

Fell and Rock Journal 1986

## THE WELL OILED MACHINE - TWELVE MONTHS ON

Tony Burnell

COMPONENT PARTS

SPARE PARTS

MARTIN BERZINS

GORDON HIGGINSON

CHRIS SOWDEN

NICK HALLAM

MARK SPREADBOROUGH GRAHAM DESROY

TONY BURNELL

'The Well-Oiled Machine' was christened by Graham (Streaky) Desroy on the 30th of September 1984, which incidentally was almost at the end of a hyperactive year. The event that inspired this title was the team's enthusiastic assault on a mediocre discovery, Ravenscar South.

The team was first assembled in the closing days of 1983. Three quarters of the team, that is to say Martin, Chris and myself, were exploring above Arncliffe. After struggling through knee-deep snow we eventually came to what we thought was Yew Cougar Scar. We were not impressed; our eyes beheld an almost vertical stack of rubble. It was obvious that someone had climbed there before, however the crag's true worth had quickly been evaluated and no routes have been recorded there. We carried on up the valley and eventually struck gold (black gold some might say.) There, half immersed in the hillside like a black nugget, was the true Yew Cougar Scar. The crag is on average eighty feet high and bulging all the way to the top. Apart from a little damage sustained during the sixties and seventies from the whap and dangle brigade and, rumour has it, a rebuffed assault from members of the Y.M.C., we had a virgin crag. On that cold wet afternoon even the most obvious lines looked somewhat futuristic: time alone would tell.

The next mention of crag 'X' was at one of the early guidebook meetings.

Chris and Martin spent the evening keeping straight faces and playing innocent as they listened intently to Frank Wilkinson extolling the virtues and obvious potential of a one hundred and fifty foot high, three hundred foot long, steep limestone crag called Yew Cougar Scar. Fortunately Chris and Martin were successful in playing down the significance of any of these comments and reluctantly accepted the responsibility for checking the crag.

Gordon, Chris, Martin and myself started checking routes at Attermire in February and notched up the first new route of the year. Albeit a somewhat insignificant route, nobody was prepared to solo Green Beam; eventually ropes and runners were brought into play and the first gap was plugged. Thoughts were refocused on Yew Cougar and on the 18th March, 1984 the Machine headed off into the Dales; conveyed on this particular occasion by Mark's twenty-four hour old Vauxhall Cavalier. Whilst travelling past Sleets Ghyll in close proximity to an old Honda (one week old to be precise) a screech of brakes accompanied by the smell of burning rubber resulted in both Cavalier and Honda being instantly customised. Later that same day Yew Cougar yielded its initial routes, Power Play and Cavalier Crunch. Development continued at Yew Cougar throughout March and April, the only major problem being cleaning. Chris was given the task of procuring some angle iron stakes. We assumed a man so conversant with mechanical engineering would be best suited for this

job. This following weekend we set off into the dales secure in the knowledge that Chris had succeeded and we would soon be able to abseil in safety. On parking at the crag, Chris proudly produced several lengths of Dexion slotted angle; we were not impressed and Chris could tell. An hour later we had managed to persuade three rather disfigured pieces of Dexion that they really should stay in the ground. Martin was the heaviest and as such volunteered his services as test pilot; all went well. The belay was really put to the test when Martin decided, for reasons best known to himself, that he would set off solo and put some runners in whilst Chris was still cleaning. The inevitable happened, retreat was impossible and after much bleating a rope was swung into position and Martin swung into space. We now knew the belay was capable of supporting two bodies at one time.

The team moved back to Attermire, picking off several new lines like Ultra Brite, Lemming Essence, Blind Panic, Chrome Yellow etc. etc. On one such visit half the team were ensconced on Whizz Popping and Escapologist, whilst Bruiser had lashed down Chris, elected himself as team gymnast and set to work on his own creation Red Terror. It was a sight to behold! Imagine if you can, flying through the air with all the aerodynamics of a brick, the thirteen stone sylph-like figure of Martin Berzins grasping for non-existent holds, undercut at that. It was also around this time that Mr Careful, alias Chris, forgot what a bowline was and how they were formed. The result of this minor oversight was the first, albeit unintentional, solo of Legal Limit, carefully removing the runners placed by Martin when he led it. I think the mere thought of it scared him more than his rather vocal ascent of Blind Panic a few weeks earlier. For the next few weeks Trollers Gill was the scene of fervent and hushed activity, so hushed in fact that one half of the team forgot to tell the other half where it was going, hence routes like Angel Dust and Barguest were followed by Book Up and Sour Grapes.

