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The BOLFA newsletter

A publication of the Climbing Club of South Australia

A window on the past: The formative years of cutting edge rock climbing Part 1 (1980-1990) by Steve Kelly

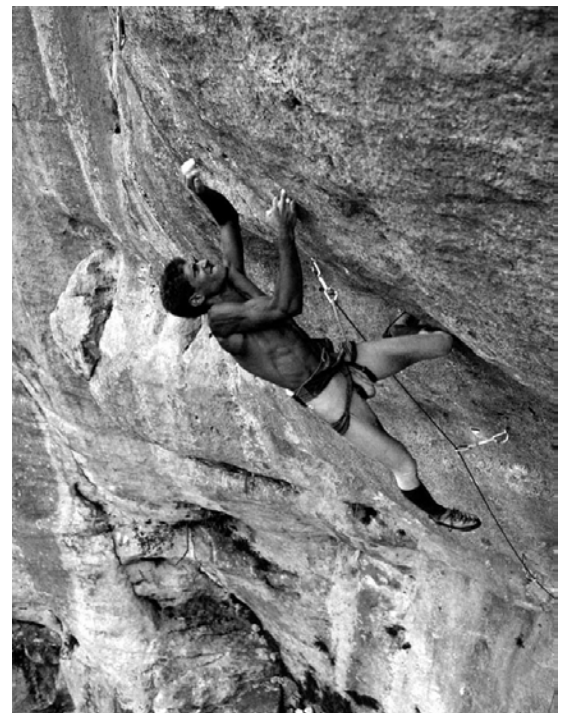
Back in 1980 (a quarter of a century ago can you believe it) the small world of cutting-edge rock climbing was mainly a world of hard-end trad routes and skimpy multi-coloured tights. Top climbers of the day were names such as Carrigan, Fawcett, Bachar, Yaniro and Edlinger – and the thus unsurprisingly the hardest routes of the day were mainly their own creations.

If you wanted to make a name for yourself, then you could do no better than visit Wales (Tremadog & Gogarth), the US (Joshua Tree) or Australia (Arapiles) – all three destinations responsible for harbouring the hardest climbs in the world.

The level at this time was hovering around grade 27 – with only half a dozen routes having been labelled a harder grade. Routes considered to be the top of their class were things like Strawberries (27), Yesterday (then 27), The Phoenix (28), Equinox (26) and Supercrack (26) – the latter three all residing in the States.

Very unknown at the time and somewhat largely ignored due to the tactics used on the first ascent (probably the first true redpoint of any route) was Tony Yaniro's line Grand Illusion – which at first was given 5.12+ - but later regarded as 5.13b/c (29/30) – a route WAY ahead of its time.

Australia was holding its own – mainly due to the efforts of the hard working Kim Carrigan, but also due to people like Mark Moorhead and Mike Law – who were both operating in the grade 26 bracket (2 grades off the world standard).



Dale Goddard – looking very '80's – climbing La Mission (31), Buoux

Probably the most famous climber of the time however was Patrick Edlinger – a French superstar – notably because he had struck a deal with a television producer and had a film made of himself – climbing (and sometimes soloing) routes in the Verdon Gorge and environs. Edlinger though – wasn't just any old climber – he was one of the most naturally gifted.

1981 came along and the Frenchman put up Medius (27) – the hardest route in France. Equalling it though was the efforts of American John Bachar – who cheekily visited the Frankenjura (Germany) and established a new line which he called 'Chasin' The Train' (27) – supposedly a reference to the state of Euro climbing versus its American equivalent. (Years later Bachar denounced this claim – saying that it was merely a reference to the well known jazz musician Johnny Cochrane).

Most of the routes (if not all) were being put up in a style known as 'Yo Yo' – the accepted norm at the time. This involved no pre-inspection – but climbing up to your highpoint – falling off – then lowering back to the ground (without working the moves) and starting again. The climber left the rope clipped into their highpoint – thereby essentially top roping the section on their next attempt.

First to use what would soon become termed 'redpoint tactics' was the German Kurt Albert – who in the same year ('81) had put up Germany's first 26 with Sautanz. His new ethic was to 'free climb' routes (in the now standard practice of today) and then mark the base of the climbs with a painted red dot – signifying that they had been 'freed'.

