



Sustainable solutions and Innovations in climbing hardware.





ClimbTech Removable Bolt

ClimbTech removable bolts are great for bolting and minimizing impact. New features include cable stiffener, ergonomic trigger, and one-piece cleaning bushing. ClimbTech RBs are safe, efficient and easy to use.



The Wave Bolt is a glue-in rock climbing anchor, offering tremendous strength and increased resistance to corrosion. It combines the strength of glue-ins with the convenience of pitons. In vertical placements the Wave Bolt will not slide out of the hole – like other glue-in bolts do – prior to the glue hardening.



The new Legacy Bolt sleeve anchor now makes it possible to be installed and removed, allowing the same bolt hole to be used for rebolting. See new Legacy Bolt product videos at: climbtech.com/videos



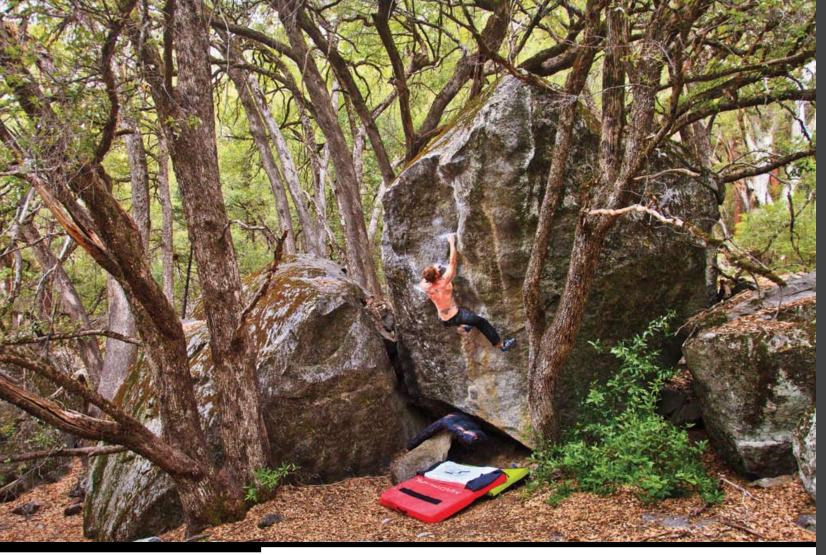
ClimbTech Cable Draws

ClimbTech's permanent draws – Permadraws – are designed to be long-life rock climbing quickdraws that don't wear or deteriorate like traditional nylon draws.



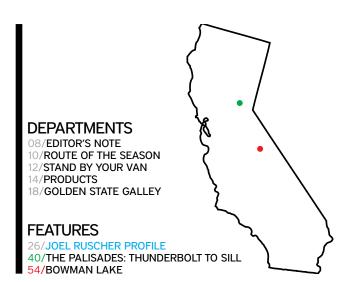






CALIFORNIACLIMBER

NO. 13 SUMMER 20 CALIFORNIACLIMBERMAGAZINE.COM



ON THE COVER

Brian Russell negotiates the traverse from Thunderbolt to Sill in the Palisades. IMAGE + KEN ETZEL

THIS PAGE

Joel Ruscher finds solitude while working on *Noah's Arc* in Yosemite Valley. IMAGE + DEAN FLEMING



CALIFORNIACLIMBER

CALIFORNIACLIMBERMAGAZINE.COM

PUBLISHER Dean Fleming

ART DIRECTOR Alton Richardson

SENIOR CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS

Jerry Dodrill, Jim Thornburg
SENIOR CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

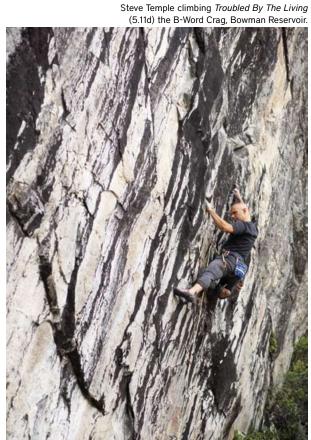
Fitz Cahall, James Lucas

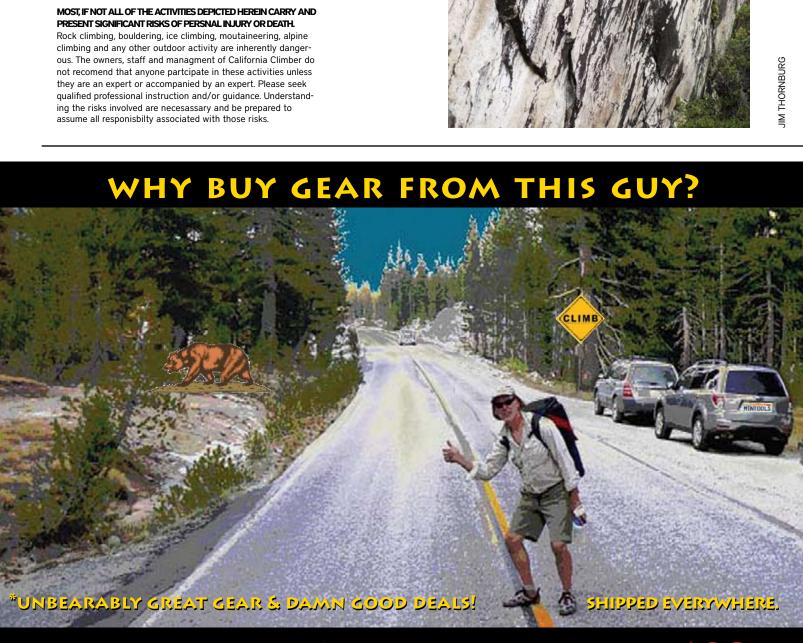
CONTRIBUTORS

Charlie Barrett, Mike Carville, Ken Etzel, Dean Fleming, Kim Groebner, Tiffany Hensley, Josh Horniak, Anthony Lapomardo, James Lucas, Jediah Porter, Ann Raber, Joel Ruscher, Jim Thornburg, Carolyn Wegner

CALIFORNIA CLIMBER

22502 Colorado River Dr. Sonora, Ca 93570 Phone: (209) 768-0110 Email: climb108@yahoo.com









TC PRO

THE ULTIMATE BIG-WALL, FREE-CLIMBING SHOE

DEVELOPED IN COLLABORATION WITH TOMMY CALDWELL

P3® PERMANENT POWER PLATFORM FOR POWERFUL EDGING



WWW.LASPORTIVA.COM

MOUNTAIN TOOLS * CALIFORNIA * SINCE 1980

EDITOR'S NOTE

IN THE SUMMER OF 1995 my stepfather worked the high camp tents at Sunrise and Volgelsang in Yosemite National Park. A few of the guys on Tent Crew that year also worked for Yosemite Search and Rescue. Some of them were also employed as climbing guides at the Yosemite Mountaineering School. My stepfather knew that I was starting to try rock climbing; at the least, he knew I went rappelling out of trees and off of the cliffs beside Crystal Falls, a 200 foot slab of rock about a quarter mile from my backyard. One day, back in the Valley, he reached into the dumpster behind the Mountaineering School and pulled out a 50 foot length of 11mm climbing rope. Greasy, weathered, and black as the night with steel carabiner grime, this would be my first real climbing rope. I was psyched to take it to the waterfall.

That summer I was introduced to "real" climbing at the developed cliffs near my home in Sonora. I climbed on better rock with better ropes owned by far more experienced climbers, but on those boring days after school, I'd hike the 11mm cord down to Crystal Falls to swing around on the slabs.

The falls were a sacred site; not only to me, the only climber that visited, but also to the neighborhood children that built forts and fished in the river, and also to the Native Americans who left their mark with a 100

square foot grinding stone on its summit. In 1998 the landowner died and the property surrounding the summit of Crystal Falls was subdivided. Today the top of Crystal Falls is a gated community with a large steel fence surrounding houses built on top of an old meadow that leads down to the slabs. One of the largest houses in the subdivision sits atop Crystal Falls, its foundation cemented into the same granite slab as the grinding stones.

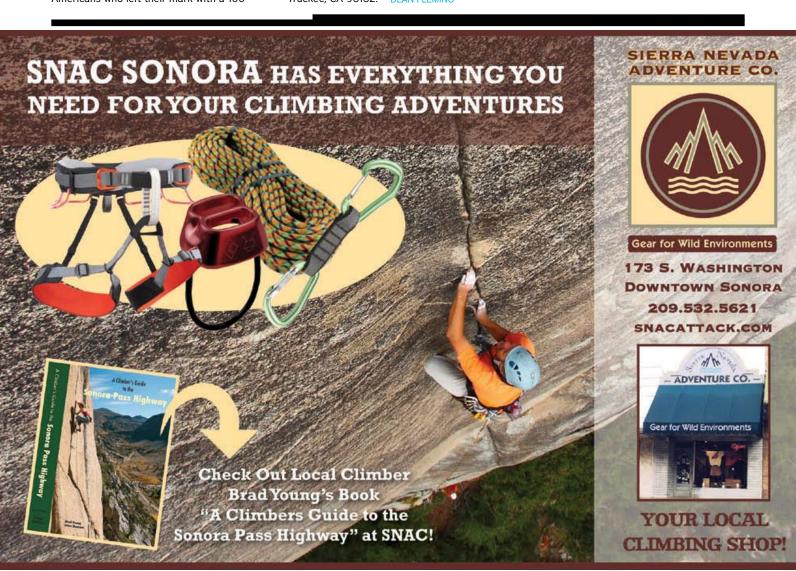
Crystal Falls was terrible for climbing. Access to the falls was certainly of greater value to the families in the neighborhood than to any member of the local climbing community. Neverthe-less, the loss of any open space, whether it is purely scenic, or if it provides opportunities for recreation, is a great defeat that can often never be rectified. When the rare opportunity comes along to protect any of California's climbing areas for future generations, perhaps taking action should be seen as an obligation rather than an option.

