



AAC Publications

Mammoth Crest, Blue Crag, New Routes

California, Eastern Sierra

Blue Crag is a serene and diminutive moniker for an otherwise sizable and rowdy piece of rock. This cliff, located on the Mammoth Crest south of Mammoth Lakes, features compact, gneiss-like stone and only one previously established climb, which follows the obvious snow line slashing up the center of the north face: *Why Ya Sufferin'?* (Humphrey-Rhea, 2013).

In late March, Jack Cramer, Drew Smith, and I were hanging at Jack's house in Mammoth and looking for trouble. After seeing the original route on Mountain Project, we thought there might be room on the face for another line. We packed the spikes, janglies, and gear for an alpine slumber party, and on March 29 we skied in from the Tamarack Cross Country Ski Center and camped on a knoll below the face.

On the approach, Jack had spied a large chimney feature on the northwest side of the peak that seemed to be accessible from the north face. The next morning, we started up the original line, simul-climbing the first pitch and a half of snow before breaking off right up an obvious steep groove. Moderate yet enjoyable mixed moves and bottomless wallowing through sugary garbage snow took us several pitches up to the shoulder, where a traverse into the base of the main chimney feature ended with a tricky step through a flared corner.

From this nerve-wracking belay, positioned below a massive overhanging snow mushroom, Jack started up steep rock on the right wall of the chimney, climbing through hard stems and sketchy hooks, culminating in a difficult and poorly protected traverse back left. A short tension traverse from a fixed pin (downclimbed free by Drew on the follow) regained the main snow gully and a belay below an overhanging wall. The following rope-length, dubbed the Jenga Pitch, saw Jack heroically tiptoe and trundle his way through steep terrain and another traverse that had Drew and me cowering under a small overhanging block as a barrage of choss rained down.

Drew took the final pitch to the ridge, which featured a tough boulder problem around a chockstone and a glorious exit to the ridge through a natural rock tunnel. We regrouped in the sunshine after freezing our asses all day, and then scrambled one long pitch of 4th class to reach the low-angle south slopes and the summit of Blue Crag. As Drew was shooting photos for a Swedish company whose name translates to "climbing mouse" and the climb followed a steep couloir with nowhere to hide, we named the route *Mouse Trap* (ca 1,200' climbing distance, IV M6 A1 and steep snow).

We descended southwest to the top of Crag Couloir, the obvious ski descent north of the peak. Nervous about snow conditions after a snowstorm and wind event a few days prior, we used one of our ropes to cut through and drop the cornice overhanging the chute, intentionally triggering a shallow soft slab avalanche before making our way down the couloir and back to camp, about 11 hours after departing.

In mid-April, Jack returned to Blue Crag with fellow Mammoth local Ian McEleney, and they climbed another route on the far left side of the north face, the *McCramer* (M3 50° snow) in 12 hours car-to-car. They reported fairly solid rock and several other moderate lines still to be done.

– Andy Anderson

Images



Drew Smith following moderate mixed terrain low on the route during the first ascent of Mouse Trap (1,200', IV M6 A1 and steep snow) on Blue Crag, outside Mammoth Lakes.



The north face of Blue Crag, on the Mammoth Crest outside of Mammoth Lakes, showing established routes: The McCramer (2019) in green, Why Ya Sufferin'? (Humphrey-Rhea, 2013) in red, and Mouse Trap (Anderson-Cramer-Smith, 2019) in blue.



The northwest aspect of Blue Crag, on the Mammoth Crest outside of Mammoth Lakes, showing the line of Mouse Trap (1,200', IV M6 A1 and steep Snow). Andy Anderson, Jack Cramer, and Drew Smith climbed this new line in late March 2019.



Andy Anderson traversing into the chimney system that defines the upper portion of Mouse Trap (1,200', IV M6 A1, steep snow). Anderson, Jack Cramer, and Drew Smith climbed this new line in late March 2019.



Jack Cramer casting off on the Jenga Pitch, one of the cruxes of Mouse Trap (1,200', IV M6 A1, steep Snow) on Blue Crag near Mammoth Lakes.



Jack Cramer and Andy Anderson skiing in to camp below Blue Crag, on the Mammoth Crest near Mammoth Lakes.

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