

Ball Bearing Amphitheater. The rock pitch was hard, sometimes wet and run out. Instead of heading right onto Serpentine Arête, we finished in the long, ice-filled corner to the right of the spectacular slab known as the Fin. Throughout the route, the ice runnels were very narrow but always thick enough for good tool placements (AI-3).

MARK BEBIE

*Hozomeen, Southeast Buttress of South Peak.* Dave Adams, Don Goodman, John Petroske and I climbed this new route on June 25 and 26. We approached from the Lightning Creek trailhead at Ross Lake, hiking east to just beyond Willow Lake, where we left the trail. We bashed our way through a tangle of timber and avalanche debris east to a deep ravine. Steep dirt and brush on the far side brought us to open timber on the broad shoulder which sweeps to the south from the south peak. We ascended this to meadows at 5000 feet. We bypassed cliff bands to the west and gained the 6200-foot saddle on the ridge directly below the southeast buttress after six hours of travel. We bivouacked there. The next morning, we headed up the divided buttress. The eastern portion is an extension of the ridge. Bench systems cut diagonally across this buttress. We climbed the most prominent of these. This 700-foot-high lower east buttress leads to a vertical headwall which is bounded on the right by the sheer east face. From there, we crossed left into the gully that splits the lower buttress and traversed to the left on detrius-covered slabs and steep heather to gain the obvious flat shoulder, the crest of the western half of the lower buttress. We roped there and climbed straight up until we had to traverse to the right to gain a ramp system that rises diagonally to the left. This ramp ends at a steep, loose chimney (5.6), which we climbed to a belay at its top. The route then led us up a 50° dihedral for 80 feet and up to the right on gravelly slabs to a poorly protected belay stance. We then climbed to an overhang and traversed to the right under it to gain a 4th-class chimney, which took us to a small notch. The fourth pitch went to the right to the entrance of a broad, loose gully which splits the vertical upper buttress. We continued up the right side of this to a belay among large blocks. From there it was 80 feet of 4th class to the top of the gully. We scrambled the remaining 200 feet to the summit. The cruxes were the first and third pitches with the rest of the roped pitches 4th class (III, 5.6). The rock was often loose and friable. Hard hats were a must. Protection was scarce.

