

Women on the Rocks

Alison Jane Hargreaves

Between the 13 and 26 June 1982, women from 7 countries gathered together in Britain for the first 'International Women's Rock Climbing Meet' organised by the BMC with sponsorship by Camera Care Systems, Europa Sports, Guinness, Karrimor International, Robert Saunders and the Sports Council. The group that finally arrived (with various countries being absent) was a mixture of mountaineers and rock technicians. The group was probably too big and the range of rock abilities too great, so that within only a short space of rock time the group split by ability into 'A' and 'B' teams. The use of two mini-buses and an absence of a player/manager/supremo made the split inevitable.

The team assembled at Porters Pie Shop in Covent Garden (the true centre of British rock-climbing?), on Saturday evening, the British representatives being Bonny Masson, Geraldine Abrey-Taylor, Grace Penney, Antonia Freem, and Alison Hargreaves. The away team being represented by Maire ni Chiosain from Ireland, Katherine Freer and Rosie Andrews from the USA, Renata Rossi and Paola Mazarelli (at the time living in England) from Italy, Susanne Rydfelt of Sweden, Sally Westergard of Denmark, Anne Fyhn and Anne Aurdal from Norway, with Benedicte Reynaud, Colette Villaret and Meije Le Cotier (also living in England) from France. From the BMC came Mark Hutchinson, and he was helped by Simon Horrox (killed on the S face of the Fou only 3 weeks later).

Our London base was Crystal Palace Sports Centre and Audrey Salkeld was our Liaison officer. Slightly late, but well fed we retired to the Alpine Club, where Ken 'wiz' Wilson gave a superb audio-visual on the delights of British rock-climbing. Sunday dawned and the Sobell Sports Centre was the venue for 'meet the Press' and warm-ups on the climbing wall, followed by a mystery tour (no-one knew the way) to Harrison's Rocks. Here the multi-linguist Ian McNaught Davis, 'wiz' Wilson, and Trevor Tullis ring-mastered the team around. The more well known ascents included Unclimbed, Bulging and Birchden Walls and The Niblick.

Monday, away to the north, we joined the rest of the British ladies (Sarah Williamson, Janet Robinson, Fiona Percy and Angela Soper) at Stoney café. Based, as we were, at the North London Mountaineering Club hut near Hathersage, it was soon gritstone time, and with 1001 man-eating midges, Stanage Edge was the afternoon venue. Many of the classics were climbed including, Right and Left Unconquerable, Congo Corner, Flying Buttress Direct etc. . . . A keen team were at Millstone Edge by 9.00 am—which was fortunate as by the afternoon

