



AAC Publications

Mt. Chamberlin, new routes

California, Sierra Nevada

An excellent trip to Mt. Chamberlin in 2010 left Chris Brown, Jimmy Haden, Mike Pennings, and I pining for more. So in late July 2011, we reconvened for another trip to the alpine playground surrounding the Crabtree Lakes, this time armed with bacon, steak, beer, and whiskey, courtesy of a mule train. Nothing fuels adventure like a little swine-in-the-'pine.

On the first day, Chris and I headed for the western buttress, which has interesting patterns on its east-facing prow. I wheezed and thrutched my way to a sketchy hanging belay about 150' up a steep corner. (Turns out the climbing was just hard.) Continuing up the corner, Chris encountered guillotine flakes that threatened to trundle down on my tethered position, so he aided left across incipient cracks into an alcove. I followed free, just barely. Unfortunately, the alcove proved inescapable, with overhanging walls on all sides, so we bailed.

On the ground, we had a perfect view of Mike and Jimmy doing battle high on the mountain. They had made their way up the lower wall and over to a crack we dubbed the Wingsuit Splitter for a gold splotch resembling a BASE jumper we'd seen buzzing the northeast face earlier. This attractive fissure led to another splitter crack a pitch or two higher. Eventually Mike tensioned left to another crack and ran the rope out to a nice ledge, and Jimmy followed free. Another clean but burly 5.10 pitch and some easier terrain took them to the top. They named the route Beanstalk (V 5.11+ A0) in memory of their friend Bean Bowers. "If it's not hands it's fingers; if it's not fingers it's hands," said Mike [of the Wingsuit Splitter].

We hoped to climb the route too; however, watching Mike and Jimmy wrestle with the crack above the Wingsuit Splitter gave us pause. We planned to climb Beanstalk to the upper splitter, then exit via the north face route instead (V 5.10 A2, 1983). We'd figure out how to deal with the aid climbing when we got up there. The first few pitches of Beanstalk were incredible: A 70m pitch of varied 5.11, an amazing rising traverse with just enough protection, and a chossy chimney gained the top of a pillar. From there, I downclimbed a series of flakes to the Wingsuit Splitter. A lone cam was the only protection. I hemmed and hawed across the flakes, then finally committed, lunging for the bottom of the splitter. I latched it for a second, then ripped off and whipped back to the belay, slicing my finger. Next try, I made it over to the splitter and continued up. Mike was right: sweet fingers and hands on golden granite right in the middle of a huge wall—classic! Another pitch brought us to a ledge where Mike and Jimmy moved left. We continued straight up into the north face route. Some dicey climbing past a bolt placed by the first-ascent party led us to the aid climbing. I took a left here and managed a difficult crack switch, avoiding the wide cracks and aid on the north face. Another 5.10 pitch followed by easier right-trending cracks and we were on top. We called our variation Great Northern Beans (V 5.11+).

The next day, Mike and Jimmy climbed a line just right of their 2001 route, Asleep at the Wheel (V 5.12-). The thin crack they were aiming for turned out to be a figment of their imagination. Fortunately, it was surrounded by 5.8 knobs, and they made the top without further incident. They report that the new route, Reckless Driving (V 5.12), is even harder than Asleep at the Wheel.

After a rest day, Chris and I climbed the first six pitches of our 2010 line Safety First (IV 5.10) to reach the base of a 150' freestanding tower perched on Chamberlin's west ridge. Chris traversed a dicey face (5.9) to reach a ledge near the base of the tower, then jammed two physical pitches of hands

and fists to tag the summit. We slung the top of the spire and rapped into the notch behind it, then traversed toward the descent gully. The Bean Pole Variation (V 5.10+) adds a few more short pitches to Safety First.

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Images



Mike Pennings leading Asleep at the Wheel, one of many fine routes on the buttresses comprising Mt. Chamberlin.

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