

From the chockstone, step onto a steep wall and make one tricky move to reach a ledge. Continue scrambling along the long undulating ridge, over a major false summit, down a couple of loose chimneys, across a stunning plateau, and up the final ridge to the main summit. A rope is recommended for less-experienced climbers.

SUNLIGHT PEAK  
ASCENT

Sulphur Creek parking elevation: 7,200 feet  
 Elevation gain: 4,722+  
 Distance: 8 miles  
 Overall grade by northeast ridge: II-III Class 3  
 Estimated ascent time: 5 to 8 hours  
 Maps: Geers Point, Jaggar Peak, Stinkingwater Peak, Sunlight Peak

## PILOT PEAK

[11,699 feet]

Pilot Peak is one of Greater Yellowstone's most striking and famous landmarks, on par with the Grand Teton itself. The most celebrated view of Pilot is from Clarks Fork valley, above which it rises like a wedding cake nearly 5,000 vertical feet in steep concentric bands of lava and breccia to a spike-like summit. It is the quintessential mountain peak. Ferdinand Hayden wrote that Pilot "is visible for so great a distance from every side that it forms an excellent landmark for the wandering miner, and thus its appropriate name of Pilot Peak."

Yet, while the Grand Teton stands eminently visible in a relatively isolated range with large adjacent valleys, Pilot Peak is mostly shrouded by a complex range of ridges and high peaks. In fact, Pilot Peak is visible to valley travelers only from the middle Clarks Fork, where it dominates the head of the valley. It is not at all visible from valley locations in Yellowstone Park or anywhere in the periphery of the ecosystem. It is not even visible from Cooke City, lower Clarks Fork canyon, or Dead Indian Pass. How then did Pilot Peak become such an acclaimed landmark for nineteenth-century travelers who were headed to the upper Clarks Fork?

There are two practical answers to this thought-provoking question. The first is that Pilot Peak never actually was used as such a monument. In the nineteenth century, the member of a trapping or prospecting party who was responsible for route finding was called the "pilot." Amongst their group, they probably were



*Aerial view of Pilot and Index peaks from the east.  
 a. Fox Creek basin*

the most familiar with an area, or were gifted with exceptional route finding savvy. Perhaps prospectors who viewed this striking and identifiable mountain from its classic Clarks Fork perspective applied the name "Pilot Peak" simply to honor their skilled guides. Learning the name from local prospectors, Hayden thus could have assumed that Pilot Peak was actually used as an "excellent landmark for the wandering miner and prospector." Interestingly, Hayden never saw the classic view of Pilot from middle Clarks Fork valley. The second intriguing answer to the question is that prospectors had to climb other significant peaks or high ridges to scan the horizon for Pilot Peak and set their bearings. From nearly every major summit in the ecosystem—Grand Teton, Gannett Peak, Washakie Needles, Younts Peak, Trout Peak, Granite Peak, Mount Cowen, Gallatin Peak, and Hilgard Peak—Pilot is visible, identifiable, and spectacular. Prospectors of the 1870s might have looked for Pilot from high summits while homing in on Clarks Fork mining region from the

remote reaches of the Western Beartooths and Northern Absaroka where early prospecting took place.

Pilot Peak's absence on trapping-era maps suggests that it was neither noted nor named until the prospecting era, and even then not until around 1870. In early July of that year, prospectors A. Bart Henderson, James Gourley, Adam "Horn" Miller, and Ed Hibbard dropped into the valley of today's Cooke City from Lulu Pass and discovered gold in Fisher Creek. Gazing across the valley at Pilot and Index, Henderson applied the name "Dog Turd Peak" to the entire Pilot massif, Index Peak included. He later mentioned this name to Hayden Survey guest William Blackmore, who recorded it in his diary. When Blackmore, Hayden, William Henry Holmes, Jack Baronett, George A. Huston, and Jack Bean made a side trip to Clark Fork Mines and Daisy Pass in 1872, Index Peak stood in bold relief across the valley. Pilot Peak was visible only in the back-



