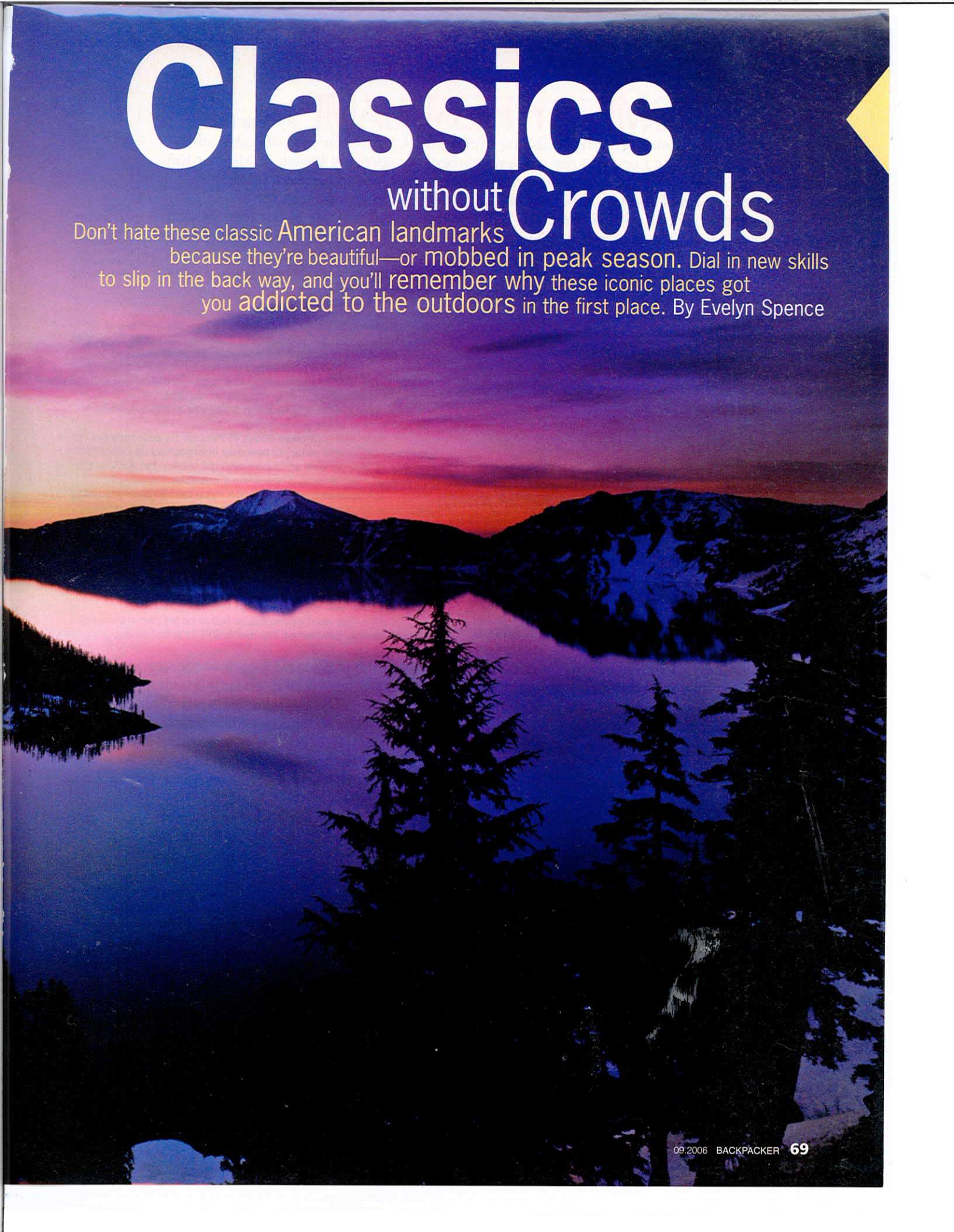
