

SAMOUNTAIN

SOUTH AFRICA'S DEDICATED CLIMBING MAGAZINE ISSUE NO. 91 DECEMBER 2024 - FEBRUARY 2025

CLIMBING SCOTLAND

Creags,
Sgùrrs &
Sea Stacks

TRADATHON
CEDERBERG
2024

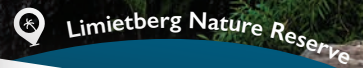
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Photo TONY LOURENS

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Enjoying a macchiato and a Nutella cornetto on Cogman's Buttress, Montagu
Photo SUSAN WESSELS

DEVASTATING CLIMBING BAN – access rears its (very) ugly head again!

“The Victorian Government and Parks Victoria have announced sweeping bans to rock climbing at Arapiles, a place with more than 3,000 recorded routes.”

The climbing world was rocked to its core when this crushing news was splashed all over social media a few months back.

I have never had the privilege of climbing at Arapiles, but I have read numerous articles over many decades about the pristine climbing at this iconic crag and I, as many of you, have seen thousands of breathtaking images of climbers on the exquisite orange and black streaked walls of what many refer to as ‘the best crag in the world’, climbing routes that are regarded as some of the finest to be found anywhere – the most famous of course being

Punks in the Gym, the world’s first 8b+, opened by the legendary Wolfgang Güllich and a route that the British climber, Andy Pollitt, dedicated the last part of his climbing career to. It’s that good.

When I read this news, I felt a deep sadness for world climbing. Even though it was happening on a continent thousands of kilometres away, I could feel the profound emotional effect across the waters. A sort of helplessness. Like when your favourite toy is taken from you as a child and you are powerless to get it back. The only thing you can do is ask nicely and hope that the powers that be will lend a sympathetic ear. But like all government bodies, they have other agendas, and a group of climbers lobbying for their most heartfelt lifestyle and passion to be returned is not an urgent matter for them to contend with.

To try and align my emotions to what every Australian climber must be feeling, I thought, imagine if I woke up one morning and read “The Cederberg mountains have been closed to all climbing”. Krakadouw gone, Tafelberg gone, Wolfberg gone, Truitjieskraal gone, Rocklands gone. The devastation we, as South African climbers, would suffer, is unimaginable. Almost suicidal! A huge chunk of our lives would be taken from us in the most brutal fashion, so I can imagine what this has done (and is doing) to our climbing brothers and sisters down under. I hope and pray (to the mountain gods) that this atrocity can somehow be turned around, or that an acceptable compromise can be agreed to, which can bring climbing back to this paradise.

But this does remind us, in no uncertain terms, of the delicate dance we perpetually have to perform regarding access to our beloved mountains and climbing areas. We take so much for granted, but with one quick signature on a document, crags, walls, and whole mountains can be pulled from beneath our feet before we have a chance to place our first piece of protection. It’s that scary!

If you are not a climber, you simply cannot understand the enormity of such a ban and the absolute devastation this will have on Australian and world climbing. It is tantamount to tearing the soul out of your chest, leaving a dark empty space. It just cannot be replaced!

Protect our mountains and be safe in the hills

Tony

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COVER PHOTO: Climbing the beautiful corner above the crux 'coffin' slot on the iconic Old Man of Hoy, Scotland.

Photo **PATSY LOURENS**

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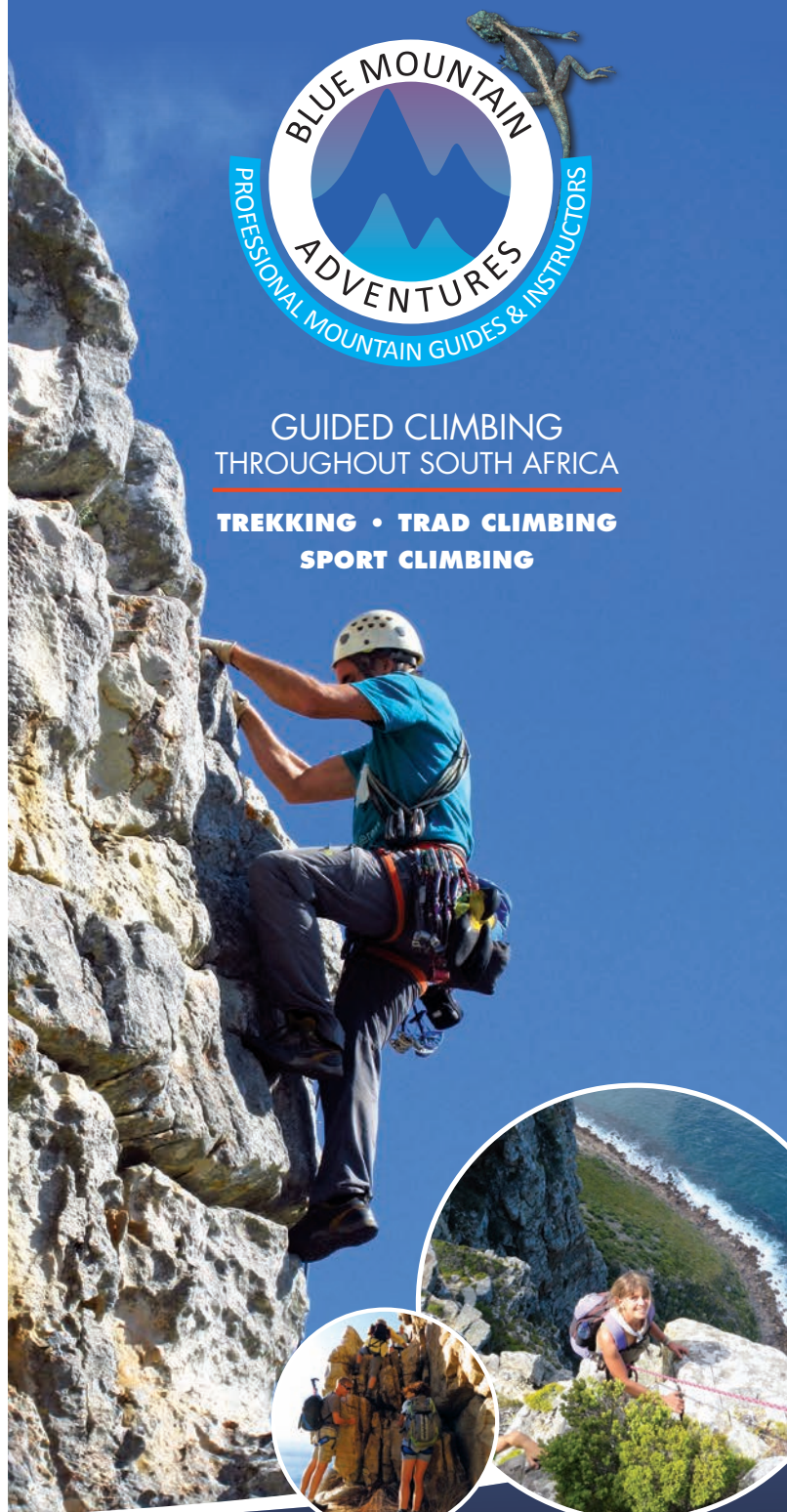
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A SCOTTISH

Walking along the picturesque Loch A'an Basin en route to Hell's Lum Crag in the Cairngorms.
Photo MHAIRI WILLIAMS

Creags, Sgùrrs and Sea Stacks

By Tony Lourens

There we were, walking along the boggy path across the Moor Fea from Rackwick Hostel on the small remote island of Hoy, a few hours by ferry north of the Scottish mainland. It was chucking it down, all four of us clad head to toe in Goretex rainsuits, en

route to climb the Old Man of Hoy, arguably the most famous and iconic sea stack in Britain, if not the world. The rain was incessant and it looked unlikely that we were going to get a weather window to climb the Old Man, but the forecast said

H TALE

that the rain would stop at about 8.30 am and stay that way for the rest of the day. I put my trust in the weather gods and the UK met station and continued plodding along to the top of the mainland that looked across to this famous sea stack.





