

Backpacker Logo

Friends and family can meet you on top of these peaks via hiking routes detailed in the September issue of *Backpacker*.

City to Summit

[By Brendan Leonard]

A summit route is the purest concept in climbing. Your grandmother may not understand the beta of your new project, or how we got from 5.10 to 5.15b, or even how you get the rope up there, but she can understand climbing to the highest point on a mountain.

Fortunately, you don't have to venture far from many American cities to find superb summit routes. Here are 10 worthy peaks, covering the spectrum of climbing: sport, trad, alpine, desert, winter, and summer. And best of all: The trailheads are all within an after-work drive of a major city.

[San Francisco]

Mt. Conness

Elevation: 12,590 feet

Route: *West Ridge* (5.6, 1,500 feet)

Drive: 4 hours

Guidebooks will tell you that Peter Croft once called the West Ridge of Conness the best route he's done in the Sierra backcountry. If you rope up for all of it, it's 12 pitches of climbing on clean Sierra granite, with enjoyable finger cracks and great exposure. The summit view extends over Tuolumne Meadows all the way to Half Dome. Combine this route with Conness' North Ridge for a mega-day of ridge running.

→ **CLIMB IT:** The first few pitches are fourth and low fifth class with a couple of 5.6 moves—after that, cruise as close as possible to the arête for the best rock, and negotiate two exposed notches above the sheer southwest face on your way to the summit. Dozens of variations exist, as well as plenty of places to pass other parties. Plan 3 to 4 hours for the approach, and stay off the climb if clouds are in the vicinity—Conness attracts storms, and retreat-

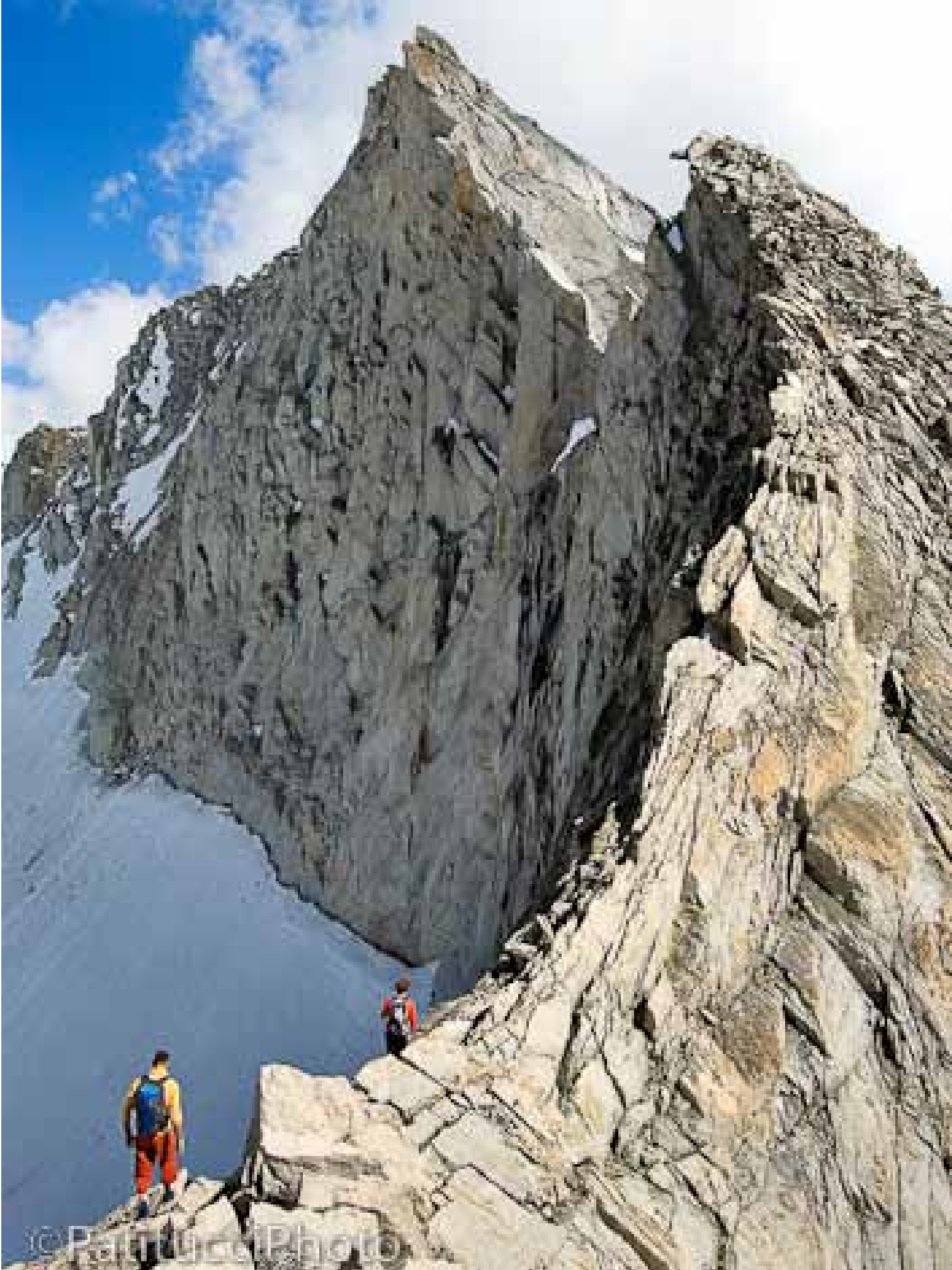
ing from mid-route is difficult and dangerous. From the summit, descend the hikers' route southeast onto the summit plateau and retrace your steps.

