



***Buckland Hill climbs
Bwlch***

Martin Crocker

Climbing in the Brecon Beacons National Park

Buckland Hill, Bwlch

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Front Cover: Looking eastwards from Boulder 4, Buckland Hill.

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E grades coupled with UK technical grades are used for the solos. V grades (in combination with UK tech grades) are used for the bouldering, but please feel free to convert to Font grades. No attempt has been made to V-grade anything less than 4c.

Rescue

In the unfortunate event of an accident requiring assistance ring **999** or 112, ask for **Police**, and then state you need **Mountain Rescue**.

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The crags are located on Access Land. Further information may be available on the BMC's Regional Access Database (www.thebmc.co.uk/rad). For access issues please contact the BMC's Wales Access and Conservation Officer or local volunteer access representative (www.thebmc.co.uk).

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BMC Participation Statement

Climbing, hillwalking, and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept those risks and be responsible for their own actions and involvement.

|  | | CRAG CODE www.thebmc.co.uk |
|--|--|--|
| Access | Check the Regional Access Database (RAD) on www.thebmc.co.uk for the latest access information | |
| Parking | Park carefully – avoid gateways and driveways | |
| Footpaths | Keep to established paths – leave gates as you find them | |
| Risk | Climbing can be dangerous – accept the risks and be aware of other people around you | |
| Respect | Groups and individuals – respect the rock, local climbing ethics and other people | |
| Wildlife | Do not disturb livestock, wildlife or cliff vegetation; respect seasonal bird nesting restrictions | |
| Dogs | Keep dogs under control at all times; don't let your dog chase sheep or disturb wildlife | |
| Litter | 'Leave no trace' – take all litter home with you | |
| Toilets | Don't make a mess – bury your waste | |
| Economy | Do everything you can to support the rural economy – shop locally | |

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Buckland Hill, Bwlch OS 146214

An unusual Old Red Sandstone outcrop of solid unquarried rock overlooks the Usk Valley next to Bwlch, northwest of Crickhowell. It provides some good quality, if in places rather dusty, bouldering and micro-routes up to 6 metres on a series of mini-butresses and walls. Precocious pockets and sizzling slopers make for some great bouldering action; nice views too.

The crag is a pretty good winter venue since it mostly faces south to southeast and is sheltered from any howlers from the north. However the rock is porous and the east-facing walls tend to stay wet, gathering dirt over winter (however, they offer shade in summer): a soft brush may help. Probably the best time to visit is during spring before the bracken and brambles go bonkers and when the east-facing walls have dried out. Bring a mat as there are a few hidden blocks around.

Approach

Take the A40 to Bwlch, northwest of Crickhowell. Turn into Buckland Hill, which is also the name of the minor road on the west side of the A40 (which leads to kennels); the junction is just uphill from the New Inn. Follow the road for 300 metres to a right bend where there is parking for three cars max. Follow the track on the left and, after a gate, take the left fork up the hill for 100 metres before turning left on a smaller path that contours the edge of the hill overlooking the Usk Valley. This path eventually leads to a platform at the top of the crag (above Boulder 1).

I only came across this crag because a local, who'd used it for some years, suggested it might be worth a look (and it deserved some form of guidebook). But that was back in 2016 or so, and maybe things will have moved on again since. Anyhow, the crag has been climbed on for many years and route-naming, if any, is patchy. With a bucket-load of research it might be possible to chronicle a history including route names. Meantime the obvious problems and solos are described here. Other route-sequences, including tortuous sit starts, appear to have been worked out, but they currently defy my understanding (and ability no doubt): apologies for these and other omissions.



The routes are described from right (northeast) to left (southwest).

Boulder 1

A pleasant sunny boulder which is suitable as a warm-up venue, rising to just over 5 metres. It is the first crag encountered on the approach

1 V1 (5b) The right arête, starting with an awkward pull (no tree stump). It feels pretty high.

2 4b Step onto a sloping shelf and climb the face via the obvious pocket.

3 V0 (5a) Climb the slight rounded rib left of the obvious deep pocket.

4 4b Three metres from the left-hand end, climb up pockets starting from the obvious foothold.

5 4c Tiny. Start from a block in the ground, and take pockets in a slight rib to top.

6 V1 (5c) Traverse left to right; easy after the first three metres.



Boulder 2

Approaching from Boulder 1, you pass under an overhanging 6-metre high northeast face.