I first heard about the Old Man of Hoy about 50 years prior, when I read about it in one of Chris Bonington's seminal autobiographies of his early climbing exploits. I was an avid reader of mountain literature in my teens during my early climbing years and, amongst other celebrated routes that I added to the tick list that I gleaned from these books, the Old Man was one that stayed near the top of that list – a route, a summit that I really wanted, one that I dreamed about for decades.

It was first climbed in 1966 by the all-star cast of Chris Bonington, Rusty Baillie and Tom Patey, then famously re-enacted for a huge BBC production the following year, with more renowned climbers joining in the mix for the cameras, including Joe Brown, Dougal Haston, Peter Crew and Ian McNaught Davis. The broadcast was watched by millions of viewers on their tellys throughout the UK, catapulting the previously unheard-of sea stack to mega fame status.

Now, standing on the barren, cold, windswept mainland of Hoy, gazing across at this legendary 140-metre-high teetering tower, seeds of doubt started to tickle the pink lining of my brain where apparently your ability to reason with yourself is kept. *How badly do I really want to climb this thing, I thought to myself? Dreams can sometimes turn into nightmares.* It looked scary, exposed and decidedly uninviting. But we were there, and the rain had stopped. And I wanted this summit badly. I pushed my fears to the back of my head and quelled the butterflies in my stomach to a semi-controlled fluttering as Mhairi, Brad and I started down the muddy, treacherous descent approach to the crashing seas surrounding the base of the Old Man. My wife, Patsy, very altruistically volunteering to sit up on the mainland to record our ascent on camera.

A few years back, I met Brad and Mhairi, an Anglo-Scottish couple, based near Inverness in Scotland, who were on a climbing holiday in South Africa. They hired me as their guide for a few climbs on Table Mountain and in Montagu, and we quickly became friends. During the time we spent together, we chatted about the awesome climbing in Scotland, and I made it clear that I would be super keen to do a climbing trip there to tick off some of the classic routes. They very kindly invited us over to climb with them when we could find a period that suited all of us. And so the seed was planted.

On one of Scotland's ultra classics, *Savage Slit*, Cairngorms. Photo BRAD ALLIX

Although I had been to Scotland a few times in the past, I had done very little climbing there, and I harboured a strong desire to return and climb some of the classic routes as described in Ken Wilson's excellent *Classic Rock* and *Hard Rock* publications. Here was the perfect opportunity to get back to the wild and unspoilt hills of the Scottish Highlands and experience some of the finest trad in those remote mountain settings, surrounded by steep walls, sweeping valleys and bluer than blue lochs. Say what you like about the weather and conditions, it is a climbers' paradise, a place that talks to the inner savage within your soul. A land where they wash down Haggis with fine single malt, where the names of mountains are impossible to pronounce, and a country that calls the unicorn their national animal. I started planning!

My first acquisition was the newly published *Scottish Rock Climbs*, an excellent guidebook showcasing hundreds and hundreds of classic routes, from single pitch crags, to long multi-pitch climbs deep in the Cairngorms. Celebrated routes on Ben Nevis and across the Isle of Skye to exciting sea cliff cragging and, of course, a number of sea stacks, including, obviously, the Old Man of Hoy. I sat many a night in bed with my book and pencil, marking all the routes that I wanted to do, being waaay too optimistic of course, as we only had three weeks, and also had to contend with the friendly Scottish weather. But I've always had a penchant for tick lists, particularly over-ambitious ones.

After numerous WhatsApp calls and messages between Scotland and Montagu over the months preceding our trip, discussing routes and plans and back-up plans, we eventually landed at Inverness airport to blue skies and a smiling Mhairi and Brad. We wasted little time, and after a day of sea cliff cragging near their home in Hopeman, and stocking up with food, we packed their Ford camper van and headed for the Cairngorms in the eastern Highlands, the biggest national park in the UK, and famous for its excellent remote climbing with big mountain ambience.

The crags at the top of the mountains were all clogged in when we poked our snouts out of the van on the first morning of our road trip, to be greeted by the crisp Scottish summer air. In Scotland, if it's not actually raining, you go regardless and hope for the best. So, we duly packed our bags and headed up into the corries en route to the famous *Savage Slit*, an uber classic of moderate grade, the enticing photo in *Classic Rock*, well etched in my memory.

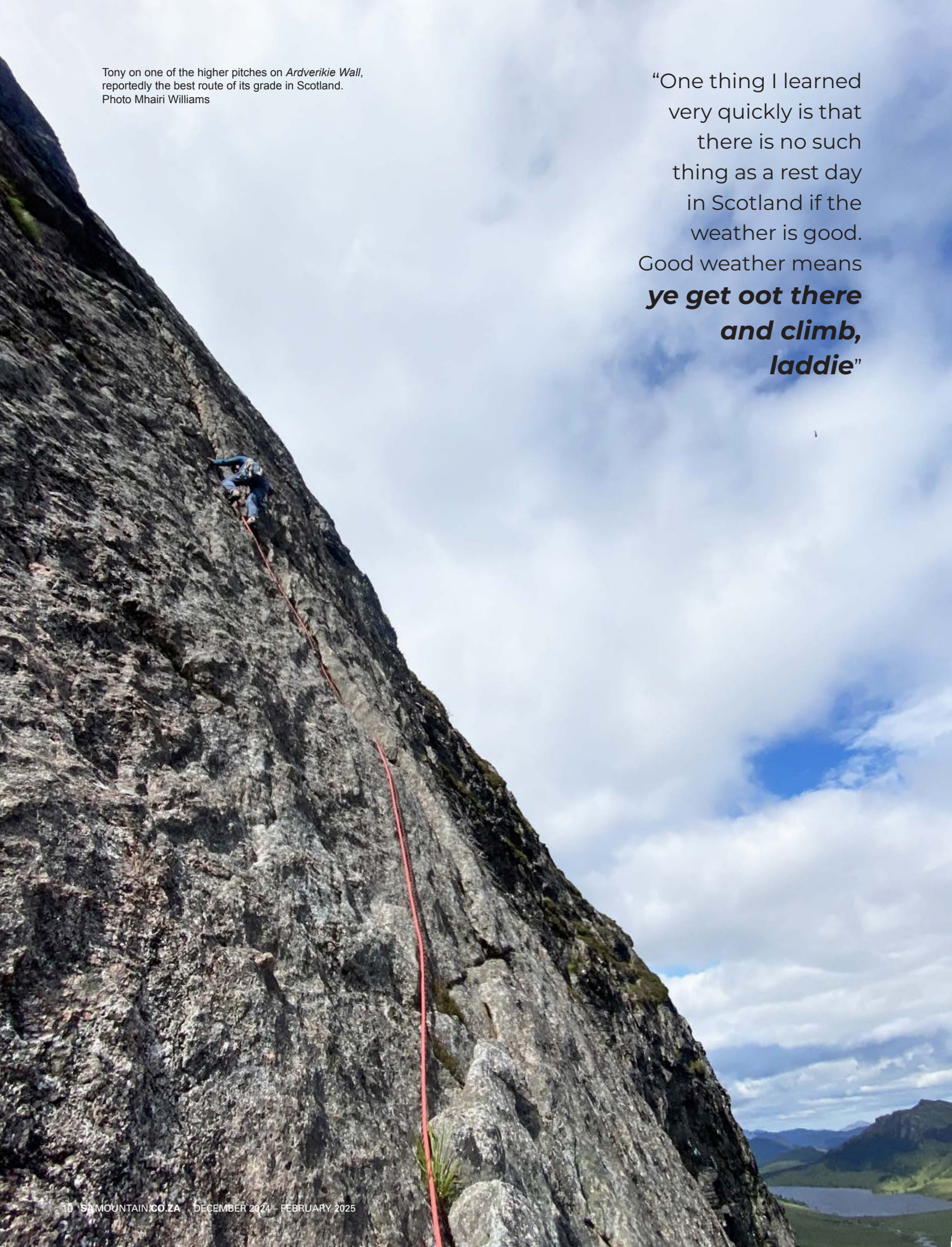
As Brad and Mhairi had already climbed this route, the plan was for Mhairi and I to climb >>



Blundering around on top of a ridge in the Cairngorms on a typical Scottish summer's day, trying to find our route. Photo TONY LOURENS

Brad and Mhairi in their comfortable camper van, which was our home for some time on our road trip through Scotland. Photo TONY LOURENS





Tony on one of the higher pitches on *Ardverkie Wall*, reportedly the best route of its grade in Scotland.
Photo Mhairi Williams

“One thing I learned very quickly is that there is no such thing as a rest day in Scotland if the weather is good. Good weather means ***ye get oot there and climb, laddie***”



the route while Brad and Patsy scrambled up the aesthetic *Fiacail Ridge* to meet us on top. No problem! At the start of the ridge, we split up with a cheery, “see you on top”, as Mhairi and I continued up into the thick cloud. With visibility cut down to maybe 50 metres or so, we couldn’t see the crags where the climb was situated, and miscalculated our position somewhat, with the result of going way too far left and ending up scrambling up the slope, ever higher, with the hope that the route would materialise in front of us. It didn’t! Instead, we suddenly found ourselves on top of the ridge and 10 minutes later there came Brad and Patsy. We had a good laugh, found a sheltered spot for tea, walked down the descent route and back to the car, still quite happy with a good day out in the hills and a harsh reminder that “yer kannie jest tek the Scottish hills fer granted, laddie”.