Strangely, the first nation to really take up this new game were the French, who embraced it whole-heartedly during the early '80's. As a result, the levels of hard climbing took off in France – as now the hard sections of routes were worked – rather than left as ground-up affairs – which led to a massive increase in strength and talent.

Despite this soon-to-be-embraced-revolution, the word was still 'yo yo' – and the routes that fell courtesy of this style were very impressive indeed. By the end of '82 the grade of 28 had all but been consolidated with routes such as Cobwebs (Moorhead), Fenir (28 – Edlinger), La Haine (28 – Berhault) and Little Plum (28 – by a young new comer – Jerry Moffatt).

Also that year Carrigan claimed the big grade of 29 with India, which was the biggest news to date, and probably still holds that grade today for Carrigan's original sequence. Law meanwhile quietly put up the much unheralded Slime Time (mainly because he graded it 26! (now 28). Carrigan consolidated at the grade with the amazing Ogive (28) at Bundaleer.

Meanwhile, Ron Fawcett's 'heir apparent' – Jerry Moffatt – paid his first visit to the States, and promptly flashed one of their hardest routes – Supercrack (26/27).

1983 arguably ushered in the term 'power' – thought by some to have previously not existed until then. Routes like Jerry Moffatt's The Face (8a/8a+) – the first of that grade in Germany – clearly required a new level of bouldering strength. Steep limestone was the new 'in thing' – and bolts began proliferating the crags – though mainly on the continent. The first 29's were introduced in France with Reve de Papillon (29) and Le Coeur est un Chasseur Solitaire (29) (Marc Le Menestrel); Ca Glisse au Pays des Merveilles (29) by Patrick Edlinger; and Crepinette (29) by Fabrice Guillot.

Australia kept up (just) with the likes of Slopin' Sleazin' (originally 26 – now 28) and the aforementioned India.

The first 29 in Britain came in at the hands of new kid on the block – Ben Moon. A fully bolted sport route, Statement of Youth (29) indeed made a statement in the more 'traditional' line of thinking Britain. This was overshadowed though by fellow compatriot Jerry Moffatt's offering – that of Revelations, which at solid 30 was recognised as the hardest route in the world at the time.

In a period of intense development, such a title wouldn't hold on for long. France got introduced to the 30 grade with Tribouts' Le Bidule (30) and Edlinger's Le Boule (30). Carrigan finally solved the mystery of Masada – giving it 30 as well (later downgraded to 29). But the big news was to be had at the end of the year – when a new name hit the press with the boulder problem extension route of Kanal Im Rucken – and a new grade – 8b (31). The man responsible was Wolfgang Gullich.

Also of note at this time was a first ascent by an American women – who over the next decade was to become the top female climber the world had ever seen. Tourist Treat (27) was at the time a fine effort by a young Lynn Hill...

Moffatt meanwhile demonstrated his virsatility by onsighting The Phoenix (28), Pol Pot (27/28) and Chimpanzadrome (28), the latter on the day of his 21st birthday.

1985 and Moffatt went out of action – due to a reported bout of tendonitis and later – a motorbike accident – putting him out for nearly 2 whole years. The French took over the helm and went to work. They produced Chouca (31) (Marc Le Menestrel) (the first 8b in France - now down to 8a+); and Les Braves Gens (31) by J.B Tribout – but the really big news was Tribout's and Antoine Le Menestrel's visit to the UK – whereupon Le Menestrel free soloed Revelations! The equivalent in today's money is like going out and soloing a 35!

Bigger news still however – was yet another grade increase, this time from German contender Mr Gullich. Gullich flew over to Australia and over the period of 6 days established Punks In the Gym – at a whopping 32. The line had already been prepared by Swiss climber Martin Scheel (who made the 3rd ascent of India) – but hitherto unclimbed. Gullich had once again broken the mould.

So what were the States doing back then? Well the top route belonged to Alan Watts – who got major flack by partially bolting the fantastic line of East Face of Monkey Face (30/31).

