

## TOWARDS 1000 NEW CLIMBS MY CLIMBING LIFE SO FAR

I've climbed 822 new routes since I started climbing in 1980. My goal is to reach 1000 new routes within the next 5 years. I just did an inventory of all the first ascents I've either led or seconded, the dates I climbed them and the partners I was with. In compiling this list I realized that it's a picture of my life over the past 36 years.

It represents hundreds of climbing days, which shows that climbing has defined my life..its what I do. In the past 36 years, there has only been 9 years where I did not put up a new route. I still climbed a lot, but other priorities like family and full time Christian ministry took over and took me to live in places with little opportunity for first ascents. But nevertheless, this list of new routes shows me that climbing and the pursuit of new routes has been a constant in my life for a long time. I've never been bored with it. I'm always psyched, always dreaming of the next project.

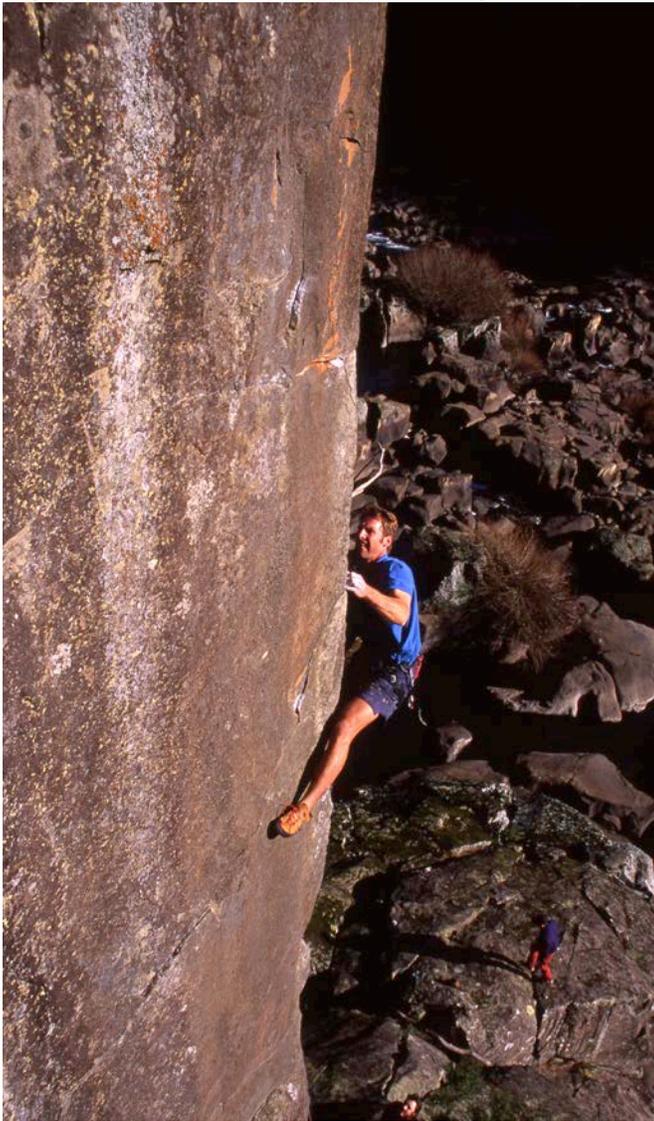


*Mick Ling and I in May 1982 on a day trip to Pavement Bluff for a new route. It's minus 10 degrees, 4 hours walk to the crag..we must be frickin insane. I collapsed with hypothermia vomiting in a Launceston gutter after this epic.*

This list also begs the question of why spend so much time seeking out new pieces of rock to climb, in often obscure places, hours and hours of scrub bashing, thousands of dollars worth of bolts, scrubbing moss, trundling loose rock, dirt in your eyes, to end up with a climb that may not get repeated. But pioneering seems to be the motivating force every time I go climbing..an obsession almost. I sometimes repeat classics, but its not as satisfying as creating a climb..a non-descript piece of