*Aerial view of Index and Pilot peaks from the west-southwest.*

**a.** West Basin  
**b.** standard route

ground, and thus Index became the subject of conversation. Their view of the brown, globular breccia on Index Peak justified the distasteful name "Dog Turd," but Hayden rather likened it to a fist with its index finger extended upward. In his monograph in the *Sixth Annual Report*, Hayden took the liberty to apply the name "Finger Peak" to the lower of the two peaks. On a sketch and map on adjacent pages of that report, Holmes agreed with Hayden and labeled the higher peak "Pilot Peak," but contrarily applied the name "Index Peak"



*William Henry Holmes' sketch of "Index and Pilot Peaks" from the Hayden Survey's Sixth Annual Report, 1873.*

instead of "Finger Peak" for the extended index finger of the lower peak. In 1874, Captain William Jones produced a map of his 1873 expedition that correctly labeled Pilot Peak and upheld Holmes's name of "Index Peak."

Hayden never wavered in referring to today's Pilot Peak as Pilot Peak, nor did he bother about the discrepancy between Index and Finger peaks. Yet, one of his division chiefs would make a critical error. Confusion began when geographer Allen D. Wilson mislabeled today's Pilot Peak with the name "Index Peak" on his Primary Triangulation map surveyed in 1877 and 1878. This was to be the base map upon which all future federal maps were made. On his own map of Yellowstone Park in 1881, Superintendent Philetus Norris attempted to remedy the situation by correctly labeling Index Peak and applying the name "Pilot Knob" on today's Pilot. Even an 1888 General Land Office map came close by naming Pilot Peak "Pilot Knob," and Index Peak "Indian Peak." Nevertheless, Wilson's simple draughtsman's error would plague federal maps and texts for seventy years to come. Subsequent surveyors, such as geologists Arnold Hague, Joseph P. Iddings, and James P. Kimball, as well as geographers Edward Douglas and Frank Tweedy, each unwittingly perpetuated the misnomer in their reports and on their maps. The most significant repetition of the errors occurred on Tweedy's triangulation for the Survey of Wyoming and his subsequent 1896 Crandall quadrangle, as well as Tweedy and Douglas's triangulation map for the Survey of Montana, which was published in the U.S.G.S. *Eighth Annual Report*.

Finally, when the Shoshone National



*Aerial view of Abiathar Peak in June from the northeast.*

- a. east face
- b. northeast couloir
- c. north couloir
- d. "AC Traverse"

## ABIATHAR PEAK

[10,928 feet]

The Northern Absaroka of Yellowstone Park's northeast corner are Greater Yellowstone's best replicas of the unique mountains of Glacier National Park and the Canadian Rockies. Pleistocene glaciers and strong currents in Pebble, Soda Butte, and Amphitheater creeks have dissociated what in the Eocene and Oligocene epochs was a continuous volcanic plateau. These beautiful wide valleys now isolate the large massifs of Cutoff, Barronette, Abiathar, and Amphitheater and are enveloped by colossal cliffs of striated breccia and lava. While the mountains of northern Montana and Canada are comprised of much older sedimentary rock, the Northern Absaroka share their grandiose topography.

Perhaps this is what drew Jim Kanzler, Terry Kennedy, and Mark Kalitowski to Abiathar Peak in October sometime in the late 1970s. Kanzler and Kennedy had just spent a month in northern Montana and Canada waiting for stormy weather to subside so they could attempt some alpine routes. Frustrated, they drove south, but the early-season storms also were entrenched over the Northern Absaroka. Undaunted, they approached the north couloir of Abiathar in a storm and cramponed through fresh snow overlaying 50- to 60-degree ice. Where the couloir steepens to an overhanging chimney near the top, Kanzler and Kennedy inadvertently kicked a slab avalanche onto Kalitowski who was climbing a couple hundred feet below. Kalitowski managed to quickly burrow into a snowdrift to avoid being carried away. After a sigh of relief, the three convened at the overhang and traversed right on a hanging ramp. Kennedy and Kalitowski roped up for three pitches of