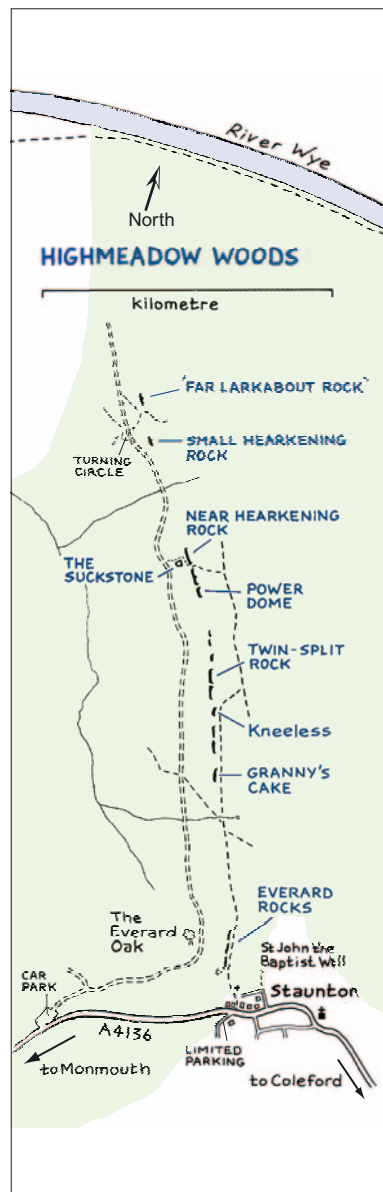




The Boob Tube (p.26) Ally Smith DON SARGEANT



DON SARGEANT



Highmeadow Woods



OS Ref 547 129 – 540 145

In addition to a numbing first-joint finger-jam crux, the main deterrent is the ragged nature of the off-fingers crack across the great sloping ceiling. A free ascent is likely to witness an order of pain hitherto unknown in climbing.

(Martin Crocker, 2003, showing respect for *The Mean Machine*)

'Oh yeah, I free-climbed *The Mean Machine* about four years ago with my brother. I just didn't bother to tell anyone.' (John Clark talking to Martin Crocker, November 2004)

From Staunton, five miles east of Monmouth, an open wooded valley leads northwards to meet the River Wye, and on its eastern flank a long, intermittent edge can be traced for two kilometres through deciduous and coniferous woodland. For the most part, low, moss-covered walls and boulders predominate, but from place to place the full thickness of the outcrop is realized in some imposing buttresses and walls. Chief amongst these are the two awesome buttresses of Near Harkening Rock. There is also a Far Harkening Rock buried deeper in the Forest but this is merely a mound of wet dolomite. Of greatest importance for the climber are a number of shorter walls that provide extended bouldering and micro-routes – upstaging, perhaps, even the mighty challenges of the bigger crags. All of the crags face west, are relatively quick drying, and provide a reasonably reliable winter climbing venue.

Take the A1436 from Coleford towards Monmouth. Pass through the village of Staunton and follow the double white line downhill for about 400 metres. Exactly where it ends, there is a Forestry Commission track entrance on the right (not visible in advance) and a large car-parking area. Coming up from Monmouth, pass the Gloucestershire county and Forest of Dean signboards and turn left into the entrance where the double white line begins.

The crag walk in is one of the most charming in the Wye Valley. From the parking-area, take the well-made Forestry track, keeping right at the fork just beyond the barrier. Suddenly everything opens out and there are stupendous views down the valley, with the magnificent 'Everard' oak at its head. From the designation stone, the Black Mountains can be seen across to the west on a clear day. Above, in the woods at this point, are the Everard Rocks. After a further ten-minute walk, and just around a right-hand bend is a clearing, and the huge boulder-slab of The Suckstone appears on the right above the track. A path leads up to and past The Main Crag of Near Harkening Rock and into the forest.

Seven hundred metres north of The Suckstone the track enlarges to form a grassy clearing and turning-circle. One hundred and fifty metres upslope diagonally leftwards is 'Far Larkabout Rock', while 100 metres upslope diagonally right, and clearly visible from the track, is Small Harkening Rock.