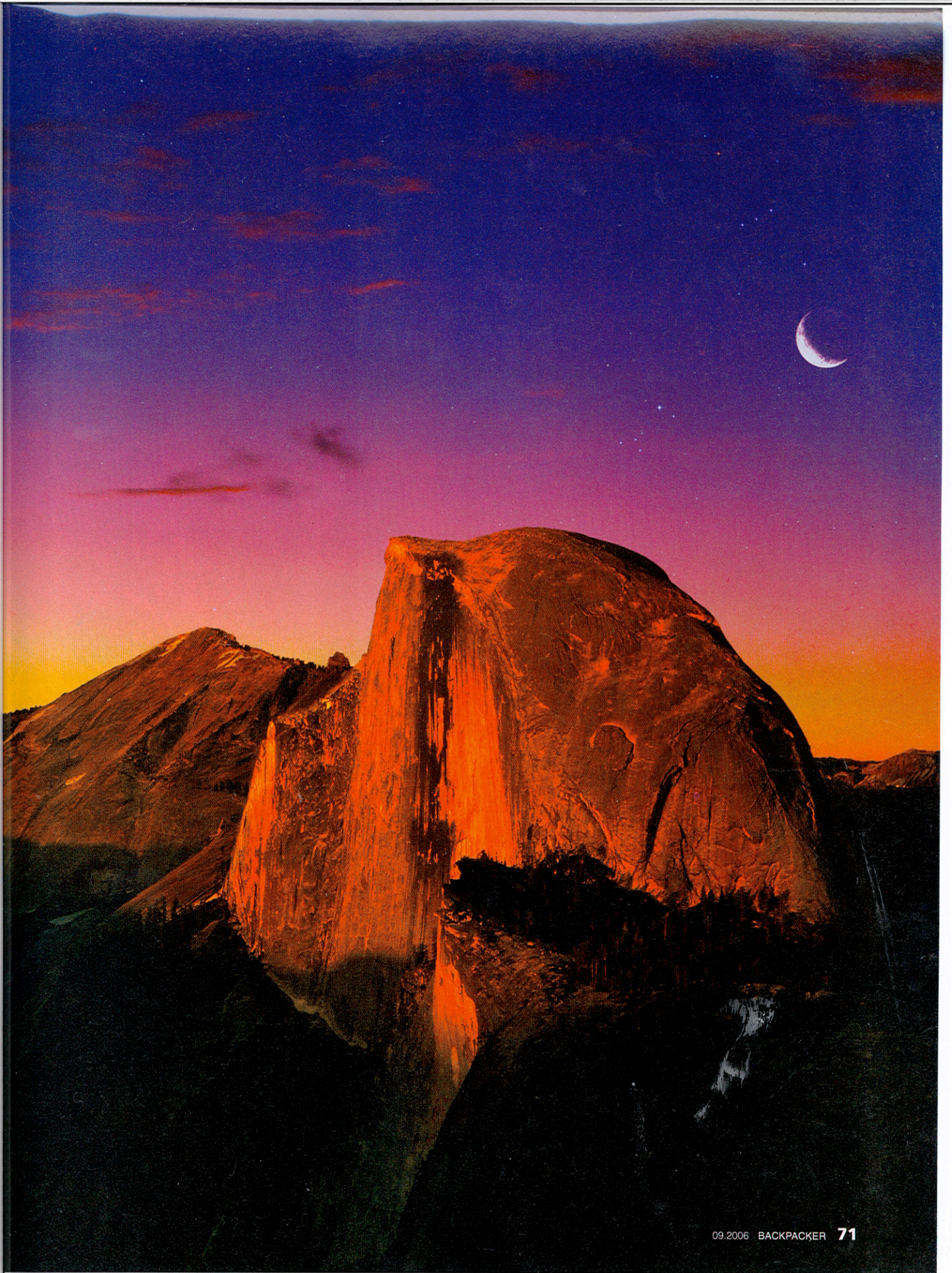


