



AAC Publications

Tokopah Valley, New Routes

California, Sequoia National Park

Tokopah Valley is an overlooked gem tucked within the west side of Sequoia National Park. While it's known primarily for the 1,000' Watchtower, towering over Tokopah Falls, the north side of the valley holds several beautiful granite formations with a variety of climbs that will please crack, slab, and even sport climbers. The only thing missing is people.

Although a mere handful of climbs have been reported since the early '80s, climbers have been steadily exploring the domes and cliffs. Many of these adventurous souls have been seasonal employees who came and went without leaving much more than an occasional bolt or rusty piece of fixed gear, making the climbing history in the valley patchy at best. The climbing, scenery, and rock quality are on par with the best in the Sierra.

Over the last few years some classic routes have been pioneered and some older routes rediscovered. In November 2013, Matt Schutz and I went to Upper Tokopah Dome (a.k.a. Santa Cruz Dome) and established a beautiful route we dubbed Tan In November (4 pitches, 5.9). Tan In November starts on a big block below the enormous chimney in the middle of the dome and follows cracks to the right of the chimney for two pitches before heading right across a sloping ledge. The last two pitches follow outstanding cracks and chicken heads up an arête to the summit. Later, in December, Jonathan Zerlang and I made the first recorded ascent of a pleasant moderate route on Tokopah Wall, directly across from the Watchtower. Snow Boots (7 pitches, 5.8) starts to the right of the gully dividing the cliff. It traverses right on the second pitch below a big open slab and takes an obvious corner and crack system for five more pitches to the top.

After hearing stories of incredible rock in a picturesque setting within two hours of the road, Vitaliy Musiyenko, Tom Ruddy, and Hunter Bonilla joined me at the Tokopah Domes in January 2014. Vitaliy likes to suffer, so our first objective was an obvious 500' offwidth splitting the west face of Lower Tokopah Dome. It ended up being pretty pain-free and provided us with the first recorded ascent of the Boardwalk Chimney (3 pitches, 5.8). That same morning, Tom and Hunter beat us to the summit while establishing Welcome to Wal-Mart (4 pitches, 5.10d). Their climb began up a clean slab (where they placed a few bolts) below Boardwalk Chimney, near the southwest toe of the dome. It then joins a large, arching, right-facing corner. At the top of the arch, hero jugs lead over the roof into a sea of chicken heads and eventually the summit.

In April, not yet satiated, Vitaliy and I returned to Tokopah and finished a line on Upper Tokopah Dome that he and Tom had started on the previous trip. Usually It's Sunny (5 pitches, 5.10d) starts near the toe of the dome, right of the big corner of Funky Neurosis/Southwest Face (AAJ 1990). After passing a few bolts right off the ground, it gains a finger crack; from the top of the crack a few awkward moves lead to an obvious, flaring squeeze chimney. Three more pitches gain the summit. While it is usually sunny in the Sierra, we got snowed and rained on during this trip.

Over the following two and a half days, Vitaliy and I returned to Lower Tokopah Dome to put up Beauty and the Beast (5 pitches, 5.11a). To reach the climb, we headed up a short ramp toward the east side of the dome and then climbed left to a ledge with an old, rusty bail bolt. From here, beautiful face climbing on bulletproof orange granite leads to a new two-bolt anchor. Above the anchor, a short and somewhat run-out traverse leads left onto a balcony-like ledge, where the views alone would

make this climb a classic. Next up is the beast, a full 60m of flaring offwidth shooting straight up from the center of the balcony (5.11a). One badly placed, bent-over bolt protects the wide section in the middle, while desperation, grunting, and walking five- and six-inch cams will get you up the rest. The last pitch follows a 5.8 crack that gains easier climbing and the summit.

Still haunted by an incomplete and improbable-looking route that Tom Ruddy and Hunter Bonilla had started on the southwest side of Lower Tokopah Dome, Tom, Vitaliy, and Brian Prince visited the valley yet again in May to complete the crown jewel of the new dome climbs: Tokopah Reality (5 pitches, 5.11). Two offwidth pitches gain a nice ledge underneath the massive arching roof on the southwest side of the dome (an alternate start traverses in from the left to join the second pitch). From here an incredible, overhanging hand crack goes up the corner and traverses out a flake, almost forcing the leader to cut his feet and campus in order to reach the finishing mantel onto a small ledge. A couple more fun pitches up a chicken heads leads directly to the summit.

Late in June, Rob Brown and I made the last trip of the season, traveling to Silliman Point, a rock northwest of the Tokopah Domes, sitting on a ridge across from Mt. Silliman. We climbed seven fun pitches up a recess and onto the ridge, passing cracks, blocks, and highly featured granite along the way. Although we saw no signs of previous passage, we later learned that the first ascent had been made by Skip Gaynard and a friend in 1973: West Recess (7 pitches, 5.7).

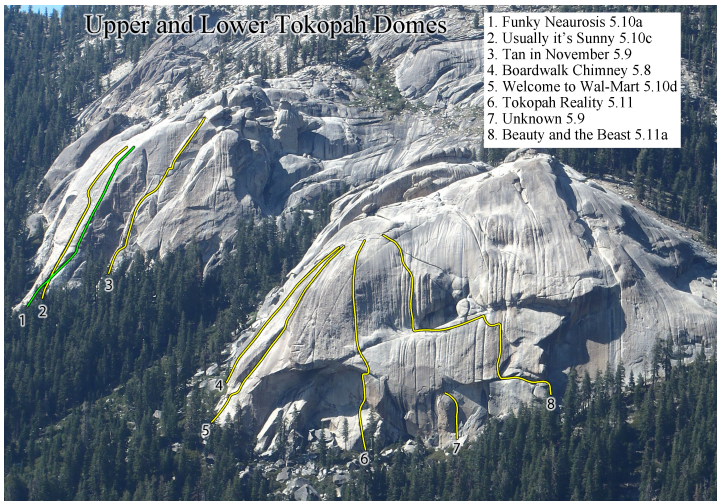
All of these climbs were climbed ground-up, though several of them took a bit of work before they were redpointed.

Daniel Jeffcoach

Images



Daniel Jeffcoach pulls the roof on Tan in November (4 pitches, 5.9).



An overview of the Upper and Lower Tokopah Domes, showing the new routes.



Snow Boots (7 pitches, 5.8) on Tokopah Wall.



Silliman Point, showing the 1973 route West Recess (7 pitches, 5.7).



Tom Ruddy leading out a very steep flake on Tokopah Reality.

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