

CALIFORNIA CLIMBER

SPRING 2018

N° 24

FEATURES

LYNN HILL
SAWMILL
MOUNTAIN
COSUMNES
RIVER
GORGE

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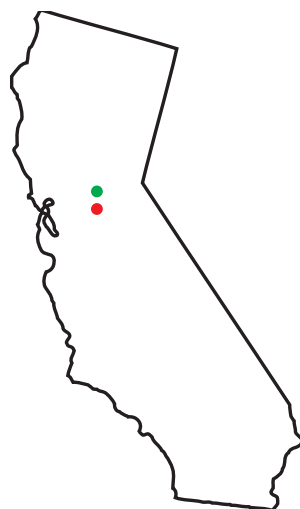
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ON THE COVER

Jimmy Web makes the first ascent of *Yayali* (V14), Cosumnes River Gorge. IMAGE + JIM THORNBURG

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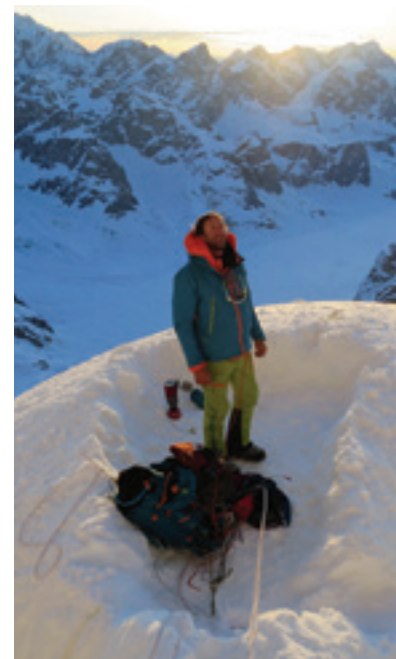
Austin Schuler climbing an un-named V4 at Moonstone Beach. IMAGE + DEAN FLEMING

Clockwise starting top right: Dan Brayack, Nate Gerhardt, Andy Cross, Alk Berg, Dan Brayack



Be a climber.

Pursue what you love, encourage others as they do the same.



CALIFORNIA CLIMBER

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Luke Mast climbing *Mortise and Tenon* (V2) at Sawmill Mountain.



DEAN FLEMING

LA SPORTIVA AMBASSADOR
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PHOTO: MATT ALBERTS @theliteraproject

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EDITOR’S NOTE

AROUND 9:45PM ON SUNDAY, OCTOBER 8TH 2017, the Tubbs Fire started near Tubbs Lane in Calistoga, California. Although the cause of the fire remains under investigation, Sonoma County emergency dispatchers sent fire crews to at least 10 reports of downed power lines and exploding transformers as the North Bay fires, including the Tubbs Fire, began. Pushed by strong winds from the northeast, the front of the fire moved more than twelve miles in its first three hours. At 11:58 p.m., firefighters called for an evacuation order encompassing the area between the city of Calistoga and Santa Rosa.

The Tubbs Fire quickly became the most destructive wildfire in California history, burning parts of Napa, Sonoma, and Lake Counties. By the time it was contained on October 31, 2017, the fire was estimated to have burned 36,807 acres and at least 22 people had been killed in Sonoma County by the fire. The fire incinerated more than 5,643 structures, including more than 2,800 homes in the city of Santa Rosa. In that city, the damage was estimated at \$1.2 billion, with five percent of the city’s housing stock destroyed. As if a cruel afterthought, the Tubbs Fire also burned the near-entirety of Mt. Saint Helena, scorching some of the Bay Area’s best climbing routes at The Bubble, The Bear Cliff,

Hailstone Rock and the Far Side. A group of dedicated locals have been working to remedy the loose rock and old bolts at the Bear Cliff at Mt Saint Helena since the smoke cleared and the area was re-opened to recreation this winter.

<~~~>

“Caught in the bull’s-eye of the fire, the Bear Cliff was particularly hard hit,” said area route developer and major contributor to the restoration effort Jim Thornburg. “Most of the cliff was blackened, in some places as high as 100 feet up. What at first looked to be a grievous loss is now looking better with each man-hour put in at the cliff. Locals are hard at work replacing older bolts and scraping off the spalled rock, and the cliff might end up even better than before, reminding us that natural disasters, while bad news for man made things, are no big deal for nature herself.”

“In my opinion, the fire damaged the rock far worse than the bolts,” said local climber and route developer Jerry Dodrill. “The heat caused a lot of surface spalling and loosened many features that were already hollow. The underlying rock, which is very hard quartz that rapidly dulls drill-bits, is generally solid and I have no question about its integrity. We’ve been working to remove anything that might come off and hurt somebody. Small flakes and chips will continue to come off. I strongly advise belayers to wear helmets and stand off to the side out of the fall line. The priority has been to clean and replace bolts on the easiest and most popular routes first.”

“Many of the 3/8 Rawl 5-piece bolts that were installed in the ‘90s were due for replacement before the fires, so the fire certainly didn’t help things,” added Dodrill. “The 3/8” and 1/2” wedge anchors seem to have fared better than the carbon steel 5-piece bolts. It was apparent that the biggest priority was to replace the 5-piece bolts and clean as much loose rock as possible.”

<~~~>

To date local climbers have replaced about forty bolts. The following routes have had all their bolts replaced, and or inspected:

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hampi, india

How do you even prepare for a climbing trip when you know it is going to be hot, humid, and conditions couldn't be further from perfect? You put a smile on your face, don't expect too much, and have as much fun as you can. Half of my trip to India the trip was spent surfing and the final half was spent climbing in the historical area of Hampi. We discovered that the best time to climb was in the morning. This was the coldest part of the day and the rock had not yet been baked by the sun. Climbing in Hampi for nearly a week was a treat. The people, culture, and food all made for an unforgettable experience.

-Paul Robinson

NEW 2018 PADS

ASANA

EVERYTHING BOULDERING

EDITOR’S NOTE

Silverado Squatters, Rampage, Beast of Burden, Arête, Marks Moderate (First pitch + anchor), Black Hole Sun, Treasure Island (Now finishes on upper ledge.

“Whenever possible we’ve been trying to re-use the existing 3/8” bolt holes, drilling them out to 1/2”,” added Dodrill. “Many of the old bolts were over-torqued when installed over twenty years ago and simply snapped off in the hole when we tried to remove them. I feel confident that they were plenty strong and would have lasted for a while longer, but am much happier to be clipping new bolts. There is still more work to do, especially cleaning small flakes on less popular routes, but that will happen as the routes get more traffic. If you see folks working up there, please give them plenty of space and a beer.”

“I want to thank everybody who has helped in this effort,” added Dodrill. “Especially Jim Thornburg, Kim Pfabe, Jordy Morgan, Eric Berghorn, Bryan Snyder, Seth Dilles, The ASCA, who generously donated the bolts/hangers/anchors, the Rock Ice & Mountain Club, B-Rad Foundaion, and Bay Area Climber’s Coalition, all of whom have contributed to make this work possible. I’ve personally spent 15 days up there with a crew of awesome folks too big to list here. You know who you are and that you are appreciated.”

If you’d like to contribute to the restoration efforts, please consider donating your time or funding to the following organizations: the American Safe Climbing Association, the Rock Ice & Mountain Club, the B-Rad Foundation and the Bay Area Climber’s Coalition. Recent updates and information can be found at www.mountainproject.com. –DEAN FLEMING



LEFT
The old piton in a pocket that protected the crux of Mark’s Moderate came out very easily. Jerry Dodrill removed it and then took liberty to install a bolt at the same height.