KENNETH JOHNSON

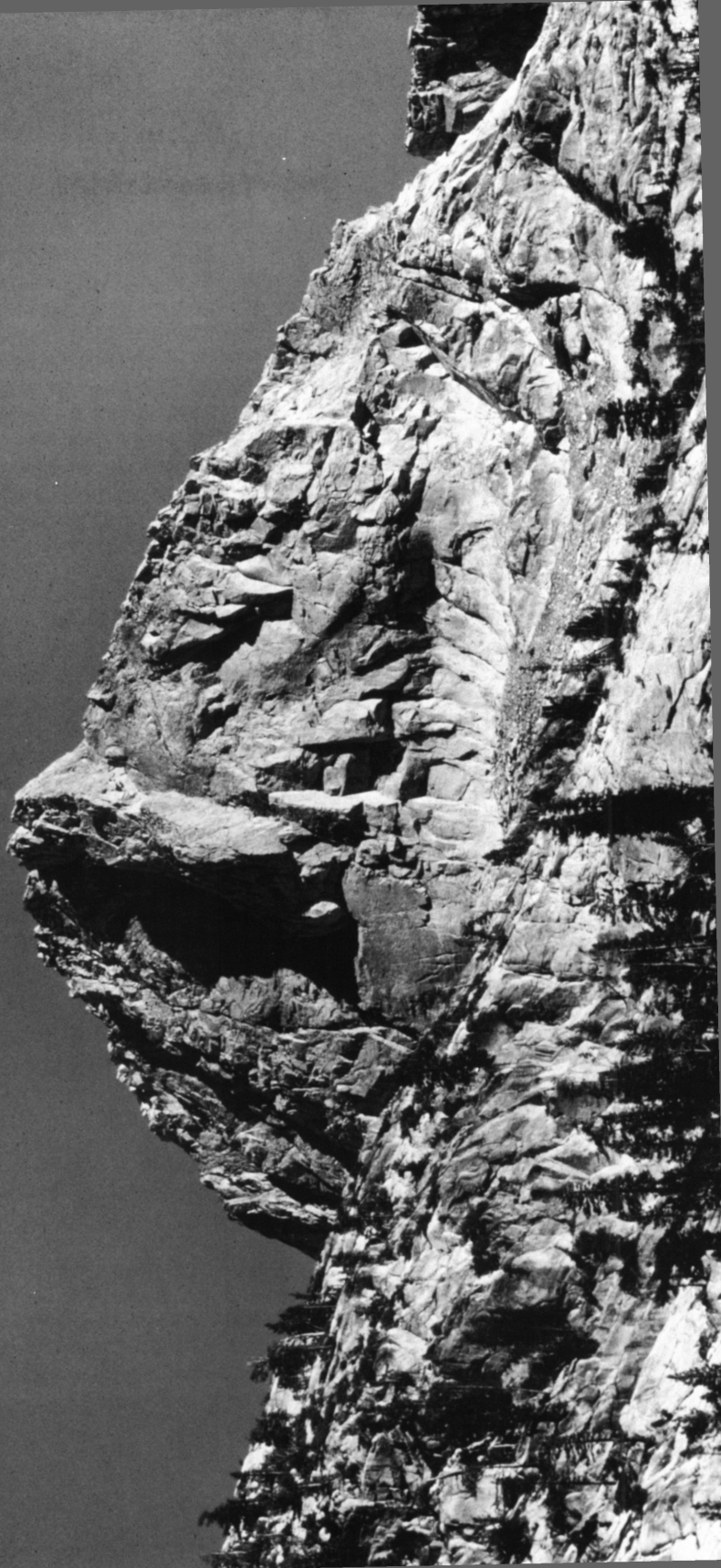
## California

*Rock climbs along the John Muir Trail.* While working on a story for the *National Geographic*, I skied the length of the John Muir Trail in February with David Wilson and Rob Mckinlay. We saw no one for the first 160 miles and made ascents of Mount Whitney and Cathedral Peak by the easiest routes. I also noted dozens of apparently unclimbed rock walls to return to in the summer when I

PLATE 50

*Photo by Galen Rowell*

“Piscator Peak,” unclimbed until  
1988. Both routes ascended the  
prominent buttress.



planned to repeat the 211-mile trail in five segments with different companions to complete my coverage. The climbs were generally on firm Sierra granite, but one was especially unusual because the peak was virgin. Back in 1919, Francis Farquhar noted "a particularly beautiful peak that towers above the head of the canyon like another Matterhorn" in the upper Fish Creek region, a mile above what is now the Muir Trail. In an article he proposed the name *Piscator Peak*, meaning "Fisherman's Peak," because of its position above Fish Creek. Although several other of his names are in current use, current maps show the Matterhorn-like peak as unnamed. On August 15, Kevin Worrall and I began directly beneath the prominent buttress that splits the face of *Piscator Peak*, while Dick Duane and Sebastian Letemendia chose a route 200 feet to the right that gained a huge dihedral, then climbed out of it to join our route near the west summit. The rock on both routes was covered with firm knobs and plates very similar to Charlotte Dome, which is often considered to have the finest rock in the High Sierra. Both climbs are rated 5.8. The surprise came when we traversed to the main summit and found it to be previously unclimbed by any route, a great rarity these days in the Sierra. On the map *Piscator Peak* is P 11,280 + , a mile east of the Muir Trail just north of Silver Pass. Other routes on the same trail segment included the following: *Virginia Pass Crag*, Left Crack (5.10a), a 200-foot overhanging hand-crack on a prominent triangular cliff between Virginia Lake and Purple Lake, climbed by Duane, Letemendia, Worrall and me on August 14; P 11,428, above Silver Pass, "Double Barrell Right" (5.9), 600 feet, right center of east face, by Duane and me; "Double Barrell Left" (5.8), 600 feet, left side of the same face by Letemendia and Worrall, both on August 16; *Seven Gables*, 13,075 feet, Second Gable, Chimney Route. Letemendia and I ascended this 1400-foot 5.9 route on the longest face up the northeast wall, while Duane and Worrall did the Right Wall Route (5.9), both on August 18. The variety of virgin rock climbs beside this well-traveled trail was hard to believe. Even *Mount Whitney*, which I thought had been ascended from every possible direction, had a virgin northeast arête between easy chutes on the north and west sides that had no cairns on prominent gendarmes or loose rock moved away from critical handholds. On July 27, I climbed this 1200-foot, 5.7 pinnacled ridge, finding some of the finest rock anywhere in the Sierra Nevada. Near the northern end of the trail, in September, Bob Palais and I climbed a four-pitch crack route on the northeast face of *Columbia Finger*, a prominent spire near Cathedral Pass. This equaled the best in Tuolumne Meadows with pitches rated 5.10a, 5.11b, 5.10a and 5.8. The crux was a long, rounded, first-joint layback with tiny faceholds on the opposing wall. We named the route "Digital Manipulation." Opposite Mount Whitney on the western side is a peaklet between Mounts Hale and Young designated at P 12,880 + on the map. Its dead vertical southeast face of white granite is split by straight cracks that run from base to summit. The face is seen from the Muir Trail on the way from Crabtree Meadows to the summit of Mount Whitney, rising on the left side of Arctic Lake. On July 27, Pat O'Donnell and I ascended what appeared to be the easiest route, slightly left of center (IV, 5.10b). *Langille Peak*, 11,991 feet, has the largest face anywhere