The next day, the weather gods didn’t get the memo, and were still growling at us, so we checked the forecast and decided to drive about an hour to the central Highlands and climb another *Classic Rock* route called *Ardverikie Wall*, a 5-pitch HS (15), that claims to be the best of its grade in the country. The legendary Tom Patey famously commented “*Ardverikie Wall* was the finest route I ever walked past.”

The climb was all it promised to be – a beautiful direct line up 170 metres of steep, solid pegmatite and mica schist slabs, with incredible knobs, features and cracks. Besides the first very runout (but thankfully easy) pitch, the route is adequately protected and we romped up it quite swiftly, all the while with an eye on the swirling clouds, which took pity on us, giving us a full day of good weather and my first proper Scottish classic.

One thing I learned very quickly is that there is no such thing as a rest day in Scotland if the weather is good. Good weather means “ye get oot there and climb, laddie”. So, the next day, we went back up the hill and revisited *Savage Slit*, this time in good weather. What a difference! We walked straight up to the route and, after waiting for a while in a queue (it is a classic after all), we managed to climb it, and the equally excellent *Fall Out Corner*, just to the right. Another good day ticking off two more classics. >>

Mhairi and Brad on *Ardverikie Wall*.
Photo TONY LOURENS





After three days in a row traipsing for many hours in the hills and doing a clutch of great routes, I was feeling a bit jaded and ready for a rest day. But the weather forecast had other ideas. Good weather meant climbing and the following day had a very favourable forecast, so the rest day just had to wait.

One of the routes that I had high on my tick list was a climb called *Clean Sweep*. Another *Classic Rock* route which lay on the huge intimidating Hell's Lum Crag, two hours walk into the midst of Cairngorm magic, beside the even more foreboding Shelter Stone Crag, overlooking the stunning Loch Avon running down the long Loch A'an Basin. A rugged and more beautiful place would be hard to find. The route takes a brilliant sweeping line up the centre of the wall for five superb pitches, starting at the lowest and finishing at the highest point of the crag.

Early the next morning saw the two locals and I heaving our packs over hills and along dales en route to the classic *Clean Sweep*. After a little detour, we arrived at the foot of the wall, having walked an hour longer than planned and, believe it or not, it was actually quite warm, even though threatening clouds were perpetually swirling around us.

I spied the line immediately, and after racking up, set off up the first pitch, which is given a moderate grade of VS 4c (17), but some guidebooks and forum comments give it HVS 5a (18/19). Nonetheless, I climbed the first relatively easy crack to the step-up into the steeper corner and immediately knew I had arrived at the crux – an awkward pull through on 'adequate' handholds with only smears for feet. With only one piece of gear protecting this sequence, I found it hard to commit to the moves. A further search revealed a cunning nut placement slightly higher up, and with this extra piece calming my nerves, I managed to climb through and continue up the magnificent crack system to stance beneath the seeping second pitch, silently agreeing with the higher grade given by some. >>

Tony just past the crux on the first pitch of *Clean Sweep* on Hell's Lum Crag. The route takes a line through the hanging wall above, following corners and cracks, circumnavigating the big roofs, to reach the top at its highest point. Photo: BRAD ALLIX

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The striking wall of *Groove Armada*, with Tony and Maihri at the hanging stance just above the swirling North Sea. Photos BRAD ALLIX



Although moderate in its grade, the second pitch had disturbing water streaks running down the black granite, but it looked worse than it actually was, and before long, we all gathered at the base of the next pitch – a long 45-metre corner/fault, described as ‘a superb pitch’ in the guidebook. Also graded VS 4c, I was wondering if this was also going to be a sandbag, as I set off to find out. The climbing was indeed superb – coarse hard granite with positive edges and decent gear took me ever higher. But the grade was true and I was starting to have fun, feeling comfortable and more confident with every move. Sitting on the stance in the middle of this impressive wall, bringing up Mhairi and Brad, and peering out over the mythical Cairngorms, it was a pinch myself moment, as I could scarcely believe I had eventually managed to get the Highlands and climb some of these quintessential classic routes.

The following two pitches were nearly as good, and before long we were on top, congratulating each other and walking back down to the fleshpots of the van and delicious gourmet beans on toast made for us by Patsy. As I wolfed down a slice, followed closely by some Scottish pale ale, I silently prayed for rain the next day. This was our fourth day in a row, multi-pitch routes with big approaches, and I was in dire need of a rest day.

The next day, my prayers were answered, the rain came down and my body felt tired but good as I turned around under our cosy duvet and went back to sleep. But you must be careful what you wish for! The rain was widespread, so we made our way back north and checked the weather forecast over the next few days. It all looked bleak, except for the north eastern coast on the sea cliffs of Caithness, where Mhairi and Brad had climbing friends staying in a nearby village. So off we went. >>

On the way to climb the Old Man of Hoy
Photo TONY LOURENS



On the way down the treacherous approach to the Old Man of Hoy. Photo TONY LOURENS



Sarcelt is reported in the guidebook as ‘the jewel of Caithness sea-cliff climbing. Steep, adventurous routes in a wild beautiful setting on rock quite different to any other venue’.

We arrived to copious mugs of tea, a hot meal, a warm bed, and the wonderful Scottish hospitality of Rob and Janet. Rob is a long-time local climber and agreed to accompany us to the crags the next day. We only had time for one route, so we went for the classic of the crag, *Groove Armada*, described as a ‘Scottish Classic!’ It starts off with an atmospheric abseil off some metal stakes, down to a hanging stance a few metres above the crashing North Sea. A good way to get the old adrenaline flowing, to be sure. The route itself follows a spectacular curving corner/flake system for 35 superlative metres, with gear aplenty, finally depositing you on the grassy banks above. Wow, what a route! Certainly worth the few hours’ drive.

The weekend was on us and Brad and Mhairi had a wedding to go to, so Patsy and I took ourselves off to the town of Inverness for two days to do some touristy

stuff. We visited bookshops and vinyl stores, walked the streets and sampled some interesting food, beer and whiskies. We also met up with Leila and Arno, two friends from South Africa, who happened to be in Inverness that same weekend, along with their Scottish guide, Malcolm. They were off to climb the Old Man of Hoy. We met in a pub for dinner and we chatted about what we had done and about their intended plans for the Old Man. I was super envious!

After we got home, we pored over the weather apps, which is almost a national pastime in Scotland, and it looked bad everywhere. But far north, around Orkney and Hoy, the weather seemed to be more stable. “Let’s go for the Old Man,” I said. “It will be a great adventure.” Neither of us had been to the islands of Orkney or Hoy, so the worst that could happen is that we are rained off, but still experience those wild and atmospheric islands off the northern mainland of Scotland. We packed, and the following morning we headed north.

In the meantime, Leila and Arno and made a successful ascent and were raving

about it. I contacted their guide, Malcolm, and got all the beta, regarding ferry times and, most importantly, gear requirements and abseil tips, etc. “You need big cams for the crux off-width and for the long corner immediately afterwards,” he said. He was super helpful with lots of good beta about everything and wished us the best of luck.

