
BOULDERING GUIDE

Tanote Bay, Koh Tao, Thailand



View from the top of Tanote Multi-Pitch, the longest trad route on the island.

APPROACH TO TANOTE BAY

Turn off the Mae Haad to Sairee road where the Frontyard and Backyard bouldering areas are and follow the road, now concreted, to its end. Parking is limited but there are a few parking spots for scooters which are the main transport of the island. Follow any of the paths down to the beach.

Look for the Calypso Diving School, the Beach Boulders are immediately to the south of it.

THE CLIMBING

There are many areas to climb. The North Side, South Side and the Beach Boulders are easiest to find and moderately mosquito free. Once you venture into the jungle, take your mosquito repellent.

THE ROCK

Sharp, grainy granite. It hasn't seen much action as of 2022 so there are lots of loose grains and small flakes which break away.

ETIQUETTE

Many boulders are part of the architecture on Koh Tao. Best not to climb parts of people's property. Be quiet around the chalets and resorts. Above the chalets and resorts be extremely careful you don't dislodge anything which will tumble down the slope.

Sit starts on the beach are problematic as the level of sand shifts and bouldering mats could make quite a difference to grades. It's hard sometimes to decide which are the start holds for sit starts too so if I've included any, I've been as specific as I can about where the start holds are.

Grading is my best guess. Take it as a guide and if you disagree, let me know so I can amend the grades. Alternatively, use the voting on ukclimbing.com.

ONLINE GUIDES

Some routes have been recorded in the IHASIA BOULDERING GUIDE which can be found online. I have been unable to repeat all but the easiest ones, especially those on the south side of the huge boulder on the shoreline so I can't really comment on them. The granite flakes on the south side look quite friable and in the years since the IHASIA guide was written (2013/2014), perhaps some crucial holds have washed away.

THE CRAG online also lists 'Decompression' at 'Around The Corner' as a V5. Australian climber Daniel Da Silva made the entry. I'm guessing this was what I have called the south end.

SCOPE FOR FURTHER ROUTES

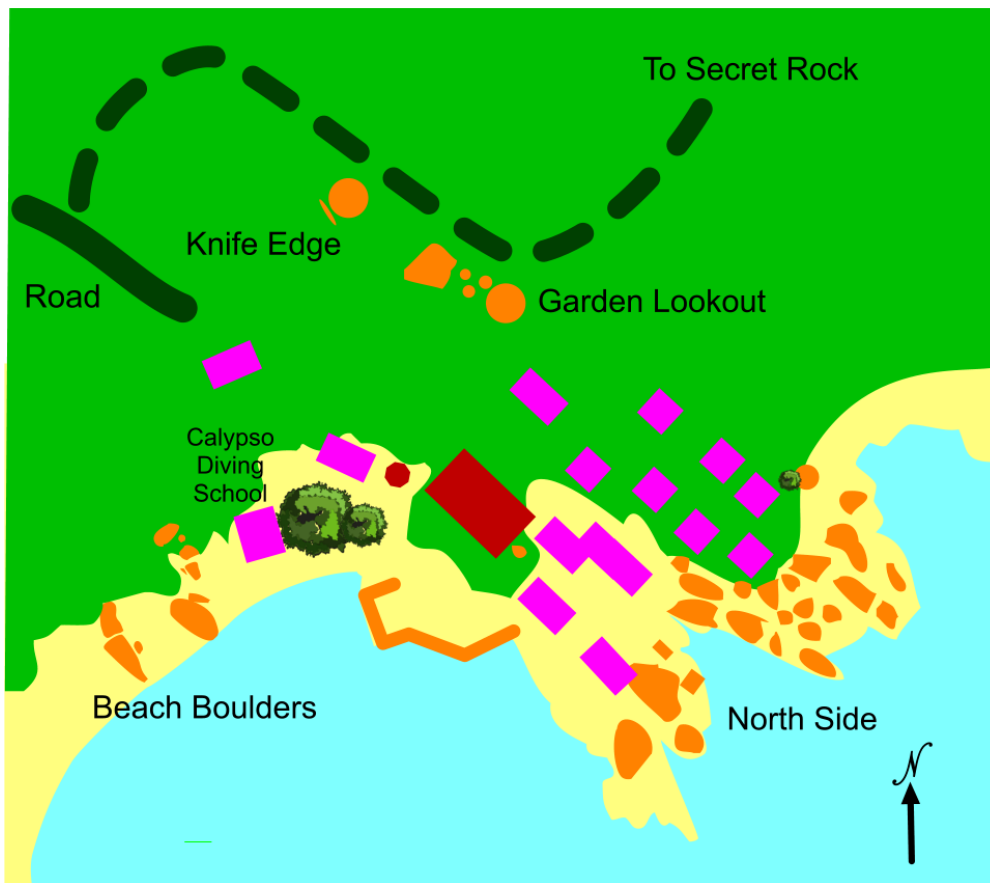
I left behind so many unfinished projects and whole unstarted areas which I visited but didn't get to climb on. To the south towards Lang Khai looks good. Up around the slopes there are lots of amazing looking boulders, particularly the Giant's Thumb and the line of boulders up towards Love Koh Tao. To the north, the whole area up above Secret Rock all the way to Mao Rock above Laem Thian is awash with boulders but hard to access.

