



## AAC Publications

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### **Spring Lake Wall, New Routes, and Other Climbs**

California, Sierra Nevada, Sequoia National Park

**Last summer I worked as a backcountry ranger in Sequoia National Park in California. Sequoia is a vast playground of granite peaks, domes, and beautiful alpine country.** Near the northern boundary of the park are the incredible climbing areas of Valhalla and Tamarack Lake, where most route development has occurred. I was stationed about 15 miles south of Valhalla along Little Five Lakes. From here it was easy to hike three to ten miles in any direction and get to nice granite walls—some climbed, some not. The majority of my climbing was focused along the Great Western Divide, which could make for a killer traverse in its own right. The following descriptions are of new routes I climbed in chronological order, with the route lengths based on total climbing rather than vertical gain.

In June, Austin Siadak and I climbed a new route on the Spring Lake Wall. This wall was first climbed in 1974 by Fred Beckey, Rob Dellinger, and Debbie Winters, by the right side of its north face (III F6, AAJ 1976). One year later, Sierra heavyweights Vern Clevenger and Galen Rowell established a new line on the center-right side of the wall, which they called That's a Sheer Cliff (IV F9, AAJ 1976). The wall apparently saw no further development until Siadak and I established a new route up a prominent sun-shadow arête left of That's a Sheer Cliff, climbing nine pitches up to 5.11. Our line follows corners and cracks straight up the face—The One That Got Away (1,500' climbing distance, 5.11b C1). The name also plays off the incredible fishing in Spring Lake, which teems with trout.

Siadak and I went on to climb a formation just east of Sawtooth Peak, rising above Columbine Lake. We followed a beautiful ridge of Tuolumne-esque rock to a fourth-class traverse onto a face and then some mediocre 5.8 that we simulclimbed for about 600' to the summit. It's not clear if the peak had been climbed or named previously. Since I was on the job, and we were hiking for a few days, approach shoes and a light rack sufficed. We named the route For Want of a Sheer Salamander, in homage to Rowell's line on Spring Lake Wall and the incredible specimen we found on the summit—a living and breathing Mt. Lyell salamander, more than a mile from any standing water or snow.

A week later I climbed probably my best route of the season, with new friend Cody Cavill. On July 14, over the course of six and a half hours, Cody Cavill and I established an eight-pitch, approximately 1,300' route on a previously unclimbed pinnacle in Lost Canyon. The route consisted almost entirely of perfect hand and finger cracks in corners or up clean faces, with safe and enjoyable climbing in the low 5.10 range. The first pitch was the obvious crux (5.11+) and could possibly be avoided. When we arrived at the top, we were treated to a pointy summit big enough for only one foot at a time. We both tagged the summit and signed a register that we left in a zipped bag on the summit ridge. One 30m rappel and a short fifth-class traverse brought us down to the notch between the pinnacle and the wall behind it, and another 30m rap took us down the west slopes adjacent to the pinnacle. A lot of necky downclimbing took us to an enormous scree skirt that we skied down to the base. We named the formation Lost Pinnacle and our route A Fine and Pleasant Romp (III 5.11+), because that's exactly what it was.

Although getting to Lost Canyon involves ascending Sawtooth Pass and gaining 3,500' of elevation, it is only six miles from the Mineral King Trailhead. The canyon is absolutely idyllic, with granite walls rising steeply on both sides, big glacial erratics dotting the canyon floor, alpine-stunted lodgepole pines reaching for the skies, and a clear, winding creek running through it all. It is well worth a trip for climbers who want to establish new routes. As of now, I know of only two routes in the canyon: ours

and Bernard Hallet and Gary Kirk's 1968 route up the northwest buttress of Needham Mountain (IV 5.7).

Shortly after Cody's visit, my girlfriend, Megan Kelly, and I added a three-pitch sit start to Sawtooth Peak's north face, which included runout 5.10+ knob climbing on excellent rock. I cannot find any account of the face having been freed before, but it certainly could have been. We found a couple of old piton holes along the way.

My next visitors were Drew Smith and Miranda Oakley, whom I met July 19 at the Spring Lake Wall. The following day we climbed a new nine-pitch route (though three pitches are shared with my earlier route). We called the route Standard Deviation (1,260' climbing distance, 5.11+ C1).

After Drew and Miranda left, I was unable to secure a solid partner for the rest of the season. I soloed three new routes, each of them between 800' and 1,000' long. The first two I soloed in a day. Starting from the Big Arroyo, I climbed up a previously unclimbed and unnamed cliffed. I freed the route on a Pakistani Death Loop (a long loop of slack tied through an anchor for minimal protection) at 5.11, with mostly 5.10 or easier climbing. At one point, a pitch from the top, I pulled up on my anchor to try and inspect the crack above, a funky number three Camalot popped in my face, and I fell back to the micro-ledge I was standing on. Close call. I named the route PDL (800', 5.11). You can decide whether it means Pakistani Death Loop or Pretty Darn Lucky.

After finishing this route, I scrambled a third- and fourth-class ridge over to Mt. Lipincott's north face. I climbed a new line here that was about equal in quality with Tuolumne's Cathedral Peak, but one and a half times as long, with some sections of 5.10. I called the route Me and My Arrow. Again, I freed everything using a PDL. Standing on the summit, I reflected on my day: I had free climbed about 1,600' of unclimbed terrain, rappelled about 1,600' to clean gear, and free climbed most of the 1,600' again on a Micro Traxion. It was an El Cap day but far slabbier.

My luck for the season finally ran out on my final route. I went back to Lost Canyon and started rope soloing up a beautiful 1,000' wall that apparently had never been climbed. After freeing a lot of 5.9 and a perfect 5.10 handcrack, I got into some rotten granite. Not being an aid climber, I aided this poor rock with a lot of cursing and praying. I finished the route, Paradise Lost, on some heads-up free climbing (5.11-) when the rock got good again. By this time I was pretty sick of soloing with potential 100' lead falls—and of looking for a partner.

Later, I finally got a chance to see Valhalla and Tamarack Lake, and I scrounged up another ranger to climb with me: Matt Zussman. For his first ever multi-pitch climb, we attempted a Dave Nettle route on Mt. Stewart's north face, rising above Tamarack Lake. I couldn't follow the questionable topo and ended up hauling poor Matt through some wild layback flakes (5.11- R). I don't know if this was a new route or not, as Nettle, et al, were very active on this face some decades ago. They probably climbed it. It was quite good.

There are a ton of excellent walls still unclimbed in this area—or only climbed once before.

– Chris Kalman

## Images



The Spring Lake Wall, showing The One That Got Away (yellow) and Standard Deviation (red). That's a Sheer Cliff and the original north face route ascend the clean wall to the right.



Sawtooth Peak (center) and For Want of a Sheer Salamander (left).



The tower climbed by Cody Cavill and Chris Kalman, via A Fine and Pleasant Romp, in Lost Canyon.

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