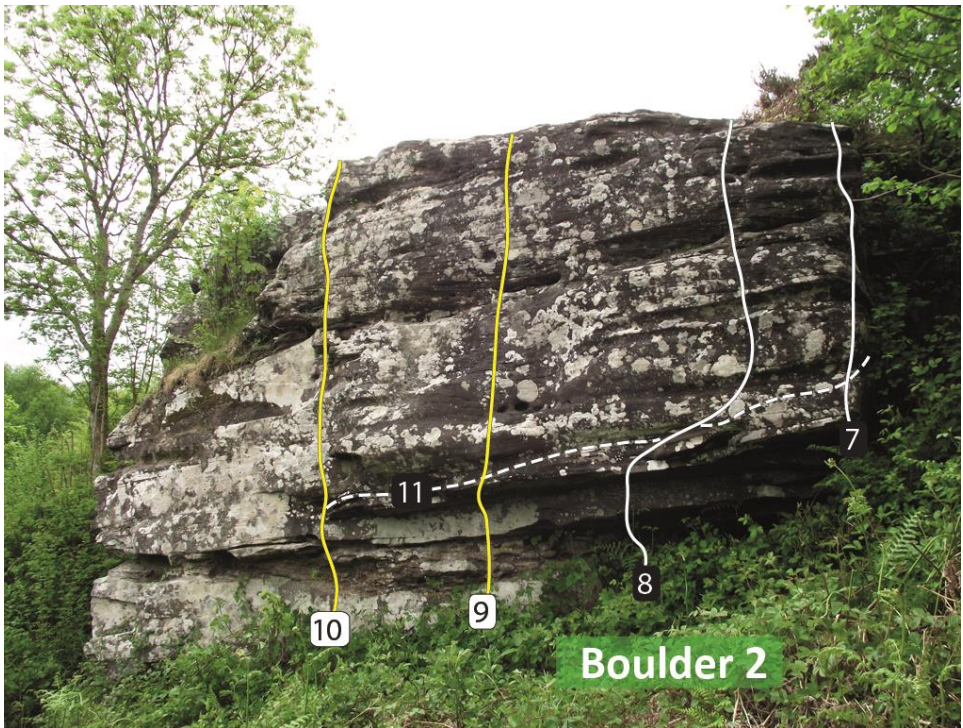
7 4b The right arête from standing.

8 V4 (6a/b) Sit start two metres left of the right arête, fingers on narrow scooped shelf. Power diagonally right onto sloping breaks and reach direct to an easy finish. (V1 5c eliminate from standing.)

9 *6m E2 5c (V2) Start in the centre of the wall; gain the 'eye-sockets' on a shelf; then forge direct up the face with left foot in a large open pocket. A delicate and bold mantel completes.

10 6m VS 4c Climb the flakes and rib above to the top, incorporate a sit start for extra value.

11 ***Rickenbacker TwangBand** V4 (6a) A low pumpy left-to-right traverse from problem 9. Take sloping breaks rightwards always keeping low, and finish by hand-traversing around the right arête.



Around the corner to the left, in the sunshine again, are the following route and a fine clean 4-metre high wall above a platform.

12 6m E1 5b/c Reach-dependent. Start two metres left of the right arête. Pull up to a bulge and make a long (or an extra) move to the obvious deep pocket; finish more easily. Boulder beneath.

13 4c Sit-start the crack at the right end of the platform and exit with an exposed mantel.

14 4b The wall just left.

15 V0 (5a) The wall left again, the grade depending on which – if any – pockets you allow yourself to use to get started.