The whole island of Koh Tao is constructed of boulders. The established boulder fields of Frontyard, Backyard, The Secret Garden and Boobaloo have barely scratched the surface. I hiked to the southernmost point Cape Taa Toh which is a peninsula of huge boulders, to the easternmost point of Laem Thian which is the same. Two points on an island with a 26km coastline of beaches and boulders. Inland is boulderfield after boulderfield, all wrapped in a jungle of vines, trees, scrub, ants and mosquitoes.

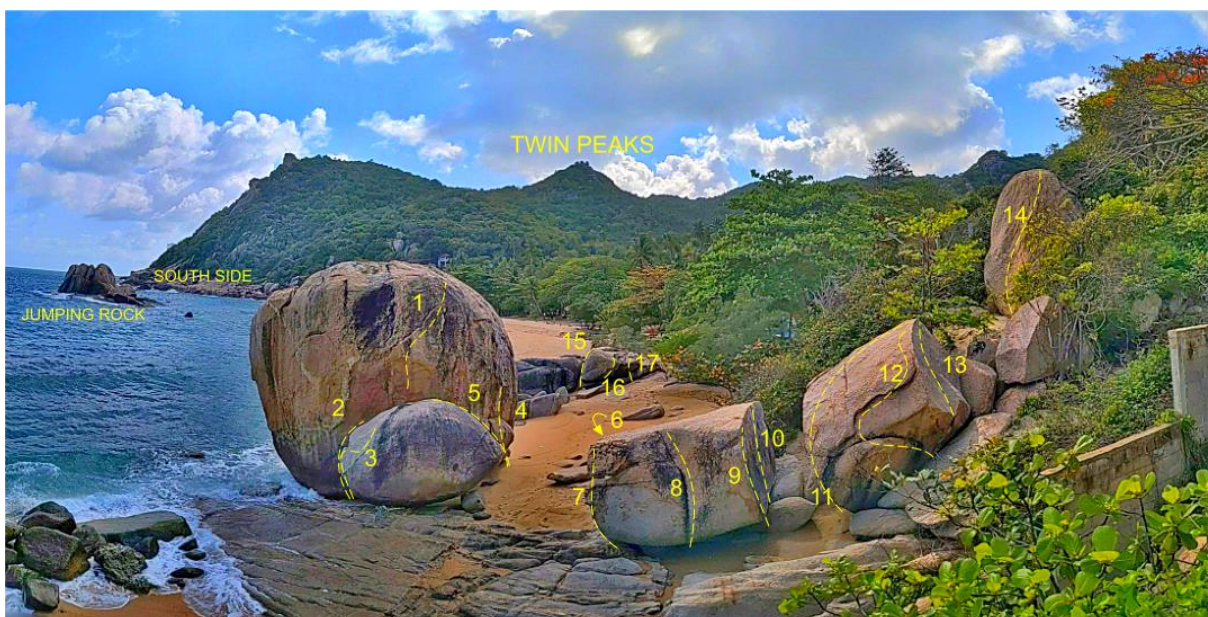
To the north of Tanote Bay along the path to the Secret Rock are a few boulders, but up into the jungle away from the path (and the sea) are so many boulders and boulderfields but picking through the vines is a tiring affair.

And it's hot. When I visited it was constantly between 26 and 30 centigrade.

