

## Northwest Branch Bouldering



by Robin Close

## Overview

Northwest Branch is the largest developed bouldering area between Baltimore and Washington, DC., and may be the most convenient as well. The boulders are located just off Route 29 in Silver Spring, with a Trader Joe's, Starbucks, and California Tortilla just up the hill. With close to 100 established problems, and the main concentration of boulders less than a five minute walk from the parking lot, it's easy enough for anyone to put together a decent circuit. Northwest Branch is characterized by good (though sometimes sharp) incut holds and lots of solid crystals for feet, with relatively flat landings making a single crash pad usually sufficient even for a solo boulderer.

## Safety

Bouldering is a dangerous activity anywhere you go. Despite rumors of drug dealers and gang members, the greatest hazard at Northwest Branch remains the physical environment. Be careful when crossing the fast-moving river, especially on wet rocks. Also be sure to have a spotter when bouldering close to the water, or on hillsides where landing areas are more uneven. And if you're uncomfortable with the height of areas like Long Wall, nobody says you can't rope up!

As with any outdoor area in Maryland, be aware that the ticks here can carry Lyme Disease, so be sure to check yourself after you finish. Also, copperheads have been spotted near some of the boulders. They are generally non-aggressive, but try to be aware of your surroundings and avoid stepping too close to them.

## Directions

The Northwest Branch boulders are located in Burnt Mills East Special Park at 10701 Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20901.



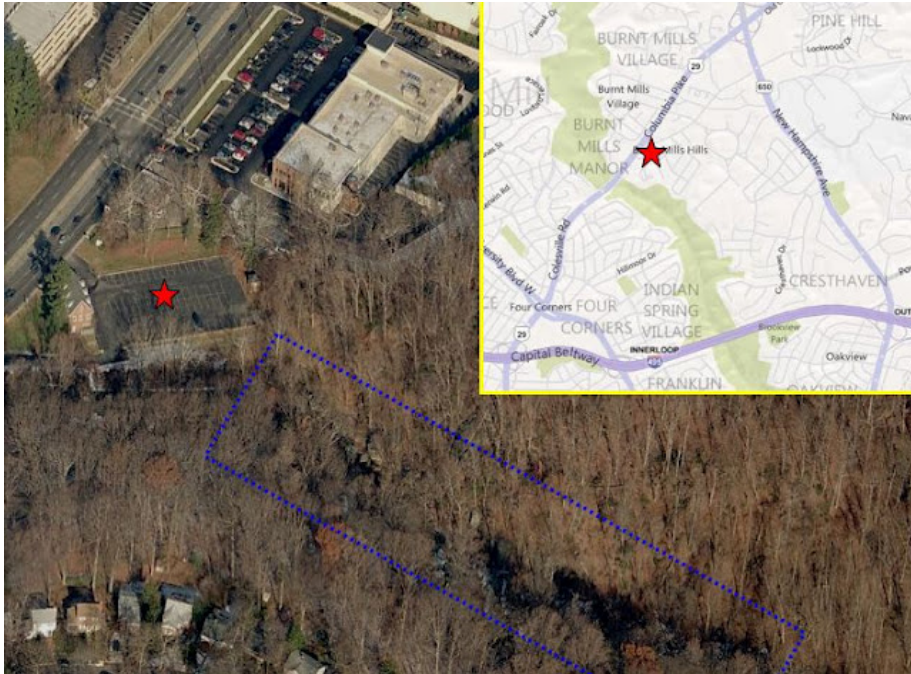
### **From the north (Columbia, Baltimore, etc):**

Take Route 29 south. After crossing 650 (New Hampshire Avenue) you'll see a shopping plaza on the left with the Trader Joe's, Starbucks, California Tortilla, etc. Go through the light and make a u-turn. Now heading north on Route 29, turn right into the parking lot with the old red brick building. The trail to the boulders is in the far corner of the lot.

### **From the south (Silver Spring, DC, etc):**

Take Route 29 North. After crossing over Route 193 (University Blvd.) and going down the hill, look for the old red brick building and continue as above.





### A Note on Ratings

Approximate ratings are indicated by the colored symbols shown to the right, with the problem number displayed inside. Dotted lines are used for variations or problems that intersect. For example, in the image below problem #3 is marked as a dotted line to differentiate it from the lines of #1 and #2. Ratings are subjective, and this guide presents ratings traditionally given to problems, regardless of whether they are now viewed as “soft” or “stiff.”

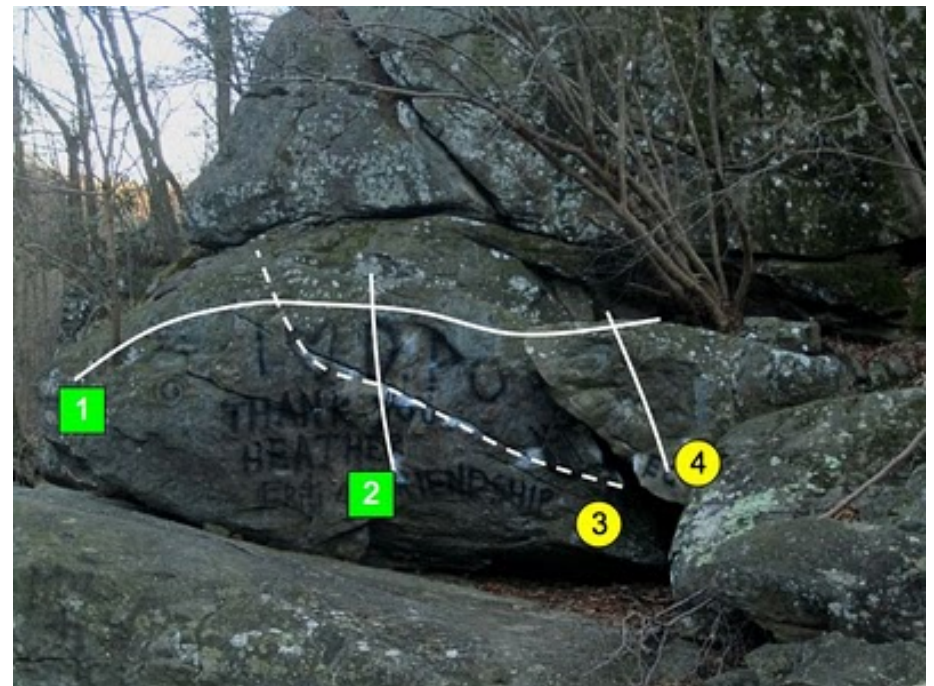
-  Green square = V0-V2
-  Yellow circle = V3-V5
-  Blue diamond = V6-V7
-  Red triangle = V8-V9
-  Black pentagon = V10+

From the trail entrance in the parking lot, the main concentration of boulders is only moments away, located in the area indicated by the dotted rectangle above. For the purposes of this guide, Northwest Branch is divided into three areas, which will be listed in order of approach.

The North Bank section is reached directly from the parking lot trail, and contains the majority of the established bouldering.

The South Bank section can be accessed via a variety of crossings, but the safest approach is by using the Rt. 29 crossing and walking downriver from there.

The Downstream section, including Long Wall and the 495 boulders, is located about a mile down the parking lot trail.





# North Bank- Tulip Area

## Approach:

After starting down the parking lot trail and passing a single boulder on the water's edge to the right, the Tulip Area is the first major cluster of boulders you'll find on the right side, with a short approach time of approximately one minute.

## Tulip Boulder

### 1. Center Face (V2)

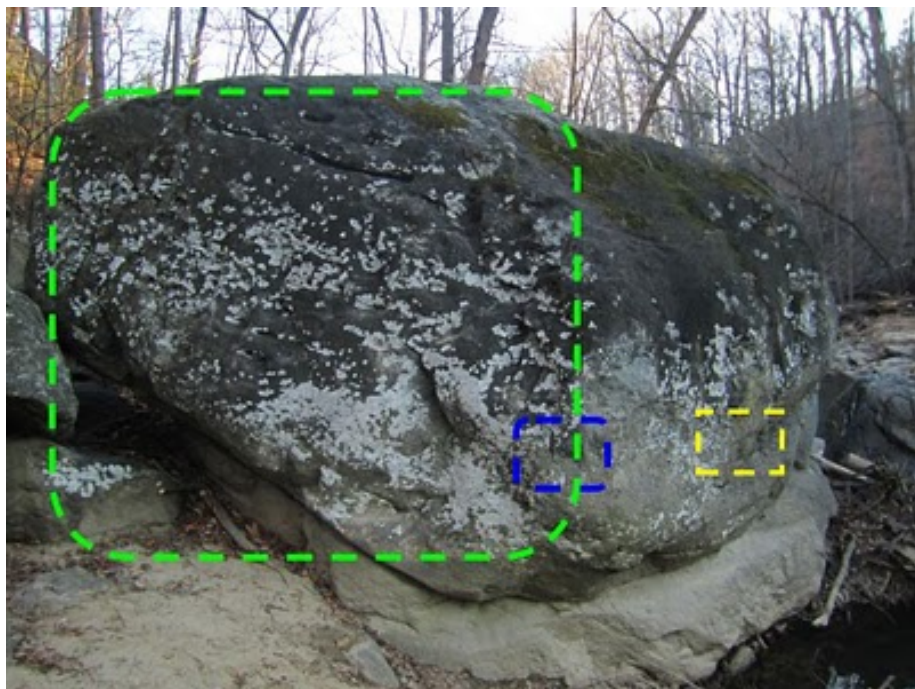
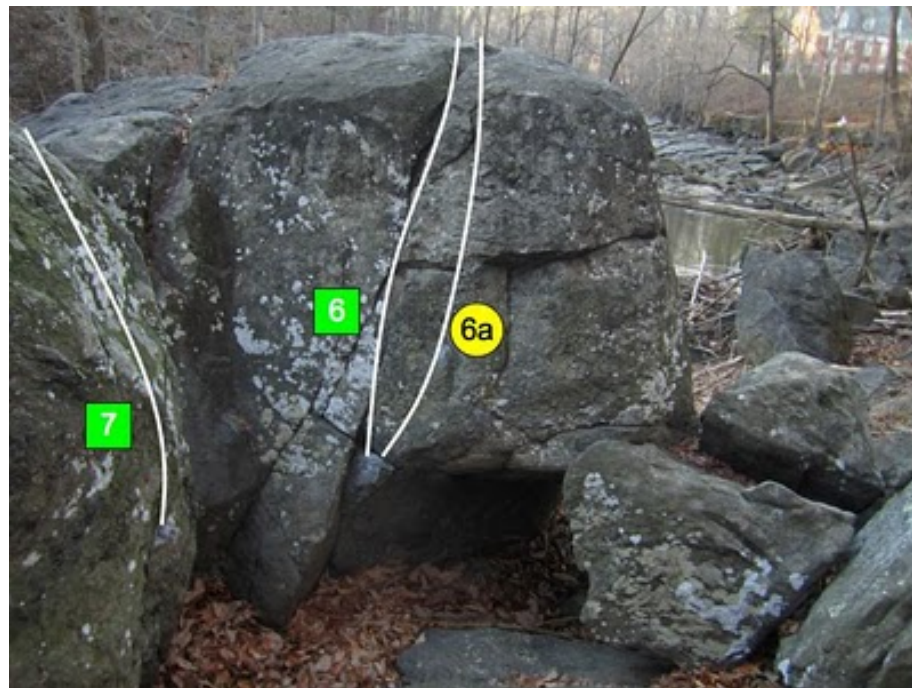
Starting on a jug approximately within the yellow box, go straight up using a knob and a jug.

