

# **The East Face, The Diamond**

## **Casual Route (5.10a)**

### **TRIP REPORT**

**THE DIAMOND, CASUAL ROUTE (5.10a)**

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## **OVERVIEW**

Longs Peak is a 14,255 foot mountain located in Rocky Mountain National Park Colorado. The Diamond is the uppermost 1000 feet of Longs Peak's East Face. The Face is vertical to slightly overhanging. It is approached by climbing the 5th class lower east face for 600 feet. Afternoon thunderstorms are common. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to be below tree line (11,500 feet) by 1 P.M. We did not even come close.

## **BACKGROUND**

Our 1st trip to the Diamond was in Aug of 2007. Ross had 7 days of experience leading on traditional climbing routes. I had never completed a tradition lead of more than 5.7. However, we both wanted to check out the climb. We did the approach climb (North Chimney 5.5) and bivied on Broadway. Broadway is a series of broken ledges that splits the East Face of Longs Peak in half. After bivying at 13,100 feet, we climbed to the top of the D1 pillar (5.6). A couple of climbers we meet on the wall encouraged us to continue. We debated for a while at the top of the D1 pillar about whether or not to continue. We decided we did not have enough experience and rappelled off the climb.

## **PREPERATION**

We dedicated the following year to training. We made numerous trips to Enchanted Rock Texas (a local granite crag) to improve our crack and traditional climbing skills. To test our endurance we climbed Time Wave Zero (a 23 pitch sport climb in El Potrero Chico, Mexico). In the days leading up to the climb we acclimated to Longs Peak's altitude by climbing Semi Automatic Crome Plated Eneyrna Syringe 5.7, Mainliner 5.9, Spearhead (Regular Northwest Face 5.6) and then Spearhead again (Sykes Sykle 5.9+).

## **THE APPROACH AND 1ST BIVY**

**(9400 foot trail head to 12,600 feet)**

We started our approach from Longs Peak trailhead at 1:30PM. We arrived at Chasm Lake at 4:30PM. It took us about 20 minutes to walk around the lake to a large Bivy cave. We wanted to be 1st on the Diamond the following day so we filled up our water bladders at Chasm Lake and continued up the Mills glacier to beginning of the climb. At that altitude it was very difficult to walk with the weight of the extra water. We arrived at a one man bivy cave at the base of the climb at 5:00 P.M. I offered it to Ross, because he would be leading the hard stuff the following day. He declined and slept out in the open. What lay ahead looked massive, horrifying and awe inspiring. I went to sleep wondering if I would live through the next day.

## **NORTH CHIMNEY TO BROADWAY**

**(600 feet of 5.5) 12600 to 13,100 FEET**

We woke up at 4:30 A.M. Our approach to the North Chimney from the bivy was a 200 meter hike on the Mills Glacier. The glacier was steep where it joined the North Chimney route. Wearing only approach shoes made it difficult to transition from the ice to the rock. As soon as I got on the rock I braced myself in between 2 boulders and gave Ross a hip belay. Shortly thereafter Ross slipped on the glacier and the hip belay held. I lead up the North Chimney in 1 continuous simu pitch. It took us about 1 hour. From the year before we learned that it is easier to climb on the slab to the left of the actual chimney. Just before the D1 pillar I saw slings to the right and started following that line. The climbing became progressively more difficult. I decided that I was going the wrong way. I reverse down lead back to the 1st sling and belayed Ross up to me. Ross then traversed about 25 ft to the left and he was at the bottom of the D1 pillar on Broadway (I almost made it with out getting lost).

## **THE CLIMB**

**(13100 feet to 14000 feet)**

**Pitch 1 and 2 (5.6)** A party was just catching up with us as I was leading out to the top of the D1 pillar. The climbing was easy. I used only 3 pieces of protection. In hindsight, it would have saved time to lead the North Chimney and the D1 pillar as 1 continuous simu pitch. The year before I led up the left side of the D1 Pillar and it is definitely easier on the right side. We linked the 1st 2 pitches on the D1 Pillar by bypassing the 1st belay station. We belayed from just below the 5.9 finger crack. This was our high point from the year before. (Pitch length 50 meters)

**Pitch 3 (5.9)** Ross took over leading. The 5.9 crack is roughly 30 feet. Then we did a 5.7 traverse. At the same time Ross got to the belay station for pitch 2, two climbers had joined me at the belay station for pitch 1. Once again, I took off in haste. As a result I fell on easy terrain right out of the belay station. The 5.9 was not too difficult. However, it was a lot harder than anything we had done up to that point especially at over 13,000 feet. The 5.7 traverse did not seem very scary even though Ross had skipped clipping one of the pitons. (Pitch length 55 meters)

