

North Wales Slate

Mark Reeves

**A guidebook to rock climbing
in the slate quarries
near Llanberis in North Wales**

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This book belongs to:

Cover: Simon Lake on *Goose Creature* (E3) -
p.94 - on Llooning The Tube Slab in Australia.
This page: Guess the route?
Photos: Mark Reeves

AWESOME WALLS CLIMBING CENTRES, INFLUENCING THE CLIMBING WORLD SINCE 1999!

Photo: Ladoza



AWESOME WALLS

CLIMBING CENTRES

AWESOME BY NAME,
AWESOME BY NATURE!!!



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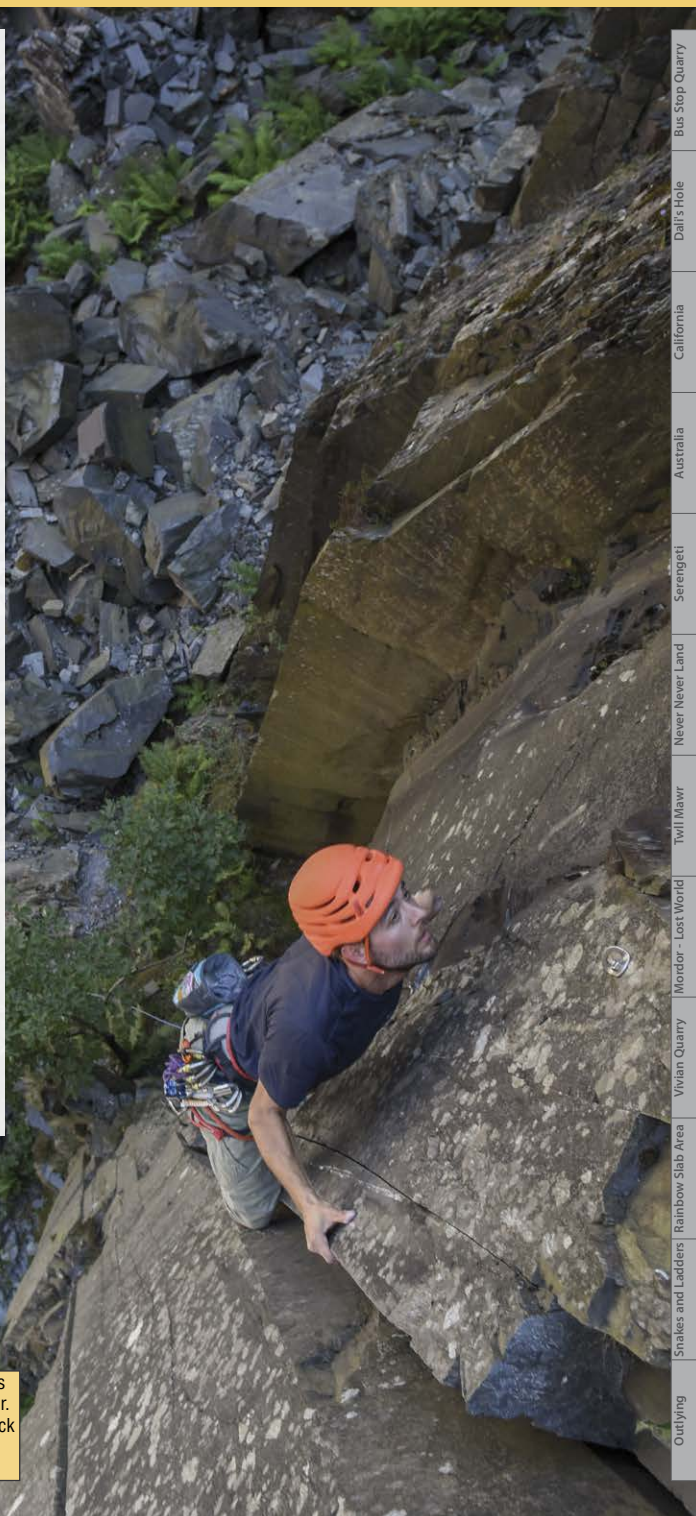
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'JJ' climbing the first of two contrasting pitches on *Imagine Dragons* (6b) - p.165 - in Twll Mawr. The first pitch is a short steep climb up the crack in the photo and is followed by a longer slabby and technical pitch with a crux groove.



Bus Stop Quarry
Dali's Hole
California
Australia
Serengeti
Never Never Land
Twll Mawr
Mordor - Lost World
Vivian Quarry
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Mordor - Lost World
Vivian Quarry
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Outlying

Visiting Kiwi Josh Douglas climbing on *Looning the Tube* (E1 5a) - p.94 - in Australia. This route was originally a simple shuffle along a pipe fixed to the slab from the bottom left to top right. Over the years it has fallen down, making it more of a climb - imagine how hair-raising the original 'stroll' was! If you would like to try and follow in the pioneers' footsteps, *Exhuming the Tube* pretty much follows the line where the tube was attached.



Slate has often been described as the Marmite of rocks - you either love it or hate it! However, a lot has changed in the quarries since the original boom in the 1980s, so whichever category you fall into, you would be well advised to give the slate another look.



The infamous routes of 'designer danger' and 'run-out rockovers' era will still scare anyone bold enough to step off the ground, but they have been joined by a whole host of sport routes across the grade range. Many of these are on the less slabby sections of the quarry, offering climbing styles other than the customary small edges on slabs. Multi-pitch sport routes and link-ups are another facet to the climbing developed here in recent years. These can offer big full-day expeditions to remote walls and provide a memorable experience.

Part of this experience is the unique nature of much of the climbing. Often you will encounter strange and perplexing crux moves. You can't train for these, so you just have to get yourself on the route and use your strength, balance, technique - and most of all your brain - to solve the puzzle presented. The time you have to figure out the moves usually depends on the angle of the rock. Sometimes the slabs will give you too much time, making commitment to the move difficult. On the steeper routes, lengthy working sessions are often required to decipher the key move.

A lot of routes rely on fixed protection or have lower-offs which need maintaining. In the past 10 years, the North Wales Bolt Fund has been actively re-equipping old routes and helping fund new routes. For more information on bolting and how you can help, see page 38.

This guide is a celebration of slate. We hope that it will no longer be a destination to love or loathe, but a place where climbers can become passionate about the unique climbing. There are plenty of routes to enjoy and many dramatic locations to explore in this fascinating post-industrial graveyard - come and see for yourself!

Bus Stop Quarry
Dall's Hole
California
Australia
Serengeti
Never Never Land
Twll Mawr
Mordor - Lost World
Vivian Quarry
Rainbow Slab Area
Snakes and Ladders
Outlying

The geological story of North Wales Slate starts around 500 million years ago, but it wasn't until the last few thousand years that its use as a building material was noticed. Virtually impervious to water, and easily split into tiles, slate became a very desirable roofing product.

Only limited mining occurred in early times - the most notable example of early slate use was on a Roman fort with remains on the outskirts of Caernarfon. Much later slate mining expanded rapidly during the industrial revolution. Factory building and urban growth led to a demand for an effective roofing material and that's where slate, and the Welsh quarries associated with it, came to the fore.

In 1890, the industry peaked with over 17,000 men employed in the mines and quarries of North Wales. The subsequent decline in the industry was to have a major effect on the local workers and economy. In one significant dispute, the quarry owners locked the workers out for nearly a year with no pay in an attempt to disregard new Health and Safety Laws. In the end, after great hardship, the mine owners eventually opened the gates to the capitulating workers, but they only took on half the original workforce.

Another shameful development is only recently coming to light after the Penrhyn family released historic papers. These showed that the owners not only kept the Welsh workforce in poverty, but used the ships that transported the slate all over the world to engage in the slave triangle. It was this global transportation that gave birth to some of the names of the areas in the quarries, and though some of these have been misnamed by climbers, the general theme is still there.

After the Second World War, the ceramic tile was born. It was cheaper and easier to manufacture than slate. Despite more mechanization, the quarries went through a steady decline until 1969. At this time the Dinorwig quarries' income had become almost entirely dependent on a single French firm importing all its slate. When this company went bankrupt, all the quarries closed virtually overnight. By the end of the mining in Dinorwig, 362 quarrymen had lost their lives extracting the 'grey gold' - see 362 on p.144.



Rust and ruin high up on the east side of Australia. This old rusting structure strikes a sculptural beauty against the purple/grey backdrop of the slate.

The Early Climbing Forays

Climbing history started in the quarries in 1969 with the legendary Joe Brown, who seemed to have been waiting for the workers to leave so he could step in. Joe was, of course, a pioneer of steep and intimidating lines up big cliffs throughout the UK and abroad. It seems fitting that he set his sights on the biggest cliff of all, the back wall of Twll Mawr (Big Hole) putting up the compelling and rarely ascended *Opening Gambit*. This route has been greatly altered over the years through small and colossal rockfalls. The route also exacted a high price on two students who fell to their deaths when attempting it - *Opening Gambit* should not be underestimated and, despite the lowly grade of HVS, is probably more of an 'XS'.

Another local legend, Al Harris, whose house on Fachwen overlooked Gideon Quarry, made an early exploration of this slab producing *Gideon*. This smart little HVS was an unusual excursion. The gear is sparse and pushes the limits of friction on what feels like Teflon. Other routes were climbed in these quarries, but they have remained a bit of a backwater that failed to spark the imagination of those that explored the myriad of levels, holes and workings on the other side of the valley.

