

A D V E N T U R E S

A T T H E E D G E O F T H E W O R L D



**THE
EPIC
STORY
OF
TASMANIAN
ROCK
CLIMBING**

GERRY NARKOWICZ & SIMON BISCHOFF

CLIMB TASMANIA INCORPORATED



Left: Kim Carrigan working what would become Australia's first grade-31 route, Lord of the Rings, Mt Arapiles. Photo: Carrigan collection

F O R E W O R D

KIM CARRIGAN

Climbing for me became a lifestyle choice at the age of 14. Growing up in Sydney, where an 'Outer Metropolitan Excursion' ticket would get us a weekend trip to the Blue Mountains for \$0.50, I was able to indulge that passion without the need for a driver's licence or the tutelage of the climbing establishment.

At that time, climbing history came mostly from the exploits of crazies in the European Alps, and in tales like that of Warren Harding and Dean Caldwell's first ascent of The Nose of El Capitan in Yosemite. In contrast, information on the history of Australian climbing was thin on the ground, and that of Tasmania even more spartan.

Still, there were a few stories about the first ascents of Federation Peak and Frenchmans Cap, Australian feats against which we could test our mettle, and so in January '74, that same yearning for independence and freedom had me hitchhiking to Melbourne for the school Christmas holidays, followed by a \$79 return flight to Devonport. I was in heaven.

In my mind, mountaineering was a sport and rock climbing merely a subset of that activity. Whilst Australia is blessed with an abundance of craggy outcrops, of mountains we are not similarly endowed. Our choices are limited to the Warrumbungles, Ball's Pyramid and, of course, the remote peaks of Tasmania. Inspired by the efforts of Bryden Allen and Jack Pettigrew, I made my first trip to Frenchmans Cap with the hope of at least repeating The Sydney Route. Beaten and bloodied by

the miserable walk in across the sodden Loddens and worn down by two weeks of listening to torrential rain batter the roof of Tahune Hut, we finally managed to battle up Gwendolen Ridge. This was not the auspicious start I had been hoping for, but it did put into context the challenges overcome by those earlier giants to establish significant first ascents in remote wilderness.

Like most otherworldly pursuits, climbing is based on the new blood of the day seeking to make their mark on history by building on the work of their predecessors and this first Tasmanian experience whet my appetite for subsequent expeditions to Frenchmans Cap, climbing both The Great Flake (22) with Evelyn Lees and the first foray up De Gaulle's Nose (23) with Mark Moorhead. Trips with Ian Lewis to the Totem Pole, new routes on the Organ Pipes, Stacks Bluff and the Freycinet traverse have always left me hankering for more.

Geology plays an extraordinary role in climbing. Movement, sequence and flow are a function of rock type. Tasmania is blessed with a diversity of stone barely rivalled in the world. Dolerite and quartzite dominate, but there is also granite, sandstone and conglomerate. Tasmania's unique landscape for 'rockaneering' offers extraordinary diversity, remote wilderness, challenging big crags and infinite possibilities. And yet climbing has always been more than just a sport. It has been described as a cross between gymnastics and chess, but this does not effectively capture the importance of the climbing culture. Whilst esoteric at best, the eclectic mix of people and

