

THE MALVERN HILLS

By Roger Smith and Doug Kerr

INTRODUCTION

The long whaleback ridge of the Malvern Hills is a very popular attraction for walkers and ramblers, indeed, the walk of the length of the hills from Chase End to North Hill is one of the finest in the south of England. There are several quarries and small outcrops scattered along the length of the hills, but unfortunately these offer very little to tempt the serious rock climber. **Ivy Scar Rock** has some local popularity with both beginners and organised groups and provides the best concentration of climbing that the Malverns has to offer.

HISTORY

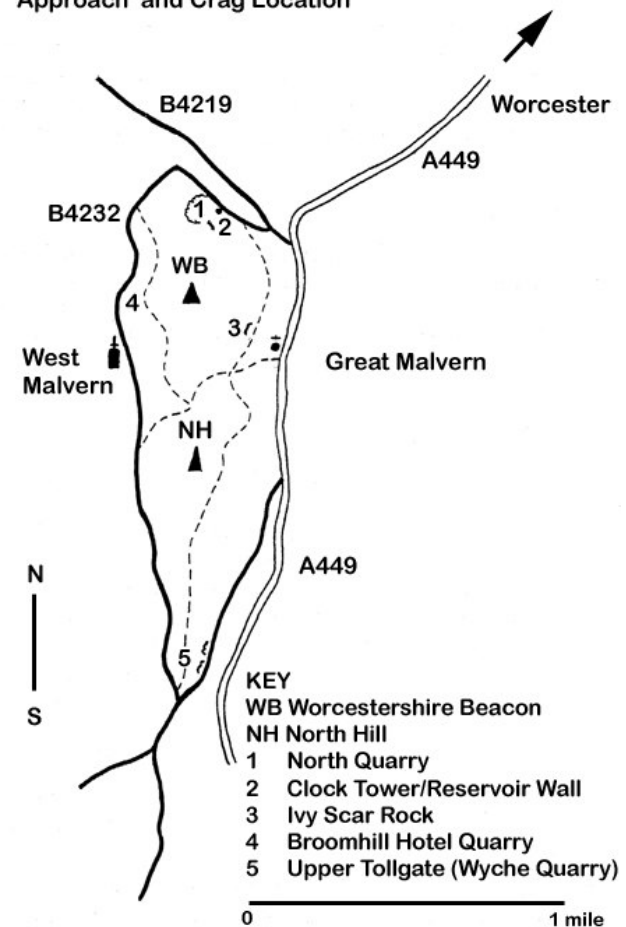
The vagaries of the 1939-45 war brought various climbers to the Radar Establishments based in Great Malvern and these, together with Wilfred Noyce who was at that time teaching at Malvern College, formed the nucleus of pioneering rock climbers on the Malvern Hills. Few additional new crags or climbs have been discovered since these early days. Interesting documentation of the climbs completed in this period can be found in the 1949 Climbers Club Journal by C.W.F.Noyce and the 1951 M.A.M Journal by R.Chasmer and H.Sutcliffe.

SITUATION AND CHARACTER

The Malvern Hills are composed of diorites and granitic igneous rocks. Natural outcrops of rock occur along the length of the hills but they only exist in appreciable size at the northern end on the slopes of Worcestershire Beacon and North Hill. The naturally outcropping rock is reasonably well weathered and moderately rough whereas the more recent quarried exposures of rock provide a complete contrast being unconsolidated, unsafe and positively dangerous for the climber.

The Malverns

Approach and Crag Location



ACCESS

All the climbs described in this section lie on land owned and managed by the Malvern Hills Conservators, a body empowered by an act of Parliament and local councils to preserve the hills for all to enjoy. The Conservators have no objection to rock climbing on their land and do not require individuals to seek permission, but they do ask that a courtesy telephone call be made to their office at Priors Croft, Great Malvern, telephone number 01684 892002 prior to a visit.

APPROACHES

From the North, approach can be made south to Worcester by following either the M5 or the A38. Approach to the Malvern Hills from Worcester by following the A449 to Great Malvern and then the B4232 to the Clock Tower Car Park, OS Ref: 770469, Sheet 150 (1:50,000 Landranger Series).

THE CLIMBS

CLOCK TOWER AREA

The Clock Face

OS Ref: 769470 Sheet 150 (1:50,000 Landranger Series)

Immediately behind The Clock Tower and set above broken rocks is a small headwall with a tree at its centre: **The Clock Face**. The left-hand boundary rib from the base of The Clock Tower can be climbed at a Moderate standard to gain the left-hand end of the wall. The following route is then gained by traversing very carefully rightwards beneath the wall through thick vegetation.

1. **Wait a Minute** 25ft VS 4B
Start just to the left of the right-hand arête of the wall and climb trending rightwards to gain the arête near the top. Unprotected.

The flake just to the right has been climbed to provide **Just a Second**, HVS 4B, 25ft; unfortunately, the flake is dangerously loose so climb this only at your peril!

