

# RED ROCKS

## A Climber's Guide

by Jerry Handren

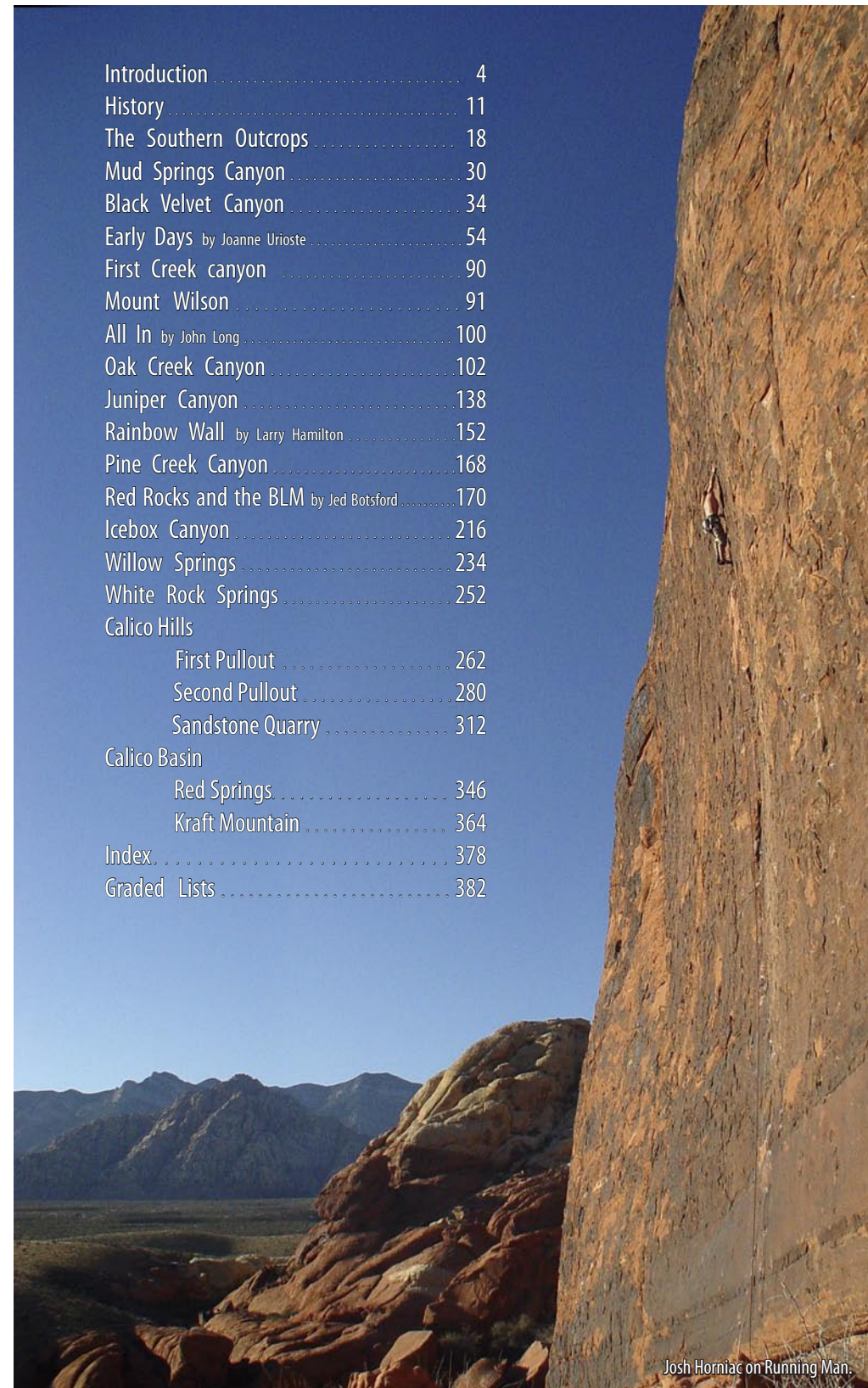
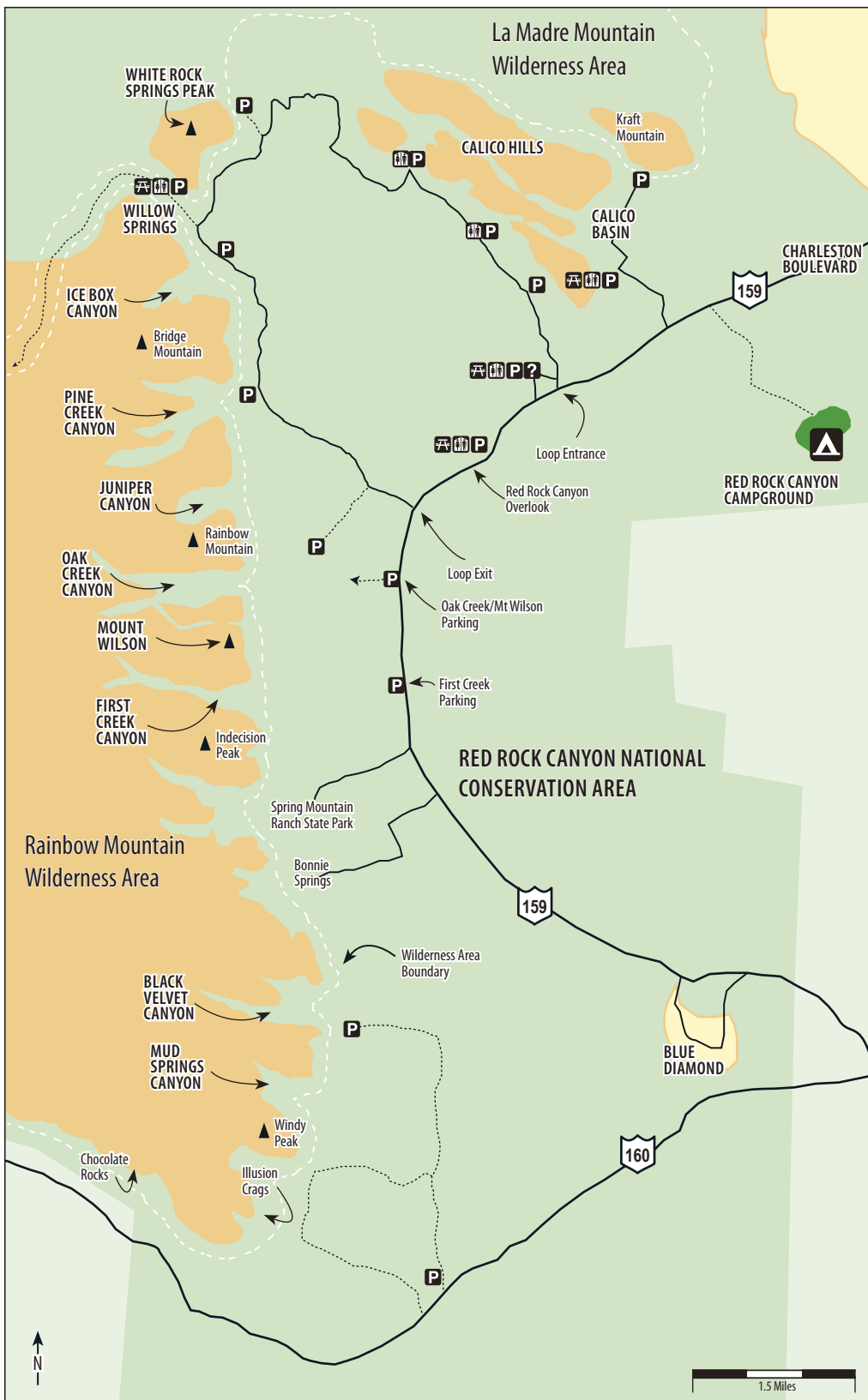
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### **Warning! Read before using this book.**

