

*"The setting is as good as it gets,
the rock is as good as it gets...
in the Similkameen."*

— HOWIE RICHARDSON



SPECIAL K

Climbing Guide

*Rock climbing
in Keremeos*



D. Strewth



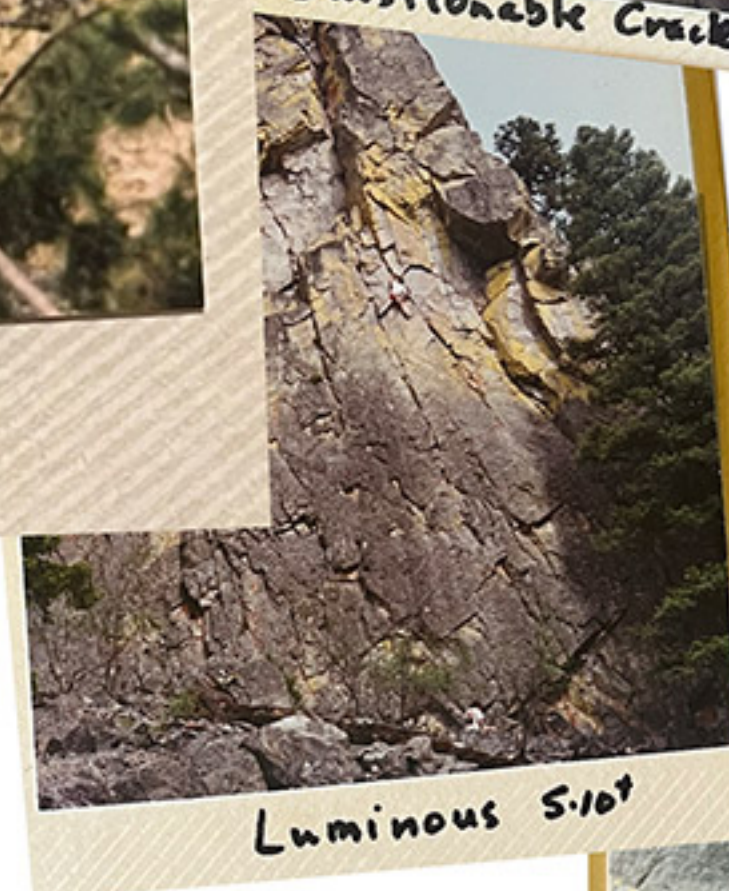
Special K
May '94



Questionable Crack 5.10



Nimbus' revenge



Luminous 5.10+



Brian + Shelley
Quest for Brilliance 5.11



Rob on Flourescein

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Cover photo: Special K approach, by D. Stewth

Back photo: Similkameen Valley, by D. Stewth

Clockwise from above: Robin Barley with Brian Wyville demonstrating 'the dance' by the camp fire, Questionable Crack FA Robin Barley, Nimbus' revenge, Rob Shackleton on Flourescein, Brian Wyville and Shelley Lebay on Quest for Brilliance, Luminous FA Robin Barley.

Special K Ornithology Wall



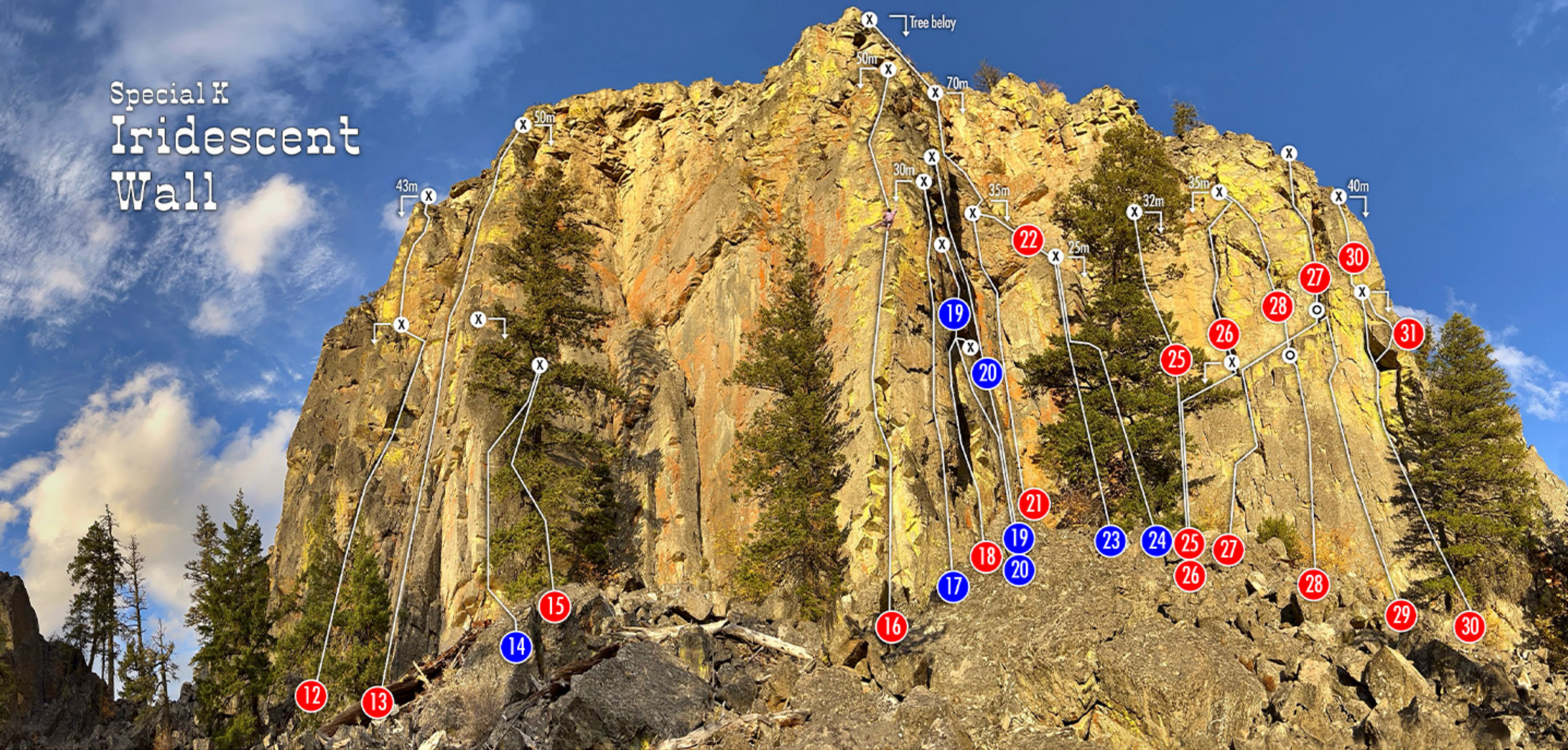
- ⑫ Gear route
- Gear anchor
- ⊗ Bolt anchor
- ↘ 35m Distance to ground

- 1** 5.10- **Raven Warrior** SR to 4" (2P)
- 2** 5.10 **Dark Songbird** SR (25m)
- 3** 5.10- **Unkindness of Ravens** SR (25m)
- 4** 5.10- **Swallows Gliding** SR, 3 bolts (2P)
- 5** 5.10 **Western Tanager** SR (20m)

- 6** 5.10 **Rope Eating Rats** SR (2P)
- 7** 5.10- **Not Sophie's Choice** SR to 4" (2P)
- 8** 5.10 **Geological Freak** SR to 4" (20m)
- 9** 5.10 **Dwarf Tosser** SR to 4" (20m)
- 10** 5.7 **Zillertal** SR to 4" (2P)

- 11** 5.9 **Green Mouldy Crack** SR to 4" (2P)
- 12** 5.11- **Pyogenic Gangrene** SR to 4" (2P)
- 13** 5.10- **Bloody Fool's Gold** SR to 4" (2P)

Special K Iridescent Wall



- 12 Gear route
- 14 Fully bolted route
- X Gear anchor
- X Bolt anchor
- ↘ 35m Distance to ground

