



## AAC Publications

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### The Deeper Mysteries

A New Stash of Spicy Towers in Southeastern Utah

**THE DEEPER MYSTERY TOWERS** are a previously untouched area of desert sandstone towers, a mile east of the Mystery Towers, which themselves are just east of the well-known Fisher Towers. The Deeper Mysteries can only be seen from the nearby mesa called Top of the World, and from up there everything below is remote and flattened as if viewed from an airplane.

In 1995, during the first ascent of the Wait of the World (6 pitches, A3+) on the Atlas, on the eastern edge of the Mystery Towers, Chip Wilson and I had spotted an inviting hoodoo along the adjacent steep hillside. Up close it was scrappy, but just around the next corner were more impressive spires. I dubbed the largest the Mysteron. Later, I discovered a side canyon of Onion Creek that burrowed deep into this area, allowing easier access. Even so, the logistics were daunting—we opted for lower hanging fruit elsewhere.

Fast-forward two decades and low-hanging fruit is hard to find. Keiko Tanaka and Joe Shultz, who, with Neil Chelton, had recently climbed Beaking in Tongues (7 pitches, A4, Bartlett-Levine, 1997) in the Fisher Towers, sought me out to tell me they'd enjoyed the route and to ask for suggestions for similar objectives. Hmmm, I pondered, would they be interested in exploring a new area? I asked and they were enthusiastic. Chip Wilson, when I phoned to see if he'd like to join, not so much. In April, Keiko, Joe, and I drove to Onion Creek, shouldered our loads, and set off with provisions for three nights.

The Deeper Mysteries are rowdier than the Mystery Towers or just about anywhere else I've visited on the Colorado Plateau. Hoodoos sit hard against cliff bands and buttresses that ascend to the Top of the World, 1,000' above. A massive fault cleaves the mesa and has excavated a chaotic zone of boulders, precipices, and ravines, framed by pale, fresh-hewn cliffs. In the other direction, back toward Onion Creek, tortuous gullies hacksaw through raw red ridges. The terrain is overly tilted, and further collapse appears imminent.

The first night, desert winds rattled our sleeping bags and peppered us with gravel. Furious roars reverberated in the dark and kept us awake. The next morning the gale abated. We slept late and circumnavigated the Mysteron, post-holing through dust. Over 200' high, the landform featured a curious summit: a jumble of car-size erratic boulders, fallen or rolled from who knows where. On the more conventional Cutler sandstone flanks below, one seam came within reach. After the approach and sleepless night, I was feeling every one of my 61 years and happy to let someone else lead. Joe—who would have been 8 years old when Chip and I were climbing the Atlas—stepped up and got going. He hammered all manner of pitons into what proved to be a continuous, if rotten crack, while I napped and pretended to belay.

Next day, the second pitch was to be my lead. Midway, I took a Screamer-ripping fall—my first fall on a desert aid pitch in nearly 30 years. That pitch ended at the topmost band of solid rock. The third pitch looked awful: a gross flare lined with stacked projectiles, supported by each other or by vestiges of dried mud hiding somewhere in back. Next morning, Keiko carefully "fraid-climbed" (or was it unafraid-climbed?) via stems, laybacks, pitons, and cams to the SUV-size summit block. As Joe and I joined her on this remote, hard-earned summit, we were startled by a yell, the first sign of another human in three days. It was Chip. He merrily jumared our ropes and joined us on top.

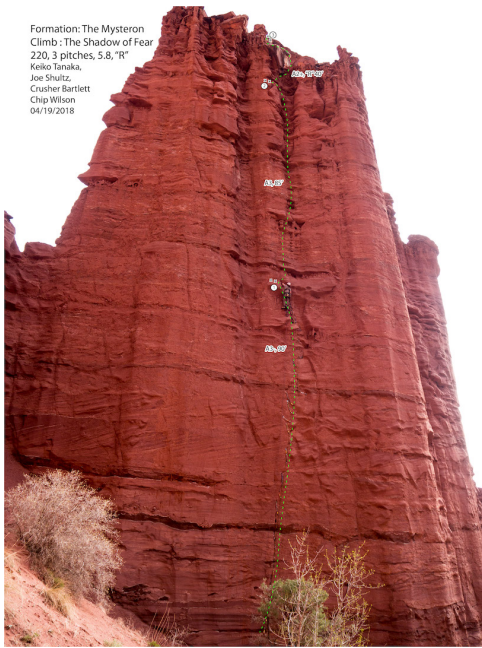
Two weeks later, we returned and climbed a splendidly isolated spire, reminiscent of the Fisher Towers' Ancient Art, a half-mile south of the Mysteron. Over 300' tall, Scarlet Spire took Keiko, Joe, and me five days to climb. Pitch one, Keiko's lead, featured a traverse close to the ground that lasted into the night in the search for a piece worth rappelling from. Next day, as I cleaned this pitch and jumared the last few feet to join Keiko at the belay, I gently tried to trundle a loose stone—and a mattress-size block dropped off, shoving me aside and causing Joe, at the base, to run for his life. On the third pitch, Joe actually placed a couple drive-in ice screws. As with Ancient Art, the final, corkscrew pitch was accessed by a walk along a narrow, rounded spine we called the Land Bridge—undercut and dropping hundreds of feet on both sides. And the summit? It was a coffee table, barely balanced, a stacked relic from the Stone Age that was nearing its demise.

