

Desert Towers Select



Dougald MacDonald and Chris McNamara

Desert Towers Select

S U P E R T O P O S

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Climbing is an inherently dangerous sport in which severe injuries or death may occur. Relying on the information in this guide may increase the danger.

When climbing you can only rely on your skill, training, experience and conditioning. **If you have any doubts as to your ability to safely climb any route in this guide, do not try it.**

This guide is neither a professional climbing instructor nor a substitute for one. **It is not an instructional guide. Do not use it as one.** It contains information that is nothing more than a compilation of opinions about climbing the routes described. **These opinions are neither facts nor promises.** Treat the information as one man's opinions and nothing more. Do not substitute these opinions for your own common sense and experience.

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Introduction

As a climber, it is impossible to ignore desert towers. Each sandstone splinter rises dramatically above endless river-carved valleys of red earth. Constructed of dead-vertical, chocolate-colored walls with flat summits, the shape entices while the steep and smooth walls terrify. Each one seems designed to keep climbers from the summit, which is, of course, why desert towers are so appealing.

Now, imagine that surrounding just one of these incredible formations was another two or three of equal beauty. Imagine from the summit of one tower you could see another ten. Around the next bend in the broad canyon in which you stand perch more and more towers. Welcome to the Colorado Plateau—desert tower paradise.

So, why isn't everyone climbing desert towers? Why isn't the Colorado Plateau the center of American climbing instead of Yosemite? Why not quit your job and move to Moab? Two reasons: desert towers are hard and scary.

Nearly all towers involve 5.9 to 5.11 moves, which makes them accessible only to seasoned and confident trad climbers. The walls lack handholds or rests, and the parallel-sided cracks mandate refined crack technique. These are "pure" crack climbs—no hidden jugs in the crack, no large pods to rest in, no face holds to relieve your hands and feet. Not even a 5.12 gym climb will prepare you for a dead vertical 5.9 sandstone crack.

Towers frighten because their sandstone ranges in quality from decent to horrendous. Even a perfectly placed cam in the best desert sandstone is not guaranteed to hold a fall. Now consider that gear placements rarely inspire and the rock quality sometimes resembles dried mud. Not surprisingly, there is a simple rule in the desert: don't fall.

That said, the fear and difficulty lead to reward: desert towers guarantee adventure. Just the chance to camp and hike around the desert towers and surrounding canyons would be well worth a trip. The fact that you can climb perfect rock towers in this unbelievable setting means any desert climb comes packaged with enduring memories.

The difficulty will certainly deter many from attempting a tower. Others, however, will see the challenges towers offer as inspiration to take their trad climbing to the next level. If you are not confident on cracks, then let the images, stories, and topos in *Desert Towers Select* push you

to hone your skills. If you are already a confident 5.9 or harder crack climber, then what are you waiting for! Borrow or steal cams from your friends and direct your car to one of the most incredible climbing destinations anywhere, the desert towers of the southwest.

Welcome to Desert Towers Select

Our goal in this guidebook is to provide you with everything a climber needs to know about the finest desert towers in order to prepare you for an awesome climbing adventure. We chose these routes because of their rock quality, elegant lines, and outstanding views.

Many of these routes played a historic role in the development of desert towers rock climbing. As we do in all of our SuperTopo guidebooks, we've taken the time to provide you with the history for each route as well as the climbing info. If you are like us you will find the experience of climbing these classic routes enhanced by the rich history and stories of the colorful characters that pioneered the climbs.

We hope you enjoy climbing these routes as much as we do. If you need to choose what climbs to do in a limited time period, you can be assured that these routes offer a guaranteed adventure.

Essential Desert Tower's Beta

You will find a wealth of *Desert Tower Select's* information and links on the SuperTopo web site. We encourage you to check the web site, as it will have more current beta than we can include for you here.

For the latest info, visit:

www.supertopo.com/climbingareas/towers.html

There you will find essential beta on:

- Climbing safety
- Getting there
- When to climb
- Road conditions
- Staying in Moab
- Food
- Climbing gear and climbing guides

Building Desert Tower Skills

Whether you just started trad climbing or climb 5.11 in Yosemite, familiarize yourself with short sandstone routes before attempting a tower. Desert sandstone can be sandy and scary and takes some practice to get used to. Below are some quick tips to prepare you.

Before your trip:

Train by climbing as many cracks as possible at your home crag and gym. While it is unlikely that the cracks in your area will be similar to the desert, any crack climbing training will help. Surprisingly, many gyms have great

cracks to train on. If the gym crack is vertical and parallel-sided, then it may be more similar to a desert crack than anything you can find at your crag.

Familiarize yourself with the rock:

Desert sandstone bears little resemblance to the sandstone familiar to eastern climbers. It is sandy, has few large holds and is often fragile. When you first arrive in Moab, consider stopping for a few hours at the Big Bend Boulders to get a feel for the rock. The problems range in difficulty from easy to ridiculously hard and will familiarize climbers of all abilities with the moves before they rope up. There is no guidebook, but directions are available on the SuperTopo web site:

www.supertopo.com/climbingareas/towers.html

First Desert Climbs:

Start your desert climbing trip at Wall Street. Just a 10-minute drive from Moab, the area offers the rare 5.4-5.9 difficulty range so hard to find in the desert. The climbing ranges from face climbs and slabs to vertical hand cracks and offwidths. In a few sections, you can scramble up easy rock to set topropes. However, most climbs end with an additional 300-500 feet of rock above, so leading is the only way to reach the anchor. Bring a ropegun (strong leader) who can set up topropes on crack climbs that challenge you. For a good guidebook to Wall Street, check out: *Desert Rock II: Wall Street to the San Rafael Swell* by Eric Bjornstad.

About the Desert Towers Climbs

Below is a list of climbs included in the *Desert Towers Select* guidebook. Climbs are listed from easiest to hardest.

Off Balanced Rock, Northeast Chimney (5.7 R, 2 pitches)

This is one of the few 5.7 towers, but don't let the rating deceive you: The second pitch hits you with a full 90 feet of secure but unprotected chimney climbing on excellent rock.

Owl Rock (5.9, 1 pitch)

Located right off the road in beautiful Arches National Park, Owl Rock is fun, popular, and the easiest tower in the area. This is a great first tower.

Ancient Art, Stolen Chimney (5.10d or 5.8 A0, 5 pitches)

This tower has one of the most exhilarating summits in the desert and is many people's first multi-pitch desert tower. While this is the next step in difficulty from Owl Rock, it is a BIG step. The exposure is intense!

Independence Monument, Otto's Route (5.9, 4 pitches)

This is the most moderate major tower in this guidebook and probably all of the Colorado Plateau. This awesome, unusual route follows a large ramp with chimney sections (no chimney moves required), yet whenever the climbing gets steep, there are large drilled pockets for handholds, circa 1911.

Lizard Rock (5.9 R, 1 pitch)

The short tower is a good introduction to Fisher Towers rock and protection. This climb, while relatively moderate, is runout and only attempted by bold climbers who confidently climb 5.9.

Castleton Tower, North Chimney (5.9, 3 pitches)

The North Chimney is perhaps the easiest of all-free routes on a major tower. The first pitch may be the best 5.9 in the desert and the overall quality of the line rivals the nearby Kor-Ingalls route.

Castleton Tower, Kor-Ingalls (5.9, 4 pitches)

Even with numerous wide cracks, this classic route offers sunny exposure, good ledges, interesting history, and fun climbing. If you could only do one climb in the desert, this would be it.

Great Wall, Chinese Eyes, (5.10b, 1 pitch)

Located on the enormous Great Wall, this challenging route ascends a left-facing corner with fingers, hands to a (brief) squeeze. This offers great 5.10 handcrack training.

Three Penguins, Right Chimney, (5.10c, 2 pitches)

This short, but proud tower is located just minutes from Moab and offers great rock. In spite of its name, this route is not a chimney though it does require 20 feet of offwidth climbing before the summit.

Sister Superior, Jah Man (5.10c, 5 pitches)

Great, varied climbing and a narrow summit make this an unheralded desert classic. It may be the best 5.10 desert tower.

The Rectory, Fine Jade (5.11a, 4 pitches)

This is an elegant thin and sustained route. The many cruxes are rewarded with grand views of Castleton Tower and the La Sals Mountains.

North Six Shooter, Lightning Bolt Cracks (5.11b or 5.10d A1, 4 pitches)

Excellent rock and a full variety of crack climbing techniques will lead you to the incredible summit in the expansive Indian Creek Canyon.

Castleton Tower, North Face (5.11c, 4 pitches)

The North Face is an exceptional and challenging route up arguably the best tower in Utah. Great wide climbing, if that's your thing.

Moses, Primrose Dihedrals (5.11d or 5.10d A0, 8 pitches)

Located in the remote heart of Canyonlands National Park, this route is one of the most rewarding you will ever do. This is one of the taller towers and the climbing is steep and sustained. It is easy to pull through the 5.11 cruxes.

Cam sizes by brand

Ref Size*	BD Camalots	CCH Aliens	Metolius Cams	Trango Big Bros	Wild Country Friends
0.4"	.1 red	.33 black	.00 gray		
0.5"	.2 yellow	.375 blue	0 purple		0 red
0.6"	.3 purple	.5 green	1 blue		.5 orange
0.75"	.4 gray	.75 yellow	2 yellow		1 yellow
1"	.5 pink	1 red	3 orange		1.25 brown
1.25"	.75 green	1.5 orange	4 red		1.5 sky
1.5"	1 red	2 purple	5 black		2 pink
1.75"	1 red	2.5 gray	6 green		2.5 royal
2"	2 yellow	2.5 gray	7 blue		3 navy
2.5"	2 yellow		8 purple		3.5 purple
3"	3 blue		9 burgundy		4 black
3.5"	3.5 gray		10 dark blue		4 black
3.5-4.5"	4 purple			1 red	5 silver
4.5-5.5"	4.5 red			2	
5.5-7"	5 green			3 green	6 plum
7-8"				3 green	
8-12"				4 blue	

*"Ref size" is the optimal crack width for a given camming unit. It is not the range given by the manufacturer.



Understanding the maps

Topo Symbols

Right facing corner



Left facing corner



Straight in crack



Groove



Arete



Flake



Chimney



Roof



Ledge



Slab



Belay station



Pitch length



Optional belay



False belay



Bolt ^x



Rappel anchor



Face climbing



Pine Tree



Oak-like Tree



Bush



Knob



Hole



Overview graphics

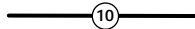
Low-clearance dirt road



High-clearance dirt road



Road or State Route



Interstate



Federal Highway



Park service trail



Climbers' trail



Cross-country trail



Notes on Rack

- "nuts" refers to any wired nut, stopper, or chock.
 "micro" = #1,2, "sml" = #3-5, "med" = #6-8, "leg" = #9-13

- for cams, "2 ea .75-1.5" means bring all the sizes between .75" and 1.5". Check the cam size chart to see which cam corresponds to which crack size.

Notes on Topo

- "belay takes .6-1" means, while leading the pitch, save enough .6-1" cams and nuts to build a natural anchor.

- a number next to a tree is the height of the tree.

Topo abbreviations

ow = offwidth

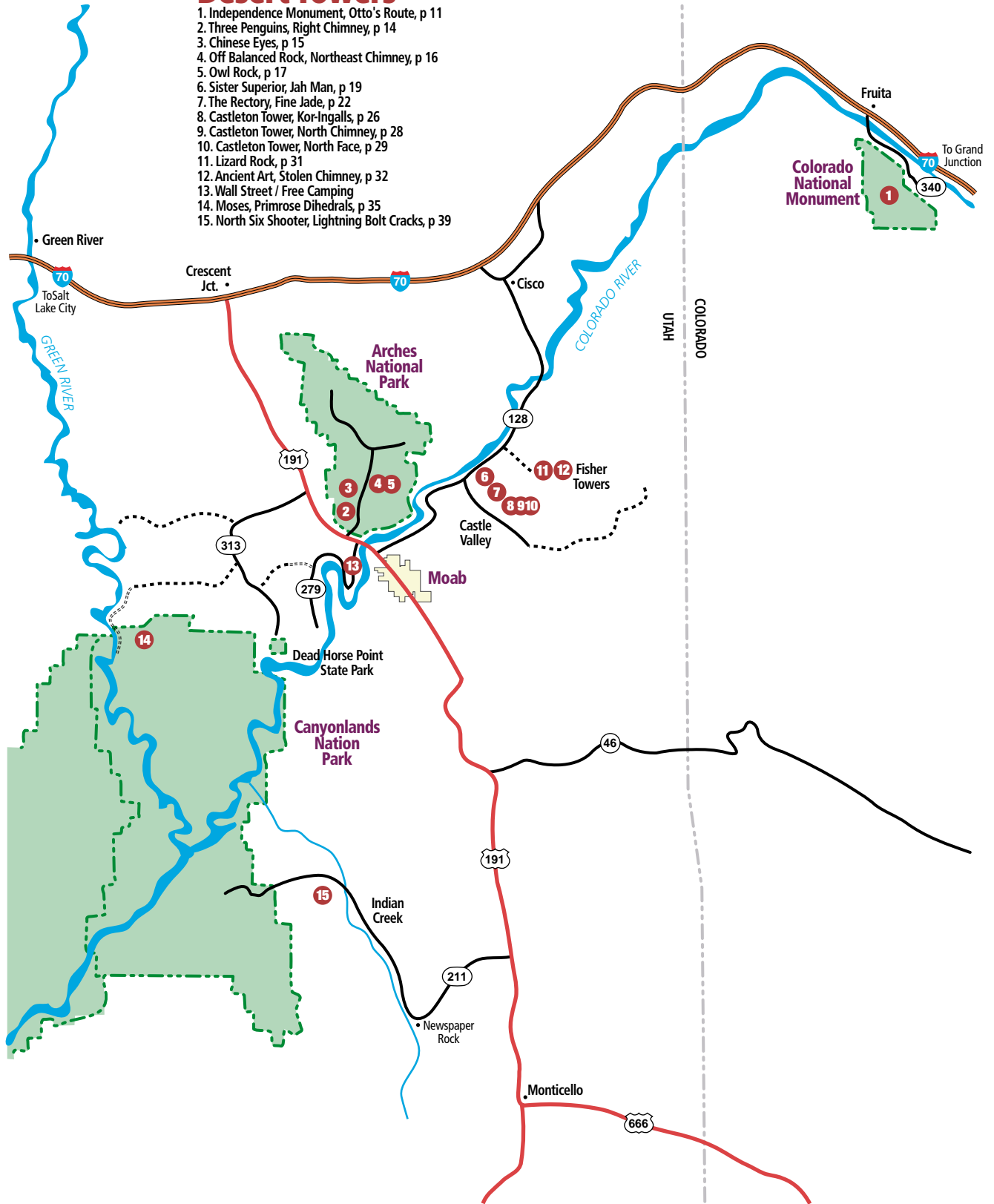
lb = lieback

p = fixed piton

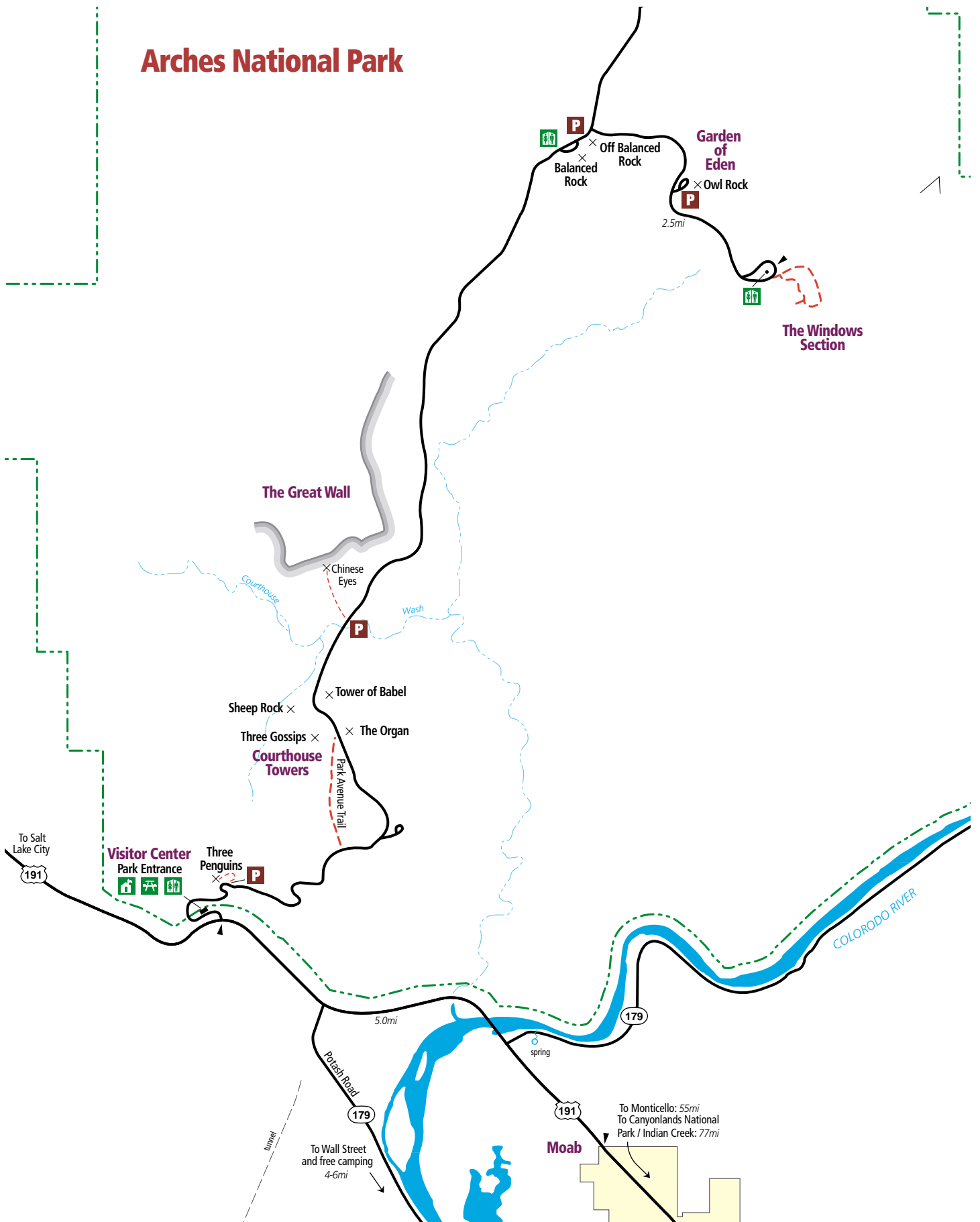
R = runout (dangerous fall)

Desert Towers

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Arches National Park



Independence Monument

Colorado National Monument hosts a number of impressive towers in the 200- to 400-foot range. Most of the towers share a similar shape: The bottom two thirds are vertical and the upper third has a tapered neck like a bottle of wine shaded by a summit visor. Of all the towers, Independence Monument is the most striking and accessible. While most of the other towers are connected to the surrounding cliffs, Independence Monument stands proudly alone with steep vertical cracks on every face.

