
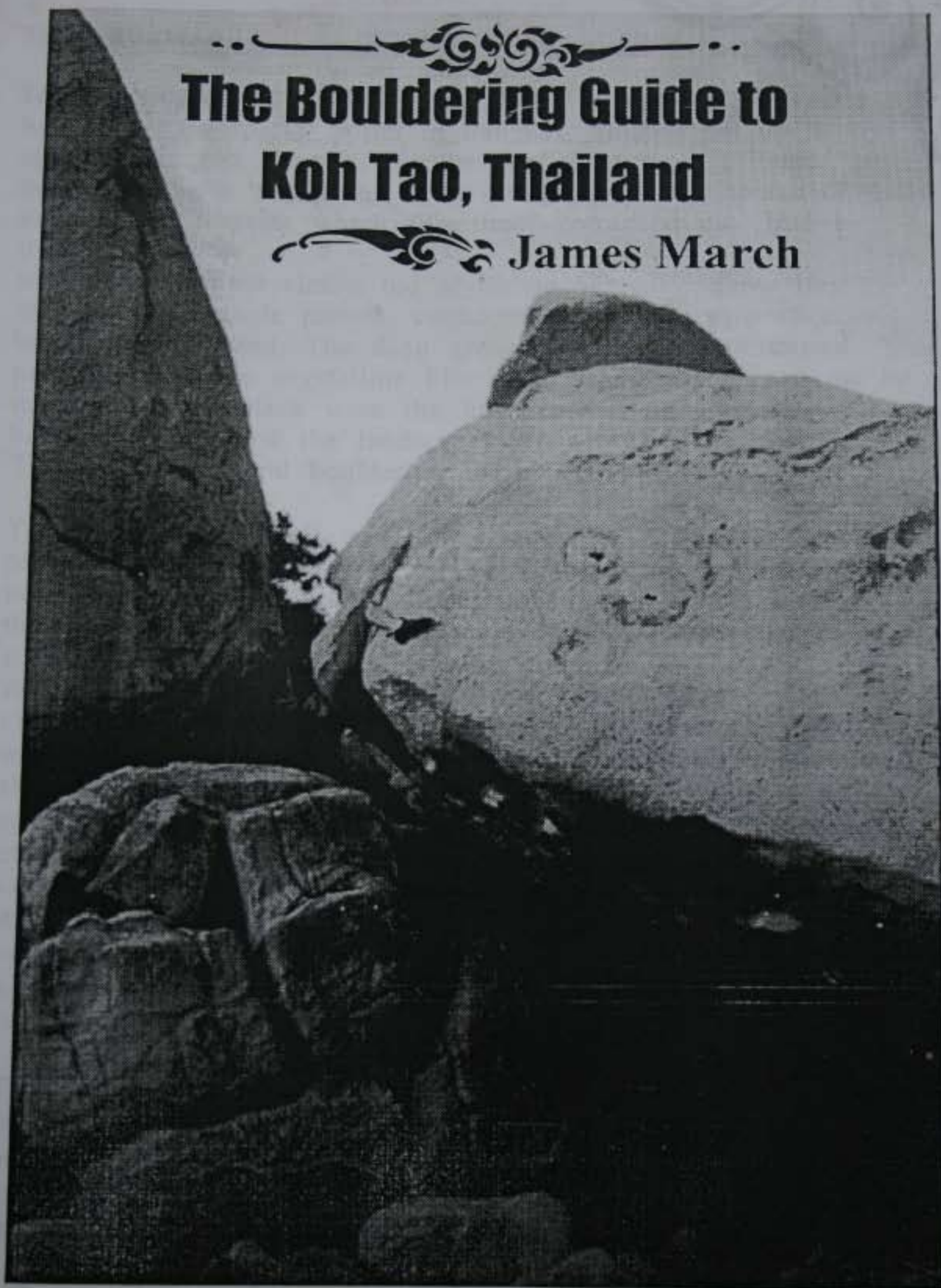




**The Bouldering Guide to
Koh Tao, Thailand**

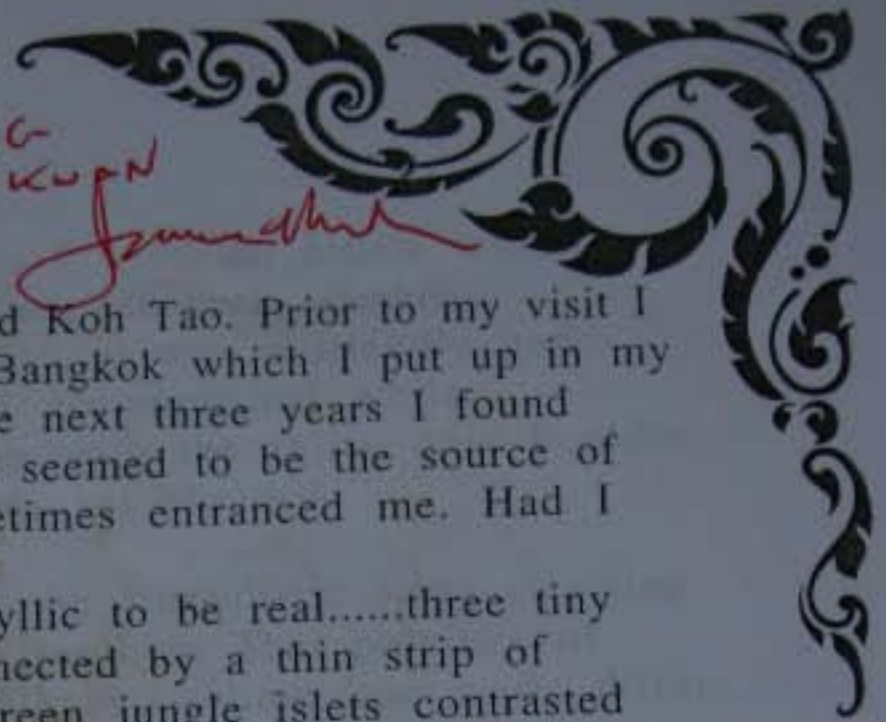
 James March





Introduction

CHOCK DEE PUAN!
POM HAI
WEE KOENG KUN
James



In the spring of 1996 I first visited Koh Tao. Prior to my visit I had obtained a special poster in Bangkok which I put up in my apartment in Los Angeles. For the next three years I found myself staring at this poster as it seemed to be the source of mystical day dreams which sometimes entranced me. Had I lived here before.....?

It depicted a place almost too idyllic to be real.....three tiny islands in a triangle pattern, connected by a thin strip of brilliant white sand. The deep green jungle islets contrasted perfectly with the crystalline blue sky. What mesmerized me most about the place were the huge, prehistoric-looking boulders that dotted the landscape. What were these rocks.....? There must be good bouldering there!

The poster on my wall was Koh Naangyuan, a petite archipelago off the coast Northwest of Koh Tao. I had heard about the good scuba diving and snorkeling there, but when I finally arrived these activities were not on my mind. In fact, I appeared as somewhat of a freak to the locals as I started out alone exploring the island's unique rockscape. The method I chose to climb these boulders was as primitive as the environs. This method is called "bouldering", where a rock climber scales up a side of a boulder using no safety protection other than a pair of sticky rubber soled shoes and a sack of magnesium carbonate chalk worn around the waist. I soon found out that in Koh Tao's sweaty tropical heat this chalk was especially crucial to hold my fingers to the rock. Like an exotic spice, it became a valuable commodity not to be wasted. Where ever I climbed in a landscape as colorful as this, I left in my path a new color, the color white.

Two weeks later and my hands were thrashed from the amount of climbing I had done. The extreme nature of the solo bouldering as well as the absolute purposelessness of the whole project was a very monastic experience. Instead of looking for rocks I wandered the shores and jungles waiting for the rocks

Cover Photo: The author sending "M-150" VH/R (Jan Som)

to find me. When I returned home I wrote an article which was published in "Rock & Ice", an American rock climbing magazine. Titled, "Granite Buddhas", it was a friendly and spiritual summary of what I had accomplished while bouldering there, including a map with the thirty new boulder problems I had put up, and others yet climbed.

The secret has long been out on the surrealistic sport climbing in Phra Nang Bay, located in the southern Thai province of Krabi. However, Phra Nang's overhanging limestone walls differ greatly from the granite boulders on Koh Tao. Located midway between Bangkok and Phra Nang, Koh Tao offers solitude rare in Phra Nang's resort-like atmosphere. With over 350 routes, Phra Nang could be described as the yin of Thai rock climbing; Koh Tao's boulders seem the perfect yang.



In terms of bouldering's popularity these days, 1996 could have just as well been the "dark ages". Bouldering has always had a strange relationship with many rock climbers. Though respected by most for the difficulty and bold style, it had also been written off as a silly, esoteric activity well below the importance of roped climbing. Little did I know that today my favorite style of climbing would soon rise above the stigma as "mere training", and propel itself into the forefront of modern mountaineering. The renaissance has just begun, and in this new millennium "bouldering" will no longer be just a step-child to roped climbing. It is, after all, the very essence of the sport. Maybe better yet classified as an art, bouldering is the "poetry" of moving on stone.

It seems everyone must find their own vehicle to wisdom and happiness in this life. For me, bouldering has become this, my personal dharma. After my initial visit to Koh Tao, I have been called back there again and again. Through these excursions I have had the pleasure of establishing many hundreds of superb boulder problems. For the beginner through expert rock climber, this new guide is the first comprehensive effort to document the new amount of present bouldering history. I

only hope that your experience there be as enlightening as mine.

History of Koh Tao



With an area of twenty-one square kilometers Koh Tao is the twentieth largest island in Thailand. The island's name comes from it's shape Tao meaning "turtle", and not from any natural fauna. (If you look at a map of Koh Tao turn the map horizontal) Koh Tao lies Northwest of Koh Samui and Koh Phangan, and is the smallest and most isolated of these three islands in the southern end of the Gulf of Thailand. The island is situated between two areas of deep water, the Chumphon and Samraan Pinnacles. Koh Tao's interior is still mostly jungle with big granite boulders, some so large they may geologically suggest that perhaps some time long ago Koh Tao was a great mountain which had crumbled down into the sea.

The past history of Thais living there is somewhat bleak. It was supposedly discovered by King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) 1868-1910, who tripped around Koh Phangan and up to Koh Tao tagging his name in the form of etchings with gold leaf. After Rama V's discovery, the island was used as a type of "Devils Island" type prison for the worst of Thailand's criminals. It's isolation proved to be of good use to the next local people as well, the equally lawless Thai pirates. It's hard to believe that only some forty years ago pirates were still seen in these waters. It was around that time too that Thai farmers came to Koh Tao from Koh Phangan and Chumphon to plant the first Coconut Trees. Coconut farming soon flourished into a local economy and a small marketplace formed.

In the 1980's scuba divers started recognizing the water's off Koh Tao as prime viewing spots for marine life. An eco-tourism economy spawned and with it's constant demand the scuba business grew and the first bungalows were built.

The 1990's brought more growth to Koh Tao, and the first roads were paved. Today the island is a "must hit" on the backpacker tourist circuit. Koh Tao has no hotels and monster discos like

Koh Samui to offer, but if you feel like partying there is always nearby Koh Phangan. This hippie hedonistic island has manifested itself with world-wide reputation for its monthly full-moon parties.

On Koh Tao it is like the whole island is crazy for one thing, scuba diving! It seems that just about every farang (foreigner) is involved in the business of diving in some way or another. And why not?, Tao is still the cheapest place in Thailand to get certified. The offshore waters are still clear, though not quite as clear as they were only ten years ago. I have been told, that many of the diving sites have become overcrowded, and the once famous marine life is sadly disappearing. I have witnessed myself the garbage on the shores, oil leaking from boats, and the newer run-off from cars and motorcycles. These are the evils of modern human inhabitation and sadly enough becoming all too prevalent. Still today Koh Tao can offer a visitor its greatest asset if you want it,.....

isolation.

You may not be a prisoner there, but you can still escape the trappings of society and simply chill out on an isolated beach giving thanks to the perfect existence that beholds you. The irony of the historic prison camp here is that it has come full-circle, and on these same beaches today people are paying to be temporarily deserted.

My Climbing History

It took a crazy "farang" like me to ignore the water sports and come to these beaches just to climb. I have a history of doing just this, developing obscure boulder fields, sometimes in exotics parts of the world. Having studied Art in college, I have always applied myself to my activities as creatively as possible. My bouldering has evolved into this, a type of artistic discipline. The boulders themselves are canvases, just waiting to be cleaned with a brush and painted with my chalk and

sweat. The rock is here. The moment is now. On and on and on.....

My brief history:

I grew up by Chicago, Illinois where I lived a pretty typical suburban life. Always bored, I was prime to be corrupted in some way and I knew this. I was good at sports, but there was nothing I had yet found for my soul. I knew I would find my inspiration somewhere. I was always an artist possessing a special talent, extraordinary free association of the mind.....

