



Matt Adams climbs
Jesus Wept (5.12 c/d)
in Muir Valley.

KENTUCKY

NEW ROUTES SHOOTING UP LIKE KUDZU

THE RED RIVER Gorge, tucked like a fine moonshiner's still in the foothills of eastern Kentucky's Appalachia, is world-renowned for overhanging sport routes. Although the gorge was originally a trad area, in the early 1990s visionaries like Porter Jarrard began zipping in bolted lines on the featured sandstone faces, jump-starting a new route bonanza. By the late 1990s, when John Bronaugh's second edition of *Red River*

Gorge Climbs was published, the Red's tally of trad, sport and mixed routes approached 1,000. ¶ In the years since that first guide, development has continued unabated. Today there are some 1,300 routes. In the southern region of the Red, south of Natural Bridge State Park off Highway 11, the areas most actively being developed are Muir Valley and the Pendergrass-Murray Recreation Preserve.

MUIR VALLEY

Muir Valley is located on 400 acres of private land owned by Rick and Liz Weber. Named after John Muir, the famed naturalist usually associated with Yosemite, this area has been generously opened for public use, including route establishment and bolting. Access is free and, under the Kentucky Recreation Use laws, open to anyone who signs a release

form, available online at muirvalley.com. Muir Valley is maintained and developed on a volunteer basis through the organization known as Friends of Muir Valley. In this area there are 12 new walls located in multiple hollows. One such area is the Lower Tantront Branch Hollow, home to such walls as The Sanctuary, The Indy Wall and The Stadium. The Sanctuary hosts a handful of aesthetically pleasing,

upper-grade routes such as *Jesus Wept* (5.12c/d), which starts off on a steep, pocketed overhang and transitions to a vertical face and technical pocket finish. Just left of *Jesus Wept* is the eye-catching *Triple Sec* (5.13a), a pocket line with bouldery sections. Left is *Prometheus Unbound* (5.13a), another classic that follows a pockety face after pulling steep lower moves.



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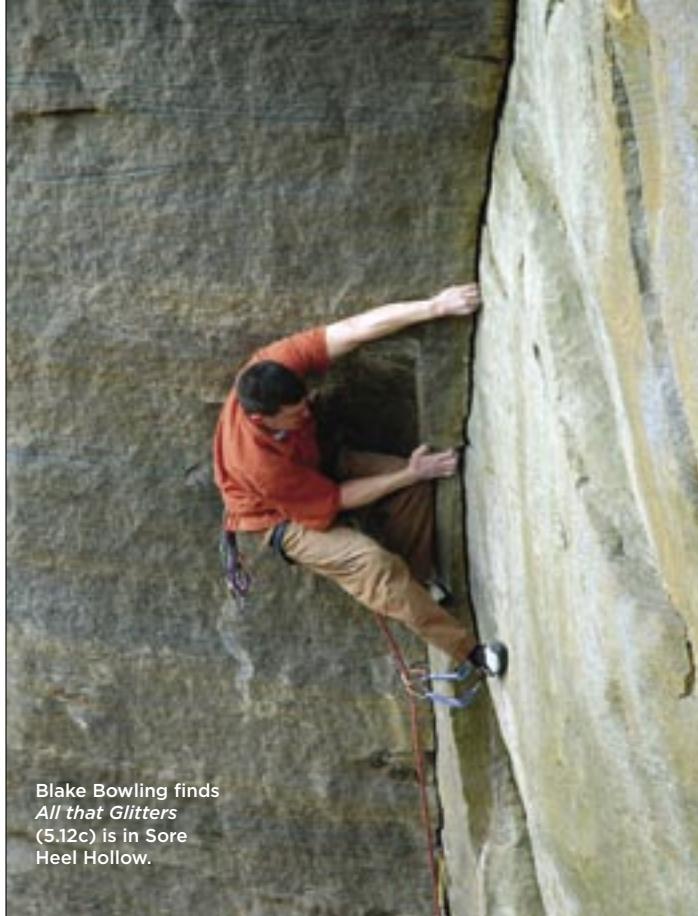
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Blake Bowling finds
All that Glitters
(5.12c) is in Sore
Heel Hollow.

Just around the corner is the uncharacteristically vertical Indy Wall, brimming with sub-40-foot, four- and five-star routes such as *Makin' Bacon* (5.10d), *The Happy Fisherman* (5.11c), *Annie the Annihilator* (5.10c) and *Stretcherous* (5.12b). The nearby Stadium hosts good mixed routes. Be sure to do *Trad-isfaction*, a five-star 5.10a trad line that follows a chimney to a pumpy dihedral.

PENDERGRASS-MURRAY RECREATION PRESERVE

The Pendergrass-Murray Recreation Preserve (PMRP) comprises the southern region of the Red, and is owned and maintained by the non-profit Red River Gorge Climbers' Coalition (RRGCC). On January 20, 2004, the RRGCC purchased the 700-acres—now containing over 150 routes—from the Pendergrass-Murray family. According to the new guidebook, this was the “largest direct land acquisition ever made by climbers.” The preserve is maintained and developed by private donations and volunteers, which cover the yearly expenses of roughly \$30,000. Access is free and open to the public as long as you sign a waiver, found at parking-lot kiosks or online at rrgcc.org.