Approach

The parking area for the tower is about two hours from Moab. Most climbers will want to climb it either at the beginning of their trip to Moab or the end.

From Moab, drive north on U.S. 191 to I-70 and head east to Fruita. Take Highway 340 south for 2.5 miles to the main entrance road for Colorado National Monument. Do not take this road. Instead, continue on 340 for 2.3 miles and turn onto a dirt road that ends after a few hundred feet in a small parking area for the Monument Canyon Trail.

The hike to Independence Monument takes about 40 minutes. The Monument Canyon Trail starts by traversing behind a suburban neighborhood and then enters a canyon and gradually climbs 600 vertical feet to the base of the East Face of Independence Monument. From here you have two options: A) Follow a climbers' trail right and up to the base of the North Face or B) continue on the main trail, passing under the South Face of Independence Monument and gain a climbers trail up to the west shoulder of the formation. This trail then skirts the north face to the base of the route. Option A is more direct and gives a good view of the climbing route. Option B offers a good visual tour of the entire tower. The climb starts up the obvious 4th class gully/chimney.

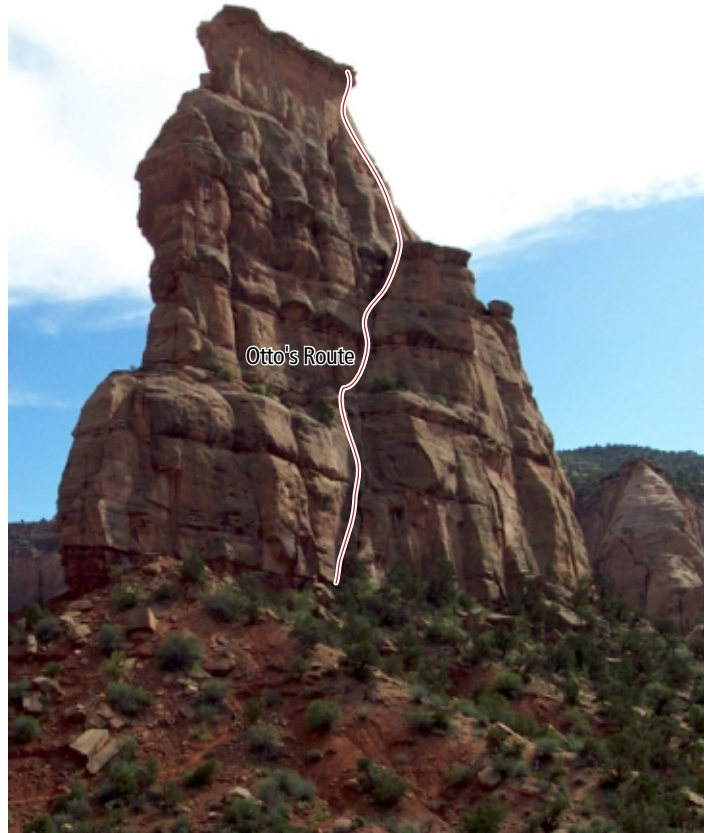
Descent

Make three rappels with two 50m ropes from chain anchors. Rappel from the last anchor to the second belay, the second belay to the first, and the first directly down to the ground. It is possible to rappel the route with one 60m rope, but you must rappel from anchor to anchor and will have to down climb on the last rappel (the first pitch) which is 110 feet long. Reverse the approach back to the car.

GPS Coordinates

Parking Area: 39° 06.530', 108° 42.081'

Summit: 39° 05.747', 108° 43.384'



Independence Monument, Otto's Route

III 5.9★★★★★

v1.0 2002

Time to climb route: 3-5 hours

Approach time: 40 minutes-1 hour

Descent time: 2 hours

Sun Exposure: noon to sunset (on last two pitches)

Height of route: 350'

This is the most moderate major tower in this guidebook and probably all of the Colorado Plateau. That said, it is not easy and while the protection is good at crux moves, there are often long runouts on easier terrain. The route is moderate for two reasons: First, the climb follows a large ramp and chimney sections (no chimney moves required) and second, whenever the climbing gets steep, there are large drilled pockets for handholds. Each pitch is varied, fun, and manufactured for your climbing comfort.

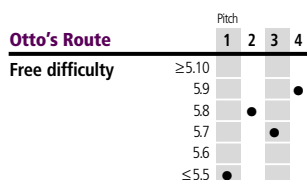
History

As one of the most interesting climbs on the Colorado Plateau, it is no surprise that Otto's Route has one of the more fascinating histories.

John Otto was a self-described trail builder and promoter who fell in love with the staggering topography outside of Fruita, Colorado. In 1906, he began building a trail into Monument Canyon as part of his one-man mission to popularize the area and make the scenery accessible to all people. On May 24, 1911, his extraordinary efforts culminated in the designation of his beloved area as Colorado National Monument by President William Howard Taft. Just a few weeks later on June 14, John Otto stood, solo, and placed an American flag on the top of Independence Monument.

To reach the summit, Otto used a staggering array of ingenuity and boldness. Climbing solo, Otto chopped steps when the rock was too smooth and drilled holes for pipes when the rock was too steep. The resulting route didn't really require any rock climbing and would probably be rated 5.0 A0 today. For many years on the Fourth of July, Otto made an ascent of his route and placed a flag on the summit.

If established in the same style today, the ascent would no doubt cause heart failure in most traditional climbers.



However, in 1911, before the sport of rock climbing really even existed, the route was less of a rock climb and more a vertical trail. The pipes were later removed and the result is today's classic climb that ascends large pockets.

– Chris McNamara

Strategy

This route is popular so get an early start and expect other parties. If you are really fast, you can start late in the day and climb the route just before sunset when the crowds are gone and the last two pitches bask in warm evening light.

Almost all the protection is fixed: You either clip drilled angles or pitons hammered into pipe (I am not joking). It is possible to climb the route with only five quickdraws. However, almost all parties will want a 4" cam to back up a slung chockstone on the second pitch crux. The average party will also want a few medium nuts and cams to protect the first pitch.

The first pitch is mostly 4th class with a few 5th class moves thrown in. Use long slings on every protection piece.

The second pitch is the first crux. Back up the slung chockstone with a 4" cam then stem and pull on drilled pockets around the wide crack. If you do it right, you won't have to do a single offwidth or chimney move on this pitch (or the rest of the route). Belay at the chain anchors if you want to communicate with your follower. All climbers can either coil the rope and walk/scramble 80 feet to Lunch Box Ledge. Or, you can belay each other on this section.

Pitch 3 requires an unprotected 5.6 move to the first piece of protection. The face moves are well-protected after that.

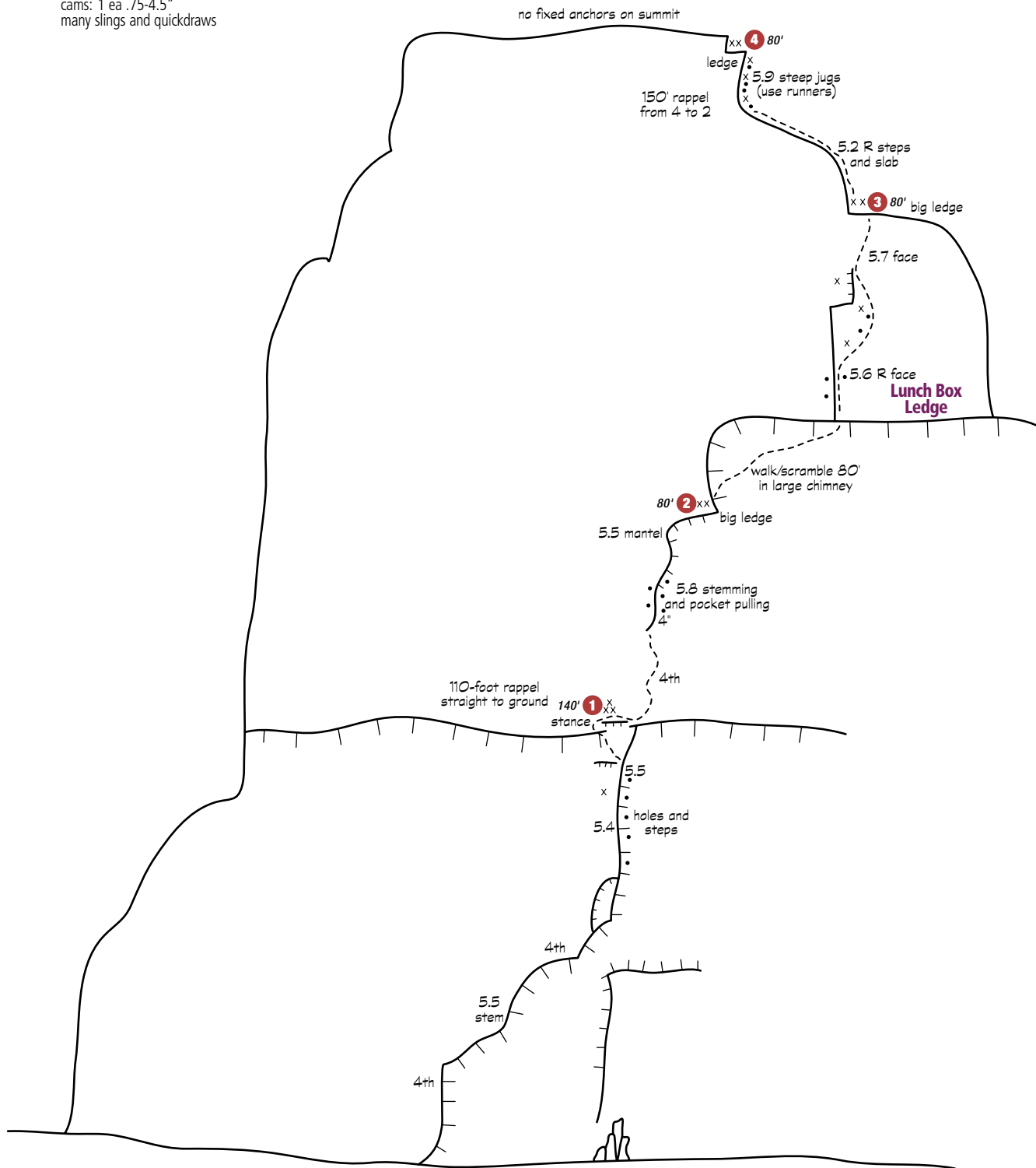
The fourth pitch starts with 60 feet of unprotected 5.2 to the first piton. From here, 15 feet of wild and steep 5.9 gym climbing moves lead to the last anchor, just below the summit. Be sure to clip the last piton under the small roof with a long sling. From the last bolted anchor, you must climb five feet to mantel onto the summit. There are no bolted anchors on the summit. To belay the follower, either use a body belay by sitting in one of the large depressions or scrounge around for a few gear placements to set anchor.

Retreat

Rappel the route at each point with two 50m or 60m ropes.

Rack

nuts: 1 set (optional)
cams: 1 ea .75-4.5"
many slings and quickdraws



Three Penguins

Approach time: 10 minutes

Sun exposure: morning to noon

Height of tower: 130'

The Three Penguins is a short but proud tower located just minutes from Moab. Because of its position on a slender rock pedestal, the tower feels taller and more exposed than it is. In spite of its name, this route is not a chimney though it does require 20 feet of offwidth climbing before the summit. The rock quality is awesome relative to other Arches routes. The climb starts with tight hands and ends with offwidth and involves every size in between. This tower is highly recommended for any leader with solid 5.10 crack climbing skills.

FA: Michael Kennedy and Molly Higgins, 11/76.

Approach

From Moab, take U.S. 191 north to Arches National Park (\$10 entrance fee). From the Visitors Center, drive the main Arches Park Road for a little less than a mile until you pass directly under the east face of the Three Penguins. Park on the paved shoulder on the left. Walk northeast up a boulder filled gully for a few hundred yards until you gain a large ledge that cuts back left (southwest) to the Three Penguins.

Descent

Two rappels with one 60m rope.

Right Chimney

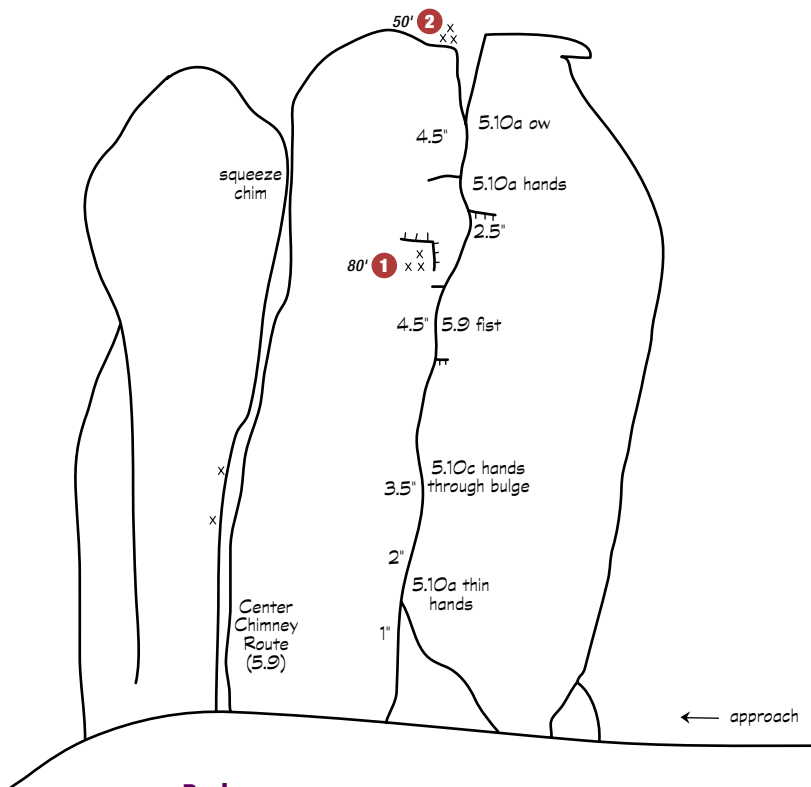
5.10c★★★

Crowds are rare on this climb so an early start is not mandatory. In most temperatures, climb the route after noon when it goes into the shade. Only one 60m rope is required for the rappels.

The first pitch offers incredible climbing by Arches standards. Climb tight hands to hands to reach 5.10c bulge. The crack becomes wider and easier until a 10-foot 5.10a fist section that is protected by a 4.5" cam. Stem whenever possible on this pitch.

