



AAC Publications

Shaw Spire, East Face, Desayhumo

California, Eastern Sierra

FREESTANDING PINNACLES are a rarity in the High Sierra, where it's more common to top out on a flat plateau and surf down scree to descend. But in late August, Jon Griffin, Tad McCrea, and I found a new route up Shaw Spire, a freestanding tower below the east peak of Mt. Barnard (13,680'), first climbed by Galen Rowell and Jerry Gregg in 1971 (III 5.8, AAJ 1972) by the southeast arête. We approached via George Creek, a notoriously burly and bushy hike. Luckily for us, this was our sixth time entering the drainage over the last three seasons and thus we had it pretty dialed.

We spied an incredible line straight up the longest and steepest part of the east face. Another team had attempted a similar line a few years earlier but had escaped out left after encountering loose rock, joining the Gregg-Rowell route after four new pitches. Our climb followed an independent line to the right of earlier climbs or attempts.

We began by climbing two pitches of mediocre rock up to a left-leaning ramp and a good belay ledge below a wide crack. Jon went straight up the 5.10+ R offwidth for 30m, finishing with a fun chimney to a ledge belay. Two number 5 Camalots and a number 6 would be more comfortable to protect this pitch. After a hair-raising 60m 5.10 R corner with friable rock, the rock quality began to improve as we headed up moderate cracks and face near the southeast arête. Darkness fell, causing our pace to slow. A few more sections of short, steep 5.8 to 5.10 climbing led us to a final 5.9 splitter crack, about 30m east of the original Rowell line. We climbed 12 pitches in total to the ridge and then linked in to the original line, which traverses left for 100m to the summit. We called our route Desayhumo (1,300', IV 5.10+).

We reached the top around 2 a.m. and decided it best to wait until morning to find our way down. We found a perfect flat rock protected from the wind and snuggled up for the night. Although we didn't sleep much, it was incredible to wake up staring at the east face of the east peak of Mt. Barnard in the golden light. Though the lingering smoke from the summer's fires enhanced the sunrise, it felt like we were eating smoke for breakfast.

From the summit, we downclimbed 300' of 4th and low 5th class until we were able to begin rappelling. Four or five double-rope rappels down the original line on the southeast arête brought us to the ground. According to the summit register, we had made only the sixth ascent of Shaw Spire.

– Whitney Clark

Images



Shaw Spire, below the east face of Mt. Barnard's east peak. Whitney Clark, Jon Griffin, and Tad McCrea climbed a new route on the spire's east face, to the right of the original Gregg-Rowell line. According to the summit register, theirs was only the sixth ascent of the spire since the first ascent in 1971.



Whitney Clark leading out on the third pitch of Desayhumo (1,300', IV 5.10+) on Shaw Spire, a freestanding pinnacle below the east peak of Mt. Barnard (13,680').



Morning alpenglow on the east face of Shaw Spire, a freestanding pinnacle below the east peak of Mt. Barnard (13,680').



Whitney Clark traversing to the belay during the first ascent of Desayhumo (1,300', IV 5.10+) on Shaw Spire, a freestanding pinnacle below the east peak of Mt. Barnard (13,680').



Jon Griffin starting up the crux wide pitch of Desayhumo (1,300', IV 5.10+) on Shaw Spire, a freestanding pinnacle below the east peak of Mt. Barnard (13,680').

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