BACKPACKER RECOMMENDS: Experience awesome exposure on the catwalk finish to Conness' South Slopes route, an 18-mile round-trip overnight via the Dog Lake/Young Lakes Trail.

→ **GET THERE:** From San Francisco, drive to Manteca, and take Hwy. 120 into Yosemite National Park and up to Tuolumne Meadows. After passing Tioga Lake, turn north onto Saddlebag Lake Road, and park at the Sawmill Campground. Follow a trail to the Carnegie building and continue west cross-country up a broad canyon toward the south ridge of Mt. Conness and up onto the sandy summit plateau. Cross the south ridge and drop down to the west, descending a class two- to three gully all the way to the bottom of Conness' south face. Contour around to the West Ridge.

BETA: *High Sierra Climbing*, by Chris McNamara; summitpost.org

Climbers stroll an easy section of Mt. Conness' North Ridge, with the upper West Ridge at top right. A classic outing traverses the peak via the South Slopes and North Ridge, bagging the West Ridge in the middle of the day.





The three-mile-long Northeast Ridge of Lone Pine is the central ridgeline, descending from just left of the summit.

[Los Angeles]

Lone Pine Peak

Elevation: 12,944 feet

Route: *Northeast Ridge* (5.6, 3 miles)

Drive: 3 hours, 30 minutes

Towering 9,000 feet above the town of Lone Pine, this peak is often mistaken for its taller and more famous neighbor, Mt. Whitney. Three massive ridges yawn out to the desert floor, and two hold classic mountaineering routes. The under-the-radar Northeast Ridge is the longer, more challenging, and less traveled of the two, gaining nearly 7,000 vertical feet. Soloists will find at least 10 hours' worth of granite on the ridge, and parties who choose to rope up for the entire ridge will make this into a two-day climb. Climb it during high summer for maximum daylight, but a handful of winter ascents have been recorded.

→ **CLIMB IT:** Follow the line of least resistance up the ridge, staying to the north of the first gendarme, where even soloists may want gear and a rope for a rappel. Pass the second gendarme on

the south side, and keep moving up steps 5.6 or easier to a final headwall, where you traverse easy rock to your right, below the headwall, to find a gully up to the summit plateau. Allow another 3.5 to 6 hours for the unmarked descent, staying just south of the east ridge to avoid cliffs on the south face, until you can descend toward the road and walk three miles back to your car.

