

# BOLDER BOULDER

news special by Alec Sharp

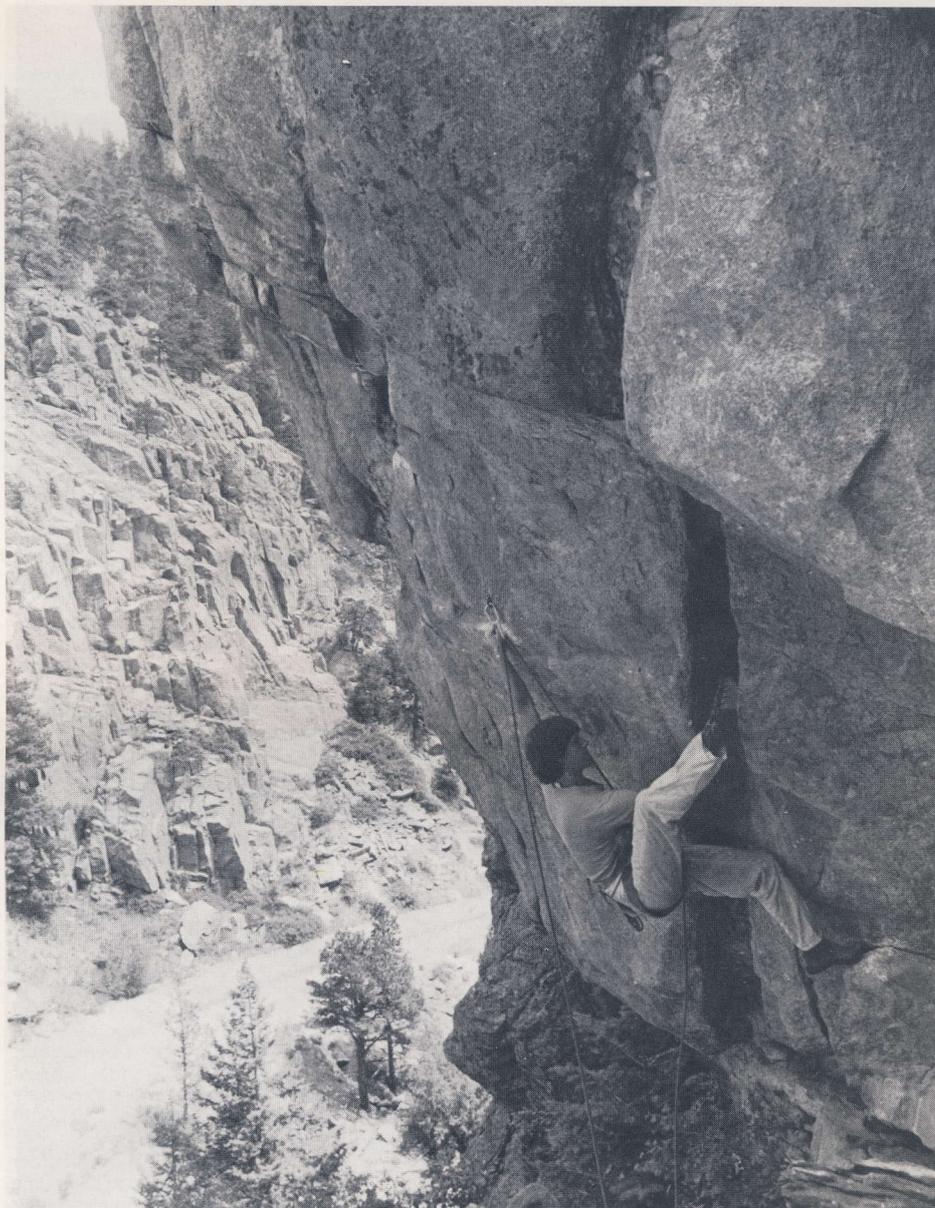
God created the world in six days, and on the seventh he rested, had fun, and created Eldorado Canyon. Time passed, man arrived, Christ was crucified, and the 1960's were here. Eldorado was an aid climbers dream; overhangs and roofs to nail and bolt, blank walls to hook, when along came Royal Robbins from the Golden State and introduced hard free climbing to Colorado. Among his disciples was Pat Ament, who expanded on the theme and created some amazing and very hard free routes. Along came the seventies, and with the new decade came Jim Erickson and Steven Wunsch.

Erickson and Wunsch were the prime motivators of the seventies, but what is interesting is the different paths they took. Wunsch's primary concern was how hard could he climb, how difficult was the upper limit of what was possible to do on a rock climb. To this end he spurned the limits of style and concentrated on falling repeatedly on well protected routes where the fall was insignificant. This is not to imply that he was a poor stylist or needed good protection to climb; the bold *Jules Verne* attests to his other qualities, but his major concern was difficulty. Erickson on the other hand, never did a route quite as hard as *Psycho* or *Mellow Yellow*, but if you were looking for style, there was no need to go further, his philosophy being concerned with an almost puritanical style of climbing. To quote Roger Briggs, "... for Wunsch the end was more important than the means, whereas for Erickson the means were absolute. The rest of us were caught in between."

In retrospect Erickson had the most widespread influence on climbers — everyone stopped carrying pegs and a hammer on routes, everyone started feeling bad if they had to pull on aid, but as for pushing the limits, Erickson's influence fell short of that of Wunsch. After all, it was obvious that you could climb harder if you went up enough times to learn the sequences that were necessary, and after all Wunsch had done the harder routes, so the end began to justify the means.

With the awe inspiring masterpieces of the mid-seventies climbed, the Erickson/Wunsch era drew to a close. To most people around everything had been climbed; what had not been climbed by these demi-gods was either too hard to be humanly possible or was not worth bothering with. For the next few years events stagnated and people were for the most part content to repeat routes and consolidate the tremendous gains made by the climbers of the early and mid part of the decade. There were exceptions of course, but it didn't seem to matter. The other routes done at the time seemed to lend credence to the belief that the world around Boulder was the world according to Erickson and Wunsch, being for the most part fillers or routes on the granite crags in Boulder Canyon that no one else had been bothered to do.

Leading this small splinter group were Chris Reveley, Dan Hare and Scott Woodruff, plying their many talents across Blob Rock, Happy Hour Crag, Security Risk Crag and others. Eldorado was not left untouched either. Just right of the classic *Verschneidung Dihedral* the wall is steep, red and rather out of character with its surroundings. Reveley opened with *Foaming Cleanser*, unprotected and precarious in its first half, and strenuous in its second, while Woodruff climbed the intricate and interesting *High Anxiety* up the corners just to the right. Pride of place among the routes done by this trio had to go to the free ascent of *Center Route* on *Rincon Wall*, in which all three participated; Woodruff led to above the roof then Reveley took over and finished the climb. Today *Center Route* is one of the best pitches in the canyon, a steep bulge leading to thin holds up a corner,



Above: Alec Sharp on *Grand Inquisitor* (5.12-). Photo: Sharp collection.

over a roof and up a thin finger crack. Woodruff and Reveley also laid siege to the impressive overhanging corner just left of *Wendego*, attempting it for several days until one day they returned to find that someone had been up to their high point and come down, placing a peg, and stealing all their gear. At this point they left the route in disgust, never to return.

Besides the routes done by this trio, there were a few truly major routes done in the area; Roger Briggs led the wall that joined the crux of *Jules Verne* to the stance after pitch 2 of the *Naked Edge*, after previously top-roping it; Greg Lowe used his tremendous strength to free climb the bolt ladder across the roof of *Bolter's Lament* to produce *Clever Lever*. In 1977 Bachar climbed the incomparable *Wisdom*. Already free to the last roof, it had repelled many attempts by top climbers before Bachar found a way to avoid the original aid line by an undercling out right. He attempted to lead what is now the second and third pitch in one, but ran out of strength and had to come back to rest at the current stance before finishing that long runout.

