

Cimarron Canyon Crag

Excerpted from *Rock Climbing New Mexico*, by Dennis R. Jackson, Globe Pequot Press: Guilford, CT, 2006.

Overview

Cimarron Canyon slashes through the Sangre de Cristo Range between the towns of Eagle Nest and Cimarron. The Palisades in the central part of the canyon are the biggest cliffs here, unfortunately Park personnel discourage climbing on these beautiful formations because of poor rock quality. But two fine sandstone crags--Maverick Cliff and Probe 1 Cliff--hide just down the canyon near Maverick Campground. These small, fun cliffs are worth a stop if you're traveling through the canyon. The area is quiet, secluded, and low-key since it's somewhat remote. A climbing visit is almost always a solitary experience. Hiking, mountain biking, fishing in the lovely Cimarron River, and bouldering are added inducements to visit.

The cliffs, lying on opposite sides of the canyon, are composed of metamorphosed sandstone, a geologic anomaly in this area which features lots of softer sandstone and Dacite porphyry, the other main formations in the canyon. Maverick and Probe 1 are the only two climbing sites developed on the sandstones thus far. Other cliffs lie on the higher ridges but these are on Philmont Scout Ranch property and are off limits to the general public. A small overhanging cliff with several bolted routes is also on private property just east of Probe 1 above the highway and is generally closed to climbing.

Maverick Cliff is a hidden, south-facing cliff north of Maverick Campground. The climbing area, part of a longer broken cliff band, is a 50-foot-high cliff divided into two sectors with The Block Head, a huge detached block, separating the two. The resistant sandstone is very climbable with lots of jugs and in-cut edges. Slabs with easy beginner routes and steep jug hauls with occasional thin moves characterize the climbing.

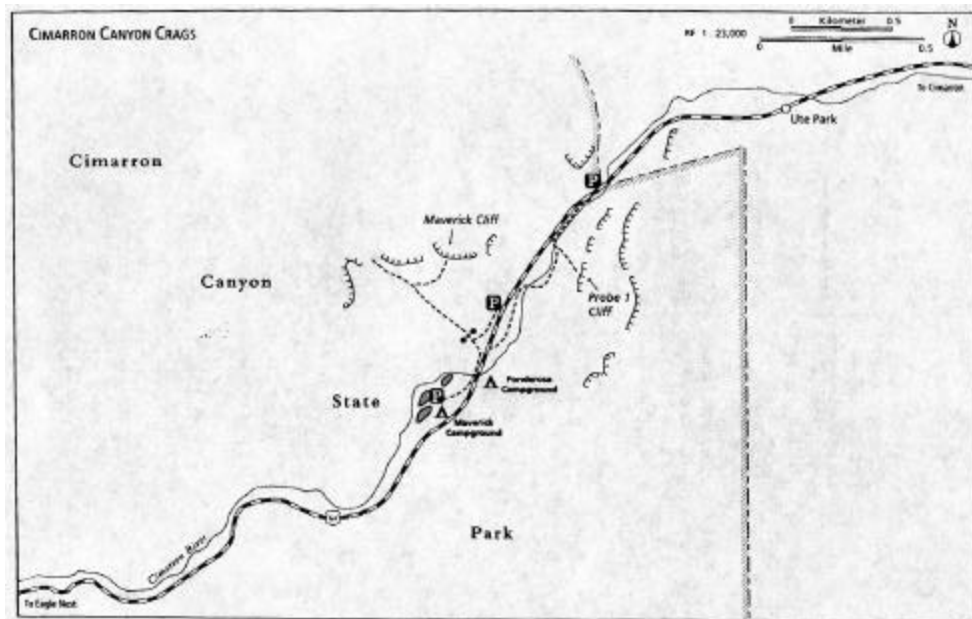
Maverick's climbs, ranging in difficulty from 5.4 to 5.11, are well bolted for safety. All the routes either have or share 2-bolt lowering or rappel anchors. The first bolt is sometimes high although the climbing is generally easy getting to it. If you have any doubts about your safety reaching the first bolt then ask for a spot and climb carefully or turn over that end of the rope to someone else. Setting up top-ropes from the cliff top is possible but use extra attention or a belay for safety. The free-standing Block Head must be led, and indeed, this is the best way to set up top-ropes on all the climbs.

