

CLYDE MINARET

— The Sierra Nevada —

Southeast Face 5.8

BY ROBERT "SP" PARKER



The Minarets, Clyde Minaret is the tallest. photo: Todd Vogel

The Minarets area is one of the most beautiful in the High Sierra. Green tinged metamorphic rocks interlayered with quartz gneiss and sparkle amongst rushing creeks and scented pine forests. This is a popular hiking destination but the climber is also drawn to the jagged peaks of the Minaret Crest. Readily visible from Highway 395 and from the lifts of the Mammoth Mountain Ski area the south face of Clyde Minaret dominates the area and from a distance appears steep and blank. Even from the base of the face the way appears improbably steep, but upon closer contact the rock offers sharp edged hold and straight in cracks providing straightforward climbing. But the climb-anywhere nature of the rock increases the route finding problems since the options are plentiful. Consequently the route has developed a reputation for hard route finding and there are many rappel and retreat slings where the unwary have climbed themselves into deadends. Careful assessment and constant evaluation is necessary to ensure making the summit before dark and having an unnecessary bivouac.

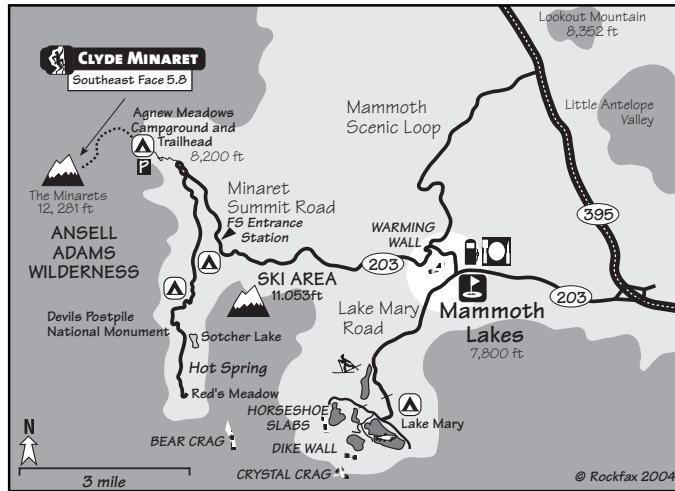
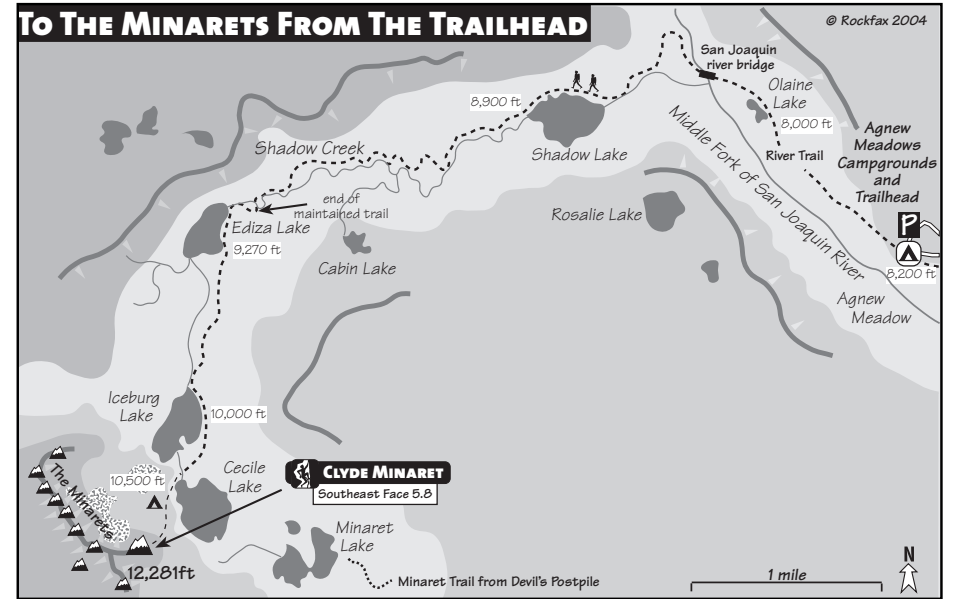


Photo caption right photographer

The legendary Norman Clyde made the first ascent of this, the highest point in the Minarets, solo in 1928 via the Clyde Couloir on the north side of the peak and his name has been attached to the peak in keeping with their naming after the first ascensionist.