The Everard Oak
JOHN WILSON

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'Far Larkabout Rock' JOHN WILLSON

'Far Larkabout Rock'

OS Ref 540 145
A clean and bulging 6-to-7-metre wall. The rock is compact and most pebbles stay put. From the left end of the clearing, follow the obvious path until it swings right – the Rock can then be seen above left.

Simple Life (VS 5a) is a warm-up via two finger-pockets at the extreme left-hand end of the cliff.

Screw Technology 6m E1 6a (16.12.01)
Start below the right-hand silver birch at the cliff-edge, and climb direct to finish immediately to its right. A few technical pebble-pulls.

★ **Peace of My Mind** 6m E3 6a (16.12.01)
Reach a round pocket, and take small holds above to good pockets just below the top. Mantel out at the 'apex' of the cliff.

★ **Larkabout** 7m E4 6b (16.12.01)
★ A mini-classic, with a repulsing start.
★ From a good pocket above the initial bulge in the centre of the cliff, dyno up right to the left end of a handrail. Climb diagonally left to pockets, reach the top, and then pull over on roots slightly right.

★ **Back to the Trees** 7m E5 6a (16.12.01)
A peculiar and trying finish. From the holly tree at the right-hand end of the cliff, move up to the obvious line of handholds, and take these leftwards for 2 metres to a big sidehold. Hang a

crimp above and then edge to the top using the tree-trunk to your left.

★ **Bin Laden** 9m E1 6b (22.12.01)
A must-do bouldering traverse. Start as for *Back to the Trees*. Move up to the obvious handrail and follow it leftwards to where it ends (on *Larkabout*). Continue horizontally, and then diagonally leftwards to the silver birch at the exit of *Screw Technology*.

Small Harkening Rock

OS Ref 541 143

★ **Hearken from Afar** 7m E3 5b (30.10.01)
A pleasing route on good rock. Amble up onto a projecting block below the dominating arête. Reach a good hold under an overhang, swing right, and finish up the arête.

There are several smaller boulders to the right, including a holly-topped replica of the above.

Small Harkening Rock JOHN WILLSON



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Near Harkening Rock

OS Ref 544 140

The name indicates that it was a spot from which the deer-hunters would 'hearken' for their prey. Now, visiting soloists are left to hearken for a partner, since most climbs are best led, given their height and protectable nature. The Main Crag is dominated by a remarkable *Sloth*-like ceiling, which escaped being headline news when free-climbed. It faces south-west, is currently free of trees, and is as sunny as sandstone gets. It offers dry bouldering in showery weather.

The name properly belongs to The Main Crag, but it is used here to include the broken escarpment from The Left-Hand Crag rightwards for several hundred metres. An intermittent path continues from below The Main Crag to the remaining boulders. Descent to the approach track from anywhere along this is fairly simple.

The Left-Hand Crag

This is located in a shadier position in the woods 30 metres to the left of The Main Crag, and directly behind The Suckstone.

Two meaty cracks slice vertically through the overhangs in the front face of the buttress.

Picket Line 9m HVS 5b ▲ (9.9.84)
Climb the sly, overhanging left-hand crack and expect pain.

★ **Symbiant** 9m E3 6a ▲ (2.9.01)
Diverse, and with the high-level climbing protectable. Start 2 metres left of the right-hand crack. Stretch around a low overhang for a jug. Span up to the left to reach a good pocket. Enter a hanging groove (peg) and, from the shelf above, finish easily.

Crystal Grips 9m VS 5a ▲ (9.9.84)
A rejecting start up the right-hand crack should gain a good break. Continue a little more easily to the top. VS rarely gets any tougher.

Crystal Grips Emily Goodman DON SARGEANT

★ **The Boob Toob** 13m E5 6a ▲ (9.5.99)

★ A brilliant line across the impending main wall of the crag: mind-boggling stuff. The E-grade is for the pump; protection is quite good. Climb *Crystal Grips* for 5 metres to the break that shoots across the wall. Hand-traverse right 4 metres (small cams) to flakes above the bulge. Rock up to a break, and traverse right to finish up big holds on the prow.