### 2. Dankie Doobie (V4)

Starting on the same jug go right to a gaston, and up to a crimp/jug, topping out right.

### 3. The Furious Climber Named Andrea (V5)

Starting on the same jug, go left to a bad sloper with the left hand, bump to a good crimp, and top out on the Warm Up Problem.



### 4. The Tulip (V7)

Starting on two small holds approximately within the blue box, traverse right without using the high knob, and finish on Dankie Doobie.

### 5. Warm Up Problem (V0-V1)

Basically climb anywhere within the green box.

### 6. Maui (V0)

Sit start in the crack and move straight up on good holds.

### 6a. Monoamine Oxidase Inhibitor (a.k.a. MAOI) (V3)

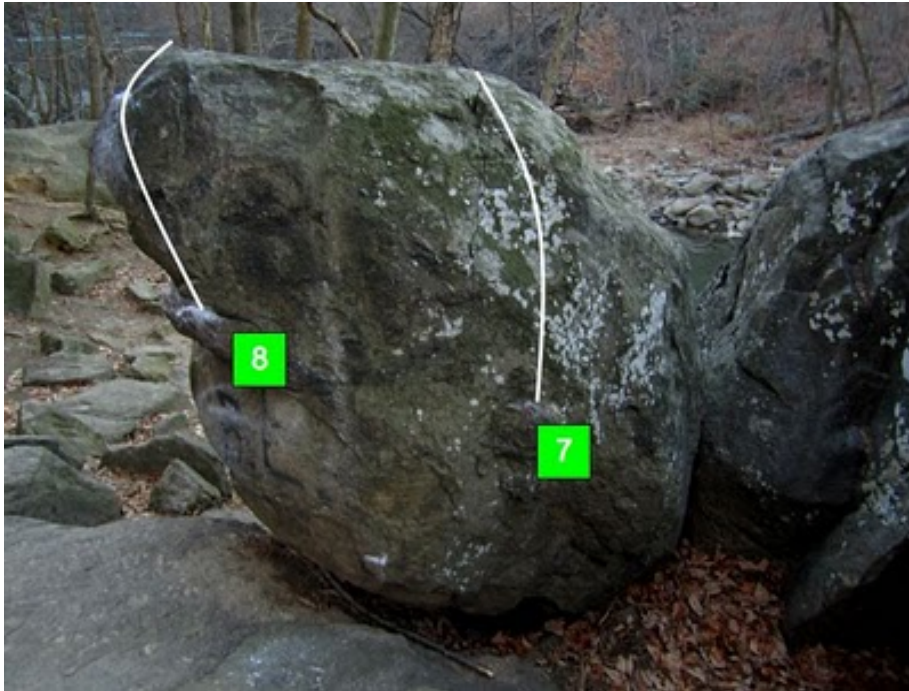
Start same as Maui, but all large holds associated with the crack are off. For more fun, start on the Warm Up Problem and traverse along the crack through the "cave" to the same finish.



*Robin Close on MAOI Variation*



## Tennies Mantle Boulder



### 7. Scum of the Heel (V2)

Start on a left hand crimp and a right hand undercling/sidepull, and move straight up to the lip.

### 8. Tennies Mantle (V0)

Start on jugs in the center and make one move up to a jug on the lip. Almost over before it starts, but good practice for topping out.

### 9. Santero (V0)

Sit start on the left end and traverse the lip up and right to top out at Tennies Mantle. A great introduction to using slopers and finding small feet. Much easier in the winter!



*Rebecca Close reaches through Santero*



# North Bank-Uphill Slab

**Approach:**  
*Less than a minute after passing the Tulip area, you'll see these boulders up the hill to your left.*



## 1. Thor's Prodigy (V7)

Start left of the jug and traverse up and right without using the lip until you reach the slot, then use the lip to finish.

## 2. Right Hand of Thor (V4)

Starting on the jug, traverse up and right using the lip and top out when you hit the oblong jugs.

## 3. Crimps (V9)

Starting on two small crimps, pull up and left to a slot, and finish up Right Hand of Thor. The sit start supposedly goes at V11.

## 4. 50 Foot Slab Slap (V0)

Start at the bottom of the slap and traverse up and right. A great problem for developing footwork.

## 1. Crack Line (V2)

Start low on large holds in the crack, and traverse up and right, finishing upward when you reach a sidepull and sloper. Despite complaints of sandbagging, don't miss this one!

## 2. Gateway Jugs (V0-)

A good first problem for new climbers. Start on the same large hold and pull straight up through good holds.

## 3. Fine Heroin Line (V5)

From the starting jug, go up to a pinch, then out right to a finger crack. Move across to the right to finish.