We had two number 3 cams and one number 4. Definitely not enough. Brad knew a climber in Stromness, the port from which we were to take our first ferry, and we were very glad to get another number 4 and number 5 cam from him. Still not enough (as I later found out), but it was all we had, so off we sailed into the rain and wind, towards Orkney and onto Hoy for a rendezvous with the Old Man.

And so, after waiting out the weather for a day on Hoy, we eventually found ourselves at the base of Britain’s most famous sea stack. I walked across the narrow, bouldery tongue of land to the start of the route and touched the rock. It was dry and felt surprisingly solid. It was quite surreal, standing at the bottom of the Old Man of Hoy, all that history

Walking across the headland on the island of Hoy, in the piddling rain, en route to the Old Man, whose summit is sticking out in the background. Photo BRAD ALLIX



tumbling through my head. I pushed it aside. The rain had stopped, and we had a big day ahead of us. I racked up and started up the first pitch, which mercifully is rather easy and friendly. Unfortunately, that was short-lived, but at least it gave us a chance to warm up a tad. I peered around the corner and realised that this is where the fun and games began. The next pitch led us across a very exposed sandy and awkward traverse to a semi hanging stance at the base of the famed crux pitch. A pitch I had read about extensively and seen numerous pictures of climbers fighting their way through the awkward E1 5b (20) crux moves, the famous image of Tom Patey climbing through the 'coffin' on the first ascent, with a fag in his mouth, coming to mind.

I set off up the pitch with a slew of huge cams dangling off the back of my harness, an anxious Brad and Mhairi wishing me luck. The first part was reasonably straightforward, climbing around the first roof and into the foot of the coffin – a chimney/slot that led to a roof about eight metres up. Some stemming and jamming took me higher and also relieved me of several of my large cams. When I got to the roof, I only had two big cams left and, peering through the off-width crack that split the overhang, I saw, with immense relief, that there were two in situ cams solidly wedged through the crux section. All I had to do was clip them and concentrate on the climbing. In reality it wasn't as simple as that. Moving out to clear the roof, one hundred metres of crisp Scottish air lay between me and the crashing waves far far away and, as I peered at the void below me, I felt a definite tightening in the sphincter area. Although the gear was bomber, the climbing was awkward and demanding, and it was with a modicum of relief that I gained the small ledge above the roof and the end of the main difficulties. My respect for Rusty Bailie increasing exponentially. He made the first lead of this pitch 58 years earlier with very little gear and in tackies!

I examined the corner above me. I was staring up at a pretty uniform crack about 15 metres long, which took nothing less than a number 4 cam. I had one number 4. Everything else was smaller. Mmmm, more fun and games lay ahead. I managed to bounce my solitary cam up with me and around halfway I found a slight constriction which took my last number >>

On the easy first pitch of the Old Man.
Photo MHAIRI WILLIAMS



Maihri Williams coming across the exposed traverse on pitch 2. This is where things started to spice up a tad. Photo TONY LOURENS



3 cam, so was very happy to place that, and continue up, bouncing the bigger cam, until I decided to leave it and bolt for the stance, which was a very welcome sight when I eventually got there. After a tussle at the crux, Mhairi and Brad both arrived at the stance a little wide eyed, especially Brad, who had volunteered to carry the pack up the whole route, and coming through the crux, exiting the coffin, must've been a lesson in contortionism with a pack on, but after a short scuffle and some cursing, a relieved Brad eventually joined us below the next pitch.

From here on the route was less demanding, but the rock was not the greatest and we had to contend with vomiting fulmars. I managed to avoid being spewed on by a particularly fat and aggressive fulmar while trying to bypass its nest, which lay right in the path of the route. I waited until it had puked up a few dark green blobs which fell short of me, then realising that it had run out of ammunition, I took my chances and bolted past and climbed up to the stance below the final corner.

The guidebook said it was the best pitch of the route, and looking up at the clean-cut open book, I believed it. Beautiful climbing, involving stemming and jamming past good rails with plenty of gear took me to the top of the route. I pulled up onto the small summit, and there to greet me was a little colony of puffins just metres away.

I took in the sweeping 360-degree views and spotted Patsy on the mainland in my yellow down jacket. I waved with both hands above my head and she waved back. I felt a lump in my throat as the emotion swept through me, scarcely believing that I was actually standing on top of the Old Man of Hoy. Brad and Mhairi climbed up to join me on the summit and after proudly adding our names to the summit book, we started the scary descent – four abseils off tat attached to pegs, touch points and prongs. Pretty solid really, but still daunting, with the massive exposure always sucking at your bowels.

The first three abseils took us down to the stance above of the crux pitch, then from there, one huge 60-metre, mostly free, abseil takes you to the rocks at the base. A more character-building abseil would be hard to find. >>

Climbing easier ground on pitch 5,
but on less than perfect rock and
deep in fulmar country.
Photo PATSY LOURENS



Brad arriving at the stance after the crux pitch.
A face that tells the story of trying to exit the crux
'coffin' with a pack. Photo MHAIRI WILLIAMS



Greeted by a small colony of puffins on the summit.
Photo MHAIRI WILLIAMS



Well deserved drinks in the pub in Orkney after climbing the Old Man. Photo MHAIRI WILLIAMS

We touched the ground running, as our ferry was leaving Hoy in about 90 minutes for Orkney, where we had a hotel booked, cold beer and a restaurant meal waiting. Missing this ferry was not an option, as that would mean another night in the hostel and no celebratory meal and beer. We packed our bags and ran back along the mainland to our waiting taxi, which whisked us off to the port with only 10 minutes to spare. We made it!

We docked in Orkney to the sounds of a full pipe band playing traditional Scottish music on the quayside. What a reception! Then came the hot shower, cold beers and a wonderful pub dinner, all the while with that wonderful glow of having just climbed one of the most iconic sea stacks on earth.

The last few days of our Scottish holiday was dogged with inclement weather, but I wasn't really bothered. We had climbed some real classics in the Cairngorms and the fat cherry on top was standing on the summit of the Old Man. An unforgettable and truly Scottish experience.

Thanks Mhairi and Brad and thanks Scotland for all those wonderful, wild and memorable experiences.

Do dheagh shlainte!



Climbing the exquisite top corner, sensing the summit close by. Photo PATSY LOURENS

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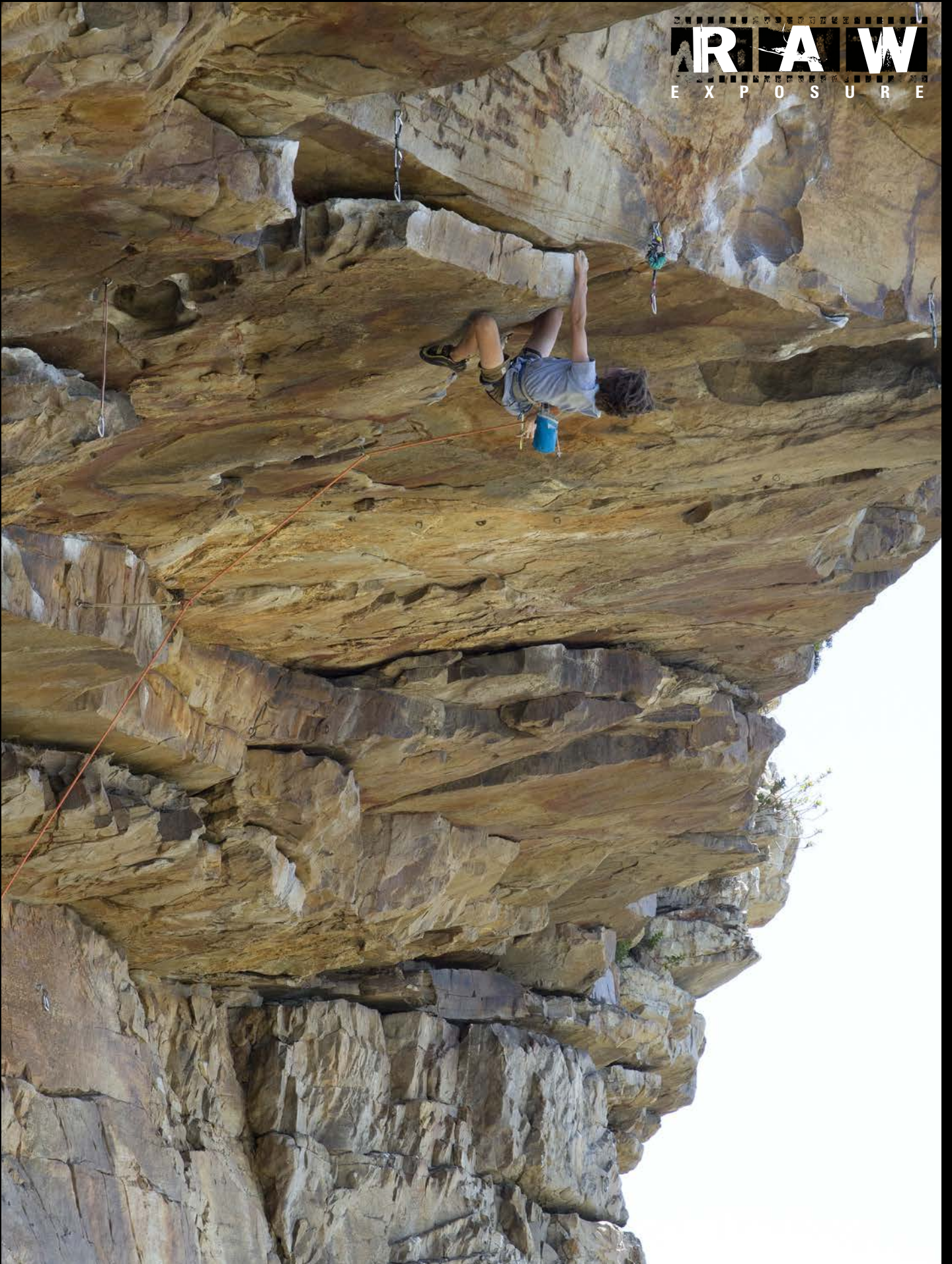
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Rob Zipplies on the exposed final pitch of *Champs Elysees* (17), Postern Buttress, Table Mountain. Photo TONY LOURENS