1979. The last year of the seventies, and a year when things started to gather impetus again. A year dominated by two climbers, Jim Collins and Alec Sharp, both pursuing different goals. Collins obsessed by difficulty, and especially by the difficulty of *Genesis*, epitomised Wunsch's attitude and carried it to still more rarefied heights. He repeated *Psycho*, although only in as much as his and Wunsch's line shared the same bolts for protection. Wunsch's route had gone out to a large flake hold in the centre of the roof, above the bolts, a flake large enough to get both hands

on and then heel hook, but this later came off with Dave Breashears. Collins chose a line below the bolts and made hard moves and long reaches without the advantage of any large flakes, and so far he is the only climber to have managed the roof this way.

However, *Genesis* still remained, daunting and taunting. The climb up to the bolts in the center of the wall had been freed by Wunsch, and was one of the most varied and enjoyable pitches in the area, but no impression had been made on the slightly impending upper wall. It was a pitch that was becoming more feasible with time; the peg hole that Collins used on his ascent was originally a thin seam. Beyond this, it needed a climber with a deep obsession to climb it. Collins worked on it for two years, culminating in a series of determined attempts in 1979. Local resident Kevin Donald, who belayed Collins on his successful ascent later estimated that Collins had tried it over one hundred times, not always in the best of style. Such was the difficulty and the effectiveness of the propaganda the Collins put out about his ascent, that no-one has yet managed to repeat the route, and there are plenty of exceptional climbers who will not even attempt it for fear of failing.

Collins' other route of note was the free version of the original aid direct finish to *C'est La Vie*, offering very difficult climbing on holds that all faced the wrong way. Besides these ascents, which secure him a position of having advanced the upper limit of free climbing, he also attempted two other routes of interest. The first one was on the lower Redgarden Wall, the old aid route of *Fire and Ice*, where he managed to free

climb up to the first bolt of the aid route. The other was an old route with a fine looking finger crack, located on Castle Rock, just above the bridge and to the right of *Country Club Crack*. The problem is that below the crack there is a steep smooth polished slab with three bolts, that no-one has managed to free climb. Collins climbed up on micro-edges (small ones at that!) and managed to place a fingertip into a shallow hole and pull up enough to reach, at arms length, the layaway hold that allows access to a ledge. He was so extended at that point that he fell off, and never managed to get that high again.

Until 1979 the major developments of free climbing in the area lay in the domain of freeing the major aid routes. There were some exceptions, but they were anomalies, small eddies in the main flow of things.

Alec Sharp veered away from this course, being more interested in finding new lines to climb, more fascinated by the imagination needed to climb a totally new route. He started the season by climbing some striking new cracks on Jam Crack Spire in Shadow Canyon, just behind the Maiden, then took an interest in the granite cliffs of Boulder Canyon.

After two routes on the third Elephant Buttress, Sharp turned his attention to two routes, both on Castle Rock. The first, *Englishman's Home*, climbed leftwards up a series of steep and holdless corners, involving strenuous laybacking, then more laybacking led up a steep flake corner to the roof on *Country Club*. Now acknowledged as a significant climb, this route provides an interesting comment on how ingrained was the feeling that there was nothing major left to climb in Boulder area. When Erickson was writing his guidebook to the area, his first draft had the route down as a variation to *Country Club Crack*, and only comments from several people changed his mind.

The second route, *Never a Dull Moment*, was altogether a different proposition. A four pitch route up the rock to the left of *Athlete's Feat*, it obviously would involve climbing some very hard slabs with no protection, so Sharp repelled the route and placed two bolts, one on the first pitch and one on the third. He climbed the first pitch that day, the crux being immensely technical, and involving true finger nail holds, but failed on the second pitch, a difficult and strenuous thin crack. Returning with Dan Hare, Sharp repeated the first pitch, but took a long fall on the crack. After pulling the ropes down, and resting for a while he went up again, this time taking a shorter fall thanks to an alert belayer. Returning again, this time with Englishman Andy Parkin, Sharp managed to lead the crack on his first try, and then a very Yosemiteish slab pitch past the bolt he had placed. The fourth pitch climbed up the rib just left of the fourth pitch of *Athletes Feat* with no protection, until it was possible to climb over leftwards to a ramp.

During this spring, Bell Buttress received a quiet ascent that gave it what was then probably the hardest route in the canyon. Ron Matous worked away at the aid route *The Spoils*, an almost holdless corner that overhangs severely and provides sparse protection, and eventually climbed the canyon's first full 5.12. The route involves awkward and brutal laybacks to reach a good handjam, then poor flares to where the crack runs out and the climber must move left to face holds.

With the summer heat, came a general lethargy over all those involved in hard climbing, a lethargy that only disappeared with the onset of autumn, with its rich colours, and soft sadness for the dying of another year.

In October, Mark Wilford, Fort Collins boulderer supreme, went up to the short steep wall of Mental Rock with Skip Guerin, and climbed a finger crack, with a technical crux over a roof at the top. Named *Manic Depressive*, this short problem soon became a classic 5.11+ test piece. The same pair also climbed a right leaning corner just to the left, but covered with bat guano as it is, it never became popular.

Apart from a few other routes in Boulder Canyon, not much. The routes of the spring and summer needed time for digestion, upsetting as they were to the established way of thinking. Indeed the digestion was hard, and there were people who became very upset at the thought of outsiders coming in and finding new routes while

the locals slowly worked their way up, slowly consolidating the advances of the early and mid seventies. As time wore on though, the routes would speak for themselves; for the time being personalities and iconoclasm prevented clear sight.

Winter came, the snows fell, and the cliffs had time to recover. Climbers skied or hibernated, waiting for spring. Finally spring came, and warmth again spread over the rocks. Climbers came out, stretched long dormant muscles, and began the process of gaining strength and confidence again. The bouldering area at Morrison, with its innumerable overhangs and roofs again became popular, and slowly but inevitably muscles tightened and strengthened.

1980 In May Sharp went up to Rincon Wall with Casey Newman, and they traversed in to the bolt stance above the main pitch of Center Route. No *'Arm In It*, the route they climbed had been attempted by Sharp the previous year with Andy Parkin, but lack of protection foiled that effort. The route involved a traverse to the top of the main corner of *Wendego*, which is capped with an overhang. A flake on the lip of the overhang gave protection, and access to the bulging wall above which was climbed to the top; good holds but sparse protection. Steve Matous and Dan Hare added a new route, *Tempest*, to the steep slab at its left side, the route starting up a short unprotected wall above a towering spike, then following a thin diagonal crack.

Later that month Sharp returned to Castle Rock with his wife, and climbed *Sticky Fingers*, a thin seam crack involving some interesting bridging up the wall above the gully of Jackson's Wall.

Eldorado beckoned after this, the dihedral of the *Sidewall* area of the West Ridge causing itchy fingers. This area contains some very steep rock, the obvious line being the superb dihedral of *Sidewall*, strenuous wall climbing on the first pitch, followed by a smoothly vertical second pitch. Just left of this is a short smooth square-cut dihedral leading to a ledge below a thin crack in a long overhang. The route is *Practice Climb 101* and at that time only the lower corner had gone free. Between the thin crack, and the second pitch of *Sidewall* is another steep corner, protected by a bulge below. To the right of *Sidewall* is a steep black corner, and immediately to its right is a rather holdless red corner, both starting in the same place.

