

HISTORY

This chapter is dedicated to the memory of Billy Westbay: 1952-2000

A rich history surrounds the climbs of Estes Park and Rocky Mountain National Park. It is beyond the scope of this book to flesh out the full historical details of each climb — interested readers are urged to peruse the selection of books listed at the back of this guide, and to make an effort to become acquainted with the history of our sport. An understanding of yesterday's climbs and the context in which they were completed can only add enjoyment and perspective to the climbs and issues we struggle with today.

What follows here is a synopsis of the important developments in mountaineering and rock climbing that took place over the last two centuries. With few exceptions, only in the last fifty years has anything resembling modern rock climbing been practiced.

Early Exploration

Longs Peak has been the center of attention in the unfolding saga of Estes Park climbing for many years. It is only fitting, then, that on its flanks we also find the beginnings of mountaineering in the region.

To the Ute and Arapaho Indians, who populated the area long before it became known to westerners, Longs Peak and Mount Meeker went by the collective name of The Two Guides. This comes as no surprise since these two summits are the highest and most visible of the peaks in Rocky Mountain National Park. It is possible that the first ascent of Longs came at the hands of Arapahos, who are said to have visited the summit for the purpose of trapping eagles.

The first Europeans to sight these mountains were probably members of a French trading expedition that reached the South Platte River in 1799. It wasn't until 1820, however, that the first written account of Longs Peak appears in the literature. Major Stephen Harriman Long, leader of a government sponsored expedition to the western mountains, noted the obvious landmark from the eastern plains, and though his party never set foot on (or even near) the mountain, his name was firmly attached to the northernmost fourteener in Colorado as early as 1825.

The Utes and Arapahos certainly made first ascents of the lesser peaks, as they used three trails to cross over the Divide — one of these trails led over the top of Flattop Mountain. It seems inconceivable that they would have paid no attention to the easily accessible nearby mountains (such as Hallett Peak). Whether they sought out routes to the summits of the more difficult peaks is a matter of speculation.

That we know anything of their activities during the 1800s can be attributed to a fact-finding mission by the Colorado Mountain Club in 1914. The Club, in an effort to bolster support for the creation of RMNP (which took place in 1915), traveled to the Wind River Range in Wyoming and sought out the services of three Arapahos: Gun Griswold, Sherman Sage and Thomas Crispin. Griswold and Sage

had last been in Estes Park in 1864 (then 13 and 23 years old), and Crispin was an interpreter. The three traveled with members of the Mountain Club for fifteen days, making a huge loop through the center of current-day RMNP in order to record the names and places of the surrounding terrain. Oliver Toll (relative of Roger Toll, one of the Park's early superintendents) was given the task of writing everything down. "Probably some of the names, and perhaps some of the stories, were inaccurate," he remarked in his report, "and perhaps manufactured for the occasion, but in the main, I am convinced that they were genuine names and legends." It is from this expedition that we get the tale of eagle trapping on the summit of Longs Peak. Other than pottery shards and arrowheads found along the three aforementioned trails over the Divide, the indigenous peoples left little physical evidence to support a definitive ascent of most of the area's mountains. Whether they did in fact climb Longs Peak (or any of the more inaccessible summits) is a question that will likely never be answered with authority.

Aside from the Arapahos, who only summered in Estes Park (the Utes generally summered on the west side of the Divide), and Kit Carson, who is said to have built a cabin south of Twin Sisters around 1841, there were no permanent residents in the valley until Joel Estes arrived in 1859. His family homesteaded east of Lake Estes, though it took several years of hard work before they were ready to move in for good. They didn't stay long — by 1866, they left for New Mexico, a decision that was influenced by the harsh winter of 1865-66.

The Estes family presumably did not venture far into the mountains (had they done so, it is likely that we would have some record of their climbs). However, it was their presence in the valley that paved the way for those more inclined to seek out new heights. Early visitors to Estes Park invariably stayed at one of several homesteads that were increasingly set up to make a profit from the tourist industry. From the very beginning, homesteaders realized that to make a living in the Estes Valley, they would have to rely upon the summer tourist trade.

In 1864, William N. Byers (founder of the still existing *Rocky Mountain News*) and a fellow named Velie made a visit to the area. They attempted Longs Peak by way of the Keyhole, and again via the Loft. Though they failed to reach the summit of Longs on both attempts, they were able to salvage their trip with an ascent of Mount Meeker, only to find the names of a previous party on top. Already the race to bag the peaks had begun. Byers returned to Longs in 1868 as a member of an expedition that was led by Major John Wesley Powell, and included L. W. Keplinger, W. H. Powell, Samuel Gorman, Ned E. Farrell, and John C. Sumner. Starting in Grand Lake, the team climbed through Keplinger's Couloir to join the Homestretch on the present-day Keyhole Route, and claimed the first documented ascent. In retrospect, the route was quite reasonable in terms of its difficulty, though the final 500 feet must have been a great psychological menace to overcome. The south face of Longs likely appeared as a ridiculous vertical wall to a climbing team approaching from Wild Basin in the 1860s (much as it does today, in fact). It is only when one reaches the base that the prospect of climbing it enters the realm of the possible.

Within the decade, Longs Peak became a sought-after destination for tourists and mountaineers who visited the area. Published photographs from the Hayden Survey of 1873-76 were instrumental in increasing the popularity of Estes Park, and the west in general. Local guides, the first of whom was Reverend Elkanah J. Lamb, accompanied the vast majority of these early ascents on Longs. Lamb homesteaded at the foot of the mountain in 1875, and charged \$5 per party. He is remembered most not for his guiding, but his harrowing descent of the East Face of Longs in 1871, in which he down climbed to Broadway (near the Notch Couloir) and continued along the snow chute that now bears his name.

Lamb's son Carlyle took over the guiding business several years later, and he, in turn, sold the family homestead to Enos A. Mills (in 1902). Mills took great pains to educate his clients, giving nature lectures on the way up. In fact, he is often cited as the father of Rocky Mountain National Park for his undying promotion of the area.

By 1907, Mills could not manage the volume of clients that sought out his services. Shep Husted (among others) began to work for Mills, and Husted amassed more ascents of Longs Peak than anyone — one source puts the number at 350, while another claims Husted summited an astonishing 938 times.

As Longs continued to grow in popularity, more travelers made the trip without a guide. Paul Nesbit asserts that only one in four used a guide during the years from 1927 to 1935, even though this was the period when Robert Collier, Jr. was running his guiding service out of the government-built Boulderfield Cabin (see photocopy of his promotional pamphlet, page 280). The era of the Longs Peak guide came to a close when the cabin was demolished in 1937 — of course, guided ascents continue to this day, but operations are no longer based on the mountain.

Longs Peak remained the focus of attention for many years after its first ascent, and hundreds of trips were logged on its flanks before hiking enthusiasts ventured to other objectives in the area. Among the early mountaineers willing to explore the unknown backcountry beyond Longs were Frederick Hastings Chapin and William Hallett.

Chapin, whose permanent home was in Hartford, Connecticut, was a member of the Appalachian Mountain Club (the AMC) in the latter part of the 19th century. He climbed on several occasions in the Swiss Alps, summitting Mount Blanc in 1877. He made at least four trips (and perhaps as many as eight) to Colorado in the 1880s. Near the end of his life, he even made a trip to the Himalayas (in 1894). Though many of Chapin's efforts in the Rocky Mountains were not first ascents, he made a lasting contribution to the area when he wrote *Mountaineering in Colorado — The Peaks about Estes Park*. This was the first of many climbing guidebooks for Estes Park ('climbing' is used loosely here as Chapin's climbs were just peak bagging scrambles), and by all measures it was a very successful book. First published by the AMC in 1889, it was reprinted in 1892, 1893, and 1899; British editions were released in both 1890 and 1896. That the volume even had a British edition speaks to its wide influence, and its importance in promoting mountaineering in the Rockies. (Even today Chapin's book continues to sell. It was republished in 1987 with copious historical notes added by James H. Pickering).

LONG'S PEAK

Elevation 14,255 feet

The ascent of Long's Peak, the fourteenth highest mountain in Colorado, is the most interesting trip to be made in the Rocky Mountain National Park. The ideal method of ascent is to climb to the Boulderfield Shelter Cabin, at the end of the horse trail, in the afternoon. Starting from there refreshed by a good night's rest, the more difficult part of the climb is leisurely made in the early morning, when views are best. By this plan, the afternoon storm is avoided.

LONG'S PEAK CLUB

Those successfully making the ascent of the peak with guides from Boulderfield Shelter Cabin will be presented with a certificate and membership pin of the Long's Peak Club.

HINTS

- Wear good, stout shoes, not slippers or pumps. Wear warm clothes.
- Parties start on time. Don't be late.
- Make reservations in advance.
- Gloves may be obtained at Boulderfield.
- Get hot lunch on return at Boulderfield Shelter Cabin.
- One-day horseback parties to Boulderfield for Luncheon and return are popular.
- Take new Glacier Basin Trail going one way, return via old trail.

**CLIMB
LONG'S PEAK**



TWO
DAILY
TRIPS

6:50
A.M.
10:50
A.M.

FROM
**BOULDERFIELD
SHELTER CABIN**

With Government Licensed Guides
\$2.50 PER PERSON

Phone Estes 72-F-5 for Reservations

ROBERT COLLIER, Jr.
Licensed Guide

MEALS LODGING GUIDES

Boulderfield
Shelter Cabin
Elevation 12,700 ft.



Located
on
Long's Peak

BOULDERFIELD SHELTER CABIN
Boulderfield Shelter Cabin is located at the end of Long's Peak Trail, seven miles from the auto road. Real meals, comfortable lodging and shelter are furnished for those climbing this wonderful peak. Many will enjoy a trip to this unique hotel at the end of one of the most enjoyable trails in the Rocky Mountain National Park. This cabin was built by the National Park Service, and is operated under its control.

