

We rested in bad weather for three days, then set off at 5:00 am on April 22. It was snowing lightly as we descended the Cruise Gully, and then we shot up the route. I climbed every pitch first go, and Ben cleaned and jumared. Things became tough on the final pitches, as I got tired, and the pumpy crux pitch with its finishing dyno was touch-and-go. But we reached the final belay unscathed, 8 hours and 41 minutes after starting. The time was a record, but this came about completely by chance. Speed records don't really mean much to me. [*In 2005 Jared Ogden and Ryan Nelson climbed it in 8h 59min—Ed.*]

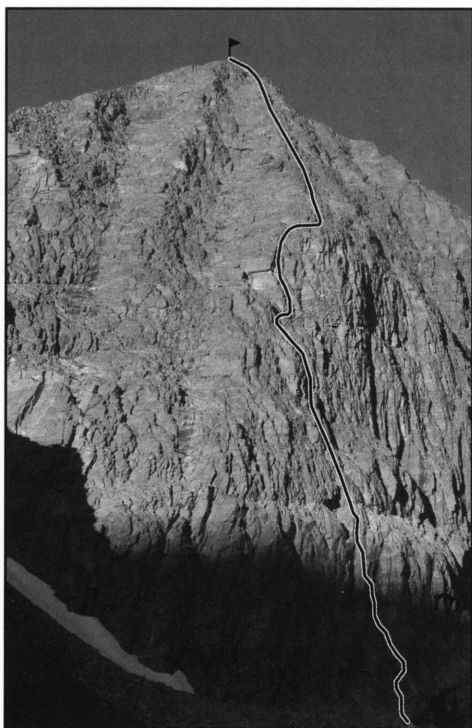
I had expected the crux 13th pitch would be a smooth wall with tiny crimps. But it is athletic, with good holds and cool heel-hooks. I diverged slightly from the original line three times: immediately after the belay (where I added two pegs and a copperhead); in the middle of the pitch, at the start of the bolt ladder; and just before the belay, with a leftward dyno.

The route itself isn't all that difficult (5.13+ R), but the pro is fairly alpine, with numerous copperheads, especially in the middle section. It probably had to wait 31 years for the first free ascent because the Black Canyon wasn't the place to be. I'm happy to have grabbed this little jewel, especially since there are so many talented climbers living less than five hours away, in Boulder. Climbing it free in less than nine hours, without a massive prior effort, is something pretty important to me.

HANSJÖRG AUER, *Austria (based on an interview in PlanetMountain.com)*

SAN JUAN MOUNTAINS

The Guardian, Weather Window Waltz. In August 2011 Wesley Ashwood, Kelsey Sheely, and I put up a new line on the northeast face of the Guardian (13,617') in the East Grenadian Range of the southern San Juan Mountains. My two previous attempts on the face had been thwarted by weather (once with Jon Rezabek, once with Ashwood). Weather forecasts revealed a three-day window of sunshine, so we had to try again. We camped east of the Guardian, next to Vallecito Creek. The following morning we hiked a steep 1,200' slope to the face and began climbing, at 8 a.m., on the left side of the prominent, water-streaked dihedral. Eight pitches of surprisingly solid quartzite corners and cracks, punctuated by occasional broken sections, brought us to the high ridge, where the angle eased. We simul-climbed the ridge for 500', then strolled to the summit in the evening alpenglow. We descended the mountain's long, nontechnical south side, arriving in camp at 2 a.m. and celebrating with kipper snacks and whiskey. We christened the route Weather Window Waltz (1,700', IV 5.9).



NIC HARNISH, *Durango*

Weather Window Waltz on the Guardian. Nic Harnish