The Slate Boom and the Birth of the Slatehead

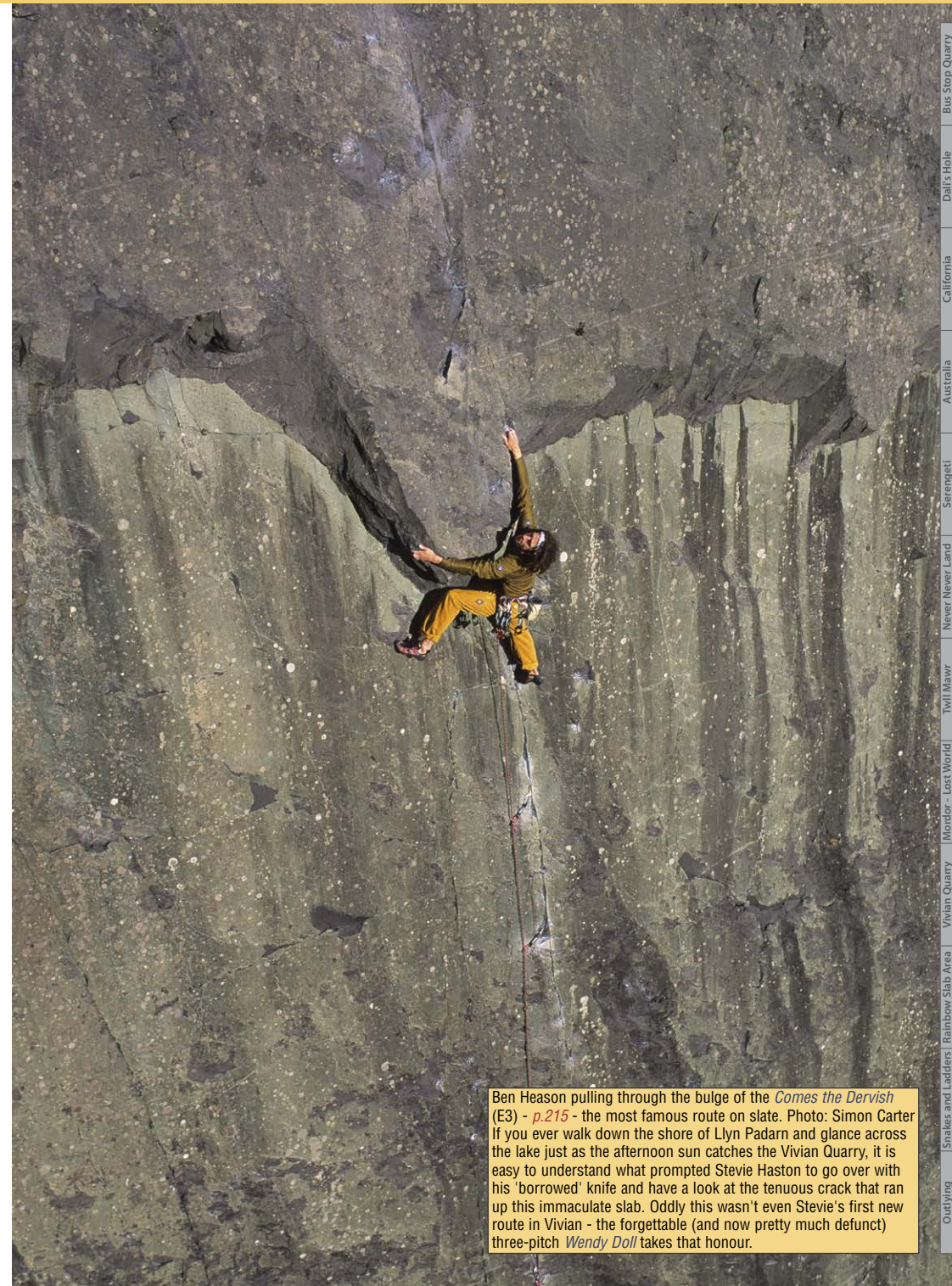
Twelve years after Joe Brown's epic route, it was the rising legend Stevie Haston who was to take up the baton and redefine climbing on the slate with *Comes the Dervish*. Famously cleaned with a 'borrowed knife' from Pete's Eats, *Comes the Dervish* is a route that any wannabe 'Slatehead' needs to put at the top of their ticklist. Originally graded E5, the line has cleaned up and is now one of the best E3s in the UK. If you have not climbed this route then you are not a slate climber, just a climber who has climbed on slate!

For a trend to really take a hold, a single route is not enough - you need a social context to effect a tipping point. *Comes the Dervish* may be said to have sparked the revolution, but it also had as much to do with the socio-economic situation of the times as it did with that clean fresh line on a pure slate blackboard.

The catalyst was the rise of unemployment in the early 1980s. From the unemployed army of 'Maggie's Millions' rose a new boom in the quarries, and this time the boom wasn't from the quarrymen's soft explosives! The 'rock and dole' generation was spawned.

What this meant was that if you were a climber in the early 1980s, and you wanted to live off benefits and climb, the world was your oyster. You could sign on by post, and spend all your available time climbing and engaging in all manner of socially irresponsible activities.

As acres of virgin rock were available to the ballooning population of rock and dolers, climbers migrated to Llanberis to get involved with this new punk-like movement. The stage was set for slate to make a big impact on climbing in the UK, along with mullets and bad moustaches. This was a time of hard men in garish tights. The Slatehead was born - a person whose antics off the rock were just as important as on it. This was a time of hard partying climbers having ample time, not only to push the boundaries of climbing, but also hedonistic behaviour. Perhaps the best account is given in Paul Pritchard's book *Deep Play*, which chronicles the antics of this era.



Ben Heason pulling through the bulge of the *Comes the Dervish* (E3) - p.215 - the most famous route on slate. Photo: Simon Carter
If you ever walk down the shore of Llyn Padarn and glance across the lake just as the afternoon sun catches the Vivian Quarry, it is easy to understand what prompted Stevie Haston to go over with his 'borrowed' knife and have a look at the tenuous crack that ran up this immaculate slab. Oddly this wasn't even Stevie's first new route in Vivian - the forgettable (and now pretty much defunct) three-pitch *Wendy Doll* takes that honour.

Designer Danger: Myths and Legends

Stevie Haston had climbed the most conspicuous slab in the quarries. Elsewhere the slabs were devoid of such luxurious cracks, which meant that the ethic quickly turned to bolting. The story is that the new routers of the time, led by the enigmatic John Redhead, applied Joe Brown's 'two pegs per pitch' rule on their new routes on the Rainbow Slab - only this time with bolts. It does not matter whether or not you believe this, or that the hard economic times led to the minimalistic approach to fixed gear. Either way the quarries got was some immaculate routes with astronomical run-outs.

The Sport Climbing Revolution: Slabs are for Softies

If you can turn your brain off and just climb, the slabs of the quarries are likely to feel easier than routes elsewhere of similar grades. It does, however, take a long time and a lot of confidence to train your mind in the ways of the run-out slab. After a while there came a point though when climbers started to look away from the slabs and turn to steeper and blanker rock. Here the pressure of the pump means that mind games become time limited - an altogether scarier and more dangerous proposition.

Many of the top climbers of this period were enjoying the luxury of sport climbing in France whilst collecting their dole money via the post. Upon their return the introduction of the full sport route ethic began to realise the full potential of the quarries.

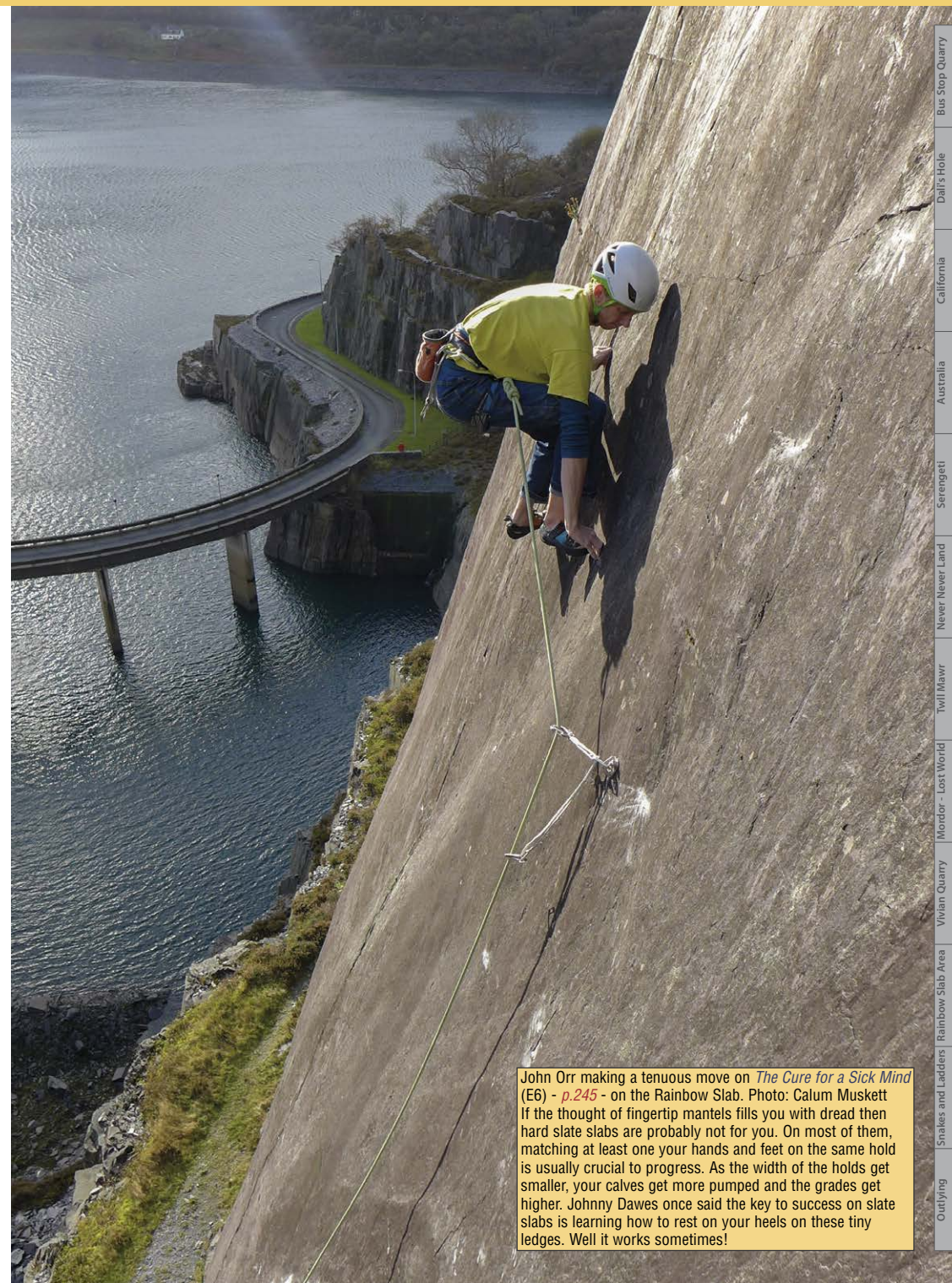
Three routes stood out and ushered in this new era. In Vivian Quarry, John Redhead sculpted two utterly horrendous routes that suited his height and finger strength. The first, *Manic Strain*, is still considered 7c+ or 8a, whereas the frequently re-named *Misogynist Discharge* is no pushover at 8a+, and features more of a scrape than a chip on its crucial foothold.

