

There is no better introduction to the Sierra Nevada alpine climbing than Temple Crag: the approach is easy to follow, overnight permits are relatively easy to get, and the climbing and the rock is beautiful. The most popular routes here are the Celestial Aretes: Moon Goddess, Sun Ribbon and Venusian Blind. Venusian Blind is the easiest of the three aretes. The next step up from Venusian is the adjacent Moon Goddess Arete (they also share the same approach and initial pitches). Moon Goddess is more involved, longer in length and the route finding is trickier than its easier neighbor. The Big daddy is Sun Ribbon

Most camp below Temple Crag before their assault. But if you are experienced, relatively fit, and can move fast it is very do-able in a day from the trailhead.,

## WHERE

Temple Crag is situated near the Palisade Glacier and is approached via the north fork of Big Pine creek from Glacier Lodge trailhead, 11 miles west of Big Pine which is 15 miles south of Bishop. From Glacier Lodge it is 6 miles hike to Temple Crag.

## WHEN

The trail to Temple Crag is usually free of snow from early June onwards to the first winter snows in October. The snow bank at the base of the cliff usually persists throughout the season, although the later in the season you go the less snow approach you will have to endure or enjoy.

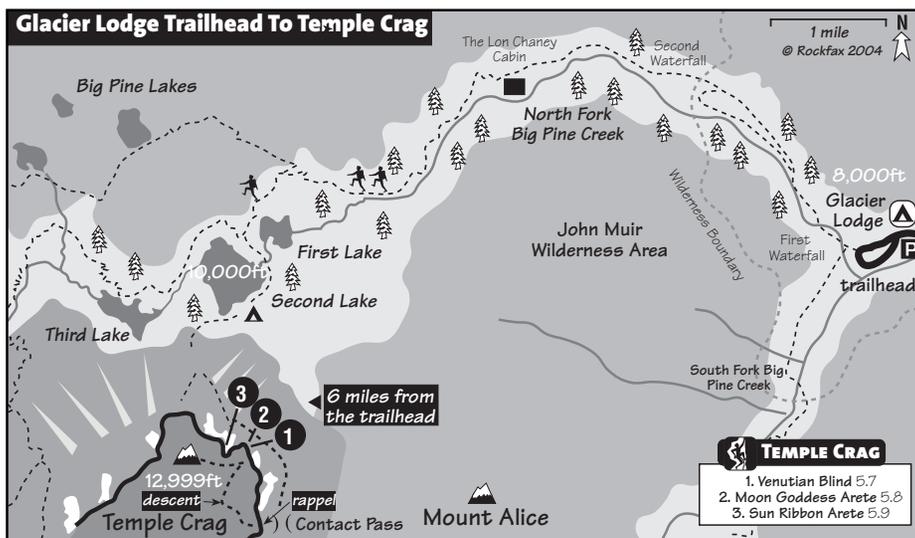
## STRATEGY

With an early start fast and competent parties can climb any of these routes in a day from the Glacier Lodge trailhead. Most, however, especially if coming from low elevations, prefer to spread the adventure of two or three days. One day to approach, set up a camp, acclimatize and reconnoiter the route, then one day to climb the route and return to the trailhead.

## PERMITS AND REGULATIONS:

### NORTH FORK OF BIG PINE CREEK

Overnight stays require a free WILDERNESS PERMIT. See page 261 for how to get one.