- 12 5.11- **Pyogenic Gangrene** SR to 4" (2P)
- 13 5.10- **Bloody Fool's Gold** SR to 4" (2P)
- 14 5.10 **Numbum Arête** 7 bolts (25m)
- 15 5.10- **Bum Landing** SR, 4 bolts (22m)
- 16 5.10+ **Iridescent Arête** SR to 4", 3 bolts (50m)
- 17 5.11- **Quest for Brilliance** 8 bolts (25m)

- 18 5.10 **Questionable Crack** SR (18m)
- 19 5.10+ **Dance of the Flaming Arseholes** 9 bolts (22m)
- 20 5.11- **Quizzical** 10 bolts (30m)
- 21 5.10- **Bloodline** SR to 5", 2 bolts (2P)
- 22 5.10+ **Crimson Connector** SR to 5", 10 bolts (3P)
- 23 5.10+ **Aniline Red** 7 bolts (25m)
- 24 5.10 **Handle Carefully** 10 bolts (25m)

- 25 5.11+ **Flourescein** SR to 4", 7 bolts (32m)
- 26 5.10- **Really Solid Crack** SR to 4" (2P)
- 27 5.8 **The Dusklands** SR to 4" (2P)
- 28 5.10+ **Luminous** SR to 4" (2P)
- 29 5.10+ **Day Glow** SR (20m)
- 30 5.10+ **Phosphorescence** SR to 4" (2P)
- 31 5.11- **Rob's Roof** SR to 4", 2 bolts (25m)

Location

Above the town of Keremeos in southern British Columbia sits a dramatic fortress-like crag with views up and down the Similkameen valley. Facing southwest at 1200m elevation, it is breezy in spring and autumn with warm afternoons. In the blaze of summer it provides shady climbing in the morning and a pleasant wind usually blows by the time the sun comes around.

At the center of Special K is an eighty meter high wall with many exciting features, hued brilliant orange, green and fluorescent yellow by lichen. The lofty grandeur and silence impart a wild west feeling to this adventurous alternative to Skaha Bluffs.



Access

Recommend high clearance AWD.

1. Start at Liddicoat Road (0 km) which is on highway 3A heading north out of Keremeos. Follow Liddicoat down across a bridge and right.

2. Turn left at the Pin Cushion Trail street sign (0.8 km). Liddicoat continues up as a gravel road past houses and driveways then switches back to traverse the hillside across rocky sections.

3. Pass the radio tower access gate (2.8 km) at the shoulder of the hill. Avoid a steep quad bike trail at 4.2km by following the low grade contour left... or test your 4x4 skills.

4. Road fork (4.8 km) goes right to a forested gully and 'Cow Patty' camp spot. Left leads to Keremeos Columns provincial park. At 5.8 km avoid another steep quad trail by contouring left. At 6.0 km switchback to the right to re-join top of the quad trail. If you went straight at the switchback, you are on the wrong path.

5. A cattle guard with long fence marks the lower trail head (7.0 km). Park and camp on the lower shoulder at 7.2 km with views of the Similkameen valley. If windy/cold, continue around shoulder to tree-sheltered pullout at 7.8 km where the upper trail head begins. From either trail head, walk 30 minutes to crag.

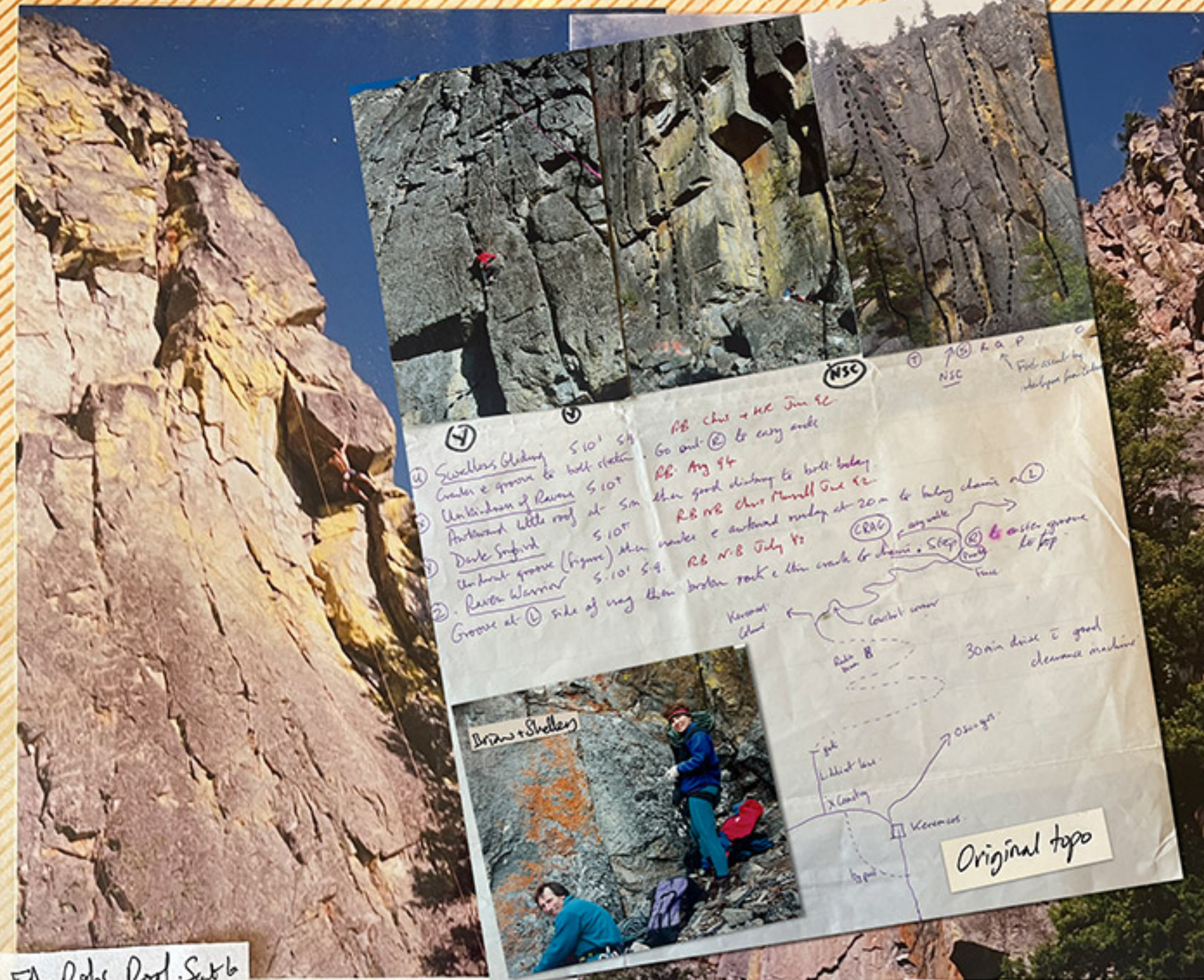
6. The upper trail is an obvious animal trail that contours around the hillside to meet the lower trail at the cattle fence just below the tree line. Contour left and up just inside the treeline to a steep shoulder behind a tree thicket. Ascend steep shoulder for fifty meters to gain the scree zone.

7. Go left along scree without increasing elevation to drop slightly through a shallow gully on to main scree slope below Special K. Cairns lead to the now obvious prow of the Iridescent Arête and a large Douglas fir at the base of the crag. Loaf here.

Ravens, eagles and vultures soar upon the thermals above. Varied small birds include Steller's jays, magpies and the bright Western tanager flitting among the old growth. Squadrons of discordant, clanking Sandhill cranes migrate north in spring up the Similkameen valley and (perhaps) the very same birds head back south at the harvest full moon.

