



AAC Publications

The Incredible Hulk, Choose Joy

California, Sierra Nevada, Eastern Sierra, Little Slide Canyon

Over 15 years of exploring and countless days of dreaming led to the discovery of a new route on the tallest section of the Incredible Hulk in the High Sierra. The basis for the route was an array of features I had spied over the years while climbing classics on the peak's roughly 1,200' walls. During the COVID-19 lockdowns and California's smoke apocalypse of 2020, my wife, Monica, and I took extended climbing trips to the area, armed with binoculars and our imaginations. We spent a lot of time gazing from the cliffs surrounding Maltby Lake, which offer a unique perspective from slightly up-canyon of the typical bivy area.

Putting a rough plan in place, I spent the next couple of years roping in various partners for ground-up exploration on different potential lines. We scoured the right side of the west face of the Hulk, trying to link the desired crack systems. After cruising dreamy, well-protected sections, we'd be stymied by closed seams or blank faces that forced us onto existing routes or dangerously loose new terrain. We pioneered some decent pitches that led to nowhere in the area left of what became our final line, and we did a chossy 5.10 that topped out to the left of Red Dihedral, right of our final line.

With our ground-up methods exhausted, we started swinging around to seek out the highest-quality free climbing. The advice I got from other developers was to "make it classic," and we aimed for that. In the end, following the cleanest rock was the key to the line. I spent two summer seasons—2022 and 2023—scrubbing and equipping, primarily alone, rope-soloing Positive Vibrations (5.11a) to access the bottom half of the new line or Red Dihedral (5.10) to access the top.

In the summer of 2024, my wife and I attempted the route and found it harder than expected. We had to redpoint most of the five 5.12s, cleaning and working our way up. The crux third pitch, a beautiful 5.13- splitter, was out of my league due to soaring summer temperatures and my still-developing fitness.

Monica and I worked out a 5.11 variation around the pitch, but the direct route deserved a proper send. Eventually the temperatures dropped, and with refined beta and support from one of the Sierra's main crushers, Chase Leary, I was able to pull off a no-falls free ascent on August 28. The ascent included a thrilling runout due to skipping the gear placements I had rehearsed for the 5.13- crux—I climbed through the hardest part to a thumb jam, then barely got in a below-knee placement. I also got to witness some amazing onsighting by Chase, and the absolute glory light and stoke we had topping out the 1,200' line.

Choose Joy (12 pitches, IV 5.13a) is a safe, no-grovel endurance route characterized by sustained 5.11 to 5.12- crack and face climbing between nice belay stances. We placed bolts where necessary. This route provided me with a ton of joy, and I hope it will do the same for others.

Other people who made this happen included Josh McClure, Peter Foster, Louie Allen, Brendan Cathcart, Sarah Shaw, Allen Higginbotham, and Joanie Swarthout. The route lies in the Hoover Wilderness: Permits and bear cans are required and waste bags are strongly recommended for the area.

— Abel Jones

Images

Article Details

Author	Abel Jones
Publication	AAJ
Volume	66
Issue	99
Page	138
Copyright Date	2025
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions