

# A SHORT HISTORY OF LAKELAND CLIMBING PART III

## (1960-1969)

Pete Whillance

*This article is not intended as a definitive history. It is more an outline of the major events that occurred and my personal interpretation of the course that important developments followed.*

*I have not confined myself to a chronological list of the facts, but rather attempted to examine how the trends, attitudes and approaches of individuals and groups (as well as more obvious influences such as weather and equipment), have affected progress and developments in climbing, during this period.*

*Such an approach is inevitably controversial as it involves selective opinions and personal interpretations, but if this article does go some way towards achieving my objectives of discovering how and why events happened as they did; it will be worth suffering the potential wrath of those who disagree.*

### 1960 - A Golden Year

By any standards, 1960 was an exceptional year in the annals of Lakeland climbing history. Indeed, there are many who feel, with some justification, that in terms of quality new climbs produced, it represented the Golden Year of the whole 100 years of climbing development in the region. Whether or not one agrees, there can be little doubt that routes of the calibre of Ichabod, Extol, Gormenghast, Astra, Sidewalk and Centaur will continue to rank amongst the top all-time classics of the District.

In retrospect, the forging of so many outstanding climbs in that year might almost have been predicted. The drought of 1959 had already witnessed the production of a remarkable quota of excellent routes. Paul Ross was firmly established as the dominant and most prolific pioneer in the Borrowdale and Thirlmere areas, whilst Allan Austin was gradually emerging as the primary driving force behind Langdale developments. Into this arena stepped the new talents of Les Brown and Geoff Oliver, their arrival on the scene being signalled by an impressive list of achievements during 1959. (Oliver - Pernod, Mayday Direct, Agony, Vandal, Virgo and Moss Wall. Brown - Xerxes, Moonday, Inertia and Caesar.)

In addition to this wealth of local potential was the constant threat from 'Welsh Activists'. Don Whillans in particular had made evident his interest in the area with numerous forays during the late fifties resulting in climbs such as Trinity and Delphinus.

Thus it may be argued that the ingredients were all present. When the hot dry weather of 1959 recurred in 1960, the stage was clearly set for some further dramatic developments.

### Les Brown

John Lagoe's article 'Some Eskdale Rock Climbs' and the accompanying photographs in the FRCC Journal of 1959, had well advertised the potential of the relatively new find of Heron Crag in Eskdale: 'Beyond doubt the best is yet to be. The main nose with a remarkable flake half way up, seen in profile on the way from Taw House, and the whole right wing of the crag, overhanging by several feet at the bottom, remain untouched, waiting for some V.S. pioneers.'

The main nose was indeed a superb prize and it didn't have to wait long for a pioneer. Les Brown confounded his opposition by completing the first ascent of Gormenghast by the end of March 1960. Brown was ideally placed for snatching this particular gem, as he was working at nearby Windscale, but he was rapidly acquiring a reputation for quietly picking off outstanding routes over the length and breadth of the Lakes.

Typically, in less than a month he had established three more notable new routes on crags as widely spread as Dow, Scafell and Bowfell. His ascent of the excellent and improbable looking Sidewalk on Dow's 'A' Buttress was a significant breakthrough on a crag which had seen no important developments for some thirteen years. The crucial first pitch requires a bold approach to gain access to the upper buttress and Brown took the unusual and precarious step of employing a hand-placed piton for resting.

Brown's next foray produced Armageddon, a difficult line on Scafell's East Buttress which he had doubtless spotted the previous year whilst making the first ascent of the adjacent Moonday. Three points of aid were used to tackle some of the most impressive ground so far attempted on this crag. However, the climb was seldom to be found dry, and it did not achieve the instant classic status normally associated with Les Brown's creations.

Two days later Brown ascended the obvious groove line left of Sword of Damocles on Bowfell's North Buttress to gain Gnomon.

Later in the year Brown returned to Scafell's East Buttress to take on the huge area of unclimbed rock to the right of Great Eastern. By a superb piece of route finding he succeeded where others had failed and produced a magnificent climb at the remarkably reasonable grade of HVS. Centaur remains one of the best and longest routes on the crag but even this fine achievement was overshadowed by the efforts of that other relative newcomer to the scene, Geoff Oliver.

### **Geoff Oliver**

Oliver and his Newcastle companions had made a considerable impact on the Lakeland cliffs during the summer of 1959, and further successes followed in the autumn of that year in the shape of repeat ascents of many of the top Rock and Ice Extremes in North Wales.

1960 began quietly with his ascent of two obvious crack lines on the Napes. Although Alligator Crawl and Crocodile Crack are both good routes they have never gained the popularity they deserve.

As the sunny weather continued into May, Oliver moved up to the East Buttress of Scafell to attempt one of the last great natural lines left on the cliff. The hair-raising ascent that followed is described by Geoff in his article 'Recent Developments on Scafell' (FRCC Journal 1962) and the resulting Ichabod is one of the very best classic climbs that the Lake District has to offer. It says much about the unassuming nature of this man that as co-writer of the 1967 Scafell Guide, he chose not to mention his own contributions, including Ichabod, in the historical section of that publication.

The very next day Oliver teamed up with Paul Ross to produce two new routes on Castle Rock. By alternating leads, the pair completed a new girdle on the crag in one and a half hours. Eliminate Girdle takes in many of the finest pitches of the crag and made Jim

Birkett's Gossard largely redundant. To round off the day, Ross took revenge for his previous fall on a line at the right hand end of the crag and established Drag, a short yet surprisingly difficult problem. (See 'Castle Rock of Triermain' by Ross, FRCC Journal, 1961).

### **Don Whillans**

In the new 1959 Eastern Crags guide, Harold Drasdo somewhat rashly said of Dove Crag that 'the central part of the main cliff presents a challenge unanswerable by unaided climbing'. Furthermore his article 'Extremes and Excesses' in the FRCC Journal of 1960 stated that 'It is not for want of trying that only one new route has appeared on Dove Crag in the last 20 years, and this route, Dovedale Groove by Whillans and Brown, indicates at what level the next ones will be carried out. I have not seen a more impressive piece of igneous rock, of similar size, anywhere. All one can say is that we have failed; others can try.'

The ink could barely have dried on the paper before the challenge had been met. In the spring of 1960, Don Whillans, the man most likely to succeed, forced Extol, a ferocious line straight up the centre of the crag. Colin Mortlock's account of the first ascent ('Entity', CC. Journal 1961) had all the hallmarks we have come to expect of a Whillansian route; wet conditions, unrelenting difficulty and a high level of seriousness which included at one point both leader and second climbing extreme rock simultaneously.

In a year in which local climbers did so much to redress the balance with Wales and establish hard classic routes comparable with many of the Rock and Ice finer achievements on Cloggy and the Llanberis cliffs, it is perhaps ironic that Whillans' Extol was probably the most outstanding accomplishment of 1960.

### **Allan Austin**

Although Austin had been producing new climbs in the Langdale area for several years, it was not until 1960 that he really showed his metal and thus began a long campaign which was to make him the most outstanding Lakeland pioneer of the decade.

Austin's primary ambitions around this time lay in the development of Pavey Ark, a huge rambling cliff which still remained largely untouched by modern climbers of the day. His additions that year included Rectangular Slab, Astra and Red Groove. Astra is a magnificent and bold lead which was for many years considered to be the hardest undertaking in the area, and today it is still one of the finest climbs in the Lake District. Both Astra and Red Groove were significantly harder than any of Austin's previous routes and opened up areas of the East Wall, which had previously been considered unclimbable.

Two other climbs are worthy of mention in 1960 as each in its own way had a bearing on future developments in the Lakes. Paul Ross and others who operated mainly in the Northern Lakes area were developing a different philosophy towards the use of pegs and aid climbing from their contemporaries in Langdale and the South. Ross's artificial route If on Gimmer Crag caused a good deal of controversy among the Langdale devotees. Ross explained in 1974: 'We did If as a totally provocative route, up an incredible piece of rock Greenwood provoked me into it. I got Geoff Oliver interested in turn and he tried it twice before I did it. He was a little bit that way, trying to provoke people, but he never pulled it off, he was a nice guy.' (Leeds University C.C. Journal 1974).

Also in that year Pete Crew, still a relative unknown, who had just begun to cut his teeth on the Black Cliff of Clogwyn D'ur Arddu, made a rare visit to the Lakes and climbed a new route on Pillar Rock. Although Odin was not an outstanding route the ascent was instrumental in awakening local climbers to the potential of the cliff and gave due warning of the interests of a man shortly to become one of Britain's leading climbers.

All in all, 1960 was a magnificent year which arguably produced proportionally more truly great Lakeland classic routes than any other before or since. Equally significant however was the fact that most of these climbs attacked areas of cliff previously thought impenetrable and thus opened many eyes to possibilities for the future.

## **1961-1962**

After the phenomenally dry summers of '59 and '60 it was hardly surprising that 1961 turned out to be something of a wash-out. In terms of quantity of new climbs produced, it was certainly one of the worst on record and the only developments of any importance occurred on the fast drying Heron Crag.

Brown's route Gormenghast attracted much attention and became instantly popular, with Austin adding a direct start and Whillans a direct finish. Austin was impressed by the vast scope of the mossy right wing and returned to establish two very good climbs, Spec Crack (HVS) and Flanker (HVS). Both routes acquired a somewhat inflated reputation and were not repeated for seven years. Ian Roper wrote in 1967; 'Spec Crack and Flanker continue to resist all attempts at second ascents, despite many assaults, particularly on the former. It might well be that Spec Crack is one of the hardest half-dozen routes on Scafell.' (Lakeland Letter in New Climbs, 1967)

In 1962, the pace of development picked up again. Les Brown returned to Dow Crag's 'A' Buttress to climb a very good pitch which was later linked by Dave Miller to Unfinished Symphony to give today's Isengard. Miller himself added the excellent Nimrod to 'B' Buttress, a sustained piece of wall climbing which proved to be the hardest route on the crag.

### **The Race For The Pillar**

Much of the main activity during 1962, however, centred on Esk Buttress. Allan Austin began the year by ascending Right Hand Route on the Buttress, before returning to his exploration of Pavey Ark and the discovery of another superb route in the form of Arcturus. A Carlisle team led by Dennis English also visited Esk Buttress and climbed the very fine Gargoyle Direct, but the best was yet to come.

During 1961 and 1962, Pete Crew had been establishing himself at the forefront of Welsh climbing in the company of Jack Soper, with a string of impressive new routes on Cloggy which culminated in his ascent of the Great Wall. Crew took time off from his beloved Cloggy in June to visit Dove Crag. Here he succeeded where others had failed in ascending the brilliant line of Hiraeth, and pressed home the point further by making the second ascents of Dovedale Groove and Extol. 'The Big Three' as they were later to become known had all been pioneered by climbers primarily associated with Wales.

A week later Crew returned to deal another blow to the pride of Lakeland activists. The great outstanding problem of Esk Buttress's Central Pillar had received a number of attempts, which were ultimately repulsed by the existence of a crucial pile of loose blocks. Jack Soper finally abseiled down and removed these, but he did not finish the climb. Thus it was that, one Sunday morning, two rival teams raced for the prize of the Central Pillar. When Soper arrived with Austin and Metcalf he found Crew's party already established having made a dawn start from Langdale.

Austin and his party compensated for their loss with admirable first ascents of their own, the appropriately named Black Sunday and the bold and elegant Red Edge. As a final gesture Crew returned to the Lakes in September to climb the best pitch on Buckstone How, Alexas.

Other important ascents in the Northern Lakes that year included High Crag Buttress in Buttermere by J.J.S. Allison and L. Kendall and further developments on Falcon Crags in Borrowdale. Ado Liddell and Ray McHaffie made their first appearance on the new climbs scene that year with three very good routes on Lower Falcon Crag - Interloper, The Niche and The Girdle Traverse, all of which required pegs for aid. The Niche, which is still regarded as the best route on this overhanging crag, caused a certain amount of controversy at the time due to the liberal use of pegs to assist gardening. Both McHaffie and Liddell in different ways went on to exert a considerable influence on the future of climbing in this valley. The other important ascent on the same crag that year was Plagiarism, by the new names of Paul Nunn and Oliver Woolcock, soon to be found gracing the first ascent credits of many new routes in this area.

### **The Divided Kingdom (1963-1967)**

There has perhaps always been an inclination by climbing pioneers to concentrate their efforts on specific areas. Even when transport improved, factors such as social gathering centres, peer group influences, ease of limited access, favourite locations, familiar ground and local knowledge, continued to polarise the activities of many groups of climbers into well defined areas. In the Lake District, geographical lay-out and lack of road systems across the central massif has tended to accentuate this effect.

Polarisation of climbing groups towards exploration of specific valleys or areas became particularly noticeable during the mid-sixties and with it came the development of localised ethics, approaches and codes of practice. This may be an over-simplification of what occurred, but hopefully it will help to explain the course that Lakeland climbing followed during the mid and late sixties and its repercussions during the seventies.

### **The North - 'The Borrowdale Piton Image'**

Paul Ross was easily the most prolific and influential climber operating in Borrowdale and Thirlmere from 1954 to his departure for Canada in 1966. Most of his new routes were confined to the Borrowdale valley and by 1959 his systematic development of Shepherds, Falcon, Walla and Black Crags had yielded around thirty new routes. Some excellent and very hard routes were climbed with a minimal use of aid (Post Mortem and Eagle Girdle) whilst others were criticised for the over-use of pegs (Vertigo, The Cleft,

Rigor Mortis).

Ross and his companions developed a different philosophy and felt justified in using pegs on climbs which were often dirtier, looser and more vegetated than elsewhere in the Lakes. Their attitudes were far different from those of today: 'If you'd thought that in twenty years time Ken Wilson was going to play hell with you, you wouldn't have done some routes with pegs, they would have been done without.' (Paul Ross interview in Leeds University C. C. Journal 1974)

Ross's own article 'Castle Rock of Triermain' (F.R.C.C. Journal 1961) has a description of the first ascent of Rigor Mortis which included the use of pegs for aid and the chipping out of three separate spikes for use with aid slings.

Ironically, the Editor's Notes in the same Journal state: '....at last, in this number, we are fortunate in having an account of the climbing there (Castle Rock) from the pioneer of so many recent outstanding routes. At the other end of the scale one hears of misguided enterprise - hand holds chipped from a Moderate a piton hammer is certainly a menace in the hands of irresponsible people!'

In the sixties Ross was joined by fresh talent in the shape of Liddell, McHaffie, Nunn, Woolcock, Henderson, Clark, Thompson and Toole. Many new crags were explored in Borrowdale and the local attitude towards pegs continued to be somewhat more liberal than elsewhere. Manufactured nut-runners were now becoming generally available, but many of the teams operating in Borrowdale preferred the security of pegs for protection and saw no ethical differences between pegs and nuts when direct aid was required.

Few top quality routes were climbed during 1963-64 but aid proliferated, resulting in a number of purely artificial climbs (Exclamation, The Dangler, Via Roof Route, Hells Wall, The Technician, Joke, D.T.'s etc.) During the next two years, however, some fifty new routes were added to Borrowdale. Paul Nunn and Paul Ross climbed a number of excellent routes on Eagle Crag, the best of which was Daedalus (although this also used substantial aid.)

The attitude of South Lakes climbers was expressed by Dave Miller's comments in the F.R.C.C. Journal 1965-66 'New Climbs and Notes.'

'Surprisingly, Eagle Crag had a spate of routes which are said to be good and of a high standard of difficulty. It would appear from the descriptions, however, that they are more likely to be enjoyed by enthusiasts of peg and sling dangling.'

The long overdue guidebook to Borrowdale was scheduled for 1967/8, so Ross and Thompson in protest produced their own private guide within six weeks. Many of the routes were overgraded but the guide did serve as a useful stop-gap measure and the use of asterisks to denote climbs of quality was a futuristic concept.

The major climbing event of 1965 and 1966 was the discovery and development of Goat Crag. Until 1964, its northern face was so heavily vegetated that few had considered it worth climbing upon. Yet again, it was Les Brown's eye for a great route that led him to spend a whole winter, in total secrecy, gardening his chosen line. In the spring of 1965, just as local climbers were starting to get wind of his operations, Brown moved in to

make the first ascent of Praying Mantis; a magnificent route which was destined to become one of the best and most popular in the Lakes. Brown's route triggered off such a spate of activity from the valley's regular climbers, that it resembled a modern day gold rush! None of the routes that followed managed to match the quality of Praying Mantis, but several excellent routes materialised from beneath the carpets of grass. In less than two years Goat Crag was transformed from an obscure vegetated hillside into a major crag that boasted twenty-eight new climbs. Three of the best routes employed a substantial amount of aid; D.D.T. (6), Big Curver (7) and Rat Race (a large number!).

Adrian Liddell's free ascents of both D.D.T. and Big Curver in 1966 were notable accomplishments which have often been quoted as the spark that initiated the self-generated clean-up campaign of the late sixties. In truth, most Borrowdale pioneers spent much time trying to avoid pitons and the free-climbing ethic had never been in question. As Paul Nunn explained: 'If some went too far away from the free climbing ethic, they were criticised; if a new climb used too much aid, it was soon done with less. The invention of new ideological positions can affect such things, but in the 60s that did not happen.' (Mountain 44, August 1975)

Nevertheless, it seems fair to say that although pegs continued to be used quite freely for a number of years to come, the emphasis on avoiding or eliminating aid gradually gathered momentum. It was not until the late seventies, however, that the valley could completely claim to be rid of 'The Borrowdale Piton Image.

### **The South - 'Whiter Than White'**

'It was Austin's ideology that had profound effects on the later history of Lakeland climbing; so dogmatic were his ethics that their effect on the total British climbing scene is still gathering weight. As spiritual head of the Yorkshire purist movement, which is like saying whiter than white, he came to Langdale, and Pavey Ark in particular, with a virgin set of Yorkshire gritstone ethics.' (from 'Lakeland Community' by Pete Livesey in Mountain 39, October, 1974)

At best this statement is an exaggeration, at worst it is completely refutable, (see 'The Other Side of the Historical Coin' by Paul Nunn in Mountain 44, August 1975) but like all good stories it contains a grain of truth, and helps illustrate how the differences in attitude towards pegs and aid between the North and South of the Lake District originally came about during the mid-sixties.

Allan Austin, like Jim Birkett and Arthur Dolphin before him, is generally regarded as the foremost Lakeland pioneer of his day. In common with his two predecessors he concentrated his efforts on Langdale and throughout the sixties he totally dominated developments in that area. (It is an unusual fact that from 1940 to 1970 one in two of all recorded climbs in the Langdale area was pioneered by these three men.)

There is little doubt that Austin's attitudes and approach to climbing had a strong influence on his companions, and the fact that only two of the twenty-five climbs he established in Langdale during the sixties employed a peg for aid (one each on Astra and Rainmaker) stands in stark contrast to the developments in Borrowdale during the same period.

In 1963 Austin in the company of Eric Metcalf and Dave Miller made two fine additions to Gimmer Crag with Poacher and Gimmer String. The former is a surprisingly bold and exposed lead, and the latter was so named because all the pitches had been previously climbed by separate parties and it only remained to string it all together. Also that year Austin and Jack Soper regained some Lakeland pride by making the third ascent of Dovedale Groove and adding a new direct finish of comparable difficulty to the lower pitches. ('Dovedale Groove' by A. Austin. F.R.C.C. Journal 1964)

During the next 3 years only eleven new climbs were recorded in Langdale and Austin was on the first ascent of all of them. The best of these were Bowfell Buttress Eliminate, (Bowfell), Man of Straw and Chimney Variant (White Ghyll) and Gandalfs Groove & Razor Crack (Neckband). Austin returned to Neckband Crag in 1968 to add Gillette, thus completing a trilogy of superb short routes.

Elsewhere, Austin and Jack Soper opened up new crags with Cam Spout Buttress in Eskdale and Paper Tiger on Green Crag, Buttermere. Also in Buttermere the same pair along with Ian Roper added the fine and difficult Carnival to Eagle Crag.