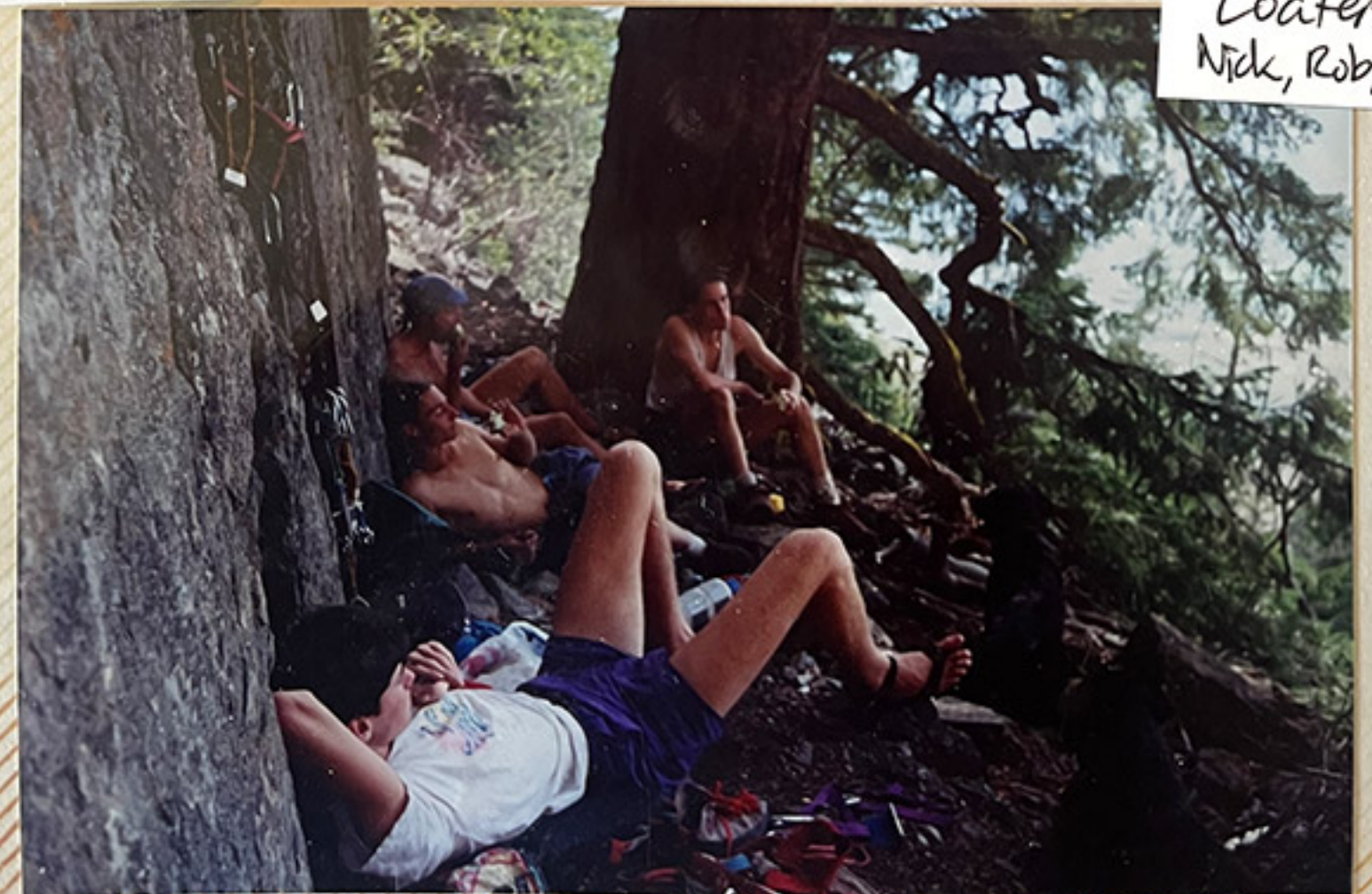


It should be noted that most routes were rock-scaled on rappel and, apart from anchors, bolts were used sparingly in the early years due to drill battery logistics. Latterly, fully bolted routes were added, a futile attempt at elevating Special K's rock bottom appeal to reasonable, discriminating, safety-oriented climbers. Thus the crag has remained, haunted only by the few off-kilter craggers for whom a whiff of danger spells adventure.



FA Robs Roof. Sept 6

Loafers
Nick, Rob, Pete



Special K Ornithology Wall

The Ornithology Wall faces west-southwest and remains shaded for slightly longer than the Iridescent Wall. Enormous fractured basalt columns dominate the central portion of this wall. To reach it, traverse left along the scree until you are between some very large boulders and the wall.

Rope Eating Rats ascends the colorful, dramatic roof in the center of the wall, *Green Mouldy Crack* and its offspring, *Pyogenic Gangrene*, are both quality lines.

All routes at Special K were originally climbed on twin 50m ropes with a single standard Squamish rack (SR to 4"). Each route is topped with a chain anchor. Adjacent multipitch routes may share a single rap route to an intermediate anchor.

Routes

- 1 5.10- **Raven Warrior** SR to 4" (2P)
- 2 5.10 **Dark Songbird** SR (25m)
- 3 5.10- **Unkindness of Ravens** SR (25m)
- 4 5.10- **Swallows Gliding** SR, 3 bolts (2P)
- 5 5.10 **Western Tanager** SR, 3 bolts (2P)
- 6 5.10 **Rope Eating Rats** SR (2P)
- 7 5.10- **Not Sophie's Choice** SR to 4" (2P)
- 8 5.10 **Geological Freak** SR to 4" (20m)
- 9 5.10 **Dwarf Tosser** SR to 4" (20m)
- 10 5.7 **Zillertal** SR to 4" (2P)
- 11 5.9 **Green Mouldy Crack** SR to 4" (2P)
- 12 5.11- **Pyogenic Gangrene** SR to 4" (2P)
- 13 5.10- **Bloody Fool's Gold** SR to 4" (2P)

- 12 Gear route
- 14 Fully bolted route
- Gear anchor
- ⊗ Bolt anchor
- 35m Distance to ground

Grades

- 5.10- Easy 10, eg. 5.10a-b
- 5.10 Solid 10, eg. 5.10b-c
- 5.10+ Hard 10, eg. 5.10c-d



1 Raven Warrior 5.10- SR to 4" (2P)

Pitch 1 (5.10-, 22m) Groove at left side of crag then broken rock and thin crack to chains.

Pitch 2 (5.9, 10m) Step right and follow easier groove to top.

FA Robin Barley, Nick Barley, 1992

2 Dark Songbird 5.10 SR (25m)

Undercut groove then cracks and awkward overlap at 20m to belay chains on left.

FA Robin Barley, Nick Barley, Chris Murrell, 1992

3 Unkindness of Ravens 5.10- SR (25m)

Awkward little roof at 5m then good climbing to bolt belay.

Unkindness is a group of ravens. Murder is a group of crows. Mischief is a group of magpies. That humans connect the social intelligence of corvids to trouble says a lot about the humans.

FA Robin Barley, 1994

4 Swallows Gliding 5.10- SR, 3 bolts (2P)

Pitch 1 (5.10-, 25m) Cracks and grooves to bolts.

Pitch 2 (5.8, 13m) Go out right to easy arête above second roof.

FA Robin Barley, Chris Murrell, Howie Richardson, 1992

5 Western Tanager 5.10 SR (25m)

Start on *Swallows Gliding*. At first overlap cut up and right on the face to join *Rope Eating Rats* at the second overlap.

The flame-colored Western Tanager is a high mountain bird, closely associated with Douglas fir forest. Spotted on FA.