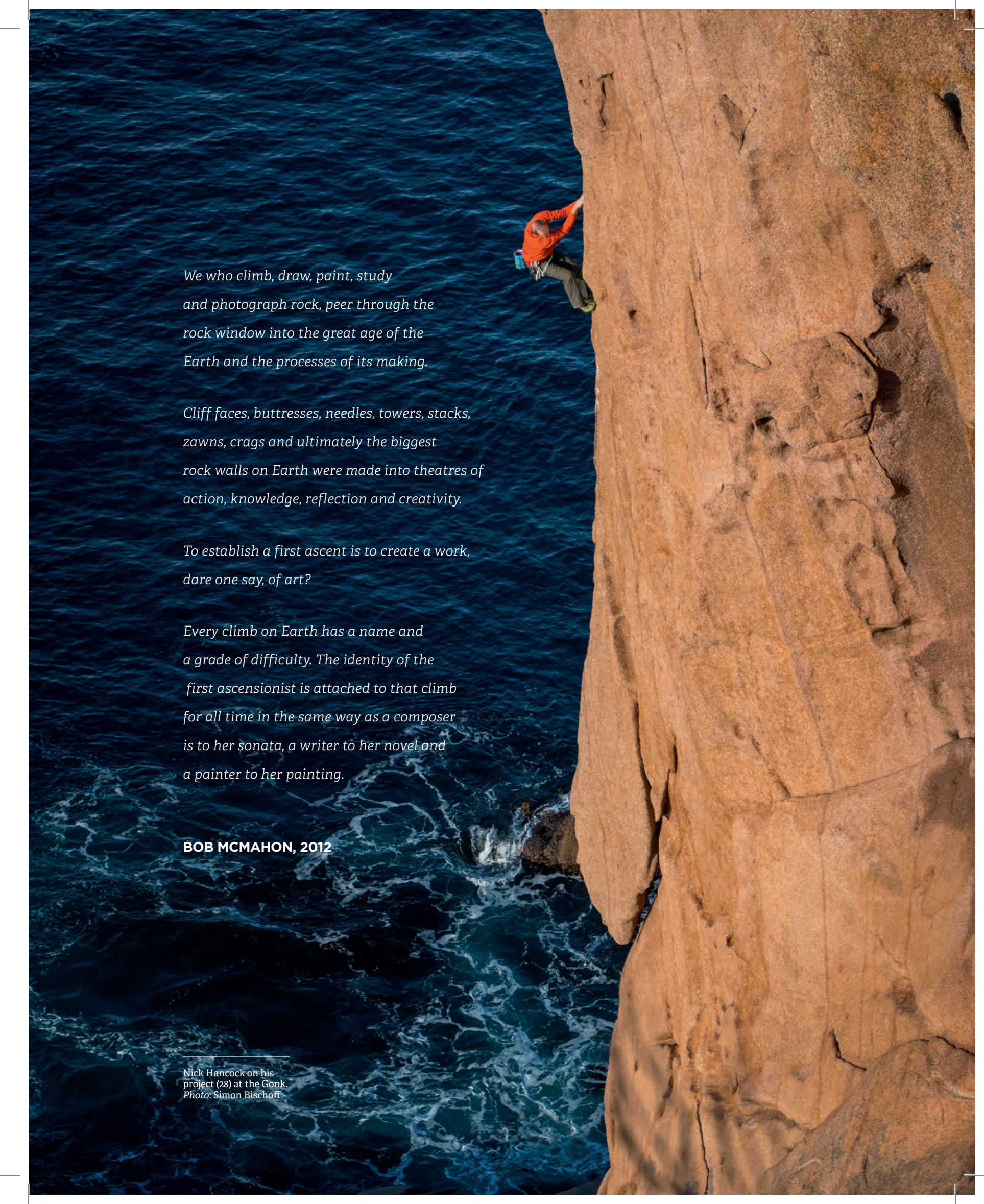
personalities in Tasmanian climbing has shaped a culture that is unique to a time and place.

Gerry's book of Tasmanian climbing brings together much of what has previously been written on the subject, as well as covering new ground and in so doing, admirably documents the past and the present before painting an enviable picture for the future. The reading is captivating, the stories engrossing and the people come to life as giants. The Tasmanian culture shines strongly through the host of interviews and the adventures leap off the page that we might one day seek to emulate them.

The gauntlet has been thrown down for the next generation to pioneer routes of the difficulty of the Tooth Fairy (32) or Roid Rage (31) in the remoteness of Frenchmans Cap or the Tyndalls. The future of Tasmanian climbing has never looked so bright.

GLENN TEMPEST ON KIM CARRIGAN

During the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, Kim Carrigan dominated the Australian climbing scene by freeing and/or establishing hundreds of new climbs at often unprecedented levels of difficulty. Kim was also the first Australian to solidly establish himself on the world stage and is today regarded as one of the finest climbers of his generation.

A high-angle photograph of a person in an orange jacket and dark pants climbing a steep, reddish-brown rock face. The person is positioned in the upper left quadrant of the frame, clinging to the rock. The rock face is textured and shows signs of weathering. Below the rock, the ocean is a deep, dark blue with white foam from waves crashing against the base of the cliff. The overall scene is dramatic and emphasizes the scale and difficulty of the climb.

*We who climb, draw, paint, study
and photograph rock, peer through the
rock window into the great age of the
Earth and the processes of its making.*

*Cliff faces, buttresses, needles, towers, stacks,
zawns, crags and ultimately the biggest
rock walls on Earth were made into theatres of
action, knowledge, reflection and creativity.*

*To establish a first ascent is to create a work,
dare one say, of art?*

*Every climb on Earth has a name and
a grade of difficulty. The identity of the
first ascensionist is attached to that climb
for all time in the same way as a composer
is to her sonata, a writer to her novel and
a painter to her painting.*

BOB MCMAHON, 2012

Nick Hancock on his
project (28) at the Gonk.
Photo: Simon Bischoff

P R E F A C E

*“Truly this is edge of the world territory,
its ruggedness and beauty, its fierce
storms and primordial scrubs and forests
are part and parcel of the thought.”*

