CERTAIN CRAGS capture your imagination and force you to return time and again. Kilnsey is one such crag for me, a huge bulging mass of limestone totally dominating the upper reaches of Wharfhead.

Appraising from the south, the climber is at once impressed and intimidated by the enormous main overhang and, beyond it, the continuous 45-degree overhanging wall of the North Buttress. Between the two is a series of vertical and overhanging walls and grooves. The only sop to easy climbing here is a couple of vegetated gullies. The whole place has an air of seriousness. Stood at the foot of the crag, craning your neck to study the lines, then we tend to lay things back.

Pete Livesey summed the place up:

"The trouble with Kilnsey is that the reasonably angled slabs turn out to be overhanging."

One of my regular climbing partners said "I don't like Kilnsey it psyches me out." For me this is the whole point of going there, the very attraction of the place. You tend to have to "go for it."

Everything about Kilnsey is difficult, even attempting to climb it is problematic. Climbers on the crag form a natural showcase for the tourists on the road below, which becomes blocked and people complain, so climbing is banned at week-ends. (The notion of double yellow lines seems to have escaped the local council.)

The farmer who owns the crag lives opposite the northern end and it is wise to ask permission. The alternative is amusing only in retrospect. Ever been halfway up an A3 when the police arrived to take you back?

"Sorry officer, we're stuck. Love to come down but can't. "Be down by 3 p.m. or we'll sort you out at the station." At five to three the boys in blue returned as we stood on the ground covered in ropes, pegs and slings.

"Are you the climbers?"

We looked around in vain for others, but there were none, so we assumed that we must be they.

"Names and addresses."

To be fair this bobby didn't mind too much and left telling us not to do it again. I was foolish enough to tell my parents.

"What next? You'll soon be robbing banks!"

PRE-HISTORY

Access wasn't always such a problem and most people still associate the crag with the aid extravaganzas of the fifties and sixties. I won't bore you with the engineering details and instead will concentrate on free climbing. The legendary Arthur Dolphin had tried to free climb here for the fortes and after the peg brigade had most finished Alan Austin climbed Central Wall which at least had more than a token measure of free climbing on it.

The Barley brothers left the crag with two predemolishes for free climbs - Brainwashed and Warlord; fine lines, but some of the worst free climbing on the crag: vegetated, grotty corners and traverses. The older routes also suffer from one drawback in actually reaching the vertical grass at the top of the crag. Todays climber, fortunately, does not suffer from such misconceptions with regard to his climbing!

THE LIVESEY-FAWCETT ERA

The boom time for free climbing on the crag came with Pete Livesey in the seventies. Brainstorm was first to be free climbed in 1972 or so. The massive corner of Diedre was next. This superb natural line divides the North Buttress from the easier central section of the crag. The first pitch is both steeper and harder than its grassy appearance belies. The real meat of the climb is the superb second pitch. An overhanging corner leads to moves out onto the left wall to escape the worst bulges. The climbing is a reasonable E1 unless you happen to start the route in gathering gloom and find yourself bridging up the top pitch aided only by the car headights on the road below.

Left of Diedre is a smooth grey wall of perfect limestone which ends in the broken groove of Warlord. Up the middle of the wall is the intimidating line of Central Wall. Pete Livesey's classic account in Rocksport of the first free ascent in 1972, matched from John Syrett and Roger Baxter Jones, was entitled Arms like a Fly because of Pete's supposedly withered appendages and the steepness of the climb. In fact this superb wall climb is all fingers and toes. The traditional grade is E3 but those used to sensible grades will muster complaints as they power away from sparse protection. The crux move is low down, swinging right by a peg on slipping finger holds, but the upper wall is sustained and tiring. In particular there is quite a run out at the top before the delicate dimply break of Trauma Traverse is used to traverse left to the delay. More than one2 budding hero has reached this break too pumped to use it! The resulting fall seems like about fifteen feet. Time to wonder if, how and when you're going to stop. Fortunately it's free. The top pitch doesn't compete with the abseil from the tree.

Livesey's campaign continued with Ron Fawcett and a free ascent of the fiercely overhanging Perverted Geranium E4,6a on the central section of the crag. The poor stature at the top of the first pitch and the vertical pasture that follows have discouraged many repeats.

The next routes to be free climbed on the crag in 1975 were on the left hand, south side of the crag. The main overhang provides a convenient umbrella for the steep clean wall beneath. Ron Fawcett and Al Evans free climbed the first pitches of Diretissima and Original Route as far as the main overhang. In keeping with Yorkshire's ridiculous grading system both were given Hard VS2. The Diretissima's pitch is perfect and probably the most popular free climb on the crag, steep groove climbing on mostly good holds at about E2,5c with masses of in situ protection. Above a restful niche spectacular bulges are covered in jumble. At the top you swing out right and look 100 feet down and 20 feet, in to your second. The first pitch of the original route is different having a short steep crux at E3,6a on slightly inferior rock. At about the same time Pete Gomersall and Jill Lawrence free climbed the direct start to the Dodger at HVS+ to give one of the few good easy free pitches on the crag.

About thirty feet to the right of Brainstorm/Original Route is the start of another very impressive Livesey-Fawcett route: Birdmen (E4,6b,5c). The initial deliberately overhanging crack puts many roof climbs to shame, even worse is that the crux is still to come in the form of an easier angled crack above. The route was written up with a mysterious slant for aid to leave the ground which no-one ever mentioned again. The top pitch traverses right along Brainstorm before breaking out over three sets of roofs to the top. It has been compared with Fish on Cheddar for quality. Imagine Siripha but make of the holds loose; throw in a couple of six foot roofs, fill up the odd crack with loose rock and take away all the best runners. Yes it's dissimilar. Thinking that I was invincible I led this pitch on my 21st birthday and sat at the top, tied onto steep grass with bulky belays and with both feet firmly dug in, whilst Pete Bottrill followed. Watching the huge blocks that he flung aside into the stream I suddenly realised that life could be very short.

The main era Livesey's final offering Claws (E5,6a,6a), a route that is firmly engrained on Yorkshire climbing history in more ways than one. The route takes the blank looking rock between Diedre and Central Wall. The first pitch has a very serious air with difficult route finding. A vague groove is climbed to flakles and bold moves up and across lead to better holds and runners followed by an obvious groove and belay on Trauma Traverse. The myth of this route's invincibility was finally broken by Andy Brown and Ashley Cowell. Once they had illuminated the first pitch with chalk a host of repeat ascents followed. The top pitch provides a surprise. A steep wall leads to a tree below a prominent blank looking scoop. Brother Bob led up into the groove and yelled down.

"It's covered in chipped holds."

As the groove was wet at the top we abseiled off full of righteous indignation, wondering where we could buy some readymix. To Pete's accurate statement that Claws is "the hardest, most sustained and one of the best routes on limestone" one can only add that it is also one of the most clipped.

Right: Neil Foster on Deja Vu, E4,6a, a thankfully short-lived aid route subsequently free-climbed by Fawcett.

Photo: Ian Smith.
The Eighties

One of Yorkshire's bouldering experts, Rob Gawthorpe, was next to make his mark on Kilnsey. Fortunately for the rest of us his devotion to more academic pursuits has restricted his climbing activities to a handful of new routes, all remarkable for their sheer technical difficulty. The first pitch of the Super Direct, a slim groove with a bulging problem start, was his first contribution at E4 6b. It provides intricate and technical climbing, especially on the last section to the belay bolts. Worse was to come. The start of Warlord used to involve lassoing a projecting twelve feet off the ground and prusicking up to it. Gawthorpe started to the left and free climbed this at an impressive 6c. Thinking that Warlord couldn't possibly follow the grotty groove above he moved out left onto a clean wall and followed the obvious groove at an easier 6a to the break of Trauma Traverse. (Mistaken Identity E4 6c).

The same line caught the attention of Lancashire climber Dave Knighton. Not knowing of Gawthorpe's ascent, he traversed across from Central Wall, placed a sling and then led the groove and added an easier pitch above. This non-event was written up as Talons. Knighton's other contributions were more impressive however. Worlds in Collision (E3 5c, 5c) gains the wall right of Dieder from thirty feet up that route. Route finding is awkward as the first pitch weaves its way up the wall to provide sustained and fingery climbing. The top pitch is equally difficult but is shorter and in a more exposed position. The route as a whole feels a little undergraded at E3. Only this year Alan Clarke from Lancaster added a bold looking direct start at E5 6a to improve the route, if that's possible.

