



Northern England

Chris Craggs

A rock climbing guidebook
to selected routes on the
gritstone and sandstone edges of
Yorkshire and Northumberland

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Cover: Adrian Berry on *Western Front* (E3 5c) - [page 105](#) - at Almscliff. Photo: Duncan Skelton

This page: Colin Binks on *Eastern Arete* (S 4a) - [page 351](#) - at Berryhill. Photo: Chris Craggs

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A close-up, low-angle shot of a man with glasses and a black t-shirt with red trim on the cuffs and collar, climbing an indoor rock wall. He is gripping a light-colored rock hold with his right hand. In the background, another climber in a yellow shirt is visible. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the climber's arm and hand.

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Ali Kennedy on Western Front (E3 5c) - [page 105](#) - one of Almscliff's finest offerings. Photo: Jamie Moss



This guidebook covers a huge swathe of Northern England and its high quality outcrop climbing. Some of the venues such as Almscliff and Bowden Doors are well known, though between these are many smaller gems that see few visitors other than knowledgeable locals.

Our journey starts near the Yorkshire-Lancashire border with many of the varied venues that make fine gritstone cliffs of West Yorkshire. These crags give a climbing experience similar to their counterparts to the south in the Peak, only perhaps a little less accommodating - sometimes remote, sometimes savage, sometimes wild, but almost always rewarding.

The next stop is the North York Moors where we find a different kind of cliff. The sandstone here offers more short outcrop-style climbing, but there are fewer familiar names and none of the celebrity ticks. That doesn't mean it isn't worth visiting though, and most who make the effort will be pleasantly surprised with what they find.

The final destination is the rolling hills of Northumberland - the Country's best kept secret. There is none of the hectic atmosphere of the Lake and Peak Districts here, just empty hills, beautiful crags and some fine climbing to keep you busy.

The rock types vary from the coarsest gritstone around, to black columns of iron-hard dolomite and onto filigrees and flutings of superb sandstone. The cliffs range in size from some that are little more than overgrown boulders, to buttresses up to more than 20m tall. Whilst the areas don't have the extensive edges of the Peak, or the soaring crags of Wales and the Lakes, they do have variety and quality by the shed-load.

This guidebook draws together this fine array of climbs and crags from right across the three areas. It offers an introduction to these fascinating climbs - explore, enjoy and respect them - there are many great days of climbing between these covers.



Alan James at the top of the classic *Callerhues Crack* (HVS 5a) - page 265 - at Callerhues Crag. Photo Chris Craggs

The Book

The term 'Northern England' can mean very different things to different people, usually depending where they live in the country. For the purposes of this book we use the word 'Northern' to refer to the gritstone of West Yorkshire, the sandstone of the North York Moors and the dolerite and sandstone of Northumberland. The book doesn't cover the limestone of West Yorkshire, or any of the Lake District, both of which could justifiably claim to be 'northern'. The coverage is aimed more north eastwards focusing particularly on the two rock types of gritstone and sandstone.

The book uses the same presentation style and degree of coverage that was started so successfully with Peak Grit East in 2001, and continued through all our other books since including Western Grit (2003), Northern Limestone (2004) and the follow-up to PGE, Eastern Grit (2006). This level of coverage means that we have probably only managed to document around 20% of the routes in the three areas. Obviously the content focuses on the prime spots and the best routes but I would still be surprised if there aren't at least five crags in this book that you have never heard of let alone visited.

Even on the crags that you have heard of you are most likely to find classic routes that didn't attract a second glance before. Use the book to explore a bit, and if you like the areas then the list of other guides on page 14 should give some useful further reading.



Alan James researching the complex pinnacles at Brimham. Photo: Chris Craggs

Web Site - www.rockfax.com

This book is supported by the online Rockfax Route Database which contains a listing of every route in this book (and all our other books) with the opportunity for you to lodge comments and vote on grades and star ratings. This feedback is essential to help us ensure complete and up-to-date coverage for all the climbs since opinions and circumstances around the routes are continually changing. It can also be a useful place for you to seek out others' opinions on a certain route before you climb it, or check out what other people think about the grade.

In addition to the Route Database, the web site has Area Guides to Yorkshire, North York Moors and Northumberland which contain slightly more information than on the introduction and logistics pages of this guide.

