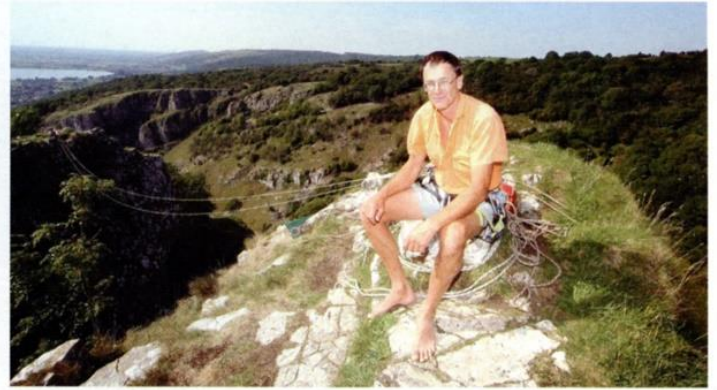


CHEDDAR GORGE TRANSFORMED

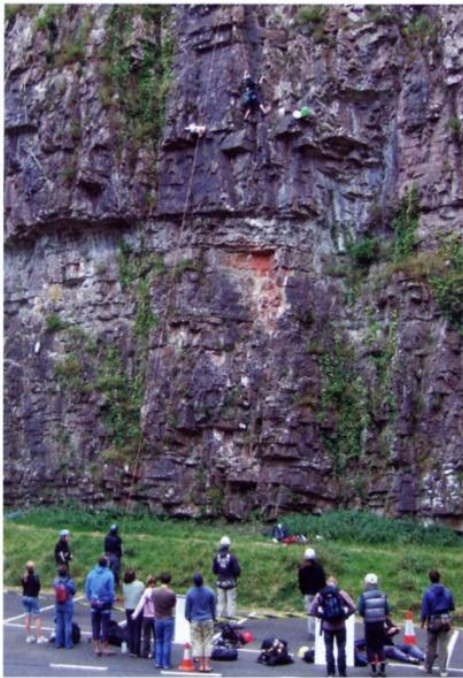


Above: Martin Crocker author of *Photo-guide to Restored Climbs in Cheddar Gorge*.
Left: Nigel Elliott on the 450ft high Tyrolean across Creeps Gully in front of 200 guests. SWNS

A recent celebratory picnic was held at High Rock, Cheddar Gorge to showcase the new and vastly improved access to over 300 traditional and sport climbs. Over 200 guests (including Sir Chris) have all played a part in the development of 450ft high Cheddar Gorge.

The hosts were Hugh Cornwell, Director of Cheddar Caves & Gorge, which manages Lord Bath's Somerset estates, and Martin Crocker, author of *Photo-Guide to Restored Climbs in Cheddar Gorge*. Climbers have visited Cheddar Gorge for the last 50 years but have had limited access because of restrictions imposed due to the area's status as a Special Area for Conservation and Site of Special Scientific Interest. Also, most of the climbs stretch above the road and car parks which receive half a million visitors a year. Cheddar Caves has spent over one million pounds during the past 17 years trying to care for this spectacular karst limestone landscape, its wildlife, rare plants and animals as well as meet the needs of climbers and visitors. Now, finally, after years of negotiation and hard work, the Gorge is open to summer climbing again. *Climb 19* featured an article by Martin Crocker highlighting the new access arrangements.





Above: Katy Holden and Guy Percival of Legal Eagles with balloons still intact on the High Rock Rap.



Above: Mark Stevenson of Army Mountaineering wrestling with the crux roof of *Dada* (F7a) – the 'difficult climb' that proved too easy for most!

CRAG ATTAK

Following postponement in July due to severe weather, Cheddar Cave's Crag AttaK event successfully took place one dry September Sunday in Cheddar Gorge.

