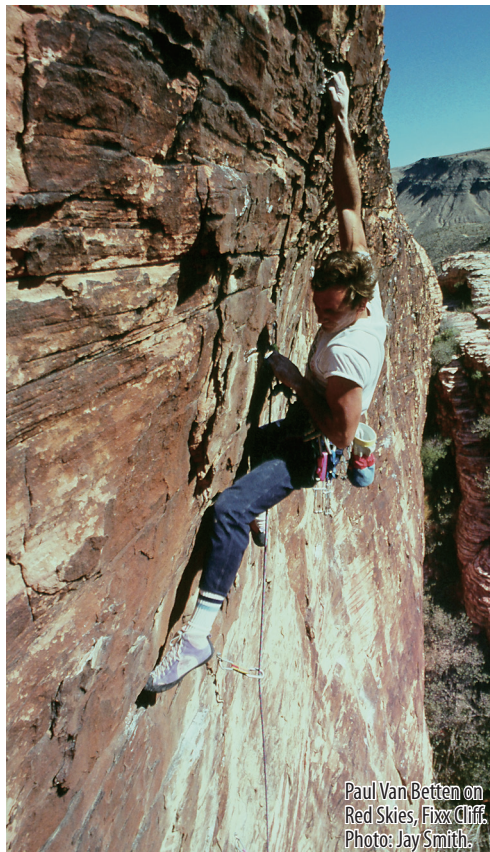




Sal Mamusia on Main Attraction,
Circus Wall. Photo: Paul Van Betten.

Climbers had been periodically exploring the Calico Hills since the very early days of climbing in Red Rocks, but it was not until the mid 1980s that these low formations of soft rock were seen as a worthwhile alternative to the classics in the main canyons. Whereas overhanging rock was a rarity in the canyons, here almost all the rock was overhanging, and even better, covered in small edges making even the steepest bulges quite climbable. When Paul Van Betten, Richard Harrison, and their friends became aware of the possibilities, they quickly went to work on the cliffs of the First Pullout. This group of climbers had been committed adherents to the long-standing tradition, in American climbing, of establishing routes from the ground up. So it seemed only natural to them to employ the same tactics when establishing routes in the Calico Hills. A climber would head up the rock hoping to find a few gear placements; if none existed then a bolt would be drilled, usually by hanging from a skyhook placed on one of the many edges. Many of the tactics that climbers use today were considered cheating back then. The routes were never top-roped or cleaned prior to the lead. Bolts were never placed near natural gear placements, and it was considered a big no-no to climb up to a bolt, rest and then keep climbing to the next bolt. Instead climbers would lower back to the ground every time protection was weighted. By modern standards the routes established by this group seem like anomalies; short, steep routes protected by a mixture of bolts and gear, occasionally quite runout and often with no anchors at the top. Since climbing styles have changed and sport climbing has become the accepted norm, the routes at places like the Fixx Cliff, Circus Wall and Meat Puppets Wall have pretty much been abandoned in favour of the more friendly challenges offered by the bolted cliffs, developed when climbers such as Mike Tupper and Greg Mayer brought full-fledged sport climbing to the Calico Hills in the late 1980s.



Paul Van Betten on
Red Skies, Fixx Cliff.
Photo: Jay Smith.