## APPROACH: TO THIRD LAKE FROM GLACIER LODGE

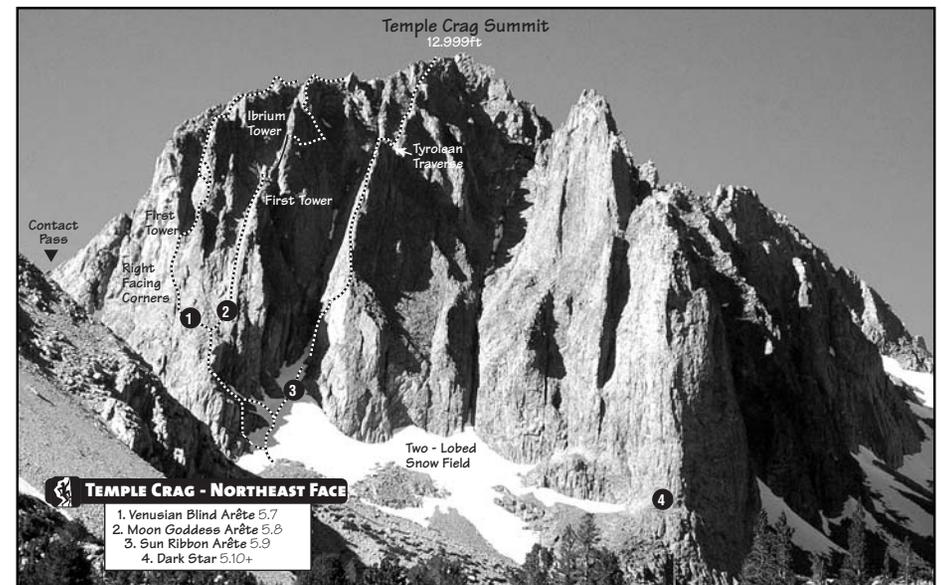
The trail up the North Fork of Lone Pine Creek is a beautiful hike in its own right and very simple to follow (see map). For the most part the trail follows the creek, although there are two alternatives in the initial part of the hike (take the high road to avoid steeper switch-backs) and always stay left at any forks. You will pass an old stone house that used to belong to the Hollywood star Lon Chaney, it is now a Ranger Refuge. You are deposited after about 5 miles at First and Second Lakes and a fine view of Temple Crag.

## CAMPING

Good sites can be found near the outlet to Second Lake. There are several spots that are less good on the southern side of the lake. Some very nice spots are located immediately below the Dark Star Buttress feature of Temple Crag. These spots have the advantage of being quite close to the climbs and away from the main trail. Later season these spots usually require a ten minute walk for water (bring a bag). These sites necessitate carrying your overnight pack over the small moraines that project from the crag towards Third and Second Lake, an arduous task. If you intend to attempt other objectives in the canyon you will probably want to camp somewhere over by Third Lake (but avoid the ghetto camp near the main trail on the north east side of the lake).

## OVERVIEW OF TEMPLE CRAG

A great overview of Temple can be had from near Second Lake, where the main trail intersects the lake. From this spot one can easily see the giant north buttress known as Dark Star (though it contains other routes as well) which drops down to form the lowest point of Temple Crag. From the toe of Dark Star Buttress to Contact Pass the face of Temple Crag is more or less evenly divided into thirds by two deep gullies, usually snow filled. The right hand gully is the Mendenhall Couloir and the left gully (unnamed) divides the Moon Goddess Arete (left of the gully) from Sunribbon Arete. Each gully feeds a permanent snow field which usually coalesces into one large snow field, locally known as the Two Lobed Snow Field, but in dry years can form two separate icy slopes. The Celestial Arete routes are accessed via these snow slopes.



BE AWARE: The top of the cliff is very foreshortened in this photograph. The top half of the routes shown are much longer than they appear. photo by Robert 'SP' Parker/ Todd Vogel

## INITIAL APPROACH DESCRIPTION

The initial approach to the base of Temple Crag can be made several ways depending on where you camp. The shortest approach is via the south side of Second Lake but this involves quite a bit of sand and talus. Still, this is probably the best way if you are just climbing a Temple Crag route and/or positioning your camp as close as possible to the base of the Crag. If approaching from Second Lake you'll follow the south side of the lake first on a trail then on talus to the base of a sandy moraine. Here you'll find faint trails ascending the sand and scree of the moraine (this is the moraine that descends from Contact Pass). If heading just to the base to climb, as opposed to heading to find a camp, you'll follow these faint trails all the way up the moraine towards the aretes. (Late season Second Lake will be your last water if you're heading directly to the Aretes). If you're heading to find a camp close to the base of Temple Crag, as recommended above, you'll want to aim for an area where the top of the moraine changes angle dramatically, about 400' gain above Second Lake. Contour towards the base of the Crag from this point to find the nice sandy camp areas mentioned above. If approaching from Third Lake you'll cross the outlet to Third Lake on a log jam "bridge" (bad in periods of high run off; take the Second Lake approach then) and follow a faint trail around the south east side of the lake. This trail gains the top of the small moraine about 200 feet after you leave the log crossing. Continue along the moraine top for a few minutes but eventually you'll want to strike out across the moraine, aiming straight for the lowest point of Temple Crag (Dark Star Buttress). The moraine can be a slog but take heart as it's only fifteen or twenty minutes to easier terrain. You'll see the occasional cairn as you traverse the moraine but there really is no good way across this area. Eventually you'll reach the sandy camping area at the base of Dark Star, described above.

