



## AAC Publications

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### **Wheeler Crest, New Routes**

California, Eastern Sierra

**IN THE FALL of 2017, many new climbs were established in the various steep canyons of the Wheeler Crest.** In general, climbers were seeking out the cleanest slabs and crack lines, as well as the few remaining unclimbed formations. The routes are listed South to North.

**Hardy Wall, Jersey Boy (600', III 5.9 R).** Adam Mills, Tony Lewis and I established this six-pitch route in Sphinx Canyon on September 9. Most pitches feature runout slab climbing with a few stance-drilled bolts. The route can be rappelled from fixed anchors with a 70m rope.

**Neptune Tower, The Trident (1,000', 8 pitches, IV 5.10).** On September 16, Amy Ness, David Russell and I made the arduous 3,000' uphill approach to the highest tower on the Wheeler Crest. Our objective was the solitary, straight-in crack system that Galen Rowell and Mike Graber had intended to climb in 1979, but which they abandoned in favor of an easier chimney to the left due to time constraints [see AAJ 1980]. A 5.10 entry pitch up a vertical seam was protected by a few knifeblades, and the long splitter headwall crack featured all sizes from fingers to squeeze chimney for multiple rope lengths.

**Torre Innominata, Tenderoknees (850', III 5.10+).** Natalie Brechtel and I climbed this five-pitch route on December 2. This unnamed tower is the large, egg-shaped, orange peak just left and uphill from Hot Tuna Tower, and had been climbed only once before in the early 1980's by Kevin Leary and Bill Taylor. Our line follows a prominent crack-and-chimney system on the right side of the tower, which featured a sustained 60m 5.10+ offwidth pitch. The name was derived from the combined effects of the long wide cracks and the pounding 4,000' descent back down to the desert from the summit.

**Lost Pink Tower, Ménage a Trois (800', III 5.10).** Brian Prince, Vitaliy Musiyenko and I climbed a crack system up the prow of the formation's east arete on October 6. An exposed fifth-class traverse pitch starting from a notch gains the crack system, where a single bolt doubles as both the belay anchor and protection for the crux moves gaining the crack. We descended from the summit by rappelling into the gully behind the peak.

**Cobbler's Bench, Sting of the Scorpion (1,000', IV 5.11a).** Brian Prince, Vitaliy Musiyenko and I climbed this eight-pitch route on October 7. The climb follows natural features to the right of the Weary Leader (800', 5.10 R, 1978), joining it at the end of our fifth pitch. A long squeeze chimney, delicate 5.10 flake, offwidth flare, and crux undercling roof mark the highlights. We placed one lead bolt and left no fixed anchors on the climb, descending the gully behind the tower. A tiny eight-legged arachnid was spotted down-soloing our route when we arrived back at the base.

**Cobbler's Bench, Hobnailer's Crack (900', III 5.11a).** Brandon Thau, Daniel Jeffcoach, Vitaliy Musiyenko and I climbed this six-pitch route as two teams of two on November 3. The line follows the splitter crack system on the leftmost buttress of the Cobblers Bench. 5.11 face climbing on the first pitch gained the long crack, which terminated on a large brushy ledge at mid-height. An easy wandering pitch led to a long chimney and a final 5.10 headwall flake to the summit. We descended by rappelling the line of ascent on fixed anchors.

**MOG Tower, Make a Merkin Great Again (800', III 5.8+).** Tad McCrea and I climbed this moderate

five-pitch route in terrible conditions on November 19. The brushy, low-angle cracks were made more difficult by the three inches of fresh snow and verglas covering much of the north-facing route. We descended from the virgin summit by downclimbing and rappelling the gully between the tower and Super Grey Pinnacle.

