

WALLULA GAP ROCK CLIMBING GUIDE

By Kemper Brightman and Kevin Pogue

Wallula Gap is a steep-walled gorge carved by the Columbia River through the Horse Heaven Hills 30 miles west of Walla Walla and 20 miles southeast of the Tri-Cities. Erosion of multiple lava flows of the

Columbia River Basalt by catastrophic ice-age floods formed the numerous cliff bands in the gap. At present, rock climbing has only been developed on two cliff bands on the east side of the gap. The developed cliffs are accessed by parking in a pullout on the west side of US Hwy 730 that is 0.75 mile south of the signed rock formation known as the Two Sisters. Climbing on the Two Sisters, which was popular for many years, was banned in 2001 by Walla Walla County due to objections by Native Americans.

The two cliffs are called the "lower cliff" and the "upper cliff". The lower cliff consists of large fractured basalt columns and has higher quality rock than the upper cliff, which is composed of non-columnar basalt with more closely spaced fractures. Compared to most climbing areas, the routes at Wallula are short and the rock somewhat loose. Both cliffs have required extensive removal of loose rock to become suitable for climbing. Currently there are 35 routes on the lower cliff, with a mix of traditional and sport climbs ranging from 5.2 to 5.11. Conveniently, many of the traditional lines share anchors with sport climbs, or are accessible from the top, via a 3rd class scramble at the north end of the cliff. All of the routes are short, between 25 and 35 feet long, so longer ropes are not required.

The routes on the upper cliff are 40-60 ft. in length. Currently the upper cliff hosts 10 sport routes ranging from 5.4 to 5.9 with potential for many more. The basalt on the upper cliff is extensively fractured, so climbing is possible only where the rock has been thoroughly cleaned. Straying off route will likely result in an unpleasant experience for both climber and belayer. Unlike the lower cliff, it is very difficult to set top-ropes from above at the upper cliff. Ownership of the upper cliff is split between the federal government and Walla Walla County while the lower cliff lies on land owned partly by the US federal government and partly by Whitman College.

A big thank you is in order for all those who have aided in the recent development of climbing at Wallula Gap :

Kevin Pogue [KP]
 Kemper Brightman [KB]
 Brien Sheedy [BRS]
 Stuart Chapin [SC]
 Ben Sheppard [BDS]
 Noah Wertheimer [NW]
 Chase Martin [CM]

Special thanks to:

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 The Whitman College Climbing Center
 Lish Riley and everyone at the WCOP



Cover: Brandon Paris takes a sunset lap on Loess Without You.
 Photo by Megan Ash

Lower Cliff Routes: North to South (left to right)

- 1) **Death By Jenga – 5.8** (3 bolts to rap rings) This is the first bolted route on the left end of the cliff. Fun stems lead to the first bolt. Find the cool side-pull/under-cling at third bolt. Great fun, especially if you do it a few times in a row. [BDS]
- 2) **Jungle Butt – 5.8+** (gear to 1" bolt anchor at top or walk off) Find the green crack in a north-facing dihedral. A few fun finger locks and a hand jam can be found. Start low and right for a few more feet of climbing. [KB]
- 3) **Indirect Irregular West Face Buttress (IIWFB)– 5.7+** (Gear to 3" to Rap Rings) Twin crack system leads to ledge. Atop ledge make an airy step right to gain a crack. [NW]

[Break in cliff]



- 29) **Astroknot - 5.7** (6 bolts to quick clip anchor) Start by surmounting a head-high block to gain the first bolt. Climb low angle bulges past bolts to the anchor. An alternative start takes the crack in a corner around to the left and connects at second bolt.

