



## AAC Publications

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### Castle Rocks Area: The Fortress, The Sage

California, Sierra Nevada, Sequoia National Park

The Sage (1,060', 10 pitches, 5.10c), seen here from the south, follows a series of corners, ramps, and chimneys up the southern aspect of the Fortress. Photo by Sam Fearer.

**In early August, under a full summer sun, Dave Meyer and I set out to explore the seldom-visited easternmost formation of the Castle Rocks complex: the Fortress.** Neither of us strangers to heavy loads and off-trail travel, we figured the approach would be demanding but still reasonable. We were wrong.

The Fortress was first climbed in 2012, by Daniel Jeffcoach, Vitaliy Musiyenko, and Tom Ruddy, who followed an obvious corner-to-offwidth system up the east face to establish The Siege (1,000', IV 5.10c A0). In 2016, Neal Harder, Chris LaBounty, and Brandon Thau added The Surge (1,000', 5.8), also on the east face.

Much has changed since then. For three months in 2021, the KNP Complex Fire burned along the hillsides of the Kaweah River's middle fork, consuming over 88,000 acres of forest and vegetation. Castle Rocks was not spared. Where pine duff and shade once were present, we found hillsides of loose, ashy, and at times thicket-infested fire soil, with nowhere to hide from the searing sun. We arrived at camp—a spartan, 15° sloping bivy site—much later than anticipated, and were more than a little relieved to hear the comforting tune of trickling water, just a 15-minute bushwhack away.

The next day, we set out on virgin terrain, deviating from the broad east face to explore a series of weaknesses we had noted on the formation's narrower southern aspect; our route corkscrewed around an enormous pillar feature that leans upon the main wall.

The climb begins in a clean left-facing corner on the climber's left side of the pillar and makes its way to the only surviving pine tree in the area, partway up the wall. From here, we climbed through a short, left-angling chimney to a shaded belay below the near-vertical upper half of the wall. A ramp system on featured Sequoia granite and a 200' pitch of jungle-gym climbing through huecos the size of beach balls landed us near the summit of the Fortress's southern turret.

We called our route The Sage (1,060', 10 pitches, IV 5.10c). Though much has changed in the area since the fire, the rock quality remains impeccable and the adventure is still high.

—Sam Fearer

## Images



Looking northwest at The Sage (1,060', 10 pitches, 5.10c), established by Sam Fearer and Dave Meyer in August 2024 on the south side of the Fortress, the easternmost formation of the Castle Rocks area. Two prior routes ascend the east face, farther to the right.



The Sage (1,060', 10 pitches, 5.10c), seen here from the south, follows a series of corners, ramps, and chimneys up the southern aspect of the Fortress. Two prior routes ascend the east face, around the corner to the right.

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