

# **BOULDERING PALISADES-KEPLER AND SELECT CLIMBS**



**BRYAN HANSEL**

I want to climb a mountain – any mountain – and put the world behind me,  
and when I reach the top turn into a piece of the sun.

Douglas Coupland, Girlfriend in a Coma

Bouldering Palisades-Kepler and select climbs:  
A Guidebook  
By Bryan Hansel

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Cover photo of Stephen Hauptli taking the jump.



**Author at Blue Mounds, MN**

**Warning and Disclaimer:** Climbing is dangerous.

You could die from climbing, and Bouldering is even more dangerous.

You could hurt yourself or someone else could hurt you. You could break a leg, sprain a wrist, cut your finger, poke an eye out, and that's just the start of all the injuries you could suffer. You know they say, "If you know a lot of climbers, pretty soon you'll know a dead climber." Seek professional help if you are new to the sport, or especially mental help if you've been climbing for awhile. The publisher takes no responsibility for any deaths or injuries that may occur because of the use of this guide. This guide is not a substitution for proper instruction.

There are three rules that will enable a climber to succeed at any pitch. Unfortunately, no one knows what they are.

John Gill

## INTRODUCTION

There are several reasons that I rock climb. The first is that it allows you to forget about everything in your life, except the current minute. It isn't just forgetting though. Rock climbing takes you out of your life to a place where there is no future and you have no past. It is pure existence in the moment.

The second reason that I love climbing is exploration. I can go places that no one has touched and see beauty in an overgrown crack that no sane climber would touch. Or sometimes walking 6 miles on old paths just to find a 30 foot tall 5.7 crack that you've heard is good. It's that first instant of touching the rock that makes it pay off. Or many times I've been out exploring Iowa's unclimbed areas to find nothing, but towering gullies of dirt and trees. Climbing for me has always been exploring.

No matter how far I've explored, there are a few places that I'm drawn to. A few of these places are ice climbing in Smugglers Notch, Vermont, Bouldering at Horsetooth, Colorado, crack climbing on Devil's Tower, Wyoming, and the rough rock of the Needles, South Dakota. With all these places I've traveled it's hard to believe that my favorite place to climb is in the middle of Iowa at Palisades-Kepler.

There is something about climbing next to the muddy Cedar River on dirty limestone cliffs with bad protection that draws me back. I learned to climb on these cliffs. I learned to boulder on its few fine boulders. The people that climb here are laid back, as opposed to the sport climbing crowd up the road at Pictured Rocks and Indian Bluffs. Or maybe it's just that I've climbed some of the routes over 100 times, and they seem like home to me.

Whatever the reason, Palisades-Kepler always fulfills me when I climb there.

I'm in the moment and exploring the already explored.

Enjoy.

Bryan Hansel, October 2, 2000

The broken boulders by the road  
Shall not commemorate my ruin.

Carl Sandburg, The Road and The End



**Bryan Hansel and  
Janell Tailer on Ring  
Trilogy, 5.6**

## GETTING THERE

Palisades-Kepler is located on the south side Highway 30 about halfway between Highway 1 and Interstate 380. The climbing follows the banks of the river closely throughout the park.

## THE FACILITIES

The park offers modern camping in a recently redeveloped campground. It has 76 campsites, 45 with electrical hookups. Restrooms and a shower are also available. There are four cabins available for rental and they are located directly above Lookout Point, the most popular place to climb in the park.

## ACCESS

P-K has been a climber friendly park with a long history of climbing – see if you can find the old ring pitons still in cracks all over the park. Keep it that way. Don't add bolts to the walls, most of which have been lead on gear. If it's a route in the 1978 guide book Rock: the climber's guide to Palisades-Kepler by John B. Ferguson, it has been lead without bolts. And don't chip holds. You only rob the more talented when you chip the rock to make it easier for you. This is a park, so before you consider cleaning a route know that it is illegal to do so.