The West Coast of America was sunny. I always wished I could be where it shined. I moved to Southern California and found myself skateboarding on the mean streets of Venice. There I lived at the beach, the skatepunk lifestyle fast. I remember the bigness and seriousness of commitment when I surfed 10 foot sets in Oxnard where the waves break into beautiful almond-shaped tubes, I remember snowboarding **huge** black diamond moguls in Colorado on my first ever snowboard run.....

Extreme? The mind of the human animal is extreme, and when this extreme mind is relaxed it was fearless. When I made this discovery, I wanted to apply this in everything I did whether it be writing, painting, or..... rock climbing.

This was extreme!, it was karma. I instantly loved rock climbing. At first it was the thrill of exposure when top roping, then leading the routes. Later it soon became evident that the simple movement fascinated me more than the vertical challenge. I slowly bouldered more and more. I was very thankful that I was shown this form of climbing. Bouldering suited me. I found it more intimate, focused and contemplative. With the lack of a rope or even a partner it was especially appealing. I could practice alone. The isolation of bouldering alone was nice. I could hear the sounds of nature; a bird call here, the wind blowing through the trees, and the silence of the stone. It was all so simple; being at one with the environment was the real goal. Bouldering it seemed to me, was an ancient sport of strength and enlightenment. A benign gladiator ritual. The rocks themselves are our source of power, and this power is just waiting to be tapped into. For some, rock

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climbing is merely a physical act on a two dimensional plane, but for others it can transcend into higher realms of metaphysics, mysticism, and Zen.

The Boulders

This is Koh Tao not Krabi.

If you are expecting to climb overhanging limestone stalactites, guess again. Here the stone is granite, a very coarse crystalline variety. It also has other xenolithic types of stone embedded within, as evidenced in the smooth sandstone-like bands and knobs. The contrast of these two types of rock create a unique textural experience. These boulders are coarse similar to Californian "Joshua Tree" monzonite. Coupled with the tropical heat it can be sharp at times, so I recommend that the novice climber slow their pace and focus on footwork. Coarse rock is sticky on rubber boots, and balance is everything. The sheer beauty of the rockscape does inspire. There are hundreds and hundreds of huge black and gray boulders lying around everywhere. Of the established boulders, the majority of the problems are on minimally spaced holds just under vertical, creating some nice technical puzzles to solve. Koh Tao does have steep, but there are few jug hauls if any. Steep here is difficult! Steep here is serious.

If you are serious about climbing here you must understand that the tropical environment is hot, so discipline yourself to waking up early and beating the heat. You can scuba along with climbing, however too much swimming will soften the hands. It just depends on how far you want to take it. I myself, took to wearing rubber gloves while doing dishes as I knew that even this small moistening would soften my proud callused hands. Getting used to the style here takes time, use the time, breathe deep, enjoy the ambiance, enjoy the..... isolation.

Ethics and Safety

There are different ethics for climbing everywhere. I would like

to take a moment to elaborate on Koh Tao. No bolts!, Krabi has enough of them, and they are not necessary here. If you want a top rope, there are many natural anchors available to tie off, such as other rocks or the numerous trees. You will need long nylon slings, and having two short ropes: one for the anchor and one for the top-rope is good.

Do not alter the stone, in any way, shape or form. Respect these rocks!

I used a wire brush when first cleaning the new problems, but on already established problems this will polish the rock.

Instead use a nylon brush (toothbrush or floor scrubber) to clean the debris and caked up chalk from the holds.

Many of the problems in this guide are dangerous. Rock climbing is just that, and caution and confidence should be your own personal guide. The more dangerous problems are given a **R** for injury potential if you fall from high up. Even a waist high fall can be serious if you are alone. If you are with friends, spot each other and if you have a crashpad use one, although I have **yet to see many crashpads** in Thailand other than my own. Protect yourself however you can. I once used the mattress from my own bungalow which I dragged every day to a certain beach side project. Please remember, there are no hospitals on Koh Tao. If you are seriously injured you should go to one of the medical clinics in the marketplace which may have a doctor available. Above all, please be careful!!!

Beta

The first time traveler to Thailand is seldom disappointed. The exotic tropical surroundings and inexpensive accommodations make it an affordable, always memorable holiday. You may vow to return time and time again. I fell into this category and returned many times because I considered it a friendly country to get "lost" in. Thailand for me, was the other side of the coin, the total opposite of my own homogenized Western culture. The main expense of your trip to Thailand will be airfare. Fortunately there are many good discount airlines flying there. From Los Angeles, California, I can regularly find a round trip

airfare of \$600.00 or less to Bangkok. Korean Air, Thai Air and Japan Air are among the cheapest. Bangkok is the springboard for any trip within Thailand. I always stay there a few days to take in the local vibe, and acclimatize to the extreme heat. At first you will find it hard to adjust to the tropical heat, but in no time at all you will learn to love it!

The heat is Thailand.

Out of convenience I can recommend Khao San Road in Banglumpoo as a temporary layover site before leaving for the South to climb. This road is famous on the backpacker circuit. The area is very tourist friendly with no shortage of guest houses, travel agencies, souvenir stands and restaurants to relax in. Some of the best temples in Bangkok and the Grand Palace, are all close by to view.

To get to Koh Tao directly, the fastest way there is a combination mini-bus/speed boat ride going through Chumpon. From Bangkok this costs about \$15 (600-800 baht). Coming up to Koh Tao from Krabi you can take a bus to Surat Thani. Once there, a inexpensive ferry will take you to Koh Samui, then Koh Phangan, and ending up lastly on Koh Tao. Koh Tao is located in the Gulf of Thailand, where weather conditions differ somewhat from Krabi on the Adaman Sea. The weather on Koh Tao falls into three seasons. The "cool season", (better titled "less hot season") is from February-May, this is also the peak season for visitors and prices are raised accordingly. June-Sept. is the "hot season" with less tourist traffic, and Oct.-Jan. is the official "rainy season". During this season it can get very wet on Koh Tao with monsoons rains that can last for days on end. ~~It can rain any season however,~~ but the granite boulders dry quickly.

When your boat first arrives at the pier on Mae Haad, you will be greeted by representatives of Koh Tao's various bungalows and scuba schools. There are many bungalows in different areas of the island to choose from, so take your time to compare. The scuba schools usually include accommodations in their packages and most are located on the main beach, Haad Sai Ree, and other popular scuba spots around the island. Mae

Haad is Koh Tao's marketplace with a post office, currency exchange, and grocery stores. Getting around here is quicker on a rented motorbike, about \$4 a day (150 baht), but due to the many sketchy dirt roads more dangerous than old-fashioned trekking.

The Zen Gecko School of Rock Climbing Arts



In January 2000, I first opened up a school to promote rock climbing on Koh Tao. My idea was to save money while waiting for my Thai girlfriend's American Visa to come through. Teaching rock climbing here seemed a lot more fun than teaching English in Bangkok again.

We rented a small house in Chaloak Baan Kao, just opposite a vast boulderfield and from word of mouth and a few flyers later, the tourists started coming. I taught in the span of six months, many aspiring rock climbers from many different countries and climbing backgrounds. Each one of my students left here inspired with some valuable teachings. Along with the basic techniques of how to use a rope, harness, and belay devices, I taught the importance of how climbing can instill self-confidence which can be translated to all aspects of life. Climbing to the top of a rock without a fall, is a simple metaphor for success.

I closed up the shop when my girlfriend's visa came in and we moved back to Los Angeles. As karma had it, the culture shock there was too great and we are now back in Thailand on our little tropical island paradise. The Zen Gecko School of Rock Climbing Arts is now open again for business. With this new guide available, the time is perfect for climbers to come and boulder. The school will continue teaching basic and advanced rock climbing techniques with a complete line of harnesses and rock shoes available to rent. I am currently working on supplying bouldering crashpads for rent and installing a small gym to train in. Chalk is available for purchase. For information and location of the shop:

www.zengecko.com

Glossary of Terms

If you are not familiar with some of the different rock climbing terms this glossary may help. Many of the terms used by me in this guide are slang used mostly by climbers from the United States.

Arete The side of a rock, usually an exposed edge.

Crimp A small edge to hold.

Dyno A dynamic movement, a throw or jump, usually needed to climb a section of rock where the holds are spaced far apart.

Sloper, sloping hold A smooth hold which you must grabbed or slapped with an open hand.

Highball A tall boulder problem done without a rope that could be dangerous if a fall occurs up high. Best climbed with a crashpad and spotter.

Spotter Another person who helps to stabilize a falling climber by grabbing their waist and guiding them to the crashpad.

Crashpad A small, portable, dense foam mat that cushions a boulderer's fall.

Crank A difficult rock climbing movement that is usually done static (not dynamic).

Jug, Bucket A very large hand hold.

Slab A less than vertical boulder usually climbed with friction technique.

Friction The contact between the climber and the rock surface. Friction movement requires a lot of balance and

usually are done on a hold that is smooth.

Sit start The style of starting a boulder problem off the ground, usually from lowest possible handholds.

Dead hang The style of starting a boulder problem by hanging from a high hold.

Seam A very thin crack or fissure in the rock. **Slash** A short crack in the rock.

Mantle To surmount a handhold by pressing straight up while keeping the body centered over the hold. Usually this is done at the top of a boulder problem.

Lieback The technique of pulling sideways on a hold to climb.

Landing The base of a boulder problem.

Traverse To climb sideways on a boulder, as opposed to straight up.

Glossary of Useful Thai Words

A little Thai spoken with the locals will go a long way in terms of respect. Don't be shy! If you are a man use the polite participle (**krap**) at the end of a phrase. Women use (**kha**). Men say (**pom**) when referring to themselves, women (**chan**)

farang Westerner, tourist. **kon thai** A Thai person. **chai**
yes **mai chai** no

sawat dee (krap/kha) hello, good morning, good day

kop koon (krap/kha) Thank-you **mai ao (krap/kha)** no
thank-you

sabai dee mai? How are you? **sabai dee** feeling good

māi
sabai feeling bad

lah gorn nah good bye dee-o jer gun See you soon

pin khao, pin hin Mountain climbing, rock climbing

pai nai? Where are you going? (example answer) Pom pai
pin khao krap.

pai tee-o To go out and have fun sanook fun

gin khao To eat/drink gin khao yung? Have you eaten yet?

aroy delicious aroy mahk very delicious aroy mahk
mahk amazing food!

phet spicy (food) mai phet (not spicy) phet ao phet I want
it hot!

soo-ay beautiful dee good mai dee bad

Chan rak Mueng Thai I love Thailand Chock dee! Cheers!
Good luck



Koh Tao Bouldering Grades

If you are not used to bouldering or have never really done it on real rock, then you may find my grading scale hard to follow. The reason that I came up with a new scale is simple. The vast amount of climbers visiting Thailand these days are from many different countries. Many of these different countries have different grading systems to rate the difficulty of a rock-climbing route.

I would often be asked by a visiting climber how hard a particular boulder problem was. I would usually answer back with a grade in terms of the popular V-Scale. I thought the V-Scale was recognized worldwide, but more often than not I was next asked to translate the V-grade into another scale, the French Scale. The French Scale is used to grade routes in Krabi, Thailand.

Because the greater variety of boulder problems usually have only one or two moves of a given grade, they are given a "Power" grade based on the hardest move possible. The Hueco V- Grades and the Fontainbleu System grade this way. The opposite is true when using a grading system to rate a route that is normally done on rope. The French System and the Yosemite Decimal System grade on terms of overall "Endurance" due to the fact that a roped climb is usually much longer than a boulder problem.

When I started this guidebook I was stuck with the dilemma on how to come up with a grading system that would be understood by all the many foreign climbers. The purpose of any scale should be a rough estimate to steer a climber to those routes within his or her ability. My Koh Tao Scale is the result. It is based on how an average sized climber with an average climbing history would rate a boulder problem on very simple terms. **E** would be easy, **M** would be medium, and **H** would be hard. Pretty understandable?

In the U.S.A. these days there seems to be less and less emphasis on grading boulder problems. With some of the top boulderers refusing to rate their ascents, the grades themselves are becoming out of vogue. Yet, there will always be those who feel they need to attach a number grade to satisfy their ego. Those climbers may feel free to do so on their own. I personally feel that any foreign number equivalent will never come close to describing the very personal experience one gets climbing in Koh Tao's unique tropical bouldergardens.

