



AAC Publications

Mt. Morrison, Torre de Mierda, Northeast Face, Two New Routes

California, Sierra Nevada, Eastern Sierra

Frozen lakes weren't part of my childhood in Rhode Island, so I was a little nervous when Jack Cramer and I skied out onto Convict Lake at dawn. The ice came alive with sound: booms, cracks, and all sorts of sci-fi noises. Panicking, I started poling and skating as hard as I could. Jack, a native of the Upper Midwest, found my fright quite humorous.

The north face of Mt. Morrison—along with its subpeak, the Torre De Mierda (10,040')—draws the eye of everyone driving on Highway 395. The area has been a focus of Jack's energies for several years, and he had spotted two lines on the northeast face of Torre: one a prominent red dike, the other a ramp system to the left of it, both starting at the lower end of the dramatic hanging valley below the north face of Mt. Morrison. In March 2021, Jack and I had been scheming on something bigger, but didn't like the look of the forecast. He suggested the red dike as a Plan B, and so there we were, crossing Convict Lake on the 1.8-mile approach.

The Torre De Mierda is not made up of the Sierra's exceptional granite, but of an ancient metamorphosed rock. Secure- feeling holds are rare, as is protection. Ledges, chimneys, and couloirs are covered with rubble; it's best to climb in winter, when the loose stuff is covered by snow and the holds are (hopefully) frozen in place.

In March 2021, Jack led up the first pitch on the red dike, using all of our 60m rope and almost all the rack. Thinking ahead, he found a belay to the right of the dike— which presented as a wide but shallow chimney—that kept him out of the fall line.

In the dike, I found the red rock was slightly better than the surrounding stone, though pro was still sparse. The third pitch was the crux, as Jack climbed the steep right wall of the dike on decent rock. As the dike became more of a low-angle gully, we simul-climbed, doing just one more belayed pitch on steeper rock right of the dike. We topped out with just enough light to navigate the third-class start of the descent, a gully on the west side. Given that we'd followed a big red stripe, there was an obvious name: Jamaican Lager (800', 5 pitches, III M4).

About a year later, in February 2022, we were back, this time for the left-leaning ramp system to the left of Jamaican Lager. A warmer and drier winter had us skiing around the lake instead of across it. We followed two easy but run-out pitches to a ledge at the start of the ramp.

Once we started up the ramp itself, the route-finding was straightforward. The challenge was once again finding good protection and anchors. Because of the route's slanting nature, the rockfall hazard from the climber above was easier to manage. Though it didn't have a single move harder than anything on Jamaican Lager, this route felt more sustained. Each of the first three pitches of the ramp felt more difficult than the last. Somewhere around pitch eight, we put our headlamps on. The last two pitches to the summit eased up some.

We had talked a lot about Ukraine and Russia on the way in because the military buildup was all over the news. An interview on NPR with Ukrainian writer Artem Chapeye had moved me, so we named the route Artem's Ramp (1,200', IV M4+). A selection of pitons, including beaks, is useful on both routes.

Images



Jamaican Lager (800', 5 pitches, III M4) on the northeast face of Torre de Mierda, Sierra Nevada, California.



Jack Cramer getting the rope up on the first pitch of Jamaican Lager (800', 5 pitches, III M4) on the northeast face of Torre de Mierda.



Jack Cramer leads pitch three of Jamaican Lager.



Artem's Ramp (1,200', 9 pitches, IV M4+) on the northeast face of Torre de Mierda, Sierra Nevada, California.



Jack Cramer approaching the belay on pitch one of Artem's Ramp (1,200', 9 pitches, IV M4+) on Torre de Mierda's northeast face.



Looking down pitch three, the first pitch of the namesake ramp on Artem's Ramp (1,200', 9 pitches, IV M4+), Torre de Mierda, Sierra Nevada, California.



Mt. Morrison with (1) Troll Toll (600m, WI3 M5/6) partially visible on the northeast face. The original summer routes up the northeast and north faces are in the center. Torre de Mierda is to the right, showing (2) Artem's Ramp and (3) Jamaican Lager, first climbed in the winters of 2022 and 2021, respectively.

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