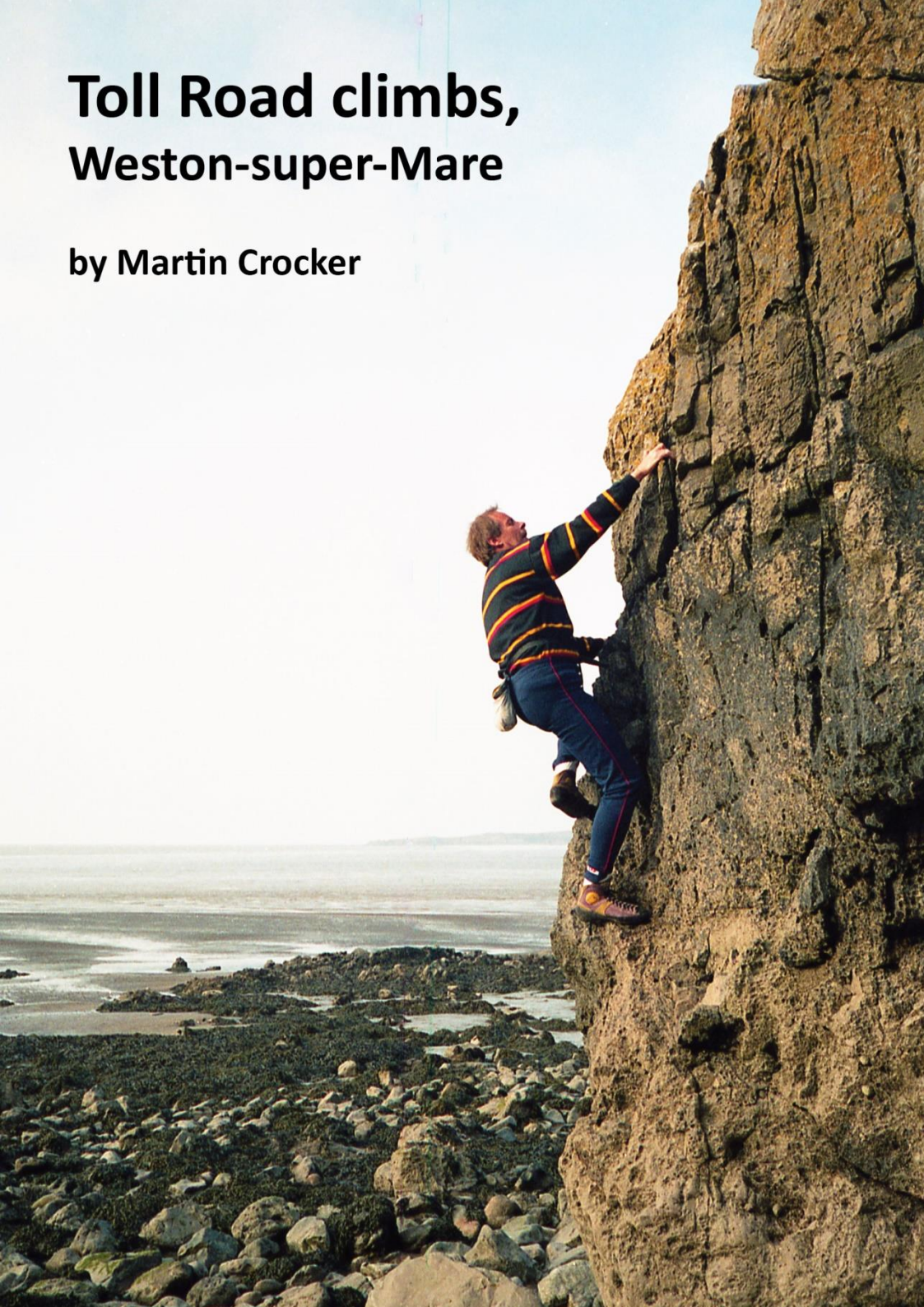


# Toll Road climbs, Weston-super-Mare

by Martin Crocker



## Toll Road climbs

A guide to the climbs and bouldering of The Toll Road Crags, Weston-super-Mare, North Somerset

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Front cover: John Harwood enjoying a snow-free ascent of *Hornli Ridge*, Pierview Pinnacle

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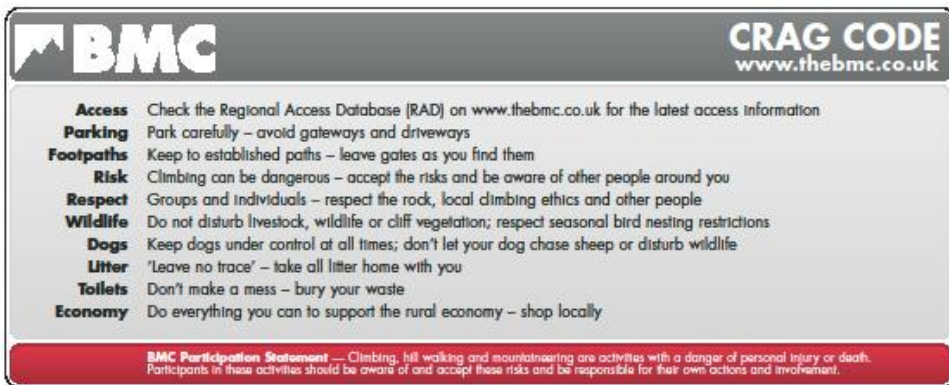
*Toll Road climbs* is one in a series of free guidebooks to the climbs and bouldering of the cliffs of the North Somerset coast. The aims of this series are to make available for public use details of some activists' explorations and to use this opportunity to raise money for a proven good cause. The guidebooks are *not* definitive records of the climbs since legitimate access to, and use of, sources of information outwith the public domain is not always available. The author expresses his apologies, therefore, for any omissions; and he would be happy to receive details of same, so a wider record of the climbing and – importantly – its correct history can evolve.

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## Ethics

The routes are trad' and bouldering, much of which was originally climbed ground up. There are no bolts; bolting is not permitted.

## Caution: fixed gear

Fixed gear is virtually non-existent; the few pegs that are in place here need to be treated with the utmost caution and backed up.

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

## The Toll Road Crag

*What a bonus it was to discover a new winter lunchtime training ground for the mid-80s while I was working for Woodspring District Council. So when time allowed, maybe after inspecting a local caravan site or restaurant, I'd show my pass at the toll booth, park up, and scurry down to the crags. At first there were small beaches under Toll Wall and Swing Cavern, but in a matter of a year or so the pebbles had been scoured away by sea and storm, leaving only naked rock to break your fall. Having a private place to let off steam was a Godsend since working as an EHO in Weston proved surprisingly arduous. Among the challenges were the hoteliers, who ranged from a gracious Greek community to a sneering local mafioso. Of the latter persuasion a big-shot Porsche-driving brat one day took exception to my asking him to clean up his kitchen and duly threatened to throw me in the sea just like my colleague before me. I was a good swimmer, so that didn't bother me, but as for being called an 'office boy' ....*

### Introduction

Scattered along the coastline between Sand Bay and Weston-super-Mare are the Toll Road Crag, a thin yet tasty spread of small wave-washed Carboniferous limestone cliffs, caves, and buttresses up to 10m high. Above the cliffs is a road – *the Toll Road* – which gives climbers super-convenient access to the crags and the local 'fast and furious' tearaways a fast-track into the sea. Its 50-year old toll was suspended in 2005 but the road-name, a colloquialism, has stuck fast (it is technically Kewstoke Road). Over many years the local authorities have wrestled with the road's poor vehicle safety record (several cars each year in the 80s and 90s going over), but road safety measures have improved matters now. Mind you, some Kewstoke residents say they would like the toll back.

This is one of the area's premier bouldering sites, but its quality has yet to be perceived by the masses – partly due to the absence of a guidebook (one promised in 2004, sorry). So it's good news that climbing here is still a peaceful experience, but not one that is without risk especially on your lonesome. Many of the boulder problems are pretty high and above rock, and – though mostly originally climbed ground up without a mat (as one did in the dark ages) – they are nowadays wisely experienced above cushioning and company. There are quite a few lead-routes here requiring kit.

The cliffs are tidal but not drastically so; read on and check the tide times.

### Approach

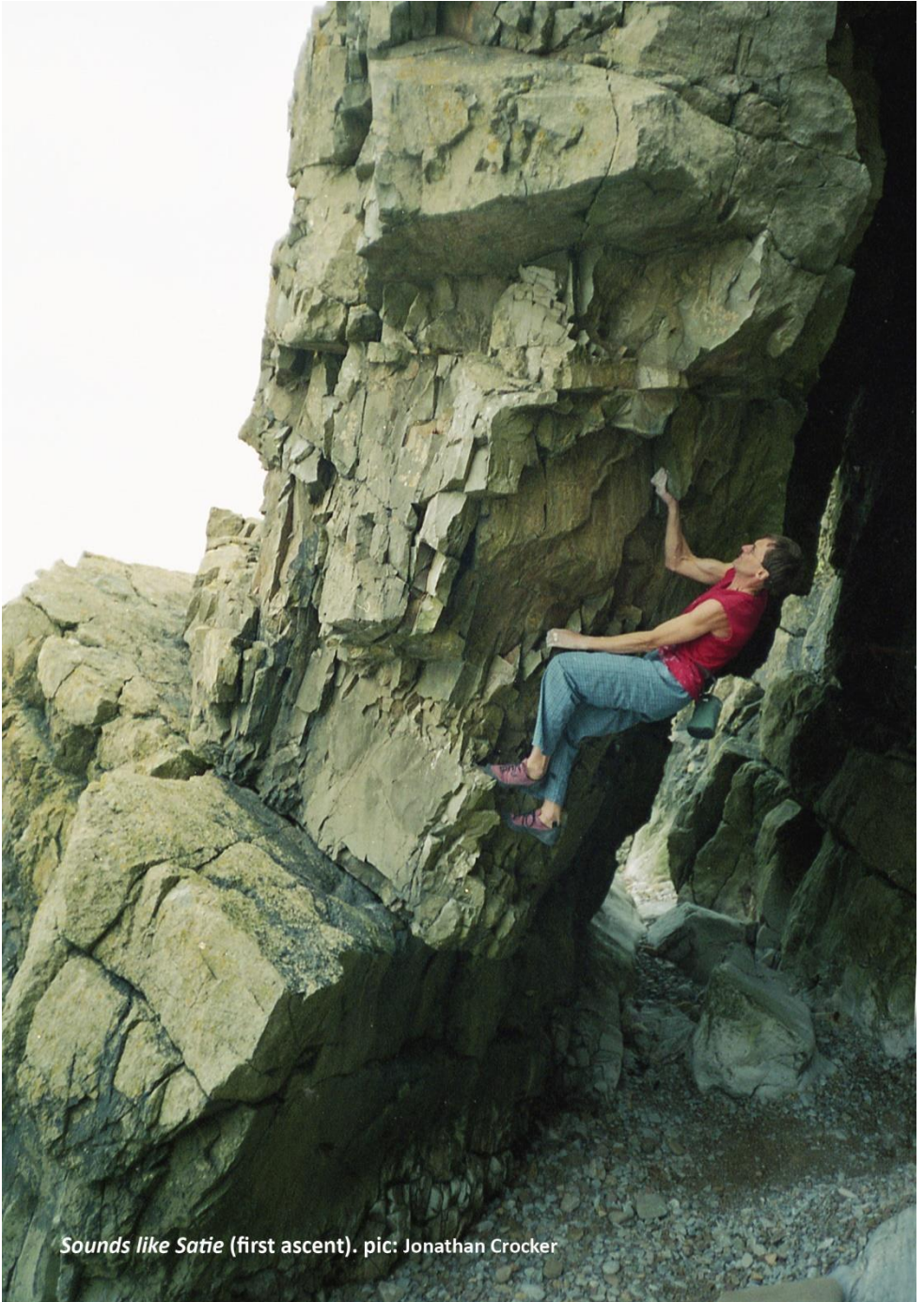
If approaching the Toll Road from Bristol/the M5, you have two possible strategies: a) to battle through Weston-super-Mare to the sea front and head northeastwards to Birnbeck Pier and the Toll Road beyond, or b) (my preferred option) on the outskirts of Weston-super-Mare follow signposts to Worle, and then take minor roads signposted Kewstoke to the eastern end of the Toll Road.

