



AAC Publications

Yosemite Overview (2016)

California, Yosemite Valley

During what was likely a record-breaking summer for park visitation, three-hour traffic jams edged slowly in a counterclockwise loop around the Valley floor while El Capitan's mostly empty walls flickered through the exhaust and idle air of 102° July days. At the time, it seemed difficult to imagine that roughly a dozen of the world's best rock climbers would descend on Yosemite a few months later with the goals of repeating some of El Capitan's most difficult free routes.

Before the Sierra snow returned in earnest last autumn after years of drought, Jacopo Larcher (Italy) and Barbara Zangerl (Austria) made the third free ascent of Zodiac (5.13d), Jorg Verhoeven (Netherlands) made the second free ascent of the Dihedral Wall (5.14a), Sébastien Berthe (Belgium) made the second ascent of the Free Heart Route (5.13b V10), and Adam Ondra (Czech) completed the second ascent of the Dawn Wall (5.14d, see previous report). Perhaps most unusually, Pete Whittaker (U.K.) managed to rope-solo the Freerider (5.12d/5.13a), all free in a day. As the dust settled toward the end of November, Larcher said in an interview on the Planet Mountain website, "I'm sure that the real free climbing boom in Yosemite is only just about to begin."

Though the headlines focused on last autumn's exploits, climbers living in Yosemite and its surrounding communities established new routes around the park throughout the year. In May, Cameron King and Eric Bissell finished the first free ascent of Mr. Midwest (13 pitches, 5.13b) on the textured west face of El Cap. After three months of weekends and 10 days on the wall, Kevin DeWeese and Steve Bosque established Hail to the Chief (11 pitches, 5.9 A3) on Lower Cathedral Spire, named for President Obama's Yosemite visit that occurred while the two were working on the route. In October, Brandon Adams and Tito Krull plucked the final dihedral line from the center of Liberty Cap with their first ascent of Stiff Upper Lip (10 pitches, 5.9 A3+).

Speed climbing saw its milestones last season as well. In mid-June, Scott Bennett and Brad Gobright linked three El Cap routes in a day, climbing Zodiac, the Nose and Lurking Fear in 23 hours 10 minutes. Theirs was the third El Cap triple in a day, and the first to complete this particular combination. Multiple women closed in on a sub-24 solo ascent of the Nose on El Cap, and on August 5 local climbing guide Miranda Oakley started up the route at 5:30 a.m. and topped out in quiet darkness 21 hours 50 minutes later, achieving the first female solo NIAD.

In October, two large routes with small sections of aid, the Misty Wall near Yosemite Falls and the West Face of Sentinel, saw complete free ascents via short variations to their original routes. Under the tutelage of John Long, the routes were group efforts of rebolting, cleaning, and projecting before being redpointed by Jon Cardwell and Marcus Garcia on the Misty Wall Direct (5.13), and Kevin Jorgeson and Ben Rueck on Sentinel's West Face (5.13).

– Eric Bissell

Images



Eric Bissell engages the tiered roof crux on pitch five of Mr. Midwest (13 pitches, 5.13b) on El Capitan during the first free ascent, with Cameron King.

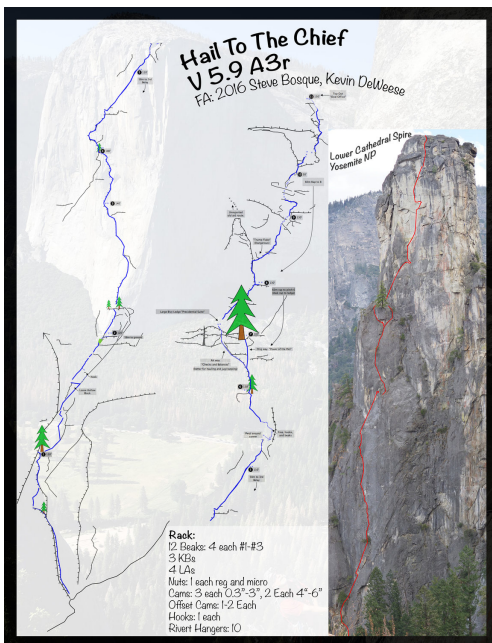


Photo topo for Hail to the Chief on Lower Cathedral Spire.

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