Probe 1 Cliff is the best section of the long cliff band on the south side of the canyon opposite a roadside spring. Probe 1 is a 45-foot-high, north-facing cliff ascended by a selection of moderate sport routes. Small, crisp edges on the vertical face characterize the harder climbs here, while the easier routes have lots of good edges and chickenheads. All the routes are protected by bolts with 2-bolt lowering anchors. The first bolts are above a large ledge 15 feet off the ground. Use caution and climb carefully to the ledge to clip the first bolt. It's best to lead the routes in order to set up top-ropes.

A simple **rack** of eight quickdraws and a 150-foot-long rope is sufficient for all routes. A small rack of Stoppers, TCUs, and small Friends is an option for additional protection on some climbs on Maverick Cliff. **Descent** off all routes is by lowering or rappelling from established anchors.

Climbing History: The Cimarron Canyon cliffs intrigued climbers since at least the 1970s. The main climbing focus was the large, beguiling cliff called The Palisades, located a short distance west of Maverick and Probe 1 alongside U.S. Highway 64. These towering ramparts beg to be climbed but after closer inspection they are less attractive for climbing. It's steep crack systems are often loose and discontinuous, and both protection and retreat options are inadequate. Permission to climb on the cliffs may be possible after a permit process that involves a trip to the Fish and Game office in Raton and jumping through more hoops than you care to do.

Since there is a decided lack of climbing possibilities in this part of New Mexico, a few climbers searched for more climbable rock in the fall and winter of 2000-01. Probe 1 Cliff was the first area established, which led to the discovery and subsequent development of Maverick Cliff. Both cliffs were developed by Dennis Jackson and Stewart Green. *Roadblock*, (5.11a/b) Maverick's hardest route was put up by Jay Foley in the summer of 2004. There may be a few lines left to do, but the area is considered fully developed. Today the crags are often visited during the summer by climbing instructors from adjoining Philmont Scout Ranch but languish in obscurity for the rest of the year.



Trip Planning Information

Area Description: Short moderate sport routes on two 50-foot-high metamorphosed sandstone cliffs.

Location: Northern New Mexico. The cliffs are in Cimarron Canyon State Park between Eagle Nest and Cimarron.

Camping: No primitive camping in the immediate area. Developed campsites are found at nearby Maverick and Ponderosa campgrounds. Both are fee areas with time restrictions. Other campgrounds are located in the canyon.

Climbing season: Spring, summer, and fall. It is possible to climb on mild winter days. When it's cooler, Maverick is the best choice since it's sunny for most of the day. Probe 1, with lots of shade, is the crag of choice on warm days.

Restrictions and Access Issues: The crags are under the joint jurisdiction of Cimarron Canyon State Park and the Collin Neblit Wildlife Area. No restrictions are presently in place. A permit to climb on The Palisades is required. Check in at the park headquarters in Tolby Campground on the western end of the park to get started on this involved process. These are the first crags in Cimarron Canyon State Park that will see increased climber visitation. Our actions will likely determine any changes in restrictions and access issues

Guidebook: None.

Nearby mountain shops, guide services and gyms: The nearest shops and guide service are in Taos about 35 miles west. No gyms in the area.

Services: Ute Park, a short distance east, offers limited services. All services are in Eagle Nest and Cimarron.

Emergency services: Call 911 or notify state park personnel at Tolby Campground near the west entrance to the park.

Nearby climbing areas: Sugarite Canyon State Park is 60 miles east near Raton. Lots of climbing is found in the Taos area 35 miles to the west, including Dead Cholla Wall, Bat Cave, John's Wall, and Comales Canyon. Climbing is found at Philmont Scout Ranch but it's private property and closed to all public use and visitation.

Nearby attractions: Cimarron Canyon offers scenic beauty, fishing, hiking trails, and mountain bike trails. The Pine Ridge store in Ute Park has free maps of the hiking trails in the area. Otherwise Cimarron lies on the old Santa Fe Trail and has a rich history. Taos offers lots of visitor attractions including Taos Pueblo, Rancho de Taos, and many museums and art galleries.

Maverick Cliff

Maverick is a south-facing cliff on the north side of the canyon near Maverick Campground.

