

Gower June 23/24 2012

It was supposed to be Pembroke but doubtful weather and the difficult housing market accounted for some of the main contenders. In the end, it was Dave Adams, Scott Cramp and I who decided we'd go and make the most of it.

We decided to try the Gower as the forecast was marginally better than Pembroke over the two days and it was closer too.

I'd found a luxurious campsite - but instead we stayed at Easter Slade which at least had a tap and some portaloos. Scott's £400 tent had started to feel a bit run down the previous weekend in North Wales and gave up the ghost entirely in the mini gale that accompanied our setting up camp. We used my £30 40 year old Vango instead.

Morning dawned dry but a bit overcast. Rain was forecast for 4pm. We set off for Juniper Wall. Dodging cow and sheep shit was the main problem on the walk in. Dave had been to the cliff before and set off confidently round the corner. We stood looking up at a heap of choss (which was supposed to be among the Gower's best cliffs) and tried hard to make the guide book fit what little rock was visible. On the off-chance that we might not be in the right place, we traversed further over and when we turned the corner we found a much more promising cliff which matched the guidebook. With some overnight rain, there were some seepage lines but generally it looked good.

Dave set off up Hitman – a steep looking VS. There was some ritual moaning about my rack (ok – so two of the cams were jammed and had to be put aside but otherwise, it did the job). Awkward moves on some wet rock led to an obvious jammed block which proved to be the crux but it was pretty sustained for VS after that and, even with my rack, well-protected.

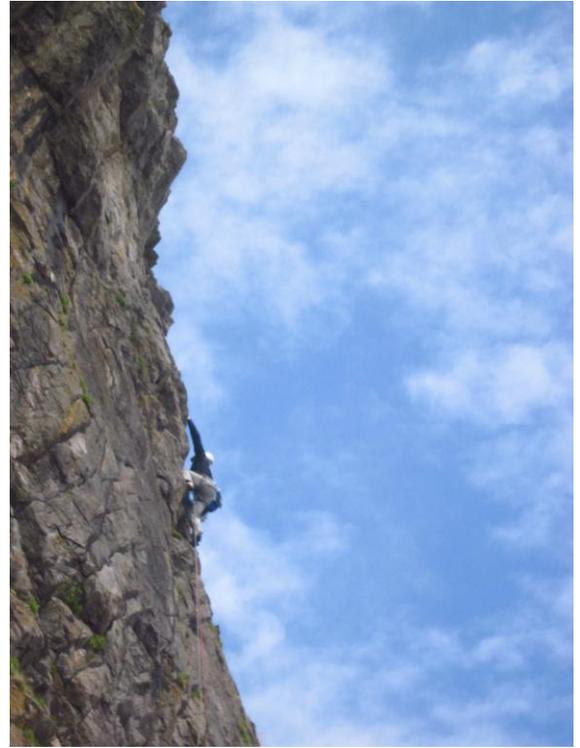


*Dave approaches the jammed block*

*On Hitman VS*

I then went for Assassin 5a HVS the line of the crag to the left. After the easy first bit, the crack steepened up and it got quite tenuous and a bit run-out. Soon however, gear arrived and better holds. Some easier climbing led to a step left and a steep groove to finish. A good long pitch.

Scott then led a pleasant VS – Ninja.



*Scott on Ninja VS*

For our final route we decided on Hair Raiser – a right to left girdle at HVS. Dave set off. The guidebook was a bit vague on where to belay, but he tied off on a bit of tat and a nut or two. By now, the weather was looking a bit doubtful and Dave’s “stance” clearly would not accommodate three. As Scott was already tied on, I left them to it and put on all my warm and waterproof clothing. It started to rain properly. Dave handed over the gear to Scott who set off on the final pitch. It looked good if a bit damp. The occasional runner appeared as he approached the overlap. Here Scott showed his knitting skills. The ropes began to run through right angles and even before he worked out how to climb the overlap, the ropes began to form a cat’s cradle. The overlap was clearly tough in the wet and with rock not above suspicion. Helpfully, Scott placed a high runner for Dave before sidling off left to belay. Sadly, the rope drag now meant he couldn’t take in the blue rope at all! With help from the ground crew (me), the team decided that Dave would climb on the red rope only. His feet and legs now numb from his long vigil at the “stance”, he edged across, dealt quickly with the overlap (without the benefit of the high runner) and was soon at the stance where the blue rope could be recovered.