The Koh Tao Bouldering Scale

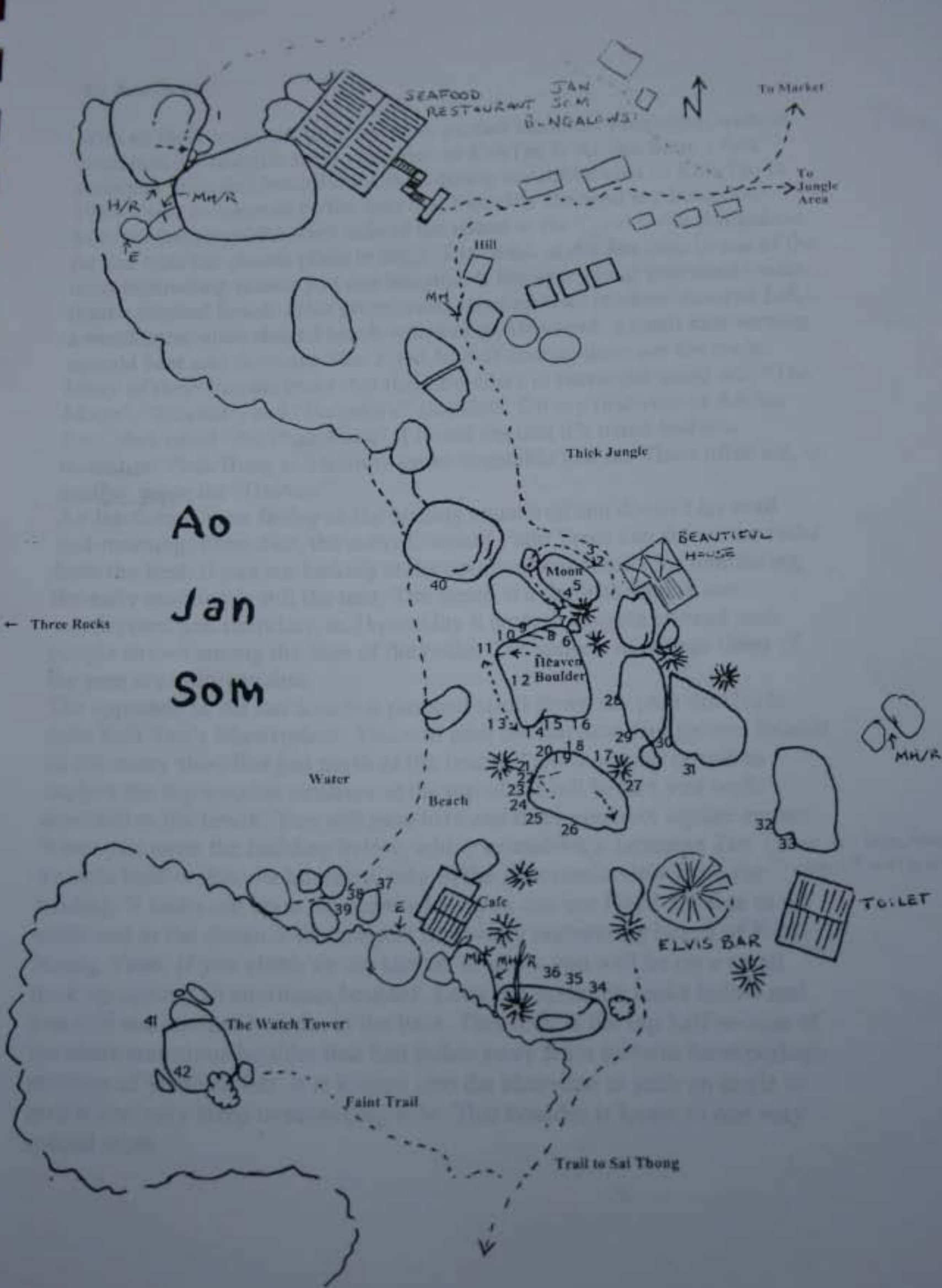
- VE Very Easy
- E Easy
- M Medium
- MH Medium Hard
- H Hard
- VH Very Hard
- EX Extremely Hard

- R Dangerous/Chance of injury
- * Exceptional Quality/ Moves





Koh Tao
เกาะเต่า



Ao Jan Som

With its three rocks sitting offshore in perfect Buddhist formation, without exception my favorite area to boulder on Koh Tao is Ao Jan Som. I first stumbled upon this beautiful location during my initial visit to Koh Tao in 1996. I was so taken in by the area that I quickly changed my bungalow from the jungle on the north side of the island to the Coral Cove Bungalows (at that time the closest place to stay). The beach at Ao Jan Som is one of the most captivating scenes you can imagine. It has everything you would want from a tropical beach: clear green water teeming with rainbow-colored fish, a small horse-shoe shaped beach with fine golden sand, a small café serving up cold beer and delicious Thai Food, and of course, there are the rocks! Many of them line the coast, but three boulders in particular stand out, "The Moon", "Heaven", and "Purgatory" Boulders. On my first visit to Ao Jan Som, then titled "Ao Phak Bung", I found out that it's name had two meanings. Phak Bung is a healthy green vegetable that the Thais often eat, or another name for "Heaven".

Ao Jan Som is west facing so the blazing equatorial sun doesn't hit until mid-morning. Even then, the many Coconut Palm Trees can shield the rocks from the heat. If you are looking at the optimum conditions for bouldering, the early morning is still the best. The beach is a favorite among sun worshippers and snorklers, and by midday it sometimes gets crowded with people strewn among the base of the rocks. The sunsets at certain times of the year are unforgettable.

The approach to Ao Jan Som is a pleasant stroll down the path that leads from Koh Tao's Marketplace. You will pass the Jan Som Bungalows located on the rocky shoreline just north of the beach. Take a second or two to explore the big wooden structure at the top of the hill before you walk downhill to the beach. You will pass between three concrete square arches. When you enter the building below, which resembles a Japanese Zen Temple built within the boulders, take in the panoramic view from the landing. It looks out upon the coast where you can see Haad Sai Ree to the north and in the distance the magical three-way connecting beach of Koh Naang Yuan. If you climb up the last set of stairs you will be on a small deck up against an enormous boulder. Look out upon the rocks below and you will see another boulder at the base. This rock is the top half section of the same enormous boulder that had fallen away from its twin form perhaps millions of years earlier. It is lodged into the shoreline at such an angle to give it one very steep overhanging side. This boulder is home to one very special route. (now a seafood restaurant.)

1. **VH/R** "M-150" ***** This five-star boulder problem is the finest route on Koh Tao and with out a doubt the most difficult. Named after the popular Thai energy drink that is a virtual icon at most Thai Boxing matches, the amazing "M-150" is a route that lives up to the beverage's label..... "Heroism, Leadership, Courage". The severely overhung boulder has a heinous rocky landing, which fortunately can be climbed on a rope. The top of the boulder has a small alcove where there is a part of the rock that has formed a natural cinch where a sling can be easily installed to accommodate a top rope. Or, you can go for the pure ascent and boulder the sucker. I built my own jungle "crashpad" out of hollow coconut shells and criss-crossed palm branches. This is the way I mentally prepared for the ascent, using the menial "zen task" labor as a humble preparation. On top of this huge natural mound I placed two old scavenged mattresses which turned a deadly free solo into only an injurious highball boulder problem. Sit start the face with both hands matched on the bottom crimp. Crank through a series of long reaches to an embedded "gun handle" hold. From here, faith and karma will get you up to the lip for an experience that goes beyond the sloping mantle to a place not unlike that of "Nirvana"! **H/R** "Paul Oakenfold" Ocean facing crack, long reach!
2. **MH** "Total Eclipse of the Moon" Sit start (if you can reach the hold) on good part of horizontal crack in center of face. Hard mantle to delicate topout.
3. **MH** "Half Moon Party" * Start on #2. Traverse right on seam ending on front of boulder facing the sea. Up from here.
4. **H** "Black Moon Party" Sit start low on sloping crack by base of coconut tree. Traverse left through sloping shelf and up ending just right of #3. **M** climb straight up. Caution: the sand shifts occasionally exposing rocks at base.
5. **(Project)** "Full Moon Party" Start on #4, traverse entire boulder ending up the mantle on #2. (No resting on the higher holds in front, stay in crack).
6. **M/R** Sit start on the lower flake, traverse right and up. Mantle lip above big rock.
7. **MH/R** Sit start lieback crack just outside of small overhang. Mantle lip and up slab. **VH** Super-low traverse, Goes right ending up #10
8. **M** Sloping crack. Balancy moves above. (Project) burly sit start.
9. **H** "Poo-ying Phak Bung" (Girl Heaven) Sit start with hands on bottom of sloping crack. Crank up into crack and make a reachy move for top holds.
10. **MH** Another sloping crack. Sit start in crack and crank up to arete.

11. **VE** The downclimb. A barefoot, drunken sunbather's free solo. This slab crack is a staircase.
12. **MH** No hands. Center of slab face; climb with feet only up a small series of bumps leading from small crack feature at base. **E** Using hands.
13. **M** Starting on right side of slab, low traverse left to #11 using the foot ledge between black and white colored rock at base. **VE** Goes up.
14. **E** or **M** "Dao Tao Noi" (Little Turtle Star) * Sit start left most crack to bucket and up. A harder variation sit starts off crimps on #15 and goes left. (Project) The crack alone needs an ascent to the top, but it gets hard!
15. **VH** "Planet Thailand" * Sit start low on crimps just right of crack. Crank up slippery holds and then out right through overhang to decent hold in middle of face. Hard moves follow into highball topout. Radical!
16. **VH** "Phak Bung" (Planet Thailand direct) Right hand on low undercling, left hand on pinch. Dyno to decent hold, exit same as #15.
17. **M** Start on good edge with poor footing. (When sand was high this was a sit start) Make one hard move to easy mantle. **M** A high traverse starts on this mantleshelf and goes right to end on top of #19 or **H** Continue traverse to #24 with a reachy funky crux in middle of west face.
18. **M** * Off good edges, crank up face. **MH** A dyno variation goes off the left horizontal edge to the knob-like feature up and slightly left.
19. **H** A hard variation starts on the edge on #18 and goes into right hand lieback past miserable slopers to good edge. Pretty much straight up.
20. **M** Off faint sidepulls crank up to balancy edges.
21. **MH** Sit start off sloping low holds. Climb left to diagonal upper crack.
22. **H** "Gop" (The frog) * Sit start same as #21. A bizarre frog-like dyno to dished out edge up and right.
23. **MH** Use slippery inner arete edges only, avoiding main arete out right.
24. **M** Start off grainy arete. Use inner and outer edges. Stay on left side. Way harder than it looks!
25. **E** Arete right side. Palm arete and climb slab on right.
26. **E** No hands slab. Practice your footwork. Don't cheat on the top!
27. **E** Sit start off ledge left of coconut tree. One move to mantle.
28. (Project) "Prehistoria Boulder". Climb face on very smooth features.
29. **M/R** * Grainy scoop with bad landing. The rock quality is dubious.
30. **M** **Big Slab** on backside of boulder, another frightening landing.
31. **VE** to **E** Easy face with many features and variations.
32. **MH** From dead hang start off low slot, dyno up and right for good incut, or sit start right and
33. **M** Two Belgian children top roped this problem for a first and second ascent. Start in scoop and climb up right to slab topout. traverse left

