

Darrington Rock Climbing Sampler

a mini-guide to some routes in Clear and Copper Creeks

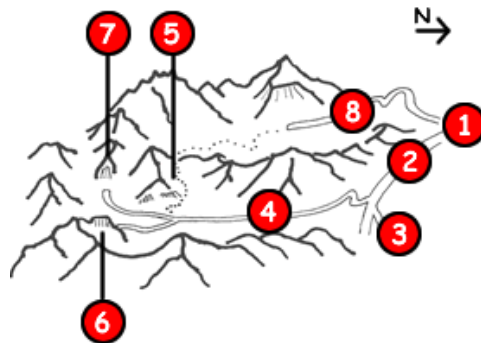


Joe near the top of Exfoliation Dome.

Near Darrington, Washington, there are several granite domes in scenic mountain valleys. This is not sport climbing: almost all of the routes here require the leader to place cams or nuts. The area is known for slab climbing but steeper faces are found here too. The routes featured in this guide are 1 to 11 pitches long, 5.5 to 5.11, and lie in Clear Creek and Copper Creek, southeast and south of town. Routes up to 23 pitches long are found in Squire Creek, southwest of Darrington. Most climbers will want to do some climbs in Clear Creek before venturing over to Squire Creek



Dexter Perkins on Jacob's Ladder
(5.10b A-0 or 5.11c) Exfoliation Dome.



Shown here:

1. Darrington
2. Mountain Loop Highway
3. Clear Creek Campground
4. Clear Creek Road #2060
5. Eightmile Creek Trail / Three O'clock Rock
6. Exfoliation Dome
7. Green Giant Butte
8. Squire Creek Road #2040

Note:

The area receives over twice the rainfall experienced in nearby Puget Sound. Some of the climbs seep for a few days after wet weather. Most climbs offer little shade and the hottest days of the year are to be avoided.

Caution:

Only Three O'clock Rock is reached by an easy hike on a real trail. Many approaches include stream crossings, brush, and scrambling. The rock is generally solid but, as with any exfoliating granite, large flakes peel off from time to time. Though rare, such an event could kill someone. On low angle rock, a falling climber will be scraped or banged against the rock. Long falls are possible on most routes featured in this guide; care and judgment is required. Cell phones do not work; help is far away.

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Three O'clock Rock

Three O'clock rock is the easiest to reach of all Darrington crags and a good place for a first visit to the area. Many good climbs are not shown here, including Masters of the Universe (5.11a), near the south end of the rock. Some old classics still retain the original Darrington run-outs, including Shot in the Dark (5.10d) and The Rash (5.6). Most new routes and many of the older classics are fairly well protected with a combination of gear and bolts.



Chris Greyell on Silent Running (5.9), Three O'clock Rock. Exfoliation Dome in background.

Clear Creek Road:

The Clear Creek Road is on the right, about three miles southeast of Darrington on the Mountain Loop Highway (Clear Creek Campground is on the left, just beyond). Forest Service budgets have been cut in recent years and the road is a little rough, though as of April 2015 it is passable in a normal car.

Eightmile Creek Trail:

The Eightmile Creek Trail departs the Clear Creek Road about six miles from the Mountain Loop Highway, a mile past where a fork diverts left (stay right at the fork; parking will be on the left). The trail is rough; sturdy shoes are recommended.

Beyond Three O'clock Rock, the trail climbs steadily up to Squire Creek Pass, with great views and wide open granite slabs.

For more information:

The information here is mostly found at Darrington Rock Climbing (www.mattsea.com/Darr).

*The area is featured in guidebooks including *Rock Climbing Washington (Smoot)*, *Select Climbs in the Cascades, Volumes I and II (Nelson and Potterfield)*, and *Weekend Rock (Whitelaw)*. A CD guide is available from Mr. Whitelaw: dwhite5522@aol.com.*

Your friend Google will find information about climbs in Clear Creek and Squire Creek on the Internet.

