

## Pinnacle Rib Route V Diff 175m

**Area:** Ogwen Valley

**Crag:** East Face of Tryfan

**Style:** Trad

**Rock type:** Rhyolite

**Approach:** 50 - 60 minutes

**Altitude:** 725m

**OS grid ref:** 664 594

**First Ascent:** J M A Thompson, H Hughes 1894

**North Wales has many spectacular mountain crags,** but if you are looking for classic low grade expeditions then the Ogwen Valley is the place to go. A perennial favourite is the East Face of Tryfan, a huge sprawling area of rocky buttresses that lead to the castellated summit of this most magnificent of mountains.

There are four popular V Diff routes: **Gashed Crag**, the two **Pinnacle Rib Routes** and the famous **Grooved Arete**. The latter has traditionally drawn the most traffic, but it is actually the least friendly of the quartet. The right hand of the two **Pinnacle Rib Routes** gives a more amenable option with the choice of two spicy, but non-obligatory pitches. Even if the harder pitches are avoided it still gives a continually interesting route at a very consistent standard.

The route was first climbed in 1894 by the Cambridge educated, Bangor School master James Merriman Archer

emerging North Wales climbing scene, establishing numerous classic routes and authoring the first ever guide to the Ogwen area: *Climbing in the Ogwen Valley* was published in 1910. With the recent publication of Mike Bailey's *Ogwen* guide, exactly 100 years later, it seems apt to celebrate one of Archer Thomson's most popular routes. The first pitch, a delightful groove, leads you in nicely with a few tricky moves towards its top. Above the narrow ridge line provides continual interest, and then suddenly a tight V groove which requires a bit of grunting. Luckily the gear is excellent, so push on with gusto.

Above are a few more pitches of excellent open climbing. The line is mostly obvious, but if in doubt just look for the tell-tale polish. At one point a groove leads to a leftwards traverse and a steep wall. Soon enough you arrive at a grassy terrace level with a prominent pinnacle over to the left. This is the convergence point with the 'other'

**Pinnacle Rib Route (aka: Overlapping Rib Route).**

If the team is feeling confident then there is the option of taking on the challenge of infamous Yellow Slab. The holds on this pitch have long since been rendered frictionless by the passage of thousands of nailed boots and, more recently buffered to a glass-like sheen by rubber rock shoes. Think of it as a highball boulder problem; by the time the good holds and protection are reached you will have already surrendered to the notion that you are soloing!

Current thinking has this pitch rated at a technical grade of 4b, with the suggestion that this equates to an overall standard of Severe. Whatever the truth, it certainly makes for an exciting lead.

Those looking for a less rude challenge can take the easier groove line back round to the right and then traverse over to a belay above the Yellow Slab. The next pitch follows a series of curving strata/cracks which arc upwards in a

