



AAC Publications

Schultz's Ridge, Psycho Bitch, first free ascent

California, Yosemite National Park

I rolled into Yosemite Valley in customary fashion—no plan and no partner. I soon repeated a few neoclassic routes, including Border Country (Collins-Drummond-Schaefer, AAJ 2010) and the Final Frontier (Berry-Lucas, AAJ 2014), but then became restless. I needed a project. A Mikey Schaefer route on the far left (east) side of Schultz's Ridge, below El Capitan, came to mind: Mikey had added a new free pitch above an old Dale Bard route called Ain't That a Bitch (5.12b), which he called the Dividing Line (5.13b), and he believed the line could continue to the top of the cliff via the old aid route Psycho Bitch (A3+, Kevin Andrews, solo). This lies a few crack systems left of the well-known route Moratorium.

BD athlete Mason Earle makes the FFA of Psycho Bitch (5.13b) in Yosemite from Black Diamond Equipment on Vimeo.

I first hiked up to the base of the climb and then spent seven days aiding and French-freeing the climb, solo, leaving the pitches fixed as I went. After aiding each pitch, I would rappel down and Mini Traxion the pitches. As I climbed higher on the route, the climbing became steeper. The penultimate pitch followed an unbelievable arching crack with wild, three-dimensional movement. The character of the rock varied as well: The first three pitches ascended classic Yosemite granite, while the second half comprised much darker and highly featured diorite. There was no more than five combined feet of choss on the whole route.

After another week alone on my fixed ropes, working out the moves, I felt ready to give the route a proper try. Spring, unfortunately, was dead and gone, and the forecasted temps for the next week were 95°F and higher. I decided to wait it out. Two weeks later, the highs had reached 100°F. I was tired of waiting, so I called my buddy Cruise, and he agreed to give me a belay.

We hiked to the base on the afternoon of July 24. Before starting up, we drenched ourselves in water—a technique acquired from the legendary Surfer Bob. I slipped and fell on the first pitch, the easiest one on the route. Annoyed, I pulled the rope and climbed it clean. I managed to climb the crux second pitch (The Dividing Line) first try. Relieved, we continued upward. I didn't fall again, despite getting apocalyptically pumped a couple of times, and even tearing my right hamstring on the last hard move of the last pitch. We topped out just as darkness began to fall. I was elated. Hiking down the Zodiac talus in the dark, it was only now just cool enough to put on a shirt.

This is my first real contribution to Yosemite climbing, and while I free-climbed the route in an odd style—ground-up, headpoint—it was the best style in which I could achieve a free ascent. The six-pitch free version of Psycho Bitch is sustained at 5.12: It goes at 12b, 13b, 12b, 12c, 12d, 12d. In October, Alex Honnold and Will Stanhope made the route's second ascent.

Images



Mason Earle leads the crux finger crack on the first free ascent.



Schultz's Ridge, showing the now-free line of Psycho Bitch.

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