

# Lake George

The shoreline of Lake George, the archetype of Adirondack lakes, is flanked by mountains and cliffs. Thomas Jefferson described it as "the most beautiful water [he] ever saw."<sup>1</sup> Positioned between Lake Champlain and the Hudson River, the 32-mile-long Lake George has figured prominently in battles of the French and Indian War and the American Revolution. Historic forts sit at either end of the lake, and sunken warships can be glimpsed through its clear waters. For centuries, Lake George has been the summer destination in the Adirondacks, and it was only a matter of time before visiting climbers took notice.

The region is bordered by the lower Hudson River to the west and the park boundary / Vermont border to the east, and includes three lakes—Lake George, Schroom Lake, and Brant Lake. The hillsides along Lake George are particularly rugged and, together with the neighboring Pharaoh Lakes Wilderness, house a lot of rock.

The cliffs in this section are described from south to north along the Northway (I-87), beginning at the southern boundary of the park, near Exit 20. This exit accesses the east shore crags—Pilot Knob (Stewart's Ledge, The Brain), Buck Mountain (Upper Buck, New Buck), and the cliffs along Shelving Rock Road (Sleeping Beauty, Shelving Rock, and the Ark Wall). These crags offer mostly single-pitch climbing with a mixture of sport and traditional lines and are scattered in an area with many hiking trails and camping options.

To the north, Exit 21 provides access to Lake George Village (to the east) and Lake Luzerne (to the southwest) and the excellent single-pitch steep climbing mecca at Potash Cliff.

Farther north, Exit 24 accesses the west shore crags—the excellent ridgeline crag of Tongue Mountain Cliff, with some of the best rock in the park; the cliffs around Rogers Rock Campground, with multipitch slabs, steep faces, and cracks, in an idyllic lakefront setting; and Wild Pines, a quality road-side cliff.

Exit 25 accesses the trailheads for Pharaoh Mountain and Barton High Cliff. Although both are large, somewhat scruffy, and buried deep in the woods, they do offer excellent multipitch adventure climbing.

Exit 28, the northernmost exit in the region, accesses the sunny Gull Pond Cliff. This exit is also used by those coming from the north to access the north end of Lake George and Rogers Rock.

## SEASON

The Lake George region has one of the longest climbing seasons in the park. In the early spring and late fall, this region is generally warmer than the rest of the park due to its low elevation and the moderating effect of Lake George. It's also located in a rain shadow, making it one of the drier places to visit. However, with warmth come pesky bugs. Ideal weather conditions are irrelevant when the bugs prevent you from even belaying, let alone climbing. Lakeside cliffs such as Rogers Slide, Stewart's Ledge, and Shelving Rock are breezy and have fewer bugs.

## ACCESS

Annual closures for peregrine falcon nesting may affect Pharaoh Mountain, Barton High Cliff, Sleeping Beauty, the Campground Wall at Rogers Rock, the Main Face at Shelving Rock, and Potash Cliff. Shelving Rock Road is often closed during mud season (Apr–May), which affects access to Sleeping Beauty, Shelving Rock, and the Ark Wall.

## DIRECTIONS (MAPS PAGES 4 AND 34)

All of the cliffs are readily accessed from the Northway, via Exits 20–28. If you're coming from western New York, the quickest access is via the NY 8 shortcut (page 12). From northern Vermont, take the Crown Point Bridge (page 12), then south on NY 22N / NY 9N. (The ferry to Ticonderoga is slow and not recommended for

crossing Lake Champlain.) From southern Vermont, follow US 4 to Whitehall, where the road splits to go toward either end of the lake.

