

Artificial hold review ■ Rappel techniques ■ Grenoble rock

# CLIMBING

No 146 August 1 – September 15, 1984

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## The Shining Path

A 15-pitch sport route south of the border

## Hammer Time

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## Sultana

Mount Foraker – Denali's lesser-known companion





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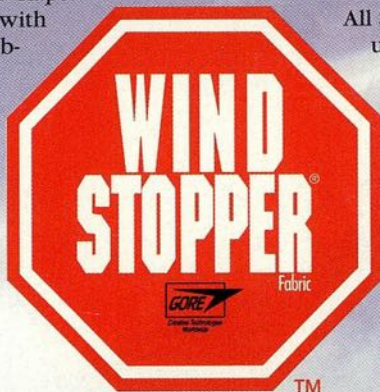
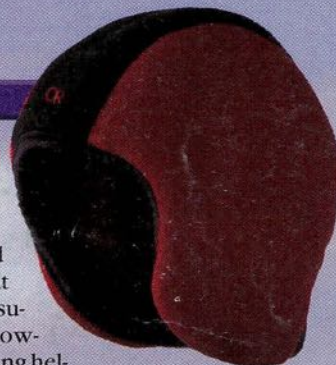
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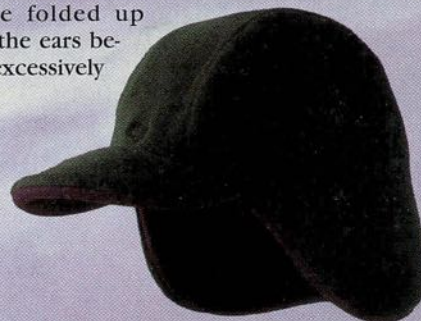
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# CONTENTS



## 84 Sultana

Denali may be bigger, but its lesser-known companion — Mount Foraker — may be badder. Here's a look at its roots.

*by Bill Sherwonit*

## 96 Hammer Time

Behind the walls of world-class climber John Middendorf.

*by Lisa Morgan*

## 104 The Shining Path

A sporty odyssey south of the border: a dedicated team engineers a 15-pitch limestone free route.

*by Jeff Jackson*

## 112 The Road to Obed

Move over, Tennessee Wall. A recent southern discovery dishes up some of the finest sandstone climbing — both sport and gear routes — in the country.

*by Rob Robinson*

## 120 The Climbing Gallery

From the Emeralds to the Chamonix aguilas to urban L.A.

Cover: Jeff Jackson on pitch five, *The Shining Path* (V 5.12+), El Potrero Chico, Mexico.  
Photo: Kurt Smith

Contents: John Middendorf in his trademark pose, on the summit of Cerro Torre, Patagonia.  
Photo: Conrad Anker



# DEPARTMENTS

## 80 Postcards from the Edge

Souls on ice. Confronting his fear of crevasses, the author comes face to face with Dumas's Hollowmen, those sinister dwellers in the ice.  
*by Greg Child*



Photo: Chad Hussey

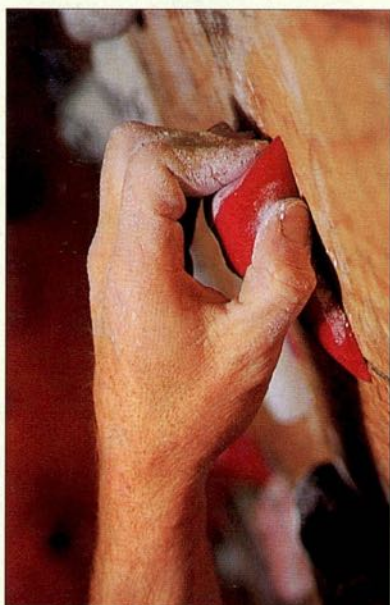


Photo: Duane Raleigh

## 130 Equipment

Up for grabs. Q: Why does it hurt when I climb? A: Because you missed *Climbing's* modular-hold update.  
*by Duane Raleigh*



Photo: John Middendorf

## 168 Players

A looney Brit takes a grounder — into the sea. And the face behind Chessler Books.

## 24 Basecamp

Grenoble rock (p. 24); Peak Lenin tragedy remembered (p. 30); new rock climbs in Rocky Mountain National Park (p. 34); kids and climbing (p. 40); Slovenian limestone (p. 46); Telluride's MountainFilm (p. 50); Himalayan report (p. 54); Passages (p. 62).

## 64 Hot Flashes

Alaska news: new routes on Mount Hunter, complete South Ridge of Denali climbed, and accident reports; freeing Valley walls the rage; Christian Griffith at Rifle; Scott Milton does *Bad Man*; and more.

## 150 Technique

Rappin'. A guide to troubleshooting climbing's insidious killer — rappelling.  
*by Jeff Achey*

## 176 Perspective

First thing we do: kill all the plaintiffs. Taking personal responsibility for our actions is the cornerstone of climbing.  
*by John Taladay*

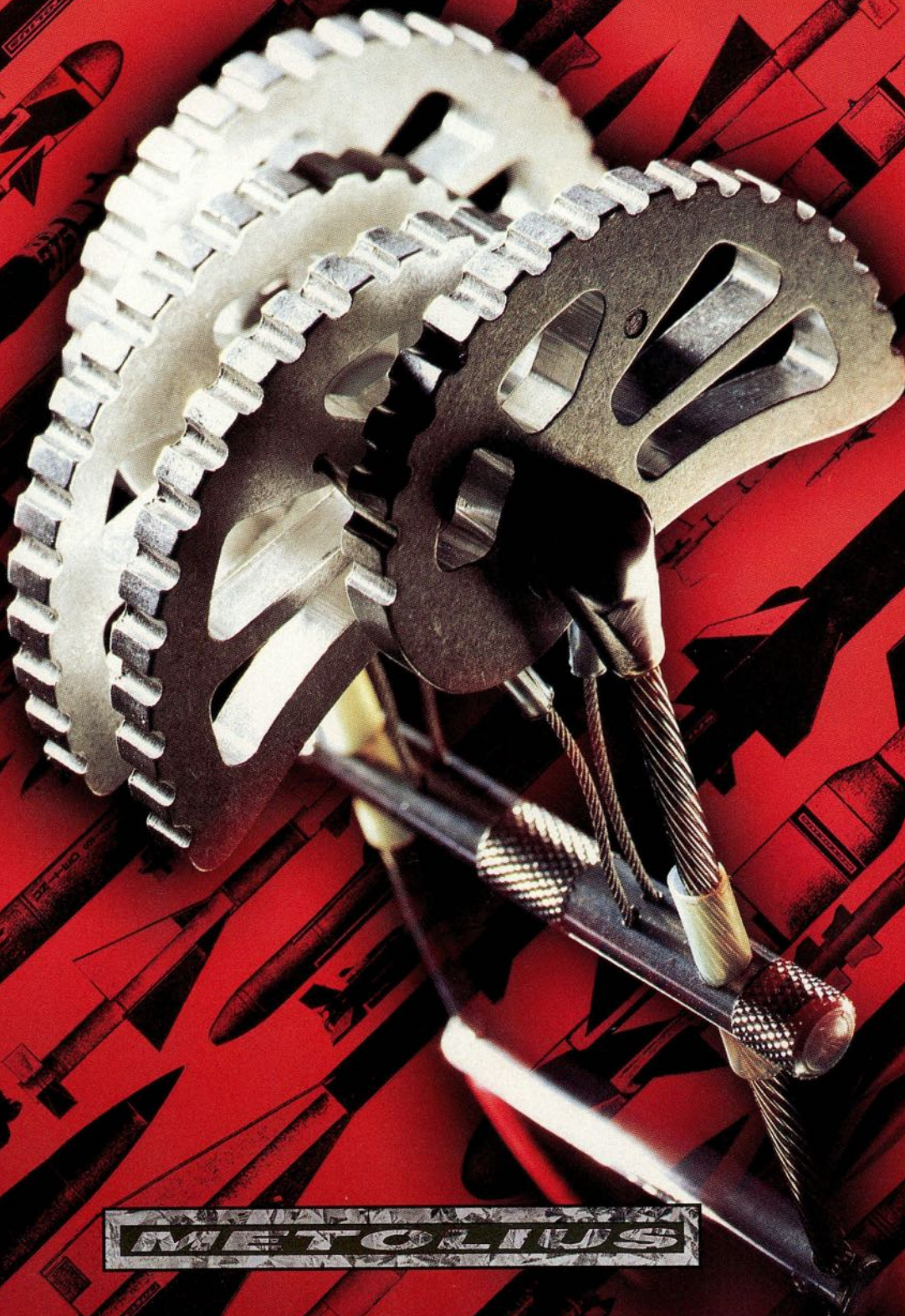
Editorial .....	10
Letters .....	14
Off the Wall .....	18
Access Alert .....	60
Competitions .....	70
Events .....	78
Quick Clips .....	128
Just Out .....	136
Medicine .....	150
Reviews .....	156
Guides & Travel .....	159
Suppliers .....	164
Marketplace .....	170



# **BOMBPROOF**

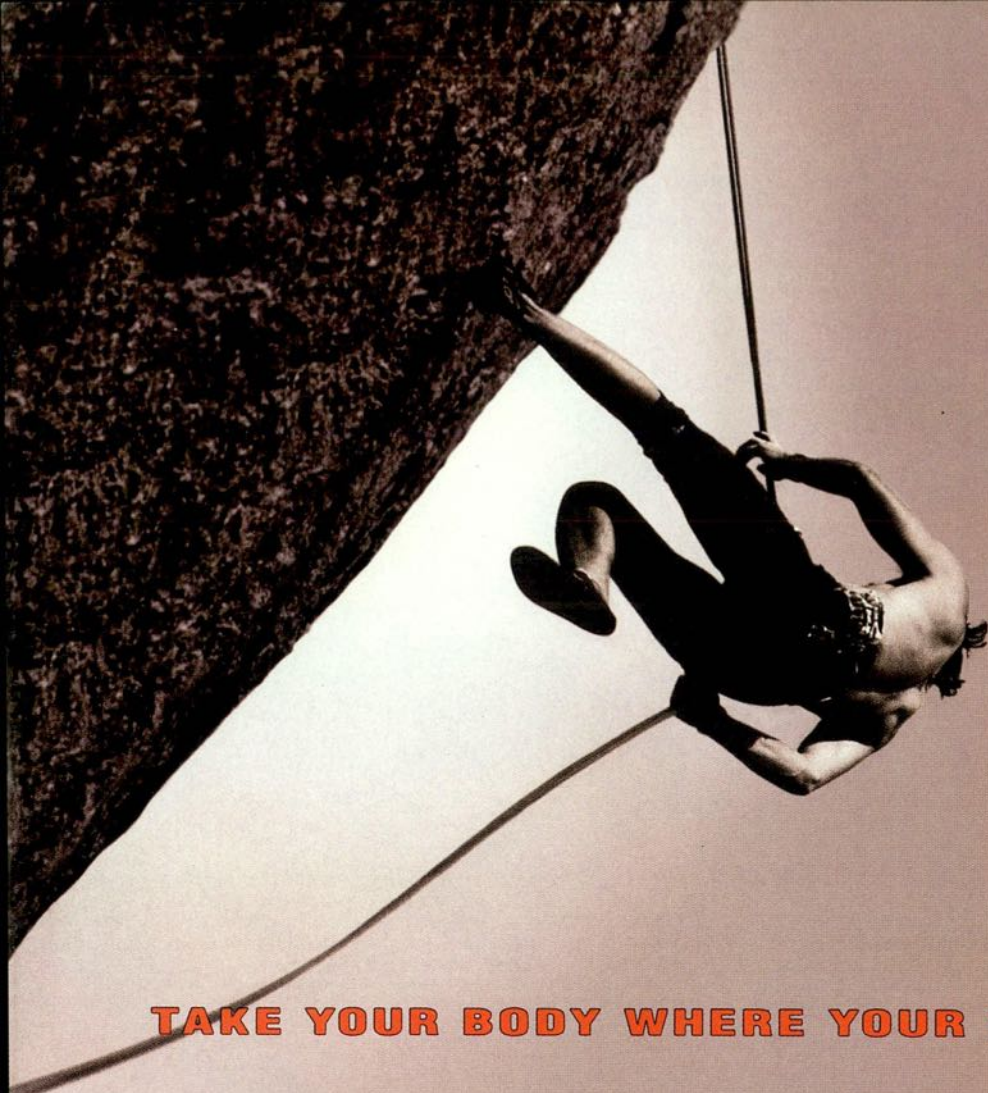
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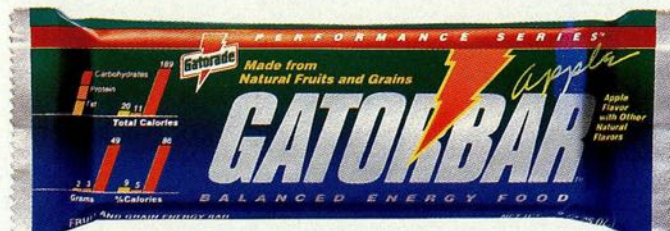
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## Cops and robbers

Nefarious deeds. An informant. High-tech surveillance. Undercover agents. A stakeout and a big bust. The scene has all the elements of a cheap thriller, but this story is real, and being played out in Yosemite Valley, with climbers cast as the criminals and National Park Service rangers as the cops. The question is, who are the good guys and who are the bad?

That depends on your perspective. In this case, I don't think anybody comes out on top.

### The sting

The facts are pretty simple. As many climbers are aware, the use of power drills in Yosemite and other national parks has been prohibited since 1990. In early June of this year a climber (who also happens to be a Park Service employee) overheard talk of other climbers using power drills on the *Muir Wall* on El Cap, and reported it to his superiors. Shortly thereafter, Mark Fincher, a wilderness ranger, climbing program director, and climber, and Keith Lober, a law enforcement ranger and climber, observed Scott Cosgrove and Kurt Smith on the *Muir Wall* through a high-powered telescope for several hours, during which time they saw both use power drills. The rangers obtained a search warrant, then walked up the back side of El Cap and waited for Cosgrove and Smith to get there.

When the two climbers, accompanied by the respected lensman Greg Epperson, who had been photographing their attempt to free climb the *Muir Wall*, first arrived on top of El Cap on June 12, Fincher and Lober represented themselves as climbers waiting for friends on the *Nose*. According to Smith, the rangers asked him and Cosgrove at least twice about their use of power drills during the course of ostensibly friendly conversations between fellow climbers. Cosgrove, Epperson, and Smith had been on the wall for 13 days and only managed to haul some of their gear to the top, so descended again and bivouacked on the wall.

After the three hauled the rest of their gear up the next morning, Fincher and Lober sat them down and told them they were, in fact, Park Service rangers, and that this was a bust. They then issued citations to Cosgrove and Smith for the use of power drills; Epperson, who took no part in the drilling, was cited for conspiracy. Cosgrove and Smith's power drills, Epperson's 20 rolls of exposed film, and a T-shirt from each climber were confiscated as evidence.

It was the first time climbers have been cited for the use of power drills in a national park. The charge carries a maximum sentence of six months in jail and a \$5000 fine, although such maximums are seldom if ever

imposed for a misdemeanor. It is unclear whether or not Epperson's film will be returned (he says that as a matter of practice he never photographs people drilling, minimizing the film's value as evidence), but it seems unlikely that Cosgrove and Smith will see their drills again. The citations specify mandatory court appearances for all three climbers, but as of July 12 a court date had not been set.

### Reasonable and prudent

Cosgrove and Smith started their free attempt in late April and worked on the route over the next six weeks (see *Hot Flashes*, page 68, for more details). They wanted to reinforce the *Muir Wall*'s existing anchors, and knew they'd have to place additional bolts to protect the free variations they expected on the route. Both felt that using a power drill was the most practical method available. Cosgrove argues that he and Smith are "just climbers trying to do what climbers have done

of controversy, and clearly distraught over the bust, Cosgrove and Smith are convinced their actions were reasonable and prudent. Referring to the deteriorating condition of many of the *Muir Wall*'s 30-year-old anchors before they were replaced, Smith asks, "Is it better to fine us, or to fill a body bag when an anchor blows?"

### Black and white

The Park Service doesn't buy their arguments. It was a "black-and-white issue" for Yosemite chief ranger Bob Andrew, who made the decision to go after Cosgrove and Smith: climbers have continued to use power drills despite the four-year-old ban, and need to understand that the park is serious about enforcing its rules. "We hear over and over again that climbers will police themselves, but they aren't doing it," says Fincher.

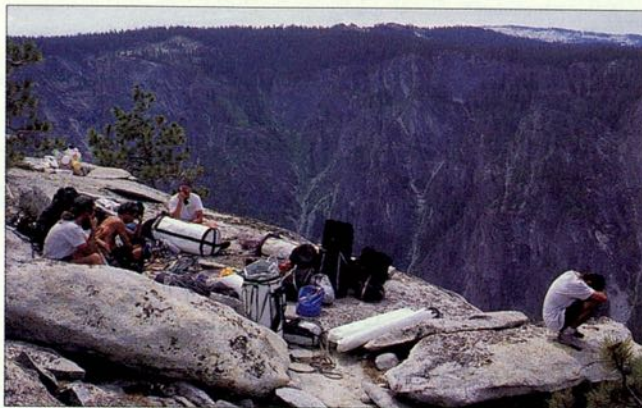
Land managers say resource protection is at the heart of their concerns, citing the increased population of climbers, the rapid proliferation of bolts in some areas, and the Park Service's mandate to limit the environmental impacts of all user groups. "We want to let bolting continue," says Fincher, "but power drills allow it to happen too quickly. We don't want every rock in the park to be covered with a gridwork of bolts."

And politics plays its part. Wilderness advocates have put increasing pressure on federal and state agencies to regulate climbing, and while some land managers are sympathetic to climbers' concerns, many are openly hostile to the use of fixed anchors, period. It should come as no surprise, then, that there is, in Andrew's words, "a very strong movement within the Department of the Interior to ban bolts immediately."

"The further climbers push [the use of power drills], the closer they'll get to even more stringent regulations on climbing," says Lober, echoing a theme common in many of the conversations I've had with land managers. "Land managers are trying to give climbers 95 percent of what they want," says Gary Colliver, the former climbing program director in Yosemite who wrote the park's proposed climbing management plan. "Resisting the 5 percent land managers want will cost climbers."

### A step backward

This strikes me as a sorry situation all around. As unpopular as the idea may be, I think that limited use of power drills in wilderness is legitimate. Maintaining existing routes with the best tools available makes perfect sense, and even bolt-intensive new routes may be appropriate on some wilderness crags.



National Park Service rangers Mark Fincher (in hat) and Keith Lober (with radio) cite Scott Cosgrove and Kurt Smith (far right) for using power drills while attempting to free climb the *Muir Wall* on El Cap.

for years." Smith says that the pair felt it was better to pull the old bolts and redrill the holes rather than add to the existing anchors. In the end, the two replaced 46 anchor and six lead bolts on the route, and added 28 new bolts on seven variation pitches.

Like a number of other Valley climbers I spoke with, Cosgrove and Smith were aware of the power-drill ban, but they also realized that it hadn't been actively enforced by the Park Service. In this regard, other high-profile climbs that probably involved power-drilled bolts, such as last year's free ascents of the *Direct Northwest Face* of Half Dome and the *Nose* on El Cap, certainly come to mind. Cosgrove and Smith also cited instances of existing bolts being replaced with power drills in recent years, supposedly under a permit system (a possibility contemplated in the park's proposed climbing management plan), but park officials say no such system is currently in place. The Valley activists I spoke with told me that they don't know of anyone who has applied for or gotten a permit.

Although embarrassed to be at the center

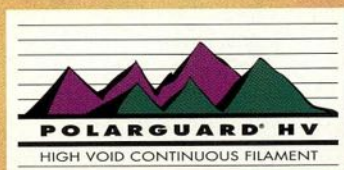


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These are issues that can and should be part of climbers' ongoing discussions with land managers, but while these discussions are taking place we should respect the existing rules.

I find it difficult to unequivocally defend Cosgrove and Smith's actions. After all, they knew that the power-drill prohibition was on the books. More important, they should have realized — as all of us climbers need to — the seriousness with which land managers are approaching climbing management issues, and the negative effect such incidents as the El Cap bust are likely to have on all climbers' ability to use fixed anchors in the future.

The actions of the Park Service are even less defensible. Going from seemingly no enforcement to a hammer blow in one giant step may make sense from a law-enforcement standpoint, but it also fosters an atmosphere of distrust and alienation that will poison a developing sense of goodwill between land managers and climbers. Given the apparent hands-off approach to enforcement that the Park Service has displayed since the power-drill ban went into effect, an explicit warning to Cosgrove and Smith would have been the better course to take.

Mitigating climbing impacts is an important task that all climbers support, no matter where they stand on power drills and bolts, and land managers I've spoken with almost universally say that they want and need the cooperation of climbers in order to come up with equitable and workable solutions. Taking a sudden hard-line approach on El Cap was a step backward for all concerned.

— Michael Kennedy

Comments invited on climbing management plan. At the end of July, Devils Tower National Monument released its draft climbing-management plan for public comment. The document is the result of a year-long series of meetings of a work group that included climber, Native American, environmentalist, and National Park Service representatives.

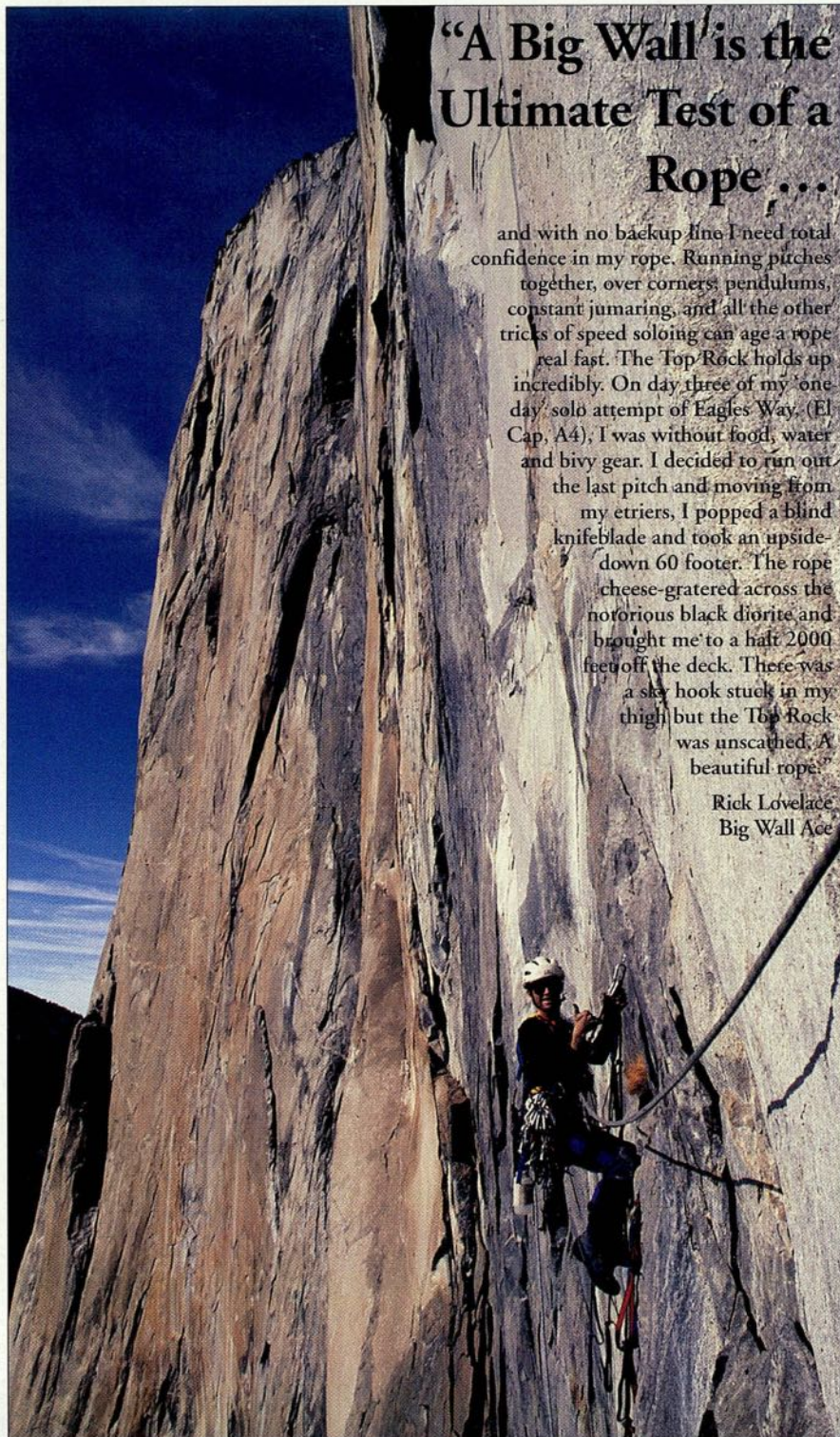
Under the plan's preferred alternative, climbers would be asked to observe a voluntary, month-long closure of Devils Tower each June to allow Native Americans to conduct traditional cultural ceremonies; the closure would become mandatory if not judged successful after an evaluation period. No new bolted routes would be permitted, but replacement of existing bolts would be allowed under a permit system. Climbing within 50 meters of an occupied raptor nest would be restricted until the young birds are fledged, usually between mid-June and mid-July.

Copies of the plan are available from Devils Tower National Monument, P.O. Box 8, Devils Tower, WY 82714. Comments, which are due October 31, 1994, should be directed to Deborah Liggett, Superintendent, at the same address.

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Rick Lovelace  
Big Wall Ace



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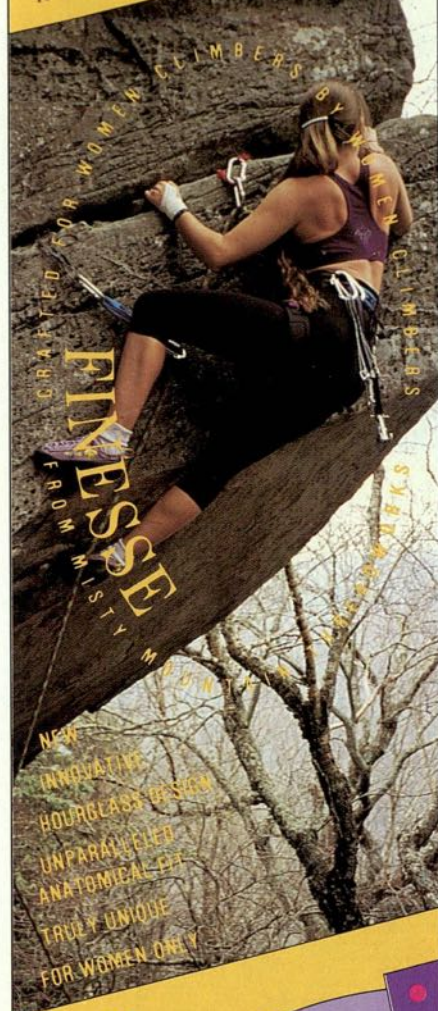
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## Tibet aid

Climbers seem to be showing increased interest and concern toward the ongoing human rights crisis in Tibet (Perspective, No. 145). What some climbers may not know is that there is a way to help the Tibetans right here at home.

Following the Chinese invasion of Tibet and the revolution of 1959, many Tibetans, including the Dalai Lama, fled to neighboring countries. Estimates are that as many as 200,000 Tibetan refugees live in the surrounding countries of India, Nepal, and Bhutan.

In 1990, Congress issued 1000 visas to some of the displaced Tibetans. These Tibetans were dispersed among 20 "cluster" cities throughout the United States, from New York to Seattle. The Tibetan U.S. Resettlement Project is a volunteer, grassroots effort to help these Tibetans. There are plenty of ways to get involved, including pro bono legal and medical assistance, English instruction, fund raising, guidance through logistical problems of being a working U.S. citizen, hanging out, and, of course, taking the Tibetans to the crags.

The U.S. government, in an attempt to appease China, has refused to grant these Tibetans refugee status, so they are not eligible for the traditional social programs, such as health care and unemployment benefits. This also means that our help is that much more important.

To find out if you are in or near a cluster city, you can try to look up the Tibetan Resettlement Program in the phone book, or contact the International Campaign for Tibet at (202) 628-4123.

— Scott Jerger  
Austin, Texas

## Ticked off

Hot Flashes (No. 144) only mentioned part of the story concerning what went on at Hueco Tanks last winter. While the bouldering successes of Elie Chevieux and Bobbi Bensman are significant, they in no way compare to the damage inflicted on the park by a minority of chisel-wielding, pseudo-climbers.

These rogues chipped holds on climbs as moderate as V5 and as difficult as V9. In the process of bringing the problems down to their level, the

cheats took something away from all the climbers who will come after; not to mention those who knew and climbed the problems in their original state. Many of the chiseled problems were Hueco Tanks classics that had seen many ascents in their original, unmarred state. Others were testpieces that only a handful of climbers managed to send before they were destroyed.

Another disturbing trend at the park this winter was the gratuitous use of tick marks. Boulder problems had two-foot chalk stripes pointing to obvious holds and X marks next to other holds. Some problems looked as if someone had played handball against the rock with a Bison Ball. The overticking could lead to access problems, especially at a park such as Hueco where access is already a sensitive issue. Problems covered with all sorts of stripes, circles, and Xs look trashy and unnatural.

Climbers need to realize that it is a privilege to climb at Hueco, and if we are not careful and considerate of other park users, there will be no more climbing at the park. To this end, please keep ticking to a minimum, or clean up your mess after you finish working a problem. Everybody will be happier in the end. As for those "climbers" out there who feel compelled to chip holds, you are not welcome back.

— Chris Baker  
El Paso, Texas

## Open questions

I read Alison Osius' article "Open, Shut" (Competitions, No. 144), and what she said there, from my point of view, is absolutely correct. On the other hand, as she knows, the CEC (UIAA Competitions Commission) is a very flexible organization, and we will find a solution which will satisfy the climbers as well as the organizers. It was never planned just to stop the Open. It was always seen together with an increase of the number of the quota as well as the increase of the international series.

— Robert Renzler  
UIAA Competitions  
Commission, Austria

In her piece "Open, Shut," Alison Osius uses the unsharpened edge of

## Stamp Collector's Corner



One of a set of three Indonesian stamps commemorating adventure sports.



Because you **never** know what's in the water.



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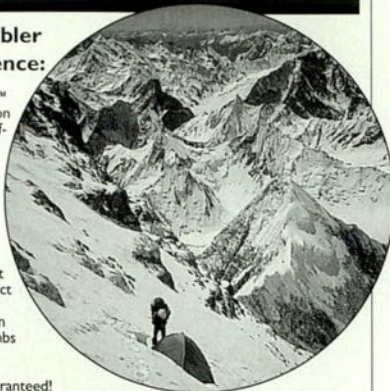
- Factory seam taped

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#6  
**A TRUE STORY!**

## "K2's Wind Driven Blizzard"

Dear Todd (Bibler)—  
There are reasons why Jonathon Pratt and I were able to make the second ascent, oxygenless, of K2's West Ridge: **6900m**—pushed up to a tiny ledge, enough for 7/8 of the Eldorado. Gusts



buffeted us as we roped the tent down in the all out gale...no way we could have put up a conventional tent in that howl. **7500m**—A slough from high up

buried the tent in a mound of snow...dug through 4 feet of debris... amazed to find it unripped and as strong as ever. **8200m, September 2, 1993.** Brewed our last hot drink in the Hanging Stove and stepped out to a frosty breeze. At 11:15 pm we reached the top under a full moon. Descending through the night and into the next day, the storm built to a wind driven blizzard. The final rappel landed us at our solidly standing Eldorado...In a flash we sat, calm inside, brewing a hot drink, sheltered from the raging weather by our superbly crafted Bibler tent. Thanks.

Daniel Mazur  
K2 '93 Expedition  
Missoula, Montana

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her editorial license to scratch away just enough of the surface of a complicated issue to reveal those details and comments which support her own opinions. The piece would better have appeared as an editorial or in the Perspective department than to have been presented as news.

— Ralph J. Erenzo  
*American Alpine Club Delegate  
UIAA Competitions Commission*

## Work with 'em

In Letters (No. 143), Roman Dial encourages climbers to engage in "civil disobedience, protest climbs, and blatant disregard" for National Park Service regulations. It's really a shame Dial approaches working with land managers in such an aggressively hostile manner. It implies that ongoing discussion between land managers and climbers must be solely goal-oriented, rather than to cultivate a process and relationship that fosters continued understanding.

My experiences with land managers have been, for the most part, rewarding. By taking the time to explain climbing and to stay in touch about issues as they arise, climbers around Big Bend National Park, Texas, have kept several areas open to climbing and made friends and allies among National Park Service managers.

A few years ago, a well-known "big-name" climber spent a couple of hours chatting amiably with the then-superintendent of Devil's Tower National Monument. They talked about the future of climbing and climbing management at the Tower, and the superintendent later expressed how impressed he was by this gesture. His attitude toward climbers and climbing improved and he became less of a potential adversary and more of a partner in the process of balancing climber interests with those of other users.

Right now, there are several climbing areas where managers and climbers are working hand-in-hand to figure out ways to allow for continued climbing given the growth of our sport. I would encourage more climbers to become part of this process. Sit down with local land managers, talk about climbing, find out more about *their* concerns. Heck, get 'em on a toprope or go bouldering — they love an excuse to get out of the office.

Treat land managers with respect and they'll most likely reciprocate.

— Martin Ziebell  
*Terlingua, Texas*

## Strong words

Last February I spent three weeks ice climbing in Valdez, training for big climbs in the Alaska Range. However, the

most profitable day I spent there was not a climbing day, but the rest day I spent in the Valdez Consortium Library reading back issues of *Climbing*. In Fairbanks, months go by without me even seeing a single climbing magazine; I found it most enlightening to catch up with what's been going on.

Most intriguing of all were the Perspective columns. The hours I spent in the library reading them served me better than all the days I spent shivering out on the frozen waterfalls. When the time came to go for it in the Alaska Range, I found my mind returning again and again to the insights I had gleaned in Perspective. Somehow, it was comforting to know the thoughts of other risk-taking climbers and how they deal with their fears and doubts. My readings of your magazine allowed me to extend my limits.

— Ian McRae  
*Fairbanks, Alaska*

## Carolina coalition

I'm writing to inform readers about a climbers' coalition being formed in North Carolina. The purpose of this coalition is to inform and organize climbers so that we may better represent ourselves to state and National Park officials. This is not a social club and therefore no dues or fees are needed to join. It is simply a means by which we can represent ourselves and find out exactly how many climbers use public lands.

Joining will put your name on a mailing list to help keep you informed of access issues and other climbing concerns throughout the state. To join, contact Marc Driver or Jason McDougald at Appalachian Outfitters, 2447 Battleground Ave., Greensboro, NC 27408; (919) 282-5108.

— Jason McDougald  
*Greensboro, North Carolina*

## Eco-climbing

I have been monitoring raptors for the past three years at Pinnacles National Monument. I am one of those people who closes your favorite climbing areas. However, being a climber myself, I understand the climber's position — I, too, want to be out on those routes. Closures usually occur during the prime climbing time, leaving the rock available only during the off-season or uncomfortable weather. It amazes me how many people comply and how few problems the park has.

I want to personally thank all the climbers who follow recommended closures. I have personally seen our falcon populations prosper. (I have also seen how upset they become when someone enters a



Which explains why the Mountain Light has rapidly become the choice of

world-class mountaineers. It's constructed of a lightweight technical fabric from

# The Mountain Light

W. L. Gore & Associates, Inc. that features a Gore-Tex® membrane laminated to

## is the definitive

a Nylon Taffeta which is *guaranteed* waterproof, breathable, completely windproof

## multi-purpose

and rated for Extreme Wet Weather. So it'll keep you warm when you're just starting out

## mountaineering

and haven't yet worked up a sweat. Higher up, it'll protect you from blowing snow and

## jacket.

high winds. And when you're really working hard and pumping out the heat, the wicking

## We engineered

mesh lining, extra long underarm zippers and the Gore-Tex® fabric will help you stay dry.

## it so that when

The Mountain Light is generously cut for a comfortable fit and features articulated

## the weather

elbows to allow for a wide range of motion, regardless of activity.

## changes,

Even its full-featured hood has been designed for optimum visibility and freedom of

## you don't have to.

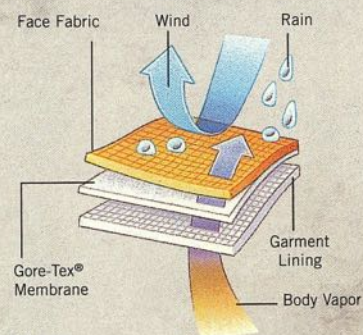
movement: it turns when your head turns, even when fully cinched down. Strategically

placed abrasion-resistant zones created from heavier Supplex Taslan add protection to

those areas, like shoulders and knees, that take the most abuse during an ascent.

### Mountain Light Jacket

- Double overflaps on zippers for extra barrier against weather. CoolMax® Vaporator chin guard at top to protect chin from zipper teeth.
- Double storm flap over full-center front zipper.
- Versatile shell offers four-season protection when layered with appropriate fleece midlayer or high performance underlayer.



### 2-Layer Gore-Tex® Fabric

### Mountain Light Pant

- Two-way full-length zippers open from waist or ankle for easy removal over boots, skis or crampons.
- Articulated knee results in less bunching, more freedom of motion.
- Rugged crampon patches on inner leg protect fabric from abrasion.

Photo: Chris Noble



Alpinist Kitty Calhoun Grissom with her Mountain Light Jacket and Pant climbing the Grand Teton.







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apparel  
engineered  
for those  
compelled  
to challenge  
the extremes  
of nature.**









Speed. Lightness. Agility. On big peaks, these are the keys to success—even survival.

Which is why we designed our new Karakoram Jacket and Pant to be the ultimate

expression of technical simplicity. These are no frills, no nonsense, ultra-utilitarian

pieces. Accordingly, they possess only those features that top alpine climbers demand—

**Karakoram featuring**  
nothing more, nothing less. The extraordinary weight-to-function ratio of the Karakoram

**Gore-Tex® 3-Ply Fabric.**

is the result of a new Gore-Tex® 3-Ply fabric that eliminates the need for a lining.

**The performance**

We laminate this new Gore™ product to two different face fabrics—

**of a technical jacket.**

lightweight Nylon Ripstop for the body of the jacket and abrasion-resistant

**The weight**

Supplex Taslan in those areas prone to wear and tear, like the shoulders and forearms.

**of a shell.**

This design creates a protective shell that is lightweight, waterproof, breathable,

windproof—and *extremely* durable. And of course all inside seams are hot-taped.

Which means this one garment is equally suited for technical ice climbing,

as well as high altitude alpinism and ski mountaineering.

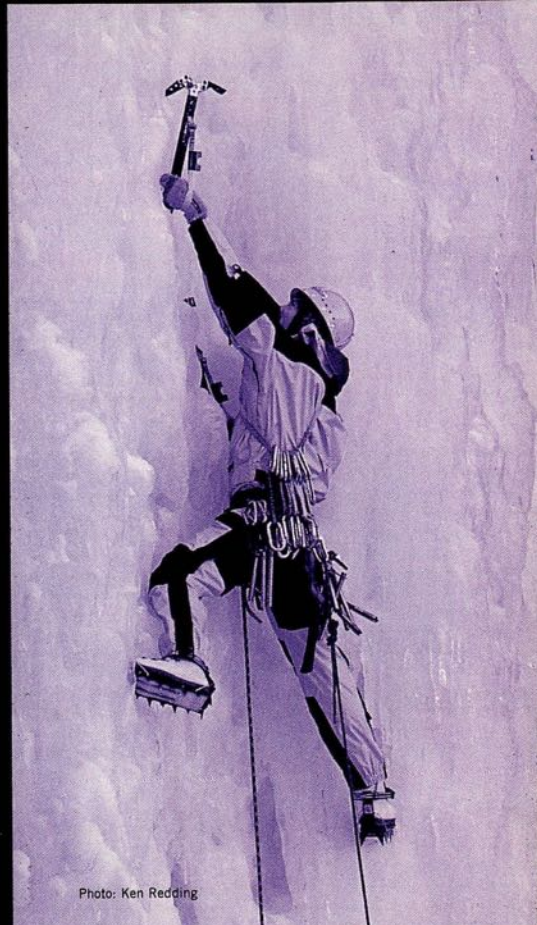
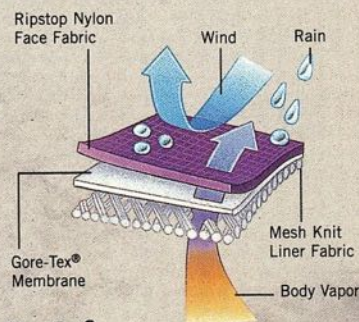


Photo: Ken Redding

Ice climber Jim Nowak in our Karakoram Suit on The Designator, Vail, Colorado.



**Gore-Tex®  
3-Ply Fabric**

**Karakoram Jacket and Pant**

- Rated for Extreme Wet Weather by W. L. Gore & Associates, Inc.
- Articulated knees aid ease of movement.
- Full-featured hood with tie-downs adjusts along front and back of neck to protect head and face without obstructing vision.
- Covered underarm zips with pull-tabs and Velcro closures for ventilation.
- Versatile shell offers four-season protection when layered with appropriate fleece midlayer or high performance underlayer.





No, it's not an oxymoron.

In partnership with Gore, The North Face has succeeded in combining two—until now—mutually exclusive clothing concepts: the warmth and comfort of fleece and the durability and weather-resistance of outerwear. This new concept in garment design uses Gore's revolutionary WindStopper® fabric technology to finally take ordinary fleece across the boundary into truly technical outerwear. In this new fabrication, the extremely breathable, windproof, durable WindStopper™ membrane is sandwiched between two layers of fleece.

## Introducing the Pamir Anorak and Pant.

The outer layer absorbs far less external moisture than other high

performance fleece products due to an application of a durable

## The world's first technical fleece outerwear.

water-repellent finish. The inner fleece layer stays dry and warm—even during high-output activities—because of the extreme breathability of the membrane, which

allows excess perspiration vapor to escape. In addition, climbers are protected against convective heat loss at high altitudes by the membrane's ability to completely block even the coldest, strongest winds. To further validate this concept as true outerwear, the Pamir features integrally-constructed protection zones at high-abrasion areas, like forearms and elbows. These zones are created out of a 3-layer fabrication that laminates the WindStopper membrane between a Supplex outer layer and a fleece inner layer. All of which makes our Pamir Anorak and Pant the first fleece products suitable as outerwear for technical ice climbing and all serious cold-weather activities.

### Pamir Anorak

- Adjustable hood for optimal protection.
- Deep front zipper with draft flap extends high for chin protection.
- Covered underarm zips with pull-tabs for ventilation.

### Pamir Pant

- Wide, elasticized suspender straps with Velcro adjustments for comfort and a close fit.
- Elasticized waistband with Velcro side-tabs and elasticized drawcord for an adjustable fit.
- Full-length, covered, two-way side zippers for easy on/off.
- Seat, knees and crampon patches inset with 3-Ply Supplex to protect against abrasion.



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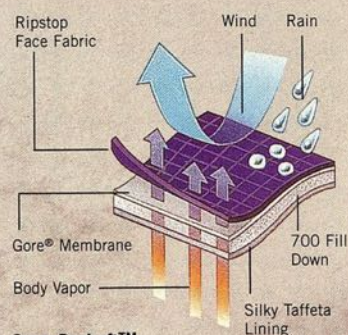
Our Foxfire DL Sleeping Bag is intended for use by the most extreme outdoor adventurers, people for whom sleeping outdoors is a way of life. It features our revolutionary Radial Baffle Construction. This exclusive North Face construction technique virtually eliminates the potential for down to shift and create cold spots. The Foxfire DL also delivers the industry's most weight-efficient fill power—a true 700 cubic inches per ounce. You can think of our Baltoro Jacket as a walking sleeping bag, too.

Because it features fully baffled, sleeping-bag-style construction to

# The North Face introduces the ultimate goose down sleeping bags and outerwear for high altitude mountaineering.

and forearms for abrasion resistance, a full-length two-way zip with an interior draft flap and insulated overflap and a baffled detachable hood.

**Gore DryLoft™ Fabric.** To insure that our Foxfire DL Sleeping Bag and Baltoro Jacket retain their warmth under the most extreme conditions, we've constructed them with a new fabric technology from W. L. Gore & Associates, Inc. called Gore DryLoft™ fabric. This remarkable technology is extremely breathable and water resistant. So it protects the down against condensation from the inside as well as from precipitation on the outside. It's also completely windproof, so it offers added protection against convective heat loss at high altitudes.



**Gore DryLoft™  
Fabric**

## Baltoro Jacket

- 33 separate hand-filled goose down chambers.
- Reinforced stitching in high stress areas.
- Interior cargo and water bottle pockets.
- Articulated elbows for ease of movement.



## Foxfire DL Sleeping Bag

- High thread count silky Nylon Taffeta lining.
- Differential baffle depth puts more insulation on top.
- Three-dimensional adjustable contoured hood.
- Internal draft collar for excellent heat retention.





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sensitive area.) There are so few rangers compared to the number of visitors, and without your cooperation my job would be impossible. Thank you.

— Amy L. Fesnock, raptor monitor  
Pinnacles National Monument, California

### Sumo revised

I would like to correct the article about myself and Team Sumo in *Climbing* No. 143. I would like to apologize for any misinformation I gave you. My foot was severed entirely (in a climbing accident), except for my achilles tendon, which was badly damaged and still causes me a considerable amount of pain, but my foot was reattached and is now about 90 percent functional. The fact that the foot was saved at all is due to a partner that was able to maintain his composure and assist in getting me to the ground. Two very well trained and prepared climbers from the East Coast also helped, along with the very skilled, professional, and compassionate rescue team and the staff at Boulder Community Hospital.

I would love to be considered a god in the climbing community, but I am not worthy of receiving the adulation due such climbers as Hugh Herr, who has sustained a much more severe life-threatening injury. He deserves the credit because he has pushed the limits of what is possible in a vertical world.

— Derric Brones  
Denver, Colorado

### Corrections

In *Off the Wall*, No. 144, the name of the French TV star, husband of the climbing champion Isabelle Patissier, was misspelled; his name is Nicolas Hulot.

In the *Climbing Gallery*, No. 144, Ed Barry is on Haul of Justice (5.13b), not the nearby Soap on a Rope.

The rock-shoe review in No. 144 incorrectly noted the Fire shoes as Boreals; in fact, S.W. Partners, Inc. distributes the boots, which do not carry the Boreal label.

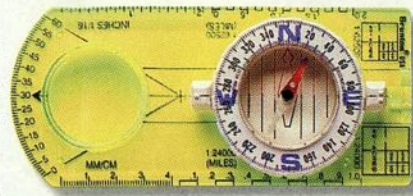
Thanks to Gary Neptune for pointing out that the Herman Buhl who climbed on Longs Peak (see "Longs Strange Trip" in No. 145) was not the famous Austrian of Nanga Parbat fame.

In *Off the Wall*, No. 145, the name of one of the owners of Gripmaster was misspelled; his correct name is Bob Silagy.

In *Quick Clips*, No. 145, the shock-absorbing runner clip should say use a cut up bicycle inner tube, not tire, for the energy absorber.

In addition, *Just Out*, No. 145, should have noted that PUR offers a one-year warranty against clogging for their water filters.

Things sure have changed since 1952. If we follow the stream down, we'll come to a town. That lake is around here somewhere. The sun sets in the north, right? I'm positive it's only one or two more ridges. This doesn't look familiar.



Where would you be without a Brunton?  
Frankly, your guess is as good as ours.



Shown, the \$27 model 8020G. For information on our products, call 307-856-6559.

## OUT HERE, WHO'S GONNA RESCUE YOU?

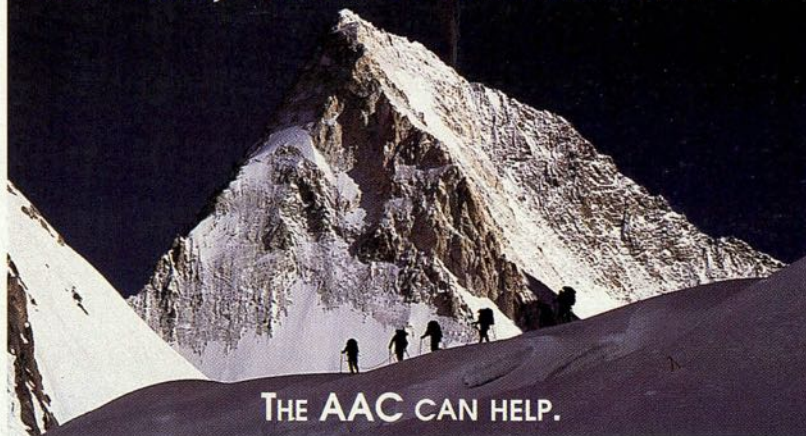


Photo by: Charley Mace

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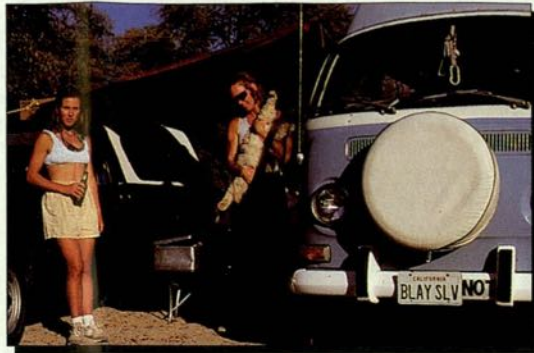


# Off the Wall

Compiled by Allison Osius

## Scree

■ Creative license. Vanity plates: we've seen them around, in climbing spots and parking lots from Yosemite to the East. There was JUMAR; one, in guess which state,



Make sure not to miss the sticker after the license plate. Standing are Cal McCullough and Karen Tracy; stretching is Ronnie-Bob — half cat, half bobcat.

said GUNKS; in Boulder there's MAKALU. In California we've seen RCKCLMR and MTNMAN.

The two honed characters pictured here were spotted at the Phoenix Bouldering Contest beside a van whose plate read BLAY SLV — letters followed by a big decal reading NOT!

■ Ads evermore. Among the latest batch we saw and received were ads for:

— Parkside Behavioral Health Service ("Who you choose for a partner can make all the difference"), as advertised in *Modern Healthcare* magazine (April 18, 1994). This one, which appears to have been taken in Eldorado, Colorado, was a particular favorite — though it is hard to tell in a reproduction, it shows two guys climbing on the same rope at once. — Themis computers ("Peak performance"), appearing in various computer magazines. This one amusingly fuses climbs in the Gunks

and the Fisher Towers into one route. The producers stuck a picture of Keith Lennard on *Crack of Bizarre Delights* (5.11) in the Shawangunks, New York, underneath one of Jimmie Dunn on Ancient Arts (5.10 AO), the Fisher Towers, Utah, to imply: use our computer and you're on top, use the competition and you're hosed. Both shots are by Bob Palais, a Salt Lake City climber and mathematician. The tower shot was a cover on an issue of *Rock &*

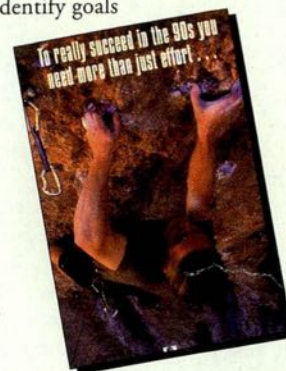
*Ice* magazine, having won its photo contest.

— "HDL Solutions" by Summit Design, Inc. ("Perform at your peak"), in *Electronic Engineering Times* (May 30, 1994). The pic is of Michael Graber, David Wilson, and Galen Rowell on top of Fitzroy, all looking most energetic considering where the hell they are. Cerro Torre is behind the climbers, and Cerro Stanhardt off to the right, by Rowell's left hand. — Burrelle's Press Clipping service ("Next time you're in a difficult position ...") in O'Dwyer's PR Services

newsletter (December, 1993). The route on which this climber is about to make a clip is recognizable as *Visual Nightmare* (5.10a) at Cap Rock, Joshua Tree, California.

In a rather knowledgeable little play on words, the text adds, "We offer the perfect balance of careful planning and clipping."

■ Timing. A brochure for Franklin Quest, a Salt Lake City company that offers time-management seminars to help people identify goals



Tick, tick: Mike Call teaches you how to manage your time wisely.

"and convert [them] into action," has a cover shot of a climber — a good shot obviously photographed by a climber. And indeed, the shot is by Cathy Beloeil of Salt Lake, a climber-photographer/climbing instructor. Shown is Mike Call, on a project in the Virgin River Gorge, in spring 1993.

■ Calling all handicapped climbers. "Let's share ideas," says Pete Adams, an amputee climber. Realizing that a lot of climbers like himself have learned how to climb on their own, through painstaking trial and error,

Adams would like to start a clearinghouse of how-to information.

"Maybe if there was enough interest, we could create a newsletter of sorts a few times a year to keep up to date on tips, techniques, and advice," he says. "Things like how to keep your sandals from falling off." You can write him at 2714 Pierce Street NE, Minneapolis, MN 55418.

## Overheard

"I think I got him hooked on climbing when I gave a slide show at Dartmouth. So there's probably another mother out there who hates me."

Jim Bridwell, speaking of John Middendorf



Ad nauseum.

Photo: Jeff Achey





# Belayers need to be backed up, too.

In climbing, it's best to back up everything you can. And, used correctly, a Grigri adds a measure of security — particularly when the leader or second takes a fall and the belayer is caught unawares, or is too small or weak to hold the fall.

The Grigri works like an automobile seat belt. When movements are slow, the rope runs freely through the device. When there is a shockload, the Grigri locks, jamming the rope with a cam.

Designed to work with ropes 10mm to 11mm in diameter, the Grigri is a non-dynamic belay device. Hence, we recommend it for use only on well-protected routes and in climbing gyms, where anchors comply with the UIAA standard.

Also, we strongly urge that belayers learn the proper setup and use of the Grigri, concentrate on anticipating the climber's moves, and never *ever* take the brake hand off the rope.

The Grigri. As the first belay device that can back up a belayer, it's designed to make climbing a little less risky, not to make belaying any less demanding.



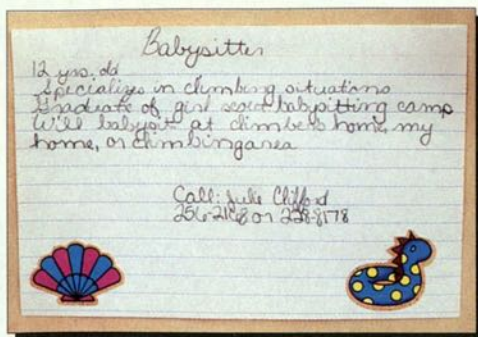
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1-800-282-7673



■ **Bulletin board notice of the month.** Credit to this enterprising and highly trained girl,



The enterprising spirit.

who specializes in babysitting at the crag. She's tapping a rich vein.

■ **Accidents will happen.** Congratulations to Mike Pont, for being here. This spring, driving home to Colorado from Smith Rock, Oregon, he was in a car, driven by "Jimmy Z" Elie, that hit black ice just outside of Denver.

The car did three endos, and Pont — who had just undone his seat belt to take off his sweater — flew 40 feet, landing in the opposite lane. He had to scramble up and run out of the path of oncoming cars. His only significant injury was a broken wrist.

The congenial "Pontster," an internationally certified course setter and designer of the new Bloodlines climbing holds, could be spotted this spring climbing hard routes at Rifle, Colorado, with his arm in plaster. "My fingers go numb when I get pumped," he said, "because of the cast."

■ **TOP CLIMBERS WEAK! SHOCKER!** So said the headline for an item in *On the Edge* magazine of Britain (April 1994). Read the item: "Two of Sheffield's ultra-honed beasts, who would prefer to remain nameless, were eliminated on the first round of the [TV] Gladiators selection trials. As with most climbers who just 'happen to see it on TV' they thought it would be a walk-over. But they failed to complete the 800m run in the allotted time. It's a shame, really, because the next test was to do 10 pull-ups. They were wondering which arm to do them on."

"So, Messrs [Jason] Myers and [Gavin] Ellis, will we see you out jogging in the mornings?"

■ **Big bang for your bucks.** An updated version of the popular Sierra Club "Mountaineering First Aid and Rescue" card is available again for a nickel. The wallet-sized card contains directions for first aid, and mountain emergency and rescue procedures. To get one, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope and a big 5 cents to: Sierra Rescue Card, Box 1795, Whitefish, MT 50037.

■ **Redpoint Ale, only the start.** After seeing (and perhaps sampling) Redpoint Ale, made in Boulder, that traveling climber and wag John Sherman has suggested some more brew types and titles: Traditional Bitter, Sport Climber Lite, and Charlie Porter. (You'll remember that Charlie Porter was a major player in expedition and Yosemite wall climbing in the 1970s.)

P.S. Taste testers doing quality-control work tell us Redpoint Ale is good!

## Media watch

■ **Cover news.** Carol Simpson appeared on the cover of *Northwest Outdoors*, the magazine of *The Oregonian* newspaper (April 28) for an article titled "Rock On — the



Carol Simpson, extremely recognizable on the cover of the *The Oregonian's* Sunday magazine.

expanding sport of rock climbing is including more and more women."

Simpson, of First Ascent, an outfit run out of Bend and Redmond, Oregon, is pictured in silhouette. She was belayed from the bottom of the beginner route *Bunny Face* but moved over some six feet to the side, to an arete, to get the angle the photographer was looking for.

Simpson, 45, is in her second year of teaching women's courses and camps in rock climbing and whitewater rafting. "It's changing a little bit," she says, "but women, especially in their 40s, were discouraged [from doing such sports]. It's never too late to start learning these things and get the rewards."

■ **Gamesmanship.** Climbing is to be part of the weeklong Extreme Games put together by ESPN and ESPN2 in June and July 1995. The event will be covered nationally and internationally by ESPN, which broadcasts to 110 countries.

The series, to be based in Newport, Rhode Island, is to bring together several hundred of the top competitors from around the world in sports ranging from climbing — including contests in bouldering, speed, and difficulty — to bungee jumping, sky surfing, mountain biking, in-line skating, boardsailing, and street luge.

Josh Krulewitz of ESPN calls it "an Olympic-style extravaganza." He said the network will be working with Ralph Erenzo, UIAA delegate and board member of the American Sport Climbers Federation, to run those competitions.

The selection of climbers, he says, "all falls on the individual organizer, whether (through) competitions leading up to this or direct selection by the organizer."

Krulewitz did not know yet how many climbers could take part.

The climbing competition is to take place in the park in front of Fort Adams in Newport.

The contenders will compete for medals and \$300,000 in prize money at the Games.

For information, call Ron Seniao, (202) 585-2000 at ESPN, or Ralph Erenzo, (212) 865-4383.

■ **Grease is the word.** *USA Today*, in another installment of its series on Sandy Hill Pittman's participation in the Vaseline Research Team attempt on the Kangshung Face of Everest, ran a sidebar interviewing Ed Webster about his experience on that route (April 6).

In 1988, Webster and three teammates, of which only Steve Venables reached the summit, put up the east face route selected by Pittman and her team. Her partners — David Breashears, Steve Swenson, Barry Blanchard, and Alex Lowe — are, as Webster put it, "the creme de la creme."

## Overheard

"Well, sure, I'd like to be a great climber, but what I'd really like is just once to slam-dunk a basketball."

Jeff Hollenbaugh  
of Glenwood Springs,  
Colorado, watching  
the NBA finals.





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Excerpts from Webster's stories:  
 "On the 3000-foot buttress we named Neverest — because of the 12 times we went up and down carrying loads — there were several nightmarish sections.



A climber *Vogues*.

The pitch my partners named the Webster Wall was a sheer wall of ice, overhanging at a 95-degree angle. The other was a crevasse we called the Jaws of Doom, 50 feet wide and 100 feet deep at 23,000 feet.

"Those ice pitches may be two of the hardest rope lengths ever climbed at altitude ... those sections blew us away.

"There was another reason this particular route hadn't been climbed: the avalanche danger. When you're on the buttress, there is a gigantic avalanche gully that runs down the mountain to your right ...

"Between the top of the buttress and the South Col is a two-day climb. And that is very much an endurance test because of the deep snow, the avalanche danger, and the crevasses.

"On oxygen, it's 10 hours from the South Col to the top and back. Without oxygen, I climbed for 16 hours and had to turn around 300 feet from the summit.

"We were all frostbitten. We ran out of food for three and a half days. Descending was an absolutely horrendous ordeal.

"... I lost eight fingertips and three toes. Venables lost four toes.

"It was a great adventure. I'm just glad I survived."

Pittman wrote a diary series for *USA Today*, and David Breashears

filmed her in a spoken diary that aired on the Today show.

Breashears is quoted in *USA Today* as saying that without Pittman's ability to attract a sponsor such as Vaseline, he and the other climbers "wouldn't even be leaving the States."

Vaseline bankrolled the team to the tune of \$200,000.

Additionally, *Vogue* magazine, in April, ran a big feature by Pittman, titled "Peak conditioning." It began with her describing running laps in her apartment building — eight laps times 26 floors, or 208 floors in all.

Pittman went on to detail her other vigorous physical preparations, done both in the gym and outdoors, then gave away her Everest Secret Diet: "For six weeks before I go, I will eat anything I want — triple helpings of breads and pasta — plus an entire homemade bread pudding every day."

The team returned to the States in May, having gotten to about 24,200 feet, past the very technical sections to where they were stopped by deep snow.

But Swenson then went around to the North Face and joined his friend Eric Simonson, a guide who let him come along on his Rainier Mountaineering Inc. trip. When the group stopped at its high camp for a day, Swenson, who wasn't using oxygen, felt he ought to carry on, and made the summit alone — "which was really great."

As to climbing on the east face with Pittman, the only person he hadn't really known beforehand, he said, "I really enjoyed Sandy. She was a good sport, she never complained, she's determined and she worked really hard."

■ **Quick study.** *Outside Kids*, the new quarterly from *Outside* magazine, is running a 1000-word profile, slated for the fall issue, on Jessica Haines, 16, who placed third in the elite women's field at the annual Snowbird national competition last year. In the story, Geoff Weigand, her coach, will be quoted as saying he watched her in the Snowbird finals last year and "I saw things that I hadn't seen in anyone else. To me, she's the most talented climber with an American passport that I've ever seen." Haines is known for reading moves well and quickly.

## Kudos to:

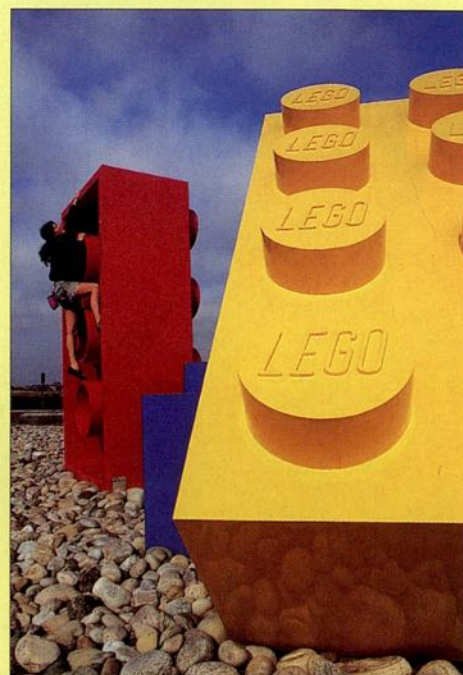
All involved in the Snake River Rock Rodeo, put on at Granite Point, Wawawai, Washington, by the University of Idaho at Moscow, Idaho. Before the competition, contestants and spectators collected over 50 garbage bags of refuse, including cans and broken glass left behind by area partiers.

## Overheard

"Doug Crispin, [Smith Rock State] park manager, estimated rock climbing provides 70 fulltime jobs and has an economic impact of \$4 million on Central Oregon."

The Oregonian newspaper (April 28)

## OFF ROUTE



Lilliputian climber in kid's sand box. Actually, it's Carolyn Pollock at the Lego factory in Toronto, Ontario.

Please send humorous, dramatic, or blackmail shots to Off The Wall c/o Climbing, P.O. Box 339, Carbondale, CO 81623.

Photo: Rob Buchanan



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## The long and short of it

Grenoble, France

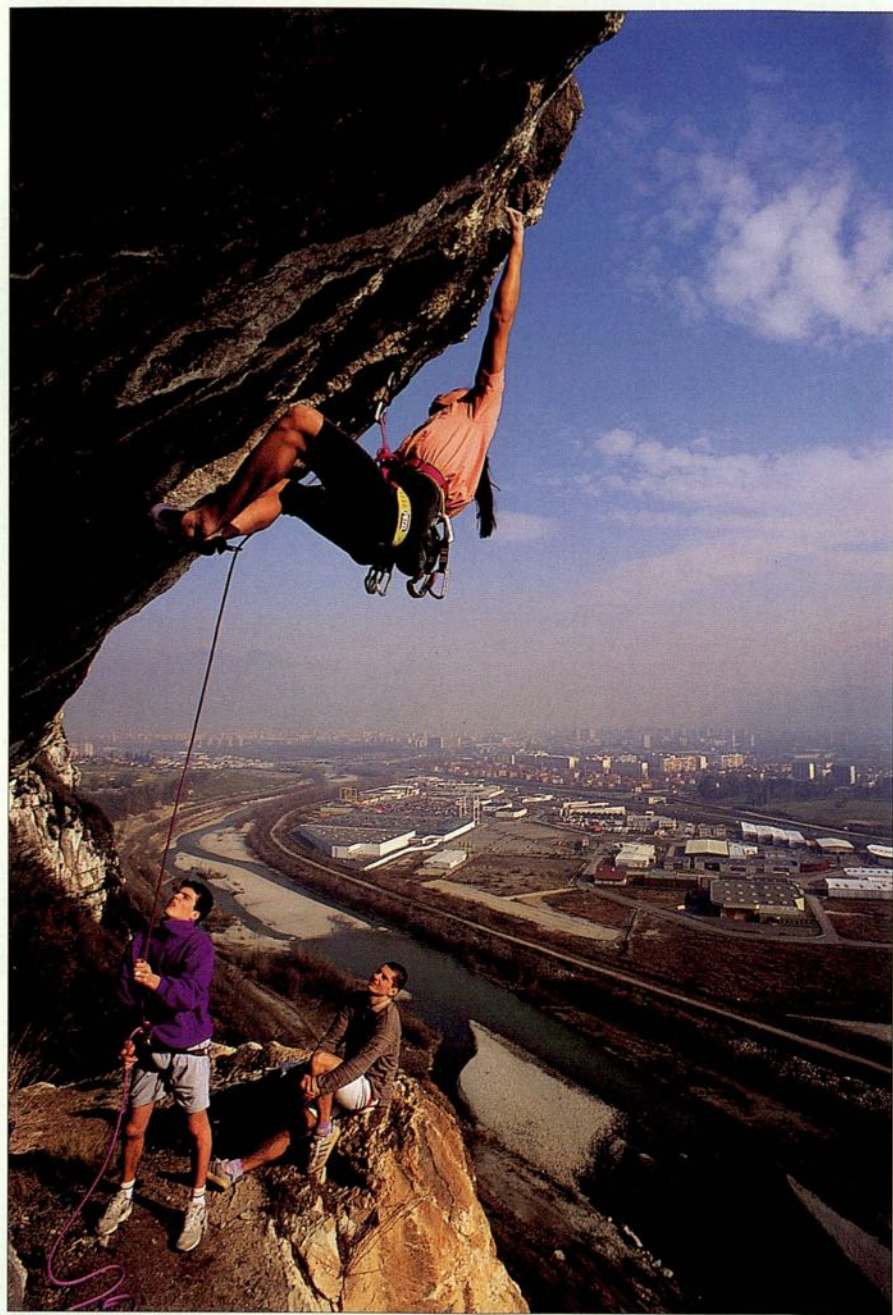
Imagine standing at the base of a 825-foot limestone wall five miles long. Weaving up the face are 250 established routes — over 1000 pitches. The vivid green pastures of rural France frame the yellow, gray, and rust cliff. A herd of goats stands idly by munching anything within reach — one even seems to be eyeing your backpack. This amazing climbing site is called Presles and is located in the French Alps, only 45 minutes from the city of Grenoble.

*Vue de l'Exterieur*, a six-pitch, 660-foot face climb, twists and vaults its way through pitches ranging in difficulty from 6b (5.10c) to 7a (5.11d), and is one of the prettiest and most interesting climbs in the area. The second to last pitch includes a traverse with holds hidden behind small columns, a large overhanging column that you climb in a straddle, a dihedral, and a short roof. The last pitch starts on little holds that lead to a juggy ceiling with 800 feet of air below. An adrenaline lunge lands you at a second roof and a crack.

The classic *Chrysanthemes*, an easier though equally impressive route, is only 15 yards away. Its 10 pitches average 5+ (5.9) without exceeding 6a (5.10a). Both routes top out where you can easily hike around and down to the Tina Dalle, a smaller cliff with over 35 one-pitch routes good for wearing out anyone still feeling energetic.

After climbing, you need not rough it. A quaint, reasonably priced hotel is nestled into the narrow valley at the foot of the cliff in the town of Choranche. A nearby restaurant, Le Jorjane, serves a local specialty of miniature raviolis filled with cheese and spices. The wine is delicious and inexpensive, and the bread unlike any you've eaten.

If you're planning a climbing trip to France, Grenoble is the perfect place to start your tour. From here you can easily



Climber on *Le Masque et la Plume*, Comboire, Grenoble.

continue northeast to Chamonix or south to Buoux, the Verdon, or any number of well-known areas. France is a sport climber's paradise, so pack light on Friends and heavy on quickdraws.

Grenoble is located at the intersection of three ranges within the French Alps. The valley floor sits at 600 feet above sea level and is surrounded by peaks as high as 10,000 feet. Two major rivers have carved the valley into a Y-shape, one arm extending toward Mont Blanc, one toward the

Atlantic Ocean, and one to the Mediterranean. Because of the area's magnificent beauty and endless possibilities for outdoor activity, it is a popular crossroads for hikers and climbers. The three adjoining valleys and surrounding plateaus house more than 20 different crags.

Grenoble is also known for the diversity and difficulty of the climbs, with an abundance of routes in the 8 (5.13) range. And yet, a beginner can still find plenty to do, often at the same crag. The

Photo: Laurent Belluard/Mission





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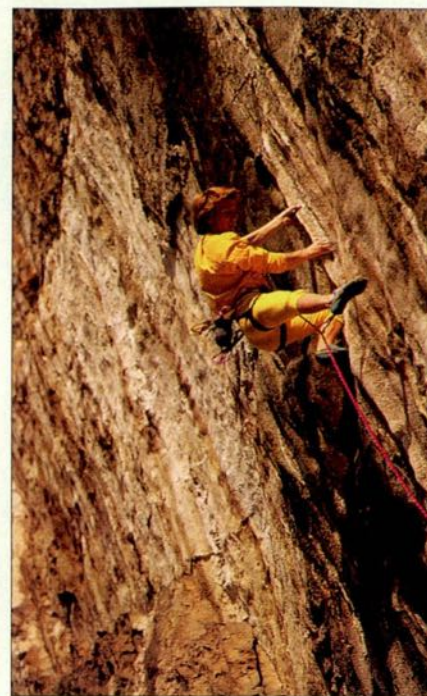


Photo: Laurent Belliard/Mission

Arnaud Petit on *Lady Heroine*, St. Egreve.

cliffs offer slabs, vertical faces between five and 800 feet high, long roofs, and even an occasional crack on the higher mountaineering routes.

Though there are numerous crags to choose from in Grenoble, five central areas offer a good representation of the climbing: Presles, Correncon/Lans-en-Vercors, St. Egreve/Fontaine, Comboire/Espace Comboire, and Les Lames.

**Presles.** This is one of the most exciting climbing sites with 800-foot routes the norm. The majority are bolted, so you'll rarely need anything other than quick-draws, long runners, and possibly a helmet. (There's usually a lot of traffic, and there is some loose rock on the ledges.) Tina Dalle, in the same area, is a shorter crag designed for the timid.

Presles is located 39 miles from Grenoble, and deserves several days of exploration. Local climbers are usually more than willing to share stories and information on the area. On your day off, be sure to visit les Grottes de Choranche, the caves that wander through the interior of the cliff. Daily guided tours wind through some of the over 17 miles worth of galleries.