In 1967, Austin's Langdale guidebook finally appeared, the first in a long overdue New Series of F.R.C.C. guides. The colour-coded plastic covers and the introduction of the H.V.S. and Extreme gradings were innovations. (Paul Ross had first used the Extreme grade in his pirate guide to Borrowdale in 1965 and the idea had been incorporated by Austin and Miller in the second of the F.R.C.C. New Climbs booklets in 1966.) In a review of the Langdale guide (Mountain 4, July 1969) Chris Bonington wrote; 'In Langdale, Allan Austin displays his contempt for artificial climbing by dismissing Trilogy in three sentences. He altogether ignores Paul Ross's spectacular, though artificial, line over the big overhangs on White Ghyll.' Reviewers of Austin's next Langdale guide in 1973 would have far harsher comments to make!

### **The West - 'All To Ourselves'**

One of the more notable events of the mid-sixties was the renaissance of Pillar Rock by local West Cumbrians. In 1963, the new partnership of Geoff Cram and Bill Young ascended the impressive crack of Scylla and initiated an intense period of activity on the Rock which was to continue until 1972. More than thirty new routes were produced, almost exclusively at the hands of just five climbers - Cram, Young, Schipper, Eilbeck and Lounds. Many of these climbs were long and difficult and required a good deal of cleaning but here the use of pegs was generally kept to a minimum. The remoteness of Pillar had been an important factor in its total neglect for almost two decades prior to 1959, and its relative inaccessibility from the popular centres of Keswick and Ambleside in the sixties meant that the local climbers virtually had the place all to themselves.

In 1964, Cram and Young took time off from Pillar to make a visit to Castle Rock in Thirlmere to climb The Ghost. It was the hardest route in the area, and maintained a fierce reputation for many years to come.

Geoff Cram was the principal leader in the assault on Pillar Rock for several years and took most of the obvious prizes on the North and West Faces. Charybdis, Sheol, Puppet, Gondor and Ximenes, together with Electron and Necromancer on the Shamrock, provided him with an excellent string of trophies. The striking and awkward crack of

Sheol, Puppet, Gondor and the exposed, bulging arête of Gondor presented challenges comparable with the hardest routes in the Lakes. Young, Eilbeck and Schipper also produced good routes during 1966 and 1967, particularly on the Shamrock.

In 1968, Bill Lounds appeared on the scene and in the company of Chris Eilbeck established six routes in as many weeks, the best of which were Eros, Thanatos and Vishnu. Another local team of Martin, Wilson and Cowan climbed The Black Widow, with four pegs for aid that were quickly eliminated by Lounds the following year to produce a very hard route. Lounds went on to eliminate aid from a good many Lakeland routes during the 60s and early 70s.

The long neglected Gable Crag had a visit from Cram and Young in 1966 resulting in the superb wall climb of The Tomb. Here again, though to a lesser extent, they began a revival of interest in the crag that was to extend into the early seventies. Interceptor in 1967 by Pat Fearnough and The Slant the following year by the strong team of Burbage, Griffin, Fearnough and Oliver provided the best routes.

### **The East - 'White Elephants'**

Developments in the Eastern Fells during the mid-sixties were far less significant than elsewhere in the Lakes. Many small crags around Ullswater and in the Thirlmere area were discovered and climbed, principally by Neil Allinson and Jack Soper, but few have ever gained any popularity.

On Dove Crag, Mordor was started in 1965, by yet another top Welsh activist, Martin Boysen. It was not continued through the overhangs until 1968 (by Cram and Jones). Although the climb was very hard and serious, the rock was loose and dirty, and it did not compare with its illustrious neighbours.

Rainsborrow Crag received a great deal of time and attention in 1966 and 1967 by Roper, Allinson, Soper and others but here again it turned out to be something of a white elephant. The best route taking a fierce crack in the central Prow was left for Joe Brown, making a rare visit in 1969. The Groan used a point of aid that was soon dispensed with by Bill Lounds.

### **The Marauders**

Not all the pioneers of the sixties were content to funnel their efforts into a particular valley or area. Some moved freely around the crags of the Lakes, poaching well chosen lines from under the noses of the local devotees. Most successful of these 'marauders' were Chris Bonington and Les Brown. Significantly, both these men soon broadened their climbing ambitions to beyond the confines of the Lake District - although this seems to be something of an understatement in the case of Chris Bonington!

