

"What you hold in your hands is a love letter to Bay Area bouldering. This guide has been expertly crafted through a lifetime of experience and years of research. As you read through these pages, don't forget to look for opportunities to honor and protect our amazing climbing areas."

Peter Monks, President of the Bay Area Climbers Coalition

"I started climbing in the Bay Area, and twenty years later, it is still one of my favorite places. Golden State Bouldering is the guide I always wish I had. This book represents a lifetime of passion and dedication by locals to develop these pristine areas. New climbers can use it to transition from the gym to the crag, and long-term climbers will learn something new about the local areas they already love."

Kevin Jorgeson, Professional Climber

"The California coast is like a dream to me. I love being by the water, and it feels surreal to climb on boulders directly on a beach. Whenever I get frustrated or just need a break, I can always get in the water for a bit. With dozens of maps and hundreds of photos, Golden State Bouldering has all the information you need to have this type of experience for yourself."

Meagan Martin, Professional Climber & Ninja Warrior Champion

Golden State Bouldering is a comprehensive guide to the greater Bay Area of California, with information on the outdoor bouldering around San Francisco, Sacramento, Santa Rosa, and Santa Cruz. This guide describes 1,600 boulder problems with hundreds of color photos, maps, GPS coordinates, and hand-drawn illustrations. Golden State Bouldering has a philosophical twist, exploring the ways in which climbing can be among the most meaningful parts of our lives. Whether you are new to climbing or an old-school veteran, Moore and Joslin draw on decades of experience to describe the unique magic of Bay Area climbing.

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San Francisco Bay Area

GOLDEN STATE BOULDERING



Kimbrough Moore & Shannon Joslin
Illustrations by Leo Popovic

Buy this book or look for new editions & updates:
www.goldenstatebouldering.com

If you have any corrections, updates, new first ascents, or further information please email
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Front cover: Shannon on *Kung Fu Kitten*, one of hundreds of problems spread throughout the Bay Area with unpublishable access information. Inspired by a photo of Vikas Agatha. Illustration by Leo Popovic.

Back cover: Kimbrough on *Full Circle* (p. 275) with Daniel Fineman providing a spot and moral support. Photo by Anthony Lapomardo, modified to make additional space for text. Illustration by Leo Popovic.

Inside front cover: Illustration by Leo Popovic.

Previous page: Savannah Bergquist on *Unnamed Face #11* (p. 226) at Goat Rock.

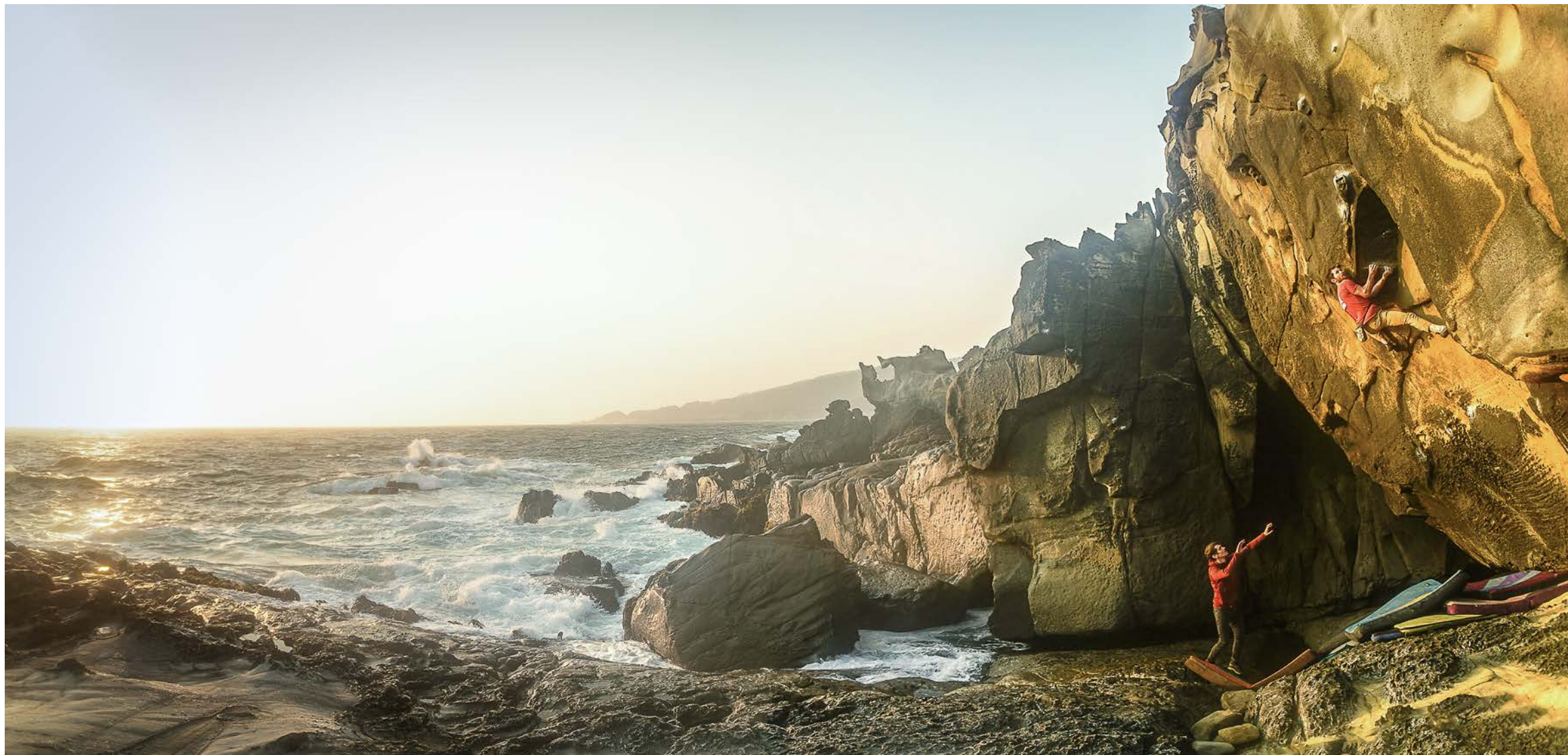
Table of contents: Daniel Fineman on *Stoney Whiteboots* (p. 262) while Kimbrough, fearful and confused, does his best to keep him safe. Photo by Anthony Lapomardo.

WARNING! READ BEFORE USING THIS BOOK

ROCK CLIMBING AND BOULDERING ARE DANGEROUS ACTIVITIES. Rock climbing and bouldering are sports with inherent risks. Participating in rock climbing and bouldering may result in injury or death. This guidebook is intended as a navigational tool for advanced climbers. This guidebook is a compilation of information from many sources, and the authors and publishers make no representations or warranties, expressed or implied, of any kind regarding the contents of this book. This book does not give the user the right to access any area described within. The user assumes all risks associated with the use of this book and the activities of rock climbing and bouldering.

Kimbrough:
To all the nerds out there, keep thinking big ideas.

Shannon:
To Philia, forever.



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Photo: Joshua LaCunha

Foreward

A decade ago, when I was writing the guide to Black Mountain in Southern California (where my heart will always live), I thought climbers wanted to buy a bouldering guide. I was wrong. Five years ago, I thought climbers wanted to know about boulder problems. I was wrong once again. Now I think that, at the deepest level, climbers simply want to have a meaningful life. Yes, we buy guidebooks to know more about the problems in order to find meaning. But why have all these intermediaries? In this guide, we want to speak directly to what matters.

MEANING -OF- CLIMBING What is the meaning of climbing? How does climbing help you live your best life? I have been asking this question for years, and I always seem to be finding new answers, hidden beneath a pile of concepts that I never noticed before. While writing this guide, we asked climbers, over and over, what they thought the meaning of climbing was. Their answers are diverse, and you can find them throughout. Just look for the marker.

We believe that meaning in climbing isn't given to us. It is something that we create. We hope this guide inspires you to find new ways of relating to the rocks, to have new ideas, and perhaps even to expand the limits of your imagination. Our experiences are the raw materials that we use to make sense out of this absurd, often dirty, highly contrived thing called climbing.

This guide is a product of its time. You will see many photos of me and Shannon – too many for our taste – but this is what happen when a global pandemic makes climbing together more dangerous, for once, than climbing alone. We had many solitary days at the rocks, on our computers, drawing maps and inventing new ways of describing the same basic thing. A rock, with some holds, and a path to climb up.

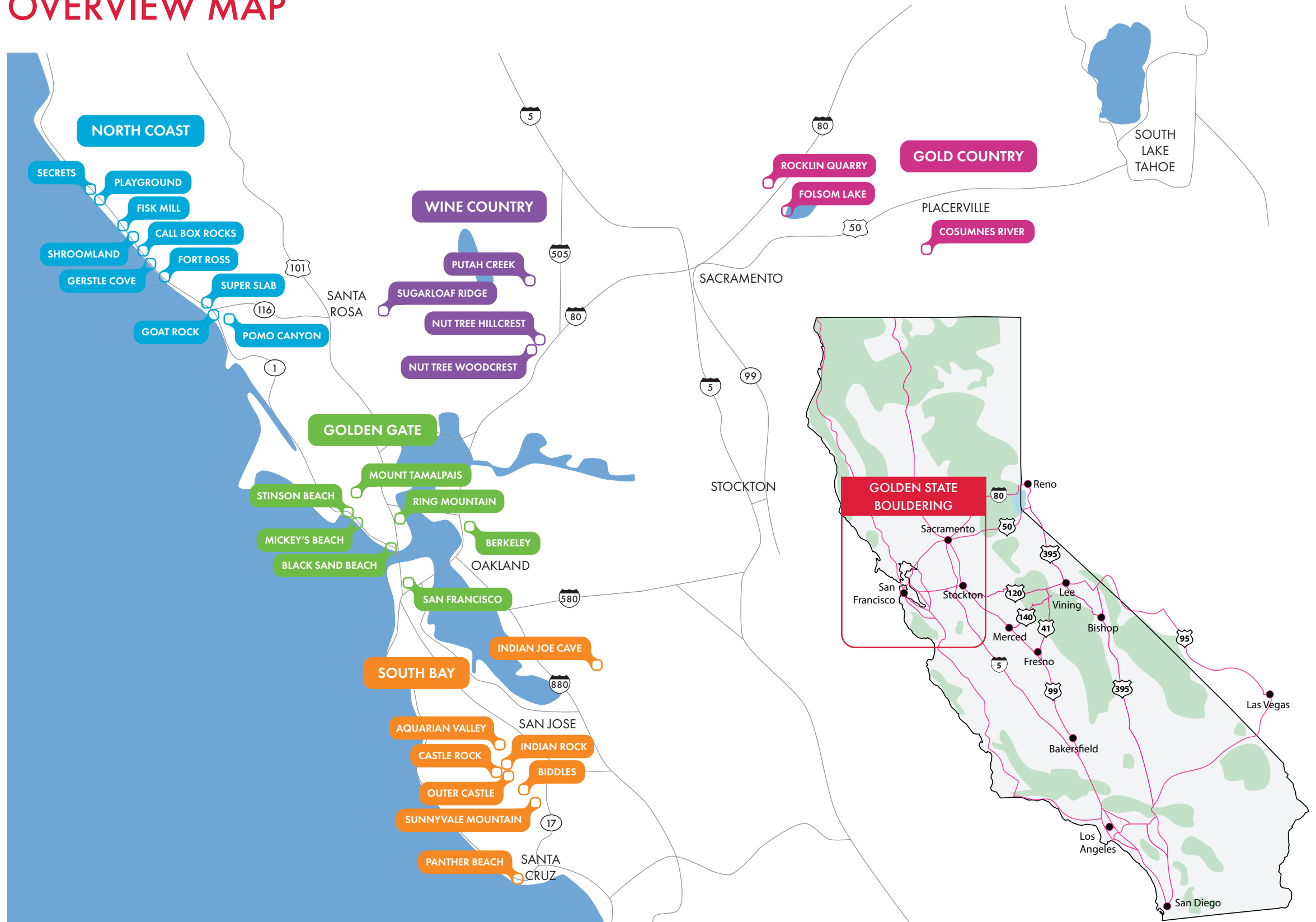
Could I have written this book without Shannon? Maybe, but it would have been a flimsy version of itself, as if counting the number of stripes on a tiger in your dreams. Nothing would have made as much sense. I am the philosopher and she is the scientist, and through our dynamic, our ill-defined ideas take form as ink on the page. Shannon's fingers have been on every word, every topo, and every photo. If there is something you particularly like in this guide, she deserves equal credit.

At first, Leo was only going to design the inside of the cover. Slowly, one illustration at a time, his art expanded until the guide was infused with Leo's surreal perspective. Does he always see the world this way? If boulder problems are the bones of the guide and philosophy is the brain, Leo's illustrations are its soul.

If I may speak on behalf of all of us, we hope you enjoy this book and that it helps you get outside, to the rocks, where life seems to make more sense. Climbing has poured joy into our hearts, and every so often, when filled to the brim, it spills over the side. You are reading the result. If you experience the feeling of wonder or a touch of the sublime, even just once, that means that we did something right.

Onwards,
Kimbrough

OVERVIEW MAP



THE PROBLEM WITH PROBLEM NAMES

Names are cool, and problem names have an emotional significance that's hard to articulate. Perhaps it's best felt through their absence. Who hasn't struggled on a boulder problem only to learn it's yet another unnamed slab, apparently too trivial and insignificant for anyone to bother naming? And yet, unnamed problems can be fun, hard, and worthy of respect. There are three issues we encountered with names in this book, and while we don't know if we've made the right decisions on any of them, we can at least explain our reasoning and our intentions.

Unnamed Problems: There are hundreds of unnamed problems in this guide. The role that names play in the climbing community has changed over time. Back in the 70s, when bouldering was starting to take off in the Bay Area, there was an established culture of naming roped climbs, but boulder problems were different. Bouldering was considered training, not the serious stuff, hardly real climbing at all. In this period, most problems were left unnamed, and when they were named, it was usually descriptive (e.g. *Nat's Traverse* was first climbed by Nat Smale, water runs down *The Watercourse*, *The Pegboard* was used for training, etc.). This changed slowly (e.g. *The Impossible Wall* was established in 1980), and by the 90s, boulder problems were regularly getting names like their roped counterparts (e.g. *Deforestation*, *Santa Cruz Dudes*, and *Hoop Dreams*). Today, almost all new problems get a name, no matter how easy, obscure, or downright chossy (e.g. The Secrets were developed in the 90s and 00s).

The point is that unnamed problems are themselves a part of the history of the area. Because of this, we have generally left problems unnamed if that's how they've been forever. Occasionally we have given these problems descriptive names (e.g. *Magoo Warm Up* at Castle Rock). Other times, an unnamed problem gets named years later, or even decades later. We have generally not added these late bloomers, but we made exceptions when a name seemed especially fitting or when a new name seems to be catching on (e.g. *Desertification* at Castle Rock).

Multiple Names: It's not uncommon for problems to accumulate multiple names over the years. *Groundation* is also the *Yabo Problem*. You are just as likely to hear *The Seam* as *Worm Drive*. *The Fryeball* and *Red Monster* are equally valid. There isn't a single reason for this. Sometimes names get forgotten or lost. Sometimes a consensus on a name never forms, so two names have an equal claim. Sometimes a name gets added by a guidebook author and it takes a while to catch on. In all of these cases, we have tried to include all of the known names.

Offensive Names: The climbing community is in a bit of a quandary around offensive names. Do we respect the history and keep the offensive names, or do we change the names to respect our current values? We have taken inspiration from the rangers at Mount Tamalpais State Park. They have a similar struggle – how to explain the history of Mount Tamalpais when the official plaques and literature only tell the history through a small group of white men. Their ingenious solution is to annotate the official literature in order to tell a more complete history. Resourceful as they are, you can now see their additions on sticky notes in official displays.

Fortunately, compared to many other climbing areas in the country, there are relatively few boulder problems with offensive names. After countless conversations with climbers, while working in conjunction with the BACC, we have divided offensive names into two categories.

Slurs - We have shortened or changed the names of these.

- *Fever* at Mortar Rock, shortened from *Jungle Fever* with the blessing of Scott Frye, the first ascensionist. We have also changed the names of the low start and a handful of variations.
- *Invasion* at Indian Rock in the South Bay, shortened from *Asian Invasion*. It's complicated because we've heard that the first ascensionist was Asian (although we don't know who exactly), making this a case of reappropriation. Still, many of the people who will be using the name are not Asian, so we've shortened it.
- *Heel Hooker Traverse* at Mount Tamalpais. Changed to *Heel Hook Traverse* to remove the slur.
- *High Heeled Hooker* at Mount Tamalpais. Changed to *Don't Hate My Heels* to remove the slur. This is also the name of an award-winning local zine written by sex workers to educate loved ones about stigma.

The Rest - We have left these names, but have commentary.

- *Bitch* at Goat Rock. We have added our own commentary next to the problem.
- *Fingerbang* at the Biddles. The name is crass, but in the spirit of sex positivity, we have left it as is.
- Genocide Rock in the Marin Headlands. We haven't been able to figure out where this name came from, but the first use we can find is in Marc Jensens's 1988 guide, *Bouldering, Buildering, and Climbing in the San Francisco Bay Region*. Since the problem doesn't seem to be commenting on genocide, we are calling it the Headlands Boulder, another name that is common among climbers.
- *Nature Nazi* at Indian Rock. We have added our own commentary next to the area description.
- *Peeping Tom* & *Peeping Tom Traverse* at Mickey's Beach. We have expressed our disapproval of this name on a nude beach in the problem description. It's creepy.

Acknowledgments

We're writing this page just a few days before going to press, and we don't know where to begin. After completing a book with hundreds of problem descriptions, snippets of philosophy, semi-rants, metaphors for life, and jokes that range from bad to okay, we seem to have run out of words. Through the process of writing this guide, we have been supported by a whole community of climbers, land managers, artists, and photographers. Our strongest praise would inevitably be an understatement. Know that behind each of the people we name is sincere and heartfelt appreciation.

Leo Popovic, we think your fantasy world is every bit as real as the one we live and breath in. We've always needed your watercolor kraken, we just didn't know it yet.

Much love to all the guidebook authors who came before us, including **Chris Summit**, **Tresa Black**, **Jim Thornburg**, **Clay Breitweiser**, **Marc Jensen**, and **Bruce Morris**. Where would Bay Area climbing be without you?

It's rare for someone to read a climbing guide cover to cover, but our copy editor team did just that: **Gary Goldfinger**, **Wade Clark**, **Vlad Sofiyev**, and **Zeke Lam**. **Jordan Torres** also popped in for content edits in the introductions. We would have a messed up, typo-ridden, less-good book without each of you.

Many local volunteer organizations helped tremendously, and of course, they're nothing without their volunteers. Thank you to **Peter Monks** and **Nanda Guruswamy** of the Bay Area Climbers Coalition for the many conversations about access and inclusion. **Elliott Nguyen** of ParaCliffHangers helped open our minds to new ways of thinking about accessibility at the boulders. We appreciate the way **Tyler Poston** and **Jay Louie** are holding it down with Queer Crush. Go California Climbing! **Zeke Lam**, we're counting on you to get Cal students out of the books and onto the rocks. **Tim Transon** of C.R.A.G.S. hopped in at the last minute to give feedback on the inland areas.

Meagan Martin, **Kevin Jorgeson**, and **Peter Monks**, thanks for hyping us up on the back cover of the book.

For the history, we leaned on people who were there: **Susan Patenaude**, **Nate Bartley**, **Ben Polanco**, **Mike Papciak**, and **Harrison Dekker**. You remember what it was like before gyms, Instagram, and the Olympics. **Analise Van Hoang** shared the current vibe with all these old timers.

Plato famously argued for a philosopher king to lead us toward virtue, but I'm happy with my group of philosopher climbers: **Bas van Fraassen**, **Matt McCormick**, and **Bill Ramsey**. **Natasha Barnes** also lent us her ideas in an article on training, while **Chatz of Love** laid down some truth about sex work.

Speaking of philosophers, no one else has influenced our thinking as much as **Eric Schwitzgebel** and **Justin Tiwald**. You have taught us how to talk to humans about abstract, complicated, and nuanced ideas. You're nerdy AF in the best kind of way, and you pushed the limits of our imagination.

All the best photos came from one of these amazing photographers, and they help make the guide look so soft on the eyes: **Anthony Lapomardo**, **Hilary Maloney**, **Paulina Dao**, **Shaun Welsh**, **Bruce Morris**, **Mary Mecklenburg**, **Carlo Traversi**, **Adam Long**, and **Josh LaCunha**.

Everyone in this group took a chance and shared their thoughts on the meaning of climbing. It's a brave thing to do, so a round of applause for the deep thinkers in the room: **Ethan Pringle**, **Jennifer Vuong**, **Tyler Lamb**, **Jose David**, **Jorge Portillo**, **Andy Rini**, **Chris Wessels**, **Donald Huang**, **David Tran**, **Grace O'Connell**, **Vanessa Vun**, **Vishaal Agartha**, **Reilly Savage**, **Kate Yachuk**, **Emilia Burkhart**, **Daniel Fineman**, **Savannah Bergquist**, **Vikas Argatha**, **Nathan Seidman**, **Aditya Venkataraman**, **Mia Campanelli**, **Gary Goldfinger**, **Zeke Lam**, **Noah Chavez**, and **Damien Verrett**.

Research! There was so much of it that needed to be done, and we had plenty of support: **Mateo Bekemeier**, **Milo Timberlake**, **Joel Ruscher**, **Connor Laine**, **Ryan Moon**, **Zacharias Miller**, **Vikas Argatha**, **Nilo Batle**, **Zacharias Miller**, and **Jeremy Meigs**.

The community goes on and on. Thank you to the anonymous contributors on **Mountain Project**. For many of the areas in this book, Mountain Project has been the best source of information. And to all those who have put up a first ascent (or a thousand... we're looking at you again **Chris Summit**), we appreciate being able to climb the boulders you put your sweat, emotions, and sense of self into discovering.

Ian McIntosh, you will always be our guidebook buddy and we miss you.

Finally, our lives would be shallower (and a lot less styley) without the Edgewalker crew: **Chatz of Love**, **Poppy Cuervo**, and **Reiko Que Fuego**. We also needed the endless love and support from our El Portal humans: **Sean Smith** and **Anna Carney**. You're some of our favorite people and always will be.

BIDDLES



Overview: Normally you can tell if a claim is true or false by comparing the world it describes to the world that exists. We don't mean anything fancy or technical. If someone says "You can climb at the Biddles," they're saying something true because indeed, you can climb at the Biddles. No surprises here.

Things get tricky, however, when you talk about the truth of fiction. Is it wrong to say that Santa Claus smokes two packs a day, Marlboro reds, unfiltered? We've never heard a Christmas carol that speaks against this claim exactly. Perhaps it's false because it goes against Santa's character. Fair enough.

