



AAC Publications

Castle Rock Spire, East Face, First Free Ascent

California, High Sierra

The east face of Castle Rock Spire was first attempted in 1949 by John Salathé and Jim Wilson; the direct crack system is obvious. However, it took 64 years for the route to see a complete ascent (AAJ 2014), at 5.9 C1. When Daniel Jeffcoach mentioned that a strong crack climber could potentially free the line, I was excited to try. In 2014, I was shut down by the second pitch. While bailing, though, I saw a good-looking hand crack 40 feet to the left of the thin crack I had tried.

This year I returned with Maxim Belyakov. The alternative second pitch went at an enjoyable 5.10a. The third and fourth pitches were the crux, with the most demanding sections going at solid 5.11+. Even though I was able to onsight all the pitches, I felt the two crux sections required all the skill and strength that I had. In all, the route is 600', III 5.11+.

This ascent was special to me, as this spire has rich history and is considered to be the hardest summit to reach in the Sierra. To date, fewer than 50 people have stood on top, a short list that includes some of the most accomplished climbers in North America. With good climbing and an easy descent with a 70m rope, the east face may now be the preferred way to reach this elusive summit.

– Vitaliy Musiyenko

Images

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