

# Ben's Branch

## Climbing Character:

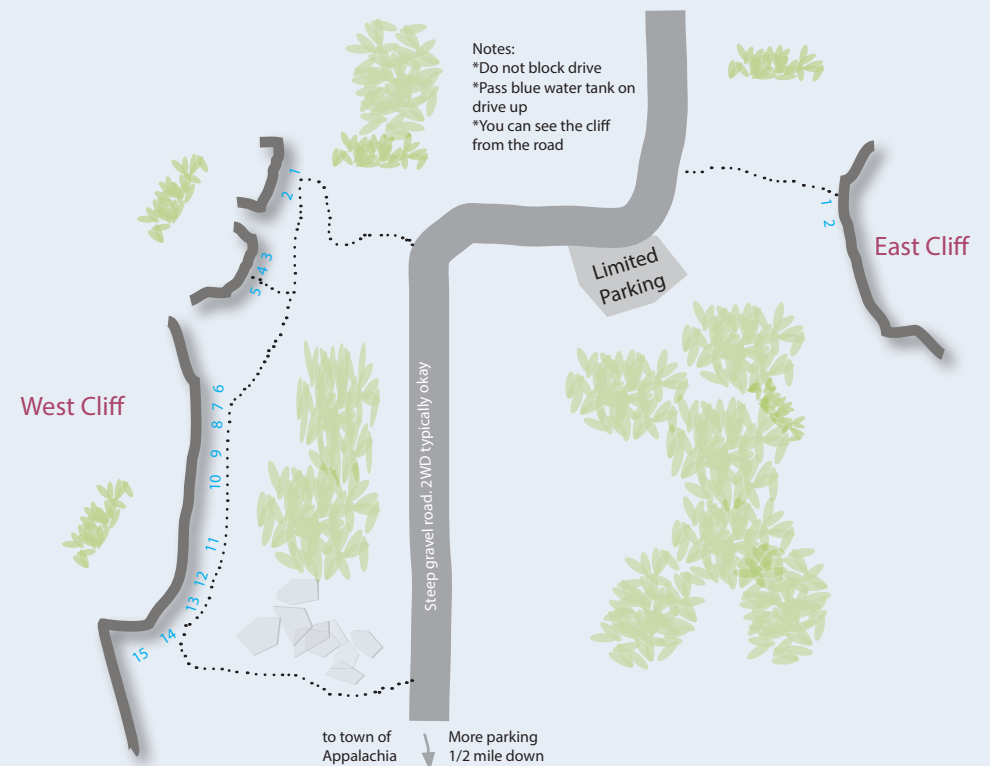
All of the climbing at Ben's Branch is Sport climbing with a wide variety of grades and route lengths between 40 and 120 feet. While the rock at Ben's Branch is still sandstone, it is unlike what you may traditionally expect out of Southern Sandstone. While still good quality rock, it is fractured and broken (Blown Up?) in a way leaving the climbing edgy and blocky. Be aware of loose blocks while climbing and get used to finding your balance on slanting holds. A Stick Clip is recommended for most routes.

## Access Position/Rules:

Access to Ben's Branch is provided by the Town of Appalachia in a combined effort with the Central Appalachia Climbers Coalition. Officially opened in Spring of 2018, Ben's Branch is a relatively new climbing area. The Town of Appalachia maintains no responsibility for the activities or safety at Ben's Branch as stated in the Climbing Management Plan. The Town of Appalachia is welcoming of climbers onto the property and we should do our part to be thankful by keeping the area clean and cared for. An important note is that this road is still an access road to the Water Treatment facility and **NO CLIMBER PARKING SHOULD EVER OBSTRUCT ROAD ACCESS.**



Brad Mathisen on ????  
Photo: Jesse Cheers



## Getting There:

The Town of Appalachia can be reached from Big Stone Gap (2.5 Miles) or Norton (10 Miles) via Business 23. Coming from Norton take a left at the first stop light in Appalachia (from Big Stone Gap this will be a right turn at the second stop light at the end of town) and pass the Miner's Exchange Bank on your right. Take the next right across the railroad tracks on Kilbourne Ave. When this dead ends, turn left onto Brown St. Stay right at every fork in the road as Brown Street turns into Woodland Drive. Woodland will turn up hill following a stream (Ben's Branch) past a water treatment gate and a blue water tank and pump system. Here the road (now Hemlock Dr.) turns to gravel and gets very steep, be prepared to make your car work hard getting up this final bit of road. You will pass the main cliff on your left as the hill tops out and curves right. The parking area is in the next left hand curve.