RIGHT
On Silverado Squatters, old 3/8” bolt was successfully removed and a new 1/2” x 5” bolt placed. It’s a lot more work to re-use the same hole, but worth the effort when possible.



CENTER
A typical Rawl 5-Piece bolt, blackened by the fire.

JERRY DODRILL



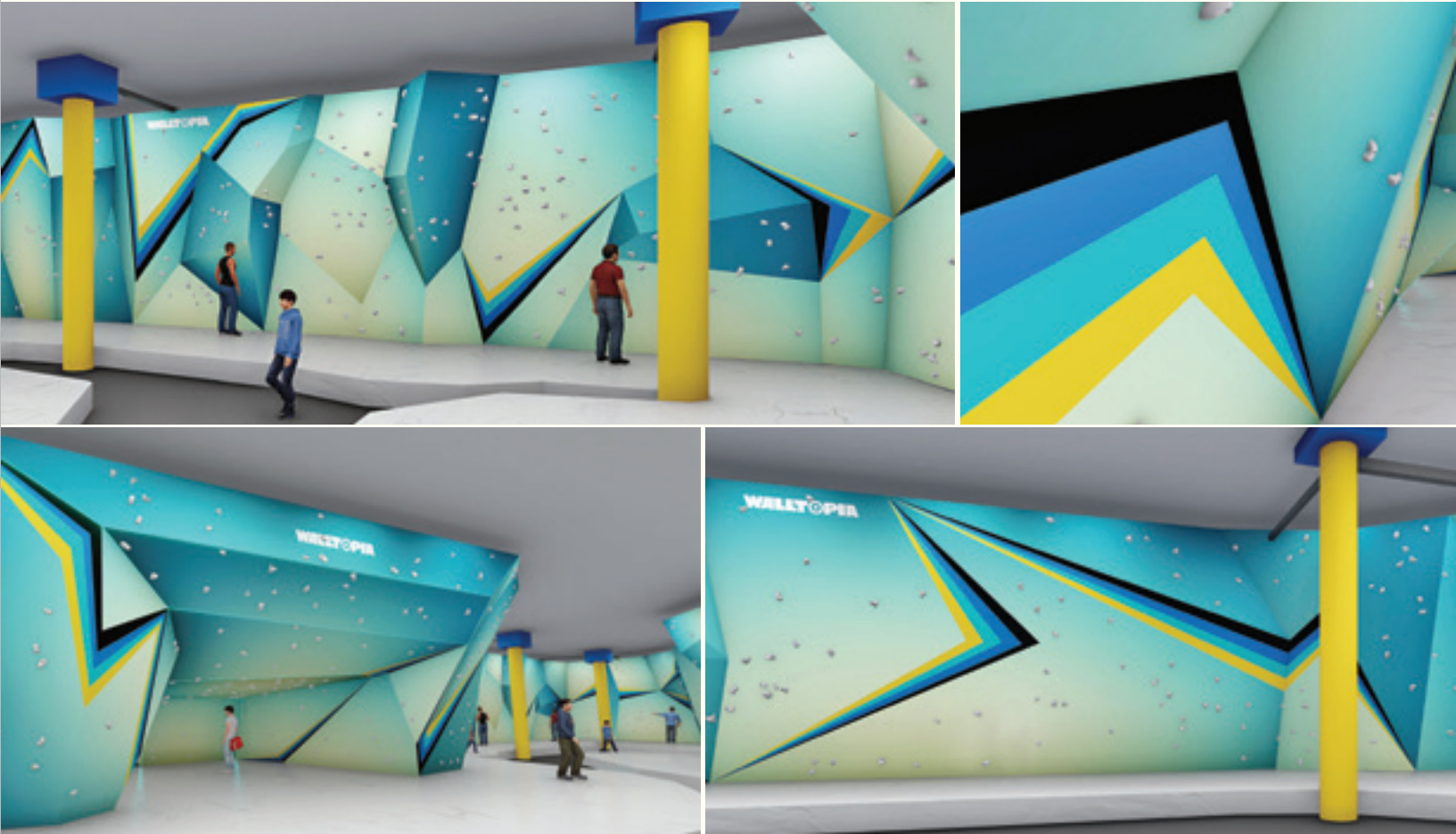
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BETA

ROUTE Trout Fishing		GRADE 5.11a	LENGTH 2 pitches
ROCK TYPE Granite	STYLE Bolted, sporty	PROTECTION 10 draws + long runners	
LOCATION Cosumnes River Gorge	APPROACH 25 mins	DESCENT Rappel, 60m rope	
SEASON Year-round	GUIDEBOOK <i>Bay Area Rock</i> , by Jim Thornburg		

DESCRIPTION

The Gutenberger Wall features fun crack and slab climbs, some of which extend to four (short) pitches above a very scenic stretch of the Cosumnes River Gorge just south of Placerville. Crossing the river to reach the wall can be dangerous or simple depending on the height of the water. Scrambling over the very polished boulders is not for everyone, but it's not that bad once figured out. There have been some deadly accidents in the sinkholes at the bottom of the pool where the water rushes into tight caverns, so use caution!

Some say that the first pitch traverse of *Trout Fishing* (5.11a) is more fun without a rope, but you'll be glad you have one when the river is low, or if you want to do the fun second pitch. Cross the river 40 feet downstream of the first bolt and then downclimb a mossy corner to the single bolt hanging belay that marks the start of this unique route. **This approach can be dangerous when the water is high.** The first pitch (only) is also a fun deepwater solo: falls are a mostly safe 4 to 10-foot plunge into the river, but be wary of hidden ledges, some visible just under the surface.

Eliot Carlson climbing *Trout Fishing* (5.11a), Cosumnes River Gorge.



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“CALLA”

Bessie & Travis Lombardo and their 2018 Forest River Rockwood 122ESP

CC: Alright, what the hell is this thing?

B&TL: Calla is a sports camping trailer. The E in 122ESP stands for EXTREME... and then Sports Package. The meat in the potatoes of this whole trailer dish is Martha May, our 2007 Toyota Tacoma. She pulls Calla like a beast.

Where did you find her and how much did she cost?

We found her in Carson City as we couldn't find this model anywhere in California; just Utah and Nevada. It cost less than a sprinter van and more than a used Subaru Impreza.

Where did the name come from?

“Calla” apparently has roots in Gaelic and or French and means “From the Forest.” Plus I’m a Stephen King freak, and book five in the Dark Tower Series is called “Wolves of The Calla.” Since the trailer model was Forest River, it seemed fitting.

Any modifications?

We added mountain bike racks, a solar panel and some rad stickers. We also added some custom reclaimed barn-wood shelves for the dishes and various storage uses. We also ditched the microwave for some more storage space.

How's the gas mileage?

Well, Martha wasn’t very impressive to begin with. Like, maybe 21mpg hwy without towing. But truck and trailer we probably came in around 15mpg. Not that great, but could be worse.

Is there a reason you went with a camper instead of a van?

It was tough to justify buying another petro guzzling mode of transport and we liked the idea of being able to leave the camper setup at camp, while Martha remained freed up to carry crash-pads, gear and three extra people with seatbelts. Late night dominos sessions with the furnace blasting and a bottle of wine with friends after an epic meal and properly washed dishes will be hard to beat. It might be impossible to go back to minimal tent camping. But the whole rig is a bit bigger than we thought it would be. We also are quite limited on incognito roadside camping while towing. Actually, zero incognito-ness. With truck and trailer we are pushing 38 feet! Ooooph! I (Travis) get stuck and frustrated every time I try and back her into my driveway at home. So far my record is 20minutes to get it parked. Also, extra points for Calla as she doubles as cozy guest room for visiting friends and relatives.

