

THE LIMESTONE INVASION

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The great feature of modern rock climbing in Britain is undoubtedly the gradual development that is now taking place on carboniferous limestone. The great cliffs of Cheddar and the Avon Gorge have already been charted and recorded in guide book form, and the Yorkshire crags are receiving constant attention. Gordale Scar is already noted for having forced a cragsman to bivouac on his climb, and the tremendously forbidding bulge of Kilnsey Crag has been overcome by a remarkable *tour de force* and a siege that lasted several months. The final successful attempt by Ron Moseley of the Rock and Ice Club, accompanied by two members of the Mountain Club of Stafford must, despite the artificial aids that were used, be considered a triumph of ingenuity, skill and courage.

I really want to tell here of the developments in the Peak District because I know this area best and because here, on the great gleaming limestone crags of the dales, lies the future climbing ground of this country. Here are buttresses galore; great cliffs of incredible steepness and exposure that for years have attracted the admiring eyes of cragsmen. It is true, of course, that the stability of the rock is not above suspicion, but that is because the eye traces a route of obvious hand and foot holds, and an examination of the great faces and bulges of rock that appear too smooth to climb shows that such rock is sound, steep and contains many infinitesimal finger holds, and that there lies the way.

Limestone climbing in the Peak District already has a history and tradition that began in the 1890's when J. W. Puttrell scaled the Dargai Crack in Castleton's Cave Dale. In 1903 he followed this with the first ascent of the Great Gully on the High Tor of Matlock, and about this time Samuel Turner, better known for his exploits in the New Zealand Alps, aroused the admiration of the numerous spectators who watched his ascent of Ilam Tor in Dovedale. True, he first threw a rope over the summit and ascended this hand over hand; however, on attaining his object he did stand upon his head—and that is more than I would dare to do on such a lofty perch.

Gradually a few climbers here and there developed leanings for this unpopular rock. Siegfried Herford visited Dovedale just before the 1914-18 war, and on a dismal wet day climbed the Ilam Tor by purely orthodox methods; and at Matlock, odd parties paid their respects to the cavernous depths of High Tor Gully. By the 1920's

this gully was becoming quite popular. It was the period which saw the foundation of the M.A.M. and the annual joint meets with the Rucksack Club in Derbyshire.

In those early days the climbing venue was often Cromford Black Rocks, and "The Greyhound" below the crags was the climbers' "pub." It was quite common for climbers to arrive on the Saturday and High Tor Gully to be invaded. The local inhabitants believed that these excursions were made in search of Rock Pigeons' eggs; however, this was a belief not held by the guardian of the Alpine gardens at High Tor, whose opinion was that the parties were attempting to evade the 3d. fee necessary for the usual entrance, and climbers on reaching the top of the gully would inevitably find him waiting there, his tickets at the ready.

Since then, odd parties of climbers have paid their respects to such places as Stoney Middleton Dale and the various rock spires that rise like church steeples from the wooded slopes of Dovedale, but it is only in recent years that the true cult of limestone has developed. The original places have been the first to receive attention; Ilam Tor has been charted by Joe Brown and his Rock and Ice companions, Siegfried Herford's route is now the easy way, and the modern classic is the White Edge, a long, steadily overleaning arete which seems to rise almost from the river. It is a spectacular climb that takes the leader longer to do than the Grooved Arete on Tryfan.

At Matlock, climbers had for a long time eyed the tremendous "Bastion Face" of High Tor and in 1953 it was first attempted by Donald Wooler, R. A. Brown, and Frank Fitzgerald, a strong team from Sheffield University. Wooler (now a member of the M.A.M.) was at this period one of the top cragsmen on gritstone. It was his idea that the climb should be done on Coronation Day, and Brown spoke of sticking little flags on the rock at regular intervals. Unfortunately the weather was very bad and the attempt was postponed. When it did take place the climbers ran out of pegs before the summit could be reached and also the police intervened, being disturbed at the dislocation of the traffic on the A.6 highway far below.

A few days later the Bastion was again assaulted, this time by a party from Leicester led by Peter Biven. After several hours of endeavour on what must be one of the most exposed and spectacular buttresses in this country the party succeeded in reaching the summit and in so doing introduced a new era in Peakland climbing. Since then, many have climbed the High Tor Bastion and Biven, after a series of spectacular ascents on gritstone, returned to High Tor in

May, 1957. With his inseparable companion Trevor Peck he pioneered Bastion Wall, which runs up this astonishing face as straight as a die and about 40 feet to the left of the ordinary Bastion Route. The climb, which took $7\frac{1}{2}$ hours, surmounts a continuous series of overhangs and gradually increases in difficulty, with the crux occurring on the last twenty feet. Here a repulsive black overhang was only overcome by using an expansion bolt, and an indefinite crack above faded out on a smooth wall topped by a final overhang that proved very hard to tired climbers. "A very fine route," said Joe Brown after making the second ascent.

A few weeks later Biven and Peck were back again, and this time produced Fortress Wall, 200 feet of rock work some 30 feet left of Bastion Wall. The route needed fourteen pegs, and is remarkable in that it goes over bulge after bulge and contains a traverse that Biven considered to be the most spectacular on Derbyshire limestone, although nowhere is the severity of the climb extreme.

So much for High Tor. The Manifold valley has received some attention—the great crag of Beeston Tor has yielded routes, and higher up the dale the prominent buttress that contains Thor's Cave has presented the Rock and Ice Club with much sport and interest. Further north the dales offer much for the future, and in particular the area between Buxton and Monsal Dale; if one follows the River Wye downstream it flows past crag after crag. A few expeditions have been made here by such first-class cragsmen as Geoffrey Sutton, the Warden at White Hall, and his assistant instructors, Harold Drasdo, Geoff. Roberts and the late Bob Downes. They have also surveyed and produced several fine routes in Chee Dale.

Further downstream in Miller's Dale a most striking piece of rock architecture is the tremendous crag of Raven Tor, famous to geologists for the intrusion of basaltic rock known locally as Toadstone. This tor rises sheer from the road in one great bulging sweep of quite 200 feet; I would hesitate to climb it even on a rope ladder, and yet in the autumn of 1957 Graham West and his companions of the Manchester Gritstone club spent many hours forcing a route up one of its lines of weakness. This route, called "Hubris" starts about fifteen feet to the left of the upper cave behind a wild rose tree on a ledge, and takes a thin wavy intermittent crack for 25 feet, gradually trending upwards to a small roof, a white streak, and then a little tree. All this, some 100 feet, continuously overleans and needs artificial aid, but above one does get some free climbing in a most sensational position with odd roots, withered ivy and vertical grass thrown in for excitement.

Whilst more ways will be found on this tor, perhaps future exploration will concentrate on the limestone canyon between Miller's Dale and Monsal Dale. This stretch, known by the charming name of Water Cum Jolly, has undoubtedly as fine a range of limestone cliffs as any I know. I predict a fine future for it, and already friends have written of new routes accomplished and more to follow.

There are of course many side dales, spurs from the main limestone gorges, all of which will repay attention and which will undoubtedly be investigated in the future. Every limestone dale in the Peak seems to have its share of crags and tors, faces, walls, and overhanging bulges. Here, then, is the climbing ground of the future.