Feedback - If you find anything in this guide that you disagree with - a hard grade, and dubious star-rating, a misleading route description or a blatant error - then please let us know.

Email - feedback@rockfax.com

Guidebook Footnote

The inclusion of a climbing area in this guidebook does not mean that you have a right of access or the right to climb upon it. The descriptions of routes within this guide are recorded for historical reasons only and no reliance should be placed on the accuracy of the description. The grades set in this guide are a fair assessment of the difficulty of the climbs. Climbers who attempt a route of a particular standard should use their own judgment as to whether they are proficient enough to tackle that route. This book is not a substitute for experience and proper judgment. The authors, publisher and distributors of this book do not recognise any liability for injury or damage caused to, or by, climbers, third parties, or property arising from such persons seeking reliance on this guidebook as an assurance for their own safety.



Matt Kilner on the superb crack of *Thin Red Line* (E1 5b) - page 54 - Heptonstall Quarry in Yorkshire. Photo: Jamie Moss

Most of the crags in this guidebook have no major access problems and all that is required to ensure continued freedom of access is a responsible approach otherwise the freedoms already won could be so easily lost. The most common access conflicts are not caused by the climbing of routes, but the parking of cars, the walk to the crag, the dropping of litter and people who insist on letting their dogs run wild. These are all things that are well within our control as visitors. Please read the specific access information in the crag introductions to check on any parking suggestions and crag restrictions that may be in place. Infrequently new access restrictions do occur mainly due either to nesting birds, or because of potential fire hazards - signs will normally be posted. If you need up-to-date information about access to a certain crag then check the BMC Access database - www.thebmc.co.uk - or post a question on UKClimbing - www.ukclimbing.com. If you do encounter access problems, contact the BMC via the web site (see advert opposite).



Environmental Considerations

Every time we climb a route our hands and feet, and rope and runners, erode the rock slightly. Our chalk dust, our food waste, our foot prints and our cars all have an impact on the crag environment. These facts are undeniable and something all climbers need to come to terms with as our number increases. Although we can't stop our impact completely, we can do many things which significantly reduce it.

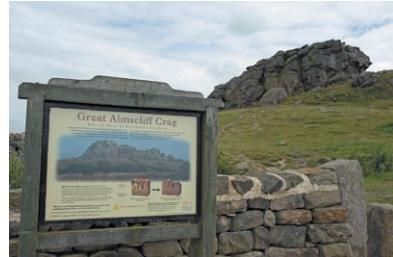
Here are some suggestions:

Rock Damage - Much of the modern damage to rock has occurred when climbers have attempted to retrieve stuck gear. Equipment that gets stuck is invariably gear that is badly placed, so think before you place it. If it does get well and truly jammed it may be better leaving it for someone who can get it out without wrecking the rock. Another way which holds get damaged is when people climb routes without cleaning their boots properly. Remember, clean boots means less eroded footholds and significantly better friction! Brushing on the harder routes needs to be done with great care as even iron-hard gritstone can be damaged by over-zealous cleaning. Finally, there is no reason for attempting to improve holds on any of the routes in this guide and if you think otherwise then you are wrong.

Bouldering Pads - If you own a bouldering pad then use it, not just when bouldering but also when trad climbing. Place it on the grass under the routes when you gear up, place it under the route when you do the first move, sit on it when belaying. By doing this you will help reduce the erosion of grass and vegetation at the base of the crags, as well as maybe saving yourself from a nasty twisted ankle if you slip off before placing a runner.

Chalk - The use of chalk has become almost universal yet it is an unsightly addition to the rock and, being alkaline, is alien to the acid moorlands which many of these crags are on. The pale streaks below well used holds show where the dark lichen that gives the rock its colour is being killed off. Try and use less chalk, use a chalk ball, dip less frequently and zip-up your chalk bag before you reach the top of the route where the wind can invert it.

Top-roping - The action of a rope sliding over the rock on the top edge of a crag can act like a saw, particularly on soft rock like sandstone. Before you top-ropes a route, consider leading it. If you really do want to top-ropes it then please read carefully the sections on 'Top-roping and Soft Rock' in the North York Moors (page 194) and Northumberland (page 238) introductions which describe the best way to set up a top-ropes to minimise damage.





