



AAC Publications

Red Sentinel, Human Centipede 5

Utah, Zion National Park

Number 4 is the new free route Human Centipede 5.

See images below for complete route listings. Photo by Brian Smoot.

I have long dreamed of standing on top of obscure and puzzling big walls, and the Red Sentinel in Zion National Park has been on my list for nearly 15 years. The north-facing wall is on the left as you look into the Court of the Patriarchs. As far as I can determine, there are five routes on the wall, all of which are aid climbs. The oldest was established by Jeff Lowe and Cactus Bryan and is called the Toad (VI F8 A3, AAJ 1972). The other four aid climbs all were done in the late 1990s and 2000.

In late November 2015, I conned a few partners—Mike Brumbaugh, Curtis Chabot, Sean Lynn, and Darren Mabe—into trying to establish a ground-up free route with me over the winter months. After scouting the face numerous times over the years, I had a solid plan of attack. We would climb the middle of the wall, where the cracks seemed plentiful, wide, comfy, and continuous, until we reached the top. It would be just a matter of doing it.

Well, Old Man Winter had a different idea. It snowed every day on the 2,000'-plus, north-facing wall—so much so that we weren't just post-holing on the approach but also on the ledges up high. It was so cold that two out of the five team members (including myself) got frostbite on their feet during the 16 days (spread over five months) that it took to complete the first ascent. The cracks were not all wide and comfy—some were thin and filled with dirt. There were multiple days where we advanced only 200' up the wall. The line was confusing, and every time I led a new pitch up virgin terrain, I had doubts that it would actually connect with another climbable crack or feature. Much of the wall is just less than vertical, but at times it is intensely overhung and in your face. The rock was bomber, except for when it wasn't and we trundled massive teetering blocks into the peaceful canyon below.

All that being said, we were continuously impressed by the variety of styles the 21-pitch climb presented. There are wonderful dihedrals that allow the climber to use every size of gear on the rack, from tips to sixes. There are traverses where the climber hangs out in dizzying exposure. There are Indian Creek-style splitters from tips to fingers to hands to offwidth. Finally, and most importantly, there was a good to very good ledge at every belay. Nothing makes me happier than hanging out on a big-wall belay while on a ledge (or at least a good stance).

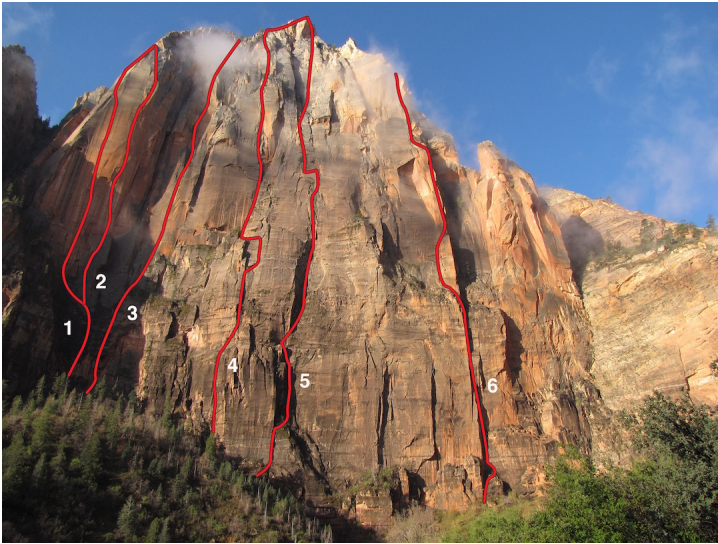
The two 5.13 cruxes (pitches 5 and 13) are both short-lived. The first is a tips layback dihedral, protected with a bolt, and a small roof. The entire hard section is only 15' or so. The upper crux begins with a massive, 45° overhang on flat jugs that is 5.11 and bolt protected, followed by an arête that yields about 8' of desperate technical moves and an enjoyable stemming finish. Both cruxes can be aided using the protection bolts. In fact, the whole climb can be done mostly free at 5.10 and 5.11. My goal for the route was to establish an everyman's big wall. It turned out the only free path to the top of this wall involved a couple of 5.12 and 5.13 cruxes, but they are not deal-breakers. The gear is there and you can easily pull through and get back to the fun climbing at a lower grade.

We completed the route to the summit in February, and I finished freeing all the pitches in April, belayed by Mike Brumbaugh, Curtis Chabot, and Rob Warden. The effort that all the team members gave over five months was monumental. I just want to say thanks to those men, who could have stayed home each weekend when it was time to partner up with me on that cold, dark, unforgiving

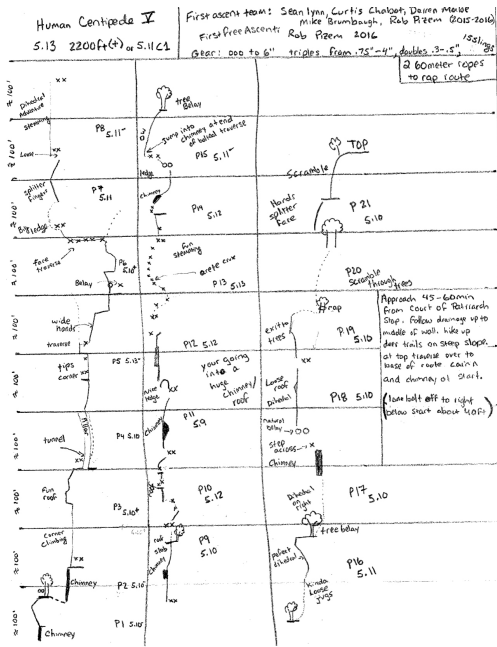
wall.

Rob Pizem

Images



The north face of Red Sentinel, showing the approximate route lines of (1) Brown Eyed Girl (VI 5.8 A3+, Nolte-Schock, 1999), (2) Red Dawn (VI 5.9 A3+, Dodds-Stratford, 1996), (3) Off to See the Lizard (VI 5.6 A3, Hill-Jones, 1998), (4) Human Centipede 5 (VI 5.13 or 5.11 C1, Brumbaugh-Chabot-Lynn-Mabe-Pizem, 2016), (5) The Toad (VI 5.8 A3, Bryant-Lowe, 1971), and (6) The Big Easy (VI 5.10 R A3, Denise-Hammond, 2000). All route lines except 4 are by Brian Smoot.



Topo for Human Centipede 5 (5.13), the first free route up the north face of Red Sentinel in Zion.



Darren Mabe at the base of pitch 10 on Human Centipede 5.



Rob Pizem nearing the end of pitch 6 on Human Centipede 5, Zion National Park.

Article Details

Author	Rob Pizem
Publication	AAJ
Volume	59
Issue	91
Page	0
Copyright Date	2017
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions