

# MIDDLE CATHEDRAL COMMENTARY

Roger Breedlove describes the climbing history of Middle Cathedral Rock, a cliff that offers some of the longest and finest free climbs in Yosemite Valley.

THE THREE CATHEDRAL Rocks and two Cathedral Spires are the most varied and interesting rock formations in Yosemite Valley. They are also the most beautiful in stormy weather: clouds swirl among the summits and pour across the faces, obscuring parts of one, revealing parts of another; snow collects in the gullies and on the ledges, and oblique sunlight is blocked and released by the buttresses, bringing their features into bold relief.

Middle Cathedral Rock is the most massive of these granite forms and has the clearest character to the climber. Its summit is 2,500ft. above the valley floor, its base three-quarters of a mile long, and its faces up to 1,800 feet high.

'Middle', as it is termed in the local climbing vernacular, lies directly across the Valley from El Capitan, and little more than half-a-mile away. The two rocks have many contrasts, both in their appearance and the way they are climbed. El Cap is stark and imposing; Middle is darker, more richly coloured, and has more weaknesses. Climbing El Cap means aid-climbing, massive logistics, and more than a few days' effort. Climbing Middle means free-climbing, and no bivouac.

The character of the climbing on Middle is strong enough to include all of its divergent routes and strong enough to separate it from the other formations in the Valley. In fact, climbers will often describe a route by comparing it to one on Middle, but will rarely try to describe Middle's routes by comparing them to any others. Its climbs are generally longer and less gymnastic than those elsewhere in the Valley. The rock is varied, calling for a combination of techniques. Rarely is there just a crack to jam, a flake to layback, or an edge or rough friction spot to stand on. Eric Beck has described this as "normal" climbing. When

pressed for an exact definition, he playfully finished his tautology: "The climbing on Middle itself is the definition."

Valley climbers have always known Middle's routes were mostly free, but in recent years, as sharper distinctions have been drawn between free and aid, the character of the climbing has sharpened: it can almost be said that all of Middle's routes are free. Prior to the 1960s, Middle was climbed in the same way as other large rocks, with free and aid-climbing being regarded as equally valid methods of getting to the top.

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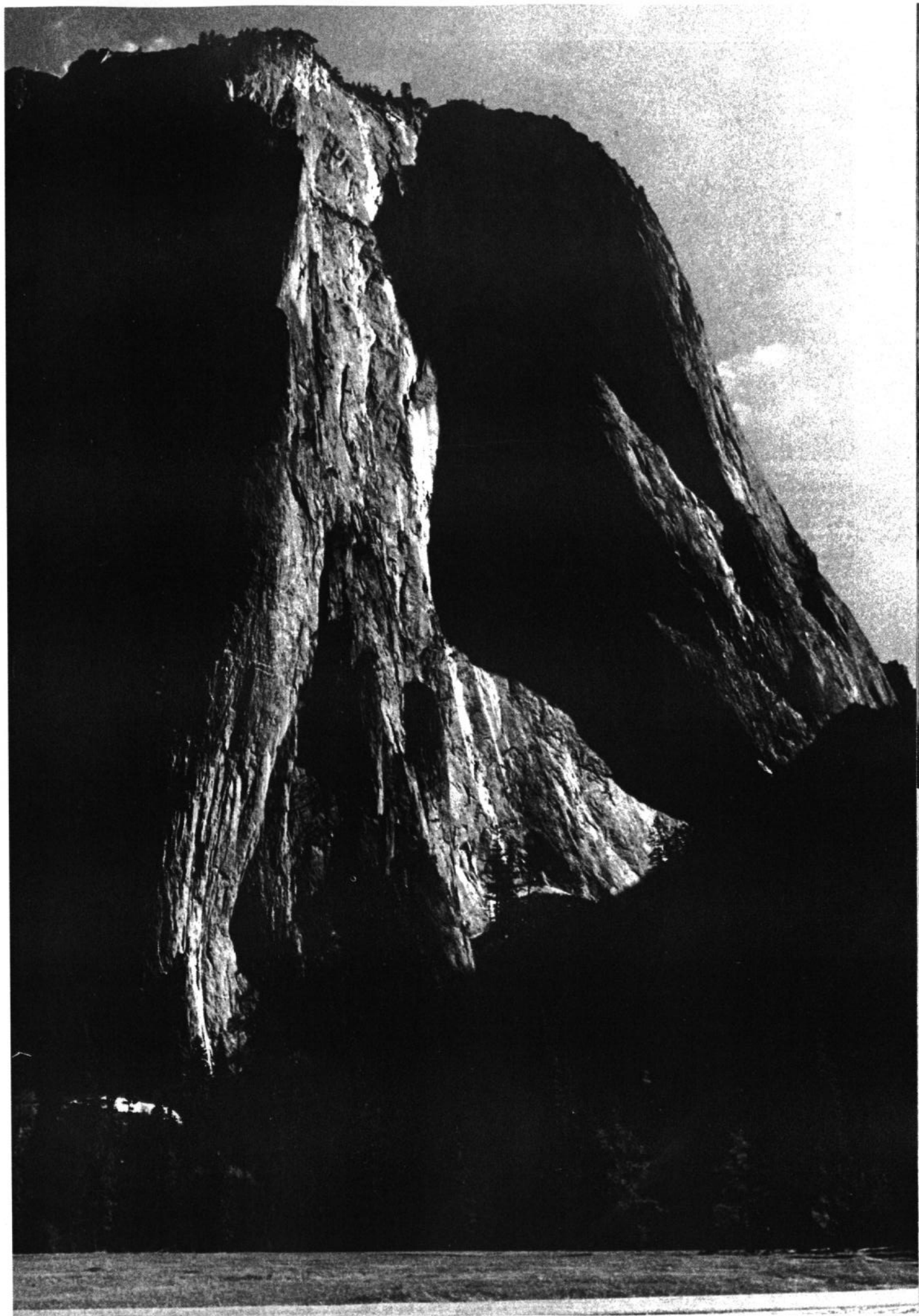
In 1954, it was purely accidental that Warren Harding and Frank Tarver, and Craig Holden and John Whitmer, met during their attempts to make the first ascent of the North Buttress of Middle. The biggest routes in the Valley at that time were the Steck/Salathé on Sentinel, the Lost Arrow Chimney, the South-West Face of Half Dome and the East Buttress of El Capitan. The North Buttress was probably easier than any of these routes, but it was longer and it was clearly the next 'great problem'. In the same year, Harding, with Bob Swift and Jack Davis, climbed the East Buttress of Middle. Harding's recollection of the event gives a good idea of the way the climb was made: "I think we spent three days up there on the first try. I don't remember why we came down. We went back later and finished the route in two days."