In 1964 Bonington established two important and very contrasting routes on Raven Crag in Thirlmere. The central cave area of this crag, consisting of a complex array of overhangs, was to be the preserve of a future generation of climbers, but the only apparent weakness at that time was a huge bottomless groove in its left wall. Bonington and Martin Boysen - a climber rapidly attracting attention in North Wales and destined to become one of Britain's finest cragsmen - managed this improbable-looking line with three points of aid. The Medlar, named after the medlar tree which still sprouts from its foot, proved to be an outstanding climb and probably the fiercest undertaking in the

Lakes at that time. Bonington returned the following month with Mike Thompson to add the delicate and elegant Totalitarian.

The following year, on the opposite side of the valley, Bonington with Ross, Henderson and Moseley added The Last Laugh to Castle Rock. Aid was used to climb the very steep groove on its second pitch, but the climb's reputation grew on the basis of its bold and serious first pitch. Also in 1965, Bonington and Thompson set off on an intended girdle traverse of the East Buttress of Scafell but realised too late that they had underestimated its difficulty and seriousness: 'it was a blind alley and I'd had it, the only thing I could have done was to jump off.' After an epic, Bonington managed to get to the top of the crag. (see Lakeland Rock, Chapter 4, The Holy Ghost.) The Holy Ghost has good climbing and was certainly a very hard and serious route for its time, but perhaps its main importance lay in providing the key to the outstanding problem of the girdle traverse.

In the mid-sixties Les Brown continued to pick off classic routes around the Lakes. In 1964 he added the highly technical Psycho to High Crag, Buttermere to provide the hardest route in the area. The following year after ascending the magnificent Praying Mantis (previously described) he turned his attention to Dow Crag once more and the big unclimbed groove in the centre of 'A' Buttress. The Balrog proved to be impressive and very strenuous, requiring three points of aid, and completed for Brown a brilliant trio of routes on this buttress.

In 1966, Brown solved one of the 'last great problems' of the period, the wildly overhanging crack in the wall to the left of Central Buttress on Scafell Crag. Operating in typical secrecy, Brown is reputed to have told inquisitive competitors that he was exploring a fictitious Far East Buzzard Crag. The initial crack was finally overcome after several attempts with two pegs and a nut for aid. The resulting climb Nazgul takes a direct line up the face and provided Scafell with yet another superb route.

Brown's other route that year, The Hun on Pillar Rock, added another fine, airy route to the crag's growing repertoire and signalled the end of his inspired explorations of Lakeland crags in the sixties.

### **1968-1970 Transition Period**

It can be argued that climbing standards in the Lake District virtually stood still for most of the sixties. In the late fifties, several routes such as Post Mortem (1956), Phoenix (1957) and Elimot (1957) had already breached the E2 barrier, and many of the outstanding classics of 1960 - Side Walk, Extol, Astra and Ichabod - were solidly of this grade. (Admittedly, each of the above-mentioned climbs employed a point of aid, which was subsequently eliminated, but they all possessed the aura of this new standard of climbing). During the sixties many formidable lines were ascended, opening up sections of cliff previously considered unclimbable, but purely in terms of the top level of climbing standards achieved it may be regarded as a period of consolidation of the E2 grade. It was not until the final years of the decade that new climbs began to emerge which showed signs of another rise in standards.

It is perhaps interesting at this point to compare progress with other areas. The advancement of climbing standards in Scotland roughly paralleled the Lakes, with routes like Club Crack (1956), Shibboleth (1958) and Carnivore (1958) representing the first E2's, but the next step forward did not occur there until the mid to late seventies.