## WHERE TO STAY

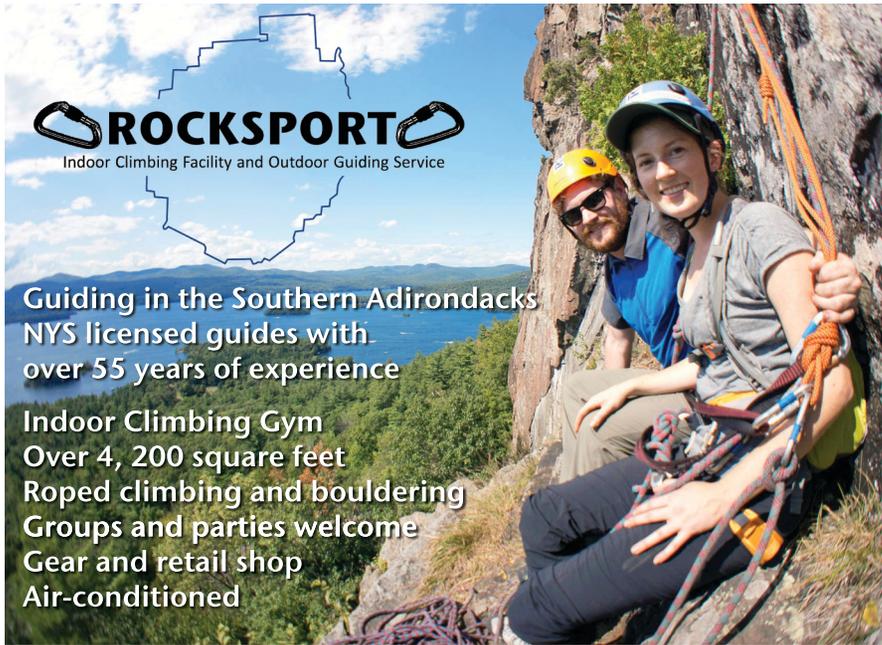
Primitive car-camping sites can be found along the access roads to Hudson River Crags (River Road) and Shelving Rock (Shelving Rock Road). Most of the trailheads are on state land and are pleasant enough that setting up a camp, back in the woods, is an option.

Excellent backcountry camping is found in the Pharaoh Lakes Wilderness.

**Campgrounds:** No shortage of state campgrounds here, but even so, it can be busy during peak season, so call ahead for availability. Try Eagle Point, north of Exit 26 (518.494.2220); Hearthstone Point, near Exit 22 (518.668.5193); Lake George Battleground, in Lake George (518.668.3348); Luzerne, near Exit 21 (518.696.2031); Paradox Lake, near Exit 28 (518.532.7451); and Putnam Pond, near Exit 28 (518.585.7280). Rogers Rock, near Exit 25 (518.585.6746), is a huge campground and day-use area.

There are many options for other lodging (more than any other region), including cottages, motels, hotels, and luxury resorts. The Lake George Chamber of Commerce is a good place to start ([www.lakegeorgechamber.com](http://www.lakegeorgechamber.com)).

<sup>1</sup> Sarah N. Randolph, *The Domestic Life of Thomas Jefferson* (1871), p. 201.



