



AAC Publications

The Albatross and the Shiv, New Routes

Alaska, Brooks Range, Arrigetch Peaks

Pouring rain, nightmarish mosquitos, tussock bog—hopping with 90-pound packs—the struggle was real when Cigdem Milobinski, Nick Pappas, Todd Torres, and I began our approach into the Arrigetch Peaks on July 2. But the objectives we'd dreamed of climbing kept us going, and in the end we managed to complete two new routes during our three-week trip.

Due to various unfortunate factors, including carrying too much gear and Cigdem spraining her ankle and subsequently self-evacuating, it took us nine days to approach and establish our base camp in the Arrigetch Valley. On July 12, Nick Pappas and I set out to climb the Albatross (5,565'), a twin-summitted peak that had been climbed to its southern (and true) summit twice before—first in 1969 via its much shorter southwest ridge and then in 1993 via cracks up its south face. We found no report of climbs or attempts on its north side, despite the north buttress commanding the view upon entering the Arrigetch cirque. Its top is split in two by a giant dihedral that never sees sunlight, and a large black gash slashes across the buttress, making it appear as if the watchful eye of some great god overlooks the valley. Photos of this magnificent feature had intrigued me in the months leading up to the trip, and I couldn't believe that it remained unclimbed.

A beautiful 400' splitter crack system led us up to the shoulder of the north buttress, and some nerve-racking climbing over giant loose blocks got us to the base of the dihedral. The corner was slammed shut at the bottom, and we spent four hours exploring various options and then retreating to a ledge to rest. Finally we followed a line of tiny crimps directly up to the dihedral, which eventually opened up to a decent crack. We climbed the wet, crumbly corner, full of flora and fauna, and exited to find a perfect safe nest for a well-deserved nap. After climbing a licheny slab to the north summit of the Albatross, we simul-climbed the ridge to a low point between the peak's two prominent high points. From here we made six 70m rappels off the west side to the glacier below. We returned to our tent 30 hours after leaving and named the route after the stunning dihedral that glowers over the valley: The Eye of Sauron (1,200', 5.10c).

After scouting the area and finding nothing else we desired to climb, we moved base camp to the beautiful Aquarius Valley. On July 18, Nick and Todd climbed the northwest ridge of an unnamed peak attempted in 2002. [Editor's note: This peak lies northwest of the Badile in the Aquarius Valley and is represented on the Survey Pass (B-3) Quad as a long ridge between two glaciers at the head of the valley. Approximate coordinates are 67.40149N, 154.14952W. The 2002 party called it "Notchtop"; see AAJ 2003.] The climbing consisted of classic 5.6–5.8 for the first few pitches, which led to a knife-edge sidewalk and wild face, devoid of crack systems. It was clear that the 2002 attempt had ended here—Todd used the previous party's bail nut as part of the belay. Nick managed to free the pitch onsight, calling it the culmination of 10 years of climbing and the best pitch of his life. Tricky ridge climbing took them to the summit, from which they continued down the ridgeline to a notch, where they rappelled the west side of the peak. Since it was our last day to climb before hiking out, they named the route Go Big or Go Home (5.10d R, ca 800' vertical but considerably longer climbing distance) and dubbed the formerly unclimbed mountain the Shiv. This trip was made possible by the Bob Wilson Grant from the Mazamas.

– Katie Mills

Images



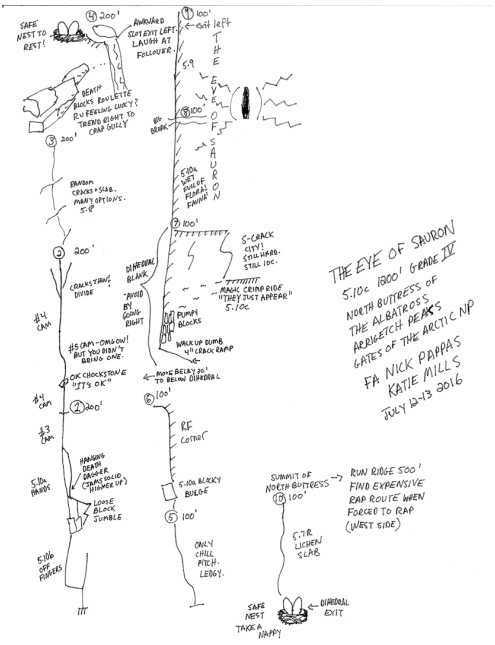
Nick Pappas on the approach to the north buttress of the Albatross. The upper pitches of the Mills-Pappas route Eye of Sauron follow the striking shaded dihedral on the summit tower.



Nick Pappas climbing the clean splitter crack system that makes up the lower 400' of the Eye of Sauron on Albatross.



The Albatross, showing the line of the Eye of Sauron (5.10c). After reaching the north summit, the two climbers continued along the ridge and descended from a notch north of the true (south) summit.



Topo for the Eye of Sauron.



Katie Mills leading up toward the base of the upper dihedral on the Eye of Sauron (5.10c).



Nick Pappas racking up for ridge climbing, with the crux lurking above, during the first ascent of Go Big or Go Home (5.10d R) on the Shiv.



The previously unclimbed peak that Nick Pappas and Todd Torres named the Shiv, seen from the north. Their route Go Big or Go Home (5.10d R) followed the northwest ridge (right skyline). The pair traversed the peak and descended the far side.



The Eye of Sauron

Article Details

Author	Katie Mills
Publication	AAJ
Volume	59
Issue	91
Page	0
Copyright Date	2017
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions