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WINTER 2021/2022

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## CALIFORNIA CLIMBER

NO. 33  
WINTER 2021/22

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### DEPARTMENTS

06/EDITOR'S NOTE  
08/STAND BY YOUR VAN  
14/ROUTE OF THE SEASON  
16/REVIEW  
64/LAST GO

### FEATURES

20/BEHIND THE LENS: ERIC BISSELL  
22/CALIFORNIA CLIMBER: GENA WOOD  
32/DESTINATION: KINGS CANYON  
54/DISPATCH: MOUNT DIABLO'S OMEEZEE TRAVERSE

### ON THE COVER

Katie Lambert, *Eleventh Hour*  
(V11), Bishop.

IMAGE + ERIC BISSELL

### THIS PAGE

Casey Zak, *Fern Down For What*  
(V6), Kings Canyon.

IMAGE + SPENSER TANG-SMITH

TRANGO

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Sean Burke on P2 of *West Face Route* (5.10a), Pine Canyon, Mt. Diablo.



JIM THORNBURG



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TC PRO  
FALL 2021



“ I'm really excited about the re-design of the TC Pro. I was a little nervous at first 'cause it just seems so sweet, I didn't want to mess with it, but as we've learned from La Sportiva, they tend to have a really good vision. One of the updates was to make the shoe more durable, while making sure the shoe could still crack climb and edge really well. ”  
I got my first pair in 2008 and I can't go back!"  
- Tommy Caldwell

Tommy Caldwell

  
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EDITOR’S NOTE

SUNSETS & RAINBOWS & MIDNIGHT LIGHTNINGS

I tugged on the sun-bleached straps of my old crash pad, trying to cinch the awkward mass tighter around my shoulders before plunging down a steep, muddy, overgrown pathway– a little shortcut that leads into the Back Area of the Arboretum at Columbia Junior College. The pad bounced me side-to-side, scraping and jostling into the mossy rocks and limbs of small oak trees as I wove my way deeper into the rocky labyrinth. The oddly shaped spires of marble loomed overhead, appearing as if they were growing from the forest floor, as alive as the thick moss that thrives in the dark, cold pit. I rounded a sharp corner and saw Ryan Moon, a friend I’d met a few seasons prior, dangling from a rope about 15 feet above the ground, wearing safety glasses, a gigantic steel-wired chimney brush in his hands. “What’s up dude?” he said casually, without turning away from the massive scoop-shaped feature he’d been scrubbing. He then spun 90 degrees in his harness and pointed towards an enormous pile of junk strewn out on a flat rock below. “I found an old Four Loco in the trunk of my car,” he said. “You know, in case you feel like some warm, watermelon-flavored energy-liquor...”

Ryan was always doing that kind of shit; driving early in the morning or late at night from the East Bay to Columbia, tromping through the mud and poison oak to spend entire days hanging from ropes, scrubbing dirt and moss into his eyes, and then driving home; sometimes without even lacing up his climbing shoes. But it seemed as though the days of stumbling around road-side campgrounds in places like Yosemite Valley to pluck first ascents of clean boulders with flat landings was over, and it seemed like Ryan’s approach to climbing new problems, while unappealing to most, was the best way to get it done.

“The Columbia Boulders incidentally illustrates Ryan’s impressive fortitude when it comes to dealing with miseries such as poison oak,” says Spenser Tang-Smith in this edition’s Destination: Kings Canyon. “He even managed to find one of the only zones in Yosemite Valley that has poison oak, and he’s been gleefully developing it over the past few seasons...”

Perhaps no one more than Ryan Moon deserves to stumble into “The Next Yosemite Valley,” a place where clean roadside granite boulders litter a U-shaped canyon below towering walls, a place with convenient campgrounds and pristine rivers. While it’s true that Kings Canyon has basically all of these things, it’s not all rainbows and sunsets and Midnight Lightnings.

“When it’s warm, which is most of the time, the place swarms with little gnats that cluster around you and manage to get into your various face holes at the worst moments,” says Tang-Smith. “While we’ve had the privilege of dozens of memorable first ascents, most of them required hours of manual labor, often in 90 degree heat.”

Kings Canyon probably isn’t “The Next Yosemite Valley,” its lack of close proximity to basically everywhere means that Kings might never become a booming destination. Never-the-less, the bouldering in Kings looks so cool that we’ve allotted 22 pages in this issue to showcase it. For more about bouldering in Kings Canyon check out Destination: Kings Canyon on Page TK.

–DEAN FLEMING



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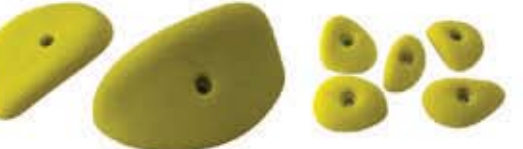
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“NEAL”

Becka Ruiz and her 1978 Chevy G-20 Van

Where’d you come up with the name Neal?

I don’t normally name my vehicles, but this thing’s paint job is just crazy, so I named it Neal because the guy who painted it actually signed his name – on the back it says, “Lodi, 1978, Neal...”

Where’d you find this magnificent beast?

I found it on craigslist for \$2k from some lady who said that she had bought it from her uncle and that he had bought it new in 1978, so if she’s not lying I’m the third owner of this van. And it had a lot of sun bleaching on one side, so it was definitely parked somewhere for a long time. It had low miles and the small block 350 motor which is a reliable engine.

How long have you been living in Neal, and how much did it take to get him livable?

I was working at Camp Mather when I bought the van so I didn’t live in it that first summer, but I was able to spend a few weeks cleaning all the original upholstery and the rest of the interior. I lived in it for a while the second year I had it, but it was really leaky; the carpet would get wet and all the upholstery would be soaked, I had to hide on the bed and then take my socks off to move around the van. So I didn’t live in it for about a year. After that I tore out the whole interior because by then rats had moved into it. I ripped out everything, put in a wood floor, foam board insulation

on the walls and built the bed, and I finally fixed some of the mechanical things that were broken and then I was able to live in it again full time.

But it’s taken so many different arrangements to get it the way that it is now. First I had a bed that would sit sideways, but then I couldn’t use the back door, and I just wanted to utilize all the things that it has – I didn’t want to block all the big windows or any of the doors. And I’m still having a problem with the shelving. It’s hard not to block the windows with the shelving, but you also have to build shelves for things that you’re actually going to use. You can’t have tiny little shelves that you can’t fit a pot into, or a deep shelf that you can’t get into the bottom of.

Can you tell us about the roof?

I spent two different winters in the van not being able to stand up, and it was okay, but it gets to you. The only reason to have a camper van is to have a place that is comfortable to spend those rainy days, because the point of having the van is to be outside as much as possible. So it’s hard to have a folding bed or anything else when you can’t stand up because you’re hunched over and uncomfortable the whole time you’re doing it. It’s nice to have a comfortable big bed, but also to have all the space to stand up and move around. So I cut a 4 foot by 8 foot hole in the roof so that it would be smaller than the actual box that I built for the high top, which is 12 feet by 5 feet – so that sits over the whole roof opening so that when it rains it drains off the high top and down the metal roof. I used 2x4 and composite board for the roof.

For the waterproofing I used Henry’s latex paint, which is a roofing paint, which is really cool for sealing stuff. First I put silicone in all the cracks and used expanding foam spray for all the larger cracks, and then painted over it with the roofing paint. I put side-to-side braces because that vibration from wind is really strong.

It’s nice that the roof is so strong, because the long-term dream is to use the van as the center of a house or the bedroom of a house when I get a piece of property. I even thought about taking the engine and drive-train out to make it lighter and then lifting the van up into a tree to make a tree house.







What else do you like about Neal?

The captain's chairs that swivel are fucking awesome; it makes a whole new extension of the space. And I have a movable center console, so if I'm parked somewhere for a long time I just move that outside or put that somewhere else, and then I turn those two seats and I have a whole recliner system going on.

Can you tell us about your solar system?

I have a solar panel glued to the roof and a Goal Zero thing, which has the battery and the inverter and the charge controller all built in. I got the Goal Zero because I didn't really want to figure out how electricity works. It's a little more expensive, but it's all there and it's easy. You can plug USB ports into it; you can charge your car battery from it. I have used it to charge my motorcycle battery with it when it died with a battery tender. So if my van battery dies I just have to wait for 4 hours for the battery tender to charge it and then I can jump the van with it. Or if I'm parked somewhere for a long time I can just hook up the battery tender so that the van battery stays charged.

What's this scooter you have on board?

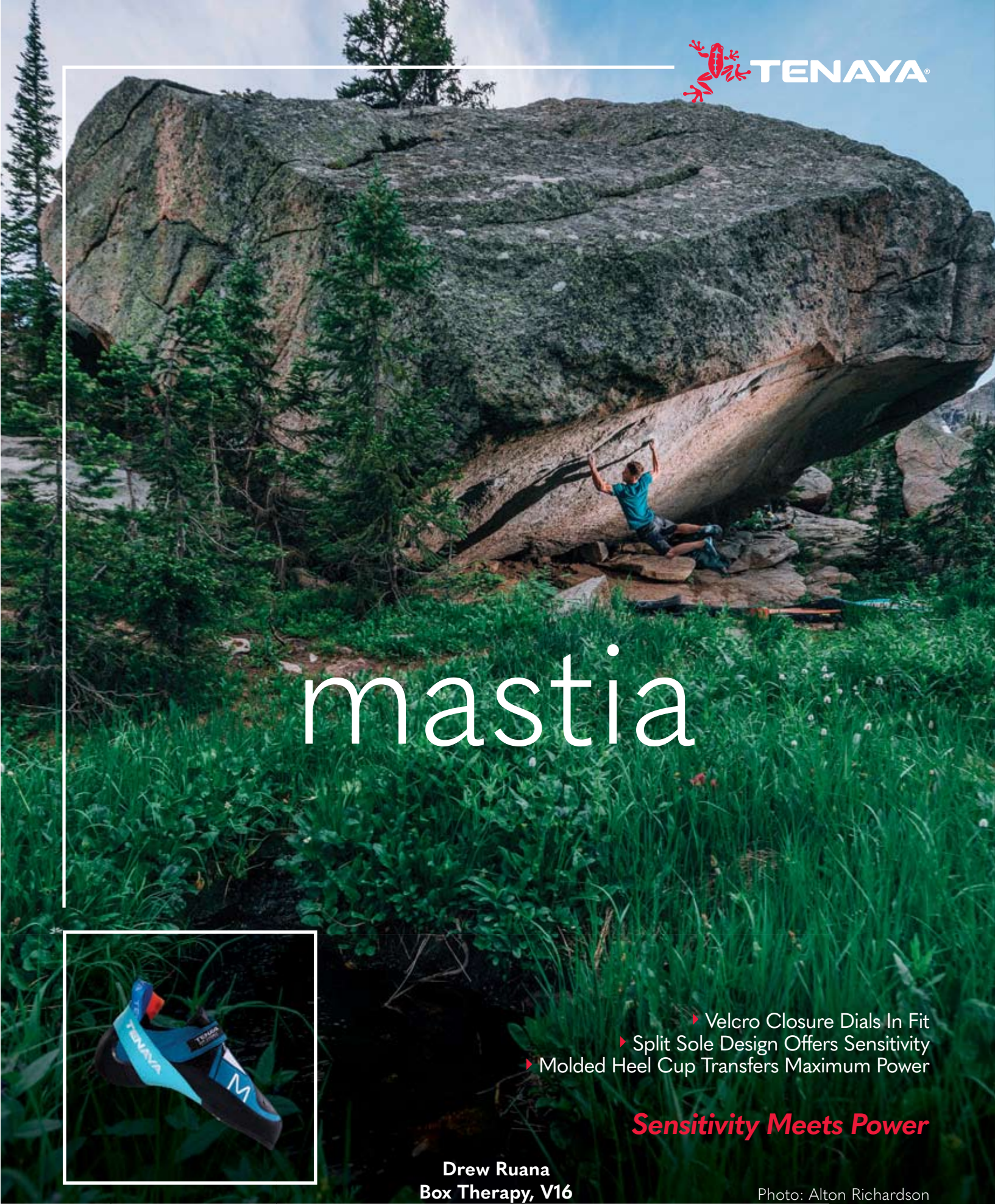
So yeah, I have a scooter in the van, and it's like my emergency vehicle; if the van breaks down I can just pop out the scooter and go get gas or whatever. But figuring out how to have a living space while traveling and carrying the scooter with me has been the real challenge of it. So I can fold the bed up into the sofa and then park the scooter next to it, and then I still have tons of open space to cook and do all sorts of things, and I can still sleep in the bed as a sofa, it's just not super comfortable because it's a lot smaller. So if I'm traveling I can just keep the scooter in there, I don't have to move it in and out all the time and sleep next to it. Or I can park it between the kitchen and the front seats and then fold the bed out and have a big bed. So the scooter fits in there through the slider door or through the back door.

