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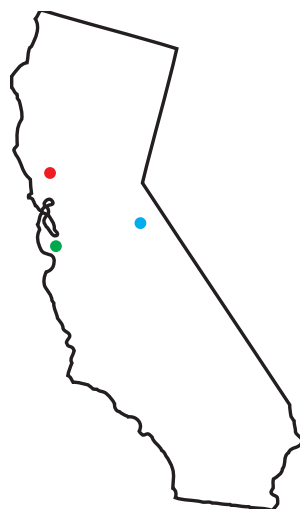
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## ON THE COVER

Cover Caption: Julia Mackenzie on *Delirious* (5.12a), Columns of the Giants.  
IMAGE + DEAN FLEMING

## THIS PAGE

Giovanni Traversi on the second ascent of *Stigmata* (V11), West Sonoma County.  
IMAGE + DEAN FLEMING



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Chad Suchoski on *Evolution* (5.10b), Mt. Diablo.



JIM THORNBURG

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# GO ANYWHERE-CLIMB ANYTHING



BUILT ON EXPLORATION

On their never-ending quest for new rock, the climbers of West Sonoma County have encountered poison oak, ticks, moss, incredibly steep slopes and private property lines—a battle that has quickly become a rite of passage for the region’s small but prolific community. Alongside Richie Esquibel, Marcos Nunez, Ryan Tolentino, Jerry Dodrill, Mark Howe and others, Santa Rosa-based guidebook author Chris Summit was among the first to dig deep into West County’s winding river canyons on the hunt for new boulders. Last year I took a quick trip to scout some seaside crags on the Sonoma Coast. When Chris offered to host a drive-by tour of the infamous blueschist boulders that reside in West County’s vast network of tributaries, I jumped at the chance.

I gripped the passenger’s side door handle as we rocketed down a narrow one-lane road. As we sped through the redwood forests of West Sonoma County, the hillsides to the south and deep river canyons to the north appeared to be completely vacant of climbable rock. The area was totally void of the telltale signs of deep shadows, rounded tops of boulders and rocky drainages. Rolling foothills with grazing cattle appeared and then disappeared as we worked our way toward the coastline. Every few minutes the car swerved wildly as Chris took his hands off the steering wheel to point at thick patches of ferns and barely decipherable tree trunks. This terrifying motion was accompanied by an encyclopedic recollection of names and grades of problems that

reside on hidden boulders beneath the dense foliage.

To some degree, many of California’s strongest climbers have been raised on the blueschist boulders discovered by Summit’s generation. Kevin Jorgeson, Charlie Barrett, Carlo Traversi and Giovanni Traversi are among the strongest Sonoma County locals. Like many others, these climbers tested their skills on the neighborhood stones. After dispatching the classics, these climbers sought out their own discoveries and then moved on to crush some of the hardest routes in larger venues. The climbing in Sonoma County is not endless, but the area does host a handful of truly brilliant problems. Jorgeson may have best described the region in his Sonoma County chapter in Chuck Fryberger’s film Pure: “What we lack in quantity, we make up for in quality.”

In this issue of California Climber, Forestville resident Travis Lombardo takes us on a tour of his backyard boulders and presents a tale of discovery and rediscovery in the boulder-laden creek beds of West Sonoma County (see “Resurgence” on page 56). We also take a tour of Mt. Diablo, one of the Bay Area’s most accessible yet seldom-visited crags. Although the soft sandstone buttresses of Mt. Diablo have seen activity since the early 1970s, local climbers are still plucking quality lines from the less-traveled walls at Diablo’s Boy Scout Rocks and nearby Pine Canyon. We also take a short drive up Sonora Pass to visit the high-elevation sport crag

Column of the Giants. This once futuristic stack of basalt columns and blocky headwalls offers some of the steepest climbing in California at a pleasant 5,700-foot elevation. Many of the obvious lines in the cave were established in the late 1990s, but local climbers are still discovering plenty of quality climbs on the nearby columns and jumbled blocks of basalt to the east.

This season, like so many seasons prior, ever-evolving groups of adventurous climbers will be charging up their local back roads in search of virgin rock. With long days and open mountain passes, summer is the perfect season for exploration. From the highest Sierra summits to the smallest canyons in the mossy woodlands of California’s foothills and coastal regions, hundreds of new climbs will be established in the coming months. But it is not just the quality and quantity of rock that makes these discoveries special. Climbing communities are built on exploration. The camaraderie that is shared within these groups and the traditions that are passed down through generations form a decree on which future route developers expand and grow climbing resources. This season we celebrate not only the boulders and cliffs at these high-quality crags, but also the dedication and resolve of the local communities that cherish and preserve these resources for future generations.

—DEAN FLEMING

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BETA

ROUTE <i>Thin Ice</i>		GRADE 5.10b	LENGTH 350 ft
ROCK TYPE Granite	STYLE traditional, 3 pitches	RACK doubles to 3.5"	
LOCATION Sequoia N.F.	APPROACH 3.5 miles + XC	DESCENT walk North to two 50m rappels	
SEASON spring thru fall	GUIDEBOOK look for a new one by Kris Solem		

DESCRIPTION

The Needles climbing area is located in the southern Sierra, north of the town of Kernville. The free campground nearby is the jumping-off point for your adventures in this beautiful summer climbing heaven. The crags sit at just over 8,000 feet and offer perfect mid-year climbing temperatures. The rock at the Needles is revered for its colorful lichen streaks, perfect cracks and flat edges. The spires at the Needles poke out the top of a steep hillside, exposing them to the elements and adding beautiful exposure to many of the routes.

*Thin Ice* (5.10b) follows a striking weakness up the east face of the Sorcerer in the

center of the Needles area. This route sits directly above the Fire Wall, which hosts the beautiful and famous *Pyromania* (5.13b). The sheerness of the wall and the ubiquitous exposure of the area add both attraction and fear when climbing this route.

*Thin Ice* is the easiest way up the Sorcerer, and a stiff 5.10b grade says a lot about the steepness of this amazing tower of perfectly weathered stone. The aesthetics of this route and the Needles themselves make this some of the best stone in the Sierra Nevada. If you climb 5.10, love splitter hand and finger cracks, have a car (or a good friend) and a love for adventure, *Thin Ice* is your dream come true.

Thin Ice (5.10b)

[ PITCH BY PITCH ]

**Pitch 1 (5.10b):** The route starts in a right-facing corner left of the beautiful flake that is the start of the equally amazing *Atlantis* (5.11c). The long first pitch is the 5.10b crux. Climb the corner for a while, with abundant edges for your feet and a relentless finger crack for your hands. From the corner, switch cracks to the right and then head up easier flakes and a hand crack to the belay at the base of the chimney.

