

## WHITE SLAB

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The weather was good, dry and sunny; we felt that Cloggy must be in condition so we went there. Two climbers were just abseiling off Bloody Slab because of a wet patch on the crux, so like true tigers we decided to keep our paws dry and try another climb.

White Slab looked dry, and two climbers had just roped up at the bottom of it. Quickly realising that they could show us the way and also drop any top ropes that might be needed, we commenced unpacking the gear and roping up. We delayed tying the laces of our P.A's until we actually started to climb.

The leader of the pair in front now had both feet on the rock. Alas, he retreated. He tried again, and again he retreated. His second had an attempt. He also retreated. They smoked cigarettes and tried; after about an hour they gave up altogether and Dave had an attempt. He showed much more promise than the other two, and just as I thought he was up, he was down. A handhold had broken off. We looked at his grazed leg in silence, and I suddenly realised that it was up to me as second in command to guide my injured leader to safety. I was also fed up with sitting around and had run out of cigarettes. I sprang at the cliff, and after two moves arrived at a freshly broken piece of rhyolite. The piece that had let Dave down with such a bump had also left another, slightly better, handhold in its place. I moved higher, and then by using side pressure holds to stay in balance I inched my way along the tiny sloping ledge until more handholds appeared, a distance of about eighteen inches. I traversed further to the left and then moved up to a shaky grass ledge which was the belay. Dave quickly followed, and led through to the foot of Linnell's Leap. The second pitch was greasy, especially in a crack with an overhung start, but it went.

We were now at the foot of the slab itself, and the pale rock leant away from us like a solid shaft of sunlight in the early afternoon. I collected some runners from Dave and went up Linnell's Leap to the arête overlooking Ghecko Groove. I reached a small ledge and considered the next move. On my right was the pale sunny slab looking warm and welcoming, while on my left beneath me was the dark shadowy steep groove. I seemed poised on the brink of eternal darkness. Plucking up courage, I made a high step up on a good side hold and started traversing diagonally right, back to the middle of the slab and towards a rusty piton embedded firmly in a crack. Feeling more secure, I climbed on to a big spike on the left hand edge and put another runner on. A second piton was reached after a long stride back to the middle of the slab, and I clipped into my fourth runner. The rope was beginning to drag now, but I didn't have much further to go and was feeling more confident. I moved back and left to the arête again, but this time in order to move over it and into the

groove. I felt as if I was doing a tension traverse, but I eventually forced my way up to the belay on Ghecko Groove. To my horror there was no peg for a belay, so I ended up by jamming a couple of nuts on two line slings in the peg crack, and with my feet on a sloping ledge I felt reasonably sure of holding Dave if he came off. He came up quickly without any trouble and brought a fat welcome peg with him.

Feeling much more secure, I read out the guide book's description of the next pitch. Dave traversed back to the ledge and looked for a small spike to lasso on the far side of the slab. He reported that he couldn't see any spike; I told him that the variation was straight up the slab. He had another look, and asked someone on Sheaf if they could see it. They couldn't. We had numerous exchanges with people all over the cliff to see if anyone knew of this small spike. Nobody seemed interested except our friends, who laughed. I finally suggested to Dave that he probably couldn't see it because he hadn't got his glasses on, and that maybe I should have a look. As he reluctantly surrendered the lead I said he could lead the next pitch as he hadn't led a long pitch anyway, and this would put things right. After a few minutes perusal of the crag I was able to pick out a small white spike about six inches high and an inch in diameter on the other side of the slab.

I fashioned a lasso, making sure there was no slack between me and Dave, and attempted a Roy Rogers on this maverick unicorn. It took me about fifteen minutes before I eventually succeeded. I half tension-traversed and half Tarzaned across to the other side, belayed on an uncomfortable stance and brought Dave across. He led through up the second 120-foot pitch and soon passed out of sight, and I heard occasional mutterings about finding pitons and putting on runners. I followed as soon as he was belayed and found it much the same as the first long pitch, delicate climbing on small holds with occasional long reaches and pitons. The only difference was that the route went straight up the slab.

A short scramble brought us to the last pitch of Longland's which we overcame with a few strenuous heaves. We soon reached the ridge and made a painful descent in P.A's to our boots. All haste was then made to the Halfway House where a cup of tea completed a most enjoyable day.