



AAC Publications

North Fork of Granite Creek, New Routes

California, Sequoia National Park

I met Pete Cutler in Patagonia during the winter of 2017. Since he lives in Des Moines, Iowa, and has a professional career, his climbing time is valuable, and when he does get a chance to take a short climbing vacation, he does things like the Salathé Wall in a day or a slew of 5.12 cracks in Indian Creek in a weekend.

We booked some time to climb together in the Sierra, where we were psyched to explore the south faces of some attractive rock spires in the North Fork of Granite Creek. After 16 miles of hiking, it seemed like a sin to walk past Angel Wings, yet we continued over the neighboring ridgeline to the south and set up camp by Eagle Scout Creek, two and a half hours from Hamilton Lake. Our target climbs were on the other side of the divide between Eagle Scout Creek and Granite Creek, but the former has better camping, with less vegetation, a great water source, and a lake for scenic fishing and swimming.

The following day we warmed up on the south face of Eaglette Pinnacle, doing a likely first ascent of a five-pitch climb that went over a large overhang in the middle and popped onto a headwall with chickenheads leading to the summit—Nothin' But a Good Time (750', III 5.10a).

We still had most of the day, so we descended to the base of the southwest side of Periscope Dome. Our route started with a 5.10 boulder problem off a ledge and into a nice splitter, then traversed left on quality face. Pitch two goes up an overhanging arch. Dikes, flakes, more cracks—the route kept going. We ended up climbing six mostly 60m pitches to the top of Periscope Dome, did another pitch of downclimbing to the notch, another traverse to the base of a steep headwall, and on our ninth pitch climbed 5.10 face to the incredibly exposed summit of the Wallace Stegner Spire. After taking in the views and bathing in the sun, we got down the east ridge with one 60m rap—Sweet Corn and Steak (1,600' of climbing, IV 5.10d).

The following day we approached a large unnamed wall east of Wallace Stegner Spire. It has no known history of previous ascents, yet from the top of the Darth Vader Tower (AAJ 2016) it looked like the largest wall in the drainage. What we saw was wild: an enormous detached pinnacle leaning against the main dome with a 3m roof about 40m up, and what looked like a hand-size splitter from the base. After an interesting 5.10 approach pitch, I built the belay at the base of the roof and watched Pete send the roof first go. He was as excited as a little kid and reported it went at low 5.11. Above, he continued for another 20m up a double hand crack and built a belay at a nice ledge. From the belay, I did a 5.9/10a boulder problem up a finger crack and continued up a perfect hand-size splitter that went on for the whole rope length. Pete climbed the remainder of the crack and placed two bolts to climb through a bulge, which went at approximately 5.11a as well. The climbing was truly spectacular.

Another pitch of cracks and face climbing took us over another overhang, and then Pete did a long sixth pitch to reach the top of the detached pillar. When I got to the belay, Pete thought it was too blank to top out. I looked around and, though I agreed with his sentiment, I wanted to at least try. We moved the belay and I was able to piece together 5.10 face climbing with a few natural gear placements and two bolts for protection.

Three easier pitches and a long simul block up easy terrain took us to large trees, where we unroped and continued to a nice summit. We named the formation the Long Dong Wall, and the route Sick Gnarski Pillar (1,800', IV 5.11a).

We descended to the east, hiking around the formation and over the ridgeline to our camp. Because the trailhead was so far away, Pete had a flight to catch the following evening, and we were itching to shower, we decided to shorten the hike out and continued over to the neighboring valley and down to Hamilton Lake as the sun dove behind the horizon. Even though the temps were chilly, it did not stop us from diving in.

The Granite Creek drainages are remote, beautiful, and have some of the best backcountry granite I have climbed, with plenty of other plums to pick.

– Vitaliy Musiyenko

Images



**Eaglette Pinnacle
Sweet Corn and
Steak
750', III 5.10a**

Eaglette Pinnacle in the North Fork of Granite Creek, in Sequoia National Park. This formation was first climbed from the west side in the early '90s, but its much larger south face had no previous ascents. Vitaliy Musiyenko and Pete Cutler's route, Nothin' But a Good Time (750', III 5.10a), is shown.



Wallace Stegner Spire, Periscope Dome, and the Long Dong Wall from the top of Eaglette Pinnacle to the northwest. Vitaliy Musiyenko and Pete Cutler completed three new routes in the North Fork of Granite Creek in the summer of 2018, including the two shown—Sweet Corn and Steak (1,400', IV 5.10d) on Periscope Dome/Wallace Stegner Spire, and Sick Gnarski Pillar (1,800', IV 5.11a) on the previously unclimbed Long Dong Wall. Darth Vader Tower (III 5.9, Musiyenko-Prince, 2015) can be seen on the far right.



Pete Cutler on the summit of Eaglette Pinnacle after he and Vitaliy Musiyenko made the first ascent

of its south face via Nothin' But a Good Time (750', III 5.10a). In the last five years, Musiyenko and partners have done new routes on nearly all of the formations visible in this photo. From left to right: Eagle Scout Creek Dome, Beau-Te Cache Dome, Hamilton Dome, Rowell Tower, Serpent's Tooth, Angel Wings, the Red Rocket, the Globe, Cherubium Dome and Mt. Stewart.



Side profile of the Sick Gnarski Pillar (1,800', IV 5.11a) on the previously unclimbed Long Dong Wall, which climbs the face of an enormous leaning pillar six pitches tall.



The formations bordering the North Fork of Granite Creek in Sequoia National Park showing the three new routes completed by Pete Cutler and Vitaliy Musiyenko in summer 2018:

Article Details

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