BEACH BOULDERS AND NORTH SIDE MAP



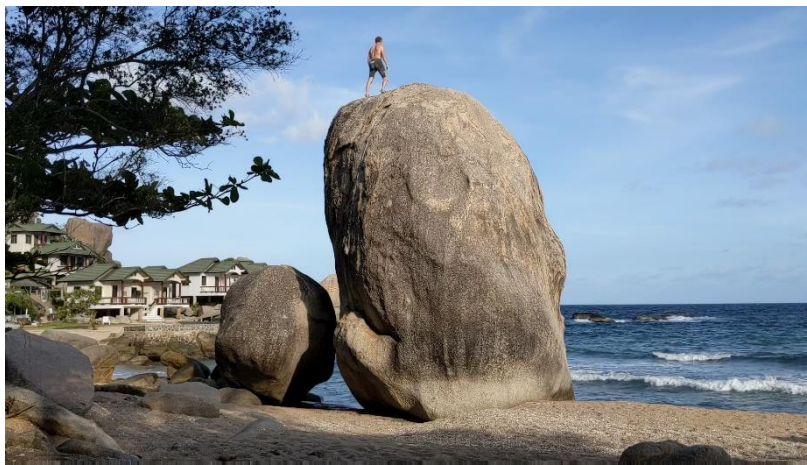
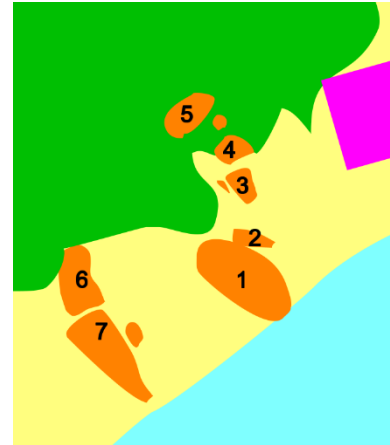
BEACH BOULDERS



Boulder 1. The huge boulder on the shoreline

There are reports of people getting stuck on the top of the boulder and Koh Tao rescue being called out for a hefty fee, or a ladder being procured from the Poseidon Resort. None of the diving instructors could tell me how anyone got down off the boulder and they've been there twenty years, so take care...

1. The Magnet, 6b. (6m) On the north side from the top of the smaller boulder, climb the flake then go straight up. The climb must be reversed to get back down and as the top is rounded it's hard to see where to put your feet when reversing so remember the moves and holds as best you can. The water is not deep enough to jump.



Between the small and large boulders is a feature with some decent handholds.

2. A Little Boulder Dash, 6a. Climb and stand up on the feature

Boulder 2. The smaller rounded boulder on the north side of the huge boulder

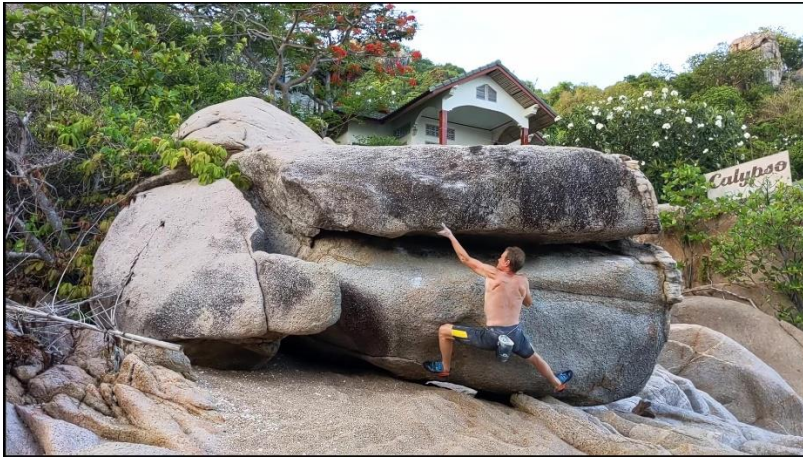
3. The Press, 6a. Press between the feature on the larger boulder and the side of the smaller boulder.
4. The Jump, 6a. Climb the feature and jump across to the smaller boulder

On the sea side of the smaller boulder

5. The Squeeze, 5. Use the big hold and squeeze up the gap
6. The Traverse, 6a+. Use the big hold and traverse out right along the rounded edge before pushing up onto the boulder

Boulder 3. Slightly further away from the sea is a bulging square face split horizontally.

7. Finely Poised for the Coupe de Grace, 7a. Start with one foot on the small edge of the flake on the boulder and two tenuous holds on the rounded lip. Reach out left beneath the upper half for an upside down pinch (as shown in the photo) then go over the top.

