



◀ Immaculate rock, perfect runners and satisfying moves sums up Red Wall.
▶ Scrambling to the start of the route. Care is needed to pick the easiest way in a couple of places.
All photography: Mike Robertson.

Go For It!

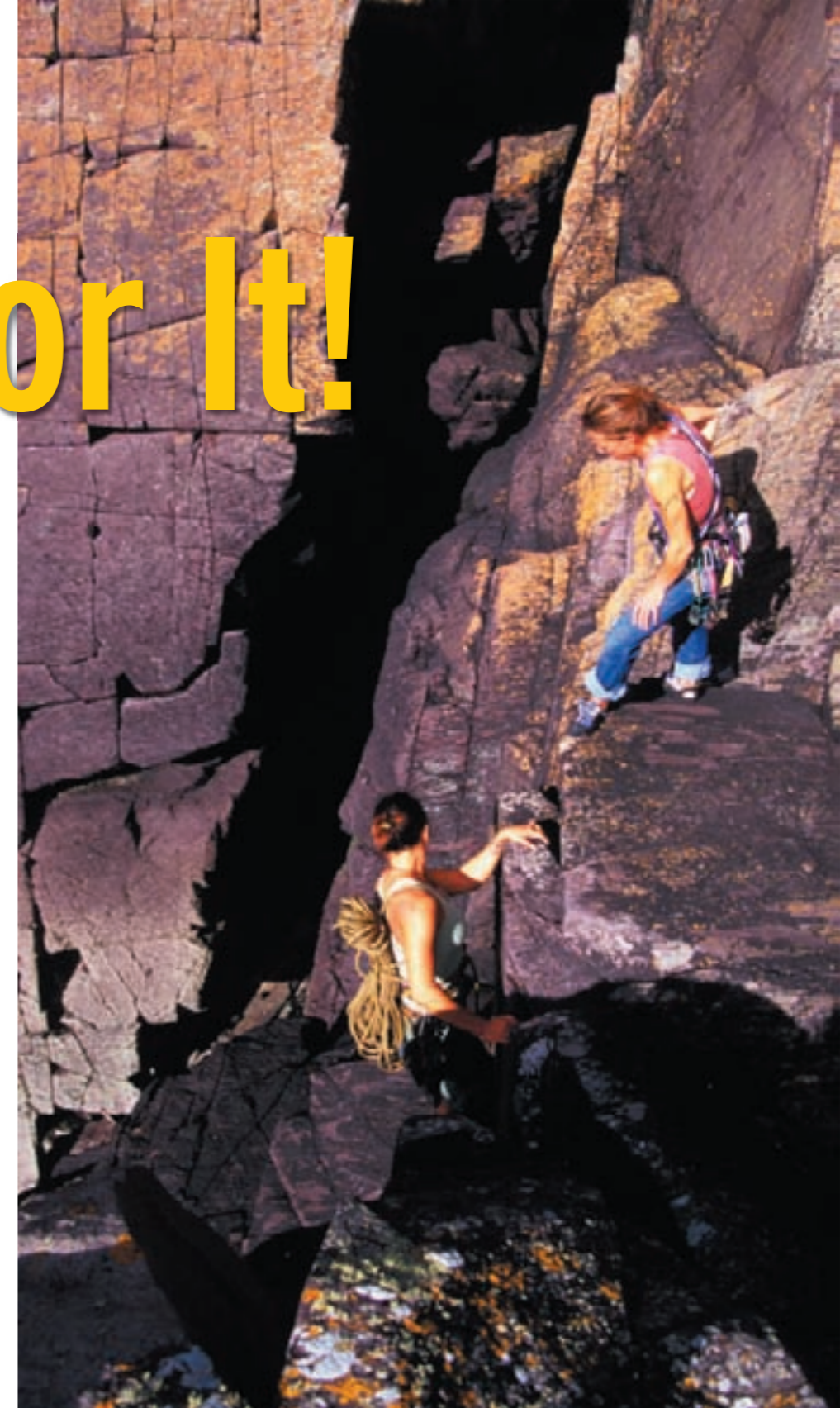
Grade Tour 2: Severe

Many climbers breeze through their introduction to the world of graded climbs until they meet a Severe. Quite often getting established at this grade marks a transition from the world of tricky scrambling to proper rock climbing. Moving onto your first Severe undoubtedly presents more of a psychological challenge than a physical one and if you can keep this in mind it'll help you no end. – *Libby Peter*

The essence of Severe

So what does Severe feel like? Well, it's likely to provide you with your first taste of steeper rock. Steep enough that for the odd moment it feels like you're being pushed out from the rock unless you hold on tight. These moments pass quickly and you find yourself back in a position of balance where you can stand comfortably, relax and look ahead. These steeper sections when combined with a sense of exposure give the experience a big and intimidating feel far beyond the actual difficulty of the climb.