The second pitch starts with steep hands to a jug that sends you into 20 feet of vertical 5.10a offwidth. It is possible to slide one 4.5" cam up the entire crack for protection. However, most people will want two 4.5" cams so that they can leave one for protection. The crux comes at the end when you must move from the offwidth into a short chimney.

The anchor is on the center summit. However, it may be most comfortable to belay sitting on the right (north) summit.



Rack

nuts: 1 set (optional)
cams: 2 ea 1-4.5" (extra 2.5-3.5" optional)

Great Wall

Approach time: 5 minutes

Sun exposure: morning to mid-afternoon

Height of route: 70'

The Great Wall is an enormous expanse of sandstone, which is 3 miles wide by 250 feet tall and parallels the main Arches National Park Road. Most of the rock is featureless and only a few climbs ascend even half the wall.

Located at the south end of the Great Wall, Chinese Eyes ascends a beautiful left-facing corner in the center of a thin buttress. The corner leans slightly to the left making the route feel gently overhanging in sections. This results in sustained and strenuous hand jamming with an occasional stemming rest when footholds appear.

FA: Charlie Fowler and Dan Grandusky, 11/86.

Approach

From Moab, drive on U.S. 191 for 5 minutes to the Arches National Park entrance (\$10 entrance fee).

Once on the main Arches National Park Road, drive to the Courthouse Wash parking area (a paved pullout on the left just after a bridge). Follow a climbers' trail directly toward the wall for 5 minutes to the base of Chinese Eyes.

Descent

Rappel with one 50m or 60m rope.

GPS Coordinates

Parking 38° 38.923', 109° 35.902'

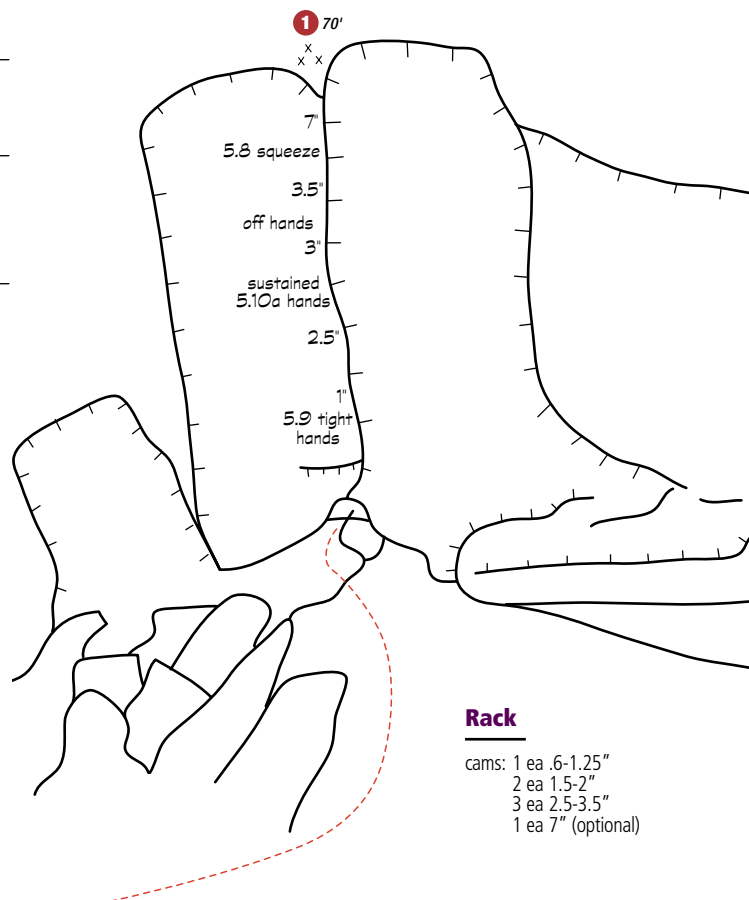
Base of Chinese Eyes 38° 39.209', 109° 35.878'

Chinese Eyes

5.10b★★★

The rock is a little sandy and all but confident 5.10 leaders will want extra 2.5-3.5" pieces to sew up the increasingly demanding crack. Climbers with small hands may struggle on the wide hand jamming near the top. The brief squeeze below the anchors is thankfully laced with handholds and protects with a 7" cam.

This route is great for top roping and building hand jamming technique and endurance. However, because ropes are wearing grooves in the rock, each climber should rappel rather than being lowered. Most climbers will want to tape their hands.



Rack

cams: 1 ea .6-1.25"
2 ea 1.5-2"
3 ea 2.5-3.5"
1 ea 7" (optional)

Off Balanced Rock

Approach time: 5 minutes

Sun exposure: morning

Height of tower: 160'

While as nondescript as towers come, Off Balanced Rock does offer some incredible climbing. This is one of the few 5.7 towers, but don't let the rating deceive you: The second pitch hits you with a full 90 feet of secure but unprotected chimney climbing. The runout aside, the chimney offers incredible rock and moderate moves making it a secure but wild adventure for the confident 5.7 chimney leader. The first ascent party is unknown.

Approach

From Moab, take U.S. 191 north to Arches National Park (\$10 entrance fee). Drive the main Arches road for about 9 miles and park about 100 yards after the Balanced Rock Parking Area in the gravel on the side of the road. If you reach the Windows road turnoff you have gone too far. The route is visible from the car. Walk directly towards it.

Descent

Rappel the route with one 60m rope.

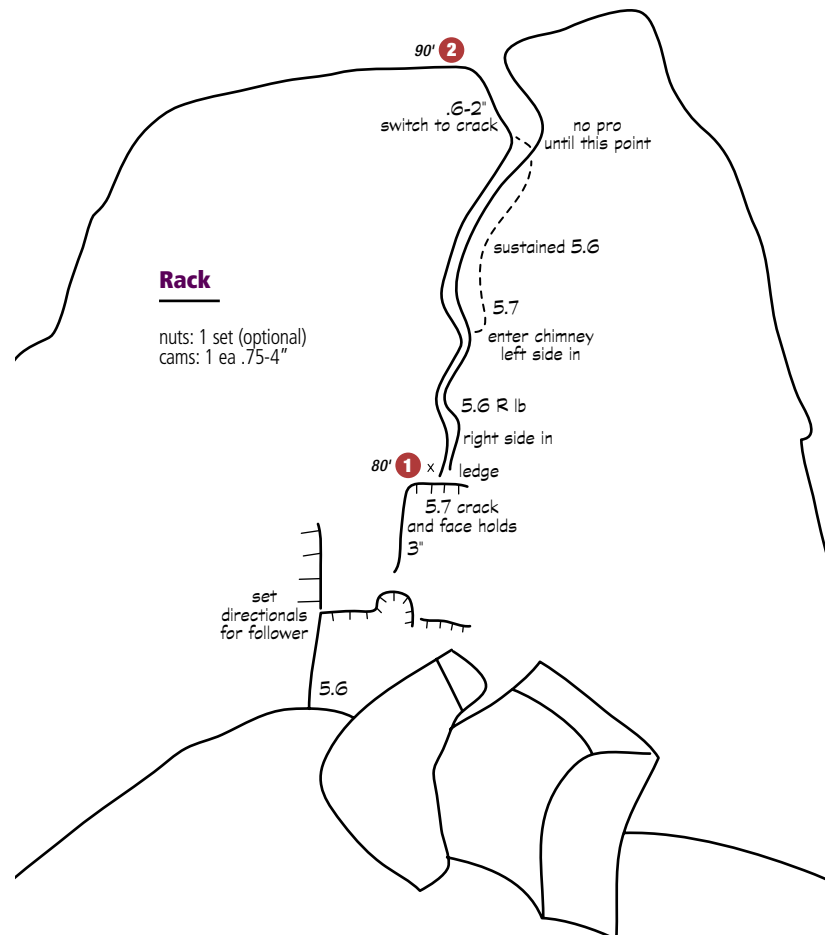
Northeast Chimney

5.7 R★★

There are few crowds on this climb. In most temperatures, start in the late morning once the rock has gone into the shade. You only need one 60m rope. If you have a 50m rope, you will need a second rope to rappel.

The rock on the first pitch is loose and fractured. Before the route traverses right, place a few cams to protect the follower. The crux hand crack bulge comes below the anchor and protects with a few 2.5-3.5" cams.

The second pitch is the reason to climb the route and is only for confident 5.7 chimney leaders. Most will want to climb the pitch without gear as there are essentially no placements. The first 20 feet are the crux and involve some heady but secure lieback and chimney moves. Once you enter the chimney, climb secure 5.6 chimney to 15 feet before the summit. At this point, the chimney widens and a crack appears. If you led the 5.7 chimney without pro you probably won't care to protect this 5.6 last part. If you do wish to protect it, bring a few cams .75-1.5" and maybe a few nuts. Once you get to the top you will want to lower back down and backclean the pro to keep the rope running smoothly for the follower.



Arches National Park, Owl Rock

Resembling a 100-foot-tall glob of mud, Owl Rock is not a thing of beauty. However, with a two-minute approach and some wild, gym-like moves on big solid holds, most can't resist at least a few ascents. It's hard to believe this 5.9 climb is one of the easier towers, but such is the stout nature of desert climbing.

Approach

From Moab, take U.S. 191 to the Arches National Park entrance (\$10 entrance fee).

Once on the main Arches National Park Road, turn right 100 yards after Balanced Rock (a "Windows Campground" sign marks the turnoff). Drive one mile and turn left into the "Garden of Eden" parking area. Park and walk a few hundred feet east to Owl Rock. Follow established trails.

Descent

Rappel the route with one 60m rope or two 50m ropes from the first belay. Do not rappel off true summit as ropes are wearing grooves in the rock.

GPS Coordinates

Garden of Eden parking area: 38° 41.810', 109° 33.054'

Owl Rock: 38° 41.883', 109° 32.917'



Owl Rock

5.9★★★★★

v1.0 2002

Time to climb route: 1 hour

Approach time: 2 minutes

Descent time: 3 minutes

Sun Exposure: noon to sunset

Height of route: 100'

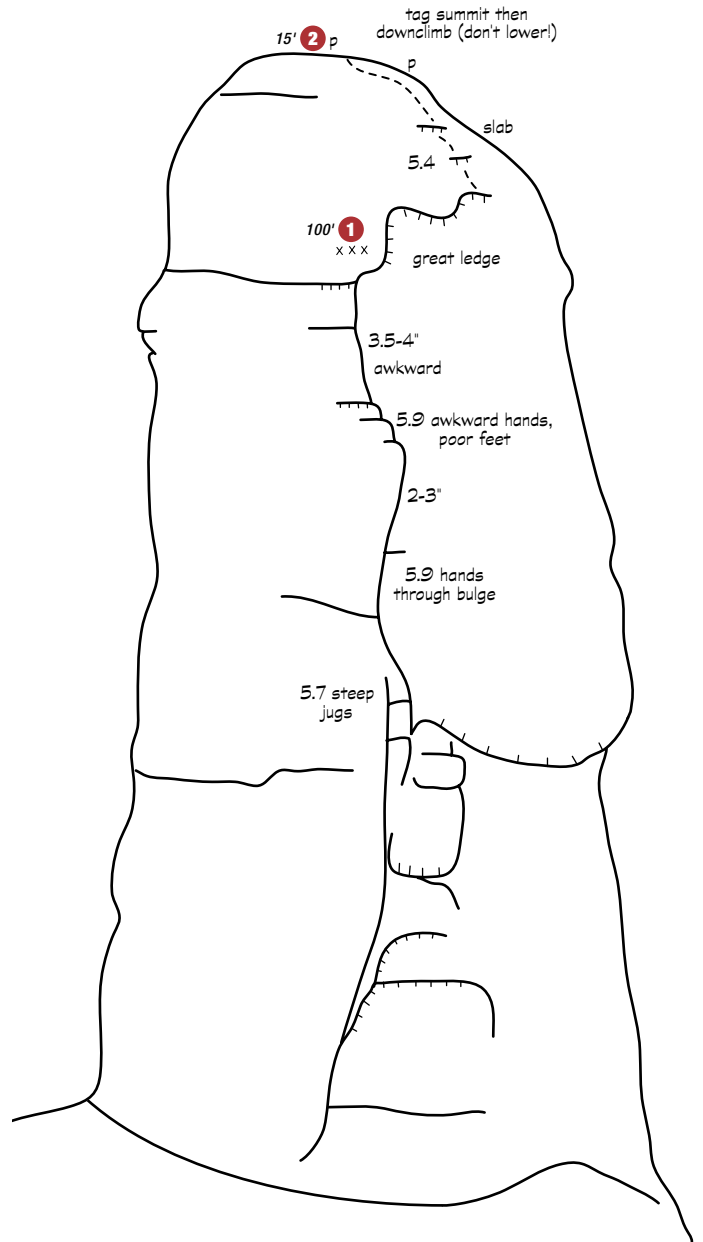
Many climbers experience Owl Rock as their first desert tower. From a distance, the rock quality appears dreadful, but the sandstone is miraculously solid and sucks in good protection. One of the steepest 5.9 desert climbs, only the presence of unusual jugs prevents the route from being 5.11. While you climb mostly on the featured face around the obvious crack, the two cruxes do require hand jamming skills. The leader needs desert experience and the follower needs some crack experience to pull through cruxes. Try to look good as tourists will gawk and take pictures.

FA: Ron Olevsky, solo, 2/78.

Strategy

Start early, or, if you are fast, climb just before sunset to avoid crowds. During midday, expect a wait. The route receives sun from noon to the very last minutes before sunset and is a great way to spend the end of a day. Bring either one 60m rope or two 50m ropes.

After a few low-angle moves, the first pitch hits you with steep and wild climbing. Stem when possible, reach high for hidden jugs, and place a quickdraw or sling on every piece to prevent rope drag. Two short cruxes require awkward hand jams to jugs. On the 15-foot second pitch, have each climber lead up, tag the summit, then downclimb. Do not lower off the summit as ropes carve unsightly grooves in the rock.



Rack

nuts: 1 ea med, lrg nuts
 cams: 2 sets 1-4.5"
 many long slings

	Pitch
Owl Rock	1 2
Free difficulty	≥5.10
	5.9 ●
	5.8
	5.7
	5.6
	≤5.5 ●

Sister Superior

Sister Superior is the tallest point in a cluster of narrow towers about a mile north of Castleton Tower. In silhouette, from certain angles on the River Road, these are among the most dramatic spires in the area—the aiguilles of the desert. Sister Superior has the same solid Wingate sandstone and calcite coating as Castleton, but it is a bit less crowded because of its isolated position and rough approach. Yet, most desert aficionados place Jah Man among their top five desert tower routes.

Approach

From Moab, drive north on U.S. 191 and turn right onto Highway 128/River Road. Drive 15.7 miles to the Castle Valley Road, set your odometer, and continue another 0.8 miles. Turn right onto a poor dirt road located just before a bridge with guard rails across a wash. Drive south, often in the wash itself, for 2.2 miles to the trailhead located in broad right turn just past a wire fence. Cairns sometimes mark the parking and/or trailhead. A high clearance vehicle is necessary to reach the trailhead. With low clearance cars, drive as far as you can (probably less than half a mile) and walk the road.

The approach trail leads directly to the base of Sister Superior, the tallest and southernmost tower. Walk up washes toward the longest talus ridge descending from the group. Follow this prominent ridge to talus and the tower. Don't be tempted to hike directly from the car to other towers of the group or to the connecting ridge. Dangerous and scary ball-bearing scree lies over steep, exposed slopes on the ridge.

Descent

Rap the route with two 50m or 60m ropes:

1. Rap from summit anchors to bolted belay at the end of the third pitch. You must swing right a bit to reach the ledge.

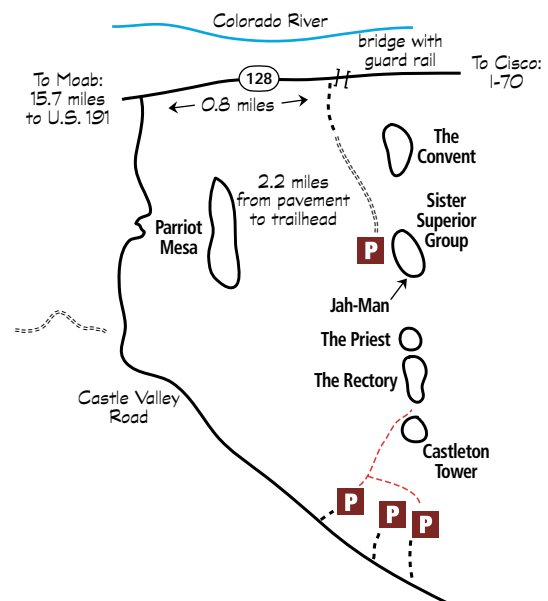
2. Rap to the ground.

If you miss an anchor or come short, remember that there are anchors at every belay. The lowest is on the ledge system at the base of the Sister Squeeze, at the far right (south).

On the walk out, don't be tempted by shortcuts. The trail is the best route.