BACKPACKER RECOMMENDS: See Mt. Whitney and many of California's other 14ers without the crowds of the Whitney Trail on the 12-mile round-trip overnight hike up Lone Pine via the Meysan Lakes Trail and the Northwest Slope.

→ **GET THERE:** From Los Angeles, take U.S. 395 to the town of Lone Pine. Turn west onto Whitney Portal Road. At 5.6 miles, turn south onto Olivas Ranch Road. Take the first right and the next immediate right to a parking area. Follow a faint trail to a stream crossing and walk up sandy terrain to the start of the rock ridge.

BETA: *The High Sierra: Peaks, Passes, and Trails*, by R.J. Secor; mountainproject.com

PERMIT: None for day use; fs.usda.gov/inynationalforest-home for overnights

[Phoenix/Tucson]

Elephant Head

Elevation: 5,607 feet

Route: *West Gully* (5.6 R, 1,000 feet)

Drive: 2 hours, 20 minutes (Phoenix)/45 minutes (Tucson)

Drive south of Tucson and Elephant Head is bound to catch your eye as it forms the abrupt west end of the Santa Rita Mountains, rising 2,000 feet above the desert floor. The *West Gully*, the easiest technical route to the summit, is a desert mountaineering romp to an incredible viewpoint. Make a day of it in the spring or fall, and avoid the peak desert heat in the summer.

→ **CLIMB IT:** Follow the easiest line up the gully for 5 to 8 pitches on granite, passing through a notch near the top. Be prepared to run it out on easy terrain. At the summit, check out the "Elephant Shrine," a collection of miniature elephants left by hikers and climbers.

BACKPACKER RECOMMENDS: Ascend the tricky class three terrain of Elephant Head's East Ridge route, the standard descent for the West Gully, to views of the rugged, dry ranges of the Santa Rita and Baboquivari mountains.

→ **GET THERE:** From Tucson, drive south on I-19 to the Canoa Road exit, turning south onto the frontage road on the east side of the freeway. Drive 3 miles and turn left on Elephant Head Road. Follow it as it changes to Canoa Road, and turn right onto Hawk Way. After 1.5 miles of dirt road (high-clearance vehicle recommended), take the left fork in the road. After 0.4 mile, turn right and head down into a wash. Follow the road through two more gates to the base of the west face of Elephant Head. Hike up slabs on the west face and rope up when necessary.

BETA: *Backcountry Rockclimbing in Southern Arizona*, by Bob Kerry (out of print), is viewable at climbaz.com.



[Las Vegas]

Mt. Wilson

Elevation: 7,070 feet

Route: *Inti Watana* to *Resolution Arête*
(5.10+, 14–17 pitches)

Drive: 40 minutes

Sailing up the 2,000-foot Aeolian Wall on Mt. Wilson's northeast face, *Inti Watana* to the final pitches of *Resolution Arête* offers one of the best desert alpine adventures at Red Rock, as well as one of the few real summit routes in the park. Expect a 1.5- to 2-hour approach, 14 to 17 pitches of climbing, and a 3-hour descent. You'll find the best temps in spring and fall.

→ **CLIMB IT:** Take a light rack for the mostly 5.9 or easier, generously bolted face climbing on good edges, punctuated by a few cracks. Belays are bolted for the 10 to 12 pitches of *Inti Watana*, and you can rapel that route with two 60-meter ropes. To top out on Mt. Wilson, follow 4 to 5 pitches of wide cracks on *Resoluton Arête*, followed by 400 feet of easy fifth class with a few 5.8 sections. Hope you don't see the night-time lights on the Strip from the summit—it will take several hours to descend First Creek Canyon.

BACKPACKER RECOMMENDS: Scramble to the top of this sandstone giant on an adventure hike via First Creek Canyon, the descent route from *Resolution Arête*.

