

## IN THE LIGHT OF DAY

Phil Requist on his new route *Better Than Life* (5.13c), on a new sandstone crag near Santa Maria, California.

At Owl Tor, a new conglomerate sandstone crag (similar to the Pinnacles) near Santa Maria, California, Phil Requist of Santa Barbara redpointed *Better Than Life* (5.13c), the hardest route in the area and one of the hardest in the state. Requist, known for his skills on plastic, doesn't climb outside much. In fact, his previous hardest rock redpoint was 5.12c, four years ago. The line of *Better Than Life* has seen attempts by several top climbers, who vouch for its difficulty. It is an endurance route, with 38 moves punctuated by one marginal, inverted, heel-hook shakeout. The route took Requist 25 days over six months.

Locals often refer to the climb as "Phil's easy route." Many other lines, when redpointed, will reportedly be much harder.

## Southern Belle: getting a reputation

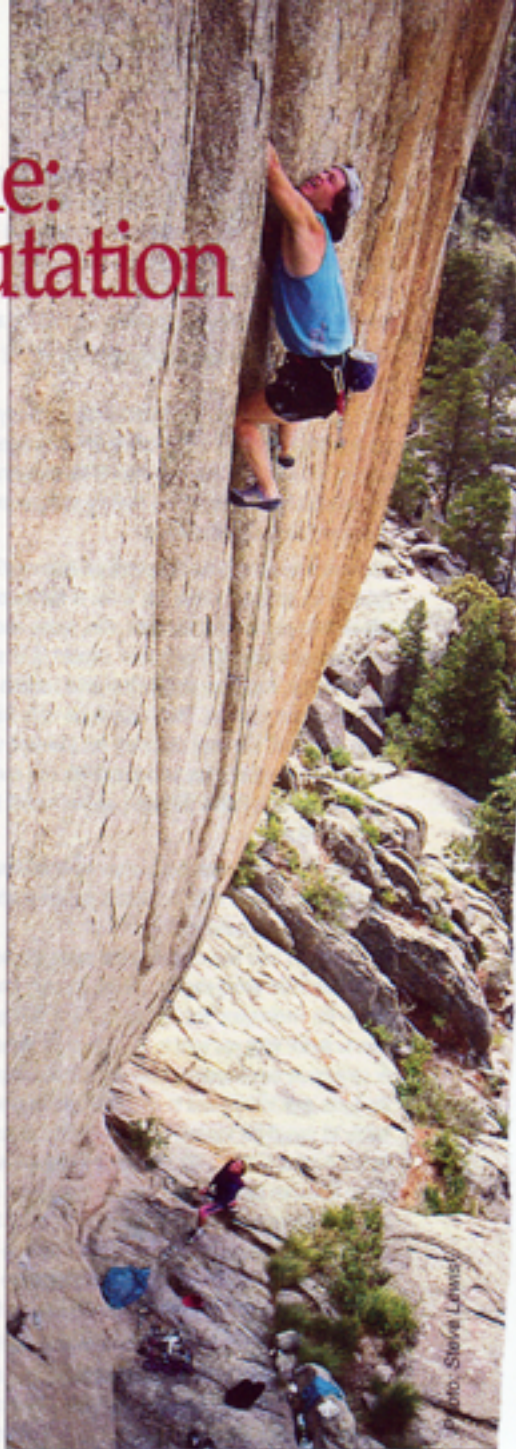
In late July, Alan Lester joined forces with Hank Caylor in Yosemite Valley to attempt the second (and first one-day) ascent of the dicey 15-pitch *Southern Belle* (VI 5.12d R) on the South Face of Half Dome. The pair made excellent progress on the crux lower pitches, with Lester on-sighting the 5.12c/d fist-to-finger crack on the third pitch. By 10:30 a.m. they were over halfway up the face, with the four 5.12 pitches behind them. The upper pitches are no give-away, however, involving very runout, insecure 5.11 face climbing. "Alan would go 75 feet to a 1/4-inch bolt, then another 75 feet to the belay," says Caylor. "And you couldn't see the bolts from below, so you were doing these moves that you couldn't reverse."

One hundred feet out on the eighth pitch, with one marginal HB nut and a tiny cam nested 30 feet below him, Caylor took a 60-foot "slab-splashing plunge," as Lester put it. He sustained numerous bruises and abrasions and a broken ankle. "I scraped off all my skin," says Caylor. "It looks like I got dragged behind a pickup." Lester set up 1300 feet of devious angling rappels, then helped Caylor to the tourist trail, where rangers gave him a pony ride to the Valley floor. "The route was horrifying," says Caylor, who has done other Yosemite scare routes, like the *Bachar-Yerian*. "I'll never go back."

Lester, however, says, "I'm going back for sure, unless it gets done this fall." The route's reputation seems to grow. The taxing climbing and the long approach makes doing the route in a day even more formidable.

Dave Schultz of Yosemite and Scott Cosgrove of Joshua Tree freed the bold line in 1988. Peter Croft and Schultz had attempted it on two subsequent occasions, but reportedly never got past the fifth pitch.

On Lumpy Ridge, Colorado, Lester made the first free ascent of *Annaconda* (5.13b/c) on the Twin Owls, a former A3 crack next to *Silly Putty*. In its 60 feet, the climb had lunging between flared hand jams, a tips crack, laybacking the outside corner of a shallow dihedral, a section of "really thin" fingerlocks, and, finally, 20 feet of overhanging 5.11 fingers. Lester calls it one of the hardest cracks in the state. He is qualified to make the judgment; in 1985, he made the third ascent of *Sphinx Crack* (5.13b/c). "*Annaconda* takes less endurance, but the difficulty of the moves is a quantum leap," he says. He would like to see somebody try it, but notes that he took out the fixed gear he had in for the ascent, including a pin and four or five wires.



Alan Lester freeing *Annaconda* (5.13b/c), Twin Owls, Lumpy Ridge, Colorado.

## SPEED FREAKS



Photo: Beth Wald

Fast one-day wall ascents were nearly as common in Yosemite Valley last spring as Everest ascents are these days. Rolando Garibotti, 23, of Bariloche, Argentina, and sometimes Boulder, climbed several routes in quick times during a two-week stay. On May 23, with Jon Rosemengy of New Zealand, Garibotti did what may be the fastest ascent of *Lurking Fear* (5.10 A3), in just under 13 hours. On June 2, Garibotti and Adam Wainwright of Great Britain did *Triple Direct* (5.9 A2) in 8 hours 20 minutes, and on June 5, the same team fired *The Shield* (5.9 A3+) in 18 hours 20 minutes. The previous fastest time was 23 hours 30 minutes, by Rick Lovelace and party. On May 27, Garibotti and Rob Slater of Boulder did *The Nose* (5.9 A2+) in 5 hours 48 minutes.

Between July 9 and 15, Steve Schneider with various partners climbed three grade VIs, each in "one-day" pushes in the fastest times to date: the *West Buttress* (VI 5.10 A3+) in 18 hours 1 minute, with Jeff Schoen; *Chinese Water Torture* (VI 5.11 A4) in 17 hours 15 minutes, with Scott Stowe and Lance Allred; and *Dihedral Wall* (VI 5.9 A3) in 27 hours 38 minutes, with Mark Deger. All routes were done on-sight, and on the latter Schneider led every pitch.

We've heard rumors of numerous other fast ascents — of routes including *Zenyatta Mendatta*, *Grape Race*, and *Flight of the Albatross* — by Valley locals like Steve Gerberding, Stowe, and Dave Bengsten, but the typically reticent group has kept quiet.

Rolando Garibotti on an easy day at the crags.