**Pitch 2 (5.9):** The second pitch starts with a funky yet short chimney/flare, to a short section of stemming and fingers in a corner. This is followed by an incredibly long, perfect hand crack that cuts straight up the center of the wall at 5.9.

**Pitch 3 (5.9):** Climb a nice hand crack to a V-slot that leads to the summit. Pitches 2 and 3 can be linked with a 60-meter rope, creating a lengthy, sustained pitch to the top of the wall.



Tiffany Campbell on the first pitch of *Thin Ice* (5.10b).





THE VANCHINE

Shayd Forrest Otis and his 1979 Van Dura Camper aka “the Gorgeous Mountain Chalet (GMC)”

*CCMAG: Where and when did you find this beast, and how much was it?*

SFO: I got it in July 2013. My mom bought it as a travel RV and then decided to move to Ireland. I had been living out of an Astro van for the past six years. When I saw the GMC, I knew I had to make the switch to the Vanchine. I hinted to her that it would make the perfect vehicle, and I got it for a pretty good deal: 100% off!

*What kind of gas mileage does she get?*

Ten mpg... It’s a pretty scenic cruise up Tioga Pass.

*Have you done anything to it?*

When I first got it, the thing was covered in mice. I cleaned it out pretty good. I also took out the original plumbing, and I am currently working on installing a new system.

*I’m sure there’s been more than one dance party in the GMC...?*

There have been a few nights for sure. One time in Ten Sleep Canyon, Wyoming, I had seven climbers inside during a really bad rainstorm. We were all watching a movie, and it quickly turned into drunken, acoustic improv with lots of singing, drinking and yelling. Someone chipped a tooth on the bottle of Carlo Rossi. The GMC was rocking that night. At the end of the night, one of the girls stopped by to ask, “So where do you sleep?” I pulled out the slick articulating bed that was the bench seat. She said, “Perfect,” and stayed the night.

*What’s your favorite place to park the Chalet?*

The Eastside of the Sierra, particularly Mammoth. The coolest place for me to park is the free hot springs outside of Mammoth, where you get to maximize the “free” water from the springs for showers and such. With fishing for my protein, Internet at the library and good entertainment located nearby, it’s not a bad hang.

*What are a few of your favorite bumper stickers?*

Beaver Liquors (a liquor store in Colorado), Buttermilk Rd. (duh), Splitboarding is the Answer (because it is), and Desperately Seeking Mary Jane (a ski area in Colorado).

*1979 was a pretty fashionable year. Are there any particularly rad ’70s styles in the Chalet?*

The walls are 100% shag carpet. It also has a working CB radio. And there’s a fake brick veneer that surrounds a unique bubble window in the kitchen.

*How many people does she hold while on the road?*

Seven comfortably, with a bunch of storage on top and inside.

*Any future plans?*

I want to paint one side of it desert camouflage and the other forest camouflage, so I can park and have either side blend in with whatever landscape I happen to be in. I also want to keep up on the maintenance because there’s not many of these guys on the road. I’m currently working on a solar-power system, which I think will be sweet. My ultimate dream would be to have a massive wind turbine on the roof to power everything inside... and to look badass.

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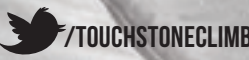
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METOLIUS LONG DRAWS

{ \$18-21 }

When we first saw the Metolius Long Draws at the Outdoor Retailer trade show in Salt Lake City earlier this year, we instantly recognized the application of these items for tackling wandering and traversing pitches. On par with Metolius' history of utilitarian designs, these [simple yet highly functional draws](#) are a logical step forward in the innovation of traditional climbing gear. After a few months of testing, we found the Long Draws far exceed the alternate option of over-the-shoulder slings in many scenarios.

Once attached to a protection point, the Long Draws hang straighter than shoulder-length runners, making them much easier to clip. The tightly sewn carabiner loops on both sides of the dogbone keep carabiners snug and properly oriented. Over-the-shoulder runners often get tangled and can be quite messy to sort and attach to protection points—especially when you have a great hand jam with your right hand, the same side you've chosen to rack your long slings. Because the long draws easily rack onto a harness or gear sling, the draws can often be utilized easier and faster than standard runners. Many testers found the Long Draw to be strongly suited for quickly equalizing and lowering from bolted anchors or easily extending placements to offer faster equalization when building traditional anchors.

All the features of the Long Draw make it a top contender in today's competitive climbing-gear market, but one highly desirable attribute makes these draws stand above the crowd. To rack the draws on a harness or gear sling, Metolius suggests "clipping them up," which is clipping the lower carabiner to the upper carabiner, cutting the length of each draw in half. This method keeps them from hanging incredibly low off the climber's harness or gear sling. Once the upper carabiner is attached to a protection point, simply unclip the lower biner and let gravity extend the long draw to its full length. Over the course of the review period, the Metolius Long Draws were not only functional, but [they quickly became a necessity](#). Next time you see these oversized quickdraws at your local climbing store, we highly recommend you take a closer look.



