

Culver Cliff climbs, Walton Bay

by Martin Crocker



Culver Cliff climbs

A guide to the climbs of Culver Cliff, Walton Bay, North Somerset (OS ref. 423743)

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Front cover: *Engineered for Speed* (F7c/8a+). Pic: Jonathan Crocker

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Abbreviations Used		Grades	
BMC	British Mountaineering Council	D	Difficult
ASSAR	Avon & Somerset Search And Rescue	VD	Very Difficult
RoW	right of way	S	Severe
m	metre	HS	Hard Severe
km	kilometre	VS	Very Severe
FA	first ascent	HVS	Hard Very Severe
Soloist	A self-belay device that enables ground-up lead-climbing without a partner	E1 – E7	Extreme
BR/BB	Bolt runner/bolt belay	F	Sport grade
		V	Bouldering grade

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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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History

The first ascent details are the record of the history, but I have inserted notes of style of ascents as some routes required a fair amount of effort. Clevedon resident Jack Bradbrook and Bristol firebrand Guy Percival repeated most of the routes in 2019 and expanded Culver's repertoire at the higher grades. (Thanks to them and to Jack's dad, David Bradbrook, for their notes and pics.)

Culver Cliff, Walton Bay, North Somerset

A special thank you to my son, Jonathan, whose patience and sense of fun enabled me to battle on overhead. We got to know Culver Cliff simply as ‘The Cliff’, our time there shadowed by an old radio, jammed in the boulders, which moved positions at each new spring tide (still there in 2020).

The Crag

Culver Cliff is an unusual Old Red Sandstone sea cliff beneath a coastal signal station (now a private residence) on the southwestern fringe of Walton Bay. Funny; I had coasteered back and forth here since I was a kid but observed: ‘nah, surely not’. That outlook changed in the noughties when closer inspection revealed the rock to be better than its desert-red colours might suggest. Cue another affair with Martian stone, intense for three years.

Culver Cliff explodes with super-steep athletic sport routes mostly on whopping holds – undercuts, pinches, and even jugs. (Rather like Stair Hole, at a stretch of the imagination, and equally overhanging.) The main, cave area of the cliff faces west to northwest and – while pretty sombre in the winter – gets plenty of air and afternoon/evening sun at other times. The cliff is tidal, but access is only precluded two hours either side of high spring tides. One of the nicest times to climb here is during neap afternoon high tides – anything under a 10m tide should see you unimpeded rather than underwater (but do your research first). Care is required with the rock, especially above half height.

After sustained heavy rainfall the cliff seeps like the love for a lost one and then remains dripping for some time. Conversely, once dry, it can stay so for a long while – even well into the winter.

Approach and Layout

On the coast road (Walton Street) between Walton-in-Gordano and Portishead park on the wide grassy verge opposite the entrance of Coast Caravan Park (it is assumed that this verge is part of the highway but that may not be the case: no problems have been encountered to date). Walk northeastwards along the road for 100m; then take the narrow tarmacked road on the left immediately *after* a letterbox and bus stop (this is the *second* left). Walk along this road for 50m and turn left again following the RoW downhill into Walton Bay Caravan Park. Wind down through the mobile homes to intercept the coast path. Turn left (southwest) onto the coast path, and follow it for 400m onto a low headland (bench just left of the path): Culver Cliff is directly beneath this point. Continue downhill along the path for 150m until able to scramble down onto the foreshore; you’ll see Culver Cliff back to the northeast.

Ethics and fixed gear

As at Ladye Bay and High Cliff bolts have been used here, since natural protection is very limited. However a small number of unbolted trad routes harmlessly complement the bolt routes, including the not-to-be-unseen *Saw 1*.

Caution: fixed gear

The bolts are 12mm or 10mm through-bolts with Petzl or Fixe hangers, but there are some glue-ins too: all stainless steel. (Most of the through-bolts have been resin-glued too, for extra stability.) There are several single bolt belays which, ideally, should be doubled up in the future. All bolts date from the first ascents. **Some fully bolted sport routes offer one or two good nut/cam placements and you are well advised to take a small rack with you to back-up and supplement the bolts.**

No fixed gear is completely trustworthy. In line with the BMC Participation Statement you must realise that it is your decision and yours alone if you choose to use the bolts.