The boulder behind the Cafe has two new problems

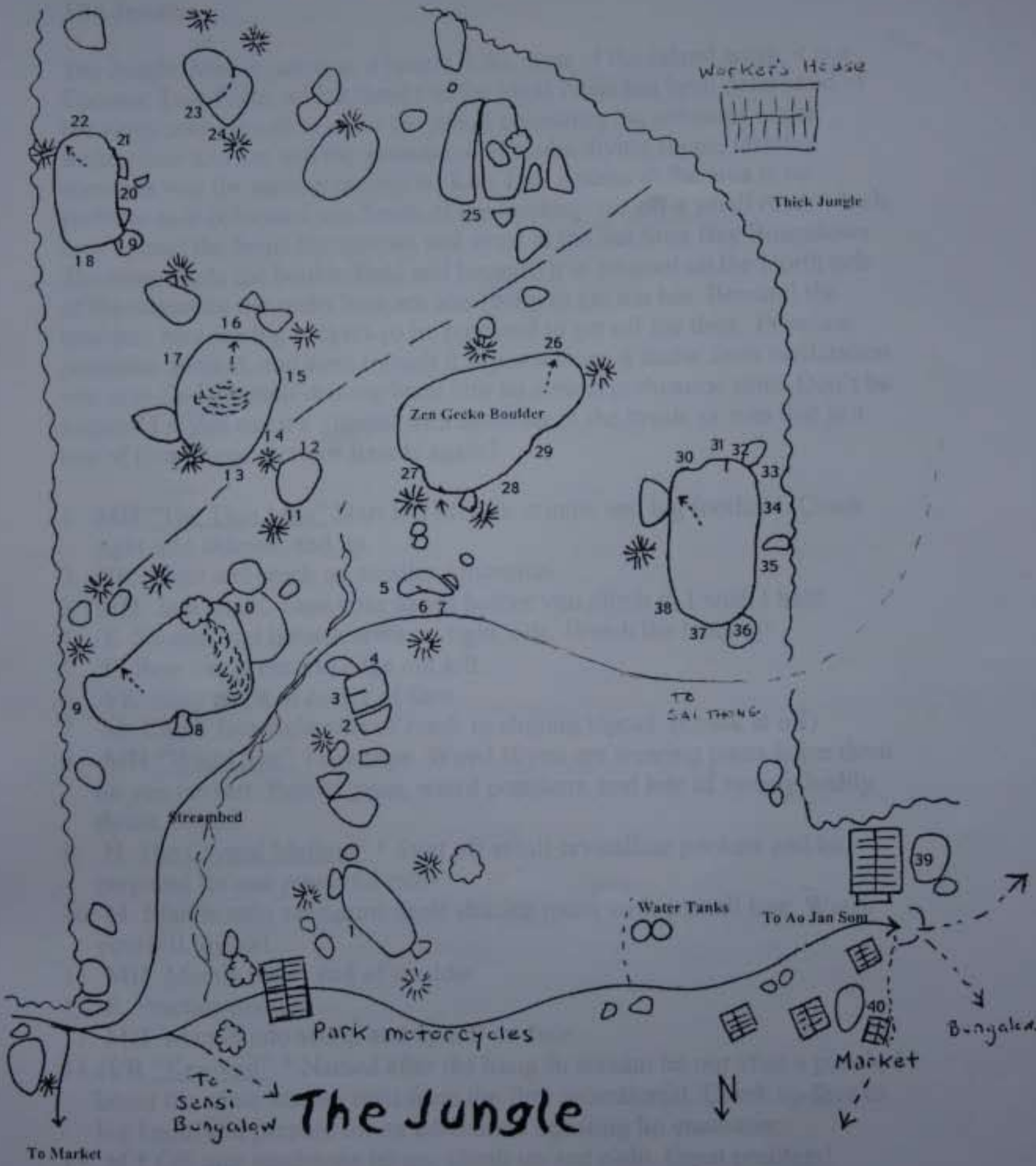
MH Right side, thin and technical start

MH/R "Gecko Nest" Goes left to crack with gecko eggs and up. Careful!

34. VE or E * A toprope can easily be set up using the rock on top as an anchor. Using only the crack is slightly harder. Also the downclimb.
35. M * The face looks easy enough until you get half way up it. Use your footwork! Exit on top into crack.
36. M Start on # 35, traverse right and climb up right side of face. (Climb the leaning palm tree for a thrill next to this)
37. (Project) Why do you think I call it the "Hell Boulder"? Sharp and thin.
38. (Project) "Chinese Water Dragon Torture" Sharp, powerful pulls.
39. (Project) Sharp hard mantle.
40. H Sit start (if the sand isn't too high) on small edges. You might need to scoop away some sand. Climable only on low tide.
41. MH Top rope "All Along the Watchtower" * Located on a huge pinnacle boulder overlooking the bay. It can be approached by the trail from Ao Jan Som going uphill towards Haad Sai Thong. You'll see a faint trail, which breaks right, before you once again view the sea. Take this trail through the jungle to the "Watchtower". Anchor long nylon slings to the big tree leaning up against the boulder's South Side. Making the anchor is no easy task, as you will have to climb up the tree. You will be rewarded with an outstanding top rope! A difficult opening move leads to brilliant incuts and edges up a gently overhanging arete.
42. M Top rope. A warm-up route can be done by using a shorter sling and climbing up a short vertical face with small holds. Start beneath big rock on West Side. The view from the top is awesome! Many more routes exist on this rock awaiting those with some creative anchoring techniques.

Top rope
Bad
landings



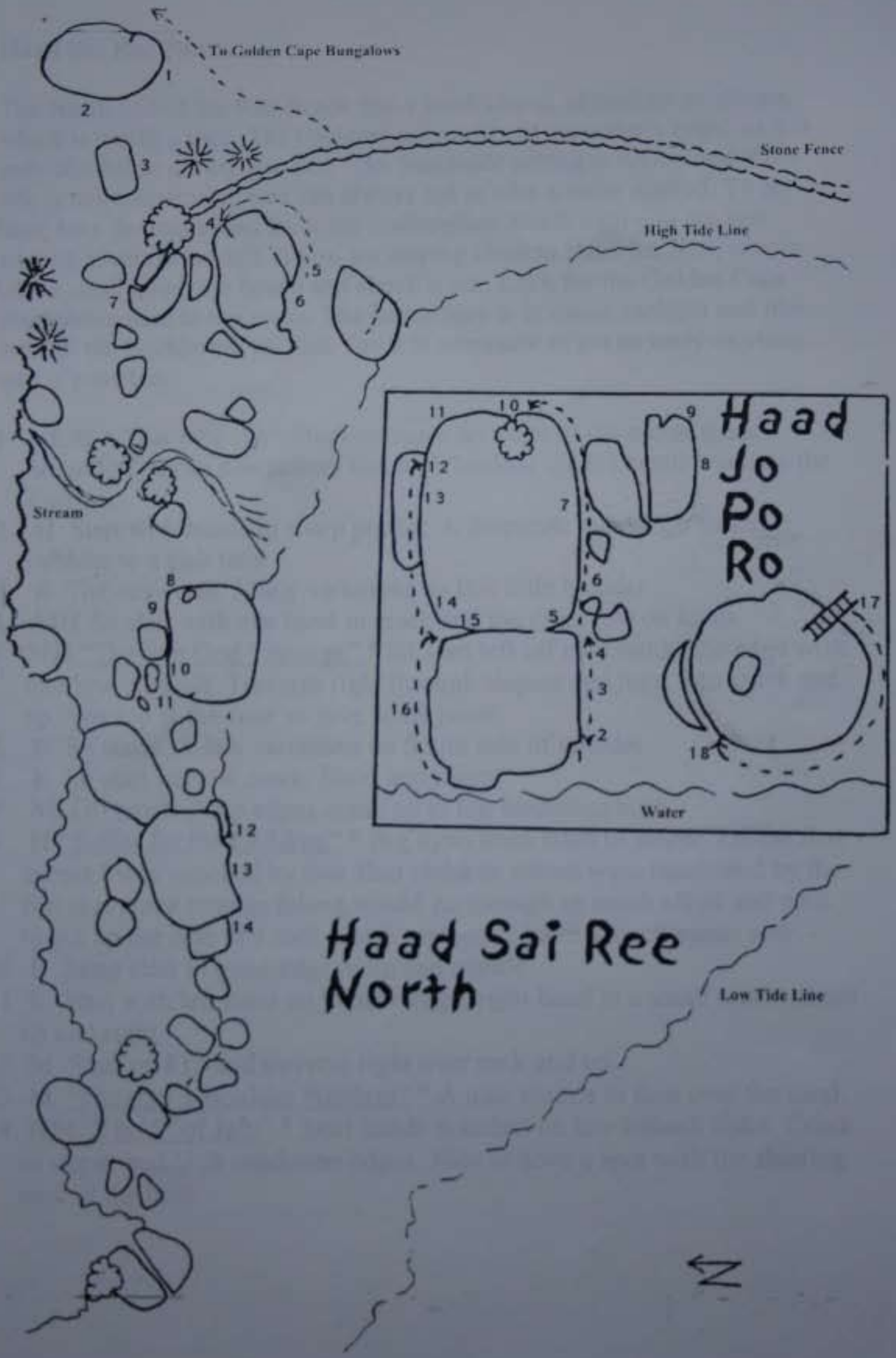


The Jungle

The Jungle Area is just that, a jungle. Like most of the inland areas, it is a Coconut Tree Farm, which thanks to the local Thais has been deforested of the viney mid-growth to make the job of collecting the coconuts easier. Before Eco-tourism and the abundance of scuba diving shops, farming coconuts was the main economy on Koh Tao. Access to the area is no problem as it is located just South of the marketplace off a small road, which runs behind the Sensi Bungalows and stops at the Jan Som Bay Bungalows. The trees shade the boulderfield and because it is situated on the North side of the mountain the rocks here are less likely to get too hot. Beware! the boulders here are big suckers so be prepared to get off the deck. Premium problems abound, and even though it is just a stone's throw from civilization you may find yourself drifting back into an almost prehistoric time. Don't be surprised if you catch a glimpse of a dinosaur in the brush, or was that just one of those huge monitor lizards again?

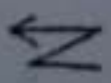
1. **MH** "The Thin Man" Start left off thin crimps and big foothold. Crank right into sidepull and up.
2. **VE** Arete and crack on smaller formation.
3. **MH** Jam crack. Tape your hands before you climb it, I wish I had!
4. **E** Sit start and lieback arete on right side. Watch the landing!
5. **E** Bear hug arete and edge out left.
6. **VE** Easy crack in center of face.
7. **M** Climb face right side of crack to sloping topout. (Crack is off)
8. **MH** "Weird Sex" Tope rope. Wow! If you are wearing pants leave them on you pervert. Painful jams, weird positions, and lots of sweaty bodily fluids. Wow!
9. **H** "The Crystal Method" * Start off small crystalline pockets and be prepared for one powerful ride!
10. **M** Mantle onto sandstone shelf sharing room with a small tree. Watch yourself higher!
11. **MH** Mantle lower end of boulder.
12. **E** Practice mantle.
13. **MH** Mantle into scoop and up left on face.
14. **H/R** "Key-yai!" * Named after the kung fu scream let out after a punch, I heard the same scream emit from the first ascensionist. Crank up face to big knob, and prepare for an adrenaline boosting lip encounter.
15. **M** * Off nice sandstone incuts, climb up and right. Great problem!
16. **E** Climb face on sandstone edges. Also the downclimb.

17. **MH** Jumpstart to nice edge and up.
18. **M** Reach high to lip for a good mantle.
19. **(Project)** Just the thing for a Hollywood Stuntman. Sloping edges over rocky landing zone. Could go from low holds if you are strong enough.
20. **VH** "The Flying Gecko" * Start off horizontal crimps on seam. Fly up to edges above. A spotter helps because the landing is a bit sketchy.
21. **M** "Brainchild" * Mantle knob to slopers.
22. **E** Another mantle. Start with feet feet below on good holds.
23. **VE** * Traverse up and right in good hand crack.
24. **E** Thin face to crack, then goes straight up.
25. **VE** Try a chimney traverse. I bet you'll like it!
26. **E** "Pain tee" (The map) Start at incuts on lip, climb up through "relief map" creases. Also the easiest downclimb.
27. **MH/R** "Dink Dink Dong!" * Start at tooth-like incut with small crack above. Climb up right onto lumpy face. Very casual mental moves up into the treeline.
28. **(Project)** Off small sharp holds in scoop, climb up left to bigger hold. Highball topout.
29. **M** "Zengecko" * A mega-classic high face. Starts off sandstone holds, and climb into large scooped slab above. Get a good spot.
30. **E** Climb up scoop using right side arete and face. Downclimb out right.
31. **M** Climb seam on right side using face.
32. **MH** Climb seam on left side with a delicate start.
33. **MH** Start low with left hand on crack hold, right hand on sloper below. Crank up!
34. **M** Using high crack to start, climb up to excellent sandstone holds.
35. **H** "The Contortionist" Start off small holds. Bizarre moves to blank slab.
36. **M** Start off knobby edge, mantle into dish and carefully ascend slab.
37. **(Project)** Face climb.
38. **(Project)** Another face.
39. **H** "Objective Burma" If you get the permission from the people living in the house there is a hard face that ascends up protruding knobs. Watch the landing zone as you might hit the roof if you come off. Crazy!
40. **MH** "Sony" Thin face. Harder than it looks.



Haad Sai Ree North

Low Tide Line



Haad Jo Po Ro

Water

Stone Fence

High Tide Line

Stream

To Golden Cape Bungalows

Haad Sai Ree North

The North end of Sai Ree Beach has a small circuit of boulder problems, which is worth a visit. The boulders are mostly at the water's edge, so it is only climbable during low tide. The beachside setting is idyllic and if the tide is not cooperating you can always opt to take a swim instead. To get here, take the main road from the marketplace North until you are just starting to climb the hill. If you are staying close to Haad Sai Ree, simply take a stroll down the beach and check it out. Look for the Golden Cape Bungalows next to the rocks. The beach here is in direct sunlight and like most of the bouldering on Koh Tao it is advisable to get an early morning start if possible.