Sister Superior Overview



Sister Superior, Jah Man

III 5.10c★★★★★

v1.0 2002

Time to climb route: 4-6 hours

Approach time: 45 minutes with 4WD and 2 hours with car

Descent time: 30 minutes

Sun Exposure: mid-morning to evening

Height of route: 325'

Despite being a moderate climb, and in plain view from Castleton Tower, Jah Man is bypassed by many visitors to the Colorado Plateau. Don't make this mistake. A great variety of finger, hand and body-size cracks plus face climbing and a narrow summit make this an unheralded classic.

History

Kirk Miller and I chose Sister Superior for a weekend adventure because it was the nearest good tower to Denver. We had no idea that we would find good quality hand cracks, face climbing, perfect ledges, and a sunny exposure. I had climbed a lot of desert towers by this time and knew we had scored big. We did the first three pitches on Saturday, did some big air trundles into the sunset, then went back up and finished it on Sunday.

I remember being a little worried that the weather might change. Coming back was not an easy option, and you never knew when Ed Webster might show up. I'm not a user of red tags, but after my "first-attempts" on the The Primrose Dihedrals, Flake Route, and Hallucinogen, I was permanently paranoid. I think it's safe to say that Ed was the Fred Beckey of both the Black Canyon and Canyonlands in the late seventies. The only real plan we had was to fix whatever we climbed with half ropelength rappel stations. Carrying two ropes up the approach was something to avoid and the drilling gear weighed less than another rope. We barely had a double set of friends and figured the bolt gear was sort of a poor man's back-up. We basically equipped the route to be safe and fun, but the last rappel was off of our last, lonely bolt (or baby angle)—kinda scary.

We named the route after Bob Marley's song Jammin'/Jah Man. A good set of lyrics with a double meaning that seemed to fit any good crack climb/climber. We hoped to see the tower renamed, since we had freed it, the Rastafarian. However, the "Astroman Principle" was really used more for routes than rocks. Since we never really sent data to either the Alpine Journal or any magazines, and the name Sister Superior might be USGS official, that renaming never happened, at least through Bjornstad.

– Ken Trout

Strategy

The route faces southwest and has sun by mid-morning. A high clearance vehicle (not necessarily 4WD) is needed for the closest approach.

The pitches are short, but linking is not recommended due to rope drag. The Sister Squeeze chimney on the second pitch is intimidating, but footholds make it easier than it looks. The final three pitches are all tough, but the cruxes are short and the protection is good.

The new direct start of "Za Man" adds another fine 5.10+ crack and can be used to separate two parties who arrive at the same time.

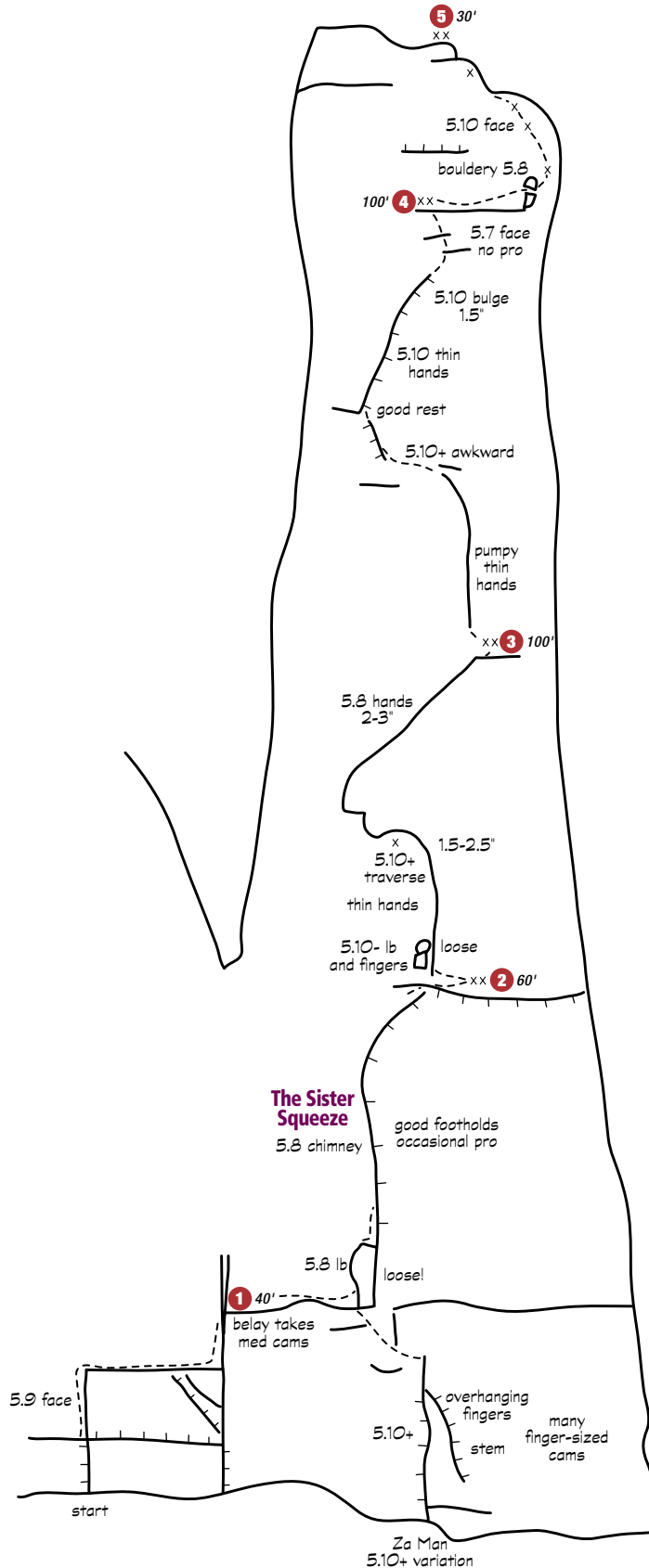
Retreat

Rap stations are located at every belay except the first (walk right, south, on ledge to find rap here).

Jah Man	Pitch				
	1	2	3	4	5
Free difficulty	≥5.10		•	•	•
	5.9	•			
	5.8	•			
	5.7				
	5.6				
	≤5.5				

Rack

- nuts: 1 set
- cams: 2 ea .5-.75"
- 4 ea 1-1.5"
- 2 ea 1.75-3.5"



The Sister Squeeze

5.8 chimney good footholds occasional pro

1 40'

belay takes med cams

5.8 lb loose!

5.9 face

start

overhanging fingers many finger-sized cams
5.10+ stem

Za Man 5.10+ variation

The Rectory

The Rectory is a massive block of calcite-hardened Wingate sandstone, a few hundred yards north of the famed Castleton Tower. Positioned above the Colorado River Valley, The Rectory has a near-alpine feel with a long, strenuous hike up massive slopes of scree and a final approach along a narrow, spiny ridge. Nearly a dozen routes reach The Rectory's broad summit, but Fine Jade remains the favorite because of its striking hand and finger cracks, spine-tingling hand traverse, sunny aspect, and spectacular views.

Approach

To the Parking Area:

From Moab, drive north and turn right onto Highway 128/River Road. Drive 15.7 miles and turn right on Castle Valley Road. Drive for 4.6 miles as it switchbacks steeply out of the valley. Here, a dirt road turns left and a few yards ahead is decent camping (no water) and the Castleton trailhead. The Rectory is visible behind the striking Castleton Tower. Similar dirt roads leave the pavement in the next mile and offer better camping plus access to the approach trail. However, the first pullout offers the quickest approach.

From the Parking Area (also see Approach Topo on next page):

Walk up the obvious drainage, directly toward Castleton, and enter a narrow canyon. Climb this, scrambling easily past drop-offs, until the canyon opens near a sandy hilltop. Cross a dirt road, descend a well-beaten footpath, follow another road briefly, then head right on a trail toward Castleton. Cairns usually mark the turns.

From the other parking areas/camping spots: Hike toward Castleton until you reach a dirt road. Follow this left (west) until you meet the main approach trail. Do not be tempted into hiking directly up the talus cone.

The main trail climbs easily, then very steeply, past a cliff band with some easy scrambling. A trail built by the American Mountain Foundation switchbacks up the hill using many stone steps. Scramble up a 12-foot-high second cliff band at a break. (The band is about 5.5—some may wish to haul packs.) Don't try to skirt this cliff—the trail leads to the best spot! For The Rectory, a better option may be to follow a side trail left around a cliff band.

More switchbacks lead to a junction below Castleton. Head left (north), skirting several escarpments. Traverse the spectacular ridge between Castleton and The Rectory, skirt another formation on its left, then switchback up right to the base of the southern prow and the start of the route. The traverse between the towers can be scary and loose in dry conditions.



Descent

In the old days, climbers walked the length of The Rectory and rappelled the northwest corner (with two long ropes). This is still worth doing if you want to do a climb at that end, such as the Priest, or if you want to just explore this unique formation. However, ropes often stick on these raps.

A better descent for Fine Jade is to rappel the route. The first anchor is at the very southeast corner, atop the bolted variation top pitch, Coyote Calling. Anchors are at every belay (and then some). Plan four raps with one 60m rope or three raps with two 50m ropes.

The Rectory, Fine Jade

III 5.11a ★★★★★

v1.0 2002

Time to climb route: 4-6 hours

Approach time: 1-1.5 hours

Descent time: 2 hours

Sun Exposure: sunrise to afternoon (except first pitch)

Height of route: 400'

Fine Jade is one of the finest tower climbs, although The Rectory is perhaps too broad to be considered a true tower. Excellent, varied climbing with many cruxes ascends the sunny southern prow of The Rectory. You will be rewarded with awesome views of Castleton Tower and the La Sals Mountains.

The full name of the route is Fine Jade Meets Three Nuns. The Nuns is the name given to part of The Rectory formation and Fine Jade is a euphemism for penis. The route is quite a score no matter how you look at it.

FA: Chip Chase and Pat Ellinwood, 1984.

Strategy

Fine Jade faces south and gets sun from the early morning, though the first pitch is shaded and the crack tends to retain the cold. Wind can also chill the route.

Although the second pitch gets the hardest grade, most people have a harder time with the first: The short, right-leaning fist crack about 30 feet off the ground is very strenuous and awkward, and it comes before you're really warmed up. Place a solid 3.5" piece high, then move quickly until you turn the corner, where good hand jams and an easier angle await.

The last pitch has easy climbing on blocks until a horizontal break leads left. Hand traverse with good footholds, decent pro, and big air to the corner of the tower. Belay off cams around the corner, or, with good rope management, continue up the cracks at the back of the huge ledge. An awkward crack (#4 Friend/#3 Camelot) leads to an intimidating leftward traverse under a gaping flake. Footholds and jams make this much easier than it looks. A short lieback puts you on the abruptly flat summit.

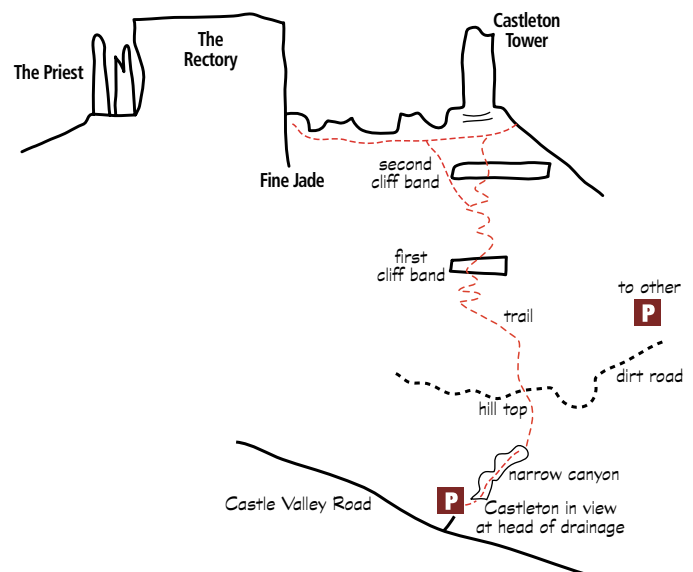
Fine Jade	Pitch			
	1	2	3	4
Free difficulty	≥5.10	●	●	
	5.9		●	●
	5.8			
	5.7			
	5.6			
	≤5.5			

A new direct finish joins the last pitch of an east-face route named Coyote Calling. Beginning on the southeast corner, climb easy ground above Fine Jade's third belay to the first of three bolts leading up a varnished, featured face. Many climbers opt for the bolt-protected finish, but the spectacular hand traverse and lieback of Fine Jade's original line add much of the character of the route and should not be missed.

Retreat

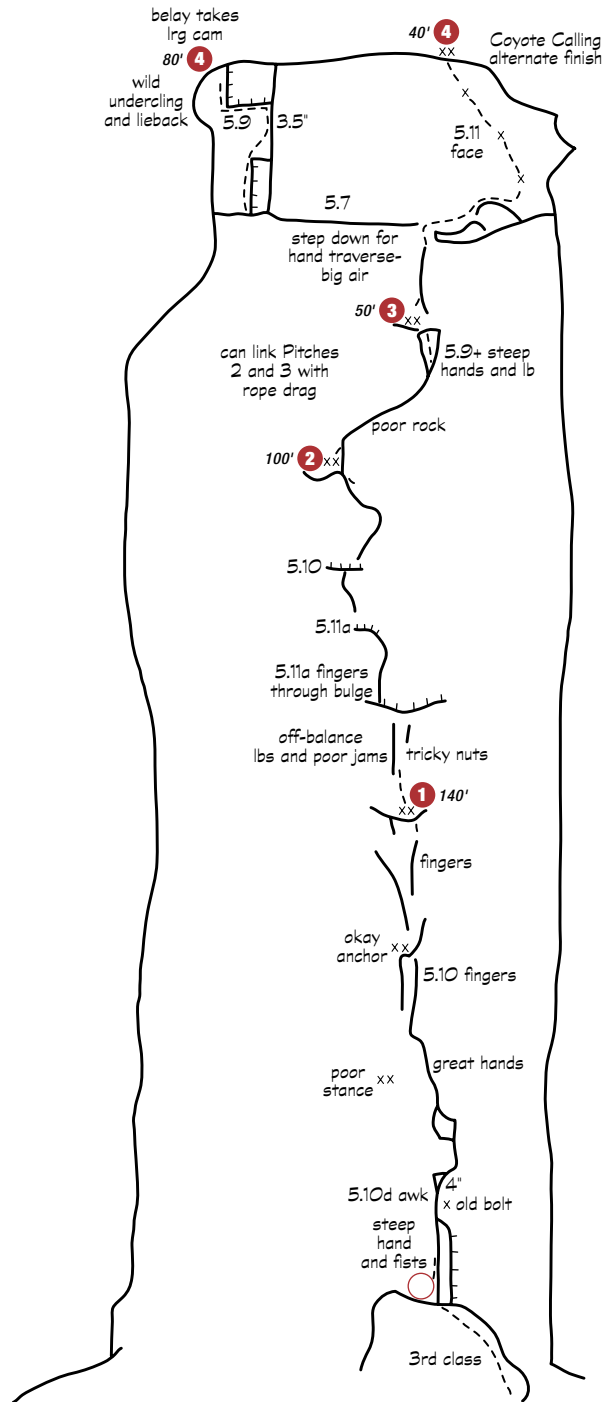
Escape is possible with one 60m rope.

Approach Topo



Rack

nuts: 1-2 sets
cams: 2 ea .5-3"
1 ea 4"



Castleton Tower

Castleton is the Big Daddy—one of the most alluring summits in the desert. The tower offers superb rock, outstanding views, and a variety of lines and exposures. A desert rarity, this tower offers two moderate 5.9 climbs.

Castleton has sheer sides and an incredible position on top of a 1,000-foot talus cone, next to the snowy La Sal Mountains. But the Tower's hallmark is its frequently impeccable Wingate sandstone, hardened in places by huge sheets of the white mineral, calcite. This extremely hard substance crystalized onto the sandstone when it was still underground many thousands of years ago. Well-bonded to the softer stone, the calcite protects the weaker rock and often provides excellent face holds.