PLATE 51

*Photo by Galen Rowell*

**Dick Duane on SEVEN GABLES,  
High Sierra.**





along the Muir Trail. The left side of this 3000-foot northeast wall was climbed by Beckey and Jones in 1970. On July 14, David Wilson and I ascended a more direct, very prominent arête that leads to the south summit (IV, 5.10b). On parts of the trail, I found myself without a partner but eager to climb. In Evolution Valley, there is a conspicuous rock peak, *The Hermit*, which was first ascended by a party in July 1924 that included my mother. The final 20-foot summit block is so rarely climbed even today that the Sierra Club register is placed below it. My Mom's party threw a hemp packer's rope over the pinnacle to get to the top. In July 1988, I thought I spotted a reasonable route up the steepest part of the east face, but when I began soloing in running shoes, I found myself on 5.8 and tried to traverse left to easier climbing. Unable to find a way, I did a second 5.8 pitch and then a third. The rock was very solid with each crux a quite similar short but steep hand-crack. The summit block itself is at least 5.7. While camping on the upper basin of the King's River, I was struck by the beautiful north arête of *Vennacher Needle*, a 12,996-foot peak just south of Mather Pass. On July 12, I soloed an 800-foot 5.8 route that ascends the skyline as seen from the trail, directly above a dark, hole-like overhang near the base of the wall. Vern Clevenger and I ascended the north buttress of the west summit of *Acrodictes Peak*, a 13,183-foot peak near Baxter Pass. The 1000-foot 5.10a route was up very shattered diorite that makes it hard to recommend when so much fine rock remains unclimbed in the rest of the High Sierra. Just south of Donohue Pass is a prominent ridge at the head of Rush Creek that forces the Muir Trail to detour east before continuing into the Minaret region. On July 1, Jim Jackson and I ascended a conspicuous crack on the steepest section of this 350-foot face (5.9). Many harder routes remain to be done on either side of this one. We certainly didn't exhaust possibilities along the trail. Few, if any, technical climbers with ropes and hardware have visited areas that are several days' walk from the road. I doubt that I'll ever again have the chance to travel the whole trail with a pack train for food, climbing equipment and photo gear.

GALEN A. ROWELL

*Ruby Wall.* In September, Malcolm Ives and I added a third new route to this fine wall, "Wide Sargasso Sea." Our climb takes a direct line to the summit, staying right of Galen Rowell's 1982 route until the summit dihedral. Eight pitches with a delicate (5.10b) crux constitute this highly enjoyable route. Descent was made to the north into the large gully bounding the face, with four rappels.

ROBERT J. PARKER

*Bear Creek Spire.* In February, Bill Kerwin and I made the first winter ascent of this peak via a new route on the south face. Starting on slabby rock uphill of Rowell's routes, we took a direct line to the summit through the upper steep headwall and finished just ten feet left of the summit block (9 pitches, 5.9). The