



AAC Publications

Mt. Wilson, Horseshoe Wall, Fin Baggin' Society

Nevada, Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area

Danny Urioste starting the squeeze chimney of pitch three of Fin Baggin' Society. Photo by Tom Ashley
Geoff “Madman” Conley was like an uncle to me while growing up in the morally depraved city of Las Vegas. He and my dad, Jorge, would undertake adventures on huge swaths of crispy, untouched sandstone in Red Rock National Conservation Area.

I remember vividly the story of Geoff and his good partner, John Grinder, going for the first ascent of the Fin, the prominent overhanging panel of rock on the left side of Mt. Wilson’s Horseshoe Wall, in 1986. After climbing over 2,000 feet of awesome, rugged desert rock, they bailed several pitches from the top of the formation when they couldn’t see obviously protectable terrain above. They left Tricams and some other old gear, and retreated back down to Sherwood Forest, the tree-covered ledge about halfway up the wall.

Fast-forward several decades. Sam Boyce and I were contemplating a possible line that would finish off Geoff and John’s route, Madman’s Fin Baggin’ Society, and finally put to rest one of Red Rock’s longest unfinished projects. I recruited Tom Ashley, an eclectic geohydrologist and masochist extraordinaire, to join us on the Fin in May 2024.

In the spring heat of the Mojave Desert, we set off to Sherwood Forest via the long, weaving approach to Lady Wilson’s Cleavage. We started climbing to the left of Dogma (Lewis-McCray, 2000) and climbed the first two pitches of Willy’s Wild Wide (1,000’, 9 pitches, V 5.10+)—a route Tom and I established in 2023—then dove into a big, gaping chimney system. We climbed several great crack pitches, including a 65-meter, intensely varnished chimney with little to no protection. I ventured up this pitch with the whole kitchen sink, including number 6 and 7 cams, all of which ended up being useless. (From discussions with Madman, we believe the route we followed was mostly to the right of the original 1986 line.)

From here, a couple more pitches led up to the headwall of the Fin, where Sam took the sharp end and quested up the crux pitch, a 5.11- mix of face and crack climbing. He found spaced, but bomber, gear along the way. Two more pitches of fun, crispy questing brought us to the top of the Fin. I couldn’t wait to tell Madman about it.

Fin Baggin’ Society (8 pitches, IV 5.11- PG-13) is a spectacular gem of desert chossaneering. If one started with Salty Cracks (11 pitches, IV 5.10a), an elegant line that Sam and I established several months after Fin Baggin’ Society, starting on the lower apron of Mt. Wilson and ending on Sherwood Forest, it would make for a fantastic 2,000-foot, grade V outing. The new route is best attempted by those who have already climbed the other obscure lines on Mt. Wilson. A good head for runouts is advised.

—Danny Urioste

Images



Danny Urioste about to lead the third-pitch chimney on Fin Baggin' Society (8 pitches, IV 5.11- PG-13), on the Horseshoe Wall, Mt. Wilson, Red Rock National Conservation Area, Nevada.



Danny Urioste starting the squeeze chimney of pitch three of Fin Baggin' Society.



Sam Boyce leading the crux pitch on the Fin headwall during the first ascent of Fin Baggin' Society.



The Horseshoe Wall on Mt. Wilson. Fin Baggin' Society ascends the broad pillar and headwall on the left side.

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