Typically you'll start to encounter moves that aren't obvious at first glance and would be awkward to reverse. Take the time to work out such moves in advance, getting yourself into the right position to reach a high hold or even making a move or two 'blind' where you have to trust that the hold you need is going to be there. This takes commitment; a frequently used expression in climbing which conveys the need to make a sequence of moves in a positive and ideally flowing style rather than half-heartedly. Commitment, of course, requires confidence and this is best gained through success and plenty of mileage at lower grades.



Another feature of Severs can be that the run-outs (the gaps between runners) are longer so there's a necessity to be confident that the gear you place is up to the job.

TECHNICAL TALK Minimising rope drag

If you're using a single rope it's crucial to take every opportunity to keep rope drag to a minimum. This is best achieved by carrying several longer quickdraws and slings (short 4ft and long 8ft) that can be

used as extenders too. It may be necessary to discount runners that are along way out to the side unless the gear is really spaced. If a runner out of line is going to put a significant bend in the rope not only will it create drag but also increase the chance of it lifting out once you've climbed past it, which defeats the object anyway. It's really hard to make the decision not to put a runner in (and I rarely advocate this) but this is one instance when no runner may be better than one that's way off to the side.



plus 18 plus 19 It's really useful to carry some short (4ft) slings tripled as quickdraws which can be extended easily to full length to minimise rope drag.

Libby Peter has been climbing for 20 years, is a qualified Mountaineering Instructor and IFMGA Guide and author of the best-selling *Rock Climbing – Essential Skills and Techniques* published by MLTUK. Her base is North Wales from where she runs the guiding outfit Llanberis Guides info@llanberisguides.com

Sea cliff caution

Climbing above the sea is a fantastic experience with an atmosphere that's both exhilarating and intimidating but it's worth noting the additional considerations of climbing on sea cliffs, which add seriousness and a few complications. These include:

Access: the approach is often by abseil, which creates an extra degree of commitment (in other words be sure you can climb out!) or a down-climb/scramble that may be awkward to locate.

Tides and waves: the base of sea cliffs can be affected by both tidal conditions and sea state. Consider whether the start of your chosen route will be affected by a rising tide or by rough conditions. A coastal weather forecast and local tide tables will provide all the information you need.

Belays: it's important to be secure at the base of a sea cliff but with enough slack to allow you to dodge both falling rocks and rogue waves.

- ◀ *Keep the weight on the feet and comfortable positions can be found to place excellent runners. The belayer watches attentively.*
- ▶ *The belay is awkward to arrange but it is possible to link anchors on the fin and slab to get a position from which to view your second.*

Condition of the rock: sea cliffs are often damp and greasy even when there's been no rain through spray and moisture in the air. This is especially true if there's no breeze or sun. These conditions can add a grade or more to the climbing and can be hard to predict.

Communication: don't underestimate the noise of the sea; establish simple strategies for communicating with your partner before you set off.

Affect on gear: salt from the air and sea needs to be cleaned off your gear regularly to avoid hardware seizing up and damage to textiles.

Profile of a Severe

Name: Red Wall

Crag: Porth-clais, North Pembroke

Length: 70ft

No. of pitches: 1

Rock Type: Sandstone

Guidebook: *Pembroke Part One* (Climber's Club)

Character: A mini-gem of a climb tucked around the corner from the picturesque inlet of Porth Clais harbour. A great choice for your first Severe as it's gentle for the grade with no hard moves or nasty surprises. Just move after perfect move on faultless rock with bomber nut runners every 8ft or so. The start and finish provide the bulk of the interest. There's a 'Mod' scramble to get down to the start and the best ledge to start on is affected by the sea and can only be accessed at calm low tides. In bigger seas a higher ledge allows a stride onto the face and a leftward traverse to get established. At the top a move that causes pause for thought lands you on a rock fin with a 30 degree slab on the other side which makes the belay very awkward to arrange. You may find yourself taking more time to rig the belay than climb the route! The only downside (if you're unlucky) is the popularity of the crag with groups.

