

BY ARMANDO MENOCAI

# MUCHO PUMPITO (II 5.10b)

Viñales Valley, Cuba

"The best 5.10 in the world"



Dave Barnett clutching a stalactite on P2 of *Mucho Pumpito*, Viñales Valley, Cuba.

**THE BEST 5.10 IN THE WORLD**—it's a big claim for a two-pitch sport route in western Cuba. Yet that's the consensus among those who've climbed on the elbow-deep pockets of *Mucho Pumpito*, in the island's Valle de Viñales. As the British climber and writer Mikey Robertson effervesced, "*Mucho Pumpito* is the best 5.10 I've ever done, and in the top five of all climbs." And Lynn Hill called *Mucho Pumpito* the "juggiest climb I've done [anywhere]."

*Mucho Pumpito* ascends the chiseled, 200-foot overhanging edge of a limestone cathedral, La Bóveda de Las Españolas. The wall is a fantasyland of big-wall-style sport climbing: steep angles, big air, and technical descents. (Without a secondary line to tram into the wall, you could find yourself stranded in space on the rappels.) It's north facing (read: shaded) and gets a sea breeze, too.

The climb marks a Cinderella story of sorts—for many years, *Mucho Pumpito* sat in obscurity until, almost by accident, its exquisiteness was discovered. Even after this, *Mucho Pumpito* went unnamed by its first ascentionists, three Americans—Cameron Cross and Craig Luebben, of Colorado; and Dave Ryan, an Exum Mountain Guide, of Wyoming—known for establishing long, classic lines on Cuba's three-dimensional limestone.

In March 2000, Cross and Luebben climbed a three-pitch route called *Pssst*. To link its harder faces, they ascended the steep, striking corner of the main wall. To their astonishment, the pitch, which overhung 40 feet in 90, was only 5.10b. Ryan, who later found the direct first pitch (also 5.10b), confirms the grade, saying, "Even after timing out my pump clock three of the five times I've climbed [*Mucho Pumpito*], I've got to admit there aren't any moves harder than 5.10b." Subsequent climbers quickly linked the two 5.10 pitches.

But the route hadn't become *Mucho Pumpito* yet. It was only when a visiting John Middendorf, flamed and gunning for a stalactite rest on pitch two, yelled "*¡Mucho pumpito!*" to his belayer, Jim Donini, that the route was christened. After that, the name just stuck.

In 2002, a team of talented gritstone climbers including Seb Grieve and Tim Emmett added Cuba's hardest route to date—Emmett's *The One-Inch Punch* (5.14a). After climbing *Mucho Pumpito*, Grieve could not be restrained. With a Cuban cigar in his teeth and a glass of aged rum before him, he proclaimed, "That climb we did today was world-class. If it was at any of the top climbing areas, it would be the absolute best, without a doubt."

JIMMY CHIN

## The Beta



You'll currently find no guide services, printed guidebooks, or equipment shops for Viñales (as such, local climbers greatly appreciate gear donations). Your best bet for comprehensive Beta is to visit [cubaclimbing.com](http://cubaclimbing.com).

Also, see "El Castillo Illegal" (p.26) for a look at Cuba's "outdoor gym" of El Morro castle, overlooking Havana Bay; check out *Climbing* No. 248 for Beth Wald's feature on Viñales; and click [climbing.com/exclusive/classicclimbs](http://climbing.com/exclusive/classicclimbs) for a route topo, more classics in Viñales, and the lowdown on the mysterious climbing history of La Bóveda de Las Españolas.

SHOW US YOUR PHOTOS OF MUCHO PUMPITO AND WIN LA SPORTIVA CROSSLITES!

Log onto [climbing.com](http://climbing.com)'s Photo Post and submit your images to the Classic Climbs folder. We will pick our winner on July 15!



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