**JOHN BÉCHERVAISE AFTER THE FIRST ASCENT
OF FEDERATION PEAK IN 1949.**

Tasmania lies 240km south of mainland Australia, smack bang in the path of the Roaring Forties – wild westerly winds that roar across the Southern Ocean and slam into the west coast bringing torrential rain, snow and freezing temperatures, and in so doing help to shape an uncompromising landscape of remote mountains and dramatic coastal cliffs. Just walking in the wilderness of Tasmania is more than enough adventure for most, but for generations of rock climbers in search of adventures at the edge of the world, Tasmania has been a paradise.

The remoteness of some of our mountains, our rugged coastline with the tallest sea cliffs in the Southern Hemisphere, the density of our ancient forests, our peculiar geology with the largest intrusions of dolerite in the world, our wild, unpredictable weather, our small climbing community and uncrowded crags, have combined to make climbing in Tasmania something special.

From the first recorded Tasmanian rock climb on Cradle Mountain in 1914, through the few extreme bushwalkers in the early part of the century, from climbing's emergence as an activity in its own right in the 1950s and '60s, to the lunatic fringe pushing boundaries in the 1970s and '80s, up until recent times when it has become a more mainstream activity, adventure has been at the heart of Tasmanian climbing. This history of wild adventure is undoubtedly the result of the wild Tasmanian landscape.

A Tasmanian historian once wrote, “In Tasmania we tell stories to reassure ourselves we have not slipped unnoticed over the rim of the world.” It's about time the story of Tasmanian climbing was told, so that it doesn't fall unnoticed off the edge of the world to be forgotten. While I have tried to be faithful to the historical narrative of Tasmanian climbing, I don't claim it as a definitive history. What started as an idea for a history book, evolved more into a celebration of our climbing, honouring the people involved, enjoying their superlative and exciting adventures, and appreciating our unique and precious wilderness.

Tasmania's savage landscape has always attracted a particular kind of person... big personalities pulling off massive feats on some of the most improbable rock features in the world. Many of these 'larger than life' characters have contributed to the book and their stories form the bulk of what follows. The land that their words evoke is brought to life in Simon Bischoff's stunning photographs and together I hope this book will be regarded as the collective memory of the Tasmanian climbing community. Immerse yourself and enjoy this record of their *Adventures at the Edge of the World*.

GERRY NARKOWICZ, JANUARY 2019



The Wedding Cake at Cape Raoul. *Photo: Simon Bischoff*

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Cheers to my old mate Bobbo, who sadly summited too early in 2013. Thanks for the friendship, the adventures, your insatiable thirst for discovery and showing me what climbing was all about. Your passing made me realise the need to write this book.

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Pat Conaghan	Nick Hancock	Robert McMahon	Dean Rollins	Mathew Farrell

Sunset at Lake Youl, Ben Lomond. Photo Robert McMahon

TASMANIAN CRAGS

1. ORGAN PIPES

The most spectacular location of any local crag in Australia, these 100m high dolerite columns tower above the city of Hobart.

2. CAPE RAOUL

One of the most amazing coastal formations in the world, a narrow ridge of dolerite pinnacles extending out to sea. Home of Pole Dancer and other unique pinnacle climbs.

3. MT BROWN

Adventure sport climbing in a dramatic coastal setting facing the Southern Ocean. Spectacularly located bolted routes on the 200m high main face and world-class single-pitch routes at the Paradiso.

4. CAPE PILLAR

The tallest sea cliffs in the Southern Hemisphere.

5. TASMAN PENINSULA

Home to the unique sea stacks of the Moai, Candlestick, and the world-famous Totem Pole.

6. SAND RIVER

Hundreds of small, bolted sandstone climbs in a tranquil valley provide the winter playground for Hobart climbers.

7. FREYCINET PENINSULA

Granite sea-cliff climbing paradise. Hundreds of sport routes and traditional climbs amid stunning coastal scenery.

8. BARE ROCK

Two hundred metre high black and orange dolerite face overlooking farmland in the Fingal Valley. Major sport climbing crag.

9. STACKS BLUFF

Large, dark, south facing dolerite crag on the southern escarpment of Ben Lomond provide serious traditional crack and face climbs.

10. BEN LOMOND

Alpine plateau with huge columnar dolerite cliffs plunging from all sides. The premier crack-climbing venue in Australia.

11. NORTH ESK RIVER

A rugged gorge near Launceston with over 300 routes on small dolerite crags.

