

RED ROCKS

A Climber's Guide

Second Edition

by Jerry Handren

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About this Guidebook

This is a comprehensive guide to the rock climbs found in Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area, twenty miles to the west of the famous Las Vegas Strip in Southern Nevada. Red Rocks offers the climber everything from sport routes to big aid walls and long free routes. The reliable weather, beautiful surroundings and great climbing make Red Rocks one of North America's best and most popular destinations during the fall, winter, and spring.

This book provides detailed information on over 2300 rock climbs, using full written descriptions, maps, topos and photodiagrams. This new edition includes over 400 previously unpublished routes. Notable recent developments include the addition of a large number of entry-level and moderate sport routes in the Calico Hills; it is probably true to say that Red Rocks now has one of the biggest collections of such climbs in the country. At the other end of the difficulty spectrum, the free ascents of old, big-wall aid climbs in the canyons has resulted in the addition of a batch of fantastic long, free routes.

One of the most notable developments in recent years has been the emergence of Red Rocks as a world class bouldering area. All the bouldering is documented in Tom Moulins' superb

guidebook, "Southern Nevada Bouldering". If the routes in the photographs throughout this book seem unfamiliar, that's because I have made a deliberate attempt to shoot new and/or obscure routes. In order to save some space, the updated history of climbing in Red Rocks, as well as the historical essays that appeared in the previous edition have now been moved to the website (www.redrocksguidebook.com.)

In the next few years the BLM is going to be making a series of improvements to the basic infrastructure of Red Rocks. This is going to include expansion of the existing parking areas and possibly the addition of several new ones. Also, it seems likely that there is going to be some sort of return option from the Sandstone Quarry parking area, either making the existing road to that point two way or building an entirely new road back to the Visitor Center. It is worth keeping track of these developments as they will have an effect on some of the information in this book.

Jerry Handren, February 2016.

The Land, Rules and Regulations

The climbing in Red Rocks lies within the boundaries of the Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area. The land received this designation in 1990 to protect and preserve what was then recognized as a resource of national importance. The land is managed by the Bureau of Land Management, from the Las Vegas District Office, (702 515 5000).

There are two wilderness areas within Red Rock National Conservation Area, Rainbow Mountain Wilderness area, which includes all the canyons, and La Madre Mountain Wilderness which includes the Kraft Mountain area of Calico Basin.

Most of the northern half of Red Rocks is accessed from the Red Rock Scenic Drive. This is a gated 13-mile-long loop road which requires an entrance fee, and has restricted access hours.

Vehicles left inside the Scenic Drive after hours are subject to a heavy fine (\$120 in 2016). Please note that this includes the parking area beside the fee station at the Scenic Drive entrance.

Late exit permits are available to provide an additional three hours after the normal closing time. These permits are available only for multi-pitch routes, not for the Calico Hills or Willow Springs.

To obtain a permit, you can call up to seven days in advance. No permits are issued after 4.30 p.m. There is no paper permit to pick up, just call 702 515 5050. If you do not reach one of the climbing rangers, you will need to leave the following information. If using a cell phone make sure your signal is clear.

1. Your name, address, and phone number.
2. Your vehicle license number/state and description.
3. The date of your climb and location where you will park.
4. Which permit and route you are applying for.
5. An emergency contact name and phone number.

If you have additional questions or comments feel free to call a climbing ranger (Monday to Friday 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) at 702 515 5000.

For multi-day routes it is also possible to get an overnight permit. These are issued for the following walls only:

- Mt. Wilson (1-2 nights)
- Eagle Wall (1 night)
- Rainbow Wall (1-2 nights)
- Buffalo Wall (1-3 nights)
- Hidden Wall (1-3 nights)
- Bridge Mountain (1 night)

Scenic Loop Hours	
November 1 to February 28/29	6:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.
March 1 to March 31	6:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M.
April 1 to September 30	6:00 A.M. to 8:00 P.M.
October 1 to October 31	6:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M.