FA Robin Barley, Chris Murrell, Howie Richardson, 1992

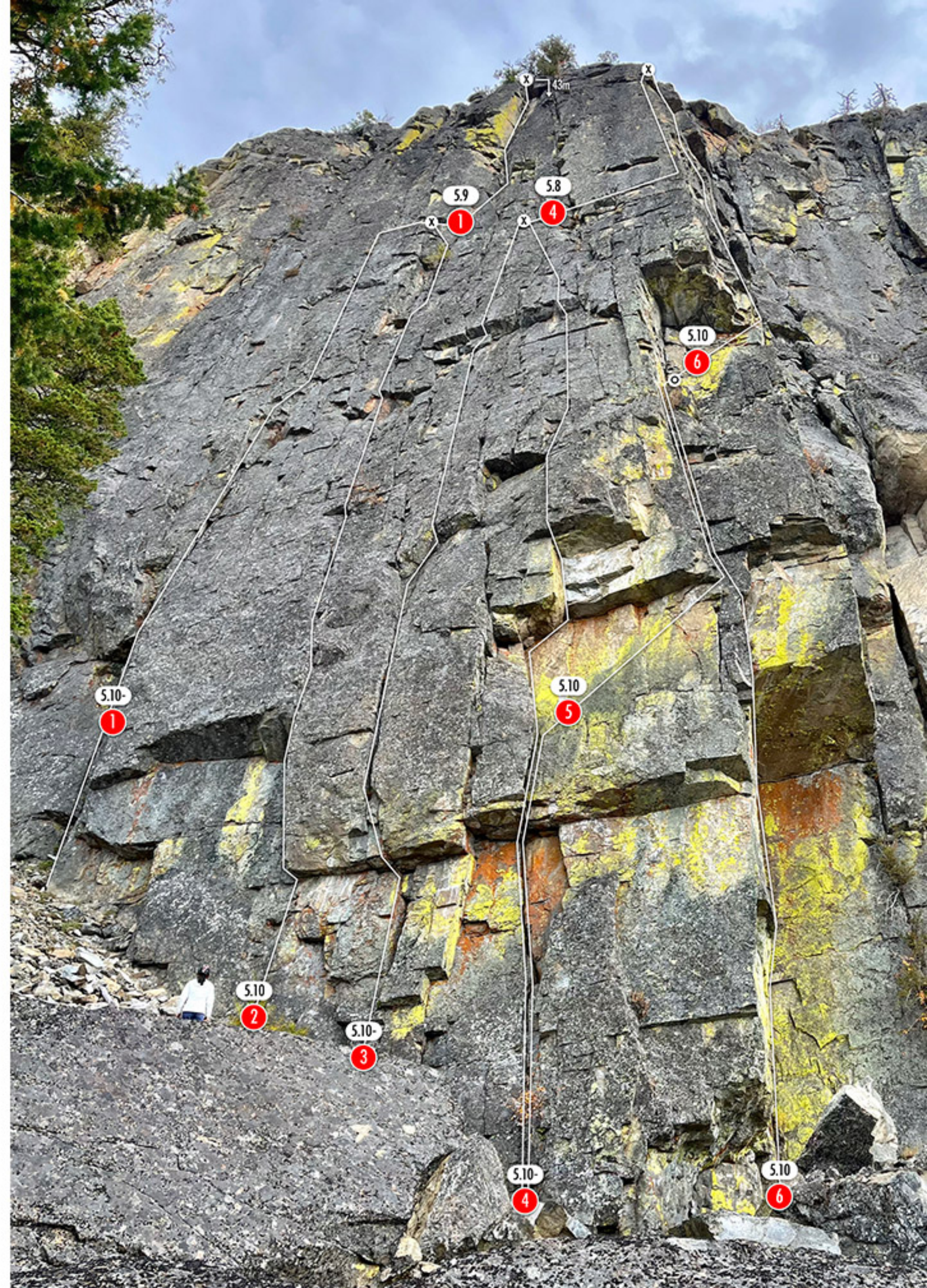
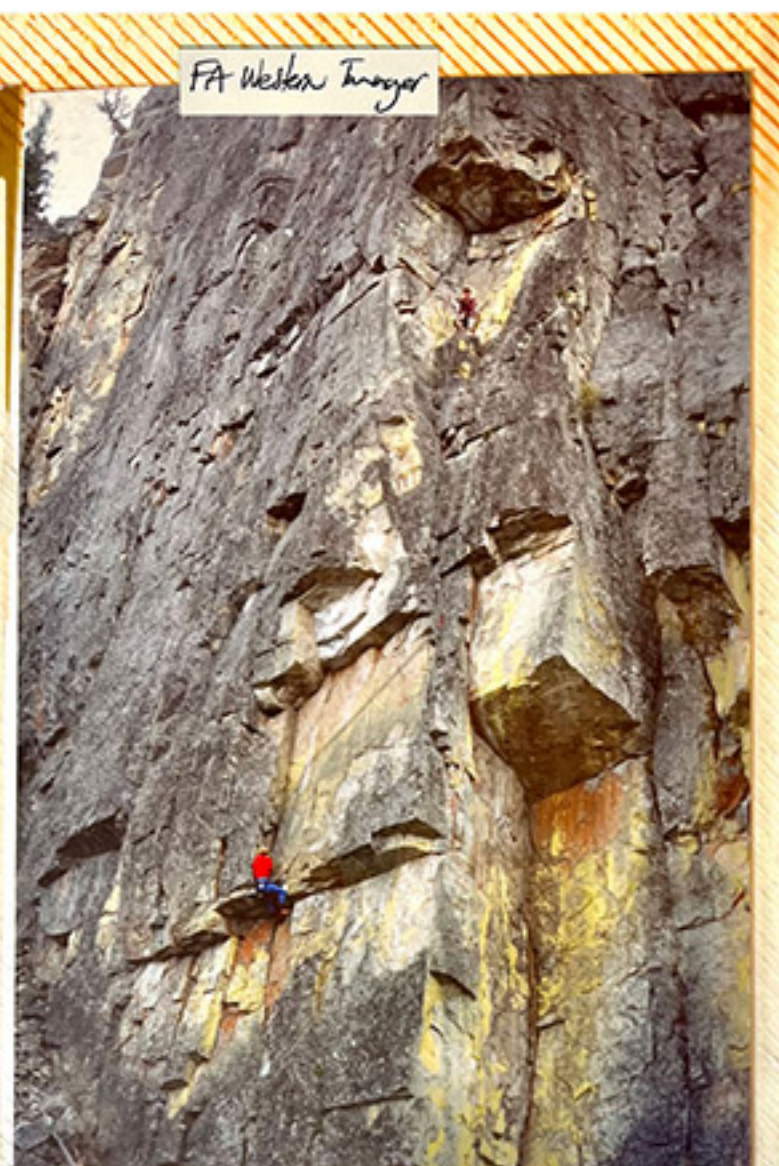
6 Rope Eating Rats 5.10 SR (2P)

Pitch 1 (5.10, 20m) Major corner and roof, then easily to second roof.

Pitch 2 (5.10-, 20m) Step out right then shallow groove.

Rats living 500 meters up the wall of El Capitan chewed up a sleeping bag on the first ascent. Here it was the ropes. Bushy-tailed Woodrats build dens from sticks (and climbing gear) in cliffside cracks to easily escape trouble.

FA Robin Barley, Nick Barley, Judy Komori, 1991



7 Not Sophie's Choice 5.8? SR to 4" (2P)

Pitch 1 (5.8?, 21m) Deep chimney to ledge. Large block has detached since FA and the chimney now leads into a roof. As yet unled.

Pitch 2 (5.8, 25m) From ledge, cross over right to follow corner groove to top.

Original route on crag

FA Robin Barley, Nick Barley, Sophie Royer, 1991

8 Geological Freak 5.10 SR to 4" (20m)

Reach and surmount the suspended column following crack at left of orange lichen.

FA Robin Barley, Nick Barley, 1991

9 Dwarf Tosser 5.10 SR to 4" (20m)

Past bolt to right side of suspended column.

Dwarf tossing, a pastime of noble families, goes back as far as the 17th century Romanovs. In the 20th century, an enterprising circus tumbler from Florida revived it as the now infamous pub sport. Dwarves are well compensated, apparently.

FA Robin Barley, Nick Barley, 1992

10 Zillertal 5.7 SR to 4" (2P)

Pitch 1 (5.7) Off-width at bottom.

