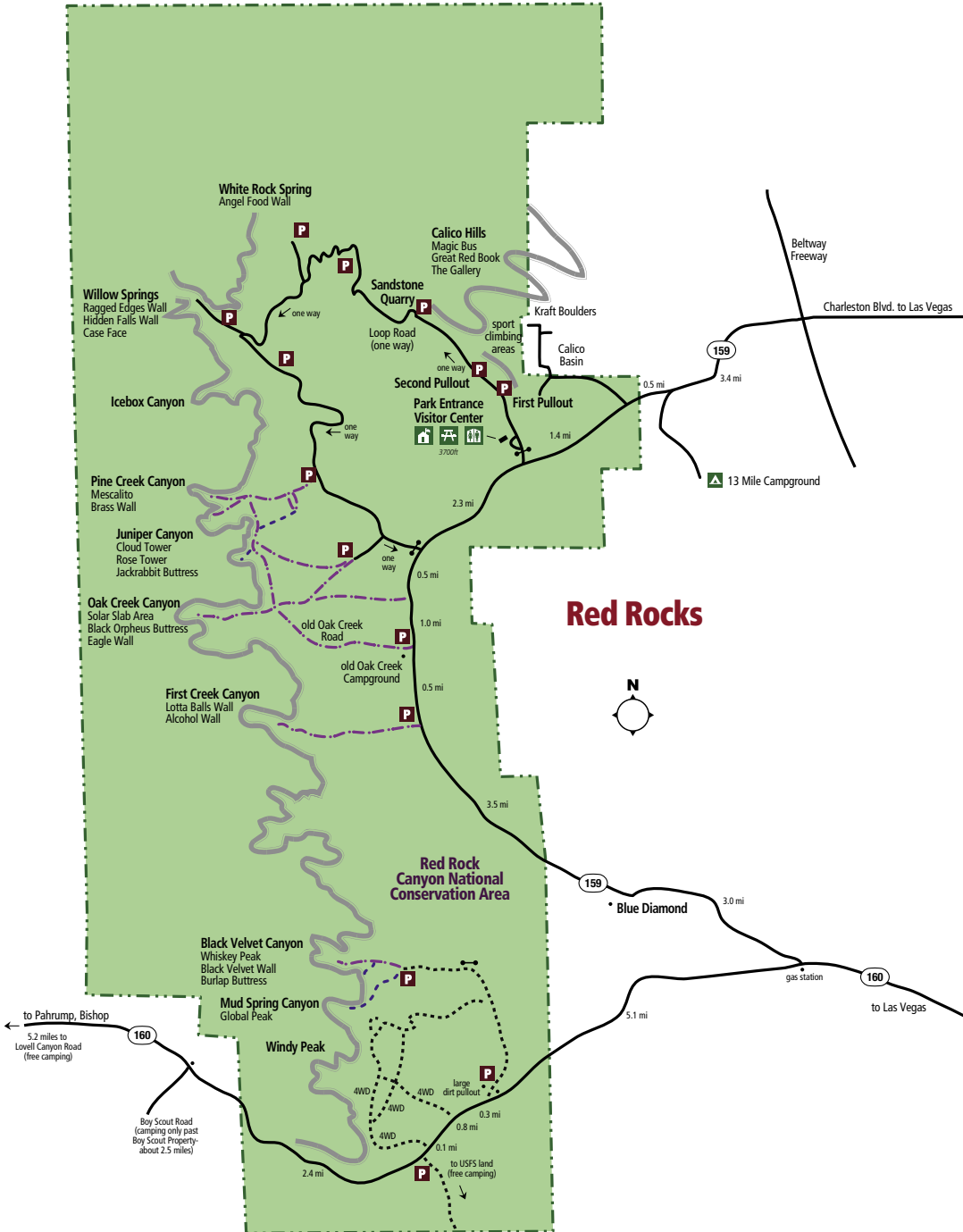


Red Rocks Climbing

Greg Barnes

SUPERTOPOTM

Red Rocks Overview Map

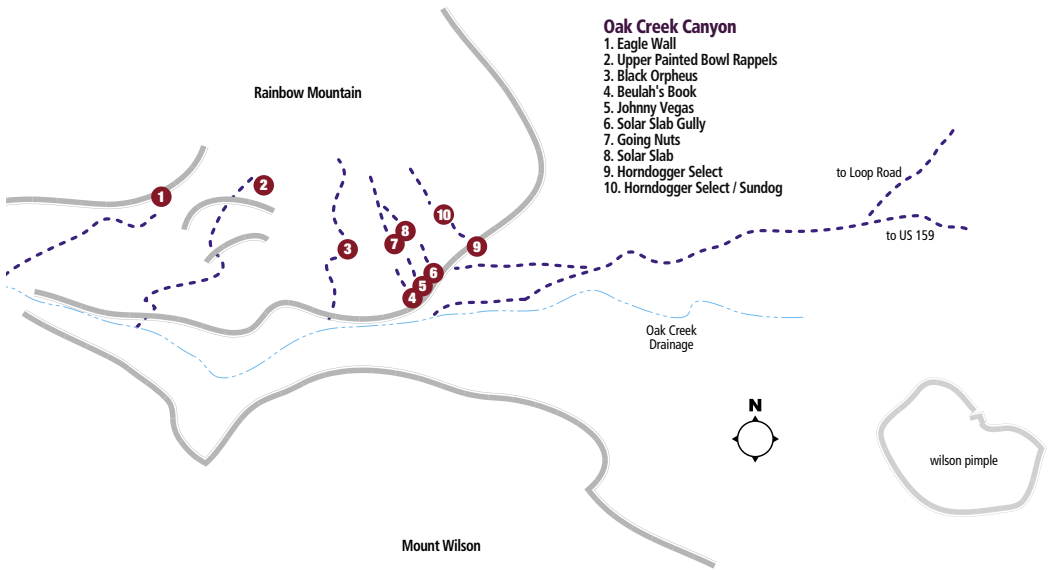


Oak Creek Canyon

Huge, complex, and varied, Oak Creek Canyon has some of the warmest climbs in the main canyons of Red Rocks. South-facing routes where the sun is not blocked by the opposite wall of the canyon often get uncomfortably warm, and are perfect for cooler days. Long approaches, long routes, and short Loop Road hours often force climbers into choosing to hike an extra half hour from the old Oak Creek Campground on Highway 159, although the Oak Creek trailhead (last stop on the Loop Road) is closer. Oak Creek Canyon routes are some of the warmest longer routes and are best in late fall through early spring.



Sarah Felchlin



Shelly Presson Dunbar plans her next move on Pitch 5 of Levitation 29. (Greg Epperson)

Black Orpheus Buttress

The steep, broken Black Orpheus Buttress hosts one of the best moderate routes in Red Rocks. This brown wall, actually the southwest face of Solar Slab Wall, is totally out of sight on the approach. With a long approach and descent, plus lack of easy retreat, the Black Orpheus Buttress hosts one of the more committing moderate routes at Red Rocks.

Approach

Oak Creek Canyon is at the very end of the loop road. Because of this, you can also park at the old Oak Creek Campground along the main highway and avoid the hassle of the Loop Road, at the price of an extra 20-30 minute hike in each direction.

Black Orpheus is around the corner from Solar Slab, but the boulder-strewn canyon bottom and the long 3rd and 4th class approach takes about 2 hours. Hike past Solar Slab, then drop into the canyon bottom. Hike up the canyon for about 1/4 mile, looking for a cairn on top of a white boulder on the right. Black Orpheus starts well above the canyon floor after a series of slabs and bushy areas and is not obvious from the bottom of the canyon, so examine the SuperTopo picture to help you determine where to head up. The pile



Greg Barnes

of rocks on the white boulder is just as the canyon bottom takes a vague curve to the left, and is well before the split in the canyon. Depending on exactly where you go up, you must negotiate usually at least one 4th class band of 40-foot cliffs, and some may want to rope up for these sections.

