

VARIOUS NOTES

UNITED STATES: CLIMBS IN CALIFORNIA

Castle Rock Spire, Sequoia National Park. Looking S.E. from Moro Rock on the Generals' Highway, across the Middle Fork of the Kaweah River, one sees the serrated ridge of Castle Rocks, rising to an elevation of 9150 ft., more than 5000 ft. above the river. In the foreground of the mountain mass rises a slender, bladelike needle: Castle Rock Spire. It does not tower above the other peaks, but it is made spectacular on the valley side by a sheer drop of more than 1500 ft. At the notch where it joins the side of the mountain, it rises more than 500 ft.

Many climbers have gazed at the spire, but until recently few have ventured to try its defences. Here was a Sierra climb of the type which had to await the development of modern "rock engineering," liberal in use of pitons and bolts not only for safety but also for direct aid. The first climbers who visited the spire (Anton Nelson, DeWitt Allen and Ted Knowles, in 1947) reported that earlier estimates, made at a distance, had not belied the difficulties of the climb. It would take a strong party, with plenty of hardware. After more than two years of reconnoitering and preliminary attempts, the first ascent of Castle Rock Spire was accomplished on 27 April 1950 by Will Siri, Bill Long, Jim Wilson, Al Steck and Phil Bettler, all from the San Francisco Bay Area. It took two and a half days on the rock.

The beginnings of success were really in September 1949, when Siri, Wilson and Bettler located and climbed more than halfway up what proved to be the best and perhaps the only feasible route. From our camp at the notch, a long fourth-class traverse leads out to the right across the E. face over a series of broken rocks and ledges. Rounding a corner, the route drops down to the point where the face is joined by a buttress. A 100-ft. lead up a 75-degree crack in the buttress brings one to a platform of chockstones in a gap where it joins the wall of the spire. Passing through the gap and continuing diagonally down along the other edge of the buttress, one finds a vertical right-angle chimney rising 60 ft. toward the N.E. ridge of the spire. This chimney—start of the really difficult climbing—required a ladder of pitons up its full length. I had

the honor of exhausting myself on this lead. The top of the chimney was blocked by a horizontal overhang. Finding no usable cracks, I got around it with two expansion bolts. I then relinquished the lead to Wilson, who made another 30 ft. before darkness drove us back to our camp at the notch.

The next morning, after prussiking up a fixed rappel rope, Siri resumed the attack. He made a beautiful lead to the right out of a second overhang. Above, he gained the lesser angle (still 80 to 85 degrees) of the N.E. face and, cutting back to the left, followed a crack up 50 ft. There I found him under yet a third overhang. This was not so large as the others; but, being without a good piton crack, it required an expansion bolt. A rounded fissure into which one could almost jam a leg and arm led upward. The top of this was to be the high point of the trip. We had spent two full days on the rock, and our time was running out. We had made only a little more than half of the climb, but knew that our route would go and were sure that next time the spire would be ours.

For the final and successful attempt, Bill Long and Al Steck were added to the party. On the morning of 25 April 1950 we were again in camp at the notch. This time we were prepared to bivouac at the chockstone ledge. After taking over supplies, Long, Steck and Wilson renewed the attack. They reached the previous high point and established fixed ropes. That night we gathered at the bivouac, confident that the next day would bring us victory.

The return of light was welcome. Limbering up our aching bones, Siri, Wilson and I mounted the fixed ropes. At 10.00 A.M. Siri and I were at the top of the rope, with Wilson just below. While I gave a belay, Siri began to work on the 100-ft. crack that leads up to a gendarme near the summit ridge. Six hours and 18 pitons later, he reached a small ledge just below the ridge. Since there was room for all, Wilson and I joined him. This was the first chance to sit down since we had left the buttress. The rest of the time we had to remain standing, tied to the rock with pitons and slings.

Siri, exhausted by his labors, elected to go down; but Jim and I, choosing to chance a night on the summit, stayed to see what we could do before dark. A quick scramble to the ridge showed no route that way. Returning to the ledge, we traversed to the left, and Jim led up a sixth-class pitch which proved to be not so difficult

as we had expected. We were on the top at 5.30 P.M. and yodelled to inform the others that we had made it.

After congratulating ourselves and placing a register, we hurried back to the ledge and on down the fixed ropes. The next morning the rest of the party prussiked up the ropes and added their names to the register, while Wilson and I hurried up another slope to take pictures of them on top. By early afternoon we were all headed down the mountain, happy that we had finally conquered the great spire.

PHILIP C. BETTLER

North Wall of Sentinel Rock, Yosemite Valley. The lure of the N. face of Sentinel began to be felt in 1936, when Morgan Harris, William Horsfall and Olive Dyer made a reconnaissance of the lower cliffs, hoping to find a route up the face. They ascended over easy fourth-class ledges to a sandy, tree-studded ledge 1500 ft. above the valley floor. This ledge, known as the Tree Ledge, lay at the foot of the N. wall itself, though still 1500 ft. below its summit. Here one could look up and barely catch sight of the small tree growing on top of the buttress that reaches up 800 ft. onto the wall. Beyond? No one could tell: this was one of the great mysteries stirring the ambitions of many climbers.

There was some activity on the wall in the Forties. Robin Hansen, Jack Arnold and Fritz Lippmann made several attempts and eventually reached a point some 150 ft. above the Tree Ledge. In the fall of 1948 Jim Wilson and Phil Bettler climbed another 100 ft. higher. In October 1949 a party (Wilson, Bettler, Bill Long and I) arrived at the Tree Ledge prepared to make the first bivouac on the face. We made about 450 ft. in over 20 hours' continuous climbing. The greatest difficulty during this attempt was the lack of a suitable ledge for a bivouac: the night was passed on a tilted chockstone—crowded with two people, more so with four!

Spring finally came, and May 1950 saw the successful ascent of the buttress. Long and Bettler, in a two-day ascent, reached the top and had the first look at the great chimney, a dark cleft that led the rest of the way to the summit. Their report was anything but encouraging. The chimney was inaccessible; it was fully 100 ft. to the left, with nothing but bare granite between. The only possible way was to go straight up, with bolts, and hope to enter the chimney higher up.