Located about six miles from Presles in the Gorges de la Bourne, the cave la Grotte de Bournillon is also well worth a visit. Follow the road running from Pont en Royans to Villard de Lans; when you arrive in the Gorges de la Bourne, watch for an electricity plant on the right. Park here and follow the trail for about 20 minutes into the cirque toward the waterfall. The roof of the cave is the largest ever climbed. A few years ago, a route was completed that starts at the back, runs the length of the roof, and then continues

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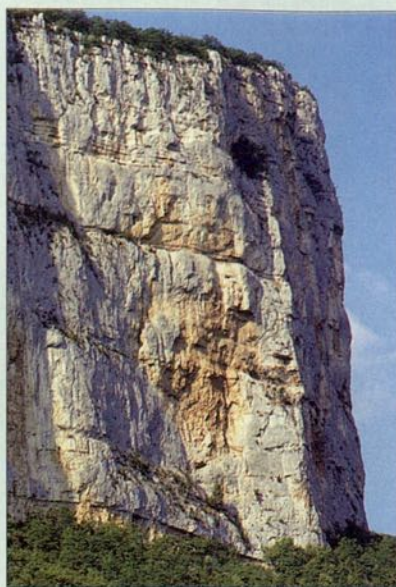
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Mina Bertunek  
Columnne Meadows, CA  
Photo: Greg Epperson





The 800-foot face of Presles, Grenoble.

## LOGISTICS

**Getting there.** I advise buying a Berlitz phrase book and booking your airline ticket to Lyon or Nice. These airports are the closest to the best climbing. Also, arrange for a rental car because, although France has an excellent train system, most of the best climbing is only accessible by car. Having your own transportation also frees you of any time constraints the train schedules might impose. For more information call the Office de Tourisme Grenoble at 76.54.34.36, or the Office de Tourisme Villard de Lans at 76.95.10.38.

**Guidebooks.** *Escalade Autour de Grenoble* (in French only) by D. Duhaut & C. Vigier and *Presles* (in French and English) by D. Duhaut, are both updated annually, complete, and easy to understand.

Corrençon is the only area without a guidebook (due to past access problems), so ask at the Office de Tourisme before going. This will hopefully change this year. If it is open, there are almost always local climbers there who will gladly provide route information.

**Food and gear.** Grenoble is fully equipped. Climbing gear is easy to find and inexpensive — Decathlon, one of the large national sport stores, is located both at the exit for St. Egreve and at Espace Comboire, the shopping complex just below the crag sharing its name. Food is also inexpensive, and grocery stores and restaurants are as abundant as they are in the States.

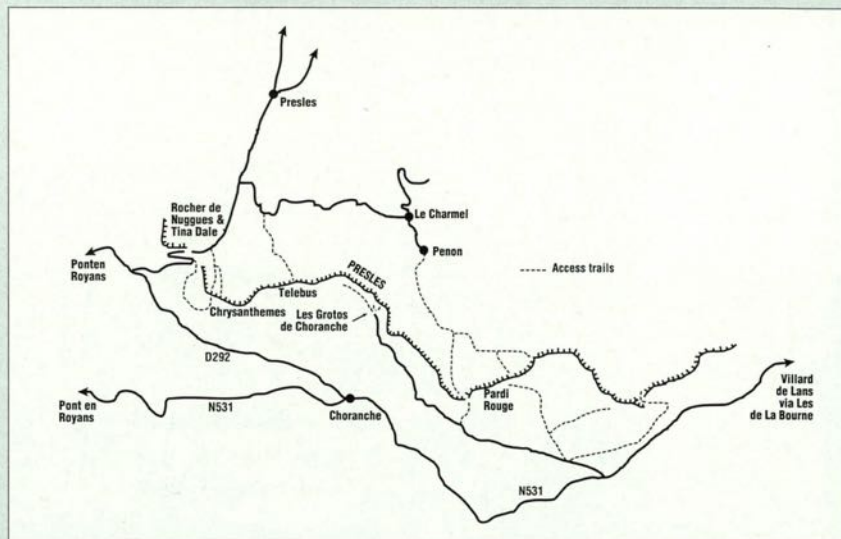
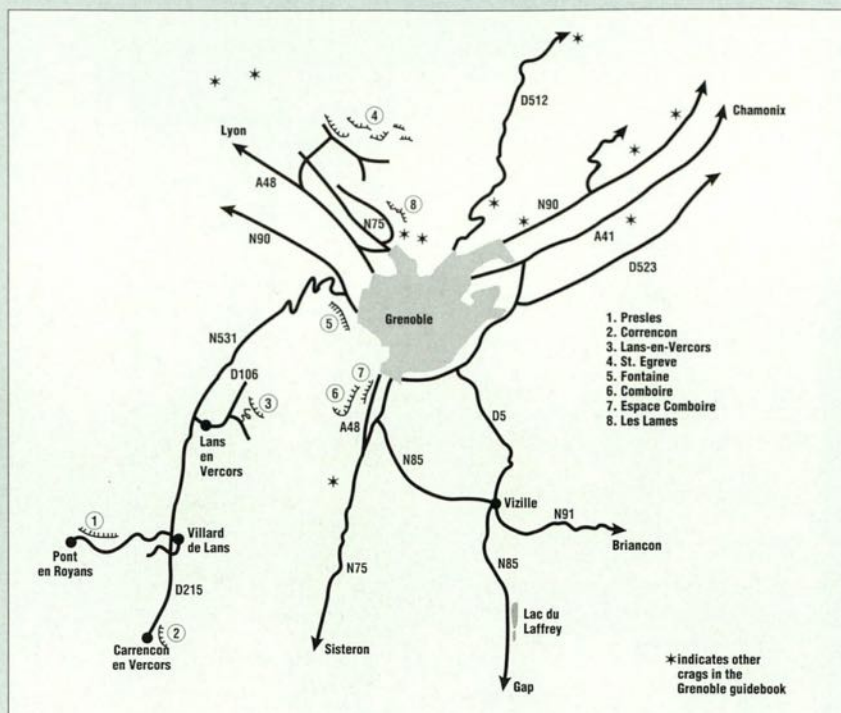
**Accommodations.** Campgrounds are common, but getting a spot in the busy season can be difficult. In that event hostels and *gites* (inexpensive bed-and-breakfasts often used by visiting climbers) are easy to find, just inquire at the Office de Tourisme in each city or village. The people there always speak English and will usually call around and find you a bed. In Choranche, located at the foot of Presles, try the gite called Vol de Nuit, an inexpensive and nice place to stay. If that is full, Pont en Royans, the closest town, has a campground and a couple hotels. In Corrençon, try the gite L'Essendole, located between Villard de Lans and Lans-en-Vercors, or the campground De l'Oursiere at the entrance to Villard de Lans. For those occasional days off there are endless activities. You can hike and mountain bike, as well as swim or rent wind-surfers and canoes at the many lakes and rivers around Grenoble. The Lac de Laffrey, on the road from Grenoble to Gap and Ceuse, is a particularly good place to spend a hot afternoon.

**Seasons.** Spring and fall are the best seasons, with mild temperatures and only occasional rain. Summers tend to be dry and hot, and the winters are wet.

## Recommended routes

### Presles

*Nosferatu* (7a). 8 pitches.  
*Chrysanthemes* (6a).



*Cancer* (7a). 8 pitches on Chrysanthemes Wall. Sustained.  
*Vue de l'Exterieur* (7a). 6 pitches on Chrysanthemes Wall. Slabs and roofs; continuous.  
*Passage a Vide* (7a/b). 7 pitches on Telebus Wall.  
*Les Ficelles du Metier* (7b/c). 9 pitches on Paroi Rouge Wall. Slab route.

### Tina Dalle

*Fissure* (5). Good holds.  
*Alpinista 6CH* (6c/7a). Continuous, slightly overhanging.  
*Coulee Douce* (7a/b). Reachy and powerful with big, rounded holds.

### Lans-en-Vercors

*Michel Ange* (6c/7a). Southeast face. Continuous, classic.  
*Humour Noir* (6b/c). Upper cliff. Slab; technical.  
*Novice en la Matiere* (7a/b). Upper cliff. Technical, continuous.  
*Biscuit Sec* (8a). Upper cliff. Long, continuous.  
*Pilier Gris* (4+/5+). Upper cliff.  
*Vent du Sud* (6b/c). Upper cliff. 2 pitches of slab.  
**St. Egreve**  
*Les Faveurs de Corinne* (6a). Rochelpleine Wall.  
*In Shalla* (7a). Babylone Wall. 3 steep pitches.  
*Vie d'Ange* (7b/c). Les Haut Lieux. Crack-chimney; tough.

### Orange Diabolique

(6c). Centrale Wall.  
*Cagaou* (6b). Centrale Wall. 2 pitches.

### Fontaine

*Escalito* (6b). Lactique Wall. Crack.  
*Fils de Brute* (7a). Lactique Wall.  
*La Strada* (6b/c). Principale Wall. Flint.  
*Ticket Pour en Face* (6c). Principale Wall.

### Comboire

*Souvenir de Chine* (6b/c). South face, right side. Continuous.

### Espace Comboire

*Carreau Coeur* (6b/c). Classic.  
*High Glandeur* (7a). Dihedral, technical.  
*Poulpe Glairoux* (7b/c). Boulder problem to start.  
**Les Lames**  
*Sainte et Soph* (6b). Sustained, excellent holds.  
*Cadavres Exquis* (7a/b). Continuous, powerful.  
*Je Grimpe Donc Je Suis* (8a/b).





1100 feet up the face. The cave pitches alone cover 600 feet. The climbing is A1 to A3. To keep things daring, the lake inside the cave makes it difficult to rap off before the fifth pitch.

**Correncon/Lans-en-Vercors.** Two of the more beautiful and serene crags in the area are located between Presles and Grenoble. Correncon and Lans-en-Vercors are both famous for their setting and huecoed limestone. Though Correncon is a smaller crag than Lans-en-Vercors, it is generally more overhanging and has a great roof. With mostly one-pitch routes, the crag makes a good day trip, and the high altitude guarantees sunshine even when the valley below is in the clouds. Hiking trails heading in every direction and 95 miles of nearby mountain-bike trails will fill up your days.

**St. Egreve/Fontaine.** Sitting at the northern and eastern city limits are St. Egreve and Fontaine, respectively. These two crags are well-known for their accessibility and abundance of routes (St. Egreve has over 200 climbs and Fontaine has approximately 125). Don't, however, expect a quiet mountain setting as both areas are directly above the city — the noise is constant. But the quality of the rock is exceptional: flint protrusions in the limestone provide sharp and surprisingly solid holds, and several overhangs make Fontaine perfect for a rainy day.

**Comboire/Espace Comboire.** Comboire is famous for dynamic, strenuous climbing and routes created with artificial holds on a huge ceiling. Its southern orientation means lots of sunshine, and on the rare rainy day there's always the ceiling. Local climbers often stage races up and down these steep routes.

The crag is set away from the valley so the noise is minimal and the view of Grenoble impressive. The right-hand section of the southern face has several two- and three-pitch routes with slabs and overhangs.

**Espace Comboire** has quality rock with routes that are more technical than strenuous. However, access is tricky due to huge and rather ferocious dogs that live at the start of the dirt road. I recommend driving. If you are on foot, stay close to the river and cut over to the cliff at the base of the giant gray pillar. Once at the cliff you are safely out of hound's reach.

**Les Lames.** This crag is known for its surprising concentration of 8s dispersed among 6a and 7c routes, all within five minutes of Grenoble. The majority of walls are steep and technical, with a few dihedrals and cracks, requiring a 60-meter rope. Like St. Egreve and Fontaine, Les Lames also sits over the city, so don't expect quiet.

— Julia Perrin

Vasque

Imja Khola Valley, Nepal.  
Photo by Dan Bouchard.

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Photo: Vladimir Shataev collection

Funeral for Elvira Shataeva, Tatyana Bardashova, Nina Vasilieva, Irina Lyubimtseva, Lyudmilla Manzharaova, Ilsiir Mukhamedova, Galina Perekhodyuk, and Valentina Fateeva, victims of the Pamir's Peak Lenin in 1974.

## A women's climbing tragedy remembered

Peak Lenin, 20 years ago

Elvira Shataeva was strong and charismatic, organizer of several women's expeditions and a crusader for women's opportunities in the mountains. Twenty years ago this month, a young Molly Higgins, one of the leading women rock climbers of the day, visited the Pamir Mountains in Russia, saw the woman from Moscow — and wanted to be like her. Arlene Blum, another American visiting Peak Lenin in the summer of 1974, observed Shataeva's graciousness as well as her determination, her warmth and her generosity.

According to her husband, Vladimir Shataev (note: his name is spelled Shataev, hers Shataeva), Elvira's youth had been troubled and she tackled mountaineering as a sort of personal vindication. Elvira's insistence on self-sufficiency was so firm, he has written, that she refused to use steps kicked by other climbers. His book, *Degrees of Difficulty*, quotes her as saying, "In a woman's heart there is a constant desire to convince others that a woman's competence is not less than that of a man."

The traverse of Peak Lenin by a group of women from different corners of the Soviet Union was Elvira's dream. The women would climb up the Lipkin Ridge and down the Razdelny over Lenin's 7134-meter summit. Some of the group had accompanied Shataeva on the first ascent of a 7000-meter peak by an all-women's team

(Peak Korzhenevskoi, 7105 meters) two years before, and on a traverse of Ushba, a classic technical route in the Caucasus.

The women prepared to climb Peak Lenin against a backdrop of highly charged gender issues. Although under communist ideology women were officially equals with men in the world of state-subsidized alpinism, they were completely dependent on men's approval for financial support. The traverse was a challenging undertaking. Most of the members of the exclusively male "old school" of Soviet climbers felt women didn't belong in the high Pamir. Shataeva and her seven teammates were determined to manage the traverse under their own power, resisting attempts by other Soviet climbers to "spot" them as escorts or back-ups on the mountain.

Shataeva's team left basecamp (elevation 3800 meters) on July 30, after acclimatizing for almost two weeks, and headed up the Lipkin Ridge. They were poorly equipped even by Soviet standards at the time; they climbed in antiquated leather boots and carried heavy, unreliable stoves and two flimsy cotton pup tents with button-loop closures instead of zippers. The women reached 6500 meters on August 2 as planned. The first hint that they were experiencing difficulties came when Shataeva radioed to base that they would take a rest day there,

although the weather was deteriorating. (The common tactic would have been to move quickly, going for an objective, before a storm hits). By the time the women climbed to the summit on August 5, a total white-out enveloped them. Unsure of the descent route down the Razdelny Ridge, they pitched their tents on the summit and radioed to base for instructions. (According to accepted Soviet mountaineering practice, teams were required to make regular radio contact with basecamp and to follow the directions of a basecamp boss.) Basecamp approved spending the night on Peak Lenin's summit, although meteorologists were warning of an impending hurricane, and the camp boss had forbidden all climbers to leave basecamp.


By the time the women tried to descend in the storm — which had turned into the worst in Pamir history — it was too late. They had now been above 6500 meters for four days, battered by high winds for the last two. The first woman, Irina Lyubimtseva, died. The night of August 6, the wind ripped their tents to pieces and scattered their gear and clothing. They had no shovels or other implements for digging a cave and could no longer melt snow for water. They struggled to descend against the storm.



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Radio transmissions related the deaths, one by one over 22 hours, of all eight women. Their last radio transmission crackled over the basecamp radio: "Two of us are left. We have no more strength. In 15 or 20 minutes we too will die."

Galina Perekhodyuk hung on the longest. Through her tears she choked, "Forgive" — or was it "request"? The two words sound much alike in Russian.

Several more clicks in the airwaves. Then, silence.

What is known, and the transcript record of their radio reports, leave many pieces of the puzzle missing. Did the women know the severity of the weather system? Why did they not turn back in the face of the storm? Perhaps they feared failure and scorn by those who believed women were not up to high-altitude climbing. Why the unusual decision to spend an extra day camped at 6500 meters? After the fact, the examining male doctor went so far as to speculate that the extra day was connected to three of the women beginning their menstrual cycles.

Most likely, the women wanted to wait for all teams of male climbers to clear out before they went for the summit, to avoid possible gossip that they'd been babysat.

Why did the women not descend back down the Lipkin Ridge when they reached the summit and could not locate the standard descent route? Having myself wandered disoriented in poor visibility while descending the route I had just ascended on Peak Lenin, I would not criticize their decision to wait for a clearing.

Did they relinquish their fate, exhaust-

ed, or did they stop because two of the group were sick, and the others refused to abandon them?

Basecamp that summer at Peak Lenin was home to several hundred climbers, over a hundred of them international guests invited by the USSR Sport Committee.

An American team in the Pamir that summer witnessed the disaster from basecamp and organized a rescue attempt but was unable to reach the women in time. Robert Craig, leader of the American group, described the events in *Storm and Sorrow* (Mountaineers, 1977) as did Vladimir Shataev in a chapter of *Degrees of Difficulty* (English edition, Mountaineers, 1987).

When rescuers (a Japanese team) finally reached them on August 8, the eight women were dead, strewn over the frozen slope.

Elvira Shataeva would be 55 this year. Vladimir Shataev, now 57, has for a quarter-century been an official leading light of Soviet alpinism, and was one of the few supporters of an all-women's expedition in 1974.

In a recent interview in Moscow, he reminisced about that summer of 1974. He spoke of his wife and her companions with a tenderness that I had not expected. The Shataev that I'd met several years ago



Elvira Shataeva.

Photos: Vladimir Shataev collection



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in a mountaineering camp was aloof and reserved, displaying all the dignity of his position as state coach, an international master of sports.

"Twenty years is like last year," he said. "I think in 30 years, in 40 years, what I saw when I went up the mountain in 1974 will be just as clearly etched in my memory."

Shataev has had to preserve his private memories in the face of a public white-washing of the 1974 catastrophe. The Soviet sport of high-altitude climbing did not brook human failings: climbing was about heroics, and deaths weren't discussed.

The cryptic report of the tragedy in the newspaper *Soviet Sport* emphasized the women's heroic summit achievement: "They placed a note under the bust of Vladimir Ilych [Lenin], the highest monument to the greatest of men." This short article, the *only* mention in the national press, never addressed the issue

of the women's pitiful equipment and ignored the pressure on them to succeed. When Shataev first published *Degrees of Difficulty* in 1977, he had to battle authorities to include the chapter of reflections on the deaths of his wife and her companions. A 1985 article, by Genady Bocharov, a journalist, in *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, the national literary magazine, required the approval of the Communist Party's Central Committee.

Officially, the Peak Lenin women's expedition did not affect opportunities for women climbers in the

Soviet Union. The sanctioned inquest into the incident, in fact, barely noted that all members of the expedition were women. The accident generated little discussion of the gender politics behind the expedition or the skewed status of women in Soviet society.

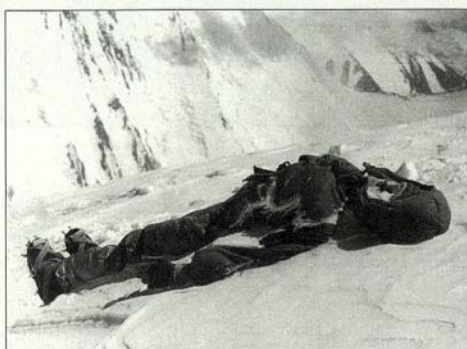
Behind the scenes, however, Peak Lenin

cast a pall that has hung over Russian women climbers for two decades. Although the outcome might have been the same had a team of male climbers found themselves in the same atrocious conditions, burdened by sick teammates, the tragic expedition has been handed down by Soviet climbing czars as evidence that women weaken an expedition. Russian women climbers now have fewer opportunities to climb than ever before, due to the disintegration of the Soviet economic system as well as a lack of support for women in mountaineering.

Today, the eight women pioneers are remembered at an annual footrace in Moscow in their honor. The event, held at Tsaritsino near Moscow's popular climbing wall, took place this year on May 15. And on a large cairn near Achik Tash, the Peak Lenin basecamp, a plaque illustrated with pictures of each woman on the expedition commemorates Elvira Shataeva, Tatyana Bardashova, Nina Vasilieva, Irina Lyubimtseva, Lyudmilla Manzharovna, Ilsiara Mukhamedova, Galina Perekhodyuk, and Valentina Fateeva.

—Frith Maier

Frith Maier is the author of *Trekking in Russia and Central Asia (Mountaineers, 1994)*.



Part of the grim scene that greeted rescuers on Peak Lenin in 1974



## Summer solace

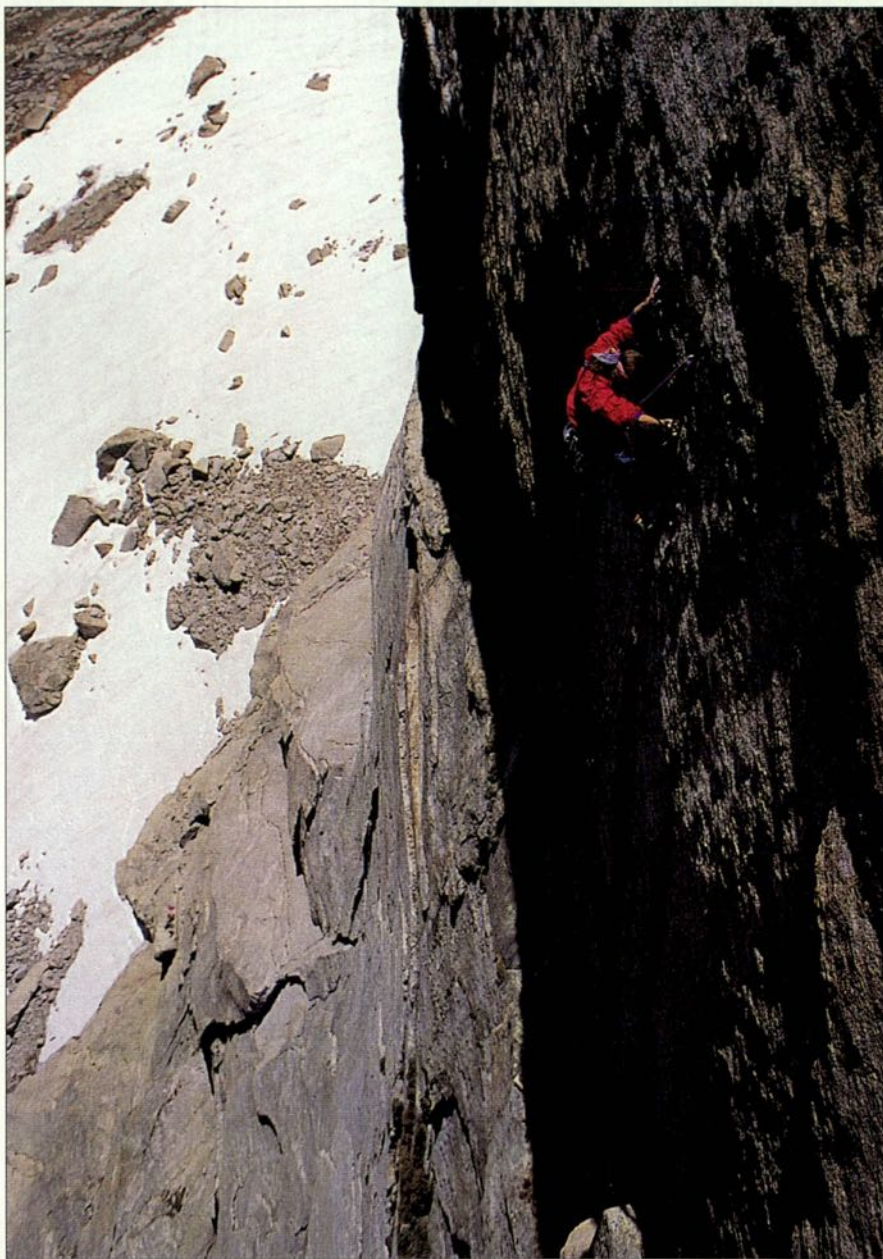
Glacier Gorge, Colorado

As mirages flutter off the pavement in front of Neptune Mountaineering, and the lines at the Mall's frozen yogurt stands string out into clusters of tie-died jugglers and Zen magicians, Boulder climbers turn to the high peaks for solace. Longs Peak beckons visibly, but Rocky Mountain National Park's gentler peaks see just as much traffic. Classics new and old await, on gems like Hallet Peak, Mount Alice, and the crags above Sky Pond. Some of the best lie in the pristine alpine basin of Glacier Gorge.

Chiefshead (13,579 feet) is an alpine free climber's paradise, sporting two broad, 800-foot faces separated by the distinctive triangular spur of Spearhead, with three-star free lines from the 1960s to the '90s. Spearhead's Northwest Ridge (II 5.6), *Sykes Sickle* (III 5.9), and *The Barb* (III 5.10) are old favorites, and Chiefshead's original northwest-face route, *Path of Elders* (IV 5.10), done in 1961 with only a few points of aid, was one of the bolder brush strokes in Colorado climbing.

Chiefshead routes span the ethical spectrum. In July 1980, Charlie Fowler and John Harlin III climbed the northwest face's second major route, a direct line a few hundred feet left of *Path of Elders*, leaving in their trail only a few fixed pins. The first ascent of *Seven Arrows* (IV 5.10) was Park traditional climbing at its best — bold but reasonable climbing toward features which sometimes did and sometimes didn't offer protection or a belay stance before the rope ran out. *Seven Arrows* developed something of a cult following in the early '80s; most climbers who did the line returned to show a friend.

In 1988, Richard Rossiter took a different approach on *Birds of Fire* (IV 5.11a), using about 30 bolts to climb the ultimate directissima on the face. With his wife, Joyce, and Rob Woolf, Rossiter climbed in ground-up style until rebuffed by the third pitch. In the following weeks,



Chip Chace and Pat Ellingwood on the crux pitch of *Stone Monkey* (5.12a), Spearhead.

Rossiter rappelled the entire wall, installing belays and other bolts, scoping the upper route, and retro-bolting scary climbing he had led unprotected. At the end of August, on their eighth trip to the wall, Richard and Joyce completed the route, placing seven bolts on lead that day.

The heavy tactics ruffled some feathers.

"It's total bullshit," says longtime Park climber Mark Wilford. "Rocky Mountain National Park is one place that should be left to traditional climbing."

Rossiter claims he chose his tactics to create the best finished product, using 3/8-inch stainless bolts. Still, he hand-drilled and placed about two-thirds of the bolts on

lead. The uproar quieted as climbers repeated the route, finding it no sport climb. The route-finding involves more than sighting the next bolt, and if the cruxes are well protected, long runouts are the norm. Rossiter went back in 1992 to reroute the final pitch, bolting the elegant 5.10b arete left of the original wet dihedral.

Spearhead, too, has its spectrum. In the late '70s, Bill Feiges freed the striking leaning corner (5.11c) left of the last pitch of the *Barb*, in a wide-eyed, on-sight effort. In 1985, Chip Chace and Dan Stone climbed *Stone Monkey*, which features a technical 80-degree tips crack (5.12a), still one of the hardest and prettiest leads in the high peaks.

Photo: Jeff Achey





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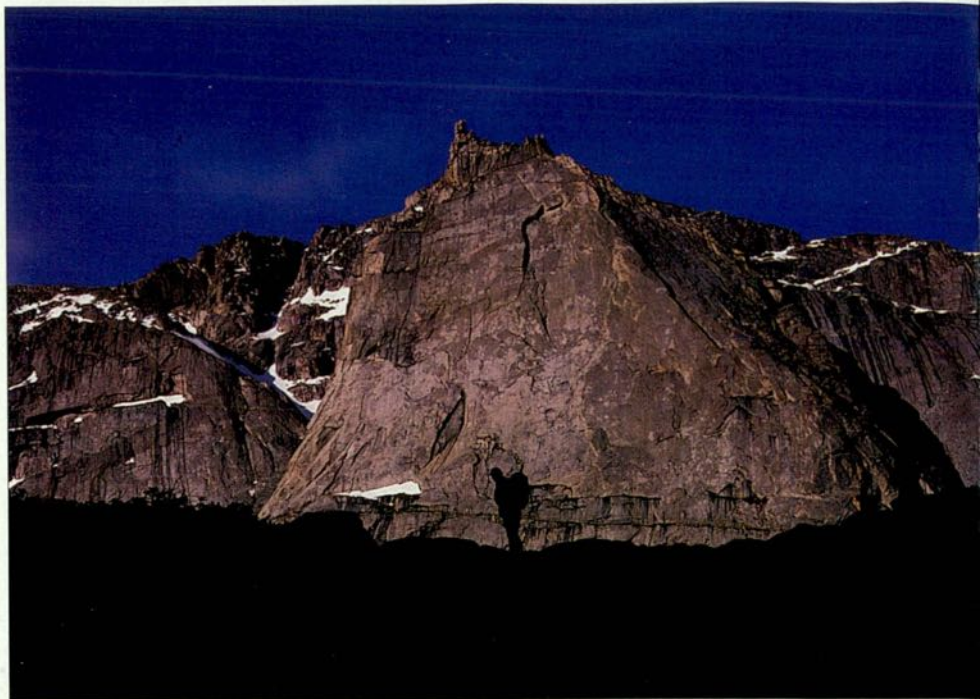
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Spearhead, with Chiefshead's northeast (left) and northwest (right) faces behind, Glacier Gorge, Rocky Mountain National Park.

In 1990, Greg Davis and Neal Biedleman gave Glacier Gorge its first real "sport" pitch with the rappel-bolted 5.11c face crux of *Spear Me the Details*. This fun, varied, and direct route has been called the best climb on Spearhead.

To the left, or east, of Spearhead's pyramid-faced spur is the northeast face of Chiefshead, a little-known wallflower beside its popular northwestern twin. Layton Kor and Bob Bradley climbed it in 1963 via a 5.8 A2 line, but the wall has remained obscure. Most climbers form their impressions of it late in the day as they descend from Spearhead; in the afternoon shade it has a damp, chilly look — the shattered rock on its left side is spattered with snowpatches and streaked with run-off. But seeing a pair of climbers on the face as colored specs in the midday sun puts everything in perspective.

The first climbers to probe the smooth expanse right of Kor and Bradley's line were Mark Wilford and Jeff Lowe, in 1985. Their *Risky Business* (IV 5.11c), begins in a J-shaped chimney just right of center, and blazes up and right, sporting a half dozen pitches 5.10 or harder and an impressive leaning crux hand crack near the top.

Since 1992, Davis and Eric Winkleman have monopolized the northeast face, spending countless summer weekends on new routes, variations, and explorations. Their first route, *Ten Little Indians* (IV 5.11a) strikes out left of *Risky Business*, toward the center of the face, topping out after 13 pitches, mostly naturally protected, with scattered cruxes and the occasional bolt. In 1993 the pair added *Rodeo*

*Drive* (IV 5.11c), between *Risky Business* and *Ten Little Indians*. The crux is near the top, a wild pitch out of an alcove. On Spearhead, also in 1993, Davis and Winkleman linked a series of old free pitches to a new 5.11d/5.12a sport pitch and more demanding climbing above, producing *All Two Obvious*, just left of *Spear Me the Details*. Just at press time this year, the pair finished *Cowboys and Indians* (IV 5.11c), the most sustained of the Chiefshead routes, with many exciting passages that belie their 5.9 and 5.10 grades.

In late summer, the Glacier Gorge classics get crowded. *The Barb* and *Birds of Fire* are seldom lonely, and on an August Saturday you might find four parties on *Sykes Sickle*. Don't be the fifth. If your chosen route's taken, there's adventure, solitude, and great cragging on the neglected flanks of Pagoda and Arrowhead, just a turn of the head off the beaten path. Fine middle-grade routes have been recorded — but forget the guidebook. Trust your eye, follow your fancy, and shake hands on your own summit between the glinting lakes and gathering thunderheads.

What does the future hold? Ethics wars have fizzled. Good rappel-bolted lines have gone in, but the lack of sport-style steepness and the need to hand-drill (power drills are illegal, and barely perform at Park altitudes) take the joy out of that game. Traditional exploration of remaining blanks on the topos suits the terrain, and promises the kind of crag days that take the edge off facing the tie-died jugglers again.

— Jeff Achey

(Logistics on page 38)



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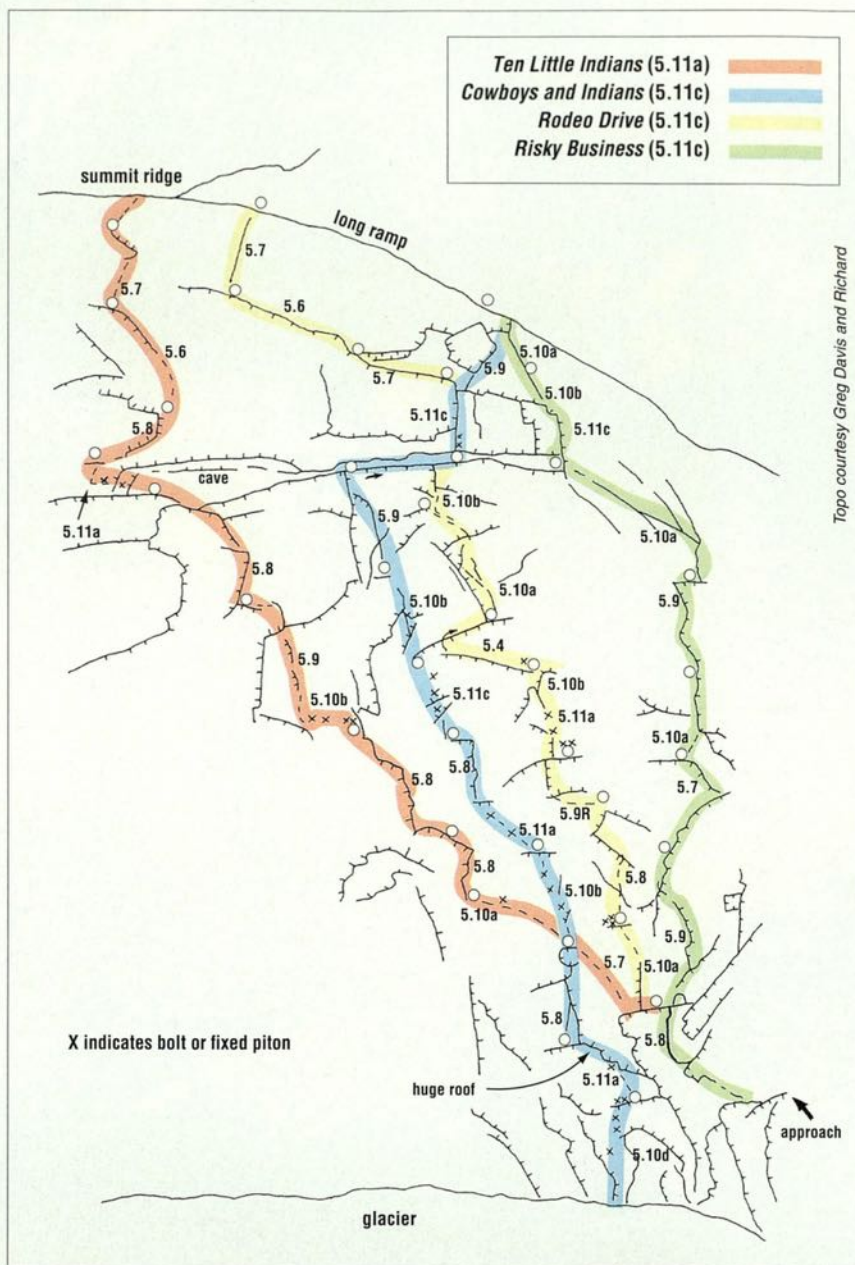
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### Chiefshead, Northeast Face



Topo courtesy Greg Davis and Richard

#### LOGISTICS, GLACIER GORGE

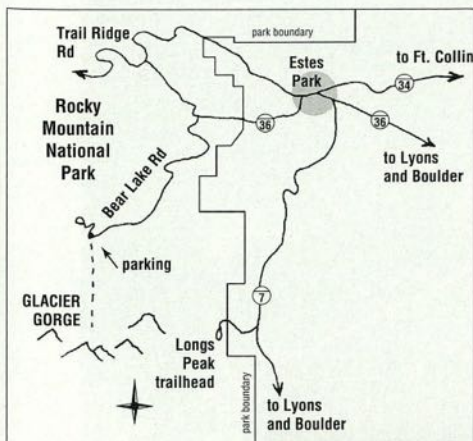
**Getting there.** Rocky Mountain National Park is just west of the bustling tourist town of Estes Park, an hour northwest of Boulder and southwest of Fort Collins. From Estes Park, enter the park (there is a fee) and follow the Bear Lake Road; park at the Glacier Gorge trailhead just before Bear Lake. A good trail leads about four miles to Black Lake, skirts a cliff band on the left, and reaches the beautiful upper basin. Allow about two hours to here

from the parking lot. Follow one of several cairned routes for another 3/4 mile to Spearhead, a little farther to Chiefshead. Pagoda is the pyramid-shaped summit on the left, between Chiefshead and Longs. To the right of Chiefshead lie McHenry's Peak and Arrowhead.

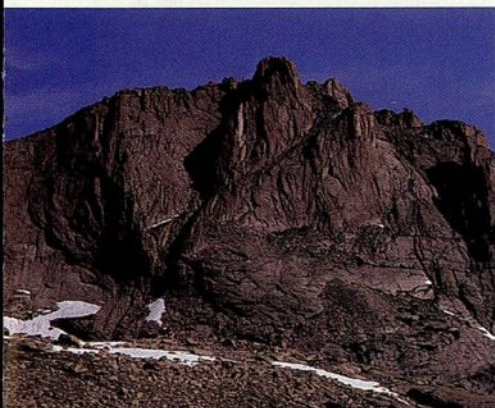
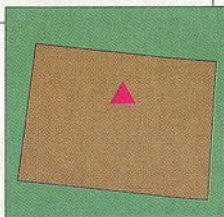
**Seasons.** June to September, depending on the last winter's snowpack and the next autumn's storms.

**Impact.** Climbers and the Park Service have done a remarkable job keeping the upper basin primitive and pristine. Do





your part. Glacier Gorge routes are usually done car to car in a day, but bivi permits (free) are available at the backcountry ranger station near the Moraine Park entrance (open 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.). Know and follow all regulations: camp off vegetation and above Black Lake, no tents or fires, protect the water quality, and don't build those stupid rock-walled shelters (or at least take them apart when you're done). If you're going in and out in a day you don't need to register.



**Arrowhead, a neglected peak in the popular Glacier Gorge.**

Call the backcountry station at (303) 586-1242 for more information.

**Guidebooks.** *Rocky Mountain National Park: The Climber's Guide*, by Bernard Gillet, 1993, has topos of Spearhead and the northwest face of Chiefshead. For Chiefshead's northeast face, see above.

**Amenities, climbing gear, etc.** Cotton candy, jackalope trophies, luxury hotels with room service, and other essentials are available in Estes Park. Komito's Boots, also in Estes, is a national historic landmark among climbing shops, sells any gear you might need, and is an excellent information source: (800) 422-2668.



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# The kids are alright

Not for adults only

Little League, Pop Warner, and Girl Scouts of America — look out. For years these American institutions have dominated young people's recreational interests. But with the advent of new climbing styles, indoor climbing gyms, and safer technology, rock climbing in America has evolved to include a niche for both children and teens.

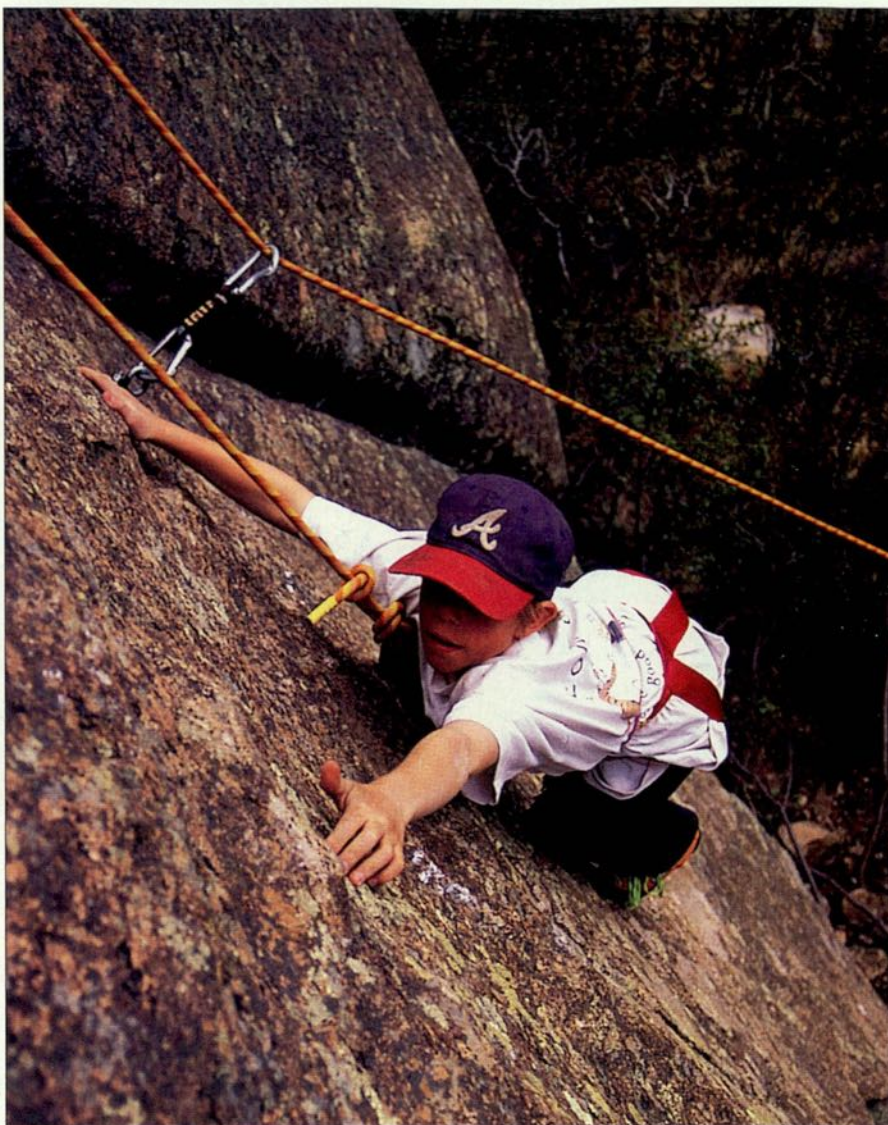
Outliving its previous daredevil reputation, climbing has won the approval of apprehensive parents, who are now allowing their children a taste of the sport. (Not to mention that climbers of the 1970s and '80s are having children.) The result is people of all ages at rock gyms and climbing areas nationwide, some pushing their physical limits and others simply satisfying their seemingly inherent gravitation toward climbing and scrambling.

## A psychological perspective

Children are natural climbers. According to Sue Pritchett, a seventh-grade teacher and the South Tahoe Outreach Education Director, kids are usually less fearful than adults. "They often have no concept of what they can and cannot do yet, so they can be successful at any level," she says.

Pritchett, 51, initiated a summer climbing program in the public school system in South Lake Tahoe, California, for children who have a low success rate in regular school. Numerous successful grant proposals led to the construction of an indoor climbing wall in the gymnasium of the South Tahoe Middle School. Pritchett hopes to eventually incorporate the wall into the school's P.E. program.

Jim Marshall, an early-childhood educator for the University of California at Santa Cruz, touts the problem-solving aspect of climbing. "Even though a child may be reaching for the next hold, testing their grip, and navigating the way up a rock face, they're experiencing the same type of problem solving it takes to do a math problem in a classroom," he says. "Children learn by doing. By involving their mind, bodies,



Ian Achey, 9, taking time out from Little League, Penitente Canyon, Colorado.

and brains, they learn faster."

Marshall encourages teaching kids first by allowing them the pure experience of climbing with little instruction. "Don't evaluate every move," he suggests. "Kids need to be internally motivated by how good it feels to climb to the top on their own, rather than doing it a specific way." Marshall compares climbing with surfing, saying both offer internal rewards that build self-esteem. "There are no two waves alike, and no two people will surf the same wave in the same style. So, it's more like an art form than a sport measured by external accomplishments," he says.

## The gym scene

As commercial climbing gyms open at an explosive rate across the country, more kids have a supervised and relatively safe means of checking out the sport without the resources of parents who climb. Approximately 85 percent of the commercial climbing gyms in North America now offer climbing classes for kids (some even host birthday parties for children). In

France, gyms may offer leading classes for children as young as 5; some kindergartners are leading 5.10 on artificial walls.

At Salt Lake City's Rockreation, the climbing gym is "the scene" for a small group of teens. "They climb with each other, go on dates, and even go on these little climbing trips together," says Dave Hudson, gym manager. According to him, several teenage members of Rockreation are consistently leading solid 5.12. "The fact that they have very little or no body fat, minimal muscle mass, and small, undeveloped bones makes them light, so they are able to climb hard routes," Hudson says.

## Industrial-strength response

Outdoor equipment manufacturers are also beginning to cater to young climbers. In 1990, Petzl's U.S. distributor, PMI, began importing one of the first child's specialty harnesses, the Ouistiti (pronounced "Wee-stee-tee," and meaning "little monkey" in French). The Ouistiti (\$54) is a full-body harness. According to



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—Jeff Lowe

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PMI's president, Steve Hudson, the problem with fitting kids in a climbing harness is that their heads are very large in relation to their bodies, and they don't develop in the hips until puberty. "Because they have such a high center of gravity, kids can easily flip upside-down and fall out of a conventional seat harness," Hudson explains. Black Diamond makes the only other child's harness available in the United States. The Lizard Harness is another full-body design, which retails for \$58. Mammut and Edelrid both make children's seat and chest harnesses, but neither are available in America.

Other child-specific climbing tools on the market today are Boreal's Baby Ninja slipper (\$63), and Edelrid's children's climbing helmet (\$50). Petzl's semi-automatic belay device, the GriGri (a North African good-luck charm), is also geared toward younger climbers. "This device works especially well for lighter-weight kids who are belaying a heavier individual," says Hudson.

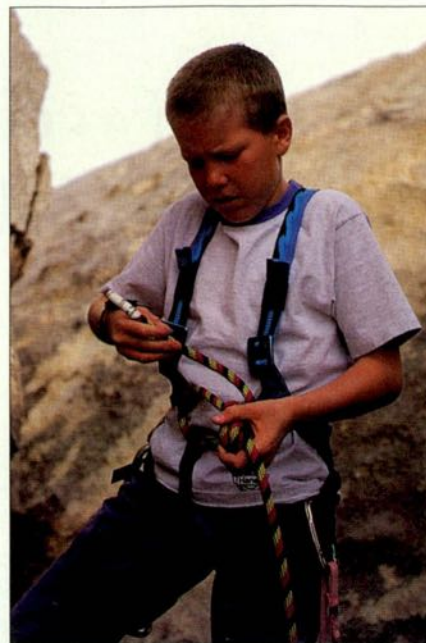
However, as Dave Nettle, manager of Alpenglow Sports in Tahoe City, California, notes, parents are often reluctant to invest in top-quality gear for younger children. "The equipment is expensive, and the rate at which the gear will have to be replaced because kids are still growing is much more rapid," he points out. For children under 8, Nettle sees most parents simply resoling tennis shoes with sticky rubber. An industrious parent can resole shoes with Barge cement and a standard resole kit for approximately \$20.

### A physiological perspective

Intensive athletic training and activity for kids who have not yet reached their growth peak has its risks. According to Don Torrey, a physical therapist and athletic trainer, young athletes involved in sports requiring intensive and/or repetitive motions can be subject to several injuries, the most severe being early bone damage caused by tearing of the ossifying cartilage known as the epiphyseal, or growth plate.

According to Torrey, an infant's skeleton is mostly made up of cartilage at birth. As a child develops, this cartilage begins to form a matrix of bone cells known in part as the epiphyseal plate. This process of bone development, Torrey explains, is spurred throughout childhood by hormonal and metabolic activity. An epiphyseal injury results when the calcifying cartilage and the immature bone separate. It can actually curtail the growth of that particular bone. The result? "One arm or leg will be longer than the other," says Torrey.

Climbing-related epiphyseal injuries are



Kevin Bransford, 10, tying in.

Photo: Kevin Powell

most likely to be caused by repetitive movement resulting in severe ligament sprains. Muscle strains created by an overly forceful contraction can also create a tear in the epiphyseal plate.

As a preventive, Torrey suggests a very gradual climbing introduction, and urges parents to prevent overuse by encouraging children to branch out and explore other sports.

Most severe, but less common in climbing, are fractures. Children will probably recover from them quickly, Torrey says, but the consequences could be disabling in the future. According to him, the growth plates won't completely solidify until 16-18 years of age for girls and 17-21 for boys.

Shey Nelson, a certified personal fitness trainer and climber who works at Colorado's Pulse Fitness Center and Boulder Rock Gym, agrees that the most detrimental sports injury for children is a broken bone resulting in damage to the growth plate. She also points out that kids are subject to the same climbing injuries as adults, the most common being tendon related. Nelson believes, however, that children are generally less at risk for these problems than adults. "If kids feel pain, they will usually stop climbing and allow themselves to rest," she says. Nelson also warns of the danger of a child becoming overly involved with climbing. "If kids become obsessed with [the sport] as an activity, they may start climbing through injuries and won't realize they're hurt," she says.

Rob Candelaria, owner of the Colorado Athletic Training School (CATS), has been coaching Olympic gymnasts and world-class climbers at his Boulder facility for six years. To him, the main risk for





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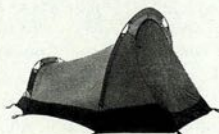
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# Kids speak for themselves

Following are tales of three young climbing enthusiasts.

Chris Lindner of Ramona, California, climbs with the goal of being one of the top 50 climbers in the world. In a recent interview, the 4'9" Lindner proudly revealed achieving his goal of redpointing a 5.13 before his 10th birthday. Chris was born into the climbing family of Tom and Elke Lindner, and was on the rocks not long after he learned to walk.

Unlike many adults, Chris doesn't believe his height is a disadvantage in climbing. "Sometimes people come up to me after I've finished a route and say, 'Hey, that climb's way reachy, how can you do it?' And I just tell them, 'There are lots of holds, you just have to use the intermediate ones.'" His dad says, "Chris finds holds that have never ever been chalked before."

Chris' favorite type of climb is one that's "really overhanging with small holds." While he has only been to half a dozen climbing areas, his favorite is Red Rocks, where he recently managed the 5.13b *Sissy Traverse*, taking three weeks. The Lindners can be found climbing at Red Rocks nearly every weekend except in the summer months. Chris, who prefers real rock to artificial walls, doesn't see himself entering competitions in the near future. Chris' training program consists of bouldering twice a week locally at Mount Woodson, and an occasional workout on the family's indoor climbing wall. As for the fear factor, both Chris and his father have found a unique cure for dispelling their fear of falling. When it seems either is being hindered by fear, the two take off for a bungee-jumping adventure. Claims Chris, who must have weights attached to his small frame before each jump so that he will weigh enough to be able to bounce back upward, "It really works!"

Another 10-year-old climbing enthusi-

ast is Kevin Bransford of Joshua Tree, California, who puts in over 100 days a year at the crag. While Chris Lindner's climbing motivation is very goal oriented, Kevin's desire to climb is cyclical.

"Sometimes he likes to climb everything in sight, then other days he just prefers to come along, watch, and socialize with other climbers," says his mother, Cyndie, a single mom and Yucca Valley elementary school teacher.

"We've been coming to the crags for seven years now, and there has never been any pressure for Kevin to climb," says Cyndie. "I want it to be fun for him." Cyndie and Kevin plan most of their vacations and summers around climbing, and as a result, Kevin has climbed at over 29 different areas around the United States, and has reached the summit of the highest peaks in 15 different states. Kevin prefers traditional crack climbing over face because, he says, "I've got the crack technique down better." He hasn't led yet, although he'd like to; Cyndie says she is

keeping an eye out for appropriate routes to start on.

Kevin's most difficult climbs to date are *Schmoe's Nose* (5.11) at the New River Gorge, and the *Left Sawdust Crack* (5.10c) in Joshua Tree. He describes his ideal route as "a thin line, with some face holds on either side, slabby at the bottom, and steep at the top." Kevin maintains a healthy fear factor and is very specific in describing when climbing is most scary for him: "It's when it's real windy, and I'm trying to do an offwidth crack and can't get the right jam ... then suddenly the wind picks up and takes me off somewhere."

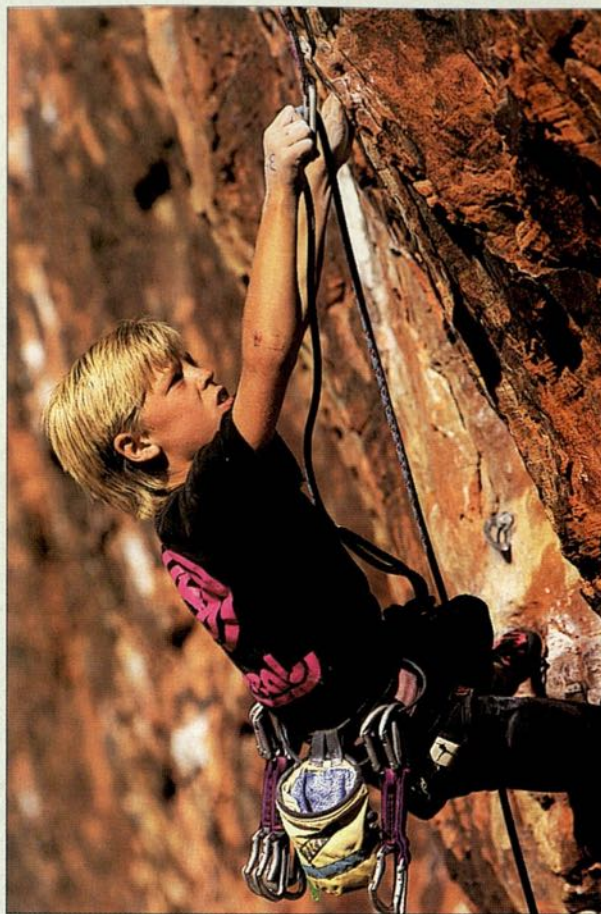
Kevin's climbing hero is Lynn Hill, "because she freed the *Nose* and I think that's pretty cool." His advice to other kids who think they'd like to pursue the sport is: "Go out and try it. If you like it, stick with it. If you don't, try something else."

When Anna Matous Valsing, 6, of Kelly, Wyoming, plays make-believe, she sometimes pretends she is climbing the famous Friction Pitch on the Grand Teton.

Anna was bouldering at 18 months, and completed her first roped climb around age 3. With an Exum guide for a father, and a mother who manages the Grand Teton's Climber's Ranch, she was introduced to climbing simply as a way of life. She mostly climbs locally, but has visited City of Rocks, Idaho.

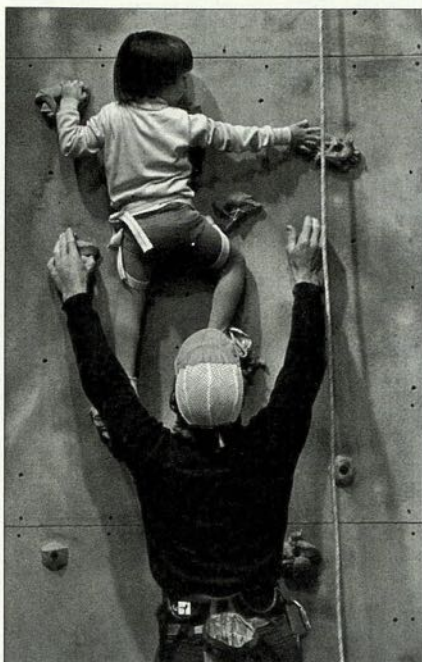
Anna follows 5.6, but, like Kevin, her interest in the sport waxes and wanes. What she enjoys most about climbing is problem solving. "I like if there is something hard, figuring it out," she says. Anna stands at 41 inches tall, and weighs a mere 36 pounds. She has her own chalkbag, and a harness and shoes her father made for her. Climbing is only "a little bit" scary for Anna. What does she do when she's scared? "I just tell my dad, then keep on climbing," she says.

—H. P.



Chris Lindner, 10, redpointing *The Gift* (5.12d), Red Rocks, Nevada.





Ron Matous spots his daughter, Anna, 4, at the Teton Rock Gym, Wyoming.

young people in climbing is the possibility they might become over-specialized before developing a firm athletic base. "What happens is one muscle group will become overdeveloped, while antagonist muscles remain underdeveloped," he says. Candelaria also warns parents against being their own children's coaches. "Parents must be their children's friend, otherwise, they'll have nowhere to turn." Candelaria's training program for young climbers emphasizes the concept of climbing as a sport. "Kids learn they just can't come in and start grabbing holds," he says. "They must learn to warm up and warm down, just like any other sport."

Other injuries common to young athletes, especially gymnasts and football players who suddenly begin weight-training programs, occur when their muscles begin developing faster than their bones can accommodate. Torrey believes young climbers, too, could be at risk for such injuries if they become involved in weight lifting. On the other hand, Torrey points out that children introduced to a sport early in life will always excel at it later because they will have developed the necessary motor skills early on. "It's much harder for us as adults to lay down new neurological patterns."

Thus, we adults have much to envy. While most of us are caught up in a societal resistance to aging, the maturation process holds nothing but promise for these young climbers. By laying down patterns that lead to the mastery of the sport early in life, they will probably evolve into better climbers than many of us will ever dream of being.

— Heidi Pesterfield

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Osp and the cliffs above, Mesja Pec on the right.

Photo: Kevin Wilson

## Behind the lines: Osp, hot new destination

### Osp, Slovenia

Two Slovenian climbers are forced to leave their campsite and sleep under the cliffs when soldiers arrive and begin their preparations for war. Supplies at the local market quickly disappear and the climbers are left with almost no food and no way of getting home because few cars travel the local roads. Ten days later, the army pulls back past the borders of Slovenia to begin the more serious fighting in Croatia. The climbers return to their home in Ljubljana, Slovenia, to find their country free of communism.

Slowly, word of the climbing in Slovenia spreads as its climbers take advantage of their new freedom to climb in Italy, France, Switzerland, and Austria. Many excellent climbers from those countries now visit the Slovenians, their destination the limestone of Osp.

The history of the cliff goes back only to 1985, when Sreco Rehberger explored the climbing above the town of Osp, and the lower horseshoe-shaped cliff, called "Mesja Pec" (pronounced "meshya pitch," meaning "mouse cliff") some 300 meters from the town entrance. Although several mountaineers had prob-

ably trained in the area before this time, Rehberger truly began to develop the cliffs, especially Mesja Pec, which is now home to the most difficult routes in Slovenia. One of the hardest routes in the world is found here, *Za staro kolo in majhnega psa* (8c+/5.14c), established by Tadej Slabe, another one of the area's early developers. (If anyone out there has doubts about the difficulty, just wait until you see the route and watch Tadej on the 9a project to its right.) Two of the other masterpieces at Mesja Pec are *Preobrazba* (7c+) and *Mozaik* (7c), the first routes put up by Rehberger.

Osp is a hardcore area. Its routes range from 10 to 30 meters in length and are from 6a+ to 8c+ in difficulty. Some 64 of the 71 routes (including projects) are 7b and harder. The longer cliffs above town, however, have many routes in the lower grades, starting at 5+ and ranging to 7a+.

Many of the best climbers in Slovenia, including Tomo Cesen, can be found training here in the winter. Located near the Mediterranean, Osp is warm enough to climb at year round, with the best climbing between late fall and early spring.

If you're in Osp in the summer, the locals will tell you it's better to go to Bohinjska Bela, another excellent area higher in the mountains north of Ljubljana.

The harder routes on the limestone cliffs of Misja Pec are incredibly overhanging with tufas coming out of roofs, creating big jugs and perfect knee bars.

If you want to venture from Misja Pec to the multi-pitch cliffs above Osp, or you just want some general information on the climbing, you can get facts and a topo from Frau Elica (originally Austrian) and her husband. French climbers call Elica the Slovenian version of the famous, warm-hearted Lucette who runs Les Cedres campground in Buoux, because Elica is always willing to help climbers. Her house is on the way to the cliffs near the top of town and is marked with a tiny sign with a red cross in a blue circle. She speaks Slovenian, Czech, Italian, and German, but little or no English. However, there are generally other climbers around who will help translate. Her husband also makes homemade wine, which will keep anyone warm on a cold winter night.

— Kevin Wilson



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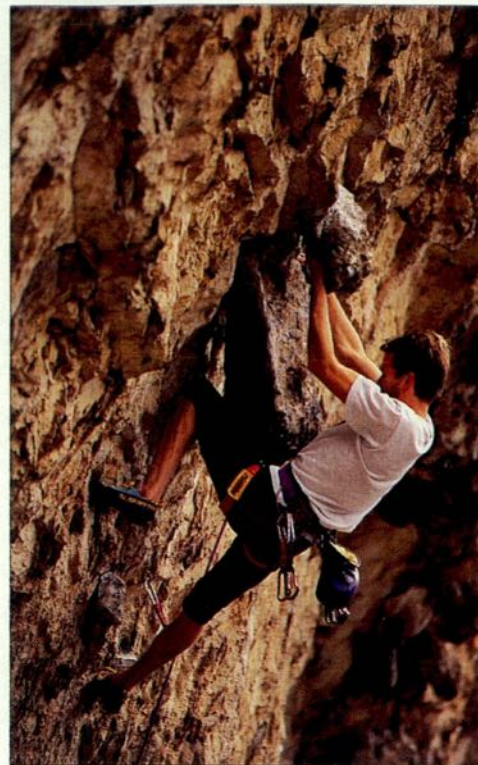
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Kevin Wilson on Mozaik (7c), on the Central Sector, Misja Pec.

## LOGISTICS

**Getting there.** Although the borders to Slovenia are similar to those between the European Economic Community countries, which is to say pretty much non-existent, it's probably best to go through the international border between Trieste and Koper in case there are any problems. Three kilometers past the border take the Ljubljana exit to Crnikal, then follow signs to Osp.

**Amenities.** The nearest climbing store is in Trieste (Adventure), and there's a post office in Crnikal. On rest days it's possible to find some entertainment in Koper, where you will also find several markets (with more selection than the one in Osp), banks, and souvenir shops. Foreign products are about the same price as anywhere in Europe, but home-made products, such as garden-grown fruit and veggies, are very cheap. On your way back from Koper or after a hard day of climbing, you can stop in Dekani at the pizza restaurant (follow the signs "Pizza 700 M") for some of the best pizza in Europe. In any event, for around \$3 American, it's the cheapest.

**Camping.** Signs point the way to the local campground, which is actually the parking lot of the former Communist army barracks. There isn't a lot of soft ground for tents, and there are no washrooms. The Gasthaus (bed & breakfast) in Crni Kal offers comfort for a decent price and the owners speak German as well as Slovenian.

At present, local climbers are also working with the people in Osp in an attempt to turn the barracks into a climbing hostel. At the very least there should be some washrooms soon, and there is already a well for water, although you need the right-sized can to drop down into the water.

## ROUTES

### Osp - Misja Pec

#### Sektor Tullio

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- 1a. *Pepel* var. (6a+)
2. *Jumbo* (7a+)
3. *Mickena* (6c)
4. *Nido* (7b)
5. *Kindergarten* (7a+)
6. *Matamoros* (7c)
7. *Tekila* (?)



Photo: Keven Wilson

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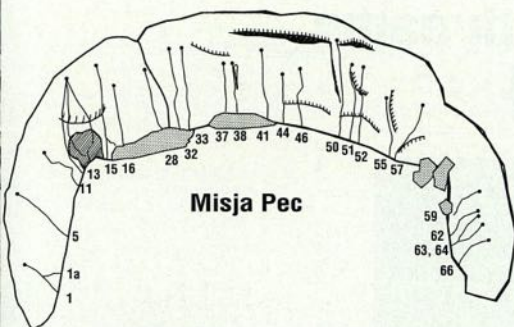
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- 9. Tortuga (7b+)
- 10. Corto (7c+)
- 11. Manana (7c)

#### Sektor Tedijeva Luknja

- 12. Project (8c?)
- 13. Za Staro Kolo In Majhnega Psa (8c+)
- 14. Project (8c+/9-?)
- 15. Peskovnik (7c)
- 15a. Sistolični Vrt (7b+)

#### Centraini Sektor & Levo

- 16. Tazio (6c)
- 17. Kurciji Rock (6c+)
- 18. Ribaltan (7a+/7b)
- 19. Cau Picke (?)
- 20. Flashdance (7c+)
- 21. Rock 'n' Roll (7c)
- 22. Project (?)
- 23. Strta Srca (8a+)
- 24. Twin Peaks (7c+)
- 25. No Fly Zone (?)
- 26. Skodelica Kave (7a+/7b)
- 27. Nina (7a+/7b)
- 28. Danger Zone (7a)
- 29. Nikita (7b+)
- 30. Minulet (7b/7b+)
- 31. Ponarejena Zelva (7a+/7b)
- 32. Oro Puro (7c)
- 33. Teta Liza (7a)
- 34. Project (?)
- 35. Project (?)

#### Centralli Sektor - Desno

- 36. Veseli Tobogan (8a)
- 37. Albanski Konjak (6c+[7c+])
- 38. Rodeo (6c+)
- 39. Pticja Perspektiva 8a (7a+/7b)
- 40. Project (?)
- 41. Triad (7c+/8a)
- 42. Project (?)
- 43. Jsfk (7c+)
- 44. Figa (7b)
- 45. Blood Sugar Sex Magic (7c+/8a)
- 46. Highlander (8a+/8b)
- 47. Project (?)
- 48. Marioneta (8b/8b+)
- 49. Mozaik (7c)
- 50. Chiquita (8b+)
- 51. Preobrazba (7c/7c+)
- 52. Klobasa (8a+)
- 53. Kaj ti je Deklika (8b/8b+)
- 54. Krasni Oktober (?)
- 55. Krvavica (7a)
- 56. Project (?)
- 57. Pecenica (6b+)

#### Sektor Hladilnik

- 58. Truplojedka (8a)
  - 59. Missing Link (8b+)
  - 60. Marjetica (8b/8b+)
  - 61. Project (?)
  - 62. Sonce v Oceh (8a+)
  - 63. Runo (7b+)
  - 64. Reksi (7a+/7b)
  - 65. Project (?)
  - 66. Platfuss (7a+)
  - 67. Milky Way (6a+)
  - 68. Bounty (6c)
  - 69. Snickers (6b+)
- (Routes on other walls not listed here.)

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# Tibetan trials and cowboy dreams at MountainFilm '94

Telluride, Colorado



Film goers relaxing at the Telluride MountainFilm festival.

After spending spring slogging through mud and lounging on the couch waiting for the snow to melt off the local cliffs on Independence Pass, I was eager for the Telluride MountainFilm Festival on Labor Day weekend, to kick off the summer and help me get motivated for adventure.

And indeed, the setting of the festival was stunning, the bouldering great, and the weather perfect. Telluride, the most style-conscious, metropolitan small town you could ever visit, is nestled in a box canyon of jagged mountains, and has the feel of a college town without the college. Locals with carefully arranged dreadlocks, ragged flannel shirts, and long skirts casually walk the streets, pausing for lattes at the coffee shops.

On the evening before the festival, the local public radio station prepared residents for one of the many other upcoming events, the Mushroom Festival, with a discussion on wild mushrooms, including a lengthy segment on psychedelics. Telluride seems hopelessly lost in the '60s, though most of the residents are under 30. As one who falls into this dubious category, I was enjoying myself.

I was hoping to see movies that would humble and inspire me. I did. And I didn't. The climbing films were all but non-existent and many of the films selected weren't related to the mountains. Although the festival's complete title (in fine print) is the 16th Annual Festival of Mountain, Adventure, and Environmental Film and Video, in the end, I felt a little shortchanged.

Several films, although enjoyable, left me wondering why they were chosen, such as *Baraka*, a montage of images varying from traffic intersections to religious ceremonies from around the world, and *The Wonderful Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl*, an interesting documentary on the life of the famous German director, Riefenstahl. Although Riefenstahl did make a couple of mountain films in her youth, she is primarily known for her

direction of Hitler's propaganda film, *Triumph of the Will*, on which the movie concentrates.

In fact, due to the lack of climbing films, an award wasn't even given on the subject. The festival's organizer and official movie selector, Rick Silverman, says he just didn't see many good mountain or climbing films this year.

"I would love to see more climbing films, but it has to be great. They have to tell a story," he says. "When we see great climbing films, we will happily program them."

Yet the films chosen were educational and well made, and a few were genuinely exciting. In the midst of wandering around buzzing on strong coffee, I overheard many a MountainFilm vet say that this was "the best festival ever."

The fest opened on Friday with various panels and speakers discussing the political situation in Tibet, namely the Chinese occupation and subsequent destruction of Tibetan culture. More social than environmental, the symposium related heavily to climbers, as many mountaineers travel to the area.

Discussions got heated when the photojournalist Galen Rowell, filmmaker David Breashears, and writer Jeff Long — all three of whom have climbed extensively in the Himalaya — stepped on stage to debate the ethics of foreign travel in Tibet.

Long lit the fire with his first comment, "Tourism subsidizes genocide in Tibet ... and climbing is nothing more than a radical kind of tourism. It indirectly legitimizes the Chinese presence there."

Breashears quickly disagreed. "The Chinese don't need our money to repress the Tibetans. They may use it, but they

don't need it."

Rowell was somewhere in the middle. In the end, the consensus was: yes, travel to Tibet, but look beyond its surface and study the social and political aspects of the country to share with Americans upon your return, a view shared by the Dalai Lama, religious leader of Tibet.

With speakers varying from a Columbia University professor of Buddhist studies to a representative from the Tibetan government, Friday was a learning experience, and the story of Tibet's suffering was the theme of the festival, with several movies on the subject.

A particularly touching film, *Satya — A Prayer for the Enemy*, won a Special Jury Award, and covered the plight of Tibetan nuns, who were reportedly tortured, raped, and forced to break their religious vows by the Chinese government. Breashears' PBS documentary, *Red Flag Over Tibet*, won Best Documentary, and also discussed the Chinese occupation and included shocking footage of Chinese brutality.

Although the festival concentrated on such issues, some adventure films were thrown in. Several of the French filmmaker Didier Lafond's action films, including one of a stunt pilot shooting through the Alps, elicited many oohs and aahs, but weren't judged because they aren't current.

Glenn Singleman's *BASEclimb*, which won Best Adventure Film, showed two friends slogging up the Great Trango Tower with a guide, and hurling themselves off the top. The two jumpers used helmet-mounted cameras, creating stunning footage of the cliff flying by as they fell.

*The Seven Faces of Everest* wasn't action packed, but gave historical perspectives on Mount Everest and why men (it discussed women only as those left behind) climb it.

Doug Peacock, author of *Grizzly Years: In Search of the American Wilderness* and the inspiration for the character Hayduke in Edward Abbey's *Monkey Wrench Gang*, veered from the Tibet theme when he discussed the reintroduction of grizzly bears

Photo: Doug Berry



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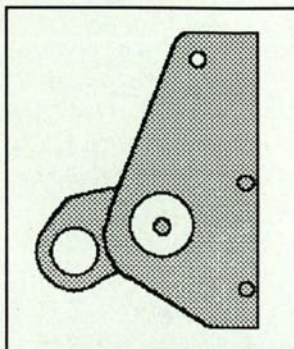
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to Colorado. His stories included being charged and tracked by grizzlies while living alone in the Montana wilderness.

The special guest speaker was Paul Petzoldt, 86, who founded the National Outdoor Leadership School and made notable first ascents in the Tetons of Wyoming. He brought the house down with stories of his early climbing days, including one on rescuing a parachuter who inadvertently landed on top of Devils Tower. Also entertaining was Petzoldt's discussion of his strong family history of longevity. "My grandmother died in the hospital when she was a hundred and sixteen," Petzoldt said. "But they saved the baby."

Between his stories of working on rescues and drinking too much liquor, Petzoldt urged the new generation of climbers to clean up their act and keep the mountains pristine. Petzoldt plans to climb the Grand again this year for the 70th anniversary of his first ascent.