Entrance Fee Schedule		
Daily	Car	\$7.00
	Motorcycle	\$3.00
Annual Passes	Red Rock	\$30.00
	America the Beautiful Pass. (Interagency)	\$80.00
	Golden Age	\$10.00
Cabs, Buses Etc.	Per Passenger	\$2.00
	AS OF JAN 2016	

With the exception of the Red Springs parking area in Calico Basin, all the areas outside the Scenic Drive are not subject to the same time restrictions.

Camping is not allowed anywhere in the National Conservation Area. In particular, this includes the network of dirt roads, accessed from route 160, which provide access to Black Velvet Canyon and the other areas at the southern end of the range. The rangers regularly patrol this area looking for campers, and the fines are stiff.

- There are several other rules that relate directly to climbers.
1. It is prohibited to chip, glue, chisel or scar the rock.
 2. Climbing is not allowed within 50 feet of any Native American rock art site.
 3. It is prohibited to place bolts in either of the wilderness areas. This includes all the canyons and also the Kraft Mountain area of Calico Basin. The fine is \$300 per instance, so if you are unsure about the status of your proposed route contact the climbing rangers.

An important development in May 2007 was the release of the

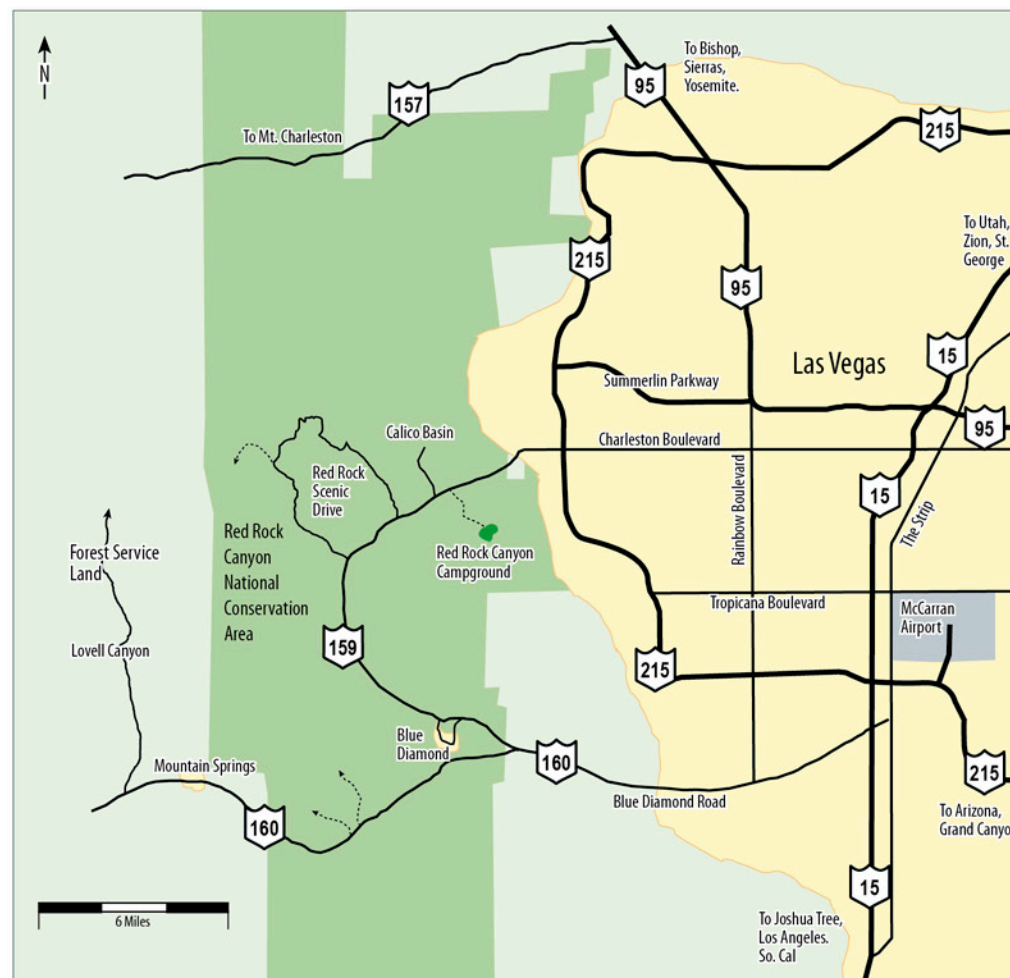
Preliminary Action Plan. This plan was created by the BLM in cooperation with various interested groups, including the Climbers Liaison Council. It includes a proposal for a permit system for new routes that would allow for the addition of new bolts, with certain provisions. As of 2016 this state of limbo was dragging on with no resolution in sight.

