

Shield, The Promise Land. On Oct 3, 2004, Carolyn Parker and I completed the first ascent of our big-wall project, The Promise Land (V 5.12c), which climbs a 1,200'-tall section of the Shield's southwest face. The Shield, in the Sandia Mountains, is home to a host of routes ranging from alpine scrambles to new-wave aid routes and a lot in between. What the Shield lacked for many years was a modern, high-standard free route on good rock. The granite of the Sandias varies widely from steep and solid faces with in-cut holds to grainy and loose weaknesses of relatively poor quality. It was our vision to establish a route on the Shield that avoided the choss, even if it meant really hard face climbing. Due to an annual six-month falcon closure and my guiding schedule, the route took many forays over nearly two years to complete. To help me when Carolyn wasn't available, I enlisted our friends Marc Beverly and Alan Aiken to help clean, protect, and belay me while figuring out some of the crux pitches.

The route starts 20 feet right of Rainbow Dancer, with eight feet of climbing onto a right-trending ramp system and a step left to a steep face with crystalline knobs. The first pitch has a lot of fixed gear, since it's steep face climbing with no real cracks. The route is sustained and technical. Of the 11 pitches, two are 5.10, seven are 5.11 (three 5.11+), and two are 5.12. The rock and the positions are excellent. The continuous face climbing and discontinuous cracks made the protection devious or impossible with natural gear. Despite this, we went to great effort to add as little fixed gear as possible. The climbing is unrelenting, and the protection can be challenging but, in general, not runout. The exception is pitch six, which involves long run outs on 5.9-5.10a sections. We look forward to strong parties having a go at it. As of December 2005 it awaits a second ascent.

JOHN KEAR, AAC

Colorado

BLACK CANYON OF THE GUNNISON NATIONAL PARK

Atlantis. Several years ago Kent Wheeler identified an unclimbed buttress below and around the corner from his route Lost Cities. Kent has the eye of a tiger and experience of many years in the Black, so when he asked me to join him for a new route, my answer was easy. Over three seasons we put up a fine line on excellent rock. During a final push to the walk-off terrace atop pitch 13, we made a cold bivy in crumbling rock three pitches from the top; retreat was not a likely option. We went back in late May and put together a quality finish through a maze of unlikely pegmatite bands.

Approach via the Prisoner of Your Hairdo gully past Lost Cities, and continue down and around the corner. A small cairn at the base marks the start. Up 30' and left 30' is a greenish pillar forming a right-facing corner where pitch one begins. Pitch three has a classic Black Canyon traverse: unprotected, balancy, and committing climbing that leads into an excellent 5.11- seam. Pitch six, a full ropelength, traverses under the rotten "black eye." After this traverse a party is significantly more committed to finishing the route. The route steepens above and gives nice 5.10/5.11 climbing for the next seven pitches.

In September Kent and Jay Shotwell added three more pitches above the large terrace to finish the route at the Narrows Overlook. The first of the final three pitches is also the crux, at hard 5.11. If the day is late, however, a party can walk off left past Lost Cities to the escape gully.