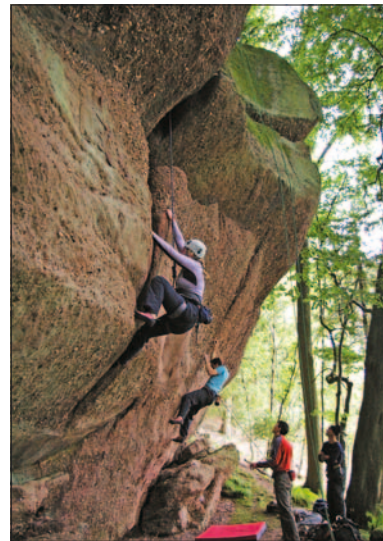
Pass humbly below a flake in the impending pebbled wall ('a route of the future') and you come to a less steep face right of the prow with the next three climbs.

Elsie Dog 9m E2 5c ▲ (9.8.90)

Start at the lowest point and gain the upper of two slanting breaks. Shuffle leftwards and make hard moves to reach and pass a large pocket just below the cliff-top tree.

Tweak This 9m E3 5c ▲ † (8.5.99)

Climb up and left to a point halfway along the main break (bombproof large cams). Now, using pebbles, edge up the slab to a thin break and the top.



Wet Appetite 7m E3 5c (8.5.99)

A satisfying solo up the right side of the slab. Step up into the break; then balance up a narrow foot-ramp to a good pebble on the left and positive finishing-holds.

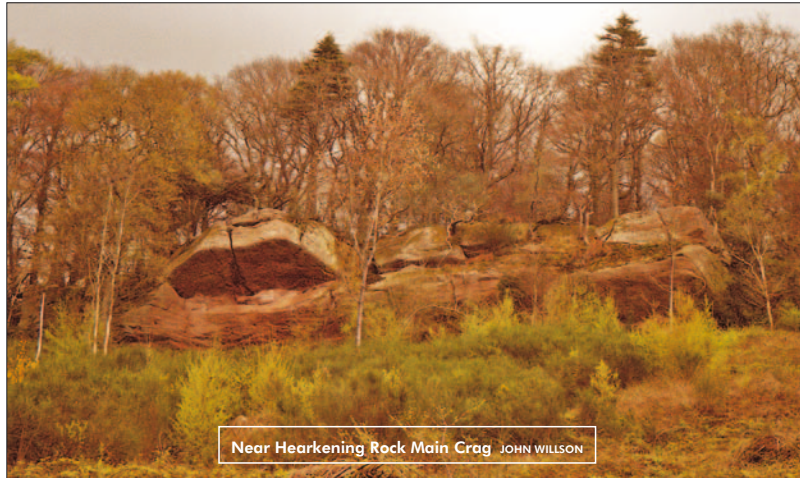
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There is a girdle traverse along the high-level break reported at a surprising Severe grade.

Elsie Dog Paul Robertson & Emily Goodman
DON SARGEANT



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Near Harkening Rock Main Crag JOHN WILLSON

The Main Crag

The short wall at the left end of the crag, and immediately above the footpath, accommodates some problems: **Night Vision** (5m E1 6b 2.9.01) is the arête on the extreme left; there is a 5a up the centre of the wall; a 4b up the left-slanting right edge; and a 4a up the arête on the right (with a yellow arrow at its base).

The Mean Machine

15m E7 6c ▲ † (15.9.84)

The line! The roof! It's free after all! One of the most monstrous challenges in the south; come equipped with cams, tape, and talent. Pull into the slight groove below the left-hand side of the roof. Climb easily to the roof and traverse right beneath it for 3 metres. Fix poorly persuasive gear in the roof, in addition to clipping an old peg, and hang a forefinger to reach the crack in the roof proper. All that remains is what is behind you.

Odyssey (15m HS 4c 7.8.90) provides an escape from the roof up the dirty groove to its right.

The short wall beneath the roof provides two ever-dry extended boulder-problems: **The Vein** (5m E1 5c 8.5.99) is the vein leading direct to *The Mean Machine* roof; and **Backoff** (5m E2 6a/b 8.5.99) starts a metre right and rocks up onto the slab.

The Trampling Man

6m E2 6a ▲ (2.9.01)

Climb the fierce open groove beneath the right-hand edge of the large roof past a useful pocket to trees. Scramble out. A good wire protects.

Without Weekends the Country Would Be a Desert

11m E3 6a ▲ (30.11.99)

Start down and slightly to the left of a sapling 5 metres up, and left of an overhanging crack. From jugs, crank pebbles through the bulge to a break (large cam). Mantel up and trend easily right to another break with a tree. Take a delicate rib to the top.