BELAGGLES BELAY GLASSES

{ \$89.99 }

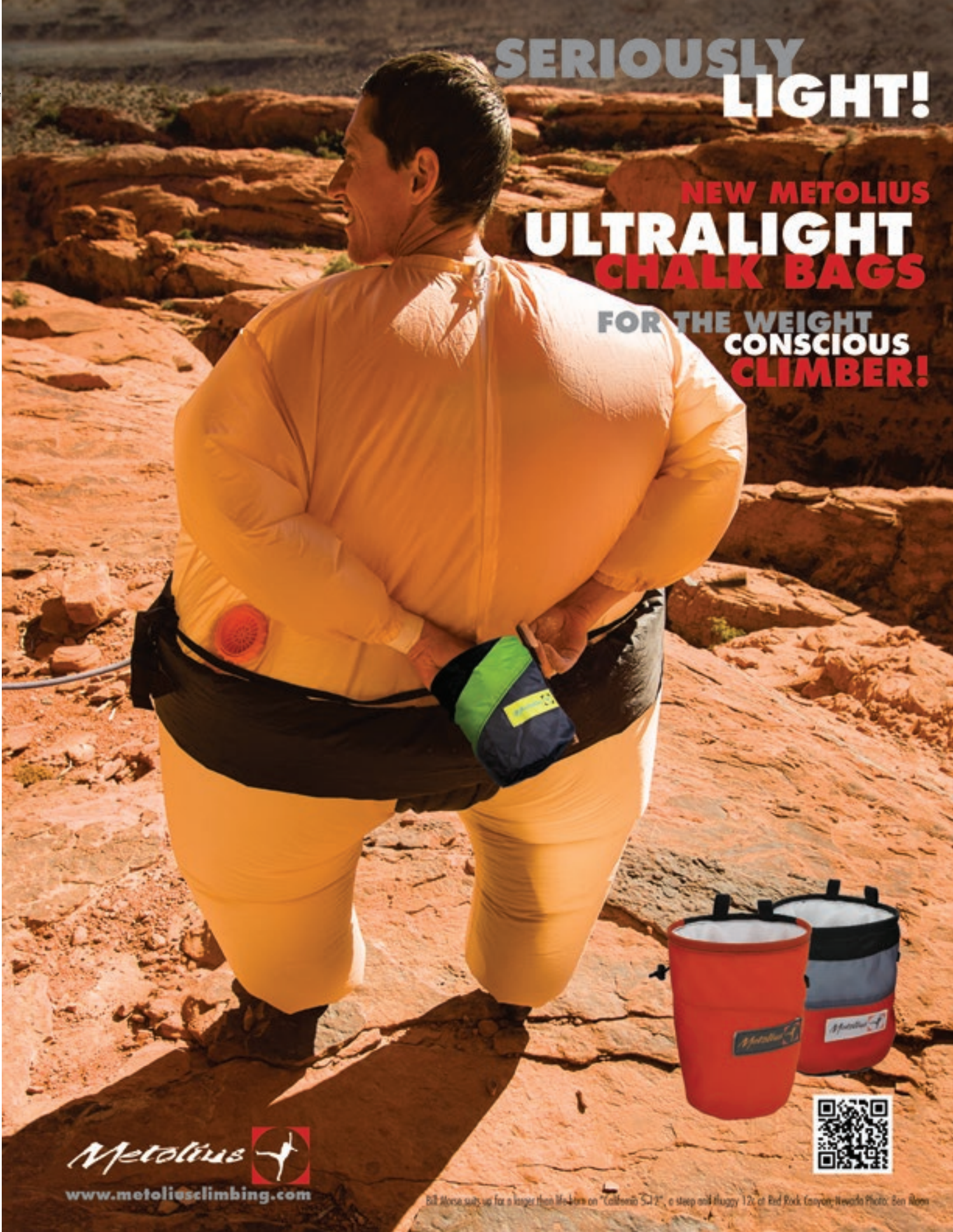


We all know someone who routinely takes three-hour burns to work out the moves on their project. When climbing at your limit, anyone can be that person from time to time. But if you've ever been on the belaying end of this scenario, or if you've spent more than a few hours belaying in your local climbing gym, you've probably experienced the uncomfortable and sometimes debilitating strain of belayer's neck. The folks at Vertical Vision in Las Vegas recognized that the best way to solve the problem of belayer's neck was to prevent it entirely. Vertical Vision introduced the now widely popular Belaggles belay glasses in January 2013, and shortly after, they became well-known for their incredibly comfortable fit, [excellent optical performance](#) and rugged construction.

The pain in your neck that follows long belay sessions will usually start as a nuisance, but if you continue to aggravate the problem, it can result in long-term pain. The prolonged position of looking up while belaying can cause compression on delicate spinal structures such as joints, nerves, discs and bone, resulting in pain that can keep you from climbing. In extreme cases, belayer's neck can result in facet joint pain: an irritation of the facet joints in the neck. Facet joints are parts of the bones in the neck and back that help guide motion, and stress on them has been implicated as a major source of neck and lower back pain.

We got our hands on a pair of Belaggles in early 2013 and tested them on various types of terrain. From the steep roofs at Jailhouse, Columns of the Giants and Owens River Gorge, to vertical terrain in Yosemite and Lake Tahoe, these well-crafted glasses proved to consistently [add a high level of comfort to nearly every belay scenario](#).

Noteworthy features of the Belaggles include very comfortable rubber nose caps, well-designed protective frames and eyelets on the arms that provide easy cord threading for personalized retainer straps. Each pair of Belaggles comes with a soft-shell case, an eyewear retainer, a microfiber lens cloth and a one-year limited warranty. If you're in the market for an extremely high-quality pair of prism belay glasses this summer, take a peak at Vertical Vision's Belaggles. More information can be found at [belaggles.com](#).





MAD ROCK SOLAR

{ \$59.95 }



The California-based company Mad Rock is known for constructing innovative climbing gear and offering it at affordable prices. Mad Rock’s new Solar Harness checks in at [.9 pounds](#), which is on the lighter side of the harness-weight spectrum. Although a handful of companies make lighter rigs, the Solar has cut a serious amount of ounces while maintaining a [very high level of comfort](#). After a few months of testing, we found that the Solar achieves this with some finely tuned and highly specialized features.

The waistband is ergonomically cut from a single piece of webbing, which not only trims some weight, but also allows the waistband to equally distribute the climber’s body weight while hanging. A very thin layer of EVA foam is laminated onto the other materials to increase comfort while maintaining a slim profile. The inside of the harness and leg loops features a silicone-gel print that prevents the harness from riding up.

Features include four molded gear loops, fully adjustable straps on the back of the leg loops, auto-locking buckles, a haul loop, and easily detachable leg loops. A few testers felt that the gear loops on the Solar could be a bit stiffer to allow for slightly more precise racking. That said, the size of the gear loops were more than adequate for racking traditional gear for even the longest pitches. The full-strength haul loop and beefy belay loop added a nice level of confidence on multi-pitch routes and big walls. For a staggeringly low \$59.95, this harness has easily proven itself as an inexpensive, high-performance workhorse for all seasons. If you’re in the market for new straps this summer, the nice price point and do-it-all, [year-round performance](#) of the Solar make it the perfect fit.

In 1982 Gramicci released their iconic G Pant and Short. The thoughtfully engineered, gusseted crotch and one-hand, easy cinch-and-release nylon belt/buckle system [created what is now the archetype of design](#) and function for climbing pants and shorts. The very first production run of these pants and shorts were an undyed white. Rock climbers and surfers took them home and dyed their G Pants in whatever colors they could find. Before long, pink, purple, neon orange, tie-dye and paint-splattered G Pants and Shorts popped up at crags across the nation. Gramicci has held true to this tradition of exciting colors with their newest line of classically inspired G Pants and Shorts.

With 30 years of product innovation under their collective belt, Gramicci is still setting standards for performance outdoor apparel while keeping a strong emphasis on comfort and casual style. This season Gramicci released the newest addition to their classic G series: the Tokyo G Pant. A modern update to the Original G Pant, the Tokyo G sits below the waist and is fitted through hip, thigh, knee and seat. With a sculpted-leg silhouette and 14-inch leg opening, this pant is [perfect for both high-performance climbing and casual wear](#).

