

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

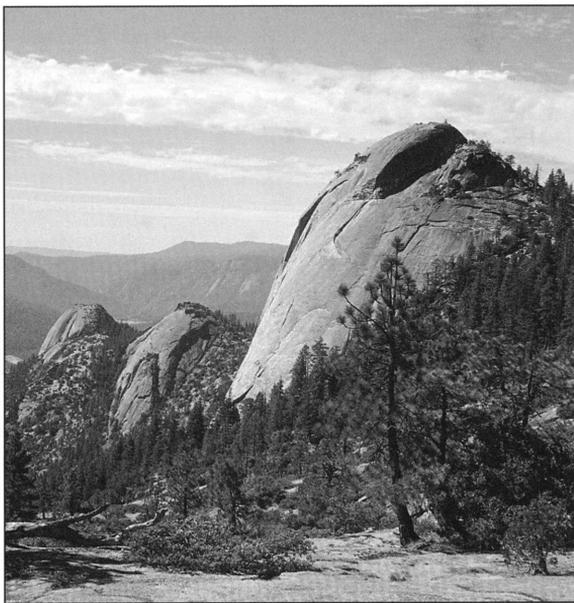
*Birch Mountain, north ridge, attempt and tragedy.* I had scoped out a line on this long ridge and questioned Sierra veteran Doug Robinson as to whether it had been ascended. He became secretive, and, probing further, I discovered that he also intended to make the first ascent that spring. We decided 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

exhibiting classic signs of altitude sickness, and we urged him to rest and drink water. After he vomited several times we suggested that descent was the best medicine and offered to lead him back to a meadow at 10,000'. He assured us he could make it down, and his footing seemed strong and balanced as he walked down the talus. This was the last time we saw Keith Kramer.

We started to fix the first pitch, an overhanging crack, and Seth took a stout fall, and he too vomited. The altitude didn't seem to be affecting any of us benevolently. We bivied at the base and woke up before sunrise to attack the ridge. The first 10 pitches were high Sierra granite at a moderate grade. We saw smoke in the meadow below and could hear Keith yelling words of encouragement, so we figured he was all right. After ascending the first tower in 13 pitches, we realized that we were only a third of the way up the ridge and would not make the summit by nightfall. We retreated via two shaky rappels, tricky downclimbing, and traversing two ridges to the west. Out of food and water, we found a waterfall, then were dumped on by an afternoon storm, just as we found a comfortable cave. We arrived at the base of the ridge at sunset and quickly made our way down the talus to the meadow, where a stick in the ground assured us that Keith had been there and was surely on his way down. But upon arriving at the car at 2 a.m., it was obvious that Keith had not made it out. We searched the lower reaches of the canyon until dawn, and then called Search and Rescue. Keith was found the following day tangled in the willows of the creek. The coroner ruled the cause of death as exposure. Keith Kramer was a jovial man who was well-known in the Mammoth Lakes community for his crazy antics and light heart. He will be sorely missed. Seth Dilles, Doug Robinson, and I intend to climb the ridge in spring 2004, name it for Keith Kramer (K2), and spread his ashes from the summit.

MIKE STRASSMAN, AAC

*East Fuller Butte, Walking with Walt.* After three false starts over 18 months, two due to 110°+ summer temperatures and one due to a "10% chance of light, scattered showers" that turned into a blizzard in September 2002, Sigrid and Lynnea Anderson, Kenny Rose, and I finally completed this route (V 5.10d C2) in mid-October 2003. This route features 11 pitches of enjoyable, clean rock in the wilderness setting of the upper San Joaquin River and has fine views of the upper San Joaquin River Gorge and the Sierra high country. It also features a one-hour downhill approach, a mostly level one-hour return, and a year-round spring at the base of the climb. Although the free-climbing is rated 5.10d, and



East Fuller Butte. The route follows the left skyline and the bottom 400 feet are hidden by the trees. *Jerry Anderson*