Blaina Bloodsports

12m E3 6a ▲ † (9.84)

What you see is what you get. Start below an overhanging jamming-crack left of impossible scalloped roofs. Tape-up, and then get mauled.



The Mean Machine
Ally Smith DON SARGEANT

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★ Idiosynchrotree 11m E1 5a/b ▲ (9.5.99)

A fun climb, the crux of which is not on rock. However, it keeps on getting easier as the tree grows taller! Reasonable protection can be arranged for the roof. Balance onto the top of a silver birch tree at the right-hand end of the crag. Tremble left onto a flake on the lip of the roof, and make a mid-air traverse until it is possible to pull onto a rib. Climb the rib above, or the easier crack on the left, to the top.

Power Dome

Fifty metres right of The Main Crag is a smaller buttress. Undercut and super-steep, this is a crag for short and powerful bouldering-style routes. The first three routes share an exit. Though quite high, this is on positive holds (and barely rates E3 5b). It can be avoided by traversing right along the shelf.

★ Blast Off 9m E3 6a/b † (3.3.02)

From a jug right of a crack on the left, span for the left end of a jug-line in the roof. Swing right a metre, and then hook, crimp, and dyno for a jug. Pull out onto a sloping pebbly shelf. Reach a big jug on the edge of the slab overhead and mantel to safety.

★ Lip's Ink 8m E3 6b † (23.2.02)

Start at a short dog-leg flake. Extend to a finger-hold on the lip of the roof. Power over and slightly leftwards to a jug and a rest on the shelf. Exit as for *Blast Off*.

★ Hi Karate 8m E3 6c † (3.3.02)

Starting a metre right of the dog-leg flake, undercut to a hold on the lip; then lock or innovate for glory – glory being a finger-pocket at 5 metres. Move left and pull onto the shelf on good pebbles. Exit as for *Blast Off*.

★ Springtime 6m E4 6c † (23.2.02)

★ A more stunning short route you will surely not find. Overcome the honeycombed 2-metre roof that

undercuts the right-hand arête. A shallow pocket to the right enables progress before better holds are reached on top of the arête. Finish with a nervy rock-up.

On the rightmost wall, **Pebbles Only** (6a) starts off a stump and exits on a suspect block.

One hundred metres right, past various green boulders, is a wall, the vegetation of which gives way to a fairly clean arête.

★ Humosphere 6m E1 6b † (3.3.02)

Using poor holds on the arête and a small pocket on the left, climb the leaning wall to better holds on the arête. Move up to a holly tree.

★ Pebblesfear 5m HVS 4c † (3.3.02)

Take the slab right of the arête to the holly tree.

Twin-Split Rock

Sixty metres right is a relatively clean and large buttress. This is split by two gullies. The first two routes take the bulging wall at the left-hand end of the crag.

★ The Hollies 6m E1 5a † (24.2.02)

From a large pocket, haul up to large holds at the top.

★ He Ain't Heavy 6m E2 5c † (24.2.02)

Climb strenuously from a small pocket to a shelf. Trend left to the exit of *The Hollies*.

★ Green Lane 7m E4 5c † (3.3.02)

Climb the overhanging leftward-slanting gangway and crack to a bulge. Undercut over to better holds and a tree on the right. Bridge up next to the tree to reach the top.

★ George of the Jungle 8m E4 5c † (3.3.02)

Exhilarating jug-pulling. Start a metre right of *Green Lane* behind a tree (which might provide an escape route if confidence ebbs). Climb up to a break that rises rightwards into bulging rock. Follow the break, and make a hard lock

for a flake in a bulge. Pull up to good holds, and finish, using a good but hidden pocket on a tiny slab at the top.

★ Birch Boys 8m E4 6a † (3.3.02)

Start below the right-hand arête of this section. Reach and follow pockets rightwards before a strenuous pull gains holds in a slight break. Using a pebble finger-jam above, move up and right onto the arête. A short slab yields an amiable exit.

Between the two gullies is an overhanging pebbly wall furnished with surprising holds.

★ Sun Dance 10m E5 6a † (7.3.02)

An arm-testing, back-baring, rising traverse of the wall. Start at its left end. Stretch right to a handrail and follow this downhill before moving up to another line of holds. Track rightwards, with a bigger drop, until a rock-up onto a nose has a small fir tree grasped.

