

Go For It!

Libby Peter's grade tour: 7 Vector - Britain's best E2!

So you're in the swing of Extreme by now, you've got a raft of E1s under your belt and feel it's time for a meaty adventure – you're ready for E2. The time has come to seek out some of the great classics that you never imagined you'd be reading the description for. You'll find yourself spoilt for choice as E2 most definitely takes you onto some of the great pieces of rock in this country – you're in for a treat.

The essence of E2

After the psyche-up for E1 there are no big surprises at E2 (as long as you steer clear of the frequently vicious E2 6a pitches). E2 is a consolidation grade where you get the chance to take your newfound Extreme confidence to ever more exciting settings. And this is probably the crux of E2 – that you find yourself in increasingly serious places wondering what on earth you'd do

▶ Reaching to make distant gear placements can take away some of the fear.

All photography: Mike Robertson

if something went wrong. So it's time to brush up on those technical runner and ropework skills that may get you out of trouble one day. With the knowledge that you can get yourself and your partner back down without incident should you need to, you can tackle these great adventures with confidence.

Technical talk: advanced ropework

Traverses need careful thought so you can protect both you and your second:

- Carry a number of longer quick-draws and slings so you can minimise rope-drag.
- If the runners are all in a line you can clip double ropes alternately – if they jump around clip one rope high and one low.
- Falls from traverses tend to put a fairly gentle load on the runners as the load is applied gradually. But the runners are loaded through a range of directions from sideways to downwards. Placements must anticipate this type of loading.
- Place a runner just before a hard move to protect you and one just after it to protect your second, (this applies whatever the grade!).
- Remember that a leader fall will load the runners from one side but a falling second will load the opposite side.
- It may be possible reduce the sense of terror for your second by moving back above a traverse to belay.
- Traverses are difficult to retreat from, so embark on such pitches with caution, in other words don't push your grade on them.

Clever runners and strategically placed runners can turn a bold pitch into a more reasonable proposition. For example, place multi-directional runners (threads, cams, deep seated nuts) at places on the pitch where you change direction or if this is not possible extend them further than you normally would.

Retreat

Failing to get up the route becomes a possible outcome as you start to attempt longer and more complex climbs. Abseiling from the Vector Cave as we had to when the weather changed is a good example.

- Getting back down safely from the top or part way up a climb can be potentially dangerous so:
- Don't cut corners and don't rush your decision-making.
- Back-up *in situ* anchors you're going to abseil from.



The first Vector belay consists of several spike anchors. The belayer should get comfortable so they can give the leader their full attention.



▼ Stepping onto the ochre slab is intimidating and nerve wracking and sensational but don't pin your hopes on the peg – it's been there for quite a few years!



- Select big solid simple anchors like spikes and threads.
- Always use a safety back-up when you abseil such as a French Prusik tied on the abseil rope below the abseil device and clipped to the leg loop of your harness.

Profile of an E2

Name: Vector

Length: 250 ft

No of pitches: 4

Rock type: Dolerite

Crag: Bwlch y Moch, Tremadog.

Guidebook: *Tremadog* (CC), *North Wales Rock* (Ground-Up publications), *Rock Climbing in Snowdonia* (Constable).

Character: One of those famous routes with a fearsome reputation. The combination of varied climbing, intricate line and years of polish make it a much sought-after but tricky lead. It has a gentle introductory pitch and a gentle top out (where it joins *One Step In The Clouds*) but sandwiched in between there are two meaty traverse pitches. The first of these takes you diagonally rightwards on positive holds before teetering up to and onto the famous Ochre Slab where confident footwork is everything. This leads to a sensational belay in the Vector Cave. These first two pitches can be climbed even during heavy rain!

The next pitch traverse horizontally back left to

the notoriously awkward top crack at a junction with *Diadic* (E1 5b tough for that grade).

The runners are good where you need them and the perma-chalk ensures you won't have route finding problems but if you choose a sweaty day you may struggle to keep contact with the rock!