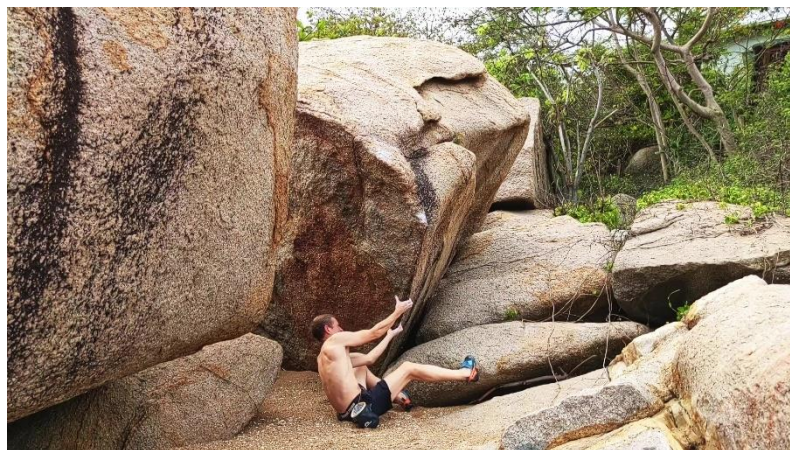


The next routes are around the corner to the right, on the north face.

8. Goldbricker, 4. Climb the corner.
9. Sesquizygotic, 6a. The curved groove
10. Quinquereme, 6a+. Around the back, reach high for the start hold. A few mats may need to be stacked for the short but the grade will remain the same.
11. Jump, 5. A metre to the right, in the gap between the two boulders, is a rock to stand on and a flat handhold. A jump for the top.

Boulder 4. On the next boulder furthest from the beach

12. A Brief History of Mime 6b+. Sit start with your feet on the boulder at the foot of the curving arete. Climb direct. Start as in the picture.



13. Le Chien Qui Riait, 5. Climb around the bulging flake the follow the flake right and up.
14. Pes Platus, 5. Climb the easy sloping feature

Boulder 5. The final boulder is the large one at the back with coral dumped at its base.

15. 6a. Nigel and the Giant Canne a Peche. (6m) Climb using any of the features, then enjoy crawling down through the leafy tree on the right. The less leafy one on the left is another option but probably less safe unless a python* is lying in wait in the leafy one.

*Despite hacking through the jungle for weeks looking for boulders, I never saw a snake. Only two tokay geckos and one big lizard.

20m further south is a long but not very high boulder running from a shack down to the sea. The right hand end has a short overhang. The left end has a few easier routes.

Boulder 6. The short overhang on the right

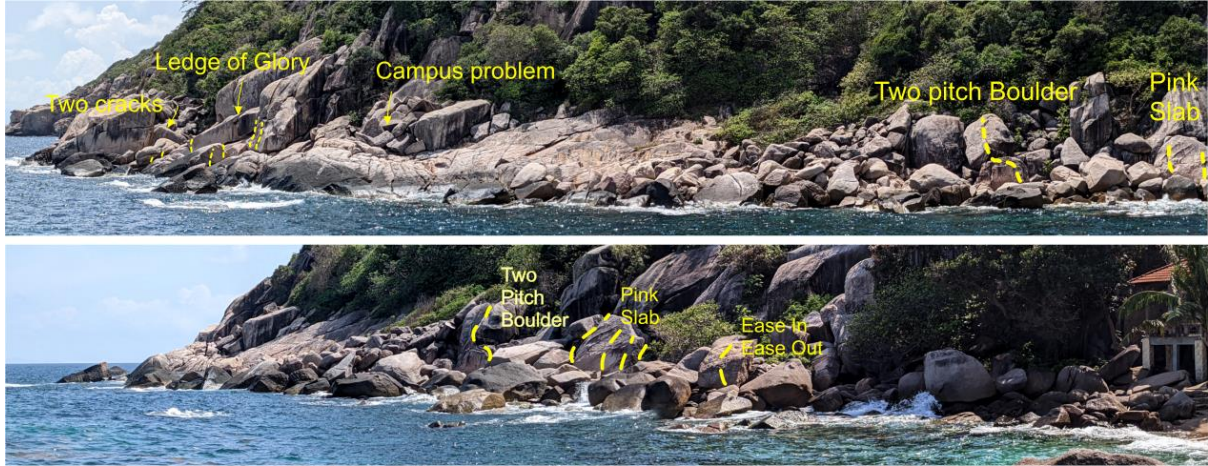
16. Left arete, 5. The left arete.
17. My Fingernails are Filthy, 5 or 7a. The rising flake has a burly low start and an easier high start. Climb the flake using the small boulder down left for feet. Occasionally the crucial foot pocket is buried under the sand.
18. I've Got Beach Tar on My Feet, 6c. Sit start low down on the right with two undercuts and toes in the two triangular depressions or thereabouts. Gain the rounded undercut where there is a good thumb sprag to reach for the top.