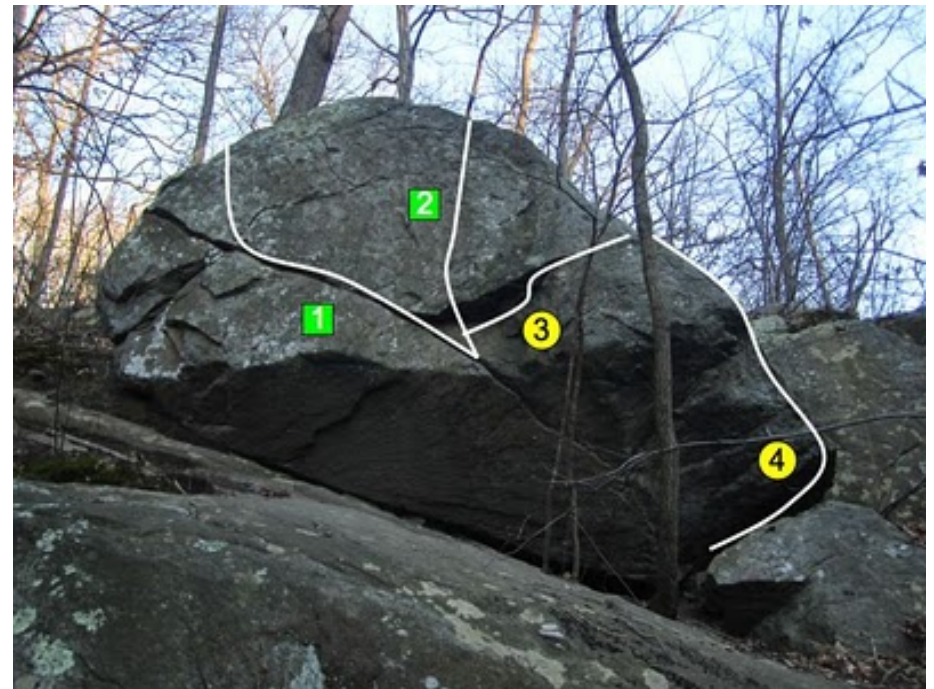
# North Bank-Crack Line Boulder

**Approach:**

*On the left side of the trail just after passing the Uphill Slab area.*

## 4. Dredges of Society (V3)

Start low under the overhang and squeeze your way up both sides.





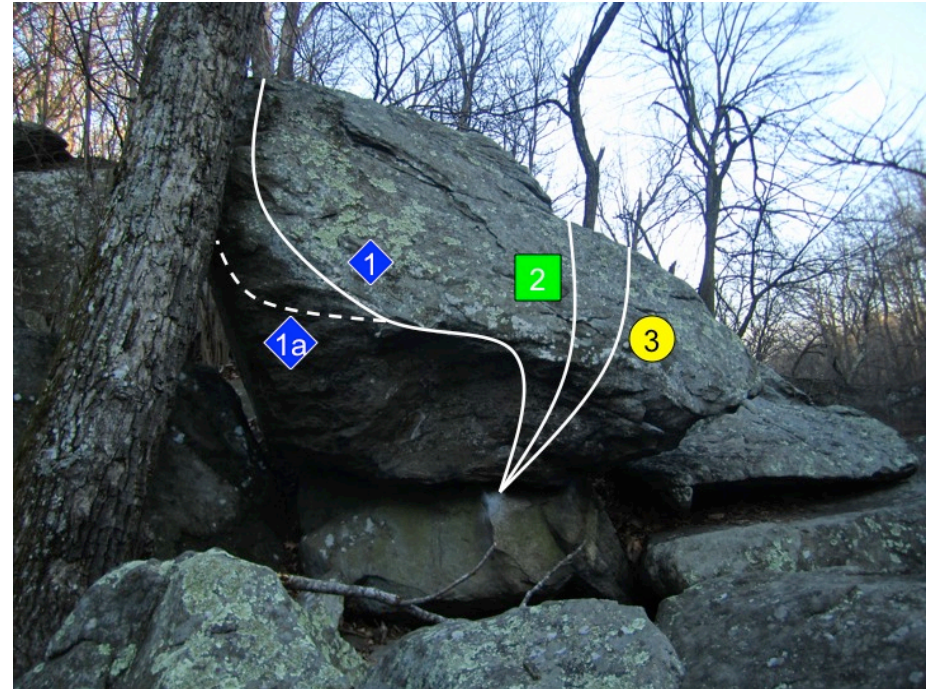
# North Bank- Pyramid Area

## Approach:

After passing Upstream Slab on the left, this area of jumbled rock is immediately to the right, with the Pyramid boulder just off the trail, the Anklebiter boulder a little further in, and the Suspended boulder at the river's edge.