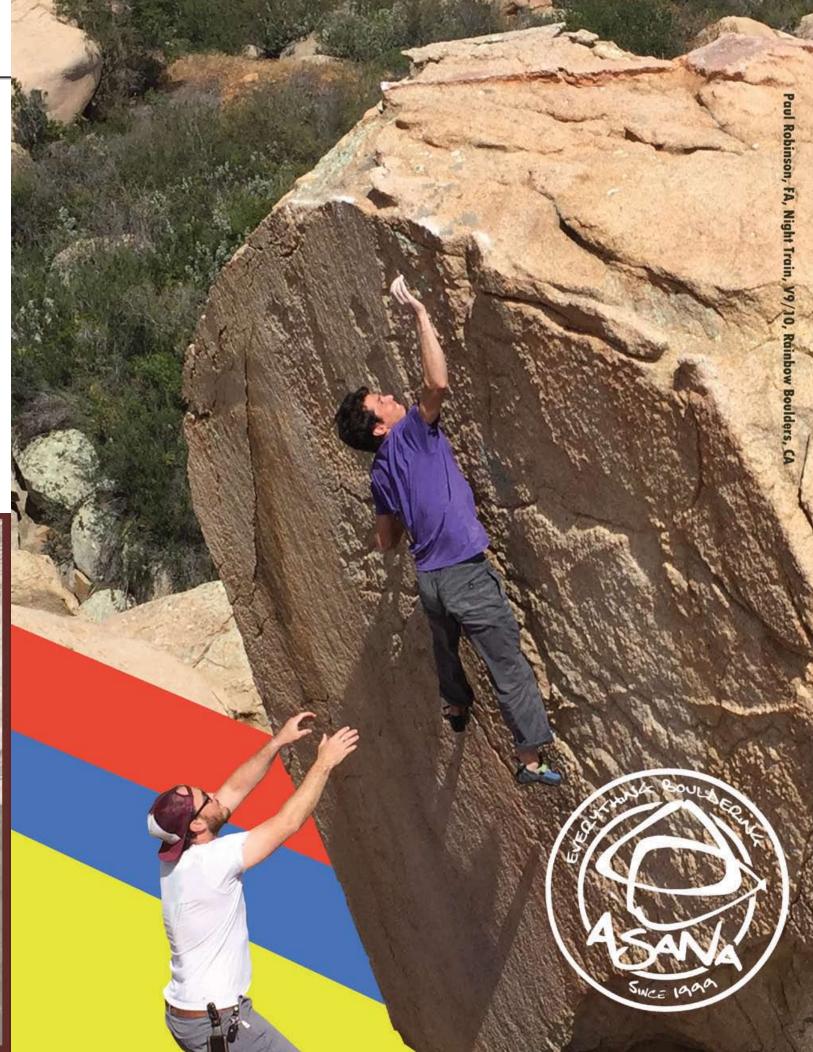
++-

The black granite towers at the west end of Donner Lake make up five of the North Lake Tahoe region's popular climbing areas including the Road Cut, Peanut Gallery, Black Wall, Space Wall and Stealth Wall. The property surrounding the Black Wall at Donner Summit has been privately owned since the mid 1800s. Recently, the owners have decided to sell this 10 acre plot.

You might not think of the Black Wall as a world class crag, but it has been a destination for generations of California Climbers and the area includes a colorful first ascent history. The Black Wall area has seen early ascents by Warren Harding and Royal Robbins, first free ascents from Mark Hudon and Jim Bridwell in the 1970s, and later on, more than a handful of wonderful sport pitches established by Scott Fry and others (for details about Jim Bridwell's classic Black Wall route *Firecracker* (5.10b), check out this edition's Route of the Season by Charlie Barrett on page 10).

The Truckee Donner Land Trust and the Access Fund have partnered to acquire and manage the land as open space in perpetuity. The goal is to raise enough money to buy the 10-acre property outright and provide funds for long-term management. To find out more about the Black Wall acquisition, or to make donations online search "Save the Black Wall." Donations can also be made by mailing a check or money order to the Truckee Donner Land Trust at PO Box 8816, Truckee, CA 96162. —DEAN FLEMING









"Eleanor"

Kim Groebner and her 2006 Dodge Sprinter 2500

What made you want this Sprinter?

The first time I went to Indian Creek we had dinner with Mikey Schafer in his Sprinter. I had never seen one built out before and when I saw it I decided, I want this van. At the time I was living in San Francisco, working as a graphic designer paying off big student loans. I made this agreement with myself that if I saved up enough money for a van and a build out and I still wanted to do it, I could. Three years later I had enough. It took six months to find the van. I knew the exact year, model, and mileage range I wanted. It cost \$20,000, one giant payment to a nice lady in San Jose in 2012. I took it on what was suppose to be a 3-week trip to Hueco. When I was still gone four months later I realized I needed to get rid of my apartment.

What was the build out process like?

I made a spreadsheet of ideas I wanted and had lots of plans, and I got some help from my dad. He took me by surprise by kicking in some money for the wooden cabinets. I'd never asked him for money before, and that gesture told that he was really behind me on this whole "move into my van at age 30" idea. I always felt like I had to tiptoe around my family, but then building out my van together became this catalyst for my dad and I to get closer as adults.

Were you already good at building things, or did you learn with the van?

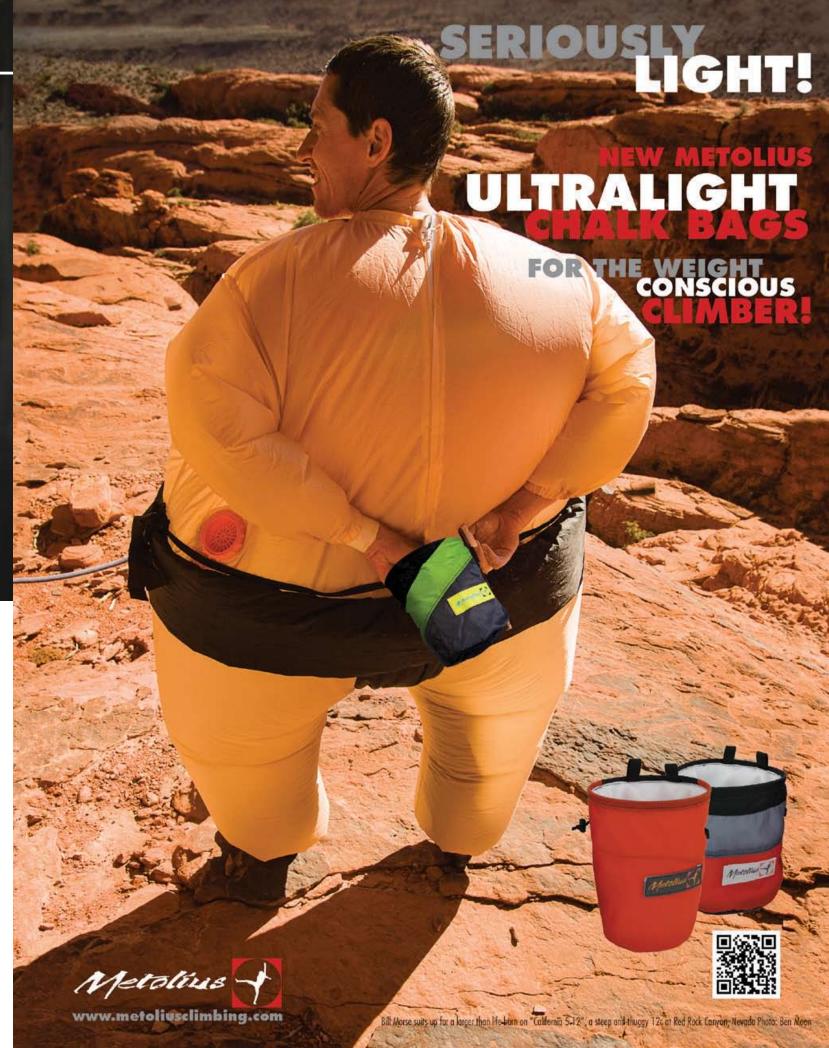
I didn't know anything about construction, and it's still mostly a mystery. I had to learn so much in such a short time about solar, propane, plumbing and wiring. That's why I won't change anything. It was way too much information in a short time and I never want to go through that again.

You've lived in the van in San Francisco before, what's that like?

I've done two stints there of three months each. It was kind of terrible. I got a membership at Planet Granite, where I'd shower and train and climb, and my office was nearby. There are a few spots over there where they overlook the fact that camping in your van is illegal. You can't be obvious there, so no reading lights, no movies. It was kind of wonderful, having this beautiful scenery out your window all the time and living for free and never dealing with traffic. But then there'd be a crazy person tearing apart a newspaper dispenser in the middle of the night outside my van and I'd be like, what am I doing here? I don't think I'd do it again.

What are the challenges of being a girl traveling solo?

People always tell me how they never see girls on the road alone, but I meet so many women who are doing it full on, so I don't know. It doesn't seem that unusual. One interesting thing; if there's a guy hanging out and someone comes up to talk about the van, they ALWAYS address the guy, as if it must be his. It's super annoying, but it also makes me proud. Because when they realize it's mine then they ask about the build out and the solar and the water, I can answer.



METOLIUS CRIMP OIL

{ \$12.95 }

etolius Crimp Oil is a 100% natural blend of essential oils (mostly anti-inflammatory) produced specifically to support recovery from the daily abuse of hard climbing and the injuries that arise from climbing. And yeah, it actually works. To be clear, Crimp Oil is not going to repair your blasted tendons or miraculously cure your 7-year battle with tendonitis, but it is a fantastic anti-inflammatory aid that will most likely ease mild-to-medium finger discomfort, and it has been known to cure some pretty serious cases of joint pain. And it smells nice. And it's cheaper than a physical therapist.

We grabbed about ten bottles of Metolius Crimp Oil in the summer of 2014 and spread the supply to friends who expressed discomfort in their joints – everything from popped tendons to mild aches and swelling in the knuckles. Most of the testers with more serious injuries did recover while using the Crimp Oil, but as you might expect, these individuals also utilized more traditional forms of therapy and often abstained from climbing for significant blocks of time. The most remarkable results were reported from testers who suffered from mild discomfort and nagging pain for long periods. After utilizing nothing but the Crimp Oil for a couple of weeks, a surprising number of testers with mild pain experienced some pretty drastic results. Again, if you're looking for pain experienced some pretty drastic results. Again, if you're looking for a miracle cure for your severed A2 pulley, Crimp Oil is probably not the answer. But if you're looking for a 100% natural product that might cut dication like Ibuprofen, Črimp Oil is a really affordable place to start.



TENAYA TARIFA

{ \$165 }

strongest

climbers, includ-

After rave reviews of Tenaya's high-performance Oasi swept media outlets last season, climbers around the globe have anticipated the release of the Tarifa; another performance shoe from Tenaya that maintains an awesome and precision. With no exception in any category, the Tarifa is the shoe we've all been waiting for. The new Tarifa sports a narrow last, a form-fitting and wellcrafted lacing system, and like all Tenaya shoes, incredibly sticky and durable Vibram XS Grip rubber. Tenaya shoes have been utilized by a number of the world's

ing Alex Megos, Ramon Julian, Josune Beriziartu and Ethan Pringle. Because the Tarifa was crafted as a narrow-last and precision-fitting complement to the already successful Oasi, climbers with low-volume feet, including many of Tenaya's female athletes, have been wearing the Tarifa exclusively since its release. We grabbed a few pairs of Tarifas at the summer 2014 Outdoor Retailer trade show in Salt Lake City and tested them with fantastic results for a 10 month period.

tested them with fantastic results for a 10 month period.

We climbed with the Tarifa for nearly a year on exceptionally varied terrain. We took them everywhere, from the demanding knobs and slabs of Tuolumne Meadows to the steep, pocketed sport climbs of Southern California. The shoes performed wonderfully on almost everything, including a huge selection of cracks of varying sizes. But the Tarifa really excelled when we laced up for climbs that offered dime-edging, precision smearing and narrow pockets. The shoe's thinner profile fit perfectly on climbers with low-volume feet, and these testers raved about the heal of the shoe and its suction-cup fit.

