

## SECTION 4:

# “The Climb”: On Crag and Wall



**W**e'd better start with cards on the table: I'm not a climber. I've only done three graded routes which went down rather than up the grades – from a V Diff to a Diff to a Mod to retirement. All safe and sound thanks to Andy Chapman's leadership and all done in preparation for the Black Cuillin. So this section, which outlines the Club's achievements in England and Wales involving ropes – on rock, on ice, and on indoor walls – is written “from the outside looking in”. I hope this route “goes” as the nail-booted old timers would have said!

In overview, climbing has been an integral part of what we've done throughout these years, and a good number of our members have been involved. We've not been, to date, a Club with many “pure” climbers. Most do other things in the mountains to a greater or lesser extent as you'll see from the names that come up.

GMC climbing breathes in and out; sometimes there's more of it and at a harder level than at others. So this is a story of different climbing partnerships, and circles of partnerships over time.

In rough terms, I feel we have 4 “periods” which we'll visit in order:

- The Richard and Tony Show
- Allan & Co
- Gail, and David LJ
- Indoor climbing

Richard Kinsman wrote a series of magazine articles called “The Climbing Year”. The one for 1999 in “The Gwydyr 16” magazine discloses a wide range of venues from North Devon and the Gower through Symond's Yat, to turf nearer home:

“The first climb of the year was at Tremadog on the Saturday of the Annual Dinner. I took Melinda [Kinsman] up ‘Christmas Curry’ (Severe) on the ordinary line. Greg [Leasor] and Mal [Bonner] followed us up but did the ‘Michah’ finish which Mal led”.

There were a couple of interesting mountainous routes:

“The May Day bank holiday Melinda and I went up to Wasdale to see Andy Chapman...[on] the Saturday we climbed ‘Slab and Groove’ route (VS) and summited Scafell via ‘Scafell Pinnacle’ a Diff route...”

On the Dent meet that year:

“I wanted to climb one of the more obscure classic rock routes which is ‘Red Pencil Direct’ (V Diff) on Pen y Ghent. I climbed this with Pete Mann, and Greg [Leasor] followed leading Steve [Byrne] and Pete Butler. I then led a route called ‘Brass Monkey’ an HVS 5a which was my first HVS lead.”



Red Pencil Direct

The next year's highlights (as per "The Gwydyr 17" magazine) started for Richard again at Tremadog, where Tony Lamberton who became a steady climbing partner enters the lists. Tony and Richard climbed with Mike Dagley and Tom Brodie and:

"In between showers and cups of tea at Eric's we managed to climb 'Poor Man's Peuterey' (Severe)"

In the April Richard and Pete Mann had a crop of eight routes in a day on The Roaches, Pete leading 'Damascus Crack' at Hard Severe and the Severe 'Runner Route.' Coastal routes were part of the mix and in August Richard and Tom Brodie climbed at Bosigran:

"We started on the classic Hard Severe 'Doorpost'. I led the first and third pitch. Great route, good holds even in the rain and hail. We got to the top and...were hit by a major hailstorm. The hail was the size of golf balls and we were glad we still had our helmets on...we headed back to the car which had dents in nearly every panel."

So much for the soft south! They went on to Baggy, which I always thought sounded so happening and laid back. There they met up with Boo Jemmett-Stone. It was

"One of the biggest camp sites I have ever been in. There were about 3,000 people on the site and 2,980 of them were surfers. We had only one day's climbing. Tom led 'Ilizen' (VS 4c) 'Twinkletoes' (VS 4c) 'and 'Shangri La' (Severe 4a). I led 'Lost Horizon' (VS 5a) and Boo led 'Shangri La' also."

2004 (see "The Gwydyr 21" magazine) saw the Richard and Tony partnership in full swing. Over the year they had a number of productive trips to the Llanberis Pass; and in the March:

"Tony, Alan [Jemmett] and I did 'Lavaredo' (VS) at Carreg Alltrem. Tony had wanted me to climb this for a few years and I can see why. It's one of the best VS routes in North Wales."

Richard repeated the route with Mike Dagley and Bryn Roberts (The Elder) later in the year. There was a special trip that year for Richard, Melinda, Mal Bonner and Rob Platt, plus Rob Pickering, a friend of Rob's, to Lundy Island. They did thirteen routes the hardest being "Formula One" at HVS 5a, and Melinda spent the week snorkelling with seals.