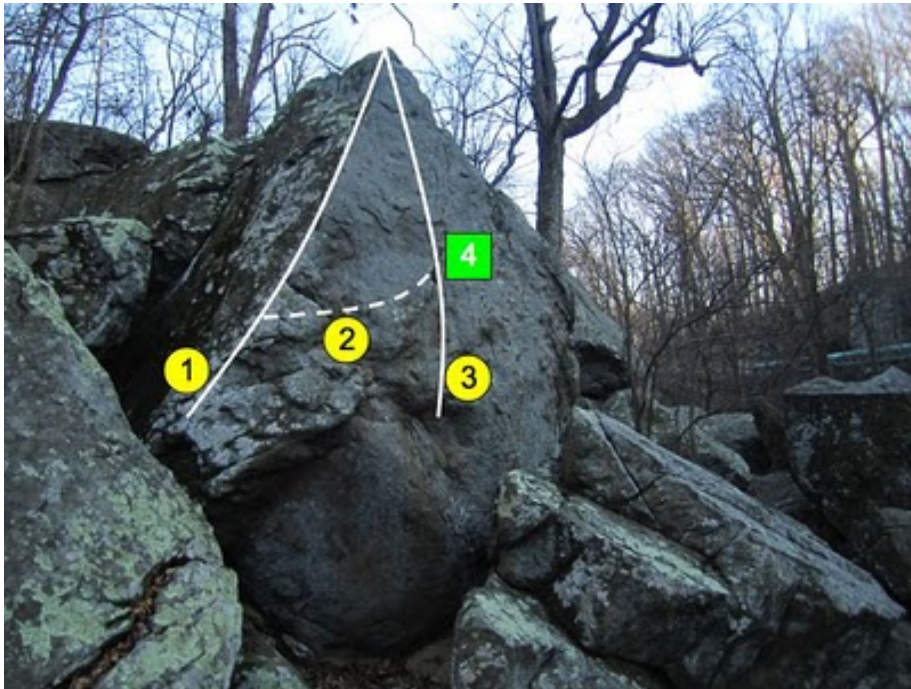
## Pyramid Boulder

- 1. Sharp Schist Arete (V3)**  
Climb the left side of the boulder using crimps and the arete.
- 2. Sharp Go-Tee (V3)**  
Start on the arete, but traverse right across crimps to join Upper Pyramid at the jugs.
- 3. Pyramid (V3)**  
Climb up the center, starting on crimps and moving up through jugs.
- 4. Upper Pyramid (V0)**  
Start on the center jugs and top out straight up.



## Anklebiter Boulder

- 1. Anklebiter Left (V6)**  
Sit-start in the center with the left hand on a sidepull and the right in a constriction. Move up to the edge of the overhang and traverse left along crimps. When you reach a flake just right of the tree, top out straight up.
  - 2. Anklebiter (V1)**  
Sit-start same as above, move up through the overhang and top out straight up.
  - 3. Anklebiter Right (V3)**  
An eliminate, starting the same as Anklebiter, but without using the good sloper and crimp rail past the overhang. Instead, move slightly right and use a worse sloper and left crimp.
- 1a. Anklebiter Further Left (V6?)**  
Same as Anklebiter Left, but use kneebars to move under the tree and finish up the left face on crimps.





# North Bank- Chaos Roof Area

## Approach:

*Just past the Pyramid area, this area has boulders on both sides of the trail, starting with the Gumdrop boulders on the left. The Floating Pyramid is almost immediately afterward on the left, with Chaos Roof directly across on the right, and the Cracks Over Water boulder at the river's edge*

## Gumdrop Boulders

### 1. The Gumdrop Twins (V1)

Starting on the left boulder, traverse to the right boulder and finish straight up.

### 2. Gumdrop Right (V2)

Start sitting in front of the right boulder, with your left hand low on the arete and right hand on a crimp. Finish straight up.

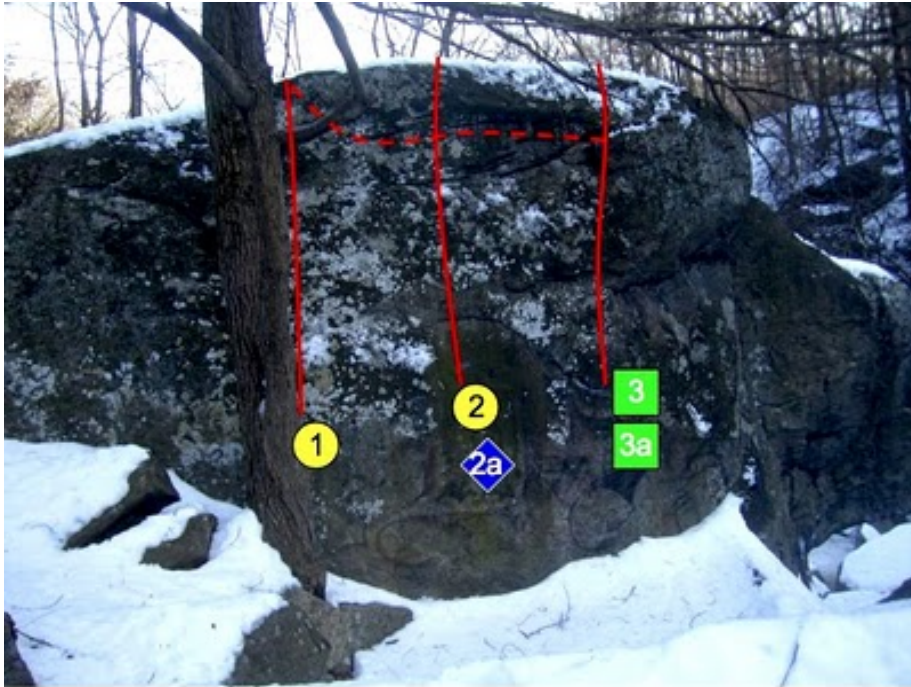


## The Floating Pyramid

### 1. The Floating Pyramid (V0+)

Move straight up the center of the slab without using the aretes. Or use them if it makes you happy. Just watch the nasty pointy rock on the right side of your landing area!





## Chaos Roof- Upstream Slab

### 1. Damn Tree (V3)

Start matched on a sidepull in front of the tree, then move up through the vertical crack to top out.

### 2. Center Face (V3)

Starting on a small crimp and a tiered hold, move through a small undercling rail and top out straight up. A good problem for those with tiny fingers.

### 2a. Genetic (V6)

Same as Center Face, but the right hand gaston is off. Again, small fingers are a plus.

### 3. Don't Fall Right (V0)

Start on opposing undercling sidepulls at the right end of the flat area, and climb straight up. Looking at the drop to the right, the reason for the name should be pretty obvious.