## Season:

Because of its east/west facing aspect, Ben's Branch is good nearly year-round if you climb at the right time of day. Most cliff stays dry in moderate rain. However, if it has snowed recently ice is likely to form at cliff top and the road will become rather hazardous.

## Food/Lodging:

## Area History:

## AREA



## BEN'S BRANCH EAST CLIFF

The East cliff is the shorter, undeveloped step-sister of the West cliff. It only has a few routes established for the time being although has the potential for another 15 or so if you're feeling ambitious.



**Approach:** 2 minutes. Park in the main lot and continue walking up the road towards the water plant for about 75 yards. A short approach trail on the right leads to a small crag with an enormous orange hueco in the center. Other undeveloped cliff on this side is likely more easily accessed by an approach back down the road (towards the West Cliff lower entrance).

**Conditions:** The aspect of this cliff gives it morning sun. However, if the leaves are still on the trees it stay fairly shaded even in the mornings. This lack of sun makes this a moist crag during wet weather.

**Notes:** This area is largely undeveloped and may see more routes spring up in the future.



Routes listed left to right.

1 **Kyle's Route** 5.11a ★★★

Route left of the hueco.

60 ft. 7 bolts + Anchors. Kyle King, Fall 2018

2 **Brad's Route** 5.11c ★★

Climb's the right side of the golden hueco that might be more awesome in appearance than rock quality. Bouldery finish on better rock.

60 ft. 6 bolts + Anchors, Brad Mathisen, Fall 2018

## BEN'S BRANCH WEST CLIFF

This is the primary crag at Ben's Branch with routes ranging from 5.6-5.12. Many of the routes of the middle and harder grades provide good and sustained climbing. The further down hill you go the bigger and harder the routes get.



**Approach:** 2-5 minutes. There are two trails to this cliff, both of which you will drive past on your way to the main parking area. Park in the main lot and walk back down the road to the left turn heading back down hill. In this corner is an approach trail leading up to the easier routes such as "America's Most Wanted". If you want the bigger, harder routes, walk the road down the hill to another short approach trail on the right hand side near the tallest part of the cliff. Both trails walk the cliff line and eventually connect as a loop.

**Conditions:** Morning Shade and Afternoon Sun make this crag great for almost any season depending on the time of day. Belay spots can be challenging due to the steep slope at the bottom.

## AREA



Routes listed right to left.

1 **America's Most Wanted** 5.6 ★★★

An unsolved murder mystery at the Appalachia Water Plant lead to the bolting of this route during a filming of it's namesake TV show. This route is one of the few true beginner climbs in the area. Begin at a right trending seam leading to the line of bolts up the right side of the first chunk of cliff arrived at from the trail. Move through engaging blocky terrain into fantastic sandstone jug features leading to the anchors. 50 ft. 5 bolts + Anchors. Carter Baumann, Brad Mathisen, Fall 2018.

2 **The Delegate** 5.8 ★

Start in a similar location to America's Most Wanted but journey directly up easy terrain into a strange block press move at half height. Finish under the roof leaning back on an undercling to clip the chains.

40 ft. 4 bolts + Anchors. Brad Mathisen, Fall 2018

3 **Murdock and Peanut** 5.9 ★

This is the furthest right route on the 5.9 section of cliff up-trail from The Delegate. Stick clip a high first bolt and start on suspect blocky sandstone on the "arête" of the route. A tricky move at the first bolt leads to more enjoyable and solid climbing to the chains.

45 ft. 4 bolts + Anchors. Brad Mathisen, Fall 2018





**4 One Stop Shop 5.9 ★★** ☐  
The center line of three on this wall. Climb interesting edges to a semi-technical crux at the 2nd bolt. Shake off the face climbing and pull through juggy roofs onto a featured face.

45 ft. 4 bolts + Anchors. Brad Mathisen, Fall 2018

**5 Stonega 5.8+ ★★** ☐  
This fun route is named after an old coal camp on the north side of Appalachia. Easy edge climbing mantles into a hueco seat rest followed by a bulgy jug finish.

40 ft. 5 bolts + Anchors. Brad Mathisen, Fall 2018

**6 Deep Shaft 5.11a ★★** ☐  
Downhill (climber's left) of the big chossy cave. Look for a slight undercut start leading to a basketball sized hole about 15 feet up. Sustained climbing leads out the undercut and up the face into a striking dihedral feature mid-route. Boulder out the dihedral and climb left around an awkward bulge being mindful of your rope through this section. Finish on fun easier climbing.

