

route, Boom Town (IV 5.10b), was done ground-up, onsight, with no bolts drilled. The pitches are new except the first, where we found a drilled anchor at the ledge where the pitch ends. We were told by Mike Strassman that whoever did the first pitch went no farther. We returned during the summer of 2001 and did a route to the left of Boom Town. This route, Billy from the Hills (IV 5.10b C1), was also done ground-up, onsight, with a few moves of C1 at the end of the first pitch. We swung leads on both of the nine-pitch routes, using a 70m rope for both ascents. Two ropes are required for the descent for an overhanging 60m rappel to exit the gully. Rumor has it that Boom Town was the first route to have summited the formation.

DAVID LANE, AAC

*Mt. Mills, Northwest Ridge.* Jackie Carroll and I climbed this spectacular ridge in an unintended two-day push from Rock Creek Lake. From Mills Lake we crested the North Ridge of Mt. Mills, only to find that our dog had followed us over 4th class ground. Sending her back to camp, we crossed the ridge and descended via one rappel into the Fourth Recess. We crossed Fourth Recess and began Mills's northwest ridge where the divide between the Fourth and Third Recesses meet the ridge. (One could add to the adventure by starting the ridge between this point and Third Recess Peak, undoubtedly a Grade V, or climb one of the Grade IV's on Third Recess Peak to access the ridge.) Airy class 5 climbing led over several gendarmes and knife-edge arêtes for many pitches, including an exposed 5.8 overhanging mantle. Beyond several large towers, a gap in the ridge required a short rappel. We thought the ridge would become easier, but no. Exposed climbing on the north side of the ridge (and a tunnel inside the ridge) past snow-covered ledges and ice-filled cracks found us below the summit plateau at nightfall. Without sleeping bags, food, or water, we shivered the night away in below-freezing temperatures, summiting at 8 a.m. the next day. We descended the chute to the north of the standard 3rd class route, which we found horribly loose and sandy for a standard route, necessitating belays and short-roping. The dog greeted us at the base after spending an epic night on the north ridge, and we arrived in camp at sunset the following day. We rated the route IV 5.8. Total number of pitches was around 20.

MIKE STRASSMAN, AAC

*Birch Mountain, north ridge, attempt and tragedy.* I had scoped out a line on this long ridge and questioned Sierra veteran Doug Robinson as to whether it had been ascended. He became secretive, and, probing further, I discovered that he also intended to make the first ascent that spring. We decided to do it together, but I live in the eastern Sierra and he doesn't, so I went without him. On the first attempt we didn't even leave the car, as a spring snowstorm had the ridge looking like K2. The second attempt, with Cindy Springer, showed what a long winter it had been. One look at the slog up the 2,000 feet of talus from base camp turned that trip into a reconnaissance. On the third attempt, in mid-July, I was in better shape and had enlisted the rope-gun talents of mountain guide Seth Dilles. A last-minute addition to the party was Keith Kramer, a long-time big-wall partner of Seth's from Yosemite. I feared that three on a rope might make the ridge a difficult undertaking to achieve in one day, but Seth felt that Keith was strong enough and experienced enough to move quickly. A recent fire had made the approach up Birch Creek relatively easy, but the 2,000-foot talus slog was another matter. Keith began