

## California Mountaineering Club

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### Trip Report: Temple Crag, Moon Goddess Arete

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Climbers: Steve Aho, Jack Cronk, Jan Lorenzen, Sam Page

It didn't bode well for the climb, or for any of our pre-climb appetites, that Steve was retching at the breakfast boulder at 5am. We had slogged (or slugged, to perhaps coin a new term) up to the 10,800 foot level from Glacier Lodge the day before, strategically positioning our camp within 200 snow covered feet of the toe of the Moon Goddess Arete. Dismissing the fashionable fast and light alpine tactics, the four of us had boldly gone slow and heavy on the approach and at least one of us was now paying for it: four ropes, two tents, two stoves, no less than three cooking pots, and enough climbing gear to suspend every loose block encountered on the route from a textbook, equalized, multi-directional, three-point anchor. Considering our prospects while gazing up at the dark crag looming ominously above, I was astonished to see Steve, remarkably unfazed by his episode, single-mindedly continuing his pre-climb preparations, as if nothing had happened.

With crampons and ice axes we crunched our way up the snow gully separating the Moon Goddess and Sun Ribbon Aretes, hanging (literally?) a left onto the ledge affectionately (and aptly) referred to by locals as the "traverse of death." Gaining the buttress proper, we scrambled unroped up third and fourth class terrain for about 300 vertical feet before angling right to the arete proper. Here we roped up as two teams of two: Jack and Jan on one rope, and Steve and I on the other. Steve and I combined the next several hundred feet of fourth and fifth class climbing into one monstrously long simul-climbing pitch, eventually belaying about 15-20 vertical feet below the alleged 5.7 roof near the top of the first gendarme/tower. From here, Steve lead diagonally up and right for about 15 feet before creeping horizontally right on what is referred to in the various route descriptions as an exposed 5.6/7 traverse on "jigsaw" rock. The only thing puzzling about the route description at this point was the word choice, as there was nothing resembling "jigsaw" rock.

From the notch behind the first gendarme, Steve, discouraged by the dark, dank and loose appearance of the "green corner," veered up and left over some fairly clean 5.7 cracks while Jack opted to stay "on route." Bogged down by rope drag (and perhaps by the look of the sustained 5.8 hand crack looming directly and unavoidably above), Steve set up a belay while I calmly envisioned myself jamming confidently on the next lead.

Reaching desperately and instinctively for my chalk bag (which had been left in the car to save weight) and finding only the unobliging pick of my ice axe, I whimpered "watch me" once more as Steve braced himself while eyeing his belay anchor nervously. After some prolonged stalling and careful slithering, I stepped out of the 5.8 hand crack and stared up at the 200-foot face of the Ibrium Tower, flawless except for a thin crack

running up its left side. Wanting to avoid the reputed 5.9 runout climbing above, I followed Jack's ropes for about 80 feet up and right around the tower, sharing a belay ledge with a 5-foot spike of rock. Peering over the spike, the elusive 5.6 downclimb and 100-foot traverse was clearly discernible.

After Steve lead without incident over to a large ledge at the end of the traverse, I took the sharp end and headed up the loose 5.7 crack and corner system with Jack in hot pursuit, foolishly belaying in a shady wind tunnel just below the crest of the arete. With the wind ripping through my belay spot and my extra clothing out of reach, I was relegated to dancing vigorously in place, unbeknownst to Jack and Jan who were comfortably sunning themselves ten feet above and out of sight on the crest, while Steve took what seemed like an eternity aiding his way up the sandbagged 5.6 flakes.

From Steve's belay a 100-foot scramble along the crest landed me at a 15-foot drop-off, necessitating a short rappel into a notch at the base of what turned out to be the technical crux of the route: a 75-foot left facing dihedral on the left side of the arete, culminating in a 5.8-9 off-width crux. (Curiously unmentioned in many of the route descriptions, this pitch may be avoided by going either far to the right or left of the arete). Taking the sharp end, but not before announcing that I was feeling rather worked, I meandered around, pulling a tricky 5.8 move about 10 feet left of the dihedral in hopes of circumventing the off-width. Sucked inevitably back into the crux off-width section, I was appalled to discover that the 4-inch crack was too wide for any of the 45 pieces ranging incrementally in size from .1 to 3 inches on my now useless rack. Proclaiming heroically that I was "going for it," I powered up confidently for six inches before frantically gapping at my last piece of protection which was placed disconcertingly far and diagonally away. After a string of similarly aborted attempts, each one more suspenseful yet pathetic than the last, I drew on over seven years of alpine climbing experience and did the only thing that seemed feasible: "Jack, help!!!" Within minutes Jack was at the crux, stuffing his knee into the crack and blasting his way through.

Roughly two-hundred more feet of scrambling up the crest, including a 60-foot 5.6 pitch, put us on the talus at 7:30, 14 hours after setting off from the vomitorium. With dark, foreboding clouds hovering over the Palisade crest, we eschewed the summit and began plodding down the talus in the direction of Contact Pass. Reaching a promontory at the bottom of the talus, we headed down and left for several hundred feet along third class ledges, tending generally to the right. The colorful nest of rappel slings was discovered only moments before dark almost directly above Contact Pass. One rappel on a single 60-meter rope deposited us on the pass, after which roughly 1000 feet of plunge-stepping down moderately angled snow slopes and gullies put us back at our camp at 9:30. Whew!

Notes: On the approach hike we easily crossed the outlet of Second Lake via two sturdy bridges. From here an unmaintained trail parallels the southeast bank of Second Lake, disappearing in talus near the far end of the lake and reappearing at the base of an eroded 2-300 foot slope on the other side of the talus. We were unsure of the crossing conditions in between Second and Third Lake.

There are many route descriptions available for this climb. It is advisable to obtain several of them and compare and contrast. (1) The description in "Sierra Classics" by Moynier and Fiddler is relatively misleading and incomplete. (2) The description in R. J.

Secor's "High Sierra" (1992), though not exactly misleading, is incomplete. Far better sources exist, which could keep you from rapping off one of the many bail anchors littering the route. (3) Ellen Holden's (CMC member) description and topo is one of the best available. (4) A comparable description without the topo is available online from one of the prominent Sierra guiding companies. (5) Finally, a description and rare topo was published by Steve Sosa in Rock & Ice magazine number 61. This description, which could be used to supplement either (3) or (4), is not recommended by itself, as it does not adequately describe the two key traverses. Happy routefinding!