

Recent Routes on Penmaenbach and Penmaen Mawr

Abbreviations

BB: Bolt Belay

BR: Bolt runner

BLO: Bolt lower off (2 bolts and equipment suitable for lowering off)

ILO: Intermediate lower off for 2-stage lowering: very long pitches only (mostly >35 m)

L: Left (LH: Left Hand)

R: Right (RH: Right Hand)

Introduction

This is a brief guide to the sport routes (and a few others) I have been involved with in the Penmaenmawr/Llanfairfechan area in the last two years. Most of the routes are in Penmaen West Quarry but there are also several at Creigiau Cigfran and one at Penmaenbach Quarry. The guide gives photo topos and route descriptions for all the routes together with approach information for Cigfran and Penmaen West (Penmaenbach is already popular and access is well-covered elsewhere).

Penmaenbach Quarry, Last Butt One Level (SH 755 779)



In the Albion

1) In the Albion, 25 m, F6b+*, 6 BR, BLO

The big, inverted-staircase groove R of the large overhangs between Uluru Magic and Jack the Jeffer. The name goes with A Prelude to a Pint. A strong line with good moves and impressive positions. Graded for knowledge of the holds and sequence. It may seem harder on sight as the holds are unusually hard to spot and the best sequence is not obvious.

Start at a slabby rib directly below the groove. Climb the rib for a few m, step R across a wide crack to a slab, move up on to a block at the base of a smooth slab and step L to the most prominent crack. Now it really starts. Climb the crack and continue with difficulty through a notch in the bulge (crux) to gain the slab above. Ascend the groove to the roof. Undercut L to holds just above the lip, exposed. Gain the block above and exit round the L arete. Finish easily up the slab to the lower off.

FA: H. Walmsley, C. Calow 05/06/2015

Creigiau Cigfran (SH 694 756: Drumhouse between Fence Buttress and Black Slab)

Approaches

Turn off the A55 at J15 (Llanfairfechan East), turn immediately L towards Pendalar and park just before the road turns uphill (SH 688 756). Go up the road on foot, pass to the R of the community centre and follow the path up to a gate into the woods (Tyddin Drycin). Turn L immediately after the gate and follow the track as it bends R and runs up past a mesh fence. Go through a hole in the fence and continue R for another 25 m to a track that leads back L up 2 inclines and past 2 drum houses. From the 2nd drum house go horizontally NE (along the track of an old narrow-gauge railway line). After 100 m (just after the 2nd horizontal guy of the rockfall fence - GR SH 694 757) is a hollow containing a small building (Capel Seiriol)¹. For Fence Buttress follow a small path R up an old incline until just above a stonefall protection fence (and the adjoining gorse patch!) then traverse down and left to the foot of the routes. For Black Slab continue up the incline to the next drum house. Just above this, traverse the hillside R on a faint path to the foot of the slab.

Fence Buttress

This clean buttress of attractive grey rock can clearly be seen from the vicinity of the 2nd drum house on the approach from Pendalar (topo taken from here). In addition to the two routes described there is a mystery line further L with 2 bolts and 2 in situ pegs.

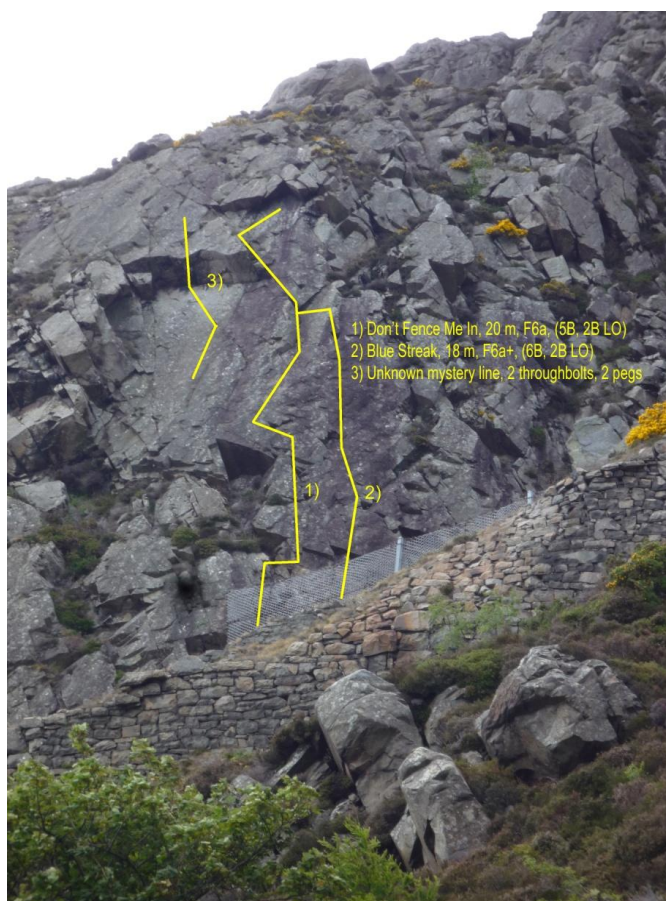
1) Don't Fence Me In, 20 m, F6a*, (5 BR, BLO) Very pleasant climbing on nice rock starting in a heathery recess on the uphill side of the fence at its L end.