Now what about biddles? No one knows what they are, so in a sense, anything you say about them has as much claim to truth as anything else. It's as if the fictional world of biddles has yet to be built. So go for it, tell your own biddle story.

The rock is the same vaqueros sandstone that you'll find at Castle Rock, just with less crowds and more moss. While it lacks the sheer number of quality problems as its northern neighbors, the best lines would stand out no matter where you put them.

Conditions: As with Castle Rock, it gets hot in the summer and rainy in the winter. Spring and fall are the prime seasons. Do not climb on wet rock, so give it 3-5 days to dry after it rains.

Parking: From the old parking lot at Castle Rock, drive south on Skyline Blvd. for 1.2 miles and park in a turnoff on your left. You will know it's the right one because there are steps leading down to the trail below.

Approach: The boulders are spread out into three distinct clusters, and each specific area has its own directions.

Accessibility: For all areas, there is a flight of stairs and ¼-½ mile of walking on a wide dirt trail. For Biddles Tower, add 200 feet of steep, narrow trail.

Land Manager: Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Department

Rules: Open 8:00am to sunset. Doggies allowed on a leash. No wire brushes. No climbing for 3-5 days after rain. Call (408) 868-9540 for current conditions.

Bathrooms: There is a bathroom at the Castle Rock parking lots, 1.2 miles north on Skyline Blvd.

+ A handful of excellent problems in small isolated zones.

- Clumps of moss can outnumber climbers.

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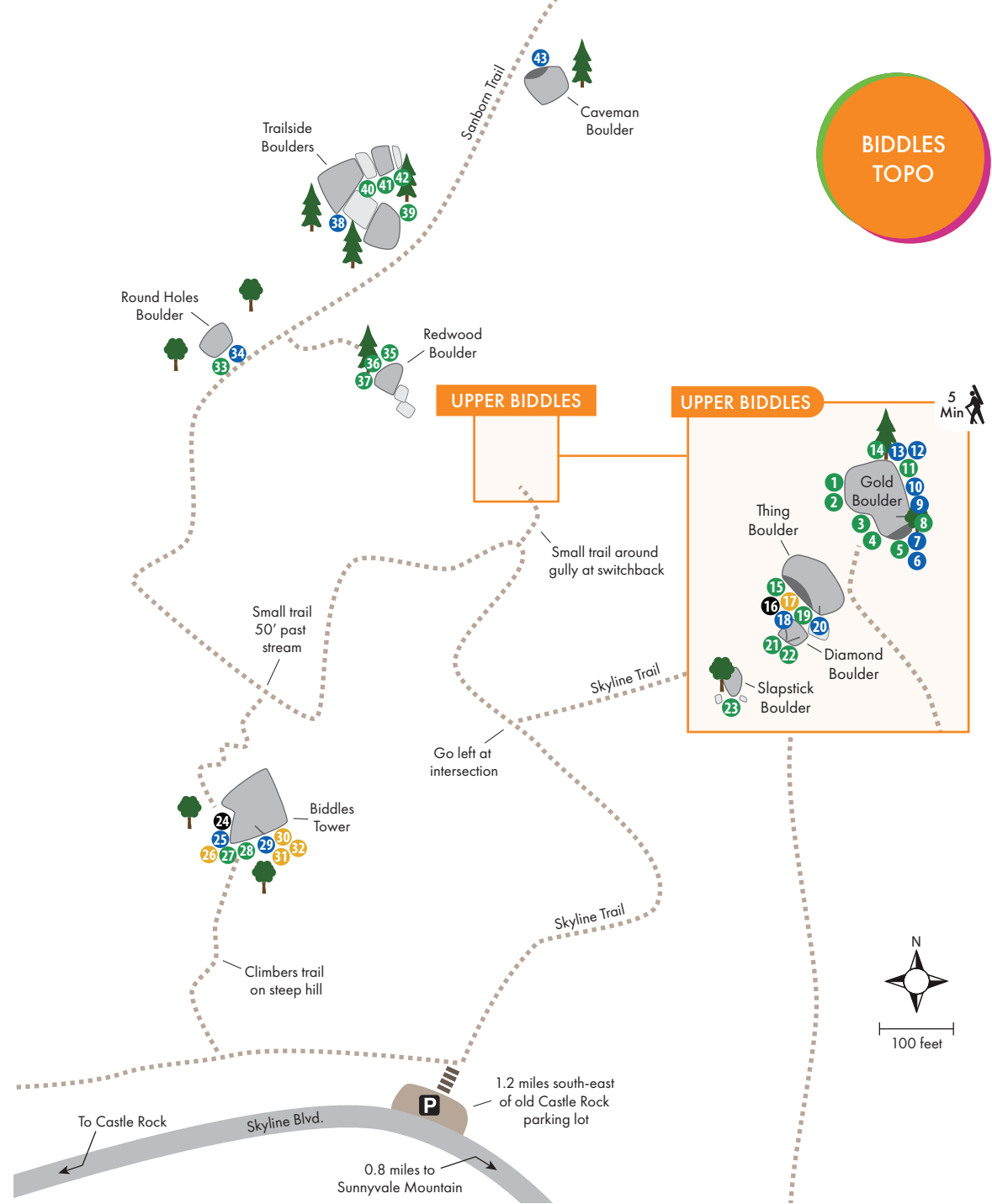
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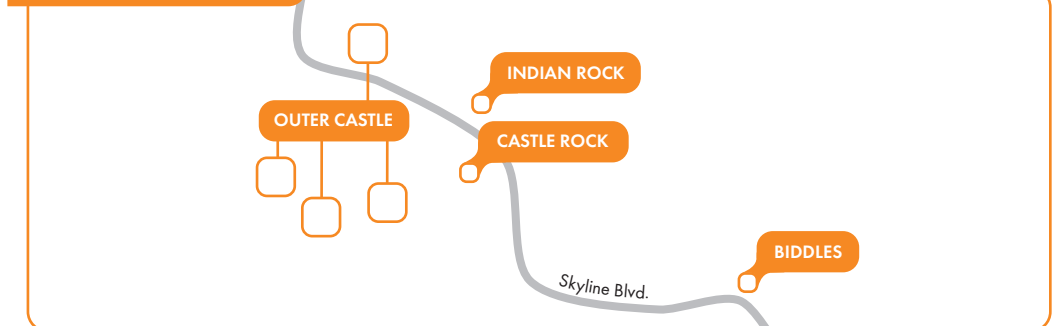
Parking



Awaswas
Amah-Mutsun



SKYLINE BLVD. OVERVIEW



UPPER BIDDLES

↑ The boulders are ¼ mile (10 minutes) downhill from the car along the well-maintained Skyline Trail. From the parking, walk down the stairs and head right on the trail. Go left at the fork. When you reach the first switchback, follow a climbers trail to the right. There is a sign marking this trail as closed for restoration, however there is no mention of the area being closed to climbing.



Gold Boulder

GOLD BOULDER



GOLD BOULDER



GOLD BOULDER

Getting off this tall boulder is tricky. The best descent is to downclimb *Tender Biddles*, but it's hard to cross the mossy top from the far side. If you're on *Backside Grind* or *Backstabber Arete*, you can shimmy down the small tree. Scout your descent ahead of time and have buddies ready to move pads.

- 1 **Good as Gold** V2
Use a coffee-cup-sized indentation to pull onto the rock. Follow features up left to a hueco.
- 2 **Big Top** V0
A positive foot at the start allows you to reach a protruding feature in the diagonal seam, then quest straight up the mossy face.

- 3 **Golden Mantel** V2
Climb into the slopy ledge just left of *Biddles Gold*. (Clay Breitweiser)
- 4 **Biddles Gold** V2 ★★★
Use edges and huecos to climb the face over a flat rocky landing. Once you gain the ledge at the top, traverse left to downclimb near *Tender Biddles*. This climb is as cool as it looks, but don't underestimate the height. (Clay Breitweiser)
- 5 **Upper Cave** V1 ★
Start by grabbing a hueco overhead. Reach into the bottom of the next large hueco cave. Explore the cave a bit then reverse the problem to get down.
- 6 **Backstabber Arete** V4 ★
Start with a right hand sidepull at 6 feet and climb the arete. (Chris Summit)
- 7 **Backstabber Arete Low** V5 ★
Begin on a right hand crimp and left hand undercling at 2 feet. Climb into *Backstabber Arete*.
- 8 **Backside Grind** V2 ★
Finesse your way up the groove in front a small tree. There are many ways to climb it, but we recommend using what might be the friendliest arm bar in California. (Chris Summit)
- 9 **Silver Traverse** V3 ★
Climb 8 feet up *Backside Grind* then traverse directly right to finish at the top of *Tender Biddles*. (Clay Breitweiser)
- 10 **Biddles Silver** 5.11a ★★★
Climb the middle of the tall face. Bring a rope or hella pads. (Clay Breitweiser on top rope)
- 11 **Hueco Highball** V1 ★★★
Climb the right side of the tall face. End on a ledge just after the second hueco.
- 12 **Tender Biddles Traverse** V5 ★★★
Start as per *Tender Biddles*, but traverse left to finish on *Backside Grind*. The problem would be much easier if the slopy holds faced the right direction, but as you'll find out, they don't. (Chris Summit)

GOLD BOULDER



- 13 **Tender Biddles** V3 ★
Start on edges at 4 feet. Climb the blunt arete past a right hand scoop near the top. (Chris Summit)
- 14 **Tree Problem** V0 ★
Start on positive edges to the right of a tree. Trend left to finish in the gap between the tree and the rock.

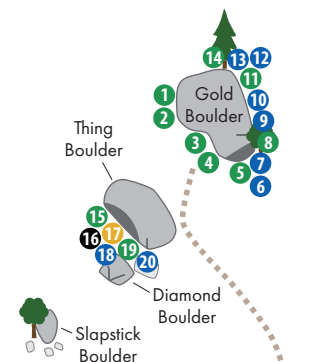
THING BOULDER

- 15 **Fingerbang** V1 ★
Start with pockets at 6 feet on the left side of the overhang. Make a long reach to the shelf above. You'll quickly find yourself dangling off the small ledge, so take care not to fall.
- 16 **Project**
Start on *Fingerbang* and traverse into *The Thing*.
- 17 **The Thing** V7 ★
Begin on a left hand sidepull/undercling at 5 feet and a lower right hand cracky-pinch. Climb to a notch and then to the top.
- 18 **Flap Your Wings** V4 ★
Start by compressing holds at 5 feet with your left hand in the crack. Fly to a ledge before moving left to finish on *The Thing*.
- 19 **Sit Down Crack** V1 ★
Climb the crack and arete formation on the right side of the face.

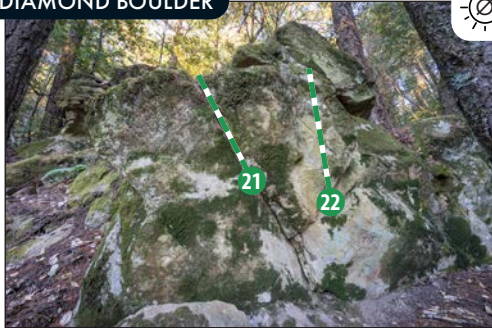
THING BOULDER



- 20 **A-Team Cave Traverse** V3 ★
Begin as per *Sit Down Crack*, but traverse left along a campus rail to finish on *The Thing*. (Daniel Miller)



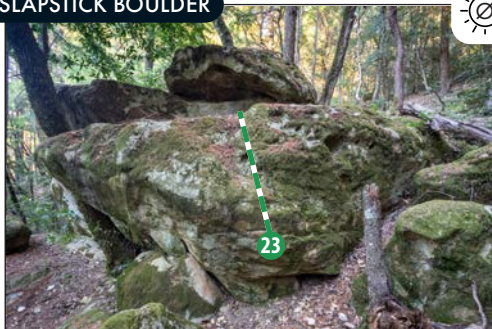
DIAMOND BOULDER



DIAMOND BOULDER

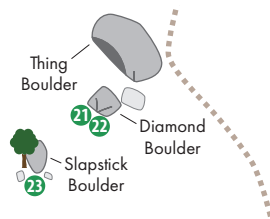
- 21 Diamond Crack V1** Climb the finger crack on the left.
- 22 Diamond Direct V1** Compress the diamond-shaped wedge.

