

THE CLIMBER

NEW ZEALAND'S CLIMBING MAGAZINE

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QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE
NEW ZEALAND ALPINE CLUB



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Isaac Buckley attempting the desperate cross-through move high on *The Iron Curtain* (V11), Flock Hill. DEREK THATCHER



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JOHN PALMER

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DEREK THATCHER

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Melissa Le Navé and Nina Caprez in Tough Enough, Madagascan © Jan Novak



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📷 Alastair McDowell takes in the sunrise views towards Aoraki / Mt Cook from the summit of Mt Graham. To see more about Alastair and other members of the New Zealand Alpine Team, visit: www.alpineteam.co.nz
GAVIN LANG



▲ ABOVE Derek Thatcher on his latest first ascent at Christchurch's Superbowl, *Superboy* (35). This 101-move mega-pumper is New Zealand's freshest grade 35 route and involves starting on the left side of the Cave by climbing *She Devil* (28), into the crux of the unrepeated *The Phantom* (31), dropping down into the crux section of *Kaz's Project* (33) and on into *Hydroplaning* (34), before continuing on through to the anchor of the *Space Boy*

Extension (32, out of frame on the right). Derek made use of several creative rest positions in order to get it done. TOM HOYLE

▲ RIGHT Alec McCallum holding on to very little during a speedy second attempt ascent of *Dr Strangelove* (32), Lyttelton Rock. DEREK THATCHER



THE WILL TO TOWER

I AM Will and I'm 11 years old. I started climbing at Hangdog last year and I'm a member of the Dynamites - Wellington Climbing Club. I competed in all the NIBS competitions this year, the Regionals and the Climbing New Zealand Youth Nationals. I placed 8th overall in NIBS (under 16) and came 2nd in the Youth Nationals (under 12). I did my first outdoor boulder climb this month, attached is a photo of me trying to send *The Tower* (V2) on the Overhanging Wall at Baring Head. My dad has got into climbing too, he's losing weight and getting fit. Thanks for your magazines!

(Editor- Will, you are very welcome. Best of luck to you [and your dad] on *The Tower*.)




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Our vision: NZAC champions the pursuit of climbing, enabling skilled and active adventurers. We provide inspiration, information and seek to enable a vibrant climbing community.

Our core purpose is to foster and support climbing.

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NEW LIFE AND HONORARY MEMBERS AWARDED

AT THE club AGM, two honorary memberships to the club were presented. Both Julie-Ann Clyma and Lloyd 'Kiwi' Gallagher were granted this honour in recognition for their significant long-term contributions to climbing globally.

Also recognised for their long term contributions to NZAC and climbing in general were five new life members. Thanks to Christine Jensen Burke, Gillian Crombie, Phil Doole, Max Dorflinger and Cliff Ellery for all their energy over the years.

A special presentation was also made to Geoff Gabites in recognition of service to the club after 50 years of involvement at the highest levels of club leadership.

TARANAKI CLIMBING MEET

THE TARANAKI Section are hosting a climbing meet based out of Taurangi Lodge, on the northern side of Mt Taranaki, over the weekend of February 29th–March 1st. For more information and to book your spot, contact Phill Davies (ascent.phill@gmail.com).

FLOCKFEST 2020

THIS YEAR Flockfest returns in autumn, after last year's successful first event in early spring. The event will take place over Anzac weekend (25–27 April), so be sure to save the date and get your travel booked in early.

MOUNTAIN WORKSHOP WEEKEND

NZAC IS excited to launch a brand new event, the Mountain Workshop Weekend. The NZAC Mountain Workshop Weekend is an opportunity for club members to participate in a workshop to develop their skills in activities affiliated with NZAC. During the weekend there will be a number of workshops delivered, covering a range of topics and presented by experts in their field. Workshops run over two days, with a Saturday night social event to relax after a day learning new skills. Following a communal meal, there will be a talk by a guest speaker (to be confirmed) and the opportunity for participants and course tutors to mingle. This is the perfect time to pick the brains of the other course tutors and meet like-minded NZAC members. See www.alpineclub.org.nz for more information and registrations.

PORTER LODGE WORK PARTY

FOLLOWING THE successful work party at Porter Lodge last February, when much outstanding urgent maintenance on the lodge was done, it is proposed to run another work party in the week of 16–22 February to complete remaining items of work. If you are able to help with this work party, for part of, or all of this week, please contact Philip Tree at: philipree7@gmail.com, or phone him on: 03 9427670.

BANFF FILM FESTIVAL 2020

THE DATES for this year's Banff screenings across May and June are already being booked in. Visit www.banff.nz to see when screenings are taking place in your area so as not to miss out on this always popular club event.

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MOUNTAIN WORKSHOP WEEKEND

NZAC NEWS

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for Climbers

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*

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Ropework

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Climbing
Skills

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NEW ZEALAND
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EDITORIAL

THIS IS the tenth issue of *The Climber* since I took over the desk from Kester Brown. That time seems to have flown by and it is perhaps overdue for me to write a few words reflecting on the state of climbing and this publication.

UNESCO have just included 'Alpinism' into their list of recognised cultural practices and expressions of intangible cultural heritage. While many climbers celebrate this as climbing being recognized as an art, those in the fine arts will look at other representations on the UNESCO list (such as Byzantine Chanting, Mongolian Camel Coaxing, Slovakian Bagpipe Culture, Chinese Shadow Puppetry and the making of Kyrgyz men's headwear) and suggest it is perhaps more a craft. Semantics aside, this is an acknowledgement of climbing beyond sport or craft as something of human cultural significance. Climbing is more than just the activity of physically navigating to the apex of a peak. It requires 'physical, technical and intellectual strengths' to succeed in the process of 'challenging one's own capabilities and expertise while negotiating natural, non-artificial obstacles'. As a climber, it is great to see UNESCO recognising the unique human experience that climbing offers.

Rock climbing also seems to be experiencing a boom period of popularity. In these times of competition climbing in the Olympics, Academy Awards for climbing films and the widespread popular adoption of climbing through a proliferation of increasingly accessible indoor climbing facilities, climbing is part of the public lexicon in a way that it has never been before.

Despite these positives, climbing faces a lot of challenges. Unfortunately, the boom in popularity naturally biases people's experiences of rock climbing more and more towards indoor climbing—due simply to the economics of accessibility—while at the same time the increasing numbers of climbers outdoors places more pressure on access issues. If we want climbing to remain about 'negotiating natural, non-artificial obstacles', it is vital that we establish a dedicated access fund and become pro-active about lobbying for climbers' interests. NZAC is the default organisation for this work—and the first to have the finger pointed at them when access issues result in crag closures—yet is hugely under-resourced for tackling the myriad of issues at play. As climbers, we must not keep our heads in the sand.

Given the effects of climate change and based on my own observations on the balance of content submitted to me, it seems clear that alpinism (despite its intangible cultural heritage) is just as threatened as rock climbing. While I think all climbing activities appeal to a sense of adventure and achievement, it does seem that rock climbing sits more easily within people's capacity for treading familiar ground as 'type one fun', while alpinism is more geared towards the notion of the first ascent and 'type two fun'. Those heavily committed to alpinism are looking for firsts in whatever shape or form they can contrive, the endless search for

a challenge beyond what has been previously surmounted. As the alpine landscape changes, new opportunities will undoubtedly emerge, yet it is undeniable that most of the traditional 'last great unclimbed' objectives in our mountains have been ticked off. This leads people to seek more distant challenges overseas, more esoteric challenges, or more dangerous objectives in order to quench the thirst for success.

Perhaps there needs to be a shift in the mindset of climbers away from the 'big game hunting' of trophy collecting and bucket list peak conquering. But is this commensurable with the appeal of the challenge that seems an essential part of people's motivation? Is it innate to the activity? While I don't have an answer to that question, I do think there has been a subtle shift in the value of climbing, one that can be observed in studying the history of mountaineering in New Zealand.

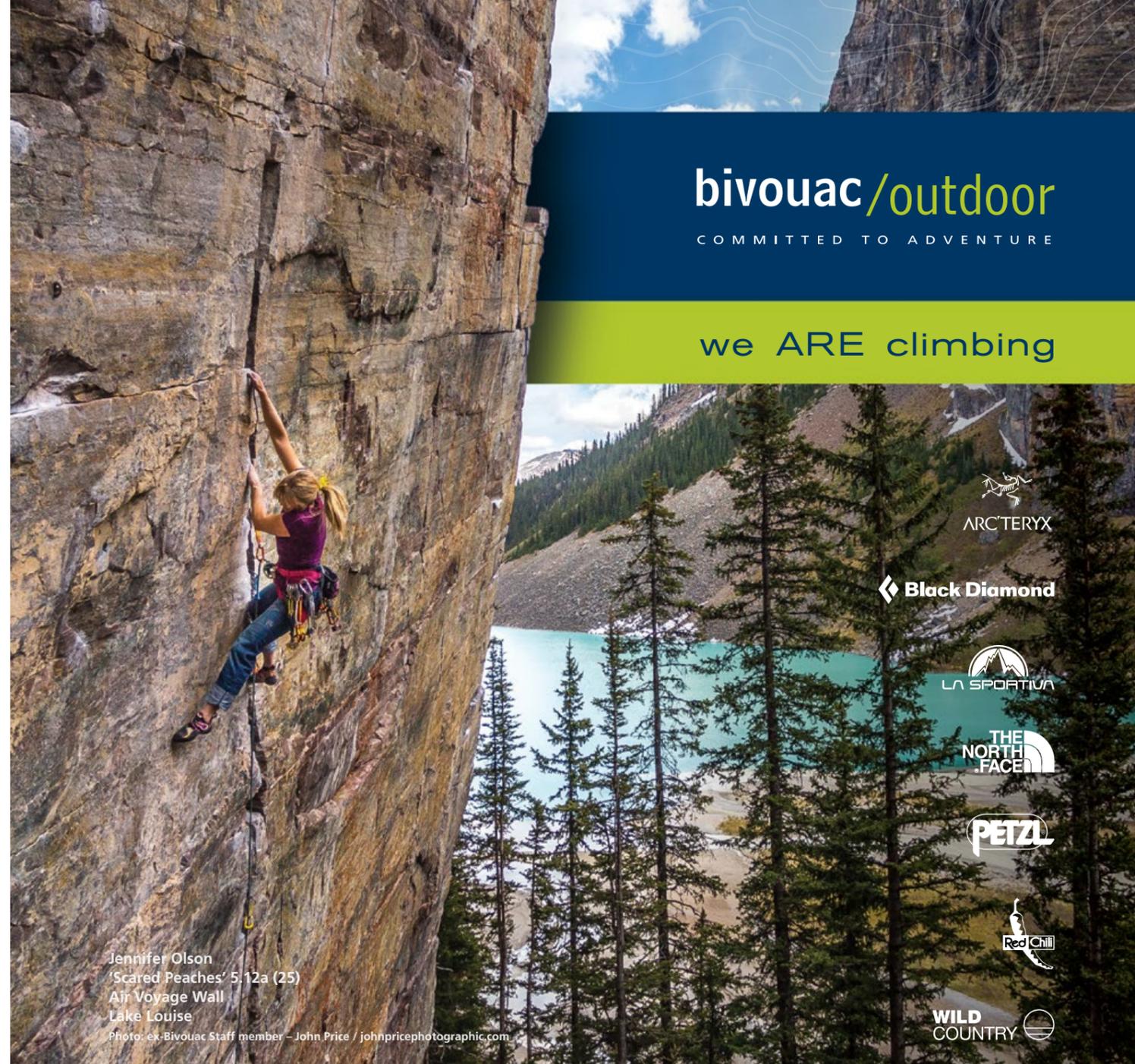
In colonial times—rightly or wrongly—mountain climbing was written about in terms of taming the wilderness. The success of the brave souls who were first to summit significant peaks were expressed as symbolic of humankind's struggle against nature and the power to conquer it. While the popular press still uses terms like 'conquer' when speaking of climbing success, this term has become increasingly cringeworthy, at least amongst the climbers I know. In this digital age, as our lives become overly sedentary and so many of our experiences screen-based, the value of simply being out in nature is becoming more and more recognised.

There is plenty of new evidence and increasing research into the health and well-being benefits of time in the outdoors, but I think the value of climbing exceeds even these benefits. Simply put, despite UNESCO's more polite definition, climbing is more visceral than most activities. Through climbing we are made more conscious that we were once—if not still are—wild animals. Climbing as an activity is clawing at the veneer of civilisation and makes us aware of our own frailty in relation to the colossal power of nature. There is value in being reminded of our own limitations contemporaneously with our attempts to exceed them. This is the struggle, the existential tension in which we live our lives and I think it vital that we are regularly reminded of this.

This is just my opinion though and I'd hate for this magazine to just be about me and my idea of what climbing is or should be. This magazine should be a reflection of the state of climbing in New Zealand and express all of the elements of intangible cultural heritage climbing has to offer. To that end, I'd like to reiterate what Kester wrote in his editorial for issue #100, that this is *your* magazine. It lives and dies by the content I receive from people like you. If you would like to see something new or different then I implore you to get in touch and submit the content you'd like to see in here.

Thanks for reading and happy climbing. 🇩

-Tom Hoyle

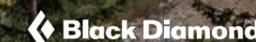


Jennifer Olson
'Scared Peaches' 5.12a (25)
Air Voyage Wall
Lake Louise
Photo: ex-Bivouac Staff member - John Price / johnpricephotographic.com

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CHAS TANNER

BY JOHN COCKS

Chas Tanner stepped down from the Accommodation Committee this year, ending an involvement in the club's huts that spanned over 40 years.

Chas joined the Otago Section of the club in 1974 after he arrived in New Zealand from the United Kingdom. He was keen to participate in club activities. With a construction background (he was working for Fletcher Mechanical at the time), he offered to help with club huts. His introduction was joining a working party to Aspiring Hut. He still remembers arriving at Raspberry Creek carpark late on a Friday and seeing a night sky 'with stars so big and bright they looked like they'd fall on my head'. So started a long association with the West Matukituki valley—a wonderful wilderness, my favourite valley—from which he has climbed many a peak and ski toured the Bonar Glacier.

In 1977, a large slip threatened Aspiring Hut, with slip debris through and around it. Chas led large work parties that built diversion bunds and ditches, as well as cleared debris from around the hut. So started Chas' long journey in being a leader in caring for club huts.

With the demands of repairing Aspiring Hut and maintaining all its other huts, and with visitor numbers increasing, the Otago Section needed support. The club's national office assisted. In 1989, the Aspiring Huts Management Agreement was established, under which DOC manages the club's huts in the West Matukituki valley. Chas was a long-serving member of the steering group. This agreement continues to this day and much of its success is a result of the strong relationships that developed through Chas and others working closely with DOC.

Initially, overdue maintenance work on Aspiring Hut was carried out under the agreement. The hut is rich with club and mountain history. Significant events have frequently occurred since its opening by AP Harper in 1949, including a centennial dinner organised by the Otago Section with Sir Edmund and Lady Hillary as guests of honour, and a hut jubilee celebration in 1999. Chas was a stalwart supporter and contributor to these events.

Chas' first major project was building a new Colin Todd Hut. In partnership with DOC and with help from the Aspinall family, a modern prefabricated hut was erected in 1995. Ownership of the hut reverted to the club under the Aspiring Agreement, which ended a period of DOC ownership.

Chas remembers: 'Our Iroquois pilot, when bringing up a hut section from the valley floor, was playing the *Dambusters* tune on my radio link. As he hovered above, lowering the section, I reached up to steady it and got a massive static shock. He had flown through a small storm and picked up a charge. All I could hear through my radio were bellows of laughter.

'On completion of Colin Todd Hut, I took the building inspector to site for the sign-off. There we were, leaning on the rail of the deck. I was pointing out how climbers get to the hut ... over snowfields, crevasse-ridden and dangerous. He was impressed, but suddenly said, "You will have to put a bar on this rail to stop people sitting on it and falling off."

With visitor numbers increasing at the Lucas Trotter Hut (now French Ridge Hut), Chas' next project was replacing the hut, again in partnership with DOC. This hut was architecturally designed and set a new standard of mountain accommodation. A warden's quarters and a specifically-designed ventilation system were included. The new hut opened in 1999.

Stu Thorne, formerly of DOC, did a lot with Chas. 'Chas and I were the project managers for the rebuild of Colin Todd Hut and French Ridge Hut and worked extremely well as a DOC/NZAC team.

'Many inspections were made during the construction phase of both huts onsite and at the builder's base in Gore. The onsite visits were particularly rewarding as we were both at home in the mountainous environment, and stories of past climbs and adventures would fill the evenings.

'Chas was passionate about the huts and always trying to get the best design and build for NZAC members. He instilled a friendly and calm



Chas at home in his library. KATRINA MCKENZIE

atmosphere when dealing with anyone related to these building projects, and nothing was a problem.

'Getting around the bureaucrats and making good, sensible decisions were key to the successful outcome of these two important projects.

'Chas and I were a good team, and I often look back and reflect on the good times we had over the years completing these exciting projects.'

In 2000, a review of the club's huts was initiated to establish club policy for their development and management—which was completed in 2002. Chas was a member of the review team as the designated club contact for Aspiring Huts Management Agreement.

During his presidency from 2001 to 2003, Chas continued his strong advocacy for club huts. For example, agreements based on the Aspiring Huts Management Agreement were established with DOC for the management of club huts in the Aoraki / Mt Cook and Westland National Parks, and funding was then approved for the Homer Hut upgrade. The upgrade was completed in 2006.

The Unwin Lodge upgrade project was the club's largest accommodation project in recent years, completed in 2011. Chas and his partner Katrina were the first managers and set a benchmark for a new era of making this a 'home to friends of the mountains'. When the club was seeking applications for the position, Chas and Katrina were in the United Kingdom on an extended cycle tour, yet applied. Chas recalls being interviewed for the job early one frosty morning in their Minaret tent whilst out in the wilderness.

They organised activities at Unwin Lodge, including a photography course, a painting course, an artist in residence, a 'music in the mountains' event and Easter rock climbing events on Sebastopol Bluffs. As the first managers, much needed doing to make the place a home and establish a modern accommodation service. As well as achieving these, they secured funding for landscaping and planting, work they carried out with the South Canterbury Section and other members. Chas also compiled a comprehensive management manual, the first of its kind for a club hut and a much-used document by subsequent managers. Chas had been involved with the rebuild process, including the water supply, gas supply and ventilation components, so he was well placed to do the manual.

During the period of Chas' involvement with club huts and the Accommodation Committee, hut management has changed dramatically. He started at a time when sections decided on building and maintenance

requirements and then, simply, organised working parties or others to do the work. Now, with regulatory changes, formal permission for a building on conservation land is required, and formal approvals and professional involvement are required for building work. Furthermore, regulations require ongoing checks for some club huts. Chas has supported the club in adapting to these changes.

An Accommodation Committee with the convenor as a member of the Club Committee was established around 1990. This was a time when sections were seeking greater support with hut management. The committee has members from many of the sections, typically those with huts to manage. Its activities are diverse and include providing guidance on club huts policy, supporting sections with knowledge and experience on building and managing huts, and advising on concession licences and hut management agreements with DOC, hut insurance policies, hut fees and much else.

Chas advises: 'Because of the challenges the club faces when dealing with legislation, such as the Building Code, and the specific requirements of local authorities and the Department of Conservation, leadership of the Accommodation Committee needs to be filled by those who have a good, rounded knowledge of the plethora of regulatory provisions and construction issues.

'I have always been impressed by the enthusiasm of club members fronting up to work parties and the like. I fear the myriad of legislative requirements could put a dampener on people's willingness to put in the time and effort, which is often considerable.'

The club has provided huts in the mountains since the 1930s and continues to build and maintain them. Indeed, the club continues to be a leader in providing accommodation in the mountains. Since the annual membership survey was initiated in 2005, huts and lodges have ranked highly in terms of importance and use, with alpine huts the highest at times. Members have also indicated that, if they were to contribute funds to the club, huts would be the likely or most likely choice for the funds. As someone who has put so much effort over some many years into the club's huts, Chas has strong views about their value to members and more widely in our community. 'Our Alpine Journals are full of tales of intrepid club members building huts all over the alps. Stories abound of carting massive loads of timber, roofing, mattresses etc up ridges where another mountain refuge was to be built. As years progressed, these feats of strength and endurance were largely replaced by helicopters, which led to stronger and tougher construction. But who can deny the sheer tenacity of, for instance, the people who built the first Colin Todd Hut? Whilst much of the construction material was airlifted, Otago Club members still ferried gear up from the valley floor. The history of hut building and maintenance by the NZAC is legendary.

'New Zealand's hut system, whilst not unique in global terms, is very special and confirmed by club members as being high on their priorities for club funding, and rightly so,' Chas says. 'What a thrill it is to spend a day in the mountains and head towards a cosy refuge at the end of the day, cooking up a spag bog and chatting with like-minded mountain people. Some will take a more purist view and say no to huts.

'The club is a responsible mountain climbing organisation and we provide accommodation for not only club members, but also for overseas climbers, the guiding community, and for educational purposes at our base lodges. I'm not convinced the general public should be using our facilities but, as in the case of Unwin Lodge and Aspiring Hut, public fees have seriously contributed to paying off our almost \$700,000 debt for the upgraded Unwin investment, or funded operational costs of club huts in the valley. And what an investment Unwin Lodge is. You would be hard pressed to find a similar complex anywhere else internationally.

'With the new governance structure now firmly in place, I do hope to see some movement advancing new projects. I have felt a more professional approach to dealing with our assets is to have a dedicated NZAC Huts Trust. The vision remains: to be the leading provider of alpine accommodation in New Zealand.'

As well as a long-serving member of the Accommodation Committee, Chas is past president and was made a life member of the club in 2005



TOP Helicopter construction of Colin Todd Hut below Mt Aspiring. CHAS TANNER

MIDDLE Chas with DOC staff Stu Thorne and Paul Hellebrekers celebrating the opening of French Ridge Hut. CHAS TANNER

BOTTOM French Ridge Hut with a fresh dusting of snow. CHAS TANNER

NEW ZEALAND COMPETITION CLIMBING SEASON SUMMARY



Tom Waldin on the men's final boulder at the Climbing New Zealand Open Boulder Championships 2019, held at Northern Rocks, Auckland. LEE HOWELL

best teams in the world in other sports send 'B' sides on world tours, so they can learn to adapt to that high intensity situation. This year five Open competitors put themselves into the fire of the World Cup and World Championships. Chase Gatland, George Sanders and Tom Waldin competed in men's Boulder and Speed events where we saw Chase get a top in one of the boulders, the first ever top for a Kiwi at a World Cup. Amanda Speed and Sarah Tetzlaff competed in the World Cups in China and Europe, on climbs that began at 7c+ (28) and got harder from there.'

Para-climbers Rachel Maia and Diane Drayton are two of New Zealand's most impressive climbers, competing at the Para-Climbing World Championships in France this year. Rachel finished fourth in her category (AL2) just months after amputation surgery on her left leg and Diane finished seventh at her first ever world competition. Rachel also competed at the Para-Climbing World Championships in 2018, achieving an amazing fourth place in the RP2 category, and fourth place at the USA Nationals Combined RP3/2/1 category.

The Climbing New Zealand (CNZ) Youth Team attended the Youth World Championships in Arco, Italy, with a number of great performances, led by 14-year-old Oskar Wolff in his first Youth Championships placing 31st in the Youth B Bouldering.

Speed climbing is a new discipline for many of our climbers and new standards are being set, with records achieved, broken and then lowered further at each event. Tom Waldin set a new open speed record for New Zealand with an incredible run of 9.138 seconds.

A 14-strong CNZ Youth Team also travelled to the Australian Youth Championships in May, with four climbers winning their categories and seven podium finishes in total. Jake Townsend was first in Youth A Lead, Henry Booker first in Youth B Lead, Monique Gray first in Youth C Boulder, and Sarah Tetzlaff first in Junior Speed. Recently, Chase Gatland competed at the Australian Open Combined Championships and placed third overall.

Climbing New Zealand's calendar year kicks off in May, dedicating the early part of the year to developing regional events that local gyms and clubs facilitate in preparation for the year's national and international events. This year, social and regional competitions were hugely successful and drew high numbers of participants over all ages.

CNZ National Lead Champs for Youth, Open, Masters and Para-Climbing was a huge success. Held at Extreme Edge in Auckland, there was a competitive final round with climbers in both the Open categories split either on time or by just one hold. The men's final culminated with a superfinal to determine second and third place. Josh Evans stormed the climb, being the only climber to move past a crux, similar to the Open women's final, where Tayla Manning secured the win. Tayla had an impressive year, winning four national events. She reflects:

'The season started off with the Lead Championships where I took out the titles for both Open and Youth A Females against tough competition. Next, I was off to the Youth Bouldering Nationals where I was super happy to win the Youth A Female title. The Open Bouldering Championships at Northern Rocks was a very cool comp and it was unbelievable to take out this competition for the females. I, along with many others, was excited to partake in the first National Combined Championships. It was super tough, featuring long hours in isolation but there was so much anticipation and excitement. I finished up fourth after I climbed my best through speed races, hard lead routes and some testing boulders. I took trips to Sydney and Italy in between all this for some international competitions, where I set a new national speed record for Youth A females of 13.46 seconds, and I had an awesome season.'

BY SARAH HAY AND RICHARD WALDIN

The sport of climbing is experiencing a period of enormous global growth, both recreationally and commercially, in outdoor settings and in competitive climbing. New Zealand is no different, with 2019 seeing the opening of three brand new world-class climbing facilities: Northern Rocks (Auckland), Uprising (Christchurch) and Basecamp Adventures (Queenstown). Climbing is seeing an increase in youth participation too, with kids getting involved for fun and exploring competition climbing.

The Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games will feature competition climbing for the first time in history, a culmination of many years of hard work from the International Federation of Sport Climbing (IFSC). The announcement created a media frenzy and helped boost a niche sport into the limelight and mainstream news coverage. The prize of olympic glory has motivated a new generation of triathlete climbers, who will compete in all three disciplines to achieve a combined score in Lead, Boulder and Speed.

For the first time in many years, New Zealand climbers participated in World Cup and World Championship competitions in 2018 and 2019 in Japan, China, USA and Europe. Competing at this level has been an extraordinary experience for our climbers, as they gain valuable insight into the high level of competition internationally and set long-term goals in this arena. New Zealand's participation at these events has helped put us on the map and create a platform for New Zealand competitive climbers to aim for. Many more of our athletes are gaining

sponsorship through their achievements and participating in outdoor climbing alongside their indoor training.

Rob Moore, Head Coach of the New Zealand team, summarises:

'2019 was a fantastic year along our path towards Paris 2024. It's a long and ambitious path for a New Zealand climber, but every country at the top first started by aiming for a goal.

'A great relationship with High Performance Sport New Zealand (HPSNZ) and the New Zealand Olympic Committee (NZOC) was formed during the Youth Olympics in Argentina and, with their encouragement, we are continuing along a path to learn about succeeding in the pressure cooker environments that are World Cups and World Championships. Climbers who can be very good on paper can really struggle if they don't know how to handle themselves in this environment. It's the reason why some of the



📷 Sarah Tetzlaff on the women's final boulder at the Open Climbing New Zealand Boulder Championships 2019, held at Northern Rocks, Auckland. LEE HOWELL

The Para-Climbing category was also one to watch, with Australian para-climbers travelling to compete and a television crew following Rachel Maia's performance as they covered her journey as a para-climbing athlete.

The CNZ Youth and Masters Boulder Champs in Wellington showcased our talented youth, with exceptionally close competition over all the categories. Every participant should be acknowledged as our young climbers are climbing well, are supportive of each other, and are developing their skills and aiming high for recreational, indoor, outdoor and competitive goals.

CNZ Open Boulder Champs at Northern Rocks was a great success, and drew international climbers from Australia and USA. Challenging boulders, brand new holds, and a good crowd made for a superb event, with Tom Waldin and Tayla Manning taking out the titles. Tayla blitzed her year of competition climbing, taking out the win for the Open Boulder, Open Lead, Youth A Lead and Youth A Boulder. Tom has been climbing competitively for five years, represented NZ at the IFSC World Cups in Japan and China, and climbed his first outdoor V10 at Castle Hill.

Tom Waldin says,

'2019 has been a great year for my climbing. I have achieved many of my goals, both in competition and on rock. The most

notable of these achievements was winning the open bouldering championship, which has been a goal of mine for many years. Looking ahead to next year, I will be attending the Oceania Open Championship in Sydney, where I aim to make the final.'

Climbing New Zealand's competition year culminated with our first ever combined event in preparation for the new format of Tokyo 2020. This event was run in the Olympic format with the top eight climbers per gender earning automatic selection to the Oceania Open Combined Championships, to be held in March 2020 in Australia. Two wild card spots bring the numbers up to ten competitors per gender attending the event next year. Only one hotly-contested spot per gender in the Oceania region is available for Olympic selection, therefore the male and female winner of the Oceania Championships will qualify for selection to the Tokyo Olympic Games. Chase Gatland and Cirrus Tan look to be the frontrunners from New Zealand, taking out the combined titles for men and women at the first national combined competition at Rocktopia (Mt Maunganui). This event was made possible by the construction of New Zealand's first official full-height speed wall. The local climbing club—the Bay of Plenty Sport Climbing Association—raised funds for the construction and organised the build. Chase Gatland set a new unofficial record on this wall with a run of 8.99 seconds. The national women's record was set when Sarah Tetzlaff raced up the wall at a qualifying run at the Villars World Cup in Switzerland in 11.686 seconds.

Sarah Tetzlaff says,

'Achieving second place at the Open Combined National Champs this year was definitely something I was pretty proud of and was a breakthrough moment in my competition career. Although I felt tired leading up to the event, it all came together and I achieved a first in speed, third in boulder and second in lead. Everything just flowed on the day; my recovery, my headspace, my determination. It feels so incredible when you get it all right in the moment.

'My biggest challenge this year was definitely managing burn-out. My competition schedule was pretty intense; I travelled overseas on three separate occasions to compete in nine World Cups, the Open and Youth World Champs, and the Australian Youth Champs. In total, I spent three months overseas in eight different countries. On top of all this, I also needed to peak for the New Zealand national events to secure my spot on the 2020 Open team, as well as a spot at the Oceania Champs 2020. It was all pretty exhausting and I found it quite difficult at times to perform anywhere close to my best. From all my travel I learned so many things about ways to improve my climbing, mental game, managing injuries, wellbeing and motivation and I feel that my on-the-wall maturity has vastly improved in competitions. I'm incredibly grateful to have been so brutally challenged at times and have grown a deepened passion for the sport and greater motivation to push my boundaries.'

In the youth competition scene, the overall team cup winners were the Dynamites from Wellington, with the highest aggregate of team points over the season. New Zealand's biggest intermediate age school competition, the AIMS Games at Mt Maunganui, covers a huge range of sports and climbing was featured for the second year running, which saw 119 Year 7 and 8 competitors. The National Secondary Schools competition is also one to aim for and will be held in Auckland next year at Extreme Edge, Panmure.

Sky Sports has announced an exciting new initiative led by Rob Waddell, Sky Sport Next. This free-to-air YouTube channel will stream 50 youth sports nationwide going into 2020, including climbing. The Northern Rocks Open Boulder and Mt Maunganui/Rocktopia Open Combined events were the first to be streamed in 2019; Northern Rocks partner Sarah Hay attended the launch and the Sky News presentation as a representative from Climbing New Zealand, and spoke

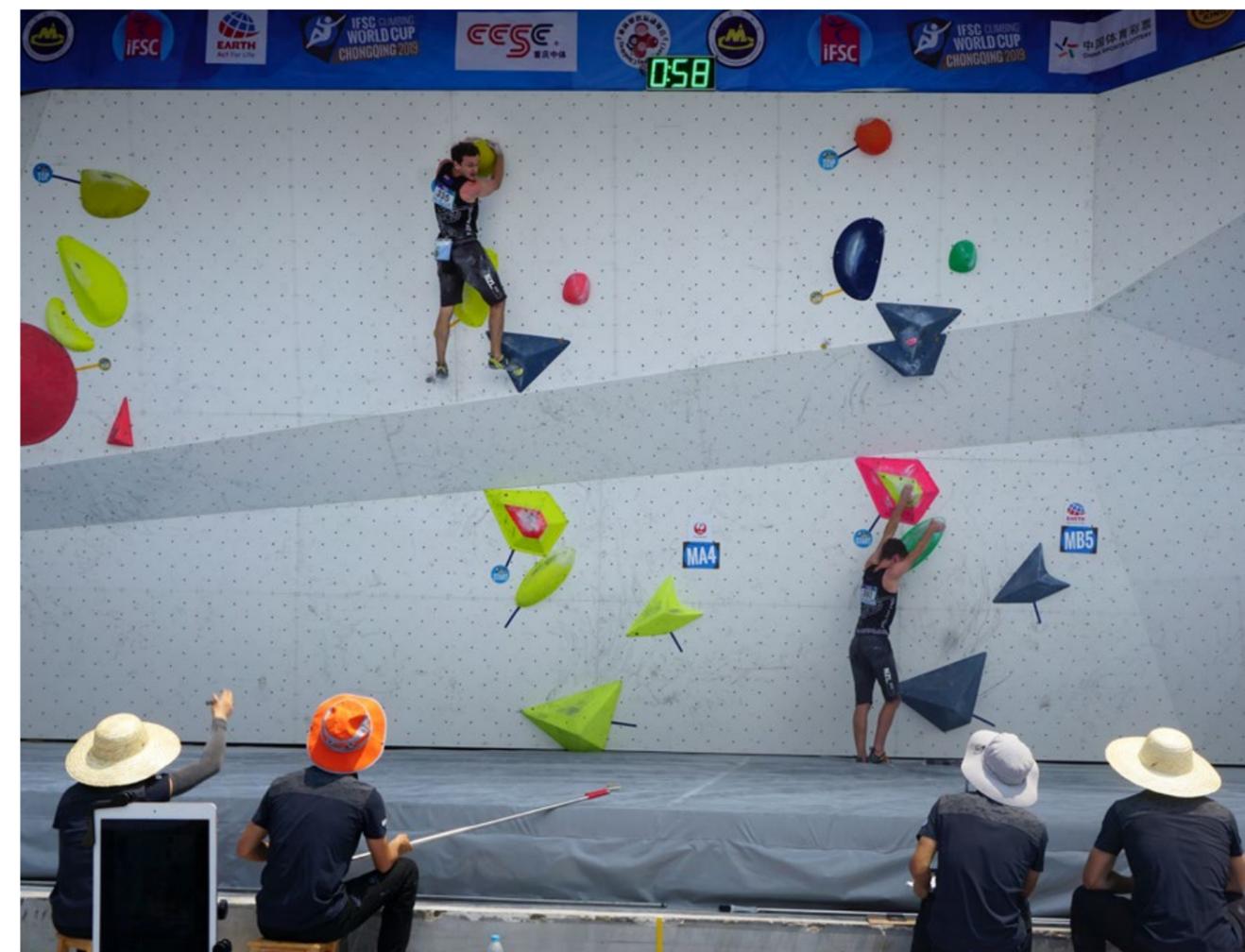
on the athlete panel about the impact an increase in media coverage will have on our sport.

The ever popular social NZAC NIBS competitions saw its most popular year to date with two competitions in new facilities, Northern Rocks with 194 participants and Uprising with a record 247 participants. 📺

2020 will feature the following National Championship events (dates and venues to be confirmed):

- Climbing New Zealand National Lead Climbing Championship for Open, Youth, Masters and Para-climbing.
- Climbing New Zealand National Youth and Masters Championship, Bouldering.
- Climbing New Zealand National Open Championship, Bouldering.
- Climbing New Zealand National Speed event.
- Climbing New Zealand National Combined event (tbc).

📷 Chase Gatland topping a qualifying boulder at the IFSC Boulder World Cup in Chongqing, China 2019. ROB MOORE



Our Champions for 2019:

Youth D (Under 12) Female- Kyra True (Bouldering and Lead). Male- Jamie Birchler (Bouldering and Lead).

Youth C (Under 14) Female- Meredith Butcher (Bouldering), Rebecca Hounsell (Lead). Male- Mac Duggan (Bouldering and Lead).

Youth B (Under 16) Female- Willow Cook (Bouldering), Isabella Shanks (Lead). Male- Oskar Wolff (Bouldering), Henry Booker (Lead).

Youth A (Under 18) Female- Tayla Manning (Bouldering and Lead). Male- Caleb Bryant (Bouldering), Jake Townshend (Lead).

Junior (Under 20) Female- Kim Forde (Bouldering), Sarah Tetzlaff (Lead). Male- Tom Waldin (Bouldering and Lead).

Open Female- Tayla Manning (Bouldering and Lead), Cirrus Tan (Combined). Male- Tom Waldin (Bouldering), Josh Evans (Lead), Chase Gatland (Combined).

Masters Female- Rochelle Andrews (Bouldering). Male- Lukas Kirchner (Bouldering), Steve Gavin (Lead).

Para-climbing champions- Diane Drayton, Rachel Maia and Byron Raubenheimer.

The best day

by anon

with illustrations by Ronnie Baker

Lisa sits in her sleeping bag propped against the back wall of the crevasse. The sleeping bag bunches around her waist, for she's cooking a packet of Hella's bacon on a small gas stove and needs her hands free. Her companion Rob, lies prone, his sleeping bag clinched around his ears. His pile hat is yanked well down and all you can see is his face.

'Hey, this bivouacking's not too bad,' Rob says with a yawn, all Canadian accent. 'How's that bacon doin'? Man, I'm hungry.' Lisa doesn't answer, for she's on the verge of a very bad mood. A bad mood and an anxiety attack. 'What the hell am I doing here,' she's thinking, 'taking a novice climber up the hardest route on Mt Cook? How did I come to agree to this?' She scowls and scrapes the bacon viciously with her spoon—it's sticking—and frets about the next day, the day of the climb.



Lisa has never climbed the South Ridge of Mt Cook. She's climbed the mountain itself plenty of times but never this, the hardest route. She's tried sporadically over the years to arrange a climbing partner and a spell off work for the climb, but plans have always fallen through.

When Rob, a Canadian friend on sabbatical leave from his university in Ottawa, asked if she would climb Mt Cook with him, she'd wondered in the back of her mind if he would be up for the South Ridge. The route was no push over, with only a couple of ascents in the last 30 years. Rob was of the ever-growing breed of modern-day climber with money to spare, a busy life and little time to commit to improving his climbing. He relied on professional guides to get him up. In fact, he'd recently been guided to the summit of a Himalayan peak. 'No one's guided anyone up the South Ridge of Mt Cook before and I'm no mountain guide,' thought Lisa, 'but maybe I can pull it off?'

'What do you think, should we try the South Ridge, Rob?' she'd asked cautiously. 'I'd have to do all the leading, of course.'

Rob's eyebrows had risen in surprise. 'You think I'm up for it?'

At that point Lisa had paused. Was she about to commit to something beyond both of them? She didn't really know what sort of climber Rob was; their relationship was through skiing—they'd belonged to the same ski club decades ago. Rob was a small neat man in his late 40s, with an academic's reserve and two teenaged children and a wife back in Canada. He'd been in the same university department for 22 years and liked to cycle and work out at the gym.

She'd sensed a growing excitement as Rob thought about the prospect of the South Ridge. 'I'll pay you a proper guide's fee,' he'd said. 'I'll pay all your costs. I'll buy great food. We'll have wine.'

'Oh, come on,' he begged, clearly warming to the idea. 'How 'bout I buy you a mountain bike? I'll buy you an airfare. I'll buy you that new computer you want.'

'Ok,' said Lisa, with a modicum of conviction. 'We can try it.'

Two days later, Lisa and Rob meander up the Hooker Glacier in the mid-afternoon heat of a peerless day. For an hour and a half they trip around the terminal lake of the glacier, teal blue and bobbing with

icebergs as serene as swans. They venture along a stony beach at best six inches wide, dodging rocks as they bounce down the moraine wall and plunk into the water below them.

'A "real" mountain guide wouldn't bring a client this way,' Lisa thinks, for the chance of being hit by a rock is very real. 'But this way is quicker and Rob seems happy enough.' He follows close on her heels, as they reminisce about their ski days in the Canadian Rockies.

After eight hours' trudge, they reach a small corrugated iron refuge, perched on the edge of the ice. Ten kilometres of tenuous, irritating glacial moraine is now behind them, where each step risked a fall and a hard slam on the ice. Rob had gone quiet as they stumbled along—he was concentrating on his feet. The little hut sits in a magnificent position atop a rock dome with views up glacier to Mt Cook, and down glacier towards the button buildings of the village they'd left that morning. The day has cooled, and Rob appears a bit dejected, but he perks up at the sight of the hut.

'Splendid,' he says, taking in the comfortable bunks on the back wall, the neat little bench, the water buckets and cooking pots arranged on the shelves, and the hooks for jackets and other bits and pieces.

The sparse comfort of the hut is enticing, but Lisa has to disappoint him.

'Rob, I'm sorry,' she says, 'I don't think we should stay here; I think we need to go higher up the slope and camp in a crevasse so we can get a good start on the South Ridge in the morning.'

Rob looks crestfallen. 'Really?' he queries, then nods solemnly. 'I guess you're right.' He sighs heavily as he scuffs back outside.

So here they are—it's 8pm, and they're settled in the crevasse eating bacon. Rob had taken some convincing—he never bivvied before and had looked at the crevasse with disbelief.

'We climb in this end here, see,' Lisa had said, with as much optimism as she could muster, 'And see, there's two walls to keep the wind off us, and that end has a roof,' pointing to where a snow

bridge made a natural ceiling. 'And look! The bottom is flat, so it will be comfortable.'

Eventually the two companions settle down for the night as a million stars flare against the black. A slight breeze teases the edge of the crevasse. All is quiet but for the occasional phat-phat of stones trickling down the slope to the right and the clatter of ice in the glacier below. The air stiffens towards freezing and the walls of the crevasse slick over. 'Hey, can you see that satellite up there?' asks Rob, before he falls asleep.

Lisa stares at the stars and frets and frets about the next day. In the dark of the earliest part of the morning, she will need to negotiate the crevasses and towering seracs of the icefall leading to a small col at the base of the South Ridge with only the threaded beam of her torch to help her. Later, will Rob have the headspace to cope with the wild exposure high on the ridge, or the stamina to stand on the front points of his crampons for many hours?

'We may get only so far, and for a myriad of reasons have to turn back. I may never get him down. And what if I become resentful towards Rob—after all, I'll be doing all the leading, the hard work, the decision making, but he will get equal credit for the climb...if we pull it off.'

At 1am the stars still flare, but with little effect, for it's darker than dark. Lisa makes Rob coffee and passes him granola, which he tips in the snow. 'I'll eat later,' he grumbles, clearly out of sorts. While Lisa packs away the cooking things and puts on her boots, Rob continues to lie in his sleeping bag.

'Hey Rob, what's wrong, man?'

Silence.

'Rob, are you sick?'

A pause ... then, 'I'm not sure I'm up for this.'

Lisa sits silent for a minute, wondering what to say next. She decides to come clean.

'Look Rob, I'm feeling exactly the same way. But I know from experience that it's the climb you are most scared of that gives you the most satisfaction, if you pull it off. I think we should give it a go. We can always turn back if things go wrong.'

Rob gives a couple of noisy sniffs and begins to shuffle out of his bag. 'Ok,' he says.

By 5am they've made little headway up the icefall. With Rob on the rope behind her, Lisa hunts in the dark for a way through the tangled maze of crevasses, all the while becoming increasingly embarrassed and distressed at her incompetence. Rob is silent, nothing but a foot fall 30 feet behind her. 'Oh god! What's he thinking?' Lisa frets. 'That he's put his life in the hands of an idiot? And where the hell do I go?'

The further they zig-zag and flounder, the more lost they become, and the more Lisa imagines Rob's growing resentment. He becomes a dark, silent presence trailing her, always just outside the beam of her torch. The hairs on the back of her neck rise. She resists the urge to look back ... then a cheerful voice calls out of the dark, 'Hey Lisa, I reckon that's the col, look, just up there, against the sky. Bravo, well done with the route finding.'

By 10am they are well on their way up the South Ridge.

They'd made the top of the col just as the sun inched over the horizon, turning the eastern foothills from dark blue to violet to a tawny grey. The route up to the col was a ribbon of snow with the crunch and consistency of gravel, and their crampons and ice picks had clawed and scudded noisily down to the icefall below. 'Oh hell, I'm not so sure about this,' Rob had said with each unwanted passing visitor. Lisa thought the best thing was to ignore him.



They reach the first rock buttress by leaving the ridge and traversing wildly and airily out over the East Face of the mountain, two tiny checks above a 6000-foot void. Far, far below the icefall is in shadow—as distant and dusky as an ocean. Lisa wonders if anyone is watching them from the village. There is a telescope set up on the lawn of the Hermitage amongst the outdoor chairs. Maybe someone down there has put down their latte and is making a fleeting connection with two tiring climbers way above.

By the time they reach the second rock buttress a tiny whisper of optimism skips up the slope to meet Lisa. 'Maybe we are actually going to do this,' she thinks. 'Why not? Rob is climbing well, following her with care and method and persistency. He doesn't say much, just accepts her commands with a small nod each time they meet at a shared stance.'

And I'm climbing well, she thinks. The air is still and sweet for me; the ice is kind and forgiving. Time is generous—the day is passing but not that quickly.

And all around them, the other mountains smile at the pair under a sky as perfect and clear as an egg shell.

Toiling up the summit ice cap, Rob starts to flag. He is sunburnt, stumbles a little every few feet and seems slightly desperate, glancing up often to where he hopes the summit will be. He says nothing to Lisa, who is 'short-roping' him—with a short piece of the rope between them, she will hold him if he slips

'Summit soon,' she mumbles, hoping she's right. The ridge winds on, but intuition tells Lisa ... not far now, not far now. Rob gives a soft little whine and falters to a stop. 'Hey man, I'm hooped and I gotta eat.' Lisa kicks a small flat spot into the slope and they sit down and pull out the food.

After a bit Rob says, 'We're going to make it, aren't we.' An announcement, not a question. 'Yes, we are,' Lisa replies. They smile



at each other and go back to gazing unspeaking over the surrounding mountains, the foothills stretching away orange and misty to the south, over the rivers and sparkling lakes to the west, the small farming towns, twisting roads and darting fence-lines of the distant plains, to the rim of waves lining the coast.

When they get to the summit, they don't stay. Lisa is too concerned about the descent. She hopes they can get off the mountain by a shorter route. She takes photos of Rob but knows her worry is infectious and that he, too, is wondering about getting down.

'Which way?' he asks, uncertainly.

'There,' says Lisa pointing and she bends to build an anchor in the ice. Then she lowers Rob down two nervous lengths of the rope to the top of a narrow couloir. Before global warming, the couloir could be relied on to be chocked with snow. Now it is only a ragged channel of rotten and broken rock darting off right and down to where it broadens into a wide gully. The rock is glued optimistically together with small skats of ice.

'I can't climb down this,' she admits to herself and says as much to Rob. 'Too hard for me.'

She sees a fleet of panic cross his face.

'But what will we do?'

'We'll rappel,' Lisa says. 'It won't be a problem.'

Shadows are leap-frogging the glacier below by the time they reach the mid-point of the gully. Lisa is lowering Rob—building an anchor in the snow, taking his weight, then climbing down to join him. She can tell the process frightens Rob, but he says nothing, and she offers no words of comfort. She just wants to get it done. As the hours pass, they both become increasingly tired and, as they near the bottom, the sun begins to set. Rob asks for another photo.

'Of me and the sunset,' reaching for his camera and passing it in Lisa's direction. She reaches out, fumbles, and watches the camera leap away, taking wilder and wilder bounds until it disappears into the gloom.

'Oh, I'm sorry Rob, I'm so sorry,' Lisa says, and bursts into tears.

'Hey, it's no problem, it's only a camera. And what does it matter compared to today? You've got me up this mountain, and now we're nearly down. I think you are amazing. What does a camera matter?'

Lisa feels better than she has all day.

The crevasse fringing the base of the gully has a reputation for being a problem. Its upper rim overhangs the bottom, and it runs out on both sides into hostile walls of tottering rock and glacial garbage. There is nowhere for Lisa to build an anchor, no hospitable boulder to place a sling around. She begins to dig a snow bollard with her ice axe, the effort bringing home to her just how fatigued she is.

'Hey, what's up?' Rob says, watching with alarm.

'It's a snow bollard, for us to rappel off.'

'But how does it work?' Lisa explains the procedure. 'We put the rope in the bottom of the trench like this and put the ends over the edge and...'

'No way,' Rob exclaims. '*No way!* We can't rappel off *that!*'

'Rob, we have to, there's no other way to do it.'

She attaches herself to the rope as Rob looks on incredulously, and lowers herself into space, spins in a slow circle, and lands softly on the snow below.

'Come on down,' she shouts into the evening.

After a bit, Rob's feet appear at the lip of the crevasse. Nothing happens, then his knees come into view and Lisa realises he's sliding over the edge on his stomach. Then his face appears; it's a mask of horror. He leaves the lip with a soft yelp and a lurch, which flips his anorak up around his waist. Lisa watches him get larger as he glides down through the dusk to land at her side.

'Never again.'

They are nearly there now, just a few hundred meters to their bivouac—sleeping bags, cooker, food, sleep. Roping up, Lisa marches off in the lead, only to be brought up short a few minutes later by another

crevasse. A benign version of the previous one, flat on either side, neat vertical walls ... but with a 15-foot gap between the walls.

'Hey, we can jump this one,' Rob exclaims.

'No way.'

'We have to, Lisa.'

'There is *no way* I am going to jump across that crevasse,' Lisa says, more forcibly this time. She envisages the frantic leap, the near miss, the plummet, and then a long agonizing demise wedged headfirst, asphyxiating and hypothermic between the narrowest walls of her icy tomb. Meanwhile, 60 feet above, Rob would be nothing more than an ineffectual presence.

She tows Rob off to the side to where the crevasse junctions against a rock wall. It's very dark now and not even her head torch allows a glimpse of the bottom. 'We are going to rappel down here,' she announces, 'and climb back out the other side.' Rob looks at her as if she's a madwoman, but says nothing.

'He's lost all confidence in me,' Lisa thinks. 'I just hope this is going to work.'

Lisa lowers herself into the depths, the beam of her torch a zig-zag across the grey walls of ice. She's descending into ... what? Rob's head is a small orb silhouetted against the deep blue gash of the night sky.

'How does it look?' he calls.

Her beam scouts erratically for an exit. 'Ok, I think. Come on down.' The orb disappears, and then reappears as a shaft of light emanating from a larger shape.

'Holy shit! This is one helluva place,' Rob says as he lands beside her. All around them lie the remains of broken blocks of ice of all sizes, metallic grey and studded ugly with gravel and shards and splinters of rock as black as pitch. The pair strain upward as far as their torches will allow; the towers of the ice lean wildly over then, dripping and muttering frenetically to each other. Something very large moves close by and Lisa grabs Rob's arm. This way, she tugs. Come quickly.

By the time Lisa climbs out the far side of the crevasse, she is at the end of her tether. Tackling the overhanging exit—nothing more than a stack of large loose ice blocks soldered with grit—takes the remains of her strength. Rob swears as he claws his way after her. 'We should have jumped,' he yells, as drips and grit fall down the back of his neck.

'Why can't you understand that there was no way I could have jumped that distance?' Lisa yells back. She sheds a few tears of exasperation. For a moment, she wishes she was a man; if she'd had the physical ability to jump, they'd be they'd back at the bivouac by now, lying in their sleeping bags in anticipation of dinner, with the cooker humming benignly between them.

'Half an hour and I reckon we'll be at the bivy,' she tells Rob as he enters the halo of her torch.

'Sorry,' he says.

They reach the bivouac at 1am, 24 hours after leaving for the climb. By now, both are stumbling and weaving on their feet, and Rob has a bad headache. Lisa makes instant soup. They eat a handful of dried fruit, then Lisa falls into her sleeping bag and sleeps like the dead. Rob can do what he likes, she thinks. She doesn't wake until the sun is on her face, by which time Rob has the cooker going and is singing softly to himself. He hands Lisa a cup of tea and her sunglasses.

'Well, we did it,' he says with a grin.

'Yes, we did it,' Lisa thinks. 'Rob has his mountain and via a route few climb. And I've got us up and down in one piece, having guided the South Ridge of Mt Cook.'

A few days after Lisa put Rob on the plane for home, he phones.

'You know something?' he says. 'I have an overwhelming sense of satisfaction.'

'Didn't I tell you it's the climbs you are most afraid of that give the most back?' Lisa replies.

'Yes,' Rob says, 'I might go so far as to say that was the best day of my life.' 📍

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We're Going To...



Rock Climbing in Australia's Blue Mountains



BY JOHN PALMER

In the terra nullius between the bottle shops of Katoomba and the Blackheath Bowlo lies the other Bonnie Doon. Not the one from *The Castle*, that seminal comedy about Darryl Kerrigan and his affable Australian blue-collar family, but the other Bonnie Doon. Everything that I know to be true about Australia and Australians comes only from two sources: *The Castle* and a brief but enlightening visit to the Gold Coast as a young man. So you can imagine my delight when I eyeballed the 'Boonie Doon' sign as I arrived for a week of bolt-clipping in the Blue Mountains.

Maybe it isn't a coincidence, I thought. Maybe every region in Australia has a Boonie Doon. And a Darryl Kerrigan for that matter. Maybe every Australian scours the *Trading Post* (or Ebay) for jousting sticks or 'ergometric' chairs, or stares pensively at powerlines and sees a reminder of man's ability to generate electricity. Maybe I was in for a treat.

