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The social world of climbing in North West Wales

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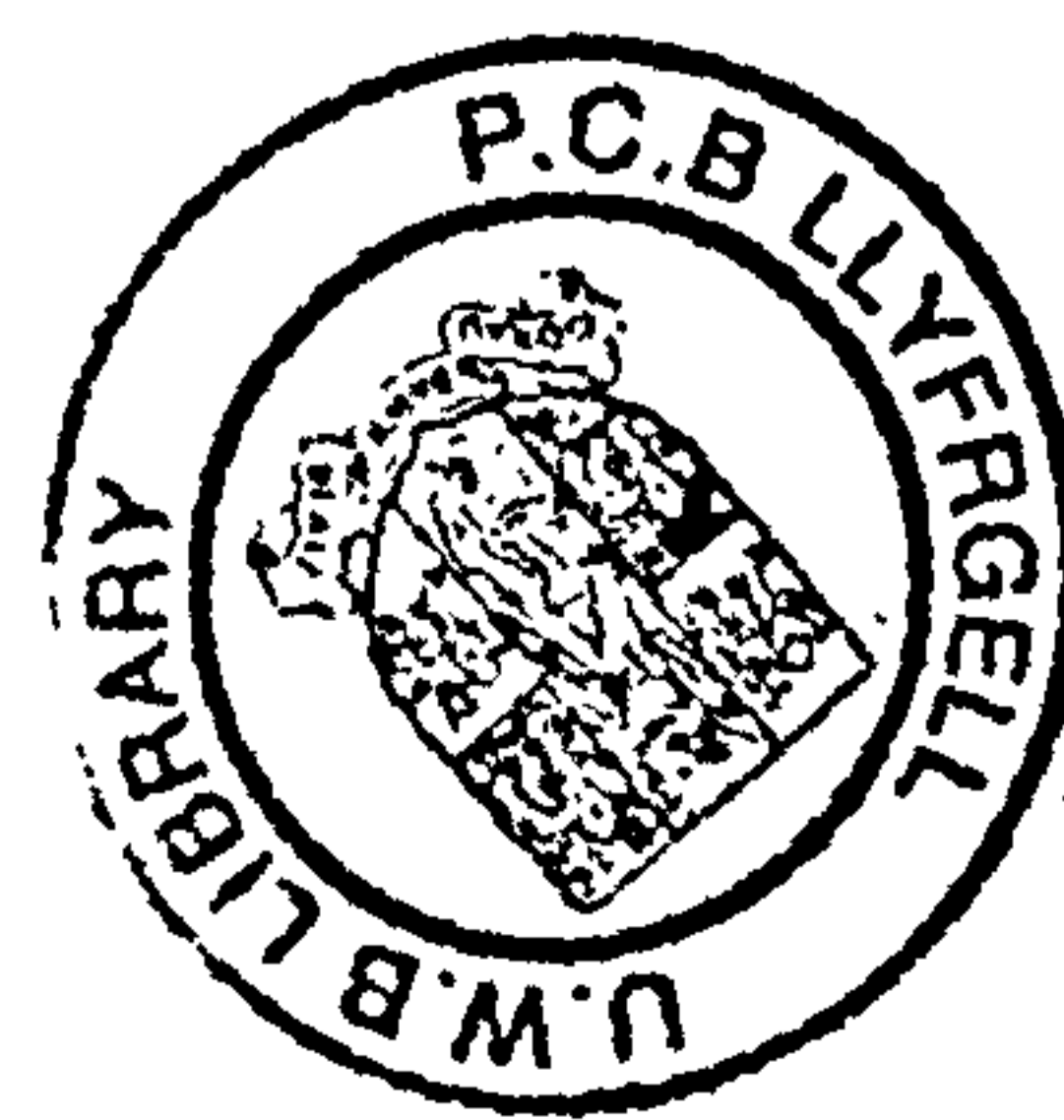
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ABSTRACT

This thesis focusses on the Social World of Climbing in North West Wales whilst also drawing on particular examples either nationally or internationally when illustrating certain arguments. The study applies an ethnographic approach in order to examine what climbing is and how its relationship to style and competition is inherently bound with the sport and raises questions of authenticity in its activity. The work attempts to give insights and develop an understanding of processes that are important to the climbing world whilst at the same time taking account of climbers and groupings of climbers positions in relation to it. The study includes both historical and contemporary analysis which is relevant to the work as a whole. The aim of the thesis is to provide a deep understanding of the climbing world and its many facets.

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Thanks are due in many quarters and firstly I would like to acknowledge the many climbers I have met and climbed with over the years. Secondly, I wish to dedicate this work to Paul Williams, Jimmy Jewel, Gidian Wilson, Ed Stone, 'baby' Dave Alcock and Nick Donnelly who lost their lives as devotees of the climbing world.

Thirdly this work could not have been drawn to a conclusion without the continuing help of Cath Griffiths, Ian Smith and Al Hughes, nor the guidance of my supervisor, John Borland. Thanks to all.

The Social World of Climbing in North West Wales

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INTRODUCTION

The world of climbing and its activity has, in a public sense, often been associated with and symbolised by such icons as the 'Matterhorn' and 'Mount Everest'. Although both these peaks are situated geographically apart from the British Isles they nevertheless represent significant climbing endeavour in the public sphere since their first ascents were well publicised in the national media and their first ascentionists were either English or, in the case of Everest, part of the British led Expedition.

Beneath these images lies an entire social world which in a contemporary setting constitutes a great many climbers some of whom engage in different types and styles of climbing than others. The estimated number of climbers in Wales is around four thousand, whilst figures for the United Kingdom as a whole range from 150,000, British Mountaineering Council (1997) to a somewhat inflated 700,000, Mintel (1997).

Since the beginning of the sport in Britain different groupings and individuals have contributed to its development along with external social processes which have allowed greater participation and change in the social make-up of the climbing world.

Internally the British Isles have a long history of climbing dating back to the mid 19th Century so that it is possible to identify four main areas or locales in which the activity was initially developed, these are :-

1. Snowdonia in North West Wales
2. The English Lake District
3. The North West Highlands of Scotland
4. The Peak District

Interestingly an analysis of this early development reveals that the emergence of the sport in at least two of these locales (Snowdonia and the Lake District) was not brought about in any significant sense by indigenous members of the areas in question but rather by activists from larger industrial and commercial towns such as Birmingham and London. In Wales the sport was exclusively the concern of visitors.

“Mountain climbing is a sport almost entirely in the hands of strangers. Since the days when the early enthusiasts assembled almost in secret at Pen-y-Gwryd

for their attacks on Snowdon local people have taken but little interest in the science of surmounting rocky slabs and forcing natural chimneys.”

Lewis (1937) p74

The geographical position of Snowdonia may be located in an area of North West Wales known as the county of Gwynedd. Gwynedd is a modern county but is perhaps more famous for its ancient history - being at one time the stronghold of Welsh independence and strongly bonded to Welsh culture, language and legend Gantz (1976); Evans (1907); Jones (1973); Rhys and Evans (1887).

Snowdon at 3560 feet is the highest mountain in England and Wales and is surrounded on all sides by a number of satellite peaks with steep sided craggy valleys so that;

“In this central core, the land rises sharply on all sides and it is only a matter of four miles from Beddgelert at approximately 100 feet above sea level to the summit of Snowdon. Deep valleys with swift flowing streams open from this central core in every direction and leave no more than seventy square miles of the county above the 1500 foot contour line - some twelve percent of the total area of the county.”

Davies (1978) p11

In this sense the physical layout of the area presented a number of cliffs of value to climbers some of which are now almost sacred to modern protagonists of the sport. Yet the area was not initially easy of access and for the most part their activity starts in any seriousness after 1830, with the building of the road through the Llanberis Pass to Capel Curig.

In 1848 the main railway line from London via Chester reached Bangor creating further access to the area. The Snowdon mountain railway was constructed in 1896 but meant little to emergent climbing groupings in the area and held the same position then as it does today as a scenic and seasonal tourist attraction, Turner (1973); Dodd (1951); Boughan (1972).

The main industry in the area throughout the 19th Century was Slate Quarrying and although initially impeded by the difficulty of transportation from work site to ports of export the business began to boom once horse tramways and then railways had been constructed to allow ease of export. The demand for slate during the 19th Century was considerable and brought about in part by the fast expansion of Britain's industrial ports and towns, Carr and Lister (1948).

In 1862 three thousand two hundred and eighty five men were employed at the Penrhyn

Quarry near Bethesda whilst at the Dinorwic Quarry near Llanberis the output of slate was more than a hundred thousand tons, Lindsey (1974).

Today the industry has virtually disappeared but it was against this backdrop of vast rural space together with heavy industrial activity in certain niches that the first alpinists came to Wales in order to explore its mountains.

From this point on climbers and hillwalkers have had a different relationship with the area than most local people and climbing activity itself has often been interpreted as a form of madness by non climbers, a point emphasised by Isabel Emmett in her Social Anthropological Study of a North Wales village :-

“Secondly there are the climbers. Before the War, climbers were rarely working-class; now they often are, and this breaks down the stereotype to a certain extent. On the other hand, poor or rich, climbers are obviously crazy. Fancy climbing Snowdon for fun and then feeling proud of it when Will Pritchard, skinny 45 and No Hero, toils up Snowdon every day to dig ditches and wouldn't bother to mention it except as the disadvantage of his present job.”

Emmett (1964) p25

Taken at surface level the sport certainly appears foolhardy and undoubtedly contains elements of risk. Yet climbers in the sense discussed in this work are not people who 'climb' Snowdon, since more strictly gaining the summit of Snowdon remains the preserve of hillwalkers, whilst climbers concentrate on specific cliffs and climbs where gaining a specific summit or getting to a certain height is largely unimportant compared with completing particular ways up any given rockface, often involving the use of equipment such as ropes and specialist climbing shoes.

The failure to make this distinction continues to annoy climbers and is compounded in a contemporary setting by misleading local media reports. An example of this may be gleaned from a front page article presented by the Bangor and Anglesey Mail on October 31 2001 which read :-

“Rescuer Blasts Climbers

Mountain rescue teams have slated people who climb mountains without proper equipment.

The attack comes after one of the busiest weekends of the year in and around

the Ogwen Valley.

Climbers are constantly being warned of the dangers, in the hope of avoiding yet more deaths in the region this winter.

Now fighting for his life, Londoner David Aitken, 53, was climbing Idwal Slabs when he fell 100m into a gully.

Ogwen Valley Mountain Rescue Service spent two hours reaching Mr. Aitken, who was airlifted by a helicopter from RAF Valley to Ysbyty Gwynedd.

On Sunday, after a climber fell off the slopes of Moel Siabod, it emerged the injured man had no map, compass, or torch. But he did have a mobile telephone.

Chris Lloyd of the rescue team said: 'It's all very well having a mobile phone but people who venture on to our mountains should realise that basic equipment is needed, too.'

He added: 'Also on Sunday, a family group of six were descending the North Ridge of Tryfan. None of them was equipped for such a difficult descent. Whereas the incident on Saturday was bad luck, both of the incidents dealt with on Sunday could and should have been avoided.'

In two of the incidents mentioned in the article, those on Moel Siabod, and the North Ridge of Tryfan, hillwalkers were involved rather than climbers since both places are considered by those with climbing knowledge as unsuitable owing to their lack of cliffs and whilst Moel Siabod is a mountain containing virtually barren hillsides, the North Ridge of Tryfan is at best a rocky scramble, though its East Face does constitute a climbing area.

From now on in this thesis the terms climber and climbers will refer specifically to climbers who have developed a technical knowledge and understanding of the sport in their own distinct way. Hillwalkers and scramblers are therefore excluded from the Study.

Another point to bear in mind is that a common myth seems to exist amongst non climbers that Mountain Rescue Teams contain the best and most expert climbers and whilst the presence of rescue teams is a valuable resource and may well contain at least some relatively experienced climbers it should be borne in mind that, except for professional services such as RAF rescue helicopter staff, mountain rescue teams are made up of volunteers who spend a great deal of time practising and dealing with rescue efforts.

Indeed, the world of mountain rescue is almost as specialist as the world of the climber and although these worlds to some extent clearly overlap, there are very few regular climbers, expert or otherwise, who wish to become involved with rescue teams, preferring instead to spend their time climbing. Furthermore many mountain rescues involve hillwalkers who, as previously noted, are often wrongly defined even by rescuers as 'climbers'.

Finally in this matter, climbers pride themselves on self-rescue in anything but the most life-threatening circumstances and this type of self reliance forms part of what being a climber means. In this sense climbers who are rescued in relatively manageable situations such as becoming lost or being benighted come in for a great deal of social sanctioning.

Essentially then climbing practices are often misconstrued by non climbers since what on the surface might appear to be a novel way of suicide is in reality a complex and time-consuming sport requiring the knowledge and practise of various techniques together with the learning of special terms and language that make up the climbers' argot (Appendix 1).

Another way of interpreting the action of climbing is firstly to look at where it takes place as arenas. In this sense then natural crags and cliffs can initially be viewed in the same way as a football pitch, bowling green or netball court in that they are the places where the activity takes place, but because they are a natural part of the landscape I will refer to them collectively as genuine or authentic arenas (Chapter 4). Clearly such arenas are on a vertical rather than horizontal plain.

When climbers discover and explore such arenas they can be seen to compete for resources, in this sense the various ways that climbers get to the top of a cliff (arena) can be viewed initially as resources. These are referred to by climbers as routes (Appendix 2).

When the first ascent of a route is done the reward bestowed upon climbers is the rite to name, grade and record the route, remembering that the style in which the route is done must also be considered because of the ethics of the sport which make for fairer competition and give meaning to climbing action.

Further to this, once all the routes on a particular cliff have been climbed, climbers refer to the cliff as being 'worked out'. However, this perception changes over a period of time as successive generations of climbers review arenas for resources that may have been overlooked or deemed too difficult by leading climbers during a particular period of exploration.

Further to this, recorded routes may then in themselves still be competed over by subsequent climbers who may vie for the social kudos of being the first from a particular grouping of climbers to complete a certain well-known route. Climbers are also constantly concerned with discovering new arenas but apart from natural authentic arenas groupings of climbers may also now compete for resources in man-made arenas, some being part of an otherwise natural outdoor landscape (Chapter 2) whilst in a contemporary setting a number of

unambiguously man-made indoor climbing walls provide what I will refer to as inauthentic arenas of competition, (Chapter 5).

Rather than accepting the view that climbing is 'crazy' it seems more useful then to attempt to understand climbing from a viewpoint that sees it as an activity in which climbers compete in arenas for resources and that central to an insight into this notion is the way in which style, authenticity and boundary are linked with the codes and rules that climbers refer to as ethics ultimately influence the activity and action of climbing.

Moreover, to gain further insight and to grasp the essential nature of climbing and its world it is also necessary to delve into the history (Chapter 1) and experiences of being a climber (Chapter 3), together with issues and influences surrounding it (Chapters 6 & 7) some of which are not always what they may appear (Chapter 8) or be presented as in a public sense when compared against the backdrop of the climbing world and its various groupings (Chapter 9).

Firstly then the history of the sport beginning in the 19th century provides a starting point.

CHAPTER 1

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE AND ANALYSIS

CHAPTER 1 : HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE AND ANALYSIS

It is clear that the British played an important part in the de-mystification of the Alps and contributed significantly to early Alpine exploration and climbing Whympers (1871); Clarke (1953); Fleming (2002). The Alpine Club had been formed on the 22nd December 1857 in London and its members shared common interests and concerns with exploring and climbing mountains. The Alpine Club journal along with various newsletters represented a formal internal communication network, which persists to the present day.

Initially then the Alpine Club was set up to maintain an interest in climbing in the Alpine arena. Its members were drawn from the professional upper and middle classes who often secured the services of local guides to undertake their often lengthy excursions but nevertheless made major personal contributions towards the development of Alpine climbing and its accompanying style Mummery, (1895).

During December 1860 a Professor Tyndall, himself a member of the Alpine Club, along with two friends made an excursion to Snowdonia, stayed at the Pen-y-Gwyrdd Hotel (situated at the junction of the Capel Curig to Beddgelert road which cuts over the Llanberis Pass a few yards past the hotel, (and was completed by 1830), and made an ascent of Snowdon' (3,560ft.) under winter conditions, stating that :-

"The scene would bear comparisons with the splendour of the Alps themselves."

Hankinson (1977)p33

Subsequently in 1870 the significant and influential figure of Charles Edward Matthews, a wealthy Birmingham solicitor, formed the society of 'Welsh Rabbits' for those particularly drawn to exploring Welsh mountains. It was the start of an organisational development that would later lead to the formation of the Climbers Club whose members pioneered many early Welsh rock climbs.

It should be noted however that the early frequenters of the Pen-y-Gwyrdd pursued the activity of scrambling and walking to various summits such as those of Tryfan and Snowdon,

usually at Christmas and Easter, in an attempt to find them under snow cover. In this way they could be used as a form of Alpine training, Jones, T. (1986).

The early pioneers were professional middle-class visitors who chose to spend their leisure time engaging in mostly Alpine training. As far as indigenous participants were concerned there are no records of any involvement though groupings of visiting climbers did include Welsh men and women such as Owen Glyn Jones, Humphrey Owen Jones and Muriel Gwendolyn Edwards, though these people were also middle-class professionals who worked outside Wales yet formed an integral part of predominantly English climbers' groupings, Jones, R.M. (1999), after 1898.

Climbing as a distinct sport in Britain is generally acknowledged to have been started in the Lake District by Walter Parry Haskett Smith in 1882, Clark and Pyatt (1957). Haskett Smith was a 22-year-old Oxford student who had never climbed in the Alps but proposed that rocks and features on or around a cliff could be climbed for their own sake. Initially he demonstrated his ideas by making ascents of 'Deep Ghyl' on Scafell and 'Great Gully' on Pavey Ark, however his most famous climb was his ascent of the 'Napes Needles' on Great Gable in 1886, Unsworth (1977).

In the late 1880's he continued to discover climbs in the Lake District, Scotland and North Wales, often climbing 'solo' or with renegade Alpine Club members who had taken an interest in the new sport such as John Hopkinson and Cecil Slingsby, Clark and Pyatt (1957).

In 1894 Haskett Smith produced the first part of 'Climbing in the British Isles' a book that was designed as a general guide to various crags and areas of interest to the climber rather than a guide to specific climbs on a specific cliff. Although he completed the sections on England Wales and Ireland by 1895 the third part of the work, Scotland was never produced.

Hasket Smith was not, however, typical of early climbers since most of them were already Alpine climbers who began to transfer their attention to the development of the new sport either in the Lake District or Wales.

What is significant about Hasket Smith is that his involvement showed that it was not necessary to have Alpine climbing experience to climb in Britain and this point is emphasised by the emergence and development of the sport not as a form of Alpine training but as a sport in its own right. It should also be noted that many Alpine Club members questioned the authenticity of rock climbing for its own sake. The Alpinist Douglas Freshfield often

spearheading their views, Unsworth (1977).

The development of rock climbing in Wales started in any serious manner slightly later than in the Lake District so that in 1883 Stocker and Wall made an ascent of the West Buttress of Lliwedd, (a cliff on the flanks of Snowdon whose rock face is nearly 1000ft in height), to produce the first recorded rock climb in the area, Jones, T. (1986). The cliff of Lliwedd then formed the basis of early rock climbing exploration in Wales.

It was now clear that rock climbing was emerging as a sport in its own right and although most climbs either attempted or achieved in Wales from 1883 till around 1907 followed the lines of various gullies or clefts rather than the rock faces that normally flanked them they often gave considerable technical climbing interest, East Gully (1896) and Slanting Gully (1897) for example, both on Lliwedd. The ascents were made in order to climb features of certain cliff faces rather than to gain a specific summit many of which could be reached either by walking or scrambling.

The early history of rock climbing is divided by what climbers refer to as the 'Lakes School' and the 'Welsh School' Clark and Pyatt (1957) which are terms which essentially refer to groupings of climbers who championed one place over the other for climbing activity, though such affiliation did not exclude members of each school visiting the other, Hankinson (1977).

The tactics used for climbing were the same in each place and although there were no written rules climbers began to develop strategies and formats for carrying out climbs within an ethical code which was passed on by word of mouth. The ethical code amounted to the rules of the sport and was based on a shared understanding that climbing was essentially centred on notions of style whilst making any given ascent. In this sense climbing became concerned not only with what could be climbed but how a climb could be done. During the course of this work I talked to several non climbers who thought that once one climber fixes a rope in place then the other climbers may legitimately haul themselves up it. Then as now climbing ropes are typically used only to safeguard climbers as they climb up the rockface so that any use of a rope for direct aid amounts to an ethical infringement and this point can be traced back to 1909.

“Two forms of pioneering, a genuine and a debased one are equally possible on our mountains. The higher form postulates experience of rocks and skill in the art of descent; the lower involves experiments with ropes and reliance on

retentiveness of memory. The subtle charm of true exploration will be felt by adherence to the sound traditions of climbing on Lliwedd.”

Thomson (1909) p2

If aids are used it is the duty of climbers to report such methods or means employed so that subsequent ascensionists try to dispense with them. An example of this is George Mallory's route 'Bowling Green Buttress' on Lliwedd which was climbed and recorded in April 1919 stating that an ice axe had been used for aid on one section of the climb. Subsequently in 1937 Ken Roebuck dispensed with the aid and recorded the climb as being done 'free', Neal (1998).

Thus typically climbing meant going to a specific place to seek out a particular feature on a rock face and attempting to climb it. The climbing team typically was composed of two or three climbers and the ascent would be made by what climbers termed 'the order of the rope'. What this meant was that once the team had arrived at the start of a particular climb it would be decided which person would 'lead' or go first on the climb and who would go 'second' and/'Third Man' in the case of a three-strong climbing team.

The leader simply tied one end of the rope round his/her waist and set off up the climb whilst the second paid out the rope as smoothly as possible. If the climb was longer than one rope length*, it would be done in stages which climbers referred to as 'itches'. After each pitch the leader would stop at a suitable place on the cliff, typically a broad ledge or deep chimney which climbers referred to as a 'stance' or 'belay place'. Once established on the 'stance' the leader would take in any slack rope until it came tight around the second's waist before he or she then proceeded up the climb to eventually join the leader before the process could start over again until the top of the climb was reached.

In order to communicate whilst on the cliff, climbers developed a set of terms which were particularly useful when the leader and second were not in visual contact and these terms are still in common use today, Creasey (2000).

Firstly, when the leader arrives at the 'stance' and has made him/herself as comfortable as possible he/she shouts 'I'm safe'. This signal alerts the second to let go of the rope and shout back 'okay' or 'all right', whereupon the leader shouts 'taking in'. When the rope

* Climbing ropes normally made in 150ft. lengths

becomes tight around the 'second's' waist he/she shouts 'that's me' and waits for the leader to reply 'climb when you're ready'. Once the second hears this call he/she replies 'climbing' but before finally setting off must wait for the last call of the leader which is 'okay then' or 'come on'.

Many early climbers were concerned with climbing the most obvious features of a given rock face since they were convenient to describe and as Hasket Smith pointed out this served a competitive purpose.

"It is one great merit of a climb if it clearly defines itself, when A makes a climb he wants B, C, and D to have the benefit of every single obstacle with which he himself met, whilst B, C, and D are equally anxious to say that they followed the exact line that Mr. A found so difficult, and thought it perfectly easy."

Hasket Smith quoted in Clark and Pyatt (1957) p39

As Gully's form the main topographical features of most cliff faces they were easy to pin point and identify to other interested parties either by word of mouth or recorded notes. They also provided what climbers initially referred to as 'lines of weakness' and once embarked upon often involved climbers struggling with various problems in positions that whilst not 'exposed' (a climbers' term meaning that when looking down a sheer drop can be seen), were nevertheless considerable and dangerous undertakings with less security than might have been expected. Alerting us to this point are accounts of such early exploratory climbs including Archer Thomson's description of the first ascent of Great Gully on Craig-yr-Ysfa where he states that:

"By utilising a small foothold on the right wall the climber effects a lodgement on it, and then reaches its sharp upper edge by a struggle, in which he becomes near to defying all the laws of anatomy. A novel expedient is to lay the palm of the right hand on the block and, using the arm as a pivot, perform a pirouette to the south. the climber thus lands in a sitting position, with one leg thrust upwards to the roof to maintain equilibrium ... any Galileo, however, will complacently demand a shoulder. A bastard hand traverse is now made to a ledge of rock on the left wall."

Thomson (1910) p108

The description is a typical example of how climbers began to interpret and

communicate climbing experience and alerts us to both the physicality of the sport and to the beginning of a specialised climbers' argot which is exemplified in the last lines of the paragraph "A bastard hand traverse is now made to a ledge of rock on the left wall."

Whilst to non climbers such information might remain baffling, active climbers would immediately interpret the description and recognise its meaning so that if and when they decided to make an ascent of the climb, they would expect at some point to move leftwards using only smooth features in the rockface for the hands ("A bastard hand traverse"), whilst expecting little in the way of footholds until reaching the "ledge of rock on the left wall".

As climbing emerged as a physical activity it also developed as a social event and to this end became associated with certain places apart from crags and areas. The Pen-y-Gwyrdd for example, as well as providing accommodation for visiting climbers, also provided a venue that became 'owned' Moore (1994) by climbers and at which the sport could be debated and initially recorded in a visitors book.

For general convenience, visiting pioneers established their base initially at Pen-y-Gwyrdd, from 1847 to 1901 and then at Pen-y-Pass from 1901 to 1914. Both places had a number of basic significant factors in their favour. Firstly the close proximity to Lliwedd, secondly simple but comfortable accommodation and thirdly understanding and tolerant management. It is under such circumstances that the 'Gwyrdd', as it later became known, provided a key base for climbers and their activities. It was also at Pen-y-Gwyrdd that records began to be kept about various incidents and expeditions - specific to the locale. This form of record keeping continued at Pen-y-Pass and provided the raw data from which guide books to specific cliffs and climbs would subsequently be compiled.

The first Pen-y-Gwyrdd visitors book eventually fell into disarray having lost many original pages. It was salvaged by Mr Hugo J Young QC and restored by the Cambridge librarian Charles Sayle so that in 1884 Mr Young was able to present to the proprietors a thick black book which had a metal lock and was inscribed:

"For contributions on mountain rambles, botany, geology and other subjects of interest connected with Pen-y-Gwyrdd, with reminiscences poetical and otherwise."

This was fortunate since the 'Locked Book'^{**}, as it is now known in the climbing world, provided the blueprint for 'New Route Books' (Appendix 3) which have been a feature of climbers' 'hanghouts' ever since and in whose pages new climbs are initially recorded.

The proprietor of Pen-y-Gwyrd Harry Owen was born in Nant Gwynant in 1822 and in 1847 bought the Pen-y-Gwyrd and married a local girl, Ann Pritchard, together with whom he ran the hotel until his death in 1891, Hankinson (1977).

With the demise of Harry Owen and no forthcoming new landlord it was fortunate that y Gorphwysfa or the Pen-y-Pass Hotel, a mile away from Pen-y-Gwyrd had undergone recent renovations and the new licensee, a Miss Pritchard began to encourage business from the visiting climbers. This act was further aided when she married Rawson Owen a veteran of the Boer War and a congenial host towards climbers so that the ingredients that previously existed at the Pen-y-Gwyrd in terms of hospitality were eventually sustained at Pen-y-Pass, Noyce, Sutton and Young (1957).

As the century ended, visiting climbers decided to introduce a more formal structure for their activity and in 1898 the Climbers Club was formed at the Café Monaco in London with forty initial members.

Since 1898 the club has produced an annual journal of relevance to the climbing world, including personal accounts of climbs, new routes and new climbing arenas. Despite the emergence of many regional clubs throughout Britain the Climbers Club is still considered the most important and influential climbing club in the country and is responsible for guidebooks to climbing areas throughout the UK.

As the activity of rock climbing gained new acolytes under the umbrella of the Climbers Club an Eton schoolmaster, Geoffrey Winthrop Young, began to arrange regular climbing meets at Pen-y-Pass during Christmas and Easter from 1900 - 1914. These gatherings stimulated further exploration of the area and brought together relatively local climbers like Archer Thomson (the headmaster of a Llandudno School) and Harold Hughes, a Bangor based architect, together with visitors such as George Mallory, Siegfried Hereford and Hugh Rose Pope amongst others. One fundamental aspect of the sport that went hand in hand with its development was the inherent risk factor associated with the activity and evidence of this can

^{**} The original locked book is retained by the current proprietors of the Pen-y-Gwyrd but it is no longer available for general viewing - access being gained by a formal letter of introduction from a reputable body

initially be found in early entries in the 'locked book' at Pen-y-Gwyrdd. The first concerning a Mr. J. Mitchel of Oxford who had attempted an ascent (solo) or alone, of Slanting Gully on Lliwedd; he subsequently slipped and fell some way down the route before being killed.

The Mitchel case occurred on August 30th 1894 and the account of the incident includes a description of how the body was recovered with the assistance of Copper miners from Nant Gwynant which reads :

"The way in which these men accomplished their task is worthy of the highest praise one of them descending the whole way alongside while the last man had the body and preventing any further injury, to come down without any aid whatever."

Later in 1910 the Climbers Club Journal published in March of that year contains accounts of climbing accidents on the cliffs of Glyder Fach and Lliwedd where Donald Robertson and Leonard Salt respectively lost their lives. The Journal also testifies that both men were experienced climbers and well respected Climbers Club members.

Later again in 1934 a further example of the penalty incurred from the activity is the case of Colin Kirkus's accident on Ben Nevis which ended in horrific circumstances when after falling and being knocked unconscious Kirkus came round only to find that his climbing partner Maurice Linnel had somehow been fatally strangled by the rope during the course of the incident, Jones, T. (1986) p59.

Despite these hazards climbing attracted a number of new recruits from successive generations some of whom eventually became immersed in the sport. Indeed, further analysis of the history of climbing reveals the existence of individuals who act as exemplars of the sport and who represent and symbolise what the sport is about at any one point of time. Such people are central to the iconography of the climbing world and are often mythologised by climbers over a period of time.

One early climbing icon was James Merriman Archer Thomson 1863 - 1912 who both championed and symbolised climbing in Wales for a period of eighteen years until his death by his own hand in 1912, Unsworth (1977).

There is little doubt that up until the period after the Second World War climbing in Wales remained the preserve of the middle class, climbers were commonly drawn from

lawyers, schoolmasters and clergymen and that Thomson was a leading example of this grouping in his approach to the sport.

Thomson graduated from Cambridge in 1884 and soon afterwards took up a teaching post at Friars school in Bangor on the North Wales coast before becoming headmaster of a Llandudno school, Hankinson (1977).

There is no record of him having climbed in Wales until 1894 and his first climbing experience seems to have taken place in the Lake District in 1890, Unsworth (1977).

However, by 1896 Thomson had established himself as a leading pioneer of Welsh rock climbing and his climbing career included making the first ascents of a number of routes throughout Snowdonia many of which represented the top end of difficulty at that time and involved considerable risk. Avalanche and Red Wall Route (1907) on Lliwedd are two examples, whilst a third route of Thomson's Horned Crag (1905) also on Lliwedd maintains a reputation even today because of a number of contemporary climbers experiences on one of its key passages which they describe as 'desperately slippery even in dry conditions', (conversation with the author).

Archer Thomson also invented the idea of routes that could be climbed horizontally along any given rock face. Today such routes are commonly referred to as girdle traverses and are included as a standard feature of climbing on most documented crags.

Thomson was a pioneer of the sport in several ways and sought to protect the authentic nature of climbing as he and his companions both constructed and understood it. His attitude values and contributions to the sport are typical of the relatively small grouping of pioneer climbers who frequented Pen-y-Gwyrd then Pen-y-Pass during the late 19th and early 20th Century. He claimed that :

“it is axiomatic that there is a certain element of risk in all climbing”.

Thomson (1910) p 19

Thomson's attitudes to climbing publication placed him in opposition to climbers like Owen Glynn Jones, who sought to photograph and popularise climbing by producing graded descriptions of climbs and climbing experience in book form, Jones (1897), and George and Ashley Abraham, two climbers and photographers who Jones had introduced to the sport.

Thomson preferred to keep rock climbing knowledge restricted to word of mouth communication. He was only persuaded to write the first guidebook to Wales Lliwedd (1909) for the Climbers Club in an almost angry gesture against the publications produced by the Abrahams, notably 'Rock Climbing in North Wales published in 1906.

Thomson's 'guide' differed widely from the type of books produced by the Abraham's since it related more specifically to climbers and the world of climbing by describing certain routes for those who might wish to climb. The guide was practical, in a pocket-sized format and contained information and descriptions of various climbs. Thomson's format was initially developed because he felt that:

“The mountains deserve appropriate literary treatment and should not merely act as pegs whereon to hang stories of rollicking adventures.”

Clark and Pyatt (1957) p86

Thomson firmly believed in rock climbing for its own sake and he emphasised this in his second guide book (Climbing in the Ogwen District, Thomson (1910). In that book he made the statement that rock climbing should no longer be thought of in terms of training for the Alps because:

"The difference between the two pursuits is not a difference of magnitude only, but of essential quality, and dissimilarity of method has been accentuated of late years by specialization."

Thomson (1910) p 14

The outbreak of the war in 1914 can be seen as the end of what Archer Thomson called 'The Romantic Trust' of climbing. A notion that implied that the sport should be kept as far as possible from the mainstream of organised sport with its emphasis on rules and regulations together with specific competitions, Noyce, Sutton and Young (1957).

By the beginning of the war Archer Thomson was already deceased and after it many of his grouping were also either dead or incapacitated. Geoffrey Winthrop Young for example lost a leg whilst serving with an ambulance unit, yet remarkably began climbing again with the use of an artificial limb, Young (1951).

After the war the pace of climbing development in Wales slowed considerably, Jones, T. (1986), and only began to gain momentum after the Climbers Club bought their own Club hut at 'Helyg' in the Ogwen valley in 1925, Milburn (1985).

This move meant that emerging climbers had an independent base and although positioned around five miles from Pen-y-Pass and Pen-y-Gwyrdd 'Helyg' was ideally situated for climbing on the crags of Tryfan, Glyder Fach and Cwm Idwal in its immediate vicinity as well as acting as a staging post for access to the entire Snowdonia area.

Groupings of climbers from the Manchester Rucksack Club also acquired a cottage in the Ogwen valley at Tal-y-Braich and they too contributed to a general resurgence in Welsh climbing activity. Thus :

“By the late 1920s the renaissance of Welsh climbing was assured. The two great climbs of Piggot and Longland on Clogwyn du'r Arddu were only its most obvious and spectacular signs, outstanding feats carried out by outstanding men. In addition to these exceptional climbers there slowly came into being a constantly expanding reservoir of more moderately efficient men, a supporting body as it were, which from time to time was to produce its own leaders.”

Clark and Pyatt (1957) p169

The very steep East Buttress of Clogwyn du'r Arddu had been climbed in 1927 by three members of the Rucksack Club, Morley Wood, Fred Piggot and Lindeley Henshaw, but their ascent employed a number of aid points (three in all), instead of using features on the rock face to climb upwards, they had pulled up on slings threaded around stones that they had inserted in the crack. These tactics were reported and although only used on a small section of the climb flawed the overall ascent. In most cases even on extremely hard climbs the idea of climbing was, and remains, to dispense with any such aid. Most climbs in Wales and throughout the UK are therefore what climbers refer to as 'free climbs'. The aid on Piggot's climb was later dispensed with, Williams (1989)

However, it is clear that climbers were seeking out more difficult routes and attempting to push the limits of climbing so that by the 1930s the climbing world was set to receive an important ingredient in its structure, which was an attempt to provide each climb with a graded classification.

Two seminal figures from the period Colin Kirkus, and John Menlove Edwards, Perrin (1985), spearheaded the main grouping of climbers which whilst mostly drawn still from middle class professionals and undergraduates under the influence of Geoffrey Winthrop Young began to explore new arenas for climbing activity and contribute to a general rise in standards of difficulty. Established climbing arenas were revisited and new routes added to them and the grading of climbs in a hierarchical order of difficulty had become generally accepted as being of value to climbers so that when Edwards wrote a new guidebook (for the Climbers Club), to the cliff of Lliwedd in 1939, all climbs included in the text received a grading in an ascending order of difficulty for the first time in Wales.

This was an extremely important development and it allowed climbers to compete against each other in pursuit of the hardest climbs and also in the extension of orders of difficulty as they sought out new climbs, some of which were considered harder than those previously established.

From this point on climbers and groupings of climbers entering the sport in Wales as well as those already immersed in the activity could aspire to a standard of difficulty and in some cases surpass it. Prior to the introduction of this grading and standard setting the climber in Wales could aspire to climb named routes, but now as well as being named and recorded, climbs were also to be graded against a set of standards which took into account the overall difficulty of any given route. What climbers called a 'technical' grade which accounted for the most difficult passage on a climb was added in 1951.

Yet the idea of a grading system for climbs dates back to 1897 when Owen Glynn Jones published his 'Rock climbing in the English Lake District' which contained photographs by the Abraham's of the nature of the new sport and, most importantly a blue print for a graded system of climbs which would eventually be adopted and extended throughout Britain as the sport emerged. Jones introduced the system by stating that:

"A rough classification is here appended of some seventy-five of the well-known courses judged under good conditions. They are divided into four sets. The first are easy and adapted for beginners, the second set are moderately stiff, those of the third set rank as the difficult climbs of the district, and the last are of exceptional severity. Some attempt has been made to arrange them in their order of difficulty, the hardest ones coming last. but the variations of condition of each due to wind, temperature, rain, snow, or ice are so

extensive that no particular value should be attached to the sequence. But even if only approximately correct, the lists may help men in deciding for themselves where to draw the line that shall limit their own unaided performances. As for the items in the fourth class, they are best left alone. Mark the well-known words of an expert (Mr C. Pilkington):

‘The novice must on no account attempt them. He may console himself with the reflection that most of these fancy bits of rock-work are not mountaineering proper, and by remembering that those who first explored these routes, or rather created them, were not only brilliant rock gymnasts but experienced and capable cragsmen.’”

Jones, O. G. (1897) p112

Quite clearly the proposals set down by Jones did not gain general early favour in Welsh climbing circles and evidence of this can be gleaned from the introduction to Thomson’s Guidebook to Lliwedd (1909) where he states that :

“With this in view, no attempt has been made to grade the climbs in classes in accordance with their supposed difficulty. The mountaineer knows that technical ‘difficulty’ is inextricably interwoven with an entirely distinct element of ‘danger’. The estimate of ‘difficulty’ among climbers varies largely with their physical conformation just as their capacity to gauge ‘danger’ fluctuates inevitably in accordance with their individual experience. Satisfactory classification, therefore, is impracticable and its attempt only misleading. The fact alone that such lists are found to encourage competitive climbing would be sufficient reason for their omission.”

Thomson (1909) p6

Initially then guidebooks to Welsh cliffs described but did not grade specific climbs and an example of a typical early guidebook description is Thomson’s write-up of ‘Avalanche Route’ and ‘Red Wall continuation’ on Lliwedd which is reproduced below :

Avalanche Route

“The most exposed climb in England and Wales. Exceedingly difficult but delectable in good weather, indefensible in bad. Best number, two. Ninety feet of rope required. Good balance essential. No aid and little protection can be given to the leader. Only for a thoroughly expert party. Steepness. Absence of grass and gravel. Excellence of rock. Exiguity of holds. Long distance between belays. A succession of breezy situations.

Red Wall Continuation. - More exposed than wall of Devil's Kitchen, but safer in so far as the rock is perfectly sound. Ninety foot interval. Leader ascends 70 to 80 feet alone. No prodigious feats of strength, but constant muscular tension. One face foothold of limited utility. An operation of exceptional delicacy."

Thomson (1909) p32

After these introductory notes the description continues for a further five and a half pages. In notable contrast the description to the same climb taken from the 1939 guidebook written by Edwards provides a more practical and concise account together with an initial grade. The overall length of the description had been cut to just over a page to read :

Avalanche Route

"The Central Ridge, in the lower third of the East Buttress is open to doubt, but a ridge that may be taken for it goes straight up between Heather Shelf and Bird Tree Terrace to join the Terminal Arête. The route hugs this ridge up steep open rocks, keeping a little to the right except for the start. The ridge is between the Central Route grooves and the Central Chimney.

A very open route of no special difficulty but of obvious charm, and sufficiently steady to keep the interest going over about a third of the whole cliff height.

Standard : Medium Very Difficult

Start: Below the right end of Heather Shelf, where an 80 foot groove cuts up to the West end of the Shelf. Or else start by scrambling on to the Shelf by the usual East end easy way and avoid the initial section.

1. 80 feet. Up the groove to Heather Shelf; moderate climbing.
2. 140 feet. On to and up the rib. Traverse away out to the right over a broken rib, passing below the foot of the Central Route grooves, 20 feet, and out on to the far rib, making up and around it on to the general face of its far side, where good stances soon occur, 60-70 feet. Then up pleasantly, still on large holds, to ledges below a fresh outcrop of wall. This wall is marked by a tall sickle of quartz. The ledges slope up to the left and are used at that end by the Central Route. On the right the Central Chimney slopes up bending left towards us at an easy angle from the Summer house of Central Chimney Route.
3. 40 feet. The right centre of the wall is grooved and recedes from the vertical; by the quartz of the sickle. Step into the groove to the right, then keep left as it steepens and soon again step right on to the edge of the rib between our groove and the Roof. The first part of this pitch is the hardest part of the climb.
4. Straight up the rib, steep at first, but on pleasant holds. At 60 feet it sinks into the easy slop of the Roof, and one makes off easily to the

right on to the Great Terrace. The Gorphwyspha of Central Route is 40 feet diagonally up to the left, easy of access from the end of the rib. The Red Wall was designed as a suitable continuation to this route, above the Terrace.

Edwards (1939) pp45-46

Although the format of the pocket-sized guidebook differs little in size from Thomson's the more considered use of language backed up by grades of individual climbs provided the blueprint for subsequent guidebooks and the way in which climbs would be described in a less literary but more practical manner. To complete this format the Avalanche Route is now described in less than a page with the grade, overall length and individual passages (which climbers call 'pitches') all included. The final description of 'Avalanche' then is a typical example of how most routes are described in a contemporary setting and is taken from the 1998 Guidebook to Lliwedd.

Avalanche 530 feet Very Difficult (1907)

Terrific climbing, continually interesting and open. Very popular.

Start. The first pitch follows the steep, curving groove that runs up to the right-hand end of Heather Shelf. Start just left of the foot of the groove.

1. 80 feet. Traverse easily right to a grass ledge in the groove, then follow the groove to Heather Shelf on good holds and sufficient protection. This pitch is often wet and may be avoided by the left entries to the Shelf.
2. 110 feet. From the right end of the Shelf traverse right, around two ribs, and then trend right and up to a small ledge which is about 15 feet before a large spike on the right.
3. 50 feet. Climb the slab above to a grass ledge, below and left of a quartz wall.
4. 50 feet. From the right end of the ledge, climb the steep quartz wall for a few feet then step left into a widening groove. Up this until it is possible to move right to ledges, then go right again, around a rib, to a stance on its front.
5. 120 feet. Climb diagonally right, then go up a grassy gully to a niche and large bollard.
6. 12 feet. Scramble up rightwards to the Great Terrace.

Continuation : Red Wall and Longland's Continuation is the usual finish, maintaining the excellence of the climbing right to the summit.

Neal (1998) p27

In 1939 the grading system contained the categories easy, moderate, difficult, very difficult, severe and very severe. The system was open-ended in that although very severe represented the top standard it could be added to when and if new orders of difficulty came into being. Thus by 1950 two further categories, those of hard very severe and extremely severe, had been added. The grading of climbs as well as naming and describing them remains the responsibility of the first ascensionists, though before they appear in guidebook form climbs are usually repeated by a number of climbers and a consensus of opinion gained about the grade and merits of each route. By the time the guidebook writer comes to record them he/she will therefore consider the views not only of the first ascensionists but also accounts given by other experienced climbers along with personal experience of any given route.

Guidebook writers do not necessarily have to be at the top of the climbers' hierarchy in that they may not regularly do routes at the top standard in the climbers' grading system. On the other hand, they are always authentic members of the climbing world with a great deal of knowledge concerning a wide range and variety of climbing. Their efforts include liaising and often climbing with top climbers whilst attempting to correlate and balance both the grades and climbing descriptions for eventual inclusion in guidebook form.

In cases where the guidebook writer is a top climber, he/she must also be supported by and liaise with a number of other climbing activists in order to gain consensus of opinion about various climbs. In this sense all climbers' guidebooks are coordinated and produced by a process involving many climbers as well as the main guidebook writer.

As we have seen from the examples relating to Avalanche Route, descriptions may be changed over a period of time and in cases where the first ascent has been made before gradings were introduced the climb graded retrospectively.

Further to this climbs that have not been checked either by the guidebook writer or his/her accomplices are usually marked with a cross symbol, indicating to other climbers that although a certain climb is described in the text it has not been climbed since its first ascent and should therefore be treated more cautiously since a consensus about its grade has not yet been reached.

Menlove Edwards also introduced the notion of naming climbs in a more liberal and imaginative way. Initially, climbers had identified and named climbs by simply referring to the particular feature of the rockface taken by the climbing route, Slanting Gully (1909) for

example, but eventually began to give more imaginative and less strictly topographical titles to climbs as the sport developed. Foremost in this was Edwards and after his imaginatively named climbs of the 1930s there has been little restriction on what a climb might be called.

Examples of Edwards' climbs are 'Pharaoh's Wall, named because the overhangs at the base of the climb look like an Egyptian hat and 'Sextons Route', named because of the somewhat sombre attire of the third climber in the team who wore a black tailcoat throughout the ascent, Williams, P. (1987).

After the Second World War in 1945 a general process of social change contributed to a change in the social make-up of the climbing world so that the number of climbers increased and working-class climbers began to make an impact in Wales owing to greater amounts of leisure time and, most importantly, the gradual democratisation of private travel.

Although the number of cars on the road had increased steadily from 1919 to 1939 an initial lull in production caused by the war effort and petrol rationing eventually gave way, as economic circumstances improved, to greater output so that by 1950 production had increased to over 900,000 which, when contrasted against the figure for 1939 (526,000) shows a considerable increase, Briggs (1983).

Before the 1950's working-class people had been generally excluded from parts of the country that might now appear within relatively easy reach. Unless an area was accessible by local public transport, by bicycle or on foot it was usually economically unviable for the working class, especially on any regular basis. The introduction of cheaper private transport after the Second World war changed all this.

The democratisation of travel is a key factor in the emergence of the working class climbers on the Welsh climbing scene as it was throughout Britain. It also meant that climbing could become a realistic weekend activity since faster and more efficient vehicles allowed less time spent travelling to and from relatively remote climbing arenas such as Wales by groupings of climbers otherwise based and employed in various cities.

Thus the development of relatively cheap motorised transport enabled a wider social class to enter the sport in many different parts of the country. Without this development the impact of working class climbers on the sport would have remained limited.

Initially motorcycles and motorcycles with sidecars provided the necessary means of travel, followed, as economic circumstances improved, by private cars.

Private travel has played and continues to play such a crucial role in the climbing world that it is almost part of the same activity and there are nearly as many driving stories as there are climbing stories told in climbers' hangouts.

For many climbers a weekend climbing session almost always began by long but fast drive and even within climbing areas themselves the availability of a bike or a car meant exploratory trips could be undertaken on a regular basis from a favourite climbing centre to explore new areas (a clear example of this is the development of the Anglesey sea cliffs as a climbing arena in 1964 by climbers who preferred to mix socially and were accommodated in or near Llanberis some thirty miles away).

The advantage to climbers in general brought about by the availability and refinement of both 'Black ton up machines' (motorbikes), or private cars was noted by Smyth (1966) writing in *Rock Climbers in Action in Snowdonia* where he states :-

"Road transport is a subject close to all climbers hearts. In the same way that we all spend a third of our lives in bed and know the need to be comfortable there, a climber might spend a third of his weekend on the road. The first requirement then is for his vehicle to be fast, not only for additional enjoyment and prestige, but because the faster the car the sooner the climber, gets to bed - in Wales on the Friday night and at home on the Sunday night.

Smythe (1966) p79

When the working class grouping of climbers entered the climbing world in Wales after the Second World War they found a sport which was, apart from the cost of travel and some rudimentary equipment, free to engage in. The locations where climbing took place were on crags and rockfaces which few people apart from climbers could either access or were interested in and the sport anarchic in that there were no written rules. Many very steep cliffs had still not been fully explored leaving plenty of resources in terms of new climbs to be attempted and any competitive urge could be measured against a grading system.

By 1943 there were still only eight guidebooks dealing with climbing in Wales. These were, Lliwedd, Thomson (1909), Climbing in the Ogwen District, Thomson (1910), A Climber's Guide to Snowdon and the Beddgelert District, Carr (1926), Cwm Idwal, Edwards (1936), Tryfan, Edwards and Noyce (1937), Glyder Fach, Kirkus (1937), Lliwedd, second

edition, Edwards (1939) and Clogwyn du'r Arddu, Edwards and Barford (1942). All of these guidebooks had been produced by the Climbers Club which remained the dominant climbing club for those interested in climbing in Wales, although many local climbing clubs began to form after 1945, Clark and Pyatt (1957).

After 1945 an influx of activists, initially spearheaded by Peter Harding and Tony Moulan, two Derbyshire-based climbers, started to raise the general climbing standard particularly in Wales.

Harding and Moulan joined the Climbers Club and from the traditional base of 'Helyg' developed a number of new climbs mostly in the Llanberis Pass. Examples of these are 'Spectra' graded Hard Very Severe (1947) and 'Ivy Sepulchre' also Hard Very Severe (1947) both of which extended the grading system, Williams (1986).

Harding's most important contributions to the climbing world can be narrowed down to three significant innovations, first, he produced what is considered the first modern guide book (since it extended the grading system to take in the Hard Very Severe and Extremely Severe category and also introduced technical grades) to Clogwyn Du'r Arddu and the Llanberis Pass (1951) which became known in the climbing world as 'the bumper fun book', and second, he invented the skill of 'hand jamming' a technique later developed by Joe Brown and usually attributed to him, which is most useful in the climbing of very steep and overhanging cracks, Unsworth (1977). Third, he began to experiment with protection devices which allowed a degree of safety for climbers as they tackled steeper and more demanding climbs.

Before the Second World War climbers employed little in the way of technical support. Nevertheless, climbers could be distinguished by their use of two main items of equipment. First, the use of ropes and second heavily nailed leather boots, followed later by tennis shoes.

Leather boots with a variety of nails driven through the sole were considered the normal and most effective footwear though at least two individuals preferred different styles. A. W. Andrews for example climbed in Plimsoles whilst a certain Conor O'Brien was known to climb regularly bare footed, Hankinson (1977).

The problem with this early equipment was its adequacy. The type of rope used was unsuitable in that it could snap in the event of a shock loaded fall. It also became extremely

heavy when wet and generally unmanageable in icy or frozen conditions. The rope was of limited protection, being tied directly around the climber's waist, but gave some protection to the 'leader' of a climb while also giving confidence to the second person as he/she proceeded up the climb. Nailed boots were cumbersome and also incredibly heavy when wet.

Despite these disadvantages the use climbers have made of equipment seemed to have changed little up until after the Second World War. Even with the introduction of nylon ropes, ex-WD pitons and karabiners after 1945, together with the refinement of more complex equipment, including specialist lightweight rockclimbing shoes in the last half century the use of equipment in climbing has always been valued less than the human ingredients of skill and risk.

The working-class climbers brought a pragmatic attitude towards the sport so that all manner of machine nuts on threaded nylon rope began to be used as 'protection'. Previously only slings over spikes and naturally occurring chockstones in the rockface had been used in order to give climbers the advantage of some sort of safety if a fall occurred by the leader. Today's arsenal of protection devices were developed from these early beginnings all of which did not come under ethical scrutiny as long as they could be removed by the 'second' in order that the crag not be littered. More permanent fixtures such as 'pegs' or 'pitons' were usually only allowed after ethical debate and in any case used as sparingly as possible, yet after 1945 their use was increasingly acceptable so that Peter Harding, was to write:

"This article would be incomplete without an attempt to rekindle the old flame of controversy. Pitons! Pegs! Bergstaples! Call them what you will - a rose by any other name - and there would still be the same old questions, to be or not to be. At one time in this country rubbers were looked upon in much the same way as pegs are regarded by some climbers today. Climbing in rubbers (plimsolls) is now an accepted and even desirable practice" which shows the triumph of common sense over prejudices"

Harding, P., quoted in Young, Sutton and Noyce (1957) p86

In 1951 Harding produced a guidebook to climbing in the Llanberis Pass which contained a small supplement recording the climbs of a working class grouping of climbers from Manchester whose loosely affiliated club name was 'The Rock and Ice'.

This club was formed on 26th September 1951 and initially contained 13 original

members. The membership of the Rock and Ice Club at its zenith was 23 so that it was always a relatively small grouping but nevertheless it was effective particularly in the production of hard new climbs in and around the Llanberis area. For example, an analysis of the current Llanberis Pass guidebook, Williams (1986), shows that in the period from 1951 - 1953 its members achieved twenty four new climbs of which eleven reached the Extremely Severe category, ten were Hard Very Severe and the remaining three were Very Severe. Before 1947 there were no climbs graded Extremely Severe in Britain.

The Rock and Ice grew from an earlier club known as the 'Valkyrie' which was largely concerned with climbing on Derbyshire gritstone. Thus the working class climbers that now began to emerge and lead the climbers' hierarchy in Wales had gained experience and practised rock climbing on the outcrops and edges of the Peak District. This area was easily accessible to them from their homes in the north west of England by means of public transport especially when compared to the Lake District, Wales and the Scottish Highlands at this time. Derbyshire gritstone edges seldom exceed more than eighty feet in height and are usually much less, they are not big mountains, but their main significance at least as far as the climber is concerned, is that they can be used as a practice ground for the development of techniques that can be transferred to longer more difficult climbs in other locations as well as providing significant climbing challenges in their own right.

In Manchester the group met at the Y.M.C.A. to drink tea, play pool and plan weekend or week long holiday trips. Instead of finding a venue which provided services when visiting Wales the working class grouping preferred to either 'bivouac' or camp in the Llanberis Pass but sometimes stayed in Nant Peris at a premises known as the 'Cromlech hut'.

The 'Cromlech hut' was in reality a loft above a cowshed. It was not advertised as a hut and the climbers were responsible for giving it such a title. There were several practical reasons for using it as a base. Firstly, it was better than camping during periods of bad weather. Secondly, it required little or no economic outlay (depending on the appearance of the farmer) and, thirdly, the Nant Peris hamlet is situated within a three quarter mile walk from the first cliffs in the Llanberis Pass, whilst the 'Cromlech' (a commonly used climbers' abbreviation referring to the popular climbing area Dinas-y-Cromlech) is itself only a half mile further on. With any type of vehicle the Llanberis Pass can be accessed from Nant Peris in five to ten minutes.

For the working class climbers the 'Cromlech hut' suited frugal requirements and provided something of a communal base, Young (1957), whilst carrying out weekend climbing activity.

During the working week their employment usually consisted of hard manual work in the building and engineering trades, for example, two of the leading climbers from this grouping, Don Whillans and Joe Brown, later to become known in the climbing world as 'The Baron' and 'The Villain' respectively were plumbers, whilst some of their marginally less able competitors such as Joe 'Morty' Smith and Ron Moseley were mechanics and engineers respectively, Brown (1967).

The working-class climbers were physically strong and able to apply solutions to practical problems, an experience of which they transferred to climbing as they negotiated their way up steep difficult climbs, often in dramatic situations.

As a climbing team Brown and Whillans combined to create a powerful partnership but also made their individual mark on the climbing world by creating their own distinctive routes in the company of other members from the Rock and Ice Club.

Joe Brown's ascent of Cenotaph Corner on Dinas Cromlech in the Llanberis Pass (1952) is an example of this. 'The Corner' as it is commonly known in the climbing world was considered impossible by previous generations of climbers, one of whom, Menlove Edwards, had already proposed its name, Perrin (1985).

Eventually Brown and Whillans became the first working class climbers to gain iconic status in the climbing world and top the climbers' hierarchy. Brown's first ascent of Cenotaph Corner marked a turning point in climbing history and epitomised the term 'hard' climbing with which the working class climbers became associated.

The climb is still considered as an entry point into the extreme climbing grade and nowadays remains the goal of many aspiring leaders who wish to begin climbing at a high standard. The grade of the 'Corner' is E1 and is a good example of what climbers refer to as a 'classic climb'. Its description in climbers' guidebooks bears testimony to this :

"Cenotaph Corner 140ft. E1 Brown, Belshaw (1952)

The pitch is one of the best in Britain, giving superb climbing in a perfect line up the centre of this fine cliff. A 'must' for all aspiring hard men, its ascent in good style makes an introduction to modern hard climbing. Two pitons are

usually in place, more definitely are not needed, whilst a good leader will try to use less. Protection is good throughout, although a little cunning is needed to find it all!

Start directly below the Corner. A low piton is sensible as a belay.

I 120ft. A few easy ft. lead to the foot, and fairly normal bridging follows to reach the first hard move by a good thread runner at 20 ft. Either swing out L. to reach jugs and a mantelshelf, or layback in the corner on finger-holds. The resting place above is followed by easier climbing at about vs mainly on the L. wall, until another resting place is reached where a ledge runs out onto the R. wall (Plate 21). (This is the stance of the Girdle Traverse!). The crack is now wider and some jaming moves lead to a large chockstone at about 90 ft. A second hard section follows into a niche with a piton and rest in a bridging position below the last few ft. This final section is hard and needs careful climbing to find a good finishing hold and so reach the top. Belay at a tress 20 ft. back.”

James (1970) p96

The emergence of the Rock and Ice grouping as the standard-setters in climbing was supported by a number of other regional clubs that had formed after the Second World War. Amongst these were the Stonnis Club and the Oread, whilst the older and well established clubs like the Climbers Club and Manchester Rucksack Club also continued to engage in climbing activity, though none of their respective members could match the performance and skill displayed by the Rock and Ice grouping.