12. CATARACT GORGE

Small dolerite crags in a spectacular gorge carved by the South Esk River as it flows through central Launceston.

13. HILLWOOD

Basalt sport climbing venue with 150 moderately graded routes and easy access near Launceston.

14. FLINDERS ISLAND

Bass Strait climbing paradise on the perfect seaside granite of Killiecrankie, and the vast, blank faces on Mt Strzelecki.

15. MT ROLAND

Dominating the landscape near the farming community of Sheffield, this large conglomerate peak is home to the classic Rysavy Ridge.

16. ROCKY CAPE & SISTERS BEACH

The best cliffs on the North-West Coast provide entertaining traditional and sport climbing in a lovely seaside location.

17. CONICAL ROCKS

Shapely granite boulders in an idyllic location on the remote West Coast.

18. TYNDALLS

Supposedly the unclimbable cliff when it was discovered, this steep, 300m conglomerate cliff reflects brightly in a sea of mirrors below: the beautiful Lake Huntley.

19. MT GERYON & THE ACROPOLIS

Huge dolerite faces up to 450m high provide long traditional climbs in a remote wilderness setting.

20. FRENCHMANS CAP

Australia's premier wilderness climbing venue, a gigantic 350m face of overhanging quartzite.

21. ADAMSFIELD

Sport climbing on conglomerate boulders in a wilderness setting.

22. FEDERATION PEAK

Australia's most spectacular mountain, a jagged quartzite tooth rising 600m from a primordial jungle. Home to the longest rock climb in the country.

23. CLOUDY BAY

Superb bolted routes on a lonely mountain top and in thundering zawns in a truly edge-of-the-world location.



Rosie Hohnen on After Midnight (24).
Photo: Simon Bischoff

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CHAPTER ONE

TASMANIA

ADVENTURE ISLAND

**“IN HIS ATTEMPT TO
TRANSCEND THE
TRIVIALITY OF HIS LIFE,
MAN IS DRIVEN TO SEEK
ADVENTURE, TO LOOK
BEYOND AND EVEN TO
CROSS, THE LIMITING
FRONTIER OF HUMAN
EXISTENCE.”**

BOB MCMAHON

Col Hocking trying to pass a knot
in the rope during the first ascent
of the Candlestick from sea level
in 1971. Photo: Mendel Tillema

Adventures at the edge of the world

GERRY NARKOWICZ

Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths,
ask where the good way is and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.

JEREMIAH 6:16

One sceptic of the viability of this book said, "History is boring, and the subject is nutters climbing rocks at the arse end of the world". But I think it is precisely these things which make Tasmanian climbing history interesting.

To the casual observer, climbers may appear to be nutters with a death wish. "It's easier this way via the track," one fellow joked as we prepared to abseil from a lookout fence in the Cataract Gorge. Yes it is easier, but with the right equipment and knowledge, climbers have found a glorious, and relatively safe, way to slake their thirst for adventure.

The spirit of adventure is central to the climbing experience. Robert (Bob) McMahon, the most prolific pioneer of new climbs in Tasmanian history once wrote, "In his attempt to transcend the triviality of his life, man is driven to seek adventure, to look beyond and even to cross the limiting frontier of human existence." Rock climbing is a heady combination of physical prowess, risk and wild locations. It's the same buzz an athlete gets, using their skill and fitness to overcome a challenge. Throw in some risk, an 'edge of the world' location like the Totem Pole and friendships heightened by the experience, it's no wonder climbers keep coming back for more.