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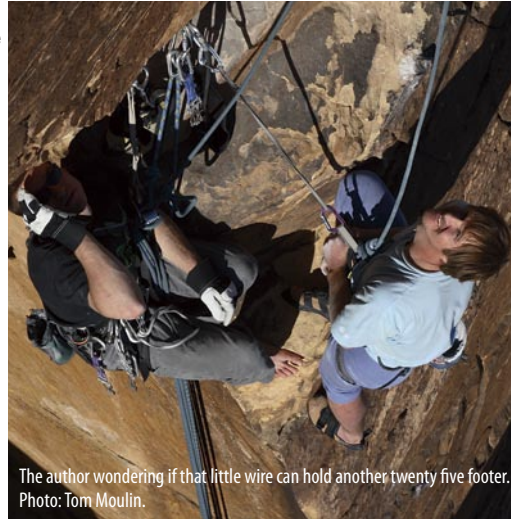
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Josh Horniac on Running Man.

About this Guidebook

This guidebook documents the rock climbs found in the Red Rock Canyon National Conservation area, 20 miles west of the Las Vegas strip. It includes a substantial number of routes not found in previous guidebooks. It also expands on the descriptions of many of the older routes and attempts to correct some lingering errors. In compiling the route descriptions for both new and older climbs, I have tried to use recent, first-hand experience as much as possible. Many descriptions were culled from various Red Rocks locals within a few hours of an ascent. Also, in researching this book, I climbed hundreds of routes myself in an attempt to make this the most complete, detailed, and accurate Red Rocks guidebook to date.

To give a flavour of the short but lively history of Red Rock Canyon I have included an historical essay in the introductory section, written with Larry DeAngelo, the unofficial historian of Red Rocks. There are also several articles spread throughout the main text, written by some of the main protagonists. If the routes in the photographs throughout this book seem unfamiliar, that's because I have made a deliberate attempt to shoot new and/or obscure routes.



The author wondering if that little wire can hold another twenty five footer. Photo: Tom Moulin.

The Land, Rules and Regulations

The climbing in Red Rock Canyon lies within the boundaries of the Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area. The land received this designation in 1990 to protect and preserve what was then recognized as a resource of national importance. The land is managed by the Bureau of Land Management, from the Las Vegas District Office, (702 515 5000).

There are two wilderness areas within Red Rock National Conservation Area, Rainbow Mountain Wilderness area, which includes all the canyons, and La Madre Mountain Wilderness which includes the Kraft Mountain area of Calico Basin.

Scenic Loop Hours	
November 1 to February 28/29	6:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.
March 1 to March 31	6:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M.
April 1 to September 30	6:00 A.M. to 8:00 P.M.
October 1 to October 31	6:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M.

