

# 66

MOUNTAIN

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# STATES OF THE ART

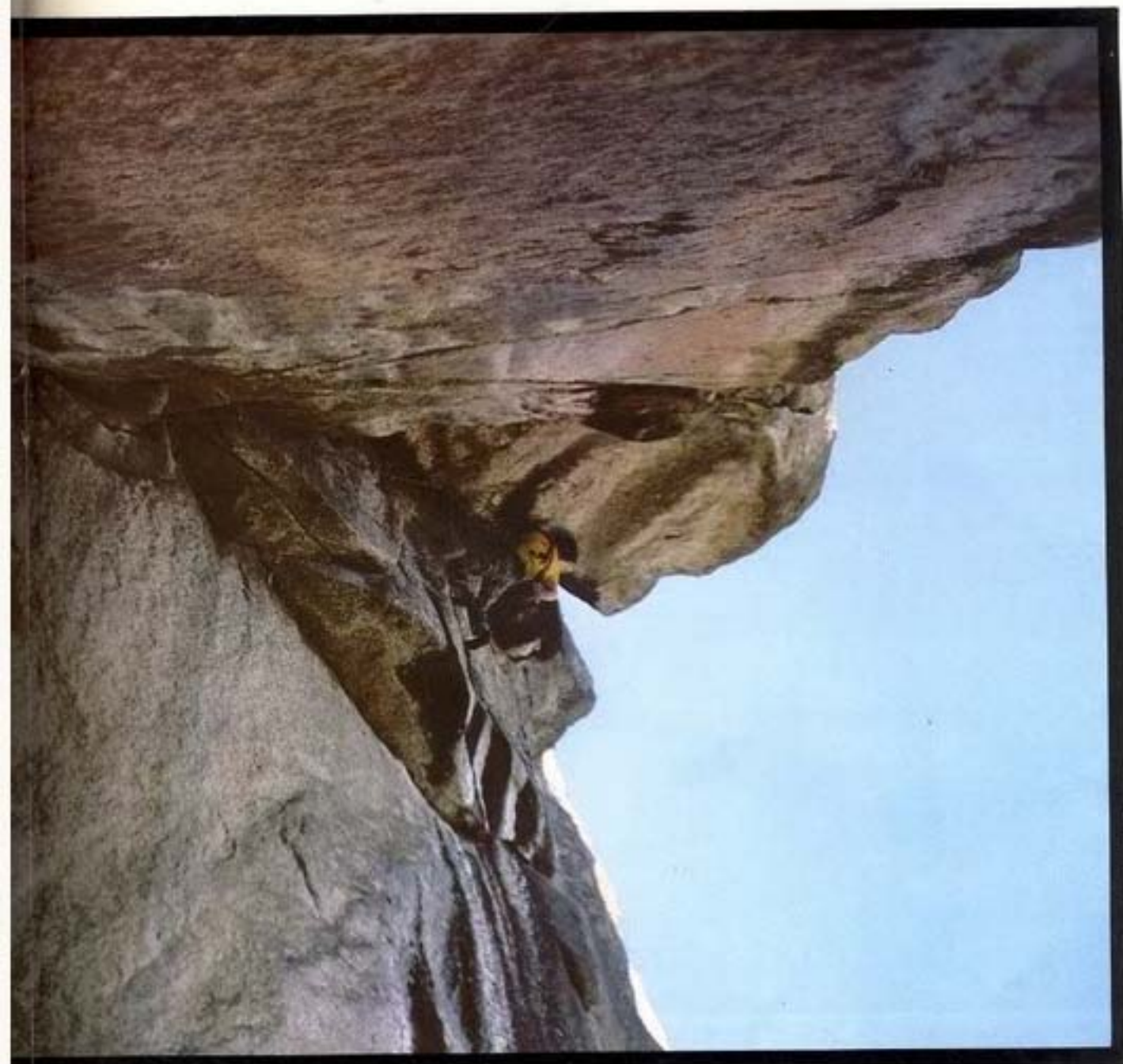
by Mark Hudon  
& Max Jones



Max Jones (left) and Mark Hudon. Photo: Ed Webster.



Twenty years ago hard free climbs were rare in America. Even ten years ago you could be forgiven for thinking that American climbing was all about Big Wall Aid Climbs. Now there can be no doubt that the growing numbers of American free rock climbers are the equal of any. Mark Hudon and Max Jones recently spent a year travelling the USA doing the hard climbs, and adding a few of their own, in a two part photo essay they review these climbs.