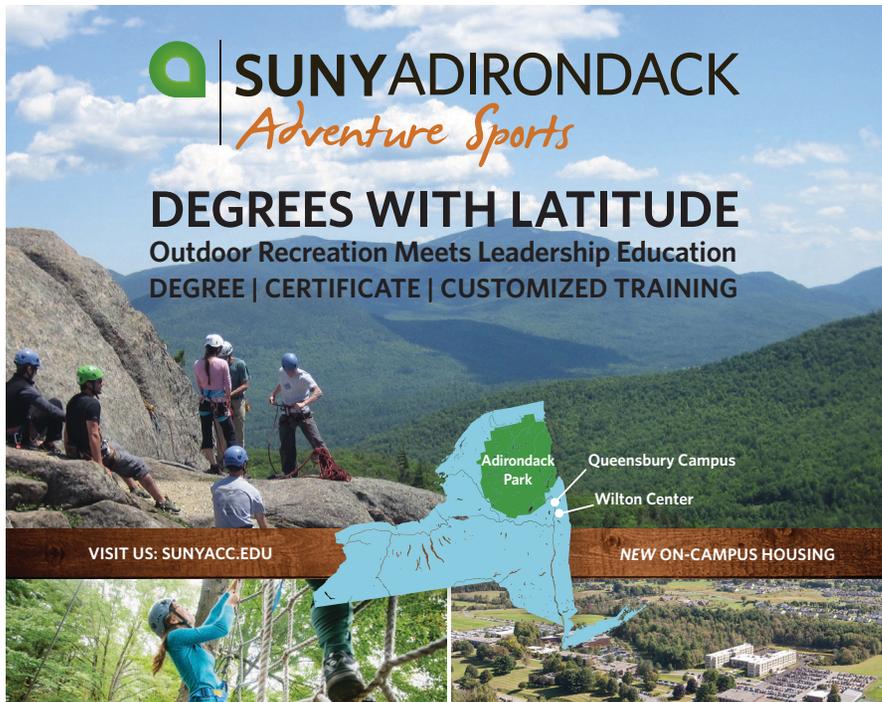
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PG	CLIFF	QUALITY	ASPECT	APPROACH		GRADES	#
38	Shelving Rock	★★★★	SW	4-20 min	easy	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	72
60	Ark Wall	★★★★	W	16 min	moderate	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	18
64	Sleeping Beauty Mountain	★★★	W	20 min	easy	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	19
67	Buck Mountain Upper Buck		W	30 min	easy	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	5
69	Buck Mountain New Buck	★★	W	40 min	moderate	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	28
72	Buck Mountain Eagle Cliff	★	W	50 min	difficult	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	8
73	Inman Pond Bluff		SE & S	35 min	easy	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	4
74	Pilot Knob Mountain Stewart's Ledge	★★	W	10 min	easy	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	21
78	Pilot Knob Mountain The Brain	★	W	40 min	moderate	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	6
79	Hudson River Crags	★	NW	5 min	easy	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	8
80	Potash Cliff	★★★★	SW	22 min	moderate	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	18
88	Rogers Rock Campground Wall	★★	SE	10 min	easy	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	16
91	Rogers Rock Cove Wall		SW	10 min	easy	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	2
92	Rogers Rock Rogers Slide	★★★★★	S	20 min	easy boat required	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	24
102	Brown Mountain Cliff	★	S	1 hr	difficult	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	4
104	Deer Leap		S	1 hr 20 min	moderate	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	1
106	Wild Pines	★	NW	5 min	easy	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	3
108	Fly Brook Valley Wardsboro Cliff		SE	45 min	difficult	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	4
109	Padanarum Cliff		S	20 min	moderate	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	5
111	Tongue Mountain Cliff	★★★	W	1 hr	moderate	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	27
117	Barton High Cliff	★★	NW	1 hr 15 min	moderate	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	13
121	Spectacle Ponds Cliff		W	33 min	moderate	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	2
122	Pharaoh Mountain Main Face	★★	SW	1 hr 35 min	difficult	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	16
130	Pharaoh Mountain Summit Cliffs	★	SW	1 hr 35 min	moderate	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	8
132	Gull Pond Cliff	★	W	20 min	easy	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	13

**AMENITIES**

There is no shortage of amenities, as there are many towns, most of which are easily accessed from the Northway. Glens Falls, located just south of the park (Exits 18-19), is a small city and has everything you could want, including a climbing gym (see Appendix E, page 500). Just inside the park and on the south end of Lake George is Lake George Village, a summerlong carnival of shopping, beachgoers, theme parks, and festivals. The other towns along the lake are also filled with summer tourists but have limited amenities during the off season (Columbus Day to Memorial Day). At

the north end of Lake George, and just north of Rogers Rock, is Ticonderoga, a good-sized town with many options for groceries and gas. Pottersville, located at Exit 26, has 24-hour gas.

**DIVERSIONS**

There are lots of rest-day options in this region. Aside from the water recreation on Lake George, there is dam-released whitewater boating on the Sacandaga River near Lake Luzerne. Excellent hiking and trail running can be found in the trail systems around Shelving Rock and Tongue Mountain.

## SHELVING ROCK

<b>Location</b>	North of NY 149 on the east shore of Lake George, accessed from Northway Exit 20																								
<b>Aspect</b>	Southwest																								
<b>Height</b>	200'																								
<b>Quality</b>	★★★★																								
<b>Approach</b>	4–20 min, easy																								
<b>Summary</b>	A wide range of difficulty and quality, with the greatest concentration of quality routes in the 5.10 range. Best for face climbing on incut edges. Dries quickly after the rain.																								
	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>5</td><td>6</td><td>11</td><td>10</td><td>28</td><td>7</td><td>5</td><td>72</td> </tr> <tr> <td>-5.6</td><td>5.7</td><td>5.8</td><td>5.9</td><td>5.10</td><td>5.11</td><td>5.12</td><td>5.13+</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="7"></td> <td>total</td> </tr> </table>	5	6	11	10	28	7	5	72	-5.6	5.7	5.8	5.9	5.10	5.11	5.12	5.13+								total
5	6	11	10	28	7	5	72																		
-5.6	5.7	5.8	5.9	5.10	5.11	5.12	5.13+																		
							total																		