In our opinion, Vibram XS Grip rubber is (although somewhat dated) perhaps the best all-around performance rubber on the market. Tenaya's decision to use XS Grip rubber on all of their shoes is a direct reflection of their commitment to quality; a dedication to performance and durability that can be seen in almost every aspect of their new Tarifa. If you're searching for a shoe that will devoir everything from hard cracks to technical granite edging, bouldering and overhanging

hard cracks to technical granite edging, bouldering and overhanging sport climbing-and especially if you have a low-volume foot profile-a pair of Tarifas could easily become the only shoes in your bag.



TRANGO

FIXE ALIEN LITE

{ \$66/\$68 }

n 1986 David Waggoner of Durango, Colorado started the climbing gear manufacturing company Colorado Custom Hardware (CCH). Waggoner and CCH designed and patented a number of unique innovations to camming devices, most specifically innovations to micro cams. In 1987 Waggoner invented the Cable Pro camming device which introduced the "Stainless Steel Control Sheath," a technology that was also used on his most welcomed invention, the CCH Alien. The Alien surpassed the Cable Pro in many ways, but most notably, by inserting the springs inside the cam lobes, Waggoner crafted the Alien into the narrowest four cam unit in the world.

Since CCH released the Alien cam in 1988 they have been a staple piece of gear for both aid climbers and free climbers who desire optimal placements in wonky terrain. The cams are well-known for producing incredible placements in shallow pin scars and bottoming seams, and their extremely flexible stems offer placement options and greater holding capabilities in horizontal cracks and other awkward positions. When Waggoner died in 2009 at the age of 53 the production of Aliens halted and orders backed up. For many years, the only negative statement you'd hear about Alien cams was how hard they were to find for sale at a local gear shop or online vender.

In 2011 Kevin Daniels of Fixe Hardware decided to purchase the brand to continue the legacy of the Alien cam. Fixe sold (and continues to sell) the CCH design of the Alien, but after extensive research they have also made significant improvements to the device. With a 20% reduction in head width, a 22% reduction in weight, a more cost



effective production for a lower market price, the introduction of molded polymers, stronger trigger cables and a version with doubled sling length, the new Alien LITE is a fantastic re-creation of a timeless product. As avid CCH Alien users, our testers' standards were pretty high, but after a few months of trials we found the new LITE version of the Alien to exceed our expectations in many areas.

The new LITE model of the Alien is more ergonomically designed, durable and less expensive, but our testers found that the 20% weight reduction and the 22% reduction in head width were the most noteworthy improvements to the original design. "With a full rack of cams, the nitely noticeable," one tester remarked. "With the narrow head width and light weight, the new Alien LITE could easily compete with (and probably TKO) the most expensive micro cams on the market today." In straightforward splitters, most cams are created equal, but if you're climbing in places with pin scars or funky placements like Yosemite Valley and Joshua Tree, or in remote areas in the High Sierra, the new Alien LITE from Fixe is the tool for the job.

MAD ROCK LYRA



hat do powerhouse Juliane Wurm, handcrack babes, and a ropedup group of cabronas in El Potrero Chico all have in common? For those of you now lost in thoughts of patina desert rock, the answer is a love for women-specific climbing gear - especially if that gear is fitted for fearless women who are grabbing life by the walls.

On account of a majority of climbers actually having real huevos, a third or less of the product lines by climbing shoe brands are modeled specifically for women with as much love for the vertical world as Dan Osman, and who often have "narrow" or "low volume" feet. There is a deficient market niche for women's specific active gear, and Mad Rock is pointing at that problem with their release of the women specific climbing shoes the Lyra.

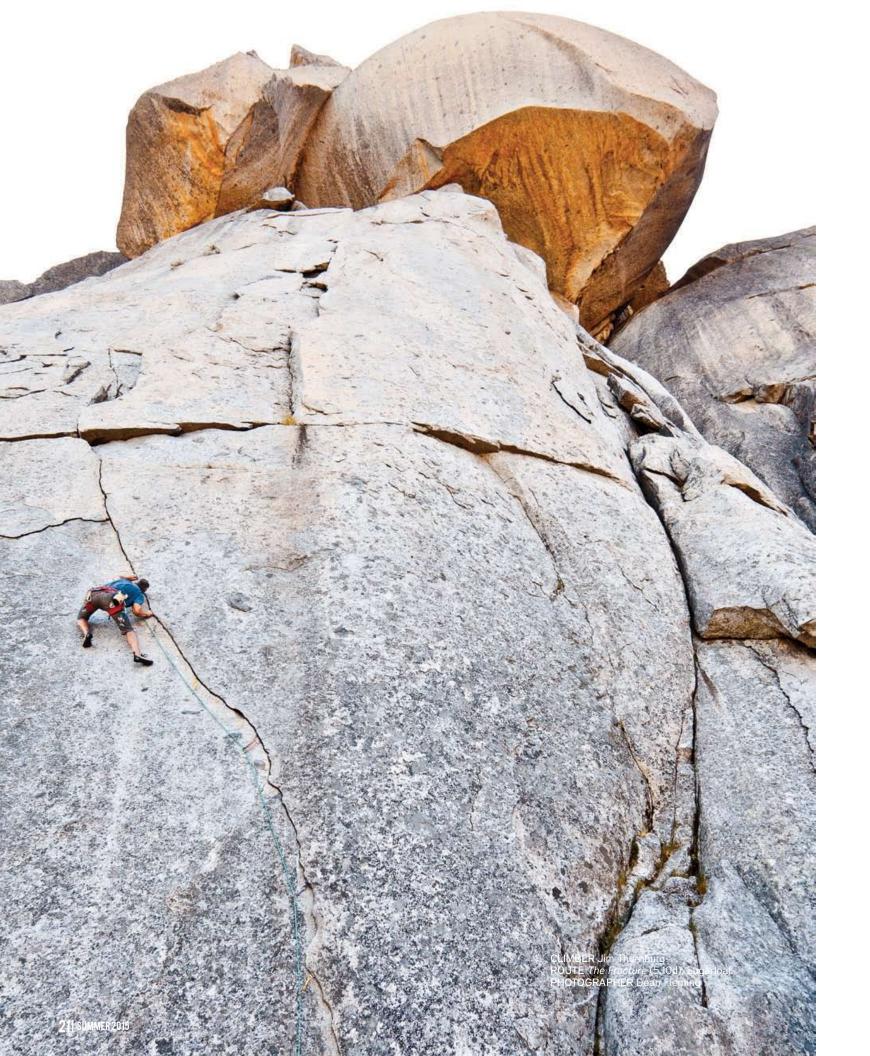
The Lyra, named after a Labrador crag dog that frequented a grassroots climbing gym in Colorado, is geared towards climbers who are looking for a comfortable shoe, or those who are accustomed to a

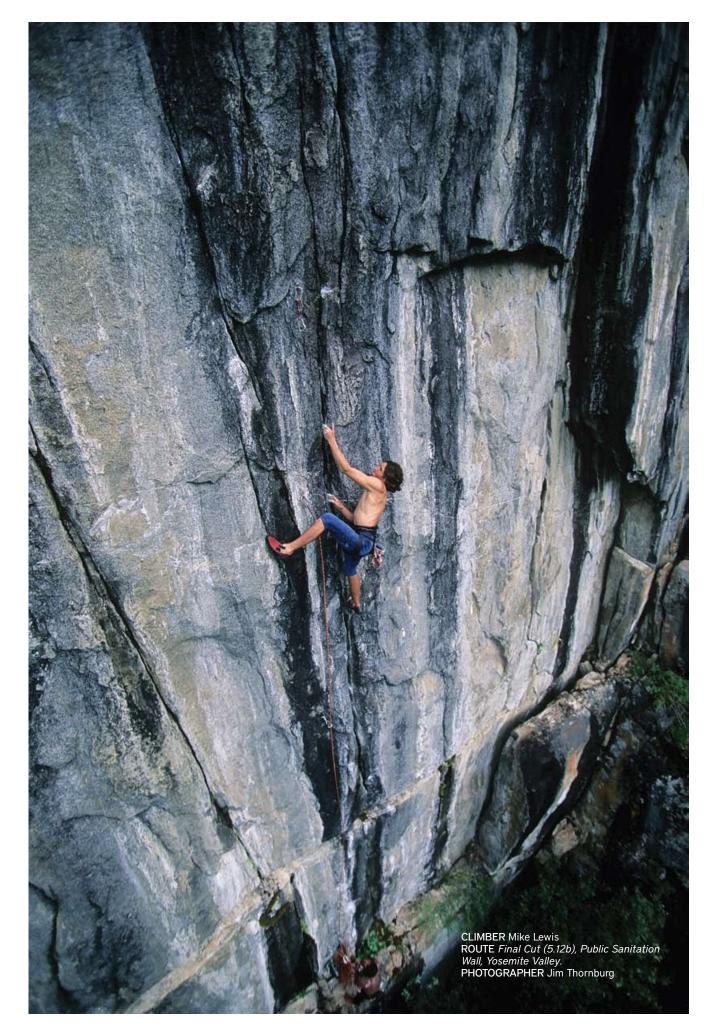
flatter shoe model. The Lyra is as mellow and tough as the old black lab herself, good for a whimful run around inside or outdoors, with two closing straps and the full power of polycarbonate stiffness. I've taken these climbing on thin edgy vertical terrain in Huasteca, Mexico, known for its cryptic and sharp style, and indoors to train on 60 degree plastic. In addition to providing great power and support, they have proven to be comfortable enough for long routes and multi-pitch; which means you can probably keep them on your feet while your masculine equal hangdogs the delicate crimpy section.

Haven't female climbers spent enough time searching for a racerback tank in Bishop's second-hand store to fit our shoulder muscles? How many times do we need to put on cute long-sleeves to find out they are actually compression sleeves? Thank Hera that Mad Rock has the heart and sole to provide a pair of high performance shoes for women. —TIFFANY HENSLEY













METEOR

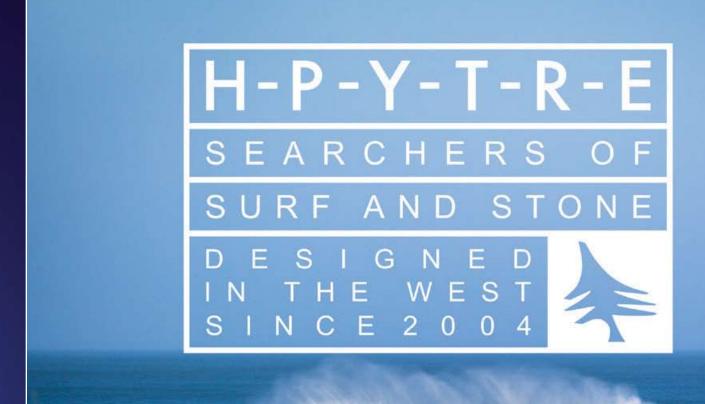
Artfully engineered to take (and make) an impact.