Later that year came a four-pitch masterpiece from Johnny Dawes in the form of *The Quarryman*. Its third pitch has now been made famous by his *Stone Monkey* video, where Johnny climbs the gymnastic and powerful groove. A little later, Dawes went on to add the classic *Bobby's Groove* and the ultra technical *Untouchables Arete*.

Another of the main sport climbing activists on the scene was Nick Harms. In 1986 he made the first ascent of *Cwms The Dogfish*, *Tru Clip* and *The Dark Half* - all of which are fantastic high-end sport climbs. None of his routes have diminished in reputation over the years and just a sighting of Nick in the book *The Power of Climbing* will make you realise that, even in those days, the ability to be totally ripped despite rampant hedonism was still possible!

What set many of these routes apart from limestone sport routes elsewhere is the moves. Often a scene of much frustration for the climber, the technical on/off nature of the slate cruxes often have more to do with feet sticking to a hold than the ability to pull hard. This gives slate sport its very own style, where relentless body tension is needed to keep in contact with the tiny holds.

In the years that followed, the Rainbow Slab, Never Never Land, Vivian Quarry and Australia all saw attention with their major lines ascended. Around 80 routes were climbed between 1983 and 1985 of which 30 are now considered classics. Development picked up more speed and in 1986 over 100 new routes were added, around 80 the following year, and over 70 the year after that. Then almost as quickly as it started, the new route boom tailed off as climbers looked elsewhere.



John Orr making a tenuous move on *The Cure for a Sick Mind* (E6) - p.245 - on the Rainbow Slab. Photo: Calum Muskett
If the thought of fingertip mantels fills you with dread then hard slate slabs are probably not for you. On most of them, matching at least one your hands and feet on the same hold is usually crucial to progress. As the width of the holds get smaller, your calves get more pumped and the grades get higher. Johnny Dawes once said the key to success on slate slabs is learning how to rest on your heels on these tiny ledges. Well it works sometimes!

... and the Beat Goes On

Slate climbing is like flares - if you live long enough then it is going to come back into fashion at some point - and 2006 saw its return to popularity. The resurgence started with the re-equipping many of the classics.

With the re-equipping came some controversial retro-bolting in several forgotten areas that had routes of reasonable quality but a dearth of gear. The ultra classic bold routes were rightly left untouched, but other areas saw plenty of attention from the drill. Those doing the bolting claimed they were bringing these areas "kicking and screaming into the real world of the Noughties". Whatever your opinion, there is no doubt that many of these routes became much more popular going from a couple of ascents in a decade to many ascents a week, just days after they were equipped. The quarries felt alive with climbers again.

A surge of easier sport climbs followed as people starting to clean new routes everywhere. Some were good, others less so, but all were popular. As a result, the quarries really were opened up to everyone. This had a knock on effect in creating access problems, notably at the very public Dali's Hole where the routes became so popular that access to the whole of the quarries was threatened. The original developers took the sensible action of de-bolting these routes to solve this problem. Easy sport routes have subsequently been developed higher up on The Sidings away from the main path through the quarries.

Alongside this 'everyman' revolution, a small number of climbers felt inspired to develop a new set of modern testpieces. None captures the cutting edge of slate climbing more than *The Serpent Vein*, a project that was left uncompleted by the 1990s generation and eventually climbed at 8b by James 'Caff' McHaffie. In 1990, the great Johnny Dawes' last major new route on slate was the magnificent *The Very Big and The Very Small*. At the time this represented the peak of slate slab climbing and still sees few repeats. The one Johnny didn't manage was a project in Twll Mawr that became know as *Meltdown*. In 2012, Caff managed the first ascent of what is currently the hardest route on slate, tentatively graded at 9a.

The slate quarries are far from fully developed. It should also be said that they still have a habit of collapsing from time to time so some new routes become fleeting challenges before huge sections of wall collapse in storms. There is plenty of rock left though and much of this is likely to be developed with new routes - probably sport routes and probably of varying quality. There will be occasional gems in the new routes, but it is safe to say that most of the best lines have been climbed, unless of course something collapses and reveals a new Rainbow Slab - now that would be something!

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.



Pete Robins climbing *The Very Big and the Very Small* (8c) - p.245 - on the Rainbow Slab.

This photo superbly illustrates hard slate - pulling on a match-edge, reaching for a chalk stain and we can't even see what he is standing on! Success often depends on a certain amount of faith - the concentration in Pete's eyes shows that he believes he can pull it off.

As a fast-developing area, slate has always attracted guidebook writers and a variety of publishers. The first 1986 small book by Perry Hawkins and George Smith was back in the middle of the 80s boom. This guide paved the way for the brilliant 1987 *Llanberis* guide by Paul Williams, published by the Climbers' Club. For many climbers this was their introduction to the slate; written in Paul's inimitable style, this guide inspired a generation of climbers to realise that Llanberis offered more than just 'The Pass'.

Since the 1980s there have been three privately-published guidebooks and the latest one from Ground Up in 2011. A big contribution to this last book was data collected through wikifoundry.com - a free open source wiki site set up by Mark Reeves in 2005 to record new routes and re-equipping information. Such has been the development though that even this beautifully produced guidebook is now in need of an update. As an aside, if you are interested in the history of slate, then it is worth tracking down a copy of the 2011 Ground Up guidebook. It is out of print, but there are copies to be found around and it gives much more depth to the characters and development of slate than we have included in this book.

Since 2011, a number of areas have been developed, routes have been re-bolted, new lines have been fitted in and, sadly, a few old buttresses have fallen down. This new Rockfax book brings all these together with an amazing set of new crag shots to illustrate them combined with detailed maps and full route descriptions. It is being published in print and digitally through the Rockfax app. Looking to the future, we have laid the foundation for a sustainable record of climbing in the slate quarries in both print and digital format. All the route descriptions and information are available publicly through the UKClimbing Logbook Database for comments, feedback, grade and star votes, and new routes. The app version will be updated and the new print edition begins being prepared the day after we publish this edition.

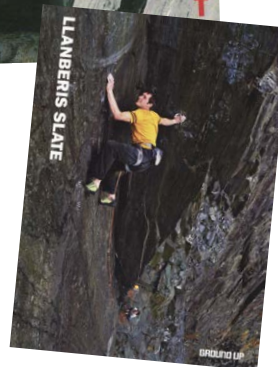
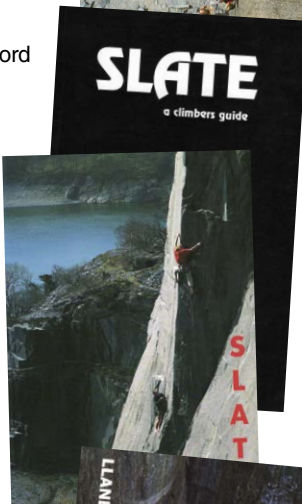
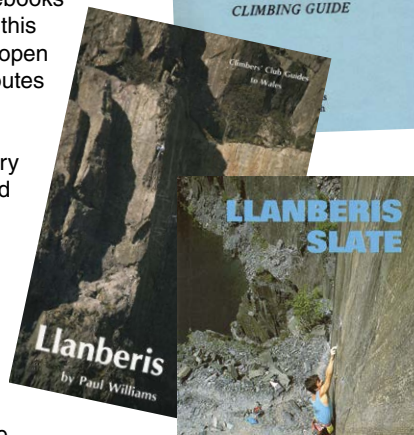
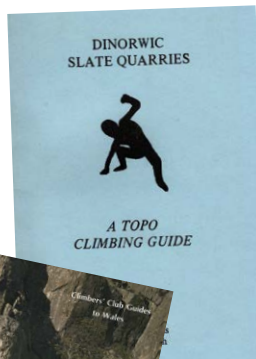
Rockfax is very grateful to all the previous authors of guidebooks to North Wales Slate. Without their efforts our job would be much harder. In addition to the list below, Slate has also been included in a number of other selected books from Paul Williams, Ground Up and the Rockfax book North Wales Climbs from 2013.

