





A view of the southern Salt River Range from Peak 10,689. In the foreground lies the head of Corral Creek. Greysalt and Mount Wagner (right) are the two high peaks on the horizon.

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Like a cresting tsunami, planar beds of limestone and sandstone tilt thousands of feet upward to the abrupt knife-edge ridges and summits of the Salt River Range. This giant wave of mountains rises from the west out of Star Valley and seems frozen in a breaking position with sheer east-facing pink and black cirque cliffs overhanging the vast trough of Greys River. Subsidiary ridges and peaks east and west of the range's high crest are like turbulent waves of storm-driven surf.

Such is the pattern of the Overthrust Belt, which identifies a zone of thrust faulting that extends for 5,000 miles from Alaska to Mexico. Between 150 and 55 million years ago, continental compression squeezed the earth's crustal veneer, cracking and buckling gigantic sheets of sedimentary rock. From west to east, these shingles were thrust upward and over one another during a mountain building event known as the Sevier Orogeny. There were many such planes or faults where rocks ground past each other to form today's Salt River Range, but the greatest displacement occurred at the Absaroka thrust fault. Between 80 and 66 million years ago, this fault created a dramatic escarpment extending the entire fifty-mile length of the Salt River Range between two and three miles east of the range's crest. In some places, cliffs of sedimentary

rubble nearly 1,000 feet high complicate and add intrigue to the topography of the eastern Salt Rivers. They also are stark evidence that the Absaroka fault boosted the range from mere 10,000-foot peaks to summits approaching 11,000 feet.

Indeed, the summits were once much higher, but subsequent erosion softened these peaks through the early Tertiary period. The most peculiar topographic aspect of the Salt River Range is the manner in which runoff carves its way down the range's western slope. Headwaters of west-slope creeks run almost exclusively parallel to the crest of the range following weaknesses along the many thrust faults before turning west and cross-cutting the collage of upthrust beds through colossal canyons. The Salt River Range as we see it today rose along the Grand Valley normal fault, while

Ascent: Despite its proximity to Greys River Road, Virginia Peak is a difficult peak to access. Not only are there no trails that climb to any of its three main ridges, but only one of its three main aspects allows an ascent over reasonable terrain. The moderately angled south slopes are best reached from Meadow Creek trailhead, approximately 33 miles from Alpine on Greys River Road. Turn west across a bridge, turn left at the T, and park near a Forest Service barn at the mouth of Meadow Creek. Hike along Meadow Creek trail (#081) for about 3 miles to a trail junction, take the right fork, and gain the forested ridge north of the creek. Hike off-trail through a scenic basin south of point 8,925 and climb into the cirque northeast of Sherman Peak. Ski or hike north along a bench system and pass through a small gap west of point 8,993 into a narrow basin below the south face of Virginia Peak. This face is easily climbed to the summit ridge about a half mile south of the summit.



VIRGINIA PEAK ASCENT

Meadow Creek parking elevation: 6,660 feet
 Elevation gain: 3,481+ feet
 Distance: 7 miles
 Overall grade by southwest ridge: II Class 1
 Estimated ascent time: 3 to 6 hours
 Maps: Blind Bull Creek, Man Peak

North aspect of Virginia Peak from Man Peak. The Wyoming Range from Triple Peak to Wyoming Peak spreads across the horizon.

HAYSTACK PEAK

[10,108 feet]

Shaped by a similar erosional pattern, Haystack Peak is a virtual twin of Rock Lake Peak. Although Haystack is lower, it is perhaps more dramatic because of its position west of the crest and because it is encircled on two sides by the deep canyon of Strawberry Creek. Haystack's ridges and faces are also steeper than Rock Lake Peak's lending a distinct appearance of a sail or shark fin from Star Valley. In 1907, Robertson sighted on Haystack's sharp summit as a triangulation station from Prater, Hoback, Triple, Rock Lake, and Redtop, but probably did not climb it. The summit is most likely unattainable by all but the most powerful horses and skilled equestrians, thus early ascents by this mode of travel were unlikely. The U.S.G.S. surveyors who



worked on the Afton 30-minute quadrangle in 1916 and 1919, including D. S. Birkett, R. H. Reineck, J. H. Wilke, Cornelius Schnurr, A. J. Ogle, and C. G. Anderson, were possibly the first to reach

*Aerial view of the north aspect of Haystack Peak.
 a. north face
 b. northwest face*



Aerial view of the south aspect of Haystack Peak.
a. summer route
b. southwest face
c. Porgy's fin
d. Strawberry Creek



Aerial view of the east aspect of Haystack Peak.

the summit. Their 1921 map showed Haystack Peak, as did 1925 editions of the Teton and Wyoming national forest maps.

Guarding the north face from ascent is one of the most impressive walls of Madison limestone in the range, plummeting over 800 feet in one sheer drop. The 3,100-foot south ridge defends the summit with a 500-foot knife-edge rock fin about 500 feet below the summit. However, this did not stop Jackson mountaineer Porgy McClelland's party during a March 1999 ascent. They climbed directly over the exposed fin unroped with skis on their backs. Other aspects of Haystack Peak are not as serious as the north face and south ridge, but still confront climbers with daunting challenges of steepness, difficult footing, and sheer size.

Dave Moore, Hope Sneller-Moore, and this author made an early ski descent of Haystack in early March 1998. We climbed steep trees and gullies to Porgy's rock fin, then traversed under the fin to reach the summit ridge. Concerned about avalanche danger on the spectacular southwest face, we decided to ski the brushy northwest face and exit the mountains via Dry Creek. Christoph Schork and I returned that spring to attempt the southwest face, but were thwarted by rotten snow. On March 18, 1999, I returned with Russell Rainey, Todd Hogan, Greg Seitz, Win Goodbody, and Mike Schwartz. We ascended the southwest face, then skied the 2,750-foot east face with Schwartz bravely making the first turns in soft snow under a massive cornice. Schwartz and Rainey skied out Strawberry Creek, while the rest of us skinned into the basin northeast of Haystack and regained the summit via the north ridge. We were rewarded with 3,500 feet of perfect corn on the southwest face to the floor of Strawberry Creek!

Ascent: In times of questionable snow hazard, the safest approach to Haystack Peak is via Dry Creek. However, shrewd glisse mountaineers should wait until conditions are appropriate to climb the southwest face in order to ski either the southwest or east