

Classic Climbs



Al Leary romping up
the initial 4c pitch
Photo: Si Panton

Spectre HVS 5a 78m

Area: Llanberis Pass

Crag: Clogwyn y Grochan

Style: Trad

Rock type: Rhyolite

Approach: 5 minutes

Altitude: 250m

OS grid ref: 672 573

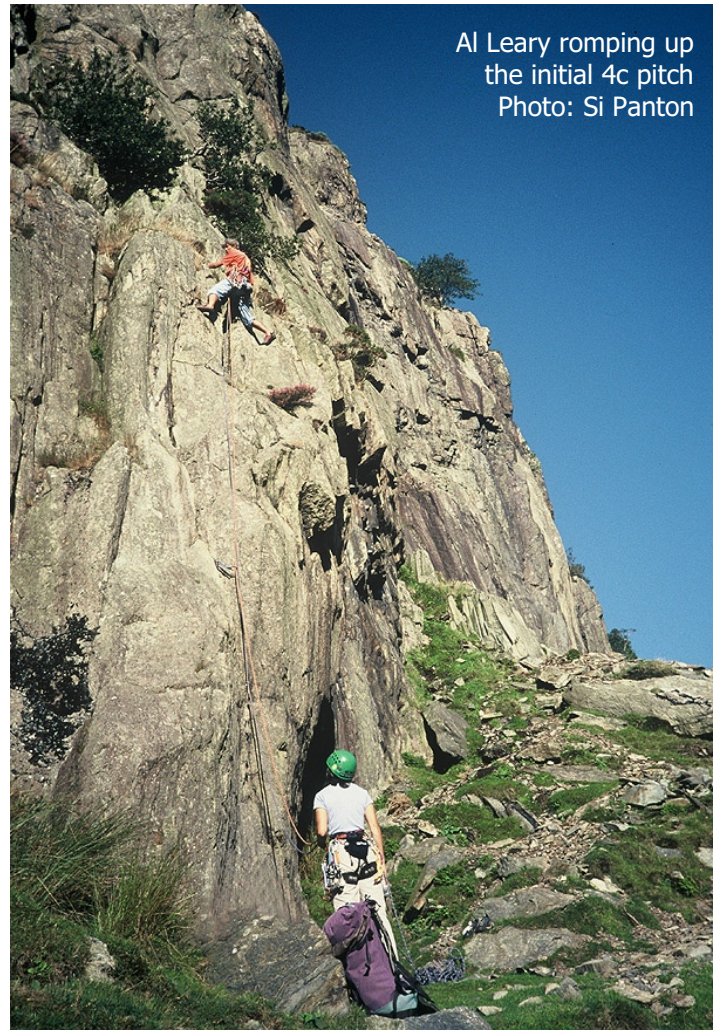
First Ascent: Peter Harding, E Phillips 1947

During these sunny spring months the urge to get back up on the mountain crags grows ever stronger. Nonetheless, patches of snow in the upper cwms and the nip of a fresh breeze remind us that the smart move is to stay in the sun if possible. The north side of the Llanberis Pass provides a perfect early season venue, with a number of sun drenched cliffs lining the flanks of this dramatic mountain valley.

The second nearest to the road is Clogwyn y Grochan, an intensely developed crag with a brilliant collection of test piece routes. You won't find many soft touches on the Grochan, but what you will find is some of the best climbing in the valley. It's hard to pick out a 'route of the crag' as the quality level is so consistent, but one climb does stand a touch taller and prouder than its neighbours.

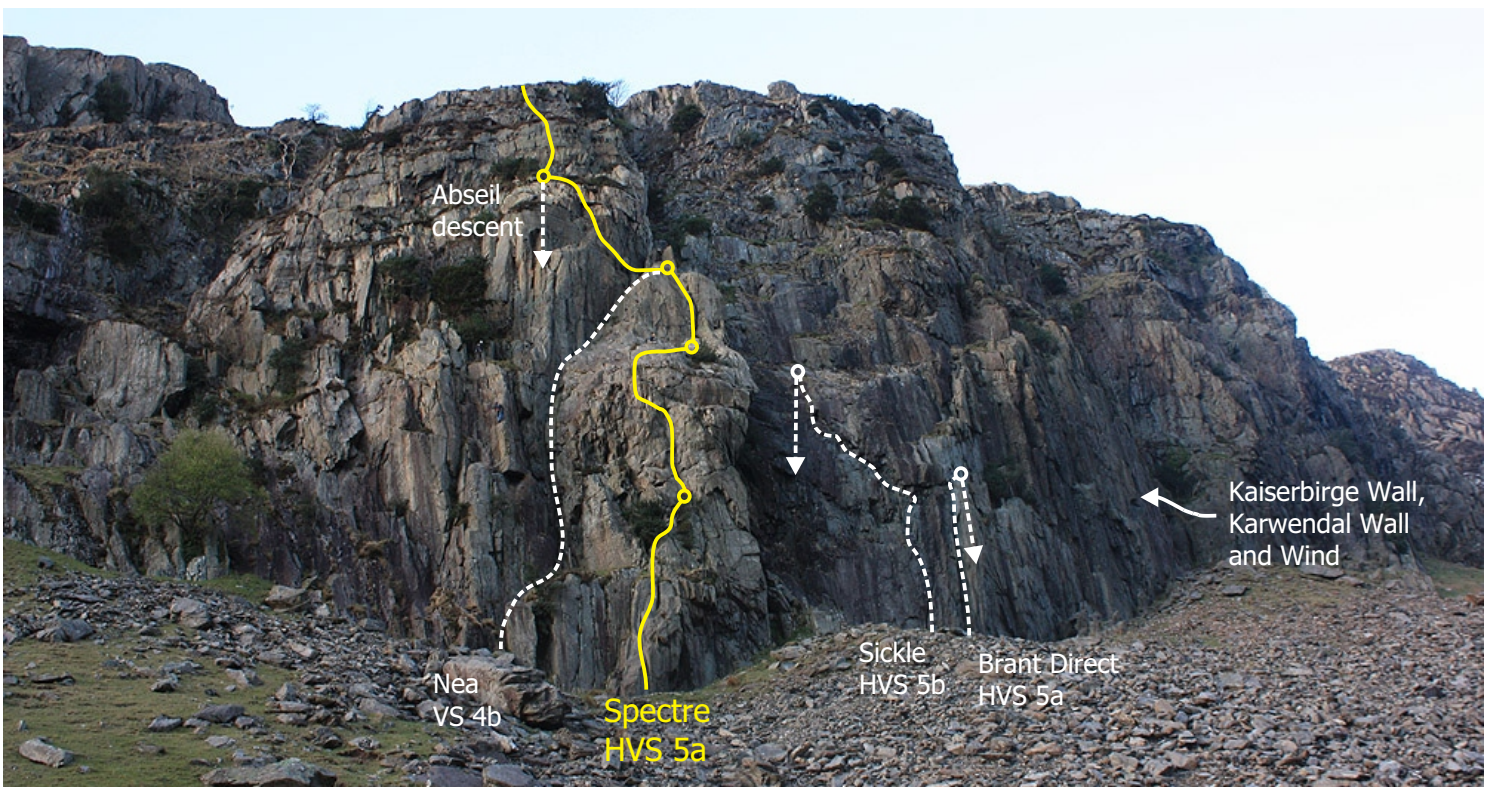
Spectre is a four pitch trip which maintains interest levels throughout and includes one of the most memorable HVS pitches you'll ever do! It was first climbed in 1947 by Peter Harding, the exceptionally talented climber and author of the much celebrated 1950 Llanberis Pass guide (oft referred to as the 'Bumper Fun Guide').

