



FLASH AS

PROFILE BY **KESTER BROWN**

Beka Burberry is an elusive sort of person. She is currently one of New Zealand's best female rock climbers, but has stayed pretty well out of the spotlight. She doesn't froth on social media, doesn't have an 8a scorecard, and doesn't do comps. She just likes to rock climb. A lot.

I was planning a day out bouldering at Castle Hill with some mutual friends so I invited Beka along. I texted her: 'We'll pick you up on the way out of town, what's your address?'

'I live in a bus', she replied, 'I'll see you up there'.

We didn't hear from her all day, and I'd pretty much given up on the idea of a profile for *The Climber*. But just before dusk, Beka slinked up to our group in the boulders. Her bus had overheated coming up the pass, she said, then she'd been hanging out with her dog in the sun at the carpark. So far she wasn't giving the impression of a hardcore rock climber.

Beka was worried about Bronson (her bus): 'Argh, I'm so bad with cars', she said, 'once, there was smoke and steam coming out of my car's bonnet as I drove along the motorway. I thought it was vapour trails 'cos I was driving so fast. The engine blew up shortly after that'.

I started to worry about Bronson too. Beka decided to move into the bus with her partner Tom Allen (who's also fairly handy at the rock climbing), and two dogs, Ruby and Daisy when she and Tom returned to New Zealand in 2016 after a few years climbing overseas. (Sadly, Ruby recently passed away, aged 19). Beka's currently in her second year of studying towards a Diploma of Art and Creativity by distance through the Learning Connexion School of Creativity and Art.

Prior to starting the course in April last year, Beka and Tom travelled around Australia for a year, climbing full time, before settling down in Blackheath in the Blue Mountains for a couple of years. Beka loved the opportunities the Bluies provided for pushing her climbing level, through the small, supportive community and the variety and quality of crags.

In early 2012, Beka decided to make climbing the main focus in her life, and since then has been dedicated to building a lifestyle that enables her to climb almost every day. Five years later, Beka says she's still not prepared to compromise that ideal. The primary reason for living in a bus is to enable Beka and Tom

BEKA BURBERY

to rock climb as much as possible, and work as little as possible. There wasn't one location in New Zealand that they thought would satisfy both of their climbing ambitions, so they travel from crag to crag, following the climbing seasons around the country. So far, it's worked out pretty well, Beka paints, hangs out with Tom and Daisy, and climbs almost every day.

Beka's been steadily progressing her route climbing over the last five years, continually getting better, without any significant plateaus or injuries. I asked her if she anticipates that run to continue, and how important it is to her to maintain that progression curve. 'I enjoy it more if I'm climbing well', she replied, 'I've never been on a climbing trip and just climbed easy routes. I like to push myself'. Apart from doing a bit of bouldering at the BBC indoor wall in the Bluies, Beka hasn't trained properly, but recognises that she's at a point now where she is going to have to if she wants to continue getting better. 'I definitely want to keep pro-

ABOVE Beka and Daisy at home in the bus. KESTER BROWN
RIGHT Beka on one of her favourite climbs, *Hairline 2000* (28), at Diamond Falls, in the Blue Mountains, Australia. SIU ON AU YEUNG





gressing', she said, 'but I don't like training, I like rock climbing'. It's a dilemma. 'I think if I had someone telling me how to train properly, that would make the sacrifice easier. I have no idea what to do'.

It was early June when I met Beka at Castle Hill—the perfect season for bouldering. But she didn't seem very psyched. Beka says she much prefers route climbing, and bouldering just hasn't grabbed her in the same way. 'I really like feeling like I've done a lot of climbing. Doing lots of moves is satisfying, whereas falling on the same move over and over again is demoralising for me'. Beka said she's hardly bouldered outdoors, and views bouldering as more of a tool to work on her route climbing weaknesses. She claims she has a 'serious lack of power'. 'Endurance is quite easy for me to obtain, but I'm not a very strong climber, I rely on technique and endurance to get me up routes. Tom and I did a bouldering trip to the Grampians back in

2013, and I got really shut down. I think that put me off bouldering. I had much more success on the routes'. 'And I love the exposure, on walls like Taipan, being high on the routes, I just love that'.

I asked her about her early inspirations in climbing, and how she got interested in performance climbing and pushing her limits. 'When I think back to my early days in climbing, I remember a specific day at Paynes, it was in 2011. I saw a woman climbing *Amino Pro* (24), and I thought, *she's on a 24, that's amazing, one day I want to be like her*. A year later I sent my first grade 24 at Froggatt Edge'.

'This past summer I was back at Paynes, and I had a few ladies tell me they'd never seen a woman climb as hard as me before. It made me think that female climbers in New Zealand might not realise they can climb hard because there aren't many role models for them here'.

'I haven't met many other women climbing harder than grade 25 since I've been back in

BEKA DECIDED TO MAKE CLIMBING THE MAIN FOCUS IN HER LIFE ... SHE TRAVELS FROM CRAG TO CRAG, FOLLOWING THE CLIMBING SEASONS AROUND THE COUNTRY ... SHE PAINTS, HANGS OUT WITH TOM AND DAISY, AND CLIMBS ALMOST EVERY DAY.

