



## AAC Publications

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### **Aiguille Extra, East Buttress Free, with Variation Start**

California, Sierra Nevada, Eastern Sierra, Whitney Massif

**To those who look upon it from the east, Aiguille Extra (14,048'), a peak in the Whitney Massif, cries out to be climbed.** At the base of the needle is an excellent bivy, cradled in an isolated drainage between Wotans Throne (ca 12,730') and Pinnacle Ridge, nicely away from the overused trails nearby. Clear streams cascade down the talus, and a lone gentle creek trickles its way to Mirror Lake.

The steep formation was first ascended by Bill Sumner and Mike Heath by the East Face route in 1971; their route was freed by Pat Brennan and Kenn Kenaga in 1993. In 1978, Kenny Cook and Werner Landry climbed an obvious line to the right of the original route: the East Buttress (V 5.10 A2). The only sections they didn't free were a tension traverse on pitch three and the start of the final pitch. Kenny and Werner's route was a proud achievement, but it has largely faded into obscurity, perhaps because schlepping aid gear so high into the Sierra Nevada doesn't have universal appeal.

James Holland and I embarked on a ground-up free attempt of the East Buttress in August 2023. After a bivy at the base of the needle, we climbed to the summit via engaging face and cracks—from tips to wide—without adding any bolts or using any aid. We added a three-pitch direct start (5.9+, 5.10+, 5.10) instead of climbing the two blocky 5.8 pitches of the original route. Pitch two, the physical and mental crux, involved a sporty, gear-protected traverse to gain a steep hand crack. Our fourth pitch (originally A2, now 5.10) followed a sustained and steep right-leaning hand and fist crack. Pitch nine (originally A2, now 5.10+) had excellent bouldery movement through a steep dihedral.

We were impressed by the free climbing that Kenny and Werner did back in 1978, but not surprised: They were both native to San Diego and frequented Mt. Woodson, a crack training mecca. Mt. Woodson routes like Jaws (5.10+) and the Crucible (5.10+) had prepared them well. Having spent much time at Woodson myself, I felt a kinship with them on Aiguille Extra, knowing our endeavors had overlapped in space, if not time. James and I hope the free version of the East Buttress (12,230', 10 pitches, IV 5.10+) will encourage others to check out this unsung gem of the Eastern Sierra.

— Cam Smith

## Images



James Holland following pitch two (5.10+) during his and Cam Smith's first free ascent of the East Buttress (1,230', 10 pitches, IV 5.10+) of the Aiguille Extra. This pitch was part of a three-pitch variation to the original East Buttress route.



Cam Smith leads pitch four (5.10) of Aiguille Extra's East Buttress.



The East Buttress (1,230', 10 pitches, IV 5.10+) of the Aiguille Extra, Eastern Sierra, California.

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