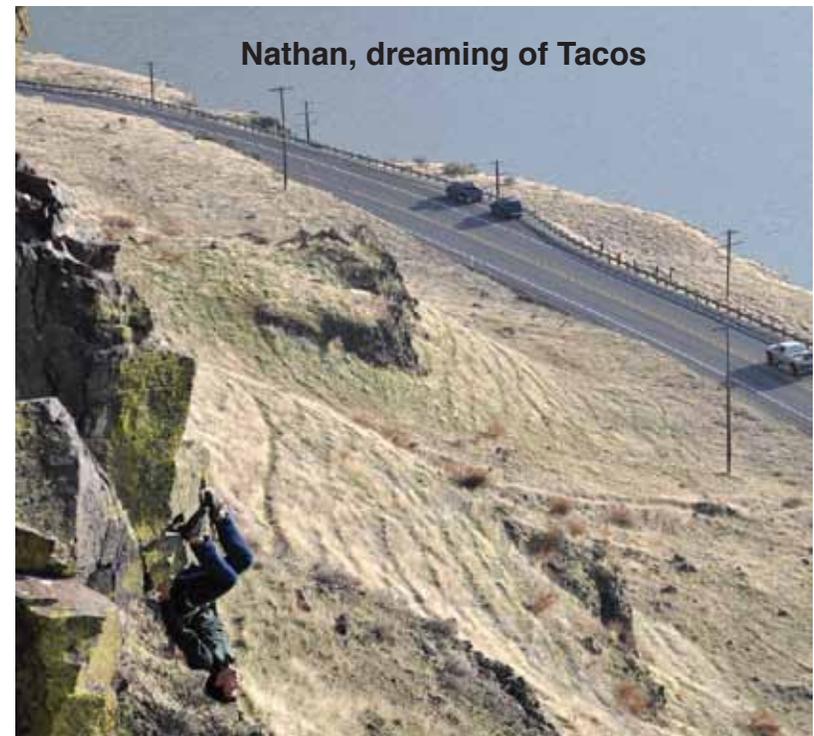
[KP]

- 30) **Red Planet (AKA The Sit Clip) - 5.10+** (5 bolts to quick clip anchor) The odyssey to be the man on mars begins by climbing past the first bolt to enter your ship. From your comfy space chair (atop the detached pillar) clip the second bolt, ponder last minute beta and begin the countdown to launch. Look out for the sneaky Martian crimps that threaten to stymie your journey. [BRS]

- 31) **Jimgermanclimb - 5.6** (7 bolts to quick clip anchor) Climb broken terrain to a fun hand jam and crux move around a corner.

This is the left of the two lines on the face. [KP]

- 32) **The Terroirist – 5.7** (6 bolts to rappel rings) The right of the two bolts lines on the face. Climb jugs to bulge at 2nd bolt. Pull the bulge and cruise your way to the anchor. Might be slightly harder than the line to the left. [KP]



Note The following climbs are about 75ft down the cliff band from Jimjermanclimb and Terroirist.

- 33) **R. Kelly – 5.11** (4 bolts to rappel rings) Start on a left facing incut rail in the middle of a blank face. [KB]
- 34) **Soulacoaster – 5.9** (not yet bolted but can be TR'ed from R. Kelly anchor) Starts just right of R-Kelly. Climb through a series of triangular holds and pockets to a small roof. Either continue through the roof or bail left to the ledge above R-Kelly. [KB]
- 35) **Trapped in the Corner – 5.9** (thin gear to shared anchor with R.Kelly) Twin, thin cracks lead up a shallow dihedral right of Soulacoaster. Interesting finger locks, stems, and crimps make for an enjoyable route. [KB]

****Climbing all three routes that share this anchor three times in a row has been called “Going Platnum” and could be considered wallula’s most contrived (and only) 5.12****



WEATHER

Wallula Gap is a desert area that receives <10 in. of annual precipitation. The weather is similar to the Tri Cities and almost always sunnier and warmer than Walla Walla. It's not uncommon to leave Walla Walla in the rain and find clear skies at Wallula. The west aspect facilitates year-round climbing potential. Summer mornings are relatively cool and shady and winter afternoons can be remarkably warm if the winds are calm and the sky is clear. Both cliffs are generally too warm for afternoon climbing from May through mid September. At the lower cliff, an interesting effect occurs during the hours before sunset when the sun is low on the western horizon. A belayer, looking to the west, sees two suns, one in the sky and the other in middle of the river. The enhanced solar radiation provided by this reflection can make the cliff remarkably warm on a chilly day.