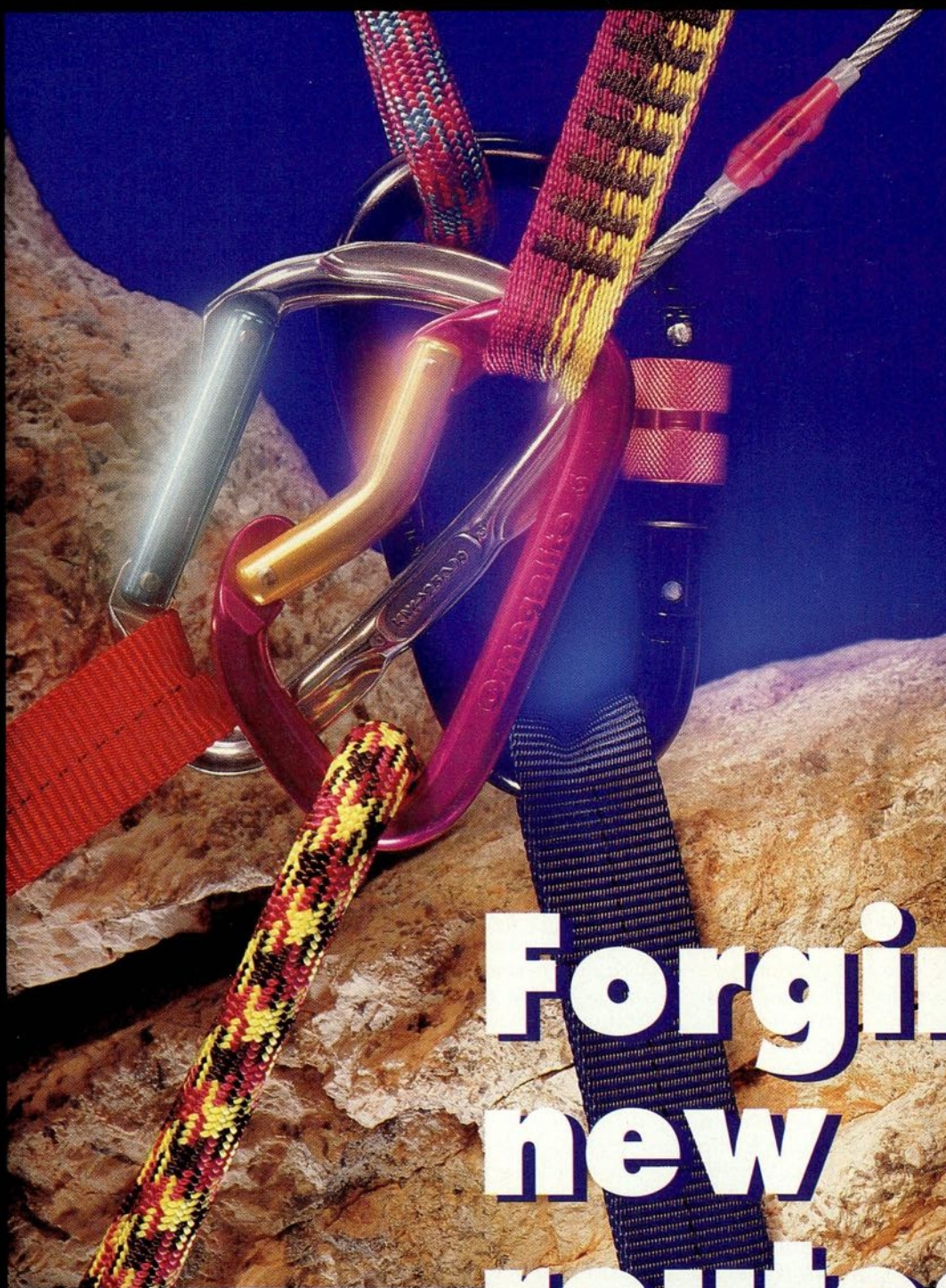
Ironically, one of the weekend highlights had nothing to do with the mountains or environment, and only a little to do with adventure. Taking home the festival's Grand Prize was *Colorado Cowboy: The Bruce Ford Story*, about a professional rodeo bareback rider. The black-and-white movie was entertaining, with slow-mos of Ford at work, and hilarious interviews demonstrating the rodeo lifestyle. The similarities to sport climbing kept the climbers in the crowd laughing, as the riders sat in what looked like a climbing competition isolation room, taping up their hands and elbows while wearing Wranglers and chaps. Like sport climbers, the riders also showed each other their moves, which involved slipping one hand in front of their pants, waving the other above their heads, and doing a display straight out of "Dance Fever."

Other winners included *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* for a Special Jury Award, *Mighty River* for Best Environmental Film, *He Dances for His Cormorants* for the Gold Jury Award, and *Assault on Empire Mountain* for Best Humor Award. The festival's judges were the accomplished mountaineer Kitty Calhoun-Grissom, climbing photographer Beth Wald, filmmaker John Armstrong, executive director of the American Alpine Club Charley Shimanski, and Dana Saunders, head of acquisitions for Planet Central, Inc., a new cable network.

I may not have gotten the motivation to climb El Cap this summer, but the weekend was packed with interesting speakers and great flicks. There was barely time to enjoy the real-life mountains of Telluride. Somehow I managed.

—Lisa Morgan





# Forging new routes



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Photo: Neal Beidleman

## Everest southwest face sees winter ascent; fast spring Makalu climb by Russian/American pair

Nepal Himalaya

The southwest face of Mount Everest (8848 meters), which sees few attempts in any season because of its steepness, technical difficulty, and sheer size, saw its first winter ascent late in 1993 by a small and highly experienced Japanese team aided by a large group of strong Sherpas.

The Japanese were highly organized, well financed, and abundantly equipped. Twenty-eight Sherpas helped the seven Japanese reach the top of the world via one of its most difficult routes in only three weeks, despite bitterly cold winter winds.

Three Himalayan veterans led the team: Kuniaki Yagihara, the overall leader, stayed at basecamp throughout the climb (Everest teams in Nepal are now allowed only seven foreign members, so he was at basecamp with a trekking permit), while deputy leader Yoshio Ogata and climbing leader Hideji Nazuka participated in the actual climb.

They carefully planned their effort, which began last autumn with an ascent by all seven Everest climbing members, plus Yagihara, five more compatriots, and five of their Sherpas, of nearby Cho Oyu (8201 meters). This helped them acclimatize, while their use of oxygen on the summit attempt minimized the likelihood of frostbite. They then spent three weeks resting in Kathmandu and lowland Nepal before returning to the high mountains.

When the Everest climbers arrived at basecamp on November 21, two of their Cho Oyu teammates had already estab-

lished the camp and supervised the arrival of 13 tons of supplies for 50 people (including over 40 Sherpas). Their equipment included a special tent platform for the highest camp, 6000 meters of rope, and 96 bottles of oxygen.

All seven Japanese climbers and their leader had experienced two grueling months in the winter of 1991-1992 during their first attempt on the face. They were driven back by fierce winds and their Sherpas' unwillingness to continue carrying supplies to the highest camps.

This year the Japanese knew the route, the same line taken in the autumn of 1975 during the first ascent of the face by a British expedition led by Chris Bonington. They knew its problems, including what they needed to make a proper last camp at 8350 meters.

Nepalese mountaineering regulations fix December 1 as the first day of the winter season, so the Japanese couldn't officially start their climb until then. In the last half of November, the expedition's Sherpas established the route through the Khumbu Icefall with 50 ladders and 2000 meters of fixed rope, and carried loads to Camp 1. At the same time, the Japanese climbers made a quick climb of a small peak in the region, Pokalde (5806 meters). On December 1, the seven Japanese and a number of Sherpas moved up through the Icefall, and by afternoon six of the Japanese were established in Camp 2.

They fixed 3635 meters of rope between Camp 2 at 6500 meters near the bottom of the face and the south summit at 8750 meters. On the final difficult part of the climb, the Hillary Step on the southeast ridge, they used fixed rope left by previous expeditions. Using bottled oxygen while sleeping and climbing at and above their two highest camps, the Japanese suffered no serious damage from frostbite. "We could not climb Everest in winter without oxygen and not lose all our fingers and toes," Yagihara said.

Winter is not usually a period of much snowfall, and snow fell all day long only once. Falling rock (blown loose by the strong winds) and cold were the major problems. At basecamp the temperature was three degrees F; at 5 a.m. one day at Camp 4 (8350 meters), it was minus 32. The winds were especially fierce above the south summit.

Three pairs of Japanese climbers reached the summit on December 18, 20, and 22: Hideji Nazuka and Fumiaki Goto, Osamu Tanabe and Sinsuke Exuka, and Yoshio Ogata and Ryushi Hoshino, respectively. "Now I can go back to Japan," said Yagihara.

The successful expedition contrasted markedly with a party of four Spaniards and two Swiss who made a low-budget, alpine-style ascent of neighboring Cho

Anatoli Bukreev approaching the twin ice towers just below the summit of Makalu.



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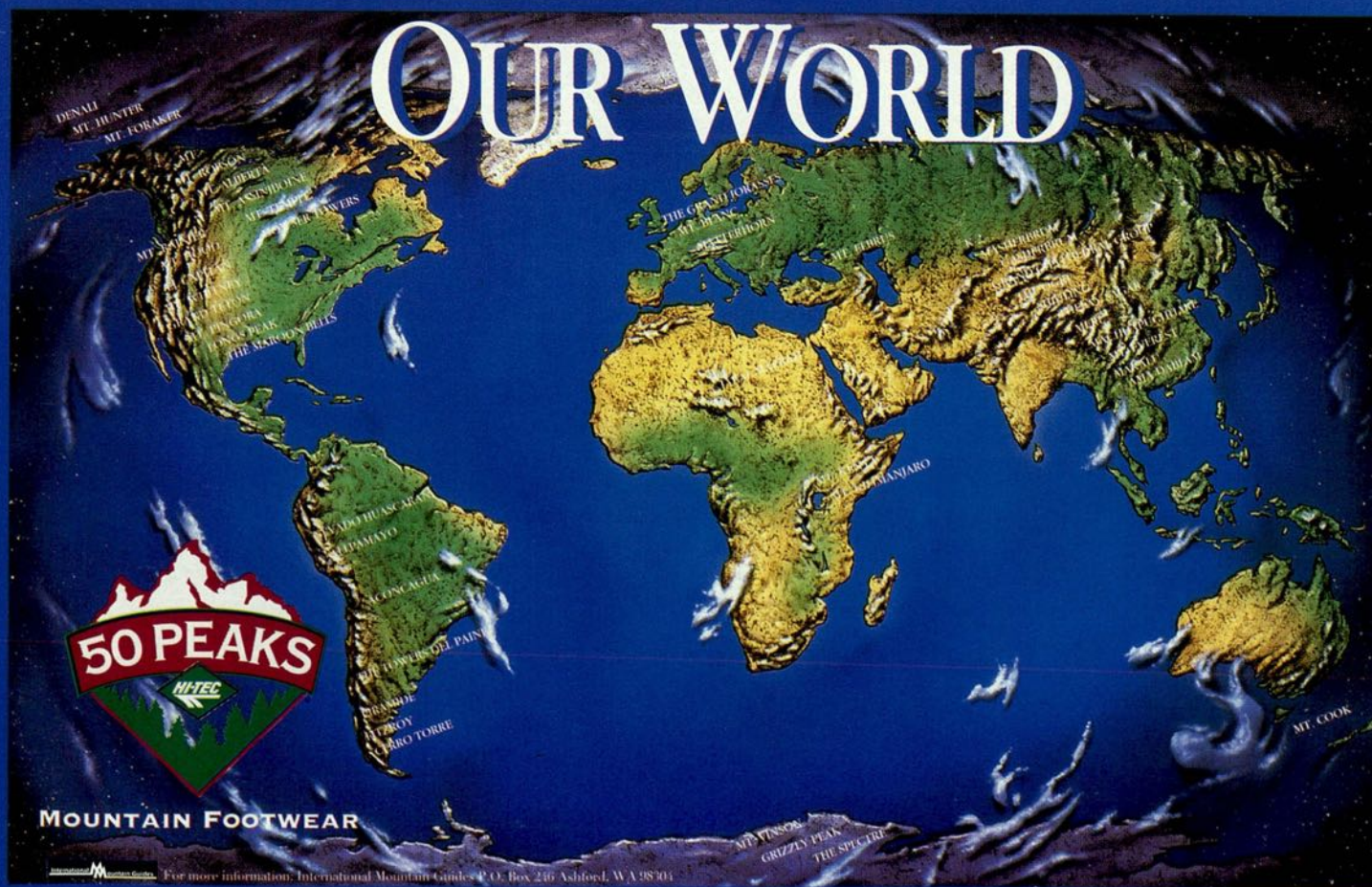


They attacked Cho Oyu by its well-trodden standard route, in alpine style: no climbing Sherpas, fixed camps, fixed ropes, radios, or artificial oxygen. The Swiss pair set off from basecamp at 5600 meters for their summit push as soon as clouds cleared late in the morning of January 19. The Spaniards followed the next day. Each party had its own tent, sleeping bags, cooking gear, and food.

One of the Spaniards, Cucurull, decided to abandon his attempt, but Magrina and Garra pressed on and reached the summit on January 26. They had spent the previous night out without a tent, but their sleeping bags gave them some protection. Garra suffered from frostbitten fingers, and all three had frost-nipped toes, but returned safely to basecamp.

The Nepalese limit on the number of permits granted to climb Everest from the south started to have a significant effect

Out of 548 climbers who have summited Everest, just 108 have done so via a route in Tibet. Why? The terrible winds that seem to constantly sweep the north face are certainly one reason. Another factor is the altitude of the final camps from which climbers must make their summit bids. The last camp on the standard north-side route (North Col to north ridge and north face) is at 8300 meters, whereas the last camp on the standard southern route (South Col to the southeast ridge) is at 7900 meters. So, to summit Everest from the north most climbers stay for two





nights at and above 8300 meters, while on the south side they are usually at this altitude for only eight to 10 hours.

To make matters worse, on the north side there are serious technical difficulties above the last camp: the Yellow Band of unstable rock, the great Steps, and a last section of difficult rock just below the summit snowcap. (The southeast ridge has the famous Hillary Step to surmount, but it's a relatively small section of the final day's climb.) And the descent of the southeast ridge is clearly defined by the precipitous east face to the left, while the north-side descent is trickier.

A vivid example of the north/south contrast happened this season. On the morning of May 9, several climbers, who had just arrived at the summit from the south, were enjoying themselves at the top of the world, while just 300 meters below on the north face a Taiwanese climber, who had summited alone the previous evening, was trying to make his way down to safety. Shih Fang-Fang, a friendly 27-year-old, known to his teammates as Norman, collapsed and died at noon that day.

Shih's death was one of several dramatic events on the north side. An Australian, Michael Rheinberger, a 53-year-old veteran of six unsuccessful Everest attempts, was fiercely determined to summit. "He

was not turning back," said Mark Whetu of New Zealand, a mountain guide for 14 years who went to the summit with Rheinberger on May 26. In the middle of the afternoon, with several hours of climbing ahead, not to mention the descent, Whetu felt they should turn back due to Rheinberger's slow pace. But Rheinberger had no intention of doing so and was prepared to go up alone and bivouac that night.

Whetu stayed with his friend and they reached the summit as the sun set at 7:18 p.m. Now they were confronted with technical rock just below the summit that Rheinberger could not negotiate in the dark in his exhausted condition. They dug a snow hole behind a rock and bivouacked, only 20 meters below the summit — the highest bivouac ever made.

Their descent the next day was a nightmare in slow motion. In 11 hours they climbed to just below the Second Step. Rheinberger, now blind and incoherent from altitude sickness, could no longer move and Whetu continued down to fetch more oxygen. By now Whetu had seriously frostbitten toes and a frostbitten finger; he was unable to return to Rheinberger and no one else was in a position to do anything but help Whetu. On May 31 an American summiteer saw Rheinberger's

body sprawled about 200 meters below where Whetu had left him.

Just before Rheinberger and Whetu summited, two Canadians, John McIsaac and Denis Brown, had also developed altitude sickness. McIsaac was especially ill, and in the final stage of getting him down to the foot of the mountain in the very early hours of the morning, a line of dots of light from the headlamps of perhaps 20 climbers from various expeditions could be seen moving upward to help carry him down. McIsaac survived thanks to the cooperation of so many people.

But this cooperation came at a price. Two members of an international expedition of New Zealand, American, French, Canadian, and Romanian climbers had moved up for a summit bid when their leader asked three of the team's four climbing Sherpas to go up quickly with a supply of oxygen for the stricken McIsaac. The Sherpas made a forced march from 7000 to 8300 meters in four hours and 20 minutes. The Canadians were rescued, but the international expedition no longer had the resources to support a summit push, and the team went home unsuccessful.

There were no fatalities and no one suffered serious frostbite on the Nepalese side of Everest this spring. During the course

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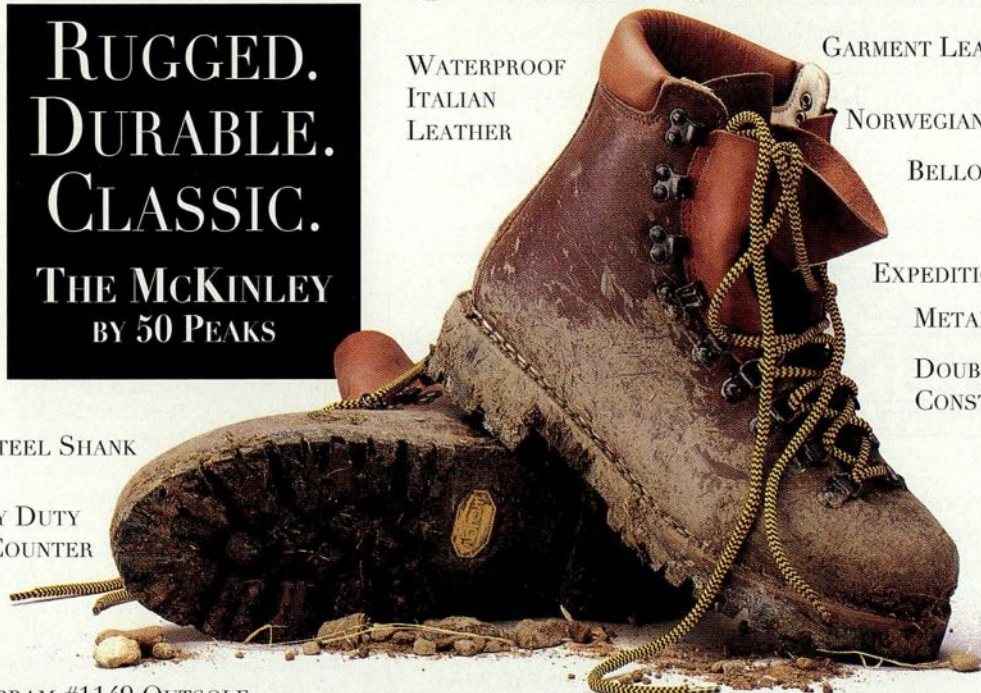
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of one ascent, five American climbers removed 5200 pounds of garbage, including 250 oxygen bottles, from the South Col route. Scott Fischer, Steve Goryl, Rob Hess, and Brent Bishop (the son of Barry Bishop, who summited Everest in 1963) all reached the summit in mid-May, Fischer and Hess without the aid of bottled oxygen, while Steve Gipe, a physician, provided medical support.

Two other climbers, who were successful on Everest's south side, also climbed its immediate neighbor, Lhotse (8516 meters), the world's fourth highest mountain. Rob Hall of New Zealand and Ed Viesturs of the United States thus became the fourth and fifth persons to scale both summits in the same season, and the first ones to do Everest first and then Lhotse.

Carlos Carsolio of Mexico made ascents of Cho Oyu and Lhotse alone. After acclimatizing on Lobuje East, a minor peak in the Everest region, he traveled quickly to Tibet to climb Cho Oyu as an autonomous member of a commercial expedition. He made the fastest ascent ever done of Cho Oyu: in just 19 hours, Carsolio said, he went to the summit from the team's basecamp at 5650 meters, which he left at 3 p.m. on April 25 in the company of the team's Swiss leader, Erhard Loretan. The two rested for an hour at Camp 1 (6400 meters). Loretan turned back at 6600 meters at about 7:30 p.m., leaving Carsolio to climb alone in a full moon. Carsolio reached the summit at 9:57 the following morning, April 26.

Carsolio returned to Kathmandu on April 30 and flew by helicopter to the Everest-Lhotse area, arriving at Lhotse basecamp on May 7. He then made a daylight ascent of Lhotse in just under 24 hours. Carsolio had wanted to do the climb faster, but a big party at basecamp the night before drained his energy.

Carsolio, 31, has now scaled eight of the world's 14 mountains over 8000 meters, and is the fourth person to climb the five highest, Everest, K-2, Kangchenjunga, Lhotse, and Makalu. (The first three were Reinhold Messner of Italy, the late Jerzy Kukuczka of Poland, and Viki Groselj of Slovenia.) Carsolio left Nepal after his Lhotse climb to scale another 8000er, Broad Peak, in the Karakoram Himalaya of Pakistan.

Elsewhere in the Khumbu region a small Russian team pioneered a new line on Ama Dablam (6812 meters) in pure alpine style — no fixed camps, no fixed rope, and no Sherpa help. Vladimir Bashkurov, who climbed Annapurna I in 1991 and Everest last year, led the four-man team. The route climbed the southeast face (to the right of the eastern of two



ridges that run south from the summit) onto the southeast ridge. The team made six bivouacs on the steep route (average 50 degrees, sometimes vertical), and could climb for only three or four hours each morning before clouds rolled in and snow limited their visibility.

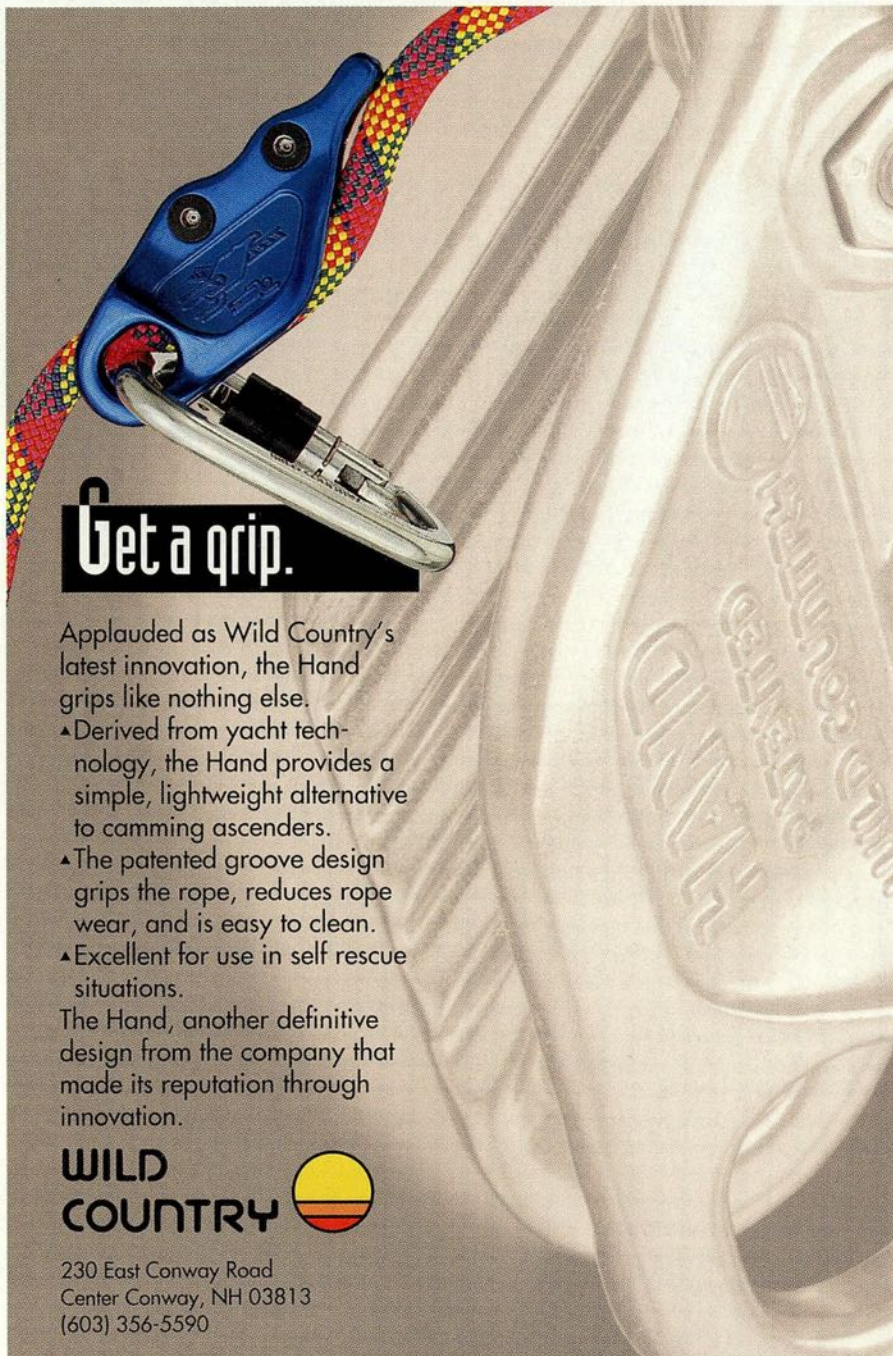
In stark contrast, five Japanese and three Sherpas pitched one high camp and fixed 2000 meters of rope up the north face and north ridge of Urkinmang (6151 meters) in the Jugal Himal range northwest of Kathmandu. The Japanese, under the leadership of Tamotsu Onishi, were the first climbers to attempt the route, and they ascended a direct line to the top. They found moderately difficult climbing with ice up to 75 degrees near the summit.

On Makalu (8463 meters), a Bolivian, who says he is the first Native American ever to climb in the Himalaya, reached the base of the twin ice towers approximately 30 meters from the summit via the normal route on the northwest side. Bernardo Guarachi, a 41-year-old mountain guide from La Paz, reached his highpoint on April 29 with Russian climber Anatoli Bukreev, who continued solo to just below the summit. On May 9, American climbers Steve Bain, Thor Kieser, and Neal Beidleman climbed to within 125 meters of the summit; Bain, using oxygen, continued alone to the base of the ice towers.

Bukreev and Beidleman stayed on to repeat the Makalu climb in a speed ascent that they hoped to accomplish in under 24 hours. The two men left basecamp (5300 meters) at 6:30 p.m. on May 13, climbed through the night, reached Camp 2 (7400 meters) at 4 a.m., and stayed there an hour before pushing to Camp 3 (7700 meters) on the north face, where they arrived at 6:15 a.m. to find its tent flattened. The two spent several hours rebuilding the camp, brewing tea, and sleeping, before setting out for the top at 2 p.m., but returned to Camp 3 an hour and a half later, too lethargic for a summit attempt. They set out again at 8:30 a.m. and, 46 hours after leaving basecamp, gained the true summit at 4:15 p.m. on May 15.

An experienced Dutch climber, Bart Vos, traveled to Nepal with an ambitious project, to solo Dhaulagiri I (8167 meters), the world's seventh highest mountain, via its standard northeast ridge route. With no teammates, no climbing Sherpas to accompany him, and no other expedition anywhere on the mountain, he was alone in his efforts. After three weeks, he reached a high point of 7100 meters, and two weeks later abandoned the attempt because of constant snowfall and serious avalanche danger.

— Liz Hawley




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## Good news

**Rumney, New Hampshire.** The Access Fund's purchase of the land providing access to the Rumney climbing area in central New Hampshire should be completed by the time this issue is out.

The closure of the Main Cliff and several other popular crags to provide a buffer zone for nesting peregrine falcons was lifted in June. Wildlife specialists were impressed by climbers' compliance with the closure. Also, five or six species of rare plants were discovered in the area. The Access Fund is working with the Forest Service and New Hampshire Heritage, a botanical preservation group, to make sure that climbers will not threaten these plants.

Local climbers are raising funds to pay for a new parking area and trail improvements; to make a contribution, call Jim Shimburg, the Rock Barn, at (603) 536-2717.

**Devil's Lake, Wisconsin.** *Climbing* No. 144 reported the closure of a sandstone bluff, where climbers had established a few sport climbs, at Devil's Lake State Park.

There are in fact no sport climbs on any crag at Devil's Lake, and the area maintains perhaps the strictest no-bolting ethic of any climbing area in the country. Moreover, there are two sandstone bluffs at Devil's Lake: the Old Sandstone, where climbers have climbed for decades, and the New Sandstone, which was explored more recently. Both of these bluffs were closed to climbing in January.

Local climbers met with park officials in late May to discuss the closures. The park promised to consider reopening the Old Sandstone to climbing, based on its climbing history and a review of impacts at the site. The New Sandstone will remain closed. Officials also pledged to consult regularly with local climbers on climbing policy.

Devil's Lake also does not allow guiding in the park, unless a contractual agreement is reached between the guide and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. For more information on climbing at Devil's Lake, contact the park at (608) 356-8301.

**Santee Boulders and Mission Gorge, California.** On June 4, National Trails Day, some 50 San Diego climbers removed graffiti and picked up more than 60 large bags of trash from the Santee Boulders and Mission Gorge climbing areas. This impressive cleanup was organized by the Access Fund in conjunction with the American

Hiking Society and the San Diego Climbers Club. Special paint remover was required to clean the widespread graffiti from the Santee Boulders.

The SDCC has been working with the Access Fund to preserve access to the Santee Boulders, the centerpiece of a proposed residential development. For more information on the status of access to the Santee Boulders, contact Mike Brown, P.O. Box 1983, Spring Valley, CA 91979; (619) 670-6167.

## Closures

**Snow Canyon State Park, Utah.** With its mild winter temperatures and colorful sandstone, Snow Canyon State Park, near St. George, Utah, is popular with both climbers and hikers. A few years ago climbing activity provoked controversy, but local climbers have worked to improve trails, clean up trash and graffiti, and improve relations with park rangers. However, a new access problem has arisen.

Johnson Canyon, on the park's southern boundary, is a scenic destination for climbers and visitors alike. Access to this area crosses private land, and recently the land owner posted the property and is enforcing the closure aggressively. The owner's concern, apparently, is not liability but rather that the state buy this land at an inflated price.

The local climbers' organization, 3D Climbing Club, has begun a petition drive to encourage the state to acquire the access to Johnson Canyon and add the land to the state park. Climbers are urged to write Utah Governor Mike Levitt (210 State Capitol, Salt Lake City, UT 84114) to request that the state take action to preserve public access to Johnson Canyon. For more information on climbing and access at Snow Canyon, contact Bo Beck, The Outdoor Outlet, at (801) 628-3611.

**Rainbow Boulders, Temecula, California.** In May the access road to the Rainbow Boulders, a popular granite climbing area, was closed to the public. The Sheriff's Department is enforcing this closure, which was reportedly a response to vandalism.

Although climbers have good relations with neighboring land owners, the owner of the boulders intends to develop the area. For more information on the Rainbow Boulders, call Brian Foster, Gregory Mountain Sports, at (800) 477-3420.





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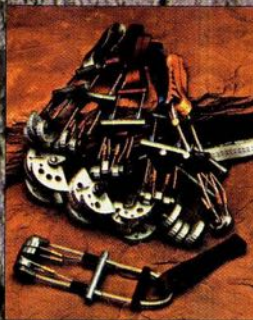
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## DIED

• Paul Stettner, 88, of heart failure, on May 26. Paul, of Steamboat Springs, Colorado, and his brother Joe are best known for their first ascent of *Stettners Ledges* on the east face of Longs Peak, Colorado, in 1927. After migrating from Bavaria, the two brothers motorcycled from Chicago to Rocky Mountain National Park to attempt the new route.

Using 120 feet of hemp rope purchased at the general store, they free climbed the 5.7 route, the most difficult high-mountain rock climb in Colorado at the time.

• David Tollakson, 59, a retired school teacher who volunteered as a mountaineering guide and ski patroller, on April 9, while climbing Mount San Jacinto in California. Tollakson apparently slipped near the summit of the 9600-foot peak and fell about 600 feet. Tollakson, from Studio City, California, had climbed the highest peaks on six of the seven continents and was planning an Everest expedition for 1995 in hopes of doing the seventh.

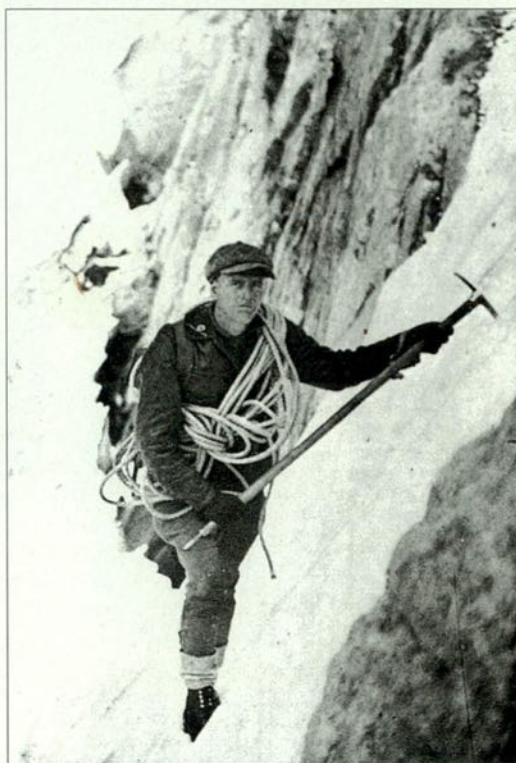
• Bill DeMallie, 40, of Boulder, in May. DeMallie, who reportedly suffered from Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, committed suicide.

DeMallie taught interdisciplinary science at the University of Colorado at Boulder and also worked at the Tribal Resources Institute. He started climbing in New Hampshire. In the late 1980s, DeMallie migrated west and established many routes in the Boulder area.

"He was also an accomplished free-soloist. Soloing was an aspect of Bill's climbing which gave him the greatest joy," says his climbing partner and friend Mike Clinton.

DeMallie also biked, hiked, ran, and basically enjoyed the mountains — his favorite books were John Muir's stories on traveling in the wilderness. "I like to think [DeMallie and Muir] are sitting around the campfire right now in the Sierras, swapping stories," Clinton says.

• Daniel Caskenette, 20, of Saint Catharines, Ontario, of encephalitis on



Paul Stettner on the east face of Longs Peak, Colorado, in 1927.

June 6. Caskenette, a Niagara Escarpment regular, was a full-time university student.

## ENGAGED

• Stuart Ruckman, 27, and Libby Ellis, 34, both of Ventura, California. Ruckman, co-author of *Wasatch Climbing North* and *Wasatch Climbing South*, is a photographer and has been climbing for 17 years, traveling abroad to France, Mexico, and Australia. Ellis, environmental program director for Patagonia, Inc., has been climbing for about eight years. The two set the date for October, in Zion National Park where they can get in a little climbing.

## MARRIED

• Neal Beidleman, 34, an aerospace engineer, to Amy Gilbertson, 37, chief financial officer of Aspen Bancshares, Inc., in July. Beidleman, a mountain runner and skier as well as a climber, proposed to Gilbertson while the two were trekking into Makalu in the Himalayas, before he topped out on the mountain in May. Beidleman, who climbed without oxygen, was the seventh American to summit Makalu. Gilbertson, also a mountain runner, skier, and rock climber, reached 5800 meters on Makalu.

• Gea Phipps, ranked in the ASCF top five women, to Scott Franklin, ranked number one in 1993 ASCF competitions, on July 3. Phipps is also a regular contributor to *Climbing*. They plan to remain in their home in Bend, Oregon, and forego the honeymoon, as they're always traveling for competitions.

• Marc Twight, 32, an alpinist and frequent contributor to *Climbing*, to Cathy Beloeil, 29, a climbing instructor and photographer, in June. Both reside in Salt Lake City and are setting off on a slide-show tour in October and December. Twight, a veteran of many hard ascents in Canada and the Alps, established a new route in May on the north buttress of Mount Hunter in Alaska with Scott Backes. Beloeil, a talented rock climber, is a contributing photographer to *Climbing*.

• Eric Candee, 28, to Melynda Machovec, 28, both of New Castle, Colorado, on June 12. Candee started Geologic Holds, producing artificial climbing holds out of river rocks. He has also put up numerous routes around Colorado, including his recent *Philabuster* (5.12c/d), in Rifle, and drives the local school bus. Machovec is a massage therapist, skier, and cyclist.

## BORN

• Melissa Lowe, to George Lowe, 49, and Liz Regan-Lowe, 40, of Golden, Colorado, on May 24. Among his many mountaineering accomplishments, George made the first ascent of the Kangshung Face, one of the hardest routes on Mount Everest, in 1983, the first ascent of the North Face of North Twin in the Canadian Rockies, and a solo ascent of Dhaulagiri I in 1990. He works as an engineer, and Liz is an orthopedic surgeon, climber, and pilot.

• Emma Yardley, to Nick and Ann Yardley, of Conway, New Hampshire in May. Nick is director of the American Mountain Guides Association as well as the IME Climbing School. Ann is a climber and guide. Emma is their first girl and second child.

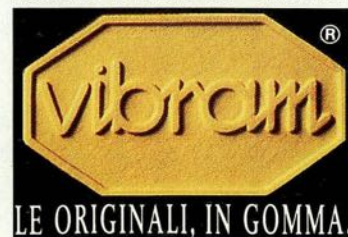




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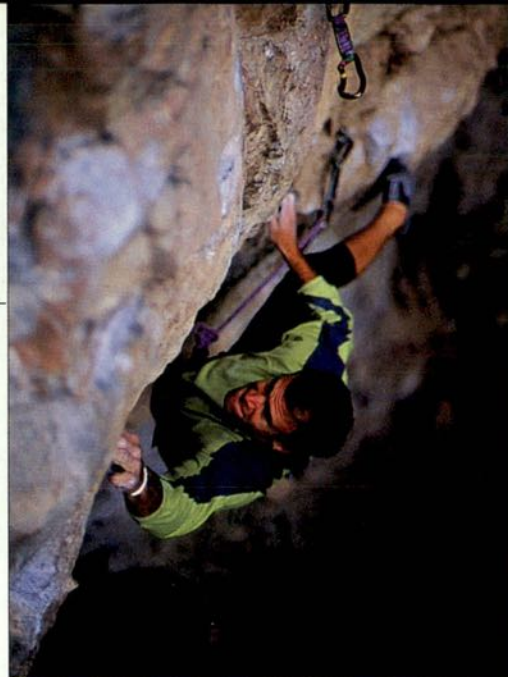
# Hot Flashes

Compiled by Michael Bengt

## RIFLE MAN

In Rifle, Colorado, Christian Griffith of Boulder had a big nine days before leaving for Europe. He started off his spree with the fourth ascent (second since a key crux hold broke) of Kurt Smith's *Slice of Life* (5.14a), probably the state's hardest route. (Daniel du Lac of France did the second ascent and Jean-Paul Finne of Belgium the third.) Griffith had spent one day on the route last fall and eight days over two months this spring, thwarted on some by seepage and/or bad weather. He says the route is so athletic that he was only able to give it two burns a day. "It's the classic formula," says Griffith. "There's a significant investment just to get to the crux, which then takes so much concentration and desire." On his redpoint, wasted after doing the crux, Griffith threw 10 to 15 deadpoints in a row and faced a 40-footer when he skipped a bolt because he was too pumped to clip.

Two days after *Slice*, Griffith did *Path* (5.13c), which he had tried twice before. Later that afternoon he worked *Cryptic Egyptian* (5.13c) and came within two moves of redpointing it. The next weekend he did *Cryptic* first try, and two days later, did *Der Stahl* (5.13c) in an afternoon.



Christian Griffith on *Slice of Life* (5.14a), Rifle, Colorado.

Photo: Chris Goplerud

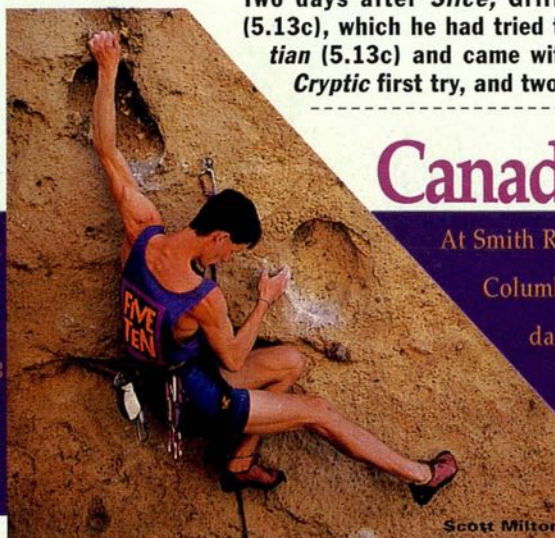


Photo: Darwin Wiggelt

## Canadian Rocker

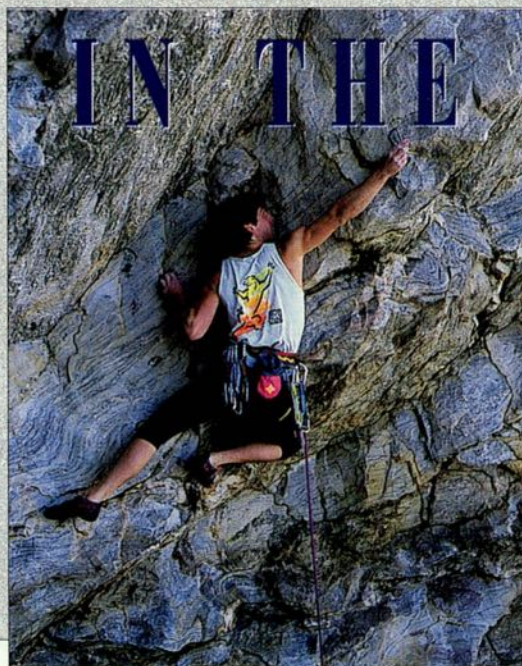
At Smith Rock, Oregon, Scott Milton of Coquitlam, British Columbia, redpointed *White Wedding* (5.13d), in three days, and *I Am a Bad Man* (5.14a), in four days. The relatively unheralded Canadian has done several other 5.14s, including *To Bolt or Not to Be* at Smith last year and some in Europe.

Scott Milton on *I Am a Bad Man* (5.14a), Smith Rock, Oregon.

## STOUT IN THE SOUTH

Last April, North Carolina received its hardest sport climb to date. Howie Feinsilber's *Emla* (5.13d) on the quartzite of Cook's Wall. Located at The Cook Book section of the crag, the route overhangs 30 feet in 80, with three cruxes, the hardest being 20 feet of continuous, powerful tweakers.

*Emla* is Feinsilber's hardest route to date. He graded the route with the recommendation of Harrison Dekker, another North Carolina climber, who reportedly believes it is the hard-



est route he has ever worked on. Dekker has established and repeated some of the hardest routes at the New River Gorge.

Cook's Wall, which is on the south side of Hanging Rock State Park, home also of Moore's Wall, is a great winter area, but its 40-minute uphill approach and few established routes keep it from being very popular. There are about two dozen routes at Cook's, many of which are sport routes in the 5.9 to 5.11 range.

Howie Feinsilber on his new route *Emla* (5.13d), Cook's Wall, North Carolina.

Photo: Bobbie Wright

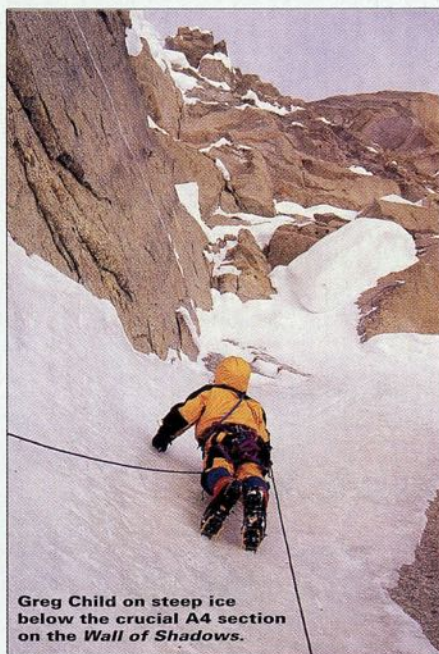


# SHADOWS & LIGHT

## HARD NEW CLIMBS IN ALASKA

BY MICHAEL KENNEDY

*Alaska was the place to be this spring. Spurred on, perhaps, by the rising costs of climbing in the Himalaya, North American and foreign climbers flocked to the state, attracted by easy access (via ski-equipped airplane), low cost, and relative lack of hassles. As of June 20, a record of over 1200 climbers had registered for Denali, but more remote areas like the Stikine Icecap in southeast Alaska saw visitors as well.*



Greg Child on steep ice below the crucial A4 section on the Wall of Shadows.

### HUNTER STALKED

Mount Hunter was particularly popular. At 14,573 feet, Hunter is the third highest peak in the Alaska Range, and even by the four-mile-long West Ridge, the "standard" route, the mountain is far more difficult than its higher neighbors, Denali (20,320 feet) and Mount Foraker or Sultana (17,004 feet). Nevertheless, the West Ridge saw almost constant traffic, although only a few parties actually completed the climb.

Rising in a grand sweep of steep, ice-veined granite, the 4000-foot north buttress of Hunter has been an irresistible lure to climbers for nearly 20 years. In the 1970s attempts on the north buttress concentrated on the obvious deep gully on the left side of the face (a route eventually climbed in 1984 by two French climbers, Yves Tedeschi and Benoit Grison), but the prize line has always been the broad prow formed by the juncture of the north and northwest walls of the north buttress.

This prow saw a number of strong attempts before its first ascent by Paul Aubrey and the late Mugs Stump in 1981; the pair reached the top of the buttress, then rappelled back down the route. Stump regarded the *Moonflower Buttress* (Alaskan Grade 6 AI6 5.8 A3) as his finest climb, but some felt the route was incomplete without a summit. In 1983 Todd Bibler and Doug Klewin climbed to the top of the buttress, continued 2500 feet up the easier Northeast Ridge to the summit, and descended the West Ridge. The *Moonflower Buttress* saw just two ascents in the next 10 years, both to the summit: by Rob Newsom and Pat McNerthney in 1984 (with McNerthney free climbing the crux ice pitches in The Shaft), and Andy DeKlerk and Julie Brugger in 1992.

The entire north side of Mount Hunter is plainly visible just two miles from the standard Denali landing strip on the southeast fork of the Kahiltina Glacier, and convenient access is no doubt part of the wall's attraction. This summer, at least three strong parties attempted the *Moonflower Buttress* (one succeeded), another pair tried the *French Gully*, and two major new routes went up on either side.

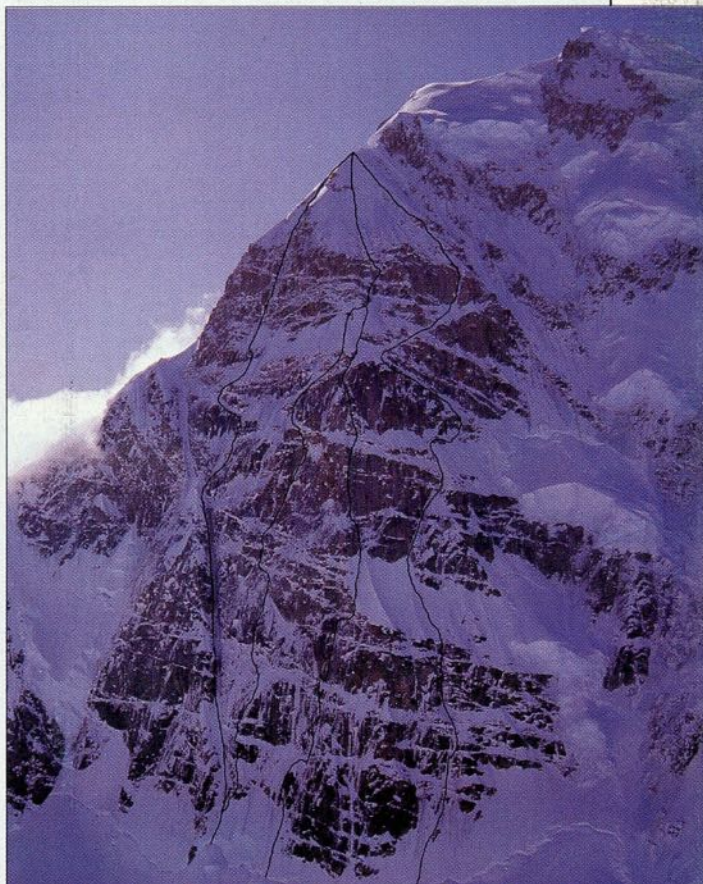
Scott Backes and Marc Twight arrived on the Kahiltina late in April with several weeks' food and ambitious plans to climb new routes on the north buttress of Mount Hunter, the south face of Mount Foraker, and the southeast face of Denali in super-lightweight style. "Our plan was to climb as fast as we could until

Denali from the south; the complete South Buttress follows the curving ridge line on the right (delineated by sun and shadow) from the Kahiltina Glacier below the cloud layer. Mount Hunter is the peak to the right; the mountain's West Ridge follows the sun/shadow line.

something went wrong," says Twight, "at which point we'd retreat and try the wall again in better conditions." After waiting out two and a half weeks of unsettled weather the pair made an attempt on a line left of the *Moonflower*, retreating from the sixth pitch when they realized that their speed-dependent approach was not appropriate for the complexities of the route.

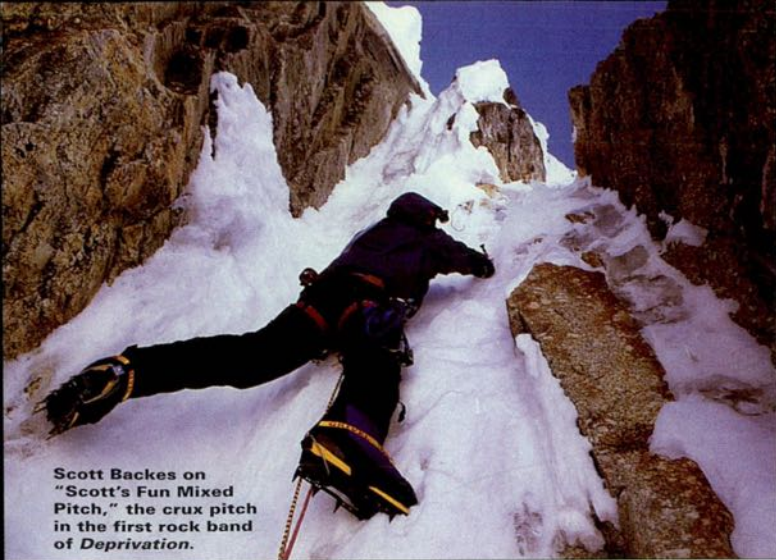
Backes and Twight then turned their attention to a line to the right of the *Moonflower*, a system of ice runnels and ledges through four major rock bands. The route had been tried by several parties in recent years, with Nick Craddock of New Zealand getting the highest in 1988. The pair reached the final rock band and traversed left to the *Moonflower*, where they were stormed off.

At 1 a.m. on May 15 Backes and Twight left their skis at 8200 feet on the southeast fork of the Kahiltina and soloed 500 feet of moderate ice to the first rock band. Here, two pitches up ice runnels led to three hard pitches with questionable belays, sections of 90-degree thin ice, and only one or two good pieces of protection per rope-length. The third hard pitch, according to Twight, featured "totally psychotic mixed climbing, dry tooling on rounded edges, bad pro, a bad



The 4000-foot north buttress of Mount Hunter, with the French Gully, Wall of Shadows, Moonlight Buttress, and Deprivation (left to right).





Scott Backes on "Scott's Fun Mixed Pitch," the crux pitch in the first rock band of Deprivation.

belay, and ice like the stuff stuck to the freezer at home." Above this, more moderate ice, again simultaneously soloed, brought the pair to the base of the prominent left-facing ramp through the second rock band, with its 70- and 80-degree cruxes. The pair reached the base of the third rock band at 7:30 that evening and chopped a ledge for the night.

The next morning Backes and Twight zigzagged up iced-over ledge systems through the third rock band, then made a long traverse left on 40- to 45-degree terrain. As the ground steepened, the pair belayed five pitches back right to the obvious ice-flow cutting through the fourth rock band. This pitch, the crux of the route, had two 95-degree cruxes on bad ice. Four mixed pitches and five 60-meter ropelengths of black ice brought Backes and Twight to the top of the north buttress, where the route joins the Northeast Ridge, at 6 a.m. May 17.

The pair rested here until 9:30 a.m., then continued up and traversed around the summit plateau just below and south of the summit. Foregoing the easy climbing to the summit, Backes and Twight descended the West Ridge in storm and whiteout conditions, aided by some radio beta from Steve Mascioli, who had done the route before. They reached the Kahiltna Glacier at 11 that evening, and were met by Greg Child, Joe Josephson, Michael Kennedy, and Ken Wylie, who brought the pair hot drinks, food, and skis for the trip back to the airstrip, which they reached at 1 a.m. after 72 hours on the go. The route was aptly named *Deprivation* (Alaskan Grade 6 ED+).

In contrast to Backes' and Twight's go-for-it style, Child and Kennedy took a more conventional approach to the *Wall of Shadows* (Alaskan Grade 6 AI 6+ 5.9 A4), their new route to the left of the *Moonflower*. The climb followed a series of ice runnels and smears linked by devious rock pitches, and required a full wall rack as well as ice gear. The pair spent a day studying the route through a telescope and parts of two days fixing six ropes and hauling 10 days' food, fuel, and a portaledge up the initial pitches. This section included a pitch of A2 and a key iced-up corner. A long period of unsettled weather set in, sending almost continuous spindrift avalanches down the face.

Starting out May 25 day at 7 a.m., Child and Kennedy jumared their fixed lines and climbed two moderate mixed pitches to the base of a steep ice smear. After fixing a long pitch up this feature, the pair spent the first of six consecutive nights in their portaledge. Child led an A3+ pitch to circumvent a thinly-iced slab the next day. More steep ice and a moderate traverse led to a second bivouac. On the third day, a pitch of steep ice, A2, and mixed ground allowed the pair to gain the prominent right-leaning ramp a little over halfway up the buttress.

After a third bivouac at the top of the ramp, Child spent an entire day on two steep A4 pitches, the climbing complicated by having to clear virtually every placement of snow mushrooms. A traverse left early on May 29 brought Child and Kennedy to the hardest mixed pitch of the route, a thinly-iced but well-protected corner crack. Two moderate mixed pitches and several easy ropelengths of ice got them to the base of the

final rock band late that evening.

An intense but short-lived storm set in and kept Child and Kennedy in their portaledge for 36 hours. Fortunately, the morning of May 31 dawned clear. Two pitches up and right brought them to Todd Bibler's difficult "Come Again" finish to the *Moonflower*. Late that day Child and Kennedy settled into a cold open bivouac at the cornice which caps the buttress.

The pair gained the Northeast Ridge the morning of June 1, plowed through knee-to-waist deep snow to the summit and, after 14 hours, down to a final bivouac at 13,000 feet on the summit plateau. They eventually reached the Kahiltna Glacier at 7:00 p.m. June 2. Backes and Twight returned the earlier favor, bringing food, drink, and skis to the now staggering Child and Kennedy.

Meanwhile, Bill Belcourt and Randy Rackliff made an efficient ascent, the fourth to the summit, of the *Moonflower Buttress*. The pair started up June 1, summited June 6, and returned to the airstrip June 7; the weather was good throughout, although whiteout conditions slowed the pair on the descent. Rackliff, who lives in North Conway, New Hampshire, remarked on the high quality of the route and says that if a section like The Shaft was close to the road it would be a world-famous classic.

## DENALI DREAMS

Climbers made several notable ascents on Denali this year as well. Mark Aspery, Ron Bauer, Marcus Brown, Tahoe Rowland, Mike Vanderbeek, and Tom Whalen made the first ascent of the complete South Buttress from May 4 to 25, starting from the Kahiltna airstrip, climbing to the col just east of Mount Francis, and continuing along the lower unclimbed portion of the buttress to approximately 12,000 feet, where the 1954 route gains the South Buttress. The six continued to the summit via the upper south buttress and descended via the West Buttress. Although not very difficult technically, the route is over 12 miles long, gains nearly 13,000 feet in elevation, and was completed during a period of unstable weather.

Tyson Bradley and John Montecucco made the first ski descent, on telemark skis, of the seldom-visited Wickersham Wall on the north side of Denali. Starting from the Kahiltna on May 5, the pair followed the West Buttress to Kahiltna Pass, dropped down onto the Peters Glacier, then climbed the Canadian Route to the north summit.

Bradley and Montecucco took an unusual approach. They would ferry loads to their next campsite, then ski down to camp and move up the next day, thereby skiing the route in sections from bottom to top. They skied the final section, from the 19,470-foot north summit, on a crystal clear evening May 24, and descended via the West Buttress over the next few days.

Three French climbers made a rapid ascent of Denali's *Reality Ridge* in mid-May, climbing the route from a basecamp on the west fork of the Ruth Glacier and descending the West Buttress in 10 days round trip. Besides the hordes on the West Buttress, the only other Denali climb of note was an ascent of the *American Direct* on the south face by four Korean climbers. Elsewhere in the Alaska Range, Mount Foraker saw attempts by 13 teams, none of which had made the summit by mid-June, and Mount Huntington saw two alpine-style ascents, both by the classic *Harvard Route* on the mountain's west face.

## THE DARK SIDE

The Alaska Range's popularity came at a price, however, with 18 mountaineering-related accidents and rescues in Denali National Park as of June 20, the most significant of which are noted below.

On April 24, Todd McCann and Walker Parke fell approximately 1500 feet to their deaths while descending from an attempt on the Northeast Buttress of Mount Wake in the Ruth Gorge. One climber had unclipped from a rappel and fallen, knocking the other off; a third climber survived and was able to descend safely on her own.

On May 7, Andy Carson and Charles Crago were caught in an avalanche and swept down about 800 feet on the northwest basin variation to the West Ridge of Mount Hunter. Carson broke both legs and Crago suffered abrasions, puncture wounds, and numerous sprains. Other members of the team helped the injured pair descend to their basecamp, and seven climbers from Kahiltna International (including Backes, Twight, and the South Buttress team) got them back to the airstrip. Despite the northwest basin's popularity — it circumvents the lower third of the West Ridge, which has some of that route's most difficult climbing — this variation is incredibly dangerous, especially during and after storms.

On May 15, Pauline Brandon and Richard Tyler fell while descending from Denali Pass on the West Buttress; they were found by other climbers about eight hours later in extremely cold temperatures. Tyler suffered from severe frostbite to his hands and feet and was helicoptered out by Denali National Park rangers; Brandon died of exposure and cerebral edema.

On May 21, Sang Myeung Lee and Kee-Won Kim set out from the 14,200-foot camp on Denali to climb one of the ice routes left of the headwall on the West Buttress. Kim, a climber with considerable experience in the Alaska Range including two previous ascents of Denali, was a volunteer member of an eight-person National Park Service mountaineering patrol on the mountain at that time.

During the climb the weather deteriorated, with whiteout conditions, 50-mile-per-hour winds, and temperatures of minus 50 degrees. Lee and Kim were last seen reaching the top of their route (about 16,000 feet) at 10 p.m. on May 21. When the pair failed to return to camp that night, their companions set out to search for them. At 6 a.m. on May 22, they found Lee's body on the fixed lines on the headwall; he had apparently fallen and died of hypothermia. Kim's body was found two days later by other climbers, and recovered by park rangers on May 27.

On June 10, a four-person party fell while climbing the initial couloir on the Southwest Ridge of Mount Hunter. Patti Saurman and Chris Walburgh died in the 1700-foot fall, while David Saurman and Don Sharaf were seriously injured. All four were evacuated by National Park Service helicopter.



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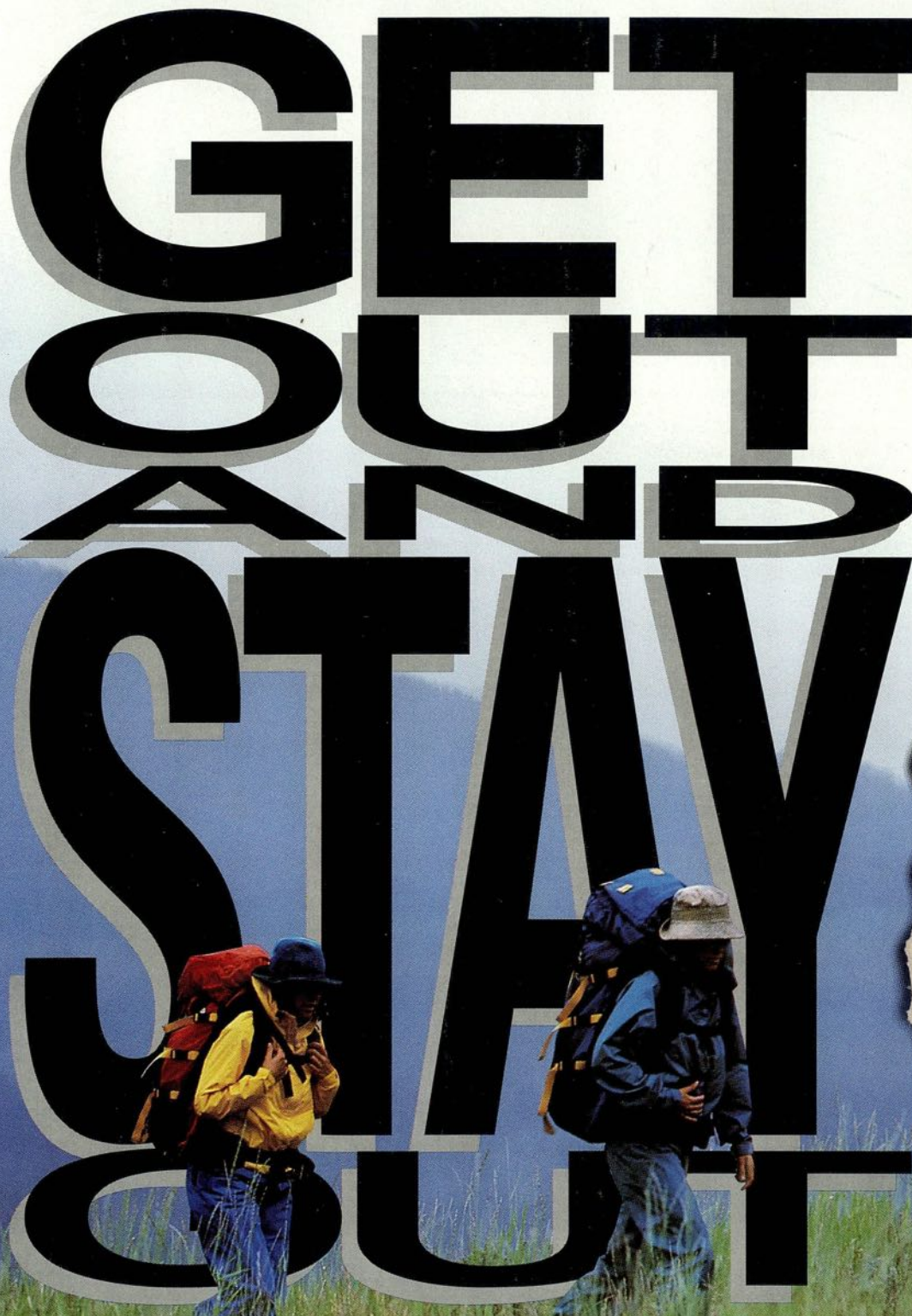


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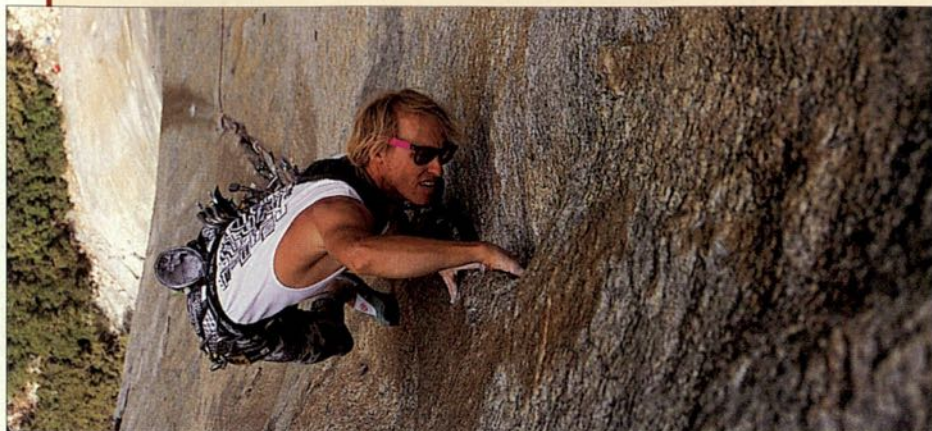


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# Free<sup>as</sup> can Be



Steve Schneider on pitch six (5.12c), (above); Alan Lester on pitch five (5.12), *Lurking Fear*, El Capitan (right).

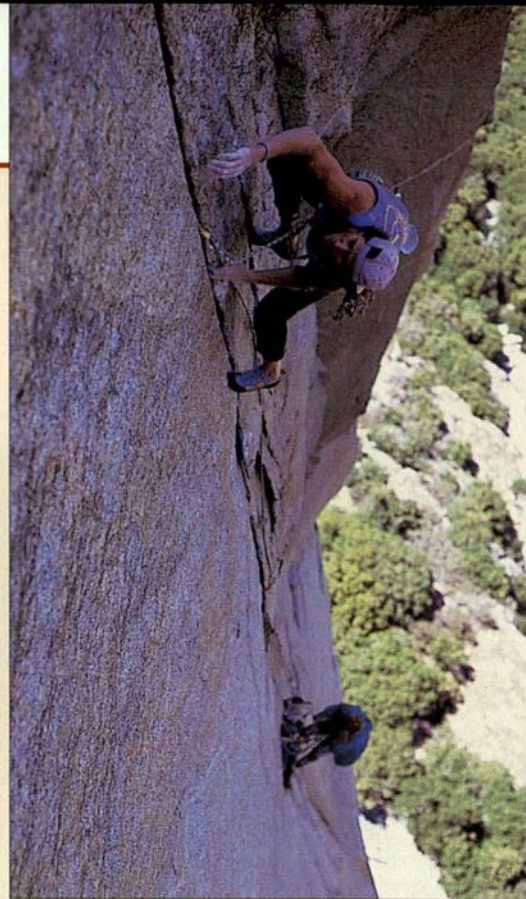


Photo: Pete Takeda

Spring of 1994 saw an explosion of big-wall free-climbing activity in Yosemite. Leading climbers attempted several El Cap routes, including *Lurking Fear*, *Dihedral Wall*, *Salathé*, and *Muir Wall*.

Dave Schultz, Scott Franklin, and Jason Karn started off with a tentative foray, intent on reaching the featured diorite of the *North America Wall* via the *New Jersey Turnpike*, a hard aid route from 1977. In 1990, Schultz had rebolted and worked the second pitch, an A4 hooking section. The pitch was, in Schultz's words, "nasty hard, with hideous clips ... it would be 13c or d." This pitch thwarted free-climbing efforts, as did the climbing ban on the right side of El Cap due to peregrine falcon nesting.

The team switched their focus to the *Salathé Wall*, whose 1988 free ascent has been dogged by doubt in recent years. The route has yet to see a second free ascent. The trio flashed every pitch through 18, climbing up to 5.12c, until stymied by drainage oozing down the thin 5.13 double cracks below El Cap Spire. At this point the team abandoned their free effort and aided to the top.

In mid-May, Alan Lester and Peter Takeda, both from Colorado, arrived in the Valley. Finding the *North America Wall* closed for peregrine nesting, they went to Plan B: run up the *Dihedral Wall* (VI 5.9 A3+), free climbing whatever looked good.

After fixing and working the lower dihedral for several days, the pair blasted on a three-day push, freeing nearly 50-percent of the route, including two pitches in the 5.12+ range, which Lester led.

Meanwhile, work was in progress on *Lurking Fear* (VI 5.10 A3), eyed for many years as a route with great free-climbing potential. Steve Schneider — teamed variously with Bill Price, Jeff Schoen, and Lester — freed all but several moves on the route's 19 pitches. Lester, in particular, was an outstanding partner, flashing two pitches of 5.12c and redpointing a pitch of 5.13a. Lester describes several of these pitches as "better than anything on the Cookie." Schneider redpointed or toproped every free pitch on the route. Some of his better efforts included beautiful thin face-climbing pitches and classic clean cracks. Pitch 12, the Grand Traverse (A3), required circuitous traversing and downclimbing to avoid a mere 10 feet of improbable rock. This unique and airy pitch clocks in at 5.12d. The remaining points of aid on *Lurking Fear* consists of one move on the second pitch face variation — perhaps hard 5.13 — and a short rivet and hook traverse on the seventh pitch. These short sections, according to Schneider, await cooler temperatures.

At the end of April, Scott Cosgrove and Kurt Smith, accompanied by the photographer Greg Epperson, began work on the *Muir Wall* (VI 5.10 A3). The pair attempted to maintain a high adventure level by on-sighting and flashing as much as possible

(neither had done the route before). The climbers adhered to a ground-up ethic — no rapping down to rehearse or preview sections of the climb. On pitches requiring cleaning or extensive preplacement of gear, one climber would lead on aid, pull the rope, and belay the other climber on a flash attempt. From April 26 through June 13, Smith and Cosgrove worked the route from the ground. Several five-day stints were required to climb difficult sections and move camp higher. On the final push to the summit, the team spent 10 days on the wall, hauling 45 gallons of water along with many pounds of other gear. Above Camp 4 they avoided several improbable sections with a four-pitch variation.

Near pitch 26, more blank sections forced a difficult traverse onto Chickenhead Ledge on the *Shield*. Several pitches above Chickenhead, a thin A2 pitch ended the all-free push. Smith believes this pitch, number 32, will clock in at 5.13+. "With a week of rest, the section would undoubtedly go free," he says. "Given the circumstances we just bagged it." Says Cosgrove, "Our commitment to a more traditional style perhaps cost us the all-free ascent. Had we rapped from the top and worked the route, we would have ended up with the time to deal with a difficult, yet well-rehearsed pitch. As it was, we had only a few days of food and water left." The team summited a day later. All told, Cosgrove and Smith climbed numerous pitches of 5.11, 14 pitches of 5.12, two of 5.13a, and one of 5.13b.

On the summit, things got strange — undercover rangers cited Cosgrove and Smith for using motorized drills and Epperson for being an accomplice to the crime. The Park Service confiscated their drills and Epperson's exposed film. Legal proceedings surrounding these actions are pending (see Editorial).

"We basically did 31 pitches of killer free climbing and got jacked on the summit," says Smith. "I really feel shitty about the whole thing. This route has been an eight-year dream. I've spent 15 years getting in good enough mental and physical shape to do this thing in good style. And the Park Service dumps this crap on us."

"I'm not happy about what happened," says Cosgrove. "I do think they [the NPS rangers] were doing their job and we were doing ours." Epperson declined comment.

In June, Franklin and Schneider made a one-day free ascent of the Regular Northwest Face of Half Dome, redpointing and following every pitch in a 13-hour push. It appears this was the first free ascent of the 23-pitch 5.12 route in this style.

These efforts have all given El Cap free climbing a shot in the arm. In recent years, sport climbing has put the necessary edge on the participants' fitness level. Whether one wishes to free an entire climb or scoop up a few choice pitches, the options are there for the taking. As Lester put it, "It's sort of like the old days all over. Things are new and cool. For me, Yosemite is an exciting place again."

— Pete Takeda



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# COMPETITIONS

## To Russia, with glitches and goodwill

Moscow, Russia



Photos: Arnaud Petit

Competitors in the Palace of Children's Sports (above), and Shelley Presson on her way to 14th place.

Nothing can prepare you for the grim reality of Russia — Moscow is virtually crumbling to the ground. A World Cup competition here seemed a frivolous waste of resources, and the place had a sobering, if not depressing, effect on most competitors. Considering the lack of resources the Russian Federation had at its disposal, it was extremely ambitious to host a World Cup, held April 29 - May 1, and a stream of problems resulted.

The comp was held in the Palace of Children's Sports, situated near a power plant that transferred any additional energy to the surrounding buildings regardless of whether it was needed or wanted by the occupants. So, with outside temperatures in the 80s, radiators blasting, and the solarium effect of the glass walls of the gym, it was oh-so-balmy.

The mustard-colored climbing wall was mostly vertical, with several large roofs. Each panel had only four possible hold placements (two insets and two bolt-ons), which limited the options for the course-setter, Alexi Chertov, a former World Cup competitor. In addition, Chertov was working alone, with no one to verify the difficulty of his routes — an impossible situation for the course-setter, and one that beckoned heaps of controversy.

The women's quarterfinal was the first

indication of trouble. Within the first 15 feet of the 5.12b route over half the women's field of 45 had been dropped, including some normally strong competitors such as Felicity Butler (GBR) and Luisa Iovane (ITA). About 15 women fell in the first six feet of the route, most without clipping the first bolt. Because the route eased up a bit higher, the 14 who managed to get

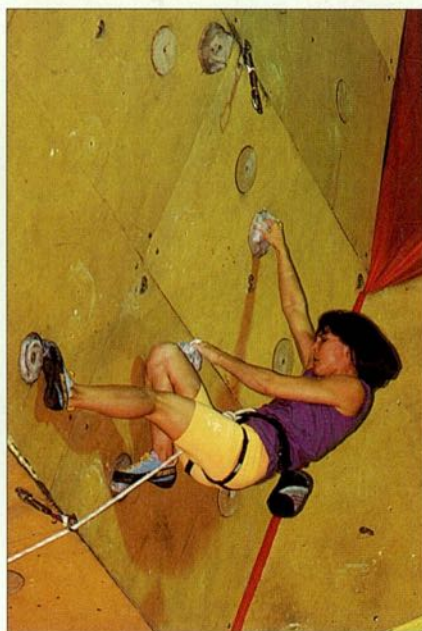
past the bouldery first section, including Americans Robyn Erbesfield and Shelley Presson, flashed it.

By contrast, the men's quarterfinal routes were too easy. Both were called 5.12c; one had 21 flashes and the other 16, making for a huge semifinal field.

