

High Cliff climbs, Clevedon
by Martin Crocker

High Cliff climbs

A guide to the climbs of High Cliff, Clevedon, North Somerset (OS ref. 403722)

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Front cover: Ian Parsons enjoying a turbulent journey on *Sac Mal de Mer*.

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High Cliff climbs is one in a series of free guidebooks to the climbs and bouldering of the cliffs of the North Somerset coast. The aims of this series are to make available for public use details of some activists' explorations and to use this opportunity to raise money for a proven good cause. The guidebooks are *not* definitive records of the climbs since legitimate access to, and use of, sources of information outwith the public domain is not always available. The author expresses his apologies, therefore, for any omissions; and he would be happy to receive details of same, so a wider record of the climbing and – importantly – its correct history can evolve.

Abbreviations Used		Grades	
BMC	British Mountaineering Council	D	Difficult
ASSAR	Avon & Somerset Search And Rescue	VD	Very Difficult
RoW	right of way	S	Severe
m	metre	HS	Hard Severe
km	kilometre	VS	Very Severe
FA	first ascent	HVS	Hard Very Severe
Soloist	A self-belay device that enables ground-up lead-climbing without a partner	E1 – E7	Extreme
BR/BB	Bolt runner/bolt belay	F	Sport grade
		V	Bouldering grade

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CRAG CODE
www.thebmc.co.uk

Access	Check the Regional Access Database (RAD) on www.thebmc.co.uk for the latest access information
Parking	Park carefully – avoid gateways and driveways
Footpaths	Keep to established paths – leave gates as you find them
Risk	Climbing can be dangerous – accept the risks and be aware of other people around you
Respect	Groups and individuals – respect the rock, local climbing ethics and other people
Wildlife	Do not disturb livestock, wildlife or cliff vegetation; respect seasonal bird nesting restrictions
Dogs	Keep dogs under control at all times; don't let your dog chase sheep or disturb wildlife
Litter	'Leave no trace' – take all litter home with you
Toilets	Don't make a mess – bury your waste
Economy	Do everything you can to support the rural economy – shop locally

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Acknowledgement

My thanks to Ian Parsons for checking the original hyphen-crazy guidebook draft and for firing my way the odd social media reality check. Whether he would wish his name to be visibly attached to this publication is quite another matter.

High Cliff, Clevedon, North Somerset

I checked this place out many moons before the routes materialized. Reluctantly I concluded bolts were needed so eventually I brought along sportster Gordon (Jenkin), knowing that he would be suitably impressed. He said: 'This is probably one of the worst crags I've been to; no, I'll rephrase that – it's the worst'. But I'd long got used to his brusque analyses, always best tackled with a bias-busting counter-attack: 'but what about all that collapsing rubble in the Wye Valley you climb on Gord?' Anyway, he allowed himself to stay long enough to set up one route with big bolts nice and close together.

The Crag

Sounds magnificent, I know, but the 'high' in High Cliff is a misnomer unless you are a boulderer and unaccustomed to the dizzy heights of 8 metres. This is a modest sea cliff of gritty and abrasive sandstone, north of Clevedon, with an uplifting outlook towards 'The Most Beautiful Pier in England' (Sir John Betjeman) – Clevedon Pier. One of its values is that it mostly faces westwards and is very quick to dry, especially when compared to the weeping forlorn of nearby Ladye Bay sport routes. A Brucie Bonus is that the climbs here are unaffected by the sea except at spring high tides in rough conditions (access along the cliff-base is then precluded an hour or so either side of high tide).

Approach and Layout

Park anywhere legal along the B3124 coast road north east of Clevedon Pier. When opposite the Catholic Church (250m from the pier) locate a tarmacked RoW to seaward (this is the southwest end of the Clevedon to Portishead coast path, a very fine ramble). Follow the path for 150m to a stile on the left. Descend the short path and dressed stone steps to the foreshore; you're at The Steps Area. For the Main Crag, boulder-hop 150m rightwards (facing in) – possible at all but the highest spring tides. You can also approach the crag from the Ladye Bay car-park by walking southwestwards along the coast path.