Guidebooks to North Wales Slate

- Dinorwig Slate Quarries** (Perry Hawkins, George Smith 1986)
- Llanberis** (Paul Williams 1987)
- Llanberis Slate** (Nick Harms 1990)
- Slate** (Iwan Arfon Jones 1992)
- Slate** (Iwan Arfon Jones 1999)
- Llanberis Slate** (Ground Up 2011)
- North Wales Slate** (Rockfax 2018)

New Routes

Please submit any new routes to the relevant crag on the UKC Logbook Database. These will be checked by the crag moderator and added to the Rockfax app version in future updates.



BETASTICKevo

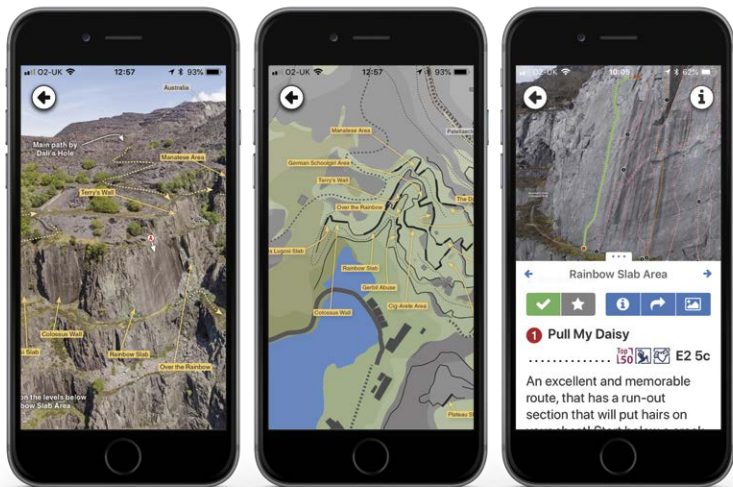


The Rockfax App brings together all the Rockfax climbing information with UKC Logbooks and presents it in a user-friendly package for use on Apple iOS devices (Android version to follow).

The heart of the app is the Rockfax crag and route information covering individual crags, or bundles of crags, in 'areas' which correspond roughly to printed guidebooks. From the end of 2018, the main data is sold by subscription so that you can purchase access to all the Rockfax guidebook information for a period of time, from 1 month to yearly. Once you are subscribed, you will have access to every digital Rockfax guidebook for the period of your subscription. You can download the main data and store it on your device, so you don't need any signal to be able to read the descriptions and see the topos and maps. There is also plenty of free data available without subscription enabling you to get a really good impression of what the app is like, without shelling out any money.

The Rockfax App itself is a free download and incredibly useful in its own right. It contains a detailed crag map linked to the UKClimbing crags database (currently with basic information and route lists for around 22,000 crags worldwide). The map also displays all the 4,000+ listings from the UKClimbing Directory of climbing walls, outdoor shops, climbing clubs, outdoor-specific accommodation and instructors and guides, amongst others.

To find the app, search for 'Rockfax App' in Google or on the appropriate store.



UKC Logbooks

An incredibly popular method of logging your climbing is to use the UKClimbing.com logbooks system. This database lists more than 432,000 routes and over 22,000 crags; so far, more than 36,000 users have recorded over 6.1 million ascents! To set up your own logbook all you need to do is register at UKClimbing.com and click on the logbook tab. Once set up you will be able to record every ascent you make, when you did it, what style you climbed it in and who you did it with. Each entry has a place for your own notes. You can also add your vote to the grade/star system linked to a database on the Rockfax site used by the guidebook writers. The logbook can be private, public or restricted to your own climbing partners only. The Rockfax App can be linked to your UKClimbing.com user account and logbook so that you can record your activity while at the crag and look at photos, comments and votes on the routes. To do this you will need a 3G/4G data connection. You can also look at the UKC logbooks to see if anyone has climbed your chosen route recently to check on conditions.

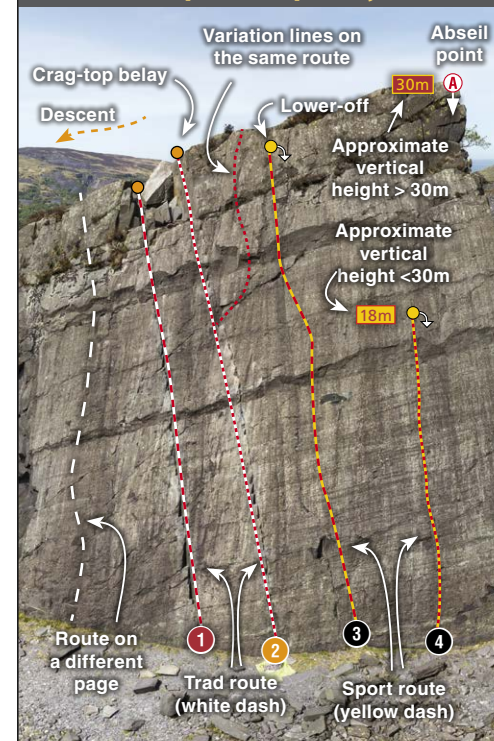
Route Symbols

- A good route which is well worth climbing.
- A very good route, one of the best on the crag.
- A brilliant route, one of the best in North Wales. (There is no Top50 in this book).
- Technical climbing requiring good balance and technique, or complex and tricky moves.
- Powerful climbing; roofs, steep rock, low lock-offs or long moves off small holds.
- Sustained climbing; either lots of hard moves or steep rock giving pumpy climbing.
- Fingery climbing with significant small holds on the hard sections.
- Fluttery climbing with big fall potential and scary run-outs.
- A long reach is helpful, or even essential, for one or more of the moves.
- A dynamic move is required.
- Graunchy climbing, wide cracks or awkward thrutchy moves.
- Loose rock may be encountered.
- A route which has been de-bolted and is no longer climbable.
- A route which can be deep water soloed.

Crag Symbols

- Angle of the approach walk to the buttress with approximate time.
- Lots of sun
- Sheltered
- Seepage
- Abseil
- Restrictions
- Deserted** - Currently under-used and usually quiet. Less good routes or a remote area.
- Quiet** - Less popular sections, or good buttresses with awkward approaches.
- Busy** - Places you will seldom be alone. Good routes and easy access.
- Crowded** - The most popular sections of the most popular crags which are always busy.

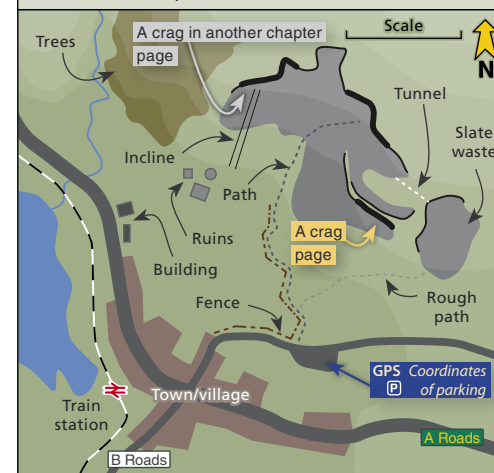
Map and Topo Key



Parking GPS Locations

GPS 53.127975
-4.108359

Parking spots are marked with blue GPS boxes and a QR code. If you scan the QR code with your phone camera, then it should open into a navigation app which will take you straight to the parking. You can also add the coordinates manually if required.



Having lived in North Wales since 1995, I am passionate about the climbing we have here. In bringing this book together I have had another amazing opportunity to help sell North Wales and the slate quarries to you, the climbing public at large. This wouldn't have been possible without so many people.

First off the Rockfax team - Alan James for giving me the opportunity to write this book and Rebecca Ting for her eye for detail.

I could not have completed this project without such a good bunch of friends and clients that I have climbed with in the quarries. I hope they know how much they mean to me. In particular four stand out as worthy of a mention.

Simon Lake is all over this guide - his companionship has meant so much to me over the years. At the time of going to print, Simon is recovering from a climbing accident and he does not yet know how much I have missed his company - my thoughts are with you and the family bud! Llion Morris and I have shared so many great climbing memories with - please don't ask him for truth about what happened on *Fresh Air Crack*, it's too embarrassing!

Katie Haston for accompanying us round what once was her back garden.

Dave Evans who has provided fine company on the more adventurous and esoteric routes.

Many of the harder routes were beyond me to climb, but I have been lucky enough to be dragged up some of these classics by James McHaffie, Pete Robins and Dave Rudkin.

We have also been lucky enough to get some great photos from David Simmonite, Simon Carter, David Price, Calum Muskett, Mike Doyle, Tristram Fox, Talo Martin, Mike Hutton, John Bunney, Matt Stygall.

Thanks are also due to two stalwarts of Slate - Neil and Paul Harrison - who have helped at the latter stages by going through the proofs with their eagle-eyes.

In addition to those mentioned above, there are really too many other people to remember; anyone from the list of hundreds of climbers I have had the joy to share a rope with in the quarries from 1995 through to July 2018 when this book went to print have all helped shape me, my knowledge and love for climbing in the slate quarries.

Finally, anyone who has contributed to either the Slate Wiki or added to the UKClimbing database over the years. Your small contributions have been just as important to the final product.

