



## AAC Publications

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### Coke Wall, I Left My Wallet in La Sedona

Arizona, Sedona Area, Oak Creek Canyon

**Climbing is littered with stories of mentorship; it is tradition for the current generation to pass knowledge and inspiration down to the next.** I learned to climb without a mentor, but since I moved to Ouray, Colorado, in 2018, no friend has had a greater impact on my climbing than Jason Nelson, 45. He taught me how to find a line, clean it, and bolt it—things he's done a vast amount in his life. From developing sport crags to Ouray's premier dry-tooling crags (namely the Hall of Justice and Remedy Wall) to new routes around the world, Jason's list of first ascents is prolific. In October 2021, he recruited me to help finish a 10-year project: a 12-pitch route on Coke Wall, in Oak Creek Canyon, northeast of Sedona. We loaded into Jason's truck and headed south.

Jason's project was located at the right-hand toe of the buttress extending from the middle of Coke Wall, around 200m right of the The People's Republic of Vermont (7 pitches, 5.12-; see note below). Day one was eye-opening. After we navigated the 30-minute approach from Oak Creek trailhead and arrived at the base of a face with three bolts leading to a right-arching crack, I racked up, pulled on, and got shut down. The intro 5.12 moves were a rough warmup: The holds were sandy and the feet nonexistent.

I onsighted the 5.11 crack above, and Jason followed, remarking, "Damn, that was hard." We arrived beneath the third pitch, one of the route's cruxes. The overhanging face led to a shallow thin corner and a bulge guarding the upper wall. I cast off and promptly fell at the first crux. Bolts at the start added comfort, but the second crux was protected by a small wire in soft rock. I sweat through it and fell at yet a third crux. My heart pounded through the runout to the anchor. With little time left, we lowered down, cleaning holds and dialing gear beta as we descended. This was going to be difficult.

Over the next five days, we projected pitches, updated 10-year-old hardware, and started making some promising links. I even sent pitch three, and we added another bolt to take the sting out of its final runout. Jason was frustrated: The cruxes revolve around small tips locks with bad feet, and his meaty fingers didn't fit. The overall style is insecure: Sloping holds, bad feet, and small cams in soft rock make even the easier climbing rather tenuous. On pitch seven, the Flakes of Wrath, 5.11 steep crimps and jugs weave up an overhanging headwall; the soft, wafer-thin flakes can explode at any time. In this period, we never got higher than pitch eight.

Jason and I passed the downtime between attempts shit-talking, eating good food, and sifting through life's idiosyncrasies. These are the times I cherish, but I could tell Jason was thinking about the route. The thought that he might not be able to do it was wearing on him: He'd spent many weeks of manual labor to find, rig, and develop this decade-old dream. I was grateful just to be there. I'd never tried to develop or free a new route of this size, and Jason taught me how to break it down. I had to have patience. He had thought about this for years; I'd been there for six days.

The weather for October 30 looked good, so we prepared for a full attempt.

**Racking up at the first pitch, I was calm.** Left hand on small crimp, right foot to a minuscule edge, lunge. Cross through small pods. Finish on the crack. Sent! Jason followed, fell, and pulled through. **Pitch two** went down easy, but my nerves were buzzing for pitch three. I breathed through the first crux and, balancing on sloped footholds, stretched to put in the key small nut. Cursing, I realized the wire was bent and just kept climbing without placing the nut. Embracing the fear, I caught the last small crimp

with my fingernails and willed my fingers to curl in. Pitches four through six fell next. I then sent Flakes of Wrath, but Jason broke a crimp while following and fell. He then linked pitches eight and nine.

At the base of pitch 11, my confidence waned. I was tired, and the stacked sloping bulges, resembling melting ice cream cones, looked heinous. I crept through, questing between sparse gear and bolts. It was a journey of a pitch, insecure the whole way. I hit the anchor with a huge sigh of relief. Jason took the last pitch, dancing through 5.11 crimps. At the top, we hugged and celebrated.

Over dinner that night, Jason thanked me for helping him write the final chapter. He may not have sent it all, but we had sent—the mentor and the mentee. The send mattered less than the story. I'm eternally grateful for what I learned on the trip. We decided to name the route I Left My Wallet in La Sedona (1,200', 12 pitches, IV 5.12), part musical homage (see "I Left My Wallet in El Segundo," by A Tribe Called Quest), part reference to the character of the journey. We had gone back to finish what Jason left behind, and to paraphrase Phife Dawg, "We had to get it, had-had to get it."

### —Charlie Faust

**The People's Republic of Vermont:** In 2007, Sedona climbers Caleb Belford, Jason Boyd, with help from a number of other locals, established the seven-pitch People's Republic of Vermont (PRVT) on the Coke Wall over 20 days. Though Belford and Boyd hoped to free it one day, they graciously opened it up to other climbers, and in 2014, Zach Harrison and Jeff Snyder made the first free ascent at 5.12-.

## Images



I Left My Wallet in La Sedona (1,200', 12 pitches, IV 5.12), Coke Wall, Oak Creek Canyon, Sedona, Arizona.



I Left My Wallet in La Sedona (1,200', 12 pitches, IV 5.12), Coke Wall, Oak Creek Canyon, Sedona, Arizona.



Charlie Faust climbing the bouldery 5.12 first pitch of I Left My Wallet in La Sedona (1,200', 12 pitches, IV 5.12) in Oak Creek Canyon. The route was a 10-year project of Jason Nelson before he and Charlie Faust finished it in October 2021.



Charlie Faust doing battle with pitch three, one of the cruxes on I Left My Wallet in La Sedona (1,200', 12 pitches, IV 5.12), Coke Wall, Canyon, Sedona, Arizona.





Charlie Faust following the airy fourth pitch of I Left My Wallet in La Sedona (1,200', 12 pitches, IV 5.12) on the Coke Wall, near Sedona, Arizona.



Charlie Faust leading out on the seventh pitch of I Left My Wallet in La Sedona (1,200', 12 pitches, IV 5.12).



Jason Nelson on the 12th and final pitch of I Left My Wallet in La Sedona (IV 5.12), a route that he had

been working to free, on and off, for over a decade before completing it in October 2021 with Charlie Faust.

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