

Colossus Area

Style: Trad/sport
Aspect: South/South-East
Approach: 30 minutes
Altitude: 100m
OS grid ref: 593 602

Shazalabon	E5
Light and Darkness	E5
Big Wall Party	E5
Wall of Flame	E5
Major Headstress	E5
Jack of Shadows	E4
Ride the Wild Surf	E4
Great Balls of Fire	E4
Colossus	E3

Bella Lugosi is Dead E1

Horse Latitudes	F6a+
Alive and Kicking	F6a
Catrin	F6a

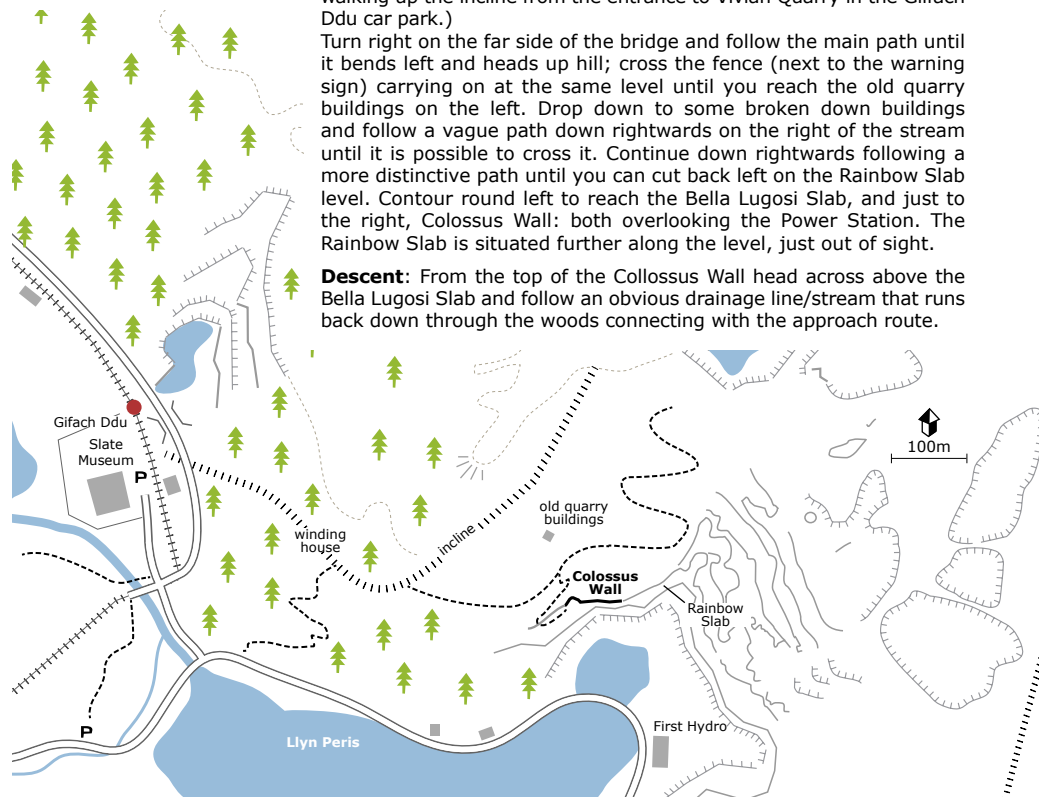
The main feature of this area is the imposing Colossus Wall, a 50m high sheer face, striped with a range of magnificent wall climbs. The routes here are big, pumpy and often quite thuggy. By way of a contrast, the adjacent Bella Lugosi Slab offers more typical slate challenges at an accessible standard.

Conditions: The Colossus Wall faces south, so catches all available sunshine, however it does suffer from prolonged seepage after rain. The Bella Lugosi Slab dries quickly after rain, but loses the sun mid/late afternoon.

Approach: Park in the Dolbadarn Castle car park, situated on the left as you approach the power station from Llanberis. Walk along the road towards the Power Station. Just beyond the left turn leading to the Slate Museum and the Giflach Ddu car park (and Vivian Quarry) an obvious and initially walled footpath cuts up leftwards, thereafter zigzagging up and through the trees to a longer walled zig-zag section. This leads to a small bridge at an old winding house. (NB. This point can be reached by walking up the incline from the entrance to Vivian Quarry in the Giflach Ddu car park.)

