



AAC Publications

Angel Wings, southwest face, Val Kilmer

California, Sequoia National Park

“An alpine El Capitan,” as Galen Rowell described it, Angel Wings is neither as tall nor as steep as El Capitan, but it is impressive in its own right. Compared to El Capitan’s pristine sea of chiseled geometry, Angel Wings twists roguishly from the ground, like the horns of a wild beast guarding the cirque of Valhalla.

Jonathan Schaffer and I hoped to discover unclimbed lines on the southwest face, but after being shut down by numerous dead ends, we settled on starting up Valkyrie (V 5.12, Croft-Nettle-Thau, [AAJ 2013](#)), looking to split left low on that route toward the central pillar of the formation. Over the following weeks, we continued weaving our way up Angel Wings, returning each night to our camp. The healing waters of Hamilton Lake provided vital rejuvenation, allowing us to push our route higher each day.

Intricate routefinding on the wall and mangled toes from the arduous approach meant we had barely reached the midway point after two weeks, and our food stores were nearly exhausted. Racking up one final time, we knew this would be our last chance to do the route in a one-day push. We hoped to finally make our way through the wide crack system splitting the upper headwall. Rather than slimming down our hefty rack, which included a hammer and hand drill, four bolts, six pins, and big cams, we opted to pare our food and water.

Our new route, Val Kilmer (V 5.11+) begins on the first four pitches of Valkyrie before cutting left to a left-facing corner, which leads to a candy-striped roof. A short traverse out this roof leads to a portion of deteriorating rock just before an offwidth/chimney. By this point in our trip we had the first seven pitches of our 15-pitch route dialed, so we were able to focus on the wild and wonderful climbing higher up.

To gain the flared chimney and offwidth system on pitch 8, one must first bear-hug, knee-bar and head-scum up a massive tooth of granite hanging from a roof. Above, steep climbing up wide cracks is interspersed with kneebars and pinches, involving more chicken-wings than a KFC giveaway in Mobile, Alabama. The remaining pitches are very high quality, including a steep hand-to-finger splitter on pitch 13.

We found ourselves at the summit as the sky became indigo, dappled with sweet potato-colored clouds. The excitement of topping out was immense, but quickly overshadowed by thoughts of the convoluted descent. After some hours of wandering down gullies and across slabs, my balance deteriorated and I noticed the foul taste of hypoglycemia in my mouth. Within moments of suggesting we settle in for the night, Jonathan and I were cuddling in our Mylar bag, on the floor of a sandy cave. I was pretty excited to finally spend some quality time together.

I tracked the coming of dawn by the full moon’s progress across the sky, and was nearly lulled to sleep by mice chewing on our gear. Several times, I arose to warm myself with push-ups, sit-ups, and star jumps, which caused a large puddle of condensation to accumulate at the base of our bag, drenching our socks overnight.

As the sun rose, we found the proper gully and we lumbered back to camp by midmorning. To our surprise, some kind hikers had left us a stash of tasty, organic snacks their mom made, so we spent the remainder of the day eating in our sleeping bags in a state of exhausted bliss. We rode this high all the way down the trail and back through the giant sequoia forest of the lowland.

Timothy Gibson

Images



Route line clarification: Valkyrie (right); Long-Steck-Wilson-Wilson, 1967 (middle), as drawn by Dave Wilson. Attempt by Dave Wilson and Eric Brand (left). The route Valkyrie is independent of the Long-Steck-Wilson-Wilson route for its entire length, though it may briefly share a section on pitch 8 where an old bolt was found.



Angel in the mist.



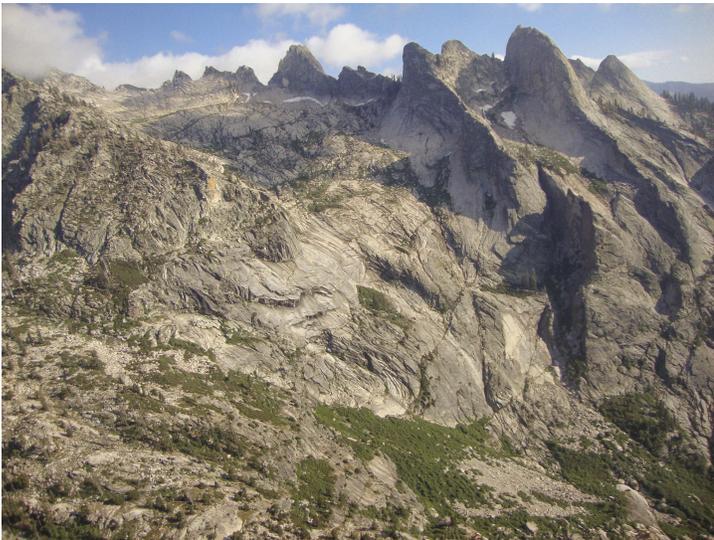
Jonathan Schaffer pinches an arête high on Val Kilmer, a mostly new, 15-pitch route on Angel Wings.



Throwing a chicken wing high on the route.



Climbing a laser-cut splitter.



Looking out at other domes in Sequoia National Park.



Detailed topo of Val Kilmer, with inspiration.



"An alpine El Capitan," the massive south-southeast side of Angel Wings, showing approximate locations of: (1) Wings Over Sequoia (Beckey-Lahr-Neifeld-Martinson, 1977). (2) The Lorax (Bland-White, 1996). (3) Just a Rock in the Park (Felton-Joe-Leversee, 1996). (4) Val Kilmer (Gibson-Schaffer, 2013). (5) South face, right side (Long-Steck-Wilson-Wilson, 1967), which climbs just left, and independently, of Valkyrie. (6) Valkyrie (Croft-Nettle-Thau, 2012). (7) The Devil Made Me Do It (Franosch-Mayfield, 2000). (8) Hell on Wings (not to summit, Grandfield-Joe-Leversee, 1989), (9) South Arête (Jones-Rowell, 1971). (10) Right Wing (LaBounty-Thau, 2005).

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