CLIMB IT, WALK IT, PROJECT IT

THE BMC CRAG CODE

Access Check the Regional Access Database (RAD) on www.thebmc.co.uk for the latest access information

Parking Park carefully – avoid gateways and driveways

Footpaths Keep to established paths – leave gates as you find them

Risk Climbing can be dangerous – accept the risks and be aware of other people around you

Respect Groups and individuals – respect the rock, local climbing ethics and other people

Wildlife Do not disturb livestock, wildlife or cliff vegetation; respect seasonal bird nesting restrictions

Dogs Keep dogs under control at all times; don't let your dog chase sheep or disturb wildlife

Litter

'Leave no trace' – take all litter home with you

Toilets

Don't make a mess – bury your waste

Economy Do everything you can to support the rural economy – shop locally

BMC Participation Statement — Climbing, hill walking and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions and involvement.

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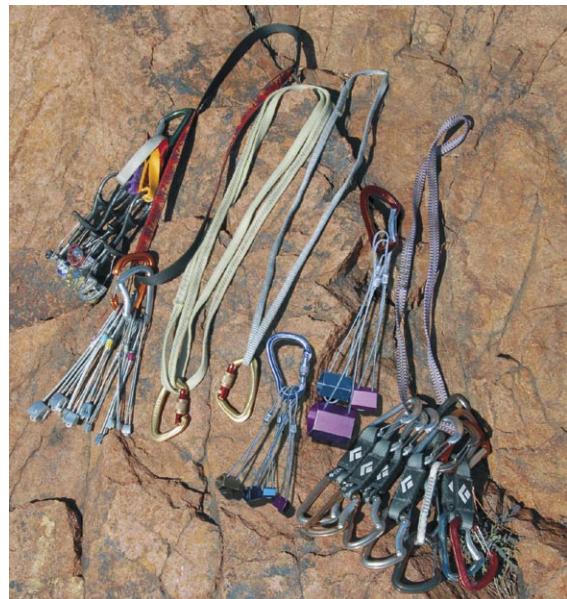
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 **BMC**

On the vast majority of routes in this guide there is no fixed gear so everything you need will have to be carried up the crag. Starting with the correct equipment is essential so it is worth taking a few moments to try and envisage all the runner placements that might be available. It may seem obvious but wide cracks take wide runners so starting up an off-width with a bunch of small wires doesn't make much sense. Taking extra gear 'for the belay' is okay if you are comfortable at the grade but if you are really pushing yourself, then lighten the load a little and wander back down to get the belay gear while basking in the glory of your ascent. No-one ever got any extra points for arriving at the top of a 10m route with most of their gear still on their harness.



Runners

Many old routes which were bold and unprotected leads in their day are now relatively safe with modern protection. The wide breaks and cracks make gritstone and sandstone ideal places for camming devices, often in positions where nothing else would hold. Hexes can be useful in wider parallel cracks and wires are essential for the narrower cracks. For harder routes micro-wires and more advanced camming devices may be found essential, plus some duplication of wires and camming devices in the useful ranges.

Ropes

Most outcrop routes are short enough to be climbed on a single 10mm or 11mm rope. There are lighter 9mm single ropes available but the abrasive nature of the rock means that you are better advised to go for something thicker and more durable. The only exception to this are routes which wander around in which case you may need 2 x 9mm half-ropes or use one rope doubled.

Other Gear

Beyond these essentials you may find useful; a poker for persuading recalcitrant gear; tape for bandaging your hands before, or after, they are wrecked by some savage crack; a tooth brush for cleaning the smaller holds on the harder routes; and a bouldering mat can be very welcome on those unprotected starts.

A Versatile Gritstone Rack

The list below is suggested for taking to the crag but not necessarily for carrying up every route. Use your judgement before setting off to tailor your rack to the route.

- **Full set of wires** across the range racked on separate krabs - one for the small wires, one for the larger ones. Two sets of wires are useful for many routes.

- **Full set of camming devices** if you can afford them. If not then get a few well spaced sizes first and supplement with some Hexes.

- **6 to 8 extenders.**

- **2 or 3 slings** with screwgates.



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Alan James checking grades at Call-erhues

The British Trad grade is probably never more appropriately used than it is on outcrop routes. Here the subtleties and versatility of the Trad Grade can be appreciated to their maximum.