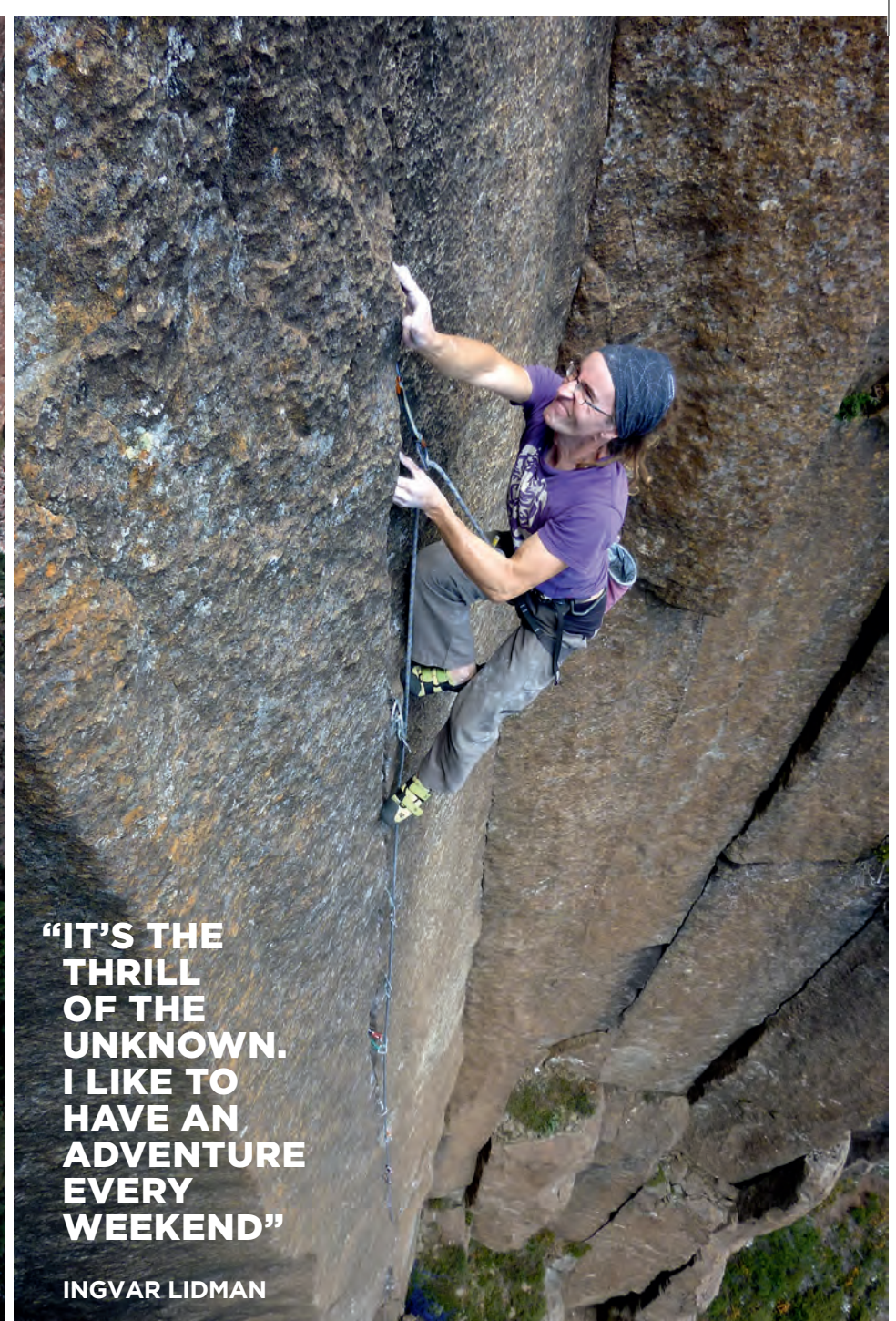
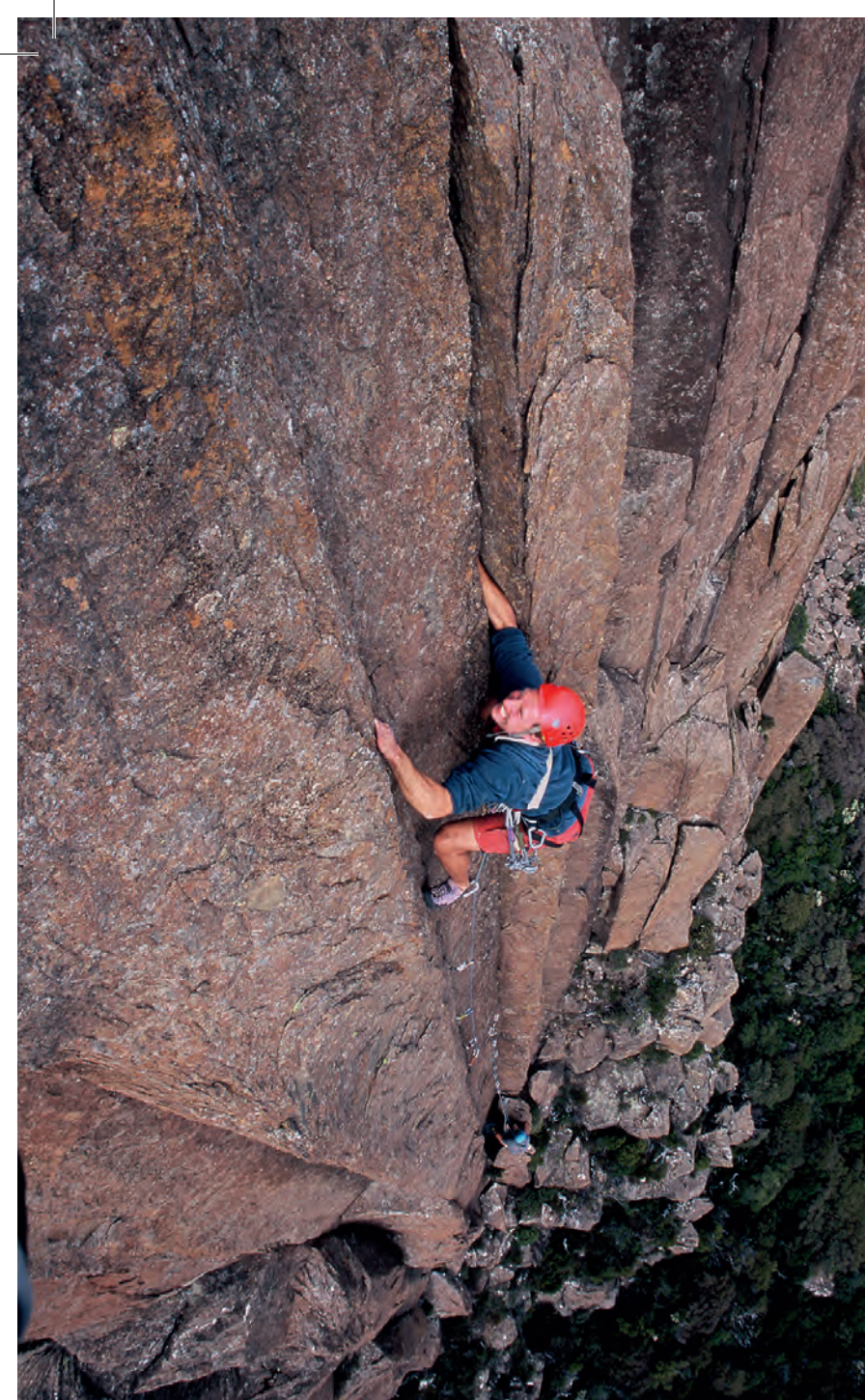
To move on rock with hundreds of metres of air beneath my feet and feel the cool mountain breeze, reconnects me