**The Beast (5.11)** Photo: Mark Hudon. On the first ascent Jim Dunn followed the corner. On this, the 3rd ascent, the leader stepped right (desperate) and lay backed the thin flake. After the crux a horizontal off-width has to be climbed. Cathedral Ledge, New Hampshire.

ALONG WITH THE RISE in popularity of rock climbing in the United States, the standard of difficulty has risen. It now lies in the esoteric region of 5.12.

It's quite difficult to describe what the rating 5.12 represents, but with these photographs and this article we'll try.

#### Length

In Yosemite, if you want to make a pitch harder, all you need to do is make it longer. When many 5.9 moves were climbed in a row, the pitch appeared to be harder than what had been considered as traditional 5.9; therefore 5.10 came about. No moves of 5.10 had yet been climbed, but a pitch of considerable length and strenuousity would be rated 5.10.

It was the same with 5.11; most 5.11s have long sections of 5.10. (Think about it. Butterballs has no individual move harder than 5.10.)

Now, pitches of sustained 5.11 have been climbed and are called 5.12 (for example, Crimson Cringe in Yosemite and Super Crack in the Shawangunks).

#### Sustained technicality

Good examples are the Phoenix (Yosemite), Babylon (Donner Summit, California) and Hooker's Haven (Sugar Loaf, California).

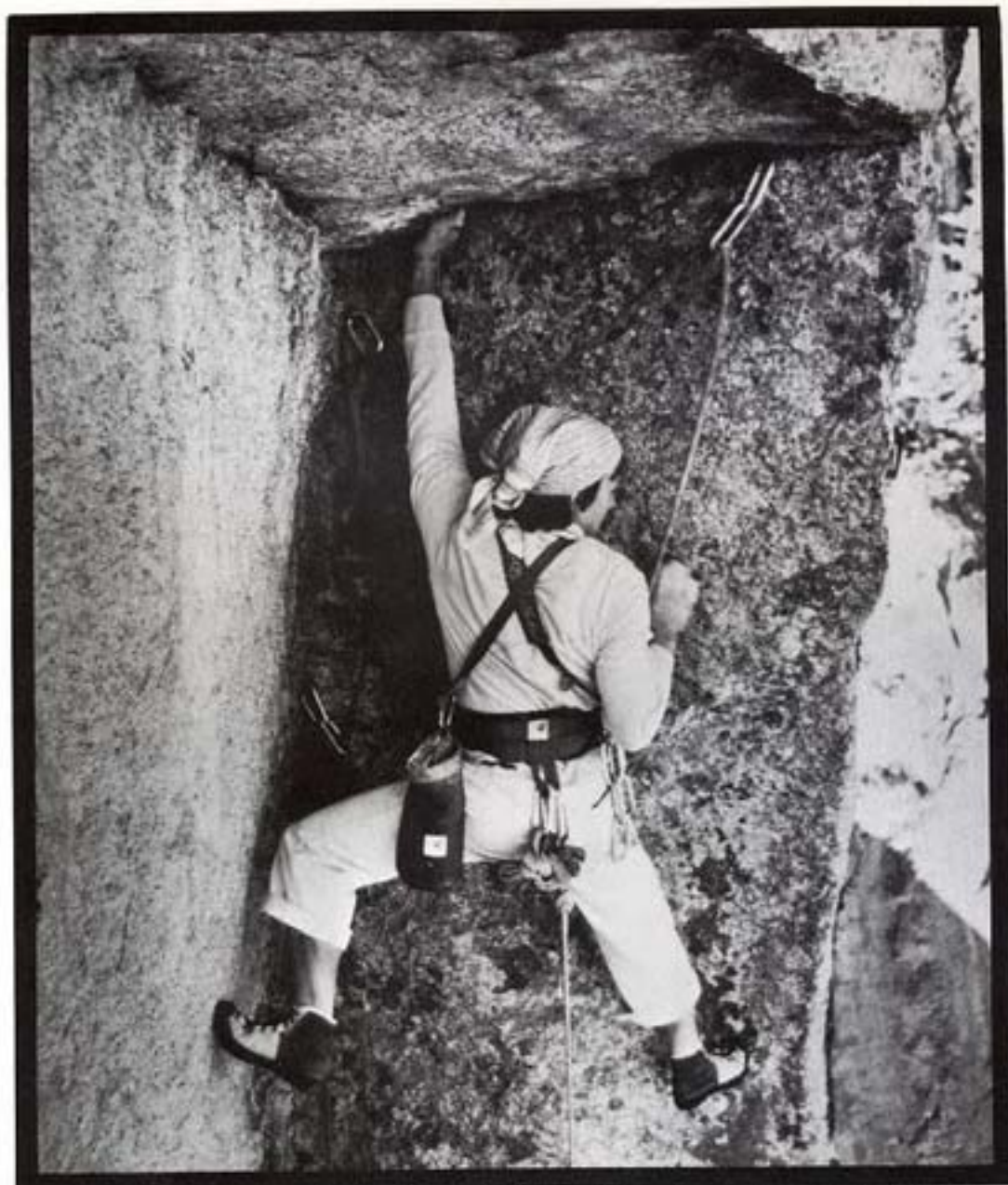
Although these climbs range in length from 40 to 120ft, the moves are complex and strenuous for the entire distance. The Phoenix and Babylon have complex sections about 40ft off the ground.

