

NOTES ON CLIMBING IN THE BRITISH
ISLES 1957-9EDITED BY A. BLACKSHAW¹THE LAKE DISTRICT : *by J. A. Austin*

Perhaps the most outstanding feature of recent Lakeland climbing has been the striking increase in the number of leaders prepared to attempt climbs previously held to be in the hardest category. Old 'hard' routes such as Do Not, Harlot's Face and Hell's Groove are becoming popular and Kipling Groove is well on the way to becoming a classic. In this connection it is interesting to note that with the repetitions of Trespasser Groove by A. Austin, R. B. Evans and B. A. Fuller, and Ferrous Buttress by H. Drasdo, all Arthur Dolphin's major routes have been repeated.

In Langdale, J. Brown and J. Smith did a very hard climb in White Ghyll, Eliminot. It goes directly up the overhangs to the chimney of Perhaps Not, and then slants across the overhangs on the right. It was repeated the following Christmas by D. Whillans, and later on by P. Ross. The obvious and oft-attempted groove on the left of Slip Not has now been led by G. Oliver, who named it Moss Wall. On Gimmer, two short but exposed routes were done. Starting from the Bower, Oliver climbed the arête between the Crack and Kipling Groove, and L. Brown led Inertia, a couple of steep pitches up the grooves on the right of Hiatus, finishing up Grooves Superdirect. On Pavey Ark Austin and Evans worked out a new route, Cascade, up the slabs and grooves above the start of Hobson's Choice. Stickle Grooves was repeated by E. Metcalf and J. Ramsden. On Bowfell that very fine climb, the Sword of Damocles, has had in all about a dozen ascents. Opinions vary a little, but it seems to be accepted that it is not quite so difficult as Deer Biold Buttress, and that these two routes are the most difficult of Dolphin's climbs.

On Scafell the Scots repaid the Sassenach with interest when R. Smith and D. Leaver did two routes on the East Buttress, Leverage and Chartreuse. Leverage especially is a very fine climb starting at the foot of Mickledore Grooves and continuing up in more or less a straight line. One of the 'last great problems' of the Lakes was solved this summer when G. Oliver and L. Willis climbed the groove above the

¹ I am very much indebted to the contributors, who have made these Notes possible.—A.B.

second stance on May Day using chockstones and a piton. Another route, Pernod, was made by Oliver and F. Carroll up the groove on the right of Mickledore Grooves. L. Brown and C. E. M. Yates climbed a steep and impressive line to the left of Overhanging Wall, naming it Moon Day. In 1957 the second ascent of Slab and Groove was made when R. B. Evans and B. A. Fuller repeated it after a lapse of nine years. 'The best single pitch on Scafell,' they said. Oliver and Willis also made a new climb named Vandal between Routes 1 and 2 on Pillar Rock. It is similar in character to its neighbours, but seems to be a considerably more difficult undertaking.

Thirlemere becomes ever more popular, although the heavy traffic is still confined to Overhanging Bastion and Zig Zag. Thirlemere Eliminate was repeated by Brown and Whillans, then Austin and Evans. It does not seem to be as difficult as was first thought, although instead of traversing left on the last pitch all subsequent parties have continued straight up the groove following the way of Brown and Whillans—a much more impressive finish. Angel's Highway had its difficult section short-circuited by Brown's start, but Greenwood's original pitch gives far better climbing and, unlike Triermain Eliminate which seems to be very hard, has had several ascents. New routes keep coming and it seems as if one can climb anywhere on Castle Rock, if one is good enough! G. Oliver has made a route Agony, crossing Zig Zag and Overhanging Bastion to finish up the arête on the left of Zig Zag's upper pitches. P. Ross led another route, Rigor Mortis, sharing stances with Thirlemere Eliminate. Its main pitch, an impressive open groove above the first stance of Thirlemere Eliminate is probably the most difficult piece of climbing in the valley. The second and third ascents of Delphinus, surely one of Lakeland's finest climbs, were made by E. Metcalf and J. Ramsden, and J. A. Austin, R. B. Evans and Miss J. M. Ruffe. It was found to be not so difficult as was expected, and has now seen eight or nine ascents.

Over the hill in Borrowdale the pace has slackened slightly. P. Ross, G. Woodhouse and F. Carrol girdled Eagle Crag, and Ross led a new route to the right of Falconer's Crack using several pitons. Post Mortem was repeated when Whillans, seconded by Ross, led the second ascent. On Great End Crag J. A. Austin and B. A. Fuller contributed a couple of vegetable routes with Redberry Wall and Slime Groove, and Ross led another two routes Shroud and Vertigo up the steep left-hand wall of Black Crag.