The Wave is a bouldering area that is located on private property close to the park. It is not open to climbing, although it is arguably one of the best easy to moderate traverse problems in the state. It also has some nice up problems. For historical records only I've placed the wave on the main map. It is indicated by the number 0.

## RATINGS

Where possible I've included the ratings from the Rock: the climber's guide to Palisades-Kepler by John Ferguson. These ratings many feel stiff to you, because they were climbed when a 5.10 was still a 5.10. The rest of the routes and problems are rated by consensus. Enjoy the routes, ignore the ratings..

## GEAR

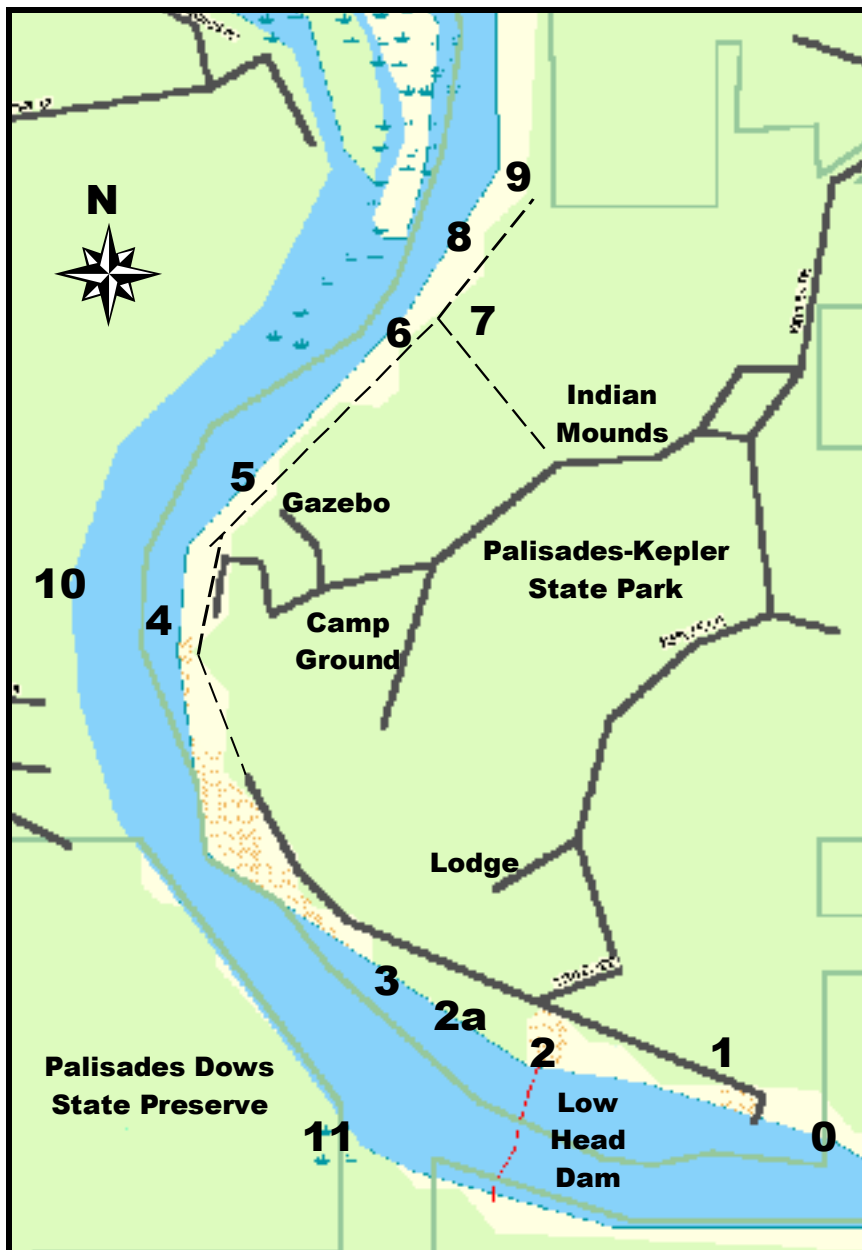
The gear is simple: a Sickle chalk bag, Metolious chalk, La Sportiva shoes, and a Cordless crash pad. An old tarp is nice to put on the ground during wet days. Always bring an alert spotter to guide your fall onto the crash pad. You may want to bring a rope because some of the high problems have bad top outs. If you find yourself being spanked by these problems buy a Metolious Simulator and easily boost your climbing grade by one notch within a month. See Appendix I for a suggested Iowa traditional rack and a perfect top rope set-up.

Yosemite	V-Scale	B-Scale
5.8	V0-	
5.9	V0	B0-
5.10	V0+	B0
5.10+	V1	B0+
5.11	V2	B1-
5.11+	V3	B1
5.12-	V4	B1
5.12	V5	B1+
5.12+	V6	B1+
5.13-	V7	B2-
5.13	V8	B2-
5.13+	V9	B2
5.14-	V10	B2
5.14	V11	B2
5.14+	V12	B2+
	V13	B2+
	V14	B2+

Author at the Hancher Blocks



# PALISADES-KEPLER STATE PARK MAIN MAP



If your mind isn't clouded by unnecessary things,  
This is the best season of your life.

Wu-Men

## THE CLIMBING AREAS

The climbing areas are divided up into 11 sections. The State Park side of this Palisades-Kepler is more developed, more often climbed and cleaner than the Preserve side of the river. Also, I've included photos when needed for each of the areas. This is by no means an exhaustive listing of all the climbs at the park. There are many other routes here for you to explore. I suggest just climbing anything that looks good, but John Ferguson's guidebook, Rock: the climber's guide to Palisades-Kepler State Park, will list most of the routes in the park and everything done up to 1978. This book is available for photocopying at the Cedar Rapids Library or for looking at in the Iowa Collection of the main University of Iowa Library.

### AREA ONE: ROADSIDE ATTRACTIONS

Just north of the boat ramp in the woods are several boulders. The east boulder called Roadside Attraction involves sit down starts and eliminates. Just decide which holds are in and which are out. The top out is dirty. There are three problems that are often done (Routes 1 to 3). The west boulder, called Another Roadside Attraction has several great problems on it. This is one of the best boulders in the park (Routes 4 to 8).

### THE ROUTES

1. Right Crack: Use only holds in the crack that is on the right side of the bulge.
2. Over the Bulge (5.7)\*: Sit start under the bulge and work up and over the

bulge. Skip any holds that make this less than 5.7. Variant: Sit start as far to the right as possible and traverse in to the left and then up and over.

3. The Right Side: Sit start on the right side of the bulge. Skip holds to make it fun.

4. The Far Right (B0)\*: Okay route as far right on the wall that looks fun. It has a sit start.

5. The Moderates (B0-)\*\*: Quality easy eliminate. Sit start hands in the large pocket. Work up the bulge and get a couple of good holds. Throw a fun little dyno to a jug under a loose rock that looks like it's about to come off the wall.

6. Democratic Corner (B1-)\*\*: Start with the same sit start as The Moderates and head up the slanted face on the right side of the dihedral. Keep your hands out of the crack and feet off of the left face.

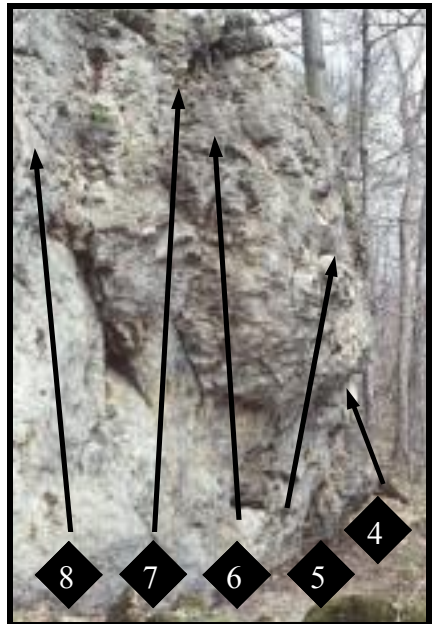
7. Capital Steps \*: Climb the dihedral.