### 3a. Go Left (V0)

Start same as Don't Fall Right, but when you get to the small horizontal cracks traverse left without using the lip until you reach the vertical crack on Damn Tree. Follow the broken line on the picture above.

## Chaos Roof- Downstream Slab

### 1. Snowflake Dyno (V6)

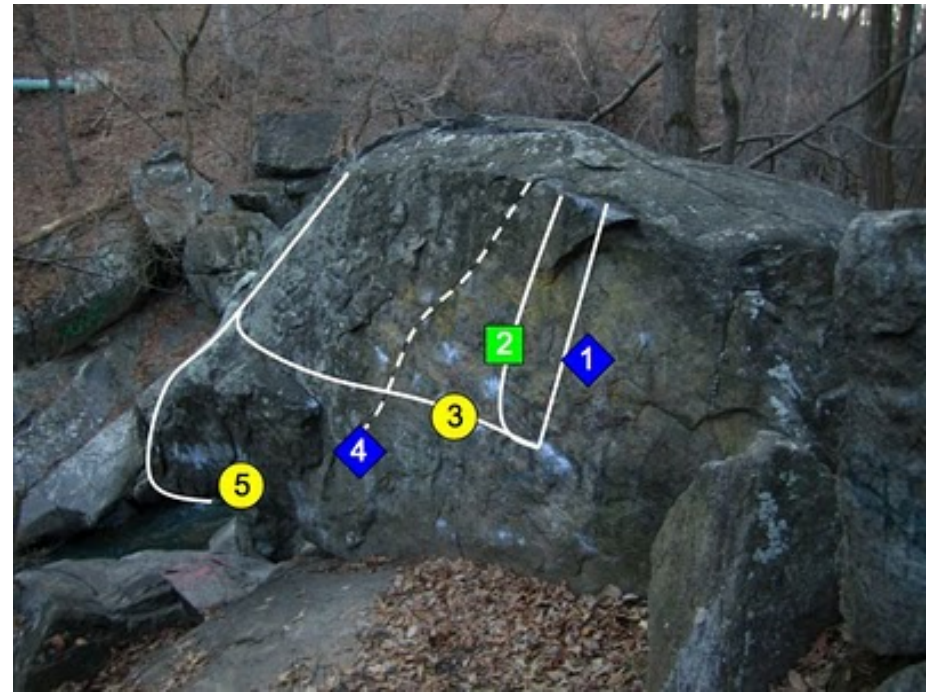
Start on good crimps and go directly up to the lip. Not the most amazing problem, but fun to do once or twice.

### 2. Snowflake (V2)

Start on crimps and move up and left through more crimps to top out. Fun, but sharp if your fingers aren't used to it.

### 3. Mikey Likes It (V5)

Start on crimps and traverse left to top out at the ledge. If you're looking to build endurance, turn back around at the ledge and traverse right to top out at the other



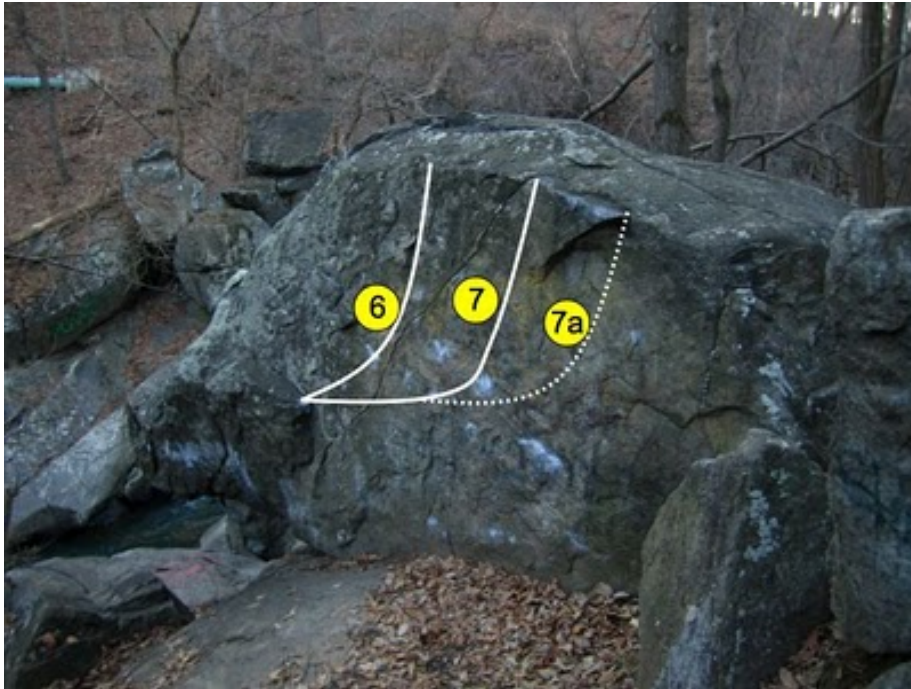
### 4. Seam Nightmares (V6)

Go up and right using only the thin seam for hands.

### 5. Doom (V4/5)

Starting on two underclings beneath the roof, move left to a crimp, then follow jugs to the top. V4 using the large flake, V5 without. Watch the fall.





## Chaos Roof

### 1. Chaos Roof (V9)

Starting on a pinch under the overhang, work out the left arete using crimps and heel hooks until making a big move to the starting jug of The Edge of Chaos. Finish straight up using the arete.

#### 1a. Full Chaos Roof (V9/10)

Starts two moves further into the roof.

### 2. Ultimate Doom (V10)

Starts same as Chaos Roof, but moves right under the overhang to the start holds of Doom, and finishes up the jugs on the lip.

