

Again we started from the bottom of the route. Neil led the first pitch; alternating leads, I then had the opportunity to lead the excellent sixth pitch. We had the bottom pitches pretty well rehearsed, so our progress was fairly swift up to our old high point.

The next couple of pitches were quite straightforward and took us to the foot of two large chimneys; they were part of an existing aid route which to the best of our knowledge hadn't yet been freed. Thinking the meat of the hard climbing was over, we were shocked to find the first chimney to be quite horrific. The first half was very loose and strenuous; there were some bolts on this pitch, but the adequate surrounding natural protection meant I didn't find it necessary to clip them. The pitch was certainly the toughest at about 5.11d X. The rest of the climb was of a modest standard and the rock went back to being the immaculate textured granite we grew to expect from the Sphinx.

By the end, *Little Fluffy Clouds* turned out to be exactly what we hoped for. We managed to climb the whole route without the addition or use of any fixed protection, and every pitch was climbed on sight at 5.11 or below, a grade attainable by many. Although the line wasn't totally independent, it was certainly the most natural line for free climbing and we feel that that is enough to justify its independent existence.

PATCH HAMMOND, *United Kingdom*

*La Esfinge, Dion's Dihedral, New Variation and First Free Ascent.* Looking at the Sphinx (La Esfinge) and following its features and lines, it rapidly becomes obvious that one feature dominates all others. That is the 150-meter left-facing corner, the aid line *Dion's Dihedral*. The corner begins about two-thirds of the way up the crag and looms darkly over the lower slabs, cracks, and walls. The aid line follows a fairly direct route into the corner along some natural features and then uses rivet ladders up the blank walls.

Nic Sellars and Mark "Zippy" Pretty devised a potential free line through binoculars. Their line succeeded in linking all the features, but only by some devious and winding route finding. Nic and Zippy then set to work on free climbing the route. They quickly succeeded on the first four pitches, all of which were about 5.11+. They mainly followed the aid line, though at times it was necessary to perform large detours in order to get around some of the rivet ladders. These early pitches were certainly the route-finding crux. Above, the climbing looked more obvious, but strenuous and sustained.

At this point, Zippy sadly became unwell and was unable to continue, so I took the opportunity to join Nic and try to finish the route. The first day was a chance for me to climb the pitches already climbed by Nic and Zippy. Nic and I quickly worked through these until we were back at Nic and Zippy's high point. The next pitch was a steep, slanting finger crack. It was by far the most physical point of the route and the only pitch that was not onsighted. We both felt it to be a tough 5.12b. This pitch was not part of the original aid line and was well protected with traditional gear. From the high point, we abseiled to the floor and left the ropes fixed.

The second day started with the rather grim task of jumaring back up to our high point. From there, a couple of 5.11 pitches soon took us to a point the aid climbers used for their portaledge. We decided to adopt the same strategy, but to help with the hard work of hauling, Neil Dyer came along to give us a hand. While Nic and I were free climbing, Neil juggled and hauled a portaledge up the fixed lines to our bivy site. The superhuman effort was much appreciated. As Neil happily abseiled back down to the ground and back to camp, Nic and I set up the ledge and went to sleep.

Above us lay a couple of reasonable-looking pitches and then the corner itself. If we were

going to have a chance of free climbing it, we had to climb light and fast. We started the day by lowering the portaledge, extra ropes, gear, and sleeping equipment to the ground. This involved tying all our spare ropes together and just lowering everything, which left us committed with two ropes and a rack of gear.

The pitches into the corner were enjoyable cracks and slabs and were soon climbed. The first pitch of the corner turned out to be one of the best pitches I have ever climbed. A perfect 55-meter pitch of laybacking and bridging finished on a little ledge with a double bolt belay. We felt the grade was sustained 5.12a. The next pitch up the corner was slightly less strenuous but quite a lot bolder. This led to the final hard pitch of the route; the aid line here followed a seemingly blank corner, so we devised a line across the slabs to the left. Nic led the pitch, and it was certainly the most memorable of the route. Fifty feet above good gear, Nic found himself wobbling on a very tenuous slab move. The penalty of a fall would be 100-foot swing into the corner and the loss of much crucial time. Fortunately, Nic pulled through and the pitch was in the bag; 5.11c X seemed a fair grade for the pitch. We continued on to the top, weaving around the easy angled slabs and corners to reach the summit of the Sphinx once more.

The line taken by the free version of *Dion's Dihedral* (VI E6 6b/5.12b X) was purely dictated by the easiest way up the wall into the huge corner. Although no fixed protection was added on our ascent, we did rely quite heavily on the bolts left by the aid ascent. The belay bolts were particularly useful and the route would have been a lot harder without them. However, a number of the rivet ladders did seem to be a bit pointless, as it was possible to climb the features on natural protection, avoiding the blank granite walls.

PATCH HAMMOND, *United Kingdom*

*La Esfinge, Lobo Estepario, New Route.* In July, I completed the route *Lobo Estepario* (VI A3 6b obl., 650m). (This was the first solo ascent of *La Esfinge-Ed.*) All of the belays are equipped with double expansion bolts, except for pitch 13, which has only one bolt. Ten bolts were placed by hand at the belays. I made seven bivouacs on the wall. There is a dangerous flake plastered to the wall with mud at the end of pitch nine.

The route starts in an obvious black water runnel to the left of two obvious thickets of brush. From the last belay, the 13th, there was 170 meters of IV/IV+ terrain. For gear, you need two sets of Friends to number 4, one set of microfriends, one set of nuts, 25 assorted pins, one set of hooks, and one copperhead for the first pitch. A portaledge is not necessary: it's possible to sleep at belays 3, 4, 5, and 7; and it's very comfortable to sleep at belays 2, 8, 9 (the "Hotel Ledge"), and 13. You can rappel the route. It has not been repeated and, apart from the initial part of the first pitch, which is all hooking, the route has great potential as a free climb.

JONÁS CRUCES FERNÁNDEZ, *Spain*

*La Esfinge, Todos Narcos.* Spaniards José Fernández and Daniel Lacueva ("Papiol") attempted to climb the southeast face of *La Esfinge* by a new route, but because of the poor quality of the rock and the absence of a direct, logical line, they decided to go for the east face. They climbed four pitches between the routes *Papas Rellenas* and *Ganxets Glacé*. Due to diarrhea and dehydration, they left fixed ropes and descended to Huaraz. The team returned to the wall July 16 and did not descend until they had reached the summit the night of the 23rd by their route *Todos Narcos* (A3 6c, 750m).

ANTONIO GÓMEZ BOHÓRQUEZ, *Spain*