Pitch 2 (5.7) Dirty grey groove above (rappel route).

Horrible... FA interlopers from Yorkshire.

FA Tony Barley, Tim Barley, 1992

11 Green Mouldy Crack 5.9 SR to 4" (2P)

Pitch 1 (5.9) Pleasant cracked grey wall to gear belay.

Pitch 2 (5.9) Good upper crack. Large pro. Two rappels down adjacent Pyogenic Gangrene.

The Gang Green Trilogy: Green Mouldy Crack, Pyogenic Gangrene and Squamish's Green Slime Line. Collect them all.

FA Robin Barley, Nick Barley, 1991



12 Pyogenic Gangrene 5.11- SR to 4", 5 bolts (2P)

Pitch 1 (5.11-) Climb black basalt corner then overhanging crack to bolts at base of upper face.

Pitch 2 (5.10) Streaked green-yellow wall above. Two rappels on chains.

Gangrene's green-black color comes from iron sulfide, created during a loss of blood flow in body tissue. Pyogenic refers to a pus-producing version caused by bacteria or fungi.

FA Robin Barley, Judy Komori, 1995

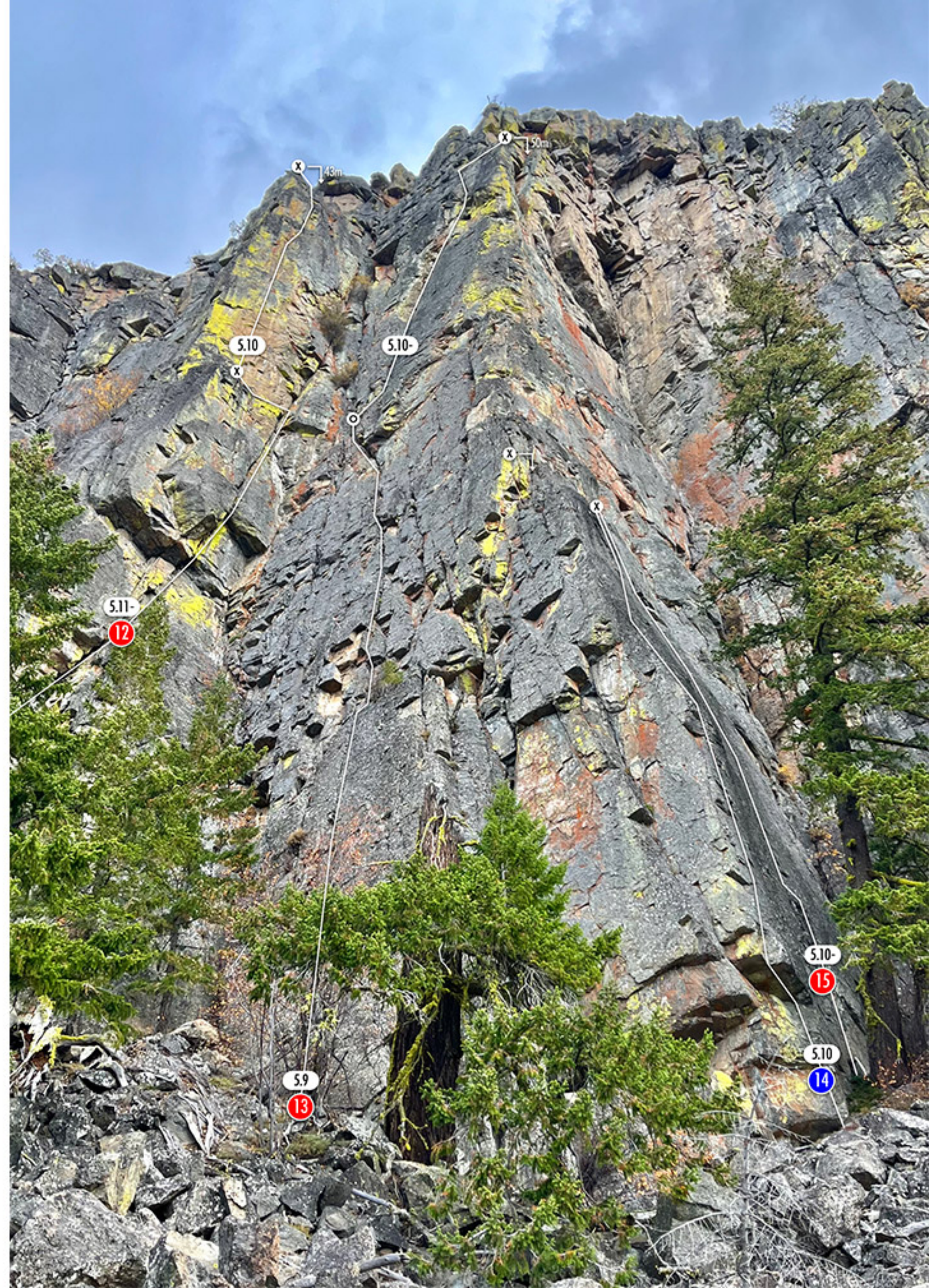


13 Bloody Fool's Gold 5.10- SR to 4" (2P)

Pitch 1 (5.9) Broken crack up leftwards to gear belay in corner

Pitch 2 (5.10-) Step back right to groove in upper wall. Two rappels on chains down arête.

FA Robin Barley, Judy Komori, 1995



Special K

Iridescent Wall

The Iridescent Wall faces southwest above the scree of the approach trail. It is shaded until 11am when a breeze usually begins. A large Douglas fir at the base of the main wall makes a comfortable resting spot with sublime views of the Similkameen valley below and the Cathedral peaks beyond.

The *Iridescent Arete* is the most striking line. *Quest for Brilliance* is a fine sport route. *Really Solid Crack* is a surprisingly accurate description. *Flourescein* awaits a bold first ascensionist.

All routes at Special K were originally climbed on twin 50m ropes with a single standard Squamish rack (SR to 4"). Each route is topped with a chain anchor. Adjacent multipitch routes may share a single rap route to an intermediate anchor.

