

MOUNTAINEERS ROUTE (III 5.9)

Elephant's Perch, Sawtooth Range, Idaho

Alpine Shangri-La on a 1,000-foot granite wall




Majka Burhardt sneaks left from the Elephant's Ear on P3 of the *Mountaineers Route* (III 5.9), Elephant's Perch, Sawtooth Range, Idaho.

ELEPHANT'S PERCH IS THE WEST'S HIDDEN GEM, with golden granite and airy climbs above sapphire lakes. Fred Beckey, S. Marts, and H. Schwabland put up the Perch's first line in 1963 (the *Original Beckey*, then V 5.8 A2), when the approach involved eight miles of bushwhacking and 2,000 feet of gain. Now a boat takes you the five miles across Red Fish Lake, but the remaining hike still stings enough that most stay overnight. The splendor of the sheer, 1,000-foot south face is hidden until the switchbacks to Saddleback Lakes. Look left of center for the *Mountaineers Route* (III 5.9), the easiest way up the wall. Begin beneath the golden diamond that forms the Elephant's Ear,

moving into its lower apex. The climb's first quarter (two pitches of corners and cracks) leads to the line's dominant feature: the triple roofs that skirt left around the diamond. Pitches 3 and 4 climb into, and then out of, these tiers, 800 feet off the deck.

Next, the route moves into a deep, left-facing corner via incipient seams. Once here, circumnavigate the occasional suspended chunk of granite guarding an ever-widening crack. These two 5.7 and 5.8 pitches likely gave the *Mountaineers Route* its name in 1967, when Gordon Webster, TM Herbert, and Dennis Hennek put it up—the blocks are big (and loose) enough to force creative stemming, face climbing, and selective jamming. (Two climbers died here in the mid-1980s when their anchor, behind a loose flake, pulled—stay sharp!) According to Herbert—now 73 and still climbing near his Reno, Nevada, home—his group bivied en route “just as we bivied on everything back

then,” he says, while their wives waited at the base.

“Loose blocks?” asks Herbert. “Loose blocks were just part of climbing.” (The otherwise-solid rock on the Perch's other technical climbs—the *Beckey Direct*, *Fine Line*, *Astro Elephant*, etc.—makes the *Mountaineers Route* a bit of an anomaly.) This rock-quality deterioration is standard on many alpine moderates—think, the North Ridge of Spearhead, in RMNP; and *Dark Star*, on Temple Crag—but if you hang in on the *Mountaineers Route*, your reward will be a final, three-inch 5.9 crack, the route's technical crux leading to easier terrain and a lunar summit. 

The Beta



Guidebook: *Idaho: A Climbing Guide*, by Tom Lopez (The Mountaineers Books, 2000; mountaineersbooks.org). Topos and route descriptions available at mountainproject.com.

Guide Service: Sawtooth Mountain Guides—(208) 774-3324, sawtoothguides.com

Equipment Shop (Ketchum): The Elephant's Perch, 280 East Avenue—(866) DAPERCH, elephantsperch.com

Season: July through September

Rack: Set of nuts, cams to 3 inches (optional No. 3.5 Camalot), 60-meter rope

Topo: Visit climbing.com/exclusive/classicclimbs for topo, gear Beta, and a list of nearby classics.

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