Climb the initial groove on its L. Step R and climb the wall to a slightly wobbly wedged flake (well stuck - resisted removal by a pick but need not be used). Step L past the flake and climb the wall to gain the main R-facing, L-slanting ramp/groove. Up this to a 2 ring bolt LO below the capping overhang. FA: H. Walmsley, C. Calow, 05/06/2015

¹ Name taken from the local 1950 guide

(If you want to continue over the overhang it can be climbed fairly easily on jugs to trad belays on blocks above but there are no more bolts).

2) Blue Streak, 18 m, F6a*, (6 BR, including 2 on Don't Fence Me In, BLO) More pleasant climbing on lovely holds starting a few m up the bank R of Don't Fence Me In. Climb the dark streak to a harder move at its end (by the 4th bolt). Step L and follow Don't Fence Me In to the lower off. FA: C. Calow, H. Walmsley, 05/06/2015.



The Fence Butters routes

Black Slab

The Black Slab is located just right of a prominent narrow arete (see topo) on the hillside directly above the 2nd incline on the approach from Pendalar.

1) Dark Matter, 32 m, F6a+* (9 BR, BLO). A good long pitch up the L side of the black slab with very pleasant delicate climbing. Done with a 70 m rope but might just be possible with a 60 on the stretch or maybe a bit of down climbing?

Start mid way between Black Slab and the big grassy corner that bounds the black slab on its L. Climb up then L into a shallow R-facing groove. Exit this to good footholds on the R then pull back L through bulges to pass a grass patch on its L. Pass the next grass on its R then go delicately over a bulge, up a slab then R to easier ground. Step L to the lower off. FA: H. Walmsley, C. Calow, 21/05/2015.

2) Heart of Darkness, 32 m, F6a* (10 BR, BLO shared with Dark Matter). Another good long pitch with sustained delicate climbing up the middle of the black slab. It comes close to Black Slab in the mid section but just retains its independence and makes up for its eliminate nature with some very good moves.

Start up a shallow rib just L of Black Slab and follow the vague fault line that runs parallel to Black Slab over several overlaps to the Dark Matter lower off. FA: H. Walmsley, C. Calow, 21/05/2015.

3) Black Slab, 30m, F6a (8 BR, BLO). A pleasant sport route on good rock. There is a loose trad second pitch (25 m HVS 4c) up the R side of the upper recess but this is not described.

Follow the main line of weakness up the R side of the slab to a lower-off below the final bulges. Delicate top and bottom, much easier in the middle. FA: L. C. Goodey, E. Jones, 12/05/1971 as a trad route. Re-cleaned, bolted and re-climbed as Camouflage Slab (without knowledge of the previous ascent) by H. Walmsley, 21/09/2014 (Led with Soloist). The first ascensionist is happy for it to be left as a sport route with appropriate 1st ascent credits and use of the original name (Black Slab).

4) Into the Light 10 m, F6b* (2 BR, BLO). A short but exciting extension to either Black Matter or Heart of Darkness climbing the bulges directly above the Dark Matter/Heart of Darkness lower off via an inverted V niche. Can be done as a second pitch to either route or used to make one long pitch with a two-stage lower-off (maybe ** as a long combination pitch?).

Gain the inverted V niche then out to its R arete with difficulty. Bridge back L, exposed, and continue up the groove to the upper lower off. FA: H. Walmsley, C. Calow, 27/05/2015.