The BLM runs a visitor center just inside the Scenic Drive entrance, there is an exhibit which provides interesting historical and geological background information on Red Rocks. This is where you can get current information about the National Conservation Area.

The activities of climbers are under close scrutiny in the Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area. It is very important that climbers treat Red Rocks with the utmost care. This means using Leave No Trace Ethics, treating other users with respect, and observing the rules and regulations.

There is a twenty-four hour limit to parking along route 159. If you are planning to park here for a multi-day objective you will want to make sure that this is ok with the rangers.

Access Map



The Rock

Red Rocks is composed of a three-thousand-foot thick escarpment of Aztec Sandstone, which has weathered into a series of ten major canyons which drain from west to east. This rock is generally quite well-bonded, being more solid than that found in the other great sandstone areas of the west, such as Zion or Canyonlands. Another major difference is that much of the rock is covered with a thin layer of desert varnish which, on many of the faces, has partially weathered to leave behind a sea of good in-cut edges. It is these edges which allow routes like Dream of Wild Turkeys, Eagle Dance, and Crimson Chrysalis to climb such impressive features at a reasonable standard. In general, the unvarnished white and red rock can be soft, sandy and rounded in its natural state, although it cleans up well on popular routes to give very enjoyable climbing. The varnished rock provides superb climbing, especially on some of the north-facing walls where the varnish has resisted weathering and there are far fewer face holds. On these walls the long, clean, crack and corner systems provide some of the best routes in Red Rocks.

The edges that are the hallmark of so much of the climbing in Red Rocks can be quite fragile in their natural state. On popular climbs the loose holds and fragile lips are gradually

cleaning up, but even on these routes it is not uncommon to pop a foothold or two. Some of the more recent and/or less travelled routes can feel very fragile and require careful climbing. Climbers also have to be aware of larger blocks and flakes which crop up from time to time and can be amazingly unstable.

By far the most important factor affecting rock quality is precipitation. The Aztec Sandstone is porous and easily absorbs water; when waterlogged the rock becomes much weaker, causing holds to break with alarming ease. During long stretches of dry weather the rock will dry out in a few hours after an isolated rainstorm. However, after a long spell of heavy rain, it can take up to three days for the rock to dry out. In fact, during a wet "El Nino" year the rock can feel snappy all winter long. It is important to stay off routes when the rock is wet, especially in the Calico Hills where the rock is particularly soft after rain, and the loss of a crucial hold can easily destroy a classic route for good.

Despite these words of doom, the rock in Red Rocks is generally superb and a joy to climb, many of the classic routes rank with the best of their grade anywhere in the world.



Luke Olson enjoying the immaculate varnish of Saracen. Page 321.

The Weather

The numbers say it all: Red Rocks is often blessed with perfect climbing conditions for months on end, with the spring and fall each usually having three months of perfect weather.

Average temperature 66.3 degrees (19 degrees centigrade). Average yearly rainfall 4.13 inches (10.64 centimeters). Average daily humidity 29 percent. 211.5 clear days annually, 82.4 partly cloudy days, 71.3 cloudy days.

