



AAC Publications

Cartago Wall, The Revenant

California, Eastern Sierra

Over the course of two separate trips, Joey Jarrell and I completed a new route on the Cartago Wall, the second known line on the granodiorite wall (see AAJ 2018), and possibly the first to summit the formation.

We set off on our first trip on May 28. Even though the approach was bluntly described as “the most unpleasant in the Sierra,” we still managed to underestimate the time and effort required to get there. Challenges included bushwhacking up a nettle- and ant-infested gorge, finding and flattening a suitable campsite among cactus, bashing through thick alders, and tiptoeing up polished slabs to reach the base. We began climbing to the left of the 2017 route, in a wide system on the next buttress uphill. We did not start climbing until late in the afternoon of May 29 and did only one 180’ pitch before retreating to camp.

On May 30, we made a 21-hour push for the summit. The physical nature of the endless offwidth cracks ensured slow progress. From the top of the ninth pitch, 1,300’ up our route and with the sun setting, we retreated using slung blocks and single-bolt anchors. We stumbled back to camp at 2 a.m., coming in on nothing but fumes, and were devastated to find that our camp had been utterly destroyed by a bear. The two of us slept on the ground in shifts and twice had to scare away the large cinnamon black bear. When at last morning dawned upon us, we rounded up the scattered scraps of gear and food wrappers, and limped back to the car.

Acting on the skewed judgment with which only the impassioned mountaineer can sympathize, Joey and I decided to return to Cartago Wall at the end of the season, on November 14. We started the approach at 10:30 a.m. and made it to Bear Camp just before sunset.

Our idea was to improve our chances by partitioning the ascent over two days, so we spent all of November 15 climbing the first our pitches and hauling bivouac gear up to the ledge atop the fourth. Waking at sunrise on November 16, we left our gear on the ledge and motored up the wide crack system as fast as we could. By noon, we had regained our previous high point via free climbing up to 5.10, but not without event. While manteling onto a ledge cluttered with loose blocks on the ninth pitch, I inadvertently trundled a coffee table-size boulder, which careened 120’ down the chimney and struck Joey square in the thigh. Thankfully, the only injuries incurred were surface wounds and extensive bruising. The subsequent 200’ pitch, the Cinnamon Chimney (5.10), was probably the crux of the route. We proceeded to the summit via three pitches of moderate climbing (5.8), bouldered onto the highest pinnacle at 3:30 p.m., built a cairn, and enjoyed a spectacular view down the deep granite gorge to multi-colored Owens Lake far below.

About halfway down the rappels, things started to go haywire. Both of us were becoming dangerously fatigued, and our lead rope suffered two mysterious core shots that reduced its length to 100 feet. Shortly thereafter, while pulling the ropes, our tag line got hopelessly stuck and we had no choice but to cut it, leaving only 50 feet. When at last we touched solid ground we felt extremely lucky. Two hours later, we felt even more fortunate to discover that our camp was intact.

On November 17, after sleeping late and hiking out, we drove back to Arizona through the night in a

caffeinated frenzy; I made it home just two hours before my Monday-morning work shift. Given that we had gotten screwed by a bear and metaphorically came back from the dead, we named our route after a 2015 movie: The Revenant (2,000', 13 pitches, IV 5.10).

– Derek Field, Canada

Images



Derek Field rejoices at the top of the Cartago Wall after making the first ascent of the Revenant (2,000', 13 pitches, IV 5.10). What remains of Owens Lake is spread colorfully in the valley below.



Joey Jarrell rests at the base of the Cinnamon Chimney (Pitch 10), his and Derek Field's high point on the first attempt at a new route on the Cartago Wall. The two later returned to complete the Revenant (2,000', 13 pitches, IV 5.10).



Derek Field leading the third pitch (5.10-) during the first ascent of the Revenant (2,000', 13 pitches, IV 5.10), on the Cartago Wall in the Eastern Sierra. Awkward wide flares, like this one, characterized much of the route.



Derek Field follows the upper part of the second pitch (5.10-) during the first ascent of the Revenant (2,000', 13 pitches, IV 5.10) on the Cartago Wall.



Joey Jarrell navigates a dicey section of the approach to the Cartago Wall.



Joey Jarrell leads the second pitch (5.10-) of the Revenant (2,000', 13 pitches, IV 5.10), which goes up to and through the roof cracks in the center of the photo.



Joey Jarrell follows the sixth pitch (5.9+) during the first ascent of the Revenant (2,000', 13 pitches, IV 5.10), on the Cartago Wall in the Eastern Sierra.



Alder-surfing Joey Jarrell bushwhacks down Cartago Creek Gorge after finally completing the Revenant (2,000', 13 pitches, IV 5.10) on the Cartago Wall.



The Cartago Wall, showing the two completed routes: the Revenant (2,000', IV 5.10, Field-Jarrell, 2019) in yellow and Saddle Sores (1,600', IV 5.11a, Shore-Prince, 2017) in red.

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