Make all reservations in advance, as accommodations are limited. Phone 72-F-5.

NO MODERN CONVENIENCES

No mosquitos (too high for the pests).
No trees or shrubbery to spoil view of 1,000 acres of granite rock.

Water carried from snow banks a few feet from door.
Freezing temperature guaranteed outdoors every night.
Guests arrive on foot or horseback (No autos.)
No regular mail service. Telephone works.
No Hay Fever.

RATES

Lodging, per person, over night.....	\$2.00	
Shelter, over night.....	.50	
Breakfast.....	\$1.25 | Lunch.....	1.50
Dinner.....	1.75 | Coffee, tea, cocoa.....	.25
Sandwiches, pie, cake.....	2.50	
Guide for Long's Peak, per person.....	.25	
Horses: Hay, per feed.....	.50	
Grain, per feed.....	.50	

SCHEDULE

ONE DAY TRIP		ONE AND ONE-HALF DAY TRIP	
Leave Estes Park.....	No Bus..... 5:30 A. M.	2:30 P. M.	R. M. P. T. C. Bus.
Start up Trail.....	Horses..... 7:00 A. M.	3:30 P. M.	Foot or Horses.
Timberline (8 miles) 11,119 feet.....	..... 8:30 A. M.	5:15 P. M.	.....
Boulderfield Cabin, 12,700 feet.....	..... 10:00 A. M.	6:45 P. M.	Supper, Lodging, Breakfast
Start for Summit (via North Route).....	..... 10:30 A. M.	6:30 A. M.	.....
Chasm View.....	..... 12:00 P. M.	8:00 A. M.	.....
Summit Elevation, 14,255 feet.....	..... 1:30 P. M.	9:30 A. M.	.....
Leave Summit.....	..... 2:00 P. M.	10:20 A. M.	.....
Boulderfield Cabin.....	..... 4:00 P. M.	12:20 P. M.	Luncheon Rest.
Leave Cabin.....	..... 4:30 P. M.	2:00 P. M.	.....
Auto Road.....	No Bus..... 7:00 P. M.	4:30 P. M.	Bus to Hotel.
Reach Estes Park.....	..... 8:30 P. M.	6:00 P. M.	R. M. T. C. Bus.

If old trail from Boulderfield Cabin is used add two hours to climbing time.

A guiding pamphlet from the late 1920s.

PAMPHLET COURTESY MIKE DONAHUE

William L. Hallett, for whom Hallett Peak is named, first came to Estes Park in 1878. He raised his family in Denver, but they spent summers in the house he built in 1881 (the home still stands, on Marys Lake Road just north of Marys Lake). Hallett was a frequent guide for Chapin, and the two shared a thirst for unexplored territory. Influenced by Chapin's membership in the AMC, Hallett, along with eighteen other men from the Denver area, formed the Rocky Mountain Club. It was the first climbing club in Colorado, and Hallett served as Vice President and Chairmen of Explorations. In 1898, he was selected to lead an expedition to the Grand Teton in Wyoming, and were it not for obligations to his job, the now-famous climb on the Grand might have been named the Hallett-Owen route instead of the Owen-Spalding route! Because Hallett could not travel to Wyoming, Franklin Spalding went in his stead, winning an important victory for the RMC with William Owen, Frank Peterson, and John Shive.

The principal activities of the RMC at the turn of the century were hiking and mountain scrambles. It was inevitable that these outings would soon escalate in difficulty. In 1906, members of the club made the first ascent of the Third Flatiron near Boulder, and it is not unreasonable to suspect that Hallett himself reached the summit of the Third during this period, as he was considered one of the better climbers in the RMC. The 1906 ascent marked a turning point in Colorado climbing: never before had such an unbroken face been scaled. Club members (and others) would soon take their daring to the peaks about Estes Park.

The First Technical Climbs

The ascent of the Third Flatiron was one of a handful of 5th class climbs established in Colorado in the decades surrounding the turn of the century. It would be some time, however, before ropes and specialized climbing gear entered the picture (and a longer time still before anyone would bother to call technical climbing 5th class). Most of the early technical climbs were done without a rope, as it was considered unsporting to sully such efforts with extraneous gear (it is worth noting that there wasn't much gear available that one might use, aside from a rope). Elkanah Lamb's 1871 descent of the East Face of Longs Peak may well be the first 'climb' that would qualify as 5th class by modern standards, and Enos Mills repeated his feat in 1906. Other important ascents of this era included the North Face of Longs, (first climbed by Carlyle Lamb and Mills around 1910, give or take five years — it is unclear who climbed it first), and the largely unknown line up Longs Peak taken by Werner Zimmerman on August 23, 1919.

Zimmerman's ascent was head and shoulders above anything else yet done in the area. He climbed Alexander's Chimney to Broadway, and then followed the Eighth Route to the southeast ridge. Upon reaching the nonnegotiable Notch, he down climbed Gorrell's Traverse, and continued to the summit via the Homestretch — all ropeless and alone. The names of the routes he followed were not attached to his climb until many years later, when other parties made their ascents without the knowledge that Zimmerman had preceded them (by 21 years in the case of the Eighth Route).

It is telling that Zimmerman was a European with extensive climbing experience throughout the world. Colorado climbers of the early twentieth century were largely unaware of the relatively advanced state of alpinism that existed both in Europe and England, and as a result, most of the early climbs in RMNP paled in comparison to the developments taking place elsewhere. One Coloradan who was exposed to European climbing was Albert Ellingwood. He established difficult climbs in Colorado Springs, the San Juans, and the Crestone Needles that were the most difficult in the state. For several years after this, exposure to the European climbing scene was a key component for any climber wishing to push the standards (this maxim holds some truth even today).

In 1922, two more parties made ascents of Alexander's Chimney and the upper East Face, including the best known of the early ascents made by J. W. Alexander and RMNP Ranger Jack Moomaw. Moomaw writes that they brought a rope and crampons for the climb (a fairly new development), but did not use them. Alexander had actually soloed the East Face just two days before their ascent, though he did not take the chimney named after him to reach Broadway.

The third ascent of Alexander's took place only three days later. A seven-member party, led by Carl Blaurock of Denver, climbed to Broadway and established a separate finish known as Little Notch. Once again, European traditions influenced this effort as Herman Buhl, one of the seven who made the ascent, was a member of the Swiss Alpine Club before he emigrated to the United States. He had climbed in the Alps, and was well versed in rope management (particularly belaying and rappelling) and the use of modern climbing equipment (pitons, carabiners, crampons and ice axes). Also of interest is that Buhl's wife made the climb, becoming the first woman to ascend the East Face. Women climbers were frequent participants in the pioneering efforts of Colorado climbing, more so than in later years. Three separate parties on Longs Peak in the 1873 season included women (Addie Alexander, Anna E. Dickinson, and Isabella Bird all summited), and women participated fully in the RMC outings, making ropeless ascents of the Third Flatiron and doubtless other routes.

Alexander and Moomaw continued to make unroped forays on the flanks of Longs Peak in the early 1920s. Moomaw claims to have made the first winter ascent of Longs Peak in 1922 from the south (though Paul Nesbit gives credit to Enos Mills, 1903), and Alexander established the exposed Southwest Ridge in 1924. Also established in 1924 or 1925, by E. H. Bruns and W. F. Ervin, was the North Chimney route that led to the north side of Broadway and positioned the climber directly below the Diamond. Though the Diamond was certainly out of the question to climbers of the time, it doesn't take much imagination to realize that they were beginning to dream of ascending that great face.

In 1925, famed Longs Peak guide Walter Kiener climbed the East Face with Agnes Vaille for the first winter ascent on that side. The accomplishment was marred by tragedy: Vaille collapsed from exhaustion near the base of the North Face, and Kiener had to leave her to round up a rescue team. She perished while rescue

efforts bogged down in a fierce storm, and Herbert Sortland, a member of the rescue squad, died returning to the base of the mountain. His body was found the following spring, only a few hundred yards from the Longs Peak Inn.

Modern Rock Climbing Arrives

In 1927, Joe and Paul Stettner drove from Chicago to Colorado, intent on sampling the climbs of the Rockies. These famous brothers had more than just exposure to European climbing going for them: they were European. Born in Germany, the two moved to America in 1925 and 1926 (first Joe, then Paul), though by this time they had climbed for six years in the Alps. Within a year of moving to Chicago, they put up several difficult routes at Devil's Lake (a popular climbing area in Wisconsin), but soon tired of the short supply of climbing areas in the Midwest.

Longs Peak was notable enough (even in 1927) that the Stettner brothers were aware of the already-established routes on its East Face. Packing up their pitons, carabiners and felt-soled rock shoes, they rode to Colorado on a pair of Indian motorcycles. The trip alone was adventuresome enough to secure a place in the lore of Colorado climbing — it took five days of rough riding on dirt roads just to reach the mountains.

Once in Colorado, Joe and Paul bought 120 feet of hemp rope from a general store in Estes Park, hiked up to a bivy in the (now demolished) Timberline Cabin on Longs Peak, and waltzed up the Lower East Face the following day, taking a line up the sheer wall right of Alexander's Chimney. Though Joe reported, "several places where we thought it was impossible to get over," Paul, who led the entire climb, on-sight flashed all of it. Stettner's Ledges, as the route came to be known, was the most difficult climb in the state.

It was a climb ahead of its time when measured against subsequent ascents by the locals. It was probably the first time carabiners were used in Colorado, and though the Stettners began by free soloing the easy initial pitches, they used a rope, a belay, and pitons for protection on the majority of the route. Stettner's Ledges was the first established in a fashion similar to modern day climbs.

