



AAC Publications

Mt. Morrison, Northeast Face, Troll Toll

California, Sierra Nevada, Eastern Sierra

The Sierra Nevada is a range where pristine golden granite dominates the landscape. Mt. Morrison, however, doesn't care about fitting in with the masses. Known as the “Eiger of the Sierra,” the 12,240' peak's notoriously chossy northeast face, made of ancient metamorphosed sandstones and muds, towers above Highway 395, sending chills down the spine of any climber who considers it.

Unlike the real Eiger, which gets climbed all the time, the northeast face of Morrison sees very little action. [In 2014 and 2015, Preston Rhea and partners made several first ascents on the complex north and northeast faces, including Caught Inside (9 pitches, IV M4 steep snow), with Kia Ravanfar, in April 2014; the North Buttress Direct (1,900', 16 pitches, IV 5.8), with Jayson Limnios, in September 2015; , and Psychopomp (8 pitches, IV M4+ moderate snow) in December 2015, on the far left side. (Information on these routes is at Mountain Project.) The new routes did not tackle the main northeast face, which had only one full-length route, the Northeast Wall and Buttress, climbed in summer in 1946 and in winter in 1968.] In mid-April, when Jack Cramer and Tad McCrea invited me to join them on an attempt to put up a new route up that monster, I was training for an ultramarathon and trying to log 100-mile weeks. Wise as it might have been, saying no to an adventure of a lifetime in my home range was out of the question. I met the team at Convict Lake trailhead two days later.

This wasn't their first rodeo. Jack and Tad had tried the same route, starting on the left side of the main northeast face, twice before, in 2021. Those attempts—hindered by sustained climbing, challenging route-finding, bad bivouacs, and lack of ice—ended in retreats after six and nine pitches.

But 2023 was different. With record snowfall blanketing the Sierra Nevada, the conditions were ripe. Our climb followed a good freeze, and we didn't experience any rockfall. All we found was pitch after pitch of engaging mixed climbing—some even had plastic ice. The rock was generally as solid as an alpinist could wish for. In fact, the rock might be described as too solid in places—pro at times was hard to come by, but thankfully the climbing dropped in difficulty at those spots.

On the crux fourth pitch, Jack followed blobs of ice and cracks straight up rather than staying in a dominant right-facing corner to the left—this variation was a total classic and surprisingly well-protected. By the evening of our first day on the wall, we had surpassed Tad and Jack's previous high point and settled in for a night of recovery in our two-man tent. On our second day on the route, venturing into uncharted territory, we found more ice and engaging mixed climbing on shockingly solid rock.

If I were to describe Troll Toll (600m, WI3 M5/6) in one line, it would be “not particularly hard, but tricky.” It provided a sense of precarious security, with holds often plentiful but not always positive or reliable. The route was sustained, with most pitches having at least some M4/5 moves.

Just five days later, the route witnessed a swift second ascent by Dylan Johnson and Josh Wharton. With a description and photo overlay, they completed the climb in mere hours, simul-climbing and using Micro Traxions. They confirmed the route's moderate yet classic character. For someone with similar skill to Wharton and Johnson, Troll Toll will feel like a good warm-up for mixed routes in Alaska. For those with little experience on gear-protected mixed routes, don't underestimate the difficulty based on the moderate grade.

Images



Jack Cramer on the crux fourth pitch of Troll Toll on the northeast face of Mt. Morrison.



Vitaliy Musiyenko climbing mellow ice high on the northeast face of Mt. Morrison during the first ascent of Troll Toll (600m, WI3 M5/6).



(Left to right) Tad McCrea, Vitality Musiyenko, and Jack Cramer on the summit of Mt. Morrison after the first ascent of Troll Toll.



Troll Toll (600m, WI3 M5/6) on the northeast face of Mt. Morrison, Sierra Nevada, California. Two routes climbed in 2014 and 2015, Caught Inside and Psychopomp, ascend the buttress and chimney system near the left edge of the photo.



Mt. Morrison with (1) Troll Toll (600m, WI3 M5/6) partially visible on the northeast face. The original summer routes up the northeast and north faces are in the center. Torre de Mierda is to the right, showing (2) Artem's Ramp and (3) Jamaican Lager, first climbed in the winters of 2022 and 2021, respectively.

Article Details

Author	Vitaliy Musiyenko
Publication	AAJ
Volume	65
Issue	98
Page	132
Copyright Date	2024
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions