



## AAC Publications

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### **Fifi Buttress, Center of the Universe**

California, Yosemite Valley

Fifi Buttress is the impressive formation just right of Leaning Tower, first climbed in 1960 by Steve Roper and Richard McCracken. In 1980, Chick Holtkamp and Randy Russell climbed Vortex, which Russell freed with Eric Zschiesche in 1982 (IV 5.12). (This route was finally repeated by Alex Honnold in 2015, on his second effort, the first known repeat, to my knowledge.) After about 20 years without activity, I came in and soloed Romulan Warbird in 1999 as an aid route. A few other aid routes were established around this time. [See [www.yosemitebigwall.com](http://www.yosemitebigwall.com) for more routes.]

After trying to free Romulan Warbird for years, I asked the talented Lucho Rivera to head up with me, and in 2013 he freed the route, calling it Romulan Freebird (AAJ 2013). This is when word started to get out about Fifi Buttress. James Lucas soon asked if another route I had aided in 1999, Final Frontier, would go free. I said yes, and he and Nik Berry went on to free this spectacular 5.13 (AAJ 2014). I aided Backburner (V 5.7 A3) around this time, and though it didn't quite connect as a free route, there was plenty of reward in finding and free climbing the nearby Voyager (IV 5.11+).

I spent the following seasons putting up quality shorter routes in the Fifi Amphitheater, which I've dubbed the Coliseum because of the great view of all the gladiators working the big routes above. These short pitches are some of the best I will ever climb. However, 2015 found me wanting more adventure. Casey Jones and I had just finished a great three-pitch 5.11a in the Coliseum we called Torpedo. From below, I couldn't help but wonder if there might be another route to do left of Voyager.

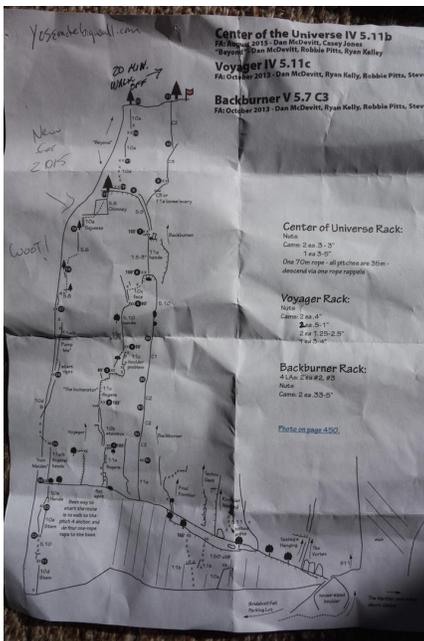
It was scary walking out the final bit of the exposed approach ledge past Voyager to a crack I had not been able to view before. Thankfully, it turned out to be a beautiful overhanging crack (5.11a). After this, I spent time scouting the lower wall, below the Voyager approach ledge, finding four great 5.10+ pitches, one of which I had established years earlier. Higher on the wall, pitch seven was the real question mark. I had stared at this pitch for years, studying it in different lighting and at different times of year. It turned out to be a long, leaning splitter ending in knobs on an arête (5.11a). Above that, a couple of easy pitches led up to a 5.10b squeeze chimney—like Texas Flake but with a tiny crack that takes great pro. This pitch lands you atop Fifi Buttress: Center of the Universe (IV 5.11a). And now that you've done 10 pitches, you can choose whether to complete the "Beyond" finish up a separate wall above, which has three more good 5.10+ pitches of adventure. You can walk off or rap the route with one 70m rope—Center of the Universe (IV 5.11a).

– Dan McDevitt

# Images



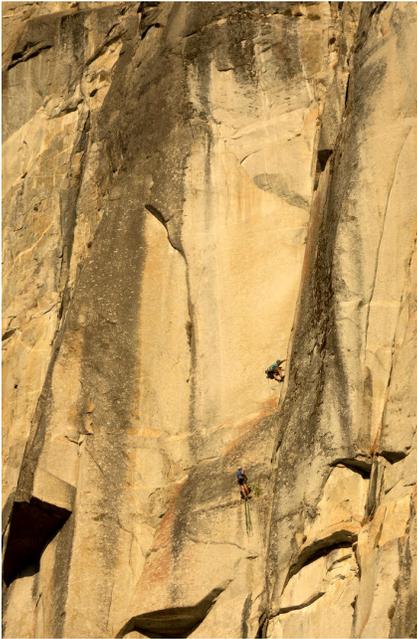
Casey Jones seconding on Torpedo (3 pitches, 5.11a) at the Coliseum/Fifi Buttress Amphitheater.



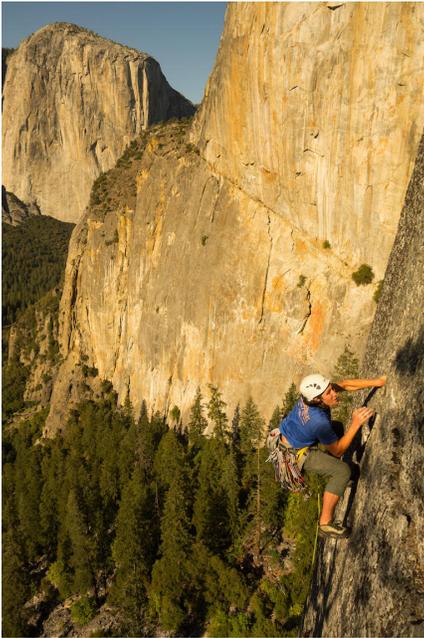
Fifi buttress topos



Looking down the fifth pitch (5.11a) of Center of the Universe.



Alex Honnold and partner on Vortex (IV 5.12).



Pitch seven (5.11a) of Center of the Universe, with Leaning Tower and El Cap in the background.

## Article Details

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