

SCRATCH

R. HANDLEY

Some few years ago a new group of cliffs was discovered near Tremadoc, climbing commenced, and some very fine new routes were worked out by members of various climbing clubs.

I heard about these cliffs some five years ago when the main climbing centres were the Llanberis Pass and the Ogwen Valley. It was said that these cliffs, being near the coast, provided excellent climbing when the higher crags were shrouded in mist and rain ; this is quite true, but to get on to them and really enjoy the climbs fine weather is recommended as the difficulties can be as great as many in the Llanberis area.

I did one or two of the easier routes, and then two years ago I started doing some of the more difficult ones in the company of Harry Smith and Trevor Jones. One day Trevor and I went to do one of the harder routes called *Scratch* on a day that was damp but not raining. Trevor, who had done the route before, elected to lead and climbed without much difficulty to the first stance. This was a grass ledge apparently stuck to the face of the very steep slab by grass and mud alone ; the belay was a very small spike. After I had joined him he led across the face of the slab to the foot of a very steep groove which constituted the crux of the climb. I joined him at the foot of it and he began to layback up it. I could see that the finger crack was greasy and the wall for the feet green, and as his rubbers kept slipping it looked to me that a descent would be necessary. After much grunting and groaning Trevor decided (as I had already) that it would not go that day. After changing positions I began to descend to the grass ledge and found that though the ascent of the slab had been fairly easy the reverse was not the case.

After a little time I managed to perform a descending mantleshelf and alighted on the grass ledge, feeling it shudder as I did so. I considered that the belay was not good enough to hold us if a slip occurred, and as the ledge seemed liable to collapse I decided to insert a piton. Trevor negotiated the wall with difficulty and as he let himself gingerly on to the ledge I felt it descending like a lift under me, slowly at first, and then with increasing speed. Trevor shouted :

“ Hold me ! ” which I tried to do whilst still descending, until with a slight jerk we were arrested by the rope through the peg. It quivered, but with a great feeling of relief I realised it was well and truly in, and Trevor by this time suspended from me facing outwards on the steep slab. I slowly lowered away until he was able to obtain footholds. Our descent continued without any further mishap.

We vowed afterwards to handle gently in future any sea cliff grass which obviously had not the tenacity of the “ Cloggy ” variety.

