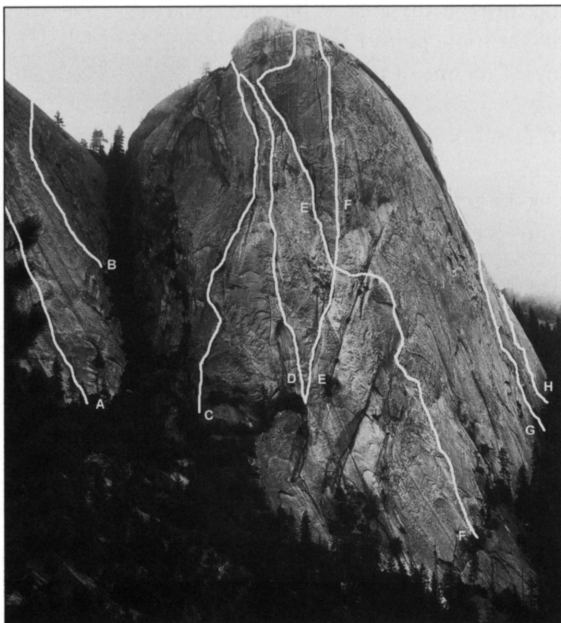


SIERRA NEVADA

The Incredible Hulk, free routes. On July 3, Peter Croft, Dave Nettle, and Greg Epperson established Airstream (V 5.13), considered the most difficult free climb in the High Sierra. In August, Croft returned to the Incredible Hulk with Andrew Stevens and Hans Steingartner to put up Blowhard (IV 5.12+). Finally, on September 4 Croft and Nettle finished the season with another new route, The Venturi Effect (V 5.12+). See Croft's feature article in this journal for details.

East Fuller Butte, Eagle Buttress, and Eagle Dihedral free ascent. Dave Nettle and I may have made the first free ascent of Eagle Dihedral (IV 5.11- or 5.10 A2) on August 21. We freed the crux pitch after wiggling the original pitons out by hand. This route was established by Galen Rowell and Jerry Coe in 1971. This natural line starts with a sparsely protected groove chimney and ends with a steep, spectacular hand crack. Dave and I also established a new seven-pitch line left of Eagle Dihedral. Eagle Buttress (5.11+ A0) consists of well-protected face climbing that links natural features. The first pitch (some bolts) starts at the base of the 4th/5th class ramp of Eagle Dihedral. The line is almost free, except for 5 feet on the third pitch.

BRANDON THAU



Fuller Butte. (A) The Twisted Bit (5.12b, Drazin-Thau, 2001). (B) East Face (5.9 A1, Bartlett-Reid, 1979). (C) Cassam-Maciaszek (5.8, 1993). (D) Eagle Buttress (5.11+ A0, Nettle-Thau 2004). (E) Eagle Dihedral (5.11- or 5.9 A3 Coe-Rowell, 1971—FFA: Nettle-Thau, 2004). (F) Southern Yosemite Direct (5.10c A2+, Cassam-Didden-Maciaszek, 1994). (G) Walking With Walt (5.10d C2, Anderson-Rose, 2003). (H) Southeast Face (5.8 A2, Beckey-Donaldson-Stuart-Vennum, 1972). Photo, lines, and route info from Brandon Thau

Palisade Traverse, second continuous ascent. Our climb consisted of a

complete traverse of the Sierra Crest from Southfork Pass to the summit of Mt. Agassiz, a distance of approximately eight miles. This route is notable not only for its length but also for its sustained elevation. At no point does the traverse drop below 13,000', and much of the climbing is at or above 14,000', making it, in all likelihood, the highest continuous stretch of alpine ridge in the continental United States.

As best we can determine this traverse had been climbed start to finish only once before, in 1979, by Palisade guide John Fischer and his client Gerry Adams. Although he and Adams apparently bypassed a few sections of the ridge crest during the last mile or so, this hardly detracts from their visionary achievement. Including these sections presented us with no exceptional difficulty, and we found that closely adhering to the crest along its entire length (with the



The Palisades Traverse follows the entire skyline in this photo. *Adam Penney*

minor exception of the “Dolphin Fin” between Thunderbolt and Winchell, which we skirted above the bergschrund) made for a satisfying route.

Partial traverses of the Palisades are not uncommon, and a good route description can be found in several guidebooks. However, logistics contributed greatly to our success. Since much of the climbing is fourth class and most obstacles go at 5.8, technical difficulty isn’t the primary reason attempts at this traverse are unsuccessful. Weather, on the other hand, is decidedly an issue. Palisades storms may be mild by the standards of great ranges, but they’re still unavoidable. Seven of our twelve days on the Crest (6/14-6/25) found us on the receiving end of frozen precipitation. This complicated the climb and added to its duration. Had we not been prepared for such delays, we too might have failed.

Like Fischer and Adams we placed supply caches at strategic points, each stocked with three to four days of food, fuel, and miscellaneous equipment. Establishing these caches was not a trivial undertaking—it required as much time and almost as much energy as the climb itself—but it kept our packs to a tolerable weight and more importantly, gave us the margin of extra time we needed not to be hurried. We remained well-hydrated, well-fed, and well-equipped, and inclement weather proved no more than a minor inconvenience.

The route is rated VI 5.9, but we feel competent parties have a reasonable chance of success, provided they allow sufficient time. The first ascent team’s time of seven days is a tribute to the skill and stamina of its leader; lowlanders and weekenders (such as ourselves) should probably factor in a few more days. All in all, the Palisade Traverse is a magnificent climb that we highly recommend to aficionados of alpine adventure. We hope another 25 years won’t pass before its next ascent.

SCOTT MCCOOK and ADAM PENNEY, *Columbia, South Carolina*

Birch Mountain, Bardini Route. This climb is hidden in plain sight. You can study the north face of Birch Mountain (13,665') from downtown Big Pine. But it took a decade of driving up to