



## AAC Publications

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### **Sawmill Canyon, Sawmill Spire**

California, Eastern Sierra

**On October 20, Myles Moser, Amy Ness, and I hiked into the mouth of rugged Sawmill Canyon from the edge of the desert, about nine miles northwest of the town of Independence.** This narrow, brush-choked canyon has thwarted many potential explorers from reaching the intriguing granite fins visible from Highway 395.

We navigated around the nastiest bits by climbing a pitch of 5th-class rock over the basalt cliffs in the lower reaches of the canyon, which gave us access to sandy game trails high above the canyon floor. A fully intact, three-inch-long obsidian spear point lay on a game trail, indicating this was also the preferred approach route of our ancestors.

About a mile and a half up canyon, an 800' needle-like spire shoots skyward from the sagebrush at an elevation of approximately 6,200'. Two warm-up pitches (5.4 and 5.7) led to the base of the sharp northeast arête. Four more pitches of sustained and varied 5.10 and 5.11 climbing, including thin layback cracks and steep bolt-protected face climbing, gained the airy summit.

From the top of the spire, a mildly attractive ridge continues upward for another thousand or more feet, but it appears to become increasingly brushy and deteriorate in rock quality. This Grade V ridge-to-nowhere awaits someone with a penchant for extreme suffering and on-route first-aid skills. We opted to keep it classy and end our climb on the spire, descending to the northwest with single-rope rappels. The Sawmill Spire (800', III 5.11) is the only known climb in Sawmill Canyon.

– Richard Shore

## Images



Amy Ness heading up pitch five of Sawmill Spire, the first recorded climbing route in Sawmill Canyon, northwest of Independence, California.



Myles Moser on the summit of Sawmill Spire (800', III 5.11) after making the first ascent of the formation. This route is the first documented climb in Sawmill Canyon, northwest of Independence, California.



Sawmill Spire (800', III 5.11) in Sawmill Canyon, northwest of Independence, California, showing the line of the first ascent. This route was the first documented climb in the canyon, which required arduous bushwhacking and a 5th-class pitch to access.

## Article Details

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