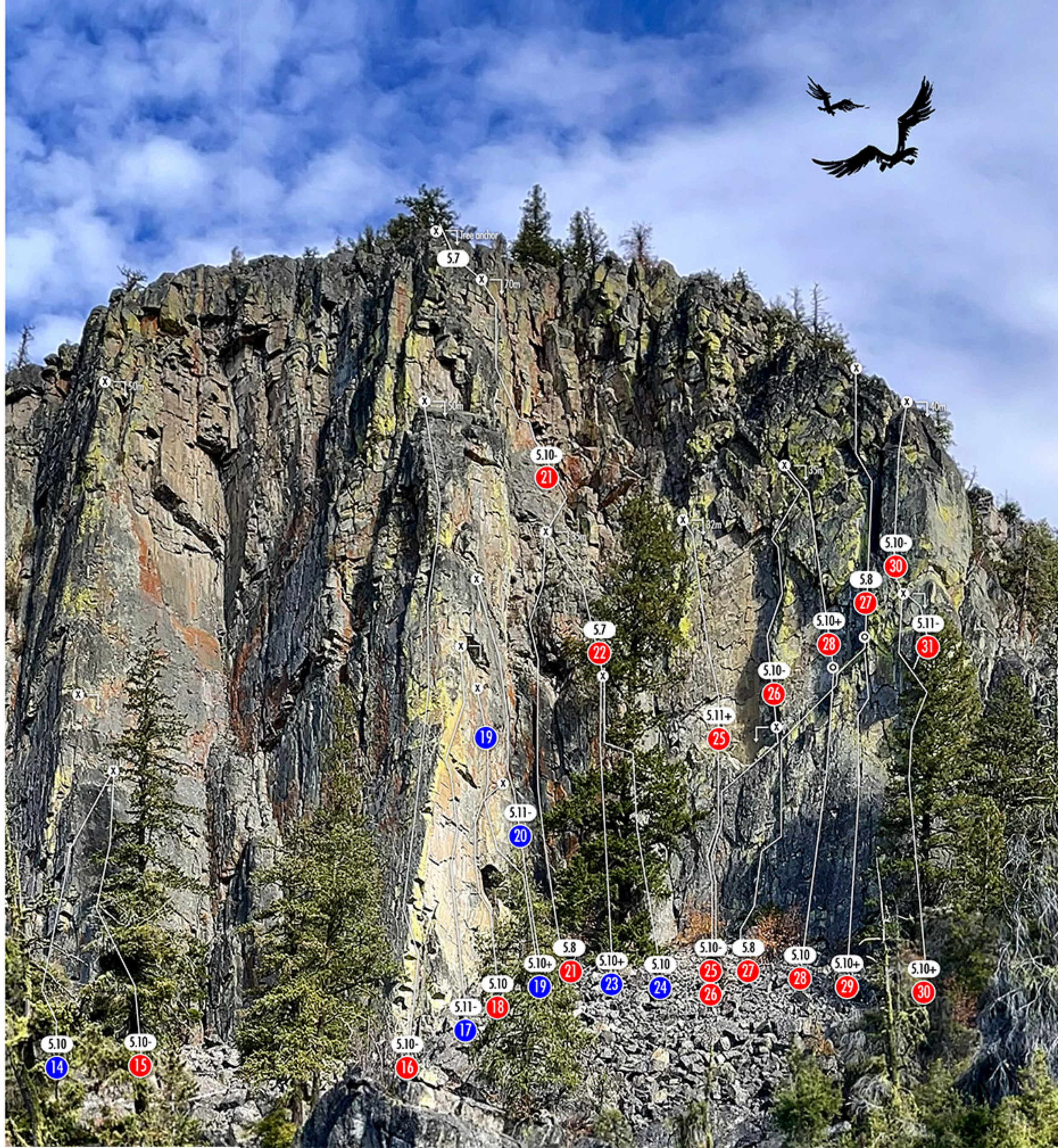
Routes

- 14 5.10 Numbum Arête 7 bolts (25m)
- 15 5.10- Bum Landing SR, 4 bolts (22m)
- 16 5.10+ Iridescent Arête SR to 4", 3 bolts (50m)
- 17 5.11- Quest for Brilliance 8 bolts (25m)
- 18 5.10 Questionable Crack SR (18m)
- 19 5.10+ Dance of the Flaming Arseholes 9 bolts (22m)
- 20 5.11- Quizzical 10 bolts (30m)
- 21 5.10- Bloodline SR to 5", 3 bolts (2P)
- 22 5.10+ Crimson Connector SR to 5", 10 bolts (3P)
- 23 5.10+ Aniline Red 7 bolts (25m)
- 24 5.10 Handle Carefully 10 bolts (25m)
- 25 5.11+ Flourescein SR to 4", 7 bolts (32m)
- 26 5.10- Really Solid Crack SR to 4" (2P)
- 27 5.8 The Dusklands SR to 4" (2P)
- 28 5.10+ Luminous SR to 4" (2P)
- 29 5.10+ Day Glow SR (20m)
- 30 5.10+ Phosphorescence SR to 4", 1 bolt (2P)
- 31 5.11- Rob's Roof SR to 4", 2 bolts (25m)

Grades

- 5.10- Easy 10, eg. 5.10a-b
- 5.10 Solid 10, eg. 5.10b-c
- 5.10+ Hard 10, eg. 5.10c-d

- 12 Gear route
- 14 Fully bolted route
- ⊙ Gear anchor
- ⊗ Bolt anchor
- 35m Distance to ground



14 Numbum Arête 5.10 7 bolts (25m)

Bolt clipping up undercut arête, then traverse right to chain anchor shared with *Bum Landing*.

FA Robin Barley, Gordie Smaille, 1995

15 Bum Landing 5.10- SR, 4 bolts (22m)

Crack behind fir tree up and to left, then bolted grey slab to chain anchor.

FA Robin Barley, Judy Komori, 1995

16 Iridescent Arête 5.10+ SR to 4", 3 bolts (50m)

Excellent long pitch of mixed pro to anchor atop second bulge below headwall. Two raps via *Quest for Brilliance*.

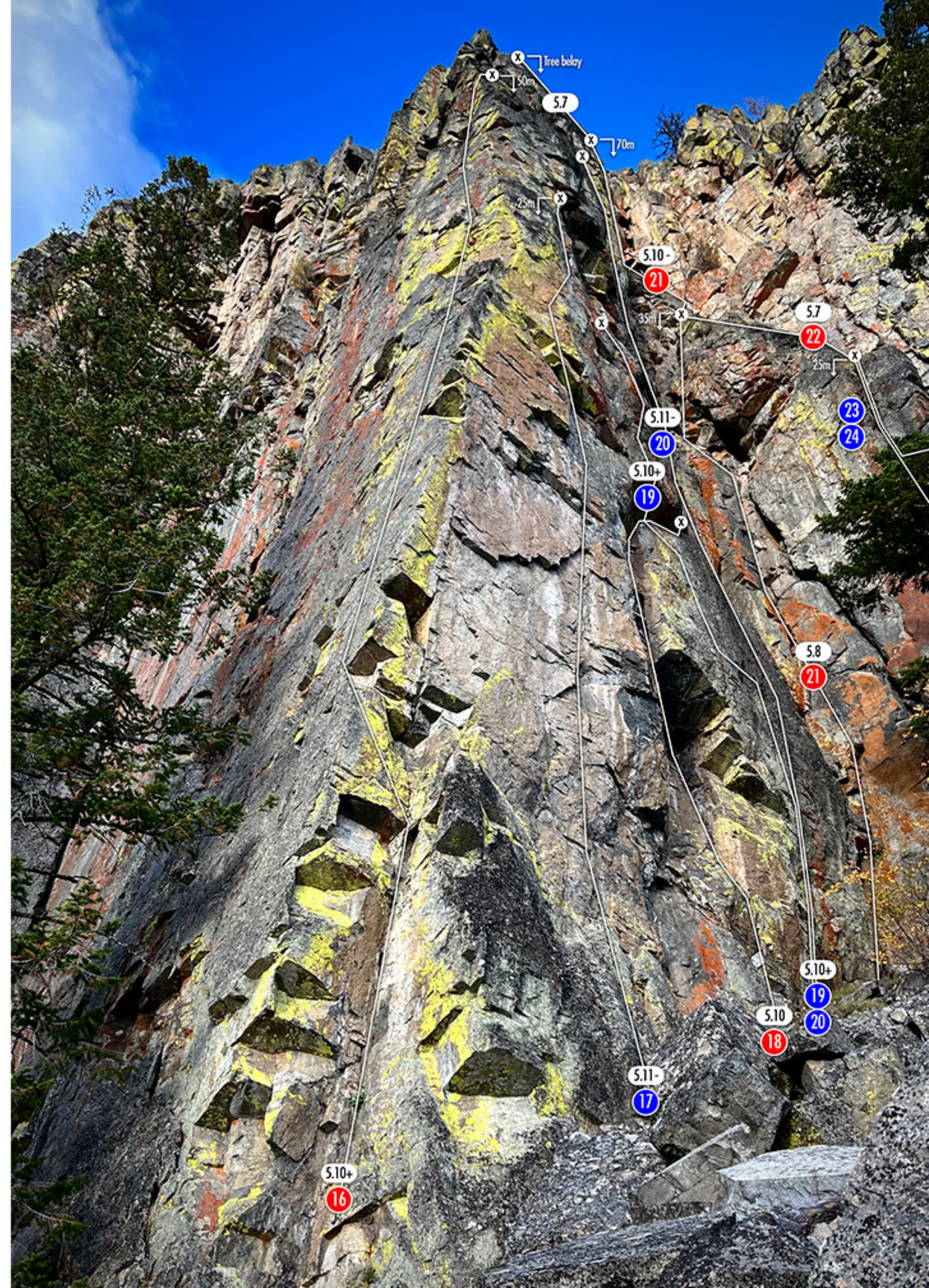
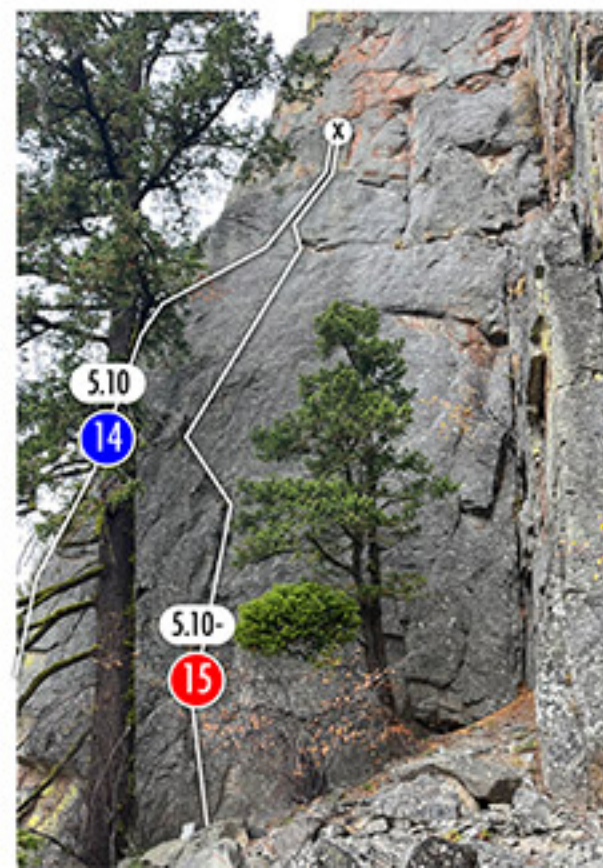
Iridescent colors change with the angle of view. Microstructures cause reflected light to interfere in constructive and destructive patterns, making brighter and darker colors appear. Iridescence is an important communication tool for sexual selection in birds.

