



AAC Publications

Pleasant Point, Northeast Buttress and Mordwand Direct

California, Inyo Mountains

Pleasant Point (9,690') is located two miles north of the historic mining town of Cerro Gordo in the southern Inyo Mountains, a limestone range to the east of the Owens River Valley and south of the White Mountains. When viewed from the Owens Valley, Pleasant Point is but a minor bump along the ridge crest. When seen from the Saline Valley, however, the dramatic 1,000' eastern escarpment is a bit more apparent. Attractive yet extremely loose, this complex, fluted cliff has been dubbed the "Eiger of the Inyos." The wall is like a giant overstuffed Oreo cookie: black wafers of limestone sandwiching the soft, poor white dolomite in the middle.

From the east, rugged 4WD roads lead to the Bonham Talc Mine, which makes for a convenient and interesting base camp. A few single-pitch sport routes have been developed at the base of the cliff on the black limestone, but no one had attempted to push a line up the giant mountain face above.

On April 20, Natalie Brechtel and I climbed what we deemed to be the "safest" route on the far right side of the peak. Safe is a relative term on this cliff—torrents of climber-induced rockfall are inevitable, and the dolomite is so sharp that a fall by leader or follower seems likely to cut the rope. Steeper technical sections were interspersed with narrow alpine ridges, and most pitches took an hour or more to lead, due to navigational and protection difficulties in the choss. Soft-iron WWII army surplus pitons proved to be most valuable—bolts were often worthless in the shattered mess, and hard steel pins would explode the rock into bits.

Eight long pitches up the Northeast Buttress (1,300', IV 5.9 R/X) provided full-value mental engagement. We finally reached sandy slopes where we could walk a quarter mile to the summit. We descended an easy snow-filled gully back to the base, and I vowed never to return to this pile of garbage.

Yet against my better judgment, I returned with Myles Moser on September 29 to attempt a harder line directly up the wall's central buttress. With just one day to climb, we opted for a smash-and-grab strategy, driving the 4WD Swansea/Salt Tram road from Cerro Gordo to a saddle just below the north side of the peak. We dropped into the base of the wall along the same descent gully we had taken in April, but tedious loose talus had replaced the easier spring snow. While more expedient overall, this approach was committing, requiring us to climb back out over the top to reach our vehicle on the west side of the peak.

Myles and I swung leads, climbing onsight through eight similarly dangerous but even more difficult pitches than Natalie and I had found in the spring to complete the Mordwand Direct (1,100', IV 5.10+ R/X). A stress-free descent off the west side led back to our vehicle just as the sun set over the Sierra to the west. Pleasant Point is hardly a recommended climbing destination, due to the poor rock quality, but the peak has potential for great ice and mixed climbing in wintertime, with difficult and remote access.

– Richard Shore

Images



The east face of Pleasant Point (9,690') in the Inyo Mountains, east of Lone Pine and Owens Lake, showing the two new routes completed by Richard Shore, Natalie Brechtel, and Myles Moser in 2019. Mordwand Direct (1,100', IV 5.10+ R/X) is on the left, and the Northeast Buttress (1,300', IV 5.9 R/X) is on the right.



Myles Moser engaging the first-pitch crux during the first ascent of the Mordwand Direct (1,100', IV 5.10+ R/X) on the east face of Pleasant Point (9,690') in the Inyo Mountains.



Myles Moser on the fifth pitch of the Mordwand Direct (1,100', IV 5.10+ R/X), on the east face of Pleasant Point (9,690') in the Inyo Mountains.



Natalie Brechtel following the fifth pitch of the Northeast Buttress (1,300', IV 5.9 R/X) of Pleasant Point (9,690') in the Inyo Mountains.



Richard Shore leading the fourth pitch of the Northeast Buttress (1,300', IV 5.9 R/X) of Pleasant Point (9,690') in the Inyo Mountains.

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