Included in the new Tokyo G are all of the features that make the G series great: three-piece engineered gusset and an adjustable nylon belt with a two-piece buckle. This version is made from Gramicci’s own abrasion-resistant, durable stout-weave cotton twill Dourada, a proprietary Gramicci fabric. Last winter, we took these pants up everything from boulders to burly offwidths and squeeze chimneys. After a few months of wear, our testers reported that the fabric and stitching held up quite well. Although the Tokyo G is dually appropriate for both casual wear and technical performance, our testers found that the pants really shined when worn under a harness for long periods of time. The extra room in the crotch, slim belt profile and deep pockets allowed for [exceptional comfort on long routes](#), even with hanging belays.

Gramicci is a California-born and locally operated company that is deeply committed to green manufacturing. They continue to research and adopt new standards of manufacturing that reduce impact on the environment. Their organic products have received certification from Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS), Organic Exchange for blended fabrics (OE Blended) and Organic Exchange for all organic fabrics (OE 100). These highly functional pants look equally good at the crag and the dinner table, and this latest addition to the iconic G series only improves an already solid apparel line.

GRAMICCI G PANT

{ \$52 }



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GOLDEN STATE GALLERY

CLIMBER Trevor Seck  
ROUTE *Meadow Roof* (V8), Way Lake  
PHOTOGRAPHER Devlin Gandy



CLIMBER Kenny Suh  
ROUTE *Conquistadors* (V8),  
Tuolumne Meadows.  
PHOTOGRAPHER Dean Fleming



CLIMBER Graham Doe & Matt Schutz  
ROUTE *Taipan Rising* (5.11a, A0, 5 pitches)  
Electric Eagle Dome, Shuteye Ridge.  
PHOTOGRAPHER Jim Thornburg





GOLDEN STATE GALLERY

CLIMBER Dennis Baumsteiger  
ROUTE *Z Crack* (5.8), Patrick's Point.  
PHOTOGRAPHER Dean Fleming



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a. payne, first female v13, automator, rmnp; j. dickey photo



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# COLUMNS OF THE

WORDS & IMAGES + DEAN FLEMING

# GIANTS



PREVIOUS SPREAD James Lucas on *Delirious Continuation* (5.12c).

THIS PAGE Julia MacKenzie on *Behemoth* (5.12c).

Beyond the oak woodlands that surround the foothill communities of James-town and Sonora, Highway 108 winds steadily through the Stanislaus National Forest until it ascends steeply to the 9,623-foot summit of Sonora Pass. Just below the steepest part, charming log cabins sit at the edge of a surreal sub-alpine meadow. Here, in the very small community of Dardanelle, a small mercantile shop makes a modest income selling overpriced gasoline, cabin rentals and knick-knacks. Just a few feet from the banks of the Middle Fork of the Stanislaus River, this family-owned business has relied on tourism from fishermen and trans-Sierra travelers for nearly 100 years.

From the town of Dardanelle, Highway 108 continues its journey eastward, following the river as it meanders through an ever-changing ecosystem. The landscape gains elevation at a rapid pace, quickly transforming from fertile valleys to steep river canyons and granite slabs. Douglas firs and pinyon pines give way to old-growth junipers that cling to life from the steepest precipices of these rock walls. Although exceptional in both stature and beauty, much of the scenery near the base of Sonora Pass could be considered typical when compared to other high-elevation areas in the Central Sierra. However, there is one feature of this region that seems out of place among the granite slabs and manzanita-strewn hillsides: Columns of the Giants. With its huge wall of overhanging columnar basalt capped by an obvious cave feature near the western buttress, the uniqueness of this place is clear.

**THE LANDSCAPE  
QUICKLY  
TRANSFORMS FROM  
FERTILE VALLEYS  
TO STEEP RIVER  
CANYONS AND  
GRANITE SLABS.  
DOUG FIR AND  
PINYON PINES GIVE  
WAY TO OLD GROWTH  
JUNIPER TREES  
THAT CLING TO LIFE  
FROM THE STEEPEST  
PRECIPICES OF THESE  
ROCK WALLS**







*LEFT* Julia MacKenzie on *TH Route #2* (5.12a).



*RIGHT* Trevor Carter on an un-named 5.8 at Pygmy Pillars.





The bolting of sport climbs in the West Coast reached an unprecedented level of development in the early 1990s. Although bolting on walls with less-than-ideal rock quality had been a theme for more than two decades—particularly at areas like Smith Rock in Oregon and Owens River Gorge—the bolting of incredibly steep features in California did not reach its full potential until the early 1990s. Cave features with enough solid holds to allow for free climbing are not exactly plentiful on the West Coast. Accordingly, many of the earliest established bolted face climbs in this region range from less than vertical to slightly overhanging.

Two of the most prominent cave features in Central California can be found along Highway 108. To the west, Highway 108 passes by Jailhouse, a massive cave of basaltic latite that hosts the largest number of hard routes per-square-foot in the nation. To the east, near the summit of Sonora Pass, Highway 108 takes climbers directly to the base of

Columns of the Giants, Jailhouse's largely forgotten twin sister.

Sport climbing spread quickly, which led to the development of a few bolted ceilings in Owens River Gorge, the cliffs at Cave Rock in Lake Tahoe and the massive cave feature at Jailhouse in the foothills. Soon after these discoveries, a hunger for wildly overhanging rock rapidly took over California. Among the first to venture up to Columns of the Giants was the avid Jailhouse climber and well-known California route developer Tommy Herbert. Referred to by many local climbers as "The Warden," Herbert spent a huge amount of time bolting and projecting new routes at Jailhouse. But at just under 2,000 feet, Jailhouse becomes a scorched, solar-reflecting panel in the summer months. Seeking cooler temperatures up higher (and always on the hunt for new routes), Herbert soon began developing the equally steep cave feature at the Columns.

**CAVE  
FEATURES  
WITH ENOUGH  
SOLID HOLDS  
TO ALLOW  
FOR FREE  
CLIMBING ARE  
NOT EXACTLY  
PLENTIFUL  
ON THE WEST  
COAST**





# GIANTS

Although a handful of new routes have been established in the Columns' cave feature over the past decade, the most obvious lines were plucked by Tommy Herbert and friends in the mid-1990s. Nevertheless, the greater formation varies in both style of climbing and quality of rock. It's a landscape that can often be misleading at first glance, providing great discoveries to future groups of adventurous climbers.