On the Phoenix, the crack turns sideways and

must be jammed palms-up in a certain sequence. It took us most of a day to figure this out, and then another day to climb it. This section is only 10ft long, but has 40ft of 5.11 climbing into it, and is followed by an overhanging 5.11 thin crack!

On Babylon, the crack disappears and a rounded edge must be palmed up an overhanging wall to where the crack widens to fingerlocks again. Although these are technically the hardest moves on the climbs, the crux, as with most 5.12s, is reaching a no-hands rest (usually at the top of the climb).

Hooker's Haven, one of the best 5.12s we have climbed, is a 30ft sequence with bouldering moves. Each move must be done right the first time in order to reach and complete the next move.



**The Prow (5.11+), Cathedral Ledge, New Hampshire.** Mark Hudon is on the crux pitch during the third ascent of this route. He has to move slightly down and lay away on the arete to regain the crack above the roof. At 5ft 2ins his height is no advantage in making the moves! Photo: Ed Webster.

#### Rock gymnastics

Climbing 5.12 and harder routes is actually a sub-sport of rock climbing. It has lost all relation to classic mountaineering. Pitches of this difficulty are not yet being led and followed regularly in one push. The routes go beyond that - when one gets the least bit tired or sloppy, one just falls off!

Most 5.12s, like a gymnastic routine, require many attempts to wire the moves, memorise the sequence, and then put all the pieces together. The rock is our apparatus; climbing it is our routine.

#### The human variable

Don't laugh. One man's meat is another man's poison. We are approaching the limit of human

ability. (Sure, they all said that! But wait; read on.)

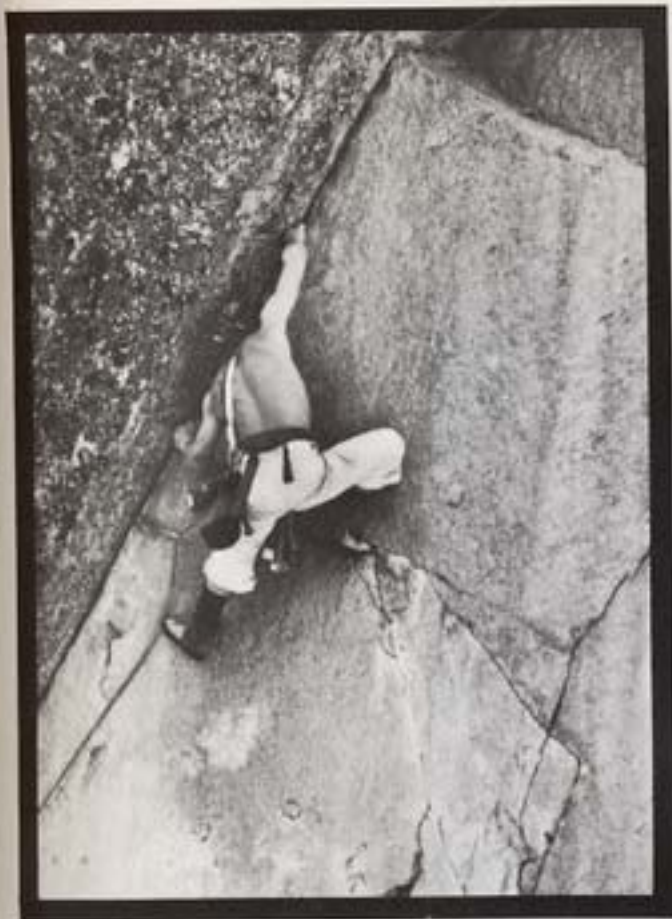
The finger, hand, arm and foot size, along with height and weight, are all playing a bigger part in how hard a route is for the individual.