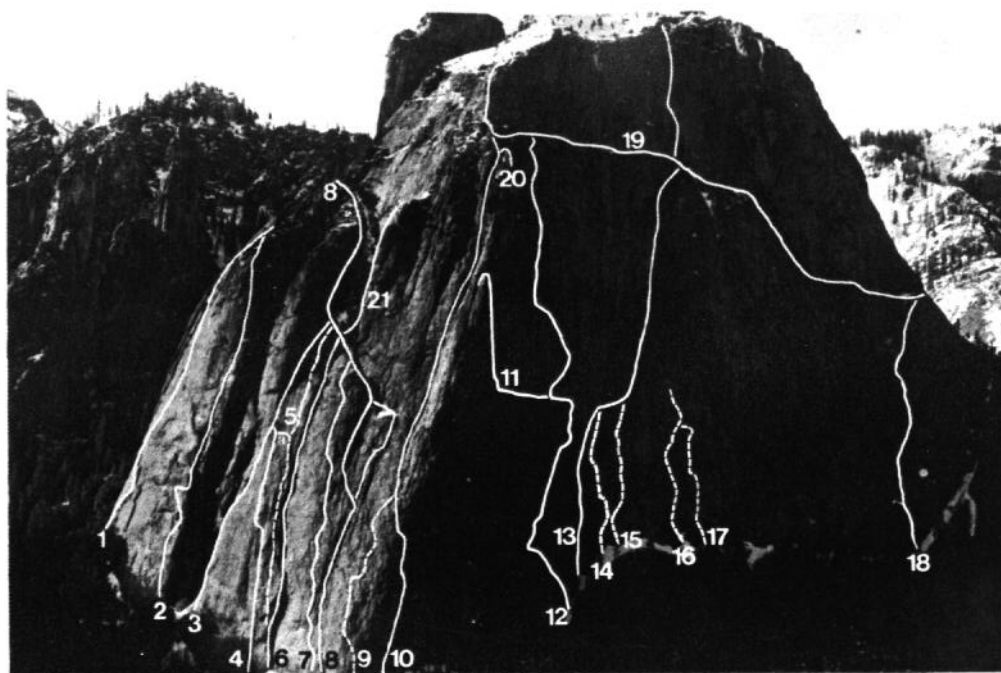
The East and North Buttresses were important big routes and were to become popular. For years the East Buttress has been the most popular grade IV in the Valley, and the North Buttress, as the easiest grade V, is popular with those who collect numbers or do the route in the erroneous belief that they will learn big-wall skills. The length and difficulty of the North Buttress are such that many climbers can climb it in

one day, either entirely free or with aid. Those climbers, unsure of their speed, who take on the dreadful task of hauling bivouac gear across the ledges and through the bushes, will surely end up needing it. Although many serious climbers will disdain so much easy climbing, the route is worth doing for its own sake or as an exercise or test of one's stamina.

While Harding was making his ascents, three other routes were done. None of them has become popular, and there is something curious about their locations. One feature of climbing on Middle is short approaches, but these routes are exceptions: all require climbs or hikes to get to their starts. The so-called North-West Buttress, climbed in 1953, is a short route on the slabs on the west side of the rock, above Bridleveil Creek; the North Face Traverse (1954) starts above the top of the Gunsight (the gully separating Middle from Lower Cathedral Rock) and ends on the top of the North Buttress. The North-West Face, located on the West Face slabs and climbed in 1957, also fits into this category. Because these routes are seldom done, little is known of their qualities. Certainly, climbing any of them would at least be an adventure.