#### 2a. Ultimate Direct (V11)

Same as Ultimate Doom, but after reaching the start holds of Doom, finish straight up and right without using the juggy flake.

#### 2b. Ultimately Doomed Snowflakes (project)

Follow Ultimate Direct to the face, then traverse right to finish on Snowflake.

### 3. The Edge of Chaos (V3)

Jump to the jug and finish straight up using the arête.



*Emily Close highsteps up Snowflake*

### 6. Booby Trapped Dog Dish (V4)

Start on the jug and move up and right through crimps to a dish with a pebble in it.

### 7. Snowflake traverse (V4)

Start on the jug and traverse right to top out on Snowflakes.

#### 7a. Variation (V4)

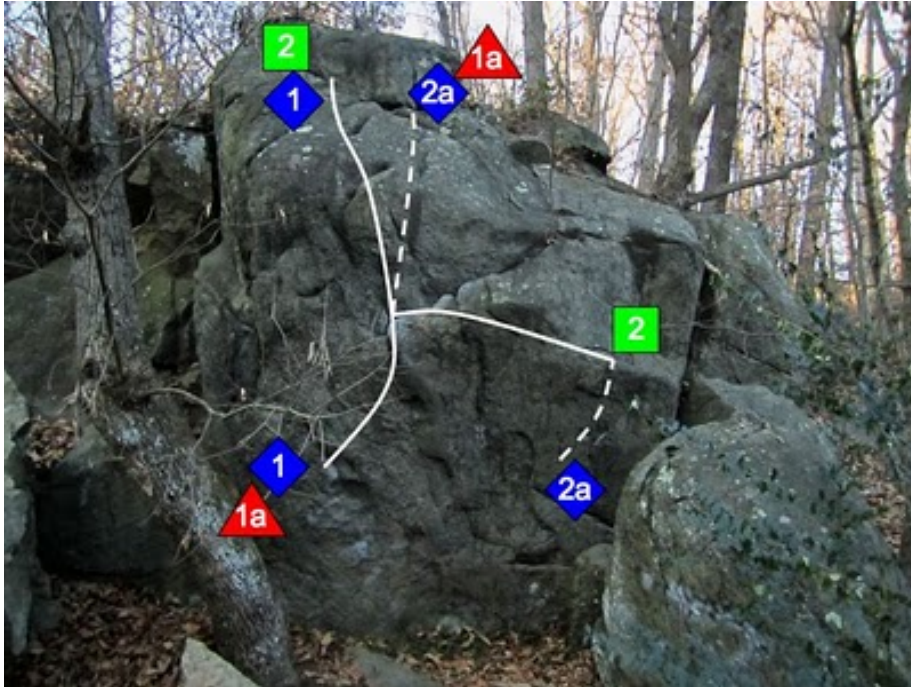
Continue right to top out toward the end of the boulder. For more fun, downclimb from the lip into the start of Mikey Likes It, then traverse back left.





# North Bank- Trailside Boulder

**Approach:**  
Immediately after the Chaos  
Roof area, this boulder is  
just up the hill on the left.



## 1. River Dyno (V6)

Not really a dyno, but move from a left sidepull and right gaston up to the large jug in the center, with an easy finish up and left on jugs.

## 1a. River Dyno Direct (V8)

Same start as River Dyno, finish straight up on slopers. While more sustained, the start is still the crux, so V8 seems a bit inflated. From a sit with a low left

## 2. The Fin (V2)

Jump to jugs on the right side, traverse left, and finish on River Dyno. Also fun to move back up and right across jugs for a lower finish.

## 2a. The Fin Low-Start (V7)

Starting on small holds below the jugs, climb into The Fin and finish the same as River Dyno Direct. Also rated generously, but still fun.

# North Bank- Bloody Buddy

**Approach:** Just  
downstream from Chaos  
Roof, almost directly in line  
with the roof itself.

## 1. With the Famous Thighs (V3)

Start on two crimps, move left to a sidepull in the seam, then back up and right to top out.

## 2. Bloody Buddy (V3)

Not bad if you like traverses...and I do. Start on the right end of the boulder and move right through slopers and crimps, then make a big move to the "dog dish" hold and top out.





# South Bank-Roof Area

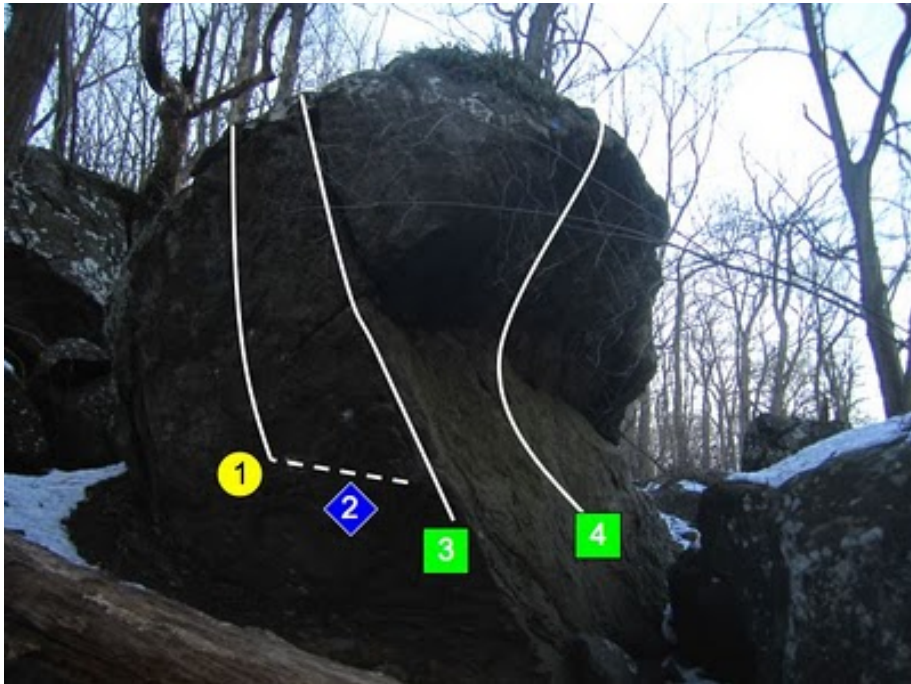
## Approach:

From the parking lot, cross the river on the Rt 29 bridge, and walk downstream until you reach the boulders across from the lot.

