



AAC Publications

Regge Pole, Free Radical

California, Sierra Nevada, Little Slide Canyon

Of the hundreds of climbers who enter Little Slide Canyon every year, only a few venture onto the cluster of soaring, granitic spires positioned on its west slope—collectively known as Little Slide Spires—rising above the approach to the famed Incredible Hulk. The tallest and steepest of these spires is the Regge Pole (10,340'+), whose square-cut geometry is reminiscent of a 700' skyscraper. This pinnacle is rarely climbed because of its reputation for low rock quality and poor protection.

Several years ago, Brandon Adams and I separately noticed a thin fracture splitting the virtually featureless southeast face, which had been more or less—and confusingly—ascended by the South Face, Right Side route (5.7 A3, Gocking-Warburton, 1973).

In the fall of 2022, in preparation for a push on a challenging nailing route on El Capitan, Brandon and I decided to refresh our aid skills on the thin crack system (which shares about 150' of terrain with the South Face, Right Side, split between pitches two and three). The minute we got to the base, the rock quality, the stunning position, and the unique nature of the line were evident. We abandoned our El Cap plans and decided to put in the work on a well-constructed free climb. We knew this would be a first ascent worthy of effort.

Over the next year, Brandon and I somehow found enough time away from work and family responsibilities to venture repeatedly to the project, either together, alone, or with other partners, in order to find the line with the most enjoyable climbing. Much of this was on crackless faces; nearly every pitch has stretches of bolt-protected climbing.

On September 16, 2023, the line was prepared, and the time had come to enjoy the fruits of our labor.

We swung leads up the route, laughing the whole way. The highlights just kept coming: the laser-cut crack on pitch two that we called “Critical Mass”; the crackless right-angle corner topped by a steep roof traverse on pitch three, “The Particle Accelerator”; a gently overhanging, thin crack capped by a V5 crack-switch boulder problem on pitch four, “Quantum Leap”; the wildly featured, sport-bolted arete on pitch five; and even the incredible, rarely trodden summit. The first ascent of Free Radical (7 pitches, IV 5.12) took us only a few hours.

As storm clouds gathered, we dropped to the south over the subsummit and descended the rappel line—which mostly follows the route and is equipped with bolted rap stations—back to our packs. Twenty minutes later, it began to rain. We watched a glorious rainbow arc over Mt. Walt from the shelter of a cave under a late-season snowbank, happy in the knowledge that we had created something beautiful, free, and radical.

— Roger Putnam

Images



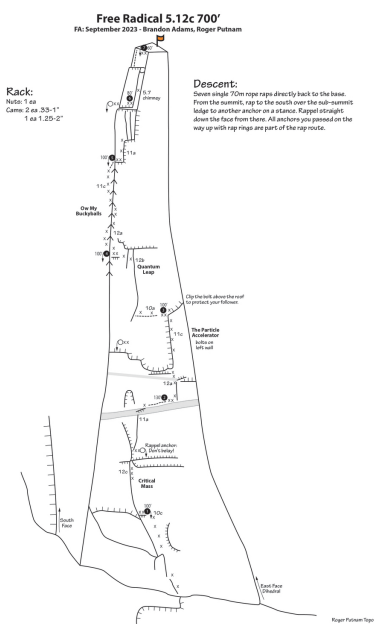
Brandon Adams leading the 5.10 knobs at the start of pitch four on the first ascent of Free Radical.



Brandon Adams following the bolted fifth-pitch arête during the first ascent of Free Radical.



Free Radical (700', 7 pitches, IV 5.12) on the southeast face of the Regge Pole, Little Slide Canyon, Sierra Nevada, California. Other routes not shown.



The topo for Free Radical (700', 7 pitches, IV 5.12) on the southeast face of the Regge Pole, Little Slide Canyon, Sierra Nevada, California.

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