For Rob 2004 was a landmark, as Peter Vaughan recorded along with his own climbing debut in "The Gwydyr 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary" magazine:

"Over the Easter break of 2004 Rob Platt celebrated 40 years of climbing by revisiting his first climbs [on]...Idwal Slabs. I joined him, along with Allan McDonald and Rob Pickering...to climb the 'Ordinary Route'. We climbed as two ropes but simultaneously, so while Allan led our rope one of the two Robs was near me to offer support and advice. It was a good day: awe inspiring and a bit bewildering...it was fun and challenging and above all safe".



Allan and Andy at Windgather

This seems like a good place to segue into the overlapping time of "Allan & Co."

Allan's climbs are very varied in terms of venue, style, grade and teams. In the September 2011 Newsletter he describes a trip that month that started and progressed at least in a relaxed style, on what I reckon is the most romantically named crag, Windgather Rocks...

"Sunday dawned...for the Chairman and Andy Odger...our resolve to get something done over-ride any thoughts of lethargy and we drove back out to the Peak District hoping for some dry rock. As we made our way through Manchester in heavy rain



Allan leads Crescent Crack at Windgather

we thought that breakfast would be a good idea and stopped in Sainsbury's cafe for a mid-day brunch. The weather began to improve and... we...continued onto Windgather Rocks as the weather had improved dramatically with more than a hint of blue in the sky.

For those who have not climbed on Gritstone or outside before this is a smashing place to go, short climbs and an easy walk off. We managed six routes, none harder than Severe, before calling it a day and heading home. The journey was not without incident as running out of diesel in Stockport on a quiet Sunday evening was interesting to say the least. With the help of a friendly taxi driver all was sorted."

Just a month earlier he'd been somewhere a lot less Trad with Phil Earl as per the April 2011 Newsletter. One of the routes was "Intruder" at F5+ which is roughly HVS and jolly nearly E1 in English money....



Phil Earl on Intruder (F5)

"We went to the newly developed crags of Penamnen Head (the cliffs beneath the old 70 degrees hotel) where we managed five routes (and one particularly annoying wasp sting for your chairman) before heading over to the busy Castle Inn Quarry for a further three climbs. All in all a good day and as a bonus we stayed dry all day."

And to think as a kid going past in my Dad's car I always imagined Jason King-like types sipping sophisticated cocktails wearing kaftans in the Hotel 70 Degrees...how things change!

Quarries were again on the menu for the same team in the October:

"Family commitments did not allow me or Phil [Earl] a full weekend away but we did manage a cracking half day in the Lancashire quarries of Denham and Anglezarke. Another ten routes were done including one with the longest route name imaginable – 'Mohammed the Mad Monk of Moorside Home for Mental Misfits' – a brilliant Very Severe and worth climbing if only for the route name alone" (October 2011 Newsletter)

Fast forward to April 2014, and team and venue flex again (see the Feb/Mar 2014 Newsletter):



On Lliwedd Bychan

"...a group of four [Andy Chapman, Lindsey Fooks, Bethan Hines and Allan] made their way to a delightful little cliff in the shadow of the shapely Cnicht called Lliwedd Bychan. Sadly the cafe in Croesor was closed so there was little to distract and thus we made our way up to the cliff where a great day was had. We did five easy climbs (V Diff to Hard Severe) and when the sun came out (albeit briefly) it was most pleasant and spring like. It's a smashing little place and well worth the 45 minute walk in, and one we will be visiting again I am sure."

In his years in the Club Allan was always keen to involve, and take good care of, less experienced climbers. We've already mentioned in an earlier section his day out at St

John's in the Vale with Kev McEvoy in October 2011. They did "Via Media" on the south side of Castle Rock.

Earlier, in March 2007, along with Keith Colwell he'd helped Peter Vaughan do his first lead, in the Moelwyns. In "The Gwydyr 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary" magazine Peter takes up the story...

"I [had] recently led a few single pitch routes at Stanage and Pandy Outcrop. Was it time to have a go at multi

pitch leading...?