Boulder 7.

There are a few easier routes on this boulder and the one in front of it. See the IHASIA guide.

THE SOUTH SIDE.

I spent most of my time on the south side as it comes into shade early in the evening and is packed with gems. It is also home to Koh Tao's longest multi-pitch climb.



I have included some routes (orange) I didn't manage and some (yellow) I did.

Routes are listed, as all guides should be but aren't, from left to right and the left end is a huge block in the sea. You can get further, including ascending a cleft with a tree in it to reach the real limit where all the rock starts pointing the wrong way just before Lang Khai Bay.

Twin cracks. There are two parallel cracks leaning slightly right on a boulder to the right of the large boulder. I couldn't manage either of them.

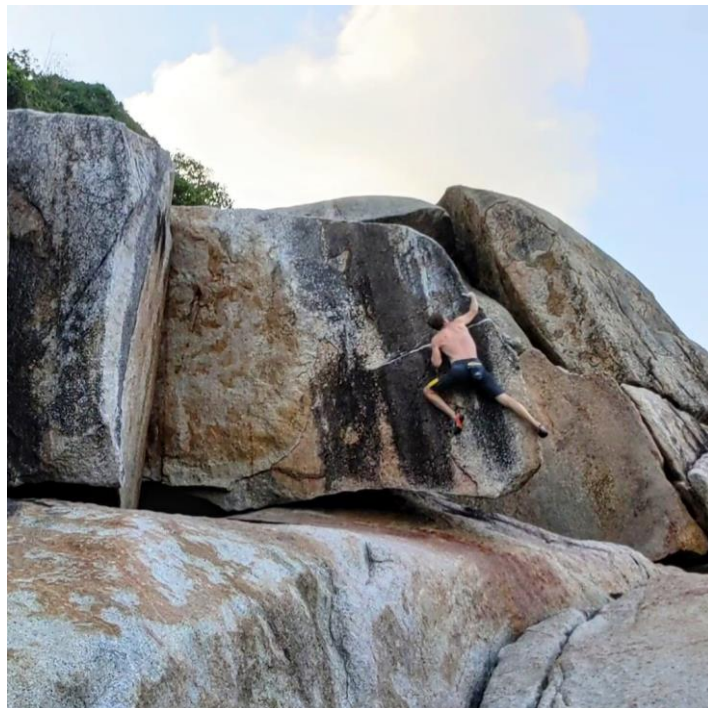


In front of this is another boulder forming a cave beneath. There are two lines, the right one being the harder.

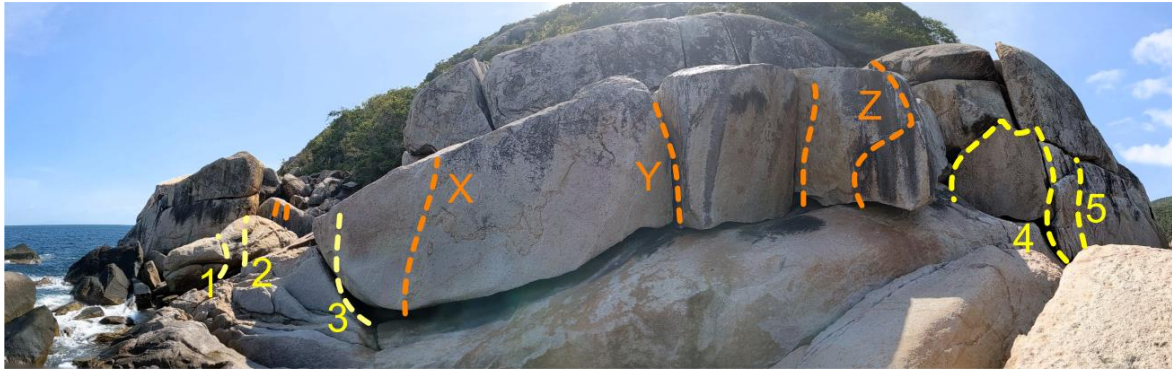


1. Baht'at. 6a. Start as low as possible and follow the left line of crystalline rock to the obvious break and flake.
2. A Clutch at Crystals, 6c+. Start with hands on the low curving ledge. Follow the line of crystals.