Tales of Power and the Crimson Cringe are definitely easier for someone with small hands. Foops in The Gunks is 5.11+, or 5.12 for anyone shorter than 5ft 4in - and if you are that short you might as well cross Psycho in Eldorado Canyon off your list. But, thank God, we challenge anyone taller than 5ft 8in to climb White Eye on Cathedral Ledge in New Hampshire.

As we move on to 5.13 (and be warned - it's coming), body size will become more important.

And when 5.14 arrives, you will have to be made just so - or sorry, you can forget it!

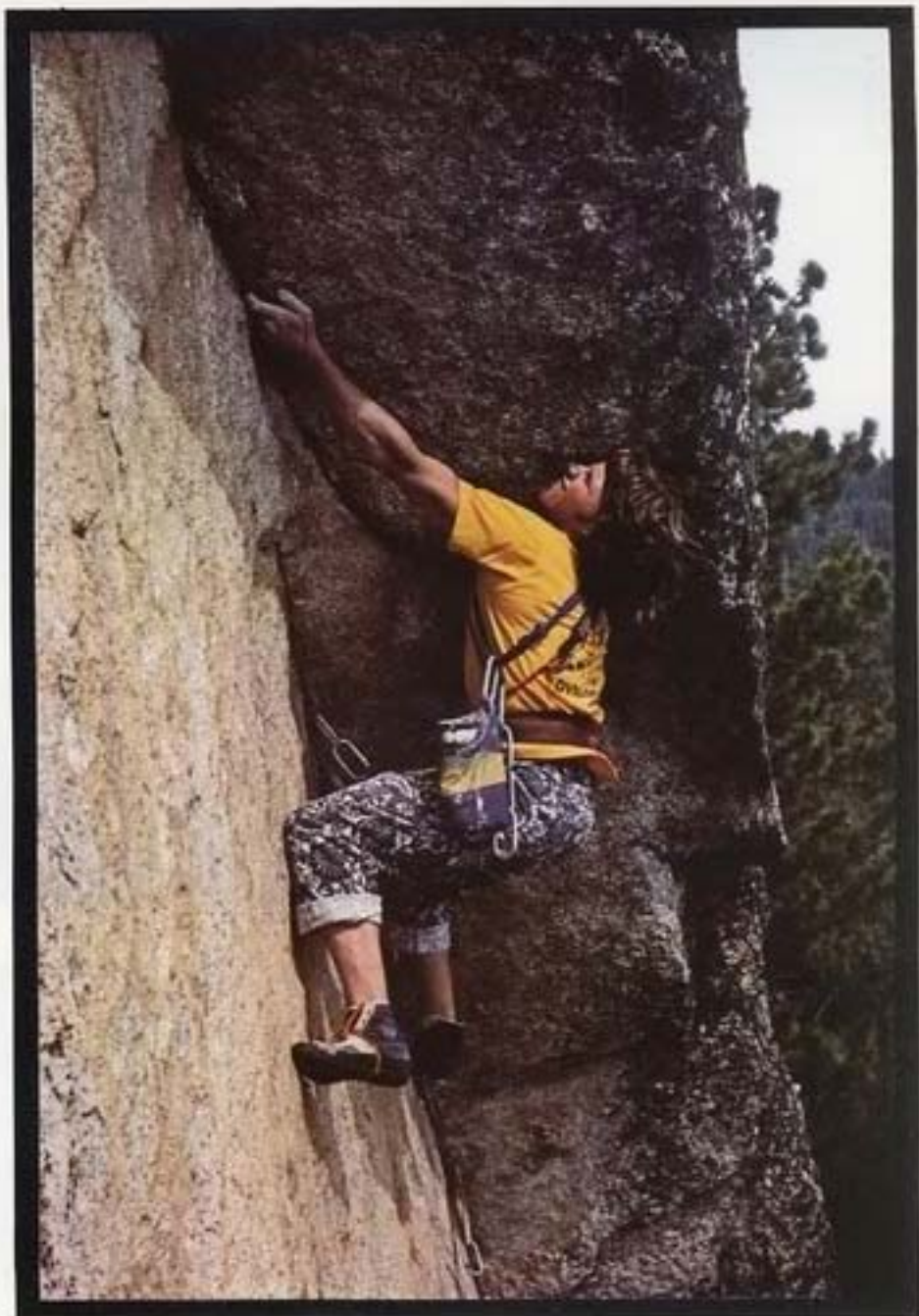




**Hangdog (5.12) Yosemite.** Mark Hudon on the 3rd ascent, photos by Max Jones. The start, not shown, is a desperate overhanging layback. Then it is possible to "step off left to a 'Thank God' rest ledge". (Left) The next section is 5.11 and leads to the ledge in the groove where a rest can be taken below the final section which is the technical crux.



**White Eye (5.12) Cathedral Ledge, New Hampshire.