In the middle 1950s there were few climbers in the Valley and even fewer who were highly skilled. No new routes were done on Middle until 1957, when Mark Powell and Wally Reed climbed a line on the North-East Face. This flat, 70° face catches oblique sunlight for several hours each day. It is roughly textured and richly coloured with tan and orange rock; only a few hundred feet from the road, it is the most easily seen of Middle's faces, and the one in which most interest has been shown. Powell's and Reed's route is on the left side of the face, following a crack system that starts 300ft. above the ground. The pair climbed the





- 1 East Buttress (1954)
- 2 Sacherer/Fredericks (1964)
- 3 Kor/Beck (1962)
- 4 Bircheff/Williams (1969)
- 5 Central Pillar of Frenzy (1973)
- 5a Traverse variation (1973)
- 6 Chouinard/Pratt (1960)
- 7 Stoner's Highway (1973)
- 8 Powell/Reed (1957)
- 9 Paradise Lost (1972)
- 10 Direct North Buttress (1962)
- 11 Turret (1962)
- 12 North Buttress (1954)
- 13 North Face (1959)
- 14 Jigsaw (1974)
- 15 Black Rose (1974)
- 16 Quicksilver (1973)
- 17 Freewheelin' (1973)
- 18 Flakes (1964)
- 19 North Face Traverse (1954)
- 20 Thirsty Spire (1954)
- 21 U-Shaped Bowl

Routes made since the publication of the 1971 Guide are marked with broken lines

### First ascents on Middle Cathedral Rock

Name	Date	Personnel	Grade	Name	Date	Personnel	Grade
<b>North-West Buttress</b>	1953	Bill Dunmire, Marj Dunmire, Jack Davis, Dale Webster, Dick Long and Dick Houston	II 5.6	<b>Flakes</b>	1964	Frank Sacherer and Mark Powell	III 5.8
<b>North Face Traverse</b>	1954	Dick Long, George Mandatory, Jack Davis and Bob Skinner	IV 5.8 A3	<b>Sacherer/Fredericks</b>	1964	Frank Sacherer and Chris Fredericks	IV 5.10
<b>Thirsty Spire</b>	1954	Dick Long and Bob Skinner	I A2	<b>Bircheff/Williams</b>	1969	Phil Bircheff and Steve Williams	V 5.8 A2
<b>North Buttress</b>	1954	Warren Harding, Frank Tarver, Craig Holden and John Whitmer	V 5.8 A2		1973	Kevin Worrall and George Meyers (with pendulum)	V 5.11 A1
	1964	1st free ascent: Frank Sacherer and Jim Bridwell	V 5.10		1974	1st free ascent: Pete Livesey and Ron Fawcett	V 5.11
<b>East Buttress</b>	1954	Warren Harding, Jack Davis and Bob Swift	IV 5.9 A2	<b>Paradise Lost</b>	1972	Ray Jardine and Rik Rieder	IV 5.10
	1965	1st free ascent: Frank Sacherer and Ed Leeper	IV 5.10	<b>Central Pillar of Frenzy</b>	1973	(with Traverse) Roger Breedlove and Dale Bard	IV 5.10
<b>Powell/Reed</b>	1957	Mark Powell and Wally Reed	IV 5.7 A3		1974	(Direct) Tobin Sorenson and Gib Lewis	IV 5.10
	1964	1st free ascent: Bob Kamps and Tom Higgins	IV 5.10		1975	1st free ascent of Direct: Jim Bridwell, Billy Westbay and John Long	IV 5.10
<b>North-West Face</b>	1957	Les Overstreet, George Gray and George Ewing	III 5.7	<b>Stoner's Highway</b>	1973	Kevin Worrall, Peter Barton, Ed Barry, John Long and Verne Clevenger	IV 5.10
	1959	1st free ascent: Steve Roper and Margaret Young	III 5.7	<b>Free Wheelin'</b>	1973	George Meyers, Kevin Worrall, Roger Breedlove	III 5.10
<b>North Face</b>	1959	Bob Kamps, Chuck Pratt and Steve Roper	V 5.9 A4	<b>Quicksilver</b>	1973	George Meyers, Kevin Worrall, Verne Clevenger	III 5.9
<b>Chouinard/Pratt</b>	1960	Chuck Pratt and Yvon Chouinard	V 5.8 A3	<b>Jigsaw</b>	1974	George Meyers, Kevin Worrall, Verne Clevenger	III 5.11
<b>Kor/Beck</b>	1962	Layton Kor and Eric Beck	IV 5.9	<b>Black Rose</b>	1974	Kevin Worrall, John Long and George Meyers	III 5.11
	1966	1st free ascent: Eric Beck and Mark Klemens	IV 5.9	<b>Alley Cat</b>	1975	Dave Anderson, Mark Moore and Chris Eastman	III 5.10
<b>Direct North Buttress</b>	1962	Yvon Chouinard and Steve Roper	V 5.10	<b>Pee-Pee Pillar</b>	1975	Peter Barton, Eric Schoen, Bob Ashworth and George Meyers	I 5.10
	1965	1st free ascent: Eric Beck and Frank Sacherer	V 5.10	<b>Picnic</b>	1975	Peter Barton, Eric Schoen and George Meyers	I 5.10
<b>Turret</b>	1962	Bob Kamps and Mark Powell	IV 5.8 A2				
	1972	1st free ascent: Jim Donini and John Bragg	III 5.10				

'blank' wall below the crack, by dint of resourceful use of aid and good route-finding. Even with the arguable differences between free and aid, and the great difference in technical difficulty, the Powell/Reed can be considered the forerunner of contemporary routes.

At the 800ft. level the route traverses up and left on a system of ledges to a U-shaped Bowl; from there it continues to the top of the East Buttress, making possible a quick descent down the Kat Walk. The Powell/Reed ledges and the U-shaped Bowl comprise the finish for two-thirds of the routes on the North-East Face.

