

## MY UNCONQUERABLES.

ERIC BYNE.

Not everyone can write of Alpine endeavour with the ease and humour with which we have come to associate Clive Bramfitt. This article, therefore, is not concerned with feats—gastronomic or climbing—on the Continent. It is the simple tale of three climbs on Derbyshire gritstone which, despite their shortness, have through the years accumulated a history and a reputation in the Sheffield area comparable with that of Peter Harding's Suicide Wall on Cratcliffe and even, it might be said, with the Terrace Wall climbs on Tryfan.

It all began twenty years ago on gritstone. I fell off the first climb I attempted, cracking a shin, and immediately bought a rope and persuaded my old friend Clifford Moyer to climb with me. Two years of regular week-ends on gritstone developed in both of us the ability and nerve to attempt, and climb safely on, most of the Very Severe routes that could be found in Derbyshire. In spite of this and throughout many succeeding years, three possible routes defied our leadership: the Unconquerable Cracks on Stanage, the Rivelin Needle on Rivelin Edge, and Moyer's Buttress on Gardom's Edge.

Moyer and I had been climbing with Maurice Linnell and Alf Bridge on Stanage one Sunday early in 1932. Bridge had just made the first ascent of Robin Hood's Innominate and the Cave Gully Wall, a truly notable effort. Linnell and I wandered along the Edge looking for something new; and then we saw them—two magnificent cracks up a steep, smooth tower of rock. We named them then and there 'The Unconquerables,' and set about the task of



disproving the name. Most of our efforts were concentrated on the right-hand crack, a huge flaky structure with an overhang halfway. We first descended it on a top rope, but the ascent, for all our strenuous assaults, would not go.

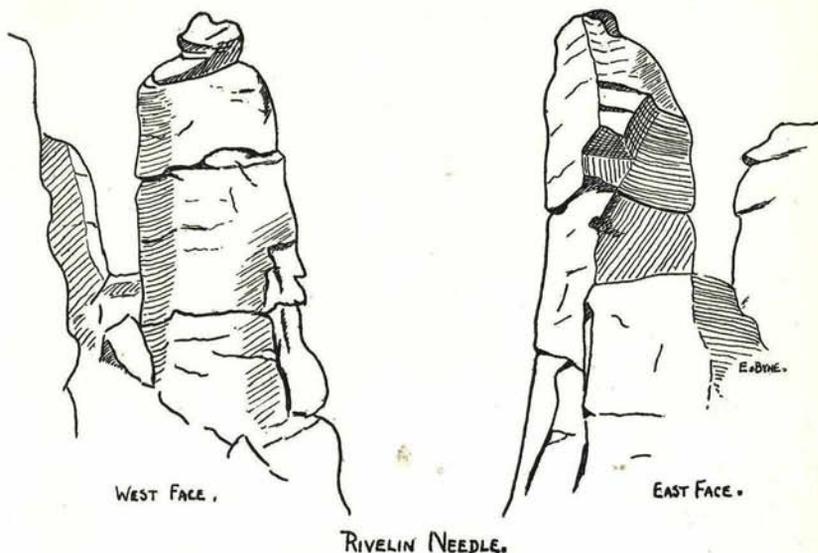
The death of Linnell on Ben Nevis two years later robbed Stanage of one who would, I am sure, have played a great part in further developments.

After our original attempts "The Unconquerables" became a constant challenge, and up to 1940 were attempted frequently by Moyer, myself and everyone else who knew them. But it was not until we watched Byron Connolly, of the Sheffield Climbing Club, make the first safe descent without a top rope that we realised that an ascent was possible and would, some day, be done. Peter Harding in 1946 "had a bash" at both cracks, but without success, though he made two magnificent new routes, Goliath's Groove and Cave Superdirect; and in 1947 the Sheffield University Mountaineering Club made repeated attempts. It began to look as though they would never be climbed, and I for one was secretly pleased.

And then along came the Valkyrie Mountaineering Club. They were, and are, tough, and their standard of climbing unusually high. The year was 1949 and the new climbing guide to the area was well under way. All the Very Severses seemed to fall to the Valkyrie without trouble; but the "Unconquerables" gave them a shock. Here was something worthy of their mettle. Everyone else had tried and failed. Now there was only the Valkyrie left to try. Sadly accepting the inevitable, I encouraged them to greater efforts. We needed those two cracks for the guide. And in due course they were led at last, by Joe Brown and Wilf White—a magnificent performance.

The Rivelin Needle on Rivelin Edge, near Sheffield, was an entirely different proposition; pinnacles always are. This one is as large and as high as the Napes Needle. J. W. Puttrell had attempted to lasso the top, without success, in the closing years of the last century, but in 1932 it was still virgin. Three companions and myself laid siege to it and finally ascended it by means of a human pyramid and a safeguarding rope which had been thrown across the top. (Those who have attempted to throw a climbing rope over a high projection will realise the amount of energy—and blasphemy—this involved.) We left our names in a tin box on the summit and then descended the long and attractive south-west corner on a top rope; the ascent of this corner, however, proved to be impossible.

In 1934 Michael Doncaster, of the Sheffield University Mountaineering Club, came up specially from London to have a go at the Needle. Assisted by a top rope and some engineering, he managed to get up the South-West Corner. The following year Moyer and I decided it was high time that the Needle was properly subjugated. At Easter we approached it, armed with grim resolve and two pitons which we had stealthily appropriated from our friends. With the aid of the pitons, which I managed to hammer into a thin crack on the seemingly impossible section, I succeeded in leading the South-West Corner—a most exhilarating but rather nerve-racking ascent.