SLAPSTICK BOULDER



SLAPSTICK BOULDER

- 23 Slapstick V2** Begin on a pocket and edge at 3 feet. Squirm up the mossy bulge without using the rock to your left as a foot.



Bridget Roell focusing on the slopers of Hueco Highball, V1 (p. 110)

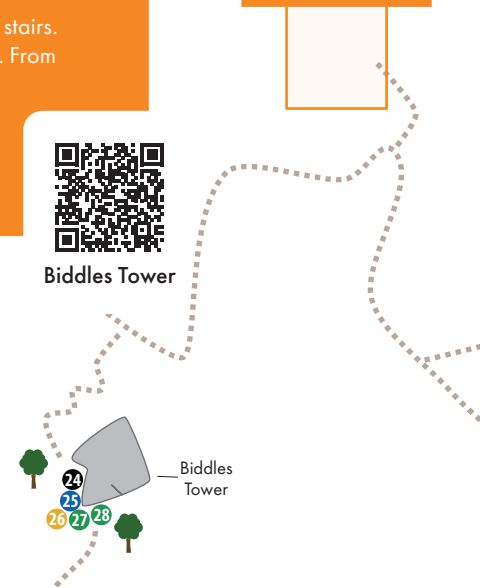
BIDDLES TOWER

From the parking, walk left for 350 feet at the bottom of the stairs. Turn right and drop down a small climbers trail for 500 feet. From Upper Biddles, head back to the main trail and continue for 600 feet. Take a climbers trail 50 feet past a stream with a sign that says "Todd Creek Redwoods." The path zig-zags up the steep hill, ending at Biddles Tower.



Biddles Tower

UPPER BIDDLES



BIDDLES TOWER

To descend, drop off the top of Biddles Platinum or downclimb The Fin. It's awkward either way, and it's nice to have a someone on the ground to move pads.

- 24 Unknown Face** Start as per *Copperhead*, but climb straight up to a rounded top.
- 25 Copperhead V5** ★★★ Begin on a positive flake at the bottom of a large hueco. Follow features up and right until you gain the arete, then finish as per *Regular Route*. (Clay Breitweiser)
- 26 Copperhead Extension V8** ★ Start as per *Copperhead*, but continue traversing along the lip to finish on *Biddle Platinum*.
- 27 Regular Route V1** ★ Step onto the nose of the arete. Meander up the path of least resistance. (Photo on next page)
- 28 The Fin V1** Reach overhead to an incut edge at 8 feet. Pull to a round hueco and finish straight up the mossy face. (Photo on next page)

BIDDLES TOWER



BIDDLES TOWER



BIDDLES TOWER

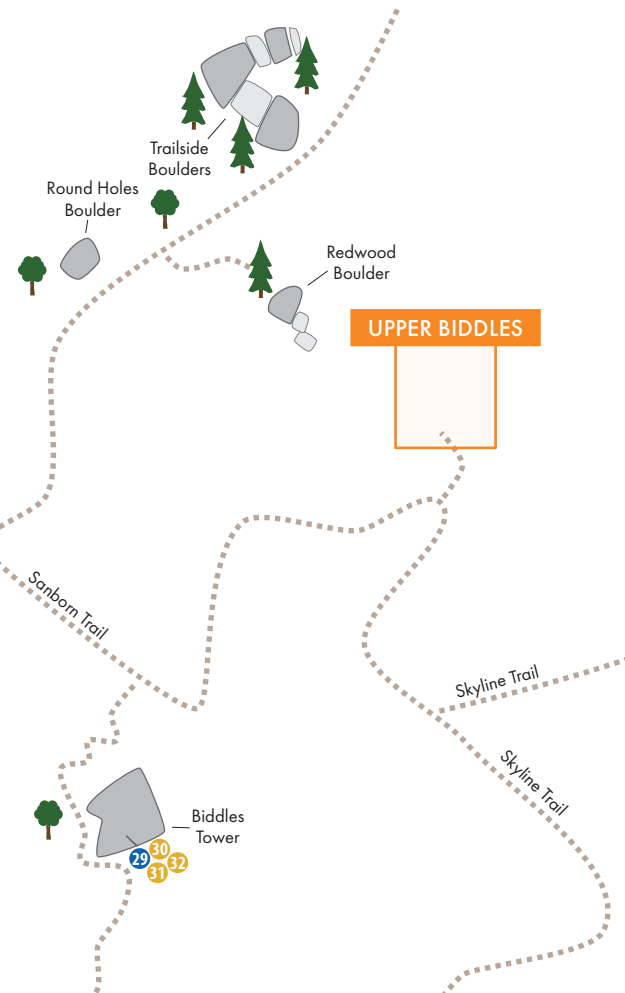
- 29 Biddles Platinum V5** ★★

Start with a handjam in the bottom of the crack and follow the feature to the lip.
(Chris Summit & Clay Breitweiser)
- 30 Biddles Steel V6** ★★★★★

Use a left hand diagonal edge at 5 feet and a lower right hand sidepull to start. Compress up the arete feature. These holds are a joy to grab. While you have some good edges on the lip, maintain your composure as you rock onto the slab.
(Clay Breitweiser)
- 31 Blue Steel V6** ★

Start as per *Biddles Platinum*, but finish on *Biddles Steel*. (Mike Donovan)
- 32 Steel Platinum V6** ★

Start as per *Biddles Steel*, but traverse left to finish on *Biddles Platinum*.



WHAT DO ROCKS FEEL?

Do you ever wonder, when climbing, what the rocks think about all this. Do they like to be climbed? Do they hate it, like being covered with ants? Are they indifferent in the way we don't care about a lone speck of dust on our skin?

We've come to this idea through panpsychism, the philosophical theory that everything is conscious. Theories come in and out of style, and right now, panpsychism is having its day. We understand why. There's something unbelievably cool about the thought that rocks have conscious experiences, maybe even something that we would call feelings.

One of the main arguments for panpsychism is that there is no obvious cut off point for consciousness. Humans have it, dogs too, but... garden snails, oysters, trees, and rocks? In terms of complexity or information integration, there is no clear line to draw between what is conscious and what is not. The panpsychist idea is to stop looking for a boundary. Let everything in. Even the rocks.

You see similar ideas in the animism and myths of many California Native traditions. For example, the creation of Half Dome and Tis-sa-ack's tears. The motivation for the origin myth is different from contemporary philosophy, but the resulting conversation has surprising overlaps. Should we give rocks moral consideration? For the panpsychist, if rocks are conscious – and can suffer – perhaps we should. Similarly, the White Earth Nation recently filed a lawsuit to protect the rights of wild rice from the construction of a tar sands pipeline in Minnesota.

We don't know if panpsychism is true or not, and we don't think there will ever be a rigorous argument that will convince someone who's skeptical. Philosophers and cognitive scientists can't even agree on whether or not you are constantly feeling your foot in your sock. (You are now... but what about before you read this)? That being said, it's an expansive, heroic idea, so we're going to believe it regardless. We prefer a world where the rocks know about us, even if they find us annoying like the ants that we are.

Shannon Joslin about to be real scared on the topout of *Biddles Steel*, V6 (opposite page)

LOWER BIDDLES

Continue walking down the main trail from the bottom of the small climbers trail that leads to Biddles Tower. With the exception of the Redwood Boulder, the climbing of Lower Biddles is right along the path. In total, it's about a ¼ mile (10 minutes) from Biddles Tower trail to the Caveman Boulder. These problems don't get much action, so don't plan on an overly curated experience.



Redwood Boulder

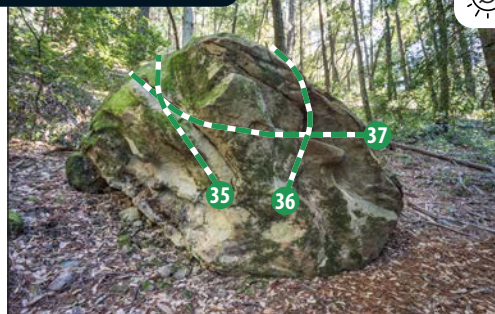
ROUND HOLES BOULDER



REDWOOD BOULDER APPROACH



REDWOOD BOULDER



ROUND HOLES BOULDER

- 33 Trailside Traverse V2 ★** Start on a sloping feature uphill from the trail. Reach left to a round hole and continue traversing left along the face. (Chris Summit)
- 34 Fish Face V3 ★★** Start as per *Trailside Traverse*, but put your foot in a round hole for a large move right. From here, swing out to the arete for some joyfully dynamic movement. (Chris Summit)

REDWOOD BOULDER

From the Sanborn Trail, the Redwood Boulder is on the hillside to your right, although you can't see it because of a redwood tree blocking the view. From the Round Holes Boulder, continue along the trail for 100 feet. Turn southeast (right) on a faint trail between a tree and a large chainsawed log. The boulder is located 150 feet up the hillside.

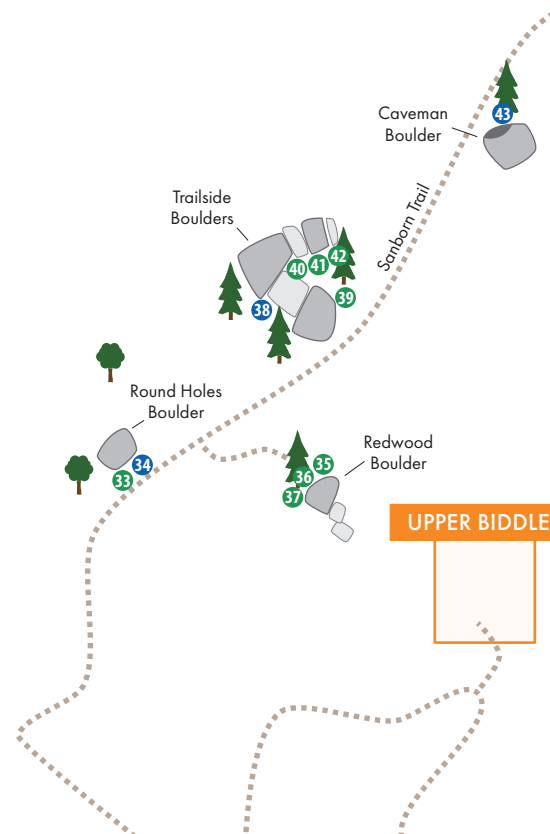
- 35 Redwood Sit Down V0** Climb the sloper rail from the very bottom to the very top. (Clay Breitweiser)
- 36 Redwood Direct V1** Start matched on an edge at 4 feet. Climb out angular features on the low face.
- 37 Redwood Boulder Traverse V2** Begin on the arete with a diagonal edge at 5 feet. Traverse left to finish left of *Redwood Sit Down*. (Clay Breitweiser)

TRAILSIDE BOULDERS

- 38 Knobby Bulge V3 ★** Start on the lowest holds on the arete. Follow blocky features up the chiseled arete. The landing has been fortified with logs, but there is still the possibility of a wild fall down the slope.
- 39 Trailside Mantel V1** Start low in a hueco and climb out the rounded arete. Finish slightly left of the large tree that has fallen over the top of the problem.
- 40 Trailside Face V0** Obscure, mossy, and dirty, this face is only for the true completionist.
- 41 Left Arete V0** Climb the left arete without using the boulder to the left.
- 42 Right Side V1** Start sitting and ascend the right arete using the rock on both sides of the crack.