1. **VE/R** * This face is a virtual staircase on some of the nicest stone around. You can downclimb this high boulder via the small crack on the Eastside.
2. **H** Start with hands in sharp pocket. A desperate mantle on small pebbles to a slab face.
3. **E** The easy wall. Many variations on this little boulder.
4. **MH** Sit start with one hand in crack and the other low on knob.
5. **MH** "The Sun God Traverse" * Sit start left off nice sandstone edge with feet low on shelf. Traverse right through slopers and jugs, into crack and up. The top is the crux so save some juice!
6. **E** Sit starts. A few variations on South side of boulder.
7. **E** Sit start lieback crack. Short and sharp.
8. **M** Off small sharp edges crank up to big sandstone horn.
9. **H** "Suffer for the Children" * Big dyno from slash to sloper. On the first ascent I was watched by two Thai children whom were fascinated by the fact that some strange falang would go through so much effort and pain to get up the side of a rock which seemed to have a much easier way.
10. **E** Jump start to good edge at lip and mantle.
11. **E** Start with left hand on lieback edge, right hand in a small crack, climb up and right.
12. **M** Start on #13 and traverse right over rock and up.
13. **M** "Number 1 Boulder Problem" * A nice mantle to face over the sand.
14. **H/R** "The 5th of July" * Start hands matched on low lieback flake. Crank to sloper and high sandstone edges. Nice to have a spot with the slanting rock at the base.

Haad Jo Po Ro

There is a small area of Haad Sai Ree that is known for the huge granite boulder that is situated on a long stretch of sandy beach. The beauty of this rock is that it is the only huge stone to be found within a great distance of other boulders and stands as a proud sentinel on an otherwise empty beach. I call this rock the "Jo Po Ro Boulder", not to be confused with the stone on the South end of Haad Sai Ree which bears the carved initials of the late Thai King Rama V. (The aforementioned stone is a holy Buddhist shrine and must not be climbed on!)

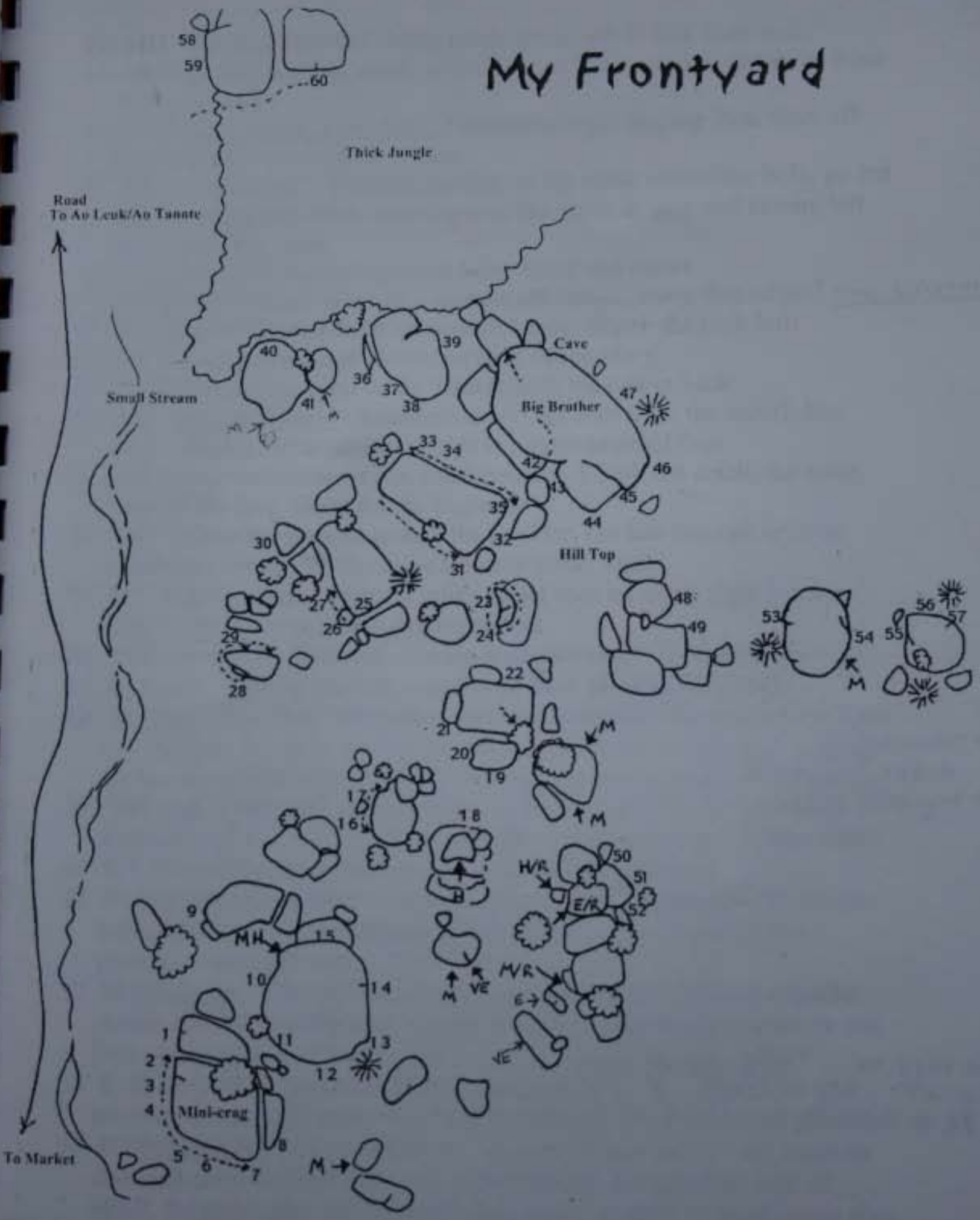
The "Jo Po Ro Boulder", named after the nickname of Rama V, is located between the AC Bar and Ban Diving in the heart of the most developed stretch of beach on the island. The boulder is well featured and because of the eternal tidal action, is smoother than most of the granite on Koh Tao. It can easily be climbed (and downclimbed) via the crack on the backside which has a small tree growing within it. The boulder is quite high and with no fixed anchor on top must be bouldered or top-belayed with a heavier person on top with some caution. The beauty of the boulder is that sand or water, depending on the tide surrounds it. The sand has an on-going process of coming and going with the storms. Because of this, there may be less or more sand at the base as when I first climbed these problems so exercise caution if the landing zones are rocky. *Free soloing can be fatal!* If isolation is your thing than get here in the early morning which is the best time to climb. The sun heats up quick and the beach is a virtual playground for tourists. You will be quickly elevated to the status of "rock star" as you chalk up and crank the lines on the boulder watched by the crowds of people hanging out. Don't miss the photo opportunity to climb the boulder by sunset, as it is usually quite beautiful from here.

1. **M** "Jo Po Ro Arete" * Start on nice lieback crack/flake left. High mantle to committing topout. Wow!!!
2. **H** Traverse from flake through X-shaped seam in middle of face to arete. Dangerous if the sand is low, as there are rocks at the base. (Project) Traverse on through problem #6.
3. **MH** Climb face straight up to X-shaped seam to end on #1.
4. **MH** Lieback crack on #5 and traverse left with long reach to end on #1.
5. **M/R** "Yu's Jam Crack" My Thai friend, Yu, taped up his hands like he had seen in many climbing magazines and sent this high jam crack. Much to the horror of me spotting below. It was his first crack climb ever!

6. MH Thin traverse. Start on #5 and traverse right through thin section to nice holds and up the left side of the crack with tree on the backside.
7. M/R Start on good sandstone holds and mantle to gain a seam up high. Watch your back!
8. MH Thin face. Start on thin flake in center of face. Crank up to small crimps and to the top.
9. VE Climb arete for a fun short problem above soft sand.
10. VE The downclimb crack. Try not to pull too hard on the little fir tree growing within it.
11. MH Northeast corner. Thin start up and right to small pocket-like depressions on lip.
12. E Twin cracks. * Climb good quality crack using just the left or also the right to top.
13. MH Climb right crack only. Sloping topout. Watch the slab below!
14. M Leftside of chimney. Ascend wide crack using the left side only to good sandstone features. Careful topout.
15. E * Offwidth crack. Body jam this crack for a thrilling climb.
16. H "Gahn dern tahng yahk!" (The difficult journey) Hard traverse, which starts on good, holds out right. Climbs up and down flake to very thin reachy move into offwidth crack. (Project) Traverse all the way through horizontal crack ending up problem #12. A real butt dragger because of slab.
17. M Located on the other dome-like boulder to the South. Traverse on horizontal band starting at the ladder near the big features and goes around the boulder to end on good sandstone edges on #18. The horizontal band of sandstone is good for the feet, but the top is slopers.
18. E Start on good edges, short fun moves up face. Lower sand = harder start.



My Frontyard



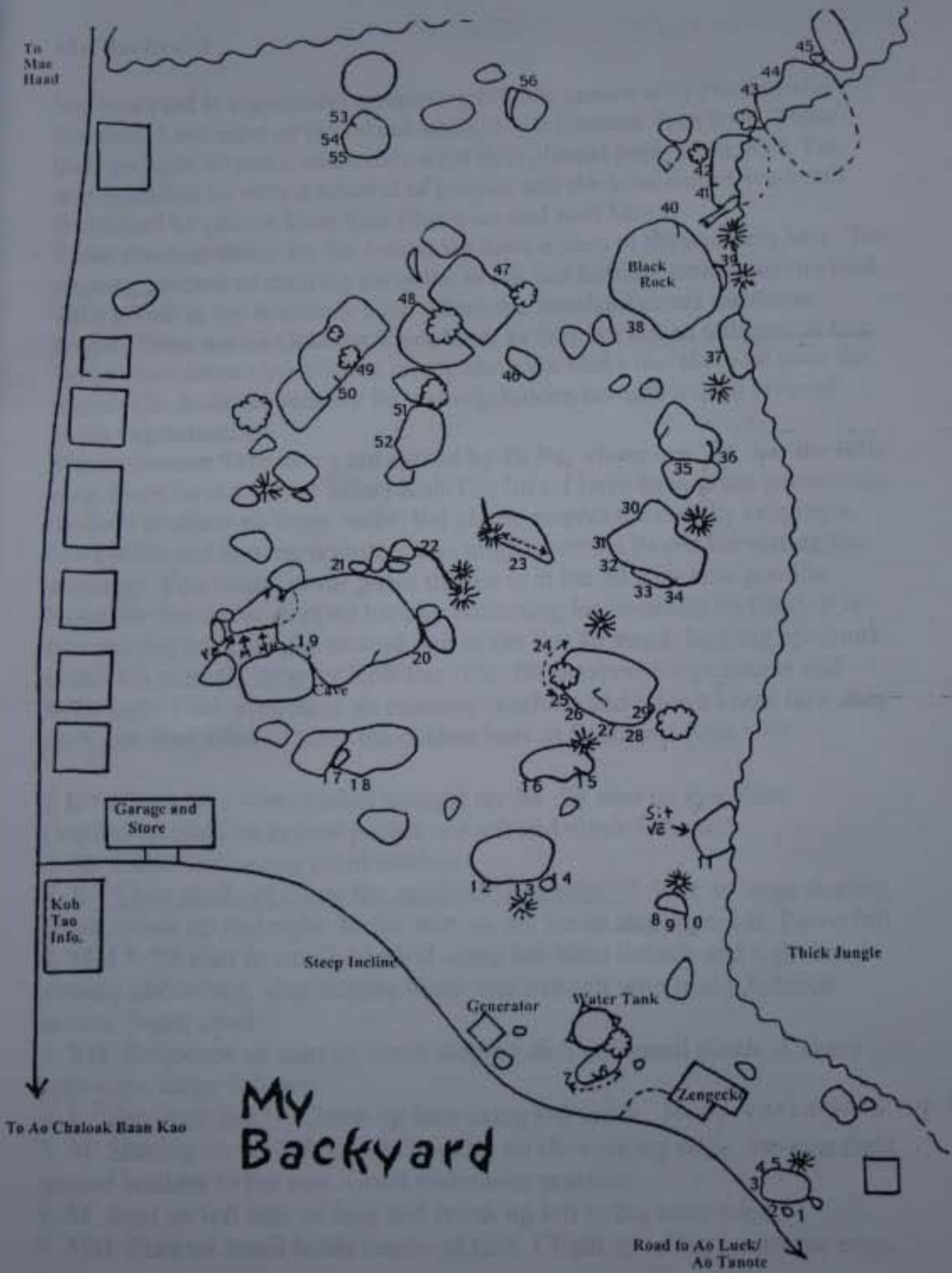
14. MH * Sit start from horizontal crack, go up left to thin seam exit.
15. M Over slab landing, crank off large incut to big bucket, or can be done in one big dyno.
16. VE "Nueng, song, sam, Bap!" * Beautiful right angling face. Start off big hold left near the rock at base.
17. MH "Black Hole" Traverse starting on big black crystalline hole, go left dipping down low when crossing over the rocks at base and exiting left up obvious big flake.
18. E Sit start and mantle big black hold. Short and sweet.
H Dyno On front of boulder sit start off ledge, sharp thin edges. "The Orator"
19. E Crank off bottom flake up beautiful face. Watch the rock left!
20. E * Nice reach to good sandstone hold above seam
21. E Tall arete with good holds. Downclimb the tree in back.
22. M "Tahng bpai luey" (Road to riches)* Sit start from the mouth-like crack, climb good crystalline holds in jigsaw puzzled face.
23. VE Many variations on this small boulder. Climb the crack, the arete, traverse the face. Good for the beginner.
24. MH Tricky traverse all around the boulder. Go low through crux on Northwest corner. M The same traverse going high.
25. H * Sloping arete. Left hand milks sweet spot on arete, right hand on face. Crank to crimps then sloping topout.
26. MH Sit start on rock with sloping holds out right. Traverse left to #27.
27. E A series of long stretchy mantles up face. (Project) Sit start?
28. M "Jup" (The kiss) What does this rock resemble? Sit start on the right side of chin. Traverse into the mouth and climb around the rock to grab/center face the ear. Be careful not to pull on the upper lip, loose rock! MH*Long reach
29. MH "Jup Farangset" (French Kiss) Start same as #28, but instead of straight up. traversing all the way, climb up straight to sandstone edge. Rocky base!
30. E * Short little crank off flake in center of face to mantle.
31. E Step off rock at bottom, mantle to slab arete. Variation Off obvious holds, traverse in from left side of boulder trying to avoid the tree growing within the rock.
32. M "Glink goo" (The millipede)* I often see those big black millipedes slowly climbing on the face of these boulders. The obvious seam on this face reminded me of them.
33. E From perfect sandstone block, mantle up. "The Middle Way" or Left to right
VH * Start here and Variation
traverse left through steep overhang to end on # 35. Pumpy and powerful! # 35-33
34. H "Pah mai fai" (The brushfire) * Sit start off low holds. Left hand on diamond-shaped block side pull, right hand on sloping right side of block. Establish feet on left lower slab, crank up right to good holds, then
(There are many sitstart variations here)

