



AAC Publications

Lake Basin, Peak 12,358', The Fable of Hedwig

California, Kings Canyon National Park

Last summer, my friend Tess Smith and I got increasingly involved in route development in the Eastern Sierra, mostly sport climbs. After figuring out that drills should be set to hammer mode and that rocks don't make good wall hammers, we decided it was time to step up our game. I spend an inordinate amount of time hangboarding. Tess spends an inordinate amount of time adventuring in high mountains. With our combined finger strength and expertise in alpine shenanigans, we felt we had the skill set to put up free routes in the Sierra.

We were tipped off to a gorgeous unclimbed wall above Lake Basin, the north face of Peak 12,358' (36.963, -118.51), in the remote Cirque Crest region of Kings Canyon. [Editor's Note: This wall is just southeast of Marion Lake and looker's right (west) of a formation climbed in 2019 by Vitaliy Musiyenko and Brian Prince, which they dubbed Alexandra's Arete. See AAJ 2020.]

In late August, after a strenuous approach consisting of 8,000' of gain, just under 20 miles, and one bear encounter, we found ourselves staring up at 1,000' of untouched granite with a rack and a bellyful of psych, which quickly dissipated once it became clear that climbing this route would be an exercise in avoiding death by rockfall. But we hadn't hiked all this way to bail, so we started up the wall, anxious but determined.

Pitch one consisted of 4th-class choss, dancing on microwave-size loose blocks. Pitch two was the crux, with well-protected, discontinuous 5.10+ finger cracks, spiced up by loose rock. Pitch three was a long dihedral, which ended about 20' below a body-length roof, which we avoided with a short traverse pitch to the right, followed by two more long pitches of easier climbing on better rock to the summit of Peak 12,358'. Despite fun climbing and solid protection throughout, omnipresent loose rock means this climb warrants an R rating in its current state. Luckily, the descent was very mellow—a simple walk-off down a scree slope climber's right of the summit.

All said and done, this is a proud line up a gorgeous wall in a remote and beautiful part of the Sierra, with some engaging climbing on often questionable rock, at a moderate grade. There is extensive potential for more routes, both on the wall and in the region.

As a mentor of mine wrote in an AAJ entry from the 1980s, "How fortunate are we to have unclimbed walls where we can enter the unknown." In our shrinking world of information overload and constant connectedness, there is something special about looking up at 1,000' of unknown and choosing to take a first step, with no one to see it but a trusted partner.

We named the route The Fable of Hedwig (1,000', 6 pitches, 5.10+), after my snowy-white chicken Hedwig, a sweet girl, who was taken from this life too soon by Fable the dog shortly before our trip began.

— Taimur Ahmad

Images



The Cirque Crest from camp near Marion Lake. Alexandra's Arete (Musiyyenko-Prince, 2019) follows the obvious arête on the left, while The Fable of Hedwig (1,000', 6 pitches, 5.10+) climbs the right-hand wall.



Looking up the crux second pitch of The Fable of Hedwig (1,000', 6 pitches, 5.10+), which climbs the north face of Peak 12,358' in Lake Basin of Kings Canyon National Park.



Taimur Ahmad finishes the fourth-pitch traverse during the first ascent The Fable of Hedwig (1,000', 6 pitches, 5.10+), which climbs the north face of Peak 12,358', in Lake Basin of Kings Canyon National Park.



Taimur Ahmad and Tess Smith on the summit of Peak 12,358' after making the first ascent of its north face via The Fable of Hedwig (1,000', 6 pitches, 5.10+).



The north wall of Peak 12,358' in the Lake Basin area of Kings Canyon National Park, showing the line of The Fable of Hedwig (1,000', 6 pitches, 5.10+).

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