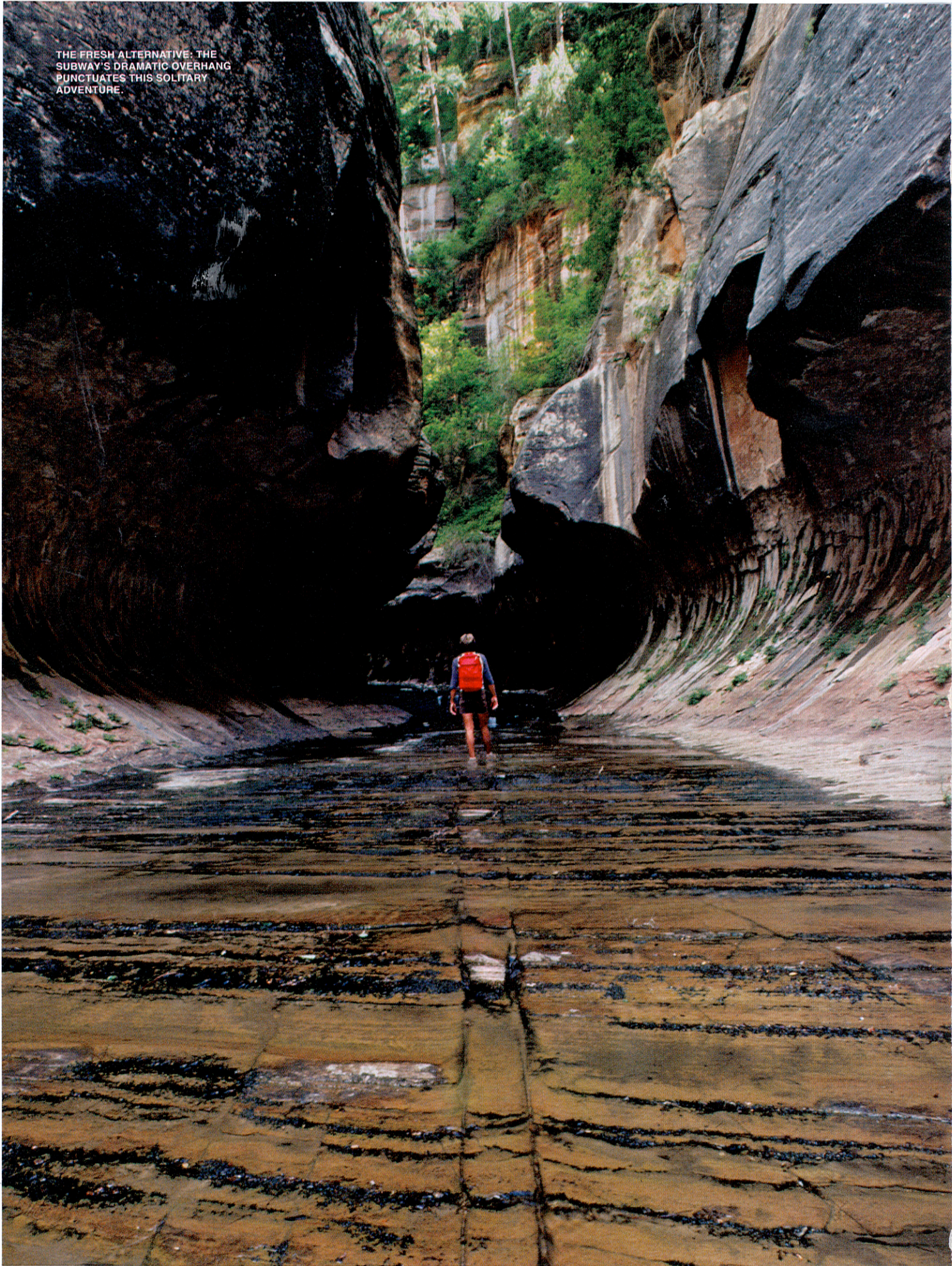
Classics without Crowds

Don't hate these classic American landmarks because they're beautiful—or mobbed in peak season. Dial in new skills to slip in the back way, and you'll remember why these iconic places got you addicted to the outdoors in the first place. By Evelyn Spence





THE FRESH ALTERNATIVE: THE
SUBWAY'S DRAMATIC OVERHANG
PUNCTUATES THIS SOLITARY
ADVENTURE.



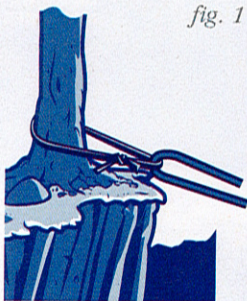
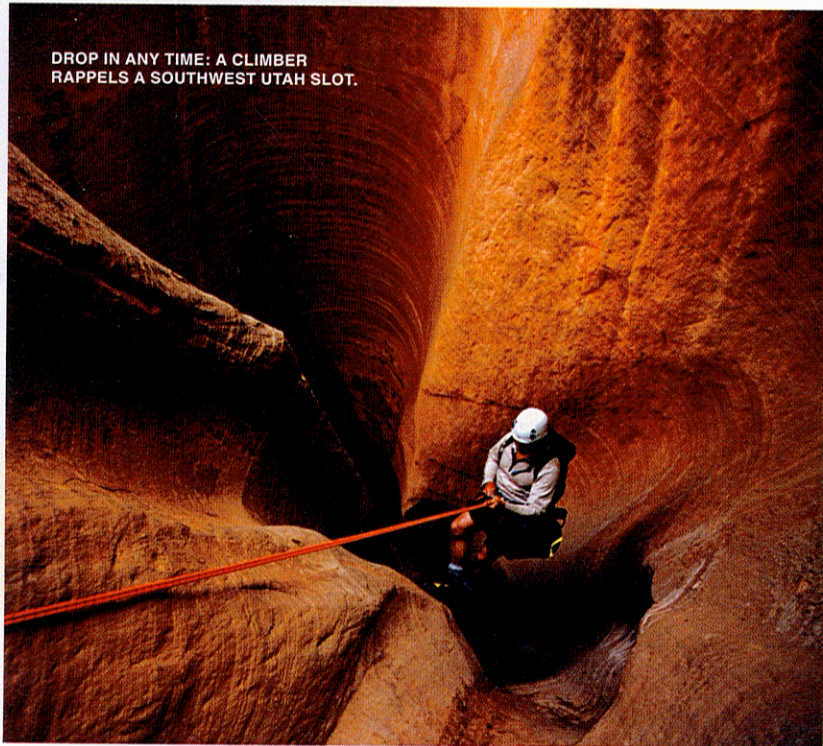


fig. 1

DROP IN ANY TIME: A CLIMBER RAPPELS A SOUTHWEST UTAH SLOT.



RAPPEL ZION'S SUBWAY

Anyone and everyone can explore part of Zion's renowned Narrows, but only the roped-up (and permitted—the park only lets 50 people a day in there) can drop into this equally stunning slickrock slot. The classic Subway route starts at the Wildcat Canyon trailhead and finishes—9-plus miles, several bone-chilling swims, a few rappels, hours of wading, and a couple of dinosaur tracks later—at the Left Fork trailhead. The highlight: The Subway itself, a long, undercut slot canyon that wouldn't look out of place at the Piccadilly tube stop. Bring at least 60 feet of rope.

How to do it anywhere

Caveats first: Before you rappel down a poulover or a cliff, be sure you can get out of whatever you're getting into (by climbing back up or walking out). Before you do *that*, get instruction from an experienced guide. No matter what, don't go alone. That said, rappelling—using friction to descend a rope—can drop you into some of the most stunning, twisting, shoulder-scraping canyons in the West. Here's how.