Approach:

The Eightmile Creek Trail passes directly beneath the North Buttress of Three O'clock Rock. About a mile from the trailhead, the trail cuts right across a boulder field overgrown with slide maple and after a couple hundred yards the trail passes directly below the start of Silent Running (climbers are asked not to leave their packs and other gear actually in the trail). To reach the North Buttress, and most of the routes shown in this guide, watch for the climbers' approach which heads straight uphill, leaving the trail about 50 yards from the edge of the woods and 100 yards or so before reaching the North Buttress. The main trail continues beyond the North Buttress, passes near "Four O'clock rock," and continues on up to Squire Creek Pass. Thirty minutes.

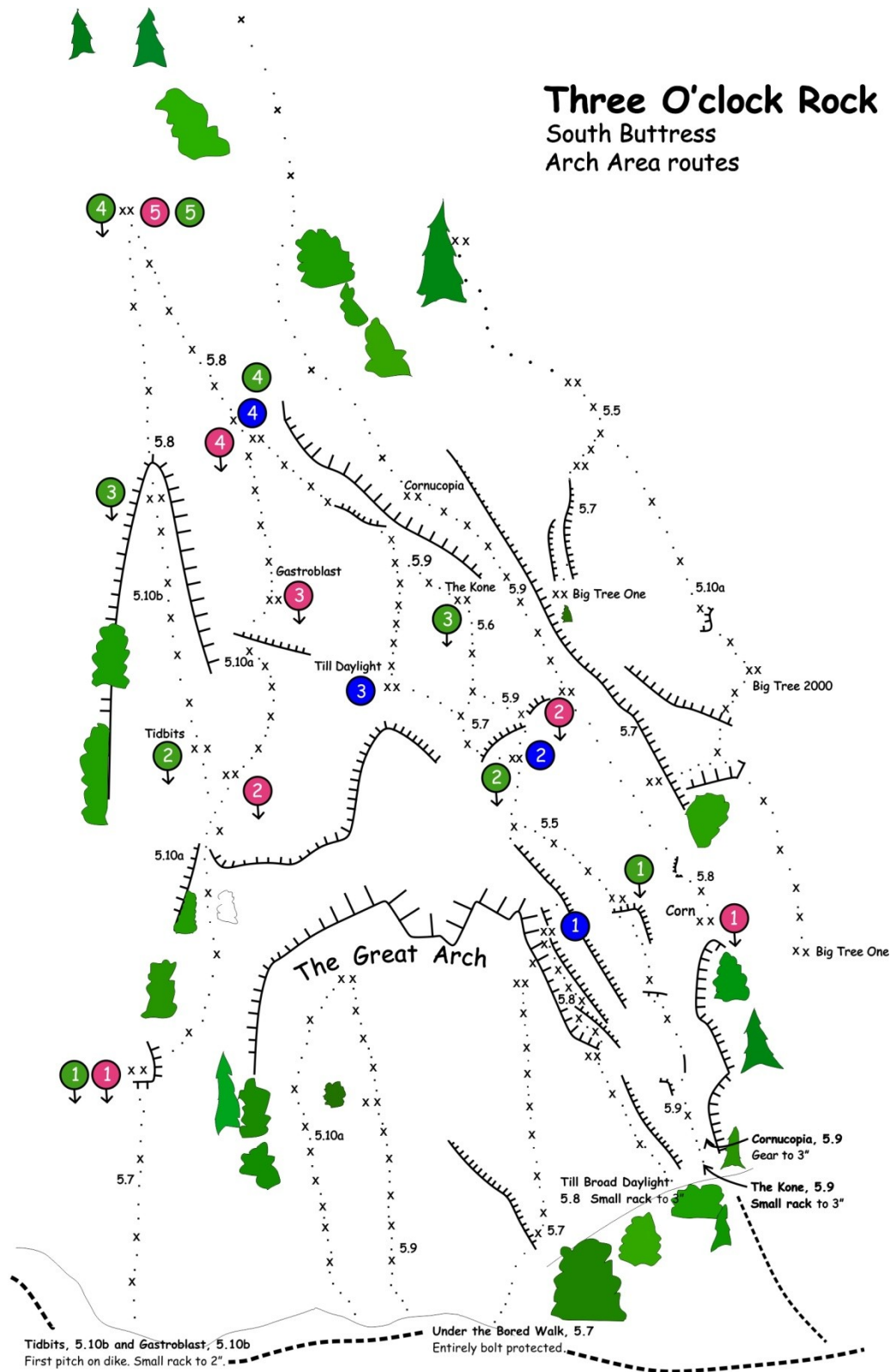
Gear:

