



AAC Publications

Bishop Pass to Piute Pass, Evolution Crest Traverse (previously unreported)

California, Sierra Nevada

During the summer of 2008, Kyle Sox and I completed a new traverse in the Evolution region of the Sierra Nevada: the Evolution Crest Traverse (VI 5.9). This consists of a complete traverse of the Sierra Crest from Bishop Pass to Piute Pass, a distance of approximately 16 miles.

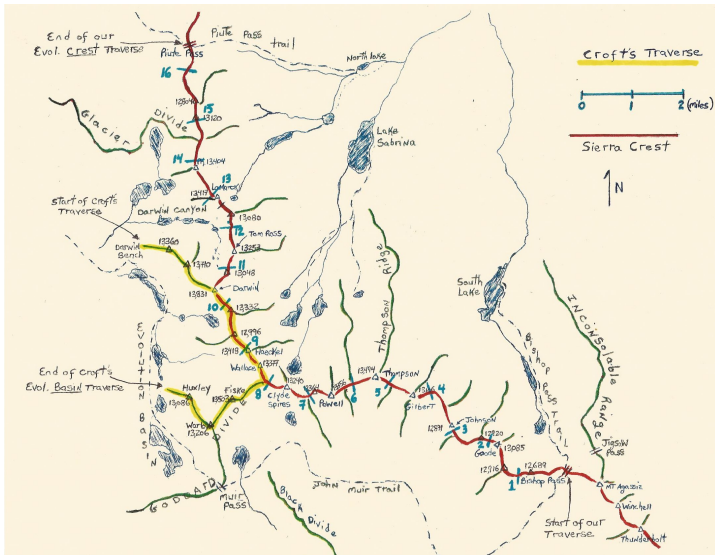
Between Bishop Pass to the south (12,000') and Piute Pass to the north (11,400') is a continuously high ridge, unbroken by any major gap and uncrossed by any established trail. The traverse ascends 10 major peaks and a dozen additional summits, crosses five technical notches, and traverses over six of the high summit plateaus that give this section of the Sierra a unique character. The elevation hovers near 13,000' and includes peaks such as Mt. Goode, Mt. Gilbert, Mt. Thompson, Mt. Powell, Mt. Haeckel, Mt. Darwin, and Mt. Lamarck.

Traversing the Evolution Crest offers a surprising mix of challenges, including approximately five miles of class 2-3 ridge scrambling (much of it good, some of it excellent); four miles of class 3-4 ridge climbing (much of it excellent, some of it superb); three miles of class 4-5 notch and tower traversing (none of it easy, some of it dangerous); and, finally, four miles of simple hiking across broad summit plateaus. To the best of our knowledge, a complete traverse of this ridge had never been attempted, primarily, we surmise, due to its length.

We approached the traverse with something akin to an expeditionary mindset, as my experience on a similar climb, the Palisade Traverse, had demonstrated how frequently storms could occur. We therefore came prepared to remain on the crest twice as long as we estimated it would require. Even with excellent weather, it took us eight days to complete the climb (June 24–July 1, 2008). We first portaged and cached food, fuel, and other supplies above several different drainages so we could sustain a single, uninterrupted push. After we started climbing, our plan was simple: Reach the next cache before our supplies ran out. The route we followed strayed no more than a rope length from the crest throughout the traverse. For the nearly 200 hours we spent on that magnificent granite spine, the Sierra Crest was our home, workplace, and playground.

[Editor's note: This traverse of the Evolution Crest is not to be confused with Peter Croft's historic eight-mile traverse of the peaks around the Evolution Basin, known as the Evolution Traverse (VI 5.9). Croft's Evolution Basin Traverse and the Evolution Crest Traverse share only 2.5 miles of terrain: the section between Mt. Wallace and Mt. Darwin, which is the only stretch of Croft's traverse that is actually on the Sierra Crest.]

Images



A map of the traverse from Bishop Pass to Piute Pass.

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