



AAC Publications

Mt. Hitchcock, Shadow of a Doubt

California, Sierra Nevada, Sequoia National Park

In June, Honz Mikhalek and I approached remote Mt. Hitchcock (13,186') from Whitney Portal, hiking up and over the Sierra Crest to Guitar Lake basin, where we set up camp. Looking at the new High Sierra Climbing Volume 1, by Roger L. Putnam and Vitaliy Musiyenko, we noticed an unclimbed buttress left of Starlight Dihedral. This 1,000' buttress has a steep headwall that tops out onto a dramatic 400' ridgeline, which from below appeared to be 3rd or 4th class.

From camp, we hiked for about 45 minutes to the base of the unclimbed buttress. Honz and I swapped leads up two pitches of fun splitter cracks at a difficulty of about 5.9 to low 5.10, gaining low-angle terrain for two long pitches before the rock eventually steepened into the 200' upper headwall.

On pitch five up the steep headwall, delicate stemming (the crux) between flakes that were more secure than they looked led up through a sustained wide hand crack to a ledge 130' above the belay. Right off that belay, a short 5.9 crux protected by a bolt led us to the top of the headwall and around its right side to a low-angle big -hand-size 5.8 dihedral. Two more pitches of easier climbing gained the top of the buttress.

From here, we could see that the ridgeline that had looked like 3rd or 4th class actually consisted of several towers of stacked blocks that we were unlikely to navigate safely. With the sun going down, we opted to rappel the route, leaving bolted anchors most of the way. After we ran out of bolts, we left cam anchors.

The next day, we came back to the base with a few more bolts to replace some of our cam anchors on the lower pitches. We called our route Shadow of a Doubt (8 pitches, 5.10) since on the final ridgeline, as shadows overtook the sunlight, we questioned the safety of trying to reach the true summit. We also named the route for an Alfred Hitchcock thriller of the same name, following the theme of other routes on Mt. Hitchcock. If anyone repeats the route, please feel free to add anchor bolts as you see fit.

—Shaun Reed

Images

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