Lightweight, breathable climbing and mountaineering helmet

Light on the head and very airy thanks to generous ventilation, the new METEOR helmet offers exceptional comfort and protection for rock, ice, and alpine use. The simple adjustment system and magnetic chinstrap buckle offer unparalleled ease of use. Available in two sizes, to fit a wide array of users.



Access the inaccessible







THE HIGH ROAD HOME

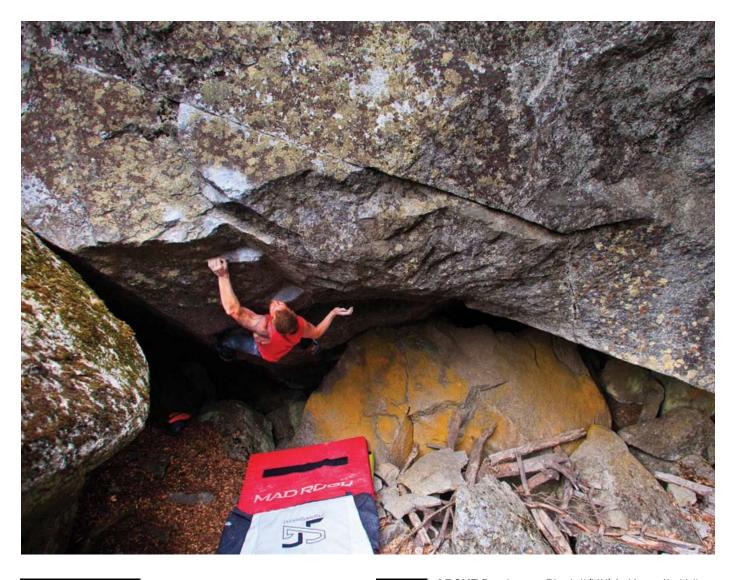
Joel Ruscher's Return to Climbing

WORDS & IMAGES + DEAN FLEMING / PORTRAIT + ANTHONY LAPOMARDO

n hands and knees I pushed a full size crashpad stuffed with camping gear through a muddy hole in the dense blackberry brambles. I slithered through the hole, crawled on top of my crashpad and thrashed my way to a crouched position. I could hear Joel murmuring curses and hacking at the brush a few yards ahead of me. When I finally managed to stand upright, I saw Joel's crashpad fly out of the bushes and launch down the slope toward the Pacific Ocean. I was too tired to laugh. We armed ourselves with heavy sticks to beat down the branches and toiled forward to the sound of breaking waves.

After nearly an hour of world class bushwhacking we reached the

After nearly an hour of world class bushwhacking we reached the beach, where we washed mud, poison oak and stinging nettle from our gear in a small freshwater stream near a large group of gray boulders. The blocks were not as impressive as I'd remembered, and under normal circumstances I'd be ready to bail, but for seven days prior–since Joel Ruscher showed up at my one-room apartment in California's north coast town of Arcata the week before–this had been our daily routine: Wake up early, drink 4 cups of coffee and then search for new boulders. For Joel, this was vacation, and you could tell he was loving every minute of it.



THERE WAS A TIME – the late 1990s to be more specific—when you'd be likely to meet Joel Ruscher. Maybe you'd run into him below a classic boulder problem at a popular destination. Or perhaps you'd strike up a conversation with him while warming up for an indoor climbing competition. You might even set up your tent next to his in Camp 4. But now, in 2015, those encounters are few and far between.

In 2007, after ten years dedicated to the sport, Joel stopped rock climbing. But that's not why he's hard to find these days. In fact, after rekindling his relationship with climbing in 2012, he's more psyched than ever before. But Joel is a part of a truly rare group of California boulderers who value discovery and exploration above a high 8a.nu ranking. So it's hard to find Joel, because he's usually hiking, or scrambling, or cleaning, and when all that hard work pays off, Joel climbs on boulders that we will enjoy years down the road; if we're lucky enough to find them.

<~~~>

Joel Ruscher discovered climbing in the mid 1990s when he and a friend saw a pair of climbing shoes in a magazine.

"We thought climbing shoes would be super comfortable and lightweight, like ninja shoes," said Ruscher. "We wanted to be the first people to wear climbing shoes for everyday stuff; like urban ninjas. Somehow we ended up in an REI in Santa Rosa and went to try on some climbing shoes. They felt like cardboard boxes on my feet. They weren't soft or supple, and worst of all; they didn't make me feel even one tiny bit like a ninja."

In late 1996 Ruscher met Hector "Papi" Blandino and Jim Trout at a party where he overheard them talking about rock climbing and how awesome it was. Hector and Jim invited Joel to Planet Granite in Santa Clara.

ABOVE Ruscher on *Ringtail* (V11) in Yosemite Valley.

RIGHT Ruscher sending the rarely completed *Physics Project Direct* (V11), Split Rock, Lake Tahoe.

NEXT PAGE Ruscher takes a spin on some of the highest quality granite in Yosemite, with a quick ascent of *Squirrel* (V8).

"I jumped at the chance to try climbing," said Ruscher. "Until then I was really into weight lifting, but I wasn't stacking on the pounds and I was beginning to realize that I wasn't blessed with body-building genes. I was never going to be the monster of a man I saw in the magazines and I was interested in trying something new."

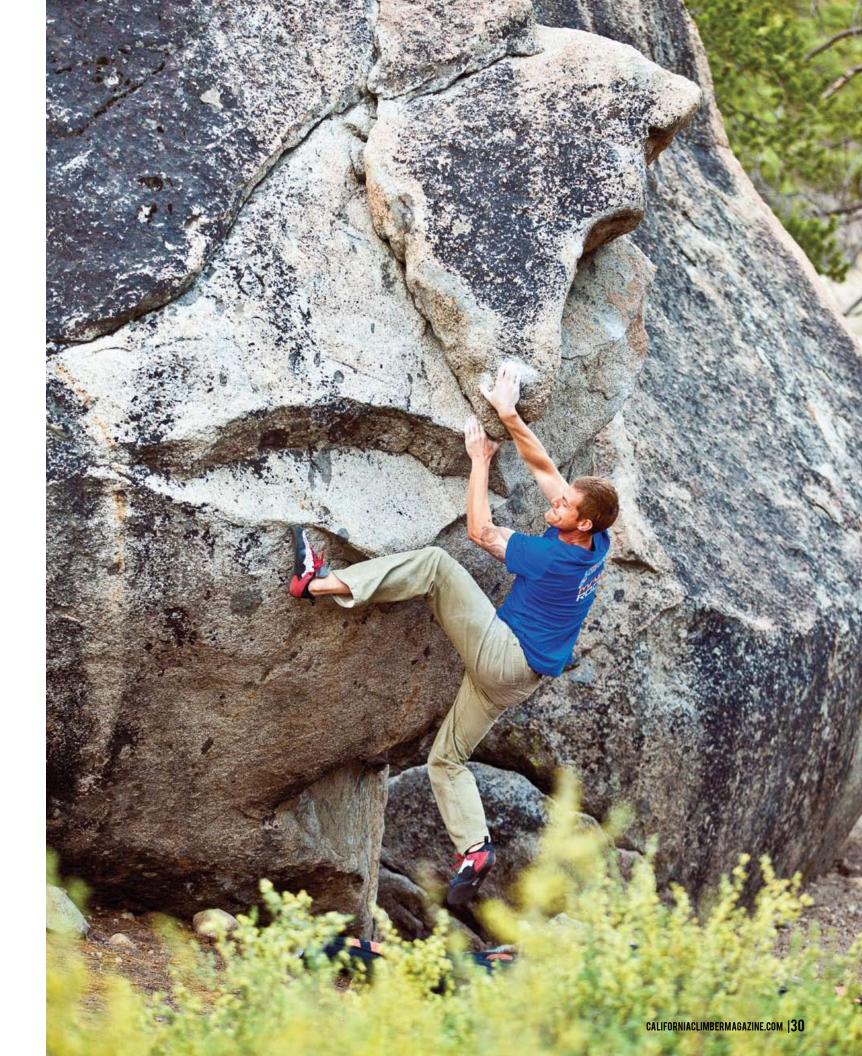
Joel was 18 years old the first time he put on a harness. Three weeks later, he had a job at that climbing gym.

Like many Bay Area-born climbers before him, Joel's first climbing trips outside were to Castle Rock in the Santa Cruz Mountains and to Indian Rock in Berkeley.

"My first days climbing outside were pretty funny," said Ruscher. "Rental shoes, tight blue jeans and a whole lot of shaking."

After only a few trips climbing outside, Joel began to search for rock closer to his home in the South Bay. He scoured the small valleys and foothills for anything and everything climbable.

"I remember feeding off the feeling that there might be a golden wall or perfect boulder just around the corner, just around the next bend, or over the next hill," said Ruscher. "Searching for new climbs and the process of discovery became as rewarding as climbing itself."



<~~~)

N THE LATE 1990'S folks like Mick Ryan, Tim Steel, Vic Copeland, Dustin Sabo, Wills Young, Chris Sharma, Greg Loh, Byron Schumpert, Randy Puro, Tim Medina and Moses Potter were among a small group of climbers paving the way for bouldering in California. These climbers established tons of first ascents at now-popular areas. Joel quickly fell in ranks with this group, and with these climbers he began to travel further from home and stay on trips longer. He started to plan his life around climbing.

"We climbed on the sticky grains in Lake Tahoe, the sharp volcanic bubble pockets near Mt. Shasta, the canyons in Bishop, the tall puzzles in Yosemite and the surreal golden eggs of the southern areas," said Ruscher. "Everywhere I went I met new people and heard of wonderful places that beckoned me to visit."

Over the next few years, Joel traveled to Hueco Tanks, Priest Draw, Squamish, Poudre and Boulder Canyons, Little and Big Cottonwood Canyons, the New River Gorge, Maple Canyon, Box Canyon, the Dungeon, and countless little-known places in between.

On an early trip to Joshua Tree, Joel remembers getting "schooled" by fellow climber Vic Copland. After reaching the top of a 20 foot tall boulder, Joel was struck by fear. Panning for holds at the top of the boulder, he faced a sun-baked Joshua Tree mantel. No amount of chalk seemed to alleviate the pools of water that would appear and re-appear on his hands.

"The problem was well within my ability," said Ruscher, "but I began to doubt my ability to control myself."

After five minutes of teetering back and forth over the blank topout, Joel backed off. On the ground, he sat down and mumbled out loud; "I don't get it, I was really fucking scared up there. I just didn't know what to do." An old spirit in a young body, Vic Copland said to Joel; "Hey man, don't worry about it. We're all scared. The difference between those that get to the top and those that don't is what we choose to do with that fear."

"I still think about that statement when I get high off the ground," said Ruscher. "Hell, I think about that even when I'm not climbing."

++

Joel quickly progressed through the grades and after making an ascent of *Mushroom Roof* (V8) in Hueco Tanks in 1997 he received his first climbing sponsorship from a grass-roots company: three pairs of shoes and a few pieces of soft gear.