Once you reach the wall, Black Orpheus begins in the largest left-facing dihedral; to the left is slick polished rock and some bushes 40 feet up on a ledge.

Descent

Four descents are possible. Most people use one of the two Upper Painted Bowl descents, but you can also downclimb to the rappels for Solar Slab, or rap the long Upper Solar Slab Gully. We only describe the Upper Painted Bowl descents here; the Solar Slab descents should not be used unless familiar with them, and even then they often have other parties clogging them. **None of these descents should be attempted in the dark without someone who knows the descent.** It is far better to scramble up to wide flat ledges with bushes and bivy for the night.



Greg Barnes

View of Black Orpheus from the approach.

Upper Painted Bowl double-rope descent

From the top of Black Orpheus, hike up slabs for a short distance (50-100 yards) to a large ledge which heads around left. Hike along this ledge around the corner, where you will see the ledge descending steeply behind a huge flake. Scramble down behind this flake to a ledge/platform with bolts at the far end. From these bolts, rappel 130 feet, passing an intermediate rappel station, to a set of bolts. From here it is 165 feet to 3rd class slabs. As of spring 2002, there is NO intermediate station allowing a rappel with only one rope.

Once you reach the slabs you are in the upper region of the Lower Painted Bowl. Scramble down long 2nd and 3rd class slabs, staying on the right side of the bowl, aiming for a shoulder on the right with a prominent large rounded boulder. Here, turn the corner to the right and head down and traverse right along another long 2nd and 3rd class slab below a headwall. When the slab hits a line of bushes and forces you down, it seems logical to keep traversing. However, keep heading down and left on the only ledge system, finding abundant cairns along the way. After 200 yards, the ledge system ends in a steep slab, with bushes heading left. Here, you go down steep 3rd/4th class slabs for about 100 yards, then contour right above a line of bushes for 50 yards. Then you head down 3rd and 4th class blocks until just above the streambed; a very slick traverse to the right, or sliding down on your butt, gets

you down this final 30 feet. Always head right at this very end section, or a drop-off is encountered.