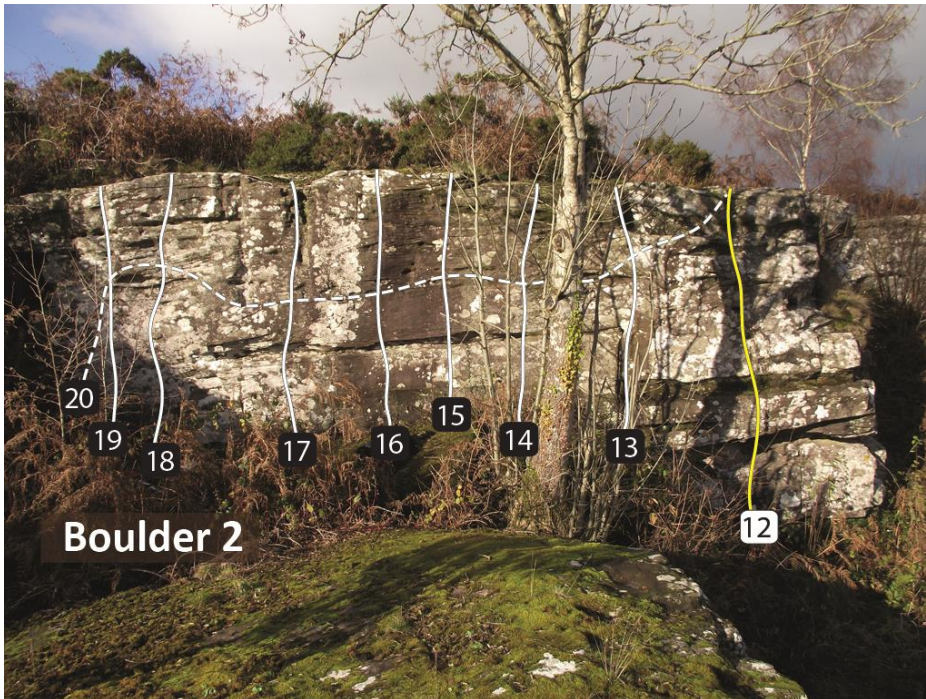
16 *V0+ (5a/b) The superb pocketed black wall (can see) using the mono high left. Swing left to mantel out.

17 4b The obvious runnel on good layaways.

18 *V2 (5c) The white face direct (without using the large pocket on the right).

19 V0 (5a) The white face immediately right of the left edge, with a sloping mantel exit.

20 ** V3 (6a) The sustained left-to-right traverse mostly with feet a metre or so up; exposed once the 'comfort' of the platform is passed.



Boulder 3

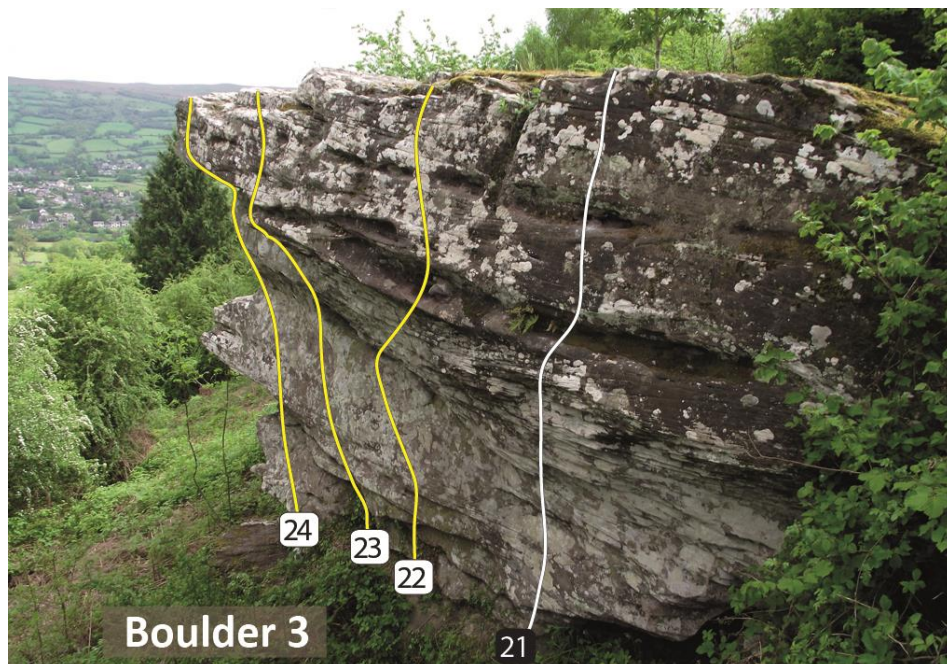
Below the platform is another northeast facing wall that ends in a high prow.

21 *V3 6a Sit start at the right-hand end and take obvious crimps up the bulging wall to a sloping break over the lip; strenuous moves via a finger-slot lead to the top.

22 **6m E2 6a (V3) Start in the centre of the wall. Reach a superb thread for left hand and span high right for good holds including a huge red sandstone 'pebble'. Match the finger-edge above and stretch and stretch to close it out.....

23**6m E1 5b Spectacular jug pulling just right of the prow. Gain deep pockets, reach the projecting jug, and shoot for the top.

24 6m E3 5b Escapable, and with a dire landing. Start below the prow. Keeping right of the arête (not used) make a long move up a smooth wall for small finger pockets. Gain more pockets above and reach up the prow for the top. A serious mantel concludes.



Down to the left of the prow is a low projecting roof: a stone 'diving board'.

