



Poets' Walk climbs
by Martin Crocker

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A Guide to the Climbs of Poets' Walk, Clevedon, North Somerset (OS Ref. 390707)

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Front cover: *Xscream* (E1) Pic: Jonathan Crocker

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Poets' Walk 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.

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BMC		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		
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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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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
S1 – S3	Deep water soloing grade	F	Sport grade

History

The first ascent details constitute the basis of much of Poets' Walk known climbing history. In the early 80s Nigel Gifford, the editor of the short-lived newspaper for climbers *Mountain World* ('Mountain Worms' according to competitor *Crags*), coasted the whole of the headland – presumably not at low tide! Others must have scrambled beneath the cliff too as did Martin Crocker in the mid-80s, but he got covered in mud when he should have been at work. Crocker left it 20 years before taking a second look and getting stuck in with Soloist, waterwings, and fellow esoteria-tolerant climbing partners Nigel Coe and Ian Parsons. Potential remains, especially in the lower grades (which may even have been realised and put 'out there' already).



*Gasping for air, from Bristol 's towering powers,
off to Poets' Walk, gliding through flowers
where angry bumblebees, young on the wing
declare it's war, but no joy of spring.
Two bees latch fast, 'damn they got me',
furious at being displaced, from their afternoon tea.*

*Forgot the blackthorn, arrived in silly shorts.
I balance on the thicket to the cliff-edge, of sorts.
Tiptoeing nimbly like on slate, 'It's working' I declare
as smugly I make progress, but unaware,
the mesh is to snap, and I plummet deep inside
a pincushion of spikes, venting my pride.*

*Churning an escape, I emerge a sorry bloody thing;
legs in shreds, heart missing beats: it was the sting.
The charm of Poets and gentlemanly days out!*

Poets' Walk sea cliff forms the seaward, northwest-facing side of the headland named Poets' Walk after poets Coleridge, Thackeray, and Tennyson who enjoyed its relaxing strolls and views while staying in Clevedon. All the established climbing described in this guide is situated at the far, southwest end of the headland. The rock is Carboniferous Limestone and – while weak and hollow-feeling in places – it's no worse than much of that of Brean Down, and the climbing is equally interesting. Poets' Walk is owned by North Somerset Council. The site is a Local Nature Reserve.

The routes have seen very little traffic, the protection is often poor, and the climbing is serious.

The cliff comes into the sun from around mid-afternoon and is unaffected by seepage – both factors being of real benefit in winter. Access is not possible two and a half hours either side of high tide. Once in though, during neap tides climbing can progress from ledges that stay largely unaffected by the sea (rough seas are a different matter however). In any event keep a wary eye on our lightning fast Bristol Channel tides. If you get it wrong or you're losing light, you can traverse back out westwards a metre or two above the sea (V Diff to 5a) or top out (*Emergent Sea* is a possibility).

For the deep water soloist Poets' Walk provides the best of the limited deep water soloing available locally. But you should not just launch out into danger. Instead, get tuned into tides, sea conditions, and develop an intimate knowledge of the cliff's topography so you know whether you'll have 3m of water free of obstructions beneath you or 3cm. Don't fall for the forked tongues of 'purists' (who have more skeletons in their cupboard than Dr Crippen); it is perfectly reasonable for you to take steps to look after yourself – your adventure will not be compromised.

Ethics

Poets' Walk sea cliff is trad and bolt-free. As a first ascensionist my strong preference is that it remains so (but with bolt belays placed beneath the cliff-top so the routes are sustainable; see below). However, for reference purposes, I would understand if at some stage in the future climbers decide to convert it into a predominantly sport climbing cliff. If this transpired it is important that the protectable cracks are not bolted and that the cliff's history is maintained (by resisting the mindset of retrobolting and renaming routes to contrive to fracture individual endeavour from the climbs). This statement may appear at loggerheads with my stance on retrobolting, but here are the reasons. First, much of the top 3m or 4m of the cliff are extremely loose (lowering using ropes creates a major rockfall hazard); second, there is the blackthorn barrier at the cliff-top; and, third, the gear on most routes is often hard to spot and highly placement-specific making on-sighting anything above E2 nastier than even at Symond's Yat. I've appended speculative French sport grades (in brackets) just in case. Playing devil's advocate I tabled this *notion* (rather than motion) for discussion at the BMCSW Area c.2004/5 which neither approved nor disapproved. Anyway I hope this note will help in the future; Poets' Walk is an atmospheric place to climb – Portland's delinquent kid brother even – and I'm confident future generations will enjoy it in some guise or other.

Caution: Fixed Gear

There is little *in-situ* gear on the cliffs, but what there is must be treated with the utmost caution. The small number of pegs and threads date from the first ascents and have been subject to a battering by wind and sea ever since. **Assume the fixed gear is unreliable and in need of replacement.**

Approach

When approaching from the M5 Junction 20, turn left at the first roundabout into Central Way, and follow this 'ring road' through a second roundabout (supermarket on right) into Southern Way (always following signs to the 'sea front'). Three hundred metres from the coast (and 100m before a playground) take a left turn into Old Church Road and park on the right 50m or so before a metal gate across the road near its end. From the parking walk a short way along the road past the gate; then take the tarmac footpath up onto the headland, weaving between dogs-doings. Three hundred metres from the road a fence appears alongside the path; a faint path branches left here to the top of a gently angled ramp rock ramp leading to the foreshore. Take slippery seaweed-covered boulders and mud-gorged pebbles northeastwards under the cliff to the routes. In calm conditions the courageous can solo in during neap high tide to the ledges below *A Living Flash of Light*; the grade is anything between V Diff and 5a, depending on the height of the sea. But don't fall in!

THE CLIMBS

Approximately 200m left (east) of the way down are two distinctive cracks just before the cliff-line turns a slight bend. The left-hand crack (*Xscream*) cuts diagonally rightwards. Left again is a bulging buttress that contains the first two routes; they start at a small recess 3m left of *Xscream*.

1 **Howler** 15m E4 6a (F6c) (21.3.2004)

Climb easy pink rock on the left of the recess and pull up onto a large flat handhold under a roof. Stretch around the widest part of the roof and then swing left (peg) onto the face. Widely spaced jugs (peg) lead up to a foot-ledge. Needs a belay/lower-off rope.

FA: Martin Crocker, John Harwood

2 **Tempest** 15m E2 5b (F6a) (21.3.2004)

Climb easy rock above the recess onto a slight rib left of the left-hand crack. Bear leftwards across steep rock into a niche. Pull up to the *Howler* foot-ledge. Needs a belay/lower-off rope.

FA: Martin Crocker, John Harwood

It is easy to pre-fix a rope on a stout fir tree above a bramble patch 15m back from the cliff-edge to lower from the next four climbs. You could use it to abseil in too (after checking the sea state!).

3 **Xscream** 18m E1 5b (16.10.2003)

Take a vertical crack to join the diagonal one beneath a steepening. Follow the crack rightwards to its close. Adequately protected; no need to bolt this one, though it needs a belay/lower-off rope.
FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)

4 ***Hexdream** 15m HVS 5a (16.10.2003)

Climb the right-hand crack and groove, which start life as a wide crack. Very protectable; no case to bolt this one either, though it needs a belay/lower-off rope.
FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)

Right of the two cracks is a fine wall of overlaps. Starting 2m right of *Hexdream* is a F6c+ deep water solo up its left arête (2010), (Route '5' on the topo). Its description drifted off somewhere.

When clean there is a possible exit to the cliff-top for routes 6 to 9, which was once-well-used for the deep water solos including *Extraordinary Lives of Ordinary People*.

