



Culver Cliff Isle of Wight

by Martin Crocker



Culver Cliff, Isle of Wight

Introduction

For most, Isle of Wight climbing equals *Skeleton Ridge*. But in the Isle's opposite, eastern corner is an enigmatic chalk alternative; Culver Cliff, useful if circumstances or a domestic holiday rule out the former. Thanks to Arkaitz Zubiete for making public the records of his explorations.

Culver Cliff rises to 80m, but only its wave-washed and surprisingly solid bottom 15 metres is of merit from a climbing perspective. The climbs here are either well-protected cracks or unprotected slabs, though with some bouldering too. Potential for bold hands remains.

Approach

Park in the large pay car-park at Yaverland, just east of Sandown. Walk eastwards along the beach on a lowering tide and proceed over tiring boulders to the crag (35 – 45 minutes).

ARCHED OVERLAPS SECTOR

The first bunch of routes takes the cliff with an arched overlap you first come to from the west; it is the least tidal of the sectors and can be climbed upon up to 2 to 2.5hrs either side of low tide. When I have visited the promised pebble beach under the boulder problems had been washed away leaving only rock, ridged and puddled. (I've no idea whether a mat was used on the bouldering first ascents, but – If by some quirk and feat of endurance you had brought one to the island and to the cliff – you'd best use it.)

1 ***Sundown Express** V0 (5a) (4.8.2008)

The break under the strip roof at 4m. Start up the scoop on the left and traverse right: sustained. Bold without a pebble beach or a roving mat.
FA Arkaitz Zubiete

2 ****Pyschovertical** V4 (6b) (28.8.2009)

Brilliant. Three metres right of the start of *Sundown'*, dyno for the obvious jug and crank up to the break. You'd best level out the irregular wave-cut platform before the launch. (A pebble beach would reduce or even obviate the dyno, leaving a much easier problem.)
FA Arkaitz Zubiete



3 ***Tiger Island** V1 (5b/c) (4.8.2008)

Start far right (just left of *Lucy*) and traverse along a slight bulge for 4m on serrated smears until decent holds lead up to the break. Bold etc..
FA Arkaitz Zubiete

4 **The Epicentre** V4 (6a/b) Top-rope (8.4.2010)

Follow *Sundown* for 3m until beneath an open V-feature in the strip roof. Stretch and snatch around and proceed to the ab' point overhead. This would be mildly tempting either as a headpoint if the pebble beach were in place or as a lead with a pre-placed warthog over the lip. FA Arkaitz Zubiete

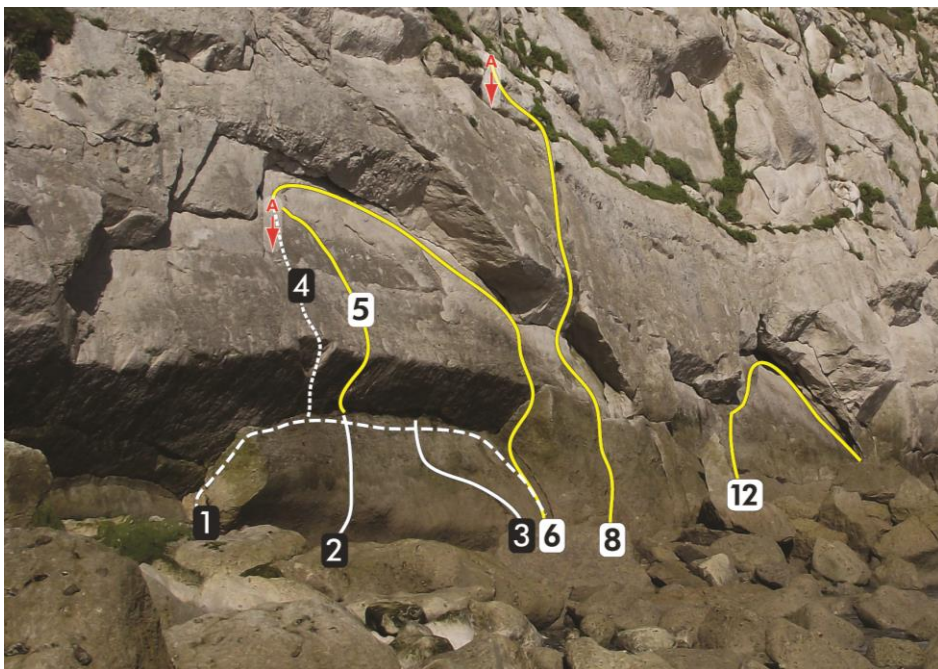
5 **The Last Time** 12m E5 6a (25.8.2021)

