

Jonny Woodward

I first met Jonny Woodward in 1998 when I came to Salt lake City on sabbatical. Three days later I found myself hanging off a crappy skyhook drilling on lead on a “slab” of perfect limestone at the Bear Creek Cliffs in southeastern Idaho. Jonny's scheme was pretty simple in that the drill was belayed at the last bolt on a supply line; you climbed above it as far as you dared then sat on a hook pulled up the drill and drilled. Or some times it was necessary to just stand and pull the drill up. The cliff has Verdon quality limestone with iron extrusions suitable for hooking. While completely illogical and very time consuming it was also great fun and a good adventure.

The idea was that you should only put in good bolts and that you took turns on lead. One time the drill ran out of juice part way through and the bolt would have stuck out.

“Don't ruin the route with a poor bolt” he yelled and insisted that I come down. But how?

Eventually I tied off the supply line to the skyhook I was on and hand over hand went down while he took in. Jonny then went up and finished the route, and I began to understand the competitive nature of the game. Many great routes at Bear Creek followed including Churt Albert – which was described as being at “Goat Gulch” in Jonny's Alpinist profile. In fact all the routes mentioned in the profile were real but were placed at fictitious cliffs so as to make them impossible to find.

Perhaps the most memorable moment at Bear Creek came about because Jonny is also something of a trail obsessive. So it wasn't surprising that on the drive up to the Bear Creek trail there was a particularly stubborn boulder on the road that caused the truck to tilt and so had to be subjected to sledge hammer treatment. This thing was about six cubic feet and buried deep, with only its tip showing. The several hours of sledgehammer work that was involved over several days made climbing on run-out slabs seem like the recreation it may not have always seemed.

[Photo] Jonny in the chain gang.

Of course Jonny is also known for his crack climbing skill and has been noted as one of the better crack climbers around. One day we went to

a quartzite cliff that had lots of bolted faces and a bunch of cracks in between that were unclimbed.

“What this cliff needs is a good warmup” said Jonny and proceeded to clean a somewhat unlikely looking flaring bomb-bay type crack. “This is going to be a nice 5.9” he said and set off. As he only had a minimal rack the protection was somewhat spaced but he arrived at the “5.9” bit pretty easily. He started on the crux, climbed up climbed down, up, down, up, down and so on. With each attempt the birthing type noises increased in volume and frequency. It didn't look much like 5.9 although it did not seem entirely proper to suggest this, or for that matter to ask when the baby was due. Finally with much grunting and scrabbling he finally fought his way into the upper crack and proceeded more steadily to the belay.

“Do you want to do it?” he asked.....

In honor of his appearance when he'd finished and his cat-catching I suggested that he call it Catweazle [Photo]. I'm sure it is a classic Jonny 5.9, although he declined a grade.

A hitherto unrevealed secret is that Jonny is Adam Ondra's long lost great uncle [Photo]