

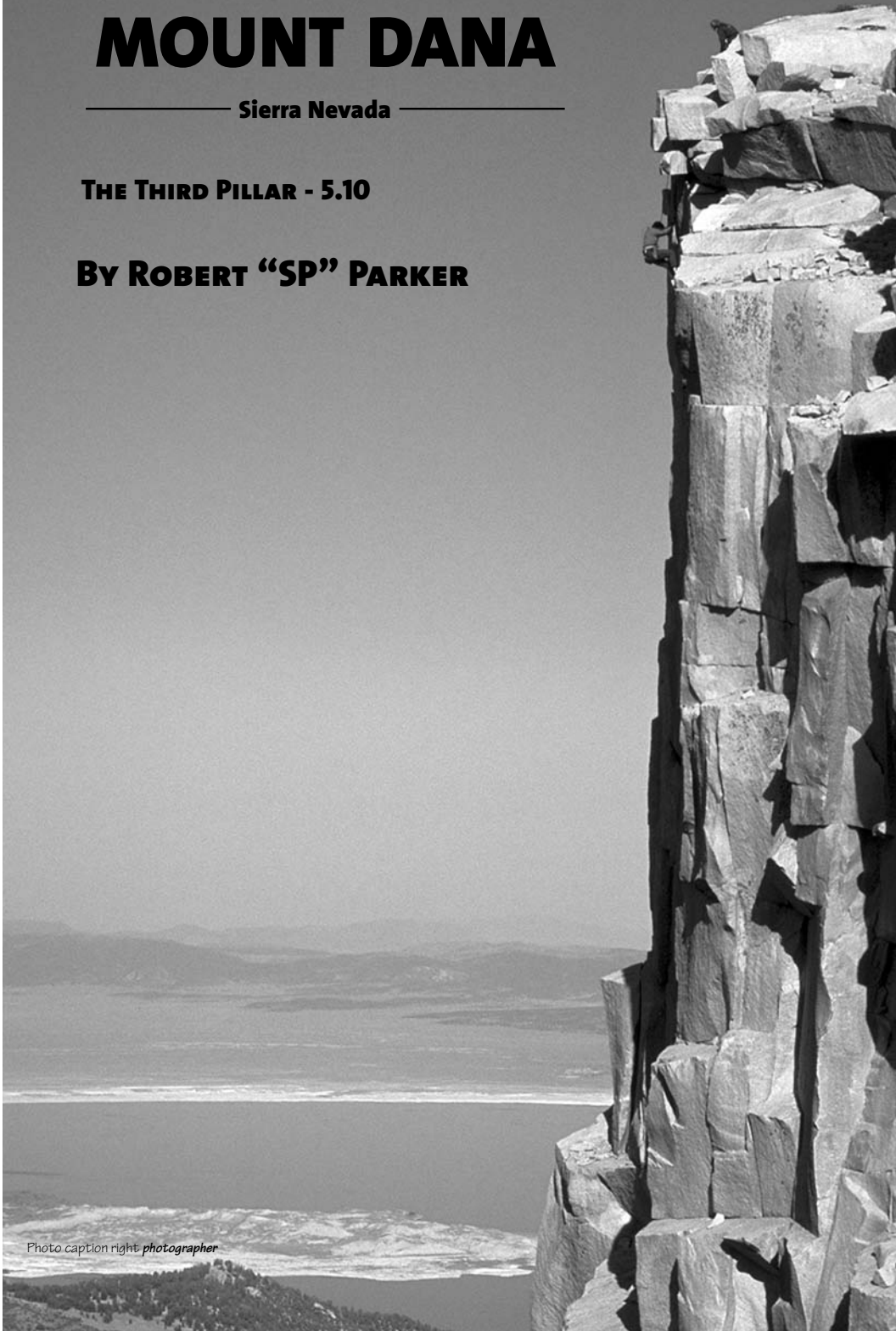
MOUNT DANA

Sierra Nevada

THE THIRD PILLAR - 5.10

BY ROBERT "SP" PARKER

Photo caption right *photographer*



The Regular Route up the Third Pillar of Mount Dana is one of the finest alpine rock climbs anywhere. Soaring cracks up a slender pillar composed of the best backcountry granite, at a reasonable standard of difficulty and a couple of hours from your car. The views across Mono Lake and into Nevada are outstanding. The protection is good and the climbing is sustained out around 5.8/5.9 with a couple of moves of 5.10. The final pitches as the climbing steepens are exhilarating and the mantelshelf move on to the summit give a satisfying climax that will stay in your memory all your life. This is a Sierra Nevada classic that should be on everyone's list.

WHERE

The Third Pillar of Mount Dana is on the west edge of the Dana Plateau situated southwest of Lee Vining and east of Tuolumne, off State Route 120, the Tioga Pass road. The trailhead is at Tioga Lake on SR.120, just short of a mile from the Tioga Pass entrance station to Yosemite National Park and 11 miles from Lee Vining and Hwy.395. Park at the Tioga lake pullout (with bathroom) at the north end of the lake (9,440 feet).

Tioga Lake campground is located near the trailhead and the Tioga Pass Resort and store (www.tiogapassresort.com) is only half a mile away offering gas, food, dining, accomodation and supplies. Don't miss the Tioga Pass Burgers.

WHEN

Depending on the severity of the winter by June the Tioga Pass is usually open and the trails are usually free from snow soon after. Anytime from June until the first snows in October is a good time to do this route. The route faces east but gets sun for most of the day.

STRATEGY

The Regular Route of Mount Dana's Third Pillar is usually climbed in a day.

PERMITS AND REGULATIONS:

There are no Wilderness Permits required unless you are camping overnight.

MOUNTAIN GUIDES: SIERRA MOUNTAIN CENTER

