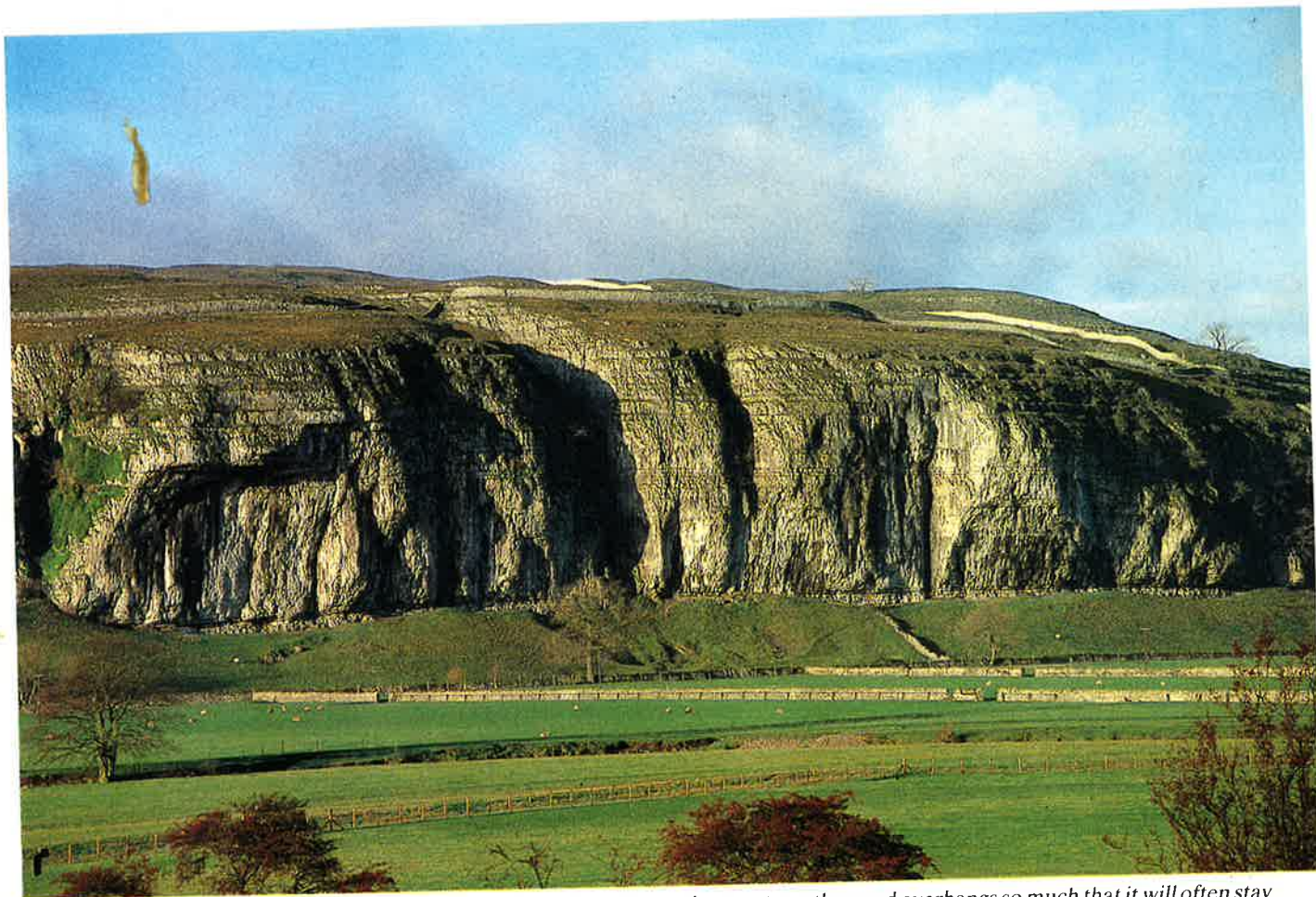


WORK IT OUT

by Martin Berzins



Kilnsey Crag in the morning light. Facing due east, it is sheltered from the worst weather, and overhangs so much that it will often stay dry in torrential rain. Photo: Graham Desroy.

The problem with taking your favourite crag and telling all the world about its secrets (*Kilnsey - Yorkshire's Dark Horse*, Mountain 93) is that once it's done there is no going back. Everybody knows where the routes are, which lines are left to be done and so on. I could try telling you that Kilnsey is just a loose tottering mass of limestone barely 50m high, doing its best to fall onto the main road up the valley of Wharfedale. I doubt that you'd believe me though - it can't be that bad a crag when a pretentious magazine like this one devotes two articles to it in the space of two years. Now bigheaded I may be, but even I realise that it was not *Mountain* 93 that made Kilnsey popular. The real reason is that the whole of Yorkshire Limestone became popular firstly because of work on the new guidebook and then more so when the new guide appeared. Such is the intensity of effort that the number of new free climbs put up on Kilnsey during the last two years is more than double the number of routes put up in the previous twenty two!