Much of this climbing is bolt-protected but bolts were not placed next to cracks. As a result, most of these climbs require some gear placement. Carry a rack of singles. Larger cracks are relatively rare but a 4" piece can be used on the first pitch of the Big Tree routes. Two ropes are needed for rappels.

Three O'clock Rock

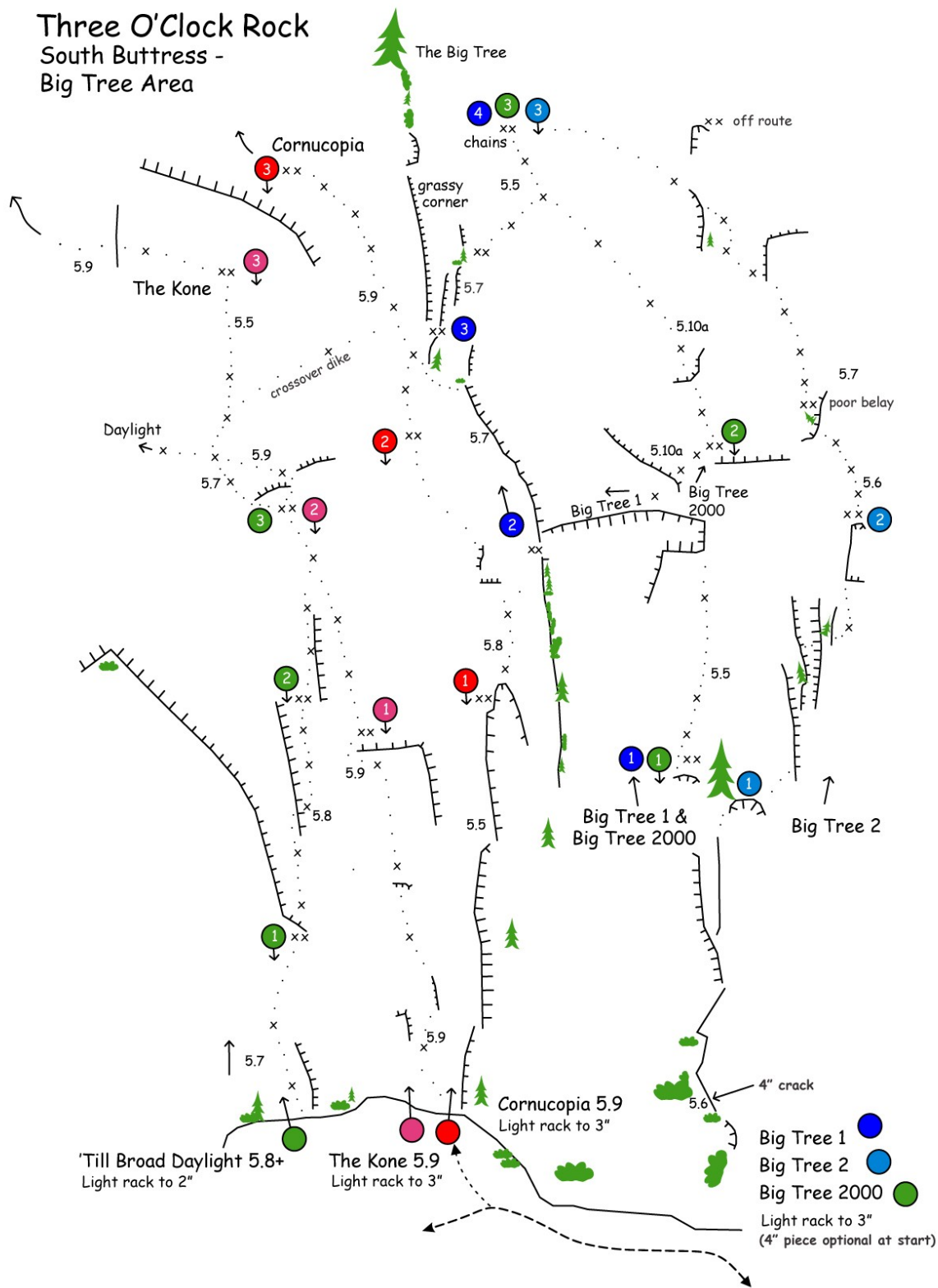
South Buttress

Arch Area routes



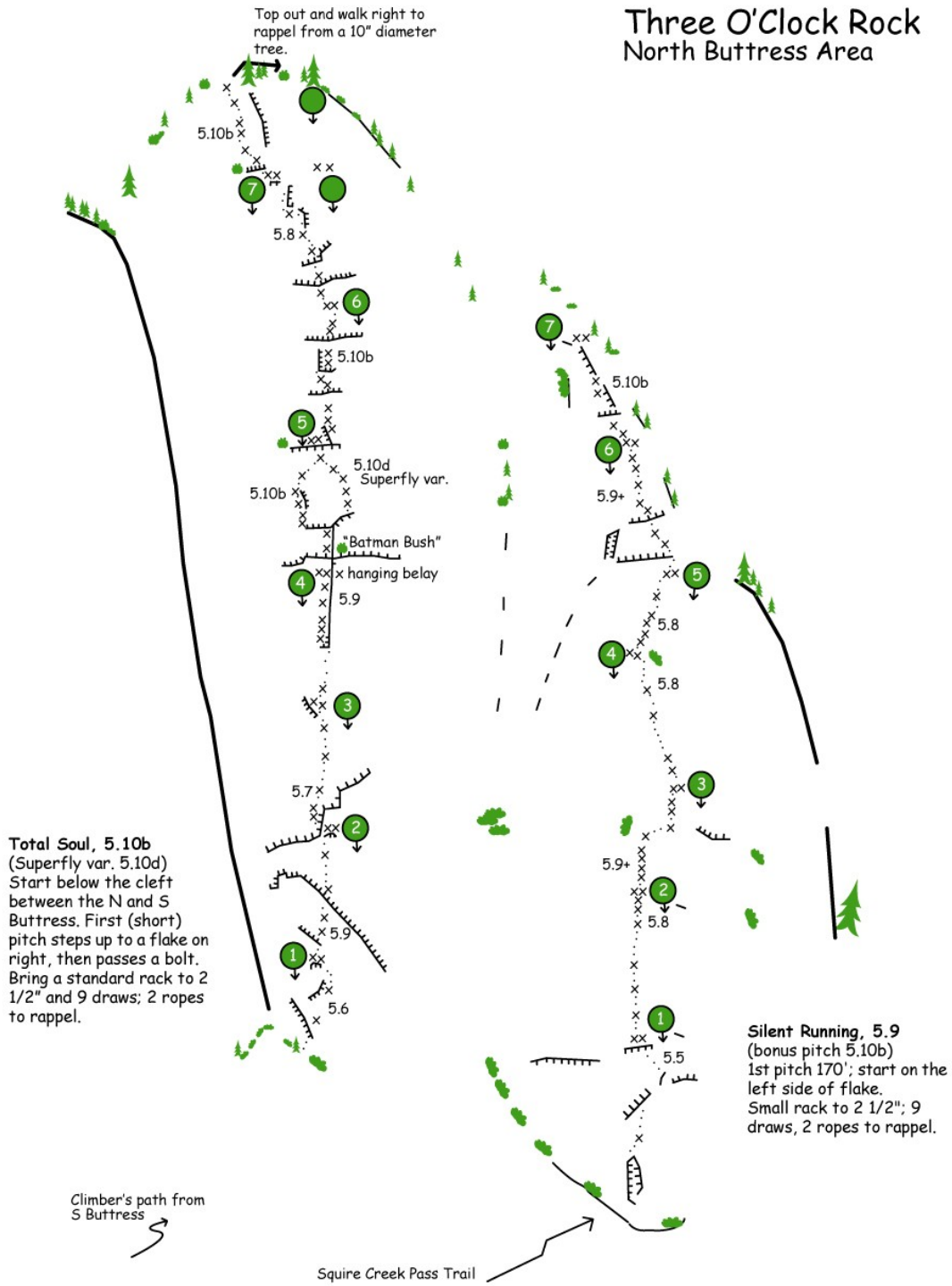
Notes: the Arch Area is a good place for a first visit to Darrington. The first pitch of Tidbits/Gastroblast (run-out) will get your attention! Two bolt-protected climbs are left of Bored Walk. Under The Bored Walk is a good romp. The first two half-pitches of Till Daylight are fun but the traverse to the belay shown here as third one is not recommended due to there being old hardware. The Kone is mildly run-out. The first pitch of Cornucopia is 5.5 and all trad protected; the second pitch is 5.8 and run-out.

