

Classic Climbs



Anoushka Mulgrew abseiling into Castell Helen
Photo: Si Panton

Rap VS 4c 65m

Area: Gogarth

Crag: Castell Helen

Style: Trad

Rock type: Quartzite

Approach: 5 minutes

Altitude: sea level/semi tidal

OS grid ref: 206 819

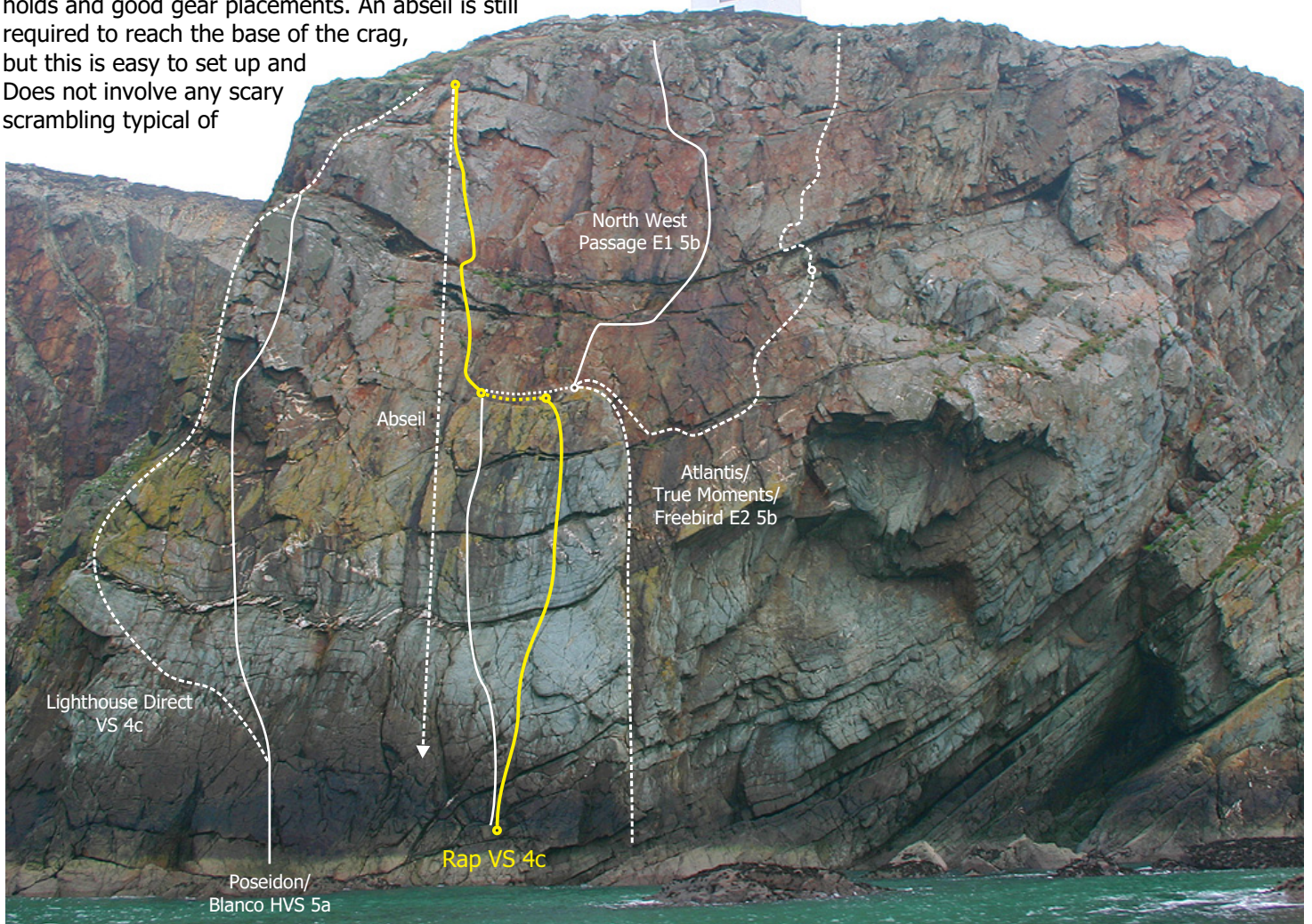
First Ascent: Pete Crew, Dave Alcock 08.10.66

Most people would agree that Gogarth is the best sea cliff in Britain; it even out classes those found on the magnificent Hebridean isles of Mingulay and Pabbay. Despite its celebrated status there are a surprising number of British climbers who have not climbed there (yet). This might be explained by its rather fearsome reputation; talk of loose rock, scary, tidal approaches and big bad routes is rife. And then there is the infamous 'Gogarth grip' an anxious state of mind which descends upon all but the most experienced of visitors.

