

The development of Craig Llong, Pembroke

Martin Crocker

My appetite for Craig Llong was whetted three years ago by a clandestine leak of information from my eyes and ears in South Wales, Roy Thomas. Roy had heard from Andy Sharp that, gracing the wild and infrequented North Pembrokeshire coast, lay this tremendous gabbro crag featuring huge leaning walls, untarnished by mankind, and as yet untamed by the crag's mentor, Pat Littlejohn. During the three years or so we were kept guessing, it became personified to us as 'Littlejohn's Crag'. A misappropriation, perhaps, since it was Chris Jackson who first discovered the crag and led the sanguine South West rockhound on to its rich and fulsome scent. Littlejohn took a bite out here and there, but the biggest and wildest game were left to roam free. His partner on one of these early forays, John Harwood, had been

sworn to secrecy by Pat, who reportedly feared that rival packs would gatecrash the hunt, and defile the bastion using 'modern' techniques and steal an amazing groove line of 'his'. However, John remained obedient, more or less, and apart from an authorized visit by Sharp, who returned, short-changed but gobsmacked, the crag lay unassailed and shrouded in mystique.

Well, Pat chose not to return, unbelievably, and with the new Pembroke guide as imminent as a CC guide could be, canny John eventually enlisted the help of the ever-eager-for-most-things, me. It was in October 1992, therefore, that the new combo of old: Principal Health Officer, shaggy dog and Professor of Biochemistry, roared past the hordes to Trefin in John's red-hot phallic symbol.

"Wow!" I exclaimed, gasping for superlatives, as a



1. Flake Slab
2. Trainer Slab
3. Moonie
4. Moonstruck
5. The Cambrian
6. Souls Of The Departed
7. Grand Duke
8. The Count
9. Corkscrew

- V Diff
S
E6
E6
E5
E5
E2
E1
HS

10. Classic Walks
 11. Go Take A Running Jump
 12. Extreme Walks
 13. Chimney Route
 14. Impetus Now
 15. Strangers
 16. Wait On The Corner
- A = The Asteroid
WD = Way Down

- S
E6
E4
HS
E6
E6
E4



Martin Crocker on the first ascent of 'Strangers'. All photos: John Harwood.

rotund 50m planet of bulging gabbro bore down on me from overhead. So, this was the great overhanging wall that my imagination had failed to imagine. Littlejohn had called it Dinosaur Wall, like many others, but had yet to implant his spear. To me, its arid, scored and lava-like outworldly texture resembled more the product of interbreeding between a giant wart and an interstellar body. That was it. Solid and spherical, yet spatially tilted to the point of imbalance, it seemed to possess its own rolling momentum; with our success it would become, by deed pole, 'The Asteroid'.

Explorations of the North Pembroke coast by the secretive Nat Allen team in the '70s proved revealing and epochal. Northern interest was continued by Chris Jackson but on this obtusely hard crag, however, he was only able to leave various minor additions, apart from *Classic Walks* (Severe) which runs airily across an enormous jug-rail in an overhanging wall. Understandably, Littlejohn had, in turn, eschewed most of the major challenges, since they were not viable on sight propositions (and much too hard for Pat, anyway). The main exception was *The Cambrian* E5 6a, an honest on sight interpretation of the huge groove right of The Asteroid. It's a great route, and it bears the unfading crest of Littlejohn; cool climbing, spaced gear, uncertain destiny. Take some advice and take a thin tape for the small vibrato spike before the crux. Right again, either side of a bleak, black and still virgin groove (dubbed 'The Baron') Littlejohn added, on the left, *Grand Duke* E2 5b, which is now free of its booby-trap thanks to Paul Donnithorne, and, on the right, *The Count* E1 5a, which was recommended by Pat but described as 'a dose' by Roy Thomas on the second ascent. The remaining noteworthy route of Littlejohn's is *Extreme Walks* E4 5c, a menacing lead across the slightly friable left-hand, leaning wall of the Upper Crag, above *Classic Walks*; gaining entry to the exit groove is fraught with tension.

Our first visit took us, inevitably, up the very centre of The Asteroid; a memorable trip with all the elements necessary to leave an historic climb. I particularly recall our efforts to pass a short steep shale

band which undercuts the wall and guards access to it from the raised belay ledge. Each time I tried the moves, a couple more inches of a thin, bending, two-foot spike of shale which I was standing on would crumble off making the starting holds ever more distant. The extra stretch was fine, but I could not contain my acute concern that the spike was also John's belay. Above the shale band, the route shed its esoteria, and a truly unique and engrossing 40m pump-out, past pegs, led to the top and hard-earned success. We had orbited the heavenly body on a ladder of buckets, and were well-pleased with