Entrance Fee Schedule		
Daily	Car	\$5.00
	Motorcycle	\$2.00
Annual Passes	Red Rock	\$20.00
	America the Beautiful Pass. (Interagency)	\$85.00
	Golden Age	\$10.00
Cabs, Buses Etc.	Per Passenger	\$2.00
	AS OF MAY 2007	

Most of the northern half of Red Rock Canyon is accessed from the Red Rock Scenic Drive. This is a gated 13-mile-long loop road which requires an entrance fee, and has restricted access hours.

Vehicles left inside the park Scenic Drive after hours are subject to a heavy fine (\$120 in 2007). Please note that this includes the parking area beside the fee station at the Scenic Drive entrance. Late exit permits are available to provide an additional three hours after the normal closing time. These permits are available only for multi-pitch routes, not for the Calico Hills or Willow Springs.

To obtain a permit, you can call up to seven days in advance. No permits are issued after 4.30 p.m. There is no paper permit to pick up, just call 702 515 5050. If you do not reach one of the climbing rangers, you will need to leave the following information. If using a cell phone make sure your signal is clear.

1. Your name, address, and phone number.
2. Your vehicle license number/state and description.
3. The date of your climb and location where you will park.
4. Which permit and route you are applying for.
5. An emergency contact name and phone number.

If you have additional questions or comments feel free to call a climbing ranger (Monday to Friday 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) at 702 515 5000.

For multi-day routes it is also possible to get an overnight permit. These are issued for the following walls only:

- Mt. Wilson ( 1-2 nights)
- Eagle Wall (1 night)
- Rainbow Wall (1-2 nights)
- Buffalo Wall (1-3 nights)
- Hidden Wall (1-3 nights)
- Bridge Mountain. (1 night)

With the exception of the Red Springs parking area in Calico Basin, all the areas outside the Scenic Drive are not subject to the same time restrictions.

Camping is not allowed anywhere in the National Conservation Area. In particular this includes the network of dirt roads, accessed from route 160, which provide access to Black Velvet Canyon and the other areas at the southern end of the range. The rangers regularly patrol this area looking for campers, and the fines are stiff.

There are several other rules that relate directly to climbers.

1. It is prohibited to chip, glue, chisel or scar the rock.
2. Climbing is not allowed within 50 feet of any Native American rock art site.
3. It is prohibited to place bolts in either of the wilderness areas. This includes all the canyons and also the Kraft Mountain area of Calico Basin. The fine is \$300 per instance, so if you are unsure about the status of your proposed route contact the climbing rangers.

An important development in May 2007 was the release of the

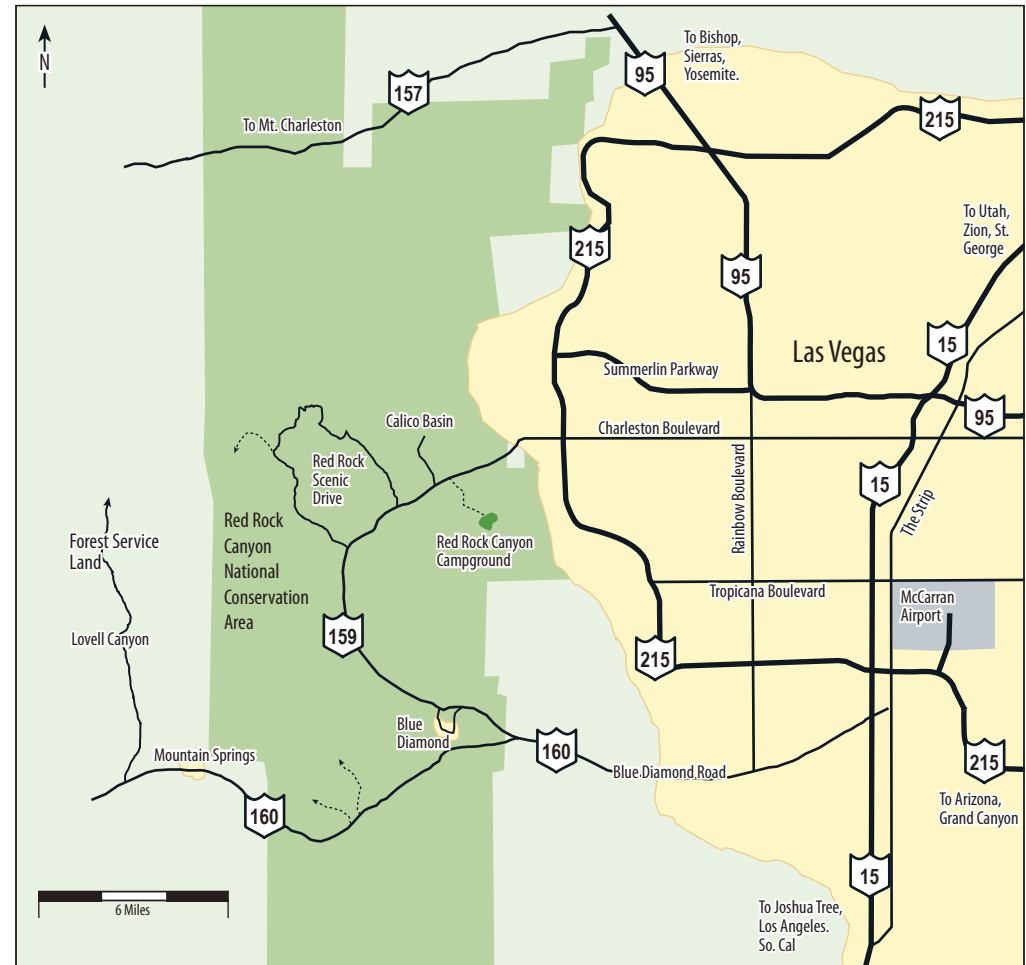
Preliminary Action Plan. This plan was created by the BLM in co-operation with various interested groups, including the Climbers Liason Council. It includes a proposal for a permit system for new routes that would allow for the addition of new bolts, with certain provisions.