Out on the crags these different groupings began to meet and the working class climbers were often amused by the accents of their middle class contemporaries when engaging in climbing action; referring to them as ‘Oxbridge types’ and often mimicking their accents as well as ascribing nicknames to some of their own members borrowed from those heard on the cliff face. In this sense Joe Smith became known as ‘Mortimer’ which also had the practical purpose of differentiating between the two Joes, Brown and Smith when shouting to each other on the cliff, Brown (2001).

It is worth noting that working class climbers were under no pressure to climb within the ethical parameters of previous groupings but the fact that this happened meant an increase in standards whilst still climbing in authentic style.

The Rock and Ice continued to develop climbing activity in Wales throughout the decade as greater numbers of participants began to engage in the sport and gradually repeat their climbs Crew, Soper, Wilson (1974), though it would be some time before their technical standards would be surpassed.

Significantly climbing was becoming less defined by class barriers since the activity in Wales was now a shared one rather than the somewhat socially closed innovation it had been in the early part of the century. In this sense the climbing world became more united around the core object of the activity.

Don Roscoe was the first member of the original Rock and Ice who applied to join the Climbers Club. He was eventually accepted and produced in 1961 a guide book to the North Side of the Llanberis Pass, which included many of the new climbs 'put up' by members of the Rock and Ice throughout the 1950's. The emergence of the Rock and Ice Club widened the social base from which climbers were drawn and this feature of the climbing world was further compounded after 1960 when climbing grouping's from clubs associated with the red brick universities had begun to develop. The most significant one to emerge in the climbing world was the Alpha Club. The Alpha Club was a loosely held together formation of climbers from a number of universities most of whose members were keen to repeat the harder climbs in and around Wales and the Lake District. Some of their members such as Martin Boysen and Peter Crew began regularly visiting Wales and Crew in particular occasionally joined forces with Joe Brown who continued to produce new climbs and explore new climbing sites or arenas.

The social hub of the climbing world became centred around Llanberis and the Padarn Lake Hotel or 'The Pad' as it became known in the climbing world and this point is emphasised by Joe Brown in his autobiography 'The Hard Years', Brown (1967) p15.

One of the emergent young climbers at that time, the 'Captain' also remembers what he describes as the 'old days' and the 'pad scene' :

"In the 'pad' they'd all be there on Saturday night. Brown played darts, Whillans held up the bar. They were always surrounded by climbing friends, a few locals and hangers on. We were dead keen then, didn't drink too much, but the 'pad' was something always great climbing crack, noisy and crowded out."

(The Captain (1995) in conversation with the author)

A major discovery by the Alpha Club was the potential for climbing on sea cliffs off the coast of Anglesey in 1964 which, "entered the climbing world with a loud fanfare of trumpets", Collomb (1973). Gogarth as the sea cliff was called was a hard and serious arena for the activity and required would be prospectors to be able to climb at very severe standard

or above even to attempt to climb there, furthermore Gogarth was not just one cliff but an umbrella term for an area that contained seven cliffs of around 250ft, each of a slightly different character in terms of rock type, Sharp (1978).

The discovery of the Anglesey sea cliffs marked an important development in the history of climbing in Wales as it provided a new arena and resources which up until 1966 had remained untouched by climbers. The idea of sea cliff climbing in itself was not new since early accounts by A. W. Andrews are to be found in the Climbers Club Journal (1905) dealing with the exploration of sea cliffs off the coast of Cornwall. Further accounts are to be found in the Climbers Club Journals (1934), (1937) and (1938) respectively.

The Cornish sea cliffs are for the most part easy of access and are generally composed of solid granite, whereas the Gogarth sea cliffs provided climbers with an altogether greater challenge both in terms of access and general seriousness. This is because the view from the cliff top is generally restricted so that the means of approach is often by 'abseil'*** or steep descent paths.

When 'abseiling in', climbers may well miss features such as caves in undercut rock platforms so that on occasions climbers undertaking exploration have been left spiralling around in space with the end of the rope still way above the sea or proposed ledge. In these cases the means of escape is by 'prussicking' or jumaring**** back up the rope, an exercise that often requires a great deal of time and some danger from loose material being dislodged from the edge of the cliff by continual tension on the rope.

In one particular incident during the early exploration of Cilan head on the Lleyn Peninsula a climber lost consciousness whilst spinning out of control near the end of a 50 metre rope. He was woken sharply by the shock of entering the sea but luckily did not sustain further injury, Jones, T. (1975).

Once the base of the cliff or zawn is reached the first few feet of ascent may involve the negotiation of highly polished sea-washed rock, sometimes covered in seaweed and/or razor-sharp barnacles.

Waves and swell, together with changing tides, need to be accounted for and nowadays a copy of current tide tables is a necessary and sensible aid to sea cliff climbing.

*** Abseil. A method of sliding down a rope in a controlled fashion

**** Prussiking and Jumaring. Methods of re-ascending a rope often using special equipment *i.e.* Jumars.

Occasionally narrow passageways and caves may be traversed or passed through at low tide to gain access to various parts of a cliff, though not always without hazard, since two climbers reported an incident which left them face to face with a large seal whilst attempting to exit from the 'North Stacks' area at 'Gogarth' by a rarely used cave passageway.

In the initial exploration of Gogarth psychological factors also played a part when selecting routes to climb. Though for the most part ethical boundaries were not overstepped and remained the same as those employed whilst climbing on inland cliffs yet competition for new routes was greater than ever and was accompanied by technological improvements provided by the climbing industry that had begun to make 'protection devices' specifically for rock climbing use and as Sharp (1978) noted in the now-defunct 'Mountain' magazine :

“The real onslaught began in 1964, and there followed a race for routes such as had never before been seen in Britain. At that time, the main mountain cliffs of North Wales, particularly Clogwyn du'r Arddu, were reeling under the attacks of the Alpha Club. Leading the activity was Peter Crew, a young climber keen to dislodge Joe Brown from his then acknowledged position as king of climbing. New lines were fast disappearing as the voracious Alpha gobbled them up, but keen competition between the members of the club ensured great secrecy concerning the whereabouts of the remaining lines.”

and also that :

“Another explanation for the meteoric growth in popularity of such a serious cliff is perhaps the general improvement that occurred in equipment at that time. Denny Moorhouse had just started his 'Clog' factory in North Wales, and was producing a wide range of nuts and, just as important, chrome moly pegs. When nuts first appeared in the early 'sixties, they were slow to catch on. At first, ordinary hexagonal nuts were reamed out and threaded on slings, but the accepted ethic still laid the emphasis on threaded chockstones, and climbers carried specially fashioned wire threaders to pull the slings round the chocks they had inserted. Later, specially designed alloy chocks were introduced, first by Troll and Moac, then by Clog, but these again were at first considered a trifle unethical.”

Sharp (1978) pp22-24

The development of climbing at Gogarth also gave final evidence that rockclimbing was a sport in its own right and could be carried out anywhere cliffs could be found whether they

were in mountainous areas or not. This sea cliff development by climbers also coincided with a greater degree of social mobility and economic freedom.

For example, Joe Brown had moved to live in Wales in 1965 in order to open his new climbers shop in Llanberis followed later by another retail outlet in Capel Curig. Until the 1960's the activity of climbing in North Wales still meant, in most cases, activity carried out by visitors to the locale, however in 1967 a significant sale occurred of land and property which allowed many derelict or semi derelict cottages to be bought up so that some individuals involved in regular travel to the area made property purchases and therefore became owners of various premises mostly in the Gwynedd area.

Twenty one thousand five hundred and sixty acres of land and property were auctioned by the Vaynol estate so that it was possible to acquire all manner of buildings in and around Caernarfon, Bangor, Port Dinorwic, Llanberis, Nant Peris, Rhyd Ddu, Nantlle and Trefarthen on the Isle of Anglesey, Arris (1977).

Some properties were bought by active climbers who moved to the area on a permanent basis so that in this manner North West Wales received its initial climbing 'commune' composed of mostly English émigrés from the larger industrial and commercial centres of Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham and London.

I located eleven people with a link to climbing who moved to the locale in this period and one factor about the places they lived in was that none of them impinged to any great extent on local communities so that they tended to be isolated farmhouses and cottages mostly in need of some kind of renovation rather than terraced village houses.

The Vaynol sale can be seen as an important factor in the wider social context yet it also helps to pinpoint a significant development in the social world of climbing with particular relevance to North West Wales.

The reason this was significant is that instead of remaining keen weekend climbers the activists who moved to the area in the 1960s could begin to live what is now referred to in the climbing world as a 'climbing lifestyle'. This meant they could maximise time spent climbing by doing so after work in the summer months and generally gain more knowledge about the locality and its various arenas by engaging in climbing activity more regularly than their visiting weekend counterparts.

In time they created something of a magic circle of 'local experts', many of whom

contributed to a further extension in climbing standards and some of whom attained iconic status in the climbing world whilst topping the climbers' hierarchy.

Peter Crew or 'Kid Crew' as he is still referred to, particularly exemplified the sport and its activity during this period and many of his routes such as 'The Great Wall' on Clogwyn du'r Arddu (1963) and 'Mammoth' (1966) typify the limits of climbing standards at this time.

Furthermore, the exploits of these local experts became documented and photographed in the emerging climbing media through the introduction of the specialist climbers' magazines, 'Rocksport' and 'Mountain' as well as by Cleare and Smythe (1966) in their book 'Rock Climbers in Action in Snowdonia'.

By the 1970s climbing in North West Wales experienced something of a social lull and some of the climbers who had come to live in the area were accused of general apathy so that:

"In their fundamental desire to escape from the claustrophobic cities, from nine-to-five jobs and attendant responsibilities, and live in the Mountains, they became in time estranged by a veneer of poverty and aimless purpose in life from the surroundings they admired and wished to preserve."

Collomb (1973) p35

This pause in climbing activity was relatively short-lived and in 1974 significant climbing action led to a restructuring of the grading system and the introduction of what, at that time, were referred to as 'super routes'. Resident activists Ray Evans and Alec Sharp began to raise local standards and as many of the new climbs contained more difficult moves than those on the standard Extremely Severe, Sharp suggested extending the grading system at the upper limit of the scale. This meant that once a climb had been designated as Extremely Severe it should then be categorised in relationship to others in the category so that the system could give a better indication of the type of climb encountered. First, a numerical grade starting at Extreme One, (E1), followed by a technical grade based on the hardest move on the route would be applied.

After some debate throughout the climbing world in general this system was adopted and now forms the accepted method of grading 'adventure climbs'. The following table then serves to illustrate this point.

Table 1

Standard	Abbreviation	Technical Grade
Moderate	(MoD)	
Difficult	(Diff)	
Very Difficult	(V Diff)	3A
Severe	(S)	4b
Very Severe	(VS)	4c
Hard Very Severe	(HVS)	5A
Extremely Severe	(E 1)	5B
Extremely Severe	(E2)	5C
Extremely Severe	(E3)	5C/6A
Extremely Severe	(E4)	5C/6A
Extremely Severe	(E5)	6A/6B
Extremely Severe	(E6)	6B
Extremely Severe	(E7)	6B/6C
Extremely Severe	(E8)	6C
Extremely Severe	(E9)	6C
	(E10)	7A

It may also be noted that climbs from very difficult upwards will in most cases also carry a technical grade for example E4, 5c or E7, 6b might occur. The E system most often refers to the overall seriousness of the climb whilst the technical grade attempts to objectify the actual difficulty. Thus a very safe climb might receive a low E grade but because of high technical standards of climbing be graded for example E1, 6a, whilst a very serious climb that is considered dangerous to fall from owing to loose rock and or perhaps a lack of protection devices (which would otherwise make the climb safe) might be graded E5, 5c.

Also in the summer of 1974 Peter Livesey made two significant ascents, one in North Wales and one in the English Lake District. The climbs were named and graded, both 'Right Wall' on Dinas-y-Cromlech, and 'Footless Crow' on Goat Crag were rated E5, at the time the hardest grades achieved in the British Isles. It took five years before this standard became a reasonable aspiration for up and coming climbers and Right Wall in particular is now considered as something of an entrance examination into high grade climbing and is described in contemporary guidebook form thus :-

“* Right Wall 150 feet E5 (1974)**

Although it has lost its awesome reputation through many ascents, this brilliant climb is still a big lead and should not be underestimated. The original way up the wall, it is a route-finding masterpiece, the holds only coming to light at

close quarters. Start at the right-hand end of a grassy ledge at a short wall and short corner below some old bolts.

1 150 feet. 6a. Ascend the short wall to a ledge. Climb the corner, breaking out left up the diagonal crack. Move back right and continue up the wall on pockets to a narrow ledge and so to a good rest on the right. Step up onto a prominent foothold and climb leftwards to a large broken pocket; or move left a few feet and ascend direct. From the top of the pocket step left and climb up on small pockets to a line of holds rising rightwards to The Girdle ledge. Traverse right until directly below a shallow pocket, The Porthole, 20 feet above. Start up the crux wall just to its right, then step into it, and so reach a series of good holds which run rightwards past a good spike. Traverse along these to finish up a thin crack.”

Williams (1987) p144

Livesey however had introduced a rigorous training regime consisting of distance running and circuit training in order to prepare himself for hard rock climbing and whilst some climbers took up this idea to help them compete at the highest levels most still preferred the more traditional method of ‘training in the Pub’.

The idea of training either for specific climbs or climbing in general was taken up mostly by the younger generation of climbers and as it did not impinge the ‘ethics’ of the sport to a great degree as they were carried out on the rockface, but rather contributed to a rise in standards, it was not long before climbers began to develop specific training facilities.

Bouldering, the action involving climbing relatively small rocks, typically no more than fifteen feet high, so that the ‘boulderer’ might jump to safety in the event of failing to complete any given ‘problem’, whilst competitive and entertaining as well as useful for increasing finger strength, did not allow the climber to gain an increase in stamina, which seemed so vital for those wishing to engage at a higher standard and was not considered a form of training or taken seriously by climbers at this time.

The answer to training needs lay in purpose-built indoor facilities specifically designed for the rock climber. Thus the man-made indoor wall entered the world of climbing. Most climbers now consider climbing walls an essential part of climbing whether for their social attraction, particularly in the winter months, or as part of a serious training routine (Chapter5).

In this sense it is necessary to understand that before the advent of indoor competition climbing in the late 1980's which required improved wall design, climbing walls were basic facilities which provided rudimentary training grounds for those following up the Livesey

approach to climbing but who were still concerned with climbing on natural cliffs as their primary goal.

Within the next few years a different approach to climbing and the introduction of a new type and style of climbing by a grouping of climbers who sought to extend the difficulty of the sport but minimise its risks entered the climbing world in Wales and the process and action by which this came about forms the focus of the next Chapter, together with an analysis concerning another grouping of climbers who redefined the nature of climbing arenas in the contemporary setting.

CHAPTER 2

CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVE AND ANALYSIS

CHAPTER 2 : CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVE AND ANALYSIS

Since 1980 a number of factors, including training, improved equipment and footwear, increased competition for fewer resources, the refinement of purpose-built indoors walls, the exploration of new arenas and the introduction of a new type of climbing with its own specific style has led to an increase in standards and participation in the sport.

It has also combined to produce, in the case of the new type of climbing and its accompanying style which is known as 'sport climbing', both an alternative and a threat to traditional climbing values and ethics.

As a consequence new terms which clearly define the two types of climbing have entered the argot of the climbing world. Thus 'adventure climbing' and 'trad' climbing now define what up until the 1980s was just plain climbing from its alternative 'sports climbing'.

A key ingredient in the debate between the two types of climbing has been authenticity so that groupings of adventure climbers clearly questioned the ethics and style of 'sports' climbing and suggested that it was not real climbing but merely a fake alternative with no real values since it lacked a basic element of danger or risk and also promoted the use of fixing 'bolts'* permanently into the rock face in order to make 'sports' climbs, despite their difficulty, safe and obvious.

Sports climbers argued that their style of climbing need not impinge on traditional values and that it was largely an alternative to traditional climbing which took place on cliffs not used by adventure climbers. Furthermore it had its own rules and style and was therefore in itself authentic.

To the outsider such arguments may seem absurd since any form of climbing may seem inherently dangerous, yet these arguments are central to an understanding of the climbing world and are essentially debates about authenticity linked to styles or ways in which the sport may be carried out.

Insiders in the climbing world up until the 1980s debated the authenticity of any given

* 'Bolt' Runners : bolts define the style of 'sports' climbing as they are essentially steel rings which are fixed permanently to the rockface. They afford protection to the 'sports' climber as he/she proceeds up the route and clips the rope into them by means of a karabiner. They are extremely strong and durable and are visually obvious as they are not removed from the rockface, providing 'sport' climbing cliffs with what 'adventure' climbers refer to as 'litter'.

ascent but after this point they also came to debate the authenticity of 'sport' climbing, especially when such an alternative was perceived to threaten existing ethical boundaries and potentially invade some of its territory which in this case was traditional areas for adventure climbing in the form of crags where traditional values and ethics in climbing were already well established.

Such areas became clearly boundaried and sports climbing confined both to indoor arenas and overhanging limestone cliffs which had received little attention from climbers in the past.

Slightly preceding the sports/adventure climbing debate was a debate about the authenticity of place and this centred around the climbing development of disused slate quarries near Llanberis and Dinorwig in north west Wales.

Slate was a type of rock that did not provide natural cliffs and had therefore been largely disregarded by traditional groupings of climbers up until the 1980s. The development of slate climbing in itself raised questions of authenticity since the arena was initially man-made whereas previous groupings of climbers in Wales had carried out the activity on natural cliffs. The slate climbers were not 'sports climbers' though they did push traditional ethical boundaries by using new methods to create climbs in that instead of climbing routes 'on sight', that is with no previous knowledge of what to expect on the climb, slate climbers would invariably inspect possible routes by lowering down them on a rope from above.

The reason for this was that although slate looked solid from below it often contained hidden loose holds and required what climbers refer to as 'cleaning' before any attempts to climb it could take place, once this was done all subsequent ascensionists could then climb 'on sight' in the same way as they did on natural cliffs.

The disused slate quarries were used by groupings of climbers who became known as the 'slateheads' and they created a series of climbs which while they diverged somewhat from traditional style were still seriously adventurous and challenging. Some traditionalists claimed that slate climbing was not real climbing but this did not deter the slateheads from continuing to use this arena as a basis for what they wanted to do.

The slate climbers were not easy to incorporate into pre-existing climbing groupings. Typically they were unemployed, living on the dole and slightly anarchic as well as clearly interested and totally absorbed by climbing in the quarries, though they also engaged in

adventure climbing in natural arenas.

The slateheads as a whole comprised a climbing grouping drawn from both indigenous climbers and those who had moved to the area to become full-time unemployed climbers rather than spend their time on the dole in or around urban areas. The nucleus of slateheads containing around thirty regular activists whose numbers were swollen by climbers from Bangor University and Normal College once slate became in vogue.

In the same way that earlier climbing groupings had established their bases near to arenas they wished to explore, for example the middle-class grouping that initially developed rock climbing on Lliwedd from the bases of Pen-y-Gwryd and later Pen-y-Pass during the latter part of the 19th century, the slateheads, although not visitors to but resident in the area adopted Pete's Eats Café in Llanberis High Street as their hangout and meeting place.

'Pete's' had opened in 1978. Its proprietor was a keen climber and from the café window there was a good view of Vivian Quarry on the opposite side of Llyn Padarn. The quarry itself could be reached in twenty minutes' walk from the café, a factor that suited unemployed climbers with little economic power to own vehicles at this point, but with plenty of leisure time in which to go climbing.

Most of the slateheads lived in cheap rented accommodation in and around the Llanberis and Dinorwic area and would take on black economy work (mostly in the building trade) if and when it was available, to supplement their fortnightly Social Security payments. On occasion, the deserted quarries would be visited to reclaim roofing slates from dilapidated buildings or to extract other items such as heavy slate slabs and pitch pine beams which could be incorporated into the restoration work on individual cottages.

Clearly such expeditions were illegal and did not take place on any great scale or regular basis, though the quarries, despite warning signed to 'keep out', remained relatively easily accessed and some climbers who had initially visited them in search of the objects for building work took an interest in their climbing potential since there were a number of areas that contained rock faces from fifty to five hundred feet in height.

It was clear that slate climbs would require the use of ethics that would have been considered taboo on natural crags and early attempts to climb in the quarries alerted the 'slateheads' to the fact that slate could not be climbed by traditional means which typically meant from the ground up with no inspection.

However in 1982 Steve Haston, a pioneer of slate climbing decided to abseil down a route from the top and to 'clean' it with a 'knife and fork' borrowed from Pete's Eats café. The route he subsequently climbed 'Comes the Dervish' instantly acquired a substantial reputation and now represents a classic slate rock climb. This ascent provided the catalyst for those interested in slate climbing to begin producing routes and opened up the possibility for exploration of slate on an unprecedented scale. The route is described in a contemporary slate climbers guidebook like so :

“Comes the Dervish 40m E3 5c

An outstanding pitch, normally well chalked, which provides one of the most popular modern Welsh extremes. Start below a slotted hairline crack running up the centre of the slab. Make a hard move at 6m to reach the first slot in the crack. Follow the crack with lowy reaches for good ringer locks and face holds past a semi layback move right, onto better holds, and a good rest at the overlap pull over this and continue up the easing slab above to finish.”

Jones, I. (1998) p170

As noted in Chapter 1, the naming of climbs, largely after the 1930s, was not limited strictly to topographical features on a rockface and could be designated by first ascentionists as anything they wished. There are often stories behind the name of climbs and 'Comes the Dervish' was so named because it heralded the start of climbing on slate by climbers who like Sufi Dervishes**, lived impoverished lifestyles albeit under different social circumstances.

Clearly it is difficult to ascertain the first ascentionists' ideas behind the naming of all climbs, but in this case my own conversations with the first ascentionist meant that it was possible to discover that he thought the name appropriate to and analogous with the 'religion' of climbing on slate.

The quarries therefore began once again to be used as a site of activity but the motivation for and nature of this activity had changed and the quarries were gradually transformed into unusual climbing arenas.

The workforce comprised unemployed climbers and instead of producing slate for commercial benefit they created slate climbs in a workman-like fashion, thus files and

** Dervish /'d3:vis/n. a member of any of several Sufi religious groups, vowed to poverty and austerity and holding esoteric beliefs. Some of the orders perform ecstatic rituals (such as dancing or ritual chanting), and are known as dancing, whirling, or howling dervishes according to the practice of their order. The order of whirling dervishes, founded in Anatolia in the 13th c. by the poet and mystic Mevlana, was dissolved in 1925 by order of Atatürk [f. Turk. F.Pers., = poor, a mendicant]. Source : Oxford Reference Dictionary 1990 p 224.

hacksaws became part of the slate climbers equipment. These tools were used to clean off loose rock before climbs were attempted.

Initially some climbers who were not involved in the slate development suggested that the manufacturing of routes in this bizarre environment would lead to something like the creation of a giant outdoor theme park. The reasons for the analogy in the first place are obvious given that the medium had been man made in the first place and that 'slateheads' created their own routes in a style that would not be considered acceptable on more traditional cliffs, however the reality of this situation was counterbalanced by the general seriousness and dangerous nature of the quarries and slate climbing. A point emphasised in the current slate climbers' guidebook :

"Slate by its nature is blocky, friable and loose and it is difficult to get away from the fact that it is considerably more serious than most natural crags. It is important that climbers choose their routes carefully, particularly in the less frequented areas. Special care is required when climbing on slate for the first time; familiarity with the rock should hopefully develop a 'feel' for the slate. There are virtually no worthwhile easy routes; indeed of those below Extreme, there are few worth the trouble to find. Sharp edges abound, and extreme care must be taken with the ropes; standing on them on slate scree is an absolute taboo. The weather also has a part to play. Although the rock dries quickly after rain, it is very unwise to get caught by a shower halfway up a pitch - the rock turns to glass in moments, just the thing for those long serious leads! In some areas huge towers have collapsed and others are, obviously, waiting to topple. In areas where falls have occurred, it is sensible not to linger beneath fresh rock-scars and to avoid scrambling over new blocky scree. Good slate was split using 'black-powder'. A soft explosive that did not shatter the rock, but the overlying soil and weathered rock was often removed using high-explosives; this has left the top metre or two of some routes very friable. Walking anywhere amongst slate debris can be trying, don't stuff your hands into your pockets and land on your head, although, putting out hands can be risky - slate 'daggers' abound."

Jones, I. (1998) p11

Further to this, climbing on slate not only entailed risk from climbing activity but also risk from prosecution since slate climbing technically involved breaking the law, though this law was rarely enforced since there were no permanent security staff employed to police the entire quarries.

On occasions when slate climbers were challenged as to just what they were doing,

interesting interactions occurred which in at least two cases led not to mutual understanding but more to mutual misunderstanding. In one incident, climbers making an ascent of 'comes the Dervish' in Vivian Quarry were informed by workers from the nearby Quarry Museum that the Police would be called if they did not immediately abandon their climb. From a position half way up the route the lead climber, speaking in parlance common to climbers but baffling to non-climbers, replied to this demand with a phrase that subsequently passed into climbing folklore when he said :-

“It’s all right man, we’re experienced rock cats.”

The bemused onlookers left shortly afterwards but the Police never arrived, leaving the climbers to complete their ascent with no further interruption.

On a separate occasion, slateheads engaged in climbing on a facet of slate some 150ft. high, which they had named 'The Rainbow Slab', were again threatened with the Police, this time by security men looking after the offices provided for workers at the hydro-electric station, from which the 'Rainbow' is clearly visible, though a quarter of a mile away.

The climbing team involved again refused to leave and unless physically removed claimed that they should be 'left to climb in peace' since they could only endanger themselves. Eventually the security men left and no further action was taken.

In most instances, slate climbing involved accessing areas of the quarry that were outside the public view and some slate climbs involved actually going down into holes in the ground before climbing could begin. Any notions of romanticism concerning the views and scenery more normally associated with mountain landscape was clearly not present in this case and it showed that climbers were not so concerned with looking at natural or unnatural features, but using them as arenas for climbing action.

In the case of the quarries, between 1980 and 1989 the 'slateheads' completed a total of four hundred and seventy nine 'first ascent listed' climbs with the years 1984, 85 and 86 being particularly prolific, Harms (1990).

The unemployed climbers began to record the quarry climbs in such a way that now their activity is well documented. Climbs initially recorded in Pete's Eats new routes book were eventually incorporated into modern guidebooks. The dominant language used in these

accounts was English so despite most of these climbs being located in North West Wales and being developed by Welsh as well as English climbers it is easy to see the development as a purely English venture.

The development of the quarry for climbing has not had a great impact on local consciousness quite unlike the days when the quarry was an industrial enterprise. From that time the quarrymen have left a lasting physical mark on the landscape and many of the quarrymen's names for various parts of the quarry have been retained by climbers yet individual routes have been named by those who first climbed them. This leads to a strange mixture of Welsh and English names, for example on a feature known as "Twill Mawr" there is a route called 'The Wonderful World of Walt Disney', Jones, I. A. (1998) p92.

The history of the Llanberis and Dinorwic Slate Quarries is well documented Lindsay (1974); Jones, M. (1982). Yet since their closure in the 1960s it seems that little interest has been aroused in their more recent use, except by climbers, for example, since 1987 five rock climbing guidebooks to these areas have appeared, they are : *Dinorwic Slate Quarries*, Hawkins Smith (1987); *Slate in Llanberis*, Williams (1987); *Llanberis Slate*, Harms (1990); *Slate*, Jones, Newton and McGinley (1992) and *North Wales Slate*, Jones (1998).

The hardest climb yet recorded on slate is also in the 'Twill Mawr' but as a mark of respect for the Welsh working class men who worked in the quarry for many years the first ascent team of 'slateheads' called it 'The Quarryman'. It is also worth noting that the current slate guidebook Jones, I. (1998) bears an inscription in the first paragraph of its introduction which states perhaps ambiguously that :

"This guidebook is dedicated to the men who toiled, often for scant reward, in the slate quarries of Snowdonia."

Slate climbing then was unusual and although it took place on man-made cliffs in a post-industrial setting the features of slate often mirrored features on natural crags so that grooves, cracks, slabs and walls were all feature of slate climbing. Furthermore, once slate climbs had been 'cleaned' the actual ascent of a slate climb typically mirrored the style of traditional climbing so that climbers placed protection on lead and left nothing fixed to the rockface except in a few isolated cases.

Slate climbers therefore exploited the resources of an unnatural arena but did not ultimately completely dispense with traditional methods nor create a separate grading system for slate climbs or employ the same cleaning tactics on natural cliffs if and when they were visited. To emphasise this point what follows is a description from direct experience in doing a slate first ascent.

“In February 1984 I developed an interest in the 160ft. Tapering slab just around the corner from the hot air vent and about 200 yards from the Watford Gap. A first attempt-on-sight achieved about 20ft. of climbing up the stepped groove below the slab proper but ended in retreat owing to the inadequacy of available protection. Next came a series of abseil inspection during which an ice axe was employed to prize off some loose flakes in the upper part of the route and place a few poor blade pegs as well as a small iron dowel that we found whilst ‘bouldering’ around at the base of the slab. Nick Walton assured me that by binding copper wire around the bottom of the spike it would attain a better grip in the small borehole into which it was duly bashed. Unfortunately the object stuck out too far and I knew I would have to tie it off in order to stop the sling lifting off once it had been passed en route. This device was also unsatisfactory as it became clear that if the leader fell off above it he/she might be impaled in some fashion and would be lucky indeed not to incur traumatic injury. Cliff Phillips, the quarry’s version of Dr. Livingston, appeared and gave his diatribe as to how best to approach the problem, ending with one of his favourite sayings of the time, ‘anyway we’re all out of our skulls to be hanging around here, it’s that sort of a place yeh’. Eventually I started up the route with Nick Walton belaying but only managed to make it to the spike before retreating owing to a deluge of heavy rain. At that time it was possible to leave gear around for days as we were one of the only teams operating on slate so instead of getting drenched, packing the gear and fumbling with wet ropes we left everything on site and retired to a blast shelter whose innermost sanctum bore modern graffiti in striking blue aerosol. One hour later we decided to retreat to Llanberis as the rain was incessant and we were now party to a lecture by Captain Livingston both on the existence of extra-terrestrial life and the precise details of interstellar navigation. We were back next day this time accompanied by Andy Newton who expressed his concern about our psychological state whilst expanding some enthusiasm for the whole project. I knew that other climbers might do the route more easily than me but I had taken the responsibility of the leader and indeed was inspired by the line and called upon by my team mates to do the business. First came the stepped groove, then the high point of the macabre spike, feeling uneasy I did the crux then the gripping semi layback type moves of the upper flake. Above there was a weird rockover move and the first runner of any merit an RP4 somewhere out on the left and long way above the ground. It was often the way on early slate routes that one moment you would be talking with mates on the ground then

minutes later facing ‘lobs’ that you never imagined existed, on rock that you didn’t really know how to climb, so that at the end of the day you hadn’t so much done the route as survived it. The old adage ‘the leader never falls’ was certainly firmly applied by us in order to complete some of the more serious undertakings and nowhere was this rule more stringently adhered to than on Never Never Land, as the big slab pitch was subsequently to become known, E5, 6a. Andy and Nick seconded in due course before the familiar spits of rain had us once more heading off to the security of the blast shelter. This time the captain had left us a slate clearly visible on the floor of the cell, which contained a detailed etching of the Bregalia Peaks and in particular a topo of the North face of the Piz Badile. Since we planned to visit the area later that summer the detail was superb. Our general demeanour at that time both on and off the crag probably defined us as a tiny subculture. Most of us were on and off the dole like yo-yo’s. Of course we all had friends who had jobs but we had no obligation to set standards and trends in relationship to the majority of mainstream climbers but we did so indirectly by continually climbing on a medium previously thought to be unsuitable and unjustifiable. Our main aim was to do routes in the best style possible rather than to impose restrictions and regulations by setting down rules.”

Alongside the development of the slate quarries another grouping of climbers began developing a new type of climbing which whilst utilising previously unclimbed natural crags promoted a completely different way of doing and grading climbs which both traditional climbers and ‘slateheads’ regarded as inauthentic.

Although previous groupings of climbers had always considered climbing to be a sport in itself this new way of doing the activity was called ‘sports climbing’ and although concentrating on gymnastic difficulty reduced the risk element involved in climbing to an absolute minimum.

The beginning of sport climbing can be pinpointed to 1984 when Ben Moon created a route on a hitherto unclimbed cliff on the North Wales coast which used nine ‘bolt’ runners as protection. This can be seen as the defining introduction of sports climbing in Wales and in this way ‘sports climbing as it became known arrived in Britain. Although the climb was technically very hard, Moon provocatively called it ‘Statement of Youth’ and graded it 8A according to the French style grading system which concentrates solely on the technical difficulty of any given climb.

Throughout the late nineteen eighties and early nineteen nineties sport climbing as an outdoor and indoor sport gathered momentum and the number of participants in the climbing

world in general increased.

Traditional climbers became worried that sports climbing might begin to take place on traditional cliffs and so set about firmly defining their own boundaries and 'policing' in the form of social sanctioning and written warnings in guidebooks.

An example of this may be gleaned from the most recent Climbers Club guidebook to the traditional climbing arena of Gogarth on the Anglesey sea cliffs where it states that :

"Bolts have occasionally appeared on these cliffs but these have been reduced to a few rusty relics and the infamous Cad bolt. It should be well noted by all visiting parties that any bolt appearing on any sea cliff in the guide will be removed and the perpetrators discouraged from repeating their unwanted actions."

Newton (1990) p10

'Sports' climbers however concerned themselves more with increasingly refined indoor climbing arenas at which they could compete in organised competitions and train for specific routes as well as frequenting the previously mentioned limestone areas suitable for their type and style of climbing. Thus as splinter groupings of sports climbers emerged in Britain throughout the 1980s they sought out cliffs and crags that were unsuitable for traditional climbing. These cliffs, while traditional climbers may have discovered them, were thought unsuitable for that style because climbers were unable to fix removable protection devices to the face and found the extreme angle of rock which usually bulged or was overhanging unsuitable to 'protect' by traditional methods.

The best example of this 'take-over' was lower Pen Trwyn near Llandudno on the North Wales coast, Jones, T. (1986) where many bolted 'sport' routes are located.

Sports climbing allows the climber to pre place fixed protection. Those who first climb the route therefore 'equip' the route which means that they commonly leave bolts in place for other 'sports' climbers. This practice has been greatly aided by the use of the cordless power drill, which began to be used in the 1980s and was adopted by sports climbers. This enabled climbers to drill into the rock face, insert steel bolts and either screw or glue them permanently into place with epoxy resin. The sports climber would 'abseil' down a particular part of the rock face he/she wished to 'equip' and rehearse the moves that he/she would make on the

climb itself.

Once the sports climb is equipped in this way the lead climber carries only equipment to clip the rope into the bolts as he/she progresses up the climb. If this is done successfully with no falls, once the top of the cliff is reached the leader will usually reach a fixed 'lower off' point and instead of bringing up the second person, as in traditional climbing, will be lowered back to the ground. There will be no need then to either walk or scramble off the climb once the main technical difficulties are over.

If the climber falls during the ascent of the sports climb, either on a first or subsequent attempt (which is most often the case) then the sports climber will hang from the fixed protection by the rope and attempts a set of moves over and over again until the moves are learnt (that is 'wired' in the sports climbers' language). This process is called 'hang dogging' or 'working' the climb and if it is used the ascent is considered invalid until such times as the sports climber 'flashes' the route from the ground up with no falls. This may be done on the same day after 'dogging' the route and 'wiring' the moves if the climber is not too 'pumped' or tired to begin again from the ground. However, this process may also take a great deal of time requiring a number of visits to the cliff sometimes over a period of months.

An example of this is 'Stiff Upper Lip' a sports climb in the 'Pigeon hole cave' at Pen Trwyn which took 33 days of 'working' spread over a period of five months before being completed, it is a climb of no more than 90 feet.

Once the 'sport' route receives its first ascent those who made the climb will name it in the same manner as a 'trad' or adventure climb. The name is therefore anything that the first ascent team decides it to be. However, unlike traditional climbing, sports climbers have developed a separate grading system based on that used in France and Spain. The system starts normally at 4+ and then is open-ended. The table below shows how this works.

Sports Climbers Grading System
4+
5
5+
6a
6b
6c
7a
7a+
7c
8a
8b
8c

The sports grading system actually extends to 8c. To give some idea of the gymnastic ability and power required to even contemplate such a level of difficulty, image an outstretched arm with two fingers of the hand curled over an 8mm bar that is fixed like a pull-up bar seen in many gymnasiums. Now with only the one arm imagine a person chinning the bar two or three times, that is the level of strength required.

While the sports climber needs to be very strong a certain degree of fitness is required in all types of climbing. However, the level of strength in sports climbing is generally higher at the outset than in traditional climbing because the sports climbing grading system starts at a higher level of difficulty (grade 4+). In 'adventure' climbing there are three grades of climbs below this level, which are moderate, difficult and very difficult. The 'sports' climber often looks more spectacular on the face than a traditional adventure climber since being more 'protected' than the traditional climber he/she may climb more gymnastically and quickly.

The most notable difference between the two types of climbing in terms of grading is that the sports climbing grading system is only concerned with the technical grade of the climb, whilst the adventure climbing grading system takes into account technical difficulty and overall seriousness (Chapter 1). This is because sports climbing is about performing technical

moves without the element of risk or danger which is involved in adventure climbing, a term that now encompasses slate climbing.

Thus after 1984 the climbing world contained three distinct groupings of climbers 'slateheads', 'adventure climbers' and 'sports climbers'. Whilst the 'slateheads' no longer form a coherent grouping 'adventure' and 'sports' climbers do and represent conflicting styles that characterise the contemporary climbing world not only in Wales but throughout the UK.

Some climbers may cross over from one type of climbing to the other and as long as they climb in the style appropriate to the arena that they choose to visit there are no sanctions against them. However, in general climbers come to favour one style over the other so that in a contemporary setting it is possible to identify two ideal types of climber, the adventure climber and the sports climber.

1. The adventure climber

The adventure climber is interested in the traditional style of climbing. The basic axiom of which is that a degree of risk must be involved in the ascent, although it is possible to survive falls on many adventure climbs at the higher levels the risk factor increases.

When discussing adventure climbs he/she refers to them by name and is likely to judge the merits of a route for its overall qualities and value as well as its grade. The adventure climber values routes regardless of their level of difficulty but may still judge themselves against the adventure climbers grading system and compete with other adventure climbers in the race to establish new routes.

Contemporary adventure climbers frequently use climbing walls mostly in the winter months for training but they do not usually train intensively or consistently or consider entering climbing competitions in the way that sports climbers do.

The adventure climber leads climbs on sight only using temporary protection which they remove after the climb. Most adventure climbers are opposed to any sports climbing in the natural arena and will not tolerate it on cliffs traditionally the preserve of adventure climbs. They see sports climbing as unworthy and ultimately not 'real' climbing. They claim that the traditional climbing method is the only authentic style and they enforce the boundary between their sport and 'sport' climbing whenever they can.

The adventure climber accepts and operates within a framework of ethics which defend the basic axiom that, one, climbing must include an element of risk and, two, no artificial aids

to climbing should be used. In essence the adventure climber attempts to climb in a 'free' style throughout an entire climbing career. For many people adventure climbing is the original form of climbing and is often referred to as 'trad' or 'real' climbing. For them it is the most authentic style of climbing.

Adventure climbing takes place in Britain on cliffs of between 15 to 300m and covers a number of areas where bolt protection is not allowed. First climbs are done, ideally, without rehearsal or inspection, subsequent ascents are made with the help of the guidebook which will have recorded the climb's level of difficulty and location.

The ethics of adventure climbing depend on a code of unwritten rules, which must first be learnt, internalised, kept to, by any climber who wishes to be considered an adventure climber. At the top levels of 'adventure' climbing keeping a cool head in the face of danger is still regarded as more important than pure gymnastic ability.

2. The sports climber

Typically the sports climber is interested in a climbing style which favours the practice of technically difficult moves in a relatively safe environment in which falling is acceptable and occurs frequently. Although most sports routes are named the sports climber usually refers to the grade of the climb rather than its name and conversations between sports climbers centre on the difficulty of the climb. Typical sports climbers will talk about having "just done that 7B+" or "That's a really good 7A route." The overall adventure is not a concern of the 'sports' climber.

The sports climber values difficulty above all else and typically trains for climbs either at a climbing wall or at home by using some kind of specialist climbing apparatus. Often the sports climber will do both in an effort to maximise strength and stamina so as to increase personal climbing standards rapidly as well as take part in indoor climbing competitions.

Typically the sports climber attempts to lead climbs after practice and rehearsal, referred to as 'red pointing' though 'on sighting' sports climbs performed without rehearsal are of greater value in the eyes of other sports climbers. As protection devices are already fixed to the sports climbing cliff when the sports climber leads he/she places no protection on the rock but clips the rope to pre-placed safety devices. Generally sports climbers refer to adventure climbing as 'scary' climbing and admit that it is more risky than sports climbing yet, nevertheless, claim that their form of climbing has its own distinct worth.

Sport climbing is distinctly identified by its use of 'bolt' protection which is permanently 'fixed' to the face. This means that once a climb has been established a climb leader carries only the required number of 'clips' to complete the climb rather than a 'rack' of equipment including many forms of retrievable protection devices which would be carried by the adventure climber. While sports climbing can be carried out at sites on limestone cliffs thirty to three hundred feet in height, it is generally confined to routes of a single 60m rope length. Participants normally prefer to lower back to the ground from a designated fixed anchor point rather than gaining the top of the cliff, which is considered unnecessary once the main gymnastic difficulties of the ascent have been overcome. Sports crag climbing is best characterised by its convenience. A low risk with high degrees of technical difficulty. The sports ethics allow any technique to be used before the final ascent being made 'completing the project' in the best style possible without any falls and from the ground up. It is the low risk factor that is found in sports climbing that has led to the notion amongst 'adventure' or 'trad' climbers that sports climbing is not 'real' climbing since it does not involve serious risk and ultimately the possibility of death which is found in authentic or 'real' climbing. Furthermore as most sports climbs do not follow natural lines in the same way that 'adventure' routes do and are also often choreographed before the final ascent the entire enterprise is considered to be 'unnatural' as opposed to the naturalness of adventure climbing.

Sports climbing also takes place on indoor climbing walls which since 1985 have been developed not only as training facilities but also as arenas of organised competition which has allowed the winning of cash prizes and sponsorship deals for a relatively small number of champion sports climbers (Chapter 6).

Further to this induction of 'sports climbing' and its splinter grouping may be added another grouping of climbers who have emerged as part of the climbing world since the mid 1990s and these are Specialist Boulderers.

What climbers refer to as bouldering is the practise of doing short (typically no more than 15 ft. high) climbs on boulders that are often found below larger cliffs as well as in isolated clusters predominantly in mountainous areas. Bouldering has long been used by climbers as a form of exercise and non serious training and an extract from 'Rock Climbers in Action in Snowdonia' emphasises this point :

“A few yards past the bridge there are several enormous boulders beside the road. A couple of them stand over 20 feet high. These are the Cromlech Stones of Boulders and they are marked all over by the feet of innumerable climbers who have flexed their muscles on them in the same way that a boxer pounds sense into his punch ball. Ways have been found to the top even on the steeply overhanging sides. Climbers have long recognised that boulders are the ideal gymnasium. You can fall off practically as much as you like, and the keen competition of a crowd causes each man to experiment and take risks which he would never consider on a real climb.”

Smythe (1966) p52

However, up until the 1990s bouldering was largely carried out at such areas as the Cromlech and similar roadside venues. ‘Problems’, the name given to various ways climbers tackled parts of any given boulder were never recorded, graded or named. With the development of specialist bouldering, boulderers were prepared to visit and explore not only roadside areas but also remote or isolated boulders many of which constituted hitherto untouched bouldering resources. Problems were individually named and graded against a system imported from America where the idea of specialist bouldering was first developed by a small grouping of climbers in the early 1960s. The system in use in Wales from 1997 is based on orders of difficulty and differs from adventure and sports climbing systems by the use of V grades which begin at V1 and currently extend to V12.

Specialist bouldering does not require or allow the use of ropes or any other equipment except that of specialist rock shoes, which are the same as those used in adventure and sports climbing and gymnasts chalk to keep the fingers dry as well as facilitating grip on small holds. The most obvious item of equipment used by boulderers but not other types of climbers are specially made crash pads that are carried to and from various bouldering areas in order to facilitate a safe landing in the event of a fall or jump back to the ground.

Specialist boulderers claim that their way of climbing is pure and unencumbered by the use of equipment whilst at the same time requiring just as much skill and focus as either adventure or sports climbing. Typically groupings of adventure and sports climbers do not take bouldering too seriously and as it does not impinge to any extent on either of their activities it seldom comes under scrutiny leaving its protagonists to develop the sport with little interruption so that :

“The fact that many climbers do not take bouldering seriously in no way imperils its existence. Such differences of opinion that do arise are pleasant parodies of the more acrimonious conflicts that, depending on one’s attitude, either plague or vitalise bouldering’s big brother.”

Gill, J. quoted in OTE magazine No. 7 February (1998) p54

Boulderers then are also a constituent in the contemporary world of climbing. Again there are no rules which disallow the boulderer from engaging in other types of climbing if and when he/she wishes to do so but as a specialist the boulderer typically prefers to concentrate all time and effort into the technicalities offered by short problems.

Thus the boulderer may be seen as a third ideal type in the climbing world and belongs to a grouping that now forms a segment of the contemporary climbing world.

The Boulderer

The boulderer is typically a very athletic climber who is concerned with the ascent of boulder problems. Bouldering takes place on natural rocks but may also take place indoors as many climbing wall facilities now contain a separate bouldering area. The boulderer competes amongst other boulderers to solve ‘problems’ which are graded and named individually.

The boulderer performs as an individual rather than part of a team so that when groupings of boulderers get together they each take individual turns on a specific problem. In the micro world of bouldering style is of paramount importance and boulderers must complete each problem using no aids whatsoever other than their strength, skill and technique. Typically then the boulderer may concentrate a vast amount of effort into figuring out only four or five moves which when completed may only amount to ten feet or so of ascent.

Further to these ideal types it is also possible to provide a typology of climbing beginning with alpine climbing and continuing in order as the types of climbing and their essential characteristics emerged.

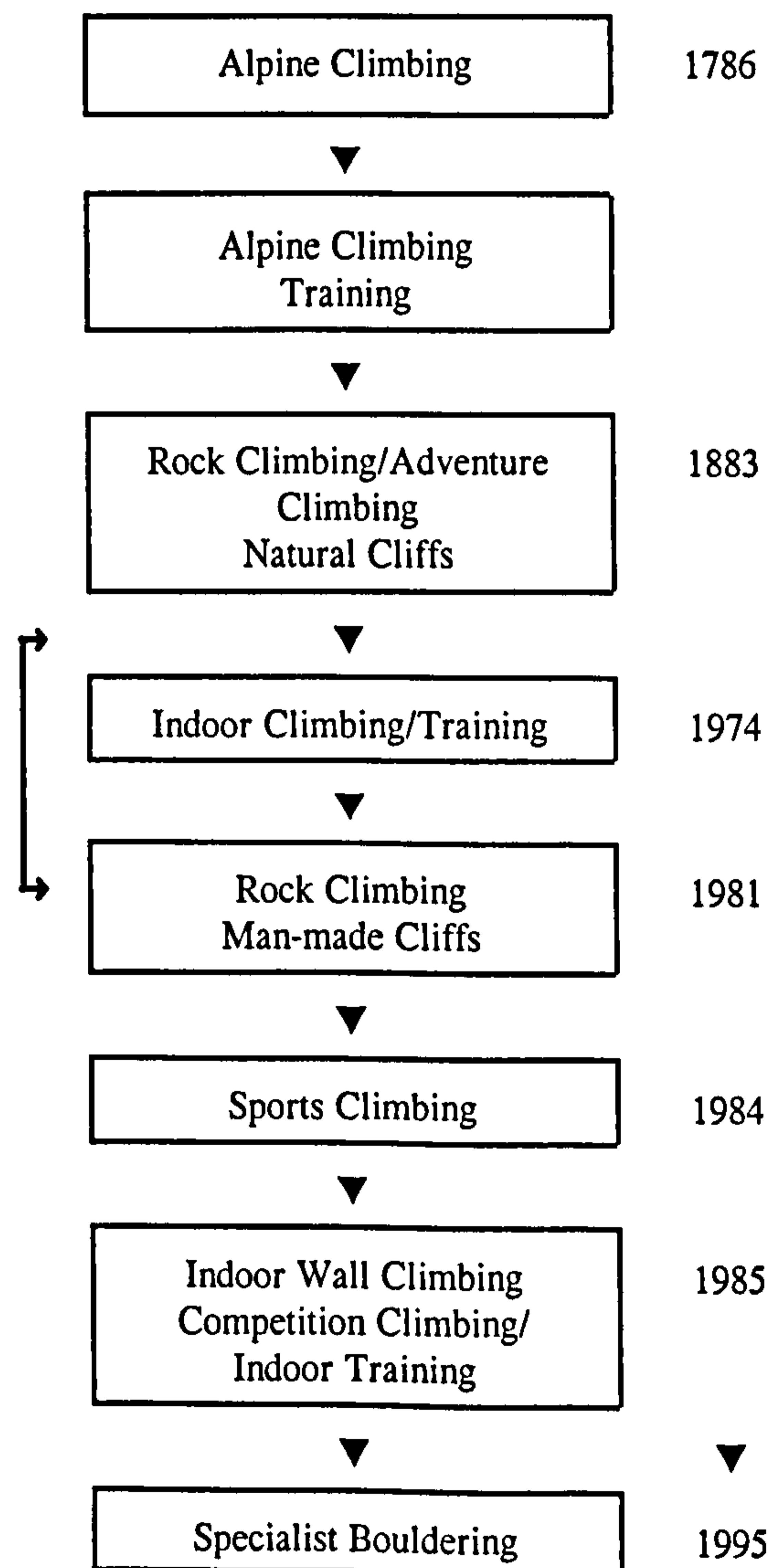
Figure 1 Typology of Climbing

Attributes	Mountain Climbing Alpine Climbing	Adventure Climbing Rock Climbing	Sport Climbing	Specialist Bouldering
Place - General	Alps - France, Italy, Himalaya	Lake District, Scotland, Wales, Peak District	All areas and indoor climbing walls	All areas and parts of indoor climbing walls
Place - Specific	Specific Mountains and/or ranges	Crags, specific parts of a mountain/cliff	Specifically limestone cliffs not used by Adventure Climbers	Boulders often but not always below cliffs
Organisation	Group/Guides/Solo	Team, Small groups, solo	Small groups/teams	Small groups, solo, individual
Level of Commitment - Time	High, requiring climber to be away from home and work a long time. Long holiday	Medium, requiring climber to be away from home for specified short periods. Few days or hours at weekend	Medium, usually less than Adventure Climbing but dependent on particular route to be done	Minimal. Few hours at a time
Level of Commitment - Finance	Heavy, travel, guides, possibly accommodation. Membership of Alpine Club, equipment	Medium using small hotels/camping, short periods, purchase of cheap food, travel, guidebooks, equipment	Medium, but more expensive than Adventure Climbing as payment to climb indoors, travel, short periods, guidebooks, equipment	Minimal as less equipment required than 'sport' or 'adventure' climbing
Objective	Climb a mountain	Climb a natural rockface	Climb natural or purpose built face	Climb a 'problem' on boulders
Style	High risk and objectively risky pure Alpine, small team, minimum aids, is authentic style. Large group maximum aids is inauthentic style	High risk 'free' climbing no aids, competitive, skill, fitness authenticity. No in situ protection	Low risk, high in situ protection, spectacular but safe. Competitive, highly technical and gymnastic	Low risk. No aids used, extremely athletic and competitive
Props	Special clothing, ice axes, boots, ropes, crampons	Special rock shoes, gymnasts chalk, ropes, equipment	Special rock shoes, gymnasts chalk, ropes, karabiners	Specialist rock shoes, gymnasts' chalk, special crash mats
Skills and Attributes	Stamina, stoicism, deal with hardship, leadership, adventure	Athleticism, physical and mental stamina, technique	Gymnastic, super physical, stamina, technique	Highly gymnastic, powerful and technical
Communication Special parlance in all 4 categories	Guidebooks, books, magazines, journal of the Alpine Club	Route books, key places (Pete's) guides, special magazines	Special magazines, rockfax, Internet, competitions indoors	Specialist magazines
Biographical Attributes	Initially professional middle class, well educated/ now mass	Initially middle class, now more amorphous since Second World War	Amorphous class base	Amorphous class base
Associated Activities	Hill walking, scrambling, fell running	Caving, scrambling	Gymnastics, aerobics, training	Gymnastics

It should also be noted that by far the greatest proportions of areas recorded in guidebooks 'belong' to adventure climbers, whilst sports climbing areas recorded form a small portion which exist outside the main adventure climbing areas. For example, in North West Wales the entire Snowdonia area as well as Anglesey is divided into eleven adventure climbing areas each with a number of cliffs whilst sports climbing in North West Wales is confined to only one area near Llandudno on the North Wales coast, as well as taking place indoors at two local climbing walls. Bouldering occurs in all areas although it may also take place indoors on specific parts of local climbing walls.

At present the most dominant and largest grouping of climbers operating regularly in North West Wales are adventure climbers although in a model of the history of climbing, adventure climbing was developed earlier than more recent types of climbing.

Figure 2 Model of the History of Climbing in Wales as Types of Climbing Emerged



NB For a full historical map of the climbing world see Appendix 8

The observation of climbers tackling any given adventure climb shows that there are a number of basic ways in which a climb is carried out that amount to a kind of ritual.

Firstly, the climbing team is typically two in number and as they approach any given cliff the first thing that normally occurs is their reference to a special climbers guidebook which contains the names, grades and description of individual climbs as well as their locations and starting points. Once the climbers have decided which route to tackle and arrived at its base the next step is usually the unfurling of two climbing ropes each 50 metres in length and 9mm in diameter. This is done in such a way that it will allow the ropes to run freely as the 'lead' climber makes his/her way up the chosen route whilst the 'second' climber makes sure nothing impedes this operation.

However, before setting off the climbing team typically dons equipment such as special lightweight rock shoes which look like ballet shoes but have a durable rubber sole which maximises friction grip on the rockface, lightweight waist harnesses, together with specialist 'protection' devices (protection devices are made in a number of shapes and sizes usually from steel alloys which are designed to fit into features on the rockface but are also retrievable). Thus the lead climber may place 'runners', whilst the 'second' climber takes them out.

They are designed so that once secured to the rockface the rope can be passed through them by means of a 'karabiner', which is a special oval-shaped alloy clip with an opening gate, in order to 'protect' the leader in the event of a fall.

One climber will 'lead' which means that he/she goes first in the ascent whilst one climber will 'second' which means that he/she will not only follow the route after the lead climber has finished and secured him/herself at either the top of the climb or at a point some way up a particular climb, but will also be responsible for 'belaying' the leader.

'Belaying' means that as the leader proceeds up the rockface the rope that is tied to his/her waist harness (and maybe passed through protection devices if and when they are available), must be paid out smoothly or held firm in the event of a fall.

Once the leader has finished the climb he/she 'belay' the 'second' from the top of the climb.

Typically this is how climbs are carried out but within this ritual a number of other factors must be taken into account which may affect the climb and its outcome and are of key importance to what climbing is.

Place

The place where climbing activity is carried out is an important part of climbing since climbers imbue different arenas with greater or lesser levels of significance. For example, when climbers talk about the activity the conversation often begins by a reference to places so that if for example a climber states that he/she has been climbing at 'Gogarth' thus other climbers are immediately aware that the climbers in question are experienced and not beginners.

On the other hand, if the team had opened the conversation by saying they had been climbing on the Idwal Slabs then other climbers would immediately assume that they were beginners or at least inexperienced climbers.

In so far as actual routes are concerned one word is usually enough to convey to climbers the place and nature of any activity when discussing the sport providing the conversation takes place between experienced climbers. For example, typically the route Cenotaph Corner situated on Dinas Cromlech in the Llanberis Pass when discussed amongst climbers is simply referred to as 'The Corner'.

Argot

The language used by climbers is often specialised and abstracted so that climbers when discussing climbs are often difficult to understand (a list of climber's argot is included in Appendix 1 but in most instances an attempt has been made to explain words and phrases as and when they appear in the text).

The Climber in Action

Although the climber may use specialist equipment such as a harness, a rope, and specialist climbing shoes when going climbing none of these technological safeguards are used to aid the climber's progress up any given climb so that when the rockface is reached and a particular climb decided upon the person who goes first, the leader, attempts to negotiate a way up the cliff. This is what climbers refer to as 'doing a route' (Such routes are usually already named and graded so that by reference to a guidebook the climbing teams have at least some idea of where to locate the climb and the standard of difficulty).

During the climb the leader advances only by the utilization of naturally occurring

features on the rockface which climbers refer to as 'hand- and foot-holds'. Since it is the point of climbing to climb the rock and not simply pull up on or climb objects that have been inserted into the rockface. If such aids are used during a climb then the climber is said to have 'used aid' and whilst there are certain specialist routes where the use of aid and aid climbing is permitted the main concern of climbers operating within Britain is that of 'free' climbing. However, this is not a simple matter and requires that climbers have a good understanding of what are known as the 'ethics' of climbing.

Ethics

To a climber climbing means engaging in a sport that although containing no formal written rules is nevertheless boundaried by what climbers refer to as the 'ethics' of climbing. Thus whenever the word ethics appears in the text of this work it refers to ways of doing the activity and is bound up with the notions of style, legitimacy, authenticity values and boundary. To a climber these themes are extremely important since climbing as a sport is not concerned with getting up in any haphazard manner but rather depends on climbing within the framework of climbing 'ethics' which, essentially, constitute the rules and codes of how climbs may be done and form the focus of much debate between climbers both in a historical and contemporary setting.

Firstly, if any individual who is a non-climber wishes to gain height for example in order to inspect a household roof, he/she will most often use a ladder or scaffold and can therefore claim to have 'climbed' onto the roof. Yet to a 'climber' climbing means something quite different and the act of climbing is carried out not just for practical purposes like inspecting a household roof but for the act of climbing in itself against a set of standards. In this sense then how a climb is done is of paramount importance to the 'climber' and the use of ladders and scaffold would not be considered by climbers as a legitimate means of climbing. Climbing is not just about getting to the top of any given rockface by any means possible though there is nothing to stop any individual who does not understand the sport doing this, for instance :

“Because climbing is a sport which has no rules or laws laid down by a

governing body (indeed has no governing body), the way in which an ascent is made is left entirely to the climber. To take extreme cases there is nothing to stop a man bolting his way to the top of Napes Needle and using every protective device known to science, or on the other hand, attempting Everest naked in winter. In neither case would he get far, of course - in the first instance he would probably be lynched by irate climbers and in the second he would die of exposure.”

