



AAC Publications

Deer Lakes Basin, New Routes

California, High Sierra

In August and October, Ray Eckland, Giselle Fernandez, and I established a dozen new climbs in the Deer Lakes region, south of Mammoth (John Muir Wilderness). We enjoyed prime weather conditions that facilitated ground-up ascents on rest days between stints of fieldwork for my master's in geology. The Deer Lakes basin is an often-photographed alpine cirque at about 11,000'. Geologically, the basin is dominated by ancient tuffs and lava flows that were metamorphosed by the intrusion of younger granites and sculpted by glaciers to form durable metavolcanic fins spawning myriad fracture systems.

All but one of our routes are found on the east face of Peak 11,600+, a 150m-tall escarpment of brilliant white Jurassic tuff rising directly above the south side of the uppermost Deer Lake. This broad feature is divided into three separate buttresses and flanked by a permanent skirt of snow. Collectively, we refer to this trio of formations as the Ivories for the abstract resemblance to a gigantic piano. We could find neither record nor rumor of previous climbing activity. The approach is a simple and scenic five-mile hike on established trails from either Lake George or Coldwater Creek trailheads.

On August 9, Ray and I climbed our first route at the Ivories, a glorious 35m dihedral dramatically positioned on the edge of Ivory Prow, the leftmost (and by far the shortest) of the three main formations. We agreed upon the obvious name Ivory Dihedral for this superb 5.11 pitch. We learned that the angularity and texture of the rock offered ample relief on steep terrain, essentially opening the entire wall for route potential.

The next day we set off to climb the rightmost of the three formations, which we called Ivory Tower. With a sea of cracks spread out before us, we opted to trace the most appealing system, which yielded a full rope length of splitters followed by sparsely protected face climbing to the final knife-edge ridge. We called this the Field-Eckland Route (150m, 4 pitches, 5.9). Later that day, we climbed the central (and largest) formation, which we called Ivory Crag. A prominent "tusk" divides the wall in half; we opted for the more amenable left side and found a fantastic line of hand cracks leading to the summit. We called this route Poacher (140m, 3 pitches, 5.10a).

After a few more weeks of field work, I returned on August 24 with my fiancée Giselle Fernandez. On our first day we ventured up a striking offwidth splitter in a prominent black streak to the right of Poacher which we named Ebony (150m, 3 pitches, 5.10a). Upon reaching the summit of Ivory Crag, we looped back around to the base of the wall and promptly began racking up for another round. We discovered yet another high-quality route in one of the myriad cracks to the left of Poacher: Piojitos in Paradise (140m, 3 pitches, 5.9).

The next day, Giselle and I established three good single-pitch lines on Ivory Prow to compliment Ivory Dihedral. From left to right: Goldilocks (5.10d R), Heart of Darkness (5.10a), and Martini Void (5.10b). The latter, a remarkably deep offwidth, widening from bottom to top akin to a martini glass, was the only route at the Ivories that necessitated fixed hardware: We hand-drilled a bolt placement to protect the crux section, which was too wide for our seven-inch cam.

On August 26, we finally climbed the steeper right side of Ivory Crag, the difficulty gradually increasing

through dueling twin cracks until the ultimate climax: a solitary fingertip crack gracing an otherwise blank and slightly overhanging 10m headwall. We called this route Pinky and the Brain (130m, 3 pitches, 5.11).

Mild autumn weather permitted a third and final trip, and on October 30, Giselle and I established two new routes on Ivory Tower. First, we dispatched the obvious, low-angle, right-leaning ramp extending across the entire northeast face. The difficulty was consistently moderate on this mildly run-out three-pitch adventure, which linked into the Field-Eckland Route just below the summit ridge. We called it Parisian Alleyway (150m, 4 pitches, 5.8), a nod to flat gray skies that afternoon.

Branching off from the lower part of the big ramp defining Parisian Alleyway, near the top of that route's first pitch, we found an incredible 50m hand crack splitting the middle of a clean, vertical wall. With sustained jamming and wild exposure, it was arguably the best pitch we did all summer. We named the complete route La Vie En Rose (120m, 3 pitches, 5.10). Finally, we explored two mediocre variation pitches, Rampa Al Cielo (5.7) and Rapunzel (5.10).

On the hike out, we climbed a route on the pyramid-shaped northeast face of Peak 11,477'. Our attention had been drawn to an extremely striking fissure splitting the center of the smooth, jet-black wall. The route lived up to our wildest dreams, yielding four pitches of steep crack climbing and a final catwalk along the knife-edge ridge to the summit. To descend, we continued southward along the jagged crest to its natural terminus and looped around the east shoulder of the formation and down a snow and scree gully. We called the route Slayer (170m, 5 pitches, 5.10). With a scenic approach (two to three hours) through Sky Meadows from Coldwater Trailhead, we recommend it as a day trip out of Mammoth Lakes.

– Derek Field, Canada

Images



Derek Field starting up the third pitch of Ebony (150m, 3 pitches, 5.10a) in a new alpine cragging area that Field and his partners named the Ivories for the resemblance to a piano.



Giselle Fernandez waltzes along a section of precarious ridge on the second pitch of La Vie En Rose (120m, 3 pitches, 5.10) on Ivory Tower, one of a trio of alpine buttresses south of Mammoth that Derek Field and partners developed in summer 2017.



Giselle Fernandez on the final section of Heart of Darkness (5.10a), a single-pitch line on Ivory Prow, one of a trio of alpine buttresses that Derek Field and his partners named the Ivories.