📷 Zac Keegan on his successful flash of the dynamic *Better Than Nothing* (27), Centennial Glen. JOHN PALMER



'It's Mabo, it's the vibe...'

From the moment that you set foot in Blackheath, you can feel the vibe. It is also the perfect place to base yourself for a 'Blueys' trip as it is reasonably central to all the crags and is home to a pleasant mixture of 'OG' Kerrigans, proto-hipster Kerrigans and more than a few climbers.

You'll find all the usual amenities there or nearby; grocery shops, cafes, climbing gear and the like. If you fancy a flutter on the nags or the dogs while sucking down a pint of V Banger, Gardners Inn is the one for you. They do a reasonable pub meal too and you may even see legendary Australian greyhound, Son of Coco, in action on the big screen. If delicious hoppy beer and variable-quality live music are more your thing, don't walk past the Blackheath Bar and Bistro.

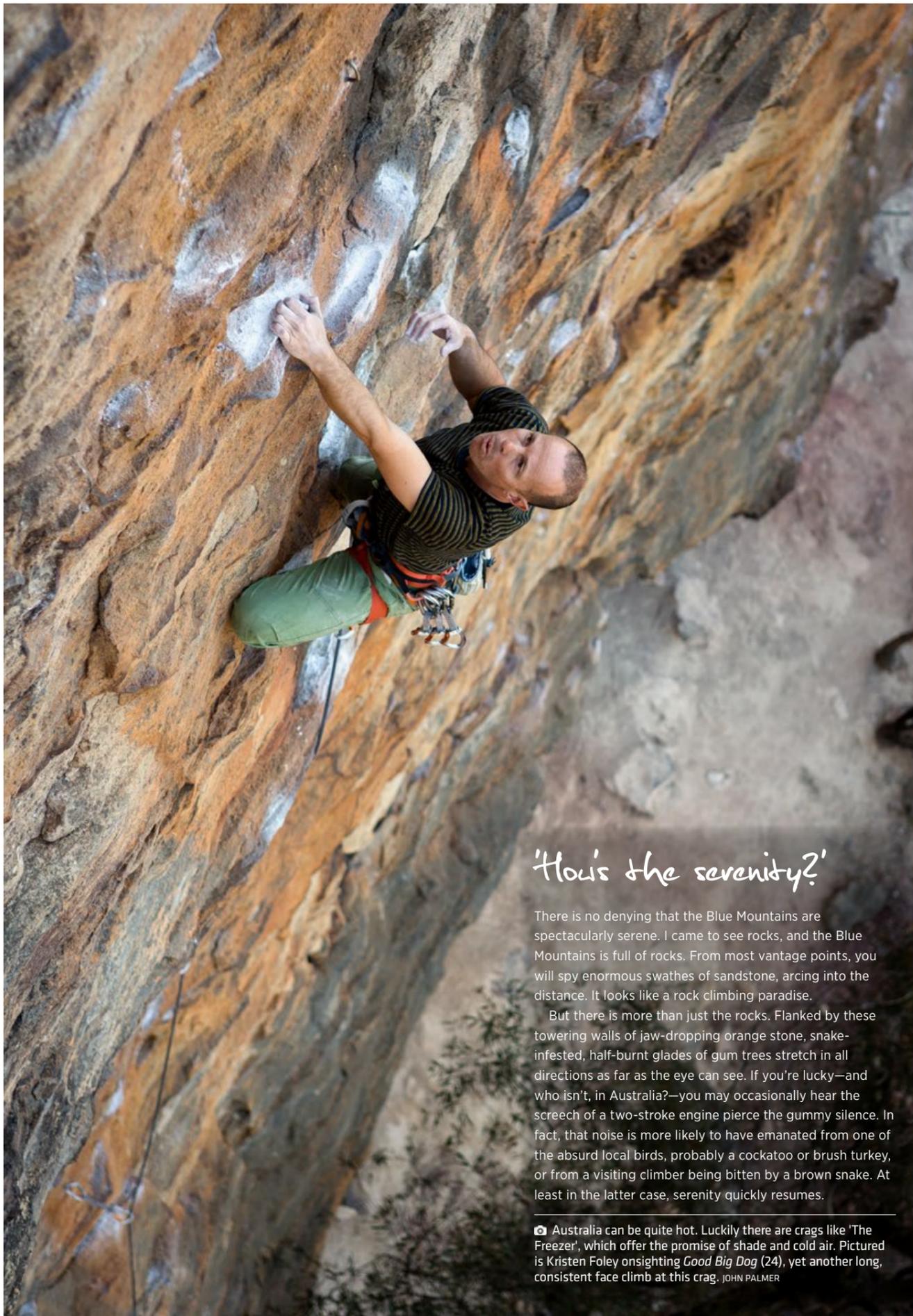
Solid double espressos at Anonymous café are occasionally served with a side of excessive surliness (no extra charge). But don't let that spoil your day; the deli next door peddles a smorgasbord of tasty treats, with free smiles for everyone.

If your redpoint grade is in terminal decline, going *#keto* may be the answer. Fortunately, copious quantities of tasty meat can be purchased at the Blackheath butcher. If that doesn't work, get ahead of the curve and try the 'fresh air' diet, which is sure to be the next big thing in climbing diets.

'Dad... I dug another hole.'

Thumbing through Simon Carter's excellent Blue Mountains guidebook on the plane over the ditch did nothing to dispel my suspicion that the lucky country was overstocked with simple folk like Darryl Kerrigan's son, Dale. You can tell a lot about the character of a climbing scene from local crag and route names. Whereas 'The Pit' and 'The Freezer' are little more than prosaic, 'Boganville' is almost too good to be true for a crag in Australia. If you like your route names more puerile than poetic, some Blue Mountains gems include: 'Get a Black Dog Up Ya!', 'Spread 'em Baby' and 'Wank Wank Spurt'. Or if booze is your thing, try: 'Beer & Skittles', '50 Million Beers' or 'Better Than a Wank'. Actually, that last one could easily go in the preceding category.

📷 Tom Hoyle onsighting the delightfully-titled *Spread 'em Baby* (22), Porter's Pass. JOHN PALMER

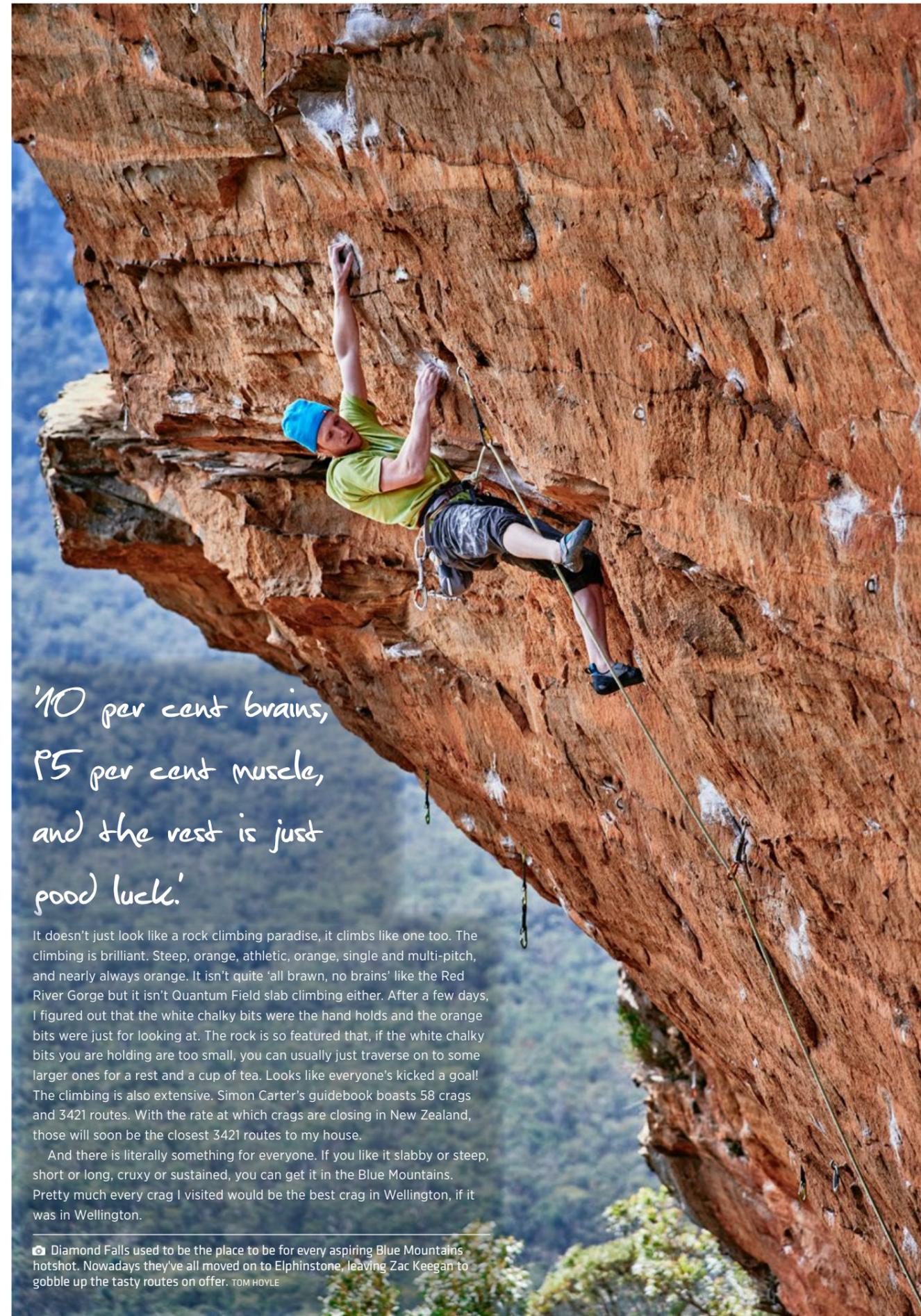


'How's the serenity?'

There is no denying that the Blue Mountains are spectacularly serene. I came to see rocks, and the Blue Mountains is full of rocks. From most vantage points, you will spy enormous swathes of sandstone, arcing into the distance. It looks like a rock climbing paradise.

But there is more than just the rocks. Flanked by these towering walls of jaw-dropping orange stone, snake-infested, half-burnt glades of gum trees stretch in all directions as far as the eye can see. If you're lucky—and who isn't, in Australia?—you may occasionally hear the screech of a two-stroke engine pierce the gummy silence. In fact, that noise is more likely to have emanated from one of the absurd local birds, probably a cockatoo or brush turkey, or from a visiting climber being bitten by a brown snake. At least in the latter case, serenity quickly resumes.

📍 Australia can be quite hot. Luckily there are crags like 'The Freezer', which offer the promise of shade and cold air. Pictured is Kristen Foley onsighting *Good Big Dog* (24), yet another long, consistent face climb at this crag. JOHN PALMER



'10 per cent brains, 95 per cent muscle, and the rest is just good luck.'

It doesn't just look like a rock climbing paradise, it climbs like one too. The climbing is brilliant. Steep, orange, athletic, orange, single and multi-pitch, and nearly always orange. It isn't quite 'all brawn, no brains' like the Red River Gorge but it isn't Quantum Field slab climbing either. After a few days, I figured out that the white chalky bits were the hand holds and the orange bits were just for looking at. The rock is so featured that, if the white chalky bits you are holding are too small, you can usually just traverse on to some larger ones for a rest and a cup of tea. Looks like everyone's kicked a goal! The climbing is also extensive. Simon Carter's guidebook boasts 58 crags and 3421 routes. With the rate at which crags are closing in New Zealand, those will soon be the closest 3421 routes to my house.

And there is literally something for everyone. If you like it slabby or steep, short or long, cruxy or sustained, you can get it in the Blue Mountains. Pretty much every crag I visited would be the best crag in Wellington, if it was in Wellington.

📍 Diamond Falls used to be the place to be for every aspiring Blue Mountains hotshot. Nowadays they've all moved on to Elphinstone, leaving Zac Keegan to gobble up the tasty routes on offer. TOM HOYLE



'Suffer in your jocks!'

The climbing may be obvious but it isn't easy—on the body or the skin. If you're trying hard—and who isn't trying hard in Australia?—skin management will be an issue. One of our party accumulated no less than eight flappers on a single redpoint burn on one viciously steep and juggy climb. I didn't measure it exactly, but the flapper rate must have been at or about 0.5 flappers per metre of climbing. Pack your tape and superglue.

Actually, the description in the guidebook for that particular climb was something like: 'all out jug war'. In my experience, that is apt for a lot of the climbing in the Blueys, where large lurps, lunges or leaps between positive holds are almost ubiquitous. That makes the climbing exciting, as it allows you to imagine while you climb that you are no longer you but someone much better, like Tomoa Narasaki or Janja Garnbret, arcing gracefully between volumes as the crowd goes wild. That fleeting fantasy alone is reason to travel to the Blueys.

📍 Owen Davies putting his skin in danger while flying high on *Better Than Nothing* (27). TOM HOYLE
 INSET Ewan Sinclair's hands after a few days on in the Blue Mountains. JOHN PALMER



Tell 'im he's dreaming!

I can categorically say that a week's climbing in the Blue Mountains isn't nearly enough. Even in a month, you'd barely scratch the surface. Sitting on the train to Sydney, as it rattled through the suburban castles of Penrith and the Emu Plains, I stared out at the powerlines and began to daydream about my next trip to Bonnie Doon. I may even have got a little misty-eyed, like Darryl Kerrigan sitting on his patio with a 750ml bottle of V Banger, admiring his fake chimney. I realised that it wasn't just the climbing that had me hooked.

There is a real community built around the crags of the Blue Mountains. Local and visiting climbers alike mix and mingle at the cliffs, sharing beta, offering encouragement, playing with their dogs or babies or other people's dogs or babies. It's more than the proverbial bricks and mortar, more than ironstone crimpers, stick-clippers and carrots. Like all great climbing areas, each wall, each climb holds the collective memories and stories of the climbers who have plied their trade there. And now just a little bit of that story is my own—the one where I shook my way up a few soggy ticks, occasionally climbed with some pizzazz (similar to but not the same as Tomoa Narasaki) and shared a lot of laughs with old and new friends along the way.

In a post-truth world of divided communities, the immortal words of Darryl Kerrigan ring true for the Blueys: 'It's not just a house, it's home.' For climbers. 📍

📍 The author on another classic of the signature Blue Mountains style—the long and slightly-overhanging face climb. This one is *Self Portrait* (29), at Porter's Pass. TOM HOYLE

TRAILPINISM: TAKING TRAIL RUNNING TO THE HIGHER MOUNTAINS

BY ALASTAIR MCDOWELL



📷 The author on the summit of the Matterhorn, after an ascent via Hornli Ridge. ALASTAIR MCDOWELL

Mountaineers have long been approaching mountains dressed lightly, shod in lightweight trail shoes, wearing shorts and a t-shirt, as if they were going for a casual rip on some local trails. But sadly, they cannot run. They must walk. Why? Because the pack they are carrying is far too heavy. They are weighed down by heavy boots, heavy steel crampons and a heavy ice axe they carry for the snowy mountain. As a result, the approach takes a full day, so they must carry a sleeping bag, maybe a tent and sleeping mat, gas, cooker, and an extra day's food. As a result, they also need a big heavy pack to fit it all in.

Welcome to the exponential spiral towards a slow and heavy ascent. What if it were possible to reverse this towards the light and the fast? Many are inspired by the superhuman efforts of people like Kilian Jornet. What if you didn't have to be an elite athlete to share a similar experience?

Imagine yourself jogging up the Matukituki valley with a 3kg pack, cresting Bevan Col, donning light crampons on your running shoes across the Bonar Glacier, taking a late morning snack at Colin Todd, scrambling up the North West Ridge of Mt Aspiring, and ripping it all the way back to the car in time for dinner in Wanaka.

Welcome to the exciting world of Trailpinism: combining trail running gear, tactics and efficiency with mountain craft for a different way of tackling higher peaks.

Disclaimer

This article is not intended to diminish or look down upon the classical approach to mountaineering, which has so many advantages—a higher safety margin, the ability to spend many days and nights out enjoying the hills, and the ability to tackle higher, longer, more technical peaks.

The aim is to explore this new way of climbing mountains for those who wish to take their climbing and scrambling skills, as well as their fitness, to new heights. But it requires a careful, measured approach in gear selection, timing and conditions for a safe trip.

In this article, we analyse each different component of the system. It should become apparent that many of the gains come from careful gear selection—which results in improved efficiency—rather than a huge gain in fitness.

Shoes

The point here is to complete the entire trip in a single pair of shoes that you can both run and climb in. The challenge is to find a shoe that is also rigid enough to work well with crampons, yet still be flexible enough for running in. Stiff approach shoes won't work if there's 20km of trail running involved, unless you want shin splints.

I recommend the La Sportiva Bushido II or the La Sportiva Uragano GTX, which has an in-built gaiter for snow. These shoes are intended for trail running, but have a rigid enough frame and carbon footplate to support crampons. Other options include the Salomon S-Lab X Alp Carbon GTX 2 or Scarpa Ribelle Tech OD.

It's a continuum: the better a shoe is at climbing, the worse it will be for running, so try and strike the best balance for your objectives in mind. I also recommend fitting your crampons to the shoes before purchasing to ensure a good fit.



Crampons

There are several tiers of shoe traction devices available which you can select, depending on the steepness and snow conditions. For hard-packed icy trails or low angle/soft snow, Kahtoola MicroSpikes are great. For more serious snow terrain, the Kahtoola K10 or Kahtoola KTS steel crampons are better.

But for the maximum security a running shoe can afford, go for the Petzl Leopard aluminium crampons. With dyneema cord linking the front and back sections, there is little front-pointing ability, as the crampon offers no rigidity in itself. The advantage is that the crampon flexes with the shoe better, and that makes running in the crampon easier. It is also lighter and more packable, which is important with such a small running pack.

With basket-style crampons, thread the straps towards the front basket in both directions, rather than directly across the ankle as you would with a boot. Low profile running shoes have no padding in this area above the tongue, so the strap will dig into your ankle if you use the same method as with a boot. Threading twice through the front basket eliminates this problem.