Strong winds are common at Wallula. Westerly winds blowing up the Columbia slam straight into the west-facing cliffs as the gorge swings to the north at the gap. The upper cliff is particularly windy.

GETTING THERE

From Walla Walla, drive west on Hwy. 12 to its intersection with Hwy. 730. Continue on Hwy. 730 for about 2 miles until you pass a pullout on the left for the Two Sisters. Continue another 0.75 mile to a large pullout on the right (west) side of the road. Resist the temptation to utilize the first small pullout that lies directly below the lower cliff, as the approach trail from this pullout is very steep and highly erodible. The approach from the 2nd pullout, which diagonals across the slope rather than going straight up, is slightly longer but causes much less erosion. The trail to the upper cliff heads up the left (north) side of the side canyon across the road from the pullout.

Once you reach the head of the canyon, traverse back left (northwest) along the base of the uppermost band of cliffs to reach the climbs.

CONSIDERATIONS

The rock at Wallula is highly fractured and loose. The routes have been extensively cleaned, but it is impossible to remove all loose rock. It is very important to stay on route to avoid sections of the cliff that have not been cleaned. However, loose rock may still be encountered on cleaned routes. The belayer should always try to find a position that is out of the potential line of rock fall and should definitely WEAR A HELMET. Rattlesnakes are common in Wallula

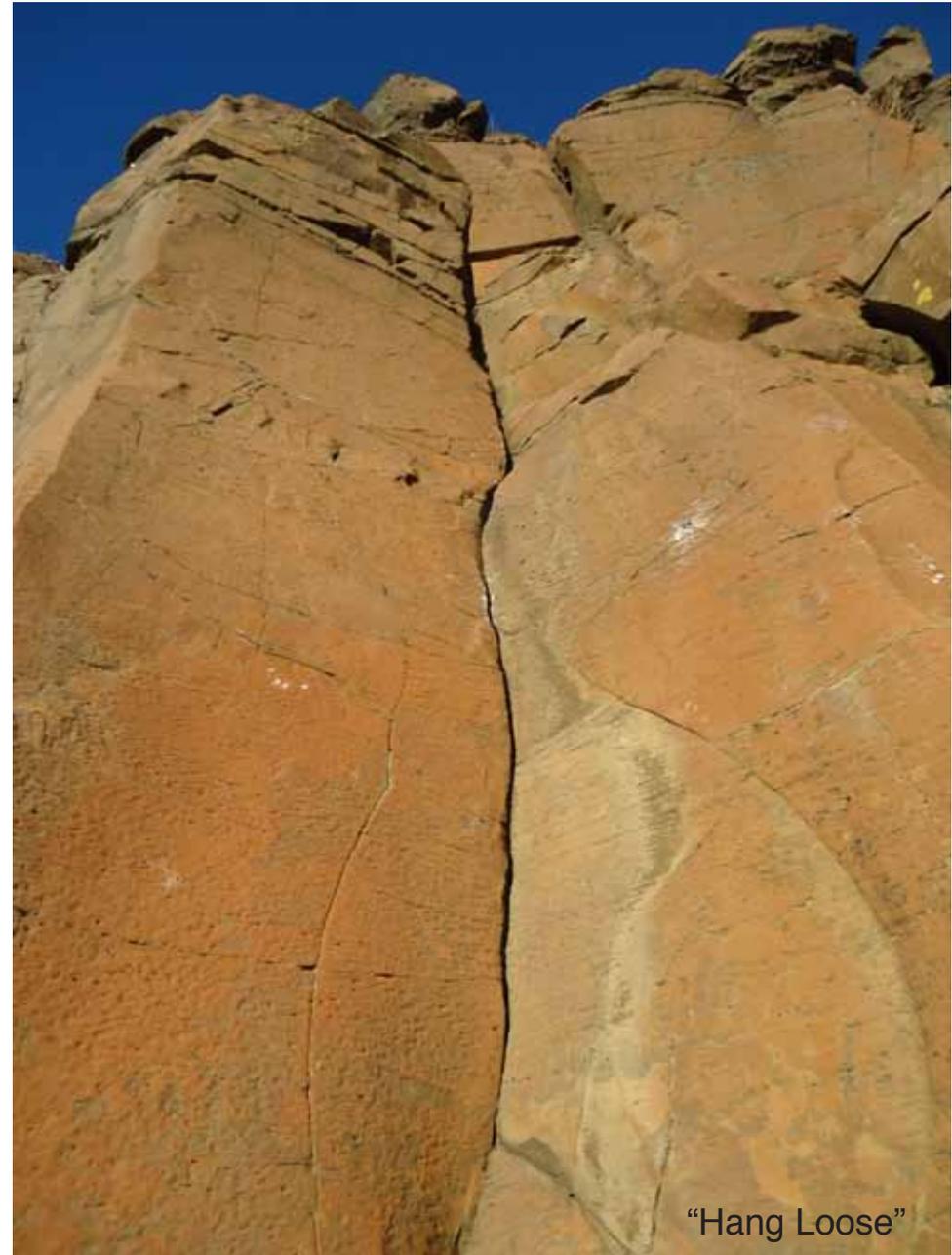
Gap – be alert!