The remainder of the '80's belonged to the lycra-clad limestone power climber though – and arguably it hasn't changed since. '86 was the year of the 8b (31) with French creations such as La Mission (31) and Sortileges (31) by Didier Raboutou and the ultra-classic La Rose et la Vampire (31), and La Rage de Vivre (32) by Antoine Le Menestrel (the latter considered to be harder than Punks). Le Minimum (32 – now 33 due to a hold break) was then put up by Marc Le Menestrel. GhettoBlaster (then 32 – now hard 31) was Germany's contribution (Gullich again), whilst To Bolt or Not To Be (32) was the first 32 to be put up in the States (by a Frenchman no less!)

Ben Moon continued making a name for himself with Zeke the Freak (31) in the UK, and German Stefan Glowacz completed Carrigan's old project of Lord of the Rings (31). He then makes the coveted 2nd ascent of Punks. Visiting Frenchie Didier Raboutou flashes Carrigan's masterpiece Masada (29) – making this possibly the hardest flash in the world.

1987 was again – a big year. America briefly woke up when Scott Franklin made the first American repeat of 'To Bolt' (32). Peter Croft onsighted The Phoenix (28) and then (very impressively) establishes The Sword (29) onsight. Over in Europe Gullich climbs a line that he calls Wall Street – but then another climber drills one of the pockets larger to allow him to utilise it. Gullich returns,

fills the pocket in altogether, and re-establishes Wall Street – now regarded as the world's first route of grade 33 (then regarded as only 32).

In France the pace goes off, and routes of grade 32 are consolidated with creations such as Silence (32) (Antoine Le Menestrel); Coup de Bambou (32) (Didier Raboutou); Toit de Auguste (32) (Patrick Berhault); and Les Specialists (32) and Le Spectre du sur Mutant (32), both by J.B Tribout.

Big news is the return to climbing by Jerry Moffatt, who after 6 months of getting back into it travels over to France and sends the hardest known routes there with both Le Minimum (32) and Rage (32). Also in France Lynn Hill pays a visit and ticks both Laisse Dire (28) and Papy On-Sight (28) in the same day.

Back in her homeland, Scott Franklin establishes the first 32 by an American (Scarface) in 1988 – whilst Ron Kauk makes second American repeat of 'To Bolt' (32). By now the 6 top routes in the world are known as 'the Smith Trifecta' and 'the Buoux Trifecta' – with Smith Rocks harbouring White Wedding (32), To Bolt Or Not To Be (32) and Scarface (32), and Buoux accomodating Le Minimum (32), La Rage du Vivre (32) and Le Spectre du sur Mutant (32). Incredibly, Moffatt ticks the Buoux trifecta, then travels to the USA and knocks over the Smith Trifecta as well – the first person to do so. He then travels to Germany and establishes then what is thought to be Germany's hardest route – Stonelove (32).

Hot on his heels though is Ben Moon – who within a week repeats the Buoux Trifecta – before concentrating on an undone open project on the seriously overhung wall of the Bout de Monde.

Back in ol' blighty the first 32's go up with the likes of Cry Freedom (32) (Mark Leach) – a 46 day first ascent epic, and the much shorter (in length and time) Mecca (32) by Martin Atkinson.

A return to France and Catherine Destivelle redpoints Chouca (30) – making that the hardest redpoint by a female to date. Stefan Glowacz onsights Sceance Tenante (29) in the Verdon, and new boy Yuji Hiriyama onsights Orange Mechanique (29) at Cimai. Clearly standards had risen quite a bit!

1989 sees the first true appearance of Robyn Erbesfield – when she redpoints Churning in the Wake (28) at Smith Rock. Robyn over the next several years dominates the world cup circuit. Jim Karn (America's top climber at the time) onsights Power (29) at Smith – making it the hardest American onsight to date.

But 1989 belongs to a dreadlocked Sheffield resident named Ben Moon. He completes the much tried open project at Buoux – calling it Agincourt and grading it 8c (33) – the first confirmed route of its grade in the world. He then goes one step further and completes yet another French project – Maginot Line – grading it 'easy 8c' – but still 33. Patrick Edlinger steps in and makes the second ascent of Maginot – confirming the grade. Obviously in fine form – he then free-solo's his own route Orange Mechanique (29), and puts up Are You Ready? (32).

World Indoor Champion Isabelle Patisser comes outside and strikes one for the ladies with ascents of Echographie (30) and Sortileges (31) – the latter being the hardest ascent by a female climber to date. Didier Raboutou ups the ante in onsight climbing by sending Pipe Line (30).