Unsworth (1977) p132

Climbing therefore involves getting to the top of any given rockface in a style which climbers deem appropriate to the type of climbing they are engaged in.

Style and Skill

As noted it is not so important to climbers what is climbed but how it is climbed. To give a basic example, a climb that is graded high in the grading system may be climbed using some aid, perhaps in an extreme case say five pitons. Although the individual gains the top of the climb he/she will not be considered to have climbed the route in good style and the authenticity of their ascent will be brought into question and is open to social sanctioning. When a climb is accomplished in this way the climbers are said to have ‘cheated’ by contravening the ethics of the sport, on the other hand climbing in good style occurs when climbers make an ascent of any given route in an exemplary manner using only the natural features of any given rockface. Between these two positions a number of tactics which climbers either claim are justified or dismiss as cheating form the crux of many ethical climbing debates.

The idea that climbers are mainly concerned with feats of strength such as pulling themselves up overhanging rock or climbing not up the rockface but a rope suspended from it have often been placed in the popular imagination by such Hollywood film productions as, ‘Cliffhanger’ (1993) and ‘Vertical Limit’ (1999) but in reality such spectacles rarely occur and climbing teams often make their way up any given climb whilst quietly concentrating on the task in hand. To reach this point he/she will have set out on the climb in an unhurried and careful manner and taken time to adjust to the environment of the vertical using climbing skill.

If the climber is experienced he/she will be looking for familiar or typical holds depending on the type of rock he/she is climbing. Whilst using particular holds the climber

may be able to rest in certain places during the climb, but whether this is possible or not he/she typically attempts to plan moves in advance rather than rushing up in any manner possible before strength gives way.

In this way risks are calculated and overcome or deemed to be so great that a retreat is made. Whatever the outcome of the climb a discussion will usually take place about the episode with other climbers and groupings of climbers about the style and nature of the climb together with an assessment of its difficulty in relation to other climbs.

Any given climb may start at the bottom and finish at the top of any given rockface but between these points the climber not only attempts the individual climb but does so knowing that the standards and values associated with an entire socially constructed world must be observed whilst at the same time competing against a grading system.

The direct experience of climbing is then both physically and mentally absorbing and about using and developing skill to overcome obstacles on any given climb. When engaged in a climb the climber focusses on a micro world - that of the immediate features of any given climb all of which are imbued with special significance to climbers who have constructed, as part of a specialist argot, terms which describe these features (Appendix 1).

This experience is also reflected in some literature on the sport Thomson (1910); Piley (1935) and more recently :

“With hardly a word I set off on the next unprotected traverse pitch. I edged sideways with loose spikes for my hands and dinner plates for my feet, right on the lip, which kept snapping off. I glanced back at Johnny, just a loop of slack ropes between us. If I fell would the centrifugal force be enough to bring the stone down? My head begins to swim with fear so I concentrate on the mosaic of bubbles and ridges just beyond the end of my nose and keep on blindly feeling to my right.”

Pritchard (1997) p43

Although climbing and climbers has often been applied in a popular sense to include people who engage in hillwalking and scrambling the term should more strictly be used to describe groupings of activists who are boundaried by the use of a grading system against which climbing can be measured (Chapter 1). Hillwalking and scrambling may take place in the same areas but specific arenas within such places are strictly the domain of climbers who

follow specific graded technical routes and typically use both specialist guidebooks and specialist equipment such as ropes and specialist climbing shoes. Crucially climbers are concerned with the way in which a climb is done so that style is of paramount importance and is closely linked with the ethics of climbing.

Technology

The part played by technology in the development of climbing should not be overlooked nor overemphasised since particularly in Wales and the UK in general groupings of climbers whilst engaging in the sport have attempted to limit the use of technological advancement and in particular the use of aid to assist the climber physically whilst concentrating more on the development of skill and technique in order to 'free' climb various routes. An anomaly to this preoccupation did occur in the late 1950s and 1960s when groupings of climbers, particularly in Derbyshire and Yorkshire, began to practice aid climbing as a form of training and preparation for visiting the Alps and Dolomites as well as Yosemite Valley in California where many of the long, big wall climbs required and allowed the climber to physically aid up certain parts of the route, Unsworth (1977).

This phenomenon was a relatively short-lived practise and climbers who engaged in it became known in the climbing world as 'Dangle and Wack' merchants, a somewhat derogatory term which denoted their tendency to practise aid climbing. Even as a form of training the practise was generally discouraged and many of the old aid routes received attention from climbers who eventually climbed them 'free' so that by the 1970s the relatively minor imposition of aid climbing was largely defunct.

The main focus of climbers remained 'free' climbing and in its development several important technological advancements have contributed but not been solely responsible for a rise in standards.

Such refinements in the technology of climbing include the refinement of nylon ropes after 1950 together with the development of special climbing shoes initially in the late 1950s but latterly after 1983 when a new type of friction rubber was developed which provided a better grip, and also the development of a number of protection devices which help to safeguard the climber as he/she leads up any given climb. The most notable of these is the 'Friend' which was introduced to the climbing world after 1978. Such devices still have to be

placed and removed by climbers on traditional climbs whilst the technology employed to protect sports climbers is quite different being permanently fixed to the rockface and largely dependent on the use of steel bolts that began to be used in any number after 1984 when sports climbing developed.

Clearly then climbing is a more complex business than it may first appear and especially in a contemporary setting provides a number of ways in which the activity can be done. Given these factors how then does an individual become a climber and enter the social world of climbing, and what does becoming a climber entail and mean within that world?

These questions form the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOCIAL WORLD OF CLIMBING - AN ANALYSIS

1. Getting Vertical
2. The World of the Leader
3. The Role of the Second
4. Solo Climbing
5. Climbing Epics
6. Climbing Life
7. Climbing Death

CHAPTER 3 : THE SOCIAL WORLD OF CLIMBING

- AN ANALYSIS

1. Getting Vertical

The process of becoming a climber may start in various ways, some people are introduced to the sport by a friend, some attend an organised course, perhaps as part of an outdoor activities programme at school, or simply they chance to observe climbers in action.

Beginners then may enter the sport in a number of ways and at any age, not all novices are necessarily young. Karen, for example, a thirty-eight year old solicitor took up the sport after watching a TV programme in which rock climbers tackled a limestone cliff in Thailand.

“I saw the BBC series ‘The Edge’ a few years ago and thought I’d like to have a go so contacted some friends in North Wales who put me in touch with a climber they knew and we arranged to go out one weekend.”

(Conversation with the author)

Danny was a much younger recruit at 16 years old. He began climbing at a climbing wall whilst at school; he would not have considered doing such a sport if he had not been introduced to it.

Whatever the initial reason for introduction to the sport it is not until individuals become ‘hooked’ that the process of becoming a climber really begins. Once the beginner is a regular climber and has a basic knowledge of the sport he/she embarks on a process that will account for a great deal of his/her spare time. Because there are a great number of climbing walls nation-wide climbers, living in urban areas, may begin their career in the sport by making use of this facility. However, if they wish to experience adventure climbing they must be prepared to spend time travelling to natural crags many of which lie outside urban areas.

The indoor wall is a more appropriate introduction to some forms of climbing than to others. For example, if the novice wall climber is only interested in ‘sports’ climbing then he/she will be able to learn the necessary skills and values required to engage in this form of climbing without leaving the wall. The style and ethics of indoor and ‘sports’ climbing are essentially the same as ‘sports’ climbing outside.

The wall is not only an important place for learning skills but it can be particularly useful to 'sports' climbing beginners because in that environment they are able to observe and engage with others in the sport. While some of these climbers are more experienced many are also at the novice stage and are potential climbing partners.

Partnerships are important in climbing because, except for a limited amount of 'solo' climbing, most participants climb in pairs. For a pair to be successful they need to be of similar ability so that they can test themselves against the climbers' grading system. Through this shared experience gained on the ascents either in 'sports' climbing or adventure climbing a degree of trust is developed in the climbing team which brings with it the confidence to push to their limits and increase their climbing skills.

In some instances the process of becoming a climber is facilitated by contact with experienced climbers either as a direct source of information or in some cases by giving beginners climbing training. Local climbing clubs are particularly important in this regard. Often Clubs meets at certain crags where the more experienced climbers take time to encourage beginners and teach them basic safety skills. This is the time when the newcomers will begin to become familiar with some specialist climbers equipment and the technical terms used in the climbing world.

Instruction manuals are useful to the beginner in this sense, though they can be difficult to understand without also being interpreted by more experienced climbers. Because the climber requires equipment at some point the process of becoming a climber involves economic commitment and this largely depends on the type and style of climbing the novice is initially drawn to. Moreover, should the beginner lose some item whilst engaging in the activity he/she is unlikely to get it back except in certain circumstances. This is more the case in Adventure climbing where it is not only the equipment left by novices that is removed but also that of more experienced climbers and novices sometimes learn this at their cost.

If a climber fails to complete a certain adventure route it is often the case that he/she will leave in place a piece of equipment but this is only done for the practical purpose of escaping the climb by using such equipment as an anchor point to which the climber's ropes are attached before he/she lowers or abseils to the ground. Afterwards the ropes are pulled down leaving in place the now in situ anchor point which, if the lead climber had successfully completed the climb would have been removed by the 'second'.

Such in situ artefacts seldom remain for long on any given adventure climbing cliff because they are removed by subsequently successful climbing teams who, if they know who the equipment belongs to, will often return it to the rightful owner as a kind of put-down. On the other hand, if the failed climbers are not known to the successful ascensionists then it is considered perfectly acceptable to keep such equipment which is typically a removable protection device such as a 'nut', 'friend' or 'sling'.

In this case, successful climbing action takes on further delight for climbers since they not only manage to climb a certain route but also benefit economically by adding to their own equipment otherwise expensive pieces of climbing gear. One 'friend' for example retails at £25 whilst a single 'nut' with a karabiner costs around £10 - £12 depending on the particular make. As most lead climbers carry a 'rack' of equipment which typically consists of 'friends' in sizes 0 to 5; 'nuts' in sizes 1 -5, each with a karabiner or 'quickdraw' by which any piece can be attached to the rope so as to 'protect' the leader in the event of a fall. The contemporary adventure climbing team commonly carries out the action of climbing with around £400 worth of 'protection' devices alone.

Any free equipment that is found en route is therefore clearly beneficial and it also means that if and when the benefactors 'fail' to climb any given route themselves they can afford to abandon at least some equipment free of charge though this is in any case always done as a last resort. It is little wonder that some adventure climbers imbue certain pieces of climbing gear with talismanic significance that will hopefully protect them from failing on routes, or in the event of a fall.

The economic commitment of the 'sports' climber is initially slightly less. Since fixed bolts are already in place he/she only needs to carry around 10 - 15 'quickdraws' (a short 3" sling with karabiners at either end) which are used to clip into the bolts and the rope to provide protection.

The 'sports' climbers 'rack' then may cost around £150 - £200 in contrast to that of the adventure climber who, for economic reasons, usually builds up his/her rack over a longer period of time. All other equipment such as specialist rock shoes, harnesses and ropes are normally suitable for each type of climbing and a set of such equipment works out at around £350 per individual.

Unfortunately, for the 'sports' climber the overall cost of his/her activity is higher than

that of the adventure climber since the 'sports' climber will typically spend more time at indoor walls where it is necessary to pay to climb. Further to this the 'sports' climber's equipment needs to be replaced more often than the adventure climber's because often in 'sports' climbing many falls are repeatedly taken during 'working' a single route thereby placing great strain on the rope and 'quickdraws', which although robust do not last more than six months when in constant use and are discarded when showing signs of wear. First ascents in 'sport' climbing are also expensive affairs since the equipping of one climb with typically ten bolts including a lower off anchor costs around £100 even when the drill used to place them is borrowed.

In contrast, the adventure climber's gear usually lasts much longer because it is seldom subjected to the same amount of wear and tear. Clearly, falls do occur in adventure climbing but they are far less frequent than in 'sport' climbing.

Add to this travel costs, guidebooks and climbing fashion items such as fleece tops, Gortex jackets and chalkbags and the climber is equipped for action.

It takes a longer time for the novice to become initiated into adventure climbing. This is largely because this style of climbing accepts that a high level of personal risk is a characteristic of the sport and that the novice needs some time to learn how to place and remove various protection devices which are commonly employed during the ascents of adventure climbs. As adventure climbing places such a value on 'naturalness' and its relationship to the natural environment it takes time for the novice to become familiar with the styles and values that are embedded in and associated with the action of adventure climbing.

The values of adventure climbing can best be learnt by climbing itself and by frequenting the 'haunts' of climbers themselves, together with information gleaned from the wider world of climbing which today embraces the traditional climbers' 'hangouts' as well as magazines, video and the Internet. In this way the new climber becomes aware of a number of places where climbers meet, relax and make and re-make their identity as climbers.

Important social establishments in the world of climbing are places where the sport is informally debated and discussed on a regular basis.

Throughout Britain there are a number of places whose names are well known throughout the climbing world. Either they have a considerable history such as the Pen-y-Gwryd Hotel in North West Wales and the Watwaterer Hotel in the Lake District, or the more contemporary such as the Heights Hotel in Llanberis and the Broadfield Hotel in

Sheffield. Together with the Clachaig Inn at Glencoe in Scotland, well known climbers cafés are Pete's Eats in Llanberis Snowdonia, Longlands Café at Heathersage in Yorkshire, Stoney Café in Derbyshire, Wilfs Café at Kendal in the Lake District and Nevisports café at Fort William in Scotland.

To the insiders of the climbing world such places act as 'hang outs', meeting places, arenas of debate and a network of communication. Experienced climbers visiting a particular area will know the places where climbers meet and seek them out rather than simply stopping at any pub or café in the area.

Two typical examples of climbers hang outs are Pete's Eats and The Heights in Llanberis, Snowdonia in North West Wales and to give some idea of the nature of such places and their significance for the climbing world they need to be described.

Pete's Eats on the High Street in Llanberis can seat around seventy people but will house many more particularly during periods of bad weather and at busy weekend holiday periods when it is often more than full. From Easter to October Pete's is open Monday to Sunday 8.00am to 8.00pm. While from November to Easter it opens later at 9.00am and closes earlier at 6.30pm. On Saturdays and Sundays it goes back to 'summer time' 8.00am to 8.00pm. Although it does not claim to be a cybercafe it does have an Internet link (usable for a small fee in the café) and its own Website which contains new route information gleaned from the café new routes book.

In Pete's or 'The Café' as regular habitués call it, climbing is symbolically reinforced by historic and contemporary photographs of climbers and climbs on the walls, and a large notice board covered with adverts for climbing gear, climbing shoes, lifts, climbing partners and climbing information. A central feature of the place is the New Routes Book. Taken very seriously by visiting climbers, it records information about climbs and events relevant to the climbing world. Its function is immediately clear to anyone opening it and reading the first page, which states :

"This book is the property of Pete's Eats and should not be removed from the café. The routes recorded here are climbing history in the making. It is not a child's scribbling book, and should be treated with respect, if you the climbers wish this service to continue please do not tear out pages from the book."

Many entries in the book reflect climbers' views about certain routes that are often critical and sometimes bizarre yet to climbers the book is sacred and provides information about climbs as well as an initial record of new or early repeats of routes. All good climbers' cafés have a new routes book (Appendix 3).

Life at Pete's is often informal, official closing times are often ignored, particularly in Summer, last orders can be taken as late as ten o'clock in the evening. Food is ordered and prepaid for at the counter then brought to tables according to ticket number. Tea and coffee are served at the counter in half pint mugs whilst a varied menu is illustrated by chalk pastel behind and above the counter. Meals vary from the 'greasy spoon' big breakfasts to 'healthy' vegetarian style. At least two of the dishes are now legendary in climbing circles; Pete's chilly and 'The Big Jim'.

'The Big Jim' has considerable history. It is noted for its vast amount of fried ingredients and constitutes something of a challenge to the prospective eater. Their friends and onlookers often deride their comrades who fail to eat every morsel. The Big Jim was named in honour of Jimmy (Phil) Jewel one of the original Pete's habitues who was killed when he fell whilst solo climbing at Tremadoc rocks near Porthmadog in 1988. Paul Williams, also killed whilst solo climbing in 1995 is said to have once eaten two Big Jim's in a row. A feat not matched in local folklore.

Since its opening in 1978 Pete's has become internationally known in the climbing world. Each summer a number of visiting climbers of various nationalities come to Llanberis to meet and climb with local climbers thus gaining important information about local routes, and introductions to other climbers.

Pete's is a place of talk where the world of climbing is constructed. Discussions, often highly animated, characterise much of the time spent in Pete's by climbers. The most heated debates concern the ethics and standards of an ascent (how it was done and whether it conformed to traditionally accepted styles and methods). Such rules and codes, although perhaps appearing as absurd to the layman, make up a considerable part of accomplishing any given route. One distinct feature of climbing in general has traditionally been its anarchic nature in the sense that the participants have not wished to fully conform to a set of written guidelines laid down by a governing body. Therefore the ethics and values of the sport are determined by continuous discussion and Pete's is one arena where the discussion of these

issues takes place and determination made of the standards of the moment. Many of the debates are between climbers who favour one style over another.

Pete's is an interesting location, which shows both the divisions and the homogeneity of the sport. In the café at the same time there may be locals, 'trad' or adventure climbers, 'sports' climbers and boulderers together with hill walkers mountain bikers. In this way the café is not exclusively the 'hangout' of any particular grouping of climbers but is open to all climbers irrespective of the style they use and the grade they climb at.

Over the years I have been involved in a number of debates in Pete's about climbing, some of which deal with the absolute minutia of just how a climb can be done. One example of this concerns the value given to an 'on sight' climb, which means that a 'trad' climb or 'sports' climb is climbed literally on sight by the climber who has no prior knowledge of the route before making his/her ascent. This type of climbing is seen as very valuable and confers high status on a climber who is successful. But the value given to such a venture is disputed by those who suggest that 'on sight' must also mean doing the climb on the first attempt whilst others maintain that a climb can be climbed 'on sight' even if the climber fails on his first attempt but subsequently completes the climb 'on sight'.

Paul W. 'Jerry did Masters today'
Me 'What the Masters Wall?'
Paul W. 'Yeah, first ascent, not on sight but brilliant effort.'
Jim J. 'Well its not really ben done if its not on sight.'
Paul W. 'Yeah, well he chopped the bolt out of the high point before
 he did it so you'd probably die if you fell off.'
Jim J. 'Well someone else might do it on sight'
Paul W. 'May be, but it's a big event anyway.'

(Conversation with the author)

Sometimes such debates can become heated arguments which are passionately opposed or defended by various participants whilst still others are conducted in a lighthearted atmosphere which contains a great deal of badinage.

Arguments often take place in the climbers; own language (argot). This is used in Pete's New Routes Book and in many of the discussions that take place between members of the climbing world when engaging in conversations relating to climbing events and procedures. Climbers are not alone in developing such a language, Polsky (1967).

The Heights

The Heights has, for the past twelve years, served as a focal point of the climbing world in North West Wales. In the sense it took over the role from the Padarn Lake Hotel which, up until the late 1980's, was the pre eminent 'hardcore' climbers' pub in the village of Llanberis. It was the 'local' for such legendary climbing figures as Joe Brown and Don Whillans together with other concentric layers of the climbing world.

Today the 'Heights' is the meeting place for individual climbers and groupings of climbers both from the locality and from further afield. The clientele is varied including novices, aspirants, experts and well known 'star performers'.

After an initial demand by management, when the Heights opened in 1990, that all customers should be members of the B.M.C. (British Mountaineering Council), a demand that did nothing to endear the place to the locals nor did it foster good Anglo-Welsh relations, the condition was dropped when the owners realised that, first, many English and Welsh climbers living in the location were not affiliated to the B.M.C. and second that non-climbers in the area were insulted and felt excluded, and third, it did not make economic sense.

While neither Pete's or the Heights clientele is exclusively climbers they do make up a high percentage of customers and both places are regarded as climber's hangouts.

The Heights as well as Pete's is the setting for many debates between climbers over various issues concerning climbing activities. Therefore it is a place in which the novice may learn the ethics of the sport and become aware of the type of social sanctions that are associated with a transgression of such ethics. He or she can also observe the kudos and social status that can be earned by completing climbs within the legitimate ethical boundary.

It is in these social arenas that the sport is debated and discussed so that many of the unwritten codes, particularly concerning styles of ascent, become apparent. For the aspirant climber, as well as the more experienced, they are places that serve as useful meeting places and learning centres for a better understanding of the sport in general. Becoming a climber involves the construction of a climbing identity based on climbing performance. So no matter what social status is held by the individual in a wider sense it is climbing performance that matters in this context. The top climbers hold their position by their achievements in the activity rather than their standing in other fields.

As Jim 'the dog', a top climber in the 1970s pointed out :

“There is a truth to be voiced here, this sport like any sport is not egalitarian but competitive and hierarchical and this is because not everyone can kick a ball like David Beckham or box like Mohamed Ali could, even though everyone tries to.”

(conversation with the author)

Some novices may eventually become top climbers themselves but even if that is not the case, they will be aware of climbing ‘stars’ and their exploits through specialist climbing magazines and guidebooks in which some of their routes are recorded, and through conversations in climbers’ hangouts.

In a sense becoming a climber involves serving a type of apprenticeship in which the trainee not only becomes familiar with the tools and tasks of the trade but also with written and unwritten information concerning it.

In this sense the reading and understanding of climbing guidebooks to specific areas has to be taken on board. In this way the novice can successfully locate and embark on routes which are of a suitable standard for the climber’s level of experience at each stage in his/her climbing career.

To recap. from Chapter 1; climbers’ guidebooks provide the practical information which informs climbers about specific routes and their grades. In Snowdonia guidebooks cover nine different areas and are updated every few years. The format used is both simple and effective beginning with an introduction followed by a historical section before the actual climbs are described on a number of cliffs relevant to a specific area. The guide finishes with a chronological list of first ascents compiled from known records.

In the text routes are named (originally by the first ascentionists) and graded accordingly. The books themselves are usually the painstaking work of one or more devoted individuals who will have completed all or nearly all the recorded routes in a specific area. This form of record keeping acts as part of an internal communication network in the world of climbing.

By reading and interpreting guidebooks as they begin to climb novice climbers not only begin to gain knowledge about certain climbs but are also introduced to the history of the sport. Because of this guidebooks are not only read ‘on the crag’ but also at home. ‘Sports’ climbing guidebooks or ‘rockfaxes’ as they are commonly named usually contain a box alongside the

route name so that the climber might 'tick off' the route once he/she has succeeded in climbing it. In this way the climber 'collects' routes and marks his/her own progress in 'sports' climbing. Adventure climbers also commonly 'tick' routes in their guidebooks.

As well as the written history of climbing, a certain amount of mythology, particularly in adventure climbing, has been built up surrounding the nature of the activity itself. The beginner may glean a knowledge and understanding relating to this mythology from guidebooks as well as from stories told in 'hangouts'.

For example, within the world of climbing in North West Wales the rise of the Rock and Ice grouping and in particular the figures of Joe Brown and Don Whillans came to epitomise the zenith of rock climbing after the Second World War. Their climbs in the Llanberis Pass and on Clogwyn Du'r Arddu on the flanks of Snowdon soon acquired a reputation for difficulty and seriousness that enjoyed legendary status. They presented would-be aspirants with not only the difficult physical task of repeating such climbs but also an almost impenetrable psychological barrier that put off all but the most determined aspirants.

Although this mythology undoubtedly helped them to establish their reputation it was not based on their own claims but on the word of mouth networks that surrounded them and amplified by other climbers who aspired to the standards set by Brown and Whillans and the Rock and Ice grouping generally. Initial written descriptions of their climbs from the 1964 Llanberis Pass guidebook, Roscoe (1964) also contributed, an example of which illustrates this point : -

"1956 Feb. 11 **The Thing** J. Brown, D. Whillans
Extremely strenuous. A short vicious climb of great technical difficulty. Possibly the hardest problem in the valley. Difficulty is sustained, protection poor, retreat beyond the crux uninviting and the ground below nasty to land on. One of two routes to be given the Exceptionally Severe grade in the 1964 guide.

Williams (1987) p269

Similarly in 1974 when the next major breakthrough in climbing standards in North Wales occurred both the route, 'Right Wall' on Dinas Cromlech in the Llanberis Pass and its creator Pete Livesey passed into climbing folklore. This was followed a few years later by

Ron Fawcett and his climb 'Lord of the Flies' on the same cliff.

Occasionally an individual will become legendary for making the first ascent of important climbs and also for all round enthusiasm or a certain way they negotiated the physical aspects of the rock face which may distinguish him/her from most other climbers.

An example of this type of legendary figure is a climber who developed a system that allowed him to execute dynamic moves when he encountered situations on the rock face where he could not reach the next set of holds. 'The Dawes' became an almost mythical figure because of the nature of his technique so that the 'Dawes Dyno' has passed into climbing folklore along with many of his climbs.

The process of 'becoming a climber' is further developed when the climber learns to appreciate that some climbing arenas are especially significant in the world of climbing and are considered sacred to the activity.

One example of a sacred site in North West Wales is the cliff, Clogwyn du'r Arddu, James (1970); Crew, Soper, Wilson (1974). The cliff sits on the flank of Snowdon and can be reached in about an hour's walk from Llanberis. The reason 'Cloggy' is considered sacred is that it contains a number of routes which are regarded as exemplary, not only of quality and traditional style, but also because they represent the history of adventure climbing and its standards as they have developed and changed over time.

To become a climber is being aware of such sites and ultimately climbing on them. This awareness is summed up in the phrase well known in the climbing world 'If you've not climbed on Cloggy, you're not yet a climber'.

As well as becoming familiar with the heroes, the history and the places of climbing the novice becomes more experienced by 'doing'. Climbing is first and foremost an activity. The beginner first gains experience by 'seconding' or following routes with the safety of a rope from above, but eventually wishes to begin leading climbs within the ethical framework of one or another of the types of climbing.

Leading is the most crucial aspect of climbing. When climbers claim to have 'done routes' they imply to other climbers that they are lead climbers. However, the initial experience of leading may not always be easy and relies on a number of matters that are neither obvious nor readily accessible. Nor is there a single path 'to the top' and the progress made by individual leaders in the climbing world may differ considerably.

2. The World of the Leader

The narcotic effects, which some adventure climbers claim to get from engaging in the sport regularly, particularly applies to those who have become experienced leaders. Though it must be noted that not all leaders subscribe to this notion or claim to have experienced it, though most do admit to experiencing a sense of release and well-being after a particularly difficult lead.

“The thing is to remember to stay in total control till it’s finished and you’re back on terra firma otherwise you fall off or back down but you wont get that sense of release only relief followed by failure”

(Nick T. in conversation with the author)

Although there are many written accounts concerning certain climbs and of climbing adventures in climbing literature there is a striking lack of accounts dealing with the process of leading climbs in a typical manner. On close inspection this is not perhaps surprising since in many instances it is actually very difficult to translate what one actually does into text, even though on the surface it might appear to be a relatively simple task.

In the climbing world two articles in particular - Arthur Birtwistles ‘Thoughts on leading up difficult rock, Rucksack Club Journal (1951) and Menlove Edwards ‘End of a climb’, Climbers Club Journal (1937) are generally acknowledged as being the most profound on the subject even in a contemporary setting.

The most common aspects that are referred to by inexperienced leaders are not features or techniques applied in overcoming a certain climb but most often their own feelings as they attempt to control increasing levels of fear and its accompanying effects., a process which climbers refer to as ‘getting gripped’. As Birtwistle (1951) notes :

“During this stage of a young climber's career, the enthusiastic leader does not stop to think; he acts rather like an animal; in that the desire to do something drives him on until fear gets the upper hand, and compels retreat. This fear is of course, prompted by the insecurity of the position in which he finds himself, or the exposure of the pitch. It would be wrong to assume that this stage of a climber's career is confined to the first few routes, and then only if they are led without the benefit of any previous experience. However much a climber might have been taken up climbs as second or third man, he will still be in this stage when he starts leading. It is only by leading that a climber can get to know

himself, and until he does know himself it is the instinct of fear which will dictate when a return should be made. Many climbers never get beyond this stage, but in spite of this are perfectly safe leaders. If their fear instinct and physical powers are both well developed, a long lifetime of safe climbing can be enjoyed. If on the other hand neither is particularly well developed, the time for enjoyment is likely to be seriously curtailed.

To develop beyond this stage takes some time, and certainly in my case a good number of alarming frights, too. With increasing experience and practice, and especially by continuous and regular leading, some men, get to know fairly accurately their own physical and nervous strength. Eventually daylight dawns and the leader becomes a thinking climbing-machine. This graduation has been achieved when the leader has learned to master absolutely his natural fear - to eliminate it in every respect as a factor controlling his actions - and has substituted a cold judgement and deliberate reasoning.

This implies his concentration on the immediate problem on the particular piece of rock under his hands and feet whilst he bears in mind the possibility of having to descend the bit he was concentrating on a moment or two before.”

Staying cool-headed and concentrating directly on the particular difficulties of a certain climb is a learned skill which allows leaders to climb harder routes. The reason for this is that once the realization that fear and exposure to danger can be overcome the leader's focus becomes sharper since he/she is less distracted and more able to proceed as if engaged in a vertical chess game.

Interestingly, George Simmel in his work 'on individuality and social forms' whilst describing the social type of the adventurer observes that :

“When the outcome of our activity is made doubtful by the intermingling of unrecognizable elements of fate, we usually limit our commitment of force, hold open lines of retreat, and take each step only as if testing the ground. In the adventure, we proceed in the directly opposite fashion : it is just on the hovering chance, on fate, on the more-or-less that we risk all, burn our bridges, and step into the mist, as if the road will lead us on, no matter what. This is the typical fatalism of the adventurer.

Simmel (1910) p194

The difference between the social type of the adventurer and the ideal type adventure climbing leader is that the leader starts from the premise that 'the outcome is in doubt' and instead of proceeding 'on the hovering chance, on fate' proceeds in a manner which, whilst it

does involve heading into unknown territory, is done on the basis of meaningful action which is supported by a number of techniques which form part of a strategy carried out within socially constructed codes and rules which constitute the ethics of climbing.

There is a certain point on a climb where leaders often refer to themselves as 'being committed' and this means that, after weighing up the possibilities, they have decided upon a strategy to overcome key difficulties (known as the 'crux' on any given climb). Such a strategy in no way guarantees a successful outcome, nevertheless for any leader a strategy is preferable to a 'kamikaze' approach.

Leading climbs allows climbers to enter the pantheon of experience that extends to the highest levels of the activity where the leading exponents of the sport have refined climbing to an almost mystic form.

What 'good climbing' means to climbers in terms of climbing performance can only be understood in relation to the climbers' grading system and the individual's climbing experience. In this sense, to watch a climber who may normally do routes in the extreme category climb a route of very severe standard in a neat and precise manner whilst impressive to non climbers does not constitute 'good climbing'.

The reason for this is because the climber has experience of much harder climbs and is therefore expected to deal with very severe climbs without any problems. On the other hand, if the same climber is observed climbing at his/her limit but still manages to climb in the same neat and precise way the performance would be referred to as 'good climbing' by climbers.

What 'good climbing' means to climbers can therefore be observed by watching a climber successfully complete a climb in a stylish controlled manner that is at his/her personal leading limit. 'Good climbing' can be seen at all levels of the activity but what climbers refer to as '*brilliant climbing*' is reserved for top performers who manage to climb in good style at the highest standards.

In climbing the sight of a climber ascending a particularly difficult climb in good style is similar to watching a good boxing match in that to appreciate anything other than the knock out punch or the spectacular fall the observer requires an understanding of what exactly is going on either in the ring or on the rock face. This is why lay people who stop their cars to watch climbers in the Llanberis Pass on any busy holiday weekend soon drive on when it

becomes apparent that no such fall is likely to occur and they cannot understand what else is going on. Similarly detractors of boxing see it as no more than a contest of brute force, which, like rock climbing, sometimes ends in death or disablement.

The irrefutable evidence that death and disablement have and do occur in both sports goes no way to explain or understand what they are about. Whilst the potential consequences of their actions must remain in the climber's or fighter's peripheral vision as possibilities, they are not the focal point of either activity, nor are they the inevitable consequence of their actions.

In the first instance then the climber competes with him or herself against the neutral object of the rock face. Although many climbers give the rock human qualities by using phrases such as: "The crack just spat me out" (Tony Bud) and "That route blew me away its real man" (Big Jim).

The process of leading a climb is highly complicated and dependent on a number of factors. The first is psychological, the climber needs to be in the right 'mood' for climbing. General motivation to climb is obviously important but being in the best frame of mind is crucial, especially when a hard and/or serious climb is to be undertaken. When both of these factors are combined climbers will often refer to themselves as being 'really psyched' meaning they feel both motivated and ready to climb.

On the day of the chosen climb some climbers go through certain rituals, sometimes to help get 'psyched' and sometimes because they do not feel that a good climbing day can be had without such rituals being completed. Examples of this include, John Redhead's salute to ancient spirits which he performs in a disused sheep pen a few hundred yards from the cliff of Clogwyn Du'r Arddu before embarking on any climb on one of its many facets easy or otherwise, and the late Jim Jewels religious eating of a full fried breakfast before setting out to any given cliff.

Once the team reaches the proposed route the first thing that concerns them is the condition of the rock. The best possible conditions are dry rock, which has been warmed by the sun but by the time the climber begins his/her ascent has been cooled off by the shade. Under these circumstances the frictional properties between rock face and rubber soled rock shoes can be maximised.

Once conditions are assessed the next stage of the process is uncoiling the ropes and

donning specialist rock shoes and safety harness before 'tying on' (attaching the ends of the ropes to the leader's harness so that as he/she proceeds on the climb they can be smoothly paid out by the second person in the team).

After this is done the leader will then try to 'read' the route from the ground. 'Reading' is similar to what gymnasts refer to as visualisation where they imagine themselves performing a certain routine before physically attempting it. The gymnast however may practise this routine many times before perfecting it and performing it in competition, but the climber, if attempting the climb in exemplary adventure style, must have no prior knowledge of the ascent and climb 'on sight'. If the climber is engaging in 'sports' climbing he/she may often perform in the same way as the gymnast with prior knowledge.

The initial 'reading' of a proposed route is no guarantee that the climb will be successful yet it may provide an indicator of what the climbing is likely to entail. Reading is a learnt skill based on previous experience and breadth of climbing on different types of rock in different conditions. The skill of 'reading' is further complicated by the fact that not all rock faces are composed of the same rock type and even within a relatively small radius the character of known climbing arenas may be markedly different. For example in North West Wales there are nine different types of rock, all of which are represented by a number of cliffs composed of various types of granite, limestone, slate, rhyolite, mudstone, sandstone, quartzite, shale and gritstone. Add to this list gabbro, gneiss and chalkstone and a picture of rock types, where climbs are carried out in the UK, as a whole emerges.

Thus, a climber who may be very good at 'reading' one type of rock is not necessarily expert unless his/her range of experience extends to other types of rock.

Some cliffs, such as Cilan Head on the Llyn Peninsula, are made up of a number of different rock types that the climber will have to deal with during the climb. Moreover, the rock is not necessarily solid thus part of the reading is to identify where any loose material might be encountered. Thus an attempt to 'read' such routes will often take into account colour as an indicator of likely loose or solid holds for example Ray local sea cliff climbing specialist suggests that:

"The routes on 'Cilan' (a sea cliff on the Llyn Peninsula, North Wales) are colour coded, the dark brown, or black bands of grit are solid but the stuff in between, is some kind of grey shale and best left untouched though it can not

always be avoided. It is the same at Craig Doris only there it's yellow rock that's best not pulled on but the dark red rock which is ok, you know what I mean."

(conversation with the author)

Once the leader begins he/she may move at a different speed on different sections of the climb. Throughout, the leader is always concerned to conserve energy and will constantly adjust position to look for possible 'protection placements' whilst at the same time working out 'moves' in advance. 'Moves' in climbing are made by the use of a whole range of techniques. This may be basic technique such as a simple pull up where the climber whilst standing on a 'foothold' (anything on the rock face from a ledge to a tiny dimple in the rock - 'smear' or 'edge' in climbers' parlance), reaches up carefully with the hands and 'pulls up', before stepping up once again (often using the previous hand holds as footholds). The climber will always seek to keep three points of contact with the rock face at any time because by doing so one of the four limbs can be released to reach the next set of holds.

Even basic climbing techniques may on first acquaintance feel complex and insecure and it is only when climbers become relaxed on the rockface that they can move fluidly whilst executing basic techniques and attempting more sophisticated ones. Such techniques may have been discussed in climbers' hangouts but no amount of theorising, although helpful, can account for putting them into action and actually experiencing them on the rockface in the role of the leader. Further to this a steady balance must also be kept when moving between one set of holds to the next so that balance on the rockface is in itself an important techniques in maintaining the climber's equilibrium as he/she climbs any given route.

Balance has always been a component in climbing skill and was noted by the early pioneers of the sport as long ago as the end of the 19th century.

"It has been stated that ordinary rock-work is effected wholly by means of the hands and feet, and so it is; but there is another element which must not be forgotten, and that is *balance*. Skating is, of all sports, the one in which balance reigns supreme; but it is hardly too much to say that there is, in climbing, almost as much scope for the cultivation of this quality. It is when changing from one foothold to another that the greatest call is made upon the balancing faculty; and, just as spasmodic movement is avoided by acquiring the ability to balance the body in all sorts of positions, so is balancing power gained

by a fixed determination to move steadily, deliberately, and not in jerks.”

Wilson, C. (1893) p123

Despite the development of the sport over the succeeding years with the ascents of much steeper and technically difficult climbs together with the introduction of new techniques for climbing them, balance remains an important climbing skill and is learnt mostly by experience gained initially from doing easy angled ‘slab’ climbs.

The techniques used for making moves are many and varied but in any case form part of the climber's skill and may often be used in combination to secure success on certain routes.

Thus as the climber moves up during the ascent of any given route he/she might, ‘mantelshelf’, ‘heel hook’, ‘finger jam’, ‘hand jam’, ‘crimp’, or ‘knee bar’ depending on the particular features of the climb in hand.

In the case of climbs which are already recorded in guidebooks the leader is sometimes forewarned about the particular techniques that are required and an example of this is the route ‘Raving Lunatic’ on the cliff Carreg Hyllidrem in the Tremadog area of Snowdonia whose written description reads :-

“Raving Lunatic 110 feet E5

An inviting prospect through the ‘gash’ right of The Burner. The Separate Reality* of Wales. Start at the top of the first pitch of The Burner.

100 feet 6B. Move up to the Evil Rook crack then swing out on arm-bars etc.

‘til a final struggle on the lip brings sanctuary within reach.”

Climbers Club Guide to Tremadog (1989) p105

Although this description may make little sense to non-climbers it should be clear to aspiring leaders that the main technique to be used on this particular climb is that of ‘arm-baring’ where the climber uses the palm of the hand against one side of a crack whilst bracing it into position with the shoulder or upper arm against the other, because of the shape made by the arm in this position this technique is also referred to in climbers’ argot as ‘Chicken Winging’.

Mastery and knowledge of techniques in either ‘sport’ or adventure climbing does not always guarantee a completely smooth ascent and even well-known and respected aficionados

* *Separate Reality*; a reference to a famous American climb of that name.

in the climbing world occasionally have trouble in the application of their skills. Tim for example took a long fall from the last moves of 'Statement of Youth' a well-known 'sports climb' on the North Wales coast because in his own words :-

"I should have 'rocked up' (a technique where the climber attempts to get all his weight over onto the foot or thigh before standing up) but I just didn't see the move and pulled up instead, that's why I fell off."

Similarly during an ascent of the adventure climb 'Total Bull' 'Big G.' informed me that :-

"Of all the bars in all the world I've got to hang off this one, watch me I might slip off."

(Conversation with the author as 'second')

Technique is of key importance to economy of movement on any given climb and is much more crucial than brute strength since without its application even very strong and fit climbers will tire quickly leading to what is known in the climbing world as 'pumping out' or 'running out of gas' which ultimately leads to either falling off or resting on a 'piece' (protection device) to avoid a fall.

Non climbers tend to think that the key to climbing is physical strength and whilst strength together with stamina are clearly important, particularly in 'sports' climbing, strength alone is not sufficient and must be combined with technique.

In this sense what climbers seek is a good power to weight ratio so that they retain a great deal of strength whilst remaining light in stature.

Any observation of 'sports' climbing action will reveal the lithe physical appearance displayed by most of its participants and whilst adventure climbers are also concerned to keep generally fit, some 'sports' climbers have deliberately taken to serious dieting as part of their climbing regime.

In the early 1990s adventure climbers coined the term 'anorexic weirdos' to describe such climbers whose orientation places them more in pursuit of highly gymnastic performances. Again even 'sports' climbers must also rely on key elements of technique

despite their obvious physical prowess.

Clearly any fall is potentially dangerous and sometimes fatal yet the consequences for a falling leader may in some instances be kept to a minimum and will leave the leader unharmed as the well-managed rope clipped into a protection device eventually holds him/her.

In these circumstances the leader may after being lowered to the ground begin again, usually after a rest, or decide to abandon the climb completely until a later date. If the climb is abandoned the team is said to have 'failed' on the route and this may lead to other competitors attempting the same climb in a bid to show superiority. Furthermore, if the climbers do return to the scene of their nemesis and again 'fail' on the route then it becomes their 'bogey' route and most experienced climbers collect one or two such routes during their climbing careers, which is to say, routes that they have 'failed' many times but never successfully completed.

Falling then is the climbers' last resort and mars the style of ascent since it means that he/she cannot overcome the standard of the particular climb. If the leader does however complete the climb after falling and resting he/she may claim a 'yo yo' ascent which whilst not exceeding climbers' ethical boundaries is not regarded as an ascent in pure style since this can only be claimed when a climber successfully leads the climb from the ground up with no falls or use of artificial aids other than climbing skill.

In the climbing world falls are divided into five different types, two of which are very serious and three less so.

The first two instances relate to an unexpected slip by the climber or a hold snapping away from the rock face as the climber either pulls or stands on it. Because in both cases a fall may often occur instantly when this happens and leader and second have no time to prepare for the sudden nature of the action these types of fall are always unpredictable in outcome and more likely to lead to serious injury or death. They are in essence the objective dangers of climbing.

What it feels like to 'slip' from a rock climb in the uncontrolled fall is the same as what happens when a hold snaps. Like any unexpected accident it happens instantly whilst at the same time seems to happen in slow motion. Fortunately in the three incidents of this type that I have experienced none of them resulted in serious injury, but it is clear that they are the most common causes of both serious and fatal climbing accidents witnessed by most climbers of

experience.

As well as the accidents brought about by objective dangers there are three relatively more predictable types of fall where the leader often has time to communicate to the 'second' that a fall is imminent. In the climbing world these falls are referred to as 'whippers', 'take us' or 'lobs'. They occur because the leader is either too physically tired to continue ('pumped out' in climbers' parlance), too psychologically stressed to continue ('psyched out' in climbers parlance), or has climbed into a position from where it is impossible to move up or down because he/she has not 'read' the climb correctly up to this point ('blowing the moves' in climbers parlance).

Sometimes a combination of the above factors are responsible for falls but the technique of falling in all the previously mentioned 'subjective' falls requires the climber to push away from the rockface as what climbers refer to as 'air miles' or 'air time' is taken before the falling climber is hopefully held by the rope under control by the 'second' who is often referred to as a 'belayer', 'groundman' or 'belay slave'.

In the case of 'take us', 'air time' may be nothing more than a slump of a few feet onto a protection device which is just below the leader but in the case of a 'whipper' it may be as much as 80ft. Taking 'Big air' before hopefully he/she is held on the rope. Often leaders describe their falls in a matter-of-fact way so that :-

Dave W. 'I hadn't led much, or come to it climbed much since the spring and the last time I went to Gogarth I got pretty psyched out not on a very hard route but hard enough that it got to me.'

MC 'Which route?'

Dave W. It's called Diogenes, you've probably done it, you know the thing with that 'mantelshelf' move (climbers term for a technique which requires one to gain a broad ledge by first getting the upper body over the ledge by pushing own on it with the arms then bringing one foot up and standing up in balance), it's given the grade of E1, but it felt much harder to me and on the mantelshelf move I kind of lost control and tried to belly flop it.'

MC 'What happened?'

Dave W. 'I just couldn't get stood up and started thinking about what would happen if a I fell off because I wasn't too happy with the gear I'd placed, you know, thinking would it hold or not.'

MC 'Did you fall?'

Dave W. 'Yeah, but not a whipper, I just had a 'take us'. I was too

psyched out to try the move properly and in the end I gave up and after a lot of messing around with gear Ricky lowered me off.'

(Conversation with the author)

The object of pushing away from the rock face in the event of a fall is one of damage limitation and if the climb is overhanging the outcome, although spectacular and frightening for both leader, second and anybody watching, is that the climber is brought to a stop in mid air by the rope as it comes tight on protection devices he/she has placed on the climb before falling off some way above them provided of course the second has 'belayed' properly and has not let go of the rope from below.

In the case of the falling leader impacting with the rock face he/she will try to do so with either one hand or one leg first, again in an attempt to limit damage and spread the weight of the fall. It probably goes without saying that this cannot always be done without mishaps and not at all without the collusion of a vigilant 'second'.

Seconds are not always vigilant. In extreme cases seconds have been known to fall asleep, lying on the ground or ledges halfway up a cliff, when the leader's progress has been slow and the team exposed to sun for long periods. Other 'shoddy' belaying techniques such as engaging others in conversation or worse still actually 'barracking' and 'hassling' the leader as moves are attempted also occur and may be acceptable in the 'culture' of some climbing teams but are not applied and unacceptable for strangers climbing together for the first time. However, some 'shoddy practices' are more apparent than real. This is because a belayer may, on initial observation, appear to be acting in an irresponsible manner, yet can dramatically switch attention should the 'leader' shout for assistance. Then the belayer goes into automatic 'red alert' taking in any slack in the rope and preparing for the impact of a fall. In some instances a second may 'cause' a fall. In one instance a leader became so scared or 'gripped' that he was unable to continue and shouted instructions to the 'second' to: 'pull me off' which resulted in him taking a large fall onto 'protection', (whipper), before he was lowered to the ground where he stated that:

"I had to do something but was too scared to jump or carry on"

(Lee, in conversation with the author)

For the climber falling off any climb is a complex and diverse event not the simple matter it may first appear. Clearly falling is not the object of climbing but, as with other techniques, it is learned by experience and becomes part of a knowledge that is turned to the leader's advantage and reduces climbing risk.

Risk however cannot be eliminated altogether by such knowledge and even in the case of 'sports' climbing where 'in situ' protection makes falling off very safe there is ultimately no guarantee that injury will not be incurred in every instance though it is far less likely than in 'adventure' climbing.

Indeed there are a number of routes towards and at the upper limited of 'adventure' climbing that are recognised as dangerous undertakings and prospective leaders are warned what to expect through guidebook descriptions. Two examples of this are :-

"The Enchanted Broccoli Garden. 86m E7 (R) (1986)

Excellent wall climbing, but possible death for both members of the party should the leader muff pitch 2. Only survivors will confirm the star quality of the route. Start from a block belay, about ten metres above Pagan.

1. 43m. 6b. Step onto the wall, and make a hard traverse right onto a pinnacle. Climb up on bubbly rock to a hinged block, and pull round the roof onto a porcelain-like slab. Delicate moves lead right to a slanting crack, which is climbed for five metres, before going up to an extremely inadequate belay on one poor peg.

2. 43m. 6b. Climb rightwards to a foot-ledge, then go up to a thin crack. Ascend straight up to a ledge and spike. Carefully climb up the boundary wall to a lichenous section, which is followed by a relatively relaxed groove to the top."

Newton (1990) p163

"The Hollow Man 43m E7 6b (1986)

This very direct line takes the strenuous Clown start as far as The Bells! Then goes straight up through the line of this offering immaculate fingery climbing with virtually non-existent protection. There is no margin for error, so either a strong will to survive, or better still a blatant disregard for life, will prove helpful. Start left of Sarah Green beneath a left-facing flake crack with twin overhangs at eight metres. Climb the flake, moving left at its top, then reach right to a peg beneath the first roof, Friend. Surmount this to a standing position below the next roof, then pull out left onto the wall and move up to good holds at the end of the initial traverse of The Bells!. Move up to small holds (down right of the peg on The Bells), then go up left passing the peg and straight up to good incut holds in the quartz break. Pull up left to the base of

a thin flake crack and climb this to final big holds rising rightwards to reach the sloping ledge just beneath the top. Climb the short back wall to the top. Congratulations.

Newton (1990) p 140

On the other hand there are also a number of 'adventure' climbs which although very hard are described as 'safe' and this seemingly contradictory position occurs when a climb is what climbers refer to as being 'well protected', meaning that a great many protection devices can potentially be placed by the leader as he/she progresses up the climb but that the actual climbing involved is extremely difficult and in some instances likely to result in 'air miles' for the leader. Two extracts from descriptions in the current Tremadog Climbers' Guidebook emphasise this point.

"Strawberries 60 feet E6 6b (3.80)

The stunningly situated crack in the vector headwall gives one of the most sought-after traditional 'flashes' in Wales. Start below the top pitch of Cream, at the spike stance overlooking the gully. Move left as for Cream but continue leftwards to gain the crack. This is climbed with a great deal of difficulty. A safe but sustained sequence of 6B moves."

Jones, I. A. (2000) p107

and

"Llanberries 65 feet E7 6c (55.87)

A dynamic pitch in a fantastic position. Up the wall left of Strawberries, 'air miles' guaranteed. Start 20 feet below the spike belay at the base of the top pitch of Cream, but using the spike as the belay. Climb the slab left of Cream to gain the base of the Strawberries crack. Layback the footholds of Strawberries to a jug using a peg, a rock 1 and an rp3 for protection. Some very difficult moves up and then left may gain an even harder move, which leads to the arête. Finish up the edge.

Jones, I. A.(2000) p107

The leader then must learn to interpret and understand such descriptions as well as being prepared to take on the responsibility of providing a useful description for other climbers if and when he/she makes the first ascent of a new route.

Despite the introduction of 'sport' climbing in Wales in 1984 (Chapter 2) the main

focus of climbing in Wales and throughout the UK remains typically associated with 'adventure' climbing and it is this type of climbing which most climbers engage in so that notions of becoming a climber to most climbers means entering the world of leading 'adventure' climbs where as noted, risk may be minimised and accepted rather than excluded altogether as in indoor competition 'sport' climbing (Chapter 6) and this point is emphasised by Bonny Mason in her account of climbing the route 'capital punishment'.

“Real climbs are those I aspire to most, seeming to epitomize the best in the British style of rock-climbing. They force you to commit yourself and failure may carry a painful price. You've got to be there for the climbing primarily. If a climber faces poorly protected moves at the limit of his ability he shouldn't be there for fame, fortune or someone's favours. Real climbing demands ascents in good style. No matter how pushed you become, once launched on a poorly protected section, you have to complete the moves; no scuttling back to rest arms and nerves, no bouldering out moves with the aid of yo-yoing.”

Mason (1987) p127

Those climbers who remain interested only in 'sport' and indoor climbing are not therefore considered to be part of the authentic or genuine climbing world where the leaders of climbs at all levels must learn to experience and accept risk over a period of time before becoming contenders for the 'head games' associated with the highest standards set by contemporary adventure climbing's leading protagonists.

The ability then to remain what climbers refer to as 'psyched' is highly valued in the climbing world and it is this factor that typifies top adventure. It should also be noted that a climber who is not particularly good technically will make better progress up the grading system by getting away with a 'bold' approach, during his/her ascents, however this is not to suggest that bravery or foolhardiness are the key ingredients to climbers psyche, since a bold climber with little technical skill will eventually be stopped around the grade of E1 and sometimes far below that level.

It is rather the learned ability to remain technically proficient and relaxed throughout an entire climb, linked with a sense of timing that characterises the key aspects of climbing 'psyche'.

It may sound strange that timing could be considered an element in the ascent of any given climb but in fact it often plays a crucial part, since a key aspect of climbing is not only

knowing how to make certain moves but when best to do them. A climber who leads a route from ground up 'on sight' with no falls or 'aided' rests is said to have 'flashed' the route. However, speed is relative. A 'flashed' ascent can still be claimed even if the climber has taken an hour or so over the ascent as long as no prior knowledge of the route is known, otherwise he/she may only be credited with a 'beta flash' which suggests that the leader had discussed the climb with other climbers before the climb. In hard serious climbing at the grade of E5 and above a climb of say 150 foot can take many hours even by a top climber. From the point of view of the leader, time and performance may merge with making the right moves, being in control and remaining 'psyched'. For him/her in that moment there is no time. Thus in the 'head game' of the ascent timing is linked to psyche and in the same way that Norman Mailer has observed about boxers, takes on a different framework.

"Before fatigue brings boxers to the boiler rooms of the damned, they live at a height of consciousness and with a sense of detail they encounter nowhere else. In no other place is their intelligence so full, or their sense of time able to contain so much of itself as in the long internal effort of the ring. Thirty minutes go by like three hours.'

Mailer (1975) p188

In climbing the reverse is true, three hours can go by like thirty minutes yet the aim is exactly the same as boxing, to remain psyched and focussed throughout the contest whilst thinking about the next moves and trying to anticipate what their outcome will be. At this level any thoughts of 'one upmanship' or recognition of the drop (exposure) below the climber or any 'everyday' thought is dismissed to the recesses of the mind while the problem of the climb is addressed.

Another aspect of the activity is the nature of the climber's breathing as they negotiate a route. This is clearly a factor in very hard and long climbs but is also an issue on all climbs included in the climbers grading system. It is important at all stages but becomes more important as the difficulty of climbs increases. A climber who is said to be 'dead steady' moves up any given climb in a methodical way managing the technical difficulties of the route without getting out of breath. The 'dead steady' climber is attempting to remain calm throughout the climb and remain in control even when 'pumped'.

The opposite is when a climber becomes 'shaky' during an ascent which often means

that he/she becomes out of breath and begins to hyperventilate. This oxygenates the blood and helps the climber regain some kind of composure.

The ability to measure breathing and control it as the climber makes an ascent thus is not just the commonplace phenomena we would expect but rather a definite technique similar to that of distance runners as they too attempt to conserve energy while they are racing. In other words, the climber like the runner paces himself/herself throughout the climb.

The leader then must remain 'psyched' for however long the route takes him/her to negotiate and once committed to the climb must maintain this kind of equilibrium until the entire climb is finished or 'topped out' to use climbing parlance.

To watch a top climber move smoothly and gracefully up any given route makes even very hard climbs look easy but it is only achieved by a combination of his/her strength, particularly mental, technique (knowing when and how best to move) and knowledge and experience of implementing such techniques over a period of time.

It should be remembered that the ascent must also be made in a way that conforms to the ethical code of the type of climbing being undertaken.

The experience of leading climbs in the natural setting of the outdoor arena allows climbers to visit places that are uncontrolled environments and this 'adventure' aspect is in sharp contrast to the unnatural and controlled environment of leading climbs on indoor climbing walls (Chapter 5).

According to adventure climbers the authentic climbing experience may only be gained by climbing routes on real cliffs with no fixed protection in place and a typical example of the 'adventure' climber's day involves commitment and risk being overcome mainly by the use of climbing skill. To emphasize this point the following account may give further insight into this world.

The Adventure Climbing 'Leader's' Day

The first thing to consider before climbing begins is actually gaining the starting point for a certain climb. In the Llanberis Pass this is relatively simple so that a steep walk of around twenty metres brings the start to many climbs within reach. Similarly the slate quarries can be easily accessed though the climber may be required to fix a rope in place before making an 'abseil' (means of descending a rope) to gain the base for climbs in a certain area.

Some cliffs have extremely difficult access and this is particularly true in the

case of sea cliffs where the normal means for starting climbs involves either the descent of very steep grass banks or an 'abseil'.

The means by which Ray, Pete and I accessed the starting point for 'Cordon Bleu' was the steep grass descent and this experience is more significant to climbers at the beginning of the climbing season than it is once the situation has become normalised by accessing climbs in this way on regular occasions.

The main climbing season is normally between April through to October, that is the period when most adventure climbing activity takes place, though this is by no means an official time but simply coincides with spring and summer when longer days and possible periods of good weather make climbing a better proposition. In a bad season poor weather makes many mountain cliffs out of bounds since they do not 'come into condition' in that they remain wet sometimes throughout a summer.

Adventure climbers sometimes refer to 'early season training' but this does not mean that they are spending time in a gym or climbing wall, even if they have done so. What it means is that they intend to visit cliffs in order to do climbs that are categorised lower down in the grading system than their previous (last season) highest performance level. The reason for this is to re-familiarise with the feel, nature and hazards of the climbing environment. The same goes for 'sports' climbers operating in the natural arena and though there is usually less risk involved once the climb begins they too have to remember how to act.

'Cordon Bleu' is a four hundred foot climb on the Gogarth sea cliffs off the coast of Holyhead in North West Wales. It is a typical sea cliff climb, in that it presents the climber with often spectacular situations and also involves stopping at various points on the climb since it cannot be done in one single rope length, nor can the entire climb be viewed in any detail from below.

The grade of the climb is hard very severe and is described in climbers' guidebooks as having 'one mean pitch' whose technical grade is 5b. This alerts climbers to the fact that they can expect one section on the route to be considerably harder than others.

It is one of the great climbing contradictions that a guidebook description is allowed yet the climber is still said or can claim to have done the route in an ideal 'on sight' manner providing he/she has no other knowledge about the climb other than that implied by the guidebook.

For the ascent of 'Cordon Bleu' we were a team of three, whilst the more typical climbing team is two. However 'Cordon Bleu' has three pitches and it meant that each climber could lead a part or 'pitch' on the climb.

