

Potrillo Cliffs

Miniguide

The majority of this downloadable miniguide was copied from Gary Clark's excellent climbing guide for Potrillo Cliffs. A couple of routes were added, thanks to Walt Wehner and friends, who provided me with information of almost all climbing areas of Los Alamos and White Rock. Please give Gary Clark and Walt full credit for this miniguide. Special thanks to Jim Straight, who took me out for a little hike and showed me where the Potrillo Cliff Trad Area is located. If you have suggestions for changes or additions to this downloadable guide, send info to Guido Bender: guido@lanl.gov.

Caution

Outdoor recreation activities are by their very nature potentially hazardous. There are inherent dangers and other risks involved that include the risk of personal injuries, including paralysis and death. All participants in such activities must assume the responsibility for their own actions and safety. The information contained in this guidebook cannot replace sound judgement and good decision-making skills, which help reduce risk exposure, nor does the scope of this guide allow for disclosure of all the potential hazards and risks involved in such activities.

Learn as much as possible about the outdoor recreation activities in which you participate, prepare for the unexpected, and be cautious. The reward will be a safer and more enjoyable experience.

General

Potrillo Cliff consists of a 45 foot south and west facing basalt cliff with about 30 fairly easy traditional and top rope routes between 5.4 to 5.12. Some routes are somewhat chossy but most see plenty of traffic due to their moderate difficulty. Potrillo also features 2 bolted sport routes, both of which are missing their hangers. Bolting is not allowed here, and there really isn't any sport climbing potential anyway. This cliff is sometimes very crowded, partly due to the ease of setting up top ropes, especially in the afternoons, when it receives direct sunlight until sunset.

The legendary Layton Kor once visited Potrillo, and led a couple of routes. The star-struck locals named the two cracks after him, and one route after his girlfriend. Continuing the tradition, Gary Clark has named route #11 after Kor's dog.

Route #22 is named after a chuckwalla, which is a large lizard with the interesting defence mechanism of crawling into a crack and inflating itself.

Directions

To get to "Potrillo Cliffs," drive out of White Rock towards Bandalier National Monument on State Road 4. Turn left into Monte Rey Drive South, one of the last streets in White Rock. Turn right into Potrillo Drive and right again into Estante Way. Park opposite site of the first fire hydrant near house number 428. Please make sure you are not blocking any mail boxes and your tires are off the street. Head into the trail between mail box 428 and the fire hydrant. When the trail splits, follow its right branch and continue until you pass a metal sign: "US Government Property" after about half a mile. Then turn left and walk straight back until you come to the cliffs. The gully to descend lies on the eastern side of the south facing cliff. Total approach time should be no more than 10 minutes.

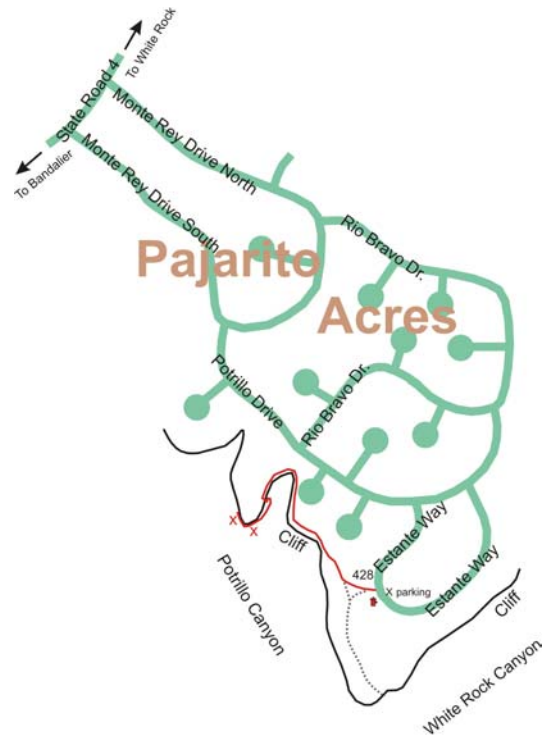


Figure 1: Directions to Potrillo Cliffs

Routes

According with all our other miniguides, the climbs of Potrillo Cliffs are numbered and described from the most left climb of the West Cliff to the most right climb of the South Cliff. Please be aware, that this order contradicts to the order the climber will approach the climbs coming from the entrance/exit gully.