The Black Slab routes

Penmaen West Quarry (SH 693 752: The Pinnacle)

Character and Approaches

Penmaen West Quarry is a big quarry in 3 levels on the hillside above Black Slab. The back walls of all three Levels are rather shattered in places but also have large areas of good rock. The routes home in on these. They generally follow well-defined lines of least resistance on impressive rock features and grades range between F5c and F6c+. The rock architecture does not lend itself to grid bolting so the routes retain more individuality than at many sport venues. The pitches tend to be big: more than 30 m is the norm and they go up to 45 m. Ascents often require a bit of thought and the use of long slings to avoid issues with rope drag or the occasional sharp edge. The longer ones may require a two-stage lower off. All routes can be done on sound holds but some have a few loose ones as well that need to be recognised and avoided. For all these reasons it is probably not the best place for your first outdoor sport climbing experience but it is very rewarding for those who have the necessary skills and wish to climb in the F6 grade range. It almost feels like a sport crag for trad climbers?

Before the recent developments there were several previously established routes on the Top Level (Triskelion, At the Heart of it All, numerous easier routes on The Pinnacle) and two on the RH wall of the Middle Level (A Tetris Temperament and Room to Roam) but as far as I know, the routes described below are the first to be recorded on the main back wall of the Middle Level or on the Bottom Level. All the routes recorded here are worthwhile and several are outstanding. Most are off-vertical and on the feet but they are quite diverse in character within this genre.

If climbing only at Penmaen West it is probably easiest to approach all levels from the turning circle at the start of the quarry access road above the top of Mount Road in Llanfairfechan (SH 699 747). However, routes on the Bottom Level can be combined with routes at Creigiau Cigfran by continuing steeply up the remains of the incline above the 3rd drum house on the Black Slab approach to a 4th drum house on the edge of the Bottom Level.

For the Mount Road approach leave the A55 at junction 15, go to the lights and turn L (R if coming from the other junction) into the village centre. Turn L again about 100 m past the school (sign to Mount Rd on a small white building) and L yet again on to Mount Rd when it is reached (sign). Follow it up the hill and out of the village until it levels off at a wide junction with 2 uphill forks. Take the R fork and follow it to a turning circle where a quarry road branches off L. Park here and walk up the quarry road to stables then follow the wall up to the Wales Coast Path. Follow this L to a gate in the wall where it drops back down to Llanfairfechan. Don't go through the gate, keep above the wall for another 100 m or so until a diagonal path rises across the hillside and traverses into the top level of the quarry (very pleasant walking with fine views). There is a drum house on the outer edge of the level beyond the outcrop of The Pinnacle (15 to 20 mins to here). From it, an incline leads down to the Middle Level (1 stage) and Bottom Level (2 stages).

Upper Level

Back Wall

1) Y Garreg Gamp, 11 m, 6b (3BR, BLO): A diamond-shaped block of excellent rock at the base of the crag towards the left end of the level. Climb the slabby face diagonally from L to R with a thin crux past the 3rd bolt. Short and sweet. F.A: H.Walmsley, 30/07/2015 (led with Soloist)

2) Reincarnation, 22 m, 6a+* (7BR, BLO): The middle of the grey wall left of the Mungo Jerry descent. Good technical mantle and rockover climbing up the middle of the grey wall to the left of the Mungo Jerry's Sideburn Factory descent. It is sustained at 6a/6a+ but with rests after every move. F.A. (new version): H.Walmsley, 30/07/2015 (led with Soloist)

(This route is a re-working of an ancient mystery line with 2 old bolts and a peg all near the top. There is no record of the route. Was it ever done? It didn't seem like it as there were many disposable holds and all useful cracks and horizontal breaks were fully choked with soil and heather roots that looked beefier and older than the bolts. If it was climbed, it would have been a black-spot, Russian-Roulette of a route. About 75% of the existing holds were seriously loose and were easily disposed of with a nut key (mostly) and small hammer pick leaving the extensive brown rock scars that can now be seen and the pile of rock covering the vegetation at the foot. The peg, which was behind one of the loose and now defunct flakes, came away with a single light tap and a tug on the attached sling. It would not have held bodyweight. Now, after serious amounts of cleaning, the remaining rock is pretty sound, the moves are better and the difficulties quite sustained. Previously only the top was technically hard, the rest was just disposable. With the more sustained difficulties I think more bolts are justified so I have fully bolted it as a sport route (there is no obvious alternative protection). It climbs rather nicely in this form and seems to me to be an improvement on the original. It is essentially a different route now as few of the original holds/moves remain except right at the top. I hope the additional bolting won't be controversial.)