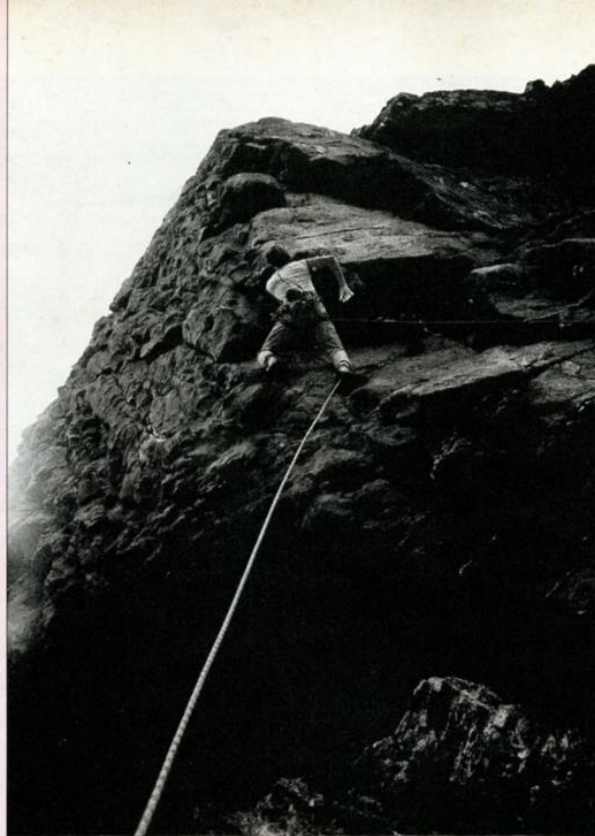
Moonie E6 6b. "French 7c" I blasphemed, imagining the ridiculous for a moment.

The Upper Crag is dominated by a sharp arête, grit-like but tilted 20°, and thrust out dizzily into the void above the pebble beach 250ft below. It was love at second sight; the appeal was magnetic once I realized that it might be possible to link the slopers that broke the defiant bow of the arête. With six peg runners in place, I launched up on to the mighty ship's keel. There was a bitter easterly wind; never before had I felt so isolated, exposed and vulnerable on a 60ft route. Double peg and

Friend 2 at the break clipped; now for the dyno to the big sloping hand-ledge. Whoops — missed. Down and try again... 'crack'. As I turned my hand to weight the sloper something had snapped in my left shoulder and plugged my nervous system into the mains. Rest, then try again, but the same thing happened, crippling me up in pain. This time there was a depressing finality about the agony. It was the end. I had been betrayed by my own cursed single-mindedness.

We returned in March '93, me with shoulder repaired and four pounds down, but pensive with the fear of re-injury. Fortunately, the arête yielded first go; I binned the dyno concept and conjured the move statically. The genesis of the best short route in Pembroke, *Strangers* E6 6b/c, was consummated in moments.

The same day as *Strangers*, the team also ascended the long arête right of *The Cambrian*, which John had cleaned. This evolved into *Souls Of The Departed* E5 6a, a fine, big pitch clinched with the tag: 'Just enough gear'. However, the remaining plumb line was the towering right-hand arête of *The Asteroid*, which I had briefly explored six months earlier. It proved trying to



The first ascent of 'Moonstruck'

gear adequately but, after four hours hunting from an abseil rope, six stainless peg runners gave hope to the intricate path of big holds which led from the roof-capped entry groove right to the top of the arête. In fact, *Moonstruck* E6 6b, passed without error, pain, pause or trauma: another meteoric 50m brawn-drain in positions unreal. We wound down with *Wait On The Corner* E4 6a, Andy Sharp's lively contribution to the crag, and actually a perfect warm-up for higher priorities on the agenda.

Later, a cursory look at the acutely overhanging left

wall of *Strangers* revealed some unbelievable pockets and positive flat holds running up its centre: unfinished business. So, arming myself with Francis Ramsey, the Ambassador of Adventure, I returned one month later to place seven peg runners in the wall and red point *Impetus Now* E6 6b. It proved to be a climb of sheer enjoyment on quite beautiful holds. Hard 7b+ I reckoned, applying a French dressing to British ethos.

Our parting shot was the fulfilment of a hare-brained idea to blaze a direct line up the concave *Extreme Walks* face. From the good viewpoint at the top it looked horrifying. While Francis battled to stay warm in the dogged easterly wind that swept around the *Strangers* arête and scoured the face, I clung to the headwall in extremis. Fear had raised a sweatful panic, but outside I was numbed with cold. Tenuous moves on exploding pumice led to a superb break with Friends to match, but I still could not relax. Let's get out of this windswept hell — pronto. What followed was a more-off-than-on triple-snatch scrimmage to grasp the bucket on the very lip of the rim; no French grade for *Go Take A Running Jump* E6 6b, that's for sure.

Crag Information

Location: OS Ref 842334. One mile north of Trefin on the North Pembrokeshire coast.

Access: Turn into Trefin from the A 487 St David's to Fishguard Road. Turn right at Trefin on to the road to Abercastle and park one half mile along at the gate and stile on the left. Follow path along edge of a field and through a gate, then bear right to crag. Don't miss the sheltered picnic spot at the top of easy grass ramp below the routes.

Conditions: Non-tidal. Faces due South. Upper Crag will always dry quickly, if it gets wet at all.

Minimal seepage, except on *The Cambrian*. Best to catch *The Asteroid* in the sun, to burn off occasional sea-damp and optimise enjoyment.

Clientele: Planet-hoppers, in search of some more of the country's best hard routes of high atmosphere.

Recommended routes (in order of planetary impact)

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|------------------------|-------------|-----|
| Moonie | E6 6b | ★★★ |
| Moonstruck | E6 6b | ★★★ |
| Strangers | E6 6b/c | ★★★ |
| Impetus Now | E6 6b | ★★★ |
| Go Take A Running Jump | E6 6b | |
| The Cambrian | E5 6a | ★★ |
| Souls Of The Departed | E5 6a | ★★ |
| Extreme Walks | E4 5c | |
| Wait On The Corner | E4 6a | ★ |
| Grand Duke | E2 5b | ★ |
| The Count | E1 5a | ★ |
| Chimney Route | Hard Severe | |
| Classic Walks | Severe | |