How does this set-up work off road?

So far we have only pulled her up a few dirt roads and through some bushes while getting shut down finding available sites in Joshua Tree. To be honest, Calla did really well tracking behind Martha. It's like four wheeling in a semi truck, kind of. We do hope to drag her up to Shuteye Ridge this coming season and get in everyone's way while we white knuckle the sketchy drive up the mountain.

REMORA

All Around Performance Slipper

Much like the fish this shoe was named after, the Remora suctions not only to your foot, but onto the rock as well. With tension applied in all the right places, the sock like fit in this slipper allows one to do it all. The Remora has been built with a traditional look, yet enhanced with features such as the power upper and SynFlex to give a consistent and precise fit.



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MAD ROCK GEMINI

{ **\$16.95** }

We live in an age of high-tech climbing gear that is constantly evolving, yet it is still rare to see a truly unique innovation – especially regarding simple, tried-and-true products like the locking carabiner. Enter the Gemini carabiner from Mad Rock, with its Reactive Gate Technology that [eliminates the danger of the carabiner flipping](#) into a bad alignment and cross loading, while also providing the ability to [open both gates simultaneously](#) for ease of use and safety. At a glance the Gemini looks alien, even off-putting by its wild design, yet in testing we found it to be perhaps the most [user friendly](#) and safest belay-specific carabiners in existence.

While the idea of a locking belay-specific biner that cannot be cross-loaded is not exactly new for the climbing market, the Gemini completely removes the hassle and fumbling that is commonly found with other designs. In practice the Gemini is in fact [as easy to use as any other standard-style locking carabiner](#), yet when the Gemini is loaded from the belay loop while in use with a auto-assist style belay device, we found that it would be nearly impossible to cross-load this biner. If you're looking for an ultra-safe, easy to use belay-specific locking biner, that is actually quite lightweight at 65 grams and relatively inexpensive at under \$20, the Gemini is, in our opinion, the best option.



FIXE DUECE

{ **\$36** }



In the 1980s John “Deuce” Middendorf climbed the hardest walls in Yosemite including numerous routes on El Capitan and Half Dome. Deuce also pioneered numerous difficult big wall routes across the globe, and furthered his climbing legacy as a renowned portaledge designer, pioneering the world’s first storm-proof portaledge back in the 80’s and 90’s with his company A5. At A5, and at other times in his climbing career, Middendorf also designed a number of products that worked brilliantly for establishing remote first ascents. One of his original designs included a [high quality sewn and pocketed](#) bolting bag used specifically for compartmentalizing the tools needed to bolt new routes. This design has since been modified or replicated a number of times by numerous companies. The Fixe Hardware “Deuce” Bolting Bag does a great job of this while also paying tribute to the original designer of this incredibly functional product.

In testing we found the “Deuce” to [appropriately fit all the needs and functions](#) of a well-crafted bolting bag, including a multitude of interior compartments that easily [separate small hardware items](#) like bolt hangers, bolt studs, nuts, and even more complex anchor systems. The exterior pockets and loops function well for things like drill-bits, holding hand drills, clipping a mess of hooks or even stashing a candy bar.

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LA SPORTIVA KATAKI

{ \$170 }

If you are at all familiar with the La Sportiva shoe line up, then you will likely recognize the Katana and it's younger, more aggressive brother, the Katana Lace. Coming from the same Italian blood line, the new Kataki is more of a pissed off, younger cousin that just earned their spot at the "adults table." Stiffer then most high-performance downturned models and with an edge that damn near rivals the TC Pro, the Kataki truly [excels with precision footwork on steeper angles](#). Think granite boulders with dime edges in Camp 4, or tech nine sport routes at Trinity Aretes. Heck, I even saw a Spanish team on Freerider last fall using a Kataki on the right foot for the boulder problem!

Sportiva's patented P3 technology keeps the [down-turned performance throughout the life of the shoe](#) while the S-Heel construction (brightly colored band around the heel) provides that "Solution heel" fit for the aft of the foot. A differentiated lacing system helps to tune the fit, allowing for a more [precise fit](#) then standard lacing systems. Rounding out the delivery is a three-quarter sole, which makes resoling not only easier, but also cheaper.

This shoe definitely fits snug, but in a comfortable way. The tounge creates almost a sock like feel, similar to the Solution perhaps. It did take these shoes a little longer to break in than your average shoe, but that comes with the territory of a thicker soled, stiffer model. If you were a fan of the Katana Lace, but always had another shoe on hand for the steepes, then this model will certainly interest you. But don't be fooled, a properly broke in pair of Kataki's will [dance up even the thinnest Valley slabs and boulders](#).



METOLIUS SAFE-TECH

{ \$109 }



The All Around Safe-Tech harness from Metolius is a great multi-use harness that features four gear loops (xs has two), a rear haul loop and reinforced tie-in points. [Dual belay loops reduce clutter](#) at belay and rappel stations. One simple, patented buckle adjusts the leg loop size and rise (distance between waist and leg loops) for [a natural, comfortable fit](#). We thought the Safe-Tech line was a [logical step](#) in the right direction for climbing harnesses, after all, the harness is one of the most important non-redundant pieces of gear a climber can own.

"The double belay/rappel loop—I didn't really think that was such a big deal because I know a single one is super safe. But I actually end up using them a lot; it's much more valuable than I thought. Like yesterday, after doing this wall we had to do 12 rappels to get back down and I liked having a tether off of each loop," said legendary California climber Peter Croft in an interview with the online retailer Moja Gear.

"This one time, I was using a non-Metolius harness up on El Cap and I had a really light rack. I was climbing The Nose in a day and I had half the gear on one side and half on the other. Two-thirds of the way up, at the Great Roof, one of the gear loops—I wasn't even in a chimney or anything—blew and half my rack went to the bottom! And, the rest of the climb I had a very, very small rack ..." added Croft.

The Safe-Tech line is a little more expensive than some competitor's basic models, yet you certainly get what you pay for. If [piece of mind](#) is high on your list, these are certainly worth considering.

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GOLDEN STATE GALLERY



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CLIMBER Devlin Gandy
ROUTE *Unknown*, Nut Tree Boulders
PHOTOGRAPHER Joshua Roth

ABOVE

CLIMBER Nick Bradley
ROUTE *Buttermilker Sit* (V13), Buttermilks
PHOTOGRAPHER Alton Richardson

RIGHT

CLIMBER Ethan Pringle
ROUTE *Redwood Burl* (5.13a), Promontory
PHOTOGRAPHER Dean Fleming

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CLIMBER Tommy Caldwell
ROUTE *The Dawn Wall* (5.14), Yosemite Valley
PHOTOGRAPHER Jerry Dadrill