## FINAL APPROACH DESCRIPTION

Make sure you have identified the arete that is your objective before you even attempt the final approach. It can be difficult to find the left aretes when you get up close; as with any big alpine route, having a general sense of where the route goes before you get on it is important. Don't rely on the route description for all of your route-finding. Take a good look at Temple Crag from the outlet side of Second Lake. The Celestial Aretes can be seen best in morning lighting and then again in the afternoon.

## TIP: AVOIDING CRAMPON USE

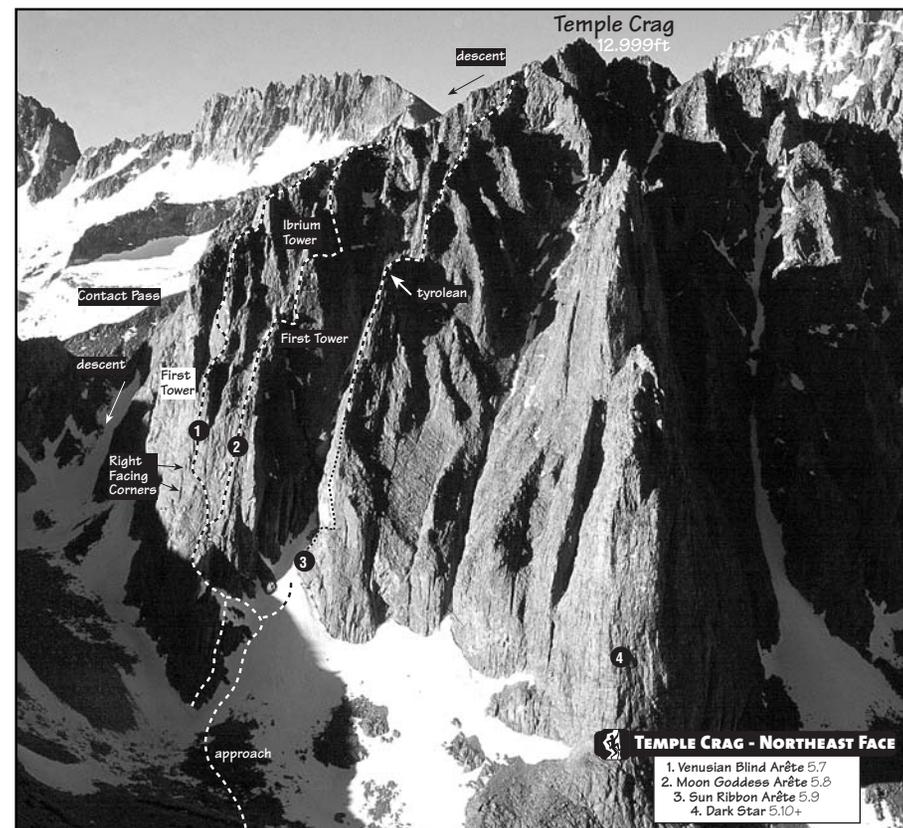
In warm weather it is usually possible to avoid the need for crampons by hiking up to the snow fields the afternoon before your climb and punching in a "stairs" while the snow is soft. The next morning things will be firm, ice axe recommended, but if you did a good job with your steps the trail will be easy and crampons will be unnecessary.

## TIP: WATER

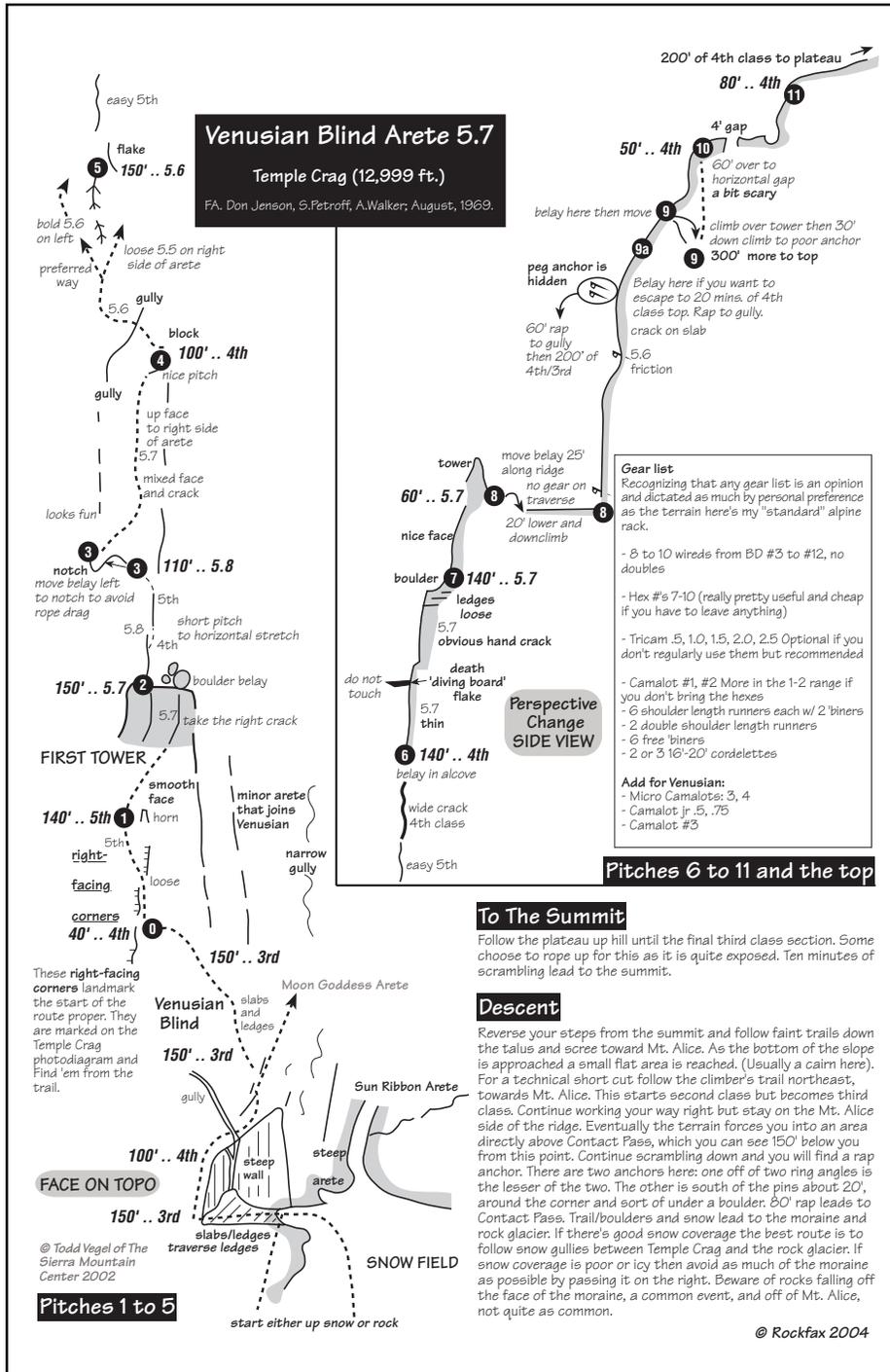
Running water can usually be found afternoons only just before where the approach heads up the snow field. It seems to "turn off" at night but will be running again by the time you come back down.



The Tyrolean traverse on Sunribbon Arete. *photo by Robert 'SP' Parker/ Todd Vogel*



*photo by Todd Vogel*



**APPROACH TO THE START OF THE ROUTE**

Both Moon Goddess and Venusian Aretes are approached via the left lobe of the two lobed snow field. You can avoid the snow by climbing the steep rock band below the routes directly but this is not recommended. Climb the snow slope heading for the point where one can easily head left on a scree covered ledge. Generally this involves several hundred feet of moderate snow climbing. This ledge is a good place to transition to rock shoes. The ledge quickly becomes third class as you scramble left to the toe of Moon Goddess Arete and the start of fourth class climbing. For Venusian start heading left from the Moon Goddess approach at the point where the fourth class turns briefly back into third class. You'll trend up and left for another 200', heading for a series of 40' to 60' tall right facing corners. The route starts at the highest of these, on the left side of a feature that is more a blunt buttress than an arete. There is a minor true arete to the right of this feature that joins the buttress several hundred feet higher. It works to climb this, too, but it is quite loose and not recommended.

**THE CLIMBING**

**The first pitch** trends up and left via the left facing corner mentioned above. Many belays are possible but a good ledge with a natural anchor comes along 150' out. Two ways are apparent from here, the preferred trends slightly right on moderate ground, passing through a steep 5.7 handcrack which splits the buttress higher up. A large ledgy belay caps the tough moves at the end of the pitch (watch for the loose boulders as you move onto the ledge). The next pitch is short and reaches a horizontal section. To avoid heinous drag belay short then move the belay to the end of the horizontal stretch. **Pitch four** heads up directly from the notch and is 120' in length. Great face climbing with some cracks for protection lead to a large but sloping stance with a block for the belay anchor. Variation: the face 30' to the left of the normal route is a nice but poorly protected alternate.

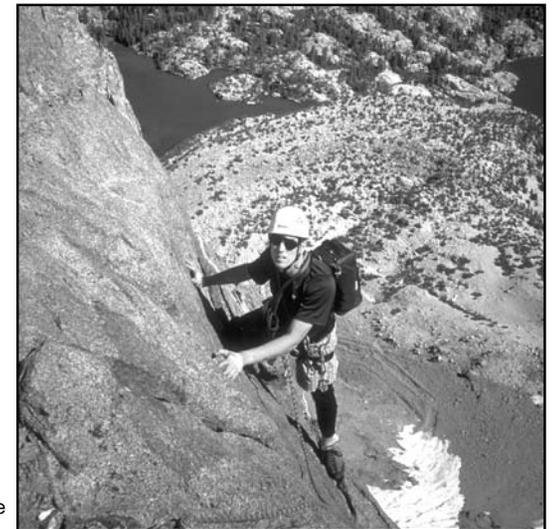
**Pitch five** has two route options: either way move left across a small gully and onto the right side of what will become a sharp arete. The first option is to climb directly up the right side of the face, angling slightly left to a small stance about 140' out (5.6). The other option is to continue moving left after crossing the gully, working around a small roof, through a steep area, and back right to join the first option. Neither way is particularly well protected; the left option is better climbing and more solid.

**Pitch six** is fourth class except perhaps for the moves just off the belay. Stop the pitch below a steep area with a prominent diving board flake. **Pitch seven** carefully avoids the diving board with some nice 5.7 thin moves then a short 5.7 hand crack with good exposure (loose blocks at the top of the pitch). The belay is in a horizontal section with a nice ledge. **Pitch eight** is short, up a nice face, to another horizontal stretch which is more technical than the last. It is suggested to stop the pitch short, bring up followers, have them climb by and down to the next ledge. Downclimb to them, finally moving the belay all the way to the end of the horizontal section, belay at a fixed pin at the start of the next steep area.

**Pitch nine** climbs a steep face with some 5.7 (and a fixed pin) to the top of a tower. Options from this point: From near the top of the tower, climber's left (towards Mt. Alice) there is a rap anchor that allows one easy access to the adjacent gully. Twenty minutes of third class lead to the summit plateau from the rappel. Or: downclimb 20' off the tower and along the ridge to a poor belay. Cross a spot where four feet of the horizontal ridge are "missing" (poor pro, exposed) and continue with 250' of fourth class to the summit plateau.

**ESCAPES**

Generally escape is made to the right. It is not as easy to escape Venusian as it is Moon Goddess; for this reason if the weather is questionable or other factors are extant Moon Goddess may be a better choice.

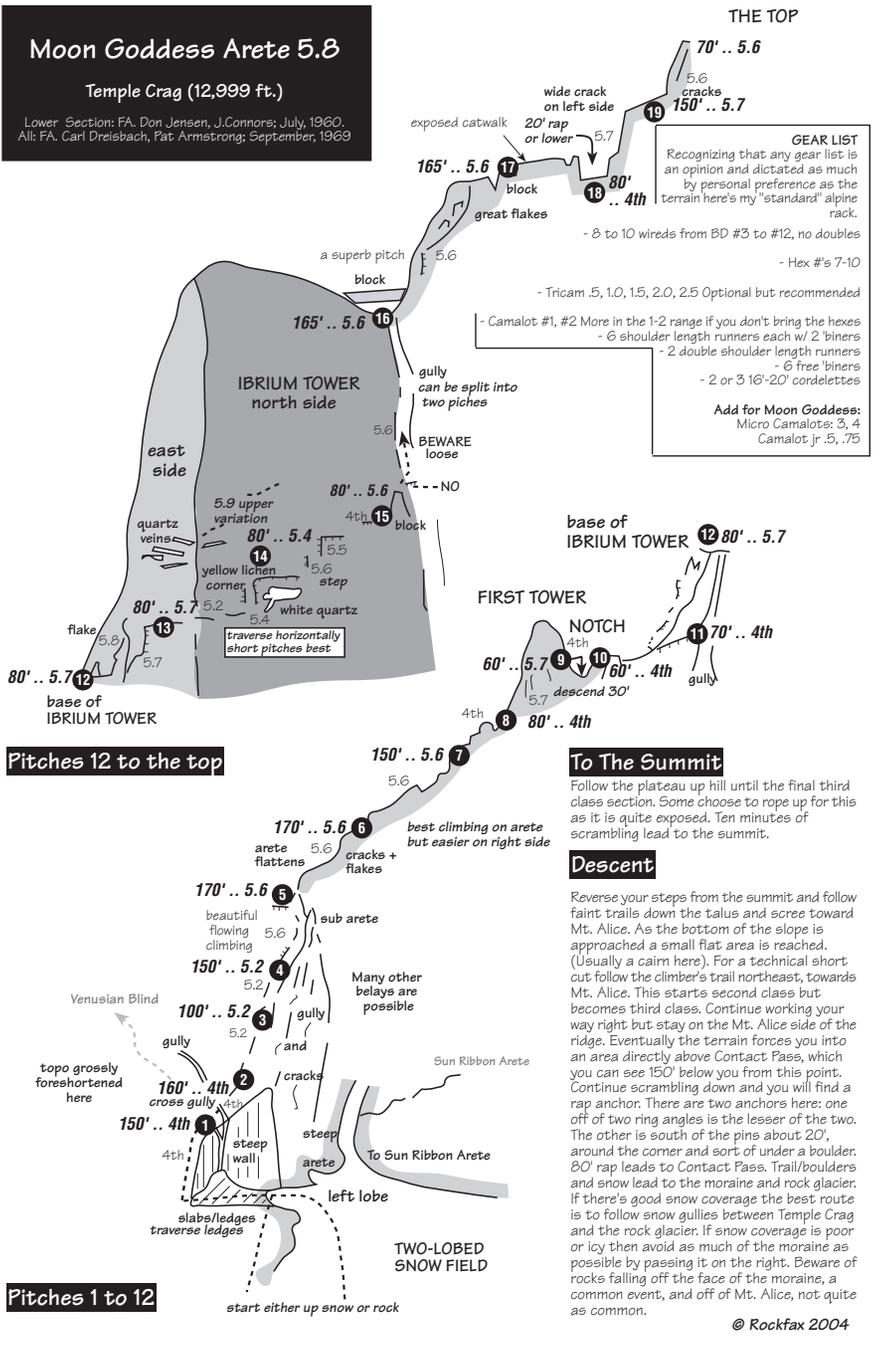


Caption Caption Caption Caption. photo by Robert 'SP' Parker/ Todd Vegel

Moon Goddess Arete 5.8

Temple Crag (12,999 ft.)

Lower Section: FA. Don Jensen, J.Connor; July, 1960.  
All: FA. Carl Dreibach, Pat Armstrong; September, 1969



APPROACH TO THE ROUTE

Moon Goddess is approached via the left lobe of the two lobed snow field. You might be tempted to avoid the snow by climbing the steep rock band below the routes directly but this is not recommended. Climb the snow slope heading for the point where one can easily head left on a scree covered ledge. Generally this involves several hundred feet of moderate snow climbing. This ledge is a good place to transition to rock shoes.

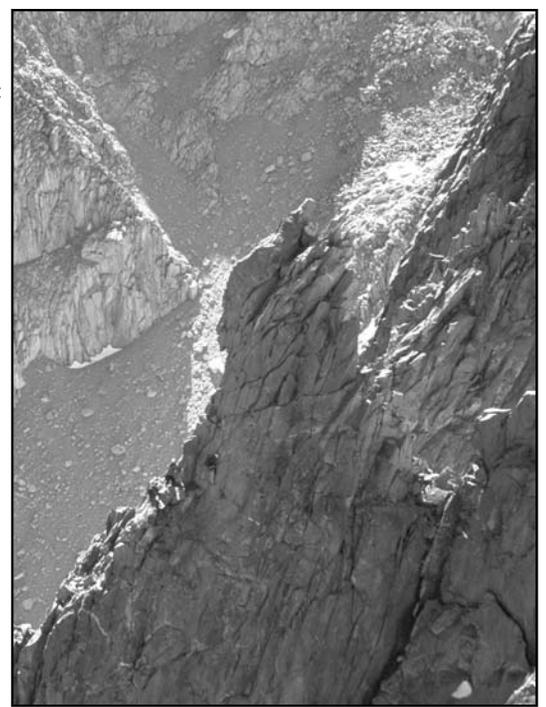
THE CLIMBING

The ledge quickly becomes third class as you scramble left to the toe of Moon Goddess Arete and the start of fourth class climbing. Continue out the ledge until you round an outside corner, the ledge becomes three or four feet wide and fairly exposed at this point. Two hundred feet of fourth class, more or less straight up, lead to temporarily easier ground and the start of Moon Goddess. From afar, and up close in certain light, it appears that Moon Goddess starts as two aretes that join about 500' from the start of roped climbing. With this perspective the proper route is the left arete though not everyone sees this view. The true start has a faint gully to its left that becomes more incised the higher it goes. (This gully serves as a good escape route if taken anytime prior to the ninth pitch).

The first six pitches are fairly straight forward, with minor variations here and there. In the event an escape is needed it is usually easy to rap with one rope into the gully on the climber's left of the arete. One rope rap lead back down the gully to the start of the climb. Two ropes would make the escape procedure much more enjoyable. At the end of what is usually the sixth pitch the **First Tower** is reached. This is passed on the right with an upward trending traverse (5.7). Don't be tempted to run this pitch all the way to the notch, as many before you have, heinous leader-paralizing rope drag will result. Instead, the leader should trend high as he rounds the steep face, aiming for a small horn/tower above the notch. It is easy to belay from here. Have the second stay low, below your stance and belay them directly to the notch. Rap or downclimb off the horn.

From the notch it is your last chance for easy down escape by rapping into the gully (past this point to escape off the route it is best to go up and over). Next pitch: to avoid drag as you climb out of the notch: climb the corner and belay short at the base of a chimney. For the short version of Moon Goddess continue up the chimney above, exiting to the left at the top of the chimney. A short rap leads into the gully but instead of escaping down the gully four pitches of fourth class lead to the summit plateau. Done this way Moon Goddess has only 10' of 5.7 on it and is only 12 pitches long, most of which are fourth class.

**To the top:** Climb the chimney mentioned above but exit right to a 20' long left facing corner (5.8). Belay on a boulder/ledge. You are now on what has been called the **Ibrium Tower or the Second Tower**. It takes three pitches to regain the arete. Start by heading up and right to broken ledges. Belay short to avoid drag. The next pitch is often missed, much to the parties detriment: start by down climbing 25' to a sloping but easy ledge system. Follow this for nearly a rope length to terraced small ledges at the base of a crack/chimney system that goes straight up. (Avoid the diagonal cracks). 140' of sometimes loose 5.7 regains the arete. Several short pitches, downclimbing, and a rappel lead to the summit plateau. By the time you unrope on the plateau you'll have done 15 or so pitches.



Caption Caption Caption Caption. photo by Robert 'SP' Parker/ Todd Vogel

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