It may also have been the first climb put up with a specialized pair of shoes designed for rock ascents. Prior to 1927, climbers generally wore nailed boots in the mountains. The Stettners also used nailed boots, crampons, and an ice axe for the approach, but switched over to their climbing shoes once on the rock. Tight-fitting baseball and basketball shoes were popular footwear on the Flatiron climbs in Boulder, but these were likely worn for the hike in and out as well. And though Moomaw's account of his ascent of Alexander's Chimney mentions that "Alexander was wearing tennis shoes", he also wrote that on the descent, "...scree jumping bruised the bottoms of [Alexander's] feet and his soles peeled off later," indicating that Alexander wore these shoes all day.

It would be some time before Colorado climbers were up to the task of repeating Stettner's Ledges. Warren Gorrell, Charles Hardin, Ernie Field and Eddie Watson made the second ascent in 1936, but only after a failing the previous season — that

Gorrell broke his foot on the 1935 attempt served to warn other climbers away from its abundant difficulty. Even after Gorrell's success in 1936, only two additional parties climbed the route through 1948, and one of these included Joe Stettner.

The most active climbers in the 1930s and 1940s (in the Estes Park area) were the Longs Peak guides, Gorrell being one of them. They generally confined themselves to low-angled gullies and chimneys, establishing routes such as Field's Chimney on the Lower East Face, and several moderate climbs on the North and South Faces of Longs.

Joe Stettner again established the only notable ascent of the period, though in a style that was a throwback to earlier times. Climbing alone and without a rope, he picked out a line on the Upper East Face left of the Notch Couloir. Though the bottom portion was easy, the upper buttress proved to be quite difficult, enough so that later climbers doubted the line that Stettner claimed he followed. It's possible that Stettner incorrectly marked his route on a Warren Gorrell photo of 1936. A more likely scenario, however, is that Colorado climbers were still one or two decades away from matching the Stettner's accomplishments, and thus were not in the frame of mind to appreciate how well they climbed.

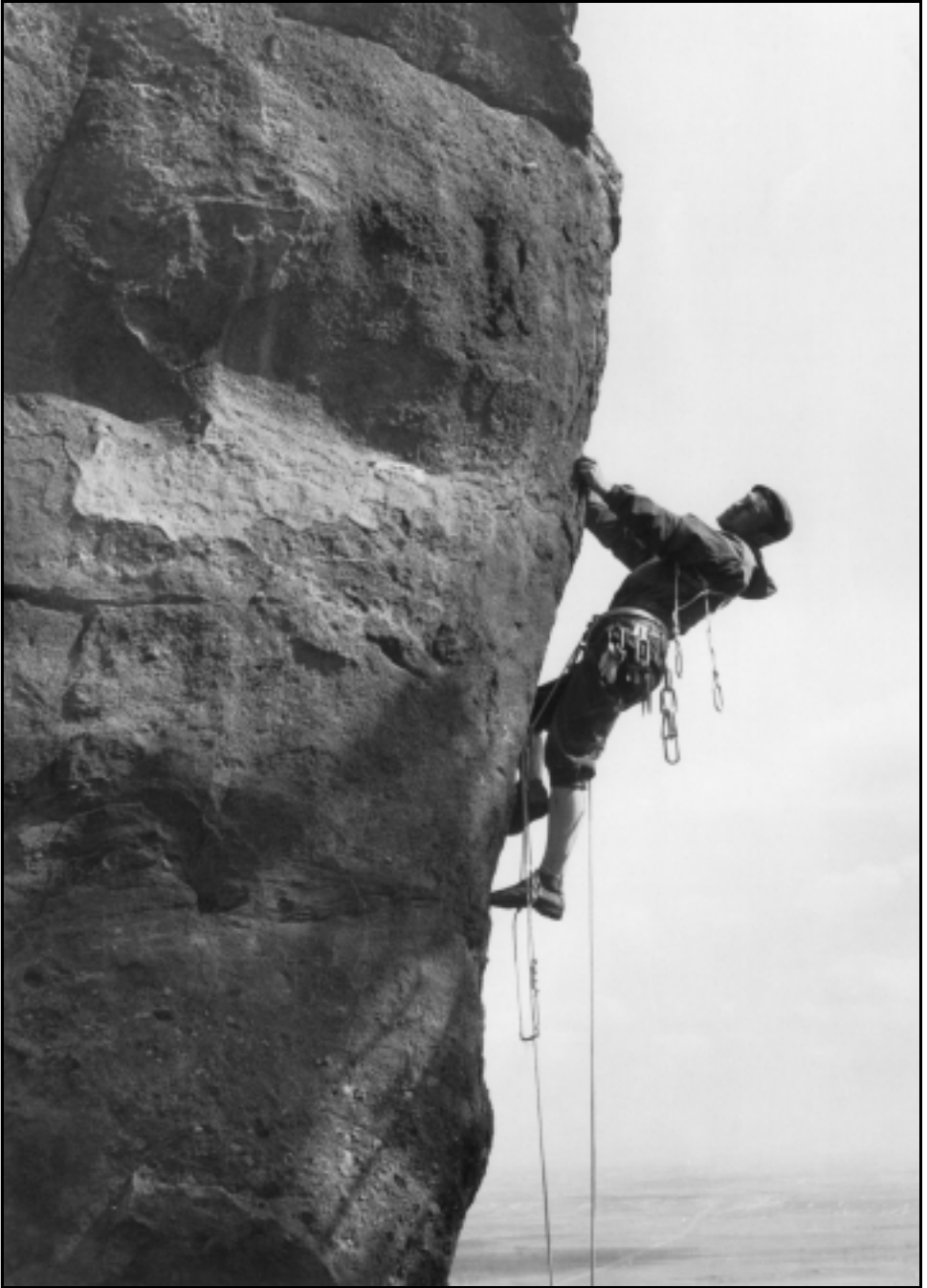
In addition to the routes on Longs Peak, the Stettners made first ascents of difficult lines on Lone Eagle Peak (south of RMNP in the Indian Peaks, in 1933) and on the east face of Monitor Peak (in the San Juans, 1947). They brought modern climbing to Colorado, and it would be two decades before the locals caught up.

The Calm Before the Storm

Longs Peak remained the center of attention for alpinists of the region throughout the 1940s and 1950s. However, it was around this time that climbers also began to take notice of the smaller cliffs in and about Boulder (and later around Estes Park). Advances in technology brought about better equipment, and perhaps more importantly, an increased availability of such gear. After World War II, army surplus gear was in abundant supply, and climbers could purchase nylon ropes, pitons of various sizes, and carabiners.

A group of Boulder climbers patiently tinkered and experiment with the new gear, which also included bolts from the hardware store, and slowly advanced the front lines in the vertical world. After mastering techniques of rope management and tension climbing (as aid climbing was called in those days), they took to the high peaks and finally walked up to the line drawn in the sand by the Stettners.

The first of several difficult routes established by the Boulder locals was the Window on the very edge of the Diamond, by Brad Van Diver and Bill Eubanks (in 1950). Having served their apprenticeship in the Boulder foothills, they were able to climb the route without much fanfare. (In 1955, Eubanks and Van Diver nailed West Owl Direct on the Twin Owls, the first of many difficult aid lines to be established on that formation). Two days later, Dave Hornsby and Harold Walton (the pair responsible for the Hornsby Direct on Stettner's Ledges in 1949), made the second ascent of the Window, and they compared its difficulty with Stettner's Ledges.



Ray Northcutt posing on Flagstaff Mountain in Boulder.

PHOTO COURTESY RAY NORTHCUTT

The span of time separating major ascents in RMNP began to diminish as the new wave of climbers applied their skills to the flanks of Longs Peak. It had taken Colorado climbers seventy years to get to this point: Elkanah Lamb's descent of the East Face in 1871, the Third Flatiron in 1906, the North Face of Longs by Carlyle Lamb and Mills, Zimmerman's East Face solo in 1919, Stettner's Ledges in 1927, Joe Stettner's solo in 1936, and Van Diver and Eubanks on the Window, were all separated by quiet periods of repeating the classic routes and practicing techniques. In comparatively rapid fashion, the decade of the 1950s saw several landmark routes established, including Zumie's Thumb (Tom Hornbein, Dexter Brinker, and Harry Waldrop, 1951), Hornbein Crack (the first free climb surpassing Stettner's Ledges in difficulty, done in 1953 by Tom Hornbein), the East Arete on Mount Meeker (Becker, Gorman and Gustafson, 1955), the Northcutt-Carter on Hallett Peak (by Ray Northcutt and Harvey Carter, 1956), Tiptoe on Chasm View Wall (Cecil Oulette and Dick Woodford, 1956), and Great Chimney in the Palisades (by the Camp Hale climbers in 1957). These climbs were all in the same league in terms of the level of difficulty and commitment required — they were one day climbs (though a few took several attempts), rated around 5.7 or 5.8 by today's standards.

Always the Diamond loomed in the back of the collective conscience of the small climbing community that existed in the 1950s. Indeed, both Tom Hornbein and Dale Johnson had designs on climbing the wall. Hornbein even traversed out on Table Ledge to have a look-see in 1952, though he later dismissed it as beyond the current abilities of his climbing circle. Johnson trained specifically for an ascent of the wall, but his dream became forever doomed when he approached RMNP officials asking for permission to climb the face. They summarily forbade it, and ended up closing the wall to all comers for six years. It was a decision that ultimately cheated Coloradans of the chance to climb the face on their own terms — by the time the Diamond ban was lifted, a pair of very competent Yosemite climbers aced out the locals, using equipment and techniques that were well ahead of the standards in Colorado.