A committing breach of the roof; there is good-looking gear in the underside of the roof but, in *this* rock, how good is 'good'? Follow *Sundown* for 5m to a hole and huge undercut in the roof. Fix protection (I got 7 pieces in); it's your last. Reach over to flint crimps and grab a big hold. Cautiously rock over and continue to the belay point. FA Martin Crocker (led with Soloist after top-roping)

More class bouldering on this wall awaits, but you'll need a sump pump and a mat (or that elusive pebble beach).

6 ***Lucy** 18m HVS 4c (2008/ 2010)

Curiously inviting and well-protected once you overcome the tricky start (it even feels a bit 'Ruckley'). Start under a left-facing corner (end of *Sundown* traverse). Bridge up the corner, and pull up to the huge undercut arched overlap. Make a long rising traverse leftwards eventually arriving at an abseil point (dodgy stainless steel bolt and twin pegs). FA Arkaitz Zubiete



Caution: *Agroberry* belay point.

This comprises two pegs (2010, presumably) joined by rope (renewed in 2021). You are well advised to back up the belay e.g. there is a good nut placement in the crack 2m below.

7 *Sundown at Sandown 15m E3 6a (22.8.2021)

Brilliant: a safe hard route, for a change. Takes the roof left of the crack of *Agroberry*. Follow *Agroberry* to its roof. Swing left (twisted wires in pockets and Rock 1s in thin crack), stretch for a big fat pinch over the roof, and make powerful moves up the left-slanting crack to an easy slab. The *Agroberry* belay is above and right.
FA Martin Crocker (led on sight with Soloist)

8 *Agroberry 15m VS 4c (24.4.2010)

Climb up to the right of *Lucy* to a rightward-slanting crack. Pull over the roof, and follow the crack and its left-hand branch to the abseil point.
FA Arkaitz Zubiete

The following routes take the fine wall to the right, which is covered in so many crimps and pockets it could be climbed anywhere. But what it boasts in holds it lacks in protection – there isn't any, any at all. As a consequence the routes were originally top-roped before being soloed. They end on a narrow ledge which connects with the belay of *Agroberry*; a 'right-hand stance' holds a jammed nut, but ideally you'd place a peg here to safeguard your headpointing rope.



Answers, on an Oracle Bone, first ascent
Pic: Crocker coll./Connor Woods

9 *K'ung Fu-tzu 15m E2 5a (22.8.2021)

Climb a thin flake crack and step left under the slanting roof. Reach for two crimps above the roof, and pull onto the wall. Take small holds past twin flint handholds and go straight up a shallow white scoop to intersect *Agroberry* where it branches leftwards.
FA Martin Crocker (solo after top-roping)