Three O'Clock Rock South Buttress - Big Tree Area



Notes: Big Tree I is a good route for a new trad leader. Cornucopia retains some of the headiness of climbs from an earlier era. Big Tree 2000 is run-out.

Three O'Clock Rock North Buttress Area



Notes: Total Soul and Silent Running are well protected near crux moves but both have lengthy run outs on easier terrain. There are three additional routes between them.

Exfoliation Dome

Exfoliation Dome is not just a crag, but a mountain peak with no simple route up or down. Fred Beckey first climbed it in 1969 via the steep northeast face, one of the most imposing walls in the Darrington area. Mr. Beckey pronounced the Dome "quite possibly the most difficult 4,000 foot peak in the State of Washington" and he is probably right.

The main faces on the dome are called Blueberry Hill (facing west) and Witch Doctor Wall (facing east). The routes shown here climb clean granite on the west side of the formation. On hot days, these west facing routes can be climbed largely in shade with a very early start. In early season there is water near the start of the West Buttress.



The Granite Sidewalk approach to these routes approaches from the right.

Approach:

Take the left fork in the road about 5 miles from the Mountain Loop Highway. After about a mile it crosses the second of two rocky streambeds. Follow this streambed 100 yards to the Granite Sidewalk, a steep scramble up slabs. Detour left into bushes where there is a steeper section relatively low on the approach. The route has some exposed scrambling where a slip could be tragic. One hour.

Gear:

