



The Whitney Cirque: east faces of Third, Day, and Keeler needles and Mt. Whitney. *Renan Ozturk*

*Day Needle, new variation and Whitney Cirque linkup.* In late July Jake “The Snake” Whitaker and I climbed a new direct free variation to the East Face of Day Needle in the Mt. Whitney cirque. Prior to our climb I had already learned about Jake’s horrendous epic on his initial onsight solo attempt of this line. He and his free-soloing companion had collaborated in their gusto, only to get trapped in a formidable alcove a third of the way up. After yelling for a rescue produced only useless helicopters, Jake committed to the insecure downclimb to rescue his petrified partner.

Under this suspicious pretext I agree to climb with Jake for the first time and take part in his emotional cleansing. This time, however, I was happy we could use a 100’ 9mm rope, some wires, and a set of Camalots, to #3. Above the previous high point I encountered a burly 5.10 off-fists crack, which I protected by placing RPs in a seam behind my back as Jake simuled below me. Above, Jake onsighted the crux, a brilliant 5.11 overhanging hand-and-finger crack on a golden headwall, close to the 14,000’ summit, thereby completing his catharsis.

A week later Jake and I returned to the Whitney Cirque and completed a one-day free linkup of some major faces that form the iconic California skyline. With our 100’ piece of cord we first repeated our Day Needle free variation (V 5.11), then downclimbed the classic East Face (III 5.7) of Mt. Whitney, looped back into Keeler Needle’s Harding Route (V 5.10c, onsight for me), then glissaded a snowfield and onsighted the Western Front (IV 5.10c) on Mt. Russell. During our scramble off Russell, we watched a huge lenticular of fire smoke overcome the highest point in the contiguous U.S. As the setting sun descended through this anomaly, it cast a rare neon red, day’s-end alpenglow, capping our adventure.

RENAN OZTURK, AAC

*Keeler Needle, The Strassman Route.* Yup. Eight days. Constant work, no rests. And that’s why I ran out of food and water. Not to mention that this was completely unknown terrain. I am not 20 years old anymore.

What would motivate a 46 year-old guy to solo a new route on a remote backcountry wall, when he knows what’s involved? As any woman knows, four things motivate men: money, sex, food, and ego. I would be deprived of the first three on the list, so it must be that seventh