On the basis of that boring article I wrote in *Mountain*, my crag for the guidebook was Kilnsey. Now it's my belief that a guidebook writer's real task is to fill in as many of the gaps as he can. The business of grading existing routes is done by committee and

consensus these days and offers little scope for amusement. The first rule of exploring a crag with plenty of unclimbed spaces is, in the true way of a non-competitive pastime, to climb all the lines that you know other people have seen. There were obvious possibilities of this type at Kilnsey.

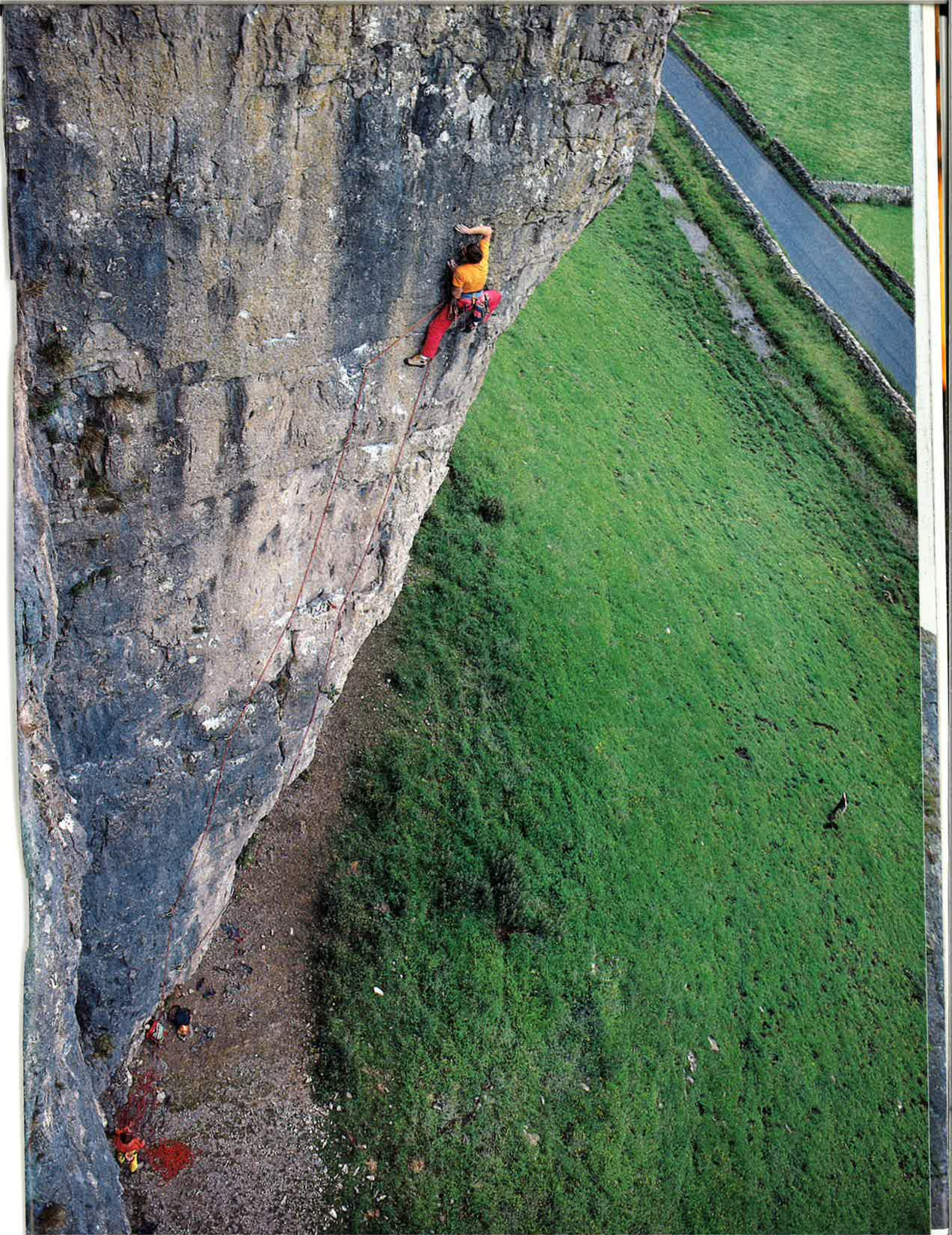
Either side of the very overhanging North Buttress are two superb bits of rock. To the left is the smooth Central Wall and to the right is a series of very steep grooves. Rumour suggested that Ron Fawcett had abseiled down the line of an obvious white streak on the Central Wall, while everyone who had walked under the superb rising leftward line of the *Overlap* (A3) must have wondered whether or not it could be free climbed. Andy Pollitt was even said to have suggested bolting it until Bernard Newman threatened to break his arms!