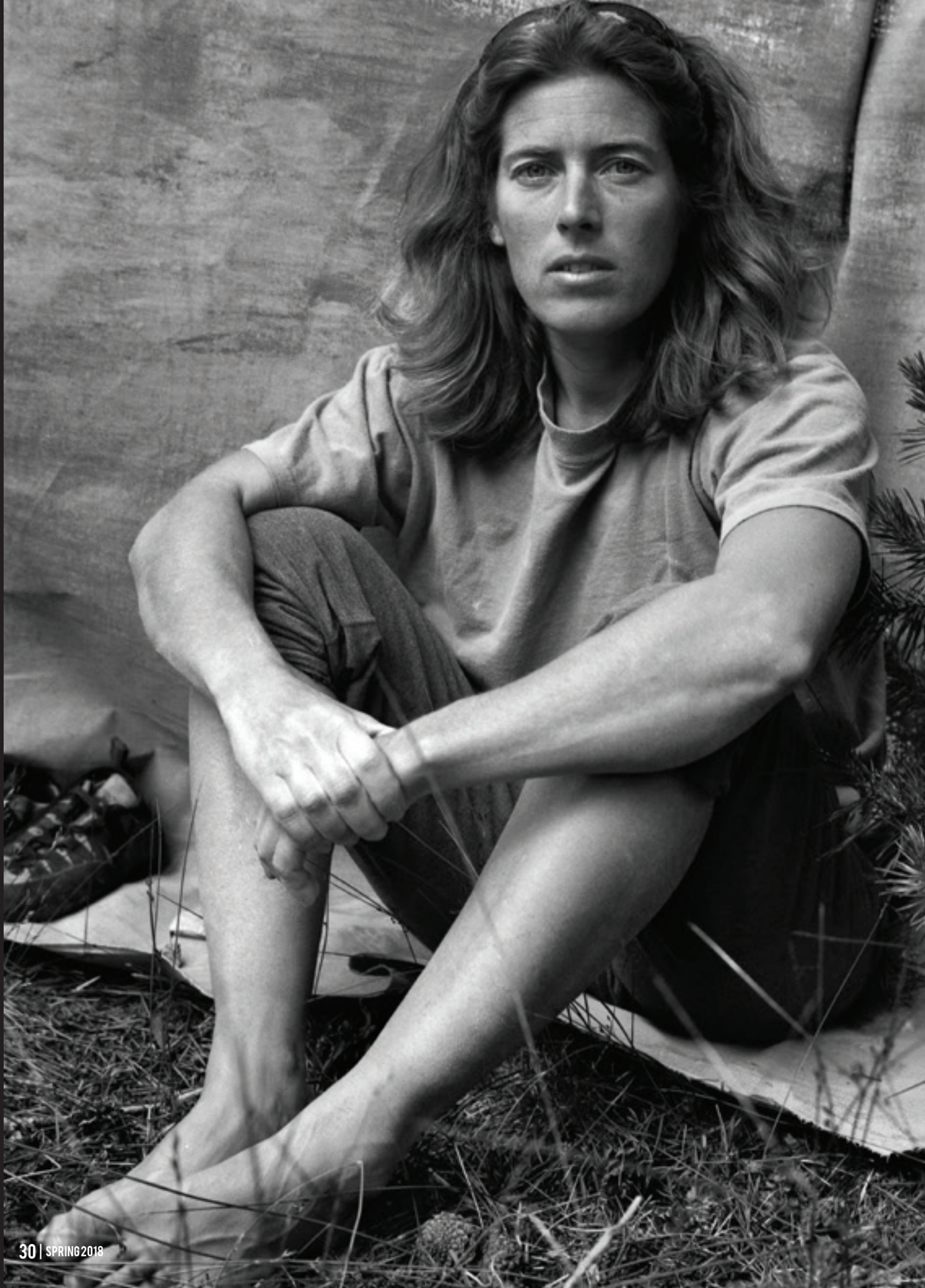
GOLDEN STATE GALLERY



GOLDEN STATE GALLERY



CLIMBER Ben Pope
ROUTE *Across The Tracks* (V10), Yosemite Valley
PHOTOGRAPHER Dean Fleming



Lynn in Yosemite, 1994.

IMAGE + DEAN FIDELMAN

CALIFORNIA CLIMBER: LYNN HILL

INTERVIEW + DEAN FLEMING

“IT GOES, BOYS.”

Those three words rang around the globe when legendary climber Lynn Hill became the first person to free climb the *Nose* (VI 5.14) on El Capitan in 1993. While most climbers today know of Lynn Hill and her many historic climbing achievements, her long list of groundbreaking ascents continues to astonish. Hill was the first woman to climb 5.12d in 1979, the first woman to climb 5.14 in 1991 and the first woman to on-sight 5.13b in 1992. During Hill’s relatively short competition career she quickly climbed to the top of the ranks, winning more than 30 international competitions including five consecutive wins and the Arco Rock Master.

Anyone who has dedicated their life to a sport for more than a decade will know that it takes a strong sense of commitment and perseverance. After over 40 years of climbing, Hill seems as psyched

as ever, and continues to improve her climbing methodically. Between juggling her household in Boulder, Colorado, traveling for work and recreationally climbing, Hill has found an adoring and rewarding passion for teaching others the sport she has dedicated her life to mastering. Over the past decade Hill has been working on an instructional video called “The Art and Technique of Rock Climbing;” a passion project that focuses on technique for face-climbing in applications like sport climbing and bouldering. The video will introduce climbers to the library of techniques that are used on everything from slabs and vertical faces to overhangs, corners and arêtes.

As the 25-year anniversary of the first free ascent of the Nose quickly approaches in 2018, 56 year-old Lynn Hill continues to lead a busy life in Boulder, Colorado as a climber, instructor, mother and “grown-up” home-owner. The following interview was conducted via phone in September of 2017.



Living near the Shawangunks during her college years, Hill pioneered a number of difficult free climbs. In 1984 at The Gunks she grabbed on-sight first ascents of *Yellow Crack* (5.12c) and *Vandals* (5.13a). *Vandals* was the most difficult route on the East Coast at the time and the first climb of its grade at the Gunks. Pictured here, Hill re-visits her stomping grounds *on Stannard's Roof* (5.10a).

IMAGE + JIM THORNBURG

"I THINK THAT MAYBE I'M UNUSUAL IN THAT I HAVEN'T REALLY FELT BURNED OUT.

But I've tried to maintain balance in my lifestyle as a climber. I do the kind of climbing that has meaning for me and I don't let the various forces around me destroy my sense of freedom and enjoyment of climbing. I'm a lifer and I want to climb for as long as my body will allow. I don't really care about the grades and I don't really care if I plateau."

"I'VE DEFINITELY HAD MY PERIODS OF TRAINING FOR THINGS LIKE THE NOSE AND FOR COMPETITIONS, BUT I ENDED UP RETIRING FROM COMPETITIONS BECAUSE I DIDN'T WANT TO BURN OUT.

It seemed like competitions were pushing me toward indoor climbing only. I started thinking this is not why I started climbing - this is taking me away from my passion for rock climbing. That is why I retired early from my competition career and instead focused on things like free climbing the Nose and traveling around the world. When I look back on those days of traveling and working on the Nose, I remember calling it "Vacation Climbing."

"I'M 56 YEARS OLD NOW AND I WANT TO CLIMB AND FEEL GOOD WHEN I CLIMB.

I think it's better to under-do it rather than over-do it. I try to have fun with my climbing. I like to warm up, push myself a little bit and then just go home. I'm probably climbing better now in a certain aspect. Although I

WHEN I LOOK BACK ON THOSE DAYS OF TRAVELING AND WORKING ON THE NOSE, I REMEMBER CALLING IT VACATION CLIMBING.

might not be stronger, I feel like I haven't lost much since those days for a combination of reasons; I try to be as fluid and efficient as possible. This started out as part of my mental training while preparing for the *Nose*. I focused on optimizing every movement and maintaining an efficient flow of movement, while conserving my energy so that I could climb 5.14, 2,500 feet off the ground. I feel like I've become a better climber over the years through the process of analyzing my own technique as well as that of other people for instruction purposes."