### Parking

Parking is, and was, rarely a problem especially off-peak. There is a large free car-park at the western end of Sand Bay, which gives access to The Indelicate Arch and Toll Booth area. For the sectors further west (Toll Walls, Catacombs, Birnbeck Boulders, and *Cosa Nostra* sector) it is quickest to park in a choice of lay-bys or informal pull-ins on the Toll Road itself (check the text).

### History

The first ascent details of the trad' climbs are noted. I've included the date/year when I first climbed the boulder problems. I'd welcome details of any earlier ascents. A YouTube film illustrates, after a fashion, some of the mid-80s activity: <https://youtu.be/uzq6cHR4qTc>



*Sounds like Satie* (first ascent). pic: Jonathan Crocker

## THE CLIMBS

### The Indelicate Arch (OS Ref. 322629)

This is the modest but curious arch feature (which is a microbe compared to La Porte d'Aval at Etretat). The routes here are *not* boulder problems and – short of a flotilla of mats and an army of sacrificial squashees – cannot really be converted to such. But you can combine a visit here with the bouldering on The Toll Booth. The routes are clear of the tide except during high spring tides.

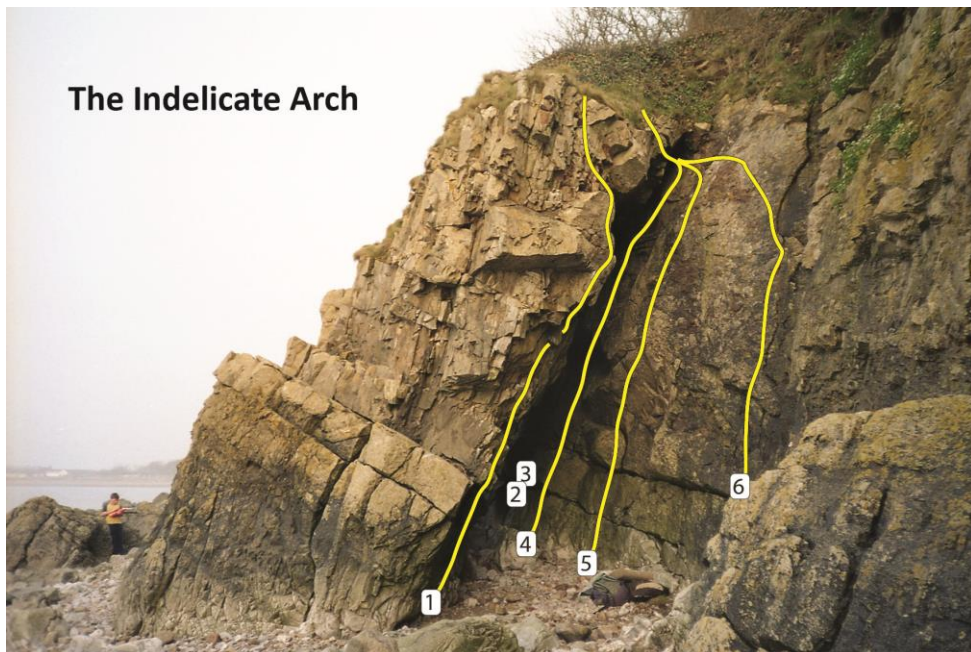
#### Approach

1. At all save high spring tides walk from the car-park at the southern end of Sand Bay along the foreshore past swimming possibilities (10 minutes): very pleasant, and quite nice for your kids.
2. Park in the large wooded lay-by on the south side of the road about 1km west of the Kewstoke Road/Beach Road junction. Walk along the road westwards for approx. 100m and the arch will be below you. Find a suitable path or way through the bank of trees and scramble down carefully (some of the paths are obstructed by veg' during the growing season).

#### 1 \*Sounds like Satie 8m E5 6b (29.4.2003)

Gymnopédiesiastic soloing above a dire landing. Start 2m from the left (west) edge of the landward-facing wall. Move up right from a high jug; then undercut a rickety downward-pointing blade to gain fingerholds on a small hanging column. Pass a hand-ledge and gain a finger-jam in the top of a short crack. Step left to exit.

FA: Martin Crocker (solo after top-roping)



## 2 \***Ear of the Wind** 8m E3 6b/c (8.9.2016)

The hanging arête on the seaward wall would be a highball if it were not for the risk of bashing your brains out on the back-wall behind. However the back-wall has its uses: bridge up and stretch over to clip the peg (stainless steel) at 6m. Back at base extend for the obvious sidehold right of the arête and make an even longer reach for good slopers left of the arête. Ignoring the temptation to bridge across, take the arête direct to a break. Now escape to the back-wall or finish up the preceding route.  
FA: Martin Crocker (unseeded)

## 3 **Manneporte** 6/8m E3 5b (29.4.2003)

Rather spooky. Climb the overhanging corner in the centre of the seaward wall to a handrail at 5m. Bridge across the rift onto *La Porte d'Aval* which you can reverse down or finish up.  
FA: Martin Crocker (on-sight solo)

## 4 **Deep Space 11** 8m HVS 4c (29.4.2003)

Bridge up the middle of the rift and transfer carefully onto the slab. Gain a scoop; then begin some exposed bridging left across the rift to emerge on top of the seaward pillar. No obvious gear.  
FA: Martin Crocker (on-sight solo)

## 5 \***La Porte d'Amour** 8m E1/3 5b (29.4.2003)

A fine little route up the convex slab forming the landward side of the arch. Mantel onto a black ledge. Make delicate moves up to a slot (possible gear: then E1); step left and rock up onto the easier-angled slab above. Stride left across the rift to exit – exposed.  
FA: Martin Crocker (on-sight solo)

## 6 **La Porte d'Aval** 9m VS 4a (2003)

The crack right of the landward slab; climb it and step out left onto the slab. Stride left across the rift to exit – exposed. Unprotected and therefore serious at the top, unfortunately.  
FA: Martin Crocker (on-sight solo)

**Variation:** HVS 5a – the black groove just right (reverse the crack to its left).

Right of the arch are some nice easy slabs and a 5m rib (D grade) normally with pebbles below. Right again, facing the arch, is a square-cut overhanging nose.

7 **Mental Mountain** V0 (5a) (2003) Strenuously climb the nose; either hand traverse left and descend or swing right and reverse a yellow groove. A tad nasty without a mat.

One hundred metres right (west) of the arch is an east-facing wall with a leftward-rising ramp.

8 \***A Bit of Boccherini** V3 (6a) (8.9.2016) SS the ramp and palm up it to the top: superb.

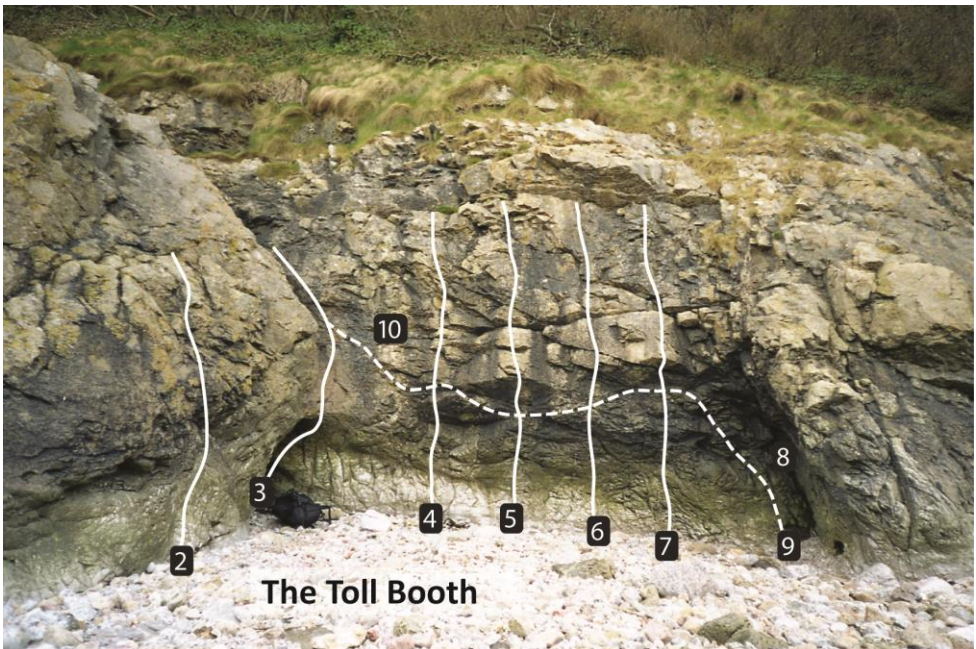
## **The Toll Booth** (OS Ref. 321629)

An attractive if limited feature 200m further west along the beach from The Indelicate Arch. This is a little 'wave' of perfect compact pocketed rock at the back of a recess. The base of the crag varies between small pebbles to small rocks for which a mat is desirable; however all the problems were first climbed without – you can normally shift a few rocks around to keep your ankles safe. The beach level varies from time to time too, which can affect the routes and the degrees of self-discipline required for the real deal. All the problems described are from standing apart from *The Hermit*. No limits are applied to the freedom to spice things up. Access is only precluded an hour or so either side of high tides (longer during spring tides).