Turn right on the far side of the bridge and follow the main path until it bends left and heads up hill; cross the fence (next to the warning sign) carrying on at the same level until you reach the old quarry buildings on the left. Drop down to some broken down buildings and follow a vague path down rightwards on the right of the stream until it is possible to cross it. Continue down rightwards following a more distinctive path until you can cut back left on the Rainbow Slab level. Contour round left to reach the Bella Lugosi Slab, and just to the right, Colossus Wall: both overlooking the Power Station. The Rainbow Slab is situated further along the level, just out of sight.

Descent: From the top of the Colossus Wall head across above the Bella Lugosi Slab and follow an obvious drainage line/stream that runs back down through the woods connecting with the approach route.





Bella Lugosi Slab

The 1st routes are located on the superb steep slab to the left of the Colossus Wall.

- ▶ **1. Nearly but not Quite E1 5c** 25m
The open corner just left of the slab, starting on the right. A left hand start has also been climbed.
- ▶ **2. Horse Latitudes F6a+** ** 28m
Bored of slate? Then this dolerite dyke inlaid into the left arête of the slab may provide a welcome change. Originally, an escape left was made from the ledge at 18m, but *The Horsin' Around Finish* makes for a better pitch, climbing the short arête on the right to a double bolt lower-off over the top.
[M Crook, I A Jones, R Drury, D Jones 15.06.85/*The Horsin' Around Finish*: A Holmes and S Long 20.05.86]
- ▶ **3. Bella Lugosi is Dead E1 5b** ** 25m
A magnificent route up the prominent crack in the slab to the left of Colossus Wall. The climbing is well protected with wires and cams. Sustained difficulties lead to a slight impasse, just where the crack widens near the top. Make crux moves right and up to gain the finishing ledge. [M Crook, N Walton 28.05.84]
- ▶ **4. Alive and Kicking F6a** * 20m
Climb the slab to the right of *Bella Lugosi...*, past a small niche, to a double bolt lower-off.
[G Hughes, I A Jones 06.04.86]

- ▶ **5. Catrin F6a** * 20m
The right most line on the slab left of the corner. A short flake leads to a shallow groove. Climb this past two bolts to easier ground and a double bolt lower-off, shared with *Alive and Kicking*.
[L Morris, M Reeves 10.03.07]
- ▶ **6. Frogs HS 4a** 30m
The corner is often wet. In extreme winter conditions, it gives rise to *Combined Colours* [IV].
[A Williams, A Popp 06.04.86]

Jack of Shadows Wall

The heavily featured wall abutting the Colossus Wall.

- ▶ **7. Nifty Wild Ribo E1 5a** 43m
An uninspiring line up the back of the scrappy recess. [C Philips, S Andrews 26.02.87]
- ▶ **8. Shazalabon E5 6b ***** 40m
The striking groove line left of *Jack of Shadows*.
P1 6b 22m Climb the groove past a small overlap (Rock #3) to a bolt. Move out left onto the wall and go past a precarious spike (bolt) to good holds on the lip of the bulge, and then move back right. Rock over onto the good holds, and then execute a scary mantel to gain a ledge (cam #3 above). More difficult moves lead past a further bolt to the belay.
P2 6b 18m From the end of the belay ledge,

climb past 2 bolts, and then move left and go up to another bolt. Step right to gain an obvious undercut before making a desperate move leftwards over a bulge to eventually gain good holds. Follow these to the top.
[B Gregory, I Barton, D Gregory 16.07.89/P2 22.07.89]