★ Rhyme without Reason 7m E3 6a † (7.3.02)

Grab a pocket up to the right, Pull on it with feeble might, Crimp that crumble – You've pulled too hard, So off you come, Reputation marred.

★ Phobic Aerobic 8m E2 5b † (8.12.01)

A 30-second sprint: pure enjoyment, with the 5b move low down. There is a right-facing flake in an overhanging nose left of the gully. Use honeycombed pockets to snatch a handrail. Swing left and follow jugs, left of the flake, to a short arête and a little fir tree.

The next route is located on the triangular right-hand wall of the second gully. To its right is a large roof at 6 metres.

★ Between Thumb and Forefinger 6m E3 6a † (8.12.01)

Snazzy pebble-pulling on the triangular wall. Start with a pinch for the right hand and climb straight to the apex. All

but 'pebble converts' will be peeved by the grade.

★ Master of Deceit 8m E4 5c † (8.12.01)

High in the grades; a jump to an adjacent holly tree to escape the crux would be prickly. Start below the arête right of the gully and climb its right-hand side to a bulge. Layback to good crimps; then rock-up right to top out.

A green and often wet crack to the right precedes a convex wall and slab. Some explosive boulder-problem climbing hangs out here.

★ Aerial Bomb 6m E2 6a † (20.4.02)

Start immediately right of the crack, and take pockets and edges up a bulging rib to a finish using the tree on the left of the slab above.

★ Scud Attack 7m E2 6b † (20.4.02)

Start 1½ metres right of the crack. Gain and share a fingerhold at 3 metres, and then lunge for pebbles up to the right. Move up onto the shelf and escape left onto the tree.

★ Minesweeper 7m E2 6c † (20.4.02)

Start 3 metres right of the crack. Reach a layaway and a pebble on tiptoe, and erupt for twin fingerholds above. Lock for the shelf and, from a round hole, traverse left to the tree.

Eight metres right is a slab bounded on its right by a steep rib topped by a dead tree.

★ Harkening Heights 6m E3 6a † (20.4.02)

Gain a large pebble and the right-hand end of an undercut in the slab with difficulty. Finish up the slab and exit right more easily. Mind the landing.

★ Beckoning 6m E4 6b † (20.4.02)

Step off a block below the rib, and try to move up using a disappointing pocket. Gain the dead tree, and swing left around it to top out.

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About 200 metres right, past an 'unclimbable' leaning bluff, is a micro-buttruss of compact, near pebble-free rock.

Treeless 5m VS 4c (8.12.01)
Take the blunt left-hand rib just to the right of the tree. Do the route as the name implies.

★ **Kneelless 6m HVS 5a** (8.12.01)
Move up awkwardly to gain two pebbles in the central scoop. Finish direct.

Seeless 5m HVS 5b (8.12.01)
Positive fingerholds on the right-hand rib lead to a pebbly hand-ledge and a tiny rib.

Granny's Cake

About 100 metres further right, past a long, low wall, is an impressive buttress. Given the unconsolidated nature of the rock, you'd be stark raving mad to choose this place for a first visit.

Flat on Your Back 6m E5 6a (22.12.01)
The violently leaning prow at the left-hand end of the crag. Step off a low boulder and use disintegrating holds and a finger-pocket to gain a line of handholds. Swing leftwards along these to a deep, hidden pocket in the prow. A heelhook allows a couple of sloping but rough holds to be reached, and then all that remains is a flop onto a long ledge.

The Lighter Brigade
8m E4 5c (22.12.01)
Climb up crud to the large hole centre-right in the buttress. Use a positive pocket above to reach a break; swing right, with feet invisible, and exit on an overhanging tree branch.

Losing Holly 7m E4 6b (22.12.01)
Reasonably enjoyable climbing up the right-hand arête. A pebble undercut marks the crux, while the long move to the break above requires precision. Swing left to exit.

Everard Rocks OS Ref 547 129
The next climbs are on a collection of buttresses almost a kilometre to the right (south). These are located above the Everard Oak and are just visible from the main track when the leaves are down.

The first buttress, on the left, is short but defended by overhangs.