Throughout Hill's climbing career she has been well regarded for her incredible ability to read routes, and has onsighted climbs as hard as 5.13b. Some of her noteworthy onsights include the incredible onsight first ascent of *Mingus* (5.13a) 12 pitches in France's Verdon Gorge in 1993, and *Golden Boy* (5.13b) at the Red River Gorge, Kentucky. On a visit to the New River Gorge in West Virginia, Hill attempted to onsight the notoriously hard *Quinsana Plus* (5.13a) [pictured here]. She fell once on her first attempt, but easily sent on her second go.

IMAGE + JIM THORNBURG

"I DON'T AGREE WITH BEING CALLED THE BEST CLIMBER IN THE WORLD."

I did something that nobody had done before, and I would agree that I was in a small group of top climbers capable of making such an ascent. There were other amazing climbers in various places throughout Europe who were doing some cutting edge routes at the time. I think being able to do the first free ascent of such a historic route got a lot of people's attention. If anyone had been able to do it before me, they would have, because it was a prize waiting to be grabbed. I had developed my skills as a traditional climber growing up in southern California and climbing in places such as Joshua Tree and Yosemite. During the late 80's and early 90's, there was no access to the Internet and most American climbers weren't really aware of what was happening overseas. Because I traveled to various places in Europe during a pivotal time in the development of free climbing, I developed the necessary strength and skills that other Americans had not developed yet, I did my first 5.14 between competitions in France back in 1990 when there was a single route rated 5.14 in America."

I DON'T SEE A POINT IN DWELLING ON PEOPLE'S SMALL MINDED EGO PROBLEMS. IT'S NOT MY PROBLEM, IT'S THEIR PROBLEM.





Hill making quick work of the intricate (and bold without crashpads) *Stem Gem* (V4), in Joshua Tree National Park.
 IMAGE + DEAN FIDELMAN

“IT WAS UNUSUAL THAT I WAS ABLE TO DO [THE NOSE], AND OF COURSE BECAUSE I’M A SMALL WOMEN SOME MEN MADE COMMENTS SUCH AS “SHE WAS ABLE TO DO IT BECAUSE SHE HAS SUCH SMALL FINGERS” OR “SHE COULD FIT BETTER INSIDE THE CORNER (CHANGING CORNERS).”

Both are true facts, but there were other sections of the route that were perhaps more difficult for me because of my small size. I think those statements indicate hints of jealousy that comes from sexism and the idea that men always have to be better - if a woman does something before a man, some men try to find a reason to undermine the achievement instead of just recognizing the beauty and vision of the ascent. No matter what size you are, you still have to be a very good climber to free climb the Nose, so why couldn’t they accept the fact that a woman is capable of making such a breakthrough ascent? I don’t see a point in dwelling on people’s small minded ego problems. It’s not my problem, it’s their problem.”

“I WOULD SAY THAT THE LEVEL OF SEXISM IN CLIMBING IS SOMEWHAT BETTER NOW, BECAUSE THERE ARE SO MANY YOUNG STRONG WOMEN PROVING THAT WOMEN CAN BE REALLY GOOD CLIMBERS.

Look at gymnastics and the amazing Cirque de Solei performers. Women are able to perform at a very high level in those disciplines. I don’t like the tendency to compare men and women all the time. Women can do some amazing things, and men can do some amazing things, and sometimes it’s a different style. When you see people perform at a high level it’s beautiful to watch. We should all just be happy that men and women are complementary in our approaches. Hopefully we can work together in harmony to improve the conditions of the world, rather than trying to dominate or claim superiority over each other based on gender.”

GO BIG

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Alex Schwellert placing a Dragon Cam 8 on the Scott-Burke off-width, Freerider (5.12d), El Capitan, Photo: Frank Kretschmann

dmmwales.com

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work later**





IMAGE + GREG EPPERSON

“THEY SAY YOU LEARN THE MOST BY TEACHING, AND TO ME IT’S FASCINATING TO WATCH PEOPLE CLIMB AT ANY LEVEL.

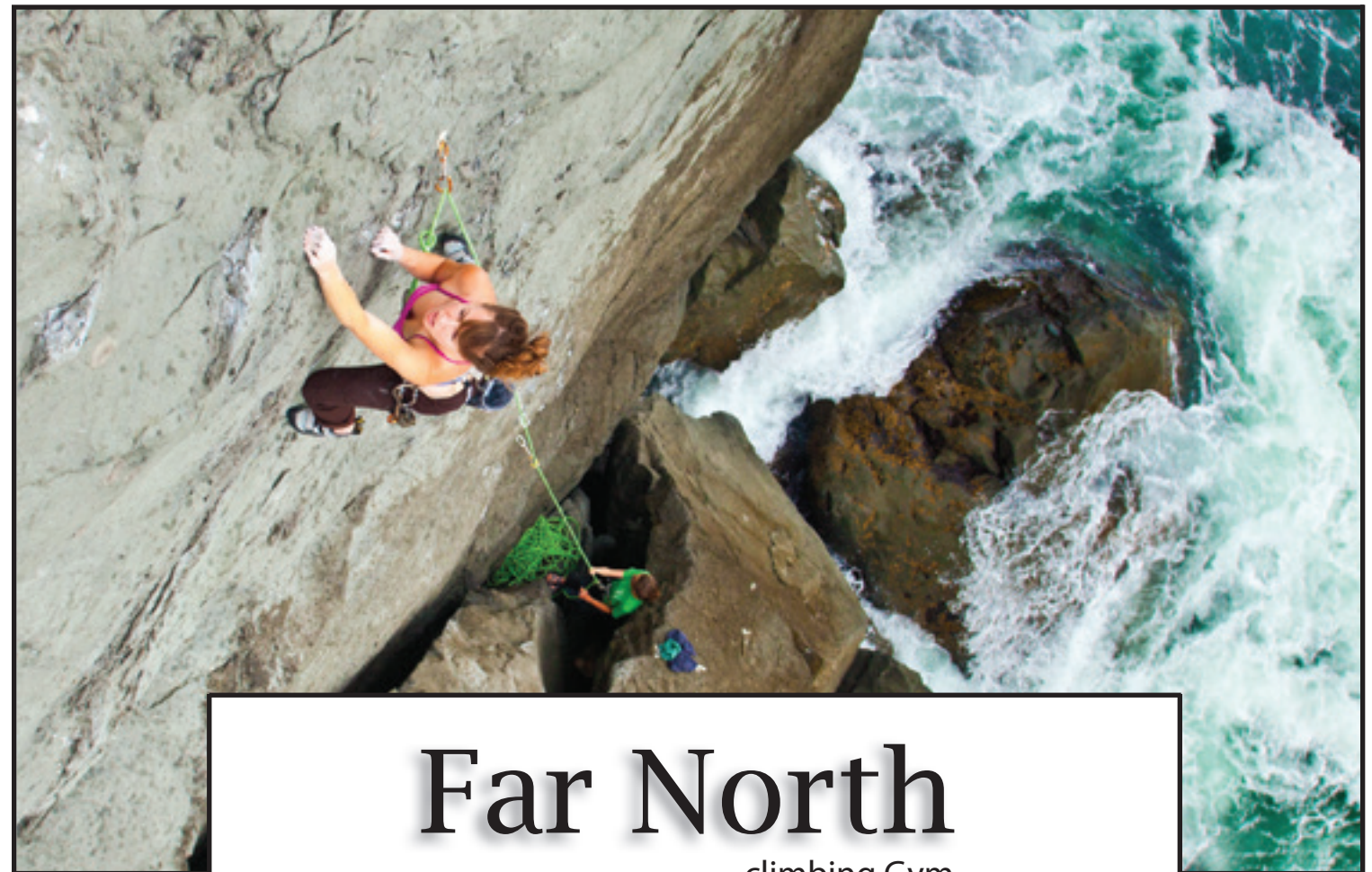
I’m trying to communicate what I’ve learned over the years and the best way to do that is to learn from the people who I’m trying to teach. It’s a two way street. I’m learning from them and they are learning from me, and the more clear that I can be with my instruction, the easier it is for people to learn and progress, but more importantly, I hope they enjoy the experience. I like to learn and progress, but not at the expense of having a good time. If it becomes too serious then there is a greater chance of burning out. When people put too much pressure on themselves to succeed, it can ruin the joy of climbing.”

