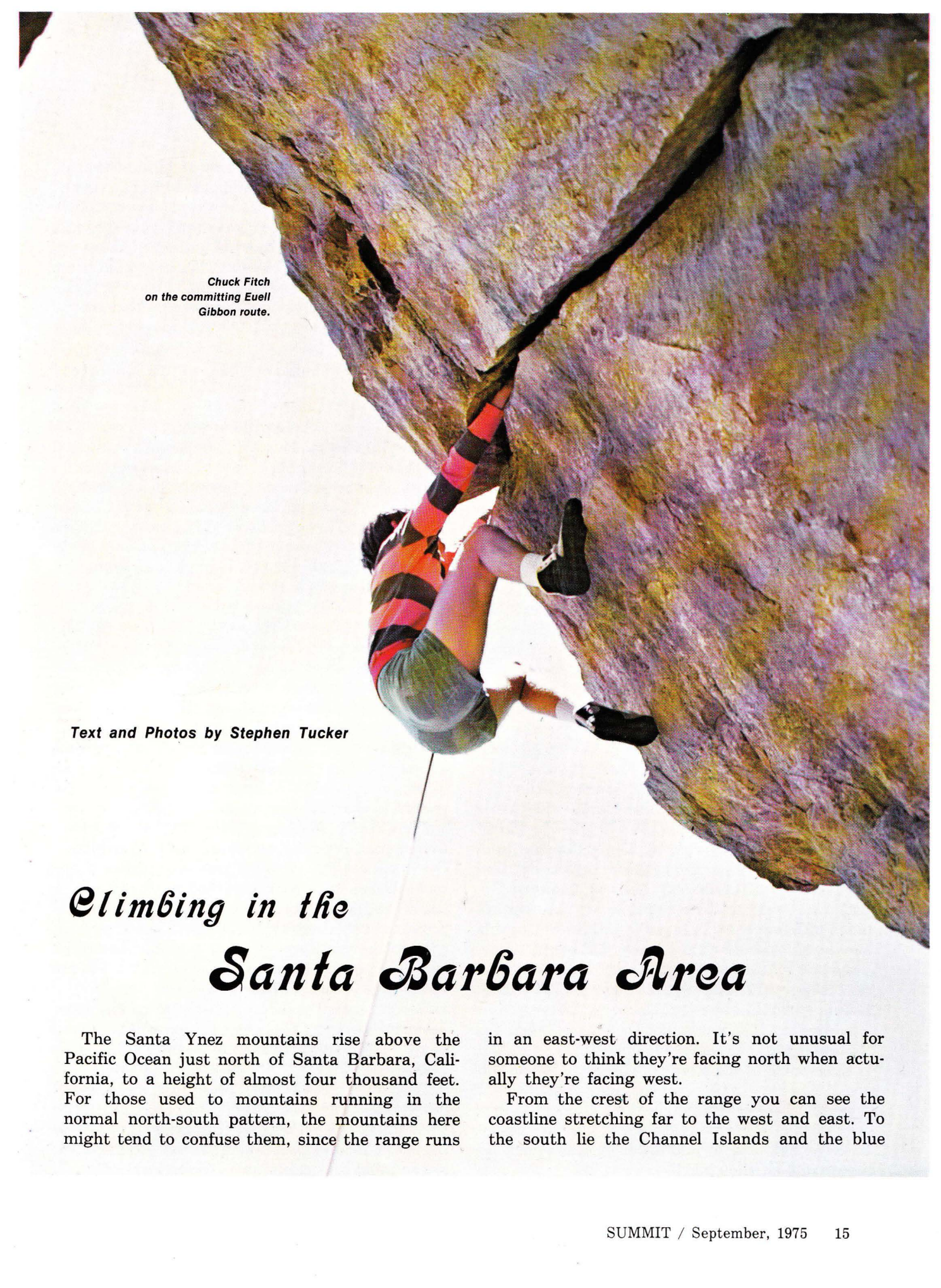




Robert Roland leading the second pitch of Any Minute Now.



Amos Clifford on the friction ramp of Any Minute Now.



