

# A Dirty Weekend in the Yorkshire Dales by Martin Berzins (1984) (appeared in Fell And Rock Journal 1988 ).

The essential components of a dirty week-end are probably suitable company, strenuous night time activity, forbidden pleasures and an obsessive passion. One of the unfortunate consequences of such a week-end might be an unexpected infection and perhaps for maximum benefit one ought to feel a little soiled.

The sun shone from Easter of 1984 until September. The weekend in my mind was already late in August by which time Tony Burnell, Chris Sowden and I were already tired of climbing and looking for an excuse to stop. Of course we just kept going.

One Friday Chris Sowden picked me up at the usual place and we raced up to the Yorkshire Dales from Leeds I his car. We never really bothered to say much on these evening races into the dales. Loup Scar is a small overhanging cliff closer to Leeds than most of the limestone crags and so after an hour of frantic cornering we reached the crag at six. Three hours – time enough?

I mumbled something about getting started while Chris was still changing out of his business suit and raced across the field to the top of the crag. Now Chris had his line and I had mine, both of them overhung severely. The crag as a whole overhangs greatly above the River Wharfe which had now shrunk to deep pools and a trickle in the drought. Loup Scar was Chris's responsibility in the New Limestone Guide and while Ron Fawcett had picked some of the plums, there was a responsibility upon us to grab everything that we could in the way of new climbs.

The trick in cleaning overhanging climbs is to start at the top and to aid your way down on abseil so as to keep the rope in place. My line needed a good peg runner but all I found was a poor thread and then a series of battered pockets only one of which eventually took a peg and this was halfway between the two roofs that made up the route.

Judging by the block being thrown into the river Chris was faring better and was soon ready to climb. An easy looking crack led up to a large hole in the roof, above which everything looked to blank out. Now holding Chris's rope when he sets off up a new route is a bit like watching a lithe athletic rat shoot up a drainpipe. The crack and then easy jamming led out to the lip. Chris reached out for what looked like a good hold, heel-hooked his left foot and reached up again to lower off the tree belay above. All he said was "E2 5b-easy". We left the rope in place so I could second the route and in the gathering gloom set off to lead my route.

The strenuous night-time activity was beginning. Lurching over the first roof I just managed to clip the peg and thread. There was no way I could make the reach I had planned so a weird on the spur of the moment move somehow got me to the lip. I rocked off, reached up placed more protection and lowered off the belay. As both ropes were now in use Chris seconded on one rope doubled. As usual he climbed faster than I could take in. Just before the lip he stopped unable to unclip the thread. Trying to make the move above he yelled "climbing". Coming from Chris this means "Take in quickly." Both red ropes went up into the gloom at the belay. One went back down to Chris, but the other went down to the thread below him before it reached him. Which was which? I took in both ropes. "Slack! Slack!" came the cry. Followed by "Take in! Take in!". I giggled at the hopelessness of the situation and resolved the situation by paying out on both ropes. Chris made the move still squawking and abseiled off.

As with all desperate overhangs Chris's route was easy to the lip. An in-situ thread was in place just below the lip. It was now totally dark. Instinct told me to leave one rope clipped into the thread. The hold around the lip was small, the heel hook imaginative and above was only blackness. It was so dark and there was so much rope that Chris could not possibly see. "Take in I said as both ropes came tied and I was suspended. I reached for something and thrutched to the top. "Might be 5c that route. " I lied as we finally reached the car well after dark.

The next day Saturday we went in search of forbidden pleasures as Chris Tony and I sneaked past the farm at Kilnsey to climb on a cliff that was still really not open for climbing. Chris and Tony went to climb the Birdmen, a fiercely overhanging crack that is still under-graded while I was going to get dirty.

Above and right of the huge main overhang at Kilnsey is a large overhanging wall with more than its share of flat holds and then breached only by an A4 aid route. Free climbing potential? The exposure was breathtaking. The end of the abseil rope was sixty feet up and thirty feet out from the base of the cliff. The top of the wall was guarded by an overhang with some indifferent rock above. One possibility was a diagonal line from bottom right to top left. After gardening large grass sods on the easy final section I was covered in soil. I had to keep bouncing in and out on the rope as I cleaned the overhanging part and then turn that into a sideways pendulum until a nut or peg could be placed to hold the rope in. Coupled with the exposure it was thought-provoking to say the least.