Approach

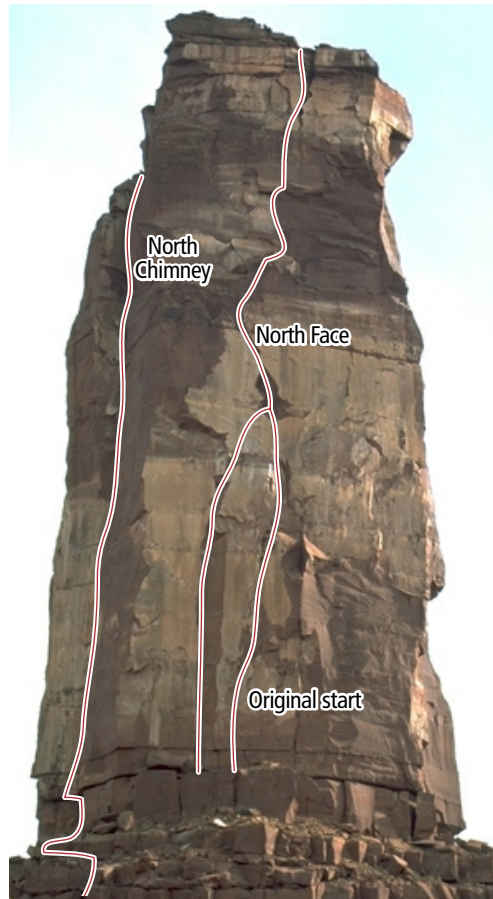
To the Parking Area:

From Moab, drive north and turn right onto Highway 128/River Road. Drive 15.7 miles and turn right on Castle Valley Road. Drive for 4.6 miles as it switchbacks steeply out of the valley. Here, a dirt road turns left and a few yards ahead is decent camping (no water) and the Castleton trailhead. Similar dirt roads head left from the pavement in the next mile. These offer more secluded camping, but a longer approach hike.

To Castleton Tower:

From the first parking area, walk up the obvious drainage, directly toward Castleton, and enter a narrow canyon. Climb this and scramble easily past drop-offs until the canyon opens near a sandy hilltop. Cross a dirt road, descend a well-beaten footpath, follow another road briefly, then head right on a trail toward Castleton. Cairns usually mark the turns. (Do not be tempted into hiking directly up the talus cone!)

The main trail climbs easily, then very steeply, past a cliff band with some easy scrambling. A trail built by the American Mountain Foundation switchbacks up the hill using many stone steps. Scramble up a 12-foot-high second cliff band at a break. (The band is about 5.5—some may wish to haul packs.) Don't try to skirt this



cliff—the trail leads to the best spot! More switchbacks lead to a junction.

Kor-Ingalls Route:

Head right from the junction toward the southeast face and traverse around the south side at one level, then diagonal back up left to reach a narrow shelf. Traverse left to the start of the route.

North Chimney and North Face:

Traverse left from the junction to a loose scree slope. Climb this and scramble easily to the base. A very exposed, flat shelf traverses the east side of the tower and offers easy access between the south and north faces.

Descent

The best descent is to rappel the north face. Begin near the northeast corner of the summit and take three double-rope raps off of good bolted anchors. It also works to rappel the southeast face just below the summit. There are good ledges atop every pitch of Kor-Ingalls. Most parties do four double-rope raps (three is possible with 55 or 60m ropes). Follow the descent trail carefully and bring a headlamp. Some may wish to lower or hand down packs at the 5.5 cliff band.

Rappel quickly if thunderheads threaten. At least one climber has been killed by lightning atop Castleton.

Castleton Tower, Kor-Ingalls Route

III 5.9★★★★

v1.0 2002

Time to climb route: 3-6 hours

Approach time: 1 hour

Descent time: 1.5 hours

Sun Exposure: morning to mid-afternoon

Height of route: 375'

Desert towers were made famous when the Kor-Ingalls Route was highlighted in *50 Classic Climbs*. There are too many wide cracks to offer unmitigated pleasure, but sunny exposure, good ledges, solid stone, and history combine to make this an ultra classic. Only climb this route if you have solid 5.9 offwidth technique.

History

It is hard to believe now, but in the early 1960s it was difficult to arouse interest in first ascents of the desert towers around Moab. A common attitude was that the really outstanding spires had already been climbed. Additionally, desert climbing was considered an esoteric game, peculiar to North American climbing and involving only a handful of eccentric climbers.

My first view of Castleton Tower, the Fisher Towers, and North Six Shooter Peak was in 1956, while I was working for the United States Geological Survey. I was entranced and immediately dreamed of climbing them, although they were very difficult by the standards of the day. I'd heard a rumor that Spider Rock, an 800-foot spire in Canyon de Chelly, had been climbed that spring, but it seemed so improbable that I did not believe it. Castleton Tower was most attractive. This beautiful red prism dominated the Castle Valley with a clean, aloof presence both forbidding and inviting. I knew it would be a classic, but I needed a partner.

In 1959, I met Layton Kor at a party on Flagstaff Mountain above Boulder. There was an immediate rapport between us, and the next day we climbed the Bastille Crack in Eldorado Canyon. I was amazed, even shocked, by Kor's ability. Here was the man for Castleton Tower.

Two years later we arrived in the Castle Valley in fading sunlight. The brooding red tower seemed ancient, remote, apart from human concerns. Under its presence, we had a comfortable bivouac on the sand. We lay in our sleeping bags thinking about our impending adventure with a

mixture of anticipation and anxiety. What would we discover? How would it feel to reach the summit? Would our equipment be adequate? Would the rock be dangerous? What if there was an accident?

The desert was still bathed in the bright light of morning. The valley was sparsely inhabited at that time and we had a fresh land to ourselves. In my excitement, I hardly noticed trudging up the 1000-foot ballbearing scree slope, which has since become the subject of many complaints.

At the base of the tower, Layton was energized and eagerly surveyed the dihedral system on the south face—the only obvious route. We were pleasantly surprised to see that the rock was excellent by desert standards.

We rapidly gained about 100 feet on the first pitch. The rock was warm, clean, and friendly, inspiring us with a feeling of well-being. The next pitch was more serious, presenting a flared chimney pinching out to three-inch cracks on a bulging blocky wall. Layton overcame these, placing large angle pitons back-to-back. Then a shattered ledge and short chimney led to an excellent platform. The walls of the vertical dihedral above were covered with a hard white crust, offering tiny projections for edging. This stiff lead of stemming and jamming ended 40 feet above on another good ledge.

By mid-afternoon we were halfway up the tower, but the weather looked unstable. It was already raining to the south, in the La Sal Mountains, and the hardest part of the climb appeared to be still above us. We rappelled off, leaving the ropes in place.

In the morning we prussiked up the fixed lines to our high point. Now we faced the crux—a 70-foot chimney. I was unable to watch Layton's lead, but I found the climbing strenuous and exposed. With my left side in the chimney, I moved upward by tiresome offwidth moves. At the top of the chimney, it felt odd to suddenly balance on a friction slab. The next 45 feet was easy, then ten feet of pleasant stemming in a wide chasm was connected by a mantel to the final 35 feet of steep face climbing, and the summit.

The climbing had been an ideal combination of enjoyment and difficulty. We shook hands and congratulated each other. It was about noon, September 16, 1961.

The summit was large enough for a house, and the view was almost larger than life. We were elated by a spectacular 360-degree panorama of the Colorado River, La Sal Mountains, Fisher Towers, Castle Valley, and the Priest, Nuns, and Rectory. How wonderfully fortunate to be the first ever on this summit. There is nothing in climbing quite like a first ascent, especially of a technical route. The very knowledge that a line has been done changes the quality of uncertainty.

We soon became nervous. An ominous black cloud

Kor-Ingalls Route	Pitch			
	1	2	3	4
Free difficulty	≥5.10		•	
	5.9		•	
	5.8	•		•
	5.7	•		
	5.6			
	≤5.5			

building over the La Sals cast an electric blue-green light over the desert. Our love of adventure did not extend to getting fried by lightning. Racing the storm we quickly made two exposed rappels. We had secure anchors, and it was a merry thing to be running down the tower immersed in so much space and scenery.

It began to sprinkle, so we stopped at the platform above the second pitch. There was a lull, and we started rappelling again. Suddenly, the rain was upon us. Layton made the last rappel and took shelter under a ledge.

I was about to start down the rope, when the jerking sting of a ground current stopped me short. That was enough! I sat it out balanced on the balls of my feet in a squatting position to minimize the possibility of taking another jolt. The storm became a violent downpour, thoroughly soaking me, but the worst was over in about 15 minutes.

The arroyos ran bright red. I was wet and cold, but far from discontent. We knew we had played a part in the Golden Age of climbing in North America.

– Huntley Ingalls

Strategy

The Kor-Ingalls Route faces south, but east-facing corners bring some pitches into shade in early afternoon. The best time to climb the route is October through April. This is a very popular route (ditto: North Chimney). Get an early start and try to climb on a weekday and/or avoid spring and fall. On the climb, bring only the gear you need. A pack will make the crux pitch nearly impossible.

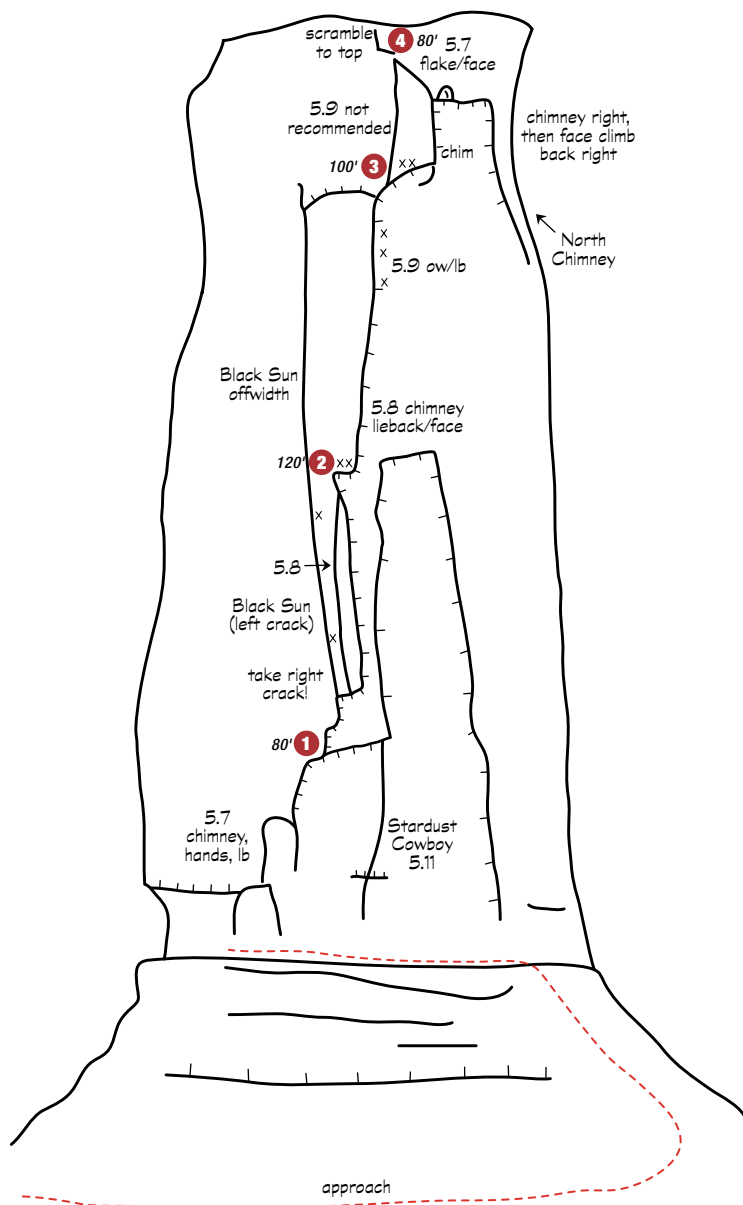
On the crux 5.9 pitch (Pitch 3), climb the left-facing corner system with chimney, face, and lieback moves. The crux is about three-quarters of the way up the steep section. An array of historical gear ‘protects’ face moves left of the crack or a wide crack moves right in the thick of it. Keep a sharp eye out for footholds. The difficulties end at a good ledge and bolted belay.

Either jam straight up to the summit (5.8) or, easier, continue to chimney up right into the notch that connects with the North Chimney. Easy face moves and a 5.7 flake gain the summit belay anchor. Scramble easily to the top.

Fast climbers may wish to save themselves from repeating the long approach and do multiple routes on Castleton or the neighboring towers. Stardust Cowboy offers a good pitch of 5.11 cracks that joins Kor-Ingalls. Fine Jade on the Rectory (4 pitches, 5.11 cracks of all sizes. See SuperTopo) and Honeymoon Chimney on The Priest (4 pitches, 5.11 chimney and face climbing) are the best routes on the towers north of Castleton.

Retreat

There are anchors at every belay ledge. Be careful rappelling if the routes are crowded. If a storm hits near the top, work together with other parties to make sure everyone gets down quickly via different routes.



Rack

- nuts: 2 ea (offsets useful)
- cams: 3 ea .5-1"
- 2-3 ea 1.5-3.5"
- 1 ea 4.5"

Castleton Tower, North Chimney

III 5.9★★★★

v1.0 2002

Time to climb route: 3-5 hours

Approach time: 1 hour

Descent time: 1.5 hours

Sun Exposure: shade all day

Height of route: 375'

The North Chimney ascends a prominent line of large dihedrals and chimneys on the left side of Castleton's North Face. The route is technically easier, more sustained, and, some argue, more classic than the Kor-Ingalls Route. While half the route ascends a large chimney, there are few actual chimney moves. Instead, the route ascends a variety of straight in jams, stems, and one short, but tough, offwidth section.

History

The first ascent was made in 1970 by Daniel Burgette and Allen Erickson in a quick five hours. They climbed the route all free with a rack consisting of 21 nuts and eight pitons. The climb was originally rated 5.8.

Strategy

The route is in the shade all day and wind often blows through the chimney so wear warm layers. The route is extremely popular in the spring and fall. Try to climb it on a weekday, and get an early start.

The first pitch, possibly the best 5.9 stretch in the desert, ascends a steep double hand crack in a corner. The pitch sports 5.9 bulges at the beginning that end with sustained 5.8 jamming in the middle.

The second pitch starts with a short and hard offwidth protected by one old bolt that should be backed up with a 4-5" cam. The climb then enters a large chimney, which requires little chimney technique. Long slings keep the rope running smoothly around the chockstones in the upper chimney.

The third pitch exits the chimney and moves onto the south face where it joins up with the Kor-Ingalls route for the fourth pitch.

The route has some loose rock—bring a helmet.

Retreat

There are anchors at the first and second belay, but the bolts are old and the crack is a rope-eater. It may be better to continue to the notch and join Kor-Ingalls. Three double-rope rappels off of good anchors get you to the base.

North Chimney	Pitch		
	1	2	3
Free difficulty	≥5.10		
	5.9	●	●
	5.8		●
	5.7		
	5.6		
	≤5.5		

Castleton Tower, North Face

III 5.11c★★★★

v1.0 2002

Time to climb route: 3-6 hours

Approach time: 1 hour

Descent time: 1.5 hours

Sun Exposure: late afternoon

Height of route: 375'

The North Face is a real testpiece, especially for those with small hands. The first and third pitches present wide hands and offwidth challenges on very steep and solid sandstone. This route is a must-do if you are up for the challenge.

History

In 1972, more than ten years after its first ascent, Castleton Tower had seen a mere eight ascents. According to Jimmie Dunn, "At the time, the desert was a place that people didn't really like. It was just too dry, too rocky, and too weird." Dunn felt differently and was on a desert tower binge, making back-to-back first ascents and participating in the 6th, 7th, and 8th ascents of Castleton. Now he looked to the unclimbed north face for his 9th.

Joining up with Doug Snively, Dunn drove out to the Castle Valley and enjoyed the solitude of the day, "We had the only car parked on the 40-mile stretch of the River Road." The two put together a rack that would send chills through today's climbers: large pitons and crude hexes instead of cams, swami belts instead of harnesses, and EB's (\$12 per pair) instead of sticky rubber climbing shoes. While museum quality today, it was all state-of-the-art in 1972.

Dunn and Snively's route on the north face started to the right of what climbers ascend today. Dunn nailed an A3 crack for Pitch 1—the only aid on the route. Above, Dunn faced a stout 5.10 offwidth crack that was 5-7 inches wide. With his largest piece, a 4-inch piton, utterly useless, Dunn ran the entire pitch out. This is especially impressive considering that at the time, 5.10 was cutting edge in the desert.

While the rest of the climbing went smoothly with little of note, Dunn will never forget his summit experience. "I heard a loud buzzing and I thought it was hornets. I started slapping at my face and my head." Jimmie's hair stood straight up but there were no stinging insects in

sight. Instead, he was under a much greater danger: electricity. "I had all these large pitons on me and I realized, 'Oh no, I'm a lightning rod.' I mean, my whole body was buzzing and it was loud." Dunn threw down the pitons and jumped back over the edge where he met up with Snively who was jumaring the pitch. The two of them huddled for a moment before making a mad dash across the summit to the rappels. Luckily, no lightning struck.

As was a custom at the time, the pair left their route unnamed. Later it became known as the North Face.

In April 1979, Ed Webster and Buck Norder made the first free ascent of the route by using a new 5.11 starting variation left of the Dunn/Snively first pitch.

– Chris McNamara

Strategy

The route faces north with some sun in the late afternoon. It is best to climb this route in warm weather during September to May.