8. The Leftist Slab (5.4 to 5.5)\*: Just climb up the steep slab to the left.

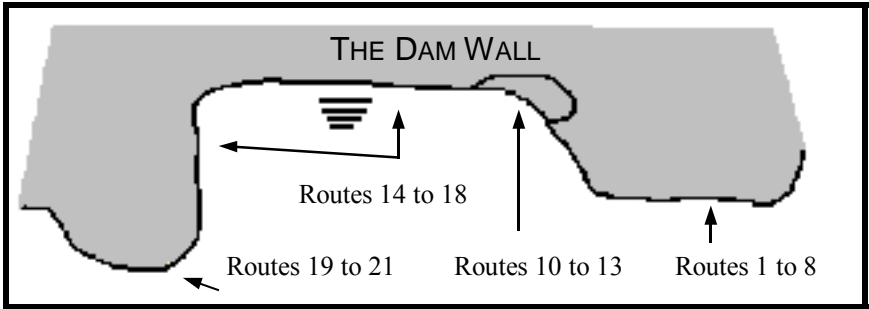
ROADSIDE ATTRACTION



ANOTHER ROADSIDE ATTRACTION





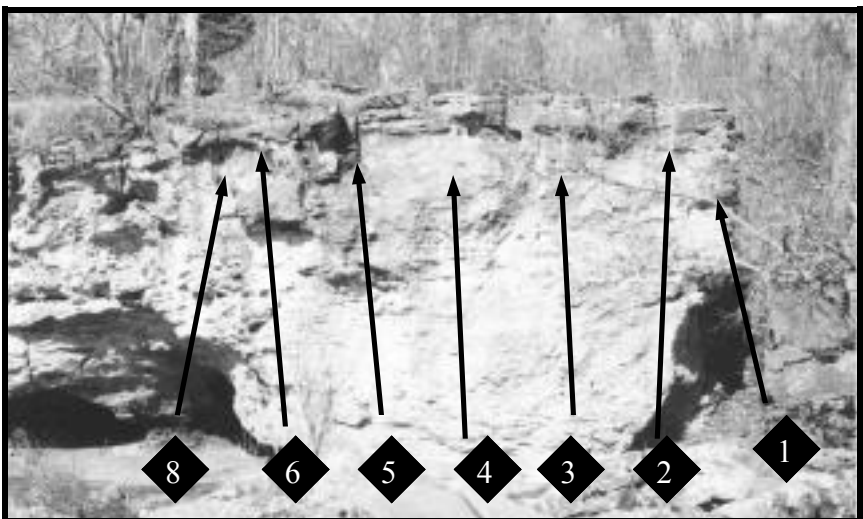


## AREA TWO: THE DAM WALL

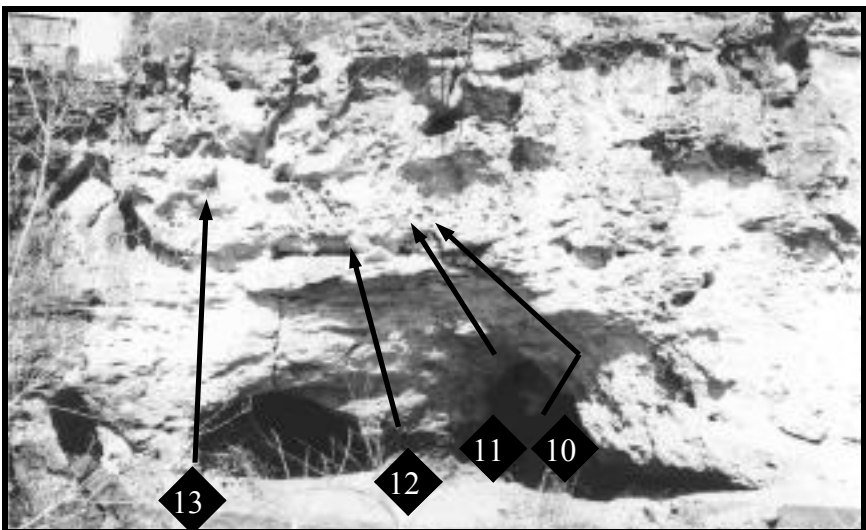
Located on the cement pad by the Low Head Dam the Dam Wall has many distinctly different sections: an easy wall, a huge easy traverse, a highball wall and a cave. This is the most used Bouldering area in the park. Expect to see people here climbing almost everyday. It gets really busy after 5 pm when IC and CR climbers get off of work and want to squeeze in a couple hours of climbing. Early in the spring the Bouldering here to Reef Rock may be completely underwater. Don't forget to try the Mega Traverse. This starts on Sloppy seconds and heads left until you run out of rock and then it turns around and comes back. How many laps can you do? My record is three.

## THE ROUTES

1. Sloppy Seconds (5.6)\*: This route is the farthest route to the right on the Dam Wall proper. Start under the overhang and head up on buckets and pinches.



2. Praying Mantle (5.7): Work up the right corner.
3. Praying Mantle Direct (5.7)\*: Start under a teardrop shaped hole on the top of the wall. And head up. Use a stylish mantle to surmount the top.
4. Old Gold (5.9)\*\*: Start at the bulge seven feet from the left corner. Climb over the bulge and then climb over the second bulge.