We moved along the crag to the foot of a long protruding slab, the first pitch of a route called 'Slick' (V Diff) – but why call it that I wonder – Ha! Allan led the first pitch...Keith went up second and I brought up the rear. We swapped the ropes round so I had both ropes for the next lead...and I immediately found out why it's called 'slick'. The rock is rough and sticky but there were no holds big enough for more than a toe, edge or finger...and few obvious places for protection. After getting a couple of wires in and a friend, I made it up to the belay ledge... and brought Keith and Allan up.

The next pitch started up a chimney...so...thrust, jam, struggle, pray, swear and I managed to exit the chimney...



Melinda leading Chimney Climb

get some protection in and...move up to the final belay stance and bring the other two up. I'd led my first two pitches on a multi pitch route."

These middle years of our period were very fertile climbing ground and a variety of teams were active. Richard, Tony and Melinda's climbs included a trip to Ogwen in late October 2011 as she recorded in the October Newsletter.

"Despite an unpromising forecast, [we] had a surprisingly dry and mild day's climbing at Bochlwyd Buttress. We managed 'Two Pitch Route' (Severe, 4a), 'Five Pitch Route' (Hard Severe, 4a) and 'Marble Slab' (Hard Severe, 4b), before finishing with me leading my first Severe ('Chimney Climb')."

Andy Chapman was out there throughout. Ice Climbing, heavily dependent on the conditions, can be hit and miss outside Scotland and so we've done less overall than on rock. One excellent trip was a three day tour of a very iced up Ogwen based at the Hut, by Andy and Melinda Kinsman in March 2013. In the Mar/Apr Newsletter Melinda writes...

higher tier of cliffs on Glyder Fawr, with Andy eyeing up a new tick! Although Central Gully was unfortunately



Andy leads the first pitch, Chicane Gully

"On day one we plodded through deep powder snow up to the only showing signs of a powder snow coating, and no real ice, we set off to see how far we could get. After the first pitch, we thought we'd have to abseil off, with no obvious gap under the boulder in front of us, and no ice to let us take the alternative route on the smooth slab to our left! After a lot of mole-like digging by Andy, however, we forged a way through, and about four pitches later we topped out in clear blue sky, and then made our descent down Devil's Kitchen. Despite the lack of ice, we agreed this route had been a mini adventure!

On day three, we were once more out of the Chapel very early... Walking up past Idwal Slabs to Chicane Gully, we finally found ice - and lots of it!

Thankfully no other party started the route until we had left it, as the name seemed very apt, considering how much ice hurtled down once we set foot on the upper pitches!

Finishing the route fairly early, we returned back to see what other ice looked good, and settled on doing The Ramp. By the time we had topped out next to the Devil's Kitchen path yet again, we were both pretty worn out, but glad to have sampled

the icy yet safer, quiet delights of Ogwen, before hordes of other climbers would arrive for the Easter Bank Holiday weekend!”

As far as I can ascertain David Lane-Joynt (aka DLJ), who joined the Club in 2010, enters our actual climbing records in the October 2014 Newsletter which shows that in the July:

“David Lane-Joynt has been climbing with Andy Chapman in Wales including Dyserth Castle Slab near Abergele which David describes as desperate!”

I’ll now hand over direct to David to tell the story of our recent climbing scene:

“I joined the GMC with the intention of doing some hill walking. I had done quite a lot of climbing in my younger days, but this was 40 years ago. Seeing Allan and Co climbing, I wondered if I could still do it. So when Allan offered to lead me up a climb I dug out my old gear, with a Whillans harness and some EB’s, and Allan led me up a V Diff in the Moelwyns.

I found that everything had changed since I was last climbing. There was now something called “sports climbing” and what I used to do was called “trad”. Equipment and protection gear had changed out of all recognition, and so had the people climbing. The climbing world was now full of women! Lastly indoor climbing had really taken off, and was driving up standards (more on this below).

Gail Smith had also recently joined the club with her husband Doug Florence, and she was interested in climbing. She was working part time at that stage, so we teamed up, and Friday became our regular climbing day. We were not climbing at a high standard, but we had a lot of fun and I think we made a good team. Gail was good at the delicate balance sort of climbing, whereas I preferred something more physical with some good hand jams.