- slap sloping arete to end in an exhilarating open handed topout. Is that enough beta for you...?
35. **MH** Off good crimps left of arete, hard mantle on horizontal slash.
36. **M** Strange sit start off jagged arete flake. The boulder behind the flake is on for feet.
37. **H** "Little Brother" Left hand crank off high incut, up to sloping mantleshelf. The landing drops away to give you a special thrill. **MH** Variation that cranks off high incut with right hand, then out left to good holds over scary sharp flake.
38. **MH** Another reachy start to mantle on small edges.
39. **M** Start on sharp holds just left of flake in ground, climb face.
40. **E** Two mantles. If you can't reach the starting holds you may have to jump. You may want to brush the leaves off the holds from the top first.
41. **VE** This face is a virtual ladder. Don't slip!
42. **H** "I did it with purple glasses, I did it for the masses" Start in cave on big crack, big reach to sloping ledge then up and left to sloping topout. Could use a spotter because of the landing. I wish I had one!
43. (^{PROJECT}LOW START) "Human Fly" In the right side of the little cave, start left hand on nice jug and right hand on low rectangular crystal, feet low. Bust to sloper and go for the upper ledge. *GOES FROM SLIPPER MH/R*
44. **E** The easiest route to the top of this big boulder. Somewhat tricky mantle to huge ledge then up top slab. The downclimb is in back and it too is a sort of a tricky (reverse) mantle to boulder below.
45. **H** "Crow's Feet" Reach high to upper seam and ledge. Hard mantle to slab topout. Way harder than it looks!
46. **(Project)** Sharp dicey mantle on West corner.
47. **VH/R** * "Big Brother" The big tick! Very thin face to highball topout, starting right of Coconut Tree. A **Key hold broke**, but goes as a jump-in to the right off small rock at base. *The low start is waiting for a new ascent.*
48. **MH** "Jessica" * Sit start off lowest sandstone knob under roof. **M** Starting off bigger lower holds. Excellent rock! Killer moves!
49. **MH/R** "Maa Oil" * Grab high starting holds off rock at base. (Right hand on arete, left hand on bottom of crack) Power up tall arete to better holds above. Don't forget to sit and shake out in the high saddle-like holds. **E/R** Can start in from right at bottom to same high topout.
50. **MH** Hard mantle on good knob.
51. **(Project)** Off awkward liebacks with terrible footing. Everything is wrong with this one, except the beauty of the rock.
52. **E** Easy face with bad landing.
53. **M** Face/seam to good lieback. **(Project)** Sit start.

M Left of #54, thin edges

54. E * Sitstart left and climb crack to it's dissolving finish. Fun! Fun! Fun!
 55. M Sit start off lower diagonal slash, up right and over sloping ledge.
 56. E Right of Coconut Tree. Climb up good featured slab.
 57. E Slab face left of tree. Use crack to start or further left on small holds.
 58. M This boulder lies to the East and is visible from the road. Start with feet on bottom rock under boulder, hands on lower pinch and upper slanting edge. Climb up and left into crack
 59. MH * Starts with right hand on sloping lieback, left hand on upper sloper, good footholds below. Straight up to sloping lip.
 60. M A hidden jungle treat. Climb seam to a higher than it looks topout.





My Backyard

My backyard is a gradually steepening hillside strewn with massive slab boulders. Like most of the inland areas, it is a Coconut Tree farm. These trees go back 40 years when they were first planted here. Then, Koh Tao was inhabited by only a handful of people, and the local waters were still threatened by pirates from Koh Phang-an and Koh Samui.

These coconut farms are the reason we have access to the boulders here. The ongoing process of clearing away the brush and burning manicures the land. Take a look at the boundary zone where the farmland meets the dense jungle. There are no Coconut Trees here, as they are not an indigenous tree. Within this dense vine-choked jungle there are rocks like these all over the island. The boulders secretly lie waiting, hidden beneath a deep layer of green vegetation.

These Coconut Tree farms are owned by Pa Pa, whose son, Sit, has the little shop down on the corner called Koh Tao Info. I have been given permission by them to climb on these rocks, but please respect the area by keeping a low profile and leaving no litter. You might meet Pa Pa out harvesting the coconuts. You would never guess that he is in his 70's by how good he looks. He has never stopped happily collecting his coconuts by hand. It is like nothing has changed around him in the last 40 years; farming coconuts is still his passion. Stop by Koh Tao Info. for inexpensive groceries and beverages. They even have an espresso machine and I don't know how they do it, but they seem to have the coldest beer in Southeast Asia.

- 1 E * Climb face with slashes straight up. M Sit start on low slash. (Variation) Start on crystal pocket out left and climb lieback.
2. M Climb face using small slashes.
3. E "Thou shall not covet thy neighbor's boulder" * Start on large sloping block, climb up and right. H Sit start on the lower sloping holds. Powerful!
4. MH * Sit start in small dihedral using left hand lieback and right hand sloping undercling, slap sloping block and exit left with tricky balance moves. Super cool!
5. VH Desperate sit start on small sloping dish and small pinch. A crazy side-ways lunge follows.
6. E "The Fruit Bat" * Climb up face using left crack. Many variations up face.
7. M Starting on far-left side of boulder on obvious big edge, traverse right around boulder to the tree. Good endurance practice.
8. M Start on left side of face and crank up left to big arete edge.
9. MH Start on small holds center of face. Climb up to big sandstone edge.

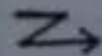
10. **M** "Big Bang Theory" * Climb right arete trying to avoid the oncoming forces of gravity.
11. **E** * "Beginners Lunge" Start on low sloping holds, feet on bottom ledge. *VE * S.+*
Lunge to top ledge and up. Go! (Like most dynos, harder if you are short) *start up left*
in crack
12. **MH** Climb dished out face on sloping holds.
13. **M** Below Coconut Tree. Start on lieback flake, crank up and right.
14. **E** If you can reach, climb slab from high holds. If you can't reach, step in off rock at base.
15. **MH** "Het Mao" (Magic Mushroom) Sit start right hand on sandstone knob, crank! (Project) Sharp holds left in dish, traverse right and up.
16. **MH** Start on high holds. Sloping topout. (Project) Start on low holds.
17. **M** Crack. Be careful if you pull on the right arete slice on top. Loose!
18. **MH** * Sit start left and pull to good holds below bulge. Splendid moves.
19. **MH** "The Cave Painting" * Sit start *in cave on big edge*, traverse right and up. *The slab behind has good problems too*
20. **M** Climb face of huge boulder (rock on right is off) until the exit moves.
21. **MH** * A rare overhang for the area. Sit start off rock below for extra points, or dead hang off lower big edge. Crank with style to the top. A spotter is helpful.
22. **E/R** "The Palm Tree Problem" * Though not a boulder problem this funky horizontal palm tree is both a freak of nature as well as a thrilling game. There are a few of these radically leaning trees, probably as a result of heavy wind damage. Traverse the tree to the far end and hang onto the other tree. It starts to get funky when your body weight makes the tree sway. Cool!
23. **E** Easy friction slab with many variations. **M** No hands variation, straight up. **MH** No hands variation traverse.
24. **MH** Start left in crack, climb down and traverse onto face and up. Try not to use the tree, which has grown through the rock.
25. **M** Start low in dished out area and lunge to top.
26. **M** Start off low flake and crank to flake above.
27. **E** * Small crystal crimps lead to better holds and an even better ledge.
28. **E** Start where the rock has a small crack and traverse up left to good **slanting edges**.
29. **VE** Climb up easy face.
30. **M** Stem scoop in boulder.
31. **M** Climb left arete. A mind clearer on top.
32. **E** * Standing on ledge, climb into dish in face and up and right.
33. **M** Easy start into very thin crystals. Trust your feet and your weight!
34. **E** Start on # 33, traverse right and up right arete.

35. MH/R Mantle boulder, bad landing.
36. VE "Jeffy's Crack" I tied a very psyched two-year old on the end of a rope and he climbed this crack like a little monkey.
37. (Project) Sit start off good ledge.
38. (Project) "The Black Face" Top rope, tie long slings from Coconut Tree in back for an anchor.
39. MH Start off big foot ledge, thin crimps to top. (Also the downclimb)
40. H "Out of the Darkness There is Hope" * Thin start to upper crack and sloping topout. Highball!
41. E Pull gently on loose flake to slab. Is your karma good?
42. M Thin slab face.
43. E Start in scoop and climb high up and right.
44. E "John Long comes to Thailand" * Ascend scoop in boulder. Don't even think about falling!
45. (Project) Loose rock, or it would be great.
46. E Face, many variations.
47. (Project) Thin high slab.
48. MH * Top rope (use big tree as anchor). Start in horizontal crack taking care not to harm to tiny sting-less bee hives, climb face and arete. A little of everything on this mini-route. It could be bouldered by a brave soul! Take a look at the Southwest arete of the larger boulder. It is a beauty, but because of the fear of coming off and swinging into the boulder behind it, I never top roped it. A daring solo might be safer, ...any takers?
49. E Horizontal crack and left.
50. M "Yin and Yang" * Hard crank low to nice ledge.
51. (Project) Left arete.
52. VH * Skyla Super hard, sharp, but classic. Two very cool Filipino climbers solved this technical pro.
53. MH Seam. (Project) Sit start.
54. M Blunt arete.
55. E Start low on crack, up and right.
56. (Project) Seam.