Pete's Lead

Ray and I watched Pete as he led the first pitch. His movements were controlled but fluid, he continually assessed the rockface in front, sometimes craning his head out at angles trying to 'read' the territory above. Below him the sea sent waves crashing into the cliff face making it difficult to communicate and contributing to a general atmosphere associated with sea cliff climbing which climbers often refer to as 'good value'.

Pete continued in a focussed and steady manner. At one point surmounting a pinnacle by way of what I recognised as a mantelshelf move. Very little was said since Pete was concentrating on the task in hand.

At several points he stopped to 'place protection' before doing 'moves'. In this way he safeguarded himself in the event of a fall. After a hundred feet or so of climbing he disappeared round a corner and the rope between him and us came to a standstill. Pete had led the pitch in a 'steady' manner which is typical of an experienced leader and after a few more minutes shouted 'I'm safe' letting us know in climbing terms that he had secured himself to the rockface and was about to take in the rest of the spare rope before it was our turn to each 'second' the pitch.

My Lead

The 'crux', or most difficult piece of climbing encountered on any climb now lay above. The crux on 'Cordon Bleu' is located on a slightly overhanging wall of orange rock poised some two hundred feet above the sea. From the 'belay' point the climbing team may look down straight into the sea since the cliff below is undercut and to reach this position the climb comes in slightly diagonally by 'traversing' rather than climbing straight up. We were now in a situation referred to as 'exposed'.

Setting off upwards I tried to 'read' the climbing above so as not to get into irreversible or bad positions where the use of 'aid' might be required or I might fall. In this sense I was the typical leader not only wishing to get up the climb but also wanting to climb in good style.

I took care to make moves in such a way that would leave me in a position, as I thought, that would allow the next part of the climb to be read though there is never any guarantee that this will inevitably be the case.

The leader in this position is like the snooker player who attempts to ensure that whilst potting a single ball the cue ball rebounds in such a way as to leave him in a good position for the next shot.

Eventually I committed to the moves to gain much easier climbing at a less inclined angle that led in around sixty feet to the next 'stance' or stopping place.

Ray's Lead

The last 'pitch' was the easiest of the climb but nevertheless required great skill on the part of the leader since the rock in the area found at the top of most sea cliffs tends to deteriorate and this 'top out' was no exception.

The time taken to get this far on the climb had been four and a half hours and the team was now keen to finish the experience, placing the leader in the unenviable position of being responsible to dispense with the final climbing as swiftly as possible. Contrary to textbook climbing this is when the leader is most likely to be pushed on by the 'second' or 'seconds' with critical comments rather than helpful or encouraging advice.

In these cases the leader must still maintain a steady movement rather than rushing on in the face of risk and the 'seconds' ignored.

During the final pitch on 'Cordon Bleu' Ray was forced to move slowly owing

to a very loose block preventing anything other than calculated, deliberate movement in surmounting it but eventually succeeded in gaining the steep hillside above and safety. Observing him lead the pitch particularly in the area of loosest rock was to see the experienced leader in action.

He used holds delicately rather than with great force and balanced up rather than relying on strength to simply haul up. Occasionally he looked down to ensure Pete was 'belaying' properly which normally imputes meaning rather than voicing it to make sure everyone is ready in the event of a fall. It is only a leader in real trouble that voices this.

In comparison the 'sports' climbing leader is not so much concerned with the 'adventure' aspects of any given 'sports' route and in many cases will have inspected the route prior to its ascent. The 'sports' climbing leader is therefore more concerned to see if he/she can physically do the routes and this in itself may provide onlookers with a spectacular performance of climbing skill which the following description serves to illustrate :

The 'Sports' Climbing Leader's Day

Once we arrived at the crag Mel did some warm up exercises whilst I uncoiled the rope and decided on the best position to watch the action from. John would be the 'second' and therefore be responsible for 'belaying'. They were attempting 'Bad Bad Boy' which was rated at 7A+ by the sports climbers grading system.

I was along to photograph the climb so had plenty of opportunity to observe both leader and second in action.

Mel had attempted this climb a week earlier but had not successfully completed it having only gained forty feet before being stopped by some 'moves' he was unable to 'read' out even after many tries. The entire length of the climb looked about ninety feet and I noticed seven or eight 'bolts' had been placed in a line that then disappeared into apparently blank overhanging limestone.

The 'bolts' seemed to be placed at around ten foot intervals and on the third bolt a 'karabiner' was still hanging in place. Mel identified the karabiner as his own and it marked his previous high point on the route.

This 'in situ' equipment demarked the cliff as a 'sports' climbing arena and on further inspection many other 'in situ bolts some with karabiners, could be seen demarking the way of various 'sport' routes. This equipment whilst perfectly acceptable in the sports climbing arena would not be allowed in an adventure climbing arena.

As soon as the leader left the ground he made several gymnastic moves that required him to 'power' up using tiny fingerholds. The movement was swift, controlled and executed with precision, in particular the feet were not left to hang free but deliberately kept into the rock which was severely overhanging.

Reaching the high point from the previous attempt looked easy and gave no real insight into the physical effort involved. At around seventy feet a 'rest' was reached. A rest in climbing has two meanings. If the leader says 'I'm going to have to rest' it means he/she will use some aid because they can no longer continue on the climb, if the leader (as in this case) says 'I'm at the rest' he/she means they have gained a position on the rock where they can recover strength and composure, yet some rests are more comfortable than others.

On this occasion the 'rest' consisted of a 'heelhook' which allowed the leader to push his feet into a horizontal break in the rock before hanging upside down from them.

After a few minutes of this the performance continued no less spectacularly until the final 'juggs' (large handholds) lead to a fixed anchor point from which Mel lowered back down to the ground. This time he had successfully completed the route and the whole performance had taken around twenty five minutes.

The next question was whether to go to the café or start 'working' another 'sports' climb before a heavy shower intervened to decide the outcome."

3. The Role of the Second

The term 'second' in the climbing world relates to the person who under normal circumstances 'belay' the leader whilst he/she attempts to climb a route. It is the second's role to pay out the rope carefully and watch the movement of the leader as he/she proceeds on the climb. If the leader falls it is the responsibility of the second to 'lock off' the rope so that the fall is as short as possible.

Once the route has been completed by the leader the 'second' follows the route with a rope from above so that the leader 'takes in' the rope as the second climbs. The second is therefore protected from falling very far as he/she proceeds up the climb. During his/her climb the second will remove any equipment placed on the route by the leader.

Any observation of climbers in action will reveal this basic process. What will not be immediately apparent is that there are essentially three types of second in the climbing world and whilst all are involved in the basic process described above there are a number of hidden roles that seconds, depending on their type, also fulfil.

In the first instance beginners normally 'second' a number of routes in order to gain a feel for movement on steep rock and also learn from the leader various techniques involved in negotiating difficult sections of the climb as well as gaining a knowledge of equipment used

in the climb. In this case the leader cannot afford to fully trust the second and climbs with this in mind. In this case the leader takes complete responsibility for the climb. Although the second in this instance is part of a climbing team his/her role is greatly restricted and is expected to make very little input to the climbing process. He or she is there to gain experience in basic climbing techniques.

In the second instance the role played by the 'second' typically involves much more input into the climb itself and in later discussions of the climb.

In this case then the 'second' is a trusted part of the climbing team and the leader will normally rely on him/her to hold them in the event of a fall. Climbing teams who have climbed together regularly over a period of time build on this trust which enables the leader to attempt harder climbs which would not be possible in the company of a beginner and less likely when climbing in the company of an unknown but otherwise experienced 'second'.

Another feature concerning 'seconding' in this case is that at any time during the climb a role reversal may take place. This is because most climbing teams are made up of two climbers of roughly equal ability and will take turns in leading and seconding. The reasons for a switch during a climb may be because a leader is unable to complete a certain route owing to becoming 'pumped', 'psyched out' or falling off. Or the reason may be technical as when climbs exceed more than the rope length (150ft). In such instances the 'second' after seconding one 'pitch' or section of the climb, usually adopts the role of leader for the next section whilst the leader who completed the first pitch clearly then takes on the role of 'second'.

The only exception to this 'rule' is when the climbing team consists of the leader and a 'permanent second'. Permanent seconds rarely if ever lead. This is despite the fact that they are nearly always of equal technical climbing ability to their leader and trusted in the role of 'second' in a climbing team. If the permanent second leads at all it is usually on a climb of much lower technical standard and often in a less controlled manner than when seconding harder climbs.

Surprisingly this third type of 'second' is most likely to be part of a very high standard climbing team and his/her role is highly valued for very good but not obvious reasons. The first reason is that when certain leaders are known to be 'going well', which means that they are consistently climbing at a high standard, they often prefer to focus solely on leading climbs

and regard time spent seconding as unproductive and in some cases psychologically damaging since if they find themselves in difficulty whilst seconding any given climb the experience can dent their leading confidence or psyche.

“I can’t second, I mean I can but I hate it. I can’t concentrate properly not like when I’m leading something”

(Andy, in conversation with the author)

A further reason is that an equally balanced climbing team may become unbalanced when two climbers who wish to lead the same route begin to compete with each other rather than competing with other teams. The problem with this type of climbing team is that whoever attempts to lead the climb first is under more pressure than usual to succeed and this too can affect a leader’s ‘psyche’. If the competitive edge is not over played by one or other of the climbing team it may have a positive result and the leader may embark on the climb with a feeling of healthy rivalry, but if it is overplayed it may have the opposite effect and the leader may feel that the ‘second’ is failing to support the climb and may even wish the leader to fail on the climb so that the roles can be reversed. This rivalry is more apparent amongst teams in the middle climbing grades. At the highest levels of difficulty it is a much less likely to occur for in this case top class leaders often employ the permanent second as they attempt ‘desperate routes’. The work of the ‘second’ is often arduous, for in the world of top level climbing the ascent in both adventure and sport climbing usually take up a great deal of time, sometimes involving repeat visits to a certain route, over a period of days or weeks. When this occurs it is important that the ‘second’ is prepared to belay for long periods whilst generally supporting the leader throughout the entire project. ‘Seconds’ who adopt this type of role are typically ‘permanent seconds’ and as such are known throughout the climbing world usually by a nickname such as ‘The Anorak’, ‘The Walrus’ and the ‘Tick’ all of whom are well known in North Wales.

Once the climbing team returns to a climbing hangout both the second and third type of ‘second’ may adopt another role. He/she supports and sanctions any claims made by the leader in conversations with other interested climbers as they discuss the ethics and styles used in particular ascents. In this role the ‘second’ can either play down or enhance the status of the leader. A good example of enhancement can be gleaned from the ‘Ticks’ description of

a day spent seconding hard routes at Gogarth on the North Wales sea cliffs, speaking to climbers in the 'Heights' he said :-

“We did, The Cad, The Long Run, Blue Peter, and Talking Heads but Ron (the leader), didn't even get a pump on, incredible it was, great just to second.”

In these cases the role of the second is quite complex, he/she is involved as a skilled expert with a great deal of technical knowledge but he/she is also a supporter and an advocate to the leader.

Although seconding climbs does not normally involve a great deal of accolade by comparison to the leader it nevertheless can count for a great deal of social currency which can often be spent at climbers hangouts whilst sifting through the minutiae and details concerning the ascent of various routes where the 'second's' role is at least as important as the leader's whilst recounting and emphasising specific points, since the second is the witness to the leader's claims.

This is particularly important in the climbing world when climbers claim either a new route climbed in good style or the first 'free' ascent of a climb that has previously been done with the use of some aid and the following account from my involvement as a second serves to illustrate this point :-

“The Back Room of Pete's Eats, brews and ideas, local gossip and the ever present temptation of the pull-up bar.

A tap on the steamed-up window signified our departure. We had arranged for a lift to Gogarth from the ever youthful Joe Brown. The trip from Llanberis and across the island went speedily enough, with just a few complaints from Val about the old man's driving.

Steve Haston and I were still undecided about our sportsplan as the car rolled to a halt at North Stack, although I now suspect that The Creature (Steve) had all along nurtured a secret desire

Steve and I bantered around for a while, sorting gear and discussing possibilities, whilst Joe set off for 'Wen Zawn' (a particular climbing area).

After some persuasion I eventually agreed to go and have a look at the Obelisk. This meant walking across to South Stack, so we informed Joe, after some catching up, of our intention in the hope that he would drive round later and save us the walk back.

The 'Obelisk' climbs the double rooves to the right of 'Atlantis'. First climbed by Mo Antoine and Dave Alcock as an almost all 'aid' route, it was wrongly

described in the Gogarth guide as extreme with only three points of 'aid'. The only other attempt to 'free' climb it, as far as we knew, was by Dave Pierce and Paul Trower. Dave made a really fine effort on the main pitch, but still reckoned he had used six or seven pegs for 'aid'.

We went down the Castle Helen 'abseil's and boulder hopped to the bottom of the Zawn. The first pitch is only VSish, but the rock needs care and one has the feeling of getting into something serious as the size of the rooves above become alarmingly more apparent. The 'stance' is composed of crumbling footholds, and the 'belay pegs are in an appalling state of decay. From here I resigned myself to a leap into the sea, should Steve take a fall of any consequence from the next pitch.

He set off up the slabby corner above, and clipped on an old 'peg' at the junction with the first roof. From here an overhanging 'hand traverse' led out onto the very edge of the void. After some contemplation and a few hurried retreats, Steve went for it and made the arete. Here a 'heelhook' round a loose flake provides a welcome respite for tired arms. I remember thinking, "Oh, if he gets up this I've got to follow". I had visions of myself 'pumping' out halfway along the 'traverse', and penduling out of reach from rock.

Steve kept moving up the groove above, and I thought, "Wow! This is pretty serious; looks as if he's going to make it". Some more old 'pegs', and a stand-still. The groove overhung above and looked really desperate for a few feet, until a leftward 'hand traverse' took him out of sight. I knew he was really 'pumped' by now, and I was waiting to be pulled off the stance by a monster fall. Thankfully he stopped moving, and after about five minutes the rope dragged in slowly, and became tight around my waist. I could just make out the words 'Don't come off', drifting down from above.

I didn't really understand the significance of this at the time, but I thought, 'Well, it's just a question of not getting too gripped up or pumping out'.

I set up a Backrope for the first 'hand traverse'. Unfortunately, this only involved me in an unjustifiable epic. Steve was blatantly unaware of my predicament, which was perhaps just as well. If he had seen me I expect he would have almost given birth.

Eventually, I did unclip my backrope, and managed to limb my way up the rest of the pitch in blind fear, resorting to technique only when absolutely necessary. I arrived gasping on the stance a few moments later. The belay was unsafe. Steve then told me that he had clipped into the stance and passed out momentarily, probably with relief. (Hence the cries of 'Don't come off'.)

The old man was peering over the top of the cliff obviously waiting to go home. It was now just a question of getting up to the top of the cliff. The Obelisk was now all free. Joe gave us both a top rope on 'Freebird El', which felt easy, after what had gone before. We joined him at the top, and he said, 'How many falls did you have?' Steve replied 'None, boastfully. 'It couldn't have been very hard then', said Joe. It was hard enough for the second I thought, a notion I later endorsed in the 'heights' along with the claims Steve made about the route's merits and difficulty.

A final important point concerning all types of 'second' is that although most kudos is gained by the lead climber the 'second' is still expected to operate within the boundary of ethical parameters related to a particular style of climbing. The 'second' must, like his/her leader, climb the route in an acceptable style if he/she wishes to claim to have 'seconded' the route properly. This is particularly important when a relatively inexperienced leader 'seconds' a route of a much higher standard, if he/she can do so successfully it may count as something of a personal best. From his/her own point of view the 'second' may gain some insight into the demands dictated by climbs higher in the grading system.

It remains here to emphasise the point that in the world of climbing the action of 'seconding' may best be understood in relation to different types of 'second' and their respective roles.

4. Solo Climbing

Solo climbing is the least understood activity in the world of climbing and to outsiders may appear foolhardy and reckless. As the name implies, solo climbing means to climb alone and although initially nothing would appear more simple and dangerous a focus on solo climbing quickly reveals that there are different types of solo climbing which have their own boundaries and are legitimated by reference to a number of ethical parameters and are judged for their authenticity.

Before discussing the different types of solo climbing and the meaning of their climbing style it is important to emphasise that solo climbing is rarely undertaken by beginners and is most often the domain of experienced climbers who have decided to dispense with normal support climbing in a team.

A second point to note is that solo climbers rarely survive for any length of time if they habitually solo climb so most climbers punctuate their solo careers with periods of team climbing.

The dangers of solo climbing is clear when the careers of solo climbers are considered. Of six solo climbers that lived in the North Wales area during the late 1980s and 1990s who I regularly climbed with in an orthodox fashion (but occasionally accompanied them on relatively low standard solo climbs). One is now a professional climber and guide. One has given up any form of climbing altogether, one suffered severe injury from a fall taken whilst solo climbing but still continues to climb, though rarely solo, and three have been killed solo

climbing - Jim in 1987, Ed in 1990 and Paul in 1995. All the above engaged in what is commonly referred to in the climbing world as 'free soloing' and this constitutes the ultimate form of solo climbing. It is also known as 'real' or 'pure' soloing.

As far as standards are concerned, while it is true that some very high standard solo climbs have been made none have been made at the current highest levels of difficulty.

To observe a solo climber in action is, for novices and those with little or no knowledge of the sport, a death-defying spectacle. Whilst there is little doubt that this form of climbing is inherently dangerous, most solo climbers ascend climbs that are at least two and often three or four times below the level of difficulty at which they would normally lead. The different types of solo climbing are described below.

Solo Climbing

Roped Solos (Shunt on Fixed Rope)

This method involves the climber in first gaining the top of a particular climb usually by walking or easy scrambling to the top of a particular crag. A rope is then fixed into position so that it hangs down the entire length of the route that the solo climber proposes to eventually ascend. Once this is done the lone climber locates the starting point for his/her climb either by abseiling down the fixed rope or by walking/scrambling back down to the base of the crag. A 'shunt' or 'Jumar' is then attached back to the climber's waist harness and to the fixed rope (both devices, 'shunt' and 'Jumar' are pieces of equipment which whilst designed to run freely whilst going up a rope will lock when under weight so that they will not slip back down a rope). Thus once the climber begins the ascent he/she although climbing solo is ultimately protected in the event of a fall.

Little significance or importance is given to 'roped' solos in the world of climbing so that such ascents are most commonly made by keen climbers who for one reason or another find themselves without a climbing partner. As long as the climber who ascends any given route in this way does not claim any worth for his/her ascent then no social sanctions are enforced. It will be regarded simply as a measure of an individual's keenness to go climbing in the absence of a climbing partner or team.

A climber having employed this method may refer to a particular climb not as solo ascents but as 'shunts' illustrated to other climbers in the following way :-

“Oh, yea I shunted that route a couple of weeks ago so I’m not bothered about leading it.”

(Craig, S. referring to The Route Cad in conversation with the author)

This type of roped solo climb is not given any kudos in the climbing world because although the individual undoubtedly undertakes the activity alone the methods employed ensures that he/she experiences little risk. In all this activity is considered to be one step away from seconding a climb.

Roped Solos ‘Back Roping’

This type of solo climbing is occasionally employed by solo climbers on multi-pitch climbs and involves leading pitches in much the same way as when climbing with a partner. The difference is that instead of a person paying out the ropes a device known as a ‘self belayer’ is first anchored to the rockface by the climber so that when he/she begins to climb the rope comes out freely through the device but in the event of a fall or shock load locks thus acting in the same manner as a human beylayer.

Again this method is not considered by most climbers to constitute a real solo climb and although ‘back roping’ is considered more authentic than ‘shunting’ it still does not gain much merit apart from the fact that the individual operates alone. It may be that a ‘back rope’ solo climber has made an ascent in good style but because he/she has climbed alone this cannot be verified and because ropes have been used such ascents are often referred to in the climbing world as ‘no big deal’.

To illustrate this point the case of Phil, a roped solo climber who has made ascents of the Eiger North Face and Matterhorn in this style; he is known in the climbing world as ‘Phil the Snail’. Rather than gaining social kudos from his ascents, which in most circles would count as *impressive feats*, his moniker, awarded by protagonists of pure climbing style, relates to the fact the ‘he climbs very slowly and carries everything on his back’ qualities which are not usually revered or adopted by free solo climbers in the local climbing world.

Real ‘Free’ or ‘Pure’ Soloing

Both free and pure soloing mean that a solo climb has been carried out in the most authentic manner with no recourse to either ropes or protection.

Essentially the climber engages in this form of climbing in the same way as he/she would whilst leading a difficult climb though clearly any form of escape barring rescue or down climbing are ruled out once the ascent begins. The free solo climber is therefore operating within a fine margin with little room for error, no matter what standard the particular climb he/she chooses to solo.

Apart from the wearing of specialist rock shoes free soloing entails doing the climb free which means (as it does in adventure climbing generally) that no aids are used to move up the climb other than the climber's skill in using the naturally occurring features on the rock face. Thus free soloing is the highest form of solo climbing and is afforded the greatest social kudos in the climbing world where it is often referred to as 'real soloing'.

The number of free soloers active in the sport at any one time is relatively small and should not be confused with those who solo climb with ropes. However, much soloing is carried out spontaneously and comes about after climbers have completed one or two routes and are 'warmed up'. They then decide to solo a particular route. When this occurs the climbing team may decide to 'tandem solo' which means that both climbers solo the same route in an orthodox manner. As long as both climbers complete the climb in the same free style they are both afforded the social kudos as having soloed the route and as each climber is able to testify to the other's performance there can be little doubt that solo ascents have been made.

On the other hand, some climbers decide to undertake a solo climbing day from the outset. The following description is based on my own participation in a solo climbing experience and aims to show some typical solo climbing situations faced by 'free' soloers.

'Bob and I found ourselves round at Ogwen Cottage. I had suggested a moderate days climbing taking in the Idwal Slabs and Holly Tree Wall before finishing off on Glyder Fawr by means of the classic severe grey slab before walking back over to Nant Peris. We would climb solo and hopefully move quickly over the proposed easy ground. However, this was not to be.

In the first instance I had thought we might warm up by a 'polished' V Diff on 'the slabs' but soon found myself tucked in a rather precarious position about one hundred feet up Heather Wall (VS) just behind Bob.

The guidebook description had read, "The route is one of the best on the wall, on clean rock and using delightful pocket holds. The crux is well situated near the top".

A short interpretation of which might read. The hardest bit is high off the ground, a part that any climber, let alone soloists must take into account.

And so it transpired that a grassy groove was crossed which was a little damp for my liking but which Bob had dismissed in a confident manner totally in keeping with his ability.

Strangely it dawned on me that I might be quite a good soloist and certainly I was no stranger to it. However when engaged in traditional climbing with protection and rope I had always made it my business to seek out even the most obscure runner placements in order to 'protect' moves, should the option be at all possible in fact I've probably spent more time placing 'runners' than actually climbing, a notion common to most climbers.

Arriving on the upper part of 'Tennis Shoe' we moved on rapidly towards the next objective, a section of cliff known as the Holly Tree Wall before embarking on the classic 'Lazarus' 150 ft Severe. Lazarus is 'polished' and a bit delicate so it's not a particularly easy solo but we daintily grasped the holds and moved up in unison ten feet apart.

When soloing in tandem the front man has greater responsibility since a fall on his part would almost inevitably lead to a double 'deck out' (both climbers falling to the ground). On the other hand the first soloer having reached the safety of a good flake or ledge may be able to offer assistance to the second person by means of proffering a hand or leg for aid, should this be necessary. Fortunately in this particular case none of these techniques was called for, though I have seen them employed.

If the free solo climber becomes intimidated or 'psyched out' to use climbers' argot his/her exit strategy is limited to either down climbing or by what climbers refer to as becoming 'cragfast' meaning that the climber has reached a position on the climb where it is possible to remain in place and shout for assistance which is usually provided by other climbers in the form of a rope being lowered down from above. In cases where this occurs the solo climbers may be embarrassed and can expect a degree of interrogation in climbers' hangouts usually in a lighthearted manner which expresses relief for the climber's safety whilst also lampooning his/her actions. If, however, the mountain rescue team is involved the solo climber can expect a lesser degree of understanding and a great degree of serious criticism.

The Lazarus ascent went smoothly enough and on this occasion we were now getting warmed up or, in climbers terms, 'full of juice' (adrenalin). Next came the somewhat minor though nonetheless strategically placed Continuation Wall which we climbed by means of 'Groove Above' an excellent V Diff with a precarious start and no noticeable difference in grade from the supposedly more difficult routes we had already soloed.

To arrive at the upper cliff of Glyder Fawr from the top of continuation wall requires the negotiation of a few hundred feet or so of easy ground punctuated by short rock steps and slabs of solid grey granite. We did this with little conversation since concentration involved in this type of climbing must remain sharp in preparation for the next difficulties.

With hardly a word Bob started up Grey Arête a 270ft. HVS which I knew to have a remarkably exposed crux and for a moment I thought of taking the easier though equally aesthetic line of grey slab but instead found myself making the

semi lieback moves which constitute part of the first pitch of Grey Arête. Thus one of the problems commonly encountered by tandem solists is that neither climber wishes to loose face by taking an easier route than his accomplice. Bob paused a couple of times before executing moves which gave me time to look down the sweep of grey granite below and in a momentarily lapse in concentration I imagined a rope snaking up to me through 'good runners' but of course there were none just hundreds of feet of rock. There was no turning back and I quickly refocussed.

Bob was poised on the arête his boot soles a few feet above my handholds before he gracefully liebacked round into the exposed finishing crack and very quickly dispensed the final moves whilst I hung moments in time waiting my turn. He was sitting on an armchair ledge now grinning down.

Far below I could also make out the figures of two teams watching us. I could see that they had the typical climbers' arsenal of 'gear' comprising ropes and protection devices and it must have been clear to them that we were climbing solo.

From my own observations of solo climbers in action I realised the interest the watchers might have in our performance was probably because they knew what we were doing and wanted to see the outcome. It occurred to me that this interest might appear quite different to outsiders from the climbing world who might quite legitimately see the enterprise as foolhardy and 'crazy'.

From the climber's view the act of solo climbing is however seldom crazy and it is rather that solo climber usually takes place after a climber has become experienced with the more orthodox form of the activity. In the sense he/she has already learnt to normalise situations that to those unfamiliar with the detail of rockfaces and climbing still must seem unjustifiably dangerous.

Clearly the positions held by Bob and myself in this particular case were inherently dangerous yet we both proceeded with great reliance on previously learnt climbing skill and judgement and were fully aware of our actions. In this sense we were typical solo climbers, operating below the standard of climbs that we had lead with ropes and protection devices. We nevertheless, like all solo climbers, embarked on these climbs with a serious attitude.

Disputed Solos

Disputes have and do occur concerning solo ascents in the climbing world and especially in the competition for the accolade of a first ascent so much so that it is now unwise for climbers making or claiming such ascents to do so without some kind of evidence.

This is particularly important for claims made by sponsored climbers since sponsors are particularly keen to be associated with the genuine article and because many new routes have now been identified competitors wish to know that such resources have been genuinely climbed and in what style. This information is also of importance to the climbing world in

general and is usually communicated through the network of specialist climbing magazines as well as by word of mouth. Currently disputed solo ascents include one climber's claim to have soloed 'The Bells', a very hard climb on the Gogarth sea cliffs, a dispute which has so far not been resolved. It is a problem that is endemic to solo climbing because of the difficulty of proving the authenticity of such claims.

Another ambiguity surrounding solo ascents is that whilst being afforded, when undisputed, great social kudos in the climbing world few climbers seek to solo harder routes. Moreover the solists leave less impact than one might expect for just because a route has been soloed does not mean that others will follow preferring instead to continue competing in the arena in a more orthodox manner.

Total Soloing

Other climbers are often ambivalent to solo climbers, on the one hand they often admire their commitment but they also show concern and express some degree of hope that the individual might return to more regular climbing activity. Occasionally warnings can be harsh and straight to the point reflecting the seriousness of the situation. An example to illustrate this point was Stevie's reaction towards Jim when it became apparent that he was becoming a 'total soloist'. (In fact at this particular point in Jim's career he had recently soloed a hard climb known as 'The Axe' on Clogwyn du'r Arddu in Snowdonia, North Wales)

"Yeah, you've done The Axe but tomorrow it might be the 'chop'.**"

(Steve H. in conversation with John and the author)

Thus solo climbing is not simply a matter of climbing alone nor is it considered a necessary part of a climber's career and while many climbers have experience of solo climbing few climb solo for any length of time. While solo climbing has its very particular devotees it is not removed from the values that are used to judge more popular forms of climbing. It is therefore still open to questions surrounding the way it is done and, as noted, in some cases if it has been done at all. Solo climbing may be very dangerous and carry high risks for the climber but like other forms of climbing takes place within the framework of the socially constructed and socially sanctioned world of climbing and its ethical framework.

** 'Chop is climbers' parlance for a death fall.

5. Climbing 'Epics'

Whatever type or style of climbing is undertaken (except perhaps in the indoor arena), and despite best-laid plans that climbers make, 'Epics' do occur. In the climbing world 'Epic' means that some form of prolonged episode takes place usually involving escaping from certain climbs and cliffs.

The most typical 'epic' comes about due to some unforeseen event such as benightment or loss of equipment. In these scenarios climbers attempt to extract themselves from these situations by means of their own skill. If they are rescued, under any other circumstances than because they are injured those concerned will be derided by their fellow climbers.

In order to show what a climbing 'epic' is and to give at least some idea of how it may come about, I include here an account of an 'epic' I experienced due to spending too much time attempting a new sea cliff climb.

Unfortunately some climbing 'epics' end in tragedy but most do not and although clearly unpremeditated there are few serious long-term climbers who have not experienced 'epics' in one way or another.

The most common cause of 'epics' is benightment brought about by the climber's sense of time as he/she concentrates on the problem in hand, as discussed earlier in this Chapter.

“Approximately 30 minutes from the parking knoll, Tim and I 'abseiled' to the black ramp, which leads down to a small beach underneath the dramatic 80 metre high sea cliff of Cilan Head.

The main cliff is bounded on its right but a huge black buttress, which to our knowledge had no routes on it, however, in order to see its possibilities you have to negotiate an unnerving sea washed channel, just at the correct moment, otherwise partial submersion is guaranteed.

Furthermore, a few metres on is the only 'belay' place, a tapering slab surrounded on all sides by water, but at low tide a reasonable spot from which to 'read' the crag. Yes, there was a 'good line' and yes, we would engage. It took me a long time to climb the three metre seaweed covered wall at the start of the route, slipping around on barnacles before moving delicately into a sort of 'gritstone groove' capped by a 'roof', with a good crack running through it.

The rock was jet black and although 'gripping' the climbing was of a high quality, which is more than could be said for my technique. Surmounting the 'roof' developed into tussle followed by 'leg kicking', fumbling with 'Friends' and 'piano playing' over the rock bulge, before the sanctuary of moves on 'jugs' led to easier climbing and the chance to belay.

At some point during the struggle Tim said: "what's it like?" and, for

some reason, I said : "I don't know" without looking down or losing concentration, a reply that later seemed utterly absurd, yet strangely appropriate and in perfect keeping with the steady paranoia that is, frankly, the hallmark of a 'leader' in trouble.

To my surprise when I looked down to converse with Tim, the water around the belay platform had risen alarmingly leaving him stranded but stoic on his rock. From then on he became a Prometheus-like figure with the lapping waves playing the part of the Harpes by continually tormenting him.

The truth is I'd taken hours over the 'pitch' and Tim had kept a patient vigil throughout the episode, while the tide had slowly risen around him.

Now that we could discuss the situation, we realised it was also the start of late afternoon's dip into twilight. Furthermore, we had a friend who'd gone for a walk and expected to meet us back at the car, probably some hours ago.

A climbing team in this situation has a limited number of choices and it didn't take me long to make ours. It's not that it wasn't a democratic process, it's just that I'd been in similar predicaments before and as Tim was younger and less experienced, though no less competent, it was easier for me to assume a kind of tacit responsibility.

I couldn't see the next pitch clearly enough to 'read' its outcome and as we were 'onsighting' a new route, the wisest move seemed a fast retreat.

I secured two 'nuts' before Tim lowered me down over the overhang where I paused momentarily here and there to remove pieces of 'gear' - some of which was eaten by the crack, where it still resides as a bizarre visual icon of our downfall, a museum of rust that never sleeps - before finally descending to the sea washed platform.

The first undesirable but very real problem was regaining the now tiny beach beneath the beetling overhangs of Cilan Main Cliff. It wasn't that far, but a swim through a rough sea on a cold November night is, I can assure you, a most unappetising ritual. Abandoning the sanctuary of the platform felt a bit like walking the plank, but after committing ourselves to the chill of the water we arrived wincing on the beach in no time, only to be confronted by the next harrowing test; the re-ascent of the 'abseil rope'. It was a single 50 metres of 9mm, which blew around in the dusk like a tiger's tail inviting the unwary to grab it. We had one 'JUMAR' and a 'prussic sling', so as I set off up, Tim paid out our two climbing ropes so that at least we'd have some sort of safety line should any problems arise during his ascent.

The whole exercise lingered into the night and despite retaining some air of dignity we wished to be 'done with it all' as soon as possible. 'Jumaring' in the dark against the backdrop of a booming sea can easily get you 'gripped' but if you can stay in a remonstrative, methodical, steady type of mode you will, barring Equipment failure, eventually arrive at the top.

After an age of fumbling I pulled over to the insecure 'pegs' and 'rabbit warren belay', before firmly lashing myself to all of them. Now came the final round, or so we thought.

I had arranged with Tim that I would pull up the abseil rope, tie on the 'jumar' and lower the whole lot back down. We still had the umbilical cords

of our two climbing ropes binding us together, although 50 metres of loose overhanging rock separated any meeting on equal terms.

The plan proved to be plausible, but after a while I realised the 'jumar' must have lodged somewhere on a ledge out of Tim's reach. Communicating was desperate and the noise of the pounding sea ensured that we'd have to go the full 15 rounds for a points win over our opponent 'the night'.

Eventually, Tim started to climb and I wondered how much longer our friend back at the car would wait before raising the alarm. Tim meanwhile employed the whole gamut of techniques in a last effort to climb to safety. Unfortunately, the rock around the area of the 'abseil' is taken by a route called Central Pillar, a teetering Hard Very Severe by day and a nightmare for Tim in the dark.

Suddenly, the ropes went tight around my waist and a demonic scream rose from the depths, before a further sound, not unfamiliar in these parts, of debris colliding with rocks and sea informed me that a hold or two had been exiated from the route.

After more useless shouting the ropes began to slacken and soon I was 'taking in', in the normal fashion, before Tim appeared, dripping and shocked, out of the dark.

Our equipment and paraphernalia was quickly retrieved before we ran up and over the Cilan hill towards two gesticulating figures. It was the farmer and our walking friend they were debating whether to call out a rescue, after all, we were only four hours late to our rendezvous. Fortunately we had escaped from the cliff in reasonable style.

Retreating from climbs in this manner has significance in the climbing world and somewhat ironically can reward the climber with a great deal of social currency which may be spent in climbers' 'hangouts'. The reason for this is that by the process of self-rescue the climbing team, having admitted its mistake, does not attempt to involve anyone else in the rescue procedure but takes full responsibility for getting themselves out of difficulty.

Climbers that do not act in this manner but attempt to alert rescue authorities as soon as 'epic' circumstances occur lay themselves open to a great deal of social condemnation, coming under attack for not taking appropriate responsibility and therefore 'giving climbers a bad name'.

Essentially the ideas surrounding self-rescue form another part of the unwritten ethical code within which climbers operate. It indicates that if the climbing team is not in some way incapacitated then they must make every effort to extricate themselves from climbing 'epics' when and if they occur.

6. Climbing Life

To begin this Chapter the economic and time commitment involved in becoming a climber was brought to light together with an analysis concerning key elements in the process and actions undertaken by climbers. To finalise this Chapter I consider how and how long climbers maintain their involvement in the climbing world once they have entered it and for what reasons they may leave it.

Any observation concerning climbers will reveal that there is a striking diversity in the age of participants. At extreme ends of the scale are young beginners in the eleven to twelve age group whilst older climbers may continue with the activity once over sixty five. The most common age group is between twenty through to fifty.

Although there is no age limit that climbers can begin at the majority of climbers presently active in North Wales started their climbing careers in their mid-teens and whilst some of these remain relatively young (early twenties) at least fourteen are over forty and six are over sixty. For climbers who become 'hooked' it is usually the case that their climbing careers commonly last twenty years or more whilst lifelong association with the sport is also not unusual.

Typically the action of climbing is carried out by individuals who are otherwise allied to groupings of climbers with whom they interact and share a common interest and experience over time.

Because this experience is often intense climbers begin to build up a host of memories centred around significant incidents and climbs in their climbing careers. Some of these events become well known throughout the climbing world, particularly in the case where an important first ascent is made, and is reported through a network of communications including word of mouth and climbing magazines.

However, the great majority of climbing action does not involve groundbreaking ascents but may nevertheless prove significant enough to become part of the subjective memory important to certain climbers at a certain time.

For example the first time a climber leads a climb graded E1 it constitutes an important breakthrough in the individual climber's career since it signifies he/she has entered into the extreme climbing category yet it is rarely discussed outside the particular grouping of climbers it is important to. On the other hand when a top level first ascent is done the climb is not only

greatly significant for the actors involved in doing it but will also become a topic for discussion throughout the climbing world by being reported in climbing magazines. The following extract illustrates this point :

“Probably the most impressive ascent of the year goes to John Arran who in mid November finally succeeded in headpointing his long-standing project up the wall left of ‘Slab and Crack’, at Curbar. The route, ‘Doctor Dolittle’, starts as for Johnny Dawes’s E7, ‘Slab and Crack’, then makes a bold traverse left to join the crux of ‘One Step Beyond’(E6), it then takes a direct line up the wall past a slight overlap. The final 7a (British) sequence involves desperate undercutting on a particularly poor set of holds. The route is ‘protected’ by two hand placed pegs and No.1 micro-wire, a fall down a good portion of the route left just one hand placed peg, over 10 metres off the deck holding his weight. John has refused to offer an ‘E’ grade but it looks like it might be the second E10 in the Peak.”

Climber magazine (2002) January issue p13

Arran is at a stage in his climbing career where he is very close to topping the climbers’ hierarchy and one reason he does not grade the climb is because he wishes to wait until other top climbers have experienced the climb. In this sense the grade can be debated before it is finally decided upon and it also means that competitors can not downgrade the climb after repeating it. By throwing down the gauntlet in this way it assumes that the final grade will remain authentic and this practice is increasingly common at the top levels in both adventure climbing, sports climbing and bouldering.

Climbers who operate at the top levels for any length of time in some cases gain a climbing nickname and are afforded greater authenticity than beginners and mid grade climbers who may or may not eventually attain such a position themselves.

In this sense who a climb is done with can lend authenticity to the ascent since climbs done with exemplars of the climbing world give the climb and the climbing team immediate credence. Some climbing ‘names’ in Wales have been : ‘Kid Crew’, ‘The Captain’, ‘Dirty Dereck’, ‘Punk Steve’, ‘Johnny the Fox’, ‘Mel the mole’, ‘The tick’, ‘the crane fly’, ‘Duggy the Flash’, ‘Big G’, ‘Steve the Seige’, ‘Caligula’, ‘Nodder’ and ‘Will Kecks’.

Once the climber reaches the peak performance in his/her climbing career he/she may in certain cases leave the climbing world though it is more likely that their climbing careers will continue by recourse to climbing routes at a lower standard which are well within their

capabilities.

In this way they may be recognised as authentic members of the climbing world who whilst no longer competing at the top level in climbing are still afforded the prestige associated with previous actions and who in any case still participate in the sport on a regular basis. Joe 'the Baron' Brown is an example of this and remains a climber at the age of seventy.

Further to this climbers do not necessarily reach the peak of their climbing careers in youth since the recent grouping of top climbers in Wales consisted of fourteen climbers with ages ranging from twenty to forty seven, though typically climbers 'peak' somewhere between age nineteen to thirty five

Because there are literally thousands of routes at each climbing grade the time commitment required to climb them all is an impossible task. Thus, in the career of a climber the usual way he/she proceeds is by advancing through the grades by doing a number of climbs in the same category before entering the next. This is called 'consolidating the grade' and means that the climber does not do all the routes in one category before moving on to the next, but has done a sample of them. Whilst some climbers are keen to move into the top levels by quickly moving through the grading system for most climbers this is not possible since once the extreme grade is reached a great deal of motivation, commitment and time is needed and also in the case of adventure climbing the risk factor becomes higher.

Yet climbers who find that routes of the E2 or E3 grade are sufficiently taxing for them do not simply give up climbing but rather continue to do routes in that category whilst remaining interested in what is going on at the higher levels. Often climbers who have climbed harder routes at a certain time in their climbing careers drop the grades when they become less immersed in the sport because of other commitments and an example may be seen from looking at Tom's climbing career.

Tom's Climbing Career

I met Tom in 1989 after he had been a climber for three years. He was then twenty one and living in Llanberis, Snowdonia. A keen climber he also completed a teacher training course whilst resident in Wales where all of his free time was spent climbing.

By 1994 Tom had moved to Sheffield to take up a teaching post though continued to visit and climb in Wales on a regular weekend basis. By 1996 Tom had started a family and

visited Wales more sporadically. He now climbs in Wales less often though continues climbing whenever possible on the Gritstone edges around Sheffield. When resident in Wales Tom broke into the hard climbing category by doing several E5 routes which demarked the pinnacle of his climbing career. He now usually climbs routes in the E1 to E3 category. The commitments of family and work time have limited his climbing time and in this sense Tim is typical of a great majority of climbers who balance a professional career, family life and climbing activity.

Clearly Tom made the choice not to immerse himself fully in a climbing lifestyle though he still pursues a climbing career.

In some instances climbers give up their climbing activity because of understandable social pressures imposed by non climbing partners and/or family responsibilities.

Reaching the top level places more demands on climbers in terms of time and commitment although in the first instance the individual must develop a basic aptitude and feel for climbing which gives him/her some idea of their potential.

Nevertheless it is more likely that top level climbers are prepared to put in more time climbing and build their lifestyles around the sport so that they are more committed, motivated and driven by it.

Supporting the action of climbing is an entire social scene which apart from climbers 'hangouts' and parties provides climbers with opportunities to network and interact. In this sense there are a number of events throughout each year that climbers may attend. The most well known is the Kendal film festival at which climbers gather each year ostensibly to watch a host of specialist films made by climbers covering all types of climbing.

Climbers' groupings from all over the country are well represented and the event provides an ideal setting for a ritual gathering of otherwise local climbing 'clans'.

There are 300 regional climbing clubs in the UK, Bonnington (1997) and many of these organise social events where well known climbers are employed to give climbing lectures and slide shows. Further to this many other climbers groupings who are not affiliated to any clubs but are in contact, also organise their own particular social events and climbing meets.

These social events provide a further extension for climbing forums and unlike organised competitions climbing indoors (Chapter 5) usually take place during the evening rather than infringing on potential daytime climbing time.

For those climbers who wish to become more fully immersed in the climbing world these functions provide an extension to climbing life and indeed become the focus for their entire social life as part of a climbing lifestyle which some climbers choose to live and has been a feature of the climbing world in Wales at least since the 1960s.

The groupings of climbers that moved to the Llanberis area in the 1960s raised serious questions about the identity of climbers who to outsiders from the climbing world may have appeared to have 'dropped out' to use an adage from that time, but as Joe Brown points out :-

“To those people who are bitten by the climbing bug, it becomes more than a pastime. It is a way of life. One tends to become disorientated at work and to live only for the weekend's climbing. Many climbers have given up good jobs which interfered with climbing. For quite a large number of my friends it has become the custom to finish work in the Spring and tour Europe climbing until September, then get a job until the following Spring.”

Brown (1967) p18

The effort of getting to and from climbing areas requires in most cases driving from urban areas such as Liverpool, Manchester or London to either Wales, the Lake District or Scotland and whilst there are many climbers who still undertake these journeys on a regular weekend basis, ever since the 1960s there has been a relatively small grouping of climbers who have chosen to live in or around climbing areas in order to maximise time spent climbing and generally become involved in living the climbing lifestyle. Yet, unless sheltered by the luxury of a private income, the economic factors in doing this have to be considered since work cannot be abandoned altogether and especially in a contemporary setting is more difficult to access on an irregular basis.

As we have seen in Chapter 2 in extreme cases work considerations are abandoned altogether and climbers operate under social limitations, the 'slateheads' being the best example of this relatively unorthodox approach.

Clearly many climbing areas are located in rural settings with fewer work opportunities than urban areas but in a contemporary setting those climbers wishing to live in such locales have benefited greatly from the increase in climbing business some of which has been transferred into the industrial sector. Furthermore, with improved road access and better transport it is now less crucial for climbers to live in climbing areas but those who do so still

hold an advantage over their urban counterparts in that they can spend more free time climbing and this is particularly noticeable in the spring and Summer months when local climbers can go climbing during evenings after work.

Further to this some climbers who choose to live in climbing locales are not necessarily excluded from the labour market in other areas and may trade time away working for free time spent climbing. The best example of this is rope access work which in a contemporary setting has become a feature of many climber's lifestyles.

Traditionally many areas of structural maintenance and cleaning relied primarily on scaffolder's as a means of access and for some quarters of the workplace this is still necessary, mostly because of the work that is to be carried out - ground up building for example.

Scaffolding entire buildings and oil rigs etc is, however, extremely expensive and time consuming especially when used to carry out routine repairs and maintenance. Clearly sophisticated rope techniques have been developed by rock climbers and cavers over many years and since the mid-1980s the application of these techniques, particularly where large architectural structures are concerned, has expanded to become recognised by the industrial sector.

Because of these factors the roped access worker is now an integral part of the work force commonly employed in dealing with structural problems, both on and off shore.

The key points about the nature of such work from the point of view of climbers engaged in it are as follows:-

1. Short term contracts normally one to three weeks though occasionally longer.
2. Good rate of pay typically one to three hundred pounds per day.
3. Although any member of the public can be taught rope access it is clear that climbers and cavers have greater advantage in the applications of its techniques.
4. It is not necessary to ascend a career ladder and therefore operators may work for a number of companies when and as they obtain various contracts though some certification is usually necessary and may be gained by attending a one-week course.

These four points were deemed important by rope access workers who otherwise base

their lifestyle around climbing and the climbing world. The financial benefits along with projected periods between jobs without the incumbrance of a firmly imposed career structure has meant that they could afford to go climbing for extended period of time when not working.

Other common forms of employment provided by the climbing business in North Wales at the present time are outlined in the following table.

It must be noted that there are many individuals involved with the world of climbing in North West Wales who may be employed in quite diverse fields so that I do not suggest that all climbing activists in the area are employed in the workplaces described, it is rather that such workplaces most commonly attract those with climbing skills and especially in the case of the rope access business, may contain a large percentage of climbers in its workforce at any one time who are otherwise pursuing a climbing lifestyle.

Jobs and Employment Related to Climbing in North Wales

Current Number of Employees Year 2001 - 2002	Job Activity	Qualifications Needed
10 - 12	Professional Climbers	Sponsorship deals
Dependent upon demand but 35 qualified	Guiding	UIAGM Guides Certificate/ Experience
40+	Instructing = outdoor educational centres and climbing wall supervision. 3 climbing walls and at least seven centres in area	MLC) MIA)Teaching Awards MIC) SPA)
55	Climbing Retail Shops. 11 in area	None formal
250	Climbing equipment manufacturers. 3 in area	Formal engineering/design None formal
5+	Media - climbing magazines. Guidebook work: phenomenological accounts. Freelance	None formal
3/4+	Photographic. Climbing magazines. Media. Climbing books. Freelance	None formal
30+	Rope access technicians (workers usually travel away to undertake contracts)	IRATA Standards 1 - 3
Dependent upon demand	Film safety officers and film extras. Occasional climbing films in documentary form	None formal
Seasonal 25+	Café and bar staff	None formal

Once a climber decides to live a full climbing lifestyle he/she becomes absorbed by climbing and an example of this may be gleaned by considering the 'ticks' climbing career.

Paul the 'tick's Climbing Career

I met the 'tick' in 1978, he had begun climbing at the age of twenty-eight and had moved from Nottingham to live near Llanberis in North Wales because he had in his own words "become totally obsessed with climbing". He took a job in a local climbing equipment manufacturers (DMM) and spent all his free time climbing. Eventually the 'tick' became well known in the climbing world, gaining his nickname because he would 'tick' off routes at a phenomenal pace.

Although he broke into the hard climbing category the 'tick' did not become a top climber but often accompanied top climbers on many ascents in the role of second. He also became a guidebook writer, climbing photographer and slide presenter. Both on and off the crags he was immersed in the sport, becoming a well-known and passionate climbing character.

Essentially he lived a climbing lifestyle focussed on and around climbing activity. In 1995 he fell whilst solo climbing and later died in hospital from injuries sustained.

This does not suggest that all climbers who become immersed in the sport end their climbing days in this way and whilst tragedy does occur in some cases there are many climbers who never sustain injury during long climbing careers. Nevertheless, climbing deaths are a feature of the activity and must be considered by anyone engaging in the sport from novice to expert.

7. Climbing Deaths

Despite advances in safety equipment in the contemporary climbing world, deaths still remain a feature of the activity, along with serious accidents. Anyone who engages in the sport over a period of time will, at the least, become aware of this unfortunate reality.

At the present time I have known, personally, fourteen climbers (over a fifteen year period) who have been killed in climbing accidents. Five of whose funerals I have attended. There is no one reason for climbing accidents and a catalogue of individual incidents is not the purpose or focus in this instance except to emphasise that climbing in any style is inherently dangerous, though it is clearly the case that the maximum risk is encountered in adventure climbing.

The focus therefore of this work is placed on the climbing world's response to climbers

who either die of natural causes or are killed while climbing.

If the deceased has been part of the climbing world for some time he/she will typically have built up a network of friends and climbing partners. Although groups of climbers often frequent particular climbing areas, over a period of time they also travel to other climbing areas throughout the country and when possible abroad.

During this time bonds are formed through shared experience in the face of dangerous situations. The more experienced and immersed in the climbing world the climber becomes the more likely he/she is to build up a number of such relationships which are further accentuated and linked with individual status within groups of climbers and the world of climbing in general.

Bearing these points in mind climbers' funerals are seldom ill-attended affairs except in cases where the immediate family have requested a private service. Thus the funerals or cremations of many climbers are almost always finalised in the form of a Wake which normally starts in a designated climbers' bar but continues at a private premises well into the day after the funeral. Nevertheless, the social gathering of climbers at the service initially unites climbers in a show of collective grief and respect for loss of a climbing friend so that :-

“Such persons have no interest in who is what, they are bounded together within a magic circle, and they know it. They know that any man who has been in a tight place either on the leading end or the bluntest of blunt ends of a climbing rope requires no other reference either in this world or in the world to come.”

Fitzgerald, K. (1973) p9

A brief description from the service for the 'tick' emphasises this :-

“Inside, the different clans either sat or stood together because the church was so full. The different faces reflecting the history of British climbing over the past forty-five years. Original members of the Rock and Ice side by side with my generation and those newcomers who had not yet proved themselves but were already making a name.

Joe Brown sat impassive in dark shades, how many times had he been through this, marking the passing of lost comrades? Someone was crying and I noticed it was my old climbing partner Jim Moran. He had given up climbing some years ago to start a family and get a 'proper job' rumour had said. I knew he loved Paul as a friend but even those who didn't were here because they valued

what he represented and symbolised - the essence of climbing life. Long days out, epic climbs, the endless ethical debates in the pub, the seriousness and the commitment.

Jim (Perrin) read the eulogy and afterwards he and I went to do the climb that Paul had fallen from, there were already bouquets of flowers at its base. We did it to pay our respects before going to the wake.”

Post-funeral service events in the climbing world are usually organised by climbing friends rather than close family who most often choose not to attend. In effect they are ritual gatherings which serve to symbolise collective grief, whilst at the same time celebrate a climber’s passing. Far from being solemn occasions they are frequently lively and informal, allowing climbers to indulge in heavy drinking, arrange climbing meets, discuss climbing matters and generally let themselves go in a ritual remembrance and celebration of a climbing life.

Wakes are also social gatherings at which some climbers re-assess their climbing careers. Particularly those who are either close to or involved in the accident itself may feel responsible for the death of the deceased alert other climbers to their decision either to give up climbing altogether or to continue in the sport.

Whatever the social position or role taken up by the deceased in wider society it is his/her identity in the climbing world that is celebrated at climbing wakes and occasionally it is also revealed that some of the climber’s last wishes require a further and much smaller ritual to be carried out at a later date. This ritual involves the scattering of a climber’s ashes usually at a favourite crag site or at the top of a favourite climb.

The entire process serves as a reminder, particularly to younger climbers, as to the ultimate, though by no means inevitable, price that the sport may exact. At these times older participants, who have experienced the loss of many climbing friends seem to exhibit a soulful knowing regret coupled with acceptance after the fact.

At the Wake of Dave Pearce for example (killed after an accident on the Gogarth Sea Cliffs in 1998), Sue, a close friend who had given up climbing many years ago but still retained links with climbers and the climbing world told me :

“That’s twenty-nine now, I hope Dave’s the last but I’ve come to expect it from time to time.”

Death from a climbing accident is the ultimate way by which climbers leave the climbing world but many give up climbing because of the psychological trauma incurred by the death of climbing friends.

Because climbing is time-consuming and an entire social world of its own, outsiders to the climbing world particularly family members of those killed in climbing accidents may not understand the fascination and the need to pursue the activity exhibited by climbers themselves. They have never been 'bitten by the climbing bug'. In the case of a deceased climber hailing from a climbing family there may be more understanding of the activity but nevertheless the shock and pain of such loss remains the antithesis to the exhilaration of the sport.

CHAPTER 4

STRUCTURE AND ACTION IN AUTHENTIC ARENAS AND COMPETITION

CHAPTER 4 : STRUCTURE AND ACTION IN AUTHENTIC ARENAS AND COMPETITION

As each grouping of climbers has emerged in the climbing world it has tended to focus the activity on new arenas and resources when and if they were available on natural cliffs.

Initially then an exploratory period which concentrated on gully then buttress climbs in the arenas of Lliwedd and Tryfan's east face was followed by exploration of more open slab climbs at Ogwen and the Glyders together with tentative probes into the possibilities of Clogwyn dur Arddu.

As steeper and harder climbs were sought the arenas of the Llanberis Pass together with a fuller campaign on Clogwyn dur Arddu meant that as the number of climbers increased and entire cliffs became mapped by climbing guidebooks those entering the sport would be less likely to discover completely new arenas and that if they did they might be faced with increased competition in those arenas for the resources of new climbs.

This point may be illustrated by an account referring to the first ascent of the route 'Rat Race' on the Gogarth sea cliffs in 1966.

"Howells got across the initial traverse which had been attempted by Geoff Birtles and Chris Jackson. On the next attempt he got farther but was stopped by a hard section. In contrast to Brown and Crew he decided not to use a peg and retreated. Shortly afterwards Brown climbed the whole pitch using a peg for aid but on both occasions the seconds could not or would not follow - a scenario Brown was ruefully used to by then. The attack was renewed by Howells and on the main pitch he was assisted by the slings left by Brown. He then climbed the overhanging chimney above which completed the main problem. Crew and Brown added the upper pitches whereupon Crew credited the route to himself and Brown with a footnote about Howells. Now it is felt that Howells deserves the main credit for the route.

Later in the year Crew wrote an interim guide with thirty-nine routes which had nearly all been done in a space of four months."

Jones, T.(1986) p173

Since climbing developed as a sport in Wales certain places have been the focus of climbing activity and although revisited by subsequent generations of climbers over a period of time the initial exploration of these arenas can be charted in conjunction with particular

groupings of climbers and style of climbing to show that the majority of crags in Wales are adventure climbing preserves.

Key Grouping	Dates	Arenas
Middle Class groupings, climbers and Rucksack Club; Adventure climbers	1883 1910 1920s 1930s	Lliwedd, Tryfan, Ogwen, Cwm Idwal, Cwm Silyn Glyders and Carneddau Clogwyn d'ur Arddu
Adventure Climbers Rock & Ice Working Class groupings	1940s 1950s	Llanberis Pass Clogwyn d'ur Arddu
Adventure Climbers Red Brick groupings	1960s 1970s	Tremadoc Anglesey Sea Cliffs
'Slateheads' 'Sports Climbers'	1980s	Slate Quarries Coastal Limestone
Adventure Climbers	1990s	Llyn Peninsula Sea Cliffs
Boulderers	1990s	In all arenas near above

Since the introduction and acceptance of a climbers' grading system which allowed all climbs to be graded in an ascending order of difficulty (Chapter 1), it has been possible for climbers to compete throughout their climbing careers at all levels of difficulty and in some cases eventually extend the grading system by making the first ascent of a climb or climbs that are considered worthy of a new order or grade since they are more difficult than previous top standard routes (resources).

In this sense a climber entering the sport, once he/she has begun leading will typically attempt to climb the prestige ladder of the climbers' grading system by starting off with easier grade climbs (resources), before attempting to 'push their grades' (climbers' expression for anyone who is attempting to climb at a higher level of difficulty than his/her normal standard).

Typically climbers will consolidate the grade they climb at by doing not one but any number of routes at a certain grade before feeling confident enough to try climbs of the next grade up.