The maximum slope angle I would consider in firm snow is about 30-35 degrees, since you are mostly relying on side-stepping rather than front-pointing. If patches of ice are present, I would be very cautious. This technique is really intended for routes consisting of simple snow and rock scrambling.

Socks

Running through snow can be cold. Depending on the snow quality, it may be dry or frozen snow and therefore very cold, or warm wet snow and therefore very wet. Neither are ideal without appropriate socks. One tactic is to wear a thin running sock for running at lower elevation to avoid overheating and sweating, then supplementing this with a thicker wool sock once at the snowline. I did this for a recent trip up Mont Blanc and, to save even further weight, I took a thick ankle-high merino sock rather than a normal calf/knee-high mountaineering sock because the legs don't usually need that extra insulation. Even at 4800m, I was comfortable enough, albeit with a bit of toe wriggling.

For wet snow, such as a typical summer-time glacier crossing, consider waterproof socks. Bridgedale Storm socks are excellent—waterproof, but also comfortable to run in and they don't cause blisters, a far better solution than wearing plastic bread bags on each foot.



Legs

Your legs need surprisingly little insulation to stay warm compared to the upper body. On a recent ascent of the Matterhorn via the Hornli ridge, I was comfortable on the summit in just a pair of running shorts. But in cold, windy or wet conditions, consider either full length tights or thermal leggings.

For variable conditions, look at a light pair of over-trousers such as the Macpac Hightail pants, which are easy to put on and take off without removing shoes.

Shorts with high and tight pockets around the waist will allow you to redistribute some food weight (energy gels, bars) from your pack and onto your hips, rather than it all being in your chest pockets.



Torso

Starting in the valley, you'll typically be in a t-shirt and sweat hard up the trail. A few hours later, a stiff chill whips into you from above the bushline. You'll stop for a minute and, quickly, your sweaty shirt will freeze. You could throw your thermal over the top, but you might end up fighting a losing battle in heating up that cold sweat against your skin as you layer up. I prefer to take off the wet shirt and wear it over the top of my thermal base layer. It makes for a dry layer against the skin, while body heat dries the shirt on the outside. The shirt will still add some insulation, instead of being dead weight in your pack or chilling you from the core. Techniques like this become more important if you want to climb a peak with only three thin layers.

For many ascents, the only other layer you will need is a light waterproof shell, such as the Macpac Hightail jacket. If it's colder, swap the rain shell out for a synthetic pullover jacket or light down jacket such as the Macpac Icefall. The insulation jacket will be most necessary if you are with someone else and ever have to wait. If you are alone, you will never be stopped waiting for anyone and can dress slightly lighter. That said, an emergency warm layer may be prudent.



Pack

This is the essential piece that will make or break the fast and light approach. The most important thing with the pack is that you should be able to do almost everything without taking the pack off. Vest-style trail running packs are designed for this exact purpose. With a trail running pack, you can access all your food, check your phone (with Gaia GPS or NZ Topo mapping apps), fill up your water bottles, deploy or stow poles, and put on/take off your jacket.

If you need to take off your pack to do any of these things, its valuable time wasted—every time you pause, a more efficient version of yourself is striding further towards the summit. The only time you should need to take your pack off is for major transitions, such as adopting crampons and ice axe.

On the back of the pack, stash the jacket so you can pull it out while moving and put it on over the top of the whole pack. You can reverse the process when you heat up again, stashing the jacket into the back—all without breaking stride. Tie your thermal layer tight around your waist to take some weight off your pack and onto your hips. This will make running easier. However, with some very thin running vest packs, you might want to use your thermal inside the pack to cushion your back against your sharp crampons.

Check out the running vests made by Patagonia, such as the Slope Runner Vest. Other brand options to explore are UltraSpire, Ultimate Direction and Salomon. Macpac is also coming out with a new running vest in early 2020.

Hydration

Many runners are familiar with the one to two litre water reservoir and hose system for hydration. This is the old school way. The new school way is to carry two 500ml soft plastic flask bottles on the front of the running pack in long tubular pockets. This also balances the weight on your back so you can run less hunched over. These are lighter than a reservoir, infinitely quicker to fill up during stream crossings, and having two allows you to add electrolytes to one and keep pure water in the other.

For sections with frequent water refill opportunities, you can quickly dump most of your water and regularly top up. What's the point of counting grams on an ice axe if you carry 500-1000g in excess water for much of the day? Flasks allow you to easily optimise your water-carrying capacity.

This does assume water access is fairly frequent, but if you're in a desert or need larger capacity, a two litre or larger bladder can be a good idea.



Poles

Most mountain approaches involve steep trail hiking, so a pair of carbon hiking poles will improve efficiency incorporating your upper body. For two-hands scrambling or downhill running, stash them on the front of your pack using elastic loops (check your pack for this feature, or add your own loops). Recommended models are the Black Diamond Distance Carbon Z or Leki Trailstick.

Ice Axe

Most trailpinism peaks will not involve any great technical difficulty on snow or ice—think MC grade 1/1+—so get the lightest aluminium ice axe possible. Recommended models are the Camp Corsa 50cm, which is the lightest on the market and weighs only 200g. For slightly higher performance and minimal extra weight, the Petzl Ride is excellent (240g), or for more security on the odd steep section, look at the Petzl Gully (280g), which includes a pinky trig rest for a better grip. Beware of the limitations of an aluminium axe—it will not penetrate hard ice. Practice with your gear before taking it onto something gnarly.



Helmet

The first question you should ask is: do I need a helmet? Is there a chance of something coming down on me from above? If yes, then obviously get the lightest one available, such as the Petzl Sirocco. For the approach, you may be able to tie it onto the back of your pack without it banging around too much, but this may be difficult for the thrashing descent, so just wear your helmet all the way back to the car. With such light helmets, you'll hardly realise you're wearing one.

Glacier Travel

It's up to you how light you go for glacier travel. A minimalist setup could be ten metres of 7–8mm cord or rope between you, with a harness made from a 120cm dyneema sling and a small locking carabiner to clip in with. Of course, this would not allow a 3:1-style extraction, but it should catch a crevasse fall. For a full lightweight crevasse rescue kit, check out the Petzl RAD system, which includes 30m of hyperstatic 6mm cord and traxion devices. For a real harness, try a lightweight tape harness such as the Black Diamond Couloir harness.



Nutrition

As you increase the intensity of exercise, the body relies more on carbohydrates than fats. Many ultra-marathon runners who race 100 miles across mountains rely almost solely on energy gels and electrolyte drinks, with little in the way of 'real food'. But a new brand of energy gels called Spring Energy are based on real foods—a blend of banana, mango, basmati rice, nuts, sea salt—adding up to 250 calories per gel. This is much more appealing than most gels, which are a maltodextrin base with added supplements like BCAAs. Spring gels are expensive though, so consider making your own in a blender and carrying it in a 300ml soft flask.

It's also smart to drink calories by adding sachets of Tailwind powder to your water—that's another 200 calories per 500ml. Tailwind also contains all the electrolytes you need.

As a rule of thumb, try to consume a total of 250 calories per hour. The trick is convenience—so you can eat and drink on the go—which is where gels, OSM bars and liquid energy shine. And for those 10pm starts, a few caffeine pills won't go amiss to keep you alert until sunrise.



Timing

Timing presents a challenge if you are aiming for a single push ascent. You will need to estimate how long each section of the approach, climbing and descent will take in order to try and maximise your efficiency. Think about what sections are easy in the dark and where you will need to be at first light. Also take snow conditions into account, and avoid traversing a gaping glacier in the heat of the day. In the case of a one day Garden of Eden/Allah traverse, this required starting from Erewhon at 8pm. Get creative with your timing.

Team Size

Going solo will often be the fastest option, but having a team of two or more presents many safety advantages—especially for glacier travel, or trips with difficult navigation or in remote areas.

Possible New Zealand 'Trailpinism' Objectives

Here are a few ideas for possible objectives in New Zealand to get you scheming and dreaming:

- Tongariro three peaks: a traverse of Ruapehu, Ngauruhoe and Tongariro. Early winter or late spring.
- Mt Murchison, Arthurs Pass. A long flat run up the Waimakariri with a scramble up to Barker Hut, then an easy glacial ascent.
- Mt Somers in winter.
- Crossing of the Gardens of Allah and Eden, from Erewhon to Harihari.
- Mt Annette, Aoraki / Mt Cook.
- Mt Aspiring North West Ridge. For less distance, consider walking into Aspiring Hut and making this the start/end point.
- Traverse of the Olivine Ice Plateau.

There are so many more possibilities. Just make sure to research recent conditions and the level of technicality.

Final Word

You will find the process of honing your gear and strategy and executing your plan to be very satisfying. Refine your system for each trip. Take it easy at first while trialing new gear to learn its range of limitations, especially on snowy or icy terrain.

Don't feel like these techniques are reserved for elite athletes. You will find the largest gains are reaped from the first step of simply replacing a pair of heavy boots and steel crampons that weigh 3000g (eg La Sportiva Nepal Evo, Black Diamond Contact 10pt and gaiters) to a pair of running shoes and aluminium crampons that weigh only 900g.

That said, choose an objective relative to your fitness and you'll soon discover how much terrain you can cover in a day with your new systems. Gradually increase the distance, elevation gain and technicality.

By incorporating all of the efficiency strategies noted here, you will cut your times in half or thirds, enchain more peaks, reduce wear on your knees, fit more family time into your weekends and have a whole lot of fun in the process. We can't all be like Kilian, but we can at least try. Just remember—safety first, safety second.

Disclaimer #2: The author is a member of the New Zealand Alpine Team, which is sponsored by Macpac. For more information on the New Zealand Alpine Team, visit: www.alpineteam.co.nz

📍 The author atop Mt Blanc, just five and a half hours after leaving Les Houches.

ALASTAIR MCDOWELL



CHASING THE HIGH

EL CAPITAN

WORDS AND
PHOTOGRAPHS
BY DEREK CHENG

Whoever said that 'ignorance is bliss' didn't do any aid climbing on the Big Stone.

I had placed a tiny 00 cam into a crease of granite near the top of the *Salathe* headwall, an imposing shield of magnificence on El Capitan in Yosemite Valley.

A moment later, the cam ripped and I was in free fall. The offset microwire below it—never meant to take anything more than body weight—also ripped, as did a similar piece below that.

The yellow alien I thought would hold me not only ripped, but was violently catapulted into my ear as if to add humiliation.

It was one of those falls where you have a moment to check yourself and register that you are, in fact, still falling.

But the *Salathe* headwall, a mere three pitches from the top of the Big Stone, is overhanging. When the rope finally interrupted the grip of gravity, some 18m lower, I barely grazed the wall.

'Are you alright?' my belayer called out from below.

'I got your Alien out!'

'Um ... great. Are you okay?'

I had wrestled with the yellow Alien on my way up. One of the lobes had inverted, jamming it in an immovable way. I had resigned myself to buying a replacement for the owner, but with the force of the fall delivering its freedom, I would at least get to keep the old one. This made me very happy.

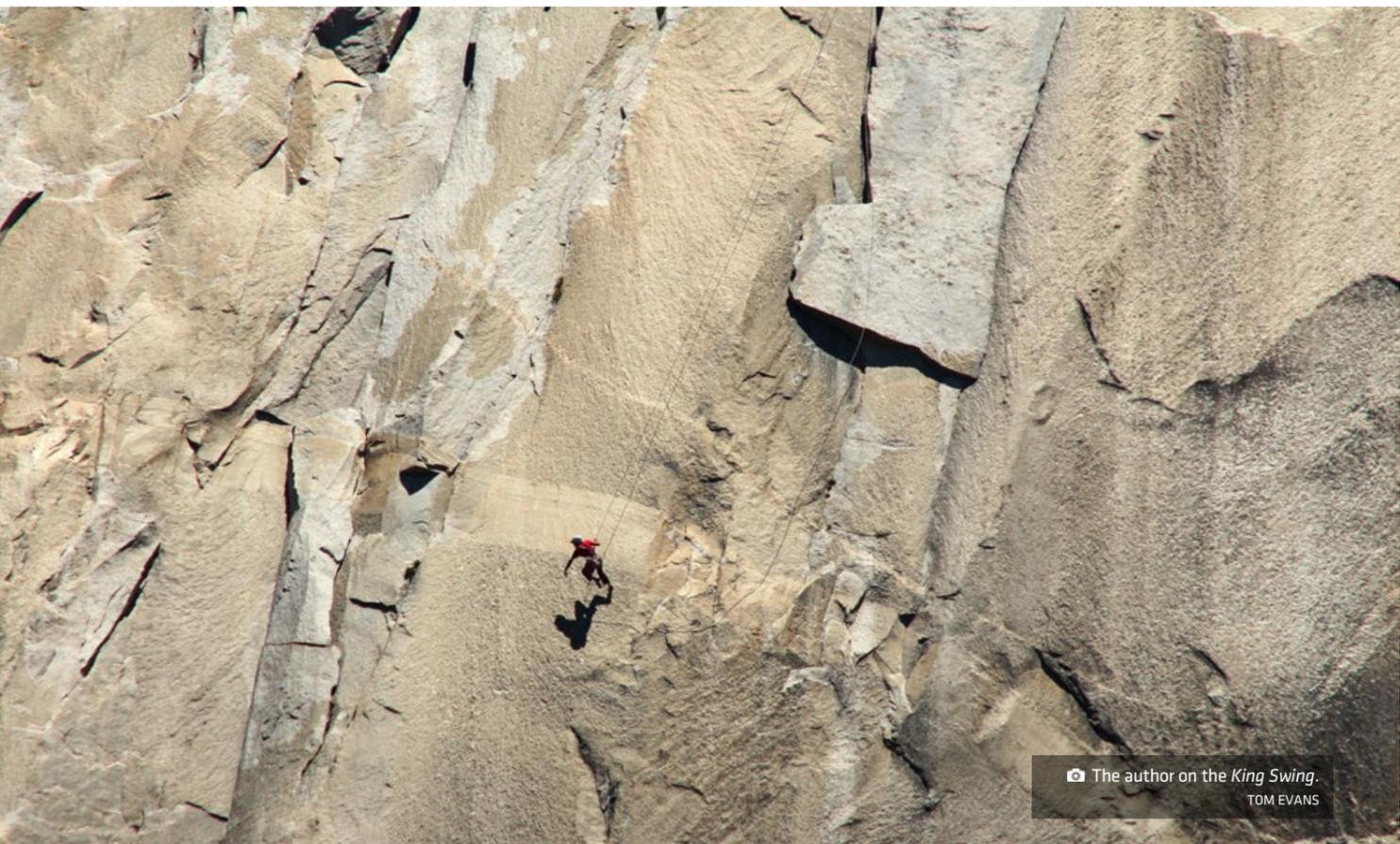
The enormo-whip could have been avoided by doing a simple bounce test, which would have exposed the microcam placement as laughable. Yet despite having climbed El Cap once already, I was 'blissfully' ignorant and had never bounce-tested.

Instead I had frayed my nerves endless times by slowly weighting tenuous aid pieces while holding my breath, squeezing my insides, and glaring at the piece in question as if willing it to hold my weight, all with a sense of hope wildly disproportionate to reality. Sometimes the words 'oh boy' would escape my lips.

But I had always been fond of Aliens, and safe enormo-whips are, in hindsight, awesome fun. So this wasn't such a bad outcome.



Hauling 'Big Bertha'.
TOM EVANS



The author on the *King Swing*.
TOM EVANS

I didn't know what aid climbing was when I got to Yosemite, and my initial impression was similar to when I first started trad climbing; why would anyone bother with a form of climbing that took so much longer than sport climbing? But terrain you can't free climb can only be overcome by jet-packs or aid climbing, and with no knowledge of the former, I eventually embraced the latter.

My introduction was meant to be on the *Regular Northwest Face* of Half Dome, but I had only taken one ladder/etrier during our two-day ascent, and wouldn't describe the type of climbing we did as anything other than inventive French-freeing.

So I turned to *The Nose*. In Anthony, a broad-shouldered South African who had climbed El Cap before, I was sure I had the perfect partner for the Big Stone. I needed one. Roughly half of the attempts on The Nose end in bailing, and with only a week or so of valley climbing under my belt, I anticipated leaning on Ant a lot.

He wanted to free climb as much of the 5.10 and 5.11 (up to grade 23) pitches on *The Nose* as we could over four days. To him, this meant taking three ropes—one for hauling, a light one for trailing the haul line, and a leading rope—a portaledge so we could sleep wherever we wanted, and what I considered an excessive amount of food. He justified the extra weight by saying the haul bag would be heavy anyway, so what's the difference if it's a bit heavier? ('The weight,' I replied. 'The difference is the extra weight.')

'BY THE TIME I GOT TO SICKLE LEDGE, ABOUT A TENTH OF THE WAY UP THE NOSE, I WAS SURE MY INSIDES WERE BLEEDING.'

And heavy it was. Planetary. Big Bertha-type heft. I was sure if I opened it, I would find nothing but the densest of volcanic rocks. It was noticeably heavier than the haul bag I would drag up *The Salathe* the following year, which was also for four days, but for three people.

Just carrying Bertha to the base of *The Nose* felt like running successive marathons. After leading my first pitch, I set up the haul device and sat all my weight on my end of the rope in the naive hope that it would launch the haul bag towards me. Bertha did not budge. Hauling became an exercise in savage heaving and bone-crushing brutality just to budge it an inch.

By the time I got to Sickle Ledge, about a tenth of the way up *The Nose*, I was sure my insides were bleeding. I set up the haul device again and used my lead line to give myself a long safety of five metres or so. This would enable me to dive balletically off the ledge in the hope of lifting Bertha.

But Bertha was immune to my plan. After a few failed attempts, I assumed the position at the edge of Sickle, my feet propped against a rock to employ the violent leg-presses that had previously worked.