with the natural world and enlivens my soul. After a day of climbing there is nothing like enjoying a few beers and laughing with friends around a campfire. This feeling of freedom keeps drawing me back to the mountains time and time again. Ingvar Lidman, a current hard-core climber and pioneer of extreme first ascents, said recently, "It's the thrill of the unknown. I like to have an adventure every weekend." And if there ever was a place on the planet designed for climbing adventures, it would be Tasmania.

Tasmania, like Timbuktu, is a byword for remoteness. "As with Patagonia, to which in geological prehistory it was attached, it is like outer space on earth and invoked by those at the center to stand for all that is far-flung, strange and unverifiable." (Nicholas Shakespeare, p7 2004)

Some 40,000 years ago, the first humans colonised Tasmania, their adventurous spirit leading them to the farthest reaches of the island. The Tasmanian Aborigines were a diverse set of peoples who persevered through multiple glaciations and, when Bass Strait flooded for the last time around 9,000 years ago, the longest isolation in human history.

Cut off from the rest of Australia, Tasmania became an ark supporting unique wildlife, such as the thylacine, or



Tasmanian Tiger. The first European to sight Tasmania was Dutch navigator Abel Tasman in 1642, and it was colonised by the British in the early part of the 19th century. It became Britain’s most distant penal colony, and from 1812 to 1853, some 76,000 convicts landed here on what must have seemed to them as the end of the world. They became the labour force that built the early infrastructure of the island that was initially called Van Diemen’s Land. Tales of brutality in the prisons, depravity in the streets and even cannibalism, painted Tasmania as near a realisation of hell on Earth as could be, but though the convicts and settlers suffered immensely, no one had it worse than the Aborigines. Never more than several thousand strong, most were dead by the end of the ‘Black War’ (1824-1831).

The capital city of Hobart was once the southern-most city in the world and the last port of call for Antarctic explorers. It is this background of isolation, recent

European settlement, the brutality of the penal colony, the genocide of its native inhabitants, strong ties to Britain, a small population, plus its wild landscape, that has shaped all aspects of Tasmanian life since, and the view Tasmanians have of themselves and others.

On the mainland, Tasmanians historically have been perceived as being backward, caught in a time warp, and even in-bred. The old joke is that we used to have two heads and we all have a scar on our shoulder. Tasmania was forgotten and left off the Commonwealth Games map of Australia when the Games were held in Brisbane in 1982.