Except for the previously mentioned North-West Face route, the next new route was the North Face, climbed in 1959 by Bob Kamps, Chuck Pratt, and Steve Roper. In marked contrast to the North-East Face, the North Face is forbidding: it is concave,

gets little sunlight, and is mostly overgrown with lichen. The line is obvious and, in 1959, it vied with the North-West Face of Half Dome as the second largest route behind the Nose of El Capitan. Steve Roper, in his *Climber's Guide to Yosemite Valley*, states there are few enjoyable pitches, and much dirty and decomposed climbing on the North Face route. It has had only a few ascents, the last being by Layton Kor, who climbed it with few aid pins in ten hours, lowering its grade from VI to V.

In 1960, Chuck Pratt and Yvon Chouinard climbed the right-facing corners on the middle of the North-East Face to the U-shaped Bowl, finishing on the Powell/Reed route. Pratt climbed the lower corners twice more, in an attempt to add a more direct finish to the route, but lost interest both times. The route is not popular: the corners are a major drainage of the upper

face and are dirt-filled.

In 1962, three new routes were climbed on Middle: Kor, with Eric Beck in tow, climbed a line between the Chouinard/Pratt and the East Buttress; Chouinard and Roper climbed the Direct North Buttress (DNB), which lies on the farthest right edge of the North-East Face; and Kamps and Powell climbed the Turret, a prominent tower on the North Buttress.

Roper remembers this about the DNB: "Chouinard discovered the line. It starts in an obvious chimney and ends in an 800ft. chimney. From the ground, the middle section looks like the start of the Powell/Reed; so we knew it would go. The first year we tried it, we got as high as the Powell/Reed ledges. It rained all night, and we escaped to the U-shaped Bowl the next day. The next year we climbed higher on our first day and bivouacked in the upper

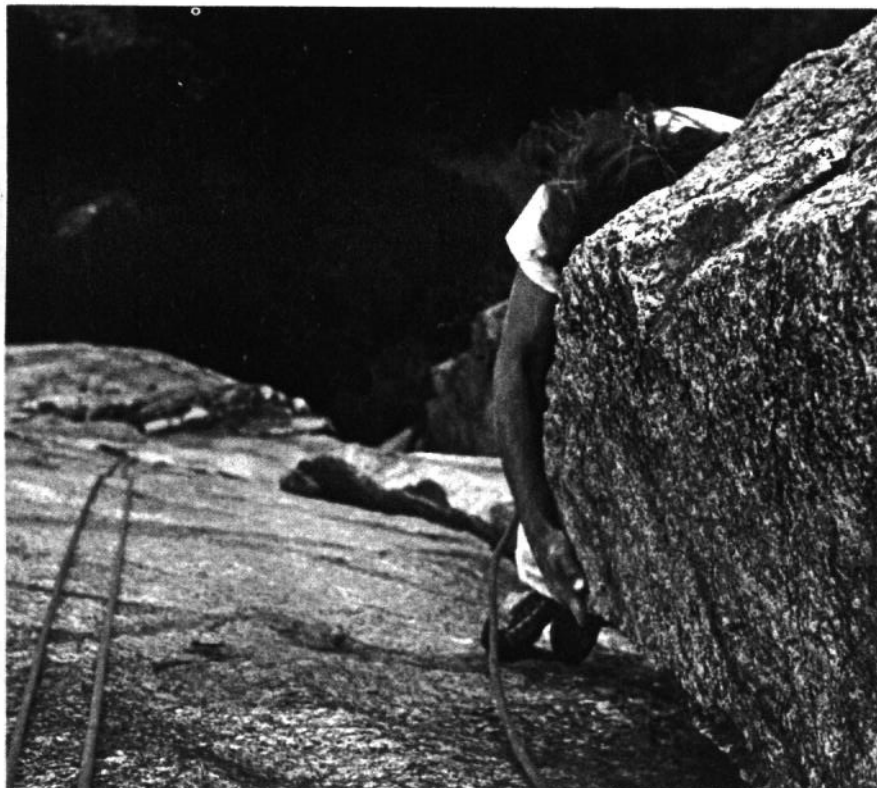


chimneys. It rained again! But we stuck it out. It seemed to take forever to climb those chimneys the next day. When we got to the Valley floor, our wet down jackets weighed seven pounds each.

"I remember Yvon and I thought no one would ever climb the lower pitches any faster than we had on our second attempt: we were fast, and we had done the pitches before; the few bolts were in place, and the days were long. We actually believed that. I think Kamps and T. M. Herbert did the second ascent in one day."

There were no new routes on Middle in 1963, but in 1964 four first ascents were completed. At this time the climbing character of Middle began to change, from mostly free to all-free. Frank Sacherer was mainly responsible for this. He was climbing at a wild pace, taking the aid out of existing routes, and climbing new routes in his bold, sometimes reckless style. Chris Jones, in his *Climbing in North America*, describes Sacherer and the times: "Pratt and Robbins had been the star free-climbers of the early 1960s, but Sacherer surpassed them. They had a deliberate, controlled style; his was to get mad at the rock. If Pratt initiated 5.10 in Yosemite, it was Sacherer who brought it to fruition. By 1966, Sacherer was through. He realized that if he kept up this pace he would probably be killed. His nerves were frayed, and there was a good job offer in Europe." Sacherer left the Valley, but his influence had been strong: despite all the changes in Yosemite climbing, many young Valley climbers can trace their style and ideas to him, although most are unaware of it.

*Undercling – East Buttress*



In the summer of 1964, Sacherer and Powell climbed The Flakes, a route on the far right side of the North Face. This excellent route, of moderate technical difficulty, has many of the characteristics of the hard face-climbing routes on Middle: good rock, long run-outs, and difficult route-finding.