The first pitch is long, strenuous, and sustained. Bring five 3.5" cams. The last pitch is scary and demanding. Some climbers may want a 7" piece.

You can rappel this route and top rope the other cracks that parallel the first pitch with two ropes. The Castles Burning start (first crack right of the North Face) is a superb 5.11c finger crack.

Retreat

There are good rappel anchors at every belay.

	Pitch		
North Face	1	2	3
Free difficulty	≥5.10	●	●
	5.9		
	5.8		
	5.7		
	5.6		
	≤5.5		

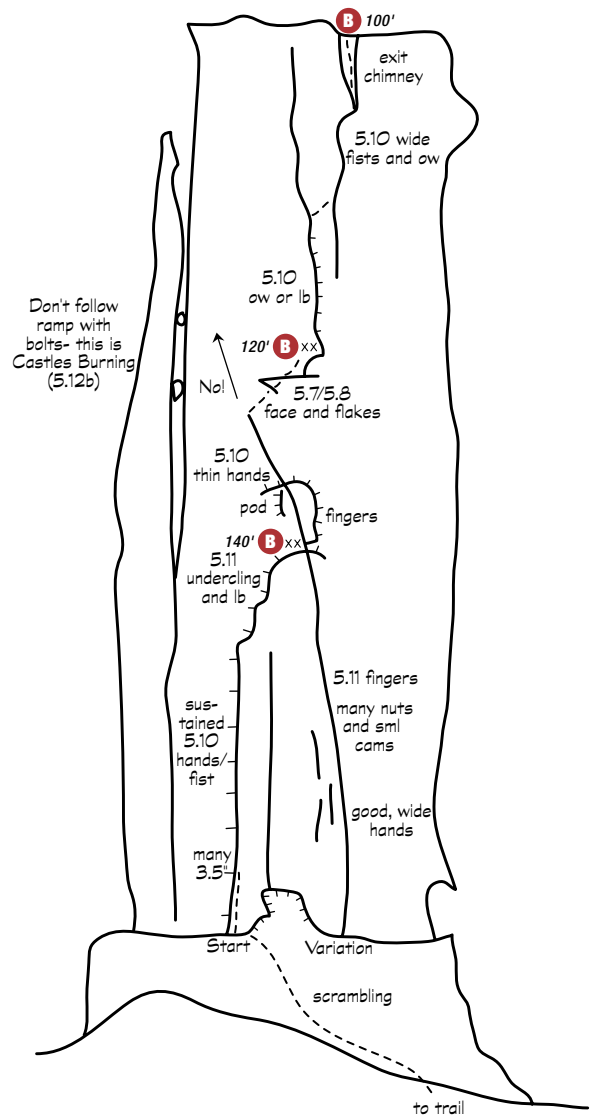
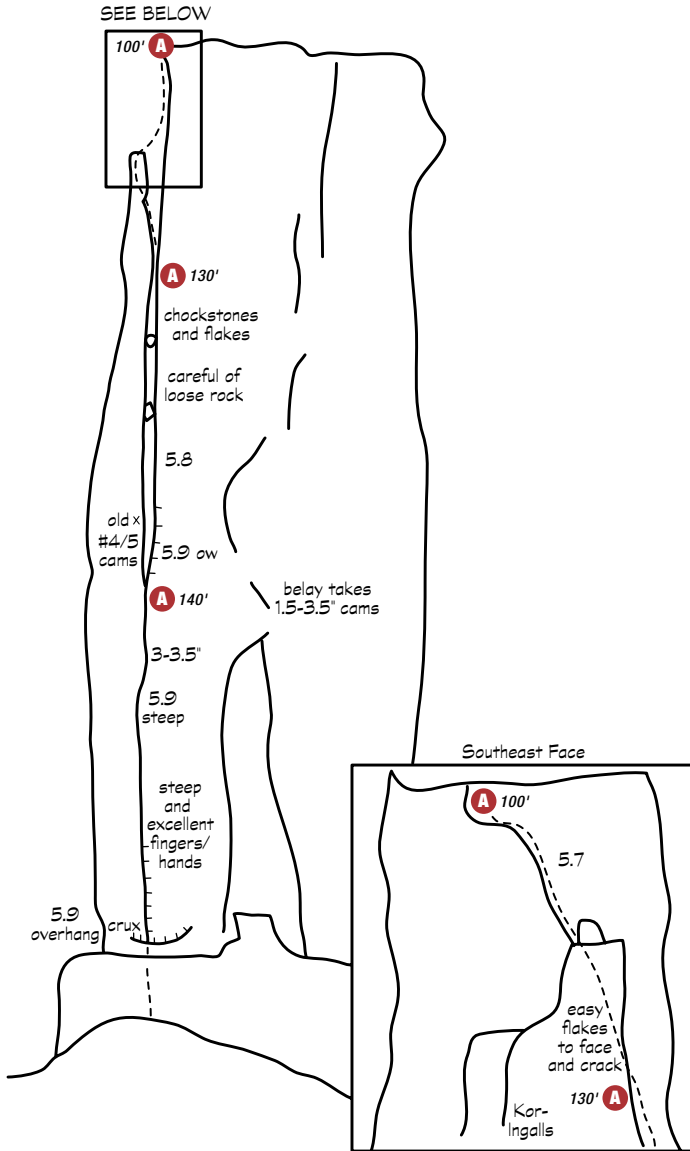
Rack

A. North Chimney III 5.9★★★★

nuts: 1 set
 cams: 2 ea .4-1.75"
 3 ea 2-3.5"
 1 ea 4-5"
 many slings

B. North Face III 5.11c★★★★

nuts: 1 set
 cams: 2 ea .6-1.25"
 3 ea 1.5-3"
 4-5 ea 3.5"
 1 ea 4.5"
 1 ea 7" (optional)



Fisher Towers, Lizard Rock

Approach time: 1 minute

Sun exposure: noon to sunset

Height of tower: 70'

Lizard Rock tests your head and desire for bold desert climbs. Located 35 minutes north of Moab next to the Fisher Towers parking area, this 70-foot tower offers some of the best rock in the Fishers with an unbeatable approach. It is a good way to spend an hour at the end of a day or a consolation prize if the cold and wind keep you off the bigger towers. The climbing routes get sun from early-afternoon to sunset.

Approach

From Moab, drive north, and turn right on Highway 128/River Road. After 21 miles turn right onto a dirt road just after mile marker "21" and the sign "Fisher Tower." After 2.2 miles, the road ends in the Fisher Tower parking area. Lizard Rock is the 70-foot spire a few hundred feet away.

Descent

Rappel from the summit with one 50m or 60m rope.

GPS Coordinates

Parking Area: 38° 43.503', 109° 18.460'

A. Entry Fee

5.8 R ★★★

FA: Harvey T. Carter and Annie S. Carter, 6/62

For the bold climber, this is a great cool down after Ancient Art. Protection is scarce and the final mantel comes 20 feet above your last piece. The route starts with moderately runout moves to a big flake. Place big cams behind the flake and climb to a second huge flake/rail. Sling this a few times then press an awkward 5.8 mantel/face move. Traverse right on easy terrain then make a steep and runout 5.7 mantel onto the summit. Rap off the summit with one 50m or 60m rope. On topope, the follower will need to climb the 5.8 direct variation on the front of the face.

B. Leapin' Lizards

5.10a R ★★

FA: Ed Webster and Patrick Griffin, 5/84

This route is bolder and more difficult than Entry Fee. A straight-in crack offers a few nut placements before it peters out to face moves. Next, 5.10a edges lead to a bolt before the route joins with Entry Fee. Sling the big flake and traverse on the flake way left to a good rest. Look for the bolt, then climb up and right making a final big reach to the summit.



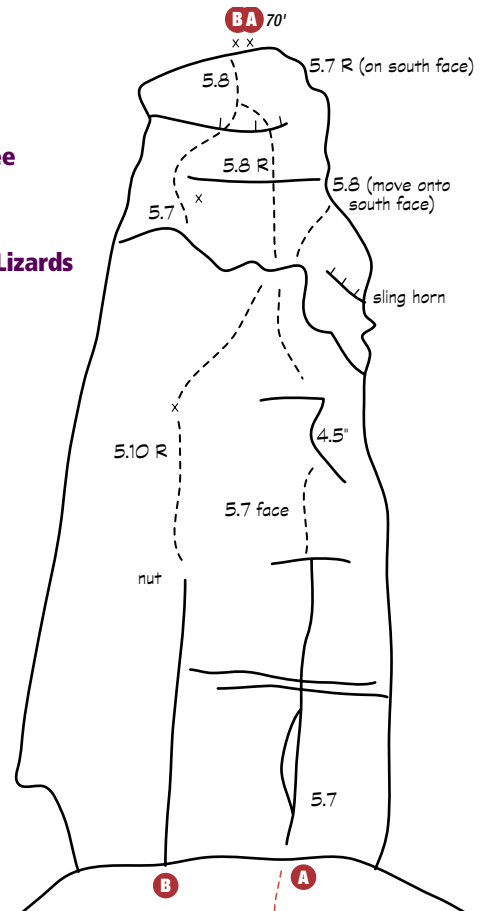
Rack

A. Entry Fee

cams: 1 ea 1-4" long slings

B. Leapin' Lizards

nuts: 1 set quickdraw long sling



Fisher Towers, Ancient Art

The Fisher Towers area is a cartoon land composed of towers, gargoyles, and hanging curtains of mud. The towers resemble clumps of melted candles and it's sometimes unclear whether the formations are comprised of rock or compact dirt. Capping the top of a steep wall, the spiraling cone summit of Ancient Art, with its narrow base and wildly twisting proportions, seems to defy the laws of physics. A raven fart should be enough to topple it, but somehow the summit stubbornly clings to the wall, allowing climbers a terrifying, but moderate journey to the top.

Approach

The drive from Moab to the Fisher Towers parking area takes about 35 minutes. From Moab, drive north, and turn right on Highway 128 (The River Road). After 21 miles turn right onto a dirt road just after mile marker "21" and the sign "Fisher Tower." After 2.2 miles, the dirt road (low clearance vehicle is okay) ends in the Fisher Tower parking area. The Ancient Art summit is visible to the southeast.

Pick up the main trail and walk about 0.5 miles. Pass under the southwest face of Ancient Art until you are directly under the Cobra, a tenuous 30-foot tower. Head up left of the Cobra on a climbers' trail for another few hundred yards to the base of the Stolen Chimney route. It is twenty minutes from the parking area to the base of the climb.

Descent

Rappel the route with two 50m ropes or one 60m rope. The first two rappels can be done with a single 50m or 60m rope. The third rappel (Pitch 2) is a FULL 100 feet. If you are using a shorter 60m rope, you will either need to downclimb unroped or use the intermediate bolted belay on the pitch. The last rappel is 90 feet straight down.

GPS Coordinates

Parking Area: 38° 43.503', 109° 18.460'

Base of climb: 38° 43.276', 109° 18.287'



Ancient Art, Stolen Chimney

III 5.10d or 5.8 A0 ★★★★★

v1.0 2002

Time to climb route: 4-6 hours

Approach time: 20 minutes

Descent time: 1 hour

Sun Exposure: morning to noon

Height of route: 300'

Ancient Art is the most classic and moderate free climb in the Fisher Towers. While the often-photographed summit pitch is the most memorable, the lower pitches also captivate with everything from face climbing on pebbles to many 5.6 to 5.8 chimney sections. The rock has some integrity (some of your protection will hold), but place gear carefully. One of the easier multi-pitch desert climbs, Ancient Art's exposure and 5.8 chimney make it only suitable for seasoned 5.8 desert leaders and followers accustomed to exposure.

History

While on the third ascent of the Titan in 1969, Bill Roos and Paul Sibley took notice of the wild corkscrew summit of Ancient Art to the west. Two weeks later on April 29, 1969, they arrived at the base with a rack solely comprised of pitons, Kronhoffer Klettershoes for footwear, and 1/4" bolts that would hopefully hold bodyweight on the two bolt ladders.

The climbing went smoothly and quickly up the entire route, which they climbed in one day. Roos received the honor of leading the last pitch, which he led with only one slung horn for protection and one bolt (today there are three bolts). They didn't place more bolts because, according to Roos, "With each hammer blow the whole corkscrew summit vibrated. It seemed like the whole thing might just fall down. I just wanted to get up, tag the summit, and get down."

Roos says he was nervous, but both climbers felt comfortable standing on the tippy top, a feat still only repeated by the few climbers immune to insane exposure. Roos stated, "Those were peak bagging days which meant you had to stand on the very summit. We wanted to get up there and wave our arms like everyone did in the climbing books."

Once on the top, Roos spent some time thinking about the rappel; which direction would be the least likely to topple the summit? The summit, of course, withstood their weight and continues to amaze and horrify all climbers that stand on it. Says Sibley, "It is definitely the most unique summit in the

	Pitch			
	1	2	3	4
Free difficulty	≥5.10			
	5.9			
	5.8	•	•	
	5.7			
	5.6	•		
	≤5.5			

desert and I am amazed that it is still there."

Keeping to their custom, Sibley and Roos did not name the route, but years later the route was dubbed "The Stolen Chimney." Sibley and Roos speculate another active climber in the area felt entitled to the first ascent and that the route was stolen from him, hence the name. Sibley responds, "That's the nature of first ascents. Nobody owns the rock." Incredibly, at least 14 years passed until the second ascent.

– Chris McNamara

Strategy

Get an early start in order to climb in the sun and beat the crowds (it is difficult to pass parties). The route gets shade in the early afternoon and can be subject to high winds on the summit pitch. All belays are bolted with 2-3 good bolts (with rappel slings).

At 5.10+, the first pitch is the technical crux but most climbers will aid this section at A0 on good pitons and bolts. Pull through with slings—no aiders needed. If free climbed, the moves are bouldery on surprisingly solid pebbles and pockets. While it looks intimidating, it is well-protected and worth a try for the confident 5.10 leader.

The second pitch is the meat of the climbing and with 5.8 chimney moves, it is the mandatory free climbing crux. The pitch features sustained 5.7 with a distinct 5.7 squeeze at the top. The entire chimney has protection every 8-12 feet with a good piece before each crux. Be careful of your feet; curtains of loose rock/mud, perched above your belayer, are precariously attached to the wall.

The exposure begins on the third pitch. Climb the 5.10d technical face move or pull through on pins and bolts.

The fourth pitch may be the most memorable pitch in the desert. The exposure is outrageous as the 500-foot southwest face drops to the left and a 300-foot wall drops to the right. Cross a skinny sidewalk (some walk, most crawl) to the base of the corkscrew summit. Mantel the jutting Eagle's Head where a double-length sling provides the only protection, and climb the spiraling face moves to the right. Proudly stand on the pizza-sized summit, pose, then feed the rope through rappel slings and lower back to the belay. The second follows on top rope.

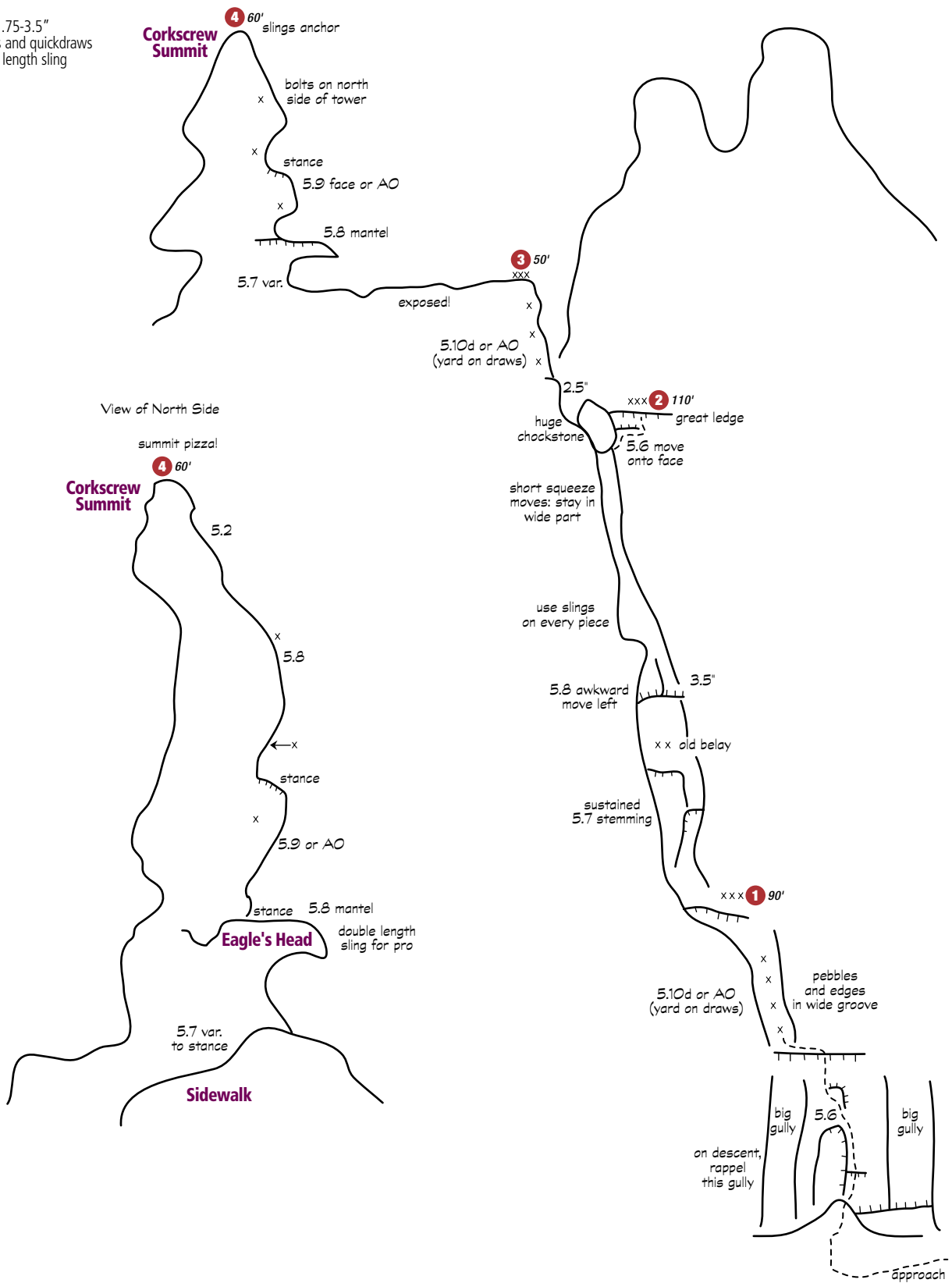
Camping is available at the Fisher Towers parking area for \$10 per site, each night. Sites are limited to six people, two cars, and two tents. There is a fire pit and picnic table for each site and one pit toilet for all five sites. There is no running water.

