



AAC Publications

Sphinx Lakes, New Routes

California, Kings Canyon National Park

In early August, Jon Griffin, Tad McCrea, and I left Road's End and hiked into the Sphinx Lakes, where we established three new routes on various peaks.

After setting up camp at one of the upper lakes, we hiked up and over an unnamed pass east of Sphinx Lakes to reach the unclimbed northeast face of North Guard (13,327'). We followed a striking arête for eight pitches until we were able to gain a ridge that led to the final headwall.

We began by climbing a 5.9 hand crack, followed by a short steep section of 5.9+ to gain the arête. A bit of 5.9 R face got us to cracks on the arête, which soon gave way to a short 5.10 finger crack crux and mantel. A chimney with a precarious flake loomed above; we avoided the flake by wide stemming. After reaching a gendarme, we traversed right along loose rock to gain the final headwall. Three pitches of crack climbing got us to the summit. We named the route Jah Chosstafari (1,200', IV 5.10) after the loose rock we encountered and sounds of reggae emanating from our speaker.

Getting off the peak was quite the challenge, as we had to scramble down thousands of feet to the south into a different drainage, walk a few miles west, and find our way up and over Sphinx Pass and back into the Sphinx Lakes basin. We descended a little too far in the dark, but luckily the moon rose full and we were able to find our way back to camp around 1 a.m.

After a rest day, we decided to climb a beautiful peak that rises above the south side of Sphinx Lake. Although this peak lies along the mile-long ridgeline west of North Guard's summit, it seems to have its own prominence. Our route followed an obvious arête straight up the center of the north face.

After climbing up moderate snow, we began just right of the toe of the buttress and encountered a 5.10 move to gain the slabs below where the rock steepens. From there we generally followed the arête for the next five pitches and encountered incredible climbing on corners and cracks up to 5.10+. A few hundred feet of 5.8 hand cracks on the ridge brought us to the final steep headwall. We climbed the central dihedral for two pitches of 5.10, which brought us to the summit. We named the route The Sphinxter (1,400', IV 5.10+) and believe the peak was unclimbed. We walked off the backside and repeated the trek up and over Sphinx Pass to return to camp.

The following day we hiked up and over the same pass used to access North Guard but headed west to Mt. Francis Farquhar's northeast face (12,893') where we climbed a new six-pitch route. After scrambling up a pitch off the snow, we gained a nice belay ledge, from which a section of tricky 5.10 face climbing brought us to a striking splitter wide crack. We stemmed and groveled our way up until the crack narrowed to perfect fists for 50'. We continued to connect features up the ridge for a few pitches up to 5.9 and eventually made a 5.9 R traverse left to gain another system. Discontinuous cracks and face climbing led us to the summit. We named the route Only Cheese (800', III 5.10).

– Whitney Clark

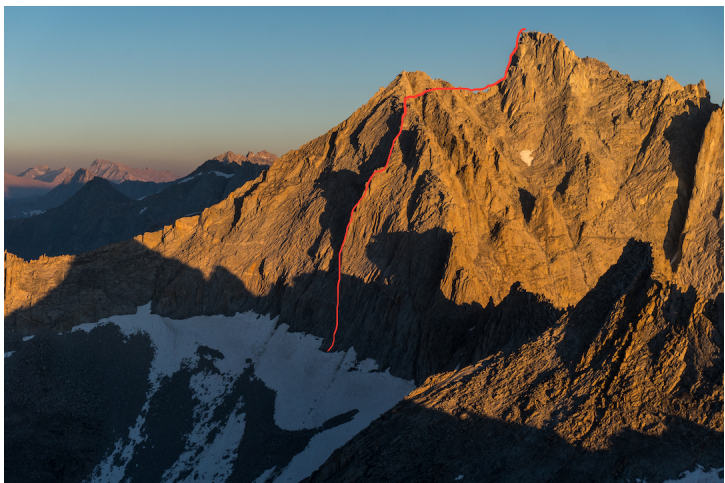
Images



Jon Griffin leads out during the first ascent of Jah Chosstafari (1,200', IV 5.10), on the northeast face of North Guard in Kings Canyon National Park.



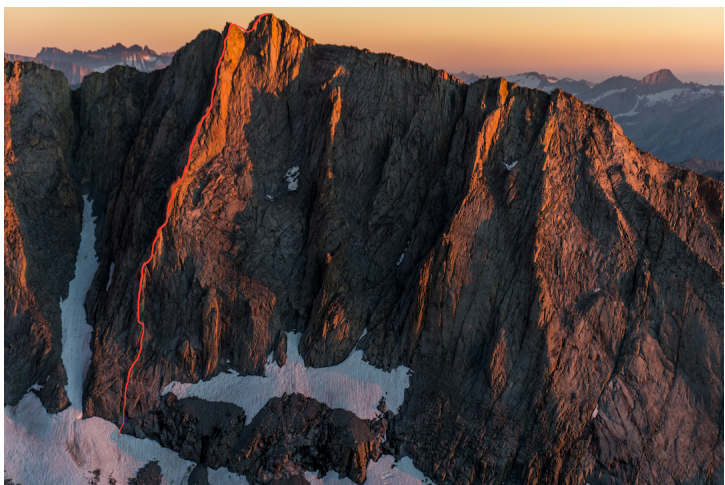
Jon Griffin tackles the final headwall during the first ascent of the Sphinxter (1,400', IV 5.10+), on an unnamed peak along the ridge west of North Guard's summit.



The northeast face of North Guard (13,327') showing the line of Jah Chosstafari (1,200', IV 5.10). The route was one of three big new climbs completed by Whitney Clark, Jon Griffin and Tad McCrea during a week trip into the Sphinx Lakes basin.



The northeast face of Mt. Francis Farquhar (12,893'), near Sphinx Lake in Kings Canyon National Park. The line of Only Cheese (800', III 5.10) is shown.



Sphinx Lake Peak, a prominent point along the mile-long ridgeline west of North Guard's summit. Whitney Clark, Jon Griffin and Tad McCrea made the first known ascent of this point via The Sphinxster (1,400', IV 5.10+).

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