledge (two bolt anchor with chains). Rappel 30m to a flatter area on a slightly exposed part of the upper West ridge. Descend on or just right (north) of the crest to a slight notch that forces you back up onto the ridge with some exposed 3rd class. Continue down the ridge or just left (south) of the ridge until the ridge crest travel gets more circuitous and it looks easier to drop down. Descend slightly left (south) onto ledges (3rd and 4th class) about 50 feet below the ridge crest. It's difficult to see the first rappel station. There is a small tree just to the left of the station, and you haven't quite gotten above a large corner system that goes to the bottom of the west ridge. Referencing the West Ridge topo is helpful.

South Buttress

Descending the South Buttress is a hassle, takes a fair bit more time and involves far more rappels and a similar amount of down climbing. Make 14 rappels down the buttress, staying close to the climbing route. If rappelling off trees and rocks, only one 60m rope is required. Once at the base of the route and above the gully, most climbers down climb the rest, making only two more very short rappels over steeper sections. While the West Ridge does have its fair share of sandy walking, most climbers find this to be more pleasant than the steep gully descent on the South Buttress.



South Buttress ★★★

Difficulty: III+ 5.8

Sun Exposure: Mid-morning to sunset

Height of route: 1000'

Approach time: 1.5-3 hours

Climbing time: 3-7 hours

The South Buttress is neither the least difficult nor the shortest route on Cutthroat Peak, but because of the rock quality and access, it is easily the most popular. This route is characterized by lots of low 5th class climbing interspersed with short sections of 5.7-5.8 on mostly solid rock. There are a few loose and sandy sections of rock. Take care not to knock anything down on your partner or other climbers below. Nearly the whole time you are climbing to what appears to be the summit, you are actually climbing to a sub summit, the "Two Humps" that are actually sub-summits of the true summit. This can be a small mental blow, with a few cruxier sections still to go, but the rock quality only improves and the route finding gets more straightforward.

History

The South Buttress is now the most commonly climbed route on Cutthroat Peak, likely because it has the easiest access. But before Highway 20, the West and North Ridges were easier to get to because of access from the Pacific Crest Trail and Rainy Pass. Consequently, the South Buttress wasn't climbed until September of 1958 when Fred Beckey and Don Gordon did it in a marathon two-day effort from Seattle. That might not seem like a big deal now, but Beckey and Gordon hiked in via Twisp River and Copper Basin, more than 18 miles of hiking and over five hours of driving each way. The pair hiked in and camped, then climbed the peak the next day in a long mid-day effort. This is an incredibly impressive time to climb a new, nearly 1,000-foot-tall route, descend back down and hike out through the night,