Sharp and Madara went up to try the corner just left of *Sidewall*. Sharp traversed in below the bulge from *Sidewall* and managed to climb over the overhang, but was unable to let go with either hand and took a short fall while climbing back down. He managed the route on his second attempt; the corner above the overhang was strenuous but fortunately not as hard as the overhang. They named the route *False Prophet*. A few days later Sharp returned in the evening with Dan Hare, and the pair climbed the black dihedral to the right of *Sidewall*. The dihedral is guarded by a bulge, and again this proved to be the crux, being both technical and strenuous. On that occasion *Quiet Desperation* quite lived up to the name they gave it, wrists having to substitute for screaming fingers on the top buckets.

Christian Griffith, a young and fast improving climber, noticed a short thin crack up on the West Ridge and led it, rating it 5.11. Chris Peisker failed to repeat *Kashmir* on his first attempt; when he returned and climbed it he rated it 5.11+.

At this time, Sharp had also been climbing up on the granite of Boulder Canyon, and one wall in particular had caught his eye. In relief it looked similar to *The Rasp* on Derbyshire's Higgarr Tor, severely overhanging, glistening as the afternoon sun swung round to catch the west side of Bell Buttress. Unlike *The Rasp*, there were no cracks, either for holds or protection, so Sharp decided to abseil and place bolts for protection. After placing two bolts, he led the route with his wife. John Kirk repeated *Front Line* less than a week later, and since then the route has become one of the most popular of its standard in the canyon. Kirk also led a short steep corner problem on Bell Buttress, calling it *Malaise*.

Back in Eldorado Sharp returned to Rincon Wall with Newman and Jeff Butterfield, this time to climb the obvious overhanging corner to the left of *Wendego* that Woodruff and Reveley had

attempted. To quote Erickson: "Steve Wunsch and I walked underneath it and Steve thought it might be a good climb — I though it looked like a piece of garbage. Reveley and Woodruff went up and tried it — this was in the days when Steve was sieging all those climbs, so they thought they may as well siege one somewhere. They worked on it for about three days then someone came up and stole all their protection. Nowadays everyone thinks it is a very good climb — it's certainly a striking line". The route was named *Climb of the Century*, and within a week it saw its second ascent by John Kirk who pronounced it better than the *Naked Edge*!

One of the more significant routes to be done during this period was a new route up the main Redgarden Wall by Roger Briggs. After the great days of the mid-seventies Briggs had come to the conclusion that there was nothing of note left to climb, but events of the last year and a half had forced a reconsideration, and now he was again fighting for a place at the top. Let him describe the route, which started by free climbing the first pitch of *Canary Pass*, and continuing up an extremely steep corner just left of the *Wisdom*, and over a roof.

"I imagined a line there then I aided it, solo, in winter and put in the bolts above the roof. I think getting the first pitch of *Canary Pass* had the most significance; it seemed really scary to me, and I knew I could get protection in the upper parts. I went up with my brother and finally worked out the first crux about twenty feet up, but couldn't quite do the top of the pitch. I came back with Jim Collins about two days later and led the whole first pitch. He couldn't follow it — he was strong physically but his head just wasn't into climbing; that's when he decided to leave Boulder. I was really psyched to keep going — I wanted him just to belay but he said he'd really appreciate it if we could go down. I rested another two days and came back with my brother again and we repeated the whole first pitch. I think it's overall 5.12; the second pitch is the type of pitch where there are no handholds and that's why I like it. Overall it's an atypical route; it's a long route, an endurance route."

Let him describe another major route of the summer, *Superpower*. This twenty foot roof crack in Skunk Canyon, in the Flatirons, was previously attempted by Woodruff and Hare with little success, and was finally climbed by Erickson and Briggs.

"I always thought of *Superpower* as my route although others will disagree. Jim was the motivation for it so I was really just going along to belay him. All the way up I assumed I was going to belay Jim. He's famous for taking up partners that very often aren't really qualified to lead, and saying 'Well, why don't you give it a try?' letting them get as far as they can, then using the protection they placed. That's how I got up on the pitch. I struggled and struggled and got the protection all the way to the lip of the roof — I wasn't taped and was just tearing my hands up. I got up to the 5.8 buckets and just totally ran out of strength; part of the problem was that I had had shorts on and couldn't jam my knee in the pod to rest, and my hands were bleeding, so I eventually lowered off. I'm not that into having the first ascent so I just said 'go ahead if you want to try it'. Jim tied in and top-roped to the lip and I guess the official word is that he got the first ascent. Now all the protection is fixed, and everyone tapes and wears knee pads, which discourages me in a way because I paid a price for that route."

While these interesting developments were taking place, Sharp had suffered a recurrence of tendonitis, and had used the opportunity explore the cliffs high on the West Ridge. During his explorations he had found a cliff on the West Ridge, past Rincon Wall, bristling with steepness, split by fearsome cracks and corners. A two tier cliff, both tiers bulging. With Chuck Fitch, Sharp climbed twelve routes in two days. The feeling was tremendous, a new cliff to explore and work out along; probably a feeling similar to that of climbing on Rincon Wall some years ago, isolated and lonely. The cliff was christened *Physical Crag*. The two outstanding routes were *Crown Joules*, a slightly overhanging square cut dihedral, and *Bacon and Ergs*, a very overhanging off-width crack just to the right of *Crown Joules*, protected by a natural

chockstone in the crack. Sharp and Fitch returned later in the autumn and Fitch led a sensational pitch across a large blank face at the lower right side of the cliff; a diagonal intrusion splits a steep smooth slab, and *Hertz of Gold* follows the band, strenuously at first, then with increasing delicacy, protection becoming scarcer as the climber becomes more committed to the route.

Just to the right of Physical Crag lies The Veil, dominated by a beautiful slab in its upper half. Once word had circulated about the routes on Physical Crag, Mark Rolofson and Alfredo Len walked up in September and climbed a line on the Veil, the main pitch being a crack in a prow to the right of the slab. They called the route *Zabrina*. Unfortunately it was slightly marred by a bolt that Rolofson placed on the first pitch, just eight feet from some easy climbing.

Sharp's other interest at this time lay in routes that would require a bouldering approach. The first one that he tried was on the wall of Winter Warmth in Boulder Canyon. On the right bounding wall, slightly overhanging, is a flake corner that starts about half way up the cliff, with no obviously easy access to it. Sharp, Fitch and Brian Smith went up to the route one evening, and with Smith's inspiration, they managed to boulder out the first fifteen feet, across a hand traverse and up a thin crack to a finger hold. From here the route, if possible would go out left to a flake and undercling leading into the corner. None of them managed to reach the flake. Sharp and Fitch returned a few days later; this time they were able to touch the flake at arms reach, until Sharp found a new way to climb this section and managed to reach the flake in a manner that would allow further progress. He reached the corner but was too tired to climb the route. Returning again Sharp used his knowledge of the moves to do the route straight off. The corner proved to be very strenuous until a rest was available about half way up it. The almost inescapable nature of the stance inspired the name *The Prisoner*.

At this time Sharp entertained the possibility of climbing the red corner to the right of *Sidewall*; on his ascent of *Quiet Desperation* he had seen it and been struck by how holdless and unprotected it looked. In addition, the two East Coast climbers, Newman and Butterfield had attempted it, but had not managed to get past the first hard move. Sharp decided to try it anyway, and walked up the West Ridge with Dan Hare. The crux turned out to be right at the top, where the protection was worst, and involved pulling on a small crystal. In the middle of the move, Sharp was faced with either letting go, not knowing what would happen to the protection, or continuing to pull, and possibly suffering a recurrence of an old tendon problem. The choice was obvious, and the *Human Factor* was done. Both Kim Carrigan, attempting the second ascent, and Skip Guerin, making the second ascent, took falls of about twenty five feet on the crux.