Ethics

As at Ladye Bay bolts seem to have found a place here since natural protection is very limited. However there are a few very respectable trad routes that follow easy-to-protect cracks. There is some interesting bouldering too (mat advised as it's all rather highball).

Caution: fixed gear

All the bolts are stainless steel, though of mixed spec. Most bolts are (according to the manufacturers) '10mm Power Bolt anchors' which rely on the expansion of a cone to ensure embedment. A number of the routes are protected by 10mm or 12mm stainless steel glue-ins. All bolts date from the first ascents.

No fixed gear is completely trustworthy. In line with the BMC Participation Statement you must realise that it is your decision and yours alone if you choose to use the bolts.

History

The first ascent details are the record of the history; there's not much else to report, unless some genie from the 60s who bouldered out all the routes without any bloody bolts is holding back.

THE CLIMBS

The Steps Area

Some huge boulders (actually collapsed parts of the crag) and a low edge provide some interesting problems; the section left of The Balcony comprises the best quality rock here.

Immediately left of the steps is a projecting and undercut shelf, The Balcony. There is a single BB on the shelf; you should back this up with a rope from the tree on the slope above. This clutch of routes is described from right to left.

1 **Hueco Inferior** 6m F6c (4.11.2006) [1BR]

The right-hand side of The Balcony, via good pockets on the lip. (Stick-clip/spotters advised.)
FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)



2 ***Hueco Superior** 6m F7a (4.11.2006) [2BR]

A quality roofing job. Undercut the mega-hueco beneath the left side of the roof; stretch around the lip, control the swing and lock for better holds. (The first bolt is clippable from the adjacent boulder.) Only F6c if you miss out the roof by using the boulder. FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)

3 **Towering Damp Squid** 6m HVS 4c (9.11.2006)

Step off the large flat boulder left of The Balcony and take the face a metre right of the corner-crack via a helpful pocket high right.
FA: Martin Crocker (solo)

The next five routes all share the same straightforward exit which has a good tree as a handhold. Some of the 'landings' hereabouts are atrocious and – if you must lose control – jump rather than fall! Grades assume that bouldering mats are not used, as per the first ascents (but please don't take this as advice not to bring one!).

4 **Tales from the Crypt** 6m HVS 4c (9.11.2006)

The corner-crack above a ghastly coffin-like rift.
FA: Martin Crocker (solo)

5 **Early Grave** 6m E1 5a (9.11.2006)

Still above the coffin-like rift, pull up onto the pocketed face a metre left of *Tales from the Crypt*, and bear left to the common exit.
FA: Martin Crocker (solo)

6 **Gravelly Early** 5m E2 5c (9.11.2006)

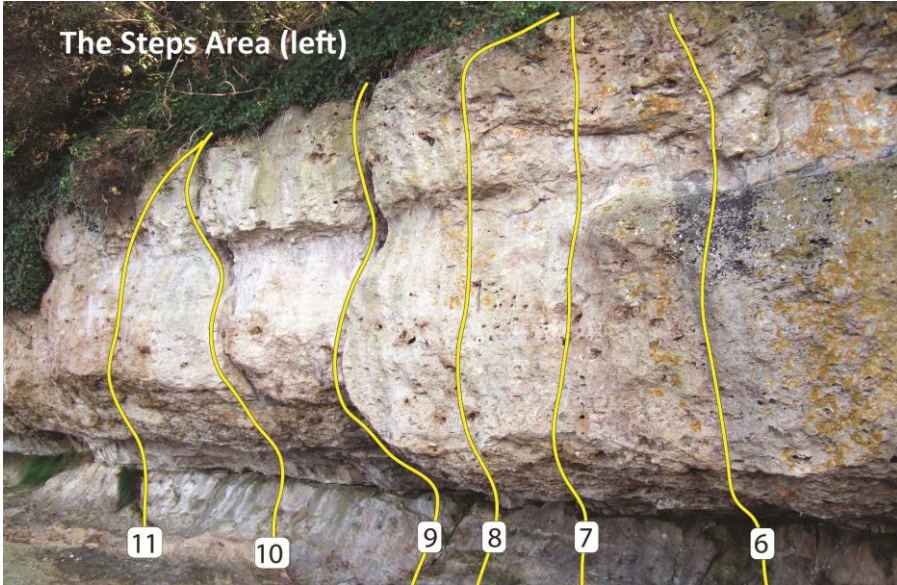
Follow the grey streak 2m left of the corner-crack and stretch past a rounded shelf for a finger-pocket. Pull up to the exit.