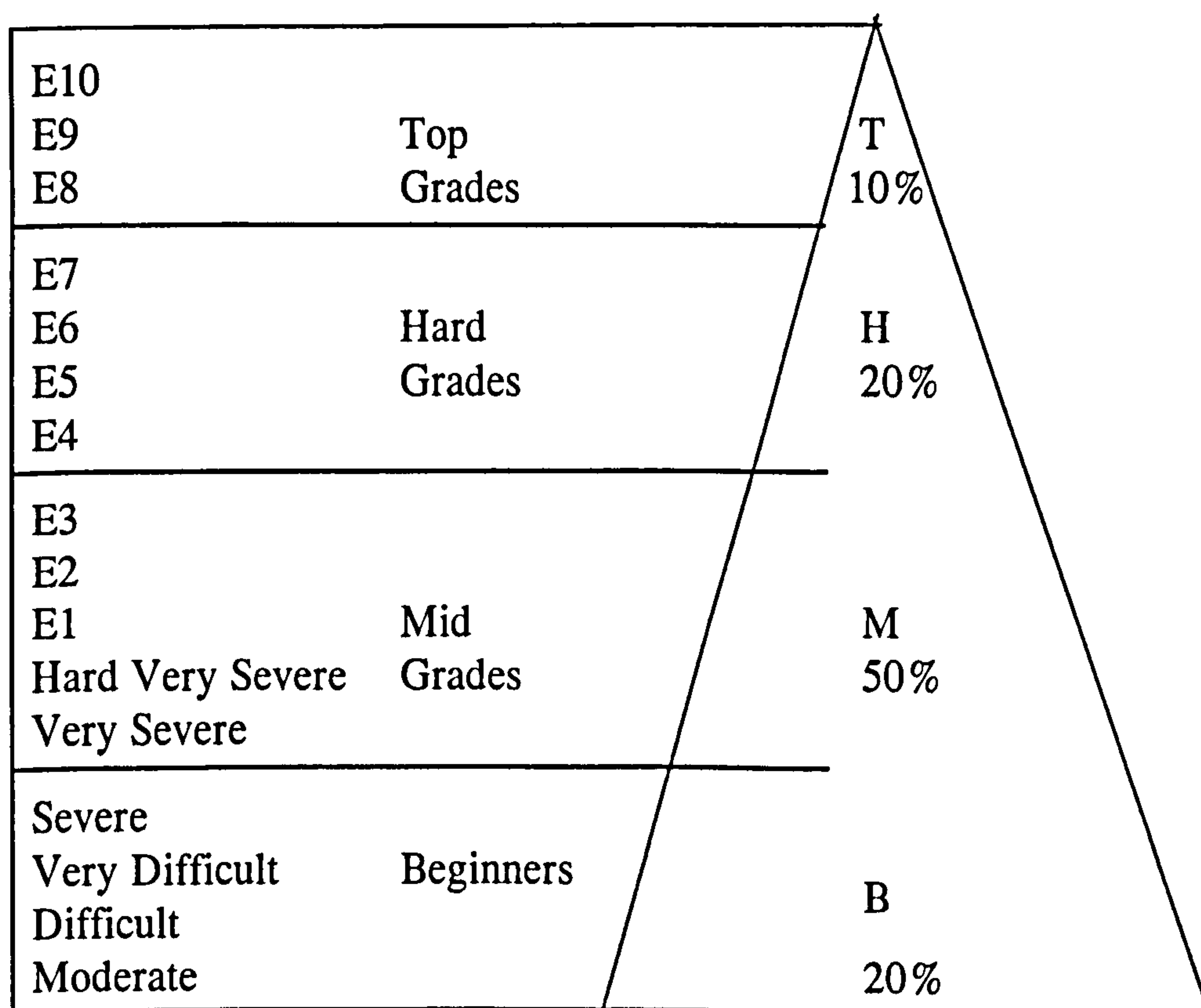
At any one time there are typically a number of climbers operating at all levels of the

grading system but the higher the standard of climbs the fewer the numbers of climbers operating.

The significance of this is that as climbers compete against the grading system, often spurred on by the performances of their contemporaries operating at the same level, there is a common sticking point around mid-grade climbs before the higher level of hard grade climbs can be reached and whilst most regular weekend climbers with plenty of experience operate in the mid grades, harder grades and top grades are typically the preserve of climbers likely to be living a climbing lifestyle where more time and commitment can be reserved for refining techniques and gaining knowledge about various higher grade routes.

A simple model of the climbers' hierarchy may be seen as a pyramid which can be used to illustrate this point and is based on observation of the number of routes being done by climbers at various crags during the period from January 2001 to December 2001, whilst taking account of the grading system.

Pyramid Model of the Climbers' Hierarchy



Thus by far the largest proportion of regular climbers operates in the mid and beginners' grade range where they can compete against their contemporaries in the action of

climbing various recorded and graded routes (resources). Fewer climbers operate at the higher levels of the sport whilst it is topped by an even smaller minority who compete amongst themselves for mastery over one another as they attempt to extend the limits of the climbing grading system by doing new and harder climbs.

The nature of this competition does not adhere to written rules and may be carried out between climbers over a period of time so that the competitors may not turn up to attempt a certain route at the same time. In this way the nature of the competition is foreign to that of most sports where competitors take turns at a certain task one after the other, the high jump and long jump in athletics for instance.

Because of this lack in organisational framework it may occur to the casual observer that a climber in action is merely ascending a certain route up a given rock face for unknown reasons since it is unlikely that there will be other participants waiting at the bottom of the climb wearing numbers and no obvious judge at the start and finish of the climb with either a stop watch or clipboard.

Initially the nature of this unusual form of competition lies in the knowledge of unwritten rules codes, ethics and styles of ascent together with a knowledge either of the standard of the routes or in the case of a new or proposed route a knowledge of its whereabouts in a certain area and on a certain crag.

Armed with this information and usually an awareness of likely competitors who are also interested in the route the competition takes place between different contenders over a period of time so that :-

“When I was a V.S. (Very Severe) leader my inspiration was to do Cenotaph Corner, which is like you know your passport to the extreme grade. I’d read about it and seen it when doing Sabre Cut (a very severe climb on the same cliff). It looked brilliant but I also wanted to do it before Steve because we were sort of leading around the same grade in a sort of friendly but competitive way. I mean if he knew I’d done a certain V.S. then he had to do it as soon as possible after me and vice versa. It kind of kept up momentum as we got better and did harder routes.”

(Rich C. in conversation with the author)

At the top level of the sport and particularly where the resource of a new route is

concerned this competition may be intense and often bitterly disputed. Yet the nature of it remains more or less the same (Appendix 4).

The action of the competition simply involves climbing teams going to the crag and climbing the proposed line and if this is done first time with no pre- inspection of the route or recourse to technological aids, resting on the rope or down climbing of any type the leader is said to have completed an 'on site flash' which means he/she has done the route in the best possible style so that it is considered in the climbing world as a genuine and authentic ascent.

For those climbers who champion the particular grouping of climbers who adhere to traditional style by operating at its top level the competition will often be engaged in for the ascent of a new route with an extremely high level of technical difficulty. Whoever makes the first ascent can claim, name and grade the climb and will inevitably reap the benefits of social kudos, which as well as the climb itself are the resources at stake in this particular instance, together with topping the climbers' hierarchy.

Again competing teams may or may not be present to have their go at the route under attack, but in any case the competitors will be relatively few and keep up a constant tacit surveillance between what each other are doing over a period of time.

Because new routes particularly at the top level of difficulty are a valuable resource first ascensionists of such prizes must be seen to act in the best possible style since if they do not it is more than likely that their ascent will be castigated and debased rather than praised and elevated in the climbing world by social sanctioning.

An example of this may be given by looking at a particular cliff, climb and ascent at the highest levels of the sport.

Firstly the specific cliff is Clogwyn Du'r Arddu known in the climbing world as 'Cloggy' and the 'Black Cliff'. It is particularly significant to the climbing world and although positioned on the flanks of Snowdon in North West Wales is revered throughout Britain as "the shrine of British Climbing".

The cliff is normally only in conditions for climbing during the summer months since it faces north and takes some time to dry out after bad weather. It has four prominent features the East Buttress rising to around 300 feet in height topped by 'The Pinnacle' another 150 foot and is flanked on the left by the Far East Buttress about 300 feet in height and on the right by the massive 600 foot high West Buttress. It is the only cliff in Britain to have a book 'The

Black Cliff crew, Soper and Wilson (1974) as opposed to a guide book written about it and to climb their from a climbers point of view is akin to playing at Wimbledon might be for a tennis enthusiast. There are no beginner's climbs and the cliff takes about an hour and a half to walk to so that some climbers refer to this as 'the Pilgrimage'.

Further evidence of its sacrosanct position may be gleaned from its guide book introduction so that:

"The temple. The Mecca. The shrine of British Climbing. The cliff is revealed in its full splendour as you crest the rise beyond the green tin shack that is Halfway House. The impact is absolute, there is no compromise, the sight is stunning; sweeping lines and a sombre appearance plus a high angle conspire to produce an impressive atmosphere, and often make the leads more different than might be expected. One's eye is immediately drawn to the centre of the East Buttress and a magnificent sheet of the roughest flinty rhyolite - Great Wall, which the cliffs devotees regard as 'almost hallowed ground' ...The Altar!"

Williams (1989) p6

It is on 'The Altar' that the specific climb known as 'The Indian Face' finds a tenuous way up the cliff and it is the debates surrounding its ascent that I wish to focus on here.

In 1980 John Redhead began a long campaign to climb the line that many climbers knew about but few were prepared to even attempt. At this point the route was known in the climbing world as the 'Masters Wall.' since anybody able to climb it in good style would have to be a true master, furthermore because the rock was smooth and crackles it became obvious that the route had very little to offer the climber not only in the form of hand and foot holds but also in the way of possible protection. It would therefore be a climb of great technical difficulty where the potential for hitting the ground in the event of a fall was very real. It was in essence the acme of 'trad' or adventure climbing but despite Redhead's dominance at this type of climbing he could not prevail.

There then followed a highly competitive set of events, which eventually led to a furore in the climbing world, as the drama unfolded. Following a final attempt on the route in the summer of 1982 Redhead, having left his protection devices in place on the cliff (such that they were), so as to make an attempt the next day returned to the base of the route to find that his 'gear' (climbers parlance for protection devices and general climbing equipment) had been

removed and stolen.

Redhead then abseiled down from the top of the cliff to his high point on the wall and placed a bolt, something which was *neither in character for his own high standards nor responsible to adventure climbing ethics.*

The bolt was removed the next summer by Jerry Moffet who then led the climb in traditional style, and graded it E7/6B. Furthermore Moffet had used a new specialist type of rock shoe with better frictional properties than those commonly in use at that time, though it is debatable amongst climbers whether these shoes performed any better than ordinary rock shoes on holds that had been 'resined' which means that a special type of resin has been applied to features on any given climb in order to increase frictional properties for the climber. This tactic had been employed by Redhead but is generally regarded as cheating by climbers at any level.

To put the competition on an even par the new rock shoes became generally available only a few weeks after Moffet's ascent and Redhead then repeated the climb wearing his own pair of 'stickys' as the shoes came to be known in the climbing world.

However the competition was far from over as Redhead then claimed that the route Moffet had climbed was a 'cop out' and after repeating it suggested that the real line of Masters Wall had still 'not been done'.

The reason for this allegation was that the line taken by Moffet above the bolt veered off slightly towards the right side of the wall to eventually reach another route before finishing at the top of the cliff.

Redhead further stated that his proposed route would continue straight up and not merely finish up another climb but maintain its independent status throughout.

Moffet in turn disputed these claims as 'nonsense' and because he had belayed Redhead on one of his attempts had gained a clear picture of the proposed route which he further claimed that Redhead had prepared by pre-chalking handholds and 'resining' crucial footholds.

Even considering the new rock shoes Moffet claimed that the reason he had succeeded on the route and Redhead had not was a simple one, which centred on the fact that he was climbing better than Redhead and therefore able to overcome the difficulties with greater skill.

Almost everyone in the climbing world became aware of these issues as the saga resonated and eventually rebounded back to 'Cloggy' in the summer of 1986 when a gritstone

trained climber upstaged all other contenders by actually climbing the route imagined by Redhead. The climber, John Dawes, had applied modified tactics to the route in that he had top roped the line a few times and also pre placed a couple of small protection devices before leading the route. He was extremely concerned that his ascent was flawed by this strategy and graded the climb E9 (the first in the country) as a projection of what it would require for future climbers to do his route 'on site'.

Dawes had acted responsibly and completed his route acceptably both in terms of grading it in the manner he did and also acting individually but without the use of bolts for protection. Redhead immediately criticised Dawes for reducing the ascent to the level of a 'sports' climb even though the Dawes route kept to the true line and in one hundred and seventy feet of climbing relied on three or four marginal protection devices which were of uncertain value and in any case were of no practical use for the top section of the climb.

It was clear to other climbers who watched Dawes make the ascent that if he had fallen from some of the most difficult moves near the top of the route that he would have suffered at the least serious injury. The fact that he then suggested the E9 grade for an onsite ascent, which he acknowledged, would be a more authentic ascent than his own rather outweighed Redhead's arguments.

This phase of the competition then was drawn to a close in the summer of 1986 and as it was left to Dawes to ultimately name the route he did so by reference to three things. The first that the masters wall was too egocentric a theme to be continued, the second that he did the climb in an 'Indian Summer' (October 1986) and thirdly and less well known the fact that a local Llanberis lad had told him that from halfway house on the Snowdon track the part of the East Buttress climbed by Masters Wall resembles the face of an Indian War chief with full head bonnet.

Bearing these points in mind the route was called the Indian Face and is said to be two grades harder and a great deal more serious than Masters Wall. By the year 2000 Indian Face had received only four ascents in the same style but Masters Wall had been climbed completely on sight in pure traditional style by 1995.

In competitions between contenders for the first ascents of Masters Wall and Indian Face there is no doubt that the three main competitors were top level climbers all of whom were vying for position at the top of the climbers' hierarchy yet as climbers compete in arenas

for resources their actions must take into account style and authenticity of ascent as well as legitimate boundaries.

Redhead's actions included the placing of a bolt on a natural cliff that was clearly important to the climbing world, and whilst he defended such action by stating that the route up to the bolt should be thought of as a climb in its own right (which he named the Tormented Ejaculation) and also as a protection point for a continuation route to be done some time in the future. This was not considered acceptable either to his competitors or the general climbing populace.

The reason for this when viewed from a wider perspective was that he had failed to stretch climbing boundary in a way that was considered legitimate or authentic enough to escape social sanctioning by both competitors and pundits in the climbing world who clearly felt that the placing of bolts on an adventure climbing cliff in the natural arena did not extend existing ethical boundaries but seriously transgressed them.

The significance then of the Masters Wall/Indian Face saga is that it serves to illustrate the highly competitive nature surrounding ascents of highly coveted new routes in a contemporary setting as champions of particular climbing styles compete in arenas for resources. Indian Face climb still remains open for an 'on sight' ascent.

The fact that its original ascent by Dawes employed minimal but nevertheless pre-placed though removable protection devices illustrates that top performers may on certain occasions responsibly push accepted boundaries of legitimate ethical parameters which are then extended to encompass such actions whilst still acknowledging that an ascent 'on sight' in authentic style remains a future possibility.

The arguments surrounding the ascent of Masters Wall/Indian Face are also typical in the climbing world as competing climbers thrash out the nuances of any given ascent which they covet though it is important to note that only at the highest levels that legitimate boundaries are permitted to be pushed whilst authenticity remains a concern at any level.

The subsequent guidebook description to 'Indian Face' was written in a style more normally associated with the description of climbs from an earlier era, (Thomson (1909)). In this way the history of climbing in Wales is reflected and cross-referenced allowing an extreme modern climb to receive a traditional write-up which is nowadays atypical. The original description took up a few lines in Pete's Caf's new routes book. However, with artistic licence

bestowed on the guidebook writer the description reads :-

“The Indian Face 150 feet (4.10.86)
(a.k.a. The Headmaster’s Wall)

Standard: E9; Exceptionally Severe (Excessively so). Rubbers. It has been said that up the face to the right of A Midsummer Night’s Dream, a pitch of such appalling difficulty as to be almost beyond the realms of human comprehension has been ascended without mechanical machinations or other insidious practices normally associated with a route of this calibre. The crux is as fearsome a piece of climbing as has yet been seen in Snowdonia; harder than the Horned Crag, or perhaps even the Gambit Climb of Crib y Ddysgl (though this may be to overstate).

A preliminary inspection on the rope is certainly advisable. Where the crux (of an obduracy to satisfy even the most advanced of ambitions) to be even so little as two feet longer, it is a matter much to be doubted whether even so much as a single man possessed of the necessary capacities of temperament, physique and moral character could be found in these islands capable of fulfilling the requirements of such an exacting ascent. Skilly and confidence - and both in abundance - are required, though a greater premium may be placed upon fingers possessed of some of the characteristics of tempered steel.

The climbing is on holds unremittingly exiguous in nature - their paucity proving such a drain upon mental faculties as to daunt the heart of a would-be leader, even though he may be the stoutest of fellows.

Protection is at best illusory; the whole sweep of rock affords not so much as a single nubbin on which the thinnest line may be secured, nor a single crack in which the most vestigial of chockstones could hope to gain lodgment. Should the leader fail to negotiate the crux, or be seized by a palsy high on the pitch, disaster must be imminent - nay, inevitable, the ground below which would receive his fall being by no means accommodating to such a contingency. The second’s faculties should comprehend any eventuality, no matter how dire, which may befall, though medical qualification is supernumary, spiritual rather than temporal care being of more direct assistance in the aftermath of an abrupt descent. Scatological preoccupations are most likely amongst the preliminaries to an ascent, though it is questionable whether abstinence from carnal pleasure the preceding week would prove advantageous to a man of such moral fibre as would dare to contemplate so audacious an undertaking.

The party should most conveniently number two, the competence of the leader should, as has previously been noted, be of an exceptionally high order, whilst that of the second should not lag far behind.

Rope : A full 150 feet of Alpine line will be found necessary for each member of the party, though more would add to the comfort, both mental and spiritual.

Start : A few feet to the right of the start of a route, that which is called A Midsummer Night’s Dream, below a shallow scoop in the rock where the angle of the face has relented somewhat. A small rock scar painting, 100 feet up,

where a flake has become detached gives the aspiring leader something to aim for ...

1. 150 feet. 6c. By pulling on the merest of excrescences, it is sometimes possible for a man to effect a placement on the face. Climbing of a surprisingly steep nature, though on more accommodating holds now, soon leads to an overlap in the rock at about the 25-foot mark. A leader with strong legs will be able to rest by bridging out upon two small hanging flakes of rock. A traverse left which is both delicate yet strenuous has to be undertaken, culminating in a ferocious pull, using almost imaginary rugosities, up into a shallow groove upon the main sweep of the wall. Above, a further delicate 20 feet gain a tenuous lodgment. Precarious moves across leftwards, then similar moves back up, lead into the left-hand of two faint grooves. In dry conditions, a man may ascend this grove, relying upon that Blessed Union of faith and friction twixt rock and rubber, passing a small rust-coloured hole on the right (the scene of a despicable steeple-jacking attempt in days gone by) before exiting left to the ephemeral security of a long line of flakes. By utilising steep smears and sidepulls with great difficulty, a fearless leader may boldly start to follow this perilous line which leads out rightwards to a resting hold, where such a man may tarry a while and contemplate. A mantelshelf on the aforementioned hold brings the crux to hand; now, a passage so tenuous in nature that it defies all attempts at description, it is said, may be made to pass a small rock scar; this piece of the wall is so blank that it offers not so much as even a horizontal ripple on which sanctuary may be sought in the unlikely event of a leader losing his resolve. Above, the remaining section of the face is hard and honest, frank and open with no hidden malice, mostly of an order of difficulty which is slightly less than that experienced upon the fearsome section which has just been negotiated. However, the leader must remain on guard, be wary and keep on his mettle - it would be folly to relax - as the climbing is still of an exacting nature so as to tax the ingenuity of any experienced rock gymnast. Near the top, at a junction with Master's Wall the standard of the ascent becomes somewhat easier, say, at an order of difficulty comparable with that to be found on The Flake Finish to Central Climb, on the Fach. Soon, good holds are forthcoming, and a short scramble gains a large grassy terrace with a sturdy block around which a belay may be taken. After attaching himself to this block (by means of a full length sling, which of a preference should not be less than No. 4 hawser), the successful leader, even though he be of a modest disposition, may relax, and justifiably award himself a 'pat on the back'.

Williams, P. (1989) pp59-60

The competition for first ascents in the cases of Masters Wall followed by Indian Face show the nature and drama associated with highly coveted new routes. The small number of competitors involved reflects the relatively small numbers of climbers operating at any one time at the highest levels in the sport which in any case fluctuates over time.

Added to this is the consideration that not all top level climbers may wish to focus their attention on the same route at the same time as they may be engaged in other time-consuming projects in a different locale which they are subjectively more motivated to complete.

In Chapter 1 I mentioned that an early distinction was made between the 'Lakes School' and the 'Welsh School' based on the notion that different groupings of climbers championed climbing in one place over the other. In both locales they climbed in the same style and when visiting climbers more familiar with climbing in the Lake District came to Wales they met and debated the sport with Welsh activists whilst also doing a number of Welsh climbs.

The situation was reversed when climbers more associated with climbing in Wales visited the Lake District, although each grouping claimed that climbs in their favourite areas were better than those in the area they visited less frequently.

It is now appropriate to analyse this situation in more depth since by doing so a further understanding of how climbers compete in arenas for resources that are sometimes beyond the realm of their usual locales may be shown.

Climbers operating in the mid grades whilst visiting an area less well known to them will attempt to climb a number of well-known routes. When they succeed on these climbs they may claim that the grading system in one area is tougher than another by suggesting for example that a climb graded E1 in the Lake District would only be HVS in Wales and vice versa. Furthermore, they may also question the quality of each climb and climbing arena by suggesting for example that climbing on Clogwyn d'ur Arddu in Wales had greater atmosphere and position than Scaffel Crag in the Lake District.

At the highest levels climbers from one 'school' may claim that their hardest climbs are better and more difficult than those of the other at a certain point in time, prompting climbing action by visiting climbers keen to dispute these claims. Again these disputes, claim and counter-claim may be punctuated by a number of years between significant climbing action and in this way, to use an analogy with cricket, the 'ashes' passed back and forth between one 'school' or another.

Early examples of this include the route Central Buttress on Scaffel in 1914 which elevated the status and standard of climbing in the Lake District above that to be found in Wales. The first ascensionist, Siegfried Hereford and his team were leading Lakeland climbers of the day and by the ascent of this significant route they gained ground over their Welsh

counterparts since the climb was considered harder and better than anything yet climbed in either area although some aid was used on the ascent in the form of a rope threaded round a chockstone which the climbers used for direct aid. Subsequent ascents failed to eliminate this 'aid' until in 1931 Welsh expert Menlove Edwards restored Welsh climbing honours by leading the climb completely free, Wilson (1981).

In 1952 when Joe Brown made the first ascent of Cenotaph Corner it was not only a significant climb in Wales but also meant the groupings of climbers allied generally to Wales could claim they now had the hardest climb within their territory.

Yet to establish concrete superiority and endorse these claims it is necessary for climbers from one grouping not only to repeat a significant climb but if possible 'steal' a major new route in the other's arena.

This is called 'cross border raiding' and in the case where it is known that climbers in one locale are competing over a new route which is considered what climbers refer to, in something of a contradiction in terms, as 'the latest last great problem', competition from outside may attempt to upstage local efforts by capturing the coveted first ascent.

For example, in June 1962 local Lakeland activists arrived early below the base of Esk Buttress ostensibly to make or attempt the first ascent of its central pillar. They were surprised however to see two climbers already at work on the route making the first ascent.

Later they discovered that the climbing team that had beaten them to their prize consisted of, amongst others, Pete 'kid' Crew a leading figure in Welsh climbing at that time, Cleare (1966); Wilson (1971).

The Lakeland team compensated by climbing another new route on the same day named 'Black Sunday' since it was a black day for Lakeland climbers.

Later again in 1974 when Yorkshire-based climber Pete Livesey created his two significant climbs 'Right Wall' in Wales and 'Footless Crow' in the Lake District both of which introduced a new level of difficulty to their respective arenas he essentially raided both arenas leaving both groupings of local experts smarting.

During this time Livesey was associated with a grouping of climbers known as the 'Cream Team' and this naming of particular groupings is not uncommon so that the climbing world at any one time contains along with climbers who are individually nicknamed (Chapter 3) groupings of climbers who are either known by their Club names or ascribed nicknames and

all of whom represent significant climbing development at a certain time.

Well-known examples in the climbing world that have often comprised main competitors are :- the 'Bradford Lads', the 'Rock and Ice', the 'Black and Tans', the 'Alpha', the 'WAC', the 'Cream Team', the 'Sheffield Team'.

In more recent times this rivalry has become roughly equal so that neither areas can claim to be ahead in terms of standards achieved though claims are still made about the merits and quality of climbing in one place or another.

Intense competition at the highest levels has become increasingly more specialist in each arena but in any case still takes place in the manner of the Masters Wall, Indian Face episode where top climbers either extend or transgress existing ethical boundaries as they attempt to increase the grading system by stepping into new orders of difficulty in various natural arenas.

Sports Climbing and Bouldering in Natural Arenas

In 'sports' climbing the action still take place in a limited number of natural arenas though the type and style of climbing in such arenas differs from adventure climbing in that equipment and protection devices are already bolted into place before the climber begins his/her ascent of any sports climbing route.

Any attempts by sports climbers to invade traditional adventure climbing arenas have been met with immediate social sanctioning and physical removal of any fixed protection that had been placed. Examples of this includes Nick Dixon's (known in the climbing world as the 'Chief Inspector') removal of bolts from the North Stack wall at Gogarth in 1986 together with Crispin Waddy's action to remove a bolt from the Cilan Head sea cliffs in 1992. In both instances adventure climbers removed the in situ protection and re-climbed the routes in adventure climbing style. Thus sports climbing or any use of bolts is generally not permitted on cliffs that are boulderied and protected by adventure climbing.

The sports climber then is confined to his/her own arenas where the placing of fixed bolt protection is permitted and because sports climbers when creating a new route firstly spend time preparing it the person who initially carries out this work is usually then left to make the first ascent. If however after preparation and practice the particular individual responsible for the creation of the route cannot then climb it the route is usually 'opened' and becomes what is known in sports climbing as an 'open project'.

In this case a number of competitors usually vie for the route each attempting the ascent whenever time and weather permit. The higher the grade the more the sports climb will depend on the execution of technical and gymnastic moves but with the relatively safe protection of fixed bolts.

This type of competition can lead to either bitter disputes or a good deal of competitive banter and in this sense the competition mirrors adventure climbing. Eventually one climbing team or another succeeds on the route and claims the first ascent closing the particular episode.

In the case of established sports climbs sports climbers attempt to measure themselves against the scale of the grading system whilst also competing with other climbing teams to be the first from a particular grouping to do certain well-known climbs. Despite enhanced difficulty there seems to be less drama between competing sports climbers than there is between competing adventure climbers and this may relate to sports climbing style. Thus the way in which a sports climb can be done is seldom disputed since the ethics of sports climbing allow all manner of choreography and preparation. The final ascent of any given sports climb then is comparable with a well-rehearsed performance though casual observers will not be aware of this. However, a top sports climbers' ultimate accolade is reserved for on-sight ascents of very hard gymnastic routes since this is considered a better performance. This seeming contradiction is one way that sports climbing defines its hierarchy and is often misunderstood and accused of having no ethics by adventure climbers in whose arenas the various methods permitted in sports climbing are seen as 'cheating' and normally unacceptable. An extract from an article in Climber Magazine further illustrates this point :-

“A photo of a climber *in extremis* on a traditionally protected climb has drama because it matters that they succeed. High level sport climbing is vertical gymnastics, a minority interest, a complete mystery to most of us.”

Horsecroft (2001) p90

To compound these issues further an overlap between styles sometimes results in boundary stretching within the arena of one style by the use of components extracted from otherwise taboo ethical positions, normally found and confined to the other.

In the contemporary world of adventure climbing for example a small number of top climbers ambiguously employ the tactic known as 'headpointing' which captures from the

ethics of sports climbing the ideas encompassed by practising routes before finally completing them only in 'headpointing' no permanently fixed bolts are permitted, and the final lead style carries with it a great deal of danger although a few marginal pieces of protection may have been pre-placed but are in any case normally removed from the route after its ascent.

This type of ethic as we have seen from the case study of Masters Wall/Indian Face is considered permissible in certain scenarios and may be carried out by top performers who admit that although they have used such practices to set a certain standard the climb can still be improved by anyone making an ascent in authentic style by the action of climbing 'on sight'.

In the cases of sports climbing and bouldering although the ethics of each style permit practise the on-sight ethos more normally associated with adventure climbing if carried out successfully places the achievements of the on-sight climber higher up the ranking as they compete against their grading system and themselves for supremacy over competitors and technical difficulties.

Specialist Bouldering

Specialist bouldering also encompasses ultra-technical gymnastic moves but without recourse to any type of protection which is in any case unnecessary because the typical boulder problem is usually no more than fifteen feet in length. In many ways though bouldering mirrors sports climbing in that it also permits much choreographing and rehearsal of moves.

However the competition between boulderers takes place in the micro arena and as such can take place close to adventure climbing arenas by utilizing boulders that are often found littering areas and landscapes which are dominated by larger cliffs. Although groupings of adventure climbers see bouldering in a less threatening way than sports climbing it is still not considered as real climbing since once again the all important risk factor that is an inherent part of authentic adventure climbing style is not present in bouldering.

Groupings of boulderers however vociferously defend bouldering, arguing that it is in fact the purest type of climbing because :-

“Bouldering is climbing distilled into its purest form, you are moving on rock with no ropes, rucksack, metalwork or fear dragging you down.”

Ingram (2001) p21

Whilst adventure climbers do not agree they in no way attempt to sanction bouldering or confine it to certain areas as is the case with sports climbing.

Competition between boulderers for the ascent of a certain 'problem' is often intense and a recent example surrounded the 'bouldering out' of a well-trying extremely overhanging face roughly fifteen feet high at a roadside location in the Llanberis Pass known as 'The Porthole Problem'.

Bouldering is climbing condensed into micro form yet despite the relatively small amount of climbing involved on each problem, in some cases their ascents take a number of years to complete.

In the case of the 'Porthole' in the Llanberis Pass the eventual first ascensionist had tried the problem over a two-year period as had many other competing boulderers some of whom would regularly drive from Sheffield to make their attempts.

Conversely the time spent attempting boulder problems in a single bouldering session can be as little as twenty minutes because of the intense physicality involved in piecing together moves. In this sense it is usually the case that each move on a boulder problem is equitable with the hardest single move (crux in climbers' parlance) on any given climb.

The fact that no equipment is used in the ascent of boulder problems other than the boulderer's skill together with specialist climbing shoes and gymnasts' chalk make first ascents undisputed and although bouldering can easily be a solitary activity there is typically an audience of other boulderers some of whom may be competitors but in any case act in turn as 'spotters' who will attempt to break the fall of a boulderer in action should he/she slip from the 'problem' being attempted. They are also witnesses to a boulderer's performance and are therefore on hand to lend authenticity to any given ascent.

Yet the final ascent belies a host of tactics which boulderers use to prepare problems which in some cases encompasses the use of ladders to inspect certain holds and blow torches to thoroughly clean and dry certain holds. Further props in bouldering are moveable crashmats which are carried to and from bouldering arenas and are used in conjunction with 'spotters' in the event of a fall.

Whilst bouldering may not be taken seriously by many climbers, boulderers themselves imbue the activity with a great deal of significance and since introducing a distinct bouldering grading system in the 1990s have competed in arenas for bouldering resources just as

intensively as sports and adventure climbers do in their respective activities.

During a bouldering session which involved one of the many attempts to complete the problem which eventually became known as 'Pool of Bethesda' I acted along with two other boulderers as a 'spotter' for the main contenders. At one point in the session two tourists took an interest in the action, eventually asking 'are you practising for real climbing?' To which remark one of the boulderers politely replied 'No, it's a bit more complicated than that really'.

Indeed the complicated nature of bouldering extends to include what is known as a 'sitdown start' and this is usually only added to a problem after its first ascent, often by competitive boulderers who have narrowly missed making the first ascent of a particular problem. It involves sitting below the problem and pulling onto the boulder from that position instead of starting in the normal standing position.

To outside observers this action may seem ridiculous but to boulderers it is important and taken seriously since it extends the number of moves on the problem and usually makes the original problem harder than in the first instance.

Finally it should be noted that groupings of boulderers will often try certain boulder problems within a system that allows 'one go each' so that individuals are prevented from 'hogging' problems by continuous attempts, in this way boulderers get a fair chance to compete during any given bouldering session. In the case of a known resource that is the focus of many attempts over a period of time between competing boulderers the competition takes place in the same manner as it does in adventure climbing often requiring a number of visits to a particular arena though not necessarily at the same time as other competitors.

CHAPTER 5

STRUCTURE AND ACTION IN INAUTHENTIC ARENAS AND COMPETITION

CHAPTER 5 : STRUCTURE AND ACTION IN INAUTHENTIC ARENAS AND COMPETITION

In Chapter 2 I noted that the emergence of climbing in the disused slate quarries around Llanberis and Dinorwic initially raised questions in the climbing world about the authenticity of place since the slate arena was clearly man-made. It was not however made for climbers and the groupings of climbers (The Slateheads) that developed slate climbing often produced climbs equally as risky as those on more natural cliffs, although there were also debates about the tactics used to 'make' some of these climbs.

With the advent and development of indoor climbing walls the climbing world has gained a number of facilities that are clearly man-made for climbers but are in sharp contrast to the naturalness of outdoor crag arenas with which they show little in common. Essentially they can be seen as inauthentic arenas yet their use is an important component in the contemporary climbing world of which they form an integral part.

"You can put in some good work on an old fashioned mantelpiece. It is easy enough to raise yourself on to your hands but surprisingly awkward actually to obtain a footing, a very delicate balance is needed. It is a good plan first to crowd the mantelpiece with all the ornaments that you most detest - those china dogs presented by uncle Joe can take a front place. A slight slip on you part - most unfortunate accident and they are no more."

Kirkus (1941) p80

The above reference is a rare example towards the possibilities of indoor climbing practice many years before the advent of indoor climbing walls specifically designed for climbers.

Indeed before climbing walls and the ideas about training for climbing introduced largely by Pete Livesey in 1974, Jones, T. (1986) few climbers made serious training away from the crags part of their climbing regimes.

Since the 1980's training has become part of the climbing world and is largely promoted by occasional magazine articles with various specific climbing exercises, (though there are a limited number of books on the subject, Hurne and Ingle (1988). In many cases

even now training is not taken seriously by some of the top protagonists in the sport. John Dunne for example famously after downing several pints of beer continuing his 'training' next morning by eating a 'full set' fried breakfast before managing to make the second ascent of a very serious E9 climb in the Ogwen Valley, North Wales in 1997.

Thus training in the climbing world is, whilst certainly a feature of contemporary climbing not always pursued by all participants in the sport in the same way.

A focus of training in recent years has been the development of a series of indoor climbing walls. These structures contain elements of ambiguity and are the subject of debate for they are not solely the domain of one type of climber and have been interpreted and used in different ways by different groupings of climbers. The physical layout of indoor climbing walls has also changed over a period of time.

In North West Wales early examples of climbing walls can be seen at Pwllheli and Plas Menai Sports Centres. A climbing facility that was very popular with climbers from Bangor University in the late 1970s and early 1980s was the wall at Llangefni Sports Centre on Anglesey and together with a wall built at Plas-y-Brenin in Capel Curig, about the same time. These provided the first facilities in the area for climbers. The walls in North Wales were recent arrivals compared with the first wall to be built in Britain. This was established in 1965 at Leeds University by Don Robinson after much discussion with members of the University climbing club.

Early walls are very different from what is now available and when they were introduced were not taken seriously by many climbers. The fact that climbers used them at all reflected more on the prevailing British weather particularly in the winter rather than their perceived value to climbers as rudimentary training sites. They were popular more for their novelty and social attraction, though some climbers undoubtedly took training on them seriously others did not.

"I remember going to Llangefni lots of times because it was better nothing. I didn't think of it as really climbing, more messing around".

Dave H in conversation with the author

Eventually wall development was further encouraged by the introduction of what was initially called 'French Style' climbing but is now more commonly referred to as 'sports

climbing'. This began to emerge in Britain during the mid 1980's. 'Sports climbing' action centred around climbing on previously unclimbed limestone cliffs and climbing competitions (Chapter 2) which, on a practical basis, came into being after 1985, mostly at indoor climbing walls.

Clearly the building of indoor walls is a commercial venture and to promote and build them a number of companies such as 'Bendcrete', 'Livingston Walls' and 'Enterprise' came into being, though they were set up by climbers.

In this sense wall climbing began to take on a further significance for some groupings of climbers and climbing walls were developed which considered not only climbers' training but the idea of the wall as a climbing arena in itself as well as a leisure facility that might attract and cater for anyone wishing to begin climbing indoors as part of a leisure lifestyle.

Whereas early climbing walls were usually constructed in corridors or on one end of a gym wall where holds had been fashioned by drilling into brick (Llangefni Sports Centre on Anglesey in North Wales) their modern counterparts are altogether different and more sophisticated.

Instead of being a small facility in an otherwise orthodox leisure centre they are now often purpose-built complexes in their own right.

By entering a modern purpose-built climbing wall it is clear what activity goes on since there are signs, symbols and instructions together with safety regulations about how and how not to use the wall.

Except in the most ambitious cases at Liverpool, Birmingham and Cardiff modern walls are usually to be found inside older structures which were initially built for quite different purposes. Examples of this include, The Bristol Climbing Centre - built inside an old church; The Foundry in Sheffield which retains its original name, and more locally, The Beacon near Llanberis in North Wales - built inside an early wireless transmission centre originally called the Marconi Building/

The key features inside climbing walls are usually : a café/reception area, the main climbing wall area and a bouldering area.

Typically climbing walls are about 15 metres in height. However they may be much longer, for instance at the wall in Birmingham some routes reach 28 metres in length. They have their routes set on panels that have been built around a steel framework so as to produce

different angles and faces that are vertical or overhanging before various shaped holds are screwed on in a way that provides colour coded and numbered routes up each part of the wall. At all walls climbers have to pay to climb, entrance fees vary from around £4 to £8, though there is no time limit on how long climbers can spend during each session.

“Twenty-five feet from the floor a climber fully extends her reach to grasp the next red hold, she take care not to touch either the green holds to her left or the yellow holds to her right. She is following only the red holds which lead to the lower off point at the top of route No. 14 on an indoor climbing wall. After four or five similar moves she finishes and is quickly lowered to the ground by her belayer. She had done route No. 14 Red which is graded 6A+ by ‘sports’ climbing standards.”

The above description is a brief account of climbing action as it takes place at indoor climbing walls and serves to show the nature of climbing wall routes which although presenting climbers with clear physical challenges are set up with an emphasis on safety.

Yet observing climbers in action can be misleading at the indoor wall since without an insight into the nature of climbing in the natural arena it might be assumed that indoor ‘sport’ wall climbers, some of whom put in impressive gymnastic performances whilst ‘pumping plastic’ (a general climbing term used to describe wall climbing activity), would automatically be equally competent on natural adventure climbing cliffs.

However, with an understanding of the differences in style and approach between ‘sports’ climbing and adventure climbing (Chapter 3) and by socialising with ‘sports’ climbers indoors many of whom explain that they would not consider performing in the same way in the natural arena unless visiting a designated and bolt protected sports climbing cliff a better picture emerges.

In this sense when watching a good sports climbing performance which may be characterised by fluid, unhurried, but un-hesitant flexible gymnastic upward movement where the climber is largely unconcerned with falling, there is no guarantee that the same climber would necessarily replicate this performance in the altogether more dangerous and less clearly defined natural adventure climbing arena.

On the other hand many adventure climbers who do use the wall might be expected to

find wall climbing easy because it is generally un-serious compared to the serious feel and atmosphere of climbing on natural cliffs; yet in most cases the reverse is true.

Indeed the adventure climbers that I either observed or climbed with at the indoor wall, except for a few individuals who were already familiar with both types of climbing, often found the action required by indoor sports climbing, although safe, extremely difficult in practice, though it should be noted that none of them took wall climbing too seriously and were often happy to criticise it.

The use of the indoor wall by climbers keeping fit over the winter months but more concerned with the outdoor crag environment is often referred to by them as not 'real' climbing, yet they will use the wall because it is 'better than not climbing at all'. Nevertheless this attitude reflects the belief that the indoor arena is not always a satisfactory experience particularly for adventure climbers who, even when they use indoor walls, still criticise them.

Over several visits to the wall I asked climbers what they thought were the main differences between adventure climbing and sports climbing indoors. Phil typifies the seemingly ambiguous attitude taken by some wall users.

MC What do you like about the wall/don't like?

PD The matter is its not climbing at all. I mean its McDonalds stuff you know, convenient, junk, designer climbing. Not real.

MC But some people seem to enjoy indoor wall climbing to a point where they don't wish to go adventure climbing.

PD That's because they're not real climbers in my book. Indoor sports climbing's too safe all round it's just about gymnastics. On proper routes you can die if you're not careful, it's a potentially serious state of affairs.

MC I think its another style of climbing that is just very different from 'adventure' climbing.

PD It's different enough for me to forget about it or get angry about. I mean if wall sports guys started bolting in the pass or at Gogarth it wouldn't be tolerated by loads of people not just me.

MC What would happen then?

PD We'd up and chop them out of course. (Reference to bolt protection)

Conversely, Emily, another 'adventure' climber who regularly visited the wall enjoyed the fact that she could climb indoors at a higher standard without compromising the enjoyment of her 'real' climbing which she did whenever possible in the natural crag environment.

- MC What do you like about the wall/don't like?
 EW Its dead safe and someone like me can climb moves to my limit, which I can't do outside.
 MC Is there anything you don't like about the wall?
 EW No I just wish I could climb as hard outside but that's harder its real climbing.
 MC Some people do
 EW I know but not me. I climb two grades harder on the wall than outside but it doesn't bother me really, it's just different

For some climbers one or two visits to their local wall were enough to put them off for ever. The reason for their rejection raised a number of issues which centred around arguments about how they viewed and interpreted the nature of climbing in general.

- MC I heard you don't go to the wall, why's that?
 RK Remember what Don Whillans said about walls "Climbing walls, climbing walls, there's no bleeding adventure on climbing walls". Well he was right and it's not my idea of climbing at all, even for training

In comparison to adventure climbing arenas in the natural setting, the indoor wall was seen by Ray and a number of other climbers as a worthless and inauthentic environment whose colour coded and safe replications of routes could not on any account lure them to participate in this form of the activity (Appendix 5).

For this grouping of climbers then there is no ambiguity about the indoor wall as they see it as so removed from 'real' climbing that it is not worth contemplating as an arena for their activity.

In this sense the indoor wall climbing experience and structure is clearly considered inauthentic and can be seen in a similar way to the 'theme park' replicas of the 'olde English' taverns and Disneyland fakes which so fascinated the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard and his writings on America, Baudrillard (1993).

To adventure climbers the wall is an environment boundaried by its limited potential for the pursuit of an authentic style of climbing whose essential characteristics and values cannot be replicated.

'Sports' climbers are altogether more familiar with the indoor climbing environment tending to view the activity that takes place as normal and enjoyable. This view was characterised by Gus when he said :-

“Sure, I’m a sports climber its always a great workout where else can you get ‘pumped’ in five minutes. May be I’ll go in a comp (competition) yeh get on the winning podium.”

(In conversation with the author)

Although it is possible to lead climbs in sport climbing style at indoor walls there are also a great many climbs that are equipped with ‘top ropes’, which means that a rope is pre-attached (usually to a pulley or other safety device) at the top of the wall. In this case the wall climber may climb with the safety of a rope from above even though no one has actually lead the climb. At the wall this is a standard practice but when indoor wall climbers attempt to set up climbs in this way in the natural outdoor arena they often come under acerbic attack from adventure climbers and this position is reflected occasionally in climbing magazines, for example :-

“I’ve got news for you. I’m the sane one, I’m the typical climber. You are the aberration. You have failed to undertake the apprenticeship. You have failed to realise that climbing is about coping with risk, not excluding it. Do not pass Go, do not collect two hundred pounds. You are the bottom feeders of the climbing world. I’d like to propose that from now on top-ropers must give way to those who want to lead. No excuses. No ‘Oh, we’ve just got fourteen more people to put up this one mate,’ just get off the damn climb. If you go to a natural edge, your first impulse should be to lead, even if it means tackling Diff or Severe. Tough shit if that hurts your pride.”

Climber magazine December (2001) p90

Back inside, bouldering action takes place in a separate area at the indoor wall where boulderers attempt colour-coded problems with extremely gymnastic performances. Most boulderers viewed indoor bouldering purely as training for ‘real’ bouldering outside so that despite attempting to complete and perfect indoor ‘problems’ with some tenacity their main concerns lay in transferring the strength gained by ‘working’ indoors to the ‘real’, natural outdoor environment.

Bearing these points in mind the action of indoor climbing is carried out by four different groupings of climbers who can be characterised as :-

1. Indoor ‘sports’ climbers

2. Adventure climbers keeping fit over the winter months but primarily concerned with the outdoor crag environment
3. Sport climbers, using the wall as training, for competition events and as a rehearsal for climbing sports routes in the outdoors.
4. Boulderers who use only those areas of the wall that have been pre-designated for bouldering. They use no ropes or equipment except for boots and a chalk bag, to increase hand grips. These groups practice gymnastic moves of no more than ten feet in height above thick crash mats

The first, second and third categories comprise the majority of climbing wall activists whilst boulderers are marginally less prominent during a typical climbing wall session. Further to this any climbers from these groupings may cross over to favour different types of climbing if and when they choose to do so. Climbers who engage in all aspects of the sport are simply known as 'all rounders'.

Remembering that any climbing wall is a commercial enterprise wall owners also encourage school groups and beginners to use the wall as part of their climbing course programmes. The emphasis is on safety and on the wall all protection is fixed in place requiring the climber only to clip the rope in for safety so that accidents are extremely rare, but they do happen. The two incidents that I became aware of concerning the injury of climbers, in this setting were both due to belayers losing concentration so that leaders, having completed a route, instead of being lowered to the ground in a steady secure fashion, were dropped quickly, resulting in one case a broken ankle and in the other a broken back.

Documentary advice against such a lack of concentration on the part of belayers is now beginning to be included in some climbing literature so that:

"Because of the friendly atmosphere of many indoor climbing venues and climbers in the main being sociable animals, there is a tendency to be lulled into a false sense of security and to be a little casual. This has to be fought against at all times. One lapse could lead to an accident. Here are some common dangerous situations seen at climbing walls".

Creasey (2000) p89

The above quote is taken from a recent manual for beginners of rock climbing and is one of a new type of instructional text that contains sections on both sports climbing and indoor wall climbing. The section that the quote is taken from is entitled 'living dangerously' and also

includes three points to be taken into account whilst engaging in climbing activity at the wall so that number three reads:

"Talking to people standing around you while you are belaying. This is dangerous because it means you are not concentrating on what your climber is doing".

Creasey (2000) p89

This advice is often disregarded. I observed that most people at the wall did in fact talk to other people whilst belaying but that in most cases still managed to keep an eye on the lead climber who took the precaution, when at the top of a given route, to shout 'have you got me?' before committing themselves to being lowered with their weight on the rope.

Thus a further aspect of indoor climbing is its social attraction and in this sense going climbing means that along with the activity climbers can meet up with friends, plan outdoor climbing trips, meet other climbers and generally discuss local climbing topics in much the same way as they do in climbers' 'hangouts'.

This is possible because the climbing environment of the indoor wall is more conducive to social interaction, since many of the problems encountered in the natural crag environment are neutralised making the action of climbing, an altogether more sanitised activity. The generally 'gripping' events that regularly occur in the outside environment such as the wet approach to a certain crag, loose holds and bad weather are not present so that climbers can concentrate on the degree of the climb's technical difficulty and, of course, the social aspects of performance and interaction.

Some walls contain elements of surveillance similar to those described by Foucault in his treatise on the modern prison and its forms 'Discipline and Punish' Foucault (1975), so that CCTV records the climber's every move which whilst satisfying insurance requirements and contributing to a secure and safe environment is seen as a kind of Orwellian 'Big Brother', Orwell (1949), scenario by some wall users who joke about and sometimes lampoon this technology.

The man-made and managed indoor wall provides the arena and setting for climbing competitions which are organised events and quite different from competition between climbers in the natural arena.

Competition Climbing and the Indoor Wall

The complex nature of competition as described in adventure climbing is altogether different and more easily observable in the indoor arena. It is worth noting that in Britain all specifically organised competition events take place indoors. Even abroad, apart from a few organised bouldering competitions in the US and an inaugural climbing competition on a crag at Bardonecchia in Italy (1985), the competition circuit, regional, national and international has been mostly carried out on indoor climbing walls.

In the UK competition climbing is bounded by the indoor arena for two reasons. First is the need to neutralise environmental factors, particularly the weather, and second the need to provide facilities for spectators at such events which are safe.

Organisers of events, not surprisingly, are drawn from the ranks of climbing wall makers and equipment manufacturers. Competitors, whilst drawn from anyone in the climbing world who wishes to enter, are more likely to contain avid sports and indoor wall climbing specialists than adventure climbers.

Competitions are usually based on four distinctive categories; men's, women's, juniors and veteran events. A fifth category, speed climbing, may occasionally be included. Indoor bouldering competitions also take place but are normally separately organised purely for boulderers. Regional events at local climbing walls take place at the discretion of the wall owners or other interested bodies. These events vary in frequency; they can be once a month or once a year.

Climbing competitions have had limited success. Even big competitions such as the 'world cup' begun in 1985, have failed to capture the imagination of most climbers. Some climbers have always been opposed to the development of organised competitions since they have always been worried that these events may affect the nature of climbing in general. They were concerned that the development of indoor sport climbing could change the essence of climbing encouraging many newcomers to the sport to pursue indoor competition climbing outside by sanitising and bolting natural crags.

Conversely, some 'adventure' climbers adopt an opposite position by suggesting that indoor wall climbing and competition should be encouraged more vigorously since if newcomers could be encouraged to stay indoors it would mean fewer numbers in natural outdoor arenas as the number of climbers increases in general.

The nature of organised indoor competition has changed little since the 1980s. The predominant style of climbing is associated with sports climbing with one main difference, since competitors are not allowed to 'work' or pre-practise but must climb 'on sight' with no prior knowledge of the route that has been 'set' by 'route setters' whose job it is to prearrange such courses. In this way the competitor has no information about the route before he/she begins.

Other competitors cannot watch and are kept in isolation until their number is called so that they cannot know how high on the set route other competitors have climbed or gain any visual knowledge of how the route might be done. This process is important because to win a competition the competitor does not always have to complete the entire route, though he/she will try to do so, but may win by getting the furthest way up a set route before falling off. Other competitors who have fallen off lower down are then placed in order.

Prizes for the first three places may include money -(anything from fifty pounds to a few thousand pounds - sponsorship deals and new equipment. However in many local competitions winners either receive no prizes or only a small amount of equipment.

The climbers who advocate competition climbing are often involved with the financial aspects of wall development. Ian Dunn, for example, the manager of Bendcrete Climbing Walls Ltd., writing in the 1997 BMC journal about competition climbing states that:

"Competition is an exciting spectacle that happens on climbing walls. There can be few who were present at the 1989 Grand Prix in Leeds who was not overtaken by emotion with the tremendous performance of Jerry Moffatt when he jumped to the hold below which Didier Raboutou had fallen in trying to reach. On completion of the route he descended to non-stop applause. Critics of competitions can ask what were climbers doing inside on a glorious day in May when Almscliff and Caley as well as Kilnsey and Malham were all bone dry. Well I was there and I enjoyed the event and the memories of that climb will be as entrenched in my mind as much as any ascent I have ever witnessed.

Another memorable competition was at Lyons in the same year when Simon Nadin won the first World Championship. My memories from this event were not Simon's excellent ascent, but the ladies super final, which was held on exactly the same route as the men. The crowd in Lyons was enormous and as Lynn Hill started to climb, the expectation that a memorable attempt was about to take place filled the Palais des Sport. Her ascent, only bettered by Simon Glowacz, was exceptional.

1989 was started by another competition that also was extremely memorable as it took place on the 2nd April, my birthday. It was the DR Open and Claudie Dunn won the ladies event, taking a £50 cheque from DR climbing Walls and a trophy to sit on the mantelpiece and remind me of my competitor in business. It also ensured a memorable birthday celebration."

Dunn (1997) pp 153-4

Thus the experience of competition climbing has something of the flavour of 'the Society of the spectacle', Debord (1967), and it is in the competition arena of indoor climbing that both participant and observer may notice that the number of logos present often outnumber the competitors.

Despite Dunn's claims about the positive nature of competition climbing he inadvertently points to their drawbacks, particularly when he notes that critics of competition climbing might appear bemused by climbers being inside a man-made structure on a weekend of fine weather.

Further to this, some climbers remain unconvinced that indoor competitions have any merit. Stating that :-

"I'd rather sit outside all day at the bottom of the crag with a broken leg than watch or go in a climbing competition".

and also :

"Spending valuable climbing time watching guys pulling on plastic holds doesn't appeal to the climbers I know."

(Steve and Cliff in conversation with the author)

Further problems faced by competition organisers are that as a spectator sport in general indoor competition events are not particularly exciting to watch.

The competitors and their focus on economy of style aggravate this problem as they move seemingly easily up the wall before either falling off safely or completing the set route. In either case it is very difficult for anyone other than climbers themselves to appreciate the moves being done and the level of skill involved during the event.

The structure of climbing walls which, as noted earlier, are usually made from various panels being bolted onto a steel framework before holds made from resin, plastic or wood are bolted to them, (Appendix 5), are therefore often more impressive in themselves than events occurring during the course of competitions. So much so that even in a contemporary setting one of the most prestigious competition events was attended by just over five thousand people over a three-day period. As the number of climbers in the country tops 150,000 the attractions of competition is limited. The world championship events in question were reported in the climbing media (High magazine, number 207, February 2000, p65) and to give some idea of the nature of the event and the structure of the wall it took place on an extract from the report is reproduced here:

"The first weekend (3rd - 5th) in December saw the bi-annual Entre-Prises UIAA World Championships and its sister event, Climb99 organised by the BMC, at the National Indoor Arena Birmingham. The World Championship is a one off battle between the best difficulty, as well as speed, competition climbers in the world and held every two years. To many it is the premier competition climbing event, equivalent to the Olympics, and this was the first time it has been held in this country. It is not to be confused with the World Cup in which a series of rounds are held every year to give an aggregate winner. This is the type of international competition we have seen in this country in previous years and, in which a decade ago. we had the champion in Simon Nadin. So much for nostalgia. This year's event was to provide probably the biggest shock in competition history but more of that later.

The vertical challenge would be met on the most impressive competition climbing wall ever built by headline sponsors Entre-Prises, who along with High, OTE, Beal and Snow & Rock supported the event. On entering the arena the sheer scale of the wall became evident, it was awesome and a fitting structure on which to hold the final event of this millennium. Utilising panels from a previous World Cup in Birmingham two years ago, the clever people at Entre-Prises built three overhanging legs. Atop these, and at the end of a large roof, a large red and black prow was fashioned using the company's sculptured Freeform to leave a wall that made the climbers quiver with fear.

The whole structure stood 17m high, overhanging 15m and capable of supporting routes of over 28m in length.

Not all competitors confine themselves purely to competition climbing and some indoor wall specialists are also competent adventure climbers but these are not typical examples. One

of the difficulties encountered by wall specialists in recent times has been their inability to transfer climbing skills learnt at the wall to 'real' or adventure climbing routes. The problem is particularly acute for those climbers who started climbing in the indoor arena instead of undergoing the apprenticeship process as described in Chapter 3. This has led to a number of courses being set up to deal with the transition from wall climber to 'the real thing' (Appendix 5).

This transition is not easy since the inherent dangers present in the natural arena are never encountered in the neutral indoor arena and whilst indoor climbing can equip the climber with skills and style which may prepare him/her for sports climbing in the outdoors such considerations as getting to and from cliffs, retreating in the face of bad weather and learning to 'read' a natural rockface, even when it is bolt protected, must be taken into account.

The transition to adventure climbing is further complicated and clearly more dangerous since the climber must learn, retrospectively in this case, how to place and retrieve his/her own protection devices as well as taking into account the ethics and style which adventure climbing encompasses.

However, some climbers remain largely unconcerned with outdoor climbing action, preferring to concentrate on developing their skill for indoor competitions. Typically, the indoor competition climber trains seriously both in the indoor arena of the climbing wall and on the custom-made facility at home. This combination of training space is now common amongst wall climbers and has led to the phrase 'cellar dweller' becoming part of climbers parlance since, particularly in Sheffield, it is usual for this facility to be built in a disused cellar. In North Wales such facilities are more likely to be built in a loft or attic.

The competition climber often balances specific climbing routines with dieting and endurance training such as running. The overall attitude he/she applies to climbing indoors is that of the dedicated intense athlete, intent on improving performance in order to become a champion.

The indoor specialist is normally unconcerned about falling since he/she comes to expect a high level of safety which is a standard feature in indoor arenas. Going climbing to the wall specialist means climbing and competing in a controlled environment so that he/she does not experience getting involved in climbing epics in what adventure climbers refer to as 'out there' situations.

Typically he/she looks clean and fit whilst preoccupied with the physicality associated with and demanded by competing indoors and it is this look that led to the term 'Designer Climber' being used by adventure climbers to demark climbers who typically spend their time climbing and/or competing indoors.

To conclude, the action of climbing in the indoor arena is clearly not important to all participants. Yet for those who do take indoor climbing seriously the possibility exists for them to become champions without ever having climbed in a natural arena. Furthermore, although there are indoor walls close to natural climbing areas the act of indoor climbing can easily be combined with an urban lifestyle because most state of the art indoor walls are to be found in large cities of which Birmingham and Bristol are prime examples. Climbing in this sense may no longer need to be associated with the rural and the natural though the demarcation between the two environments clearly provides quite different climbing experiences which is often emphasised by climbers themselves as they give meanings to their different actions.

Competition climbing is an essential part of climbing on indoor walls. The style of climbing in competition at the wall is associated with sports climbing in general though at the wall is organised and controlled.

Climbing walls are clearly used by different types of climbers throughout the UK most notably in the winter months when any style of climbing outside is often restricted by the short day light hours and poor weather.

Although wall climbing is most avidly used by sports climbers it is also used somewhat ambiguously by 'adventure' climbers.

Perhaps because the wall is obviously 'unreal' in all aspects when viewed from the perspective of adventure climbers. It is easy for them to accept it as a 'fake' but practical alternative to climbing outside at certain times of the year. It is also apparent that they use the wall as an extension of climbers' 'hangouts'. Whilst other adventure climbers remain clearly 'anti-wallist'.

According to the British Mountaineering Council website there are 475 indoor walls in the UK with 12 in Wales. Yet many of these are of the old, unsophisticated type and are now largely seldom used in preference to the more sophisticated modern walls.