I liked the old classic routes in the East face of Tryfan, with their air of history about them. They may have been put up 100 years ago, but for all the shiny new modern gear you can still get stuck in a chimney on ‘Gashed Crag’ (first climbed 1902) especially with a pack on your back. It is a real struggle to move up, and luckily to move down as well. I have now done

‘Grooved Arete’ three times (twice with Gail) and the last time I somehow managed to leave my rock boots behind in the car. So I had to climb and do my share of leading in big boots which made it feel more genuine on the famous, or is it infamous, Knight’s Move pitch (2 up and 1 across or vice-versa for those who do not play chess).

After a while we got more confident and headed for the Llanberis Pass. Gail led me up ‘Nea’ on Clogwyn y Grochan (VS) with some very wobbly rock on the top pitch, and the wonderful ‘Crackstone Rib’ on Carreg Wasted. The latter is only Severe but must be on every climber’s ‘must do’ list with its spectacular climbing up the rib in a very exposed position.

Gail’s daughter Heather had a friend Tom who was working on his MIA qualification, and we offered to help Tom as ‘clients’ for his log book experience. He took us up the ‘Direct Route’ on the Nose of Dinas Mot on the South side of the ‘Pass’. This is described in the guide book as ‘One for the well-rounded VS lead-



David belaying Gail on Pinnacle Rib Route (D) on Tryfan East Face



Gail finishes Sabre Cut in style (see next page)

er, and some will find the entrance to the final pitch baffling'. I think this is code for 'hard', and the entrance duly baffled us.

Some while later Tom had a day off, and took us up 'Sabre Cut', another classic VS just left of Cenotaph Corner on Dinas Cromlech. As the name suggests this is a big corner route with a crack at the back. I followed Tom up, jamming in the awkward width crack. When it came to Gail's turn, she managed to get up with some very delicate bridging on the outside, and not a hand-jam in sight. It is good job that our skills are different.

We also did 'The Cracks' on Dinas Mot, in the guidebook as Hard Severe and 'one of the finest climbs of this grade in the Pass'. I loved all the hand-jamming crack pitches, but then we got to the very awkward mantelshelf move right at the top of the route and in the most exposed position. Neither of us could do the move, but fortunately we managed to escape off to the side, so that remains on the 'to-do' list.

At the time there were not a lot of us climbing in the club, but we managed to keep things going, and have a lot of fun in the process".

David now moves things on to the last couple of years:

"After the somewhat quieter period of climbing when Gail and I were doing our thing, climbing in the Gwydyr has now really come to life largely in the form of indoor climbing with a whole new cast of characters.

Richard Smith joined in 2016, and Lee Robinson a year later. We now have regular Tuesday evening sessions at the Boardroom in Queensferry or Awesome Walls in Liverpool, together with Helen Grant, as well as Gail.

Sometimes Glenn Grant manages to join as. Melinda Kinsman has been a regular as has Bill Morrison – both have suffered rather from injuries but it's good that Bill is back with us and it'd be great to have Melinda back too as she shows us how it's done!

Tom McEvoy is very keen on his bouldering at the Hanger in Liverpool, but joins us sometimes at Awesome Walls. So too does Jon Foulkes, Lindsey Fooks, Oli Jenner and Tom Humphreys when his work commitments allow. We had a real dip in the average age when Brenda Turnbull came along with her teenagers Charlie and Ellen, with Charlie showing us how to get up a 6a!

Yes, standards are going up as well. Richard is leading the way in the Tuesday evening sessions and is leading 6b's, so I am now struggling to keep up (or not) with him. While we're on standards, Gail and I had taken Anna Roberts to the Boardroom at little while ago, and she tentatively did her first lead



Jane Webster at Plas y Brenin

climb. I've recently found out that Boo Jemmett-Stone and Anna have linked up, and that Anna's now leading 6a's.

In North Wales Chris Russell has been taking Bryn Roberts out climbing and they have been regulars at the Beacon indoor climbing wall in Caernarfon, where Bryn is rapidly improving in standard.

We've not neglected the need to get a bit of fresh air now and again. Richard and Lee have also occasionally been climbing with me outside, as has Oli."

David had earlier written up one his meet ups with Oli in the Great Outdoors in the October 2018 newsletter:

"I remember one memorable afternoon in late July when Oli had a free afternoon, and we decided to go to Helsby. We were then joined by Jon Foulkes.