## Approach

As for The Indelicate Arch and then walk west along the foreshore; The Toll Booth is hidden just beyond a big upright flake.

- 1 **Sand Bay Slab** (4a) (2003) The tall grey slab left of the cave, possible hands free too: and why not describe the easier problems?
- 2 **Not a Toll** V1 (5c) (2003) The grey left wall of the cave; various ways between V0 and V3.
- 3 **The Hermit** V0+ (5b) (2003) SS inside the mini-cave and tease yourself out.
- 4 **Bring Back the Toll** V1 (5b) (2003) Up you go, a metre right of the cave.
- 5 **\*Neptune's Armchair** V2 (6a) (2003) The bulges using twin finger-pockets under a small roof.
- 6 **\*Plastic Castle** V1 (5b) (2003) The next line starting with left hand on an undercut.
- 7 **\*Poke your Eyes Out** V1 (5b) (2003) The little roofs just left of the slanting crack with two pockets side by side.
- 8 **J's Problem** V0- (4c) (2003) Lunge between big holds up the slanting crack on the right.





9 \*\*\***Killer Pockets** V6 (6c) (2003) A Toll Road must-do. Traverse from right to left (or *vice versa*) on the finger-pockets, keeping low but moving up and then down to pass the cave on the left. When first done the beach level was perfect since it covered good footholds later revealed during lower beach level conditions. Therefore – if you find the beach level is low – keep your feet off any good low footholds and strictly on the smooth, fairly foothold-less rock (hence the pain-fuelled name!).

10 \***Tag** V2 (5b) (2003) A strenuous hand-traverse along the break at 3m taken in either direction.

One hundred and fifty metres right of The Toll Booth is an attractive 5m high slab which is worth a quick stopover.

11\***Lime Green Blues** V0+ (5b) (2003) Smear up the subtle lime green streak on the slab.

12 **B Side** (4a) (2003) The easier slab just right.

## **Toll Walls** (OS Ref. 317628)

This is the original and best bouldering sector of the coast which would rate highly anywhere (and it does!). It comprises a series of walls up to 10m high, buttresses, and caves – all of solid wave-washed limestone. In addition to the bouldering there are routes that require kit plus people.

Most of the cliff-line faces due north and parts of it can seep after heavy rain (though Woodspring Block is very quick-drying and Catacombs partly faces west). That said it is climbable all year round (indeed most of the climbing was established deep wintertime). Spring evenings can be a delight, subject to due consideration of tide times.

The cliffs are tidal: access is precluded approx. two hours either side of spring high tides but scarcely or not at all during neap tides (Catacombs remains clear at neap high tide).

### **Warning:** Highball Bouldering!

Some of the problems are **high**; if taken without mats they are *de facto* routes, especially considering the rocky landings. Occasionally fall-softening pebble beaches are deposited under Toll Wall and in Swing Cavern (the deepest one I've ever seen came out of the 'blue' in 2019), but these rarely last for long. Alternative solo/lead and bouldering V grades are given where appropriate.

### **Approach**

You can approach along the foreshore from the Sand Bay car-park in about 25 minutes but many will regard that as purgatory especially when carrying a mat. So you need to park in one of the pull-ins along the south side of Kewstoke Road. The usual MO is to park in a two car pull-in just before a left bend approx. 2km from the Kewstoke Road/Beach Road junction to the east (you'll see an automatic warning sign ahead). Walk westwards 20m along the road to a clearing on the right: this is the small grassy headland above Catacombs. Scramble steeply down. You can then walk 250m back eastwards along the foreshore to the Toll Walls (East).

At the left (east) end of this sector is an impending black-stained wall containing a prominent V-groove (*Trawling for Trolls*) above a pedestal on the left.

## Toll Walls (east)

### 1 **Toll Order** 8m E2 6a (V3) (10.4.2003)

From the left end of the pedestal ledge, move up to a small roof left of the V-groove. Make tricky moves over (good wire placement), and finish easily. E4 as a solo.

FA: Martin Crocker (solo after top-roping)

### 2 **\*Trawling for Trolls** 8m E1 5c (V2) (1983)

A fine mini-route up the V-groove, which you can protect to the hilt (*not* Hilti). E3 as a solo. Make a balancy sequence to enter the groove and follow it and easier ground above to the top. If soloing, instead of topping out you can traverse left for 5m across the top of slabs to a climb-down (all about 4c/5a).

FA: Martin Crocker (on-sight solo)

### 3 **Seeress** 8m E6 6a (10.4.2003)

Climb the arête and leaning brown wall right of the V-groove. Very bold in view of the crisp-thin cranking above a rock landing. Start with a move from an undercut; then make hard locks on pockets for a jug. The finish keeps you on tenterhooks.

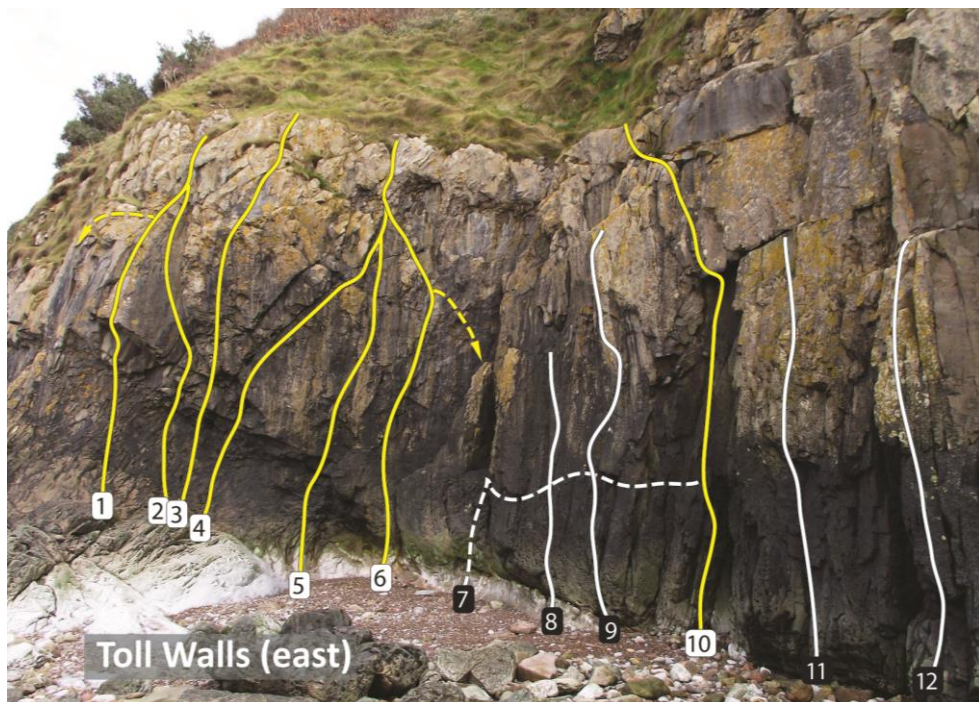
FA: Martin Crocker (solo after top-roping)

### 4 **Munch** 8m V3 (E3 6a) (1983)

The diagonal crack leading to the end of *The Scream*. Neat pockets and deft footwork with a giant reach for a jug. Top out easily, but onto slippery grass, or swing right 2m below the top and descend the easy crack to the ground.

Variation: V4. Crank straight over the black bulge to join *Munch*.

FA: Martin Crocker (on-sight solo)



### 5 \*\***The Scream** 8m V3 (E3/4 6a/b) (1983)

Originally on-sighted above a tiny beach, this would-be classic is more often a frightfest above a rocky landing (but much less so above a mountain of mats). Start from the lowest point of the wall. Pull up on a pocket to slanting edges high left. Extend up right for an awkward left-facing sidepull, and then gain easier ground above. Top out easily, but onto slippery grass, or swing right 2m below the top and descend the easy crack to the ground. If flummoxed check out beta on YouTube.  
FA: Martin Crocker (on-sight solo)

### 6 **Toll Wall** 8m V1 (E1 5b) (1983)

Start as for *The Scream*. Use the easy crack to get established on a line of finger-pockets on the wall: follow these to easier ground and the top-out/descent of *The Scream*.  
FA: Martin Crocker (on-sight solo)

### 7 \*\*\***Nureyev** V6 (6b/c) (1984)

Fantastic; a classicly nimble dance on toes across the pock-marked slab from left to right (but it has been climbed in both directions and there and back). At the mercy of the vexing sea (check out all the splash pockets) it started life in 1984 as a hard-V5; then it gained a hold a few years later and got a little easier; and then in the 90s it lost a couple of side-holds to make it V6. Now, just to keep you on your toes, there's a new foothold, so it's probably easier again! (Obviously you do not use anything for feet under the low bulge.)

### 8 **Bolshoi** V4 (6b) (1984/5)

Take the centre of the slab on mostly painful ragged holds – ouch! (Finger-jug out left not in: that's of use in the standard descent from *Top Hat and Tails*.)

### 9 **Top Hat and Tails** V2 (6a) (1983)

Changes in holds have affected this too, but it can still be climbed at the original grade. The full problem is 6m high, so concentrate! Using a small finger-jam for right hand work feet up into a narrow little groove in the right-hand side of the *Nureyev* slab (no big layaway rockfall holds out right). Off-balance moves gain a crimp for right hand in the white groove overhead. Surge up the pillar to its top; and then solo down leftwards.