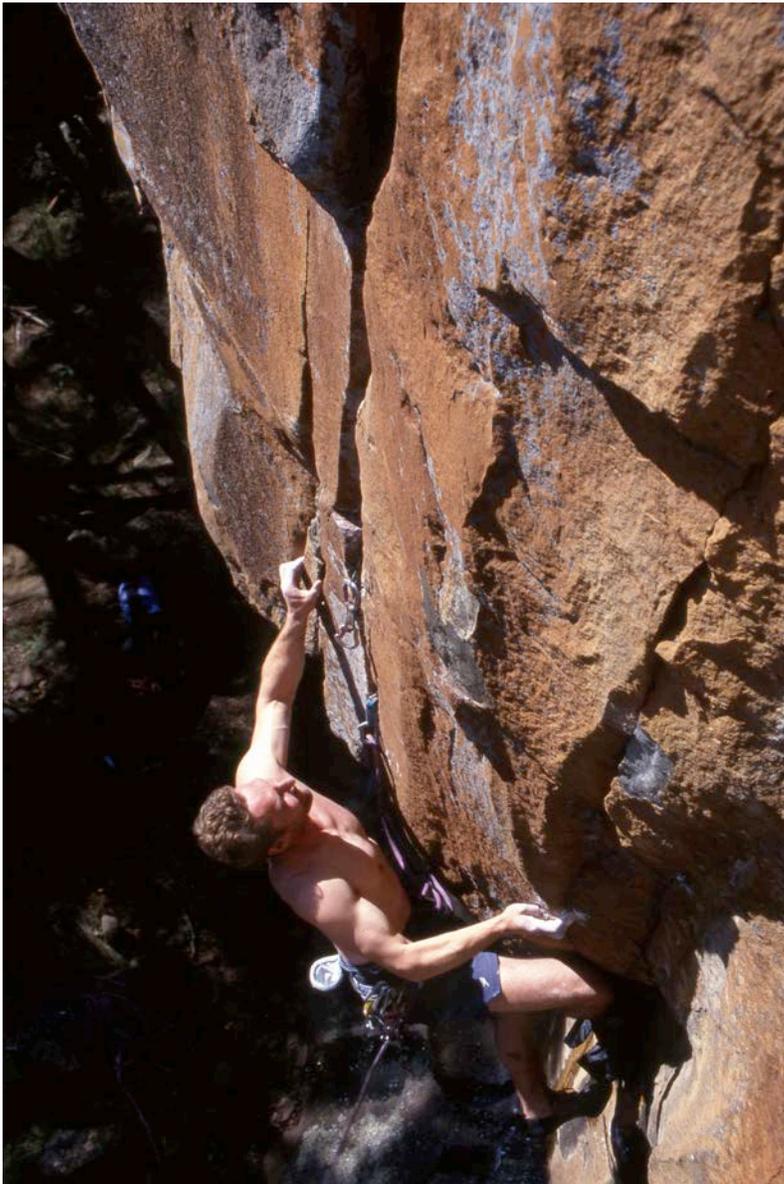
rock is changed forever by the pioneer. It becomes a sequence of moves, a memory, a legend, a story around a campfire, a shared experience with a friend, something for others to either enjoy or criticize. 'But are they routes of quality Gerry?' a cynic once asked. Questions like that from the bottom-feeders don't make sense to me. There has always been some redeeming factor in a route to bother roping up in the first place, even if its as base as totality of development in a local area. As long as I'm having fun that's all that matters.

Documenting all my first ascents shows me where I have spent a lot of my time over the past 36 years. In the South Esk river between Kings Bridge in the city to Trevallyn Dam 6km upstream is where I've spent most of my time; 261 new climbs. It is one of the great urban climbing venues of the world, a backyard wilderness with about 1000 rock climbs in central Launceston. Its not world class by any means, but as a local crag its sensational. As recently as last weekend, I did 6 first ascents in one day with Andrew Martin, and they weren't fillers or choss-piles. It was the most fun I've had climbing this year. One grade 22 arete would be 3 stars on any cliff in Tassie.