- ▶ **9. Jack of Shadows E4 [F6c+]** *** 40m
Spaced bolts but just about a sport route. It is possible to lower-off after the 1st pitch. Start below a groove, left of the main face.
P1 6a 25m Gain a horizontal borehole then move up into the left-hand groove. Shuffle blindly right into the groove proper and climb up casually until forced right on flakes to a steep finish up to the ledge and double bolt belay/lower off.
P2 5c 15m Climb the slabby groove to the top.
[O Jones, R Whitwell (AL) 22.06.86]
- ▶ **10. Light and Darkness E5 6b ***** 43m
A steep climb up the narrow front face of the pillar between *Jack of Shadows* and *Big Wall Party*.
P1 6b 25m Make a steep pull up onto the overhanging face of the pillar and go up to clip a bolt on the left. Move left on underclings past a 2nd bolt, to climb a bomb-bay chimney. Exit left at its top onto a ledge. Move right past a 3rd bolt and ascend a groove exiting right onto *Big Wall Party* at the jugs. Move left under the overhang via a finger jug on the lip (cam 1 just to the left) then awkwardly climb the slim groove on its left side to the 2 bolt belay on *Jack of Shadows*.
P2 5c 18m Move precariously right onto the front face and make a very long reach for the ledge above. Climb up the strenuous overhanging corner crack to the top. [C Dale, N Dixon 17.07.86]

Colossus Wall

- ▶ **11. Big Wall Party E5 6b ***** 47m
A very fine technical route up the left arête of the Colossus Wall.
P1 6b 30m Start just right of the slate wall at the left edge of the front face. Follow a crackline and sloping holds up to a large jug at 8m. Move left and go up to a bolt. Continue with difficulty past another 2 bolts, trending left to a good wire on the arête. Step back right and climb to a bolt (reaching); before making a long span diagonally left to reach large holds on the arête, and so gain the *Jack of Shadows* and *Big Wall Party* belay ledge, 2 bolts. Move delicately right onto the front face and make a very long reach for the ledge above, (as for *Light and Darkness*). Belay here at the foot of the steep corner crack.
P2 6b 17m Lean out and make a few desperate (but well-protected) moves right, to get established in the smooth clean crack splitting the front face. Climb this in a fine position to reach the haven of a good ledge just below the top. [J Allen, P Williams 05.07.86]



Slatehead • Paul Williams

Ironically, Paul Williams initially snubbed the quarries, dismissing them as a pile of crap, but later became the media spearhead driving the slate 'boom', enthusiastically touring the UK with a brilliant slide show called 'Slate of the Art'. He was the original Simon Panton, who also declared the quarries were rubbish a few years back, and then subsequently became a fan! So all you cynics out there; don't knock it till you've tried it! Paul left a legacy of classic extreme routes all around North Wales including those on the Colossus Wall which he made his own with a string of big steep leads, and the biggest chipped hold ever, the literally colossal 'Chipadeedodah' hold at the bottom of *Ride The Wild Surf*. His classic 1987 Llanberis guidebook included an exciting 60 page slate section, which introduced a host of humorous slate-specific climbing terms ('hypens', 'turbo glides', 'flying hours' etc.) to the climber's lexicon and really put the quarries on the map.