To the north of its main cave feature, the Columns of the Giants talus field wraps around a giant buttress of chossy rock and leads east along the south bank of the Middle Fork of the Stanislaus River. It was here that Twain Harte resident and local guidebook author Brad Young first climbed the arête of an anomalous stack of hexagonal columns. At 5.7, the climb *Hexcentric* was among the first moderate routes on the main formation. Almost 10 years after the first ascent of *Hexcentric*, regular Sonora Pass route developer Jerry Dodrill walked a few hundred yards farther up the talus field to discover a high-quality wall of moderate columns. This 100-foot-tall wall of organ pipes was dubbed *Pygmy Pillars* and now hosts a nice selection of naturally protected routes from 5.5 to 5.9.



As the 10th largest national forest in the state of California, the Stanislaus encompasses more than 898,000 acres, ranging from 1,500 to 11,000 feet in elevation. The topography varies dramatically as the forest sweeps from the northern edge of Yosemite National Park across the Central Sierra, finally joining the Mokelumne Wilderness near Ebbetts Pass and the Mokelumne River basin. Though it's well-documented, the Stanislaus is one of the least developed

national forests in the Lower 48. Only 180 miles of paved roads exist within the forest boundary; these roads provide vehicle access to a mere 14 percent of the forest. Columns of the Giants is an extraordinary and welcome feature for this region; not only because of its unusual hexagonal formations and incredible roof climbing, but also because the area hosts quality rock just a few hundred feet from Highway 108.

PREVIOUS PAGE LEFT Julia MacKenzie on *Behemoth* (5.12c).

PREVIOUS PAGE RIGHT James Lucas on *Spin Doctor* (5.12d).

LEFT Kennan Pope on *Hexcentric* (5.7).

THIS PAGE Kennan Pope on *Brown Sugar* (5.12a).



## 5 STAR ROUTES

*Hexcentric* (5.7)

*Behemoth* (5.12c)

*Delirious* (5.12a)

*Brown Sugar* (5.12a)

*Spin Doctor* (5.12d)

## THE BETA

### GETTING THERE:

From the city of Sonora, take Highway 108 for 51 miles to Dardanelle. Just over one mile east of Dardanelle, look for the well-marked interest sign that reads "Columns of the Giants." Park here and cross a bridge over the Middle Fork of the Stanislaus River. At the end of a paved trail, hike up talus to the base of the obvious cave.

### WHERE TO STAY:

An abundance of excellent and free camping is available along the Sonora Pass Highway. There are established campsites very close to the Columns of the Giants parking area, but more secluded camping can also be found east of the town of Dardanelle.

### GUIDEBOOK:

*A Climber's Guide to the Sonora Pass Highway*, 2nd Edition, by Brad Young and Steve Dawson is available at retailers across the state, including the nearby Sierra Nevada Adventure Company in downtown Sonora.

THIS PAGE Cody Sims on *Behemoth* (5.12c).



This year Bluewater Athlete Tommy Caldwell with partner Alex Honnold climbed the first ascent of the "Torre Traverse" in Patagonia, one of the most daring and difficult ridge climbs in the world. Tommy pushed our ropes to the limit with over 3 miles of climbing, 100 rappels, 13,000 feet of gain, and 7 iconic peaks.

ALWAYS  
BETWEEN  
YOU AND  
THE  
GROUND



The endless jagged alpine rock on this climb was the ultimate test of rope endurance, and our rope held up where others had failed. Thank you Bluewater! -Tommy Caldwell

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# MAT

WORDS & IMAGES  
+  
JIM THORNBURG

# DIABLO





PREVIOUS PAGE Steven Roth on *Deliverance* (5.12b).

RIGHT Jack Hsueh on *Amazing Face* (5.9+).

# S

Squinting into the gathering murk I could just make out the shadowy dog-form of Mojo as he trotted down the faint trail 20 yards ahead. When he bolted into the brush on the scent of unknown game it was nothing I hadn't seen a hundred times before. He'd spent his formative years living stray in the wilds of Kentucky – hunting things in the dark was his second nature.

I watched his shadow fly down the hill like a marauding apparition in tight pursuit of a shadow of similar size and speed. In the distance, I nervously watched the two creatures silently engage in a dance of deadly intent – a brief, soundless skirmish, then an eruption of savage snarling and soon a yelp of terror as the tables seemingly turned.

"MOJO!" I yelled, and began an adrenaline-fueled sprint down the hill. Halfway, Mojo ran back to me and cowered behind. In the night a series of yips began to ring in front, behind, and to both sides of us. The sounds were the timber of Coyotes – only I hadn't heard coyotes make sounds quite like this before...the yips were short, military and efficient – locators for the pack as it began flanking maneuvers for attack.

I'd never been afraid of coyotes before, but there were so many (10? 20?). The primal center in my brain trumped the rational one; whatever was happening, I knew beyond doubt we were no match for what was now hunting us.







LEFT Steven Roth on *Dinosaur* (5.12a).

THIS PAGE Jeff Neely on *The Quarry* (5.10d).

The winter of 2004 was unusually cold and wet, and stuck indoors day after day, my mood took a beating. No sun, no climbing, no adventure. So when I awoke on a February weekday with nothing to do, the bright sun flooding my windows and Mojo’s tail thumping at the thought of a day spent outside, I began to ponder the options. I wanted to go somewhere warm where I could get lost and see something new. But I didn’t want to waste this beautiful day in the car, so it also had to be somewhere close. I decided on Pine Canyon on the western flank of Mt. Diablo. It was a rocky place as remote and mysterious as could be found a half-hour from Berkeley.

I got on the phone to see if I could rustle up a partner. Will, who wasn’t working, was usually a good bet, so I tried him first. Dependable, he was up for a day on the rocks, but when I mentioned Pine Canyon, he wasn’t psyched.

“I heard that place is all choss” he said dismissively. It was hard to argue – it was choss, mostly. “Routes like *Deliverance* (5.12b) are as solid as they come,” I countered. “Aren’t those the ones you said were surrounded by fields of Poison Oak?” “Um, yes,” I admitted. “But the place is so cool, the flatirons are 150 feet tall and the winter sun hits the hillside at a perfect angle – it’s always warm and you tunnel around through fragrant shrubs of sage, lavender, and monkeyflower – you come home smelling like an expensive Italian meal, and if we’re lucky we’ll put up a new route or see a bald eagle or a mountain lion...”