Finally the wall is a striking place to observe the various fashions which permeate the

climbing world. Climbers arriving at the wall often do so in clothing that may be more useful on the ascent of Himalayan peaks. Others appear more scantily clad often wearing a type of uniform which whilst practical for easy movement has come to represent something of an anti-style in the climbing world and is based on 'Ronhill' tracksuit bottoms together with some form of running vest usually worn underneath a fibre pile fleece top.

The nature and direction of climbing fashion style is little documented in the climbing world though at times certain items of dress have come to symbolise and embody certain groupings of climbers. Bearing these points in mind the focus of the next Chapter is the examination of such styles as and when they have occurred and changed under certain circumstances over a period of time.

CHAPTER 6

FASHION AND STYLE

ANALYSIS IN THE SOCIAL WORLD OF CLIMBING

CHAPTER 6 : FASHION AND STYLE - ANALYSIS IN THE SOCIAL WORLD OF CLIMBING

The style of any given social world in terms of its 'fashion' may give it significance and delineate it from other worlds. In some cases it may give clues about the activity of its members.

In the world of climbing, style has changed considerably since the days of tweed jackets and breeches at the turn of the 19th Century. Although even then a few retailers began to market their wares as suitable clothing for climbing. The scale of this promotion was nothing like the high tech fashion market that may influence climbing style today. To begin with early climbing style was borrowed from Alpine climbing style which was largely undertaken wearing garments made from tweed, wool or and cotton. The tweed jacket in particular symbolised the early climbers in Wales and the Lake District, so that by 1909 specialists climbing outfitters were advertising in the climber's club journal. Burberry of Haymarket London claimed that their outfitters were specially designed:

"To withstand the severe strain of climbing, and to make provision for rapid changes of temperature, Mountaineers require garments constructed of specially manufactured textures. Burberry's weatherproof materials woven and proofed by Burberry processes, are just what the Mountaineer requires and when made into outfits under expert advice, the climber enjoys to the full his hazardous pursuit with an assurance of all the comfort possible."

... so that ...

"The Burberry outfit displays the utmost economy in weight, with phenomenal durability. Proof against rain, sleet, wind and cold, yet retains perfect self-ventilation. Practical in form and perfect by inventions that preserve absolute limb freedom."

Climbers Club Journal (1909) p11

Female climbers were catered for by way of a mountaineering gown made from the same materials. However evidence suggests that these garments were more of an encumbrance than an advantage to the user.

"In the matter of clothing, the women pioneers were much more handicapped than the men. Right up to 1914, propriety required that the legs should be voluminously concealed beneath long skirts. They must have felt uncomfortable and clumsy at all times and particularly in hot weather and found it impossible to see exactly where they were putting their feet. But their aunts and mothers had climbed in the Alps in full-length skirts for decades, and it took a great deal of courage to defy the conventions. Twenty years later one of the best pioneer women climbers, Mrs Daniell, remembered the problems: 'A woman in knickerbockers was an object of derision or shame. Even as late as 1913 I was waylaid on the slopes of Cader Idris by what I feared was an indignantly modest female but, to my surprise, this enlightened creature wanted to congratulate me on my good sense in having discarded a skirt. The skirt was decently worn for as long as possible, then hidden under a rock or carried in a neat bundle, as circumstances decreed. Just before the war, people on the road near Ogwen would walk backwards for quite a long way, in astonishment and mirth at the sight of my sister and me in our corduroy breeches."

Hankinson (1977) p150

Essentially this style of clothing was similar to sporting apparel worn for shooting and sport fishing. Norfolk tweed jackets together with tweed or corduroy breeches and woollen socks were therefore considered the norm and although by the 1930's women commonly climbed in breeches the general look of climbers remained more or less the same in terms of their outfits up until the Second World War. Much visible evidence of this can be gleaned from various accounts of climbing and the photographic record particularly those of Abrahams (1898), (1906).

After the Second World War a large quantity of ex-military clothing became generally available including heavy cotton anoraks and hard wearing ex-army fatigues, Clark and Pyatt (1957).

These items were readily adopted particularly by the new influx of working class climbers who began to dominate the sport. This style of dress was complemented by the working mans flat cap or a woolly balaclava helmet, two seemingly inconsequential items which by the 1960's had taken on special significance in the climbing world.

The phrase 'he's a hard man' is seldom used in the climbing world nowadays yet it was common throughout the 1960's and was used to denote individual or particular groupings of climbers. 'Hard men' embodied climbing at a high standard of difficulty. Two examples of 'hard men' were Joe Brown and Don Whillans whose headgear in particular took on special significance for the climbing world best characterised by an extract from the now-defunct 'Rocksport' magazine which noted :-

"Some items such as Whillans' flat hat and Brown's woolly balaclava attained exalted status as the cult objects of a heroic myth."

Lewis (1973) p21

Also during the 1960's an influx of climbing activists from the 'red brick' universities began to engage in the activity seriously so that the 'beatnik' and the 'hippy' look was brought into the climbing world. Thick woollen pullovers and jeans gave climbers a scruffy look, yet this was overlaid by the down jacket which had been developed on the Continent for Alpine Climbing. Although rockclimbing was now a sport in its own right this did not disallow British climbers from engaging in Alpine climbing when and if they wished to and could afford it. Indeed during the 1950s and 60s many British climbers including the working class grouping of the Rock and Ice contributed to a general rise in Alpine rock climbing standards, Brown (1967) and also began to appreciate and repeat hard Alpine climbs done in the 1930s which before the Second World War had largely been dismissed by the Alpine Club as the preserve of extreme nationalists.

The point here is that climbers began to bring back items of clothing from their Continental excursions which influenced climbers' style and the most obvious example of this was the down jacket or duvet. This item was practically useless when wet and unsuitable for actually climbing on account of being bulky yet it symbolised climbing style throughout the mid 1960s and 70s. Probably the most impractical item of dress worn by some climbers during the latter part of the 1960s and early 1970s were 'loons' or 'bellbottom' flared trousers since as Mike told me :-

"The problem with wearing loons was it made it very hard to see your feet when climbing".

The visiting American climber Henry Barber solved this problem in 1972 when he introduced 'Yosemite Whites' to the climbing world in Wales. Yosemite whites were baggy cotton trousers of the type more usually associated with Bakers overalls and skinhead subculture. They were loose fitting and provided easy movement and were most often turned up till just below the calf so that they looked neat and stylish and the climber gained a clear view of his feet. For a while this style of dress defined hard climbing, particularly in Wales but was fundamentally flawed in that 'the whites' could usually only be worn once or twice before becoming scuffed and dirty.

The counterpart to Yosemite whites was typically the Helly Hanson fleece top, which replaced woolly jumpers to offer a warmer less cumbersome style of garment either in blue or dark green. 'Helly Hansen' also made fleece trousers and these too were adopted for climbing purposes thus giving the climber the overall appearance of a climbing teddy bear. 'Hellys' as they were known in the climbing world departed from previous styles of dress in two ways. First they contained small logos and secondly that they were made from man made fibres known collectively today as 'fibre pile' and commonly referred to by climbers as just plain 'fleece'. Apart from the synthetic nature of the material another reason for the use of the word fleece was that although hard wearing, flecks of the fibres would often snag on tiny rugosities on the rock face leaving an indiscriminate and intermittent trail similar too, but less clearly observable than, sheep's wool on barbed wires.

'Hellys' were originally developed for the sailing fraternity as insulation to be worn under waterproof outer clothing but for climbing the underwear was sufficient and was worn equally for doing the activity and 'going to the pub'.

The next significant influence on climbers' styles came from Pete Livesey, a leading climber by 1974 who raised climbing standards and introduced the ideas surrounding training coupled with preparation to climb. Livesey had also visited Yosemite Valley in California. Known simply by climbers as 'the valley' this American rockclimbing mecca had its own rockclimbers' hangout. Known as 'Camp Four', Meyers (1979), where each summer groupings of climbers would gather for three or four months to seriously engage in the sport.

Yosemite regulars began to adopt an athletic style which was more appropriate to generally hot Californian summers which meant they often climbed in running shorts and vests more associated with track athletics. Livesey introduced this style to British climbers and eventually it became part of a more athletically orientated climbing look which by 1980 encompassed nylon tracksuit bottoms topped off with a sweatband or bandana.

During the 1980's the dominant climbing style was typified by a group of climbers that came to be known as the 'slateheads' whose lurid and often brightly coloured attire reflected the growing number of coloured fleece garments and lycra tights that became available on the market. These combined to create a kind of anti style which when accompanied by less practical and usually cheap jeans jackets and neck scarves provided a uniform of sorts that made up the in vogue climbing look.

One climbing equipment manufacturer that took account of this style was Troll Ltd, they produced a product called 'second skins' that were supposedly hard wearing climbing tights that came in a variety of striped colours.

Gymnast's chalk had become a feature of the activity in 1974 and could be used by climbers in the same way as gymnasts in order to gain a better grip by drying up any sweat from the fingertips. After some early ambivalence towards its use it had been generally adopted by the climbing world by the mid 1980's. The problem for climbers was that chalk had to be carried throughout an entire climb so that 'chalk bags' initially in various forms, from plastic bags, to socks and handkerchiefs, became available in a variety of garish colours from Troll Ltd. reflecting a further conjunction with practicality and style. The size of these bags varied from 'double dippers' 7" x 8" to 'finger dippers' 5" x 4", more significantly they began to contain manufacturers logos. When in use chalk bags are most often worn at the waist level behind the climber so such logos could be displayed with ease as climbers proceeded on various routes.

The introduction of sports climbing in 1984 initially did little to change general climbing style. Having said that sports climbers were more likely to be seen climbing wearing 'pump vests' beyond the now standard lycra leggings. Pump vests were essentially athletics style armless tops of the type commonly associated with Olympic weight lifters. They clearly allowed freedom of movement but equally importantly allowed any observers or photographers to glimpse the finely honed torsos of climbers brought about by rigorous training regimes and

regularly engaging in the activity. Training shoes and baseball boots replaced walking boots for getting to the cliffs and although widely available and recommended for climbing use helmets remained seldom worn except by 'bumblies' (climbers' parlance for beginners with limited climbing experience).

Although climbers' safety helmets are strictly items of equipment it is worth discussing them in conjunction with climbing style.

In the vast majority of photographs contained in books and magazines relating to rockclimbing action in Wales and throughout the United Kingdom from Abrahams (1897) through to Simmonite (2001) a striking feature concerning most images is that the climbers involved are not wearing helmets.

To outsiders protective headgear seems of paramount importance especially in the event of a fall and in many instances climbers have been criticised for not wearing them simply for narcissistic reasons.

Whilst it is true that climbing helmets do nothing to enhance climbers' appearance in any stylish manner the reasons for setting aside helmets is better understood by examining the dilemma they pose for climbers in action.

In the first instance, it is admitted by even the most egotistical and fashion-conscious climbers that some cranial protection would be an advantage but when this is put into practice by wearing climbing helmets there are also great drawbacks stemming from the fact that they inhibit and affect a climber's balance whilst also restricting head movement especially whilst looking upwards, when the chinstrap often rides down to cut into the climber's neck.

Secondly, the majority of crags throughout Britain used by climbers are not normally affected by stonefall from above except in cases where climbers unintentionally kick off loose material. In Alpine climbing stonefall is a frequent hazard caused by constant freeze/thaw conditions and helmets are therefore an essential item but in Britain considering the reasons noted above most climbers choose to dispense with their use.

Thus by not wearing helmets climbers take a calculated risk not solely based on notions related to style.

In the 1990s climbers' helmets became lighter and better designed than those previously available in the sport from around the late 1950s onwards though they remain limited in use by the majority of climbers engaged in rockclimbing activity.

Also during the 1990s lycra was passed over in favour of loose fitting, hard wearing cotton trousers ('baggies') in more sober khaki colours. Climbers' clothing became less flamboyant again and the younger climbers involved in the development of specialist bouldering seemed to have borrowed their dress style from 'snowboarders' so that their clothing was less visibly striking in the outdoors but nevertheless stylish and practical for their activity.

This style was further adopted by mainstream climbers along with generally shorter haircuts usually covered over with a skullcap-style ski hat. This look was catered for by the growing number of clothing manufacturers catering for the outdoor market in general whilst elements from less in vogue climbers' styles were mixed and matched showing a pastiche of garments at any given climbing site or climbers' 'hangout'.

A characteristic of climbing style since the 1950s has been its mixture between items more generally associated with popular culture during a certain time together with items designed for or associated with outdoor activity. It is this mixture that essentially defines climbing style and much photographic evidence is to be found in Cleare and Smythe (1966) and Jones, T. (1988) to support this view.

The process of change in climbers' styles has often been directed in part by its leading performers and these figures have proved influential for other climbers since any individual development in the sport is partly one of progress by emulation in climbing style, skill and appearance.

The cottage industry that started in the late 1960s to make climbing equipment and later climbing clothing was expanding and during the mid 1980s began to market their products more competitively.

Recognising leading climbers' influence on the sport they began to recruit and sponsor top performers whenever possible as part of an endorsement strategy to sell their products. The strategy itself was nothing new being recognised and described by Packard (1957). It had hardly been prominent in any serious manner in the climbing world though some well known climbers had endorsed products in rudimentary advertising seen in 'Mountain' magazine during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

However with greater numbers of climbers and the promotion of indoor climbing walls as well as a greater number of retailers who aimed their products at the outdoor market in general more aggressive marketing of climbing style became possible in the mid 1980s.

One of the first climbers to collude with companies in this sense during the 1980s was the then leading climber Andy Pollit who told me that in the first instance top climbers would only be offered free equipment and clothing for endorsing products but that :

"At the time I was on the dole so the chance of free gear for doing stuff I did most of the time anyway seemed OK."

In some instances climbers claim that companies have simply stolen climbing style and marketed it to their advantage. In 1984 Troll Safety Equipment Ltd. marketed a product called 'Second Skins' which were lycra-style leggings specifically for climbers (Appendix 6) but in a conversation with two leading climbers from that time one of them (Steve) suggested climbers already used lycra and that the Troll product had somehow monopolised on this point.

MC How did you start wearing lycra for climbing?

DH I was going out with a girl who did ballet and I thought it would be a idea to climb in ballet tights because they were so light and stretchy I borrowed a pair and wore them rolled up to below the knee like breeches, after a couple of routes at Tremadoc in them I realised they were excellent for climbing in even if they looked a bit weird.

MC Steve you told me you invented climbing in Lycra tights, is it true?

SH If I didn't I was definitely one of the first man. Tights and tracky bottoms if you remember were worn by loads of us in the 80's.

MC What about Troll second skin lycra?

SH That was after we'd started wearing it, they just came along and turned it into a ready made climbing item in a way they just nicked a trend then sold it!

(in conversation with the author)

Many of the large companies, were started by individual climbers who sought to develop equipment specifically for use in the climbing world. One example of these now

relatively large companies is DMM which started life as Clog Climbing Equipment in the 1960's to make nuts and karabiners but has since expanded and is competing for climbing business by producing a number of products and clothing.

Clog initially started with three people and was the idea of a local climber who had moved to Dinorwic in Snowdonia North Wales during the 1960's. It is clear that the company has expanded as it now employs 120 permanent staff at its factory near Llanberis and also sponsors 10 climbers.

In 1993 the company decided to introduce a line of clothing which instead of continuing under the name DMM chose the brand name 'Stone Monkey' and by doing so showed the intrusion of a commercial agent into the market of climbing style by a process similar to that referred to by Klein (2000) as 'cool hunting'.

The name 'Stone Monkey' had previously been associated with top adventure climber John Dawes who had in fact appeared in a film about his climbing career in 1989 under the 'Stone Monkey' title. When DMM launched the brand they claimed that they did so because it was a good name for clothing and :

"The directors are climbers and felt there was no climbing clothes on the market they would like to buy."

(Joe, DMM Clothing Manager in conversation with the author)

Dawes understanding of this development is however markedly different and his view of the process illustrates this point :-

MC What do you think about the Stone Monkey logo because I understand you were not involved in its development?

JD Pathetic, utterly pathetic, everyone knows about the Stone Monkey film and its obviously associated with me. They've just seen an opportunity by using the name.

MC Did they consult you?

JD No. Probably because they'd found out legally that they didn't have to. If I had enough money I'd love to take them to court even if I lost it's the principle of it.

MC Do you think it was deliberate?

JD If it wasn't why didn't they stick to their own company name, its pathetic and depressing they could have at least sponsored me or something.

The implications of this event along with the sponsoring of professional and quasi professional climbers indicates that there is enough market potential in the idea of climbing style for it to be an important feature of the climbing business. But this process brings into question the nature and definition of the style itself and the contested nature of the concept both between climbers themselves and between climbers as a group and different commercial interests. The market is developing, today prominent names in the climbing world currently include, The North face, Troll, Patagonia, Berghaus, Scarpa, Five Ten, and S7 amongst others. Almost all of these companies sponsor top climbers in one way or another and as these protagonists may be seen wearing the particular label to which they are contracted style becomes a commodity that can be seen in the reinforcement that takes place in the conjunction of the climber, the climb and the logo. The context of this display is always prestigious in competition, in advertisements and in climbing magazines.

However, not all top climbers either seek or wish to become part of the commercial world preferring instead to remain unprofessional but nevertheless influential climbing activists. The notion of sponsorship is itself ambiguous as we shall see later in this analysis.

Having noted these changes in climbing style some further points must now be made to gain a better understanding of how climbers use and lend meaning to their identity in relation to the climbing world and also against the backdrop of other outdoor enthusiasts.

For example, Snowdon at 3,562ft. is the highest mountain in Wales. It is used currently by walkers, mountain bikers, paraponters, tourists and scramblers. Although climbers do not 'climb' Snowdon there are several crags in its immediate vicinity which require climbers to initially begin walking along one or other of its several paths before veering off to gain access to their own arenas or cliffs.

During the initial walk, climbers share common territory with other outdoor users who, at this stage, are largely indiscernible, except for mountain bikers, from themselves.

They all wear similar clothing which could be described as a general outdoor leisure style consisting, typically, of various nylon or Gortex jackets/anoraks in a variety of colours and makes, hard-wearing cotton trousers, fleece tops and walking boots or outdoor-type training shoes. A rucksack, again in various colours is also normally carried.

The contents of a climber's rucksack contains the equipment, 'gear', and specialist rock shoes which will eventually be used on the actual climb once it is reached. It should also

contain ropes, but one way some climbers reinforce their identity at this stage is by the wearing of ropes.

Ropes are usually neatly coiled so as to prevent any 'kinks' occurring before being uncoiled below a climb, ready for practical use. However, at this point on the shared walking path they are worn in a bandolier fashion around the body or on the outside of the climber's rucksack symbolically stating their identity.

In this sense an item intended for practical use becomes part of the climbers' style for a period of time.

I do not claim that all climbers wear ropes on every occasion in this way, and those that do sometimes claim it is only for 'practical reasons' yet it is interesting to note that the most commonly observable instances of rope wearing occur in shared situations.

Moreover, if we think of outdoor users in terms of a hierarchy it is clear from talking to climbers that they place themselves at the top. This is embodied by the phrases 'it's a path' meaning a graded climb which does not deserve its technical status, and would abstractly be suitable for walkers, and 'they're only going walking' meaning that walking requires less skill and commitment than climbing action and is therefore given less value and status by climbers generally. Occasional short conversations between climbers and hillwalkers in the natural setting further illustrates the point so that when walkers ask "have you been" or "are you going to the top" climbers often reply "No, we're going climbing" with an emphasis on the word climbing.

Certainly climbers do not usually concern themselves with what Ürry (1994) terms the romantic tourist gaze and one aspect of climbing style which symbolises and implies their perceived status is the wearing of the rope.

Looking at the figures used by the marketing agency Mintel which in 1997 placed the total number of climbers in the UK at 700,000 it is quite possible that their definition of climbing is not the one used by climbers themselves but a more general definition which, as illustrated above, climbers prefer to delineate often before getting into action.

Once at the crags climbing style takes on a different meaning altogether and this is best understood not in looking at makes of clothing (which in the case of climbing is usually minimally rather than spectacularly logoed), and equipment but what they represent at stages of use.

For example, if you were to buy completely new equipment and clothing then go climbing at a popular cliff like Tremadoc Rocks in South Snowdonia your style would clearly bear the overall insignia, Novice, since novices or to use another term, beginners, typically have either all or at least some 'shiny' gear which means it has been little used and suggest that the wearer is inexperienced.

In between this and at the current top level in the climbers' hierarchy the image presented is a used one since it symbolises that the climber is or has been 'in action'.

In this sense karabiners that have lost their 'shine' suggest use but karabiners that have become completely dull grey from their original metallic sheen suggests 'sea cliff action' since the dullness is caused by constant exposure to sea air over a period of many sea cliff visits.

Similarly, clothing that is worn, especially anoraks or duvets that have been patched or 'tattooed' with gaffa tape to cover tears symbolises experience 'in action'. Thus items that are worn but not worn out make up and convey symbolic meaning.

When items are replaced they are done so over a period of time so that one or two new items rather than a full set of new clothing and 'gear' maintain the worn look. Like the changes in climbing style the process is gradual rather than immediate or seasonal.

Top climbers who have joined a certain clothing or equipment label in order to gain sponsorship may appear in visual advertisements in climbing magazines wearing their respective brand names yet if they turn up at a certain cliff or in climbers' hangouts wearing new and heavily logoed gear they can expect to be lampooned rather than praised since the 'shiny look' is not valued by the majority of climbers some of whom are top climbers but not sponsored climbers.

Further to this, the nature of sponsorship deals has changed since the 1980s and it is now usually top climbers who seek sponsorship rather than companies approaching them.

This is done by climbers going to outdoor tradeshows and presenting their portfolios to prospective employers. In some cases they may gain a contract of some kind yet this does not mean that the company controls all the routes the climber must do. In many instances sponsorship consists of free equipment and/or clothing with or without a sum of money which may be a few thousand pounds.

The attraction for climbers is that once the deal is cut they can go climbing for a period of time without working in another field but as there are constant competitors the nature of the deal may not be a long-lasting one.

In at least two cases climbers cut deals, did a few photo-shoots then simply went on a 'climbing road trip' to the United States and 'blew' their contracts.

Whatever the nature of sponsorship climbers do not gain greater authenticity in the climbing world by being sponsored but for their climbing action which is usually associated with a worn rather than brand-named new look.

During the latter part of this work in January 2002 I chanced on a grouping of boulders hanging around in 'Parisellas Cave' a bouldering spot well noted by boulders for its overhanging 'problems'. They wore scuffed baggy cotton trousers, thin fleece shirts with quarter arm cotton t-shirts over the top or hooded cotton sweatshirts.

Whilst either hanging from or contemplating various moves they looked more like a strange order of monks since five of them wore tight woollen ski hats not to be confused with thick woollen bobble hats or balaclavas.

They currently reflect a climbers' style that extends to the more dramatic arenas of both outdoor sports and adventure climbing as well as the more unnatural arena of indoor competition climbing where the style is similar but altogether more clean and without skullcaps.

Images relating to climbing style in this sense may also be occasionally seen in the mass media, together with a more consistent view allowed by and reflected in magazines specific to the climbing world.

Another feature of the climbing world is its climbing magazines which exist independently from Club journals and whose positions are only sustained to some degree by the selling of advertising space to companies competing in the outdoor and climbing market.

Their content in conjunction with climber's attitudes towards them are examined in the next Chapter.

CHAPTER 7

THE MEDIA AND SPECIALIST CLIMBING MAGAZINES - AN ANALYSIS

CHAPTER 7 : THE MEDIA AND SPECIALIST CLIMBING MAGAZINES - AN ANALYSIS

The world of climbing and its concerns are normally an internal affair yet occasionally outsiders gain a glimpse at the climbing world through articles in the national media. The most significant example in recent years surrounded the Newbury bypass road building scheme where small groupings of climbers from Wales and Sheffield assisted environmental protesters to resist eviction from tree dwellings by bailiffs in the employ of the Under Sheriff of Berkshire (The Guardian Wednesday March 13 1996).

The relationship between climbing and television began long before these political conflicts took place. In less controversial times several BBC outside broadcasts concerning climbing began in 1966 with the live coverage of an ascent of the 'Old Man of Hoy', 'a sea stack off the coast of the Orkney Islands, consisting of a free standing pillar of sandstone rising some three hundred feet out of the sea. The BBC produced the film as a television drama over a weekend so that from time to time the programme makers broke into other programmes and viewers were transported from their living rooms to the climb whenever a significant event was taking place. This was live drama aimed at providing entertainment for the general public. This type of production became the blueprint for occasional programmes concerning climbing up to the present day.

More recently several videos concerning many aspects of climbing have appeared in 'outdoor' shops throughout the country. Most of the footage is of special interest appealing to climbers or boulderers. There is evidence in these productions of marketing intervention so that in each case the participants can be clearly seen in action and firms logos are clearly seen on garments and equipment. BMC Climbing Rock video (1998).

More dominant than video in the climbing media are three specialist monthly magazines; 'High', 'On The Edge' and 'Climber'. With the exception of 'On The Edge' the current magazines grew from now defunct journals started up in the late 1950s, 60s and 70s. These were 'Mountain Life', 'Rocksport', 'Mountain' and 'Crag'. The BMC 'Summit' magazine and one specialist bouldering magazine called 'Northern Soul' are published quarterly each year and are also a feature of contemporary climbing world literature.

To an extent climbing magazines have always been supported by selling advertising space to clothing and equipment manufacturers. For example, the earliest climbing magazine I was able to obtain during this work 'Mountain' No. 3, September 1969, contained thirty-five pages, seven of which were used by advertising, leaving twenty-eight pages dealing with climbing issues and descriptions.

More recently an analysis of the three monthly magazines and the two quarterly journals in 2000 and 2001 makes the point. To begin with the contents of the magazines/journals were examined over a twelve-month period and related to their respective sales figures so that the prevalence of the publication in the field could be estimated. Thus a breakdown of climbing world magazines in terms of content and numbers of sales for the year 2000 - 2001 reveals some interesting contrasts.

Table One

	Name	Typical Contents per Issue
1	OTE On The Edge	82 pages of which 16 are adverts, 4 are part adverts and 8 are equipment/clothing notes. Leaving 54 pages dealing with articles and information.
2	High/Mountain sports magazine	96 pages of which 29 are adverts, 3 are part adverts and 6 are equipment/clothing notes. Leaving 58 pages dealing with articles concerning climbing, walking and general outdoor information including training and competition climbing.
3	Climber Magazine	98 pages of which 26 are adverts, 4 are part adverts and 1'2 are equipment/clothing notes. Leaving 56 pages dealing with articles and information.
4	BMC Summit Magazine	52 pages of which 21 are adverts 8 are part adverts and 4 are equipment notes. Leaving 19 pages dealing with articles and information.
5	Northern Soul, Bouldering	27 pages of which 0 are adverts except for part add on front cover and free add on back cover. Leaving contents containing 27 pages of information about bouldering only.

Table Two

	Name	Monthly Sales
1	OTE On the Edge Monthly £2.95	10,000
2	High Mountain Sports Monthly £2.80	12,000
3	Climber Magazine Monthly £2.75	12,800
4	BMC Summit Magazine Quarterly £2.50 (Free to BMC members)	45,000
5	Northern Soul, Bouldering Quarterly £4.50	No Audit

Sources: Greenshires publishing group Ltd magazines 1,2 and 4
Warner Group Publications Plc magazine 3
Private Publication magazine 5

One important factor about climbing magazines is that they serve as arenas of debate about crucial issues surrounding the activity.

In this way they act as open forums containing articles and views about ethics, new routes, new sites, and access to sites. Since the mid 1980's they have included sections on training and sports climbing. Thus even with half the space in magazines taken up by adverts they still manage to fulfil an important role in the world of climbing.

The only magazine that is truly specialist in that it focuses on one type of climbing only is the most recent quarterly Northern Soul, which started publication in 1997 specifically for Boulderers in North West Wales. It is published privately by local enthusiasts and contains information about sites where bouldering activity may be carried out, describing various problems by name and grade and occasionally includes articles by local activists.

An indication that climbing in general has become more popular is that copies of the three main monthly magazines are now commonly found on the shelves of high street newsagents. Up until the mid 1980's they were mainly available only through the outlet of various climbing retail shops.

With a growing interest the demand for both technical and social information about climbing is greater than ever thus contemporary climbing magazines covers a broad spectrum of topics. To the layman some sections of their layout are similar to that of a holiday travel brochure, because climbing of all types now takes place in a number of exotic locations around the world.

The analysis of the three main climbing magazines over the past 12 months has shown that on average each issue contains at least one article that gives out clear information about foreign venues. First, it includes, a brief summary of the climbing area together with a topographical account of its position, often in relationship or in contrast to the layouts of other, perhaps better known, areas that act as reference points. This is followed by a number of practical 'bullet' points concerning such matters as the economic and seasonal viability of the enterprise. Prices for air tickets, car hire etc, together with a list of places to stay, distance to supermarkets, family facilities etc. are also included. This enables the discerning climber to choose his/her climbing venue in very much the manner of a standard holiday package, but with the activity of climbing in mind as a key ingredient.

Such articles are usually written by freelance contributors who wish to communicate their experiences to the climbing world in general and if the area described is little known or documented it is more likely to be accepted by magazine editors than a well known climbing site though over a period of time these too may be reassessed and revisited by various groupings of climbers. Magazines pay around £200 per 1500 word article.

Such articles also alert us to the idea that despite many climbing sites in the UK many contemporary enthusiasts are prepared to travel farther a field. Thus areas for climbing now include such diverse locations as The Wadi Rum in Jordan (adventure climbing on desert Sandstone) and many areas of the Costa Blanca in Spain (sports climbing on solid Limestone). Such enterprises illustrate the global nature of climbing.

As with the democratisation of travel within the UK in the years after the Second World War which allowed working class groupings of climbers, such as the 'Manchester Rock and Ice Club' to access various climbing sites within the UK, in particular Wales, so the increase in relatively low cost air travel since the 1980's has allowed many groupings of climbers access to different global sites. This change is reflected in contemporary magazine articles.

For those climbers, who either can not or do not wish to travel abroad, and whose primary concerns lay within the regional or national boundaries of the UK the three main climbing magazines also provides a network of communication. This is done by the inclusion of regular area notes from all parts of the country.

This function provides two services in the world of climbing, first it informs climbers about new routes and climbing arenas. Second it indicates the developments that have taken place at previously known climbing arenas by providing details about new routes which includes the name, grade length of recent climbs and also the names of the first ascent team. Third, area notes act as a kind of halfway house between, new routes books, which exist in various cafes and climbing hang outs throughout the country, and guide books which may take some years to compile.

This process is dependent on what the magazines call their 'area correspondent' who will check the new routes books each month and send off any relevant information to their respective magazines editors. This is the main way in which new climbs initially get into print before eventually being included in guide book, a process that may take years. It should also be noted that this process often prevents climbs that have already been ascended but are not yet written up in existing guide books from being claimed as new routes by subsequent climbers. The following is an example of a climbing magazine news report concerning North Wales.

"C. Warren claimed a line in Dali's hole water level, 'Charlie Rock and Roll' E6 6a. This may be the free version of 'Monkey on a Stick'. Although climbed in drought condition, the route is currently all underwater save the last four feet.

Over on the island George has been busy again first at Penlas rock climbing a groove on the LHS of the zawn. Andy Cave et al climbed a new line right of this. Both lines are un-named and ungraded.

Over at Roscolyn, on some brown walls some way west of main area, George has climbed the groove to the right of the obvious overhang. The un-named route is graded E4/5 6a.

Whilst on Roscolyn, the BMC has been approached by the local church to ask climbers to park on the triangle of grass opposite the church, as opposed to right outside the church especially on a Sunday due to the problems it causes for the Sunday service.

New kid on the block for new routing outside is the talented Danny Cattell who has climbed a new E5 6b/c on Gribin Facet. This unprotected route has the first move as the crux. Model Madness can be found from the first belay of Slab Climb.

Over on the Ormes, J. Roberts has soloed a new line on Crinkle Crag given a short HVS 5a, Gwawr take a vague groove L of 'Grog on the Ground'. On the Llyn, Pat Litlejohn has been active again, climbing Wall of Saints E5 6a on Pen y Cil, which starts up some cracks on the l wall of 'Manx Goove', with T. Penning and J. Boosey. In Microcosm Bay Pat, along with T. Gold climbed 'Baywatch' E3 5b which starts 10ft R of Microcosm and eventually reaches the abseil point of Singing in the Rain (Honed Body useful). There are currently plans for a new Llyn Guide to be published in summer 2001. Any comments/routes can be passed on via Outside in Llanberis where there is currently a draft script. Socially North Wales has been going well for the winter, mainly due to The Northern Soul Presents ..., which has transformed Wednesday nights in The Heights. Typically two locals have been given a slide show each night, with topics from climbing fashion to Paul Pritchard's evocative reading from *Totem Pole*."

Reaves (2000) pp78-79

For individual climbers, living some distance from main climbing areas, but who are active climbers, magazines provide a source of information and at times inspiration. While it is generally the case that novices in the sport sometimes find the highly specialised argot employed by climbers difficult to understand this is particularly important in relation to magazine articles dealing with the ethics and styles of ascent which are part of wider debates in the world of climbing. Not surprisingly some readers have asked for the inclusion of a glossary of terms so that they can better understand climbing articles. An example of this type of plea appeared in the letters column of On The Edge magazine number 105 in March 2001 and reflects a typical beginner's request.

"Dear OTE

I am writing to agree with G. Hutcheson's 'Short and Sweet' letter in OTE 103. I also think that there should be a short article or two or at least a glossary from time to time just to help us beginners to get to grips with the lingo. While the mag is a great source of inspiration for times when I can't even get off the ground from a sitting start, the reading is a bit like reading another language. Since I am in the climbing hell, which is Cambridge, the mag is a good source of escapism and at least shows me what's out there, if only I could understand all of the article that accompanies the pictures.

I'm sure you are keen to recruit new readers so stepping back from the mag and seeing how accessible it is to beginners would be a good move. Otherwise keep up with the great pictures.

Andy Bard
Cambridge"

However, not all climbers are complimentary about climbing magazines and some cast a critical eye over the claimed authenticity and nature of climbing magazines. They are wary because none of the three monthly magazines are run purely by climbers and despite the editors expertise (all three are keen climbers) there is a suspicion that they reflect the interests of commercial bodies who are competing for the allegiance of the climbing public.

Thus Ray described *On The Edge* as 'a poor comic' whilst 'Al' an ex climber of fifteen years experience complained that :-

"Nowadays they're getting more like catalogues of gadgets aimed at consumers than really about climbing".

Perhaps this attitude was best summed up years earlier when the now defunct '*Crags Magazine*' first went to press in 1978. Don Whillans when asked to comment about the relative merits of the new publication famously remarked:

"Better quality toilet paper than the Sun".

Writing in the quarterly '*Summit*' magazine, Mick Ryan has suggested that climbing magazines, along with the promotion of climbing in general, are detracting from genuine climbing concerns, and except for truly specialist journals like '*Northern Soul*', may have too much influence on the way climbing is perceived so that :-

"They have great power and with that comes great responsibility - Neil Pearsons of *On the Edge* magazine recently went so far as to deny this power and hence responsibility. A denial which could be viewed as either reckless or naïve.

What can be done to stop this shameless promotion of climbing by the media? First magazines should only be available by subscription. Like Nevada brothels they can exist but should be banned from any type of promotion or advertising."

Ryan (1997) p9

Ryan's concern is interesting since he uses the open forum of 'Summit' magazine, the British Mountaineering Council quarterly which, with reference to Table 2 reaches 45,000 climbers four times per year.

Further to this advertising climbing equipment and clothing is nothing new. There may well be greater numbers of climbers, sponsored climbers, clothing makers and equipment manufacturers, yet since I was able to trace five remaining copies of earlier climbing magazines, starting in 1970, an analysis shows that the number of advertisements contained in the older magazines is on average exactly the same as in 2001. The following Table illustrates this point.

Table 3

Mountain Magazine	Number of Pages	Number of Advertising Pages	Year
No. 10	38	16	1970
11	40	18	1970
16	40	16	1971
27	52	22	1973
58	56	17	1977

The main differences between pre-1980s climbing magazines and the most current incarnations is that instead of grainy black and white images climbers are now provided with a less uniform glossy colour display as well as reports concerning all types of climbing fairly equally spread throughout each issue.

However by reference to Table Two which shows regular monthly sales figures for the three main monthly magazines to be under thirteen thousand each in comparison with the total number of climbers in the country which is placed at one hundred and fifty thousand according to the British Mountaineering Council, a picture emerges which suggests that a great majority of climbers do not buy climbing magazines.

One reason for this may be associated with the existing word of mouth communication network between climbers in a number of locals which keep each other up to date about climbing activity. In this sense climbers do not need magazines to find out about activity since

they are already informed and often part of it. Much climbers' information can also be gleaned from the electronic communication provided by the Internet and various climbing websites.

On the other hand if they wish to visit an area that they know little about they may be interested in a particular climbing article, report or photograph if and when the area to be visited is covered in a climbing magazine.

Thus some climbers buy climbing magazines on an intermittent basis rather than on a regular or annual subscription, according to their interest in particular features.

Clearly there is some ambiguity concerning the position of climbing magazines in the climbing world itself. But many climbers accept them as part of the climbing scene.

The risk aspects associated with climbing are also reflected in the obituary pages commonly found in climbing magazines showing that, whilst many climbers die from natural causes, there are still those killed in climbing 'action', a feature that is not common to most other sports, mainstream or otherwise.

On average half of each main climbing magazine contains advertisements of one type or another. Many of these contain 'posed' photographs and these are seen, by many climbers, as an insidious source of illegitimacy.

Unlike many other 'live' sporting events such as the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race, Wimbledon Tennis Tournament and the Snooker World Championships the ascent of a particular rock climb is relatively easy to reconstruct particularly if the route is less than two hundred feet in length. The reason for such reconstruction is usually concerned with product advertising. When this takes place it is not always necessary for the climber to perform but merely to 'pose' on predetermined parts of the climb in order to get the correct images for publication. The photograph is 'produced' by using hidden ropes and other aids. This is necessary because in the process of a 'shoot' the climber may have to remain posing in the best position for over an hour while making only a few moves over and over again while the photographer changes lenses, reassess the lighting and manages the 'set'.

The end of the 'shoot' is often dictated by the assessment of how many shots have been taken in the 'good' position showing certain crucial parts of a move or route and has fulfilled editorial expectations as to the images of the gear and company's logo. In this sense the photography of the climbing sphere is no longer purely a record of events, such as Abraham's

(1910) or Cleare (1966), but are intended to present an image of events that may be considered both usable and suitable for publication and promotion.

Professional climbing photographers are relatively few (four resident in North West Wales at the present time for example) and work on a freelance basis though often asked by both magazine editors and 'gear' manufacturers to collude with sponsored professional climbers to gain necessary shots and advertising material.

The role of the photographer in this process is interesting to record. At the very least professional climbing photographers must have some climbing skills if only to get into various positions either at the crag arena or in the indoor arena of the climbing wall. In fact most climbing photographers are very good climbers who, like the sponsored climbers they often work with, seek to earn a living from something they would otherwise do as an amateur.

Most climbing photographers do not wish to present false images of climbing and whenever possible attempt to capture action as it unfolds. But the economic reality of the profession is that the images demanded by the market have to be produced and this is the reason for the occasional reproduction of climbing images in a 'false' situation.

This brings to the fore concerns about authenticity for there is little doubt that certain images showing the action of climbing in various magazines can be described if not as 'fake' then certainly as 'near fake'. In this sense the reconstruction of climbs in order to produce desired images is most often seen in the advertising pages of climbing magazines rather than in the more genuine climbing articles, but in any case are not always easy to spot. To some climbers this is unimportant as long as it is confined to advertising images whilst to others it is a great source of derision and criticism reflecting a further concern by climbers with authenticity.

It is, however, often sponsored climbers and photographers who communicate to amateur friends that certain images have been 'produced' rather than captured as action naturally unfolds, showing no loyalty to sponsors.

Further to this theme are certain occasions and situations when climbing action and experience itself may be faked for quite different reasons and in a different way. Such action remains the preserve of professional guides operating outside the normal mandate commonly associated with climbing teams and is in any case only employed under certain circumstances.

Bearing these points in mind an understanding and description of 'fake climbs' forms the focus of the next Chapter.

CHAPTER 8

'FAKE CLIMBS'

CHAPTER 8 : 'FAKE CLIMBS'

Faking climbs and to an extent rule-bending outside legitimate boundaries occasionally occur in the world of climbing and the most likely circumstances under which this happens in the first instance is that of the client/guide relationship.

Climbing guides are relatively few and alongside thirty-five certified professional guides resident in North Wales at the present time (BMG (2000) there are six non-certified expert climbers who occasionally are appointed by individuals to act as guides. Individuals who contract guides are known in the climbing world as 'clients' and are typically professionals of one type or another who live far away from climbing areas, but maintain an interest in the climbing world though commonly engage in the activity on an infrequent basis. Conversely most clients are avid readers of specialist climbing magazines and retain a knowledge about certain routes some of which they wish to climb. It should also be mentioned that most clients have already embraced the climbing world at some point and although they may have relatively little practical insight and experience have already learnt and engaged in the sport at some stage in their lives. In this sense then the 'client', because of other commitments, has not gone through the entire process of becoming a climber.

Thus the client/guide relationship does not represent a typical climbing team since when a person engages the services of a professional guide it is taken for granted by the employer that the guide will provide a service that will allow the client to experience certain climbs or expeditions in a manner that they may not feel adequately experienced or skilful enough to pursue with their own limited network and practice in the climbing world.

Initially on meeting the client the guide will make an assessment and assumptions about what kind of climber he/she might be. They will usually discuss climbs that the client has already done, taking into account levels of difficulty, how he/she found the climb personally, if he/she led or seconded the climb and so on. Because the guide will be responsible for the client throughout an entire climb the first thing that must be decided is whether the client is 'up to it' that is are they capable of actually doing the climb that they propose to do.

If the guide thinks that the client is not 'up to it' perhaps because he/she is simply not technically competent enough judging by what has been said about routes he/she has done previously then two options are available.

One is to advise the client on a regime that will include ascents of easier climbs in order to build up fitness and technical competence gradually so that the route of their choice can be done at a later date.

The problem with this is that the client may not be prepared or be able to spend the time necessary to embark on such a programme since it would normally require the client to undertake several climbs with the guide perhaps spread over several weekends. As noted, most clients are drawn from various professions; bankers, lawyers etc and often live some distance from their chosen climbing areas and whilst guides fees are usually expensive (currently one hundred and fifty pounds per day) the issue of time is of paramount importance to the client.

Taking this into account the guide may in some cases decide to 'fake' the climb and if this course of action is decided upon it must be carried out with some precision so that the client gains maximum benefit and feels they have done the climb in good style even if in reality they have bought a carefully orchestrated climbing experience which would not otherwise be available.

How then is a climb faked? What are the subtleties, which must be employed by the guide to make this possible? Given that the client wishes to do a climb (usually a famous one which has been well documented and photographed in the climbing press, for example Joe Brown's route Cenotaph Corner on Dinas Cromlech in the Llanberis Pass) in an authentic manner whilst playing the role of second in the climbing team.

Clearly such persons cannot be simply winched up the climb since this would not satisfy client's desires or perception of themselves as climbers and also lessen the chances of future employment for the guide.

Faking the Climb

Firstly the guide calculates roughly how long it may take for the client to climb the route and as the guide leads this will be borne in mind and since the client has to feel part of a team some kind of balance in ascent times is sought after. For instance it would be of no value for the guide wishing to stage-manage the overall climb to lead the route in ten minutes whilst the client is left to struggle up in three quarters of an hour or more nor of course would the client have much confidence in the guide if the guide was seen to unduly struggle over a

long period of time on routes they were supposedly familiar with.

The guide then makes sure the client is comfortably attached to the cliff at the start of the route and before setting off also makes sure there are no kinks or knots in the rope so that the client will have no difficulty in paying out the rope (belaying) as the guide leads off up the route.

Although this is a normal procedure what the client may not know is that few guides ever trust the client to hold them in the event of a fall so that as they lead the climb the psychological mandate they employ is that of the solo climber even though they may place protection devices en route which make the ascent look real. In the fake ascent protection is placed in positions on the route that the guide deems easy of access so that the client will have an easy task when removing it. This requires great skill on the part of the guide since it means that the hardest sections of the route will be climbed either without or with very little protection allowing the client during his or her ascent the luxury of not having to bother with the removal of protective items in the middle of difficult sections of climbing. In the normal situation of a 'real' climb it is worth mentioning that the hardest sections or section of any given climb (known as the 'crux' or 'cruxes' in climbers' parlance) would be the place most likely to be protected by the leader.

Together with this strategic placement of protection the guide may also time waste whilst leading by holding positions on the particular route that under real circumstances he/she would quickly by pass. This must be done in a stylish manner so that the impression given to the client is that the climb is not so easy for the guide as to be of no concern but also at the same time well within his/her capabilities. As previously mentioned the timing of a fake climb is important to the overall credibility of its ascent for the team.

Having arrived at the top of the climb and made safe his/her position the guide communicates to the client to start the ascent and it is this performance that is crucial to the outcome of a faked climb.

Normally when a leader takes in the rope as a second person climbs he/she does so in a manner that serves to protect rather than aid the second persons ascent. In this case then the rope is kept relatively slack and only taken in when and as the second moves upwards.

Under the circumstances of a faked climb it is possible to aid the ascent of the client by means of subtle use of rope work. In this case the guide keeps the rope 'snug' throughout

the entire time the client is moving releasing the pressure ever so slightly if the client decides to stay in one position for any length of time. The trick is to let the client feel as if they've really climbed the route in true authentic style when in reality they have benefited from the aid of the rope ever so slightly throughout the entire ascent.

At some point on the route the guide may take in the rope deliberately very tight so that the client feels it pulling them upwards, however the guide immediately apologises and normally offers an excuse: "Sorry I thought you were moving up" before slacking off back to the required degree of slight tension, by this act the client feels what is called a tight rope, often referred to in the climbing world parlance as a 'G sharp' but as they are not allowed by the guide to make the entire ascent in this manner again feel justified afterwards in claiming for themselves a true ascent.

Clearly then this is a subtle operation in which the guide constantly assesses the clients progress and feel of the client whilst at the same time monitoring his/her own credibility in the over all performance.

It is because of the adoption of such methods that 'John the Banker' a fourteen-stone client based in London, and 'The goose' a wealthy stockbroker with mostly theoretical climbing experience can claim to have done Cenotaph in the role of seconds as part of a guided climbing team.

Clients are generally not regarded as 'real' climbers despite often displaying a good theoretical knowledge of the climbing world, and even when 'faking' is unnecessary there is always a sense in which the guide whilst monitoring the overall climbing situation keeps the client under constant supervision based on the premise that :-

"I'll tell you something about guiding which sounds like I don't like clients but don't get me wrong some of them are very nice people and sometimes good climbers but what you should remember if you're taking them out is based on two rules. One your client is trying to kill you and two your client is trying to kill you and themselves. Think of it like that and it should turn out OK."

(Mugs S. in conversation with the author)

Further to the faking of climbs in the client/guide situation rule-bending which is not associated with pushing boundaries at the upper limit of the sport but nevertheless involves disingenuous competitive aspects occasionally occurs in the climbing world.

This type of rule-bending relates to the gradings that first ascensionists give to climbs after completing them since in some cases a fake grade is apportioned and this abstraction of normative procedures is called 'sandbagging' and amounts to a deliberate attempt by the authors of a route to mislead others as to its relevant difficulty clearly this could have dangerous consequences but more often than not results in the failure of subsequent aspiring ascensionists to complete the given route. In this way a psychological advantage is gained by the first ascensionists so that they may be seen as finding climbs less difficult. If however it becomes known that this is not the case and that the first ascensionists have merely engaged in a 'sandbagging' campaign to make others think highly of them then their game will be relatively short lived and the grade of their given route or routes will eventually be pinpointed by consensus so that their original definition might be over ruled in favour of a more realistic grade.

Two examples concerning 'sandbagging' relate to the routes 'Quantum Jump' and 'Zangorilla' in the Llanberis Pass, North West Wales. In the first instance 'Quantum Jump' was originally graded E2.5c but has now been re-graded and is currently rated E5.6b whilst still described as :

“The nemesis of many a pub hero.”

Williams (1987) p114

In the second example 'Zangorilla' originally graded E15B is now rated more appropriately at E35c with a reminder that it was :

“Suicidally under-graded at E1.”

Williams (1987) p276

'Sandbagging' however is more typically used as a ploy between competing teams of climbers, since whilst discussing the merits and grades of certain routes one team may persuade another that a certain route is easier than its grade suggests and that the difficulties encountered are exaggerated. Armed with this false information the gullible team eventually attempts the given route only to find they have been 'sandbagged' and that difficulties are indeed considerable as opposed to easier than expected.

The grading of all climbs is initially a subjective affair so that on occasions the opposite of 'sandbagging' may occur. In this case subsequent ascensionists of a highly graded route are pleasantly surprised to find that the difficulty they had been led to expect is nowhere encountered.

In this instance the first ascensionists find that their route has been dramatically 'downgraded' and they are no longer trusted in their assessment of difficulty. The inference is that they are not as competent as they had initially imagined so that in future they must be more circumspect with regard to grading climbs if only to 'save face', when and if they grade routes after completing a first ascent.

In the cases of 'sandbagging', or 'downgrading' there is little doubt that some form of action has been carried out. Namely that although certain teams may have not for one reason or another, given their route the correct grade as corresponding to an ascending order of difficulty, which makes up the commonly accepted grading scale, the fact that they actually climbed the route is usually not brought into question.

Moreover it is clear that particularly on first ascents of climbs the route is pioneered by a team, which may vary in number but nevertheless constitutes a degree of complicity and therefore provides other witnesses as to the event besides the leader. If the climb is done 'solo' or alone then dependent on the individuals status as a climber his/her word is either taken on oath or awaits the submissions of non participants who may have witnessed the 'solo' climber in action. Subsequent ascents either confirm or reaffirm the given grade as is the norm in the instances already discussed.

In what appears to be an extremely unusual attempt to dupe climbers into believing routes had been done when in reality they had not, an incident known in the annals of the climbing world as 'The Great Gogarth Hoax' took place during the mid 1960s in North West Wales.

Two routes in particular 'Gaels Wall' and 'A Bhastier' caused leading Gogarth pioneers to become suspicious of their authors credibility. Objectively it might have been that here was an outsider who threatened dominance of a certain local at a certain time by achieving higher standards than those being set by the leaders of the established activists however evidence began to suggest that this unfortunately was not the case.

In the first instance Lesley and Laurence Holliwell climbed a route called 'Yellow Scar'

which during the ascent required the removal of a large amount of loose rock. Some time later they were surprised to find that the description X had provided for 'A Bhasier' was almost identical to the route they had done. Peter Crew another leading climber at this time made an abseil inspection of another of X's routes on the upper tier and found it to be almost devoid of suitable holds for the grade given and in fact some way in advance of the standards of the day.

The Holliwell brothers then wrote to X asking for verification of his climbs and the addresses of his 'second' since it had become known that X was in fact a climber from the Midlands and as such a member of a climbing club from that area of the country.

X wrote back giving extremely detailed route descriptions but not 'seconds' addresses and furthermore gave the date of his ascent of 'Gaels Wall' as a day when the Holliwell brothers were clearly in view of it for the best part of the day, climbing a route in the same area.

During this time the editor of a now defunct magazine (Mountain Craft) brought the problem out into a more open forum which eventually led to a bizarre conclusions so that :-

“Urgent enquiries were made among Mr X's fellow club members, all of whom were middle-grade climbers and thus in no position to gauge the importance of the routes Mr X had claimed. When it turned out that none of them had ever seen Mr X lead a hard climb, and that no one had ever met his three reported companions, McLean, Martin and Irvine, and that the routes claimed had nearly all been done mid-week, when the club was not in Wales, it became clear to the investigators (Crew, Al Harris, Les Holliwell and myself) that a major hoax had been discovered. A letter was sent to Mr X, asking him to provide the addresses of his supposed companions, so that the routes could be confirmed, but no addresses were forthcoming. The main problem was that the New Climbs Bulletin of that year had just been published, and it was full of Mr X's bogus route descriptions. There was clearly a safety element involved, and climbers had to be alerted quickly so that the routes would be treated with caution. The editor of the New Climbs Bulletin was reluctant to publish a correction. He carried out a written exchange with Mr X, to try and clear the matter up, but soon even he had to admit that the evidence was overwhelming. A cautionary notice was published in the main climbing magazines, naming twenty-nine suspect routes.

Throughout all this, Mr X claimed that he was telling the truth and threatened legal action against anyone who said that he wasn't. Following publication of the correction notice, instead of receding gracefully into the private labyrinths of his own fantasy, Mr X continued to invite criticism by publishing and selling his own interim guidebooks, which contained some of his routes. His fellow

club members responded by publishing a disclaimer in Mountain, making it clear that they did not support this move. But something had to be done to bring the whole thing into the open more clearly, and Peter Gilman of the Sunday Times was informed, it being felt that a big newspaper would have the resources to fight any legal battles that might develop. The paper published a generally neutral article, but the overall impression was clear enough, and nothing has been heard of Mr X in the climbing world since."

Wilson (1978) p33

Because climbing tends to be socially policed, luckily this incident remains a unique case and although climbers sometimes go to some lengths to conceal the whereabouts of a recently discovered crag to ensure that those who discovered it gain the advantage of picking off the best new routes with limited competition, once this has been done descriptions of the new climbs and the location of the crag arena are normally recorded in a genuine manner, initially in a new routes book.

The authors of new routes are usually keen to persuade other climbers to repeat their routes and discuss the merits or drawbacks of such climbs so as to arrive at a consensus of opinion concerning grading, techniques used on the climb and so on. In some instances climbs may be afforded the status of the label 'classic' which means that they will contain characteristics which climbers appreciate such as providing an improbable-looking way up a rockface which on closer acquaintance turns out to be imbued with features that allow the climber to get into fantastic positions whilst remaining technically climbable at a certain grade (Appendix 6).

Occasionally climbs, whilst not fake, are stolen from the climbing world in that they may be presented publically as a form of climbing achievement whilst not being considered really climbed in the eyes of the climbing world because the ascent has not been made in the best possible style. The most striking example of this can be seen by considering another type of climbing in an altogether different climbing arena and on a larger international scale.

Throughout this work it has, hopefully, been shown that how a climb is done is more important to climbers than size or height of a climb and to finalise the point the focus of the next Chapter turns to the ascent of the highest mountain in the world - Everest.

CHAPTER 9

INAUTHENTIC AND AUTHENTIC EVEREST :
A QUESTION OF STYLES AND COMMODITY

CHAPTER 9 : INAUTHENTIC AND AUTHENTIC EVEREST : A QUESTION OF STYLES AND COMMODITY

“The rules are simple: no oxygen, not even at base camp, no high-altitude porters, no intermediate camps, no fixed ropes except perhaps down low, to cross a bergschrund or something like that. We take a very light pack for speed. Nothing extra ... We climb as a pair, occasionally as a trio. We climb night and day without stopping, without sleeping. We eat and drink very little. We go for it. It’s all in the head.” Troillet (1996) p22

It should be clear from the beginning of Chapter 1 that climbing in Wales and throughout the UK as a sport in its own right grew from the interests, though not exclusively so, of Victorian alpinists, some of whom splintered off from the Alpine Club to develop rock climbing as a separate sport, Hankinson (1977).

Throughout this thesis I have focussed on an understanding of this development and together with the actions and processes involved in rock climbing as different groupings of climbers have influenced and come to characterise the sport over a period of time.

One of the main points about this development has been the climbers’ emphasis on styles of ascent so that just how a climb is done remains of central concern in the types of climbing so far discussed. To finalise the thesis I wish to return to Alpine Climbing in order to show that style is not solely the preoccupation of climbing in Wales and throughout the UK in general but is also the concern of climbing on an international mountaineering level.

Firstly it should be noted that the term Alpine Climbing is generally applied not just to climbing in the Alps but to any area in the world where Alpine environments are found, including the Himalaya. The general term Alpine Climbing is frequently used in the context of mountaineering the main aim of which is to climb to the summit of mountains. There are many rock climbers who have no wish to climb mountains but that does not exclude mountaineers from engaging in technical rock climbing when and if this is required along with snow and ice climbing skills and glacier negotiation which are the ingredients of a typical Alpine climb, together with high altitude.

As noted, authenticity in the climbing world is concerned with style of ascent which

relates directly to the 'ethics' of the sport . Style then is an important factor in climbing and is often debated in conjunction with a framework which also includes concerns relating to legitimate boundaries.

As climbers and groupings of climbers compete in arenas for resources these issues become the most salient themes surrounding ascents and are particularly important in the case of first ascents.

Every type of climbing has its ethics (although these may be little known outside the social world of climbing) and mountaineering is no exception. Therefore it is important to understand that all mountains in the greater ranges such as the Himalayas and Caucasus may only be considered as being 'really' climbed when their ascents have been made in pure 'alpine style'. Pure alpine style relates to a way of doing the activity within an ethical code which allows only climbers, not supported on the actual ascent by guides or Sherpas with only the bare minimum of equipment and in the Himalaya this means no use of oxygen at high altitude, commonly known among Sherpas as 'English air'. The origins of this style can be traced back to Albert Frederick Mummery (1855-95) who in his book *'My climbs in the Alps and Caucasus'* (1895) explains this philosophy in the final Chapter 'The Pleasures and Penalties of Mountaineering' where he advocates guide-less alpine climbing.

Unfortunately Mummery disappeared on an attempt to climb 'Nanga Parbat' in the Indian Himalaya in the same year that his book came out, yet his way of climbing mountains is still considered ethically sound, prompting Reinhold Messner in Himalayan climbing to write:-

"There is now almost 100 years history of climbing the eight thousand metre mountains. It was in 1895 that Albert Frederick Mummery made the first attempt on Nanga Parbat; an attempt in a style which would be considered exemplary even today".

Messner (1988) p11

Yet in the history of mountaineering not all mountains were initially climbed in an 'exemplary' way and an example of this was the first ascent of Mount Everest in 1953. Indeed the manner in which Everest was climbed is known in the climbing world as 'siege' climbing and is in sharp contrast to Alpine Style climbing in that the maximum use of support and

equipment is used in order eventually to place one or two climbers on the summit.