6 **Extreme Irony** 15m E4 6a (F6c) (16.10.2003)

A strenuous and quality lead up the 'wall of overlaps'; that's a bummer because protection is abysmal. Start 3m right of *Xscream*. Using the obvious undercut below the first roof, crimp blindly up to a positive finger-edge on the lip of a higher fawn-coloured roof. A committing sequence gains large holds. Finish up a short groove and to the top if clean. Ideally needs a belay/lower-off rope.
FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist; deep water soloed, 2010)

7 **Extreme Pointlessness** 15m E3 5c (F6b) (16.10.2003)

Good but not very safe to lead. Climb a short mossy corner 4m right of *Hexdream* (or flat hand-edges to its right) and climb a little rib and overhang with difficulty using a few rattling holds. Move up and left to join the finish of the preceding route. Ideally needs a belay/lower-off rope.
FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist; deep water soloed, 2010)

8 **Fata Morgana** 15m F6c+ (S2) (2010)

A fierce deep water solo. Start 4m left of the broken crack and groove of *Emergent Sea*. Climb easily; then make a very hard fingery sequence using layaways and an obvious triangular projection. Enter a short left-facing corner; then traverse left onto the preceding routes.

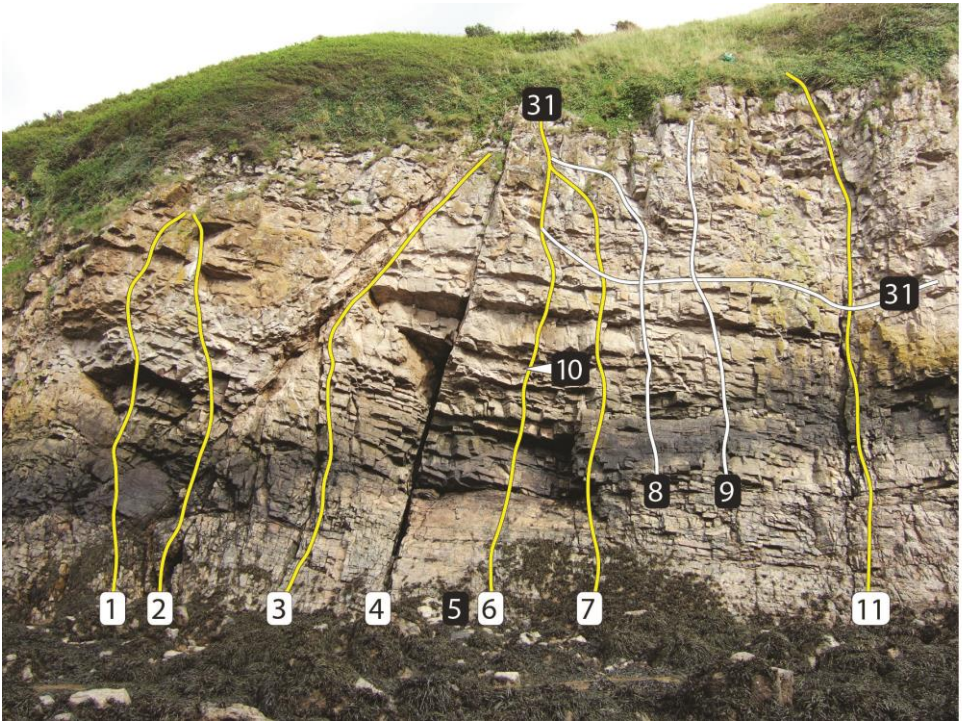
9 ****I'm Sorry Our Time Is Up** 15m F6b (S2) (2010)

Superb climbing, but a deep water solo. Start 2.5m left of *Emergent Sea*. Climb easily and then with more interest past an obvious long layaway under the widest part of the roof. Continue direct up the white buttress on large if weak holds to a stop under blackthorn. Needs a pre-placed pull-out rope.

There is also a good F6cish S2 solo that traverses under the roof-line at 7m; Route '10' on the topo.
FAs of above three routes: Martin Crocker (deep water soloed after top-roping)

11 **Emergent Sea** 15m E1 5a (22.12.2003)

The broken crack and groove has the distinction of getting you onto the top albeit with some steep veg. If the tide has got the better of you, this is probably the least traumatic means to top out (and safer than swimming these seas!). Please don't bolt this route.
FA: Nigel Coe, Martin Crocker



Approximately 150m left (east) of the way down is a modestly projecting buttress flanked by a deep overhung corner on its right (*Uninspired*). A broken crackline bounds the buttress around to its left. Lower-off ropes can be fixed on a stout fir tree 6m back from the cliff-edge and behind the blackthorn (but be wary of very loose rock under the cliff-edge that the lower-off rope could dislodge: so set up a re-belay on sound rock under the loose zone to keep yourselves safe).