This long cliff rises above the eastern shore of Lake George and has mostly single-pitch routes. There are several multi-pitch routes, but few of them top out. Most of the routes are "modern trad", meaning fixed protection and gear; don't expect many clip ups. The rock is similar to that of nearby Sleeping Beauty and Ark Wall—featured, with incut edges and tiered overhangs, and not as sheer or low-angled as many

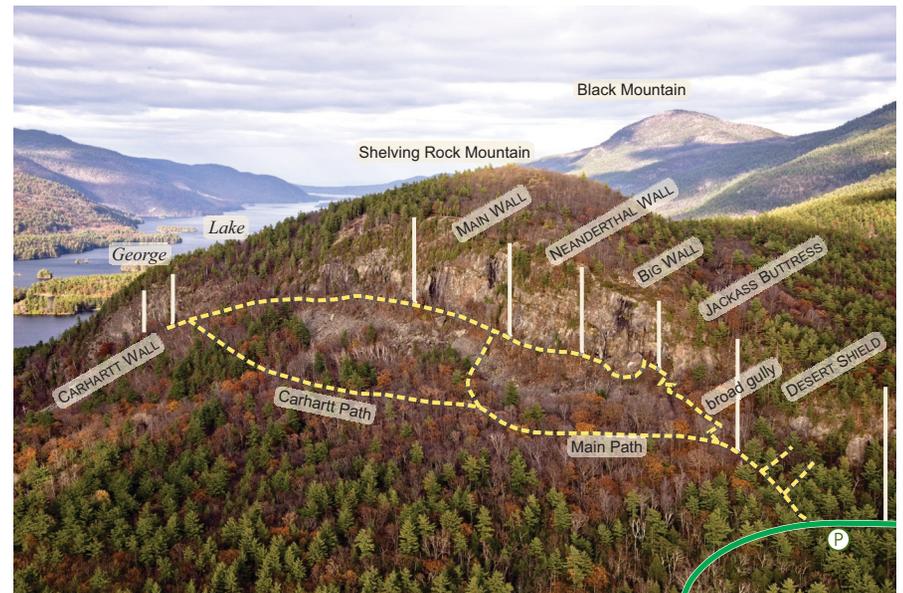
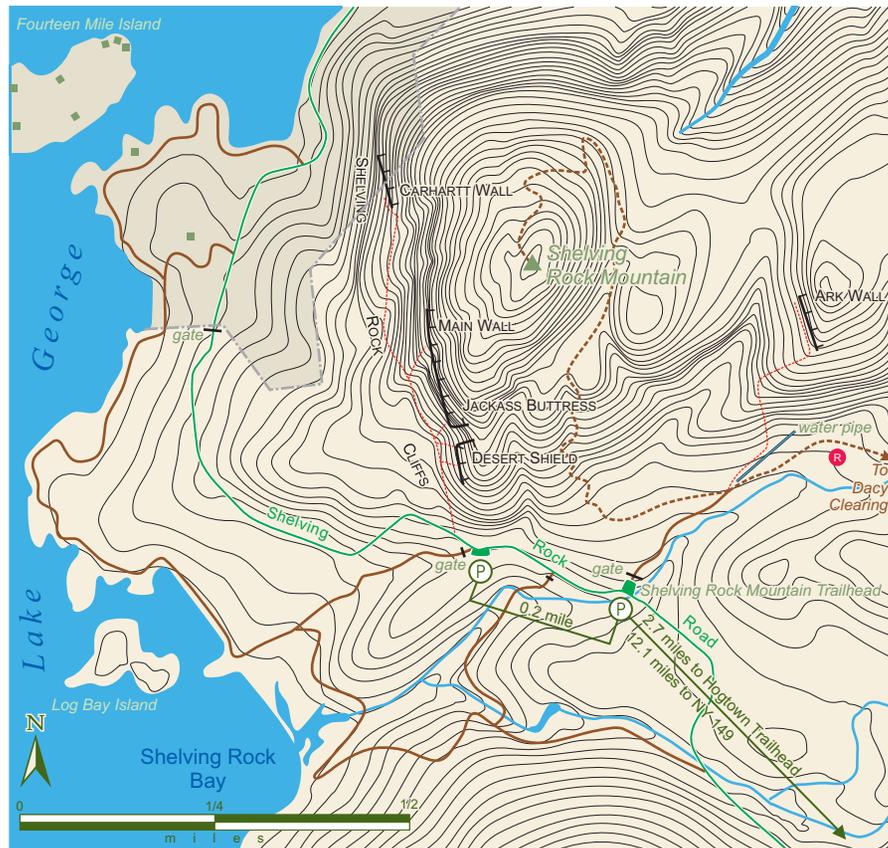
Adirondack cliffs. Like many of the Lake George cliffs, Shelving Rock and its neighbors have one of the longest climbing seasons in the park. And you can't beat the location—full sun in the afternoon with outstanding views of Lake George.