Ray Northcutt

Ray Northcutt and Harvey Carter's ascent of Hallett's north wall was an important event in the history of Colorado climbing. They had already made an attempt on the wall in 1955, but bad weather forced a retreat. In 1956, they pushed the line further up the wall, but stopped short of the top, again because of severe weather.

Finally, in July of 1956, the two finished the climb. If compared to the test pieces of the day in the United States, the Third Buttress was not a major breakthrough — climbs of greater length and difficulty had already been completed in Yosemite and elsewhere. But when compared to other climbs in Colorado, and to Northcutt's own string of ascents up to 1956, the route was a tremendous accomplishment. Northcutt proved to himself and others that the large, intimidating walls in RMNP could be safely ascended. His experience on the Third Buttress, coupled with advances in equipment, enabled him to prevail over the most difficult climbs of the 1950s.

After earning a degree at Montana State in 1957, Northcutt moved back to Colorado and enrolled at CU-Boulder for additional classes. He declares that this was the period in his life that he devoted much of his time to training and climbing. His training routines were legendary — hard trail running, 100 chin-ups a day, push-ups, sit ups, and bouldering (called “trick climbing” back then). It was in Boulder that he bumped into Layton Kor, the most prolific climber Colorado has ever seen. Northcutt was the better climber of the two in the late 1950s, but he describes Kor as his equal. “I did my best climbing with Layton, actually. We sort of fed off each other.”

By 1958, Northcutt was in fantastic climbing shape. He applied for a climbing permit to ascend the Diamond on Longs Peak, but the Park Service denied permission (as they had to two other parties in the mid 1950s). Although the Diamond was off limits, the huge unclimbed portion of the Lower East Face was not officially closed. In 1959, Northcutt and Kor planned to complete the Diagonal, a line that Northcutt had started the previous year with George Lamb. They raced up Hallett as a training route, and climbed together in Boulder during the week.

It was during this time that Northcutt made the first ascent of the direct start to the Bastille Crack in Eldorado Canyon. The story of his climb is well known, and part of Colorado’s climbing lore. Ron Foreman, a frequent climbing and training partner of his, told him that Kor had recently free climbed the pitch. Goaded on with this information, Northcutt decided to free climb it as well. “The top was really something; it was the hardest thing I had ever done in my life. Period. I had very little [to hold on to],” he says. “Much of it is a lieback, so you don’t get much chance to place pitons, and most of the gear I had wouldn’t take anyway. I ended up getting to the top without too much protection.” As it turned out, Kor had not done the pitch, and Northcutt was tricked into free climbing what is widely regarded as the first 5.10 lead in the country (5.10d). One author of a guidebook to the climbs in Boulder claims an on sight lead may be as hard as 5.11.

Northcutt was one of the first in Colorado who actively pursued free climbing as an end to itself — “Aside from safety,” he says, “my highest priority on a climb was doing it free, without direct aid.” Having made his mark as an excellent free climber, he and Kor turned their attention to the Diagonal. On the route, they followed the long, leaning crack system in the middle of the Lower East Face for about 600 feet before being forced right when the crack intersected a wide band of slime and running water. As with the ascent of the Third Buttress, the team ran into trouble with the weather, and it took several attempts to finish the route.

The completion of the Diagonal marked a definite turning point for Colorado climbing. It was the first major ‘big wall’ yet climbed, and was certainly the most difficult, as it included both 5.9 free climbing and tenuous nailing. Northcutt was at the top of his game in 1959; indeed, he was arguably the best climber in Colorado. His free climbing ethic and training regimen were futuristic, and his accomplishments become even more astounding given the primitive gear available in the ‘50s.

It’s likely that Northcutt would have continued to push the boundary of technical difficulty had he stayed with the sport. However, he married his wife Nancy in 1958, and was offered a teaching position in Montana late in the summer of 1959.

He took the job and found himself working long hours as a first year teacher. Unable to train as he was accustomed to, he felt uncomfortable about climbing off the couch. Even after he returned to Estes Park with another teaching position at the high school in the 1960s, he never found the time to devote to climbing.

“Once in a while I’d go out from Estes Park on the weekend, and try to pick up where I left off. I was running, doing pull-ups, and what have you, trying to get back into some semblance of shape. I didn’t want to go downward in terms of the quality and types of climbs that I had done, and I had a gut feeling that unless I could train appropriately, it wouldn’t be the best situation. I remember one time Bob Kamps and Dave Rearick came [to Estes] and looked me up, and we had a good time. We just went bouldering, but two things hit me rather quickly. My balance and especially my finger strength were not even close to what they had been in the latter fifties. They were in climbing shape — I wasn’t. It was discouraging; it really depressed me. Not being in climbing shape mentally or physically, and to try to pick up where I left off...so I just thought ‘That’s it.’ Just threw it away. I had the idea in the back of my mind that someday I would go back to it. But it hasn’t happened yet. I gave away everything I had, most to Layton Kor, except my Klettershoes and my pack. I still have those.”

After Northcutt and Kor completed the Diagonal, the Park Service realized that the climbing ban on the Diamond was no longer reasonable, and simultaneously issued permits to all interested parties. By this time, thanks to six years of forbidden status, the Diamond was a much sought-after prize, even to climbers in other areas of the country. In fact, Yvon Chouinard and Ken Weeks, who had traveled to Colorado to repeat Northcutt and Carter’s route on Hallett, decided to make a surreptitious ascent in 1959 (they were defeated by bad weather). In the summer of 1960, Dave Rearick and Bob Kamps came to Colorado to repeat the Diagonal, and did so in quick fashion (Rearick made a Colorado road trip in 1958 as well, putting up the first ascent of Sykes Sickle on Spearhead with Richard Sykes, David Isles and John Wharton). Finding themselves in the right place at the right time, they applied for a Diamond permit and were granted permission.

After waiting out a storm, Rearick and Kamps nailed the central crack system on the Diamond over a period of three days in what turned out to be an almost anticlimactic ascent. To be fair, D-1 involved difficult nailing in an unimaginable setting at high altitude, and it received much press (even going national in *Time* magazine). However, Rearick and Kamps were experienced Yosemite climbers, with several huge walls to their credit prior to their Diamond climb. They also brought with them an extensive collection of chrome-molybdenum pitons manufactured by Chouinard, from knifeblades to bongs. Up to that time, Coloradans were getting by with homemade, army surplus, and soft-iron pitons imported from Europe, as well as wooden wedges for wide cracks. During the six-year moratorium imposed by the Park, techniques had dramatically improved (especially in Yosemite), to the point where success on the wall was a foregone conclusion before Rearick and Kamps even set foot on the mountain. Indeed, in a letter written by Jack Rensberger to his friend Rearick in 1955, he stated, “As soon as [it] is tried by any good climber, the Diamond will be conquered.”

Despite the less than romantic conditions under which the Diamond was eventually climbed, it was, along with the Diagonal, the most pivotal ascent in Colorado up to that time. It banished any lasting doubt that lingered in the minds of Colorado climbers concerning what was possible, and it set the stage for the whirlwind that was to hit the scene soon thereafter.

Layton Kor — The Flood Gates Open

In their wonderful book “CLIMB!”, Bob Godfrey and Dudley Chelton describe the decade of the 1960s as the Golden Age of Colorado climbing. Better equipment, increasing numbers of climbers (not to mention increasing levels of competition among them), and the breakdown of psychological barriers all contributed to a furious pace of route development not seen before or since. Whereas climbers in the 1950s witnessed several landmark climbs established over the course of the decade, the 1960s saw the boundaries pushed out nearly every month.

The single most influential climber to emerge from the landscape was, without doubt, Layton Kor. Having served his tutelage under Ray Northcutt on the Diagonal, Kor was poised to break the very mold of climbing as it existed in the latter part of the 1950s.

It would take more than a few pages to do justice to the legend of Layton Kor. He was, by all accounts, a figure of boundless energy with unflinching enthusiasm for scaling difficult rock. In the span of ten years, from 1957 to 1967, he strung together more impressive ascents than the whole of the climbing community that preceded him. As Royal Robbins noted in CLIMB!, “His list of first ascents of technically difficult rock climbs, both free and aid, is perhaps unmatched by any American climber.” Though it will be obvious to any reader of this book that Kor’s name appears in the first ascent credits in a disproportionate manner, it is instructive (and inspiring) to view his accomplishments in a single list.

Kor had already established several noteworthy routes in RMNP before completing the Diagonal, including Kor’s Door on the Lower East Face of Longs Peak (with Jonathan Hough in 1958), and Kor’s Flake on Sundance Buttress (also in the 1950s, with an unknown partner). In 1960 he climbed Directissima on Chasm View Wall with Bob LaGrange, and in 1961, Kor and Bob Culp made the first ascent of the dangerously run out Northwest Face of Chiefs Head. The Yellow Wall was the first of several Kor routes on the Diamond, put up with Charlie Roskosz the following year. Also in 1962, the same team climbed the South Face of Sharktooth, and the Saber saw its first ascent when Dean Moore accompanied Kor. On Hallett, the Kor-Van Tongeren was put up (1962).

The next year (1963) was perhaps the most productive for Kor, and he seemed hell-bent to climb every line on the Lower East Face and Chasm View Wall. Tex Bossier accompanied him on Diagonal Direct, Grey Pillar, Crack of Delight, Zig Zag, and Red Wall, and they also climbed Second Buttress Direct on Hallett that year. (Kor returned in ‘64 and ‘65 to clean up what he had left undone, establishing Overhang Dihedral with Pat Ament, Striped Wall with Wayne Goss, and Invis-

ible Wall with Larry Dalke). Kor met his match in Royal Robbins when the two paired up for back-to-back one-day ascents of the Diamond in 1963, making the second ascent of D-1, and the first of Jack of Diamonds. He also returned to Chiefs Head, this time climbing the Northeast Face with Bob Bradley, and he paid visit to Cathedral Wall with an unknown companion (Bossier, perhaps?).

