

## UNITED KINGDOM NOTES, 1956

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THE year 1956 was an interesting one for those climbing in the United Kingdom. The increase in standard which was evident in 1955 continued, and consequently a small number of the best climbers approached the standard set by J. Brown. Much attention was given to repeating Brown's hardest climbs ; the Cenotaph Corner was climbed four times, and Sassenach on the Carn Dearg of Ben Nevis had its second ascent. However, there was also extensive exploratory climbing. The White Slab on Clogwyn du'r Arddu yielded to a brilliant first ascent ; but the majority of the new climbs were made outside Wales and the Lake District. The new routes discovered in Scotland, Derbyshire, Cornwall and Ireland show that previously undeveloped areas are receiving a well-deserved share of attention.

*Scotland.* In the area north-east of Loch Maree, there are numerous excellent crags, on which there are already more than sixty routes. The cliffs of Beinn Lair, and Beinn Airidh da Char, above Fionn Loch and Lochan Fada are suited to long buttress climbs ; standards vary from Martha's Peak buttress (D) to Marathon Ridge (S), both over 1,000 ft. Recent exploration has concentrated on the big crags of Carnmore and Torr na h'Iolaire on the north side of the loch ; Fionn Buttress (800 ft. VS), which takes a line up the steep nose of Carnmore Crag, is a fine example of the quality of this climbing. There are apparently unlimited opportunities for new routes up to 500 ft. in length, on crags which have very little loose rock or vegetation.

Members of the Creag Dhu Club made three hard new routes in Skye ; one was near Cioch Grooves, and the others were on the Cioch Upper Buttress. The South Post of Coire Ardair was climbed in winter conditions by N. S. Tennent and C. G. M. Slesser ; it gave an excellent climb of 1,100 ft. Further rock exploration continued on Garbh Bheinn of Ardgour ; on the fine South Wall of the Great Ridge, three new routes were made, and on the Pinnacle Face, one VS and two Severe climbs were added by G. J. and Mrs. Sutton. On Ben Nevis, R. O. Downes and M. J. O'Hara excelled themselves with the second ascent of the Brown-Whillans route, Sassenach (June 13) : ' This is a great route, probably the greatest mountaineering climb in Britain, but it is brutal rather than elegant. It compares with nothing that I can suggest—only like Curving Crack on top of Chimney Route

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to the large number of climbers who have supplied information. I am particularly grateful to R. O. Downes and to P. H. Biven, L. S. Lovat and T. W. Patey.—A. B.

on top of a day's hard gritstone climbing. 'The rock requires watching.' (Downes.) On August 31 D. Whillans and Downes put up Centurion, a new 620 ft XS to the left of Sassenach. Although this route is not as difficult as Sassenach, it is more sustained. The rock is excellent, and the climb is well protected. Two days later, the same party, leading through, straightened out Evening Wall by adding a direct central section (The Shield VS), which is very slimy and gives 350 ft. of difficulty.

In Glencoe L. S. Lovat, J. R. Marshall and A. H. Hendry did the first winter ascent of Scabbard Chimney on the Summit Buttress of Stog Coire nan 'Lochan; it was hard VS and took over five hours. The main developments in summer were on the upper part of the West face of the North Buttress of Buachaille Etive Mor; on this very exposed wall P. Walsh and C. Vieano climbed both Revelation, which starts from the platform at the top of Belial, and also Doom Arête. Walsh and S. Crawford did Bloody Crack and another Creag Dhu party made a Girdle Traverse. In July, Walsh and Noon completed the series with the Nightmare Traverse. All of these routes were VS, and Bloody Crack and Nightmare Traverse may well be as difficult as anything in Glencoe. Old ground still yields new ways; on the Central Buttress of Buachaille Etive Mor, for instance, a 200-ft Severe, Hang-over, was added, while on the Rannoch Wall, J. Cunningham and W. Smith climbed Whortleberry Wall, 410 ft. VS. The second edition of the Guide-book to Glencoe and Ardgour, compiled by L. S. Lovat, is nearing completion.

Lochnagar had two first-class winter ascents: these were the first winter ascents of Parallel Buttress by T. W. Patey, Jeremy Smith and W. D. Brooker and of the Black Spout Pinnacle by Route One by Smith and Brooker. During the summer, K. A. Grassick and Brooker made the first ascent of the Link (350 ft. VS); this very sustained route on the Black Spout Pinnacle links Route One (starting from the Springboard) to Route Two at its crux pitch. Smith's Pinnacle Face route to the Springboard was repeated by several parties, and the combination with the Link forms one of the best and most sustained climbs in the Cairngorms. In Creaghan a' Coire Etchachan, the companion *dièdre* to Crimson Slabs was climbed by J. Hay and party, giving a very fine open route (Djibangi 350 ft. VS). The publication of the new climbing Guide-book to the Cairngorms, prepared by Patey and Malcolm Smith, will arouse considerable interest; it employs a numerical system for grading ice climbs.

