



## AAC Publications

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### **South Rim, Big Island area, Black Cloud**

Colorado, Black Canyon of the Gunnison

In the summer of 2012, Chris Righter and I were lured into establishing a new route on Wild Bill's Wall, a relatively unexplored and unclimbed part of the canyon. After an initial recon, we decided upon an unclimbed section of rock approximately 1,600' tall. Unfortunately, the continuous crack systems were up high, and the bottom of the wall was guarded by face climbing with no natural protection. We regrettably decided that we would have to tackle this adventure from the top down; however, the top of this route is not in a convenient location like those elsewhere in the canyon, but on Big Island, which is separated by a 70-meter-deep gash near the parking at Cross Fissures Overlook. Only after rappelling from the South Rim and climbing our way to the top of the island could we establish fixed lines on the route.

After much trundling of large, loose blocks from the crack systems, core-shot ropes, frustration and dehydration, a wild new line began to unveil itself. We encountered unparalleled stone and, as with all Black Canyon routes, a short section that was extremely friable. The route wanders up from the river through well-protected face moves, dihedrals, and bomber jams of all sizes. Each pitch required a little something from the leader as the moves became committing and the exposure increased. However, we were always rewarded with a ledge system at the belays. The route remains sustained until pitch eight, where we traversed up some easier terrain to climb the final roof and headwall dihedral. From the top, one must rappel into the gully and then climb up one more scramble before a one-minute walk back to the car.

The name Black Cloud comes from the fact that Righter and I both have families and full-time jobs, but still want to establish new, quality climbs. As the summer progressed, it was obvious that family trips, work commitments, weather, life, and tough climbing would not make completing this route easy. As the months passed, we grew extremely frustrated and agitated until the day of the send. After all the heartache, aborted missions, and close encounters, the route climbed elegantly from bottom to top. The first free ascent took place in August 2012 and took nearly 20 hours due to being photographed and hauling nearly 2000' of rope and hardware up the wall as we each freed all the pitches. It was exhausting, yet, so satisfying to have the black cloud lifted from our shoulders.

In all, our new route Black Cloud (1,600', IV 5.12- PG) contains 11 long pitches of classic Black Canyon climbing. This is sure to become a regularly climbed route in the Black once word gets out about its quality.

Rob Pizem, AAC

## Images



Chris Righter following a featured crack.



Chris Righter leading up great rock on the second to last pitch.



Chris Righter following the third to last pitch.



Chris Righter holding a badly core-shot rope.

## Article Details

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