



AAC Publications

Angel Wings, Valkyrie

California, Sequoia National Park

On September 3, 2012, Dave Nettle, Peter Croft, Greg Epperson, and I completed the first free route on the main wall of Angel Wings, located in Sequoia National Park. Valkyrie (V 5.12) is the product of over a decade of attempts while enduring injuries, dead-end crack systems, base-camp thieves, late-melting snowpack, and season-ending storms. Each successive trip to the wall pushed the route a little higher, until finally we made a breakthrough on the ninth pitch and the route flowed free to the top. Due to the complexity of the natural features on Angel Wings, we made at least three wrong turns before the free line was found.

Our first-ascent push was made from the ground up. Dave and Peter had trail-blazed new ground up to pitch 13. When I showed up a few days later, we decided to complete the route in a one-day push, unsure of the final pitches above. Peter and I started from the ground and both freed each pitch (except for one 5.12 crux, which I aided through). Greg Epperson juggled beside us taking photos. Once reaching pitch 13, Dave and Peter navigated and freed, onsight, the last four pitches to the top. Greg and I followed behind, shuttling gear to the summit. By sunset we were back in camp and celebrating.

This exquisite route is comprised of 17 pitches, with only two under 5.10 in difficulty. It begins at the lowest point of the wall and parallels the Steck route up to "Upper Bearpaw Meadow," a 45-degree, sloping grassy ledge. From there, the route cuts out right and up an exposed arête for another 1,000'. The route is characterized by linking crack systems with face climbing cruxes. There is some fixed gear on the route—all bolts were drilled, excruciatingly, by hand, and there is one fixed pin. The belays all the way up to pitch 13 have one or more bolts; after that, it's natural gear to the top. A 16-mile approach and every granite climbing technique are required to ascend this backcountry wall.

Brandon Thau

Images



[Left to right] Peter Croft, Brandon Thau, Dave Nettle.



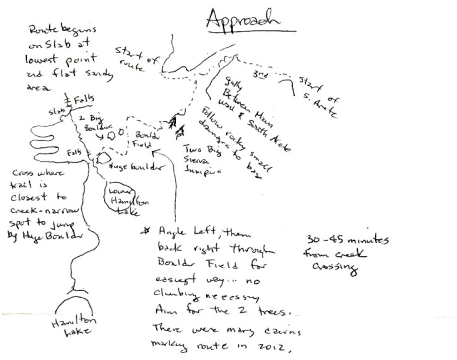
The Valkyrie on Angel Wings' main wall. The 17-pitch 5.12 route required over a decade of attempts to complete.



The immense south face of Angel Wings.



The pitch-by-pitch breakdown.

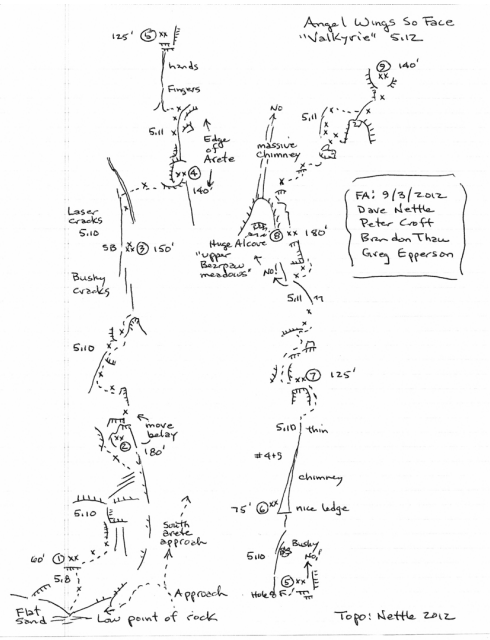


30-45 minutes from creek crossing
 * Angle left then back right through Boulder Field for easiest way - no climbing necessary
 Aim for the 2 trees. There were many cairns marking route in 2012.

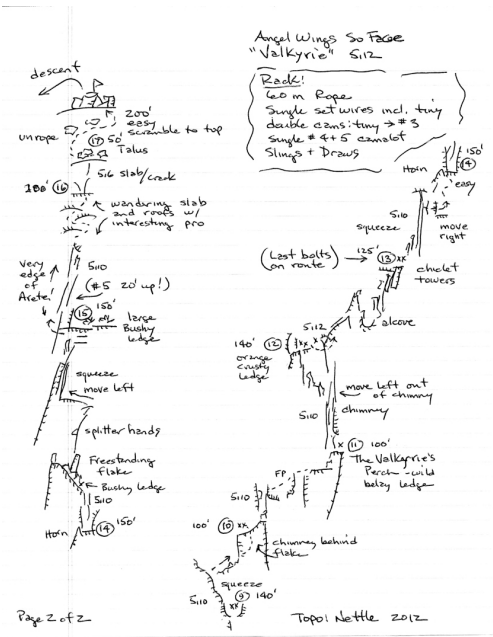
Descent

From top rail, descend and angle right towards brushy ridge that comes down from South Arête Summit. Cross through thick bushes to open Talus Slope. Follow down into Trench. Do not cut left too soon. Once through trees walk through bushes going down and left until emerging onto an open spur w/ boulders. The gully you want to descend is just below you (it's the second gully cutting down the west side of Angel wings). The descent is easy with occasional loose sections, when you reach a steep drop off either rappe! left side or class 3 down steep slab. At bottom of steep, cut up onto left side of gully and cross onto a large bench that runs along the south face of Angel wings. Work your way along base, staying mostly close to wall until back to start of route. 1 1/2 - 2 hours.

Topo 1



Topo 2



Topo 3

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