

the face. This route shares a few pitches with Tempest but turned out to be 75% independent, requiring 74 hand-drilled holes for belays and leading, with no drilled bat hooks. One of the cruxes came on pitch six, under the Great White Shark feature of the South Seas route. Extensive hooking up and left, with a marginal tied-off Arrow for pro, led into the continuous crack system of the route Space. I followed this route for three easier pitches until I broke off on new terrain for most of the remainder of the route. Two-thirds of the way up the wall, I came upon possibly the last major ledge on El Cap that had never been touched. This feature, Bobo Ledge, gave me somewhere to stand and sit other than my portaledge, after 13 days in aiders. Another 60+m pitch led up to the left side of the luxurious Island In The Sky, a very comfy natural ledge on the Pacific Ocean route. Climbing off this ledge I headed up the left side of the Black Tower on my way to the long-awaited summit.

Then, in spring 2006, I turned my focus to the Porcelain Wall. I headed up on another solo mission, looking for unclimbed terrain to scare myself on. Luckily I found it, 100m right of the only other route on the absurdly steep central headwall section. In 1995 Eric Kohl went to this face alone to climb a direct line right up the middle of this not-so-well-known Valley gem. But after fixing the first four pitches, he teamed up with Pete Takeda for the ascent. In similar unintended style, I fixed the first four pitches solo until my good friend Matt Meinzer showed up and wanted in. The first four pitches went very well and completely natural, but up higher remained a few stretches of blank rock, which I knew would be easier to drill through with someone to share the workload. After we regained the highpoint up my three fixed lines, we continued on for 10 more days to the summit of this beautifully colored wall. Our route, House of Cards (VI 5.9 A4+), was characterized by difficult climbing through large roofs and flakes with some rivet ladders to connect delicate features. In the early 90s a section of the wall, about 200' around, fell off, leaving the adjacent rock expanding and dangerous. We hand-drilled 114 holes, including a few into pitch 10's death flake, until I could see what I was attaching myself to. We topped out after 11 days.

DAVID TURNER, *Sacramento, California, AAC*

SIERRA NEVADA

Incredible Hulk, free activity. True to form, Dave Nettle called me in the midst of a heavy Sierra winter. As I often hear from him, "I just want to put a bug in your ear." But no bug was needed. When Dave calls, people listen.

We cruised snow most of the way up, getting to the Hulk as early as we could: early June. On day one we reached the headwall corner that forms the right-hand border of the Hulk headwall, which each of us had spied from Dave and Peter Croft's route, Venturi Effect. Yet another clean and steep corner up high. The end of the corner required bolts for free climbing, and as Dave is the human hammer, we rapidly dulled our bits. The next day we simply tidied up the first four pitches.

We returned a few weeks later, joined by Truckee resident Donald Otten. The three of us freed the pitches to the high point. Then, after a bit of aiding, cleaning, and working, we freed the upper pitches, which connect to the second-to-last Venturi Effect headwall pitch.

We put together approximately five new pitches along with seven pitches from other routes to complete the line, Tradewinds (IV/V 5.11+). It's really a piecing together of various

routes to form a direct, fairly sustained, high-quality free route.

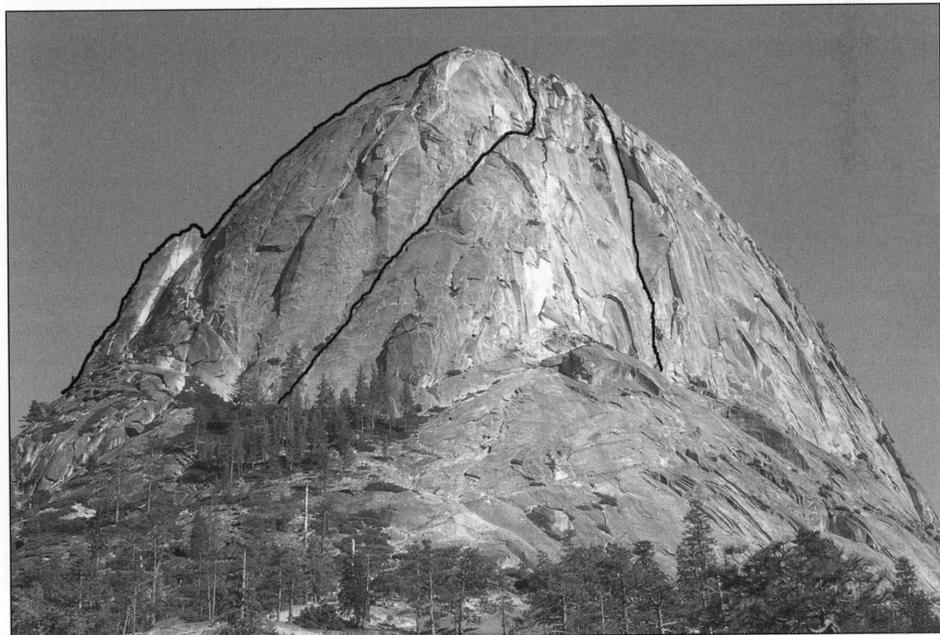
After climbing on the Hulk you won't want to quit, and neither did I. I came back with Jonny Copp, of Boulder, a few weeks later to check out other good-looking lines. We went light and brought no drill. We managed to aid/free four more new pitches between Tradewinds and Venturi Effect but were thwarted midway. We achieved the bivy ledge at about one-third height and got in another pitch-and-a-half before our vision faded into seams and flakes.

I returned again in August with Brent Obinger to free the four lower pitches. We added a few bolts to straighten out the second pitch, which is one of the few true face pitches I have climbed on the feature. The third and fourth pitches each have high-quality steep and varied cracks.

Even with the drill we couldn't piece the line together up high, as it was fraught with large loose blocks and incipient cracks. Nevertheless there is now yet another high quality, four-pitch, 5.12- variant start to a number of Hulk routes, as this line goes directly to the "mid-way ledge" from which many other routes join and depart.

NILS DAVIS

Balloon Dome, various ascents. The Crucible (IV 5.11 A1). Dave Nettle and I started this route in late October 2005 and retreated from the bivy ledge atop pitch five, due to an early winter storm. Chris LaBounty, Neal Harder, and I completed the remaining pitches during the fol-



The upper half of Balloon Dome. Left to right: Northeast Face via Leaning Tower (IV 5.8 A3, Beckey-Cundiff-Hackett, 1971; Free Dike Variation 5.11+, Harder-LaBounty-Thau, 2006), Northwest Ramp (5.10, Harder-LaBounty-Thau, 2006), Northwest Face (5.9 A3, Black-Graber, 1974). Not shown: Netherworld (somewhere right of the Beckey route, but exact line unknown, Jones-Jones, 2005) and, out-of-view to the left, the East Face (5.8) and Boku-Muru (5.9). *Chris LaBounty*