The climbing though appeared to be of the kind that I have an obsessive passion for; long reaches between sloping buckets on an overhanging wall. The protection was not great ancient pegs on the aid route and then a couple of the very thinnest blade pegs that rot all too soon.

Chris meanwhile had climbed the Birdmen and Tony wanted to lead the first pitch of the Directissima that leads to the the centre of the main overhang. Tony led his pitch easily and Chris joined him. My problem was how to get them to the foot of the pitch I had just cleaned.

“Hey lads it will be easiest if traverse across the ledge and drop me a rope.”

“Is it ok? asked Chris.

“Sure!” I replied, neglecting to mention that I had not been across the traverse.

Bushes and block rained down together with more than a few expletives directed at my judgement, personality and everything else. Chris was not amused. Tony was even less so. Nic Hallam and Terry Hirst arrived and cast doubt on the sanity of the whole enterprise.

The pitch that followed was worth it. The crux was a series of off-balance moves to reach the first peg I had placed and was protected by the usual 1960s decaying mild-steel aid peg. The rest of the climbing was more fun and consisted of using large flat holds in a sensational position above about a hundred feet of space. Tony as the team apprentice elected to go in the middle as he knew that he would have trouble with the reaches. “Gripping was how he described the pitch when he arrived at the tiny stance. I persuaded him to lead the choss to the top so off he went. Chris of course had no trouble whatsoever. Tony suggested the name Lickerish as the climb crossed through the aid route Pontefract man.

That evening while washing off the dirt from gardening the route I discovered that I had been bitten by a selective bug in a broad band around my nether regions. “Mary Anne – you are not going to believe this – but...”.

The next day we didn't really want to climb so we went back to Loup Scar. This made perfect sense as it was too hot and there was almost nothing to do there. Nic Hallam and Terry Hirst again joined us. While changing into shorts we discovered that all of had been similarly bitten.

Although enthusiasm was a thing of our collective past, we still had to climb. I began to clean a line to the right of my previous one. Tony tried Chris's new route but after several falls from the lip was getting used to the idea that the E2 5b grade was a joke. I tried too and after three goes manages to make the precarious heel hook work, reached the small holds and pulled over. Tony and then Chris(!) then both struggled on a top rope. We changed the grade to E36b.

Nic and Terry were both at work on the classic Lapper when a bunch of Bikers arrived on the other side of the river, took their leathers off and began to throw themselves off a tree that overhung a twenty foot cliff that went

straight into a pool on the other side of the river. We were clearly being upstaged! More and more people were arriving at the crag to swim in the river.

Finally I set off to lead the route I had cleaned. Another monstrous reach to the lip of an overhang stopped me dead. I was recovering nicely until a large group of women decided that the beach directly underneath me was a great place to get changed. As if it was not hot enough already, this was too much of a distraction. Something started to stir. I had to get the route finished quickly. Supercharged for once I lurched for the lip, clung on and made the belay above. Chris of course had no trouble, but was stopped at the lip by a nut that was so well jammed in that it could only have been placed by him or me.

Nic had decided that climbing was not the best thing to be doing and so had pushed Terry into the lead on Lapper. After he finished this he went with Tony to tackle the jump off the tree into the river. The two of them egged each other on until they both jumped. They even talked me into the jump that was more scary than the climbing. Our attempts to invent deep river soloing on the cliff below came to naught and eventually we grew tired of these games and drifted from pool to pool. And so the summer ended.

Summary – ascents of

Slapp Happy (E5 6a) and Slapper (E4 6b) by Martin Berzins and Chris Sowden at Loup Scar.

Loupy Lou (E3 6b) by Chris Sowden and Martin Berzins also at Loup Scar

Lickerish (E5 6a) by Martin Berzins, Tony Burnell and Chris Sowden at Kilnsey Crag

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