Reservoir Wall

OS Ref: 769469 Sheet 150 (1:50,000 Landranger Series)

This can be approached from The Clock Tower by following the brick steps signposted 'TO NORTH HILL, TABLE AND SUGAR LOAF HILLS'. Follow the continuation path around to the right and then take the right-hand flight of steps to reach Reservoir Green, a grass covered reservoir which is obvious by name. **Reservoir Wall** can be seen as the small outcrop at the far end of this grass reservoir.

There are four routes but the rock is rather shattered and natural protection is not plentiful nor is it particularly reliable. The climbing is steep and the routes are therefore serious undertakings. Top-roping is recommended as a means of making the most of the crag.

The routes are described from RIGHT to LEFT. At the right-hand side of the wall is a prominent deep chimney, to the right of the chimney is;

2. **The Prow** 40ft HVS 5A
Awkward initial moves up the shallow groove gain undercuts and a thin crack above. Finish via the thin crack with further assistance from the right arête. Tree belay.
3. **Reservoir Cracks** 35ft VS 4B
A steep route of some historic interest. Start just to the left of the base of the chimney. Climb directly and then move rightwards to gain a standing position on the small nose. Step right and gain the ledge with the sycamore tree. From the left-hand side of the ledge continue carefully up the wall to the top. Stake belay well back behind the stone wall.
4. **Right Groove** 30ft HVS 4C
Start at the left-hand side of the small slab and some 10ft to the left of the chimney. Climb up to gain the ramp on the right and then move left to gain and finish with difficulty up the shattered groove just right of the small conifer. Tree belay well back.

5. **Central Groove** 30ft E1 5A
Strenuous. Start roughly in the centre of the wall, some 20ft to the left of the chimney. Climb with difficulty on awkward sloping holds to finish up the shallow groove just to the left of the small conifer. Tree belay well back.

North Quarry

OS Ref: 771469 Sheet 150 (1:50,000 Landranger Series)

A large quarry which is approached via the track some 50 yards beyond The Clock Tower. The quarry is clearly visible from the approach to **Reservoir Wall**.

The quarry contains a distinctive lower wall with an obvious sweeping slab above the terrace. A number of routes have been recorded here over the years but, without exception, these are extremely loose and cannot therefore be recommended. The lower wall is a popular spot for abseiling and is frequently used by local youths and organised groups.

Ivy Scar Rock

OS Ref: 773464 Sheet 150 (1:50,000 Landranger Series)

Approach by following the footpath which climbs gently around the east side of North Hill from the car park at The Clock Tower. This is a relatively compact outcrop reaching a maximum height of 50ft and providing several interesting climbs. Unfortunately, the rock is rather dirty in places and protection is not easy to find.

The obvious feature of the crag is the slabby corner directly behind the wooden seat with a steep wall to its left. Stakes are in place for belays. The climbs are described from LEFT to RIGHT.

6. **Ivy Buttress** Hard Severe 4A
A good route up the left edge of the crag starting at the base of the arête. Climb onto the obvious large block at 15ft. Step delicately right into a shallow groove which is followed before moving left to finish up the

easier angled slab.

7. **Ivy Buttress Direct** VS 4C
Start at the foot of the arête. Climb the arête to join the original route above the delicate step across.

The steep corner up the middle of the wall to the right of the arête has been top-roped at 5B but, owing to several loose holds and a lack of protection, this has probably not been led.

8. **The Hangover** HVS 4C
The obvious slabby corner is taken direct with poor protection and awkward sloping holds. An easier variation, **The Original Route** VS 4B, starts up the slab 10ft to the right to join and finish up the corner.
9. **The Sidle** Severe 4A
The obvious rightward-trending diagonal line starting on the lower slab passing under the overhang to finish delicately via a hidden crack.
10. **The Slide** VS 4B
Start as for *The Sidle* on the lower slabs and climb directly to finish rather awkwardly up a shallow groove.
11. **Strong Persuader** HVS 5A
Start a few feet right of *The Sidle*. Pull straight up to the overlaps, to where *The Sidle* starts to move right, step right and climb the steep wall to the top.
12. **The Sidel** Hard Severe 4A
A direct line on dusty, sloping holds to the finish of *The Sidle*.

Upper Tollgate (Wyche) Quarry

OS Ref: 769439 Sheet 150 (1:50,000 Landranger Series)

The highest quarry on the Wyche Road, the A4105, situated some 300 yards down the road on the east side of the Wyche cutting. The quarry floor is used as a car park and there is a corrugated iron-roofed building which serves as a useful landmark.

On the left-hand side of the quarry, behind the corrugated iron-roofed building, there are two obvious slabby grooves lying to the right of a large rockfall. The left-hand groove has a small overlap at approximately two-thirds height. **The Witch**, 75ft, VS 4B, gains this groove at the overlap from the right arête but due to the vegetated and unpleasant nature of the rock this climb has not been checked and cannot be recommended. Some distance to the right and hidden by trees in the centre of the back wall of the quarry is a slabby arête with a twin sycamore tree growing near to its base.