Month	Average Daily Low (°F)	Average Daily High (°F)	Sunny Days	Average Rainfall (inches)
January	33	56	24	0.5
February	37	67	22	0.46
March	42	68	25	0.41
April	49	77	26	0.22
May	59	87	27	0.22
June	68	98	28	0.09
July	75	104	27	0.45
August	73	101	26	0.54
September	65	94	28	0.32
October	53	81	27	0.25
November	41	66	24	0.43
December	33	67	24	0.32

Red Rocks is one of the few areas that can genuinely claim to offer year-round climbing. It is possible to find reasonable climbing conditions on all but a few of the hottest days of the year, when temperatures creep up towards 110°F or more.

Nevertheless, during the hottest and coldest times of year, comfortable climbing depends on making good choices and being prepared to adapt your objectives to suit the prevailing weather of the day. In particular, warm weather climbing takes some getting used to; sunny approaches must be tackled early in the morning and climbing is not feasible until your chosen route goes into the shade. Climbing in the canyons during colder weather also requires some thought. The difference between sun and shade is often dramatic, 30°F or more. It is quite common to be comfortable in the parking area and freezing on the route. The temperature in the canyons is usually at least 10°F colder than town and can feel a lot colder yet if there is any wind. A windshell is almost always a good idea. By contrast, the south-facing walls in the Calico Hills can feel hot on all but the coldest days, so bring plenty of water and some light clothing.

Wind is an important factor to consider at all times of year. The reason is not so much how it affects the climbing as what it does to rappel ropes. The sharp flakes that cover many of the faces are always a problem when rappelling, but with the wind whipping the ropes all over the wall, the chances of a snagged rope are greatly increased. Some of the taller walls in Red Rocks are very exposed, and if your chosen route involves a rappel descent, strong winds can pose a serious hazard. Walls such as the Eagle Wall and Crimson Chrysalis are best avoided under these conditions.

It is worth remembering that the weather data are only averages. During El Nino years, when a huge bubble of warm water shows up in the Western Pacific, Red Rocks will often have a miserable wet winter. During any winter, snowstorms can happen any time from October until April, with the snow sticking around for many days in the canyons. In the summer, a sudden storm can cause very cold conditions on long backcountry routes, and any canyon can flash flood without warning.



A winter storm, February 2008.

Staying in Red Rock Canyon

Transport

Although some hardy individuals do without, a car is pretty much essential for climbing at Red Rocks. There is no public transportation system, and the distances involved are just too great for walking to be a reasonable option. Las Vegas is one of the least expensive places in the country to rent a car.

Camping, Groceries, Showers Etc.

At present, there is only one campground close to Red Rocks. It is located at the end of a one mile long spur road on the southeast side of route 159. The spur road is called Moenkopi, and is on the right 1.9 miles east of the Scenic Drive entrance, and 0.5 miles east of the Calico Basin Road. Alternatively, if you are driving west out of town along Charleston Boulevard, it is on the left, 3.2 miles west of the Charleston/215 interchange. It is a relatively primitive campsite with pit toilets, picnic tables and a water tap, all for \$15 per night. The sites are available on a first come first served basis and there is a 14 day limit. The Campground is closed June, July and August. Unfortunately there have been quite a few instances of theft in the last couple of years, so don't leave valuables in the tent.

Within five miles from the campsite, and getting closer every year, the west end of Charleston Boulevard is one of the main suburban shopping areas in Las Vegas with all manner of grocery stores, coffee shops, casinos etc.

Showers are available for \$4.00 at the Red Rock Climbing Center, 8201 W. Charleston Blvd. Phone: 702 254 5604

Sahara West Library (9600 West Sahara Ave; 702 507 3630 is at the corner of Grand Canyon and Sahara. Surprisingly, Las

Vegas has a very good library system, and if you're here for an extended visit it is well worth getting a library card. It's free, and a photo ID is all that's required to get one. The West Sahara Library has twenty seven internet terminals that you can use free for an hour.

Free wireless Internet service is provided at Desert Rock Sports, located at 8221 W. Charleston Blvd., a few doors up from the Red Rock Climbing Center. As well as being a retailer of all things climbing, this store often puts on special events such as slide shows and film screenings.

