

► Imaginative use of the features unlocks the mystery of the perplexing start and allows you to make those long reaches.

▼ Rubberneck takes the 'small but perfectly formed' line of least resistance up the centre of Third Cloud at the Roaches.

Go For It!

Grade tour 5: Hard Very Severe



Another stepping-stone grade (like Hard Severe), HVS is most definitely paving the way towards Extreme. Climbers tend not to linger for long in the HVS bracket as it can be found to be a notoriously mean grade (especially the 5b). Everyone knows of a sandbag HVS, just think of *Sloth* at the Roaches, an outrageous horizontal roof into a wide jamming crack, which most climbers find umpteen reasons to avoid until they're steady on E2! Having said that there is a wealth of delightful and entertaining HVSs with good protection and short lived hard sections. So if you don't get too hung up about having a hard time here and there you'll have lots of fun. On a more encouraging note, once you can climb HVS reliably you'll find that the step to E1 is a fairly gentle one.

The essence of Hard Very Severe

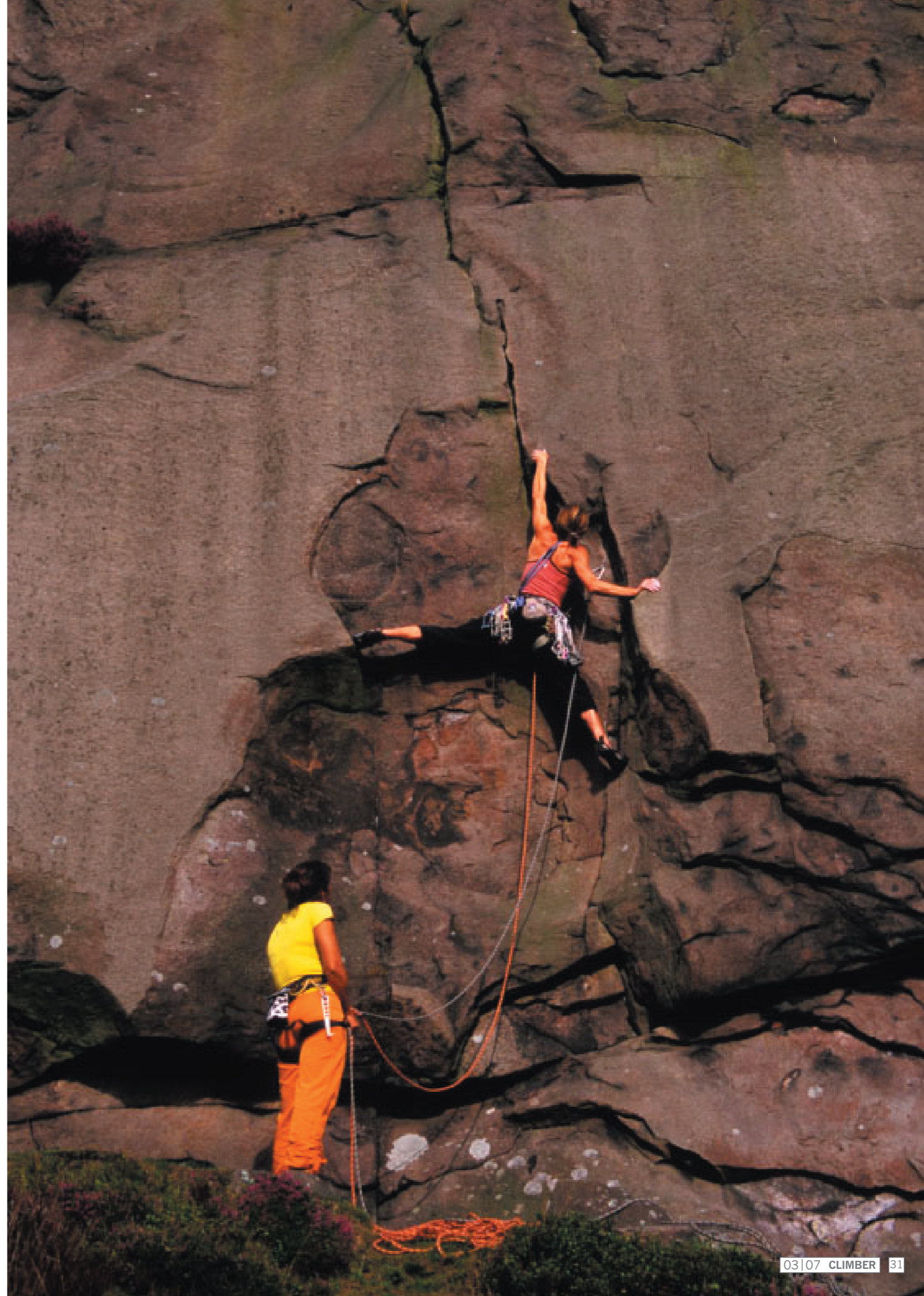
HVS introduces the world of steeper (often overhanging) and/or considerably more technical rock. Unless you can read moves accurately and place runners quickly you'll soon get pumped hanging around on a typical HVS and falling off becomes an increasingly possible outcome. The good news is that on these types of routes the gear is normally excellent (which is often all that differentiates them from their E1 neighbours) so as long as you can hang in there long enough to get the runners in you'll be safe. This isn't the case of course if you're on a HVS 4b or 4c which will feel like a scary run-out VS. So this particular bracket of the grade is one to avoid until you know you're unshakable at 4c.