Once down in the streambed, it takes most people about an hour and a half to get back to the trailhead. The entire descent takes approximately 3 hours for people who make no mistakes or have to backtrack.

Upper Painted Bowl single-rope descent:

From the top of Black Orpheus, hike up slabs for about 400 yards, aiming for a colored headwall. Just before getting to the obviously 5th class headwall, pass through a cool little arch, then head left along the base of the wall. After 100 yards, slide/chimney down a 4th class gully/chimney leading to large trees—be very careful on the slick rock. From here, work down into the Upper Painted Bowl (Chicken Lips, a long 5.10 route, starts on your right). When you can see the whole Upper Painted Bowl, head down and aim for bushes on the left—behind them is a gully that you will rap down. It may take a bit of checking to find the gully. Rappel 70 feet from slings around blocks down a low-angle chimney system. Hike down another short bit, and rappel from the last tree 100 feet to 3rd class slabs. Be very careful on this last rappel as the rope is just long enough; also, it is easy to accidentally stab your rope on a very sharp cactus near the tree—hooking your rope through a smaller dead tree can keep the rope out of the cactus.

From the slabs, follow the descent info for the Lower Painted Bowl (see above).



Greg Barnes

Black Orpheus 5.10a★★★★

Time to climb route: 5-6 hours

Approach time: 1.5-2 hours

Descent time: 3-4 hours

Sun exposure: mid-morning to sunset

Height of route: 1000'

Black Orpheus ascends a break in a huge overhanging headwall via a cleanly fractured dihedral and has some of the best moderate crack climbing at Red Rocks. An initial dihedral has a few awkward sections, then a long broad slab leads up to a traverse below the headwall. The reward is the excellent upper dihedral with tons of fun climbing and a short bolt-protected crux.

History

George and Joanne Urioste accomplished the first ascent of Black Orpheus in April 1979. It was not a good time for the Uriostes. They were divorced. Though plagued by uncertainty and facing serious life decisions, they were united by a common love for climbing. A reconnaissance up the first few pitches looked very promising. The dark, south-facing rock was warm and pleasant in the still-cool spring air. The initial pitches went free and assured easy access to the spectacular crack and dihedral system on the upper part of the route.

They returned optimistically, with the intention of climbing through to the summit in one push. The climbing went well. They quickly achieved their previous high point and continued onto the upper cracks. As they reached the top of their thirteenth pitch, both daylight and crack were fading. Faced with drilling several

bolts to protect the face climbing that separated them from the summit, they had no choice but to bivouac.

Even then, their options were limited. There was no ledge big enough to stretch out on, only big enough for sitting. And, ironically, there was no spot big enough for them to sit together, so the maritally torn climbers endured the cold April night on separate ledges high above Oak Creek.

When morning finally arrived, George set out to lead the face pitch. Tired, stiff, and debilitated from the rough night, he drilled the four protection bolts on the pink face. Above this pitch the difficulties faded and the climbers were soon unroping on the summit slabs.

The name Black Orpheus derives from a 1958 movie that modernized the Greek legend of Orpheus and Eurydice to a setting during the Carnival in contemporary Rio. The movie was noted for its presentation of the Bossa Nova musical idiom, but retained the Greek myth's bittersweet story of doomed love. The relevance of the movie to the Uriostes' personal situation, combined with the darkly varnished rock, explains the selection of the route name.

– Larry DeAngelo

Strategy

Often touted as one of the easiest long routes of its grade due to a short crux, Black Orpheus lures many into epics. While the route is not particularly long, the approach and complex descent demand an early start and rapid progress. Especially important is the near impossibility of retreating out of the upper part of the route.

The second pitch has a short but awkward section of liebacking/jamming and a large nut is the best option for protection. The eighth pitch has some

	Pitch										
Black Orpheus	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Free difficulty	≥5.10								●		
	5.9							●			
	5.8	●	●								
	5.7			●							
	5.6				●		●			●	●
	≤5.5					●	●				

scary face climbing off the belay, then an awkward chimney section followed by a tricky lieback. The crux, at the start of the ninth pitch, has two bolts protecting a tricky lieback/reach for an edge. However, due to the position of the bolts and the direction of the lieback, a fall could result in a short, hard pendulum into the belay ledge, and it is not possible to simply pull on a draw to bypass the crux.

If you finish the route early and have the time, consider running up Johnny Vegas or Beulah's Book, then rappelling Solar Slab Gully.

Bolts were replaced by the ASCA in 2002.

Retreat

From the first two pitches you can rappel with two ropes from bolts. From the top of the third, a long sling could be used to retreat. **Above the third pitch, retreat is not recommended and would require experienced parties.** A multi-pitch rappel while leaving gear, followed by a mandatory long traverse on 4th and 5th class slabs, followed by more gear-intensive rappels, means that retreat is basically not an option once you leave the initial dihedral.



George Urioste on Pitch 10 of Black Orpheus.

Larry DeAngelo