5. CCC Trail (5.8)\*: A balancy route right ascending route that starts a couple of feet right of Opus 1.
6. Opus 1 (5.8)\*\*\*: This route starts 3 feet from the corner and uses a small layback to gain a hidden bucket at the top.
7. 2722 (5.7)\*: Climb up two feet off of the ground at Praying Mantle and head left.
8. Bat Wall (5.5): Yawn. Head up the corner over the cave.
9. Novontny (5.7)\*: Climb Bat Wall and head right over the cave then top out or down climb Esmerelda at the stairs.
10. The Cave (5.9)\*\*\*: Start in the cave hanging onto the arch and back to the river, work around the back of the cave to the right. Stick your hand into a slot around the right corner. Grab holds above the cave using body tension and then top it or traverse to the left.
11. The Cave Direct (B1)\*\*\*: Start with a leg bar on the roof of the cave. Use



small holds to work your way to the bomber hold and head up.

12. The Cave Middle (B0-)\*\*: Sit start with a heel hook on the left of the rock dividing the two caves and lunge up the rock.

13. The Cave Left (5.8 to 5.9)\*: Sit start on the left wall of the left cave and work up and left. Skip hold to make it worth the one star rating.

14. Esmerelda (5.4): Climb right of the stairs to the bridge.

15. Sand People (5.3): Climb left of the stairs to the bridge.

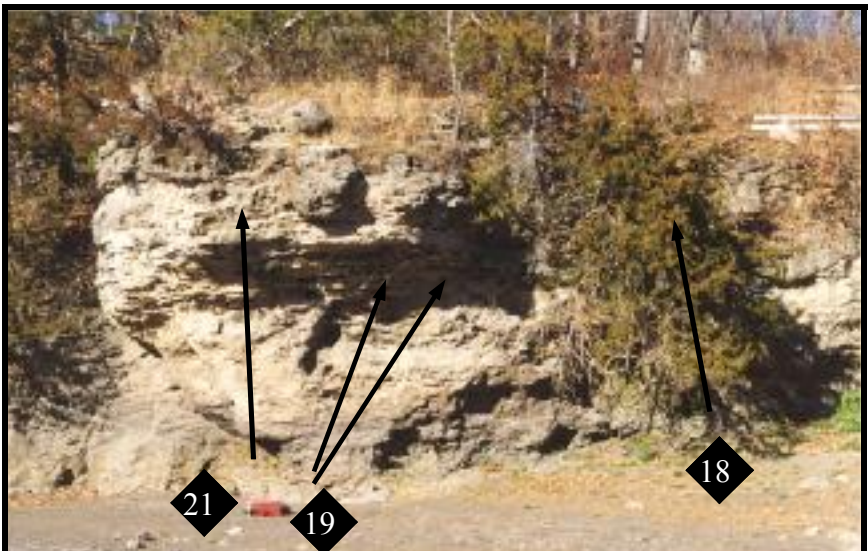
16. Quasimoto (5.6): Start on Sand People but traverse to the left until under a bulge and then go over the nose.