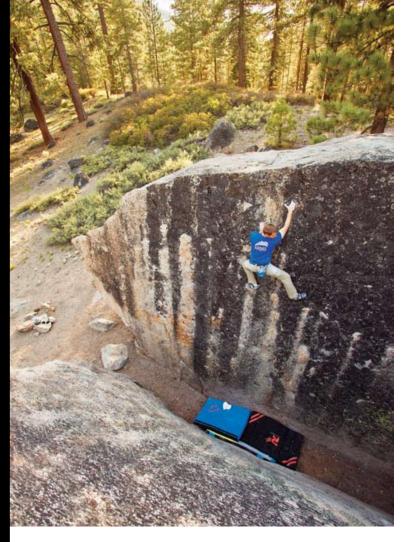
"I had been climbing for just over a year at that point, and getting sponsored didn't go over too well with the people I climbed with," said Ruscher. "Mostly quiet statements under their breath or flitting glares in passing, but some would say it out loud. I didn't fully understand it then, but I think I do now. I shrugged them off mostly, or internalized those comments and let them drive me further into it, like pouring gasoline on

In the following years Joel completed a hefty number of double digit boulder problems and placed well in quite a few climbing competitions. More company sponsorships came quickly and he was awarded photo incentives and small stipends which allowed him to climb full-time. Training indoors for climbing competitions felt unnatural to Joel, but he felt pressure from some of his sponsors to move in this direction.

"I had never set goals for myself with respect to competitions," said Ruscher. "I felt like I was at a crossroads: I could define climbing for myself and develop a lifestyle that would be in tune with my body, my surroundings, mental fortitude, and soul, or I could develop a career that may look good on paper, give someone else bragging rights, and limit something so special to me. I didn't want climbing to only be about results and indoor gyms with chalk-choked walls. I wanted it to be about the experiences, the people, the places, the epic battles and utter failures, the elation, pain, blood, sweat, mosquitoes, bears, birds, snow, sunburned skin, 60lb packs, 60ft whippers, two-hour uphill hikes and smelly shoes. There seemed to be so much more of what I wanted outside of the competition world."







<~~~>

IN 2007, after ten years devoted to climbing, Joel broke his tibia while climbing in the gym. He quit climbing and began the process of recovery, both physically and mentally.

"It's weird to say it, but I was angry," said Ruscher. "I quickly came to the realization that physical activity is how I relieve stress. After that injury, I never quite felt the same. I turned my back on climbing, the climbing community, nearly the whole thing. I just didn't care about climbing anymore. I didn't care who was doing what or where they were doing it. I don't think I looked at a climbing website or magazine but maybe a few times for the next five years."

Joel turned his focus to surfing then, and the cold water and reasonably soft falls were good rehab. But a part of the anger he felt was fostered by the often territorial and elitist mentality of the surfing community.

"I've been surfing since the age of 13 so the 'what the fuck are you doing here yuppie, now go home' persona that tends to come with it was touted by my peers early on," said Ruscher. "The surf community that I'm familiar with is not a super welcoming bunch, and you have to earn your way in. But it's weird, because we all dig the ride. There are few things that can compare to the feeling of surfing. Knowing that you are here to play with an energy that began thousands of miles away, has arrived at this moment, and will be in a form we have learned how to slide across for only a few of its last seconds. It's pretty surreal. But sharing that moment with others is not in most surfers' bag of tricks. To be honest, I can probably count the number of friends I've made in the water on both hands, and I don't have enough fingers and toes to count how many times confrontations happened in the water."

+++

After five years spent bouncing around the world surfing, Joel was missing something. He was ready to return to climbing.

"Coming back to climbing made me feel like I had found an old lost friend," said Ruscher. "I had been struggling against something for

a long time, and it just instantly got easier. Life got better when I was outside climbing. The birds, the air, the sun and the wind; I knew they were all there, but I had to re-discover them. Climbing rounds a whole lot of my sharp corners. Nearly all that anger and confusion vanished when I stepped outside."

Joel had heard rumors that the climbing and sponsorship industry had changed dramatically while he was away, but after only a few trips back outside, he seemed to be burning through all the desiccated old gear he had laying around the house from years before. Hesitantly, Joel contacted Mad Rock, a previous sponsor from 2002. Not really knowing what had changed in the years he had strayed, Joel was invited to join the team on a climbing trip to the Brickyard in Santa Barbara.

"I'll be honest, I was nervous as fuck," said Joel. "Was I going to be an old washed up mess, living on past accomplishments, or could I do what I used to do and still love it? The trip turned out great, even though it was not the best climbing conditions, the team, the old friends and the new friends re-solidified how much I love this. Those guys are awesome, and they didn't turn their back on me when I left. I really appreciated that."

<~~~>

Joel's climbing roots are deeply seated in the Sierra Nevada, and his passion for this region shows through his surgical precision and finely tuned technique on California's granite blocks. In 2012 Joel returned to his beloved granite boulders and began again, the process of discovery in areas like Lake Tahoe and Yosemite.

In the past year Joel has made quick ascents or repeats of Tahoe area classics like *Space Cowboy* (V9 onsight) and *C.E.O.T.K* (V10 onsight) at Lost in Space, *The Physics Project Direct* (V11) at Split Rock, *Ashtray* (V11) at Big Chief, *Integrity low* (V10) at Mtn. Beavers and *Love Handles* (V11) in Meyers. In Yosemite Valley, Joel quickly executed problems like *Across the Tracks* (V10) on Highway 140, *Pine Box* (V10) at Happy Isles and *Ringtail* (V11) at Ahwahnee.

"The Sierra is saturated with climbing and the granite varies in form and complexity for hundreds of miles," said Ruscher. "The grains and quartz crystals found in one region can tear a bouldering pad in half and shred your fingers like sharks teeth. At other areas the granite seems smooth and friendly, or water-polished like glass. The problems in the Sierra tend to be tall, proud, independent lines. If you play the right game with your mind and body, you'll be greatly rewarded. Play the wrong game and you might leave confused and deflated, or even spend some heart fluttering air-time. There is so much stone in the Sierra; sometimes I get overwhelmed if I think about the amount of unexplored and unclimbed areas."

Joel's build and climbing style suite granite bouldering, but it is his experience in the Sierra that has allowed him to excel on the smooth, enigmatic blocks of Yosemite Valley. The angles of the granite in Yosemite are intriguing and the rock is unforgiving. For even the strongest climbers, relatively easy grades in the Valley will sometimes take weeks to unlock.

"Yosemite's blocky and often off-vertical bulges require everyone who visits to learn their language," said Ruscher. "I still find myself greatly underestimating the movement and overestimating my abilities. Bouldering here often feels like I'm solving a weird physical puzzle, even on the climbs I repeat, and I love that feeling."

Ruscher is among a small group of climbers who are developing new boulder problems in Yosemite National Park. These climbers sometimes refer to the Valley as the Seven Mile Miracle, because of the Park's super dense collection of granite boulders that reside along the seven mile road that circles the Valley.

"There is still a ton of remote exploration to be done in Yosemite," said Ruscher, "but the means of accessing new boulders often requires a lot more motivation and horsepower."

<~~~>

With Joel's return to climbing in 2012 came a focus on bouldering and the exploration of new areas and lesser-known regions with quality stone. Exploring new areas and looking for new climbs takes a special kind of person; one who truly has vision and a drive for investigation. Joel has a firmly seated "lets go find out" attitude, and it is this mentality that has allowed him to discover some of California's best boulders.

"I'm in love with visualizing how to climb new problems, and my perspective and ability to realize new lines is changing all the time," said



Ruscher. "Boulders that have been passed by for years begin to reveal new possibilities. Even if I can't get up these problems, I love to visualize how it might be done."

By ditching guidebooks and grades, not recording ascents, and eschewing crowded climbing areas, Joel is getting back to something that feeds a wonderful, childish part of him.

"The day I ditched a guidebook: fuck that was liberating," said Ruscher. "Dropping the guidebook changed my perspective completely. Problems became more aesthetic and seemed to blend in with the surroundings. It was like when you watch a bird land on a branch, look around, fly to another branch and then fly away. The bird is in its environment, doing whatever it does naturally. Climbing became that way for me. I'd just walk up to a wall or a boulder, look at it for a bit, and climb away. It felt like I was playing in a giant playground. I don't know that it was even a conscious choice; I was just doing it because there was an urge that seemed to take over every part of me."

<~~~>

Joel rejects the elitist attitude he experienced in the surfing community, and his outlook on climbing and discovery is welcoming, but it is clear that Joel has great respect for the wild places and boulders he visits. This deep respect has cultivated a sense of responsibility for both climbing as a resource and the natural world as a delicate and endangered environment.

"I like to share new areas and problems with folks that I think will share the vision and can tap into the possibilities within themselves," said Ruscher. "Sometimes I'll clean a new problem, try the piss out of it, and after some time, realize that I'm not going to get this thing done. Maybe my skill is not quite there, or I am not strong enough to finish it. These are the problems that are saved for the few that know the process; the people who share the magic in creating something new. There are those that are ready to partake in this process, or are well grounded in these methods, and those who are very far away from understanding it. It's almost like sitting at dinner with your family; not everyone is

LEFT Ruscher takes a quick lap on an unnamed V4 highball, Split Rock, Lake Tahoe.

ABOVE Ruscher making the first ascent of *On The Road* (V8), Yosemite Valley.

invited, and what happens at the table is dedicated only to those that have been invited."

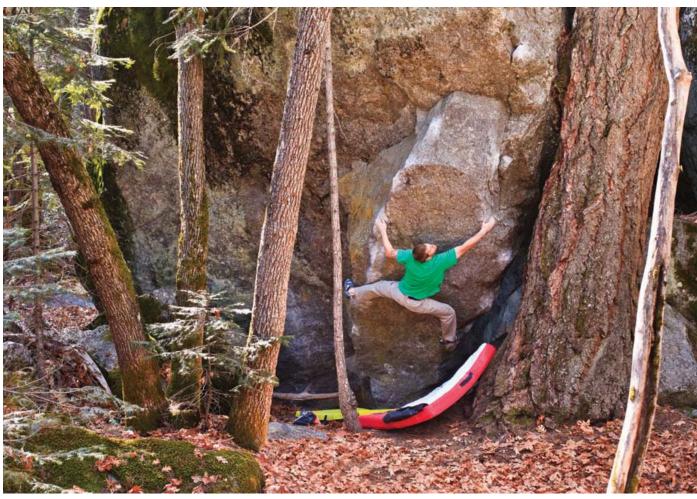
"Today you see groups of boulderers traveling in large, seemingly unaware, or unruly hordes, toting un-trained dogs and boom boxes," said Ruscher. "They plop excrement and TP way too close to the boulders, leaving trash, trampling all over plants and trees and leaving huge tick marks. These are all things that our environment cannot handle. Sometimes it makes me feel empty, like I'm watching an animal suffer. I hope that people thin out a bit and travel in smaller packs. It's so important to be aware of our surroundings and our impact, especially at places that are very delicate like the Tablelands, Buttermilks, Joshua Tree and Yosemite."

