



AAC Publications

Checkedred Demon, Northeast Arête, Dancing with the Devil

California, Eastern Sierra

MANY HUNDREDS have passed by the **Checkedred Demon (13,121')** while descending from the **adjacent and popular East Arête of Mt. Humphreys**. The north side of Checkedred Demon features one of the most stunning arêtes in the High Sierra, and the peak is unlike any other in composition and structure. Its psychedelic swirls and multicolored complexion are derived from its 300 million-year-old metamorphic rock—mostly marble with some less desirable quartzite, hornfels, and schist mixed in—some of the oldest rock in the range and also some of the loosest.

Over a couple of trips in June and August, Myles Moser and I established a wild 12-pitch climb up the narrow north arête, clawing off loads of loose rock along the way. North wall-style hammers were indispensable for clearing the path, and extreme care was taken to belay in protected spots away from the fall line. The soft rock drilled with exceptional ease, and we took some comfort in knowing the belay anchors were solid when nothing else on the mountain was. Most belays consisted of one bolt and a piton, and a few dozen pins were fixed for lead climbing protection. In some places the rock was so soft we drove pitons straight into it like nails into wood.

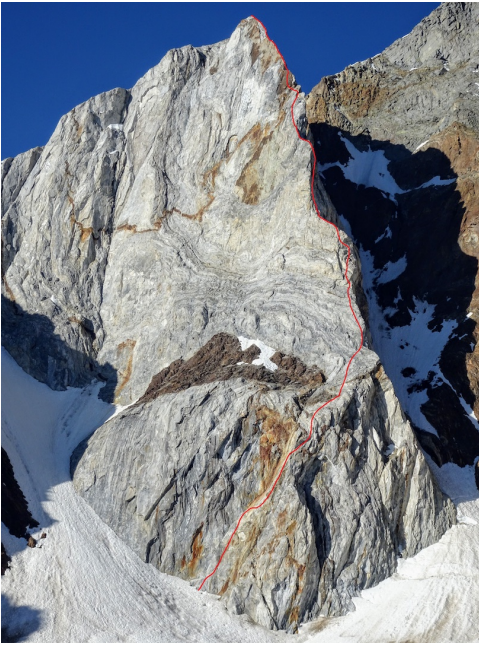
We grossly underestimated the size of the wall on our first attempt, and rappelling the line of ascent in retreat was more dangerous than the climbing. During our final push on August 5 we reached the knife-edge arête on the upper third on the peak. This was the point of no return—bailing from above pitch seven would be nearly impossible, and attaining the summit would be the only way off the peak. The final five pitches were like riding the lip of an Alaskan cornice of shattered rock, and we were unsure if the entire formation would collapse under our body weight. What this final stretch lacked in technical difficulty was more than made up for in both exposure and commitment. Teetering blocks fell away with ease on either side of the arête, exploding like gunfire in the couloirs more than 1,500' below.

The nearly flat scree slope of a summit was a welcome reprieve from the precariousness of our previous positions, and we lay on top in total exhaustion in the fading evening light. Our descent, while dark, was relatively painless as we followed sandy deer trails high on the northern side of brush-choked Birch Creek, eventually wrapping around Mt. Locke and back to our car. Dancing with the Devil (1,800', V 5.9+ X) had forced us to take great risks, and we nearly sacrificed our souls to achieve this wild collective desire.

– Richard Shore

More Checkedred Demon Climbs: Also in summer 2018, Derek and Giselle Field completed two short new routes on the west face of Checkedred Demon's south ridge. Chex Mix (300', 5.7) and The Devil Wears Plaid (450', 5.10-) climb prominent towers along the ridge and reportedly feature excellent granite. More information on these routes is at Mountain Project.

Images



Checkedred Demon (13,121') near Mt. Humphreys, west of Bishop in the High Sierra. The line of Dancing with the Devil (1,800', V 5.9+ X) is shown. This peak is home to two classic Sierra couloir climbs and several short moderate routes up the opposite side, but this was the first to tackle the long and aesthetic north arête.



Myles Moser heading up the first pitch of Dancing with the Devil (1,800', V 5.9+ X), which follows the prominent north arête of the Checkedred Demon (13,121').



Myles Moser on pitch eight of Dancing with the Devil (1,800', V 5.9+ X), which follows the prominent north arête of the Checkered Demon (13,121').



Richard Shore following a knife-edge ridge on pitch seven of Dancing with the Devil (1,800', V 5.9+ X). This aesthetic yet horribly loose route follows the north arête of the Checkered Demon (13,121'), west of Bishop in the High Sierra.

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