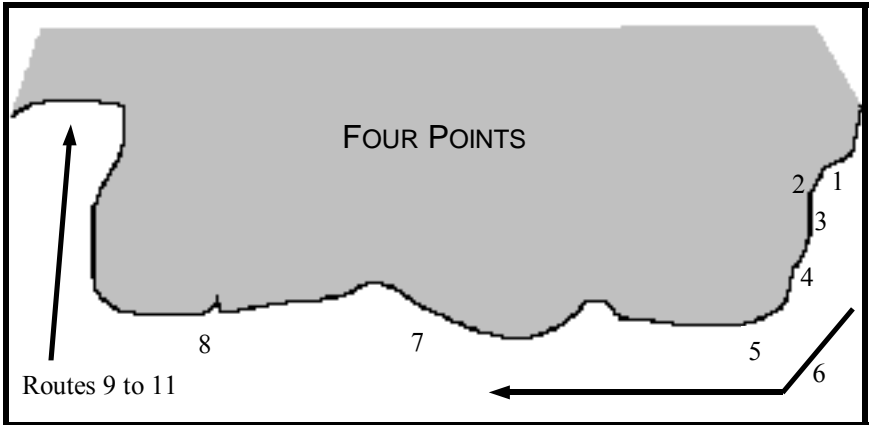
17. Arizona (5.6): Start under a chest high bulge. Traverse up and right to the bridge.

18. Under the Tree (5.5): Sit start under the tree. Head up and finish right of the tree.

19. The Ring (5.9)\*\*: Sit start under a bulge on the corner. A ceramic-like rock is imbedded into the ground where you sit. Head directly over the bulge, traverse right over the ring and find a big pocket. It turns into a highball from here on.

20. Ever Third Child (B0)\*\*: Sit start as with The Ring, climb over the bulge and work up the small pockets above the ring. Prepare to get high if you want





to sample the great parts.

21. Steve's Folly (B1)\*\*\*: One of the best routes in the park! Use good edges and pockets to head up this highball. The name comes from the first ascensionist, who climbed the route when it was flooded by traversing in and then getting to a point that he couldn't down-climb. It was up or wet.

22. Inner Space (5.8): Around the corner from Steve's Folly is a low angle crack. Follow the crack until you are directly under the Cedar Tree above. Then head straight up. Variant: Continue up the crack to a muddy exit.

## AREA TWO A: FOUR POINTS

The next outcropping of rock up river from the Dam Wall. This area has some great top ropes or high problems. Some of the really fun problems remain underwater most of the year but bravery will still allow an above the water traverse to the Pirates Cave.

### THE ROUTES

1. White Heat (5.6): Start right of the cave and head up over the lip.
2. White Light (5.8)\*: Start the same as White Heat, but go over the cave to the left as soon as you can. Avoid all the holds on 1.
3. Grunts (5.10)\*\*: Start under the large pocket, work up the notch with a heel hook or just power up on small holds. Then go back up to the right. This is a fun challenging top rope.

4. Fissure of Orlando (5.7)\*\*\*: This is a great four inch jam crack that feels stiff for its grade. Leave the cams in the car and bring hexes unless you like climbing awkward unprotected moves. This is a good solo if you're a hard man.