Be aware that this cliff has a lot of choss. The routes documented here (mostly) stick to the better sections of rock, but even so the rock is brittle and breaks where you don't expect; treat it with caution, like desert sandstone. The routes are mostly well-protected, but sometimes bolts are placed off to the side in better rock, so carry some 2'-long runners to minimize rope drag.

Large talus fields and fresh rock debris litter the base of this cliff so watch your footing (and the poison ivy) as you approach your climbs. As with any recently developed cliffs, helmets are recommended for both the leader and belayer. Test your holds before weighting them and place protection often.

Thanks to a cell tower at the Sagamore Resort across the lake, the cliff and parking area have good cell reception.

Six different sections of the cliff have been developed. From left to right, they are the Carhartt Wall, Main



Face, Neanderthal Cave, Big Wall, Jackass Buttress and Desert Shield.

### GEAR

Bring a standard trad rack with an emphasis on small cams and wires.

### CAMPING

Sleeping Beauty and Shelving Rock are on a dead-end dirt road with excellent opportunities for car camping. Designated sites are posted on a map at a kiosk that is found at the Hogtown Trailhead, where the dirt road begins its steep descent from the large parking area on the right. There's also a good bivy spot at the base of the Main Wall (no water).

### DIRECTIONS

(MAP PAGE 38)

From the Hogtown Trailhead (page 64) continue on Shelving Rock Road. At 2.7 miles go past a bridge and the Shelving Rock trailhead on the right. At 2.9 miles, park at a parking area on the left; this is parking for a carriage road that leads to the shore, a large lot delineated with boulders [0612838.4823456](tel:06128384823456), and signposted "Parking Area 4." Beyond the parking area, the road continues past several more parking areas before ending at private property (gated), 3.7 miles from the Hogtown Trailhead.

The last 4 miles of the road is a steep dirt road that is subject to closure during mud season (April–May) and can be impassable in midwinter after heavy snow.

From the parking area, continue down the road for 30', and look for a herd path on the opposite side of the road from the parking area. Follow the herd path north, contour uphill, and stay below the talus fields and cliff bands to the right. Specific spur trails are described in the approaches to the different cliff sections.

### HISTORY

The cliff is situated above the former Knapp estate. In 1904, George Knapp, co-founder of Union Carbide Corporation, acquired 3500 acres of property, including Shelving Rock and about 6 miles of Lake George shoreline. New York State acquired most of this in 1941. The existing network of carriage roads were converted to a trail system that affords excellent hiking.

Early climbing history here is unknown. In the early 1980s Tom Rosecrans drove on the lake ice in search of ice and stopped to investigate the ice near **Snake Charmer**. He fled with a distinctly unfavorable opinion of the chossy rock. No doubt other climbers visited, only to be turned away by the lack of continuous crack systems or variable rock quality.

This all changed in 2007 with the arrival of Craig Vollkommer, a contractor from Glens Falls who developed routes at nearby Sleeping Beauty. **Old School**, a non-descript corner at the Jackass Buttress, was Vollkommer's first route here in 2007. Vollkommer was the right man at the right time—he had the patience, skills, and vision for dealing with the steep, chossy, unprotectable rock. In January 2008 Vollkommer returned with Jessica Donovan and established the first route on the Main Face, **Monty Python**. Many classic routes were climbed that year by Vollkommer, now joined by Warrensburg painting contractor Ian Measeck, most notably **Rusty Lumberjack**, **Claim Jumper**, **Gong Show**, **Hackett Corner**, **Infinity and Beyond**, and **Wake and Bake**. The cliff became a great year-round project area for Vollkommer and Measeck, who could be found hanging from ropes throughout the year. In fact, many of these early routes were first climbed in the middle of winter, which highlights how temperate the conditions can be at this cliff. In the fall of 2008,