Although there is no doubt that the 1953 ascent culminated in the summit being reached, the way in which it was reached using such 'siege' tactics meant that it still represented a challenge to groupings of mountaineers who wished to climb the mountain in Alpine Style and this was achieved in 1978.

The history and events surrounding the 'climbing' of Everest then were perhaps more significant nationally in 1953 than the ascent in 1978 which is often referred to as the 'real' first ascent of Everest by climbers involved in the Alpine arena.

The British involvement with the mountain dates back to 1852 when a clerk working at the office of the Indian Trigonometrical Survey voiced his claim to have discovered the highest mountain in the world after calculating 'Peak XV' to be 29,002 feet above sea level. The height of the peak was later changed, after careful calculation to 29,028 feet (8848m). Although two local names already existed Chomolungma, which translates into English as Goddess Mother of the Snows and Sagamatha, the mountain is generally referred to as Everest in the Western world Hemleb, Johnson and Simonson (1999), being named after Sir George Everest (1790 - 1866), Surveyor General of India.

Since attempts to climb Everest began in 1921 it remained up until its eventual first ascent on Friday May 29th 1953 a British 'owned' mountain. The geographical location of Everest places it in a chain of Himalayan mountains bordering Tibet and Nepal so that with neighbouring country India controlled by the British Empire a system of bureaucracy existed which made it extremely difficult even for English expeditions to get under way. American and continental expeditions were untenable as far as Everest was concerned so that it appeared Britain retained the sole rights for any attempt at its ascent.

In 1913 captain J.B. Noel made an illicit journey into Tibet disguised as a Nomad (at that time both Nepal and Tibet did not allow foreigners across their borders). When Noel returned in 1919 he gave a lecture to the Royal Geographic society which revealed that he had travelled within forty miles of Everest, Noel (1989). The lecture must have stimulated interest in the mountain because shortly afterwards a joint Everest committee was set up between the Alpine club and the Royal Geographic Society. Under these auspices the first of the British Everest Expeditions began to take shape. Unfortunately it would appear that to be considered at all aspiring participants had to come from the same class and fit the same social

constructions as those nominated by the committee. In this sense it is possible that more able personnel were excluded from any chance of joining such expeditions when and if they arose.

The first Everest expedition took place in Spring 1921 but was not a serious attempt at climbing but a strategic reconnaissance of the North or Tibetan side of the mountain and was led by Colonel C.K. Howard-Bury, Bury (1922). The second expedition took place in 1922 and was again a primarily English 'public school' affair though it contained an Australian George Finch (the best technical climber on the team) who for unclear reasons was excluded from the 1921 and 1924 expeditions. To give an idea of the logistics involved it is worth noting that the thirteen man team was supported by sixty Nepalese Sherpas, around one hundred Tibetan porters with three hundred load bearing yaks and horses "a veritable army in miniature", Unsworth (1981).

Although the climbers reached a height of 27,235 feet the mountain remained unclimbed and the enterprise ended in tragedy when an avalanche killed seven Nepali Sherpas. A military man Brigadier General Charles G. Bruce with Colonel E.T. Strut as second in command had again led the expedition, Bruce (1923). The next and final expedition of the 1920's set out in 1924. Interestingly a woman (Anne Bernard) made an application to join the team which resulted in a statement from the Everest committee:

"It is impossible for the mount Everest committee to contemplate the application of a lady of whatever nationality to take part in a future expedition of Everest. The difficulties would be too great."

Quoted in Climber Magazine (1993) p17

The enterprise was again led by Brigadier General Bruce and contained amongst its members the significant figures of George Leigh Mallory and 'Sandy' Irvine. Mallory had already embarked on a climbing career in Wales and the Alps but his particular blend of Englishness, linked to public school, notions of athleticism together with scholarly application meant that his exploits exhibited a form of cultural nationalism that would be forever bound up with Everest and all things British, Robertson (1969).

Mallory was the only member of the team who had been on all three expeditions and his disappearance along with 'Sandy' Irvine high on the North Ridge of Everest, tragic as it was, resulted in heroic status on a national level. Speculation as to whether or not he and

Irvine gained the summit remains to this day and whilst many climbers past and present have either disappeared or been killed in various parts of the world none have become such classically heroic figures as Mallory and Irvine, Gillman (2000).

No more attempts were made on Everest till the 1930's when another four British expeditions, 1933, 1935, 1936 and 1938 launched strenuous efforts to gain the summit. Led by climbers such as Eric Shipton and Bill Tillman the British were once again rebuffed. It is also worth mentioning that in 1934 a clearly eccentric Englishman Maurice Wilson made a solo attempt which ended in tragedy when he disappeared somewhere near the North Coll. The mountain certainly appeared to be entering the English national psyche, creating in some instances, obsessive and foolhardy notions of how it could be ascended.

With the start of world war two activity on the mountain ceased and did not really start again in a serious manner till 1951 when a British reconnaissance team travelled through Nepal to ascertain if an attempt might be feasible from the south side of the mountain, Unsworth (1981).

The team was led by Eric Shipton who was noted for his Alpine style ascents together with Bill Tillman who often partnered him on small lightweight expeditions. Shipton was initially the leader of the 1953 Everest expedition but was eventually superseded by Colonel John Hunt before leaving Britain because :-

“After eight failed attempts on Everest, the Himalayan Committee decided that they needed a more forceful man in charge, somebody who was going to make sure they got to the top.”

Hillary (1999) p139

Despite the political climate in the region having changed from pre war positions, (India being independent and China now controlling Tibet), no other nations had obtained permission to attempt Everest apart from the British. However in 1952 a Swiss expedition had been granted permission by the Nepalese authorities to make an attempt. The British tried in vain to turn the bid into an Anglo Swiss affair but did not succeed and made no secret of their relief when the attempt failed high on the mountain, Hunt (1953).

In 1953 the British once again launched an all out expeditions to the peak. The eventual success was a culmination it would appear not so much of individual skill, though it is not my

intention here to denigrate individual achievements, but came about more from adherence to strict logistical planning which sought to reduce the mountain into a manageable operation conducted more like a military assault than an Alpine style ascent.

However, it is worth noting that in 1953 British notions of Empire were diminishing, as was the physical reality, which was no more poignantly represented by the granting of independence to India in 1947. America monopolised the Western world economically and Britain remained much in her debt so that at the onset of the 'cold war' with the Soviet Union it was, largely speaking, an American led foreign policy that Britain went along with, playing a more symbolic than pragmatic role.

It could be argued that this period was the end of the Empire as it had hitherto been conceived in the British psyche so that it became clear that Britain and British morale in general required a significant boost.

In 1953, against this backdrop, came the climbing of Everest by a British led expedition under Colonel John Hunt which seemingly was timed to coincide with the coronation of Queen Elizabeth the Second.

The actual summiteers were a New Zealander (Edmund Hillary) and a Nepalese Sherpa from the Khumbu region of Nepal (Tenzing Norkay). Yet this was of secondary importance since the logistic and management side of the affair had been a British endeavour carried out in the finest traditions and national spirit associated with exploration and adventure. The historian Richard Holt suggests that :-

“The climbing of Everest coincided with the crowning of the new Queen and there was much talk of a ‘second Elizabethan age’. The Times compared the conquest of Everest with Drake’s circumnavigation of the globe. It was the manner of this triumph as much as anything else that pleased the British. There was a charming amateurism and eccentricity about the expedition. Umbrellas had been carried up to 13,000ft. Sir John Hunt played the part of the cultured, competent, phlegmatic Englishman reading the Oxford Book of Greek Verse while organizing supplies and technical support with the minimum of fuss.”

Holt (1989) p278-9

Two points should be made about this statement. Firstly, any notions about ‘charming amateurism’ were annulled when Eric Shipton was replaced by Hunt as expedition leader since this meant the climb would be planned in militaristic style rather than the lightweight alpine

style approach favoured and practised by Shipton.

Secondly, whilst the carrying of umbrellas may appear to have symbolised English eccentricity its meaning and relevance is a practical one since they were and are often used by climbers in the Himalayas on the walk into any particular mountain in order to provide shade from the heat of the sun.

The Everest climb brought the nation not only to focus on the physical events concerning the ascent of the highest mountain in the world but also its significance in symbolic terms as to what being British represented and in this sense it boosted social morale.

Thus the Everest ascent was, along with the coronation, of symbolic national importance relevant to a particular time so that for a brief moment a public focus in attention was directed towards the highest mountain in the world before casting back to the more commonly available areas of sporting interest such as football, cricket and rugby.

After 1953 the legacy of Everest meant that as far as most people were concerned Everest had been climbed. It was in fact a very symbol of climbing achievement and aspiration in the public sphere yet in the climbing world many activists in the sport became critical of the type of climb Everest represented and of the style in which it was climbed.

Interestingly, the Everest climb may be contrasted against events in Wales during the same period which, although undirected or supported by powerful outside bodies and whose outcomes had little political importance, nevertheless had far greater lasting significance in the climbing world.

In this sense the ascent of Cenotaph Corner (Chapter 1) by working-class climbers in 1952, a rock climb whose length is a little under 150ft. had more impact on the climbing style and standards in Britain than did the ascent of the world's highest mountain. Thus the 'corner' remains an authentic landmark in the development of 'adventure' climbing whilst the Everest climb in 1953, as the quotation at the beginning of this Chapter suggests, was subsequently regarded as not being climbed in exemplary style owing to the great amount of support and organization on which the final 'assault' relied.

Even in a contemporary setting Everest, the highest mountain on earth endures a popular myth that all climbers ultimately wish to climb it by any means possible. This popular misconception may be best annulled by an understanding of the climbing world which shows that climbing as a sport is essentially about style when competing in arenas for resources

rather than about going highest and notions of conquest under any circumstances. As John Krakauer points out :-

"The culture of ascent was characterised by intense competition and undiluted machismo, but for the most part, its constituents were concerned with only one another. Getting to the top of any given mountain was considered much less important than how one got there: prestige was earned by tackling the most unforgiving routes with minimal equipment, in the boldest style imaginable."

Krakauer (1997) p240

The significance of the first ascent of Everest in political and national terms was therefore far greater to the general public than it was to the climbing world and the reason for this was that it was not climbed in authentic 'alpine style'.

The climbing world in general whilst noting aspects of Everest and taking account of expedition tactics in relationship to pure styles of ascent champions only those often unheard of outside the climbing world, who are really representative of what the sport is about and this is as evident in the Himalayan arena as it is at a more local level.

To emphasise this point an extract from an article which cited the ten most exemplary figures in Himalayan climbing from the last century did not include any 1953 Everesters but acknowledged the Austrian, Herman Buhl's ascent of Nanger Parbat also achieved in 1953 but clearly in a different style to the Everest climb with which it may be contrasted: -

"Herman Buhl (1924 - 1957)

High lightweight, solo summit bid on Nanga Parbat in 1953 not only gave him the prized first ascent on a mountain dripping with significance for German and Austrian climbers but secured his mythic status as the inheritor of Mummery's legacy and a guru for the late 1970's resurgence of alpine-style climbing in the Himalaya Tragically killed after stepping through a cornice on Chogolisa's summit ridge soon after making the first ascent of Broad Peak with a small team.

Climber (January 2000) p35

The climbing style remains the important issue rather than size or simply getting up by any means possible.

In as far as the world of climbing is concerned the 'real' or pure first ascent of Everest

was made by two Austrian climbers in 1978 (Reinold Messner and Peter Habeler) climbing alpine style and therefore using no support team or bottled oxygen.

This ascent received little recognition outside the climbing world compared with the 1953 ascent and whilst of no great political importance was extremely significant in the international climbing arena particularly for groupings of climbers concerned with the type of climbing which favoured and exemplified pure alpine style. Thus within this grouping of climbers Messner and Habeler became top of a particular hierarchy and this point was emphasised when the climb was reported in 'Mountain' magazine's July 1978 issue :-

“This achievement confirms the place of Messner and Habeler as undoubtedly the finest partnership of mountain climbers in the world.”

Mountain (1978) p37

In 1988 Everest was climbed via a new route (the Kanshung Face) by a four-man Anglo-American team climbing in pure Alpine style. This was an important event in the climbing world Venables (2000), Webster (2001), though was less significant in a public sense. Gaining less publicity than a previous British new route on the mountain done in 1975 on the south west face that employed siege tactics on a large scale, Bonnington (1975).

So far in this discussion I have concentrated on notions surrounding the authenticity or in-authenticity of how Everest was climbed and its importance in a public sense in contrast to its importance in the climbing world so as to emphasise the point that style is an all-important issue in any type of climbing so far as the climbing world is concerned.

These arguments are further complicated in a contemporary setting by the commodification of Everest which has taken place largely since 1986, Breashers (1998), and the process by which this came about is highlighted by Doug Scott in the Alpine Club Journal:-

“Suddenly it strikes certain people who have been successful in other spheres of life that they would like to climb Everest, even though in some cases they have had no previous climbing experience. With their 'can do' mentality they have fat enough wallets to make them think they can buy anything, even reaching the top of Everest and getting down safely. After paying a guide or a guiding organisation huge amounts of money, currently around \$65,000 a time, off they go onto the mountain, as little more than a dog on a leash. In good weather a lot of them 'succeed'; in bad weather many of them do not

and remain up there or come back terribly mutilated. The accruing publicity from such disasters only seems to encourage more non-climbers to sign up for the mountain, egged on no doubt by such claims as that of a Frenchman who climbed Everest and declared afterwards that it was the first mountain he had climbed. He was lucky with the weather and with his own ability to acclimatise but, as we saw in the summer of 1996, when the weather comes in, terrible things can happen high on Everest, even to climbers who have earned every right to be there by a long apprenticeship climbing elsewhere, but especially to clients on commercial expeditions.

The first of the genre was the high-profile and somewhat flamboyant Texan tycoon, Dick Bass, aged 55, who bought his way onto a Norwegian expedition and paid for his guides David Breashers and Ang Phurba to take him to the summit. He reached the summit and thus completed his quest to be both the oldest man to climb Everest and the first to climb the Seven Summits. The other six of the Seven Summits seem to have been the only climbing that he had done previously. Bass made it because he was canny enough to make certain that he was roped to two good men all the way to the summit. After his ascent in 1985, and his obvious enjoyment of the achievement, Dick Bass became quite evangelical about the benefits of climbing high and his success had the effect of encouraging a lot more non-climbers to follow the same trail. Guiding organisations were subsequently set up to meet this demand for climbing high in the Himalaya.”

Scott (1998) p194

Everest therefore became commodified by this process and climbing Everest has now become largely the concern of various companies such as ‘Mountain Madness’ and ‘Out there Trekking’.

Clearly the economic and time commitment in climbing Everest is an important factor and consumers of ‘high places’ wishing to reserve a position on such outings must be prepared to pay an expensive individual client fee. The experience is therefore the exclusive preserve of wealthy clients, yet success is not inevitable and sometimes clients have paid with their lives (accounts of these disasters are to be found in Krakauer (1997) and Dickinson (1998)).

Despite strongly disagreeing with the style of commercial expeditions protagonists of ‘real’ alpine style Himalayan climbing remain powerless to influence the course of this action though they would clearly prefer it not to happen.

In the same way that adventure climbers in more local arenas take all their equipment both to and from crags and make positive efforts not to litter such places, so too do alpine style climbers attempt not to litter their mountain arenas with abandoned equipment. As with

adventure climbing, any equipment that is left in place is done so reluctantly.

As we have seen from an analysis of adventure climbing, its arenas are policed by climbers themselves and infringement of ethical boundaries are in most cases quickly rectified. In this sense adventure climbing arenas remain the preserve of adventure climbers, whilst other types and styles of climbing take place elsewhere.

In the case of the Everest arena, it is impossible for alpine style climbers to police and the mountain has become a disputed arena where two contrasting styles of ascent may take place side by side. The impossibility of 'policing' Everest owes much to two significant factors. The first being logistical and the second economic.

The second factor is particularly important and relates directly to local inhabitants as well as the climbing world. The reason for this is that commercial Everest expeditions employ a great number of 'sherpas' each season*. Sherpas are the local inhabitants of the Khumbu region of Nepal where Everest is situated. They are employed to provide a number of services including cooking, portering and fixing ropes on commercial climbing expeditions and although there are also some sherpas employed as climbing guides most of the guides working on a commercial basis are of Western origin. From my own observations and experience of four Himalayan climbing trips, Sherpas seem to derive great amusement from the antics of visiting climbers and remain unconcerned for the most part with notions of climbing style whilst colluding with the climbing business.

Climbing in the Himalaya in general has, again, been largely influenced by visitors and as most regions associated with this type of climbing otherwise base their lives on an agrarian economy it is not surprising that jobs made possible by the climbing/tourist industry are readily taken up by locals. Clearly climbers have made an impact on the locale in general and this is clearly observable in a number of forms which I will briefly describe.

Firstly, to get as far as Everest base camp at an altitude of 18000ft. It is necessary to trek for at least six days into the Khumbu Valley. There are no roads and if this trek is started from the roadhead itself ten days is a more normal time. The six-day time is reserved for those flying from Kathmandu to a small and somewhat dangerously positioned airstrip at Lukla.

The first major village reached in two days from Lukla is called Namche Bazaar and this has traditionally been the equivalent of a regional market town where people from all over

* Everest is normally climbed either pre-monsoon in the spring, or post-monsoon in the autumn.

the Khumbu come to trade their wares.

In a contemporary setting 'Namche' still acts as a major trading place in the area. However, its goods now partially consist of climbing gear in many forms that has been left behind by numerous trekking and climbing expeditions so that down sleeping bags, duvets, ropes and ice axes can all be bought secondhand en route to Everest.

Two hours further on is the small village of Khumjing whose school contains a bell made from a discarded oxygen cylinder that was brought back from Everest base camp.

Further on again is the Thangboche monastery where Everest climbers are sometimes blessed by Bhudist monks before tackling the Everest climb. The main religion throughout the area is Bhudism and many prayer flags, manni stones and chorltans are to be seen around sherpa villages symbolising this faith.

Further to this the trail is punctuated by rest houses where climbers and trekkers may stop to buy tea and food as well stay overnight if necessary. The local dish of Dahl Batt (rice and potatoes) is always available. Heating is provided by open fires and lighting by candles. Contributing to a somewhat mediaeval standard of living though the ubiquitous Coca Cola serves as a reminder of first world global marketing strategy.

Everest base camp itself provides a sharp contrast to this. Spread over the size of two football fields is a sprawling tent city which provides temporary homes for visiting Everesters of all nationalities.

Apart from the climbers there are generators, shower tents, toilet tents, oxygen cylinder tents, equipment stores, party tents as well as all manner of personnel tents together with various rubbish dumps.

Inside some of the 'team' tents is all manner of high technology communications equipment such as laptop computers and fax machines, video cameras, gamma bags and medical stores.

From base camp the route used by commercial expeditions is the South Col route which is often referred to in derogatory fashion as 'the yak route' and the reason for this is because in period of good wether the number of climbers spread out along the route resembles a yak herd.

Although I have no experience of the route above base camp it is reputedly fixed with ropes on all difficult sections though in any case the technical difficulty of the climb is

reputedly PD by the Alpine Climbing grading system which begins at F and continues to include the grades of PD, AD, D, TD and ED which are further suffixed with a technical grade in some cases.

Clearly the littering of the mountain in this way and the somewhat surreal experience of Everest base camp and its accoutrements stands in sharp contrast to how alpine style climbers approach climbing mountains.

The matter is further complicated by climbers in this arena who whilst being prepared to 'work' as guides on Everest only do so for economic reasons. In their own time they often use only alpine style climbing to attempt routes on mountains that are largely unheard of outside the climbing world such as Thamaserku and Dorje Lapka both also in Nepal and both about 22000ft. in height.

As far as the rest of alpine style climbers are concerned the climbing of Everest by unfair means gives little meaning yet predominantly amongst clients there is a sense in which climbing Everest has become a kind of status symbol, some of whom advertise their climb back home. For example in 1996 millionaire businesswomen, Sandy Hill Pitman, whilst being guided on Everest took with her to camp 2 at 6,400m a fax machine laptop computer, satellite phone and a host of other communications equipment, again prompting a critical appraisal from exemplars of alpine-style climbing.

"As if you could augment the kick of being on Mount Everest through successful publicity and by getting your climb talked about at all the parties you were missing back home, they dispatched constant e-mails. Those wanting to be on Mount Everest and to be the talk of the town, saw to it that their names got into the gossip columns of the daily papers, morning by morning".

Messner (2000) p245

Clearly then since its 'first ascent' in 1953 climbers' relationships to Everest have changed dramatically so that nowadays many companies exist that organise supervised trips, though with no real guarantee of success to the world's highest summit (Appendix 7). John Hamilton writing in the Alpine Club Journal suggests :-

"Everest has already been lost. What happens on that mountain can no longer claim to have any connection with the sport of mountaineering as practised by

hundred and thousands of grass-roots adherents around the world. The rush to collect 8,000 metre peaks is a dead-end activity which is distorting the sport of mountaineering. The true custodians of mountaineering's spirit are surely the unsung array of climbers, pursuing unheralded projects who savour the quality of their experiences."

Hamilton (1998) p200

Whilst commercial climbing expeditions which offer the Everest experience may be the preserve of wealthy social climbing clients, different groupings of climbers clearly regard what is generally known in the climbing world as 'The Everest Circus' with a great deal of criticism.

Dave, a respected Alpine Style climber, who climbed on Everest in 1997 reflects a general view that :-

"Anyone who gets involved with commercial trips on Everest has a perfect right to do so, the problem is most punters aren't really climbers they're like high altitude hill walkers who don't really understand what climbing's about but they've been sold a version that makes them think they can 'climb' Everest. Some do, by the easiest route, with oxygen, fixed ropes and so much support its untrue."

(In conversation with the author)

Finally, to return to our starting point. In Wales the Pen-y-Gwyrdd Hotel that featured prominently as a climbing 'hangout' in the early years of the last century is seldom frequented by contemporary groupings of climbers yet it retains links with the first ascent of Everest. The Pen-y-Gwyrdd now has a special position as the venue for Everest reunions and centenary celebrations.

One room in the establishment is known as the 'Everest Room' and is located through the first door on the left as one enters the public bar. A glance at the ceiling in the room will reveal the signatures of many 'Everesters' who have been invited to leave their mark in this manner.

This came about because by the 1950s the Pen-y-Gwyrdd had been reestablished under new ownership and although the social hub of the climbing world in Wales was no longer based at its premises, its long association with climbing and its relatively isolated position provided a perfect place for Everesters whilst they used the surrounding area as a training

ground in 1952.

Yet apart from such historical icons and a media focus surrounding the disappearance of Mallory and Irvine in 1924, Gillman (2000) Everest largely takes its place in the contemporary North Wales climbing world not as the ultimate climbing goal but as an arena of debate which reflects wider concerns allied to notions of commodification, style of ascent, authenticity and in-authenticity which are to be found in all types of climbing particularly in a contemporary setting.

For example in North Wales, groupings of boulderers remained concerned with doing 'problems' in good style and although none of them aspired to eventually climb Everest when asked about it the fact that to them bouldering was 'real' climbing whilst Everest was an 'expensive snow plod' in no way impinged on the view that in both the micro and the macro world of climbing the concerns presented by different groupings if not about each other's favoured type and style of climbing is in any case linked with questions of style, value, authenticity and boundary as these groupings and individuals compete in arenas for resources.

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION AND METHODOLOGICAL DISCUSSION

CHAPTER 10 : CONCLUSION AND METHODOLOGICAL DISCUSSION

The conclusion to this thesis rests on the premise that it has been successfully illustrated and given insights into the social world of climbing by drawing on the main processes and concerns involved in climbing action over a period of time. By examining different groupings of climbers as they have emerged in the climbing world with particular reference to climbing activity in north west Wales the analysis has delved beneath the often limited public perception of climbing and climbers to show the divisions between different types and styles of climbing.

By examining the historical context in which climbing developed in relation to social change within wider society the analysis shows how a sport initially the preserve of middle class activists came to encompass working class participants as climbing developed after the Second World War.

In a contemporary setting the process of maturing as a climber and the experience of climbing action in relation to different roles and their meanings in the climbing world is examined in some detail showing that the nature and essence of climbing involves an entire spectrum of activity which is carried out by adhering to the unwritten rules, codes and values of certain climbing styles which constitute the socially constructed ethics of the sport. In their turn, the ethics of climbing raise key debates and issues as well as defining the most salient features and meaning of climbing action. The thesis argues that climbing is a sport in which climbers compete in arenas for resources yet they do so within ethical parameters be it in bouldering, sports climbing, adventure climbing or alpine style climbing.

In many instances different climbing groupings consider their own ethical parameters to be more authentic than others. This is particularly acute in the difference between sports climbers and adventure climbing, where adventure climbers claim that sports climbing is too safe since it does not encompass or accept greater degrees of risk which adventure climbers value. Indeed, this rivalry is so strong that stringent boundaries are enforced by adventure climbers against the intrusion of sports climbing style into adventure climbing arenas. Thus, in adventure climbing it is not acceptable to pre-place bolt protection before doing a climb, but in sports climbing it is quite acceptable. On the other hand these boundaries are not so strict that climbers cannot cross over between activities as long as they do so in the appropriate style.

This means that at any time in a climber's career he/she may engage in any type of climbing as long as they climb in the appropriate style. On occasion, leading exponents in a particular type of climbing may push the ethical boundaries of their sport by a process involving new ways in which climbs can be done within the ethics of a certain style of climbing.

As we have seen from the examples relating to Masters Wall/Indian Face in Chapter 4, the process of innovation involves a great deal of ethical debate and argument between competitors as they vie for the resources of new routes and positions at the top of the adventure climbers' hierarchy.

A key element in this process is the question of authenticity surrounding styles of ascent. Indeed authenticity disputes, in one form or another, provide a pattern of debate which spans climbing history. In the latter part of the 19th Century some visiting Alpinists to North Wales considered rock climbing for its own sake as in-authentic. Whilst the Climbers Club considered it as authentic in itself. As climbers began to explore the possibility of more difficult climbs they began to experiment with technology to protect themselves. For example, in 1927 came the first ascent of the very steep east buttress of Clogwyn du'r Arddu. The climb was done in original style *i.e.* from the ground up with no inspection of the climb from above, yet during the ascent three points of aid were used. The climb was thought worthy of recording but was regarded as not 'really' climbed until these aids were dispensed with by a subsequent ascent in 1929. This is what climbers mean by referring to a certain route as having been done 'free'. When this is done it authenticates the route entirely and this is reflected in written records by giving the date of the first ascent of the climb followed by the date of the first 'free' ascent. During the 1950s working-class climbers set new standards in the sport by utilizing arenas of Steeper Cliffs and Climbs that symbolised 'hard' climbing by taking a much more pragmatic view of the activity, leaving a legacy of climbs exemplifying authentic climbing style in natural arenas. With the emergence of the 'Slateheads' in the early 1980s more traditionally orientated climbers thought that climbing on slate was not real climbing since the methods employed to literally 'make' climbs did not constitute an authentic style, moreover, the medium itself was in-authentic. The 'Slateheads' however thought that slate was indeed an authentic medium but required a somewhat varied approach in order to climb on its bizarre man-made structures.

If there was some ambiguity about the slate debate the emergence of sports climbing

and later climbing competitions on indoor climbing walls led to a clear split in the climbing world as to what the value of 'real' (authentic) climbing and 'unreal' (in-authentic) climbing action constituted. This debate in the world of climbing forced the term 'adventure climbing' into being. It represented traditional styles of ascent which saw the in-authentic style embodied by sports and indoor wall climbing as a real threat to its resources and indeed to the whole nature of what climbing meant and represented. The Everest climb in 1953 also raised questions about the authenticity of its ascent in relation to alpine style climbing. More recently in Alpine style climbing commercial ascents of Everest are also challenged in relation to individuals' identity in the climbing world. Significantly, this position allows people who, whilst clearly successful or wealthy in larger society, to buy into a climbing experience which is seen as unauthentic by the majority of climbers. Furthermore the climbing identity of these individuals in the climbing world is seen as that of outsiders and their authenticity as climbers questioned, leading to a situation where even persons who may have succeeded in gaining the summit of Everest are not considered authentic members of, nor given any status in the climbing world as a whole.

On a lesser scale, and more locally as this thesis illustrated in Chapter 8, there are occasions when climbing action is so far removed from genuine climbing circumstances that it constitutes a 'fake' climb with little meaning in the climbing world since such action is used by professional guides in order to provide climbing experience which is as close as possible to the 'real' thing for clients wishing to engage in the ascent of specific climbs.

With greater numbers of climbers one feature of the current climbing world that should not be overlooked is that intensified competition is also accompanied by fewer resources. Moreover, because climbing is surrounded by questions of style in the sense that how something is climbed is more important than merely attaining a certain height or the top of a rock feature, the ethical code becomes more stringent and the quest for authenticity more passionately sought and defended in relation to climbing style.

Climbing action is in itself extremely complicated and relies on employing technical skill in the form of climbing technique, which is built up over time, during which the climber normally takes on a number of different roles in a climbing team.

If a climber eventually champions a type of climbing he/she may decide to cooperate with equipment and clothing companies specifically involved in the climbing business as

sponsors. This has led to the relatively recent phenomenon in the climbing world, the marketing of climbing fashion style.

Sponsorship also introduces the possibility that some climbers may achieve some kind of professional or quasi-professional status in the climbing business, which along with the process of training, may place climbing itself within a framework normally applied to more orthodox sports. In this sense, some sporting models suggest that all sport passes through stages starting from their induction to eventually becoming part of a commodified and professional activity. At this level the top performers are controlled and boundaried by outside influences, organisations and sponsors so that they must train and compete successfully to retain their positions at the top. In this process the individual performer is seen as retaining little in the way of spontaneity or personality, Rigauer (1971). Yet as Hoberman (1984) suggests sport does not always have to be considered as part of a world of 'unfreedom' but might remain as an 'area of ambiguity'. A middle position is taken by Mason (1988) who, whilst accepting elements of Rigauer's theory suggests that it may be too rigid, Mason (1988) p75. The thesis has shown that commerce has intruded into the climbing world not only in terms of fashion style but also in the arenas of indoor climbing walls and their competitions. These, together with commercial enterprises surrounding climbing Everest, has threatened climbing's traditional social construction.

However, as the analysis shows, the great majority of climbing action in Wales, which is considered one of the major climbing areas in the UK, is carried out by adventure climbers who value and engage in competition which is dictated by climbers themselves and their ethics in natural arenas. As long as this resistance to change is in place the number of sponsored climbers remains low. The few sponsored climbers that exist are likely to be either top adventure climbers living a climbing lifestyle or top sports climbers who compete in indoor climbing competition, an aspect of the sport which is clearly easier to direct but far less popular with the majority of climbers. Organised bureaucratic bodies are also present in the climbing world but they too do not intrude into the sport to any extent. For example the British Mountaineering Council set up in 1947 and funded by the sports council is a representative body which looks after the interests of climbers whatever their type and style of climbing, but has no say in the ethics of the sport and is viewed by many climbers as a kind of 'citizens advice bureau' which can be crucial in dealing with problems arising when access

to a certain cliff or climbing arena becomes problematic. In this sense a great many climbers see the future role of the BMC as extremely important in that it can help maintain and promote the interests of climbers in a more shared environment where the problems presented by greater numbers of outdoor users in general in terms of parking, access and environmental concerns may impinge to a greater extent on climbing's traditional freedom. In these arenas the BMC may liaise through its access officer with other bureaucratic bodies such as the National Trust, or the Ministry of Defence who may control such access.

The British Mountaineering Council also provides a number of climbing courses and certification schemes for those interested in becoming climbing instructors, mostly for the purpose of organised outdoor education where insurance requirements usually means that a period of training and a set of standards must be attained before individuals can gain instructor status.

This status, however, whilst important in the outdoor education field, is not important to the majority of climbers and does not gain instructors any special recognition in the climbers' hierarchy. This is because it is perfectly possible to be a competent and certificated climbing instructor who may oversee the safety of school groups without going above climbs graded very severe where as one climber put it, 'the real climbing starts'. This means that a climbing instructor's place in the climbers' hierarchy is based not on his/her professional capacity, but on climbing performance carried out in free time. The same applies to professional guides.

Furthermore, climbing can be seen as a sport whose activists have, except for the disputed areas of 'sports' climbing, limited the use of technology thus maintaining the genuine adventurous nature of the sport. This is particularly evident in Wales though it is largely the case throughout the UK. The fact that this has happened owes much to the ethical considerations of the sport or as Hamilton (1998) points out :-

“The world of rock climbing in Britain provides an example of a sport whose participants have rejected what is technologically possible in favour of what is deemed to be ethically desirable.”

Hamilton (1998) p200

It is also worth mentioning that the different climbing types discussed may also be

complimented in the winter months by the option provided by snow and ice climbing if and when conditions (which are notoriously unreliable in Wales) make this viable. This type of climbing in Britain is normally associated with the north-west Highlands in Scotland where it has been developed, owing to more consistent conditions, into a specialist concern. The season for winter climbing is from December through to February. 'Conditions' are extremely important and define winter climbing from merely walking up mountains either covered by or with a sprinkling of fresh snow. This is because winter climbing involves ascents either in steep gullies or on waterfalls which must be frozen solid to provide continuous ribbons of ice or 'neve' (crisp rather than soft snow) which then becomes suitable for climbing with special tools. These tools are normally, apart from ropes, harness and protection devices generally associated with rockclimbing, complimented by two ice axes which the climber uses to gain purchase in the ice above and 'crampons' which are specially designed metal spikes strapped or clipped to climbing boots which allow purchase for the feet.

Despite the use of such *technology* the somewhat contradictory ethical approach sustained by winter climbers is that no other aids are used during the ascent so that style again remains the important factor, even under these circumstances.

Further issues in the world of climbing are raised by the role of women, and I am aware of current criticism concerning the sociology of 'male' sports which sees the inclusion of separate chapters about women largely as a reaction to feminist theories. To quote Hargreaves:

"The second approach, which has been a reaction to the influence of Feminism, is to devote some space to female sports and discussions of gender (usually a separate chapter or section) in an essentially male-orientated account (Coakley 1990, Elias and Dunning 1986; Hargreaves 1986. Jarvie 1991). There is a tendency in both these approaches to fail to distinguish between sex and gender and implicitly to incorporate male-defined definitions and values."

Hargreaves (1994) p8

In the case of this work, whilst it may be correct to say that proportionately more males than females have engaged in climbing, since written records began there is enough evidence to suggest that female climbers have made significant contributions both to the legacy of the sport. For example, one of the best known classic climbs at the grade of severe in the Llanberis Pass, Nea (1941), was named and first ascended by Nea Morin, and to the literature

of the sport by setting down their climbing experiences in book form. Examples of these include Dorothea Piley's classic 'Climbing Days' (1935), Gwen Moffat's 'Space Below My Feet' (1961) and Nea Morin's 'A Woman's Reach' (1968). More recently two of the most committed women climbers lost their lives climbing alpine style in the Himalayas. Julie Tullis in 1986 and latterly Allison Hargreaves in 1996.

During the course of the work for this thesis I climbed with a number of female activists who took on various roles when climbing but did not apply a separate set of ethics to the sport and as there is no evidence to suggest that women engage in the sport within a different ethical framework relating to a different style they are included within the remit of this work alongside their male counterparts as first and foremost, climbers. The main emphasis throughout the thesis has been concerned with climbers, groupings of climbers and the climbing world in relation to an understanding and interpretation of climbing action so that a separate discussion concerning sex and gender issues lies largely outside this framework of enquiry.

Another point concerning the climbing world arises from its obvious lack of ethnic minority participants and throughout this work I identified only three climbers, one Asian and two Afro-Caribbean, who had become 'hooked' on the sport. Again, for the purposes of this work, the reasons for this lie outside its mandate though the observation itself might be taken up by future enquirers whilst exploring different sociological questions.

Clearly when looking at climbing from a sociological viewpoint some kind of methodological framework must be employed. In this sense my own involvement in the sport provided a starting point. But it also produced a problem in that I was of the field but would also have to be in the field.

Thus my first consideration was to commit to the project. Although I began climbing in 1975 it was not until 1989 that I began to focus on climbing sociologically whilst still pursuing the activity.

At that time I conducted a study that looked at a small sub-culture of rockclimbers living in or around Llanberis who became known as the 'slateheads' and 'the UB40' climbers on account of their association with and development of slate climbing whilst living on the dole Crook (1991).

Since that time a great number of changes have taken place in the climbing world

including the introduction of more sophisticated indoor climbing walls, specialist climbing competitions, the developments surrounding specialist bouldering and various commercial intrusions related to the outdoor market in general.

My own experience in the climbing world extended into new arenas such as the Himalaya, sandstone tower climbing in the USA and Middle East, together with 'sport' and adventure climbing at home and in Europe. Most of this activity involved a professional aspect in that I was employed either as an uncertified climbing guide or in some kind of assistant role.

During these excursions I was able to meet a great many climbers and gain at least some insight into climbers' lifestyles both locally and abroad whilst also noting the different directions and specialisations in the climbing world at home. Because of this a great many questions began to emerge about the nature and styles of climbing and how they differed or coincided. In 1995 I decided to look at these questions more thoroughly, and to gain a clear understanding of what climbing action entailed for, despite my involvement with climbers and climbing over many years, these questions remained unanswered to any serious extent.

To this end I decided to focus on the main climbing locale of Snowdonia in North West Wales since I was already familiar with the area, many of its climbs, its climbers and local climbing hangouts.

The methods used to carry out this analysis were firmly directed towards qualitative research and aimed at achieving an understanding of the climbing world and its activity.

An ethnographic approach seemed the best way to gain a deeper internal account not only of the processes and development of climbing, but also of its experience and action. To this end the tools of observation and participant observation were employed together with informal interviews and conversations over a six-year time period.

Initially a search through the literature on climbing revealed a remarkable number of sources which may be divided into six categories. Guidebooks, individual climbing biographies and autobiographies, historical books and documents, instructional manuals of the 'how to' variety, annual club journals and specialist monthly magazines.

Whilst all of these sources were of some use when piecing together and analysing the development of climbing the task was hampered by the fact that many early guidebooks and journals are out of print and in some cases have become expensive collectors' items. This is particularly so in the case of historical books on the subject which are in themselves a rare

commodity and the only comprehensive attempt at a historical account of climbing in Britain Clark and Pyatt (1957) now retails at a minimum of £50. Historical accounts aimed more specifically at climbing in Wales are also few and somewhat limited relying on Noyce, Sutton and Young (1957), Hankinson (1977) and Jones, T. (1986) together with an article by Jones, R. M. (1998).

Occasionally, access to certain documents required a formal letter of introduction, as in the case of examining the 'Locked Book' kept at Pen-y-Gwyrdd which is no longer available to the general visitor but is retained by the present owners. The opposite approach was the case in gaining access to the 'Pete's Café's' New Routes books some of which I was allowed to borrow and photocopy and therefore retain for reference when and if required at a future date.

Sociological writing and enquiry into climbing remains limited though some discussion of aspects related to it may be found in Donneley (1993) and Jenks (1993).

My 'access' to the field was greatly eased by my own involvement in the activity. In this way I could claim advantage in that I did not have to build up relationships with climbers and various participants in the same way as someone coming into the field 'cold' might have to do. This factor was important because, as a researcher, my own status and skill as an insider in the climbing world allowed a greater range of climbing activity to be studied. Thus, although I met and climbed with many new climbing partners during the course of this work my existing knowledge of the climbing world meant that I could penetrate and interpret climbers' argot in a natural way as well as extend my network of communication more easily than an outsider.

Observing climbers in action as well as participating in various discussions which took place in climbers' hangouts or at various climbing arenas was of immense value and importance for the work and in order to maximise this I never attempted to write down notes and information either during or in the settings in which the discussions took place, preferring instead to make notes afterwards so as to maintain a natural situation.

Just as climbers entering the world of climbing may glean much about the argot and ethical issues surrounding climbing the sociologist by frequenting climbers' hangouts would be able to observe and gain at least some insight into this world over a period of time. However, without participating in the physical aspects and experience of climbing in its

different styles and at different levels he/she might remain what is referred to in the climbing world as an 'armchair climber' and an outsider from climbing action.

In many instances it is not possible to observe climbers in action without participating in an actual climb since much of the action of climbing takes place on cliffs that only climbers can access and this is particularly evident in the case of sea cliff climbing. Climbing activity that is easily observable is therefore limited to what climbers refer to as 'roadside crags' (usually ten to twenty minutes' walk from vehicles) and indoor climbing walls.

Participant observation in the climbing world therefore also requires the use of climbing skill and techniques and again my experience as a climber allowed access to an otherwise problematic field. I do not claim that climbing could not be studied by sociologists who are non-climbers but simply that the field of enquiry is itself unusually difficult to access in its entirety.

Some of the problems I encountered in this work stemmed from my knowledge of the inherent dangers involved in climbing. In the study I have noted that adventure climbers consider 'sports' climbing as a relatively risk-free activity yet this is only because they value a greater degree of risk since by any outsider's view it should be emphasised and apparent that all forms of climbing including bouldering involve a certain degree of risk.

Climbers are very good at normalising situations that are otherwise considered unsafe and in this sense I had to step outside the climbing world and view all aspects of climbing as equally serious.

Because of this I never asked or expected anyone involved in climbing to either perform or climb with me purely for the purpose of this study. On the other hand I often noted and compared climbing action mentally and in this sense my own natural climbing days involved me in something of a dual role.

On some occasions I visited crags where I knew or at least had a good idea that climbing would be taking place simply to enable me to observe climbing from a removed view. Often I took along a camera and some of this record helped to remember certain incidents and actions that I later looked at in more detail as well as eventually providing illustrative material for Appendices 4 and 5.

Much climbing activity takes place at weekends and in the sense this was the best time to observe climbers who are in any case normally watched at one time or another from

roadside positions by interested tourists as well as other climbers who may be interested in eventually doing the route that the climbers in action are on.

In this respect I spent part of many weekends in the Llanberis Pass and as one of the main bouldering arenas is also located in this area, it was also possible to participate in and observe bouldering action quite naturally as well as exchanging views with non-climbers who often stopped to see just what was going on.

Climbers themselves are usually great talkers, especially about climbing activity, but they are often difficult to understand and seldom interested in talking about climbing to non-climbers since this involves them in conversations where they gain no feedback about the merits, values and difficulties encountered on a particular climb or type of climbing which they naturally discuss between themselves.

Some groupings of climbers are biased towards different climbing types and styles so that whilst I have recorded their views I have sought to avoid bias whilst presenting the work. Concentrating on an understanding of conflicting interests rather than supporting one view against another.

Further to this I have participated in all types of climbing described in the text yet whilst providing my accounts have sought to point out typical differences or key points relevant to an understanding and feeling related to climbing experience in various climbing roles rather than taking on a critical standpoint which favours any particular climbing type or style.

Despite in this case my position as an insider I remained conscious that as a researcher it was necessary to put some distance between myself and the world under focus, yet not so much distance that the essential authenticity of the work might become compromised. In this sense the nature of this work meant that its end-product was concerned with accomplishing work suitable for an academic readership as well as reflecting a genuine account of the world under focus so that the text hopes to bridge those two concerns whilst still maintaining a natural grasp of what Pearson (1993) refers to as “the authenticity of the ‘street’” and providing description that is ‘thick’, Geertz (1973).

Initially during the work I found that I had focussed too broadly on peripheral phenomena rather than concentrating on more important issues which needed to be analysed in some detail.

To do this I radically sharpened the analysis in areas I considered central to an

understanding of the climbing world whilst marginalising or abandoning those that were not. As a consequence the work has undergone several changes since its induction all with the same aim, to provide a greater degree of insight and understanding in the final instance.

In some instances my insider's position led to overlooking elements in climbing activity that with some distance were seen as more significant and in some cases less so. This became apparent when looking at climbing teams whose individual roles are crucially important but whose relationships I had initially omitted to regard.

Interestingly, as long ago as 1868 the literary figure Anthony Trollope, writing in 'British Sports and Pastimes' about English involvement in alpine climbing suggested that :-

“Some future philosopher may turn aside from more important topics to notice the rise and development of the passion for mountain-climbing. He may pick up in that humble field of enquiry, illustrations of some principles of wider application. The growth of the passion is accompanied, for example, if it is not caused, by the growth of the modern appreciation of mountain scenery; and few things would be more interesting in proper time and place, than to investigate the real meaning of that curious phenomenon.”

Trollope (1868) p257

This task has rarely been undertaken, though at least some mention of it is to be found in historical accounts of sport, Holt (1989) pp88-89. Whilst Engel (1971) and Fleming (2000) provide more thorough histories on the subject. More locally and sociologically climbing is a little researched phenomenon and in this sense I proceeded in the field with very little reference.

Clearly when placed in the context of wider society the climbing world may be seen as a small facet whose devotees often maintain dual roles in that work and family commitments restrain their climbing activity, though they nevertheless continue to pursue climbing careers.

On the other hand, a small number of devotees pursue a climbing lifestyle which allows more time for the activity and its concerns. Like other areas of sporting activity climbing has its 'stars' and exemplars though these are little known outside the environs of the climbing world.

The activity is itself unusual and is in general a doing sport rather than a spectator sport. It does not fit easily into classic sporting models and although there are a relatively

small number of professional and quasi-professional climbers, most climbing activity remains unprofessional.

The elements in climbing concerning the values associated with risk at differing degrees are seldom incorporated into other sports though at least some risk aspects are to be found in paragliding, surfing, boxing, free diving, motor and motorbike racing. As a researcher my main aim has been to present an accurate understanding of the climbing world and in this sense I was influenced by earlier interactionist work that has more traditionally looked at groups acting under circumstances of social limitations or deviance, Becker (1963), Polsky (1967), Clockars (1975).

In particular the methodological aspects of Polsky's insider work on poolhall hustlers and pool playing in America proved useful in the circumstances surrounding the investigation of groupings of climbers since, although the climbing world is not in general considered deviant, its analysis profited from looking at historical events, language, hangouts and climbing action in the natural setting.

The overall framework for the study of the climbing world is underpinned and supported by considerable ethnographic substance, Hammersley (1992), since as Sarah Thornton points out :-

“Although arguably an important tool for novelists and journalists, ethnography was developed as a more systematic mode of investigation by anthropologists in the nineteenth century. Used initially for studying foreign cultures, Robert E. Park led the call to apply the methodology to one's own society. Participant observation, he contended, was the only adequate qualitative and holistic means of understanding the subtleties of a community's beliefs and social practices.”

Thornton (1997) p213

These methods have allowed the work to delve below the popular surface of the climbing world and its symbols, whilst also uncovering the layers of meaning and processes involved in becoming a climber and going climbing in a contemporary setting.

Statistical analysis concerning figures based on climbing deaths could easily show that climbing is, when compared with many other areas of sporting activity, inherently dangerous, yet they could not account for the actions nor gain insights into the world of climbers as they construct and understand it. Such a task remains the responsibility of the form of enquiry

conducted by this thesis and in this sense I aimed to produce a work that goes beyond a purely empirical analysis that might otherwise be constrained or directed towards particular quantitative findings.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Climbers' Argot

Climbers' Argot

Climbers' argot or parlance is often difficult for outsiders from the climbing world to interpret and this is highlighted by guidebook descriptions to various routes as well as in many conversations about climbing. The following description serves as an example :-

"The Agony and the Ecstasy 140ft. E5 (1987)

A bold girdle of the upper section of two face buttress on superb rock and in a great situation.

1. 60feet. 6B. Follow Sexual Salami to the second overlap and make some very difficult and bold moves leftwards into Hitlers Buttock. Swing left again to gain Stromboli and a belay.

2. 80feet. 6B. Traverse down and left into the corner of Plastic Nerve and finish as for Surreal."

Climbers Club Guide to Tremadoc (2000) p60

Although every attempt has been made in the text to explain climbers' words and phrases as they occur, the following Glossary of climbers' specialist argot may also be found useful.

Abseil <i>aka</i> Rapp Rappel Bail Down Rapp Off Deaf Out	Descending by means of a controlled slide down an anchored rope or ropes
A Cheval	As in horse riding sitting astride, usually on a narrow ridge with drops each side
Adventure Climbing	The traditional style of climbing <i>aka</i> 'Trade Climbing'
Arete	A sharp ridge of rock at any angle
Arete Problem	Short blunt, rounded or sharp rock arete
Artificial climbing <i>aka</i> Artificial Aid Nailing Arm Bar	Any climbing done with the aid of equipment such as pitons, bolts etc for progress Technique used for climbing wide cracks
B.M.C.	British Mountaineering Council
Barn Door	To swing away from the rockface

Bale out	To escape by lowering abseil, traversing or jumping off (the latter, is not recommended on a 'chop' route)
Bars	Technique in which knee, arm and, occasionally, head are used
Belay	Anchor point
Belay Plate	A metal device for belaying
Belaying	Either paying out or taking in the rope
Beta	Information on a set of moves
Biner	Karabiner
Bionic dyno	A desperate, dynamic lunge for a 'nothing edge'
Bivouac	Stay out over night in wild country
Blooning	Climbing in a chaotic or amusing way
Blow	Dope, marijuanah
Blow Away	Impress other climbers, or successfully climb harder than one's competitors
Blown it	About to fall off
Bold	Meaning the climber must climb positively with little in the way of protection
Bolt	Fixed ring of protection (much debated)
Bomb-proof	Very safe
Bong	Large pitons
Bouldering	Practice of climbing on small rocks a short distance above the ground. An activity in itself
Buffed	Cleaned rock
Bull	To recountant unlikely story about climbing or climbers
Bull merchant	A tall story teller
Burn Off	To overcome the competition from other climbers

CC	Climbers Club
Calls	Referring to signal calls used by climbers
Carabiner	Metal clip through which rope is passed
Cellar Dweller	Person who has training facility at home
Chalk Chalk bag	Light magnesium carbonate. Carried in a small bag which allows the climber to 'dip' his or her hands, much in the same manner as a gymnast might do to facilitate a dry grip
Chop Route	A route where a fall would lead to serious consequences and potential death
Clamp	'Pinch gripping' or staying on small holds whilst working out the next set of moves (i.e. becoming a human clamp)
Clip or Clips	Karabiners, quickdraws
Col	A mountain pass; the lowest point in a ridge that connects two peaks
Cosmic	Excellent, brilliant
Crag <i>aka</i> Cliff Face The Stone Site	Arenas where the action of climbing takes place
Crampons	Metal spies fitted to boots for climbing ice or snow
Crank	Pulling up hard on small holds
Crimp	Clinging to small holds
Crux	The most difficult moves on any given route
Designer Climber	Sports and wall competition climber only
Desperate	Extremely hard
Dinks <i>aka</i> Dots	Tiny scoop or pocket holds
Dirty	Referring areas of rock which are vegetated

Dog/Hangdog	To hang on the rope with assistance from the ground belayer in order to work out the next moves or rest the arms
Dyno	A controlled leap for a specific hold
Edge	A small horizontal hand or foothold
E Grade	Adjective rating on a scale from one to ten
Egyptian	Turning side on to the rockface in order to gain balance and reach up, particularly on overhanging rock
Energy banks	Reserves of strength
Ens	An expression denoting a difficult move
Esoteric	Used to describe an obscure route, usually on an obscure cliff with a long approach march
Ettrier	Rope ladder about three feet long used in pairs on difficult passages of artificial climbing
Femms	Women or girl, female participants
Flash	Climb a route on first attempt without the use of aid
Flying hours	Time spent in the air as a result of a fall - 200 hours for a pilot's licence
Foothold	Any feature on rock that the climber can stand on
Friends	Protection devices with a range of sizes
Gardening	Cleaning a route which may at first be vegetated
Gas/gaz	Stamina, strength
Gassed out	About to fall off
Girdle	To traverse a cliff from one side to the other by means of a horizontal route
Gnarly	A general term used to mean bad, dangerous, unsafe (Antonym of Cosmic)
Go for it	Try very hard on a route committing oneself to the hardest moves

Gripper-clipper	A piece of in-situ protection ie a bolt which is difficult to clip with a 'krab' there are grave consequences if you don't manage it (may result in a 'terminal crater')
Gripped <i>aka</i> Gripped Up Gripping	Frightened or concerned by i.e. 'totally gripped' and gripped out of your mind
Grips	Climbing holds
Grit	Gritstone rock
Groove	Particular feature on a rock face with two inverted sidewalls
Gross	Appallingly difficult or strenuous climb
Guide Guido	Either refers to a book of recorded climbs in a given area or to a person holding the professional U.I.A.C.M. Guides Carnet.
Handhold	Any feature climbers find on the rockface to use for the hands
Hang dog	Complete a climb in stages by hanging on the rope to practise moves
Hardcore	Dedicated climbers
Head honcho	Extremely competent
Heap	Car
Hones	Very strong climbers
In bulk	Either laughing too much or unable to cope with a climb or social situation
Indoor Climbing	Climbing on the indoor wall
In Situ	Specifically in climbing, equipment that is left in place on the rockface
Intense	Keen climber
Isolation	In competition so result of others os not known
Jambs <i>aka</i> Jammbing Hand Jamming	Particular technique for climbing particular cracks

Joke'pro'	If you fall off, the gear rips and you die laughing
Jugs	Good holds
Karabiner	Oval shaped metal link with a spring-hinged gate; sometimes called 'snap-link'
Leader	First person in a climbing team who leads the climb
Leading through	Method by which two roped climbers alternate the lead
Lieback	Technique of leaning away from the rock to gain height
Limpet	Used in the same manner as 'clamp', to stick to the rockface
Lob	To take a short fall; massive lob - a long fall
Loon	Serious climber
Mantleshelf	Technique used to gain a standing position on a ledge
Master	Expert climber operating at the highest standards
Match	To use two hands on the same hold
MOD	Ministry of Defence
Mean hombrerors	Good team
Mega	Very good
Monster	Very large hold
Mooch	Saunter, stroll
Motor	To climb fast, powerfully and positively
Moves	Particular ways by which the climber ascends the rock
New Route	A new climb up any given cliff
Nuts	General term for protection devices including Rocks RP's and Friends
On Site	To climb with no pre-practise or inspection
On Site Flash	To climb in the above style without falling or stopping to rest on the rope

Overhang <i>aka</i> Overlap	Sections of overhanging rock on a climb
Pinchgrip	Technique for using very rounded handholds
Pitch	Section of a climb between ledges or belay points
Piton	Metal spike which is hammered into cracks to make belays more safe (used only sparingly)
Pockets	Holes in the rockface used as holds
Podium, Take the	To win a climbing competition
Power glide	Controlled leap
Powerglide	A smooth controlled dyno, usually executed with panache (whoever he is)
Power Snob	A very strong climber
Protection	Means by which a climb is made safe
Protection Device	Any form of technology which may be used to make a climber safe when leading a route
Psyched Out	Mentally tired climber who is unable to continue with a particular climb
Pumped Out	Physically tired climber who is unable to continue with a particular climb.
Punters	General climbers
Purple passage	A traditional term for a pitch, which is so exasperating, as to cause the climber to swear
Put up a New Route	To make a first ascent of a climb
Quickdraws	Short slings (approx. 3") with a karabiner at each end
RP	Small wire protection device
RP city	Type of protection on climb
Rack	The climber's set of protection devices

Radical	Boundary pushing
Reading	Technique of assessing the possible moves encountered on a climb
Redpoint	Climbing after pre-choreographing moves
Rockover	Getting your body weight over one leg, then standing up on it with a, few if any handholds
Rockshoes	Special rock climbing shoes, similar in look to ballet shoes
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Runner	Any type of protection device
Scarpetti	Light, rope soled boots
Scoops	Rounded hollows in the rockface
Serious	Means that the potential fall is likely to incur injury
Second	The second person in the climbing team, usually the belayer
Sequency	A climb is said to be this if the holds have to be utilised in a certain order to achieve success
Shair	Use both hands on the same hold
Situation	Referring to the position of the climb on the rockface
Sketchy	When climbing moves are difficult to read
Slab	Rock at an angle of up to 70°
Slatehead	Original slate activists. One who enjoys climbing on slate
Slings	Loops of rope or tape, used for belaying
Smear	Pressing down with the front of the foot to gain friction on the rockface
Smee	Small or poor holds
Smoke up	Climb fast and easily (see also 'Flash' and 'Burn Rubber')
'Sport' Climbing	Climbing in sport style where climbs may be pre-inspected and have fixed bolt protection placed before the climber begins

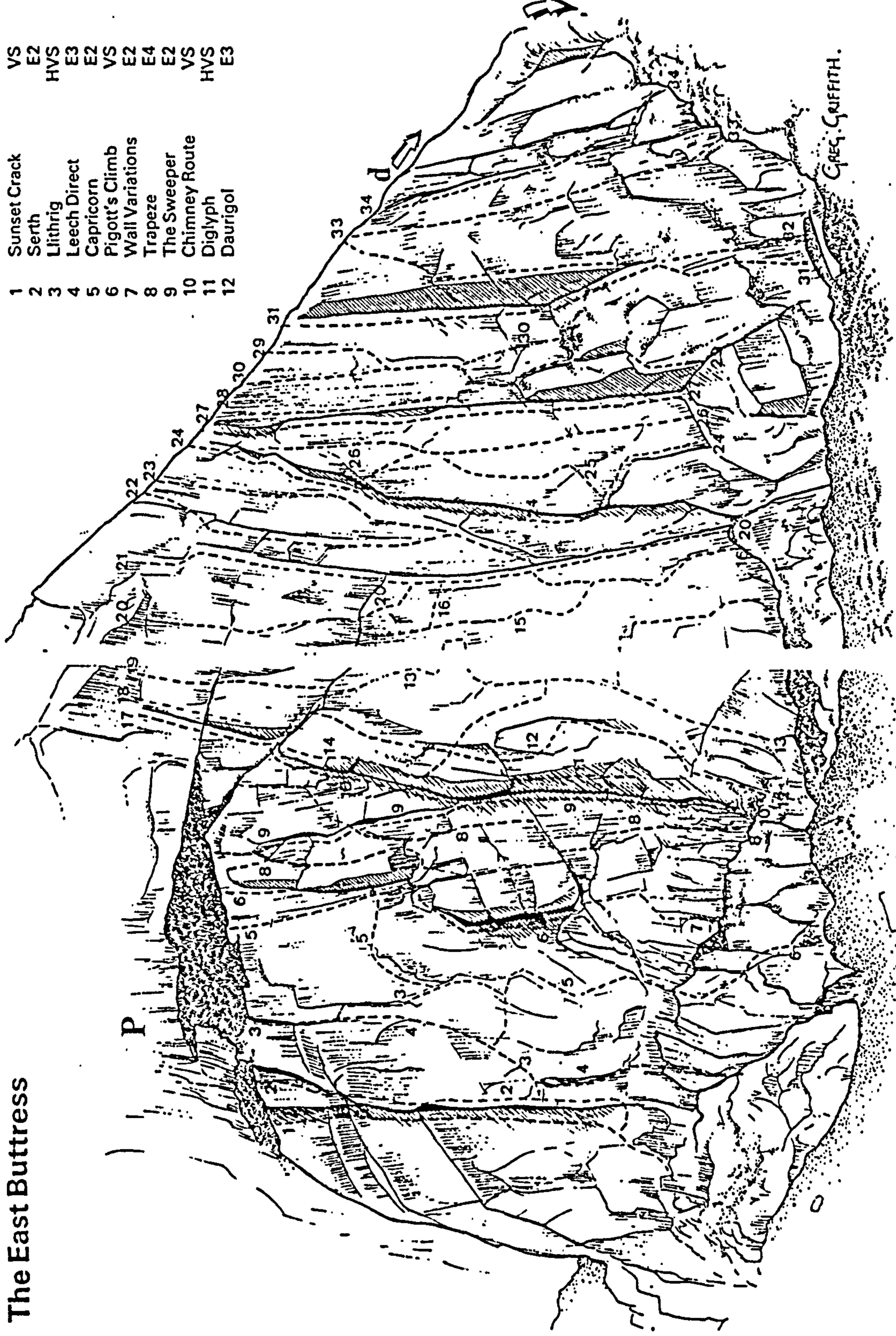
Stick men	Tall thin climbers
Stickies	Special rock shoes with high friction soles; in use since 1983
Sustained	A climb that is the same grade throughout its length
Take us	A short fall
Tights	Ballet type tracksuit bottoms for climbing
Top out	To finish
Top rope	Rope secured from above the climber
'Trad' Style	Traditional style where climb is done from ground up with no fixed protection in place or knowledge of the route
Trashed	Cut ropes, worn out ropes or gear; tired climber
Traverse	To climb across, rather than up
Tricouni	Hard steel boot-nail with serrated edge, now defunct
Tri-person	Climbers with personality problems
Turbo Glide	Adynamic jump for a hold
Wall, The	Usually the local climbing wall
Watch us	Instruction to leader or second that the climber might fall off
Way out there	A long way above protection in an impressive position
Whipper	A long fall
Work	Referring to time spent practising the moves of a climb
Youth	All climbers, regardless of age, are sometimes referred to as 'Youth'

APPENDIX 2

How Routes are Named and Recorded in Climbers' Guidebooks. A Topographical Example showing the East Buttress of Clogwyn du'r Arddu

The East Buttress

- 1 Sunset Crack VS
- 2 Serth E2
- 3 Llithrig HVS
- 4 Leech Direct E3
- 5 Capricorn E2
- 6 Pigott's Climb VS
- 7 Wall Variations E2
- 8 Trapeze E4
- 9 The Sweeper E2
- 10 Chimney Route VS
- 11 Diglyph HVS
- 12 Daurigol E3



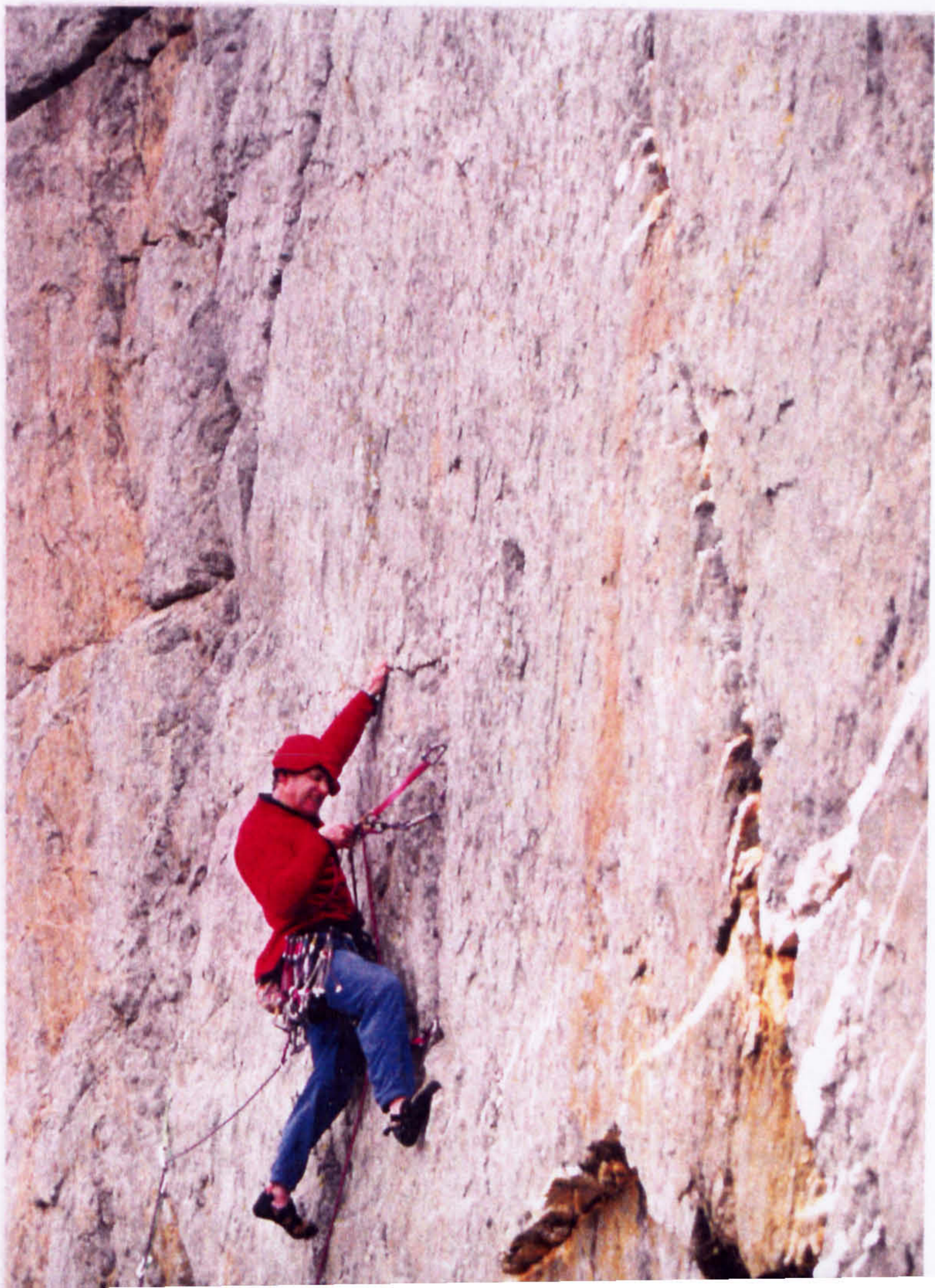
- 13 Great Wall E4
- 14 A Midsummer Night's Dream E6
- 15 The Indian Face E9
- 16 Master's Wall E7
- 17 Continuation Chimney HS
- 18 The Arête Finish E3
- 19 Blancmange Sandwich E4
- 20 Jelly Roll E2
- 21 November E3
- 22 Vember E1
- 23 Medi E4
- 24 Curving Crack VS
- 25 The Troach E2
- 26 The Purr-Spire + Direct Start E6
- 27 Pedestal Crack Direct HVS
- 28 The Organ Flagellator E4
- 29 Scorpio E2
- 30 Silhouette E2
- 31 The Corner HVS
- 32 The Shadow E2
- 33 Mordor E4
- 34 Terrace Crack VS
- P The Pinnacle

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Please refer to original text to see this material.

