

## **South Lake Tahoe Climbing**

By Chris McNamara

Review by David Rosenstein

The first time I met Chris McNamara was in the late '90s while beginning to fix pitches at the base of El Cap. He already had a reputation as a young man who had climbed the "Big Stone" more than just about anyone else. Given his young age and the sheer volume of ascents he had amassed, *Climbing Magazine* calculated that he had spent something on the order of 5 percent of his life hanging in aiders on El Cap. So I was a bit surprised when he came bouncing up the trail with a clipboard and warm smile and asked me to supply him with fresh beta on the route. Little did he know that I was in over my head and would make it up only three pitches before I retreated with my tail between my legs on my fist-ever El Cap attempt. The notes he took for each route were accessible to all, as they hung in the Mountain Shop for quite some time. Hand-written scribbles, chicken scratches and a plethora of icons and symbols would ultimately evolve into the authority of Yosemite Big Walls: the Supertopo.

"South Lake Tahoe Climbing" is another one of Chris Mac's growing list of cutting-edge guides. It covers quality Sierra granite, from area gems like Lover's Leap, Sugarloaf and Phantom Spires to lesser-known areas including Wrights Lake and Eagle Creek Canyon. It even includes some great top-rope areas like the "90 Foot Wall," an odd name for a wall that is probably less than 70 feet high. Maintaining his reputation, McNamara provides an easy-to-navigate guide for climbers of all levels and diverse styles. The book has more than 250 routes listed ranging from 5.4 to 5.13c. From pure trad to knob-and-dike face climbing and pure modern clip-ups, there is something in it for everyone.

The guidebook even offers suggestions for areas depending on the weather, and tables comparing the number of routes and grades for each crag. With all this information, McNamara has created an important resource for the year-round climbing that exists in Tahoe. The book is available in paperback as well as online in the form of an eBook, a downloadable PDF document. At press time [www.supertopo.com](http://www.supertopo.com) was offering the guidebook in either form for \$24.95. An interesting advantage of buying the eBook is what McNamara calls "Always Fresh"—a trademarked service that provides up to three years of updated beta on the guide's routes. The website also is a great resource for bonus information on

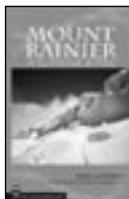
the routes, conditions, technique tips and a gallery of additional route photos, most of which were taken by famed photographers Jim Thornburg and Corey Rich. McNamara has revolutionized the notion of guidebooks, and has literally turned his website into an invaluable destination for the online climbing community.

"South Lake Tahoe Climbing" also touches on the rich climbing history of the area, including first ascent history by Steve Roper, George Connor and Aidan Maguire. One incredibly disappointing factor here is McNamara's complete failure to find the answer regarding how "the Leap" came to be named. All he could do was tempt the palate by distilling the folklore that insists two lovers did in fact launch themselves from the summit from of the crag. Oh, what a letdown indeed!

With the exception of that heart-wrenching omission, McNamara compiled a comprehensive guide. His work is distinctive due to his dedication to obtaining firsthand knowledge of the area. He apparently postponed writing the book for many years until he had had the opportunity to complete virtually every climb selected. (I believe the few that he did not complete were simply out of his free-climbing range.) Once he had amassed the information, he locked himself in a friend's local cabin until the project was completed.

McNamara truly has transformed the world of guidebooks. In some ways this can be perceived to be both positive and negative. Because he offers so much detail for each route, including crux beta and essential gear, the spirit of adventure is compromised. This book is better suited for the aspiring climber or someone who is going to be in the area for only a few days and can't afford the time to seek adventure in the more traditional style. Nevertheless, reading what a route is like is a far cry from actually doing it, and with the new South Lake Tahoe guidebook from Supertopo, there is plenty of doing to be done.

*David Rosenstein is the chair of the AAC's Southwest Section.*



## **Mount Rainier: A Climbing Guide, second edition**

by Mike Gauthier

Review by Jim Frush

Mount Rainier is arguably the most significant climbing objective in the lower 48 states. A peak or two in California and Colorado might be a few feet higher, but Rainier rises to 14,410 feet less than