The Needle was climbed at last—but only by means of a defilement, we felt. We hastened to withdraw our pitons, but without them we could not make the corner “go”; and so, eventually, we retired from the assault with mingled feelings of baffled rage and respect. Nineteen-forty-four saw a strong siege of the Needle by the S.U.M.C. After girdling it with a rope which was used as a handrail, they worked out a spiral route round the pinnacle, which landed them on the small ledge high up on the South-West Corner, from which the top was reached. With the crystallisation of the plans for the climbing guide to Rivelin, the Needle began to receive a great deal of attention. And finally, after repeated attempts, R. A. Brown and members of the S.U.M.C. managed to lead the

Spiral Route without artificial aid of any kind : the first "clean" ascent, fifty years after Puttrel's original attempt.

And so to my third "Unconquerable"—Moyer's Buttress.

Moyer and I discovered this fine crag on Gardom's Edge in 1933. Let it be said here and now that it was Moyer who pronounced it possible and was the leading light in the attempts upon it. After many fruitless efforts we found a "stooge" who was quite willing to spend much time holding a rope from the top. With this as a safeguard we attacked the buttress with increased confidence. The lower and overhung part of the crag is a huge steep slab which is ascended by a hard crack up its right-hand side. This leads to a tiny stance on the corner about 35 feet up. There is a block belay here. The wall above overhangs, and somehow one must ascend it for five feet before one can swing round the corner to the left and on to the steep overlapping upper portion of the buttress. We overcame this corner by complicated combined methods ; and found the remaining upper section of the climb extremely severe and exposed.

Although we repeated this ascent we never led it ; and at the time this article is being written it has still not been led. In August, 1950, the Valkyrie Mountaineering Club climbed it safeguarded by a top rope, and they confidently assert that one day they will lead it. Until it has been led, it will remain, with \*Undertaker's Buttress on the same Edge, one of the last great gritstone problems of the Peak District.

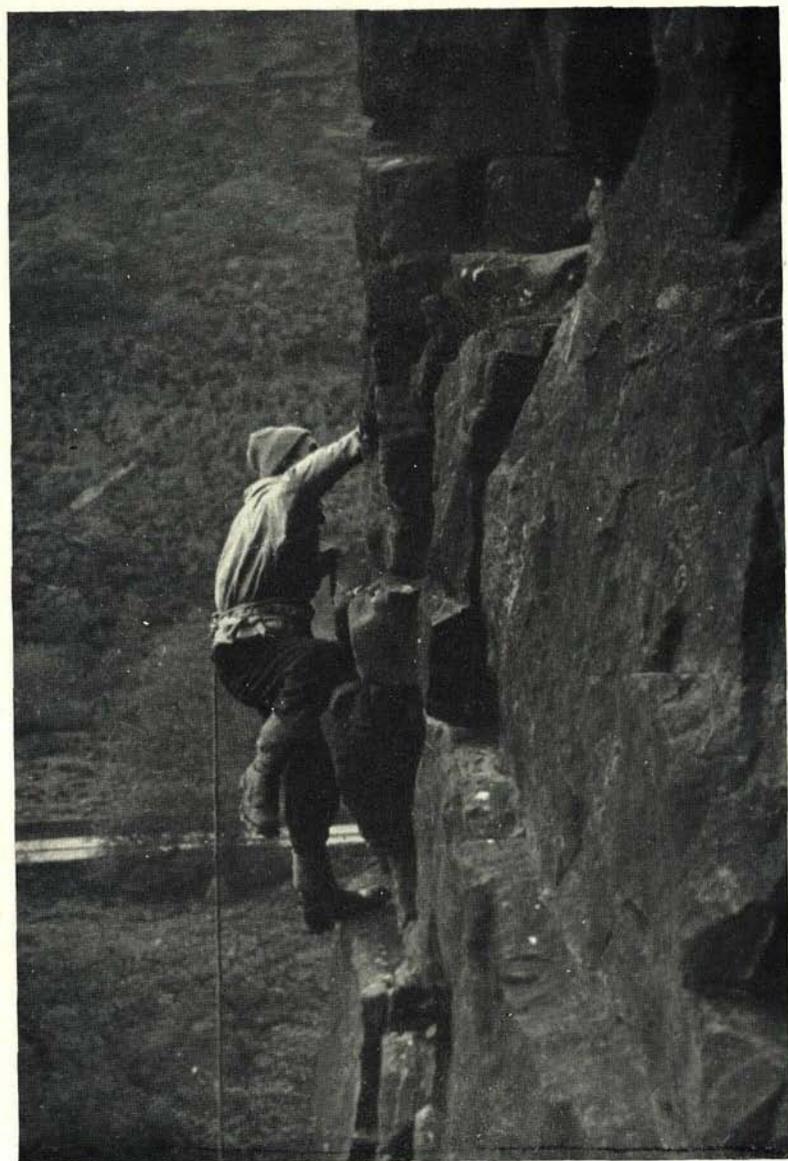
Despite the fact that the Unconquerable Cracks and the Rivelin Needle have been conquered, while Moyer's Buttress is threatened with the same fate in the near future, these routes will always remain, to me, "My Unconquerables." Neither Moyer nor I will ever lead them now : Moyer, because the R.A.F. took him and made an efficient killing-machine of him until he joined that band of those "who died that we might live" ; and I, because—well, fifteen years or so is a long time, and nerve and sinew inevitably deteriorate even though the spirit remains willing.

Perhaps some day—who knows?—we shall see these routes as well-blazoned as the Owl Gully on Cratcliffe. But I doubt it.

---

\* Undertaker's Buttress was climbed on 3rd February, 1951, by J. Brown and M. T. Sorrell, Valkyrie M.C.

Classification : "Exceptionally Severe."



GARDEN FACE DIRECT

*E. Byne*

Gardoms Edge (Gritstone).