Captains Trippe (E4 5c, 6a/b) was the last route that Dave Knighton put up on Kilnsey, and bold in conception. The first pitch follows the photogenic but technically reasonable hanging arete right of Brainstorm. From the belays at the top of Pitch One of the Original Route the climb takes a bulging crack above the belay before breaking rightwards to avoid the very top overhangs. Rumours about regarding the style of the first ascent, sections aided then free climbed later and several days taken. On the final free ascent of the top pitch, the bottom section was wet so aid had to be used on the easy bit so that the crust could be free climbed, etc., etc. Despite this circus, the climbing is reasonable, given the situation, and the crux has a peg and sling thoughtfully placed right by it. No pitch on the crag is more sensational and 'out there'.

Inevitably Ron Fawcett made an overdue re-appearance to pick a plum line. Beneath the main overhang between Diretissima and Super Direct lay the first pitch of Gomersall's difficult aid climb Deja Vu. This pitch now provides 100 feet or so of superb climbing on good flat holds. The protection is a little sparse in places but the climbing is mostly reasonable with perhaps the hardest section at the very top to gain the break under the main overhang. The pitch probably deserves E4 6a, but towards the top end of that grade, and is of the finest quality.

(In case you hadn't noticed, the point of this crag reviews seems to be for the author tobing the history of a crag and then to indulge in glorious self-advertisement. Well, you've had the former so here comes the latter).

In the centre of Kilnsey is truly impressive wide, open groove, about seventy feet high with an easier groove above and left of the top. This is Bof, the sort of route that most people had looked at and said 'yest that will go' but no-one would ever try it. All credit then to Ashley Cowell and Andy Brown for cleaning it up and reducing the aid to just one of the three bolts that are in place on the traverse left of the top of the main groove. Bob and I free climbed it but only after a joint effort. Bob went up and jumped out in the morning sun so I pulled the ropes through and eventually did it after a siege and after cleaning off some of the loose flakes on the upper traverse. I stayed low on the crux, stretched between two breaks, slapping on "times". At the very end just as I was about to fall, my hand landed on a hidden jug low down which proved the key. Above is easier so its best to abseil down to the bolts and retreat from there - or if your name is Moffat just jump straight off!

The next most obvious line to go free had to be Crank Stroke Groove - I'd been eyeing it up for years. The route is the easiest looking line to the right of Dieder. A curving overlap leads up to an obvious roof and a traverse right to a groove which leads to the top. The crucial section is the overlap, though the overlap absorbed a lot of effort from both Bob and myself. The overlap had a weird hand jam move but above it was still strenuous and quite gripping with the only protection being in situ pegs. During Bob's lead of the final groove, that David Bailey of the climbing world Bernard Newman was prusicking up the abseil rope slightly to one side and way out in space. Bob was tired from his previous efforts and was bridging out onto rock which hadn't been cleaned. Bernard, unable to move out of the line of fire, squealed with terror as rock rained all around. Bob was really going for it and wouldn't stop. I sat safely at the bottom giggling and wondered if this was the price that had to be paid for art. Surprisingly this is one of our routes that people have actually bothered to repeat. Martin 'Basher' Atkinson thought that it compared with Cave Route Right Hand in difficulty. Understandably upset by this conclusion, he did the route again and decided that he must have been having an off day.

To the right of Crank Stroke Groove is the more solid but even steeper line of Rictus. This was free climbed by Mr. & Mrs. Fawcett at E5 5c, the crux being a
desperately holdless scoop, fifteen feet up. This looks to be a superb pitch but unfortunately the crucial peg runner has been removed by one of that acquisitive minority of peg climbers, the gear grabber. This mentally deficient creature denies routes with crucial peg protection to free climbers and by smashing in pegs where nuts or skyhooks would do destroys existing climbs. The old argument that these routes wouldn’t be possible if it wasn’t for him just doesn’t apply here. Most of the aid routes on Kilnsey have seen relatively few ascents—many have good cracks which have not yet been destroyed by pegs. This situation will not last if Wilbur Pegwanker has his way. This ‘species’ has removed pegs from Ricetus, Crank Stroke Groove and Face Value (see below).

