



## AAC Publications

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### **Complete Palisade Traverse, first winter ascent**

California, Sierra Nevada

Jediah Porter and I were only acquaintances when, by complete accident, we crossed paths on the Evolution Traverse in August 2011. We made plans to attempt the Evolution Traverse during the winter of 2012; however, our climb was foiled by an optimistic disregard for the weather forecast. The successful first winter ascent of that route followed only a few days later by three climbers from the Pullharder collective. Inspired by their accomplishment, we decided that if we had failed at our first objective we should probably pick something harder.

On February 26, 2013, we left the Big Pine Creek trailhead at 6 a.m. with 30lb. packs, hoping to complete the first winter ascent of the complete Palisade Traverse in five days. A seven-mile, 5,000' hike put us at Southfork Pass, the start of the climbing. The next eight miles included 5.9 rock, steep snow and low-angle ice without crampons, and loads of classic climbing with incredible exposure. The ridge includes six 14,000' peaks, many 13,000' peaks, and scads of shorter peaks and towers.

Though the climbing on the Palisade Crest (a mile-long concentration of 12 peaks in the southern half of the traverse) was not particularly difficult, our pace was the slowest through that section. We bivied four times: on the summit of Middle Palisade, the base of Mt. Williams (immediately south of the Palisade Crest), Scimitar Pass, and halfway down the northwest ridge of Thunderbolt Peak. We returned to my truck on the evening of March 2, four days and 16 hours after leaving.

The main challenges of the traverse were moving efficiently over the terrain and staying as fit and healthy as possible. Free-soloing the whole route in boots, while possible, was more risk than we wanted to take on. We used the rope sparingly but strategically, and found that some sections were dispatched more quickly with the mental comfort of a belay. We brought a small tent to ensure a good night's sleep, and always took a brief water and food break every hour, with a real lunch break daily to melt more water. This also gave us time to dry our boots and sleeping bags in the sun and wind.

The complete Palisade Traverse (VI 5.9) is probably the longest technical route in the Lower 48, and yet has seen fewer than 10 complete ascents since the first ascent in 1979. Until more locals start heading from the front-country to the hills, or alpinists from other areas notice the pearls here, we few will continue to have this amazing alpine playground to ourselves.

Ian McEleney

## Images



The Palisade Crest, the most challenging part of the traverse.



The third bivy along the traverse.



Jediah Porter on the first winter ascent of the complete Palisade Traverse. Likely the longest technical climb in the Lower 48, the Palisade Traverse (not to be confused with the much shorter Thunderbolt to Sill traverse) runs from Southfork Pass to Bishop Pass.

## Article Details

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