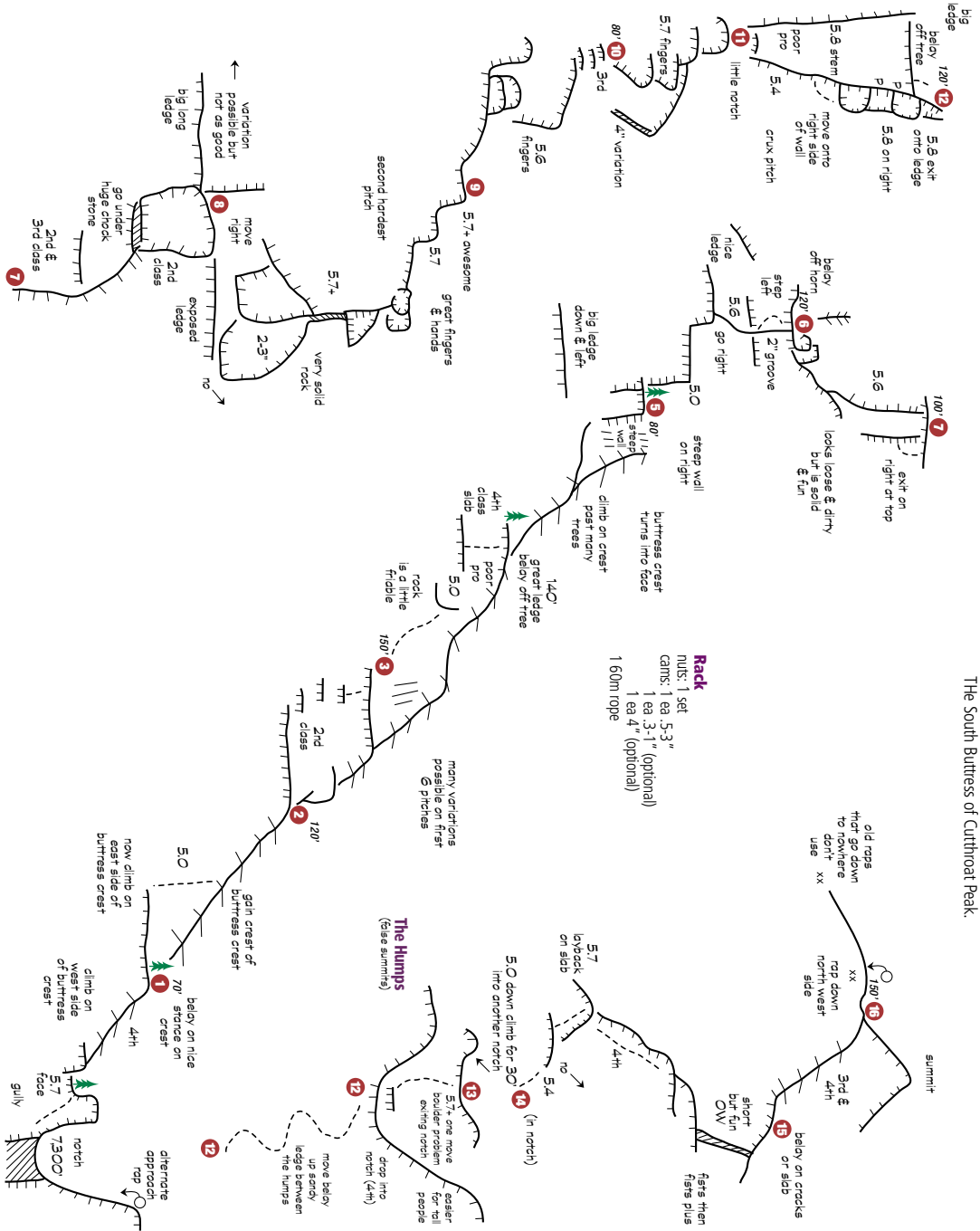
arriving back near midnight. Then they faced a five-hour drive back to Seattle.

Strategy

The South Buttress cruxes are short and the route is not very sustained, but it is big and complicated with tricky route finding. Crowds are common and on busy weekends expect to share the route with one or two other parties. Mid-week you have a 50-50 chance of having the route to yourself. If you are all hiking uphill together, consider either staying tight together or spacing out. The gully that gains the South Buttress is loose and not a place where you want to be below another party.

If there are other parties in the left-hand gully, you can gain the South Buttress via the gully to the right but there is a fair bit more 3rd and 4th class scrambling. You also have to do a short 30-foot rappel to gain the same notch once on the ridge (7,300 feet). From the notch, the climbing out of the gate is a little slabby and awkward for the grade and the fall is not very clean. This section is short and once past it there are several rope lengths of 3rd to low 5th class climbing. Pitch 9 is the first of the four crux pitches. This enjoyable pitch ascends a splitter crack that eats up gear on some of the most solid rock on the route. Pitch 12, the most difficult pitch on the entire route, involves stemming up a box chimney before exiting on the right. The rock is a little sandy and protection on the first half is harder to come by. When you are in the middle of the most difficult section, you get decent protection as well as a couple of old fixed pitons on your right before exiting on the same side. The final moves are a little awkward on sloppy and slightly sandy rock. This pitch in particular feels much harder when climbing it in stiff soled mountaineering boots, something often done.

The top of this pitch takes you onto a large sandy area between the Two Humps which, from the highway and much of the route, falsely appear to be the true summit.



The South Buttress of Cutthroat Peak.