The next four routes can be brought to a close at a good thread belay 2m below the capping vegetation. It is possible to abseil from the thread, but **you must first ensure you are happy with the condition of any *in-situ* slings. In any event leaving a back-up is advised.**

12 **Feasted the Master** 12m E3 5b (F5+) (30.9.2003)

Very poorly protected. Start 2m right of *Emergent Sea*. Climb over a bulge (good small wire in slot); then step up to a blind break. Use flakes above to enter a scoop, and swing right to the thread belay of *Spit and Spin*. A route with some nice holds which, perversely, would get a star if bolted.
FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist; deep water soloed, 2010)

13 ***Spit and Spin** 12m E1 5a (F5) (30.9.2003)

An enjoyable climb, but it is committing to start. Climb over the initial bulge using an obvious projecting hold (sling; microwires too). Follow the better protected crack and beautiful groove above to a thread belay.
FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist; deep water soloed, 2010)

14 Never more Beat on the Drum 12m HVS 5a (F5) (30.9.2003)

Reasonably protected. Start just left of a slim hanging rib. Climb up to an undercut overhang. Pull over to good holds. Climb the bubbly wall above, using the flake crack to the right if desired, and then swing left to the thread belay.

FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist; deep water soloed, 2010)

15 *A Living Flash of Light 12m E2 5c (F6a+) (30.9.2003)

A fine climb; strenuous to climb and to protect. Start at the rib in the buttress. Climb the short chimney right of the rib to finger-jugs on the right (good small wires next to the rectangular orange patch). Power over a bulge into a hanging flake crack, which leads awkwardly to easier ground. Needs a belay/lower-off rope (or you could traverse left to the thread belay of *Spit and Spin*).

FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)

16 Fire Shall Heat the Deep 12m E4 6a (F6c+) (30.9.2003)

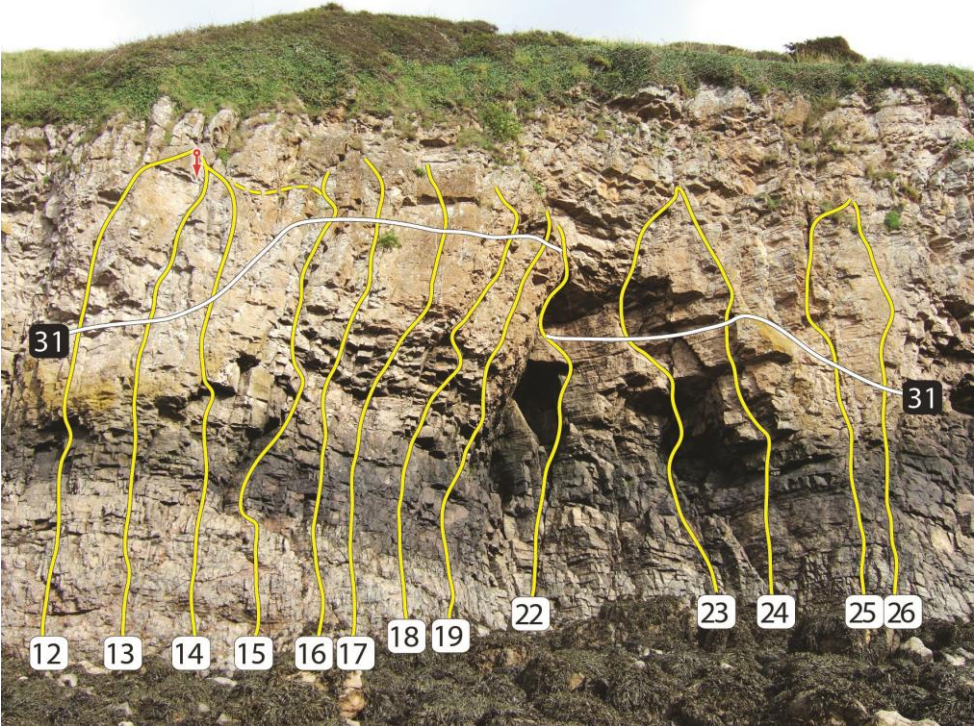
Surprisingly good wire protection, though very pumpy. Climb the bulging wall 2m right of the short chimney (wire placements on the left), and pull around into a bottomless groove. Use right-facing flakes above and step up and left onto easier ground. Needs a belay/lower-off rope.

