



AAC Publications

Wheeler Crest, New Routes

California, Eastern Sierra

On January 26, Joel Kauffman and I made the strenuous approach up Fifth Canyon in knee-deep snow to the Rocketship, where we had been watching an ice and mixed line form throughout the month. On the right side of the formation, a north-facing snow bowl feeds an ice drip, which then funnels into a clean corner system. Well-protected mixed climbing up the snow- and ice-filled granite dihedral was enjoyable and reminiscent of Alaska. A physical 5.8+ wide crack guarding entry to the snow bowl proved to be the crux, hooking icicles deep in the crack while heel-toeing in crampons. A variation pitch, when properly formed, will provide a thrilling and thin WI4 bypass. Scottish Astronauts (700', III 5.8 WI3 M3) featured six roped pitches and a 4th-class scramble to the summit of the Rocketship. We descended by downclimbing and rappelling the route. This is the only established ice/mixed route on the Wheeler Crest.

Over the course of two trips in late April and early May, Natalie Brechtel, Brandon Thau, and I climbed an eight-pitch route up the center of Neptune Tower. Named after the only spacecraft to do a flyby of the remote planet, Voyager II (1,000', IV 5.11+) follows the first (mostly) continuous crack system to the left of Fred Beckey's Stormy Petrel route (see AAJ 1984). A 5.7 approach pitch led to a ledge where the wall steepens, and technical 5.11 and 5.11+ climbing continued up stemming corners and laybacks, up and over a big roof. Nice 5.10 cracks led to the large upper ledge where the terrain eased to 5.8 for the final two pitches. A casual walk-off descent from the blocky summit started us back to the car, 4,000' below in the desert.

An all-star cast of characters was assembled for an extended weekend in mid-May, when Vitaliy Musiyenko, Brian Prince, Brandon Thau, and I set up camp in the hanging pocket forest below Hot Tuna Tower. The four of us took turns swinging the hammer and established a seven-pitch face climb up the prow of the buttress left of the classic 1978 Harrington-Wilson route Violet Green (see AAJ 1979). Some mystery bolts at the base to the left of our route are thought to be from a 2000s-era Mike Strassman attempt on a similar line. We poached a few of his bolts on our second pitch and quickly pushed beyond his old high point. Ten feet of featureless rock on pitch four prevented a completely free ascent, but we were content with the quality of the climbing while managing an independent route on the prettiest piece of rock on the Crest. Muy Bonito (1,050', IV 5.12 A0) is highly recommended and can be rappelled with two ropes from fixed anchors.

A number of shorter climbs also were done on the Wheeler Crest in 2019, including the first ascent of Overlooked Peak via the North Buttress (750', III 5.10d) and Pull the Wool (650', III 5.11a) on a prominent subsummit of Sheepoopi Spire. Jeremy Freeman and I climbed these routes in March and April. Myles Moser and I also climbed two routes on Little Grey Pinnacle in January: the Big Black Dike (450', 5.11a) and Myles from Shore (350', 5.10c) on the left and right sides of Alan Bartlett's East Face Route, respectively. In June, Joel Kauffman and I climbed the Kraken (700', III 5.11a), a fantastic three-pitch crack variation to Deep Sea Fishing on Poseidon Pinnacle, joining that route for pitches four and five to the summit.

– Richard Shore

Images



Brandon Thau on the sixth pitch of Muy Bonito (1,050', IV 5.12 A0), a difficult new face climb on Hot Tuna Tower in the Wheeler Crest above Bishop.



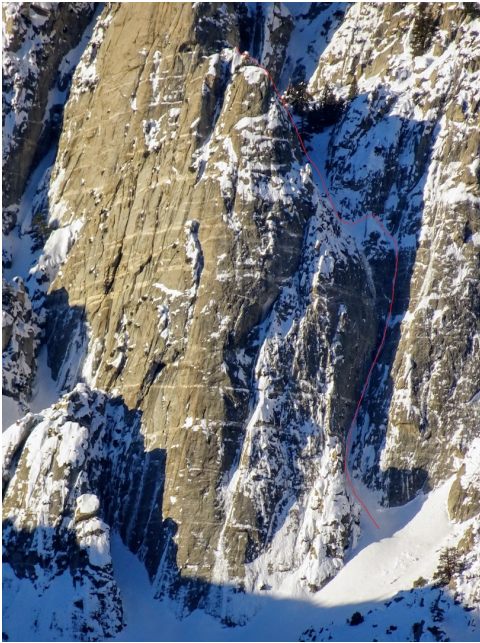
Brian Prince enjoys morning coffee below Hot Tuna Tower in the Wheeler Crest above Bishop. The line of Muy Bonito (1,050', IV 5.12 A0), put up by Prince, Vitaliy Musiyenko, Richard Shore, and Brandon Thau, is shown on the left.



Richard Shore on the fourth pitch of Voyager II (1,000', IV 5.11+), a new route on Neptune Tower in the Wheeler Crest of the Eastern Sierra.



Neptune Tower in the Wheeler Crest above Bishop, showing the line of Voyager II (1,000', IV 5.11+). Natalie Brechtel, Richard Shore, and Brandon Thau completed this new route in early May 2019.



The Rocketship, a subtower of the Wheeler Crest, showing the line of Scottish Astronauts (700', III 5.8 WI3 M3), climbed by Joel Kauffman and Richard Shore in January 2019. This is the first winter ice and mixed route documented in the Wheeler Crest.



Joel Kauffman on the third pitch of Scottish Astronauts (700', III 5.8 WI3 M3) on the Rocketship, in the Wheeler Crest. This is the first winter ice and mixed route documented in the area.



Joel Kauffman following the fourth pitch of Scottish Astronauts (700', III 5.8 WI3 M3) on the Rocketship, in the Wheeler Crest.

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