Much of this wild reputation is well deserved; take a trip out onto Red Wall or into Mousetrap Zawn and you will find some deeply adventurous routes. However, in the midst of all this fear inducing territory there is a relatively amenable cliff: Castell Helen. Here the angle is just off vertical, the rock comparatively solid and blessed with both positive holds and good gear placements. An abseil is still required to reach the base of the crag, but this is easy to set up and Does not involve any scary scrambling typical of

other Gogarth abseils. Little wonder then that this remains the crag of choice for those popping their Gogarth cherry. Many first time visitors go for the soft touch VS, Lighthouse Arete, but a more rewarding challenge can be found with Rap. Although given the same book grade this is an all together more involved route, and one that some folk might feel deserves HVS, particularly for the lower wall.

The fun starts immediately with the abseil, which takes you straight into the centre of a large wall. A friendly ledge at half height allows a moment to take stock of the line; aim to land on the narrow ledge in the middle and at the base of the wall (this is just above the high tide level). At first glance the wall looks alarmingly blank, but closer inspection reveals a choice of good holds, and if you make the effort to look around, enough gear to quell the nerves. It is possible to climb anywhere on this wall at around 4c/5a, but you should aim to trend up right-wards to gain an obvious hanging groove.



In places the climbing can feel quite pushy, but keep on trucking and good holds and runners will turn up. Once the sanctuary of the halfway ledge is reached a gloriously relaxed belay stance can be adopted, time indeed to sit back and soak up the fantastic vista. To the north the South Stack Island with its iconic lighthouse, and to the south: the old tunnel approach to Yellow Wall and the intriguing jut of Penlas Rock, and then beyond that, the Range headland and the distant hills of the Lleyn Peninsula.

Over the years this ledge has attracted more than its fair share of japes. It has oft been used as a bivy spot, either

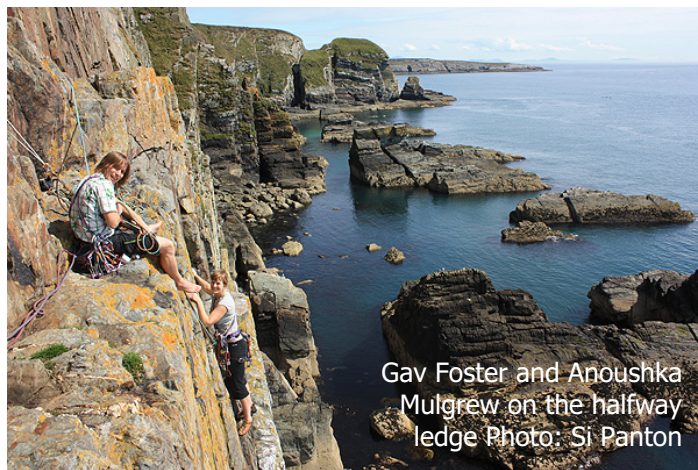


Gav Foster on the spectacular first pitch
Photo: Si Panton

as practice for more serious outings, or just for the hell of it. There are also tales of lunatics jumping into the sea from this lofty position. Even at high tide this cannot be recommended (i.e. you will probably die if you try!). The top pitch exits the ledge from its left side. The initial wall requires concentration, but in next to no time you'll be yarding past gargoyles to reach a higher ledge. Leaving this proves to be the 4b crux of the pitch - a few thin pulls and soon better holds lead up a faint groove. The final slab deposits you right back where you started with the convenient belay on the abseil station.

The café beckons now, but those looking for a more taxing rematch could try the excellent Poseidon/Blanco combination at HVS, or North West Passage at E1 5b, or perhaps best of all, the Atlantis/True Moments/Freebird combination, a brilliant three pitch E2 5b.

Top tip: The abseil station sports a motley collection of equalised pegs of considerable age. Despite what you might see from other climbers, it is always best to back these up with at least one more nut.



Gav Foster and Anoushka Mulgrew on the halfway ledge
Photo: Si Panton

Rack: Double ropes (50m or 60m), 14 quickdraws, 2 60cm sling, 2 120cm sling, double set of wires 1 - 11, full set of cams sizes 0.5 - 3.5, prussic loops for abseil.

Approach: From the RSPB café at South Stack follow the path down to the white turreted building (Elin's Tower). Cross the low wall on the right and continue down a small path which drops down over a couple of small rock steps to reach an obvious worn area next to the abseil station.

Descent: It is best to use a 60m abseil rope which can be left in place as a means of escape and belay back up.

Conditions: This is a west facing sunny crag, which can be climbed upon at any time of the year. In the summer make sure you wear some sun screen, or pay the price with painful sun burn! It does suffer from seepage after heavy rain, but the featured route is normally unaffected.



Gav starting the top pitch
Photo: Si Panton

Guidebook and further reading

Gogarth (Andy Newton, Climbers' Club 1990), North Wales Rock 2nd edition (Simon Panton, Ground Up, 2009), Explorer 262 Anglesey West (1:25000 OS Map)