Sacherer climbed the North Buttress all-free, with Jim Bridwell. Bridwell recalls that he didn't really understand what he was getting into when he agreed to go: "Sacherer excluded the water, the aid-slugs and the second rope. When we got to the base, he just started climbing. I followed close behind, and we climbed unroped for 600ft. Frank led the first aid-pitch free, and I led the second, or almost did. I was over the hard part when I noticed how impatient he was. I tried to hurry, fell off, and landed right on top of him. He was furious. He cursed me. He wouldn't let me lead any of the other pitches."

Spurred by Sacherer's ascents, Bob Kamps and Tom Higgins climbed the Powell/Reed, free. Higgins was a teenager and had been to the Valley only once or twice before. He was appalled by the size of the wall and by their project, a one-day, all-free ascent. Higgins got the lead that turned out to be the crux. He climbed up and down, and finally got it. He recalls: "Kamps came up and somehow just popped off. I wasn't paying much attention and dropped him 15ft. My first thought was: 'Oh, my God, I've dropped Mr. Kamps!' He said something like: 'You're not supposed to take leader falls when you're following.' I was horrified. I've never been so embarrassed."

A few days later, on the second free



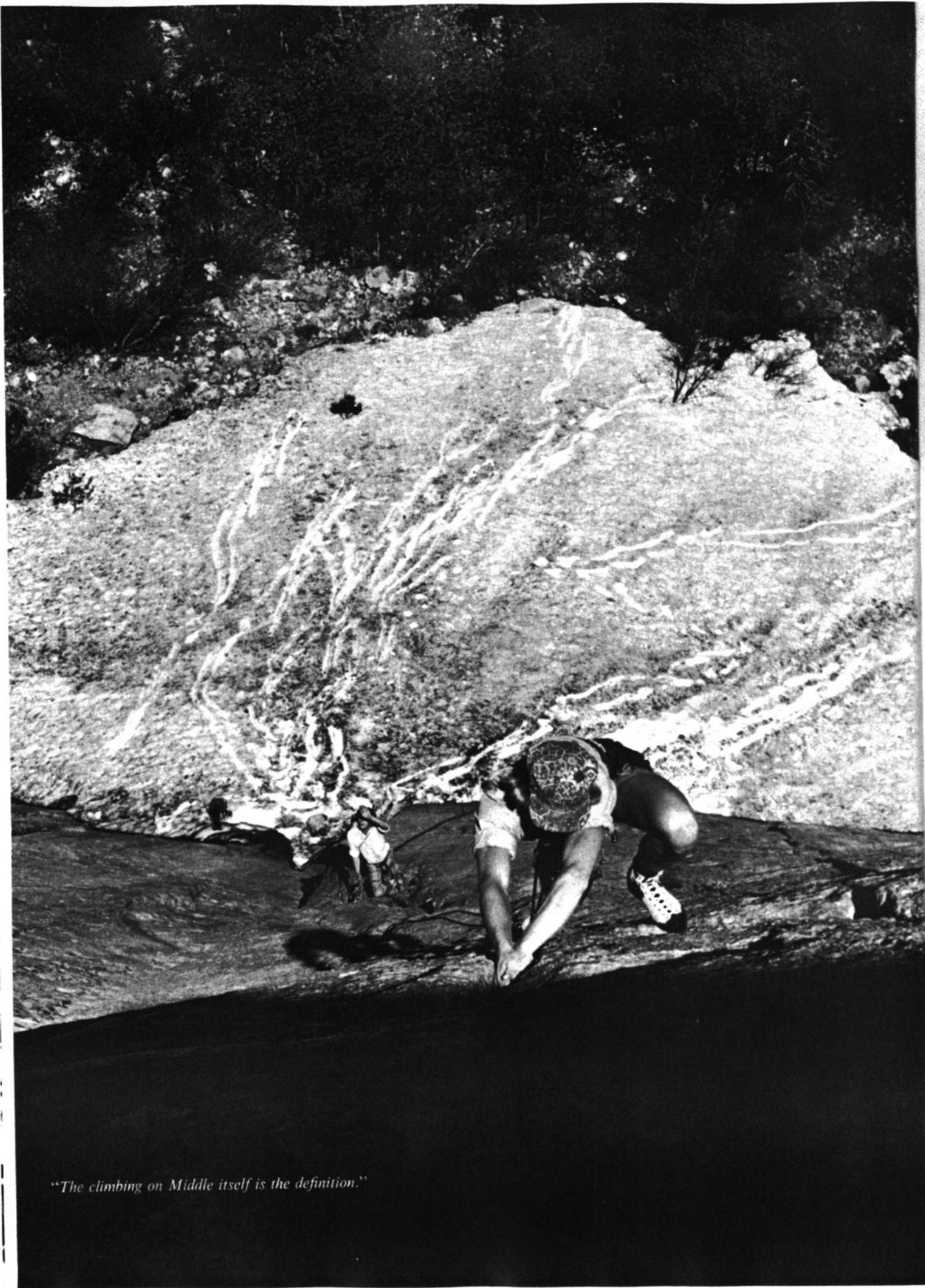
*Birchell/Williams – Pitch 1*

ascent, Sacherer bypassed the crux by easy face-climbing to its left. His ascent set off a controversy: had he done the route, or a variation? One side insisted that a valid free ascent must follow the aid-line; the other argued that free variations are corrections of route-finding errors. Although most climbers would agree that it doesn't matter whether the actual climbing fits neatly into abstract definitions, this sort of argument seems inevitable when climbers are pushing their limits and redefining the standards.