Remember the Fallen
6m E4 6a (11.11.01)
Not to be underestimated; the crux is at the top and is blind. Pull over an initial bulge to jugs in a break beneath the main overhang. Grope over for fingerholds, finger-traverse right a metre, and then make an awkward move over the centre of the overhang.

★ **The Secret Affaire 6m E3 6a** (9.11.01)
Dynamic. From a flake under the roof on the right, leap for a good hold on the lip. Rock over into safety, looking around to see if anyone caught you at it.

To the right, a much larger buttress is undercut by a huge roof.

☆ **PMT 8m E3 6c †** (11.11.01)
Near the left-hand end is a way through the roof. Identify it, pull around onto the slab, and let the tension fade away. Heinously powerful. Some pebbles have disappeared.

The centre of the buttress is cleaved by two pebble-laden cracks: The left-hand one is **Futility**: A1 on nuts and cams (2.3.02).

Humility 6m E3 6a ▲ † (7.3.02)
The right-hand crack: an exercise in pain control. A gardener's glove for the left hand was used on the first ascent.

★ **A Route for Emily 7m E4 6b** (21.2.01)
Footless and fancy-free. Start below the right-hand arête of the buttress. From a projecting pebble hold, fly through the overhang, making trying moves to get established on the slab. Finish easily. A portable tree-trunk may be in place as a launch-pad.

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Everard's Chimney is 6m VD (21.11.01).

Three ways of climbing the tapering and clean wall to the right of the chimney have been established. Perhaps the weakest is **Trapezium Left-Hand** (6m E2 5c 4.10.01), which uses the left-hand arête. Better are:

★ **Trapezium Direct 6m E2 6b** (16.2.02)
Tiny pebbles lead up the centre of the tapering wall to a layaway move up a short crack. Neither arête is used at any point.

Trapezium Right-Hand
6m E2 6a (4.10.01)
Make hard moves up the arête until it is possible to rock up onto it. Finish on its right.

To the right is a wall shrouded in jungle – except for its right-hand end.

Everard's Wall 7m E4 5c † (9.11.01)
Starting 2 metres left of the arête, surmount a bulge with difficulty. Link spaced pockets above before a thin pebble-move means the tree at the top can be hugged.

E's Ard in E? 6m E3 5c † (16.2.02)
Climb the delicate arête via a pocket, keeping on its right-hand side.

Fifty metres right are two boulders, the right-hand of which promises the following.

Everard's Arête 6m E1 5b (30.10.01)
Take the arête of the boulder, with a Crescent Arête-style finish.

The Suckstone OS Ref 542 140
Had the front slab of this huge sloping boulder been twenty degrees steeper it would surely have rated as the finest piece of sandstone in the Forest. Until recently, the shadier parts of the boulder were covered in moss, but its best section, the back (east) wall, was re-cleaned in 2004. Another full day's work could liberate the North Face of its thick furry coat of moss.

The routes are described clockwise, starting between the South and East Faces.

South Face

- 1 5c. The underside of the arête.
- 2 6b. The flake in the impending wall, with a pounce for the top.
- 3 **Bramble** 5c. The wall right of a wide crack, currently smothered by ivy.
- 4 3c. The wide vegetated crack.
- 5 5a. A mantelshelf manoeuvre left of the crack.

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West Face

- 6 **Tourist Route** 4a-4c. The overlap; then walk up the slab.
7 5c. Gain a shallow pothole over the lip 6 metres right of the left arête.
8 6c? Project onto a finger-jug on the lip. Short legs advised.
9 **Woofers Wow** 6a. A brilliant problem over bulges 3 metres right of the arête, starting from an open finger-slot.
10 6a. The underside of the left arête, swinging right in front of the tree.

East Face

- 11 **The Arête** 7m VS 4c. The left-hand side of the arête between the North and East Faces, with a strenuous start.
12 7m E1 5a. The slab 3 metres left of *The Arête*. A good pocket gets you started.
13 6m HVS 4c. The slight scoop right of an infinitesimal oak.
14 6m E1 5a. Climb above the left side of the small boulder at the base of the slab.
15 5a. A shallow mono for the right hand shows the way.
16 4b. The slab, past an obvious sloping hold.
17 5a. Smear to the small notch.
18 4c. The slab 3 metres right of the edge.
19 3a. The left-hand edge of the slab.