*Lake District.* A main characteristic of Lakeland climbing in 1956 was the intensive search for difficulty on relatively small crags. Thirlmere is establishing itself as a popular climbing ground away from the usual centres, but the centre of exploration shifted to Borrowdale,

where there is now a number of short routes of a high standard. There, Eagle Crag, Langstrath, yielded two routes of about 200 ft. ; one of these, made by P. Ross and P. Lockey, was Post Mortem (XS), which ranks among the hardest problems in the Lakes. On Falcon Crag (lower tier) Ross and Lockey have between them made five routes of VS standard ; the macabre names persist—Funeral Way, Graviter, Illusion, Hedera Grooves, Deruptus. Obituary Grooves was led by E. Metcalfe. The enigmatic reference in the Borrowdale Guide to North Buttress on Shepherd's Crag retains its inscrutable humour ; however, P. Greenwood and Whillans, in what is possibly best described as a ' first guidebookless ascent ', climbed the buttress and found it a good VS (alternate leads). Their route was repeated by P. Biven, who thought it less difficult than Conclusion, Ross's climb on the same crag.

The year's outstanding new ascent was Delphinus (XS) on Raven Crag, Thirlmere, put up by Whillans and Joe Smith in February. The route ascends the wall on the right of the great cave, then traverses left on to the lip of the cave itself. The crux is the overhanging groove just above, leading to ledges. From these the climb crosses the face diagonally up to the left. Later in the year Whillans and Greenwood completed a girdle of the cliff (hard VS). Communist Convert was repeated by N. Drasdo and C. Britt. Across the valley, Castle Rock of Triermain attracted many parties. The very fine North Crag Eliminate, thought to be slightly harder than Kipling Groove, has now had about a dozen ascents. One can vary the route on the final pitch (crux)—for example Downes and Whillans climbed the flake direct instead of pulling round to the left, while on a previous ascent Whillans and D. T. Roscoe had climbed the wall up to the right from the top of the flake. The two other Eliminates, technically much harder though less impressive, do not appear to have been climbed more than twice each. A direct start to Angel's Highway was added by J. Brown.

In Langdale, Arthur Dolphin's climb on Bowfell, the Sword of Damocles, maintains its reputation as one of the most difficult undertakings in the valley. Whillans repeated the climb last year and in June A. Austin made the third ascent with R. B. Evans. Do Not, Laugh Not and Kipling Groove have each had several ascents, thus achieving relative popularity as ' yardsticks '. A new climb in the same class has been made on Pavey Ark, Stickle Grooves, by Austin and Evans (leading through). The same party repeated Chequer Buttress, and compared it with Rake End Wall. There were at least two ascents of Deer Bield Buttress, by Metcalfe and by H. Smith and H. Drasdo. Drasdo and A. Norton put up Hubris (180 ft. hard VS) using several pegs. After gardening, it was repeated by Austin and Evans, using one piton.

On Scafell, Dolphin's climb Pegasus, on the East Buttress, was climbed by Austin and Evans.

*Wales.* The most striking development has been the repetitions of Cenotaph Corner by R. Moseley and Joe Smith, H. I. Banner, E. Metcalfe and D. Gray, and Downes, Miss Judith Clark and H. Drasdo. The general opinion is that it is not as hard as some other routes; the technical crux is at 30 ft. and the other very hard portion lies at the top of the wide crack at about 90 ft. Several excellent first ascents were made on this crag. On April 1 and 2, Brown and Whillans carried out the long awaited girdle traverse, which crosses the walls of the Cenotaph Corner. The same party did an XS new route left of Parchment Passage. Moseley used the technique of jamming knots and chock-stones at a very high technical level to climb the Left Wall of Cenotaph Corner. He used the Brown-Whillans traversing line, but Whillans later added a direct start. Cemetery Gates has had several ascents this year, and it is now usual to run the first two pitches together. Moseley and T. Stead did The Grooves on Cyn Las, which was found to be very hard. The Sickie on Clogwyn y Grochan had a number of ascents. The difficulty encountered varies directly with the level at which the traverse is taken; using the lower line, the climb has been found to be easier than Hangover, and rather better protected.

There was much climbing of very high standard on Clogwyn du'r Arddu. On May 19, Moseley and Smith did the first ascent of the White Slab, starting from Linnell's Leap. This long-awaited first ascent resolved yet another 'last problem in Wales'. The following day, Whillans and Roscoe, leading through, made a largely new direct start from the foot of the West Buttress and then carried on, Whillans leading, to complete the second ascent. There were also a number of first-class repetitions. Banner and Harvey, for example, did the second ascent of Diglyph, and Moseley the third. Octo has been repeated by Downes and R. R. E. Chorley, and by Metcalfe. The Gargoyle and the Corner have been done a number of times, and the latter is regarded as a good introduction to the harder crack climbs. Two ascents of the Left Edge of the Boulder have been made by Whillans and Smith, and by E. Metcalfe and D. Gray. Moseley and Smith also climbed the Boulder proper.

The Llanberis guide-book has been reprinted with an up-to-date addendum by Moseley; and A. J. J. Moulam has rewritten the former guide-books to Tryfan and Glyder Fach, now combined in one volume.

*South-west England.* In the south-west there is a very large amount of good climbing. The Avon Gorge is convenient for weekend climbing, while the Cornish cliffs give extremely good climbing on granite comparable with Chamonix. The climbing on the Gorge has been enhanced by another climb on the Main Wall by G. H. Francis and by two routes led by Harvey, one on the Suspension Bridge Buttress and the other on

Morning Slabs. All these routes are reputed to be very hard, especially the Suspension Bridge Buttress.

Exploration in Cornwall has exceeded all expectations, largely because of a magnificent series of first ascents by P. H. Biven, H. T. H. Peck and J. H. Deacon. This was most marked on the Bosigran Face in Porthmoina Cove. The furthest left of the new routes is Sinistra (VS 150 ft.), by D. Holroyd and A. Blackshaw, to the left of Beaker Route. The Paragon (XS 190 ft.) starts to the left of Nameless, and then takes a direct line between Nameless and Suicide Wall. Then there are two new routes which break through the line of big *toits* in the centre of the Face. The Ghost goes to the left, and the Phantom to the right. These two routes include some very hard free climbing, as well as peg climbing. The Thin Wall Special (XS 190 ft.) starts between Doorpost and Little Brown Jug, and takes a devious line to finish directly over the overhang at the top of the Doorway climb. Further to the right, and starting up the rib of String of Pearls is Anvil Chorus (Hard VS 190 ft.); this route takes a very fierce layback crack, to the right of Ledge Climb, and a high level traverse to finish on the corner overlooking the gully. To crown all these routes by Biven and Peck, is the Diamond Tiara. This 1,100 ft. Exceptionally Severe traverses the whole of the Bosigran Face and is quite distinct from the String of Pearls. There are sixteen pitches, of which several are grade VI climbing. (First ascent, two days, Biven, Peck and Deacon, leading through.)

The Great Zawn below Rosemergy was also visited to good effect. At Whitsuntide Biven, Peck and B. M. Biven, did the Traverse of the Green Cormorant Ledge, which was thought to be about Medium VS. This is never likely to be overcrowded through its popularity—it was found necessary for the third man to take a 30 ft. plunge into the sea and swim across. Biven and Peck did two artificial climbs here; the Great Zawn Chimney, which goes up the overhanging chimney to the left of Green Cormorant Ledge, gave the hardest artificial climb they had ever done. The other, easy by comparison, is dirty, and is called Garden Wall.

On Chair Ladder, Deacon and J. Oakes did the first ascent of Bishop's Rib (Hard V.S.), which takes a bold line up the exposed face to the right of Flannel Avenue; and Biven and Peck did Ariel (VS) on the Wolf Buttress. There was some new exploration at Land's End; a buttress 400 yards S.E. of Land's End Point gave two new routes to Deacon, J. Day and Holroyd. World's End is much the more difficult of the two; the holds are very small, and the angle extreme. Concealed Corner (VS) was an exercise in route-finding because the Corner, which is not obvious, can be reached only by a stomach traverse on the wall of a zawn!

*Gritstone and Limestone.* This year, many of the hardest gritstone climbs have come into vogue, largely because the number of climbers prepared to attempt such routes is rapidly increasing ; climbs such as The Sloth and The Mincer at the Roches which require a *volonté* and a gymnastic approach unusual even for gritstone are now attempted with more equanimity. However, the technical difficulty of the great Curbar routes—The Peapod, Elder Crack, Great Crack, Dead Bay Groove and Dead Bay Crack—is sufficient to ensure that they are often attempted on a rope before being led.

Some important gaps have been filled. Moyer's Buttress at Gardom's for instance was led by P. Biven, and A. Austin climbed High Street at Ilkley. J. Brown made two routes up the impossible-looking Higgar Tor (the face is 65 ft. high and the top overhangs the base by 15 ft.).

The increase of piton climbing on gritstone is significant : it is claimed that it is an excellent training medium for artificial climbing in the Dolomites. Limestone artificial requires a different technique, but is very popular. The best routes such as the Stony Middleton Roof, Pickering's Tor, the White Edge, and High Tor, Matlock, were fashionable. But the major developments have taken place on Gordale Scar and on Kilnsey Crag in Yorkshire. The sidewalls at the former cliff have been ascended ; J. Sumner made a notable route up the right wall—180 ft. with stances in *étriers*. Kilnsey<sup>2</sup> has been the scene of prodigious efforts to cross the enormous roof ; this extends for 40 ft. but is slightly stepped. R. Moseley has succeeded in reaching to within 15 ft. of the edge, but as the crack is a heartbreaking Z-shape, this has already involved about 60 ft. of pegging under the overhang.

<sup>2</sup> A.J. 60. 44. Photo.