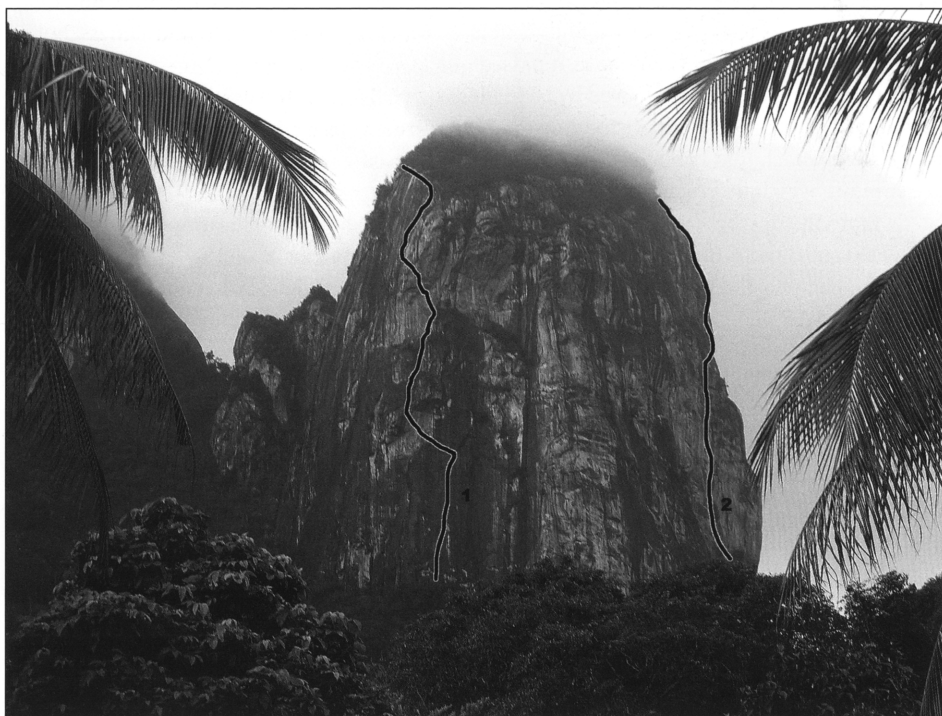


Malaysia

Tioman Island, Dragon's Horns, west face, Beckwith-Traver Route. On July 17 Mathew Traver and I traveled to the Malaysian Island of Tioman in the South China Sea. Our objective was the first ascent of the west face of Dragon's Horns (Bukit Nekek Semekut), a big wall rising from the canopy of the rainforest on the south coast of the island. The Horns (693m) are two granodiorite towers and, according to legend, are the resting place of a mythical Chinese princess who decided to stop there while flying to her prince in Singapore. When seen from the west, the southeast arête shows a distinct nose, mouth, and forehead, presumably forming her face.

Getting to the closest village, Mukut, proved straightforward though time-consuming. Reliable buses run from Singapore and Kuala Lumpur to the port of Mersing, the main embarkation point for Tioman Island. A regular ferry service connects Mersing and Genting on Tioman, though the ferry operator saw fit to charge us an additional two passages for our five haul bags.

From Genting we hitched a ride on a fishing boat to the tiny village of Mukut, arriving on the 19th with our five bags and supplies for the wall. It took 10 days' trail-cutting through the undergrowth to reach the base of the west face and a further six days of ferrying loads to install ourselves at our jungle base camp, which became affectionately known as the "Trench" on account of its dank, muddy, and insect-infested nature.



South Dragon's Horn, Tioman Island. (1) Beckwith-Traver Route on the west face. (2) Approximate line of Waking Dream on the south face. *Matthew Traver*

The approach had been physically and mentally draining. The heat and humidity, coupled with the repetitive nature of load-carrying, had us both suffering from exhaustion. After a few days rest in Mukut, we headed back into the jungle to begin fixing.

We scrambled up 3rd- and 4th-class gullies to the base of the South Dragon's Horn and fixed two pitches to a large forested terrace. A good system of cracks led from the center of the terrace toward a conspicuous overhang dubbed the Great Roof. We fixed an additional two pitches from the terrace, before hauling our bags to the high point. We then pulled our ropes and went capsule-style.

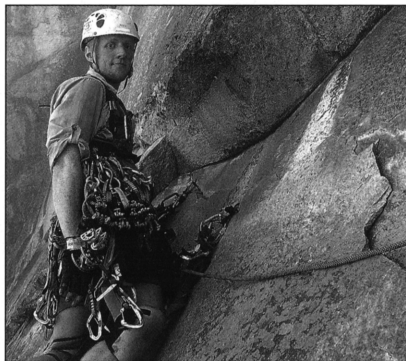
We made a long hook traverse beneath the roof to reach a clean corner-crack. This led to a seam, which we climbed on aid to cross the roof. This section proved to be the most challenging and time-consuming of the route. The aid, primarily on hooks and marginal gear, took 12 hours to complete. The remainder of the route was a mixture of free climbing and moderate aid. Protection on the free pitches was poor and spaced, the climbing characterized by water-worn pockets and grooves, often friable. The majority of the aid pitches required multiple hooking and/or thin placements. Matt suffered an inflammation of the ankle when three days in, which not only restricted his mobility, but also coincided with a fever and an illness. Fortunately, as we were 400m up the route, it passed quickly.

Our planned exit was blocked by large blocks, perched precariously above the portaledge and belay. Not willing to risk dislodging them, we instead climbed through blocky overhangs to a curving crack that brought us to a steep and exposed wall. Three long pitches took us to the summit, which we reached on August 19.

From the time we launched capsule style, it took five days to reach the top. It took another day to rappel the route, regain the Trench, and shuttle out most of our load in a single push. We called our line the Beckwith-Traver Route (13 pitches, 5.10 A3). Throughout our time on the wall the weather was mostly dry, though often windless and a scorching 35°C.

From high on the face we could see deep into the untouched interior of the island. To the northwest lay Mumbar Peak, featuring a wall, estimated to be nearly 800m high, rising out of the forest to the summit plateau. Projecting from the top was a series of spires. Farther into the dense forest a number of smaller walls rose into needle-like spires. And the North Dragon's Horn remains unattempted.

STEVE BECKWITH UK



Matthew Traver hooks a hollow flake toward the Great Roof. Steve Beckwith

Editor's note: Prior to the arrival of the British pair, there was only one established route on the entire island, Waking Dream on the south face of South Dragon's Horn. This 10-pitch climb was put up in 1999 by Scotty Nelson and Nick Tomlin at 5.9 and A2; it was repeated in 2002 by Malaysians Rosmann and Sharin, supported by Abudullah Danial, Akmal Noor, and Al Haleq. These five created an important, mostly free, variant above half-height; the climb attracted so much national attention that the ascent made front-page news in the Malaysian Star. In 2004 Americans Hank Jones and Dave Sharratt visited the island and made the third ascent. After working the route, they eventually climbed it free in a single push at 5.13a.