**Forgotten Tower, Zen Amongst the Rubble (900', IV 5.10+ R).** Peter Pribik, Tony Lewis and I climbed this sheer-sided eight-pitch spire high in Fifth Canyon on October 14. Enjoyable, varied climbing over clean stone led to a small untouched summit block. We rappelled the route with a single 70m rope from fixed anchors—a mix of pitons, bolts, and Stoppers. A blast-zone of rockfall and huge unstable boulders in the narrow part of the upper canyon provided some objective danger on both the approach and descent and gave rise to the route's name.

**Sheepoopi Spire, Lamb of God (1,100', IV 5.10).** Vitaliy Musiyenko and I climbed this nine-pitch route on October 29. The south-facing formation can be seen from Hwy 395 with a keen eye up high in the south fork of Sixth Canyon. The line follows an obvious crack system up the center on mostly excellent stone. The summit had been visited only by cloven-hoofed creatures, as evidenced by their droppings on top. The name is a play on words, and a nod to another famous climber's nickname. We descended by downclimbing the gully to the west.

**Haystack Needle, Needle in a Haystack (700', III 5.10a).** Vitaliy Musiyenko and I climbed this five-pitch route on November 2. This clean, shield-like formation is located to the right of Sheepoopi Spire in the south fork of Sixth Canyon. It is completely hidden from view from all vantage points until practically standing at its base. The climb features excellent dike-riddled slabs, corner cracks, and easy runout face to its summit. We descended the gully to the left of the peak with rappels.

– Richard Shore

## Images



Natalie Brechtel on the fourth pitch of Tenderoknees (850', III 5.10+) on Torre Innominata, a previously unclimbed spire in the Wheeler Crest.



Vitaliy Musiyenko on the fourth pitch of Sting of the Scorpion (1,000', IV 5.11a) on Cobblers Bench in the Wheeler Crest. Musiyenko, Brian Prince and Richard Shore climbed this new route in early October 2017.



Amy Ness on the fourth pitch of The Trident (1,000', 8 pitches, IV 5.10) on Neptune Tower, in the Wheeler Crest.



Tony Lewis following clean, runout slabs on pitch three of Jersey Boy (600', III 5.9R) on the Hardy Wall in the Wheeler Crest.





Tad McCrea following pitch three of Make a Merkin Great Again (800', III 5.8+) on MOG Tower in proper alpine conditions.



Cobbler's Bench Tower, The East Buttress of Super Grey Pinnacle, and MOG Tower in the Wheeler Crest above the Owens Valley. From left to right, Hobnailer's Crack (900', III 5.11a, 2017), The Rattler (IV, 5.11R, 2016), The Weary Leader (800', 5.10 R, 1978), Sting of the Scorpion (1,000', IV 5.11a, 2017) , Make a Merkin Great Again (800', III 5.8+, 2017).





Torre Innominata in the Wheeler Crest, showing the formation's two routes: Leary-Taylor Route (unknown, 1980s) and Tenderoknees (850', III 5.10+, 2017).



Sheepooipi Spire (left) and Haystack Needle, two formations in the Wheeler Crest that were likely previously unclimbed. From left to right, Lamb of God (1,100', IV 5.10) and Needle in a Haystack (700', III 5.10a).





Lost Pink Tower in the Wheeler Crest, showing the two routes completed by Richard Shore and partners in 2016-2017. From left to right: Loveline (800', III 5.10+) and Ménage a Trois (800', III 5.10).



Neptune Tower in the Wheeler Crest, showing known routes. From left to right: Graber-Rowell (III 5.10, 1979), The Trident (1,000', 8 pitches, IV 5.10, 2017), Stormy Petrel (1,000', IV 5.8 A0, 1982).



Forgotten Tower in the Wheeler Crest, showing the line of Zen Amongst the Rubble (900', IV 5.10+ R). Tony Lewis, Peter Pribik and Richard Shore climbed this sheer-sided eight-pitch spire high in Fifth Canyon in October 2017.



Vitaliy Musiyenko on the fourth pitch of Sting of the Scorpion (1,000', IV 5.11a) on Cobblers Bench in the Wheeler Crest. Musiyenko, Brian Prince and Richard Shore climbed this new route in early October 2017.



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