

Beware the Future

ROBERT HORAN

IN THE EARLY 1980s, Boulder, Colorado area standards for free climbing began to rise. Now, well into the 80s, the standards have sky-rocketed. Once again, Boulder's free climbers are among the country's leaders of difficult free routes, with several 5.12 + s and over twenty 5.13s to date.

The incursion is primarily due to the transformation of the area's ethics. Preeminent locals have ventured onto an unconventional vision among the rock crags, now scrutinizing blank, unclimbable-appearing portions of rock as opposed to naturally protectable cracks or flake systems.

These new-age rhythmical performances are usually top-roped free, if possible, and then bolts are placed in the most accessible places for the lead. The modus operandi for bolting varies, although 90% of the bolt routes have been established on rappel. Ultimately the first ascensionist will red-point the route (climb from bottom to top without ever weighting the rope). Often this ends up as a race against boredom.

Boulder's climbing mecca is gifted with many talented, well conditioned climbers, many of whom have never established a 5.13 route. It is the climbing community as a whole that is behind the push to the extremely high standards on the scale. From the first route in the area to the new desperate ones, each route acts as a stepping stone to something greater, ultimately making climbing safer and more enjoyable for all.

The Boulder area's competitive nature has driven local rock jocks to incredible new horizons and the overabundance of steep, overhanging, high quality rock shows no limits.

In the summer of 1984 the area received its first 5.13 route when I free-climbed the *Rainbow Wall* (5.13a) on the south face of Wind Tower in Eldorado Canyon. This diagonaled up and left on small holds and was protected by five bolts placed on lead. In the following spring of 1985, Christian Griffith led up *Paris Girl* (5.13a), between Disappearing Act and Grande Course on the Redgarden Wall. The thin-edged route with its long reaches was protected by eight bolts placed on rappel. In the summer of 1986, on the north side of Tower Two's summit block, Griffith and Neil Kaptain freed the bulging 30-foot wall *Venus de Milo* (5.13a). Here, as below when not specifically mentioned, bolts placed on rappel protected the strenuous route. Then down on the outcropping at the beginning of the Redgarden Wall Gully

PLATE 25

Photo by Bob Horan

**"Five-Year Plan" (5.13b), Skunk
Canyon, Flatirons, Colorado.**



Trail, just right of Breakfast of Champions, Charlie Fowler and Joe Huggins established *Kaptain Krunch* (5.12d/5.13a). Small layaways led to a slap for the sloping lip; two bolts and a pin placed on rappel protected the overhang. Meanwhile Griffith added an even wilder roof climb by traversing out left from the C'est la Vie dihedral on small but good edges. The awesome *Desdichado* (5.13b/c) is very exposed. Following this monumental ascent, Griffith teamed up with Mark Sonnefeld to establish yet another 5.13 route with the free ascent of *Wingless Victory* (5.13b). The leaning arête climb is another very exposed route just right of the fourth pitch of the Naked Edge.

The following year of 1987 brought on even more 5.13 action as young Chris Hill freed the severely overhanging wall left of Supremacy Crack. The *Web* (5.13a) follows good holds with long reaches between them. Up the road a bit on Peanuts Wall, Dale Goddard joined the action by establishing the *Sacred and Profane* (5.12d/5.13a). The vertical face follows a prominent rib with small edges. Across from Peanuts on the upper part of the West Ridge (also known as the Rincon Wall), Fowler freed *Surf's Up* (5.13). This overhanging dihedral right of Wendego is hardest at the start and slowly becomes manageable. Bolts and pins protect the climb. Down the West Ridge, on the south face of Long John Tower, I led *Incarnation* (5.13a). The overhanging thin face is capped off with a beautiful vertical slab. Six bolts and two pins protect this exposed face. Topping off Eldorado's 5.13s was the *Kloberdeath Roof* (5.13b). Bob Candelaria's overhanging route climbs up and out left from the Kloberdanz roof and then up onto a vertical face.

In the Flatirons the standards have also changed. In the summer of 1986, Goddard free-climbed the severely overhanging thin crack on the south face of the Back Porch in Skunk Canyon. The *Five Year Plan* (5.13a/b) is all naturally protected except for a bolt placed at the lip, a must for any crack monger. That same summer, Goddard also established a very thin vertical face climb just right of Stone Love across from the Finger Flatiron. *Cornucopia* (5.13a) ascends a beautiful smooth wall.

The following spring of 1987, I free-climbed an incredibly overhanging pocketed wall at the mouth of Skunk Canyon to establish the spectacular *Guardian* (5.13a). That summer in Bear Canyon, Dan Michaels created another desperate 5.13 route by free-climbing the *Fiend* (5.11a). The overhanging, leaning dihedral is protected by a pin and four bolts. That fall Michaels created another desperate climb on the west face of the first Ironing Board. *Slave to Rhythm* (5.13b/c) climbs out of a very overhanging pebbled wall. In early December I established another 5.13 free route on the west face of Satan's Slab, just right of the Doric Dihedral. *Watchmaker Steady* (5.13a) climbs up very thin edges on a slightly overhanging wall. Five bolts were placed on lead.

COLOR PLATE 8 (on following page)

Photo by Melanie Dieckman

Bob Horan on First Ascent of Solstice (5.13), Old Stage Crag, Colorado.

Down the range a bit, in Boulder Canyon, in the fall of 1984, Griffith freed *Tourist Extravaganz* (5.13a). The minute vertical granite slab is located on Castle Rock, right of Country Club Crack. Several years later, in the spring of 1987, Mark Rolofson and I led *Damaged Goods* (5.12d/5.13a). The intricate bulge and crack is just left of Rude Boys on Milkdud Rock and is protected by four pins placed on rappel. Soon after, Rolofson free-climbed the thin water groove to the right of the latter routes, *Blues for Allah* (5.13a). That same summer, Griffin put up another arête route by freeing *Verve* (5.13b/c). The overhanging, thin-edged arête is located just left of the Cosmosis dihedral on Bell Butte. In the fall of 1987 I reestablished another 5.13 free route in the canyon by free-climbing *Hands of Destiny* (5.13b). On the steep-to-overhanging crack-and-flake system, it consists of face climbing and laybacking on small holds. Four pins were placed on lead.

Another Boulder area crag worth mentioning is the Left Hand Canyon's Olde Stage Crag. Several very steep face routes all with bolt protection are here. Most noteworthy is the *Soltice* (5.12d/5.13a), which I climbed in early 1987. The steep face begins at a very technical roof and then goes up an overhanging wall.

Even further down the range, a favorite area for Boulder's climbers, Buttonrock Reservoir, has seen much activity, notably on the *New Horizons* arête, a thin overhanging prow, which I led in 1987. All the routes described are of good or excellent quality.

Editor's Note. All American rock-climbers will not agree with these tactics. By publishing this article, the American Alpine Club neither recommends nor condemns the climbing methods described above.



COLOR PLATE 9 (on previous page)

Photo by Michiko Takahashi

Kazuyuki Takahashi taking off by Paraglider from Cho Oyu for the World's Altitude Record.