True Summit of Cutthroat

The "Humps"

2nd Crux

1st Crux

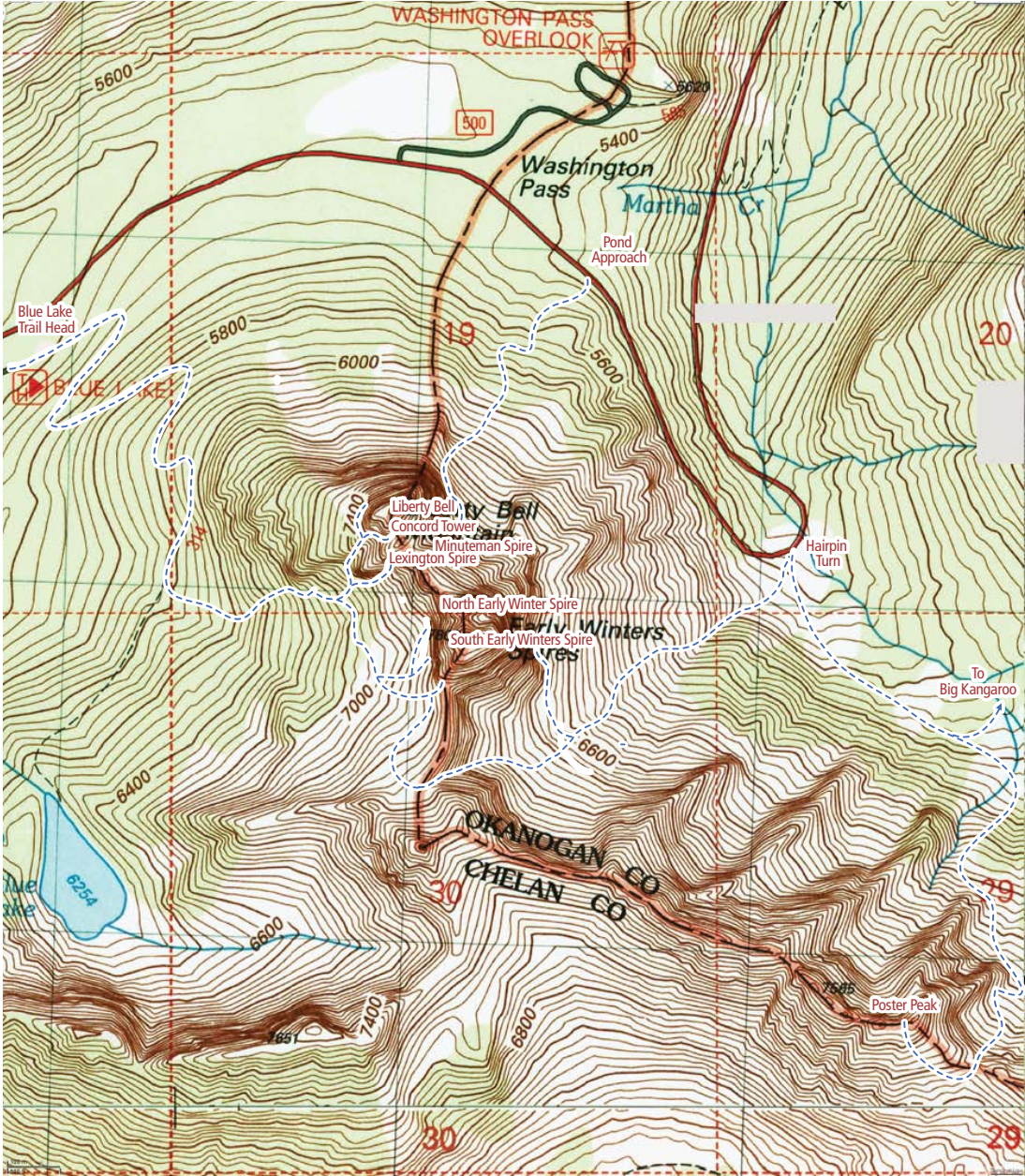
Not as good variation

Lower West Ridge Raps

The Notch

West Ridge climbing route

xx
xx
xx



Liberty Bell

Liberty Bell (7,720 feet) is the northern-most peak in the Liberty Bell group. Before any of the towers had been climbed, older Forest Service maps didn't specifically call out one tower to bear the name Liberty Bell. Instead, the word was loosely printed across all the towers. During the 1937 ascent of what is now South Early Winters Spire, the group considered attempting what is now Liberty Bell but decided it looked too difficult. They instead climbed South Early Winters Spire, because it was the highest peak in the group, and claimed the first ascent of Liberty Bell. By the mid-1940s climbers (most notably Fred Beckey) were thinking that the northern-most peak, especially when viewed from the east, bore the most resemblance to the Liberty Bell at Independence Hall in Philadelphia and the name eventually switched. Liberty Bell is one of the most famous peaks in the Cascade Range. It has high quality granite and an array of routes from easy

multi-pitch adventures to full-on big walls including Liberty Crack, one of Steve Roper and Allen Steck's *50 Classic Climbs of North America*.