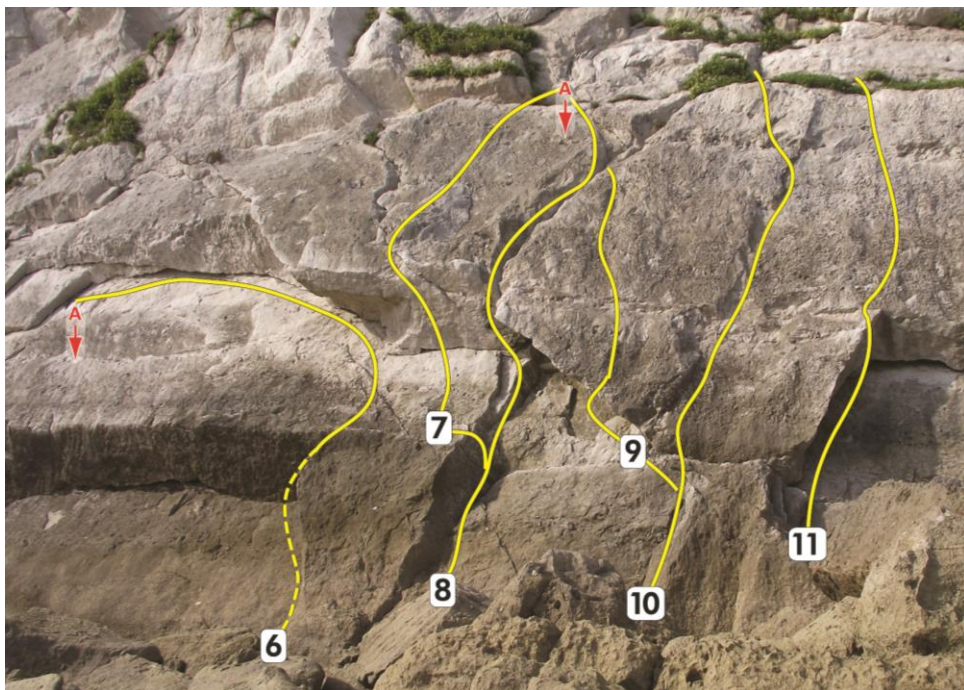
10 **Silk Road 15m E2 5a (22.8.2021)

A beautiful line; one of the best on the cliff. This is the subtle right-slanting groove. Climb the thin flake crack and the groove on myriad edges, and – near the top – take a vague flake on the left to a finishing jug and the right-hand stance.
FA Martin Crocker (solo after top-roping)

11 *Answers, on an Oracle Bone 15m E3 5b (22.8.2021)

Climb the right-facing corner and make a difficult rock-up to exit. Climb direct via a good slanting fingerhold for right hand to the

narrow ledge (the right-hand stance is 2m to the left). FA Martin Crocker (solo after top-roping).



To the right is another arched roof with another strange route: *Haiba la Hostia*. The obvious traverse-line at 3m height is *Cormorant Traverse* a delightful *V0- (4b) FA Arkaitz Zubiete 14.9.2009, which is incorporated in *Alta Via*. See pic, Page 9.

12 **Haiba la Hostia* 15m VS 4b (28.8.2009)

Weird but immense fun especially with the tide in; it traverses in either direction beneath the roof, starting and finishing at the level of the boulders. With a steady head it can be soloed (HVS) – should you wish to avoid ropework shenanigans.

FA Arkaitz Zubiete

F'IN DOG SECTOR

Right of the second arch is an extensive slab above a deep sinusoidal handrail at 4 to 5m height (*Alta Via*). All four routes are served by a range of solid nut belays on small ledges above the large roof on the left. Descent was originally made from two roped nuts and a rock-spike, and these can be readily backed-up if a piece or two of kit is sacrificed.

13 *Control Your F'in Dog!* 15m HVS 5a (24.8.2021)

Dedicated to the gormless dog owner whose minging black mutt attacked me on the walk-in. Well-protected after the steep start. Start right of the arête and take a diagonal pocket-line through *Alta Via* and up a crack to the left-hand end of the roof. Swing left and – ignoring a few loose bits – make a difficult move over the bulge to gain easier ground and the belay ledges.

FA Martin Crocker (led on sight with Soloist)

14 Culver Down Walkies 18m HVS 4c (24.8.2021)

Essentially an easier variation of the above. Follow '*F'in Dog* to the roof. Traverse right under the roof and take the groove to its right.