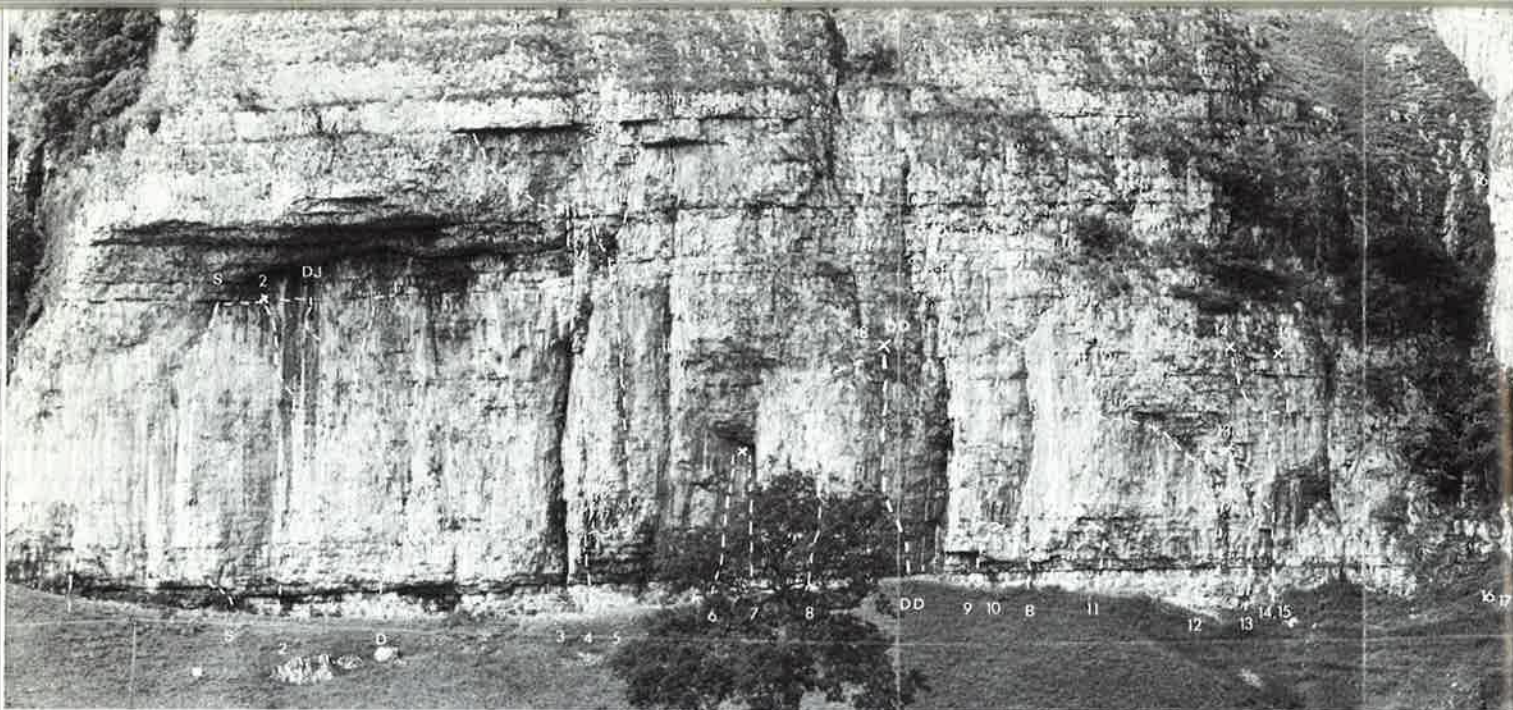
Early in 1984 Chris Sowden and I managed to climb both these lines. The *Overlap* was surprisingly easy - the crux was a short 6b traverse leaving *Crank Stroke Groove*, and the imposing upper groove was covered in holds. While I was cleaning this Chris led an unclimbed E1 hand jam crack just right of *Trauma Traverse*. This was named *Birds Nest Crack* out of reverence to the original route of that name at Almscliffe. The *White Stripe* was more of a shambles. I had

abseiled down the wrong line, and so after boldly lurching up the crux bulge found myself in the unheard of situation of leading on sight. Desperately I shouted for instructions on where to climb until runners appeared. Above that it wasn't any easier but at least I knew where to go - *White Rushin* (E5 6b).

After these routes we were foolish enough to go on holiday. Rule No. 2 of crag development is - once you've started don't stop until you've done everything you possibly can. We returned to find that the rules had been changed. In the middle of a superb ramp line to the left of the Central Wall was a new bolt and above it a chipped slot. "Who the hell put that in?" asked Chris. The answer appeared in the shape of an unrepentant Pete Gomersall who explained that the route was unfinished because he kept taking forty foot falls onto the bolt. This was soon to become *Zero Option* (E6 6c). We felt cheated - all the hard work we'd put in to somehow find means of protecting

Opposite: Martin Berzins on the committing and poorly protected first pitch of *Ice Spurt Special*, (E6 6b, 6b). Photo: Bernard Newman.