If you require a mountain guide for the Third Pillar or any other alpine route in the Sierra Nevada call Sierra Mountain Center run by SP Parker and Todd Vogel. Call them at 760-873-8526 and a visit to their website is a must www.sierramountaincenter.com

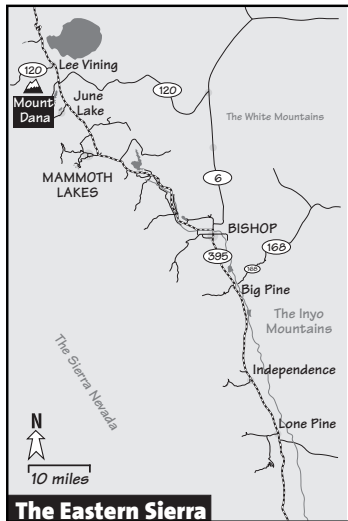
APPROACH

FROM THE TRAILHEAD TO THE BASE OF THE ROUTE

The approach is cross country, but is relatively short and while not too hard the crux can be locating the top of the climb since it remains hidden until you are pretty much right on top of it.

From the parking area (9,750ft) find the trail on the south side of the outhouse and drop about 70 feet to Tioga Lake. Follow the trail around the lake then contour and climb a little until you start to loose the trail a little. You will cross the creek to the north side at 9,840ft and the trail will become better. Take this up a mile or so to the first basin with meadows at 10,380ft. Go around the meadow on the north side and follow a trail up through the rock slabs and talus away from the creek to the second meadow at 10,550ft.

Go around this meadow on the north side and through a boggy section to the first gully on the left with white and red talus. There is a trail on the left side that can be hard to find at first. (There are often wonderful columbines in this section). The gully tops out on the plateau at 10,970ft. Head due east (the rising sun should be in you eyes if you got an appropriately early start!) up the shallow gully which may have water running. Avoid trampling the meadows and you will find an intermittent trail. Ahead will



The Eastern Sierra

appear an area of large flat white boulders set amongst grass and sand. These contrast with the red and white talus you started in. Veer gently left through grass, sand and boulders towards the end of the plateau looking for the top of the pillar. The top is in the white rock, not in the grey granite and larger outcropping further to the right. Once you see it you will know it!