Next right is an easy wide crack and to its right a series of walls with a few modest problems and a stress-free V0+ traverse – useful for warming up.

### 10 **Rootin-tootin** 6m E1 5a (V0) (9.9.2014)

Climb the easy wide crack to its top. Move up left over a huge undercut onto the top of the *Top Hat and Tails* pillar (descend as for that route).  
FA: Martin Crocker (on-sight solo)

### 11 **Little Beau Beep** V0+ (5b) (1983) The centre of the buttress between two cracks.

### 12 **Honkey Tonk Machine** V0 (5a) (1983) The sharp right arête of the second crack.

13 **Warning: Flying Cars** V0+ (5b) (1983) The slim wall right of *Honky Tonk* to flakes at 6m.  
*At a lunchtime bouldering session on 12 February 1986 I discovered an Austin Rover at the base of the cliffs: oops!*

14 **Drifters' Graveyard** V0 (5a) (9.9.2014) The wall right of '*Flying Cars* to high slots and jugs. Solo off leftwards and down.





## Toll Walls (cave area)

Round to the right (west) is a cave with some mind-boggling arm-blasters.

### 15 **Tall Wall** 6m E2 5b (9.9.2014)

Climb the grey left-retaining wall of the cave under a rightward-leading overlap, moving up left around an arête to escape onto jugs and easier ground (solo back down leftwards).

FA: Martin Crocker (on-sight solo)

The next two problems take the lines between a green recess under the left-retaining wall and the edge of the cave.

16 **Stenka Razin** V3 (6a) (1983) Power up the left-hand line to a square-cut finishing-jug; reverse, jump off, or descend left into the green recess.

17 **\*Carnival is Over** V4 (6b) (1984/5) Layback the right-hand line to finger-jugs; swing down left to the jug on *Stenka Razin* and get back down.

### 18 **\*Cave Route (The Craving)** 7m E5 6c (V6/7) (10.4.2003)

The cave roof: awesome. Power rightwards on undercuts before unsatisfactory fingerholds gain a big slot. For the full tick, pump, and E5 fix: make a long stretch up left for a rail. Traverse left, and then climb down to a square-cut jug, escaping down *Stenka Razin*. Or, it looks like you could top out, which would be much easier but loose. Multiple mats advised for the V grade given the rocks below.

FA: Martin Crocker (solo above a roll of sleeping foam and after top-roping the upper section)

19 **\*\*Bird on a Wire** V9 (6c) (2016) The stunning permanently chalked-up line out of the centre of the cave, by Doug Hamilton. A long standing target. You'll need many mats; jump off to get down.

20 **\*100% Pain** V8 (6c) (2011) James Squires's way over the roof, without use of the sidewall. (This supersedes *50% Pain* (V5), a consolation prize, which liberally uses the sidewall for feet.)

(The link-up between 19 and 20 is Squire's *Lone Ranger*, V9 6c.)

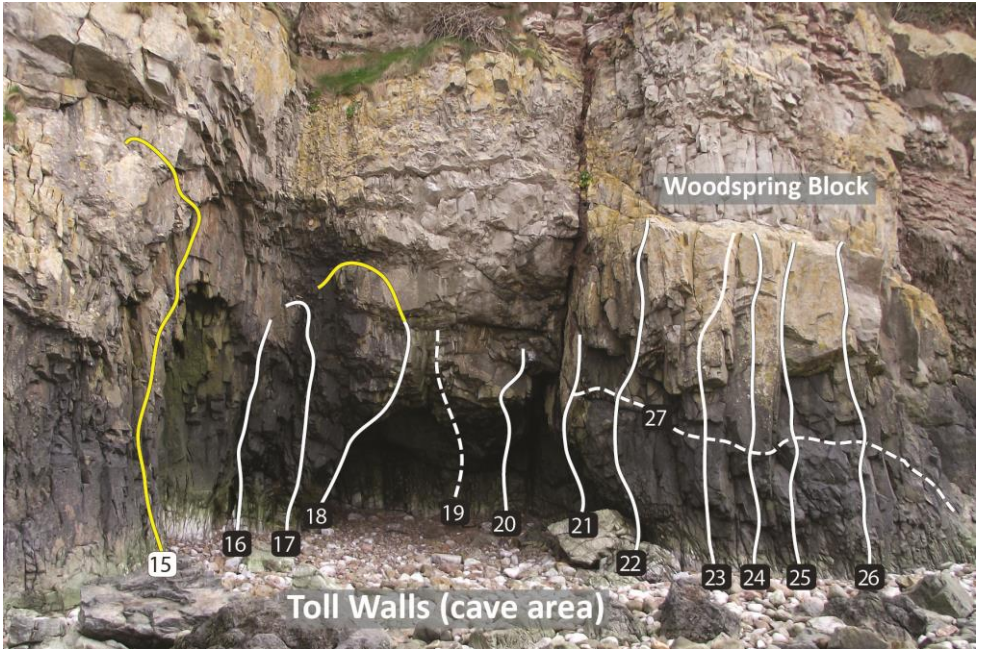
## Woodspring Block

This is the fine 4m to 5m high buttress right of the cave which used to be even finer up until the 90s when it shed its right arête and a couple of problems. But there are still a few plums here – all dedicated to members of the Environmental Health Department of Woodspring District Council. The usual descent is to hand traverse right across the sloping top of the buttress and descend a tricky wall (about 5a). Or you can reverse a problem (all have been reversed – without a mat).

21 **Aw No Mr Plaster!** V1 (5b) (1984/5) At the left-hand end of the buttress, pull up onto a jutting ledge past a mono (which you don't have to use). A better route, at \*hard-V3, is to SS down to the left with both hands on a large sidepull under a left-slanting crack: power out rightwards from here onto the original.

22 **\*Rodders and the Headless Pigeon** V2 (5c) (1984) Highball and scary. Pull up onto a sloping ledge and take the hanging wall over little overhangs above. It was a good story from Mr Rodwell.

23 **\*\*\*All Quiet on the Weston Front?** V2 (5c/6a) (1983) Beautiful movement defined by a run of opposing layaways and lots of body tension. Climb the narrow square-cut rib on opposing layaways. If you sit start at a big sidepull for right hand you get an extra move (but not an extra grade).



24 **\*Falling Off Grace** V5 (6b) (1983) A better hold for left hand makes this a little bit easier now than when first climbed in 1983 (tech 6c). With right hand and right foot on poorish holds on the arête, teeter up the groove to jugs. A bit morpho (the large low sidepull and all footholds right of the arête are out of bounds). The SS doesn't add any difficulty.

25 **\*Bugsy Molloy** V2/V4 (6a/b) (1984) There was an oft-disconcerting feel to the groove; climb it in the original style by using an obvious horizontal sloping pinch and a crimp in the bed of the groove (and nowt out right on the arête, which arose from a 90s rockfall). Unfortunately the sea has created a big undercut just under the sloping pinch; avoid using it for a taste of the original (V2 if you use it).

26 **Oh Those Curls!** V2 (5c) (1983/2003) The arête, using holds to either side.

There are two traverses.

27 **\*Laughing Boy** V4 (6b) (1983) An intricate and sustained low-level traverse normally taken left to right starting up *Aw No Mr Plaister!* When the beach level is low, extra footholds on a white band are revealed: only V2+ if you use them.

28 **Trumpet Voluntary** V3 (6a) (1985/6) Mr Bond's office signature tune. Traverse the buttress with feet at a mean 2m height; brass section optional.

Twenty metres right of Woodspring Block is a relatively high part of the cliff, capped by roofs. The two routes here require a lower-off rope in place (though it looks possible for heroes to break through the veg' cornice).

**29 Power of Love** 12m E2 5c (21.9.2014)

High in the grade, but protectable throughout. Climb up to an obvious line of pockets. A long reach straight up gains large holds and an awkward rest at a thin ledge and break. Grope over the first roof, and take the hanging crack strenuously over the second – pulling up into balance under the veg'.

FA: Martin Crocker (unseeded)

**30 Love of Power** 12m E2 5b (21.9.2014)

Starting 3m right of *Power of Love* climb a hairline crack over a shattered bulge to large wonky holds under a hawk's nest, peg. Pull through the roofs above on good holds and pull up into balance under the veg'.

FA: Martin Crocker (unseeded)

Fifty metres right of Woodspring Block is an arcing black ceiling at the right-hand end of which is an overhanging crack rising from a blind cave. Just before getting there (from the east) is a fairly promising buttress – Knight the Unworthy Buttress – with a recessed brown scoop to its left.

**31 Arise Sir paedophile** 6m E4 5c (8.8.2014)

A solo. From the recess, climb up finger-edges in the brown wall reaching left to a rounded sidepull on the rib which enables a quick stand-up to a break. Traverse left and descend easily.

FA: Martin Crocker (solo after top-roping)

**32 Arise Sir fraudster** 12m HVS 5a (8.8.2014)

Well protected throughout. From the recess climb the stepped corner leftwards to a break. Take a short groove and mantel over the capping ivy to trees at the top.

FA: Martin Crocker (solo after top-roping)

**33 Arise Sir 'just doing my job'** 12m E2 6a (8.8.2014)

Battle up the bulging finger-crack that rises from the right-hand side of the recess. Finish as for the previous route. Potentially very safe.

FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)

**34 Arise Sir 'chums in high places'** 12/8m E3 to E4/5 6a (8.8.2014)

In the centre of the mini-buttress right of the recess is a pocket and thin projecting undercut at 5m. From the undercut reach a crimp very high left and lock for jugs above. Finish as for the neighbouring knight of the realm or – if soloing – traverse right to descend. The E4/5 grade is the solo headpoint grade; it would be possible to baby-bounce protection for the E3 on-sight grade.