Bold Routes - Some gritstone and sandstone routes have limited protection and you can easily find yourself in very serious situations, especially on the harder climbs. This possibility should be clear from the route descriptions but please make sure you use your own skill and judgment as to whether you will be able to safely complete a chosen climb. A bold E2 may only feel like an indoor grade 6a on a top-rope but it is a very different proposition as a lead or solo.

British Trad Grade

1) Adjectival grade (Diff, VDiff, Severe, Hard Severe (HS), Very Severe (VS), Hard Very Severe (HVS), E1, E2, E3, E4 and upwards).

An overall picture of the route including how well protected it is, how sustained and a general indication of the level of difficulty of the whole route.

2) Technical grade (4a, 4b, 4c, 5a,).

The difficulty of the hardest single move, or short section.

Colour Coding

The routes and boulder problems are all given a colour-coded dot corresponding to a grade band and approximate difficulty level. This colour code is designed to indicate routes and problems that a particular climber might be happy attempting. Since most people are happier bouldering at a harder level than they lead, the boulder problems tend to have harder individual moves on them for the same colour-code.

Green Routes - Severe and under and V0 and under. Good for beginners and those looking for an easy life.

Orange Routes - Hard Severe to HVS and V0+ to V2. General ticking routes for those with more experience including a lot of excellent routes and problems.

Red Routes - E1 to E3 and V3 to V6.

Routes and problems for the experienced and keen climber including many of the three areas' great classics.

Black Routes - E4 and V7 and above.

A grade band for the talented.

ROUTE GRADES		
BRITISH TRAD GRADE (See note on bold routes)		
Sport Grade	UIAA	USA
Mod Moderate	I	5.1
Diff Difficult	II	5.2
VDiff Very Difficult	III+	5.3
Sev Severe	IV	5.4
BOLD HS Hard Severe 4b SAFE	IV+	5.5
BOLD VS Very Severe 5a SAFE	V-	5.6
BOLD HVS Hard Very Severe 5b SAFE	V	5.7
BOLD E1 5a SAFE	V+	5.8
BOLD E2 5a SAFE	VI-	5.9
BOLD E3 5b SAFE	VI	5.10a
BOLD E4 5c SAFE	VI+	5.10b
BOLD E5 6a SAFE	VII-	5.10c
BOLD E6 6b SAFE	VII	5.10d
BOLD E7 6c SAFE	VIII+	5.11a
BOLD E8 6c SAFE	VIII	5.11b
BOLD E9 7a SAFE	VIII+	5.11c
BOLD E10 7b SAFE	VIII+	5.11d
	VIII+	5.12a
	IX-	5.12b
	IX	5.12c
	IX+	5.12d
	X-	5.13a
	X	5.13b
	X+	5.13c
	X+	5.13d
	XI-	5.14a
	XI	5.14b
	XI+	5.14c
	XI+	5.14d
	XI+	5.15a

Bouldering Grade	VB	V0-	V0	V0+	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5	V6	V7	V8	V9	V10	V11	V12	V13	V14		
UK Tech Grade	4c or easier	5a	5c	5b	6a	6b	6c	6c+	7a	6b	7a+	7b	7b+	7c	7c+	8a	8a+	8b	8b+	8c
Font Grade	4	4+	5	5+	6a	6a+	6b	6c	6c+	7a	7a+	7b	7b+	7c	7c+	8a	8a+	8b	8b+	8c

Practice makes good.

Practice plus coaching makes perfect.



There's no doubt that if you climb a lot you will improve. You'll learn from your own mistakes and triumphs and progress at your own pace. But you're sure to experience plateaus in your development. Stages where you just can't seem to advance, improve or grasp a new technique.

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Yorkshire is also well known for its great limestone climbing which is mostly located in the Yorkshire Dales National Park, just to the north west of Rylstone, Crookrise and the Barden Moor crags covered in this book.

Northern Limestone (Rockfax 2004)

This book covers the Yorkshire big three limestone crags of Malham, Kilnsey and Gordale as well as plenty of other smaller venues. As a bonus you also get all the Peak Limestone and the South Lakes Limestone.

For more gritstone coverage take a look at **Eastern Grit (Rockfax 2006)** and **Western Grit (Rockfax 2003)** which cover the main grit crags of the Peak District and surrounding area.

For information on all Rockfax publications - www.rockfax.com

Other Publishers

There are several other guides by different publishers which complement the coverage in this book well with more detailed information on the respective areas.