Mark Reeves July 2018

Rockfax is very grateful to the following advertisers who have supported this guidebook:

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beaconclimbing.com

Guiding

Gaia Adventure - Back cover flap
Tel: 07814 412 439
gaiaadventures.co.uk

Mark Reeves Climbing Coach - Page 27
Tel: 07872 565225
snowdoniamountainguides.com

Plas y Brenin - Page 37
Tel: 01690 720 214
pyb.co.uk

Equipment Manufacturers

Petzl - Inside back cover
petzl.com

Crux - page 35
crux.uk.com

Beta Climbing Designs - Page 15
betaclimbingdesigns.com

Outdoor Shops

Joe Brown - Outside back cover
High Street, Llanberis. Tel: 01286 870327
Capel Curig. Tel: 01690 720205
joe-brown.com



Mark Reeves enjoying an easy day of Australian sport climbing on *Steps of Glory* (5a) - p.94 - one of the new additions to the Above the Rails area. Photo: David Simmonite

North Wales Climbs
 November 2013
 R A B C +

North Wales Classics
 April 2010
 R A B C +

Ciwyd Limestone
 December 2015
 R A

North Wales Slate
 September 2018
 R A

South Wales Sport Climbs
 November 2016
 R A

Pembroke
 March 2018
 R A B C +

North Wales Winter
 February 2016
 R

Lofoten Climbs
 May 2017
 R A

Rjukan
 February 2016
 R A

Northern England
 February 2008
 R A

Western Grit
 April 2009
 R A

Northern Limestone
 January 2015
 R A B C +

Eastern Grit
 April 2015
 R A

Peak Limestone
 May 2012
 R A B C +

Peak Bouldering
 May 2014
 R A

Southern Sandstone Climbs
 September 2017
 R A

West Country Climbs
 July 2010
 R

Dorset
 February 2012
 R

Dorset Bouldering
 May 2014
 R A B C +

Deep Water
 June 2007
 R

Kalymnos
 May 2018
 R A

The Dolomites
 July 2014
 R

El Chorro
 December 2008
 R

Spain : Costa Blanca
 February 2013
 R A B C +

Spain : Mallorca
 January 2016
 R A

Catalunya
 February 2016
 R A

Madrid Area
 October 2017
 R A

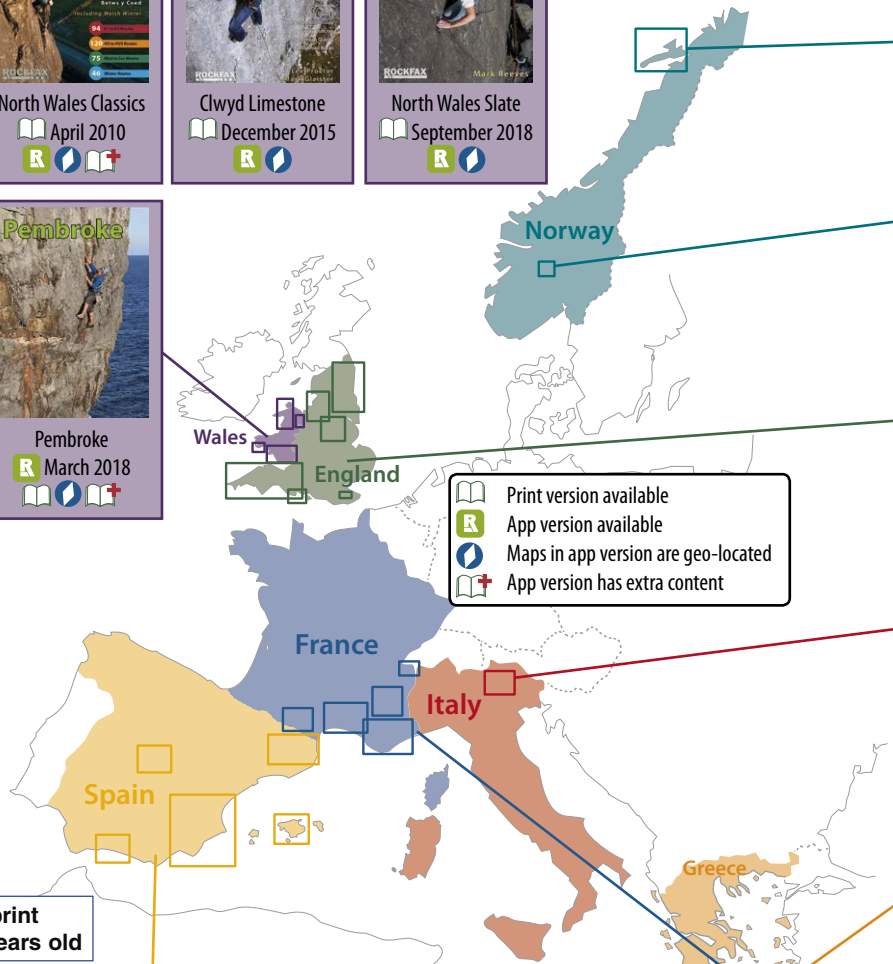
France : Ariège
 December 2012
 R

France : Lang.Roussillon
 November 2011
 R

France : Haute Provence
 December 2009
 R

France : Côte d'Azur
 February 2017
 R A

Chamonix
 October 2016
 R A



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 R App version available
 📍 Maps in app version are geo-located
 🛎 App version has extra content

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Bus Stop Quarry
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 California
 Australia
 Serengeti
 Never Never Land
 Twill Mawr
 Mordor - Lost World
 Vivian Quarry
 Rainbow Slab Area
 Snakes and Ladders
 Outlying

North Wales Slate Logistics

Left-to-right - Pierre Delas, Mark Glaister and Hubert Canart working out the logistics for making simultaneous ascents of *Horse Latitudes* (6a+), *Bela Lugosi is Dead* (E1) and *Alive and Kicking* (E1) - p.238 - on the Bela Lugosi Slab in the Rainbow Slab Area.

Tourist Information Offices

If you are short of ideas for what to do on a wet day or need some accommodation, take a look at the Tourist Information Offices. They contain much more useful information than it is possible to include in these pages.

Llanberis, Electric Mountain. Tel: 01286 870765
nwt.co.uk visitwales.com visitsnowdonia.info

When to Go

Temperature °C	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Average Max Temp (°C)	6.8	6.6	8.5	10.8	14.1	16.1	18.1	17.8	15.8	12.5	9.4	7.2
Average Min Temp (°C)	1.8	1.1	2.8	4.0	6.3	9.2	11.3	11.2	9.2	6.9	4.2	1.9
Average Rain Days/Month	19.6	16.4	17.7	15.1	14.3	13.5	14.5	16.1	14.7	19.3	19.8	18.6

North Wales is often regarded as a year-round climbing venue, despite the fact that it sees pretty high rainfall and is cold in the winter. One of the reasons for this 'year-round' tag is that several venues often seem to be 'in' when the mountain crags are 'out'. The slate quarries are one of these venues. The sheltered south and west-facing aspect of many of the crags means that there are often suntraps in cold weather. The location on the west of the mountains means that it sometimes escapes the worst of the rain. Of course these factors can also combine to make it unbearable in hot weather, though you can usually find shade somewhere. The slabby and vertical nature of most of the crags means that there is almost nowhere to shelter from rain, so if you are perched half way up a bald slab when the clouds open, you'd be well advised to bail out quickly before it becomes a slippery nightmare. That said, the rock dries very quickly on most of the walls, although there is a bit of lingering seepage in places.

Camping

The Listings on UKClimbing.com can help you locate a campsite near the area you wish to climb in. Most are happy for you just to turn up without a reservation, except on Bank Holidays. A popular site for climbers is opposite the Vaynol Arms pub in Nant Peris.

Accommodation

There are plenty of small bed and breakfast places, plus some excellent bunk-house style accommodation providers in the area.

Lodge Dinorwig

Dinorwig, LL55 3EY Tel: 01286 871632

lodge-dinorwig.co.uk

Independent Hostel with a great cafe near the Bus Stop Quarry parking in Dinorwig. See advert opposite

Crashpad Lodges

Yr Helfa, Llanberis

Caernarfon, LL55 4UW Tel: 01286 871453

crashpadlodges.com

Beautifully situated accommodation
See advert on p.29

Plas y Brenin

Capel Curig, LL24 0ET Tel: 01690 720214

pyb.co.uk

Accommodation in the National Mountain centre in Capel Curig.
See advert on p.37



LODGE

DINORWIG



www.LODGE-DINORWIG.co.uk



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1/2 mile from
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Quarry

DINORWIG
LL55 3EY

Climbing Shops

North Wales has plenty of outdoor shops but not all of them stock climbing gear.

Joe Brown Shops

High Street, Llanberis, LL55 4HA
Tel: 01286 870327
Capel Curig, LL24 0EP
Tel: 01690 720205
joe-brown.com
See advert on back cover

V12 - High Street, Llanberis.

Pubs

Good pubs are unfortunately quite hard to come by in North Wales, but here are a selection of the better offerings.

Gallt y Glyn, Llanberis - Just west of Llanberis on the main road. It does 'Pizza and Pint'.

The Heights, Llanberis - In the centre of Llanberis. A popular location for climbers offering good food and beer.

Waynol Arms, Nant Peris - Opposite the campsite. Good beers and a pool table! Can get very crowded on busy weekends.

Plas y Brenin, Capel Curig - The bar in the centre is open in the evenings and has local ales, great food and a stunning lake view.

Cafes

North Wales has a great number of climbers and a high annual rainfall, which means it also has a fair few cafes to retreat to.

Lodge Dinorwig

Dinorwig, LL55 3EY Tel: 01286 871632
Situated near Bus Stop Quarry. Good for a light lunch or coffee and cake
lodge-dinorwig.co.uk
See advert on p.25

Pete's Eats, Llanberis - Well known in this part of the world. A big old school menu with modern alternatives if you don't want everything fried. Whatever you choose, you won't leave hungry!

Caban, Brynrefail - Nice cafe, healthy menu.

Climbing Walls**Beacon Climbing Centre**

Cibyn Estate
Caernarfon, LL55 2BD Tel: 0345 4508222
beaconclimbing.com
See advert inside front cover

Plas y Brenin

Capel Curig, LL24 0ET
Tel: 01690 720214
pyb.co.uk
See advert on p.37

The Indy Climbing Wall

Llanfairpwllgwyngyll, Anglesey.