**Pitch 4 (5.8)** This pitch took us to base of a huge vertical to slightly overhanging dihedral. There were plenty of good holds with lots of places to insert protection. (Pitch length 50 meters)

**Pitch 5** (5.8+) We belayed in a little alcove that was completely shaded from the sun. By the time Ross had finished the Pitch I was freezing, and I was ready to climb. I really felt the altitude on this pitch. The exposure was unbelievable. During the whole pitch I was stemming, jamming and looking at wicked exposure beneath my toes. Awesome climbing! I felt this pitch had it all. (Pitch length 58 meters)

**Pitch 6** (5.7) The weather looked ominous. We felt a couple of drops of rain and became extremely concerned. There is a small cave at the back of the belay stance that we could have fit into to escape the weather. We decided to press on. This pitch ended at the Yellow Bivy Ledge. It was easy fun climbing. (Pitch length 17 meters)

**Pitch 7** (5.10a) It started off as 5.9+ face climbing. Next was a 5.8 squeeze chimney followed by a few moves through a 5.10a finger crack. Although Ross breezed through the 5.10a crux, he was horrified leading the squeeze chimney. He had never climbed a chimney before. I thought the chimney was fun, because I had the top rope. (Pitch length 45 meters).

**Pitch 8** (5.8+) The weather was upon us. Pitch 8 was a traverse on table ledge that led to the Kieners route. Table Ledge is about 2 inches wide and you can not stand on it. There was a tremendous amount of air underneath us (about 1600 feet), and the risk of a serious pendulum fall. It did not look as if there were any good holds below the route to get back on route in the event of a fall. A fall would have resulted in me having to slowly ascend the rope using prusik knots to get back on route. It was a very frightening prospect. If I fell I would have had to do this procedure in the middle of a lightning storm. I was pelted by hail while making the traverse. I was so scared I almost soiled myself. Luckily I did not fall. (Pitch length 35 meter. However, Ross led to the end of the rope)

## **KIENERS ROUTE**

**(14,000 feet to 14,255 feet)**

We had to do a couple of pitches on the Kieners route to get to the summit. The 1st pitch was probably only class 3 or 4. However, I got off route again and had to back track. I went too far to the left. Once we figured out which way to go, we had a pretty serious thunderstorm to deal with. It looked like we only had 1 pitch of 5th class to go. However, I did not want to be on the summit while there was so much lightning. So we opted to stay put. We waited out the storm by leaning against a boulder and sitting on the ropes. We hoped this would reduce our chances of getting hit with 60,000 volts of electricity. I was starving. I ate the rest of my food quickly. I figured it might be my last meal, and I did not want to miss out on any of it. It was 2:45 P.M.

We started climbing again at 4 P.M. We were going to simu-climb the final pitch of Kieners. However, it was loaded with snow. Ross slowly led the final 5th class pitch. It should have been easy climbing but with snow and cold fingers it definitely stimulated the senses.

## **THE SUMMIT**

**(14,255 feet)**

We made the summit around 4:45 P.M. Ross had climbed his 1st 14,000 foot peak. Normally in Colorado, if you live through the afternoon thunderstorm, it clears up and you can descend at your leisure. Although the Lightning storm had passed, the weather looked downright ominous. So we pressed on without stopping for a summit photo.

## **THE NORTH FACE (CABLES) DESCENT**

**(14,255 ft to 13,060 ft)**

There were many cairns to follow to get to 2 rappels. We could have done 4 rappels with 1 rope or even down climbed the 5.4 route but we were both extremely fatigued and opted for 2 double rope raps. We did the rappels off of 1 huge eye bolt each time. From the bottom of the rappels we skirted the edge of the diamond until we arrived at Chasm View. Chasm View is the starting point of an alternate approach to the Diamond. From Chasm View climbers do 3 double rope rappels to reach Broadway. Chasm View also has an amazing profile view of the Diamond. The view allowed me to reflect on what we had just done; a surreal experience! It did not seem possible that we had just succeeded in climbing the Diamond.