“Oh great, bushwhacking and dangerous animals!” he interjected, “I think I’ll hit the gym”. Even without a climbing partner, Mojo and I enjoyed a perfect day out amongst the big sandstone spires. I absorbed a satisfying dose of sun, scrambled up steep gullies and the short side of a few of the spires, scoped some new routes and got lost. I saw vultures, snakes and a ringtail cat, but not another person. All-in-all it was a soul-saving day and just what I needed. Yes, the rock was as soft as I remembered, but the climbs, some reaching two pitches, were as alluring as ever. The chossy nature of some of the climbs has played a key role in keeping the area underground – making the climbs all the more rewarding for those willing to cope with the added adventure.

Before you write the place off, I should mention that Pine Canyon is the wilder of Mt. Diablo’s two established climbing areas. The nearby and much more popular Boy Scout Rocks is both steeper and more solid. Both areas feature sandstone face climbs on 60 - 150 foot walls a few degrees this or that side of vertical. Though soft is the norm, there are several notable routes that feature surprisingly solid stone. *Amazing Face* (5.9+) and *Deliverance* (5.12b) for example,





*LEFT*  
Chad Suchoski on  
*Evolution* (5.10b).

*ABOVE*  
Steven Roth on  
*Dinosaur* (5.12a).

*NEXT PAGE*  
Ben Hockman on  
*Blue Zenith* (5.10a)

climb beautiful flat faces on weather-hardened scoops and plates. The softer routes, like *The Cave Route* (5.8) and *The Quarry* (5.10d) climb suspect patina and are ideal for those who like their climbs a little on the wild side.

**F**umbling with my backpack I blindly searched for my headlamp, keeping my saucer-sized but nearly blind eyes trained on the darkness ahead where I heard the latest round of yips. Mojo was trembling and growling at my side. After what seemed like minutes,

I finally got the lamp and switched it on – the beam was too dim and the coyotes lurked just beyond it’s reach. I was about to switch it off when I saw two points of light flick off and back on about 40 feet to my left...coyote eyes, trained on us. Slowly I scanned the perimeter at that distance – more eyes...2,4,8,12,16...everywhere I looked – behind, to the sides, more than I could count, surrounding us. Terror overwhelmed the rational notion that coyotes didn’t regularly make meals of humans so close to the suburbs. I knew that they wanted Mojo, so I leashed him, picked up a small rock and forged ahead. The fifteen minutes it took to get back to the car were the longest of my life – several times, small packs of six to eight coyotes came within ten feet of us. Mojo snarled and barked while I threw my little rocks and yelled like a madman, finally resorting to a sprint for the final 100 yards to the car. Safely inside, I took a few minutes to calm down before bursting into a relieved laughter.

Now that was an adventure!







THIS PAGE Conrad Frausto on *The Climb Formerly Known As "Face"* (5.10c).

## 5 STAR ROUTES

*Amazing Face* (5.9+)

*Ozone* (5.10c)

*The Climb Formerly Known as  
"Face"* (5.10d)

*Bolt Route* (5.11c)

*Dinosaur* (5.12a)

*Deliverance* (5.12b)

## THE BETA

### GETTING THERE:

Boy Scout Rocks

In Danville, take the El Cerro Rd exit off 680 and follow it to Diablo Rd and then turn left to Mt. Diablo Scenic Blvd and follow signs to the entrance kiosk. Park at the Rock City parking area a mile further.

Pine Canyon

From hwy 580 in Walnut Creek, take Ygnacio Valley Rd, past Walnut Blvd (don't blow it by turning here!) and continue for another 1.4 miles to Walnut Ave. Turn right and go 1.6 miles and veer right onto Castle Rock Rd. Follow this for about a mile to Castle Rock Regional Park.

Deliverance

(In Pine Canyon) On the Pine Creek Stage Road, after passing the #6 Nature Walk post, take a left past the corrugated pipe and hop the fence and head up the small canyon mouth. After about 200 yards a trail forks right and then right again traversing up along the hillside for 150 yards before zigging back left. Another 150 yards leads to a small fence between two rocks. Deliverance is just ahead on the right.

### GEAR:

A dozen quickdraws and two 10-foot slings (for extending anchors). **PLEASE USE SLINGS LONG ENOUGH TO AVOID FURTHER DAMAGE TO THE SOFT ROCK!**

### GUIDEBOOK:

*Bay Area Rock* by Jim Thornburg.



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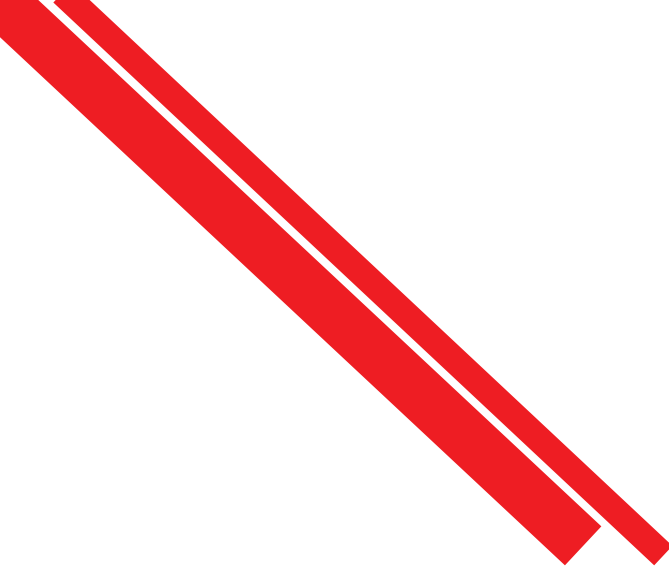
REVISITING THE WINE COUNTRY ROCKS

# *The Resurgence*

WORDS + TRAVIS LOMBARDO  
IMAGES + DEAN FLEMING

The Wild Turkey Boulder was first climbed in the early 2000s by Santa Rosa local Ryan Tolentino. For 10 years the boulder was untouched, sitting alone in a creek bed near the quiet Bohemian town of Occidental. The blue- and black-colored schist sparkles with colors of gold and silver, but after 10 years of vacancy, this beautiful rock became covered in mutant poison oak and dark green moss. Because it sat untouched in a roadside tributary for so long, the moss grew so thick and lush that the rock looked unclimbable, and an eight-inch-wide bay tree had fallen across the face.





PREVIOUS PAGE Giovanni Traversi on the second ascent of *Stigmata* (V11).

RIGHT Travis Lombardo on an unnamed (V0) highball.

*I made a plan to come back with a rope, some brushes and a handsaw to remove the dead tree.*

The following day, with a little bit of patience and elbow grease, I sat in a harness for hours, cleaning only the holds needed to climb the line. It took a couple of well-placed cuts for the dead tree to finally crash down into the creek, freeing up the space needed for the problem. With fresh chalk on the holds, this 16-foot-tall, gently overhanging wall and its a series of delicate crimps looked spectacular. Over the next few years, I would discover that Wild Turkey is just one of many boulders that have been climbed and long since deserted in Sonoma County’s creek beds.