Sort gear here (11,340ft) and pull on the rock shoes if you are descending in these. Try and hang you pack to avoid damage from the omnipresent marmots. Those who plan truly well will have refreshments to place in a snow drift or under a rock for the end of the climb!

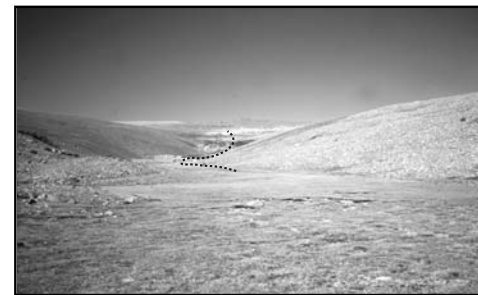
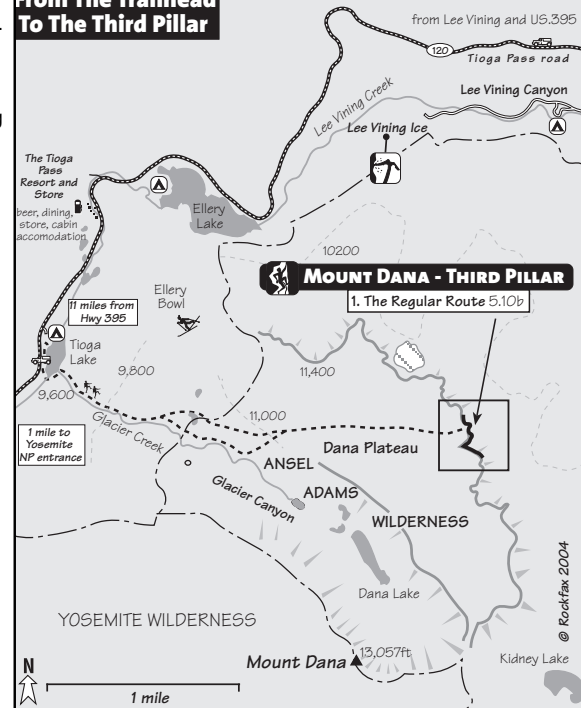
You descend the rocky rib on the north of the gully next to the Pillar. This is mixed second and third class with an odd fourth class section. Lower down drop off the crest onto the right side and look for a place to cross the gully to the start of the route. In early season there may be snow here so keep in mind that you might need an axe or have to wear heavier shoes. You should drop no lower than about 10,750ft.

The route starts on a small ledge below a large curved flake right on the crest of the pillar and several hundred feet above the toe of the pillar.

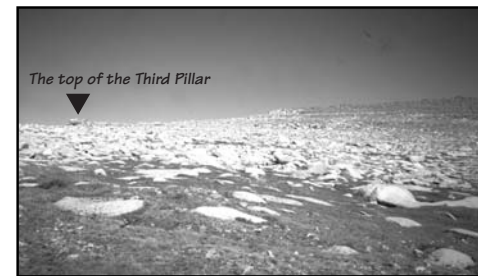
TIP: WATER

Get and treat Glacier creek as there is none above there. Take some beers and put them under a shady rock or in a snow bank ready for your return.

From The Trailhead To The Third Pillar



Crossing a meadow on the Dana plateau. photo: Robert 'SP' Parker



Not so far to go now. photo: Robert 'SP' Parker

GEAR LIST

- 1 set wires 4-13 BD type.
- 1 set micro cams/BD/Metolius
- 2 sets cams BD Camalots 1-3
- 0.1 and 0.2 BD Camalot
- 6 shoulder length slings
- draws
- extra biners

Third Pillar - Regular Route 5.10a
Mount Dana (13,057 ft.)
FA. Phil Bircheff and Bill Bonebrake, July, 1969.



