

Spain and Flashing my first F8a!

By Ross Kirkland



This year I was fortunate enough to be invited on a sport climbing trip to Spain by Neil McGeachy and spent 5 weeks climbing in the Costa Daurada area. I had climbed in Spain before when I was much younger in the Costa Blanca region so was really looking forward to climbing on some quality rock in the sun.

We stayed with friends who have moved out there, Tom Bolger, Alan Cassidy and Lynne Malcolm. Because we were there for so long I was able to climb at Margalef, Siurana, Santa Linya, Rodellar and Terradettes.

I spent the first part of the trip getting used to climbing on rock again after a winter spent training indoors and was pleased to find I was able to climb 7b/7b+ first or second go.

The first crag we visited was Rodellar; most of the climbing here is on steep ground which is not my favourite type of

climbing. However I did find a route called *Ironman 7b+/c* which I on-sighted, it was an incredible route which played to my strengths which are technical and balancy climbing on vertical or slabby routes.

I then got to watch Allan Cassidy work the 8c extension which was amazing to watch and he came very close to completing it. I learnt a lot from watching Alan and Tom Bolger climb; Tom dispatched *Aitzol 8c* at Margalef in 3 redpoint attempts, impressive!

The highlight of the trip was a visit to Football Crag at Santa Linya. This was where I tried my first ever 8a, we found a route called *Thia Dreams* a vertical crimp-fest on tiny edges and pockets, this route was a lot of fun to climb and I couldn't quite believe it when I realised I had flashed it. That was definitely the best day of the trip.



The last area we visited was Margalef which was by far the best area we went to with a huge variety of crags and style of routes and superb scenery to look at when not climbing. The visit to Margalef was near the end of the trip and the weather was getting really hot, so we could only climb in the early morning and late evening but I still managed several good routes there including *Aeroplastica 7c+*. This route didn't play to my strengths as it was very powerful so it took several days before I managed it but it was well worth it.

I also on-sited *Collons Pelats 7c* it was one of the most enjoyable routes I had climbed the whole trip as well as *Collons Plens 7b+* which was also a slabby and vertical route of the same style as *Collons Pelats*. Both routes were great fun and climbed on the last day before leaving Spain.

It was good to go home on a high, although if I had my way I would still be in Margalef climbing all the

fantastic routes there. I loved Spain and can't believe how quickly a 5 week trip passed and to top it all off the climbing was awesome.

I would like to thank the MCoFS for the funding they gave me through their climbing bursary programme, which meant I could stay for the whole five weeks and really consolidate my outdoor climbing. I more than achieved the goal I set out with, which was to climb 8a; I never thought for a moment that I would flash my first 8a. I would also like to thank Tisos for their sponsorship which meant I got a new 70 metre rope and a shiny new set of quickdraws (not so shiny now).

AND NOW:

A Few Words from Neil McGeachy about the trip

Many of the Scotland's best young climbers took time out in May to visit a variety of venues in Spain accompanied by myself and Neil Busby. Many of the kids were supported by the MCoFS Bursary and would like to thank the MCoFS for the financial support to help with funding this trip!



We stayed with ex-pats Alan Cassidy, Tom Bolger & Lynne Malcolm, all now resident in Spain. Alan is virtually the only adult Scot competing in international comps just now and received a MCoFS Bursary grant last year and Lynne became the first ever Scottish Female to red-point 8a outdoors while we were there. It could be argued that she achieved this last year when she red-pointed *Devirro Hombres* a route given 7c+ in some guides & 8a in others. However, to make sure she red-pointed the crimpy and technical *Thia Dreams* at Santa Linya after two short

sessions.

West of Scotland climbing machines, Jonathan Stocking & Paul Williamson received a guided tour of Santa Linya cave & Terradets. Both youngsters managed to tick some extremely impressive climbs, with Jonathan getting his first 8b & 8b+ red-points & Paul ticking his first 8b red-point (4th attempt!) as well as a first 8a flash. To have achieved grades like these at such a young age is nothing short of phenomenal.

Young Ross Kirkland also made the trip and stole the limelight over a few days at Santa Linya. Ross has very much found his feet on the rock now and being in the best form of his life has been setting new personal bests all over the place. He was finding things a little tricky at Rodellar due to the very steep nature of the climbing, but moving to crags of a more sustained style on less steep rock, he started to rip everything apart.

First off was a very impressive flash of *Thia Dreams* (8a). This vertical crimpfest on tiny edges and pockets is very much in his comfort zone. He cruised the route and made it look like a 5+. I can't quite believe that his first 8a was a flash; I climbed my first 8a five years ago & I am still chasing after a flash at this grade!

He then swiftly followed this up with a very good flash attempt on *Primera Linya* (8a) falling on the last move of the top crux sequence!

The last week in Spain was a touch frustrating with regards the heat. We spent a couple of days at Santa Linya cave, but were limited to climbing for a couple hours in the morning and a couple hours at night. It was just too hot for a couple of peely wally Scots. Ross spent most of these days chilling out and resting, largely down to an inability to remember his rock boots or his harness. He did however come very close to flashing the 'uber classic *Blomu* (7c) falling off attempting to rock over on to the finishing ledge to lower off!

Watch this space, as there is a lot more to come from this youngster: crimpy 8b next?

To read more about the exploits of Neil and the kids see:

www.scottishyouthclimbing.blogspot.com

<http://geekclimb.blogspot.com>