Above its third pitch, the Powell/Reed follows a dirty, usually wet, crack system. No one who climbed the route in the 1960s seems to remember it as dirty, but it is seldom done nowadays, partly because of the messy pitches, and partly because there are newer, better routes on the face. The Powell/Reed is the only free route on Middle that has almost nothing to recommend it.

In the same month that the Powell/Reed was climbed free, Chris Fredericks and Sacherer climbed a line between the East Buttress and the Kor/Beck Route. Before teaming with Sacherer, Fredericks had attempted the route three times and had done half the hard climbing. The route was nicknamed 'Fredericks' Folly', but Fredericks deserves much credit for sticking to his ideas and coming off the route rather than doing it with aid. Fredericks has this to say: "For us, the big routes were on Middle, not El Cap. We were doing short free-routes, and Middle was the place to do long free-routes. We could climb them in one day, even if they involved 5.9 or 5.10. With no hauling or slow aid-work, we could move. Climbing on Middle was somehow less like Yosemite and more like an alpine ascent."

The Sacherer/Fredericks is an excellent climb, but it has had few ascents, perhaps



*"The climbing on Middle itself is the definition."*

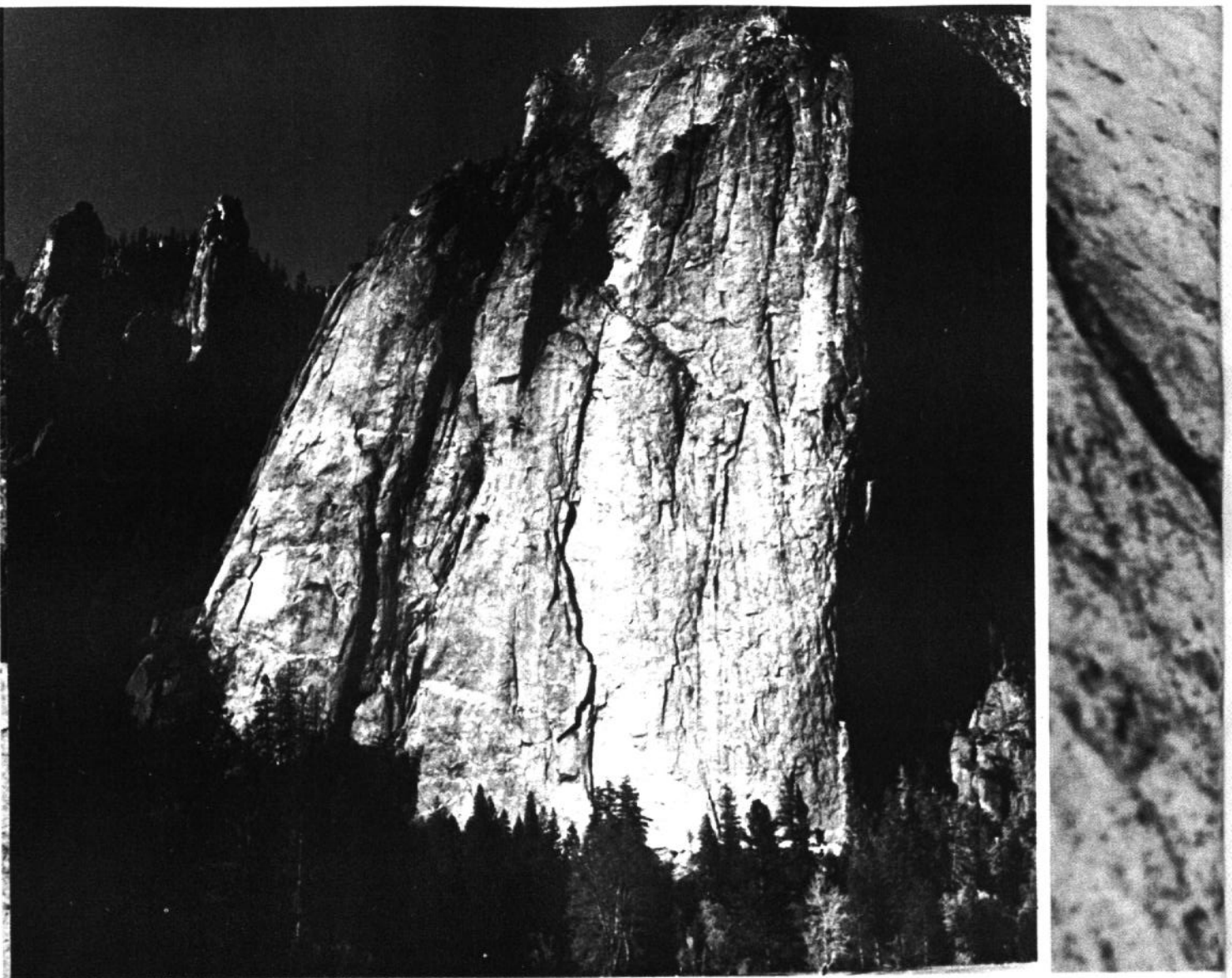


*"... a creative attitude, and the time and energy to fit the route to the features of the rock in a logical manner."*



*"Climbing on Middle means free-climbing and no bivouac . . . good rock, long run outs and difficult route-finding."*





**Above:** The North East Face of Middle Cathedral Rock with the prominent line of the Chouinard/Pratt Route in the centre, and the DNB on the right. This and lead photo: Ken Wilson; all other photos: Roger Breedlove and George Meyers

because there is no striking line to capture the imagination. But, for a few years, climbers were scared away by stories of Sacherer pulling up on weeds, and by the rating of 5.10, a grade Sacherer gave to only a few of his routes.

