



AAC Publications

Merriam Peak and Granite Park, Dr. Bear Love Free and Other Routes

California, Sierra Nevada, Eastern Sierra

Japhy Dhungana on the 5.13a crux pitch of Dr. Bear Love Free (800', 4 pitches, 5.13a), on the north buttress of Merriam Peak, Granite Park area, Sierra Nevada, California. Photo by Zach Lovell

Sometimes you don't have to pick between quality and quantity—this is especially true in a place like the Sierra Nevada. From July 14 to 22, Japhy Dhungana and I enjoyed nine days of perfect weather and five new routes across Granite Park and Merriam Peak.

For the first half of our trip, from July 14 to 17, we focused on freeing Dr. Bear Love, established at 5.11a C1 by Luke Stefurak and Casey Zak in 2012, on Merriam Peak's north buttress. We began eyeing this route after Luke graciously shared its free climbing possibilities on Mountain Project.

On our first day, we got right to it on the two crux pitches, mixing in some aid to get the rope up and start projecting. From the start, we agreed we would not place any bolts. The first of these pitches, a slightly overhanging tips crack, went at about 5.13a. The second, a technical stemming and layback corner, came in around 5.12c.

After freeing these two pitches, we took a rest day, then free climbed the entire line on the 17th. The remainder of the seven-pitch route falls in the 5.10 to 5.11 range. It has 1,100 feet of excellent climbing, including the moderate summit ridge, and is well-protected from bottom to top—a few offset cams in the tips and finger sizes were needed on the crux pitch. We recommend approaching Dr. Bear Love by the first one and a half pitches of Gargoyle (5.11b, Croft-Rands, 2011; see photo in AAJ 2012) before trending directly up to the crux pitch.

On July 18, we bumped camp two miles north, near the Italy Pass Trail. The following couple of days were spent scouting and climbing a previously unclimbed formation immediately northwest of Granite Park Spire. We dubbed this Fish Tail Spire (37.34020, -118.78321) and established two routes on its northeast face: Fish You Were Here (600', 5.12a) and Careful What You Fish For (600', 5.11a). Descent from both was via a third-class gully on the southeast side of the spire that wraps around to the base.

We spent the remainder of our trip on Golden Trout Spire, of which I did the first ascent in 2024 with Mike Hathorn and Dan Wolfskill, via a route we called Dry Flyin' (700', 5.10b). Japhy and I established two new lines on either side of Dry Flyin': Fish Pics (700', 5.10) and First Cast (700', 5.9). We also hand-drilled a descent route that can be rappelled with a single 60m rope, so future parties can enjoy the first few pitches of these routes without having to continue up the summit ridge. With an idyllic campsite nearby, we hope this may provide a fun half-day option for anyone already in the area.

We exited on July 22 after a trip that was as fruitful as we could have hoped from a climbing perspective. But the real highlight was that Japhy caught his first fish.

—Zach Lovell

Images



Zach Lovell leading one of the excellent 5.11 pitches high on Dr. Bear Love Free (800', 4 pitches, 5.13a), on the north buttress of Merriam Peak, Granite Park area, Sierra Nevada, California.



Dr. Bear Love on the north buttress of Merriam Peak. The right-leaning bottom half of the route line shares some terrain with the beginning of Gargoyle (5.11b, Croft-Rands, 2011); according to the climbers, this is the best way to access Dr. Bear Love. Other routes are not shown.



Japhy Dhungana on the 5.13a crux pitch of Dr. Bear Love Free (800', 4 pitches, 5.13a), on the north buttress of Merriam Peak, Granite Park area, Sierra Nevada, California.



Golden Trout Spire. Left to right: Fish Pics (700', 5.10), established by Japhy Dhungana and Zach Lovell in 2025; Dry Flyin', the first formation up the spire, established by Lovell, Mike Hathorn, and Dan Wolfskill in 2024; and First Cast (700', 5.9), established by Dhungana and Lovell in 2025.



Fish Tail Spire in the Granite Park area, showing the two 2025 routes. On the left is Fish You Were Here (600', 5.12a), and on the right is Careful What You Fish For (600', 5.11a).



Japhy Dhungana leading the first pitch of Careful What you Fish For (600', 5.11a), on Fish Tail Spire in the Granite Park area.



Japhy Dhungana leading one of the upper pitches on Fish You Were Here (600', 5.12a), Fish Tail Spire.

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