“THE VIDEO I’VE BEEN WORKING ON INCLUDES A LOT OF MATERIAL AND IT’S TAKEN ME OVER TEN YEARS TO PUT IT TOGETHER.

So far there’s no one else doing this, and I figured out why; because it’s really hard! To try to explain something as complicated as climbing with simple indications is very difficult. I also don’t have a lot of time to focus only on my personal projects because I’m being pulled in so many different directions. In my household I have a 14 year-old son who just entered high school. I also have a dog and a cat, so I’m always busy.”

“I’M TRYING TO THINK OF A SPECIAL WAY TO CELEBRATE THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FIRST FREE ASCENT OF THE NOSE...

We’ll see; I’m still trying to organize my ideas...”



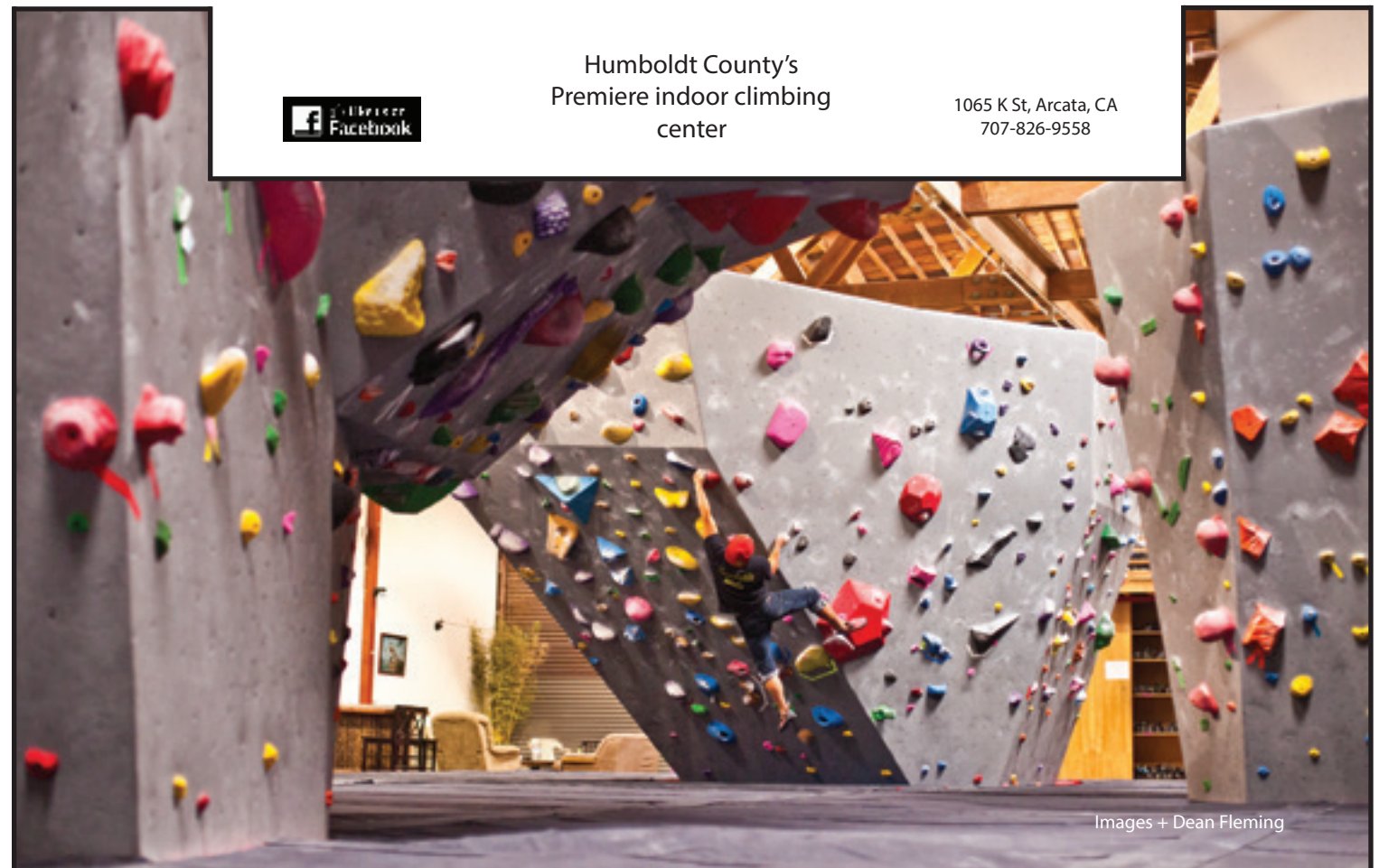
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Images + Dean Fleming



THE BURN

WORDS & IMAGES + DEAN FLEMING



PREVIOUS

This blunt arête climb later named *Peavey's Prow* (V3) follows a series of textured pinches and side pulls until a dramatic move at the lip to an incut water-carved bucket. Travis Lombardo makes the third ascent.

LEFT

Luke Mast makes the first ascent of *Mortise and Tenon* (V2), at the Mill Boulder.

RIGHT

Travis Lombardo warming up on one of the many high quality roadside slab problems found at Sawmill.



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All four tires spun simultaneously, spitting up “rooster tails” of slushy snow. I smashed my foot on the throttle and felt the tiredness of the 300-thousand-mile-old motor as the little Subaru we’d nicknamed “Ashtray” slowly lurched forward. Luke jumped out of the open passenger-side window and ran to the back of the car to begin pushing in an attempt to get us out of the 18-inch-deep packed snow that blanketed the shady side of Sawmill Mountain, near Groveland, California. Yet with each movement we dug deeper and deeper down into the heavy slush, rutted in the tall tracks left by a few 4x4 trucks that had driven the road in the days prior. The snow eventually packed itself so tightly underneath the vehicle that we slid to a complete stop. Ten-miles into the middle of nowhere, surrounded by a stark contrast of white snow and the ashen black trees that had been scorched in the Rim Fire of 2013, we were officially stuck.

In August of 2013 I was living in the small coastal town of Arcata when I happened upon a headline from an online news post: “A Fire the Size of Chicago Burns in the Stanislaus National Forest.” The size of Chicago? It’s hard to comprehend. Like many folks from the pine forests and oak woodlands of Tuolumne County, I’d never been to Chicago. Besides, in Tuolumne, we rarely measure distance by city blocks, but rather by acres of river valleys, tree stands and cattle pastures.

In the late evenings the wind would shift to the west and our small mountain town would become overrun by a dark cloud of falling ash. The smoke was thickest in the mornings and gradually dissipated into the afternoons. On August 26th 2013 Duckwall Mountain was taken by the Rim Fire. The high flames charging northward were easily visible from the rural communities in east Sonora and Tuolumne City.

The fire doubled in size overnight, steadily making its way from 50,000 acres to just fewer than 200,000. On a Wednesday afternoon I received word that the flames had reached Paper Cabin Ridge outside Tuolumne City. Two days later, I piled all of my belongings into my car and headed south for the Gold Country.