The BLM runs a visitor center just inside the Scenic Drive entrance, there is an exhibit which provides interesting historical and geological background information on Red Rocks. This is where you can get current information about the National Conservation Area.

The activities of climbers are under close scrutiny in the Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area. It is very important that climbers treat Red Rocks with the utmost care. This means using Leave No Trace Ethics, treating other users with respect, and observing the rules and regulations.

At present there is a twenty-four hour limit to parking along route 159. If you are planning to park here for a multi-day objective you will want to make sure that this is ok with the rangers.

Access Map



## The Rock

Red Rock Canyon is composed of a three-thousand-foot thick escarpment of Aztec Sandstone, which has weathered into a series of ten major canyons which drain from west to east. This rock is generally quite well bonded, being more solid than that found in the other great sandstone areas of the west, such as Zion or Canyonlands. Another major difference is that much of the rock is covered with a thin layer of desert varnish which, on many of the faces, has partially weathered to leave behind a sea of good in-cut edges. It is these edges which allow routes like Dream of Wild Turkeys, Eagle Dance, and Crimson Chrysalis to climb such impressive features at a reasonable standard. In general, the unvarnished white and red rock can be soft, sandy and rounded in its natural state, although it cleans up well on popular routes to give very enjoyable climbing. The varnished rock provides superb climbing, especially on some of the north-facing walls where the varnish has resisted weathering and there are far fewer face holds. On these walls the long, clean, crack and corner systems provide some of the best routes in Red Rock Canyon. The edges that are the hallmark of so much of the climbing at Red Rock Canyon can be quite fragile in their natural state. On popular climbs the loose holds and fragile lips are gradually

cleaning up, but even on these routes it is not uncommon to pop a foothold or two. Some of the more recent and/or less travelled routes can feel very fragile and require careful climbing. Climbers also have to be aware of larger blocks and flakes which crop up from time to time and can be amazingly unstable.

By far the most important factor affecting rock quality is precipitation. The Aztec Sandstone is porous and easily absorbs water; when waterlogged the rock becomes much weaker, causing holds to break with alarming ease. During long stretches of dry weather the rock will dry out in a few hours after an isolated rainstorm. However, after a long spell of heavy rain, it can take up to three days for the rock to dry out. In fact, during a wet "El Nino" year the rock can feel snappy all winter long. It is important to stay off routes when the rock is wet, especially in the Calico Hills where the rock is particularly soft after rain, and the loss of a crucial hold can easily destroy a classic route for good.

Despite these words of doom, the rock in Red Rock Canyon is generally superb and a joy to climb, many of the classic routes rank with the best of their grade anywhere in the world.

A sea of edges. Mike Ward on Brief Encounter, Panty Wall.



## The Weather

The numbers say it all: Red Rock Canyon is often blessed with perfect climbing conditions for months on end, with the spring and fall each usually having three months of perfect weather.

Average temperature 66.3 degrees (19 degrees centigrade). Average yearly rainfall 4.13 inches (10.64 centimeters). Average daily humidity 29 percent. 211.5 clear days annually, 82.4 partly cloudy days, 71.3 cloudy days.

Month	Average Daily Low (°F)	Average Daily High (°F)	Sunny Days	Average Rainfall (inches)
January	33	56	24	0.5
February	37	67	22	0.46
March	42	68	25	0.41
April	49	77	26	0.22
May	59	87	27	0.22
June	68	98	28	0.09
July	75	104	27	0.45
August	73	101	26	0.54
September	65	94	28	0.32
October	53	81	27	0.25
November	41	66	24	0.43
December	33	67	24	0.32

Red Rock Canyon is one of the few areas that can genuinely claim to offer year-round climbing. It is possible to find reasonable climbing conditions on all but a few of the hottest days of the year, when temperatures creep up towards 110°F or more.

Nevertheless, during the hottest and coldest times of year, comfortable climbing depends on making good choices and being prepared to adapt your objectives to suit the prevailing weather of the day. In particular, warm weather climbing takes some getting used to; sunny approaches must be tackled early in the morning and climbing is not feasible until your chosen route goes into the shade. Climbing in the canyons during colder weather also requires some thought. The difference between sun and shade is often dramatic, 30°F or more. It is quite common to be comfortable in the parking area and freezing on the route. The temperature in the canyons is usually at least 10°F colder than town and can feel a lot colder if there is any wind. A windshell is almost always a good idea. By contrast, the south-facing walls in the Calico Hills can feel hot on all but the coldest days so bring plenty of water and some light clothing.

