



## AAC Publications

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### **Cathedral Tower, west face**

Arizona, Chiricahua Mountains

[Editor's Note 10/2014: It appears that Cathedral Tower was first climbed by its east ridge (right skyline of the tower) to the east summit (rightmost in the photo) in December 1961 by Joanna Coleman, John McComb, and Don Morris. They are reported to have left a cairn with summit register on the east summit and noted at the time there was already a small cairn present on this summit so the true first ascent date is unknown. This route is considerably easier than the west face route described below and has been repeated at least a few times. For future climbers, reaching the taller east summit from the west would likely involve a rappel and short scramble. The peak just east (right in the photo) of Cathedral Tower was climbed in May 1972, solo, by Joan Bousman—she called the peak the Parsonage. Thanks to Joan Bousman for providing this history.]

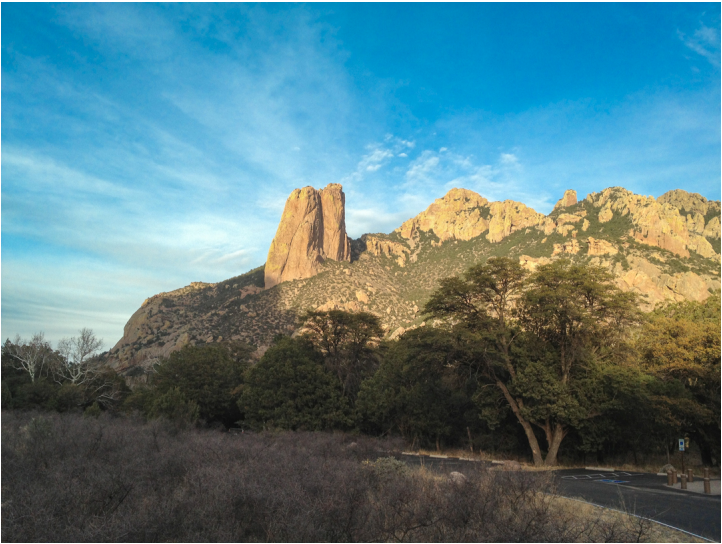
On March 20, Mark Wilford and I climbed a new route on a spectacular freestanding tower, which we named Cathedral Tower, as it is part of a large formation known as Cathedral Rock. This formation is located in Cave Creek Canyon in the Chiricahua Mountains of southeast Arizona, just a few miles south of the town of Portal. [Editor's note: Cathedral Tower is located on USFS land and not located within Chiricahua National Monument, where climbing is currently banned. Future parties should be mindful of this access issue.]

The climb starts just left of a large, overhanging alcove of gray rock on the west face of the tower and passes three very spaced-out bolts placed by a previous party. The bolts end at a two-bolt anchor with rap slings about 100' off the ground. Just before the anchors we traversed right and into a chimney/ramp system that led to a steep, clean face of reddish-colored rock and then the summit.

Although the welded rhyolite tuff can be friable and loose in places, the rock on our route was quite solid and featured, with short cracks and deep holes that would accept natural gear and was fun to climb—though it was a little run-out in places. After about six hours of climbing we reached the true summit and spent time exploring the top. We found no evidence of previous ascents. We descended our route (800', 7 pitches, 5.10) and also circumnavigated the entire base of the formation, concluding that our route is probably the easiest and first way to the top.

We are both quite amazed that a rock formation this big and prominent in the Lower 48 had not been climbed. The area has seen very limited activity but does hold significant potential, with many other freestanding towers and big faces within easy access of the park roads. It is also a popular birding destination.

## Images



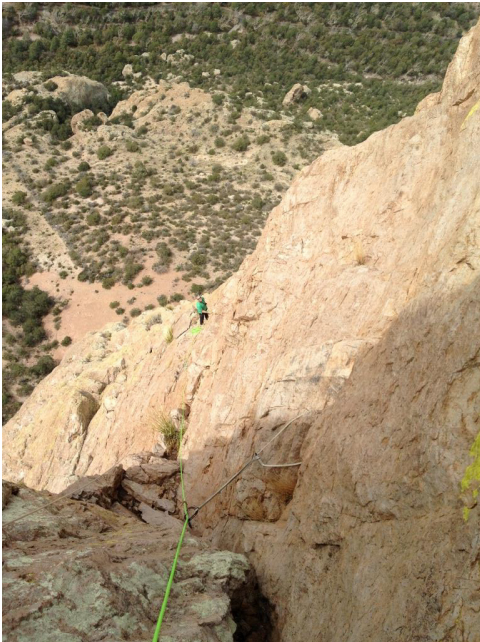
The 800' freestanding Cathedral Tower, which was unclimbed until 2013. The west face is shown.



Mark Wilford reaches the end of a traverse on the second pitch.



Mark Wilford, midway up the climb.



Looking down the sixth pitch.



The east summit of Cathedral Tower showing the east ridge (left skyline) and unclimbed north face.

## Article Details

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