I can also set up an outdoor shower - I have a whole system where I heat water on the stove and then I have a battery-powered shower pump that I just hook up to the van's power system and it works out really well. But when it's windy and rainy it's fucking cold. I'd like to build out some kind of curtain system on the back of the van but... you know, it's not really worth it, I can do other things...

Have you taken Neal on any big trips?

The main trip that I've done since I cut the top off and built the high-top roof was to Montana, and I was a little worried that the vibration miles were going to make the top come loose, but I left the bolts exposed so I could see if they were moving, and they didn't. I camped out there by the Yellowstone River and the Tongue River for a few months. Just hanging out by this river with nobody around - it was awesome, I found antler sheds and tons and

**IT CAN BE A LITTLE BIT AWKWARD YOU KNOW, BECAUSE I FEEL LIKE PEOPLE CAN SOMETIMES BE LIKE "I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU LIVE IN YOUR VAN, GET A JOB," BUT ALSO, FUCK THEM, I'M NOT DEPRESSED.**



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Sensitivity Meets Power

Drew Ruana  
Box Therapy, V16

Photo: Alton Richardson





# STAND BY YOUR VAN

tons of rocks... I've been trying not to collect too many but I still have a lot. But I did actually break down out there. The motor was originally carbureted but I put an electronic fuel ejection (EFI) system in it - and that was good but it had this defect. After a bunch of internet digging into sniper EFI forums I found that with a lot of vibration the fuel injector connector can get warn and fall off.

It took me like a week to fix the van and that whole time I was parked in front of my sister's apartment building in Montana, but I was so comfortable. I have no aspirations to live in a city and do stealth camping - and I can't with that bright yellow, brown flame paint job anyway - but no one bothered me. Just wherever I am I have everything I need and it's so nice. If you broke down in any other car in the middle of some town in the middle of Montana in the middle of nowhere, it would suck. But I had the scooter so I would just zip around town whenever I wanted to go somewhere, and Archie (my dog) sits in the back in a little basket. So I was going to restaurants and doing whatever I wanted the whole time the van was broke down.

*Do you enjoy living in Neal full-time?*

It can be a little bit awkward you know, because I feel like people can sometimes be like "I can't believe you live in your van, get a job," but also, fuck them, I'm not depressed. You can glare at me all you want, but my life's not sad. I can tell some people think it's sad, their like, "that's sad she's living out of her car," but I'm like "that's sad you're living in some shitty apartment." I save so much money too. I haven't paid rent in nine years. That's \$1,000 a month for 12 months for nine years... that's over \$100,000.

I get bored sometimes because I don't have to work so I end up in these weird lulls where I'm not doing anything and that feels kind of like "oh man what am I doing with my life?... just living in a van down by the river." But then I think I'd feel the same way living in an apartment but it wouldn't be so easy to escape. I could leave today, right after we're done with this interview, I could just go somewhere else and I'd have no less than I do right now.

Since my job is seasonal I work at these places where you should be bringing your own house with you, like a camper, or you're going to be living in a tent, or you're going to be living in group housing with three other people or something. And so I just always have my house with me and when I work these jobs it's perfect. I just show up and I have everything I need.

Or living someplace like Groveland where it's hard to find rental housing, a lot of people lose their jobs with the National Park because they can't pay for housing around here. But I can go anywhere, I can live in these places with rent deficiencies, or you can live in places with very high rental prices, make the money of someone who has to pay those prices, but without paying that rent. You can make a lot of money.

*Anything you want to add?*

If you're going to live in a van, definitely have a dog. It's a real pain in the ass but it makes everything so much better. You have to really live a better life. Otherwise you could get trapped in a city sitting on your stoop of a van or whatever, but your dog's like, "let's go out and play!" And you're like, "Okay, let's go for a fucking walk in the snow." It's very motivating. And you have to stop a lot on long trips. Sometimes I'm like "I don't want to stop," but then Archie's like "water's nearby!" and I'm like, "you're right, water is nearby, let's stop and check it out." Because living in a van can be very unnatural; you can start buying a lot of packaged food, or getting everything to-go, or eating fast food. It's hard to live a daily life mentally because you're doing something so un-natural. It's hard to take a shower and stuff like that. Just living the way that other people do and enjoying things but not having that "house" to do it at.



The small shop that's a BIG deal

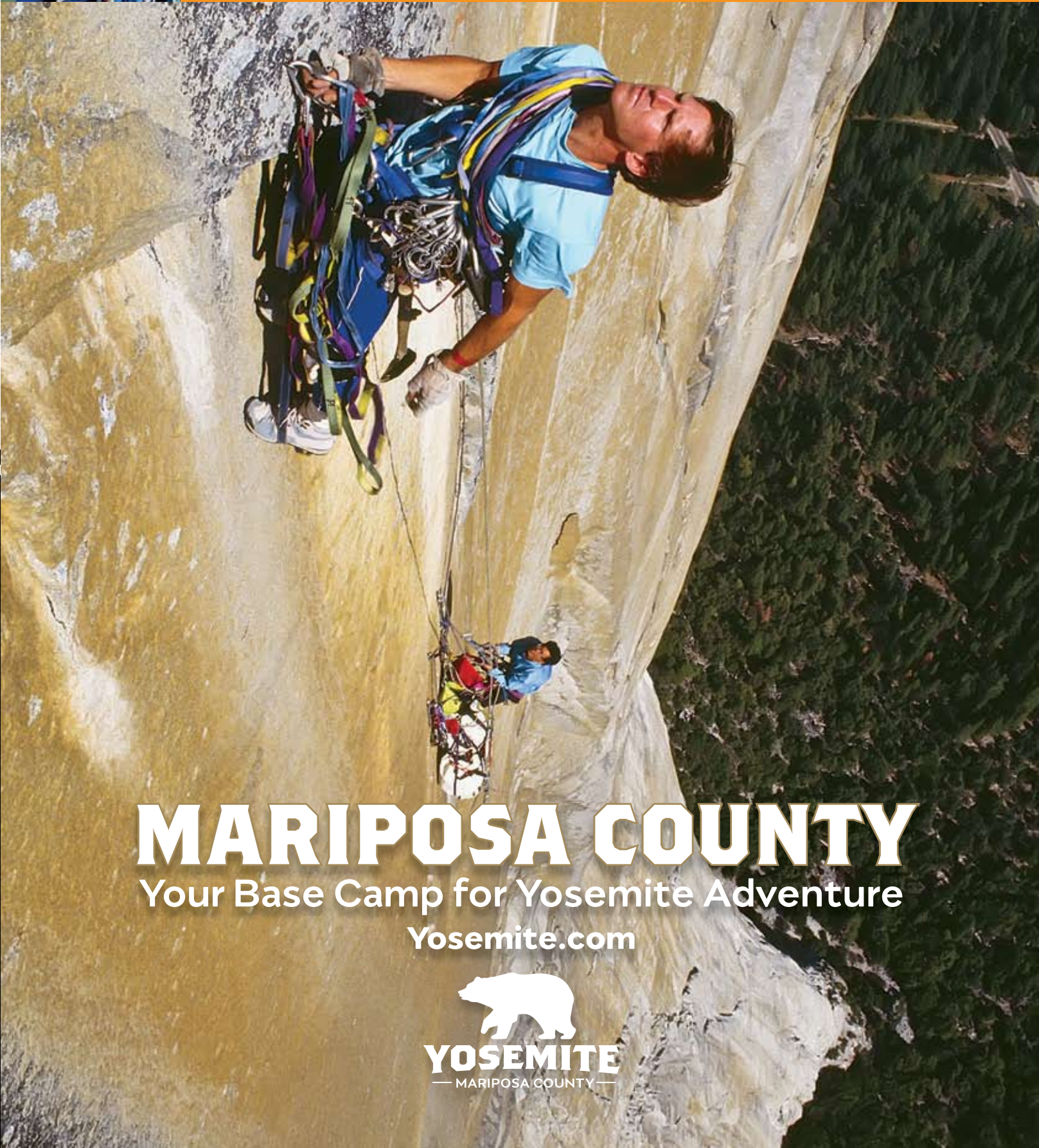
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# ROUTE OF THE SEASON

WORDS & IMAGE + DEAN FLEMING

## BETA

ROUTE: **Outer Limits**  
GRADE: **5.10c**  
FIRST ASCENT: **Jim Bridwell and Jim Orey, 1971**  
LENGTH: **190'**  
ROCK TYPE: **Granite**  
SEASON: **Fall & Winter**  
STYLE: **Gear protected, three pitches**  
RACK: **Doubles to 3" + extra hand size pieces**  
LOCATION: **Cookie Cliff, Yosemite Valley**  
APPROACH: **20:00**  
DESCENT: **Lower off or rappel on fixed anchors**  
GUIDEBOOK: **Yosemite Free Climbs** by Don Reid

### DESCRIPTION

While there are many intimidating climbs at Yosemite Valley's renowned Cookie Cliff, perhaps no other 5.10c route at the crag is quite as fear-evoking as *Outer Limits* (5.10c). The first pitch is a souring fracture that sweeps from the belly of a massive chimney— a route called *Elevator Shaft* (5.9), which is even more frightening and actually somewhat dangerous. Although *Outer Limits* is daunting at a glance, upon closer inspection you'll notice that this jagged-looking flake is actually hiding a damn-near perfect wide hand-crack that accepts excellent protection for its entirety. While many feel the technical crux of *Outer Limits* is a short thin-hands section just twenty feet from the ground, most people discover that the leaning, off-balance nature of the crack requires patience, immaculate resting technique, and a hell of a lot of endurance. While most climbers opt to only climb the first pitch and then lower, it is possible to top-out the cliff via *Outer Limits* by ascending a somewhat precarious and tricky-to-protect second pitch that traverses rightward into the last-pitch corner of the nearby route *Twilight Zone* (5.10d).