Wind is an important factor to consider at all times of year. The reason is not so much how it affects the climbing as what it does to rappel ropes. The sharp flakes that cover many of the faces are always a problem when rappelling, but with the wind whipping the ropes all over the wall, the chances of a snagged rope are greatly increased. Some of the taller walls in Red Rock Canyon are very exposed, and if your chosen route involves a rappel descent, strong winds can pose a serious hazard. Walls such as the Eagle Wall and Crimson Chrysalis are best avoided under these conditions.

It is worth remembering that the weather data are only averages. During El Nino years, when a huge bubble of warm water shows up in the Western Pacific, Red Rock Canyon will often have a miserable wet winter. During any winter, snowstorms can happen any time from October until April, with the snow sticking around for many days in the canyons. In the summer, a sudden storm can cause very cold conditions on long backcountry routes, and any canyon can flash flood without warning.



A spring storm, April 2005.

## Staying in Red Rock Canyon

### Transport

Although some hardy individuals do without, a car is pretty much essential for climbing at Red Rock Canyon. There is no public transportation system, and the distances involved are just too great for walking to be a reasonable option. Las Vegas is one of the least expensive places in the country to rent a car.

### Camping, Groceries, Showers Etc.

At present, there is only one campground close to Red Rock Canyon. It is located at the end of a one mile long spur road on the southeast side of route 159. The spur road is called Moenkopi, and is on the right 1.9 miles east of the Scenic Drive entrance, and 0.5 miles east of the Calico Basin Road. Alternatively, if you are driving west out of town along Charleston Boulevard, it is on the left, 3.2 miles west of the Charleston/215 interchange.

It is a relatively primitive campsite with pit toilets, picnic tables and a water tap, all for \$10 per night. The sites are available on a first come first served basis and there is a 14 day limit. The Campground is closed June, July and August.

Unfortunately there have been quite a few instances of theft in the last couple of years, so don't leave valuables in the tent.

Within five miles from the campsite, and getting closer every year, the west end of Charleston Boulevard is one of the main suburban shopping areas in Las Vegas with all manner of grocery stores, coffee shops, casinos etc.

Showers are available for \$4.00 at the Red Rock Climbing Center, 8201 W. Charleston Blvd. Phone: 702 254 5604

Sahara West Library (9600 West Sahara Ave.; 702 507 3630) is at the corner of Grand Canyon and Sahara. Surprisingly, Las

Vegas has a very good library system, and if you're here for an extended visit it is well worth getting a library card. It's free, and a photo ID is all that's required to get one. The West Sahara Library has twenty seven internet terminals that you can use free for an hour.

Free wireless Internet service is provided at Desert Rock Sports, located at 8221 W. Charleston Blvd., a few doors up from the Red Rock Climbing Center. As well as being a retailer of all things climbing, this store often puts on special events such as slide shows and film screenings.

There is dispersed camping in Lovell Canyon, the canyon to the west of the Red Rock range. It is accessed from route 160 by taking a right at the bottom of the hill to the west of Mountain Springs. There are no facilities, and it's a long drive (25 miles from the Scenic Drive), but there are some nice spots to spend the night in a pinch. Stays are limited to 14 days.

### Climbing Alternatives

If soggy rock is curtailing climbing at Red Rock Canyon, there is a lot of limestone sport climbing nearby which can be climbable as soon as the rain stops. For information on these areas check out Islands in the Sky (Rockfax, 2001) and Las Vegas Limestone (Fly'n Carpet Publishing, 2000).

If the local Limestone sport climbing doesn't appeal, then it is a very reasonable drive (2½ hours) to Joshua Tree. The weather in Joshua Tree is similar to Red Rock Canyon, but the granitic rock is very quick drying.

If the weather really craps out you can stay fit at Red Rock Climbing Center, 8201 W. Charleston Blvd. Phone: 702 254 5604. The fees are \$15 for a Day Pass and \$12 for a bouldering pass.

## Notes on the use of this Guide

### Layout

The routes described in this guidebook are generally grouped in chapters according to the main canyon from which they are accessed, or in the case of the Calico Hills, the parking area from which they are accessed.

Within each chapter most routes are grouped into areas which correspond to either particular crags or major topographical features.

The chapters are arranged from south to north, starting with the Southern Outcrops and finishing with Kraft Rocks.

In the canyons the main areas are described from south to north going clockwise around the walls.

### Route Descriptions

#### Route Number

Some routes within an area are assigned a route number. This number is used to identify the route on any photodiagrams, plan maps, or topos of that area. In most cases routes are on the same page as their photodiagram. In certain sections, where the route descriptions are spread over several pages, the photodiagram will always be within that section.

#### Route Names

Generally the route names are those given by the first ascent party. However, Red Rocks has many mystery routes with no

established name. Rather than having numerous "Unknowns" I have taken the liberty of providing a name for every route in the guidebook. In future guidebook editions some route names will undoubtedly change as their real names come to light. Hopefully the confusion that this causes is the lesser of two evils.

#### Length

This is the actual climbing length of the route rather than the vertical height gained. It takes the place of the commitment grade (I,II,III,IV, etc.) since along with the description, it gives a pretty accurate idea of the scale of the undertaking.