"There are still those that travel light and quiet, and really take care of our climbing areas," added Joel. "They too think of this place as theirs, and treat it so. Since I have plugged back in to the climbing community, it seems like something has changed though. Like there are less of us than there used to be. I'm not sure how to change that, but initiating a conversation about it is the start. Kids are a good place to start as well. You have a great chance to sway future behavior towards the environment by teaching kids this respect early on in their lives."

<~~~>

During his five year hiatus from climbing Joel felt like something was missing, but with the number of California's dedicated explorers and route developers dwindling or moving on each season, it's fair to say

35| SUMMER2015



ABOVE Ruscher on the aptly named *Pine Box* (V10), Yosemite Valley.

RIGHT Taking a lap on *Crossroads Moe Right* (V7), Yosemite Valley.

that our climbing community was missing something greater. It's been almost two decades since Joel tried on his first pair of ninja shoes; now there isn't a day that goes by where he doesn't think about climbing.

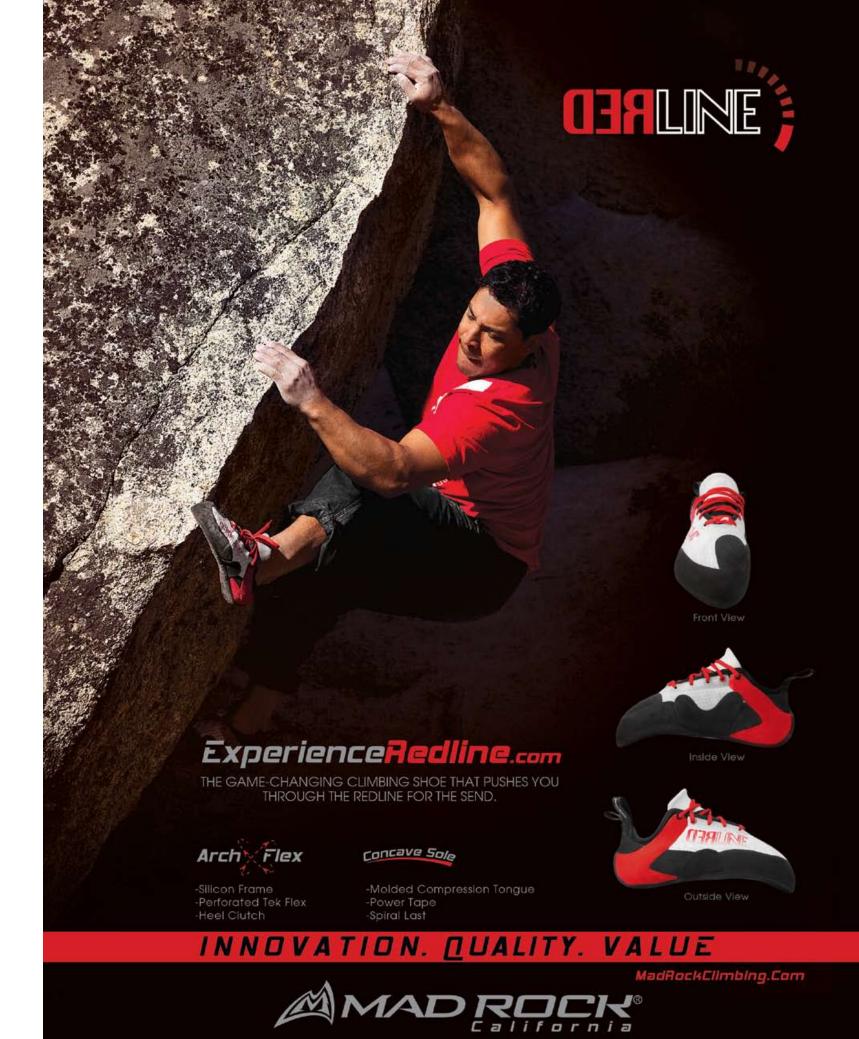
"I bring a pair of shoes and a small chalk bag nearly everywhere I travel," said Ruscher. "You just never know when a cool boulder will pop up, or maybe even a building or something. If I travel to Hong Kong for work, Australia for vacation, or Santa Barbara for a wedding, shoes and chalk are always tucked away in my bags."

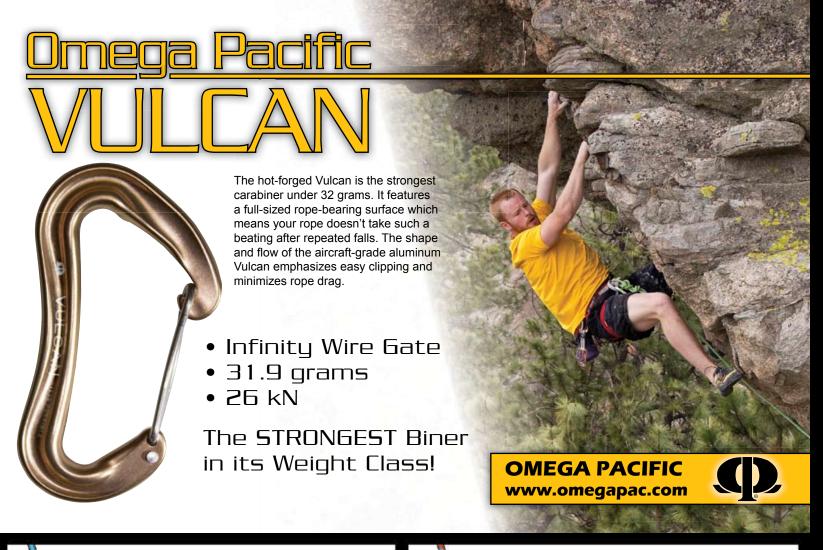
<~~~>

Back in 2013, when Joel and I scoured the northern coastline for new boulders, we discovered a handful of possible first ascents at Huda Point. Joel's week-long trip to Arcata turned into two weeks, three, then six weeks when he decided to extend his vacation and travel north to Squamish. Over the following years we'd meet up in Tahoe, Columbia, Yosemite, or down in the Bay Area for a quick trip to the boulders.

No matter where it takes place, bouldering with Joel always includes a few essential aspects. He rarely brings a guidebook. Instead, he brings a quiver of brushes, buckets, ropes, harnesses, and extra chalk for cleaning boulders. He stops at every pullout to inspect the roadside potential, often running from the car, oblivious that the doors are still wide open. He runs up and down the hillsides, over talus and through the brush, to gain different angles and aspects of potential bouldering projects. This process typically ends in disappointment when he discovers choss, easy slabs, carpets of moss, or absolutely blank sheets of rock, but every once in a while, Joel finds pure gold in the California hills







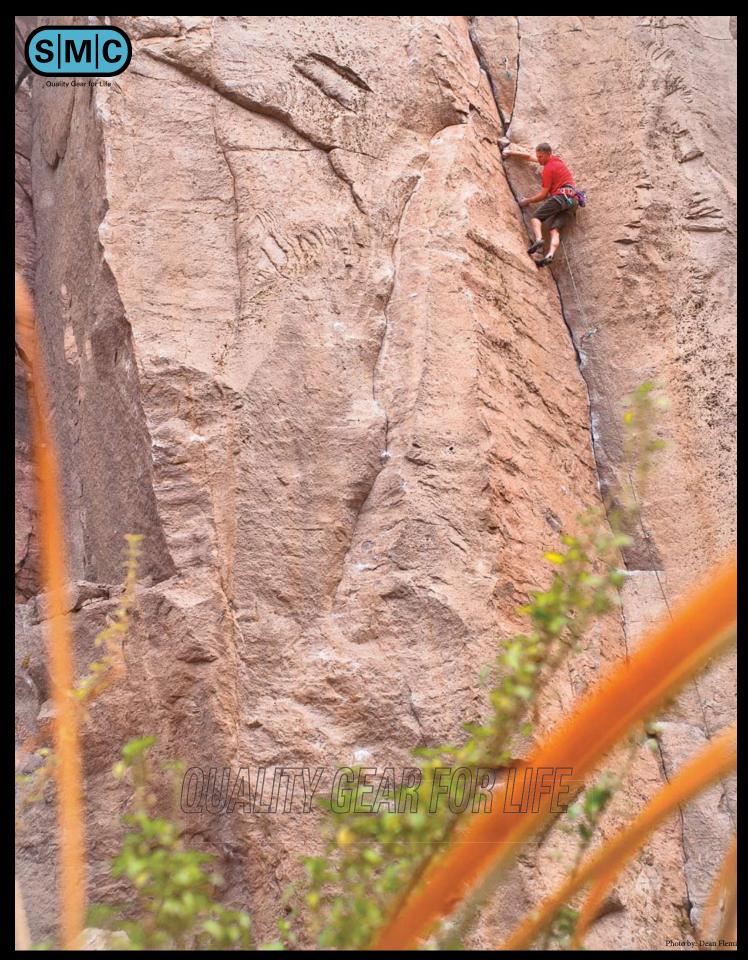




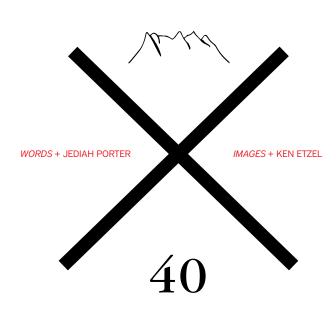
belā des

Order at www.belaggles.com



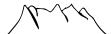


THUNDERBOLT to SILL TRAVERSE





Brian Russell traversing on North Palisade.



The rattle of old tin should be startling. After miles of only granite and snow underfoot, this incongruous sound should have been a surprise. It would indeed be surprising if it did not immediately activate a foggy memory in my exhaustion addled brain. I don't remember now if it was lan or myself that dislodged the ancient register from the stacked granite blocks in an otherwise non-descript section of the Thunderbolt to Sill traverse. I do remember that, despite the fact that I had been searching for years for exactly this, we didn't take the time to check it out then and there. We had covered miles of wintry ridge already, stretched thin on patience, exposure, and energy, and had miles more to go. I made the mental note, and we moved on. I'd be back. I always go back to the Palisades.

<~~~>

The Palisades Group, outside quirky Big Pine, CA, is a craggy piece of alpine paradise smack in the middle of the High Sierra. Geology and geography alone attract attention and action. Layers of history and ever-changing climbing patterns and practice keep trips up there fresh, yet grounded in the context of those who traversed before us. And traversing is what is best in the Palisades. Nowhere else I've been, and I have chased down ridges all over, is better suited to big, techy distance in inspiring peaks. Since the beginning of Palisades climbing history, ridge-top travel has dominated the style. In 1903 a small group led by Joseph LeConte approached North Palisade from the south. Rightfully forecasting the joy and aesthetic of ridge-top travel, they chose to come in along the very divide. However, they came up short from that direction. They lacked requisite technical preparation and ended up temporarily stymied by the super steep descent and subsequent re-ascent required to negotiate what we now call the U-Notch.