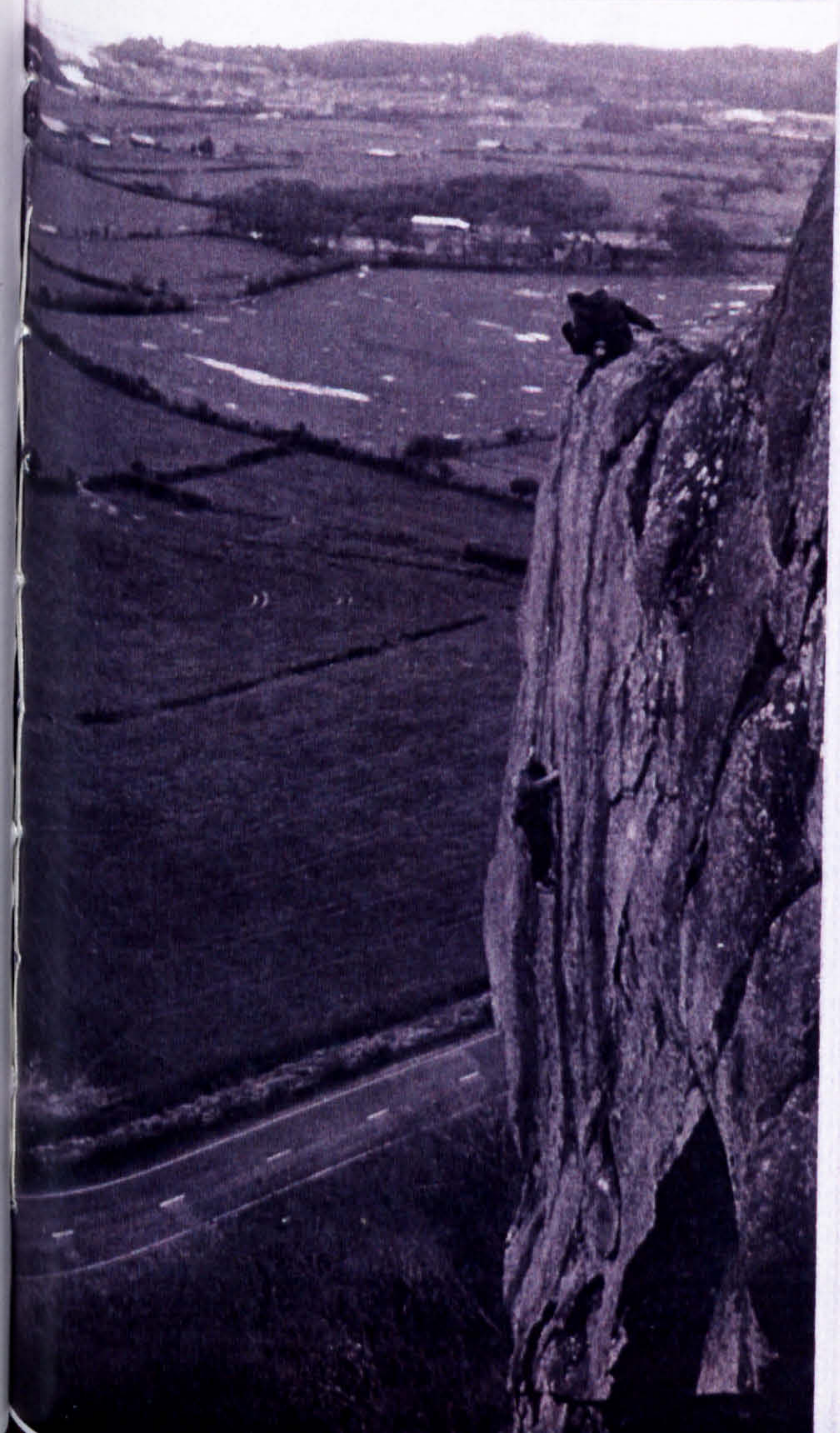
APPENDIX 4

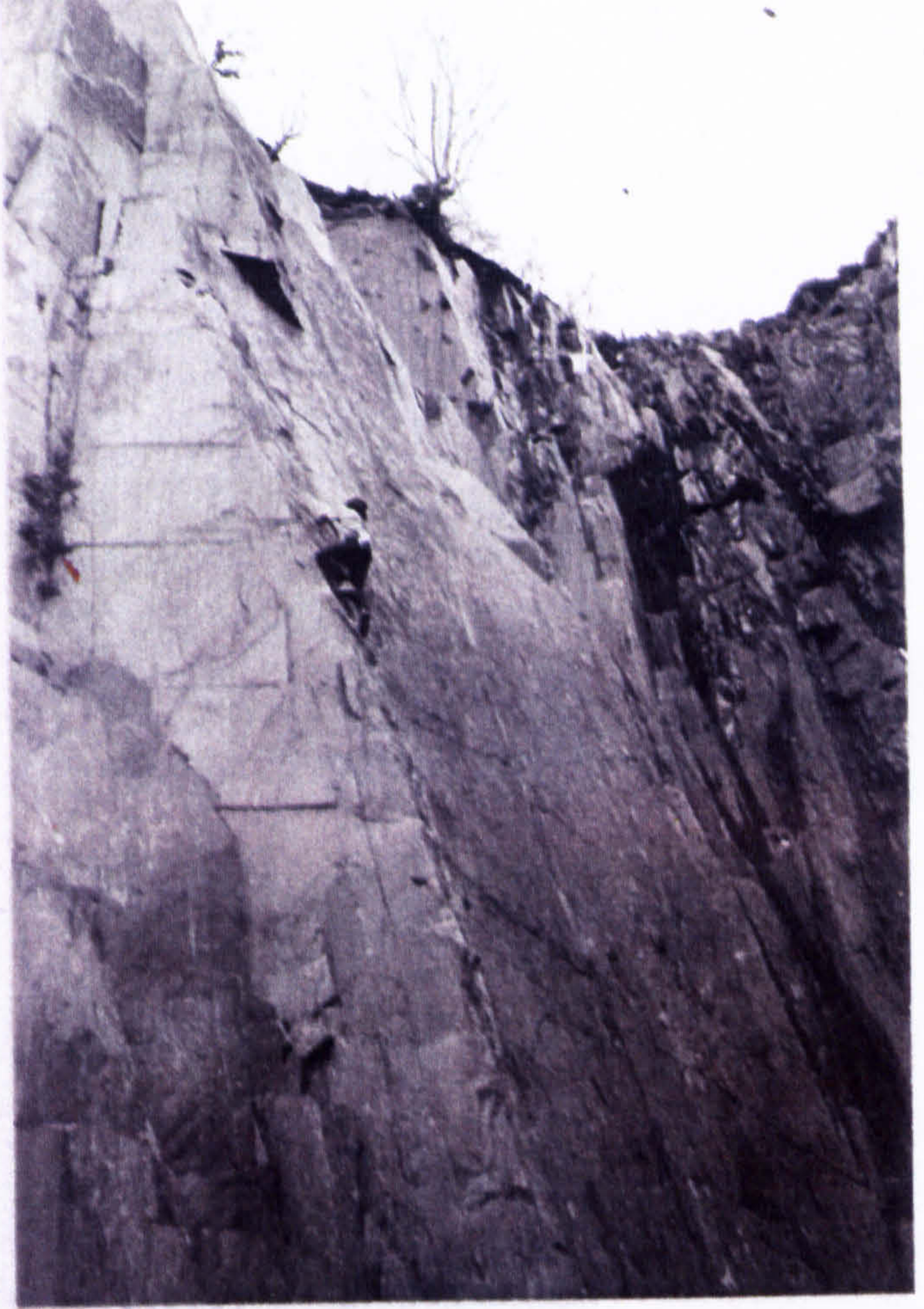
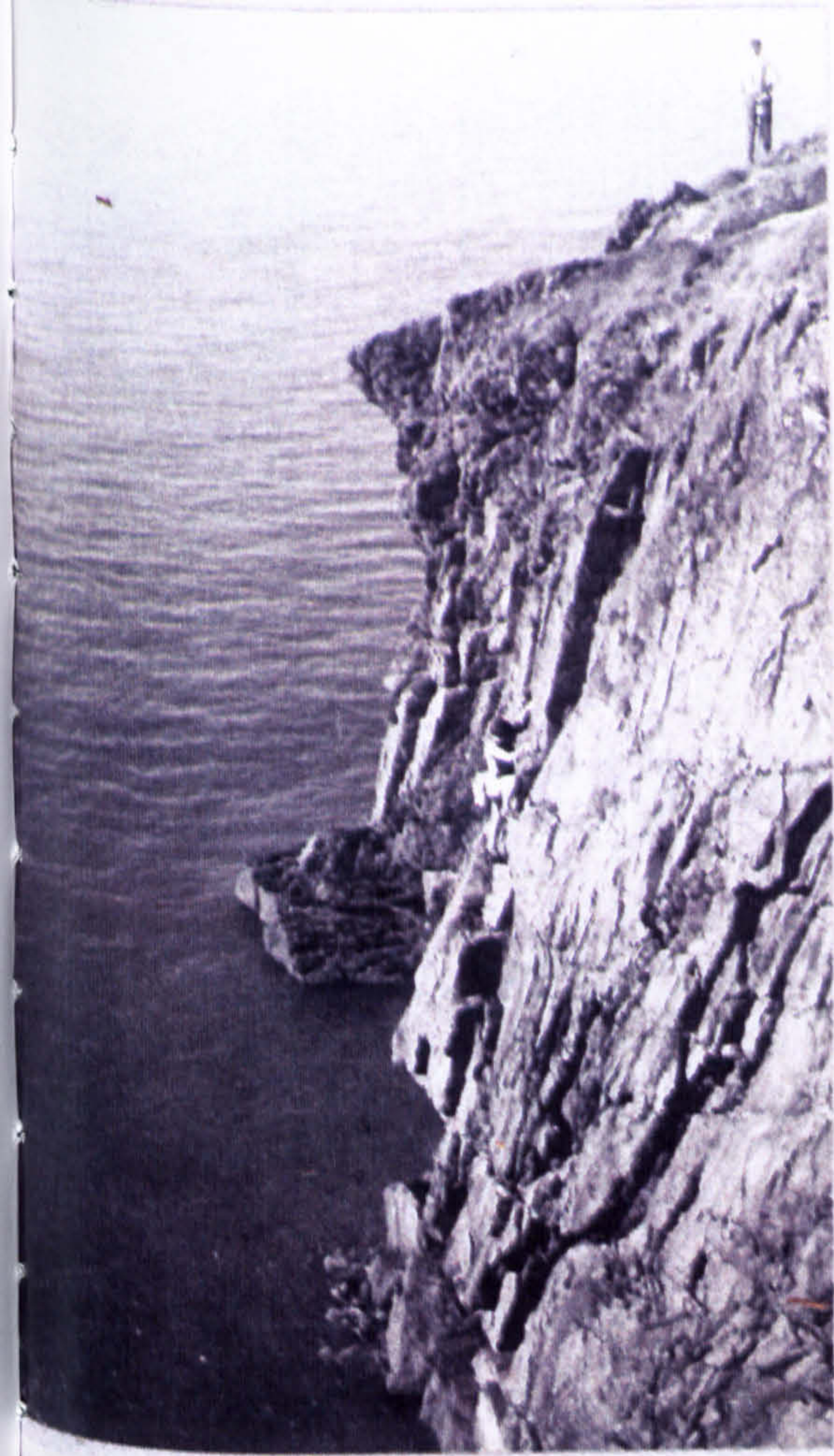
Visual Examples of Climbing Action in Authentic Arenas

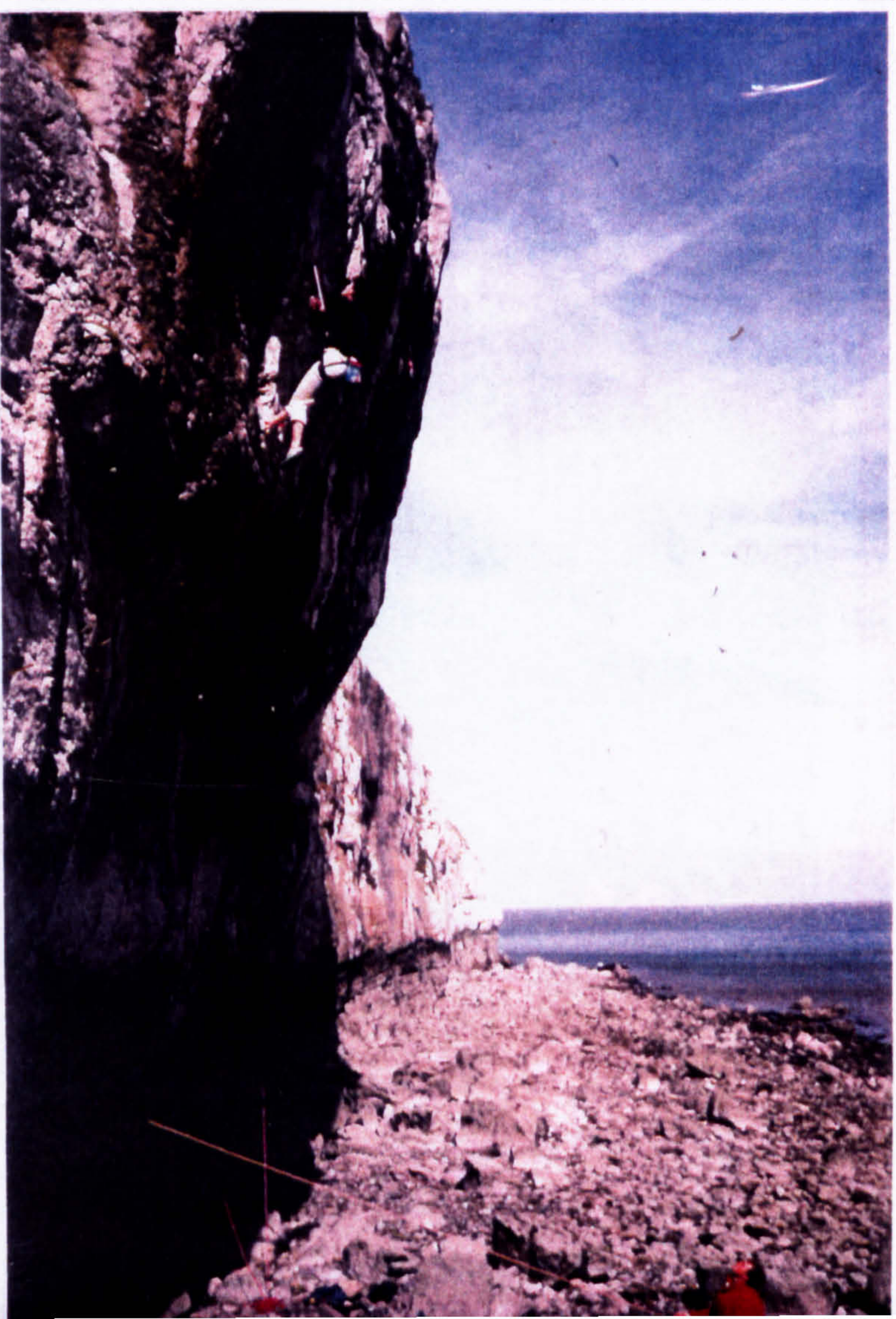
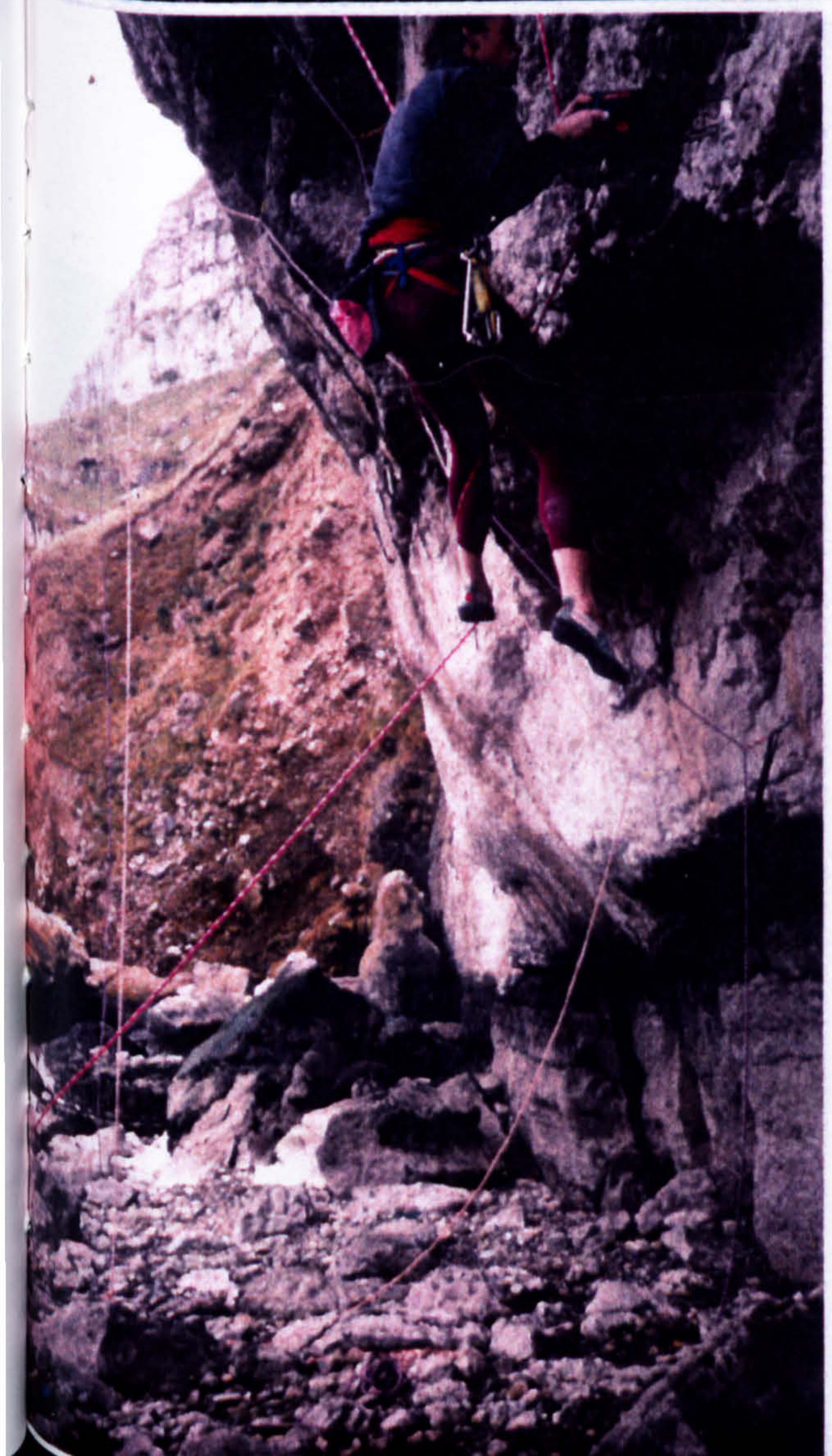
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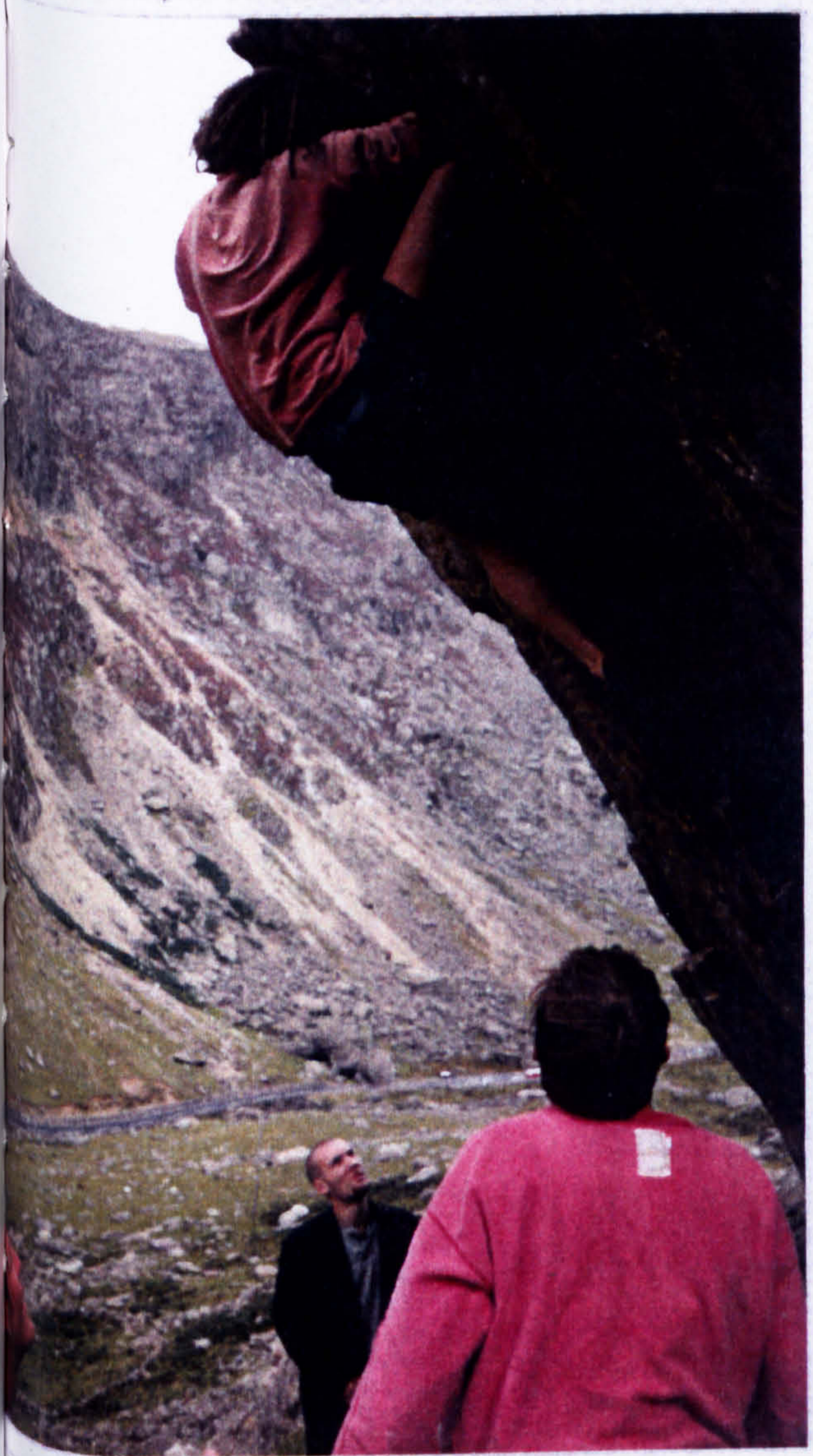






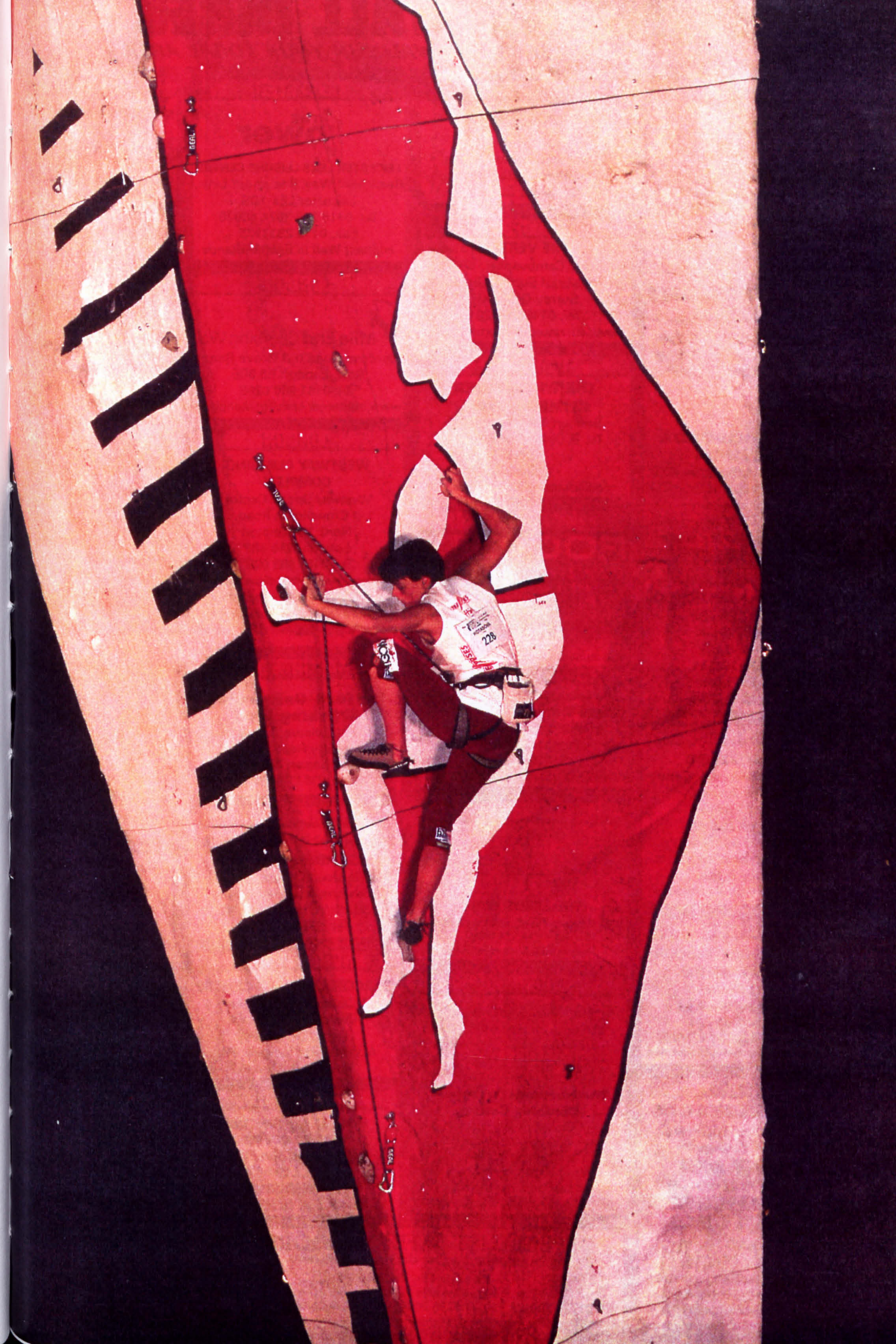


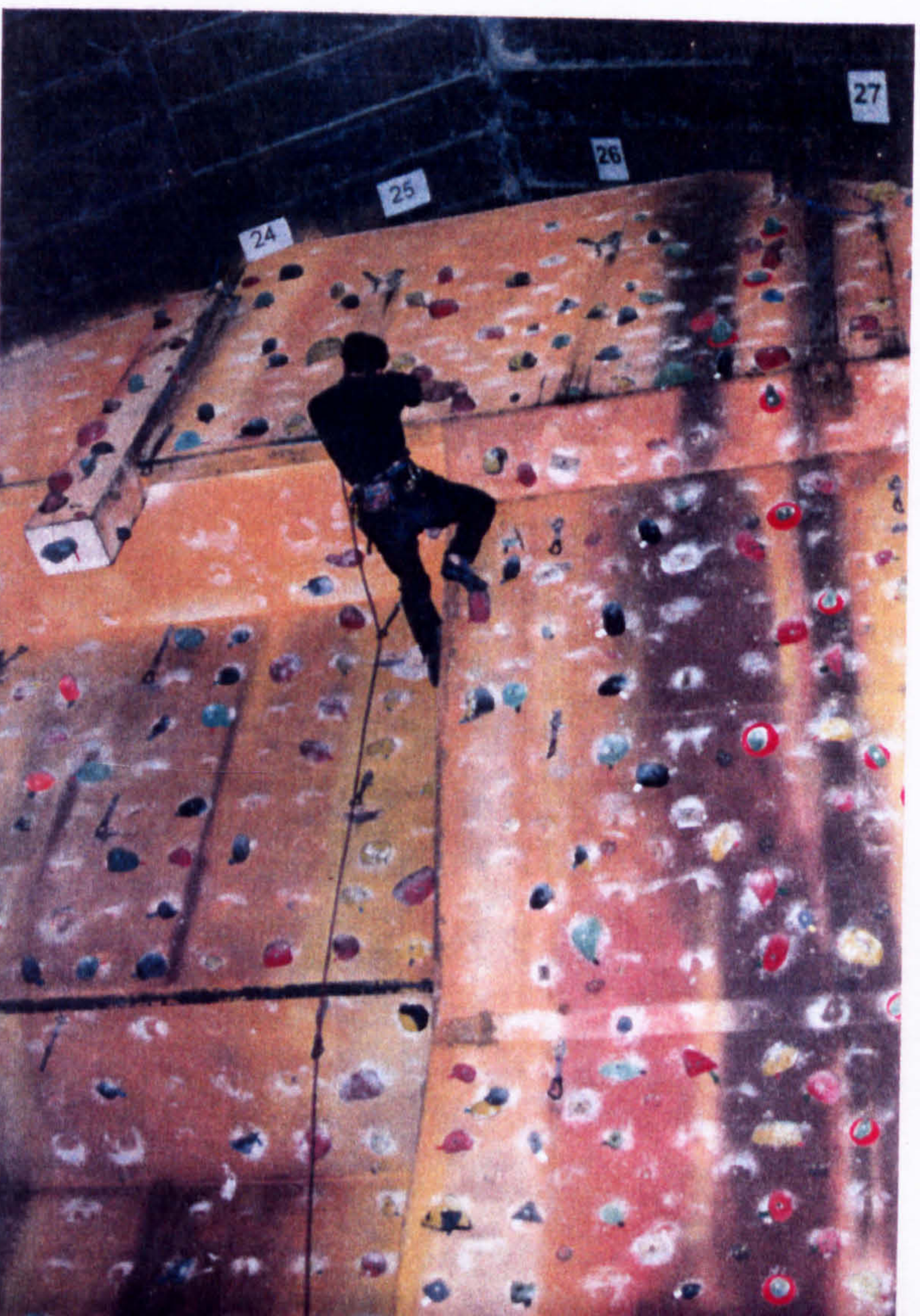
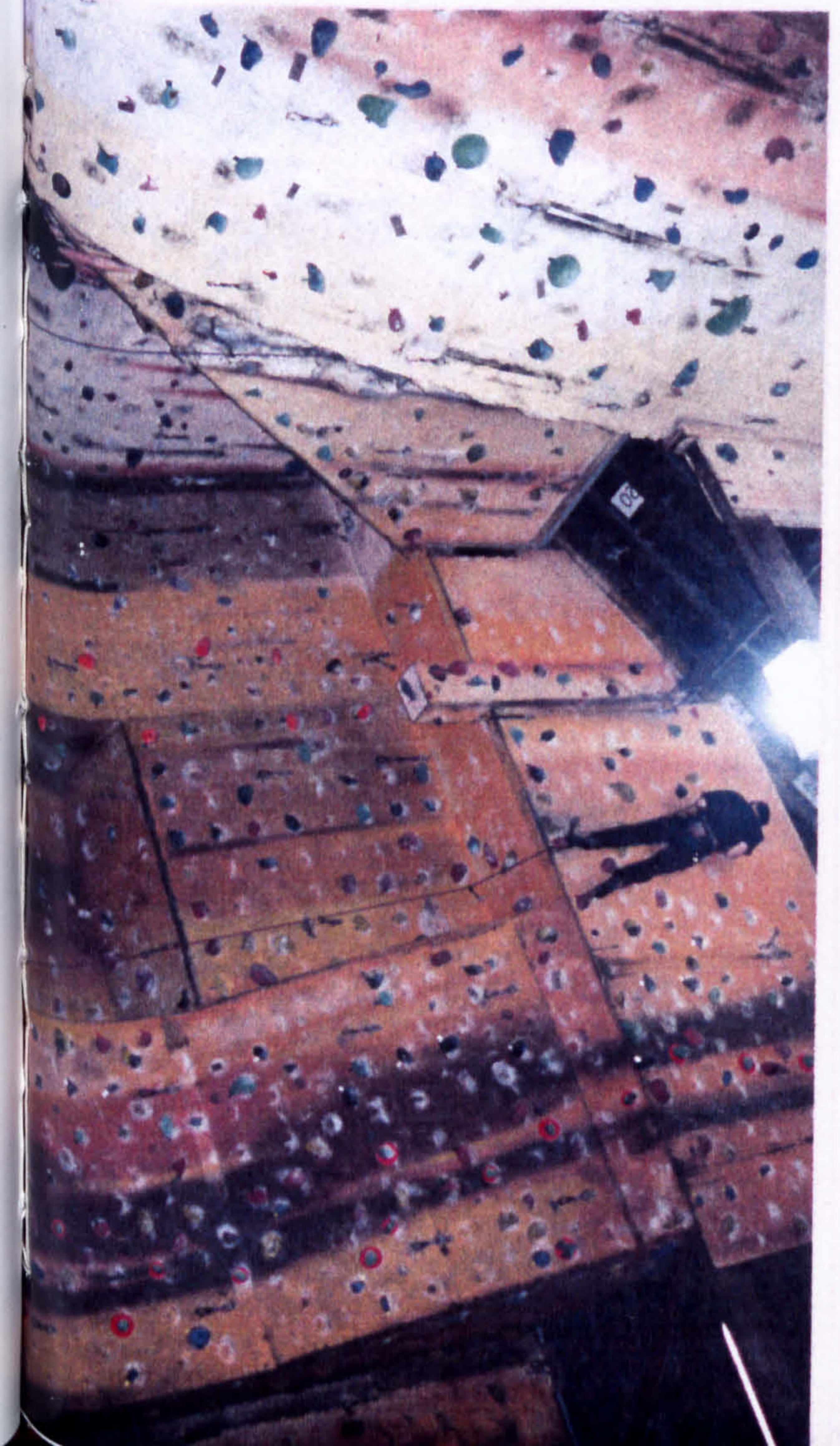
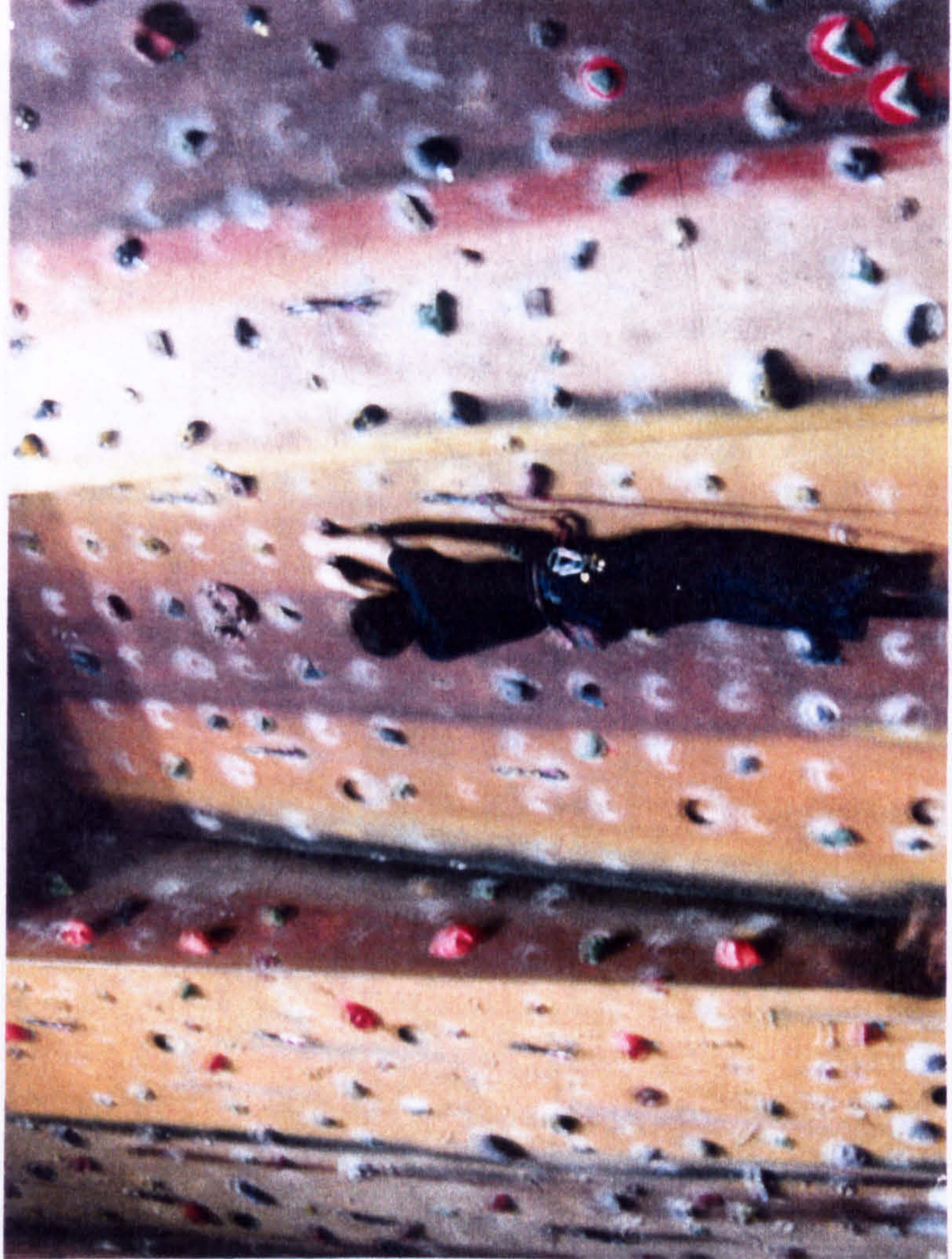


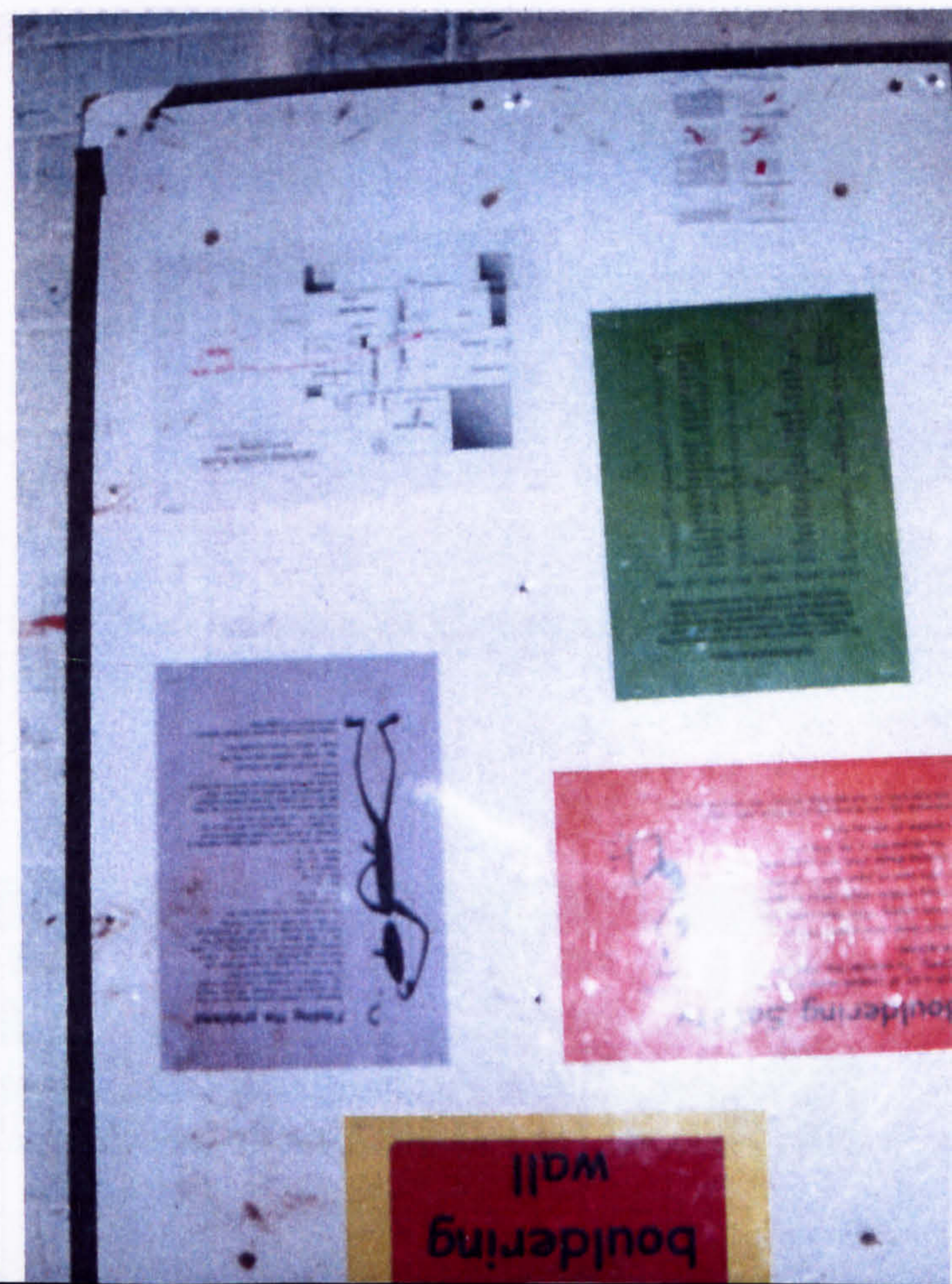


APPENDIX 5

Visual Examples of Climbing Action in Inauthentic Arenas







APPENDIX 6

Examples of Climbing Fashion Style, Advertising and
Marketing

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APPENDIX 8

The Social World of Climbing Historical Map

The Social World of Climbing

Historical Map

1857 - 2002

- 1857 Alpine Club founded, some early upper and middle class members use locales in, Britain largely as training for alpine climbing by scrambling or walking to various summits.
- 1865 The Matterhorn is first climbed by the English Alpinist Edward Whymper with three companions and three Swiss guides. During the descent one guide and all three of Whymper's companions are killed in a fatal fall.
- 1882 Walter Parry Hasker Smith begins rock climbing in the Lake District by ascending two gully climbs.
- 1883 A.H.Stocker and J.W.Wall make the first recorded ascent of a rock climb in Wales on the West Buttress of Lliwedd in Snowdonia. Pen-y-Gwyrd is the first climbers' 'hangout' in Wales and visiting climbers begin recording new climbs in a logbook kept at the premises.
- 1884 Queen Victoria writes to Prime Minister Gladstone to see if climbing can be banned owing to a number of fatalities in the Alps.
- 1886 The first ascent of Napes Needle is made by Hasket Smith symbolising rock climbing as a sport for its own sake since the route finished atop an isolated rock pinnacle.
- 1889 Hasket Smith publishes '*Climbing in the British Isles*' - the forerunner of technical guidebooks.
- 1898 The Climbers Club is founded and concentrates on the development of rock climbing in Wales. Visiting middle class participants characterise the climbing world in Wales and throughout the UK.

- 1871-1907 The worlds first ladies mountaineering club is founded. The Ladies Alpine Club.
- 1909 J.M.Archer Thomson and A.W. Andrews produce the first rock climbing guidebook. 'The climbs on Lliwedd' which is published by the climbers club. Climbs are named but not graded. Climbers' 'hangout' in Wales is now established at Pen-y-Pass. The elements of risk and ethical considerations are developed.
- 1914 Central Buttress on Scafel Crag in the English Lake District is climbed by Siegfried Mereford making a significant leap in technical standards and a landmark in the development of British rock climbing. It is later climbed free by competitors from Wales.
- 1914 - 1918 First World War. Many members of the embryonic climbing world are killed in action.
- 1927 East Buttress Clogwyn D'ur Arddu in Snowdonia receives its first route by Fred Piggot and team. A cliff hitherto thought impossible to climb. The ascent is marred by the use of three aid points, but is nevertheless a significant climb. Later to be done 'free'.
- 1928 Longlands climb on the West Buttress of Clogwyn Dur Arddu confirms that the cliff can be climbed on Future lines are scrutinised, but many are left for the next generation of climbers as they are thought too difficult.
- 1930's Outcrop climbing develops in the Peak District and Yorkshire, particularly on grindstone edges. Working class participants from Northern cities participate in the sport for the first time though not yet in Wales.
- 1938 Grades are introduced for climbs in Wales on a scale provided by Menlove Edwards in a new guidebook to 'Lliwedd'.

1939 - 1945 Second World War 2. Climbing activity centres not on the sport but on commando training in Wales and Cornwall.

1947 The British Mountaineering Council is formed under the guidance of the forward thinking Geoffrey Winthrop Young. It is a body that looks after the interests of climbers but has no influence on the ethics of the sport.

British alpinists begin making significant ascents in the Alps after their absence in the war years. Working class climbers begin setting new standards of difficulty in the sport.

British mountain areas become more accessible due to increased use of motorised transport, more leisure time and generally more favourable social conditions. Better equipment in the form of nylon ropes and slings became available by the early 1950's.

1950 The Rock and Ice Club establishes its status in the world of climbing. Working class climbers also enter the alpine climbing arena.

The Rock and Ice Club includes two working class builders from Manchester Joe Brown and Don Whillans who begin a partnership which becomes rock climbing's dominant force for a decade and remains a great influence on the sport. The phrase 'Hard Men' epitomises their iconic status in the climbing world.

1952 Brown completes the 'Cenotaph Corner' on Dinas Cromlech in Snowdonia a landmark ascent which is to become one of the modern classic extreme climbs.

1953 Everest is climbed by a British led expedition. The A.C.C. or Alpine Climbing Groups is formed to promote extreme climbing in the Alps by a small grouping of British climbers including middle and working class activities.

- 1957 B.M.C. now gives estimate that there are 18,000 participants in the climbing world throughout Britain.
- 1960's Wales. Immigrant climbing community begins to emerge in Snowdonia as some people leave larger cities for a preferred rural environment and lifestyle which gives more free time for climbing. Climbers 'hangouts' now centre on Llanberis and in particular the Padarn Lake Hotel. Climbers from 'red brick' universities also enter the climbers' arena contributing to a further raising of standards.
- 1961 North Face of the Matterhorn done by British climbers.
- Helmets are introduced from the Alps and become popular on British crags. Waist harnesses are developed by climbers as well as new lightweight ballet-style footwear. Thus P.A.'s, a specialist rock climbing shoe, are imported from France and become universally accepted by serious rock climbers in Britain. Equipment in general continues to be developed along with sea cliff and limestone climbing in Cornwall and Derbyshire respectively.
- 1962 Chris Bonnington (later Sir) makes the first British ascent of the Eiger North Face. A much competed over and coveted climbers' trophy.
- In Britain more technical innovation in equipment leads to 'nut' protection being introduced, climbing gear is now a commercially viable business supporting a relatively small cottage industry.
- 1963 Peter Crew places a protection bolt on 'the boldest' an extremely severe route on 'Cloggy' in Snowdonia creating a huge furore and much ethical debate regarding this action.

- 1964 Craig Gogarth on Anglesey in N.W. Wales is found to be an excellent sea cliff climbing venue and reinforces the idea that rock climbing does not necessarily coincide with mountains or mountaineering. Much competition for first ascents characterises its development as a climbing arena.
- 1965-67 One of the first BBC outside broadcasts films a live ascent of 'The Old Man of Hoy'. The programme features Joe Brown and his comrades as they climb this remote sea stack in the Outer Hebrides. Brown gaining the public title of 'The Human Fly'.
- 1969 Kernmantle (shock fall absorbent) rope comes into the climbers arsenal of equipment. B.M.C. now estimates 45,000 climbers in Britain with only 10,000 of those regularly visiting the Alps.
- 1969 Media is introduced into the climbing world in the form of mountain magazines. A bi-monthly containing news and views on a local and global scale.
- 1974 Training and the use of prototype indoor climbing walls begins to emerge as a means for rock climbers wishing to push technical standards. Grading system reassessed and extended in the extreme categories.
- Peter Livesey leads 'Right Wall' on Dinas Cromlech in Snowdonia and creates a breakthrough in standards to E5. 'Footless Crow' in the Lake District another Livesey creation consolidates the standard. Women are admitted to the Alpine Club for the first time though they have always been involved in alpine climbing.
- 1976 Training and athletic s le preparation become acceptable practice in the pursuit of high standard rock climbing though only on an individual basis. Rudimentary climbing walls are developed indoors.

- 1978 Pete's Eats Café opens in Llanberis North Wales providing a new climbers' 'handout'. 'Friends' a new type of protection device are developed by climbers.
- 1980 Beginning of UB40 climbing subculture in North Wales when small groupings of climbers decide to accept socially limiting circumstances which allows more free time for climbing.
- 1981 In North Wales slate climbing begins to emerge as a new medium transforming disused industrial sites into rock climbing arenas. The 'Slateheads' emerge as the leaders of this process.
- 1982 A bolt is again placed on a new route on 'Cloggy' a natural cliff in Snowdonia though the route is not completed and the action socially sanctioned as unsound ethically.
- 1983 A leading climber removes bolt then completes the 'Masters Wall' an E7 climb on 'Cloggy', Snowdonia, North Wales. He uses a new type of rubber soled boot with better 'sticky' properties imported from Spain. Marking a revolution in adherence footwear for serious rock climbers.
- 1984 'Sports' climbing is introduced in North Wales amongst ethical debate centred around its style and use of bolt protection. The sponsoring of certain climbers by equipment makers is developed. 'Adventure' climbing emerges as a term to delineate traditional climbing style from 'sport' climbing and later embraces slate climbing under its umbrella.
- 1986 Standards are pushed further when 'Indian Face' the first E9 route in the world on 'Cloggy' in Snowdonia, North Wales is completed after acceptably stretching ethical boundaries.

- 1989 The first international grad prix indoor climbing competition in Britain at Leeds, England. Marks the advent of serious competitive, regulated, indoor competition climbing.
'The Heights' takes over from the 'Padarn' as the designated climbers' pub handout in Wales.
- 1990 Training for indoor events and route setting on indoor walls becomes standard as a competition circuit develops in Britain, US.A and Europe. Indoor climbing wall design improves, providing more sophisticated arenas for indoor climbing.
- 1995 Much ethical debate centred around the use of bolts and general ethics of ascent as many high standard climbs are worked out. Bouldering develops.
- 1996/2000 Rock climbing becomes more popular than ever before, some participants only wishing to engage in the activity indoors. Commercial Everest climbs are well established.
- 2000/2002 Bouldering now a specific part of the climbing world with its own grading system and devotees.

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