Little known German Guido Kostermeyer makes the 2nd ascent of Wall Street (33), though this is hardly noticed in the press at the time.

Not surprisingly, 1990 arrived and with it another super route – this time by Jerry Moffatt. Not content to be a top competitor climber indoors – he visited Lower Pen Trywn and sent his long standing project Liquid Amber (33). Thought nowadays to be closer to 34, this line still sees very few suitors (only 2 repeats so far).

Next up was another addition by that dreadlocked fiend – Ben Moon. This time he had chosen a project much closer to home (and only 10 seconds from the car) by working an old aid line on the severely overhanging buttress of Raven Tor. The result was a 25ft route named Hubble – and given the unprecedented grade of 34. Hubble was entirely different from the routes that had been established previously (especially in France) – as it was a total power route relying on previously unheard of bouldering talent. Literally 6 moves long (the business) – Moon was perfectly suited to it – and to date it has still only had 4 repeats.

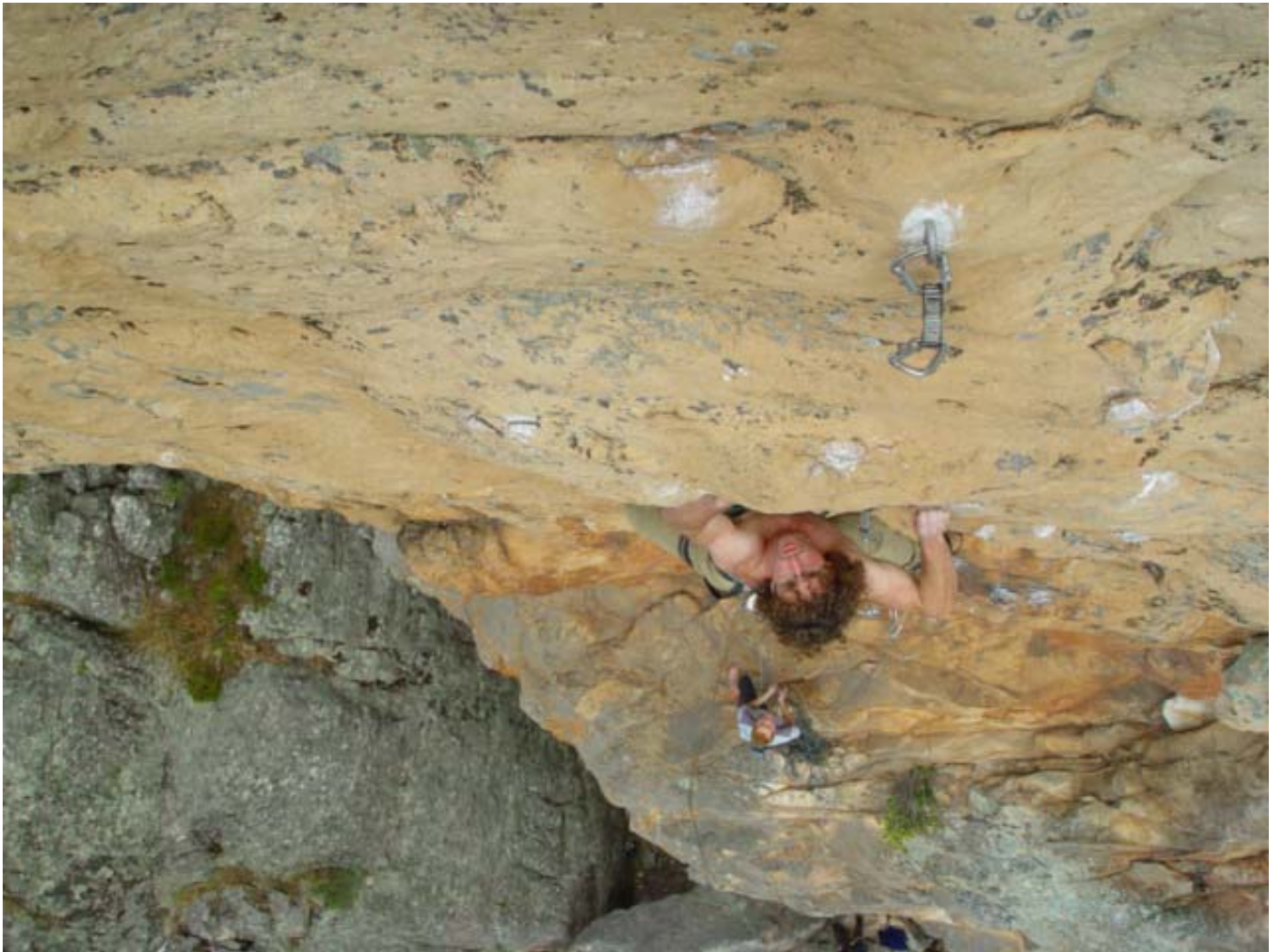
Of a thoroughly different nature was Johnny Dawes's 70 degree slab route called The Very Big and the Very Small – graded 8c (33). This – 15 years later – has still only been repeated twice, and is arguably the hardest true slab route in the world.