CAVEMAN BOULDER

- 43 Caveman V3 ★♥♥** Start matched on a sloping rail. Climb out the left side of a large overhanging hueco, move through a positive flake and a crackled slot, then head up the arete for a heady finish.



TRAILSIDE BOULDERS



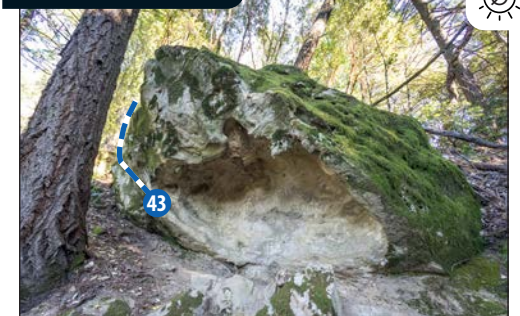
TRAILSIDE BOULDERS



TRAILSIDE BOULDERS



CAVEMAN BOULDER



UPPER BIDDLES

THE SECRETS



Overview: Let there be no mistaking it, The Secrets are unique. The otherworldly landscape feels like it's straight out of a psychedelic hallucination, complete with Dr. Seuss trees and surreal rock formations, all set to a soundtrack of barking sea lions. We've been climbing for decades, on an uncountable variety of rock spread across six continents. We don't say this to brag, but rather to add context to the following statement: The Secrets have an eccentric character that is unique unto itself.

The Secrets were once simply "a secret" among a handful of climbers, yet with some of the most photogenic climbing on the coast, it was only a matter of time before the inevitable social media takeover. The desire for secrecy was well intentioned. The coastal sandstone is fragile and requires a gentleness that you don't typically associate with an interaction between human and stone. In addition to being generally soft rock, the sandstone is criss-crossed with thin tafoni flakes and runnels. Remember, each small piece of rock you break is a small piece that's gone for everyone else.

Conditions: As long as the rock has had a few days to dry after the rain, you can climb year round. The cool ocean air keeps the ambient temperature down, but the full sun will still feel hot. A few of the boulders are tide dependent, so look ahead if you have a particular project in mind. Fortunately, there are enough other boulders to keep you occupied while you wait for the water to recede.

Parking: Park in a pullout on the left by a gate, 3.9 miles north of Gerstle Cove and about 23 miles north of the intersection of CA-1 and CA-116.

Approach: From the parking, step through the gate and follow the dirt trail for ½ mile to the coast. Take the largest trail whenever it forks, and you will end up across a small inlet from the Triceratops Boulder.

Accessibility: Although it has the longest approach on the North Coast, the hike isn't particularly strenuous. You will have to scramble across boulders to access the peninsula, and getting to the Triceratops Boulder requires a bit of stemming between two large boulders. You'll also have to downclimb a few feet on your way to Fish Lips.

Land Manager: Salt Point State Park

Rules: Open sunrise to sunset. No poodles (or any other dogs) allowed. No climbing for 3-5 days after rain. No wire brushes.

Bathrooms: The Gerstle Cove Campground to the south has the only toilet in Salt Point State Park.

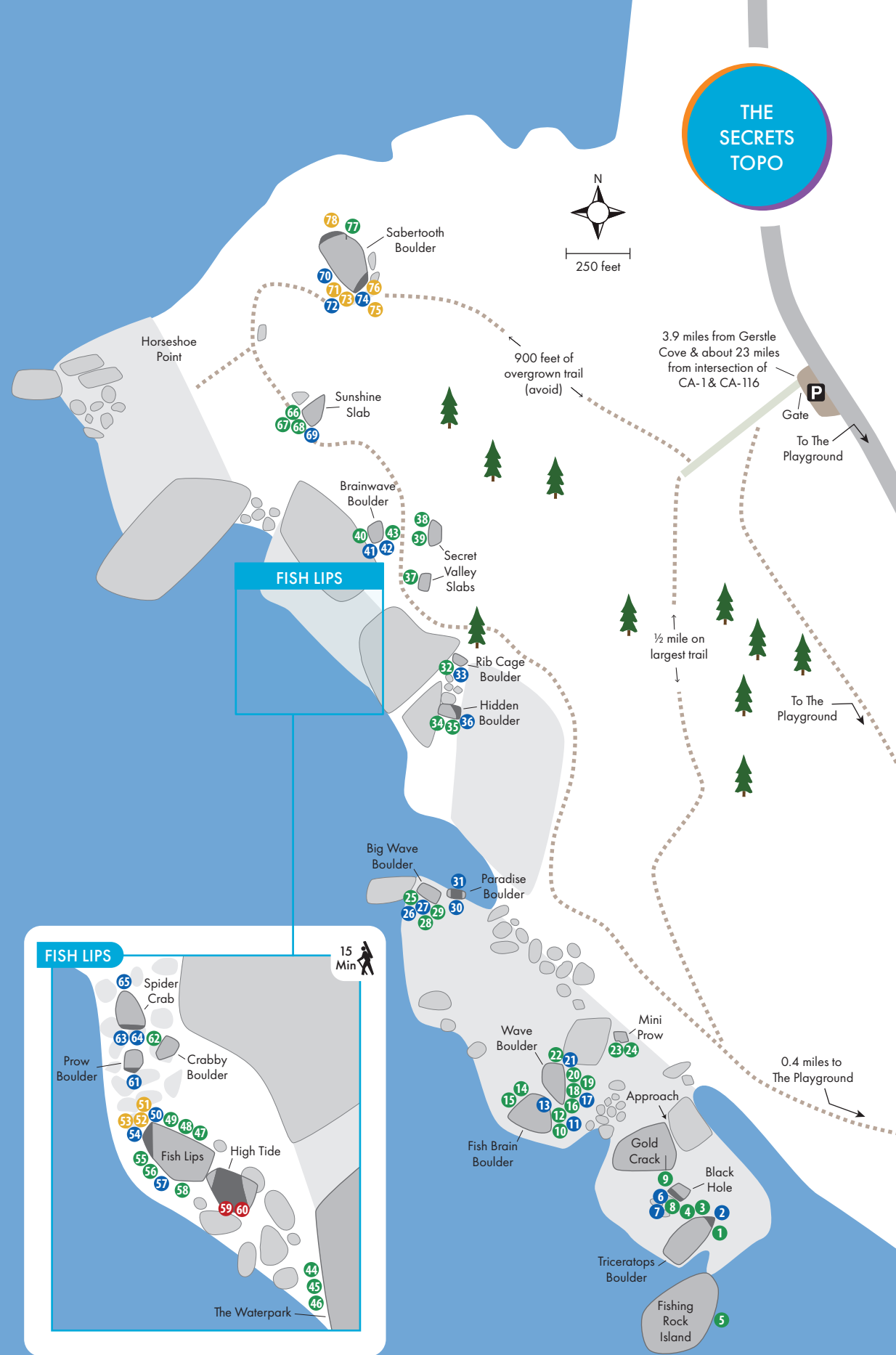
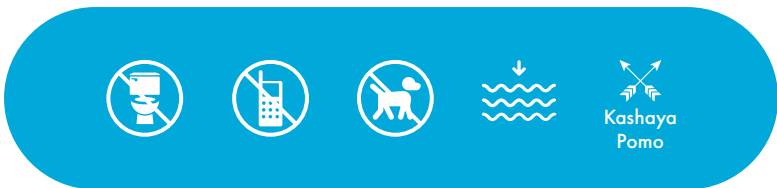
- + Picturesque boulders in an otherworldly landscape.
- The tafoni features are fragile and require maximum gentleness.

42 26
8 2

15-20 min
½ mi



Parking



PENINSULA BOULDERS

From the parking, step through the gate and walk down the trail toward the ocean. Stay on the larger trail whenever it forks, and you'll reach the ocean – and the peninsula – in ½ mile.



Triceratops

TRICERATOPS BOULDER



TRICERATOPS BOULDER



TRICERATOPS BOULDER

You can see the stunning Triceratops Boulder from the trail, but you can't walk there directly. Instead, head toward the Wave Boulder and scramble up the small gully between two large boulders to the south.

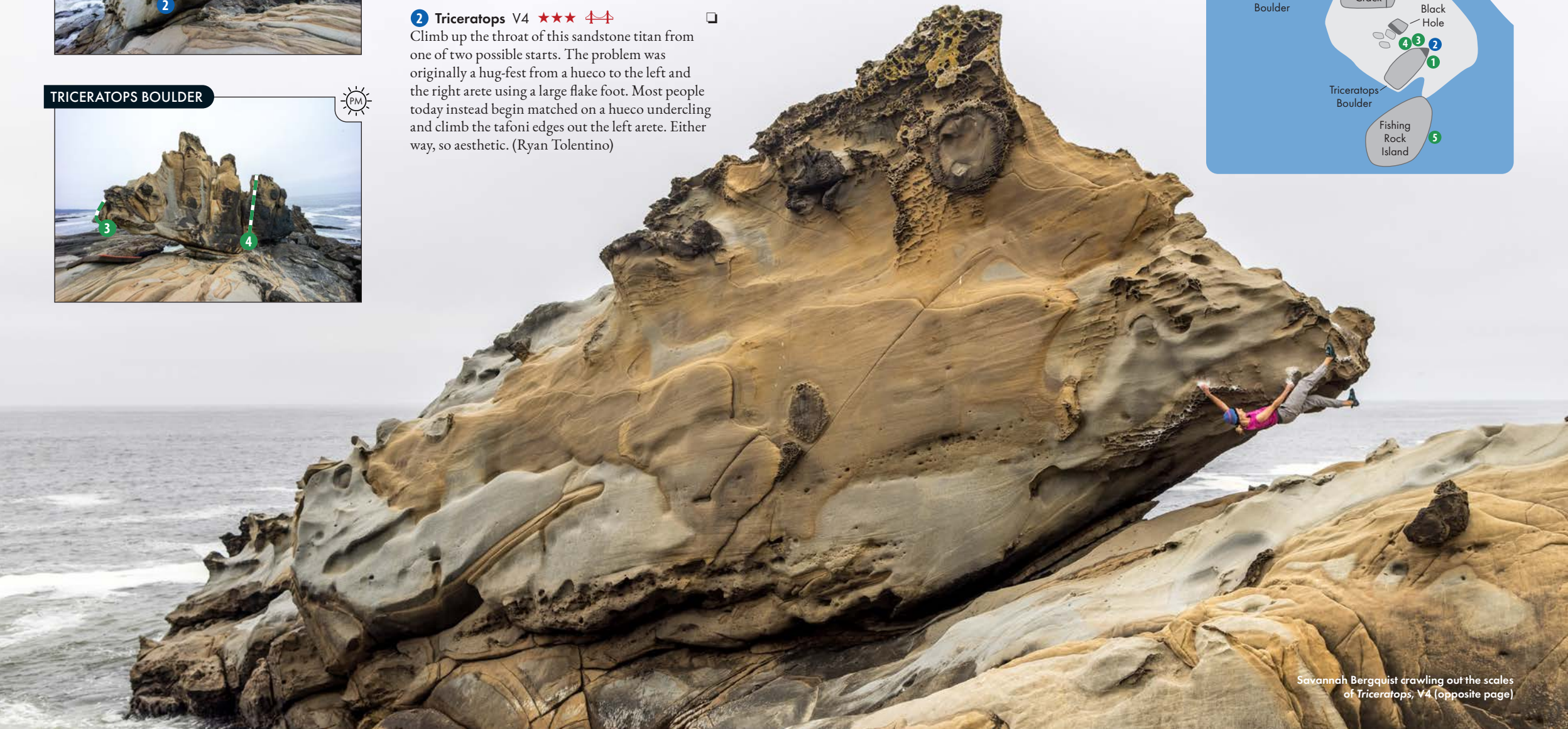
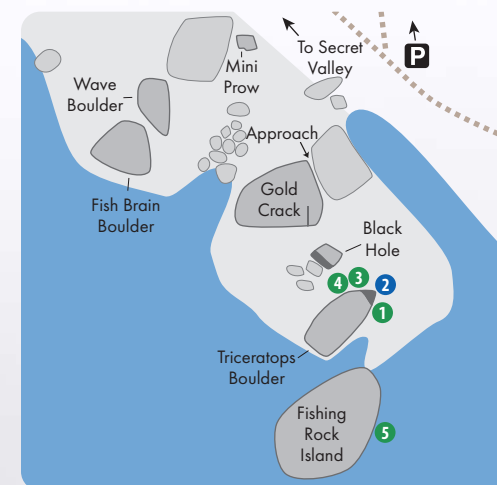
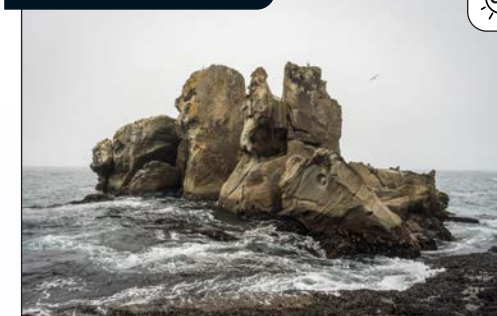
- 1 **Triceratops Left** V1
Climb tafoni edges, slopers, and sandstone fins on the face 6 feet left of the nose.
- 2 **Triceratops** V4 ★★★ 4+
Climb up the throat of this sandstone titan from one of two possible starts. The problem was originally a hug-fest from a hueco to the left and the right arete using a large flake foot. Most people today instead begin matched on a hueco undercling and climb the tafoni edges out the left arete. Either way, so aesthetic. (Ryan Tolentino)

- 3 **Triceratops Right** V1 ★
Start on a positive rail at 4 feet. Climb the right side of the overhanging prow.
- 4 **Triceratops Face** V1 ★ ♥♥
Climb the black face to the right of a crack. The holds are dainty, so step lightly.

FISHING ROCK ISLAND

- 5 **Deep Water Solo Variations** V1-4 ♥♥
During low tide you can walk to the island off the southern point of the peninsula. There are a handful of lines that climb over the water, but this is not Mallorca or Thailand. The water is cold, the waves are big, and it often seems like mother nature wants to smooch you into pieces against the spiky rocks. If you decide to climb here, make sure someone knows where you are. (Marcos Nunez)

FISHING ROCK ISLAND



Savannah Bergquist crawling out the scales of Triceratops, V4 (opposite page)

BLACK HOLE BOULDER



BLACK HOLE BOULDER

This unique boulder sits in the gully just north of the Triceratops Boulder. It's often damp, but the movement is fun enough to push through poor conditions. Bring chalk and a brush with natural bristles. All problems start on the large, low protruding fin at the bottom of the overhang.

- 6 Flipper V4 ★**
Start on the fin and climb the left side of the overhang. (Richie Esquibel)
- 7 Black Hole V3 ★**
Begin on the fin. Follow the positive holds up and right. (Chris Summit)
- 8 Dolphin Quest V2 ★**
Begin as per *Black Hole*, but traverse over the adjacent boulder for an easier exit. (Chris Summit)

GOLD CRACK BOULDER



GOLD CRACK BOULDER

- 9 Gold Crack V1 🦋**
Climb the golden crack on beautiful rock that disintegrates beneath you. (Ryan Tolentino)

FISH BRAIN & WAVE BOULDERS



FISH BRAIN BOULDER

Be careful of the sandy top of the boulder. Trust nothing. To get off, downclimb whichever problem you just climbed or tread carefully over to Stone Shroom.

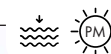
- 10 Stone Shroom VB ★**
Reach overhead to the big black blob. Mantel up! Aquatic life inhabits the fall zone, so if you think you'll fall, give life a chance and move on.
- 11 Waverider Traverse V4 ★**
Begin on *Stone Shroom* and traverse right until you meet the rock in the corridor. But why stop there? Keep going if you're feeling it.
- 12 Fish Brain V2**
Start with a hueco at 4 feet. Use a sandy snaking crimp feature to reach the brains.
- 13 Brain Wave V3 ★**
Begin on the tafoni edges at 4 feet. Trend left on sidepull crimps and make your way to the right-most brain.
- 14 Tidal Wave V0 ★ 🦋**
Climb the left side of the face.
- 15 Tidal Wave Direct V1 ★ 🦋**
Climb the center of the face. The rock is good quality, but dang, any fall would be gnarly.

WAVE BOULDER

The rock quality decreases dramatically when you get to the top of the boulder, and it's common for climbers to downclimb from the lip. Be careful on the topout, and remember, no heroes today.

- 16 Left Arete V0**
Climb the left arete.
- 17 Wave Traverse V3 ★**
Traverse the face from the left arete to the right arete. You get to do the fun climbing down low while avoiding the crumbling topout. It's a win-win.
- 18 Unnamed Face V1**
Climb the face 6 feet right of the arete. Move from a horizontal groove at 4 feet to a cluster of pockets around 7 feet.
- 19 Unnamed Face V2**
Climb the face above the right side of a horizontal groove.
- 20 The Swell V2 ★**
Start with a hueco at 5 feet. Pull past a pointed flake as you gear up for the final moves to the lip.
- 21 The Wave V3 ★ 🦋**
Begin on features at 5 feet, and climb the face to the left of the arete. The sculpted, swooping features are truly beautiful.

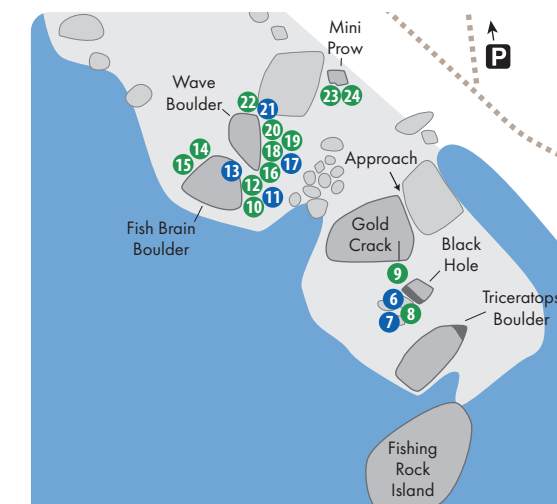
FISH BRAIN BOULDER



MINI PROW BOULDER



- 22 The Wave Arete V1 ★ 🦋**
Ascend the tafoni arete on the right side of the boulder. Be careful of the delicate features for their own sake, but also because this thing is tall.
- 23 Mini Prow Left V2 ★**
Pull on beneath the prow with a horizontal ledge. Cram your hips into the dihedral as you climb straight out the prow.
- 24 Mini Prow Right V0 ★**
Move from the hueco to the lip.



BIG WAVE BOULDER



BIG WAVE BOULDER

At the northernmost point of the peninsula.

- 25 Left Arete** VB ★
Begin on a positive flake and climb the left arete. (Chris Summit)
- 26 Kung Fu Spot** V4 ★
Start with a right hand undercling and left hand tafoni in the notch. Climb straight up on minuscule edges. (Chris Summit)
- 27 Big Wave Traverse** V5
Begin as per *Kung Fu Spot*, but climb right past the starting hueco of *Big Wave Dave* and along the thin seam to end on *Big Wave Arete*. For a V6 variation, begin on the low start for *Big Wave Arete* and traverse left to finish on *Kung Fu Spot*. (Chris Summit)
- 28 Big Wave Dave** V2 ★★★
There is a hueco at 6 feet. Put both hands on it. Feels good, right? Now angle right for another cluster of huecos up and right. For a harder intro, climb into the starting hueco from the beginning of *Kung Fu Spot*. (Richie Esquibel)
- 29 Big Wave Arete** V1
Climb the arete on the right side of the boulder. Add a grade if you start on the low sidepull feature at 4 feet.

PARADISE BOULDER



PARADISE BOULDER

- 30 Death in Paradise** V3 🦋
Start on a positive flake in the middle of the roof and climb out the middle of the suspended boulder. It's always wet and the fall is deadly. 9 out of 10 climbers advise you to try something else.
- 31 Paradise in Death** V3 🦋
Start on *Death in Paradise* and climb out the water side of the roof. A fall will turn you into sea lion food, and whatever is left will float out to sea. Don't do this rock climb, and we apply this retroactively to the first ascensionist. If we had been here, we would have stopped Chris. (Chris Summit)



SECRET VALLEY

Walk north along the trail from the peninsula. The Secret Valley Slabs are unmissable, while the Ribcage and Hidden Boulders lay below the trail in a wash to the south.



Secret Valley Slabs

RIB CAGE BOULDER



RIB CAGE BOULDER

From the Triceratops Boulder, head north on the trail, going uphill and through a small cluster of trees at the top of a gully. These problems are on the rock below the cluster of trees that look out over the Big Wave Boulder.

- 32 Rib Cage** V2 ★
Start at the bottom of the bone-like hueco and follow it to the nose of the boulder. (Chris Summit)
- 33 Cage Fight** V4 ★
Climb the rounded arete 6 feet right of *Rib Cage*. Start on a right hand undercling in a hueco and left hand crimp. Move up and over the lip then past a rounded hueco to the top.

HIDDEN BOULDER



HIDDEN BOULDER

This boulder is nestled in the gully below the Rib Cage Boulder near the water line.

- 34 Unnamed Arete** V1
Sit start the left arete. Pull around the lip as soon as you're able. (Chris Summit)
- 35 Unnamed Face** V2 ★
Start on a hueco at 7 feet and move through edges in the seams up above.

SECRET VALLEY SLABS



SECRET VALLEY SLABS

- 37 Secret Valley Slab #1** V1 ★ 🦋
Climb a line of pockets in a horizontal seam up the middle of the slab. The top gets a bit grainy and rounded, but the rock is overall excellent. There are a few variations to this core line, so be like Ash and catch 'em all.

SECRET VALLEY SLABS



SECRET VALLEY SLABS

- 38 Secret Valley Slab #2 V0 ★**
Reach up to the bulbous ledge and climb left.
- 39 Secret Valley Slab #3 V0 ★**
Walk along a diagonal foot rail as you traverse right under a small roof.

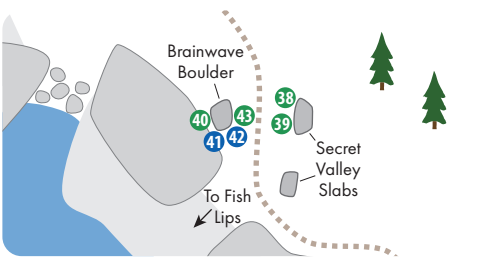
BRAINWAVE BOULDER

- 40 Unnamed Arete V0 ★**
Compress up the detached block on the arete.
- 41 Unnamed Bulge V3 ★**
Stand start on two pockets. Mantel onto the nose. Harder than it looks. Trust us.
- 42 Brainwave V4 ★**
Start on two pockets in the middle of the bulge. Traverse right to the rounded arete.
- 43 Unnamed Traverse V2 ★**
Traverse left across the low, overhanging lip. There's no obvious starting holds, so begin with enough room for a right heel hook.

