



AAC Publications

El Capitan, The Direct Line

California, Yosemite National Park

The Direct Line (39 pitches, 5.13+), a.k.a. the Platinum Wall, is a brand-new, mostly independent free line on El Capitan. It begins just left of the Nose and continues up the steepening blankness, following a circuitous path of 22 technical slab pitches before accessing the upper half of the Muir, either by the PreMuir (recommended) or the Shaft. From where these two routes meet, it continues up the aesthetic upper Muir corner system to access wild and overhanging terrain on the right wall. Bolted pitches take you to the prow between the Muir and Nose, and the route finishes close to the original Muir.

In 2006, envisioning a possible variation to the Nose, Justen Sjong and I had explored multiple possibilities for exiting the Half Dollar on the Salathé Wall route and finding some way to access Triple Direct Ledge, 80' below Camp IV on the Nose. Beginning in 2010, I picked up where we left off and began searching for the definitive free climbing path. During that hot and dry summer in 2010, it became clear there was a much more direct and independent way to climb the slabs to Triple Direct Ledge than using the Freeblast start to the Salathé. With that exciting realization, I just couldn't see finishing on the Nose, but instead envisioned a nearly independent route all the way up the wall. I took it on faith that there had to be a way to exit the Muir corner.

Each tantalizing prospect on the upper wall would either yield a new approach or would clarify a dead end (which is also helpful). It never went as expected, but somehow different pieces of the puzzle started coming together.

Elliot Faber and I worked on the project from 2013 to 2015. We hand-drilled and established Standing Rock (5.13a), the first nine pitches that form the alternative to Freeblast. We established the path of least resistance from the end of Standing Rock to Triple Direct Ledge in 2014. We took turns catching long lobs into 3,000' of exposure trying to unlock the beta to the last "hard pitch" on the route, traversing below the Muir roof. In the early winter of 2015, we attempted the first free ascent. The second free attempt was with Jay Selvidge in the fall of 2016, and it was then that I met Roby Rudolf (Switzerland), who joined me the following autumn for the send.

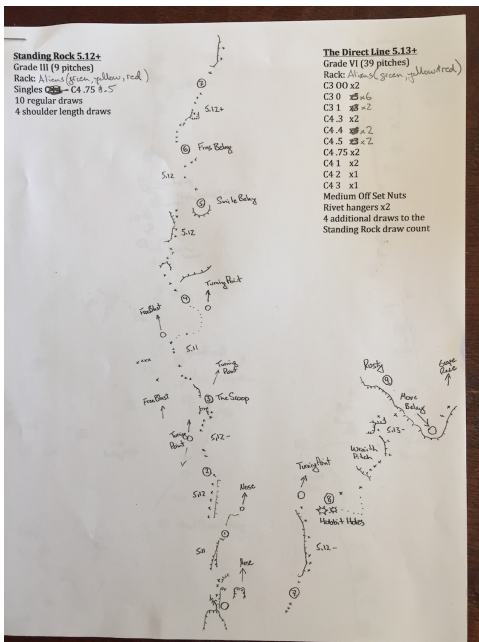
After several weeks of hiking 30 gallons of water and 15 days worth of food to the summit and distributing it to two caches at Gold Ledge and Triple Direct Ledge, as well as hauling food and gear to Rusty, we began climbing on October 10 and spent 14 days on the wall, swinging leads and freeing every pitch. A one-day free ascent of the Direct Line is something I hope to witness in the next few years. [An interesting and useful description of Miller's tactics for climbing and hauling the Direct Route's middle section, which gains only 120 vertical meters in eight pitches, can be found at Granitepage.com.]

– Rob Miller

Images



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Topo 1 for the Direct Line, El Capitan.

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