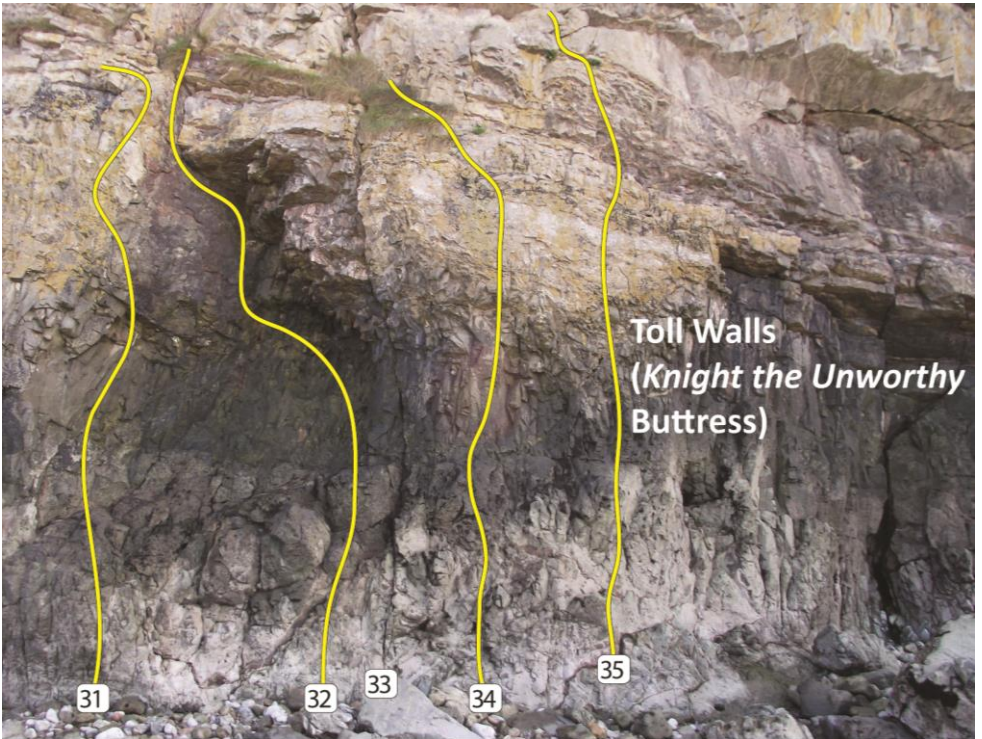
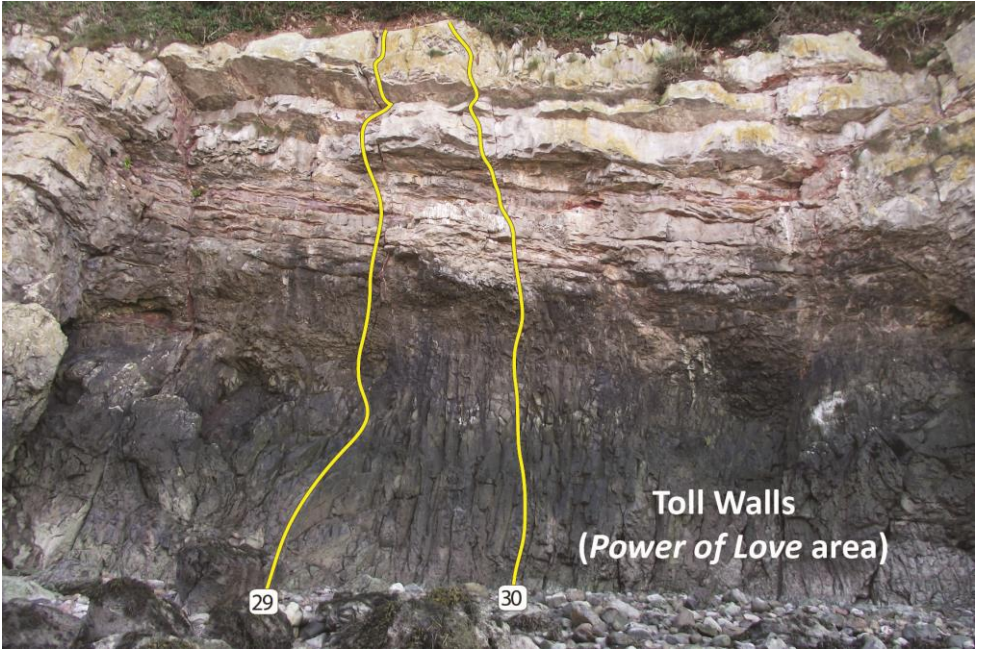
FA: Martin Crocker (solo after top-roping)

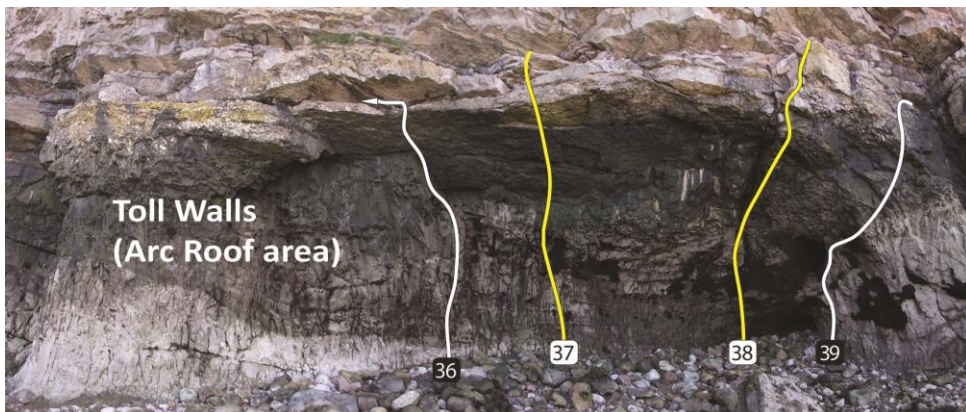
**35 Arise Sir showbiz** 12m E1 5b (8.8.2014)

Climb up to a pocket in the right-hand side of the mini-buttress; threads. Stretch for a finger-pocket and pull up to ledges. Climb the headwall leftwards to the finish of *Arise Sir fraudster*.

FA: Martin Crocker (solo after top-roping)







36 \***Just Little Old Me on Me Lunch** 5b (V0+) (1983) A classic problem over the arc roof. Start 6m left of the blind cave at a low rib under a stepped roof. Climb up to the roof, step left onto the rib, and stretch over to a jug-rail above. Hand traverse left 4m, 5m, or even 7m to a descent of choice. Mat advised (but first ascent without).

37 \*\***Disinformationists** 7m E4 6b (22.5.2019)

Big moves: lovely jubbly. Take on the ceiling 2m right of 36: two horizontal cracks provide sound gear. From the juggy ledge above reverse-frig the route.

FA: Martin Crocker (ground-up), unseconded

**Project:** the roof just right looks feasible and *possibly* boulderable with mat-Monroe and entourage, but even then at significant risk. Skates on for the first ascent?

38 \***Dishonours System** 7m E4 6b (9.7.2004)

Battle out along the crack with the crux move to seize a jug over the lip. Safe with wires.

FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)

39 **Lavender List *ad nauseam*** V3 (6a) (9.7. 2004) From the black hole under the crack, boulder right onto a rib. Pull straight up for a large undercut on the right.



## Catacombs (OS Ref. 315628)

The main event here is the superb cave (Swing Cavern) which undercuts a small grassy headland at the right (west) end of the Toll Walls sector. Swing Cavern faces west offering the promise of sunshine in the winter. Only the original substantive problems are described – no slight intended at the capacity to work out all manner of hold-specific, inverse sit-start, bum-dragging monsters at your leisure. The full Swing Cavern problems are pretty high and a mobile mat or two will be required to keep just about within V (rather than E) grades. An *in-situ* beach will help.

There is a less important sub-sector just to the left (east) of Swing Cavern on the north-facing side of the small headland. Above a scoop at sea level is the seaward entrance of a curious through-cave (which hosts some surreal subterranean potential – bring a lantern).



1 4c (2003) The left wall of the through-cave.

2 \*U **Bend** V3 (6a) (2003) ‘Really good’: the crack above the through-cave.

3 4c (2003) The right wall of the through-cave using big layaways.

There is a lower wall down and right of the through cave, but it seems either to have shrunk or been swallowed up by the sea. Nine problems between V0- and V4 have been recorded here.



## Swing Cavern

4 **Lindy Hop** V0 (5a) (1983) The grey/green wall a metre left of the cave.

5 **Break-back Dance** V1 (5c) (1983) Take the leaning cave arête strenuously (projecting wide pinch for left hand). Can be extended into *Beepbop* (V2).

6 **\*\*Beepbop** V3 (6a) (1983) Start on a good fingerhold (for right hand) a metre inside the left wall of the cave; long moves with an undercut for right hand and a sharp crimp high left lead to a jug over the lip. Hand traverse the lip to exit on a big pocket sometimes filled with fishing tackle (oh, those mischievous fishing folk). Storms caused a change to the scenery at 3m (a large undercut has gone) – top-end V3 now. The crimp can be eliminated by powerful undercutting keeping inside the cave, at **\*\*V4** (6b); head for the obvious deep undercut high up (but not reclinced since rockfall).

7 **\*Swingdance** V4 (6a) (1984) Great fun. Start as for *Beepbop* but break immediately right onto a handrail: swing down along this until you can window-wiper across to the far wall. Court danger with a finish up *One o'clock Jump* or keep low and safe along the deep break (V3).

8 **\*\*\*Dances in Polar Reaches** V6 (6b) (1988) The cream of the coast, just making the grade. SS at the back of the cave (no right wall) and follow *Swingtime's* handrail to its end. Power over direct to the deep high undercut, extend over the lip, and then finish along *Beebop's* lip traverse.

9 **\*Jitterbug** V5 (6b) (2003) Maybe V4, but pumpy. SS at the back of the cave and jerk out to the jug-rail of *Swingdance*. Twirl left across *Beepbop* and jive around the arête onto the grey/green wall.

10 **One o'clock Jump** V3 (6a) (1984) Scary. Pull up onto the smooth inside right wall of the cave. Power through the roof using a crucial finger-jam in a brown pocket (for right hand) to emerge at the exit of *Beepbop*. Don't leave your finger behind.

11 **Two o'clock Crock** V3 (6a) (1984/5) Equally frightening: another hard move high up. Take a superdirect line up the overlapping wall right of the cave using an obvious but shallow rectangular pinch for right hand. You could bale and use larger holds a metre right (V1 – but still worthwhile).

Right of Swing Cavern is a smaller cave, which contains the first three problems. Very occasionally high pebble levels will make the problems easier (and shorter!).