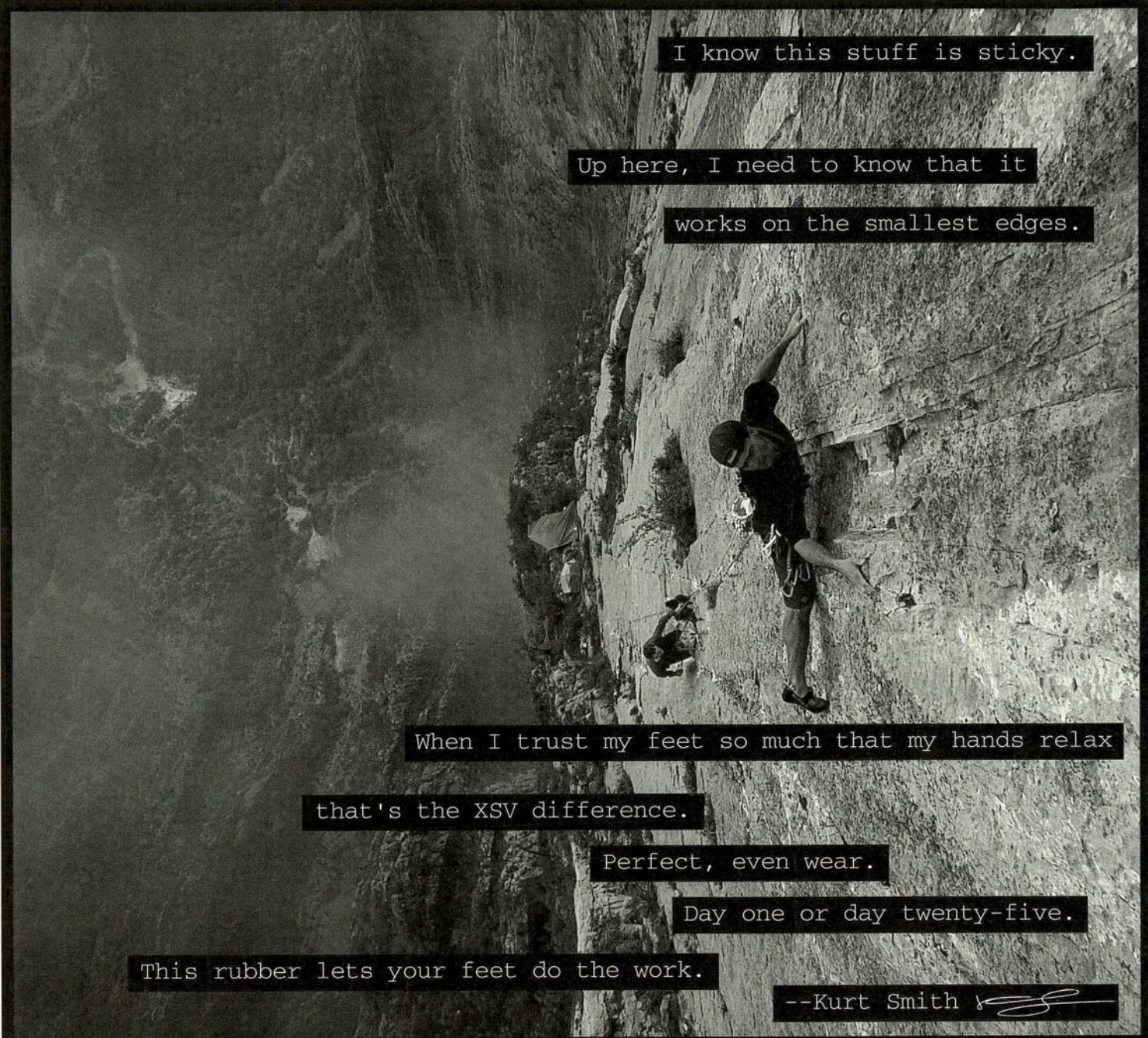
The women's semifinal, like the round before, was wickedly hard right off the ground. It was so awkward that even the top contenders looked shaky, and no one even came close to flashing it. Some competitors speculated the grade to be 5.13a or harder. Presson pulled off the lower section, but was too gassed to continue, taking 14th place.

The men's semifinal proved that the previous round's route problems were not just a fluke. The start was thin and bouldery and the first three competitors fell only three feet off the ground. In an unprecedented World Cup decision, the judges sent these first three back to isolation, while the course-setter changed the start and offered them another shot at the route. After the slight route modification — Chertov only altered two holds — six men still fell before reaching the second bolt, and no one flashed it. Ten men, seven of whom were French, went to the final.

In the women's final the two young French women, Marie Guillet, 18, and







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Liv Sansoz, 16, both had trouble negotiating some long, powerful moves and fell well below the route's only big roof, coming in fifth and sixth, respectively. Elena Ovchinnikova (RUS), Isabelle Patissier (FRA), and Yulia Inozemtseva (RUS) all made it into the roof, but only Erbesfeld, with her incredible strength and determination, pulled the lip and fought her way to the top for yet another World Cup victory. Ovchinnikova, who took second, came close to pulling over the lip, but failed to stick the burly lock-off on the next hold. Patissier took third.

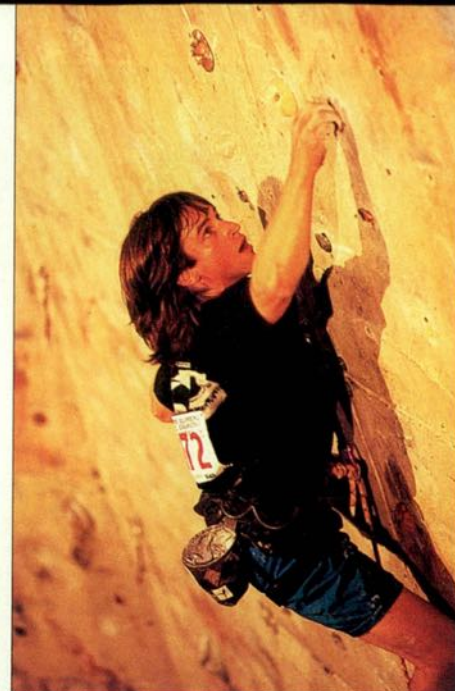
On the men's finals route a slimy, tumor-like formation threatened to spit off the best competitors less than 10 feet off the ground, but only Elie Chevieux

slipped, taking 10th. The remaining competitors came off pretty quickly, though. Both J.B. Tribout (FRA) and Ian Vickers (GBR) battled it out into the roof, but were so pumped they didn't get any higher, taking second and third, respectively. François Legrand (FRA) punched it out about four moves past Tribout's high point to take the World Cup victory.

Although the competition was somewhat of a fiasco, it must be said that throughout the event the organizers, volunteers, translators, and all who helped worked hard to pull it off. Given the lack of funds and resources, they did a great job.

— Shelley Presson

*Results of the Moscow World Cup were published in issue No. 145.*



Scott Franklin sweats it out at CityRock.

Photos: Jim Thornburg

## Tougher stuff at the Nationals

Emeryville, California

"SUSAN PRICE," the name blared over the Oakland airport intercom. "DO NOT BOARD YOUR FLIGHT; YOU'RE IN THE SEMIS." The call came as a shock to Price, who had left the competition early, and she bundled up her stuff and rushed back to CityRock, hoping to get to the isolation zone by cutoff time.

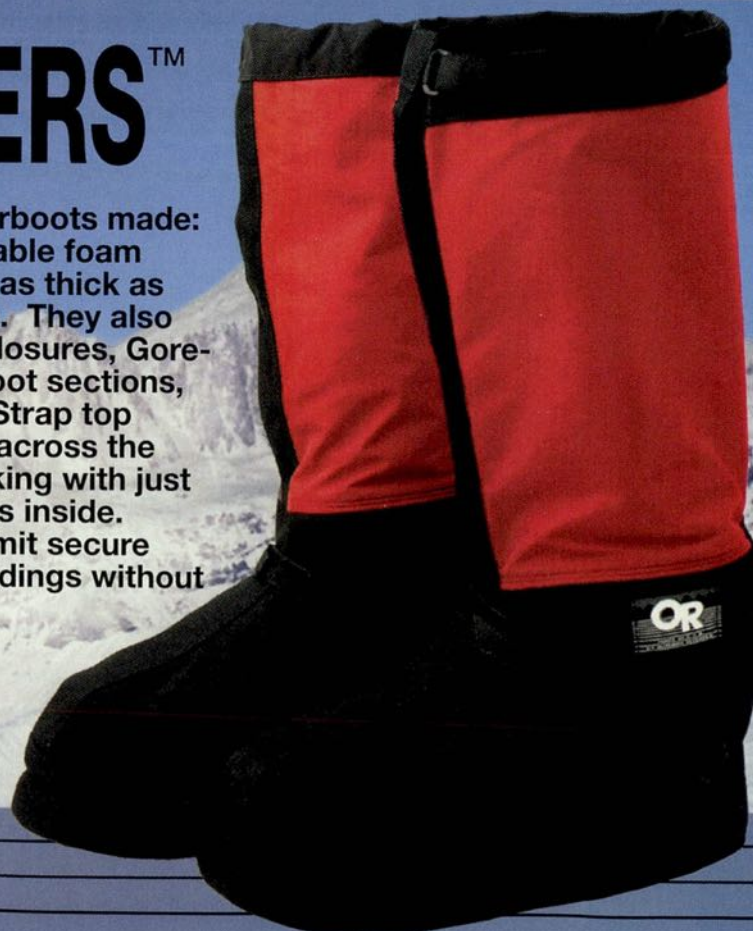
The field at this year's CityRock Nationals was one of the toughest in recent history. Climbers from Canada, Spain, Colorado, Salt Lake, and the East Coast attended. Just making the semifinals was a feat in itself. In all, 33 of America's top women and 60 top men vied for 16 and 26 semifinal slots respectively. For the finals, the field narrowed to just 10 men and six women.

The event began on Saturday with a grueling six-route qualifier that involved leading, top roping, and bouldering. Six minutes per climber per route, with one six-minute rest, ensured that all but the fittest climbers would be hammered by the time they tried their last boulder problems. This phase of the competition was extremely intense, as Tony and Kathy Yaniro's thuggish course-setting

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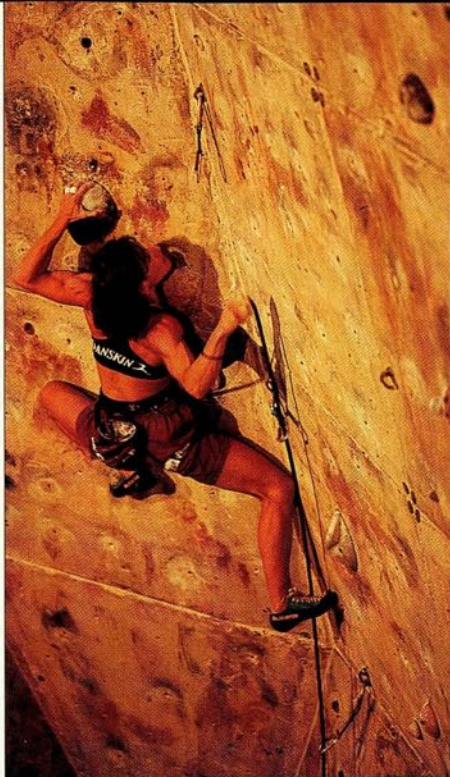
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Bobbi Bensman climbed her best in the finals.

destroyed forearms without mercy.

For the third year in a row, the event was orchestrated by Hans Florine, whose promises of "more competitors, more routes, more money, more prizes, more fun!" held true, but took its toll on the staff. The chief coursesetter, Tony Yaniro, literally

knocked himself out (he fainted on Sunday, after nearly four days of virtual sleep deprivation) setting an army of fun routes.

In addition, a few problems, increasingly common in national-level comps, arose during the qualifiers. The first was on one of the men's lead routes; several climbers battled through the route's lower crux only to be faced with a scary and absurdly dicey clip that guarded the top. A few comp veterans were even reduced to grabbing the draw!

Also, on the men's first boulder problem, the lower moves involved traversing on positive finger pockets, with tiny technical holds for the feet, only about three inches above the rubber floor. Any slip would be counted as a fall if contact, however incidental, was made with the rubber. Roughly 20 climbers were asked to start over, sometimes several times, due to slips that under normal circumstances would not have resulted in falls. The judging on this matter was inconsistent; some judges called it while others didn't.

In the women's qualifier, last year's second-place finisher, Tiffany Levine, was disqualified from one of the routes when she failed to start with both feet in a route's "starting box." Otherwise, she would have made the semis easily. The accident put Price, who made it back from

the airport in time, in the semifinals. She then made it to the finals and took sixth despite being shaken up in the qualifiers when she took her second competition groundfall. (She was once dropped 30 feet at a World Cup.) In this case, her belayer locked his Gri-Gri open while lowering her — fortunately, she came out physically unscathed.

The men's semifinal consisted of two routes, a lead and a top rope. The sequential nature of the first route led to the demise of several strong contenders, notably Jason Campbell (fifth in the qualifier), who bungled the sequence, and Tom Richardson, whose foot slipped. The best performances on this route went to Jim Karn and Doug Englekirk, who both climbed to within several moves of the top, while the next-highest men bottle-necked at a halfway point.

On the second route, Scott Franklin held a small hold below the finishing jug, while Karn only touched it, and Englekirk fell trying to skip it altogether. To the spectators, it seemed that Karn and Englekirk had climbed better overall during the semifinal round, yet according to a newly implemented scoring system that grades on a curve, Franklin and Karn emerged in a tie, which was broken on the basis of their qualifier performances. That

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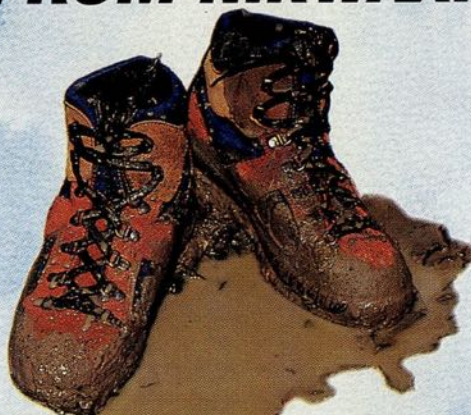
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## Small talk

The Petit brothers' double talent

In 1991, a 16-year-old came out of nowhere to beat the big guns at the French National Championships. Those who laughed it off as a fluke weren't laughing two years later when François Petit became the first person in four years to seriously challenge François Legrand for the World Cup title.

And to make matters worse for Legrand, there's not just one Petit, there are two. François' older brother, Arnaud, age 22, finished the 1993 season in sixth place overall, and is looking good for 1994 with a second-place finish in Villach and sixth in Moscow. In the French Championships in June, Arnaud took first and François Petit third. (Legrand didn't compete.)

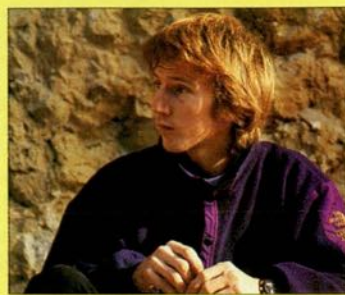
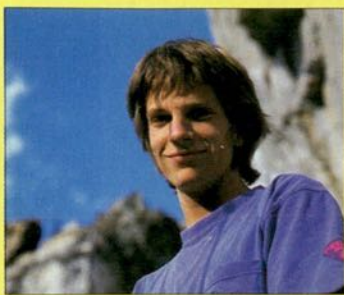
Both are thin, with toned physiques of sport climbers and long straight hair. The brothers share a passion for climbing, but otherwise are quite different. François, 19, is quiet and unassuming, Arnaud more outspoken, the businessman of the two. Arnaud used to take care of almost everything when they went to comps, and François just had to climb. That's changing now as they get older, but Arnaud still does most of the PR work. At comps they keep their thoughts to themselves, except to give each other advice on when to warm up, how much water to drink, and so on. The only thing they consistently argue about is whether to put small holds on their wall for François' power workouts, or to leave on bigger ones for the stamina circuits that Arnaud likes.

Arnaud was born in Tunisia, where the brothers' father, Jean Paul, was a visiting professor in a civil-service post. The Petits next moved to Albertville, where François was born and the family still lives.

As a teacher, Jean Paul had time to take the boys climbing. Arnaud began climbing in the mountains at about age 7, followed a few years later by François. Walter Bonatti was their hero. In 1982, François and his father climbed Mont Blanc via the normal route. In 1985 Arnaud led the Aiguille du Midi on Mont Blanc, with his father following.

Despite their love for the moun-

tains, the boys' attention soon shifted to sport climbing, and they began bolting routes on a cliff near their house. Their new hero was Patrick Edlinger. They dreamed of limestone routes in the Verdon and at Buoux, and instead of going to the mountains, the whole family used vacation time to go climbing in the South of France. François followed his brother's lead on and off the rock. In 1987 Arnaud took him to their first competition, the Junior French Championships at Saint Crepin near Briancon. Arnaud took third place behind the local hardmen François Lombard and Yann Ghesquiers. François finished second in the Benjamin class for 10- to 12-year-olds.



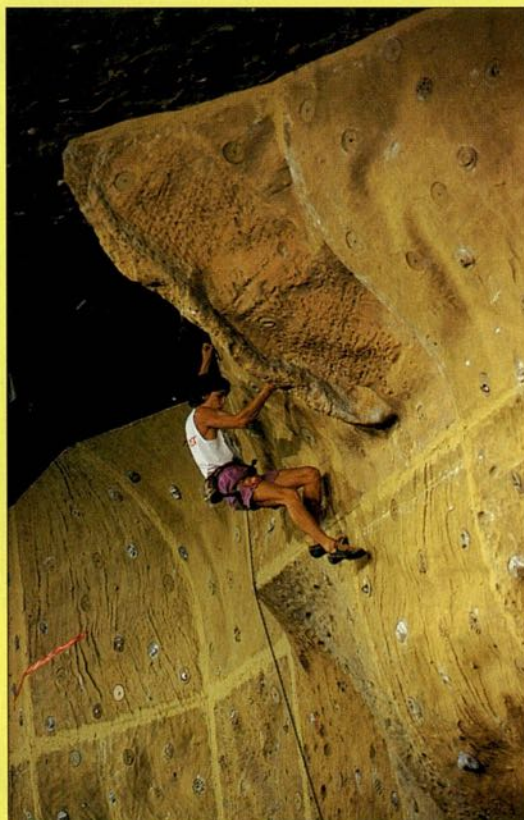
All in the family: François (left) and Arnaud Petit.

After this success they decided to train more consistently. They also discovered the steep cliffs of Ceuse. Arnaud was still leading the way but François was catching up fast. At 12 François did a quick repeat of a 7b that his brother had put up and not long after got his first 7a+ *a vue*.

The brothers continued to train at the crags, but returned to the mountains to put up routes, including *L'echo des Alpes* (7a ED) on Mont Blanc. In the next few years François pulled off three consecutive wins at the Junior French Championships, then entered the senior ranks and stole the show by winning the French Championships in 1991. Arnaud finished a respectable 10th. When asked what the main contributing factor was behind François' win, Arnaud revealed that two months before the comp, the brothers had finally set up a small training wall, which allowed them more time to work out and begin specific power and stamina circuits. The wall also helped them on rock. Shortly after the championships, François did his first 8a on-sight, *Quart de Siecle* at Russan, France.

As of early 1992, the Petits were training 80 percent of the time on their wall because they were students in Albertville, where it's too cold for climbing in the winter. They began to get bored, and decided to expand the wall. With help from their father, they constructed a 300-square-foot wall, with over 1000 holds. That year, François took second in both the European Championships and the Birmingham World Cup, and won the first-ever Junior World Championships.

1993 was the year the brothers finally decided to do the entire World Cup circuit, a decision made difficult because François was in his last year of high school and Arnaud his fourth year of a five-year university program. With little time to travel, the two continued to train chiefly at home. François spent the first five months of the season exclusively working on power. His payback? Wins at invitationals in Serre Chevalier and Bulgaria, his first victory at a World Cup



François Petit at the Nuremburg World Cup in 1993.

Photos, clockwise from top left: Arnaud Petit, Lise Noél, Arnaud Petit



event, and second place in the overall World Cup standings. Arnaud's regime was slightly different, with more emphasis on technique and stamina. His results were also excellent: fifth and sixth at the World Cup events in Nuremberg and Frankfurt, and sixth overall.

Life isn't all training for the Petits. To get away, they have started spending their summers on Corsica, an island off the coasts of France and Sicily. There they do sport routes on limestone, and establish first ascents on granite. They made the first ascent (in ground-up style, in nine hours) of what they feel is one of the nicest long routes in Europe. At 6b ED, *Jeef* is 1200 feet of beautiful climbing on pristine rock. They started one of the hardest long routes around, *Delicatessen* (8b), but it was too hot to complete last summer. They plan to return next winter to finish it.

As for the '94 season, Arnaud has left his studies in order to concentrate on the World Cup, which he says he hopes to win this year. François is in a special class at school in Lyon, which allows athletes to do their first year of engineering in two years, leaving enough time to train and compete. His goals are to win the World Cup circuit and do the hardest routes in the world. He's off to a good start with his recent first ascent of the second 8c+ in France, *Bronx* in Orgon.

François also has a project in the works at Ceuse: the first six meters of this monster have been given 8b+, and are followed by 25 meters of mixed stamina climbing until the final few meters and another crux. Undoubtedly, when completed it will be one of the hardest routes around. François rarely on-sights, preferring hard redpoints, so Arnaud picks up the slack by on-sighting 8as regularly. But Arnaud is no slouch in the hard route department either, having done 8b.

François makes enough from sponsors and comp earnings to live and travel, while Arnaud makes just enough to survive. To augment his income, and because of his interest in photography and writing, Arnaud has become an editor of the French climbing magazine *Grimper*, an excellent new publication devoted to sport climbing, and is currently working on a project for *Climbing* magazine.

With their extraordinary motivation, and with their plans for the future, it's safe to say that in the next few years the Petit brothers will be big.

— Kevin Wilson

## Competitions Calendar

Compiled by Lisa Morgan

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**Utah Open Climbing Competition.** Merchandise prizes for all categories. Contact: Snowbird Resort, (801) 742-2222, ext. 4080.

**September 17-18, 1994, Tulsa, Oklahoma**  
**Second Annual Forearm Frenzy Climber's Rendezvous.** The event, hosted by the Tulsa Rock Climbing Club, will take place in Chandler Park, a local bouldering area. Event will include shoe demonstrations and climbing games. Contact: (918) 492-6302.

**September 17-18, 1994, Pocatello, Idaho**  
**Pocatello Pump.** Competition categories include Men, women, junior, and physically challenged. Contact: Dana Olson-Elle (208) 236-3912.

**September 17, 1994, Quincy, Massachusetts**  
**Fifth Annual ClimbFest.** Event includes rock climbing competition open to all levels, and an outdoor festival with music, food, raffles, and climbing demonstrations. Event is free for spectators. Contact: (617) 698-1802.

**October, 1994, North Conway, New Hampshire**  
**Mount Washington Valley Octad.** Competition kicks off with freestyle skiing in January, and goes on to include cross-country skiing, canoeing, running, tennis, swimming, mountain biking, and climbing. Contact: Peter Pinkham, Mount Washington Valley Octad, Box 543, North Conway, NH 03860; (603) 356-5425.

### Masters/Invitational

**September 4-5, Arco, Italy**

### 1994 UIAA Provisional World Cup Calendar

**September 30-October 2, Frankfurt, Germany**  
**October 7-9, Baltimore, Maryland**  
**November 4-6, Mannheim, Germany**  
**November 18-20, Grenoble, France**  
**November 26-27, Birmingham, Great Britain**  
**December 10-12, Barcelona, Spain**

left Franklin as the top-seeded climber going into the finals. This meant that if he flashed the final, he would win no matter how many other climbers did the same; and that's exactly what he did. Also flashing the 5.12d final were Steve Hong, Englekirk, and Karn.

The women's final was more straightforward, with the dynamic Bobbi Bensman capturing first place with a brilliant performance that brought her within a few moves of the anchor. Mia Axon, fresh off a fourth-place finish at a World Cup event in Austria, was one hold below Bensman's high point when she realized that she had skipped a clip. She fell reversing her moves. Both put on a great show, displaying a marked contrast. Axon, the "plastic surgeon," climbed with slow precision, while the flexible Bensman showed a style more along the lines of pretzel logic. In third place, Gea Phipps showed some artificial intelligence when she flawlessly read the highly technical route.

— Jim Thornburg

(See page 76 for results.)

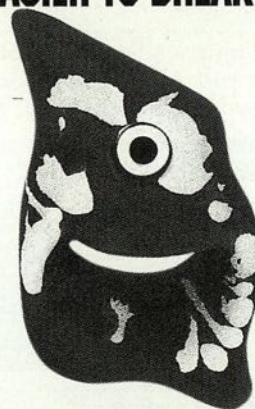
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## Competitions Results

### REI AND PMI ASCF NATIONAL

CityRock Climbing Gym  
Emeryville, California

June 11-12

Finals (in italics) & semifinals\*

#### Women

1. Bobbi Bensman
2. Mia Axon
3. Georgia Phipps
4. Shelley Presson
5. Melissa Quigley
6. Susan Price
7. Lizz Grennard
8. Trish Houghtaling
9. Michelle Hurni
10. Diane Russell
11. Kadi Johnston
12. Karen Rand
13. Jessica Haines
14. Ailish Cullen
15. Suzanne Paulson
16. Esther Bullido

#### Men

1. Scott Franklin
2. Jim Karn
3. Doug Englekirk
4. Steve Hong
5. Timmy Fairfield
6. Jeff Cloud
7. George Squibb
8. Kevin Bransford
9. John Cronin
10. Jordi Salas
11. Mike Papciak
12. Ty Foose
13. Ric Geiman
14. Ben Ditto
15. Blake Hankins
16. Seth Johnston
17. Wil Catlin
18. Marcos Nunez
19. Tom Richardson
20. Jake Slaney
21. Jim Thornburg
22. Hank Caylor
23. Greg Echelmeier

24. Jason Campbell

25. Kenny Matys

26. Vaino Kodas

### SOUTHERN

#### CLIMBERS'

#### HOEDOWN

Boulder Competition

Sandrock, Alabama

March 26, 1994

1. Steve Deweese

2. Ben Ditto

3. Jake Slaney

### THIRD ANNUAL

#### SWEET UNION

#### CRANK

Whitman College

Walla Walla,

Washington

May 1

#### Women

1. Jitka Seakyrikova
2. Lisa Lendenmann
3. Cathy Hoofard

#### Men

1. Aaron Lefohn
2. Mark Huth
3. Les Zaczek

### KEYSTONE COMPETITION

Climbnasium, Inc.

New Kingstown, Pennsylvania

May 7

#### Men's elite

1. Cory Fleagle
2. Van Eitel II
3. Obe Carrion

#### Women's elite

1. Stace Stancill
2. Michelle Hale
3. Bridget Quinn

### ROCKFEST '94

Clipper City Rock Gym

Baltimore, Maryland, May 14-15

#### Women's elite finals

1. Susan Patenaude
2. Paula King
3. Ailish Cullen
4. Zoe Panchen

#### Men's elite finals

1. Hans Florine
2. Kenny Matys
3. Ron Howden
4. Greg Echelmaier
5. Bogden Kaleta
6. Opher Kahn

### THE BOREAL NORTHERN CALIFORNIA CHAMPIONSHIPS

CityRock

Climbing Gym

Emeryville, California

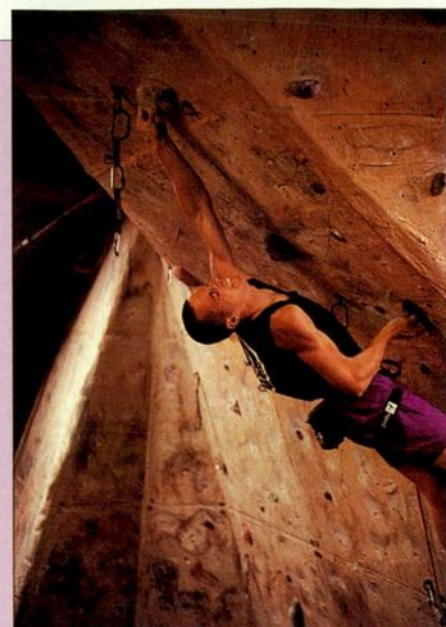
May 22

#### Men

1. Marcos Nunez
2. Ty Foose
3. Tom Richardson

#### Women

1. Diane Russell



Jim Karn, full tilt at CityRock.

2. Abbey Watkins
3. Amelia Rudolph

### ASCF JUNIOR NATIONAL

#### POINTS CHAMPIONS

(overall results for past year)

#### 13 & Under Male

1. Dan Oppenheim
2. Dustin Link
3. David Hume

#### 14-15 Male

1. Mike Brincat
2. Jason Horvath
3. Tom Smith

#### 16-17 Male

1. Sam Adams
2. Matt Goodall
3. Nick Helmich

#### 13 & Under Female

1. Claire Lyon
2. Mandy Marsh
3. Brooke Rassel

#### 14-15 Female

1. Holly Tonkin
2. Jessica Haines
3. Cara Link

#### 16-17 Female

1. Sarah Wieland
2. Kristin Peterson
3. Lisa Smith

### THE SUMMER SIZZLER LOCAL

#### ASCF COMP

Rocknasium

Davis, California

June 4-5

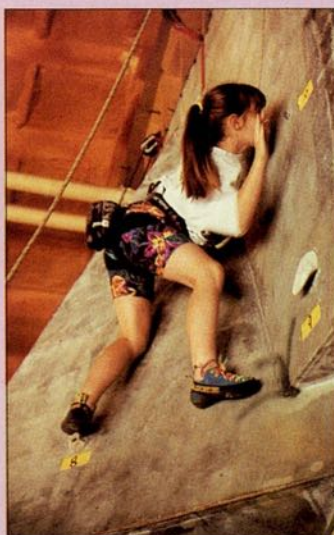
#### Women

1. Diane Russell
2. Denise Danielson
3. Zoe Bundros

#### Men

1. Blake Hankins
2. Hans Florine
3. Jim Thornburg

\* Beginning this issue, Climbing will list semifinal as well as finals fields for World Cup and national competitions.



Mandy Marsh, 9, the youngest entrant at the junior nationals.

Photo: Jim Thornburg

Photo: Paul Zeller



# Younger set battles it out in first Junior ASCF championships

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Fifty-two promising young climbers met at Pittsburgh's North Allegheny Senior High School and Climb North gym on June 4 to climb it out in the ASCF Junior National Championships. The title meet culminated a year's point-gathering for the youths, aged 9 to 18.

Said the mother of 11-year-old competitor John Bean of Baltimore, "He started climbing *real* early. When he was 10 months old, I threw away the crib."

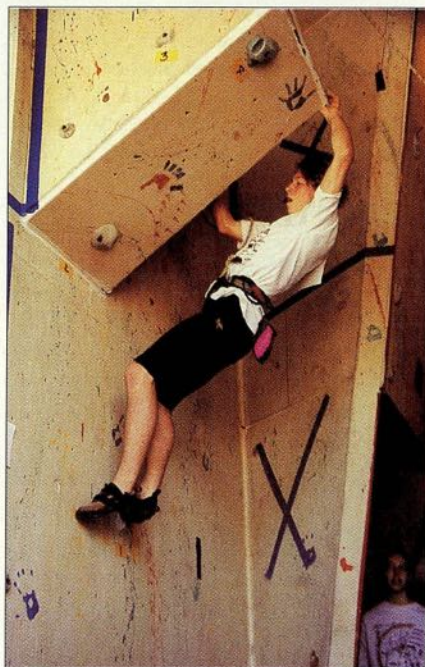
The prelims and semifinals were held at the high school's two climbing walls, tucked underneath the bleachers of the football stadium. Randy Hart, a teacher at North Allegheny, organized the event. The competitors, separated into age divisions, each climbed several qualifier routes ranging from 5.9 to 5.12, in the morning; then the 32 semifinalists each climbed two routes ranging from 5.10c to 5.12d.

Eight climbers at a time scaled the semifinal routes. Small hands shot around to chalk bags and up to holds, while parents cheered and little brothers sat in the corner with Game Boys.

The first to flash a challenging 5.12b arete was 17-year-old Obe Carrion of Allentown, Pennsylvania, who found a key finger slot.

Just before the tall Virginian Matthew Goodall began climbing, Hart (as he did for each contestant) stepped in to give standard instructions. A sign-language interpreter was quick to relate the message to Goodall, who then promptly flashed the route.

For the finals, held at Climb North, 25 contenders each climbed one route from an array ranging from 5.10c to 5.13. Since the lower third of the route



Caelah Merrick, 13, at the Junior Nationals.

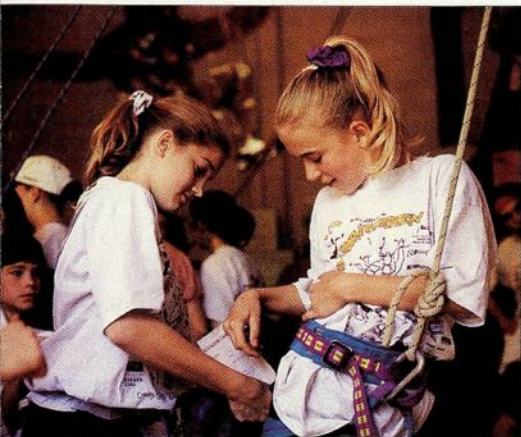
was in a pit, progress had to be relayed via video monitor to the clamoring fans. The 5.11 route for boys 11 and under was reachy, but Dustin Link, 10, of Louisville, Kentucky, took a flying leap for a hold to take first place. Josh Gray placed second, with John Bean third.

The same course served for girls 13 and under, with San Diego's Claire Lyon moving gracefully almost to the top before dropping. Nine-year-old Mandy Marsh of Carlisle, Pennsylvania, the event's youngest competitor, was second. In third place was Pittsburgh's Brooke Rassel.

The final 5.11c route for boys aged 13 and under moved around a bulge and straight up. All three finalists flashed the course, with previous performances determining placement. Lexington's David Hume took first place, Chris Sharma of Santa Cruz, California, second, and Pittsburgh's Dan Oppenheim third.

The 14- and 15-year-old girls used the same route, with Bonnie DeBrujin of Toronto making it around the bulge and climbing the highest. Pittsburgh's Holly Tonkin fell mid-course and called to her teammates, "How'd I get up here?" She finished second, with Pittsburgh's Natalie Brunner third.

The 5.12b course for boys aged 14 and 15 traversed, went through a cave, and finished straight up the wall. First place went to Jason Horvath of Lexington, the only climber to make it out of the cave and onto the final wall. Clayton Reagan



Brooke Rassel, 13, passes a shared chalk-bag to Amanda Weiland, 11.

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of Dallas, Texas, reached the top of the cave before falling, placing second. Tommy Smith of Northmont Wing, New Hampshire, took third.

Three Pittsburgh girls, aged 16 and 17, got on the cave route next and didn't fare as well. When all three fell on the first move, the coursesetters changed some holds. Second time through, Sarah Wieland and Lisa Smith snaked around into the cave before dropping. Wieland finished first, Smith second, Kristen Peterson third.

The course for boys aged 16 and 17, was a 5.13a. Aaron Chaney of Louisville placed first, with Toronto's Chris Aimone in second and Obe Carrion third.

"We young climbers are getting so much experience," said Sarah Wieland, a ballerina on rocks who will compete at the World Cup in Baltimore this October. "Someday, this sport will be as big here as it is in Europe."

— Naida Grunden

(All event results listed above. See page 76 for year's cumulative results.)

## Events

Compiled by Lisa Morgan

### August 11, Boulder, Colorado

**Poster signing.** Robyn Erbesfield and François Legrand will be at Neptune Mountaineering to sign posters and meet aspiring climbers. Contact: Neptune (303) 499-8866.

### August 19, Berkeley, California

**Poster signing.** Erbesfield and Legrand will be at Marmot Mountain Works. Contact: Marmot (510) 849-0735.

### August 25-28, Czech Republic

**The International Festival of Mountaineering Films.** Contact: Festival organizers, Rooseveltova 15, 549 57 Teplice nad Metuji, Czech Republic, or call (42) 447 93 296 93 229, or fax (42) 447 93 204 93 229.

### October 23-29, Colorado Springs, Colorado

**8th International Outdoor Recreation Conference.** Event will include merchandise vendors, job mart, and outdoor events. Contact: Bob McKeta, (703) 325-2523, or Jerry Jones, (719) 526-8353.

### November 2-6, Alberta, Canada

**Banff Festival of Mountain Films and 1st Annual Mountain Book Festival.** The book festival will run from November 2-6, with the film festival on the last two days. Deadline for film entries is September 9; a \$50 Canadian handling fee will be charged for each entry. Contact: Banff festival office (403) 762-6125, or fax (403) 762-6277.

## Two comps spell drought relief

### Santa Cruz and Emeryville, California

Local competitions have been scarce in Northern California in recent years, even though the area houses a surplus of talented climbers. This spring two area competitions ended the drought.

On February 19, the Pacific Edge, a new gym in Santa Cruz, held an ASCF-sanctioned local comp, the Crank d'Amour, on its 50-foot walls. (A local sanction is one level less than a regional, and worth fewer points.)

Jason Campbell of Lake Tahoe flashed the men's final, which at 5.13a spit off all other contenders. The gym's manager, Diane Russell, cranked her final (5.12b) to capture first in the women's division. Both finals routes equal the difficulty of those commonly used for finals in regional and national comps.

On May 22, a talented field showed up to compete at CityRock Gym for the Boreal Northern California Championships, an event orchestrated by the local climber/coursesetter Steve Schneider. Favorites in the men's category included Hans Florine, fresh off a win at the recently held nationals in Baltimore, and Tom Richardson, finalist in the last four nationals he's entered. Coming off the couch, Andy Outis nevertheless looked like a strong contender as well, climbing confidently in the qualifying rounds. But only one of those would finish in the top three.

Among women, Diane Russell was challenged by a field of talented and hungry competitors, many of whom have been ticking some of CityRock's notorious 5.12 sandbags.

The men's final route, set by Mike Papciak, required devious thought, huge power, or ideally, both. Marcos Nunez of Santa Rosa supplied the power, bullying his way through several sequences before coming off one hold short of the top for the win, while the second-place finisher, Ty Foose, used the devious approach, finding a drop-knee rest in the middle of a crux sequence, and generally looking as if he was redpointing rather than onsighting. All other finalists were stopped by a tricky sequence at mid-height, with Tom Richardson getting the highest for third place.

Diane Russell continued her dominance on the local competition circuit, climbing to within a move of the top in the women's finals. A competition newcomer, Abbey Watkins of Berkeley, climbed like a veteran to claim second place.

The event was a good one for all concerned, giving locals a chance to experience some competition pressure in preparation for the CityRock Nationals to follow on June 11.

— Jim Thornburg

(Crank d'Amour results published in Climbing No. 144. Please see page 76 for other results.)

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# Postcards from the Edge

by Greg Child

## Souls on ice

Beware the surface of things

*The Hollow-men live in solid rock and move about in the form of mobile caves or recesses. In ice they appear as bubbles in the shape of men. But they never venture out into the air, for the wind would blow them away.*

*They have houses in the rock whose walls are made of emptiness, and tents in the ice whose fabric is of bubbles. During the day they stay in the stone, and at night they wander through the ice and dance during the full moon. But they never see the sun, or else they would burst.*

*They eat only the void, such as the form of corpses; they get drunk on empty words and all the meaningless expressions we utter.*

*Some people say they have always existed and will exist forever. Others say they are the dead. And others say that as a sword has its scabbard or a foot its imprint, every living man has in the mountain his Hollow-man, and in death they are reunited.*

So wrote the French metaphysician Rene Dumas some 50 years ago, in his quirky, unfinished fantasy, *Mount Analogue*, a slim fiction that regained popularity in the heady 1970s. Subtitled *A Novel of Symbolically Authentic Non-Euclidean Adventures in Mountain Climbing*, the story chronicles a hazardous journey by a group of alpinist-explorers to an uncharted and impossibly high mountain. For a decade and then some, my copy had gathered dust on a promenade of my bookshelf reserved for culturally dated yet indispensable volumes, like Castaneda's *Tales of Power*. Nobody reads this stuff



A crevasse in the Vallee Blanche near Chamonix, France.

anymore, yet those who have (and what climber in the 1970s missed Dumas or Castaneda?) cannot forget the mystical routes that those books took us on. Back then, such fables were the blueprints of the climbing experience.

I recently found myself thinking of those bogeys of the ice world, the Hollow-men, so I dusted off *Mount Analogue* and re-read Dumas's phantasmagoric pun on climbing. I had all but forgotten these spectral beings till one day last June, while descending the West Ridge of Mount Hunter in the Alaska Range after a long spell on the peak's North Buttress, I felt the snowy crust beneath me dissolve and I dropped armpit-deep into a hidden crevasse.

It was a minor event on an Alaskan peak, *de rigueur*, I suppose. My partner, Michael Kennedy, and I had each plunged knee- to waist-deep into a half-dozen slots already that morning. Roped together for safety, we took evasive action to escape each gaping maw, by rolling forward or backward and clawing crab-like away from the darkness, hooking our ice tools in the snow. But at the crevasse in question — which I had straddled with my arms while my feet pedaled in the

void below — I felt an urge to examine the mouth that had just tried to swallow me. So, after wriggling out, I gazed down its gullet. I saw two polished, parallel walls three feet apart shooting into a night-black deep. A cold breath from within the mountain

sucked at my own panting lungs. I touched the crevasse wall. It was glass-smooth and bone-dry. My glove froze fast to the ice. When I peeled my hand away it made a sound like tearing paper. It was then I saw it — staring out from the ice near the murky junction between black nowhere and the translucent bluefish sparkle of day — a face, staring back. I stepped away, quickly, said nought to Michael, and resumed our punishing trudge — our ninth day on Hunter — down the ridge.

Of course, the mirror-like crevasse wall had merely served up my own reflection, but the sight sent a tingle down my spine anyway, and made me rifle my thoughts for a reference. And so I remembered Dumas's Hollow-men, sinister dwellers in the ice, watchers from within, waiting for us to join them.

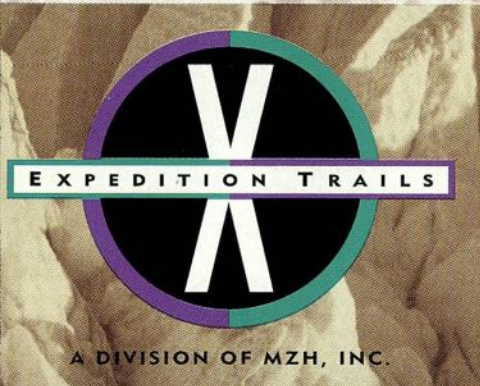
Whether the Hollow-men are doppelgängers, demons, or guardian angels I am unsure, for Dumas died before completing *Mount Analogue*, leaving the Hollow-man concept tantalizingly sketchy. Maybe his inspiration for the idea came one day when he was rambling through the Alps, gazing into crevasses. The sight of his own reflection staring back from shadows and

Photo: Chad Hussey





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DOWN WITH  
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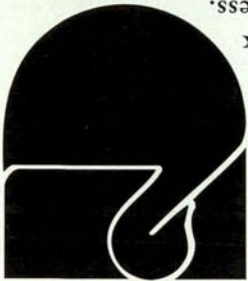




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allowed on the bus. She hobbled down moment, for whatever reason, she was not the children, but in the confusion of the Sally made her way to a bus waiting for and sprained her ankle. Limping now, fall, but lost her own balance, tumbled, down the slope. Sally stopped the child's the helicopter, slipped, and began skating many were crying. One turned to look at fools, knew their friend was doomed, and way station. The children, who were not loose moraine near the Monteverde rail- and her flock as they scrambled up a copter flew up the valley, passing Sally decided. In the afternoon twilight a heli- we finally got her to the surface, Sally that they not see their schoolmate when glacier, back toward Chamoni; better ley began herding the children down the not live. The guides left for help, and Sal- approached, we realized the girl would Back on the glacier surface, as night statement of unspeakable anguish.

appeared sole-up beside her head, a silent when she slid in, so that her hiking shoe or speak. Her leg had twisted behind her touch the girl's blond head. She didn't sit upside down in our harnesses just to cold gut of the glacier, we had to hang ahead of us, tried to reverse the terrible hour we, like the French and the Brits wouldn't alter a thing. So, for the next

they weren't, and lecturing or accusing the children had been roped together, but Everything would have been different if cork. I couldn't reach her."

British lads. "She's in deep. Wedged like a "We've been in, too," added one of the eyes welling with tears.

into a mood of stunned hopelessness, his pulling we cannot move her." He drifted is 14. But even with all the children She spoke. We got a rope around her. She by a red down coat. "They lowered me in, on his haunches, shivering, and blanketed "Oui," answered the teacher, who sat uncoiled a rope.

"Out?" Guy spat out, as he rapidly "Has anyone been down to check her the snowbridge, nearly an hour ago.

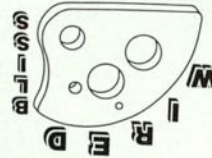
blanks: a young girl had broken through alpinists who happened along filled in the to raise a rescue. Two weary young British ing to help and hurrying down the glacier peering, they seemed torn between stay- raved. Alternately racing off and reap- ing their faces. The guides shouted and the kids, with forlorn expressions haunt- Two guides and a teacher stood with was in there was stuck tight.

from the belly of the glacier, but whatever were worth, trying to haul something out The kids pulled at the rope for all they either side of the hole were footprints. mortar shell had pierced its surface. On

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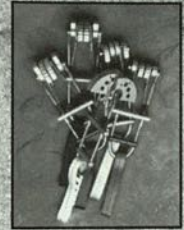
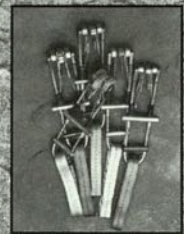
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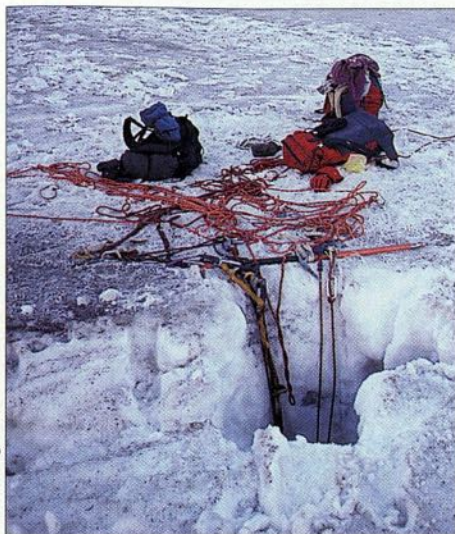


A dozen or more French adolescents on which disappeared into a three-foot-wide crevasse. Beside the rope was a snow- bridge that spanned the gap. It was pocked with a neat round hole, as if a

you're careful." That was when we saw "See," I told her, "it isn't dangerous, if stretchmarks creasing the Mer de Glace, across her first crevasse, one of countless bolster her confidence, my wife stepped of coffee. With me holding her hand to baguettes, jam and cheese, and the meros hut, and we carried sacks containing petit granite *aiguille*, a day climb near a Nordwands galore. Our objective was a friend, Mark Wilford, and a British men- tor of ours named Guy Lee, a veteran of Mer de Glace above Chamoni in France day in 1981, while strolling along the trace this fear back to a warm summer error, are high on my list of phobias. I Crevasses, I can say without risk of while slowly dying of tuberculosis.

ness of the Nazi occupation of France, and penned *Mount Analogue* during the dark- occultist, philosopher, and climber — Dunal — writer, poet, linguist, surrealist, to skip a bear, just as it did mine, for ice would probably have caused his heart





The scene on the fateful day on the Mer de Glace, France.

under her own steam, arriving in Chamonix at midnight.

Back at the crevasse, two mountain gendarmes and a doctor stepped off the helicopter. Seasoned by a thousand rescues, they commanded us into a crew. We lowered one of them into the hole. Using a spray-gun filled with anti-freeze he quickly unlocked the crevasse's grip on the girl. We winched her out. The moment she hit the surface the doctor went through the motions of trying to

revive her. There was a moment of hope as her small body quivered with jolts of current from the heart-starting machine, but her blood-drained pallor and sunken eyes told us that only her body would return from the crevasse.

Riding back to Chamonix in the helicopter, jammed beside the body bag, we were silent. After we landed in a green meadow Mark turned to me, shaking his head sadly. "She had a gold ring on every finger. She was a kid," he said. We never learned her name. We never wanted to know it.

In Dumas's book, a character named Mo strikes a rock with his alpine pick to place a piton. His pick shatters a man-shaped cavity in the stone; "... torso, legs, arms and little tubes in the shape of fingers spread in terror. He has split the head with the blow of his pick ... An icy wind passes across the stone. Mo has killed a Hollow-man."


"Watch out for the Hollow-men," Mo's father warns him. "They will seek vengeance. They cannot enter our world, but they can come up to the surface of things. Beware the surface of things."

The next day Mo's ice axe and his clothes are found at the foot of a cliff. The Hollow-men have ambushed him and dragged him into the mountain. Mo's

brother, Ho, sets off to rescue his kin. Their father issues these instructions: "The Hollow-men have taken your brother and changed him into a Hollow-man. He will try to escape. He will go in search of light to the seracs of the Clear Glacier ... Go to him and strike at his head. Enter the form of his body, and Mo will live among us again. Do not fear to kill a dead man."


At the glacier Ho looks into a blue serac and sees "silvery forms with arms and legs, like greased divers under water." Thousands of Hollow-men are chasing Mo, who only eludes their clutches by staying close to the bright surface of the ice, from which the Hollow-men cringe. Summoning all his courage, Ho aims his pick at the center of Mo's skull and cracks the ice. He steps into the serac and enters his brother's hollow form, then steps back into the world of air, taking his brother with him. He becomes his brother, and his brother becomes him. They live on as one.

*Mount Analogue* is a fantasy, a trifle, and the climbing in it is just a vehicle for Dumas to mount his broader philosophies. In real life, frail flesh is seldom retrieved from the ice so bloodlessly, so beautifully. Nevertheless, we would do well to heed Dumas's warning of the icy underworld — "Beware the surface of things."



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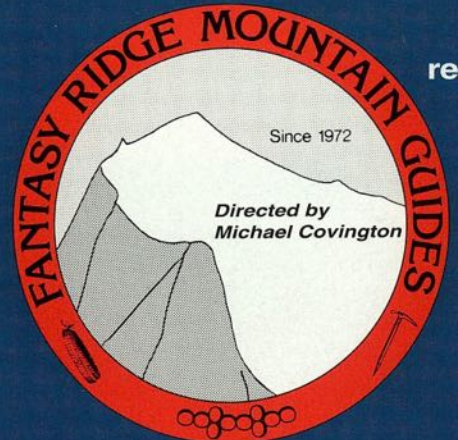
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DENALI'S SILENT PARTNER

# SULTANA

BY BILL SHERWONIT

SEEN FROM ANCHORAGE, THE NORTHERN SKYLINE OF THE ALASKA RANGE IS DOMINATED BY TWIN MOUNTAIN GIANTS THAT APPEAR NEARLY IDENTICAL IN HEIGHT. BUT THAT LONG-DISTANCE SAMENESS IS AN ILLUSION.

THE GIANT ON THE RIGHT IS THE 20,320-FOOT MOUNT MCKINLEY, OR DENALI, A TANANA INDIAN NAME THAT ROUGHLY TRANSLATES INTO "THE HIGH ONE" — IT IS THE CONTINENT'S TALLEST MOUNTAIN. THE GIANT TO DENALI'S LEFT IS NOT NEARLY AS WELL KNOWN. AT 17,400 FEET, MOUNT FORAKER IS NORTH AMERICA'S SIXTH-HIGHEST PEAK, AND THE THIRD HIGHEST IN ALASKA, BEHIND DENALI AND THE 18,008-FOOT MOUNT STELLAS. TANANA INDIANS LIVING IN THE LAKE MINCHUMINA AREA NORTHEAST OF THE ALASKA RANGE KNEW FORAKER BY TWO NAMES: SULTANA, "THE WOMAN," OR MENLALE, "DENALI'S WIFE."



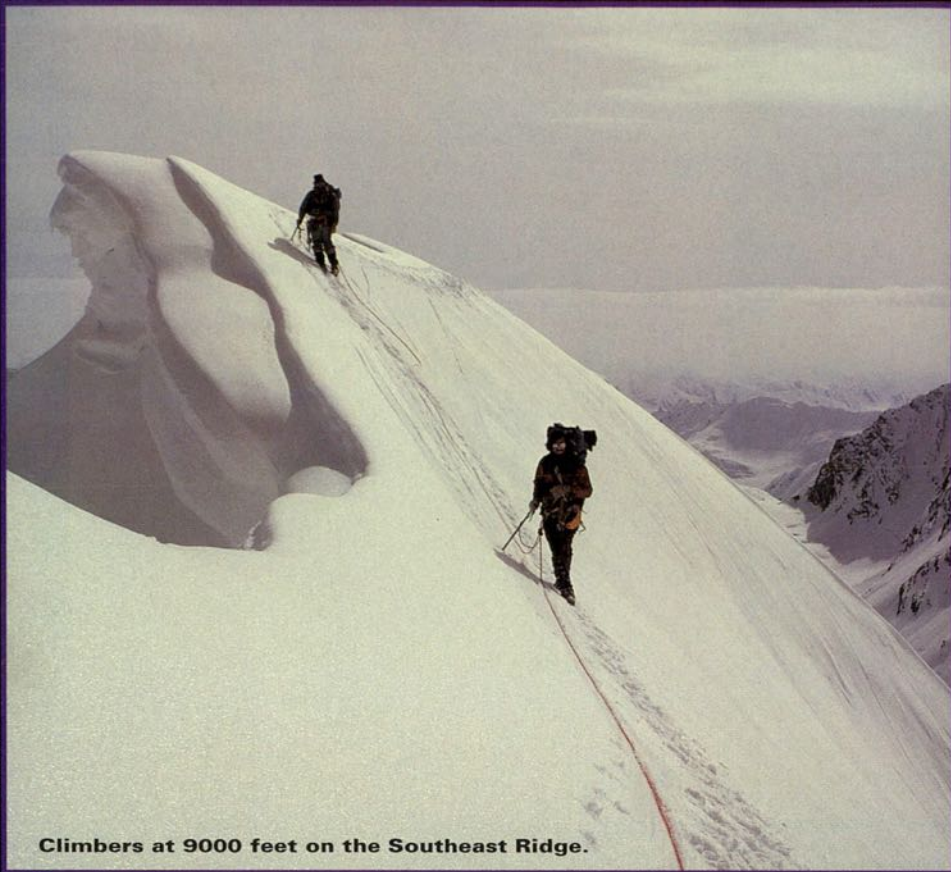


The Alaska Range from the air, with Mount Foraker (17,400 feet) on the left and Denali (20,320 feet) on the right; Mount Hunter (14,570 feet) is the twin-summitted peak left of Denali.

CAUGHT IN THE SHADOW OF HER TALLER “MATE,” SULTANA HAS HISTORICALLY BEEN OVERLOOKED, OR PERHAPS IGNORED, BY BOTH PIONEERING CLIMBERS AND THE MOUNTAINEERING MASSES WHO LATER FOLLOWED. NOT UNTIL 1934 — 21 YEARS AFTER DENALI WAS CLIMBED — DID A CLIMBING TEAM EVEN ATTEMPT SULTANA. WHILE DENALI HAS LURED NEARLY 16,000 PEOPLE TO ITS SLOPES, SULTANA’S SUITORS HAVE NUMBERED IN THE HUNDREDS. YET THOSE WHO’VE CLIMBED THE MOUNTAIN HAVE DISCOVERED CHALLENGING AND OFTEN AWE-INSPIRING ROUTES — THE SOUTHEAST AND FRENCH RIDGES, *PINK PANTHER*, *HIGHWAY OF DIAMONDS*, AND THE *INFINITE SPUR*, TO NAME A FEW EXAMPLES, ARE A MATCH FOR ANY ON THE CONTINENT.

THE FIRST RECORDED REFERENCE TO SULTANA WAS MADE IN MAY 1794 BY BRITISH CAPT. GEORGE VANCOUVER. WHILE CHARTING ALASKA’S COAST, VANCOUVER REPORTED “DISTANT





Climbers at 9000 feet on the Southeast Ridge.

THOSE WHO'VE CLIMBED THE MOUNTAIN HAVE DISCOVERED CHALLENGING AND OFTEN AWE-INSPIRING ROUTES — THE SOUTHEAST AND FRENCH RIDGES, PINK PANTHER, HIGHWAY OF DIAMONDS, AND THE INFINITE SPUR, TO NAME A FEW EXAMPLES, ARE A MATCH FOR ANY ON THE CONTINENT.

stupendous mountains covered with snow, and apparently detached from one another." Vancouver chose not to name the mountains, however, leaving that privilege to future explorers. Another four decades would pass before Denali and Sultana were given their first non-native names.

Doing the honors were members of the Russian American Company, who mapped Alaska's interior and assessed its resources in the 1830s. Their findings, published in 1839 by the territory's Russian governor, Baron Ferdinand P. von Wrangell, included a cluster of mountains marked Tenada, which likely refers to Mount McKinley, and Tschigmit, probably Mount Foraker, and their satellite peaks. For unknown reasons, references to Tenada and Tschigmit were gradually eliminated from future Russian maps, and they'd been lost altogether by the time the United States purchased Alaska in 1867.

And so it fell to Lt. Joseph Herron of the 8th U.S. Cavalry, while on a government reconnaissance mission, to officially name the Alaska Range's second-highest peak. On November 25, 1899, Herron spotted "a second great mountain in the range [the first having already been named McKinley in 1896 by William Dickey], 20,000 feet high, which I named Mount Foraker."

Like Mount McKinley 15 miles to the northeast, Foraker was named after a U.S. Senator from Ohio. But unlike William McKinley, who later became the nation's 25th president, Joseph Benson Foraker was eventually driven from politics for his role in a corruption scandal involving kickbacks from the Standard Oil Company.

Though McKinley and Denali have become virtually interchangeable, few people would recognize Foraker's native

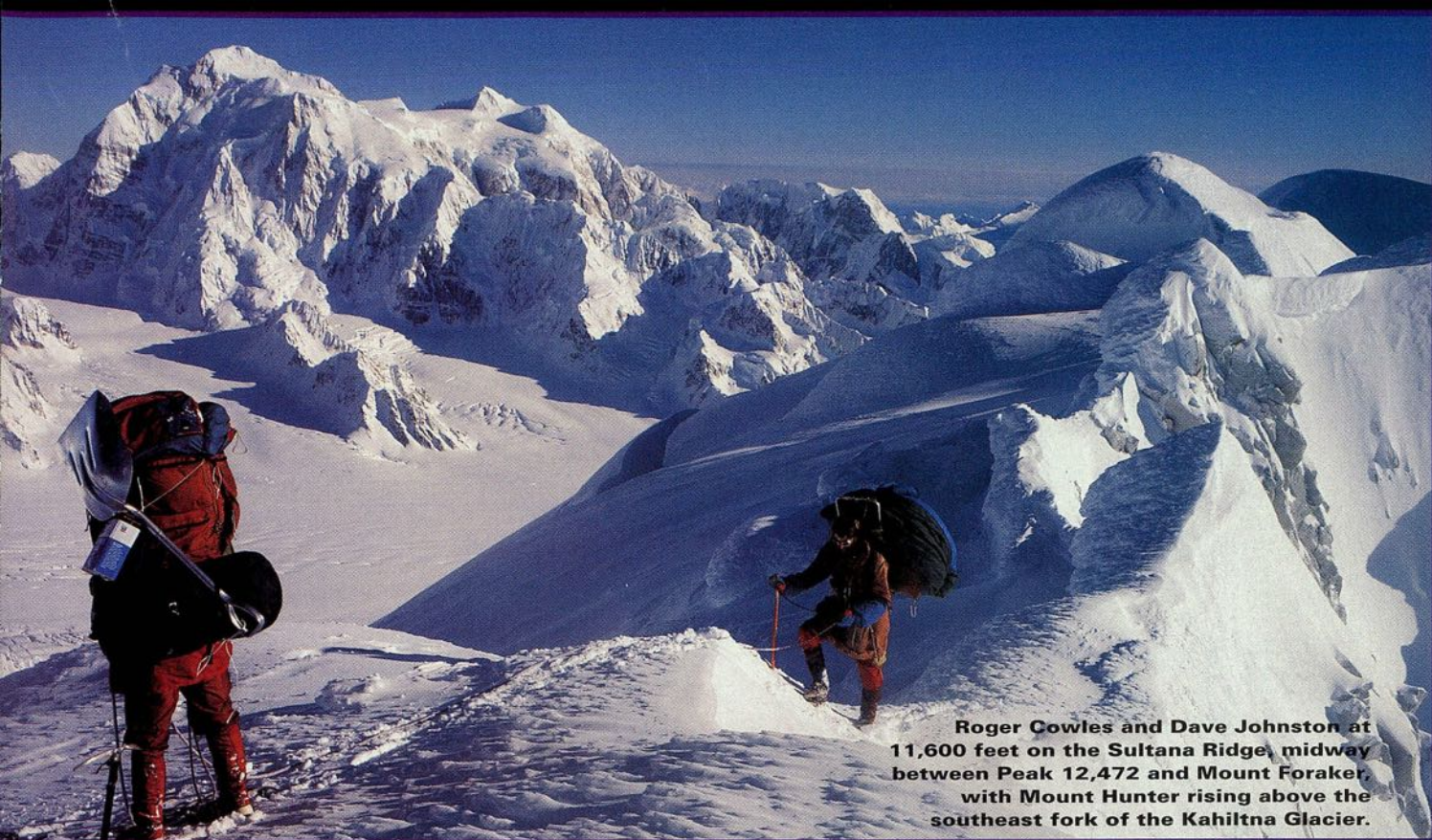
Alaskan names. Over the years, there have been many calls for an official renaming of the twin giants. Among the earliest was an appeal made by Hudson Stuck, the Episcopal missionary who organized the first successful ascent of Denali in 1913. In the preface to his mountaineering classic, *The Ascent of Denali*, he pleads for the restoration of the original names, while condemning the "ruthless arrogance ... that contemptuously ignores the native names of conspicuous natural objects."

Still, the peaks' official names remain the same. But in this story, at least, we can choose to follow Stuck's premise: Sultana it will be.

**H**udson Stuck, in his account of the 1913 expedition, was the first to describe the mountain's allures in any detail. Because members of the Stuck expedition had taken a northern path up Denali — via the Muldrow Glacier — they didn't see Sultana until reaching the mountain's summit. Stuck was enraptured. He later wrote, "About three thousand feet beneath us and fifteen to twenty miles away, sprang most splendidly into view the great mass of Denali's Wife ... filling majestically all the middle distance ... never was nobler sight displayed to man than that great, isolated mountain spread out completely, with all its spurs and ridges, its cliffs and its glaciers, lofty and mighty and yet far beneath us."

Eight decades later, climbers who know of the mountain still appreciate Sultana's majestic appeal. "It's just a beautiful mountain, with some classic routes," says Gary Bocarde, an





**Roger Cowles and Dave Johnston at 11,600 feet on the Sultana Ridge, midway between Peak 12,472 and Mount Foraker, with Mount Hunter rising above the southeast fork of the Kahiltna Glacier.**

Photo: Brian Okonek

Anchorage-based guide who has visited the peak five times and twice taken clients to its summit via the Southeast Ridge. That ridge, he says, is “not desperate climbing, but you have lots of exposure. For more than 10,000 feet, you have air below you. And on summit day, you follow a beautiful corniced ridge, with drops of thousands of feet on either side.”

Michael Kennedy, who teamed up with George Lowe for the first ascent of Sultana’s south face in 1977 — via the *Infinite Spur*, so named because “it just goes on, and on, and on” — agrees. “It’s a lovely mountain, with high-quality, technically challenging routes,” Kennedy says. “Some of my best climbing memories are from that ascent.”

The fact that this mountain, with all its charms, has historically been ignored stretches back to its first ascent, in 1934. Fittingly, that expedition was inspired by Belmore Browne’s book *The Conquest of Mount McKinley*, in which Sultana receives little more than passing notice.

The five-man expedition was organized by a New York attorney, Oscar Houston, who had come up with the idea for the trip, and his son Charles, who would later gain fame for his contributions to Himalayan climbing and mountain medicine. “You must realize that in 1934 the area around Foraker had not been mapped and few people had been near it,” Charles Houston recalls from his Vermont home. “So my father was only able to get a rough blueprint showing approximate valleys and contours. He made all the contacts and arrangements. My task was to collect a party and plan food and equipment.”

Among the party’s gear: a small battery powered radio, intended for emergencies, but which “never worked when we

reached the mountain,” Charles Houston says; 17-pound sleeping bags; custom-made one-piece coveralls, with wolverine-fur-trimmed hoods; and standard rubber and leather shoepacks that despite felt soles “were very cold.”

The Houstons and their teammates — T. Graham Brown, Chychele Waterston, and Charles Storey — met the Alaskan horse-packer/outfitter Carl Anderson on July 3 near Wonder Lake on the north side of the range in then McKinley National Park. Four days later the team set up basecamp along the Foraker River, then reconnoitered a route up the mountain’s unexplored northern flanks. On July 22, slowed by storms and their loads, which included supplies for several weeks of climbing, the team established Camp 3 at 5800 feet, a site so serene and comfortable the men named it Tranquility Col. Only a few miles away, Houston would later write, was “the whole great face of the mountain, falling in one cliff from the summit,” a vertical drop of more than 12,000 feet.

Above Tranquility Col, the climbers slogged up the Foraker Glacier’s crevassed south fork, establishing Camp 5 at 9800 feet on July 30. With only 20 days of food and fuel remaining, the group split into summit and support teams. Charles Houston, Brown, and Waterston would continue the ascent, while the others hauled loads from the lower camps to Camp 5. The senior Houston — “more of a curious traveler than a mountaineer,” according to his son — also did some mapping and “made some improvements in the rough blueprints” that the team had brought along.

Heavy snows stalled the summit party until August 3, but things moved quickly after that. Within two days, the trio had



"ABOUT THREE THOUSAND FEET BENEATH US AND FIFTEEN TO TWENTY MILES AWAY, SPRANG MOST SPLENDIDLY INTO VIEW THE GREAT MASS OF DENALI'S WIFE ... FILLING MAJESTICALLY ALL THE MIDDLE DISTANCE ... NEVER WAS NOBLER SIGHT DISPLAYED TO MAN THAN THAT GREAT, ISOLATED MOUNTAIN SPREAD OUT COMPLETELY, WITH ALL ITS SPURS AND RIDGES, ITS CLIFFS AND ITS GLACIERS, LOFTY AND MIGHTY AND YET FAR BENEATH US."

—HUDSON STUCK, 1913

Photo: Peter Metcalf



established a bivouac site at 13,700 feet, about 800 feet below the plateau leading to Sultana's twin peaks. On August 6, with both summits hidden by clouds and blowing snow, "we were only able to guess which was higher," Houston reported. They guessed the north.

Pressing on, the climbers reached the summit ridge — about 2500 feet below the top — in early afternoon. Winds had increased, but the clouds above had dissipated, giving them a clear view of the route. Buffeted by gales and exhausted by the altitude, they moved slowly and walked onto the summit together at about 8 p.m., in very cold and murky weather. Charles Houston, showing signs of altitude sickness, "felt curiously unsteady, drunk almost, but not with exultation. It was rather a feeling of finality, conclusiveness, but not of victory."

Though confident they'd ascended the higher of Sultana's two peaks, the summit party nevertheless felt that to do the mountain properly they should climb both. After waiting out a three-day storm, the trio gained the 16,812-foot South Peak — the lower of the two summits — on the evening of August 10, bathed in a sunset that painted the snow deep red.

Reunited six days later, the entire team celebrated with a banquet at Tranquility Col. They reached basecamp August 21, and park headquarters on August 28, eight weeks after beginning their journey.

From his mountaintop views, Charles Houston left Alaska convinced that his party's route offered the only practical path to Sultana's summit. "The whole area south and east of Foraker and McKinley is a wilderness of snow and ice and rock, and I've never seen a more inhospitable land," he wrote in his diary.





Glenn Randall on *Highway of Diamonds*.

Airplane and glacier landings changed all that, of course. The Southeast Ridge has become Sultana's standard route, while the Houston party's route, the Northwest Ridge, has been rarely attempted, largely because of its long and time-consuming approach.

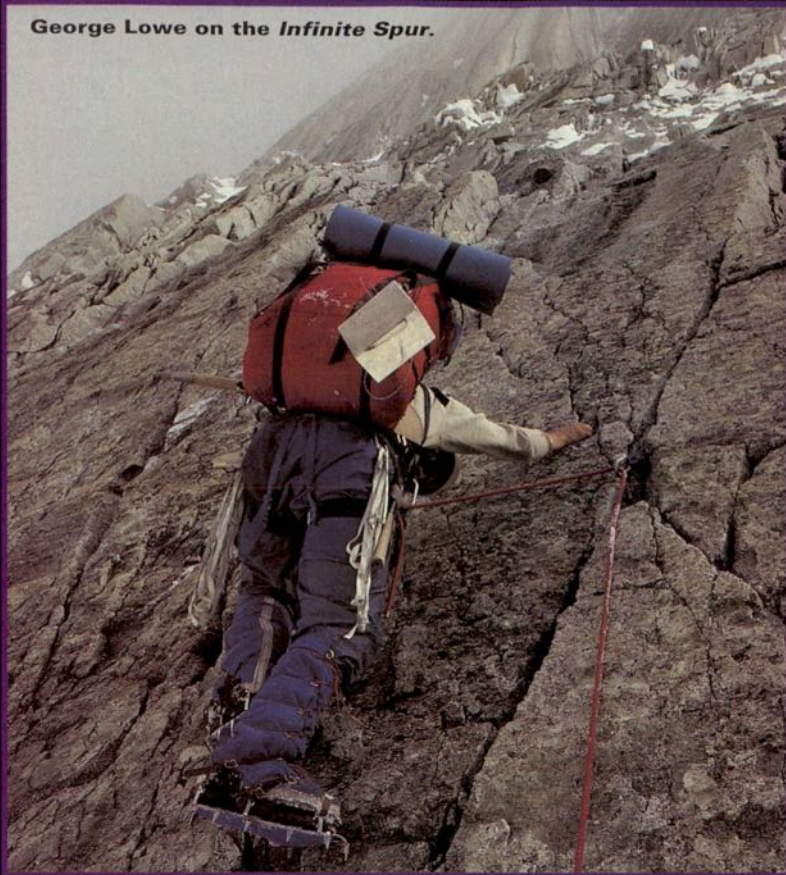
Since its first ascent in 1934, some 500 climbers have attempted Sultana. From 1975 to 1984, an average of 28 people attempted Sultana each year, with an all-time high of 43 in 1983. Since 1985, however, the average has dropped to less than 18 per year. In contrast, Denali saw more than 1000 climbers a year in 1992 and 1993.

Why the great disparity? For many people, Denali is the grand prize of North American mountaineering. People want to

do the highest peak. "Denali acts like a funnel," says a mountaineering ranger, Roger Robinson. "A lot of people from outside Alaska don't even know Foraker's here until we tell them." And unlike Denali, Sultana doesn't have a non-technical "walk-up" route that's easily accessible. "About 80 percent of the people who climb McKinley use the West Buttress," says Bocarde. "You don't need technical expertise on the Buttress; that opens it up to a lot more people. On Foraker, the most popular route [the Southeast Ridge] is a demanding, technical climb."

Though it attracts seasoned, highly skilled mountaineers, Sultana's success rate is much lower than Denali's. In the two decades since 1974, only 136 of 463 climbers have reached Sultana's summit. And over the past 10 years climber success has fallen to 40 of 196 attempts — about 20 percent. On Denali, the historical success rate has remained near 50 percent.





IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, SULTANA IS PROBABLY NOT SO MUCH OVERLOOKED OR IGNORED AS IT IS AVOIDED. THERE ARE PLENTY OF GOOD REASONS FOR STAYING OFF THE MOUNTAIN'S SLOPES, AND WHILE DENALI IS MADE FOR THE MOUNTAINEERING MASSES, SULTANA IS NOT.

... SINCE 1985, SULTANA HAS SEEN AN AVERAGE OF LESS THAN 18 CLIMBERS PER YEAR. IN CONTRAST, DENALI SAW MORE THAN 1000 CLIMBERS A YEAR IN 1992 AND 1993.

Bradford Washburn's exclusion of Sultana on his famous Mount McKinley map probably also contributes to the mountain's neglect, according to Donald Goodman, a climber/researcher from Washington state. "This might seem like a minor point, until one tries to obtain detailed topographic information on Foraker," says Goodman, who reached Sultana's summit in 1986 and wrote a brief history of the mountain in the 1987 *American Alpine Journal*.

Climbers familiar with both mountains also say Sultana is more frequently battered by stormy weather. "Foraker's sitting right out there on the edge of the range," explains Nick Parker, an Anchorage mountain guide. "It tends to get a lot more bad weather, plus it gets hammered by winds from both the north and south. And there's no place to sit comfortably for 10 days and wait out a storm."

A series of major storms was largely responsible for the poor climber success in 1992, when only two of 26 climbers reached Sultana's summit. Two others died. (That same summer, a record 11 people died on neighboring Denali.)

