



AAC Publications

Mt. Broderick, Southwest Face, Unemployment Line (first free ascent)

California, Yosemite Valley

Life is all about balance—at least that's what you call it when you sacrifice work, relationships, and life maintenance to pursue a silly climbing goal.

So when Scotty Nelson and I (two average climbers) eagerly agreed to a hefty training program in exchange for a free trip to Yosemite, where we would attempt to free an old aid route (Unemployment Line, V 5.9 A3, Bartlett-Gerberding-May, 1981) on the southwest face of Mt. Broderick, all courtesy of the North Face, it seemed like a win-win.

All the hard work had been done. In the fall of 2013 we had found the route, knocked off all the death blocks, bolted a short free variation around a rivet ladder and pendulum, and even worked out most of the hard moves, all in the 5.11 and under range. With a week of carefully planned vacation from our jobs to return to Yosemite in the summer of 2014, coupled with two months of arduous training with Rob Shaul at Mountain Athlete, we expected to easily complete our relatively short eight-pitch climb.

After a couple weeks of training, my girlfriend got hurt skiing and my engineering job and a side project threatened to pull me off track. Scotty had his own life balance to maintain, with his first kid on the way and a new job. We began to discount the training. *How do thousands of step-ups on a 16-inch box help me rock climb?* However, the scale didn't stay tipped for long. Rob reminded us of our commitment and snapped us back on track. We loathed his militant authoritarianism, but it worked. Cedar Wright, a North Face athlete overseeing our progress, kept our mental game strong by making us take big practice falls and assigning "whipper homework."

I met Scotty in Yosemite in June, glad to finally be done with our training, especially the dreaded step-ups, and we charged up to the base of Mt. Broderick. We quickly decided to add a more direct two-pitch start to the old aid line. Although technically harder at 5.10, the direct line is much less scary than the original 5.8 runout traverse. Yikes! I spent three hours leading the first pitch, cleaning dirt out of many of the finger locks with my nut tool as I went. I was very happy to onsight the pitch (5.10c). However, we both decided the next lead (5.11+) would need a bolt or two. Without our bolt kit, we descended and climbed the scary original start up to pitch six, where we fixed our ropes to the ground.

Cedar Wright arrived two days later and joined us. The first thing he said was, "Wow! You guys found a stellar line!" The second was, "You guys think this is only 5.11?!" On our last and only chance to send, Scotty started us off by leading both pitches of the direct start. I took the next four pitches. The meat of the third pitch involves a magnificent 50' undercling utilizing a finger-size crack (5.11+). The fourth pitch involves some awkward underclings and thin laybacking up a flake (5.11+), and the fifth is a short pitch of 5.11. The sixth pitch starts off a big ledge with wild laybacking, followed by big hands up a thin flake and a gorgeous dihedral that the first ascensionists proposed as 5.10++. All this leads to a good stance and the crux of the route, a short, delicate undercling traverse.

I had worked the sixth pitch the day before and got it clean top-roping so I knew I could do it. This time, though, I was tired from all the prior pitches. I fell once...twice...three times! On my fourth go, I eased into the small pinky jams and crimps and got my feat to stick, then reached up and grabbed the finishing jug. Scotty led us up the last two pitches on some easier terrain to finish it off: Unemployment Line (IV 5.12b).

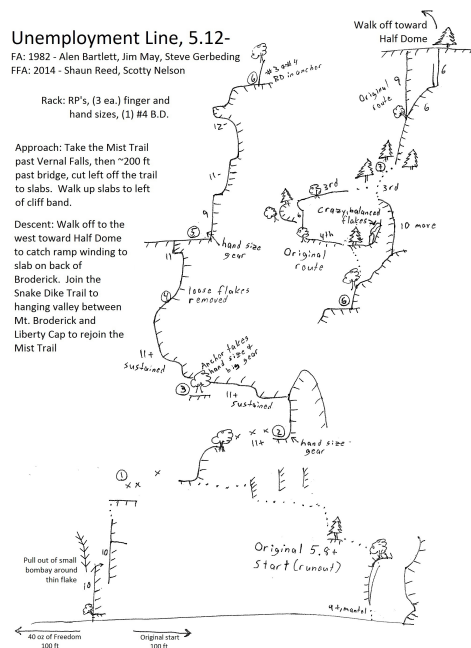
A huge thanks to Cedar Wright for all his help and for believing in our project and to Lisa Burnes, the North Face, Rob Shaul, Scotty's wife, Sarah, and my supportive girlfriend, Cassie.

– Shaun Reed

Images



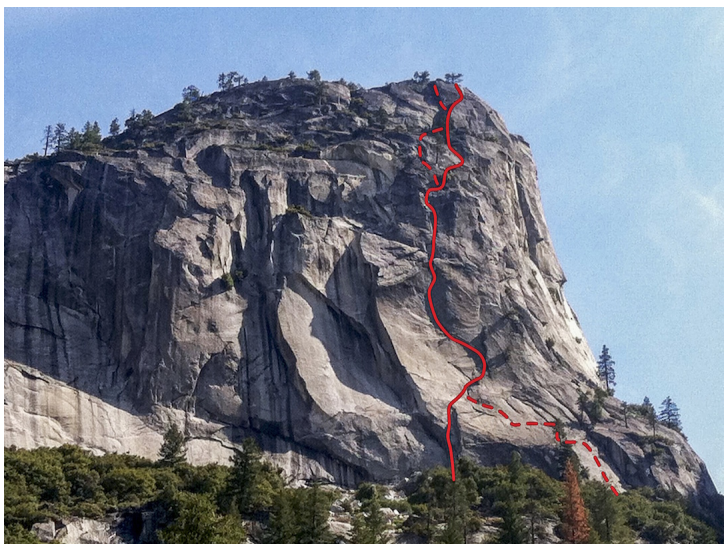
The southwest face of Mt. Broderick showing Unemployment Line (solid line; IV 5.12-) and the original start to the aid route (dashed line; V 5.9 A3).



A topo for the free version of Unemployment Line on Mt. Broderick.



Scott Nelson and Shaun Reed on the summit of Mt. Broderick after freeing Unemployment Line.



The southwest face of Mt. Broderick, showing the free Unemployment Line (solid line) and original aid route (dashed line).

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