Look down Make sure you can see the ground or ledge where you're going to end up—and make sure your rope is long enough to reach it.

Drop the anchor Set up bomber anchors, and check to ensure they meet the SRENE standard: solid, redundant, equalized, and no extension. The most convenient anchor is often a sturdy tree (use a sling; fig. 1), but you can also use rock formations, cracks, and your own artificial gear, or pitons and bolts that were previously fixed, but check these for stability. Remember: Wherever your anchor is, you'll descend directly below it (think of a plumb line).

Set your ropes For rappels short enough that one doubled-over rope will be sufficient (like the Subway), string one end through your anchor slings, passing the rope along until you find the middle. Before you toss your lifeline overboard, first check for snags and crags below, then grab both ends of the rope and tie a "stopper knot" on each one just in case. Coil the ends together (it'll give you some weight to huck), and throw the coils out. Make sure both ends reach the ground.

Rig your rappel device It's a compact, light piece of metal that creates friction when a rope is passed through it; it's clipped into a locking carabiner attached to your climbing harness.

Lean into it Weight the rope, then backpedal to the edge. Keeping your feet on the brink, let out rope until you're leaning back (fig. 2).

Go easy Press your feet straight and shoulder-width apart into the wall, bend your torso in, and walk down the cliff—don't bound. Let the rope slide through your brake hand (wear a leather glove for rappels longer than 50 feet); never release your grip with that hand.



fig. 2

GO HERE, TOO DEATH VALLEY'S COFFIN CANYON

There are dozens of starkly beautiful canyons in Death Valley's Badwater area, some of which require more than a dozen rappels of up to 100 feet. Coffin Canyon, a little over 7 miles long, cleaves the Black Mountains and is a bit mellower, with seven roped plunges—but one of them is a stomach-clenching 190 feet. You'll drop from terrace to terrace amid walls streaked with reds and dark grays; in some places the chasms open wide, in others, they close in around you—very much like, well, a coffin.

ACTING PRESIDENTIAL:
SOMETIMES YOU GET
BLASTED BY WHITEOUTS
ON MT. WASHINGTON. AND
SOMETIMES YOU GET THIS.

WINTER-HIKE MT. WASHINGTON

Summer's a madhouse here on the Northeast's alpha peak, and there's no real off-season. The main winter route up this 6,288-foot behemoth is straight up Tuckerman Ravine, on the mountain's south-east side, but relatively few people scale Washington via the western flank, where you can take in panoramas of the Franconia Range, Mt. Carrigain, and Mt. Kearsarge North. Follow the Ammonoosuc Ravine Trail (on skis or snowshoes; watch for ice) off Base Station Road for 3 miles until you see the Lake of the Clouds Hut. Climb the icy slopes north of the hut, and don crampons for a final push up the summit cone's wind-blasted snow crust (called the Rock Pile). The views of the brawny Whites are infinite.

How to do it anywhere

Most people balk at the idea of walking on snow and ice because they lack the gear and know-how. Practice your technique with these two essential items; they can take you off the beaten path in a big way.

CRAMPONS

Head up The two easiest ways up a nonvertical face are the crossover step and the herringbone. When crossing over, point both feet slightly downhill, placing one foot over the other as you traverse. If the pitch isn't too steep, you can herringbone right up: Splay your feet and walk like a duck.

Ball game Soft snow can ball up underfoot, making it tough to dig in. Get spikes with anti-balling plates (like Black Diamond's Bionic ABS), or whack the side of your foot with your axe midstep.

Switchback Say you're walking left and need to turn right. Plant your left foot so it's pointed slightly uphill, then plant the right as if you're going to herringbone.



fig. 1

You should face the hill, feet pointed out. Then bring your left foot around.

Take the plunge Descending? In softer snow, do the plunge step. With knees slightly bent and toes up, step down aggressively, sinking into the snow. On an icy slope, descend as you climbed, using the crossover step. Be ready to self-arrest. The exhilarating way down? Glissading. First, identify a safe runoff (no rocks or cliffs), no shady areas (which can ice up), and a predictable fall line (so you don't shoot off to the side). Remove your crampons, sit with your axe shaft parallel to your direction of travel, spike trailing as a brake (fig. 1). Keep your knees bent, and feet flat.



fig. 2

GO HERE, TOO

SHASTA'S WEST FACE GULLY

The dilemma: More than 300 people climb 14,162-foot Shasta via Avalanche Gulch on summer weekends. The solution: The West Face Gully follows the main route to Horse Camp, branches off to Hidden Valley (a good tent spot), gains 4,000 feet up a snowfield, and rises to 13,400 feet on the rocky spires of Casaval Ridge—joining the standard route at Misery Hill. With some super-steep sections that mandate crampons, it's more physically demanding, but still a nontechnical climb. Plus, you get up-close-and-personal views of 12,330-foot Shastina to the west, a smoother, less-suncupped downhill glissade, and an almost-empty crash pad below the upper Whitney Glacier.

