



Nic Oklobzija puts the finishing moves on *Mortal Kombat* (V3) at Horse Pens 40, location for the second leg of the 2009 Triple Crown.

Triple Whammy

The first two legs of the 2009 Triple Crown are over, but the struggle to gain access to Southern sandstone continues.

The judges for this year's Hound Ears comp are all wearing shirts that say, "Don't be a dick!"

It's good advice. Nobody likes dicks. But I wonder what it has to do with Hound Ears, a gated mountaintop community with a backyard playground of big, fat, bulbous boulders that look like petrified Thanksgiving turkeys.

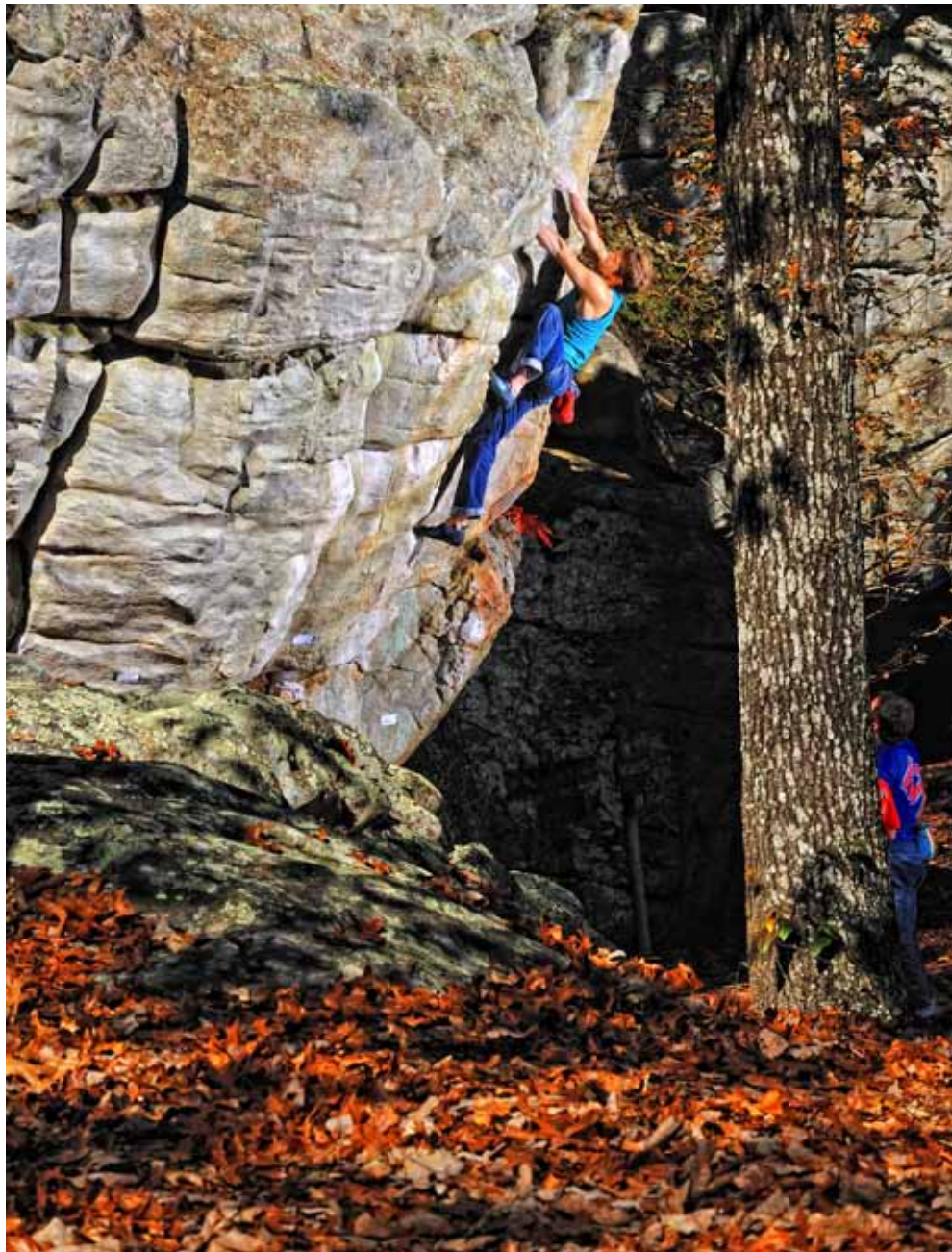
Hound Ears, near Boone, North Carolina, is closed to climbing 364 days of the year, every day except today: the first Saturday of October and the kick-off to the country's biggest outdoor competition series, the Triple Crown. The 450 competitors waiting for the event to start look wired and stir-crazy thinking about the in-cut crimps and sticky sandstone-and-gneiss conglomerate that

await them. Climbers are smoking cigarettes and pantomiming beta to remember the sequences of the area's classics. A climber in a down jacket with duct tape over the brand rubs his hands together in a combination of keeping warm and dinner-table excitement.

"This is like a family reunion," says Jim Horton, the event founder. Now in its 16th year, the Triple Crown, aside from being a

really fun and cool community event, has an ultimate mission: to raise funds for the Southeastern Climbers Coalition (SCC), the Carolina Climbers' Association (CCC), the Access Fund and other organizations, which have all helped purchase, lease and reopen climbing areas throughout the Southeast. The Triple Crown is a series of three events that take place the first weekend of every month in the fall, first at Hound Ears, then down to Horse Pens 40 (HP40) near Steele, Alabama, and finally, wrapping up at Stone Fort, a bouldering zone in Chattanooga, Tennessee. The Triple Crown isn't just a bouldering comp series—it's the fulcrum upon which these organizations have found leverage to secure local climbing areas.