Having climbed most of the major walls in RMNP, Kor's pace slowed somewhat in the coming years, but he still found time for another new route on the Saber with Cliff Jennings, and two shorter climbs on the north face of Mount Meeker. He was active on the sub-alpine cliffs as well, putting up five lines on the Twin Owls (including the Crack of Fear, which he climbed almost entirely free, and Viper, the first A5 climb in Estes Park), and five more on Sundance Buttress. Dozens of Kor's lines on the smaller attractions went unrecorded, though it is known that he climbed frequently in the Crags and Deville Rocks.

Not even assembled here are his countless ascents in Eldorado and Boulder Canyons, the Black Canyon of the Gunnison, and Glenwood Canyon; nor his unending list of climbs in the Utah desert, which included The Titan, Castleton Tower, and spires too numerous to mention in Colorado National Monument, Arches and Canyonlands National Parks, and the Navajo lands. Kor climbed in Yosemite, repeating the big walls of the day, and putting up his own grade VI — West Buttress — on El Capitan (where he found the time to climb all of this rock is a mystery in and of itself, for West Buttress was also in 1963). Almost lost in the footnotes of history, and in the haze left behind by Kor, is the fact that climbers such as Tex Bossier made first ascents of at least six major lines in 1963 alone. Such was the overwhelming presence of Layton Kor.

In 1966, Kor made a trip to Europe that would change his life. While attempting a winter ascent of the North Face of the Eiger, he witnessed the death of one of his climbing partners, John Harlin. This incident, coupled with the inevitable component of burnout from ten years of outrageous ascents, compelled Kor to rearrange his priorities. Shortly after completing his last major ascent (a winter climb of the Diamond by a new route with Wayne Goss in 1967), he turned away from climbing and became a Jehovah's Witness, seemingly never to return. In fact, he did come back to climbing twenty years later, only to add yet another set of impressive ascents, including another route on the Lower East Face in 1987.

After Kor disappeared from the scene in 1967, others took his place, though no one climber stood out like he did. The smaller objectives in RMNP were climbed, the lines on the major faces were filled in (almost obsessively so), and climbing become ever more mainstream. A major shift in focus was on the horizon, and most of the mixed climbs done after Kor, though difficult, were of little historical importance.

The Free Climbing Ethic

Free climbing has always been the purest form of ascent in the minds of climbers around the globe. Indeed, when the sport was in its infancy, even the use of ropes was frowned upon. Members of the Rocky Mountain Club at the turn of the century essentially free soloed their routes in the Flatirons, though ropes were sometimes brought along to belay the less experienced members of the group. When Albert Ellingwood introduced pitons in Colorado, he brought with him the ethics of Great Britain, which called for restraint in the use of pins. Free climbing, with minimal protection, was the norm, and most of the early routes established in Colorado were largely free climbs.

In the 1950s, however, the desire to conquer unclimbed walls trumped the free climbing ethic. Climbers of the time were still practicing the sport with crude (though rapidly improving) gear, and leader falls were not an option. The well-known adage “the leader must not fall” couldn’t easily be followed if increasingly difficult walls were to be climbed all free, and it is only natural that aid climbing techniques developed as a safety net when the going got tough.

Still, there were individuals in the climbing community that pursued free climbing as an ideal. As mentioned above, Ray Northcutt was the leading free climber in the 1950s. He religiously trained to stay in shape and improve technique, and was an early practitioner of bouldering. Even on the Diagonal, where the consequences of a free climbing fall could have been disastrous, he sought to climb the route as free as possible. Northcutt explains that he and Kor free climbed most of the route, contending that in a dry year with better surface conditions, they could have climbed the entire wall without direct aid. Modern climbers might balk at the notion of a climber from the 1950s leading 5.11 at altitude, but Northcutt was in terrific shape in 1959, as his ascent in Eldorado Canyon proved.

After Northcutt made his exit from climbing, Kor quickly became the dominant figure in Colorado climbing. Though he was an excellent free climber and made several difficult (and often terrifying) free leads, he placed an emphasis on moving over rock as quickly as possible. If free climbing was plausible, or if it was the only option, Kor was up to the task, but he wasn’t interested in spending time working out difficult sequences just to claim a free ascent.

Most climbers in the 1960s followed Kor’s example, and mixed free and aid climbs were standard for this decade. As the ‘60s came to a close, though, many contributing factors swung the pendulum back to where it started: free climbing was seen as an ideal toward which all energy was soon focused. One major factor that precipitated this change was that aid climbing had advanced to the point where nearly any face could be climbed given the right equipment and enough time — a return to free climbing was a way to re-insert adventure into the sport. Also important was that repeated use of pitons on aid (and free) climbs quickly destroyed the rock. Along with the rise of environmentalism in the early 1970s came a more refined approach to rock climbing. Chouinard Equipment began to manufacture Stoppers and Hexentrics for protection (augmenting the already available nuts from

England and elsewhere), and these were well received in the climbing community throughout the country. The new nuts did more than provide a means of clean climbing, though. Replacing a rack of pins and a hammer with a set of nuts drastically reduced the weight that was typically carried up a wall, and as a result, free climbing standards advanced by leaps and bounds.

The return to free climbing in the 1970s was a movement that can be traced back to several points of origin across the entire country — virtually all of the major climbing areas had strong-willed individuals who were determined to eliminate the aid routes in their area. Royal Robbins, a southern Californian, was one of the most influential proponents of free climbing — it is here, in Robbins' stomping ground of Tahquitz Rock, that the decimal system for rating free climbs was devised (in the 1950s). Robbins visited Colorado on several occasions in the 1960s, and Dave Rearick (who moved to Colorado and later became a professor of mathematics at CU) continued Robbins' tradition of working out free solutions to improbable sections of rock. Pat Ament, a Boulder climber influenced by Robbins and Rearick, established the first 5.11 lead in the country when he climbed Supremacy Crack in 1966. In addition, he dreamed of free climbing some of the most audacious aid lines in the area, well before they became a reality.

Ament's vision, coupled with Jim Erickson's well-known influence on the climbing community in Boulder, was to profoundly change the way people approached their climbs. Roger Briggs states, "I can't adequately emphasize how much influence Erickson had, because he really paved the way for climbing on nuts only," and was steadfast in his refusal to employ aid on climbs. Briggs, along with Steve Wunsch, Duncan Ferguson, Bill Putnam, and others, was among the inner circle of Boulder climbers who redefined the climbing game in the 1970s. Their accomplishments are well documented elsewhere (particularly in CLIMB!), and thus the remainder of this treatise focuses on climbs done in Estes Park.

Early Free Climbing Milestones in Estes Park

Most of the climbs in the Estes Park area prior to the 1960s were located in the mountains, and the vast majority of these were on Longs Peak. The standard setting ascents up to that time included Stettner's Ledges (5.7 or even 5.8), Hornbein Crack (5.8), the Diagonal (free climbing up to 5.9), and the Northwest Face on Chiefs Head (with dangerously run out 5.9). A few important free climbs were established at Lumpy Ridge and the Craggs (such as Wolf's Tooth at 5.8, and several 5.8 and 5.9 efforts by Northcutt and Kor in the Craggs), but the smaller cliffs in the region were pretty much ignored.

When Lumpy Ridge finally garnered the attention it deserved in the 1960s, the prevailing attitudes of the period influenced the style in which climbs were established. Thus many of the early routes involved a fair amount of aid because of the premium put on speed of ascent. Climbers also sought out lines that would allow them to practice aid techniques exclusively, such as the routes on the south face of Twin Owls, which are still used to sharpen nailing skills. In fact, today's climbers may be surprised to learn how the Lumpy Ridge pioneers regarded their local

stomping grounds. As Mike Donahue (longtime guide and owner of the Colorado Mountain School) tells it, people visited Lumpy Ridge often enough in the '60s, "...but that wasn't climbing. You went to Lumpy Ridge to practice, at the beginning of the season, or when you were too tired. But as soon as you could, you went to the mountains. Anybody that was going climbing was going to the mountains, so when you talked climbing, it was hard to think of going to Lumpy Ridge to do a climb. That changed in the '70s with 5.10 climbing pushing into 5.11."

Despite the fact that Lumpy Ridge was a low priority at this time, several important free climbs were completed. Crack of Fear (Layton Kor and Paul Mayrose) and Tiger's Tooth (Kor and Pat Ament) on Twin Owls were probably free climbed more out of necessity than style, simply because they were wide cracks, and would have been difficult to aid. Kor didn't quite free all of Crack of Fear, nor did Royal Robbins and Dave Rearick on the second ascent, but both parties climbed 5.10 moves, probably the first on the Ridge. Chris Fredericks and Jim Logan climbed the route entirely free in 1966.

Robbins also gave the Kor-Turner route on Sundance Buttress its first free ascent (with Bob Boucher in 1964, renaming it Turnkorner), taking several falls at the crux. His approach was quite unusual as Colorado climbers were generally very conservative in their willingness to take leader falls. Pete Robinson and John Bryant were able to free Guillotine (on Sundance, and in 1964), though the crux was only fifteen feet off the ground.

Only a handful of 5.10 routes existed in the Estes Park region in the '60s, but an increasing number of high quality 5.8 and 5.9 routes were discovered, and these were just as important to the overall development of Lumpy Ridge. After all, 5.10 represented the most difficult grade at the time, and it was a rare individual who could climb at that level. Local climbers Bob Bradley, Paul Mayrose, Steve Hickman and John Bryant were the most active Estes Park climbers in the 1960s, putting up many of the easier classics.

