



◀ Good use of double ropes. One rope is clipped in all the runners initially, saving the other rope for the other side of the arête.

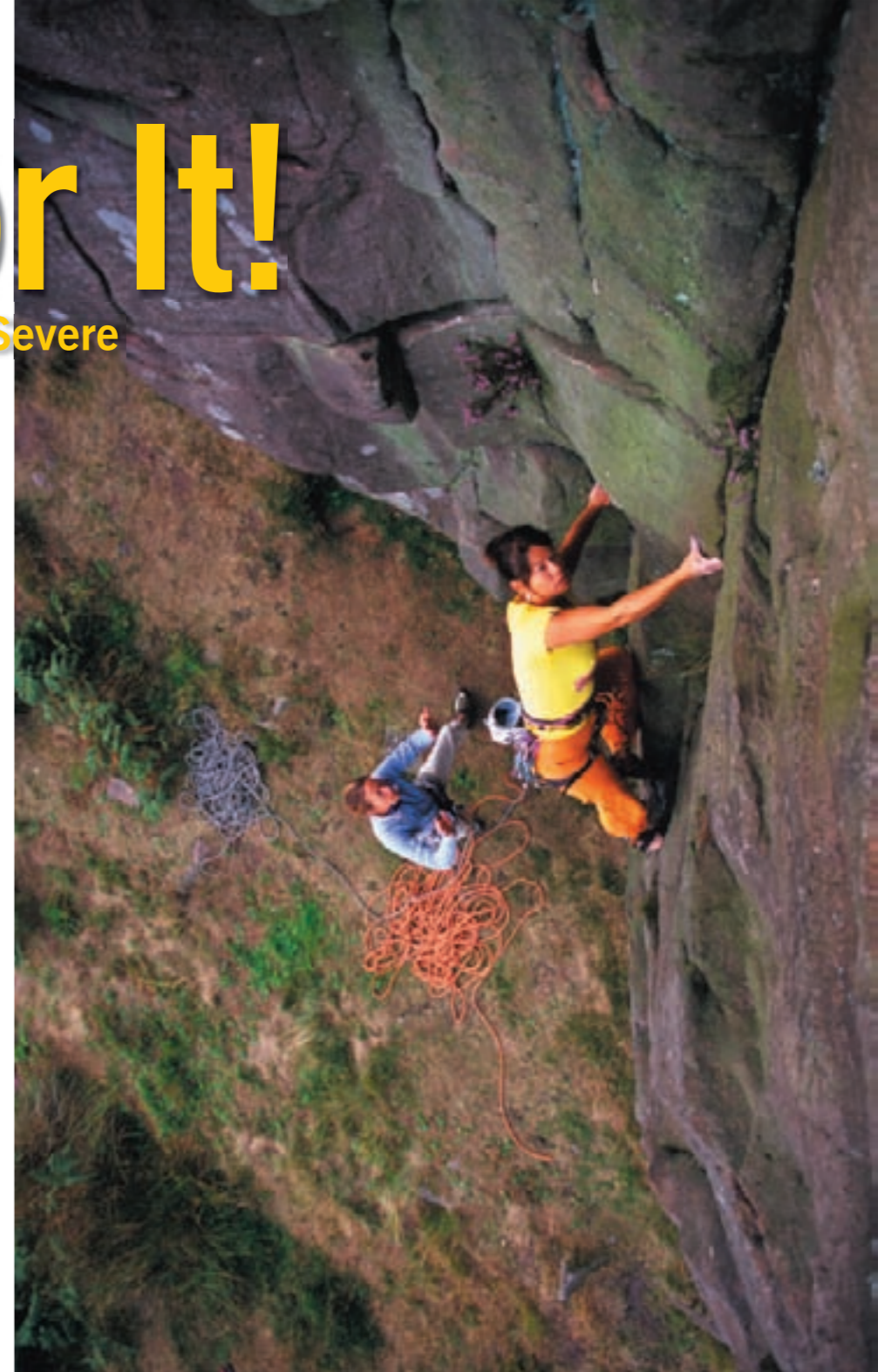
# Go For It!

## Grade tour 3: Hard Severe

Hard Severe (HS) is one of those in-betweenie grades that you encounter far less often than it's neighbours. You'll often come across a HS variation pitch of a Severe (like the famous *Micah Eliminate* of *Christmas Curry* at Tremadog), which can be a good way to branch out into the grade initially. That said, there are of course a number of world-class classic Hard Severes that should be on the list for any confident Severe climber aspiring to harder things (see the hit list for more).