There is dispersed camping in Lovell Canyon, the canyon to the west of the Red Rock range. It is accessed from route 160 by taking a right at the bottom of the hill to the west of Mountain Springs. There are no facilities, and it's a long drive (25 miles from the Scenic Drive), but there are some nice spots to spend the night in a pinch. Stays are limited to 14 days.

Climbing Alternatives

If soggy rock is curtailing climbing at Red Rock Canyon, there is a lot of limestone sport climbing nearby which can be climbable as soon as the rain stops. For information on these areas check out Islands in the Sky (Rockfax, 2001) and Las Vegas Limestone (Fly'n Carpet Publishing, 2000).

If the local Limestone sport climbing doesn't appeal, then it is a very reasonable drive (2½ hours) to Joshua Tree. The weather in Joshua Tree is similar to Red Rock Canyon, but the granitic rock is very quick drying.

If the weather really craps out you can stay fit at one of the three excellent gyms in town; Red Rock Climbing Center, The Refuge, and Origin.

Notes on the use of this Guide

Layout

The routes described in this guidebook are generally grouped in chapters according to the main canyon from which they are accessed, or in the case of the Calico Hills, the parking area from which they are accessed.

Within each chapter most routes are grouped into areas which correspond to either particular crags or major topographical features.

The chapters are arranged from south to north, starting with the Southern Outcrops and finishing with Kraft Rocks.

In the canyons the main areas are described from south to north going clockwise around the walls.

Route Descriptions

Route Number

Some routes within an area are assigned a route number. This number is used to identify the route on any photodiagrams, plan maps, or topos of that area. In most cases routes are on the same page as their photodiagram. In certain sections, where the route descriptions are spread over several pages, the photodiagram will always be within that section.

Route Names

Generally the route names are those given by the first ascent party. However, Red Rocks has many mystery routes with no

established name. Rather than having numerous "Unknowns" I have taken the liberty of providing a name for every route in the guidebook. In future guidebook editions some route names will undoubtedly change as their real names come to light. Hopefully the confusion that this causes is the lesser of two evils.

Length

This is the actual climbing length of the route rather than the vertical height gained. It takes the place of the commitment grade (I,II,III,IV, etc.) since along with the description, it gives a pretty accurate idea of the scale of the undertaking.

Grade

The standard rating system is used: 5.0 to 5.14 with the grades from 5.10 up subdivided into a,b,c and d. In a few cases I have used seriousness ratings R and X. But generally, where a route is known to be serious for some reason, this will be mentioned in the description. Do not assume that a route is safe just because there is no seriousness rating or any mention of danger in the description.

Star Rating

This guidebook uses a three-star system to rate the quality of the routes. Obviously this is a very subjective undertaking and these ratings should be taken with a grain of salt. Certain

personal biases no doubt crept into the assessment. So, for the record, I should say that clean, varnished rock, sweeping natural lines, and sustained climbing are factors that will push a route up the scale. Flaky rock, dirt, and a wandering or contrived line will push a route down.

I have tried to be very conservative in doling out stars so that the really good routes stand out; this is mostly to point visiting climbers at the very best routes. The fact that a route has no stars does not mean that it is not worth doing; instead I have tried to mention in the text if a route is really poor quality. The sport climbing in the Calico Hills posed a little bit of a problem because there is a lot of similarity from one route to the next. Generally, even the best routes would not be considered world class in the same way the best canyon routes definitely are. With this in mind, the star ratings for sport climbs and trad climbs are not really comparable. Generally, in the Calico Hills I have tried to give the extra stars to routes with particularly nice moves, good rock, or some other special feature that makes them stand out from the crowd.

Symbols

A sport climb. A route that is protected exclusively by closely spaced bolts, with a fixed anchor at the top.

Ⓛ Old bolts. Many of the old ¼ inch bolts have been replaced with solid ⅜ inch bolts, but a few still remain. These bolts are not reliable and should be backed up wherever possible.