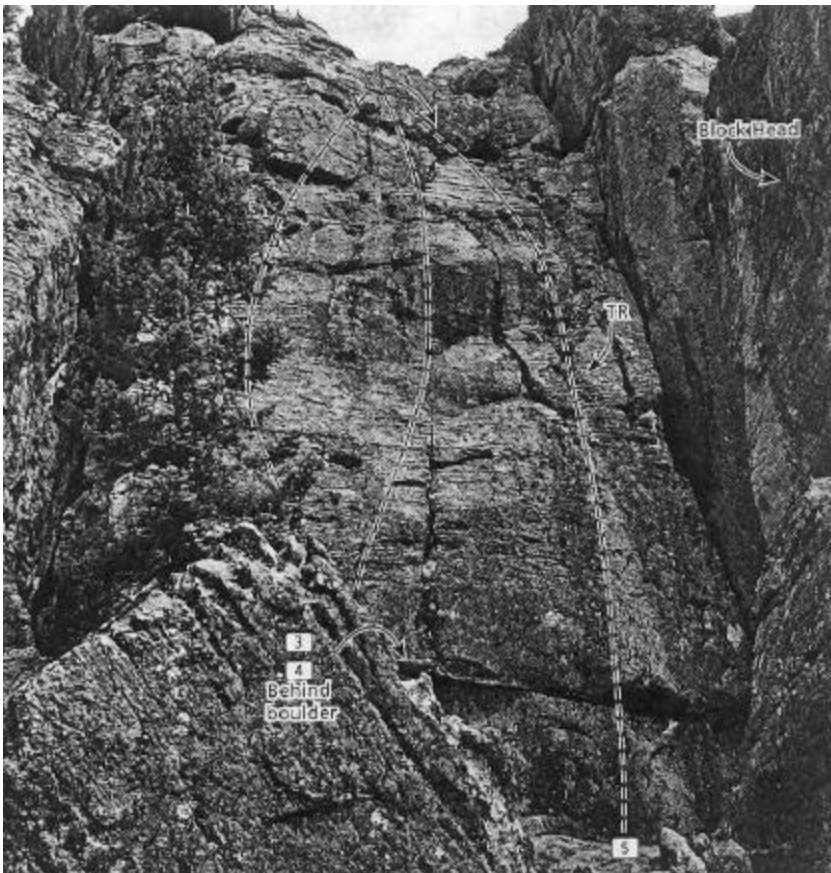
Finding the cliff: Maverick Cliff is located in Cimarron Canyon State Park about 12 miles west of the town of Cimarron. From Interstate 25 and Raton to the east, drive west on US Highway 64 through the town of Cimarron to the Cimarron State Park boundary. A short distance into the park is a park sign and a natural spring on the right. This is a good place to fill water bottles. Continue 0.3 mile past the spring to a small dirt pull-out on the right. Park here and walk up the dirt road paralleling the highway, through a metal gate, then uphill for about 600 yards. Turn right at the first road encountered. A sign here says "No Dumping." Walk about 100 yards east to a clearing then turn left (north) into the trees and locate a cairn-marked trail that heads right then up to the hidden cliff. The trail ends below routes #12 to #14. Allow 10 minutes for this short approach hike.

If you're coming from Taos and the west on US 64, drive through the canyon, passing The Palisade, to near the parks' eastern end and locate the pullout described above which is about 0.3 of a mile east of Maverick Campground. You can also park at Maverick Campground and walk along the highway edge to the dirt road.

Routes are described from left to right when facing the cliff.



1. **Este Es** (5.10b) Highly recommended but sometimes sandy. This is the farthest left climb at Maverick. Start 90' left of The Block Head next to a large pine tree. Pull up edges on a slight bulge to a slab finish. 3 bolts to 2-bolt anchor.



2. **Fred's Friendly Face** (5.4) Excellent beginner wall. Find lots of variations from the anchors plus a more difficult top-rope problem to the right up a vertical wall on the left side of a deep chimney. 2 bolts to 2-bolt anchor.

3. **The Witch** (5.6) Located on the slab right of the deep chimney that separates two slabs. Go left at first bolt. 2 bolts to 2-bolt anchor.