12 **Hypocaust** V0 (5a) (1984) From a scoop in the left wall of the cave follow good, but awkward, holds through bulges – a common descent. It can be started up the rounded grey arête on the left.

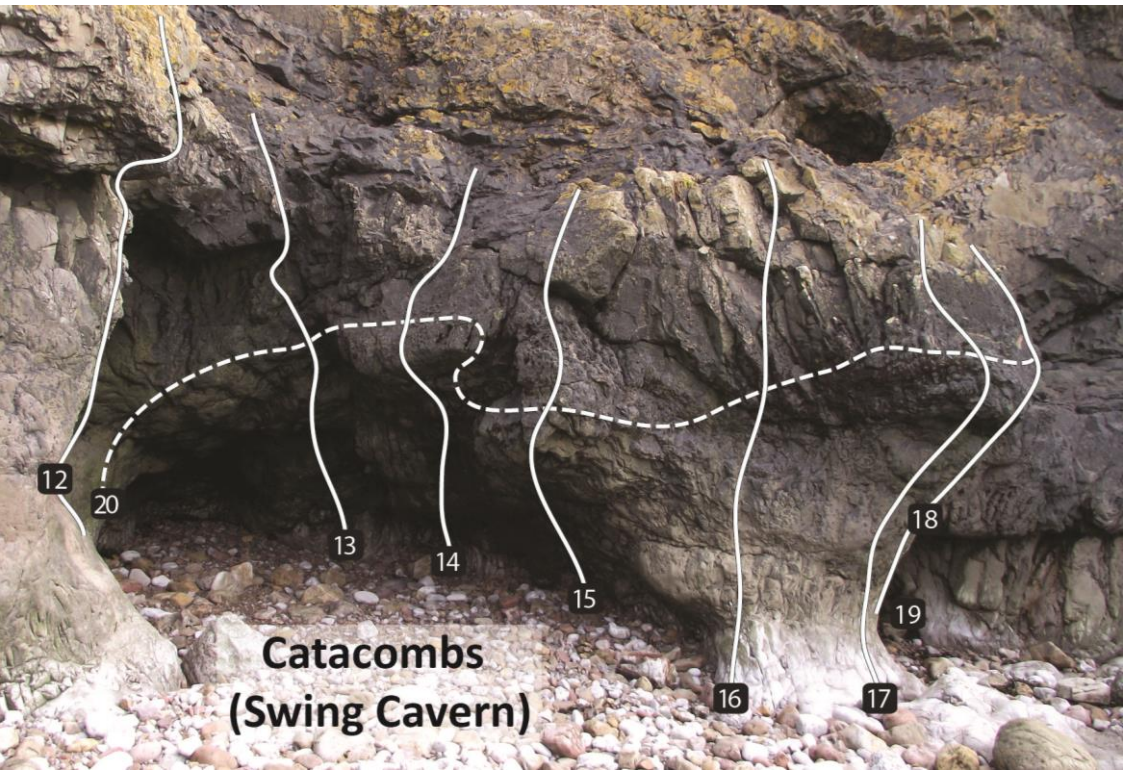
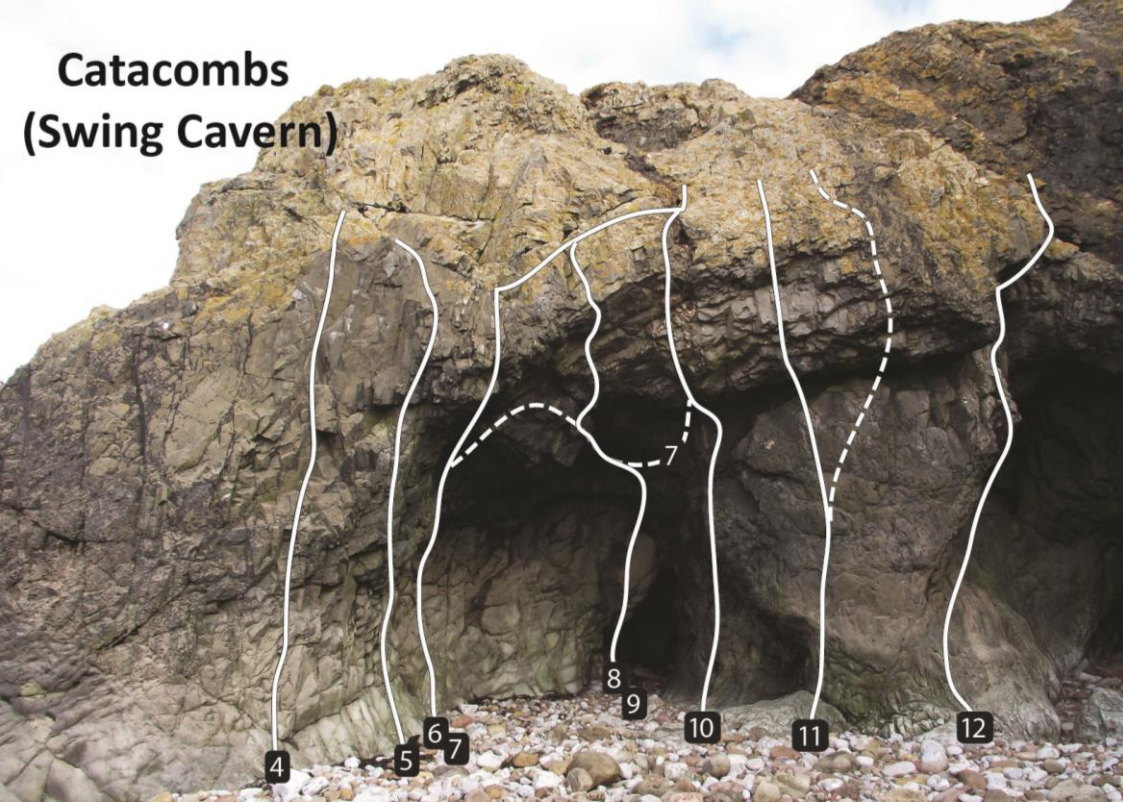
13 **Vic's Video** (shot 2 March 1988) V3 (6a) (1985/6) Battle up bulging scoops above the deepest part of the cave past a finger-jam for right hand. The SS is **\*V4** (6b).

14 **\*\*Bat Apocalypse** V4 (6b) (1983) Improbable – but it goes! SS with left hand in finger-pocket/thread in the right wall of the cave, and lock hard for a crinkly jug. Stretch around for small holds on the hanging slab above, and rock over – magic!

15 **Chi-Rho** V0 (5a) (1984) The little prow on the right, starting low on a bucket.

16 **Azulejos** (4b) (1984) The pleasant wide scoop.

# Catacombs (Swing Cavern)



# Catacombs (Swing Cavern)

17 **The Labarum V1** (5c) (1984) The jutting prow on its left side; start on a finger-pocket for left. The SS is V2 (5c/6a); a layaway for right hand starts you off.

18 **Better to Die on your Feet than to Live on your Knees V0-** (5a) (1984) Jug-haul up the right side of the prow. The powerful SS is \*V4 (6b); much tougher than it looks.

19 **Rebirth V0-** (4c) (2003) Start squeezed deep inside the chimney to the right and wriggle out.

20 **\*\*Freddie's Speeded Up Song V5** (6b) (11.5.2019) A brilliant lip-traverse. Swing right from *Hypocaust* to *Vic's Video's* finger-jam, press on to *Bat Apocalypse*; then drop down with left hand on its crinkly jug. Take buckets around a prow and speed up around a larger prow to exit up 18.



## **The Birnbeck Boulders** (OS Ref. 313627)

This is a substantive and intricate sector towards the west (Weston-super-Mare) end of the coast, which is popular with fishing people. It comprises a series of cliffs rather than boulders and offers more routes than boulder problems. The routes are characterful and they follow proper lines.

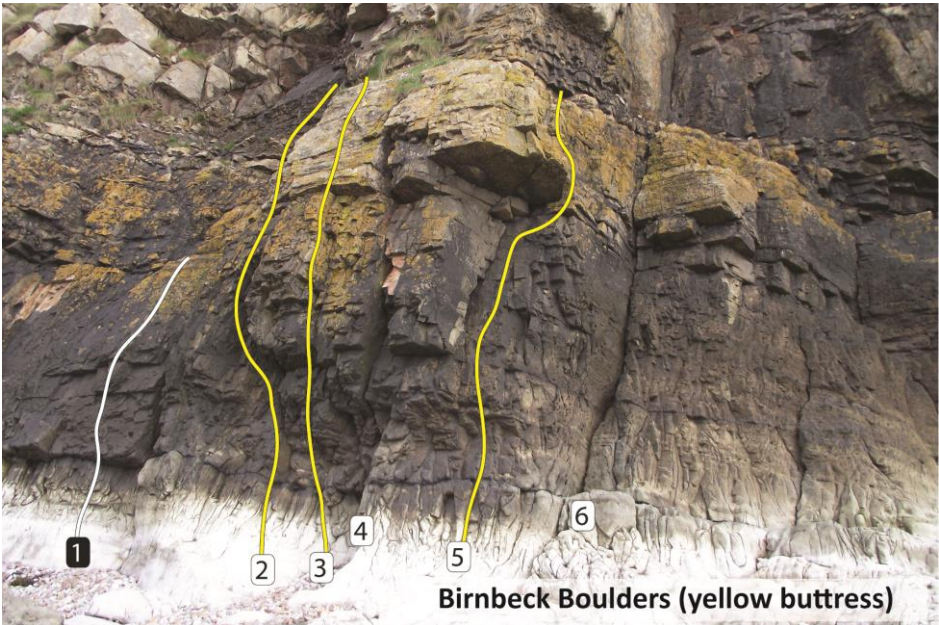
### **Approach**

This sector is situated one km from Birnbeck Pier at the northwestern tip of Weston-super-Mare, from which it can be approached along Kewstoke Road (passing a former restaurant – the one-time *Cosa Nostra*). Or just keep on driving along the same road westwards from Kewstoke. Parking is limited to three small lay-bys: one either side of the road by a speed-check unit and one on the south side of the road just to the east (about six car spaces in all; though at high tide at weekends or evening-time you'll be competing with fishermen). The lay-bys are situated 250m east of the former restaurant at the Weston-super-Mare end of Kewstoke Road. Steps lead from the lay-by on the north side of the road to the cliff-top 20m away. You can also approach this area by a 5-minute walk along the foreshore from Swing Cavern.