65 ft. 8 bolts + Anchors. Brad Mathisen, Spring 2018



**7 UMWA 5.10d ★★★** ☐  
About 50 ft. climbers left of Deep Shaft. Reach up to a side pulling jug to pull onto the wall, stack a rock if necessary. Slanty face climbing typical of Ben's Branch leads to a rest above the 4th bolt. From here a sequential crux gives way to bigger holds trending right into a potentially pumpy finish.

65 ft. 8 bolts + Anchors. Brad Mathisen, Spring 2018

**8 Bolted Hollows 5.10d ★★** ☐  
Directly left of UMWA. The big start on this looks improbable for the grade, but just go for it. Decent face climbing trends left at a tricky transfer onto the upper half of the route.

60 ft. 8 bolts + Anchors. Brad Mathisen, Spring 2019

**9 Relic or Ruins 5.10c ★★★** ☐  
This route is long and flowy and much better than it looks from the ground. Start on a right leaning jug and move through the technical crux at the first bolt. Wander through big holds between big moves on your pumpy journey to the Anchors.

70 ft. 7 bolts + Anchors. Brad Mathisen, Fall 2018



Mike Reardon on Relic or Ruins, 10c  
Photo: Jesse Cheers



**10 Pork Rind Politician 5.10d ★★** ☐

Moving downhill a little you'll find three routes moving through angular blocky rock and roofs. This route begins left of a dirty wet streak. Sustained, tricky, face climbing leads to a set of anchors underneath the first big roof.

55 ft. 6 bolts + Anchors. Brad Mathisen, Spring 2018

**11 Pork Rind Politician Extension** ☐

5.11d ★★

Place an extended draw at the first anchor and begin pulling roofs on thuggier powerful climbing for another 30 feet.

80 ft. 11 bolts + Anchors. Brad Mathisen, Spring 2018

**12 Unidentified Flying Appalachian (U.F.A.) 5.11d ★★★** ☐

I've never climbed in Rifle (because Southern sandstone is way better), but I always imagine it would be a bit like this. Begin in a grey streak of moderate face climbing leading into a fun sequence out a series of bulges where your hips just never seem to square up to the wall. After a good rest climb through more overhangs into strenuous movement to gain the chains.

80 ft. 10 bolts + Anchors. Brad Mathisen, Spring 2018

**13 8 Camps, No Sleepers 5.11c ★★** ☐

Start this route down/climber's left of the bolt line in an excellent pocket. Engaging and fun climbing similar to U.F.A. gives way to a more moderate finish.

65 ft. 8 bolts + Anchors. Brad Mathisen, Spring 2018

**14 Full Circle 5.12a ★★★★★** ☐

Beautiful route! Begin by bouldering into the enticing hueco found at the third bolt. Undercling, highstep, side-pull, and finger-lock your way through delightful movement up to a set of roofs. Long moves lead to a last crux that shuts down many a flash attempt. This one is good from start to finish.

80 ft. 9 bolts + Anchors. Brad Mathisen, Fall 2017

**15 '97 Bulldogs 5.11a ★★★** ☐

Another great route just left of Full Circle. A delicate crux opens into wonderfully flowy movement with a memorable finish to a peaceful view of the abandoned high school where the Bulldogs once played. The only downside to this route is the seemingly questionable rock through the middle.

80 ft. 8 bolts + Anchors. Brad Mathisen, Fall 2017

**16 Black Lung 5.10c ★★** ☐

About 50 ft. downhill from 97 Bulldogs find a right trending bolted line that begins down and left of the first bolt a sidepull flake. Keep your balance up the slanted face climbing holds characteristic of this area to reach the chains about half way up the wall.

55 ft. 5 bolts + Anchors. Will Black, Spring 2019

**17 The Crumbling Altar of Coal 5.12 Project ★★★★★** ☐

This line is an enormous adventure. Begin on sustained movement leading to a ledge where you can sit down, rest, and contemplate the multiple sequences of hard movement through bullet stone ahead. Epic. Bring some extendable slings to reduce drag, 70 meter rope recommended. [Not just a metaphor for the region, St. Anthony's Catholic Church in Norton actually has an altar made entirely of coal that is slowly falling apart.]

110 ft. 16 bolts + Anchors. Brad Mathisen, Spring 2019

**Full Circle History:** This was the first line bolted at Ben's Branch, chosen for its obvious beauty. The developer sought to be clandestine as access was still unconfirmed. After proudly bolting the line the developer began hiking desiring to leave unnoticed. Instead he was met by the police waiting at his car, wondering if he was the wanted murderer returning to the crime scene. The encounter ended cordially and the officer even helped move the access needle in a positive direction for the future.

