

Go For It!

Libby Peter's grade tour: 8 - arriving at E3!

All photography: Mike Robertson

In the last of this *Grade Tour* series we take you onto your first E3 and pave the way to becoming a mid-E grade climber – who'd have thought it! But E3 is no pushover and many (if not most) climbers find it quite a jump from E2 to E3. Partly it's a question of acquiring the fitness to make 5c move after 5c move after 5c move and secondly the time has arrived to get to grips with 6a.

The idea of making your first 6a move is probably as intimidating as the idea of climbing your first E1 and it quite possibly seems even more elusive. 6a moves are up there in the realms of super-hard or even desperate and they can prove to be literally stopper moves unless you take some time to get accustomed to them and even (dare I say it) think about doing some training! But of course as with all the other grades we've tackled in this series, once you've made the momentous step you unlock a whole new world of routes to go at. So read on and find yourself some new projects for the Summer.

The essence of E3

Having the fitness to climb E3 may come about as a result of simply getting lots of time on the rock. Mileage on steep E2 5cs will certainly gain you the stamina required but few climbers find they can make 6a moves without some serious effort.

Typical 6a moves require you to pull on properly small holds (think pencil down to matchstick width) so finger strength becomes increasingly significant. Finger strength needs to be built up slowly and gradually to avoid injury to the tendons and fibrous pulleys through which they run to hold them in place. (Remember that the connective tissues lag behind muscles in the time taken to strengthen by several weeks).

Other 6a moves are best described as baffling or weird. The combination of holds or features in front of you don't readily assemble themselves in any order that looks remotely climbable. All the finger strength in the world won't help you here. Instead you'll need to enlist imagination,



▲ Find the best spot for the belayer amongst the boulders and take your time getting prepared for the climb.

◀ E3 territory is steep, this shot gives a good idea of the angle of the wall climbing on *Wraith*. To avoid dropping your abseil rope into the sea or onto climbers below take the ends down with you until you can see the way is clear.

▶ It's vital to place some early runners to lessen the chance of a ground-fall – and to settle your nerves!

agility, 3-D spatial awareness and a fair helping of 'The Force'. No rules apply. Trial and error is the best approach with the ability to stay calm coming in handy!

Technical talk – a 6a Manual

- Spends loads of time on 5b (ideally until 5b holds feel big!).
- Gain considerable mileage on 5c (so you feel confident you can work the moves out and make them first or second attempt).
- Work on 6a moves indoors or outdoors on a top-rope. They'll feel baffling if not impossible at first but take your time and have several attempts as you unlock the mystery. Repeatedly try the same 6a move unless you feel it's simply a lack of finger strength that's holding you back in which case don't pull too hard, especially on crimps.
- Focus on your feet. Good footwork is essential as the handholds get smaller: it can take weight off your arms and you'll be more able to rest between moves on steep ground.
- So treat yourself to some new, neat fitting boots with positive edges.
- Spend time bouldering out harder moves than you would do normally. Don't expect to get up them at first, be contented with small progressive improvements.
- Invest in a finger strengthener to keep in the car or in your desk drawer.
- Always warm-up sufficiently so you're moving fluently on big holds before you try something harder.
- Go on a sport climbing holiday and take the time to work some routes in the F6b-6c range.
- Don't expect miracle results. You'll need to plug away gradually at this, allowing your strength and technique to improve.

Profile of an E3

Name: *Wraith*

Length: 130ft

No. of pitches: 1

Rock Type: Limestone

Crag: Mother Carey's Kitchen, Lydstep, South Pembroke

Guidebook: *Pembroke Part 2* (CC), *Pembroke Rockfax*.

Character: Debate over the grade continues but you'll certainly feel you have earned the E3 tick! A steep juggy start leads to steep fingery moves in a sensational position on the upper arête and wall. It feels like a big pitch with few



►The top of sea-cliff climbs are often loose, so place belays well back in solid ground. If safe to do so, move back to the edge to belay in sight of your partner, as good communication is vital whatever the grade.

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 Olly 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



The rock on the top half of **Wraith** becomes more compact and intimidating, as you alternate between the arête and its left wall.

rests, so make sure you have plenty in reserve in your arms. The gear gets fiddlier to place the higher you go so look ahead to anticipate the placements and the holds you'll be using to make them. There are no really hard moves but lots at 5b/5c.

The hit list

Our final list is a full one, E3 will keep you busy for years. Have fun!

Soft touch

The Sun, Rhoscolyn, Anglesey. Delightful. Only one hard move and plenty of bomber gear. Pair it with *The Moon* on Yellow Wall (see below) for a memorable day out.

Benchmark

November, Cloggy, North Wales. An all-time timeless classic on a big atmospheric mountain cliff.

Pleasure Dome, Stennis Head, Pembroke South. A gentle intro leads to a vicious move or two but hang in there it eases off quickly.

Dreadnought, The Old Redoubt, Berry Head, South Devon. Multi-pitch sea-cliff adventuring at its best.

Lubyanka, Cynr Las, Llanberis Pass. Dramatic setting and technical climbing – a winning combination.

Bitter Oasis, Goat Crag, Lake District.

Nazgûl, Scafell Crag, Lakes. Fierce, sustained main pitch on a forbidding crag.

Kingpin, Church Door Buttress, Glencoe. A magnificent high mountain route.

Meaty

Eastern Hammer, Gimmer Crag, Lakes. Powerful climbing in a superb setting.

The Moon, Yellow Wall, Gogarth. Nowhere hard but three serious traverse pitches amidst the steepest cliff you can imagine.

Raven Wall, *Kafoozalem*, Bosigran, Cornwall. Sustained but with good protection.

Dream-Liberator, Great Zawn, Bosigran, Cornwall. A big, BIG tick. □

Precise footwork pays dividends as your arms begin to tire higher up the pitch.