GRAND CANYON

From late November to April, the canyon's rims can be covered in snow—but by the river, it's shorts weather. Down here, you can kick back, gaze up 4,300 feet, and note how the geologic layers, covered in white fluff, turn to candy-cane stripes. The catch? Routes downward are inaccessible to anyone without crampons. Start your descent on the South Kaibab Trail (with spikes on), pitch a tent at Bright Angel campground (half a mile up from the Colorado), take a day to climb up the bed of Clear Creek to feathery Cheyava Falls, and then hoof it back up the Bright Angel Trail.

ICE AXE

The grip Carry the axe in your uphill hand, with the pick toward the back. Each time you turn, transfer the tool to the other hand.

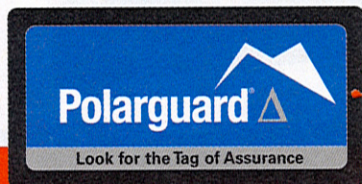
The walk Think of the axe as a third leg; always keep two points of contact with the ground, either both feet (with solid footing), or one foot and the axe shaft sunk deep enough to hold your weight if you slip.

The arrest Take a class from the likes of Sierra Mountaineering (sierramountaineering.com) or the Appalachian Mountain Club (amcnh-mountaineering.org) to learn this lifesaving technique. The key? No matter how you're careening downhill, adjust so you're headed feet-first, belly-down, spike at one hip and axe head at the opposite shoulder. Drive the pick into the snow with the weight of your shoulder, then kick both feet into the snow (fig. 2). Always roll toward and plant the pick, not the axe's shaft.



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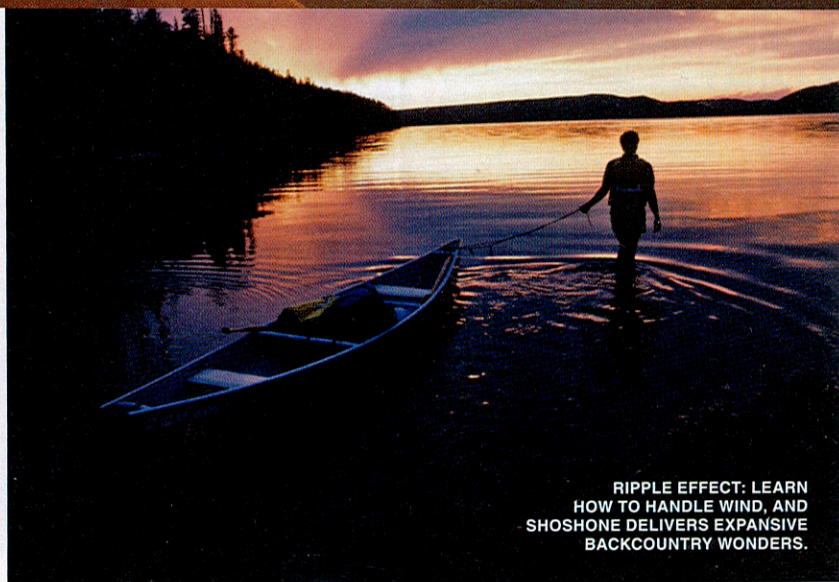
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RIPPLE EFFECT: LEARN HOW TO HANDLE WIND, AND SHOSHONE DELIVERS EXPANSIVE BACKCOUNTRY WONDERS.

CANOE YELLOWSTONE'S SHOSHONE LAKE

The roads in Yellowstone get bumper-to-bumper in summer. But get out on a boat and you'll have exclusive dibs on 20 isolated campsites, backdoor hiking access to Old Faithful, and a front-row seat to the thermal theatrics of the Shoshone Geyser Basin—all with a fairly painless paddle, if you're ready for the westerly winds that pick up most afternoons. Start at the Lewis Lake launch, hug the western shoreline for 3 miles, then power up the Lewis River Channel for another 3. For the hardy, it's 6.5 miles across Shoshone to the Basin—but there are campsites much closer.

How to do it anywhere

Packing a boat with gear and launching into the open water is a great way to slip deep into a park's interior. Learn how to navigate breaking waves and energy-sapping winds, and crowds will fade fast.

Paddling into a headwind:

Bow down "Trim" the canoe, which is a fancy way of saying shift your gear around. In a headwind, the bow should sit slightly lower than the stern. "Even moving a water jug or a backpack can make a difference," says Bardy Jones, founder of Ibis Tours, an Everglades paddling outfitter.

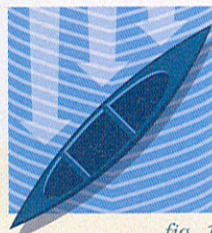


fig. 1

Full steam If wind and waves are light, paddle straight into them. When waves pile up, avoid letting the bow drop into a trough while the stern is high above—the next wave will crash into the canoe. In these conditions, you need to "quarter" the boat, paddling into the waves at about a 45-degree angle (fig. 1).

Don't stop If you need to take a swig of water, make sure your partner is paddling—or find a protected spot where you can both take a break.

Kneel If you're on your seat, you're increasing wind resistance.

Bail out Way too rough? Turn the canoe so you have a tailwind (it's generally easier to get to shore with the wind at your back), then head for the lee side of a point, spit, or rock, and take out until conditions are more favorable.

Paddling with crosswinds:

Relax Sometimes you have no choice but to paddle broadside to the breeze. Try to stay loose—the more weight on board, the more any rocking motion gets amplified. Rock with it.

Level out Trim the canoe's weight evenly, so you're not working against the boat.

Mind your way Try to have the stern paddler work on the lee side. By doing the brace stroke, and leaning the canoe slightly to lee, you can better manage the oncoming waves. Watch your course. Some sideways drift is inevitable, so you may have to quarter to get back on track.

GO HERE, TOO

GREAT SMOKIES: FONTANA LAKE

In July 2005, 2,467,995 people visited Great Smoky Mountains National Park. That's 79,000 people a day—most of whom are intimidated by the gusts on 30-mile-long Fontana Lake. Take advantage by paddling from Fontana Marina (at the park's southwest corner) across to Jerry Hollow campsite (#87)—an area inaccessible to cars. Then continue east up Hazel Creek, where rainbow trout grow to a foot long, to the ruins of Proctor, an abandoned logging town. Stash the boat, then hike up the creek into primeval 6,000-foot peaks until you reach the Appalachian Trail at 5,600-foot Silers Bald.

PHOTO BY RAYMOND GEHMAN / CORBIS

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SCRAMBLE MT. WHITNEY

At the height of summer, California's highest peak can feel like Bonnaroo—there are that many tents pitched at Trail Camp. The good news: There's a nontechnical scramble called the Mountaineer's Route that's more direct than the classic Whitney approach, and it spares you concerns about trail quotas and permit lotteries. Set up camp at Boy Scout Lake, on the mountain's east side, and get an alpine start. After negotiating class III rock (considered the easiest rock-climbing category, in which you use some handholds for upward movement and may occasionally have to face the rock while downclimbing), you'll scramble up a long couloir, then make a fairly exposed traverse north—past the tall faces of Mt. Russell—to the summit. In addition to the absence of other visitors, you'll enjoy the dark jewel of Iceberg Lake and get a chance to edge across slabby granite in a narrow gully before boosting up a final 20-foot boulder pile to the 14,494-foot top. It'll take a good 5 to 8 hours reach the summit.

How to do it anywhere

The more highwaylike the route, the heavier the traffic. But many high peaks have alternate approaches, if you're willing to work. Once you've grasped the basics of scrambling, it's as if you've been handed an alpine backstage pass.

Deal with scree First, be cautious around larger loose rocks, called talus; if it's unstable, it's dangerous. Scree, or small-rock debris, is usually most problematic mid-slope, where it often forms into a sort of channel; move to either side and it's less jumbly. If you can, clear the gravelly stuff with each foot and step on the harder dirt underneath—or, if the dirt is soft, kick a step as if you're walking on snow. Going down? Bring poles for balance, wear lug-soled boots and gaiters, and keep a wide stance. Don't be afraid to "boot ski": If your balance is steady, bend your knees, lean slightly forward, and let your soles slide.

Test your holds Different mountain ranges have different rock qualities; the Sierra, for instance, is typically solid granite, while the Canadian Rockies are more crumbly. To test a hold, kick it hard with the heel of your boot, or hit it with your hands. If it doesn't budge, you're probably safe. If the hold is above your head, tap it with a fist and listen for a hollow sound—which means it's probably loose.

Know your moves Your arm muscles are a lot smaller than your leg muscles, and they're above your heart, so they tire more easily. Use your lower body as much as possible to push off and maneuver. To climb up and over a feature, look for flakes, small ledges, or wrinkles, and try a technique called edging: Use the sharp inside edge of your boot sole on the hold, lean into the rock, and step up. With more flexible footwear, try smearing: Press your sole—as much surface area as you can—into the rock to establish friction, and push.

GO HERE, TOO

LONGS PEAK

Blunt-topped Longs is the highest peak in Rocky Mountain National Park—and the crowds know it. Let them have the Keyhole Route, and try the Loft. Named for a 13,500-foot saddle between Longs and Meeker, the route starts at the Longs Peak trailhead. After 4.5 miles, it branches off at Chasm Lake and passes the south face of Mt. Lady Washington, the 1,000-foot east face of Longs, and the cirque of Chasm Lake. After rounding a huge outcropping called the Ship's Prow, it heads up talus to the Loft. Cairns bring you back to the main route just below the crowded Homestretch, 400 feet from the summit. Allow 9 to 12 hours round-trip.



HIGH RISE: MAKE LIKE A ROCK CLIMBER TO REACH THE TOP OF WHITNEY.

PHOTO BY GALEN ROWELL / CORBIS

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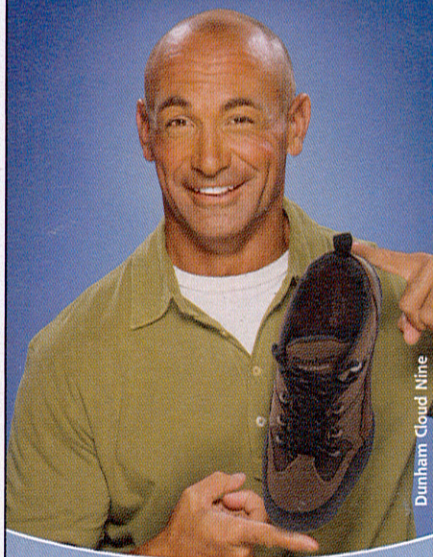
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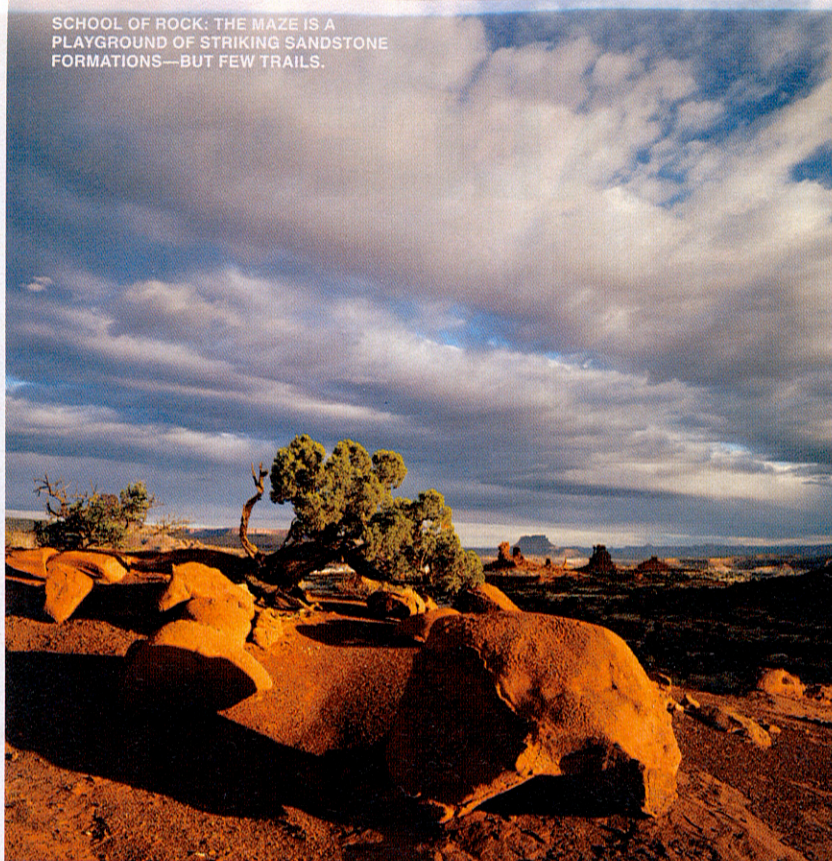
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SCHOOL OF ROCK: THE MAZE IS A PLAYGROUND OF STRIKING SANDSTONE FORMATIONS—BUT FEW TRAILS.



HIKE CROSS-COUNTRY IN THE MAZE

▶ Canyonlands National Park's remote Maze District only has a few designated trails (such as those leading to Spanish Bottom and Maze Overlook), which means this is an ideal place to strike off on your own. Trek the Colorado/Green River Overlook Trail's surreal slick-rock expanses, hopping over narrow sandstone crevasses—then continue on toward Shot Canyon. Take a right at Water Canyon to descend to the Colorado (and bring a 30-foot rope for raising and lowering packs). Plan B: Head for the Fins, starting off on the Flint Trail; you'll find rows of jutting rock that call to mind a swirling school of great white sharks.

How to do it anywhere

One of the easiest ways to get off the beaten path? Well, get off the beaten path—and every other path. If you have solid map-and-compass skills, you can safely go to places that trail-bound hikers never see. Last month, we described how to get a bearing (*Skills*, 8/06); here's what to do next.

Pick your spots Once you have your compass's direction-of-travel arrow set, head for your destination—say, the mouth of a canyon. Can't see it from your starting point? Hold the compass in front of you, orient it, and lock onto a closer, visible landmark. Hike to that spot, and repeat the process until you've reached your location.

Clear hurdles Say you've got another canyon system in front of you, blocking the way—a common situation in places like the Maze. Walk around it by following right angles. Turn at a right angle from your route and, counting your steps, walk until you're certain you're beyond the obstacle. Then turn back at a right angle to your original bearing and hike past the obstructing walls. Next, turn at a right angle back toward your original sighting line, repeating the same number of steps to return. Another right-angle turn puts you back on your intended path.

Retrace To return, hold the compass with the direction-of-travel arrow pointing toward you, instead of away. Orient by turning your body, not the compass, until the north (red) end of the magnetic needle lines up with the orienting arrow. Reverse bearing to get back.

GO HERE, TOO

JOSHUA TREE'S COXCOMB MOUNTAINS

The rugged, bright-white Coxcomb Mountains—where the Colorado and Mojave Deserts meet, in the park's northeast corner—have no marked paths and a whole lotta cholla, creosote, and ocotillo. For an overnight intro far from the car-camping crowds, drive about 42 miles east of Twentynine Palms on CA 62 and look for an unmarked dirt road. Park, and then scramble over the boulders in the first quarter-mile, then follow washes past jagged spires, redrock formations, and the open desert of the Inner Valley to the Pinto Basin Overlook.