THE ROUTE

The route starts on a small ledge below a large curved flake right on the crest of the pillar and several hundred feet above the toe of the pillar.

Layback and jam the perfect crack on the right side of the flake. From the top traverse leftwards to a very small tree and then climb the left side of the next flake. As this widens step left up and past two cracks to easier ground. Belay here by another stunted tree or continue up fourth class terrain to other belay spots.

You have two route choices.

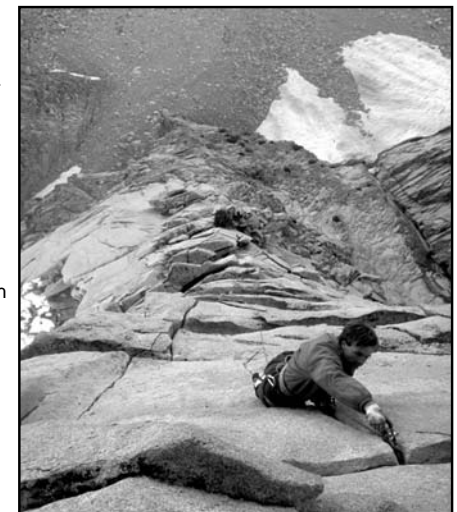
1) This variation moves left over ledges and short steps to where the ledges end. Step past a small detached pillar and belay on a small ledge. Climb directly above this up flakes and a right-facing corner (5.9) and the chimney above then step left to a big detached flake and a ledge (80 feet) if short on gear or energy belay here or continue up the small arch above the ledge to the crack and follow this up. You can make it a little easier by moving left and then back right to a 3 inch crack and the pitch finishes on a slab leading to a small ledge with yet another stunted tree (they all are small on this route). Above is a french-fry-looking detached flake (freedom fry surely! - Ed). It seems to be well attached at present but do not pull too hard. This turns into a chimney. Take this up to the top of the flake. From the top of this you can take the 5.7 flared chimney or if you are feeling bold (or maybe are carrying a pack) avoid the chimney and take the 5.9 thin crack on the outside. The pitch ends 155 feet up on a small ledge with flakes.

2) This is probably the original route. Instead of moving left go straight up to a small tree and belay here. Above, a left-facing corner that leans right takes you up to a past another crack to a straight in crack up to a distinctive tree. Belay here. Move up a couple of moves and find a horizontal crack that allows a hand traverse left. Scurry over this and it does protect pretty well and head straight up to a 5.8 wide crack to belay on the crest level with the belay on the other variation. You can step left to variation 1 or you can climb straight up via a 5.9 move on the right side of the flake and join Variation 1 at the top of the first chimney. You choose your route above via 5.7 or 5.9.

The next pitch is the technical crux although a block has fallen out recently and this makes the climbing easier that it was before. Make an awkward side pull onto small edges and clip a fixed pin. Think about backing it up with a 0.1 Camalot stuck vertically down behind the flake where the block has fallen out. Know that if you fall on it the cam will be irreparably damaged but if the pin pulls the fall will be very nasty!. Another side pull takes you up to better hold and good rests. Move left to a small right facing corner and take this to a ledge with a tree. This is a short pitch of only about 60 feet.

Now comes the "Best 5.9 pitch in the universe" according to Richard Leversee. It is probably 5.9 plus but has good rests and great protection. You can start to the left of the ledge past a fixed pin or to the right past another pin. Both starts meet atop a hollow flake. Above is a series of small ledges and vertical cracks. One step involves a 5.9 layback off the edge of a thin crack but the top is great so just go for it. The jam crack above has two projecting flakes which are actually solid. Jam off the top of the flakes and move right to make a final mantelshelf. This ultimate move comes at the same time that energy is failing. If you have saved a 0.1 or 0.2 Camalot this will protect perfectly the last move, otherwise you will go for it with gear below your feet.

From the top you gear should be about 150 feet away including that beer you stashed nice and cool.



Mark Houston on the final pitch photo: SP Parker