Behind Scarlet Spire was its twin, minus the skeletal top-knot. In the fall, Neil Chelton joined Keiko, Joe, and me for a five-pitch climb up this formation, which we named the Pink Squirrel. Nearer to the Mysteron, three smaller towers also were climbed. Neil led the 80-foot Mister Ron, and later he soloed the Corkscrew, car-to-car, in a day. Keiko also led a 120' pillar atop a high ridge. We named this the Watchtower for its panoramic views of the Deeper Mysteries, the Mystery Towers, and, beyond, the Titan, far away in time but right here and now in style and vision

– Steve “Crusher” Bartlett

Summary of Activity: First known routes established in 2018 in the Deeper Mystery Towers outside Moab: Shadow of Fear (220', 5.8 R A3) on the Mysteron; Sandromeda (350', 5 pitches, 5.8 A3+) on the Pink Squirrel; Ancient Art Simulator (340', 5 pitches, 5.7 A3+) on Scarlet Spire; Alotta Sandgina (120', 5.7 A2) on the Watchtower; Exfoliation Station (80', A2+) on Mister Ron; In Vino Veritas (100', A3) on the Corkscrew.

## Images



The Mysterion in the Deeper Mystery Towers outside of Moab, showing the line of the Shadow of Fear (220', 5.8 R A3), the first ascent of the formation. Steve "Crusher" Bartlett and Chip Wilson first spotted this collection of remote towers while climbing in the Mystery Towers in 1995.



The Pink Squirrel in the Deeper Mystery Towers outside of Moab, showing the line of Sandromeda (350', 5 pitches, 5.8 A3+), which was the first ascent of the formation. Steve "Crusher" Bartlett, Neil Chalton, Keiko Tanaka, and Joe Shultz explored this area for the first time in the spring and fall of 2018, making the first ascents of six different formations.



Scarlet Spire in the Deeper Mystery Towers outside of Moab, showing the line of Ancient Arts Simulator (340', 5 pitches, 5.7 A3+), which was the first ascent of the formation. This route was one of six new towers climbed in the Deeper Mysteries in the spring and fall of 2018. "Crusher" Bartlett and Chip Wilson first spotted this collection of remote towers from afar while climbing in the Mystery Towers in 1995.



Looking back down pitch two of the Shadow of Fear (220', 5.8 R A3) during the first ascent of the Mysterion in the Deeper Mystery Towers, outside of Moab.



Keiko Tanaka leading the complicated and dicey first pitch traverse during the first ascent of Ancient Art Simulator (340', 5 pitches, 5.7 A3+) on Scarlet Spire in the Deeper Mystery Towers.



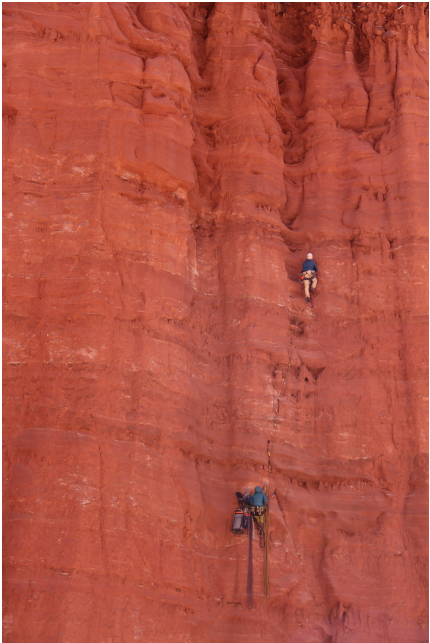
Keiko Tanaka leading the fourth pitch during the first ascent of Ancient Arts Simulator (340', 5 pitches, 5.7 A3+) on Scarlet Spire in the Deeper Mystery Towers. This remote tower features a boardwalk approach to a corkscrew summit reminiscent of Ancient Art in the nearby Fisher Towers.



Keiko Tanaka just below the summit of Scarlet Spire on first ascent of Ancient Art Simulator (340', 5 pitches, 5.7 A3+) in the Deeper Mystery Towers.



Joe Shultz leading the first pitch of the Shadow of Fear (220', 5.8 R A3) on the Mysteron, the first tower to be climbed in the Deeper Mystery Towers.



Steve "Crusher" Bartlett leading pitch two of The Shadow of Fear (220', 5.8 R A3) during the first ascent of the Mysterion in the Deeper Mystery Towers outside of Moab.



Nearing the belay on the third pitch of Sandromeda (350', 5 pitches, 5.8 A3+) on the Pink Squirrel tower in Utah's Deeper Mystery Towers. This route was one of six new towers climbed in the Deeper Mysteries in the spring and fall of 2018.



Scarlet Spire from the west. This was one of six new towers climbed in the Deeper Mystery Towers outside of Moab in the spring and fall of 2018.



Steve "Crusher" Bartlett at the base of the Mysteron in Utah's Deeper Mystery Towers. Crusher first visited the desert Southwest in 1984 and has been a driving force in exploring new routes and towers on the Colorado Plateau ever since. His book *Desert Towers* is the definitive climbing history of the area.



Nearing the belay on the third pitch of Sandromeda (350', 5 pitches, 5.8 A3+) on the Pink Squirrel tower in Utah's Deeper Mystery Towers. This route was one of six new towers climbed in the Deeper Mysteries in the spring and fall of 2018.



## Article Details

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