PHOTOS BY DAVID MUEJENCH / CORBIS (2)

SKI-TOUR CRATER LAKE

In summer, this Oregon national park is far friendlier to cars than backpackers; a road encircles the 6-mile-wide caldera turned Day-Glo-blue lake, and trails rarely climb above treeline. In winter—when the park averages 533 inches of snow—skiers claim the 33-mile Rim Drive, a loop that takes 3 to 4 days and only changes about 700 feet in elevation. Take in views of the stunning Phantom Rock and Wizard Island, along with the hemlock-and-fir-fringed shoreline, from the Sun Notch Viewpoint. Then slide down to Cleetwood Cove for a closer look at the brilliant, bright-blue water, in places nearly 2,000 feet deep.

How to do it anywhere

Once you learn to tour on skis, vast, unpeopled winter worlds open up in many of the country's most popular parks. And all you need are climbing skins for purchase on the uphills. Your reward? The hush of snow. The sound of skins zipping underfoot. And a cool dose of solitude.

Pack up—not out You want your heaviest gear close in to your hips, and as much gear as possible flush up against your back. That dangling Therm-A-Rest will throw you off balance—and onto your duff.

Be skin-savvy On flat snow, you can take longer, gliding strides, keeping your upper body in front of your feet. As the slope gets steeper, shorten your steps, keeping your weight over the arch of your front foot. If you find yourself slipping, try stomping down hard to engage the hairs on the skins.

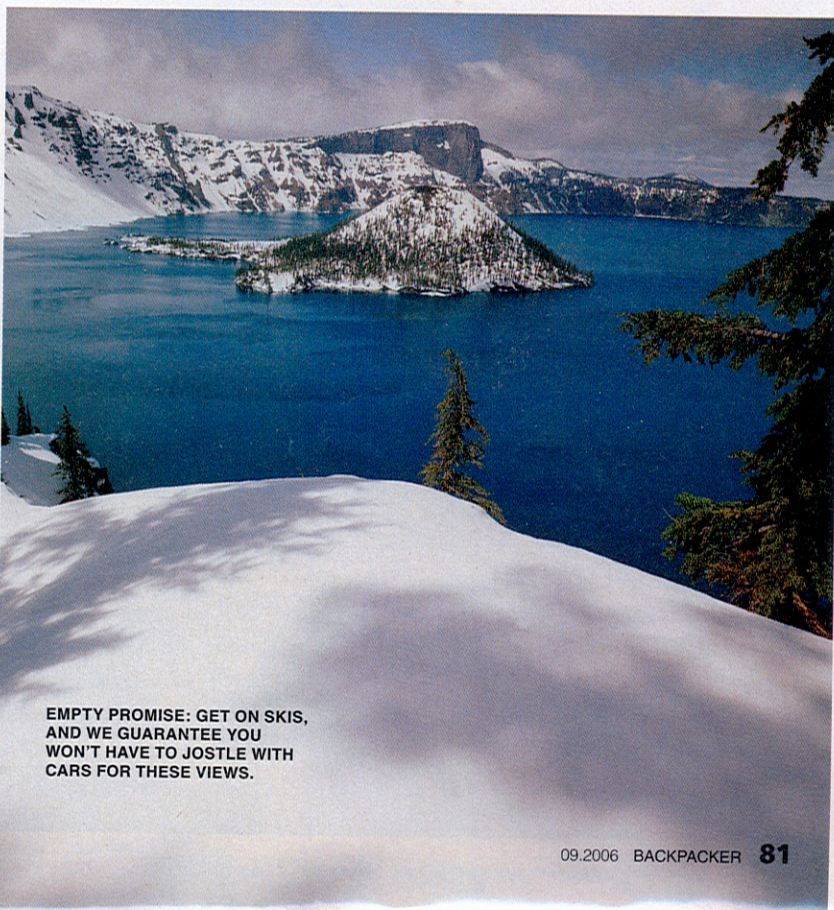
Make S-curves Going straight up a tough slope can sap energy, so think switchback. "You should almost be meandering back and forth," says Alison Gannett, a professional freeskiier from Crested Butte. If it's *really* steep, start making distinct zigzags. Each time you change direction, you'll make a kick-turn: You lift one ski up and turn it around toward the hill almost 180 degrees, then follow with the other.

Stay athletic on downhills If you're coasting down a short hill with your skins on, remember that your edges won't engage. Keep your skis flat and parallel, absorbing bumps with your knees. To descend with a heavy pack with skins off, keep a wide athletic stance, either snowplowing or trying alpine or tele turns.

GO HERE, TOO

GLACIER'S AVALANCHE LAKE

On skis, follow Going-to-the-Sun Road for 5 miles from the Apgar Visitor Center—paralleling McDonald Lake—to the now-peaceful Avalanche Creek campground (it's packed with RVs and cars in summertime). Set up camp, then take a day trip to Avalanche Lake the next morning, through cedar and hemlock forests and up into the craggy cirque. Take in hanging snowfields and frozen waterfalls above the lake—and, if you're adventurous (and it's safe), skin up from the waterfront for powder shots.



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