In the Eastern Crags developments have been numerous and extensive, and climbing there is fast being brought into line with the rest of the Lakes. On Scrubby, H. Drasdo has been active on his guide-book work and has produced three good new routes; Grendel, the impressive central groove, made an excellent V.S. of medium

difficulty; another groove to the right yielded Deflected Route, a more difficult climb, and across the right wing of the crag the steeply exposed line of Firedragon gave a beautiful but difficult little climb. To the left of Grendel, N. J. Soper and N. Crowther added two more good routes Sennapod and Beowulf. Both are steep, and Beowulf is probably as difficult a route as any on the cliff. On Falcon Crag, Drasdo and G. D. Roberts climbed the central overhanging groove, and Soper led the short but very difficult Falcon Front up the wall on the right. These climbs, along with Drasdo's Brown Study on Hutaple, are shorter and steeper than is usual in this area and are reminiscent of the Three Cliffs or White Ghyll.

Mention must be made of Langdale's development as an embryo piton centre; several pure piton climbs are now in existence.

WALES: *by J. Neill*

In 1957 very little of note was done, due to the indifferent weather—two new routes on Clogwyn-du'r-Arddu, The Mostest led by J. Brown, and Moonshine, led by H. I. Banner; and two in the Llanberis Pass, Grey Wall on Craig Ddu led by P. H. Biven and H. T. H. Peck, and Rameses Wall on Dinas-y-Gromlech led by C. T. Jones. Other new routes were confined to minor exploration and filling in of detail on the central crags, and continued exploration of the outlying crags of the district. Of the latter, the most noteworthy were a fine series of first ascents at Tremadoc by Jones and two good new routes by R. James, one at Tremadoc and the other on Craig Nyth-y-Gigfran in the Moelwyns. Due to the weather very few of the hardest climbs on Clogwyn-du'r-Arddu and in the Llanberis Pass were repeated.

In 1958, however, the continued poor weather did not prevent a larger volume than ever before of climbing of the highest standard, and the majority of the hardest climbs were repeated. Such climbs as Cenotaph Corner and Cemetery Gates were repeated half a dozen times or more. The finest repetitions were the second ascent of Subsidiary Grooves on Cynr Las by H. I. Banner and J. O'Neill, and the second and third ascents of the Girdle Traverse of the East Buttress of Clogwyn-du'r-Arddu by Banner and O'Neill (the latter's first visit to the crag!) and by M. J. Harris and C. T. Jones. Banner and O'Neill made a new girdle of Cynr Las, and two new ascents on the Three Cliffs, Rackstone Crib and Karwendel Wall. J. Brown led two new routes on Clogwyn-du'r-Arddu, No-vember and the Shrike. Jones also did two new routes there, Brwynog Chimney and Beanland's. In Cwm Silyn, Jones made a hard new girdle of Craig-yr-Ogof. Other first ascents in the central areas were again of a minor nature. Further explorations on outlying

craggs included the first ascent of Ferdinand, on Clogwyn-y-Wenallt, by Brown and Jones (so far the most formidable free climb in Nantgwynant), a further series of good new climbs at Tremadoc, almost exhausting the possibilities, by Jones, and a fine girdle of Craig Nyth-y-Gigfran, in the Moelwyns, by R. James.

In 1959, a fine summer at last, the pattern of events in 1958 was repeated on a larger scale, so much so that the easiest of Brown's routes became standard climbs for the ambitious leader. Even Cenotaph Corner has become 'très classique'. Practically all the very hardest climbs (i.e. those harder than Cenotaph Corner) were repeated. Of these can be mentioned Woubits (led by H. I. Banner, C. J. S. Bonington and H. Smith), The Mostest (Banner, Bonington), The Shrike (Banner) White Slab (H. Smith, Banner and two other leaders), Black Cleft (Banner, J. Smith), Slanting Slab (H. Smith), Red Slab (P. Walsh, J. McLean, J. Brown), Girdle of the East Buttress, Clogwyn-du'r-Arddu (J. Smith), and Vember (7 leaders—H. Smith, P. Gordon, Bonington, Walsh, McLean, J. Smith and a seventeen-year-old in the rain). Only one major route on Clogwyn-du'r-Arddu, Taurus, remains unrepeated, apart from the two new ones mentioned below. The Girdle of Dinas-y-Gromlech, however, has not yet been completed by a non-Rock and Ice Club party. The only new routes of importance are two on Clogwyn-du'r-Arddu, one on the Far East Buttress left of Woubits by Brown, and The Troach on the East Buttress by Banner. A few routes have been made on outlying crags, much less important than in previous years—evidently intensive exploration is exhausting the possibilities—and only very minor ones in the central areas.

