

route finding, establishment of protection, and continuous anxiety that the entire escarpment might somehow collapse, most pitches failed to surpass mid-5.10 in difficulty, offering large holds, dramatic, exposed positions, and good belay ledges on which to recover.

We placed bolts only at belays, but with an eye toward posterity we equipped the route with a generous number of Dolomites-style soft-iron pitons (from a retired climber's collection that we had acquired in trade for tequila). We used some aid to establish many of the pitches, but on our final push we climbed the route all free. We did extensive cleaning during our several rappels and re-climbs of the pitches, and it would be a shame if this spectacular route was not recommendable to someone. Alas, imagination fails me as to whom.

JEFF ACHEY

Capitol Peak, the Crystal Dragon. In October, when fall storms lashed the high peaks of Colorado's Elk Range with almost daily fronts of freezing rain and snow, a thin ribbon of water ice breached the 800' lower granite buttress guarding the steep couloirs and rock bands of Capitol Peak's (14,130') north face. When the weather broke Kevin Dunnett and I rounded up our gear and a couple of mules to ease the approach, and headed in.



The Crystal Dragon on Capitol Peak. *Royal Laybourn*

We agreed that the opportunity to climb this type of ephemeral, almost mythical, line trumped all obligations. Five years and four attempts on this face, with a cast of strong and talented companions, had only whetted my desire. As I age and the years pass (47, 48, 49, 50...), a deep internal debate has questioned the strength of my desire, the strength of my arms, the depth of my endurance, and the intrinsic value of the rewards.

Even from our camp at the bottom of the face, we weren't sure there was enough ice. Scoping the line through our binoculars offered no encouragement. We headed off predawn to flounder through frozen boulders and snowfields up to the base of the face. The overlaps were loaded with icy daggers and narrow bands of water ice, with a constant shower of spindrift. Solid tool placements and excitement at finding quality ice allowed me to move quickly through the roofs without placing much gear. The first and second pitches held the thickest ice, averaging 3-4", although much better bonded than in previous years. Kevin's lead on the second pitch required crossing difficult vertical rock bands to connect isolated plaquettes of ice. His hanging



Kevin Dunnett leaving the bomber belay on pitch 4 of the Crystal Dragon. *Royal Laybourn*

belay stance in a narrow chimney offered no protection from falling ice or the pounding spindrift from the upper snowfields. On pitch three I delicately balanced up narrow seams of ice and vertical rock, fighting to create placements and calling on all the resources gained in over 30 years of ice climbing. Though I was immersed in waves of billowing spindrift, the intensity warmed me with euphoria. At another semi-hanging belay 600' up with only marginal gear, including the pick of my axe driven deep into a crack, the angle lessened. If we were to tread the summit ridge far above without a bivouac, we would have to move quickly. Kevin arrived, grinning and bloodied, and started with an exposed tension traverse to reach another ice runnel, less than a foot wide. A couple of barn-door moves and some strenuous pulls got him to good anchors and the top of the first buttress.

We climbed the remaining 1,800' to the summit ridge in three blocks, through steep unconsolidated powder snow alternating with desperate, marginally protected face climbing across blank rock. Loose, overhanging rock on the summit headwall and the burning daylight convinced us to do a series of rising leftward traverses to join the standard Knife-Edge route (northeast ridge) at the base of the summit pyramid.

As the sun slipped below the horizon, since we were tired but happy, we forewent the summit. Pleased with our success on what we called the Crystal Dragon (IV M7 WI5), we headed unroped down the Knife-Edge. Darkness fell as we soloed down the last technical moves. Hours of post-holing by headlamp through the steep boulder fields finally led us back to the tent around midnight.

ROYAL LAYBOURN

BLACK CANYON OF THE GUNNISON NATIONAL PARK

North Chasm View Wall, the Black Sheep. On April 22 Mike Pennings and I finished our long-term project on the western edge of the North Chasm View Wall. The route tackles an obvious dihedral system located 200 yards up the narrow, choss-capped gully between the Plunge Pillar formation and the "Pig Routes" buttress. Mike dubbed the route the Black Sheep in keeping with the farm theme for route names in the area. Although it felt good to have finally completed the route, 30' of pesky aid remained. Over the next five weeks I invested many days on this difficult section and finally succeeded in redpointing the line (IV 5.13b) on May 30. The climb tackles seven excellent pitches, and can be climbed at a high-quality and reasonable 5.12- A0. A good topo and further details can be found at the North Rim Ranger Station and in *Rock and Ice* #166.

JOSH WHARTON, AAC