Culver Rift Area

Situated around the corner (northeast) from the Culver Cave Area, the action centres on an 8m high wall of superb pocketed dolomitic conglomerate and a deep cave rift. There are two cemented steel spikes in the ledge above the pocketed wall which can serve as the belay for the first four routes (**but you must back them up**). It is possible to climb easily down to the left from the belay ledge.

1 **Hurricane** 8m F6c (20.4.2013) [3BR]

Pull through the black bulge with one powerful move; then trend right to the top.

FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)

2 ***Innocent Man in a Living Hell** 8m F6b+ (20.4.2013) [3BR]

Move up to the substantial bulge and reach a deep pocket above. A few strenuous moves between more pockets lead onto the centre of the wall and easier climbing.

FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)

3 ***Submit to the Deranged** 9m F7a (20.4.2013) [3BR]

The hanging flange; bizarre and dynamic. Move up to a bottomless groove left of the flange. Make wild moves out right onto the flange, and reach a bucket just under its apex. Mantel frantically over.

FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)

4 ****Saw 1** 10m E6 6b/F7b+ (26.7.2013)

The monumental cave-roof crack; trad protected (but see the FA notes for the reasoning behind the split grade). Some of the gear around the lip is difficult to place but is sound when you've got it in properly. Climb the left wall of the rift and move up into a gloomy niche under the roof. Span left for abrasive finger-locks in the crack and commit to a series of gut-wrenching moves around the roof. Battle on up the crack to ledges, place gear; then traverse left to the steel spikes.

FA: Martin Crocker (unseconded). *Originally tried ground-up placing all gear legitimately on lead on 2.5.2013; the attempt got two-thirds way up but was thwarted by wet holds and raw fingers. On the FA the route was dogged ground-up and the gear left in place for the redpoint ascent immediately after. An on-sight flash with all gear placed on lead awaits!*

The next two routes end on a ledge at 7m right of the rift: there is a cemented steel spike here (**but you must back it up**). To descend: scramble off to the right.

5 **Getting into Glamour** 8m E1 5b (16.5.2013)

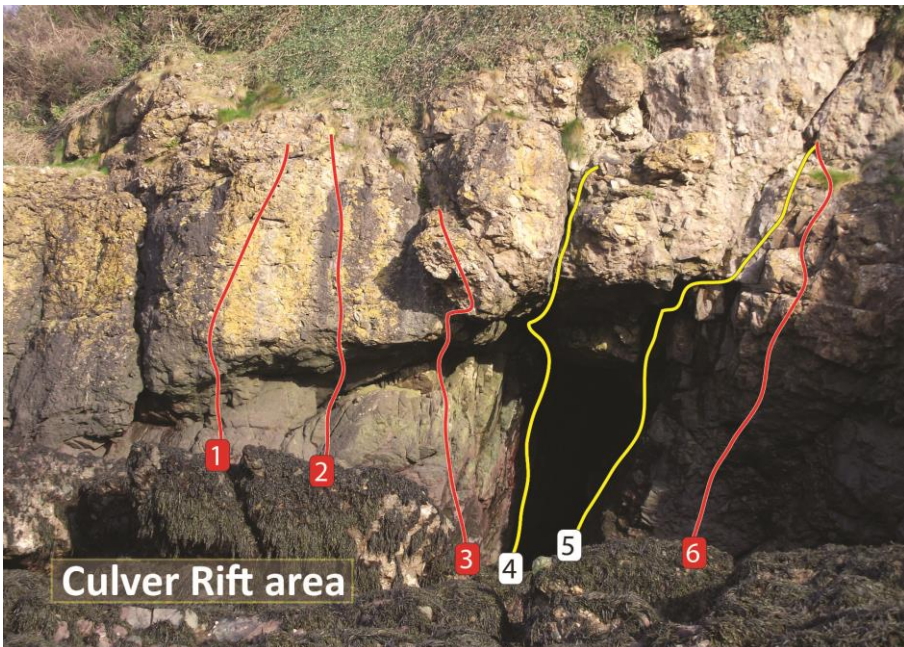
Climb easily up the right edge of the rift into a short bottomless chimney. Gain jugs on the right; then work around the roof into a groove, which leads to the steel spike and nut/cam belay. The difficulties are acute but well protected.