## Pierview Pinnacle Area

A prominent feature is Pierview Pinnacle, the 7m high stack 50m east of the metal staircase.

One hundred and fifty metres east of the pinnacle is a **yellow buttness** dissected by vertical cracks. To descend: belay on the terrace and then scramble carefully down to the right. Most are routes rather than boulder problems, and will feel so especially if the beach has been scoured away (as in the topo).



**1 Staying Power** V0- (4c) (2003) The pleasant slab. (There's also an easier problem just to the left.)

**2 Just When it Gets Going** 6m D (2003)

Climb the toplless crack.

**3 From that Day to This** 7m E2 5b (2003)

A serious solo up the centre of the narrow pillar left of the tall crack. (But if you wish you can check it out from its neighbours before committing yourself.)

**4 Sorry is a Broken Cup** 7m VD (2003)

Climb the tall crack.

**5 Sponging Freewheeler** 7m VD (2003)

Follow the crack around the right-hand side of the jutting roof.

**6 Box Office!** 6m M (2003)

The nice corner-crack; also a possible descent.

FAs: Martin Crocker (on-sight solo)

The following three routes are located on the cliff in the left side of the bay east of the pinnacle.

**7 Zip it Bojo!** 12m E1 5c (25.5.2019)

Well protected. Scramble to a sloping ledge. Climb steeply over an obvious small square roof, and pull up carefully to a solid crack (or swing right on a big hollow jug). Claw up ivy to a tree.

FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)



**8 \*Who Owns your Soul?** 15m E2 5b

(8.4.2003)

Small cliff; strong line. Start below the centre of a long, large roof. Climb a crack; then take the traverse-line left beneath the roof, pulling strenuously around into a groove. Move up and left to a crack (or swing right on a big hollow jug). Claw up ivy to a tree. FA: Martin Crocker (on-sight), John Harwood

**9 Tears of May** 15m E3 5c (25.5.2019)

A weird and insecure lip-traverse, which requires a pre-placed rope to belay. Start far right and move up 3m on good holds (gear here). Traverse left, using a downward-pointing spike, onto a foot-ledge under the right side of the long roof – hard! Climb up left above the roof, and then mantel onto the veg' a metre left of a flake. A direct start over the roof is the same grade (when not a waterfall!).

FA: Martin Crocker (solo after top-roping)

The next cluster of routes is based on the sheer wall behind the pinnacle.

**10 Trade with the Devil** 10m E1 5a (3.4.2003)

The promontory left of the sheer wall harbours a hanging crack. From a raised platform, climb an overhanging rib boldly to gain a suspect block hold below the crack. Climb the crack to the top.

FA: Martin Crocker (on-sight solo)

**11 Remains to be Unseen** 10m E2 5c (6.4.2003)

Climb a V-groove left of the sheer wall and swing right to a rightward-slanting crack. Gain a white jug on the face overhead, and make a long reach for a hidden hold up to the right. Mantel to the top.

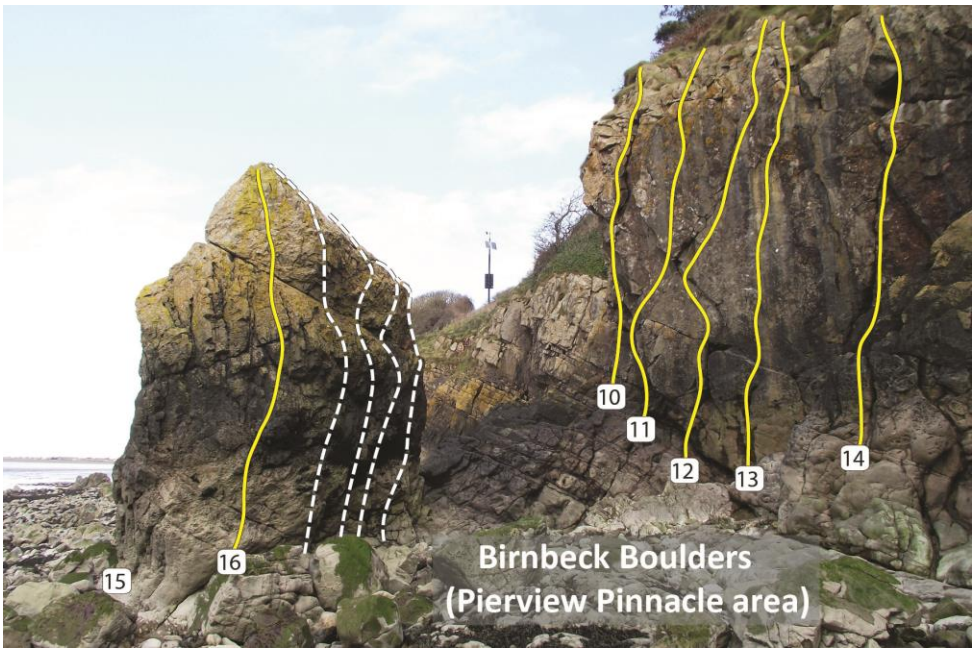
FA: Martin Crocker, John Harwood

**12 \*Why Do We Age Slower in Space?** 10m E1 5c (6.4.2003)

Excellent and protectable. Start below the sheer face at a short crack. Climb the crack and swing left to a rightward-slanting crack that cuts across the wall. Follow the crack to the top with interest.

FA: Martin Crocker, John Harwood





**13 \*Welcome to Our Thing** 10m E6 6c (6.4.2003)

The sheer wall; very bold, but not as blank as it looks. Climb the short crack of *Why Do We Age Slower in Space?* (wire above pocket) and reach up right for a narrow hand-ledge. Move up onto the hold from the right – necky. (Some small wires can now be placed in the slight groove on the right.) Using open layaways and fingertip holds make precarious moves to jugs below the top.

FA: Martin Crocker (after top-roping), John Harwood. *On a walk with my wife in 2011 I found that someone had drilled a hole in the route for a bolt. So I stuffed a polite note into the hole.*

**14 Bond with God** 10m S 4a (3.4.2003)

Scramble up the easy slab right of the sheer wall, and then climb the steep crack and groove.

FA: Martin Crocker (on-sight solo)

The 7m high pinnacle supplies some good climbing on sunny solid rock that would be amenable if not for the chunky leg-breaking rocks below. All the ‘problems’ were originally on-sight soloed without a mat; but best forget that mealy-mouth boloney and bring multiple mats.

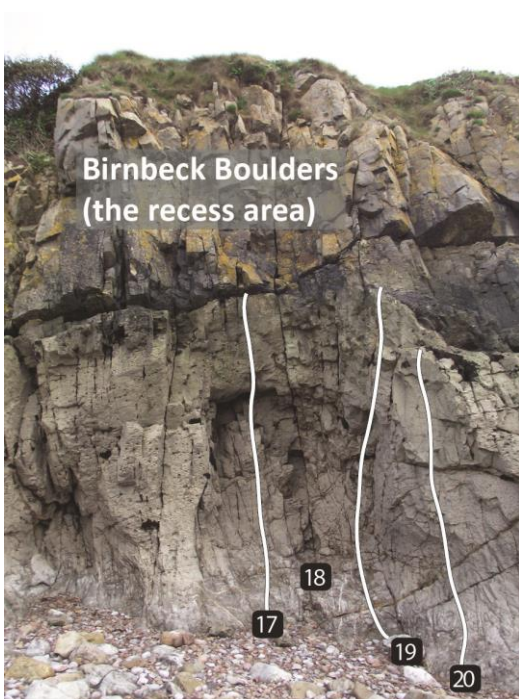
**15 Hornli Ridge** 7m D (3.4.2003)

The striking seaward arête, climbed on its right-hand side.

**16 Ends Not with a Bang but with a Whymper** 7m VD (3.4.2003)

The less prominent northwest arête – more of a rib really.

On the steep west face is a family of lookalike solos/problems which climb past a sloping shelf at two-thirds height; from left to right they are: V1 (5b), V1 (5b), V1 (5b), and V0 (5a). Add E grades and a few frights for on-sight mat-free solos. FAs: Martin Crocker (on-sight solo), 3.4.2003.



### Bathing Cove Area

Beneath the two lay-bys on the north side of Kewstoke Road is a series of rock promontories with intervening coves and bays. (One is described as a 'Bathing Cove' on the OS Explorer Map, and it's easy to see why.) The easterly of the paths, which descends from the lay-bys, reaches a metal staircase that descends between two promontories to the foreshore at Bathing Cove.

On the northern side of the easternmost headland is a low recess of rugged wave-splashed grey rock.

**17 In Recess** V0+ (5b) (2003) Climb the back wall using the obvious pocket above a small roof. High!

**18 Order in the Court** V0 (5a) (2003) The 'rough and tough' crack. High!

**19 Judge 100 years** V0- (4c) (2003) The flake in the right wall.

**20 George Grab n' Flee** V0- (4c) (2003) The pins and needles rugged wall.

At the back of Bathing Cove is a bulging wall with overhangs.

**21 FEVERED** 7m E3 6a (1pt. aid) (6.4.2003)

An 8a in waiting? At the back of the cove make a lustful stretch right to an *in-situ* thread in a pocket-line in the large ceiling. Reconciling bad form, use the thread to reach holds over the lip. Crank around and finish on the left onto steep grass. Make sure the thread is OK and backed up before weighting it (let alone falling on it).

FA: Martin Crocker, John Harwood

**22 Frenzied** 8m HVS 5a (3.4.2003)

Climb a steep crack right of the ceiling and exit right onto grass.

FA: Martin Crocker (on-sight solo)

**23 Furious** 8m E4 6a (6.4.2003)

A strenuous climb with quite an impact. Step left from a projecting toe of rock 2 metres right of *Frenzied*, and climb up to a weakness in the roof. Reach an amazing jug concretion on the lip, and power around to reluctant finishing holds. Exit above onto steep grass: care required.

FA: Martin Crocker, John Harwood

**24 Fanatical** 8m E4 6a (6.4.2003)

From the projecting toe of rock, reach up right into a pink recess below the roof. Some gymnastics above, possibly 6b, gain good holds over the lip. Bear right onto a grass-splashed exit.