Wales, however, was significantly ahead of both areas. As early as 1952, routes like Bloody Slab were breaking into the E2 grade and throughout the fifties the development of Cloggy saw the production of a whole string of new climbs which were firmly of this grade - Slanting Slab, Woubits, Taurus, The Mostest, etc. The ascents of November (1957) and Woubits Left Hand (1959), despite using considerable aid, already hinted at the next rise in standards. The almost traditional rivalry between N. Wales and the Lakes for producing the hardest climbs of the day has prevailed throughout much of Britain's climbing history. In the early fifties the death of Arthur Dolphin and the advent of Brown and Whillans on the cliffs of Snowdonia were crucial factors in swinging the pendulum strongly in favour of Wales. Many of the leading Lakeland pioneers of the sixties made regular visits to North Wales but like everyone else at that time, their principal ambitions lay in repeating the earlier routes of the Rock and Ice. An equalisation in climbing standards of the hardest routes in Wales and the Lakes was not to be convincingly achieved again until the mid-seventies.

1968 and 1969 saw the dawn of a transition period in Lake District climbing which was to bring new faces, approaches and standards during the early seventies.

In 1968, Allan Austin climbed Gillette on Neckband Crag and the following year Bill Lounds added a hard direct finish. This latter effort together with Lounds's free ascents of Black Widow and The Groan that year represented climbing at the upper limit of the E2 grade.

Many of the hardest routes pioneered during this period, however, employed direct aid and the level of difficulty achieved is now far harder to assess.

On Scafell, for instance, some notable completely free ascents were still being made: Minotaur by Syd Clark, Gold Rush by Geoff Cram and Bill Young, Gilt Edge Eliminate by Cohn Read and most important of all, the long-standing problem of a complete girdle traverse of the East Buttress, by the freshly emerging team of John Adams and Cohn Read. This marathon girdle provided serious and sustained climbing for 1,200 feet and took some 19 1/2 hours over a two day period to complete. (See 'Lord of the Rings' by C. Read, in Carlisle Mountaineering Club Journal 1971) Lord of the Rings was a magnificent accomplishment, providing one of the best expeditions to be had on Lakeland rock. It was to be six years before it received a second ascent.

At the time, other routes were being ascended by the same pioneers using substantial amounts of aid, e.g. Chimera by Cram and Young and Dyad by Ken Jackson and Read. Unlike many of the partially-aided routes of the mid-sixties in Borrowdale and elsewhere, however, those of the late sixties tackled futuristic lines which were to become the E3 and E4 climbs of the seventies. Further signs of rising standards were also evident in the number of hard routes being accomplished in a single day. On Scafell during 1969, Lounds managed Nazgul, Ichabod, Holy Ghost and Leverage whilst Richard McHardy and Paul Braithwaite paid a rare visit from North Wales to record an even better day. They climbed Leverage, Ichabod, Hell's Groove and another before soloing Mickledore

Grooves, Trinity, Chartreuse and Overhanging Wall - all on sight. The same weekend, this team successfully ascended one of the district's 'last great problems'; the vicious overhanging crack on Tophet Wall, Great Gable. McHardy's lead of The Vikings (1969) gave the Lakes its first route of an unequivocal E3 grading.

Elsewhere in the Lakes, Cohn Read and John Adams made significant contributions. They gave Dow Crag's 'A' Buttress yet another impressive climb, Silence, and their route Great End Pillar opened up a new crag in Borrowdale. More controversial were their ascents of Peccadillo on Deer Bield Crag and Athanor on Goat Crag. Both these very fine lines utilized a number of pegs for aid - four and six respectively - to give routes which were to become hard free climbs by the mid-seventies. This trend of employing a limited number of aid points to tackle some of the more improbable-looking lines that remained in the area was adopted by a number of leading figures and continued into the early seventies. It was, I believe, symptomatic of the transition taking place. Most of the good lines of an E2 standard had been climbed over the previous decade. Standards were beginning to rise again and a new breed of climber was emerging with the will to take on more improbable-looking lines. The level of technical ability needed to free climb these lines of potential E3 and E4 difficulty was still just beyond their grasp.

Thus, the sixties came to an end in a state of transition which held out great hopes for the future. The following decade more than lived up to expectations as a new regime of pioneers with better equipment, more refined techniques, professional methods and a whole new outlook began an intense period of development of the Lakeland crags. It was to be an era in which climbing standards rose dramatically, controversies flared regularly, and ethical debate intensified as many diverse factions competed for the best lines of the day.

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