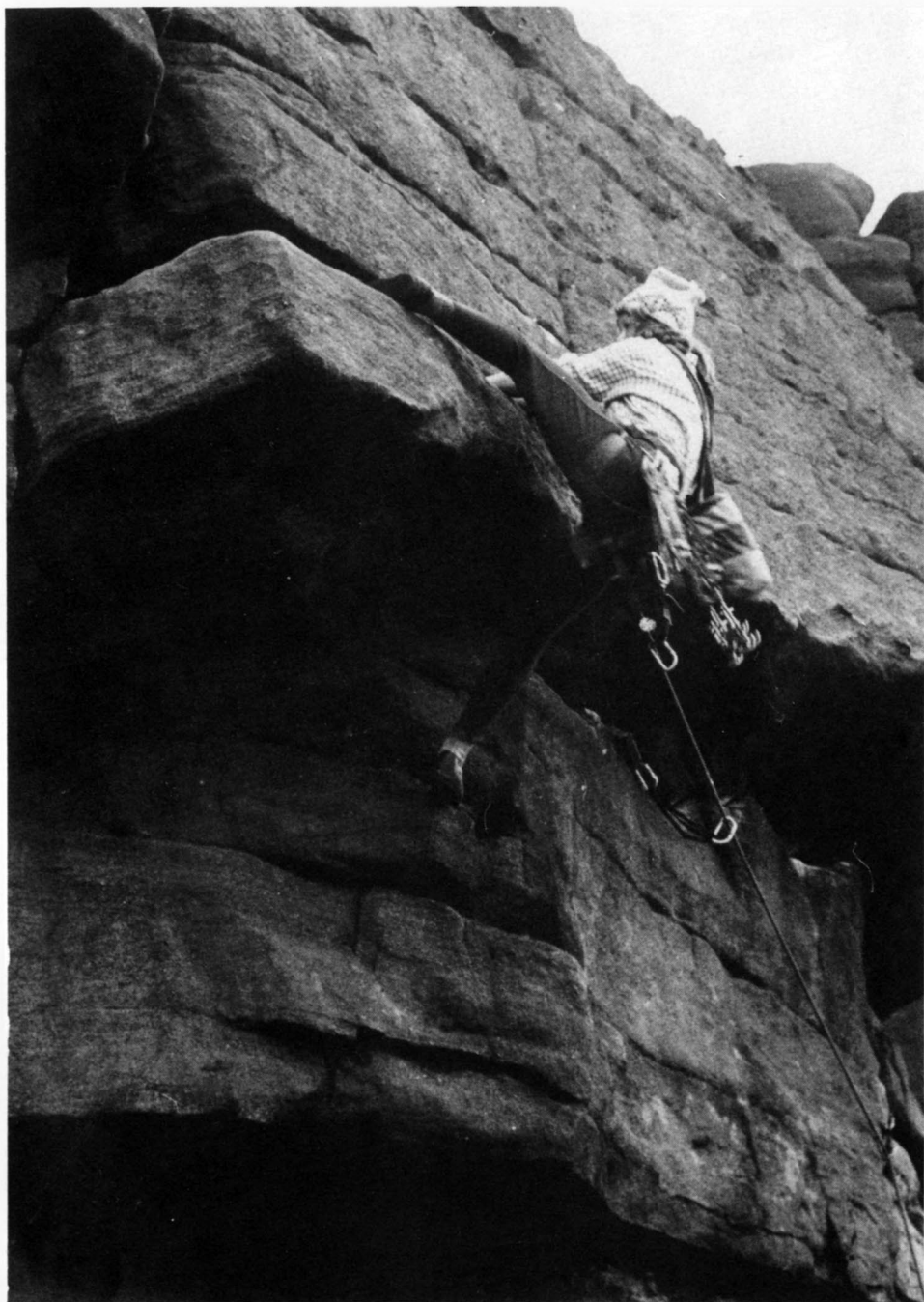


Photo: Jim Ballard

rain poured down. However, several routes of quality were climbed, including Regent Street, Great West Road, Embankment routes, Lyons Corner House, Bond Street and The Mall. A sunny Wednesday found the 'A' team on High Tor climbing Debauchery, Original Route, Highlight, Darius and others, whilst the 'B's wrestled on Willersley Castle Crag. Even though Thursday was only a half day, the 'A's managed, L'Horle, Right Eliminate, Scroach, Peapod and The Toy on Curbar Edge, whilst the others collected Valkyrie and Tody's Wall on Froggatt Edge. That evening Karrimor International provided a Victorian meal, complete with seven courses, snuff, roses, a Barber Shop quartet and Fred Smith.

Friday was spent on a rainy journey to Wales, but a sunny evening saw the still keen ones on Tremadoc, Fang, One-Slip, and Leg-Slip. In the evening more English girls arrived including Gill Price, Cath de Mengel, Brede Arkless, Stella Adams, Christine Crawshaw, Pat Taylor and Jill Lawrence. Saturday was 'spot the dry crag' day, although Tremadoc dried out later, and we climbed The Plum, Grasper, Goreagle, Grim Wall, Merlin and One Step in the . . . , etc. With the weather being so unkind, it was a late team that arrived at a buffet-disco provided by courtesy of John Barry and the staff of Plas-y-Brenin.

Eureka, sunshine, Sunday, 'A' team to Gogarth for Rat Race, Strand, Park Lane, Fifth Avenue, T. Rex, Quartz Icicle, If, Concrete Chimney and Dream . . . The others socialised in the Pass on the Corner, Cemetery Gates etc. Monday, rain stopped play, and Tuesday we travelled to the Lakes, smart organisation? However being based at the Fell and Rock Club hut, Raw Head, even the continuing rain was not enough to stop the action. Katherine Freer (USA) and Alison Jane Hargreaves rebelled, and knocked off West End Wall on Pavey Ark and the 'Hard Rock' classic, Kipling Groove on Gimmer in the rain, whilst the rest either climbed at Trowbarrow Quarries or scrambled up Bow Fell. This damp and greasy day was rounded off by a meal at 'The Moon' in Kendal by courtesy of Jess Stock and his Europa Sport team. The last official day was at least dry, if dull, and the majority put the classics of Shepherds and Black Crag in their place, whilst the 'A' team accounted for North Crag Eliminate, Agony, Harlot Face and the other two Eliminates. The team split up on the Friday, and after an orgy of photographs, dispersed. However our American cousins stayed on and accompanied by either Jill Lawrence or Alison Jane Hargreaves (or both), between them accounted for, in Derbyshire, Tippler, Dangler, Rasp and Robert Brown, and in Wales, Supercrack and Wonderwall.

The meet was marred by the indifferent weather and due to sponsorship commitments the route travelled was longer and more complicated than it need have been. I think that the meet was an unqualified success. As the first ever women's rock meet it was a great pointer to the future, and for the sake of mainstream women's rock-climbing, we need more.