

SET TO STUN:

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS ON PHASER WALL, OGMORE SEA-CLIFFS, SOUTH WALES, BY MARTIN CROCKER

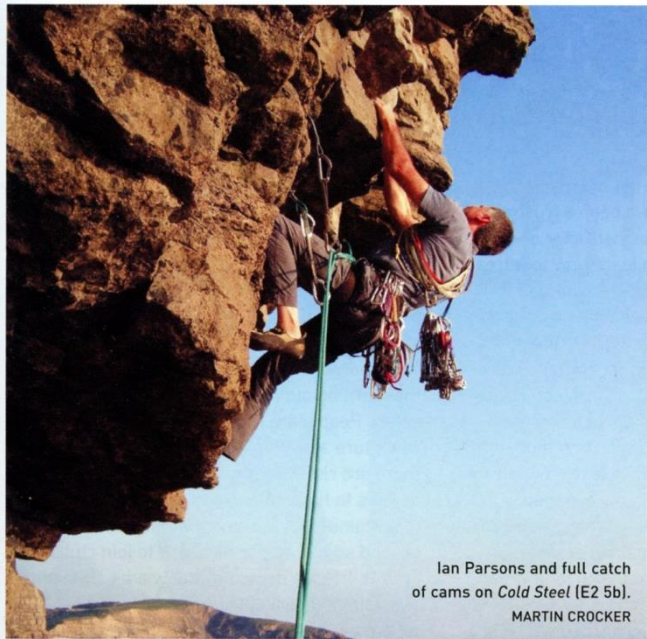
'You still don't believe me?'

Actually it wasn't meant to be an interrogation; I was just trying to pin down the exact line of *Flipside Genocide*, a deliciously mysterious E5 on the mighty Phaser Wall on-sighted by Dave Musgrove junior in 1995. A few days before that e-mail conversation with Dave, Ian Parsons had attempted *Flipside's* seven-metre wide roof but blew it after hanging out for two hours from flakes under the roof while imitating a limpet. It looked harder than E5 6a, but that's the thing about Ogmore.

In 2008 Ogmore had become a hobby once again, and I was curious to explore its still untapped potential – roped up. 'Plenty of fun to be had on Phaser Wall', Pat Littlejohn reminded me when I asked him about his routes there. Maybe he was being ironic, but I doubt it. 'Fun' is a highly subjective measure of a day's climbing. Fun applied to Ogmore might suggest the love of suffering or stress or a simple obsession with dead-hanging. Well, the 30m high Phaser Wall overhangs 1 in 4; it is a bloated expanse of banded, bulging limestone undercut by roofs and plastered with jugs. Its shaley horizontal breaks eat cams, and yes you have to carry their dead weight and tease them into the cracks you can't see into properly from below because you're too pumped to lock off. Names like *Brawn Drain* are its trailer;

audiences are small, but memories are big. Every diary entry against an ascent of Pat's classic E3 *Phaser* reads something like: 'absolutely mind and arm-blowing'. Sure it was 'fun' that first day back: looking up from the wave-cut platform and imagining where the next lines might go – all in complete comfort, not an engorged vein in sight.

Prior to 1995 the only other route right of *Phaser* was Pat's *Whatever Next?*, a rhetorical question implying that there might be no 'next' after his withering trip. But along came tourist Dave Musgrove with *Flipside Genocide*, a plucky act of youthful derring-do. So, when I'd finished sapping the last living memory from Dave, I felt clear to check out the right-hand weakness through the roof: a right-to-left series of sandwiched walls that led to a stance and some thin cracks to finish. What became *Photon Torpedo* [E5 6a, 5c] has an even bigger kill-rating than *Phaser*: exhilarating jug-swinging through stupidly overhanging terrain – I agree, this is fun, made all the more accessible by the addition of some thick-gauge (non-snapping) stainless steel pegs. While on it, Ian and I had noticed that a traverse of the lip of the main roof might be possible, giving hope for a trilogy of classic Ogmore traverses (joining *Exposure Explosion* and *A Bigger Splash*). Leading through, and on-sight (as far



Ian Parsons and full catch of cams on *Cold Steel* [E2 5b]. MARTIN CROCKER

as previous knowledge allowed), our epic proved *A Giant Leap for Crabkind*. It features a stunning and remorseless E4 5c middle pitch – in reality a cautious, sideways scuttle for two heavy-breathing old crabs laden with cams. It was Ian's name, reconciling the Star Trek theme with a quote from fellow The Perishers fan Jon de Montjoy.

