



AAC Publications

Whitney Portal slabs to Wrinkled Lady, Ummagumma

California, Sierra Nevada

One step from the sliding-glass door of the Whitney Portal Store kitchen shows it all: the looming pyramid of the south-facing Wrinkled Lady, slashed with dihedrals, rising to 10,900'; below it, a system of slabs, terraces, dikes, and tunnels that make up its foundation.

Over three years, from 2010 until 2013, I carried rocks while climbing this feature to stack cairns in strange places for future followers. I down-soloed, taking wrong turns, battling foliage, and building monastery-like steps. Friends would join in the effort of perfecting this adventure big wall with me. We would get lost together in the unknown.

Once I had done the first ascent, solo, I often found myself racing the clock to be at work by noon (usually late), pushing up the final 500' dihedral, then charging down the scree decent. I would show up sweaty and torn to the restaurant kitchen, just in time.

The 2,500' "Royal Arches of the Portal" begins by romping up a polished gully to the left of the Whitney Portal Buttress for 2,000', then joins the 500' south face of the Wrinkled Lady. Only one route had been done prior on the Wrinkled Lady, the central dihedral (Beckey-Brown, AAJ 1972). Of that route, Fred Beckey said, "Rough un-glaciated rock surface and very deep cracks conspired to scrape hands and knees and to tear clothes in serious struggles with cracks." But don't worry, this new route takes on a corner to the left, following a system of easier, and pleasant, cracks. A chimney caps the 500' corner, allowing you to look down and catch all the exposure. From the top, a descent down the west ridge of the Wrinkled Lady leads to a fourth-class gully back to the valley.

The route is Ummagumma (2,500', III/IV, 5.7 A0 or 5.9). One definition provides that the word is, "A slang term for having sex. And of course Rock and Roll was originally slang for having sex." So, if you look at it that way, the word Ummagumma could simply mean "Rock and Roll!"

I can fire the route bottom to top in about two hours, if not faster; the descent takes about an hour. But I have everything dialed. For the average team, it could take much longer with all the route-finding [see online report for all the details]. Neil Woodruff has been working on a similar route just right of this one for a few years, but no other known routes exist in this area.

Images



The south-facing side of Whitney Portal, showing the new line Ummagumma, which starts just left of Whitney Portal Buttress and finishes up Wrinkled Lady, where the original Beckey-Brown line is shown in yellow.

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