Technology and ideas were sometimes slow to make it across Bass Strait, but in many ways, Tasmania’s remoteness has protected it, and what made it the butt of jokes has become its strongest attraction. Tourism Tasmania uses the extinct Tasmanian Tiger as its emblem, a symbol that

sums up the Tasmanian experience, a wild place at the edge of the world with rare, unique and exciting adventures to be had, but a place that is delicate and precious.

The implications for rock climbing are instructive. The spread of civilisation and technology has reduced the wild lands of the world to a few isolated areas. Tasmania still possesses tracts of true wilderness, and some 42% of

Far Left: Gerry Narkowicz on the Road to Ballyshannon (22) at Pavement Bluff, Ben Lomond. Photo: Bob McMahon

Centre Left: Ingvar Lidman on the first ascent of The Wizard (28) at Ben Lomond. Photo: Bob McMahon

Below: Hanging Lake from the summit of Federation Peak Photo: Simon Bischoff



the land is protected in national parks or world heritage sites. Locals and visitors alike seek adventure climbing experiences on our wilderness crags and rugged coastline, a resource that is yearned after, but shrinking in our modern world. It also means there is plenty of unclimbed rock and new route development left in Tasmania, making it the envy of many in the climbing world.

In the pioneering days of Tasmanian rock climbing, less infrastructure meant trips to remote cliffs required greater commitment than today, and some of the hardships and epics brought on by that remoteness are recorded in this book.

Some modern day adventurers are going to the wilderness, seeking to establish new climbs with bolting technology. On remote cliffs, this is an enormous challenge, with the extra heavy equipment required, the complicated logistics to equip bolted routes and then to climb them at the cutting edge of difficulty often takes many attempts over several days.

The wildness of the landscape, the geology and the weather, impacts on everything to do with rock climbing in Tasmania. Trips to cliffs in the south-west wilderness require windows of perfect weather for any climbing to

take place, which is often not the case. Snow is possible at any time of year. On the east coast however, a rain shadow exists which means climbing is possible most of the year round, so winter climbing often centres around the granite cliffs at Freycinet National Park.

Tasmania has the largest intrusions of dolerite in the world, a rare rock type which typically forms powerful, vertical crack lines. Consequently, Tasmanian climbers are well known for their prowess at jamming, a brutal technique requiring the climber to chin up on hands mashed into a crack. Dolerite not only forms the majority of the mountains, but also much of the coastline. On no other rock type in Australia do the forces of erosion create such sky-rocketing, slender sea stacks such as the Totem Pole, which Tasmanian climbing is world famous for.

The variety of rock types and relatively short distances by road, make Tasmanian climbing interesting, varied and accessible. One day you could be climbing granite slabs on the east coast, and the next day be jamming a soaring dolerite crack on an alpine crag. When there is an easterly low weather pattern it's time to head west, and within a few hours you could be hiking into the conglomerate walls of the Tyndall Range or the 350m



Above:
Frenchmans
Cap. Photo:
David Neilson

Right: Bob
McMahon.
Photo: Gerry
Narkowicz

quartzite face of Frenchmans Cap. Tasmania also has 334 offshore islands, only a handful of which have been explored by rock climbers. They offer even more remote climbing challenges and a largely unexplored frontier for new climbs.

Our wild landscape and unique geography has made Tasmania synonymous with adventure climbing and is now attracting many foreign climbers and mainlanders. Doing the time warp is a thing of the past now that Tasmania has modern infrastructure and local climbers have embraced current trends in climbing. Only two things have remained consistent from the past – you will likely have the cliffs to yourselves and secondly, you are guaranteed an adventure. Those brave enough to swim across a chasm boiling with surf to climb the Candlestick or trek for two days to tackle the 350m face of Frenchmans Cap, will have a wild experience and create their own personal history at the edge of the world.

Why is it important to record climbing history? When my best friend and mentor Bob McMahon passed away in 2013, a history maker departed our midst and along with him, a treasure trove of memories and incredible stories. Thank goodness he kept detailed journals. It stunned me into realising that his adventures needed to be recorded for posterity in an informative book, and not just his adventures, but those of the Malthus brothers of 1914 on Cradle, John Béchervaise in 1949, Mike Douglas and Reg Williams in the 1960s, Ian Lewis and Lyle Closs in the '70s, Simon Parsons and Doug Fife in the '80s, Sam Edwards in the '90s and Garry Phillips in the 2000s, to name just a few.

The passage of time has provided the opportunity for lessons to be learnt about people, their successes, mistakes and interactions. Unless history is

recorded however, the memories will fade into the distant past and the lessons learnt will be lost.