More information on
ukclimbing.com/walls/

Guides and Instructors

Snowdonia is a hub of outdoor education. As such you can find many guides, instructors and coaches via internet searches. The Listings on UKClimbing.com return 70 Instructors/Guides within 30km of Llanberis.

Hiring a local instructor means that you will have the benefit of their local knowledge for finding the best venue. This can make the most of a day if time is limited or conditions are challenging. Expect to pay between £150 and £250 for a day of 1:1 guiding.

Gaia Adventures

Llanberis, LL55 4SW Tel: 07814412439
gaiaadventures.co.uk
See advert on back cover flap

Mark Reeves - Snowdonia Mountain Guides

Cwm-y-Glo Tel: 07872 565225
snowdoniamountainguides.com
See advert opposite

Plas y Brenin

Capel Curig, LL24 0ET Tel: 01690 720214
pyb.co.uk
See advert on p.37



Snowdonia Mountain Guides.com

Classic Routes on

Slate
Gogarth
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Moelwyns
and beyond

Instruction

Guiding

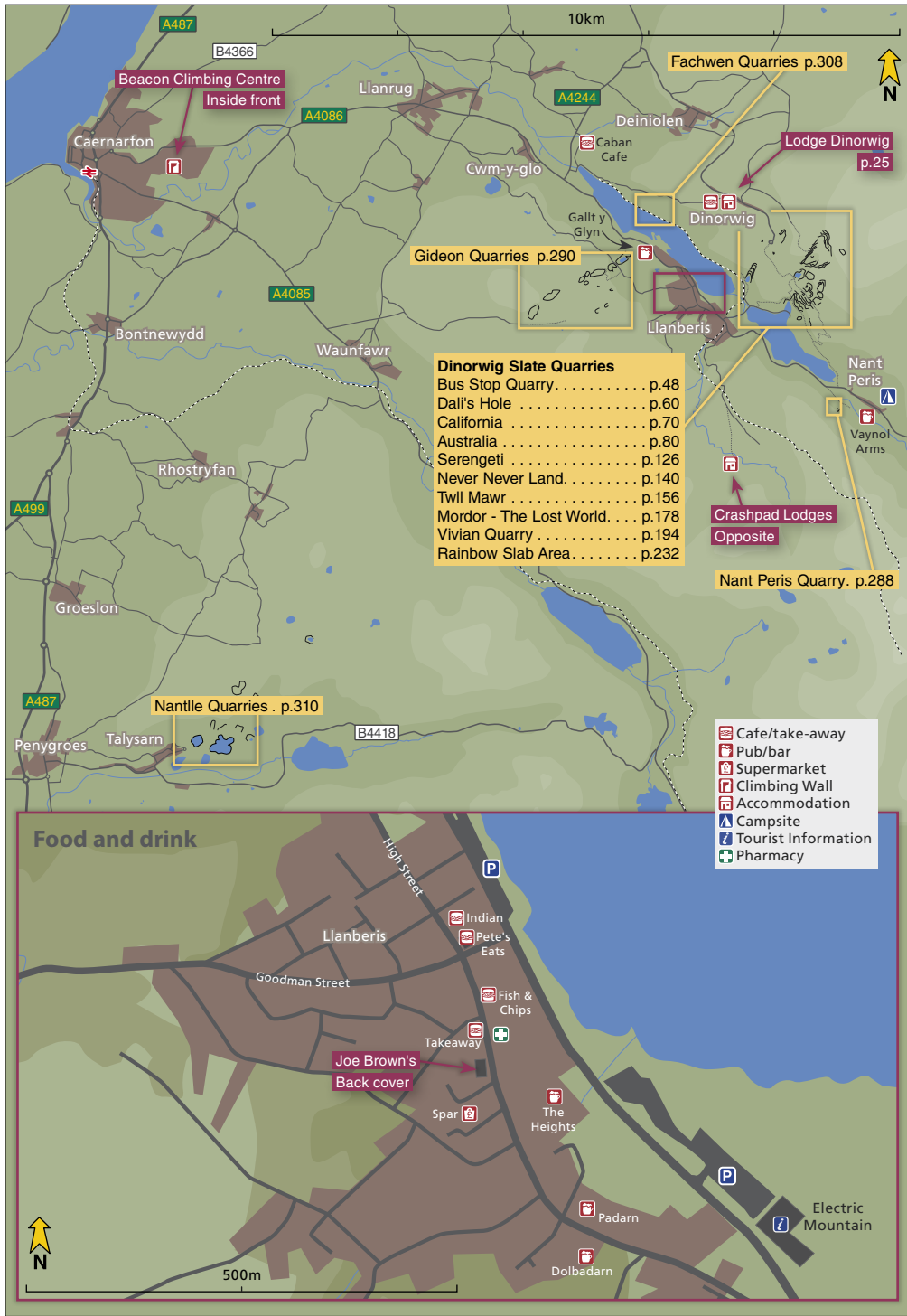
Coaching

Wales' Premier Coaching Service

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Qualified Mountaineering Instructor
MSc in Applied Sports Science in Effective Coaching,
Sport Psychology & Performance Physiology
Author of *North Wales Climbs*, *How to Climb Harder* and *Hanging By A Thread*

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CRASHPAD LODGES

Yr Helfa Llanberis

Crashpad is a unique off-grid lodge situated in the heart of the Snowdonia National Park making it a perfect base for your climbing getaway in North Wales. For more information and how to book visit our website and follow us on the below:-



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WWW.CRASHPADLODGES.COM



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Mordor - Lost World
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Rainbow Slab Area
Snakes and Ladders
Outlying

North Wales Slate Climbing

Ben Heason on the immaculate *Splitstream* (E5 6b) - p.246
 - on the stunning Rainbow Slab. Photo: Simon Carter.
 Undoubtedly the finest slab in Britain with its iconic 'rainbow' ripple. The inspired decision by the original developers to keep the bolting down to a minimum, aiming for only 'two bolts per pitch', has led to routes of real character and line. Despite the high grades and long run-outs there is plenty here to interest many climbers with your main worry often being the length of the fall onto a solid bolt and not if your dubious gear will hold.

Mountain Rescue

In the event of a incident requiring assistance in the quarries you need Mountain Rescue:

**Dial 112 or 999 and ask for 'POLICE'
then ask for 'MOUNTAIN RESCUE'**

North Wales Mountain Rescue Association - www.nwmra.org

Rescue Procedure

If you are involved in an incident then give the rescue services as many details as you can. Try to let them know your precise location, crag name and route name. In general it is the Llanberis MRT that will attend a rescue here and they know the quarries well. It may still take a while for the emergency services to reach you so any First Aid you can administer is critical. If a helicopter is called to the scene you need to signal to the pilot by standing with your arms up making a 'Y' shape, if possible with your back to the wind. Once the pilot has seen you, and looks like he is coming in to hover, then move to a safe distance away since they will either come in to land, or send the winchman down. The downdraft is considerable so collect all the bags and loose equipment together and get someone to sit on them to stop them being blown away. Do not approach the helicopter unless directed to do so by the aircrew since the rotating blades are extremely dangerous.

Access

The majority of crags in this book have been climbed on for many years. However, all the climbing basically falls on land owned by First Hydro power and Gwynedd Council, and under the Disused Mines and Quarries Act they need to ensure the areas are 'safe' for the public. This has led to access issues in the past - too many climber were visiting Dali's Hole, which enticed the general public off the main track and into the more dangerous areas of the quarry. As a result, climbers de-bolted this crag. Additionally, a few areas of the quarry have temporary restrictions due to nesting birds, or special approach arrangements. These details are covered in the text.

Apart from this, climbers are generally tolerated in the area although no formal access arrangement exists. In general all that is required to maintain this access is reasonable behaviour: try to leave a place in better shape than you found it; take only pictures and leave only footprints; and abide by the Country Code.

Access arrangements can change and we recommend that, when you are unsure, you use the BMC Regional Access Database to check what the up-to-date situation is. You can check RAD here - thebmc.co.uk/rad/ or install the BMC RAD app from your iOS or Android app store.

If you do encounter problems then contact the BMC Access and Conservation representative. They are always happy to discuss any problems you encounter and often the BMC's involvement at an early stage can defuse a situation before it develops.