Approach

There are two approaches. Blue Lake Trailhead leads to the Beckey Route, Rapple Grapple, The Girl Next Door, the Over Exposure route, the Serpentine Crack, the Northwest Face and the Remsberg Variation. The Pond Approach leads to the north and east-facing routes such as Liberty Crack, Freedom or Death, Thin Red Line, Freedom Rider, and Independence Route.

Blue Lake Trailhead:

For all routes on the north and west side of the Liberty Bell group, park one mile west of Washington Pass at the Blue Lake Trailhead (5,200 feet). A Northwest Forest Pass is required. Follow the trail a mile and a half to where it starts to flatten out and open up to give a view of the west faces of the Liberty Bell group. At 5,800 feet, a climbers path is obvious on the left (south) side of the Blue Lake Trail. This ascends a

The Liberty Bell group from the East. Photo by Ian Nicholson



well-beaten path toward a large slab called the Great Barrier in older guide books. It then ascends more steeply to the left side of this slab. The trail travels through a short boulder field as it starts to wrap around well below the west face of Liberty Bell. Just as you feel you are too far south, the first fork in the trail appears at 6,200 feet. The left fork goes toward Liberty Bell and Concord Tower and the right goes toward Lexington Tower and North and South Early Winters Spires. After ascending 250 feet more vertical feet, go left (north) into the Liberty Bell-Concord Gully (also known as the Beckey Gully) or right into the Concord Lexington Gully.

From the fork, continue up an ever steeper and looser trail. There are two very short 2nd/3rd class steps. This section has many small variations; stay on the most well-worn path. Most solid ground is on the far left (north) side until about 200 feet below the Liberty Bell-Concord Tower Col. There, traverse across the gully, and you can ascend right next to Concord Tower on solid but sometimes slabby rock. Do not head up the middle of the gully from the bottom end of Concord tower. It is steep, mostly 3rd class loose rock that is very exposed to rock fall from above. When in the Liberty Bell-Concord gully, beware of knocking loose rock on climbers below.

The Girl Next Door: Right before crossing the gully, about 200 feet below the notch, a low angle buttress divides the gully. The right side goes to the notch and the left side dead ends in a cave. Take the left side, ascend 10-15 feet to a ledge on the left side of the buttress and the start of the route.

The Beckey Route & Rapple Grapple: begin above a small narrow ledge about 50 feet bellow the notch. The Over Exposure Route begins just ten feet down from the notch.

Serpentine Crack, Northwest Face and Remsberg Variation: About 200 vertical feet below the Liberty Bell-Concord Col, there is a large cave. About 75 feet below this cave, there is a short, low 5th class step

that lead's to a gigantic ledge system. From here, you are quickly at the base of a short corner and the start of Serpentine Crack. The Deep V-slot crux section is obvious above you. For the Northwest Face and the Remsberg Variation, traverse slightly up and down all the way across this ledge system to its end on the north side of Liberty Bell and the start of the ridge. Both the Northwest Face and the Remsberg Variation start here.

The Pond approach:

For all the east faces of Liberty Bell, drive .3 miles east of Washington Pass and park in a small pullout on the south side of Highway 20. It is at the end of a guardrail just past a small pond at 5,400 feet. The climbers trail begins right at the pullout and ascends steeply through the woods to a talus field where the trail becomes harder to follow. There are many faint paths, and you can clearly see your final destinations. Stay to the right of the east face of Liberty Bell until you are about 100-150 vertical feet below it, and then begin the traverse left (south) toward your objective.

Thin Red Line and Freedom or Death:

starts just left of the center of the face to the right of a shallow corner. Look for small double roofs and the Pitch 2 start to the left.

Liberty Crack starts on the left side of a third class ramp below the obvious Lithuanian Lip.

Freedom Rider: Start on the far left side of the face in a large corner.