E2 hit list

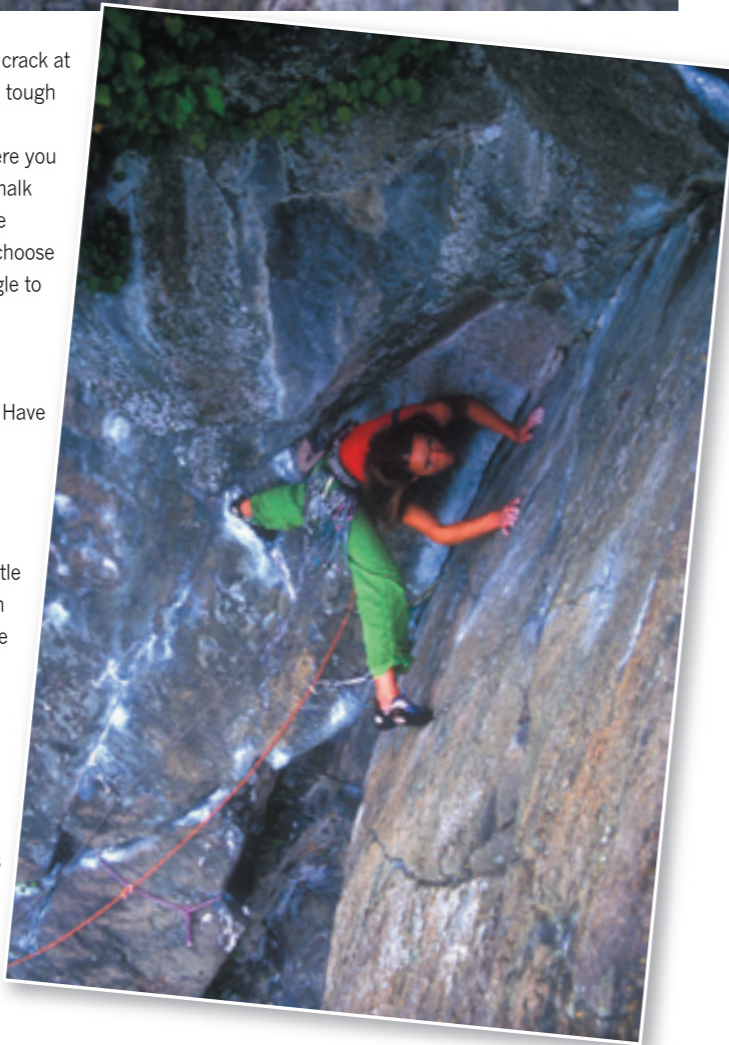
Classics galore at this grade. Have fun!

Soft touch

The Pillar, Diabaig, Torridon, North West Highlands. A gentle pitch in a beautiful setting on high quality gneiss. Worth the drive! Beware the midges

Benchmark

Left Wall, Dinas Cromlech, Llanberis Pass. It's no surprise that this is one of the most sought-after climbs in the country. The ultimate crackline. Juggy at first then fingery at the crux. (E3 if you finish direct). Take your



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

Look out for the *Self-Rescue for Climbers* seminars being run by Libby Peter and Oly Sanders (producer of the brand new *Self-Rescue* DVD). These will take place on May 27th and 28th in North Wales. For details go to llanberisguides.com

place in the queue!

The Strand, Upper Tier, Gogarth. Another superb crackline that has no really hard moves but is sustained at 5b.

Regent Street, Millstone, Peak District. Yet another crackline and one of grit's finest.

Meaty

Carnivore, Creag A'Bhancair, Buachaille Etive Mor, Glen Coe. A serious traverse guards entry to this magnificent climb. Excellent.

Shibboleth, North Buttress, Buachaille Etive Mor, Glen Coe. An amazing climb but wait for a dry spell.

The Steeple, Shelterstone crag, Cairngorms.

Possibly the best E2 you'll ever do for quality and

▼ Cracked it. Tremadoc climbing is three dimensional, so look behind you for bridging holds to bring you into balance.



location.

Red Wall, Red Wall, Gogarth. It may take you a long while to psyche up to abseil in to Red Wall but the experience will be unforgettable. The climbing is steady but you're in an intimidating and serious place.

Mousetrap, Gogarth. A remarkable slice of rock, a remarkable climb. Not hard but weird insecure rock.

Fern Hill, Cratcliffe Tor, Peak. Elegant and

awkward but friendlier than it's neighbour *Five Finger Exercise*!

Saxon, Scafell Crag, and *Ichabod*, Scafell East Buttress, Lakes, both magnificent.

Elegy, The Roaches, Staffordshire.

Sandbag!

The Rasp, Higgat Tor. This may feel easy if you're awesomely strong otherwise the "sea of overhanging gritstone" will quite probably feel epic! ☐



You can climb the first two pitches of Vector in any weather but if rain threatens it's safer to beat a retreat from the cave rather than risk a soaking higher up. Back up the in situ anchors with a piece of gear that the last person down can collect. If in doubt, leave a sling: what price your life? Always use an abseil back-up such as a French Prusik clipped to your leg loop.