→ **GET THERE:** From the Strip, drive west on Charleston Boulevard for 19.5 miles. About 1.5 miles past the Red Rock Loop Road exit, park at a gate on the right side of the road. Walk west on the old road toward Oak Creek Canyon for approximately 1.5 miles to the saddle between Wilson Pimple and Mt. Wilson. Head up and left toward Mt. Wilson, aiming for a gully to the right of a hanging gully. Follow cairns up a series of gullies, trending left and eventually tunneling under a huge boulder near the start of the route, a line of bolts on a mossy wall.

BETA: *Red Rocks: A Climber's Guide*, by Jerry Handren; mountainproject.com

Desiree Cole near the top of *Inti Watana*.





Kris Haskins on the summit of Mt. Stuart, wondering if that cloud behind him is going to grow.

[Seattle]

Mt. Stuart

Elevation: 9,415 feet

Route: *North Ridge* (5.9, 15 pitches)

Drive: 2 hours, 30 minutes

Mt. Stuart is one of the largest exposed chunks of granite in the Lower 48, rising more than 5,000 feet above the surrounding Alpine Lakes Wilderness. The North Ridge, one of the "Fifty Classic Climbs of North America," is no secret to anyone, and for good reason—it has 15 pitches of often exposed climbing on solid rock along a knife-edge ridge, reaching the highest summit in the Enchantments. Late summer and fall are the best times to find dry rock on most of the route, but you'll still need to cross a glacier and climb a snow gully at the start.

→ **CLIMB IT:** Plan at least two days for the approach, climb, and descent; several bivy sites will be found along the route. Generally, follow the ridge crest for about 10 pitches of fourth- and fifth-class climbing. Decision time comes at the Great Gendarme, where you can battle up a short 5.9 offwidth or bypass the pillar with a rappel and some easier slab climbing.

BACKPACKER RECOMMENDS: Stuart's Cascadian Couloir, the descent route for the North Ridge, is a fine summit route in its own right, with class three climbing

→ **GET THERE:** From Seattle, drive I-90 east to Cle Elum and merge onto WA 970. Turn left onto Teanaway Road for 9 miles to a Y intersection. Take the right fork (FS 9737) and follow it until it ends at the Longs Pass Trailhead. Walk the Longs Pass Trail to the Ingalls Lake Trail; take the Ingalls Lake Trail to Ingalls Pass and down to Ingalls Lake. Skirt the lake on its west side, and from the north end, drop down 300 feet to a meadow and traverse toward Stuart Pass. Take the climbers' trail to a shoulder below Stuart's West Ridge, then contour northwest to Goat Pass, cross the Stuart Glacier, and up a snow gully to the crest of the North Ridge at 8,200 feet.

BETA: *Selected Climbs in the Cascades, Volume 1*, by Jim Nelson and Peter Potterfield; summitpost.org

PERMITS: Available at trailhead; Northwest Forest Pass required for parking (naturenw.org)



[Salt Lake City]

Pfeifferhorn

Elevation: 11,326 feet

Route: *North Ridge* (5.5, 2,000 feet)

Drive: 45 minutes

The Pfeifferhorn is one of the best peaks in the Wasatch Range for year-round adventure. The commanding 11,326-foot peak is marked "Little Matterhorn Peak" on USGS maps, but its common name was given in memory of founding Wasatch Mountain Club member Chick Pfeiffer. The full North Ridge can be ascended any time of year, but many prefer to treat it as a stout winter mountaineering challenge, when loose rock is frozen in place.

→ **CLIMB IT:** Bring a light alpine rock rack and rope, crampons, and a single tool. Plenty of snowy third- and fourth-class scrambling leads to a gendarme; most parties do a 10-foot rappel into the notch instead of a 5.5 R downclimb. Exposed fourth class leads to four pitches of fifth-class climbing along the knife edge. Descend via the east ridge and then north from Point 10,897.

BACKPACKER RECOMMENDS: Scramble to the summit via the East Ridge, the Pfeifferhorn's classic summer route.