## Big Roof Boulder

### 1. Crimptastic (V3)

Climb the crimps straight up. Sharp but good.



### 2. Crimptastic Sit (V6?)

Start low and right on a jug, and adds a few fun moves to link into Crimptastic, then top out the same. Fun movement, but not easy on fingertips.

### 3. Denim Devil (V0)

An arete that turns into a crack. How often do you see that?

### 4. Do It Or... Better Do It (V1)

Climb the slab up to the cracks in the roof, out to a dish on the lip, and top out through jugs. See the boulder at the base? See the name of the problem? Guessing they're related...



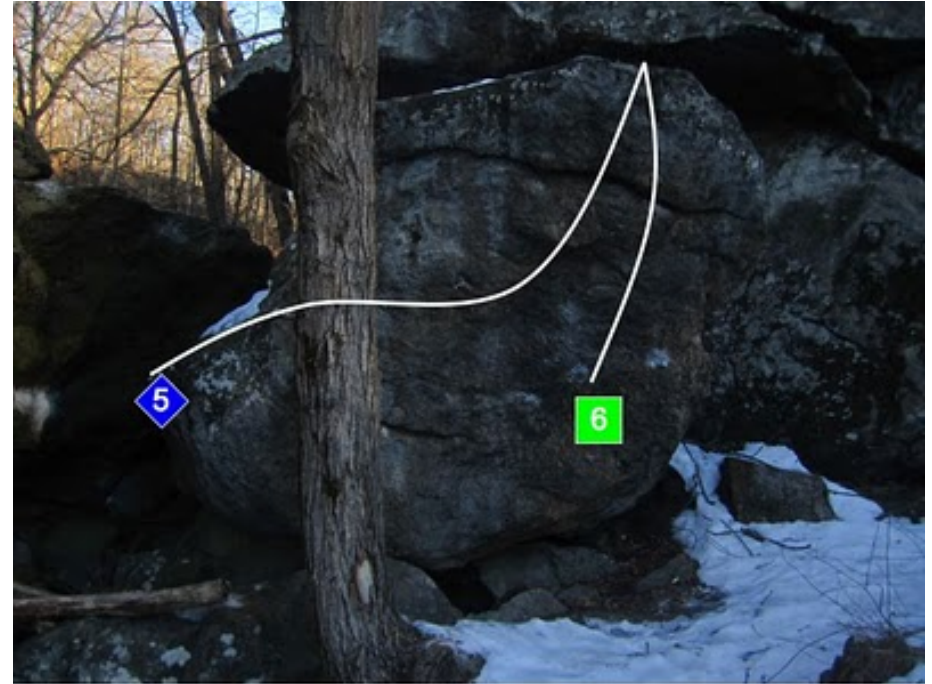
## Block Boulder

### 5. Give Me Lip (V7?)

Start far left on the lip and use it to traverse right into the face with Short But Sweet. Then, no longer using the lip, link into Short But

### 5a. Give Me Thin Lips (?)

Same as above, but finish straight up after reaching the face, rather than continuing right for the linkup.



### 6. Short But Sweet

(V2): Starting on low crimps, move up through good holds in the crack for the topout. Arete is off.

### 6a. Short And Easy (V0)

Same as above, but arete is on.



## The Business Boulder

### 7. The Business (V6)

Start low on good underclings and climb out the arete through fun slopers.



Ben Dooley on The Business



## South Bank-Roof Area

### Approach:

After crossing the river, walk downstream until you reach this large boulder next to the exposed pipeline.

Note: The routes indicated below are typically done on rope due to the height, and make excellent trad leads. If you decide to boulder them, be sure to pad well, and watch out for the pipe on the way down!



### 1. Dirty Crack (5.7)

Climb roughly along the lefthand crack. If you happen to use holds in the cracks to the right, whatever.

Done as a bouldering problem, this has been listed as Crack Solo (V1).

### 2. All My Heroes Are Heroin Junkies (5.10a)

Follow the thin crack that starts a few feet right of Dirty Crack, rather than the one that branches directly off it. There are a few crack lines here, so find something that looks 5.10a.



# South Bank-Tick Area

## 1. The Tick Traverse (V2)

Start at the left end and traverse right without using the lip until you reach the prow, then top out to the right.

## 2. The Tick (V0)

Sit start on the large left-facing sidepull, and move up through the crack and good crimps to a comfortable lip. Dynoing from crack to lip is V1.

### *Approach:*

*After crossing the river, walk downstream until you pass the exposed pipeline, then walk down to the river's edge.*

## 3. The Traverse (V5)

Start on a jug on the right arete, and traverse left using the holds in the crack for hands. A great problem with lots of fun variations, including dropping to the large sidepull and finishing out the undercling rail.

## 4. Kiss the Prow (V3)

Starting with right hand in a dish and left hand pinching the arete, get your feet up and move straight to the top.