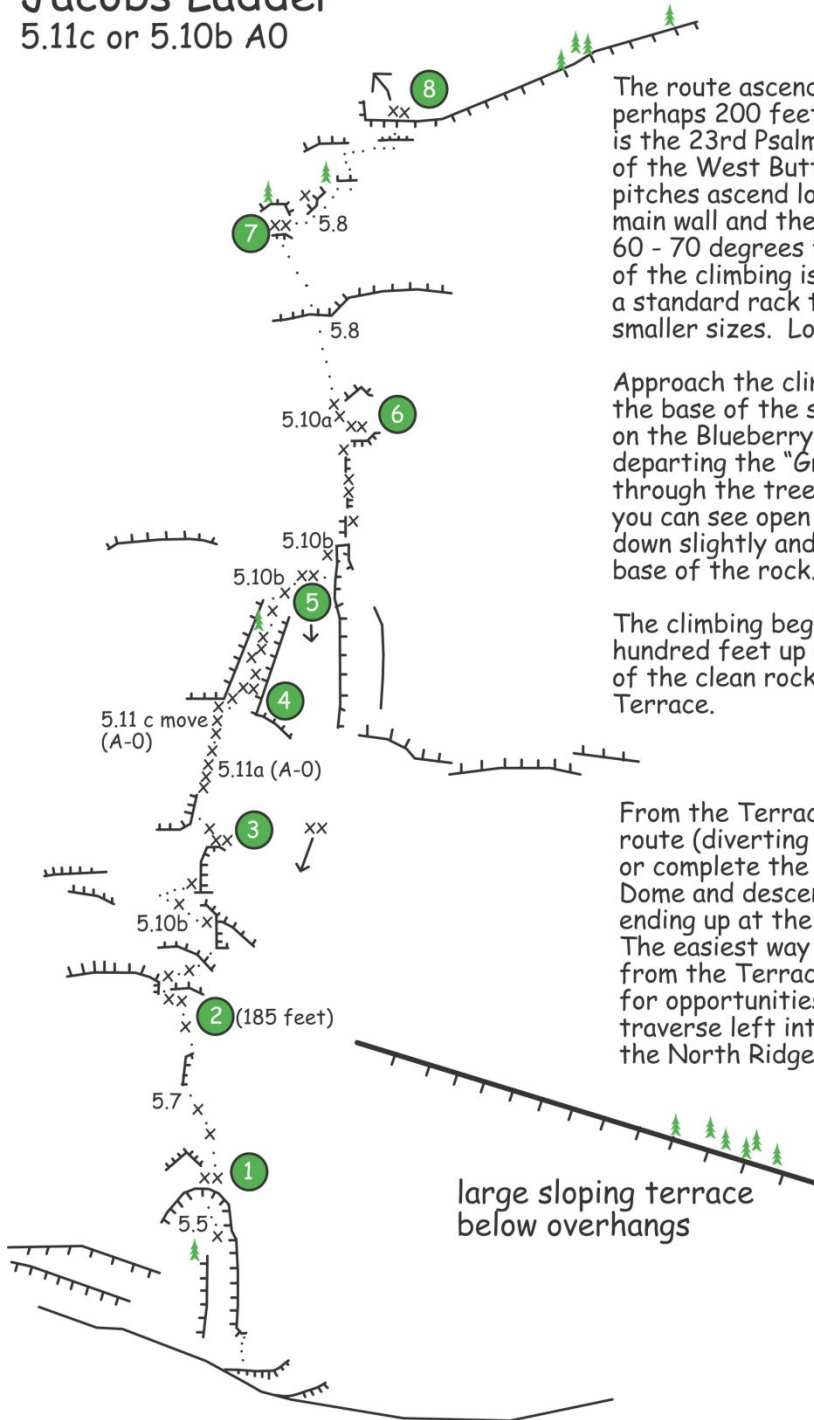
Bring a standard rack with one piece of each size up to 4"; doubles to 1". Long runners are useful.

Descent:

Descent from the top of the Dome is not simple. Probably the best descent is to take the west slabs rappels: begin with 4 or 5 single rope rappels from just S of the summit (beware of loose rock); then do 5 double rope rappels on Westward Ho (deviate S for last anchor because there is no anchor at the start of Westward Ho).

Jacobs Ladder

5.11c or 5.10b A0



The route ascends a prominent round lobe perhaps 200 feet right of the trough that is the 23rd Psalm route and 800 feet left of the West Buttress. The first two pitches ascend low-angled slabs below the main wall and the angle then kicks up to 60 - 70 degrees for five pitches. Much of the climbing is bolt-protected, but bring a standard rack to 3" weighted toward the smaller sizes. Long runners are useful.

Approach the climb by heading left along the base of the slabs below the main wall on the Blueberry Hill side of the Dome, departing the "Granite Sidewalk" to cut 30' through the trees at the first point where you can see open slabs off to the left. Drop down slightly and follow along or near the base of the rock.

The climbing begins on grassy ledges a few hundred feet up and left of the lowest part of the clean rock and ends at the Blueberry Terrace.

From the Terrace, rappel back down the route (diverting from pitches 3-5 as shown) or complete the climb to the summit of the Dome and descend the normal rappel route ending up at the base of the West Buttress. The easiest way to the summit is to climb up from the Terrace about two pitches, looking for opportunities to keep left and eventually traverse left into a shallow bowl and gain the North Ridge.