Kilnsey Crag. Only the recent additions are shown, with occasional existing routes for reference. cf Mountain 93 pages 42-43. Photomontage: Bernard Newman. **1** Metal Guru E6 6c, **S** Superdirect E4 6a, **2** Visitation E5 6b, **DJ** Deja Vu E4 6b, **D** Directissima E3 5c, **3** Lickerish E5 6a, **4** Bird Brain E6 6b, 6a, **5** Scoup de Grace E4 6b, **6** Nerve Ending E5 6b, **7** Bulgelet E3 5c, **8** Ground Effect E5 6b, **DD** Dodger Direct E2 5c, **9** Unnamed E4 6a, **10** Frankie Comes Too Soon E5 6b, **B** Balas E4 6b, **11** Relax E6 6b, **12** Dihedral Wall E5 6b, **13** No Through Road E2 6c, **14** Arch Rival E5 6a, **15** Achilles Heel E4 6a, **16** No Mans Land E4 6a, 5c, **17** Hazard County E4 6b,

routes using only pegs and nuts seemed to be in ruin. The route was obviously magnificent and, sadly, it was a sign of things to come.

Our immediate consolation was the arete right of *The Diedre*. Alan Clarke had led the bottom part with two pegs and a nut placed prior to his ascent. The easier section above was part of *Worlds in Collision* but only an ageing bolt marked the top part. One of the pegs and the wire were taken out by Alan's second and the bottom arete was unrepeatable. The climbing was both steep and serious without these runners and, forty feet above the ground I only just joined *Worlds in Collision* and not the nearest Orthopaedic Ward. The bolt above was reached by a stiff pull but above was an obvious layback flake which turned out to be detached. . . . Rule number three of new routing is - don't do them on sight especially if they are loose and difficult. I sat on the bolt and cleaned as much as I could.

"First free ascent this." I shouted to a visiting southern climber as I casually threw another hold down at him. After a retreat I tried again and almost reached the stance. I pulled on an obviously good hold. It creaked and somehow I stayed in contact with quite a sizeable block held in by my nose. By now I didn't care and with a deft flick tossed it over my shoulder. Fortunately it didn't even come close to the long suffering Chris. Darkness and the stance arrived quite soon. The top pitch was no easier but later and after I'd cleaned the bottom pitch from abseil - *Ice Spurt Special* (E6 6b 6b) was finished. It is now both difficult and on solid rock.

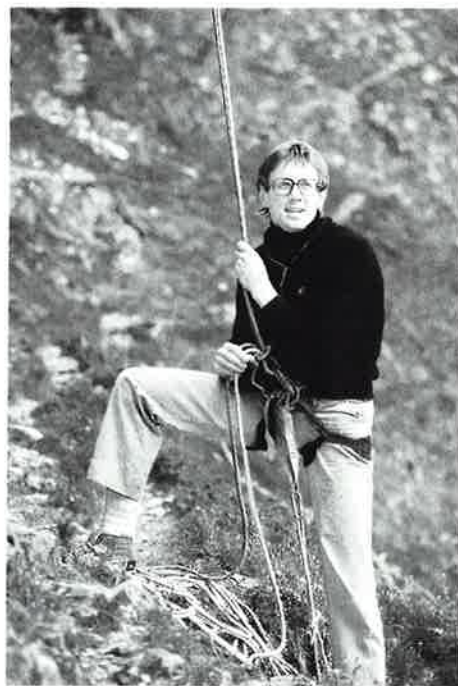
The depressing thing about writing a sequel is the repetition - history has an irksome way of repeating itself. Remember the story that I told you about Bob Bradley finishing *Picnic on Hanging Rock* after I'd led the crux? Well it happened again in almost the same place. To the left of *Zero Option* is a line that I spent the best part of

the day cleaning. A bit devious it eventually traversed left (the crux) to the thread of *Picnic*. Lo and behold I ran out of steam again and Chris finished the pitch by climbing up directly where *Picnic* moves out left - *Mantissa* (E5 6b). As if to emphasize that this part of the crag was not for me, on about the only midsummer Sunday this year when we were not at Kilnsey, Pete Gomersall cleaned the obvious direct groove line above where *Mantissa* moves left. *Exponential Exhaustion* (E5 6b) is a superb pitch - though it grieves me to say so.

The next route on Gomersall's list in 1984 was the very overhanging *Little Ernie* (E6 6c). A bolt runner was used and holds blatantly manufactured at the bottom. People began to complain about the tactics used to subdue what are obviously very hard climbs. Pete's answer was not long in coming. To the right of the large open groove of *Balas* is a rounded arete of less than perfect rock. The start is very overhanging but leads to a ledge and a peg runner. Above this the arete is steep, soon becomes unprotected and has its fair share of doubtful rock before the bolt belay is reached. There have been no takers for a repeat of *Relax* (E6 6b) which is by far the most serious route on the crag. Two other shorter but more popular aretes were also climbed by Gomersall in the shape of *Ground Effect* and *Waiting for the Sun* - both E5 6b.

