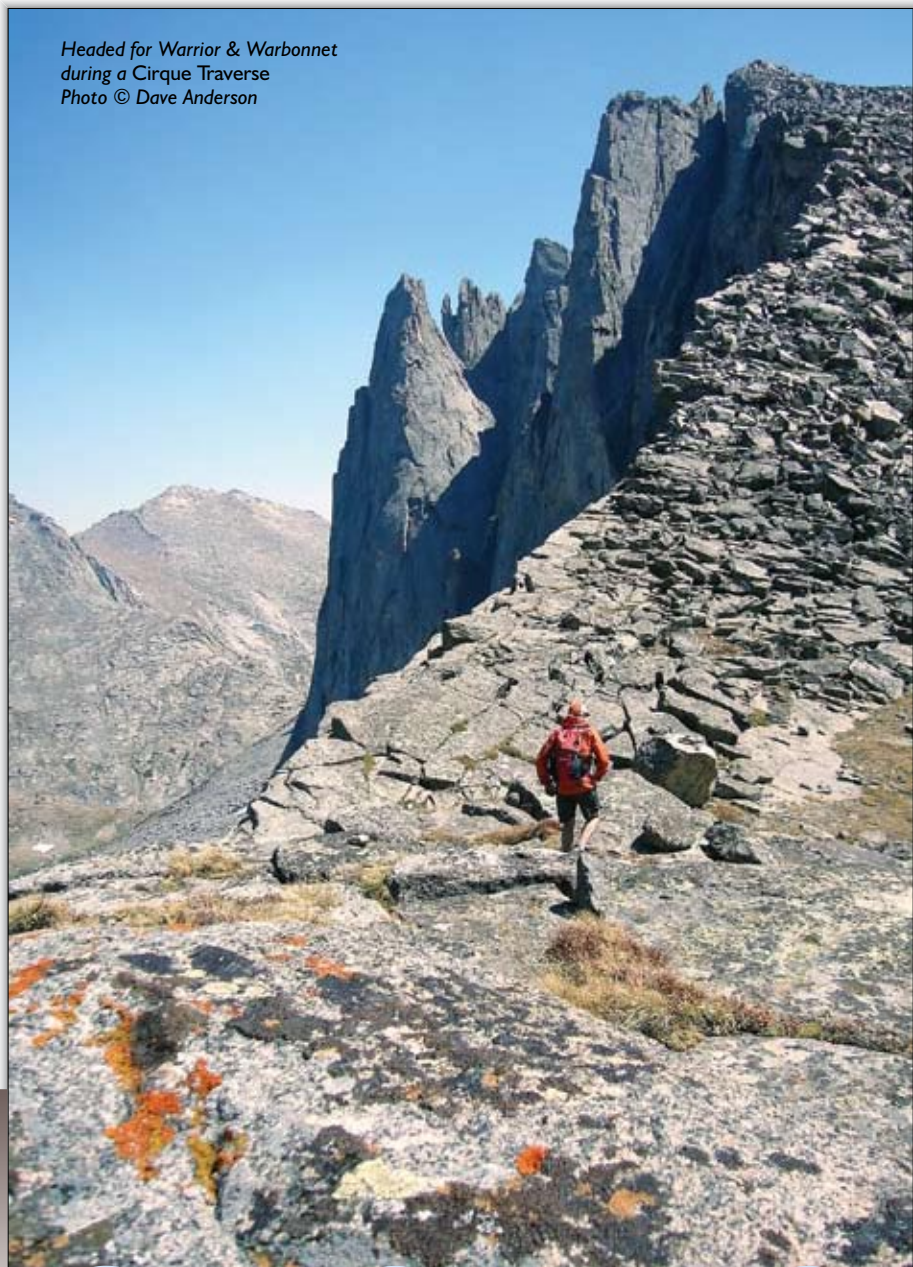


Headed for Warrior & Warbonnet
during a Cirque Traverse
Photo © Dave Anderson



THE CIRQUE TRAVERSE

Although not as famous as the Grand Traverse in the Tetons or any number of classics in the high Sierras, the “Cirque Traverse” is one of America’s premier alpine rock traverses. With many miles of trail plus four miles of 3rd, 4th, and 5th class climbing, up to 5.8 or 5.9, it has only recently become a regularly attempted objective. The unofficial speed record car-to-car is 13.25 hours by Dave Anderson in 2006.

This link-up includes all the major peaks along the main spine of the Cirque of the Towers starting with Pingora then Wolf’s Head, Overhanging Tower, Shark’s Nose, Block Tower, Watchtower, South Watchtower, Pylon Peak, Warrior II, Warrior I, and finally Warbonnet. The Traverse is often broken into two days returning to a camp in the Cirque after climbing Pingora and Wolf’s Head the first day.

PINGORA: Arguably, the purest traverse would be to climb Pingora via the *Northeast Face Route* (which is unlikely to have yet been done). Most parties, however, climb the *South Buttress Route*.

From the summit of Pingora, head west and down climb easy 5th for 100 feet then begin rappelling to the col between Pingora and Tiger Tower, traverse across the south face on a ledge system easy 5th class until you join the regular *East Ridge* route.

WOLF’S HEAD: Climb the classic *East Ridge Route* and follow the standard descent to the Wolf’s Head-Overhanging Tower col.

OVERHANGING TOWER: From the col, scramble up either the *Northeast Face Route* or the *Northwest Face Route* and descend the *Southwest Face Route* to the Overhanging Tower-Shark’s Nose col.

SHARK’S NOSE: Since they start in the same spot at the col, take either the *Northwest Buttress Route* or the *North Face Route* to the North Summit. For the honest tick, traverse out to the true, tiny South Summit.

To reach the South Summit, drop down on the *Southwest Face* from the North Summit for 50 feet, then climb up to the ridge and follow the ridge past a pin and an exposed 5.8 move. From the South Summit rappel down to the col between Shark Nose and Block Tower.

BLOCK TOWER: Climb up the east ridge of Block Tower and then traverse across the south face to the base of a chimney (5.5) that leads to the summit. Rappel to the col between Block Tower and Watchtower.

WATCHTOWER: The easiest way from the notch to Watchtower is to descend to the north (right) down the main gully (very loose) for a 200 feet then scramble up a sandy/loose gully (3rd, can have snow in early season) on the Northwest side of the Watchtower formation and gain a high plateau then scramble south to the summit.

WATCHTOWER to WARBONNET: The remainder of the Traverse is mostly hiking over rocks and talus with a little easy scrambling and careful downclimbing, particularly near the summit of Warbonnet.

FINISH: If you are completing the Traverse in a day from the car, continue south from the top of Warbonnet skirting Sundance Pinnacle to the west to arrive at Big Sandy Lake. If returning to the Cirque, scramble down between Warbonnet and Sundance Pinnacle toward North Lake then hike back over Jackass Pass to the Cirque.

Beta: Standard Rack, one 60 meter rope. Most rappels are fixed but extra stoppers and small hexes should be brought just in case. Early to mid-season there may likely be snowbanks where you can melt snow for water. Late season or in dry years there may be no water for the entire traverse.

Stats: 19 miles, 11 peaks, 7,500 feet of elevation gain, 5.8 difficulty, 12 rappels.

