



KICK START

NICK BULLOCK RIDES THE TWISTS AND TURNS OF A SEASON SPENT NEW ROUTING AROUND THE NORTH WALES COAST. PHOTOS RAY WOOD

Lanberis solidifies through the early morning drizzle. The Victoria Hotel is on the right and the Snowdon Railway Station with its deserted car park and wet wooden benches is on the left. I drive a little more before turning toward the centre of town. The pebbledash council house estate, the litter strewn bus stop, the telephone box with a broken window. A Youth, who looks

about 16 years-old, maybe 17, walks along the wet pavement. He walks behind others. All of them wear black uniform trousers and uniform blazers with Snowdon Railway badges sewn to the chest pocket. Seasonal, going nowhere jobs. They look like pictures of workers walking the cobbled streets and red-brick alleyways of 60's Manchester. The youth at the back of the group, his uniform hanging

from a skinny frame, removes a cigarette from his mouth. Smoke billows about a young face. The youth reminds me, of myself from the time I worked a dead-end, seasonal job, but also from a time when life was fresh and work was grown-up and the world was big and there was so much time it didn't matter if the work I was doing wasted a week or a year or four years. Life was a seascape, a disappearing ship on the

horizon. Life was tomorrow, next month, next year – life was just another day away. Then, on impulse, I snatched beyond the familiar and took out a £150 loan and bought a 50cc motorbike. Now each time I stamped down on the kick start and the engine screamed and my nose filled with 2-stroke I was in charge of my own destiny – anything could happen. ▶

RHOSCOLYN JUNE

Johnny Cash was playing on the car stereo, boom-chikka-boom, his ring of fire rattled, but there was certainly no ring of fire this Saturday morning in Wales. We drove across Stevenson's stone bridge from the mainland to the Island of Anglesey and beneath us the Menai Straights swollen turbulent angry green swilled out into the Irish Channel. Rain slapped the car and through the rear windows the mountains were disappearing like memories.

Graham Desroy, aka The Hippy and I were on the hunt, hopes high that dry unexplored rock could be found. Parking in-front of the Rhoscolyn church we packed bags, but as the lid shut tight, a cloud of drizzly schmee buffeted, blown-in on a westerly. 'What to do?' The hippy and I sat in his car listening to the rain and Jonny Cash while watching the old folk huddled beneath umbrellas scuttle into the church. 'It was better this time last year hey?'

Almost a year ago to the day and in perfect weather, the Hippy and I had walked the gorse headland and in the distance the quartzite cliff glowed orange. Leaving the wide crack of *Viper*, in Rhoscolyn's Fallen Zawn, I'd headed left to the space that my 'impulsive wondering' had drawn me to. I'd lurched left onto a flake-blob of layered quartzite that looked stuck-on. My heart was beating faster than an engine. Hanging from the blob, I'd wrapped a sling around it before dropping a knee and throwing a toe into an exfoliating scallop at the bottom of a hanging dagger. Committing to the next moves took belief, belief in friction, belief that when the throttle was wound back I had enough rubber on the road to get me around the corner.

Climbing, especially new routing, was perhaps the only thing I'd found to compare to that stench of the 2-stroke. Never quite knowing how it's all going to turn-out, sliding down the road, exploring a piece of unexplored, tearing clothes, touching the untouched, ripping lumps out of my legs, wondering, dreaming, imagining.

After each fall, I'd pick myself up, get back on and kick down on the starter.

NEED SPACE IN PULL QUOTE
BETWEEN TWO BELIEFS

COMMITTING TO THE NEXT MOVES TOOK BELIEF, BELIEF IN FRICTION

CARMEL HEAD JULY

Earlier that morning an impromptu gathering at the hippy's place found four of us, Hippy, Geordie Gary, Dave Simpson and I drinking coffee. 'I paddled past an interesting looking cliff, somewhat reminiscent of Mousetrap Zawn the other day Nick, just your kind of thing I reckon, loads of potential.' Dave said.

'Where was that then?'

It turned out that this mini Mousetrap was on the north coast of Anglesey and only had one established route which was a route called *The Lost Pillar of Scheiser*. Now call me weird, but this was actually a route I knew about. I can't remember what it was that had originally drawn me to this climb, but words like decomposing, rotting-quartz-vein, George Smith and XS were all words that had been used and these are words I find invigorating. Only just warmed up for summer, still in the month of July which was a month too early for adventure choss as the bird bans didn't come off until August, the Hippy and I decided to 'Go have a look.'