Michael Covington, Fantasy Ridge and Komito Boots

Michael Covington was among the active climbers in the 1960s who pursued free climbs, though like his contemporaries, he was also attracted to the big mountain walls. He made several first ascents on Longs Peak, including the first free ascent of Malander's Passage in 1965 (at 5.8+ with John Marts), and more notably the first ascent of Curving Vine with Pete Robinson in 1966, and Diamond Lil with Doug Scott and Dennis Hennek in 1976. Covington, Marts, Rick Petrillo and Jim Stanton became Obviously Four Believers when they established that route in 1967 on Spearhead, and later Covington was part of the vanguard of Estes climbers who advanced alpine climbing standards in the winter. He moved to Estes Park in the early 1970s, and obtained the concession to guide in RMNP when Hubert Creton, a French-Swiss guide, gave it up.

Steve Komito had also recently moved his boot business to Estes Park from Boulder. He, too, was an active climber in the 1960s, and though he claims he was not on the cutting edge of the sport, he has an enviable collection of first ascents, often



Steve Komito and Michael Covington (with broken ankle) in Komito's first Estes Park shop near Beaver Point, 1972.

PHOTO COURTESY STEVE KOMITO

completed with the best climbers of the day. (He climbed the Lost Arrow Spire — not the first ascent — with Steve Roper, did the first free ascent of Sykes Sickle with Royal Robbins, and became known as Layton Kor's "piton retriever.")

As luck would have it, Covington and Komito came to know one another, and they decided to rent a shop in Estes Park together. Komito sold his boots and climbing wares in the front of the store, and Covington used the back as living quarters and a basecamp for his guide service. "Suddenly Covington had people coming into the shop looking for climbing instruction and guided trips," Komito remembers, "and I was selling and fixing boots, and the whole thing was just going gangbusters." Their first shop was a poorly ventilated shack near Beaver Point.



The original cast at Fantasy Ridge: Douglas Snively, Michael Covington, Billy Westbay, Jim Bridwell and Dan McClure.

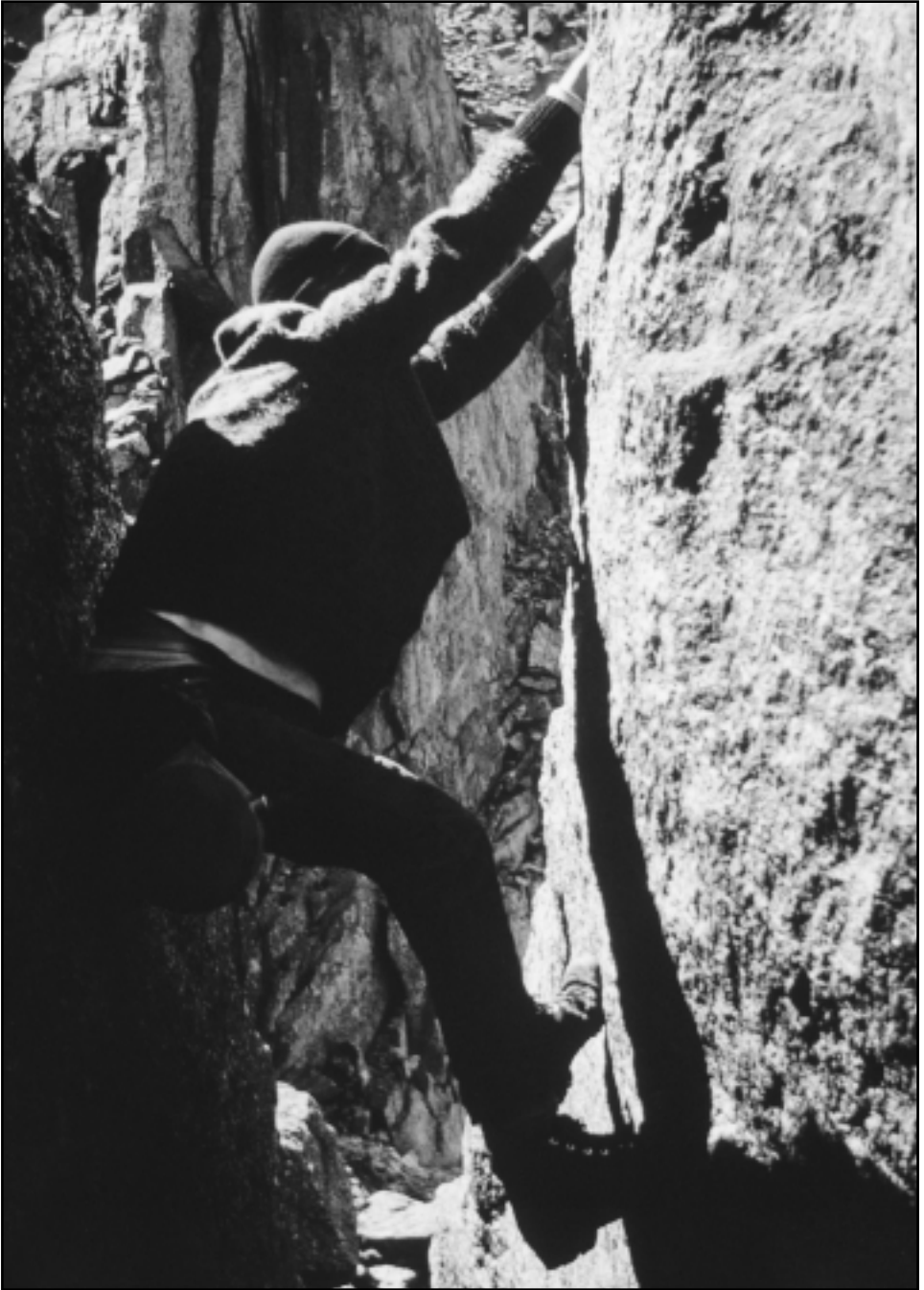
PHOTO COURTESY MIKE COVINGTON

Komito fondly recalls those days, arriving at his store in the morning: “Covington had been smoking dope in the back end, and frying bacon in the morning, and I’d come into this mixture of cannabis smoke, bacon grease, the smell of the glue in my shop, and it was really overpowering! But we both had growing businesses.”

When the building that formerly housed RMNP headquarters (and later Larimer County offices) became vacant, Covington and Komito gathered all the equity they had and moved in. This landmark became the central gathering place for the Estes Park climbing community over the next decade. “Those were the good old days,” says Komito. “I was in that building for twelve years, from 1974 to 1986. People would sleep in the building, on the roof, in the parking lot. We worked and we prospered.” “Komito was really good to anyone who came in that was a climber,” says Doug Snively, a long time Estes local. “Hats off to Komito for putting up with all of us, because we were kind of a freaky looking bunch. His doors were always open, and he was very trusting of us.” Today the Colorado Mountain School, an offshoot of Fantasy Ridge started by Mike Donahue and Harry Kent, uses the building.

As Covington’s business grew, he found the need to bring on additional guides. In quick succession, Billy Westbay, Douglas Snively, and Daniel McClure all began to work at Fantasy Ridge. Mike Donahue, who had worked for Creton in the 1960s, returned from college and also found work at Fantasy Ridge. Westbay, Snively and McClure were part of a larger circle of very talented Colorado Springs climbers that included Jimmy Dunn, Stewart Green, and Mark Hesse — all well-known climbers of the 1970s. Westbay met Covington in Yosemite, and explains that it wasn’t unusual for an advanced climber to be personally acquainted with his contemporaries. “It was a community, not a very big one, and as you did more climbing, you came to know more of the people in it. It wasn’t that big a deal to know everybody across the country; we were all in the same boat exploring things.”

Covington routinely invited his friends from Yosemite and elsewhere to guide for a season or two, and as a result, some major players in the free climbing revolution spent time in Estes Park, including Jim Bridwell and John Bachar. This fact, perhaps more than anything else, was Covington’s lasting contribution to the Estes climbing scene. The Fantasy Ridge group was responsible for much of the free climbing movement that took place in the Estes Park region in the early and middle 1970s — Lumpy Ridge was their playground, and though they shared it with occasional Boulder climbers, they essentially had the place to themselves. Covington’s guides comprised the core group of climbers who swarmed to the local cliffs with a newfound purpose.



Mike Donahue soloing on Stone Man Pass near McHenry's.

PHOTO COURTESY MIKE DONAHUE

The Free Climbing Era

Every climber who witnessed the change from pitons to passive climbing protection speaks of this period as nothing short of a revolution. Gone were the days of lugging around thirty pounds of gear, or of clinging to a hold with one hand, while desperately wailing in a piton using a heavy hammer in the other hand. These climbers speak with a gleam in their eyes, and a touch of nostalgia for an era gone by.

Doug Snively recalls that early clean protection options included Colorado Hex Nuts, cut from a hexagonal stock and manufactured by Paul Sibley and Billy Roos, as well as Moac chockstones and Peck nuts from England — the Pecks were cut from hollow circular stock, and had a knurled surface. “We still climbed with our hammers back then, so if a nut didn’t fit just right, you’d just tap them in to make them fit. It was kind of scary just setting them in there and hoping they were going to hold. Then Chouinard came out with Hexentrics, followed by Stoppers. Most people used really long slings on the Hexes, so you’d loop them around your head like a double runner. You were a pretty cool dude if you had a whole set of Hexes and a set of Stoppers.” Running it out was the norm simply because climbers carried a fairly light rack — “We just didn’t have that much protection,” says Snively, “and you would tend to go 15 or 20 feet between your gear back then. Nowadays, everybody climbs with basically an El Cap rack. It’s kind of comical, really.”