Descent

All descents start with two 25-30m rappels on Over Exposure route. While you can link the rappels with two 60m ropes, this is NOT recommended, as your ropes will get stuck. From the summit, reverse the final pitch of the Beckey Route by heading west down a 3rd class slab for 40-50 feet. Next, a short 4th class down-climb leads to a decent sized ledge. Walk down the ledge system for 15 feet to the top of the crux 5.7 slab. There aren't any great anchors to rappel off of here, and most people down-

climb it using spotters or short belays. There is a key hold that you use your hand and foot on down and right. Don't take the best place to grab with your foot. From here, head southwest (stepping through some small bushes) for 40 feet to the top of Pitch 3 of the Beckey Route. There is a key gully here with a well worn path on the descending climber's left (SE) where Pitch 3 came up on the descending climber's right (W). Follow the gully down for 50-60 feet and take a descenders right as soon as possible. It is a little bushy and it gets slightly steeper. Look for a large sloping ledge on your right with a two-bolt anchor and chains to rappel from on the far corner.

Rappel 25m to another smaller ledge and another 25m rap off bolts and chains to the col between Liberty Bell and Concord

Tower. Don't combine these rappels with two 60m ropes (your rope will get stuck).

Descend the gully right up against Concord Tower where the rock is more solid (descenders left side), until you get slightly cliffed out. Then cross over to the other side of the gully next to Liberty Bell (right side). Descend the gully for about 500 feet until it becomes more solid and an obvious trail takes you back to the main Blue Lake Trail 5,800 feet, and then to the Blue Lake Trailhead.

Note: If you parked and climbed the east-facing route and are descending the west side, watch for the trail to parallel the road. When you see the road about 30 feet away through the woods, cut over and hike back around along Highway 20. Expect a 20-minute road hike to take you back to your car at the pond pullout.

View from the approach from Blue Lake Trailhead.
Photo by Ian Nicholson

The 1200-foot east face of Liberty Bell. Photo by Mark Allen





Liberty Crack

Freedom Rider

The Thin Red Line

Freedom Rider

Liberty Crack

Freedom or Death

The Thin Red Line

Liberty Crack ★★★★★

Difficulty: V 5.10b C2 or 5.13a/b

Sun Exposure: Sunrise to noon

Height of route: 1,200'

Approach time: 1-2 hours

Climbing time: 1-2 days

Liberty Crack is one of Washington's best and most famous alpine routes. This classic route is located on one of the biggest and most sustained walls at Washington Pass on Liberty Bell, the Pass's centerpiece mountain. The route is included in Allen Steck and Steve Roper's, *50 Classic Climbs of North America* because of pitch after pitch of sustained and quality climbing that makes climbing the Liberty Crack a must-do. For most parties the route involves mostly free climbing, with only two to three pitches comprised primarily of aid, or depending on one's abilities, only a few short sections of aid on a couple pitches.

History

By the mid-1950s, word was starting to spread of the spectacular climbs done on the big walls of Yosemite. The ascents of the Northwest Face of Half Dome and The Nose of El Capitan had ushered in a new style of big wall climbing. In 1964 Alex Bertulis and Steve Marts hiked in from Twisp, coming over Kangaroo pass, unaware of the highway under construction. They started up what would become Liberty Crack. From the beginning the climbing was difficult and involved sustained aid. In this way, the duo reached the huge, 17-foot roof that would become the Lithuanian Lip, named in honor of Bertulis's ancestry. Bertulis was so intimidated he decided to put a bolt in right below the roof. He put in a half-inch angle piton right at the lip, standing on it and watching it rotate 30 degrees but not popping. "Oh shit, I'm coming off!" he yelled. After this, Bertulis lowered back to the belay, saying, "Okay Steve, you have a go." Steve replied, "No, I'm not going," and they rappelled off and went home.

Early in the summer of 1965 the pair returned. Bertulis sent the pitch and put in a bolted belay above the lip. Unfortunately, the weather took a turn for the worse with no sign of improvement, forcing them to descend.

In July, Marts returned with Fred Stanley and Don McPherson. Because Bertulis had a commitment in Africa, he told Steve, "Go finish the job." The trio juggled the fixed ropes left earlier in the summer. Marts took most of the day to lead Pitch 3 on what was to be the crux of the route. He placed numerous knife blades and RURPs on this pitch, a pitch that proved to be the most challenging of his career. The three reached a small stance not big enough to sleep on, so they spent the night in hammocks, suspended with the relief of the Cascades beneath them. In the morning, the climbers continued, and as they had hoped, the climbing began to ease. The three men bivied once more on a series of reasonably more comfortable ledges two thirds of the way up the wall at the top of the dihedral. They reached the top on the morning of the third day, severely dehydrated but elated, and rapped the southwest face.