British Mountaineering Council

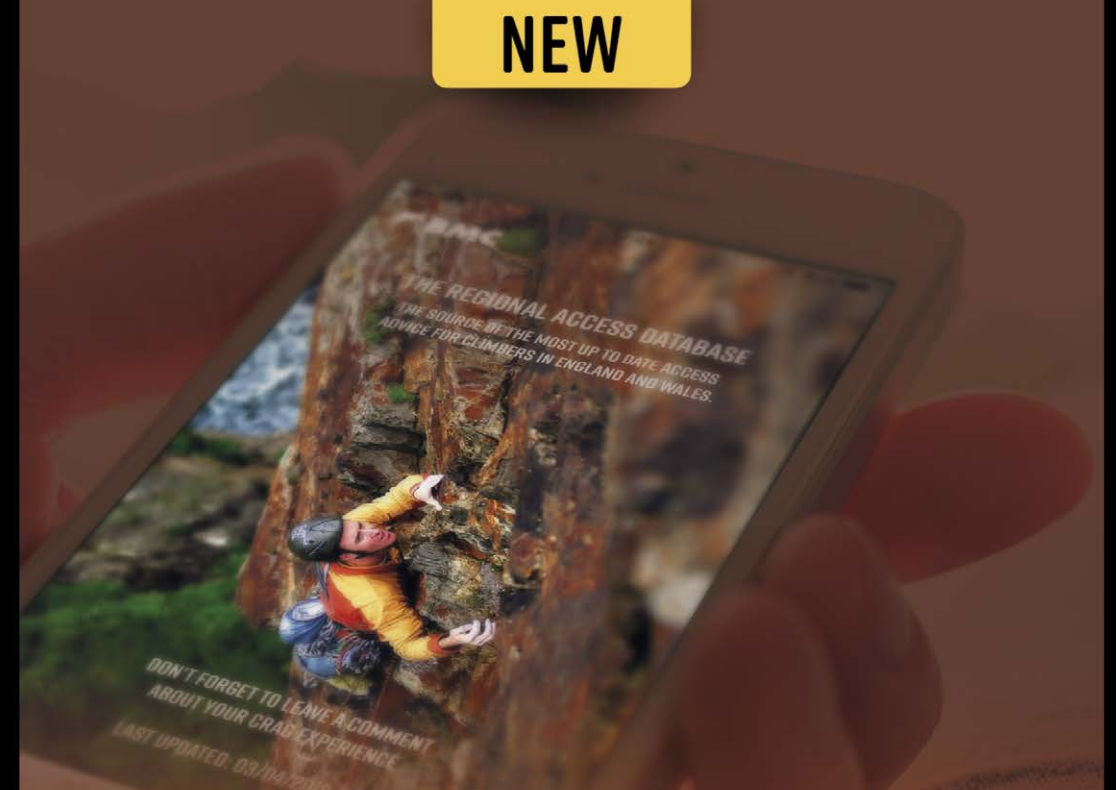
British Mountaineering Council, 177-179 Burton Road, Manchester, M20 2BB.

Tel: 0870 010 4878

Web: thebmc.co.uk

Email: office@thebmc.co.uk

NEW



BMC

RAD APP

REGIONAL ACCESS DATABASE

The source of the most up to date access advice
for climbers in England and Wales

thebmc.co.uk/rad



The routes in the slate quarries range from fully bolted sport to full trad. There have different requirements, but with some crossover in standard climbing kit like harness, helmet, rock boots and chalk bag.

Trad Routes

Runners - A typical slate climbing rack will include a double set of wires and a decent set of cams with particular attention on medium to very small cams. For the harder routes a set of microwires is essential. A few of the very hard routes require more specialist protection like skyhooks or hand-placed knifeblade pegs to offer marginal protection. These are described in the text.

Ropes - A pair of double half-ropes is best for the trad routes. 50m will be enough for most pitches and they are also often required for abseil approach or descent.

Extenders - Since the routes often weave around, it is worth taking plenty of extenders (quickdraws) and slings of varying lengths so that you can extend your gear to avoid rope drag.

Other Gear - A belay device that doubles up as an abseil device and a nut key to help remove stubborn pieces when your leader has put them in a little too well.

Sport Routes

For sport climbing you will require a single rope, preferably 60m, although the majority of the routes are possible up and down on a 50m rope. A dozen to fifteen quickdraws will usually suffice - this is slate so some of the sport routes are very 'sporty' by modern standards!

Multi-pitch Sport Routes - Some of the multi-pitch sport routes are better with double 50m half-ropes. This allows abseil escape if the heavens open and leave you marooned deep in Twll Mawr.

Rock Shoes

Any rock shoes will do for the slate, but if you really want to make your life as easy as possible a good pair of edging shoes is advised. Don't underestimate what a new stiff shoe with a sharp edge can do for your climbing, after all, good rock shoes are the only bit of climbing gear that will actually directly improve your climbing. On slate you could gain as much as a grade with the right pair of shoes.

Other Gear

Any day out in the quarries can be a cold and unpleasant experience if you don't have the correct clothing. Waterproofs, warm mid-layers and hats and gloves are worthwhile additions to a pack and might make that two-hour belay stint a little less painful. A golden rule is always have a down jacket with you, wherever you go. Having plenty of warm clothes to hand can be a lifesaver in the event of an accident too. Even in some of the more sheltered areas of the quarries, when the wind blows from the wrong direction it goes right through you.

Some of the approaches and walking descents down from several crags are far more comfortable in trainers than tight climbing shoes. So carry your shoes on the back of your harness or in a small rucksack.

A helmet is recommend in the quarries whether sport climbing or trad climbing. This is both to protect you in the event of a fall, and in case of loose rock coming from above. Take particular care when pulling onto ledges as there is often a lot of loose rock.

CRUX

specialist equipment for mountaineering
rucksacks . shelters . sleeping bags . apparel

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**V12 Outdoor
Joe Brown's**



PLAS Y BRENNIN

National Mountain Sports Centre

The routes in this book are given one of two different grades depending on whether they are a trad route, or a sport route. The table to the right gives a rough comparison of the sport and trad grade with other international grading systems. **Trad routes** are where gear is mostly carried by the lead climber and is hand placed. Many trad routes on slate have some fixed gear from bolts or pegs. **Sport routes** are where all the protection is given by fixed bolts in the rock.

British Trad Grade

1) **Adjectival grade (Diff, VDiff, Severe, Hard Severe (HS), Very Severe (VS), Hard Very Severe (HVS), E1, E2, to E10).**

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,..... to 7b).** The difficulty of the hardest single move, or short section.

Sport Grade

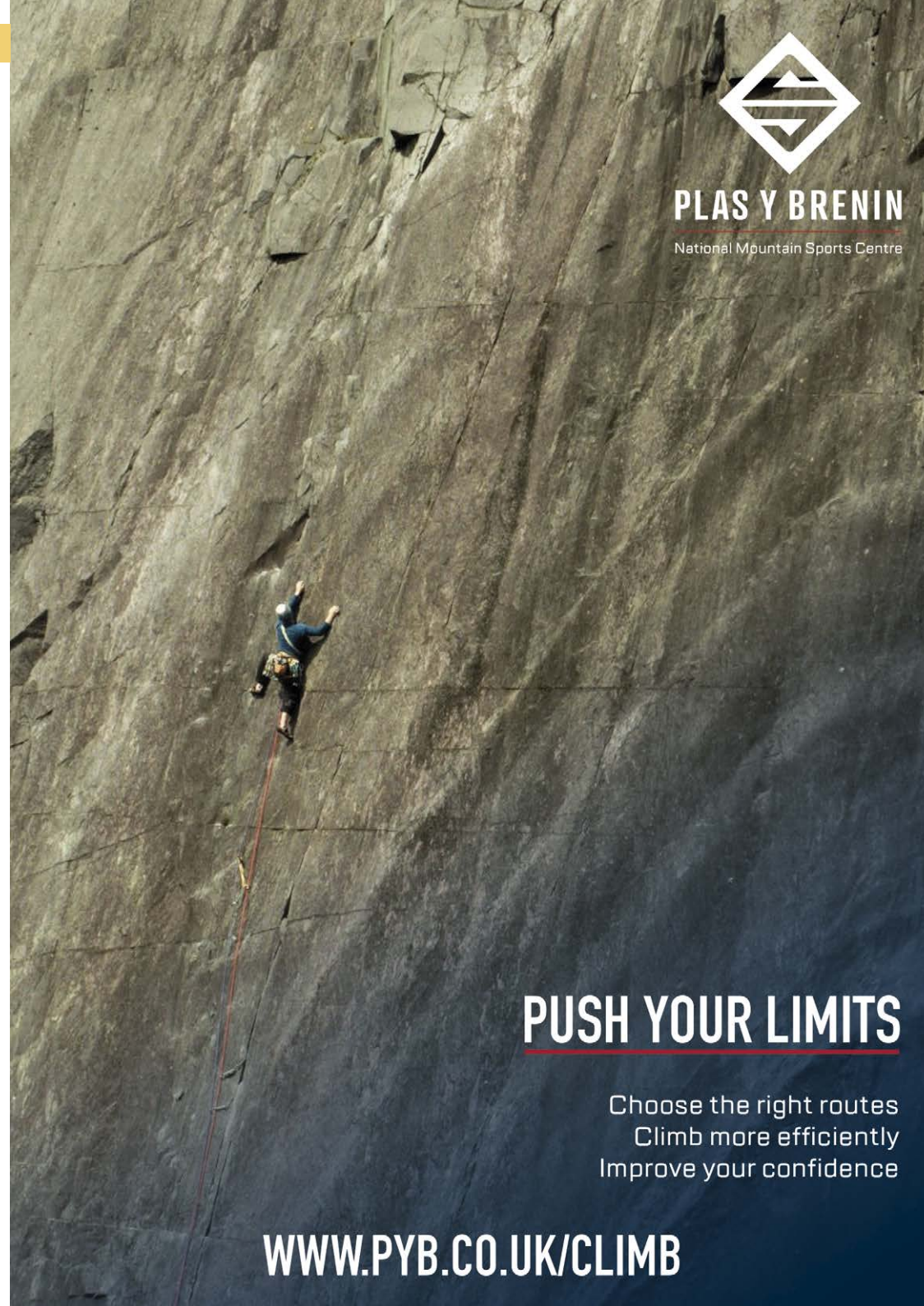
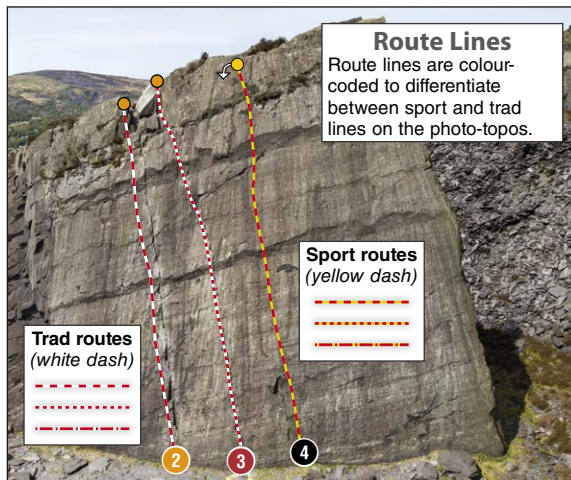
The sport grade is a measure of how hard it is going to be to get up a certain section of rock. It makes no attempt to tell you how hard the hardest move is, nor how scary a route is.