3) Mungo Jerry's Sideburn Factory, 12 m, VS 4b: Not new or a sport route: just put in for reference. Straightforward climbing but little or no protection. A little dirty but OK to climb. Would be pleasant if perfectly clean. Climb the diamond-shaped slab starting at the lowest point of the main slab just above and L of a subsidiary slab. Head for a gap in the capping heather by the apex of the diamond.



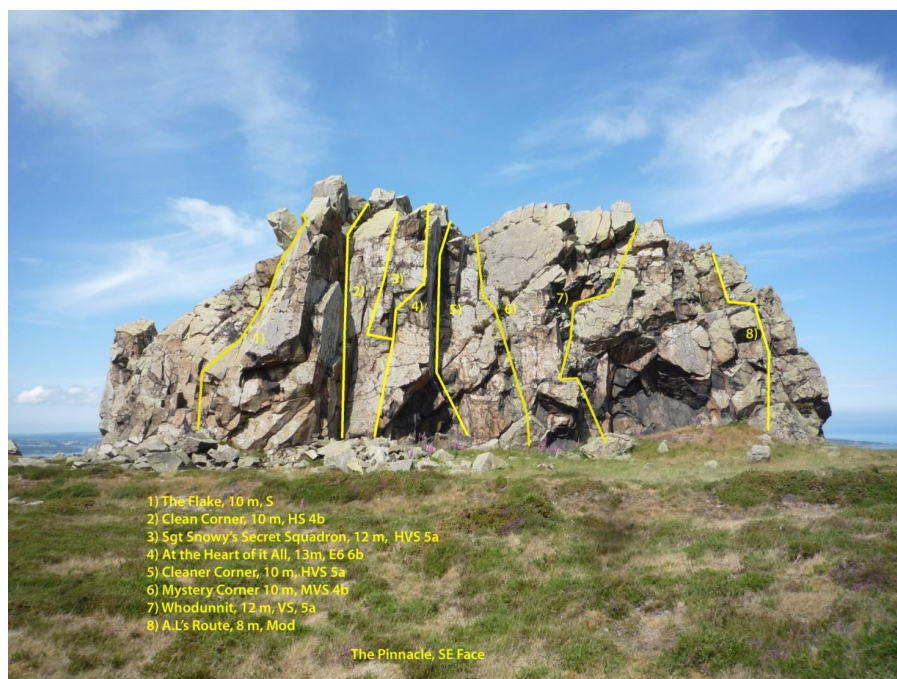
Route locations on the back wall of the upper level

Pinnacle

Most of the routes shown have already been recorded elsewhere However the following two have not as far as I know.

6) Mystery Groove, 10 m, HS 4b: My name, soloed recently. Not previously recorded. Done in the 70s

7) Whodunnit, 13 m, VS, 5a: My name, soloed recently. Not previously recorded. Done in the 70s. Old ring peg high up.



The Pinnacle

Middle Level

This level now has the most routes. All are long, two are excellent (Ace of Diamonds and Llanfair Groove) and one (The Jackpot) is outstanding. Apart from Alternative Solutions all take strong independent lines.

1) Serendipity Slab, 30 m, F5b/c (6a) (12 BR, BLO). Takes the R edge of the big black slab L and up the scree slope from the Penmaen Groove area. Pleasant climbing and a useful addition at the grade. Quicker to dry than most on this level.

Climb a juggy groove through the initial steeper section to small rock ledges at the foot of the slab proper. Step R to the edge (6a if you keep L for a short way) and follow it to more small rock ledges. Follow slabby ramps up R then up over slight bulges to the lower off. FA: H. Walmsley, C. Calow, 04/09/15

2) The Menin Road, 28 m, F6a/6a+* (10 BR, BLO) A good route up the ramp system just R of Serendipity Slab starting at a groove up the L edge of a broad, smooth slab. Trend up and R on ramps and ledges to the reces below the prominent roof. Skirt the roof on its L (awkward) and step delicately R in a good position to finish. FA: C. Calow, H. Walmsley, 10/09/2015