Other history

During the mid-1980s and early 1990s, some of the strongest climbers in the country, including Ron Kauk, Peter Croft and Dale Bard, attempted a free ascent of Liberty Crack. The painful and extremely technical nature of the Lithuanian Lip and the slab above thwarted all comers until the summer of 1991.

During that summer, Brooke Sandahl, Adam Growski and Kurt Schierer decided to spend some time and make a project out of it. With five days worth of supplies and Brooke's quiver of four pairs of rock shoes, the trio set up a hanging camp below the Lithuanian Lip. Their wall camp, which included two double portaledges, gave the trio, "A spacious place to hang out, belay, lounge around in style, swirl coffee, and dwell above the ferocious bugs below," according to Sandahl. He later said, "Camping out on a big wall or on a high peak is just sublime."



After aiding the Lithuanian Roof, giving it a meticulous cleaning and closely examining even the tiniest features, it was time for them to start learning a sequence. After three days of intense learning, memorizing, and focused effort, Sandahl had a totally dialed sequence. He sent with gear left in place on the Lip, and it is now considered to check in at 5.13a/b.

The next order of business was the micro-hold, bouldery slab that closely follows the old bolt ladder. It took another day to brush clean and thoroughly inspect the bolt ladder slab and dial a sequence. Brooke says, "I purposely didn't try to link this pitch that day...saving my skin and strength for much needed cool morning temps." The problem with the slab was that the bolts there were old quarter-inch bolts that appeared to barely support body weight. The group decided to tie a static rope to the anchor above in order to protect the pitch while leading without having to re-bolt it. They then made loops in the static rope, and after clipping quick draws to the old bolts, they then clipped the loops in the static rope into the top biner of each

draw to back up the bolts. After a thorough warmup, Sandahl red pointed the pitch on his first go in perfect, crisp, cool conditions. He originally rated this Pitch 5.12+, but subsequent attempts might lean toward 5.13a.

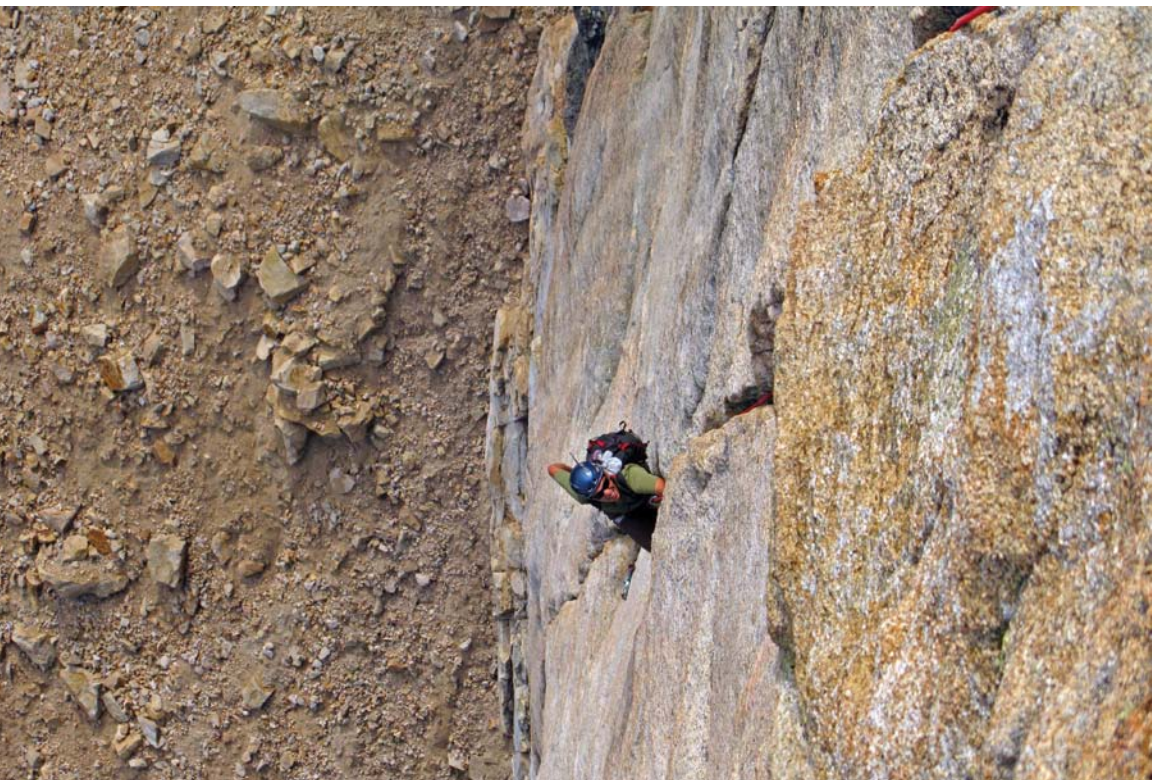
The following day, the three of them ascended the remaining pitches and Growski came close to doing the roof pitch, basically doing it with a fall at the lip.