Up to the right is a fantastic wall with lots of great routes. Shame I couldn't do any but I had a good go at the sloping ledge of glory (Z) which I tried about a hundred times, the shorter offwidth (Y) and the tenuous flaky line(X).



Failing yet again on the edge of glory.



3. Underreacher, 5. Climb using the upside down flake. Feet on the rising boulder to the left.
4. Short Circuit, 6a. Start low down on the bottom corner. Climb the flake, crack and follow on around the break.
5. Pocket, 6a. Climb the flake heading up right for the fist sized pocket then reach up into the break.

The boulder visible in the bottom right corner of the last photograph has two routes on its far side.

6. 4, Telling Bone. The easy crack up the middle.
7. 4, Stochastic. The arete on the right using the spare boulder.

Further along in the small boulder jumble is a small problem which starts with a few campus moves.

8. Campus, 6a.

Next up is the two pitch boulder.

9. Two Pitch Boulder, 5.

Further right is a large pinkish slab with another slab with a vertical crack above it

10. Slab Technician, 5. On the left
11. . Slabdash, 5. Not quite the long middle bit which someone else can have, but slightly to the right.
12. Slabrador, 5. On the right.
13. Big crack, 5. The right hand side of the slab has a large crack around to the right, climb it direct.

In front of the pinkish slab further toward the beach is a small boulder next to the sea

14. Ease In, Ease Out.

THE GARDEN LOOKOUT CLIMBS

Follow the trail from the start of the road towards The Secret Rock. When you reach the garden, the lookout boulders are on the right. One has a few carabiners hanging from it, and a thick rope to help tourists up to the bamboo perch.

Location: 10.086290,99.849185 WTW:competematriarchy.organic

The climbs I did are on the boulder to the right of the lookout and reached by leaving the path just below the lookout boulder and heading down and right

1. Cracked, 5. (6m) The first crack to the left of 'Up the Steps'. As shown in the picture. Zoom in and look for the red T shirt.
2. Up the Steps , 4. (6m) The easier, rising staircase. Take care not to dislodge the chockstone which will do a lot of damage on the way down if it escapes.



THE NORTH END

There are some spectacular formations and climbs at the north end. Few are in nice positions with easy landings and they are all decidedly highball. I did a few of the easier ones and came away with my tail between my legs more than a few times.



Eyeing up the direct finish on 'In the land of the short, the long armed man is king.'

1. In the Land of the Short, the Long Armed Man is King, 6a. Follow the flakes up, trending right through the easier layers of flakes. There are three topouts, all about the same grade.

Opposite is another huge rock with a vertical hole about the size of a small giant's forearm. Start there.

2. A Storm of Buckets, 6a. Look for the large chasm of a handhold and pull up over the edge.



Across the bay after dropping down from the chalets, is a huge area of boulders.

3. And the Orchestra Played Hallelujah, 6b. Start low down in the crack. And follow it to the top. An atmospheric climb.



4. Barefoot on the rocks, 6a. Go down to the water and look up to find this one. If you can't see it, go to the next bay along.



THE KNIFE EDGE BOULDER

Probably my best find in the jungle and a short walk from the road once you know where it is. The knife edge is a flake which has come off a larger boulder with another huge boulder on top. Oddly, it's invisible on aerial views.

Coordinates 10.086512,99.848899 WTW:festival.blocked.induce

It is reached either from the path to secret rock. Just before the garden is the garden lookout. Before that on the road, you will pass another large boulder. Drop down on its left side through the overgrown mess and you'll come out at the knife edge. Alternatively, follow the path up only as far as the water towers and go behind the shacks.

There's only one route with two starts. Either start right at the bottom, lying down, or half way up perched on a boulder. If I went back, I might take some glue as the flake sounds a bit hollow. Check for ants and millipedes before starting.