Boulder Canyon called, Bell Butress tolled, and Sharp returned to the cliff with Chuck Fitch and Richard Carey, to an area just right of the *West Face Route*, where a dirty gully or corner splits the cliff. Just right of this is an obvious flake crack, protected by a small roof and blank wall below. Sharp had placed a protection bolt on the blank wall, and he now climbed past it and managed to surmount the small roof and reach the crack itself. Exhaustion rapidly set in, and with the inevitable fall, he received a large rope burn across one elbow. Bandaging the burn up, he returned a few days later and this time managed to climb *The Arms Bazaar* with Richard Carey, finding the top section of the flake near his limits of strength. He returned a week later with Martin Taylor and climbed *Three Minute Hero* up the flakes and cracks just to the right of *Arms Bazaar*. One week later again, he returned with Fitch and Carey to the wall left of *Arms Bazaar*. Slightly less that vertical, and similar looking to some of the British walls, the line followed a thin crack, too thin to jam for the most part. The crux of *Epiphany* turned out to be wildly technical, an assortment of difficult pulls and bridging, and was led by Fitch in an inspired effort.

By this time the world was granite, so Sharp, Fitch, Hare and Carey hiked up to Blob Rock, to a steep finger crack on the East Wall. The crack looked similar in length and steepness to



Above: Roger Briggs and Leonard Coyne on *Scary Canary* (5.12-). Photo: Glenn Randall

Eldorado's *Supremacy Crack*, but thinner and harder. All attempted to climb the crack, but the crux, just off the ledge, stopped every attempt, until Carey managed to make the move. He made it twice but both times ran out of strength on the crack just above. Sharp then stretched through the crux, and managed to continue up the crack to finish the route. After all the effort Hare was the only one to follow. Such a silly day, such a silly crack, *Mile High Comic Crack*.

The last new route that Sharp and Fitch did that year was *Grand Inquisitor*, on Bell Butress, up the arete to the left of *Gates of Eden*. They placed a bolt on the initial overhang from a ladder, then the day saw many falls onto the bolt as the move past it was considered; put your foot here, there, above the head, until the only way to climb it was to lunge, so feet on smears on the overhanging wall, and pull, lunging to the bucket above. A couple of nuts in the crack ten feet higher, then swing left to little edges, but the arms ran out and a swing right on the rope was

unavoidable. They left the route for the day, and returned in the morning. This time Sharp managed to climb the whole overhang first time, and was soon at the top of the flake crack. He attempted to climb the blank arete above but the moves were too hard for no protection, so calling for the bolt kit, he placed a bolt. With this security he ran out above twenty feet on strenuous rock, before a final easy crack led to the ledge.

That left three months for 1980, and in that short space of time a young climber named Jeff Achey left an indelible mark on Boulder climbing.

"I'd been bouldering for a whole year, almost doing nothing but bouldering, and I started to get a feel for really hard moves. I'd improved my technical ability ten fold in that time, and started getting a little tired of just bouldering. I wanted to apply it, so I went out and looked for lines that had been tried, and had turned people back because they didn't perceive the bouldering style and attitude that could be applied."

Achey started off with *The Campaigner*, a

smooth and ridiculously hard and awkward thin crack on Castle Rock, sneaking out over some very rounded bulges immediately right of the twenty foot aid roof. He had climbed the crux a year previously but had not finished the route.

"The route was the idea of Bill Feiges, and for a long time he was getting much higher than I was, but I think his sequence just dead ended. Eventually I was able to find one that worked for me, and I was able to climb past his high point. I remember the second bulge was really hard too, harder than it seems. Bill still entertained notions that it was his climb and he still wanted to do it, but it was obvious he wasn't going to be able to do it that day, so we had an argument right after I cleared the second bulge and I had to rappel off because I didn't have a belayer any more. There's a short sequence of moves; you have to gain about three feet and that's the entire crux of the climb. You just have to use those holds over and over again until you figure out how to move up on them. They really cut you a lot more than you'd imagine they would . . . I'd put so much energy into the climb that it took a long time to get started again. I felt that I'd done what had held me back and didn't think it would be hard from then on. A year later Wendy White and I went up one day and I fired it really fast; I took one fall on the lower bulge, and a couple on the second. The rest was hard 5.10."

Achey also climbed a route, *Dream Street Rose*, on the north face of the Maiden, that eagle like pinnacle to the east of Shadow Canyon.

"It's a real quality climb; if it was cleaned off a bit it wouldn't be too hard . . . I usually clean new routes in the process of climbing. I'll reach for a hold, and clean it off then climb back down. One of the things I like best about climbing new routes is not knowing what holds are up there — some of my best moments in climbing have been really anxious about a hard move, then going for it and finding a good hold, and you can't do that if you've been down the route before."

In the same month Dan Hare returned to a route on the West Ridge that had previously repulsed him. With Dan Michael he placed two pegs to protect the section that had barred him last time, and climbed the line, over an overhang and up a dihedral, naming it *Pins and Needles*.

Three routes in October, three routes in November, two of them Achey's in each month. The other route in November was *Neurasthenia*, climbed by Dave Wilson and Alfredo Len. It took the unprotected overhang and dihedral to the left of *Touch and Go* on the Redgarden Wall. Often eyed by climbers, it had always looked too scary to be feasible, but Wilson and Len abseiled and placed a bolt above the overhang to protect some difficult face moves. One might have thought that such an act on a route that was often looked at would raise criticisms, but the climbing up to the roof was sufficiently hard and scary that no-one really objected to the bolt.

The other two routes were both free versions of old aid routes, *Salvation* and *Night*. *Salvation* was an old Ament aid route up a thin slab and over the largest roof on the *Wind Tower*, while *Night* takes a line up the centre of the steep black wall to the left of *Blackwalk*, on the right side of the Redgarden Wall.

"*Salvation* was a real experimental route for me — it was one where I completely rearranged my style. My first experience of it was on a top rope when we'd been rushed for time and just wanted to do something hard. We didn't manage to do it, but we realised that it would go. The protection situation was really weird — there was this old rubbish bolt that Ament had used for aid, and at least two chopped bolts on the slab below. One day I slipped out of University and rappelled down and replaced two bolts. There are now two really good bolts; I was careful about where I placed them, and I sealed them with epoxy. I don't have anything against manipulations of the environment as long as they're really permanent.

"It took us two more days before we could do it. The roof is about seven feet and there's one hold in it — luckily it's an undercling. There's a point in the way I do the move where you only have one point of suspension, and that's the undercling. The crux is avoiding swinging off when you have the undercling and the bucket at the lip. I think it took me about twenty tries — it was strange because when I finally got it it seemed trivial. It's hard to get over the lip as there are

no good holds to go for; you have to stand on your handholds, but I got it first time.

"On *Night* there's a section there which really sorts out the ruff-raff. It's only about 5.9, but you'd hit the ground and die. It's strange and complex — I remember that to protect it I tied off a small rotten tunnel in the rock, just to have a carabiner visible. The whole lower part tries to turn you back, but there's this big black magnetic wall above that you really want to get to, and the climbing up there's really fantastic."

Fantastic the climbing may have been, but even more fantastic was Achey's next route. These other routes were almost like training for this one, probably the most important route of the year. Up on Rincon Wall lies *Wendego*, a corner that leans right at an alarming angle, and to look at it, totally impossible. The only remotely feasible way would be to climb the right wall of the corner, but at the time it looked totally holdless. Every climber with any imagination that climbed in that area must have looked at that wall and speculated about its possibility. So in December Achey climbed it.