#### Grade

The standard rating system is used: 5.0 to 5.13 with the grades from 5.10 up subdivided into a,b,c and d. In a few cases I have used seriousness ratings R and X. But generally, where a route is known to be serious for some reason, this will be mentioned in the description. Do not assume that a route is safe just because there is no seriousness rating or any mention of danger in the description.

#### Star Rating

This guidebook uses a three-star system to rate the quality of the routes. Obviously this is a very subjective undertaking and these ratings should be taken with a grain of salt. Certain

personal biases no doubt crept into the assessment. So, for the record, I should say that clean varnished rock, sweeping natural lines, and sustained climbing are factors that will push a route up the scale. Flaky rock, dirt, and a wandering or contrived line will push a route down.

I have tried to be very conservative in doling out stars so that the really good routes stand out; this is mostly to point visiting climbers at the very best routes. The fact that a route has no stars does not mean that it is not worth doing; instead I have tried to mention in the text if a route is really poor quality. The sport climbing in the Calico Hills posed a little bit of a problem because there is a lot of similarity from one route to the next. Generally, even the best routes would not be considered world class in the same way the best canyon routes definitely are. With this in mind, the star ratings for sport climbs and trad climbs are not really comparable. Generally, in the Calico Hills I have tried to give the extra stars to routes with particularly nice moves, good rock, or some other special feature that makes them stand out from the crowd.

### Symbols

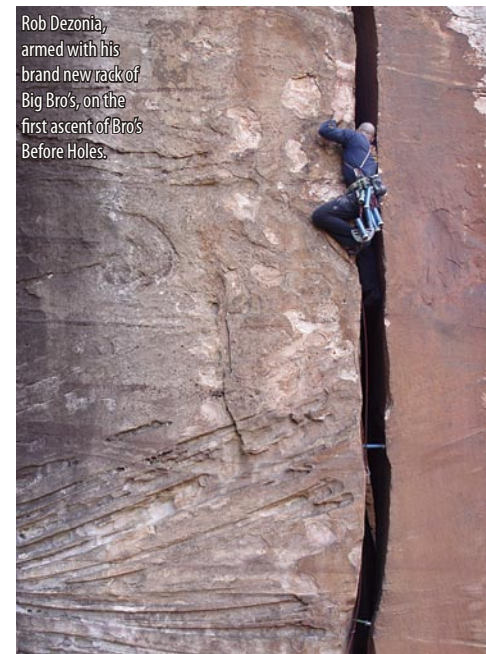
# A sport Clim. A route that is protected exclusively by closely spaced bolts, with a fixed anchor at the top.

! Old bolts. Many of the old 1/4 inch bolts have been replaced with solid 3/8 inch bolts, but a few still remain. These bolts are not reliable and should be backed up wherever possible.

† The dagger symbol is used for routes where I have been unable to track down a definitive description, the given route description should be treated as a very rough guide at best.

### First Ascent Details

Where possible I have included the names of the first ascent team. Many of the more recent routes were submitted anonymously and so this information is not available. There are also many older routes whose origin is unknown.



Rob Dezonía, armed with his brand new rack of Big Bro's, on the first ascent of Bro's Before Holes.

Route Number	Route name	Route length	Route grade	Quality rating	Symbols	First Ascent Details
2	Potso's Pudding	90'	5.6	†	!	Betsy Herbst, Joe Herbst. February 1972. Single rack to 2.5", double 0.75"-1.25" cams. Gear

This route climbs the steep, right-facing corner in the front of the buttress. Quite an impressive line for the grade. It finishes on the same ledge as Zacker Cracker.

### Equipment Recommendations

Where possible I have tried to include a recommended gear list. This is a very rough guide to what a climber comfortable at the grade might need to protect a particular climb.

Single rack to 3"

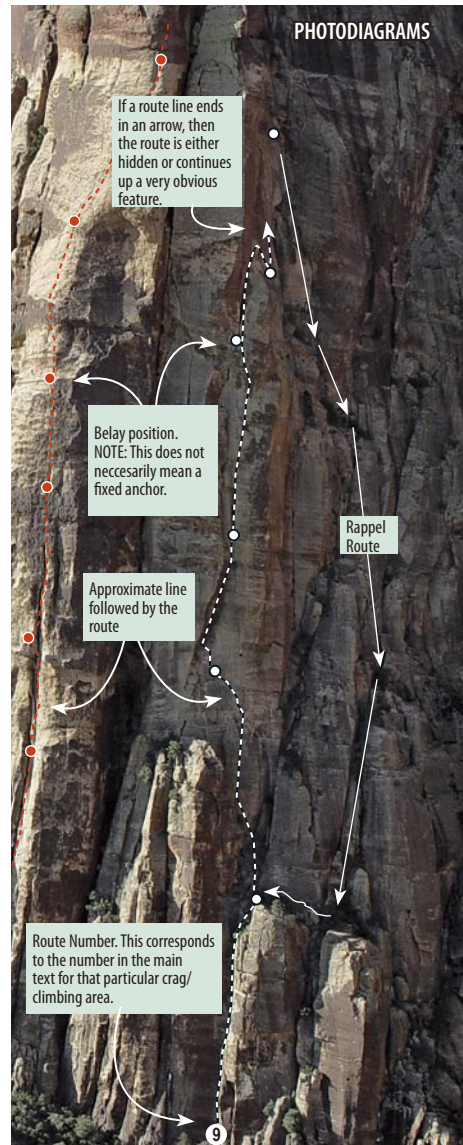
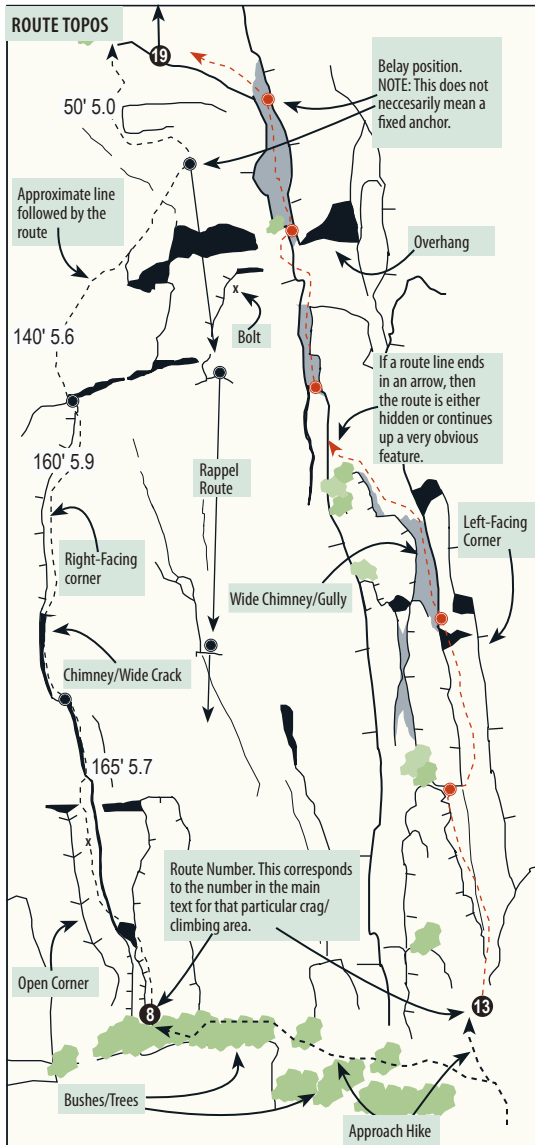
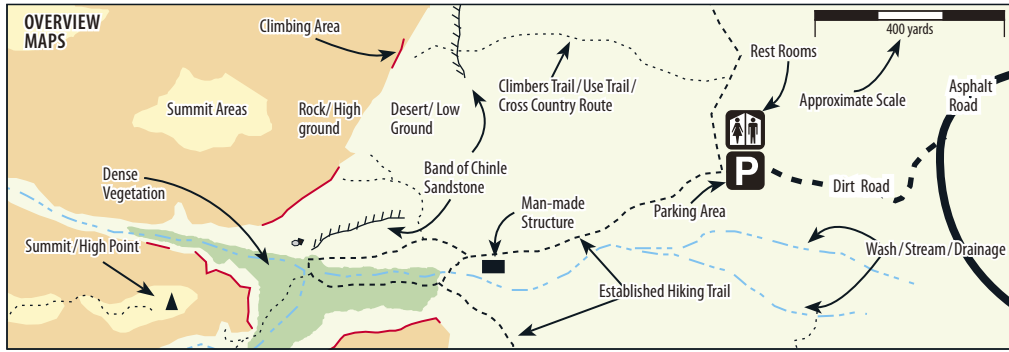
This would be a full set of wires, and a full set of cams from #00 TCU to #3 Camelot. It would also include a number of biners and slings and/or quickdraws appropriate for the particular type of climb.

Cam Size	Metolius	BD Camelots	Wild Country	CCH Aliens	Trango Big Bro
0.4"	00	0.1		Black	
0.5"	0	0.2	00	Blue	
0.6"	1	0.3	0	Green	
0.75"	2	0.4	0.5	Yellow	
1"	3	0.5	1	Grey	
1.25"	4	0.75	1.5	Red	
1.5"	5	1	2	Orange	
1.75"	6	2	2.5	Violet	
2"	7	2	3	White	
2.5"	8	3	3.5		
3"	9	3 to 4	4		
3.5"	10	4	4 to 5		1
4"-5"		5	5		2
5"-7"		6	6		2 to 3
8"-12"					4
11"-18"					5

### Pitch Numbers

On many of the multi-pitch routes (e.g. on the Black Velvet Wall), adjacent climbs will often share the first several pitches. Where this is the case, the pitch numbers of a route that break off from the main line reflect the number of pitches required to reach that point. For example, Ancient Futures starts at the third belay of Epinephrine; so the first pitch number is 4.

Maps, Topos and Photodiagrams



A brief History by Larry DeAngelo and Jerry Handren

Red Rocks stands unique in the world of rock climbing. Its position results from an accidental confluence of the time, the people, and a spectacular escarpment of unclimbed rock. The time was the 1970s and the sport of rock climbing was changing. During the previous decade, American rock climbing was dominated by impressive ascents of Yosemite's big walls. Open any American Alpine Journal of the period and you are sure to find the words: Royal Robbins, Grade VI, 5.9, A4. These walls represented committing steps into the unknown and demanded a large measure of toughness, boldness, and technological innovation. The latter was closely associated with the chrome-moly piton. These were resilient and reusable and well-suited to Yosemite's granite cracks. But, after a decade of wall climbing, two things had become apparent. The first was that big walls were not impossible and they no longer represented an ultimate challenge lying near the limits of the best climbers. The second was that a decade of placing and removing tough steel pitons was taking a heavy toll on the rock. Climbers were ready for new challenges, in both climbing difficulty and in preservation of the rock. The stage was set for the "clean climbing revolution." In Britain there was already a long tradition of climbing with natural protection. The use of runners and chockstones, both artificial and natural, allowed British climbers to extract the maximum challenge from their comparatively limited rock resources. This was something Royal Robbins observed first-hand on trip to Britain in the mid-1960s. He perceived this as the logical next step in American climbing. His 1967 ascent of Nutcracker Sweet (as it was then known) was the first step in popularizing natural protection in Yosemite. His friend Yvon Chouinard began importing British chocks to supplement his already famous line of chrome moly pitons. Chouinard was an innovator, and soon developed his own variation, the Hexentric, and of course it was featured in his catalog. The Chouinard catalog was much more than a mere listing of products. For an entire generation of climbers it was the textbook from which they learned to climb. When "climbing books" were giving advice such as "always maintain three points of contact," the Chouinard catalog showed how to nest pitons in flared cracks and use hero loops to extend reach on difficult aid placements. This was information climbers could use! The 1972 edition carried Doug Robinson's seminal article, "The Whole Natural Art of Protection." Robinson went beyond a simple primer on nut use. He articulated the concept of clean climbing as a way to elevate the elements of boldness, judgment, ingenuity, and commitment. His article was a call to arms that resonated with American climbers and defined the standards of an adventurous new generation.

None of this was news to Joe Herbst, who already knew Doug Robinson from the time he had spent as a helper at the Palisade School of Mountaineering. Growing up in Las Vegas, Joe had Red Rocks in his backyard. As a teenager, he began exploring the canyons and walls. Veteran outdoorsman Howard Booth recalls that it wasn't long before young Joe was advancing beyond his older mentors. Following his Red Rocks apprenticeship, Joe polished his skills in the California Palisades and developed his friendship with Doug Robinson.

And so it happened that in 1970, when Joe returned from summer in the Palisades and autumn in Yosemite, he was well-prepared for the blank climbing canvas that was Red Rocks. And thus it was that this majestic climbing area was born simultaneously with the clean climbing revolution and a widely expanded appreciation of the wilderness experience and ethic. Joe got to work without delay. His attention was drawn to the biggest and most ambitious walls. Immediately he free-soloed Mount Wilson's huge east face. Jubilant Song, on the south face of Windy Peak, and the elegant line of Triassic Sands came next. The latter was a warm-up for an attempt on the Rainbow Wall. This wall, the "Sandstone Halfdome" as Joe thought of it, almost brought disaster to Joe and Yosemite partner Larry Hamilton when a loose flake shredded their gear but spared their lives. Though Joe has left an impressive list of first ascents, perhaps his biggest legacy is the climbs left unrecorded. There are many. Tom Kaufman, a frequent partner of Joe's, estimated that eighty percent of their routes never made it to a guidebook. Anyone who has explored off the beaten path in Red Rocks is sure to have had the experience of climbing for hours only to come across an ancient length of faded and brittle one-inch webbing as the sole reminder of an adventure decades ago. Not content to merely tickle the toes of giants, Joe Herbst immediately targeted the biggest and most imposing walls in the range. His "Big Three" were all accomplished before almost all the shorter walls and crag routes. The Rainbow Wall was climbed in spring, 1973 with Larry Hamilton. In Fall, 1973, Joe and Tom Kaufman climbed the Velvet Wall. As if this were not enough, Joe and Larry Hamilton returned to Wilson in 1975 to climb the impressive Aeolian Wall. Once the big walls were out of the way, Herbst pioneered numerous shorter climbs. In particular he scoured the escarpment for clean-cut Yosemite style cracks such as The Schwa, Red Zinger and Orange Clonus. Herbst was well known as a master of off-widths and left an impressive legacy of grim knee grinders such as Beauty, Wise Guy's Offsize and hardest of all, Unfinished Symphony a route which regularly spits out modern day aspirants. During the early 1970s, the primary problem encountered by Joe Herbst was simply finding partners. Almost all of his routes in this time period were done in the company of out-of-towners. Larry Hamilton was frequently present for the biggest efforts, and Tom Kaufman often rode the bus in from Colorado for a long list of new routes. Jeff Lansing was one of the few locals who was a serious rock climber. His original route on Mescalito in 1968 is the earliest recorded route in the first Red Rocks guidebook. Jeff also provided the impetus for what has paradoxically come to be regarded as a quintessential "Joe Herbst route", Ragged Edges.

Ironically, Joe never met his fellow Las Vegas, John Williamson. John also got into climbing in the late 1960s and sought adventure in his local mountains. Suffering from a similar lack of partners, John enlisted his friends into the sport. Most of his climbs fell into one of two categories. The first included short crag routes such as the Fox and the Great Red Book. These were often practice for the second group: long, multi-attempt, often multi-day ascents of complicated mountaineering walls. The east faces of Mount Wilson, Rainbow Mountain and