5. The Corner: Climb up the corner on good but dirty pockets.

6. Four Points Traverse (B0)\*\*: Start on route 1 and keep going until you run out of wall. Make sure you go through the Pirates Cave. Don't let Steve's spider get you.

7. Happy Pants \*\*: Fun line of pockets that lead to a overhanging face.

8. Doggy Dance \*\*: Climb up a cool flake as high as you can.

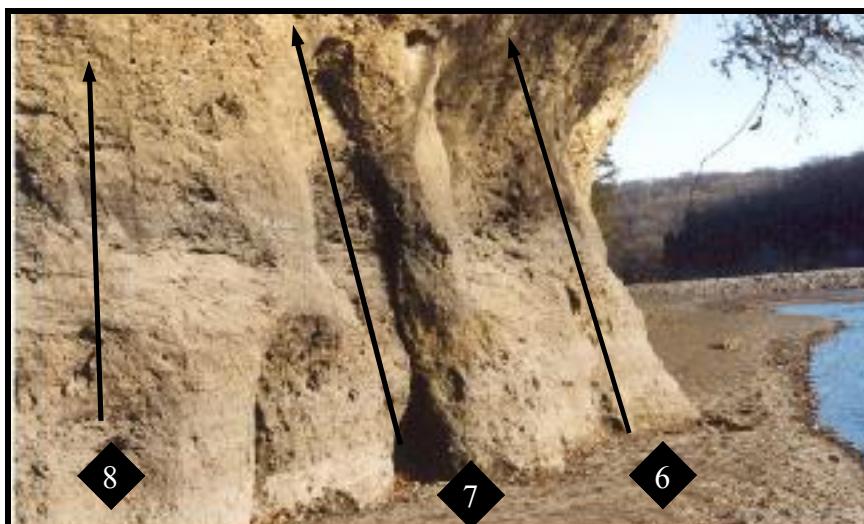
9. Wide Crack \*: Climb the overhanging crack in the corner. It must be done in the nude.

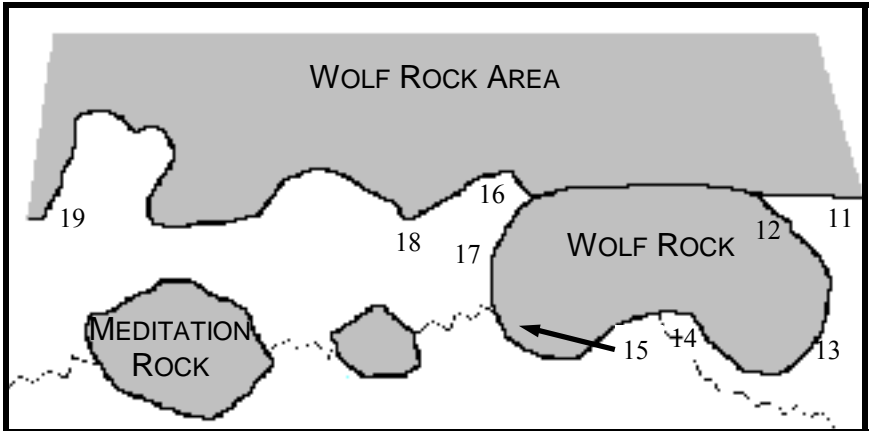
10. The Skin Within (5.6): Start between the Wide Crack and Dirty Crack under a bulge and work up the wall. Okay fun.

11. Dirty Crack: Go up the dirt.

12. Mary's Secret Treasure: Follow dirty holds up the overhanging wall of Wolf Rock at the start of the Pirate's Cave. Sit start if you dare to get dirty.