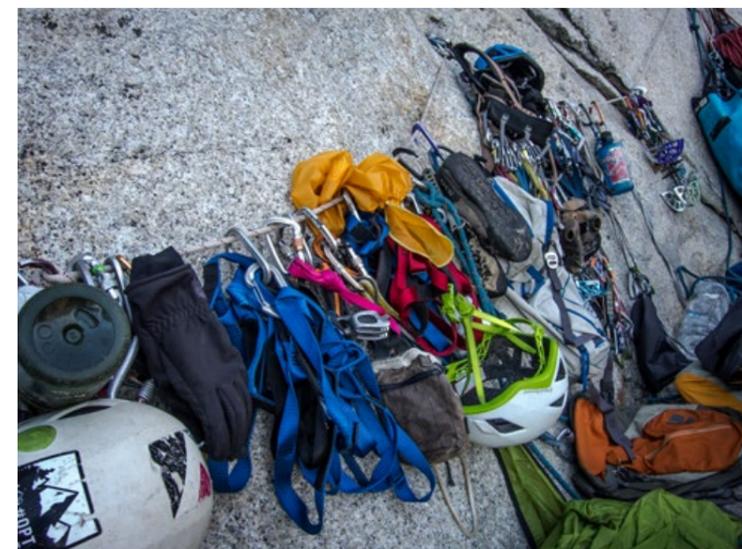
I braced myself. Deep breath. Ready for exertion. And then I was airborne.

There is a certain type of noise that involuntarily unleashes when you think you're about to die, not a screech or shriek or scream in any normal sense of those terms. It comes from somewhere deep within. When it erupts, it's not as some high pitched whimper, but a deeper sound, a guttural emptying of your insides manifesting as raw horror.

I wasn't about to die, of course, but my long safety line certainly enabled that impression for a moment before it came taut.

The haul device had somehow twisted and ruptured. A simple carabiner through the base of the device would have prevented this.

The following year, when a climbing guide joined me at an anchor halfway up *The Salathe* with the same haul device and set it up as I had, I shared my story with him. He promptly added a carabiner.



TOP Waking up on the portaledge. ANT HALL

MIDDLE Aid climbing requires a lot of gear. DEREK CHENG

BOTTOM The author on top of *The Nose* for the first time, with Ant. ANT HALL

Everything you hear about the wonders of *The Nose* is true. There's the *King Swing*, the wild pendulum across 30m of granite with 450m of air below you, where you sprint horizontally for all you're worth until your feet lose contact with the rock, and you end up skipping where possible to add momentum.

There are the *Stove Legs*, four pitches of exposed, moderate crack climbing up a section known for being slammed by the wind. Forging higher makes you feel like the conquistador of all worlds.

The laybacking into the perfect hand jams in the first half of the *Changing Corners* pitch will leave you fizzing with euphoria. And there is the final, glorious pitch to the top from where, if you happen to glance down, you can see all the way to the base of the monolith, some 900m below you.

As is so often the case, things did not go according to plan. Ant was extremely competent but not about to break any speed records. By mid-afternoon on day three, we were only halfway up *The Nose* and still five pitches short of *The Great Roof*, the halfway point in terms of the time it takes. A discussion about bailing ensued, and I managed to persuade him to let me lead on and see how we went.

There were a lot of held breaths, hopeful staring and gingerly-weighted aid pieces in the back of *The Great Roof*, along with a noticeable lack of any bounce testing. I even blew an aid piece in the *Glowering Spot* pitch and was lucky to only graze the backsides of my heels on a ledge, which inverted me in a mostly harmless way.

As we moved higher, Bertha got lighter and lighter—though we still had enough food to last another day by the time we reached the top. Hauling her up the last pitch was almost a pleasure. No violent movements were required.

Topping out was the sort of transcendental experience you would expect after an epic battle from which you emerge victorious. Elation is proportional to suffering: suspected bleeding insides from wrestling with Bertha; aching muscles from the physical demands; mental exhaustion from aid climbing above crippling exposure when you don't really know what you're doing; unquantifiable trauma of not only having to poo into a bag, but carrying it to the top while the dread of a punctured poo bag looms.

You feel like you've left your historic mark in the annals of human history, but, of course, your achievement makes hardly any impression at all, least of all on the Big Stone.

'As I hammered in the last bolt and staggered over the rim, it was not at all clear to me who was conqueror and who was conquered,' said Warren Harding after becoming the first to climb El Cap in 1958. 'I do recall that El Cap seemed to be in much better condition than I was.'

Night had descended by the time we returned to the valley floor on the fourth day, where serendipity intervened. A Korean family had decided to have beers and a barbecue at the exact point where we emerged from the forest, and duly asked us—sweaty, filthy and exhausted—to partake.

We accepted.

POSTSCRIPT:

A NIAD (*Nose In A Day*) was first climbed in 1975 by valley legends Jim Bridwell, John Long and Billy Westbay. Those that followed in their footsteps, specifically Alex Honnold and Tommy Caldwell, eventually climbed it in under two hours, a barely conceivable achievement.

Everything formidable about climbing El Cap—the fear and uncertainty and reward—is intensified in a NIAD. The most challenging aspect is often short-fixing, the seemingly alarming practice of topping out your pitch, pulling up 30-odd metres of rope slack, fixing the rope to the anchor and then using the slack to continue up the next pitch. You're on your own until your partner can ascend the fixed line and put you on belay.

I have a distinct memory of climbing up the *Stove Legs* with an infinity of loose rope fluttering in the wind amid the yawning exposure below me.

It was my third time up *The Nose*. Experience had taught me to bounce-test any questionable aid pieces, and my insides thanked me for having no Bertha of any kind to haul.

Tim, a broad-shouldered German, and I topped out after 15 and a half hours, by which time more super-human athletes could have done several laps of *The Nose*.

As a fitting homage to the Koreans, Tim's partner met us at the top with a suitably enormous portion of cake. 🍰



ABOVE Waking up on El Cap Tower. DEREK CHENG

BELOW Michael Brines employing some *King Swing* acrobatics. DEREK CHENG

PREVIOUS PAGE Climbers on El Cap Spire on the *Salathe*. DEREK CHENG





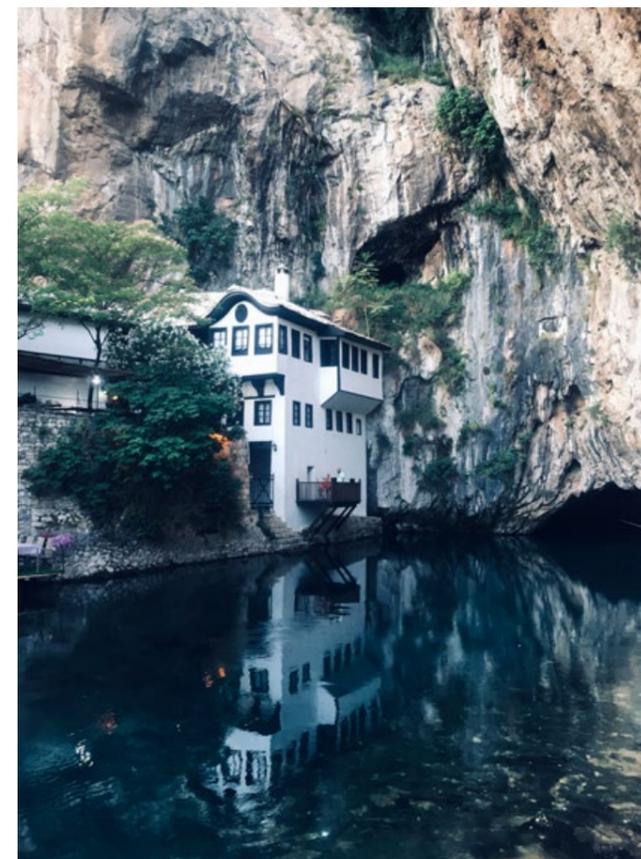
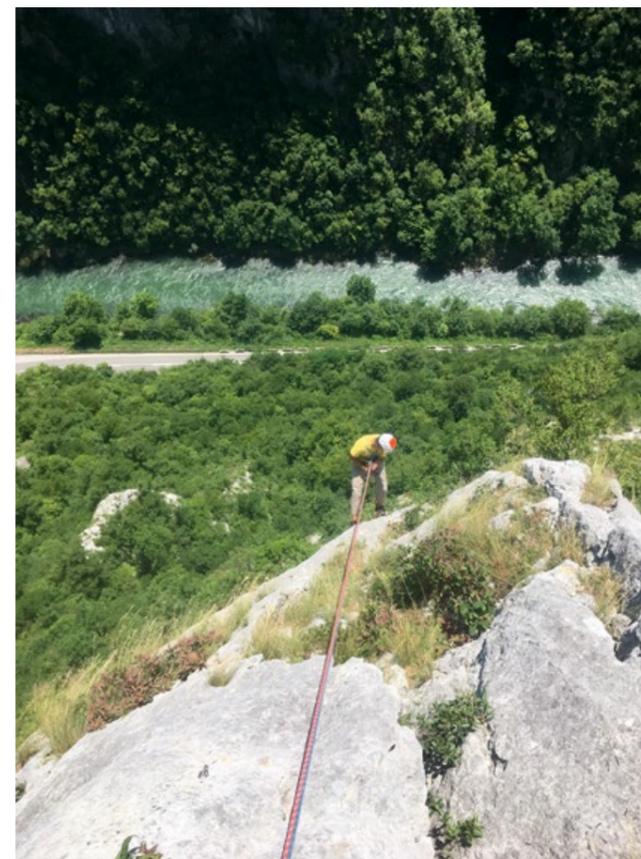
Bosnia Herzegovina (BiH) is a country that sits between Croatia and Serbia—that was all I really knew as we drove across the border. I was slightly bemused when my climbing partner suggested it as a destination on our Eastern European rock climbing and gardening tour. I wasn't even sure they had mountains there. However, I shrugged and agreed, assuming we would find something to climb, breaking up the drive from Romania to Croatia and our destination of the well-known Paklenica National Park.

Our first stop was in Banja Luka, the capital of the north, to hunt for the *Bosnia Herzegovina Rock Climbing Guidebook*. With some difficulty and only one or two navigational arguments, we managed to locate the book inside a huge mall. The mall was mildly overwhelming, given we had been dirtbagging like Roma gypsies for two

months. However, the outside temps were well over 35°C, with high humidity, so we didn't hurry to leave the air-conditioned comfort. Instead we sat, eating ice cream from the tub, pawing over our new guidebook.

Our now established routine for a new climbing area was to find a crag to get started at, figure out the style and grading, and then set our sights on a multipitch mission. Tijesno Canyon is just south of Banja Luka and we headed to the Vbras Campsite—one of the only campsites in the narrow canyon—to get our first look at what BiH rock had to offer.

The campsite was humble but delightful, complete with two potentially stray—but no less cute—puppies to play with. It was also situated right on the riverbank. The water was cold and fast flowing, the perfect cool down after a sweaty, dirty day climbing rocks in the BiH jungle.



TOP LEFT The diverse architecture of Mostar highlights Bosnia and Herzegovina's tumultuous history of foreign rule.

BOTTOM LEFT Abselling our second long route in the Tijesno Canyon, dreaming of a swim in the cool waters below.

TOP RIGHT Steep rock walls rise above the Vbras River, yet dense foliage still clings to the vertical faces.

BOTTOM RIGHT The UNESCO protected Dervish monastery is nearly 600 years-old and sits above the source of the Buna in Blagaj.

On our first day cragging at Skubalj, Bosnia's newest climbing crag, we were blown away by the rock quality. The limestone was fantastically featured, leading to a huge variety of climbs of all grades on completely bomber rock. There was a lot of greenery around. It had become a theme of our trip to regularly find ourselves dropping soil and shrubbery on each other as we did our best to help maintain the climbs ... mid-pitch.

Each year, more and more routes are being bolted in Bosnia Herzegovina. It is remarkable. There are a number of bolting festivals, the most popular being the 'Drill and Chill' festival in the Tijesno Canyon. It is an exciting opportunity for people to learn how to bolt. I feel bolting a route is something climbers aspire to, especially when their climbing progress begins to stagnate. There must be something incredibly satisfying about seeing an obvious line, bolting it, naming it, and being the first human to scale that piece of rock.

BiH is a country still recovering from a civil war with mass genocide, and where there is still a danger of live landmines. Climbing tourism is a thing that could directly help local villages and people get back on their feet after a turbulent past. However, after seeing the ecological and societal impacts of tourism in countries like Nepal, the concept did not sit easy with me. Tourism puts increased strain on already non-existent public services like rubbish disposal in poorer nations. It was evident driving south through the Tijesno Canyon that waste is already a problem in BiH. The stagnant waters of the upper Vbras river are already strewn with plastic.

In the next two days, we climbed two multipitch lines at the Krajina crag. Both climbs had high rock quality with interesting climbing. However, finding the base of the climbs was an adventure. The guidebook suggests rappelling into some of the climbs to avoid the steep approach. However, after seeing the overgrowth on the top of the climbs, I'd still approach from the bottom.

The guidebook is very well put together and well worth buying to support the local climbing community. However, when we spent an extra hour bumbling around in the dense jungle, dripping with sweat and praying to avoid any grumpy snakes, I did find myself cursing the lack of detailed approach descriptions. It pays to go for long lines in the Chucho Mucho sector closest to the road to avoid such issues.

As we drove on, we made one last stop in Kameni Most, the southernmost crag in the canyon. Kameni Most means 'stone arch' and,

predictably, there is one at the crag. However, the site is geologically significant because it is 40m high and one of the few stone arches in Eastern Europe. Most impressively, for Europe, when we visited the arch we were completely alone. It is a remarkable formation just to marvel at, and the fact there is a bolted route that traverses around the centre of the arch is unbelievable; we spent a long time wondering about logistics of belaying and cleaning such a route.

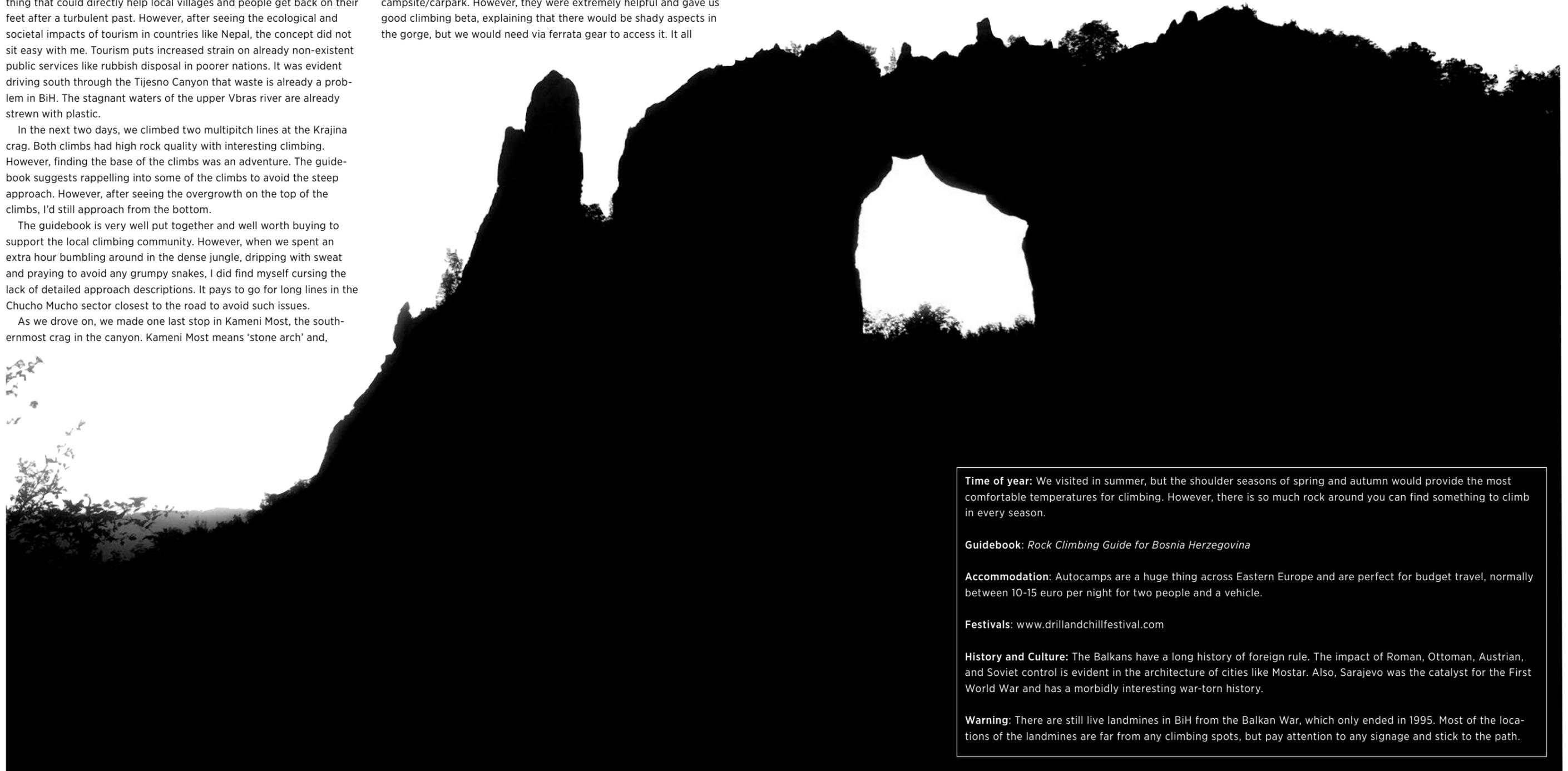
We continued south to make a short (we lasted all of two hours in the tourist hustle and bustle) cultural stop in Mostar, the capital of the south. Then, we headed for Blagaj, which had caught our attention as we searched for somewhere to escape the rising temperatures. We saw a photo of the old dervish monastery in Blagaj that sits at the Buna, a source of ice-cold water—and ice-cold water seemed ideal. However, the further south we got, the higher the temperatures rose.

