



AAC Publications

Crystal Geyser Crag, New Routes

California, Eastern Sierra

In January 2018, Reuben Shelton and Brandon Thau completed Windchester (7 pitches, 5.11a A0), on the left side of the Crystal Geyser Crag, which is highly visible from Highway 395, above the town of Cartago. [See AAJ 2018 for more information on this area.] The high-quality route climbs the left side of the crag via hand cracks, a splitter finger crack, and a wild traverse under a roof to steeper face climbing. Shelton and Thau had nearly completed this route in 2017 but had to retreat due to high winds. Almost a year later, during the night prior to the first ascent, high winds struck again and broke their tent.

In March, Chris Koppl, Vitaliy Musiyenko, and Richard Shore established a six-pitch route on the right side of the formation. The first pitch, a mellow 5.7 corner, had a vintage bolted anchor at its end. (This unrecorded old route then veered hard left into a chimney-like gully, as evidenced by fixed piton rappel stations.) The trio climbed straight up slabs and corners to a headwall with high-quality 5.10 face climbing on dikes and knobs. Fighting an incoming storm with 50 mph wind, Koppl was forced out to the right, around an arête, to take shelter from the gusts.

After 900' of climbing, they unroped for an additional 400' of 4th- and easy 5th-class scrambling to one of the many summit blocks. They descended by downclimbing and rappelling the line of ascent from fixed anchors, using two ropes. During the descent, Shore pulled a three-inch-diameter tree out of the wall to avoid rope tangles, only to have it ripped from his hands and thrown across the desert by gale-force winds, giving rise to the route name—Tumbleweed (1,300', III 5.11a).

– Andy Anderson, with information from Brandon Thau and Richard Shore

Images



The Crystal Geyser Crag, in the Eastern Sierra above the town of Cartago, showing the line of Windchester (7 pitches, 5.11a A0), climbed by Reuben Shelton and Brandon Thau in January 2018.



The Crystal Geyser Crag, in the Eastern Sierra above the town of Cartago, showing the line of Tumbleweed (1,300', III 5.11a), climbed by Chris Koppl, Vitaliy Musiyenko, and Richard Shore in March 2018.



Chris Koppl leading pitch 5 of Tumbleweed (1,300', III 5.11a) on the Crystal Geyser Crag above Cartago, CA.

Article Details

Author	Andy Anderson
Publication	AAJ
Volume	61
Issue	93
Page	0
Copyright Date	2019
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions