

Scotland last Whit ,superb weather, we got lost on the slabs on Saturday, Sunday came it just had to be a real crag day,for a seasoned team like us our first route in the 'coe ,in Scotland, HAD to be one of the best and hardest routes there.After all I had the neck and push and Bob had the experience — he was nearly fifteen and a bit then,yes a team like us needed a real classic . . . .

The 'z' team dropped us off at Lagangarbh and we began the short trudge across the moor.

'It looks dark and steep.'said BOB. I said nothing ,but thought about that big crack of Whillans .As we came closer the route looked bigger while we felt correspondingly smaller and smaller,I wandered up to the terrace that runs across the foot of the crag proper.

'It looks wet lets, . . . lets go on Slime Wall.' ' I, blurted out.

Let 's have a closer look. '

' Oh come on let's go on Slime Wall.'

' It's a long way ,besides Shibboleth WON'T look any easier.' . . . brave words from a fifteen year old.

We found the foot of the route and were just about to go back down when another team appeared.We emptied our sacks and waited, Five minutes of bullshit later ,I'd kitted up and tied on and the other team were watching. They had forced us onto the rock, which was of course bone dry.

I set off,the first fifteen feet were a doddle,but then the obvious line wouldn't go so I flung myself up and left at a hard looking wall,teeter teeter Iwent,a hold in the right place,teeter again up the leaning wall POW - a jug - more jugs ,zonk,zonk,zonk - allthe way to a peg reinforced it with a nut ,fingers screaming with pain ,set off again- no rest there - down ,down,then across the traverse ,pausing only to get gripped and to put on pretend spike runners - Iarrived at a resting place - more pretend runners then off again ,masochistic satisfaction - the ropes like washing lines ,but then it eased and I crawled along ,impressed,onto a tiny ledge where I squatted ,tied onto a sound combination of unsound pegs. The spectating team wandered off ,satisfied that we would do the route.

Up came Bob to the peg and arranged a back rope,then oh so cool along the traverse ,but he could afford to be with a stout rope from either side ,he did look worried on the hard bit and eventually bolstered by precise instructions came to the stance and scrambled to the next one thirty feet away ,below the V.S. pitch.(sorry I forgot - it's all V.S. )

The easy pitch was easy ,but dirty ; looking up and right the real difficulties began. We were not helped by a swooping carnivore,which was making a real racket screaming and cawing,no doubt it was protecting its home ground and also its namesake . . . .

A ramp line led upwards,easy at first but then getting nasty,all friction ,undercuts and layaways , and leading to the next stance - which nearly induced hysterics. Imagine . . . imagine a couple of horizontal cracks with pegs in them ,with a couple of very poor footholds below them,all perched above what seems like two hundred feet of impending wall. I brayed in gear like a maniac and as Bob came up, I looked up - and smiled.

The 'Villains' big overhanging crack was a joke ,it was more like a groove cum recess, off widths were out but this was possible. I wasn't doing Cunningham's silly traverses now. Straight up was the only way, I'd seen a picture in 'Hard Rock ' of where it went and knew that Whillans used a peg,but now the carnivore screeched louder than ever. We didn't say much as Bob tied onto the 'st ance,we were both a bit gripped.

I was determined to get up this pitch ,ethics were forgotten,a peg went in six feet above the stance to supplement the hundred or so belays. It began deceptively , but then jugs appeared,a pull and another, then I reached the peg,clipped in and sat straight on it , no question of purism in this situation ,despite the tired state of the peg. I sneaked a Moac in a crack up on the right , ' Safe now' I yelled. The carnivore yelled back -all the time. A bold layback move up and right and I was committed ,a teeter up and holds appeared. On real rock again I went up ,no more of that slaty White Ghyll - Lower Falcon stuff , a line of grooves led me on awkwardly to holds and runners and then a grass ledge with bones -carnivores prey - a higher ledge provided a belay . At last I was enjoying the route.

Then I stood and waited,it took half an hour for the pegs to come out and even then he left one in , I watched the carnivore soaring around and in time Bob appeared,not looking worried any longer. There was no elation just relief that the hard bit was done.

'Where now?' asked Bob.

'Oh up there somewhere . ' I replied.

We wandered up left and back right ,not where the route goes but it didn't matter , I lost another peg , bashed it straight down the crag. Even that didn't matter ,we'd done it. On top;

'Not a right good route . '

'No a bit chossy. ' And so we

scrambled

down ,displeased.

A lift back with the 'Z' team:

'Did you do it ?'

'Aye .'

'We 've been talking to Grindley, did you use the peg?'

'So did he, he says yours is the sixth ascent. What did you think to it ?'

'Not as good as it is made out to be . The direct pitch is only as hard as the first pitch.'

But later , weeks , months, it comes back like a dream , the only route on that amazing wall, good climbing , the bulled up Whillans' Grack and above all that carnivore , squaking and cawing away, while we climbed the same, not desperate , not technical just oh, oh so good.