The greater Tuolumne Wilderness is where I grew up and remained the home of my friends and family. If it was going to burn, then I damn-well wanted to be there for it. Don’t get me wrong, I didn’t want to die in the fire, and I sure as hell didn’t want to get in the way of the folks trying to stop it. I figured if they evacuated the area, then I’d pack up my car and follow the line of traffic towards the Central Valley. But like many people, I preferred to stay and see it through.





PREVIOUS SPREAD

Kai Defty making the first ascent of the best line (so far) found at Sawmill Mountain; the incredible (and highball) *The Yarder* (V1), at the Warm Up Boulders.

LEFT

Luke Mast climbing *Mortise and Tenon* (V2), at the Mill Boulder.

RIGHT, TOP

Travis Lombardo working the crux mantel on *Two in the Bush* (V4) at the Warm-Up Boulders. This funky back-step sets you up for a difficult throw to a textured pinch on an arête, followed by a technical heel-hook and more sloping rails to the top.

RIGHT, BOTTOM

Kai Defty working a difficult new project found at a zone dubbed the River Boulders.



<~~~>

When someone had anything to say about the Rim Fire, I wanted to listen. I wanted to hear the complaints about the smoke and ash at the grocery store. I wanted to sit with friends on patios as helicopters and enormous DC-10s flew overhead. I wanted to listen to the scanners and turn up the volume for town meetings broadcast over public radio stations. I wanted to overhear the conspiracy theories between hillbillies at the gas station. I wanted to looky-loo on ridge-tops with ice chests and binoculars. In the end, I wanted to watch the unimaginably long train of fire engines pack up shop and head west on Highway 108, and I wanted to buy my friends a round of beers when they returned home from sleepless weeks of dropping trees and cutting lines.

More than a year passed before the Rim Fire was officially declared “out” on November 4th, 2014. It became the fourth-largest fire in California’s recorded history, burning 257,314 acres, south to the northern edge of Yosemite National Park, and north to an area beyond the Clavey River Canyon. The area near the fire’s origin, a steep and remote canyon deep within the Stanislaus National Forest, was near-completely decimated, leaving behind a melancholy scene of scorched pine, oak and Manzanita trees. Five years would pass until we would discover this fire’s silver lining; the fact that the flames had also scorched the moss and debris from a large number of high-quality granite boulders along Sawmill Mountain Road, leaving them sparkling clean and easily accessible.

Rumors of climbing in the Sawmill Mountain area stretch back to the 1980s, and with its small cliff band easily visible from the drive to nearby Yosemite Valley, it’s no surprise that this place had been scoured by generations of area climbers. As evidenced by a few rusted bolts at the tops of some of the blocks, and by a random set of plastic glue-on holds that line the belly of one particularly large (and otherwise blank) boulder, there has certainly been a small history of climbing at Sawmill for at least three decades. Yet with time, like so many smaller zones along California’s western slope, this little climbing area easily faded into obscurity.

In the fall of 2017, Groveland resident Kai Defty bumped down Sawmill Mountain Road on a mission to gather firewood for the upcoming winter season. Since the Rim Fire in 2013 Sawmill Mountain Road has taken on a more literal meaning, as the once-dense pine and oak forest has become a perfect location for gathering dry, dead-and-down firewood. On this trip Defty would find that this newly opened landscape had also become an area where the once-hidden granite blocks that litter the hillsides near the road can now be more easily spotted. After stopping the car numerous times to scope a number of quality-looking blocks only footsteps from the road, Defty returned home and enlisted a few friends, including Luke Mast, Gena Wood and this author, to help scrub what little needed to be cleaned.







PREVIOUS SPREAD

Travis Lombardo climbing the brilliant finger-to-fist crack, *Slash and Burn* (V1).

LEFT

Kai Defty making the first ascent of *Cross-Cut* (V6), a sloping arête with perfectly positioned in-cut crimps.

RIGHT, TOP

Luke Mast attempts *Cross-Cut* (V6) at the River Boulders.

IMAGE + KAI DEFTY

RIGHT, BOTTOM

Kai Defty of the second ascent of *Mortise and Tenon* (V2) at the Mill Boulder.



<~~~>

In the months to come this small crew discovered (or re-discovered) and climbed approximately fifty boulder problems ranging from VB to V7 in the Sawmill Mountain area, including a handful of absolute classics. Although the problems found at Sawmill range greatly in style, including all the typical granite features like steep arêtes and blank-looking slabs, the most unique and noteworthy problems in “the Burn,” as we’ve come to call it, have been the abundance of perfectly uniform cracks and massive faces covered in large diorite knobs. Climbing on many of the boulders at Sawmill feels quite similar to climbing miniature versions of the routes found at Yosemite’s Pat & Jack Pinnacle.

Like so many of the smaller outlying areas that surround the regions close to famed areas like Yosemite National Park, the Burn will probably never become a well-known or heavily visited climbing area. There might be enough problems at Sawmill to warrant a small, pamphlet-style guidebook, yet it’s more likely that one will never be compiled. Although the small local resurgence that has chalked up a number of quality problems continues to scour the hillsides at Sawmill, and they have persisted in finding new star-worthy problems with each visit, the style of climbing found here is that of generation’s past – delicate slabs, brutal offwidths, massive highballs and rough-sided finger-cracks – quite the opposite of the overhanging roofs with large holds that tend to draw crowds.

After numerous visits to Sawmill Mountain during the dry winter months we became convinced that this area would be accessible and possibly even climbable year-round. In early March of 2018, when six-feet of snow blanketed the higher elevation regions of the Sierra Nevada, we thought we’d test this theory by means of a near-ancient Subaru Impreza with a few snow shovels and crashpads piled into the trunk. And we damn near made it to the boulders, and would have if it weren’t for the last ½ mile of shaded road with a monumental standing snow-pack. Instead, we dug ourselves out of the ruts, smashed the old Impreza in reverse back up the slippery slope, and found a place to turn around. Yet in our retreat we did find solace in a few surprise encounters; first by a nice tow truck driver that congratulated us for making it as far as we had, and then secondly by the discovery of a very nice roadside block with a perfectly uniform 2” crack on its steepest side. We left the burn that day with one more tale to tell and at least one more boulder problem worth re-visiting. In a place with such stark contrasts, a place that for many might seem lost or desolate, we really couldn’t ask for much more.





Kai Defty climbing one of the best moderate arête problems at the Burn; *Gas Prowered* (V3).

THE BETA

GETTING THERE

From the town of Groveland take Highway 120 East toward Yosemite National Park. After 17 miles turn left onto Sawmill Mountain Road. After a few miles on Sawmill boulders will begin to appear. Choose your block and take a short walk.

WHERE TO STAY

Excellent free camping can be found along Sawmill Mountain Road.

GUIDEBOOK

None, welcome to adventureland!

ACCESS

The landscape at the Burn can seem closer to a desolate wasteland than a thriving ecosystem. Still, if you do decide to visit, please keep in mind that the ecology of this region remains fragile and what little wildlife is thriving here should be cautiously respected.

FIVE STAR PROBLEMS

The Yarder (V1)

Slash and Burn (V1)

Peavey's Prow (V3)

Gas Prowered (V3)

Cross-Cut (V6)



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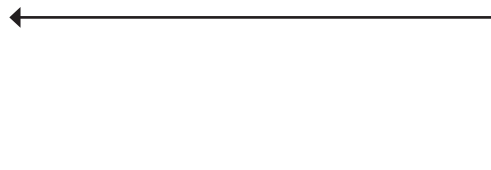


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Hannah Donnelly climbing *The Pothole* (V5)

COSUMNES RIVER GORGE

WORDS & IMAGES + JIM THORNBURG



DINKUM

Patti Phillips climbing Dinkum (5.9)

IN MARCH OF 1981, I TOOK MY FIRST “CLIMBING” TRIP TO YOSEMITE. Armed with 100 feet of goldline static rope, my lofty goal was to hike to the base of El Capitan and climb Pine Line, a single-pitch 5.7 near the base of the Nose. The grand total of my climbing experience was comprised of a couple of days bouldering and top-roping the 30’ faces at Indian Rock in Berkeley.