"I'd always thought about it; I think everyone had — it was so imposing, so blank, one of those routes in Eldorado that was screaming 5.12 face. I went up there to do *Center Route*, but it had wasps on it so we had to find something else, and *Wendego* was the obvious candidate. That was my first try on it. It gets hard right away — you can stem up and clip into the fixed pin, and all of a sudden you're faced with the hardest single move on the climb and it seems impossible, but you can see a foothold out there and you just have to fake it! That's exactly what it was — I had good protection, and realised that any single move could probably be done under those conditions, and I just faked it and got it on my first try. I got really excited but couldn't switch feet. Eventually I took some tension and switched feet and found I could stand there, and then I lowered back down. Eventually that day I got to a point where I could climb out, switch feet and do a second move and clip into a second pin. That was as high as I got — my fingertips were really sore by this time, the holds are so small.

"I came back a little while later with Kevin Bein and Barbara Devine and got through the first part on my first try, but I had a lot of trouble with the last part. The first move on the climb is the hardest move, then you have several move fairly hard ones, then you can step out to a rest on the arete. It gets easy for a few moves then there's the lieback section which is also pretty hard. I fell off four or five times there, going back to that rest."

It's hard to describe how incredible this ascent was; nowadays the route is totally marked with chalk, which detracts somewhat from its former holdless appearance.

That was pretty much it for the year, apart from a route, *Extreme*, which opened up the climbing on the overhanging wall of the central gully of Blob Rock. Looking back on the year, it was apparent that more people were beginning to appreciate the new route potential in the area. One contributing factor was a small guide that Sharp produced to the new routes being done. Keeping the information on a computer, he was able to continually update the guide and print copies whenever desired, the latest of which could always be found behind the counter at the Boulder Mountaineer. With this guide around people were kept more up to date on events than ever before; this meant that climbs were repeated sooner, and in reading the guide and doing the routes the realisation soon built up that there must be more new lines to climb. Most of the new climbs were developing with a new concept in mind — to quote Roger Briggs again: "It's a different view of climbing; rather than trying to climb something free, you're going on something that's never been done before. It's given that you want to do it free, the question is 'is there a route or not?'. That's a new twist and I have to admit I've had my eyes opened to that."

1981 With the new attitude of climbing virgin rock also came a new responsibility. Without the fixed pins and bolts of the old aid routes, climbers were forced to decide for themselves whether or not a climb was feasible without fixed protection, and whether it was valid to place some. As with all such decisions, someone has to make them, and at this point decisions become very personal. With time it seems that

most of the decisions about fixed bolts and pegs have been within a reasonable ethical framework, although there have been a few instances of climbers being over keen to get publicity for a new route, and resorting to very dubious tactics. One of the poorer examples of new route fever triumphing over considerations of style was a route called *The Formula*, climbed in February of 1981. It climbs a forty foot corner on the West Ridge, but prior to climbing it, Mark Rolofson abseiled down and placed five pegs for protection, an act almost calculated to arouse the ire of climbers. The general feeling was that however good the climbing, five pegs in a climb that short was totally unjustified.

*The Formula* aside, 1981 was a year that saw the emergence of two new rock stars, Skip Guerin and Randy Leavitt, plus some significant contributions from other climbers. The year started early, due to a very mild, almost ski-less winter. Sharp started climbing new routes in January, on the Rock of Ages, a new cliff that he had discovered in Rocky Mountain National Park, Rolofson climbed a new route, *Ageing Time on Blob Rock*, but February was when the fun started. Sharp climbed *Forever*, a line up the center of large, virtually protectionless slab of the Veil, but the month belonged to Leavitt and Guerin.

Randy Leavitt is a young Ron Kauk clone from Southern California. Being new to the area, he called up Dan Hare, whose name he had been given, and with Joel Schiavone they went up to Security Risk Crag, a cliff that had been discovered by Hare a few years previously. Hare and Schiavone had been working on a new route, but neither had managed it at that point, so they pointed Leavitt at it. It was climbed at 5.10, and named *Get Smart*.

"I came back a week later to rappel down *Hot Flyer* (a hard and very English looking lack of a line up the wall to the right of *Get Smart*). The first thing I do on rappel is see if the route will go free, see if I'm wasting my time. I think that around the Boulder area, if you don't rappel down a route you may be wasting your time on something not worth it. After that I see if there's any protection. On *Hot Flyer* I put in two copperheads and one pin for fixed protection. At the time I was pondering if that was an ethical thing to do, but now I really don't care because it wouldn't be too feasible without those copperheads there.

"I went up to climb it with Rick Accamazzo; in fact I got two belayers because it needed double rope technique and none of us were used to belaying two ropes at once! It turned out to be almost an epic — I took four twenty foot falls on the roof, and we finally finished the route just as the sun was setting."

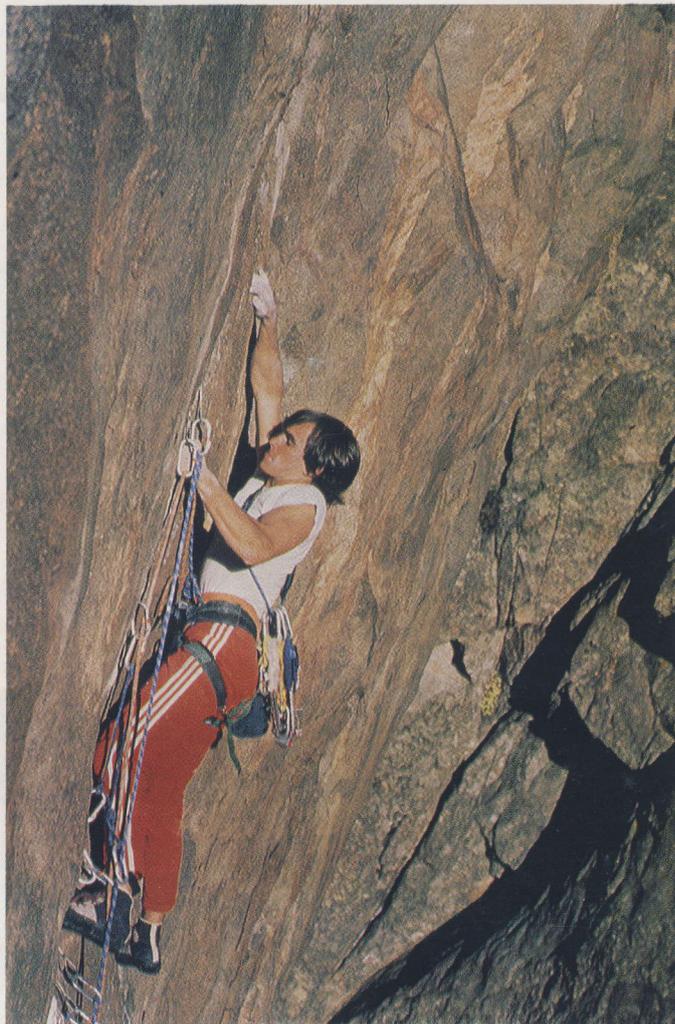
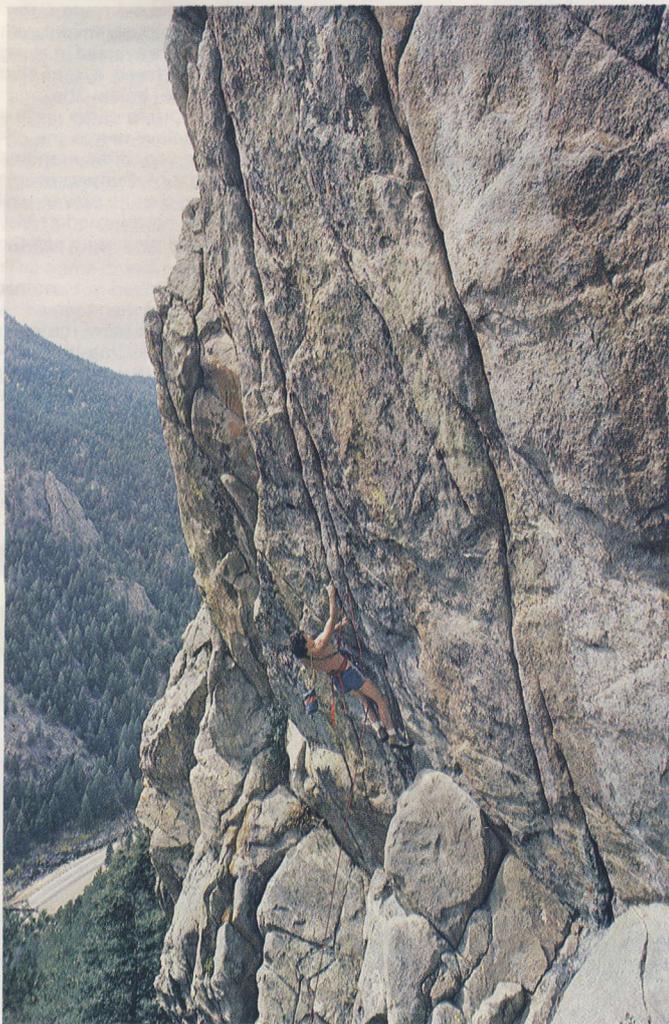
*Hot Flyer* turned out to contain some of the best climbing Leavitt did in the Boulder area, although its appearance is offputting to anyone used to climbing obvious crack lines.