We quickly packed up and walked out as the rain got going properly. A good day – probably one route too many though.

By the time we got to the Gower Inn for beers and food, the rain was hammering down. Good food and service though - plus we got to see the footy. It was still hammering down as we drove back to the campsite. The farmer had closed the gate to the field we were camped in but we opened it and Dave drove through - stopping involuntarily short of the tents as his wheels started spinning. It rained most of the night but had stopped when we got up. The farmer's wife arrived to collect our money (£40 for three of us for two nights seemed excessive given the lack of facilities). She said she'd closed the gate to stop cars going in as for the first time in years a spring had started running and saturated the ground. You could hear the water draining away under our feet. We hoped we'd be able to get out.

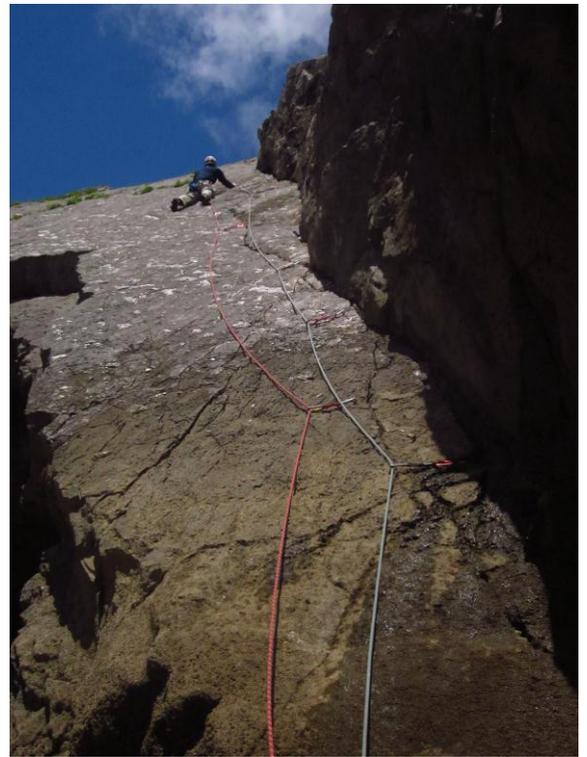
The forecast was good for the day, but someone wasn't listening as another short sharp shower passed over giving the drying tents a good soaking before we packed up. In the end, Dave got out of the field with no problems and we set off under clearing skies to the Pobbles bay area. We were seduced by coffee at the Southgate café and then sought out Shire Coombe where it looked as if it might be possible to climb while the tide was high. When we finally found it, the sea was far too high to get to the bottom and to be honest the climbs didn't look great. By now the tide was falling fast and we could see across the magnificent Pobbles Bay that the Three Cliffs would be climbable very soon. The sun was now blazing down.



Inevitably, the premier line of Scavenger looked bit damp and it needed the sun to come round. I pointed Dave at Arch Slab to the left. Tricky thin moves led out over the Arch and then pleasantly up the slab to easy ground. A scramble over the top and we were back down for Scavenger which had dried out a bit. Scott waltzed up avoiding all the wet stuff and demonstrating immaculate double rope technique (cf yesterday!). A great route.



*Dave on Arch Slab VS*



*Scott leads the classic Scavenger VS*

I'd done the main routes before, so Dave led Inverted V which looked a bit blank low down but in fact had quite a lot of gear. He moaned again about my rack (too much of it, and missing mid size nuts in his view) but still managed to lace it up. The slab on shiny little holds proved as hard as the overhang but no problem to our Dave. We finished with Perserverance – a sharp little Hard Severe.



*Dave leads Inverted V HVS*



*The finale: tea at Southgate cafe*

A very pleasant day in full sunshine rounded off with tea at Southgate and a leisurely drive home as England's Euro hopes ebbed inevitably away, the final Italian penalty going in as we arrived back at my house.

A great trip and well worth persevering despite the doubtful forecast. Thanks to Scott and Dave (who drove) for great company..

Malcolm