→ **GET THERE:** Drive south on I-15 to I-215 East, and continue east to the UT 190 exit. Drive east and then south on 190 to the intersection with UT 210. Continue south approximately 9 miles to the White Pine Trailhead on your right. Ski or snowshoe up the Red Pine Trail, and cross into Maybird Gulch. Aim for the south saddle in the North Ridge.

BETA: *Rock Climbing the Wasatch Range*, by Bret and Stuart Ruckman; summitpost.org

The Pfeifferhorn's North Ridge in center.

[Denver]

Mt. Alice

Elevation: 13,310 feet

Route: *Central Ramp* (5.8, 8 pitches)

Drive: 1 hour, 40 minutes

Those willing to put in the effort of a long approach will be rewarded with one of the biggest 5.8 routes in Rocky Mountain National Park—and a fraction of the climber traffic of many other Colorado alpine classics. Eight full pitches of alpine rock along a tilted ramp on the left side of the 1,000-foot east face will bring you to a short hike up the Hourglass Ridge to Alice's summit, with one of the best views in the Park. Climb it in late summer or early fall to minimize snow at the base. Most climbers will bivy above the Lion Lakes amid acres of columbine.

→ **CLIMB IT:** Not many parties are able to stick to the original line, so be prepared to do some routefinding to keep this climb 5.8. After a couple of approach pitches, stay to the right of the big gully splitting the east face, aiming for the crack-covered golden ramp that leads up and right. A couple of short, steep pitches above the ramp gain the summit ridge.

BACKPACKER RECOMMENDS: Mt.

Alice's third-class Hourglass Ridge, the descent route from the east face, is a terrific hike and scramble up the northeast side of the peak.

→ **GET THERE:** From Denver, drive northwest on U.S. 36 for 36 miles to its intersection with CO 7. Turn west on CO 7 and follow it 21 miles. Turn into the Wild Basin Area of RMNP. From Wild Basin Trailhead, hike the Thunder Lake Trail to its junction with the Lion Lake Trail. Above Lion Lake No. 1, about 7 miles from the road, hike cross-country to a bivy site below the east face.

BETA: *Rocky Mountain National Park: The Climber's Guide—High Peaks*, by Bernard Gillett; mountainproject.com

PERMIT: Bivy permit required (970-586-1242)

The *Central Ramp* route scends near the right-angling sun-shadow line directly below Mt. Alice's summit. The Hourglass Ridge hike follows the right skyline.





[Washington, D.C.]

Seneca Rocks, South Peak

Elevation: 2,240 feet

Route: *Soler* (5.7, 2 pitches)

Drive: 3 hours

The South Peak of Seneca Rocks is said to be the highest U.S. summit east of Devils Tower that can only be reached by fifth-class rock climbing. This summit route, with a second pitch reputed to be one of the best leads at Seneca, bears the name of Tony Soler, who put it up in 1951. Coincidentally, Soler put up another bold route the same year on Devils Tower. Spring through fall are the best times to climb at Seneca.

→ **CLIMB IT:** Bring big gear or run it out as you stem and chicken-wing up the wide first 30 feet of the first pitch, and then enjoy the overhanging, in-your-face second pitch, with holds and pro just when you need them. Rappel with two ropes from the summit, or with a single rope to the first-pitch anchors on *Frosty Flake*.

BACKPACKER RECOMMENDS: Just 20 miles down the road from Seneca Rocks, take the 11-mile overnight to Spruce Knob, West Virginia's highest peak.

→ **GET THERE:** From Washington, D.C., take I-66 West for 75 miles and merge onto I-81 South for 4 miles. Exit onto VA 55, and stay on it for 80 miles to Seneca Rocks, W.V. Park at the Seneca Rocks Discovery Center, cross the bridge on a trail, and turn right on the trail to Roy Gap Road. This leads to the East Face Trail. Hike north to access Upper Broadway Ledge, where *Soler* and the majority of the South Peak east face climbs begin.