From LeConte, through the guides of the mid 1900's, and on into the current generation of ridge-running fiends, the traverses have grown in length, creativeness, and notoriety. By far the most popular is the Thunderbolt to Sill section. Peter Croft cemented its status with his now-out-of-print bible "The Good, The Great, and The Awesome," and hundreds have connected these peaks. Even this subset of the snaking ridge line has variations and options.













Meredith Jabis and Brian Russell settle into a scenic bivy on the traverse from Thunderbolt to Sill.

<~~~>

t was during the first winter ascent of the Complete Palisade Traverse in February of 2013 that my buddy and I first unearthed the little register. Stumbling across this little tin, not on any notable summit at all, is just part of the story. It was in the fall of 2008 that I learned of it. At a gathering then, of Sierra guides past

and present, I spoke with legendary, and by then retired, guide John Fischer. John Fischer owned and ran the Palisades School of Mountaineering through the 1970s and 80s. I spend a ton of time in the Palisades. John had a little secret to share from his time there, and I was privy. He described the location of a tin containing a brief register of past visitors. I nodded over my wine, tracking and visualizing his description.

I sat on the new exciting knowledge through the winter, and revisited the idea on my first trip back up there in the spring of 2009. One is never on a truly relaxed itinerary in the Palisades. We regularly bite off more than we should chew, and seldom have time for poking around after sub-missions. But I did just that. Something about the artifact Fischer described captured my attention. I searched my first time through, confident I would find it, but I didn't. I had been so sure, listening to his description. I looked and looked. Second visit, third, fourth, still no register. A season passed. Clients loved the mission. We'd belay one another, scrambling over towers and rocks, peering into every crevice in the vicinity, unsuccessfully. Finally, I resolved to ask John for more info. I so badly wanted to be a part of whatever secret club signed in to that box.

Right around the time I distilled the idea of checking back in with John, he passed away in a motorcycle crash. The tragedy of a pioneering and bold climber and guide dying on a highway is lost on none of us. Those damn things, mountains and motorcycles alike, take far too many. But commuting isn't the way it is supposed to happen. All of us have lost friends and loved ones and acquaintances. For me, for some reason, the loss of acquaintances hits the hardest. Those with whom I have yet to share true connection are the hardest to let go of. Good friends, sure, their passing hurts, but it is the loss of could-be friends that really digs. On top of this sadness at the loss of a friend that could have been was my disappointment in being unable to tap into this particular source of intimate history of the Palisades. We are not the first to travel those ridges. Athletic challenge drives us on, but depth of history enriches the experience.

<~~~>

ur mountain communities are small and intimate. When you get into things like traversing ridges and going on expeditions, the twists and turns and interconnections unfold in unexpected ways. I stumbled over that little summit can in the late winter of 2013. Later that spring I went to Mount Fairweather in Alaska. Fairweather is more obscure than even the weirdest Sierra ridge, to put it mildly. We never imagined we would encounter another soul. The close encounter with the summit register high



on Thunderbolt to Sill was miles from my mind. The day we flew onto the glacier at Fairweather another group did the same. Turns out, they all had California connections. Of the four, I had climbed once with one, met another briefly, and the third is an Alaska climbing legend with Sierra roots and Bishop residency. The fourth is now a friend too. The Fairweather expedition unfolded well, with the small-world, insta-glacier-community a pleasant enhancement.

Straight from Fairweather I went back to the Palisades. Palisades prep and route visualization reminded me of the register. What I thought I had lost with John Fischer was now perhaps found. Our tired stumble back in February gave me enough beta to finally track down the little box. Who would have thought? I primed my guest with the whole story, or what I thought was the whole story. He was into it. We would finally close this silly little chapter in my Palisade pursuits. Sure enough, we dug around, in the right place now, and found the missing box.

In the box was just a single sheet of paper with a couple entries. On one side was an otherwise unmemorable name dated 1967, if I remember correctly. On the other was an entry from 1976. That '76 entry was signed by Bill Pilling, the Fairweather, Alaska legend. I've followed up with Bill. On that climb he was just a teenager, out with a friend to "...work up to doing big north faces in the Canadian Rockies." Bill has gone on to apply Palisades' lessons all over our northern latitudes.

Notably, there was no note from John Fischer. Why would he direct me to a box he had not signed himself? The late 60s and through the entire 70s he was very active up there. It was in 1979 -incidentally, the year I was born- that he simultaneously set climbing and guiding standards by doing the first ascent of the Complete Palisade traverse, on the clock. That complete traverse waited almost thirty years for a second, and 34 years for a winter, completion. When will it get guided again? Most likely, the more I think about it, that was not the register he had described to me that social evening in 2008. There are artifacts and memories all over our beautiful mountains. We each have our journey's there, and when we are open to them, we can interact with the endeavors of others, even over multiple generations.





TOP Brian Russell gets a grand view of the Palisade Glacier.

THUMBNAILS Jediah Porter discovers a tiny summit register from the 1960s



Eas side Sports

The Eastern Sierra's Complete Mountain Sports Store

WE HAVE ALL THE GEAR
YOU NEED FOR:
Climbing
Bouldering
Mountaineering
Day hiking
Backpacking
Trail running
And just hanging out
in the Eastern Sierra

INCLUDING:
Mountain Footwear
Books and Maps
Apparel
Tents & Sleeping Bags
Accessories

WE RENT:
Climbing shoes
Bouldering pads
Tents
Sleeping bags
Backpacks



224 North Main St. Bishop, CA 93514, tel 760-873-7520 eastsidesports.com, info@eastsidesports.com locally owned since 1977

OPEN 7 DAYS A WEEK 9 - 6, Fri & Sat until 9pm, May - Sept: all days 9 to 9









JUDGEMENT DAY

WWW.CLIFFHANGERGUIDES.COM

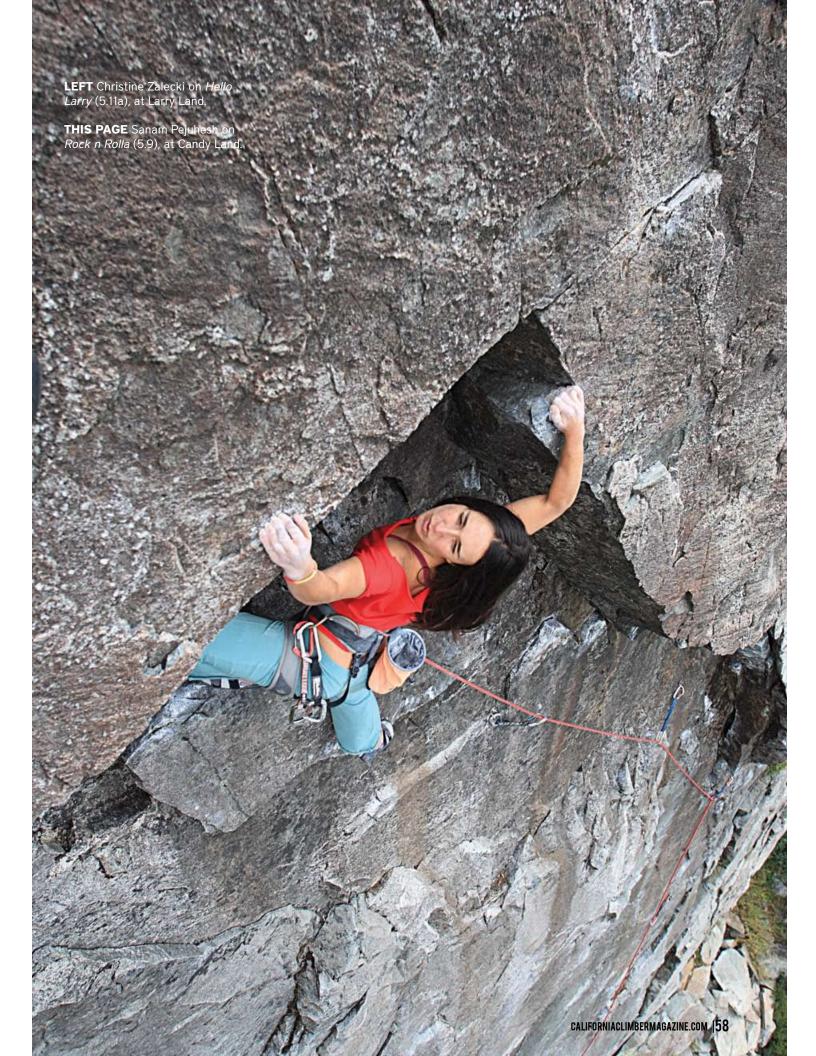


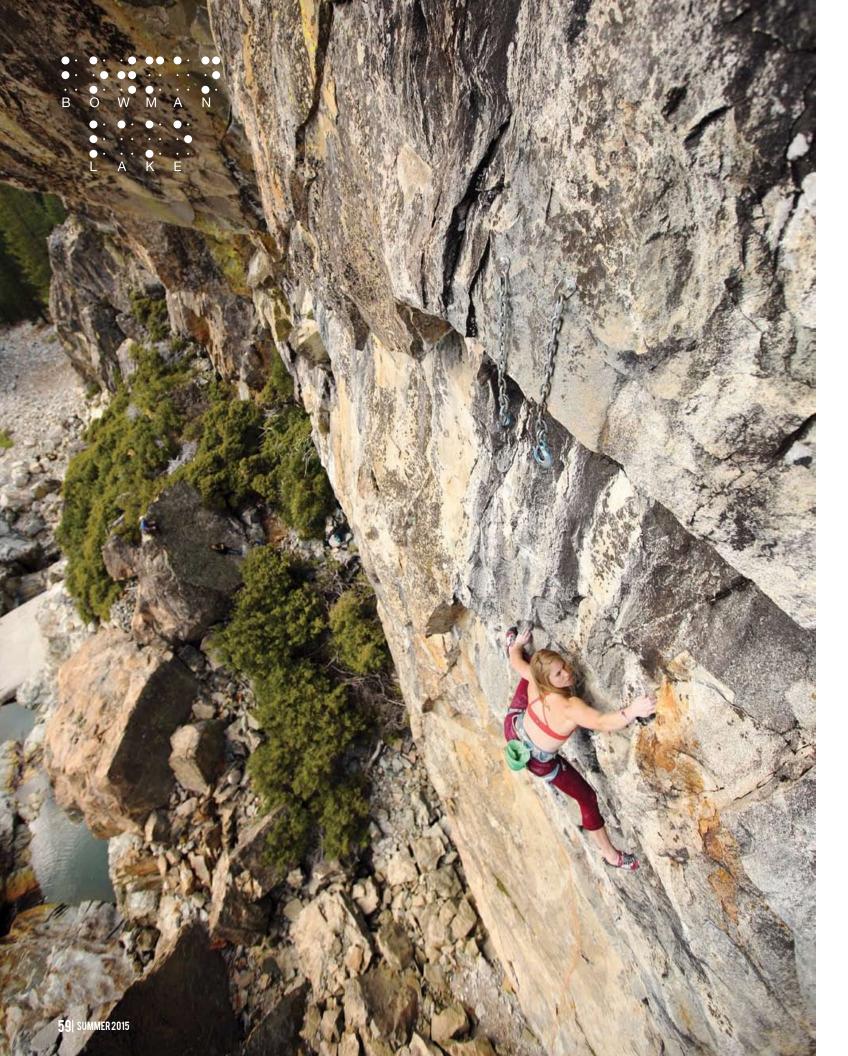


"WHAT'S IT CALLED? Not sure. The B Word, I think. Where is it? Out near someplace called Bowman Lake. Ahh, I know exactly where they're climbing. It's cool and steep but it's just one wall. No one's going to drive out there, even if the climbing is good." And so went my prediction for the future of climbing in the Bowman Valley.