In 1965, Sacherer and Beck climbed the DNB free. Both had been on the route before: Sacherer had nailed it; Beck had attempted it, pulled an aid-pin, fallen, and broken his arm. The style of their free ascent is something few climbers will ever equal. The pair had spent the winter training and were climbing incredibly well. To find a free line, they deviated from the original route by four pitches, but were still able to complete the route in twelve hours. They carried one quart of water, one rope, one aid-sling each, and no bolts.

The DNB is known as an excellent route, yet it is not often done. Although there are difficult route-finding problems and long run-outs, the climbing is not as hard as on many other long routes. Perhaps it is not

often done because there are newer, more glamorous routes; although it is more likely that few climbers relish the thought of climbing 1,800ft. in one day.

Sacherer also took the aid out of the East Buttress, which he climbed with Ed Cooper. The amount of aid had been reduced over the years, and all that remained was a 30ft. bolt ladder. Above that pitch, the route has two variations, one mostly face-climbing, the other cracks. The route is excellent, however it is done. Its character is unchanged, whether one stands on the bolts or not, although the route is sometimes done just for the sake of climbing that one pitch free.

In the late 1960s, Middle was neglected: Sacherer seemed to have taken the interest with him when he left the Valley. Climbers were preoccupied with short, hard crack climbs and El Cap routes. In 1969, Phil Bircheff and Steve Williams climbed the beautiful, silver-grey corners to the left of the Chouinard/Pratt, but real interest in Middle did not begin again until 1972. In May of that year, Ray Jardine and Rik Reider climbed Paradise Lost, a new, free route between the Powell/Reed and the DNB. They had been climbing the long

free-routes in the Valley, when Ray sparked an interest in the line. As he succinctly put it: "I got us into trouble, Rik got us out." Paradise Lost connects cracks and corners, with difficult and sometimes poorly-protected face-climbing. The route meets the DNB near the level of the Powell/Reed ledges and, although it is possible to finish on either of those routes, most parties rappel off.

In June of 1972, Jim Donini and John Bragg climbed the Turret free. The route wasn't popular before, and is not popular now: at the last report, it was said a large, loose block had to be climbed.

In the early 1970s, climbers were adjusting to the clean-climbing, natural protection ethic. However, when applied to climbing on Middle, this ethic had to be modified. The older routes, following crack and corner systems, could be climbed relatively easily without pitons; but the newer routes were on nearly featureless walls, which required both pitons and bolts for protection and belays. The clean ethic has therefore come to include the concept of fixing pins and placing bolts, where adequate 'natural' protection cannot be found.

Inevitably, the style of first ascents has





*"Climbing a 10ft. blank section free can be as absorbing, time-consuming and serious as an entire pitch."*

also changed. Climbing 'blank' walls free, and having to place bolts and fixed-pins, calls for more planning than is the case on routes following obvious lines. Often, a whole day is spent on one pitch, with first one climber, then another, pushing the route higher, trying to discover the best line, and placing protection where it will do the most good. Ropes have been fixed to high-points, sometimes hundreds of feet off the ground. It is easy to cry "foul", on the grounds of older ethical standards, but these tactics have evolved from a combination of the free ethic and the nature of the rock, rather than because of any inability on the part of the climbers.

This new style has drawn a very clear distinction between first and subsequent ascents. The first ascent requires a creative attitude, and the time and energy to fit the route to the features of the rock in a logical manner. If the efforts of the first-ascent party are successful and 'transparent', subsequent parties can do the route quicker and, it is hoped, simply enjoy the climbing.

There is another feature to this kind of climbing: in fixing belays and protection, the first-ascent climbers make a lasting

statement of their ideas and abilities, which can be judged by later generations of climbers. The desire to place few bolts and fixed-pins, for ethical and egotistical reasons, and the inability to stop on hard sections, has led to the very long run-outs that are typical of the newer routes on Middle. But there is an attendant problem here: single bolts or fixed-pins, protecting long run-outs, can create potentially dangerous situations. Although it is easy enough to re-drive a loosened fixed-pin, it is more difficult to judge the quality of a bolt. There have been several instances of bolt failure: some have pulled out, some have sheared off under body weight, and some have been removed by rock-fall. Perhaps the best solution is to back up all bolts where their failure would result in something worse than the 'standard death fall'.

In 1973, four new free routes were climbed on Middle, and an aid-route was done almost free. The first of these was the Central Pillar of Frenzy. It closely follows the Chouinard/Pratt, sharing its initial pitches and, higher, a ledge. Because the route follows obvious cracks and corners, its first ascent had fewer problems than other newer routes.

The history of the attempts is complicated. In the late 1960s, Higgins started the route by attempting the Chouinard/Pratt free. Bridwell and Roger Breedlove climbed the first two pitches on a reconnaissance in 1972. The following year they returned with a full rack of nuts and two knife-blades. They were stopped on the eighth pitch by unprotected climbing. Later in the spring, Breedlove and Dale Bard traversed on the eighth pitch to the Bircheff/Williams route. In 1974, Gib Lewis and Tobin Sorenson nailed the pitches straight up to the U-shaped bowl. Bridwell, Billy Westbay and John Long climbed those pitches free in 1975.