FA Martin Crocker (led on sight with Soloist)

15 *Queen Vic's Bathing Machine 15m E3 5b (24.8.2021)

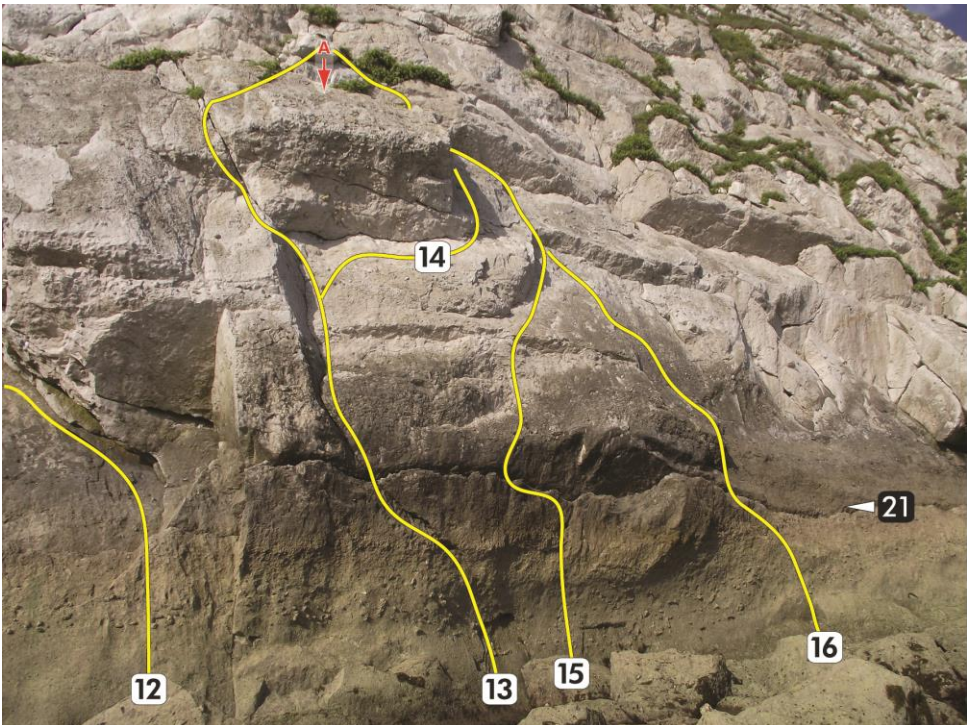
Great stuff, though protection is mostly absent. Start from a level(ish) boulder 5m right of the arête. Make a steep move into the *Alta Via* break. Swing left, reach a deep hidden pocket above, and carefully pull up onto the wall. Trend right into a shallow corner, and climb this and the flake above to a big horizontal break. Traverse left to the belay ledges.

FA Martin Crocker (solo after top-roping)

16 **Flintstones 18m E1 5a (24.8.2021)

Lovely climbing that's just about worth getting roped-up for, but only just. Start below an obvious flake above the *Alta Via* break. Gain the break and flake (gear) and step left onto the slab. Now climb up and diagonally left across the slab on flints (possible wires on the right) to gain the flake on *Queen Vic's Bathing Machine*. Finish as for that route.

FA Martin Crocker (solo after abseil inspection)





Diamond Crack; Charley Barker & Connor Woods climbing

DIAMOND CRACK SECTOR

Further right is a prominent left-facing crack and groove. Descent from *Diamond Crack* and the routes to the right is from a choice of abseil points on the line of ledges. The original abseil point is fixed around the top of a detached sitting block: NOT RECOMMENDED. A safer solution is to leave a long sling on the large but blunt spike at the top of *Diamond Crack*; it's solid but you will need to abseil carefully. A further alternative is to traverse right along the ledges (*Ammonium Traverse*, Diff; Arkaitz Zubiete, 1.3.2020) and reverse *Seagulls Way*, Diff.

