

## A Grand Vacation—Grand Teton National Park

July 27 - August 16-19, 2012 By Paul Morash



Photo by Ron Norton

sure we were fairly representing the state! Ron Norton, Greg Jacobus and Steve Shields and I were to meet at the AAC Climbers ranch in the Grand Teton National Park and scale this infamous peak. (the term “scale” is kind of an ongoing joke amongst a growing group of CMC’ers).

For those that haven’t been, you need to go! Even if you don’t get to climb, GTNP is a pretty special place. For those that ski, Jackson Hole looks like an awesome place to ski and the town is way more than I expected. Great people, good prices and location, location, location!

The AAC climbers ranch is pretty amazing as well. It is right there at the base of The Grand. You can literally hike from there to the Grand Teton or several other mountain destinations.

So OK you can hike right from there but we chose not to! We had to go get our permit at the Jenny lake ranger station which is past the Lupine Meadows (normal starting point) so decided to just stop there on the way back and head in. I think it’s about the same mileage but the trail from the ranch might be a little steeper. With 5000’+ to base camp we needed to conserve a little!

We decided on the Moraine Camp area as opposed to the Saddle which is where most guided parties and many other groups start from. We had got a tip from Kathy Rich, who climbed the Grand the year before, that the Saddle was pretty exposed and almost ALWAYS in the wind and cold. Hearing that from other sources as well Ron smartly chose the Moraine as first choice for our permit.

I remember when I started rock climbing in my early twenties, grabbing a copy of Rock and Ice or Climbing, flipping pages and dreaming about someday come out west to climb.

A few short years ago I remember a similar dream from a similar start. Another copy of R&I or Climbing and an article on the Classic Climbs in North America. Pretty near the top of that list was the Direct Exum route of the Grand Teton.

Present day 2012 and a group of 4 of us are on our way to Jackson Hole, Wyoming!

The roster varied a little over the early days and months of planning but settled on a group of 4. 2 from SoCal and 2 from NorCal (do they use that?), just to make



Photo by Ron Norton

I think we got a little weather that afternoon but nothing to make too much of a fuss about. Weather for the next day was supposed to be perfect!

As is so common in the mountains, a very early start was on tap to get us ahead of the crowds AND beat any of that 0% chance for weather we were promised. I think we got to the Saddle and were looking for our start by about 5-5:30. Still pretty dark out. Sources had advised us to scout the route the day before but...that didn't happen...we'll find it!

We actually headed off in the right direction but then got a little excited and tried to start too soon. The beta says go almost ALL the way to the Petzl route and surprise, surprise it was correct! We had convinced ourselves a gulley was a chimney! We were fortunate in that we weren't too far off and as Steve said, "this is one of the 50 classics, we have to start it right". So we did! There was another couple we almost sold on our variation but they were smarter than us and moved on to find the correct start.

With the correct start in front of us there was nothing holding us back now, well except that party of 3! Where did they come from...groan!! Somehow another group had got in front of us while we were messing around trying to get out of our chimney gulley.

Tough for a group of 4 to ask a group of 3 to let us climb through so we followed them for the rest of the day. To their credit they moved about as efficiently as a group of 3 could and they occasionally got held up by the couple we met at the false start. Hurry up and wait became the new theme!

I guess when you start ticking climbs labeled the best in North America, line ups can be expected. I don't recall ever running into this problem in CA but maybe that's because I climb with Ron a lot and he can't sleep later than 4am!



*Photo by Ron Norton*

Anyway the climbing was pretty awesome even though we couldn't move as quickly as we would have liked. The Black Face was for sure the money pitch and I was fortunate enough to get that lead. Solid pro and super steep 5.7 climbing on a sunshine filled day...ahhh!!!!

Shortly after that the Lower Exum was history, were on Wall Street and that sunshine filled day had changed! As we had seen for the past 3 days, the afternoon brought thunder storms. Now today had a 100% chance of no weather...3 days ago! Apparently you only get 100% chances 3 days out! No rain yet but the sky was dark and we could see the clouds moving. Not really knowing how long it would take us to climb the Upper Exum OR get off this mountain, we chose to bail.

The escape from here was pretty easy and obvious, compared to the unknown of continuing and not knowing where we might have to bail from.

We made it to the Saddle before the rain came and we were pretty wet by the time got back to the base of the fixed rope. The sun then came out again and dried us up pretty quick and helped the attitudes adjust to the new plan which entailed another early start!

The next morning we raced back up to the Saddle and retraced our steps, for the most part, back to Wall Street. The Step Around at the top of Wall Street was pretty cool, we got to do this twice! If you get the chance you have to do it standing up!

Jazzed to climb again and in the sun once more I lead off on the Golden Staircase and the smiles returned. The Upper Exum was a blast. About 5-6 pitches of low 5<sup>th</sup> class climbing. We simul-climbed most of it belaying a couple short pitches, just because of rope drag you know, wink, wink!