Many of the already established areas—Dark Side, Solar Collector, Gold Coast, the Motherlode and Drive By—are included in this acreage. However, the newest addition, the Sore Heel Region, mostly pioneered by the late John Bronaugh, is located here as well. Within Sore Heel Hollow, there are seven walls: the Volunteer Wall, The Playground, The Gallery, Shady Grove, The Purgatory, Left Field and The Chica Bonita Wall. Bronaugh, before his death in August 2004, had planned to have a drill fest, during which volunteers would bolt the many lines he had scoped. A memorial held this past August saw the creation of many new lines in Bronaugh's honor.

Shady Grove is a steep wall that contains such climbs as *Citizen Arete*, a sustained 5.11b, and *False Idol* and *Irreverent*, both excellent 90-foot routes in the 5.12c range. Routes in The Gallery include a five-star 5.11b, *Random Precision*, a technical line de-

manding precision footwork. *Mosaic* (5.12c), also a stellar route, is nearby as well as *All That Glitters* (5.12c), a stunning crack with a bolt to start.

Down Sore Heel's main trail, past three small bridges and up a hill to the left, you pass through a window arch, a natural door to the large amphitheatre of The Purgatory. Although this wall is in its early stages of development, there are already a slew of routes hotter than the seventh ring of Dante's hell. Kenny Barker, the main pioneer at Purgatory, had the vision of at least four memorable routes including *Believer* (5.11b) and *Special Boy* (5.11c), named after a slow boxer-retriever named Deuce, and the quality 5.11c crack, *Fallen Angel*. Beyond these routes are four more in a row. The first, *Dracula '04* (5.13b), is a technical power climb that tackles a seam system. Beyond *Dracula '04* you find a closed 5.14 project, and then the often overlooked climb, *The Castle Has Fallen*, a 5.13b bolted crack that closes down into a seam. Though casual at the beginning, this route catapults you into a tricky boulder problem at the top, moving, momentarily, onto some adjacent pockets then back into the seam. The last route, *Paradise Lost* (5.13b), is the gem of the crag: a proud line that works its way up a technical face crossing over the arete to an in-your-face power blast.

BETA: The new guidebook, *The Red River Gorge: A Rock-Climbing Guide*, by Ray Ellington is now for sale online at rockandice.com or wolverinepublishing.com. For additional info visit muirvalley.com, redriverclimbing.com or rrgcc.org.

—WHITNEY BOLAND



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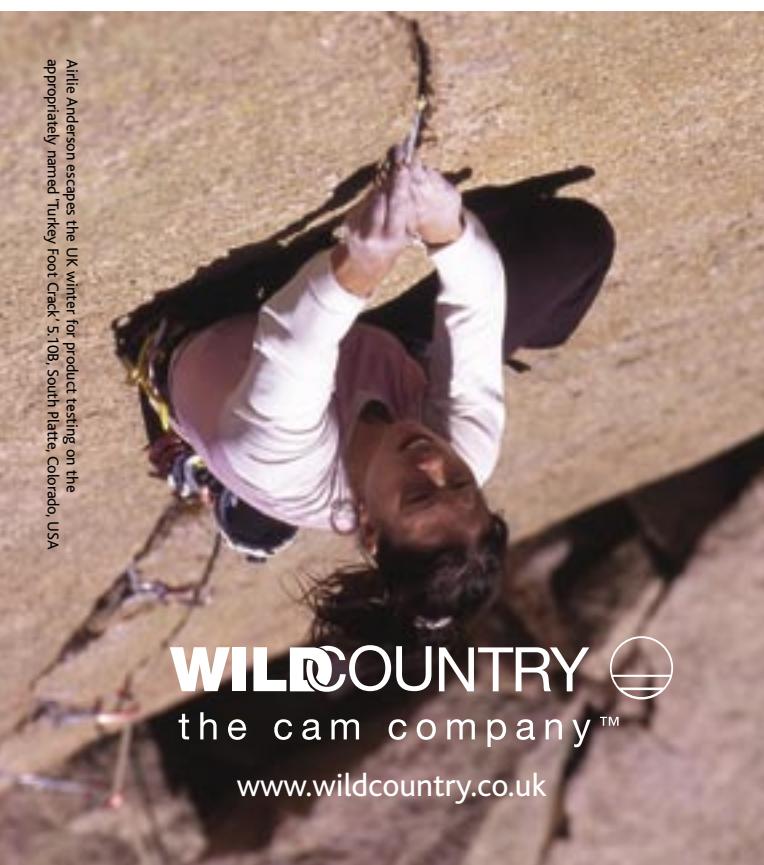
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