

Looning the Tube HVS 5b 20m

Area: Dinorwig Quarries, Llanberis

Crag: Australia

Style: Trad

Rock type: Slate

Approach: 15 minutes

Altitude: 350m

OS grid ref: 597 608

First Ascent: Cliff Phillips 1984

The Dinorwig slate quarries are a vast complex of pits and quarried holes which sit above the mountain village of Llanberis. After over 100 years of quarrying, work ceased in 1969 and by the early 1980s a new route boom was under way. Suddenly slate was in vogue and a frenzied wave of activity saw the number of climbs growing at an exponential rate.

One of the key figures in this new route campaign was Cliff Phillips, a legendary character in the Llanberis scene, who established more than 50 new lines throughout the quarries. Cliff, or 'the Captain' as he was affectionately known often climbed solo, nonchalantly wandering up sketchy 5c ground, seemingly without a care in the world. Some of Cliff's routes were firmly on the obscure side of the quality spectrum, but he also picked off some real classics, routes which would become celebrated must-dos for later generations. One such route is **Looning the Tube** in the huge Australia Quarry.

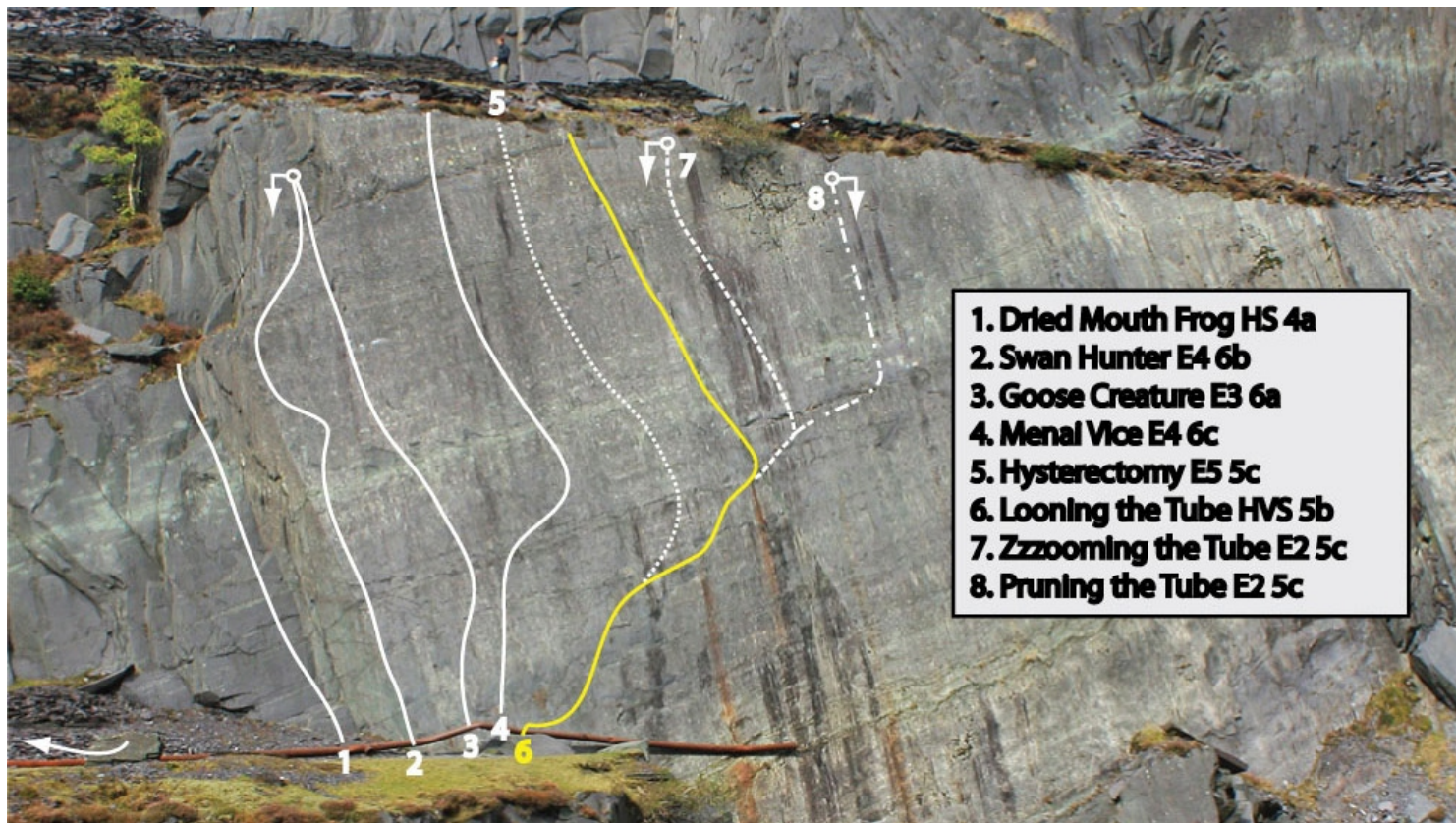
When Cliff first soloed the route in the summer of 1984 a large pipe lay suspended across the slab, hanging from some chains and metal spikes.