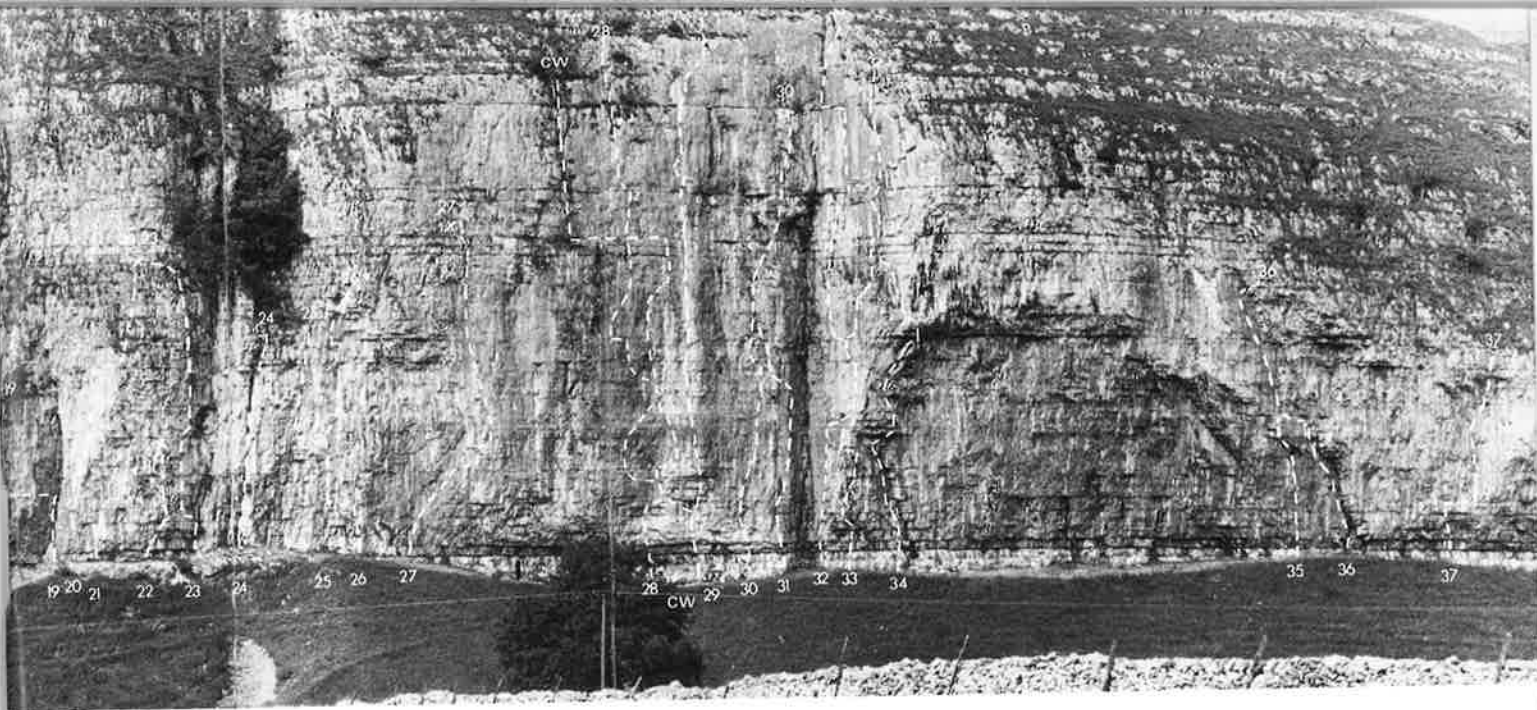
The obvious lines were getting fewer, yet there was one possibility for which it seemed presumptuous even to abseil down. Yet it was a possibility which according to rule number 4 of new-routing - abseil down everything - could not be neglected.

Most of the North Buttress of Kilnsey is blank and leans at 135°. On its left side a large groove leads up to a roof, above which a slimmer groove which in turn leads to a second large roof above. This is the belay of *Worlds in Collision*. Despite the large number of holds there were a couple of minor problems like the two roofs - both of



Above: The Author striking an heroic pose. Photo: Graham Desroy.

which had blank walls above - and the fact that the pitch overhangs about 1 in 3. The first ascent involved jumping for a 20 year old bolt and resting on a pathetic peg on the lip of the top overhang. Given that bolts were appearing all over Yorkshire that autumn I had no problem in justifying replacing an old one with a better one. Rob Gawthorpe and I used it to learn about this sacrilegious new technique. Using only this point of aid the wall above the top roof went free by a horrendous climbing-wall type lurch. Later I managed to climb past the bolt but winter came before I could free climb the whole route. The name that I gave



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it - *Dominatrix* (a woman in a sado-masochistic relationship who administers punishment) - began to seem appropriate.

