



AAC Publications

Bear Canyon, New Routes

New Mexico

The 800' walls on the west side of Bear Canyon are visible from the road, east of the town of Questa, but perhaps due to New Mexico's lack of climbers, the steep, overgrown terrain, and dubious-looking rock, they stood unclimbed until recently. When the nearby Lion's Den—a sport crag I thought would be choss but eventually turned out to be arguably one of the best 5.13 crags in New Mexico—was completed, I had a new psyche and commitment to look for more routes in the area. Bear Canyon was the obvious place to begin the search.

Bear Canyon was overgrown and hard to access but eventually showed the potential for quality steep sport climbs as well as multi-pitch sport routes on good granite. After completing many single-pitch routes in the area, I teamed up with John Kear and began exploring the canyon's bigger cliffs in November 2016. Going ground up, we swapped leads and stance-drilled the first two long routes, Beyond Stone (5 pitches, 5.10) and Loaded For Bear (6 pitches, 5.11). At first John and I had trouble envisioning the lines, but after completing the first route we were pleasantly surprised with the high quality of rock, abundance of belay ledges, and enjoyable movement.

To date, with the help of Joel Tini, John Kear, and a few other Taos locals, I have completed five multi-pitch routes up to 5.12a, all of them five or six pitches in length and fully bolted (with the exception of Chauncey Gardiner). We found evidence of only one previous single-pitch route attempt. Full topos and route descriptions will be available in the forthcoming second edition of Taos Rock.

– Jay Foley

Images



Topo of new long routes in northern New Mexico's Bear Canyon completed since 2016. From left to right: Oso Loco (50m, 5.12b), The Tao of Pooh (5 pitches, 5.12a), Stoned Immaculate (31m, 5.10), Beyond Stone (5 pitches, 5.10), Chauncey Gardiner (5 pitches, 5.11 mixed), Loaded For Bear (6 pitches, 5.11), The Silk Road (6 pitches, 5.12a). Note that rockfall is a real threat to climbers below.



Jay Foley on the fifth pitch of Silk Road, one of five new bolted multi-pitch routes in New Mexico's Bear Canyon, near Questa, completed by Jay Foley and partners.



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