BRAINWAVE BOULDER



BRAINWAVE BOULDER



FISH LIPS

↑ To get to these tide-dependent boulders, scramble down the gully below *Brainwave* at Secret Valley Boulders. A rogue wave drenched Kimbrough's laptop while writing this guide. Everything was fine (this was a freebie), but let it be a warning to all.



Fish Lips

THE WATERPARK

Waves will wash away your worries... unless you're worried about the fall on these highballs.

- 44 **Waterworld Traverse** V0 ★
Traverse across the pocketed wall.
- 45 **The Waterpark** VB ★ ♥♥
Climb the tall face around a diagonal crack.

- 46 **Waterworld** VB ★ ♥♥
Climb the pocketed face below a large round hueco.

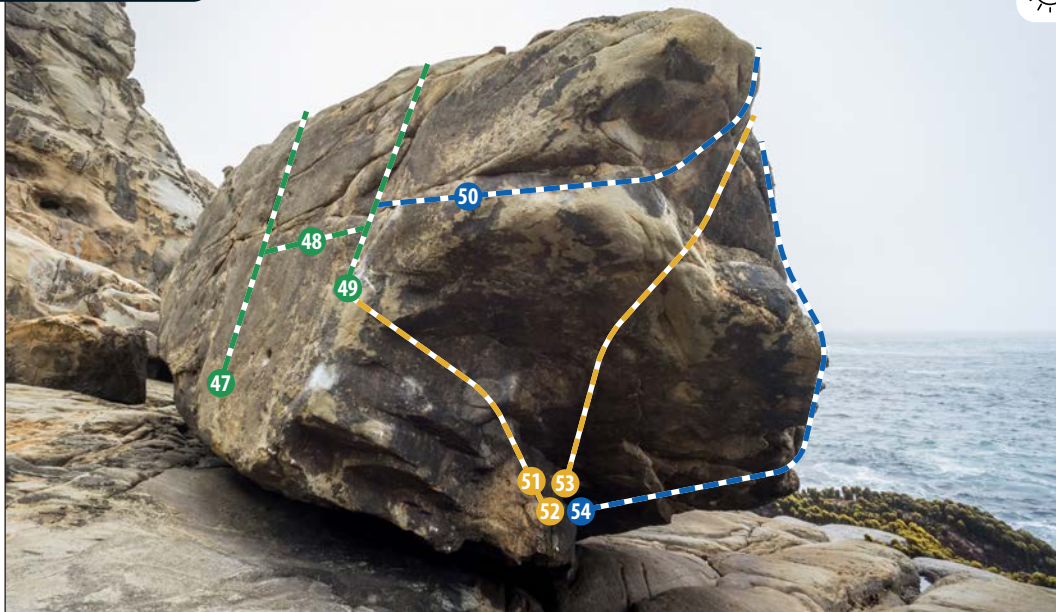
FISH LIPS BOULDER

- 47 **Center Slab** V0 ★
Climb the low-angled face. (Chris Summit)
- 48 **Slab Traverse** V0 ★
Start as per *Center Slab*, but traverse left to finish on *Right Slab*.
- 49 **Right Slab** V0 ★
Climb the face left of the roof. (Chris Summit)
- 50 **Fish Stick** V4
Start on *Right Slab* and traverse right on slopers above the roof to finish at the apex of the boulder.
- 51 **Slap Fight** V7 ★★
Start on the shelf at the bottom of the roof. Climb left to the arete, turn the corner, and finish on *Right Slab*. (Chris Summit)

THE WATERPARK



FISH LIPS BOULDER



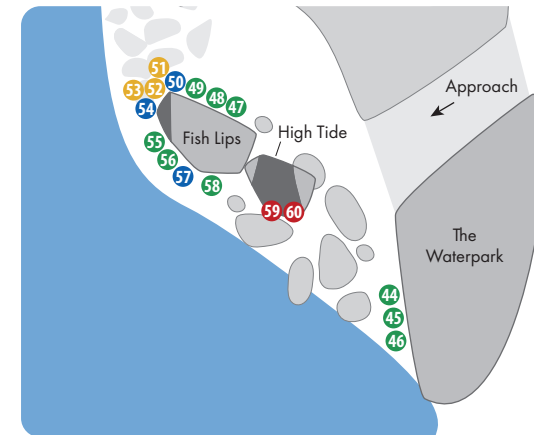
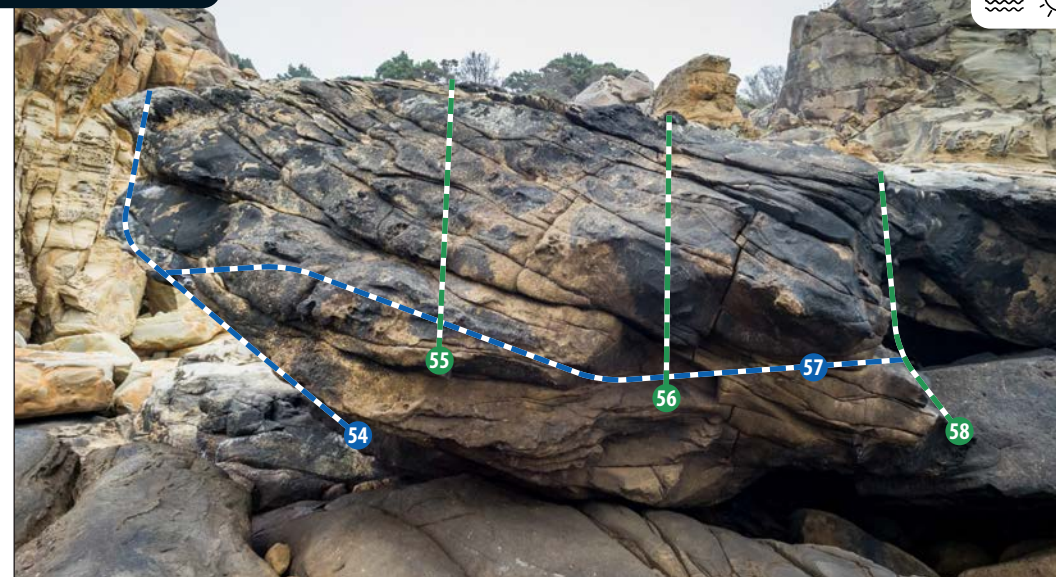
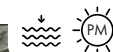
- 52 **Slap Stick** V8 ★
Climb *Slap Fight* into *Fish Stick*. (Chris Summit)
- 53 **Thumb Thing** V6 ★
Begin as per *Slap Fight*, but climb straight out of the roof using a thumb-pocket gaston. Yes, you read that correctly. (Chris Summit)
- 54 **Fish Thing** V4 ★★
Begin as per *Slap Fight*, but climb right to gain the arete. Follow the arete left to top out near the apex of the boulder. (Chris Summit)
- 55 **Fish Butt** V0 ★
Climb incut holds out the nose of the boulder. (Chris Summit)
- 56 **Fish Belly** V2 ★
Start on a ledgy-notch. Climb the middle of the wall to a huge knob on the lip above. (Chris Summit)
- 57 **Fish Belly Traverse** V4 ★
Traverse left from *Fish Mouth* to the ending arete of *Fish Thing*. (Chris Summit)
- 58 **Fish Mouth** V1 ★
Climb the short overhang over a gap in the rocks.

HIGH TIDE BOULDER

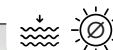
Two of the hardest problems in the Bay Area sit on the underside of a suspended boulder. You should come here on low tide, and ideally with a 2 foot swell.

- 59 **High Tide, Low Tide** V12 ★★★ 4+
Start matched on a ledge under the roof. Make a right hand move to a crimp and battle your way to two small, sloping edges before standing on top of the boulder. (Giovanni Traversi)

FISH LIPS BOULDER



HIGH TIDE BOULDER



- 60 **Waxing Crescents** V11 ★★
Begin on *High Tide, Low Tide*, but continue underneath the roof to end on the other side of the boulder. At over a dozen moves, prepare to get pumped. (Giovanni Traversi)

PROW BOULDER



PROW BOULDER

61 Unnamed Prow V3
 Start on a tafoni feature at 6 feet and climb the heart-shaped nose. Brittle rock and a pit makes the whole experience a bit sketchy. (Richie Esquibel)

CRABBY BOULDER

62 Crabby Variations VB ★
 Pick your favorite variations up the featured face.

SPIDER CRAB BOULDER

63 Charlie Tuna V5 ★
 Compress between the first elliptical hueco at 5 feet and a left hand sidepull in the right side of the scoop. Squeeze up the middle of the prow for movement that is more fun than it looks.

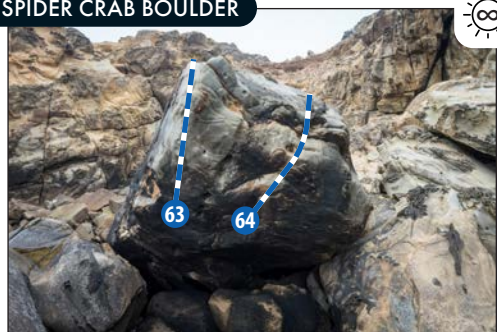
64 Nautilus V3 ★
 Climb straight up the face from a left-facing flake at 6 feet. (Chris Summit)

65 Spider Crab V5
 Climb the overhanging arete on the backside of the boulder. It's often wet, and the spider crabs love every minute of it. (Chris Summit)

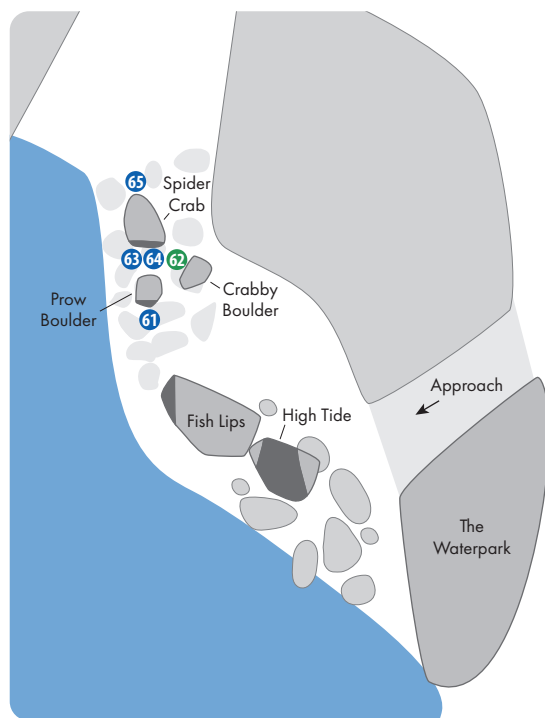
CRABBY BOULDER



SPIDER CRAB BOULDER



SPIDER CRAB BOULDER



HORSESHOE POINT

➔ From Secret Valley Boulders continue north along the trail. The Sunshine Slabs will be to the right in 100 feet, and the Sabertooth Boulder is up the hill 200 feet farther. There are additional boulders beneath Horseshoe Point at the water's edge. Go. The time has come for you to explore an area on your own.



