



## AAC Publications

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### **Bubbs Creek Wall, South Face, The Emperor, First Free Ascent**

California, High Sierra

**The Bubbs Creek Wall is one many excellent formations found along the popular Rae Lakes Loop near Kings Canyon. After completing the first ascent of the Emperor in 2014 (AAJ 2015), this route became my own “mini Dawn Wall.”** While not pushing the global limits of what is possible, the dream of free climbing this route gave me big motivation to advance my own skills. I’d say the climbing is like a cross between the Astroman and the Rainbow Wall: a step up in difficulty but not a step down in quality. With sustained technical pitches, the exposure of a Yosemite big wall, and views of gorgeous waterfalls and peaks of the High Sierra, free climbing the Emperor was a journey to remember.

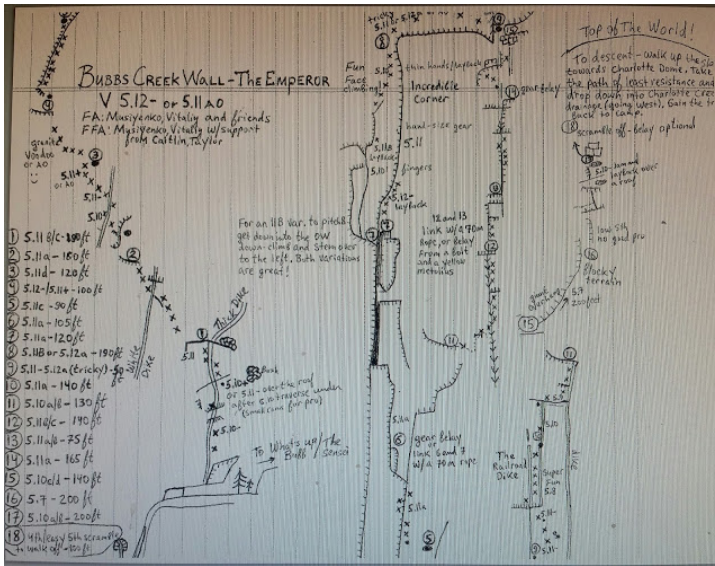
I spent 20 days focused on this route over two years, hiking over 230 miles, gaining approximately 90,000’ of elevation, and driving too far from San Francisco. The route was sustained, with all but one of the first 15 pitches containing at least one 5.11 crux. To my relief, there were only two or three sections of 5.12a climbing. Freeing this climb led to some 40’ whippers and was a complete mix of experiences and emotions. It was especially nice to finally complete the first free ascent with Caitlin Taylor, the partner with whom I initially started the route in 2014.

Even after a year of training, a healthy diet, and many days spent on the climb, the Emperor was on the borderline of possibility for me, and the complete free ascent in mid-July did not go as smoothly as I would have wanted. For me, the opening moves of the ninth pitch are the technical crux, and it took me multiple attempts to redpoint it, over 1,000’ off the ground. From there, the route continues to deliver challenges on every pitch. I had to try a few of the other pitches more than once, including pitch 14, where I took a long fall after breaking a tiny foothold. Pitch 15, the last challenge, I had only aided previously, and it appeared completely blank. Fortunately, it turned out to be much easier to free than I’d imagined—5.11a or easier. As the sun dipped below the horizon, Caitlin and I climbed the remaining 500’ of easier terrain to the top in the dark.

The Emperor (2,200’, V 5.12a) is not a scary route but could be exciting in places, which should not scare anyone off—a guy that constantly falls off V4 boulder problems in the gym can do it!

– Vitaliy Musiyenko

## Images



A complete topo for the Emperor (V 5.12a).



Bubbs Creek Wall, south face, showing: (1) Crystal Banzai (VI 5.11 A3, Joe-Leversee, AAJ 1987). (2) Samurai Warrior (V 5.11 A1, Nettle-Thau, AAJ 1998)—Brandon Thau and Peter Croft completed a free ascent of this line in 2005 via a 5.12a variation that they dubbed "Ronin." (3) Emperor (V 5.11d A1). (4) What's Up Bubb (VI 5.9 A3, Brown-Mayo, 2000)—Luke Stefurak and Casey Zak completed a free ascent of this line in 2014 via a few variations at 5.12a and dubbed the line "Sensei." (5) Beckey Route (IV 5.8 A2, Beckey-Cundiff-Losleben-McGoey, AAJ 1976). (6) Aquaman (IV 5.10+, Leversee-McConachie, AAJ 1984, doesn't reach summit).



Vitaliy Musiyenko starting pitch 6 of the Emperor.



Looking down pitch 10 of the Emperor, the Railroad Dike (5.11a).

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