## **CAMEL GULLY DESCENT**

**(13060 feet to 12,100 feet)**

We should have been able to see camel rock (the point at which we needed to begin our descent to get back to our bivy) however, we were in a whiteout. We followed the ridge line closely until camel rock seemed to materialize out of thin air. I recalibrated my barometric altimeter to match the know altitude of camel rock (13,060). The instructions were to navigate west to a point at 12,400 feet and then turn left for 100 feet to enter another descent gully. If the visibility would have been greater than 50 feet, this would have been a piece of cake. I used the compass on my Sunnto watch to head west as we descended. Once we were well into the gully and out of sight of camel rock I discovered that my watch compass was indicating west regardless of which direction I pointed it. I wanted to make sure that we did not get to too far to the left and miss the 2nd descent gully. There were cliffs too steep to negotiate all around us. Also, I was concerned about my altimeter reading correctly. When bad weather rolls in, there is a strong possibility that a barometric altimeter will read incorrectly due to the change in pressure. So we overshot to the right while descending to an indicated altitude of 12,400 feet. Then we traversed left while maintaining a constant indicated altitude. Eventually we found the 2nd gully that took us back to Mills Glacier. The whiteout lifted temporarily, and I was able to refill my camel back from glacier melt as day was turning into night.

## **MILLS GLACIER TO 2nd BIVY**

**(12,100 feet to 12,600 feet to 12000 feet)**

One huge disadvantage of bivying at the base of Mills glacier was that it required us to hike back up for 30 minutes to retrieve our bivy gear. Once we retrieved our bivy gear and took an extended break, we started our descent to Chasm Lake. Shortly after beginning our descent we were in a whiteout again. I have been

in plenty of whiteouts mountaineering but never at night. I was shocked to discover that I could only see about 10 feet in any direction. Ross had the Kmart blue light special headlamp, and he could only see about 5 feet. We were both physically and mentally trashed. It took us a long time just to get to the large bivy cave adjacent to Chasm Lake. We should have bivied at that point. It took us another 2 and ½ hours just to get to the other side of the lake. We were utterly delirious. Ross kept tripping and falling down. I was not doing much better. It was raining hard again. I looked at my watch. 1 A.M. We had been going for over 20 hours. I said “Time to bivy”. Ross was all for it. We laid down on a sloping rock for a miserable bivy. As soon as we got in our bivy sacks we started getting pelted by hail. The lightning started again and lasted for hours. Every time I started to dose off, a loud crash of lightning would wake me up reminding me that we might still die after all. Who would ever think we could do the 5.10a crux and be forced to bivy in class 2 terrain?!? The whole night I keep looking at my watch impatiently waiting for our little orange friend in the sky to reappear.

## **ESCAPE**

### **(12000 feet to 9400 foot trailhead)**

At 5:30 A.M. it was time to go. There was still a white out but with the sun coming up I could see farther. I was able to quickly determine we had about 300 feet to go to get to the path. We did the 3 hour hike to the car in heavy rain, with no sleep and no food. We were extremely grateful to be alive.

## **OUR GEAR LIST FOR THE DIAMOND (CASUAL ROUTE)**

### **THE RACK**

1 sets of nuts

Hexs 4,5,6 (did not use)

2 sets Black diamond C4 cams .3-3

C3s 000- 2 doubles of the #2

12 24in slings

4 48in slings

2 rope hooks

4 daisies

2 rap rings, rap gloves

3 atcs

Summit pack (flash pack rei) + long sling

2 30 ft 5.5mil titan spectra cord

Carabineers

Light weight 71

Small locking 4

Large locking 6

2 nut tools

Rope Beal joker 9.1 mil

## **CLOTHES**

Lightweight approach shoes

Fleece

Light weight rain pants and jacket

2 hand warmers

Fleece hat

Gloves

Wool Socks

## **BIVY**

Pack cover

Backpack arcterex 62

2 Sleeping pads

2 light weight sleeping bags

2 light weight bivy sacks

2 2 liter H2O bladders

1 10 liter h2o bladder

3 lbs of food each

2 wag bags

1 oz tp

Half oz Purel

Purification drops

1 large trash compacter bag

## **OTHER GEAR**

Helmets

Head lamp + extra batteries

Cameras

Climbing shoes

Alarm clock

Knife

Sunscreen

## **CONTENTS OF THE SUMMIT AND FANNY PACKS**

Lbs

4 liters of H2O	9
Food	2.5
Shoes + socks	4
8 mil rope	5.5
Rain Jackets	1.5
Pack	1.3
1st aid	.5
Total weight	24.3