Carter Caldwell climbing the classic first pitch of *Outer Limits* (5.10c).



METOLIUS ASCENDER SET

{ \$99.95 }

The Metolius ascender was designed as a basic, all-purpose ascender at an affordable price, but as is often the case with Metolius products, the Ascender is beautifully engineered, highly functional and worthy of competing with the most expensive models on the market. The device features a very comfortable molded handle; which is probably the most important part of a good ascension device. In testing we found this handle to be large enough to easily grab while wearing thick gloves, but not so large that it becomes off-balance when pulling, pushing or throwing the ascender up a rope. The camming device is a



snappy, responsive and very easy to pull unit which firmly grabs and locks onto ropes from 9mm to 12mm, yet is still smooth to disengage when needed. The most notable design feature of the Ascender is the balance point between the clip-in loops and the upper “head” of the Ascender where the camming device locks onto the rope – this creates great balance when weighting the device and keeps the unit from flopping left or right or wanting to twist as it’s being used. The Ascender is CE Certified, comes in red/right side and blue/left side and is sold as singles or in pairs.

TRANGO MOUNTAIN VAULT

{ \$159.95 - \$189.95 }

The Mountain Vault is a waterproof/sealed duffle bag designed to protect your gear when traveling. The small 42-L bag fits in to most airline carry-on dimensions, the 72-L model is perfect for mid-sized loads, and the large 122-L bag stows enough gear for even the largest expeditions – or makes for a perfect “swallow everything” bag; a helpful tool when you’re trying to stow away winter clothing, big wall gear, or trying to stuff your dirty laundry underneath the bed of your van.

A lockable zipper combines with a waterproof/sealed 500D PVC body and fully welded seam construction to protect your gear on anything from small trips to the remotest mountain destinations. The exterior features multiple tie-down points for secure loading on anything with legs or wheels and



customizable carry strap options make transport a breeze. A full top zipper opening allows for easy access to all your gear without having to dump everything you own onto the floor of your friend’s house or hotel room. The multiple daisy chains & buckles make it easy to secure the Mountain Vault to vehicles & racks. In testing we absolutely loved the 42-L model, finding it to be the perfect size for quick trips and also very useful as a carry-on bag. The 122-L model is also fairly manageable for its size, and super useful because of its ability to engulf everything you own, but as you might expect, 122-L is a pretty huge and somewhat cumbersome dimension to lug around on frequent trips. Overall we found the Mountain Vault to be a versatile, durable and extremely affordable option for an expedition duffle bag.

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Chalk Cartel slings the highest quality and purity climbing chalk available on the market; it’s free of agents, fillers and heavy metals, but most importantly, it’s free of bogus proprietary claims. If you want a simple, long lasting chalk that improves friction by reducing sweat and moisture, and you want that chalk wrapped in an environmentally-friendly packaging, Chalk Cartel’s Quarter Bag is an affordable, functional and eco-friendly option.

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Pulling narratives from the US Parks System, Hetch Hetchy and the development of turnkey National Parks in Argentina and Chile, author Chris Kalman weaves a short yet beautifully written fictional tale of what it can look like when we love a place to death. The story centers on a fictionalized version of Chochamo as it weaves Chilean-Spanish slang into the characters’ dialogue to accompany Kalman’s gifted descriptive ability; painting a clear and picturesque scene as the pages turn. Kalman, pulls upon his time spent in South America and Cochamo to make this book feel like a first-hand account of events that actually took place.



The intricacies of the climbing life: love, family, purpose, dedication; are all common threads beneath the story and blend together allowing any reader to find something that resonates. Mixing current political and environmental topics round out the fictional narrative, creating a multi-layered metaphorical story line that brings forth a call to adventure as well as a curious suspicion of what the true intent is behind modern conservationism. All packaged in a small format, cloth hard-cover (vintage nerds rejoice), accompanied with brilliant chapter head illustrations. Damned if you Don’t is available online as well as at [www.chriskalman.com](http://www.chriskalman.com).

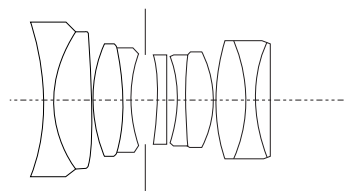


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# BEHIND THE LENS



WORDS & IMAGES + ERIC BISSELL

It's hard to find remote bouldering that matches the quality of the classic areas. Places like the Buttermilks, Red Rocks, and Joes are popular for a reason - convenience and quality. To find impeccable climbing in a backcountry setting is a tougher combination to nail.

Motivated friends make the improbable possible though, and there are few people more motivated for climbing than Keenan Takahashi. Keenan lets the rock and landscape spur him into a frenzy of excitement that goes well beyond what most of us think is a justified response to cold hard stone. It's the kind of pure excitement that can mask the consequence of bouldering a thirty-foot double-digit problem at 10,200 feet after hiking into the mountains. The moment he saw The Eleventh Hour (pictured here and on the cover) Keenan was dead-set on finding a way to climb its strikingly fractured face. I missed the chance to photograph him on the first ascent and swore to get an image of it if there was ever another opportunity.

A season later (pandemic fast-forward) Keenan and Katie Lamb were in Bishop with an itch to hike into the alpine and breathe thin air on tall problems. I had photographed Katie on her dialed send of the Swarm the previous winter and have no idea what Katie isn't capable of climbing. After bumping up the axle-breaking 4-wheel-drive dirt road, Katie, nursing the remnants of a sprained ankle, shouldered a big Organic pad, a Buddy heater, snacks, water, fans, etc. and started hiking the couple mile approach to the boulder with a determination that was visibly similar to Keenan's characteristic attitude.

In the weeks leading up to their passing through town, I had been watching a spectacular fall color display and biding my time for a shot to capture the splash of color. I knew the high-altitude basin would fill in with bright yellow and was excited to see the blue alpine granite against the ephemeral burst. I packed a long lens and a wide into my already heavy pad-pack combo and hoped there would be a chance to shoot The Eleventh Hour.

Katie roped up the top half of the boulder to check the exit moves but couldn't quite get into the wall to suss the lower crux. As the sun dipped behind the range she began giving the problem goes from the bottom, slowly but surely pushing her beta higher while testing the falls into an unstable pit of talus and foam on an equally unstable ankle. On her last go, she pulled through the crux with a redline effort and got situated in the upper dihedral. Gas tank empty I could see her look down and contemplate bailing. Keenan was locked in like a tracker missile in his encouragement, "I fucking got you!!" he shouted with almost unsettling conviction. Katie pulled through four moves past the obvious point of failure up to the final rock-over move onto the slab. Then, "I'm gonna come down," she said with deep exhaustion. "Ok, no worries," Keenan replied. Katie down-climbed two moves and collapsed into the pads. Limping out in the dark over talus and balancing across streams, Katie mentioned as if it were the first time it had occurred to her, "I'm kinda tired?"







IMAGE + RON PHIFER

## CALIFORNIA CLIMBER: GENA WOOD

INTERVIEW + NICK MILEY

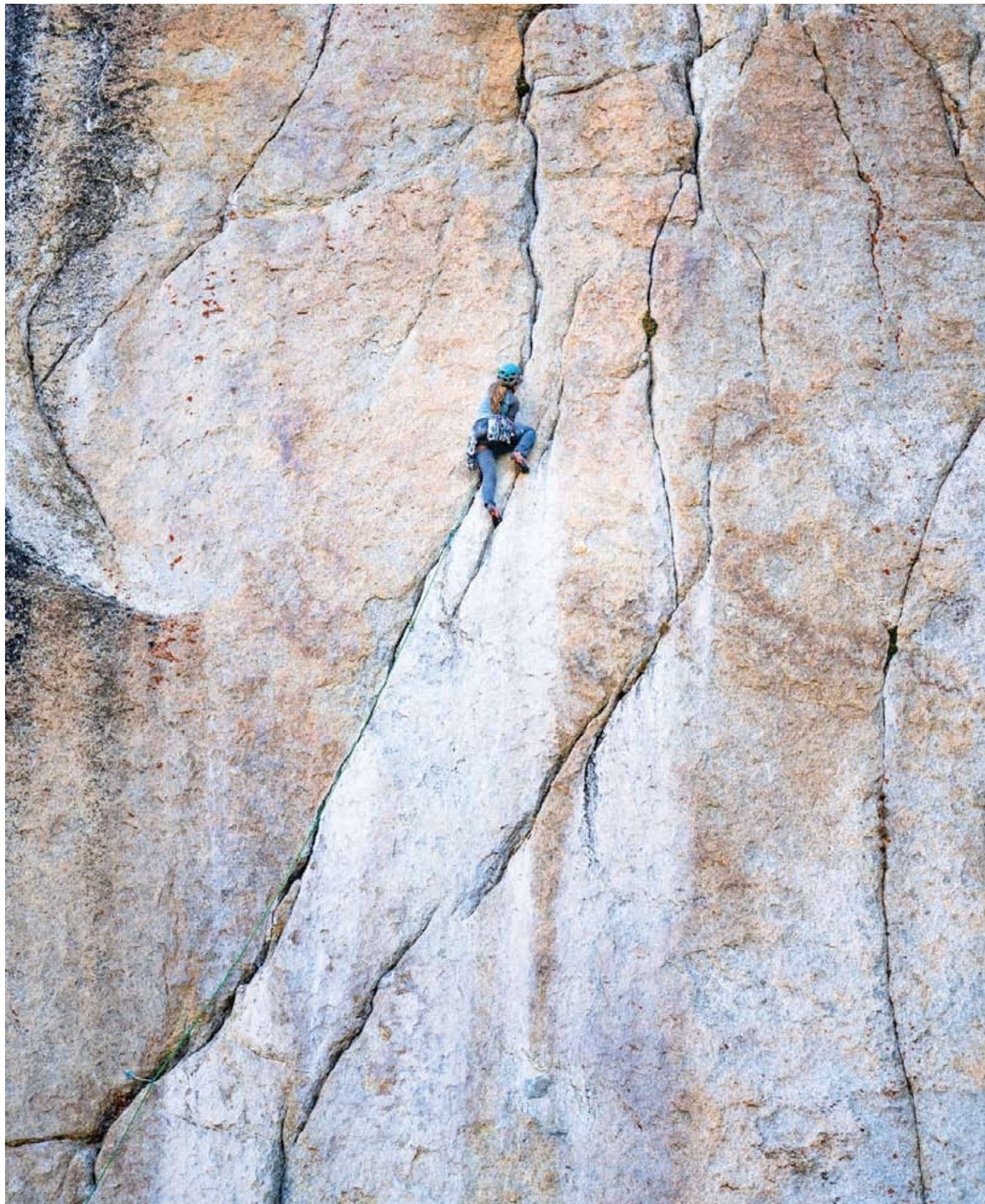
**A**t just 31 years of age, Gena Wood is the most experienced big wall climber on Yosemite National Park's 2021 Climbing Ranger Team. She's redpointed Astroman, takes regular laps on The Rostrum's North Face, and has ascended El Capitan 22 times, including a solo of The Shortest Straw – a feat daunting just to contemplate. With such a tick-list under her belt, you might mistakenly tag her as a Wall Rat, but Wood's interests go far beyond the vertical. If forced to saddle her with a single descriptor it would be Naturalist in the vein of Annie Dillard and Mary Oliver. Wood's endeavor to cut out time in her full-to-the-brim life to marvel at simple wonders is perhaps her defining characteristic.