Yorkshire Gritstone (YMC 1998)

This large book contains many more smaller crags than this book, spread from Heptonstall in the south to Eavestone Crag in the north. All crags have complete route listings and there is some bouldering although only the major problems.

Yorkshire Gritstone Bouldering - Volume 1 (Total Climbing 2008)

A dedicated bouldering guide for the main crags in the Yorkshire area. Another volume is planned for the more esoteric Yorkshire bouldering areas also due to be published in 2008.

Climbing in North East England (SBP/CMC 2003)

An extensive book with an amazing 44 crags listed across the North York Moors, Eastern Pennines, Swaledale and Tyne and Wear areas, of which only 9 make this book. Many are only small but there is certainly plenty more to discover for those who want to explore a bit more.

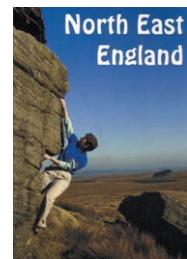
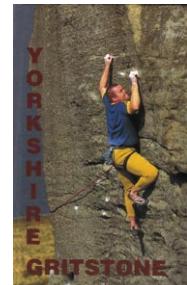
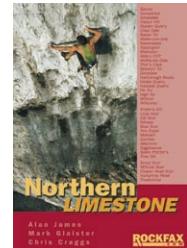
Northumberland Climbing Guide (NMC 2004)

All the crags in the area traditionally called the 'County'. In addition to the crags listed in this book there are plenty more smaller venues in the area north of Newcastle and south of the border. Some bouldering information.

Northumberland Bouldering (NMC 2000)

The first attempt at covering the fine bouldering in the Northumberland area. Due for a new edition sometime in 2008 or 2009.

Rockfax acknowledge the huge effort in documenting the route and crag information over the years carried out by volunteers and members of the Yorkshire Mountaineering Club, Cleveland Mountaineering Club and Northumberland Mountaineering Club in particular.



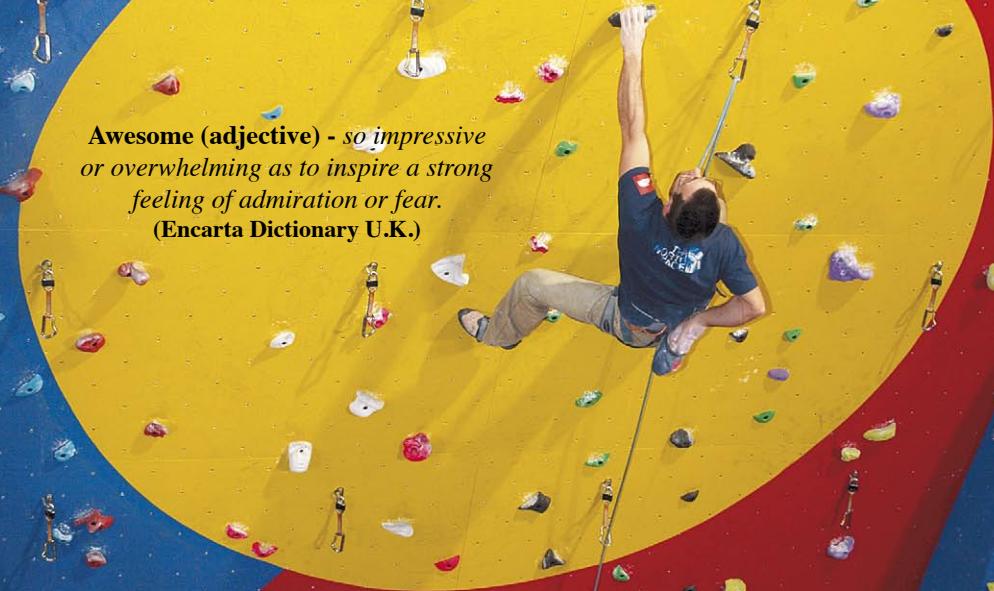
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This graded list was compiled by pooling my 40+ years of experience of climbing over the whole area, with Dave Musgrove's intimate knowledge of Yorkshire Gritstone, to give the most accurate assessment of these widespread climbs as possible. Tony Marr has helped with his encyclopedic knowledge of the North York Moors. As ever, the upper end of the list is more open to conjecture though we have sought a consensus wherever possible. The secretive world of Northumbrian sandstone has proved more difficult. We have used a mixture of feedback from the Rockfax databases, personal experience and some pointers from interested locals. If you think there are errors in the list, you may be mistaken or it may be an honest mistake; either way, let us know via the Route Database on the web site - www.rockfax.com