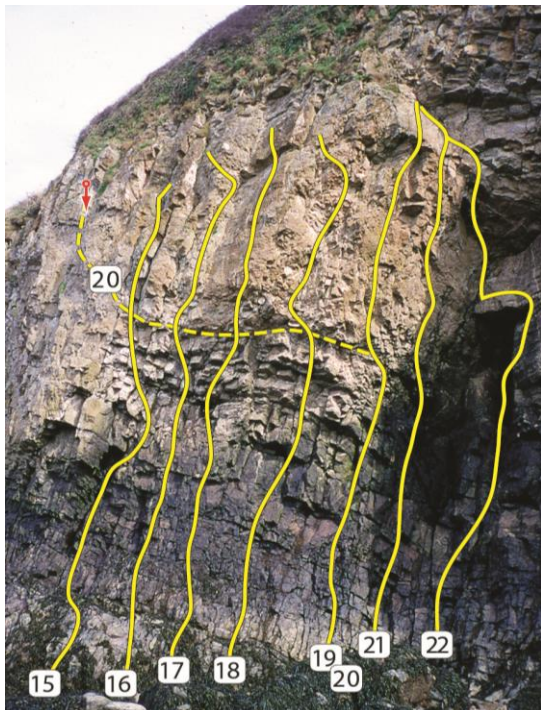
FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)

17 *There was a Young Lady from.... 15m E5 6b/c (F7b+) (21.3.2004)

A great piece of climbing on small holds up a bulging orange rib. Start 3m right of the short chimney. Climb the face down and left of the rib, and then make a very powerful sequence (between rusty twin knife blades) up the left-hand side of the rib. Needs a belay/lower-off rope.

FA: Martin Crocker (after top-roping), John Harwood





The next two routes are amongst those here that have been deep water soloed; if you get the sea conditions right the splash-out zone is relatively clean and deep (and the routes then possibly become safer to solo than to lead).

18 *Sea for Tea 12m E5 6a (F7a)
(22.12.2003)

An improbable line with very awkward (and even when you get it) unconvincing gear. Start below a bulging orange rib 7m left of the overhung corner. Starting easily enough climb up into bulging rock, and then make a mammoth reach up and left for a hanging block at the base of a groove right of the rib. Scrap with the groove, and pass some doubtful rock to a step left onto a slab. Needs a belay/lower-off rope.

FA: Martin Crocker, Nigel Coe. *Deep water soloed by Martin Crocker 8.7.2010.*

The next three routes, excluding *Seven Hornets Plus*, stay dry in pouring rain, and share the same finishing point (which needs one or two abseil stations).

19 **Pump Study 12m E5 6a (F7a+) (22.12.2003)

You got it; especially with the wire placing. Start below a hanging groove in the left-hand rib of the overhung corner of *Uninspired*. Climb up to a good nut slot under the left-hand side of the leaning wall. Bear leftwards and reach for a good handhold at the base of the groove (peg). Remaining strength permitting – barn-door the groove to large holds slightly right. Continue over an undercut bulge. Needs a belay/lower-off rope.

FA: Martin Crocker, Nigel Coe. *The peg was added later, for Seven Hornets Plus, making the route an easier lead. Deep water soloed by Martin Crocker 8.7.2010*

20 Seven Hornets Plus 20m E6 6b (F7b+) (9.6.2005)

A fingery crux after a lot of hanging out; this is bulging bedding plane that rises leftwards from the deep overhung corner. Follow *Pump Study* to the base of the groove (peg). Swing left onto the hanging block-hold on *Sea for Tea*. Cross the rib of *There Was a Young Lady from...* (2 pegs), and then traverse across cracks moving up to the thread belay of *Spit and Spin*.