1. The Twin Explosions of Heligoland. Quantum start from the bottom (Not graded and waiting for a proper climber or another visit), TNT start, 7a. Start sitting on the boulder behind my shoulder in these pictures for the 7a start. The lower one is more obvious with a small foot ledge and tiny finger rail – also you can't get down any further unless you dig.



THE BOULDERS IN THE CHALETS

Right next to the chalet I stayed in was a small boulder which I have called the Bedside Boulder. There are two hard routes over the lip.



The awkward push on *Behind the Chalet, My Holiday's Complete*

1. Bedside Boulder left, 6c. The line of crystal to the left. Sit start.
2. Behind the Chalet My Holiday's Complete, 7a. Start low on the obvious feature on the right (where my left foot is in the picture), reach up for the lip and fumble until you're over the top.

Up behind the top right-most chalet is a small boulder with a crack in and a tree growing in front.

Location: 10.0858079, 99.8499694 WTW:reacts.payments.chemistry

1. Harder than it looks, 6b. Get on and slap for the top.



THE TWIN PEAKS



View from the beach



View from Love Koh Tao

There is lots of scope at Twin Peaks for trad climbing or bouldering. The mushroom down left in the above view looks like a good trip.

Approach

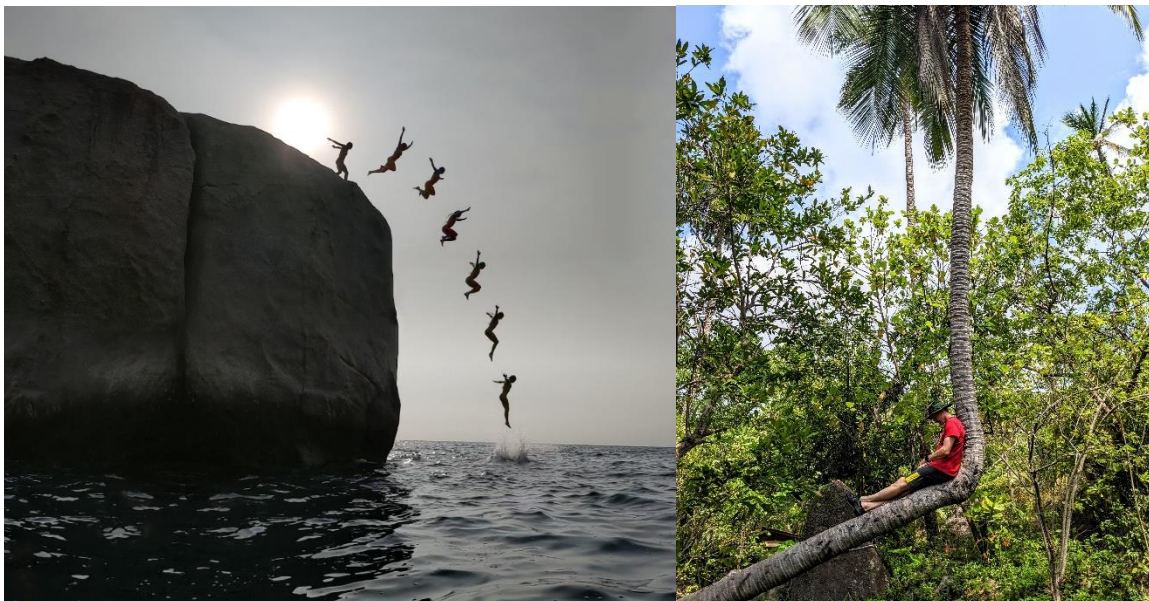
From the south end of the beach, walk up the last road and turn off to the left at the Reggae Bar (Jah Bar) towards the Rock Stone Garden Hill Bar and Campground (which was derelict when we were there). From the shacks, head up behind the toilet block and go up the hill. Skirt around the chalets to the left and continue up.

Alternatively, drive in on a scooter and park before the 'private' signs. From the car park, go down and round or up and round. The routes listed are all on the twin boulders at the very top.



1. Nagarjuna, 6a. Climb the left face at the point of least resistance
2. Fissures of Men, 5. Climb the large fissures.
3. Vercovidium, 6b. Climb the nose of the small boulder from a low start.
4. A Lope up the Slope, 2.
5. The Stranger from Elea, 6a.

When it's too hot to climb you can always swim out to the jumping rock and take a flying jump.



This guide was written by Nigel Leeming, April 2022.