The Mountainside Map 1



Thick Jungle



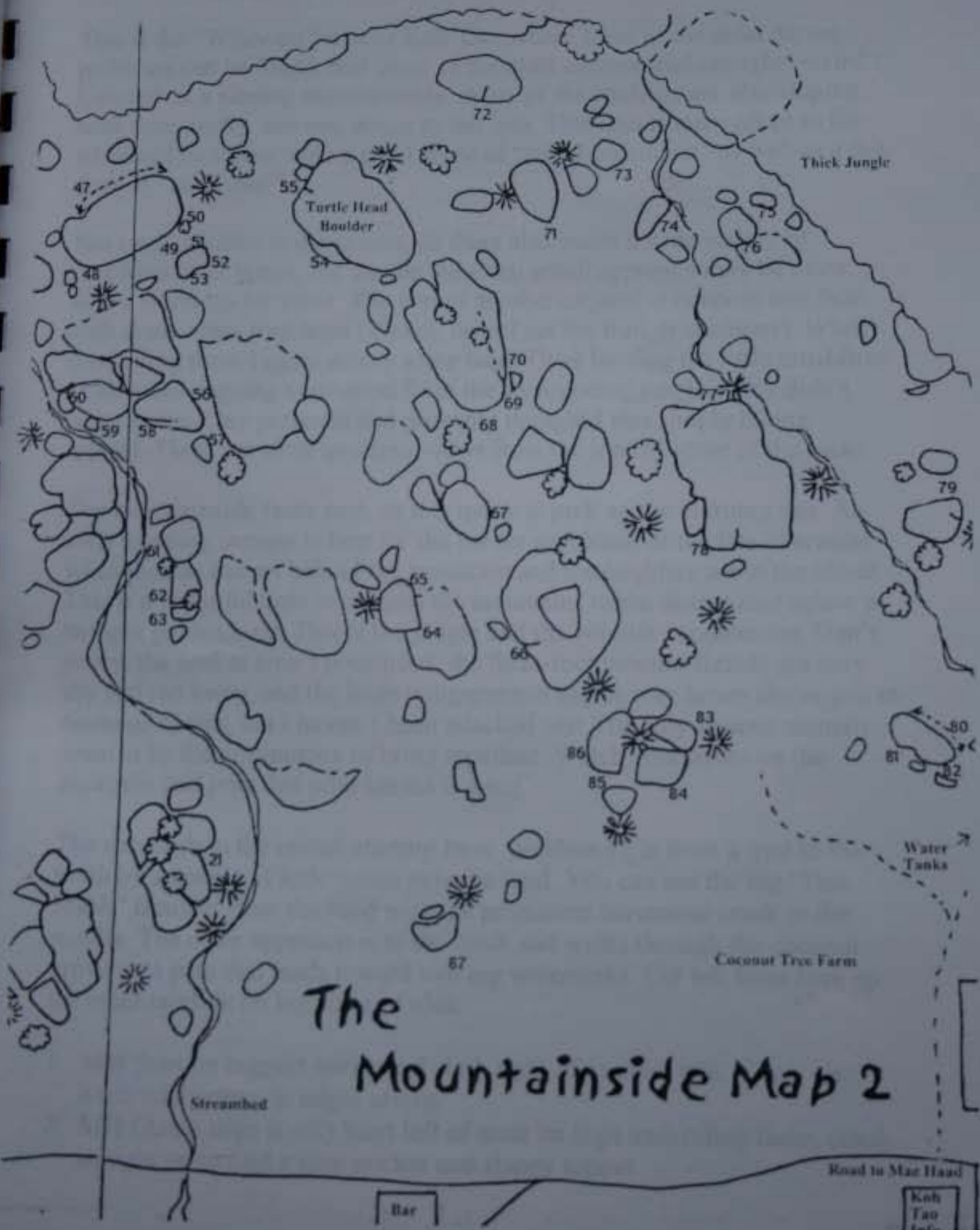
"The
Dirt Road to Peak"

Road to An Chaiak Baan Kan

Black Stones

Trail

White House
Boulder



The Mountainside Map 2

The Mountainside

This is the "Wildwest" area of Koh Tao, where some of the most daring problems can be found, and some of the most esoteric and outright "weird"! Located on a sloping mountainside, many of the landings are also sloping, with some rocky, uneven, zones to fall into. This area is more adept to the advanced boulderer with a good sense of "cool headedness" as well as a fair doze of "craziness"!

Not every boulder is dangerous, so there also exists a wide variety of problems at all levels, but maybe the steep uphill approach may be more than a warm-up for some. The area is another expansive coconut tree farm with many other fruit trees (Please, do not eat the fruit or coconuts). While bouldering there I came across some local Thais burning the little brushfires to clear the ongoing vegetation from the surrounding jungle. They didn't seem to mind my presence and probably thought I was simply hiking around. There are some amazing views from the tops of some of the rocks.

The mountainside faces east, so it is quick to pick up the morning sun. An early morning session is best for the harder problems, or the late afternoon when the sun has set behind the mountain and the boulders are in the shade. This is a beautiful time to witness the mountains to the distant east aglow in twilight golden hues. This is the jungle and the wildlife is numerous. Don't worry, the snakes aren't poisonous, the three-foot monitor lizards are very shy and run away, and the huge wingspanned eagles may hover above you in ominous circles, but I haven't been attacked yet! The only vicious animals seem to be the mosquitoes so bring repellent. Watch yourselves on the highballs and pray that your karma is good.

The approach to the circuit starting from problem #1 is from a trail to the south by a couple of little house near the road. You can see the big "Dee Mahk" Boulder from the road with the prominent horizontal crack in the middle. The other approach is to the north and walks through the coconut grove on a path that leads toward two big watertanks. Cut left from here up the mountainside on big slabs of rock

1. **MH** Start on biggest horizontal slash right of coconut tree. Crank up horizontal seams to edges above.
2. **MH** (Arete edge is off) Start left of arete on high undercling flake, crank straight up to find a nice pocket and sloppy topout.

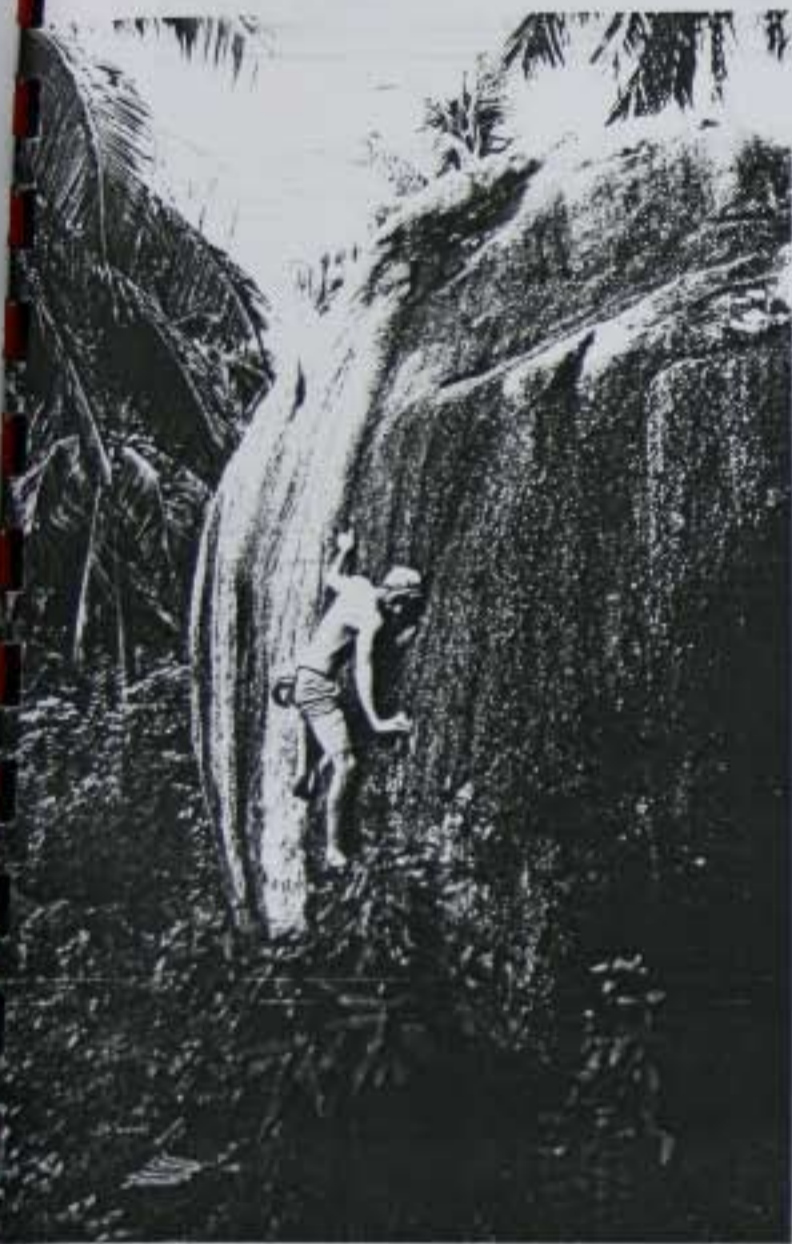
3. E Climb right side of arete to high topout.
4. E "Dee Mahk" * Easy slab start to horizontal slash and up to high knob near top of face. Scary top moves!
5. E Climb left side of arete. (The horizontal crack in the middle of the face makes a good easy warm-up traverse)
6. M/R "Scareway to Heaven" One frightening move is all there is to this one after committing to the face by traversing out from the boulder below. Then, the landing drops away as you surmount this free standing pillar-like rock reminiscent to those found on Easter Island.
7. M The crack (right side). This is also the downclimb of the boulder as the landing is safest. Don't be afraid of the big Tokay Geckos stirring within the crack as they won't bite you unless they actually have to.....
8. M The crack (left side). Climb the left side of the slightly overhanging crack stepping off the rock at the base. Short and pumpy. Finish on #7 topout.
9. E There are many easy ways up the slab behind the "Scareway to Heaven". This one starts on small crack with tree sapling growing inside. Climb to nice ledge and up friction face.
10. (Project) Highball! Starts on left side of face on seam crack with good undercling. Climb up to nothing.
11. MH "Tumbler" Start in crack on rightside of face. Climb up leftside of dissolving crack to slopping lumpy topout.
12. MH Start with both hands cranking off "smile" seam. Goes up and right to smaller seams. (Project sit start)
13. VE Small slab. A bit harder if you start in center of face.
14. M Off good high holds, crank up face to slopers.
15. E Climb up left side of face using lieback edge, or right side using sloping depression to reach a big hueco, balancy topout.
16. E Offwidth crack. Wear a shirt!
17. H "This Universe Is Infinite" * Start on right side of face off lieback pinch. Long crank to small edge up and left. Thin topout.
18. M Climb up scooped out seam to sloping topout.
19. MH Sit start short seam crack with a desperate bottom move.
20. E Crank off vertical seam holds in face to nice upper moves.
21. MH/R "Beer Chang" Climb face to scooped out slab finish, exiting under the branches of the unusual "elephant trunk" styled coconut tree next to boulder.
22. H "Blackfoot" * Sit start off pinch and edge, dynamic moves up and left.

23. E Sit start off good edges. A few awkward moves lead to a big flake, exit right. (Project) Same start, but avoid the big flake and traverse left through very thin section ending on the exit of #22.
24. (Project) Starts off good sandstone holds to thin sharp edge, then using good footwork up to zenoliths above. Highball!
25. M * Start off good crystal pocket. Ascend face up black sandstone angling stripe with edges. Awesome stuff!
26. E "Crashpad Course" Climb leftside of slab off good foothold. The first ascent was done wearing a crashpad.
27. (Project) Thin slab.
28. E Grainy arete on jungleside rock. Don't blow the top while you get into the treeline!
29. (Project) Smooth crack. Could go from a very hard sitstart.
30. MH "Nok Yeow" (Thai Eagle) Start low on right side of arete with hands matched on vertical slash. Climb desperate arete. (Easier if you have a long wingspan). The downclimb on the back, be careful.
31. (Project) Over big bushes, surmount ledge and commit to the top. It will be a real "Cliffhanger"!
32. (Project) For the honemaster! Off lieback flake and crimps, dyno up to knob, exit slightly left.
33. MH/R "The Tomahawk" Jump start to the big knob. Highball topout! (Project) Sit start off arete out right, climb left through crimps then dyno sideways to big knob. The arete alone could also go.
34. M/R "Don't look down!" A casual chimney which ends in a harrowing offwidth crack. The bad landing only adds to your adrenaline rush!
35. M/R "Pass the brush" Another highball using the seams out left and flake right. The first ascent was brushed on route.
36. E Climb face left of tree to horizontal break and up.
37. (Project) Sharp grainy arete. Unghhhhhh!, any takers?
38. MH No hands slab. On left side of face ascend face with ultra precise balance. E Using hands.
39. E Climb up right side of slab to dish, then up into crack.
40. (Project) "CIA Stress Analysis Test" A small series of ledges leads to one or two high friction moves that test your bravado. A good snapshot!
41. MH Top rope The White Face" (A.K.A. "Welcome home Mr. President, your dinner is on the table") Located on the mammoth "Whitehouse Boulder". When I first found this stunning line which ascends the line of edges to a top crack, I thought it looked wonderful, almost soloable. (Wrong!) It is in reality a bit dirty and loose. I used two 25-meter ropes, one of which I anchored to the coconut tree behind #42.