FA: Martin Crocker (on sight, unseconded)

6 **Slaterhead** 7m F6c+ (4.5.2013) [3BR]

Looks a cinch – hhhmm..... Start just right of the rift. Follow a strenuous line rightwards up the leaning red wall. Mind the serious first clip, and don't pull too hard on the holds because they might break off!

FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)



Culver Cave Area

7 ***Transcendental Flagellation** 12m F6c (27.4.2013) [3BR]

A useful grade on this cliff, but not a warm-up for us mortals. This is the overhanging groove left of the cave roof. Scramble up breccia and then power up the groove (using some holds out left) before stepping right using a red sandstone block to the BB above.

FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)

8 ***Indisputable Imagination** 12m F7b (19.7.2014) [3BR]

Intense and ‘out there’. Though resorting to the first two bolts of *TF* this route is materially different. Clip bolt 2 of *TF* and step back down onto the top of the breccia. Span far up right for a finger-lock in a short hanging crack – and spin out. Desperate moves gain a jug up right. Traverse right on the lip of the prow past a third bolt 3 to easier ground. BB of *TF* on the left.

FA: Martin Crocker (5th redpoint attempt, unseconded)

9 *****Swingers** 12m F7c (5.7.2014) [8BR]

Canny improvisation – or blatant strength – this is the left-to-right right line of scallops and finger-jugs across the 8m cave ceiling. Step up onto the ledge on the left. Swing right; then muscle out right to latch a sharp finger-jug. Gain the hanging flake overhead and make punishing moves to better holds over the lip. A quick heave and you’re at the 2BB. ‘Nice one!’

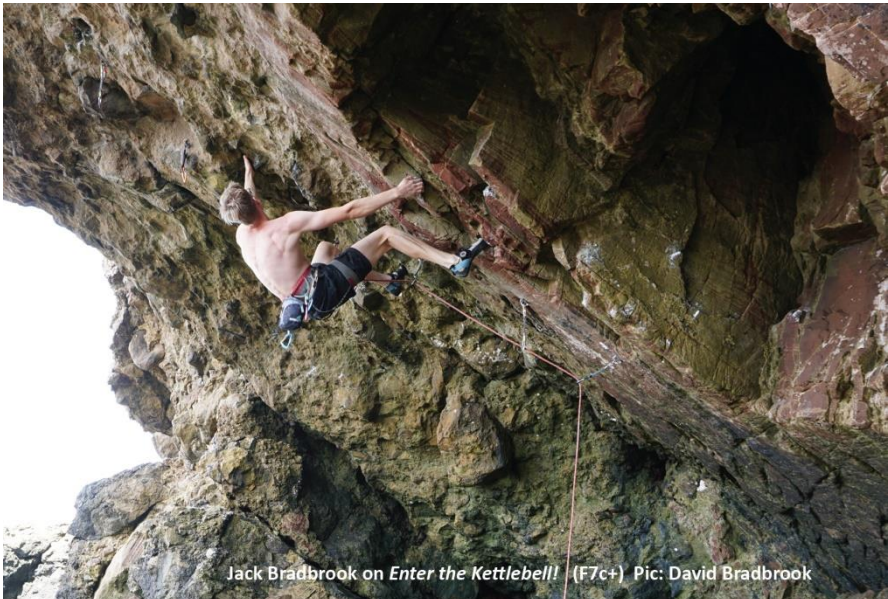
FA: Martin Crocker (4th attempt redpoint on third visit across two years, unseconded).

Originally worked via the underlying hanging crack as far as the jugs above. This variation presented hideous belaying problems from a puddle so it was ditched in favour of the line described.

10*****Enter the Kettlebell!** 12m F7c+ (30.8.2019) [10BR]

An even swingier version of *Swingers*! Pull into the left side of the large hollow under the roof. Fight your way up and around the left arête of the hollow, and then fling yourself across the hanging wall to jugs halfway up *Swingers*. Now just keep on swinging.

FA: Jack Bradbrook (1st redpoint attempt)



Jack Bradbrook on *Enter the Kettlebell!* (F7c+) Pic: David Bradbrook

11 *****Old, Red, & Smoking Hot** 12m F7c (23.5.2013) [7BR]

The left-hand (and wilder) start to the mighty roof rodeo of *Engineered for Speed*. Pull into a large hollow under the roof; optional thread. Undercut right to a finger-jam, reach up and then right again, and – if *smoking* – gain the stabilized flake on *Engineered for Speed*. Big moves lead past a crucial reach at the lip and over into a short finishing-groove.