Through the end of last year, 76 climbers have died on Denali, or about one in every 200 who attempt the mountain. On Sultana 14 people have died, or one in every 37, a death rate nearly six times higher. All but two of Sultana's fatalities have occurred on the Southeast Ridge (the others died on the *Pink Panther* route). In every case, avalanches were the cause.

**F**irst climbed in 1963 by James Richardson and Jeffrey Duenwald, the Southeast Ridge has become Sultana's standard route primarily because of easy access: it's

only a short hop from the "Kahiltna International," the landing strip and basecamp that serves as starting point for nearly all Denali expeditions.

Since Richardson and Duenwald's ascent (organized by H. Adams Carter, their expedition was only the second to attempt Sultana), nearly half of those climbing the peak have followed the Southeast Ridge. The percentage has dropped since the mid-1980s, however, perhaps reflecting climbers' growing unwillingness to risk the avalanche-prone route.

Nick Parker was guiding two clients up the Southeast Ridge in 1987, when, at 12,000 feet, after two days of snow and hurricane-force winds from the north, an avalanche hit. The wind-loaded slope released just below a bergshroud, and Parker was carried downslope by a foot-thick slab of snow, narrowly escaping. "I knew the conditions were ripe," Parker recalls. "But we pushed it anyway. I guess you could call it 'young-guide syndrome,' although I wasn't all that young." He says he wouldn't do the route again.

A pair of two-man parties that followed, one Canadian, the other American, weren't as lucky. Forewarned of the danger, the climbers kept to their plans — and paid with their lives. On May 15, the American team's due-out date, National Park Service personnel flying along the mountain saw tracks leading into an avalanche-release zone. Climbing gear was spotted in the slide debris at the bottom of the slope, about 3000 feet below. No bodies were found.

The deaths received considerable publicity in newspapers and magazines, which may account for the low number of attempts the next two years. "We have taken a more active role in clearly describing the problems and dangers associated



**Foraker and moonrise; the South Ridge is in the background, Southeast Ridge on the left, and the Sultana Ridge in the foreground.**

with climbing Foraker, so people know exactly what they're getting into," says a former chief mountaineering ranger of Denali National Park, Bob Siebert. "Some people hear the history of the mountain and change their plans."

But Bocarde — who himself has been swept nearly 1000 feet by a Sultana slide — believes the mountain, and particularly its Southeast Ridge, have gotten a bum rap. "Sure, it's a serious mountain. And the Southeast Ridge can be a very hazardous route; if you mess up, the consequences are likely to be fatal," he says. "People say 'It's death up there,' but the objective dangers aren't any worse than on other Alaska Range peaks. You can approach it so that your exposure time [to avalanches] is minimal. Its reputation as a death route isn't justified. To me, it's a technical alpine route that belongs among the 50 classics."

**T**here are other "classic" paths to Sultana's summit, without as many avalanche traps, but most require longer approaches, greater commitment, or more difficult climbing.

The unrepeatable *Highway of Diamonds*, for instance, is an Alaskan Grade 4+ route, according to the rating system in Jonathan Waterman's *High Alaska* (Waterman gives the Southeast Ridge a Grade 3). First climbed in 1983 by Glenn Randall and Peter Metcalf, its difficulty, says Waterman, "is accentuated by its remote position and long approach."

Randall and Metcalf began their 75-mile odyssey at Kanishna, a former gold-mining town on the north side of the Alaska Range. Hoping to reach the peak in five or six days by skis, they were instead greeted by "rotten snow, bare hillsides,

open streams, [and] willow thrashing," Metcalf reported in the 1984 *American Alpine Journal*. It took nine days to reach their basecamp at 7700 feet.

Reduced to half rations, the pair found the climbing straightforward, and they moved quickly up the ridge. Too quickly, as it turned out. First Metcalf, then Randall began having headaches. Metcalf's eventually eased, but Randall's gave way to more serious altitude symptoms.

"Our options were few and poor," Metcalf recounted in the *AAJ*. "Our minimal food and fuel persuaded us late that evening to opt for the summit and then to make haste down the Southeast Ridge, the easiest and safest way down." Interesting they should consider it the safest, given its history. But without question, it was the most convenient.

Upon reaching the summit in late afternoon on April 29, the pair felt "no elation, no joy — just an underlying urge to get down as quickly as possible." Unroped, the two descended. At the second rest stop, Metcalf turned to look for Randall, but saw no sign of him, only slide marks that headed down the ridge's north side.

Certain his partner was dead, Metcalf prepared to resume his descent, when Randall, minus pack, crawled onto the ridge. His fall had been broken by a three-foot-wide shelf, 15 feet below; beneath was 7000 feet of air. Randall, apparently in shock, was a mess: his face was caked with blood, his body chilled and broken; he'd suffered cracked ribs, a broken leg, and badly twisted ankles. Worst of all, his lungs continued to gurgle.

Metcalf retrieved the pack, then set up the tent. Stormy weather kept the two men tent bound for four days. On the fifth, rescuers arrived. A helicopter landed by the climbers' tent



After seeing to Jeff's evacuation, Kennedy and Lowe went on to complete a new route up the North Face of Mount Hunter (which also has a Native name, Begguya, or "Denali's Child").

Even in ideal circumstances, the climb would have been a grand accomplishment. But Kennedy and Lowe pioneered the route after losing their teammate Jeff Lowe — the expedition's driving force, as well as its strongest climber — who'd broken his ankle as the trio ascended nearby Mount Hunter.

The first ascent of the *Infinite Spur* in 1977 by Michael Kennedy and George Lowe ranks among the most audacious routes ever done in the Alaska Range. Attempted several times since, it's been repeated only once, in 1989 by Jim Nelson and Mark Bebie (since killed while climbing in the Columbia Ice-fields in Canada). Kennedy says that his route up Sultana was "probably the most important and best route I've ever done. It was a big step for me; it showed me the possibilities inherent in big mountains."

7 Archangel Ridge (Alaskan Grade 4). First climbed in 1975 by Charlie Campbell, Brad Johnson, Stewart Krebs, Dave



1 Talkeetna Ridge (Alaskan Grade 5). First climbed in 1968 by Alex Betulis, Warren Bleser, and Pete Williamson. Difficult corniced ridge climbing and some rock climbing on a 500-foot granite headwall low on the route. Remote and seldom repeated.

2 Infinite Spur (Alaskan Grade 6). First climbed in 1977 by Michael Kennedy and George Lowe. Rock climbing to 5.9, many pitches of 50- to 60-degree ice, and three crux pitches of very difficult mixed climbing make this the hardest technical route on the mountain. Repeated once.

3 French Ridge (Alaskan Grade 6). First climbed in 1976 by Henri and Isabelle Agresti, Jean-Paul Bouqulet, Gerard Creton, Jean-Marie Galmiche, Herve Thivierge, and Werner Landry. Extremely difficult and committing corniced ridge climbing. Unrepeated.

4 Southeast Ridge (Alaskan Grade 3). First climbed in 1963 by Jim Richardson and Jeff Duenwald. The route's grade doesn't reflect significant avalanche danger on the lower slopes and large cornices between 11,500 and 13,600 feet. The normal route on the mountain.

5 Pink Panther (Alaskan Grade 5+). First climbed in 1984 by Julien Dery, Jean-Francois Gagnon, and Daniel Vachon. Sustained 60- to 75-degree ice climbing with vertical steps, and some danger from falling seracs. Seldom repeated.

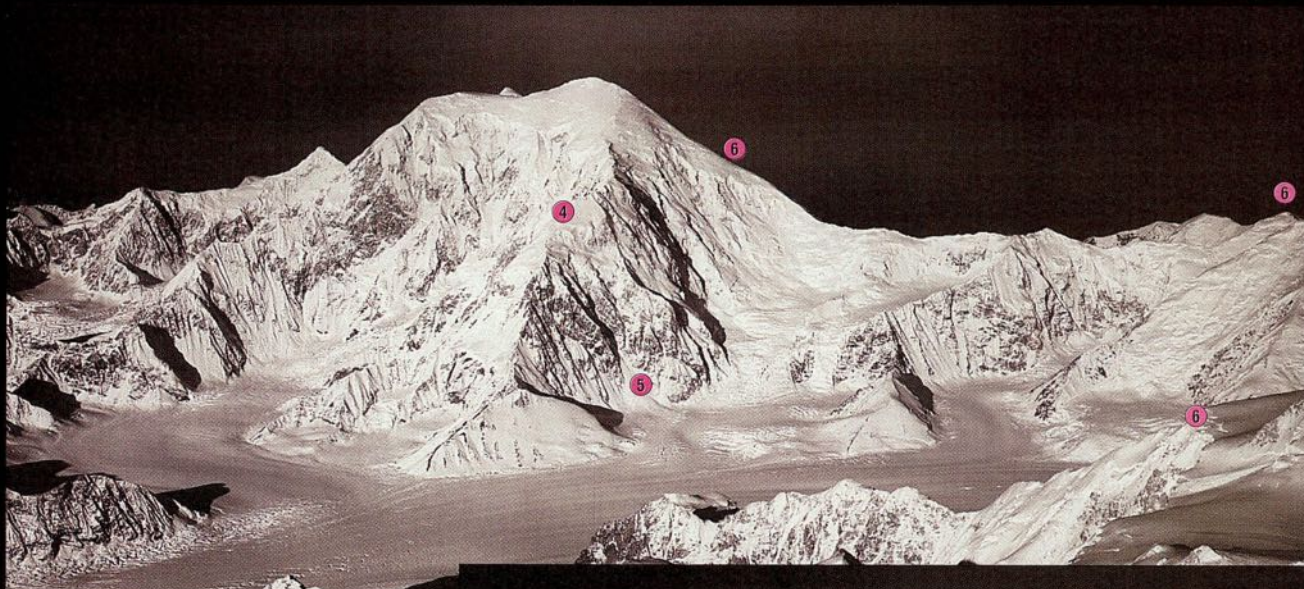
site and within minutes, Randall was airborne and bound for Providence Hospital in Anchorage. As a footnote to his account, Metcalf noted, "[Glenn] was diagnosed with both pulmonary and cerebral edema ... The examining doctors were incredulous that his edemas had not worsened and brought death during the four-and-a-half days he remained at 16,000 feet."

While the northern routes require long approaches and dogged persistence, Sultana's southern routes — most notably the Grade 5 *Talkeetna Ridge* and Grade 6 *French Ridge* and *Infinite Spur* — offer the most alluring blend of difficulty and elegance.

The *French Ridge*, says Waterman, is Sultana's most spectacular. With "miles of intricate cornicing, rock towers and very difficult climbing," it has been ascended only once, in 1976, by a team of six French and one American. Using 10,000 feet of fixed rope, the expedition finally reached the summit on its

## Sultana - selected routes

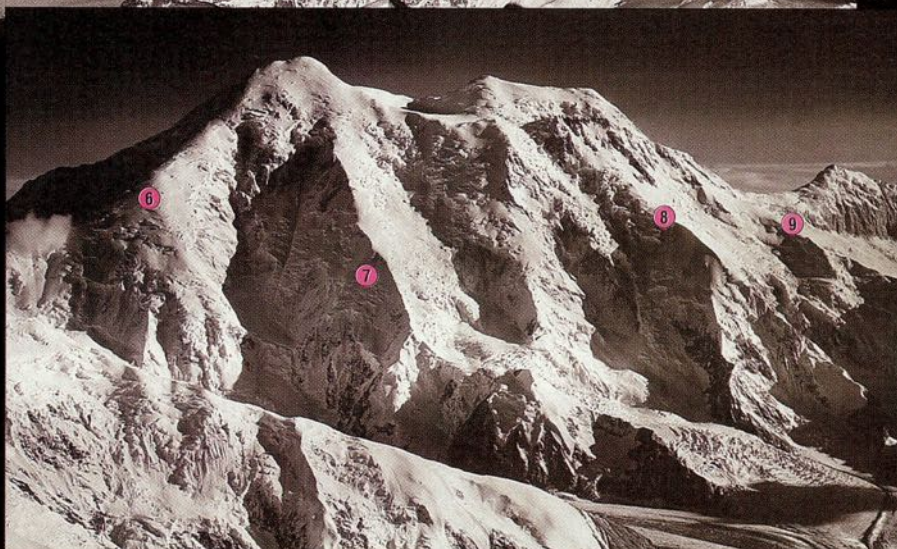




Wright, and Barbara and Gerry Roach. Like all routes on the north side of Sultana, it requires a 25-mile approach to the Foraker Glacier. Moderate snow and ice climbing. Unrepeated.

**8 Highway of Diamonds (Alaskan Grade 4+).** First climbed in 1983 by Peter Metcalf and Glenn Randall. Mostly moderate snow and ice climbing with some vertical ice through a serac barrier low down, and 1000 feet of 50- to 60-degree ice to reach the summit plateau. Unlike other Sultana routes, it has no corniced sections. Unrepeated.

**9 Northwest Ridge (Alaskan Grade 3).** First ascent of Sultana, made in 1934, by T. Graham Brown, Charles Houston, and Chychele Waterston. No significant difficulties apart from a knife-edge ridge at mid-height. Originally climbed without fixed ropes. Seldom repeated.



Photos: Bradford Washburn Collection

Sultana was another matter, however. At first convinced the mountain was beyond their reach without Jeff, the two climbers had decided to climb the Cassin Ridge on Denali instead. Shortly before leaving, they changed their minds and decided they'd rather attempt the more difficult first ascent rather than settle for a repeat. (Each eventually climbed the Cassin Ridge, Kennedy solo in 1981 and Lowe in 1988.)

They started up Sultana on June 27, climbing in alpine style through a shroud of clouds, mist, and snow. On June 30, high on the 9000-foot rib that forms the *Infinite Spur*, the pair stopped to regroup, rest, and drink some hot soup. It was 3 a.m. and they'd already been climbing 18 hours. With no place to bivouac, Kennedy volunteered to lead through the route's crux: a steep and intimidating gully of mixed rock and ice. "It looked desperate," he recounted in the 1978 *American Alpine Journal*, "but the rock all around was even worse."

"My mind was clear and surprisingly calm as I visualized the way ahead, keenly aware of the chalkboard-screch of cram-

pons on rock, the rattling thud of an axe in too-thin ice ... calf muscles screaming for relief, choking spindrift in eyes, throat, down the neck," Kennedy wrote. Looking back, he now says, "It was a very powerful experience; it opened my eyes to a different dimension of climbing."

Three more pitches brought the pair to relatively easy ground. Fifty feet below the ridge crest they cut a platform out of the ice, melted snow, and cooked a meal. Then, lying in the sun, which had risen into view, they spent the rest of the day and the following night recuperating.

July 1 brought more sun and an endless traverse below cornices. That night another storm set in, its bitter cold keeping the pair tent-bound all the next day. The weather improved enough on July 3 for a push to the summit. The air on top was calm, but minus-20 temperatures quickly chilled them.

Kennedy and Lowe chose the quickest way down, the Southeast Ridge. All went well until they came to a corniced section. "George

(continued on page 167)



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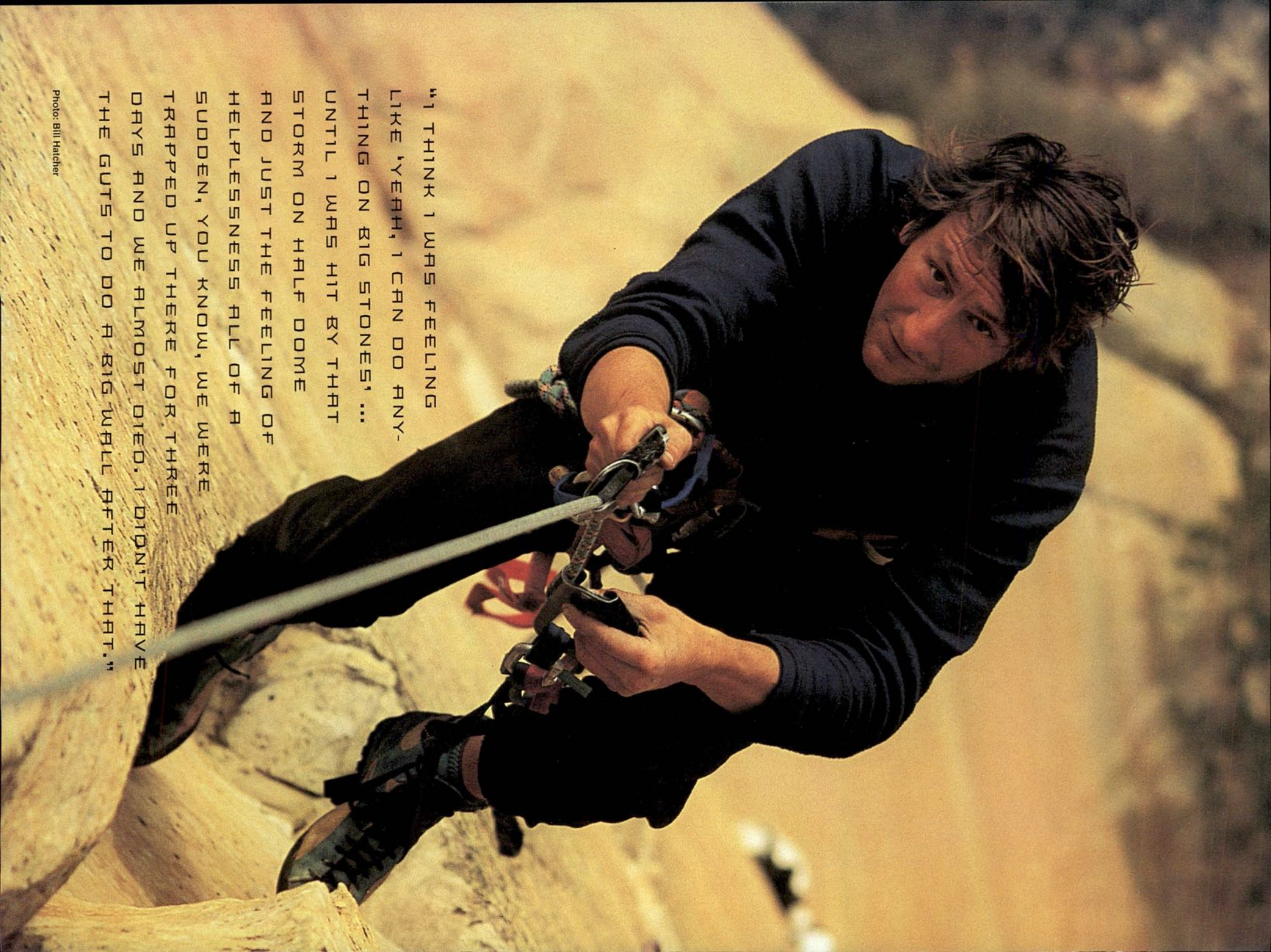




EXCEL ON THE MOST DEMANDING AND FUTURISTIC ENDEAVOURS.

# TERYYX



A man with long, dark, wavy hair is climbing a light-colored rock face. He is wearing a dark blue long-sleeved shirt and dark pants. He is using a climbing rope and a belay device. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a blurred view of the rock face and some distant structures.

"I THINK I WAS FEELING  
LIKE 'YEAH, I CAN DO ANY-  
THING ON BIG STONES' ...  
UNTIL I WAS HIT BY THAT  
STORM ON HALF DOME  
AND JUST THE FEELING OF  
HELPLESSNESS ALL OF A  
SUDDEN, YOU KNOW, WE WERE  
TRAPPED UP THERE FOR THREE  
DAYS AND WE ALMOST DIED. I DIDN'T HAVE  
THE GUTS TO DO A BIG WALL AFTER THAT."

Photo: Bill Hatcher



A TRIP WITH BIG-WALL MASTER **JOHN MIDDENDORF**

# TRAMP

BY LISA MORGAN

WITH A LIFE OF ADVENTURE HOLDING A LOADED GUN TO HIS LONGEVITY, JOHN MIDDENDORF DECIDED TO PLAY IT SAFE — HE SWITCHED TO CAMEL FILTERS. HE EVEN TRADED IN THE LIVER-HARDENING OLD ENGLISH BOO OF HIS YOSEMITE DAYS FOR WATERY OLD MILWAUKEE. BUT JOHN HASN'T ALWAYS BEEN SO HEALTHY. A BIZARRE BLEND OF TIMOTHY LEARY AND ROYAL ROBINS, HE HAS ALWAYS TESTED THE BOUNDARIES OF WHAT IS POSSIBLE, MENTALLY AND PHYSICALLY. HE TOOK ACID AND SOLOED VALLEY FREE CLIMBS, AND THEN LEFT HIS

VICES BEHIND TO ATTEMPT THE IMPOSSIBLE ON THE GREAT TRANGO TOWER. HE STAYED UP FOR DAYS AT A TIME AND FASTED FOR NEARLY A WEEK JUST TO SEE WHAT IT WAS LIKE.

HE CALMLY EXPLAINS THESE TESTS WHILE HIS ARM IS OUT-

Middendorf on the first ascent of *Tricks of the Tramp* (V 5.10 A2), Issac, Zion, Utah (far left); and in Pakistan (left).

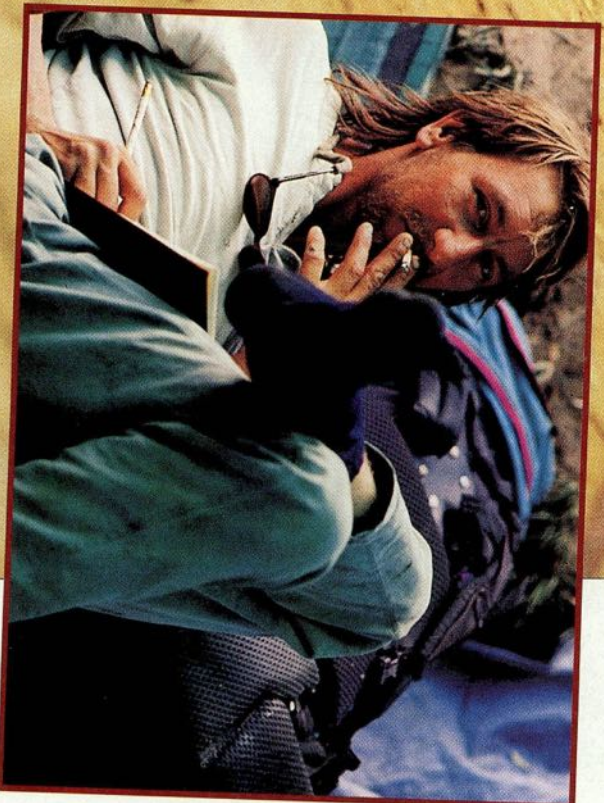


Photo: Ace Kvale

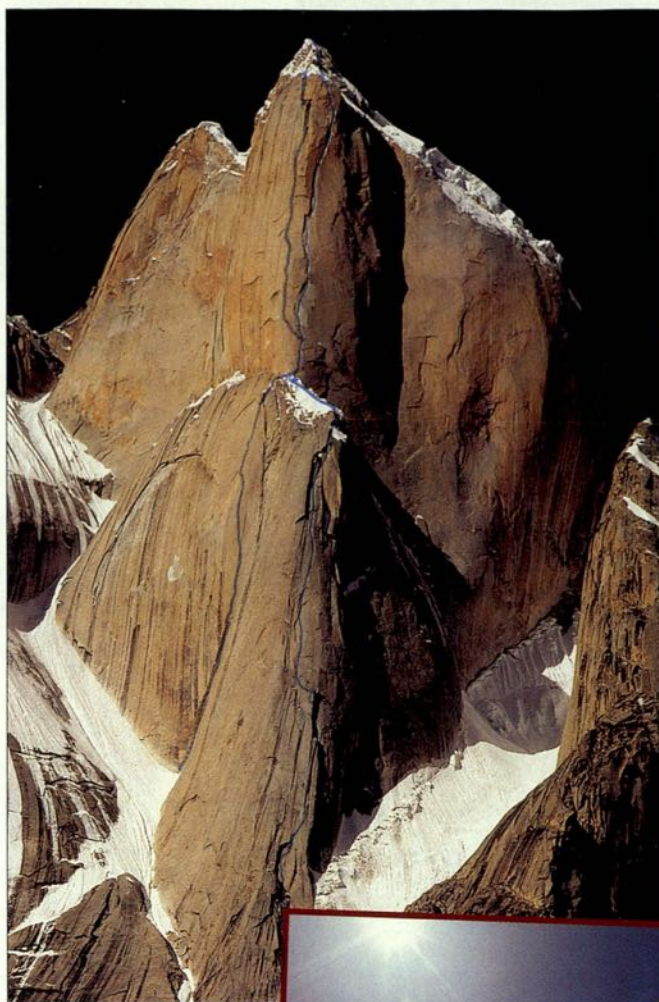


stretched and his fingers are shoved in a narrow, closing sandstone crack as he slowly lifts his feet off the ground. "I'm trying to increase my pain threshold," he says, grinning as if it were a joke, but his scrunched right hand is weighted by 175 pounds (176 if you count the warm can of beer and half-burned cigarette he's casually holding in his left hand). As he lowers his bare feet to the warm Zion sand and his childish smirk reveals teeth stained from years of biding his time on big walls with unfiltered Camels.

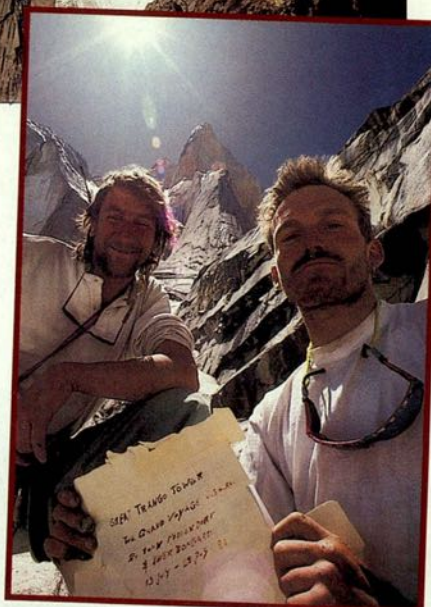
Willing to take risks with a sense of detached experimentation, Middendorff has struggled, hammered, and hooked his way up tens of thousands of feet of the most difficult uncharted vertical in the country. And he's one of the few people to take these skills to the Himalaya — to a face half again the size of El Cap, at 20,000 feet. His first ascents include the *Atlantic Ocean Wall* (VI 5.10 A5) El Capitan; *Kali Yuga* (VI 5.10 A4+) northwest face of Half Dome; *Autobahn* (V 5.11+) southwest face of Half Dome; *Radiator* (VI 5.10 A4) Abraham, Zion; and *The Grand Voyage* (VII 5.10+ A4+) Great Trango Tower, Pakistan.

"He's like the bionic man," says his climbing partner Jeff Hollenbaugh. "No matter what he does to his body, he always rises to the occasion."

Despite his well-known achievements in the climbing world, Middendorff will never grace a box of Wheaties. He may slip his lanky figure into sporty Verve pants for the desert cracks, but no doubt he'll also be wearing his rust-colored Patagonia jacket complete with cigarette burns. His brown hair will have that post-bivy look, with a few dusty strands hanging across his eyes pointing to the innocent, honest grin that bursts out of his worn face. Middendorff looks his age, 34, but his expression wears the warmth and



**The Grand Voyage:** Great Trango Tower, Pakistan (above); Middendorff and Bongard after the climb (right); and on the route (opposite).



understanding of an elderly person, and unless hiking to a climb, he keeps a slow pace, shoulders hunched over, cigarette in hand, and conversation rolling.

He holds nothing back, if you ask, but pause and Middendorff will be questioning you with earnest interest about your exploits on a 5.9 crack as if they were equivalent to his weeks of toil in Pakistan. He eagerly gives information on climbs he's done, wishing second ascenders luck, and, in his wealthier days, he's been known to give money to needy friends. Let him spend the night at your house during his travels, and you'll likely find a haul bag left on your steps after he's gone. "He's a really generous person," says the renowned wall climber Jim Bridwell.

But this is while he's on the ground. Get him a few hundred feet off the deck and he's been known to yell and set his partner

straight on the way things should be done.


"John was jumping our shit. He's all business up there," Zion local Brad Quinn says of a first ascent with Middendorff in 1993.

Middendorff agrees, "I've pursued a specialized form of climbing. I enjoy all types of climbing, but big walls — that's my focus and I've mastered it. It wasn't an easy thing to master. It took 15 years."

**B**ut Middendorff hasn't always been so confident. In 1986, he nearly died on Half Dome and subsequently took a three-year retirement from an otherwise prolific climbing

Photos: Ace Kvale





"I REALIZED  
ON TRANGO  
THAT I HAD LIKE  
A FIFTY/FIFTY  
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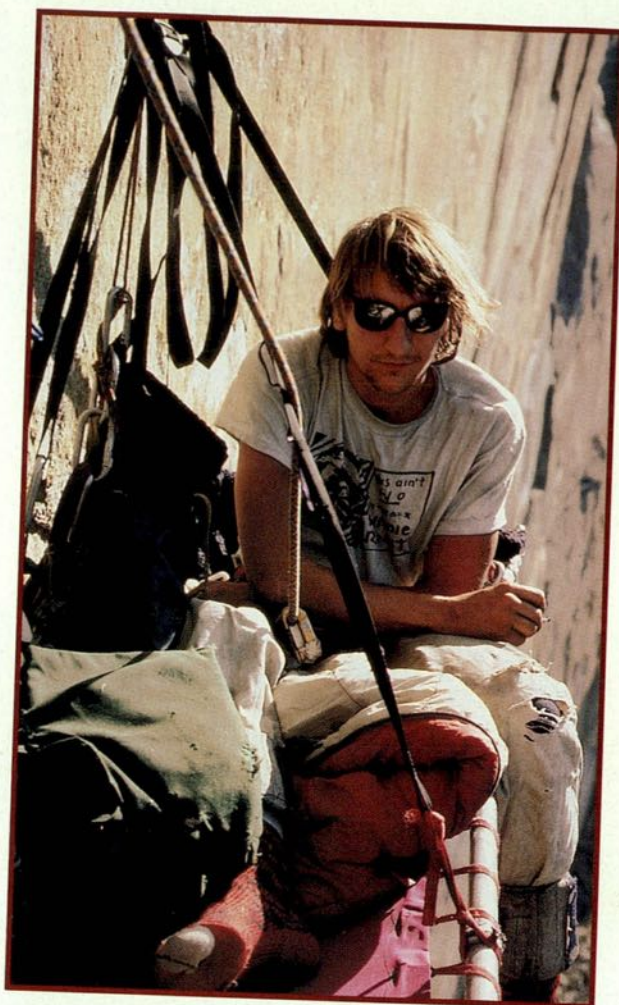
career. After having climbed several Yosemite walls, he had accepted an invitation from the then Valley locals Mike Corbett and Steve Bosque to do a winter ascent of the South Face on Half Dome, a route that, at the time, had seen more failures than successes.

Today, sipping coffee on a sunny cafe porch in Hurricane, Utah, just outside of Zion, Middendorf eagerly recounts the epic without a stutter, uninhibited by the running tape recorder. Grinding out a cigarette butt on the cement porch, he lights another and continues, "I pretty much had the game wired. I think I was feeling like, 'Yeah, I can do anything on big stones' ... until I was hit by that storm on Half Dome and just the feeling of helplessness all of a sudden, you know, we were trapped up there for three days and we almost died," Middendorf says. "I didn't have the guts to do a big wall after that."

The weather was good for the first three days of their climb. A newscast on the radio Middendorf and his two partners had hauled along announced that the approaching storm would be small. So, when the three awoke to drizzle Friday morning, the fourth day, they thought little of it. But by evening the enormity of the tempest and seriousness of their predicament became evident.

Middendorf did what anyone would do in his situation — he jettisoned the radio, and the three hunkered down for the first stage of the storm. Foot-thick sheets of run-off poured onto their portaledges, while wind-driven rain pelted the sides of their rainflys. "Our ledges would just never stop being lifted up, bang, bang, bang," Middendorf says, waving his arm in the air. The waterproof coatings on their rainflys began peeling off in sheets, and the portledge frames required constant attention as they twisted and fell apart under the strain.

By Saturday morning, the second stage was well underway, with winds blowing over 50 mph. Rain turned to hail and snow, and wet gear froze solid. The food ran out and the temperature dropped. Bosque's ledge was soon rendered useless, with the fly torn and the frame broken. With Bosque and Cor-



**Valley days: after an A5 lead on the first ascent of the Atlantic Ocean Wall, El Cap, 1986 (above); and on "The Maze" pitch of Kali Yuga during the first ascent, 1989 (right).**

bett sharing one bivy and Middendorf in the other, the two remaining portaledges were quickly breaking down under the heavy snowfall. "Inside my ledge I made constant efforts to keep from being completely buried. Huge water-saturated snow piles would rise in moments ... a minute of inactivity and the weight of the snow would begin to crush me, tearing the fly apart at the seams, and become almost too heavy to push off," Middendorf later wrote in a story published in *Climbing*.

By dusk, not even physical labor could keep Middendorf awake and the snow began to pile up, deafening him to the yells from his partners. It wasn't until

Bosque crawled out of his bivy and onto Middendorf's head that he woke up. So the counting began. To stay awake, Middendorf counted to 22,000 in sets of 100, twitching with each count to fight off hypothermia.

Things looked better Sunday morning as the stars faded in the sunrise. But the marginal warmth never gave the three time to chip the ropes out from the mounds of ice before avalanches of softball-sized ice chunks pummeled their tired bodies. "There's no way humans can survive in those conditions. It was just relentless pounding on us."

With numb and clumsy hands they hacked at their ropes, futilely hoping for what seemed like an impossible self rescue. It was in this delirium that they heard a helicopter make its first sweep to check their location before lowering a rescuer to pluck them off the face. One at a time, they were hooped under their armpits with "horse collars" and lowered to safety.

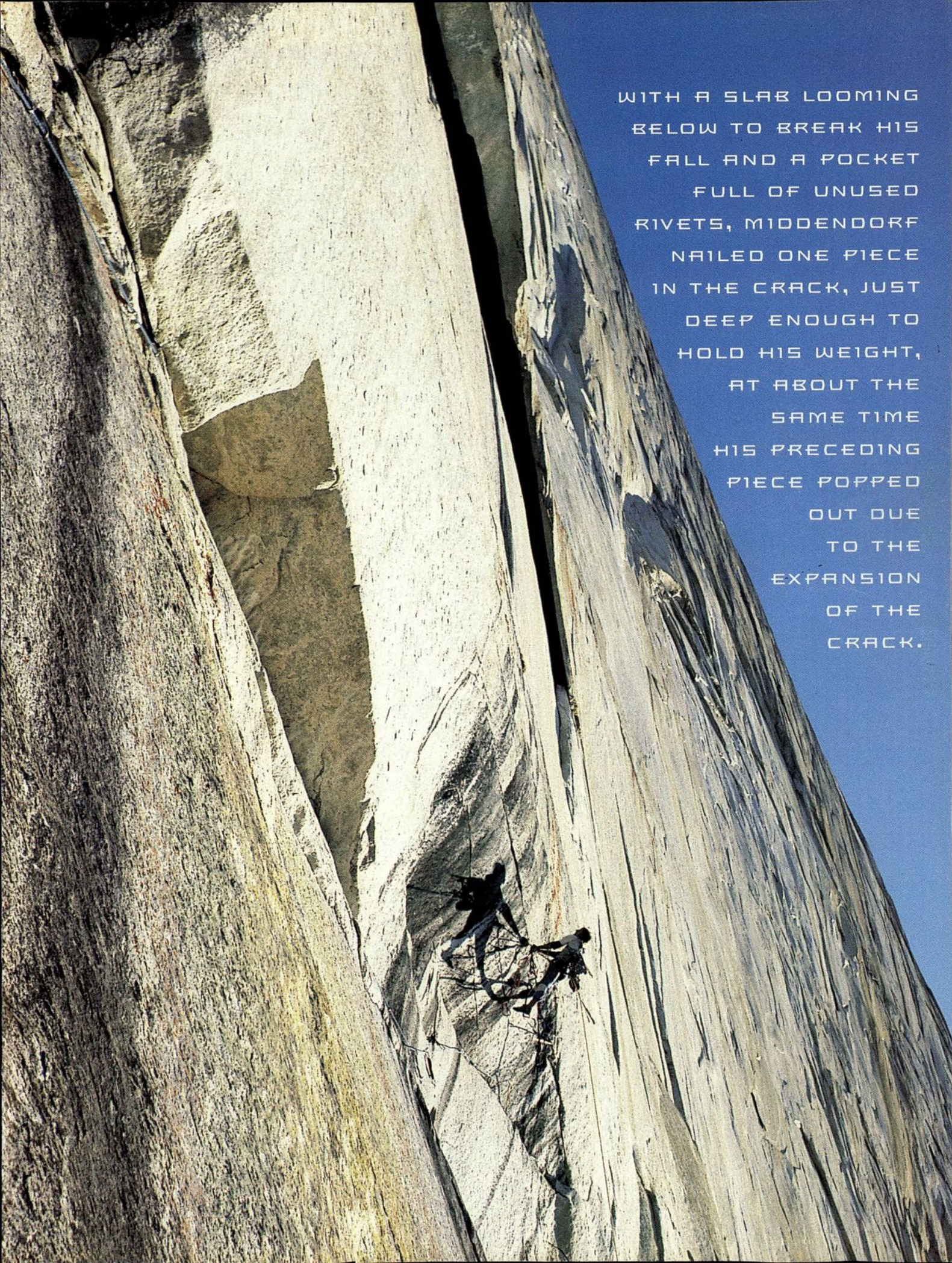
After hours of shivering on the ground, covered in warm blankets, and drinking tea, and after three years of living in Yosemite Valley and eating hard wall climbs like rock candy, Middendorf packed his gear and left. It was the end of an era in his life.

Middendorf had arrived in Camp 4 fresh out of college, at 24, for what he thought would be a two-week vacation. He rode in on a new motorcycle, with the idea of taking a break between job interviews.

Photo: Middendorf collection

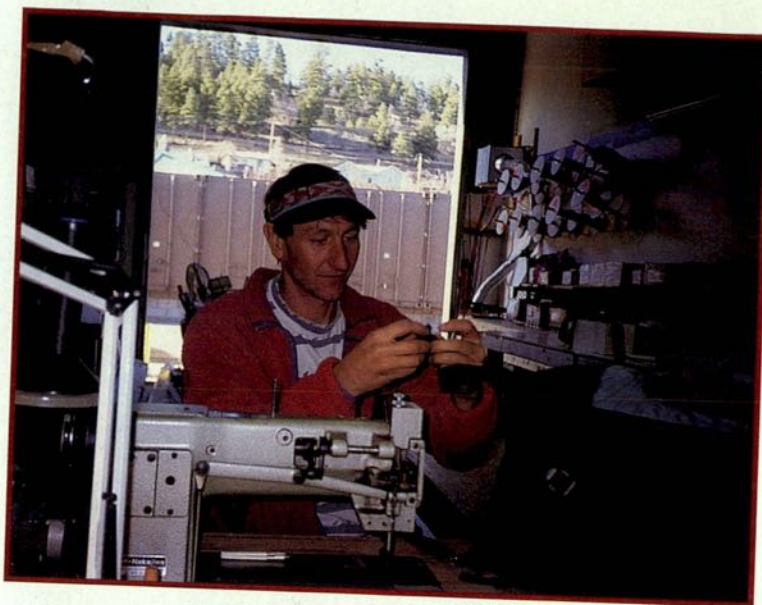
Photo: Walt Shipley



A low-angle photograph of a massive, light-colored rock face, likely granite, showing vertical fissures and textures. A climber is visible near the bottom center, silhouetted against the rock. The sky is a clear, deep blue.

WITH A SLAB LOOMING  
BELOW TO BREAK HIS  
FALL AND A POCKET  
FULL OF UNUSED  
RIVETS, MIDDENDORF  
NAILED ONE PIECE  
IN THE CRACK, JUST  
DEEP ENOUGH TO  
HOLD HIS WEIGHT,  
AT ABOUT THE  
SAME TIME  
HIS PRECEDING  
PIECE POPPED  
OUT DUE  
TO THE  
EXPANSION  
OF THE  
CRACK.





Middendorf customizing gear in the A5 shop.

Although he'd long had climbing on the mind — making camming devices in class, testing carabiners for projects, cragging when he had time, and even visiting Yosemite at 17 to climb Half Dome — John was primarily an Ivy League boy in search of a good engineering job when he motored into the Valley.

He had been following the more conservative career path his family expected. His father, John William, was a successful stockbroker on Wall Street, before beginning a career in politics as an ambassador to the Netherlands and eventually becoming a White House aid to former President Gerald Ford. Disliking the wealth and networking involved in the political arena, John chose to pursue a less social career.

He spent his first two years at Dartmouth and his last half at Stanford earning an engineering degree. He was in the top 8 percent of his class for engineers and already had a few lucrative job options. He had applied himself to his studies as early as grade school, and was clearly gifted. "In seventh grade I remember the math teacher was writing the problems up on the board, and as she was writing the problems, I was writing the answers, and we had an hour to do the test."

To further deter him from a career as a climber, Midden-dorf wasn't always a healthy child. He had asthma so severe he had to be hospitalized once, and, between the ages of 3 and 5, he suffered from a bone disease that kept him in a metal leg brace for two years. To make things worse, one of his legs was longer than the other, and as part of his treatment — which was eventually successful — he wore a high-heeled shoe on the longer limb. "One of my earliest memories was going to class and having the kids go, 'iron leg,'" he recounts.

John's parents never could have anticipated his career in climbing, and John says although he gets along with them, they're still a little bewildered by it. "They don't understand it. They would understand if it were golf," John says.

"I ENJOY ALL TYPES  
OF CLIMBING,  
BUT BIG WALLS —  
THAT'S MY FOCUS  
AND I'VE  
MASTERED IT.  
IT WASN'T AN  
EASY THING  
TO MASTER.  
IT TOOK  
15 YEARS."

But when Midden-dorf arrived in the Valley with a lifetime's worth of walls looming above him, the idea of a mainstream desk job

faded fast. "It just turned me inside out [to think] I was going to sit in some office for the next 10 years," he recalls. Of course, meeting Yosemite legend Werner Braun in the parking lot of Camp 4 didn't help the career cause either.

The two met when Midden-dorf ran to Braun's rescue. Braun was unsuccessfully attempting to put brake fluid in an old Pontiac that was slowly rolling away from him when Midden-dorf lent a hand. Braun returned the favor by planting a seed in John's mind. He suggested Midden-dorf stay in the Valley and work for Yosemite Search and Rescue.

During the ensuing years, Midden-dorf averaged a dozen big walls a year, while he worked for Search and

Rescue just to scrape by. "I had some real inspired months where I did like three walls ... I was just really motivated that whole [time] I was there," says Midden-dorf, as he flips through his tattered, greasy journal filled with lists, maps, and cartoons mocking then Valley locals and climbers, Werner Braun, Todd Skinner, Walt Shipley, Russ Walling, et al. Those drawn by Midden-dorf are quite tame compared to the graphic cartoons designed by his cohorts, in which all involved generally have their pants down and are puking. But these are the ones that Midden-dorf reads aloud, giggling uncontrollably with tears swelling in his eyes, as he reminisces about his Valley days.

"Walt [Shipley] and I had lots of days of doing hallucinogens and soloing. Often I wouldn't follow him; definitely he would be the bold one when it came to stuff like that. Then we'd go back and drink Old English 800 at the deli and talk shit for hours and hours. It was so healthy and energetic, really, even though we did decadent things like that. We were physically fit and we were really pushing our standards."



## FIRST-ASCENT SUMMARY

### 1985

- FIRST WINTER ASCENT OF ZENYATTA MENDATTA [VI 5.10 A5], EL CAPITAN
- AUTOBAHN [V 5.11+], HALF DOME
- FIRST SOLO ASCENT OF NEVER NEVER LAND [VI 5.9 A4], EL CAPITAN
- ATLANTIC OCEAN WALL [VI 5.10 A5], EL CAPITAN

### 1986

- SOUTH FACE OF MOUNT CONNESS, SIERRA NEVADA

### 1989

- KALI YUGA [VI 5.10 A4], HALF DOME
- ROUTE 66 [VI 5.10 A4], YOSEMITE FALLS WALL

### 1990

- ABRAHAM [VI 5.10 A4], ZION
- ADDED DIRECT FINISH ON THE COSMOS [VI 5.8 A4], EL CAPITAN

### 1991

- SWISS-AMERICAN ROUTE [VI 5.10 A4], ZION
- DAYS OF NO FUTURE [VI 5.9 A3+], ZION
- THE BEAR [IV 5.10 A2], NAVAJOLANDS
- THE TEAPOT [III 5.8], NAVAJOLANDS
- THE SITTING HEN [II 5.8], NAVAJOLANDS
- FIRST SOLO ASCENT OF STANDING ROCK [IV 5.9 A3+], CANYONLANDS

### 1992

- FIRST WINTER ASCENT OF HALLUCINOGEN WALL [VI 5.11 A5], BLACK CANYON, COLORADO
- GRAND VOYAGE [VII 5.10+ A4+], GREAT TRANGO TOWER, PAKISTAN

### 1993

- ISAAC [V 5.10+ A2], ZION
- BIRDBEAK SPIRE [IV 5.10+ A2], ZION
- BALANCED ROCK, COLORADO NATIONAL MONUMENT
- FLIGHT OF THE ALBATROSS [VI 5.10+ A3+], EL CAPITAN
- THIRD EYE [VI 5.10 A4], NORTH FACE OF MOUNT HOOKER, WYOMING

After such bouts, Middendorf would return to his wet tent, parked by his motorcycle in Camp 4. "I remember sleeping in a puddle every night for the winter. The water just came up through the tent. I lived really cheaply; it wasn't a problem."

The unique 'training' regime worked — Middendorf became one of the best wall climbers in the Valley, some months spending as much time on the wall as on the ground. "He's sort of spontaneous," says Bridwell. "Some people talk a lot about it and never do it. John doesn't talk about it very long and then he wants to go do it." In 1985, one of his most successful years, he began with the first winter ascent of *Zenyatta Mendatta* (VI 5.10 A5) with Shipley, followed by a first ascent of *Autobahn* (V 5.11+) ("but it's 5.12 really," Middendorf adds) on the southwest face of Half Dome. Although Middendorf's current emphasis is on new aid routes, he climbed many a hard free route in Yosemite between his first ascents, including the classic *Astroman* (V 5.11c).

The same year, he also concentrated on speed ascents to hone his wall skills, climbing the *Pacific Ocean Wall* (VI 5.9 A4) in under four days, the *Nose* in a day on the winter solstice, and *Lost Arrow Direct* in a day. He attempted the *Shield* of El Capitan in a day, and finished it in one and a half.

Middendorf had goals for the year too. He had been eyeing a new line on El Cap to be his great project, but was a tad late. He'd decided to do the first solo ascent of *Never Never Land* (VI 5.9 A4) on El Cap to train for the route, and when he returned Greg Child and Randy Leavitt had already started up what was later named *Lost in America*.

But Middendorf's first new wall route came the same year with an ascent of the *Atlantic Ocean Wall* (VI 5.10 A5) on El Cap. He spent weeks scoping the route, looking for partners, taking notes with a telescope, and getting gear ready. It was a big step for him, but he'd put in his time. Middendorf wanted a new A5, and he refrained from drilling rivets or bolts in an effort to keep the route challenging. "The crux was all nailing up this expanding thin corner, like a quarter inch crack. In places it was so thin you could actually flex it just by pulling on it," Middendorf says.

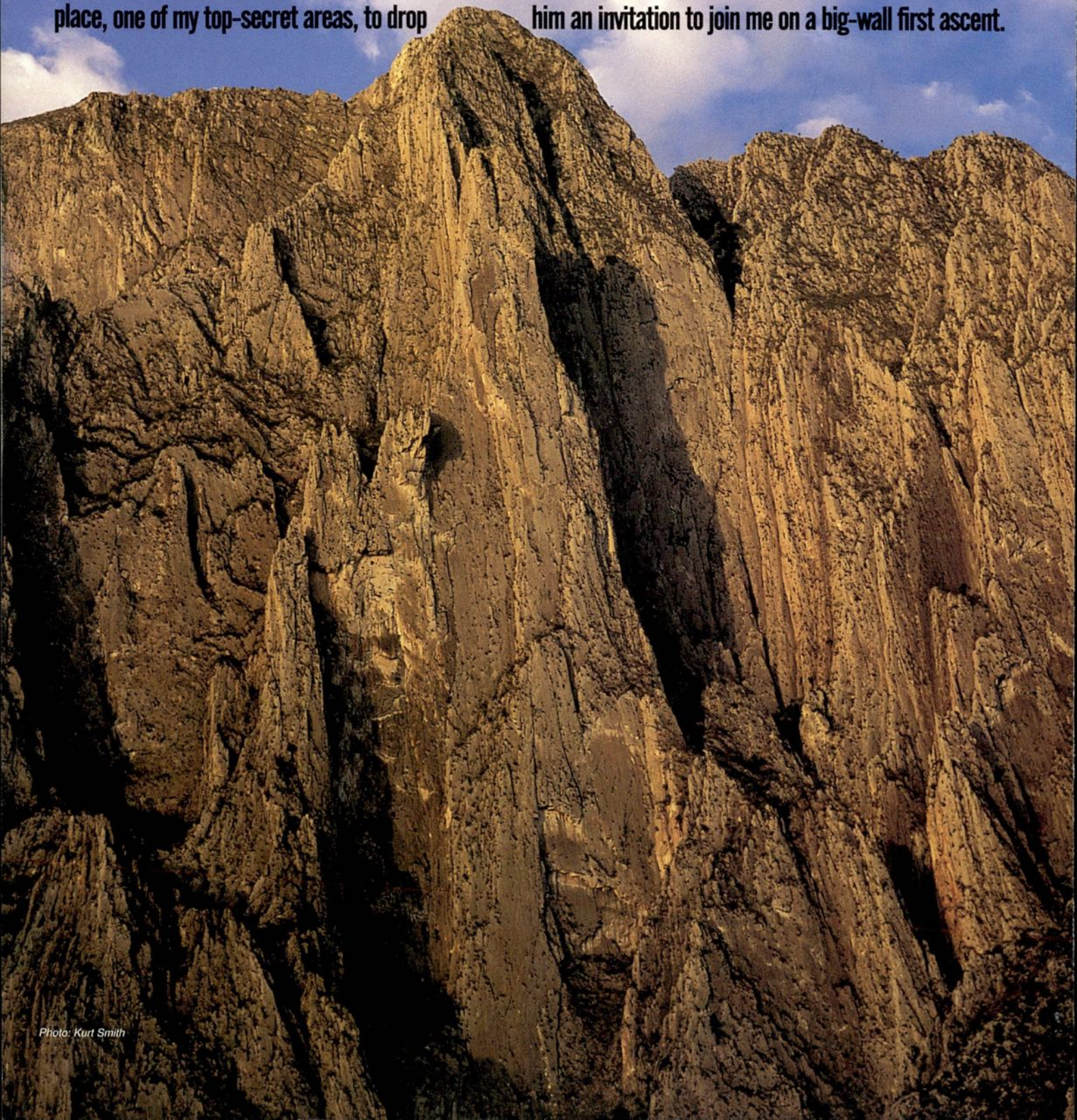
With a slab looming below to break his fall and a pocket full of unused rivets, Middendorf nailed one piece in the crack, just deep enough to hold his weight, at about the same time his preceding piece popped out due to the expansion of the crack. But he finished the pitch without a fall.

"If it's your creation, you're always faced with the decision of should I put in a rivet or go for it a little more? The point is

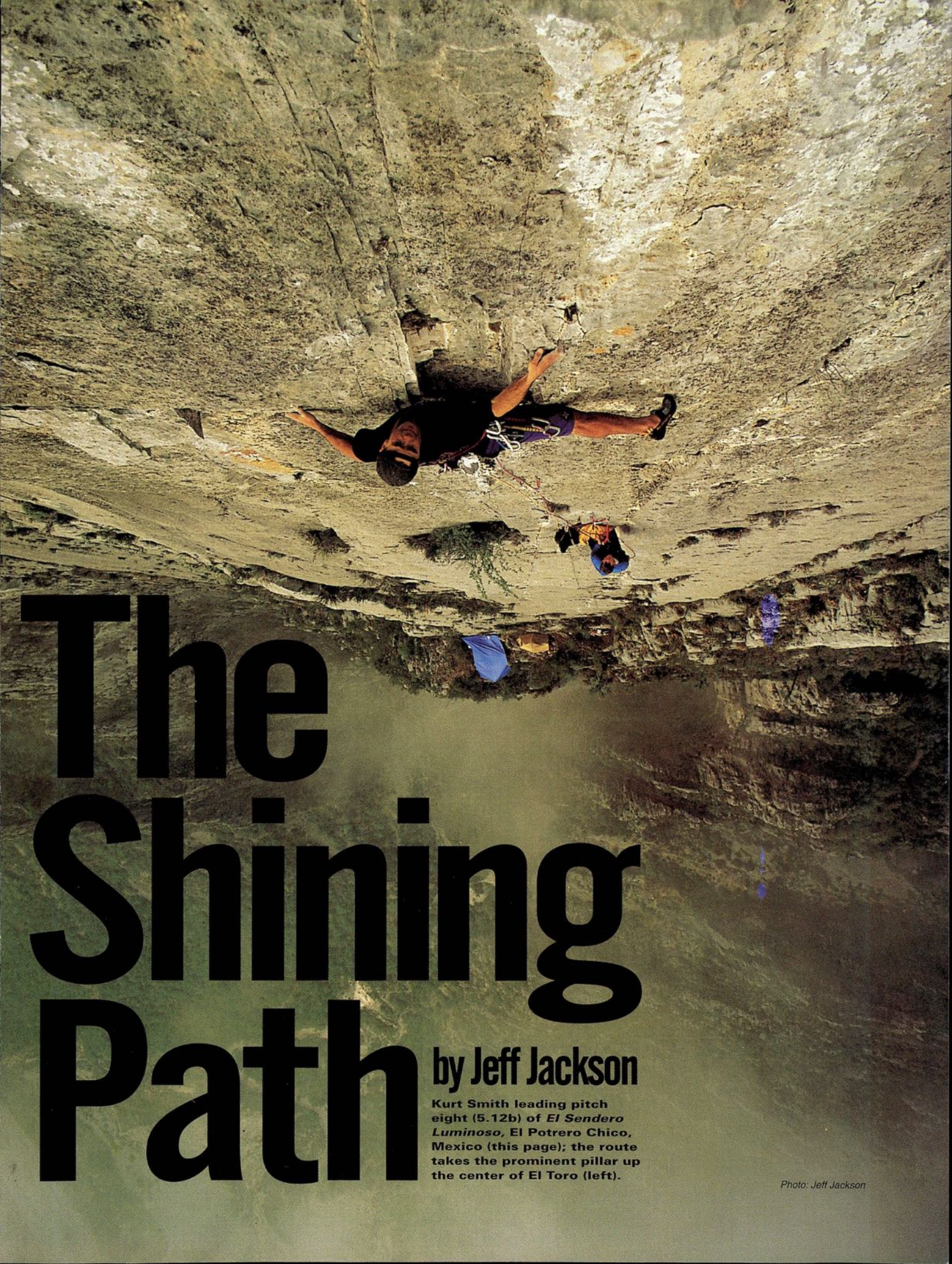
(continued on page 152)



**Kurt Smith and I were sitting at the Culo de Gato (the Cat's Ass), a cave in Nuevo Leon, Mexico, throwing back Carta Blancas like our guts were burning and beer was ice water. A hundred limestone domes, up to 200 feet tall, quilted the flat desert like gray balloons. Spanish Daggers, close kin to the Joshua Tree, twisted out of the rocky ground, their rough trunks bent like the torsos of good samba dancers. I brought Kurt to this place, one of my top-secret areas, to drop him an invitation to join me on a big-wall first ascent.**







# The Shining Path

by Jeff Jackson

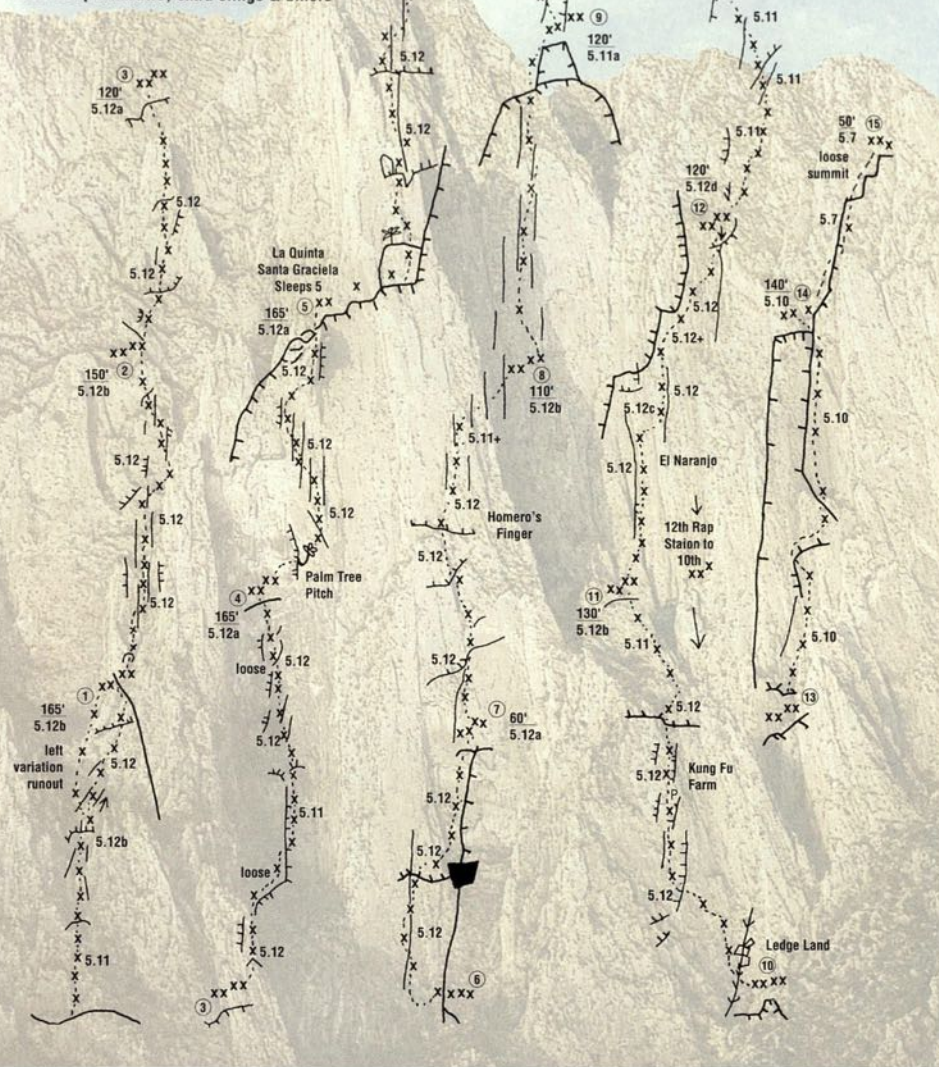
Kurt Smith leading pitch eight (5.12b) of *El Sendero Luminoso*, El Potrero Chico, Mexico (this page); the route takes the prominent pillar up the center of El Toro (left).

Photo: Jeff Jackson



**The Central Pillar of El Toro, Mexico**  
**El Sendero Luminoso (The Shining Path)**  
 Grade V 5.12+

First ascent: Jeff Jackson, Kurt Smith,  
 Pete Peacock, March 1994  
 Rack: 20 quickdraws, extra slings & biners



"What do you think?" I asked him after three days of climbing and exploration.

"I'll be back next year," he said. "I'm going to bring some friends and we'll fill that wall with routes." He pointed to a gently overhanging 170-foot fin right off the road. The white rock gleamed in the afternoon sun. The tiniest features threw geometric shadows. "See that seam?" Kurt asked. "I'm going to climb that next year."

I scanned the wall, following the feature, a miserable, rounded overlap that split the steepest sector. It looked like a mirror, tilted out and cracked by one spidery line. "Sure," I said, trying to keep the doubt out of my voice. "I hope you do."

I met Kurt in 1990 after one of his slide shows. As usually happens with Texas climbers, the crowd migrated to a bar and the pitchers of Shiner Bock circulated until everyone became sloppy drunk and ornery. Ethical debates raged. Strong words were exchanged. Two or three aging Alpha Males were forced into hard postures. Most of the women were bored, but in the end several romantic sparks were struck because anger is the flint for sex, and a whopping good time was had by all.

Kurt fit right in. He exuded enough unrefined gumption to raise the hair on a dachshund. He's overpowered and, when riled, looks like he might jump out of his skin. When challenged by the Austin old guard to justify his switch from ground-up traditional to sport climbing after publicly denouncing it, he mouthed, "Screw you, I don't have to explain myself."

Say what you mean, mean what you say. That's Kurt's first rule. In 1993, I showed him around El Potrero Chico, a Mexican national park that's the North American equivalent of France's Verdon Gorge before it was developed.

In January, Kurt was back with Marty Alfred, Phillip (Anti-Phil) Benningfield, and Tom Cecil. In four days, Kurt bolted and redpointed the cracked-glass seam, *Camino del Diablo* (5.13c), and by month's end, 20 new routes graced the canyon walls.

To me, Kurt Smith is a quintessential American. Like a latter-day Davy Crockett, he can't stomach convention. Replace the coonskin with a baseball cap worn backwards. He's a highly skilled outdoorsman, full of woodsy tricks, imbued with insane energy and an optimism that seems naive until he pulls off the next big stunt. He was the ultimate partner for my Mexican big-wall project.

**E**l Toro is a 3300-foot wall towering over El Parque Recreativo El Potrero Chico and the nearby town of Hidalgo like a Mexican Eiger. In the center of the wall, directly under the summit, a clean buttress of unbroken limestone juts up like the horn of a bull and pokes the sky, a 2000-foot limestone Lost Arrow. We called it the



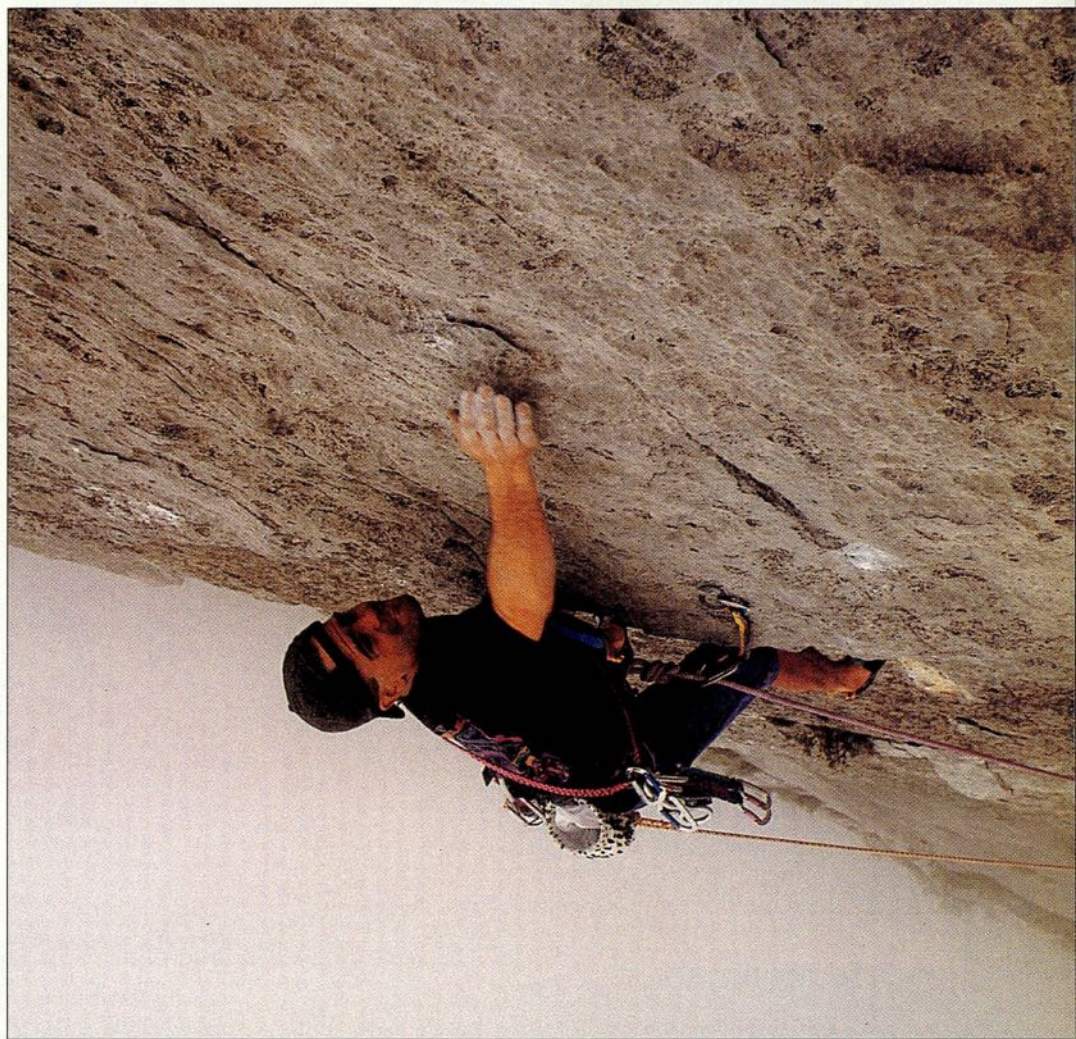
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Central Pillar. Terry Christenson, Kevin Gallagher, and I had just pulled our ropes and gear off its first five pitches when Kurt visited the Potrero for the first time.

Kurt noticed the feature right off and asked if anyone had picked a line. I told him that we were 700 feet up and hoping to finish next year. Kurt nodded and wished us luck.

By the next year, things had gone against us. Terry and Kevin were financially strapped and unable to work on the wall. I had no partners, and without Terry, our supplier of Petzl bolts, no bolts. No bolts, no partners, no spire.

I returned to Mexico for the winter guide season, and every morning I studied the summit of the Central Pillar rising out of the mist. I wanted the summit like some people want money. My hands ached just looking at it. I tried to beat back the obsession with trail-building marathons, cutting through miles of nopale cactus with a machete and an ice ax. I went on long runs through the unexplored heart of the Potrero and bolted several new sport climbs, but I couldn't quash my desire to climb the Pillar. The route gripped my unconscious like a powerful hypnotic and I was willing to do anything this side of physical coercion to secure a partner. Kurt arrived in January, and all month I dropped hints about the fabulous climbing, the exposure, the glory. We'd scanned the route through binoculars and etched out the upper pitches. We debated style and I explained to him my desire to do something unusual: a first ascent of a big wall, all free, up the



**Smith on pitch eight, 5.12b.**

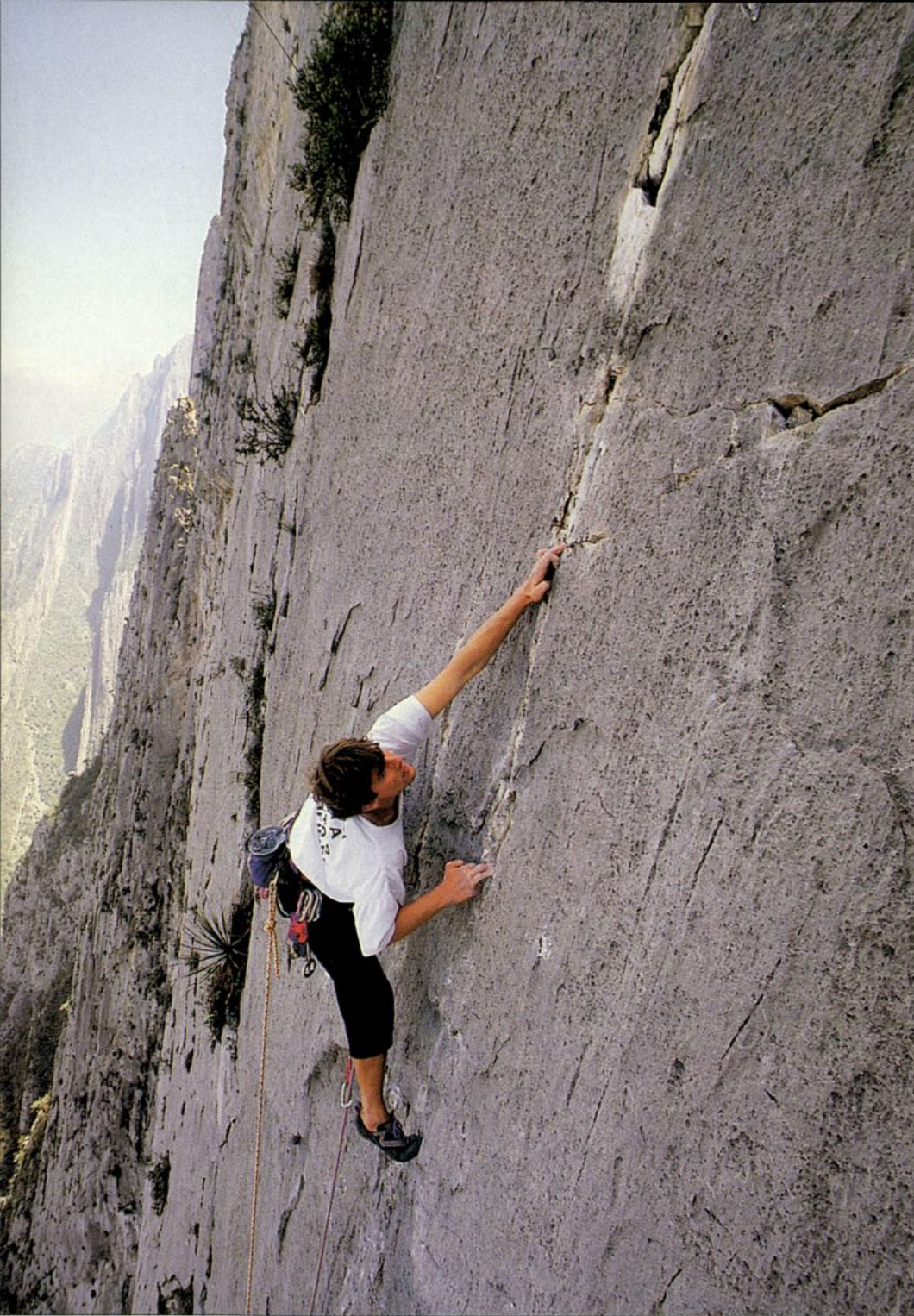
strongest line. We would avoid the weaknesses with the same care that the old school followed them. We would bolt it on lead, but leave behind a sport climb. When we finished, it would be a fully equipped Grade V.

"That big wall is going to be something," I said.

Kurt had climbed out of the truck to examine a lizard. The sun was setting over the Culo and casting weird shadows across the desert.

"Yep," he said. "That wall's the shit."





**Peter Peacock on pitch six (5.12a).**

"So what are you going to be doing until you leave for Yosemite in May?" I asked.

He looked at me and I saw his hipster goatee jump into a smile. "We ought to do that big wall."

"That's a wild idea," I said.

"I'll be back in a month with bolts, packs, and gear."

**O**ne month and 20 days later it was Semana Santa, the week that Christ rolled away the stone from his tomb and provided Mexico with another reason to party. The flagellant Fidencistas kicked things off with their

fiesta to commemorate Nuevo Leon's most famous faith healer, El Niño Fidencio. First they dosed themselves with copious amounts of Guadalupeño mescal and barbecued goat. Then they ate glass shards and rolled around in piles of cactus. It was barbarous and I was sorry to miss it, but we were on the wall trying to free climb the Central Pillar of El Toro and couldn't dilly dally.

Kurt had brought piles of gear alright, and Mack Hargrave, a Dallas businessman, donated 300 bolts to the cause. I hit up the Austin brethren for the rest of the equipment.

In a stroke of incredible good fortune, I had run into Pete Peacock at Psuedo Rock Gym in Austin. Pete and I had bouldered together earlier that season at Hueco Tanks, and I had been struck by his mindful technique and positive attitude. I invited Pete to join us in Mexico. He agreed to haul loads to our high point, a good ledge at 700 feet, in exchange for big-wall experience. As it turned out, Pete was a cardiovascular monster. On most days, he made two trips carrying heavy loads from the Quinta in Hidalgo to our bivy, 3000 feet of uphill work and jumaring. Throughout the month we spent pushing the route, Pete kept us supplied with the essentials — water and fresh drill batteries. Without Pete, and the occasional 12-pack of Tecate he hauled, we wouldn't have made it.

We had bolted the upper pitches on aid over the course of 20 days, bailing once because of bad weather, and rappelling each evening to the large bivy ledge high on the wall. Now, on our free-climbing push, we sat on the same ledge, under the blue

tarp that had served as our kitchen and cramped hang, contemplating the next day's work.

It was simple: redpoint the last 10 pitches, a lengthy section we had bolted and cleaned, but not rehearsed. We wanted to go for the redpoint with as little knowledge as possible. After nearly three weeks on the wall, I was apprehensive. It had taken us all day to redpoint the first section from the ground to the ledge and the next section was longer and looked more difficult.