The Central Pillar of Frenzy, with its two variations, is now very popular. Having climbed the first five pitches, which are all cracks, one can then rappel down, or climb two more pitches and traverse to the Bircheff/Williams route, or finish the route to the U-shaped Bowl. Each of these possibilities is a step harder than the one before.

The second of the 1973 routes, Stoner's Highway, was climbed in the summer by Kevin Worrall, Peter Barton, Ed Barry and John Long. The route was started because there was a blank section between the



Powell/Reed and the Chouinard/Pratt. One member of the party describes how the line was picked: "We got stoned, and yo-yo'ed the first pitch." There were four attempts on four successive days, each pushing the route higher. On the fifth attempt, the party climbed with bivouac gear. After a night in hammocks and a few more pitches, they reached what they called the top. Then, in October, Worrall and Vern Clevenger returned and climbed the two remaining pitches to the Powell/Reed ledges. The route has had only a few ascents, but is destined, by virtue of its consistently good climbing, to become a classic.

In September 1973 Worrall and George Meyers climbed the Bircheff/Williams free, except for the pendulum. They each tried that section at least twenty-five times, but were unsuccessful. This section has since been done free by Pete Livesey and Ron Fawcett who, surprisingly, rated it easier than the other crux. The route follows a distinct corner system and, although the climbing is unmistakably characteristic of Middle, it is mostly jamming, laybacking, and stemming. Many aid-routes in Yosemite are done free by pulling up on pin scars, but this is not the case on the Bircheff/Williams: the corners are clean and beautiful, and the climbing is excellent.

In October, Meyers, Worrall and Breedlove climbed Freewheelin', a five-pitch route on the huge, grey triangular slab beneath the North-Face. There are now four routes on this slab and more are sure to follow. Although dwarfed by the face above, they are nevertheless complete routes, and their difficulty makes them all-day projects. In the main, the routes are protected by bolts, mostly placed far apart. There are rarely route-finding problems, as there are rarely choices of holds.

Freewheelin' was begun with the light-hearted decision that the corner to the left was too obvious a start for a route. Quicksilver, climbed by Meyers, Worrall and Clevenger, starts in that corner. Worrall remembers this ascent as being special for an odd reason: "It was fun while we were on the route, and we did it on the first attempt." Both climbs are excellent and of about the same difficulty: Freewheelin' has harder climbing, Quicksilver longer runouts.

In the summer of 1974, two more routes were added to the North Face Slab. The first and more serious was Jigsaw, climbed by Meyers, Worrall and Clevenger. Clevenger tells this story: "The last pitch has a standard death-fall. I was so scared after a slip that I lowered myself on a shitty number-one stopper, which was 30ft. above my last protection - the belay. A few moments before the slip, the drill-bit chipped and a piece embedded itself in my lip. There was blood all over the place, which made it even scarier."

The second route, Black Rose (at first called Black Primo), was climbed a few weeks later by Worrall, Long and Meyers.



It follows a line between Quicksilver and Jigsaw. The route is not as serious an undertaking as Jigsaw, but is quite hard. It is named after the intrusion dike of beautiful black rock that it follows.

In 1975, the upper pitches of the Central Pillar of Frenzy were climbed free, and Alley Cat, a new route on the east side of the rock to the left of the East Buttress, was climbed by Dave Anderson, Mark Moore, and Chris Eastman. Alley Cat follows a five-pitch crack system to the Kat Walk, and is reported to have excellent climbing. In addition to the longer routes, two one-pitch leads were done at the base of the North-East Face: Pee-Pee Pillar, to the right of the start of Paradise Lost, and Picnic, on the slab that forms the first pitch of the DNB.

There is another route, as yet unfinished, to the right of the North Face Slab. George Meyers began it in 1971, by climbing a pillar at the base of the wall. He has returned at least eight times, gone through as many partners, and is seven pitches up. Though slow, this sort of climbing project, which, as Steve Roper comments, "sounds like a job!", lacks none of the spirit and adventure of most first ascents. Climbing a 10ft. 'blank' section free can be as absorbing, time-consuming and serious as an entire pitch.

George often feels oppressed by his 'Big One', as it has come to be known, and would like to get it finished. He is not trying to do impossible feats on the route: he is doing what climbers know to be possible, but he is trying it on a big, almost blank wall. His route in some ways epitomizes the newer routes on Middle, and perhaps points the direction for other new routes. Those who are repulsed by the elements of drudgery in his ascent should rest assured that some day the route will be a pleasant romp for some young climber.

There are many climbing projects left on Middle: there are new lines on the North Face, which would require only a slight extension of the current efforts for new routes; there are possible lines on either side of the East Buttress; there is a girdle traverse, which on Middle makes more sense than on some other Yosemite rocks; and there is still aid to be excised from a few routes. Of course, the rules could be changed to make it harder to get up the existing routes, thereby creating different sorts of first ascents. The newer routes could be climbed without chalk, or one could record which protection bolts one didn't clip into. Even if climbers exhaust all the possible new routes and do everything all-free, or change the rules and compile massive lists of 'firsts' for every route, climbing on Middle will always be challenging and fun. ▲

#### SUMMARY

**Yosemite Valley: Middle Cathedral Rock.** A concise history of the climbing on one of Yosemite's finest cliffs for long free-climbs.