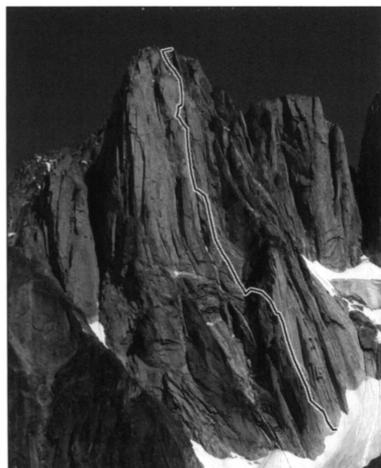


Durga and Mahisha from base camp. Renz and Schurr climbed the skyline ridges from right to left, though the back-side ridge connecting Mahisha to Durga is obscured in this angle. *Peter Renz*

climbed two peaks south-southeast of camp. We climbed the closest peak (2,350m, 2km distant) by its northwest ridge, and propose the name Mahisha (the buffalo demon). We climbed the farther peak (2,494m, 2.75km distant) by curving south and east around the cirque to a col and then to the summit by the west ridge. We propose calling this peak Durga (the slayer of Mahisha). On the 29th Mickey and I climbed the 2,477m peak just east of Friga, for which we propose the name Friga East. The morning of the 30th Mike King flew us out.

Aside from a cairn that Don and Markus found on Demeter, the area seemed untouched. Our base camp was comfortable, with nice views though with limited access to the peaks that Don and Markus scouted on their loop south from Demeter. More routes and peaks beckon.

PETER RENZ, AAC



The Real Mescalito, on North Howser Tower. Many routes exist on this face. The shorter tower to the right is Central Howser. *Marc Piché*

BUGABOOS

North Howser Tower, The Real Mescalito. In August, Crosby Johnston and I connected in the East Creek Basin. My schedule gave us only two days—the time it takes most parties just to make the approach and exit. We knew we'd have to light a fire under our asses to get out in time. We hiked up and over to the Pigeon-Howser Col that afternoon and restlessly tried to settle into our sleeping bags.

The line planned in my mind, sketched together from four previous trips to North Howser's west face, connected a lower corner system (The Shooting Gallery) to the Seventh Rifle gully and then upward into cracks in the vicinity of the fictitious line, Mescalito. The true Mescalito is on El Capitan and not North Howser Tower, a mistake made by editors and authors of the previous guidebooks. We hoped the new line would provide a free route straight up the middle of the face, filling in the gap on the topo where Mescalito had originally been drawn. Nervous anticipation settled in as we prepared and

repackaged our gear for the next day, paring down in all ways possible: no bivy gear, light approach shoes, a single set of crampons, one ice tool, and one head lamp (I forgot mine).

Our 3 a.m. start on August 13 brought us to the base of the face after three hours of negotiating steep and tenuous conditions on the glacier. Going light always seems like a good idea until you end up descending 55° hard glacier ice with a single crampon and a shared headlamp.

Since I freed the Shooting Gallery section of the route the previous year, while establishing the fourth free route on the west face (Under Fire, 21 pitches, ED2 5.11), this variation has been climbed and cleaned twice more and offers moderate 5.10 climbing on clean splitter cracks and the best access to the upper face. We connected pitches and simul-climbed the first 500m, establishing ourselves on the upper part of the face by early afternoon. We crossed the Seventh Rifle gully and continued straight up the face for 200m of perfect fist jamming and stemming in a clean water-worn right-facing corner. Simon Meis and I had climbed this terrain the year before, but loose, wet and verglassed conditions above had turned us around. It looked like the upper pitches were going to be clean and steep, but getting to them would require several pitches of horrendously loose, wet and icicle-strewn granite. This section of the face was like a freezer box, with surface hoar covering the cavernous fissures and loose death flakes exfoliating off as we tiptoed by. Working our way up the right side of the upper corner systems, avoiding the center of the carnage, we found mostly clean and steep finger cracks. The climbing was sustained at solid 5.11 but required sections of aid to avoid dropping rocks onto the belayer. Dents in my helmet, scrapes on my shoulders, and one particularly disconcerting throbbing bruise on my inner thigh finally coerced us out of this gauntlet of death. We ended up diverting out of the main corner system, forgoing the continuous line we were following, and traversing left. The traverse avoided most of the loose rock on the upper wall. We then returned right into the obvious shaft for the final pitch. Crosby pushed the line up splitter cracks to the summit ridge, arriving in the early evening, with only 100m of scrambling to reach the summit.

Although a couple of quality steep pitches wove through this granite choss in the upper headwall, we came to the sad realization that no amount of cleaning would render this route a classic. Nevertheless, we were exhilarated to have completed our goal. Eleven-and-a-half hours after starting the climb, we had successfully completed a one-day first ascent of North Howser Tower's west face: The Real Mescalito (ED2 5.11+ C1, 18 pitches with lots of simul-climbing). We did not seize a free ascent, but there is always next year and many more cracks and corners strewn across the west face.

As daylight started to fade we tripped and stumbled back to the bivy, with the rush of the day's events still pulsating through our veins. We had added haste to our adventure, not because we had jobs to return to or appointments to keep but because we had become enamored of two beautiful and captivating women. Our continuous banter on sex, love, and relationships had acted like an IV, injecting an insatiable vigor into my body. My hands were bloody and my body swollen, but none of this mattered. I frantically packed my bags, hoping that I would be able to descend before dark (the only headlamp wasn't mine). As I walked away from the bivy, I looked back and saw Crosby already opening his sleeping bag and lining up his dinner celebration like a sheikh lining up his harem. I wanted to stay and celebrate with him but instead turned and trudged on, possessed by the blissful thoughts of soft skin and warm embraces.