### The essence of Hard Severe

Plenty of climbers ascending through the grades skip happily from Severe to VS without a problem. It's common to be already looking beyond HS by the time you take on your first experience of the grade. In other words, HS is often considered to be a stepping-stone to a steeper and harder world rather than an end in itself. But this is not to undermine or belittle the grade as Hard Severe bridges an important gap between climbs that only have moments of steepness and/or difficulty compared to VS climbs that are considerably more sustained. To climb HS means embarking on sequences of moves that require a steady head, the ability to stop mid-sequence to place runners and sufficient stamina to see the process through. You may encounter up to six or seven 4a moves (these grades are explained later) one after the other where you feel committed and 'out there'. As with all the grades there is a fantastic variation within the category. At one end of the spectrum there are the long classic outings such as the 6 pitch Main Wall on Cym Las on the south side of Llanberis Pass in Snowdonia, where the climbing is absorbing but never desperate, yet the atmosphere, exposure, positions and overall length of the route make it feel a great deal harder than it actually is. It takes everyone longer to build up the confidence to tackle a long committing mountain or sea-cliff outing at the limit of your climbing ability. These long expeditions contrast markedly with short, sharp, single pitch problems that can be intense and significantly trickier. You may encounter 4b moves for the first time and these test-pieces can be frustratingly demoralising if you're trying to find your feet at the grade. Don't forget this, don't despair and above all don't be afraid to back off a climb if it feels too hard for at that particular moment. It'll be there for another day!



▲ The belayer can act as a spotter until the first runner is placed if there are tricky moves just off the ground.



▲ A quickly placed runner helps to calm you down. On steep ground you also want to place gear efficiently so you can move on to a rest before your arms tire.

► On a short route select the rack carefully. Decide what you can leave behind to save weight. Climbers: Libby Peter and Meilee Rafe. All photos: Mike Robertson.

### Single rope

Pros: Belaying and ropework simple.

Cons: Rope-drag likely on meandering routes. Abseil potential limited to half rope length.

Good for: Getting started. Single pitch routes that take a fairly direct line.

### Double Ropes

Pros: Keep rope drag to a minimum.

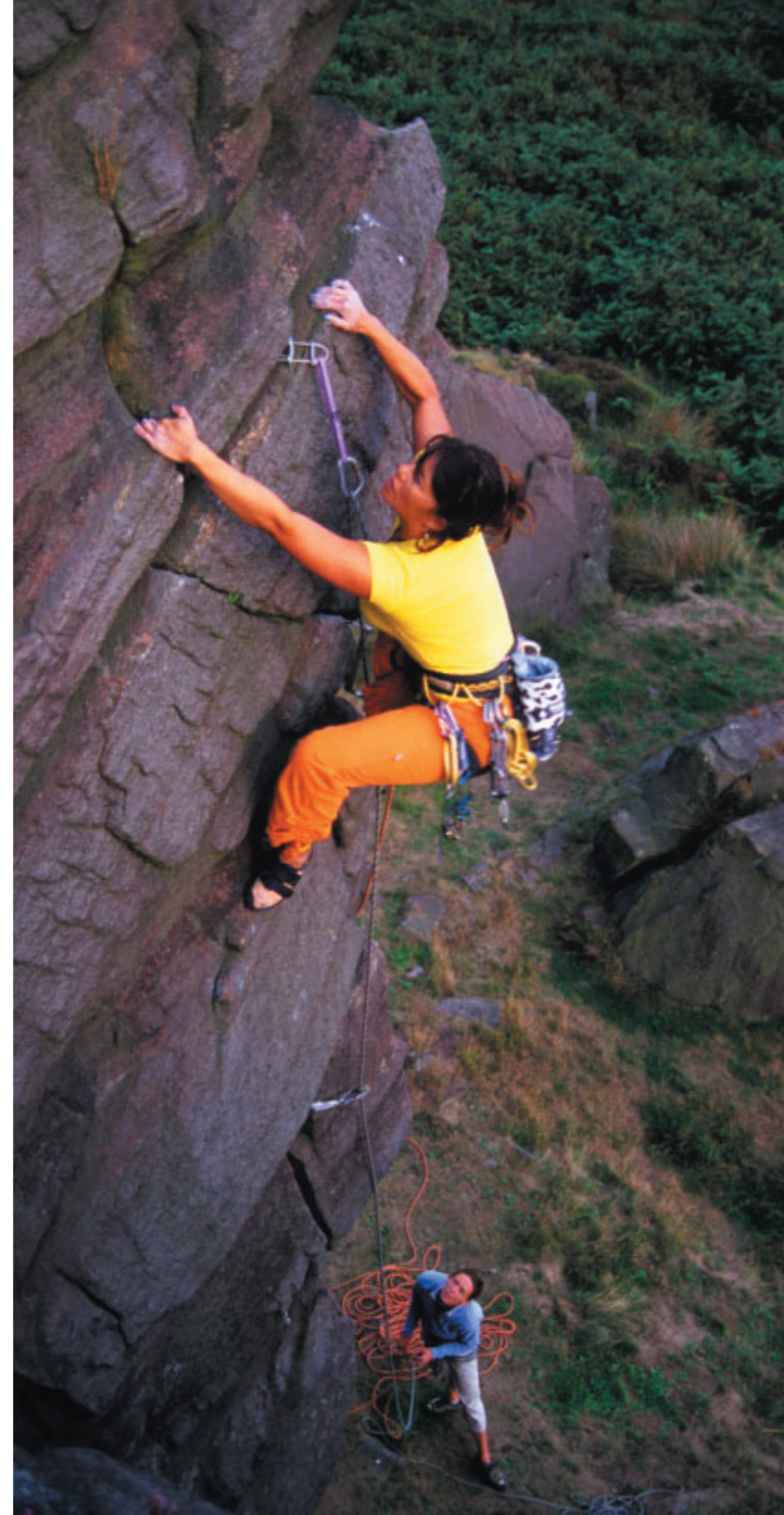
Greater opportunity for effective protection for leader and second on traverses.