<~~~>

The Bohemian Highway is a 10-mile stretch of narrow road that winds through Sonoma County’s towering redwoods, gorgeous cattle pastures and the rocky ravines of several deep river canyons. The perennial streams that occasionally cross the highway snake through dense, fern-covered canyons from springs atop the summits of Sonoma’s coastal foothills. Stretching northwest to meet the Russian River, the streams pass through inland heat to reach a thick layer of marine fog. This heavy mist rolls east from the coast to blanket the redwood groves in the earliest hours of the day and helps to feed the near-tropical ecosystems that thrive in the region’s vast network of streams.

Widely considered among the most scenic drives in California, the Bohemian Highway connects the West Sonoma County towns of Occidental, Camp Meeker, Freestone and Monte Rio. Stashed among the trees and tributaries resides an eclectic group of Bohemia-inspired people. Everyone from artists to the ever-evolving hippy-redneck hybrid lives in these small but diverse inland communities. Each of the townships found along the Bohemian Highway proudly feature organic farms, wineries and specialty nurseries—a staple of this region’s long-standing commitment to eccentricity and support for eco-friendly institutions.

The streams that connect the diverse landscape of West Sonoma County also offer a handful of extravagant blueschist boulders. The minerals in this relatively rare metamorphic rock form only under very specific and unusual conditions. Blueschist rocks almost exclusively occur in areas that mark ancient tectonic plate subduction boundaries. These rare blocks that now offer a handful of excellent boulder problems to a small community of adventurous local climbers are also seldom-seen remnants of the ancient Farallon Tectonic Plate. Today, the boulders sit exposed in the channels of plunging river canyons, and although many have been climbed by some of California’s most prolific boulderers, until recently, a huge majority of the rocks in this region were completely void of chalk and covered by thick layers of moss and lichen.

<~~~>

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Chris Summit, Richie Esquibel, Marcos Nunez, Jordi Morgan, Sean Brady, Jerry Dodrill, Ryan Tolentino, Kevin Jorgeson and Charlie Barrett were a dedicated and wily bunch that made up the majority of Sonoma County’s rock climbers. This group kept busy by discovering and establishing first ascents along the twisting roads and creek beds in the county. Unfortunately, many of the best projects and problems that this colorful crew established have been subtly forgotten. Over a number of short years, the dense redwood forest has reclaimed the stone.

“We had a different perspective of what was fun back then,” said local Sonoma County route developer and guidebook author Chris Summit. “Most of the climbers were more stoked

to road trip to expanding areas like Bishop and Joshua Tree. I was thought of as kind of a dork for sticking around Sonoma County and cleaning every line I could find. Only a couple of us had the psych to stay local. Most of what we did was just for us. We didn’t care if anyone thought it was cool.”

<~~~>

With inspiration from folks like Esquibel, Brady and the ever-psyched Summit, a new wave of bouldering activity has resurfaced in the creek beds of West Sonoma County. With help from local climbers like Bessie Lopez, Giovanni Traversi, Carlo Traversi, Duke Schimmer, Olivia Gonnella, Ken Ariza, Rob and Sarah Mckay, Cody and Denise Tucker and Michelle McCabe, forgotten classics at places like the Wild Turkey Boulder, the Slither Boulder, the Bohemian Face and the Emerald Triangle now see at least a handful of regular visitors each season.

In addition to revitalizing climbs that have not seen chalk in more than a decade, new blueschist boulders are being discovered on a fairly regular basis. A few of the most popular recent discoveries include the Dutch Bill Boulder and the Sweetwater Boulder. These two amazing creekside boulders offer about 20 problems between V1 and V11 and are located in central areas of the Bohemian Circuit. Because these blocks offer a high concentration of problems in a wide range of grades and are easily accessible, local climbers can often be found chalking up for after-work sessions.







Travis Lombardo on an unnamed (V3) at the Cascade Boulder.





LEFT Joel Ruscher on *Slither* (V7).

THIS PAGE TOP Chris Summit on *Battle Ship* (V7).

THIS PAGE BOTTOM Bessie Lopez on *Hot Pockets* (V2).

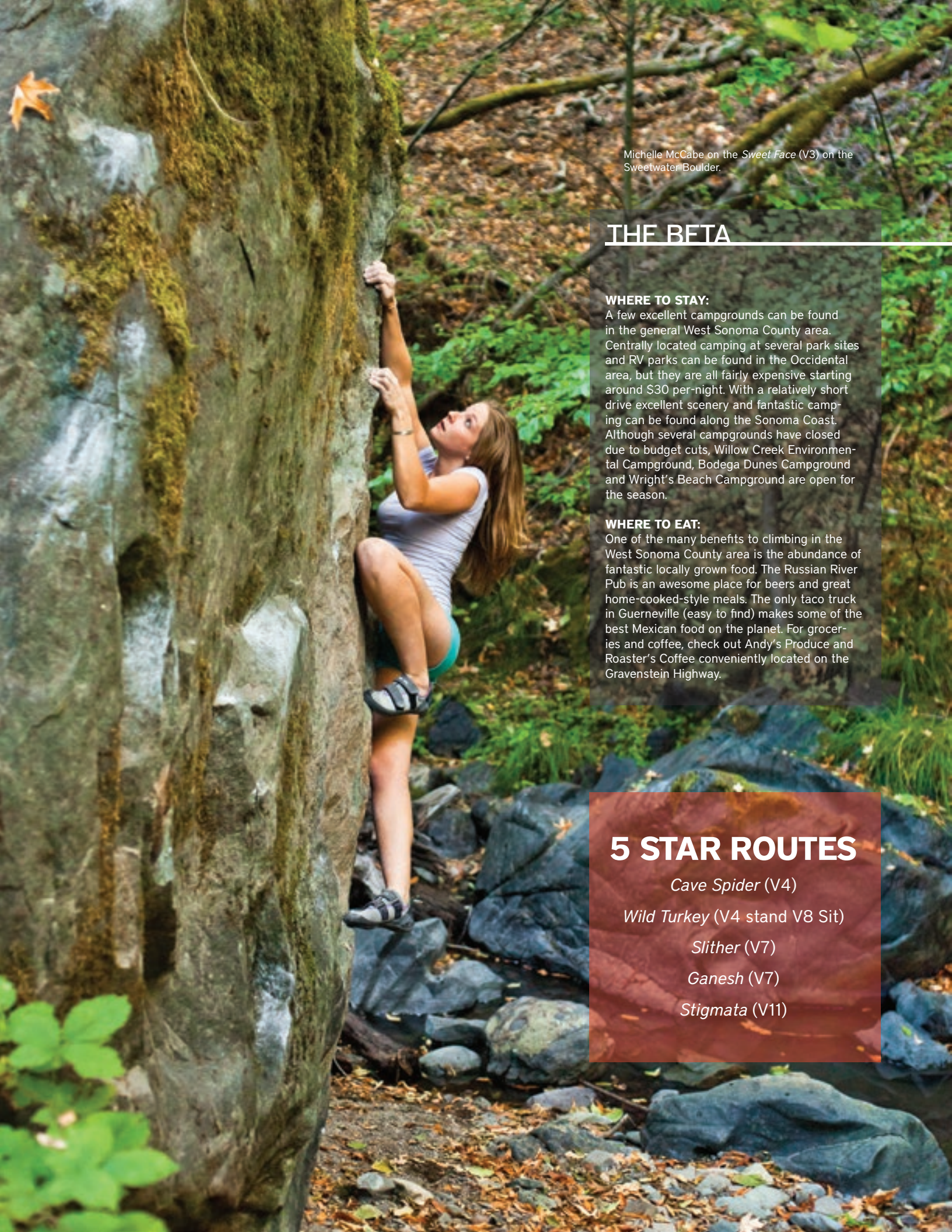
THIS PAGE FAR RIGHT Giovanni Traversi on the first ascent of *Ghost Dance* (V11R).

