



## AAC Publications

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### **Mt. Carl Heller, North Face, Stayin' Alive**

California, Eastern Sierra

**Four years ago, my friend David Pearson took a bad fall while climbing and spent the following month in a coma in the Fresno hospital.** The doctors were losing hope, saying that he was unresponsive and might never come out of it. Luckily for David, one brave nurse knew better and coerced a response out of David, saying that she would “show her boobs” if he wiggled his fingers. David gave a double thumbs-up, shot out of bed like a rocket, and has been climbing ever since. That's how I like to tell the story, at least.

Every year on the anniversary of the accident we go climbing in the Sierra to celebrate David's functional brain and body. This year we made the brutal approach up the George Creek drainage to try a new line on the likely unclimbed north face of Mt. Carl Heller (13,211'). On August 18, we started up a crack that diagonals up and left, a couple hundred feet to the right of the large double-crack gully that splits the face. What looked like good cracks from the ground turned out to be dirty water grooves—fun, but definitely not the splitters we were hoping for. We climbed 300' in the water grooves, encountering the 5.10+ crux of the route about 100' above the snowfield. The leader pulled on one cam while cleaning the crack on the crux move, but it was freed by the follower.

We then gained the double-crack gully and ascended it for 250'. While climbing out of the gully toward a right-facing corner system, I accidentally knocked off a large block. As I felt it begin falling, I tried to thrust it into the cliff with my body. I yelled “rock” and then watched as the VCR-sized block went crashing toward David. Luckily it only hit his hand, which still hurt, but was a lot better than it could have been. He had a small laceration, which bled a little and made crack climbing painful, but he was otherwise unscathed. I swear David has more lives than a cat.

We continued up the corner for about 300', then up several more great pitches of arching traverses, wide cracks, and fun moves until we were on the summit—Stayin' Alive (11,100', IV 5.10+).

With the exception of some loose rock and the near-death experience, this route was really fun, with lots of interesting climbing, especially on the upper half. This climb reminded me not to take it too lightly up there and to appreciate my friends and all the incredible experiences we have together. It was also a good reminder to stand to the side when you're belaying so you aren't right in the path of falling rocks.

– Damien Nicodemi

## Images



Racking up in camp before making the first ascent of Stayin' Alive (1,100', IV 5.10+) on the north face of Mt. Carl Heller (13,211').



The north face of Mt. Carl Heller (13,211'), showing the line of Stayin' Alive (1,100', IV 5.10+). Damien Nicodemi and David Pearson climbed this new route in mid-August 2019 for the likely first ascent of this aspect of the peak.



Damien Nicodemi following the first pitch during the first ascent of Stayin' Alive (1,100', IV 5.10+) on Mt. Carl Heller (13,211') in the Eastern Sierra.



David Pearson topping out the final pitch onto the summit ridge after making the first ascent of Stayin' Alive (1,100', IV 5.10+) on Mt. Carl Heller (13,211') in the Eastern Sierra.

## Article Details

Author	Damien Nicodemi
Publication	AAJ
Volume	62
Issue	94
Page	0
Copyright Date	2020
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions