

The Citadel - Edge of Time Arête

IV 5.10+ ****

Backcountry Permits :

Of course they're required if you plan to stay overnight. The first 6 miles up to Bishop Pass are Inyo National Forest. Once over the pass you will be in Kings Canyon National Park. Contact the ranger station in Bishop at 760-873-2483 or 760-873-2500. Or just search the web.

How to Get There :

From the small town of Bishop, California, on the East side of the Sierra, drive west on Line St. (aka Highway 168) 18 miles to the end of the road and the trailhead at South Lake. From the trailhead at South Lake, take the Bishop Pass Trail up over Bishop Pass (6.5 miles) then down to Le Conte Canyon and the John Muir Trail (another 6 miles).

Crossing the River :

If it is late season and the river is low enough, hike about 1-2 miles south on the John Muir Trail and cross the Middle Fork of the Kings River a bit upstream from Ladder Creek. From there, bushwhack uphill on the north side of Ladder Creek until you can cross it. If the Kings River is not crossable near Ladder Creek, there is a big log across most of the river just behind the ranger cabin (tree fell in 2005). The cabin is near the junction of Bishop Pass & John Muir Trails. This option will require some extra bushwhacking back down stream.

Protection :

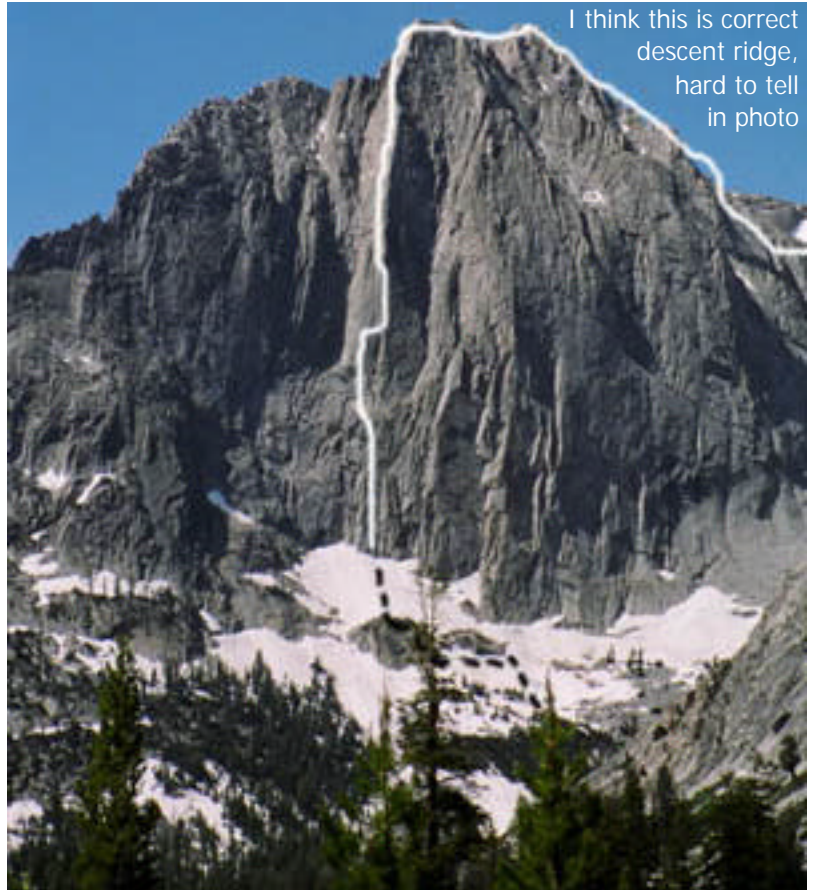
In July 2006 there were NO bolts and NO pitons on this route ... as it should be. The route generally protects well with a variety of sizes, but uses mostly medium to small pro. Several pitches have spots for a #4 Camalot.

Below is the rack we used for our ascent :

- 8- super thin Dynema 2 ft runners (this was generally enough)
- 0- quickdraws
- 1- #4 Camalot C4 (used several times on several different pitches)
- 1- #3 Camalot C4 (used often)
- 2- #2 Camalot C4 (used often)
- 2- #1 Camalot C4 (used often)
- 2- #4 Metolius TCU (used often)
- 2- #3 Metolius TCU (used often)
- 2- #2 Metolius TCU (used often)
- 2- #1 Metolius TCU (used often)
- 2- #0 Metolius TCU (used only a few times, probably optional but nice)
- 2 sets - BD stoppers #3 thru #9 (never used #3, used all others often)
- 1 each - HB brass offsets #1 thru #4 (never used, but good light wt. backup)
- 1- nut tool

34- Superfly nonlocking biners (wire gates)

total rack weight = 7.4 lbs



I think this is correct descent ridge, hard to tell in photo

1- 60 meter superdry rope

4- homemade snow daggers (.37 lbs for all 4) (used often on approach and descent due to early season snow)

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Final Approach :

There may or may not be a big snow field below the start of the route. This will depend on whether your trip is early or late season, and on how big a snow pack the Sierra got the previous winter. I have seen photos with NO snow at the base of the Citadel. However, when we were there in early July 2006, there was still a huge amount of snow that required special precautions. You've been warned.

Pitch by Pitch Notes :

Do not use the route topo in the new Moynier & Fiddler book "Climbing California's High Sierra" published by Falcon. It's CRAP.

Pitch 1 (5.7) - Begin by climbing an obvious left facing fractured dihedral that angles up and right. The Moynier book calls this the left side of a pillar. It could sort of be called a pillar in the right light. At least there was a definite ledge at the top, so I guess that made it a pillar. It's hard to say how long the first pitch was because snow buried the start. If the snow is all melted, you may need to do a bit of face climbing up to the start of the dihedral. Belay at a small ledge.

Pitch 2 (5.7) - Continue climbing the dihedral. The upper part mainly follows cracks on the right wall of the dihedral. This pitch seemed to use the whole 60 m. rope length. Belay at a big chossy ledge.

Pitch 3 (5.8) - Face climbing leads up to a big ledge with 1 good sized tree. This pitch seemed to use almost the whole 60 meter rope length.

Pitches 4 thru 10 are the core of the climb and follow both sides of the arête in some pretty interesting ways.

Pitch 4 (5.10a) - Pitch 4 runs up several 4th class ledges before coming to the real climbing. At the top of these ledges, the rock steepens considerably and you are faced with numerous ways to go. There isn't just one crack, there are probably 4 or 5. Several look a bit flaring and bottoming. I recalled that the one person I had managed to speak to about this route said "take the left crack". I took the left most crack in the vicinity, and although it was a little chossy, held pro well and climbed pretty nicely, with a small overhang near the top. The Moynier topo didn't rate this pitch but I gave it a 10a. If you belay at the tree ledge for pitch 3, I recommend quickly moving 40 ft up the easy ledges to set a new belay before climbing pitch 4. We didn't do this and I came up 10 ft short of an ok belay stance and had to set an uncomfortable hanging belay just above the overhang.

Pitch 5 (5.9+) - This pitch was basically a continuation of pitch 4 and was long and very steep. Neither Joe nor I can remember much about it. From our photo it looks like a combination of crack and face climbing up a huge dihedral that protected fairly well. Belay on sort of a slab under the first big roof.

Pitch 6 (5.8) - From under the first big roof you definitely go up and right. You can go straight up to the roof and lieback right using a great finger crack at its base that takes really good pro. This way gets a bit awkward as you try and turn the corner of the roof and is probably 5.9+. Or from the belay you can immediately move right onto a rounded arête and face climb up with no pro till you get to the roof's corner. This way is only 5.8, is fairly secure, and not too long a runout. Above the roof you hit a 5.8 fist crack that occasionally pinches to hand size. Assuming you don't have a lot of big pro, you can run it out or leap frog a single #4 and #3 Camalot like we did. The wide crack gradually narrows and becomes 2 or 3 broken smaller cracks that take good pro. The Moynier topo said to belay at a stance, but I set up a hanging belay a bit short of the stance because it was unclear which way the next pitch began. This pitch was not a full rope length pitch, probably 130-150 ft long.

Pitch 7 (5.9) - From the belay, head left and around a corner (basically you are going over to the other side of the arête). Higher up, diagonal back right by doing a hand traverse along a dike with not much pro. At least the moves aren't too hard (5.8-9). Pitch 7 belays under the 2nd big roof.

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Pitch 8 (5.10+) - From a small belay stance below the big roof, it's pretty obvious you go up and around the left side of the roof. We decided to break this pitch in two for communication purposes. About 70 ft up and just around the roof is a great small ledge that offers a perfect view of the crux, which is another 100 ft higher. Well protected 5.9 face climbing gets you to the optional (but recommended) intermediate belay. Well protected 5.9 crack climbing then gets you up to the 5.10+ crux. The Moynier topo described the crux as a "slot" which I suppose is technically true. But that word puts pictures of squeeze chimney or offwidth climbing in my head which the crux is definitely NOT. It's merely a break in a slightly overhanging wall with an angling flake in it that allows you to jam, lieback, and stem. It also offers good pro opportunities. Joe led through the crux quickly, and I breezed through it cleanly on second. And this was at 11,000 ft with packs on our backs so it can't be that hard. I personally gave it a 10bc rating rather than a 10+. While this pitch held the hardest technical moves of the climb, it definitely did not hold the hardest emotional moves for us.

Pitch 9 (5.9-10a) - Pitch 9 starts from a good sized ledge that sort of forms a notch on the arête. It felt spacious compared to previous belays and we could both easily stand up together. The pitch starts up a small left facing dihedral. 20 ft up you come to a small broken loose block (maybe 25 lbs) that is avoided by stepping left onto the face, then moving up and back right to avoid touching it and dislodging it onto your belayer at all costs. The climbing is only 5.9 but it gets a little run out here. You need to move up even with a roof on your left, then reach out left to place a small cam at the right edge of the roof. At this point traverse left under the roof and around the corner to a 5.9+ cramped left facing dihedral with a finger crack that takes great pro (this avoids the difficult 5.10 thin seam directly above). Follow the cramped dihedral until you can move left 5 ft to easy face climbing on a vertical dike. At the top, move back right and belay on a nice ledge shaped like a pedestal.

Pitch 10 (5.8 ha ha) - This pitch starts with a really dicey but short sequence of 5.9 moves right to a thin crack. DO NOT go up this thin crack. Continue traversing right to the base of a long arching dihedral. The lower part of the dihedral is low angle and wide with some big slabs in it. At the top of the slabs there may be a short 5.10 bulge. The dihedral then gradually steepens and goes from hand to finger and protects well. It ends under a big tiered roof. Belay under the roof to see your partner, or go around the right side of the roof to a slightly more comfortable belay on top.

Pitch 11 (5.5) - From under the big tiered roof, go out around the right side of the roof and follow increasingly easy climbing up and slightly left. This pitch can be a full rope length depending on where you stop.

Pitches 12 & 13 (4th class) - The final 2 pitches were long so we broke them into 3 for communication purposes. The first 120 ft was true 4th class but the rest was more like "Roper 4th class" with some moves up to 5.6 or 5.7.

Descent :

Most books say "follow the West Ridge toward Ladder Lake" and they call the descent class 2. That is pretty much a joke. The best you'll find if you do the descent text book perfect is moderate class 3. That's assuming the steep scree gullies aren't filled with snow and there are no snow fields at the base. That also assumes you didn't get off route on your descent. The mountain is a bit complex and gets little traffic so its easy to go the wrong way if you don't pay attention. We got it wrong and we did pay attention. Here is how I think the descent goes. From the routes summit, follow the 3rd class ridge for 300 ft to the true summit. From there, continue along "the same" ridgeline as it now starts to head gently down. About 200 ft from the summit you should come across a small rock walled bivy spot on a nice flat section of the ridge. From here the ridge starts to steepen. Our problem was that as we started to descend past the bivy spot we looked back and saw another descending ridge that descended right off the summit and looked like it headed straight for Ladder Lake. So we backtracked 100 ft and took this option. Actually we didn't descend the ridge itself, which looked very steep at its bottom. Rather we descended the broad 3rd class ledges just west of this ridge. Everything went well with easy 3rd class until the final 500 ft where we came to steep drop offs. This required a single 100 ft rap (on the far left) to the top of a steep snow filled gully and a second 100 ft rap down the steep snow (we did find another old rap sling here, so others made the same mistake). In late season, if you get off route here, there **may** only be scree in the gully.

A Word of Caution :

This is a Sierra moderate and we just gave you a lot of beta. But it's still a fairly serious climb. The route's flavor is somewhat like Mt Goode but it's probably 25% more committing than Red Dihedral (and this is NOT including the long scenic approach). If Red Dihedral didn't feel easy, you may find this route difficult. And that's in late season with all the snow melted and the river low. In early season the commitment factor may be a bit higher.