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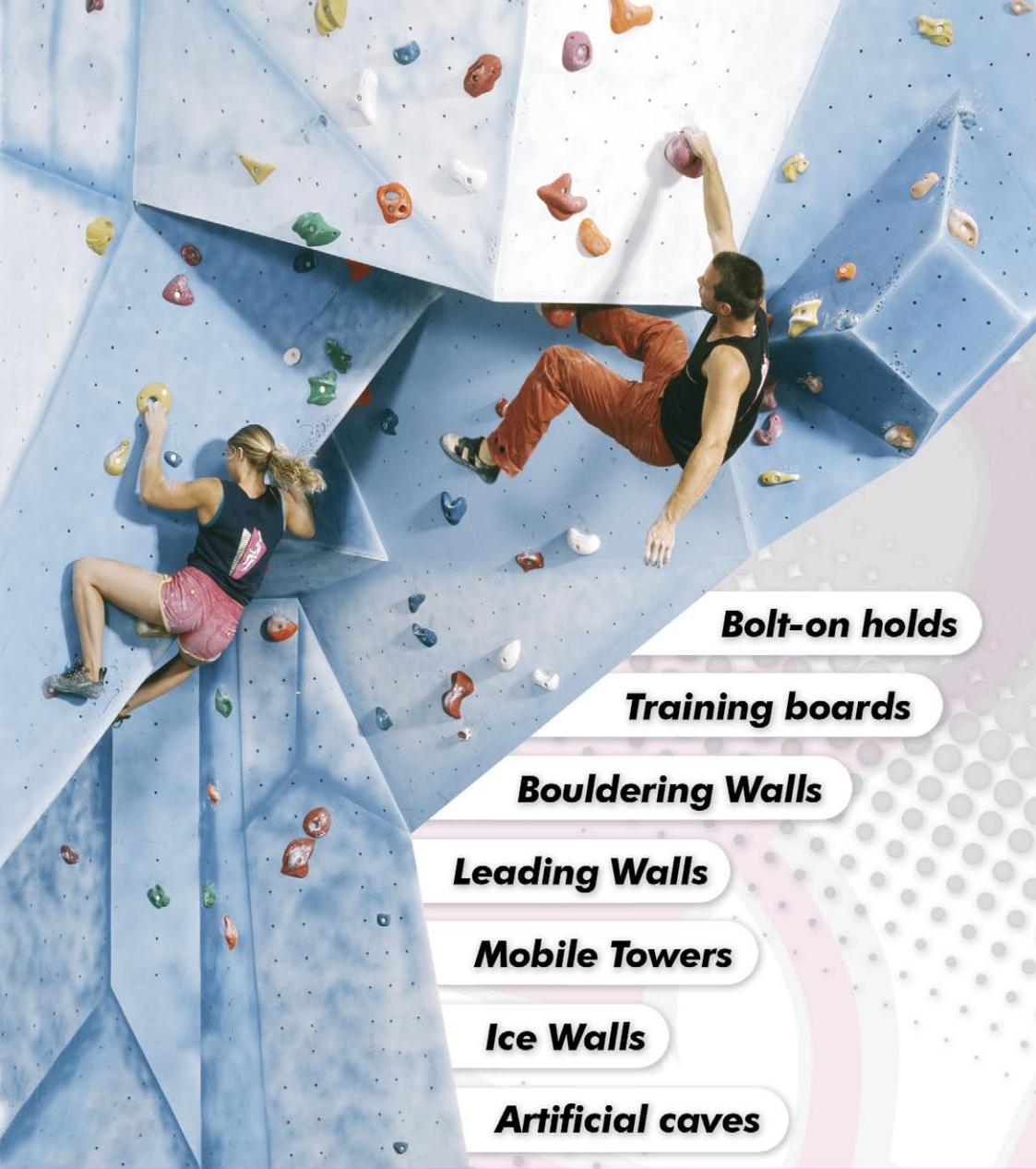
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Artificial caves

Photo: Craggy Island



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at Back Bowden. Photo: Jamie Moss