FA: Martin Crocker, Ian Parsons

21 **Over-inspired 12m E6 6b (F7b+) (22.12.2003)

Brilliant climbing on superb rock up the leaning left wall of the overhung corner. Cannily, up to mid-height, the gear can be placed by stretching from the corner on the right, which is just as well given the ‘can’t stop’ climbing. Climb direct and – using undercuts above the bulge – start a hard sequence to gain and match an obvious layaway. A high crimp in the wall must now be cranked to gain bigger holds on the left and an awkward finish (peg on the right). Needs a belay/lower-off rope.

FA: Martin Crocker, Nigel Coe

22 Uninspired 12m E4 6a (F6c+) (30.11.2003)

One of the more obvious lines here. Climb into the deep overhung corner and pull out right onto a hanging slab. Bridge widely up leftwards through the roof (*in-situ* thread and peg) and gain an overhung slab on the left. Needs a belay/lower-off rope.

FA: Martin Crocker (partner John Harwood refused to follow: '*I'm not inspired*').

23 The Mariners' Hollo 12m E4 6a (F6c+) (11.6.2005)

A dynamic finish. Climb into a hollow right of the overhung corner. Take the crack out of the hollow and move up onto a shelf slightly left (peg). Make committing moves over a bulge (Rock 2/RP 4 just over the lip), and swing right below a guillotine flake to finish. Needs a belay/lower-off rope.

FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)

24 A Ceaseless Turmoil Seething 12m E1 5b (F5+) (11.6.2005)

Starting 5m right of the overhung corner, climb slabby rock right of a hollow onto a flake crack in a broad rib. Follow the flake past a projecting spike and move up and left to the finishing point of *The Mariners' Hollo*.

FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)

Ten metres right of the overhung corner is a slender yellow rib with a crack in its left-hand side.

25 Consider your Liva 12m Very Severe 4c (4.6.2005)

Reach and climb the crack, using the ramp to the left at one point. Well protected; no need to bolt this one. Needs a belay/lower-off rope.

FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)

26 *Barefoot in a Sea of Shiraz 12m E5 6a (F7a) (4.6.2005)

Bold and balancy, yet the holds and gear make it less eliminate than it looks. Climb onto the rib and make sustained moves up it (wires in small pockets) to a final hard crimp for jugs. Needs a belay/lower-off rope.

FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)

27 *Tipple my Ale in the Shade 12m E3 5c (F6b+) (4.6.2005)

Strenuously follow the narrow overhanging corner just right of the rib, concentrating hard when it comes to a long reach for a deep pocket above a small overhang. Needs a belay/lower-off rope.

FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)

28 Boy in Mud 12m E4 5c (F6c) (11.6.2005)

Butch moves. Starting a metre right of *Tipple my Ale in the Shade*, climb up over a bulge past a good pocket (peg) to a roof. Reach a big rattling jug, and undercut over to more good holds. Needs a belay/lower-off rope.

FA: Martin Crocker (led with Soloist)

I also climbed two routes (a VS and an E1) on a slight buttress near the right-hand end of the cliff, probably in 2006, but those descriptions also sank with tech tantrums of the time. Route '29' climbed a central line up the buttress and Route '30' took the first of two cracks to the right. Rather more galling was the loss of justifiably animated reflections on my deep water solo traverse of the entire cliff. However the line on the topos is accurate if you wish to muse, even commit.



31 *****Extraordinary Lives of Ordinary People** 200m E5 6a (S3) (23.6.2005)

A fantastic 'deep' water solo traverse of the cliff best taken at high spring tide with waterwings and a tracking beacon. (Do beware the strong currents; if you flounder you could end up in Cardiff Bay or Gloucester Docks in no time at all.) A thorough scouting of water depth, especially under the hard sections, is recommended. The traverse starts at the extreme right-hand end of the cliff and finishes up *Emergent Sea*. *Bon voyage, mes amis*.

FA: Martin Crocker (solo)



From the way-down a solo sea-level traverse (possible at neap high tides up to around 10.2m with calm seas) has the potential to get you to the climbing area. Subject to the height of the sea the grade is at most 5a (but mostly VD): don't fall off.