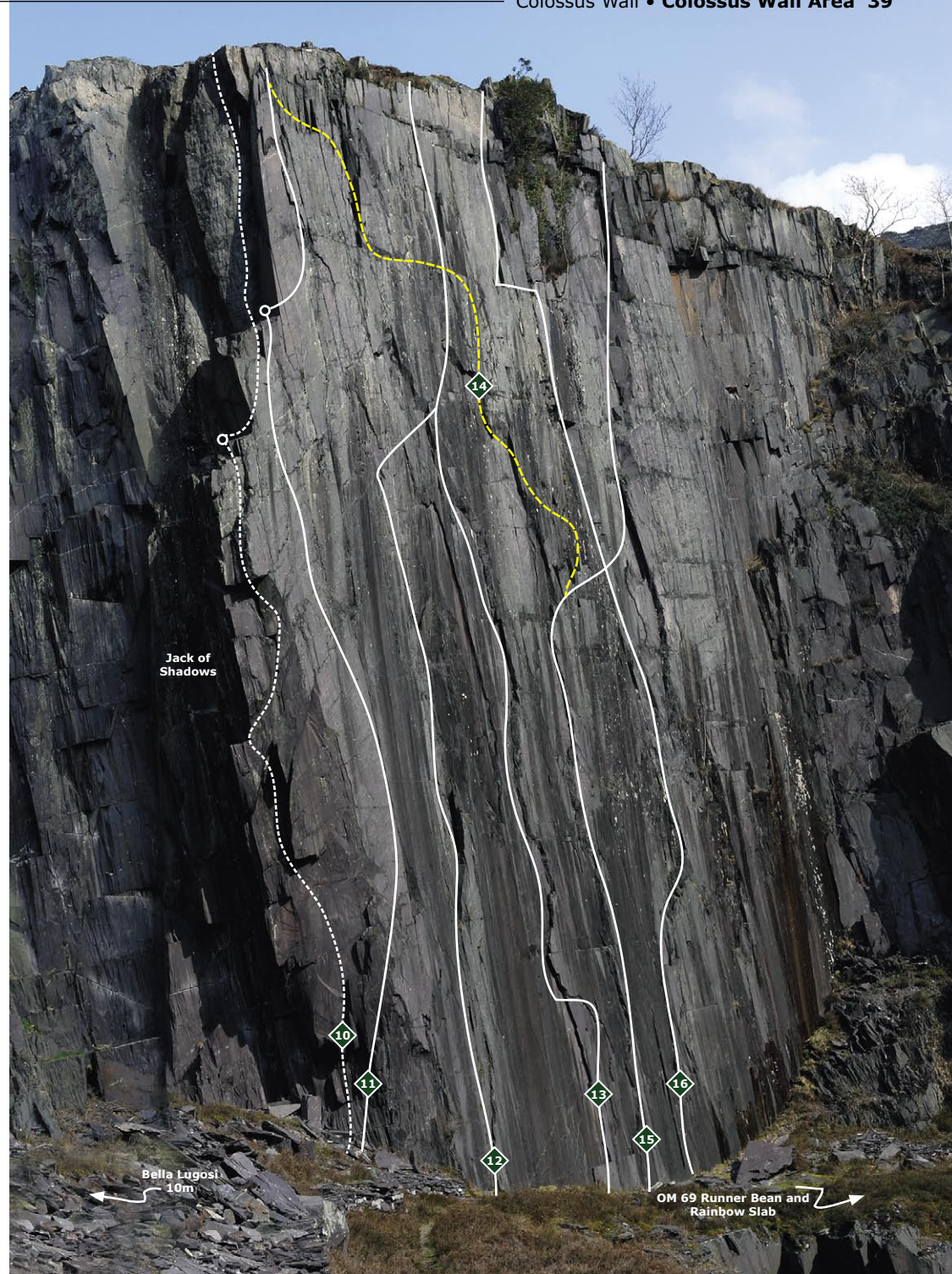
▶ Paul Williams and John Redhead in the mid 80s photo: Williams collection
Chipadeedodah photo Paul Williams



- ▶ **12. Major Headstress E5 6a *** 45m**
Another classic pitch, with bold and reachy climbing; initially independent, then swerving right to a common finish with *Ride the Wild Surf*. Steady for E5, but a little friable. Climb the crack, just in from the left arete, to a sloping niche. Clip the bolt above and climb the left arete of the V-groove to a long reach by the 2nd clip. More sustained climbing gains the sanctuary of the 3rd bolt. Pass this on layaways, then move right to good holds by the next bolt. Continue right to join *Ride the Wild Surf* and do battle with its finishing groove and headwall.
[P Williams, C Gilchrist 05.06.86]
- ▶ **13. Ride the Wild Surf E4 6a *** 45m**
A tremendous direct line up the left hand groove in the centre of the wall. The route often seeps around the crux at 2/3rds height and is best avoided if this is the case. The start passes the infamous 'Chipadeedodah' hold, right of the groove. Gain the 1st bolt then move right to clip the bolt on *Great Balls of Fire*. Move precariously back left with your feet in the chipped hole and layback the flake to a ledge. Continue up the corner, passing a number of bolts to reach a small roof. Bold climbing for 6m leads to a junction with *Major Headstress* and an easier groove, and then the final headwall.
[P Williams, D Jones 26.04.86]
- ▶ **14. Wall of Flame E5 6a ** 50m**
An interesting but rarely climbed eliminate which links the start of *Great Balls of Fire* with the groove of *Ride the Wild Surf* before traversing across to finish up the left arête. Follow the right hand groove, moving right into the obvious niche on *Colossus* at 23m. Step out left and climb boldly up to a bolt 6m above; hard moves left into the top of the groove just below its capping roof (bolt on left). Pull over the roof in a very exposed position with a long reach for good holds. Traverse strenuously left to the foot of the short problematic groove. Climb this to a ledge at its top, then make an airy traverse left, bolt, into a peapod shaped groove. Struggle up this, escaping left at the top on huge holds. Stroll left to the arête and finish with ease. It is also possible to finish up *Ride the Wild Surf*.
[P Williams, D Lawson 01.05.86]
- ▶ **15. Great Balls of Fire E4 6a *** 50m**
A big pitch with big holds and spaced bolts; though the climbing is never desperate. The route starts to the left of *Colossus* before crossing it and finishing in the immaculate grooves up on the right of the wall. Start below the right hand groove in the centre of the wall. Climb past a bolt to 2 bolts at 11m. A short and difficult section allows a further bolt to be reached and a groove