3) Ace of Diamonds, 30 m, F6b+** (11 BR,BLO). An excellent route, more strenuous than is usual here, up a series of grooves about 20 m to the L of Llanfair Pillar. Climb the initial groove getting stood on the good hold on the R wall with difficulty. Layback the next short corner and

trend L into a black recess. Take the L angle of this with difficulty until it is possible to reach a jug out R and bridge. Move up and round on to the ramp on the L. Where no more bolts can be seen, keep R on the outer slabby ramp past more bolts and follow good blocky holds on the L to the lower off. FA: C.Calow, 08/09/2015

4) Penmaen Pillar, 33 m, F6a* (12 BR, BLO) A good route that starts as for Llanfair Groove. Gain the ramp on that route but immediately break out awkwardly L on to the slabby pillar. Climb slabs until a leaning wall forces a neat traverse left. Climb the next slabby wall starting slightly R then bearing L to go through the overlap near the central notch and gain a ledge (possible belay/intermediate lower-off for 60 m ropes). Start the next wall on the R and make a tricky move to jugs that lead easily through the bulge above. Another slight juggy bulge leads to the lower off. FA: H. Walmsley, C. Calow, 30/08/2015

5) Llanfair Groove, 43 m, 6b** (12 BR, BLO, ILO) A superb line taking a soaring slabby groove with a steeper mid section. Good climbing most of the way but an easier section at $\frac{1}{3}$ height (*Might have been a candidate for *** without this?*)

Start towards the L end of the Level at the outer edge of a very obvious slabby ramp just R of a tree at the base of the crag. Pull L through a low bulge to gain the ramp. Climb it near the outer edge with delicate moves half way (options on the inside or an easier zig zag are also available). Continue easily to the steeper section. Climb this (crux) and a pleasant slabby section above to a small sapling (ILO for 60 m ropes, not needed with a 70). Continue straight up with ramps for the feet until handholds over a bulge allow a traverse R past the last bolt to a finish out R. F.A: H.Walmsley, 06/08/2015 (led with Soloist)

6) Alternative Solutions, 38 m, 6b* (10 BR, BLO, ILO as for Llanfair Groove). Takes grooves and bulges R of Llanfair Groove. Good moves but lacks line compared to its neighbour. The alternative solutions are reach or skill.

Start just R of the twin grooves R of Llanfair Groove. Gain a foot ledge in the RH groove, edge up on small holds and stretch blindly, or use superior technique, to reach a jug in the corner just above where the groove changes direction. Continue up steepening slabs to a stepped bulge. Make a precarious stretch, or again apply technique, for jugs above the first big bulge and continue round the L side of the next on good holds. Follow slabs and a corner to join Llanfair Groove at the top. FA: H. Walmsley, C. Calow, 28/08/2015.

7) The Jackpot, 35 m, F6c*** (14 BR, BLO). A tremendous route, the best of the recent additions. It takes the dominant rib just L of centre of the Middle Level starting below a splitter crack forming the L edge of a boot-shaped flake.

Gain the instep of the boot and climb the wall just R of the shin with difficulty to an easing. Ease up R wards to a diagonal line of good handholds below a groove then traverse R to the arete. Make an exposed move to good holds round the R side then up steeply to a ledge. Use a jug in the arete above to regain the L side and continue (sustained and delicate) up the slab and arete to the top. Brilliant: I think it is up with the best F6x routes on the N Wales Coast. Only time will tell if others agree. FA: H.Walmsley, C. Calow, 08/09/2015



Two views of the recent sport routes on the Middle Level

Bottom Level

More long high-quality pitches.

1) Brundrit's Slab, 45 m, 6b+* (10BR, BLO, ILO): The mediocre start is fully compensated by some very good climbing on the upper slab.

Start in the angle of the bay on the lowest ramp line and move up R gradually rising from ramp to ramp. Exit through the L side of the notch above the top ramp (jugs) on to heathery slabs and ledges (F4+ to here - *some loose stuff at the bottom, care needed but sound holds always available*). Gain the clean slab above and step to its R edge. Follow the vague weakness above past a difficult move on smears (crux). Continue more easily over an overlap and up a short final groove. FA: H. Walmsley, C. Calow, 03/07/2015.

2) Whiteway and the Blocks, 33 m, 6b/6b+** (10BR, BLO): An interesting route with excellent moves and good positions that rises in steps diagonally L crossing the line of two prominent streaks of white deposit. It has a slightly serious feel due to the use of two dubious-looking blocks and some awkward rope management. Slings rather than quickdraws are recommended on some key runners (3 to 5 useful) and/or it may be worth considering unclipping some awkward runners after reaching the next.