The south face remained untouched despite its high visibility

until 1963 when Yosemite Valley veterans Allen Steck, Dick Long, John Evans and Chuck Wilts made the ascent in one long day from Minaret Lake on June 22. Their line started part way up the Clyde-Ken Couloir via a long traverse avoiding the difficulties of the lower face. A direct start was added later by unknown climbers and while slightly more difficult is recommended for the better line and higher quality climbing on solid rock.



APPROACH

From Mammoth Lakes take the road past the ski area to Mammoth mountain. During the summer a mandatory shuttle is used to access the Devils Postpile area. The shuttle will drop you off or pick you up at the trail. This may not suit the uncertainties of climbing so there is vehicle access prior to 7.30am and after 5.00pm. Once past the entrance station there are two options to approach the climb.

We recommend starting from Agnew Meadows and taking the River Trail to the San Joaquin river bridge and ascending to beautiful Shadow Lake. From here travel west up the drainage to Ediza Lake below the Minarets. The maintained trail ends here, but a use trail takes the south side of the lake and passes through meadows to Iceberg Lake. Ascend talus on the east side of the lake finding intermittent parts of a path until Cecile Lake is reached. Travel on the west side of the lake to a bivvy site on a bench above the lake and below the south-east face.

The longer alternative, with more elevation gain, is to take the trail from Red's Meadow to Minaret Lake. The lake can be used as a base camp or a use trail can be taken on the north side of the lake. Follow this up into a broad gully capped by a short rock wall that is climbed via a short 3rd/4th class chimney to Cecile Lake. Those wanting a higher camp can use the bivvy sites above the lake.

