



AAC Publications

Ericsson Crag Number 3, Northwest Arête

California, High Sierra

In 100 Favorite North American Climbs, Fred Beckey describes Vinland, a line he and Alan Bartlett climbed on the north aspect of Ericsson Crag, as “one of my finest in the Sierra.” (See also AAJ 1988.) This is quite a statement coming from the man who climbed close to everything! While working on the Emperor, on Bubbs Creek Wall, I noticed a jagged arête splitting Ericsson Crag Number 3 straight down the middle. This feature was not among the three technical routes known on the formation. My friends Scott Berry and Mark Thomas climbed a few peaks across from the Ericsson Crag and set me up with sweet shots of the face in question. Another friend told me it was “one of the most beautiful places I have seen in the Sierra.” With so many positive reports, I convinced my friend Maxim Belyakov to join me for an adventure in mid-June.

It was Maxim’s first time in the area, so on the first day we hiked to the Charlotte Creek camp and climbed the first eight pitches of the Emperor. The following day we hiked eight or nine miles to the base of Ericsson Crag Number 3 and climbed the line I had my eye on. From the base it looked steep. There was an obvious spire halfway up and a clean headwall guarding the easier terrain to the summit. Even with reports of good rock, the close-up photos of the peak gave me doubts about the quality. Fortunately, the rock turned out to be solid.

I started left of the arête, aiming for an obvious hand crack, after which I climbed over a bulging overhang and up easier terrain, making a belay over 60m up. This was likely the crux of the route, with the hardest moves (about 5.10c) at the top of the hand crack and getting over the overhang. Pitch two traversed right and up to a roof, which is directly on the arête. It looks unlikely, but there were golden jugs that allowed me to pull the roof with a big smile. Throughout the day I mostly kept to the arête. The route is alpine in quality—a more sustained version of Russell’s classic Fishhook Arête.

Two-thirds way up, we finally hit the white granite spire, which protrudes from the mountain like a massive fang. I did not want to drop off the ridge to bypass it and was psyched to find a few moves of overhanging hand jamming on the right side of it. This led directly to the notch between the spire and short headwall made of featured red rock of lesser quality. Before moving on to the headwall above, I stood atop the spire.

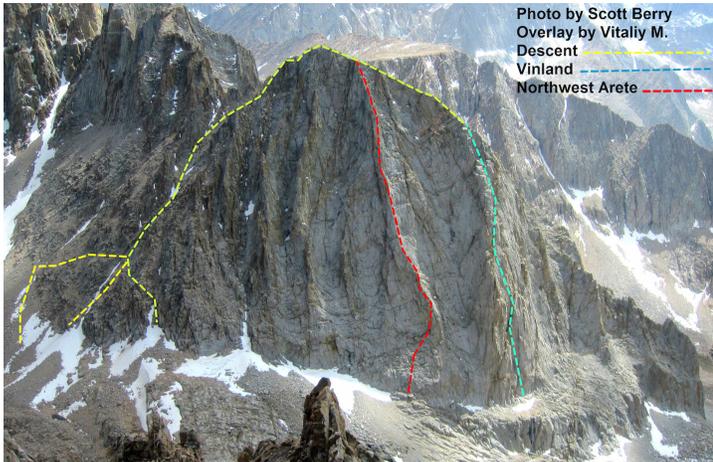
An obvious splitter crack snaked up the upper fourth of the headwall. After looking around, I started on the left side, in a fist crack. In-cut black knobs, with intermittent cracks, brought me to the final splitter—intimidating but no harder than 5.10a. After the headwall, more moderate and exposed climbing on the crest of the ridge brought us to fourth-class terrain, where we unroped and scrambled to the crest of the ridge. The summit was nearby to the east. While having a snack and relaxing on top, I noted the original entries by some of the prominent climbers who have done a lot of the exploratory climbing in the Sierra Nevada. The views from here were well-summarized by Fred Beckey: “Getting to the summit was like a taste of ambrosia, for it was possible to sight picturesque lake chains, lush meadows, and rugged peaks where glaciers once flowed.”

With conflicting directions on where to descend, we scrambled about 300’ of fourth-class terrain to the east, where we found a prominent gully; it led north and was simple to follow. Several steep drop-offs were avoided on the skier’s left (west). Descending this gully allowed us to end up in the same drainage where we started, not far from some extra gear we left at the base. After picking up the gear, we hiked back to the Charlotte Creek camp and hiked out the following day. With a very early start, the

Northwest Arête (IV 5.10c) could be done car-to-car by the very motivated. Personally, I would suggest a weeklong outing, which would allow one to complete many other worthy climbs in the area.

– Vitaliy Musiyenko

Images



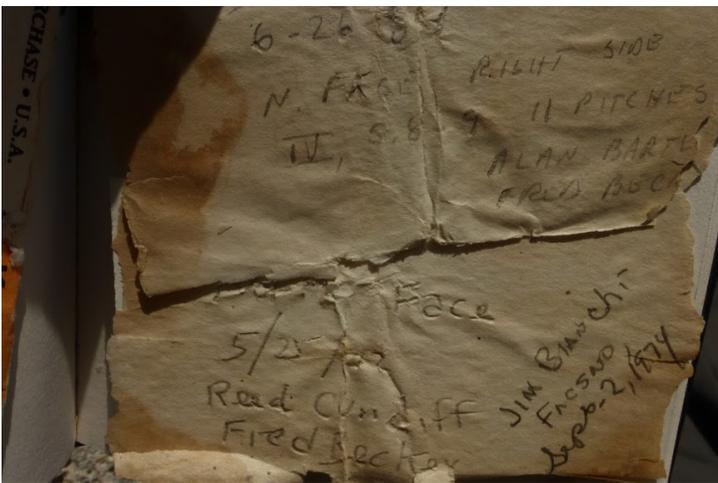
Ericsson Crag Number 3 as seen from Charlotte Dome, showing the Northwest Arête, the approximate location of Vinland (Bartlett-Beckey, 1987), and the descent used by Musiyenko and Belyakov.



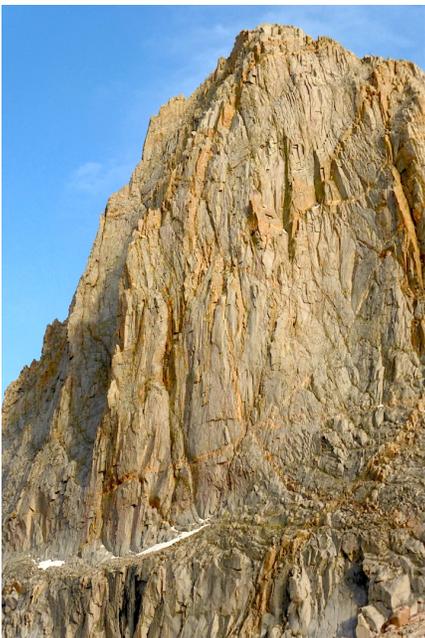
Looking up the central portion of the Northwest Arête (IV 5.10c), with the white, fang-like spire noted by Musiyenko visible.



Vitaliy Musiyenko en route on the Northwest Arête (IV 5.10c).



Snapshot of the summit register with Fred Beckey's original entry for the route Vinland.



The Northwest Arête of Ericsson Crag Number 3 climbs the prominent rib forming the left skyline. Vinland climbs the foreground rib.

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