The other major ascent of that month was an extremely difficult seam crack in a severely overhanging wall between the West Ridge and the *Vertigo* section of Redgarden Wall. Climbed by Skip Guerin, who named the route the *Poligap*, it was a full 5.12, one of the hardest cracks in the area. It has been spotted by John Baldwin, and had already seen many attempts. Guerin's friend, Bob Horan, had been photographed on one attempt, the photo appearing in colour on the front page of a Denver newspaper, the *Denver Post*. Guerin was shown the route on one attempt, and gave it a go, realised he could climb it, and came back he next day with Baldwin to do it.

"I was really psyched to climb after a lot of days of boredom and work, and I came down to Boulder one day and went up to the climb with some people who were going to try it. I gave it a half hearted attempt, then came back next day and did it one my third or fourth try. The crux is a lunge to a finger lock off a small fingerhold, a sloping hold with little lip at the very edge."

Although the crux pitch is not very long, it is a real bouldering pitch, one that stops most efforts. The second pitch is a steep corner with loose holds and poor protection, and interesting change after the difficulty of the first pitch.

Guerin came out from New Jersey to the university, but was only a 5.3 climber when he arrived. After a year of studying he realised he didn't know what he wanted to do, so he quit

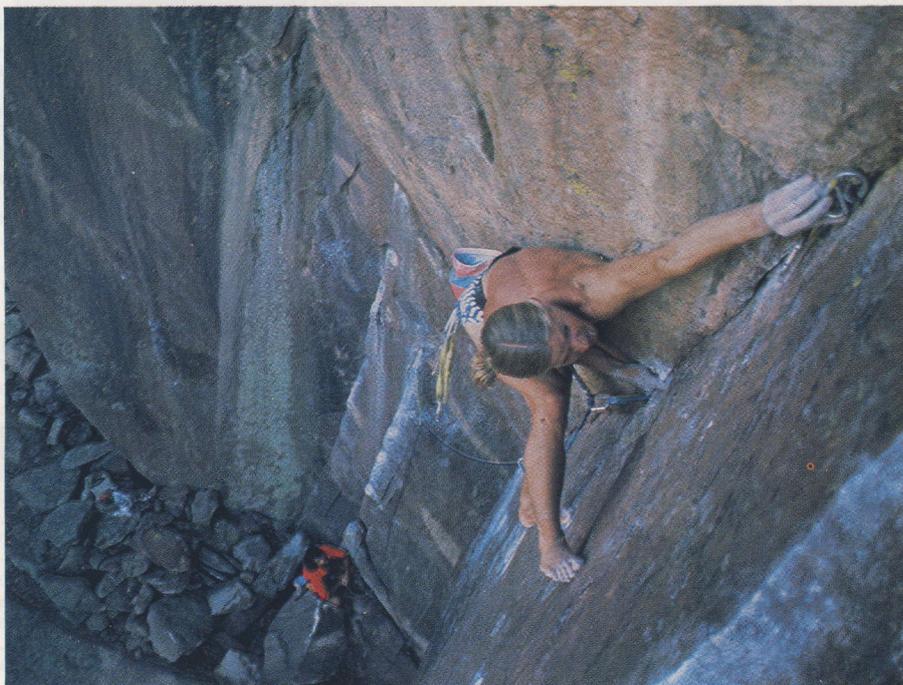


university and just climbed, rapidly working up through the grades, and developing into an excellent boulderer. Eventually he started doing new routes.

"I was going around doing all these hard routes in Eldorado and was walking around saying 'that'll go someday', then I realised that maybe I should just try routes instead of waiting till I got good. I never really think of myself as good when I go climbing because I can always get better. Even though I was doing the hardest established climbs, at the back of my mind I thought that if the unclimbed lines hadn't been done by the gods, they must be too hard. Then I read about some of the routes Sharp had been doing and I checked them out and they were really good routes. I think that was what motivated me most — I saw him going out and doing these really good routes."

March saw more routes of the same quality and difficulty as those of February. Guerin was sharing a house with Bob Horan, a welder from Illinois, who had climbed extensively at Devil's Lake, and had moved out to Boulder to become a better climber. "I knew that if I was around the area I could get better and dedicate myself to it more. . . I wasn't doing too much, then I met Skip and we got really psyched and started looking around and saying 'this will go, that will go'". The first route that the pair did was a free version of *Silver Raven*, an aid route that Dan Hare had soloed, just right of *Grand Course* on the Yellow Spur section of Redgarden Wall. They noticed the line on their way down from doing another climb, and climbed it immediately, a thin crack leading to a left facing corner.

That month they did three other new routes in Eldorado, on the West Ridge. *Blues Power*, another 5.12, took a thirty foot severely overhanging finger crack in the somewhat rotten looking wall to the left of *Wing Shot*; it had been looked at briefly by Wunsch and Bragg, who had decided that *Wing Shot* looked too easy to bother with (!), but they didn't really try it. Guerin and Horan did the route on their second day, after a few falls on the first.



**Top left:** Bob d'Antonio on *Mile High Comic Crack* (5.12-). Photo: Harvey Arnold. **Top right:** Randy Leavitt on *Limits of Power* (5.12). **Below:** Skip Guerin leading *Wendego* (5.12-) in bare feet. Photos: Glenn Randall.

"Bob and I did *Wingshot*, then we looked at the crack on the left and decided it would go, and so we tried it then. We both tried a couple of times and got out halfway, then decided to try again when we were fresh. We came back about two weeks later and I went out aways, got past the crux, then there was all this dirt in the crack and I fell off. I went back out again, got to the same place, and came off, so I grabbed the nut and hung there and brushed a lot of dirt out of the crack, and got it next try. Bob followed it without falling".

The other two routes are located further up the West Ridge, on a steep wall split by several parallel vertical cracks, too thin for fingers; the wall immediately left of Hare's route *Pins and Needles*. Horan led *Foxtrot* at 5.11+ and Guerin led *Parallels* at 5.11. "We both of those the first day we tried them, but both took falls. It was hard to get protection in — you'd climb up a bit, wiggle a nut, then come off, go back down, and so on".