4) **Short Rib – 5.8-** (4 bolts to quick clip anchors) Climb a small dihedral to a feature that resembles a ship's prow at the top of the route. Good holds and hand jams lead to the crux at last bolt. This one's worth climbing for the jams alone. A variation starts in the crack to the right and joins at the third bolt of the prow.[KP]

5) **Prime Rib - 5.9** (4 bolts to Quick Clip Anchor) Good edges lead to the 2nd bolt. The crux lies between the 3rd and 4th bolts where the holds all seem to be tilted in the wrong directions.

Can be located by a block with green lichen just right of the start.[KP]

6) **Sage – 5.10a** (4 bolts to rappel rings) Begin by scrambling up a ledge and clipping the first bolt in shallow dihedral. Navigate a series of crimps and jugs past two more bolts and a large block. Battle the pump past the fourth bolt for the real deal or traverse to finger-locks over right to knock the grade down and save your forearms. Fun roof moves and surprisingly pumpy for its length!
[KB]

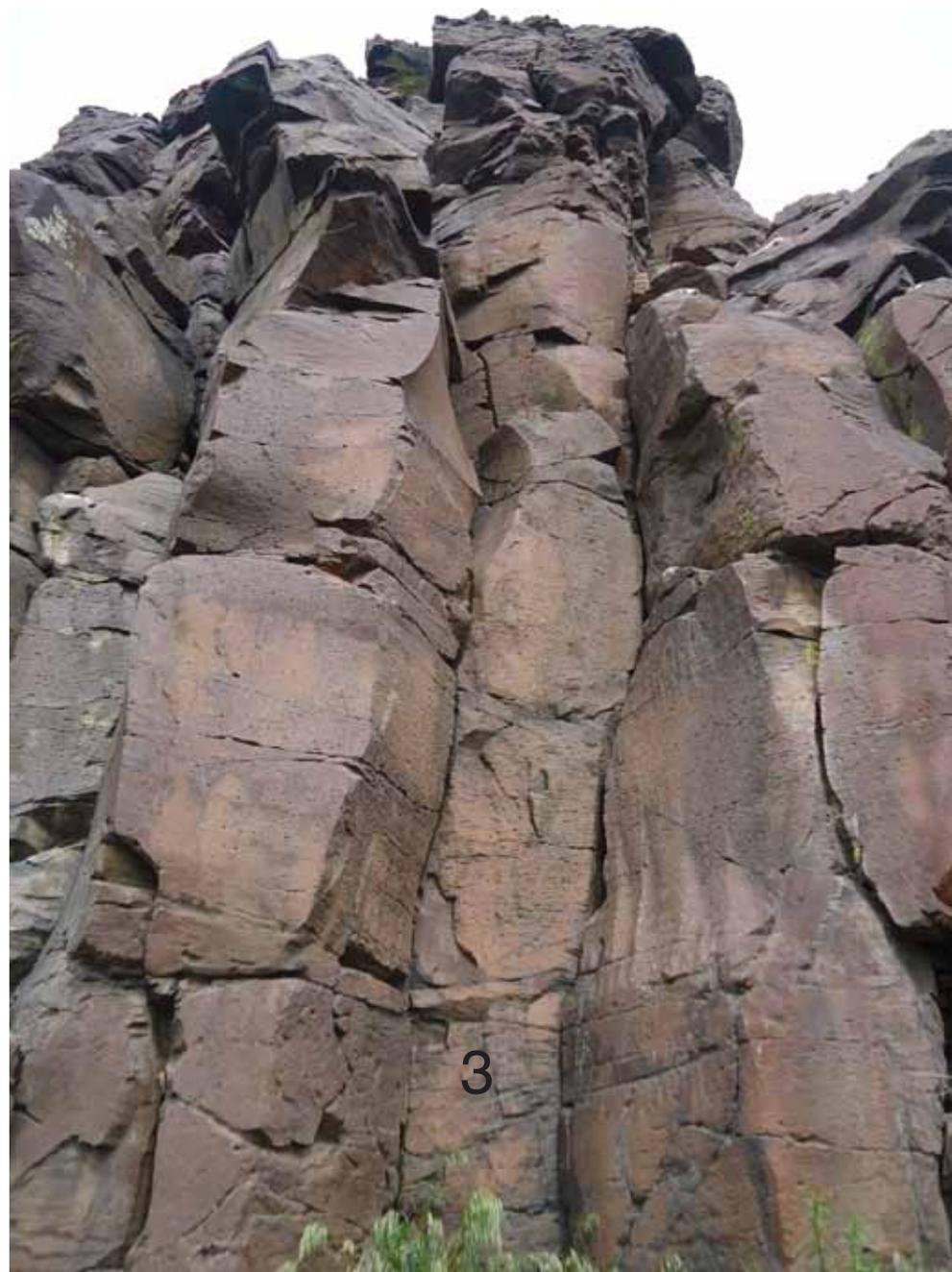
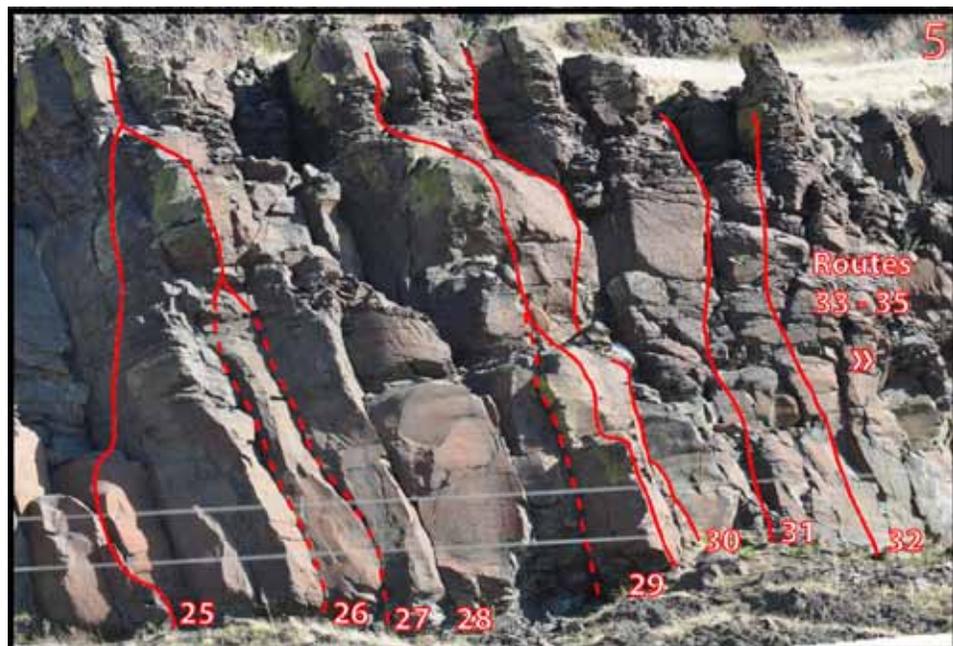


