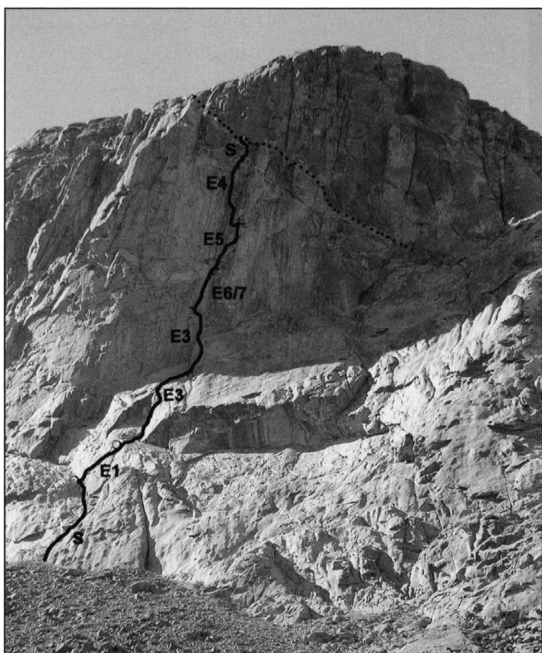


EGYPT

Sinai, *Jebel Safsafa* (*Willow Mountain*), *Holey Moses*. Sinai, the land of the Bedouin, conjures a rich and evocative image of lyrical, shifting sands, flowing robes, and the long, loping strides of camels. It also offers many opportunities to open new climbs from two to 14 pitches on superb granite around St. Catherine's Monastery. John Arran's and my line needed an early start; four direct pitches up to E3 standard flew us a good way up the solid gray granite. At 10 a.m. we were poised beneath the huge impending wind-sculpted face, ready for adventure. The first steep pitch ended with a beehive-like pillar of crumbly rock perched between me and the belay. It had the consistency of petrified mud, staying in place purely by virtue of its flat base. John

saw me eyeing both it and the belay nervously, and reassuringly explained that the rock was better than it looks! Sure enough, a fist-width under the surface the rock seemed much more reliable, and the belay actually looked like it might hold us. Above, however, looked demanding and perhaps impossible for us without a siege.

A choice of paths presented itself: insecure barn-dooring weirdness with a long runout, or a stout fingertip crack over a blank and powder-dusted bulge. John opted first for the former, hoping that difficulties would be short. He was looking unstable and I found concerned belayer-mutterings just seemed to slip out of me. "You can always come down you know," was met with a withering look from above. How could I have been so stupid? The crack proved our best hope after all, going at hard E6 or easy E7 and finishing with some wonderful contorting and curious egyptioning against the sidewall, also veiled with a thin layer of talc. The sound and beautifully sculpted red rock above offered a selection of charismatic features, including a huge folded earlobe which was great fun crawling beneath at E5, emerging to an assortment of Hueco Tanks-style holes. We were now only a pitch or so from the top, but still weren't certain of finding an exit. Moving from one hole to another was like a Swiss-cheese puzzle; if there wasn't a hold or hole within reach you could find yourself completely stuck. Much 3D ingenuity and lateral thinking was required, but this left me feeling satisfied and privileged to be surfing this ocean of petrified waves. Fortuitously, *Holey Moses* came into being just before sunset. *Holey Moses*: 250m, E6/7 6b, on the northwest face of *Jebel Safsafa* (*Willow Mountain*). St. Catherine's is about 145km northeast of Sharm El Sheikh, a popular diving resort. You can get the local bus there for £4.50, or pay about £50 in a taxi.



Jebel Safsafa, showing *Holey Moses*. The dotted line is a scramble with two rappels. Anne Arran