After a short recess in Verdon I teamed up with Gordon and, taking our lives in our hands, we headed for the escarpment at Attermire. After cutting one rope in half, as a result of a landslip, which didn't curtail our activities for very long, we managed to check a number of routes and added No Hiding Place, probably the most stable route on the crag but still no real reason to walk all the way up the hill.

Loup Scar was another crag that, although known about, had been left for better days. However Ron Fawcett's ascent of Guadeloupe stirred the Machine into action. Five routes were salvaged, most of which were done in the evenings after work and a high speed race up the dales to beat the darkness. Climbing in the dark however does not lead to accurate grading and the second ascensionists, namely Martin and myself, were left to correct the grade from E1-5b to E3-6a; so much for the team's ability to grade routes.

September 1984 brought about the episode that earned the team its name. It was a wet day when Martin, Chris, Mark and myself, closely followed by Streaky in his Tonka Toy, went to check out a minor crag, Raverscar South, and of course do a little exploring on as yet unreported crags. As with all Yorkshire's unexplored rock, from a distance they show a lot of promise, however, the closer you get the smaller they become until finally you arrive at yet another esoteric gem. Within four minutes of arriving at the crag one ascent was under way from the bottom up and two other routes were being cleaned from the top down. To

say the least, Streaky was impressed (so much so that he returned mid-week to pick off the last remaining line); needless to say it was not by the quality of the routes but by the ruthless efficiency with which they were being exploited. Evening activity was centred on Kilnsey at this point in time, due partially to the weekend climbing ban and partially to the prying eyes watching our every move at weekends. On one particular evening Martin was engaged in the first free ascent of Ice Spurt Special. Under normal circumstances an event such as this would be preceded by an abseil inspection/clean; however, due to the imminent onset of darkness, Martin considered the route looked fairly clean and pretty straight-forward so a direct assault was employed.

It quickly became apparent that the route was not as clean or straightforward as it appeared. Blocks cascaded down from on high and the meek cowered under whatever shelter was to hand. It was about this time that a visiting southern climber had the misfortune to witness the ongoing pantomime and appeared totally unconvinced as rocks and curses rained down, in between which Martin was extolling the virtues of his adopted crag in terms of quality and potential. It was after the umpteenth airborne incident that Martin disclosed that this was in fact the first free ascent and not an aid route. The route did in fact concede somewhat later the same evening.

The Machine gathered momentum as the year drew rapidly to a close, culminating with the exploitation of Gordale's upper right wing, reputedly pre-empting Martin Atkinson by twenty-four hours, and, surprisingly, the left wing at Malham, with many thanks to Dave Cronshaw for pointing the way.

Gordale's upper right wing yielded seven excellent routes while Malham rendered another fifteen. Possibly the most memorable (or, if you like, epic) was the ascent of Night Moves. Prior to setting out for Malham on the nineteenth of December, Dr. Berzins had just invested in his latest piece of mountaineering equipment, (probably as a charm to ward off the possibility of any snow in the forth-coming winter) a new-fangled head torch. I cleaned the route by abseil and due to the lack of runners decided to split the route on the half-way ledge, working on the principle that this would probably give the second a chance to grab the unfortunate leader should gravity take control.

Things were not however going well. I had led the first pitch and returned to earth in order to allow Chris to continue his siege (oops sorry Chris): eventually the crag submitted and Chris succeeded in climbing the excellent Ship Of Fools. He was followed in double quick time by Martin and myself. I returned quickly to my position on the half way ledge and brought Martin up to the belay.

Frantically we changed places and I got to grips with the top pitch. It was now twenty past four, the sun had set about half an hour previously and I was getting nowhere fast. In the gathering gloom I changed places with Martin and passed him the runners, one number three friend, one number two friend and a number three rock. Standing on the edge of the ledge looking up at forty foot of unknown rock he looked totally unconvinced; unconvinced the rock could be climbed, unconvinced the runners were good and unconvinced that he could see where to put the runners. It was now completely dark. The bleating coming down from above my head would have put many a woolly sentinel to shame. Spasmodic lurches, grunts and curses were the only evidence that the ascent was, if not going well, then at least going up. A tight rope around my waist summoned me upwards and an hour and a half after sunset we let the root of our

problems, Chris, ascend the route. Needless to say the new head-torch was lurking in the car boot.

Another atmospheric addition to Malham's left wing was the title track The Well Oiled Machine. Fittingly, after leading one pitch each, Martin and myself were joined on the first ascent by Chris, Mark and of course Streaky Bacon.

P.S. The team has always assumed Graham's title to be a compliment for its efficient activity. It could of course be attributed to the time served by the team at the bar