To reach the summit from Blueberry Terrace:

The finish from the Blueberry Terrace to the summit is shown incorrectly in Rock Climbing Washington. Walk left on the terrace to its lowest point and then scramble up and left to a point where a bolt can be seen about 20 feet above. A short pitch is followed by a longer one that trends left. From the second chains, downclimb into a shallow bowl. Un-rope, scramble up to the ridge crest, and head right to reach the summit. 5.8.

Green Giant Buttress

Dreamer (5.9) is deservedly popular. However, while only moderately difficult by modern technical standards, it is ten pitches long and surprisingly challenging. The original start of Dreamer has been replaced by two better alternatives: (1) from a blocky ledge just above the highest of the small trees on the "apron" beneath the Buttress, climb up to an anchor, hidden from below, and Dreamer Direct (5.7) leads to Urban Bypass (5.10b) and rejoins Dreamer at the top of the old fourth pitch; (2) from the same blocky ledge, scramble right then 180 feet up to the base of the Botany 101 dihedral, where two pitches of Safe Sex (5.8) lead to the old third belay of Dreamer.

The two 5.9 pitches high on the route involve challenging face and crack climbing that wanders around overhanging flakes set to snag the rope: long runners and careful rope management are mandatory. Many climbers have difficulty here but these are spectacular pitches and are followed by three enjoyable pitches leading to the summit of the rock (the current finish does not follow the original line but the anchors are good and tales of mind-boggling run-outs are exaggerated though it remains run-out by modern standards).

Green Giant Buttress is not as easy to approach as it used to be but it still remains a popular climb. The rock faces southeast so in warm weather it can be unreasonably hot even with an early start.

Approach:

To approach the buttress, drive as far on the 2065 extension of the Clear Creek Road beyond the Eightmile Creek trailhead as you can (the road is not maintained beyond the trailhead). Follow the overgrown extension of this road, two or three miles beyond the trailhead, watching for a trail that drops down to the left to join an old mining road in older forest. Follow the mining road to where it ends at a side-stream. Cross the side-stream, bear left and follow the main creek to a three tiered waterfall. Just above the base of the falls, a gully leads into the bush on the right, and it soon opens a bit and climbs to the slabs below Green Giant Buttress. Stay right as you start up these slabs, scrambling to the highest erect tree among scattered bushes on the apron below the steeper part of the buttress. Two to three hours.

Gear:

Bring a standard rack with one piece of each size up to 4". Long runners are useful. It is possible to descend off the back but is not recommended. Two ropes are required for the rappels.



Andy Fitz on Dreamer (5.9),
Green Giant Buttress.