A tip toe along this strange industrial feature lead to the



Jon Ratcliffe rocking up on the lower section of Looning the Tube HVS 5b photo: Si Pantoni

upper crack - the sheer novelty of the route ensured its immediate popularity, however sadly in early 1986 persons unknown vandalised the tube and it was sent crashing down to sit in its current position at the base of the slab. These days the tube is still present, providing a potential belay and an initial walkway before a step is made onto the slab proper. Once on the slab a bolt is reached - this



1. Dried Mouth Frog HS 4a
2. Swan Hunter E4 6b
3. Goose Creature E3 6a
4. Menal Vice E4 6c
5. Hysterectomy E5 5c
6. Looning the Tube HVS 5b
7. Zzzooming the Tube E2 5c
8. Pruning the Tube E2 5c

The view up to Australia Quarry from the kissing gate photo: Si Panton



protects the thin traverse up and across to the sanctuary of the chain which marks the bottom of the upper crack. This section of the route drops you straight into the weird and wonderful world of the slate slab. You might be in balance, but the edges are thin and there is the odd creaky foothold to contend with, which, given the leaders' growing distance from the bolt, adds a certain spice to the situation. Sure, there's nothing too desperate here, but you do have to run it out a bit to reach the old rusty chain, an unconventional but solid piece of in situ gear. From here the way forward is obvious: keep on trucking up the diagonal crack, and just when it starts to feel bold a neat parallel section provides some solid cam placements.

Further up a welcome bolt is reached, but this is no time to relax. Bolts on old school (i.e. 1980s) slate routes are usually a signal that you have arrived at the crux and the top one on **Looning the Tube** is no exception. The move looks simple, yet on closer inspection it soon becomes apparent that you have no choice but to commit, albeit briefly, to a tiny foothold in an out of balance position with only some pinchy side pulls to brace the threat of an uncontrollable barndoor. Take a deep breath, do it quickly and be thankful for the wonders of modern rubber technology.

What remains is a pleasant saunter, so take your time, look around, enjoy the view; you've just cracked one of the definitive slate classics.

There is a convenient bolt belay at the base of the wall at the back of the terrace above. And if you're keen for more action at a slightly more challenging level, then have a look at **Orangotang Overhang** F6a+, the obvious left facing groove and roof line above. The initial groove provides an exquisite technical challenge, while the steepness above gives a wild finish and access to the convenient lower off.

With that in the bag, descent is best made by walking off to the end of the level and dropping down the slatey path.

The other routes on the main slab involve a significant step up in difficulty, but once bitten most visitors to the quarries find themselves drawn in, and the more you do of these slabby rockovers the easier they feel. Why not get stuck in, eh?

Top tip: Precise footwork is essential on slate; often you have to stand on tiny, barely visible holds. A good edgery rock shoe is essential for confidence, and slate moves are all about trusting your feet - you won't be doing that in a pair of knackered old shoes!

Rack: Single rope or double ropes, 8 quickdraws, 1 x 60cm sling, 1 x 120cm sling, 1 or 2 size 2.5/3 cams

Approach: From the turning circle by Bus Stop Quarry in Dinorwig, walk into the quarries along the main track passing a large disused factory unit on the left after 500m. Go left through the kissing gate, viewing the massive quarried cwm of Australia above and right of the incline. 50m from the gate the track turns right and dips down hill, a gate is seen on immediately on the left. Beyond this it is possible to walk diagonally right for a further 100m before steps lead up one level. Cut back left and ascend a further 2 levels to arrive at the 'Col', in front of the massive amphitheatre of Australia. Just to the left is a promontory with a tunnel cut through its base; the Looning the Tube Slab sits 30m to the right.

Conditions: The slab is quick drying and receives plenty of sun. There are no seepage issues.

Guidebooks, further reading and maps

Llanberis Slate (Pete Robins, Mark Reeves, Mark Dicken, Martin Crook, Simon Panton, Ground Up, 2010), North Wales Rock 2nd edition (Simon Panton, Ground Up, 2009), the Slate wiki (<http://slate.wetpaint.com/page/Australia>) Explorer OL17 (1:25000 OS Map)