



AAC Publications

Yosemite Valley, Summary of 2019 Activity

California, Yosemite National Park

Over the course of a year and a half, Brandon Adams established a new route on the Lost Brother that quickly became a favorite among high-end free climbers. Wayward Son (13 pitches, 5.12d or 5.11 A0) features three crux pitches of 5.12 through well-protected face climbing and classic Yosemite cracks. Between attempts on his new route, Adams also managed to set two speed records on El Capitan: Genesis (VI 5.11 A4, 20:25), with Chris Gay and Steven Tata, and Lost World (VI 5.7 A3, 12:25), with Rebecca Church.

The Fifi Buttress continues to be a popular arena for new-routing. In November, Lucho Rivera and Cedar Wright established Dream Team (10 pitches, 5.13a) on the steep right side of the wall. The route weaves in and out of Vortex (IV 5.12, Russell-Zschiesche, 1982) and 9/11 (McDevitt, 2001), including a pitch previously bolted by Margaret and Trevor Shumaker. Dream Team is stout like other lines on this beautiful wall, with three pitches of 5.11, five pitches of 5.12, and one pitch of 5.13.

Chris Koppl, Vitaliy Musiyenko, and Brian Prince—all prolific Sierra Nevada first ascensionists—finished a multi-year project on the south face of Half Dome. The Xue Way is a 20-pitch route named after a friend, Michelle Xue, who had recently passed away in a climbing accident along with Jennifer Shedden in the Eastern Sierra. See AAJ 2020.

El Capitan was home to more free climbing than speed climbing this fall, with three free ascents of the Nose (VI 5.13c), by Barbara Zangerl (Austria) and Jacopo Larcher (Italy), and Sébastien Berthe (Belgium), who was the first to send the iconic route ground-up. Nik Berry and Eric Bissell made a ground-up free ascent of El Niño via Pineapple Express (VI 5.13b). El Cap also saw two of its youngest ascents, by Selah Schneider, 10, on the Nose and Pearl Johnson, 9, on the Triple Direct.

Undoubtedly, one of the feel-good stories of the year is Mark Hudon's "99.7%-free" ascent of Freerider (VI 5.13a), aiding just 15' of the Teflon Corner pitch. One of the fathers of the "free as can be" ethos, including his 1979 nearly free ascent of the Salathé Wall with Max Jones, in which the pair freed the now-famous Enduro Corner, 63-year-old Hudon returned with partner Jordan Cannon to make a tremendous effort.

Just when it seems that all the El Cap free climbs have been found, Tommy Caldwell and Alex Honnold, with partnership from Kevin Jorgeson and Austin Siadak, finished a new route on the steep southeast face: Passage to Freedom (VI 5.13d). See AAJ 2020.

One of the most notable ascents of the year happened on a single pitch: Magic Line near Vernal Falls. In November, Hazel Findlay (U.K.) made the third free ascent of the 5.14b/c finger crack. After a month of effort, Findlay sent the splitter crack, placing all gear on lead, on her last day in Yosemite, despite doubts caused by breaking a foothold and injuring a finger. Originally climbed by Ron Kauk in 1996, the route didn't see a second ascent until Lonnie Kauk's redpoint (also placing gear) 20 years later.

In other single-pitch news, Eric Bissell added a beautiful extension to the route Greenleaf (5.12c) at the East Pillar of the Cookie. New Leaf bypasses the original second-pitch anchor through 5.12+ slab

(where Bissell added one bolt), over a five-foot 5.13+ roof, and straight up the crack at 5.12. At a proposed 5.13d, New Leaf is among the hardest pitches in the Lower Merced River canyon.

Despite the apparent focus on hard free climbs, aid climbing is alive and well in Yosemite, with first ascents by Steve Schneider and Kevin DeWeese to prove it. Schneider enlisted a team of help for his new route on the southwest Face of El Capitan: Bellagio (VI 5.9+ R A4) follows a line between Mirage and Lurking Fear and is characterized by tiny copperheads, hooks, beaks, and rivets. In the Ribbon Falls Amphitheater, DeWeese, Steve Bosque, and Tyler Poston added Resist! (V 5.7 A2+). The route reportedly follows beak seams and thin nailing for eight pitches, with superb views of the Valley and El Capitan.

Finally, despite what most would call wet, less-than-ideal spring conditions, Brad Gobraight freed El Capitan in one day three separate times, on three different routes, in the span of just six weeks. In May, with support from Maison Deschamps, Gobraight climbed the Muir Wall via the Shaft (VI 5.13c) in 17.5 hours (though he would want it known that he top-roped the final 5.13c pitch). In June, he teamed up with Alex Honnold to free El Niño via Pineapple Express (VI 5.13b) in under 15 hours, and then he surprised himself by freeing Golden Gate (VI 5.13a), again with Deschamps, in under 17 hours. After leaving Yosemite in November, Gobraight traveled to El Potrero Chico, Mexico, where he died in a tragic rappelling accident. For those who knew him, and for those who simply admired him, Yosemite Valley will never be the same.

– Lauren DeLaunay

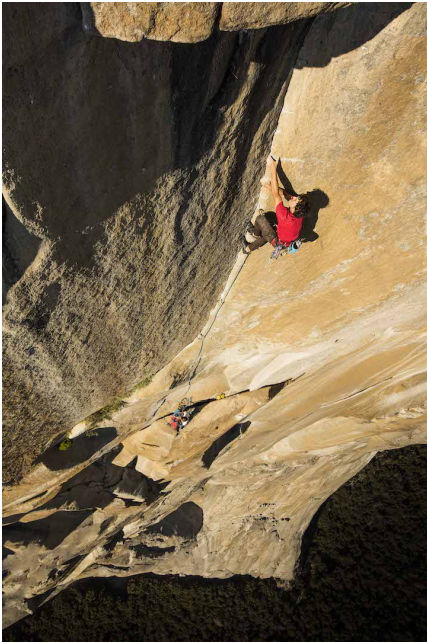
Images



Hazel Findlay works up the ultra-thin Magic Line (5.14c) for its first female ascent.



Free as can be—Mark Hudon, 63, on a nearly free ascent of Freerider.



Brad Gobright on a 17-hour free ascent of Golden Gate (VI 5.13a), his third in-a-day free climb on El Cap that season.



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Nik Berry trades A3 hooks for 5.11 R below the Cyclops' Eye during a free ascent of El Niño/Pineapple Express (VI 5.13b).

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