Once in the valley, I was overwhelmed by the stark vertical landscape. It was stormy and the giant silver walls shimmered wet in the cloud light, stretching out of sight into the mist, miles above. After hours of scrambling lost in the monster talus field below El Cap, I reached the toe of the cliff without a clear plan as to how to top-rope Pine Line or even find it. I was wet and hypothermic. From above, huge chunks of ice whirled like helicopters and exploded in the talus all around me. I had to face it: my super-sized passion to climb in Yosemite was being soundly crushed by the blank, soaring walls. Defeated, I hiked back down and drove home, filled with angst at the prospect of ever doing a real climb in Yosemite.

Back at Indian Rock, I sheepishly recounted my story to Dylan Williams, an Indian Rock regular who had climbed in Yosemite. He chuckled at my story and said the same thing had happened to him. He told me of a place in the Sierra Foothills called Cosumnes River Gorge and suggested I go there first. He said it was like Yosemite - but with training wheels.

If you’ve been to Cosumnes and to Yosemite, you might think it’s a stretch to compare the two places; in Yosemite the walls are 3,000-feet high, at Cosumnes most cliffs top out at about 40-feet. Yosemite summits reach 8,000-feet in elevation and have real mountain weather while Cosumnes sits at about 1,000-feet and is mild even in the winter. But the similarities are plentiful also. Cosumnes seems almost like a book of lessons designed for Yosemite graduation: the rock is composed of the same dense, featureless granite where the lines are defined by splitter cracks with only rare help from a diorite knob or a lonely edge. Though diminutive,

Cosumnes comes complete with cracks of all sizes from fingers to chimney, 5.5 to 5.13. Like Yosemite, there are blank slabs where you need to learn to trust your feet and balance. Across the river there are several multi-pitch routes up a 400-foot dome, and in between the river is choked with massive boulders from V0 to V14.

Navigating around the river, boulders and small cliffs is a lesson in 3rd class route-finding that might feel frustrating at first. But with some patience and creativity the practice becomes whimsical as you realize there is almost always a reasonable (usually tricky) scramble from point A to point B, and it’s a type of scrambling that will help immensely when you go to Yosemite.

Most of the climbs on the west side of the river have bolted top-rope anchors that are conveniently accessed from above. Local tradition confines the face climbs to top-rope only as no bolts are allowed on the face, but the cracks are of course lead-able. On the east side of the river, Gutenberger Dome offers a few worthwhile crack climbs and multi-pitch run-out slabs. The pools in between are amazing for swimming and for deep water bouldering when it’s warm enough.

So I took Dylan’s advice and gave Cosumnes a try. After one trip, I was hooked, and by the end of the summer, I had mastered many of the crack sizes, trained myself on the multi-pitches across the river and spent countless hours doing solo friction traverses above the water. When I did return to Yosemite, it was just as big as I remembered, but at least it was no longer too big.



TEN MINUTE CRACK

Among the short-but-stout challenges found at Cosumnes, one of the most demanding cracks in the area can be found at the aptly named Ten Minute Wall on the north side of the river. *Ten Minute Crack* (5.12a) is a slabby yet demanding thin finger crack that splits a smooth shield of rock. Although this climb is a squat 35-feet in height, what it lacks in length it makes up for with torturous finger locks and slippery feet. The route can be easily top-roped or lead with adequate thin protection. Dean Fleming reaches through the thin crux moves.

TROUT FISHING

Eliot Carlson finishing the superb first pitch of *Trout Fishing* (5.11a), one of the premier lines of the Gutenberger Wall. This first pitch, a rising, bolted traverse, has whimsical runouts that provide a dunking in the river should you peel off. So why not just solo it? Many do, but then you miss out on the fun 2nd pitch – a smooth slab to a tricky mantel (and access to the many routes above).



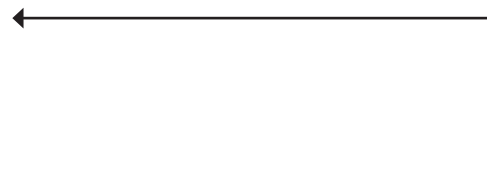
YAYALI

Jimmy Web makes the first ascent of *Yayali* (V14), one of the most difficult and beautiful boulders on the West Coast. Yayali is named after a mythical beast to the Miwok people who originally inhabited this region. The granite boulders scattered through the Sierra are said to be the bleached bones of this dead giant.



IRAQI CORNER

Nicole Bell Isle climbs sweet finger locks and tenuous smears up a steep and imposing black wall which breaches the bottom of the Gutenberg Wall at Cosumnes. Protected by good cams, stoppers and a single bolt, this pitch is the classic way to access the upper dome.



UNCONQUERABLE

The dreaded “+” rating means this is probably a harder climb lurking in sheep’s clothing. Whatever the grade, *Unconquerable* (5.8+) is a fantastically fun top rope route that can be liebacked or squeezed, depending on your inclination and tolerance for pain and discomfort.



DINKUM

Buck’s Bar Dome, while diminutive, is packed with just about any lesson granite can teach. You’ll find cracks of all widths from 5.5 to 5.13, slabs and arêtes. What you won’t find is a pitch longer than 40 feet. Although all of the routes on Buck’s Bar Dome are easily top-roped from plentiful bolted anchors, some of the climbs, like *Dinkum* (5.9) are leadable and offer bountiful protection for the fledgling leader. Kim Pfabe works her way through the crux moves; a section of absolutely sinker, bottlenecking fingerlocks in perfect rock.

TEST PIECE

Eliot Carlson climbing *Test Piece* (5.8+), a beautiful but well-used finger and hand crack in a sweeping dihedral.



LAST ASCENT
FARE THEE WELL J.B.





Clara Lopez leading the second pitch of *Trout Fishing* (5.11a).

5 Star Routes

Unconquerable (5.8+)
Dinkum (5.9)
Iraqi Corner (5.10c)
Trout Fishing (5.11a)
Ten Minute Crack (5.12)

THE BETA

GETTING THERE

From Highway 50 take exit 44a for Missouri Flat Road. After two miles turn left (east) onto Pleasant Valley Road. After 5.2 miles turn right (south) onto Buck's Bar Road. After 3 miles park in a thin but long turnout near a large guardrail along the right side of the road where the road makes a large, hairpin left hand bend. Head downhill on a good trail until you find the routes.

WHEN TO GO

Year-round, but beware of blazing temperatures and crowds in summer. Spring is gorgeous but beware of treacherous high water when approaching the Gutenberger Wall.

GUIDEBOOK

Bay Area Rock by Jim Thornburg

Climb Responsibly in the Desert

The desert climbing environment is uniquely fragile and full of life—and it demands specific minimum impact practices.



Avoid walking on microbiotic soil crusts, which play a critical ecological role in the desert.



Soil in the desert lacks the micro-organisms to biodegrade human waste. Use a toilet or pack it out.



Wait 24-48 hours before climbing on sandstone after it rains to avoid damaging the rock.



Respect cultural resources. Look but don't touch.



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Eric Odenthal bouldering in Castle Valley, UT. © Whit Richardson

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