A knock-on effect of climbing the harder or more strenuous pitches is that you arrive at the belay in state of heightened emotion. You can end up rushing the belay construction because you feel you've taken ages climbing the pitch and are flustered from the effort of the climbing. Yet there may be considerable load on the anchors if leader or second fall off on steep ground so it's even more crucial to take a moment to breath calmly, bring your heart rate down and then look at the anchors carefully.

Technical talk: testing runners

So how do you know when a runner is up to the job? This is a tricky one. I still vividly remember my first leader fall. I was surprised I'd fallen but even more amazed that the nut I'd placed was holding me. Even though I limped away with a sprained foot from having slammed stiff legged against the rock it gave me enormous confidence in my ability to place gear. Learning to fall properly took a while longer.

Placing good runners takes time to learn but a few key





▲ Getting comfortable in awkward spots to place gear is crucial as the crux is close to the ground.

pointers include:

- Look at the space the runner is going to fill and be inquisitive. Is the crack clean and are the edges solid or friable? Is it parallel, tapered or wonky?
- Imagine exactly where a piece of gear will sit and then select the size accordingly.
- When placing a nut, seat it by tugging downwards (make sure you're holding tight with the other hand!) and test for an outward pull by flicking upwards lightly, this will give you an idea of whether it will stay seated as you climb past it.
- At first acquaintance cams seem a simple solution to placing quick runners but in reality they require considerable care to be placed with maximum security.
- Cams have greatest holding power when placed in the

middle of their expansion range and are most effective in parallel-sided cracks.

- The stem of the camming unit should be aligned with the direction of load i.e. not sticking horizontally out of the crack but angled downwards.

Technical talk: holding falls

Are you sure that both you and your partner can hold leader falls reliably? If not then spend some time in a safe place, perhaps the wall, practising controlled lob stopping. It's quite shocking the amount of violent energy created in a fall so it's a good idea to experience what it feels like in a controlled environment, it'll give you confidence that the system works. Once on the crag belay your partner attentively so you can expect the same in return.

The perfect rack and how to organise it.

If you're heading onto steeper terrain it becomes more important to carry an appropriate and well-organised rack. A typical rack will consist of:

- 2 sets of nuts 1-10
- 4-6 Cams (size depending on the route)
- 10-12 quickdraws depending on length of pitch
- Short (4ft) slings x 2
- Long (8ft) slings x 2

When you're reaching for gear off your harness you want to know exactly where everything is without looking so stick to the same order of racking up.

Most climbers rack the gear in size order with the smallest towards the front.

Don't over bunch nuts, 6-7 per krab is plenty and don't overload gear loops or you'll be fighting to unclip.

Nuts are best grouped by size, small (1-3), medium (4-6), large (7-10)

50% of climbers clip the karabiners on with the gate facing in and the other do the opposite so do what feels best for you.

Keep all the items you won't need until you reach the belay clipped out of the way at the back of the harness.

Profile of a Hard Very Severe

Name: *Rubberneck*

Grade: HVS 5a

Length: 15m

No of pitches: 1

Rock Type: Natural gritstone

Crag: The Third Cloud, Five Clouds, Roaches,

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

Character: A short but inspired technical climb with some long reaches and perplexing moves. The trickiest moves are just as you leave the ground so it's essential to place adequate protection (fiddly) before making a series of committing moves to gain the crack above. Once established in the crack the runners are obvious and the moves flow (hopefully!). A mini classic.

Climbing on the bluffs that comprise the Five Clouds is a tranquil experience despite being situated a stone's-throw from the hurly burly of the Roaches and care should be taken to avoid creating disturbance for the

► Positive smears for the feet and a juggy flake crack for hands create a delightful combination on the upper section.

nearby houses. Note should be taken of the best approach in the guidebook.

The hit list

As always our graded list is subjective and non-comprehensive – you'll no doubt have your own favourite to add. Have fun!

Soft touch

Merlin Direct, Tremadog, North Wales. A stunning little pitch that increases with difficulty towards the top so keep something in reserve.

Front Line and *Army Dreamers*, St Govan's Head, Pembroke. Take your pick or better do both.

Benchmark

Right Unconquerable, Stanage. Quintessential gritstone athletics, well protected, but don't hang around at the top!

The Magic Crack, Coire an t-Sneachda, Cairngorms. If you can snatch it during a dry spell you won't be disappointed despite the crampon scratches.

Kipling Groove, Gimmer Crag, Langdale, Lake District. Simply splendid – setting and all.

Diagonal, Dinas Mot, Llanberis Pass, North Wales. Tiptoe your way to a sensational experience.

Bludger's Revelation, Slime Wall, Buachaille Etive Mor, Glen Coe. Atmospheric and shady but in dry conditions you'll encounter the finest rough rhyolite.

Meaty

A Dream of White Horses, Wen Slab, Gogarth, North Wales. Contender for the most famous and sought-after climb in Britain. The moves are straightforward but the approach, setting and seriousness are very meaty. Make sure you and your partner know what you're taking on.

Centurion, Carn Dearg, Ben Nevis. Probably the finest HVS in the country.

Dragon and *Gob*, Carnmore Crag, Northern Highlands. Big, remote crag – adventure rock climbing at its very best.

Sandbag

Sloth, Roaches, Staffordshire. The most famous and coveted roof climb in the country for its grade (as long as you treat it as an E1). Intimidating, burly, brilliant. Get strong; get brave and get over there.

Flying Buttress Direct, Stanage, Derbyshire. Ditto above!

Esoteric

Magical Mystery Tour, Berry Head, South Devon. If you're a good swimmer probably best done ropeless with a warm, calm sea. An unforgettable trip! □

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