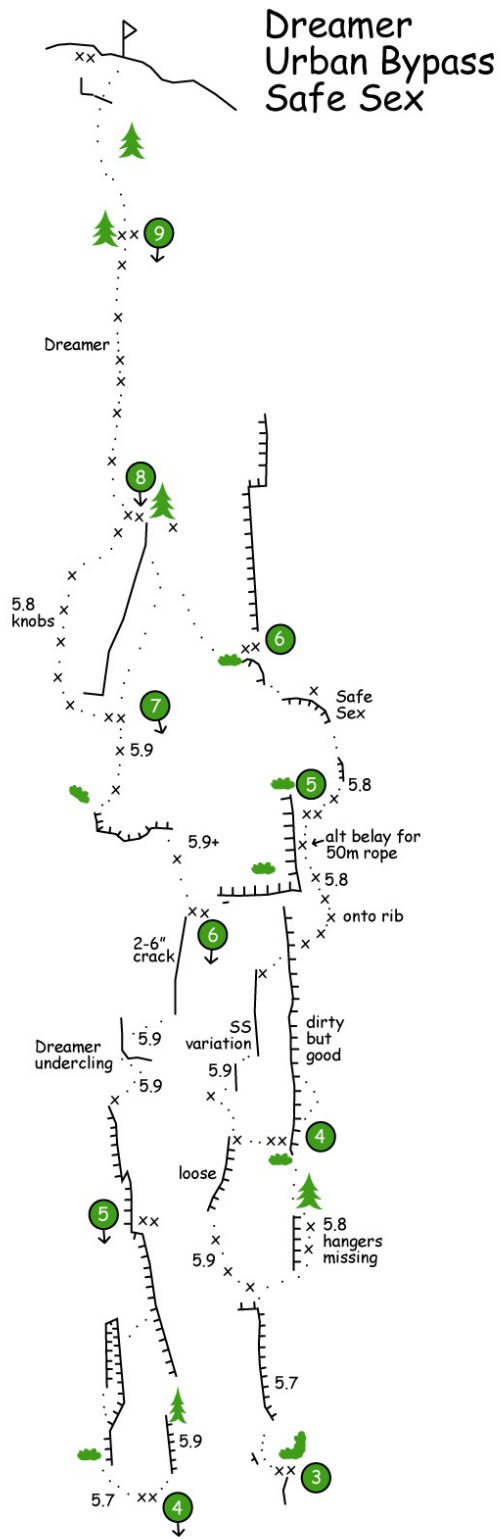
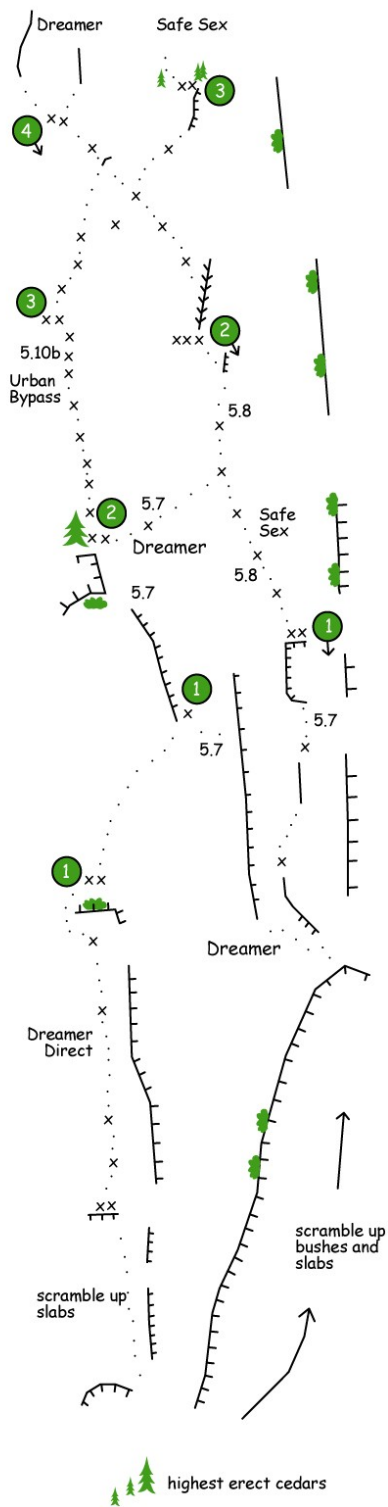
Caring for the Darrington Experience

Darrington area rock climbing is special. The area is beautiful and the climbing is not only rewarding but also offers an opportunity to hone skills that come in handy on alpine rock climbs from California to the Bugaboos. Climbing here is a privilege.

Consider volunteering. Climbers and volunteers from the Darrington Area Friends for Public Use have contributed to keeping the Clear Creek road open through clearing culverts and cutting brush, and similar efforts. The Washington Climbers Coalition, the Access Fund, The Mountaineers, the American Alpine Club, and the Washington Trails Association have done volunteer trail work on the Eightmile Creek trail in recent years.

We share this area with other users. Be friendly, clean up after yourself, do not park so as to block the road, follow all rules including dry season fire bans, etc.

All photo's by Matt Perkins.



Notes: Green Giant Buttress does not get shade until about 4 p.m.; these climbs really cook on a hot day. Beware of a rope eating flake when rappelling pitch 4 of Dreamer.