

Completing my ASBO

By Robert Mackenzie



Ruairidh Mackenzie (my dad) has a go at Sanctuary Cave!



I frequently get asked on my travels if there is any good outside climbing in Scotland. The fact is that Scotland has some of the most amazing climbing in the world. More than the entire population of Scotland could climb in a lifetime. I would choose to climb on the west coast of Scotland over any other country in the world. However one place stands out above the rest.

Tanera Beag is a small island, placed in the middle of the Scottish Summer isles, on the edge of the Minch. It is host to the most gorgeous sandstone rock formations, the most awe inspiring single pitch climbing, and the single biggest concentration of sea caves I have ever seen in one place. Stepping on to this uninhabited barren island with no people, no reception, no contact with the mainland, surrounded by amazing climbing, the select

few people that come with you and the occasional sea otter is like stepping into my idea of heaven. But there has been one goal, one mission. The line that sees you hanging from the teeth of the Sanctuary Cave a much loved hotspot for the tourist boats to view and divers to explore.

The line follows the perfect crack line, from the belay ledge on the right side of the cave. It runs back into the cave on the roof, across to the middle where the exposure of being 40ft above the water with nothing but space below you hits. The crux follows a 45 degree wall around 25ft long with horrible damp sloppers and the occasional small crimp. Oh and no gear. At the end of the crux you hit the lip of the cave and there is one bomber cam and jugs to the top. Definitely the best route I have had the pleasure of climbing.

On Thursday the 12th of August 2010 we set off in our boat to take on the cave one more time. Accompanied by good friends who swam and jumped and lazed in the sun, from the belay ledge beneath us, we put in hours of try a move, fall and swing, back up try a move, fall and swing. All with no real success.

Sunday morning was torture. Between ferrying gear and people from island to boat and from boat to mainland in thick clouds of midgets, and the thought of leaving again not having got any further on the project was just depressing. We returned to the cave around lunch time after dropping our friends off. I tried the route twice more and wasn't even getting as far as I had done the day before. I rested for an hour to film Dylan and mentally prepare myself to go and strip the gear. I was going to give it one last blast and either do it or fall and then strip the gear.

I was tired, gutted that another trip had passed. So when I got to my previous high point, still a good 15ft from the last bit of gear, and caught that next small edge it took me a second to realise that I was actually still on. Now further than I had ever got I

frantically juggled all the intermediate edges and sloppers until I had got so far away from my last bit of gear I didn't care how hard it was, there was no way I was going to fall off this far from my last gear. No thank you. As I nailed the two jugs at the end of the crux I knew it was over. The wave of relief, for not falling to my watery grave, the exhilaration of actually having achieved the goal that seemed so far away, the lovely feeling of knowing that I was now holding onto 15 years' worth of bird crap! I have never screamed for joy like I did that moment... and for the next 15 minutes that followed.

I scrambled to the top and thought as I looked out over the Summer Isles and the Minch, no longer the project, no longer a dream. I was standing on top of one of the most beautiful caves, on one of the most beautiful islands looking over one of the most beautiful views in the world. This setting for the hardest and the best route I have ever accomplished:

'ASBO' E7 6c/7a

I guess the next goal is to deep water solo the thing. If you'd like a trip out, get in touch.



See the Video at:

<http://vimeo.com/14298999>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BRLPs_qnKpM

Read regular updates on Team Mackenzie missions at:

<http://ruairidhmackenzie.blogspot.com/>