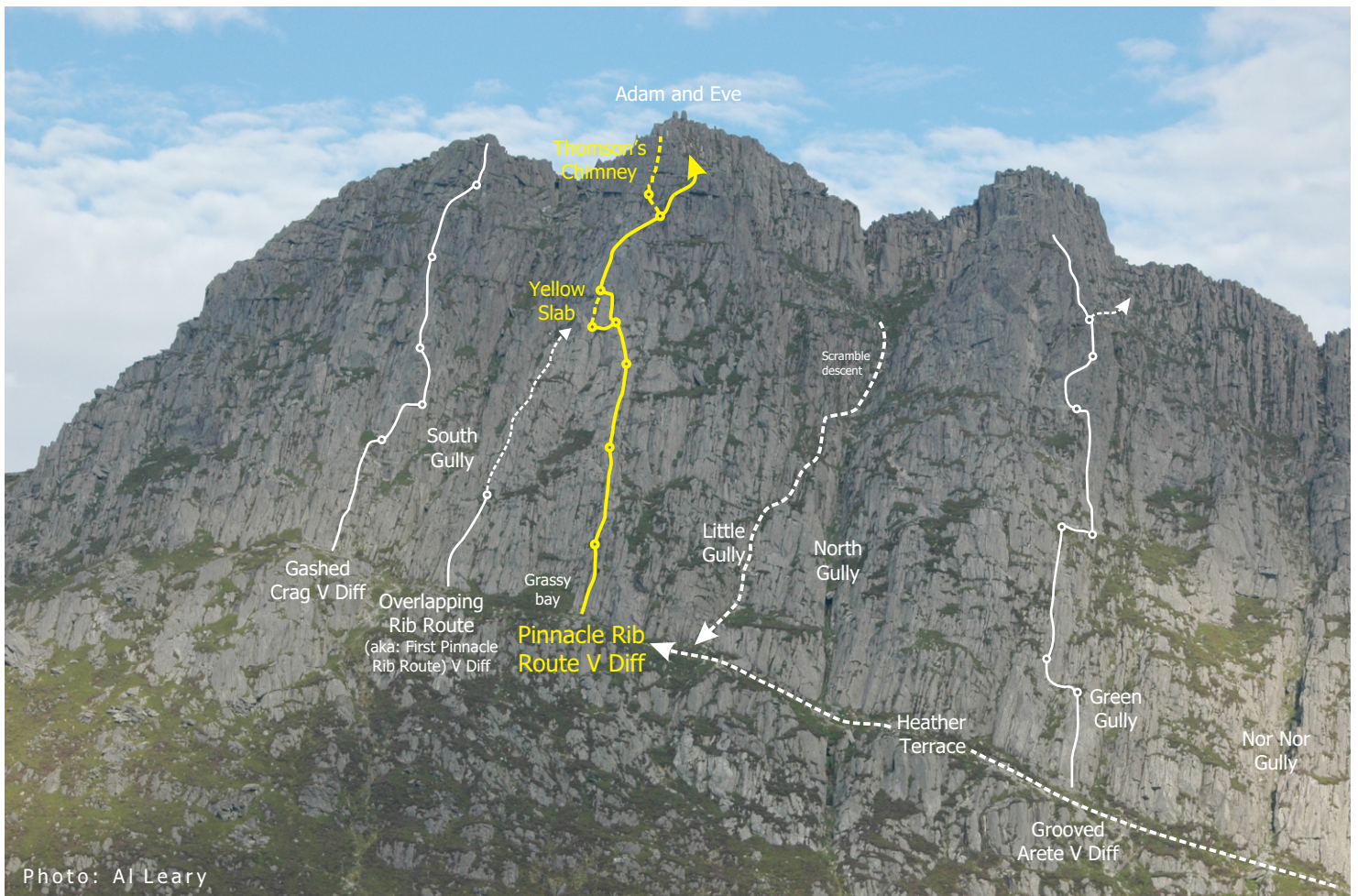


Photo: Al Leary

visually striking fashion. The directional holds ensure that the technical interest is maintained, but soon enough easier ground is reached.

Ahead is the ominous Thomson's Chimney, a compelling but rather fierce finale. According to the new *Ogwen* guide this goes at Hard Severe 4b, although *Streaky Desroy*, when researching the *North Wales Rock* guide thought it worth Severe. There is a tricky lower section passing the wedged block and a very trying entry into the upper chimney. Of course it is possible to maintain the V Diff standard by skirting this obstacle on the right. Either way the summit, with its conspicuous twin blocks of Adam and Eve, lies just above. Scramble up leftwards and then back right on a ramp to emerge triumphant, seemingly on top of the world.

As picnic spots go this lofty, exposed place is hard to beat. After you've snaffled the last of your butties one last challenge remains: the ceremonial leap across the void between Adam and Eve. This is not to be taken too lightly though as the tops of both blocks are very polished and the drop off on the east side frighteningly close!

**Top tip:** Lay your rucsac, with the ropes spread on top, at the base of the Yellow Slab to cushion the landing. Should the leader slip from those oh-so-glassy holds the second should try and guide them on to this makeshift bouldering pad. Not a perfect solution, but it might stop a broken ankle, especially if your second spots you well. It's also worth giving your shoes a good 'spit and squeak' clean before stepping on to the rock. Modern rock shoes work surprisingly well on polished rock, provided the rubber is spotless.

**Rack:** Double ropes (50m or 60m), 8 quickdraws, 2 60cm sling, 2 120cm sling, full set of wires 1 - 11, a few cams and/or hexes



Colin Crabtree and Jay Goodwin tackling the infamous Yellow Slab  
Photo: Si Pantan

Charlie Pantan sat on top of Eve  
Photo: Si Pantan



**Approach:** There are two main approaches from the A5 road which snakes down the valley. Firstly, from the Gwern Gôf Uchaf farm/campsite follow the obvious path up and rightwards passing below the slabs of Tryfan Bach, until a fence is reached. Follow this rightwards until a final gully leads up onto the shoulder of the North Ridge. The same point can be reached by the path leading up to the left side of Milestone Buttress. This path then heads up leftwards - do not go too high on the shoulder as this soon leads into steep ground on the North Ridge - to reach a junction with the previous route at the top of the gully. A path now leads up and left of the gully until the Heather Terrace, which runs along the base of the crag, is reached.

Follow the terrace past a steep little buttress capped by roofs, and 30m later the first deep gully of Barstow Gully. A further 75m leads to Nor Nor Gully identifiable by the obvious jammed block known as the Tombstone seen lying higher up the bed of the gully. 50m beyond this is another steep buttress capped with roofs and the grassy gully of Green Gully. Just to the left, and above a pinnacle below Heather Terrace, is the start of Grooved Arête. Further on an obvious open grassy bay is reached. The route starts up a groove on the right where 'FPR' has been scratched into the rock. Confusingly the start of **Overlapping Rib Route** (aka: **First Pinnacle Rib**) which lies 20m left of the grassy bay also has 'FPR' scratched at its base!

**Descents:** The simplest way down off the mountain is to follow the South Ridge down to the col and then drop down the left side if heading back to the GGU farm or cut off earlier on the right side and head down to the stream side path leading down from Llyn Bochlwyd if heading back to the Milestone Buttress area. For those wishing to return to the base of the cliff then North Gully provides a suitable descent although it is necessary to branch off rightwards halfway down to pick up Little Gully. The top of Heather Terrace can also be reached from the col on the South Ridge. South Gully is not recommended as an easy descent as two abseils are involved in the upper reaches.

**Conditions:** Sunny summer days are the best time to visit. The crag loses the sun in the middle of the afternoon and is largely drainage free.

#### **Guidebooks, further reading and maps**

*Ogwen* (Mike Bailey, Climbers' Club 2010), *North Wales Rock 2nd edition* (Simon Pantan, Ground Up, 2009), *North Wales Classics* (Jack Geldard, Rockfax 2010), *Explorer OL17* (1:25000 OS map)