We were well done, if not completely overcooked, by the time we arrived at the Eco Lodge in Blagaj. The operators of the Eco Lodge seemed surprised to find two dumb climbers dying in the shade at their campsite/carpark. However, they were extremely helpful and gave us good climbing beta, explaining that there would be shady aspects in the gorge, but we would need via ferrata gear to access it. It all

seemed too hard in the heat of the afternoon, so we resolved to check out the monastery in the cool of the evening and then try some early morning cragging before the sun hit the rock.

We were warned with a wry smile from the Eco Lodge owner that the grading here 'wasn't easy' like other 'more touristy places'. I didn't like that attitude. I hate climbing grades. I was relatively new to climbing when starting this trip and I had a steep learning curve on what a climbing grade actually meant. There was no standardised system like I imagined in my little engineer brain. There was no 'number of good holds, multiplied by the amount of force required, minus the amount of exposure and divided by your height' equation. I learned very quickly that it was all a load of bollocks, especially on 'classic' climbs. Don't even get me started on those hobnail-boot wearing mountaineers of the 1960s. Delusional, all of them. However, even with all the climbing we had done to this point, the grading at Blagaj seemed especially cruel.

When driving south, we had caught a glimpse of the big mountains of BiH. There are some peaks as high as 2386m near the border with Montenegro, and it looked like wild and imposing terrain. The guidebook described a high alpine bouldering area, which sounded magical. After spending a week in the Bosnia Herzegovina wilderness, it seemed incredulous that I had even questioned stopping here. I felt I had learned so much about this tiny, diverse, war-torn country. The fields of white crosses in every small town were a sobering reminder of a piece of recent history that already seems forgotten with all the world's troubles of today. The people of BiH, especially away from the big cities, still seemed genuine. Tourism had not sullied them so much as to only see you with dollar signs in their eyes. Once we crossed the border and met the 'user-pays' system of Croatia, we pined a little for our wild BiH paradise. In summary, go there, experience it, but just promise to take your rubbish with you. 



Time of year: We visited in summer, but the shoulder seasons of spring and autumn would provide the most comfortable temperatures for climbing. However, there is so much rock around you can find something to climb in every season.

Guidebook: *Rock Climbing Guide for Bosnia Herzegovina*

Accommodation: Autocamps are a huge thing across Eastern Europe and are perfect for budget travel, normally between 10-15 euro per night for two people and a vehicle.

Festivals: www.drillandchillfestival.com

History and Culture: The Balkans have a long history of foreign rule. The impact of Roman, Ottoman, Austrian, and Soviet control is evident in the architecture of cities like Mostar. Also, Sarajevo was the catalyst for the First World War and has a morbidly interesting war-torn history.

Warning: There are still live landmines in BiH from the Balkan War, which only ended in 1995. Most of the locations of the landmines are far from any climbing spots, but pay attention to any signage and stick to the path.

THE GREAT UNKNOWN

Mountain Journeys in the Southern Alps

By Geoff Spearpoint

Reviewed by Richard Thomson

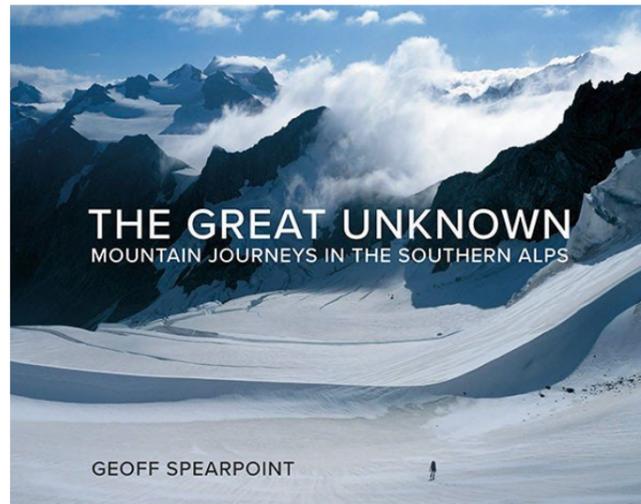
FIRST THINGS FIRST. Earlier this year, when I heard that Geoff Spearpoint had written a book about tramping and climbing in the Southern Alps, to be published by Potton and Burton, the news stirred a feeling of anticipation for a New Zealand climbing book that I hadn't experienced for a long time. Geoff's knowledge of the mountains and the people who've travelled through them, his ability with a camera and a keyboard, his enthusiasm, and the sheer length and breadth of his experience—who wouldn't be excited by the prospect of all that between two hardback covers? If you are a person who habitually reads the first paragraph before moving on to the next article, this is all you really need to know: in November, the Hutt Valley Tramping Club hosted a launch evening for *The Great Unknown* where John Nankervis gave the oration, as it were, and began by observing that it is not a question of whether to purchase this book but, rather, how many people in your life need to be given a copy of their own.

Yet when I had a copy in my hands and first thumbed through the pages, my excitement was tempered by a small suggestion of disappointment. It turns out that I was wrong to think that, and it's worth spending a little time explaining why, because that in turn helps to explain some of this book's real strengths.

This is a deceptively simple book. It starts at Bainham right up in the northwestern corner of Golden Bay and makes straight for the Dragons Teeth, barely letting up until reaching the coast at Precipice Cove in Fiordland, where handfuls of sandflies are trapped between the tent outer and inner. It was this outwardly simple structure, one trip after another, that worried me. The accumulation of experiences is one of the less appealing traits of our time, expressed as bucket lists, social media posts and the barely conscious fidgeting of mass tourism. The nature of climbing, with its discretely parcelled rations of gratification through problems, routes, projects and trips, may I think put climbers at particular risk. I suffer from this kind of thinking and so do most climbers I know, to greater or lesser degrees. We make lists and busily and deliberately tick our achievements, but never seem to find the list getting any shorter. The American Mark Greif (not a climber) writes that by focusing on peaks, 'ordinary topography loses its allure. The attempt to make our lives not a waste, by seeking a few most remarkable incidents, will make the rest of our life a waste.'

So when I first opened *The Great Unknown* I thought: 'Is this just a coffee table list?'

More fool me. Read that three-word title again. You could think about the form of this book as being like a tent, designed so you can throw it up in a moment, wherever you happen to end up at the end of the day, over and over, night after night. What Geoff has to say is revealed in the details of 55 trip reports from 50-something years in the hills. Every night brings a new sunset and every day promises a different adventure but, as Geoff writes: 'The mountains, the gorges, the forest, the scrub, the tussock, the rock and the ice are all seamlessly connected. The experience of that completeness, in which both tramping



and climbing skills are required, is what sparks and attracts me.'

Mark Greif offers a similar path to, as he calls it, radicalise experience. He 'asks you to view every object as you would a work of art ... art is essentially an occasion for the arousal of emotions and passions. You experience a work of art. You go into it. ... The discipline is to learn to see the rest of the world in just that same way.'

I don't know whether Geoff would agree. I am sure of two things, though. The first is that Geoff has created a work of art with this book. The second is that he has also written a manual. More exactly, *The Great Unknown* documents a method of living in the mountains of Aotearoa. Working that out has been the project of a lifetime for a man who I think has thought harder about what that life might look like than almost anyone else. If this sounds too much like a eulogy, it isn't. Mountain journeys continue. At the launch, I mentioned to Geoff I was about to go to the Spenser Mountains and instantly had his attention. 'There's a great high traverse to do. Beautiful campsites in the tussock basins to the west ...'

***The Great Unknown: Mountain Journeys in the Southern Alps*, by Geoff Spearpoint, Potton & Burton, 2019. RRP \$59.99**



WILD COUNTRY REVO BELAY DEVICE

IT WAS branded as revolutionary when first released, but does the Revo live up to the hype that surrounded its release? In terms of concept, the Revo really is a revolution in the world of assisted-braking devices. Much like the original Grigri, its new technology will undoubtedly shape future assisted-braking devices. The device is the first on the market to require no alternation to the standard technique taught for belaying with a tube-style belay device. Pick up the device, thread the rope (without worrying about which way this is done, as the device is bi-directional) and belay like you always have done. Easy peasy. Even after hundreds of sent projects, you may have never noticed its unique feature.

One mistake in catching that fall and you'll notice what is truly unique about the device. The device 'notices' the error and a cam locks the internal wheel and arrests the fall. Disaster averted.

Now for the mechanics. Between the external aluminium plates of the device sits a grooved wheel. This wheel automatically locks when it spins at 4m/s, the speed at which climbers free fall. This is what is unique about the Revo and makes it a fantastic option for a wide variety of climbers.

I have to admit, I was sceptical when the device first came out. It's heavier than the majority of the competition, weighing in at 285 grams, and it's easy to overlook the ingenious technology that's hidden within the device. My first impression after using the device showed my initial scepticism was unfounded, as I felt the Revo outperformed any other assisted-braking device on the market.

The Revo is super smooth when dishing out slack as the leader goes for that high clip. Gone are the days of fumbling and trying to unlock a jammed up device whilst the climber screams for slack. This is achieved by the rope being thread around the inertia wheel, rather than a karabiner. The larger radius of the wheel allows for the rope to pay out smoothly, and the device won't lock until you pull rope out at 4m/s. This is near impossible to achieve when paying out slack whilst belaying.

On the way down, the Revo lowers very smoothly. This is done exactly as you would with a traditional belay device, using friction to control the speed of descent. No handles to pull, as for a Grigri. Just two hands below the device controlling the dead end of the rope.

Interestingly, the Revo has become my partner's favourite device for sport belaying too. Having learned to belay on a traditional tube-style belay device, she has never taken to assisted-braking devices. One route of belaying on the Revo and she was a convert. Not having to learn a new technique for belaying—as so often is the way with assisted-braking devices—made the transition easy. It also helped that the Revo is the smoothest and easiest device for feeding rope, basically like pulling rope through a pulley. Wild Country really has made a device that ticks a lot of boxes.

I had concerns over the way the device does not apply a brake on the rope once weight is applied by the climber in the normal way assisted-braking devices do—there is no Grigri-style 'lock' outside of the free fall safety feature. Upon reflection, I've realised that the majority of my sport climbing is spent flashing routes rather than working them to death. Perhaps I'm a traditionalist, but I feel this is what most climbers actually do—heading to the crag and generally climbing routes that don't take too much work, and doing our best to spend time making upward progress rather than figuring out moves dangling off the rope. If you are a dangler, then perhaps this is not the device for you (look for something that locks when weight is applied to the rope). But I feel for the majority of sport climbers, the Revo could be your perfect device.

If you are looking for a new belay device, the Revo has asserted itself as one of the best assisted-braking devices on the market. Have a play with one next time you see someone using one at the crag, but be warned: you will likely be heading to the gear shop shortly after.

Wild Country Revo. RRP \$239

★★★★

—Francis Charlesworth



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SCREAMERS SHOCK ABSORBER SLINGS

'SCREAMERS', or load-activated quickdraws, are an essential piece of equipment for every ice climber. These clever devices are basically a long sling that has been stitched together in such a way that when a sufficient load is placed upon the sling (such as by a falling climber), the stitches rip, absorbing much of the force generated by a falling climber. Once ripped, the sling remains a full-strength runner if you need to continue using it, such as on an alpine or multipitch climb. When placing protection in such a fickle medium as ice, having at least a few of these to put on marginal protection and on the first piece above the anchor (if on a multipitch climb) can add an extra margin of safety, however small.

I fully ripped my first screamer this winter, falling onto a piton placed in a crumbling crack 25 years ago by Jeff Lowe. While Jeff was a master alpinist and piton placer, this was not a confidence-inspiring piton. In addition, I was close to the belay and there was not very much rope out to absorb the shock of the fall. But thanks to the low activation force of the screamer (a Petzl Nitro 2), the piton didn't budge and I had a very soft catch. I don't doubt that had I clipped the piton with a normal sling, the piton would have pulled or at least been stressed.

The name Screamer stems from the original product, made by a niche big-wall company called Yates. The Yates Screamer is still around, but many other companies make similar products these days. I have been using the Petzl Nitro 2, Cassin X-Draw and DMM Ripstop for a few seasons now.

On the surface, these products all seem similar; they all have similar activation force and the same breaking strength (22 KN), so theoretically should perform similarly when loaded in a fall scenario. While I've only ever ripped the one (and hope to only ever rip one), I've had enough experience using them on just about every ice and alpine climb to comment on their finer details.

The Petzl Nitro comes in two variations—the Nitro 2 and the Nitro 3 (pictured). At 60g, these are essentially the same thick nylon sling with a different number of sewn folds. The Nitro 2 and 3 have the same open length—60cm, but the Nitro 3 is folded/sewn three times as opposed to twice with the Nitro 2. This means that the Nitro 3 is both shorter and considerably bulkier than the Nitro 2. The Nitro 2 is still the next bulkiest screamer in this review. Both have the folds held in place by a velcro strap, which does a pretty good job of preventing the folds from 'umbrella-ing' open when being carried. While examining both of these in the shop, I immediately decided against the Nitro 3 due to the bulk. While the Nitro 2 is a little bit longer, it is 30 per cent skinnier and racks much better. My only real bugbear with the Nitro is that it is 100 per cent nylon, meaning that it can absorb water and then freeze. However, I have never actually had an

issue with this happening.

The Cassin X-Draw is my favourite of the three. At 47g, it is much lighter than the Nitro and more compact. It is made from a dyneema/nylon blend to mitigate any water/freezing issues and encased in a full-length velcro sleeve that is sewn to the sling, which keeps everything nice and compact. It has the same activation force and breaking strength (2.5 KN and 22 KN) as the Nitro and a better rubber gasket for holding the rope-side carabiner in place. It is also sewn differently than the other two, with a longer sling and more folds. One would presume that this longer activation time (more stitches to rip) and distance would place a lower force on the piece it has been placed on.

Like the Petzl Nitro 2, the DMM Ripstop is a 100 per cent nylon sling with two sewn folds and a small velcro strap holding it all together. Its activation force is a little higher than the others (DMM says between 3.1 and 3.5 KN). Thanks to the skinny 16mm pure nylon sling, the 45g DMM is considerably more svelte than the Nitro and just edges the Cassin for compactness. There is no gasket for the screw-end carabiner and a thin velcro strap holds the folds together. However, the placement of the velcro strap is too high, meaning that the folds can 'umbrella' open if you accidentally clip the draw upside down on your harness and get caught on things. This would be easily solved if DMM just moved the velcro down. I've taken to wrapping a rubber band around the unsecured end to prevent this happening. However, at less than half the price of either the Cassin or the Petzl, one can forgive a few aspects that are not as refined as the Cassin.

Despite the low price and weight of the DMM, I like the Cassin the best—it is a little more user-friendly, and the low activation force (I mean, that's what we're using these things for, right?) makes me feel as warm and fuzzy about a marginal piece of gear as I can. The Petzl is an older design—effective but bigger and bulkier than the other options.

Petzl Nitro 2 RRP US\$39 ★★★★★

Cassin X-Draw. RRP US\$39 ★★★★★

DMM Ripstop RRP £15 ★★★★★

—Graham Johnston



GRIVEL STEEL BLADE SHOVEL

LET ME make one thing very clear right off the bat: The Grivel Steel Blade Shovel is not an avalanche shovel. Nor is it even a steel shovel. This is, for lack of a better description, an alpine climbing shovel.

When I first saw this shovel, I thought, 'Wow—that's a really nice steel shovel for under 400g.' And, like most people these days, I ordered it off the internet without having ever handled it. I watched Grivel's product videos and read product descriptions. I felt pretty comfortable with my knowledge of the product. Imagine my surprise when it arrived and it was 95 per cent plastic. The product name comes from an actual blade of steel along the cutting edge of the shovel, not from the whole shovel being steel. So initially I was a bit disappointed.

The 'alpine climbing shovel' moniker (which I made up) is not a new concept. Climbers have resented carrying shovels up alpine routes since the dawn of alpinism. Over the years, various manufacturers have made niche products that allow a piolet to be used in place of a handle to save weight, but as far as I know, no one else is currently making one. A shovel is an extremely useful tool on an expedition or climb where you may have to dig a snow cave, build a wall as part of basecamp setup, or scrape out a platform for a tent or bivvy. These are all situations where you will want a shovel, but do not need to hack through hardened avalanche debris to dig your dying buddy out—that level of shovel is not required here. And that is where the Grivel Steel Blade shovel captures the market. This shovel is designed to be used with or without a detachable handle (available but not tested), or a Grivel piolet can be used in place of the handle. My Grivel Air Tech Racing SA piolet locks perfectly into the moulded tube, but I tried two other brands of piolets and neither fit.

Once I recovered from my initial disappointment that this is not an all-metal shovel, I began to appreciate it. Despite being mostly plastic, this is a robust shovel and the steel blade is very effective at chopping through mildly chunky debris or moving volumes of compacted snow. Because

of the in-moulded handles, it is very comfortable to hold without using a shaft. It is also very good for the insides of snow caves or other compact spaces where a shovel with a shaft would be awkward.

I've carried this shovel on long spring alpine climbs where I didn't carry avalanche gear and summer glacier trips where I expected to build camps. I also leave it in my car during the winter so I always have a shovel to dig myself out. It is not ideal for using as a stove base, however, being plastic and with multiple ridges on the blade. There is a flat spot where a canister could rest for a Jetboil/Reactor. It can also be slung like a deadman for a piece of snow protection, but I have not used it like this.

At 398g (410g on my scales), this is one of the lightest shovels out there, but that doesn't include a shaft. However, it is still lighter than all the metal shovel blades I've seen and is actually effective at digging. The lightest aluminium-bladed avalanche shovel is around the 475g mark, so you aren't saving a tonne of weight over a full shovel, but you are getting a very effective digging tool for spring and summer snow that mates with a Grivel piolet to become more effective when not in a tight place. There are plastic randonee-racing shovels that come in at under 300g (with a shaft) but I'd hate to actually do any real digging with those.

This is an interesting piece of kit that will appeal to a very small number of people. But if you've got a trip this summer where you'll be building camps or snowcaves/quinzhees, or an alpine climb where you want to bring a shovel, this might be just the thing.