25) **I'm Pro-Choss and I Bolt - 5.8+** (6 bolts to quick clip anchors) One of the best and longest routes at the lower cliff. Climb a ledge and north-facing wall past 5 bolts utilizing a series of interesting holds. Use this climb to set up a TR on Taqueria Dreams if you don't have trad gear. [KP]

26) **Taqueria Dreams - 5.10 b/c** (gear to 2" two bolts to shared anchor) This route is dreamy. Climb a technical slab with great pro to a bolt below the roof. The style completely switches here and pulls between jugs become the method. What's the best part of this route? A full, hands-free bat hang can be had by slotting your toes into a jug rail on the left side of the roof. Try it on TR just for fun! [KB,CM]

27) **Sangria Seam - 5.10+** (thin gear to shared upper section with TD) A thinner and harder crack is found just right of TD. Delicate balance and good technique are required. After the crack, continue through the upper section of TD. [KB]

28) **The Couch - 5.9 X** (gear to 3" no anchor) This route will be great if someone removes the large death blocks above the perfect layback crack and installs an anchor. Until then, it should probably be avoided. [KB]



11) **Welcome to Wallula - 5.3** (5 bolts to rappel ring) Very mellow, blocky climbing. Your grandmother will be delighted! [KP]

12) **Lovin' on the Run - 5.10 +** (Very small gear to shared anchor with The Martini). Stem, lock and press to get things started. From the rest, move to find a hidden hold and continue on sloping edges to the top. Lovin' is a definite candidate for best hard traditional climb at the cliff. [KB,NW]

13) **The Martini - 5.11** (6 bolts to quick clip anchors) You'll quickly encounter the crux on this climb. Start left then move right. If the going gets too tough, lower from the second bolt and start right of the arête in the corner. Named for the shape seen when looking at the arête directly from the trail. [?]

14) **The Mundercling - 5.9** (6 bolts to chain anchor) Legend has it, the Mundercling is so good it deposits money into your bank account. If you miss it on the way up, you'll probably need to climb the whole route again. [BRS].

15) **"Why Arent You Longer" - 5.9** (Gear to 2" shares anchor with Loess) A delightful thin hand crack. [BRS]

16) **Loess Without You - 5.10** (5 bolts to quick clip anchors) Loess starts on an obvious horizontal rail and uses opposing edges and the arête to gain the bulge. I used a whacky arm-bar the first time I climbed this and thought it was definitely 5.11. Kevin hopped on the top rope, figured out the beta in about three seconds, downgraded the climb and said I was a wimp. Make someone buy you a beer if you can find the arm-bar! [KB]

17) **Curious Gorge - 5.4** (gear to 3" shares anchor with Loess) This route starts in the corner just right of Sunset Arête. A great place to learn how to place gear. Seriously, bring your entire rack - it will take everything. [BRS]

18) **Mafic Wave - 5.9** (5 bolts to quick clip anchors) Ever wondered what its like to be inside a barreling wave? Now you know! [KP]

19) **The Jetty - 5.8+** (2 bolt start to shared upper section with Stone Wave) This two bolt variation bypasses the moves out of "the wave" in favor of blocky climbing to the right. It intersects Mafic Wave after the second bolt. [KP]



The Martini

20) **Feelin' 22 - 5.10** (gear to 2" two bolts to rappel rings) A fun juggy flake leads to a ledge and a bolt. Climb above this bolt to the next larger ledge then past two bolts to gain a big rail. A #2 will fit nicely in a crack above the third bolt. [KB]