Kurt seemed oblivious. He sat by the stove reading a book about vampires and waiting for the pizza to cook in the Out-back Oven, a contraption he wrangled at a trade show.

I tried to control my jitters by reading my journal but it only amped me with recollections of storms and rock fall.

Photos: Kurt Smith



**I believe in luck. I don't buy Mexican car insurance because I believe that the Virgen de Guadalupe stuck on my car's shifter knob and my 1979 Escort radar detector work together to cast an electro/spiritual web of mojo around my car. That's superstitious, but the amount of loose rock perched above the ledge tested even my level of dependence on the supernatural.**

I believe in luck. I don't buy Mexican car insurance because I believe that the *Virgen de Guadalupe* stuck on my car's shifter knob and my 1979 Escort radar detector work together to cast an electro/spiritual web of mojo around my car. That's superstitious, but the amount of loose rock perched above the ledge tested even my level of dependence on the supernatural. As the climb progressed we found ourselves jumaring through more and more danger zones. On day one we had only to contend with a nest of loose, encyclopedia-sized stones on pitch six. Day two introduced the refrigerator block pinned like a bad Hex placement directly over our bivy. By day 11 we had discovered

so many loose blocks, huge flakes suspended in cactus, leaning rock piles, and other precarious forms of wall detritus, all poised directly above the ledge, that we began to suffer from a weird kind of shell shock.

Then, the biggest storm system I've ever seen at the Potrero moved in and stuck on the wall like a colossal wad of gray Double Bubble. Each night for four nights we huddled under the blue tarp — *Casa Azul* we called it — and watched dense box cars of clouds chugging straight up the wall. With the thick fog swirling around us like smoke and the wind rumbling the tarp, I felt like I was sitting in the engine room of a speeding locomotive. Updrafts blasted the headwall, rattling the vegetation and the cooler-sized flake balanced on the lechugilla 300 feet overhead.

We could have cleaned the pitches one at a time and from the beginning we did intend to thoroughly scrub the route. But by the fifth day we were obsessed with the summit and physically unable to do anything except nail, bolt, and climb.



**A different sort of big-wall gear.**

After we summited we'd come back and polish the free route, but until we reached the top, we climbed with a single purpose. An Islamic fatalism kicked in, a resigned acceptance of fate, and we swung leads without histrionics, hooking pasted flakes, nailing weird, stacked puzzle-pieces, and sinking bolt after bolt into the perfect gray stone.

Our luck held out for 14 days. Then, on March 21, as we were descending from the summit after bolting the final 10 pitches, the rappel line dislodged a block that struck Pete on the thigh. I watched the rock as it fell 150 feet, buzzing like a chainsaw, skimming the wall a couple feet to my right, then plunging another thousand feet before disappearing into Kurt's bivy spot with an audible "whop." A second later the block shot out of the far side of the 16-foot tarp and into the green space over Hidalgo. I looked up at Pete clutching his thigh and thought about how many times he'd been under the tarp as we worked above him. I thought about how many rocks I'd almost tipped loose. Luckily, his leg wasn't broken.



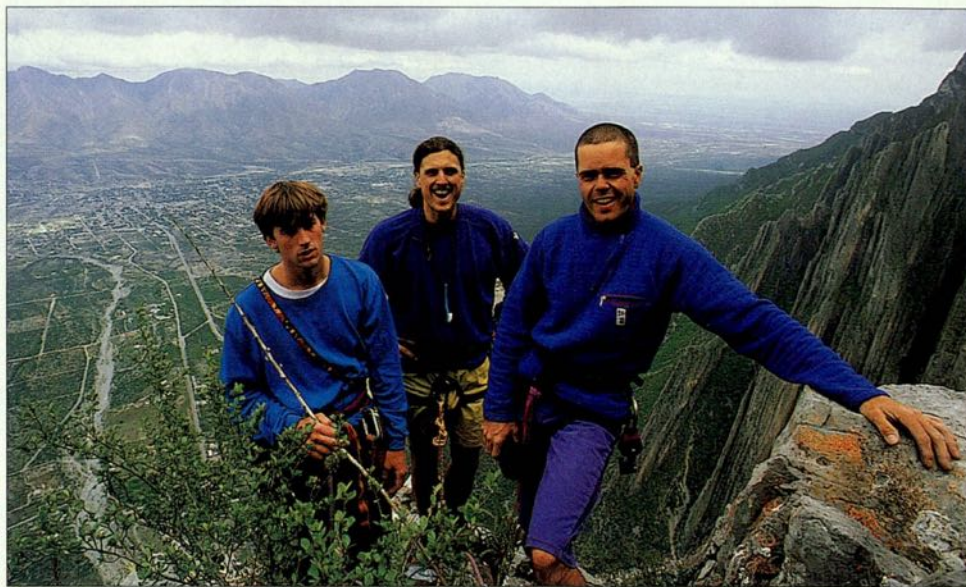
**Not every day was a war.** In fact, now, at a safe distance, living on the wall seems like pure bliss. There was a simplicity and tight focus to it that is next to impossible to achieve in life. The ascetic lifestyle and hardship made the trip into something more, a pilgrimage, and like pilgrims, we found good in simple things.

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On clear mornings the sun didn't strike the wall until 10 o'clock. We waited for it, pounding strong coffee and reading. The breeze ruffled the tarp. Patches of sun moved across the ground. The palm fronds, cactus, and green trees surrounding the ledge all shifted with the same rhythm, and I felt like I was sitting underwater on a tropical reef.

At night we lit candles and talked about climbing. Kurt and I had both put in traditional apprenticeships — sawing nuts into thin cracks like red-faced Neros watching Rome burn, tapping out that frantic SOS with a hand drill and a greasy stance, looking at rock climbing as a mysterious and dangerous sport. We were both primarily motivated by first ascents.

The pizza finished cooking and I cut it into three huge slices. Pete popped the tops on three Tecates and reviewed Kurt's video equipment — he was coming along to tape the redpoint — and we all listened to the noises floating up through the fading light: the emphatic wail of a Mexican coyote, the rumble of explosions at El Carmen's calcite mine, and the ever-present, insistent conjunto bassline overlaid with squeeze box and sentiment. I understood every third word and every third word was death, love, or loneliness. A band was tuning up for a wedding. We watched the people arriving through Kurt's binoculars and I felt the peacefulness that is only granted to a foreigner. A trumpet player far below blasted a devious Miles Davis riff and my ears perked. But it wasn't going to be that kind of wedding



**On the summit: Peacock, Jackson, and Smith.**

and we lay in our sleeping bags while the new bride danced a hundred driving polkas and the coyotes tried to shout down the moon.

**W**e woke up early to find ourselves surrounded by clouds. Like three giblets in a cold, gray soup we shifted and stretched and slowly rolled out. Kurt brewed up six strong espressos and three weaker versions for the road until we were so caffeine addled that even the miserable weather couldn't deter us.

Kurt drew the first pitch, a finger-torquing seam that went at 5.12b. I followed, squeaking through the crux with the finesse of a hooked bass. "Harsh warm-up," Kurt said.

I climbed into the next pitch, which swung left from the belay up a clean face ripped with sharp incuts and funky sidepulls. Thin smearing on creamy scoops allowed me to stem on the refrigerator block and reach better holds. Kurt followed, stalling at the crux for a moment, then pulling through to the belay. We called it 5.12-.

The next two pitches, eight and nine, cut through the center of a giant badge of rock. From the Quinta Santa Graciela, our home away from home, the feature 1200 feet up resem-

*(continued on page 173)*



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provides all the thrills you'll ever need. There's the added attraction of a 123 horsepower engine and Chrysler's Owner's Choice Protection Plan†. You'll also find the price of admission very reasonable, considering this ride lasts a



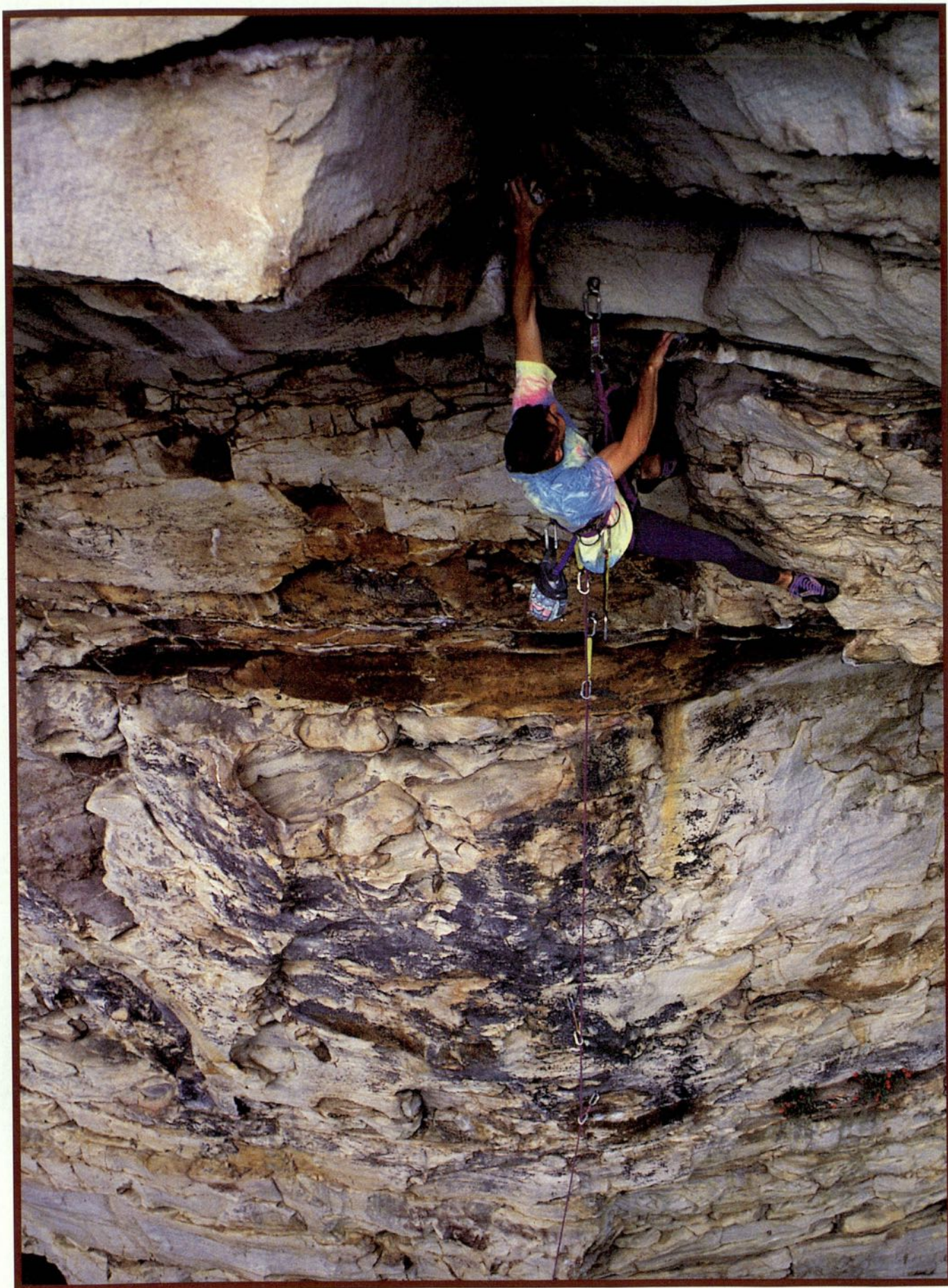
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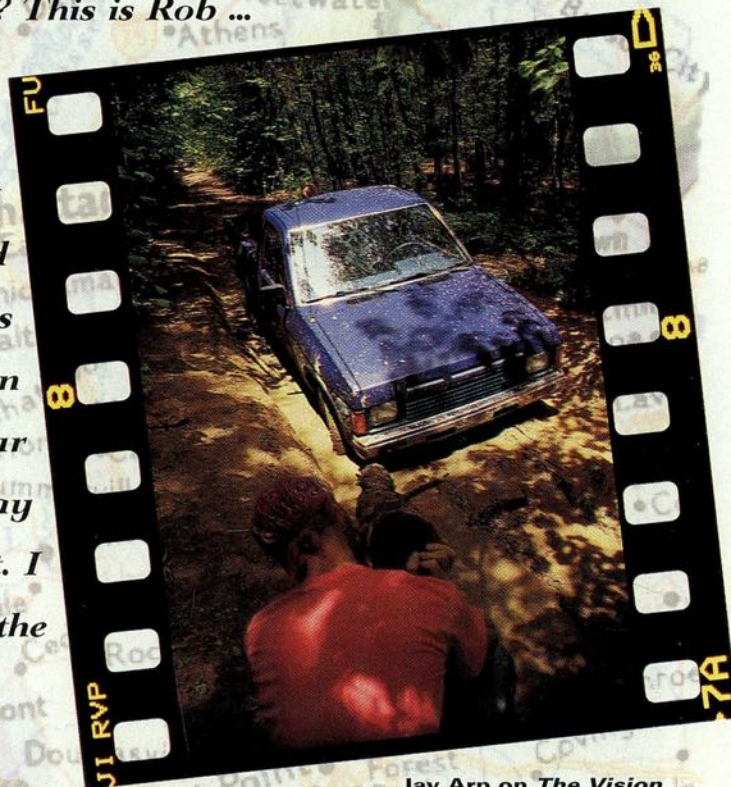


# The Road to Obed

*"Hello, Phantom Technologies? Chris? This is Rob ...*

*Yeah, the rock climbing guy from Chattanooga. I called a few weeks ago. There's this incredible new crag about an hour and a half north of here called Obed, and there's a regular king's guard ruling the road with instant-on radar. Can you send me one of your state-of-the-art scramblers, second-day air? On second thought, overnight it. I was going to take a day off, but what the heck - who needs rest?"*

*story and photos  
by Rob Robinson*



Jay Arp on *The Vision Lives On* (5.12d), Y-12 Crag (left); and on the road to Obed (above).

The Obed stories that ricocheted through the phone lines, around campfires, and at climbers' parties had several things in common: they were fantastic, improbable, tantalizing, absurd — and quite possibly true. Almost 20 years of climbing in the sandstone belt of the South had taught me never to underestimate what the intrepid explorer might find. But these tall Tennessee tales — of 120-degree, jug-infested faces peppered with overhangs, of flat hueco-filled roofs half the size of small city blocks, and of bulging sandstone waves that looked like the underside of the Goodyear blimp — proved too rich even for me. I attributed most of what I heard to mass hysteria.

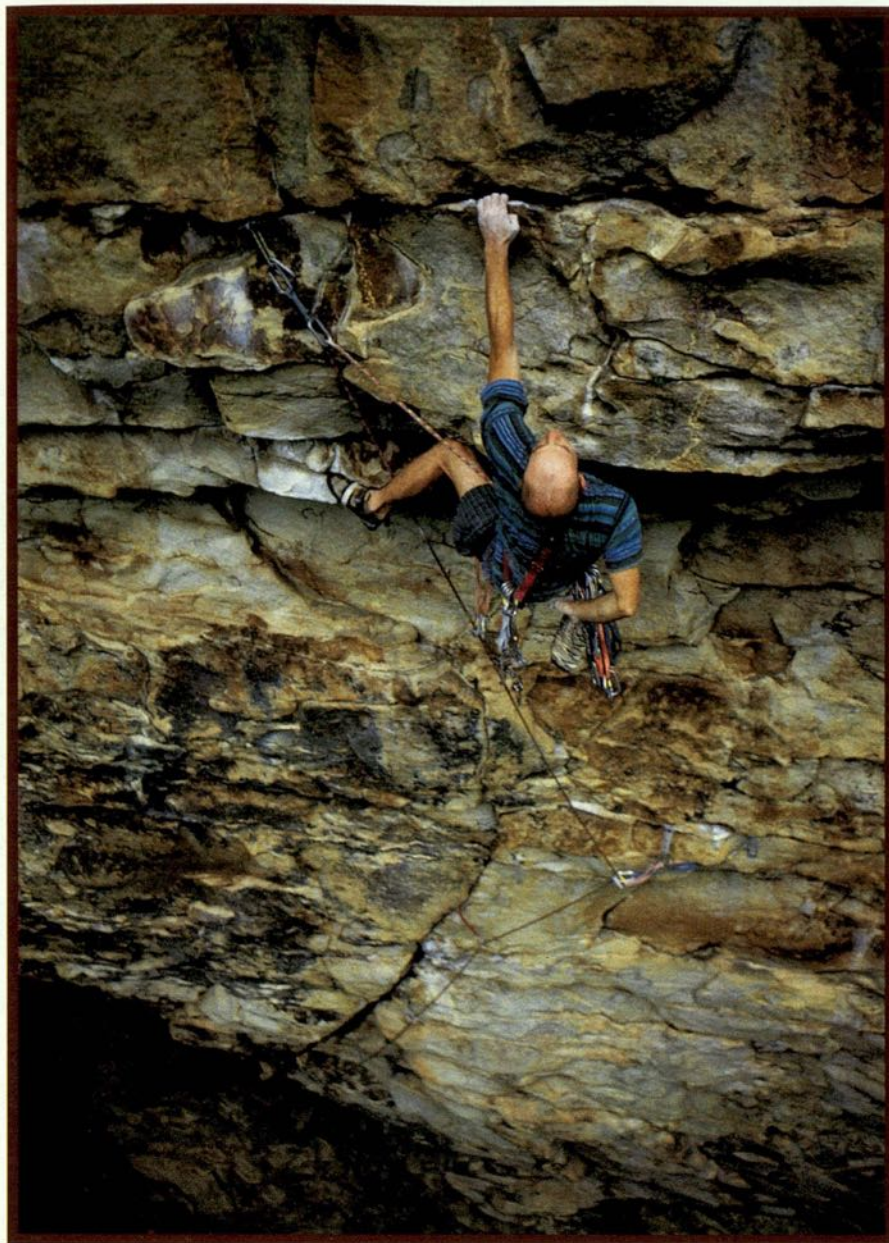
Then the dreams began to haunt me. First, I'd lie awake at

night, replaying the stories, trying cull fact from what surely had to be fantasy. Tossing and turning, I'd finally drift off, hands curled around imaginary holds, with visions of surrealistic cliffs that disappeared into shimmering skies. Finally, I couldn't take it anymore. I rang up my old climbing buddy Rob Turan. After all, who better than Rob to confirm or deny the tales — he'd found the area.

There was no denying. "... and then, after you do that one you've got to run over and do *Tierrany*," he raved. "It blasts through a million roofs, and practically hangs out right over the Obed River. You can just about spit into the water.

"Rob," he continued, "just get in your car and come up here and see for yourself."





**Jerry Roberts on *Hang on to Your Ego* (5.12c), Clear Creek.**



**I** From Chattanooga, there are three ways to get to Obed. Highway 27 North is the quickest: four lanes wide, the first 40 miles a breeze, but as you pass through the small town of Dayton the road cinches down to a squirrely two-laner. Countless blind curves and hilltops link occasional straight-aways just long enough to give the speeder in you a taste of freedom — and a chance for the boys in blue to zap you with a “Commander K” radar gun.

Outside of Dayton the road snakes through low mountains, past large, grassy fields littered with huge hay bales, weathered barns listing to one side, rusty farm equipment, worn-out houses with battered tin roofs, and countryside graveyards with bundles of colored plastic flowers spaced like bits of carefully placed confetti. Small towns blur past — Roddy, Evansville, Spring City, Rockwood, and Harriman — as you burrow deeper into the forested Tennessee hills.

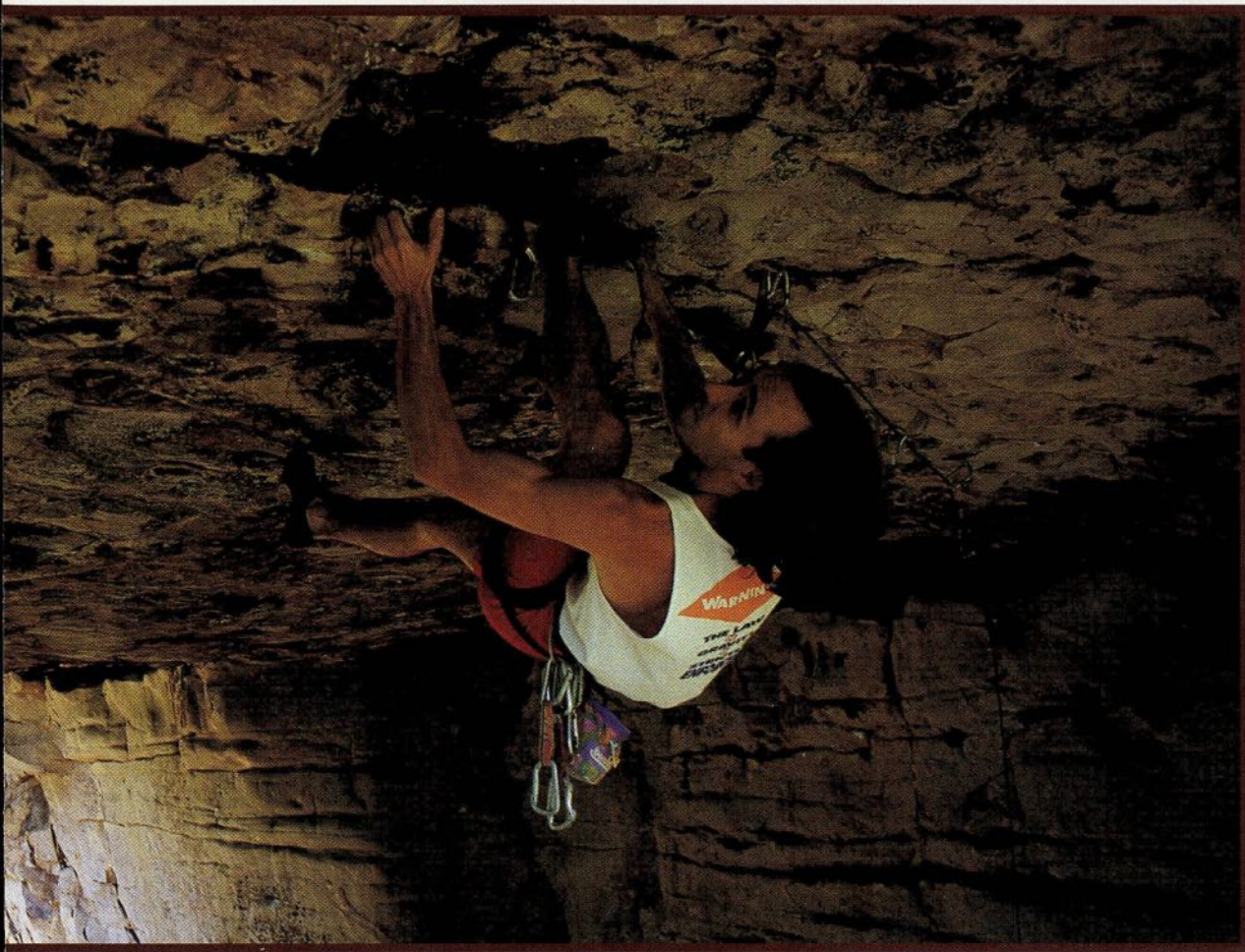
Finally, you arrive at Wartburg, a tiny community that serves as the jumping-off point for the Obed experience. Although the crags are only a few miles distant, the surrounding mountains twist and contort into a maze of deadends.

My first attempt to locate the Obed crags was slightly traumatic. From Wartburg, my Xeroxed, hand-scribbled maps directed me down gravel roads to parts — and people — unknown. Just when I was about to give up, I happened upon Laz Hawn Road, which was marked on my map. My wife Susan and I hung a left and drifted through a stand of giant, old-growth hemlocks. Shafts of sunlight penetrated the green canopy and lit up the forest floor with small circles of dappled light. The frustration of being lost dissolved.

A short distance farther, we found the parking pull-out, where we were surprised to see — judging by its bumper stickers — a climber’s car. The landmark “Junior’s cabin” up ahead on the left convinced us we were, indeed, in the right



*The landmark "Junior's cabin" up ahead on the left convinced us we were, indeed, in the right place - and in no imminent danger of having some backwoods landowner tease us with the end of a 12 gauge. Or so we hoped.*



**Kenny Campbell on the 30-foot roof of *Maximum Overdrive* (5.13a/b), South Clear Creek.**

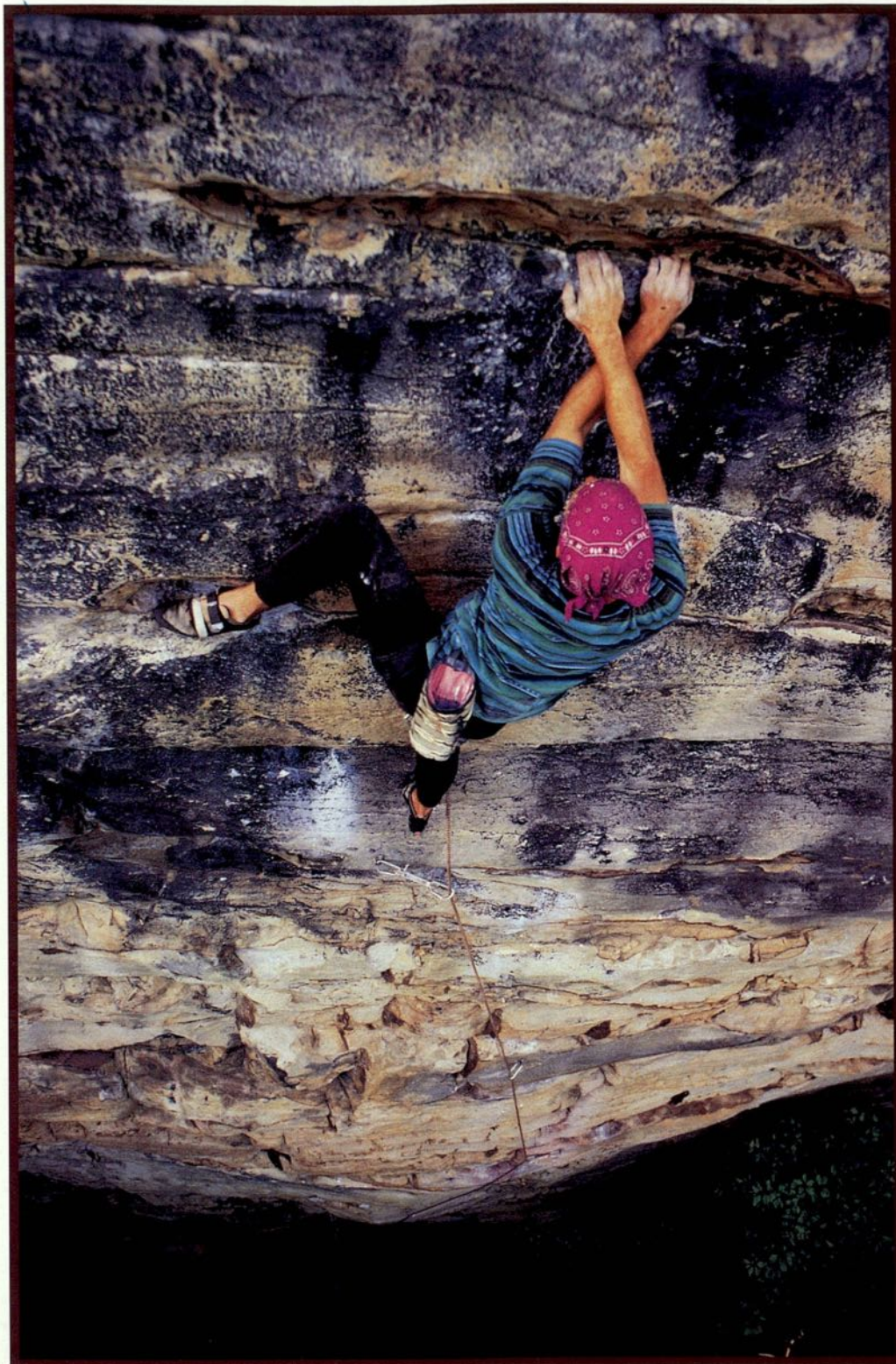
place — and in no imminent danger of having some backwoods landowner tease us with the end of a 12 gauge. Or so we hoped. “Thou shalt not trespass” is one of the unwritten commandments of the region — the last thing you want to do in the southern outback is violate someone’s property rights. We triple-checked our map for a possible warning — a sketch of a skull and crossbones or a graveyard cross. There was none. Still, we studied Junior’s cabin from a distance a bit longer. The dilapidated structure was surrounded by piles of assorted trash up to five feet high, with weeds in between nearly as high.

Shouldering light packs, we blitzed past Junior’s — keeping a wary eye out for anyone in overalls and a Cat diesel cap — and followed a road torn with deep ruts and mudholes into the woods. We passed through a field, through more woods, and finally down a gentle hill and onto the tip of a long knife-edge ridge. All around, the rugged slopes of

the tightly packed mountains were clothed in a tapestry of broad-leaved trees, punctuated by small stands of hemlock and pine. Small rivers bubbled through the stone-strewn valleys, and everywhere there were cliffs. To our immediate left, across a narrow gorge, we spied a 100-foot-high, south-facing wall. The cliff’s left side, which disappeared around a point, was capped by a flat, 25-foot roof. The rest of the wall appeared mostly vertical, and offered what looked to be several good corner and crack climbs. Farther up the canyon, on the left, a severely overhanging white buttress a ropelength tall clawed at the empty air — the awesome Y-12 crag, I later learned.

But that was rock for the future. On our right, the Tierrany Wall dropped away below, unseen. We descended a convenient series of ladders to the its base, where we were greeted by one of those sandstone tidal waves I’d heard about. My skepticism evaporated.





**Jerry Roberts on *What's This Face?* (5.13a), Tierrany Wall.**

For one-pitch cragging, the scale was enormous. I stood atop a boulder near the center of the wall, the rock looming overhead, a Titan's canopy of stone. Plastered to the mid-section of the wall was a struggling climber, looking like a fly on the ceiling. To conquer this beast of an overhang appeared impossible, although I would soon discover otherwise.

With trepidation I assembled a rack of quickdraws, tied in

with a double bowline, and added a hefty half grapevine for backup. I sure as heck didn't want my knot working loose while I was in the maw of the monster.

Though Turan had recommended the classic *Tierrany* as a warm-up, I decided to save it and instead tackle another "easy" 5.12 pitch, called *Jungle Jane*. After 50 feet of interesting but casual face climbing I bumped into 40 feet of chest-clutching tiered overhangs. With a what-the-heck-it's-bolted attitude, I hit it. Incredibly, huge holds led to a chain anchor just below the summit. As I lowered off, I was amazed to see that the entire cliff line was packed with bomber horizontal jugs. No climb, however improbable looking from the ground, was beyond linking.

**T**he Tieranny Wall was only the beginning. I had heard about a perfect hand crack, unclimbed, splitting a 25-foot roof, with a rope's worth of exposure at nearby Clear Creek Canyon. As a connoisseur of roof cracks, I was sold.

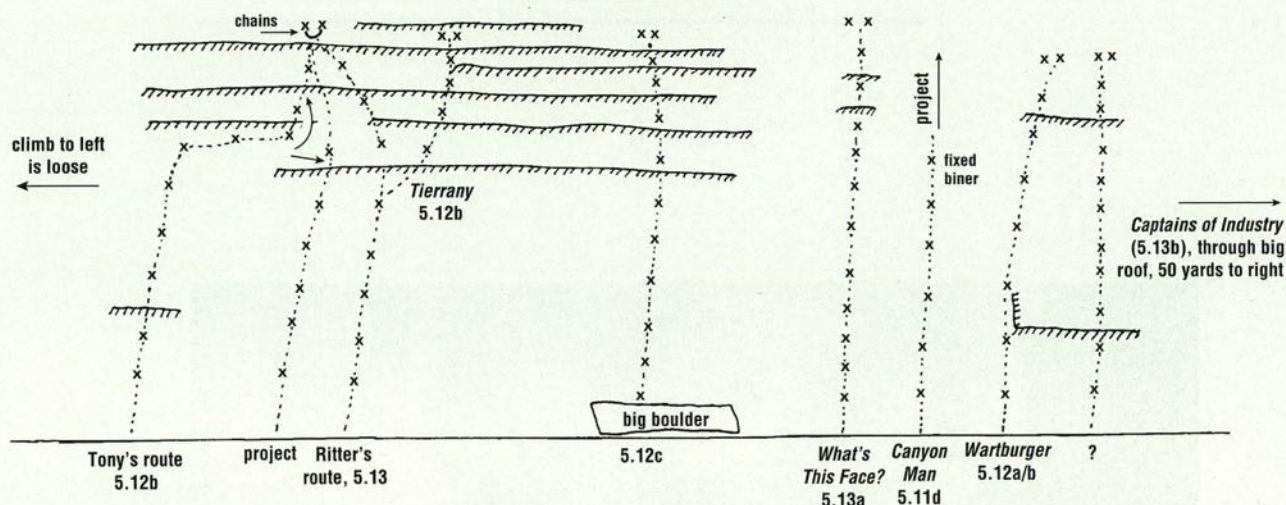
A few days later, a friend from Washington, D.C.,

Adam Eurlich, flew down and joined me. We blew through the 27 North gauntlet and, sans tickets, arrived in Wartburg in record time.

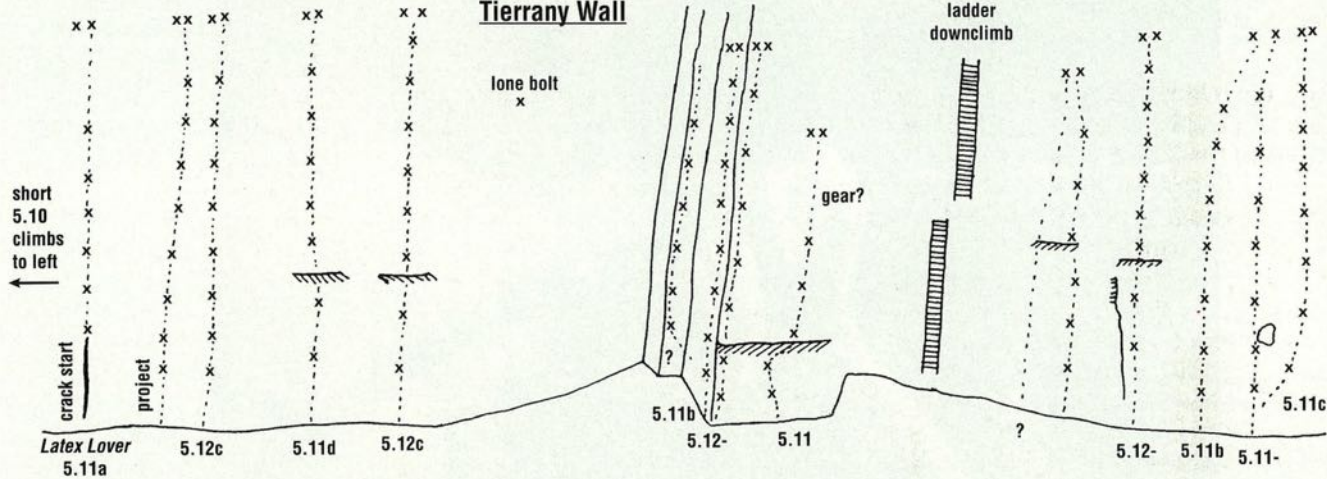
A 10-minute stroll through the woods led to the base of "the Clear." In all my years exploring the sandstone of the South I'd never seen anything like it. It was a half mile wide, up to 200 feet high, and jam packed with several hundred of



## Tierrary Wall Amphitheatre



## Tierrary Wall



• Trad routes: Clear Creek Main Wall.

• Sport and trad routes: Y-12.

If you are a first-time visitor, please leave your bolts at home; you'll find more than enough established routes to keep you busy.

**Emergency services.** Obed National Park Service Headquarters: (615) 346-6295

**Safety considerations.** Obed has had serious problems with car vandalism and break-ins. Fortunately, parking for most climbing areas is well off the main road, and these prob-

lems are less of a concern. However, if you park by the river to go for a swim, keep your vehicle in sight. If you plan on paddling the river, have someone drop you off and pick you up.

The South is home to several varieties of poisonous snakes, including copperheads and rattlers. In warmer months (April through October) keep an eye out for these critters, especially if you're tramping through heavy underbrush or topping out on a climb — they love to sun themselves atop cliffs.

**Alternative activities.** If you're into kayaking, canoeing, or rafting, consider bringing your rig: Obed offers some of the finest whitewater in the east, with rapids up to Class IV.

If you like to swim in wilderness settings, Obed has monster blueholes to enjoy. Some of the best ones are located a mere 100 feet downhill from the base of the cliffs.

Huge sandstone boulders dot the streams throughout the Obed system, and often yield superlative bouldering. On some of these behemoths

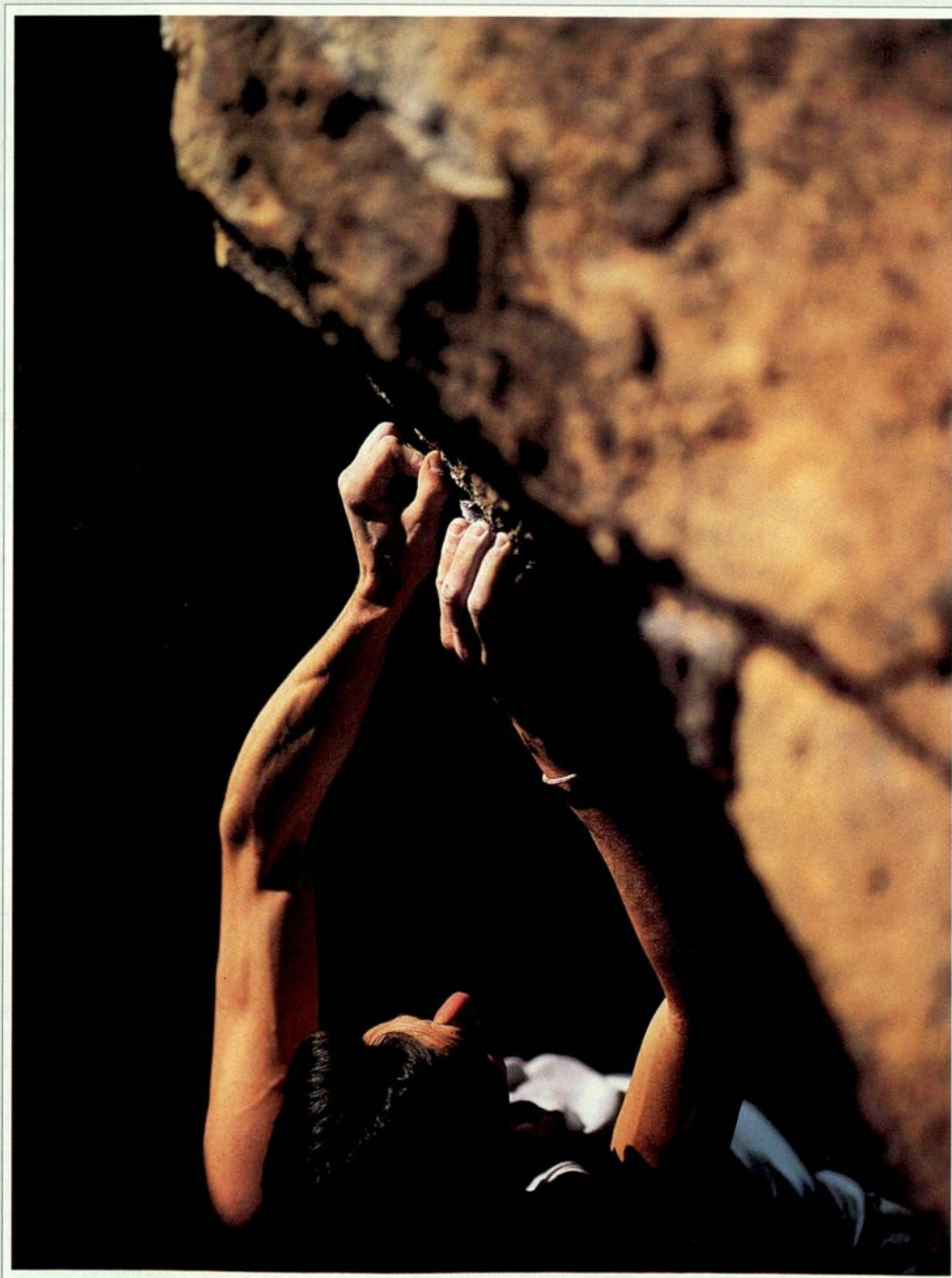
a top rope is mandatory. There is also an excellent bouldering area two minutes off the road, about 1/4 to 1/2 mile uphill after you cross Lilly Bridge. Look for an abandoned logging road on the right. (Parking is on the shoulder of a popular thoroughfare, so keep vandalism and break-ins in mind.) The setting of this area has an aura all its own; giant chunks of luminescent white sandstone are strewn across the forest. You can't miss Rob Turan's pumping training traverse on the left side of the trail — one of the best of its kind in the South.



THE

CLIMBING

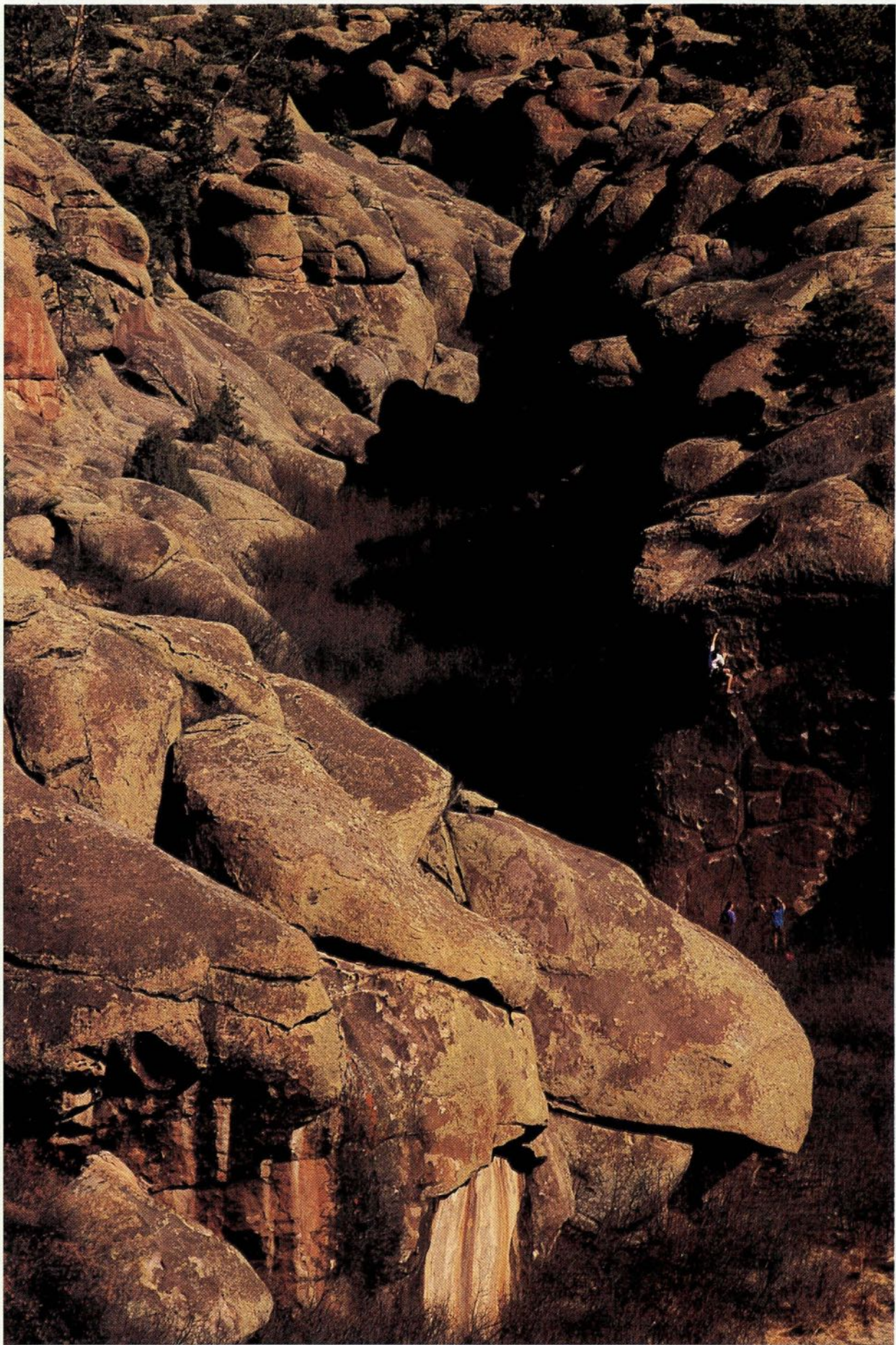
GALLERY



Scott Milton in Hueco Tanks, Texas.

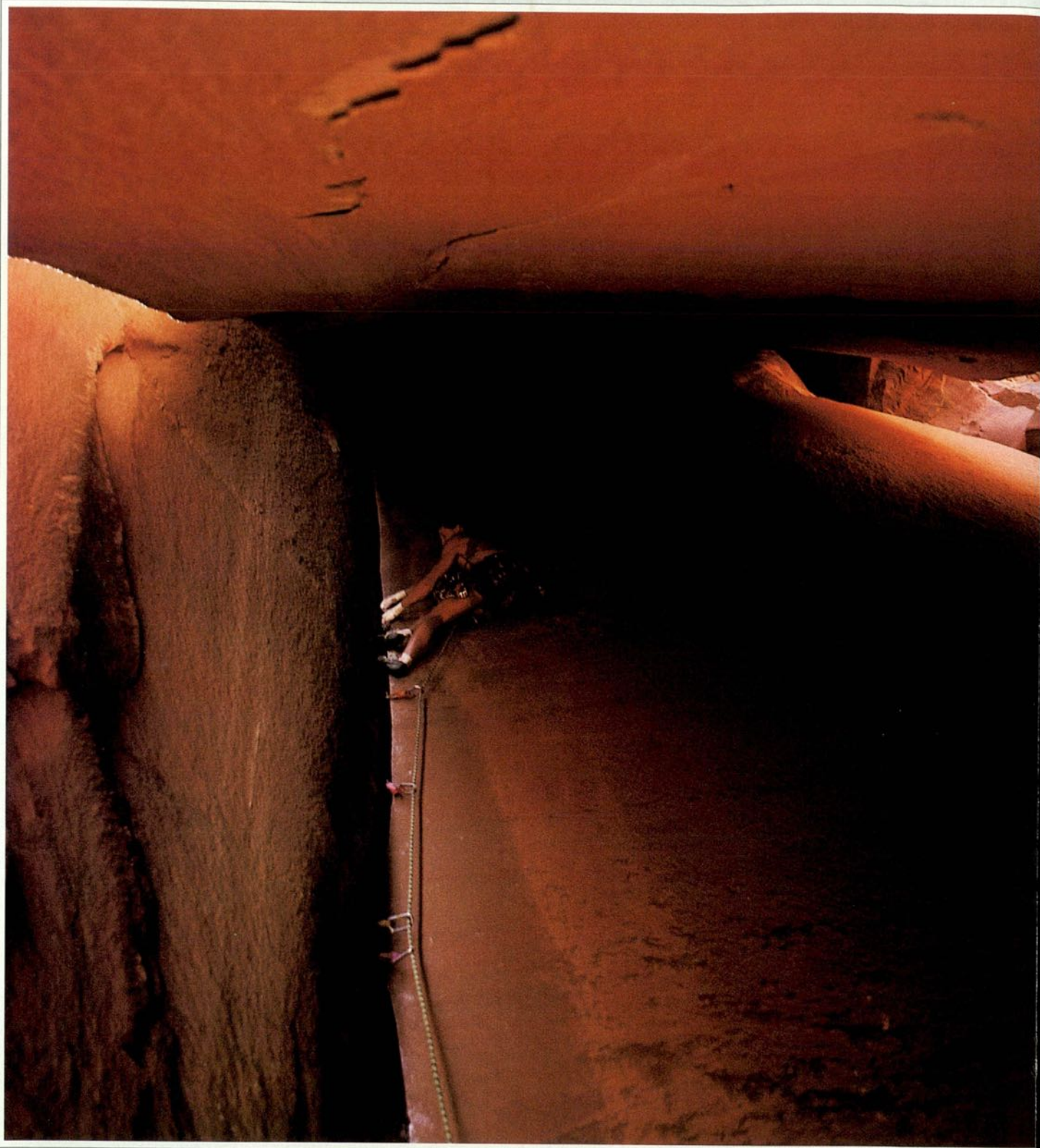
*Photo: Jim Thornburg*





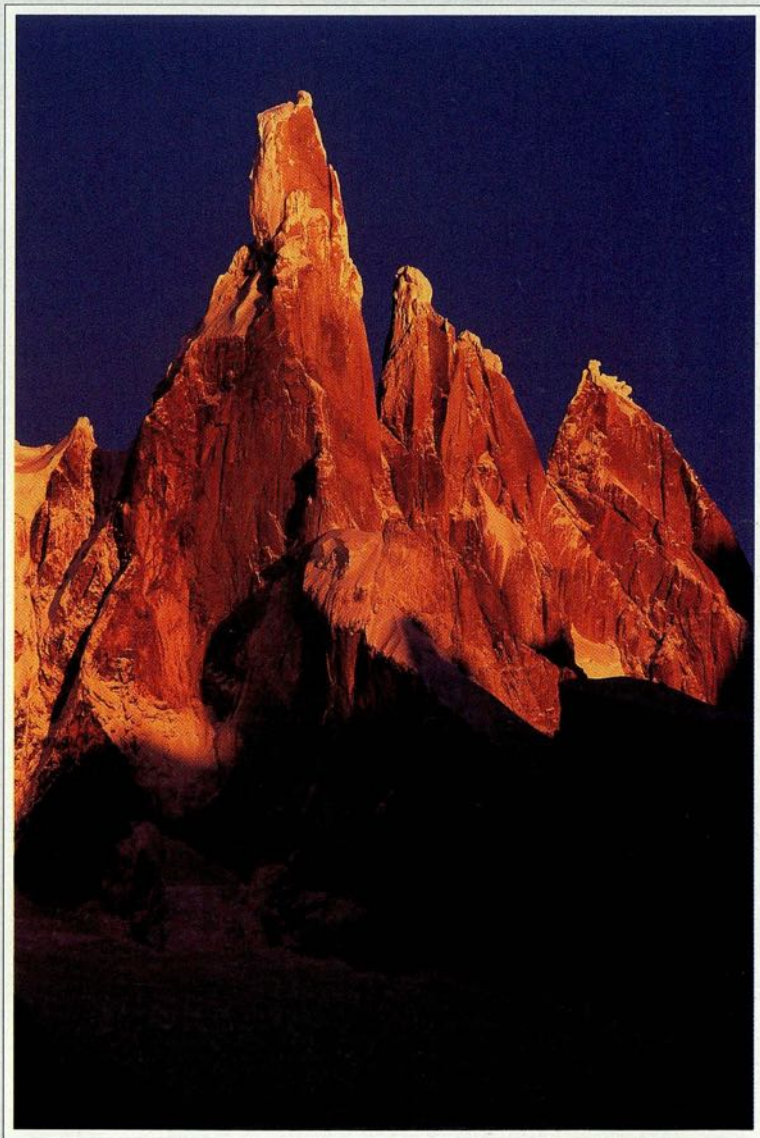
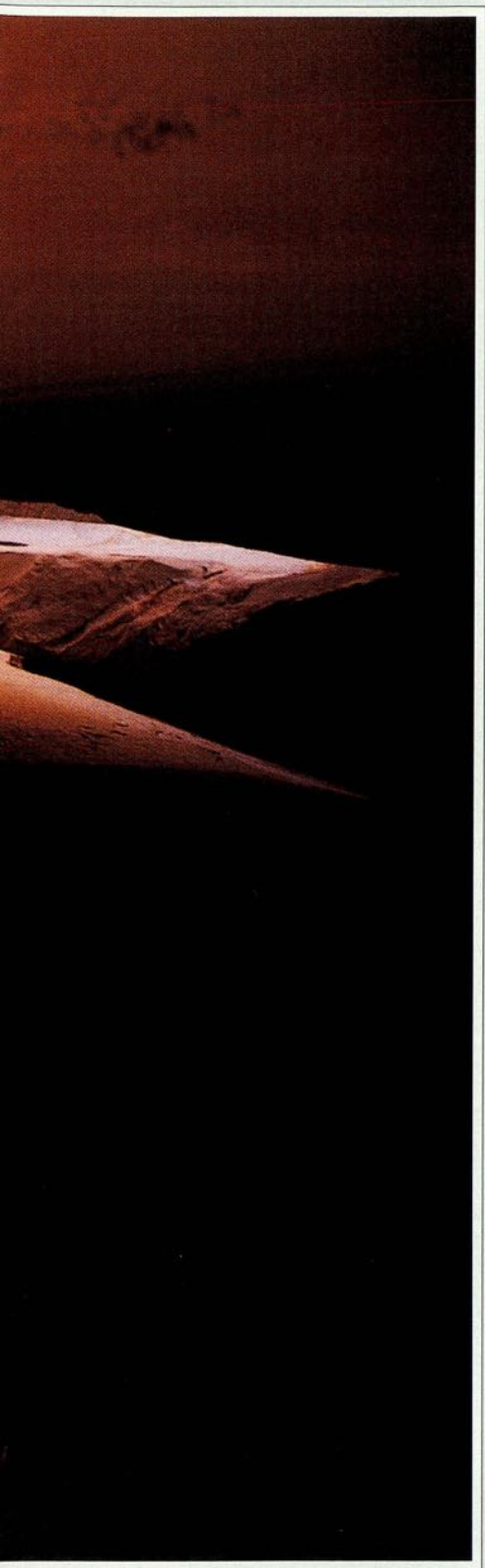
*Brown Sugar (5.11a), Penitente Canyon, Colorado.  
Photo: Stewart Green*





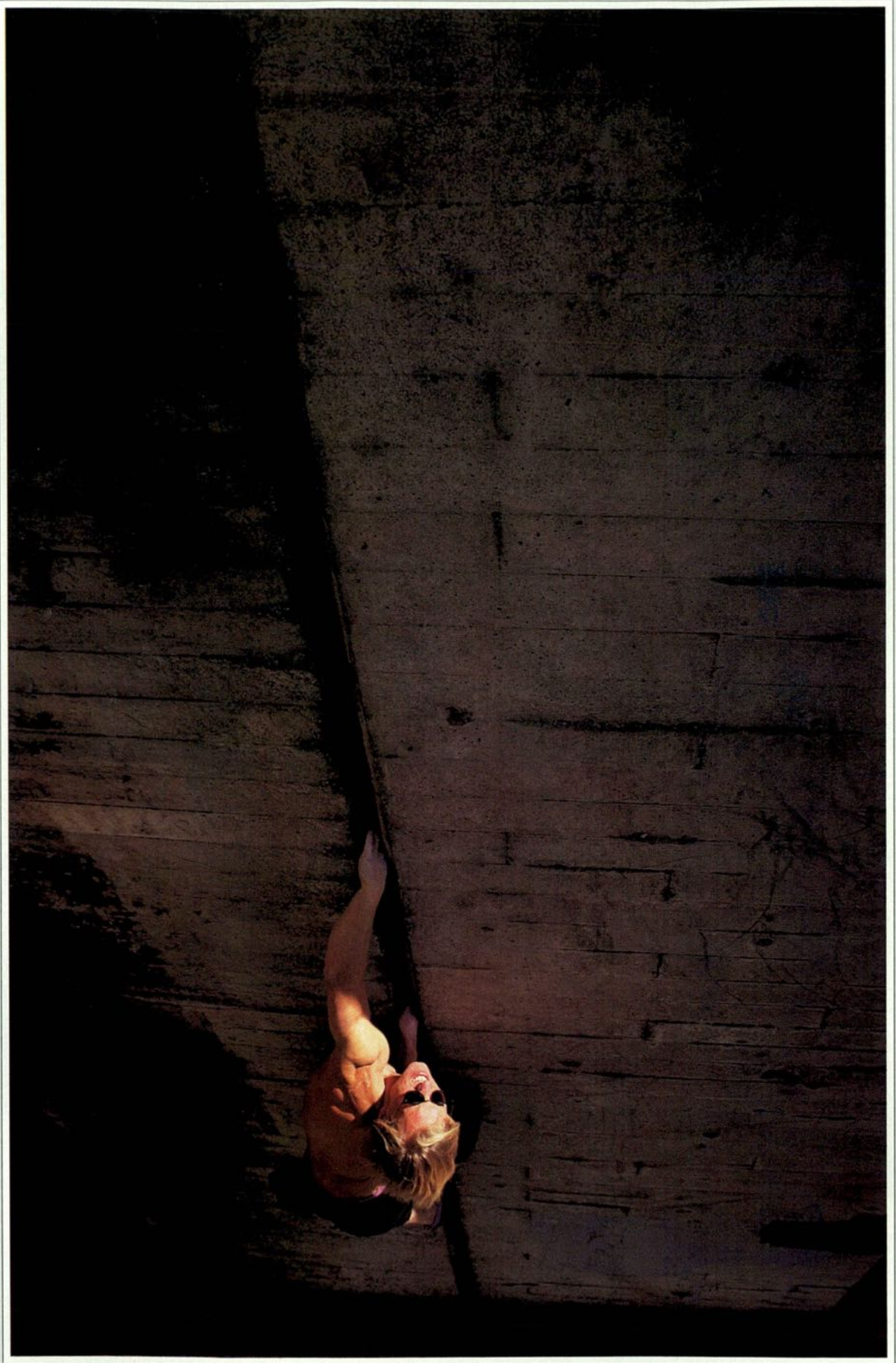
John Strohecker on *The Cave Route* (5.11), Indian Creek, Utah.  
Photo: Ace Kvale





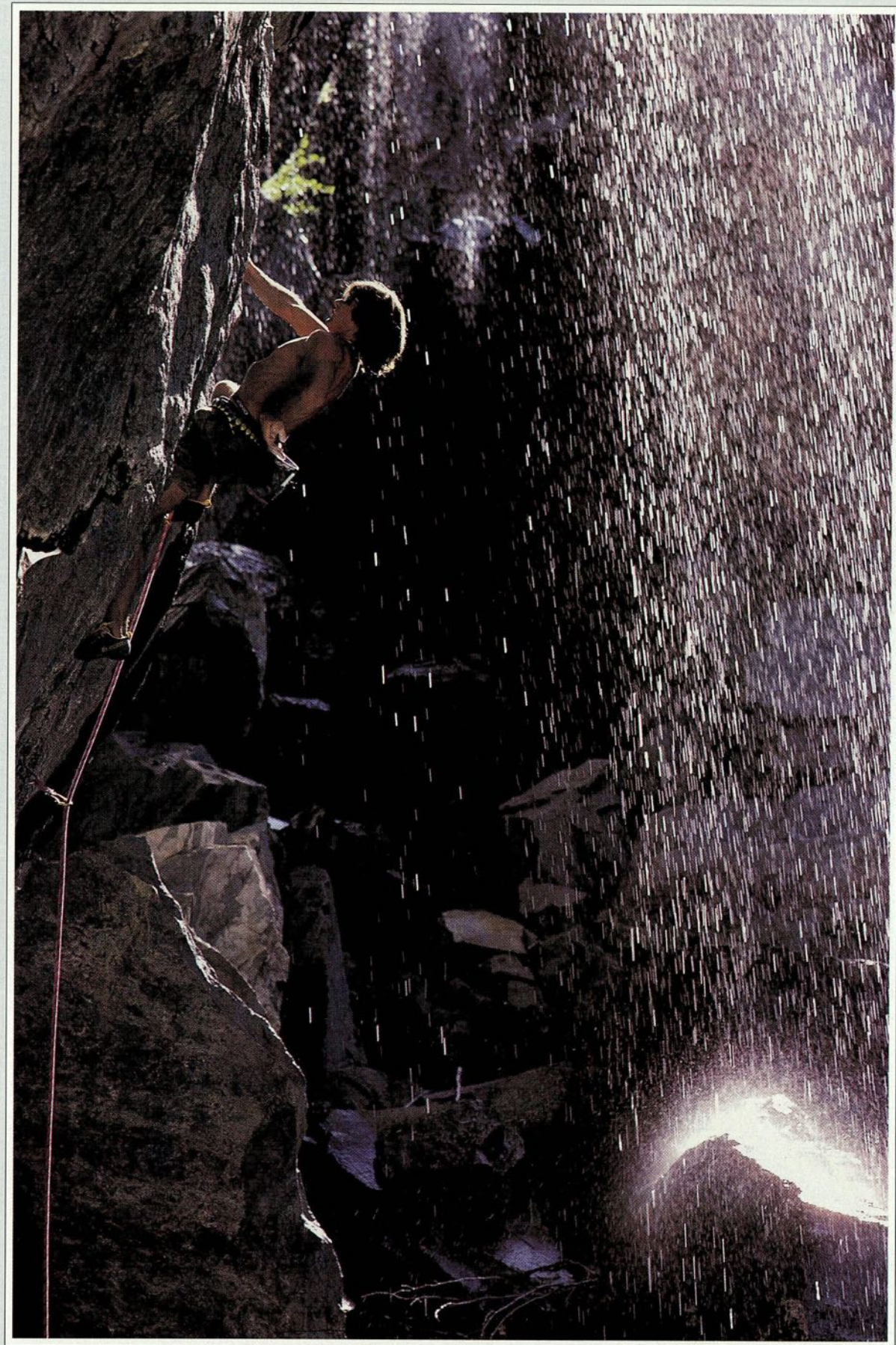
Cerro Torre, Patagonia.  
*Photo: Ace Kvale*





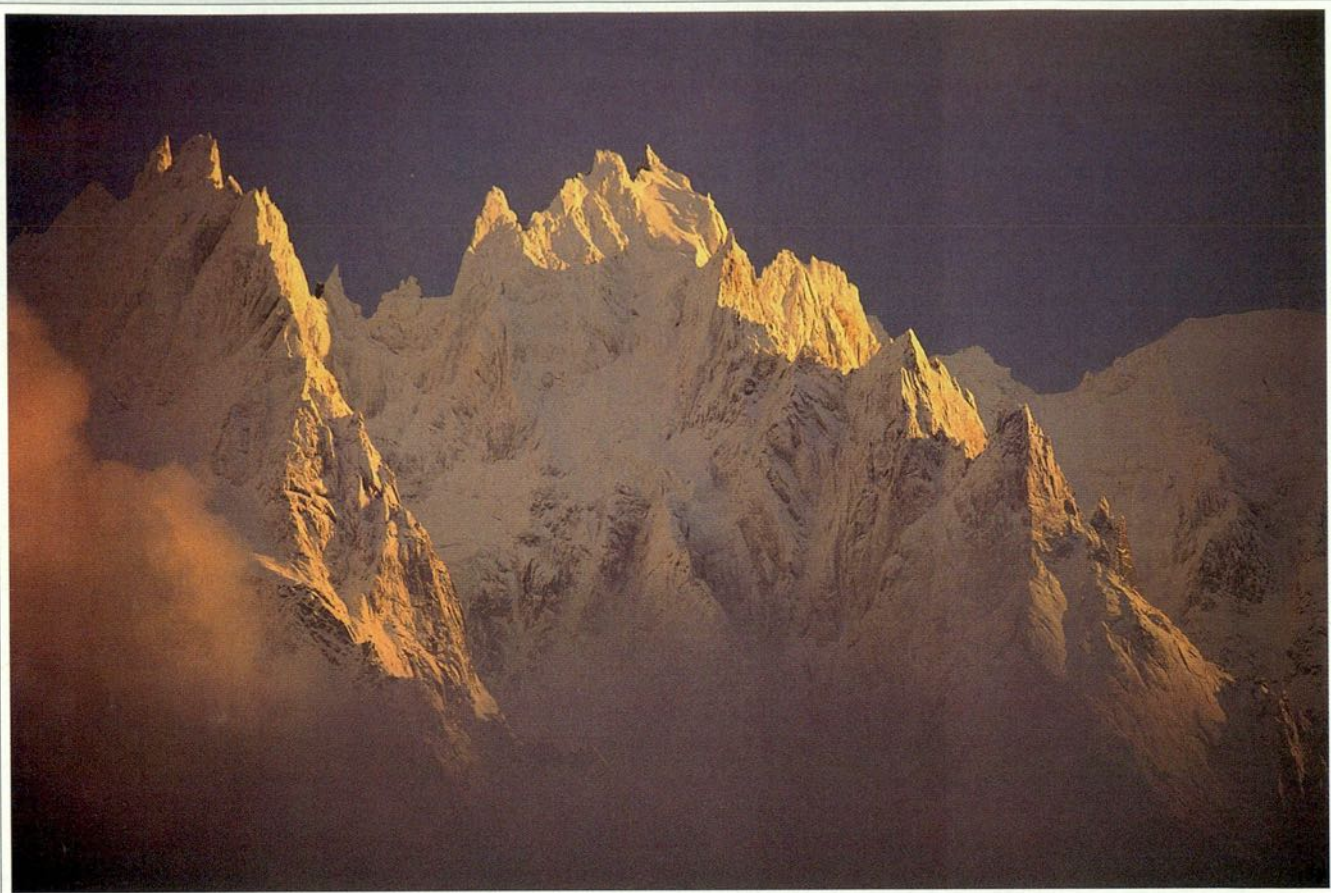
Hans Florine climbing in L.A.  
*Photo: Jim Thornburg*





Ron Kauk at the Emeralds, California.  
*Photo: Ace Kvale*





Aiguille de la Blatière and Aiguille du Plan, Chamonix, France.

*Photo: Cathy Beloeil/Marc Twight*





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EQUIPMENT



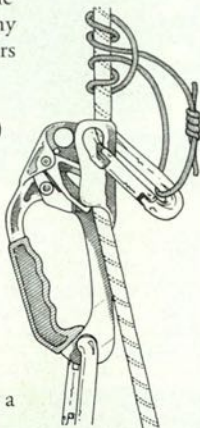
# Quick Clips

Compiled by Duane Raleigh

## Safety first

When I have to jumar a fixed line that's anchored at both ends, prohibiting me from tying a back-up knot below the ascenders, I clip a carabiner through the top hole of my Petzl ascenders (you can't do this with some brands) to keep the rope from slipping out the crack between the cam and frame. As a further precaution, I tie a prussik knot on the rope just above each ascender and clip this to the carabiner. The prussiks slide easily as the ascenders push them up, and will lock should an ascender accidentally pop off the rope.

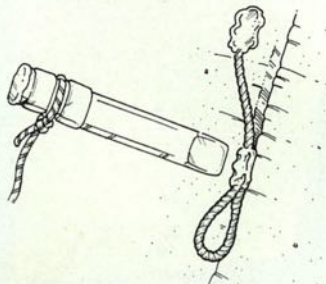
— Jon Rubinfer  
Sherman Oaks, California



A back-up system that works on fixed lines.

## Heads up

Do you ever find yourself halfway up a big wall only to discover that all you have left are trashed copperheads? When that's the case, don't forget about the swage hold-in the carabiner loop



Two heads in one.

together. You can pound this thing in just like the other swage, although it can be hard to place, and its strength is compromised.

— Aischan Rupp  
Wessen, Switzerland

## All bent

Thin, expanding flakes are a freaking nightmare to aid. Just the other day I was thinking — or was I climbing? — about being all strung out and having to move onto a crusty expando pancake. The first long-thin Lost Arrow sang all right, but as I drove the second, the flake spread and the bottom pin shifted like sin. My heart nearly exploded, but I kept it together and moved on. The next placements were the same, but all I had left were a couple long thin blades that were all bent up and weren't quite thick enough. I had no choice but to use them.

Guess what? They worked great. The corrugated bends gave them the effective thickness of the larger LA, but didn't spread the flake as radically. Better, when the flake did expand the steel sprung

Trashed pin or expando wizardry?



back out, adapting to the wider placement. The bent blades were so styling that from now on, anytime I come across an expanding flake I'm gonna ditch those shifty Arrows and wham in a bender blade while all the world wonders.

— O.J. Goat  
At large

## Hot head

Many helmets have a space between the harness and shell that is the perfect place to tuck a lightweight emergency "space" blanket. The cache won't affect the integrity of the helmet and you'll never be without a survival blanket.

— Mike Wood  
Nederland, Colorado

## Pop tops

Here's a time-tested way to keep the knot on your haul line from abrading. Take a 12-

or 16-ounce plastic soda bottle and cut the bottom off. Thread the rope through the neck, tie the rope to the haul bag, and slide the bottle top down over the knot, where it can act as a shield.

— Bob Roy Ramey  
Brooktondale, New York

## Drifting away

Tired of rummaging through your bolt kit trying to locate that elusive drift pin? Here's a solution. Take a #8 Lost Arrow



A drift pin that hangs around.

and grind down the end so it corresponds to the drift pin. Now you have a drift that's easy to find, and, in a pinch, functions as a regular piton.

— Rick Poedtke  
Virginia Beach, Virginia

## Here's the rub

Here's a tip I picked up working construction in the soggy Pacific Northwest. Take a candle or crayon and rub a thin layer of wax on your piton hammer handle. The wax gives the hammer a sticky grip, wet or dry.

— David Queen  
Stanwood, Washington

## Slab happy

It's always a struggle: whenever you get on a slab the rack swings around to the front and gets in the way. You



Keep those feet in view.

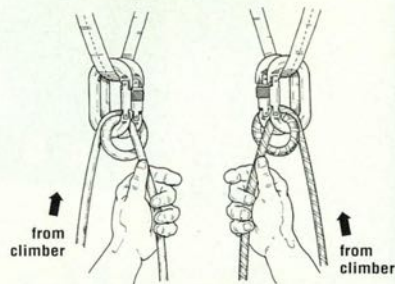
push it back, then, right at the crux smear, that rack whips back around. Don't put up

with that jive. Next time you're in that position, clip a biner to the front of your gear sling and then clip it to the back gear loop on your harness. Thus pinned, the rack will stay put.

— Phillip Benningfield  
Glenwood Springs, Colorado

## Hart brake

Here's a guide's trick that works well for simul-belaying two climbers on the follow. The Garta Hart knot lets you safely take in slack on two separate ropes, eliminating the worry of having both climbers tie into one rope, and pull the other off should one fall. Rig each rope as shown, using two oval carabiners of the same make for each system. Locking carabiners also work, just



On old guide's trick: the self-locking Garta Hart knot.

make sure they are the same shape — using different carabiners may cause them to flip through each other, and then the belay can fail. Set the two rigs close to each other for easy operation and monitoring, and make certain the anchors are bomber.


The Garta Hart knot pulls smoothly for taking up slack, but locks when weighted, allowing the belayer the hand mobility to keep up with both climbers racing to get up before the rain pounds in.