FA: Martin Crocker (2nd redpoint attempt on second visit, unseeded)

Sadly a big sea in 2020 knocked out a jug 4m on the common start of the next three routes. Use a hand-sling on bolt 3 to retain the original grades or boulder it out like Hamish Potokar at F8a+.

12 *****Engineered for Speed** 12m F7c [F8a+] (2.5.2013) [8BR]

The first route to conquer the cave roof: a Stair Hole-like challenge: flabbergasting and flab-blasting power endurance roofwork. Start right of the large hollow in the roof at a rightward-diagonal crack in the first wall. Gain a (missing) jug in the roof at 4m (bold, so stick-clip the first or a higher bolt); then make athletic moves to a jug under the fawn-coloured facet. Stretch up left and then gain a stabilized flake. Big moves lead past a crucial reach at the lip and over into a short finishing-groove.

FA: Martin Crocker, (1st redpoint attempt on second visit, unseeded).

13 ***In 57** 9m F7c [F8a+] (3.7.2013) [4BR]

Ends in limbo except for those with *Percivance*. Start right of the large hollow in the roof at a rightward-diagonal crack in the first wall. Follow *Engineered for Speed* past the missing jug to a jug under the fawn-coloured facet. On/off moves lead up the shallow groove to an obvious undercut and rightwards to a **single** ring BB.

FA: Martin Crocker (unseeded) *after many flyers and flappers on his 57th birthday. The route extended the doomed *Mosquitos & Meteorites* 7m F7a+ (22.9.2012), *the original nibble here.*

14 ****Percivance** 12m F7c+ [F8a+] (28.10.2019) [7BR]

A brilliant, strength-sapping continuation of *In 57*. From the undercut (and single ring bolt) carry on determinedly up sandstone fins to the BB of *A Heart as Big as the World*.

FA: Guy Percival (2nd redpoint attempt on fifth visit). *In the first three sessions I found about four different ways (all hard) and a made a few pathetic RP attempts....*

For those with even more tenacity there is **Wigflex**, a F8a link-up between *Old, Red, & Smoking Hot* and *Percivance*; FA: Jack Bradbrook (21.10.2019; 6th redpoint attempt on fourth visit).

A ‘two-finger dent’ proves critical connecting the jug of *Old Red...* and the undercut atop *In 57*.

Keep your ear to the ground for more mega-link-ups from members of the Order of Culvernists!

15 ****A Heart as Big as the World** 12m F7b+/7c (11.9.2012) [6BR]

Sensational and unrelenting. Start under a hanging niche at 6m. Reach a finger-jug for the right hand; then make long moves to better holds in and around the niche. Pump up over the bulge; and fire left along undercuts to a final bolt in a fin. Done in a heartbeat! BB above.