The blueschist boulders of West Sonoma County are spread out and exist as single blocks that host between three and six independent problems ranging from V0 to V12. The boulders are few and far between, and so are the climbers who seek them out. Although access to many of the boulders is only a few



feet from the car, once the pads are down and the holds are brushed, you can feel as if you are miles away from anyone. The flow of the creek and the overall mystic feel of the place drown the sounds of passing cars. You are left with dappled sunlight, the smells of flora and fauna and some excellent bouldering.





Michelle McCabe on the *Sweet Face* (V3) on the Sweetwater Boulder.

THE BETA

**WHERE TO STAY:**  
A few excellent campgrounds can be found in the general West Sonoma County area. Centrally located camping at several park sites and RV parks can be found in the Occidental area, but they are all fairly expensive starting around \$30 per-night. With a relatively short drive excellent scenery and fantastic camping can be found along the Sonoma Coast. Although several campgrounds have closed due to budget cuts, Willow Creek Environmental Campground, Bodega Dunes Campground and Wright’s Beach Campground are open for the season.

**WHERE TO EAT:**  
One of the many benefits to climbing in the West Sonoma County area is the abundance of fantastic locally grown food. The Russian River Pub is an awesome place for beers and great home-cooked-style meals. The only taco truck in Guerneville (easy to find) makes some of the best Mexican food on the planet. For groceries and coffee, check out Andy’s Produce and Roaster’s Coffee conveniently located on the Gravenstein Highway.

5 STAR ROUTES

*Cave Spider* (V4)

*Wild Turkey* (V4 stand V8 Sit)

*Slither* (V7)

*Ganesh* (V7)

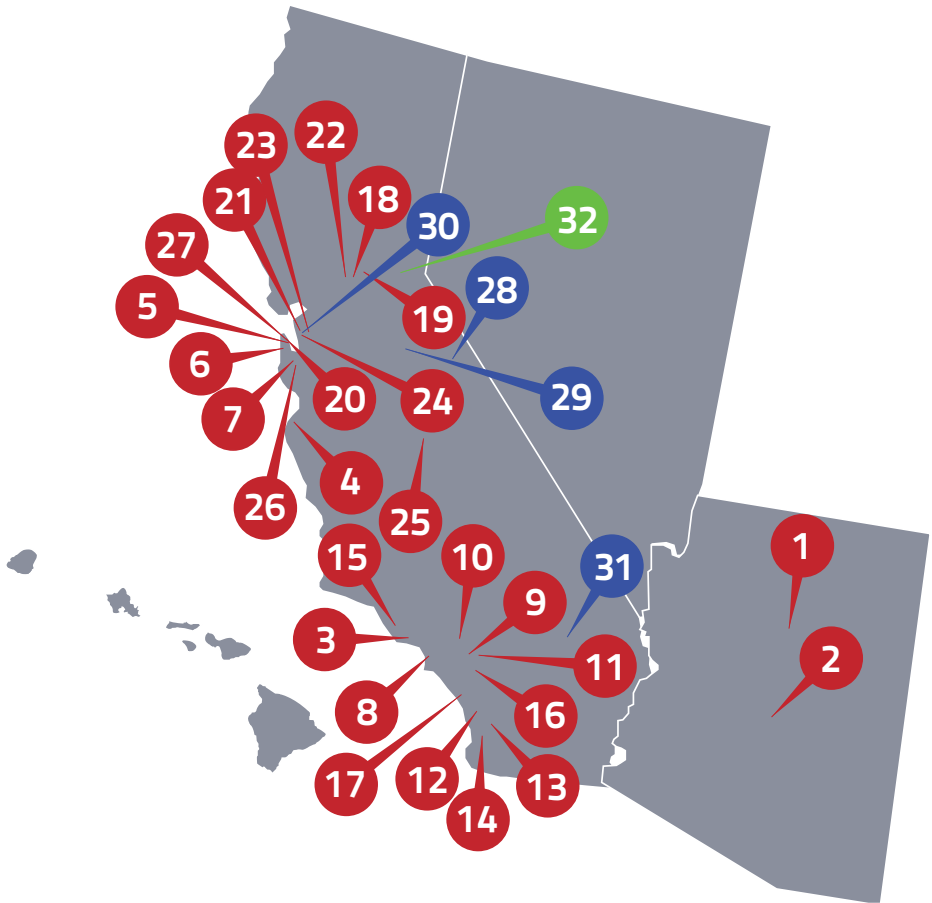
*Stigmata* (V11)

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- **28. Craggin’ Classic Fall Highball**, Bishop, CA—Nov. 8-9
- **29. 2013 International Climbers’ Meet Yosemite National Park**—Oct. 7-12
- **30. Pro Peek Event: San Francisco**—Oct. 29
- **31. Joshua Tree Spring Cling**—March 2014
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→ **4. Sanctuary Rock Gym** Sand City, CA (831) 899-2595

→ **5. Planet Granite San Francisco** San Francisco, CA (415) 692-3434

→ **6. Planet Granite Belmont** Belmont, CA

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