4. **The Ditch** (5.6) Go up and right at the first bolt. 2 bolts to 2-bolt anchor.

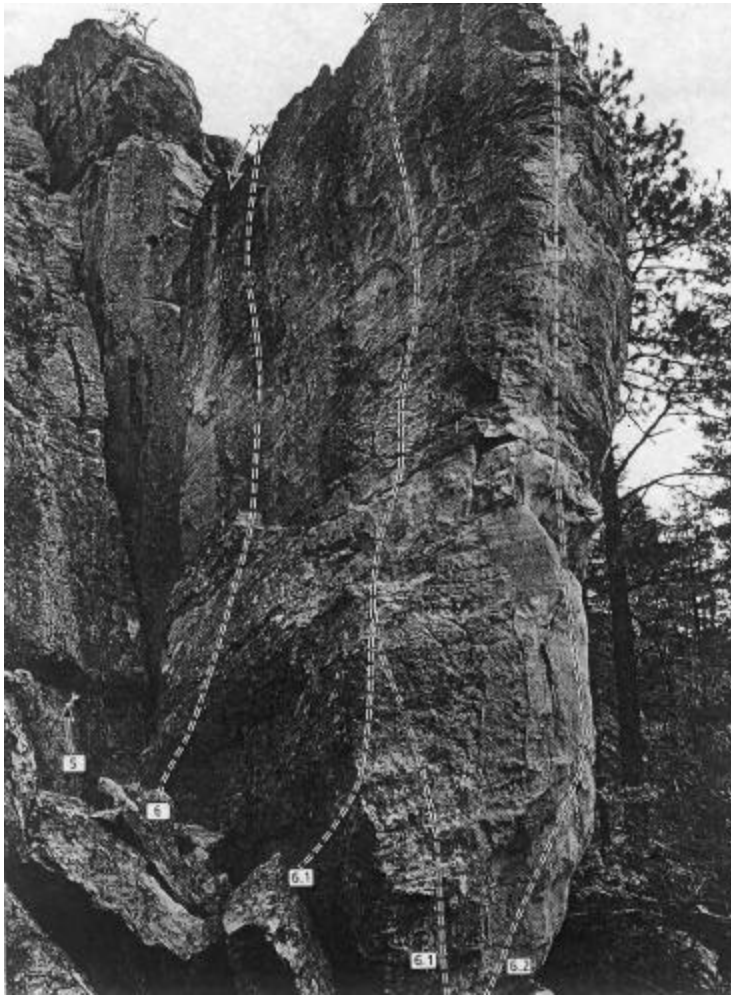
5. **The Bitch** (5.9) Top-rope problem on the tricky face left of a fist/off-width crack in a left-facing corner directly behind The Block Head.

6. **Reach for the Sky** (5.9) Excellent. Located on the west face of The Block Head. Edge up a shallow flake system. 2 bolts to 2-bolt chain anchor.

7. **Block Head** (5.9) Highly recommended. The right-hand route on the east face of The Block Head. Perfect face climbing up the short face. 5 bolts to 2-bolt chain anchor.

8. **Spinal Tap** (5.8) Another good one. The left route on the east face of The Block Head. 2 bolts to 2-bolt anchor.

8a. **Roadblock** (5.11a/b) The areas hardest route. Located on the narrow south face of The Block Head. 4 bolts to 2-bolt anchor.



9. **Jugarama #3** (5.7) Recommended. Located on the left side of the main wall. 4 bolts to 2-bolt anchor.

10. **Jugarama #2** (5.8) A must-do climb! Edges and jugs up the steep face. A couple cams ease the run-outs. 2 bolts to 2-bolt anchor.