That was circa 1990. Today the Bowman Valley hosts a broad range of sport climbs on compact, highly featured granite that cascades down a series of domes and ridges just west of Bowman Lake on the west slope of the Sierra Nevada Mountains between Sacramento and Truckee.

BOWMAN HAS MORE MID-RANGE SPORT ROUTES THAN DONNER OR ANY OF THE SOUTH SHORE CRAGS IN AND AROUND LAKE TAHOE







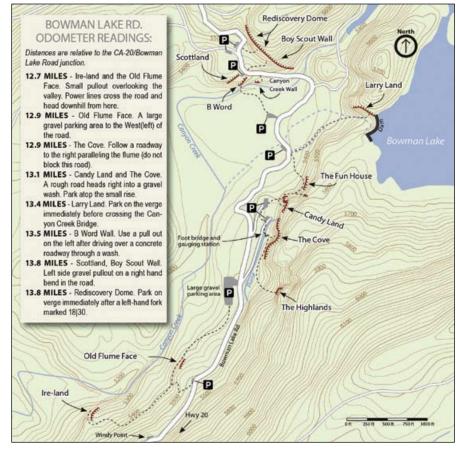
BOWMAN has an open high-country feel with over 150 lakes, tons of hiking and mountain biking trails and free primitive camping. The elevation of the valley is about 5,000 feet so the climbing season runs from spring to fall with high temperatures in mid-summer.

Although a handful of routes existed before 1990, Bowman wasn't on the map as a climbing area until a group of pioneering climbers from Reno lead by Doug Mishler, Steve Glotflety and Jim Neff started to bolt the steep lines on the B Word wall. The name came from their desire to keep their find on the "down low" as they developed the crag. Today the B Word wall features the highest concentration of hard steep sport routes in the valley.

Shortly after the development of B Word a climber named Scott Frye, fresh from sending just about everything at Donner Summit, heard rumors of a new steep crag at Bowman. On his first trip out in early spring he encountered snow on the road in and ended up hiking ten miles from his car to Bowman and back. He liked what he saw and developed Scottland during his first summer out. This compact wall lies in the gully behind B Word and although the routes are short at 40-50 feet, the rock is superb and hosts several .11s and .12s and two 5.13s.

LEFT Carolyn Wegner on *Larry Land* (5.11c).

ABOVE The approach to Larry Land. *IMAGE* + CAROLYN WEGNER







SPURRED on by the quality of climbing at Scottland, Scott revisited Bowman the following summer for more adventure. He developed "Ire"land, which lies below Windy Point. At first he figured the formation would be a fun "beginner's area" but again he ended up with several 11s and 12s flowing over thin technical terrain.

In 2006 I was just getting back into climbing after a 9-year hiatus. A strong Nevada City climber named Josh Horniak, suggested that we explore Emeralds, another local climbing area near Bowman, with the objective of resurrecting the Gorge, which had been damaged by flooding in the mid 90s. As we hiked though the Gorge we excitedly began to envision new route opportunities. However, that same day we also drove out to Bowman.

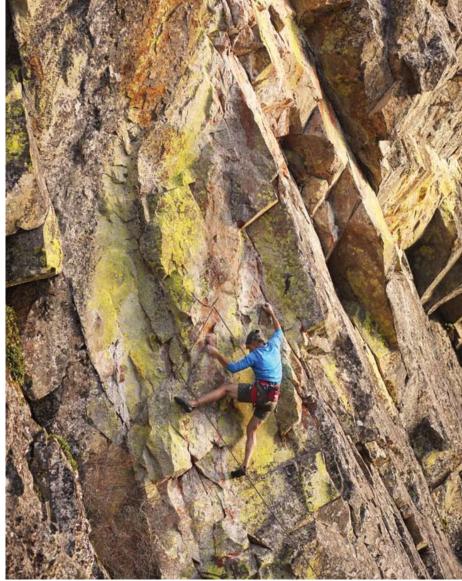
We visited B Word and Scottland - both of which offered great climbing and a peaceful ambiance. The only problem we figured, was that there just weren't enough routes to make regular trips out there. Just before dark we hiked up to a gently bulging wall capped by a huge series of roofs. The wall jetted out from the side of the Bowman Dam giving the crag a surreal feel. We squinted though the dimming light trying to decide if it was worth climbing. It's hard to say if it'll be any good but something about it looks compelling, we thought. "Let's come back and hang a rope and try it out." Josh said.

The following weekend we put up the first route on the wall, Larry Land. At 11c the climbing was not overly difficult but the rock quality was superb with good square cuts and unique angles that rewarded aggressive movement with reaches and high steps. It was super fun. The Larry Land crag now boasts over 25 bolted lines and offers some of the best moderate sport climbing in the Tahoe area.

More recently, Brad Johnson, John Robinson, Kelley Gilleran, Matt Franklin and Derrick Lindsay have added a plethora of new sport climbs up the golden granite knobs and edges on Rediscovery Dome, Boy Scout Wall, The Fun House and The Cove. These crags are just minutes from the car and offer many well-bolted lines in the 5.7 - 5.11 range.

BESIDE the natural beauty of the area, what makes Bowman unique is the high concentration of moderate sport climbs. Yes, there are a bunch of 5.12s and some 5.13s. But the majority of the routes are super high quality, very well protected routes in the 5.8 to 5.11 range. With the possible exception of Big Chief near Tahoe, Bowman has more mid-range sport routes than Donner or any of the south shore crags in and around Lake Tahoe.

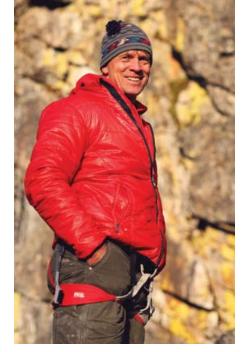
Factor in the high country ambience, the great swimming and free camping and well ... Now you know why my prediction in 1990 was so wrong. So grab some friends, pack up the car and we'll see you out at Bowman for some of the friendliest sport climbing in the Tahoe region.



LEFT Megan Gallagher on Juno Your Caseworker (5.11d), at the B-Word Crag.

ABOVE Mike Carville on Limelight (5.11c), at The Cove.

RIGHT The author, Mike Carville.



AUTHOR BIO: Mike Carville has climbed and skied in the high Sierra for the past 25 years. He lives in the Sierra Foothills with his wife and two kids.

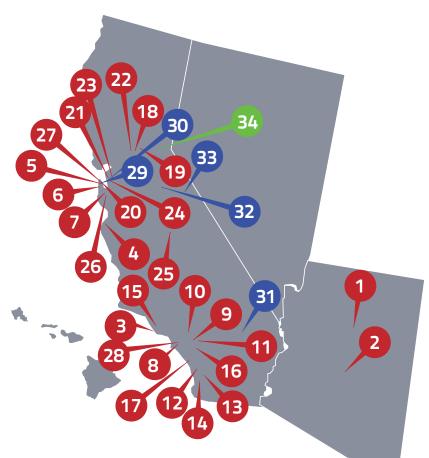


AAC BENEFITS IN YOUR BACKYARD



Members of the AAC enjoy some pretty rad benefits, including discounts on gyms, guide services, gear shops, and more.

americanalpineclub.org/join



Gym Discounts

Discounts vary. Call, check americanalpineclub.org/ discounts, or head to your local gym with your AAC member card for the latest details.

- \rightarrow 1. Flagstaff Climbing Center Flagstaff, AZ (928) 556-9909
- → 2. Phoenix Rock Gym Tempe, AZ (480) 921-8322
- → 3 Boulderdash Indoor Rock Climbing Thousand Oaks, CA (805) 557-1300
- → 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 (650) 591-3030
- → 7. Planet Granite

Sunnyvale Sunnyvale, CA (408) 991-9090

→ 8. Hanger 18 South Bay L.A. Hawthorne, CA (310) 973-3388

 \rightarrow 9. Hanger 18 Riverside Riverside, CA (951) 359-5040

 \rightarrow 10. Hanger 18 Upland Upland, CA (909) 931-5991

→ 11. Threshold Climbing Gym Riverside, CA (951) 742-8479

 \rightarrow 12. Solid Rock San

Marcos San Marcos,

CA (760) 480-1429 → 13. Solid Rock Old Town San Diego, CA (619) 299-1124

→ 14. Solid Rock Poway Poway, CA (858) 748-9011

→ 15. Vertical Heaven Indoor Rock Climbing Gym Ventura, CA (805) 339-9022

→ 16. Vital Climbing: Murrieta Murrieta, CA (951) 251-4814

→ 17. Vital Climbing:

Carlsbad Carlsbad, CA [760] 689-2651

→ 18. Granite Arch Climbing Center Rancho Cordova, CA (916) 852-7625

→ 19. Rocknasium Davis. CA (530) 757-2902

 \rightarrow 20. Touchstone Climbing Mission Cliffs

San Francisco, CA (415) 550-0515

→ 21. Touchstone Climbing Berkeley Ironworks Berkeley, CA

(510) 981-9900 \rightarrow 22. Touchstone Climbing Sacramento **Pipeworks**

Sacramento, CA (916) 341-0100 \rightarrow 23. Touchstone Climbing Diablo Rock Gym Concord, CA (925) 602-1000

 \rightarrow 24. Touchstone Climbing Great Western Power Co. Oakland, CA (510) 452-2022

 \rightarrow 25. Touchstone Climbing Metal Mark Climbing + Fitness Fresno, CA (559) 229-7900

→ 26. Toutchstone Studio Climbing San Jose, CA (408) 998-4000

→ 27. Touchstone **Dogpatch Boulders** San Francisco, CA (415) 800-8121

→ 28. Touchstone LA **Boulders** Los Angeles, CA (323) 406-9119

Major Events

→ 29. Uli Steck: The Swiss Machine Yoshi's, San Francisco, CA-Dec. 16, 2014

→ 30. Uli Steck: The Swiss Machine Mountain Hardwear HQ, Richmond, CA—Dec. 17, 2014 Richmond, CA

→ 31. Joshua Tree Spring Cling—March 2015

→ 32. International Climbers' Meet Yosemite National Park—Oct. 2015

→ 33. Craggin' Classic Fall Highball, Bishop, CA-Nov. 7-9, 2015

Guide Services

→ 34. Alpine Skills International with its AMGA/ IFMGA trained/certified guides offers all-terrain backcountry ski mountaineering, avalanche education and climbing program Truckee, CA. alpineskills.com. (530) 582-9170 (June-November) and (530) 582-9170 (December-May).