This year I tried to finish the job but failed just above the aid point. In between holding my ropes Tony Burnell cleared a good but short wall at the right end of the crag. Alas *Prying Eyes* (E1 5b) were watching from a passing car in the shape of Pete Gomersall and Bonny Masson who proceeded to pick off the lines while we worked. The best was *Smooth Torquer* (E4 6b) which climbs directly to the abseil bolt. *New Horizons* (E2 5c) is a rising traverse to the same point while *Downright Theft* (E2 6a) is the line just left of *Prying Eyes*.

As if to add insult to injury the next Saturday saw Ron Fawcett stealing onto *Dominatrix*. I didn't associate Ron with such tactics, but was even soft enough to try and break the stony silence he was trying to impose on me. Chris Sowden and Tony Burnell added to the tension by cleaning a line in the Central Gully which became *No Man's Land* (E4 6b). The trundled blocks almost wiped out Ron's dog and some very unladylike language was used. I watched Ron's attempts in a silent rage - I felt like cutting his ropes. Time after time he climbed to the top overhang only to fail on the lurch above it. After each attempt he marched back to his car followed dutifully by wife and dog. Our only consolation that day was to transform the direct start to the *Overlap* from an old A4 into a reasonable E5 6b - *Nisus*. Thankfully Ron failed, and next day I was back. Second attempt I climbed to the top roof but later the route started to seep and a small hold broke. Chris went up to dry it off but couldn't make the reach above the aid point. I knew I only had one go left but it was enough. The top lurch was horrendous yet very satisfying. Mr. & Mrs. Fawcett watched in silence and sloped off to Chris's taunts. But it didn't end there. Ron repeated the route the next day and graded it E5 6b after avoiding the crux moves on the right -

E6 is probably more correct. Despite the fact that about twenty people saw me do the route, someone - I wonder who? - spread the rumour that I'd sent Chris up to clip the top runners - I wish that he could have. The whole affair left a bad taste in my mouth. Ron's consolation was the inspiringly named *Metal Guru* (E6 6c) which takes a bold and difficult line up the very left-most wall on the crag.

While this soap opera was unfolding, Pete Gomersall was quietly at work on a superb eliminate line through *Claws*. The bottom pitch of *High Octane* (E5 6b, 6b) is probably the hardest and most finery on that section of the wall and the top pitch is a bolt-protected overhanging horror. As Pete was now getting perilously close to investigating one of my best lines I suggested we join forces to climb the obvious two pitch route. He being the fingers and toes expert looked at the wall to the right of the *Diedre* while I being the thug looked at the leaning wall and arete just to the right of its start. My pitch was damp and difficult and time consuming. Pete's pitch was totally dominated by a ridiculous series of moves by a bolt runner - how he managed to flash this I don't know but *Streaky Bacon Desroy* who was photographing said that he was pulling out all the stops. For the contrast in styles and pitches *Division of Labour* (E6 6b, 6c) seemed an apt description.

The pace of development was by now even getting a little hot for me. We drove past the crag one day to see Gary Gibson doing *Deja Vu* AGAIN. Now in our rule book you didn't do routes twice within such a short space of time unless you were after something new close by. He wasn't but we were and the next day *Visitation* (E5 6b) came into being up the rib to the left of *Deja Vu*. The last few feet were soaking wet but an excellent peg runner just below eliminated any worries.