BETA: *Seneca: The Climber's Guide*, by Tony Barnes; mountainproject.com

A climber heads for the South Peak of Seneca Rocks via the classic *Gunsight* (5.4). *Soler* ascends the shadowed east face on the left.

Peak Planner

Climbing and Backpacker teamed up to create a one-stop resource for technical and hiking routes on some of the nation's best peaks. Head to climbing.com/exclusive/features/peaks for all the beta.

The Great White Way follows the black runnel with a tiny tree at the top, left of the prominent arch on Stone Mountain.

[Charlotte, N.C.]

Stone Mountain

Elevation: 2,305 feet

Route: *The Great White Way* (5.9, 3 pitches)

Drive: 1 hour, 45 minutes

Here's the rack you'll need to climb this 250-foot water-groove route on the granite face of North Carolina's Stone Mountain: four quickdraws, and something to clip into the bolted belay anchors. Running it out is standard at Stone, and mind control is the name of the game on *The Great White Way*. Still, those who have climbed it are more likely to call it "exciting" than "scary"—after they've finished, anyway. Every season but high summer is great for climbing at south-facing Stone Mountain.

→ **CLIMB IT:** The crux 110-foot first pitch has an abundant four bolts, which is a lot compared to the second pitch, with one bolt in 110 feet. Keep your feet to the outside of the water groove (it's slicker in the middle). Think "slab stemming."

BACKPACKER RECOMMENDS: Hike to the summit of this Yosemite-like granite dome—and have time left over for fly-fishing in nearby trout streams—on the stout 4.5-mile Stone Mountain Loop Trail.

→ **GET THERE:** From Charlotte, drive north on I-77 to U.S. 21. Continue northwest 12 miles, turn west on Traphill Road for 4 miles to the John P. Frank Parkway, and turn north and take the parkway into Stone Mountain State Park. Drive 2 miles past the park office and park at the Lower Trailhead on the left. Follow a signed trail to the Hutchinson Homestead and cross a meadow to the climbing area. One pitch of climbing is necessary to access Tree Ledge, where *The Great White Way* and other quality climbs begin. *White Way Direct* goes at 5.9, but easier options exist.

BETA: *Selected Climbs in North Carolina*, by Yon Lambert and Harrison Shull; mountainproject.com

PERMIT: Get the required free climbing permit at the kiosk on the approach trail.

[Boston]

Mt. Webster

Elevation: 3,911 feet

Route: *Green Chasm* (5.6 NEI 3)

Drive: 2 hours, 30 minutes

This mountaineering adventure presents one of the longest technical routes in the region: 2,500 vertical feet of varied winter climbing—snow, ice, rock, and mixed. With summit views from the southern Presidential Range to Crawford Notch and Mt. Willey, this is a New England mountain classic.

→ **CLIMB IT:** Snow climbing up the Central Couloir leads to NEI 2-3 climbing and the base of the upper headwall. Traverse right 100 yards to Green Chasm. A mixed pitch leads up and over a chockstone, followed by a crux ice pitch of NEI 3, then several easier pitches to the summit. Plan on a long day, especially if the approach and the descent by the Webster Cliff Trail are not packed out.

BACKPACKER RECOMMENDS: Bag two Presidential summits and see one of New Hampshire's tallest waterfalls on a 6.9-mile summer/fall loop hike over Mt. Webster and neighboring Mt. Jackson. The Webster Cliff Trail also makes for a challenging winter hike.

→ **GET THERE:** From Boston, follow I-93 north 140 miles to the U.S. 3 exit. Take U.S. 3 10.5 miles to Twin Mountain, and turn right onto U.S. 302 south. Park as close to the start of Central Couloir as possible, about 10.8 miles from Twin Mountain. Bushwhack straight up the mountain to the base of the couloir.

BETA: *An Ice Climber's Guide to Northern New England*, by S. Peter Lewis and Rick Wilcox; mountainproject.com