Bob McMahon described our memory akin to walking through a museum of the mind. "They say that time is a continuum but the more the present recedes into the past, the more it resembles snapshots, or glass cased exhibits in the museum of the mind. Years after the ascent, it is difficult to maintain a flow of events in the memory, and it is beguilingly easy to be convinced of the truth of a memory, when it may be a distortion or fabrication of events for the sake of a story. Isolated scenes may be clear, but the flow is long gone."

It is possible that some of the stories recorded in this book might be the product of failing memories and embellished for the sake of a campfire yarn. But before collective amnesia sets in and we all get too old, it is important to record the stories, even if the raconteur can't remember all the facts. There is a richness that flows from appreciating our heritage, and understanding the natural, social, cultural, and ethical factors that have shaped modern climbing. It's more than a ticklist, or 'that 25 to the left of the 22.' Behind every climb is a fascinating story of people; their achievements, struggles, fun, danger and adventures. But to remain ignorant of climbing history, or worse still, disregard it, is a diminution of the climbing experience.

Every generation of climbers has been dismissive of history to some degree, giving the finger to the crusty old pricks from the past. I certainly did, to my regret and loss, but now that I'm becoming a crusty old prick, I have a greater appreciation for history. History is actually still being made today, and what we do, or don't do, will shape the way of climbing in the future. Those ignorant of history, often through no fault of their own, are likely to repeat its mistakes, and even re-write history.

On a practical level, this could mean claiming a first ascent and adding bolts when someone already climbed the same features years ago. Case in point: I recently put five bolts in a lovely phallic pillar in the Cataract Gorge and named it 'Biggus Dikkus.' Monty Python fans will get the meaning of that one. When I told Doug Fife about it, he said he had climbed it five years previously using only traditional gear. "Impossible. It's unprotectable!" I exclaimed. Douggy proceeded to tell me a hair raising story of him soloing the first ten metres then, balanced on a small foothold on the arête, he tried to lasso the entire pinnacle with a five metre length of sling. His girlfriend was on the cliff top opposite, trying to catch the sling with a stick, and drag it around the pinnacle for him. They succeeded with this ingenious and dangerous commitment to traditional style, and Douggy proved that he had much bigger balls than me. But he didn't record his climb, and it was lost to history until I came and invented a new history for the Biggus Dikkus pinnacle.



An ignorance of history might have negative consequences for the beautiful environment we climb in. From the early twentieth century right up to the 1980s, climbers were largely from bushwalking backgrounds, were at home in the wilderness and mostly respectful of the environment. Most climbers from the '60s through to the '80s, were involved in the conservation movement and the protests that divided our state, as red-neck governments were trying to industrialise, flood and deforest our landscape.

Now most people are introduced to climbing through indoor gyms. As an outdoor education teacher, I know how great a challenge it is to teach city kids about minimal impact camping, let alone instill in them an appreciation of the wilderness. If this generation of youth start climbing with no understanding of history and little appreciation of the environment, what will be the impact on our wild places? Without the restraining influences of traditional climbing culture, ethics and lessons learnt from history, the last remaining bastions of bolt-free climbing such as Ben Lomond might be ruined. Alongside the exultant cry of the currawong will be the whirring of hammer drills, and with it, all sense of self-reliance and adventure will disappear like that mountain bird swooping into a Ben Lomond mist.

Doing more with less, goes to the core of the meaning of adventure. The challenge for the future is to maintain the quality of our adventure climbing values while

fostering the development of sport climbing. Tasmania's untouched, unspoilt wild country is what draws us there in the first place, but it is a finite resource. How can we go on having adventures at the edge of the world, without eventually wrecking the joint?

There is great value, therefore, in recording the efforts of our climbing pioneers. It pays them the respect they deserve, for without them the climbs wouldn't exist.

It also lays down an historical document, which shows us where we have come from, why it matters, and gives us a line in the sand – a reference point from which to shape climbing behaviour and our interaction with the environment in the future.

On reflection, has much changed in climbing at all? Simon Madden wrote a marvelous editorial in *Vertical Life* magazine which provides a fitting conclusion to this article. He writes,

"Will climbing always at its core be the same, with different faces, different gear on different routes but governed by the same human interactions? Maybe the past wasn't so different. The route may

be harder or of a different style, the scene larger, but there is still the same piss-taking and camaraderie, the same competing with nemeses and co-operating with companions, the same search for peace or validation, the thirst for thrills and the moments of calm spent staring over treetops, alone in your mind and totally content. We all, regardless of the era in which we climb, are simply fumbling through this thing called life, using the rock to bring us together as people, and bring our lives together with meaning and purpose." ■

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