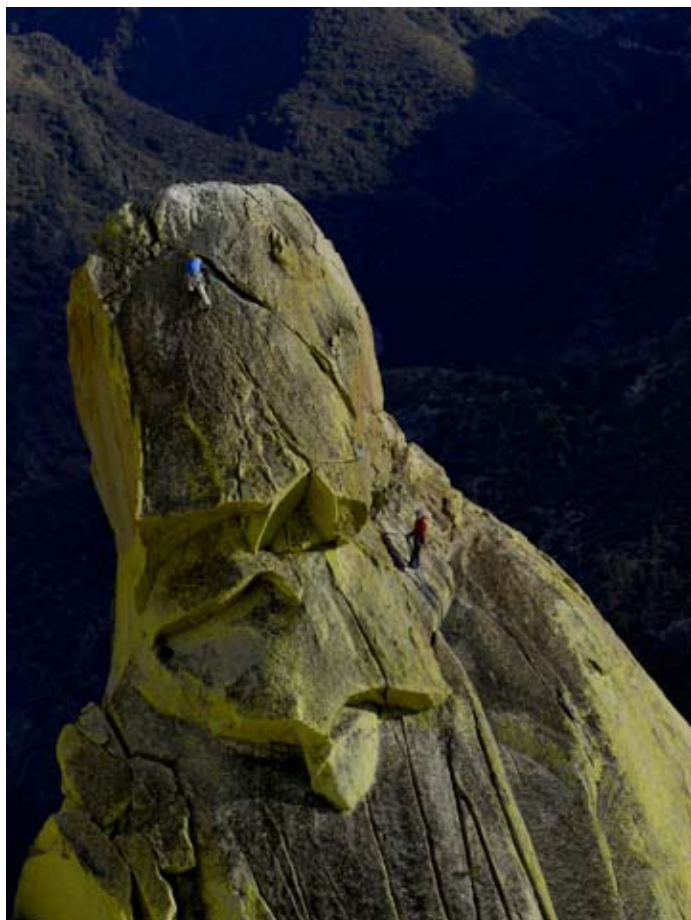


YELLOW BRICK ROAD (5.9+)

Wizard Needle, the Needles, California
Everything wild and granitic, in one 300-foot rock climb



Majka Burhardt closes in on Wizard Needle's summit via the last pitch of *Yellow Brick Road* (5.9+), the Needles, California; TK TK is on belay.

EVERY STORY YOU'VE HEARD ABOUT THE NEEDLES (California) is true: the place *does* feel haunted, and the climbing is *that* good. Towering cones of granite claim the horizon of this wonderland, near the edge of the Kern River Wilderness and at 8,000 feet in the Sierras. You earn your summits here, given the Needles' fluctuating temperatures, howling winds, and constant exposure.

Although you might not notice it at first, one of the better domes is the Wizard, a narrow, 300-foot formation just downhill from its better-known sibling, the Sorcerer. Beneath the Wizard's distinctive, cone-shaped "hat" (sometimes home to peregrine falcons), a perfect swath of yellow lichen streaks the west face. *Yellow Brick Road* ascends this via varied, quintessential Needles climbing—face, offwidth, thin (splitter) crack, and roof—all in two (or three) pitches.

Do the up-down, up-down again trot from the campground to the formations, and then drop down the appropriate gully. Begin climbing at a small, twisted pine 15 feet left of the *Yellow Brick Road* crack itself, traversing into that fissure via flakes and edges. The first pitch typically ends where the crack widens, but if you have the juice, link on through the offwidth for a 200-foot monster pitch. Legend has it a member of the second-ascent party, while following, lodged his knee irretrievably in the wide crack. His partner rappelled to earth and ran to the nearby fire lookout, where he begged the tower attendant for a squeeze bottle of salad oil. He soon returned to orchestrate a saucy rescue, and the bottle remains wedged in the offwidth to this day.

To begin the final pitch, belay from the ledge splitting the west face, heading into a right-facing corner. Thin gear leads to large horizontals before the "hat," surmounted via a few strenuous moves through the bulging rim. The views of the Kern River Valley from the summit are epic.

To descend, rap (north) 50 feet to chain anchors, and then make a 165-foot rappel to the ground. Start up the route at dusk and you might just witness the vibrantly lichened Wizard glowing in Technicolor around you—a haunting glimpse of the wild and yellow Needles at their finest. 🔪



The Beta

Guidebooks: The out-of-print *Southern Sierra Rock Climbing: Needles* (1992), by Sally Moser, Greg Vernon, and Patrick Paul. You can find a mini-guide at monsteroffwidth.com (Cummins and Cooper).

Equipment Shop: Mountain River Adventures (Kernville): (800) 861-6553, mtnriver.com

Season: May through October

Rack: Thin nuts, cams to four inches (optional to five inches); tagline or double ropes

Topo: Visit climbing.com/exclusive/classicclimbs for a free topo download, complete with gear Beta and a list of other nearby classics.

SHOW US YOUR CLASSIC PHOTO OF YELLOW BRICK ROAD AND WIN A FREE TK FROM TK!

Log on to climbing.com's Photo Post, submit your *Yellow Brick Road* images to the Yellow Brick Road folder, and on TK DATE, we'll pick our favorite.