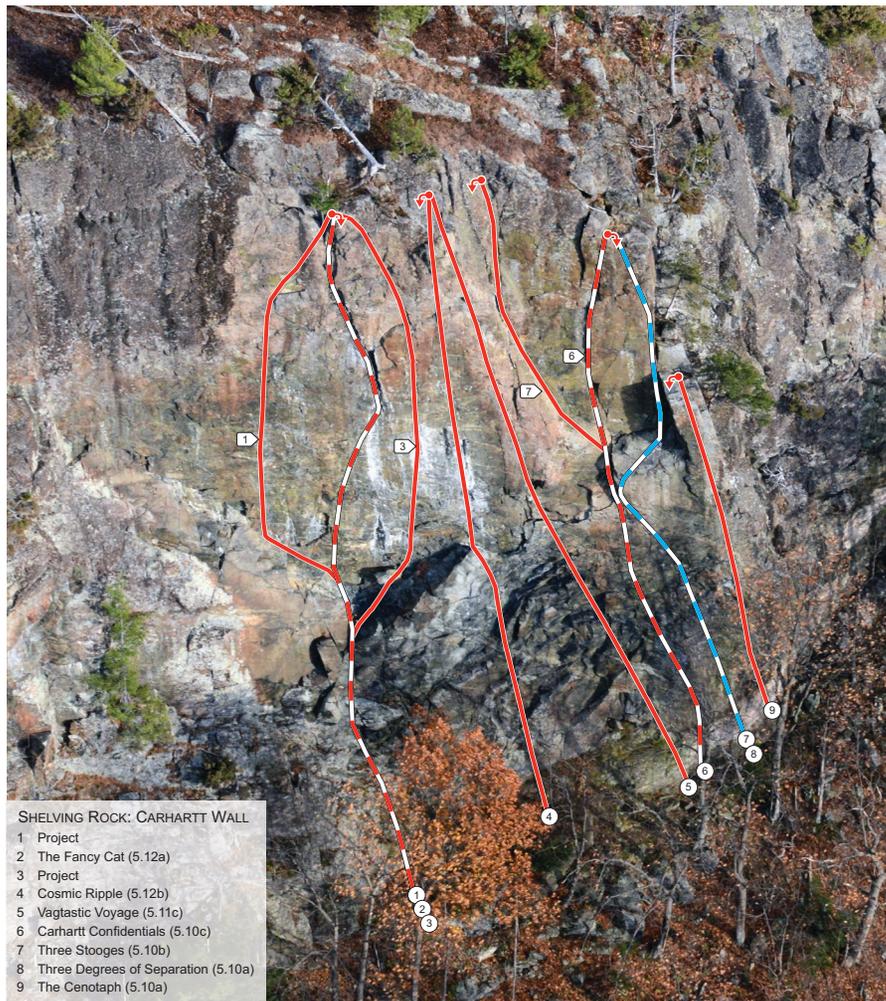
Vollkommer and Measeck invited a dozen climbers to visit, which opened a lot of eyes to the future of Lake George rock climbing.

With renewed enthusiasm (and 30 more years of new routing experience), Tom Rosecrans returned, finishing out the year with such pioneering ascents as **Cold Bare Report** at Jackass Buttress and **Obama Mama** at Desert Shield. Rosecrans, owner of the local climbing gym Rocksport, was on a quest to develop moderate routes for guiding, and his routes are generally well-protected in the easier grades for the area. In 2009, focus turned to a low section of cliff, the Neanderthal Cave, which started with Vollkommer and Measeck's contributions (**Protruding Forehead** and **Knuckle-Dragger**). Ultimately, it was Rosecrans's **Devo** that showcased what this section is best known for: good intermediate routes and a great place to start