42. **H** "The CIA Jungle Search and Destroy Test" * Starts on right side of face off low bottom flake. Crank left through thin moves to good holds in center of face. Sloping topout. **M** Start in center off good upper holds.
43. **E** Climb face between stone at base and tree stump. This is also the downclimb unless you want to slide down the slippery barked tree behind the boulder. (Not recommended) **MH** A hard sitstart variation uses sandstone sloper (under the stand-in starting edge), and holds in alcove out left.
44. **M** Climb face using sloping starting holds to easy slab above. (There are also a few project lines on this boulder. One is all the way left on a big sloper starting hold, and there are a few highballs on the north side).
45. (**Project**) A powerful line. Start in big pocket out left, and pull up and right traversing to the sloping roof lip.
46. **M** * Scooped out arete. Start off good foothold on bottom, climb sloping arete. Great moves!
47. **H** Mid-height traverse. (The top of boulder is off) Sitstart on left side of boulder. Traverse right through a series of edges, liebacks and big moves. The crux is at the end just before the exit, so make sure to brush the lower footholds in this area.
48. (**Projects**) Can you climb V13??? If so, hop on some of these face problems. Can you say POWERFUL?
49. **H** Hard mantle to dished out face left of bush.
50. **MH** Start off rounded hold out right, balancy moves lead upward.
51. **E** Run and jump to big hold in center of face.
52. **E** Climb up easy face/arete on north side of face.
53. **M** Sit start off lieback flake. Climb up and right to slopers exiting #50.
54. (**Project**) "The Nucleus" On big boulder that resembles a turtle's head from a distance. Insane jumping problem off slab at base to slopers, then up to the very eye of the turtle. It could go!
55. (**Project**) Knobby face to high crack. Bad landing!
56. **M/R** Face/arete. Off rocks at base, crank off poor lower holds to better holds up high. Hang in there, and don't look down.
57. **E** Slab face. Starting off rock at base, using big bottom hold climb up and left. Beware: sloping landing. Another **E** slab starts lower in the banana plants below on good edges.
58. **E** "Turtle Crack" * Climb up nice angled crack above the bushes to sloping topout. A beauty!
59. **H/R** Bald face with bad landing. Start off rock at base, reach up for small pocket-like starting holds. Needs good footwork and a cool head.
60. **VE** Starting off rock at base, climb easy low-angled slab.

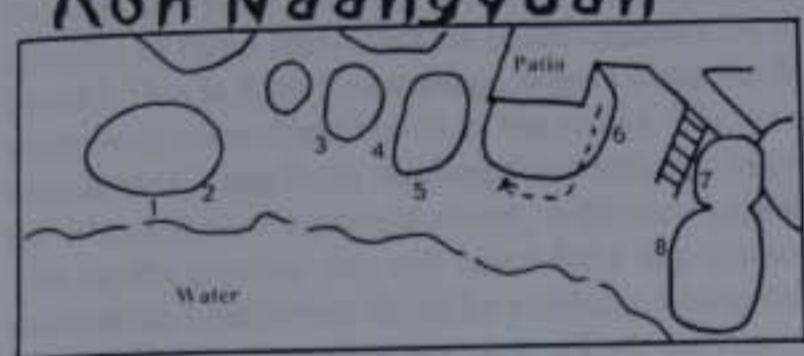
61. E Small slab. Start off good sandstone footholds, sloping topout.
62. H Thin Face. (Crack off) Start off good footholds at base. Climb small arete-like edge to sloping topout.
63. E Crack. Sit start lieback crack on right hand side.
64. MH/R "Diazepam" * Starting off slab at base, climb arete to nice sandstone hold. When you are over this hold with your feet, don't look down or you might get a slight case of anxiety. Focus on the slab above.
65. M Climb short face using good foothold, blunt arete right and big sandstone hold left. Pull to sloping topout.
66. VE Obvious dished-out crack in middle of face. Too bad the big tree stump is still living below as it can't be started lower, but this stump may be holding the bottom flake in place.
67. VE * Climb right side of arete with beautiful black & white crystals.
68. VE Climb camel's back slab from bottom of boulder.
69. (Project) Start off good lieback flake and smooth arete edge. (left of rock at base).
70. (Project) Starts on big crystal pockets, (right of rock at base) and traverse left after crossing the slanting crack with ferns growing within.
71. H "Tarzan" * Jump in start. Grab the sloping dished out hold (left hand) and leap to small sloper on lip, slappy topout. (Project) Dyno start off sloping dish and lower pinch. Set your feet and fire!
72. E * Climb seamed scoop on featureless slab. Harder than it looks.
73. E Sit start off good sandstone knobs. Short and fun!
74. E Climb nice friction slab, starting off big foot holds.
75. M From sloping ledge, reach up to cross-like feature and up.
76. M Sit start on sloping lip hold. Powerful move to nice mantle.
77. (Project) Start up smooth crack. Either topout right over bad landing, or left to pocket and sandstone knobs. Looks safer, but harder.
78. (Project) I always see big Tokay Geckos scurrying away into the crack as I approach this small cave. Climb out left through slopers, or right. Looks easier, but has a bad landing. Good luck!
79. (Project) Start off flake at bottom, crank up to sloping topout.
80. E Climb arete on north side of boulder. M A traverse also starts here and goes right across boulder (avoiding the top) exiting on notch in rock.
81. MH * Climb face off low crimps to good knob above. Rocky landing.
82. VE Easy lumpy face. Start on lieback edge and scoop on right side.
83. H "The Mind's Eye" * Sit start next to coconut tree. Start with hands in "eye" hold (black crystal pupil) and good foothold, crank for holds on edge then up to pocket feature.
84. MH * Starts off crimps in center of face, climb up left to good edge.

85. M Climb face off good flake at bottom to edges and more flakes. Rock at base makes for cautious ascent.
86. E Many variations up good featured slab.
87. E Sit starts off low edges. This nice, mostly sandstone rock, is an excellent warm-up if you approach from the north. The left side is slightly harder.

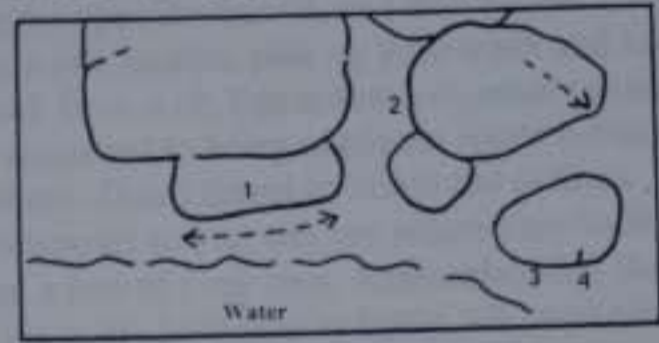


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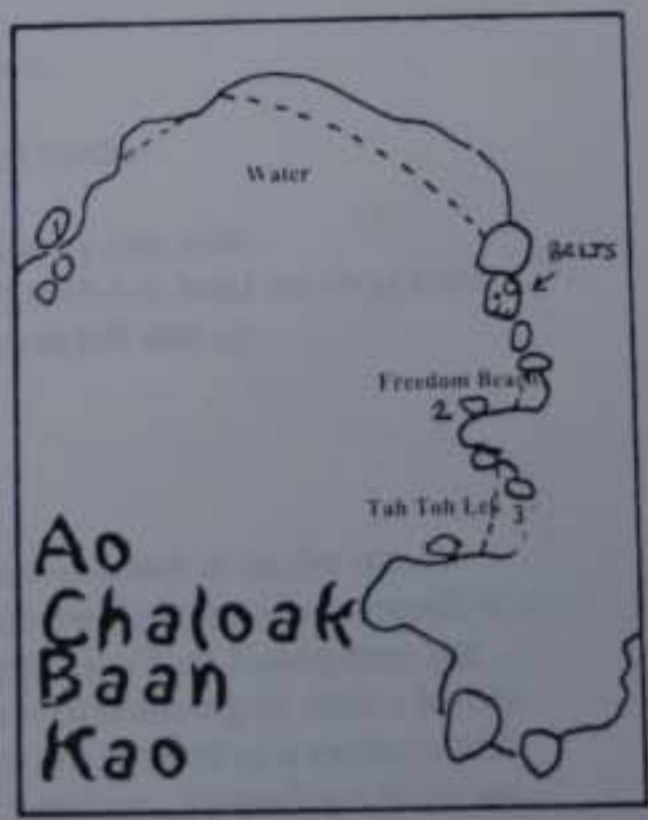
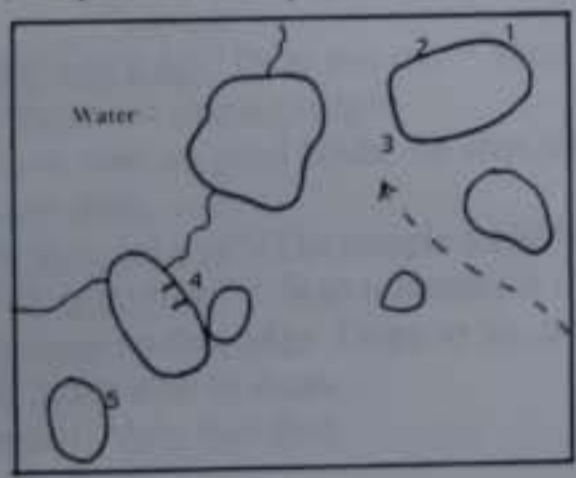
Koh Naangyuan



Ao Mamuang



Mahana Bay



Miscellaneous Bouldering Areas

Koh Naangyuan

Perhaps you have seen the postcard that depicts an idyllic archipelago that consists of three small islands fused together by a triangular white sand beach? This is Koh Naangyuan, whose claim to fame is the world's only three-way connecting beach in the world. The island is so beautiful and unique that it has been marketed towards the high-end tourist and as a result the island is now a private resort, with very expensive accommodations. The thrifty climber can still come for a day trip to explore the limited, but interesting bouldering there by catching a long-tailed boat taxi from the pier at Mae Haad. A word of warning: I had one run in by a manager at the resort who told me I could not climb there. I was perhaps too bold in my attempt to top rope a classic hand crack that was adjacent to the outdoor bar. The bouldering is across the beach on the opposite island, so I don't think there will be a problem there. Just keep a low profile, pick up your trash and have fun. Bring your own food and drink from Koh Tao unless you want to pay a lot at the restaurant. You are not supposed to bring in plastic water bottles, so conceal them when coming ashore. Don't forget to climb the endless flight of stairs to the mountain viewpoint so you can see where they took that famous postcard shot, and get a few of your own. Remember that the boulders are waterside so if the tide is too high you're better off snorkeling.

1. E "My pen's dry" (Mai pen rai) * Short face.
2. M Mantle on sloping ledge.
3. M Low start on good holds. Sit start much harder.
4. E Low start.
5. MH "Ban dai wat" (The temple stairs) balancy thin slab.
6. VH "Gecko Man" * Start underneath roof with left hand on coral knob, right hand on thin edge. Dyno to lip, traverse left and up.
7. MH Jump start to slash.
8. (Project) Very thin face.

Ao Mamuang

Known as "Mango Bay" in English, this isolated beach is on the remote Northside of Koh Tao, but it is a favorite with snorkelers and as a result it's not hard to find a boat that will take you there. Like Koh Naangyuan the bouldering is limited, but rather it is the allure of climbing in such a lovely setting that is the main appeal. The fish there are as hued as a rainbow and plentiful. I only visited this area once some years ago, so perhaps there are

boulders that I overlooked. Nonetheless the charming castaway setting will inspire.

1. MH "Mango Traverse" * Traverse across face using sloping top holds (Big bottom slab is off)
2. M/R "Crystalline" Long reach to crystal, rocky landing.
3. (Project) Thin face.
4. E Crack and face.

Mahana Bay

There has been some development in the way of new bungalows to this area. When I first climbed there, they had some bungalows, but they were vacant during that time. With not a soul around the tiny beach there was like attending church, almost a religious experience. I remember meditating in peace on a small bench overlooking the waves as they lapped the shore. Finding this secret spot might not be as hard as before. There is a small path off the road by the Sun Sea Bungalows that meanders through the jungle before spilling onto the shoreline.

1. M Short face.
2. MH No hands problem. Many variations up slab.
3. MH "Pet see dam" (Black Diamond) Crank off black crystal holds.
4. E "Siamese Twin Cracks" Like the title implies. Climb twin cracks over rocks and water.
5. MH * Low start on slash, lunge up and right.

Haad Sai Ree South

Located on the far south end of Sai Ree Beach, there is a small grouping of boulders with mostly easy beginner problems. This is where the famous boulder sits that bears the inscription of King Chulagkorn, better known as Rama V or "Jo Po Ro". Take time to pay your respects as the big rock has an altar below with Buddha images and burning incense, but don't even think about climbing it.

Ao Chaloak Baan Kao

The southern end of Koh Tao has a nice bay with a popular beach that is still a long way from being overrun by tourism. There is some limited bouldering here, but better yet the Southern most tip has some huge slab cliffs that would make for some real top rope adventure.

Some years ago bolts were placed on top of one big slab, and close to the bolts there was a big rock that could have easily been slung and used as an anchor instead. With this foolishness in mind, the ethic of keeping Koh Tao bolt free is good one. There is usually an abundance of natural anchors to choose from if you feel the need for exposure.

1. M * Jump start to lip traverse right and up.
2. E/R Left most crack (**Projects**) Middle and right crack. Top rope or solo
3. MH "Naked Dyno" Off low holds left. Best done unclothed. Haad Tah Toh Lek (where this rock is found) and Freedom Beach to the North have many boulders, that have recently been cleared by brushfires. The newly manicured boulderfields here abound with new problems that only need a creative boulderer with a wirebrush to help develop.