Retreat

Retreat at any point using two 50m ropes or one 60m rope. While the bottom two pitches are sheltered from the wind, the last two pitches get hounded. If the winds kick up and/or the clouds start moving in, think twice about climbing the last two pitches.

Rack

nuts: 1 set
cams: 2 ea .75-3.5"
many slings and quickdraws
one double length sling



Moses

Moses may be Utah's most exceptional desert tower. The rock quality is excellent and the formation is striking with its slender girth and near vertical walls on every face. Ed Webster aptly described the tower as, "a giant exclamation point mocking the forces of erosion." Not to mention, Moses is situated at the intersection of several gorgeous canyons and thus has one of the best summit views in Canyonlands.

Approach

The drive takes an hour from Moab and requires a high-clearance vehicle. From Moab, drive north on U.S. 191 then take State Highway 313 west (the road to Deadhorse Point/Island in the Sky) for 11.6 miles. Just after a metal cattle guard, a dirt road heads right (west). (Signs may point to 'Mineral Bottom.')

Follow this for 12.4 miles to the canyon rim, then descend very steep switchbacks for about 1.5 miles. (Don't do this in a storm.) Turn left at a sign for Canyonlands National Park and follow the Green River south. After 6.1 miles, turn left on the spur to Taylor Canyon. This leads 4.8 miles to parking at the end of the road.

The 30-minute hike begins at the good marked trail that heads east from the parking area. At a signed fork, go left along a well-beaten path. This winds up talus and through small cliff bands. It forks on a ridge below a subsidiary tower, the Thoracian Mare, south of Moses. Take the right fork through huge blocks and under the south face. The original 5.11 start begins at an A-shaped alcove plastered with chalk, above a small hilltop. For the popular 5.8 alternate start, continue around the tower to a notch, reached from the northeast side.

Descent

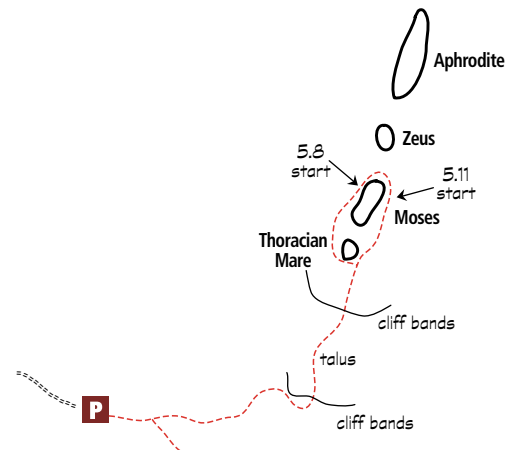
Carry two 50m or 60m ropes for the rappel descent which begins from the summit. There are two rappel options: the southeast face, as you look down, right of Primrose, or the northwest face (Pale Fire).

The southeast face begins at a bolted anchor with slings on the south face, just below the first big ledge below the summit. This option has decent stances and finishes close to the start of Primrose. Four double-rope raps, more or less straight down, gain solid earth.

The northwest face follows the line of Pale Fire with chain anchors. There is almost no danger of catching a rope, but most belays are hanging. From the summit, rap to the second big ledge down (last belay of Primrose), then rap off the northwest corner (four two-rope raps) to the ground. Hike around the north side to retrieve any gear at the base.



Approach Topo



Moses, Primrose Dihedrals

III 5.11c★★★★★

v1.0 2002

Time to climb route: 5-8 hours

Approach time: 30 minutes

Descent time: 1.5 hours

Sun Exposure: sunrise to mid-afternoon

Height of route: 525'

Primrose Dihedrals is a free route up the southeast face of Moses, a striking tower in the heart of Canyonlands National Park. It offers steep, varied climbing, mostly solid rock, and a spectacular remote setting. This is one of the most rewarding routes you will ever do.

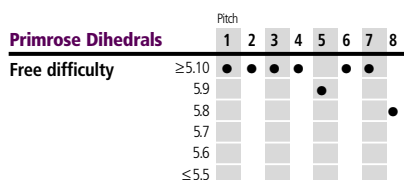
History

Moses, one of Canyonlands' largest spires, stands like an immense exclamation point mocking the forces of erosion. Dominating its three neighboring pinnacles—Zeus, the Thoracian Mare, and Aphrodite—Moses is located in the secluded sanctuary of Taylor Canyon.

The indomitable Fred Beckey was the first of many talented climbers to experience its magic. After the desert guide Lin Ottinger flew Beckey and Eric Bjornstad over the spires, Beckey wrote, "We didn't look Colorado climbers in the eyes, and trusted only the ravens and the hawks." A year later the two returned to Moses with a veritable "mini-expedition" and succeeded in making the first ascent, via an aesthetic crack system on the north face.

After several years of climbing in Canyonlands, I had still not even glimpsed Moses until Stewart Green showed me a photo. "See those corners on the East Face?" he said. "They've never been done." Quite simply, it was one of the most breathtaking lines I had ever seen.

In April 1979, armed with a rack of Hexentrics, stoppers, and a few pitons, I approached the spire—alone. Leapfrogging gear up the parallel-sided cracks typical of the desert was tenuous, but went okay until the fifth pitch, where my preconceived notions of a spiritual desert solo quickly vanished. Several loops of my climbing rope had become tangled when I pulled some slack through the system. I then made a dangerous blunder: I decided to jumar the stuck rope.



After I had cleaned 50 feet, the tangle freed itself. The fall was like being in an elevator and having the cable snap. The corner's red walls fled by with astonishing velocity—then a tremendous upward jerk stopped me. My top jumar had nearly bitten through the rope's sheath. I had to hit it with my hammer to loosen it.

Unhurt, but badly shaken, I pulled myself together for the Ear, a severely overhanging, leaning offwidth crack. Wilting in the heat, I drilled a bolt ladder to circumnavigate the obstacle. Another pitch and more bolts got me to the summit, wasted and wondering whether I even had the strength to grasp the rappel ropes.

During the next six months I often wondered if the Primrose Dihedrals, as I named the route, could be free climbed. Friends, those absurd-looking spring-loaded novelty items, had been recently unveiled, but most climbers thought them to be too expensive and too mechanized. Yet I bought two and loved them. With the right partner—and a large enough rack of Friends—the Primrose Dihedrals might be free climbable.

In October, climbing in Eldorado Canyon, I ran into Steve Hong, an old friend from Colorado College. With his recent repeats of the West Face of El Capitan and Supercrack in the Gunks, Steve was the partner I'd been looking for. It didn't take much to twist his arm, and Steve said he could borrow some more Friends. Another desert adventure was born.

On the last leg of our drive to Moses, normal dimensions of time and space no longer seemed to apply, the vast gulf of sky and earth swallowed us whole. In the morning, after yet another breakfast of peanut butter and tortillas, Steve slid down the ropes into the dry, subterranean atmosphere of the canyon. We raced madcap across loose bands of shale to the route's base. We flipped a rock, and I won. It was Steve's lead.

He climbed up ten feet into a shallow inverted slot that seemed to require a combination of palming and chimneying. Baffled, he lowered off several times, and finally handed me the sharp end. Boosted by several extra inches of height, I latched onto an elusive handhold and feverishly plugged two Friends into a wide flare. Teetering, I muscled up onto a sharp foothold and continued to the belay.

Steve led off in the still-bearable early morning heat, wedging fingers and hands into perfectly tailored jams. This engaging pitch involved switching corners and several airy bulges. When the going got tough, he paused to plug in a Friend, and continued without breaking his momentum.

The Primrose Dihedrals is the first major desert climb that I know of where Friends played such a key role. All previous free climbs had been protected by standard wedging nuts or pitons. But nuts tended to shear through the soft, parallel-sided sandstone cracks and pitons scarred the fragile rock. Steve and I were astonished at how securely Friends jammed, and it honestly felt as if we were cheating.

After climbing down 20 feet, then traversing to some exciting and delicate stacked flakes, we arrived at a comfortable ledge below the imposing upper dihedral. Snacking on an apple and water, we were satisfied with our progress. At every perplexing move, a custom-made sharp edge or bucket would appear, holds that were rare on the smooth Wingate sandstone of which Moses was formed.

Our luck stayed strong on the fourth pitch, although our pace suffered as the rock became hot to the touch. Stemming up the perfectly cleaved corner with a crack that widened from finger to fist and finally snaked around a 5-foot roof, I lost my mind to the dance. I don't remember much else about this pitch, other than that it was one of the most heavenly desert crack/corners I've ever done—like climbing up the inside of a Wingate cathedral, the walls sweeping out around you. Steve followed quickly, circled the roof, and joked that he didn't have my oversized mitts to fit the crack.

At the semi-hanging belay, we sorted gear as Steve surveyed the Ear, leering above. With Steve's enormous strength, I felt he could pull the rabbit out of the hat as I had seen him do plenty of times before.

Wedging behind the flake forming the hideous offwidth, Steve struggled higher, panting. Then, appearing to defy gravity, he extricated himself, swung free, and liebacked up the brittle outside edge of the flake, clawing up the final 30 feet. A jubilant cry told me he'd made it. His reward was a ledge big enough to collapse on.

Every move was at my limit as I struggled to repeat Steve's performance, frantically unclipping from the bolts, liebacking wildly. The pitch overhung so severely that I wasn't sure I'd be able to get back on the rock if I fell. Sand blew into my eyes and then the brittle edge snapped, but I just hung on and heaved up onto the belay, my mouth so dry I could hardly talk.

After regaining my senses, I swung around a brief undercling flake and onto the final ridge and the summit. That day, climbing with Steve, I felt harmonious and content; It was our best climb together. Unperturbed by deeper thoughts, we shared the magnificent isolation, enjoying the serene pastel colors of Taylor Canyon. We had successfully free climbed the desert prophet, Moses. The prophecy, we now knew with conviction, was that Friends would change desert free climbing—forever. A storm was brewing to the west. If we hurried, we could still get back to Moab in time for a beer.

— Ed Webster

Strategy

The route faces southeast and is sunny until mid-afternoon.

Although Primrose gets steady traffic, some loose blocks and poor bolts (from May 1977) make this a serious route. Treat it with respect. A missing bolt on 'the Ear' means some 5.10+ liebacks are mandatory.

The first pitch crux has a tough move that is pretty well-protected. It can be avoided by traversing from the notch to the right of Primrose. Step down from the notch and follow good ledges and hand traverses across the face.

On the third pitch it is best not to protect until you reach a good crack at around the level of your belayer so that the second will be on top rope when downclimbing.

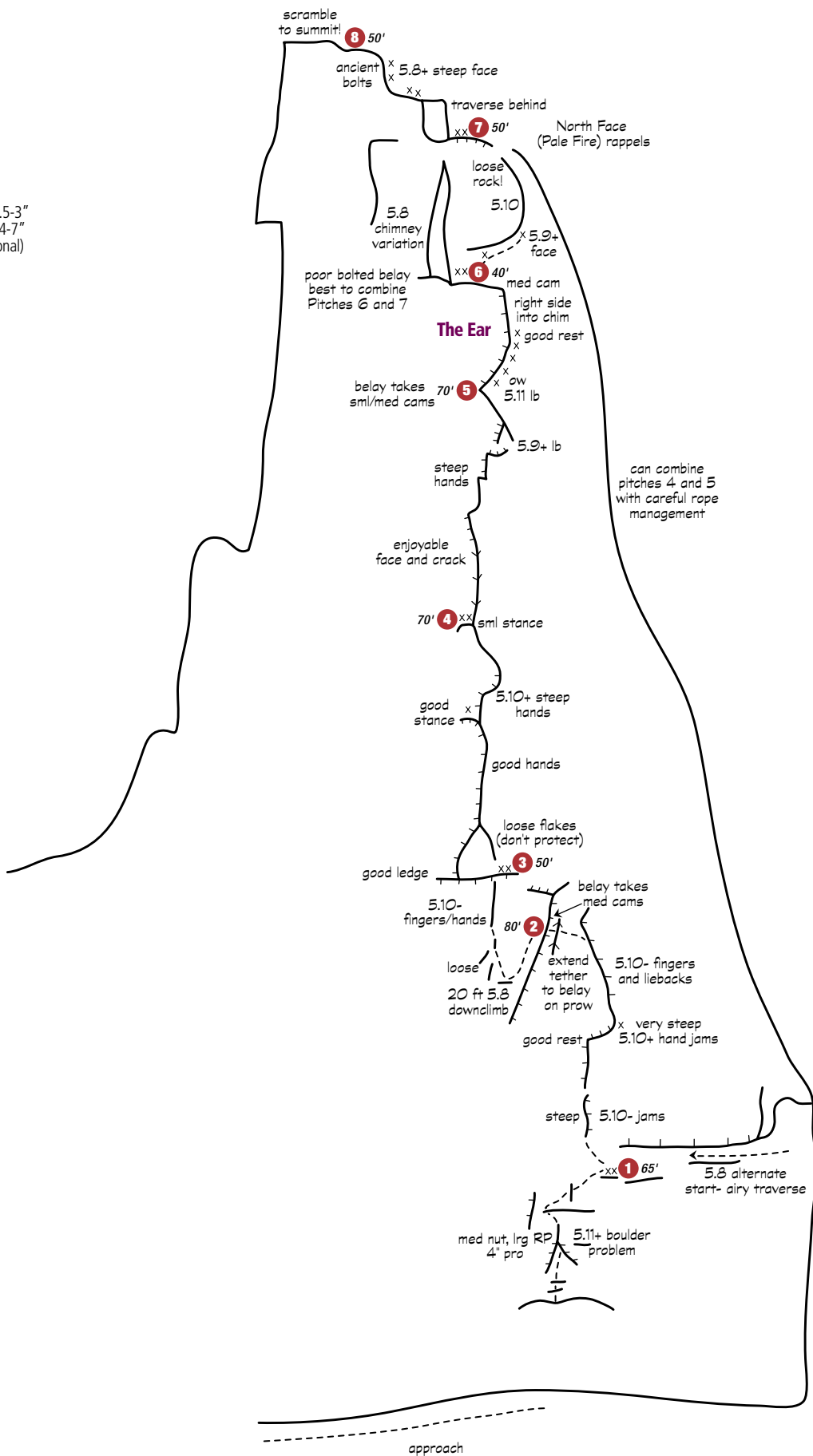
The Ear, Pitch 6, is the second crux. Offwidth until you can clip the second bolt, then use a handhold inside the chimney to swing up into lieback. Power lieback, which gets gradually easier, to a good foothold rest at the fifth bolt. Psych up and lieback again until you can swing right side into the chimney. Climb the offwidth until your foot is on a big hold. Place a 1 or 2" cam in the slot, and continue easily to a ledge. This is a poorly bolted belay. It's probably best to combine Pitches 6 and 7.

Retreat

Most pitches have bolt anchors.