FA: Martin Crocker, John Harwood



Birnbeck Boulders (Bathing Cove)

In the next bay westwards is a hanging tower on the left. (While here, why not explore the tunnel through the promontory?)

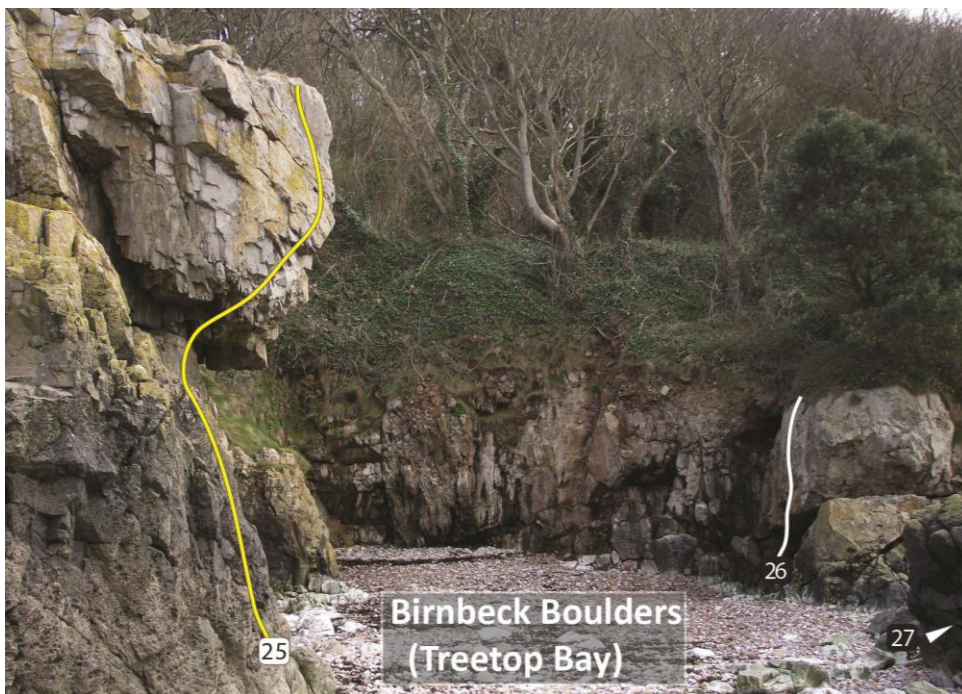
**25 Chop Chop!** 7m E4 5c/6a (3.4.2003)

Place a crash-mat (or two, or three.....) and then climb easily to a small overhang in the arête of the tower. Undercut for a block hold, spring for better holds and pull up to safety. Gear possible?  
FA: Martin Crocker (solo after top-roping)

At the back of the bay on the right is the Treetop Boulder.

**26 \*Go Climb a Tree!** V2? (5c?) (2003)

Take on the face right of the slanting crack: grade and description lost amongst my scribbles, at least I found an old pic showed the chalked-up holds and line.



**27 Up Yours** V0- (4c) (2003)

Twelve metres right, climb over an obvious inverted V-arch.

There are various other possibilities in the vicinity, including some easier problems and scrambles.

Around the next promontory to the west is a north-facing wall – the Face of Bureaucracy – that used to boast a prow with an arrogant nose (wiped out one night in the late noughties by a perfect storm: it's now on the foreshore). **Parting Ways** 6m E3 6b (6.4.2003) used to climb the prow (FA: Martin Crocker, John Harwood).

**28 Bye Bye Mendip** 6m E2 5c/6a (V2) (2003)

Climb over the narrow roof right of the ex-prow and up the wall above.

FA: Martin Crocker (on-sight solo)

**29 The Futile Reinventions of a Paranoid Local Authority** 6m VS 5a (2003)

Climb the wall just right to join the top of a leftward-staggered crack.

FA: Martin Crocker (on-sight solo)

**30 Too Many Chiefs** 6m HVS 5a (2003)

Swarm through the juggy but strenuous overhang above the centre of the staggered crack.

FA: Martin Crocker (on-sight solo)

**31 \*Subsumed in Bureaucracy** 6m E1 5c (V1) (2003)

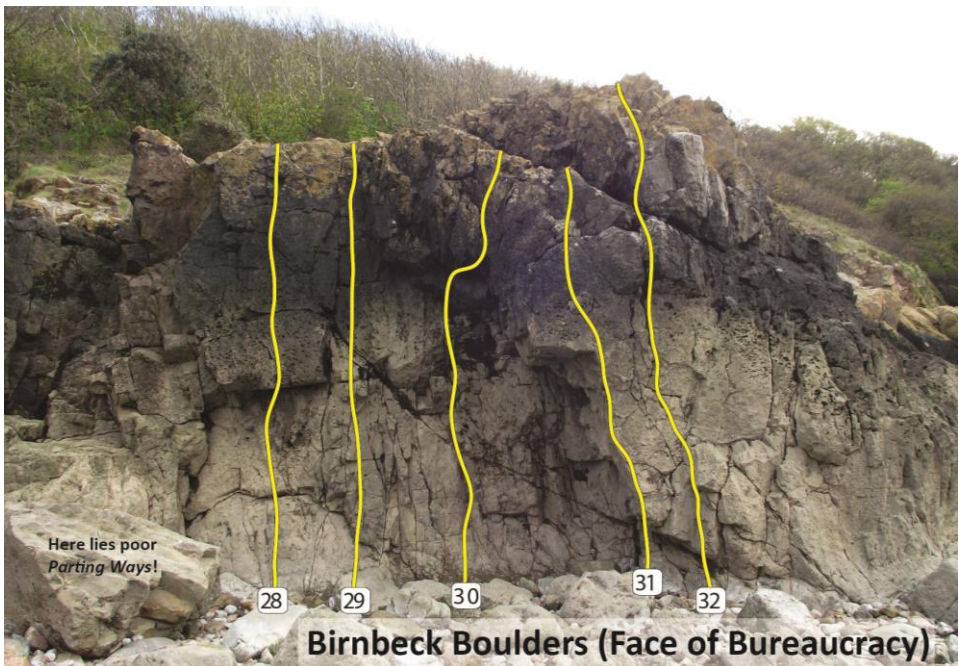
Take the arête on the right of the wall direct using a soopa-doopa jug over the lip.

FA: Martin Crocker (on-sight solo)

**32 The Only Way is Out** VS 5a (V0) (2003)

The cracks on the right.

FA: Martin Crocker (on-sight solo)



Just round to the right (west) is a short leaning wall above a high-level ledge (and puddle).

**33 In a Muddle, Not a Puddle** V0 (5a) (2003) Take the leaning wall, and don't slip into the puddle.



The *Cosa Nostra* Area lies 300m to the west, and is best reached by a trundle along the foreshore. You'll pass a load of virgin rock, but much of it is fractured and capped by veg'. An obvious rift might be worth a gander, though its best line (a shallow groove on the left wall) quickly fizzles into grot.

### ***Cosa Nostra* Area, Spring Cove** (OS Ref. 311626)

This area is named after the one-time bustling restaurant of the 80s whose now burned-out skeleton overlooks the cliff-top towards the equally dilapidated Birnbeck Pier (The Old Pier). (The restaurant, which had become The Cliffs' Café, was torched by yobs in 2017.)

Below and right of the restaurant buildings is a fine 7m high sea-cliff, a really pleasant place to hang for some chillaxed leading and soloing especially if the shingle beach is in place. This is the best of the lower-grade lead-venues hereabouts and, in this respect, is as good as most similar things on Sand Point. All the routes are easier and – with two exceptions – better protected than they look.

#### East Cliff



**1 \*Cosa Nostra** 7m VD (1990s)

Follow the grooved arête left of the deep crack.

**2 Cliffs' Café Crack** 7m D (1990s)

Wedge up the deep crack.

**3 \*Yellow Slab** 8m HS 4a (1990s)

Eliminate but very nice; just a bit like *Hopeful Slab* at Sand Point. Climb the slab right of the deep crack past an unusual thread runner at 5m.

**4 Yellow Slab (right)** 8m D (1990s)

The indefinite crack in the right-hand side of the yellow slab.

## West Cliff

### 5 \***The Torch** 7m HVS 4c (1990s)

No gear to see. Climb the end-wall on lovely edges (avoid holds to either side as the wall tapers).

### 6 **Gunned Down** 7m HS (1990s)

Follow the slight ramp; possibly unprotectable.

### 7 \***Mafiosa** 7m HS 4a (1990s)

Takes on the steep grey wall. Climb to a projecting handhold, and press on direct on more jugs.

### 8 \***Denaro** 7m VS 4c (1990s)

The centre of the steep grey wall: it looks about E2 but good holds ensure otherwise.

### 9 **Motisi** 7m VD (1990s)

Pull out of the cave and take a pocketed crack into a cleft.

### 10 \***Aquacotta** 7m HS 4b (1990s)

Climb the corner for 5m and fix good gear. Using a superb pocket stride left into a short groove that leads to the top.

### 11 **Linguini** 6m D (1990s)

March up the series of deep pockets left of an arête.



12 \***Carbonara** 6m VS 4c (1990s)

A beautiful mini-arete. No gear until the last move which is cool as that's the crux (avoid *Salsiccia*'s finishing-holds).

13 **Salsiccia** 6m M (1990s)

The line of vast jugs and pockets right of the arête, which the confident can use as a descent.

14 \***Buridda** 7m D (1990s)

Very good: climb the cracks in the slab.

15 **Bruschetta** 7m D (1990s)

The unmistakable thin crack that splits the slab.

16 \***Caponata** 7m HVS 5b (1990s)

Eliminate, well protected with wires. (E2 as an on-sight solo.) Climb the steep slab direct on crinkles to a horizontal wire slot 5m up. Using a cute knobble for left hand finish up the tricky headwall.

17 \*\***Calzone** 7m HVS 5a (1990s)

The stunning little right arête. Shimmy up the widening pillar, and continue up its edge finishing with a long reach from a jug. Wire placements at half height, but exciting as an on-sight solo (E1).

FAs: Uncertain. I avoided the cliffs when the *Cosa Nostra* was open, watching. I returned sometime in the 90s for the routes. They may well have been climbed before. Though the restaurant name refers to the Sicilian mafia, the premises – certainly in later life – operated as a Greek Taverna (perhaps the route names should have been Greek dishes?!).