RAW
EXPOSURE



Drew Olden hanging out on *Gift of Wings* (28/7c), The Mine, Cape Peninsula. Photo PETE ZAM



The Zen of the Wilds

by Roger Diamond

Why do you head for the hills? Where do you go? Who do you take along with you? What determines the answers to these and other questions? And perhaps most importantly, what situations leave you feeling most deeply satisfied?

I've spent a lot of time in the mountains and other wild, natural places – deserts, forests, the coast. There are many factors determining how we go about these things – why we leave the comfort of home, and what we intend to gain from being out there. I believe there are a few absolutes, the reasons and means that are totally wrong or totally right, but by far, the things we do and the way we behave when out in the wilds are highly subjective. What is acceptable and desirable is largely a cultural construct. It is the result of our upbringing and exposure to places, people, and various forms of media. However, I think that, in spite of this subjective nature, there are still better ways of experiencing the great outdoors, and that these are often less popular, due to some powerful forces that condition us culturally.

Humans have, for the largest part of their existence as a species, spent their lives in relatively wild or natural settings. We are wired at the deepest possible level to navigate the natural environment, to observe other animals, plants and fungi, wind and waves, and make decisions based on this information. This is what we do to survive, and it gives us a solid sense of satisfaction. Shove a human being into a building, and they immediately gravitate to a window with a view, and most will pay millions to live in a place with a view of the natural world. The psychological need to be in wild places arises as you

remove them from nature and put them in urban settings. It's a rather strong coincidence that alpinism arose as cities in Europe accommodated populations approaching one million, and the centre of that desire was London, the world's largest city at that time.

In conjunction with the psychological need was the technological ability. Initially, mountain and wilderness pursuits used what was available for general life, but once the race to the three poles began, tools and materials were developed specifically for cold, snow, ice, wind and water. Whether high strength stainless steel for ice axes, fibreglass for surfboards or plastic for kayaks, technology enables us to penetrate nature in new ways. Sadly, as both our needs and ability to go to the bush increased, so the bush dwindled. Wilderness has been shrinking ever since humans existed, but for millennia the ratio of tame to wild was negligible. The world was full of the unknown, bristling with things with teeth and thorns in places without names. A few hundred years ago, not even a dozen generations, the world map was incomplete, the majority of plants and animals had not been catalogued, and many of the world's people were living in relative isolation, unaware of the thousands of languages and cultures across the seas. The 20th century put paid to that naivety and novelty. From a time when a trip around the world was a year-long pursuit available only to the bravest and wealthiest of the aristocracy, to clicking a button and downloading current information from computers and cameras on the other side of the planet, the ratio of tame to wild has been reversed. Everywhere is known and named, everyone is contactable. Everything has *human* in its blood. High carbon dioxide levels wrap the globe, pollutants and micro plastics are everywhere, and a regurgitation of radio waves soaks the planet. Is there anywhere one can escape?

You go for a walk on the mountain. Your path is being tracked and uploaded to a website for anyone in the world to see exactly where you are. Your heart rate and footsteps are being monitored and sent to your insurance company for them to gear your medical policy and adjust the information they feed you and the products other companies will try to sell you. You pull out your mobile electronic gadget and it gives you information

(possibly even false) of no relevance to your walk, taking your mind away from where your body is. It identifies birds by their calls and automatically loads them to your lifer list. Hold up your mobile to the cliffs and it highlights all the climbing routes, labelling the crux move on each one and which line in the gym to work in order to catch that crux and send the route. You may get a glimpse of the actual route after you put your device away, if it allows you. Was your walk one of discovery or were you told where to go and what to think?

At what point did the wilderness become an app and your existence become data? It's a million shades of grey: the road, the path, the map, the bolts, the guidebook, the sticky rubber, the dynamic ropes, the GPS, the app. Every development takes one closer to quicker and safer, dumbing down the experience. Guaranteed success every time is the antithesis of adventure. Wild means unpredictable. If the outcome is certain, the risk is gone, and so is the reward.

So, does this mean we should remove all roads, paths, guidebooks and huts and head out into the hills naked? No surfboard or wetsuit, no raincoat or headlamp, no bolts and no ropes? Two problems arise from this. Firstly, it will be very difficult to remove roads, paths, GPS and cell phone signal from most places that already have it. Secondly, many of our adventure pursuits will become somewhat short-lived without the technology that makes it possible – skydiving without a parachute comes to mind!

The solution lies in a middle ground, and not a consistent middle ground, but rather a varied approach, allowing a range of activities and levels of adventure across the landscape. This requires some thought and planning and active management of places, particularly the rare remaining wilder ones. Careful thought should go into which areas to allow development and which should be left as wild as possible, including the possibility of rewilding areas, either passively or actively, by removing structures and rehabilitating impacted sites. When developing, also bear in mind that once you've drilled a hole or uploaded to Instagram, there's no going back. A place can be ravaged overnight.

Unfortunately, we are being bombarded by media, backed by profit-driven people and corporations. The manipulation of

our values and culture by those wanting our money brings us to a situation where promoters of true wilderness and deep adventure get labelled dangerous or exclusive. Companies want to sell you sat phones and avalanche beacons, huts, guides, and via ferrata. If you refuse these, you are labelled irresponsible and selfish. In some cases this may be true, but the commercialisation of the wilds is selfish by those seeking the profit, so it goes both

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ways. Take the Alps: these mountains are high, steep, rocky and icy, and contain what appear to be high adventure. But when you are there, wedged between parties above and below you on the same route, people on the neighbouring routes, bolted lines, paint markers on the rocks, signposts on the trail, helicopters buzzing above, cable cars sliding past and huts, roads and railways all around, this is certainly not wild. It may still contain a technical challenge, but how much adventure is there? Does this kind of activity really satisfy the soul?

Why do you need to climb seven peaks in seven days? Surely one mountain is enough? Perhaps the modern obsession with speed and quantity – the 14 8000ers, the seven summits, the Alpine north faces – is a symptom of a decline in quality. Just like the obesity epidemic is linked to the diminished satisfaction from consuming fast food, so our hunger for outdoor pursuits is being fuelled by the commercialisation of the wilds.

My thesis is that we are attempting to satisfy our deep desire for uncertainty, wilderness and personal triumph by stuffing our socks with quick-tick, in-the-bag, curated, guided, safe and sanitised experiences. No matter how much tea you drink, it will never taste like whisky. No offence to tea drinkers!