New Zealand. Travelling to Australia helped me a lot because I was seeing women climbing hard all the time. Also, I find the climbing in New Zealand to be limiting. The climbs are often short and powerful, which doesn't suit a lot of women, me included. Because New Zealand crags are often small, if your'e looking for projects at a certain grade, you might only have one or two options to choose from, and neither may appeal or suit you, whereas when you have access to larger crags with more routes and varying styles, you have more freedom to pick and choose climbs to suit your strengths.'

After her course, Beka plans to travel around Europe, living in a van and climbing full time for at least two years, then move back to the Blue Mountains. It sounds like those training plans might get put on hold then, but with her drive and dedication to the climbing life, I suspect she won't slow down. **E**



LEFT Beka climbing *Transilvania* (8a/29), at Oliana, Spain. JONNY BAKER

FACING PAGE *Wild vs Domesticated*, acrylic on paper. See more of Beka's work at 'Rebekah Burberry Art' on Facebook.

BEKA'S HIGH FIVES

CLIMBING ACHIEVEMENTS

1. Getting to climb with Wiz Fineron.
2. Having sent grade 8a/29 climbs in four different countries.
3. Two grade 29 FFAs in New Zealand: *Trinity*, at Whanganui Bay, and *Dancing on a Skewer Direct*, at Paynes Ford (for those wondering, no I didn't use the 'off-route' rest jugs at midway on *Dancing*).
4. Onsighting *Righteous* (27) at Al Cap in Wanaka.
5. The hardest boulder problem I've sent is *Disconnect* (V7) at Flock Hill.

CLIMBING STRENGTHS

1. Crimping everything, especially slopers and jugs.
2. Somehow managing to send projects on the last day of a climbing trip.
3. Endurance pumpers.
4. Straight-arm shoulder-rolling.
5. Professional short-roper for Wiz Fineron. In the event Wiz cuts loose, I will hold the rope just tight enough for him to stay on the wall whilst simultaneously making sure no bystanders are aware of the short-rope (sorry Wiz, gig's up).

FAVOURITE CLIMBS OF ANY STYLE

1. *Don't Believe the Tripe* (29), Boronia Point, Blue Mountains, Australia.
2. *The Invisible Fist* (26), Taipan Wall, the Grampians, Australia.
3. *Hairline 2000* (28), Diamond Falls, Blue Mountains, Australia.
4. *Transilvania*, (29), Margalef, Spain.
5. *Dancing on a Skewer Direct* (29), Paynes Ford, New Zealand.

BEST ROUTES IN NEW ZEALAND

1. *Moses* (27), Little Babylon.
2. *Send a Gorilla* (23), Paynes Ford.
3. *Dancing on a Skewer Direct* (29), Paynes Ford.
4. *Lollapalooza* (25), Wanaka.
5. *Trinity* (29), Whanganui Bay.

CLIMBING AREAS IN THE WORLD YOU WANT TO VISIT

1. Céüse, France.
2. Waterval Boven and Rocklands, South Africa (sport climbing).
3. Oliana, Spain.
4. Yosemite, USA.
5. Kalymnos, Greece.

ROUTE STYLE

1. Crimpy.
2. Not too sharp.
3. Not too polished (sorry not sorry Castle Hill).
4. Pumpy.
5. Rad, fun and exposed (Taipan Wall!).

SCARIEST CLIMBING MOMENTS

1. The first time I met Wiz Fineron.
2. Falling 15 metres into a crevasse on a day we'd planned to go ice climbing. (Thanks to me, we didn't get to climb).
3. While walking to a crag Ruby (my beagle) got her back leg cammed in-between two boulders. She was fine, and was freed eventually.
4. Falling badly off the top of a boulder problem in the Grampians and landing in-between two pads, spraining my ankle.
5. Trad climbing in Arapiles on a wide

crack with not enough of the right sized gear, and seriously running it out whilst attempting to place gear that barely qualified as protection.

NEW ZEALAND PAINTERS

1. Lynda Bell.
2. Sonja Drake.
3. Geoff Noble.
4. Karen Neal.
5. Ivan Clarke.

BOOKS YOU'VE READ THIS YEAR

1. *The Divide* by Nicholas Evans (I've only read one book this year. I'm not much of a reader, please don't judge me).

ITEMS ALWAYS IN THE TOP POCKET OF YOUR CRAGGING PACK

1. Dog treats.
2. Hand sanitiser.
3. Toilet paper.
4. Snacks.
5. Tape.

MOST PLAYED SONGS ON YOUR IPOD

1. *Time is Dancing* by Ben Howard.
2. *Empire Ants* by Gorillaz, ft Little Dragon.
3. *Fortune's Fool* by Hiatus, ft Shura.
4. *Twirl Me* by Wildlight.
5. *King and Cross* by Ásgeir.

APRES CLIMB BEVERAGE CHOICE

1. Green tea.
2. Green tea.
3. Green tea.
4. Green tea.
5. Peanut butter (I literally drink the stuff).