Over in France Lynn Hill makes the first female ascent of an 8b+/32 (Mass Critique); and Yuji Hiriyama onsights Neophypt (30), whilst Francois Legrand onsights Zenith (30).

Thus by the end of the '80's that standard had risen from 27 to 33 – with the borderline being Moon's route Hubble at 34. Yo yo tactics were out - in favour of redpointing, and climbs had gotten steeper and steeper (with the exception of Dawes's offering!) Bolts had been accepted as standard gear throughout Europe (to a lesser degree in the UK) – and America (and Australia) still held out from a more 'traditionalist' point of view. Jerry Moffatt was regarded s the most influential climber of the decade (deservedly so), whilst his fellow citizen (Ben Moon) had broken a lot of boundaries himself with just sheer power. Germany had

produced its own monster in the form of Wolfgang Gullich – who took the grading scale and produced the first 31, 32 and (later to be known) 33. But the big news was still to come – the following year...

Picture perfect...



Steve Pollard – focused on the crux of Mind Arthritis (27) Mt Arapiles



The classic Cul de Chien problem (Font 7a) Fontainebleau, France



Crux dyno to the kangaroo hold – Bordertown local crag



Where all the dead tractors go...

The BOLFA newsletter

Contributors for this issue: Many thanks go to everyone that contributed photo's.

The Half Brick Award

This issues thumbs down goes to...

No one!

A poem for the injured...

Sung to the tune of Billy Joel's classic 'Honesty'...

If you search for tenderness
it isn't hard to find.
You just have to touch your elbow there.
But if you look for tendon damage
You might just as well be blind.
They always seem to be so easy to tear...

Injury - is such a crappy word.
Everything is black & blue.
Injury - is hardly ever heard.
By those that are younger than - 22...

I can always find some climb
that makes me want to train.
And chances are my board and I will have a date.
But I don't want to spend my time
stretching in the rain.
All I want to do - is 1-5-8.

Injury - is such a lonely word.
Everyone has left - for the wall.
Injury - is hardly ever heard.
By those that weigh about - fuck all.

Should I find another?
Should I find a friend?
Should I give up climbing - and drink beer
'til the bitter end?
No-one can comfort me
with promises again.
I know, (I know) - It'll never go...

When Neurofen's taking longer
don't be too concerned.
I'll wash it down with lager, or maybe coke

But when I want something stronger
tell me where else can I turn?
Glucosamine's just crap - and so is dope...

Injury - is such a messed up state.
Everything no longer bends.
Injury - leads me to eat cake.
And go back to climbing - 5.10's...

I could always find something other
that makes me lose some lard.
Maybe swimming, golf or some gym.
But really - why would you bother?

Going that extra yard
When everything other than climbing is just grim.
Injury - painkillers are my mates.
Every little pill is good.
Injury - it never dissipates.
Maybe I should stop bouldering - on Wood.

Club Calendar

Upcoming meetings/events

Next Club Meet: Monday 5 December 2005

Venue: All bi-monthly meetings take place at 7.30pm in The Brecknock Hotel, King William Street, Adelaide on the 1st Monday of every 2nd month.

Voluntary slide presentations welcome at any of these meets.

Hot Fun Closing

Latest (and some not so latest) news & views from around the world...