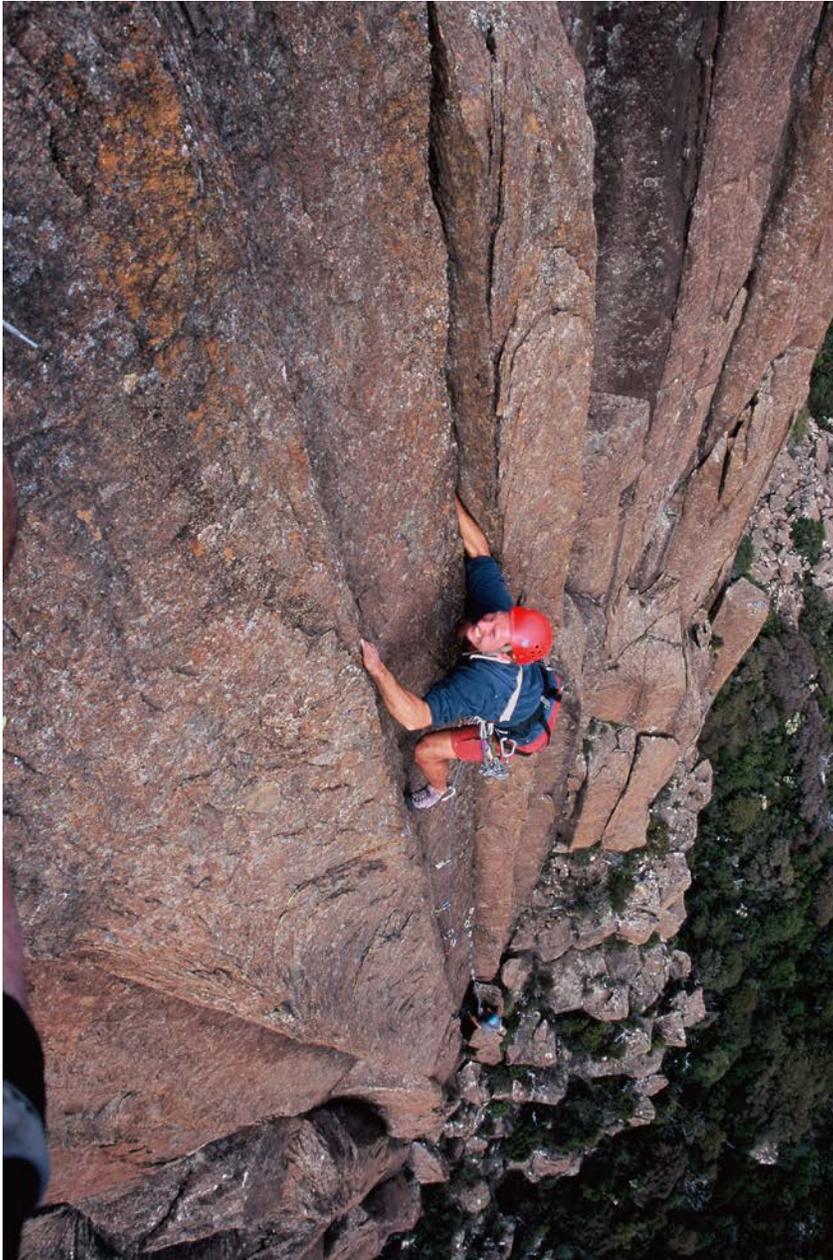
*Louis the King (22), a classic gorge arête I led in 1983.*

The next place is the North Esk river, 15 minutes from town and a wilder, bigger gorge cuts through the landscape with dozens of beautiful, orange coloured buttresses raked across the hillsides. 163 first ascents and lots of great fun and memories. To illustrate a microcosm of this, I visited Peyton Place with my daughter recently, a 10m cliff with half a dozen little classics on perfect rock, high above the raging torrent in the gorge below. I hadn't been there for 17 years, and neither had anyone else by the look of it. The casaurina trees had fallen down the climbs and I had to dig a tunnel through the tree limbs. Many climbers would dismiss Peyton Place, but after a little gardening, the climbs were excellent, I had a terrific day out with Jemimah, and it brought back vivid, valuable, important memories of Bob McMahon's first ascent of Innermost Secrets (22) in 1983, bashing in a piton in the pouring rain, and the camaraderie and frothies at the pub afterwards. If we hadn't bush-bashed and found this cliff, then the memories and the opportunity for a fun day out with my daughter at this crag wouldn't exist.



*King of Kings Direct (26), the hardest trad first ascent I've done so far, in the North Esk.*

The next field of endeavour is Ben Lomond, 107 first ascents and 30% of all the climbs on the mountain, though this could represent a far greater input of time because they are multi-pitch and often serious routes and many days out camping at places like Africa. To illustrate, 23 days camped at Africa last summer yielded 6 first ascents with lots of cleaning, route finding, and top-rope rehearsal on bold routes over 100m high, and two hours walk from the road. The Ben is my favorite climbing area with its soaring crack lines, clean mountain air, starlit icy nights, the feeling of being isolated and high above the world, the perfect tonic to refresh the soul from the grind of daily life, and strong, powerful climbs where you really earn your ascent..no finessing here, but just mash your hands in the cracks and bring on the full body pump.



*The Road to Ballyshannon (22) at Pavement Bluff, my most memorable first ascent on the Ben.*

Listing all my first ascents also shows me who I spent all this time with. I roped up with my old mate Bob McMahon (now deceased) for 348 new climbs. That's a lot of time joined together with your life in each other's hands, a lot of beers drunk and wine bottles, campfires and tents shared, a lot of bullshit talked and serious discussion of the issues of life, coming up with 348 route names, footy games watched and time spent in each other's homes with spouses and kids. That's a lot of unspoken trust, respect and admiration. I miss him a lot.



*Bob McMahon, an Australian climbing legend, who I teamed up with for 348 first ascents..*

I did 65 new routes each with Neale Smith and Mick Ling, which speaks to me of the prolific 1980's new route crew of the C.U.N.T's, the Climbers Union Of Northern Tasmania and times of great hilarity and too much alcohol. Then there's Mark Tierney who I did 46 new climbs with, and we made a great pair of juvenile delinquents developing cliffs like Headbanger Buttress with climbs like Impale Me On The Horns Of Death, and other bad taste spectaculars such as Bad Rory Chopped His Wife's Head Off and Flushed Her Down the Dunny..Mark and I won Screamer magazine's worst name award several times. The list also shows me that it's the people you climb with are the most important thing..not the climbs. I've made lifelong friendships with Bob, Smithy, Mick Ling, Andrew Martin, Ingvar Lidman, Nick Hancock, Gary Phillips, Hans Mohler, Andrew McGifford, Bruce Cameron and Doug Fife..and there's shared memories and even if you haven't seen each other for years, there's always a strong bond there by the rope.