Right of *Porky's Bad Luck* (climb #32), the cliff degenerates. There are several 4th class gullies and faces that are used occasionally for instruction of beginners. One can find 5th class moves on the upper 15 feet or so in several spots, but these are generally not considered worth the trouble.

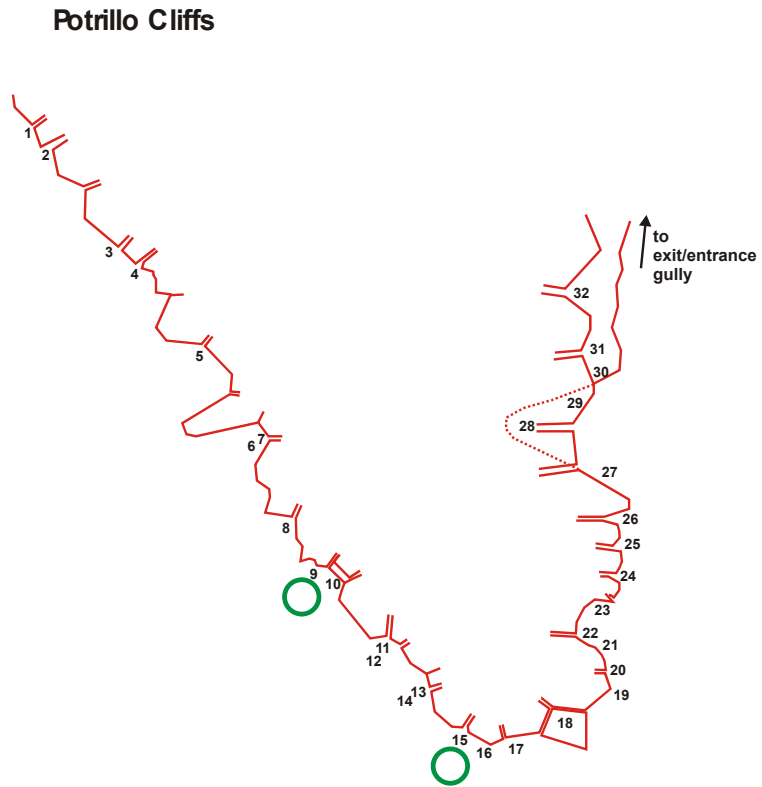


Figure 2: Schematic of Potrillo Cliffs

The West Cliff

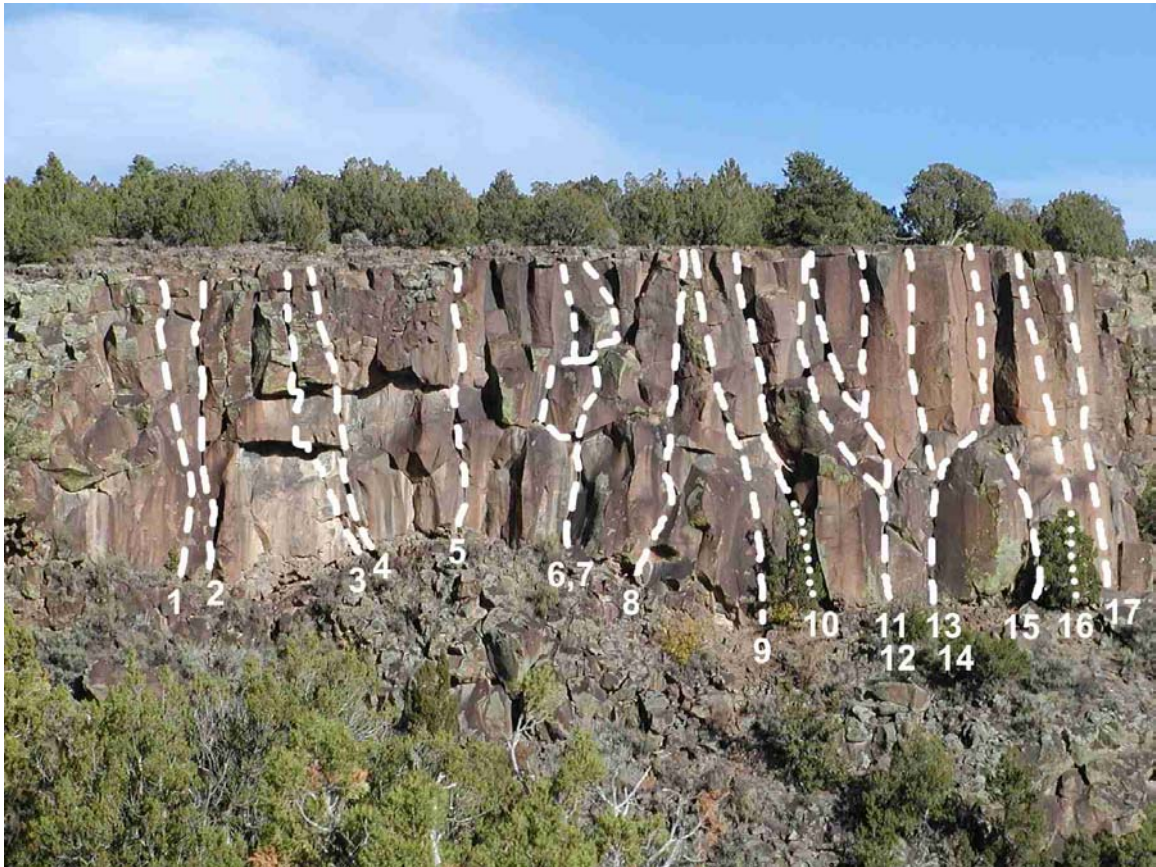


Figure 3: Potrillo Cliffs West facing side.

1. **Unknown**
5.11a **, no bolts, no anchors, Trad route. Just 5 feet left of *Car Camping with the Kids* is a thin seam, which leads to easier cracks.
2. **Car Camping with the Kids**
5.6 ***, no bolts, no anchors, Trad route, bring protection up to 2.5 inches. V-shaped corner/crack on the far left side. Good lead for beginners, but spot the first few moves.
3. **Double Trouble**
5.12c **, 2 bolts, no anchors. This double roof problem is very height-dependent. Begin below and right of the overhang on a steep face and thin holds. Go over the lip at the bolt and onto more reasonable climbing above. A much easier variation approaches the overhang from the left (bring #4 Camalot™).
4. **Unknown**
5.11a **, no bolts, no anchors, Trad route. Just right of the *Double Trouble* buttress, a steep crack start leads to a 5.6.

5. Sleeper

5.10d **, no bolts, no anchors, Trad route along a continuous crack. An awkward start leads to some jug chockstones in the upper part of the initial crack. Move up and left to a slightly overhanging, left-leaning dihedral.

6. Jane

5.9 **, no bolts, no anchors, Trad route. Climb the crack in the back of the alcove, then traverse left to a good stance at the base of a block. The crux is at the corner straight above.

7. Tarzan

5.10d **, no bolts, no anchors, Trad route. 20 feet left and uphill from *Pieces of Eight*. Continuing left along the base, you must drop down, then scramble up some jumbled, unstable boulders to arrive back at the base of the cliff. Tarzan and Jane begin in a small alcove just above the boulders. Either climb the short crack in the back to arrive at the base of the obvious overhang, or the apron-like slab on the right side of the alcove. Above the overhang is a short chimney bordered on the left by a crack containing several small, painful chockstones. Use the crack or the chockstones as handholds to gracefully swing over the roof and dance up the chimney to a large flat stance. Finish with either (A) an easy traverse to the right and then up, or (B) a short but intense right-facing dihedral. Beware: stemming far right to the ledge at the crux is considered off-route. To avoid the brutality of the Style Police, keep your feet well left.

8. Pieces of Eight

5.8+ **, no bolts, no anchors, Trad route, bring protection up to 2.5 inches. Up the smooth handcrack/layback, over a small roof problem, then straight up easier cracks.