The original route of the wall is Andy Sharp's *Glycogen*, the name identifying what's required for those burly overhangs. It takes the first of a series of cracks in the far side of the wall, and features bombproof gear and (if you want to take a nap) a lie-down rest in the breaks. Those yet to taste climbing on the wall would be wise to start here. To its left, just before *Cold Steel*, I added two lines roped-solo, the better of which is *Ogmore Olympics* – a vivacious jug-haul on a 1 in 3 keel. It would make a stunning 'deep-water' solo, though the tidal platform hereabouts limits the 'deep' to a thought-provoking 3metres of sea. Between *Glycogen* and *Phaser* are three crack-lines low down, but generations of economic guidebook descriptions had suggested there were only two. Having acquired copies of the originals from Pat, I think I now have it sussed. (Check out the topo, with apologies to anyone affected if it's still not quite right.) Amongst the enlightenments is *Overboard Man*: perhaps an insightful play on words by Pat in relation to second man (the late) Pete Boardman. If you enjoyed *Phaser*, you'll love *Overboard Man*: ignore the guidebook description and just follow the towering crack-line mid-way between *Glycogen* and *Phaser* at a juggy and well-protected E3 5b. So, ancillary research complete, and again with Ian, I battled up the more-or-less unclimbed striated wall between *Overboard Man* and *Phaser*, exploiting the *Brawn Drain* entry for the launch. Strange to give a route E4 that had no move harder than 5b and was safe. But our wasted arms insisted upon it. Like the rest of Ogmore, the Phaser wall is a crag to be taken seriously, but not so seriously that you can't have fun. Some say *Brawn Drain*, we say *Prawn Brain*.

FACTFILE

Guidebook

GOWER & South East Wales by the South Wales Mountaineering Club; Ogmore section by local expert, Roy Thomas.

Ogmore Sea Cliffs

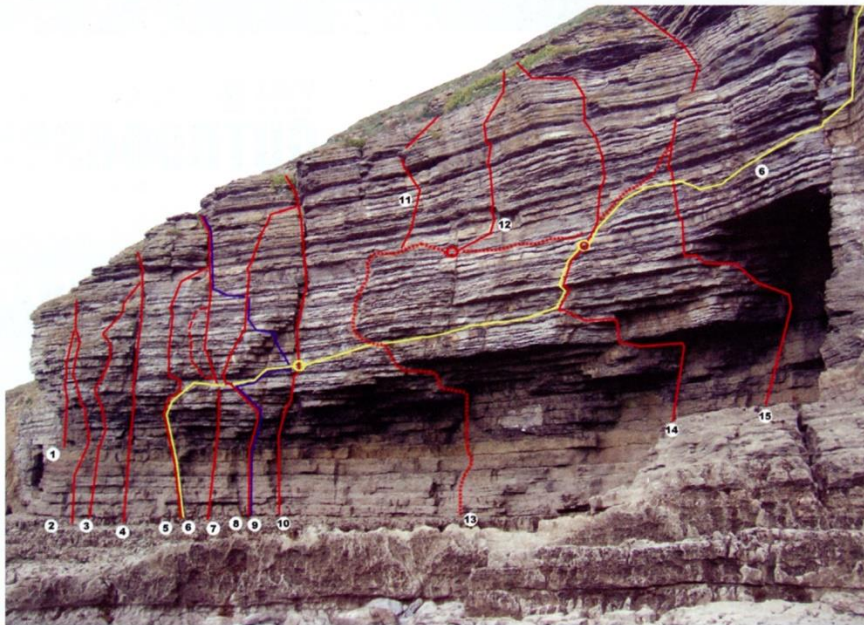
A mile of very steep sea-cliffs of Jurassic limestone, five miles south of Bridgend, South Glamorgan. There are 250 routes here; many are hard and committing, but many are not. The site remains wholly under-rated and all-too-easy to drive past on the way to Pembroke.

Phaser Wall Access and Tide

Abseil down its western end from two stakes (the belay of *The Hatch*) to high-level ledges often clear of the sea. The main platform beneath the wall is dry 2.5hrs either side of low tide, subject to wind speed and direction. On very calm days, with a neap tide, there is potential to climb hereabouts all day long – arms permitting. Autumn and early winter is good, as the lower-level sun reaches under the overhangs.

Gear

Cams and medium-size nuts mainly; most of the established lines follow cracks, so only a lesser arsenal of camming devices is required. Just hang on in there. Take prussic slings to extricate yourself from any mid-air falls.



PHASER WALL, OGMORE

1. *Cold Steel* [E2 5b]. Littlejohn, Davies 1977 2. *Ogmore Olympics*** [E3 5c] Crocker (roped solo) 2008 3. *Trogs* [E4 5c] Crocker (roped solo) 2008 4. *Glycogen*** [E1 5a] Sharp, Harwood 1977 5. *Man Overboard* [E4 5c] Crocker, Thomas 1986, in mistake for *Overboard Man* 6. *A Giant Leap for Crabkind*** [E4 5b, 5c, 5b] Parsons, Crocker [AL] 2008 7. *Overboard Man*** [E3 5b] Littlejohn, Boardman (climbed to starboard by Crocker [roped solo] 2008) 8. *Prawn Brain** [E4 5b] Crocker, Parsons 2008 9. *Brawn Drain* [E4 5c] Littlejohn 1979 10. *Phaser**** [E3 5c] Littlejohn, Harwood 1977 11. *Drain Wave* [E3 5b] – top section only identified – Lewis, Curle 1981 12. *Omega Duicide* [E5 6a] Crocker, Parsons 2008 13. *Flipside Genocide** [E5 6a, 5c] Musgrove, Coles, Irving 1995 14. *Photon Torpedo**** [E5 6a, 5c] Crocker, Parsons 2008 15. *Whatever Next?** [E5 5c] Littlejohn, Thomas 1986