Organised by West Country climber Martin Crocker, and hosted by Cheddar Caves & Gorge (the owners of the main cliffs), this friendly outdoor climbing competition aimed to raise money and awareness for a regional charity: Children's Hospice South West. It also sought to ratchet up the profile of the Gorge as a rejuvenated climbing site.

The showpiece was the Cheddar Man Marathon, a six-discipline course challenging 12 two-person teams of climbers from across the country. Gathered shivering at 9.30 in a cool and windy Gorge, a sketchy demo of the introductory hard route by the organiser flatly illustrated that this was not a day that they should take too seriously. Almost everyone flashed this 'F7a', with Gary Gibson (for team Manic New Routers) striking a blow for middle-aged-man by clocking up the fastest ascent: '6b+' he was heard to scoff past the bit in his teeth.

One by one the teams moved onto a race against the clock up Jacob's Ladder, 274 steps up the side of the Gorge. Fastest to the Gorge rim were Bristol Cream members Adam Mulholland and Matt Rawlinson – the latter celebrated their record ascent by emptying his stomach contents while Adam recuperated with a fag.

Soaring beyond was the Heaven's 900, a gruelling run that proved to be the undoing of many an ill-developed pair of legs or world-weary body. Here, Army Mountaineering members, Mark Stevenson and Mike Smith blew the competition away, thanks to Hard Rock Challenge-honed fitness and getting up to a bugle at 5.00am every morning(!).

For most, our 60-metre tyrolean strung between the top of The Amphitheatre and High Rock, 400 feet above road-level, proved to be the literal high-point, and – for those who wore them – a real trouser-filler. Naturally team Undercover Rock members Julian Walker and Mike Robertson wore skirts instead, tackling the tyrolean topless, but paying the price with rope-burned love-bites that Miss Whiplash would charge 50 bucks for.

Next came the High Rock rap, a full abseil descent of High Rock with team members trying not to snap a fragile cord that suspended a race of balloons between them. With a delicate touch most succeeded, including team Legal Eagles solicitor Guy Percival and Katy Holden, the former typically in a work-suit and 'on call' ready for a Court appearance at the drop of a balloon.

The Cheddar Man marathon was rounded off by its speed climb, most parties making it through the awkward HVS in just over a minute, despite



Ivy-Man wins the fancy-dress, before being chased down the gorge by hungry goats.



12-year-old Claudia going for broke on the Open Speed Climb.

the attentions of silver-tongued MC Duncan Massey, his amplified abuse echoing through the Gorge.

The marathon was convincingly won by Bristol Cream (Adam Mulholland and Matt Rawlinson), second place was earned by consistent Army Mountaineering (Mark Stevenson and Mike Smith), and in joint third place were ITV West (John Alcock and Ben Bransby) and the BMC (Rob Adie and Richard Simpson).

Running parallel to Cheddar Man were various open climbing events, the best attended being the Speed Climb: Adam Mulholland clocked up a winning 64 seconds first attempt on this F6a.

Food, fine local ale and a prize-giving ceremony ensued, the latter topped by an announcement by Hugh Cornwell, Director of Cheddar Caves & Gorge that the new climbing arrangements would be allowed for a second trial year. That was the icing on the cake of what proved to be a fun-packed, safe and unique day. As Louise Turner, Community Fundraiser for CHSW said in one of the news bulletins that went out on ITV next day: 'we do a lot of cream teas and jumble sales, but this was something different for us!'

For those interested, a short film of the event by freelance broadcaster Jo Morrison will be posted on a local web-site (to be announced); check it out as a taster for next year's event – all being well in the local climbing world!

Thanks are due to supporters Undercover Rock, Avon & Somerset Search and Rescue Service and Taunton Leisure, and additionally to The National Trust, Cheddar Ales, The Gorge Outdoors, Geronimo, and *Climb* magazine. And thanks especially to all the climbers who took part, raised sponsorship, and made an effort to be seen to support Cheddar Gorge climbing and Children's Hospice South West.

Martin Crocker