21) **Hang Loose - 5.11+?** (thin gear to shared anchor and upper section with #22) Start atop a flat rock with your left hand in the seam and your right in a shallow pocket. You're at the crux. Fire three moves and you're done. Fun TR project if you just did Feelin' 22. This is currently the hardest trad line at Wallula Gap. [KB]

22) **Double the Sun - 5.7** (7 bolts to rappel ring) Start where a grey rock ledge meets a red face. Easy and enjoyable climbing moves left at the top. [KP]

23) **Granola in my Chacos - 5.9** (gear to 1" two bolts to rappel rings) Pleasant finger locks and smears. Transition right when crack stops and continue past two bolts. [KB]

24) **The Rhodomlette Memorial Route - 5.9** (gear to 2" two bolts to rap rings) Starts on an in-cut crimp right of "Granola" and climbs past several finger locks to a jam and a two bolt section above. Rhonda was originally from Alabama and spent several years cooking at the Whitman dining halls. Her made-to-order omelets were absolutely legendary on campus, becoming known simply as "The Rhodomlette" somewhere along the way. [KB]



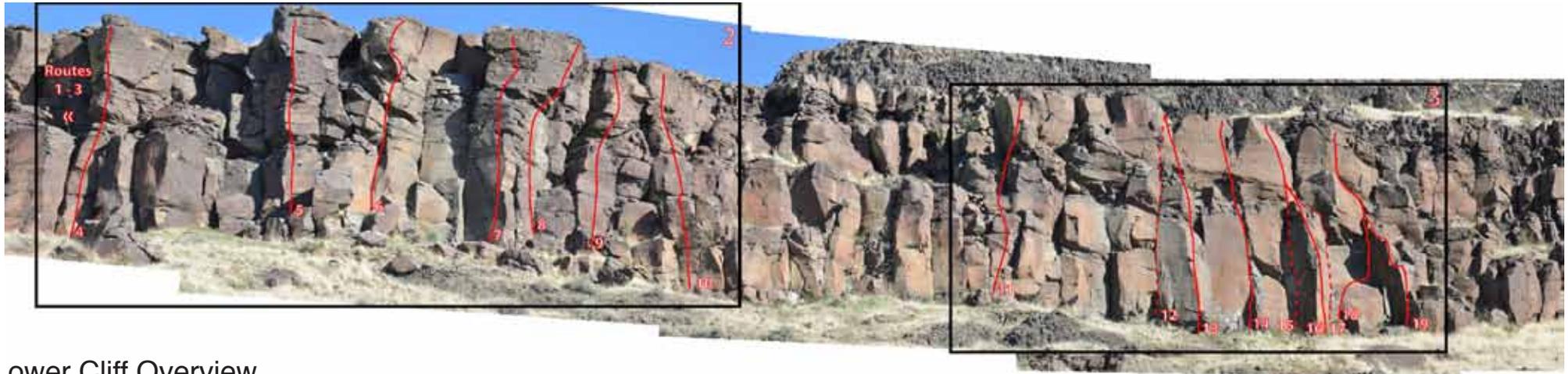
7) **Rump Roast - 5.8** (5 bolts to quick clip anchor) Start on a prominent juggy crack on left side of an arête. Enjoyable holds lead to a thought provoking ledge move at the top. The jury is still out on whether to start left or right, so you'll have to decide for yourself. [KP]

8) **Wallulove - 5.10** (5 bolts to rap rings) Start at an obvious fist-shaped feature on the right side of an arête. Choose your adventure to get to the third bolt. From here, navigate a series of edges as the angle kicks back and leave some juice in the tank for the moves to clip the chains. [KB]

9) **Kolkulator - 5.6** (4 bolts to V anchor) "Disguised" bolts lead up a blocky, fractured line. This one features mellow, enjoyable climbing that requires some route finding skills. [KP]

10) **Jökulhlaup - 5.8+** (5 bolts to rappel ring) Utilize a juggy side pull feature to pull past two bolts and over the bulge. The rest is a cruise. [KP]





Lower Cliff Overview

