



AAC Publications

Upper Castle Rock Spires, The Axe, Tomahawk

California, Sierra, Kings Canyon and Sequoia

Castle Rock Spires is a group of steep granite domes perched high above the Kaweah River in the southwest corner of Sequoia National Park. Despite the high-quality rock and route potential, the domes have seen relatively little climber activity due to difficult and problematic approaches. The approach to Lower Castle Rock Spires, with the spectacular Castle Rock Spire and the Fin, is guarded by miles of poison oak and ticks. The best approach to Upper Castle Rock Spires, with several formations including the Axe, involves a long and often waterless hike from Mineral King Road.

In late May, when the road to Mineral King typically opens for the season, Brandon Thau and I hiked in via the Paradise Peak Trail and established an eight-pitch route on the west face of the Axe: Tomahawk (8 pitches, 5.11). [Thau and other partners climbed two other routes on the Axe in 2006; see photo.] The start is approached from the notch between the Axe and Amphitheater Dome by way of a single-rope rappel or tricky downclimbing, then easy scrambling down the gully.

Tomahawk follows a subtle line of weakness that leads into the gut of a huge, improbable overhanging section that is bypassed with an airy traverse into the final pitches. The crux of the route—the pitch that connects the two main corner systems—features delicate face climbing on high-quality rock. The route can be rappelled from any anchor point with one 70m rope, though the best descent from the summit, down the east side and back to the notch, is a short scramble with a few rappels using a single 70m.

After our climb, a devastating fire swept the area and burned the forest and slopes below and around Castle Rock Spires. This will affect the approach from the Kaweah River, though it's uncertain at this point, with most of the poison oak burned, if it will become easier or harder.

— Dave Nettle

Images



The west and south faces of the Axe, showing (1) Axes of Evil (7 pitches, 5.11-), (2) Tomahawk (8 pitches, 5.11), and (3) Golden Axe (6 pitches, 5.12-).



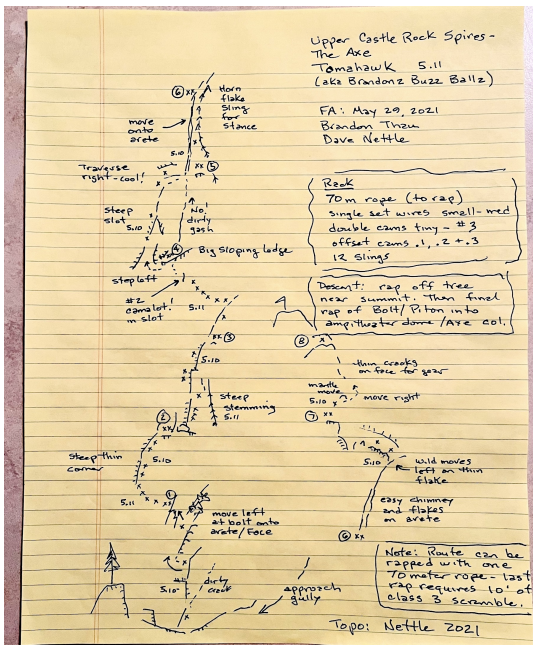
Dave Nettle on pitch three of Tomahawk.



Brandon Thau starting pitch five of Tomahawk.



Dave Nettle nearing the top of pitch seven on Tomahawk.



Topo for Tomahawk on the Axe formation in Upper Castle Rock Spires.

Tomahawk 5.11
8 pitches
Ax, Upper Castle Rocks,
Sequoia National Park
FA: Brandon Thau
& Dave Nettle 5/29/2021



Photo-topo of Tomahawk on the Axe formation in Upper Castle Rock Spires.



Upper Castle Rock Spires seen from the approach.

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