17 ***Diamond Crack** 12m S 4a (1.3.2010)

Very pleasant. Follow the crack and groove, swinging out right at the top to ledges and miscellaneous belays. **Variation:** Climb the steep crack in the right wall of the groove at VS 4b. FA Arkaitz Zubiete

18 ***Storm Ellen** 12m E1 5a (20.8.2020)

Great holds – once you reach them. No gear, except for a nut runner near the top. Start as for *Diamond Crack*. Take the open V-groove, pulling out right onto a slabby wall. Grope for huge holds above a bulge (the solitary nut) and pull up to ledges and the abseil points. FA Martin Crocker (solo)

19 ***Storm Francis** 12m HVS 4c (20.8.2020)

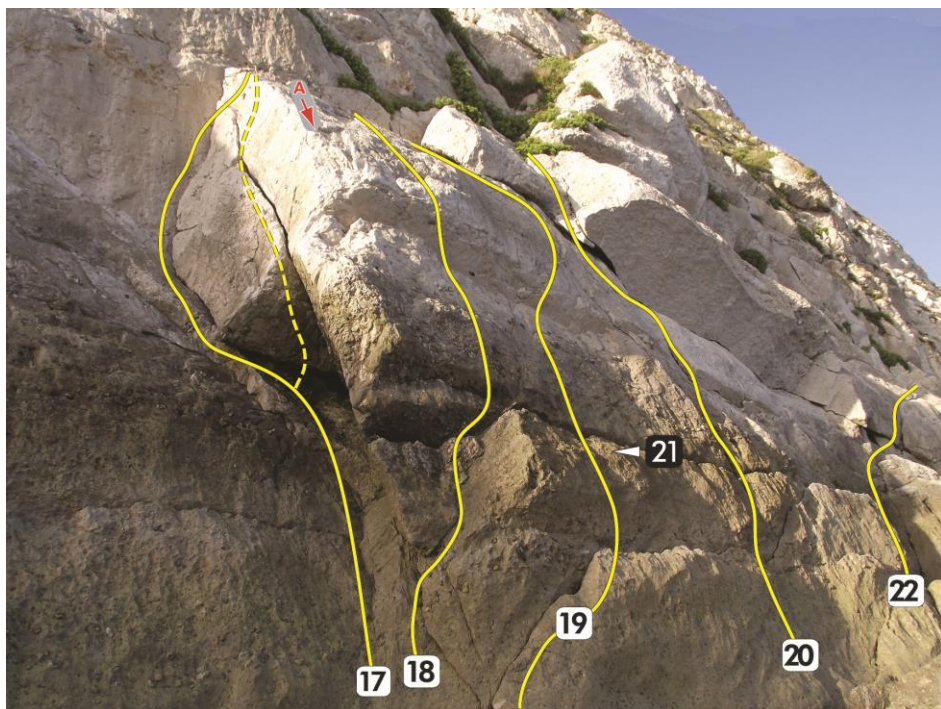
The beautiful slab right of *Diamond Crack*. Some gear may be possible in the pockets in the upper slab. Climb the slabby wall and then follow the rightward-slanting crack and pockets to the exit of *Heron Crack*. FA Martin Crocker (solo)

I don't know how the above two relate to *Action Jackson*, which is graded '6a' – presumably a top-rope? (FA Arkaitz Zubiete, 8.4.2010). There isn't the difficulty here either for a F6a let alone a font 6a, though I note that many of the routes here were somewhat overgraded.

20 ***Heron Crack** 12m HVS 5a (1.3.2010)

The block forming the off-width has been consumed by the ocean. A thin crack in its place leads to some undercutting left along a flared crack to an exit needing care. FA Arkaitz Zubiete, at E1 5a. Reclimbed at HVS 5a by Martin Crocker (solo) 20.8.2020

21 ****Alta Via** V2 (5c) 80m (approx.) A long and high bouldering traverse with a few testing bits (including the crux) positioned above leg-breaker boulders. A jug-line at 4m to 5m runs all the way from *Heron Crack* to join up with the eastern end of *Sundown Express*. Take special care on the overhanging section where hand-jugs fizzle to crimps and footholds become scarce (feels E3!). Conclude with *Sundown Express*. Quite tiring, especially for the soul. FA Martin Crocker (on-sight solo)



GANET CRACK SECTOR

The next prominent feature is the crack and groove of *Ganet Crack*.