On the summit we were fortunate to run into a friendly guide from the legendary Exum Mountain Guides Co.. He was actually there on his day off with his wife and sister-in-law. We had recognized him from the previous day and from earlier that same day



*Photo by Ron Norton*

and fortunately he recognized us as well and was kind enough to let us shadow them down. Getting off the Grand is not a trivial matter so we were very happy to have them to follow.

We followed them to the rappel, the overhanging rappel! The rap was about 200' total of which about 100' is free hanging! NICE!

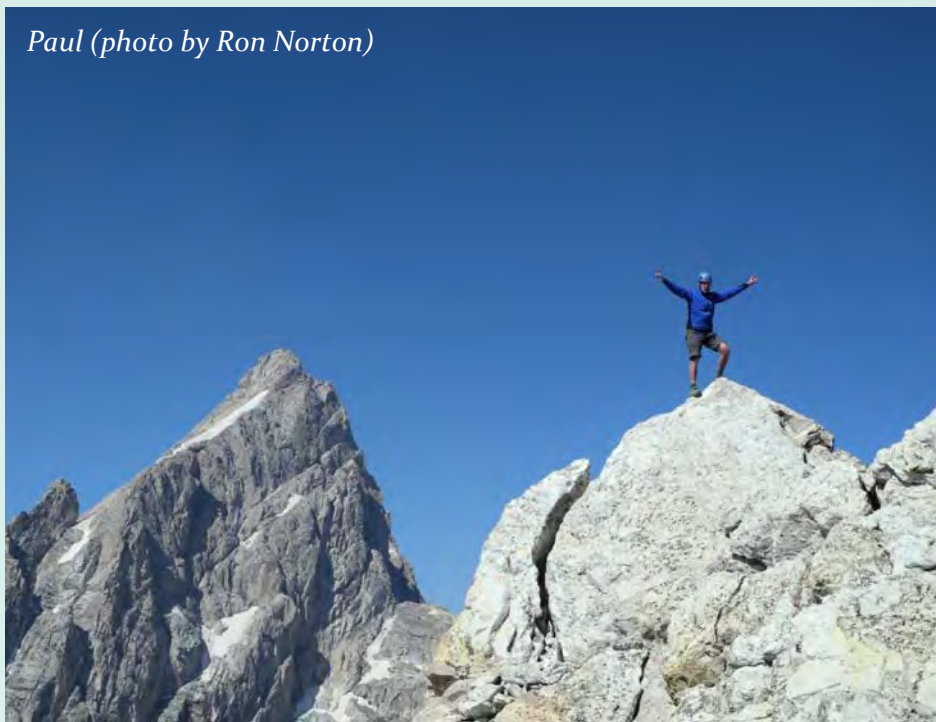
From there it was basically a scramble back down to the Saddle.

From the Moraine to the Summit to the Saddle to the Moraine and then ALL the way out, LONG day!

We had an entire week in GTNP so next up was Mt. Moran. Another very striking peak with a route that just needed our attention, the CMC Route! It was actually named after the Chicago Mountaineering Club but hey...if the acronym fits...!

This trip required a canoe approach! Sweet! Prior to coming out west I had been a canoeist so I was pretty excited to jump in a canoe again. After the thunder and LIGHTNING stopped...we had a very enjoyable paddle across two lakes to our start. Seriously, this trip had an odd start. When we woke up in the morning it was already threatening rain. By the time we got to the canoe rental place it was pouring rain and there was lightning in the distance... in the direction we were heading! We asked Fred at the canoe shop what to make of this early weather? "Means it's going to be a nice day", said Fred! Sold!

Paul (photo by Ron Norton)



He was right, by the time we put in it was beautiful again. About an hour and a half got us to the base of Mt. Moran where the familiar “up” routine would begin.

Things were going great. Everyone was feeling good, the climb was very steep but we were all pleased of this as the approach to the Grand had some pretty long switchbacks. This was direct progress, after all we were climbers!

Almost to camp, seriously, about 600-800 vertical feet away, Greg slips on a stream crossing and slices his leg and his thumb...deeply!

Steve jumps into action and his military medical training comes back as though he trained the week before.

He whips out his suture kit (sure...don't we all have one of those in our first aid kits!) and gets Greg cleaned up. Worried about infection however we felt it was best to retreat and get Greg to a hospital.

Back to the canoes!

Greg was a trooper. He hardly cried at all and managed to still paddle his canoe with Steve. Ron and I helped out a little on the portage but before we knew it we were back at the cars and Greg was off to Jackson.

Next day was a rest day, which meant Ron and Greg returned bear canisters to the ranger station and went into town for anti-biotics. Steve and I did a little cragging before we all headed into town for a good meal.

Last day, what to do? Teewinot? OK!

This last climb was totally off the cuff. Steve and Greg had actually announced they were going to head out in

the morning and start towards home. Steve did a little research and decided what the heck and our two became three. Greg took an easier hike to try and avoid any risk of reopening his wounds.

The peak immediately north of The Grand is called Teewinot, I highly recommend this as a day hike for any climber. It's a little exposed up high and there is some loose rock mid-way up but the scramble to the summit and the views from up top are REALLY very cool!

It was a great week with great guys in a great area!

Ain't life Grand!



Ron (photo by Paul Morash)