



## AAC Publications

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### **Minerva's Temple, new routes; Organ Needle, new routes (previously unreported)**

New Mexico, Organ Mountains

The Organ Mountains are about 60 miles north of El Paso, Texas in southern New Mexico. The history of climbing in the Organs is vague prior to the 1940s, when a group of German rocket scientists began climbing technical routes. Royal Robbins established routes in the Organs while stationed at nearby Fort Bliss in the 1950s. Dr. Richard L. Ingraham, a longtime professor at New Mexico State University, also was active in the early days, authoring the area's first guidebook in 1965.

Sugarloaf is perhaps the most prominent peak in the range. It was from that summit that I became intrigued with the "The Great East Faces," as Dr. Ingraham described the east face of the Organ Needle and its adjacent walls. I spent hours studying a prominent buttress in the background of my Organ Needle summit photos taken in the 1980s: Minerva's Temple. The formation became an obsession.

In June 2000, Dave Head and I began exploring an approach to the base of Minerva's Temple from Aguirre Spring, on the east side of the Organ Mountains. [See PDF extra for detailed maps and route overviews.] We found that approaching via the Sugarloaf Trail required the least amount of bushwhacking. Continuing past Sugarloaf and around the south side of a large rocky knoll, we found a ravine leading to the south end of upper Indian Hollow, a heavily vegetated drainage originating between the Organ Needle and Minerva's Temple. Indian Hollow continues northeastward, and the approach favors the south bank of the ravine until crossing to the north near the base of the cliffs. The three-mile approach takes approximately three hours.

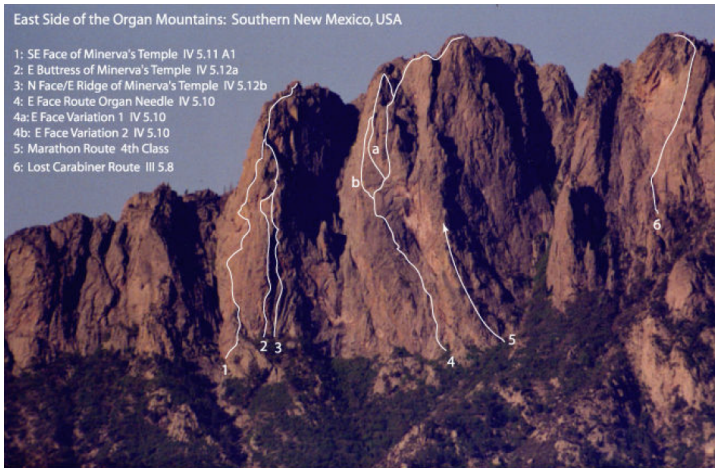
Dave Head, Jason Spier, and I climbed the north face and east ridge of Minerva's Temple (IV 5.12b) with eight days of effort, starting in June 2000 and culminating in a two-day push on September 9-10, 2000. Although established as a Grade V, it is typically climbed in a single long day so Grade IV should suffice. Figure on headlamps for the approach and walk out. Two ropes and rain gear are mandatory.

In May 2001, we began an attempt on the east face of the Organ Needle. After approaching from the Pine Tree Trail, we determined it more practical to use the same approach as for Minerva's Temple. We reached a previous party's high point on the second day, at the top of pitch five, where fixed pins on a steep headwall marked retreat. We climbed about 15' left from that anchor and placed one bolt (the only protection bolt on the route), which allowed us to turn a shallow 5.10 roof above. Quality, exposed climbing on the next few pitches led to easier ground. We finished the route on July 6, 2001, after five days of work (IV 5.10). In 2003, Dr. Ingraham told me the retreat anchor on the east face of Organ Needle was his, and he had attempted the climb twice but was unable to finish it. Dave Head and I returned in July and August 2003 to climb high quality variations on pitch 6 and pitch 8 of the route.

Back on Minerva's Temple, Dave Head and I completed the southeast face (IV 5.11d A1) on September 7, 2002, after seven days of effort. This route has some of the best rock in the Organ Mountains but has yet to go free. (The overhanging finger crack on pitch six remains A1.) Pitch nine links up with our earlier route on the east face and north ridge. A standard rack and aiders will suffice.

On May 6, 2007, Dave Head and I teamed up once again. This time we began work on the east buttress (IV 5.12a) of Minerva's Temple, a feature that starts about 20' left of our original route. After a 10-day effort, we rejoined the north face/east ridge route at a feature called Onion Ledge (see topo at the AAJ website). Surprisingly, we discovered a fixed nut and quarter-inch bolt with a SMC hanger near the top of pitch two, which appeared to mark the high point of an unknown attempt that traversed in from the left. While rappelling from Onion Ledge, our rope was cut in half by rock fall. It made for an interesting descent.

# Images



New routes in the Organ Mountains. See PDF for detailed topos and descriptions.

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