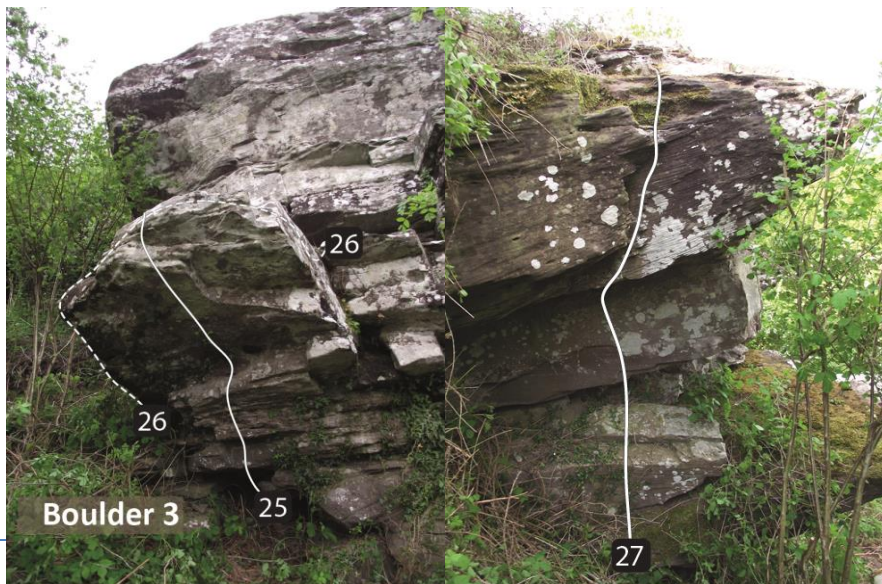
25**V4 (6b) Start from sitting deep under the roof with right hand in a finger pocket. Gain the deep pocket above, reach high up left and mantel (desperately, if tall) over the lip. (None of the holds on or right of the right arête are used for hands or feet at this grade: feels natural this way.)

26 V0 5a Hand-traverse the roof from L to R.



Around to the left is a roof; unfortunately the rock beneath it is rotten.

27 V1 (5c) Start from standing but – without using the rectangular block at the base – ape up the hanging groove to exit on a wonderful flake.



Boulder (Cluster) 4

Just to the west is a series of short buttresses that are more open and sunnier than the rest. During times of high undergrowth it might be desirable to descend the short slab far left (about V Diff), or approach via a track left again. Beware the hidden blocks on the ground.

On the right is a 6-metre high buttress with an ivy-afflicted and rather unstable roof, best avoided.

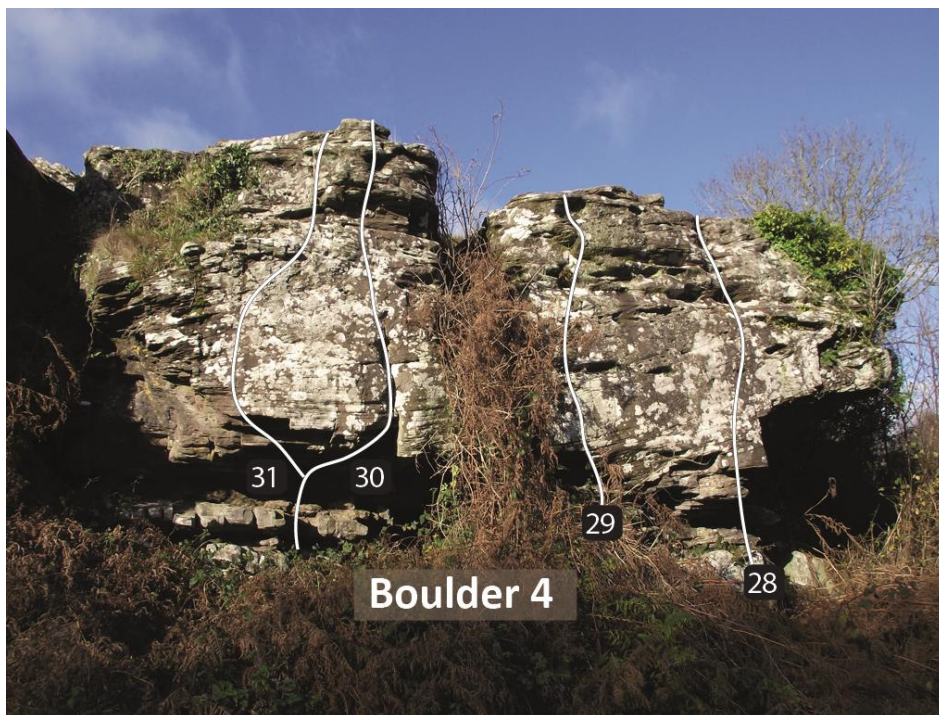
28 *V1 (5c) Make hard pulls up a rib just left of the roof to finish up a runnel containing a delicious mono-thread. Finish under the right end of a block sitting on top of the cliff.