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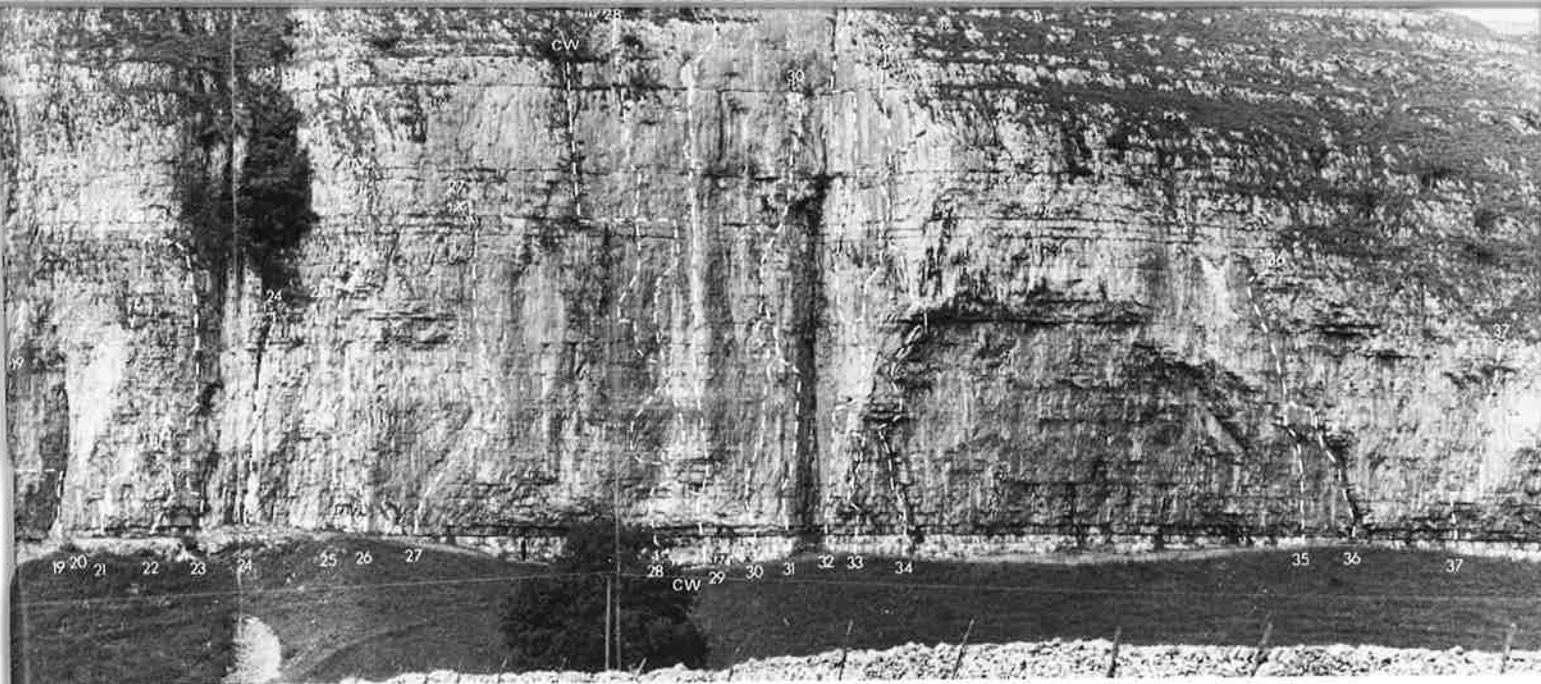
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Pete Gomersall and Bonny Masson applied the same methodical approach around *Perverved Geranium*. The arete to the left is *Abracadaver* (E3 5c) while around to the right is *Butcher's Dog* (E4 6a). Not to be left out I climbed the rock in between *Perverved Geranium* and *Butcher's Dog* with *Jumping to Conclusions* (E5 6b) and *Optional Extra* (E4 6b) both of which finish at the same abseil point.

