

## So Many Climbs, So Little Time

by Greg Aitkenhead I always have a hard time packing for a climbing trip to St. George. I never know what to bring, and usually just throw in the whole lot--well, beside the aid gear. My indecisiveness stems from a need to pick between five different rock types, route lengths ranging from two-move boulder problems to ten pitch trad climbs, and styles from ultra safe clip-ups to knob slinging nightmares. A recent cover of Climbing Magazine gets right to the heart of my dilemma, proclaiming, "800 Routes, All Grades, All Seasons--St. George, Utah." It's almost too much. You might be thinking, "Feature in Climbing Magazine? I'd better throw in a lawn chair for the cliff-side queue." The possibility of crowding exists, especially if you finish up a perfect spring afternoon with a burn at Chuckawalla Wall, but I've never had a problem finding solitude. Getting to know the area's crags, especially the differing cliff aspects, elevations, and rock types (important since Dixie's abundant sandstone becomes unclimbable when wet), will allow you to cope with the vagaries of weather, the whimsy of your belayer, and the slight possibility of crowding. Of all the climbing areas in St. George, Snow Canyon State Park deserves the most respect. Route development here started in the foggy depths of time when climbers weren't afraid to wear painter's pants or run it out on soft stone. Once considered Southern Utah's "soft rock crucible," Snow Canyon was the nursery where local climbers developed their physical abilities, honed their mental edge, and decided ethical debates; factors that set the stage for future route development in the region. Like many areas in the country where old school grades apply, come prepared to climb a few ticks below your normal limit as you pad up sugary slabs, pull on creaky varnish plates, and pray over funky fixed pins.

The crag awaits - Nicole Morganthau Although Snow Canyon boasts a great many modern bolted lines, most of today's visitors choose venues like Chuckawalla Wall and the Black Rocks. The short supply of routes won't keep you entertained for long, but the convenient location, ample parking, and sub five minute approaches put these spots on the "must do" list. The Green Valley Gap, on the southwestern edge of town, offers a similar range of climbs, with more top roping potential, and a few mini classics. Other Snow Canyon outliers include Turtle Wall, Cougar Cliffs, Prophecy Wall, and Crawdad Canyon--the latter two being personal favorites; Prophecy for moderate multi-pitch sport climbs in a remote setting, and Crawdad, a unique pay-to-climb park, for well protected clip-ups on bullet hard basalt. No one denies the value of these urban crags, but as far as destinations go, St. George might rank somewhere near "Podunk" if not for the fantastic sport climbs lurking in the limestone hills twenty minutes southwest of town. Home to almost two hundreds bolted routes of all grades, found at elevations from 3,200 to 6,300 feet, on walls facing every conceivable direction, the limestone cliffs of the Utah Hills, Welcome Springs, and Woodbury Crags areas offer year-round thrills in a tranquil high desert setting. Climbing at the Utah Hills takes place on small crags poking here and there out of the scrub. Routes from four bolt mini-desperates at the Gorilla Cliffs and the Simian Complex, to seventeen bolt rope stretching moderates at the Soul Asylum (home to some of the most enjoyable sub-5.11 routes anywhere in the southland), dot every viable chunk of rock. One grand cliff looms above them all. As guidebook writer Todd Goss declares, "rising from this bounty of stone the Diamond dominates the landscape like a crown jewel surrounded by chips and splinters." No matter which crag you choose, old mining roads make access a snap, with the heinous approach to the Diamond a notable exception. The nearby Welcome Springs and Woodbury Crags areas offer fewer climbs than the Utah Hills, but quality lines and beautiful surroundings make this a worthy option for those seeking solitude. Welcome Springs consists of the Sumo Wall, the Wailing Wall, and the Cathedral, which offer a diverse collection of routes from pumpy pocket fests to cheese grater slab lines, all accessed by hiking or four wheeling along a beautiful creek bed. The Woodbury crags sit at a lower elevation, are much easier to access, and rank as the region's most serene winter hang. Kelly's Rock sports short routes starting at 5.8, including what might arguably be the best 5.11 in the state, while the roadside routes of the Black in Tan await climbers who consider 5.11's a warm-up. Both areas lie on pristine desert lands just outside the Woodbury Desert Study Area, so make it a point to keep climbing and camping impacts here, as on all public lands, to an absolute minimum.