Strategy

One of Allen Steck and Steve Roper's *50 Classic Climbs of North America*, this is the most popular Grade V route in the state. During weekends in July and August, it is not uncommon to see one to three other parties on the route at the same time. Don't lose hope and give up right away, as it's likely more than half the parties will bail on Pitches 2 or 3. A light-is-right mantra is key to success on Liberty Crack, no matter which way you climb it; hauling on the upper pitches is horrible.

Most people climb the route in two days, hiking loads to the base and fixing the first three pitches with two 60m ropes,

Chris Wright following Pitch 4 on Liberty Crack. Photo by Mark Allen



then going light and blasting to the top the next day. Faster parties with aid climbing experience can climb the route in a single day. The key to going fast on Liberty Crack is free climbing as much as possible. The 5.11a Pitch 1 can be aided at C1+ but it has many tricky placements. Climbing at a mid-5.10 level, you can free over half Pitch 1. Pitch 2, the Lithuanian Lip, is relatively straightforward aid climbing, but it is strenuous and exposed.

Those without much wall experience will find seconding the pitch as challenging as leading it. Toward the top of the Pitch 2, be prepared for the mandatory 5.7 free climbing or face ultra tricky aid climbing. While Pitch 3 goes free at 5.11d R, it goes quickest for most if aided. High stepping in your aiders can help you skip the worst looking fixed heads, and bring at least one three-inch cam. From Pitch 4 upward, aim to free climb as much as possible.

While a few select climbers succeeded with Liberty Crack as their first or second aid climb, it is not recommended. The primary reason many parties must bail from Pitches 2 or 3 is that they aren't experience with aid climbing and are moving too slowly. On Pitch 7, the free climbing isn't straightforward and the rock on your left is poor (be careful of those below). Try to avoid going into full aid climbing mode, just pull on a few mostly fixed pieces around the roof. The tricky free climbing ends quickly and eases after you pull the roof. Protect your second on the long traverse of Pitch 9. While you can descend from the top of Pitch 12, it is worth climbing the last two pitches to the summit. Many climbers capable of climbing Liberty Crack will simul-climb Pitches 13 and 14 (same as the last pitch of the Beckey Route) to the top.

