



AAC Publications

Emerald Pools Traverse; Cathedral Mountain, Iron Curtain

Zion National Park

The idea for this adventure came while doing the second ascent of Castle Dome with Courtney Purcell and Aron Ralston in 2015. We were near the top of Castle Dome, looking over at Lady Mountain and Cliff Dwelling Mountain when I suggested it. Looking at the face one needs to climb to get out of the canyons, they said, "It can't be done." That inspired me.

From August 14-16, I did a solo (with rope) traverse of the formations that surround the Emerald Pools. I started down Behunin Canyon, exiting the canyon to climb our Castle Dome route from 2015. I rappelled the north corner of Castle Dome and did what I believe is the first descent of Castle Dome Canyon between Castle Dome and Castle Dome Ridge. At the bottom of Castle Dome Canyon I made two blind rappels into the Gunsight Start for Heaps Canyon, something that scared me since I didn't know how much water was in the canyon. I did not carry a drill and had only one rope. From Cross Roads in Heaps Canyon I climbed the north face of Cliff Dwelling Mountain for its second known ascent. The first ascent was done on the southeast side when Ron Raimonde and I did a traverse of the Court of the Patriarchs in 1999. From the summit I rappelled into the notch between it and the west face of Lady of the Cliff, down the route Buzz Burrell and Jared Campbell tried on their attempt to repeat the traverse of the Court of the Patriarchs. From the saddle I climbed up to the summit of Lady of the Mountain, then up Lady Mountain. The descent from Lady Mountain is Old Lady Mountain Trail, an unmaintained, 5.5 in disrepair. A true believer in leaving adventure and nothing else, I didn't drill or leave webbing. I rated the outing HA (High Adventure). If I had not been able to climb the face on Cliff Dwelling Mountain, I'm not sure how I would have exited Heaps or Isaac canyons. I chose August, hoping levels of water in the canyons would be reasonable. I didn't carry bivy gear for the two nights.

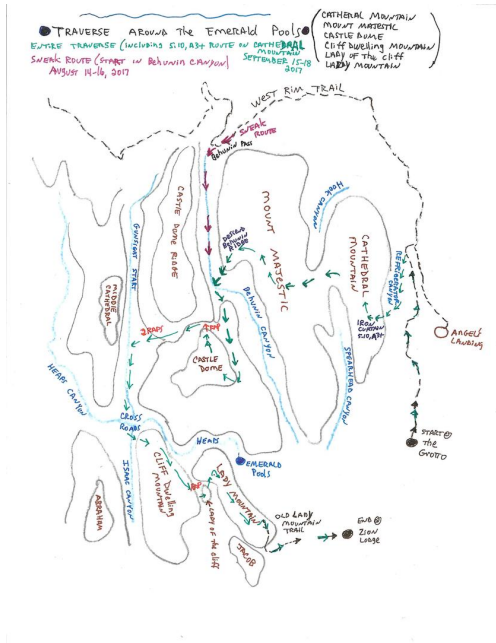
Upon hearing of my traverse of the formations surrounding the Emerald Pools, Courtney Purcell, author of *Zion National Park: Summit Routes*, asked why I had not included Cathedral Mountain and Mt. Majestic. From September 15–18, I returned to include these peaks, including a new route on the southeast face of Cathedral Mountain. Beginning at the Grotto, I hiked the West Rim Trail, leaving it at Walter's Wiggles. I descended into Refrigerator Canyon, climbed up the ridge on the other side and scrambled south up to Cathedral Mountain. My route, Iron Curtain (5.10 A3+) has two sections: The first climbs three long pitches of mixed free and aid, the most difficult being the third pitch (A3+), which required frequently free-climbing out of the top of my aiders to link sections where cracks disappear or the rock becomes too soft and rotten to aid. From there I climbed two pitches up and across to the headwall. The final headwall is two pitches of thin, white face (5.10). I took a long fall here, exposed on the hot white face at the end of day three, in 85° F weather. I bivied on the summit of Cathedral Mountain. On day four I traversed Mt. Majestic and down-climbed into Behunin Canyon where I found water. Thinking it would only take me a day to climb the route, I had carried only two days worth of water. As a result of not having enough water I got a fungal infection on the roof of my mouth that required treatment. Every moment the last two days I wondered how it would end—would I reach the slowly approaching summit? Or would I suddenly have heat stroke and need to be rescued? Reversing course would have taken a full day, a lot of energy and would have been as risky as continuing. I simply didn't think it would take that long.

Instead of repeating the aid route on Cathedral Mountain, future parties wishing to do the entire traverse of the Emerald Pools may wish to start by descending Behunin Canyon to Behunin Ridge. From there they can leave gear, scramble up Behunin ridge, climb the summits of Mt. Majestic and

Cathedral Mountain and then return to do the rest of the traverse from Behunin Canyon.

– Dan Stih

Images



Topo for Dan Stih's traverse of the formations around the Emerald Pools in Zion National Park. In the process of completing the full traverse, he soloed a new route on the southeast face of Cathedral Mountain, which is named Iron Curtain (5.10 A3+).

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