9. Shaky Flake

5.10c **, no bolts, no anchors, Trad route. Up the uncharacteristically moderate angled slab just to the left of the start for *Fickle Fingers*, and straight up easier cracks. Don't step from the tree. A very difficult move starts you up this slab characterised by thin edges and delicate flakes. The first protection can be set at the top of the slab. You can as well continue up and slightly right to an interesting headwall problem.

10. Fickle Fingers

5.10d/11a **, no bolts, no anchors, Trad route, bring small slider-wedge, e.g. #1 Lowe Ball™. Begin in a V-recess just above a Juniper growing close to the base. Easy climbing in the crack leads to the base of a left-facing corner. A difficult finger lock in the incipient crack in the corner gets you to the easier section of steep crack above.

11. Kor's Dog

5.8 **, no bolts, no anchors, Trad route, bring small and medium cams. After climbing the initial 25 feet of *Desperate*, move left to the base of a clean right-facing dihedral. This provides a short but stimulating exercise in layback technique.

12. Desperate

(Two different descriptions exist of *Desperate*. They will be presented here without change, choose the one you like best or climb them both.)

5.8 *, no bolts, no anchors, Trad route, bring protection up to 2.5 inches. Begin on moderate wide cracks just left of *Gymnast*. Climb up and slightly left until the rock steepens. Follow the left-trending crack system to the top.

5.9 ***, no bolts, no anchors, Trad route. Begin on moderate wide cracks just left of *Gymnast*. Climb up and slightly left until the rock steepens. Follow the thin crack on the right of the pocketed headwall. The crux is at the top, and short people will find this a 5.10.

13. Upper Kor's Crack

5.9 ****, classic, no bolts, no anchors, Trad route, bring protection up to 2 inches. Up the thin crack 15 feet left of *Lower Kor's Crack* and straight up the overhung hand crack. Shares the start with *Gymnast*.

14. Gymnast

5.8+ ***, no bolts, no anchors, Trad route, bring protection up to 2 inches. Climb the first 20 feet of *Upper Kor's Crack*, then traverse rightwards to finish up the twin cracks above *Lower Kor's Crack*.

15. Lower Kor's Crack

5.10d **, no bolts, no anchors, Trad route, bring protection up to 2 inches. The thin recessed finger crack behind the first Juniper tree as you turn the corner from the south facing cliff. The crux is passed within 10 feet, and leads to a terrace with a choice of upper routes, *Gymnast* being most obvious.

16. Dream of White Gerbils

5.11c **, 4 hangerless bolts, no anchors. Just left of *Fool on the Hill* is a single bolt that defines the start of a difficult climb on the orange coloured face. Share the second bolt of *Fool on the Hill*, then go up the very steep face just right of the corner arete past 2 more bolts.

17. Fool on the Hill

5.12b **, 4 hangerless bolts, no anchors, bring small cams or nuts for the top. This bolted line leads up a short face to less steep rock, then attacks the arete that divides the South and West face of Potrillo cliffs.

The South Cliff



Figure 4: Potrillo Cliffs South facing side.

18. Pillars of Hercules

Left variation:

5.7 **, no bolts, no anchors, toprope or bring protection up to 3 inches, e.g. medium cams. Mantle onto a large, flat-topped boulder close to the extreme West corner of the cliff. Step left and climb the crack to easy rock. Continue up the obvious broad chimney defined by the two pillars.

Right variation:

5.8 ***, no bolts, no anchors, toprope or bring protection up to 3 inches, e.g. medium cams. Climb the right side of the boulder, then an awkward dihedral, that leads to a roof. After the roof right and left variation join and you climb up the broad chimney. The most classic and popular route at Potrillo, with a wide variety of climbing techniques in a short distance.

19. Unknown

5.9 *, no bolts, no anchors, toprope. Up the arete just left of Cindy's Chimney.

20. Cindy's Chimney

5.7- ***, no bolts, no anchors, top rope or bring protection up to 3 inches, e.g. medium wires and cams. Up the block system and into a dihedral with 2 wide cracks.