Giselle Fernandez climbs past the bolt on Martini Void (5.10b), the only piece of fixed hardware that Derek Field and partners placed while putting up a dozen new routes at the Ivories.



Derek Field scaling the exposed second pitch (5.10b) of La Vie En Rose at the Ivories, a recently developed alpine cragging zone south of Mammoth Lakes.



Ray Eckland tosses aside an unwanted piece of ridgeline on the fourth pitch of the Field-Eckland Route (150m, 4 pitches, 5.9) on Ivory Tower. This formation is one of a trio of buttresses developed by Derek Field and partners in the summer of 2017. They named the area the Ivories for the faint resemblance to piano keys.



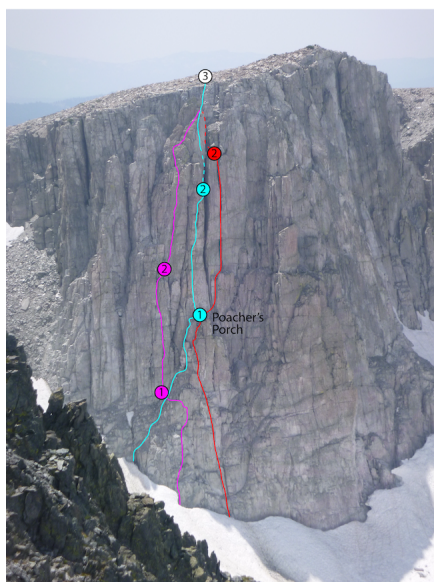
Derek Field laybacking the final stretch of Ivory Dihedral (5.11). This was the first of 12 new routes that Field and partners completed in the area over three trips in summer 2017.



Ray Eckland follows the third pitch of Poacher (140m, 3 pitches, 5.10a) in the Ivories, a collection of alpine buttresses above Deer Lakes, south of Mammoth.



Derek Field starts the second pitch of Slayer (170m, 5.10), a five-pitch route he and Giselle Fernandez climbed on the northeast face of Peak 11,477'.



Ivory Crag: Left Side

Piojitos in Paradise (5.9+)

FA: Field & Fernandez (08/17)

Pitch 1: 5.9+, 40m

Pitch 2: 5.9, 40m

Pitch 3: 5.9, 60m

Poacher (5.10a)

FA: Eckland & Field (08/17)

Pitch 1: 4th class, 60m

Pitch 2: 5.10a, 40m

Pitch 3: 5.8, 40m

Ebony (5.10a)

FA: Field & Fernandez (08/17)

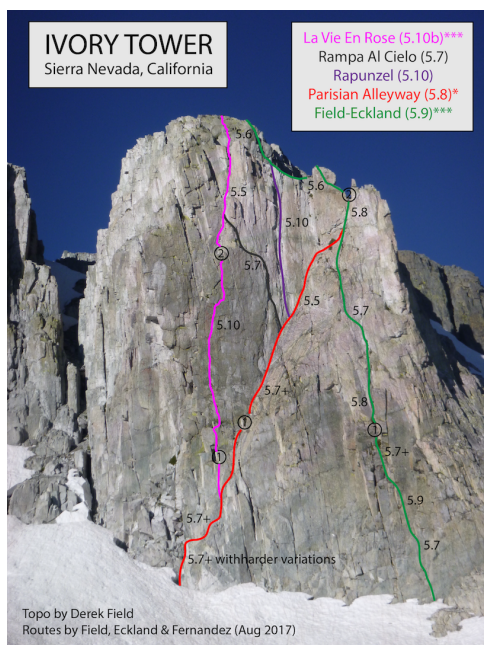
Pitch 1: 5.7, 60m

Pitch 2: 5.9, 55m

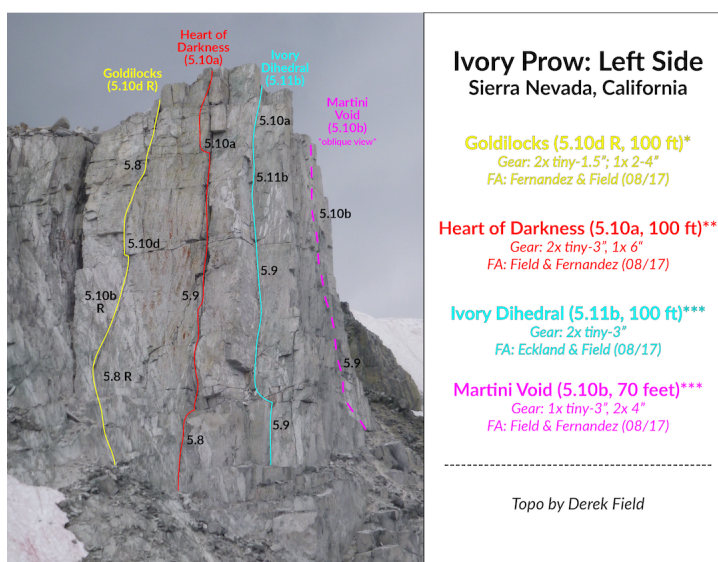
Pitch 3: 5.10a, 30m

Topo by Derek Field

The left side of Ivory Crag, one of three alpine buttresses developed in summer 2017 by Derek Field and partners, showing known routes. These cliffs rise above the Deer Lakes basin, south of Mammoth.



The Ivory Tower, one of three alpine buttresses developed in summer 2017 by Derek Field and partners, showing known routes. These cliffs rise above the Deer Lakes basin, south of Mammoth.



The Ivory Prow, one of three alpine buttresses developed in summer 2017 by Derek Field and partners, showing known routes. These cliffs rise above the Deer Lakes basin, south of Mammoth.

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