Grivel Steel Blade Shovel. RRP US\$69 ★★★★★



—Graham Johnston





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Mount Brewster
By Peter Laurenson
www.occasionalclimber.co.nz

BLACK DIAMOND ZONE CLIMBING SHOES

BLACK DIAMOND is one of the biggest names when it comes to technical climbing gear. The brand's reputation is for innovative design and for high-quality, well-tested and well thought-out products. So when they entered the climbing shoe market in 2017, their product line garnered immediate attention, albeit with the obligatory climbing shoe nerd questions like: 'How sticky will the rubber be?' and 'What will the heel cup shape be like?' The Black Diamond Zone climbing shoe is a hybrid of the Momentum from their 'neutral' range and the Shadow from their 'aggressive' range. This combination creates a shoe that is aimed at the mid-grade climber who desires a shoe that will give them the performance needed for steep terrain, whilst not being a hyper-specialised shoe solely for steep roofs.

The most important factor when buying climbing shoes is undoubtedly the fit. The Zone is available in two volumes. Black Diamond have rightly moved away from describing low volume shoes as 'women's' and now describe the Zone as available in a standard or low volume fit (the Zone LV). They describe the standard Zone as having a regular last for regular to higher volume feet. This is apparent in the fit of the shoe—with more space around the forefoot and a larger toe box. Climbers with a regular volume foot would benefit from trying on both the standard and LV to ensure they get the perfect fit. I found the shoes took a while to break in—largely due to the stiff toe box—but now the fit feels precise and they are my shoe of choice for steep bouldering. Shoes that take a while to break in are important to me, as I feel this ensures they do not stretch easily, ensuring a good fit right through until the shoe is completely worn out. The large velcro strap effectively locks your foot into an aggressive position, perfect for steep terrain, whilst the secondary smaller strap gives precise adjustment around the toe. The heel cup again reflects the slightly higher volume found in the shoe and some may find it too roomy. It's important to note that the Zone's sizing is on the smaller end of the scale when compared to other brands. I found the shoes to be well fitting by going half a size above my street shoe size, despite my size in 5.10s being a full size below my street shoe size. Trying before buying is key.

When in use, the shoe performs excellently on steep terrain, whether rock or plastic. The downturned and asymmetric shape provides trust when pushing off edges on steep routes, and precision to place my foot exactly where I want it. I felt that the moulded rubber heel gave less sensitivity when hooking, but it holds the foot well and has not softened in use, which can be a frustrating flaw with more sensitive shoes. The shoe is a great companion for a climber looking to push their grades and move onto steeper terrain. Whilst the shoe is clearly designed for steeper climbs, it performs adequately on vertical terrain, although the 4.3mm Fuse rubber sole does dampen sensitivity somewhat.

Black Diamond is justifiably proud of the Knit Technology that is used in the uppers of most of their shoes. This is not an all-day shoe, but the comfort offered from this technology is very welcome. Despite seeming illogical for a performance shoe, the upper stretches somewhat and allows greater breathability when compared to leather or synthetic-leather shoes. During the construction of the shoe, the tension of the knit has been adjusted to give strength and tension where needed, whilst allowing stretch in other areas. This gives a reassuring fit and ensures ongoing comfort whilst going for multiple redpoints. Sweating in the shoe is also significantly reduced, helping prevent stinky climbing shoes.

I don't feel able to give an accurate review on the durability of the shoe, as I have only been using the Zone for the last six months. It is



worth noting that the moulded midsole, made from Pebax (a thermoplastic elastomer known for its flexibility, fatigue resistance and ability to hold shape for a long duration), certainly holds the downturned shape extremely well despite considerable use.

The Zone is for climbers looking to have more confidence in their footwork on steeper terrain. The fit of the regular volume shoe will suit people with high volume feet much more than those with regular volume feet. As a result, trying both the regular and LV version is crucial when buying.

As with all shoes, the bottom line is that the fit should be the primary consideration, but this shoe will be a great companion for a climber looking for their first pair of performance downturned shoes.

Black Diamond Zone Climbing Shoes. RRP \$199 ★★★★★

—Francis Charlesworth

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Extreme Edge West Auckland

10% discount to NZAC members.
 Admission: with own gear - \$17 Adult, \$12 child. Students 10% discount with ID. 1,3,6 and 12 month memberships available.
 Courses available. Climbing gear for hire or purchase. Address: 5A Waikaukau Road, Glen Eden, Auckland.
 Ph: +64 09 818 3038.
www.extremeedge.co.nz/glen-eden

Extreme Edge Indoor Climbing Panmure

10% discount to NZAC members.
 Admission \$16 Adult, \$10 child with own gear. 1,3,6 and 12 month memberships available. Courses available. Climbing gear for hire, or purchase. Address: 40 Morrin Road, Panmure, Auckland. Ph: +64 (0)9 574 5677.
www.extremeedge.co.nz/panmure

Birkenhead Pool and Leisure Centre

\$11 entry to NZAC members.
 Admission: \$14 adult, \$11 children. Bouldering \$7.50. Instruction and gear hire available - harness \$5, shoes \$4.50, chalk-bag \$5.
 Address: 46 Mahara Ave, Birkenhead, Auckland.
 Ph: +64 (0)9 484 7290.
www.aucklandleisure.co.nz

Northern Rocks

10% discount to NZAC members with I.D.
 Admission: \$18 adult, \$15.75 youth under 16, \$9 child under 8.
 Address: Unit 17, 101-111 Diana Drive, Wairau Valley, Auckland.
 Ph: +64 (0) 9 278 2363

Climbing shoes for hire, membership options, coaching and classes. Fitness gym, pro shop, yoga.
www.northernrocks.co.nz

Rockup Mobile Rockclimbing Wall

10% discount to NZAC members.
 Climbing wall hire. See website and contact them for details and options available. Contact: 0800 ROCKUP (0800 762 587).
www.rockup.co.nz

Turangi

Turangi Climbing Gym

25% discount to members (\$15 adult entry).
 Admission: Adult \$20, child \$15 (15 or younger).
 Ph: +64 (0)7 3866 558. www.turangiclimbing.com

Wellington

Fergs Kayaks Wellington

NZAC club night and discount to members.
 NZAC Club Night Mondays (\$12 entry/\$2 harness), or \$15 any other time. Admission: Adult \$23, student \$18, child \$17 (less \$3 if you have your own harness).
 Address: Shed 6 Queens Wharf, Wellington.
 Ph: +64 (0)4 4998 898.
www.fergskayaks.co.nz

Hangdog Indoor Rock Climbing Lower Hutt

NZAC members \$15 and 20% discount off gear at the shop.
 Admission: adult \$22, student \$18, child \$18 (with harness/2hr pass and supervised safety briefing if needed). It is \$4 cheaper if you supply your own harness. Gear Hire/instruction available.
 Address: Unit #11 - 453 Hutt Rd, Alicetown, Lower Hutt.
 Ph: +64 (0)4 589 9181
www.hangdog.co.nz

Canterbury

YMCA Adventure Centre

NZAC members: \$16 adult, \$12 under 16's,
 Club night Tuesday: \$12 adult entry with valid membership card
 Address: cnr Waltham Road & Byron Street, Christchurch.
 Ph: +64 (0)3 377 3000 www.ymcachch.org.nz/fitness-and-climbing/adventurecentre/climbingwall/

Uprising Boulder Gym Christchurch

NZAC Members with I.D. \$16 entry.
 Unlimited entry \$19 per week.
 Admission: \$18 adult, \$16 student, \$14 under 13.

Address: 199 Ferry Road, Waltham, Christchurch.
 Ph: +64 (0)3 389 5061 www.bouldering.co.nz

Otago

Waitaki Recreation Centre

NZAC discount on memberships and casual entry.
 Annual pass: Adult \$120 (NZAC \$90), junior \$85 (NZAC \$65), family \$165 (NZAC \$125). Casual per day: Adult \$12 (NZAC \$10), junior \$8.50 (NZAC \$6.50), family \$16.50 (NZAC \$12).
 10% discount to school kids as a group if paid in full. Other groups to pay gym hire and instructor, plus gear \$30 per group.
 Address: 43 Orwell Street, Oamaru. Ph: +64 (0)3 434 6932.

www.sportsground.co.nz/waitakircr/112878

Basecamp Wanaka Climbing Centre

Admission: NZAC members \$13.50 Address: 50 Cardrona Valley Road, Wanaka. Ph: +64 (0)3 443 1110.

www.basecampadventures.co.nz

Basecamp Adventures Queenstown

NZAC members \$22 Admission: \$25 Adult.
 Address: 3/15 Red Oaks Drive, Frankton. Ph: +64 (0)3 443 1110.
www.basecampadventures.co.nz

Southland

YMCA Climbing Wall Invercargill

NZAC members with I.D. \$5 entry.
 Admission: \$6, free to YMCA members.
 Address: 77 Tay Street, Invercargill. Ph: +64 (0)3 218 2989
www.recreation.ymcasouth.co.nz/com-rec/climbing-wall

Australia

Cliffhanger Climbing Gym Altona Nth VIC

Concession rate entry for NZAC adult members.
 Admission: adults \$17, students \$15, 12 and under \$12, bouldering \$10. Passes and gear hire available. Cnr Grievs Parade & Dohertys Road, Altona Nth, Vic. Ph: 3025 +61 (0)3 9369 6400
www.cliffhanger.com.au

NO FEAR

BY ERIN STEWART

FLOCK HILL, Labour Day weekend, 2011. It's way too hot to be climbing so most of the day is spent snoozing in the shade, but people are amping to send before Flock closes for the season. Psych is high. The whole crew caddies for me on a field classic V4. I flash the crux feeling strong, confident, in control. Then comes the awkward, grovelly, smeary top-out that I haven't looked at or prepared for. I don't know where the holds are, and I don't know which feet to use. Hesitation, indecision, analysis paralysis. Despite much encouragement and beta from below, I'm stuck and decide to bail, but also not really knowing how to downclimb or fall properly, I land badly. The arch of my left foot briefly makes contact with my left ankle bone, completely rupturing four out of six major ligaments—the other two are left 'hanging by a thread'—and fracturing my cuboid. Ouch.

Physically, the injury wasn't much to write home about. More inconvenient than anything. I got lucky. But mentally, it was catastrophic. I finally had a real-world consequence and label to put to the subconscious feeling that had always dogged me while climbing—The Fear.

Over the next few years, The Fear ruled and grew. I hesitated on every move, questioned every foot placement. When I later fell pregnant and was physically unable to climb anymore, it was secretly a relief; I could finally relax and stop battling. After a three-year child-wrangling hiatus, I had to make a choice: give up climbing forever (and my life as I knew it), or commit to starting from scratch and relearning everything.

What followed has been an intense and, at times, exhausting exercise in self-discovery and reflection. I've had to face up to and accept many unpleasant truths about myself, and learn to manage feelings of embarrassment, shame, failure and self-pity. The break from climbing had compounded The Fear to monumental proportions; for the first year or so back, I couldn't boulder more than a couple of feet off the ground, if that. It was ridiculous and embarrassing. I felt lost and hopeless. The challenge seemed insurmountable. But I couldn't bring myself to give up. I still loved climbing, the places it took me to, the people that came with it. If I was ever going to enjoy climbing again, I was going to have to let go of my ego, accept my limitations, and ultimately stop beating myself up and learn to be kind to myself.

Slowly, and with the encouragement of some very supportive, patient and kind friends (one in particular, you know who you are), I started to quietly embrace the ridiculousness. I turned it into a joke, a classic self-defence mechanism. To my amazement, allowing both myself and others to laugh at it took the power out of it. I became known as the 'Lowball Queen'. It stopped mattering that I couldn't (wouldn't) climb like everyone else. I was having fun again.

Around this time, I listened to Arno Ilgner, author of *The Rock Warrior's Way*, on the *Enormocast*. He discusses 'intuitive vs analytical' climbers, a concept which struck a chord, especially his theory about never trying to push yourself (or allowing others to push you) past your limit. Despite having heard this before, this time it triggered something of an epiphany for some reason. I could suddenly let myself

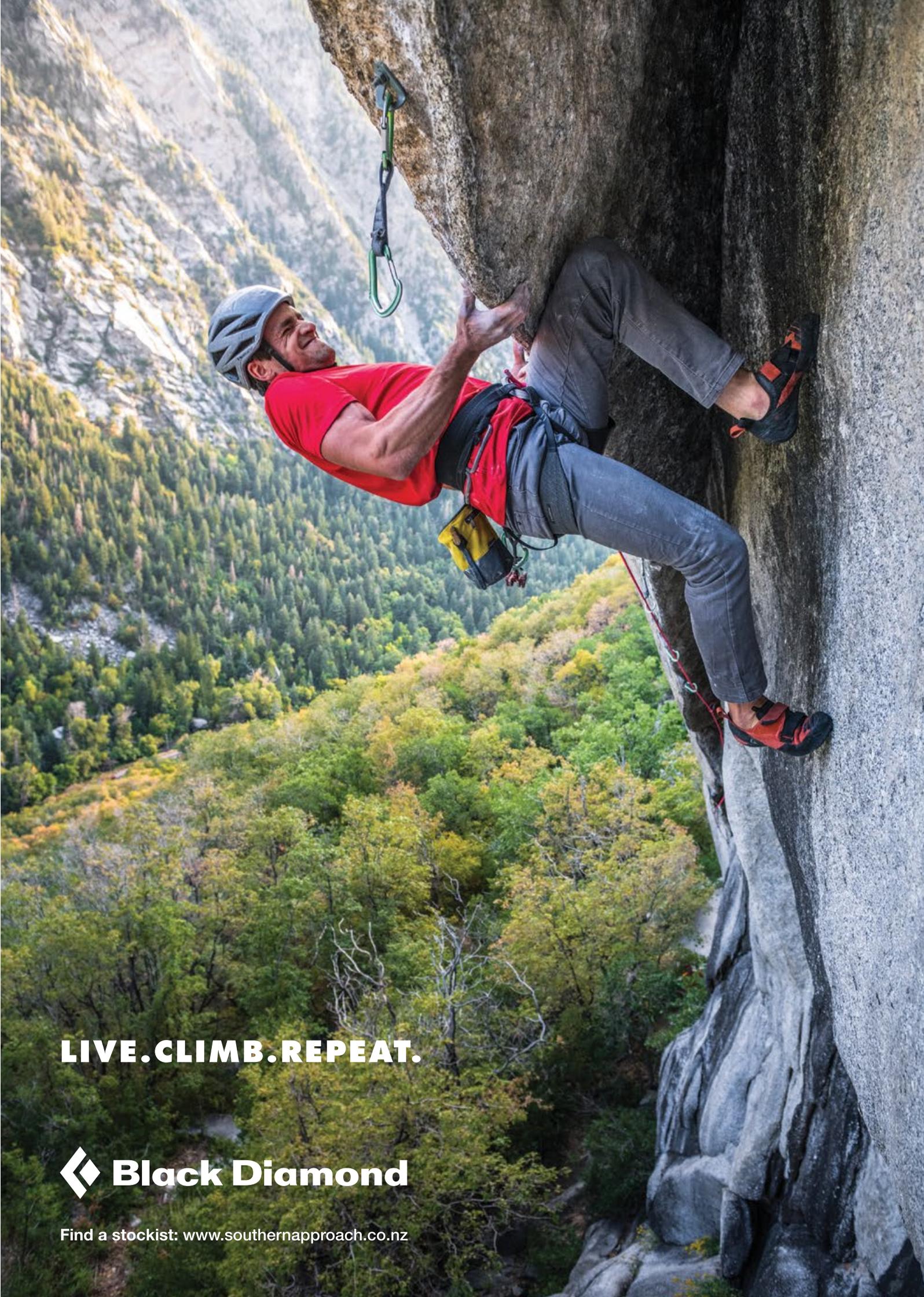


The author attempting *Rubble* (26), The Cave, Christchurch. DEREK THATCHER

off the hook, stop trying to conquer The Fear, and stop forcing myself to try things I didn't want to, which had led to guilt and shame when I inevitably failed. Adopting this strategy gave me the mental freedom to learn. I stopped worrying about holding myself back and being embarrassed about it because I had a plan. I started focussing only on what I could do and trying to improve on that, and lo and behold my overall skill-set slowly started to grow and expand, and my confidence along with it. Removing perceived expectations and reframing my mindset to be about enjoying the moment allowed me to try harder and still feel a sense of achievement, even if I didn't send (which was most of the time).

Skip ahead to now, four years on in the journey, and this approach seems to have started paying dividends—I succeeded in climbing several 'normal-sized' boulders at The Hill this last season, even ticking some respectably-sized projects at my grade limit (not high by any means, but not bum-scrapers either). The summer project is learning how to lead climb on a route at the Cave (I've only ever led one route before, six years ago)—an odd choice for learning some might say, but by some miracle of miracles, I'm not terrified of it. Nervous, sure. Anxious, definitely. I have a lot of mental and physical fitness to gain before I'm anywhere near close to sending the route, but the trajectory of progress is steep and that is more than motivating enough to keep on battling. I've learned that I must know every hold and move intimately—I am not an intuitive climber. Knowing precisely what to do and when and how to execute every single move keeps The Fear at bay and allows me to try hard. I even take whippers. It's surreal.

I stubbornly force myself to be proud of my achievements, however meagre they may be, and of how far I've come. While I have not overcome The Fear (honestly, I doubt I ever will) and I still have a long way to go, what seemed laughable and impossible at first has become not only possible, but enjoyable. I still struggle with shame and embarrassment and bouts of self-pity, but I now know from experience that those feelings will be crushed by the high when I eventually succeed, even if that success is only linking a couple of extra moves. **G**



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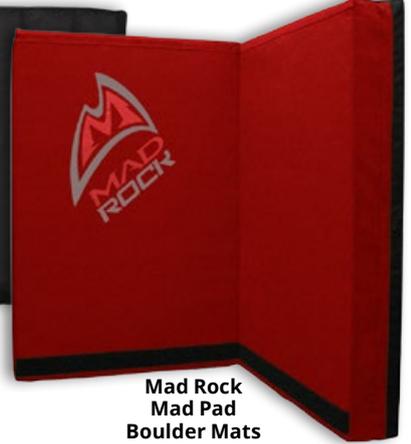
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