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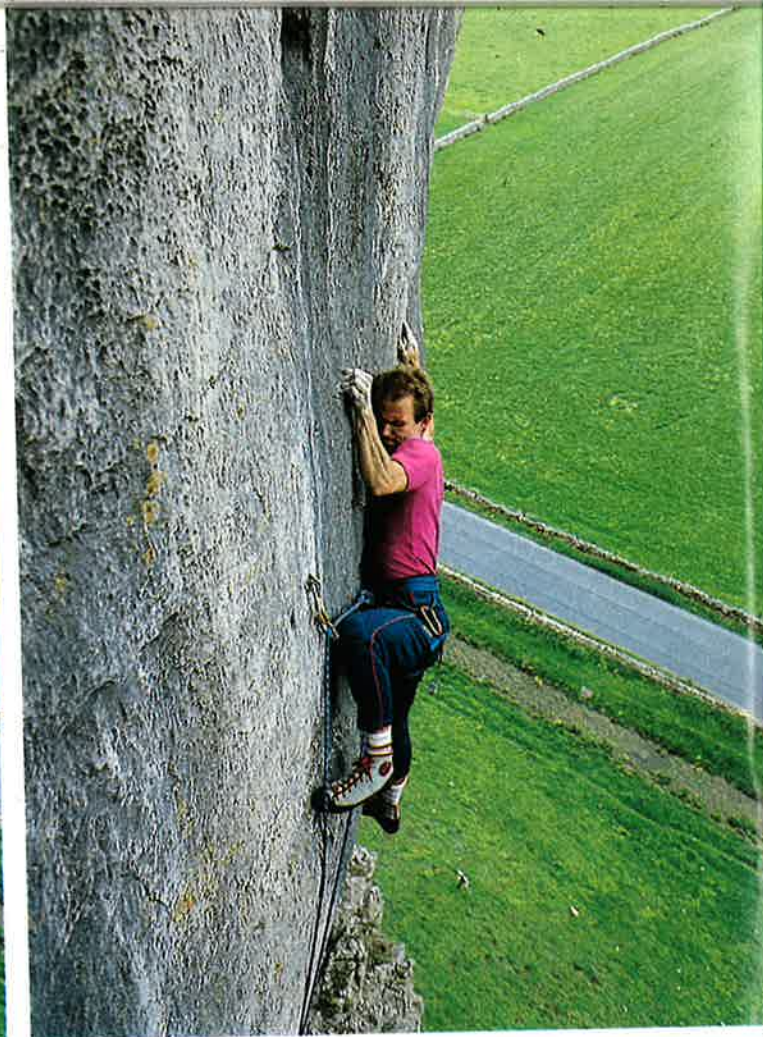
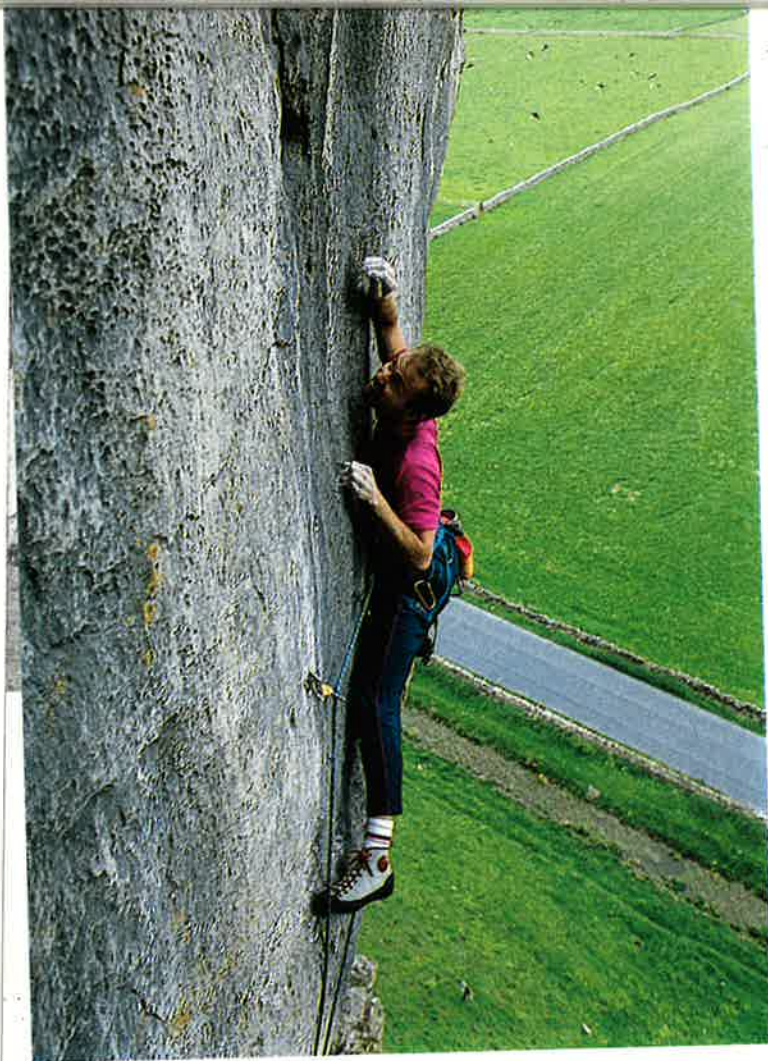
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fect rock - *Scoup de Grace* (E4 6b). Even more exciting was the top pitch of *White Rushin* which provided an intricate series of moves protected only by a bolt (E5 6c).

Slowly but surely the crag was being transformed into a good place to free climb. The transition seemed a little too easy to me and also to others. In the winter of 1984 the Yorkshire aid climbers (there are only about 3 left) removed the bolts out of all the old peg routes which had bolts put in solely for free climbing protection. They also then provocatively pegged *Frankie Comes to Kilnsey* (A5) up one of the best remaining lines on the crag - the left wall of Balas. Pete Gomersall rose to the challenge and placed three bolts to climb *Frankie Comes All Over* (E5 6b). The bolts were quickly removed by the pegmen and there didn't seem much point in replacing them.

From an abseil rope it was clear that pegs could be used instead of the second and third bolts. Not that they were that good. A nut in a hole protected(?) the moves past the first bolt placement. It had to go - a deliberate test of the nut resulted in my head brushing the grass when it stripped. A more subtle placement seemed to work and the pitch was completed. I even took short falls onto both the pegs before being benighted on the resting place of Balas. The point was made - the wall didn't need bolts - *Frankie Came Too Soon* (E6). I can't help feeling though that this was a pointless gesture on my part and that the big blank walls that remain on limestone will be climbed with just enough bolts or pegs to stop you hitting the ground from a long way up.

Summary: A review of the exceptional spate of hard free-climbing at Kilnsey Crag, Yorkshire.

Above: Pete Gomersall on the second pitch of *Division of Labour* (E6, 6b, 6c), during the first ascent. (See also cover). The grimace is de rigeur, and no prizes for spotting the hold he's going for. Photos: Desroy. **Below Left:** Desroy bouldering out the start of *Smooth Torquer* (E4 6b), Photo: Neil Foster. **Below Right:** Berzins cutting loose on the wildly overhanging *Dominatrix* (E6 6b). Photo: Bonny Masson. **Opposite:** Desroy high on *Dihedral Wall* (E5 6b). Photo: Foster.