It was definitely only going to be a look even though the bird bans were not applicable to the Anglesey north coast but the hippy had a glint in his, 'let's be mellow-man' eyes. Wheel spinning away I thought we might crash as the red bandana fell in front of the Hippy's eyes, but he recovered and continued to drive in his somewhat aggressive and erratic style while weaving around the grass

growing in the middle of the single track lane. After just minutes of looking down and reading the map I was ready to barf. But within about the same time it took the man in black to sing 'A Boy Named Sue' we were there.

Waves whipped by the wind crashed, gulls screamed and believe it or not as we walked and the sheep nuzzled grass on the deserted headland, the sun came out. Timing the dash between waves over swathes of popping kelp we came to a stop beneath a quartz pillar that cut the only semi-solid path through guano and mud and sand. 'Guess this is it then?' A sea arch and a shingle beach would have made this an idyllic spot but I was starting to sense enthusiasm sprouting from my old-enough-to-know-better-climbing-partner. Sitting down, still feeling car sick the tune, 'Don't bring your guns to town' floated through my mind.

For once I was happy just to look around and chill, but I could sense trouble. Well, bugger that! The Hippy could take on this overhanging tottering pile if he must and for once I would take the soft option of the second.

'Shall we do it then?' I asked with trepidation not wanting to sound like a lightweight and hoping the Hippy would see sense.

'We might as well as we are here.' The Red Bandana spurted enthusiasm, knowing he had a get-out clause.

'Who's going to do it then?' Big trepidation, knowing I didn't have a get-out clause.

'I'll give it a go.' Red Bandana enthuses even more, touched with blissful ignorance.

'Ok.' Big relief – finally an easy ride up some chossy horror show.

Riding my motorbike and long before the man in black, I wore red jeans, a wispy mohair jumper, Dr Martin's and The Sex Pistols provided the soundtrack. The revving engine screamed in time with Jonny Rotten and Anarchy. I was free to chose, free to steer the direction my life would take, but try as much as I could, as the ropes were laid at the base of the pillar, doubt wriggled and reared its ugly head in the form of a line from The Pistols song, *Who Killed Bambi*, 'Never trust a hippy.' All I could envisage was the Hippy getting a little way up, filling the climb full of my gear and deciding it wasn't for him, leaving me in my delicate state of barfdom to take on the choss.

Shaking my head clear of this pessimistic punk rock scenario, I settled in for a relaxing belay. The hippy pootled off, five feet high and rising and nonchalantly pulling his white-jeaned form upward. 'My, what bravery, what bottle ... what foolishness.' A foothold snapped leaving him hanging from one arm but still he continued in the direction of imminent doom ... 'Great, keep going Hippy.' Amazing, I thought, this is actually going to happen.



For once I was on the sensible end of the rope while the nutter above skittered and pulled lumps and looked at ground fall, my imagination pictured exploding gear and rock and Hippy ricocheting all around... 'So this is what it's like?'

Another pull, a lump flew, another pull, a foot skittered, and then it happened... for the first time since starting on this teetering journey of quartz uncertainty, the Hippy started to thump the rock to test, and for the first time he came out from his bubble realising that the whole pillar was detached ... 'Shit, that hold I just banged above my head caused the rock I'm stood on to vibrate!' Still feeling like I was going to barf and not feeling mentally prepared to take on this horror, I offered kind words of encouragement, the kind of words your belayer often offers when they don't want to try... 'Go on, you're doing great, keep it going, I'm with you all the way.' Which of course I wasn't and I didn't really care if he was doing well or not or even if he landed with a mighty pop in a bloody twisted wreck amongst the kelp at my feet, I just didn't want him to realise his mistake and back off.

The hippy reversed and slowed, and pulled up and tested, and reversed and slowed and pulled up and tested and at last he pulled up one more move while smearing as much of his cheesecloth on as much decomposing rock as possible. ... 'Ahhh, oooh, ahhhhhh, oooh... this whole pillar is moving, its loose blocks piled on loose blocks, piled on loose blocks that my gear is in... I don't like this anymore...'

'Your go.'