† The dagger symbol is used for routes where I have been unable to track down a definitive description, the given route description should be treated as a very rough guide at best.

First Ascent Details

Where possible I have included the names of the first ascent team. Many of the more recent routes were submitted anonymously and so this information is not available. There are also many older routes whose origin is unknown.

Bolt-Free Ascents

Red Rocks pioneers have often had a fairly liberal attitude towards placing bolts, tending to err on the side of making routes fun and enjoyable and putting bolts in if there was any doubt. Improvements in modern protection gizmos have also made many older bolt placements redundant. In order to get a bit more challenge out of older routes, climbers are sometimes re-climbing established routes without clipping the bolts. I have made note of such ascents in the descriptions. Sometimes this includes an adjusted grade due to the extra effort involved in fiddling in gear instead of just clipping and going.

GPS

When preparing this book, I had every intention of providing GPS information for routes, approaches, parking etc. However, as I collected the data it became apparent that in many parts of Red Rocks GPS is not 100% reliable. The problem appears to be associated with signal getting reflected and/or blocked by the tall canyon walls. Because of this I was then faced with the dilemma of whether to include information that was usually useful, but, occasionally, potentially misleading. Since this book provides more than enough information to find every route without GPS, I decided not to include GPS data with this edition.

Equipment Recommendations

Where possible I have tried to include a recommended gear list. This is a very rough guide to what a climber comfortable at the grade might need to protect a particular climb.

Single rack to 3"