Next summer I was back on North Buttress climbing with Graham ‘Streaky Bacon’ Desroy. Halfway up Worlds in Collision we noticed the obvious horizontal break girdling the North Buttress. On a mad impulse we set off to do it on sight. Easy traversing led to the arete. After that there was a section to rush across. Twenty feet out from my last runner, hanging onto a muddy break with disintegrating foot holds, trying in vain to persuade a friend to work on two cams I suddenly remembered why I didn’t lead new routes on sight. Being a wise old trigger I had a skyhook with me for just such an eventuality. I cleaned the break, left one sling in situ and after a sideways retreat it seemed reasonable, apart from a horrible sloping hand traverse move to gain the bolt belay. Streaky crisscrossed across and the other two pitches were much easier, if still a trifle airy. Friends in High Places (E3, 5c, 5b) seemed an appropriate name for such an adventurous day out.

We returned a week later to climb the obvious wall between Central Wall and Warlord. Unfortunately a good direct line was lacking and although the climbing compares in difficulty with Claws there are more resting places and escapes. There is
also more protection. I was afraid to climb the last bit to *Trauma Traverse* at first and came back with Bob to finish the pitch off later.

I'm not really too proud of the next route we climbed that summer Picnic on Hanging Rock. Fortunately Bob Bradley led it just before I did and so absolved me from some of the guilt. It's typical of what happens when you try to rush a new route. In the centre of the crag to the right of the first pitch to *Trauma Traverse* is a thin crack in an overhanging wall. Bob abseiled first but didn't put any nuts in, so after I cleaned it there were three slings holding the abseil rope in. We didn't have time to prussick up because Bob had to rush back to Sheffield so I set off to lead it like that. One of the nuts was low down, one sling was to be left in and the third would have been trivial to place. We were fortunate on two counts: firstly the route was so hard that it needed a thousand yos in frantic succession, secondly the crux was in between the runners that I had to keep unclipping and rope down from. Why am I telling you all this? Well firstly it's history now and secondly because Neil Foster and Allan Clarke caught and photographed us in mid-frig!

Winter and the rainy season was coming when I persuaded Ashley to pamper my obsession and take me out to Kilnsey. It was pouring with rain but the line we did was the last one on the whole crag to get wet. A little to the left of Diretissima, the steep wall is covered in flat holds but has few runners. The result was a short but superb little climb - Face Value E4.6a. A hard bouldery move rightwards led to two poor peg runners at 25 feet or so, then easier climbing to another point fifteen feet higher. Above there there was nut protection and better holds. The pitch seemed very easy after I'd cleaned it off because I knew where the holds were. The pegs, which were more to show the way and for retreat than protection, were removed by another brainless aid climber; a stupid act of vandalism.

Even a vaguely logical mind like mine could work out that if there was room for a route to the right of *Deja Vu* then there was also room to the left. Two visits later the line was clean and its bottom wall had two peg runners quite sportingly positioned. It looked impossible. I decided that I needed moral support so I recruited Neil Foster. We both climbed up to the top peg and fell off. After a fair bit of this we bouldered out the crux and a little later I managed to put it all together in one horrendous push. I only just made the halfway resting ledge. The wall above was still difficult right to the very top and the pitch as a whole was superb. *(Wise Blood E5.6b)*

Neil and I had both independently spotted the second line of the day. A rising traverse from twenty feet up the Diretissima to the top of the Super Direct. On my abseil I cleaned off the last link and then replaced the pegs in Face Value. Neil strolled up the route and I was only too pleased to be seconding in my exhausted state. *(Contraflow E4.6a)*

The crucial sections were the five progressively harder links between the four existing routes. It completed a perfect day.

**The Future**

As we turned to go Neil said "You've had the run of this place too much to yourself of late haven't you?" I said nothing.
Top: Robert Kieske high on Diedre, E1 5b, with the wall of Worlds in Collision (E4 5c) in the background.
Above: Andy Pollitt powering across the crux traverse of Balas, E4 6b.
Right: Pollitt nearing the finishing jugs of Directissima, E3 5c. Photos: Ian Smith.
Left: Martin Berzins initiating the traverse below the final roof during the first ascent of Crank-Stroke Groove (E3 6b) a fiercely overhanging pitch on doubtful rock. Photo: Bernard Newman.