DORYS COMES IN DIFFERENT SCALES OF BADNESS DEPENDING ON WHICH FACET OF THE CRAG YOU REQUIRE TO CLIMB.

CRAIG DORYS JUNE - AUGUST

The Welsh summer continued in its usual way which is wet, and because of this the Hippy and I ran to the foreign climate of the Lleyn Peninsula.

Craig Dorys, Craig Dorys, Craig Dorys... Like a chant for the doomed, six words that bring terror into the eyes of adults who wished they were still children, but we were not children and no matter how much we tried to believe there were not bogey men, beneath the stairs we knew there was.

Parking in the farmyard on-top of the headland, the panic fully sets in, delaying tactics are necessary, but eventually the rack is sorted and it's time to walk. The walk to the headland across the meadow is generally slow. The Hippy is slowing his normal slow which is slow, but eventually we reach the top of the crag where a gentle breeze flows like clouds pouring over an escarpment and in the breeze the wail of the insane can be heard.

'It feels early for this Hippy.'

'Yes.'

Talk was at a minimum, we both had bad things on our mind.

Dorys comes in different scales of badness depending on which facet of the crag you require to climb. Stigmata is bad, in fact, Stigmata is more bad than the baddest bad out there, but the lines are strong and as long as your will is as strong as the lines, or you lack imagination, you may stand a chance. Moving along the crag, The Upper Facet is actually very solid, the surface of the rock is a skin of quartz with pockets and breaks and gear and pegs. But the Upper Facet is very steep with a chance

the crag may get steeper as the whole rock face is a ginormous flake resembling a climbing wall that can be set at different angles. Walking beneath the crag Byzantium Wall, a reasonably solid and impending 40-metre wall of breaks and crimps is next, and around the corner is the orange sheet of The Golden Wall, a slightly snappy, slightly run-out, slightly beautiful, in a femme fatale kind of way, vertical slab of quartz and sand and clay. This was where we were aiming.

Warm up done, this was a day for the Hippy, who for some reason had his sideways head attached and before long he began shuffling following the first of two HVS's, *Scintillating Stitches*, complaining that his Tesco one-pound reading glasses were not working and he couldn't see his feet and all without the aid of a Zimmer frame, I was impressed. Gallantly striding the second of the climbs before topping-out I couldn't help look up... and there they were, two rod straight traverse lines that to my knowledge had not been climbed. We finished happy with our day of climbing, but mostly feeling happy to be still alive and ran away quickly.

Spark plug flashes erupt from the Irish Sea and in the distance the Cardigan coastline is a blur. Stood at the top of Stigmata, facing into the breeze, I watch a solitary gannet far out at sea circling; black pointed wingtips cut salt air. The waves, like the years roll in and never stop. Small pebbles and silt are panned like gold, washing out into the vast and the large rocks with veins of quartz like Saturn's rings are rumbled, but like some people, the rocks remain stationary. Craig Dorys, a crumbling sea crag washed up on the Lleyn Peninsula offers hope to

the climber in search of more than just a number.

Amongst other climbs, to get into the Dorys swing – a crucial process before you can really open the throttle, we climbed the untraveled tramlines on Golden Wall. At the start, the higher line, the more difficult of the new routes, gives good gear but once on the way the gear fizzles-out to give a stimulating exercise in crab like mind control. Easing back on the throttle, a cluster of gear in the middle of the wall, which is mainly poor, convinces me that, yes, I can open up and continue into the unknown and challenge my destiny.

The sun's heat cracks the earth between the rabbit holes threading the top of the cliff. Rusty wool-wrapped-barbs of the wire fence, held by old wooden posts creak. Clay bands between crumble-rock are sticky. The sun moves across the empty blue and warms the cliff. The rock lightens in colour. Clay turns to dust and the dust catches on the breeze.

Another visit to Dorys and another new route attempt. This time I force myself into a space between a climb called *Absent Friends* and the arête of *Dorys Day* on the Upper Facet. There is no shuffling, the wall is overhanging. I have abseiled the line pre-placing the smallest blade-peg which will hopefully protect a fall from the crux, but there is no gear after this for a lifetime and having not practiced the moves some of the unknown remains. The nervous tension as I step from the ledge at the base of the upper facet brings back the time I first saw the Sex Pistols on Top of the Pops, it takes me back to inexperienced fumbles in the dark while lying with a girl on a patterned carpet already speeding toward

a semi-detached and the 9 to 5. Kick down on that starter, begin and challenge predestination, give the rapidly racing years a swift kick into tomorrow and make today last forever.

