



AAC Publications

North Cotter, Vertical Illusion

California, Kings Canyon National Park

A year prior to getting into technical rock climbing, I saw the sheer east wall of North Cotter [Editor's Note: The main summit of Cotter is 12,719'. The exact elevation of its lower north summit is unknown.] while approaching Mt. Gardiner and Clarence King. Back then, those two peaks were plenty exciting via their easiest routes, "Sierra 4th class." A few years later I saw Galen Rowell's 1973 AAJ report, describing the only known route that had been climbed on this remote northeast-facing wall. In the summer of 2017, I re-visited the area with Chaz Langelier to see the wall up close for ourselves. We approached camp from Onion Valley trailhead and camped a short distance from the base of the wall. We saw the corner system that was likely climbed in 1972, but decided to attempt a direct line up the middle, to the left of the original route. From camp, the middle section of the wall didn't look rich with cracks, yet it turned out slabby enough that we were able to connect corners and cracks with a few sections of runout low fifth class. Some of the best climbing on the route included a left facing corner with a wild overhang, and solid finger-cracks up the middle of the red headwall on the last pitch. At that point, the 1,000 feet of exposure below our feet was a fine reward for the long approach, and to our surprise the steep, blank wall was only an illusion—we found plenty of climbable features on Vertical Illusion (III/IV 5.9+). To descend, we scrambled down to a saddle below Mt. Cotter and continued up the northeast ridge (varied 5th class) to the main summit, then descended the eastern slopes. To make sure we got enough cardio, after the climb we picked up our camp and hiked all the way over Glen Pass and Kearsarge Pass and back to the car.

– Vitaliy Musiyenko

Images



The north aspect of Mt. Cotter (12,719') and its north summit, showing the line of Vertical Illusion (III/IV 5.9+) and the descent. Vitaliy Musiyenko and Chaz Langelier completed this new route ground-up in a day in the summer of 2017. They had thought steep, blank wall would yield difficult climbing, but they found many climbable features that kept the climbing moderate.

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