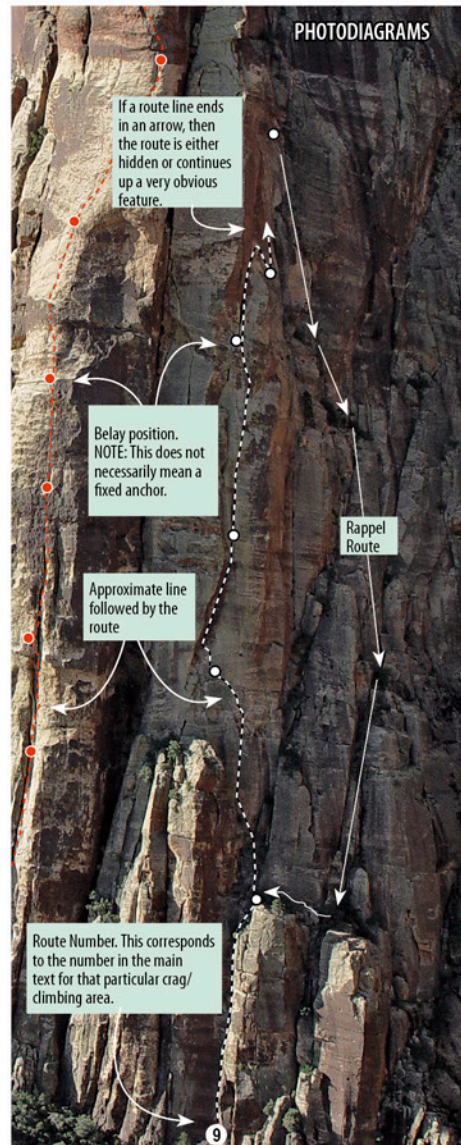
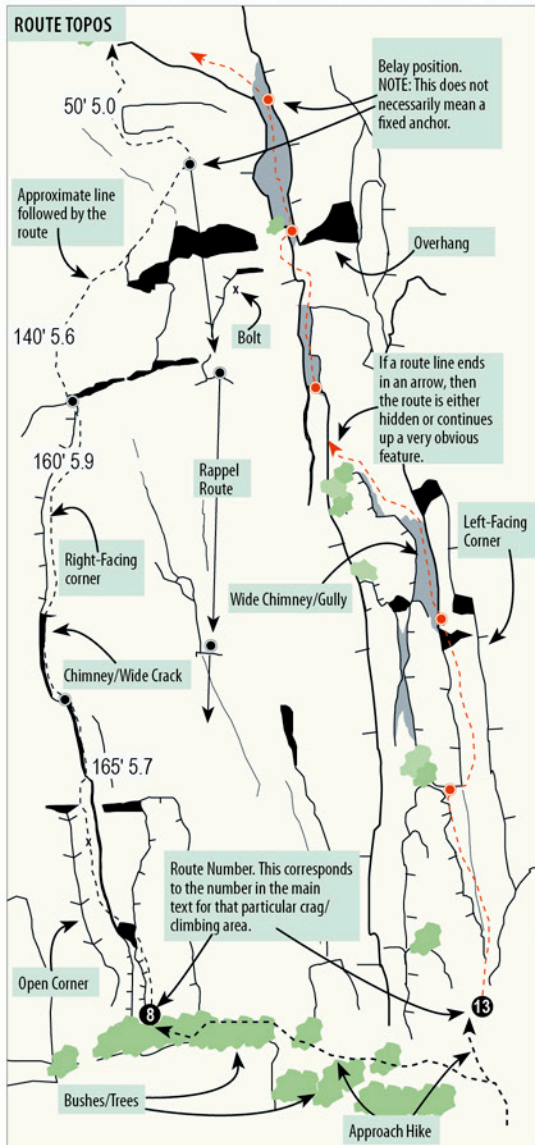
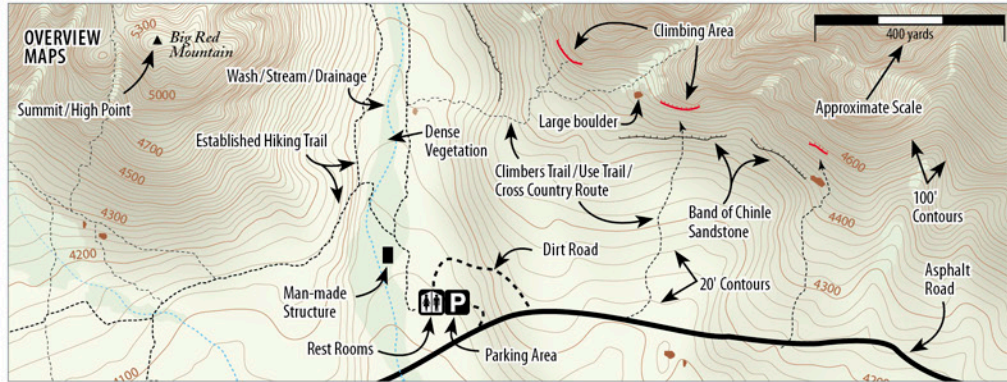
This would be a full set of wires, and a full set of cams from #00 TCU to #3 Camalot. It would also include a number of biners and slings and/or quickdraws appropriate for the particular type of climb.

Cam Size	Metolius	BD Camalots	Wild Country Friends	CCH Aliens	Trango Big Bro
0.4"	00	0.1		Black	
0.5"	0	0.2	00	Blue	
0.6"	1	0.3	0	Green	
0.75"	2	0.4	0.5	Yellow	
1"	3	0.5	1	Grey	
1.25"	4	0.75	1.5	Red	
1.5"	5	1	2	Orange	
1.75"	6	2	2.5	Violet	
2"	7	2	3	White	
2.5"	8	3	3.5		
3"	9	3 to 4	4		
3.5"	10	4	4 to 5		1
4"-5"		5	5		2
5"-7"		6	6		2 to 3
8"-12"					4
11"-18"					5

Pitch Numbers

On many of the multi-pitch routes (e.g. on the Black Velvet Wall), adjacent climbs will often share the first several pitches. Where this is the case, the pitch numbers of a route that break off from the main line reflect the number of pitches required to reach that point. For example, Ancient Futures starts at the third belay of Epinephrine; so the first pitch number is 4.

Maps, Topos and Photodiagrams



Overview & Access Map

