

less, bushy approaches. No people and no noise, except the simple things like water, wind, birds, and on occasion a mountain lion. In the fall I decided to finally get in there. I needed a partner who could take a serious beating and keep coming back for more. That would be none other than my friend Jake Jones.

We started from the Squaw Dome trailhead and headed south, cross-country, for three miles downhill (including 1,400' of rappelling) to the canyon bottom. The north face of Balloon Dome, across the canyon, faced us as we dropped into the canyon.

On our first trip in October, we planned to just scope a line up Balloon Dome, deposit huge bags of gear, then return home to stock up for the real push. But it took so much longer to reach the bottom than we expected, with all the bushwhacking and rappels, that we were committed to climbing back out by a new route. We scoped an obvious line up what looked to be a not-so-big wall and started climbing at 4:30 p.m., knowing darkness would be upon us by 7:30. The line goes directly up the center of the largest south-facing wall opposite Balloon Dome, but slightly upstream, thus taking us back toward our approach descent. We named this wall the "Cat Wall." But cracks that looked open from the ground pinched down in places and didn't all connect. Our sweet 5.9 simul-climb and jog to the beer store turned into a thin-at-times, run-out, 1,400' 5.11c. We had no bivy gear, extra food, or other way out, so we had to focus and keep pushing. We managed everything onsite and topped out at 10 p.m. on a moonless night. Wearing shorts and T-shirts, with fading headlamps and no extra batteries, we ditched our gear and bushwhacked uphill for four hours, worshipping the car like a god, when we finally found it, and drove home, arriving just before sunrise. We named the route Heaven and Hell. The route name fits the entire canyon.

During the rest of October and November we humped several loads to our base camp and pushed what I believe is the first line from the bottom of the canyon to the summit of Balloon Dome. A forested section splits the upper dome from the wall below, and a few routes exist on the upper dome. (You can approach the upper dome by a 12-mile hike from the Cassidy trailhead in the Oakhurst area, without having to descend to the river.) Fred Beckey, of course, was the first to climb the upper dome. What we did was more like two separate routes, linked during our final push.

Our line on the 2,000' lower wall, Into the Pit (V 5.11d), ascends an obvious line of cracks leading to an obvious, left-angling dike. The dike leads straight to the most amazing, splitter, right-facing corner on the whole lower wall. More straight-up cracks, then some 4th class, lead to the upper dome. Our line on the upper wall, Netherworld (1,100', 5.11c), could be accessed by the 12-mile hike (i.e., without starting from the valley bottom). It ascends our left skyline view as we approached from the opposite side of the canyon.

Whether climbing our line or any future line from the river to the summit, one should plan on a grade VI wall. As for the logistics of getting the gear and yourselves to and from the wall, plan on that being more work than the wall.

SEAN JONES

Angel Wings, Right Wing. Chris LaBounty and I made the first ascent of the Right Wing (IV 5.10d) on Angel Wings on July 15. This route ascends the striking arête to the right (east) of the South Arête. We approached from the start of the South Arête, by making a 35m rappel from bolts into the gully below. In 100m 3rd and 4th class becomes easy 5th. Three 5.10 pitches and

four easier pitches lead to the top of the arête. After reaching the stacked rocks atop the arête, make a 60m easy 5th class traverse west, toward the South Arête. Make a 30m rappel into the gully from a chickenhead and head north for 100m of 4th class to a notch. Continue north for 60m on a 4th class orange band into another notch. Make a 30m rappel off two fixed nuts onto the backside of Angel Wings. From here hike east, almost toward the summit of Cherubim Dome, descend the summit ridge, and follow the gully toward Upper Hamilton Lake; you will meet the High Sierra Trail.

BRANDON THAU

Palisade Traverse in a day. Gravity takes hold of my legs, and I stumble. My lungs still bursting, I see a flash and suddenly my father, dead seven years, turns into Norman Clyde on a bergschrund slide and screams, "Here I go to Hell!" Piss runs down my leg.

Squirming between reality and dreams, I pull myself from the nightmare and open my eyes to a full moon shining in my face. A rumble to the north brings my attention to a storm over Mammoth.

Rough trade, this mountaineering gig, I mutter to myself. Only seven hours in and the adventure has taken its toll on my body and mind....

California is unique in that one can ski and surf in the same afternoon, the weather almost always perfect in both climes. For me, it is the perfect place to raise a family while exorcising the demon shakes. When friends took me to these mountains, I rediscovered my childhood joy of wandering for days without the intrusion of another, while, as a climber, I understood that going up is the easy part of the battle. The mountaineers, the true climbers, of which I am not one, would recount tales of horrific approaches and descents, while the deaths reported occurred during the complacent periods. It is a Zen-like realm where awareness of one's surroundings dictates life and death. For me, it is nirvana. The mountains of California, Mecca. And in this Mecca lies a grand jewel: the Palisade Traverse, eight miles long, 26 peaks, six over 14,000'.

In July 1979 John Fischer and Jerry Adams made the first traverse of the Palisades, in seven days after spending a week caching supplies. In June 2004, after a week of caching supplies, Scott McCook and Adam Penney made the second ascent, in 12 days. The rock varies from perfect granite to jigsaw death to sandy scree. One can climb in a T-shirt and jeans while straddling blue ice, only to become embroiled in a storm worthy of Everest minutes later if caught unprepared. It is the stuff of nightmares and dreams. And during one glorious day last August I laughed, cried, and dry-heaved my way into a level of climbing that awaits those willing to sacrifice everything for the ultimate beauty of life. It was truly a grand adventure.

Strictly the facts: Palisade Traverse (VI 5.9), third ascent, in 22 hours. No supplies cached along the way. I started on August 18, 7:00 p.m., at Southfork Pass (12,560'), traversed the ridgeline, and finished on August 19, 5:00 p.m., at Bishop Pass (11,960'). By 10:00 p.m. I was back to Glacier Notch below Mt. Sill.

MICHAEL REARDON

Sierra and Yosemite, various activity. Climbing.com reported that Dave Turner soloed a new route, Block Party (VI 5.9 A4), on the southeast face of El Capitan. He fixed ropes for three days and spent 18 days on the wall, finishing June 21. The route shares parts of Tempest and