— Kennan Harvey  
Salt Lake City, Utah

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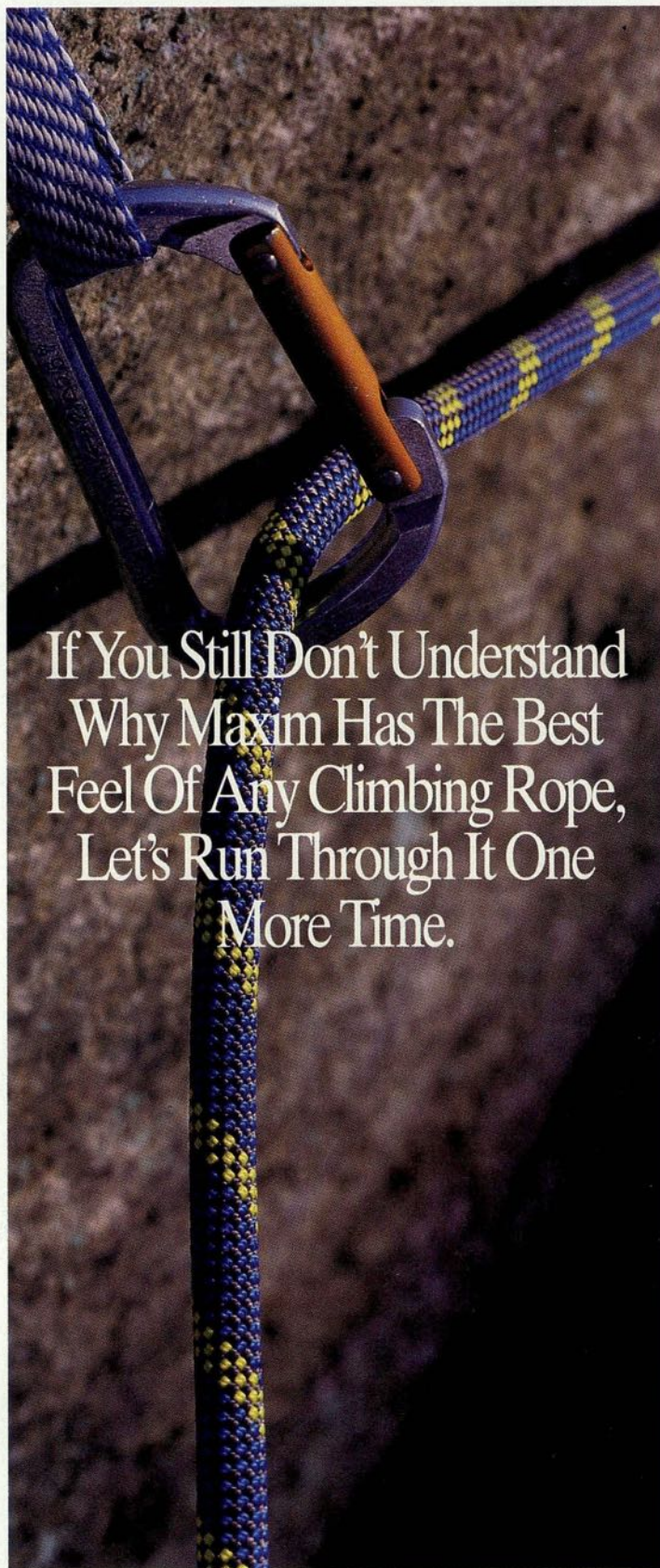
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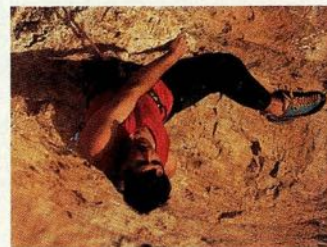
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# EQUIPMENT

## Up for grabs

### New modular holds

by Duane Raleigh

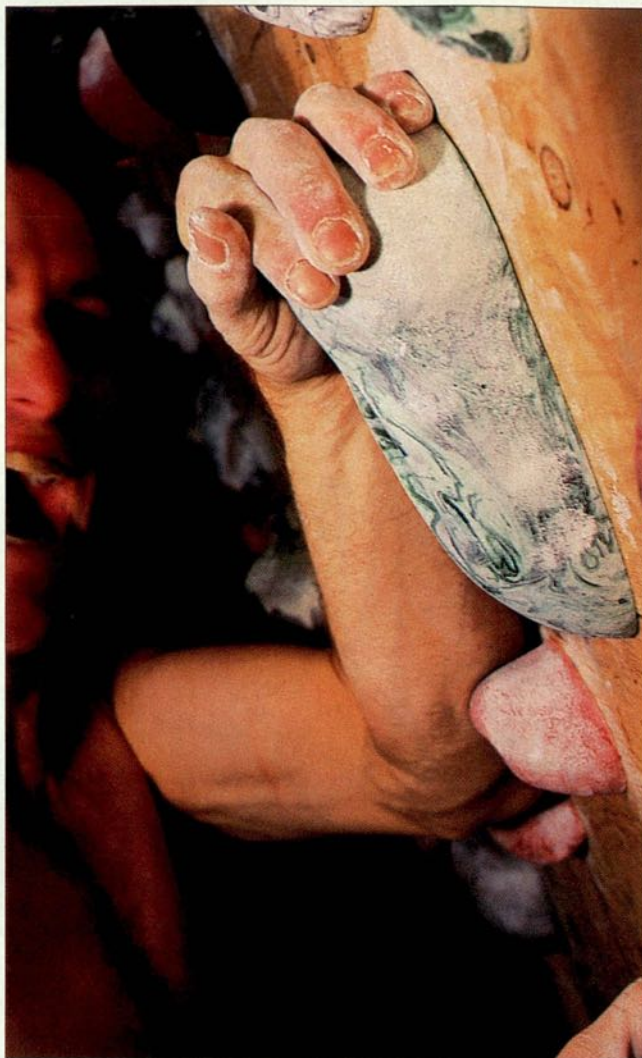
Holds, holds. It's hard to stay on top of that scene. "Thooose buggers are breeding faster than cockroaches," said our chief hold sampler, William Lee, during a recent, rare excursion into sunlight. At the time, Bill had been holed up in the garage gym for 121 days, morphing over the latest in modular holds with the relentlessness of a rutting hyena, and scribbling notes into a ragged ringbinder that would later become the nucleus of this review.

Anyhow, the light temporarily stunned him, and I took advantage of the moment and snatched the binder. I almost got away clean, but his famed mole-like hearing picked up my footfall and his veiny blue lips issued an ominous warning. "If yooou knew what was good for yooou," he hissed, "yooou'd swallow yooour tongue..."

Heebee jeebees, I should have listened. Here's one of his entries, the fruit of 21 straight hours of yanking: *Hod handles and urinals — texture premo. Tell Long Island to fatten their lips. Babyheads and dwarf fears ... mmm tasty. Call Alan.*

What does he mean?

**Price.** It's as inescapable as horseflies in the Texas sun — outfitting a home wall is going to cost you big. Dig deep, boss, and expect to fork over more for the holds than you did to erect the rickety wall they'll go on. For perspective, one panel of 3/4-inch plywood with the necessary framing and accoutrements costs \$50 tops. Twenty holds, the minimum covering per sheet — 30 or 40 is more like it — will hit you for between \$100 and \$200. Multiply that times six for a humble but usable gym and you see what I mean. Mercy be, you don't have to buy all the holds at once. Start with just the basics, then piecemeal in the gaps later as you bore of the old grips and your pocketbook swells.



This year's cornucopia of comfortable holds will have you howling.

It would be tidy to calculate a sum-per-hold, but no can do. The different packaging mixes proffered by the manufacturers make that impossible. But don't pull your hair, it works out: the best holds of similar design cost roughly the same. For example, a single Metolius Scott Franklin Mondo sells individually for \$13, and a 10-pack Nicros Roof Set of equally good jugs is \$129. I'd call that Even Steven.

Holds generally come in sets of five to 15 that include a slathering of footholds, crimpers, medium holds, and a jug or two. Prepackaging this way is convenient, but unless you're already familiar with the set, you don't know exactly what you're getting and usually wind up with a dud or two. Hand picking each hold guarantees

satisfaction, but only a handful of companies, noted in the individual reviews, offer this service.

**Comfort.** You pay for holds when you order them. You shouldn't have to pay again every time you make a grab. To their credit, most companies are with it this year, and hold forth only nice, comfy grips.

That doesn't mean there aren't some meat eaters out there. Just yesterday I was rummaging through a cardboard box swollen with the dregs that no one could bear to pull on. And those are the globby rubes your buddy Yo Jimbo will slide you for next to nothing. Tempting eh? However, a couple sessions on those rough dogs will show you the Wisdom. Then the extra money to score well-crafted holds will seem a paltry sum.

User-friendly holds are easy to spot. They have rounded contours and the hot spots, like where the fingers bend over, are thick enough so they don't crush the meat. Small holds are typically the most painful, but pockets, shallow one- and two-finger ones especially, are the cripplers. Choose flared, tendon-friendly pockets over ones with thin lips. Or shun them altogether, as I do — my knobby pig knuckles just

can't handle the torque. Jugs are, naturally, the most comfortable, but for reasons discussed in a moment, you don't need too many of these. When shopping for edges get some reasonably sharp crimpers to tune your fingers for the real thing, but concentrate more on rounded half-pad holds that are still pumpy and technical, but won't pop your cables or shred your pads.

Texture also defines comfort. Aggressive, skin-burning textures were common until recent, but today, nearly all companies use a low-impact micro-porus texture that is kind yet still positive enough to hang on, provided you keep it clean. Nicros does things a little differently: they vary the texture according to hold shape. The Nicros jugs, which are easy to latch anyway, have

Photo: Duane Raleigh



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#### **Climbe It/Mike Pont Bloodlines**

32 red plastic holds

8 for \$47

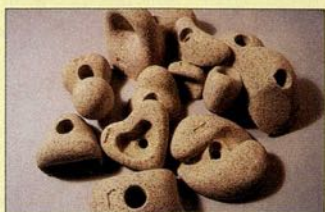
Our top picks from this year's crop; artistic; asymmetrical designs rotate to a variety of positions; technical; aesthetic; comfortable; small to medium holds, generally positive or incut; best on 10- to 45-degree overhanging walls; mostly edges and pinches; good for course setting, and power and endurance training; smooth texture requires scrupulous cleaning.

#### **Climbe It/Jim Karn Monster Holds**

14 black plastic holds

\$12 each

Top-rated slopers and jugs; gigantic, symmetrical jugs, pockets, and slopers; aesthetic; comfortable; too protruding for vertical or just over vertical walls; best for steep overhangs, woodie ramps, and roofs; good, positive yet nonaggressive texture is just right.

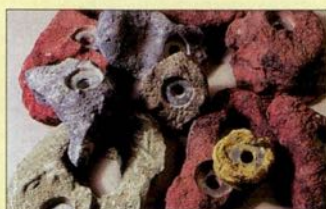


#### **EntrePrises/Lynn Hill Holds**

20 gray plastic holds

10 for \$75

Straightforward symmetrical shapes; fair aesthetics; comfortable; assorted holds, but are mostly incut edges; rounded, medium-size holds; suited to 10- to 45-degree overhanging walls; some of the pockets and incuts will sell you short if you have thick fingers; designed by Lynn Hill, but EntrePrises' old E.P., P.E., and S.N. holds are more diverse and interesting; soft rubber backing prevents spinning; smoothish texture chalks well and is skin friendly.

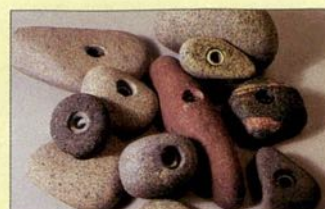


#### **Exposed Heights**

Unlimited number of hand-molded plastic holds

\$2 to \$5 each

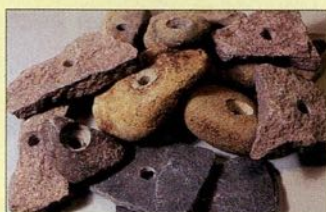
Gloppy lumps; crude; mostly flat or slightly incut knobs; best on 10- to 20-degree overhanging walls; straightforward grips; no real jugs, footholds, slopers, or pockets; rough texture is positive, but isn't as painful as you'd think; least popular of the plastic holds.



#### **Geologic**

Unlimited number of natural rock holds \$3 to \$8 each

Environment friendly; the most aesthetic and popular of the rock modulators; sizes range from small footholds to roof jugs, but river-cobble knobs are the most common; generally straightforward grips, but some of the smaller edges are deviously technical; slick texture won't shred your skin and forces you to hold on harder — some climbers like this feature, others don't; cold in winter.

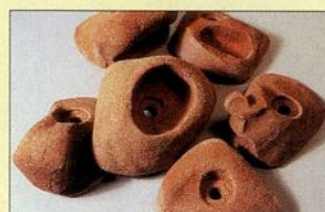


#### **Geckular**

Unlimited number of natural rock holds

10 for \$49

Environment friendly; may purchase individually; available in small to large; crudest of the real rock modulators; many don't have a flat mounting side; the thin shale edges can crack; texture varies depending on rock type, but is generally medium to smooth; mostly incut knobs and edges; comfort ranges from terrible to good; cold in winter.



#### **Grip Head Wall Rox**

Unlimited number of ceramic holds

\$7 each

Environment friendly; hand formed, so no two are alike; fair aesthetics, but are kinda chunky; usually straightforward grips, but the small pinches are technical; no real jugs or footholds; best on 10- to 20-degree overhanging panels, or as warm ups on the verticals; generally comfortable, but still found sharp ones in the set we tried; good texture that feels like medium-grit sandstone; wear and chalk well; good for variety.

a fine, skin-friendly grit, while their smaller edges and slopers use a grittier texture. Long Island Rocks does similarly by imprinting their commercial gym holds with a coarse, concrete-like surface that they say will withstand the heavy traffic of a gym better than the finer texture they put on their holds made for home use.

Some climbers complain about certain brands polishing up fast. Do tell. Bill, whom I'm inclined to believe, says they all wear about the same. Don't believe it? Next time a set of holds buff out quicker than the others, check it out: are those holds genuinely softer, or are they simply popular, so get pulled and stepped on the most? Ceramic and real rock holds are the exceptions. These, because they are harder than plastic, last longer as footholds.

**Design.** You get more bang for your buck from holds that rotate to a variety of gripping positions. Multi-faceted holds, like the Climbe It's Mike Pont Bloodlines, spin to *beau coup* grips. The incut edge becomes a sloper with a lean undercling, the one-sided knob turns into a sidepull, and so on. Try the same with a symmetrical blob or chunk and

you still have a blob and a chunk.

The way a hold is cut for the hand is also important. Is it straightforward, or do you have to use a combination grip? Plane-Janes are fine for thugging, but a sophisticated design, like one that has an edge for two fingers and a dimple for the others — again the Bloodlines and Nicros Kurt Smith Series spring to mind — is more interesting and harder to read. Being able to match on a hold, small ones as well as jugs, also adds a new twist and technical difficulty to your training.

The shapes and number of each you need depends on your ability and strength, and how steep your wall is. The best angle for home gyms is 10 to 40 degrees overhanging, but for the odd vertical wall, load up on low-profile holds, slopers in particular. When you do use more positive holds, set them as sidepulls and underclings instead of dead-on crimpers. Walls thus covered will keep you concentrating, in balance, and whet your technique ginsu sharp. Jugs, on the other hand, will induce you to set reachy height-dependent moves and soaring lunges that are fine for variety and bag-

ging your shorter friends, but do little to improve your climbing and are yawners.

As the wall angle increases you'll want to pump up the number of flat and incut holds, although, since most home gyms traverse more than they climb, take care to keep the lower foot holds slopy so you still have to use good form. The exceptions are "sit-down" starts, where you'll need a reasonably good hold just to hump your duff off the mattress.

On "woodie" angle ramps — 45 degrees overhanging — slap on a sundry of incuts for low-lock moves, but also bolt on pinches, slopers, and flat edges that you can't dead hang from, but you can latch when you hook your feet on jugs.

Bill's notes at this point took a turn for the worse, and I had to send them to RAMSCAT, where an ace team of cryptologists suffered over them. What came back read thus: Horizontal roofs are a waste. Don't bother. This angle requires a good jug and the climbing tends to be straight-arm swinging from towel racks and other buckets with the feet counter pawing a back jug, a form of climbing that is more grippy than strenuous: blow





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it and you'll find yourself flat on your back in a pile of sharp bones.

Bill is right, of course, but I wouldn't follow his lead verbatim. I enjoy aping out the horizontals on occasion. It's a good gut check and, when you have a couple stout spotters, a low wall above mattresses, or a belay (see Quick Clips #139), you can pull hard moves using the not-so-good holds.

With all that in mind, let's examine the different holds.

**Jugs.** These big grips, when screwed to the token roof, buff the major muscles, such as the biceps, delts, and abs, and are also fun for setting steep Hail-Marys and kind warm ups. Otherwise, they can be counterproductive. Their forgiving sizes make you technique lazy, and, because they are so positive, they don't develop your contact-strength as well as smaller holds. Pile all that on to their high prices — \$11 to \$17 each — and you can see why you only need one or two per panel.

When you do go for jugs, the cream of this year's crop are the Metolius Scott Franklin Mondos, Nicros Roof Sets, and Climb It's Jim Karn Monsters. Or, as an option, check out the smaller holds that are still incut and positive enough to serve as jugs, like the Vertical Concepts Vishnue Holds. Modulars such as these give you a decent jug, but use less material, so they cost less (the Vishnues are under \$5 each) than full-size honkers.

**Pockets.** Modular pockets are most everyone's least favorite holds. I hate them. The one- and two-finger jobs twang your fingers, while the three- and four-finger ones are easy grapples. Further, pockets only have one hand position and, unless you're talking insets, are bulbous goiters, making them bomber foot holds. But don't let me talk you out of pockets. Get a bag full just for variety.

**Slopers.** There's nothing like wrapping the meat of your hand around a big swollen sloper. The feeling of power and the tight focus it gives you is, umm ah ... never mind.

If I could only have one type hold to outfit a wall I'd pick slopers. These smoothies are technically hard — you have to carefully set your hand, rather than fling it on — comfortable, develop your contact strength, and, once you get used to them, make you feel like king bull. A heady point that outweighs the fact that they do get redundant. Every company has a dollop of good slopers and it's hard to beat the old "baby heads" from EntrePrises, but the power-demanding Jim Karn Monsters are the new faves.

**Horns and knobs.** Holds resembling door knobs and potatoes, while fun to



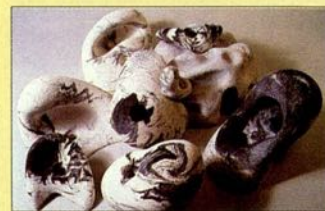
### LimeStones

Unlimited number of limestone holds 15 for \$50  
Environment friendly; no two holds are alike, but most are rounded chunks and knobs; fair aesthetics; comfortable; limited shapes; generally too thick for vertical walls and for footholds; best for 10- to 20-degree overhanging walls; dusty texture; cold in winter.



### Long Island Rocks

50 plastic holds of various colors 10 for \$62  
Comprehensive variety from micro edges to jugs; linear holds of the old, straight-angle style; fair aesthetics; some are technical, thinking-person's holds, but most are straightforward grabs; assorted set is best on vertical to 20-degrees overhanging; larger holds are comfortable, but many of the edges and pockets are cripplers; available in two textures: coarse for commercial gyms, or medium for home use.



### Metolius/Scott Franklin Shapes

130 gray plastic holds  
4 footholds for \$17 to \$13 for a jug  
Good value; interesting, creative shapes of all sizes; aesthetic; ergonomic; Microns are small, technical footholds; Microns make good crimpers and pinches — some even work on 10-degree overhangs; Modulars include assorted full-hand slopers, ears, incuts, and edges; high-relief holds are best on 20-degree plus overhangs; Mondos are gigantic, generally very positive jugs that include hand and finger threads, horns, and pinches that work well on woodie and horizontal roofs; all holds are rounded and comfortable; texture is standard Metolius: positive, yet nonabrasive.

latch, can, like too many jugs, actually rob you of technique and power. One or two per panel is plenty to warm up on, and practice wrapping the meat of your palm and copping a rest — a trick that pays big on real rock.

**Crimpers and edges.** These are the mainstays. The power holds. The ones that check your Gorm. Tank up mano, you can't have too many of these. Straight-on edges of all thicknesses are kosher, but the irregular shapes are more realistic, and require a combo crimp/squeeze. It seems as if there are a million edges, and they all work, save a few sharp ravagers, but this

(continued on page 140)



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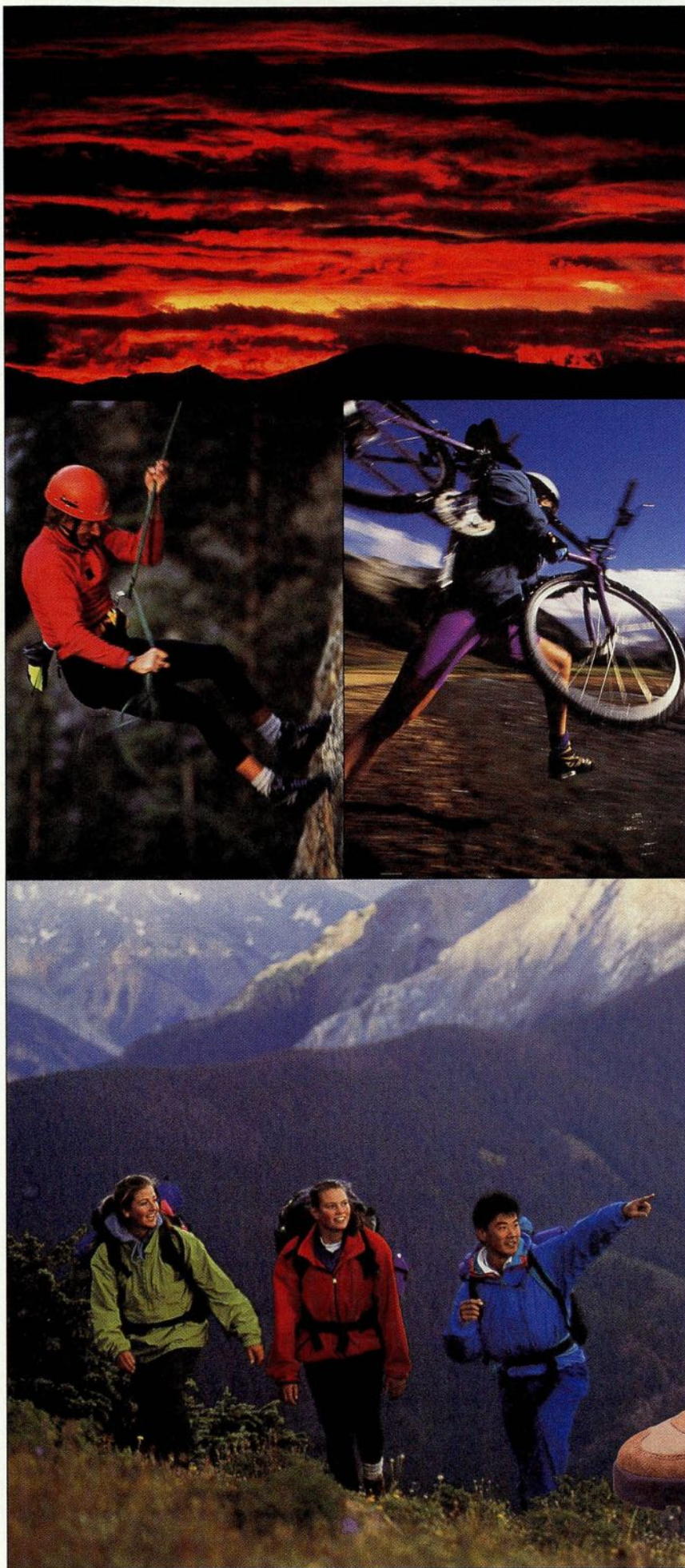
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## I spy

It's Wednesday, 10:57 a.m. I'm in the hall outside my office. At the east wing of the building, 25 yards distant, Lynn is at her desk perusing the latest issue of *Muscle and Fitness*. Her brow crunches, the jaw slackens, a bit of spitte drains out the left side of her mouth as she examines page upon page of bronze abs and unholy chest plates. I know this because I'm peering down the barrel of the new Nikon Fieldscope, model ED78, which has a lens of such fine resolution I can count Lynn's tastebuds.

Not that I condone spying on people, mind you, but with the Fieldscope in hand, nothing is beyond scrutiny. Climbs especially. Peek through the ED78 and — ah hah — you know those far-flung boulders you've been meaning to hike to are choss, and that the ninth pitch of that new wall route in the Black Canyon is #2 Arrows and thin blades. The amount of pain and leg work the scope can save is boggling.

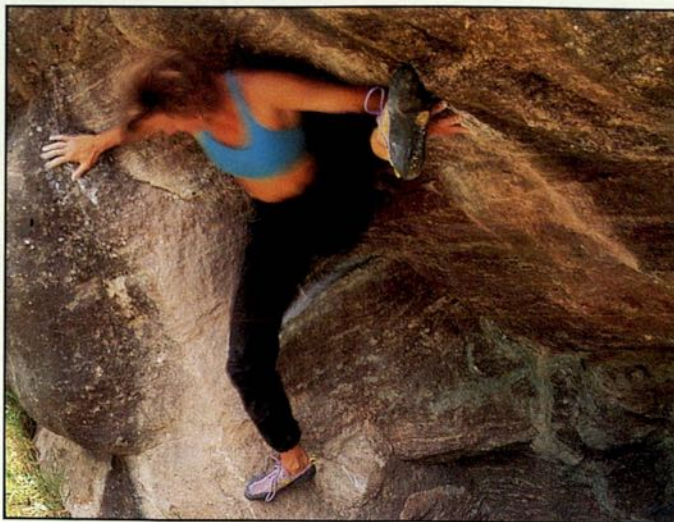
So is the price. The lens-barrel alone lists for \$1850, but you can buy it for \$950 at discount optic shops, like B&H in New York City. Next, tack on the eyepiece, which for our purposes is the

25-56X zoom (\$145), and a sturdy tripod of your choosing. Quite a few beans.

But then good glass never comes cheap. Look to the Nikon ED lenses if you don't believe me. That ED glass is spendy, but worth it because it can turn out scalpel-sharp, contrasty images in dim light. Lo and behold, you find the same ED lens in the Fieldscope, which is so optically clear that, with the bayonet adapter (\$170), you can mount it on a Nikon SLR and use it as a 1000mm camera lens.

The ED78 also has other perks climbers can appreciate. It only weighs three and a half pounds, and is about the size of a jumbo submarine sandwich. Additionally, rubber O rings repel grit and rain in all but a hellstorm, and the dampened focusing ring is, ahhhh, downright pleasurable. The model ED78A is the same scope, but has an angled body that lets you look down into the eyepiece, telescope style, a position that buffers neck strain.

Nice. But I'm gonna have to pull night shifts at 7-Eleven if I'm to afford the thing. I don't mind, really, because if you add up all the wasted time I'd otherwise spend slogging to crags that don't pan out and



Mocean Pants do as the name implies, and are tough as elk hide.

getting partway up walls only to find that the cracks aren't as continuous as I'd thought, I'm still coming out way ahead.

I press my eye back to the scope. Lynn is finished with the mag and is scribbling something I can't quite make out. I zoom in to double the magnification. Not that I condone this sort of business ....

Nikon (800) NIKON-US

— DR

## Mocean sickness

I had to chuckle when Kimberley Pierson, of Mocean Sport, handed me a sharp staple at the last trade show and asked if I would please try and rip their new Vertical Pants with it. "What? You're kidding, right?" I asked, clapping my swollen hands together. But then I wondered: could this be a trap, where the Reno goons come swarming in, paralyze me with pepper spray, and drag me away, blind and howling, still clutching the shreds of what had just been a proud pair of climbing trousers? "You dirty magazine scum," they'd hiss, and then kick me in a soft spot, right in front of the Mont Bell booth.

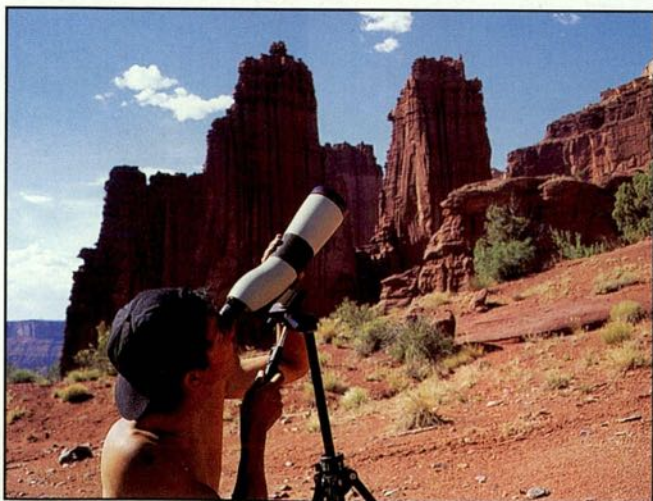
I chewed on this for a moment, but then my professional instincts got the better of me. I snatched the pants, which felt about as tough as

crepe paper, and tore at them with the steel pin. Nothing happened, so I dug harder, lashing and slashing and jabbing. Still nothing. I kept at it, biting and clawing anything tossed in the pit with me, until I collapsed.

It was depressing.

Months later, just as I was about to get off the Prozac, a pair of coal-black Mocean pants arrived in the UPS. What could I do? I wore them on a long-range bushwack, forging through thickets of ornery oak brush that has been known to tear the leather off a bull elk. The beasts wouldn't die, so I took them climbing and subjected them to flagrant abuse, including spiny knee bars, sharp stump landings, and — don't try this at home — a grievous squeeze chimney lined with six-grit Carborundum sandpaper. My flesh tore, but that was all.

Mocean attributes the pant's ruggedness to a fabric they call X-Factor, a stretch material that feels deceptively like double-knit polyester, only wispiest. The pants aren't, however, just tough as sharkskin. They are tailored full and have a gusseted crotch so you can drop into the Chinese splits and still have plenty of room for the boys. Finer touches include



Is that a blade seam or an easy Friend crack? The Nikon Fieldscope will probably tell you, if you can afford it.



cuffed ankles, crucial for watching your exquisite footwork, and a cummerbund "Backstay" that feels queer, but takes some of the sting out of your harness.

All that, of course, doesn't come for a song. A pair of Vertical Pants cost \$89. That's right, \$89 — double what I'd freely pay for climbing pants, especially ones without side pockets. Stick some pockets on there, people. A deep one for each hand.

But enough of that, Mocean makes good pants plain and simple. And if full-length isn't your style they also forge the X-Factor into the three-quarter-length Capris (\$79), which look too much like bloomers for my taste, and shorts (\$59). Whatever, I wish I'd never heard of Mocean Sport. I can't take it. This weekend I'm pulling on the pants and I'm not going to stop thrashing until there's nothing left. It's either them, or me.

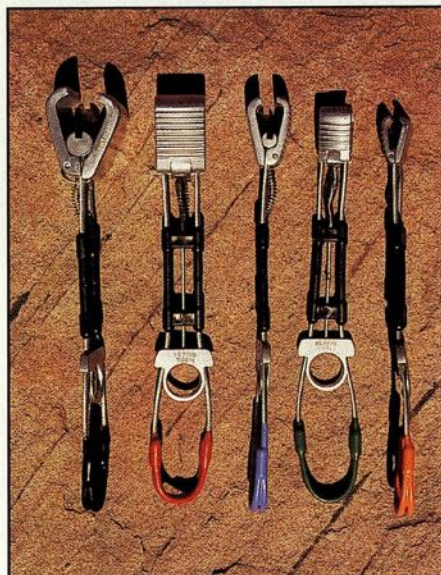
Mocean Sport (714) 646-1701

— Onan J. Goat

## New attitude

When they first appeared, wired nuts and camming units each revolutionized the way people climbed. Now, cams and nuts have reached an evolutionary plateau, and modification and fine tuning of design do little to change function or purpose. Perrin Nuts, while I doubt they'll shake up your climbing, take a new direction with protection by combining elements from these old standbys to create something different.

Simply put, the Perrin Nuts are an adjustable Stopper. They have a trigger, similar to cams, that slides the two sides of the nut over a center bar. The farther you retract the trigger, the smaller the nut gets. Release the trigger and a spring holds the Nut in place. Weight the nut, and the bar presses down into the nut,



**Perrin Nuts: adjustable Stopper-style protection that work well in some situations.**

causing it to expand, much like a cam.

The trigger action of the nut makes it quick and easy to place and remove, especially in horizontals, where you sometimes must blindly slot in the pro from the side, and those otherwise hard-to-protect pockets. Additionally, the broad expansion range lets one piece cover two to four sizes of regular wired nuts. (If you constantly grab the wrong sized nut, this is a big bonus.) Aid climbers will also find this feature a time saver.

Like traditional nuts, Perrin Nuts aren't secure in flares or parallel placements. They will, however, set solidly in cracks that don't taper enough to hold conventional nuts.

Weight and cost are the nuts biggest disadvantages. The Perrin Nuts weigh considerably more than wired nuts, and the larger ones are heavier than a camming unit of equal size. Each of the six sizes costs \$38.50 — a lot considering most of us would only use them to augment, not replace, a standard rack of nuts and cams.

Blackmoore Inc.

(406) 586-7295

— Mark Synnott

## Voo doo ya love

Brace yourself, this may come as a shock, but I must be frank: Five Ten and yours truly aren't exactly buds. We aren't pals. We aren't tight. In fact, I suspect they have a Duane doll stabbed full of pins, one right through the temples.

Well, something's giving me this migraine. If it's not a hoo-doo, then it's

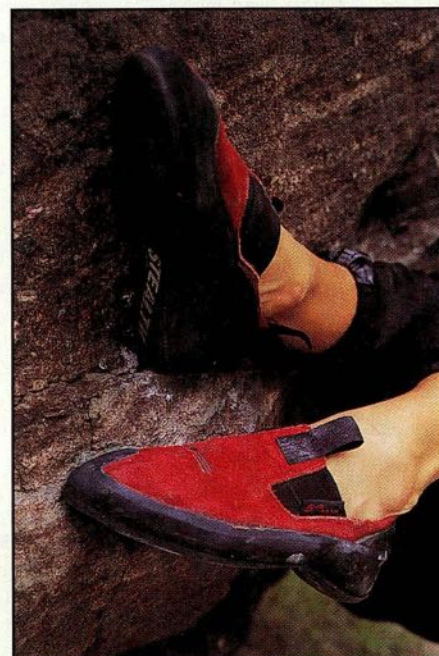
Five Ten's new Moccasym slipper — it's too good. I hate it. And at \$89 a pair, it's one of the best buys in a coon's age. Have they no mercy?

I was so hopeful, too. This slipper's abusive stepdad, the Anasazi Moccasin, wouldn't even stay on my feet. Ah soo, the recast version, the Moccasym, wraps and hugs snug as a proctologist's glove. And they don't just fit *my* dogs, which are so bent by rock shoes they've been mistaken for goat hooves. To check this, I loaned the slippers to my climbing partners. They also gave them the wagging thumb. So much for friends.

If I can't fault the Moccasym soon I'll wither like a salted slug. Too bad for me they don't suffer from a slipper's usual failings. A trio of finger tabs almost makes them easy to get into,

and the slippers don't fold on edges nor do they stretch into flip-flops, thanks to burly elastic bands and a quasi-slingshot rand that keep the fit tight as undersized briefs. All this, plus a few other technical do-dads, lets the Moccasym bear down on small creases with a precision hitherto unseen in a true slipper. Hiss hiss, they are sensitive too, not so paper-thin as the Boreal Ninja, but more like the calloused palms of a smithy.

Woe is me, Five Ten slapped copious amounts of hooking rubber in the work areas, like the instep and heel, and the slipper's elfin toe point coincides with the natural sweep of my deformed foot. Further, after a couple break-in sessions, the Moccasym is tolerable to keep on for long bouldering or indoor wall bouts, which is all you can ask.



**The 5.10 Moccasym: just another pretty slipper?**

You can also ask for perfection, but you won't get it. The Moccasym has their foibles. The front pull-on tab is too tight to accept a swollen dali log — I can get my palsied



pinky though there, but that's it — and the unlined leather uppers stain your feet blood red. That can't be good for you, can it?

Ahhh, that's better.

*Five Ten (909) 798-4222*

— DR

## It's about time

You're 30 feet above the bolt, moaning like Jimmy Swaggert in a cheap motel, grappling with the age-old question: Why me? Why me? The quivers start coming on, but you beat back that creature by zeroing in on the no-hands stance one slippery move higher. There's a flash of white spots, like when you stare at the sun, then you're there. You chill and unhorse the courage, your mighty Rawl drill.

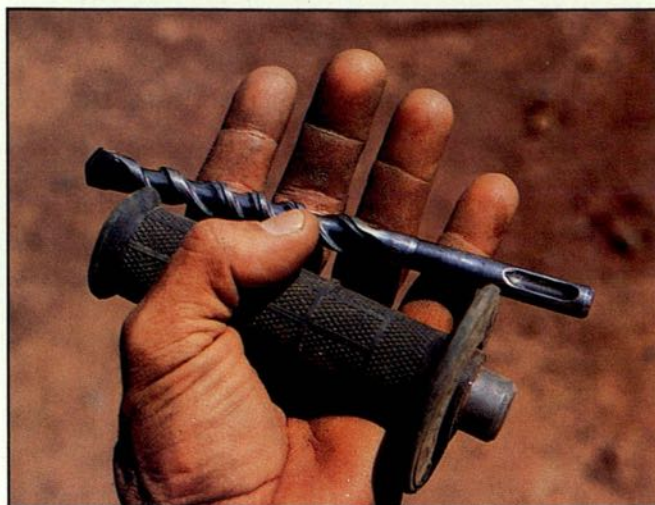
Tap. Tap. Twist. An inch of angst and you'll live, though you doubt you'll ever get off the sofa again. Tap. Tap. SNAP. An unholy, "Noooo" resounds off the old rock. The bit has broken.

Now you're in a *real* pickle: Rawl, Five Ten, and Dakota, makers of percussion drill bits and holders, have all forsaken the dirty trade. And that was your last bit. What do you do?

Dance, you heathen beggar. Pika Mountaineering just came out with a Rock Drill system that not only fills those empty work boots, but grabs hand drilling by its hairy back and jerks it into modern day.

The bit is the key. For that piece, Joshua Blumental, Pika's headman, shrewdly selected the carbide-tipped SDS bits, just like the ones you stick in Hilti and Bosch power drills. Besides being cheap and available in most any diameter at Jim-Bob's hardware or from Pika in the 1/4-, 3/8-, and 1/2-inch varieties, you'd have to clamp one of these bits in a vise and bash it with a four-pound sledge to break it.

The carbide tip is tougher still. A fresh bit will drill a life-



The Pika Rock Drill fills the hand-drill void of recent times.

sentence of sandstone and enough granite to give you carpal tunnel syndrome. (Note: stock SDS bits aren't sharp enough for hand drilling. Before you use one in the Pika holder either touch it up yourself with a bench grinder or get the bit from Pika, who puts an edge on it so keen you can remove cataracts.)

The other part of the package is the Pika holder, an impact-steel bar that can take a licking and comes equipped with a luxurious rubber grip straight off a moped. Not that you'll ever need to, but changing bits is as simple as turning a set screw — no more paa zing, as the drift pin sends your precious bit pinging down the wall.

The Pika holder costs \$58; bits are \$14 to \$20.

*Pika Mountaineering (801) 595-0362*

— Bill Lee

## Rubbin' shoulders

That second night in slings under the Great Roof — when I started yearning for my partner Franz's crouched stance in the haul bag — sealed it. Next time I'm scratching the harmonica and a liter of water from the list and substituting a hammock. But in this cushy portaledge era, can you still get one?

Yup. The classic Forrest

Wall Womb has been discontinued quite a while now, but there's a remake on the market. Based on the Forrest design, the Mountain Tools Womb With a View is a single-point suspension hammock constructed from beefy 500-denier nylon.

Hammocks ... merely retro? Perhaps. If the approach is short and the wall long and sheer, better to beg, borrow, or steal a real portaledge.

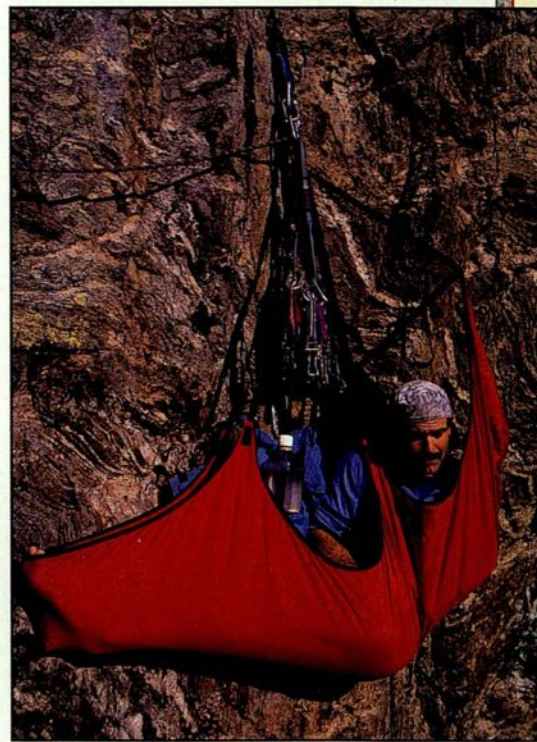
Yet the Womb has its place. At 90 bucks, it's cheap — less than a fourth the cost of a portaledge. It's light (30 ounces) and compact (smaller than a portaledge fly), the perfect specs for threading through the poison ivy jungles of the Black Canyon or the manzanita of Half Dome. And for popular excursions like the *Nose*, it sure beats squeezing in next to

the other two parties on Camp Five.

For heavy-metal duty the Womb is the perfect belay seat. Cinch up the shoulder straps and you've got a veritable Laz-y-Boy from which to assail your partner with appropriate epithets on those six-hour A4+ pitches — between naps, that is.

The Womb's greatest lack is a fly. If you've got a ledge, no problem — just use the fly off that. Otherwise, you'll have to make your own.

Shoulder scrunch is a hammock bivi synonym, and the Womb is no exception. The webbing-mounted spreader bar helps, but would work better if it rode down closer to the shoulders (fabric tabs keep it at least a foot higher). But the Womb is what it is. Mountain Tools' Larry Arthur says they



The Mountain Tools Womb With a View: merely retro or a high-tech hammock?

have no plans to change it or make a fly. It's simple, inexpensive, sells well, and works.

*Mountain Tools (408) 393-1000*

— Jeff Achey



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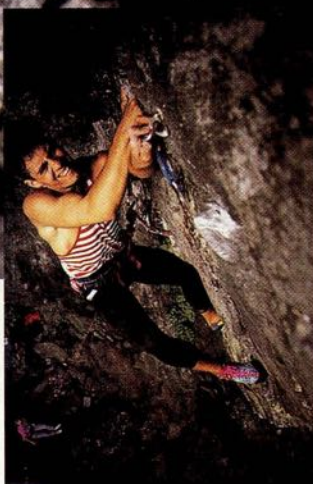
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(continued from page 134)

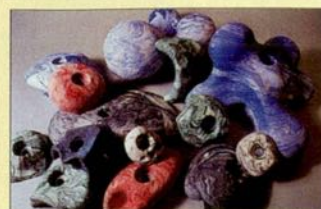
year's cream are the Bloodlines and the Nicros KS Series. Both types grip more like natural holds and aren't always obvious to read, so they are ideal for route setting.

**Footholds.** Once you get a move or two up a wall, your lower handholds usually become the footholds. You still, though, want a smattering of small holds that don't hack it for your hands, but are technical for your feet. Micros like these run between \$1 and \$5 each, and Straight Up offers the best deal — their 50 pack of Footsies retails for \$49.50. Other good, affordable footholds are Petrogrip's Granite Micros, 1/4- to 1/2-inch-thick granite chips that sell for \$3.25 each, but don't buff out like their plastic counterparts.

**Aesthetics.** Which would you rather grab, holds with the sumptuous lines of Elle McPherson (or, ladies, Fabio) or ones that could pass for Fido's proud creation? It may only be looks, but feed your head with holds that have a nice finish and pleasing shapes. These holds will get you riled up, and keep you redlining when the February blues set in. As a check, the editors here set panels with a mix of holds, and then noted the ones that got used. Sure enough, the most gripped holds were the artistic designs in the Nicros, Metolius, Climb It, and Straight Up sets. The least grabbed holds were the sinfully ugly ones, usually made from ceramic and real rock.

**Material.** Plastic is king. These holds, cast from a mixture of polyester resin and sand, are the most interesting and, because they pop out of molds, you can order specific models, or replace one that's broken or polished. But *variety* is why plastic holds really dominate. Plastic holds come in limitless thicknesses from full-on basketballs to thin as cardboard, and in any shape you can conceive. Their negative aspects are that they are the most expensive, eventually buff out, and the resin mix in its liquid form will curl the brain — just the occasional whiff of a handful of uncured test holds was enough to blacken my spine. I hate to think what it must be like in the resin sweatshops.

Ceramic and real rock, the other two popular mediums, have more limited shapes, usually a variation of the knob or edge, but are environment friendly and generally don't polish as fast. Four companies use the Real McCoy, rock, but Petrogrips has the most comprehensive selection, with granite-chip footholds, mushroom roof jugs, limestone pockets, granite chunks, sandstone cobbles, and so on. Not bad for rock. Especially good are the Carved Limestone holds. For these, Jim Bower of Petrogrips takes natural bits of limestone, shapes them on a grinding wheel, then gives them



### Nicros/Kurt Smith Series

60 grey plastic holds

10 for \$60

Our favorite technical holds; good value; flat-profile, so they are tricky for your feet; aesthetic; free-form edges, sidepulls, shallow pockets, and foot smears; the more positive holds are excellent on 10- to 45-degree overhanging walls; the less positive ones are best on vertical to just beyond vertical; beginners will find them more difficult than a standard hold set; the medium-size holds are good matches; climbers with thick fingers won't get full penetration on some of the incut edges; available in two textures: fine and smooth/medium.

### Nicros/Doug Englekirk Series

30 red plastic holds

10 for \$50

Medium-size holds aren't as positive as you're probably used to; aesthetic; straightforward; rounded; heavy on the slopers, but also has a concentration of horns and pockets; very comfortable; good for power training; work well on walls vertical to 20-degrees overhanging; available in two textures: fine and smooth/medium.

### Nicros/Roof Sets

20 blue plastic holds

10 for \$129

Comprehensive set of jugs on par with the Metolius SF Macros and Mondos; very aesthetic; generous grips for woodies and horizontals; assorted full-hand incuts, wrap knobs, bowls, towel racks, grape clusters, etc.; extremely comfortable; work well for warming up, dynos, and matching; available in two textures: fine and smooth/medium.

### Nicros/Micros

10 gray plastic holds

5 for \$19

Minuscule slopers and crimpers; typical hold has one flat edge with the remaining sides sloping flush to the wall; we recommend you use them as footholds, or for technical, vertical problems; coarse texture smears well.

### Nicros/Sets A and B

40 green or brown plastic holds

20 for \$130

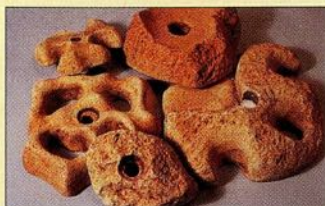
Interesting free-form designs; medium size; aesthetic; positive assortment that's generally incut for 10-degrees overhanging to woodies; edges are thinner than most, so pain level is higher than with the other Nicros holds; good variety, but don't expect jugs or footholds; numerous matching holds; available in two textures: fine and smooth/medium.

an acid washes to clean them up and smooth the edges. The results are amazing — some people have a hard time believing they are real rock — and rival the best plastic holds for texture and design. Get a whole box of these incuts for your woodie, they're a steal at \$5 each.

Everyone also raved over the Geologies, stunning knobs and edges of assorted gray/pink granite and sandstone. These stones are aesthetically pleasing, so much so that you hate to mank them up. But you do, and then you find that they are extremely kind to the skin, suiting them to repetitive training problems. The granite river cobbles are slick, forcing you to squeeze or press them harder than you'd sometimes like.

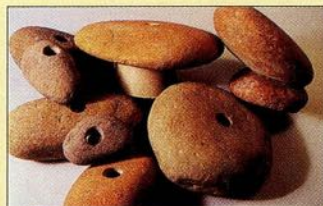
The Lime Stones and Geckular rock holds were most avoided, save for skipping across the pond. Lime Stones proved





#### Out There

**30 mold-pressed ceramic holds** 10 for \$45  
Environment friendly; no two are alike; aesthetics vary from good to poor; asymmetrical shapes make them the most interesting ceramic modulars; technical enough for all angles, but are best on 10- to 20-degree overhanging walls; no real jugs or footholds; usually comfortable, but the roof pocket is sharp; texture varies from smooth to medium; chalk up and wear well; good for variety.



#### Petrogrips

**Unlimited number of natural holds** \$3.25 for a foothold to \$8.75 for large jug  
Environment friendly; most comprehensive selection of rock holds; aesthetics vary — the Beach Pockets and Carved Limestone are excellent, while the granite jugs and buckets are only fair; some interesting holds, but most are straightforward; we recommend the granite Micros for durable footholds, and the sandstone Bots, Comps, and Power Grips for overhangs of all angles; generally comfortable; texture varies; cold in winter.



#### Rad Holds/Ergons

**24 cow-print plastic holds** 6 for \$24 to \$42  
Low-profile, rounded holds; heavy on the slopers; average aesthetics; best on 10- to 20-degree overhanging walls, but also can be rotated to difficult positions on vertical walls; typically symmetrical, straight-on grabs; very comfortable; good for power training; Rad Hold's new texture is less aggressive than the old.

redundantly blocky and, when used as footholds, took on a sheen just like your favorite Rifle routes. The Geckular shale edges broke in two, and many of their larger holds don't have a flat side, so you wind up gripping them all similarly by pressing your tip meat in the crack between the hold and wall. A second batch of upgraded Geckulars arrived at presstime. These do have a flat side, albeit crudely done, but are still bush league.

The texture of rock holds hinges, just as you'd expect, on the type of rock they are hewn from, for better or worse. Granite holds feel like granite, and limestone lime-

stone. You get the picture. Traits they all do share are low cost and low temperature. In the summer the stone's natural coolness is a pleasure to hot abraded skin, but in winter the rocks take on a death chill, something people with circulation problems can't tolerate.

Ceramic holds feel and wear like rock, and, because clay is malleable, you could potentially mold it into any shape you desire. But as yet no company has fully capitalized on these benefits. The ceramic holds herein are mostly hand-patted versions of the lump, visually bleak, too thick to be technical footholds, and the scant

holds that will work on a woodie are too thin-lipped to grab twice.

They aren't all bad. The full-hand slopers from Out There are nice, tricky holds, and the texture on the Gripheads makes you wish they'd overhaul their chunky shapes and toss in a load that would work on steeper walls. Terra Rocks is on the right track: their ceramic modulars have a comfortable, positive stippling that chalks well, and the hold forms are reasonably clean. But, again, the variety is limited and few of the holds work on overhanging ramps.

**Breakage.** Drop any hold far enough and it will either break, or kill someone. So

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Ultima Thule (Ul ti ma Thoole) 1. The most distant goal of human endeavor.  
2. Land remote beyond reckoning. 3. Any far-off, unknown region. (Webster's).

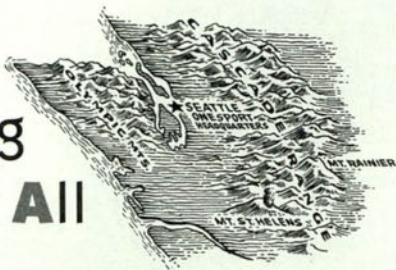
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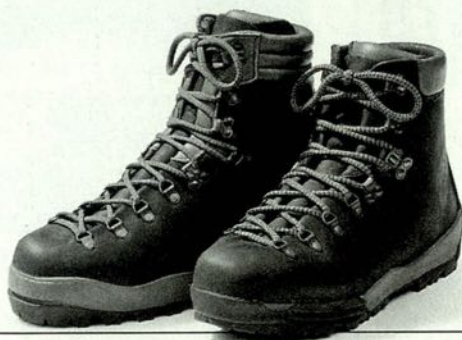
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### Straight Up/Los Diablos Sport Holds

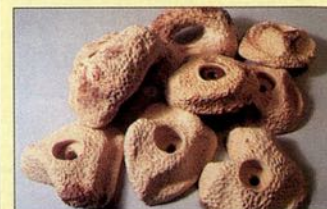
**95 plastic holds of assorted Milano colors 15 for \$95**  
Good value, basic holds; nothing fancy, but are aesthetic; symmetrical; mostly medium size; ergonomic designs that are heavy on the slopers; good training holds; best on walls 20-degrees overhanging; comfortable; good, positive texture.

### Straight Up/Teamline

**10 new plastic holds each month 7 for \$36**  
Must subscribe to hold-of-the-month club — membership is \$19 to \$41 a month, depending on how many holds you want; holds are designed by a "guest shaper," so design and size varies; in any event, holds are artsy and usually comfortable; the pack we tried included overhanging slopers, standard medium holds, and a couple bomber jugs; positive texture doesn't eat up your hands, but texture varies.

### Straight Up/Footsies

**200 plastic holds of assorted colors 50 for \$50**  
Good buy; small footholds that work well on vertical to 20-degree overhanging walls; the more positive ones also function as desperate handholds on vertical to just over vertical walls; available only to Straight Up Team Members; aggressive texture for smearing.



### Terra-Rock

**Unlimited number of ceramic holds 12 for \$50**  
Environmentally friendly; hand formed, so no two are alike; best aesthetics of the ceramic holds, but still aren't as refined as the better plastic ones; interesting designs; can make to order, but standard pack is largely flat to incut medium-size edges; no real jugs or footholds; comfortable, rounded shapes; texture chalks well and is positive without being abrasive; good for variety.



### Vertical Concepts/Vishnue Holds

**20 models of gray plastic holds \$95 for 20**  
Excellent value for small jugs; good aesthetics; medium-size, very positive holds; mostly incuts and wraps; best for woodie angles, or for warming up on lesser angled walls; good for lock-off and endurance training; comfortable; straightforward, yet still interesting grips; VC's new texture is nice — positive, yet not rough.

### Vertical Concepts/Micro SI's

**20 models of brown plastic holds \$75 for 20**  
Good value; small, technical holds; fingery devils — the more incut ones work on woodie angles, the less positive ones are ideal for 10- to 20-degree overhanging; good for power training; difficult footholds when oriented as underclings or sidepulls; crimpy, but then they are crimpers; positive texture isn't too rough.

# WILD THINGS

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be it. What isn't right is when a hold snaps in half just by pulling on it. If you don't grate your knuckles across the remnant shard or bolt, the unexpected explosion will send you reeling right onto your wrist.

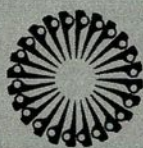
Obligingly, few holds break, and the ones that do typically crack when you tighten them down — a good reason to go easy with the wrench. Problem holds are the wafer-thin plastic jobs, ceramic (these usually come with a cushioning rubber or leather washer), rock holds made from thin bits of shale or without a flat side, like some of the Geckulars, and regular plastic holds with warped mounting surfaces that prevent the holds from drawing up flat, a malformity that is readily evident.

Getting set. And that folks, is where Bill's dreadful notes stopped. There were a couple of lines about an assault rifle and clear field of fire, then zippo. Blank crumpled paper. That being that, I'll take it upon myself to compile a list of top picks, the holds that, given a choice and a jar full of crisp 100s, our people — the editors and the myriad of visiting climbers who tried the holds — would buy.

For Herculean power training on overhanging walls and technical pimping, the Climb It Bloodlines and Nicros KS Series are unbeatable and cush. You'll find the best slopers in Climb It's Jim Karn Monsters. Favored jugs are the Metolius SF Mondos, Nicros Roofs, and the affordable Vertical Concepts Vishnues. The best assorted medium holds are the Metolius SF Modulares, Nicros sets A and B, the real things from Geologics and the Petrogrips Carved Limestone, Rad Holds Ergons, and Straight Up Diablos. And last, the good, technical footholds are the Straight Up Footsies and Petrogrips Granite Micros.

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# TECHNIQUE

## Rappin'

The art of gettin' off

by Jeff Achey

The beam of my headlamp illuminated the dangling ends of the ropes, then vanished into the gloom. I could just touch the red dirt walls with my tiptoes. There were no anchors in sight. My bolt kit was at home, and I wished I'd risked losing a rope in the Kingfisher's second-pitch chimney instead of rappelling into terra incognita on the opposite side. The weight of the haulbag tugged at my harness with an unnerving persistence, and I knew, once again, I'd gotten myself into a Rappel Epic.

It happens to all of us. Rappelling is dangerous in the best conditions, and when things go wrong on a climb — bad weather, exhaustion, injury, darkness, getting off route — what do we often do? Start rappelling. No wonder it's statistically the worst killer in the sport. In the name of survival, and for general peace of mind, here's a once through on the finer points of gettin' off.

### Anchors

Your nerves are fried, but you're alive. You've just bailed off the *Air Voyage* in the Black Canyon — 10 long, terrifying raps and you're finally safe in the poison ivy forest. All 10 single-point anchors held — even that funky wired Stopper. Six hours later, back on the rim with a beer in your hand, you've forgotten your stark fear as you lowered away from each anchor, the river roaring below. You never even knew that Stopper shifted when you dropped over a roof 500 feet up. If you had bothered to calculate how much you saved by not doubling every station, you would know it comes to \$60. You might spend that on sedatives alone if you really knew the risks you took.

Every time I set up a rappel I fight the miser in me that devises ways I could save the amount of money I squander almost

daily on cinnamon rolls, stupid souvenir mugs, or an extra game of bowling. One instead of two rap rings. A jammed knot instead of a nut. Bleached, recycled webbing instead of a new runner. Be smart. Banish the demon. Conserve the gear you think you might need lower, but don't voluntarily rappel off lame anchors.

When setting anchors, minimize unwanted forces and double everything. Avoid the so-called "American triangle," a thread-everything arrangement that produces a mechanical disadvantage, multiplying the forces on each anchor. Run separate slings from at least two reliable anchors to a single rappel point. Adjust the slings so each anchor bears the same load. (Figure 1.)

For marginal anchors, you can completely equalize the forces on each by using the "sliding X" (Figure 2). Thread a length of rope or webbing through the two points you want to equalize, and drape the sling into a two-stranded U that crosses in the middle, then clip a couple of carabiners or thread lap links through the X. (Make sure you have actually clipped through the sling, and not just over it.) When you weight the biners, the X-shaped twist will slide until it stresses both anchors equally. Bear in mind that although the anchor points are equalized, if one fails, the second will be shock-loaded as the X slides to the end of the webbing. Also, if this single piece of webbing fails, the anchor fails. Back it up.

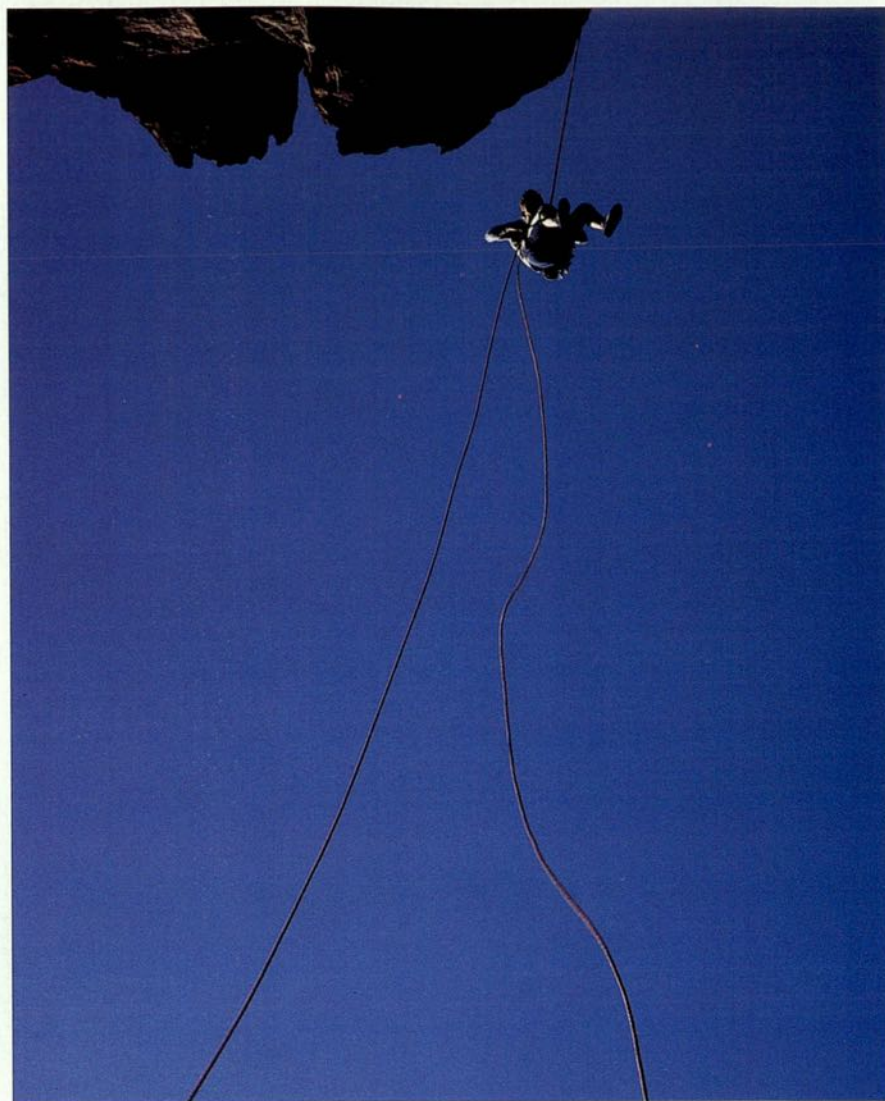
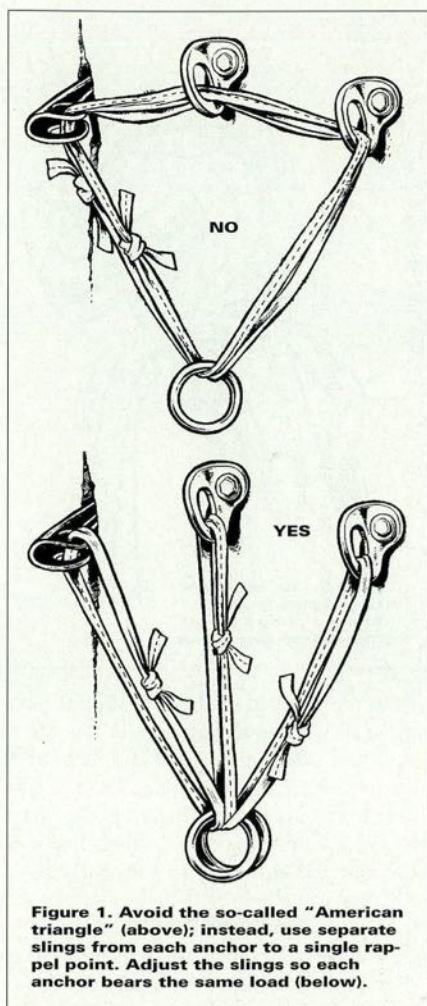


Photo: Jeff Achey

Rappelling can be the most dangerous part of a climb. Would you know how to get down if you dropped your rappel device?





**Figure 1.** Avoid the so-called "American triangle" (above); instead, use separate slings from each anchor to a single rapel point. Adjust the slings so each anchor bears the same load (below).

On all routes where you might rappel, carry a basic rappel kit to suit the climbing area: 20-30 feet of webbing (1/2-inch Supertape is strong, relatively compact, and threads more easily than 1-inch tubular), a knife, descending rings. A basic bolt kit, hammer, and a few pitons are important in some areas. Though my high-tech friends scoff, I make sure my climbing rack includes Hexentrics and other nuts — it's lighter, and I can avoid having to rappel off \$50 camming units.

For all rappel stations, minimize visual and environmental impact. Use rock-colored webbing — tans or grays for Yosemite granite, maroons, oranges, or blacks for Canyonlands sandstone, etc. Consider using drilled anchors rather than traumatizing trees or employing long, ugly lengths of webbing to tie off boulders. For permanent rap stations, consider threadable, rock-colored bolt hangers, like the ones from Metolius, or *short* lengths of painted chain.

#### Techniques and devices

Some rappel techniques allow you to smoke to the bottom of a 300-foot line in 6 seconds, and carry and fire an M-16 in the process. We'll skip those and focus on what climbers can use. Most climbers

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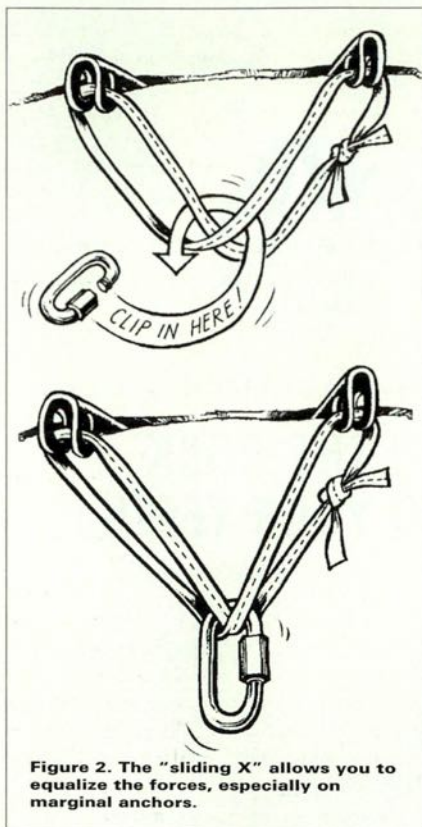


Figure 2. The "sliding X" allows you to equalize the forces, especially on marginal anchors.

know the standard Figure 8, Tuber, or ATC rappel devices. We'll skip those, too, and cover the more unusual methods.

**The Dulfersitz.** Everyone should know how to descend a rope with no gear. You won't use the Dulfersitz much — it's painful, and realistic only on less-than-vertical terrain, but it works. Face the anchor, straddle the rope, bring the tail end around your right hip, over your left shoulder, and into your right (braking) hand (Figure 3). No speed rappelling with this technique.



Figure 3. The good ole Dulfersitz will do on less-than-vertical terrain, but prepare to suffer.

**Munter hitch.** If you've got a harness and a couple carabiners, forget the Dulfers. With two biners, or one locking biner, you can rappel using the Munter hitch. Make two bights in the rappel ropes (as if you were tying a clove hitch), then fold one over the other. Clip the loops through the carabiner(s) on your harness (Figure 4); lock the gate, or reverse one of the non-locking biners. The Munter hitch kinks your rope, but it works when you've forgotten or dropped your rappel device, and provides plenty of friction. Larger, HMS-style carabiners work best, but in a pinch you can get two standard ovals to perform, even with double 11mm ropes.

**Carabiner brake.** Have you ever been 1000 feet off the talus and suddenly seized



Figure 4. The simple Munter-hitch rappel works well in pinch.

by fear as you contemplate the one carabiner and cast-aluminum gizmo that separate you from eternity? If you learned to climb on the adage: never trust your life to one piece of gear, try the old-fashioned carabiner rappel (Figure 5). It generally takes six carabiners. Clip two biners to your harness, and reverse the gates. These are "spacers" so the ropes won't rub your harness — you can eliminate them if you're short on carabiners. Clip on two oval carabiners (Ds or modified Ds will work in a pinch, but are harder to set up and undo). Pull the bights of rope through these, and clip two more biners across this pair, under the bights, so the ropes run across the carabiner spines. Use a third cross-biner for more friction, but never use just one for less friction. If any one carabiner fails, you're still OK. As you descend, you'll notice this set-up kinks the rope less than other methods.

For carabiner brakes or rappel devices, if you need to add friction mid-rappel,

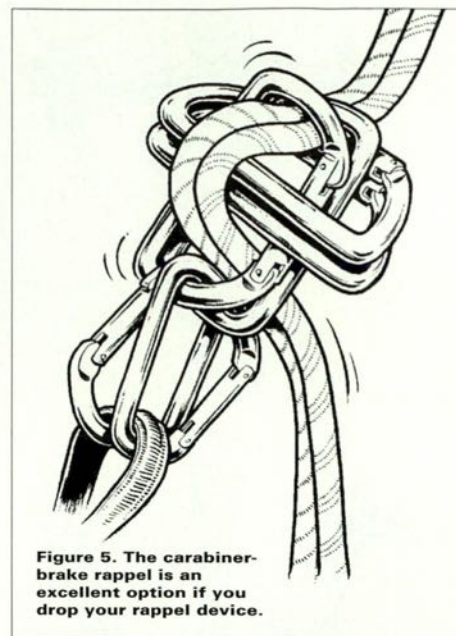


Figure 5. The carabiner-brake rappel is an excellent option if you drop your rappel device.

wrap the free end of the rope around your leg; two wraps and you should be able to stop and free both hands. If you need to do anything fancy, like make a big pendulum or set an anchor, back up the wraps by tying an overhand loop in each side of the rope and clip them to your harness.

### Retrieving the rope

"Rappel" is French for retrieve, and as this translation hints, the tough part is not just getting down, but getting your ropes down. You know the basic principle: lower down on a doubled rope, then pull one end to retrieve it. Trouble is, sometimes it won't pull, even with you and your partner taking tandem running bungee jumps onto the end. The second common problem is the rope that pulls fine, then jams as it falls. As with most problems, the key is prevention. First, jammed ropes.

To keep a rope from jamming as it falls, position the anchor carefully. When rappelling crack systems, especially flared cracks or wide ones with constrictions, rubble, or chockstones, try to keep rappel anchors well outside the crack. Sometimes it helps to remove chockstones, or jam nuts, webbing, or a bandanna in a crack that looks determined to eat your rope. Sophisticated anchor positioning or subtle wrist-snaps when pulling can sometimes give a rope just the right trajectory to jump clear of obstacles. Use every possible trick, but regardless, think pure, respectful thoughts whenever you pull a rope.

**Pulling problems.** Rope stretch can lead to several pulling problems. Long rappels are often hard to pull because 165 feet of rope absorbs most of your pulling energy before it reaches the anchor, especially if the rope runs over rock in



between. When in doubt, split a long rap-  
pel into two. Also, thin ropes stretch more  
than thick ropes, so when rappelling on dif-  
ferent diameter ropes, thread the thin one  
so you can pull the thick one. Also, this  
way you recover your lead rope first.  
Alternatively, use a static haul/rappel line.

Watch for friction. The first place to  
worry about is the threading point. Rope  
and webbing can grip ropes, and pulling a  
rope through webbing (even the shifting  
of a rope during a rappel) will burn it,  
weakening the anchor for the next party  
down. Always use metal links at the  
threading point of rappel anchors. My  
favorites are 1/4- to 3/8-inch lap links  
pounded mostly shut, with enough space  
left that you can thread them onto web-  
bing (Figure 6). They're inexpensive, so  
you won't mind leaving two. Carabiners  
also work well, and allow you to clip your  
rope through, rather than thread, the  
anchor (remember to reverse the gates).

The second common friction point is  
the first 10 feet or so of the rappel. If the  
rap starts from anything other than a  
hanging station, there's probably a ledge  
the rope will run over. Minimize the run  
angle by drilling bolts or placing gear well  
above the ledge. Alternatively, extend the  
anchor with slings so the rope hangs  
entirely below the ledge.

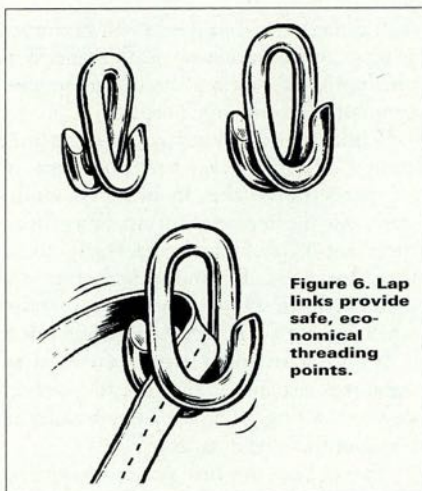


Figure 6. Lap  
links provide  
safe, eco-  
nomical  
threading  
points.

A third friction problem is the knot.  
Slide the rope through the anchor until  
the knot is below the ledge. It may be  
advantageous to rappel to an intermediate  
stance, then pull the knot past a series of  
obstructions. (Remember, your rope ends  
will then be uneven, and your potential  
rappel distance shorter.) Also, tie a low-  
profile knot, like the double fisherman's.  
For multiple rappels, consider protecting  
the sheath of your rope by taping over the  
knot with athletic or duct tape — that  
way you won't have to keep whittling  
away the last two feet of your rope.

Avoid twists. After the second person  
rappels, the rope should run cleanly to the  
anchor; pass a kinky cornrow through  
your rappel device and you may never get  
down. Don't count on untwisting from  
below. As you rappel, keep the strands  
apart and unwind them by hand.

### Tricks and general troubleshooting

Remember, during a rappel, you aren't  
tied into the rope. This means you need  
to make sure you don't detach from it dur-  
ing the rappel, or detach from the cliff  
between rappels. Rappelling off the end of  
a rope is the leading cause of rappelling  
deaths. Tie bulky knots in the ends of  
your ropes on any rappel that doesn't  
reach the ground — these will, hopefully,  
jam in your rappel set-up if you lose con-  
trol on the descent. (Make sure you  
remember to untie them before you pull  
the ropes.) Some climbers fashion a self  
belay by wrapping prusik knots around  
each rope and sliding them down as they  
rappel. In any case, have a sling with you  
that will work as a prusik in case you need  
to unweight the rappel set-up, if, say, it  
sucks in a clump of hair or a nipple.

Before you begin a multi-rappel  
descent, girth-hitch to your harness a  
couple of daisy chains to clip in to rappel-  
station anchors. Always clip in, and make

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your tethers long enough so you can move around. Avoid the classic death scenario of unclipping to walk out on a ledge to yard gymnastically on a stuck rope.

Wind can send your ropes whipping around a desert tower to snag hopelessly on an inaccessible flake. In blustery conditions, pile the loose ends of the ropes into a rope bag or pack and rappel with them thus contained, feeding out rope as you descend. You'll still have to let them fly free when you pull — wait for a lull and pray.

When scouting rappel routes into unknown terrain, sending the first person down on a single strand makes it easier to reascend the rope if necessary.

Always have the first person down test the rappel set-up for ease of pull, and deal with the problem *before* the last person leaves the station. Lengthen slings, adjust knot position, add carabiners, etc. Make a little mantra to remind yourself which end to pull. Once down, never let go of either rope end until you know the ropes will pull — you'll need both ends to reascend the rope safely. Running the rising strand through a carabiner at your station will keep track of it as long as possible.

If you and your partner have both made a rappel, and the ropes won't pull, you're on your way to a Rappel Epic. Before you despair, follow a few basic guidelines. First, make sure you're not pulling the wrong end — if you are, you'll feel stupid, but relieved. Next, flip a "wave" up one rope while pulling the other — this sometimes reduces the friction over rock bulges. Try sliding the ropes back to get a "running start" on the pull. This may work if the knot is catching on an edge. Next, jumars can help. They'll allow you to put your full weight on the rope, pre-stretch it, and bounce (make sure you're anchored); hang a haul bag on a jumar for extra force. If you're lucky enough to be on the ground when your rappel sticks, walk as far out from the wall as you can to pull. This keeps the pulling strand free from friction over the rock. You can sometimes use variations of this technique while still on the wall, using ledges, etc.

No method of reascending a double rappel rope is good. You can anchor one and ascend the other but be prepared for sudden bursts of slack as the rope gives. If it's impractical to anchor an end, two prusik knots, each circling both ropes, will work better than an ascender on each rope. Tie in to both ropes every 30 feet or so as you ascend.

Worse than a rope that won't pull is a rope that jams above you after it has fallen. Pull as hard as you can, and watch for any rock you might pull off if it does come free. If it doesn't, *don't* jumar up it. Take a quiet moment to feel sorry for yourself, then suck

it up and relead back up to the jam. In cases where ascent isn't feasible, your options are limited. Consider cutting the rope and making short rappels with what you salvaged.

## Rappelling with a haul bag

You're at Dolt Tower on the *Nose*, and — never mind why — you're going down. The stations are fixed, so no problem there, but ... the Pig. Hauling it was hell, and you know if you kick it off you'll trash all your gear, and spend a month sharing a jail cell with some Yosemite pedophile/coke dealer. So you're gonna rap with it. Here are a few tips.

Send your buddy down first with just light gear — extra webbing, jumars, a rack of nuts. A few of those rappels are quite diagonal. With the Pig, you're not budging three feet out of the fall line without help, but he'll pendulum over just fine. When it's your turn, put the Pig on rappel, attaching your braking device to the haul loops as if the Pig was going to grow arms and lower itself down. Then, tether in to the bag (to the rappel biner, or some other



Figure 7.  
Ridin' the  
Pig.

bombproof spot) with enough slack to move around, but not so much that any part of the rappel set-up is out of reach (Figure 7). Down you go, unencumbered, riding the Pig. If it's raining, the system is even better: the roostertail off the wet ropes will pour onto the bag, not into your pants. Your partner can reel you in to the station when necessary; daisy the bag off, and repeat until you're on the ground.

## Rapping on ice

You can rappel from \$40 ice screws, but since ice is plastic, there are more cost-efficient anchors. Perhaps the best are tied-off ice tunnels. Drive and remove two ice screws, angling the holes so they meet at the



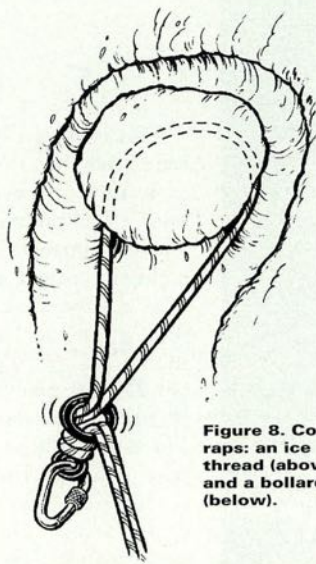
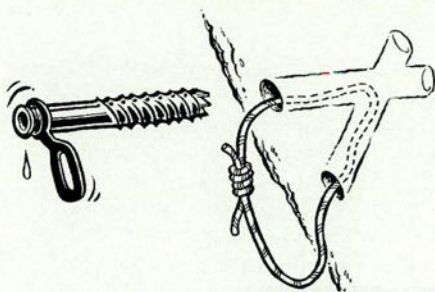


Figure 8. Cold raps: an ice thread (above), and a bollard (below).

back. Poke a length of rope or stiff webbing through one end and out the other. To help grab the end, carry a hooked wire or grappler (see Quick Clips No. 144). Make sure the tunnel is deep enough that it doesn't blow out under load. Slings or passing the rope behind a column or thick icicle also works. Ice climbers tend to be rash, but that doesn't mean you have to be: two threaded tunnels or icicles are the minimum for a safe anchor. (See Figure 8.)

Another ice anchor is the bollard, which works better than tunnels in softer, alpine ice or neve. Chop a trough to form a good-sized horn over which you can drape a sling or the rope. Depending upon the firmness of the ice, make your bollards one to three feet around. If you do loop the rope directly onto a bollard, you run the risk of having it freeze in place.

Well, what of the Kingfisher? Fortunately, I had a third rope, and, after some gymnastics, got the haulbag tied off and lowered it on a Munter hitch down into the blackness until it rested on something, presumably the ground. I wrapped a 7mm prusik around the ropes, got my weight off the rappel, then tied my daisy chains into the very ends of the ropes, allowing me to reach some dirt ledges, which, after more shenanigans, I traversed to safe ground. Another Rappel Epic survived, another mistake added to the To Avoid list. Happy rappin'!

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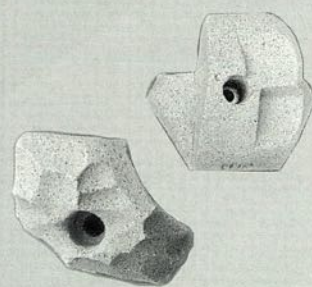


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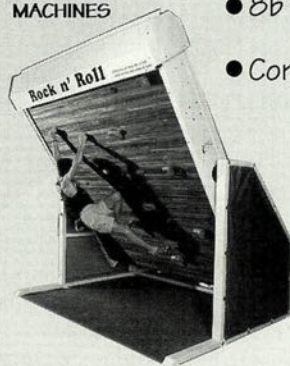
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# MEDICINE

## Tossin' and Turnin'

How sleep loss affects your climbing

by Gary Legwold

It was the night before Mount Rainier — the biggest climb of my life at the time. I should have been sleeping, but I wasn't. I was doing time in the men's restroom. I was obeying the incessant beckoning of my bladder and bowels, reading the graffiti on the gray stall dividers. Everything but sleep. A flatlander and a middle-aged climber-come-lately, I was scared.

About 2 a.m., Chuck came in. A physician, an experienced mountaineer, and leader of our group, he immediately saw I was a wreck. "Get some sleep," he said.

I never thought of that, Chuck, I thought to myself. You think I like lingering in public restrooms wearing only my skivvies? I went back to bed, only to find that the more I tried to sleep, the worse it got. How was I going to get up that mountain?

### Physical effects

We all have our sleepless-near-Seattle stories and may have wondered how losing sleep affects our climbing. Scientists, often supported by the military, have researched sleep loss and performance and — with a few important qualifiers — have come up with this basic message: rest easy. If you sleep well normally but not the night before a big climb, you may feel lousy and be slower mentally, but physically, unless you've endured about 60 hours of sleeplessness, you will still be up to speed.

Sleep is the body's, and especially the brain's, request for R&R. The brain has been vigilant in the waking hours, dispatching millions of impulses to monitor and control the wide variety of bodily functions. During sleep the brain is

allowed to shut down, and, except in the dream stages, the brain and body are running on autopilot. Brain waves flatten and broaden, muscles lose their tone, blood pressure drops, pulse decreases, and the basal metabolic rate falls 10 to 20 percent.

When the body and brain are deprived of this break, the body can be forgiving, but the mind is another matter. In a 1988 study, performed by J. David Symons, Ph.D., 11 men were deprived of sleep for 60 hours, and then tested on bench presses and leg extensions to measure both maximum strength and endurance in the upper and lower body. The study checked blood lactate accumulation during bicycle ergometer testing (to measure fatigue), simple reaction times, heart rates, and oxygen consumed in treadmill running at an intense 70 to 80 percent of maximum aerobic capacity, similar to the energy expended while hiking at altitude. When the results from these tests were compared to results of the same tests given when the subjects had seven hours of sleep, Symons found no significant differences.

Although other studies show conflicting results, the consensus seems to be that the body can take a hit of one or perhaps two nights of sleeplessness and still function normally, or nearly so, both aerobically and anaerobically.

factor, and all systems kick in. The problem may be that the novelty wears off with repeated stimuli."

### Mental edge

Martin agrees with Symons that most physiological effects of a night or two of sleeplessness are minimal. Although one of his studies showed an 11 percent decrease in exercise time to exhaustion when the subjects went for 36 hours without sleep, he says it was because the novelty of exercising in the lab wore off quickly for his subjects and that the sleep loss did affect their mental capacity.

Martin believes the brain needs sleep or things start going kaput. Many sleep studies show that a loss of sleep can cause a 10 percent rise in ratings of perceived exertion, which indicates how hard you *think* you are working while exercising. Although this may be a matter of a self-fulfilling prophecy — you're miserable and perform poorly because you think you will — it is real, according to Symons.

Robert Angus, Ph.D., worked with Symons on the psychological aspects of sleep loss. "People are concerned so much about the physical aspects of sleep loss, but they should be more concerned about the cognitive aspects — perceptions, decision making, that sort of thing," says Angus.



You've got the heebee jeebees, you can't sleep, and you've got a brutal day ahead. But will it really affect your performance?

Photo: Kennan Harvey



Angus has done a series of studies on military personnel who are deprived of sleep and then required to do tasks involving decoding, continuing subtraction, logical reasoning, and multiple message processing. His results show that after the first 18 hours of sleep loss, there is a 20 to 25 percent drop in many cognitive measures. After this initial drop, test scores don't fluctuate until 42 hours of sleeplessness, when there is another 20 to 25 percent drop. So, after about two days of sleep loss your mental lights are about half as bright as with normal sleep. Fitness level and physical exercise did not alter this decline, but a two-hour nap following the first 20 to 25 percent "dimming" helped minimize the second drop, according to Angus' research.

Because of both a declined mental capacity and a lack of stimuli, "Sleep deprivation has the greatest effect in the most boring aspects of an activity," says Martin. So, while you breeze through a tough lead, you may have problems on easy terrain, forget to double back your harness belt, fail to keep your brake hand on the rope while belaying, or do any number of basic booboos that could cost you.

In addition, sleep deprivation robs you of an appreciation of a personally rewarding — and fun — experience. At a time when it would be nice to be bright and positively on, you're eclipsed. "When you lack sleep you don't concentrate or think creatively as well," says Martin. "These are some of the highest functions of the brain."

### Remedies


Although it's difficult to compensate for lost sleep, you can start ahead of time by trying a few techniques to prevent a sleepless night. Martin cites recent studies that show cyclists who used short-acting sleeping pills (benzodiazepines) the night before a race performed the same as when they had a good night sleep without medication. Prescribed sleeping pills probably are not for most climbers, but if you're interested, make sure you try the pill before the actual night before. Also, beware; your body can build up a tolerance to over-the-counter sleeping pills. Safe amounts vary between individuals.


If sleeping pills aren't your bag, a variety of techniques may help you unwind and fall asleep. Everything from thinking about your hometown hangouts to imagining you are Noah contemplating how you're going to get all those creatures on the ark. Some may work, others may not.

Also, rather than putting so much emphasis on that night before a climb, strive for good sleep the week before. Sleep specialists often suggest not eating a full

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meal, drinking alcohol, or exercising before bed, all of which can act as stimulants when your body should be shutting down. Reading helps many people sleep. If you can't sleep, get out of bed and come back later.

"One night of bad sleep can't wipe out several nights of good sleep," says Martin. So, if you have trouble the night before a big climb, take some comfort in the fact that you'll be OK physically — just be extra cautious because your mind will be slow, especially at 3 the next afternoon.

Despite the worries that kept me up the two nights before my Rainier trip, I had gotten plenty of sleep the week previous. When it came time to climb, I was sluggish

in the brain (I had trouble remembering my knots) and yet hyper-alert to the strings of distant headlamps and dramatic dawn colors. My legs were strong. I reached the peak and made it down safely.

Since then, when the demons and doubts dog me the night before a climb, I try to reassure myself that it won't make much difference tomorrow. And, hey, after the climb I've got a great night of sleep scheduled. I'll be too tired for anything else.

*Gary Legwold is a Minneapolis-based writer who makes annual pilgrimages to the West to get in some climbing, but prefers the calm of the playful prairie crags of the Midwest.*



the whole time you're up there, you're really being creative and you're pushing it as hard as you can. I mean, it's like your baby ... one rivet can really change the nature of a climb."

In the end Middendorf and his partner John Barbella drilled only 58 holes, 19 of which were for belay bolts. "The routes to the left and the right required more drilling than our route," Middendorf says. "That was a rewarding aspect because I think that's the name of the game — to find natural lines."

With multiple risky climbs under his belt, Middendorf began establishing A4 and A5 pitches as if he were climbing trade routes, but the Half Dome incident ended his vacation and an inheritance that came his way when he was 25 took the fun out of the grunge game. "Living there in Yosemite on somebody else's money didn't make any sense to me." Although he initially refused to accept the cash, he tapped into it after a car accident left him \$2000 in debt. Middendorf decided to leave the Valley and put his education to work, which had always been his intention.

**H**is skills as an engineer and his experience as a climber fit together well for his next project, to create a big-wall equipment company. Middendorf headed south in search of a new home, landed in Flagstaff, Arizona, and immediately started the designs for a wall hammer, the first product produced at Middendorf's company, originally called Big Wall John's — a fact he's not proud of. Middendorf saw a need for specialized gear, especially after his portaledge collapsed on Half Dome. The company, called A5, now makes everything from portaledges to haul bags.

"I feel like part of climbing is the science of climbing gear," Middendorf says. "And I've always wanted to contribute to the benefit of climbers in general." It took years of forcing himself into a professional career, sometimes working 100-hour weeks, to make the business successful. Middendorf now has about eight employees and takes pride in A5, which grossed about \$150,000 in 1993. Today, for the first time, he's seeing a return on his investment, as the company is beginning to make a little money (emphasis on little).

Taking a break from wall climbing doesn't seem to faze Middendorf. He may do 10 serious walls one year and none in another. "I'm a spurt climber," he says. "I climb in spurts." After his sabbatical in the world of business, Middendorf started climbing again with a vengeance. He started in 1989 with a few desert towers with an old friend, and really kicked things off with a return to Half Dome.

In 1989, during a five-week visit to the Valley, Middendorf joined Walt Shipley for a first ascent of the *Kali Yuga* (VI 5.10 A4) on Half Dome. "It was kind of a psychological boost for me because here I was on the same rock that had pretty much cooked me three years before," Middendorf says. And he was on a roll. On the same trip he also did the first ascent of *Route 66* (VI 5.10 A4) on Yosemite Falls Wall, and a seven-hour ascent of the *Prow* on Washington Column.

Middendorf was busy ticking off new climbs once again when the accomplished Swiss climber Xaver Bongard arrived in Yosemite. Bongard had already soloed *Iron Hawk* when he sought out Middendorf for information; he posed a simple question each time, "What's the hardest wall climb that hasn't been soloed?" John answered *Sea of Dreams*; Xaver climbed it. The next year, John answered *Jolly Roger*; Xaver climbed it. "He was just basically doing whatever was considered the hardest challenge; he wanted it," Middendorf says of Bongard. But when John suggested *Wyoming Sheep Ranch*, Xaver was tired of soloing and asked Middendorf to join him. They spent eight days on the route and added a direct finish up the Cyclops Eye, of which Middendorf is brazenly proud.

"I led this one pitch — it overhangs about 80 feet in 150, definitely the steepest pitch in Yosemite. I spent 14 hours on that pitch; I graded it A2++," Middendorf, who openly sandbags, says.

"It's kind of like a bridge-type grading. You know how when you bid in bridge you don't necessarily say three hearts even if you have a good hand?" He adds that if he rates a route with a double plus, "You better watch out."

The difficult route spawned a close friendship, and when Bongard invited Middendorf to join him in Pakistan in the summer of 1992, he started packing his bags. "Of course that was always my dream, to take all these skills I learned in Yosemite to some place remote and extreme," Middendorf says.

Middendorf chose the route and the two discussed the magnitude of what they were about to do. "I mean it's by far the hardest, most extreme big wall climb in existence. Everything else that even comes close has been done in a different style, like multi-thousands of feet of fixed ropes, which changes the challenge."

Add the objective hazards of avalanches, rock fall, and extreme weather, and the dangers double. Middendorf simply detached himself; he poured the risk into a test tube and measured it from a distance. "I realized on Trango that I had like a 50/50 chance, but that was enough for me. I said 'OK, let's do

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TRAMPOLINE  
GLISTENS  
IN THE  
DESERT SUN  
IN HIS BACKYARD.



it.' It was mutual with Xaver; we both felt that way. You need to decide if it's worth it."

Greg Child, an alpinist who has made several expeditions to the area, says he initially thought the climb was a death wish. "I advised those guys against it. I saw massive amounts of shit fall down that route."

But Middendorf took the bait and was off. After a rigorous approach to the Trango Towers, he began putting his Yosemite skills to work scoping a new line. He made drawings of the route in the morning light, afternoon light, and at dusk. He scrupulously studied every inch of the peak, which soared to 20,440 feet, all while he rested for the two-man attempt. Middendorf and Bongard planned to commit themselves by climbing the 4400-foot wall with as few bolts as possible and only six ropes. "I would say Xaver was the stronger when it came to the climbing, but I was definitely the stronger with the logistics part, so we worked well as a team."

Their first obstacle came only eight pitches up in what they dubbed Gollum's Gully, a trough-like corner where they were hit by an avalanche. "If somebody throws a softball from maybe 20 yards away and hits you smack in the head, imagine that, but 10,000 softballs. That's what it was like. It lasted 20 or 30 seconds, but it seemed like an eternity, so we bailed off to the side." Undaunted, they decided to climb only at night when the ice and snow was frozen in place. For the next three nights they fixed their six ropes up the six-pitch gully in the clear light of a full moon.

The route involved Grade III ice, 5.10+ free climbing, and A4+ aid. The two sat through belays where they were pummeled by rockfall and avalanches, but they tried not to think about that. "Of course we were scared out of our minds at what we were doing. It just required a mindless sort of 'let's do this,' and you couldn't think about the next day, you could just think about what was possible to do that particular hour."

Middendorf cuts the story short, not willing to delve further into his feelings about the climb. The journal he kept in Pakistan is still dusty, held shut with a rubber band, and unlike his Valley journal, Middendorf refuses to open it, even for a private peek, he says. "It was a magical climb for me. The essence of it I'm sure I don't even come close to remembering in my conscious mind, and I remember after we finished and we started to go back home, already the intensity of it was fading."

"I feel like Xaver and I pushed the standards by a quantum jump when we did that climb," Middendorf says. He emphasizes that he speaks only of big-wall climbing. "The West Face of Gasherbrum IV is the epitome of its class of climbing, I can't compare it with the *Grand Voyage*."

**H**e's willing to take the gamble for a new route, but Middendorf has an acute awareness of what's at stake, as he has already lost more than one friend to the extreme. Bongard's recent death was particularly difficult for him. Xaver Bongard was killed in May when his parachutes failed while BASE jumping in Switzerland. "He was my best buddy," Middendorf says. "I always had the idea that he and I would get together and do some crazy project again because, you know, it's hard to find partners who will really stick their neck out for a route. That kind of energy is so rare. It hasn't

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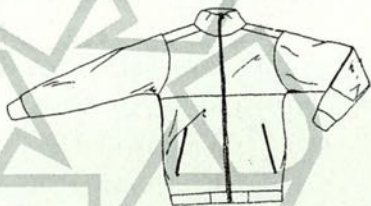
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taken away my desire for the mountains so much but it's tough."

Dealing with death isn't new for Middendorf, he's already lost several people close to him. Once again relaxing on the sunny cafe porch, John leans back in his chair and glances out to the empty streets of Hurricane, then looks down to his jacket zipper and

starts fidgeting with a loose thread. Exhaling, he lets the cigarette smoke roll across his face. "The first experience I had with that was when I was a guide in '78 at the Telluride Mountaineering School. I was 18."

John, one of two young guides at the school, had been enjoying one of the finest times of his life. "But it went from the best experience to the worst," he says in retrospect. His contemporary and good friend, Kevin Dippy, and a partner were killed on the Ophir Wall when their anchors pulled. John stayed through the summer only because of a sense of responsibility to the school. "I was really, really badly shaken," Middendorf says. He didn't climb for a year, and then experienced another heavy blow. His sister Martha, who suffered from epilepsy, died.

Martha was two years John's elder, and they were very close. "She'd always find something really bold and dangerous to do," he says. She hated having epilepsy and so she always did a lot of extreme things." Martha died when John was just getting settled in his first year of college at Dartmouth. She had been taking medication for her chronic disease, but the side effects made her miserable. "Basically, she stopped taking her medicine and she lived her life as full as possible. She was a goalie on the hockey team and it was after a practice and she had just worked out really hard and she basically went home and died." Middendorf pauses and, still fidgeting, looks up from the loose thread and back out to the empty streets.

More recently, Middendorf faced the death of another friend, Mugs Stump, who died on Denali in 1992, the same year he and Middendorf did the first winter ascent of *Hallucinogen Wall* (VI 5.11 A5) in the Black Canyon, Colorado. "Mugs and I had just been together a month before ... it was actually my first climb with him, but we had really gotten along well and we were talking about big climbs in Alaska. You know, I miss Mugs so much, all the time."

Despite these hard breaks, Middendorf has never considered giving up climbing. "When you're wall climbing you have lots of mini-religious experiences. I've definitely had some insightful times up there where some aspect of life becomes very clear all of the sudden."

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 10 BOLTS  
 TO PUT UP  
 A RAP ROUTE,  
 WELL,  
 I COULD  
 PUT UP A  
 1500-FOOT  
 CLIMB WITH  
 10 BOLTS."



But Middendorf is once again taking a break (albeit a short one) from the vertical world, working primarily on his new Hurricane home (his first wood-working project since high school) which he shares with his girlfriend, Patty Laforge, known to many conservative Hurricane residents as his fiancée. Middendorf's lot stands out in the suburban-type town — his yard is an instant giveaway. With a dilapidated brick home that hasn't been inhabited for years, paint peeling off the walls, and mice roaming free, a brand new trampoline glistens in the desert sun in his backyard. "It's the first thing I got," he says, pausing to perform a few back flips. A tour of the home reveals a distinct lack of kitchen appliances, a missing front window, and a mousetrap. The rotting porch, over-looking a yard scattered with lumber and tools, is the location of choice for entertaining.

Middendorf takes a splintery seat to describe his current goals. He's now dividing his time between his new home in Hurricane, climbing walls in the nearby Zion, and working on a book on big-wall climbing with John Long, a longtime climber and writer. Middendorf's settled down in an area he refers to as the new Yosemite. He did his first difficult project in Zion four years ago with a first ascent of the 2000-foot Abraham via the *Radiator* (VI A4 5.10), which has yet to see a repeat. "It's a very challenging big-wall climb. It's different in essence than a Yosemite wall route, but at the same time it's a greater challenge. It's harder than anything I've done in the Valley and there's a lot more like that here."

On the 2000-foot sandstone face of Abraham, Middendorf and Shipley raised the stakes by placing only 17 bolts. "I haven't ever rap bolted a route. You need 10 bolts to put up a rap route, well, I could put up a 1500-foot climb with 10 bolts. I think the number of bolts per foot is a good yardstick for natural lines."

The pair did the *Radiator* in five thirsty days. The temperatures exceeded 100 degrees, their water was gone by the fourth day, and dehydration quickly turned the last day into an blur as the two clumsily rappelled the east side of Abraham. "We did about 17 rappels to get off that thing," Shipley says. "[At one point] I rappled down and John only had one pin in. I think he was getting dehydrated at that point." Shipley also began to show signs of dehydration when, on the same ledge, their rope got stuck, and Walt, who was unanchored, began jumping on it. The rope suddenly broke free, leaving him teetering on the edge.

"I had the grim vision of being stranded on this small ledge," Middendorf wrote in a story for *Mountain Reveiw*. "Unseen from anyone on the ground with Walt's broken body lying in the hanging valley below, and waiting to die of thirst — which wouldn't have taken more than 24 hours."

Now, in true Middendorf style, John sits on his porch, the sleeves pulled up on his old jacket, laughing about their adventure, and expounding on his love of climbing. "There's nothing better to me than waking up on a big wall and knowing that I've got a full day of climbing ahead of me, and a day after that and a day after that. Life becomes so simple."

Lisa Morgan is assistant editor at Climbing magazine.

## Barnaby is the black cat in my kid's easter book who stole all the easter eggs and threw them down the bunny hole.



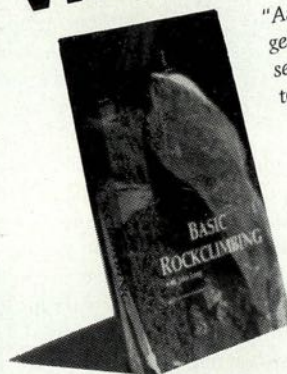
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# R E V I E W S

Edited by Jeff Achey

## Rock Jocks, Wall Rats, and Hangdogs: Rock Climbing on the Edge of Reality

John Long  
Simon & Schuster, 1994  
Softcover, \$10, 192 pp.

Many are the virtues of *Rock Jocks, Wall Rats, and Hangdogs*, John Long's Brief History of Time and Space as pertains to climbing, so I'll get my one beef over with.

For some reason (no doubt a decision made by the marketing department), despite Long's genius for melding the usually cumbersome explications of technique, equipment, and slang seamlessly into his

prose, and despite the fact that non-climbers are as likely to pick up the book as lead 5.13, and despite every aesthetic reason ever posited for not interrupting narrative flow, *Rock Jocks* comes to a screeching halt

periodically for expository asides. With titles such as "The System," "Rating the Difficulty," "Training," etc., these digressions are adequately done, but deadly, juxtaposed against Long's usual lively style.

Fortunately, these departures get less painful as topics move away from basics, so by the time Long reaches the "Soloer's Credo," which begins, "Never solo something you are not positively certain that you can finish without falling to your death," the method more closely resembles the rest of the madness.

That said, *Rock Jocks* is a magnificently readable, enormously engrossing, insightfully philosophical, and jubilantly inslacking study of climbers in their natural habitat. In 192 pages, Long covers the sport from the mid-1700s Alps to artificial walls.

Moving with the hip, freewheeling, poetic bop of a Kerouac novel, many passages make you pause to savor and re-read. "Looming on both sides of a valley barely a mile wide, these walls seem to press in on a rookie with all the chilling mass of the great glacier that first formed them. Yet the climbers came: Germans in flannel knickers and alpine hats; Frenchmen in mountain boots and red scarves; working-class Brits, or 'Limies,' looking for a fight

or another beer, their skin so pale you'd swear they'd grown up in a closet; Australians tough as dingos and ready for anything so long as there was risk involved; Japanese, each with flags of the rising sun on their tottering packs, on their shirts, tied round their heads, asking little more from life but a chance to risk it; Mexicans poor as dirt and fearless as God; Italians, none of whom spoke word one of English, but whose naked passion was vouchsafed by their waving hands and the much repeated, 'Fantastico!' And us Americans, ex-center fielders and running backs, no counts, bastards and cast offs, from Los Angeles and upstate New York, from Boulder, Colorado, and Waco, Texas. And every climber stayed in Camp 4, traditional outdoor flophouse for anyone with the dream, a rope and a restless spirit."

Humor is another of Long's strong suits. "It was said that Jim Pettigrew caught a brown bear stealing dried apricots from his tent, that he lassoed it with an 8-millimeter haul rope, and was dragged all the way to Fresno. Layton Kor was supposed to have wrestled a local bear named, 'Tiny,' who was 'about the size of a Volkswagon, only much bigger.' A Spanish climber was rumored to have had his arm ripped off by a grizzly ... only to have it sewn back on that same night by Scottish climber/surgeon Tom Patey."

Everpresent is Long's ability to dig out and illuminate universal truths embedded in the strata of climbing experience. On youth: "It's the genius of not knowing the 'proper' proportion of things, of focusing everything on what you wanted, not what others thought you needed. ... Only later would things get too complex and muddled to think and act so decisively." On life's epiphanies, El Capitan style: "Ron had scrambled to the top, had hauled the bag and was yelling for me to hustle so we could get on with our lives. But I didn't move. I couldn't move. I kicked back in my stirrups and looked around. I didn't know why. I had never lingered before, always pressing on with gritted teeth, surging, fighting both myself and the climb to gain the top. Suddenly I was free of all that, of all the incessant rushing; so I just hung there and took it all in, and for the first time in my climbing career I seemed to fully appreciate what I was doing, how outrageous it was."

It could be Long's even-handedness that makes his writing special. He presents the

most controversial issues — sport climbing vs. ground-up ethics, land management, ecology, the whole shopping list of complaints, grievances, and opinions that erode the cohesion of the climbing community — with the equanimity and foresight of a tribal elder.

*Rock Jock's* best asset could be any of a hundred other things done right and done well, but it is the combination of them all that makes this book superb.

— Joe Ferguson

## Wings of Steel

Richard Jensen  
Review and Herald, 1994  
Softcover, \$8.95, 160 pp.

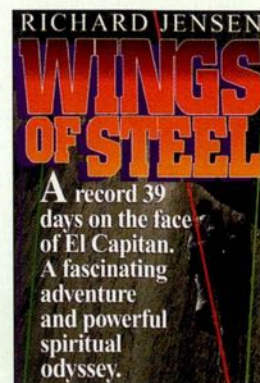
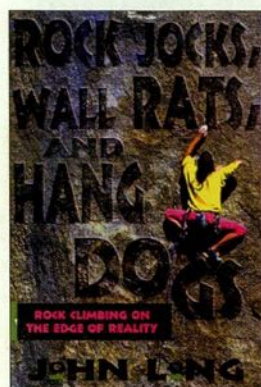
You may remember the story. In 1982, Mark Smith and Richard Jensen, never having climbed El Cap, hit the Valley and laid siege to a blank line on the Great Slab left of the *Dihedral Wall*. As "outsiders," they had their own vision of how to proceed; they drilled a lot, yet took some big falls off extended hooking sections. After fixing two ropes, the "Mad Bolters" got run through the ringer by a few Yosemite Search and Rescue climbers. Their bolts and rivets were chopped, their fixed ropes pulled and defecated upon. Jensen and Smith were made pariahs; in Camp 4 they were harassed by locals and visitors alike, often on erroneous information.

It became a war of principle. "We prayed unendingly that God would take

up our cause ... we had a sense that this climb was deeply important in some way," Jensen. The pair persevered. They went back, hauled their 11 ropes and 1000-plus pounds of gear off the ground,

and stayed up — for 39 continuous days. They rested each Sabbath. They drilled a total of 145 holes in 13 new pitches. Out of food, they finally struggled to the rim via the *Aquarian Wall*.

The crusade continued. Smith penned a pair of articles that appeared in *Climbing* June 1983, describing and defending the climb, and analyzing the harassment they endured. The team did an early





repeat of El Cap's respected *Sea of Dreams*, reporting a large amount of drilling. Last year they repeated (and downrated) Jim Beyer's Fisher Towers A5 testpiece *Intifada*, reporting their findings to *Climbing*. The team has worked at correcting the lack of "credibility" they blamed for some of their problems.

Now, a decade after the fact, Jensen has written a book. It's a loose and indulgent book, full of overlong descriptions of portaledge repairs and battles with cliff swallows, infused with spates of spiritual introspection. It has its good moments. It reads like a transcript of a slide show given on a lazy evening at a Christian summer camp.

The reader will wonder about Jensen's stability when he recounts slaughtering El Cap's silverfish like they were the Devil's own vermin, and his sense of proportion as he waxes dramatic on the trials of a harsh June rainstorm low on the wall. ("Our tiny spaces ... were the only safety in the face of death.") Here, for sure, is an unusual climber at work. By the end of the book, an authentic sense of the team's day-to-day experience comes through.

*Wings of Steel* leaves many questions unanswered — particularly concerning what took them so damn long. The team averaged just under three days per pitch on the lower slab, and the text is vague: "Mark moved up on very shaky RURPs and copperheads all day. Nightfall found [him] up only half the pitch ..." Later, "The crack was A3 and it was night before I reached the best spot for an anchor." And so on.

But one thing's certain, the *Wings* climbers had passion. Whatever they were doing all those hours between rivets, they were hanging in there, hanging it out. Not party to the established psychology of big-wall ascent, they substituted their own bizarre conception. It was their nonconformity more than their drilling that tweaked a few local climbers, and it was the lynch-mob mentality that helped everyone else take up the oh-so-righteous cause.

In bearing witness to the whole incident lies the book's greatest worth. In his Foreword, Warren Harding — player in a similar and even more famous Yosemite saga — asks, "Is it possible that the problem the resident climbers had was more territorial than ideological?"

If you're looking for a well-crafted big-wall tale, skip this book. But if you want some insight into a couple of odd seekers, and into one of the ugliest incidents in Yosemite climbing, *Wings of Steel* is worth a few hours of your time.

If your local shop doesn't stock it, the book is available by calling (800) 765-6955.

—JA

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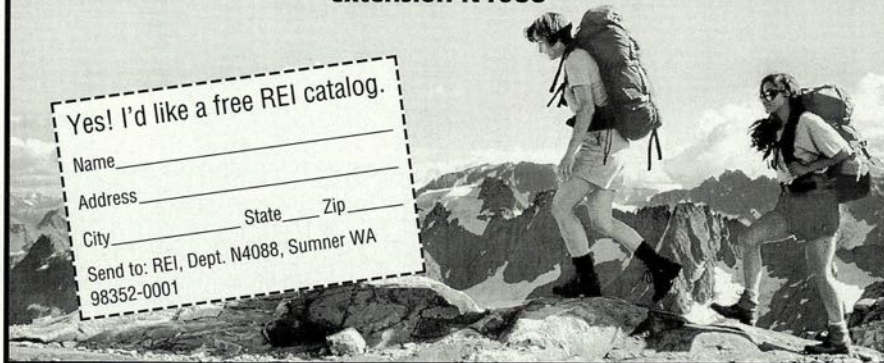
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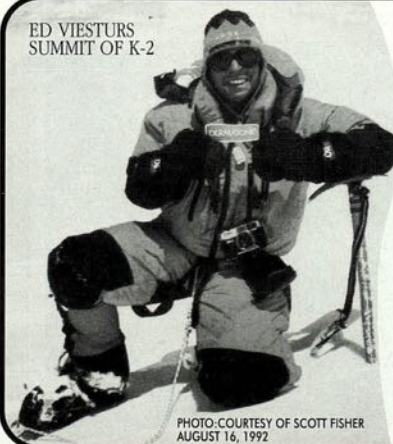
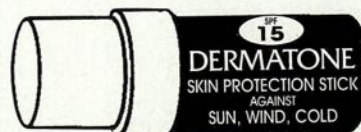


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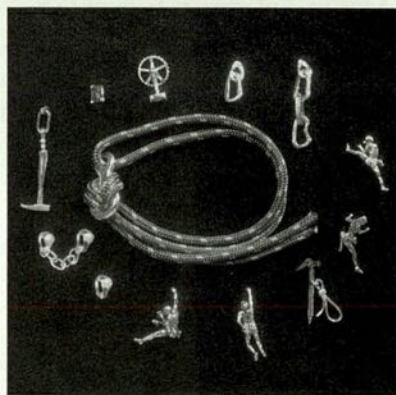
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**No Shit! There I Was ...**  
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Edited by Michael Hodgson

ICS Books, 1994

Softcover, \$9.99, 172 pp.

I remember when the contest that produced this book was announced; no way would my "No shit" stories hold up in sobriety — I forgot about it. Now the book's out. It's spunky, funny, sometimes stupid. Selections from the editor, a few jungle yarns by John Long, but mostly the work of unknown talespinners — climbers, hair boaters, flyfishers, bikers. And, of course, instructions for getting in on *No Shit, There I Was ... Again!*

**The Art of Dreaming**

Carlos Castaneda

Harper Collins, 1993

Hardcover, \$22, 260 pp.

*Separate Reality, Tales of Power* — Castaneda has inspired climbers for decades, from Ray Jardine to John Gill. It's been six years since his last book, and this once has garnered some critical acclaim, setting off something of a renaissance.

**Climbers:**

**Scaling the Heights With the Sport's Elite**

Steven Boga

Stackpole Books, 1994

Softcover, \$14.95, 214 pp.

Written for general audiences but interesting nonetheless, *Climbers* features seven diverse profiles — from high-altitude doc Peter Hackett to rock hero Lynn Hill to conservationist David Brower. There are also quotations, history, "climbing oddities," and tips to improve your climbing.

**The Deep South Climber's Companion:**

Rob Robinson and Chris Watford

Elysian Fields Press, 1994

Softcover, \$29.95, 422 pp.

A tome of over 1300 climbs in Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia, including scores of — yes — trad routes that swim out over their bases like Rifle's steepest. Moderate classics abound, but on many state-of-the-art testpieces, RPs replace Petzl Long Lifes, and "redpoint" and "deadpoint" take on sinister double meanings.

**Heel and Toe:**

**The Climbs of Greater Vedaawoo**

Skip Harper and Rob Kelman

Heel and Toe Publishers, 1994

Softcover, \$17.95, 214 pp.

The name says it all: pull on your knee pads, place that BigBro, and ... A lovingly produced, updated guide to the classic climbs of this southern Wyoming crack paradise. If you can't find the book, call (303) 482-0974.



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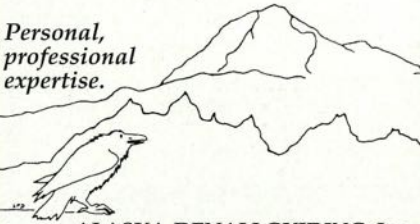
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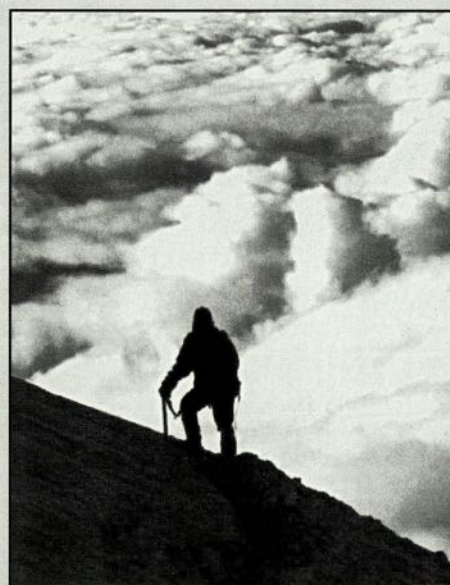
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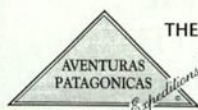
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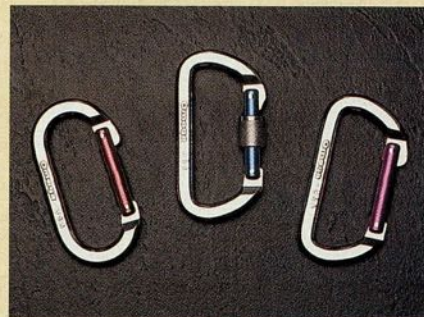
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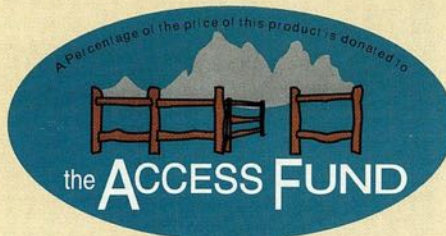
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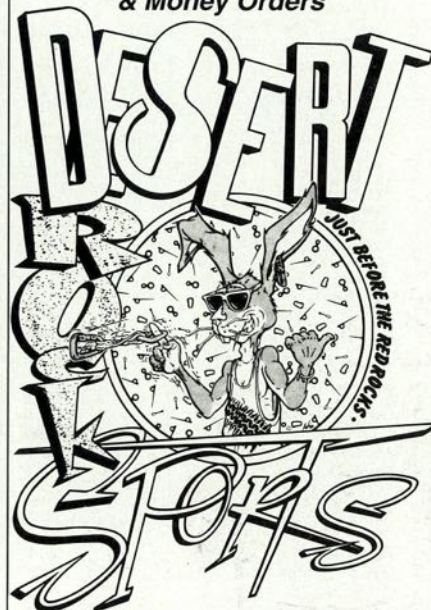
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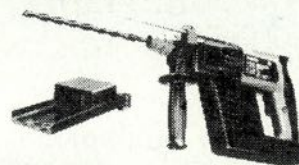
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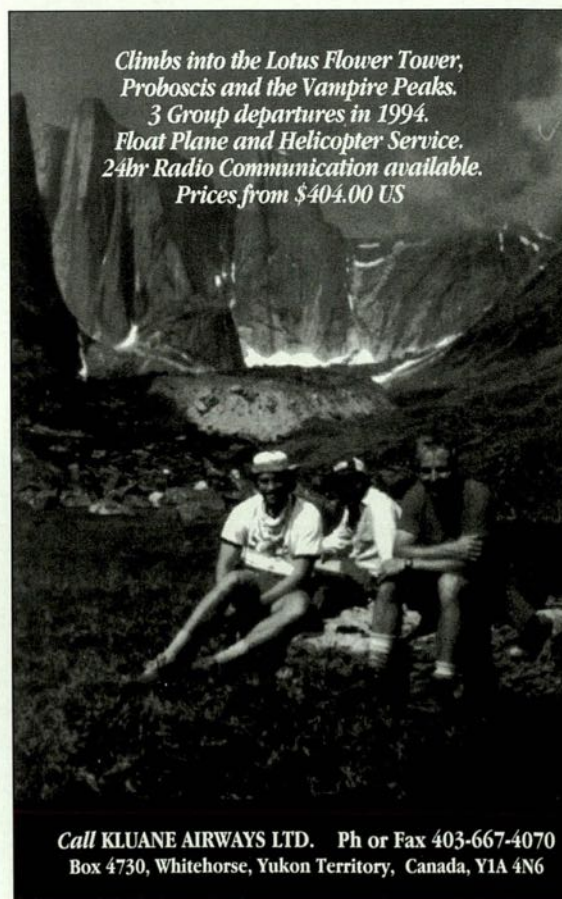
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**CIRQUE OF THE UNCLIMBABLES**



# Sultana

(continued from page 93)

was ahead, 30 feet from the crest of the ridge; he came across what he thought was a small crevasse, probed it and stepped across," wrote Kennedy. "There was a dull cracking sound, and a fracture ran along the ridge for 100 feet. The cornice disappeared, taking George with it, the rope came tight and jerked me off my feet. I flew down one side of the ridge as George plunged down the other in the midst of tons of ice ... I saw myself shooting over the edge and the two of us falling helplessly to the chaotic glacier 8000 feet below. But we stopped."

After anchoring himself, Kennedy shouted for his partner. There was no answer. But the taut rope suddenly grew slack. A few moments later, Lowe reappeared, bruised and shaken but otherwise unharmed. Taking no more chances, the men belayed each other the rest of their descent, finally reaching basecamp on July 6.

Only slightly less intimidating than either the *Infinite Spur* or *French Ridge* is the *Pink Panther* route up Sultana's 10,000-foot-high east face. A Grade 5+ climb of mixed rock, snow and ice, the *Pink Panther* "had been coveted by several active Alaska Range climbers since 1981," Waterman reports. But it fell instead to four newcomers: Daniel Vachon, Julien Dery, and Jean-Francois Gagnon of France, and Graham Sanders of Australia.

The team began its ascent up an S-shaped couloir that in places, Vachon reported, was "hideously steep." Forced to bivouac on 70-degree blue ice their first night, the men built themselves a tent site after four hours of chopping. Above was a series of 60- to 80-degree rock bands and ice, then a long stretch

of 70-degree icefields. But it wasn't until day four that the team encountered the most hair-raising part of the climb: a vertical band of mixed rock and ice, followed by a couloir filled with deep granular snow at an 85-degree angle. Even worse, Vachon recounted, was that night's "devilish" bivy: "All night long the serac which overhung us creaked, raising our blood pressure."

With the crux solved, the team ascended glassy green ice, 5.6 rock, and steep snow to 14,000 feet, where the *Pink Panther* intersects the Southeast Ridge. And on May 28, their sixth day of climbing, the

three Frenchmen stood atop Sultana's summit (Graham stayed at high camp because of altitude problems) with their mascot: a stuffed Pink Panther.

In the final analysis, Sultana is probably not so much overlooked or ignored as it is avoided. There are plenty of good reasons for staying off the mountain's slopes, and while Denali is made for the mountaineering masses, Sultana is not. As the late Utah mountain guide and Alaska veteran Mugs Stump once explained, "You see Foraker from McKinley and it's just floating out there. It's like a mirage: You can see it, but you can't touch. It's like the bride you can't approach."

Which brings us back to Stuck and his observation that the native names fit the mountain so much better than Foraker. Sultana, The Woman. Menlale, Denali's Wife. To most climbers, she'll remain the unapproachable one.

Bill Sherwonit is a freelance writer living in Anchorage, Alaska, and the author of *To the Top of Denali: Climbing Adventures on North America's Highest Peak*.

"I FLEW DOWN ONE SIDE OF THE RIDGE AS GEORGE PLUNGED DOWN THE OTHER IN THE MIDST OF TONS OF ICE ... I SAW MYSELF SHOOTING OVER THE EDGE AND THE TWO OF US FALLING HELPLESSLY TO THE CHAOTIC GLACIER 8000 FEET BELOW ..."

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# PLAYERS

Compiled by Jeff Ahey

## PAUL PRITCHARD GOGARTH TO PATAGONIA

Within five days of returning from Patagonia last year, Paul Pritchard established two new 5.12Rs at Gogarth, the notorious sea cliff in North Wales. Then one rainy day, 100 feet up on the unrepeated *Games Climbers Play*, Pritchard slipped off a sea-slimed mantelshelf. He ripped the entire pitch, hit a boulder, shattering his ankle, then fell backward another 15 feet head first into a hole in the boulders, tearing both shoulders, fracturing his skull, and coming to rest wedged upside down underwater.

It took his partner, Glenn Robbins, several minutes to dislodge Pritchard, who recalls going in and out of consciousness as he caught glimpses of Robbins resuscitating him. Amazingly, a hiker happened to look over the edge of Gogarth and hear Robbins' frantic cries for help, and called a helicopter.

Pritchard is an unimposing creature; his lanky 6-foot frame belies the fire underneath. Typically, he wears a sheepish grin, unique near-punk hairstyles, and picks from a colorful wardrobe, like the wild get-ups he and Johnny Dawes wore as they walked one day through

Born in 1967, Pritchard began climbing at age 16 in Lancashire, England. He soon moved to North Wales, home of Gogarth. There, at age 18, he established

climber, Pritchard got by working a few months a year washing windows and collecting the munificent British dole. In 1990, Pritchard joined the British Bhar-



*Super Calabrese*, a three-pitch British E8. The route would get a modest 5.12b here in the States, yet the E8 rating hints at the larger story: little of the gear "protecting" the route's 30-foot runouts would have held a fall, and the second belay would also likely have pulled if Pritchard had fallen anywhere on the 5.12 pitch above. Eight years later, *Super Calabrese* is still considered one of the most serious crag climbs in the world.

girathi III Expedition. The expedition returned from India with no success, but Pritchard came back with a new focus for his climbing: big alpine rock routes.

In December 1991, with Noel Crane, Sean Smithe, and Simon Yates, Pritchard started up a new route on the 4000-foot east face of the Central Tower of Paine, in Patagonia. They found backpacks full of rotting headlamp batteries, and piles of rope and gear slung about — a Spanish team had left gear and ropes on the first 1000 feet for three years, "claiming" the route. As a public service, Pritchard and his team merrily jettisoned the gear. For about a month they fixed ropes between spells of bad weather, and after establishing 3000 feet of rope, were poised for the final sprint to the summit.

Bad weather set in, and they returned to basecamp, drank *pisco* in Puerto Natales, and re-psyched for the route. Then, the Spanish team arrived. A multi-day fight ensued, complete with yelling and shoving, broken only by the Spanish team's attempts to get poised for the route. The

weather cleared, and in a 27-hour push, Pritchard and Crane made it to the summit. The next day, they pulled their ropes and gear off the mountain, and headed out of camp past the shell-shocked Spaniards.

Pritchard sold much of his gear to fund more climbing, and, with Phillip Lloyd, established two 15-pitch 5.12s in Torres del Paine park, both climbed on-sight in 24-hour pushes. He sport climbed for a month in Argentina, then continued north, stopping to climb a 20-pitch 5.12 route in the Brazilian jungle. He sold the last of his rock gear, soloed several 6000-meter peaks in Bolivia, then sold his alpine and camping gear to scrape together airfare home.

In January 1993 Pritchard returned to Patagonia, where he attempted Cerro Torre and climbed another new route on the North Tower of Paine, along with several other shorter new routes in the area.

After the Gogarth accident, despite his doctor's assurance that he couldn't climb for a year and a half, four months later Paul was climbing 5.12b, and in August returned to India with Dawes and Lloyd to attempt the fearsome east face of the middle summit of Meru, one of the late super-alpinist Mug Stump's dream climbs. After eight days and 31 difficult pitches, with only 10 more pitches to easy ground, Dawes dropped one of his plastic boots, necessitating a team retreat.

At 26, Paul shows no sign of slackening. This May he left for Baffin Island to try a new route on Mount Asgard. His laid-back attitude and talent for extreme rock should supply the perfect recipe for success.

— John Middendorf

## MICHAEL CHESSLER THE BOOKIE

It was Tuesday morning, and on the second ring, Donna Hyl-

**H**E RIPPED THE ENTIRE PITCH, HIT A BOULDER, SHATTERING HIS ANKLE, THEN FELL BACKWARD ANOTHER 15 FEET HEAD FIRST INTO A HOLE IN THE BOULDERS, TEARING BOTH SHOULDERS, FRACTURING HIS SKULL, AND COMING TO REST WEDGED UPSIDE DOWN UNDERWATER.

Harlem, ignorant of the dangers, asking locals for directions. On the rock he is strong, smooth, and confident. His quiet modesty hints at an unspoken spiritual side, as does his involvement in Survival of Tribal Peoples, a group dedicated to helping native peoples around the globe.

In the years that followed, Pritchard sampled mixed routes in Chamonix, and Scottish ice climbs. In 1988 and 1989 he redpointed numerous 8as in Europe, and in the U.S., repeated *When Legends Die* (5.13b), and flashed *Tarts of Horsham* (5.12d) at Heuco Tanks.

Typical of a full-time British

Photos, from left: John Middendorf, Chessler collection



land picked up the phone at Chessler Books. Michael Chessler wasn't in, she told me; he was at a book auction, in England. "He's a mover and a shaker," she said. "He's always working deals."

At 49 years old, Chessler is the country's premier broker of rare and out-of-print mountaineering books. His catalog offers everything from the Shipton, Tilman, and Muir classics to early maps of the world's polar regions. You can get a complete set of the *American Alpine Journal*, from 1859 to 1993, for \$4800, while a first-edition copy of *Annapurna South Face*, signed by author Chris Bonington, runs \$125. Warren Harding's *Downward Bound* is \$85 for first-edition hardcover. There are also titles for the non-collector: videos, coffee-table books, and almost every English-language guidebook to a destination climbing area, often at sale prices. From

In 1962, as a student at Brooklyn College, Chessler started caving, cycling, and climbing with the school's outing club. "I don't consider myself primarily a climber," he says, but he does have a taste for summits: he's made winter ascents in New Hampshire's Presidentials, topped peaks in Wyoming's Wind Rivers, and climbed Mount Blanc and Mount Elbrus in Europe.

In the early '60s, Chessler worked in Manhattan's Donnell Library, which had the city's best collection of unusual and rare books, including a stellar mountaineering section. "Climbing has a larger literature than any other sport," says Chessler, noting the ranks of British literati among the early Alps pioneers. "Everyone who did a first ascent felt compelled to write about it," he says. "The habit has stuck."

When Chessler was transferred to a library on the Lower

East Side, he frequented the booksellers row on 4th Avenue and got into the habit of buying books, excellent first-edition hardbacks for a dollar or less.

Chessler's next jobs were in outdoor shops, in Boston and later Los Angeles. He ice climbed in the White Moun-

tains, bagged peaks in the Sierras, and rock climbed at Joshua Tree and Taquitz.

In 1977 he took a job as sales manager for Sierra West, a young, innovative outdoor equipment company. While there, in Santa Barbara, he met his current wife, Heinke.

Sierra West soon transferred Chessler to New York. His job involved a lot of travel, and he'd

have been," he says. Case in point, Bradford Washburn's collection, which he recently purchased: "He's a good climber so his collection is only so so." Most paid for a single book? \$6000 for a copy of *Helveticus*, a 1723 treatise on the Alps, considered the first systematic description of mountain climbing. It's in Latin, which Chessler doesn't read.

I LOVE PLAYING WITH THE BOOKS, AND I GET TO RUB SHOULDERS WITH CLIMBERS WHO WOULD NEVER GIVE ME A SECOND GLANCE."

peruse each town's book stores. "Before I knew it I had over 4000 books," he says. He began to speculate about picking up a little cash selling books, to help support his collecting. In 1984 he tried it, taking out ads in *Climbing* and *Summit* magazines. He published a catalog, and brought in \$17,000 in the first month.

The next year, with the dollar strong against the pound, he visited England, a goldmine of rare books. The lode was rich: he and Heinke spent almost twice as much money as they'd brought, and had to borrow to get back to the States. Chessler quit Sierra West and took up bookselling full time.

Today he reads two or three books a week, and still travels frequently. Does he like his job? "I love every minute of it," he says. "I love playing with the books, and I get to rub shoulders with climbers who would never give me a second glance." He's collaborated with Messner, Robbins, Chouinard, Hillary, Herzog, and Harrer, to name just a few.

Chessler Books is no mere hobby anymore. Last year he pulled in "high six figures," and has paid over \$50,000 for book collections. "The people who collect books the most vigorously are not climbers at all, never

Chessler has pulled strings to get films on video; he even defends often-scorned Hollywood productions like *K2* and *Cliffhanger*. "You see views of climbing that you cannot see in an amateur film ... just turn the sound off," he advises. He carries a good selection of polar exploration books, and even a little Rudyard Kipling, who, Chessler says, has spawned far more interest in the Himalaya than any mountaineering author.

I asked the guru of mountaineering books the big question: what are his favorites? He responded quickly: *No Picnic on Mount Kenya*, by Felice Benuzzi, an Italian POW who escaped from a British prison camp to climb Mount Kenya. Next, Joe Simpson's *Touching the Void*, which Chessler praises as an incredible survival story with good writing to boot. Then, Eric Newby's *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush*, a tale "funny in an ironic British way," about trying to climb the highest peak in Afghanistan.

Finally, who are his favorite modern authors? "Jeff Long is great because he gets inside people's heads," Chessler says. And, "John Long takes an incident that could be quite mundane and turns it into an epic."

—JA



his trip to the U.K. he returned with two pallets — about 1600 pounds — of books.

When I did get him, Chessler gave me an energetic account — nonstop, in a distinct Manhattan accent — of his business, interesting books, interesting buyers, and how he got started.

East Side, he frequented the booksellers row on 4th Avenue and got into the habit of buying books, excellent first-edition hardbacks for a dollar or less.

Chessler's next jobs were in outdoor shops, in Boston and later Los Angeles. He ice climbed in the White Moun-



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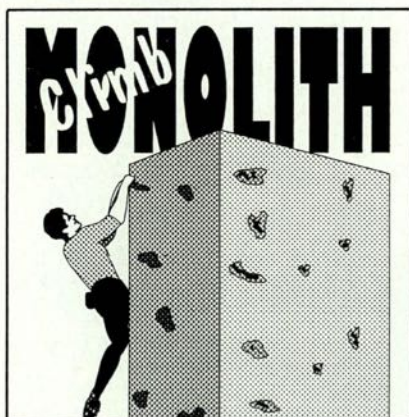
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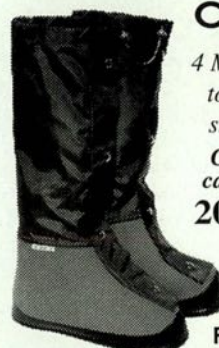
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# The Shining Path

(continued from page 110)

bled a stout finger, and we called it Homero's Finger in honor of our benefactor, Homero Gutierrez-Villareal, and his brothers, Mario, Gilberto, Doroteo, Hector, Gerardo, Everardo, and my good friend Emilio (who, as a deaf mute, comprehends my Spanish better than anyone).

A hole formed in the clouds, and from the belay, a brick-sized foot-stance, I looked over the bivy ledge with its tiny blue bathmat, and down a crazy, tropical super-slide. A smooth path wound through palm trees, creepers, and bright-red flickers of cactus flowers. It emptied onto glassy slabs and into the basin of vegetation that makes up the outskirts of Hidalgo, Nuevo Leon.

Kurt leaned back on the belay and tried to warm his fingers. The wind was howling now, blowing coils of rope off my leg. Kurt took off, crimping piss through the steepest bulge, a black and white face that terminated at a three-foot roof, which he pulled without hesitating. Now on the Finger proper, Kurt climbed more slowly, picking his way up a winding system of water-drop edges topped with a sporty runoff.

The middle of Homero's Finger was next and was the finest stone I've ever seen. The position, abundance of holds, texture, lighting, and all-around high jazz factor made it seem like God's Own Limestone, and we were up it before you could say Jack Robinson. Kurt blasted up the 10th pitch, a cool 5.10, and we split a PowerBar standing on the second and last ledge system of the route. Much less spacious than the Quinta, we still gave it a name, LedgeLand.

Based on two previews of the route — while aiding it and then cleaning it,

the 11th and 12th were going to be the cruxes. Our suspicions were confirmed.

The 11th pitch moved left across the lip of a massive roof and up an overhanging face composed of geometric blocks. I made progress by palming cubes and diamonds and kicking into a variety of stems. Kurt followed, concentrating on

**The wind was howling now, blowing coils of rope off my leg. Kurt took off, crimping piss through the steepest bulge, a black and white face that terminated at a three-foot roof, which he pulled without hesitating. Now on the Finger proper, Kurt climbed more slowly, picking his way up a winding system of water-drop edges topped with a sporty runoff.**

the series of foot deadpoints like Bruce Lee whipping up on a villain. We called the pitch Kung Fu Farm (5.12b).

The 12th pitch, El Naranjo, is the most exposed. It follows a black swath just right of the left-hand arete. The rock is tattooed with bright orange lichen and smoothed by constant blasts of wind. That day, with the mist blotting out all warmth, the wind was positively Arctic.

I glanced up. All the holds looked sloper and faced the wrong way. I struggled into my windbreaker, cinched down the hood, and wished Kurt good luck. My exhortation sounded about as optimistic as the Last Rites.

Kurt climbed slowly, establishing a rhythm commensurate with the angle and the dearth of usable holds. His breathing slowed and became more regular and I flashed on the image of a Yogi practicing his Pranayama before being lowered into a swimming pool to demonstrate how long he could hold his breath. Kurt floated upward and I began to gain confidence and send that good voodoo up the rope. He pulled off crux

after sketchy crux, shuffling up the bald face like a swimming frog. An hour or so later he was pinned in a dihedral, 140 feet off the belay, maxed but trying to cheat a little rest.

"I wish I'd cleaned this better," he moaned. The wind blew his words down the dihedral, elongating them like the whine of rifle bullets.

"Send it!" I yelled. "Put the sword in it!" He did.

"Off belay," he shouted. I drew my head farther into the hood of my jacket. It was my turn. My teeth chattered, not just because of the cold, and I felt a tingle of dread wash down my spine. As I pulled on my shoes I heard Kurt tell Pete that the pitch felt like 12+ even with

prior knowledge of its intricacies. I knew that a slip would blow the entire redpoint attempt and I was jumpy as a spook-house cat.

I'm no slab master but I do know how to smear and I smeared and stemmed and pimped sloping tufa goiters and crimped underclings and pulled on butterdish sidepulls all with the unwavering faith of a fanatic. When I clipped the belay, I felt like the Mexican healer Niño Fidencio, after he removed cataracts with a pair of tweezers. The gods were with us, we were going to make it.

Kurt felt it, too. "Vamanos, El Jefe," he said, and I climbed right into the next pitch.

The last three pitches were cold, but solid — 5.11, 5.10, and 5.7.

**O**n April 30, 1994, Kurt, Pete, and I stood on the summit of *El Sendero Luminoso*, our route on the Central Pillar of El Toro, for the third time in nine days. From our stance we could scope the



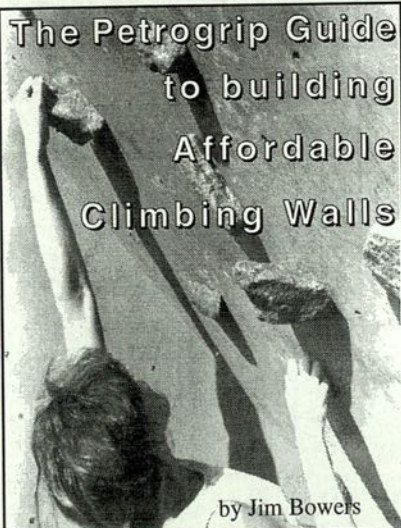
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canyons and fins that comprise the remainder of El Parque Recreativo El Potrero Chico. We watched a hundred black vultures making clumsy turns in the updrafts, and two peregrine falcons that ripped back and forth across the sky. Kurt raised his arms and yelled as loud as he could and from below, at the Parque proper, we heard a giant Mexican whoop.

It was the Saint Fidencio Day crowd, 2000 devout *paisanos* armed with binoculars and telescopes. They howled and we howled back. Homero and his brothers stood at the Quinta hollering and waving their arms.

I looked around, tingling with a mental electricity better than any drug or rub with death. After 22 nights of high winds, fog, lightning, rock fall, and screaming Mexican conjunto, we were there, standing on a rubblely summit the size of Kurt's van.

A few days later, after the epic task of descending with all the gear, Simon, Louise, Joe, and Matt, visiting Brits, forwarded an invitation to dine in Hidalgo with a wealthy family who had followed our progress on the wall all month. Simon said they were interested in hearing about our climb. We gladly accepted.

That night, we were greeted at the gate by our hosts, Elfido and his wife. The 15-foot cinderblock wall surrounding their property effectively cut the family off from Hidalgo's frenetic bustle. We gaped at the interior, jam-packed with more modern appliances and gadgetry than the latest Sharper Image catalog. Elfido's wife, typical of Nuevo Leon, was lovely and gracious, helping our plates to a dreamload of tacos, guacamole, and *verdura*. We capped the feast, a meal that could not have been tastier to three starving wall rats, with chocolate cake and ripe bananas.

Properly stuffed and soused, we settled back in our chairs, ready to chew the breeze.

Elfido cleared his throat. He spoke carefully, keeping in mind my deficient grasp of Spanish, and I translated for the others. "There is going to be a new mayor elected in Hidalgo this year. It might be my friend."

Everyone nodded. "If he's elected," Elfido said, "there's going to be some big changes in the Potrero."

"What kind of changes?" I asked.

"Pues," he said, "we're very interested in promoting climbing. We've never seen so many visitors and we'd like for more to come."

I listened carefully, not translating, just listening to Elfido's grand scheme. He wanted to build condos inside the Potrero and import exotic birds. He wanted to hire landscape artists and guards to watch the gunsight entrance to the canyons. Elfido speculated that one day there would be a sound and light show, *sonido y luz*, projected against the 600-foot Outrage wall.

I felt indignant and powerless. I'd often secretly wished that I could become involved in shaping the future of rock climbing at Potrero Chico. The rock quality, height, and temperate climate all suggested that it would one day become a destination area for climbers around the world. I had envisioned a place free from regulation, commercialism, and the generally onerous rules that dominate climbing in the United States. The Potrero to me had become a symbol of unsullied freedom.

Now, as I listened to Elfido, a different image formed in my mind.

"What's he saying?" Pete asked.

"He wants to build Jurassic Park."

We laughed and raised our glasses. Elfido's eyes twinkled. He turned and emphatically added his glass to the toast. "To Potrero Chico," he said and we all drank despite the fact that Elfido was facing away from the walls.

Postscript: Elfido's candidate was defeated in Hidalgo's recent mayoral election. Typical of Mexican politics, the voters were brimming with righteous indignation on election day. It was hotter than sin and several people keeled over waiting to cast their ballots. A brawl broke out at the polls and the two factions charged each other, dueling with their placard sticks. When the votes were counted, Maria Elena Oscuna, the liberal candidate, was elected. She appointed Homero Gutierrez-Villareal, *premier retidor*, the position that oversees the Potrero.

Jeff Jackson, a frequent contributor, is a freelance writer and operates Texas Mountain Guides out of his home base in Austin, Texas.



wise, manufacturers should be held liable for design defects if they are shown to have directly caused the injury. Often, however, it is difficult to determine whether the injury is attributable to a design defect or a user error. For instance, in Sewell, the jury never indicated whether the climber may have been at fault by failing to use the ascender correctly. But it is ridiculous to presume that the dangers of climbing should require extensive warning by a manufacturer. Even the most moronic climber recognizes the danger clearly. The same logic applies to disclaimers in climbing guidebooks and magazines: anyone old enough to read knows that cliffs and mountains are potentially hazardous to your health.

One other category of people that bears responsibility for the safety of climbers is guide services. The duty of a guide service is sometimes imposed by state statute, but regardless of the source of the duty, guide services, like other professionals, will be held to the generally accepted standard of care within the industry. The exemplary standards set by guides in this country unquestionably require a high regard for safety by practicing guides.

But unlike product manufacturers, guides can affirmatively require clients to waive the right to recover for the negligent acts of a guide, even if the duty for the client's safety is imposed by statute. Thus, guides can and do require climbers to execute liability waiver forms. Once climbers sign on the dotted line, they assume the responsibility for all risks and injuries described in the release. Numerous courts have upheld these liability-release forms. In fact, one case, *Blide v. Rainier Mountaineering*, involved a mountaineering course in which a participant suffered a serious leg injury while being lowered into a crevasse. The release, which contemplated "hazards of traveling in mountainous terrain" and "accidents or illness in remote places," barred the plaintiff's recovery. Valid release forms — perfectly appropriate to sports where some degree of danger is unavoidable — have allowed guide services to shift the responsibility for risk to where it rightly belongs: on the climber. Even novice climbers must be willing to accept the risk that guides will make mistakes. They do have alternatives — they can climb without a guide or to stay at home.

At the recent Access Fund Rendezvous in Joshua Tree, California, a round-table discussion was held to address the Department of the Interior's plan to recoup rescue

costs from climbers, beginning in Denali National Park. One option suggested was that climbers endorse a plan of self-reliance, so that the Park Service would no longer undertake climber rescues and would avoid the cost all together. Climbers would be solely responsible for their own safety. A person opposing that position stated that we have a moral responsibility to try to rescue climbers in danger, that we cannot leave them to die. This may be true, and, commendably, climbers traditionally have undertaken the responsibility to help their fellow climbers, but climbers should have no expectation of and certainly have no right to a rescue.

The perception that climbers have a right to a rescue or a right to safety, or have a right to recover damages from those people who fail to provide it for them, tears at the very fabric of the sport of climbing. There is a faction of climbers who will always blame outside forces for their own failure. They invented phrases like "I missed the crux because my shoes are blown" and "the hold was way greased with chalk." Well, I'm willing to admit that my shoes are fine; I'm just not that good a climber. If I meet my demise on the bold new expedition I'm planning — Everest: Drunk and Naked —

it won't be the fault of the guide or the landowner or the government or the gear manufacturer or my climbing partner — it will be my fault. As Mark Knoffler said (in the song prophetically titled "Solid Rock"), "When you point your finger 'cause your plans fell through, you've got three more fingers pointin' back at you."

*John M. Taladay is an attorney at Baker & Hostetler in Washington, D.C. and Chairman of the Access Fund Legal Committee.*



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## First thing we do: kill all the plaintiffs

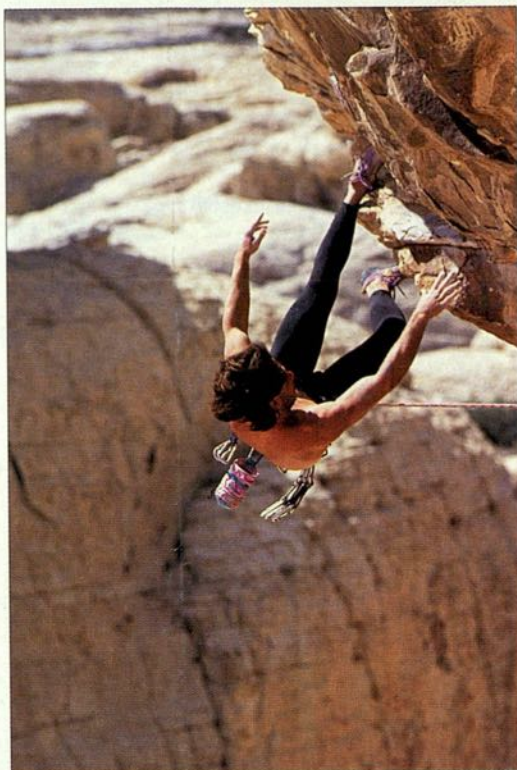
by John M. Taladay

It seems that no level of personal foolhardiness will prevent people from trying to pin the blame for their injuries on others. Our society has even come to accept the theory that taking a fall on a sidewalk can somehow be the sidewalk's fault and its owner's responsibility. But so far, no blame has been laid on a cliff or its owner for an injury to a climber.

Acceptance of personal responsibility is the cornerstone of climbing. If climbing wasn't dangerous, everyone could do it. If everyone could do it, it wouldn't be worth doing. Implicit in the penultimate reason for climbing — "because its there ..." — is the corollary, "... and you're not." If climbers choose to indulge in a sport that by its nature is exclusive of others, they must forego the guarantees of safety that our society has created. Stated more simply, if you're not willing to accept responsibility for climbing injuries, don't climb.

Thus far, in the few decisions that have dealt with the issue, courts have refused to hold landowners liable for injuries to climbers, regardless of the climber's level of experience. In the most significant case, *Johnson v. Department of the Interior*, a federal court of appeals dismissed the plaintiff's claim that the National Park Service should be held liable for failing to rescue a would-be climber who eventually died, relying in part on the principle that "the inherent dangers of mountain climbing are patently obvious." At least one other federal court has agreed. In *Dehne v. United States*, a rock scrambler sued after falling at Arches National Monument. The court held that the plaintiff "chose to take an obviously dangerous route" up a steep wall and placed herself in danger. Thus, the plaintiff's own decisions, and not any act or failure to warn by the defendant, caused the injuries.

Lawsuits aside, there is no logical basis for pinning liability for climbing accidents on landowners. The only other things I can think of that present the same conspicuous danger as a cliff are fire, guns, and drunken guys named Rocco. Even the most dimwitted among us can understand that if you hang out on cliffs, you could get hurt.



Who is responsible when a climber gets injured or killed? According to the author, the climber.

To hold the landowner liable for climbing injuries just doesn't make sense.

Unlike a hidden or manmade danger, cliffs are a visible, natural formation, and a landowner should not be liable for the danger created by them. Recognizing the need to expressly protect landowners, over 40 states have adopted "Recreational User" statutes, which provide qualified immunity for landowners who permit people to use their land for recreational purposes, including climbing. While recreational user statutes vary by state, they generally provide immunity for acts of negligence by the landowner; only intentional acts (such as firing birdshot at the climber) or reckless or malicious conduct (like the owners forgetting to mention that they planned to bulldoze debris off the top of the cliff after giving permission for climbing) are not protected. In some states, a recreational user, such as a climber, is given the same lowly legal status as a trespasser.

Recreational user statutes also protect landowners against a duty to warn recreational users of natural hazards, such as the danger of falling off cliffs or

drowning in rivers. Many recreational user statutes provide the same protection to the state and local communities, so that public land managers will also be encouraged to open their lands to recreational use. Usually, the landowner loses the protection of the statute if any fee is charged to use the land, although this does not always apply to public lands.

While landowners have not been held liable, it is true that a number of cases brought by climbers against other parties have reached settlements where the climber was awarded money. Only one case that has reached judicial decision, however, has decided that someone other than the climber himself was responsible for climbing injuries. Fifteen years ago, *Sewell v. Eastern Mountain Sports, Inc.* involved a mountaineer on Denali who accidentally unclipped from her ascender device and took a 60-footer. Arguing that the design of the device was defective, she was able to convince a jury that the manufacturer should be held liable, and received \$76,000.

Product manufacturers do have a high level of responsibility to design safe products, especially where the purpose of the product is to provide safety. But all climbers (if not jurors) know that even well-designed gear does not guarantee safety. Ropes cut, protection pops, shoes peel, well-chalked fingers slip — shit happens. Putting aside the opening sequence of *Cliffhanger*, climbing products do not fail under normal usage. They generally are scrupulously manufactured and extremely well-designed; it's climbers who are not.

Under general principles of product liability law, which vary by state, a manufacturer can be liable for three types of acts: a defect in the manufacture of a product, a defect in the design of a product, or failure to warn a consumer of the risks of using a product. These principles have not been specifically applied to climbing equipment in reported cases, not even in *Sewell*. Nonetheless, it clearly is appropriate to hold manufacturers liable for manufacturing defects, such as if, for instance, a manufacturer produced a harness that did disintegrate like in *Cliffhanger*. Like-

(continued on page 175)