One new guide-book has been produced—a rewriting by A. J. J. Moulam of the Cwm Idwal volume, including now the climbs on the flanks of the Cribin ridge.

THE PEAK DISTRICT : *by E. Byne*

Although several years ago it seemed that the Peakland crags had been almost fully worked out, the new climbs which have recently been discovered are more than worthy to rank with the best of the past.

Many of these are on the great cracked roof overhangs which various gritstone edges offer. A. Mullan's Twin Eliminate at Laddow, and Whillans' Sloth at the Roches, started the fashion for such routes. Brown and Whillans became the overhang specialists, the former leading the Cave Crack at Froggatt and the Dangler and Quietus at Stanage, whilst the latter added Strapiombo at Froggatt, and The Unprintable at Stanage—all routes of extreme severity and exposure. Of these, Quietus which takes direct the great Neb of Stanage High Neb, is perhaps the most sensational, and probably still awaits a second lead.

The year 1958 was a vintage one for hard new climbs on grit. On the Roches Lower Tier, Brown added four V.S. routes—Ackit, Choka, Rhodren, and Crack of Gloom, the latter of which takes the left wall of the great Raven Rock Gully. Whillans also provided Slippery Jim, a hard V.S. climb, two bays left of the well-known Tech Crack. At Stanage, Brown proved that the Cave arête could be led, discovered Jeepers Creepers on the next Neb to the right of Quietus—and then invented his famous Esso Extra, a hard V.S. climb (with a classical ‘left toe jam above the left ear’) to be found on the steep left wall of the Tower Gully.

Meanwhile Bamford Edge with its bold exposed promontory of the Great Tor, had been receiving much enthusiastic attention. G. J. Sutton, and others from the White Hall Open Country Pursuits Centre, had started the ball rolling with such routes as Hasta La Vista. This was followed by a series of visits by J. A. Austin and R. B. Evans who added eleven V.S. routes, winding up with the ascent of the Hard V.S. Undercut Crack. Brown and J. Smith came in at the death and produced their fine A.35 which takes the large overhang about 18 ft. from Austin’s Undercut Crack, at a slight weakness in the roof.

The most striking development of the last few years has been the increase in limestone climbing. The High Tor of Matlock has yielded two more fine routes to P. Biven and T. Peck, Stoney Middleton has been the scene of constant activities by the Sheffield University Mountaineering Club, and the valley of the Wye from Buxton down to Mousal Dale is receiving the regular attention of G. West and his companions of the Manchester Gritstone Club. This valley, comprising Cheedale, Miller’s Dale, and Water Cum Jolly, bids fair to become a great limestone climbing centre of the future, giving innumerable buttresses and walls which have yet to be tried and explored. Of those that have been climbed, the most notable are the great long, cornice-like roof in Water Cum Jolly, and the great crag of Ravenstor in Miller’s Dale. The latter has given West a route called Hubris, the bottom 30 ft. of which is an overhanging wall of smooth limestone without a fault or excrescence over a frontage of 50 yds., which could only be overcome with expansion bolts.

There is no doubt that artificial climbing on Peakland limestone has come to stay. It is as yet in its infancy, but with more and more gritstone climbers turning to limestone in the winter months, there is no doubt that the progress and development will follow rapidly. At Curbar, Insanity was first led by H. I. Banner, and the well-known Treewall lost its tree. Despite this, Brown proved the wall is leadable, although the climb is now admitted to being one of the hardest on the Edge.

The year 1959 on grit saw the consolidation of Millstone Edge as the

recognised gritstone pegging ground. Since details were published in the Vol. IV of the *Gritstone Guides*, many new routes have been added, although it must be stressed that several of the older pegging routes have been ascended clean.

Although there was a dearth of new free climbing routes, the Roches Lower Tier has been girdled, several new routes were done on the great crag of Dovestones Quarry, and at Chatsworth Whillans led the Sentinel Rock Nose, direct. This excessively severe climb takes the great crack to the right of the Puppet and judging by the numerous efforts which had been made by the Rock and Ice tigers, it must be one of the hardest routes on grit. New routes of the future will undoubtedly be either of this calibre, or else difficult problems on the shorter buttresses not previously explored.

An important feature recently has been the extensive exploration of the numerous disused gritstone quarries around the northern limits of the Peak District. Typical examples are 'Shooters Nab' on the edge of Deer Hill Moss, due south-east of Marsden, and the Den Lane Quarries in the Saddleworth Area. Both areas give about 200 climbs up to 100 ft. in length.

IRELAND : by *B. MacCall*

While the nearby cliffs of Wicklow—Camaderry and Luggala—still attract climbers and produce new routes such as 'Cornish Rhapsody' it is to Donegal and Connemara that we are now going for the best climbing. To the dedicated rock-man the Poisoned Glen at the foot of Errigal in North Donegal is a place to dream about and it is there that much of the most interesting exploratory climbing is taking place. Glen Inagh in the Twelve Bens has provided very severe routes of 1,000 ft. and over but nothing to compete with routes such as 'Nightshade', 'Route Major' and 'Dubliners' on the granite of the Poisoned Glen. While shorter by far, they have a character unequalled by the vast quartzite faces of the Twelve Bens. The south of Ireland continues to be a guide-book editor's nightmare, with hundreds of isolated cliffs in Kerry, Waterford and Cork, but the general conglomerate and sandstone have given little hope of any great new discoveries.

In the Poisoned Glen, a number of British climbers made routes of a high standard in 1957, among them Hammer and Sickle, a good V.S. on Craignambrae, by G. Sutton and H. Drasdo, and later in the year, Nightshade, 515 ft. V.S. (R. B. Evans and A. Austin) and Slanting Grooves, 550 ft. V.S. (R. B. Evans, B. A. Fuller, A. Austin and Miss J. M. Ruffe). These last two are on West Buttress and the left of Bearnas Buttress respectively. Nightshade was described as 'one of

the best climbs we've ever done, not of great difficulty, but a real Beauty in situation and quality'. The year 1958 produced mainly a fine 700 ft. H.S. route up the centre of The Castle by Miss Betty Healy, B. MacCall and F. Winder—the Dubliners—but little else of note. H. Drasdo, G. Sutton, E. Langmuir and A. J. Maxfield came over in 1959 and found a number of fine new lines, including Route Major on Bearnas Buttress, and a Dublin rope of S. Rothery and F. Winder made three short routes of a high standard.

The huge quartzite cliffs in Glen Inagh which can inspire a sense of almost Alpine isolation were the scene of much activity. During the Easter holiday of 1957, on the right of the Devil's Col, P. O'Leary, R. Lawlor and M. Lawlor put up High Tension, a 500 ft. H.S. which is probably one of the best climbs made here. Sherpani on Ben Corr (P. Kenny and Miss M. Laracy) provided a 900 ft. severe with 'a rather beautiful overhang on pink fingerholds', and on Bencollaghduff, two 500-ft. severes were led by P. Kenny and H. Quinlan. The highlight of the 1958 summer was undoubtedly a new line to the right of Seventh Heaven on the main buttress. A V.S. done in bad conditions, and about 1,100 ft. long, it was called Mona Lisa (P. Kenny, Miss Mona Monahan, N. Brown and W. E. Bottomley). Later in the summer, a H.S. variant to the first four pitches of the classic Seventh Heaven was done by B. MacCall and Miss Betty Healy, starting from the pedestal up the gully leading to Caveman's Delight on the left. The big corrie above Doo Lough has produced a couple of 1,000-ft. mountaineering routes but has not fulfilled early promise.

There was much climbing of a very high standard on the popular crags of Camaderry. Most notable was a visit from a party consisting of J. H. Deacon, and V. N. Stevenson who put up Cornish Rhapsody, a magnificent 350-ft. X.S. on the Upper Cliffs, which was repeated a few weeks later by Miss Betty Healy, B. MacCall and S. Rothery. Close by, in 1958, R. Wathen and B. E. H. Maden had finished the work of others to make Little Eiger, a 400-ft. V.S. The crux, pitch 2, belongs to the late R. O. Downes, a good friend of many Irish climbers, and the climb is also indebted to Winder, Kenny and Meldrum. Aliens Way has had its second ascent by a native party and these three first-class climbs, along with Cuchullain's Groove, have definitely shifted the centre of interest a little off the main cliff. Spillikin Ridge and Scimitar Crack have both had a number of ascents and a few variants and short routes have appeared.

At Luggala the dry summer of 1959 also bore fruit and the problem of the main face was at least partly solved. In the early spring, Miss Betty Healy and F. Winder at last completed the traverse at the high level, and during August a break was found through the big overhang on the left to provide Spearhead, V.S. (Deacon, Stevenson and Winder).

The main part of the face remains a challenge though not for want of trying.

Printed Guides are now available for Camaderry and The Mourne, and stencilled information appears now and again for the Donegal and Connemara cliffs.

(A section on Scotland will follow in a later issue.)