

Adventures on North-East Esoterica

Getting some training in for the Dolomites

By Neil McGeachy

Jonathan Stocking, recently confirmed his dominance of the competition scene in Brittan when he won both the British Bouldering Championship at the Cliffhanger venue and the British Lead Championship won at the BLCC at Ratho. Jonathan was interviewed for Sky TV so look out for it in September sometime.

Jonathan is supported this year by a MCofS Bursary to compete at British and National competitions as well as train and visit various European climbing venues.

With a visit to the Dolomites arranged Jonathan and Neil McGeachy decided to find a suitable Scottish venue to train on.

The North East Coast!



Jonny Stocking, Adam Hughes and myself are to set off on a Dolomites adventure, with the aim of ticking the classic 17 pitch E5 'The Brandler Hasse Route' on the Cima Grande. This jaw dropping line follows a steep crack and corner system up an amazing limestone pillar and was first freed by German rock star - Kurt Albert in 1987. It was also famously soloed by Alex Huber in 2002. We will most definitely be using ropes on our attempt as I tend to turn to jelly on the shortest of high ball boulder problems without a rope.

Adam has already climbed the 'Comici Route' on the same face, but Jonny and my experience of big rock routes only goes as far as trips to Gogarth and Mingulay. Not quite on the same scale!

Because of this lack of experience, Jonny and I decided that we needed to put in some extra training preparation for the big trip. With this in mind we headed to the classic north east sea cliff venue of Earnshaugh. This is a rather esoteric crag, that on first appearances looks as though it is about to fall down. Thankfully the rock quality is much better than first appearances might suggest and the crag offers a number of quality single and multi pitch lines in a steep and atmospheric setting.

We had decided that we were going to practice functioning at a level similar to that on the Brandler Hasse Route in as quick and efficient a manner as we could. So we set ourselves the target of trying to climb the the classic 3 pitch E5 lines of the crag. As we hadn't arrived at the venue until after 3pm we both agreed that even if we were tired or we were running out of light, we would still abseil in and attempt to climb all three in the one evening, or deal with the situation if we could not.

We started off with probably the most popular of the routes at the crag, the Necromancer (E5 5c, 6a, 5b). This is probably the least steep of the three routes and after a steep 5c 'jamming' pitch, you are faced with some rather thin 6a climbing on a sea-grass covered slab.

After a bit of sketching and flailing around the crux we soon found our selves sitting at the top of the crag avoiding the temptation to chill out in the sun and jumping straight back on the abseil.

Jonny had his sights on his first E5 on-sight. He was determined to attempt the crux pitch of Prehistoric Monster. A steep thuggy and yet technical 6a pitch with a huge amount of exposure. Quite a pitch to jump on for your first E5 on-sight attempt!

Things started off smoothly as I led up the initial 5b pitch and began to bring Jonny up on second. However, as he reached the belay it became apparent that he had left the guide book at the base of the crag. I then lowered him back to the base to retrieve it before attempting the crux pitch.

Again Jonny climbed the first pitch, this time with the guide book in hand and proceeded to psyche him self up for the on-sight attempt. He was looking very focussed and geared up with speed, desperate to get the attempt underway. He then chalked up and prepared himself to get stuck in.

The horror that is Earnhaugh



This build up was cut short by his useless belayer (myself), managing to drop one of his rock boots from the stance. A stupid mistake that would have much greater consequences in Italy! A rather fed up Jonny, lowered off again to collect the rock boot and climb the first pitch for a 3rd time. Finally he was ready to set off on his pitch. As always with Jonny, this went smoothly and he made the pitch look more like V diff than E5, and we soon found our selves sitting at the top of the crag, trying to avoid the temptation to chill out.

As the light was starting to run out, it seemed to take a lot more motivation to ab' straight back in this time. Yet back down we went and headed for the final of the three star classics Thugosaurus. After Jonny climbed the first pitch, which was the same as the last one, for the 4th time today - sorry dude - I set of on the middle 6a pitch which, lead to awesome steep juggy sustained climbing through a series of roofs and corners. Then Jonny quickly dispatched a steep technical fingery 6a pitch too finish. We finally got our chance to chill out at the top of the crag.

No sooner than we had pulled up the abseil rope, the realisation started to dawn that we had only climbed 9 pitches similar to the difficulties expected on the Brandler Hasse and we were both knackered. Add another 8 much longer pitches to the equation and I don't even want to imagine how we will feel.

After a short conversation it was decided that another Italy training trip was in order and we both agreed it was a good idea to head to Gogarth within the next fortnight! Bring it on!

Earnshaugh:

“The cliff is gloomy and ruinous with an air of age and decay. The rock is a cruide slaty sort and varies from downright bad to perfectly solid.

The climbs are big and serious, the exposure often dramatic”

SMC Climbers Guide

‘North East Outcrops’

Compiled by Neil Morrison