Leavitt was not to be outdone though. Exploring the steep walls of the central gully of Blob Rock, he found a beautiful line in the wall to the right of *Decade Dance*, which he climbed with Accamazzo. An overhanging hand traverse led to a difficult mantel, devoid of protection, which in turn gave access to a very steep thin crack.

"It looked like a nice thin crack up a vertical wall, but it turns out it overhangs almost thirty feet in a hundred and twenty. I rappelled down it and it took a minimal amount of cleaning and no fixed protection. The first day I took about four falls then got snowed off. I took a thirty footer on the final roof. I pulled a number one Friend off my back knowing it wasn't the right size, knowing that I was stupid to try to place it, but I still tried. My mind was racing, and I was knowing this was the wrong thing to do, it won't fit, you're going to try to place it, you won't place it, and that's exactly what I did. By the time I went for the last nut I was only hanging from one hand jam, my feet had cut loose and were bicycling in the air, and I finally plummeted. I really enjoyed the fall, so I shook out there for a while, then went right back up on the move. I went up there and did the same thing again, this time placing a nut but not being able to clip it. I cleaned the pitch, lowering off a stopper, then came back next day and did it first try."

Leavitt graded *Limits of Power* 5.11+, but failures on the route by other leading climbers soon caused a regrading to 5.12. His other route of that month was *Silent Running*, with Accamazzo and Hare. A steep climb on the left side of Blob Rock, the crux truning out to be reminiscent of Suicide Rock climbing, thin and scary.

One other route of note was done this month, although the style perhaps left something to be desired. Up on Eldorado's Mickey Mouse wall, just left of *Oblique Streak*, is particular overhanging, pocketed arete. It was climbed on aid in 1980 by Eric Doub and Eric Goukas, who left two bolts, and enough fixed protection so that when they returned in March with Christian Griffith, Goukas was able to lead the pitch free, with little gear other than carabiners.

Leavitt's preferences have been for granite routes, while Guerin has tended to prefer the sandstone of Eldorado. Guerin is a boulderer superb, ideally suited to the hard wall climbing of Eldorado, with it's difficult moves on small holds. In some ways, his barefoot climbing has almost overshadowed the new routes he did, the most amazing feat being his barefoot lead of *Wendego*. Having climbed it before, and despite its micro-edges, he managed the route with no falls. The bouldering attitude appears clearly in the routes that he and Horan did up on the West Ridge, the parallel cracks of *Foxtrot* and *Parallels*, and later *Crazy Fingers*, where obvious second pitches continue up from where these three routes end. To Guerin and Horan though, the interesting climbing ended at this point. *Crazy Fingers* was done in April, and turned out to be the hardest of the three cracks, being 5.12-. Guerin cleaned it up on rappel, then climbed it on his second day, taking several falls on the B1 crux move, with the nut down by his feet.

One of the most important routes of the year was done in Eldorado at around this time, when Pat Adams climbed the first pitch of Ament's old aid route, *Fire and Ice*, on the lower Redgarden Wall, between *Guenease* and *Psycho*. Adams is

Boulder's answer to the punk climbers of Britain, although probably a much better climber than most of them. Although he soloed *Kloebberdanz* in his teens, he had preferred to repeat all the hard routes rather than go out and climb new routes. Until *Fire and Ice*. This route does some extremely hard climbing up a wall protected almost solely by three bolts, one of which Adams placed on abseil. Let Adams take up the story:

"A long time ago Buck Norden and my brother tried the route, but the thing that kept them from trying really hard was the fact that there wasn't any protection. They stacked crack 'n ups in that little A4 pin scar and tied a big rock on the end of them to keep them in place. Ever since then I've had an interest in it.

"The first mantel by the bolt I placed is probably hard 5.10 or 5.11, then you go up and sort of get rest when you clip the second bolt, they you make hard moves over to the next bolt. It took us a while to get over there. The there's a pretty big hold that you have to mantel on. I thought that was the crux of the climb — it's harder than anything else I've done in Eldorado and I think it's 5.12.

"When I was first trying the route, we each tried three or four times to get out to the mantel, then we found the sequence to get across. At the crux I probably fell five or seven times, trying the mantel — it's about a ten foot fall onto kind of a wierd bolt. Other people say it's terrible but I never thought it was too bad — it seemed to hold okay."

Placing the first bolt was a rather controversial move because some climbers felt it was wrong to place more bolts on an old aid route in order to do it free, but more importantly because of Collins' claim to have climbed up to the original bolt. Adams' comment was:

"I put in the first bolt because the original first bolt is a good twenty feet off the ground, and I thought it would be good to have a bolt for the first mantel. If you fell off, you'd hit the ground, and it's a pretty committing move. I climbed *Psycho* and rapped down to place the bolt. As for Collins, I probably don't believe him; I can't really believe anything he says."

The pitch received its second ascent from German Kurt Albert, and then Roger Briggs placed another bolt beside the third bolt, to reduce the risky nature of the undertaking.

By this time Britain and New Zealand's John Allen had arrived in Boulder, where Sharp introduced him to the new route scene, with a route in Eldorado, between *Blackwalk* and *Night*. Sharp had always felt there was room for routes other than *Blackwalk* on that large expanse of ominous looking black rock, then Achey freed *Night*, which left the wall between the two routes. Sharp abseiled down the wall and brushed off the initial bulge, and it was left to Allen to excavate a higher foothold and find another way of doing the move. Allen finished the route, which turned out to be adequately protected by nuts, and they named it *A Breed Apart*.

Sharp and Allen also climbed some routes on Rock of Ages, but it was with Dick Cilley that Allen climbed his most important route, one of the most significant climbs of the year. On the West Ridge, to the left of *Sidewall*, is a smooth right angled corner leading to a ledge below a very thin crack in a large overhang. The route is *Practice Climb 101*, and the first pitch had been free for about five years. Despite many attempts, from Wunsch and Erickson through to Achey, no one had been able to free the second pitch up the thin crack. Cilley attempted it first on this occasion, and managed to get clipped in up to the lip of the overhang, where the real difficulties start, then Allen had a go. Ever brilliant, he managed to get over the lip on his second try, and was then faced with the choice of placing a nut or climbing further from his protection, knowing tht if he placed the nut he would have to lower off. He ignored the nut placement and finished off the hard moves, thus completing the ascent of what was probably the first full 5.12 on the West Ridge.

Also in Eldorado, although high up on Mickey Mouse wall, Jeff Achey climbed *Beginner's Mind*, a direct start to *Captain Beyond*. He considered it to be probably the best climbing he had done on a new route. The crux turned out to be 5.11+ moves laybacking up a small arete, and Achey took several eight foot falls onto a crack 'n up.

Sharp returned to Briggs' old aid route *Corinthian Vine* in May. He had previously tried it with Fitch, on which occasion they traversed in along *Jackson's Wall Direct*, then freed a roof that gave access to a large ledge below the main pitch. Sharp had managed to free climb up to a crescent shaped roof just below where the difficulties ease, and had made very difficult moves up to reach a bolt above the roof, but was unable to clear the roof free. Feeling that he may as well do it as free as he was able, he returned in May with his wife, and climbed the pitch with just the one bolt above the roof.

The same month Leavitt climbed yet another route on Security Risk Crag, and then teamed up with Bob Horan to climb several new routes in Skunk Canyon. On Security Risk Crag he climbed *Enemy of the People*, a crack line up a bulging wall, joining *Software Reliability* at the end of its crux traverse.