Born in Southern California, raised in the burbs of Chicago, Wood found climbing as an adult and took to it like a fledgling to flight. For her, climbing is something like a conversation, at times an argument, with herself. She's sworn to retire from big walling more than once but falls for the one more, one more time and again. Perhaps it's her desire for rare and unique perspectives, perhaps it's the comradery, but she's yet to shy away from the difficult and scary.

While these bold characteristics are impressive, more unusual is Wood's reflexive pondering evident in her art and social media musings. She paints, often with watercolors, finding inspiration from landscapes but more often from birds, fungi, and trees plucked out of their surroundings. An avid journaler, Wood pens lists of things she's grateful for and proud of to slow time and capture what are, to her, particularly good morsels of those special somethings that give life its lip-smacking flavor. Baked goods, Disney movies, tailwinds, snow-draped mountains, 90s hip-hop, birds and, above all, mushrooms springing from forest nooks and crannies – these are some of the entries on her lists of wonderful things.

In the pages that follow Wood's thoughts spool out unhurried, providing us with a view into a world framed by her observations, reflections, creativity, and outdoor pursuits. Like her tableau of the amazing, her thoughts saunter through many subjects but most arresting are her views on women in what has long been portrayed as a man's domain – climbing. With the backdrop of this physical pursuit, she delves into community, personal accountability, friendship, loss, questions of normalcy and, of course, mushrooming.





## LEFT

Wood styles out the leaning crack system on *Goldfinger* (5.12a), Tuolumne Meadows.

IMAGE + RON PHIFER

## ABOVE

All smiles at the top of the squeeze, Wood on *Tales of Power* (5.12b), Yosemite Valley.

IMAGE + ALEXA FLOWER

## TOASTED SOURDOUGH BREAD WITH SALTED BUTTER IS PRETTY HIGH ON THE LIST.

Cinnamon Rolls are pretty high on the list. It took a while for climbing to make it on the list. There's some joy in climbing, but there's not often the same amount of joy. If you're in a perfect hand crack, with enough cams, then there's joy.

## I'VE CONSIDERED MYSELF A VALLEY RAT, SPENDING A LOT OF TIME ON BIG WALLS, BUT I'VE BEEN EMBRACING TUOLUMNE, WHICH IS HIGH ON THE LIST OF THINGS I'M GRATEFUL FOR.

In Tuolumne Meadows I felt like I was escaping all the chaos that was happening in the world. I had a near death experience with a flash flood in the tightest part of Tenaya Canyon, which was the start of the monsoonal rains that we experienced this year, which brought us the most abundant Bolete year that I've seen in Tuolumne Meadows. I also got married this summer in Tuolumne. It was an abundant year.

## WORKING AND LIVING IN A PLACE LIKE YOSEMITE VALLEY, IT FEELS LIKE EVERYTHING IS HAPPENING SO FAST.

# I THINK THAT MUSHROOMS ARE WAY COOLER THAN ROCK CLIMBING.

And working seasonally; it's over so fast. It's important for me to slow down and check in, and to keep track of time. We often look back and think about how good we had it, but it's not often that being in these beautiful places and living this transient lifestyle that we can see the good things in front of us, because there's a lot of annoying things about working seasonally and traveling all the time. It's a good thing to remember that we chose this lifestyle and to pay attention to the positive things.





**I'M REALLY INTO MUSHROOMS; INSTEAD OF BEING DISTRACTED BY THE LARGE THINGS THAT EVERYONE'S PAYING ATTENTION TO, YOU HAVE TO BE LOOKING AT THE GROUND.**

I looked for mushrooms today – it's a great way to spend a rest day, and it creates a good balance with rock climbing. But I think that mushrooms are way cooler than rock climbing.

**"WHAT IS NORMAL?" IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTIONS THAT I ASK PEOPLE.**

I'm in a very privileged place in that I get to work with the public and have interesting conversations about climbing. I get honest, candid responses from people. When we are looking at people climbing on El Cap, someone might say "that's crazy," but in my opinion, having children is kind of crazy. So I ask them "don't you think having children is crazy? You're committing your entire life to it, and the people who are going up on the wall are only committing five days." I don't know if I can grasp what normal is, but I do know that it's important to question it and have conversations with people about it.

**I'VE HAD A PO BOX IN YOSEMITE VALLEY FOR EIGHT YEARS AND I'VE SPENT THE MAJORITY OF MY TIME HERE, WHICH I THINK IS THE LONGEST TIME I'VE LIVED ANYWHERE.**

Growing up with a single mom we moved a lot for various reasons. So it's been interesting to figure out where I want to call home next. It's hard to imagine leaving Yosemite Valley. I think a lot of people who are lucky enough to live here struggle with leaving. Some people have one home and some people have many homes, and both are okay. Society tells us that it's normal to have one home and to stay there, but I think we can question that.

**LEFT**

Wood (Above) high on *Zodiac* (VI 5.7 C3) with Alexa Flower in Yosemite Valley.

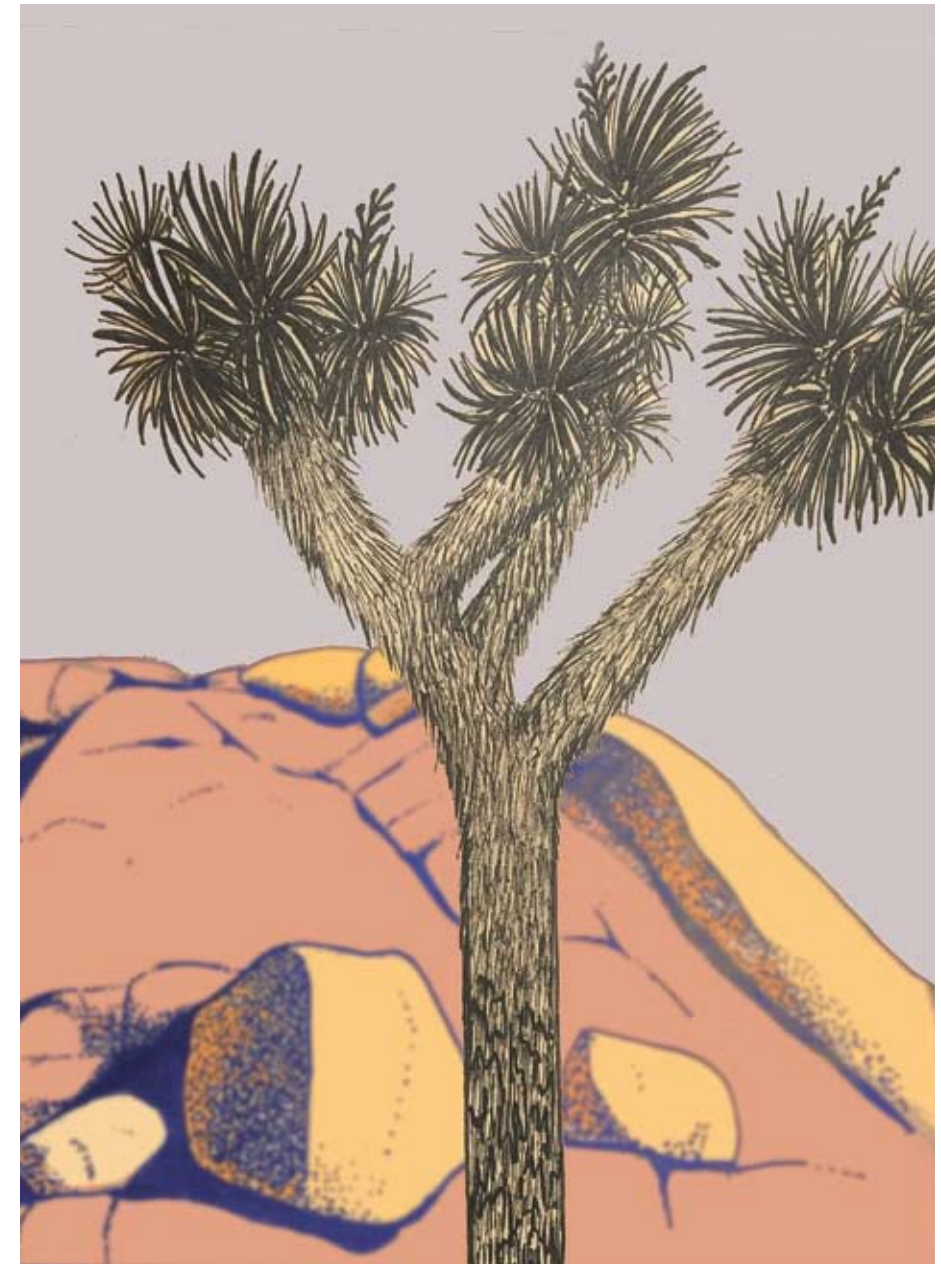
IMAGE + **ERIC BISSELL**

**WE ACCEPT THINGS WHEN A LOT OF PEOPLE ARE DOING IT, BUT IT'S HARDER TO ACCEPT SOMETHING WHEN THERE ARE LESS PEOPLE DOING IT.**

In this community we've accepted things like living in vehicles as normal because there are enough of us doing it. That's why people say "community matters;" we want to feel normal, and normal is when enough people are doing it. When I lived in Southern California, before I found climbing, I definitely felt like a weirdo. It wasn't until I met climbers that I thought "I'm not weird... well I guess I am weird, but I'm weird like these people..."