Have you ever tried stripping down your rack, packing fewer clothes, going light on

food, and leaving behind the map? Is this irresponsible? Is this unsafe? It could be, but it depends on how far you're willing to push your luck? When do you turn around on a mission? What kind of experience are you looking for? Are you there to wear your gear, impress your peers, get likes from bots? Or to push the boat out, feel the edge and get defeated by your own limits? We come back to personal preference and cultural conditioning. What I'd like to propose is that there is as much satisfaction to be gained from simplicity, elegance and style as there is from size, effort and stomp.

This is not a new idea. Alpinism celebrates fast and light. The minimalists and ultralight proponents are all about pruning down and simplifying. And the soloists take the ultimate risk in exchange for a reward which most of us will never know.

So where does this all bring us? I have clearly stated there is a range of pursuits and performances to suit a range of tastes and abilities. We should seek to allow as wide a range to coexist as possible, from wheelchair friendly or brail trails to unmarked and unmapped regions where death is one wrong move away. For all of this to be available, and most importantly, to have the deep adventure and lifelong learning option still available, we need to preserve some areas in as wild a state as possible. How do we do this? Aside from the obvious blocking of physical developments like roads, huts and trails, a dearth of information is also critical. By all means, go open a route, but don't write it up. Bivvy without a trace. Ghost a canyon. Take photographs, but keep them private. And if you can't do this, leave it to those who can. How much more of a gift can you give than to let someone else go discover a place for themselves? The best teacher is not one who tells the student how to do it, but the one who gives the student the skills to figure it out for themselves.

If people are going to love and care for this planet as a functioning earth and not just a resource for human exploitation, they need to experience it as wild as it has been for millions of years. Not only do we need the deep satisfaction of wild experiences to quell our appetite for consumption and bring us to more sustainable lives, but in being in the wilds, lost and scared, we may actually feel what it is to be a creature living amongst others on a planet brimming with danger and delight.

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TRADATHON 2024

A WEEKEND
OF FUN, FEAR,
AND FIRSTS

by Amber de Decker

Photo PETER HUNTER

Perched on an uncomfortable stance off-route somewhere above the BP overhang, I gaped at the inventive parking arrangements in the jam-packed Wolfberg parking lot. I would never have believed that half that many cars could fit in there, but this was the 2024 Black Diamond Tradathon, and more than 100 psyched climbers had walked up to the cracks that morning. With superb and historic routes waiting on the impressive, orange cliffs above, a collection of excited climbers can make any number of cars fit!



The magic of the annual Tradathon is in our vibrant and welcoming community. It is something special to experience such a large gathering of climbers of all ages, all walks of life and all levels of experience – all constantly talking about climbing! Apprehensive campsite chatter around the braai on Friday evening heard bargaining of who would lead the scary pitches and reckoning of who would whip from the hard ones the next day. By Saturday afternoon, leaders relied on the hope that their belayers could recognise their voice, since joyful shouts of “off-belay!”, “climbing!” and the occasional “take!” echoed continually and confusingly off the cliffs all around.



Eager newbies had started up the hill at 5am to be taught by more experienced climbers, including Megan Beaumont, Tony Lourens, Garvin Jacobs, Justin Lawson and Ant Hall. Anton van Zyl and I, as an unlikely team with a 37-year age gap dressed in compulsory tie-dye uniform, raced out of camp at 6am to tackle *Omega* (18). As Anton racked up, I witnessed the revered Guy-Paterson Jones contemplate and back off the frightening first few moves of *Wolfgang* (22) several times before eventually snagging an impressive on-sight. At the prize giving that evening, Guy and Andy Court won the prize for climbing the most pitches that day, after completing *Wolfgang* and subsequently whistling up *Celestial Journey* (22) as an after-thought. Meanwhile, Sarah-Jane Deary topped-out of her first trad lead on *Mango* (15) in the Gaper Crack. >>



Above photos FRANCO KELLERMAN

Photo PAUL DE VILLIERS



Photo PAUL DE VILLIERS



Photo BERNIE THERON

Once Anton had finally disappeared around the corner on the first pitch of *Omega*, it was my turn to climb. I gingerly crept past a loose rock which read “Pitch 2 flake off” in jagged chalky letters. Pitch two would be my lead! Soon I was standing below the infamous crux pitch staring up at where the critical flake once was, complaining about how scared I was. But then, just when I needed it, Julia Wakeling-Bird’s unmistakable voice drifted up from below: “It’s ok Amber, it just means you’re human!”

Tentatively tip-toeing along the airy

traverse past a piton – which Simon Larsen later told me is hollow (I’m glad I didn’t know it at the time!) – I looked down to enjoy the wonderful exposure of Wolfberg climbing and feel that familiar rush of fear. I had an audience – it was the Tradathon after all. Margaux Noyon, Robert Breyer and Kate Larmuth, amongst others, called much-needed cheerful encouragement from the ground as they prepared for their own routes. However, after surviving my on-sight of the traverse and heading up the face, I discovered I was rather unsure of where to go.

Appreciative yet again for helpful friends scattered around me in three dimensions, I yelled to Douw Steyn for directions. Nevertheless, route-finding failed me and, after ascending an awkward, shallow jam-crack, I resigned to my cramped stance and hollered “Off-belay!”

Following my winding pitch, Anton, exhausted after our desperate efforts on *Alone in Space* the previous day (and some heroic leading on his part), surrendered to the jam-crack and hung on the rope. After dragging himself up to join me, he scampered back to the correct



route, and we soon found ourselves on the big ledge at the official end of pitch two. Here, we bumped into Guy, Andy and Charlie Standing again for a very social stance gathering in true Tradathon style.

Alone in Space (22) was indeed rather entertaining. We were far from the only enthusiasts eager for a pre-Tradathon warm-up day, and thus, unfortunately, we attracted some spectators. I took a big swing off the under-cling crux, Anton flew off the top pitch and the terrifying, unprotected (though only grade 16) chimney stumped us both. Thankfully, Jason Orton (famous for climbing this route in only 56 minutes in his youth!), was climbing in a party ahead. After some begging, he took pity on Anton and threw him a top-rope for >>



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the chimney. When in that horrifying squeeze myself, I slipped off the polished walls and slid down like Father Christmas. Once more, we were grateful to have fellow climbers around to laugh at us.

After a fun day of climbing, we all huddled at Rietgat for a lively evening of interesting speakers, prizes and dinner, despite the biting wind. Highlights included Manú von Hase-Gowans winning the award for 'Youngest participant', at nine years old, and a very competitive squatting competition, in which I was regrettably beaten hands down by Justine Cole and Nico Scroll!

All in all, Tradathon 2024 was eventful and fantastic. Hilton Davies and Deon van Zyl opened a new route, *Pearly Gates* (24 A1), and the dad-and daughter team, Mark and Orianne Seuring, explored their unopened project, *Santa Claus*. Many pulled cam triggers for the first time, a couple lost their way tackling *Eclipse* and veterans played on old favourites. One standout moment was Charlse Bowker taking a massive whipper off *Knobless Robot* (18) – an incredible feat at 73 years old! Every climber knows of the special bonds formed through climbing and nowhere is this connection felt more deeply than at a gathering such as this. Thank you to Simon Larsen, Deidre Keulder, and the rest of the team at RAM Mountaineering for bringing us together to share our common obsession with trad over a wonderful weekend. ♪



Photo TONY LOURENS



Photo FRANCO KELLERMAN



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OFF THE WALL

by Brenda Marx



FEET

Originally, I was going to combine feet and legs, but once I started writing, I realised that there is quite a lot to be said about foot health in climbing. The injuries are mostly not as acute and debilitating as upper limb injuries, but there's much to be said about preventing them. There's not a lot of rehabilitation that can be done, but I've outlined the basics.

The most common foot injuries are arguably rolled ankles, especially when falling off boulders and walking on unstable terrain. I once fell from quite a run-out position and got caught with a very un-dynamic belay, causing me to swing back into the rock with force and my ankle got a little over dorsiflexed with the impact. Luckily there was no serious damage, but a situation like that can very easily result in a high ankle sprain. This is where the two bones (tibia and fibula) of the lower leg that are attached to the ankle, pull apart, and can tear the ligaments that connect them. It could even cause an Achilles tear, if that area is weaker in the individual.