*The Ragged Jack team of 1983. From left to right: Mick Ling, Bob McMahon, John Fantini, Lisa Johnson, Steve Moon, Greg Moore, Neale Smith, Bruce Cameron, Marie-Sylvie and me.*

Looking over which years I did the climbs also speaks of certain era's of my life so far. 140 new routes in 1984 reminds me of the golden era of development in the North and South Esk and on Ben Lomond, times when you could still find easily accessible entire cliffs and knock off ten new routes in a weekend. 64 new routes in 1999 reminds me of Hillwood and my first foray into sport climbing, training and projecting hard climbs, spending all my cash in bolts and fanatical bolting efforts at 5.30am before work by head torch. 56 new climbs in 2001 reminds me of writing the South Esk guidebook and a new route frenzy to clean up the remaining climbs for the book. 64 new climbs in 2002/2003 reminds me of all the fun I had with Andrew McGifford developing the sandstone at Blackwood Rocks, bending up u-bolts in his shed, and getting speeding tickets rushing the one hour drive for afternoon sessions. Only 130 new climbs in the last 5 years, but it represents almost pre-dominantly hard sport climbing at Bare Rock and other places in the Fingal Valley with Andrew Martin and Ingvar Lidman. It is so much time and effort to establish one sport route, especially in a big, complicated cliff like Bare Rock, but it shows me that virtually every weekend for the last five years I've driven to Fingal and camped on the summit, or at the base in the forest with the night sounds echoing off that 200m high black drive in movie screen, and got pissed with Andy, and fallen off hard climbs and eventually got up a few.

The climb names tell a story..coming up with 822 climb names is a challenge..but its usually got something to do with a book or piece of music, something funny that was going or some reflection of my spiritual journey. Dark Night of the Soul (23) at Hillwood and other religious themes remind me of heart searching times and struggles with faith and depression. Climbs like Monkey Money at Township Creek remind me of the time I abseiled into the monkey enclosure at City Park and waded in monkey piss and

shit to get \$80 in coins out of the moat. Nightmare In A Damaged Brain is sharply etched into my memory while climbing crumbling weebix at Pavement Bluff, where the holds fell off the cliff as soon as I used them. Hot Piss Burn My Dick shows how I was studying sexually transmitted diseases in my PE uni course. You Make My Tractor Sexy reminds me of dancing to this country and western tune at Andrew McGifford's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday party. Numbered Days speaks of the epic climb on the chasm wall at cape Pillar with Ben Maddison and being the most exhausted physically and emotionally on a climb in my life. And maybe my greatest route ever is Paschendaele at Bare Rock, an overhanging crack named after the world war one battlefield and a shit fight in a blood filled trench. See link of video of me climbing Paschendaele. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQ5zi2aOHUI>



*The first ascent of Monkey Money (19) at Township Creek in 1983. I lived for a month on the money I nicked out of the moat at the monkey enclosure at City Park.*

Of the 822 first ascents I've led or alternated leads on 596 of them, and seconded 226. I count the seconded routes because on trad climbs you are a team, and the first ascent can't happen without a team effort. Trad first ascents are 590, sport routes 199, and mixed bolt and trad 34. Of the grades, it seems my niche is grade 22 with 102 first ascents of this grade, 96 grade 23's, 79 grade 24's, 31 grade 25's, 7 grade 26's, 1 grade 27, and plenty between grade 18 and 21 (362 climbs). It goes to show I'm still climbing at a reasonable level for a 52 year old, but I saw a photo recently of a 70 year old guy cutting laps on 28's and I thought it's time to pull my finger out and get serious about climbing.

So with 822 new routes, I need 178 to reach my goal of 1000 new climbs and beyond. I'm hoping to reach this within 5 years, about 35 new climbs per year. With dwindling, accessible virgin rock near Launceston this will be a challenge, but I've got 9 projects on the go and maybe a scub-bash in the Esk gorges will reveal a few more hidden gems. I've lost 50% grip strength in my right hand over the last year from osteoarthritis in my wrist, legacy of a bouldering fall 20 years ago, so I won't be climbing as hard or putting up too many crimpy routes. I wonder what life will bring over the next 5 years and who I'll rope up with for those climbs, and what experiences will determine the names of those climbs. I'm psyched..to 1000 and beyond.



*Fireball (26) at Township Creek, maybe the best sport route I've ever put up.*