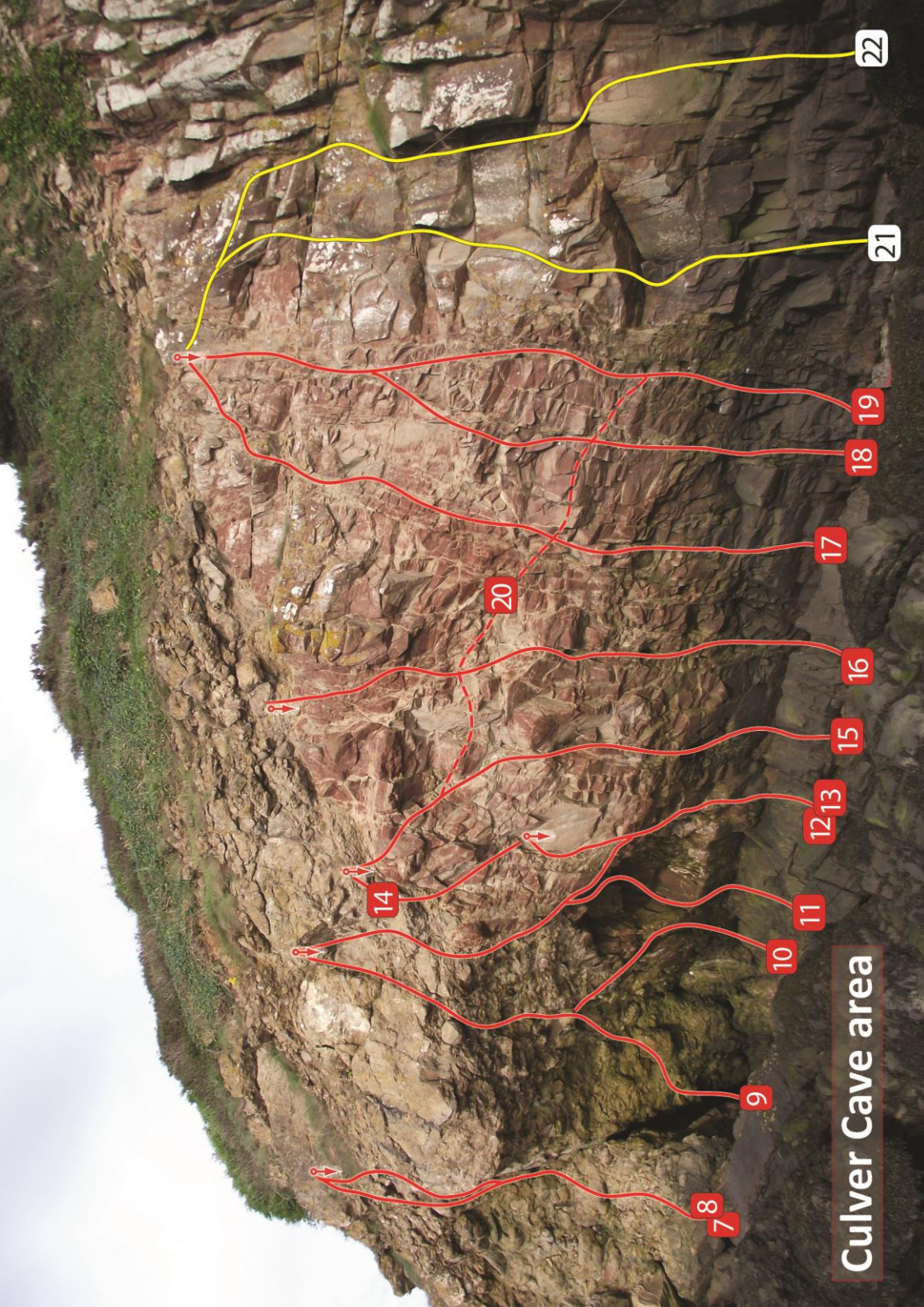
FA: Martin Crocker (1st redpoint attempt, unseeded)

16 ****Blistering Blake** 13m F7c (24.8.2012) [6BR]

A potent and very sustained pitch in the centre of the cliff which overhangs 6m; start below a line of spaced pockets. Follow the pockets, which aren't as easy to use as appearances suggest, and make a very trying sequence over a bulge onto undercuts on the headwall. Reach for a jug in the shaky rib above, and make a final tricky move to finish up a soft and crumbly few metres. BB.

FA: Martin Crocker (4th redpoint attempt, unseeded)

Culver Cave area



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17 ***Lightning Bolt** 15m F7b+ (16.8.2012) [7BR]

Undercutting galore on a strong line; high in the grade. Start under a vertical slot at 5m. Link undercuts via complex manoeuvres and proceed with fingery moves and pockets until it is possible to step up right to a rest on vertical ground. Reach up left of a bulge for a hidden jug; then, using the huge hollow layaways at first, bear right to the 16mm stainless steel threaded bar abseil station.

FA: Martin Crocker (1st redpoint attempt, unseconded)

18 ***Insane Ussain** 15m F7b (10.8.2012) [5BR]

Unusually (for Culver) this one's down to first finger-joint. Undercut a large pocket; then snatch up the leaning wall using holds either side of the bolt-line. A superb undercut above and left of bolt 3 maintains the momentum before a quick pull right over a bulge (reasonable Rock 6/7 placement) gains the resting-place on the next route. Climb the wall above using a jug on the right to clip the 16mm threaded stainless steel bar abseil station.