Better protection for leader whilst clipping runners as less slack out on the other rope. Abseil full length of rope.

Cons: Belaying and rope handling trickier to learn.

More expensive to buy.

Good For: Multi-pitch routes and long weaving single pitch climbs.



◄ Long reaches to good edges on surprisingly steep rock characterises Bollard Edge.

secluded crag which has easy access yet an away-from-it-all atmosphere. The route is probably the best on the crag and a good choice if you don't want to be hassled by crowds when you're pushing your grade. For a small route it has a big feel with some committing moves as you reach blindly and launch around the arête. The gear is good but you need to feel confident with hanging onto good holds on steep rock to place it.

### Hard Severe hit list

Here's a few classics around the country to seek out, but remember that any graded list is subjective. Have fun!

#### Benchmark

*Nasa! Buttress*, Dovestones Edge, Peak District. Superb! *Diedre Sud*, Mowing Ward, South Pembroke. An abseil approach, a perfect line, good protection, great climbing...what more could you hope for? *Creag Dhu Wall*, Creag y Castell, Tremadog. Varied climbing in superb position.

*Satan's Slip*, Devil's Slide, Lundy. Great route name, memorable climbing, special island – get on the boat! *Demo Route*, Sennen Cove, Cornwall. Photogenic!

#### Meaty

*Main Wall*, Cynr Las, Llanberis Pass. A grand day out by anyone's standards.

*Bridge's Route*, Esk Buttress, Scafell. The setting is beautiful, the climbing is superb.

*Doorpost*, Bosigran, Cornwall. A great, but hard won HS tick ☐

**Libby Peter** has been climbing for 20 years, is a qualified Mountaineering Instructor and IFMGA Guide and author of the best-selling *Rock Climbing – Essential Skills and Techniques* published by MITUK. Her base is North Wales from where she runs the guiding outfit Llanberis Guides [info@llanberisguides.com](mailto:info@llanberisguides.com)

## Technical Talk

### Technical grades

Numerical or technical grades are sometimes used with routes of Severe but it is more common to first experience them once you're climbing HS. Entering the world of technical grades is baffling initially, especially as they sound the same as, but don't equate directly to, the sport grades you've probably encountered indoors. (Traditionally, the rule of thumb is to knock two grades off the sport grade to get the British tech grade, hence F5a would equate to 4b.) The purpose of the numerical grade is to give you a measure of how difficult the single hardest move on a pitch may be irrespective of circumstances. Clearly, any attempt to categorise and compare moves on real and infinitely varied rock is going to be imperfect. Difficulty is affected by features such as size and spacing of holds,

steepness and obviousness of how to do the move. Once you've built up a reasonable amount of experience at a particular technical grade you can start to relate them to individual moves and get an idea what a '4a' or '4b' move should feel like.

On Hard Severes you encounter 4a moves routinely and 4b moves occasionally. If a route has a sequence of 4b moves it's more likely to be graded VS overall. If, on the other hand there are only one or two well-protected 4a moves, the climb could be graded Severe.

### Double ropes

When is it time to switch from single to double-ropes? If you're not sure don't worry, you're not alone, as making this decision isn't always obvious. Anyway, in many cases you could climb the same route with either rope system equally as effectively, in other words

sometimes it doesn't really matter so stick with what you're comfortable with. However, if you climb regularly and are keen to progress through the grades you'll probably end up owning both single and double-ropes so you need to decide which to take on a particular day. If you only have one system you'll need to adapt it slightly on certain types of routes.

### Profile of a Hard Severe

**Name:** *Bollard Edge*

**Grade:** Hard Severe 4a

**Length:** 8m

**No. of pitches:** 1

**Rock type:** Natural gritstone

**Crag:** Black Forest, close to the Roaches and approached from Roach End.

**Guidebook:** *Staffordshire Gritstone* (BMC), *On Peak Rock* (BMC).

**Character:** A little gem on a quiet and