



AAC Publications

Monegaw Springs Crag, The Osage Party Barge

Missouri

Yes, that's right: You are seeing a climb in Missouri in the AAJ for the first time ever—and perhaps the last.

The Show Me State has had a long yet quiet history, focused primarily on the loose but enjoyable limestone cliffs that border major river systems. Sport and trad lines started appearing in the late 1970s in the Columbia area, off the Missouri River. In 2015, a looming guidebook deadline injected new energy into the development of two sandstone crags in western Missouri: Raven Rocks, along the Pomme De Terre River, and Monegaw Springs, on the Osage.

Practically overnight, the Missouri climber had 50 new sport routes on sandstone, a medium more common in neighboring Arkansas and Illinois, ranging from 5.6 to 5.13. Monegaw especially has become the day-trip darling, with remarkably good rock in its 50' to 65' height. After seven years, most of the plum lines have been plucked and Monegaw has become the 5.12 crag in the state. As my friend Ryan Surface and I developed the crag's first 25 routes, however, we bemoaned the fact that there wasn't more or taller rock (or a wall with similar rock that wasn't covered in bullet casings and graffiti). But as any good Midwesterner will tell you, you deal with what you have and you make the best of it.

"Making the best of it" eventually led to a spontaneous traverse of one wall at Monegaw in late winter. Jarod Sickler and I wrapped up a day of climbing by angling sideways for 35m across the exceptional Burnside Wall; we clipped bolts and got scared on potentially ground-kissing run-outs, and mostly laughed at ourselves, per usual. As we prepared to rappel, I couldn't help but look further west along the length of the crag. There it was: a sideways big wall shining in the Osage sun.

We spent the next month preparing the line in between busy life schedules. We went up, down, across, up, down, across, often merely feet beneath the cliff's rim. We struggled constantly with the question What's the point?, and the answer we found at the other end of the traverse was another question: What's the point of climbing anything at all? Climbing should occasionally just be fun, and we agreed that our traverse was definitely that.

In April, we were finally ready to climb the route in its entirety. Pitch one—barely fifth class and only 20' off the ground—was a throwaway, but crucial to making the route the longest in the state. (We didn't invent this desperate practice—there are two other girdle traverses in Missouri.) However, as we prepared to climb, a ledge crumbled like a trap door and I plummeted to the earth, barely missing a boulder with my head. I asked for a beer and ibuprofen, and we headed straight to the emergency room. I spent the following months recovering from a dislocated ankle, hyper-extended elbow, and various other injuries. In 30 years of climbing all over the world, it has been my worst injury to date.

In my downtime, I read more about our weird little crag. Monegaw was once a hideout of Jesse James and Cole Younger, as well as an important home to Osage Native Americans and a resting place of one of their tribal leaders, Chief Monegaw. It also was a popular entertainment destination. I came across a sepia-toned picture of a floating barge populated by at least 50 dapper men in wide-brimmed hats and a lone woman. Apparently, parties like these would float eight miles upriver, from Osceola to Monegaw, flying a large American flag, for a day at the cliff in the early 1900s.

In September, as a warmup for a trip to the Bugaboos, Jarod and I—sufficiently healed from my tumble—returned to Monegaw to enjoy a party of our own by completing our new girdle traverse: The Osage Party Barge (550', 8 pitches, 5.11b). Simply put, it was fun.

— **Jeremy Collins**

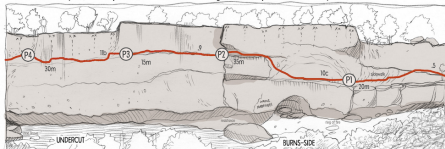
Images



While researching Missouri's Monegaw crag, Jeremy Collins came across this 1909 photo, which inspired the name of the Osage Party Barge (550', 8 pitches, 5.11b). The photo appears in the book "Damming the Osage," by Leland Payton and Crystal Payton.

THE OSAGE PARTY BARGE

5.11b (Mandatory 10a) • 8 pitches • 10 draws + 5 slings + 50m rope • Bolted belays



(P) 5.5 - 70' - 5 bolts

Start by finding a high mossy sidewalk passageway from the trail head of the far east end of the crag down a corridor. Scramble around a boulder corral, the off-to-the-right area get started. This pitch is better "cleaning" more like exposed walking, but it offers up an independent start to your barge party and is part of the full experience. Don't skip the clips...the first ascensionists broke a ledge here and decided.

(P) 10a - 105' - 12 bolts

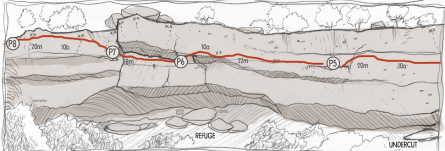
Pass through all of same-side following the obvious mid-wall cutback starting with a (slightly bolted) delicate crack, then angle up and left to a second, higher than the cutback above the Wayne Burnside graffit. Belay is just past the resistance and a heavy drop-down exit.

(P) 9 - 50' - 7 bolts

Start pitch on great holds strapping shortly before the crux. Belay on a shallow ledge of vertically offset bolts.

(P) 10a (or 10b) - 90' - 13 bolts

Start with a delicate, height-dependent case and then hold on for a sustained and fun pitch. It is optional to pull past the second bolt keeping the pitch mid-10. Belay just before High Noon's finish inside a shallow left-facing mossy corner. With enough draws, pitch 3 and 4 can be linked.



(P) 10a - 50' - 7 bolts

A shorter transition pitch to a great ledge to watch the ridiculously amazing nest section. Slight downclimb at the end. From here you get your corner ready. Pitch 3 and 4 can be linked, but it's a shame to skip the large belay ledge.

(P) 10a - 45' - 7 bolts

An airy and overhanging, but safe pitch. Your feet dance on the edge while passing through meag-ugs to access the Refuge roof. Step down around the corner past Grandfather. An eventually arriving at the Grandfather's midway anchors on a small but great belay perch.

(P) 9 - 50' - 7 bolts

A job-snapping pitch underneath the roof, full traversing and edging through the break under changing permo-draws. Great position, unless you have means to control back up your rope, one should avoid falling far levels. You could end up strapping in again. For the long rope, give a more effort than it's worth to clip. Belay at the far end of the roof on a nice ledge after a mortar exit just before the route Modern Petroglyph.

(P) 10a - 45' - 8 bolts

You're almost done, but don't bolt early! After 100' of staying beneath the edge, you are feebly kicked to the top after the first bolt for a hilariously continued but fun to traverse from. Belay from a stance 20 feet past low setting, or lower to the ground and relax while the follower finishes up. The clever team could place their cooker and shoes here up top or down below before getting started.

Topo for The Osage Party Barge (550', 8 pitches, 5.11b), a girdle traverse of the Monegaw Springs Crag, Missouri.



Jarod Sickler, belayed by Jeremy Collins, on pitch six of the Osage Party Barge (550', 8 pitches, 5.11b), a girdle traverse of the Monegaw Springs Crag, Missouri.

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