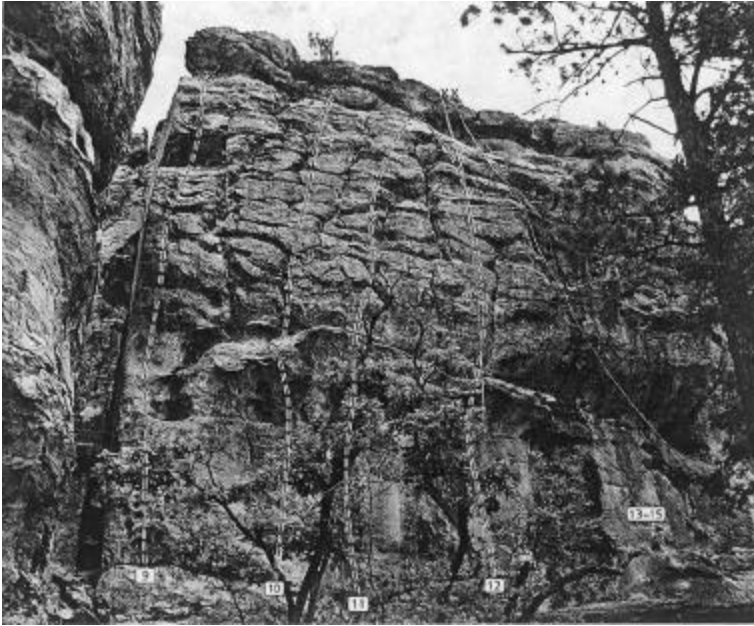
11. **Jugarama #1** (5.9) Another great climb. The cliff's first route. Start up a thin crack then over an overhang to easier climbing above. Gear placements possible in upper section. 2 bolts to 2-bolt anchor.

12. **A Stiff Upper Lip** (5.10b) A muscular route. Start up a short curving crack and pull over the big overhang onto a stance. Finish up some thoughtful climbing above. 3 bolts to 2-bolt anchor.

13. **Head 'em Up** (5.8) Excellent. Located about 90 feet right of *A Stiff Upper Lip*. Climb jugs up gradually steeping rock to anchors just below the top. 5 bolts to 2-bolt anchor.

14. **Move 'em Out** (5.10a) Area classic. Steep jug hauling to a steep difficult finish. 4 bolts to 2-bolt anchor.

15. **Rawhide** (5.7) Fun climbing. Climb an attractive laid back slab right of a large crack. Lots of variations possible. 3 bolts to 2-bolt anchor.



Probe 1 Cliff

Probe 1 is a very good section of north-facing cliff on the band south of the highway and river. All the routes are up to 45 feet long.

Finding the cliff: Probe 1 is on the south side of the canyon. There are two ways to reach the cliff.

The shortest approach is from the parking area opposite the roadside spring near the east end of the canyon. Hike west for about 500 feet along a fisherman's trail to where it is possible to see a power pole across the river. Cross the river by wading (avoid at high water) and locate a faint trail that angles left up the steep bank just past the power pole. Follow the trail for about 300 feet and then bend right on a path that heads toward a large gully. Continue up the right side of the gully and a slope to the cliff base. The path is marked with cairns and easy to follow. The important key is finding the power pole. Hiking time is about 10 minutes.

Alternately you can park 0.3 mile farther west up the highway at the same parking area as for Maverick Cliff. Cross the road and find a faint path heading south across the grassy flats to the Cimarron River. At the river, find a log jam to cross the water and hike down-river (east) for about 900 feet on a fisherman's rail to a power pole next to the trail. Turn right about 30 feet before the pole on a faint trail angling left up the river bank. Follow the directions above to the cliff. Hiking time is about 15 minutes.



Routes are described from left to right.

1. **Circe** (5.7) Begin at the far left side of the face. Easy but run-out climbing leads to a shelf, continue up fun climbing above. 2 bolts to 2-bolt anchor.
2. **Calypso** (5.8) Boulder up to the narrow ledge then edge up the face above. 3 bolts to 2-bolt anchor.
3. **Ulysses** (5.8+) Fun moves. Climb unprotected up the lower face to a narrow ledge. Continue up the steep face left of a crack that splits the face. 3 bolts to 2-bolt anchor.
4. **Dionysus** (5.7) Jam the obvious hand and fist crack up the middle of the face to the top. Either top-rope it or bring some gear.
5. **Priapus** (5.10a) Excellent edge climb up the face right of the crack. Gear placements are possible for the start or you can traverse onto it from the left. 3 bolts to 2-bolt anchor.
6. **Gaia** (5.10a) Another good route. The direct start is run-out and sketchy. It's easier to traverse in from the left. Hidden holds in the crack right of bolt 1 make it easier to clip. 3 bolts to 2-bolt anchor.