13. **Tollgate Arête** 120ft E1
 After a poor start the slabby arête provides some interesting and very bold climbing on the first pitch.
1. 70ft. 5A. Climb the dirty groove on the left and move right to gain the small sapling beneath the overlap. Move delicately left to gain good holds at the base of the arête proper. Climb boldly up the arête, either direct or by starting on the right, to gain an awkward tree belay.
 2. 50ft. 4B. Climb the cracked wall above the tree to easier broken ground and trend leftwards to a tree belay.
- Direct Start.** It is possible, though even less desirable, to climb directly on loose rock to gain the sapling beneath the overlap on the first pitch.

Broomhill Hotel Quarry

OS Ref 764465 Sheet 150 (1:50,000 Landranger Series)

A small, sheltered, west-facing quarry which is slow to dry and rather vegetated. Approach by continuing along the B4232, past the Clock Tower, and into West Malvern. About 100 yards south of West Malvern Village Hall on the east side of the road is the Broomhill Hotel. A few yards south of the hotel entrance a footpath leads to a gate. The quarry lies through the gate on the right. The climbs are described from LEFT to RIGHT.

14. **Jennie Said I Could** 25ft Severe
 Gain and climb the obvious thin leftward-trending crack moving left at

the top to a tree belay.

15. **Syringe** 35ft VS 4C
 Follow the previous route until it is possible to step rightwards into the hanging groove. Follow this to a ledge and then move left to a tree belay.
16. **We Know The Meaning Of Cleaning** 40ft Hard Severe
 The slabby central groove. Move easily into the smooth upper groove and step right to a ramp leading to a small tree. Move diagonally right to a tree belay.
17. **Smack** 40ft E2 5B
 Start just right of the arête. Pull up onto the slab with difficulty and climb past a jammed wire to a ledge on the left. Step back right and finish carefully up the flakes.

THE MALVERN HILLS: FIRST ASCENTS

Details of the following routes are unknown: *The Slide, The Sidel*

- The Hangover** H.Sutcliffe, by the original line, 1943
 The direct ascent is traditional.
- The Sidel** H.Sutcliffe, 1943
- Reservoir Cracks** C.W.F.Noyce and P.F.Holmes,
 30/3/49
- Ivy Buttress** C.W.F.Noyce, 1949
 Climbed direct by S.Richardson in 1979.
- Just a Second** C.W.F.Noyce, 1949
- Wait a Minute** C.W.F.Noyce, 1949
- The Witch** R.S.D.Smith and T.Southall, 19/5/77
- Tollgate Arête** R.S.D.Smith and H.Clover, June 1978
 The direct start was added by R.Lanchbury on 18/7/93.
- The Prow** S.Richardson and I.Johnston, June 1978

Right Groove H.Clover and S.Richardson, June 1978
Central Groove S.Richardson and H.Clover, June 1978
Strong Persuader I.Johnston, 1979
We know the meaning etc. P.Stacey and D.Kerr, 12/7/87
Jennie Said I could P.Stacey (solo), 19/9/87
Syringe R.Lanchbury, T.Penning and A.Norbury, 27/9/87
Smack T.Penning, R.Lanchbury and P. Cresswell, 27/9/87
 Originally led with a bolt runner.
 This was removed and led by D.Kerr in October 1987

Publication of Rock Climbs in the West Midlands. 1988.

WORCESTERSHIRE OTHER CRAGS

Kinver Edge

OS Ref: 835836 Sheet 138 (1:50,000 Landranger Series)

The edge is well signposted from Kinver Village. The land is owned by the National Trust who have erected 'No Climbing' signs. Climbing at Kinver has taken place mainly on the **Holy Austin Rock**; the sandstone has been carved in many places to provide interesting rock houses which are now mainly used by glue sniffers.

Habberley Valley

OS Ref: 803779 Sheet 138 (1:50,000 Landranger Series)

Habberley Valley lies three quarters of a mile to the north-west of

Kidderminster and off the B4190. A signpost 'Private Road Habberley Valley' indicates the entrance to the valley and visitors may drive up the road, but cars must be left in the car park on the right-hand side of the road after approximately 800 yards. Habberley Valley is owned and managed by Wyre Forest District Council and there are no restrictions on climbing.

There are two areas of climbing. **Peckett Rock** is the obvious weathered sandstone pinnacle which offers some interesting bouldering. The clean slabs at the head of the valley, **Ridgestone Rock**, may also provide some amusement, they reach a maximum height of 70ft but are rather friable. The steps cut into Ridgestone Rock are known as **Jacob's Ladder**.

Black Stone

OS Ref: 794740 Sheet 138 (1:50,000 Landranger Series)

A large lump of sandstone situated one mile south of Bewdley and lying behind Black Stone Farm. Black Stone reaches a height of 160ft and the landowner now charges a fee for the use of the crag. Black Stone is mainly used by organised groups for abseil practice and it can offer very little to tempt the serious climber.

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© D.Kerr. Please note that the information provided in this guide has not been checked for accuracy or for any changes since it was first published in West Midlands Rock in 1995. Climbers should therefore use their own skills and judgement when undertaking climbing at any of these crags. Please also note that climbing is a dangerous activity and no reliance should be placed on the accuracy (or otherwise) of the information contained within this guide.