UK

Ben Moon (now 39) has climbed the hanging prow of the Sphinx directly at Font 8b (V13), which he has named 'Voyager'. The Sphinx is a John Allen problem that used to get E5 6c due to its height, but in today's money gets Font 7a+ (V7). Voyager pulls onto the slopy footholds of this problem and attacks the overhanging prow directly - and is a major addition to Peak Grit bouldering, having been tried by many

strong climbers in the past. Apparently there is the possibility of a sit-start as well.

Meanwhile Siobhan Coughlan has ticked Ben's Roof, Font 7c+ (V10) at Raven Tor. This is the second female ascent of the power endurance testpiece featuring some small crimps in a cave roof. The first was by visiting American Lisa Rands earlier in 2005.

US

Tommy Caldwell has free climbed both The Nose and Freerider in a combined time of 23 hours and 23 minutes. He started October 30 at 1:03 am and cruised up The Nose (free) in an amazing 11 hours with his wife Beth Rodden who belayed and jumared. On the crux (grade 32) Changing Corners pitch he took two short falls before sending the pitch on his third go. After a few minutes of food and rest on the summit, he ran down the East Ledges descent and was back in El Cap Meadow just before 1pm. Then it was time to nip up Freerider (38 pitches - 27/28)...

Steph Davis has become the first woman to free El Cap's *Salathe Wall* (VI 29/30). She had previously done the *Freerider* (VI 27/28) variation to the *Salathe Wall* in 2004.

Lee Sheftel (59) has done The Whole Shot (32) in Maple Canyon. Previously he had redpointed a couple of 31's back when he was a mere youngster (57).

GER

Action Direct (35) has received its 6th, 7th and 8th repeats all within the same week. First up was British climber Richard Simpson - making the first British ascent of the route, then two days later Japan's Dai Koyamada making the 7th ascent. Holding the flag for the home country was Markus Bock - making the first German repeat of the line - which was established by Wolfgang Gullich way back in 1991.

All climbers have unsurprisingly considered it to be the hardest piece of climbing they have done to date - and definitely French 9a. Interestingly when Gullich established the route he climbed it via a powerful 16-move sequence and graded it UIAA XI (34/35), which Ben Moon also stuck to - until coming off the 13th move with a finger injury. Simpson and Koyamada on the other hand climbed the line via 11 moves - thinking Gullich's original way was harder. Bock took the Gullich sequence - having tried the route extensively over a number of years.

AUST

Western Australia

Kate Swain completed the first female ascent of Kalbarri Gold (26). The route involves jamming and placing gear through an 8m horizontal roof crack, and was originally climbed by HB about ten years ago.

NSW

Karen Allen has notched one up for the girls by climbing her first 28 'Fresh Goats Milk' (the direct finish to Hairline) at Diamond Falls.

In Sydney, Sharik Walker has repeated Agent Orange (V12) (at the Fox Cave), also having previously paid a quick visit to the Grampians and knocked off Last Action Hiro (V13) on the Project Wall.

VIC

Tasmanian Gary Phillips has made the first ascent of Snakes and Ladders (29) – a new line on the Sadinista Wall left of Contra Arms Pump.

Fellow Tasmanian Jake Breshnan sent Academia (31) in 5 tries, Le Petit Mort (29) in 2, and Wild Orchids (30) in 3. He also had time for Daniel Or Tiger (30) and Spurted (31) – the latter of which is the Hoette link up route of Tyranny into Lifestyling. Over at Arapiles he attempted Punks in the Gym (32) – but reportedly thought he needed more power – so promptly returned to Tasmania to get some.

HB meanwhile has been notching up some impressive ascents – this time with repeats of Ethiopia (30) and Living With A Hernia (30) – both at Arapiles.

Dave Jones has 'come out of retirement' and put up two new lines on the Fang Buttress – which already are gaining classic status. The first is a new 26 combining the start of Strolling RHV to a new direct finish, whilst the other is the much harder (29) overhanging arête to its right – with an independent start.

Adelaide strong boy Lawrie Dermody has returned from his overseas trip to the US and elsewhere – and got straight to work. He visited Taipan and sent the much-acclaimed Serpentine (29) in 3 shots – proclaiming it 'unbelievably easy'. Perhaps Rage should be next on the agenda then...!

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The Last Word

““That was a bit hard. I'm pretty tired. Not sure if it was the sex this morning or the joint last night””

Overheard at Morialta, after a middle aged woman (no doubt stunningly attractive) had just attempted Bung (20).