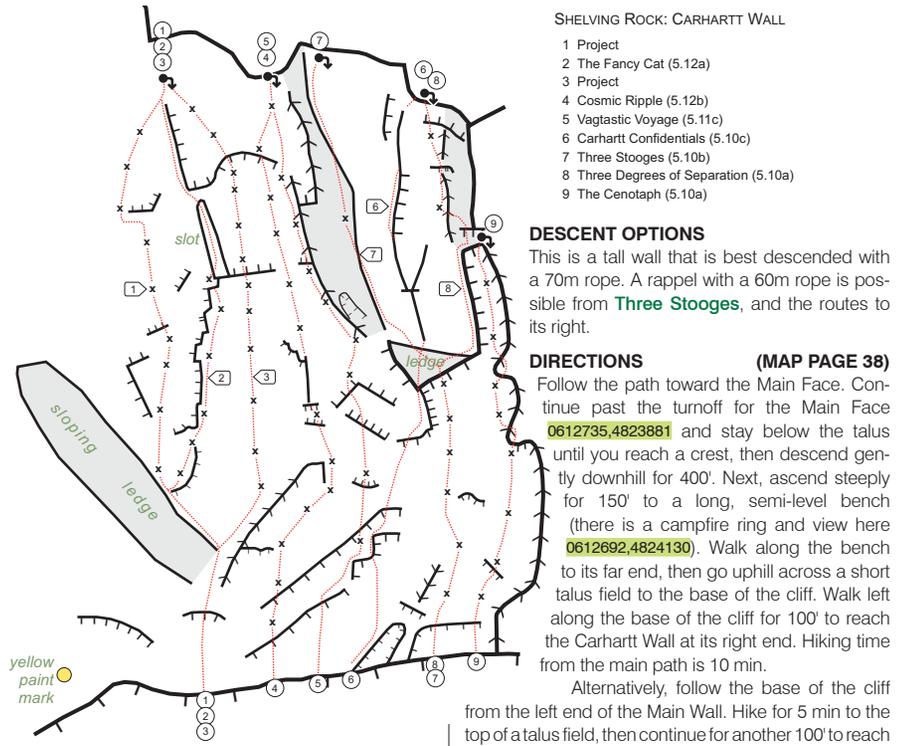
the day. Cliff-wide explorations continued, and 2009 ended with Kirby Girard's ascent of **Carhartt Confidential** at the more isolated Carhartt Wall.

Justin Barrett, an employee at Rocksport, raised the bar the next season with a slew of hard routes. These include **Vagtastic Voyage**, **Pinching One Off**, and **Infinity Crack**, all long routes on the tallest, steepest sections of cliff—Carhartt Wall, Big Wall, and Main Wall. Vollkommer and Rosecrans added some of the best 5.10 test pieces at these cliffs including **Die by the Drop**, **Johnny Tsunami**, **Three Degrees of Separation**, and **Cenotaph**.

Hard climbing at Shelving Rock peaked in 2011 at the Carhartt Wall when Vollkommer sent his long-standing project, **The Cosmic Ripple**, and visiting climber Michael Farnsworth freed Measeck's fine line, **The Fancy Cat**. Open projects remain today, many of them in the 5.13 range.



**SHELVING ROCK: CARHARTT WALL**  
 1 Project  
 2 The Fancy Cat (5.12a)  
 3 Project  
 4 Cosmic Ripple (5.12b)  
 5 Vagtastic Voyage (5.11c)  
 6 Carhartt Confidentials (5.10c)  
 7 Three Stooges (5.10b)  
 8 Three Degrees of Separation (5.10a)  
 9 The Cenotaph (5.10a)



**Carhartt Wall**

The leftmost section of the Shelving Rock cliff system is very wide and impressive, but most of it is on private property, thereby restricting climbing to a 50'-wide section on its far right end known as the Carhartt Wall. There are signs for private land on trees below the cliff, with occasional yellow DEC paint marks; there's also a 3'-tall yellow stripe on the cliff to the left of the routes marking the start of the private land.

The left side of the Carhartt Wall has a 100'-tall sheer face above a tan-colored slab. Most of this section is spectacular face climbing—the "Spider's Web of face climbing," as some have called it. A distinctive feature on this section is the shallow, blocky, right-facing corner of **The Fancy Cat**. To the right of the sheer wall (and just left of center on the wall) are two stacked arêtes—a lower, black arête that leans to the right, above which is a left-leaning arête (the route **Vagtastic Voyage**) that extends to the top of the cliff. The large right-facing, left-leaning corner to the right of the upper arête is the route **The Three Stooges** that begins at a sloping ledge halfway up the cliff's right side. **Carhartt Confidential** ascends the most prominent crack on the wall and begins from this ledge. The bottom of the cliff has a right-rising band of dike rock above a narrow ledge with several trees. All of the routes begin on this ledge and cross the dike rock.

**1 Project**

This closed project begins at the left end of the tree-covered ledge where 3rd class steps go up and left to a more exposed ledge. Scramble 3rd class ledges up and right to an open book that is right of the long, sloping, tan-colored slab, and left of the low, black arête. Go up the open book, then left above the sloping slab to a stance beneath a right-facing, left-leaning corner that begins 8' above the ledge. Work up the sheer face, stay right of the corner, go over a small overlap and then left past orange rock to the left end of a bulging wall. Climb around the left side of the bulge, and move rightward to a fixed anchor 5' below the top of the cliff. 110'.