*Chuck Fitch
on the committing Euell
Gibbon route.*

Text and Photos by Stephen Tucker

Climbing in the Santa Barbara Area

The Santa Ynez mountains rise above the Pacific Ocean just north of Santa Barbara, California, to a height of almost four thousand feet. For those used to mountains running in the normal north-south pattern, the mountains here might tend to confuse them, since the range runs

in an east-west direction. It's not unusual for someone to think they're facing north when actually they're facing west.

From the crest of the range you can see the coastline stretching far to the west and east. To the south lie the Channel Islands and the blue

Pacific, and to the north the San Rafael and Sierra Madre mountains.

Because of sand and shale soils and a mediterranean climate, vegetation is usually of the scrub-brush type, except in the canyons where streams permit the growth of larger trees and lush vegetation.

The area hasn't been considered as offering much in the way of climbing because of more popular sports such as surfing and sailing taking the local spotlight. Also, with climbing areas such as Tahquitz and Yosemite within a six-hour drive, locals have tended to overlook the short, but usually fine, routes there are to be had in their own backyard.

Santa Barbara formations are of several types of sandstones, and because of the way in which they are layered and uplifted, do not form large exposures of solid rock. The largest formations in the area do not exceed three hundred feet in height. However, for all that the area may lack in comparison to other major climbing spots, the rocks of Santa Barbara offer quite an array of face and crack climbs, varying from excellent beginner routes, to those of extreme difficulty. Most of all, it is a place to climb and keep in shape when cold weather, or the drive to more distant locations seem like a bit too much for a day or weekend.

Because of their proximity to paved roads and the brushy terrain, only a few of the area's rock formations are frequented, leaving the more secluded rocks, rarely, if ever, touched.

It wasn't too long ago, while hiking with Amos Clifford, that we came across a dome-like hill at the upper end of Cold Springs Creek. Its southeast exposure is hidden from view from trails and roads, and offered 130 feet of high angle, unclimbed rock. Needless to say we were pretty much excited with our find and have spent a goodly amount of time looking for other formations just off the beaten track. Our search for more unclimbed and secluded rocks has been rewarding. I find it far more enjoyable to spend my time exploring and climbing newly found formations than going to the more popular spots.

Even some of the more popular rock formations are seeing new routes, where many people have thought these areas climbed out. Sespe Gorge, east of Santa Barbara, is very popular, but it seems a new line is put up every year, and the place isn't all that big.

A climber who has spent any amount of time on sandstone will know how much it can give and how little it can take. The more popular routes in the area show the signs of pitons where chocks would be more than adequate, and bolts have been found right next to excellent natural and chock placements. Such practices are totally unnecessary, and only serve to destroy rocks and routes. The majority of routes in the Santa Barbara vicinity can be led clean, and it is hoped that as more routes are found and put up, the clean trend will continue.

Gibraltar Rock Area

Gibraltar Rock, the most popular rock in the immediate Santa Barbara area offers a number of enjoyable routes. To reach the rock, drive north on Mountain Drive from its intersection with Mission Ridge Road. Turn right onto Gibraltar Road. Five miles up Gibraltar Road, the formation is easily spotted as the large, block-like mass of sandstone west of the pavement.

There are bolts and natural protection points at the top of both the south and west faces for top-roping. The south face, facing the ocean, offers mostly face climbing on knobs and edges, with protection sometimes being thin. The Ladder route follows the obvious crack starting just right of center at the base of the south face. From this crack's intersection with Main Ledge, several variations up to 5.4 lie just to the left; however, the easiest route (5.1) traverses right a few feet and continues up easily protected cracks to the top.

From under the large ceiling below the southwest corner, Euell Gibbon is the route that follows the crack leading up and over the center of the roof. Above this overhang, follow the crack to Main Ledge. Belay, and continue on poorly protected face climbing to the top of the southwest corner. The route was first led free and clean just this past year by Henry Barber. It is rated 5.5/A-2 or 5.10.

The west face of Gibraltar is one of the most beautiful walls in the entire area, and has some of the most difficult climbs to be found in the Santa Barbara area.