When you hurt your ankle and you can walk on it fairly easily, you should be alright. Pain is your body's warning system. It tends to err on the cautious side, but be sensible and listen to what it's telling you. Swelling is usually a good sign. If you have pain and no swelling, it would be best to have it checked out. If you are unsure as to the severity of the injury, have your ankle examined by a professional – you might need to get x-rays or a scan to make sure what the damage is, and a recovery plan can be constructed from here.

From my experience, ankles want to work – they don't want to be immobilised and pampered for too long. If you have established that nothing's broken or needs a boot or surgery, you can move about on the foot to such an extent that there is minimal pain. Swollen ankles usually benefit from rubbing with Voltaren/Reparil gel or something similar, as it numbs the pain. Anti-inflammatories or aspirin/paracetamol can help with relieving the pain. Strapping the ankle for stability can also help while it's recovering. As far as exercises for rehab are concerned, you can do balancing exercises on a loose/unstable rock or bosu ball, gentle plantarflexion and dorsiflexion and

single-leg calf raises to help strengthen the stabilising muscles and tissues again. Complete healing can take anything from 3 weeks to 18 months, depending on the injury, so be patient. At least it won't prevent you from going climbing. I would suggest focusing on rope climbing instead of bouldering, for obvious reasons.

The other most probable cause for foot injuries is climbing shoes. We don't really consider the accumulative damage we do to our feet, as most of us are willing to put up with some discomfort in our feet if it will improve performance. And we get used to it. If you start experiencing any of these conditions, my best advice is to stop wearing those



Balancing on an unstable rock for 1-2 minutes helps with strengthening the ankle



Plantarflexion (toes down) and dorsiflexion (toes up) movements are excellent rehab for recovering sprained ankles. Do about twenty up-and-down reps 3-5 times a day to keep the blood flowing and get mobility back.



Single leg calf raises to strengthen an injured ankle. Start with holding on to a wall or something stable until the ankle is strong enough to do this while balancing without support. Do 20-25 reps 2-3 times per day.

shoes and choose a model with a different (more comfortable) fit.

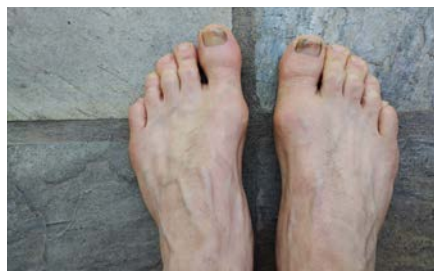
Foot deformities and pathologies seen in rock climbers due to the shoes we wear include corns, hallux valgus (bunions), Achilles tendinopathy, plantar fasciitis, and bruising under the toenails. Choose the right shoe.

Corns: Your hero is wearing Skwamas (arguably one of the most aggressive climbing shoes available now) on her groundbreaking send. Adam Ondra used La Sportiva's Solution (soft and downturned) shoe on his right foot and Miura (more flat and relatively stiff) on his left foot when he climbed *Silence*. If I wear the same shoes, I will climb like them, right? You go to the shop, you try these models on, they are far from comfortable, but the salesperson convinces you that you'll get used to the fit. Everyone at the crag is admiring your new shiny shoes. After a few days out you do seem to get used to them. One day you put them on, and your toes are on fire after the first warm-up climb. What's wrong? You take off the shoe and see a little round inflamed bump on your second toe. Corns are smaller and deeper than calluses and they have a painful core which is surrounded by inflamed skin. There are loads of remedies for corns online.

At the end of the day, Adam Ondra can wear the most basic gym rentals and still make us look like the amateurs we are. At an elite level, shoe intricacies make a significant difference. For most of us, less so. Choose something comfortable that works with your foot shape and style of climbing.

Achilles tendinopathy is recognised by pain along the Achilles tendon or at the back of the heel. Often the pain gets worse after moments of inactivity and then improves with movement. Slab climbing or toeing off on a hold will often be painful. This is probably due to your shoes cutting in too much at the back of the heel, so try and find a shoe with a wider ankle opening that doesn't constrict or compress so much in that area.

A **bunion** is a bony bump that forms on the joint at the base of the big toe, causing the toe to slant inward toward the second toe. The pain is localised at the base of your big toe, and worse when bearing weight on edges. Extreme cases may need surgery, but changing to shoes that have a wider toe box and laces that can be loosened around the front of the shoe and tightened higher up will help.



Bunions are bony growths, most commonly experienced at the base of the big toe

Pain at the bottom of the foot near the back of the arch is probably due to Plantar fasciitis. It is similar to Achilles tendinopathy in that the pain is often

worse after inactivity that improves with warm-ups. The pain is often worse on slab climbing, or when in positions where the big toe is extended (bent backward) when pushing off a hold. Here it would be best to look for a stiffer but more aggressive shoe that has more of an arch to it.

Bruising under the toenails could cause loss of the toenail and an increase in the susceptibility to infection. Consider sizing-up on your shoes, perhaps choose a shoe that is the same width but a touch longer.

There are not really any rehab exercises that will help for these types of foot injuries, and in most cases the symptoms will improve if the shoe is better suited to your feet. If you can afford it, consider having a more comfortable pair for warm-ups, training and working routes, and haul out those performance shoes when going for the send.

This is common practice at crags, but remember to take your shoes off while belaying or between bouldering routes at the indoor gym as well.

Your shoes are too small if you can't fully bear weight through them while standing. The more weight you can put through your feet, the less stress you'll be putting on your fingers and arms. This will make you a better climber and your feet will thank you for it.



THE CLIMBING BIBLE

Managing Injuries

Injury prevention and rehabilitation for climbing and bouldering

By Stian Christophersen

Paperback · 250mm x 200mm · 160 pages

Full colour

Published by Vertebrate Press

Price: £25

Available online: adventurebooks.com or amazon.com

Review by Brenda Marx



The Climbing Bible: Managing Injuries is a comprehensive guide for climbers of all levels. This book offers invaluable insights into preventing, understanding, and recovering from common climbing injuries. With clear explanations, practical advice, and real-world examples, Christophersen shares his knowledge and tools to maintain physical well-being and maximise climbing performance.

Stian Christophersen is an experienced climber who was part of the Norwegian national climbing team and their national bouldering champion in 2009. He is also a physiotherapist. He lectures medical professionals on diagnosing and treating shoulder injuries, co-runs two podcasts, one on musculoskeletal pain and *The Climbing Injury Podcast* and also used to be very involved in coaching and educating coaches on international levels. This is his third book related to climbing and training. He clearly knows his stuff.

The book begins by exploring the anatomy and biomechanics of climbing. Christophersen breaks down the complex movements involved in climbing, highlighting potential areas of stress and strain. This understanding is essential for climbers to recognise and address risk factors before injuries occur. He talks about the most common climbing injuries, providing detailed descriptions, symptoms, and diagnosis. Each section also has excellent pictures and explanations on how to do rehab exercises. From finger injuries and shoulder impingement to back pain and ankle sprains, the book covers a wide range of ailments that climbers may struggle with at some stage.

One of the book's strengths lies in its focus on injury prevention. The author emphasises the importance of

proper warm-ups, technique, and training to minimise the risk of injuries. He offers practical tips for improving climbing form, strengthening key muscle groups, and avoiding overuse. Advice that can significantly help climbers reduce their chances of experiencing pain or setbacks.

When injuries do occur, Stian provides a thorough approach to rehabilitation. He outlines a step-by-step process for recovery, including rest, physical therapy, and targeted exercises. The author stresses the importance of patience and gradual return to climbing to prevent reinjury. He also offers advice on managing chronic pain and maintaining motivation throughout the recovery process.

The Climbing Bible is not only a valuable resource for climbers but also for coaches, trainers, and healthcare professionals working with climbers. The book's clear and concise explanations make it very easy to read, and it speaks to all climbers, from beginners to experienced. He shows his expertise and passion for climbing by really identifying with how climbers might feel and react when incurring injuries. This book is suited for anyone who wants to stay healthy and injury-free while pursuing their climbing goals and passion.