**2 The Fancy Cat 5.12a G 110' ★★★★★**

**Start:** Go to the left end of the tree-covered ledge where 3rd class steps go up and left to a more exposed ledge. Scramble 3rd class ledges up and right to an open book, then left along the top of the slab to the base of a right-leaning, right-facing corner capped by a small overhang.  
**P1 5.12a G:** Go up the corner, then move right to the base of the long, gently-overhanging, shallow, right-facing, right-leaning, blocky corner. Sustained climbing up the corner ends in a slot-crack system; follow this to a fixed anchor shared with **Project**. 110'  
**Gear:** Standard rack to 2".  
 FFA Oct 18, 2011, Michael Farnsworth



Tom Rosecrans near the top of *Three Degrees of Separation* (5.10b) on the first ascent. Photo by Joel Dashnaw.

**3 Project**

This open project starts as for *The Fancy Cat* and goes right and up a right-rising ramp, then up the overhanging face to the right of a low black streak. It continues through an overlap and up an orange face to a fixed anchor at the top.

**4 Cosmic Ripple 5.12b G 110' ★★★**

**Start:** Toward the left end of the tree-covered ledge, beneath the low, black arête and several, short right-rising ledges in dike rock.

● **P1 5.12b G:** Work up the ledges and a smooth wall to a long, right-rising ledge. Continue above the ledge on gray rock, and go around the left side of the black arête to its top. Pull onto the overhanging, sheer face and go past a small overhang to a stance below a discontinuous crack. Up the crack to a stance below a bulging wall. Work up the wall, stay right of a long overhang, and follow a right-rising seam in orange rock to a ledge where it joins *Vagstastic Voyage*. Climb a headwall and an arête on the right to a fixed anchor. 110'

**Gear:** 1 ea 0.75" cam.

*FA Nov 13, 2011, Craig Vollkommer*

**5 Vagstastic Voyage 5.11c G 110' ★★★★★**

**Start:** In the middle of the tree-covered ledge, 10' left of a detached, hourglass-shaped pillar, below a right-rising ramp-ledge that begins 10' up.

● **P1 5.11c G:** Climb dike rock to the ramp-ledge which is followed right to short, left-facing corners with ledges. Up the corners and ledges to an overlap. Go past the overlap and up to a large, triangular ceiling. Work out the left side of the ceiling then move back right across a sheer face (crux) to a long, left-rising arête. Climb the arête past a large horn, then trend up the left side of the arête on a steepening face to a ledge

below a headwall where it joins *Cosmic Ripple*. Climb the headwall (not easy) and an arête on the right to a fixed anchor. 110'

**Gear:** To 0.5".

*FA May 5, 2010, Justin Barrett, Tom Rosecrans*

**6 Carhartt Confidential 5.10c G (5.7 R) 110' ★★★★★**

The original route on the wall. The name comes from the padding that was put in the sharp crack to protect the rope during its first ascent. The runoff start can be avoided by climbing *Three Degrees of Separation* or *Vagstastic Voyage* to the sloping ledge.

**Start:** At the right side of the tree-covered ledge, next to a detached, hourglass-shaped pillar.

**P1 5.10c G (5.7R):** Climb the pillar, then up left-facing corners with ledges (small gear) to steep orange rock (5.7 R) and a left-facing corner. Go up the corner to a broad, sloping ledge beneath a prominent vertical crack that goes to the top of the cliff. The crack widens from finger to fist-sized, bends to the right and becomes a left-facing corner. Finish at a fixed anchor shared with *Three Degrees of Separation*. 110'

**Gear:** Standard rack, 2 ea of 3.5"

*FA Nov 1, 2009, Kirby Girard*

**7 Three Stooges 5.10b G 110' ★★★**

**Start:** Same as *Three Degrees of Separation*.

**P1 5.10b G:** Follow *Three Degrees of Separation* to the sloping ledge. Step left and go up a deep, right-facing, left-leaning corner. Move right (crux) at a vertical crack, then back left into a higher, right-facing corner that is climbed to the top of the cliff and a fixed anchor. 110'

*FA Jul, 2010, Craig Vollkommer, Diane Dumouchel*

*Opposite: Kirby Girard on the first ascent of Carhartt Confidential (5.10c). Photo by Joel Dashnaw.*