13. Wolf's Tail (5.7)\*: Sit down under the small bulge at the downstream side of wolf rock. Work up and top out.



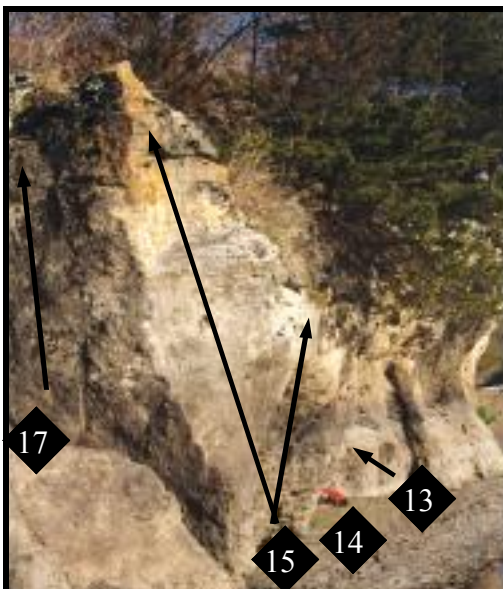


14. Hind Quarter (5.8)\*\*\*: Start with both hands in the lowest pockets under the belly of the wolf. Your feet will almost be in water. Head up on fun pockets, top out or traverse off. Climbers do it all the time.

15. Wolf's Belly (B0)\*\*: Start is the same as Hind Quarter but go left over the water and up to the snout of the wolf. Don't get wet or is that don't be wet behind the ears.

16. Pirate's Crack (5.4): Climb up where Wolf Rock and the back wall come together.

17. Wolf's Face (B0+)\*: Climb up the flat face to the left of the Pirate's Crack. Make sure not to go too far to the right onto easy terrain. You may want to clean out the drift wood if you like falling.



18. Weird Arete': Climb up the weird looking arete'. Crazy fun.

19. Access Gully (5.5): This is the blocky, ledge filled left wall. Just climb it.

## AREA THREE: DOG WALL AND REEF ROCK

This is the next rock formation after the Access Gully. The route Access Gully is located on this formation. This rock holds a great high-ball bouldering problem — Sloper Alley. Reef rock is the last rock before the beach. It's named after all the fossils embedded in it. This rock is hard on the fingers, but it provides the best problem in the park.

### THE ROUTES

1. Sloper Alley (B0)\*\*\*: Start to the left of the tree growing out of the base of the rock. Use holds under the bulge, then grab the sloper above and work up the rock on one sloper after another. How high will you go? Each move is harder and dirtier.
2. Stirred Not Shaken (5.6)\*: Sit down under the same bulge as Sloper Alley. Work right around the bulge then go up the corner, spin into a chimney move and then pull easy holds to the top. Or traverse out above the bulge and jump.
3. Pocket Fest: Follow pockets up a well pocketed wall.
4. White Rock: Go up pockets on obvious white colored rock.
5. Easy Corner: Go up the corner.
6. Dandelion Sun Hit (B0-)\*\*: A contrived problem in the shallow cave on the





right side of the Reef. Start lying on the ground work up around into the cave with a heel hook. Set up for a dyno and launch to the holds above. Try for the highest pockets.

7. Unnamed (V3)\*\*\*: One of the best problems in the park. Start with a heel jam in the large pocket and the finger holds on the ceiling. Then dyno to the holds at the lip. Head up. A hold broke off this problem making it easier, so it may only be V2 now.

8. The Left Dyno (B0-): Start holds the same as The Left Line and then dyno to a hold to the right on the upper lip.

9. The Left Line (B0)\*\*\*: The first hand holds are in the seam at shoulder height. Put your feet on

the rock. Drop knee to a sloper with your right hand. Move your foot, and lunge to the horn with your left. The sit start is also fun and harder.

## AREA FOUR: PRACTICE AREA

This is a good area to come to after a hard day of climbing. Park at the end of the lot and head up the trail closest to the river. After about 100 yards there will be a small outcropping that goes at 5.4. It's a good overhang for kids. About 30 feet up the trail is the Vertical Wall. The hardest route goes from the bottom left to the upper right. This is 5.7. The other routes are 5.6. The biggest wall is the practice wall, which has been climbed no handed.



The author grunting at Hancher.



## AREA FIVE: LOOKOUT POINT