"I brushed it up and put two pins and a bolt in, the pins on rappel and the bolt from the ground, standing on Christian's back. He'd complain and I'd drill about a quarter of an inch, then tell him it was almost done; I did that for about half an hour until finally the bolt was in. I took one of the pins out later — it wasn't necessary as there's a very good friend placement just above it. I didn't clean it as well as I'd have like to, so I came back and cleaned it out more after I had climbed it — I don't like the presence of lichen on my routes.

In August Leavitt finally forsook his main love, granite, and climbed *Sequential*, a new route in Eldorado. Dan Hare showed him the line, a direct continuation of the first part of *Kloof*, a route Woodruff and Hare had previously done. The direct continuation had been top-roped by John Sherman, who rated it 5.12 on a top-rope. Leavitt:

"I cleaned it by down jumaring and fixing nuts every few feet. I couldn't get in enough to clean it very well, but I could see it would go, estimating its difficulty at 5.11c. I pride myself on my ability to rappel down a route and know what grade it is, to the letter grade; most of the time I'm right, but this time I was way off, and it turned out to be about 5.12b.

"I tried it a few times and couldn't do it, so I ended up just aiding up it and doing a better cleaning job on it. It took three attempts to do the day I finally did it."

September got mixed reviews. It saw both fine solutions to old problems, and poor solutions to new problems. *Le Void* was finally climbed entirely free, by Jeff Achey and Roger Briggs. The first pitch up and overhanging flake crack was already free, but no one had managed to climb the roof on the second pitch. The protection turned out to be rather dubious, the sort of protection that you would consider hanging on, but not falling onto, and the moves were very technical. Achey and Briggs worked on the roof for a day, then were forced to leave by lack of light. When they returned they discovered the nuts they had left in place were no longer there, but Achey managed to lead the roof with poorer protection that he would have liked. So hard was the pitch that Briggs was barely able to follow it on a top rope.

The same pair also freed an old aid route or Briggs' in Skunk Canyon. The first pitch of *Inferno* had already been freed by Woodruff and Reveley, but they had traversed off at this point. To let Briggs tell the story:

"It's an aid route that we put up around 1971. The middle pitch has a two bolt ladder on an overhanging headwall. That's the crux to do free. It's really spectacular — the first pitch pretty much overhangs most of the way, and the second pitch goes out over this overhanging headwall that's almost a roof. That section has really small holds — you start on jugs then get out in the middle of the roof and clip the bolts, and then it blanks out, but there's just enough holds, just perfectly placed, and then have to hang around a lot to work out the moves. Jeff was kind of indulging me because I really wanted to lead that pitch, and I worked and worked, but couldn't quite do the last move. He tied in and said 'I promise I won't do it', so he fired up there but didn't do the last move, just to indulge an old man. He came back down and let me do it. I struggled a lot to get it — he could have done it in two or three tries."

Achey also managed to free most of *Tourist*

*Extravaganza* on Castle Rock. He was unable to free the initial face, and like many others before him, he resorted to using one bolt for aid, but he continued and freed the finger crack above, traversing left to *Country Club* to belay.

One other important route was unfortunately done in fairly poor style. It takes a major line up the arete between *Superslab* and *Vertigo*, but as Christian Griffith said "I have to admit that it was rather over-protected". Started by Eric Doub and Eric Goukas, who did the first pitch, the whole route was climbed by Doub and Griffith. The name it was given, the *Doub/Griffith Route*, and the amount of protection placed on rappel, make one wonder about the motives for doing the route. Doub apparently wanted to make the route "as well protected as *Rosy Crucifixion*" and to this end he placed five bolts, two pegs, and five fixed nuts on rappel. Protection aside, the route has fine climbing in spectacular and exposed position.

October brought with it a time of golden days, rich in colour, and cooler than summer. The weather hit a period of stability, which continued into November. Harrison Dekker managed to free the *Northwest Overhang* on the Maiden, then around the middle of October, Sharp awoke from summer hibernation, and touched rock again. Playing on a lack of knowledge of how unfit he was, he led several new pitches in Eldorado, two of them on the lower Redgarden Wall. The first of the two, *Slow Dancing*, climbed the wall from the second bolt on *Fire and Ice* up to the stance of *Psycho*, below the roof. It had been previously top-roped by a few climbers, but lack of protection had deterred any leads. Sharp assumed that there would be no protection after the bolt, and since a fall from near the top would have resulted in a ground fall, his second, Dan Hare, readied himself to run downhill at top speed should Sharp fall. It turned out to be possible to place small R.P.'s behind some of the flakes used as holds, but few would have held a fall.

The other pitch on this wall was the roof of *Fire and Ice*, which Sharp led with Matt Lavender. A maximum reach gave access to holds at the lip, and Sharp then had to make several moves up the severely bulging wall above before he was able to place first protection.

Two weeks later Sharp and Lavender turned their attention to the West Ridge, where they free climbed *Tanqueray*, a smooth red dihedral to the right of *Xanadu* up on the West Ridge, and climbed *Kubla Kahn*, a leaning narrow corner just left of *Tanqueray*. Originally climbed about two years previously as a 5.10 and A3 route, *Tanqueray* had repelled several free attempts before it was done by Sharp and Lavender. The major problem was a lack of good nuts to protect some very hard moves on poor holds.

A lack of good protection was the key aspect of the two other routes that Sharp climbed on the West Ridge. To the right of *The Unsaid* is a square cut arete, steep at first then easing slightly before rearing up to a small overhang. Eldorado thinking was still geared towards cracks and corners, but Sharp was struck by the similarity of this arete to some of North Wales's Tremadog aretes, and resolved to climb it. Despite anticipating a twenty five foot fall on the delicate moves leading to the small overhang, he managed to climb the arete with Lavender and Bob D'Antonio, and they named it *The Shock of the New*.

Returning to the *Xanadu* wall with Lavender, Sharp managed to climb *The Ministry of Fear*, a very hard and scary line up the bulging wall to the right of *Purple Haze*. Starting with a strenuous overhanging hand traverse, the route climbed an almost protectionless hairline crack directly up the wall. There were some good nuts and Friends after the hand traverse, but the only protection that Sharp managed to get on the bulging wall was a taped down skyhook. In reaction to an almost sleepless night spent in fear of this climb, Sharp walked back up the next day with Leonard Coyne, and climbed the perfect finger crack in the slightly overhanging wall just left of *Purple Haze*. With excellent protection, the route was something of a joke because at any point it was possible to step right into the corner of *Purple Haze* and reduce the standard five grades. With some effort, they managed the technical exercise of climbing the crack using on-



Top: Pete O'Donovan (UK) on *Arms Bazaar* (5.12-). Below: Harrison Dekker on *Crazy Fingers* (5.12-). Photos: Sharp Collection.

ly the wall left of the corner, and named it *Joke Crack*.

And then snow began to fall.

Which brings us to the end of 1981, and to the future. Looking back, we can see that as the emphasis swung from free climbing old aid routes to finding totally untouched lines, it soon became obvious that there were a large number of major lines waiting to be climbed. New philosophies developed concerning how the routes could legitimately be protected, and in the absence of a general consensus, individuals carried a lot of responsibility in their decisions. Fortunately there

have been few abuses of that responsibility, and as competition intensifies for the remaining plums, there will probably be even fewer ascents done in poor style.

Boulder will never have routes to match the long cracks of Yosemite, and for years the Gunks led the way in the area of difficult moves on routes. Boulder's chance to assert its position as one of the leading climbing areas in the country lies most obviously in the field of bold climbing and long runouts. The legacy of Dave Breashears, briefly buried in the hunt for new routes, will re-emerge.