leading to the niche on *Colossus*. From the foot of the V groove on *Colossus*, traverse right to the base of a short smooth groove. Awkward and bold climbing leads up a series of grooves and ledges to the top.
[P Williams, J Allen 12.04.86]

- ▶ **16. Colossus E3 5c *** 51m**
A fantastic route and the easiest way up this colossal wall, making it a popular outing. Although bolted, a small rack is needed to complement the fixed gear, as is a large number of quickdraws. The crux is high up and often seeps, making it very hard indeed. Start by a boulder at the bottom of the wall and make hard moves up to a ledge. From here a line of weakness snakes its way up and right to another ledge at 12m. Step left and move up to improving holds and a crack leading to the top of a pinnacle. Move up and left into a large niche, before going back right to a V groove. The top of this is capped by a roof, step up and left into a crack and climb this, crux, to eventually make an easy but airy mantel onto a ledge out left. Ledge shuffle upwards past a final awkward move to belay on bolts at the top of the crag. 60m ropes make reaching the belay easier.
[P Williams, A Holmes 27.03.86]
- ▶ **17. Colostomy E4 (1pt Aid) 52m**
A girdle of the Colossus Wall, taking in some interesting ground. Start as for *Jack of Shadows*.
P1 6a 22m *Jack of Shadows* P1.
P2 6a 30m From the belay ledge, move onto the front face and climb up to the ledge above to arrange protection. Come back down and pendulum across to a good hold on *Major Headstress*, bolt. Climb up and right to join *Ride the Wild Surf* at a groove, and then reverse *Wall of Flame* rightwards before moving into *Colossus* at the slanting V groove. Step right into *Great Balls of Fire* and follow this to the top.
[G Farquhar, G Ettle 09.88]
- To the right of the Colossus Wall the cliff face deteriorates, losing height and becoming more broken.
- ▶ **18. OM 69 Runner Bean VS 40m**
This route has a small section of good climbing, but little else to recommend it. It climbs the vague rib 30m left of the edge of the Rainbow Slab. The name comes from painted label on the white cylinder protruding from the ground beneath the rib. Ascend the rib to reach a large block. Continue up the crack above on good jams to a ledge. Climb the slabby rib to finish.
[C Philips 26.10.84]



Bella Lugosi's Dead

"The bats have left the bell towers, the victims have been bled, bled, bled, coz Bella Lugosi's dead, yeah."
Bauhaus 1984

The slate climbing experience was in most cases heightened by bizarre surroundings together with a constant threat of being guillotined by razor sharp blocks falling from above. Even after routes had undergone pre 'cleaning' (in many instances, though not all, little more than perfunctory inspections to scrape or prize off any loose flakes or dagger littered ledges rather like one might sweep a mantelpiece clear from unwanted ornaments, think lets go climbing) prior to first ascents this possibility remained the same since all top outs could not be cleaned thoroughly owing to varying amounts of debris present on individual levels, nor could it be guaranteed that local youths would not appear, oblivious of the climbers below, for a trundling session, raining down infeasibly large slate blocks which shattered on impact sending ? volleys towards unseen victims.