At the time **Spectre** was considered to be the hardest route in the Pass, and it may well have been, especially if



you consider Harding's description of pulling mud from the crux crack on the first ascent! Its fearsome reputation was further enhanced when John Lawton took a 30m ground fall during a second ascent attempt. Despite its obvious cutting edge status Harding made an audacious solo ascent the following year.

But how does it feel to the modern climber armed to the teeth with lightweight gear and precise rock shoes? Well, the truthful answer, even for those operating within their



Jimmy 'Big Guns' McCormack getting stuck into the 'Harding Slot' on pitch three Photo: Gareth Aston



grade, is that it still packs a sizeable punch. The difficulties kick in straight away with an innocuous looking groove which succumbs to some awkward 'udging'. Above the climbing eases off and soon a comfy little holly tree belay is reached.

The open groove of pitch two looms over head; this proves to be both technical and sustained. At the overhang a leftwards weakness leads with difficulty on to the slab above. A more direct (and harder) version pulls stiffly through the right side of the same overhang, but if you are anywhere near your limit at HVS stick to the left hand line and save your juice for pitch three.

From a belay at the right side of the slab a short, but fearsome looking crack beckons. This is it, the original 'Harding Slot' and one of 'the' classic Welsh crack climbing pitches. So summon your inner cave wo/man and get stuck in. Aggressive and flamboyant laybacking may get you through the steepness and wedged safely into the slot. Once here take a moment to catch your breath before pushing on up the hand crack towards the respite of a large belay ledge.

A final pitch, common with the VS **Nea**, sweeps out left and up the wall in a somewhat bold fashion to reach a ledge and abseil point. 50m ropes will get you down to the grassy bay at the base of **Nea**.

Alternatively you can summit the crag via another 12m pitch. It is then possible to descend a steep and tricky gully on the west side of the crag. A finger stone marks the initial chimney at the top of the gully.

Numerous other similar challenges present themselves across the cliff. **Sickle** is another feisty HVS with some awkward and uncertain moments; yet another HVS, **Brant Direct**, is a good honest battle, giving sustained groove and crack climbing with lots of bomber runners to bolster confidence. The right side of the crag has three popular HVSs; **Kaiserbirge Wall Karwendal Wall** and **Wind**

are excellent routes, but all three maintain the Grochan tradition of fierce grading. Master that lot and you will be more than ready to hit the extremes!

Top tip: Getting parked in the Pass on a sunny weekend morning can be a problem, the spaces having long since been taken up by Snowdon bound walkers (who ironically still need to catch the bus up to Pen y Pass). There is of course a Sherpa bus service running up and down the Pass, so why not leave your car in Nant Peris and catch a bus instead. Hitching is a fairly reliable option too. Or alternatively, leave your visit until mid afternoon when the laybys start to empty as the early bird Snowdon walkers return to their cars. On week days, and outside of the Easter holidays it is usually possible to get a parking space at almost any time.

Rack: Double ropes (50m or 60m), 12 quickdraws, 2 60cm sling, 2 120cm sling, full set of wires 1 - 11 with double ups on sizes 1 - 6, full set of cams sizes 0.5 - 3.

Approach: When travelling up the Pass from Nant Peris Clogwyn y Grochan is the second cliff to appear on the left side of the road (the first being Craig Ddu). From the layby directly below the crag a steep path zig-zags up.

Conditions: This is a very sunny crag and whilst sections of it do suffer from seepage after heavy rain, the featured route is little affected. Winter ascents are possible for hardy types, but spring, summer and autumn is best.

Guidebooks, further reading and maps

Llanberis (Iwan Arfon Jones, Climbers' Club 2009), North Wales Rock 2nd edition (Simon Panton, Ground Up, 2009), North Wales Classics (Jack Geldard, Rockfax 2010), Explorer OL17 (1:25000 OS map)