Charlie on a 6a at Awesome Walls

Helsby has a long history as a training ground for some very fine climbers. The sandstone rock can be fragile, and leading is a serious business, so we decided to try out some of the routes on a top rope. The most famous route at Helsby is 'Flake Crack', a steep crack up a corner which is best tackled by jamming, although it can be done with a strenuous layback. We all had a go at this route. With modern rock shoes the route is now a lot easier, and can be protected with camming devices, but it is easy to see why it was such a challenge in big boots long before such things as camming devices were ever dreamed of. In those days the only way to get any protection at all was to try and jam a stone in the crack to form a chock-stone.

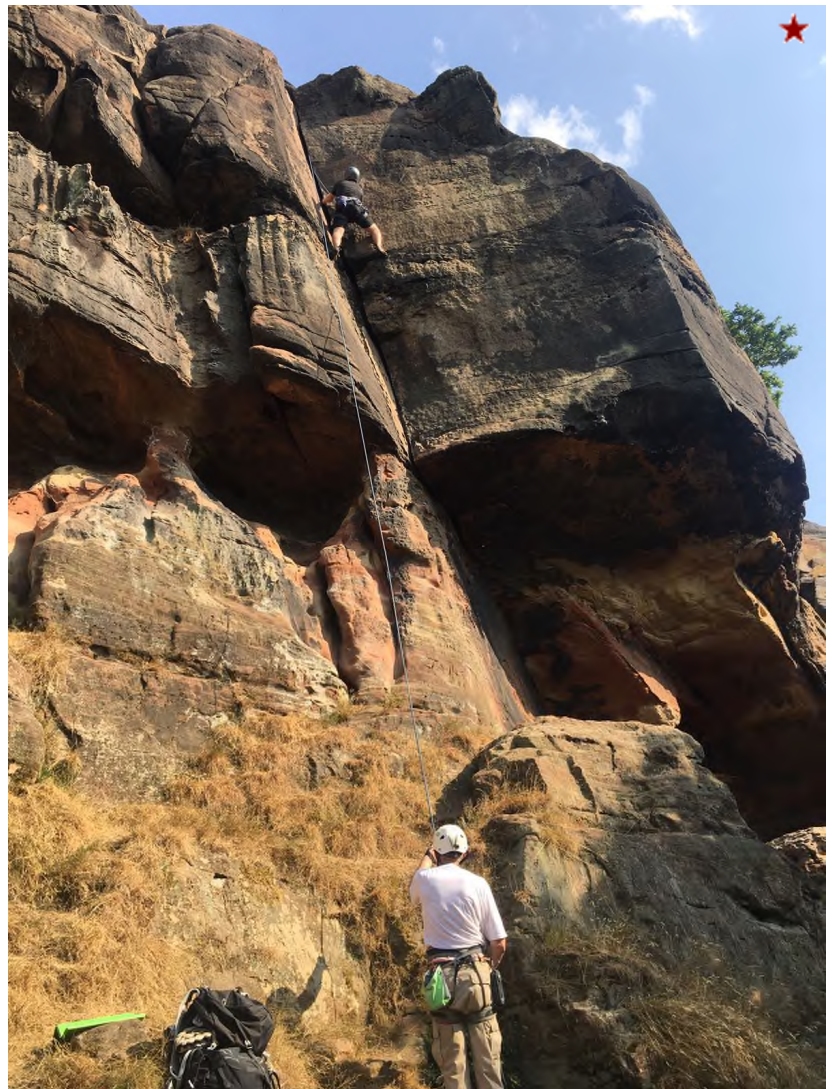
To the left of 'Flake Crack' are two fine VS's, 'Twin Caves Crack' and 'Dinnerplate Crack', which we all climbed. Twin Caves Route is described in the guidebook as 'An enjoyable, well protected tussle up the steep crackline'.

There is definitely new life in Gwydyr climbing! But for now let's coil up the rope for a while and head off for a post hill pint: we'll return to climbing outside the UK in later sections.

Some more photos to finish with:



Richard on the Pinnacle at Awesome Walls



Jon Foulkes on Flake Crack (HVS) at Helsby with David belaying



Helen is introduced to outside climbing at Little Tryfan

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