Sabertooth Boulder

SUNSHINE SLAB

This beautiful slab sits along the trail and faces the ocean next to Horseshoe Point.

66 Sunshine Traverse V1 ★
 Stay low and traverse either direction across the slab. (Chris Summit)

67 Secrets Slab V1 ★★
 Climb the left side of the slab below a diagonal seam. (Chris Summit)

68 Sunshine V2 ★★★
 Climb the middle of the slab. You get to use pockets until... there isn't anything else to grab. Eventually you'll find the top.

69 Sandpaper V4 ★
 Angle up a diagonal seam to climb the right side of the slab.

SUNSHINE SLAB



! DAD JOKE ALERT !
 "The bird says I shouldn't be sea-n lion around."
 "You listen to that guy? Don't be so gull-ible"

SABERTOOTH BOULDER



SABERTOOTH BOULDER



- 74 **Sabertooth** V4 ★★

Start on a sidepull feature midway up the left side of the arete. Climb the overhanging arete. (Chris Summit)
- 75 **Sabertooth Low** V8 ★★

Climb the full arete, beginning on the right face with a right pocket and left sidepull. The holds are obvious, but everyone seems to have their own personal sequence. The original *Sabertooth Low* start is a grade easier, and begins a few moves in with a left hand on the arete and a right hand on the face. (Lower pocket start: Kevin Jorgeson, Midway arete start: Chris Summit)
- 76 **Pit Pocket** V8 ★★

Start with two pockets on the face. Climb the overhanging wall. (Kevin Jorgeson)
- 77 **Orange Crack** V0

The wide crack on the backside of the boulder has been climbed, but avoid this problem to preserve the magical orange lichen. (Chris Summit)
- 78 **Orange Cave** V7

The overhang has been climbed to a drop-off, but again, go climb a face without incredible lichen.

SABERTOOTH BOULDER

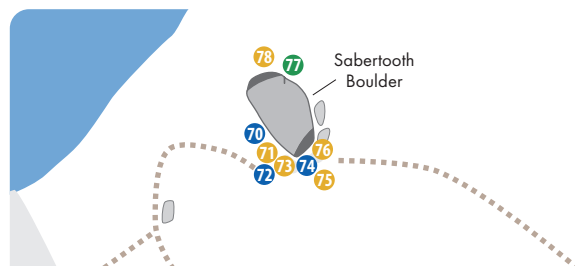
- 70 **Cherry Bomb** V3 ★

Begin on a diagonal edge at 4 feet. Climb the exposed face. The top is pretty dirty but the view is stunning. (Chris Summit)
- 71 **Romancing the Stone** V6 ★

Climb *Cherry Bomb* into *Bottle Rocket*. (Chris Summit)
- 72 **Bottle Rocket** V4 ★

Start on edges at 4 feet. Climb the rounded arete. (Chris Summit)
- 73 **Pachoong** V7 ★

Begin as per *Bottle Rocket*, but traverse left into *Cherry Bomb*. (Chris Summit)



THE ABSURDITY OF BOULDERING

By Matt McCormick

Tibetan monks will spend weeks creating a Mandala, a meticulously crafted wheel of elaborate colored sand patterns. They use small metal funnels to carefully place tiny piles of sand in a widening circle of colored patterns and symbols on a platform, on their knees, working out from the center. The result is a stunningly complex and fragile set of circular, geometric patterns of sand. When they are done, they open the monastery drapes and the wind destroys the work of art. The point? The monks invest their time and work into the beautiful work of art with the full knowledge that it will disappear, and this serves to emphasize the impermanence of our lives, our projects, and everything we love. The act puts the ultimate pointlessness of our attachments into the appropriate Buddhist perspective.

Bouldering, like everything else we do, is similarly pointless. We struggle and battle up the hard side of a boulder when a ladder would give us easy access to the top. Sometimes the finish holds can be reached by simply standing up. We impose arbitrary rules on ourselves—the ascent doesn't count if you dab! You can't use certain holds. Or you can't touch certain holds until you've pulled off of the ground. Or a hold will break and the route will become easy. One person's epic battle is another person's casual walk-up. Your titanic accomplishment will be meaningless to everyone in a year, or a week, or in ten minutes. In the end, there's really no point to getting on top. It's a seemingly fruitless pursuit.

In one of the most famous pieces of modern philosophy, French Existentialist Albert Camus turned the ancient Greek myth of Sisyphus on its head. Originally, Sisyphus was condemned to suffer for his misdeeds, rolling a huge boulder up a hill only to have it roll back down. He would then have to take his task back up, pushing it up again

and again for eternity. Camus reversed the story; what makes his task seem like torment to us is the mistaken belief that the task is pointless against a broader framework of justice, meaningfulness, and worthwhile pursuits. It's a mistake, Camus argued, to think that there is some deeper, objective, universal meaning that derives from God or reality. All human striving and projects are absurd. The universe is indifferent to our struggles. Sisyphus' task is no more or less worthwhile than any other project we put ourselves to. Camus reimagines Sisyphus as a hero who understands his plight, sees the inherent absurdity of his situation and embraces it. He renounces despair and chooses to exert himself into the world and forge meaningfulness from his choices and his will. In the moment when Sisyphus turns and trudges back down to the bottom of the hill to start over with full knowledge and by choice, Camus imagines that he is "superior to his fate. He is stronger than his rock."

The point resonates in climbing. There's no ultimate meaning to climbing, the accomplishment won't last, someone else will come along and do it better, faster, or in better style. Ultimately the holds will erode into sand. For a moment, however, we choose to exert ourselves in the world, we face our position in the universe directly, we make a game of it, and we throw ourselves into it with enthusiasm. More importantly, we do it in a way that taxes us physically and mentally to our limits. When we prevail, we find another route or boulder and do it again.

Daniel Woods spent 58 days of effort on *Return of the Sleepwalker* at Red Rock Canyon, Nevada, one of two V17s in the world at the time. He lived, ate, and breathed that boulder problem. He redesigned his life to climb it. Watching the video where he persistently works every move is remarkable. He makes tiny improvements linking just a few moves, then he's set back. His skin gets torn and

he has to pause. He changes his beta over and over again. Nothing seems to work. He faces profound, screaming-at-the-hills frustration. He changes his diet. He strips down his life and lives in a tent in the dirt. He comes back day after day. He fails countless times. Obsession with his goal drives him on despite the setbacks.

The profound power and meaning of bouldering is in the challenge of the moves. Bouldering is unique among climbing's disciplines for its singling out sheer difficulty as its self-acknowledged goal. The point is to pit yourself against moves that are at – or beyond – your absolute limit. The point is to find a problem that is on the edge of your abilities and then to work until you can overcome it. It's one thing to wander around the boulders, pick out the obvious, easy lines and fire them in a try to two. But boulderers know that something different happens when you deeply commit to a project and put in 20 or 30 or 50 attempts on a problem over weeks, or months, or even years. When the problem is that hard, given your current skills and fitness, you're forced to undergo a new level of deep and honest self-evaluation. Self-doubt and defeat constantly plague you. You're confronted with every specific weakness and fault you have. Your will falters. There's no bluffing or cheating or concealing failure. You're forced to be creative, innovative, and devise moves with your body that you had no idea were possible. And through the process, the absurd and the impossible becomes routine; you start doing a move, then linking moves, then getting the crux, and then you start linking through the crux, and so on. Impossible moves start looking and feeling different, and the whole sequence starts to seem possible. Finally, everything comes together for the send.

When he climbed *Return of the Sleepwalker*, it was a victory for Woods, and for climbing in general. The boulder problem set new standards of difficulty and represented a next level in bouldering. He's shown us what is possible. But there's also something dissatisfying, tragic, or even disappointing about his pulling onto easy holds at the top. It's over. The struggle, the uncertainty, the cusp of failure, and the profound altered state of work, fitness, obsession, commitment, and dedication are all over. The task that had defined him and given him purpose for two years of his life was over. There is satisfaction, but the victory is temporary.

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Climbers know the answer to this dilemma: what's the first thing that comes into our minds after that moment of triumph and satisfaction with success? The next project. What is the next crux that I can put myself against? The process is the point, so we try to get back into that head and body space. Once the next one is done, we find another one that's harder, that will take longer, or that has more moves, and on and on.

The Tibetan monks, even in acknowledging the Buddha's point about the impermanence of the material world, don't despair. They're not deterred from the time and investment of energy it takes to create the beautiful work of art. In fact, in the light of its impermanence, the Mandala is all the more beautiful and meaningful. (Chris Sharma set world standards in the day with a now famous boulder problem named Mandala, V12, in Bishop, CA in 2000.) They embrace the work, they lean in, they give it their full effort with full knowledge that when they are done, it will disappear. It's more meaningful in the light of its meaninglessness.

Camus and the existentialists were confronted with the staggering scale of the horrors of WWII and had come to rethink the hallowed, special moral status of humans in the universe. If humans were capable of committing the Holocaust, it seemed clear to them that there could be no God, no ultimate source of moral and personal meaning in the universe. Nothing, it would seem, was out there to stop us from doing our worst to each other. Where then could meaning and goodness emerge in the world? And how could we face the awful responsibility of the radical freedom we found ourselves in possession of? Their struggle over the general question of the meaningfulness of our actions gives us an answer to the meaning of bouldering.

The answer that Camus offered was in our acknowledging and embracing our situation. Camus says that Sisyphus' "fate belongs to him," in turning back to the rock, recognizing the absurdity of his condition, yet in command of the only thing he has, his choice, his will, his actions. Camus says, "One always finds one's burden again," and, "he concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy." It almost seems as if Camus had bouldering in mind with Sisyphus: "As for this myth, one sees merely

the whole effort of a body straining to raise the huge stone, to roll it, and push it up a slope a hundred times over; one sees the face screwed up, the cheek tight against the stone, the shoulder bracing the clay-covered mass, the foot wedging it, the fresh start with arms outstretched, the wholly human security of two earthclotted hands."

In "Existentialism is a Humanism," Jean Paul Sartre argued, like Camus, that we're defined by our radical freedom and what we create with our choices in the world: "Not that he is simply what he conceives himself to be, but he is what he wills, and as he conceives himself after already existing – as he wills to be after that leap towards existence. Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself." When we choose and act, we bring ourselves into being in the world: "of all the actions a man may take in order to create himself as he wills to be, there is not one which is not creative, at the same time, of an image of man such as he believes he ought to be. To choose between this or that is at the same time to affirm the value of that which is chosen." Sartre

thought that we achieved a unique transcendence of our plight in the world by seeing it for what it is, and then choosing to act despite that knowledge. He seems to echo a bouldering project: "it is in projecting and losing himself beyond himself that he makes man to exist; and, on the other hand, it is by pursuing transcendent aims that he himself is able to exist. Since man is thus self-surpassing, and can grasp objects only in relation to his self-surpassing, he is himself the heart and center of his transcendence."

The meaning of bouldering is in its difficulty. It gives us a process for transcending our personal, physical, and emotional limits, and achieving self-knowledge.

Matt McCormick is a professor of philosophy at California State University, Sacramento. You'll find him there lecturing on artificial intelligence, consciousness, or atheism. Alternately, he's building robots, or working his climbing project for the thousandth time.

THE BOULDERS CONTINUE...

For those of us who are thirsty for meaning, there is always another boulder. Here we see Vikas Agartha on *Kung Fu Kitten*, one of the many problems in Sonoma County with, alas, tenuous access issues. We've tried to explain to landowners that we need to climb in order to affirm the value of our choices – and in doing so – to achieve a unique transcendence of our plight in this world. However, they are rarely moved by such concerns.