Billy Westbay: “By the time I started going up to Boulder, I had a fairly good chrome moly rack, and that’s what you went up there with. About the only chocks we had in those days were called Moacs — they were radically tapered, but when they worked, they were as good as anything else — and Sibley’s Colorado Nuts. Those were some of the first nuts we carried, but you never really trusted that stuff. You’d hit it a couple times with a hammer to make sure it stayed stuck. It was a huge breakthrough when Chouinard’s Hexentrics came out. But for a long time we all carried our hammers with us, and we only trusted that stuff a little bit. You’d tap it to seat it. The hammers that Chouinard was putting out had long thin picks on them so you could tap your nuts back out. And if you were really scared, then you might fix the damn thing! As we got better at placing nuts, it became not that big of a deal. It was part of the evolution from pins to nuts, but it still felt like it was pretty much life or death to be using that stuff, so you wanted to make sure you were going in the right direction.”

Mike Donahue: “I remember the first time I used one. I think it was on Indirectissima, off to the right on Chasm View Wall. You step around the corner onto the face, and there was an aid move there.” He placed a nut and stepped onto a sling. The nut ripped out, and he took a leader fall. “Boy, that finished me on this nut idea for a long time! When nuts first came out, nobody trusted them, but they did work. So everybody would carry a rack of pitons and a hammer, plus the nuts. You’d climb and use the nuts, and realize that these things are great. And you’d slowly get rid of the pitons. I’d bet for about two years climbers would carry three pitons and a hammer, just in case. Eventually you’d realize you wouldn’t use them, and start leaving them behind. It was a four or five year weaning process to get rid of the pitons and switch over to nuts.”

Donahue also spoke of the importance of the rating system and guidebooks in this transitional period. When he started climbing seriously in the 1960s, 5.8 and 5.9 represented hard climbing, and ratings were always a bit sketchy as there was no guidebook, only word of mouth. Walter Fricke's guide came out in 1971, and that helped climbers come to a consensus concerning the difficulty of a route, but there were still problems. "5.7 or 5.8 was about our max then. [Fricke] couldn't climb very good, either; we were all in the same league. If he had to grab hold of something he'd call it 5.8. I remember Covington, one time, just about fell off on something that Fricke had called 5.8. And he said, 'goddam, if Fricke can do this at 5.8, I sure as hell can!' But he couldn't get up the thing. Finally he made it. He got a hold of Fricke and said, 'That's way more than 5.8; that's harder than hell!' And Fricke says, 'Oh yeah, that's why I grabbed the piton!'"

With Fricke's guidebook and a set of nuts in hand, the Fantasy Ridge guides began to pick off the old aid routes, and establish new free routes. Covington did Mainliner (5.9-, with Wayne Goss in 1972) and Dance, Dance, Dance (with Billy Westbay in '73) on Sundance, and though these weren't standard setters, they were long free routes on a major formation.

The first real advance beyond the test pieces of the '60s was put up in 1973, when all four of the original Fantasy Ridge guides went up to scope out the J Crack headwall on the Book. Dan McClure was the first to give it a try, and he fell a few times trying to work out the moves. "Daniel could climb with the best of them," says Snively, "and no one knew about him — it was pretty cool. He was a real silent warrior; didn't brag stuff up." Snively and Covington went next, but both were spit off by the crux and they decided to rappel to the ground. Finally Billy Westbay got on the sharp end. "I just remember going up there and peeling off," says Billy, "and then lowering back down thinking 'man, I really want to get up this thing.'" After several tries, Westbay finally managed to reach good holds and the belay. It was the first 5.11 lead on Lumpy Ridge.

Over the next few years, the Fantasy Ridge guides paired up with one another and put up scores of 5.10s and several additional 5.11s. New talent arrived on the scene, and virtually all of them — Keith Lober, Harry Kent, Scott Kimball, Chip Salaun, Joe Hladick, George Hurley, etc. — worked for Covington at one time or another. Peaches and Cream was certainly the hardest of the newer climbs, much more strenuous than J Crack. McClure and Westbay gave it several all-out attempts before their buddy Jimmy Dunn led it on fixed gear (McClure made the first clean lead a few days later).

Boulder climbers were also active on the Ridge during this time, and classics such as Pressure Drop and Finger Licking Good on Crescent Wall received free ascents. However, the next advance in difficulty came once again at the hands of the Fantasy Ridge guides. John Bachar was in Estes for the summers of 1977 and '78, working for Covington. He teamed up with Doug Snively and on-sight flashed West Owl Direct, renaming it Silly Putty (1978). "It was quite impressive to watch," says Douglas, who had been climbing with Bachar on a regular basis that season. "Bachar was pretty much in a league of his own, he really was. He trained harder

than anybody else, and even had me doing pull ups in the back yard. It was hard, but I was in really good shape, and never fell. I got rests where I needed to rest. John was really solid on it, and basically just ran it out.” Bachar gave it a 5.11 R rating, though subsequent ascents confirmed that this was the first 5.12 lead in the area.

It was quite some time before anyone managed a lead more difficult than Bachar’s, and in the interim, the sport once again underwent dramatic upheaval and evolution in the 1980s. Friends replaced nuts, sticky rubber replaced EBs, and soon bolts replaced any semblance of the clean climbing ethic that existed in the 1970s.

Free Climbing in the Mountains

The Fantasy Ridge guides did not confine their efforts to Lumpy Ridge, though it is true that the focus shifted to the lower cliffs when free climbing came to the fore. Like their predecessors, they viewed their workouts on the crags as preparation for climbing in the mountains. Dan McClure made one of the early advances in 1974, when he eliminated the aid on The Barb (5.10c) on Spearhead with Robert Gulley. This wasn’t the first 5.10 lead at altitude, however. Layton Kor freed the last pitch of Jack of Diamonds with Royal Robbins all the way back in 1963, and rated it 5.9 — modern climbers feel it’s solid 5.10 — and several Boulder climbers had been working to free the Diamond in the early 1970s, establishing several 5.10 leads in the process. Other early difficult free climbs in the mountains included Royal Robbins and Steve Komito’s 1964 free ascent of Sykes Sickle (5.9+), Roger Briggs and Chris Reveley’s ascent of Directissima (5.10a, 1974), and Briggs and Larry Hamilton’s dangerous White Room on Notchtop in 1974 (the first 5.11 lead in the high peaks).

Most of the free climbing efforts were initially focused on the Diamond — Longs Peak was going on 100 years of being the center of attention for the climbing community. After several attempts spread over three years, it finally yielded to Boulder climbers Jim Logan and Wayne Goss in 1975. They pieced together a free route that began on D-7 and ended on Black Dagger, and did so in impeccable style, using no pitons or fixed ropes. Within a week, Jim Dunn and Chris Wood freed another line on the face, and the season ended with Bruce Adams and Tobin Sorenson free climbing Pervertical Sanctuary. On the other side of Longs Peak, another important event took place in 1975 when Westbay and McClure finally made the second ascent of Kor’s Center Route on Chiefs Head. They free climbed the entire wall, encountering serious 5.10 climbing.

These climbs were major accomplishments in the grand scheme of things, and they opened the way to a remarkable period of high altitude free climbing that continues today. Though numerous climbers have now contributed to the elimination of aid from the big walls in RMNP, no one can match the record of Roger Briggs.

Roger Briggs and The Diamond

As part of the free climbing movement in Boulder, Briggs took part in the early attempts to free the Diamond, and had a special affinity for the wall. He was only 15 when he made his first trip up the East Face, in tow of the more experienced and much older Gary Spitzer. Together they made the second ascent of Hypotenuse (1966), a line on the very left edge of the Diamond. “That was sort of the new hot route that just went up. It was just maximal for me — I remember hiking up, my legs were cramping, and it really stretched me.”

The following summer he hooked up with Jim Logan, Roger Dalke, and Wayne Goss for another route on Longs. Dalke and Goss ended up doing the first ascent of Black Dagger, while Logan and Briggs nailed up D-7 for its second ascent. “Jim and I to this day can’t figure out where we thought we were going to spend the night, because we had only one down jacket between us. Nowadays, we laugh at how clueless we were — he was 20, and I was 16, and we were in way over our heads. We hit Table Ledge as darkness came in, and we shared this down jacket, shivering all night. He actually broke his thumb; a big block came loose high up.”

In 1968, he did the second ascent of Yellow Wall, with Michael Covington. “That was a lot more civilized. He had more experience, and we bivied on Broadway, and the Yellow Wall Bivy Ledge; we also had a stove.” These early experiences on the Diamond were full-on aid climbs, but they gave Roger the skills needed to survive on the inhospitable wall when, in later years, he would return to free climb these lines.

He teamed up with Rob Candelaria in 1976 and freed all of Yellow Wall (avoiding the run out crux). “It was a pretty cool climb; we just went up with one rope and sweaters tied around our waist for a real fast and committed ascent.” Later in the summer, he and his friends spent a total of fifteen days on the Diamond in late August to make the film *Outside the Arena*, and it was then that he freed the fifth pitch of Ariana with strenuous 5.11 climbing. “We had a base camp on Broadway, and one afternoon I also freed the original start to Yellow Wall,” having skipped it on his earlier ascent. This, too, was 5.11, and in 1976, they were the hardest pitches on the Diamond.

For the next few years, Briggs took time off from climbing to dedicate his talent as a coach to a group of cross-country runners at Fairview High School (where Briggs still teaches physics). He was active enough that he was able to put up Directagonal on the Lower East Face with his brother Bill, but his focus and commitment were directed toward his team. John Bachar stepped in to fill the void left by Briggs and succeeded in freeing D-7 with Richard Harrison in 1977. Bachar and Billy Westbay were back on the wall the following summer, making the first free ascent of D-1. Briggs got wind of the ascent, “...hearing that Bachar and Westbay had freed D-1. And I was just blown away. I remember feeling like I was just this old guy of climbing, and thinking, ‘God, what is it coming to?’”