A bell rings in the boulder field, and the crowd scatters. Some climbers, in a tactical move, avoid the crowds and head down the road for *Air Jesus* (V4) and the classic big-move highball *Heretic* (V2). Near the main



Nic Oklobzija enjoys the champagne of boulder problems, *High Life* (V5), at Horse Pens 40.

area's warm-ups, boulderers pump fists and tag beta on crimp classics like *Fuc Yo* (V9). Brion Voges, who has lived and climbed in the Southeast his whole life, simply walks the first ascent of *Half-Price Pornos* (V11).

Any hard first ascent at Hound Ears is impressive considering that climbers have less than nine hours per year to find, clean, suss and establish the problem. Fortunately, "the lines are perfect here," says Voges, who took second place in the Men's Open field.

Explaining who is responsible for the success of this ongoing access battle in the Southeast would almost mean naming nearly

every climber in the region. The list of advocates, stewards, developers and first ascensionists is as long as the cliffs and as numerous as the boulders.

Chris Watford, author of the *Dixie Cragger* guidebook, explains, "We have a unique opportunity for not only negotiating access, but for acquisition. There's a lot of private land or land owned by a corporation."

More areas are being purchased, like Georgia's Boat Rock and most recently, Steele in Alabama. Others are leased, like Castle Rock (by the SCC), and Asheboro Boulders (by CCC). Still others remain privately owned



WIN A ROPE WITH **LIFELINE!**

Have a question about technique, training or equipment? Ask it and Maxim's experts, including Randy Leavitt, will answer them. Every month, one lucky inquisitor will get his or her letter selected and will score a free Maxim rope!



This month's rope giveaway is the Milky Way, a 9.9mm 60-meter featuring Twill Pattern Technology (TPT) that produces a smooth sheath—reduced drag makes the rope feel lighter and gives it a soft hand. (\$202 value)

For your shot at a free cord, simply post your question to: www.rockandice.com/lifeline

with negotiated management plans, like HP40, the venue that hosts the middle leg of the Triple Crown. In these cases, people like Brad McLeod, one of the SCC founding members who helped secure Steele, and Adam Henry, who is integral in maintaining a relationship with the HP40 owners, the Schultz family, are two among many others doing heavy lifting.

"Access is sketchy at best," says Horton. "Unless we own the land, we're in danger of losing it at any minute. A long time ago we used to sneak onto properties, because we didn't know a better way. There are places that are now closed that we could have prevented if we'd had a better tactic."

Chad Wykle is a buyer at Rock Creek Outfitters and one among many developers putting in some of the newest, sickest sandstone lines around Chattanooga. He wears a visor, speaks with a mouth full o' south, and seems to have a perpetually happy disposition.

"It's so compact down here," says Wykle. "It's not like out West where you can see for miles, and a man in the desert stands out like a bump on a log. Down in these parts, a man can be standing around the corner, and you'll never know. The forest keeps its secrets. You don't know what [property] belongs to who."

The cliff bands are typically dense and bullet-hard, a combo

Hound Ears Results

MEN:

1. Jimmy Webb
2. Brion Voges
3. Max Zolutukhin

WOMEN:

1. Sasha DiGiulian
2. Kasia Pietras
3. Francesca Metcalf

HP40 Results

MEN:

1. Jimmy Webb
2. Jeremy Walton
3. Carlo Traversi

WOMEN:

1. Alex Puccio
2. Kate McGinnis
3. Francesca Metcalf

PERFECT FIT ▲
EVERYTIME ▲

CLIFF NOTES



Charlie Burnett gives his all for this send of *Dope* (V2), one of the most classic climbs at Horse Pens 40. BELOW: The masterminds behind the Triple Crown: Chad Wykle (in hat) and Jim Horton.

of blonde and golden rock, while the holds vary dramatically between each zone. Some areas are steep and tiered, making for awesome moves, while others, like Rocktown, have unique scale-like holds. At HP40, you'll bust powerful moves on ultragrippy *gigantor* slopers, like grabbing big butt cheeks.

"With so many property lines, we sometimes see a misconception of entitlement," says Wykle, who helped start the Triple Crown with Horton. "It's so important that we approach landowners the right way the first time. We're non-confrontational—we just shake hands and start talking."

The SCC—especially its most active

front man, Brad McLeod, of Atlanta—is one major part of the machine that is organizing and managing many areas of the Southeast.

Even with the success stories, there are still many areas with access issues waiting to be resolved: Howard's Knob, the Lake on the Brow, the Hospital Boulders, the main tract of Steele. For every cliff that opens, a handful of areas close, or remain secret, used by only a select few.

At the Hound Ears after-party, a mason jar of moonshine is passed around as climbers unwind and settle into another year of waiting. Thick smoke billows off a hot grill, and hungry climbers swap stories over whiskey as they wait for food. I overhear Brion Voges' friends relive the time that he fell into a creek, only to nab the second ascent of a project on a chilly 40-degree day wearing nothing but his boxer shorts. Everyone laughs.

The Triple Crown embodies Southern climbing: the fight for access, the good friends, and the relaxed attitude. One of the comp judges passes me the moonshine, and I realize the true meaning of his shirt. "Don't be a dick!" at the surface level means, "Hey, it's just a comp with your friends, leave the attitude at home." But on a deeper level, it sums up how people in the Southeast have continued to keep the climbing open. Be cool, and people will work with you.

Whitney Boland is a contributing editor for Rock and Ice.



ICE & MIXED



BOREAL
\$429

ICE MASTER

MOUNTAIN



BOREAL
\$449

KANGRI

EXPEDITION



BOREAL
\$599

G1 LITE