FA: Martin Crocker (1st redpoint attempt, unseconded). *On a later date, while working the traverse, a useful hold ripped at the crux; re-climbed 29.9.2012, the grade jumping from F7a+ to F7b.*

19 **My Grain (The Shimmering)** 15m F6c (10.8.2012) [5BR]

Come here on a sunny summer's evening and you'll understand: migraine sufferers beware. Take the line of finger-pockets direct to a resting place (slightly easier if you use holds just right). Climb the wall above using a jug on the right to clip the 16mm threaded stainless steel bar abseil station.

FA: Martin Crocker (unseconded)

20 *****Fast Track to a Bus Pass** 18m F7b+ (12.8.2012) [Many BR]

A mega-pump for the over-55yr olds. Strange that a traverse might be the crag's best route (?), but (according to younger, second ascensionists) 'it seems quite hard for F7b+'. Take long slings to extend the bolts to suit. Start up *My Grain*'; then branch left into *Insane Ussain* at its bolt 2. Move up to its next bolt (bolt 3), and then commence a dynamic sequence across *Lightning Bolt* (bolt) to good undercuts on *Blistering Blake* above its bulge. Clip the last bolt on that route (long sling), and drop down low to continue powerfully left and up into the last 2m of *A Heart as Big as the World*.

FA: Martin Crocker (1st redpoint attempt, unseconded)

21 **Go Mo** 15m E3 5c (12.8.2012)

Not nearly enough protection to preserve life and limb unequivocally, and the low crux needs attentive belaying. Start under a niche below a roof at 5m near the right-hand end of the cliff. Climb awkwardly into the niche (dubious small wires in right wall), and reach up boldly over the roof for a jug and peg runner. Pull up and right into a scoop. Take the short V-groove above (no meaningful gear: deck-out potential!) and then bear left across the lip of an overlap to the 16mm stainless steel threaded bar abseil station. (Sea damage in 2019 exposed some footholds at the crux, so it should be much easier if no safer now.)

FA: Martin Crocker, Jonathan Crocker



Guy Percival on *Perciverance* (F7c+) Pic: David Bradbrook



Martin Crocker on *Insane Ussain* (F7b) Pic: Jonathan Crocker

22 Revolving Dreams 18m HS 4a
(29.9.2012)

Not unenjoyable, and with reasonable protection (upper mid-range cams help). Start at the right-hand end of the cliff. Climb up into an open corner; then swing left on jugs under an overhang to pull awkwardly into a second, narrower corner. Step up right onto the arête and move up 2m. Now traverse horizontally leftwards across the lip of an overlap to the 16mm stainless steel threaded bar abseil station. It is also possible to top out (4b move past the abseil station; then a scramble leftwards on ivy): a strategy used to escape a rising spring tide on more than one occasion.
FA: Martin Crocker, Jonathan Crocker



Revolving Dreams (HS)
Jonathan Crocker

23 Warm-up Traverse (V2) There is a much-used ‘get the blood flowing’ bouldering traverse from *Insane Ussain* to beyond *Revolving Dreams*; right hand in the pocket of *My Grain (The Shimmering)* earmarks the level. Be cautious with the rock at all times as the landing isn’t one you will walk away from comfortably.

Fifteen metres right of the cave area is a buttress which is scarcely worth a second glance even for:

24 World-wide Web 10m HVS 4c (30.4.2013)

Take an easy slab into the obvious V-groove, and follow this to a *bolt belay below grassy, unstable slopes. Reasonably protected.