The blade peg from the crux is way below now. Hanging from edges, I eyeball a horizontal crack that will take nut protection, then I look and imagine myself stood on the ledge to my left. Placing the nut will take strength of mind, to pull onto the

ledge will take seconds, but to pull I need to use a hold that may break. Sweating and straining. Dilemma. Protection or ledge. Risk or safety. Mortgage or sofa-surfing. Thin rubber is pressed to smooth rock holding my body's position. It reminds me of the rubber-nobbed back wheel of my motorbike, for just a second it's gripping, gripping the road and in the next I'm sliding. The lane was wet and leafy and as I float sideways, the traction

long gone, I give-in. Sliding down the road, the bike sliding in front is showering sparks. Hawthorn berries, some solid, some a fleshy pulp, lie scattered, they pass in a red blur.

Beads of sweat pepper my forehead; I eyeball the crack, look at the ledge, eyeball the crack... and place the nut before continuing with my mad hatters dance, maybe the years are catching up?



RHOSCOLYN SOMETIME LATE IN THE SUMMER

Abseiling, checking an empty space on the front face of the fin to the right of the Moran, Williams and Sonczak climb, *The Jub Jub Bird* was steep, in fact so steep inspecting was almost impossible, just looking cramped my forearms. 'Jesus, it's STEEP!' I don't know why I shouted, the Hippy was no-doubt already curled like a hamster and asleep in the warm grass at the top of Fallen Block Zawn. I could see holds, well, of a kind, they looked like something you find in a foil packet and dip into a tub of salsa. Gear... yes there was some of that also.

The first soiree was fun... no, I lie, the first soiree was terrifying. Lowering down into that place of tortured souls truly felt like entering a Salvador Dahli painting. My mind screamed but down I forced myself, down into the red fiery depths. Climbing out on a top rope from the *Godzilla* niche, being the first to ever pull on those flakes and expecting them to burst like a boil, nearly sent me over the edge, but I pulled and winced and immediately pumped-out. The rope tugged and

I wanted to reverse, but the rope tugged, and I swung and lunged for a manky piece of tat threaded through the eye of the ancient peg in *Godzilla*. And the rope pulled. Surfing-spread-eagle, I now hang like Superman, but not really feeling like Superman, while gripping a flake in one hand and some tat in the other. I wanted down but the rope tugged. I prayed 'Oh lord, if I ever get out of here I promise to stop looking for spaces.' 'Slack-slack-slack-slack-slack.' The hippy came out of his sun induced coma and eventually lowered me, where I stuffed a cam into the off-width crack of *Godzilla* and clipped in.

Eventually I managed to commit and pulled on the undercut flakes, but voices in my head screamed and wailing banshees howled and the world turned dark.

Reaching the rail in the middle of the fin, try and try, I couldn't fathom a way to continue, and so, I'd eventually let go and pendulumed to Ireland. On my return I offered the Hippy a go as his years and years of experience do count for something.

The hippy, not looking like the hoped for secret technical weapon lowered, wittering-on about being

scared, but eventually he swung in and grabbed the undercut flakes where he had a technical whitey and refused to even try to work the moves. Eventually establishing himself above the undercut flakes without actually pulling on them he set to in solving the mystery of the top, which, eventually, he did. Basically it was a savage boulder problem and way above the sea and way above the last gear and virtually at the end of the climb... 'Great!'

But at the end of that first day, as I sat at the top of the crag watching the sun set, I grabbed a handful of grass and looking out across the green sea I knew it was on as long as I didn't think too much about the lack of gear and the suspect nature of the holds and as long as I could induce some power into my body and then in time, with a lot of effort and belief and commitment it may go, but if I didn't kick down on that starter how would I ever know? I lifted and opened my hand and the grass blew out to sea. ■

Nick Bullock is working on a book tentatively titled Echoes to be published by Vertebrate Graphics in September.

FACING PAGE: Nick Bullock carefully handling *Hung Like a Hamster* E5 6a, Craig Dorys.

THIS PAGE: The Hippy aka Graham Desroy warming up on *Friendless* (E1 5b) at Craig Dorys.