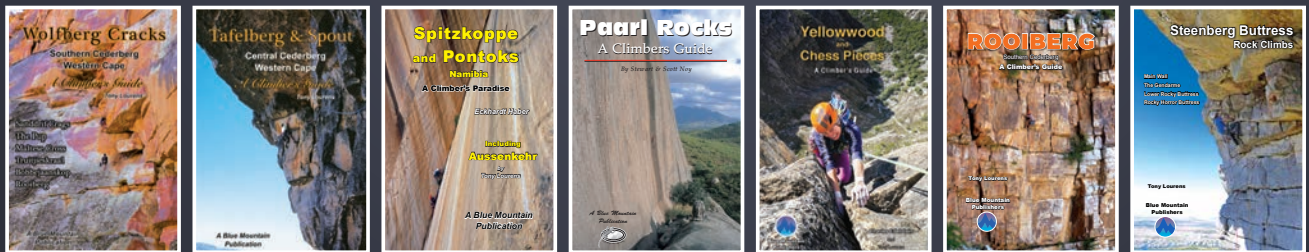
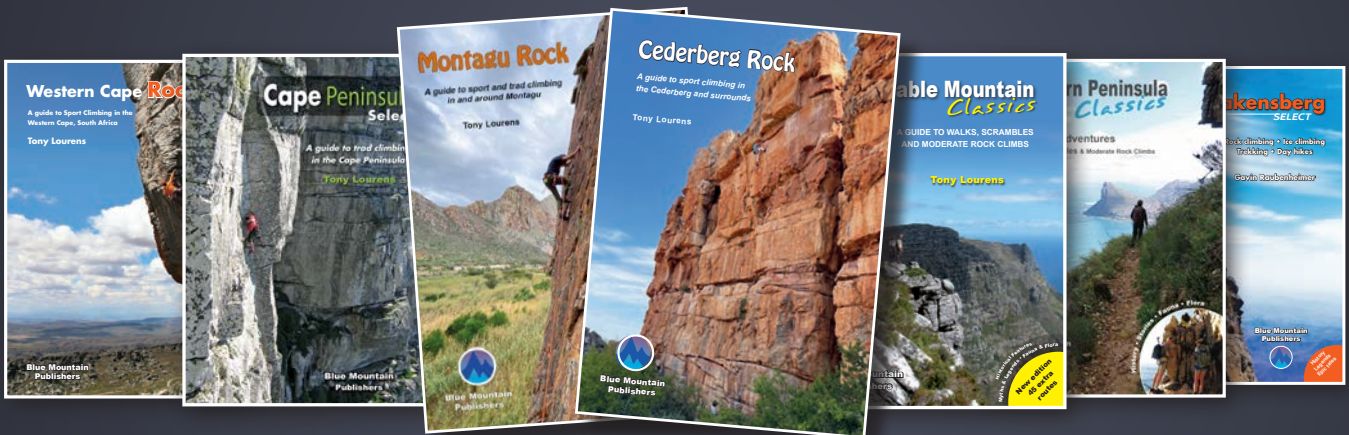
The Climbing Bible empowers climbers to take control of their physical well-being. By understanding the anatomy of climbing, preventing common injuries, and effectively managing pain when it occurs, climbers can maximise their performance and enjoy a lifelong passion for the sport. Stian Christophersen's expertise and practical advice make this book an invaluable resource for climbers of all levels.

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Penetration FACE THEN AND NOW

by Mike Scott

For all those trad climbers out there, if anyone of you has ever climbed on Barrier and/or Valken Buttress on Table Mountain and based yourself in Barrier Cave at the foot of Valken Buttress, you will have undoubtedly checked out the heinously undercut start of *Penetration Face*. A route that was, at the time, given the top grade of G, opened by Keith Fletcher and Jan Goedknecht in 1961. It has a strenuous start that demands a power pull up over the roof to establish yourself on the face above the cave.

My booted ascent of this route was in 1972/3 when I was climbing with Ralph Malan. When Paul Fatti visited Cape Town, he was usually dragged in to assist me when I was busy ticking all the climbs on TM.

In Keith's *MCSA Journal* article, he mentions that they used the tree growing at the mouth of Barrier Cave, but returning some while later, they encountered people busy chopping the tree down for firewood, as in those days the fireplace at the cave got used regularly. Keith continued to say that they found a way of doing the roof without the tree, but gave no details.

My struggle to get started through the roof was very real, and Paul and Ralph's shoulders were either not high enough or maybe too painful, so I stood on their helmets.

Some 20 years later, Dave Visser, bedecked with La Sportiva Megas and rigid stem Friends, demonstrated how to heel hook through the start of the pitch, and proved that the new sticky shoes were a quantum improvement on army boots for rock climbing.

INSET: Head start on *Penetration Face* with Paul Fatti and Ralph Malan.

MAIN: Dave Visser on *Penetration Face* in 1992.

Photos MIKE SCOTT COLLECTION

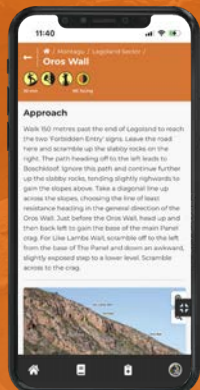
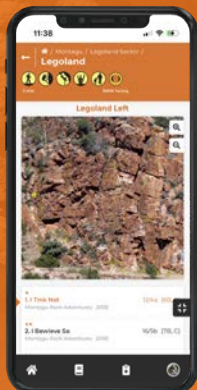
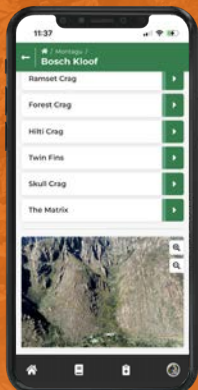
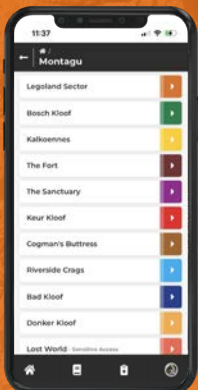
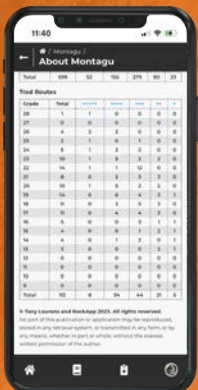
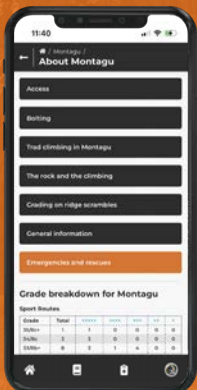
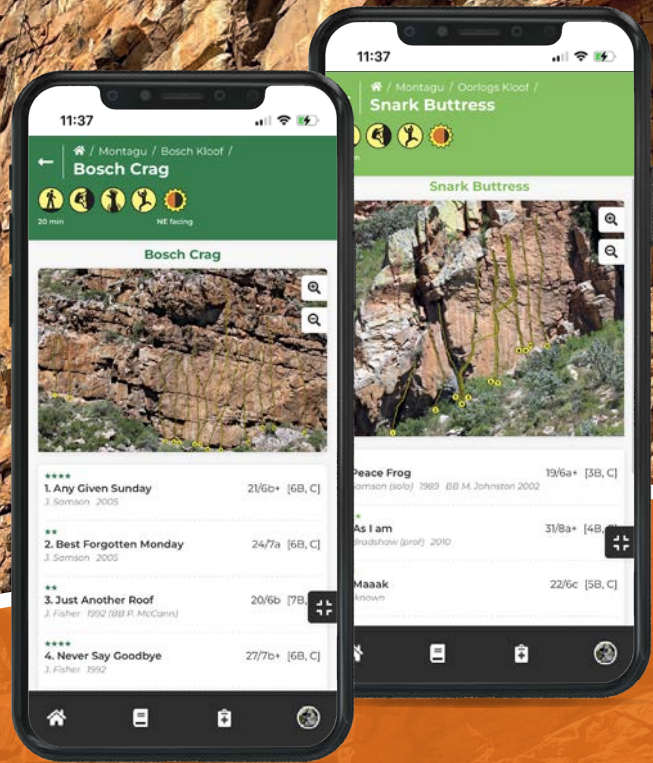


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