Bearing these points in mind, Nick Thomas and I set off for a look at what he described as a 'boss looking line somewhere near Rainbow'. Like many slateheads Nick had ranged all over the quarries, yet his specialist climbing interest often lay beyond their perimeters and rested on seemingly effortless ascents of desperate boulder problems, in which pursuit by 1984 he was well ahead of his time. To reach the proposed route entailed an ascent of the zig zags as far as the iron bridge, before levelling off right past the temple of the mantels (several massive slate cantilevers overhanging the path) continuing via the icon of the black Madonna until rounding a bend ransacked buildings cast in 1938's pre war gloom and acting as a windswept pergola for self exiled sheep demarcated a cut off point where horizontal terrain is exchanged for steeply inclined scree leading eventually into a watershed amphitheatre whose vertically featured charcoal streaked walls provided the subject of our interest.

Once there our climbing prospect was not enhanced by a general stiffness in limbs brought about by the attendance the previous evening at a party which we did not leave until, as it were, this morning, and at which a great deal of bull in various forms had taken place. Thus against a mountain backdrop of gurgling brooks drowned out by a stereo summer heartbeat that pulsed so loud it seemed as though it would last forever, we talked climbing, whilst people danced in silhouettes that sometimes gave their sex away and the air hung heavy with drifting perfumes that seemingly came from the night boats of Kanadu, though those less romantically inclined knew that such odours bore all the hallmarks of cheap Bethesda deals.

The reality check imposed by launching onto a rock face (particularly a slate one) drew out stark contrast against previous reverie and about 6m up I began to have doubts about my ability to carry on. Arthur Birtwhistle had discussed this very problem in his seminal essay 'On leading on difficult rock' and since had lead Diagonal on Dinas Mot in 1938 with barely a runner in sight his discourse had resonance for even the boldest modern exponents of this lovely art. Not being in that category and realizing that the essay, which I'd have to make up as I went along, was, on leading on difficult slate with a hangover, while your mate's turning up the ghetto blaster, left me clinging to a dubious security blanket provided by a ledge 2m or so higher whose sanctuary I duly reached to the tune of Bella Lugosi's Dead.

Here it was possible, looking down double nine millys arcing in red and blue fleck snaking through karabiners attached to a blade peg, some RPs and a few Rocks, to note my lifeline's termination at Nick's sticht plate, though the device remained partially hidden from view being obscured by Nick's long hooded smock top which also served at least some protection from an ever increasing swarm of midges which now tormented him.

Suddenly a Lurcher dog loped into view followed shortly afterwards by three climbers headed for the Rainbow Slab, they wore apparel that was colourful even for the style of the time and one individual in particular seemed to resemble a human Lovehearts wrapper, whilst another presented himself in the form of a moving Wine Gum packet. Thankfully these dedicated followers of fashion soon moved on so that their prismatic presence no longer distracted proceedings on the crack above, which although splendid in line, seemed only protectable by largish sized Friends, in which we had failed to invest.

Now my reasons for continuing largely rested on a premise that unless an invisible assailant chopped my arms off I would simply not let go, unless satisfied that each jam provided absolute security for the previous one to be released, a course of thinking that theoretically ensured three point contact at all times, yet took no account of failures in this system which might arise due to becoming out paced by the pump phase of the doomed, where even with superhuman will to power, strength saps away as if on an ebb tide, before inevitable ejection relegates leaders, 'if unhurt', to the cast list of also rans.

The dog came back to drink from a sort of argile river of lorna which perpetually flowed from a six inch circumference aperture with a cast iron lip some six feet right of our starting moves. This feature imbued an already bizarre physiography with further wonder which when coupled with Cliff Phillip's amazing nearby discovery of a single steel bolley emerging from the ground and seemingly protected by a cylindrical hard plastic tube below hieroglyphic like engineering inscription O.M.69 (inspiring the route name OM69 Runner Bean), leant itself towards a secret allotment of the mind in which many interpretations, but few clear answers were possible.

Returning to action curiosity lead me on so that what John Stuart Mill called the internal culture of the individual gave rise to a challenge on the parallel sided authority persisting above. What followed was hardly a revolution in technique, yet in those seemingly hour long minutes described by 'seconds' as 'ages' I had attained a standing position, after several shouts of 'watch us' atop gravestone wide slate ledges which lead with no real difficulty other than that of not severing the rope, towards cement bag belays on the edge of the exit culvert.

Martin Crook



Martin Crook, a ropeless acolyte scaling the gothic rampart of Horse Latitudes
photo: Crook collection