**MISOGYNY IS TALKED ABOUT A LOT, BUT INTERNAL MISOGYNY, WHERE WOMEN THINK THESE THINGS ABOUT OTHER WOMEN AND ABOUT THEMSELVES, IS SOMETHING THAT I DON'T THINK A LOT OF PEOPLE ARE AWARE OF.**

It's incredible to climb with women because it helps me to dissolve these ideas that men are stronger and braver. I've started to pick up on it subtly, including in my own thoughts. For example, if a male climber were to ask me for information about a dangerous climb, and then a female climber asked me for information about the same climb, I know I would be more worried about the female climber. When I climb with other women I don't think about any of those things, I'm just inspired to try harder. Representation matters.



**SURF THE WINNEBAGO**  
5"x7" | Pen & Digital  
2020





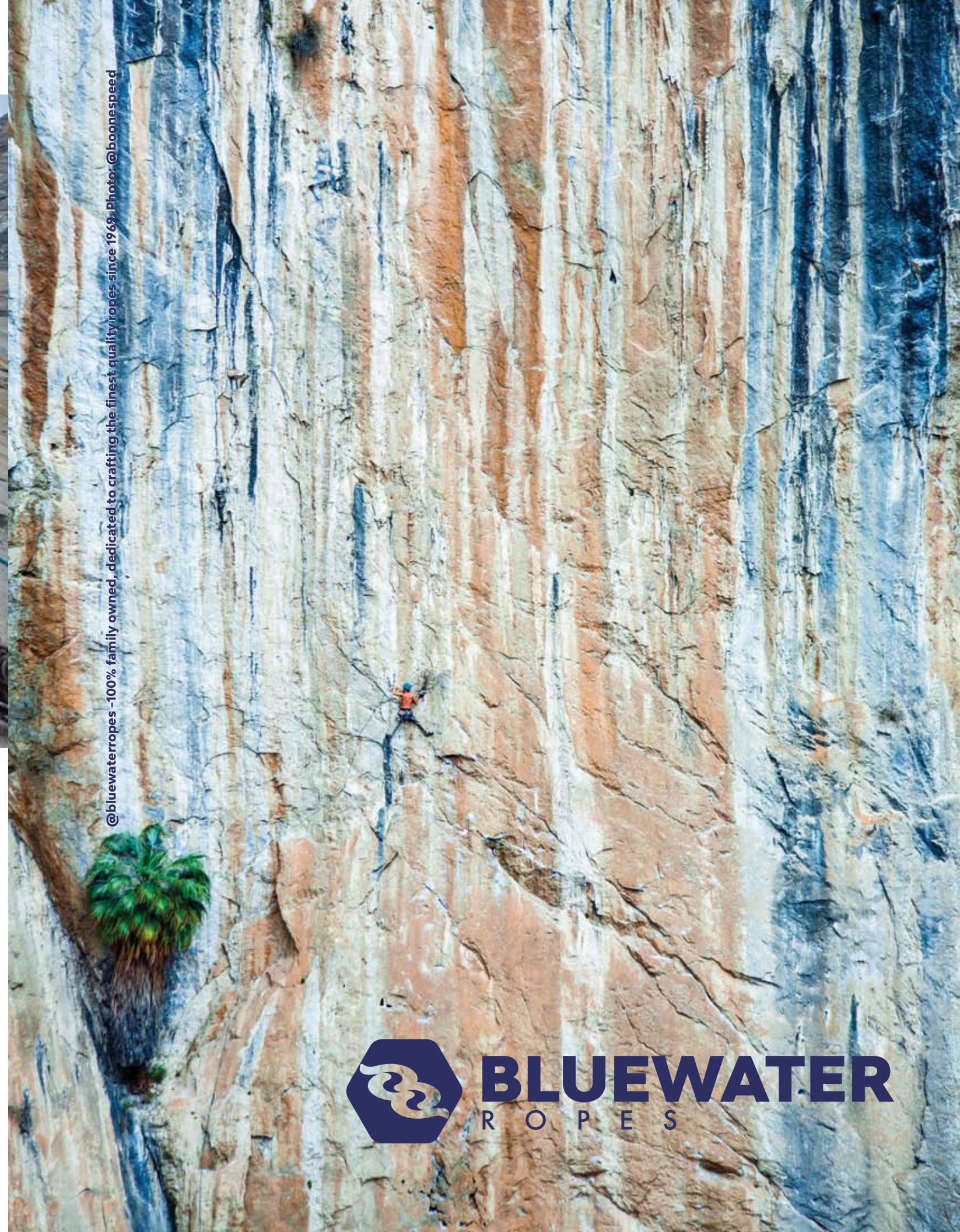
Wood (on lead) with Alexa Flower on belay while climbing *New Dawn* (VI 5.8+ A3), Yomseite Valley.

IMAGE + DREW SMITH

**I BRING UP MY FRIEND JULIA ALL THE TIME BECAUSE SHE WAS ONE OF THE STRONGEST CLIMBERS THAT I KNEW, AND SO ENCOURAGING.**

If anyone broke down the ideas that men are stronger and braver, Julia was one of those people. I'm constantly reminded of her and the effect that she had on so many of us. It was really cool to climb the Moratorium earlier this spring with a friend of mine, which was the first 5.11 I ever led, and my partner really didn't want to lead this pitch, and I was like "well, you know, Julia forced me to lead this pitch... If it's safe then you can force people to try their hardest." Just channeling the smallest amount of her spirit makes me a better person. She has also made me stop and really contemplate my wellbeing. I used to free solo Royal Arches regularly and I haven't since Julia died. If it can happen to Julia, then it can definitely happen to me. Losing a close friend that way has dissolved the illusion of safety through my ability.

**WHO LOOKS LIKE SOMEONE THAT SLEEPS ON THE SIDE OF A MOUNTAIN? CAN IT BE SOMEONE WITH DANGLING EARRINGS?**



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**BLUEWATER**  
R O P E S





IMAGE + RON PHIFER

## SOMEONE JUST ASKED ME THE OTHER DAY, “HOW DO YOU FIND TIME TO MAKE ART IN THE SUMMER?” AND I SAID, “I DON’T.”

That’s the ultimate struggle, which makes it hard to imagine working year-round. I’m really bad at balancing everything and I never feel like I have enough time. I also feel like I am really lucky to have a lot of friends, but I don’t have enough time to maintain those friendships. If I could sleep less, that’s something that I would greatly appreciate.

## WE’RE IN A VERY INTERESTING TIME FOR CLIMBING AND FOR SOCIETY’S VIEW ON CLIMBING.

With Free Solo and the Olympics, regular people are now starting to form ideas about climbing, and this will be mainly influenced by whatever the Media decides to present. My position as a Climbing Ranger is very privileged in that I get to hear what the general public thinks about climbing. Standing in El Cap Meadow, people often want to know where Alex Honnold went up the rock. In their story, in their basic understanding of climbing that comes from these movies, people free solo and there’s a dramatic woman who is left behind crying... it still continues to paint this picture. Even with the Dawn Wall movie, which I love, the story is about a man who gets a divorce and it’s this divorce that leads him to this mega project. It’s still a stereotypical male role, which is not what climbing is at all.



**THE GIFT OF PATIENCE**  
11”x15” | Watercolor on paper  
2021

## I THINK IT’S IMPORTANT AS CLIMBERS TO MAKE OUR VOICES HEARD AND TO TALK ABOUT CLIMBING AND WHAT IT IS.

I’m so proud of my good friend Lauren DeLaunay Miller who just finished a book called Valley of Giants; which is filled with stories from the 1940s to present day about women climbing in Yosemite Valley. If you look back into the photos and writings that have been published previously about climbing from the 1950s and 1960s, you wouldn’t even know that women were participating. I think it’s crucial that we tell these stories. Who looks like someone that sleeps on the side of a mountain? Can it be someone with dangling earrings? Like I said, representation matters. I just want little girls to think, “Hey, I can do that someday.”



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Despite its rugged good looks, the Eastern Sierra landscape is very fragile. So, stand up for this amazing backyard. Recreate responsibly while you’re here. Camp in existing sites. Pack out your waste (and your dog’s, too). Park intelligently. Pick up your trash. And generally just be a kind person.

The Bishop Area Climbers’ Coalition looks after the Eastern Sierra and the folks who love it. Through stewardship, education, and outreach, we seek to

foster an engaged, inclusive climbing community and healthy (and happy) crags, boulders, and mountains. Learn more and get involved at [bishopclimbers.org](https://bishopclimbers.org).





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## DESTINATION: KINGS CANYON

WORDS & IMAGES + SPENSER TANG-SMITH

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**BEFORE I TELL YOU ABOUT BOULDERING IN KINGS CANYON, YOU SHOULD KNOW A BIT ABOUT MY FRIEND RYAN MOON. LIKE ME, HE’S A BOULDERING CONNOISSEUR WITH A WIDE-RANGING RESUMÉ AND A LOVE FOR DEVELOPING NEW AREAS. HIS NAME MAY BE FAMILIAR IF YOU’VE CLIMBED AT THE COLUMBIA BOULDERS IN SONORA, A PLACE THAT INCIDENTALLY ILLUSTRATES RYAN’S IMPRESSIVE FORTITUDE WHEN IT COMES TO DEALING WITH MISERIES SUCH AS POISON OAK.**

Moon even managed to find one of the only oak-infested zones in Yosemite Valley, where he’s scratched out several dozen first ascents over the past few seasons. He also has abnormally dry skin. I watched him do Midnight Lightning and The Force—on successive tries—during a warm, humid afternoon back in 2008.

For my part, I don’t mind a little suffering, but in 2019 I had no need for such trials, as I had been on the road chasing good conditions for the preceding 8 years. When circumstances dictated that I’d be living in the Bay Area for an unknown duration, Ryan told me I had to come check out Kings Canyon. He said the bouldering potential was mostly unexplored. It was June, which meant it would be 90 degrees, but I told Ryan it sounded like exactly the kind of trip I’d been craving, because it was exactly the kind of trip I’d been craving.

