

Soul Training

Stephanie Forte finds inner strength in Las Vegas

"It weakens your tendons to wear rings. But I wouldn't say no to two carats," says Stephanie Forte, who works at the American Gem Society. Diamonds are ... well, you know the line.

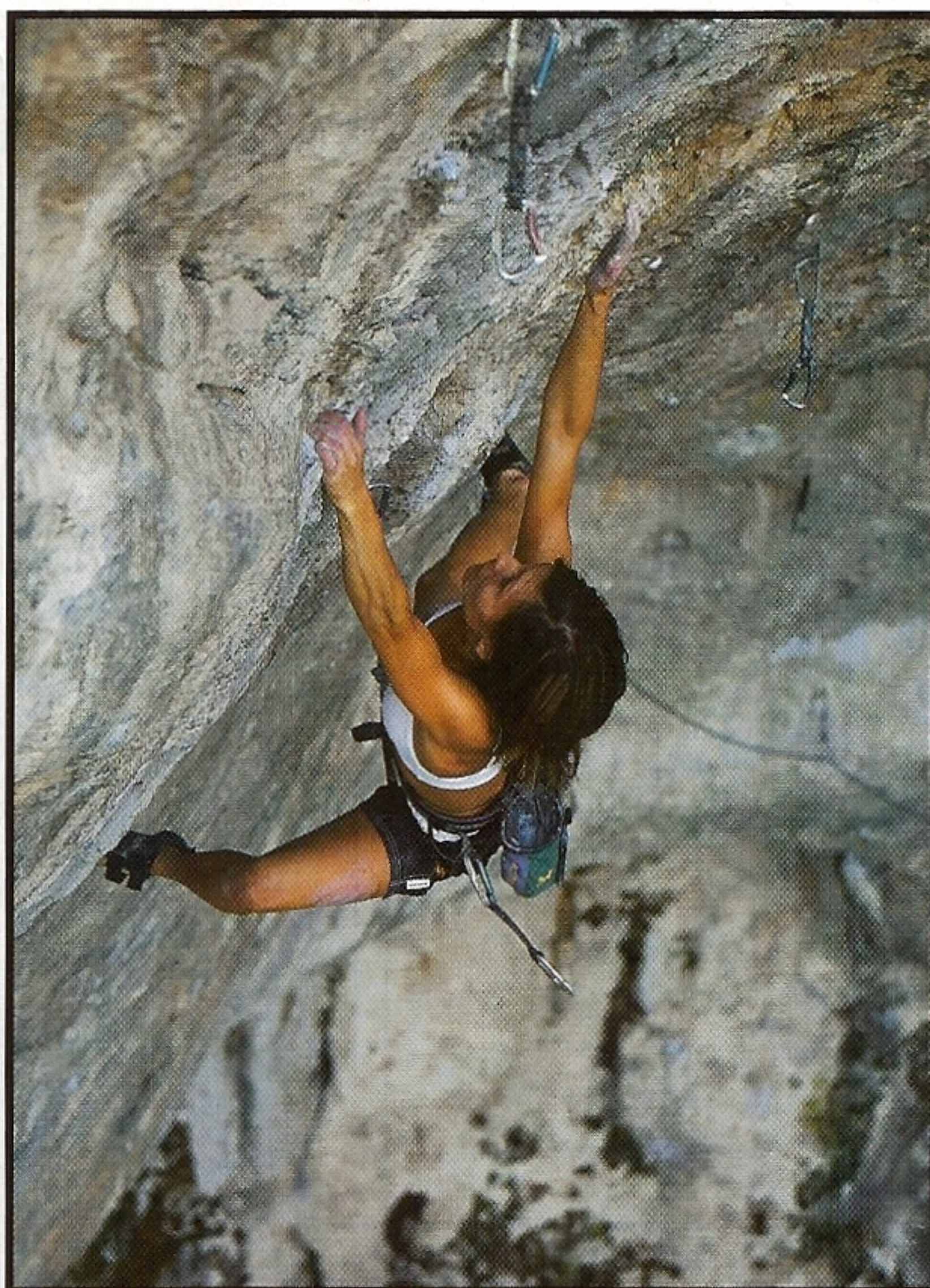
She probably knows *this* line as well as anyone — *Soul Train*, at Mount Charleston, Nevada, that is — her latest milestone in limestone. She worked on it "forever, it seemed." Her colleagues would ask her every Monday, "Did you send?" They had no idea what that really meant — but they knew what it meant to her.

A year ago October, Forte moved to Las Vegas. After a miserable six-week layoff because of tendinitis, she began again, gently, climbing 5.10s. After Christmas she built up her endurance on 5.12s. Then, in June, she climbed Mount Charleston's *Infectious Groove* — her first 5.13b. In September she climbed *Ghetto Boys* — her first 5.13c. At the end of November she climbed *Soul Train* — "I figure they're going to downrate it to 5.12, now that I've done it!"

Joe Brooks had been calling the short power-stamina route 5.14a. Others took the grade and thanked him. But Jason Campbell, who made the first ascent, always thought it 5.13d. For most, the crux is a two-finger undercling, low on the route. Forte, who is 5-foot-1, found the hardest part near the top: Where taller people pop for a big jug, she would make a power-sapping dyno for a crimp, lock it, and cross.

Faced with winter, Forte thought she'd try her hand at bouldering. In a couple of trips to the Happy Boulders, California, she sent the powerful pocket and crimp problem *Chollos* (V9). Now, if she can keep the rings off of her fingers a while longer ...