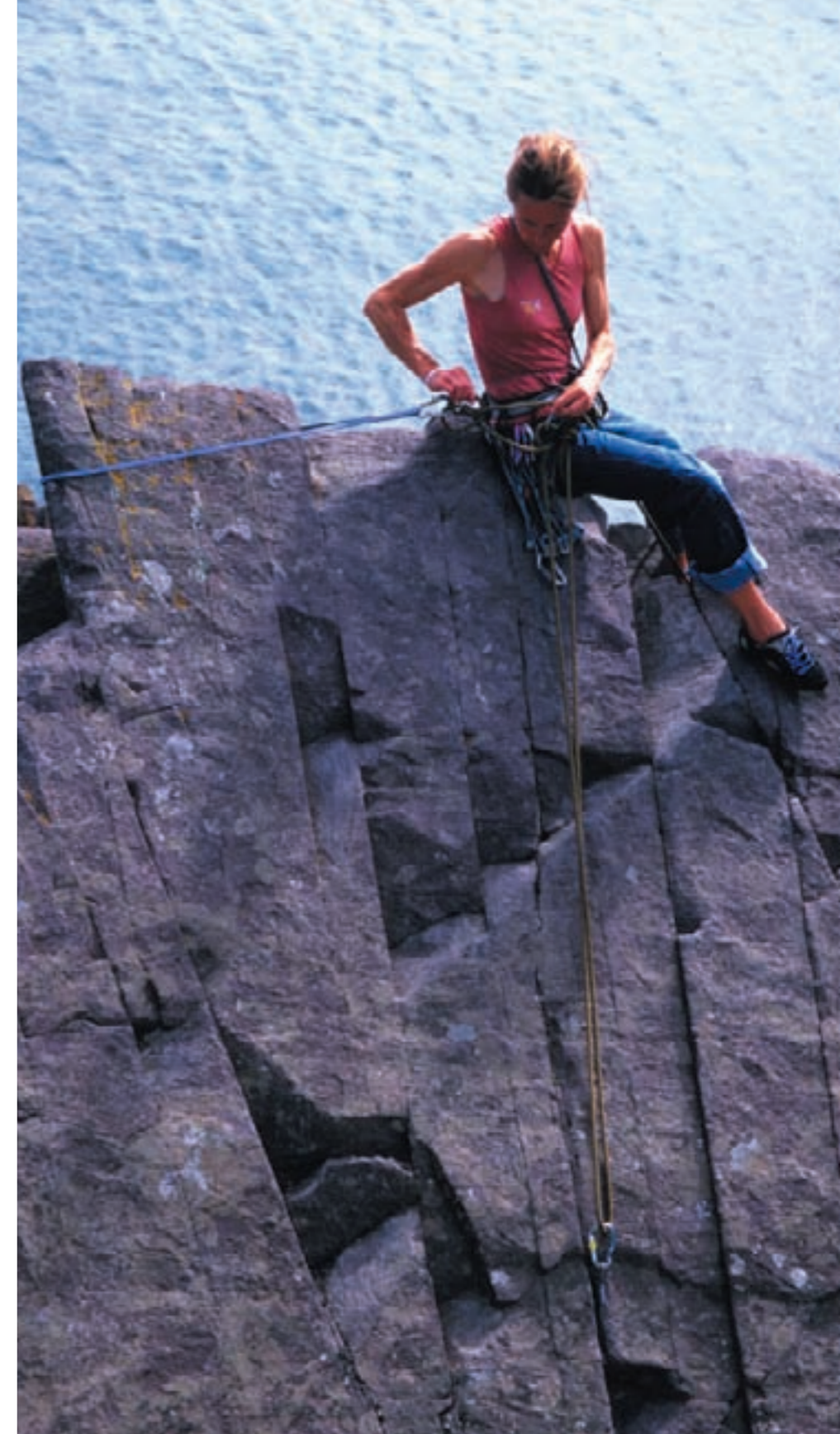
Severe hit list

Here's a few classic multi-pitch Severes to seek out, but remember that any graded list is subjective. Have fun!

Soft touch

Red Wall, Porth-clais, North Pembroke.

Benchmark



Christmas Curry and *Poor Man's Peuterey*, Tremadog, North Wales. All time favourites and rightly so. Both are good introductions to multi-pitching at the grade.

Crackstone Rib, Carreg Wastad, Llanberis Pass. Airy and bold but not for too long. An absolute must.

Murray's Route, Dow Crag, Lake District. Classic climbing in a rugged mountain setting.

January Jigsaw, Rannoch Wall, Buachaille Etive Mor, Glen Coe. Spectacular position.

If you enjoyed *Agag's Groove*, this is next. *Auld Nick*, Hell's Lum Crag, Cairngorms. A breathtaking setting and excellent rock.

Meaty

Pendulum Chimney, Chair Ladder, Cornwall. A compelling line and beautiful climb.

Tophet Wall, The Napes, Lake District. *Savage Slit*, Coire an Lochain, Cairngorms. An awkward approach, a striking line, absorbing climbing combine to make for a classic day out □