<~~~~>

I’ve read plenty of these “Hot New Destination” articles during my 17-ish years of climbing. While they used to invoke excitement and an immediate desire to check out whatever’s new, now these kinds of articles are the sort I’m likely to ignore. I’ve been around enough to know that there just isn’t any rock out there that’s that much better than anything else. Hueco Tanks features dabby caves and breakable topout holds. The Buttermilks are sharp, slick, and chossy all at once. Red Rocks? Not only are you staying in Las Vegas, but you’re climbing on semi-cemented sand.

**PREVIOUS**

Casey Zak executing the massive moves of *Fern Down for What* (V6). The movement on this problem is outstanding, but the setting makes it unforgettable. A stone’s throw from the river, the Fern Boulder stands alone in a 4-foot deep sea of soft emerald ferns, and as of this writing hosts four excellent boulder problems and an uncompleted project.

**RIGHT**

Ben Steel making the big move on *Bangarang* (V10).

IMAGE + VIKKI GLINSKII





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*Keepsake* (V10) sits less than 100 yards from the parking lot. Looking at the holds, we initially imagined a proud V6, but the line spat us off with such nonchalance that we started to question the very nature of gravity itself. Then, on a warm midsummer’s night, Ryan committed to a hand-heel match at 15’, grabbed the sloping lip, and bumped to the finishing jug. He later said that “it felt like a gift, like a present from the canyon; a *Keepsake*.”

In this photo, Ethan Pringle takes advantage of November conditions to flash for its second ascent. He made it look like a proud V6.

—

Does the previous paragraph border on sacrilege? Hell, I never said the climbing at any of these places wasn’t fun. I’m just saying that I used to think these articles were the gospel truth, that the rock we were all climbing on was garbage compared to the Flavor of the Month. Now I recognize something more like desperation, a cloying need to have the masses envy them. It’s like bad travel writing. And I say this as someone who spent their formative bouldering years on Santa Barbara sandstone, learning the art of pulling down-not-out, and watching problems evolve as holds either eroded or exploded. Even though, as former Santa Barbara local Will Wolcott put it, “you don’t climb boulder problems, you climb snapshots,” I promise you nobody out there climbing on better rock was having any more fun than we were.

That being said, I do promise that the rock in Kings Canyon is objectively solid southern Sierra granite. The “hot new destination” part is also true, in a sense.

I could pull out all my adverbs and adjectives to try to make you, the reader, feel like your life is shit because you haven’t been coming along on our trips to Kings Canyon. I could describe the scenery, the solitude, the sense of discovery. I could tell some of the stories gathered over the past 3 summers that you will wish you had been there to witness. Or I could highlight a particular boulder, or a particular problem, as particularly deserving of our praise and your salivation, then put that in the context of the canyon as a whole, in order to make it seem like there’s endless impeccable climbing to do. My praise for Kings would be effusive, yet wholly true. But it wouldn’t be the whole truth.

<~~~>

Kings Canyon is not known as a bouldering destination. Ryan and I think we have figured out why. For one thing, you most likely have to go through Fresno to get there, and if you’re going to drive 2 1/2 hours from Fresno, you’ll probably go to Yosemite. If the conditions are good in Yosemite, they’re probably good in Kings as well, but if the conditions are good in Yosemite, the chances are Kings Canyon is inaccessible by vehicle. Highway 180, which takes you from Fresno up through the National Park entry kiosk to nearly 8000’, winds back down into the canyon itself (4000’) in such a twisted and narrow fashion that it feels like a death trap even in good conditions. The Park Service closes a gate at the top of the descent from around early November until late April, which leaves only a narrow window of spring and fall when the conditions are prime.







There is also no guidebook for bouldering in Kings Canyon, save for a few topos on Mountain Project describing some of the obvious, easier roadside lines. When it's warm, which is most of the time, the place swarms with little gnats that cluster around your face and manage to get into your various face holes at the worst moments. We tend to climb at night, even though it's only marginally cooler and no less buggy. And while we've had the privilege of dozens of memorable first ascents, most of them required hours of manual labor, often in 90+ degree heat. If you're considering a trip, I should also warn you that the nearest cell service is about 45 minutes from the bouldering.

<~~~>

I know I'm not selling it. Frankly, there aren't many people I would recommend the experience to, and only a few hardy souls have joined our trips with any regularity. It's absurd to drive 6 hours to spend all day under a shriveling sun

seeking and scrubbing boulders, moving rocks and logs around, then climbing in terrible conditions until 2AM, all while swatting at flies. But in these times, I tell ya, we crave a little absurdity of our own making. Besides, what were we going to do, not climb on these awesome lines?

To those of us who spent the past 3 summers developing the bouldering in Kings, what makes the place special is that, in this day and age, one rarely finds a plethora of roadside granite boulders in a setting such as a National Park that haven't been climbed every which way. We have plucked many of the juiciest plums, but as of this writing, there is plenty of untouched rock to attend to when the gate opens again. Normally these kinds of articles are written under the assumption that, with the new area thus revealed, the hordes will soon descend. That seems less likely in this case. But I would be willing to wager there's a few people out there who are craving an experience just like what Kings Canyon can provide.

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## ABOVE

Laurn Claassen climbing the beautiful *Law of the Jungle* (V2).

## RIGHT

Vikas Agartha sends the gymnastic classic *Fern Down For What* (V6).

IMAGES + RYAN MOON







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*Raven Air (V4)* is a beautiful, technical arete with a crux reach to a hero jug at the top, and one of the first lines we cleaned. The author was battling injuries for most of the first two summers, which left poor Ryan in the position of having to do most of the first ascents. In hindsight, the author probably wouldn't have captured most of the images on these pages if he hadn't been injured.

*Raven Air* was named in honor of Jeff Cheng.

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*Petrichor Perfume* (V7). It was a bad wildfire season near Kings Canyon each of the last two years, but we didn't let that deter us until the KNP Complex forced the Park to close for much of this past fall. Our disregard for our lungs reached its peak a few days after the Creek Fire of 2020, when smoke and ash blotted out the sun, and we donned headlamps and kept cleaning a boulder. This picture was taken a week later, with the Creek Fire creating a mid-afternoon golden hour.

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Hot new destination, indeed! Above, Ryan plays on a marble roof near Boyden Cavern.

At left, Ben Steel takes a plunge near Road's End.

### RIGHT

Jessica Wan on *The Outsider* (V5), another awesome addition from Casey Zak.











## PREVIOUS

Ryan Moon establishing one of the prettier problems you'll ever see during a typical, tourist-infested summer weekend in Kings Canyon. *Trollhunter* (V7) calls for compression and confidence, and success is rewarded with a memorable I-beam finish.

## LEFT

Vikas Agartha styling one of Kings' best, *Funcrusher Plus* (V9).

IMAGE + RYAN MOON

## ABOVE

Mailee Hung climbs *Christmas Eve* (V0) on a warm June night.

## RIGHT

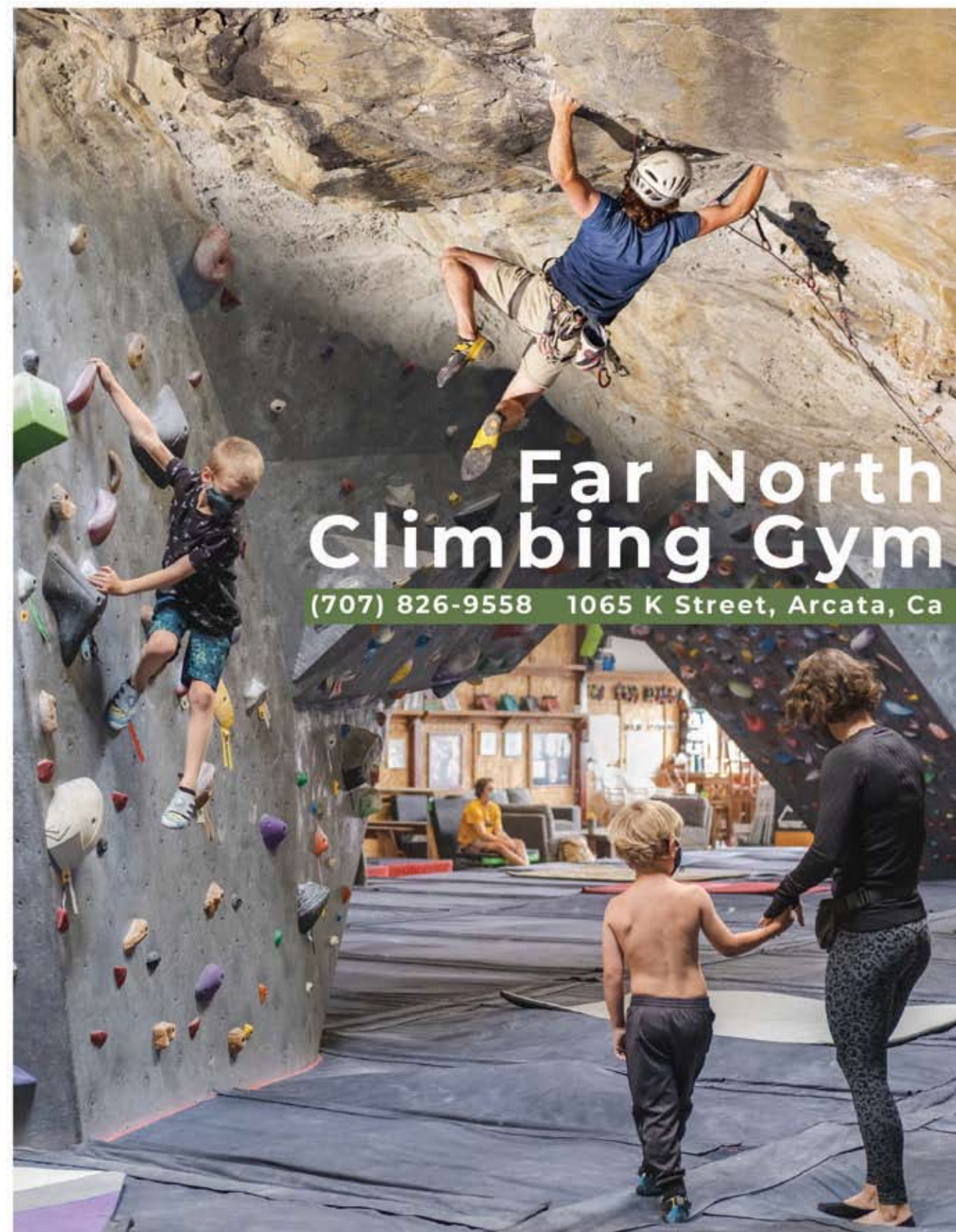
Vikki Glinkskii attempting *Prime Rib* (V4) in November of 2019.







Dan Kovner putting up one of the hardest problems in Kings Canyon, the magnificent, sustained, and heady *Avalon* (V11).