** Mark Hudon (5'2½") on the first free ascent. This "boulder problem" pitch was attempted by Jim Dunn with a mountain boot over his EB's for reach. Later on this attempt Mark took a 25ft fall from the last moves and pulled out three nuts. Photos: Ed Webster.

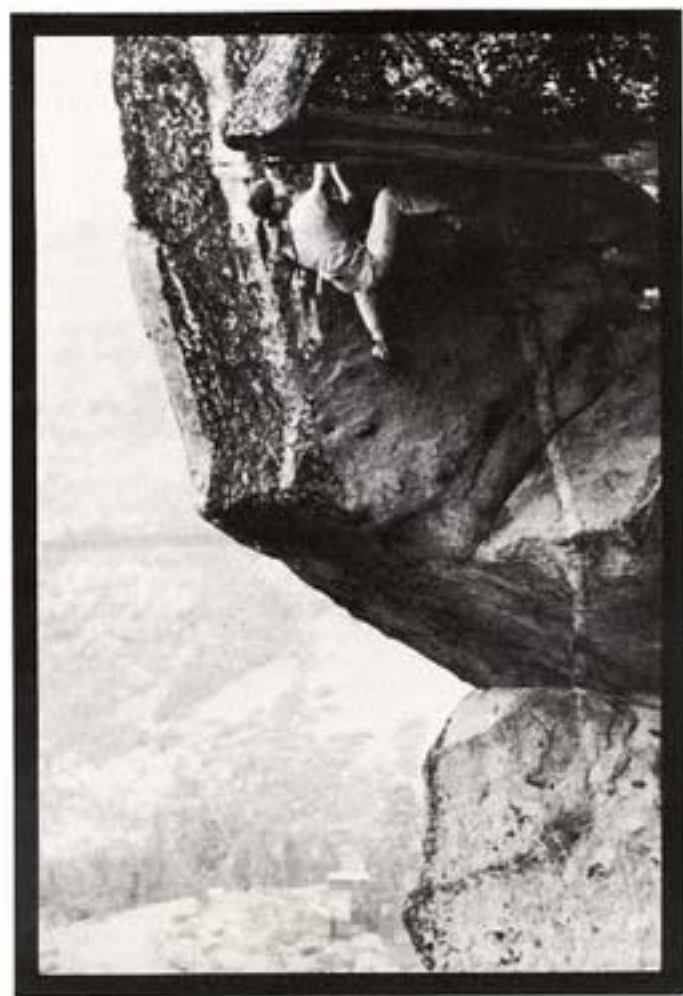


**Hooker's Haven (5.12) Sugarloaf, California.** Max Jones (colour) and Mark Hudon making the complex series of moves up the undercut arch on an 85 degree wall on the first free ascent. After this crux pitch two more very enjoyable pitches (5.10c and 5.9) lead to the top.









**Foops** (5.10c), Shawangunks. The two photos above show this classic roof pitch being done free by the 'short man's variant'. Max Jones on the left and Mark Hudon on the right. Photo: Gene Vallee. The lower photos show, left to right, Dale Bard on **Slipstream** (5.11c), Donner Summit, California; Max Jones on the classic Colorado desparacy, **The Wisdom** (5.11) and Aug Kline on **Sky Pilot** (5.11c), Donner Summit. All uncredited photos in this essay are from the authors' collection.