Rack

- nuts: 2 sets
- large RP
- cams: 3 ea .5-3"
- 1 ea 4-7"
- aiders (optional)



North Six Shooter

Perched atop a gigantic cone of steep talus, North Six Shooter dominates the wide-open valleys south of Canyonlands National Park like a lighthouse on a lonely coast. Guarded by a massive roof band at two-thirds height, the tower appears to overhang on all sides. This is a very worthy summit!

Approach

From the junction of U.S. 191 and Highway 211, 40 miles south of Moab, drive west on 211, and follow signs to Newspaper Rock and Canyonlands National Park. Pass Newspaper Rock (about 12 miles) and the famed Supercrack Butte (about 16 miles). Soon the Six Shooters will come into view. For the southern approach (high-clearance vehicles only), drive 25.5 miles on U.S. 191 and turn left at a sign for Davis Canyon. Pass the gate, drive 0.6 miles, take the right fork, then a quick right, and another right in 0.5 miles. Drive about 2 miles, mostly in a broad wash, until you're closest to the tower.

For the northern approach (better for passenger cars) drive about 1.8 miles past Davis Canyon to a gate and dirt road that heads straight across the flats north of the tower. Park after about 2 miles.

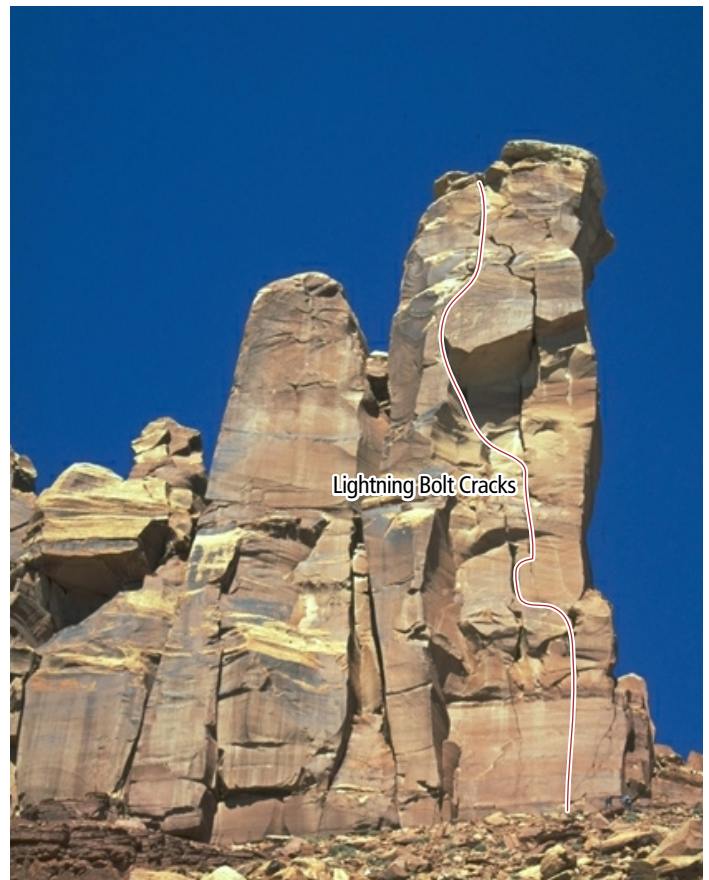
From the south, hike toward the tower, aiming for a break in the cliffband that rims the talus cone. The best line is somewhat right (east) of the tower. Some scrambling is necessary; packs may need to be hauled. Once above the cliff, climb the most vegetated, stable-looking talus directly to the tower. A decent path follows the best line.

From the north, hike across the flats, aiming for gullies well left (east) of the tower. With luck, you'll find an easy passage through the cliff bands. Continue up the steep talus east of the tower to the base.

Descent

Two double-rope rappels:

1. Rap from a bolted belay at the southeast end of the tower into a windy notch.
2. Rap northwest out of the notch from a bolted belay. A long rappel gets you to the ground. Walk easily around the north end of the tower to retrieve gear. Retrace your steps down the talus to the car.



North Six Shooter, Lightning Bolt Cracks

III 5.11b ★★★★★

v1.0 2002

Time to climb route: 4-6 hours

Approach time: 1.5 hours

Descent time: 1 hour

Sun Exposure: sunrise to noon

Height of route: 325'

Lightning Bolt Cracks is not only the best route up one of the best desert towers, it would be a great climb anywhere. Excellent rock and the full variety of crack climbing—from fingers to chimney—highlight the climb. The crux is right off the ground, though the top of the first-pitch crack is tough, too. After that, Lightning Bolt has the bonus benefit of looking harder than it is—although it's pretty hard!

History

I confess that I had to be talked into making the drive. Ed Webster didn't have a car, and I did, but I also had only a two-day weekend to make the round trip from Colorado Springs. So Ed cranked up his dream machine, and conjured up a few desert images to dangle seductively in my imagination.

And potent images they were, too. The golden age of free climbing hard sandstone routes in the Colorado Plateau region was just beginning. Most of the prominent towers in the Canyonlands area had seen a few ascents, while many of the lesser-known spires remained unclimbed, and free routes to any summit were rare. The next decade would change all of this, of course, as the word spread about dramatic cracks leading to tiny summits. But in the spring of 1979, even as striking a spire as North Six Shooter Peak, with its distinctive needle silhouette and its proximity to the road, was still rarely visited. The potential for a real adventure was high, and Edster made the best of it.

Of course, I didn't need all that much persuading. Ed had some inside information—Jim Dunn had suggested that we check out the cracks on the southeast face of the tower, really a pair of parallel systems Jimmy had taken to calling the "Lightning Cracks." So Ed began tantalizing me with stories of perfect hand cracks up a vertical wall and out a roof, leading to not only a new route, but the first free ascent of the Six Shooter itself. How could I resist? The trip was on,

and we left on a Friday evening, charged up with anticipation for the crack climbing to come.

But as we were hiking to the climb Saturday morning, I couldn't help feeling a little nervous. It wasn't just that I had spent most of the night driving, always a poor preparation for a hard climb, but that this particular crack climb also happened to be in "The Desert," a place so obviously the home of the irrational (what reason could have gone into the creation of a spire?) that I could not help but question the soundness of my own judgement in wanting to climb there. Yet this same quality is what keeps me coming back year after year—the disorienting spell that an enchanting landscape can cast over one's perceptions. For me, the desert has always been a place of mystery and potential, two qualities that must ever go hand in hand. Standing at the base of a spire, how can I know what discoveries I will make as I pass through the vertical landscape above? The desert is a world that never fully reveals itself, but that may also, sometimes, show you whatever you care to imagine.

Our enthusiasm urged us into taking the direct approach, and we set out to hike straight up the talus cone. Not a good choice. So it was only after one of the most frightening roller-bearing scrambles I've ever made—easily the most dangerous part of the day—that we at last arrived at the base of the spire, and could scrutinize the route a little more closely. What I saw didn't ease my anxiety much. Two crack systems shot straight up through desperately steep terrain, leading to the prominent roof we'd been eyeing all morning. The easiest-looking line started in the right-hand system, then crossed to the left-hand system before passing through the roof on that side. The right side of the roof was out of the question (this would later be climbed as the phenomenal Liquid Sky). Even on its left-hand side the roof looked impossibly huge to me, and I wasn't at all sure that my imagination was going to get me past that section of the climb. In desperation I told Ed the roof was all his idea, and demanded the pitch leading up to it.

Not that this first pitch didn't intimidate me as well. The thin finger cranks at the start looked hard, but I recall being more worried about how the crack widened above. We carried the standard desert rack of those days—a collection of hexes and stoppers, plus a couple of tube chocks, but we didn't have much confidence in the tubes. (Friends had just become available, but neither of us yet owned any.) That terrifying approach must have left an impression on me, as well, because I also remember visualizing falling off the start, dragging Ed off his stance (I don't recall any belay anchors), and the two of us proceeding to take some horrible, flesh-mangling slide back down the scree below. A small nut set as high as I could reach did much to ease that anxiety. And then there was nothing else I could do but get started.

Free difficulty	Pitch			
	1	2	3	4
≥5.10	●	●	●	
5.9				●
5.8				
5.7				
5.6				
≤5.5				

Despite my initial fears, from the very first move the crack kept saying “yes,” inviting me upward with the promise of deeper, ever more secure jams. Movement brought confidence, and I knew better than to stop before I could stand in the crack. Higher, when the crack got wider than my fists, a perfect lieback edge appeared. When the slot got bigger than my pro, a chockstone to tie off was provided. It was then that I began to believe this day could be a magic one, that everything was going to come together for us. The climbing began to feel like a series of revelations—as I encountered each new section, so intimidating when I had studied it from the ground, I discovered again and again that the route was providing me with just what I needed to continue my journey gracefully. In truth, the move-by-move details now no longer matter to the story; the physical act of climbing should never be confused with the experiencing of it. The pitch just flowed.

And like all magical routes should, this one gave us a prize for saying the right password at the gate, and the huge roof turned out to be the easiest part of all. Only Ed can tell you how he really felt, but he sure sounded happy as he climbed past the lip. When I let the day pack swing loose, Ed yelled down from his belay “This is the best climb I’ve ever done!” As I watched the pack swing out a good 40 feet before it began its return arc, I had to agree. This is the moment, I thought, that we came here looking for, this special moment when we know that the Lightning Cracks are going to be ours for the imagining. (I’m not sure when “Bolt” got added to the name—we may have begun using both variations during the climb, but when I wrote up the ascent in my diary a few days later, I was still calling it the “Lightning Cracks.”)

On top we indulged in a little self-congratulation on making what we were sure was the first free ascent of the spire. Mostly we stared out at the surrounding landscape, and thought about how small we were. The summit of a spire is cheapened by too much reveling in conquest. The excitement played out in the ascent must now be counterbalanced by a few moments of introspection. Spire summits can never really be ours anyway—we are always condemned to be just arriving or just leaving, and during the short duration between we belong more to the spire than it to us. It is a healthy humbling.

It was later, back in Colorado, that we learned that our claim to the first free ascent of North Six Shooter was to be just as transitory. Ken Trout had established a new free route on the opposite side of the spire just a few months before our climb. But I don’t recall ever feeling much disappointment, and now, all these years later, it really doesn’t matter to me who was first. What remains so strongly in my memory is that feeling of give and take, when we gave the desert our imagination, and it gave us back a perfect climb.

– Pete Williams

Strategy

The route faces southeast and receives early-morning sun. The roof puts the middle of the route in the shade by midday.

On the second pitch, chimney high, placing gear in the crack on the right until you can swing into it on a good foothold. Climb through the bulge on hand and fist jams (#3 Camelot/#3.5 Friend), then continue easily until you can face climb left into a right-facing corner.

On the third pitch, Diagonal left under the awesome roof, with underclings, jams, and face moves. It’s easier than it looks! Climb awkward moves in a bombay chimney until finger and hand jams allow you to crank through the roof. Diagonal back right with some tricky moves on poor rock. Continue past a large block, right below an obvious chimney, to a good stance with 0.5 inch to 1 inch crack for anchors. Rope drag often forces climbers to belay sooner, in poor spots just above the roof. Use many slings here.

Climb the squeeze chimney with an occasional small to medium cam for pro in the back. An unnecessary bolt was placed in recent years—and chopped! It is easier, but scarier toward the outside.

This climb isn’t called Lightning Bolt just for the shape of its cracks—it’s a very scary place to be in a storm. Because escape is difficult past the halfway point, bail early if thunderheads threaten.

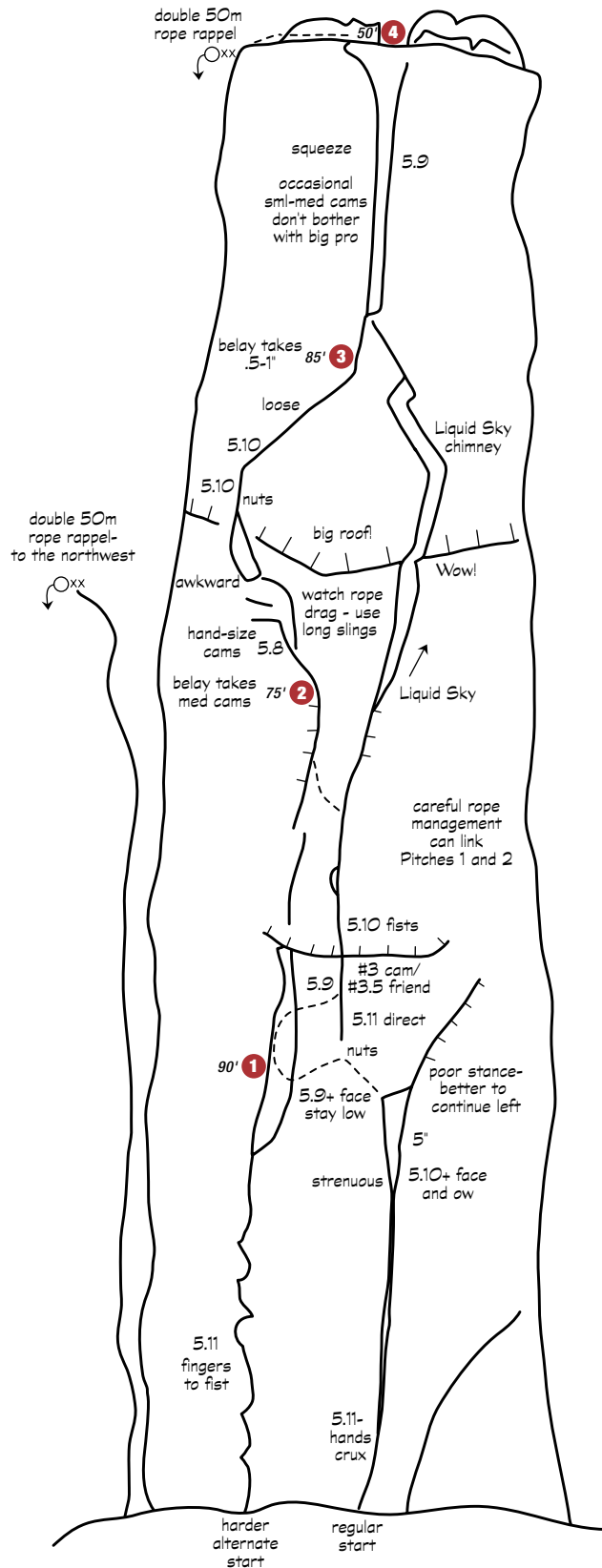
If you’re up for an offwidth challenge after the rappel off the back, the ropes will be set for top roping Pratt’s Crack, a formidable arm-barring testpiece put up by the Yosemite master in 1969.

Retreat

There are poor fixed anchors in place for the first two pitches and escape is very difficult once past the roof. It is safer to go over the top.

Rack

nuts: 1 set, including sml wires
 cams: 2 ea .4-3"
 1 ea 4-7"
 many slings



The Final Pitch

Thanks for buying this pack of SuperTopos. We hope you enjoy it and the climbing adventure it may help you experience.

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El Capitan after winter storm. Photo by Chris McNamara.

On behalf of myself and the rest of the crew here at SuperTopo, I want to thank you for your support. Keep climbing and please tell a friend about SuperTopo!

Thanks again,

Chris McNamara

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris McNamara', written in a cursive style.

Founder and CEO
SuperTopo

Castleton Tower Preservation Initiative

We Need Your Help!



Grant Collier

Castleton Tower is an icon of southeastern Utah and is recognized by climbers around the world. The Kor-Ingalls route on its south face is one of Steve Roper and Allen Steck's *Fifty Classic Climbs of North America*. Fine Jade, on the adjacent Rectory, was featured in *Rock & Ice Magazine's* 1994 article "American Classics." However, this incredible landscape, including the surrounding open space, climbing access, and the historic climbers' campground is at risk of development. A critical 221-acre parcel is owned by School Trust Lands (SITLA) which is mandated to generate maximum revenue for Utah's schoolchildren.

Three years ago, when the community became aware of the development threat, it organized the Castle Rock Collaboration and joined Utah Open Lands as its southeastern branch. We have partnered with the Outdoor Industry and climbing community to create awareness of the situation. In January 2002, Utah Open Lands made a down payment on the 221 acres, initiating an 18 month payoff timeline. We now have a year and a half to raise half a million dollars. We need the support of the whole climbing community to meet this goal!

By purchasing the land outright, the preservation of this significant climbing and scenic resource will be guaranteed in perpetuity. Utah Open Lands and partners are committed to preserving the climbers' campground while restoring and protecting the scenic values of the lands leading up to Castleton Tower. The land will remain open space in its current conservation state.

We appreciate your support and you can genuinely help this collaborative effort by sending your fully tax-deductible donation for land acquisition at Castleton Tower to: **Utah Open Lands**, 1790 South 1100 East, Suite 3, Salt Lake City, UT 84105. Please write CTPI in the memo section of your check. For more information, please visit our web site at: <http://www.castlerockcollaboration.org> - Thank you.





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