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## THE BETA

### GETTING THERE

From Fresno, take Highway 180 east. Stop when you get to the bouldering.

### WHERE TO STAY

The National Park has a few campgrounds which can be reserved ahead of time at recreation.gov. If they're full (or closed because of Covid), there are camping options in the Sierra National Forest along Highway 180, just outside of the canyon itself. Keep an eye on wildfires and any related restrictions.

### GUIDEBOOK

There is a guidebook in the works.

## THE TICK LIST

- **Funcrusher Plus** (V9)
- **Christmas is Canceled** (V1)
- **Keepsake** (V10)
- **Prime Rib** (V4)
- **Trim the Bush** (V5)
- **Fern Down for What** (V6)
- **Hexxus** (V6)
- **Kingfish** (V9)
- **Party for One** (V6)

Ethan Pringle demonstrating the opening move on the latest addition to Kings, *The 11th Hour* (V12), which he established on the last night of the 2021 season.

As of this writing it is the hardest known boulder problem in Kings Canyon.

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## DISPATCH:

### MOUNT DIABLO'S OMEEZEE TRAVERSE

WORDS + SEAN BURKE || IMAGES + JIM THORNBURG

#### RIGHT

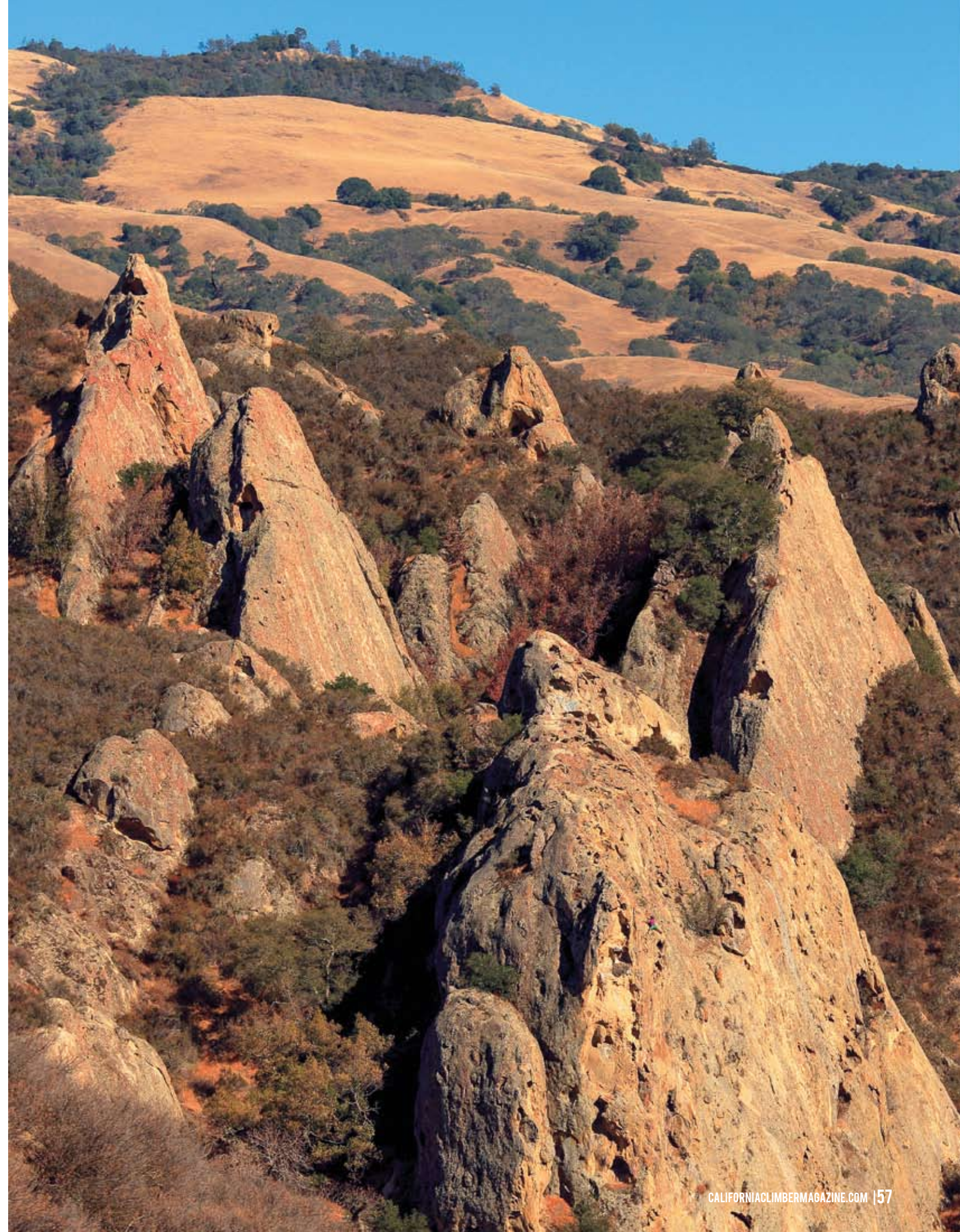
Sean Burke on *Directisima* (5.10c), two pitches, Mammoth Rock, Pine Canyon

*Directisima* is a seven bolt more direct second-pitch finish to *Bridge of Sighs* at Mammoth Rock in Pine Canyon. *Directissima* veers left after the first three bolts of *Bridge of Sighs* and is considered the higher quality finish when compared to the original second pitch.

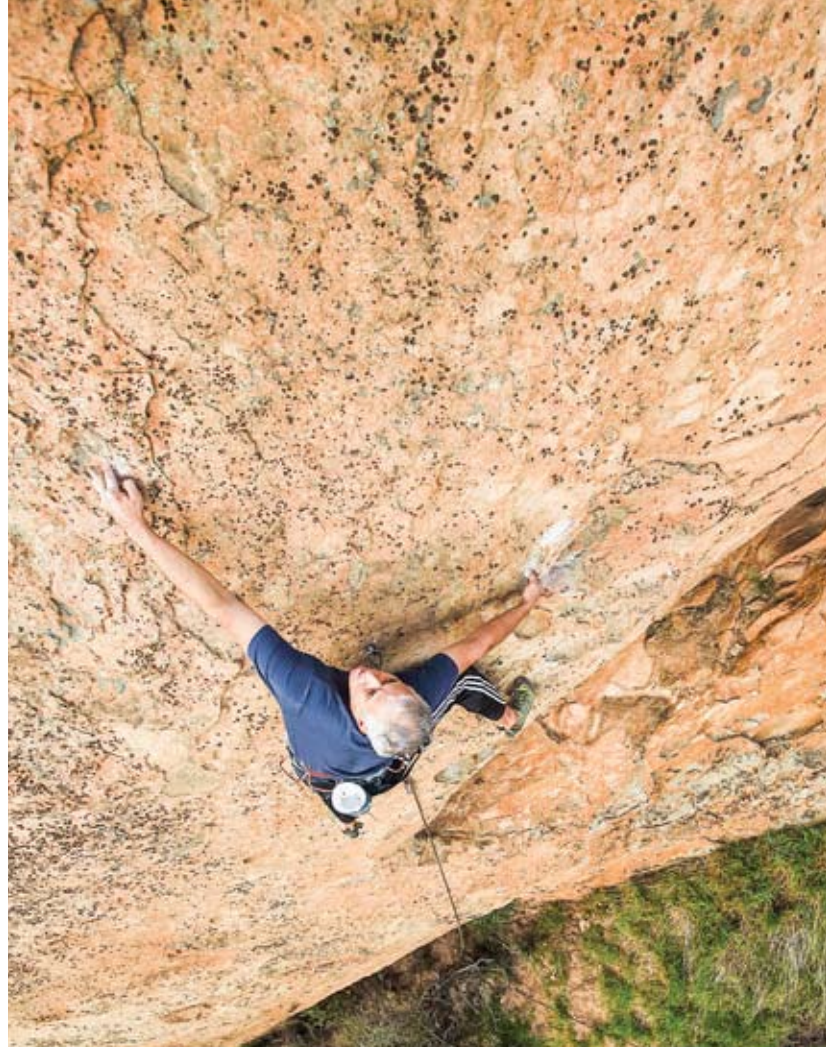
**BLAZING ORANGE AND YELLOW LIGHT** surrounded Mott Peak as my Catahoula puppy Roux and I entered Lime Ridge. This area has been a favorite of mine for many years and for many moments of oneness with my best friends; my Wife and our Pup-pack – our magnetic key card into the breath of everything around us. As I quietly closed the gate behind us we were instantly greeted by our friend the Red Tail, who skimmed the Earth as he raced down the steep hillside on our left, less than a meter above the medusa head seed pods on the golden foothills surrounding us. We looked on in amazement as he descended 500 feet in a matter of seconds before setting down razor sharp yellow talons on a commanding perch.

“Damn?” I said to Roux, mesmerized by the feat that we had just witnessed. As we continued along the trail the raptor again took flight, diving toward the ground, gaining inertia and arcing clockwise to our right in a westward direction. He made a large, 200-foot radius circling just feet above the ground. Twenty feet away from us he pulled up, just clearing our heads before once again dropping elegantly onto his perch.

The next morning I woke up and started getting my rack together. It was a beautiful summer day, not too hot, just right for an evening session at Pine Canyon. As a Park Ranger I’ve spent close to a decade at Pine Canyon interacting with nature at its most polar – the realm of disconnected materialism in the nearby neighborhoods and the realm of the sacred, where everything seems to interact and coincide. The climbing here is good, the scenery is great and the magic is all around; a place where people have lived for hundreds of generations; the Tuyshtak, Sukkujaman, Supemenenu, Kinchiwi, Ojompile and Cerro Alto de Los Bolbones. It’s humbling to be a steward of such a sacred gateway into human existence.







I picked up my phone and immediately thought “It’s Monday, I’ll see if Omar can get out tonight,” knowing that he shared the same work schedule as I did. “We can climb something on Mammoth,” I thought, a crag at the center of the canyon he hadn’t experienced yet. I sent him a text and then went about gathering gear. Around 1pm I checked my phone to see if he had replied. He hadn’t. “That’s weird” I thought, “Omeezee is usually super quick to respond, he must be fishing or something and out of service, somewhere drifting out in the Sea. Hopefully he’s hooking up...” Two hours later I received a call from our mutual friend and mentor Mike Mendoza, a fellow Park Ranger and big brother to both of us. “Is it true about our friend?” He said. My heart stopped. “Oh no, Oh Fuck” I said out loud. He continued to tell me that our dear friend Omar Gutierrez had passed away and that the details were just coming in. He told me to contact another friend and mentor of ours, Ranger Gary Fine, who was channeling information for us. I did and continued to learn that Omar had passed away in a car accident in the early morning hours.

In a breath I was taken to a moment we shared once while climbing together at Pine Canyon. "This is one of the best experiences of my life," he said as we sat on top of the Rock of Ages after linking up climbs on the Pulpit and Pagoda. It was his second day of climbing ever. "I'm hooked," he said as he mashed down sour watermelon

gummies and pounded down gulps of water. I knew he was going to be a great partner; we had worked together for years already as Rangers and climbing and alpinism were the next steps in our partnership, furthering our connection. As we transitioned to rappel and ran out of the already sweltering heat of the day, the dream of connecting a climb that covered all of the crags at Mount Diablo in a day was verbalized and momentum was initiated.

Upon hearing the news of Omar's far too early departure from this world, I knew that in order for me to celebrate his gift of life, I had to turn our dream into a reality. I felt that the best way that I could try to connect to him would be to travel the extent of the wilderness of Mount Diablo and commune with the individual crags found on and around the Mountain.

For years I had imagined this link-up and had formulated different ways to complete this fairly large undertaking. Diablo has four main areas, which doesn't seem like much, however, many of the areas have a multitude of crags. Pine Canyon, for instance has ten main crags, Boy Scout Rocks has three tiers, Butt Rock stands alone, and Wanna Getaway is miles from all the other formations on the complete opposite aspect of Pine Canyon. The relentless early September heat was surely to make an appearance, but the longer days would allow for early starts and late finishes.

**ABOVE**

*Lucy* (5.11a) is found on the south-facing upper terminus of Pine Canyon's Deliverance Ridge and packs a punch over 60-feet of steep climbing.

**RIGHT**

Perry Doig on *I Once Was Lost*,  
(5.10d).

**NEXT PAGE**

Sean Burke and Todd Worsfold on pitch two of the *West Face Route* (5.10a), *Rock of Ages*, Pine Canyon.

The Rock of Ages formation ranges from crumbly and loose to solid and clean and is characterized by a large cave half way up the wall. The *West Face Route* has some significant runouts (30-feet) on easier terrain but the most difficult sections have nearby bolts to protect the crux moves.











# LEFT

Sean Burke on *Redneck Rampage* (5.11a), Terra Dome, Pine Canyon.

Terra Dome is a secluded 30 meter-tall dome of rock on the far west side of Pine Canyon. The climbs are all on the north face and are mostly shady year-round. *Redneck Rampage* traverses over a mossy slab and then follows a curvy dihedral leading to a series of spectacular stemming moves.

# RIGHT

Perry Doig on *Old Dinosaur*, 5.11c.



At 4:30pm my partner Ben Darcy met me in the parking lot to begin the traverse of Mount Diablo. We sorted gear, talked about snacks and then quested off. We began climbing on a crag formerly known as The Lump, now known as Terradome, on a route called Money Shot. Its exquisite slab has distinctive cruxes and beautiful positioning, overlooking the towers surrounding us. As we worked our way through the routes on the crag and onto Deliverance, time disappeared. We found ourselves soloing Castle Rock Ridge and Arete into nightfall, where we crashed for a few hours on the summit. In the darkness with a new moon we were surrounded by the mellow songs of Great Horned Owls. At one moment two Great Horned Owls landed in front of us just feet away, their golden eyes staring into ours, a reminder of our journey and purpose, to celebrate the life of our friend Omar.

An hour or so before daybreak we rose and saw the Owl fully expanded, greeting the new day from a nearby spire. We made our way to Mammoth to begin our day, soaring up Africanized Direttissima, a 200 foot pitch which was at one time was 5.11b, but broken holds have made the crux boulder problem more like V4/5. From there we ran down to the Miller Pillar where we climbed Right Cheek in the already sweltering temperatures.

After careful deliberation we opted to hop on bikes and make our way to Wanna Getaway, as the temps were already in the high 80s at 7:30am. We saddled our bikes and rode off into Hidden Canyon, where Tuolumne style slabs circle the viewer. Though they are sandstone and not

granite, the rock here is unique and semi-solid, covered in micro edges, crystals and knobs. It was 92 degrees when we roped up for Stemple Slab. The moves quickly flowed and charged us for the technical portion of our traverse. We rushed over to Don't Stress and danced up the black dihedral in the last seconds of shade, moving in the oasis of the delightful 80-degree temps, literally lying on the face like an overheated rattlesnake while belaying.

We looked over to the North Lump, a neighboring crag, its black sandstone and quartzite specs glittering in the pure summer Sun. There stood our final crux of the day; Heartline; a breathtakingly unique, right-slanting diagonal dike that fires straight out of the Earth, rising proudly above a featureless, 20-foot, run out crux. My partner was sensibly not into it, as the climb had been in the sun for hours at this point. I oscillated for a moment before we pushed forward to the base of the climb, surely 110-degrees in the mid-day sun. After inching through the slab I focused my breath into the crux boulder problem and then finally onto the lovely summit.





## ABOVE

Todd Worsfold on *Lucy* (5.11a).

The crux of *Lucy* comes within the first twenty feet of climbing as the route moves out the left edge of a small cave. Pictured here, Todd Worsfold executes the sequence involving dynamic movement and delicate footwork to exit the cave and gain the upper headwall.

## NEXT PAGE

Steven Roth on *Deliverance*, (5.12b), Deliverance Rock, Pine Canyon.

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With the cruxes now behind us we still had 14 pitches of climbing to go, a massive bike ride and five or so miles left to hike on top of that. We snacked on dried fruit and hopped on our bikes and rode into the nauseating heat toward Boy Scout Rocks. When we got there we rested, ate sandwiches and drank cold piped water by the gallon before we dropped into the Upper Tier via Chouinard's Crack and then continued to Jungle Book on Middle Tier. To our amazement we had the shady Lower Tier and the Amazing Face all to ourselves. After making quick work of those climbs, we scooted over to Butt Rock and climbed In the Butt, a 5.7 chimney to a unique summit.

We hopped on our bikes and rolled over and down, through the dried creeks of Pine Canyon. Ditching the bikes, we schlepped up the narrow trail, legs heavy with

lactic acid toward the Pulpit, the beginning of the final link-up of the traverse. As we moved into the slot canyon, the sun was just a fist width above the ridgeline as we hurdled ourselves through the final five pitches of climbing. After a total of 27 pitches, nearly 3,000 feet of climbing, 6,000 feet of overall elevation gain with difficulties up to 5.12 and about 20 miles of hiking and mountain biking, we named this link-up The Omeezee Traverse, in honor of our good friend Omar Gutierrez.

The wind began to blow in the still summer evening. I made the last few moves onto the sun scorched alpenglow of the summit pinnacle, laughed and then yelled, "Off Belay!" Together we stood in the last of the day's red light, bathing in our exhaustion. My mind was with Omar a year earlier, at the same place, in the same position, over watching the same landscape, hearing his voice echo, "This is one of the best experiences of my life."



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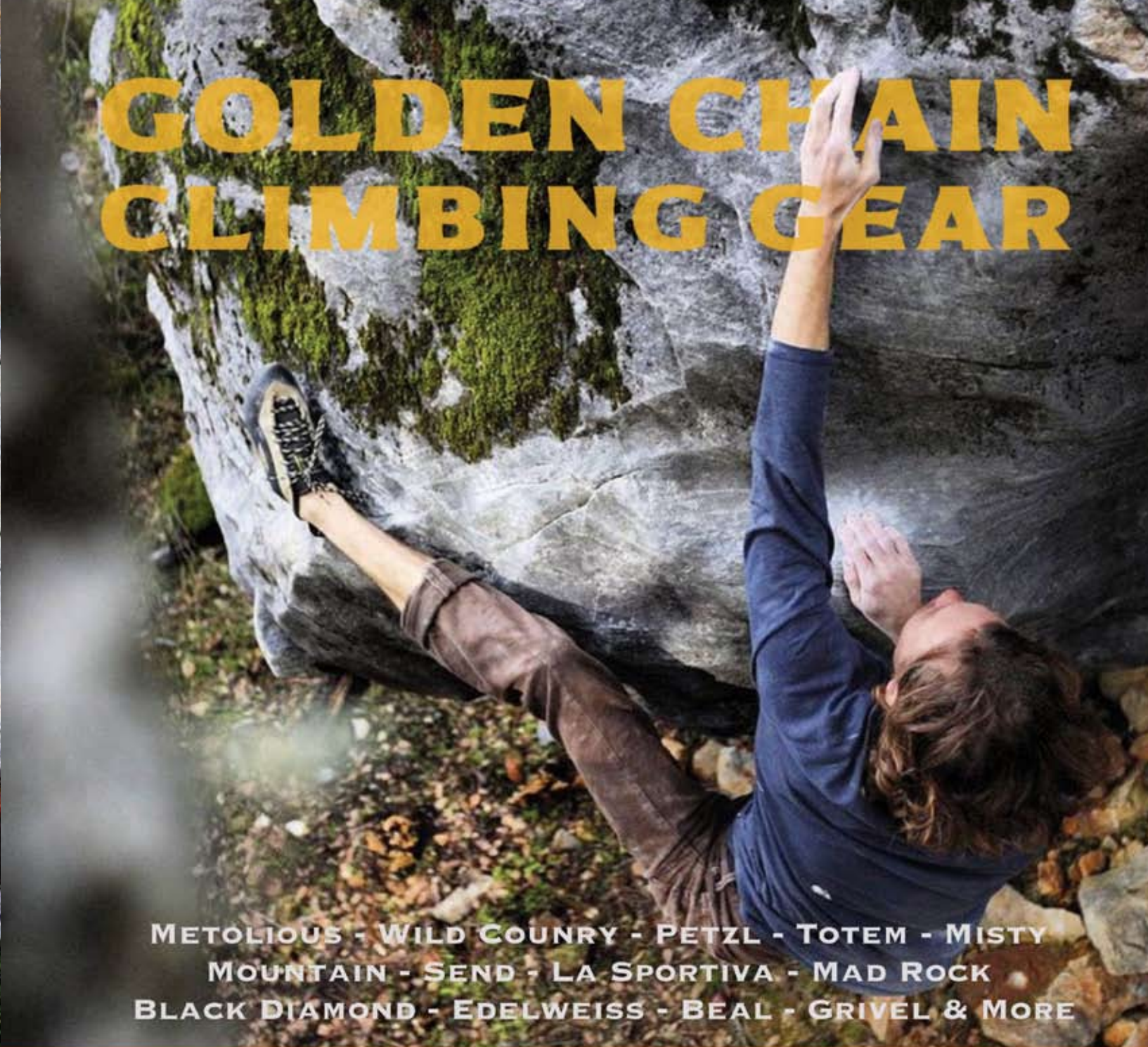
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