FA: Martin Crocker (solo after top-roping)

7 **Precision Jump** 5m E3 6a (9.11.2006)

Above a narrowing in the rift, use pockets to pull into a vague groove. Make a very hard move up past the left end of the rounded shelf to the jug-line at the top. Serious.

FA: Martin Crocker (solo after top-roping)



To the left above a sloping shelf are two cracks.

8 **Victorians Invented the Thread** 5m E1 5c (9.11.2006)

Climb the face right of the right-hand crack past a wire thread for antiquarians to a pocket. From the jug-line above swing right to the exit. A flattish landing.

FA: Martin Crocker (solo)

9 **Right-wing Extremist** 5m HVS 5c (9.11.2006)

Muscle up the right-hand crack, and pull out on a pre-placed sling. Perfectly protectable with wires; though the landing is flat – provided you don't bounce down a further 3m.

FA: Martin Crocker (solo)

10 **Left-wing Extremist** 5m E1 6a (9.11.2006)

Muscle up the left-hand crack, and pull out on a pre-placed sling. The hard start is protectable.

FA: Martin Crocker (solo)

11 **The Extreme Left** 5m E2 6a (9.11.2006)

Make a powerful move over the bulge left of *Left-wing Extremist*, and swing right to its exit.

FA: Martin Crocker (solo)

The remaining routes are described from left to right (i.e. southwestwards from the steps).

Startled Fisherman's Boulder

Yes; I frightened him to death one day when I scuttled out from behind it. This is the 6m high boulder immediately west of the steps. There is one bolt route (of sorts) and two problems, but the potential for more (without bolts) is limited by soft rock and a hostile landing.

12 **No Sushi** 6m F6c [3BR] (10.2006)

Take pockets up the centre of the front face of the boulder and mantel out; 3 bolt holes (12mm x 150mm) into which 'glue-in' bolts were poked in on lead and removed – Rowland Edwards style.
FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)

13 **Startled Fisherman's Arête** 6m E4 5c (19.10.2006)

The acute, if not cute, right arête of the boulder. Start on pockets, and finish thankfully using a pothole over the top. Scary canary.
FA: Martin Crocker (solo)

14 **Startled Fisherman's Wall** V3 (6a) (19.10.2006)

Make the first two moves up the arête, finger traverse a knobbly crease in the right wall, and pull up to pockets and the top. Don't mantel out onto the soft top (and die), but step up right onto a conjoined boulder to escape. The ground rises in steps in tandem with the route, so no E grade.
FA: Martin Crocker (solo)



Right again is a similar boulder; the same constraints apply.

15 **Radioactive Octopus** 6m F6c [2BR] (10.2006)

A tricky problem; pull past a shelf in the centre of the boulder, and make an entertaining move onto the slab; 2 bolt holes (dimensions *ditto No Sushi*).
FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)

16 **Fish Your Price** V0 (5a) (19.10.2006)

Udge into a crack and pull over the bulge on a good sidehold.
FA: Martin Crocker (solo)

Stretching leftwards from the main crag is a jutting roof which is topped by a blackthorn cornice and split centrally by an unmistakable crack.

17 Soft on the Inside 5m F7a/7a+ [2BR] (10.2006)

Desperately take on the roof left of the crack on hard-to-connect pockets. BB.

FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)

18 Unmistakable 5m E3 6a (10.2006)

Battle up the crack while flinging in as much gear as possible. Belay on flimsy multiple blackthorns; then walk right to the BB of the next route and its abseil descent.

FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)

Right of the jutting roof is a deep recessed crack above a pedestal.

19 Lay Luddite Lay 6m F7a+ (7.10.2006) [3BR]

High tech play on the white wall left of the crack, where an undercut below a bulge is the key. BB.

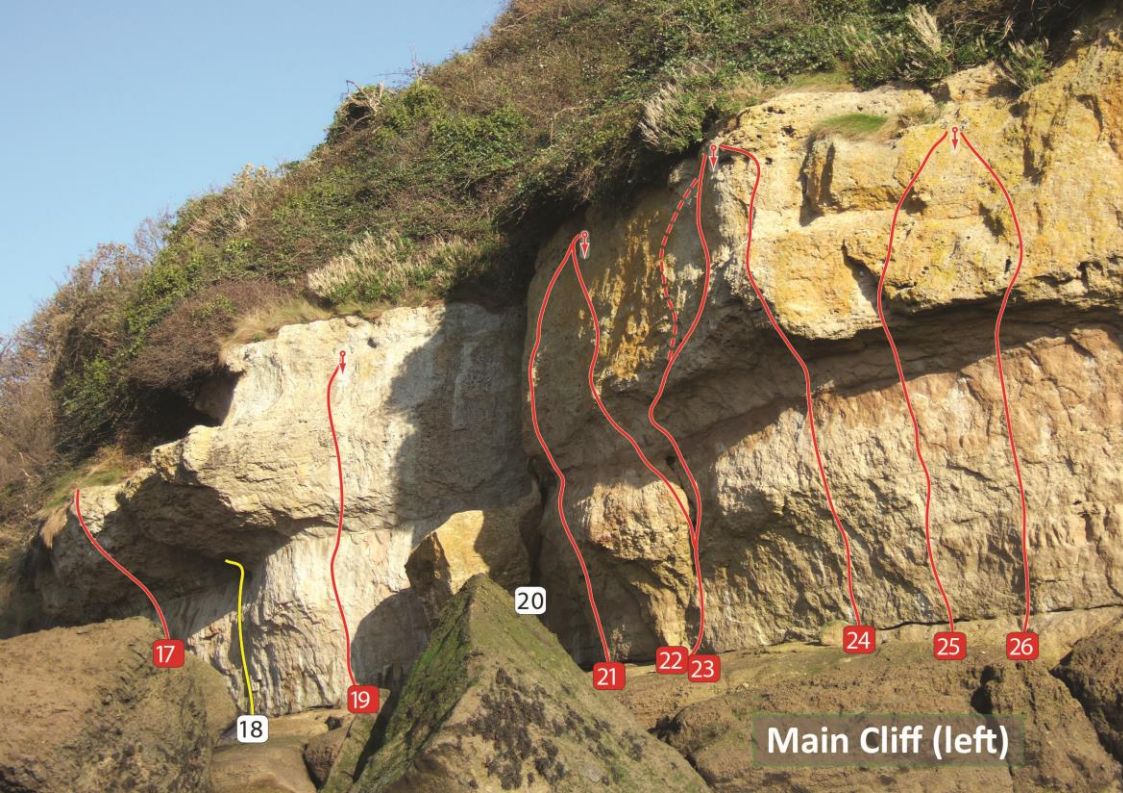
FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)

20 Blackthorn & Bramble Pie 6m S 4a (3.10.2006)

The deep crack with a useful chockstone: this was the trailblazer that fought through assorted prickles to prepare the sport routes. Reverse; or abseil off the beefiest blackthorn (not bramble).

FA: Martin Crocker (on-sight solo with loppers)





Main Crag

Above the sloping platform at the left-hand end of the main crag is a rectangular orange wall, which is quite a neat feature.