FA Nick Barley, Robin Barley, 1991

17 Quest for Brilliance 5.11- 8 bolts (25m)

Clip your way up the sunny side of the stunning Iridescent Arête. Anchor is bolts with sling and two biners, bring some sling material if you are the first to try this.

FA Brian Wyville, Robin Barley, 1994

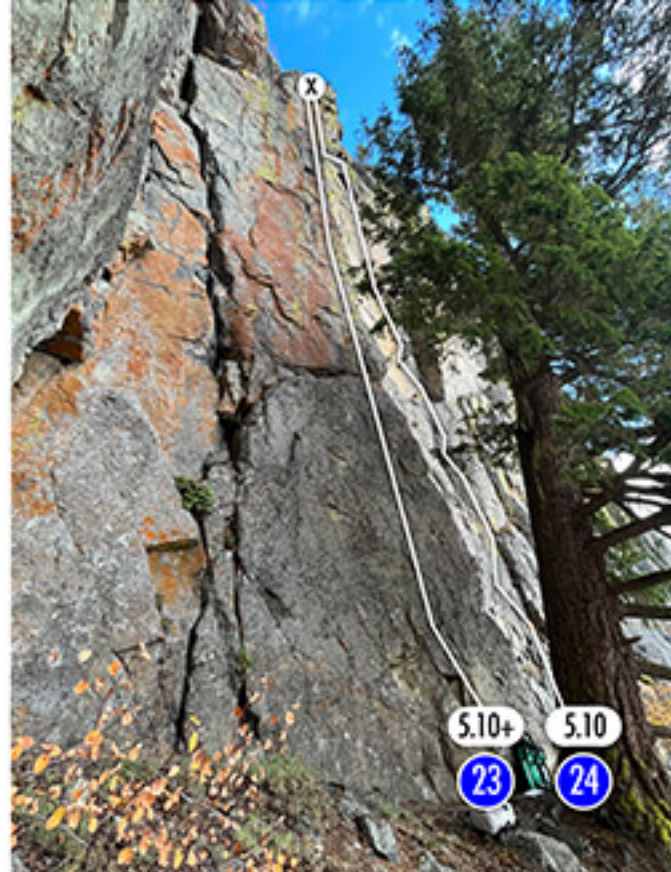




18 Questionable Crack 5.10 SR (18m)

Follow the Spanish question mark '¿' to a chain anchor in the corner.

FA Robin Barley, Chris Murrell, 1992



19 Dance of the Flaming Arseholes 5.10+ 9 bolts (22m)

Shares first two bolts with *Quizzical*, then trend left and step over *Questionable Crack* onto headwall and follow bright orange lichen to chain anchor.

The dance of the flaming arseholes is a military rite of passage popularized by sailors of the Royal Australian Navy. A roll of newspaper is clenched between the buttocks and lit on fire. The dancer must cross a stage without dropping the flame, or suffer penalties. From the 1950s to 1970s, the most famous stage for this performance was atop the public toilet roof in Bugis Street, Singapore.

Discover the Terpsichorean Trilogy: *Dance of the Flaming Arseholes*, Squamish's *Dancing with the Village Idiot* and *Dancing the Crystal Tango*. Find a glass climbing shoe at the end.

FA Robin Barley, John Fantini, 1998

20 Quizzical 5.11- 10 bolts (30m)

Start at grey wall below curve of *Questionable Crack*. Bolts lead straight up to ledge with an anchor. Don't stop there, step left and head up corner through to upper wall.

FA Robin Barley, Janet Tansley, 1993



21 Bloodline 5.10- SR to 5", 3 bolts (2P)

Top out the crag for incredible views.

Pitch 1 (5.8, 35m) Start in offwidth corner, follow corner to a bolt station.

Pitch 2 (5.10-, 35m) Ascend corner on right to small roof, then cross bolted face to reach the left side of channel. Two 35m raps to bottom from anchor, or top out to tree belay and walk off.

FA Glenn Wolowski, Kuan Neng Foo, alt leads, 2025

22 Crimson Connector 5.10+ SR to 5', 10 bolts (3P)

Pitch 1 (5.10+, 25m) Start on *Aniline Red* or *Handle Carefully* (slightly easier line).

Pitch 2 (5.7, 10m) 2 bolts connect to *Bloodline* P1 anchor

Pitch 3 (5.10-, 35m) *Bloodline* P2

FA Kuan Neng Foo, Willis Brown, Kyan Mussell, Glenn Wolowski, Robin Barley, 2025

23 Aniline Red 5.10+ 7 bolts (25m)

Up past bolts to crack system on reddish wall behind large fir tree. Aniline red is a dye used to color drugs and cosmetics.

FA Nick Barley, Robin Barley, 1993

24 Handle Carefully 5.10 10 bolts (25m)

Climb grey arête behind big fir tree to bolts, move left around arête at two thirds height to finish on *Aniline Red* crack. First bolt originally at 6m...