Colour Coding

The routes are all given a colour-coded dot corresponding to a grade band. The colour represents a level that a climber should be happy at, hence sport routes tend to be technically harder than the equivalent coloured trad routes because the climber doesn't need to worry about the protection.

- 1 - Up to Severe / Up to 4+ Mostly good for beginners and those wanting an easy life.
- 2 - HS to HVS / 5 to 6a+ General ticking routes for those with more experience.
- 3 - E1 to E3 / 6b to 7a Routes for the experienced climber.
- 4 - E4 or 7a+ and above The really hard stuff.

Sport Grade	British Trad Grade	UIAA	USA
1	Mod Moderate	I	5.1
2	Diff Difficult	II	5.2
2+		III	5.3
3	VDiff Very Difficult	III+	5.4
3+		IV	5.5
4a	Sev Severe	IV+	5.6
4b	BOLD 3c HS Hard Severe 4b SAFE	V-	5.7
4c	BOLD 4a VS Very Severe 5a SAFE	V	5.8
5a		V±	5.8
5b	BOLD 4b HVS Hard Very Severe 5b SAFE	VI-	5.9
5c		VI	5.10a
6a	BOLD 5a E1 5c SAFE	VI+	5.10b
6a+	BOLD 5a E2 6a SAFE	VII-	5.10c
6b	BOLD 5b E3 6a SAFE	VII	5.10d
6b+		VII+	5.11a
6c	BOLD 5c E4 6b SAFE	VIII-	5.11b
6c+	BOLD 5c E4 6a SAFE	VIII	5.11c
7a	BOLD 6b E5 6c SAFE	VIII+	5.11d
7a+		VIII+	5.12a
7b	BOLD 6c E6 7a SAFE	IX-	5.12b
7b+	BOLD 6c E7 7a SAFE	IX	5.12c
7c		IX+	5.12d
7c+	BOLD 7a E8 7a SAFE	X-	5.13a
8a	BOLD 7a E9 7a SAFE	X	5.13b
8a+		X	5.13c
8b	BOLD 7a E10 7a SAFE	X+	5.13d
8b+		X+	5.14a
8c		XI-	5.14b
8c+		XI	5.14c
9a		XI+	5.14d
9a+		XI+	5.15a



PUSH YOUR LIMITS

Choose the right routes
Climb more efficiently
Improve your confidence

WWW.PYB.CO.UK/CLIMB

Bolting in the slate quarries is maintained by a dedicated team of local activists, including the author of this book. This is a time-consuming task since it has been nearly 30 years since the original routes were first bolted and some of the new sport routes have become so popular that lower-offs have needed replacing after just 7 years of use!



A collection of some of the original 6-8mm bolts from the 1980s.

Despite this effort to make the fixed equipment safe, it is worth remembering that bolts can become loose and suffer from rock falls. A further issue on slate has been that the action of lowering off expansion bolts on very popular routes have caused the holes to become oval over time, which makes the bolts move from side to side and then eventually in and out. An effort has been made to place at least one resin anchor where possible on popular lower-offs, but care is needed since not all lower-offs have been replaced so far.

How can you help?

Much of this work is supported by the North Wales Bolt Fund which is run entirely on voluntary donations both of money and time. The main way to help is by making a donation to the North Wales Bolt Fund. The simple gesture of a £10 note in one of the collecting tins in the climbing shops each time you go clipping bolts in North Wales can go a long way to providing the necessary funding. You can also do this online through UKBoltFund.org.

If you want to get more involved, there is always a need for volunteers to help with the hard work. Bolting is a difficult and time-consuming activity. If you are an experienced climber, or have a background in rope access, you could be a real asset to supporting the bolting effort in North Wales.



Rockfax supports the bolting efforts in North Wales by providing point-of-sale donations on the Rockfax website and making a financial contribution from sales made direct from the Rockfax website. UKBoltFund.org is maintained by UKClimbing/Rockfax.



A local instructor getting some professional development in placing bolts. A partnership was set up between the North Wales Bolt Fund (NWBF) and some local instructors to help re-equip the lower-offs on The Sidings which had worn out after only seven years of use. The instructors were shown how to place resin bolts on lower-off anchors and then equalise this with a chain maillon and ring. This is the type of work that requires huge amounts of effort from volunteers, so if you fancy helping re-equip the quarries (or elsewhere in the North Wales area), contact the NWBF, or the BMC regional group.

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California
Australia
Serenggeti
Never Never Land
Twll Mawr
Mordor - Lost World
Vivian Quarry
Rainbow Slab Area
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Graded Lists are compiled from votes on UKClimbing Logbooks.



Tom Livingstone on the brilliant *Heading the Shot* (E5 6b) - p.132 - on the Seamstress Slab.

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Serengeti
Never Never Land
Twill Mawr
Mordor - Lost World
Vivian Quarry
Rainbow Slab Area
Snakes and Ladders
Outlying

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Simon Lake tackling the technical *Cig-Arete* (7b) - p.132 - in the Rainbow Slab Area. Photo: Matt Stygall

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Outlying
Nant Peris Quarry
Gideon Quarries
Fachwen Quarries
Nantlle Valley

Destination	Routes	Sport Routes				Trad Routes				Approach	Sun	Weather	Multi-pitch	Abseil in	Restrictions	Summary	Score
		up to 4c	5a to 6a+	6b to 7a	7a+ up	up to 5	HS to HVS	E1 to E3	E4 up								
Bus Stop Quarry	55	3	6	5	9	1	7	15	9	1 - 4 min						Easy access with popular quality trad and sport routes on offer. Great for a quick hit. Some very good bold routes on the big Rippled Slab. Catches plenty of sun and is sheltered.	50
Dali's Hole	65	=	2	6	2	1	7	21	8	16 - 18 min					A small area above an often-dry pool that resembles a Dali painting. Many of the easy sport routes have now been de-bolted giving the area much less appeal. There are still a few good trad routes worth seeking out.	62	
California	36	1	1	1	2	=	1	9	20	20 - 22 min					A big hole reached through a tunnel. It is home to one of the finest slabs on slate which has some amazing hard trad challenges. The more shady south wall has some good new sport routes and a bold slate classic.	72	
Australia	244	6	46	47	18	2	36	56	29	18 - 40 min					A vast excavation. It is conveniently supplied with distinct levels giving access to many different walls. Mostly slab climbing with plenty of good sport routes across the grades, and some popular trad climbing as well.	87	
Serengeti	48	1	3	3	3	=	6	14	18	22 - 24 min					An attractive area with the famous Seamstress Slab and lesser-known Yellow Wall. Mostly trad routes from the mid-to-hard grades. Reasonably sheltered with shade on some walls in the afternoon.	130	
Never Never Land	65	1	13	15	1	1	3	13	8	21 - 24 min					A big slab with several smaller areas around it offering a variety of climbing. Some bold trad slabs, some sport walls, some loose routes and some dry tool routes in one quarry.	143	
Twll Mawr	69	=	1	11	7	=	3	19	26	22 - 38 min					The deepest hole in the quarries with three amazing walls. Some brilliant multi-pitch routes both sport and trad, plus the famous Quarryman Wall with its iconic routes. Difficult access. Most routes are major undertakings.	160	
Mordor - The Lost World	49	=	13	5	4	=	4	10	13	35 - 55 min					The most remote section of the quarries is prone to rockfalls. It is worth exploring and recent additions have extended the area - The Balcony and The Cutting having good mid-grade sport routes.	182	
Vivian Quarry	144	=	2	6	12	=	21	52	49	2 - 30 min						A famous quarry in clear view of Llanberis and with slate's most iconic route, <i>Comes the Dervish</i> . Easy access and plenty to explore on the different levels. Mostly trad climbing but some hard sport as well.	197
Rainbow Slab Area	168	1	13	14	25	1	23	43	48	20 - 35 min					A vast area with some brilliant routes and the Rainbow - one of the finest slabs on British rock. Plenty of variety across the grades, but the real quality is in the hard trad routes which are world class.	238	
Snakes and Ladders	3	=	=	=	=	2	1	=	=	20 min					This popular tool takes in several of the quarries by way of ladders, abseils, walking and tunnels. It can be done in different sections and is a good wet weather activity for experienced climbers.	282	
Nant Peris Quarry	6	=	=	=	=	=	=	4	2	20 min					A poor quarry above Nant Peris with some old routes that see little attention. Much loose rock, best avoided.	289	
Gideon Quarries	60	=	2	5	3	=	12	20	15	10 - 25 min					A smaller complex of quarries to the south of Llanberis. Four main holes with a small set of routes each. The biggest Gideon Quarry has two excellent walls and is worth a look for any mid-to-hard grade trad climber.	297	
Fachwen Quarries	7	=	=	=	=	=	2	5	=	5 - 20 min					Four small quarries above the lakeside railway. Overgrown with loose rock and nothing of any real quality.	309	
Nantlle Valley	5	=	=	=	=	=	2	1	2	2 - 14 min					An area further to the south near the famous Dorethea Quarry pool. A few routes but nothing of note. Possible potential for new routes only. Popular with scuba divers.	311	

TOTALS 1028 18 113 117 86 8 130 284 247

Faded symbol means that only some of the routes - are multi-pitch / require abseil approach / restricted

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