21 ***How to Survive an Air Crash** 6m F6c (3.10.2006) [2BR]

Sustained moves up the right-hand side of the left arête of the wall. Pre-clip bolt 1 from the boulder on the left. BB.

FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)

22 ***Exit Strategy** 6m F6c+ (3.10.2006) [2BR]

Big wingspan helpful. From a large pocket, link small well-separated pockets on the face above, reaching left to the BB. (Note that one of the bolt hangers spins.)

FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)

23 **All in All** 6m F6c (3.10.2006) [2BR]

From the large pocket, stretch up right for good holds above a bulge. Reach a brick in the wall and swing right and up a rib to a BB.

FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)

Variation: F7a. Instead of swinging right, from the brick make a humongous rock-up on the face.

FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist); 8.9.2008

24 Back-down-Whip-lash 6m F6c+ (3.10.2006) [2BR]

Start under a small overhang in a blunt rib. An all-out crank from a small edge (there used to be a better one!) gains an undercut beneath the overhang. Better holds above gain the BB.

FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist) *A first attempt – ropeless, boltless, and matless – ended when the initial finger-flake sheared off. Arthritis to the injured knee set in 10 years later.*

25 Airbust 6m F6c+ (7.10.2006) [2BR]

Reach pockets next to a hanging flake with a very bouldery move (V4). Layback up the flake and step right to a BB.

FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)

26 *Fearless – The Movie 6m F7a+ (7.10.2006) [2BR]

Pull fiercely on a finger-flake to gain a pocket in the lip of the bulge (V5). Grasp more pockets up left; then rock up to the shared BB.

FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)

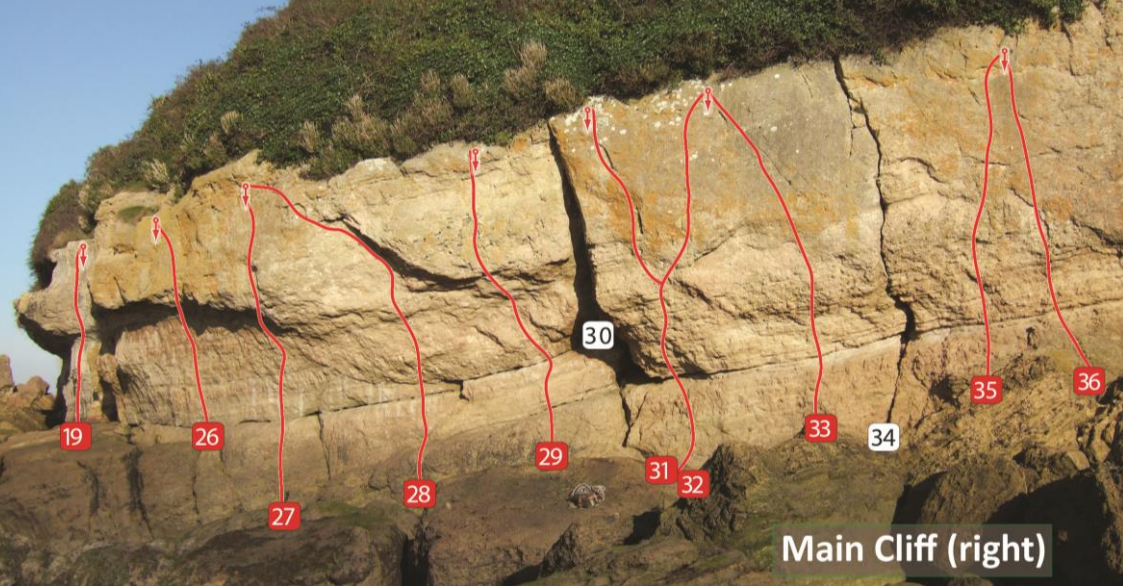
27 ** Stucco 7m F7b+ (20.10.2006) [3BR]

The best route on the crag? It takes the hanging rib where the wall changes angle. Make a baffling move to initiate the link-up between pockets in the rib: not all are good. A final trick move gains the BB slightly left. The low alloy bolt serves merely to keep the rope out of your feet. Stick-clip bolt 2.

FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist) *The moves were too dynamic to pull the rope through the Soloist; a big fall came with each mess-up.*



Above: Ian Parsons on *Shrinking Crag Syndrome* (F6b)



In the main wall (facing Clevedon Pier) are two cracks; the left-hand crack is the off-width of *For Brown and Whillans* and the right-hand crack the on-width of *'I'll Pass'*.

28 Sac Mal de Mer 9m F7b (8.10.2006) [4BR]

The hanging leftward-slanting flake crack – if you can gain it! Extend for and lock a sickening crimp, so entering the flake line. Follow the flake much more easily to a BB around the rib. (F6b+ with bolt 1 for aid.)

FA: Martin Crocker, John Harwood

29 Aerophobe 7m F7b (27.10.2006) [3BR]

Make a heinous move to a pebbly pinch on the lip of the bulge left of the off-width. Hang it; then use pockets above and left to saunter to a BB.

FA: Martin Crocker (unseconded)

30 *For Brown and Whillans 7m E2 5b (27.10.2006)

The off-width is like a friendly well-protected *Right Eliminate* or *Goliath*, and (if your cup of tea) one of the most enjoyable routes here. From a small cave, squeeze up the crack to the top; then reach left for the BB of the previous route.

FA: Martin Crocker (on sight; unseconded)

31 My Sweet Gord 8m F7a (14.9.2008) [4BR]

An engaging eliminate. Climb over the gritty bulge right of the off-width to gain finger-pockets. Reach another pocket up left and (keeping your feet *right* of the off-width) stretch for a sloper, therefore acquiring better crimps above. BB.

FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)

32 *Roughcast 8m F6c+ (17.6.2006) [3BR]

Top drawer; a few beautiful holds make this a good route – honest. Climb over the grotty gritty bulge right of the off-width and start a pocket-sequence to gain the obvious finger-flake on the right. Rock up and progress to a BB.

FA: Martin Crocker (unseconded)

33 **Italian Girl in Algiers** 8m F7a+ (17.6.2006) [3BR]

Crimp the wall left of the on-width with a perplexing move. Trend left to the shared BB.

FA: Martin Crocker (unseconded)

34 **'I'll Pass'** 8m HVS 5a (17.6.2006)

Jam the on-width with its generous serving of pain. **Single** BB, or traverse right to the BB of the next route (and therefore extend the route to a mammoth 11m!).

FA: Martin Crocker (on sight). *After witnessing the agony, Jenkin resisted all pleas to follow.*

35 **Big in the City** 9m F6b+ (8.9.2008) [4BR]

Cashes in on GAJ's investment in the next route. Climb the face 1.5m left of *Shrinking Crag Syndrome*, clipping its bolts. A hard start, but delicate moves seal the deal.

FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)

36 **Shrinking Crag Syndrome** 9m F6b (17.6.2006) [4BR]

More testing than it looks, but it's the only sport warm-up here. Climb the face 2m right of the on-width to a BB. There's a fab thread runner near the base too (if required).

FA: Gordon Jenkin, Martin Crocker

37 **Whiskas** 40m E3 5c (2.1.2007) [many BRs]

It had to be born: an eccentric girdle of the main crag just below its blackthorn hairpiece. Mostly bolt-protected, though with a few 3m 'run-outs'. Take some medium to large wires to supplement the bolts and plenty of slings if you're leading in one pitch. Climb *Shrinking Crag Syndrome*; then traverse left from its belay to the top of the crack of *'I'll Pass'*. A nimble section at a slightly lower level than the *Italian Girl in Algiers* belay gains the off-width. Continue using the handrail under the blackthorn until a bold step leads to the belay of *Stucco* (possible belay). Continue to the next arête (belay of *All in All*), and make a final technical traverse to the left arête; lower-off the BB of *How to Survive an Air Crash*. Belay your partner and get comfortable for the in-flight entertainment.

FA: Martin Crocker, Ian Parsons