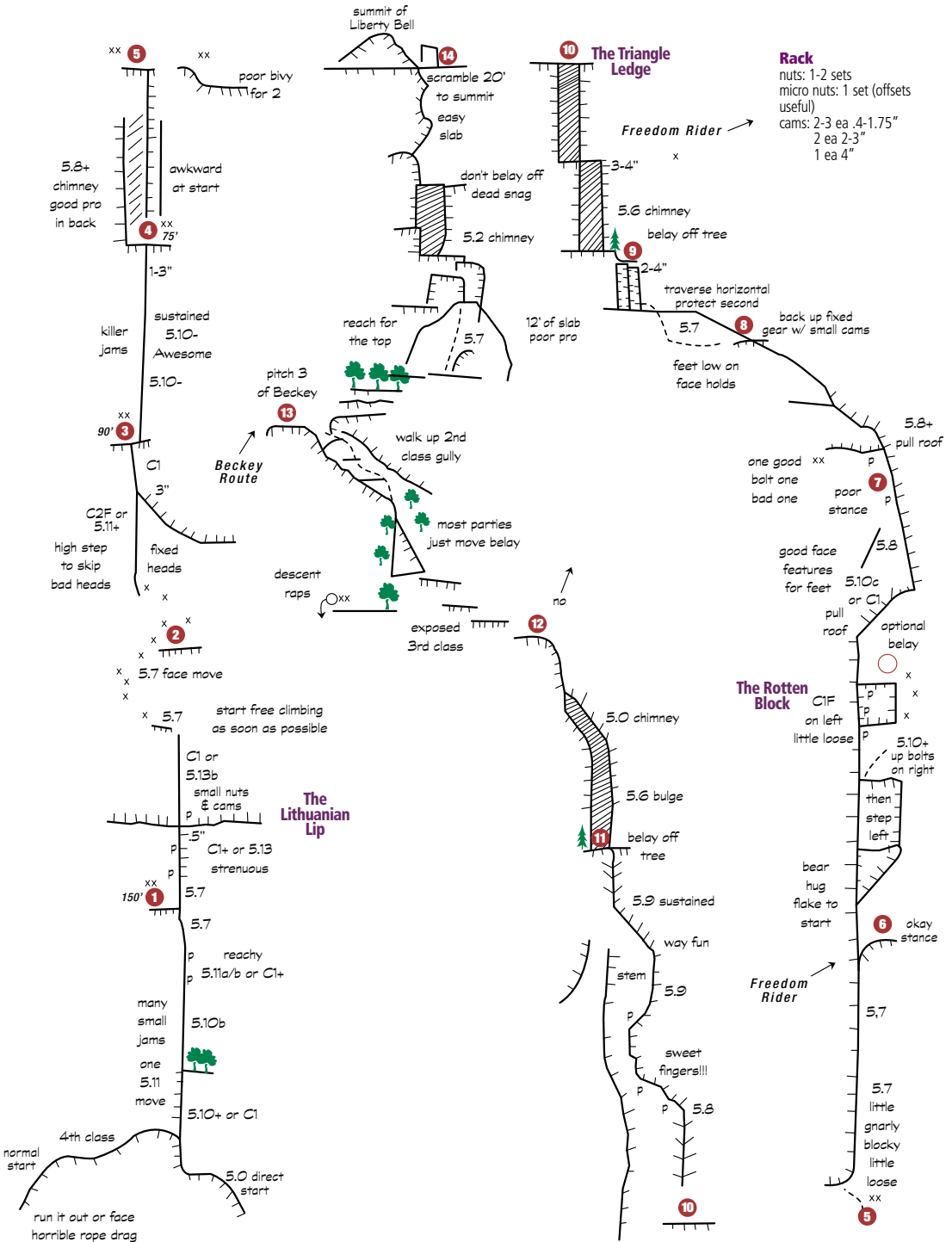
Retreat/Storm

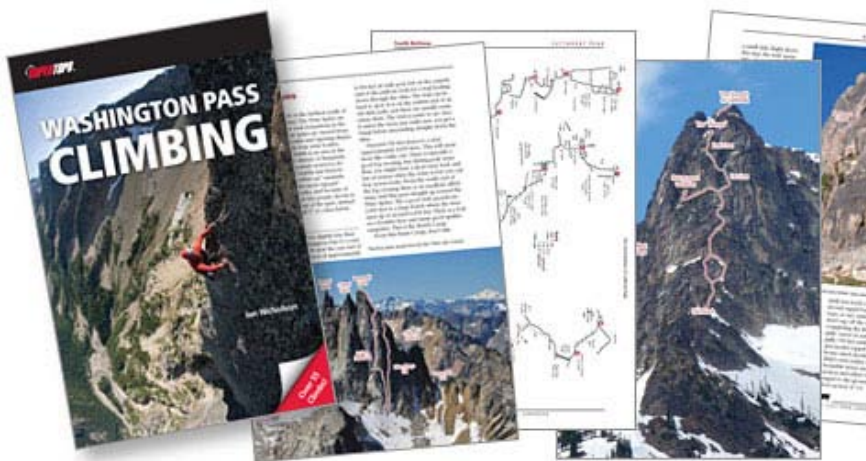
The route can be rappelled at anytime off fixed anchors from the top of Pitch 7. From there, the traversing nature of the route makes retreat more difficult but not impossible with many fixed anchors of varying states of decay higher up. The upper portion of the wall runs with water

and is no place you want to be in a storm. The route gets all morning sun and dries fairly early in the season once all the snow has melted off ledges.



Top: Jens Holsten on the first one day link-up of Liberty Crack and Thin Red Line. Photo by Max Hasson. Below: Ian Nicholson on The Lithuanian Lip of during a sub 4-hour ascent of Liberty Crack. Photo by Jason Broman





Get the full book with all 59 routes at:
Superto.com/packs/washington-pass.html