The route, Any Minute Now, involves traversing the west face twice. Climb the cracks and loose slabs under the lefthand side of the roof described in Euell Gibbon. Once under the roof, traverse left and around the corner to a bolt. Friction up a

short ramp to the left and across to the northwest corner. Peanut Gallery Ledge is the large ledge that slopes down to the west and offers a good place to belay. From here you can walk to the top via a gully, or climb the second pitch. The second pitch follows the horizontal crack that leads out across the west face from the Peanut Gallery. A hand-traverse of this section is easiest and ends up in an alcove, above which a crack-chimney leads to the top. The entire route is rated 5.6.

Although I've heard many names given it, Blood On The Tracks seems to be the most widely used name for the 5.9 jam crack which works its way directly up the middle of the west face. The first part of the route ends up at the alcove described in the second pitch of Any Minute Now. To make the route one continuous pitch, walk out to the left on the hand-traverse described in Any Minute Now, and by way of a small mantle shelf, climb directly up to and follow the small ceiling and crack that leads up and right. After twenty feet or so, swing up to the left-facing corner above, and the top.

There are a number of other rock faces in the Gibraltar area that aren't far off the road. Hole-In-The-Rock is the 30-foot high boulder just to the east of the main Gibraltar rock mass. It is distinguished by the hole halfway up the righthand side. There are bolts at the top for upper belays. The most popular route on the boulder is probably the Corner Pocket (5.7), which leads into the hole and follows the corner to the top. The route, Left of The Hole, 5.9, also leads into the hole, but one move above the hole a traverse is made to the left on tiny edges till directly beneath the rock on the top. From here, easier climbing lies above.

The Upper Gibraltar formation lies one-tenth of a mile down the road from Gibraltar Rock on the upper lefthand slopes of the large wash to the east of the road. Follow the trail up the wash from the boulder marked Don and Mata. At the lower lefthand side of the main formation, the Triple Overhang route starts with an easy jam crack that heads for a chockstone. Above this, traverse to the right, out across the face, using the sloping ledge. Continue approximately thirty feet to a bush below a bulge. Belay, and climb up, following either the easier holds directly above, or using the crescent shaped crack that leads up to the left. Both of these variations are about 5.6 in difficulty, and both run back into each other at a ledge where

either a fourth class traverse to the left leads off the rock, or face moves head directly up and right to the top.

The Sespe Gorge

The Sespe Gorge, north of Ojai, also sees a lot of climbing by Santa Barbara locals. The main wall is about three hundred feet high and its routes begin at the creek that runs along the base. The face is approximately 65 degrees in angle, and most of the climbing consists of face climbing next to cracks, using the cracks for protection.

To reach the Sespe Gorge, or Black Wall, as it's sometimes called, drive northeast out of Ventura on Highway 33. Once in Ojai, continue north on 33 for about twenty miles. The large wall on the left, across the creek, can't be mistaken.

Out of the numerous routes to be had at Sespe, I'll only describe the two more popular lines, both of which are led clean. A walk-off route lies on the opposite side of the ridge.

As you face the wall, the obvious features are the vertical pipe and platform with a cable running across to it. A gully runs up and to the right above the pipe. Upstream, to the right, is a bushy, pointed slab with a large pine growing from its lefthand base. To the right of the slab is a deep gully. Somewhat in the middle, between the slab and the pipe, an obvious crack runs vertically up the face and peters out near the top. This crack has been referred to as either the Direct or Ending Crack. The route is pretty clear except near the top where the crack and protection get scarce. Variations for this top section lead to the gully on the left, the crack system up to the right, or directly up. The latter variation is slightly more difficult. The route is rated 5.7.

Three trees grow to the left of the bushy slab. Behind the righthand tree a crack heads to a pine almost halfway up the face. This is the first pitch of the Tree Line route. Above the pine, the crack diagonals off to the left past other small pines and bushes. The route finishes in the same gully that runs above the pipe and platform. The Tree Line is 5.5 in difficulty.

There are several other formations further upstream that offer similar rock, but shorter routes.

The vicinity around Santa Barbara offers a number of fine, established routes, and the possibilities for new routes seem almost too numerous to count. □