21. Call of the Crane

5.10a **, no bolts, no anchors, top rope. Start just right of *Cindy's Chimney*, climbing moderate cracks and flakes to a bulge. Over the bulge, then up the face to an easy crack bisecting the pillar above the bulge.

22. Chuckwalla

5.8 **, no bolts, no anchors, top rope or bring protection up to 2.5 inches. Offwidth to hand crack 10 feet right of *Cindy's Chimney*. Wiggle up the chimney, then step right onto the face and follow the dihedral to the top.

23. Unknown

5.10c **, no bolts, no anchors, top rope. The face in between *Chuckwalla* and *Belly Flop*. Contrived but fun.

24. Belly Flop

5.9- *, no bolts, no anchors, top rope or bring protection up to 2.5 inches, e.g. #4 Camalot™. Climb the crack that starts 6 feet right of *Chuckwalla*, then straight up to the crack on the right side of the steep pocketed face. Awkward, and harder than it looks.

25. Belly Up

5.7 *, no bolts, no anchors, top rope or bring protection up to 2.5 inches, e.g. medium cams. Climb moderate rock up a broken crack system right of *Belly Flop*.

26. Grandstanding

5.4 *, no bolts, no anchors, top rope or bring protection up to 2.5 inches. Climb a short easy pillar 5 feet right of the previous route and continue to a 1 foot wide crack behind another pillar. A sling over a sharp flake jammed in the top of the crack protects the few 5th class moves necessary to attain a small cove. Up and left (4th class) to the top.

27. Left Cave Route

5.10b **, no bolts, no anchors, top rope or bring protection up to 3 inches. Go up the block on the left side of the cave, then up a fist crack with the hardest move of the climb. Head right to join *Cave Route Center*. When top roped, you can as well enjoy the face and go straight as shown in the picture.

28. Cave Route Center

5.9 **, no bolts, no anchors, toprope or trad lead. A weird stemming problem. Starting in the back of the obvious cave, climb out over several successive roofs to reach the base of the huge hueco above. Easy climbing leads straight up. When topped be aware of the huge ground fall potential in the beginning of the climb due to the large slack that is needed. Better have someone back you up.

Left variation:

5.9, A jam crack on the cave's left wall leads to the hueco.

Variation (5.11): Climb the right wall of the cave about half way out

29. Right Cave Route

5.11c ***, no bolts, no anchors, toprope. Climb the face/crack on the right side of the cave to a weird stemming problem. Join *Cave Route Center* after 15 feet of strenuous overhanging climbing, then go up and into the giant pocket.

30. Ardeidae Arete

5.8 *, no bolts, no anchors, toprope. Beginning on the short pillars right of the cave, climb the sharp arete just above the cave, left of *Heron's Fissure*.

31. Heron's Fissure

5.8+ **, no bolts, no anchors, toprope or bring protection up to 3 inches. Up the pockets and right-leaning crack, that has a huecoed wall to its right. Right of the *Right Cave Route*.

32. Porky's Bad Luck

5.6 **, no bolts, no anchors, toprope. Start in the base of the deep narrow slot to the right of the huecoed wall of *Heron's Fissure*. Move out right onto the face, which is followed to the top.

Potrillo Cliffs Trad Area



Figure 5: Potrillo Cliffs with Potrillo Cliffs Trad Area.

Below the Potrillo Cliffs toppling area is a very infrequently climbed full one pitch trad lead climbing area. In this area you can find about a half dozen routes. Some of the climbs offer a 2nd pitch of up to 30 feet.

Due to its low traffic, the area is not "clean", but a true Trad climb. Wear a helmet and take the necessary steps for your own safety. Make sure the rock is the same good hard basalt of the main Potrillo Cliffs. Don't climb any of the soft and very dangerous rock that is further west.

Not many people have climbed in the Potrillo Cliffs Trad Area. You'll find almost untouched rock.

Access the Potrillo Cliffs Trad Area by carefully heading straight downhill from the *Cave Route Center*. You'll find a gully where you can descend. Turn to the right and you'll find the obvious area shown in the picture.

No one ever bothered to name these routes (less people bothered to climb here). These are all the descriptions we have. Let us know which route you climbed, how you liked it and we'll add it to the guide.