22 **Seagulls' Way** 15m Diff (1.3.2010)

Follow cracks and a ramp diagonally right to the top of *Ganet Crack*: a useful and straightforward descent route too.

FA Arkaitz Zubiete

23 ***Ganet Crack** 12m HS 4a (1.3.2010)

Start on highly tidal seaweed boulders and follow the cracks in an open groove past a rock-bridge to the top. Very protectable.

FA Arkaitz Zubiete

Right of *Ganet Crack* (HS 4a) is a delicious long slab that extends all the way to *Cormorant Crack*: the following routes represent only a slice of the potential but perhaps the tastiest. The rock has the texture of a translucent polymer and while mostly solid it offers very little protection. Come at low tide; you might enjoy one and a half to two hours of on-sight soloing either side of spring low tide, assuming calm seas. There is a thin ledge system all the way along the top of the slab and – as an alternative to abseiling – you could reverse the ramp and crack of *Seagulls' Way* – and this takes you to less tidal ground to the west.

24 **There's a Sprat in My Ear** 12m HVS 5a (22.8.2020)

Something of an eliminate (given the next route) but elegantly positioned. Pull steeply up the arête and follow its edge eventually joining up with *There's some Crab on Your Nose*. No gear unless you side-runner *There's some Crab on Your Nose*, which is a reasonable solution.

FA Martin Crocker (on-sight solo; the sprat jumped out, scared)

25 ***There's some Crab on Your Nose** 12m S 4a (22.8.2020)

Follow the attractive leftward-slanting crack to the top of the arête, packing in as much gear as you like.

FA Martin Crocker (on-sight solo), though it is hard to believe it hasn't been done before.

26 ****Hnefatafl** 12m E1 5a (22.8.2020)

Pristine, but there isn't any gear (apart from the *possibility* of a wire runner near the top). Start 3m right of the arête and climb straight up the open slab to finish between two thin cracks.

FA Martin Crocker (on-sight solo)

27 **Isabella's Window** 12m S 4a (22.8.2020)

Start about 6m right of the arête and climb up to gain a major rightward-slanting flake: climb the flake to the top. Only tricky at the bottom where protection is absent. With a methodical and careful touch it can also be used as a descent.

FA Martin Crocker (on-sight solo)

28 **We Should Have Been on Brittany Ferries!** 12m VD (22.8.2020)

Search out and link thin flakes in the centre of the slab. (There seem to be lots of possibilities for similar routes to either side.) In the evenings you can see the ferry, Portsmouth-bound.

FA Martin Crocker (on-sight solo)

29 ***Practice Makes Imperfect** 12m HVS 4c (22.8.2020)

Gorgeous porcelain rock. Six metres left of *Cormorant Crack* is a steepening open scoop. Climb to the scoop and work directly up it on improving fingerholds to the ledge (no escaping left!) No protection so no falling off.

FA Martin Crocker (on-sight solo)

30 ***Cormorant Crack** 12m S 4a (1.3.2010)

Take the crack on the far right, which is much easier than it looks. Trend left from the chimney feature to the long ledge.

FA Arkaitz Zubiete

31 **Culver Traverse**

This is the 200m coasteering traverse between Whitecliffe Bay and Yaverland beach; no further tangible details available. It looks highly tidal and sea-conditions dependent, and it could involve some deep/shallow water soloing. Mind you don't provoke a rescue call-out.

Proviso

In the little space that remains, let me express my apologies for any routes claimed here that have been climbed before. The topo can be re-issued without too much trouble. And it does seem probable that there will be other unrecorded or unpublicised routes on the cliff.