After an invigorating trip to Yosemite in 1979, Briggs returned to serious climbing (though with a diminished need to compete against his peers). He made the second



Roger Briggs (17 years old) waking up on the Yellow Wall Bivy Ledge on the second ascent of Yellow Wall, 1967.

PHOTO: MIKE COVINGTON

free ascent of D-1 with Jeff Achey in 1980, finishing on the original line taken by Rearick and Kamps, which again turned out to be the most difficult pitch yet done on the Diamond. (Westbay chose a horrific, wet offwidth when he climbed the route with Bachar, and ran it out for forty feet on solid 5.11 — it's a lead that has never been repeated).

With most of the routes on the left side of the Diamond freed, the wall yielded little in the way of new free climbs for five years. Many had the feeling that after D-1 was climbed, there wasn't much left to do. Also true was that the era of walking up to the base of the Diamond and free climbing a new route was, for all practical purposes, over. Climbs would have to be established with several attempts, sometimes spread out over two or three seasons. When Briggs decided to seek out "one last free climb" on the Diamond in 1985, he had little competition — the rest of the climbing community had become enamored with number chasing and bolt clipping, and were seemingly uninterested in pushing the standards in the mountains. (In recent years the newer generation of climbers has returned to the high peaks once again, free climbing at a very high standard made possible only through devotion to the lower cliffs in the 1980s).

Briggs "one last free climb" eventually turned into four more lines on the Diamond, each harder than the last. In 1985 he completed King of Swords with Dan Stone (Jim Logan was on the initial attempt), and it was the first Diamond climb to receive a 5.12 rating. That same year, he recruited his brother Bill and fired off Ariana (5.12a), and he topped off the season with a rope solo of D-7, free climbing each pitch twice. Over several attempts in the late 1980s, he established Eroica with various partners (5.12b), and he capped off his Diamond career with a 1994 repoint of The Joker (5.12c, unrepeated), accomplished with Pat Adams.

In all, Briggs has made 84 climbs on the Diamond (his most recent trip was with the author in 2000). He has his sights set on 100 ascents, and in all likelihood, he will have no trouble reaching that number.

In Pursuit of the Impossible

In recent years, the crags around Estes Park (as in all of America) have undergone a free-climbing renaissance, though of a completely different nature than what occurred in the 1970s. The defining characteristics of this newest form of climbing are the use of bolts for protection and the pursuit of difficulty on a free climb. Of course, neither bolts nor the pursuit of difficulty is new, as both have been a component of climbing for at least fifty years. The difference this time around is the extent to which bolts have become the standard for establishing new routes, and the astounding level of difficulty that has been attained.

Throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, climbers shunned the use of bolts, for a variety of reasons. For one, there was an abundance of well-protected cracks to choose from, and thus there was no great need to use bolts on most free climbs. More importantly, the clean climbing movement was in a sense a return to the traditional ideals of the early part of the century. Leading members of the climbing

community declared that climbs should be done with a minimal reliance on gear, and everyone else more-or-less agreed to adhere to that ideal. Those who decided to place bolts anyway were ridiculed, even assaulted, and the offending bolts were often chopped — it's an issue that the community continues to struggle with today.

Finally, climbing has always been a sport deeply rooted in the concept of taking risks as a means of personal growth. The famous boulderer John Gill wrote, "A large number of climbers accept the premise that a climbing experience is deficient if it fails to demand a mortal commitment under somewhat desperate circumstances. This is the evolving essence of the risk ethic." (Ironically, Gill wrote those words in an essay entitled *American Bouldering — An Alternative to the Risk*



Mike Caldwell, Mr. Colorado in the 1970s.

PHOTO COURTESY MIKE CALDWELL

Ethic, in which he promoted the idea that the pursuit of difficulty through bouldering need not involve risk.) An overabundance of bolts reduces or completely removes the risk component that many climbers hold in high esteem.

Given the prevailing attitudes among climbers at the close of the 1970s, it is not surprising that the development of bolted routes as a means to pursue difficulty was met with great resistance. Various points of view were debated to no end in the climbing magazines, and for a time, the anti-bolt faction prevailed. However, as Scott Kimball wrote in his 1986 guidebook to Estes Park, “the era of the bolt route is upon us; it is inevitable — all the crack lines are exhausted.”

Mike Caldwell was one of the first local climbers who embraced the new ethic. Caldwell had grown up in California, and learned to climb in Yosemite at a very young age. After climbing in California for a decade, he moved to Colorado and began teaching at Loveland (a small community east of Estes Park). Though he continued to climb for a couple years after arriving in Loveland, he soon gave up the sport, and devoted his energies to body building.

For eight years, from 1975 to 1983, this was his passion, and he excelled at it, winning 26 different bodybuilding titles. “I was Mr. Colorado and Mr. ‘all-kinds-of-other-things,’ and I ended up participating in the Mr. USA contest, doing pretty well. I didn’t climb much at all. Finally I got to the point where I realized that being Mr. Whatever wasn’t really making me all that happy.” After putting down his barbells, Mike returned to climbing, “...and in the eight years that I was away from it — it was just BLAMMO! — everything had changed! When I stopped climbing, there were a few nuts out there, Peck’s Crackers and Clog’s Wedges, but when I came back; there was sticky rubber, and Friends. I found that I could do slabs that had been hard for me in the past, and climbs that were really hard to protect had become really safe. I jumped right back into it, even more energetic than ever. I was so wound up that I wanted to get into the mountains, so we moved from Loveland to Estes Park.”

Once he moved to Estes, he went on a new-route binge, seeking unclimbed lines wherever he could find them. He’s got a long string of impressive first ascents to his credit, a few of them groundbreaking for Lumpy Ridge. “Some of the routes we had done on Lumpy Ridge we did before I moved up here. That was the period when bolts were moving from one-quarter to five-sixteenths and then to three-eighths inch. We were still putting up everything on lead, which was desperate. It seemed logical to me that rap bolting was the way to go, and I had read some European stuff that this was a good way to do it.”

“One route that I was really attracted to was Weight Loss Clinic on The Pear. There was one spot in there where the climbing was really continuous — we’d climb along, up and up, way farther above our bolts than we liked to be. The climbing above looked harder yet, but still climbable. So we’d down climb a little bit, and then fall off, and took real long falls. We did that over and over again. Finally I went up by myself, rapped down, cleaned off a little bit, and put a couple of bolts in on rappel. Somebody came hiking along the base and saw me, and just raised holy hell. One of those guidebooks came out and said the route was put up with

extensive pre-inspection, making it sound like some grossly immoral act. It seemed to me that nobody would progress beyond about 5.10+ unless you put your protection in some other way. It might not have been popular, but I have a thick skin.”

By the time 1993 rolled around (the year the first edition of this guide was published), a small group of climbers had engineered a handful of 5.12 climbs that surpassed the level of difficulty established by John Bachar’s 1978 lead of Silly Putty. Some of these routes were protected with a mixture of traditional gear and bolts, though most were fully bolted. Mike Caldwell, Topher Donahue, Kennan Harvey, Randy Farris, Bernard Gillett, and Lawrence Stuemke had all redpointed routes in the mid to upper 5.12 range — Farris and Caldwell’s Renaissance Wall, Gillett’s El Camino Real, and Farris’ Weekend Warrior were perhaps the hardest of these. (In the traditional vein, Roger Briggs had already eclipsed Silly Putty when he put up Eroica in 1987, though even that route involved less traditionally protected leads, and repeated attempts. What’s remarkable is that the crux is near 14,000 feet! Boulder climbers were several years ahead of the Estes Park crowd in terms of technical abilities).

These efforts were only the beginning, though. In the following five years, a veritable flood of new climbs were top roped and bolted. The advent of indoor climbing gyms helped to propel the surge in difficulty, and by the close of the 1990s, 5.12 was passé, due largely to the efforts of Mike’s son Tommy. The younger Caldwell had climbed the Devil’s Tower at age 6, the Diamond by age 12, and in quick fashion, he rose to the top of the American sport-climbing scene.

Credit for the first 5.13 lead in Estes Park goes to Boulder climber Alan Lester, who freed Anaconda on the Twin Owls (a crack climb led on fixed gear in 1994), but Tommy was hot on his heels with two 5.13 leads in 1995. Within the year, he climbed the aptly named Third Millennium in the Monastery, the first 5.14 of the area, and since then has put up two additional 5.14s (and a handful of 5.13s), one of them on Ships Prow near Chasm Lake. What the future holds for him is anybody’s guess.

Billy Westbay, who was steeped in the traditional ethics of the 1970s free climbing revolution, commented on the current situation of climbing in Estes Park and elsewhere. “The evolution of the sport has definitely made it a lot more palatable for the general public. The realm of risk is still there if you want to go find it, but the mainstream people aren’t really going for that. It took a lot of work to learn how to climb the old way...I remember going up and trying to do the Diagonal with Jimmy [Dunn]. Walking into the East Face of Longs, into the cirque there — you know, you just look at it and go ‘Jeeesus Christ!’ I had never seen anything that big in my life before, and I remember being properly intimidated by the surroundings. It’s not like that anymore, and I don’t think many people have the patience to get beyond the immediate gratification of doing hard bolt routes. It is good? It doesn’t really matter; it’s just what they’re into doing. It’s a really wide-open sport, but it is self-limiting to think in only those terms. If they’re getting out and enjoying themselves, I think ultimately that’s what it’s all about.”