Climbing Walls

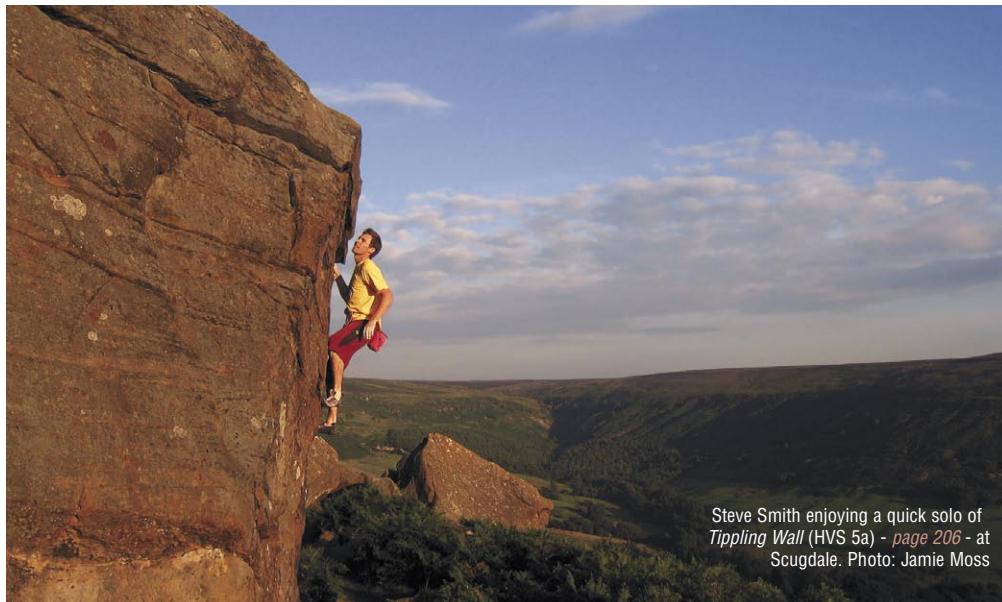


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Steve Smith enjoying a quick solo of
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Scugdale. Photo: Jamie Moss

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The big fella' scooping out Eavestones.

Photo: Sherri Davy

When I first got the climbing bug (obsession) my long suffering parents were tasked with shipping me to such destinations as Brimham, Almscliff, Scugdale, the Wainstones and Slipstones. So started a lifelong interest with these 'little green cliffs' - thanks for the support (and the lifts).

In the very early days I climbed with Adrian Bridge and Alasdair Amato - we had an epic bivi at Scugdale. Then Pete Ackroyd and Colin Binks helped me spread my wings wider (they both had cars!) before I moved to Sheffield to climb with Steve Warwick, Nigel Baker, Rich Watkinson, Dave Spencer and later Graham Parkes. A couple of years spent living in Scotland and Willie Jeffrey joined me on many visits to the Northumberland cliffs. Another year in York I lodged with John Addey and he became a regular partner on Yorkshire Grit and the North York Moors.

The usual suspects have supported me when visiting and photographing these cliffs for the book: Dave Spencer, Brian Rossiter, Dave Gregory, Colin Binks (as ever) with his sidekicks Mark Binney and Bruce Perry. Colin in particular has been irrepressible - always there when needed, always happy to stop and pose in the most ridiculous positions and never a single complaint!

A special thank you is due to Jamie Moss who allowed us access to his superb set of shots covering all three areas. Other photographers who have helped lift this celebration of the areas are Duncan Skelton, Nick Smith, Simon Jaques, James Rowe, Rob Askew, Dave Musgrove, Mark Glaister and Mike Took.

The text has been looked over by folks who know these areas very well, especially Tony Marr (North York Moors), Dave Musgrove (Yorkshire Grit), Ian Jackson (North York Moors), Jack Geldard (Earl Crag). The document has been expertly proofed by Graham Hoey, Simon Jaques and Simon Caldwell, who managed to pull out many errors - those that remain are mine, often added at the last minute!

Then of course there are the two people without whom there would have been no book at all; Sherri Davy, who has supported me from first to last despite being dragged all over the North of England; and Alan James, who finally caved in after four year's of badgering and agreed that this guide would be a good idea after all - he worked his magic on my raw text and topos; thank you both.

Chris Craggs, January 2008

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