

A rising young trad rock star

Jessica McCaskey has recently been selected to the British Youth Team for 2009; she also has a very keen and active interest in traditional adventure climbing, here's why...



Photo: Kevin Howett

Jessica on an MCoFS REALrock session in 2006

I was introduced to climbing by my parents when I was eight years old and enrolled at Alien Rock kids club in Edinburgh.

I have progressed my climbing over the last five years, competing at the Youth Climbing Series with Scotland South team, and I have also been a regular attendee over the last few years at the junior British Lead Climbing Championships achieving 8th and 6th placings respectively for 2007 and 2008.

2008 resulted in an overall 4th place at the British Youth Team trials at Ratho with an invitation to join the team as an aspirant member. I have also had successful results at Scottish Junior Finals at Extreme Dream Aviemore the last couple of years.

Over recent years I have taken a keen a very interest in trad climbing, having been introduced via MCoFS REALrock courses during 2006/07. The last year has seen a number of interesting experiences focusing on consolidating many E2s and E3s. I have learned how to set up belays including hanging belays on multi-pitch and I can safely abseil using a klemheist!

In the past year I have visited various places, a favourite being Creag Dubh: the boldness made the whole experience more exciting. One particular route that I on-sighted here was *The Hill* (E2, 5b). I found the moves ok but the gear was... well not there. The route has a peg on the crux.

Pegs usually make me feel safer but I think I could have broken that one with my hand. However, it was still a great experience.

One of the favourite places that I visited was the Etive Slabs. I led the scoop pitch on *The Hammer* (HVS) which was quite a scary experience as it was very balancy and my calves were aching. *Spartan Slab* (VS) was also an amazing route with a tricky move through the big roof.

One of the highlights of my year was climbing *Crocodile* at Aonach Dubh. I led the first pitch which I found quite bold and I also attempted the third pitch; it was great on the hanging belay at the top of the first pitch. Whilst at Aonach Dubh we also soloed up *The Long Crack* (S) on to the large terrace and then soloed *Quiver Rib* (an excellent VDiff).

Par for the course, I have taken three leader falls so far, one of them was on *Springboard Direct* (HS) at Polney, it was quite a scary fall as it was on to a blindly placed runner and it was above a slab!

Over the last couple of months I have been heading down south for slightly better weather. I've visited Bowden Doors several times (without even tying on to a rope). We soloed many routes including *Russet Groove* (VD), *Lorraine* (VS), *Tiger Wall* (VS), *Scorpion* (??) and many more. Soloing is a whole different experience as you have to concentrate much more and climb much slower.

I also just recently visited Back Bowden where I tried *Outward Bound*, a one-move wonder at a grade of E4, it was freezing and stupidly windy but I was still up for attempting it, unfortunately I failed and stopped when a knee jam I was using became too sore, however it was amazing as it was completely on-sight.

I prefer on-sighting routes as it is certainly more rewarding and I am not much for head-pointing. Sport and competition climbing are certainly good preparation and training for trad and this year I shall be focussing on trad at every opportunity.

I am of the opinion that my laid-back and relaxed approach to competition and climbing generally helps with nerves and allows me to achieve the best possible results in all disciplines.

All photos by Les McCaskey unless credited



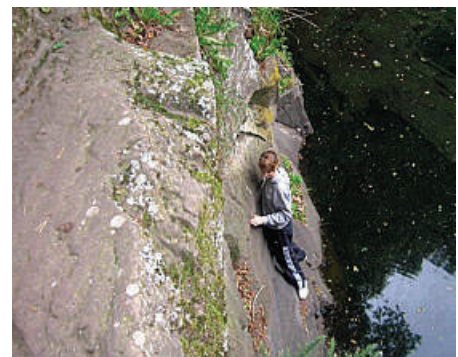
On Hammer (HVS)



Leading on Hammer scoop (HVS)



On-sighting *The Hill* (E2) at Creag Dubh



Soloing, although more risky is more rewarding



Jessica's backyard training venue