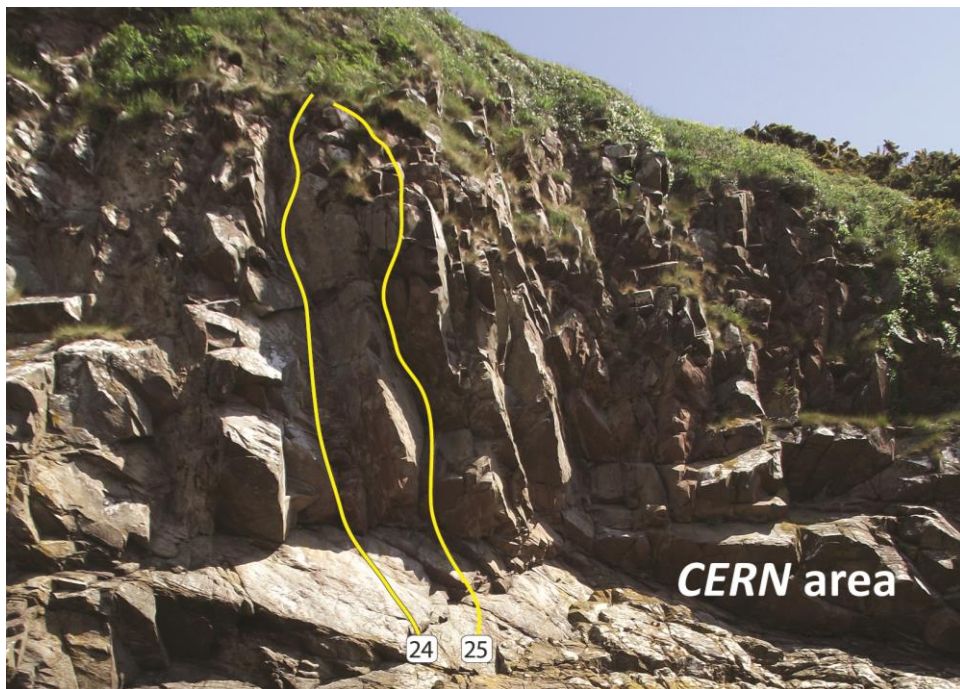
FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)

25 CERN 10m E3 6a (30.4.2013)

Heinous – at least for tall guys with fat fingers. The hard part is safe enough. Right of the V-groove is a hanging slab. Pull into a niche and then traverse awkwardly left across the slab (peg, small cams) to the arête. Avoid escaping into *World-wide Web* and pull straight up a bulging rib onto a ledge. Carefully shuffle left to the *shared bolt belay.

FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)

***Warning:** at the time of publication this BB is not in place. Meanwhile use a pre-placed rope or risk life and limb to get to the path.



Further right (southwest) is a rocky bay with some low key bouldering you pass on the approach. There is a friable sandstone wall on the left and a black conglomerate wall on the right; two problems apiece. Better is a V3 lip-traverse of the landward tip of the boulder between.

Nearby Bouldering

I'm tagging on a few adjacent oddball sites partly to fill up the four A4 sheets required for printing the sixteen A5 pages of this guidebook. The two crags described are about the best on the lack-lustre stretch of coast southwest of Walton Bay before things pick up again just northeast of Ladye Bay (see the *Ladye Bay climbs* topo). They are located in Margaret's Bay, about 600m southwest of Culver Cliff, and are readily visible, close together, from the coast path. The quickest approach is from Ladye Bay (about 1km walk).

The Bottle

Not quite up to French standards (La Bouteille, Ploumanac'h), this shapely solid crag nonetheless provides some pleasant pocket pulling above a reasonably level sandstone platform. It has been climbed on for many years and once even sported a few route names written on the rock.



1 Merry on Merlot V0 (5a) The prow extreme left.

2 Silencia Stone V0+ (5b) SS deep under the roof: take pockets around the roof.

3 Silva V0- (4c) Start at the big projecting sandstone pinch under the roof.

4 One bourbon V0- (4c) From a thread at the lip of the roof, zip up on pockets.

5 One scotch V0- (4c) The line left of the obvious crack.

6 And one beer V0+ (5b) SS and yard out around the roof past a chockstone.

To the right you can ramble around on buckets 'til the cows come home'.



The Monster

An ugly yet erudite pock-marked harpy staking out South East Wales: meet Barclay the BMC's Transboundary Bolt Warden. He's a wonder to behold. Just watch as – in the snap of a drill bit – his tongue darts out across the channel to pluck all retrobolting finks and other meat flies from their mischief. Too far gone to repent or to repair their damage, they are digested in an instant in Barclay's rancid gut, never to be seen again. Well, that's another good job done; this could mean honorary BMC membership or even the Queen's birthday list for Barclay. Love him.

Big pockets prevail, but the routes feel nasty above landings that eat humans. Bring mats or treat the routes as solos with E grades.

7 **Gunakadeit** 6m E1 4c The east-facing black wall, trending right on pockets.

8 **Bakunawa** 6m E2 5a Climb the front face just right of the left-hand prow past a low spike.

9 **Tiamat** 6m E3 5b Start from a platform and climb the stupidly steep face right of centre.

10 **Mega, Mega, Black Thing** 5m E3 5b The right-hand overhanging prow. Exhilarating!
FAs: Martin Crocker (on-sight solo, 2003)