FA Robin Barley, Nick Barley, 1993





25 Flourescein 5.11+ SR to 4", 7 bolts (32m)

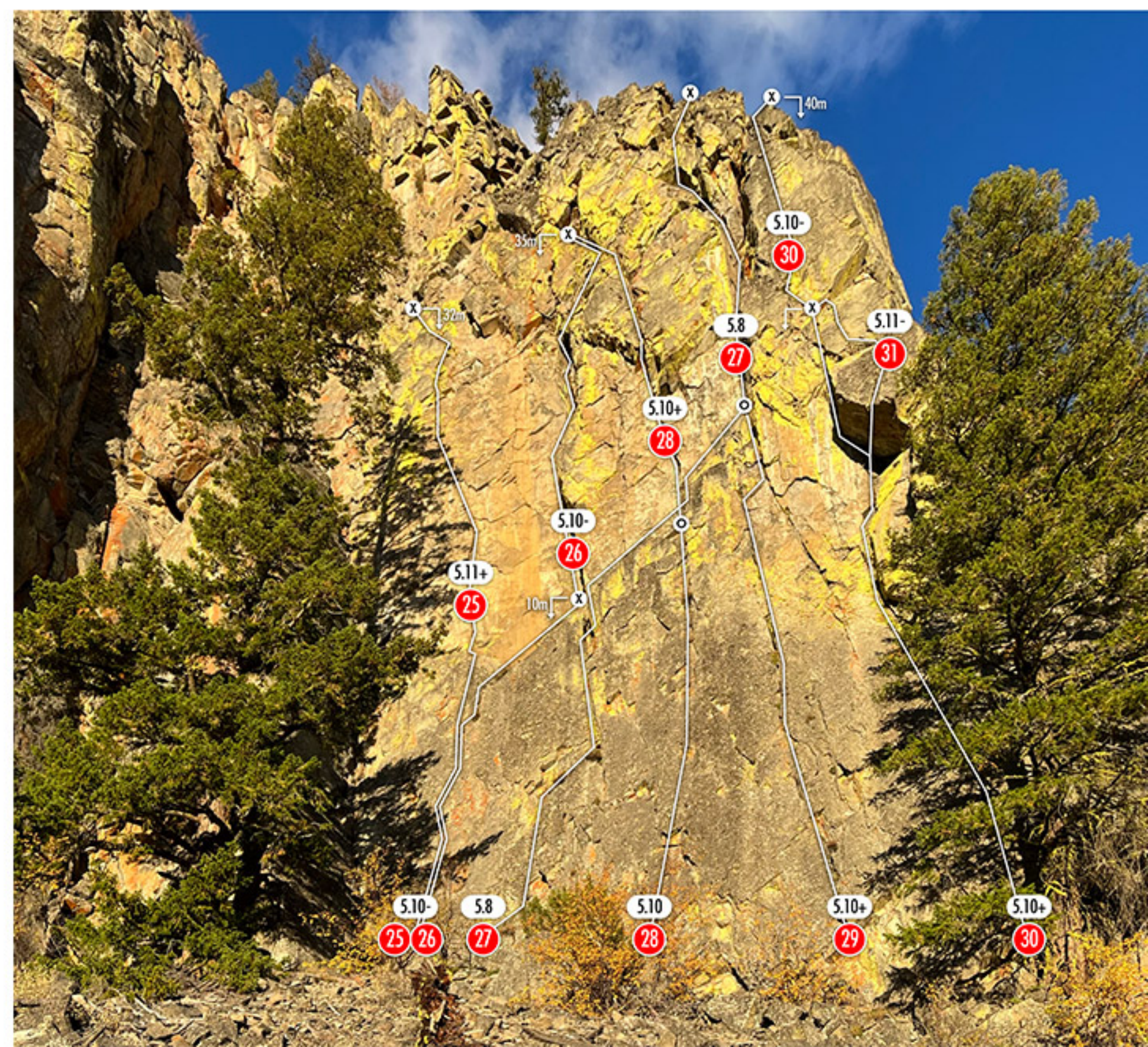
Two bolts in lower wall lead to ledge and a long yellow wall above with intermittent bolts. Rob Shackleton suffered a shoulder subluxation on the first attempt in 1993. The route awaits a first ascent.

Flourescein is a greenish-yellow medical tracer dye. Flourescent substances re-emit absorbed light energy immediately, making them 300% brighter than normal. The flourescent lichen on this route, use the reflective brightness to prevent themselves from drying up in the sun.

PR Robin Barley, 1993



Clockwise from above:
Robin Barley demonstrating proper loafing posture, Glenn Wolowski after the ground up FA of Bloodline, the Iridescent Wall, Willis Brown on Crimson Connector FA packing a paraglider to get back to camp, the Similkameen valley looking towards Cawston with camp circled.



26 Really Solid Crack 5.10-
SR to 4" (2P)

Pitch 1 (5.10-) Pass two bolts and loose rock on lower wall to ledge. A hammered-in bong and chock stone with sling provide two anchor points. Don't pass up this belay experience from another era.

Pitch 2 (5.10-) Follow the good corner crack through a roof to alcove. Chain anchor. Rap 35m, or twice with the pitch 1 bong station.

FA Robin Barley, Nick Barley, 1993

27 The Dusklands 5.8 SR to 4" (2P)

Pitch 1 (5.7) Cracks up to the Really Solid Crack belay, traverse right along the ledge to corner gear belay.

Pitch 2 (5.8) Follow corner to top.

FA Robin Barley, Sophie Royer, 1992

28 Luminous 5.10+ SR to 4" (2P)

Pitch 1 (5.10) Sketchy pro on pitch one to gear belay on ledge. The excellent pitch 2 is best accessed via Day Glow.

Pitch 2 (5.10+) Superb crack up steep wall to bolts in alcove. Rap 35m or twice with the Really Solid Crack pitch 1 rap ring.

FA Robin Barley, John Jones, 1992

29 Day Glow 5.10+ SR (20m)

Good crack and pro to sloping belay ledge. This is the best entrance to the excellent second pitch of Luminous.

FA Robin Barley, Howie Richardson, Chris Murrell, 1992

**30 Phosphorescence 5.10+** SR to 4", 1 bolt aid (2P)

Pitch 1 (5.10+, 1PA) From fir tree at far right of wall, crack leads up left facing corner system into roof. Bolt aid used to get up groove in roof. Bolted belay.

Pitch 2 (5.10-) Follow face to top.

The first diving watch with phosphorescent dials was built by Panerai in 1936, on commission from the Italian Navy. Designed to track air supply and decompression times underwater at night, it was the basis of a secret human torpedo program aimed at sinking British warships. The program commander eventually changed sides and sank two Italian warships instead.

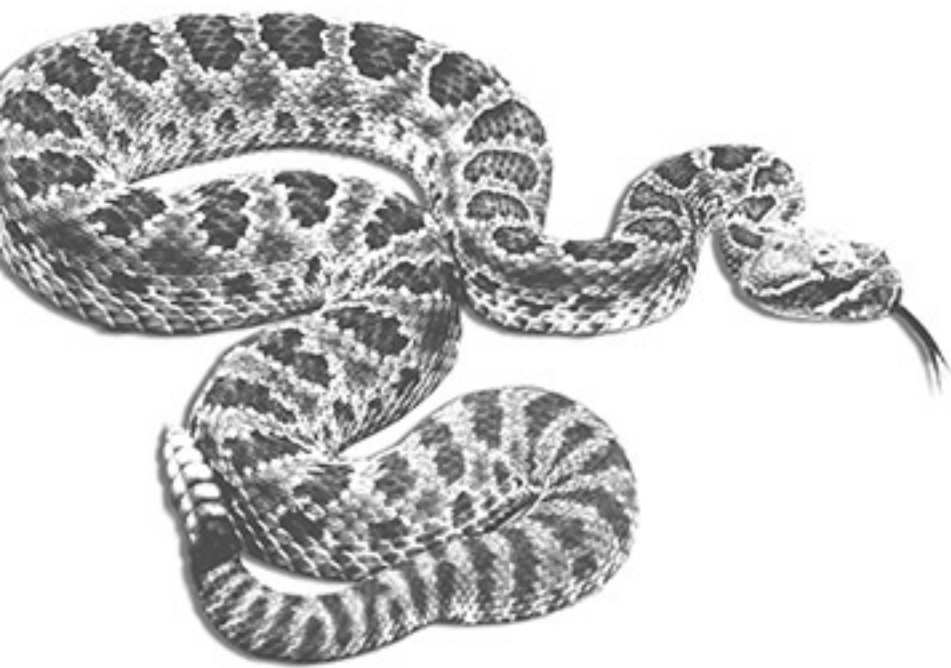
FA Robin Barley, Nick Barley, 1993

**31 Rob's Roof 5.11-** SR to 4", 2 bolts (25m)

Variation of Phosphorescence pitch 1. Climb roof via crack out right.

FA Rob Shackleton, Pete Shackleton, Nick Barley, 1993





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"Holds can break, there are big blocks, but the position is spectacular. It's awesome!"

— WILLIS BROWN



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