



AAC Publications

Moonlight Buttress, Moonshadow

Utah, Zion National Park

IN 1971, THE YOUNG AND STRONG team of Jeff Lowe and Mike Weis walked up to the base of “Chimney Tower” and climbed what became the famous Moonlight Buttress. Forty years later, Jeff was crippled by a disease that rendered him incapable of talking or walking, let alone climbing. I told him I wanted to climb Moonlight in the best style—ground-up and onsight. He typed into his iPad and turned it toward me to read: “You can do it. Let me know when you do.”

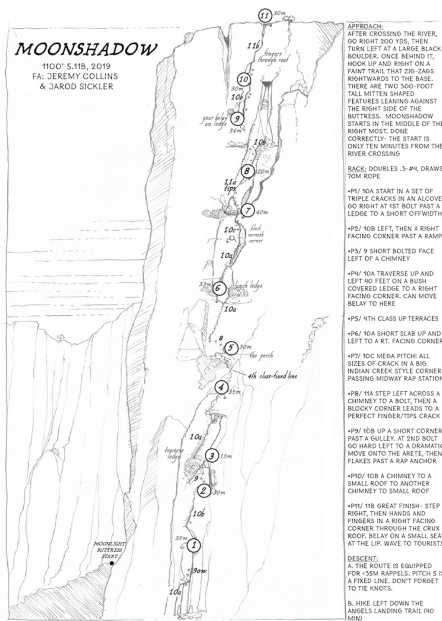
Spoiler alert: I failed on the onsight. But from Moonlight I looked over to the right side of the buttress to study a line I had always wondered about. It appeared quite featured and broken. In August 2018, Jeff died from his health complications. Shortly thereafter, my buddy Jarod Sickler and I hiked to the base of Moonlight Buttress, 100 feet to the right of the historic line. Lying in the grass was a rusted Leeper bolt hanger, presumably from the first ascent of Moonlight. We took it as a good omen from Jeff and Mike and headed up with it in our pocket.

Intent on finding a moderate free line, we connected dihedrals zigzagging 600’ to a midway ledge. From there we entered a massive varnished corner system easily seen from the road. The upper headwall revealed at least five different options of where to go next. After cleaning some dangerous loose blocks off the first half of the line on rappel, we hiked to the top via the West Rim Trail and rappelled in to decide how to connect our high point to a good exit. Eventually we found exactly what we were looking for.

We returned two months later and pushed the route to a dramatic finish with the crux in the last 50 feet, avoiding any cracks smaller than fingers or bigger than chicken-wings for a sustained line of enjoyable, varied cracks—Moonshadow (1,100’, IV 5.11b). Hopefully we did Jeff proud by finding a line not only in Moonlight’s shadow but also his own. Many thanks to guidebook author Bryan Bird for his wise counsel and to the Bit & Spur Saloon for nightly libations and protein replenishment.

– Jeremy Collins

Images



Topo for Moonshadow (1,100', IV 5.11b), a new free line to the right of Moonlight Buttress. Jeremy Collins first spied the line from its famous neighbor and returned twice with Jarod Sickler to complete the first ascent.



“Good routes in Zion aren’t found, they are made.” Moonshadow (1,100', IV 5.11b) features solid and clean corners that often passed through bushes and loose blocks, and some were more obvious than others. Jeremy Collins after taking a 20-footer when a foot ledge blew and his cam ripped from the soft desert stone.



The final section of Moonshadow (1,100', IV 5.11b) before topping out on the rim—a glorious patina-lined handcrack. The exit features a flat jug and a small butt-sized rock chair to belay from.



Jarod Sickler pulls through a wicked section of Moonshadow (1,100', IV 5.11b) that leaves a thin dihedral and reaches out a body-length to an arête where one's feet cut loose to commit to the transition out of the corner. This was one of the more mysterious pieces to the puzzle of finding a moderate line from valley to rim.



Moonlight Buttress in Zion National Park, showing the line of Moonshadow (1,100', IV 5.11b).



Jeremy Collins enters the crux bulge on pitch 11 of Moonshadow, a new 5.11 route up Moonlight Buttress.

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