29 V2 (5c/6a) Make a fierce pull over the roof just right of the left arête and finish more easily.

And on the second buttress...

30 **V4/5 (6b) One of the best here. Start very low under the roof, hands on a projecting finger-ledge. Power up and right to grab a large pocket in the crack and lay one on for the break above. Finish direct up the prow, with interest. The standing start is good too: *V3 (6a).

31 * V2 (5c) Start at the projecting finger-ledge but swing up left for good holds and then back right onto the face for a strenuous finale.



And on the third buttress...

32 *V0 (5a) The right arête past the block jug and a long finishing reach.

33 V0+ (5a/b) Surmount the roof just right of the left arête; then make pleasant, if rather high, moves to the top.

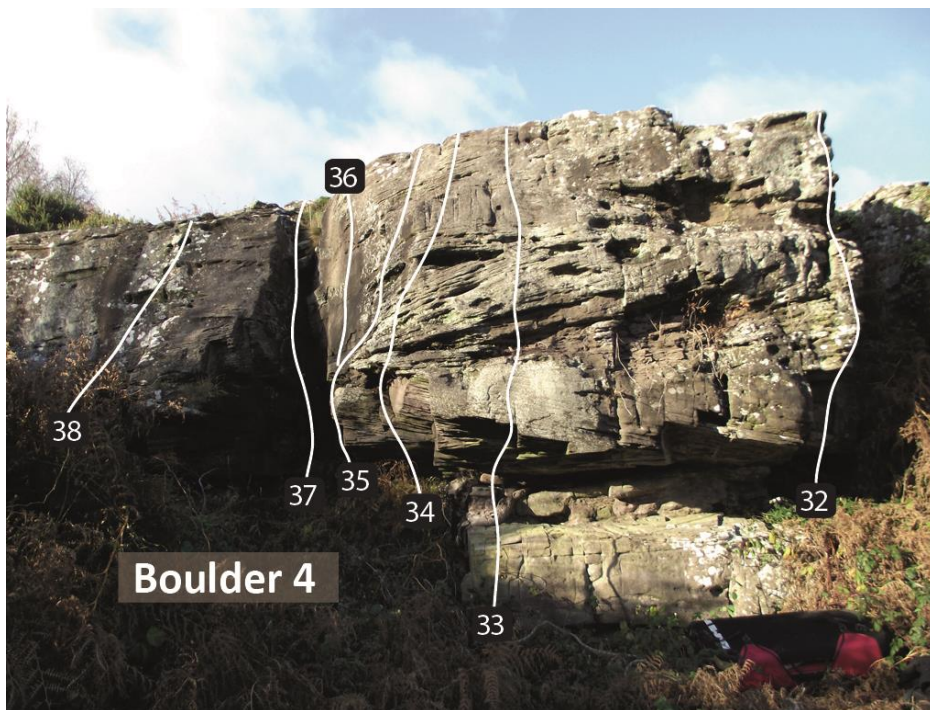
34 V0+ (5b) The left arête of the roof with a strenuous (and bramble-dependent) pull; an easy arête lies above.

35 4c Hop up right over the roof to an exposed mantel finish.

36 *V0- (4c) Take the black right wall of the cleft on gorgeous pockets.

37 4b Bridge up the wide cleft.

38 V Diff The short 'descent' slab.



Boulder 5

One hundred metres to the west the cliff reemerges as a fine 5-metre high wall, one of the best pieces of rock here and certainly the cleanest. Much fun can be had eliminating holds and making life hard for yourself. The exits feel high.

39 V1 (5c) The little undercut groove.

40 *V3 (6a) The blank looking wall via a powerful move from a sloping crimp to a high pocket. The mantel exit is OK.

41 *V4 (6b) Sit start at the right edge of the low alcove, stretch for and share a sloping crimp and reach up right for another. Gain the break and mantel out.

42 *V1 (5b) From the low alcove on the left use any holds to reach a thread in the break. Climb the right-hand side of the prow exiting with a trouser-filling mantel.

43 *V3 (6a) Hand-traverse the shelf on the left, move right with hands in the break and pockets and continue on slopers to bridge across the chimney. Hand traverse the subsidiary block on the right down to the ground.