PHILIPPE MAUREL



With better things to come: Stephanie Forte on *Ghetto Boys* (5.13c), Mount Charleston.

smokes Sharma Europe

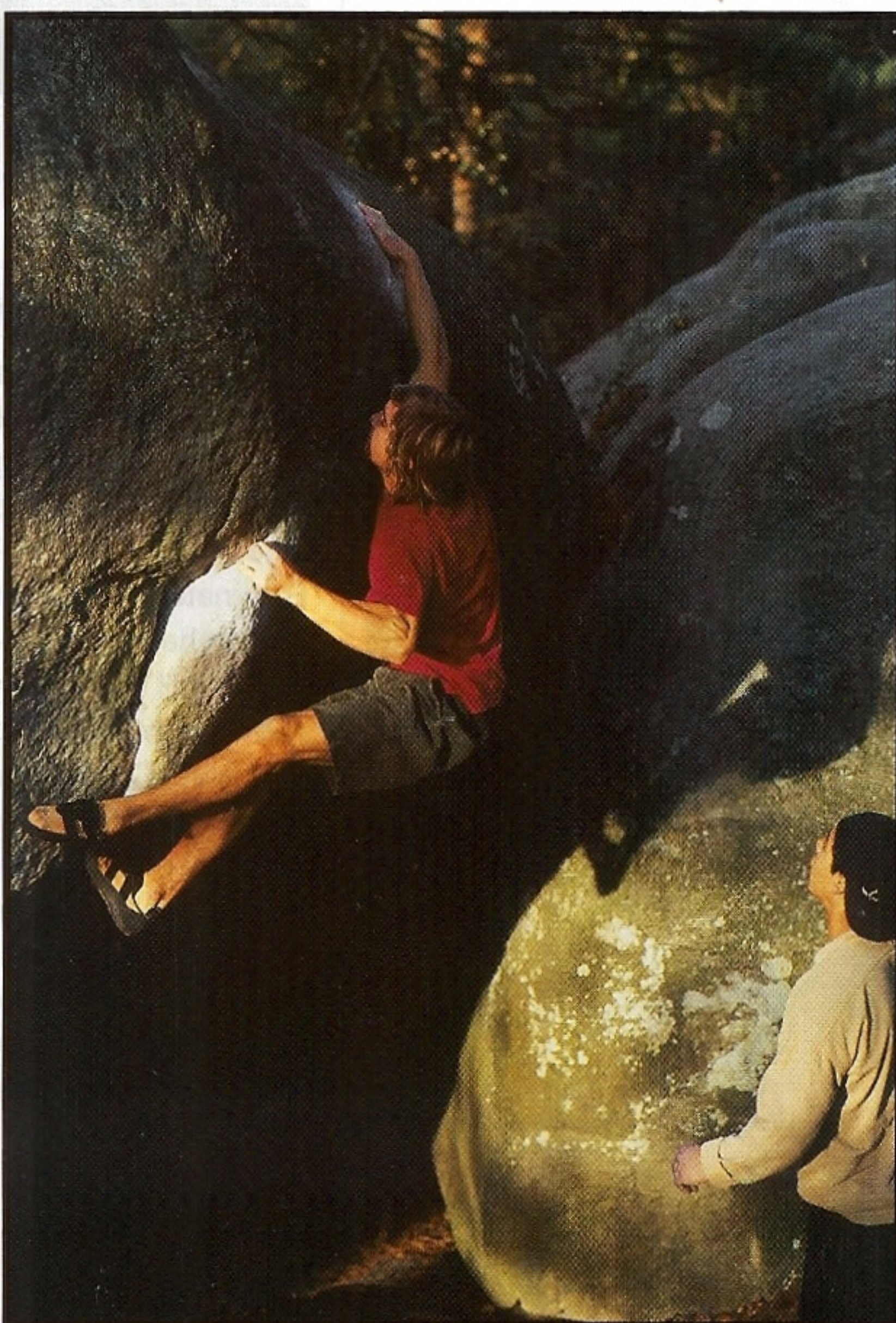
Switzerland, France, and ... uh ... Amsterdam

Chris Sharma may have been unlucky at the Arco Rockmaster competition in Italy this fall (see Inside Game No. 191), but, even after the four days of consecutive climbing there, he surprised everybody with his bouldering during a day-trip across the border to Cresciano, Switzerland. This is a granite bouldering area discovered and largely developed by Fred Nicole. Sharma pulled many of the classics, worked an unclimbed problem almost to success, invented a one-handed trick dyno, and flashed *La Grotte des Soupîrs* (The Cave of Sighs), a hard Font 8a (V11/12).

Soon after that short trip, Sharma returned to Europe late in the fall to boulder at Fontainebleau, south of Paris. Between long rainy spells, and a trip to Amsterdam, he was able to climb a few of the area classics, and one or two testpieces. One of the latter standouts was his ascent of *Karma* (another Font 8a, or V11, featured in the video *The Real Thing*). This is a powerful problem involving a long swinging deadpoint over a rounded bulge to a small crease, followed by a body-pumping, arm-cramping drag to the summit. The problem played to Sharma's strength — which is, well, strength ... and he did it without much difficulty.

On the whole, however, Sharma found the rounded sandstone intriguing. "I have so much more to do there ... so many projects left undone. It's just really hard climbing. You'll try a hard problem over and over again, until you find you can move your hip a millimeter to the left and then ..."

STEPHAN DENYS



Sharma on one of Fontainebleau's most famous problems, *Karma* (V11).