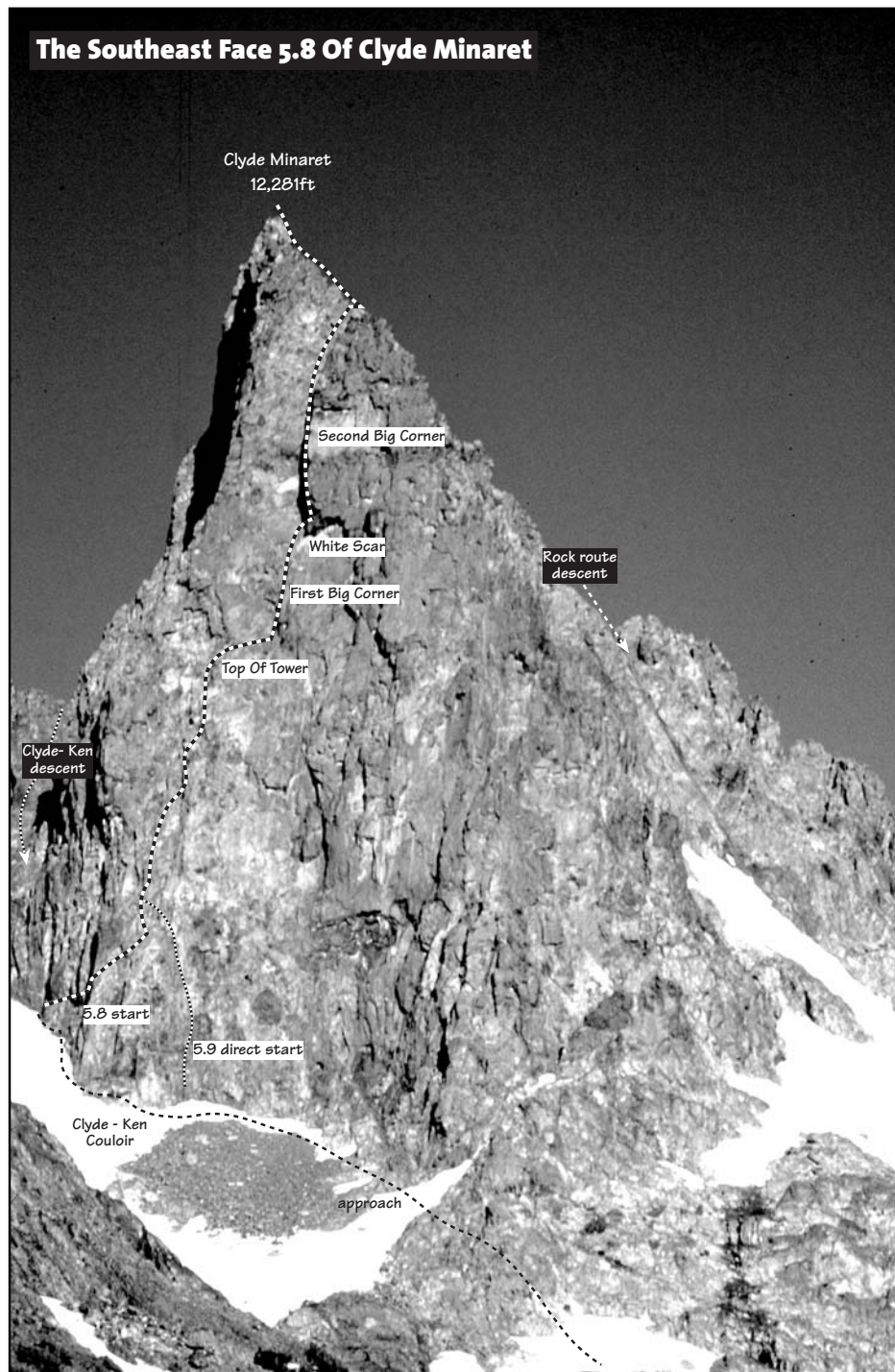
PERMITS

Overnite stays in the Ansel Adam Wilderness require free backcountry permits. These can be obtained from the Mammoth Lakes Visitor Center & Ranger Station, located on the north side of SR 203 just before reaching Mammoth Lakes. It is advisable to get a permit in advance: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/vc/mammoth.html> or call 760-924-5500. Camp fires are not permitted and camping is restricted to designated areas.

BEAR CANNISTERS

You will need to rent a bear cannister from a Ranger station or local outdoor shop.

The Southeast Face 5.8 Of Clyde Minaret



EQUIPMENT

THE CLIMB

In early season an ice axe and crampons may be needed to approach the climb and for the descent via the Ken-Clyde Couloir. The approach to the base is obvious from Cecile Lake. The direct start is the set of right-facing corners, left of center of the face. The original start requires ascending the Ken-Clyde Couloir for 200 feet where a cairn may be found that marks the start of the route on the shadowed southwest face. After two pitches on the regular route and three on the direct both routes converge at the base of a wide crack that is visible from the base of the route. Ascend the corner and crack, avoiding the widest part of the crack itself to a good ledge. From here a series of corners and cracks are followed for three pitches to just below the top of a broad shallow pillar. Belaying below the top of this sets the leader up for the traverse on small holds to the base of the first corner. Climbing this, avoid placing too much protection, or back clean it to avoid rope drag. Avoid the large ledge on the right because of large loose blocks and belay at a small stance. Climb over a small roof and straight up on small but good holds to the base of a left-facing corner with a crack on its right side. Ascend this to a good ledge. The corner continuation above has some loose blocks that can be avoided and climb into a wide slot behind a giant block. A short loose pitch above then leads to the top of the face proper. Climb on the right side of the crest on 4th class ground and then a steep, but easy, arete to the final ridge traverse to the summit.

DESCENT

There are two options depending upon whether gear or not has been left at the base.

The Clyde-Ken Descent. Follow down the summit ridge to the northwest until almost at the low point between Clyde and Eichorn Minarets. Descend the left side of the ridge down easy ledges to the saddle between Clyde and Ken Minarets. Descend into the Clyde Ken Couloir on the left side of the gully until a rappel anchor is found that will take one down over the large chockstone in the couloir. This is a double rope rappel and may take the climber to snow requiring crampons and ice axe. The snow can be followed back to the base of the route.

The Rock Route Descent. Follow down the summit ridge for several hundred feet until a descent can be made towards a tower on the north side. Beware of descending too early into the Clyde Couloir; the real one is the second main gully. At the tower descend to the left and enter a steep gully. The gully can be followed all the way down to open slopes dropping to Cecile Lake or a traverse can be made when on a ledge to the base of the route. This traverse may have snow on it in early season and be dangerous and tricky without crampons and ice axe.

Photo caption right *photographer*