Start on the nice grey slab just L of There Must be Something and climb a vague weakness. Step L and climb the groove cutting through the bulges to the next slab (keep off a wobbly block high on the L). Traverse the slab more or less horizontally to a small grass ledge at the foot of a corner. Bridge the corner and carefully use two dodgy-looking blocks (both rope and belayer are well out of the way if either of them goes but they feel firm despite appearances) to gain holds on the L arete. Reach round to a jug. Continue up the R side of the rib for a couple of moves before traversing round into the groove on the L. Finish easily up this to a lower off on the slab to the R. The rope pulls more easily if you unclip the gear on the way down. FA: H. Walmsley, C. Calow, 03/07/2015.



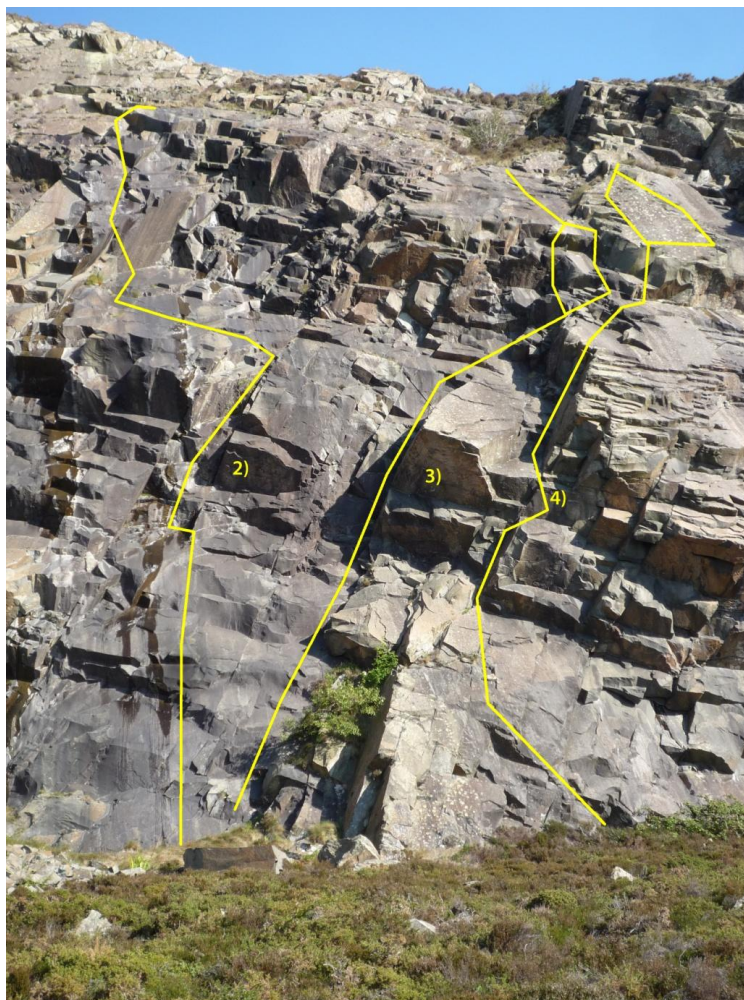
Penmaen West Quarry Bottom Level

3) There Must Be Something, 30 m, 6a+*, (9BR BLO): Good climbing up the smooth corner above a small tree then the overlap above and to its right. Start below the small tree. Climb the slab just L of the vegetated lower groove and bridge back into the groove above the vegetation. Alternatively, if you must, climb the vegetation. Continue up the groove past a short problematic section by the 3rd bolt. At the top of the groove traverse R across a slab to another corner (the continuation of the crux groove on There Isn't Much). Move up on to the rib on its R then surmount the bulge above either

by the slabby corner on the R or layaways through the notch to the L (both good moves). Zig zag L then R up the final slab to the lower off. FA: H. Walmsley, C. Calow, 03/07/2015.

4) There Isn't Much, 30 m, 6c+** (9BR, BLO): An excellent climb with a satisfyingly technical crux and pleasant slab climbing above (*I think it is worth 2* but probably just pleased to have managed it, being less than 7c, it wouldn't get any * in N. Wales Limestone*).

Start about 10 m R of There Must Be Something. Trend L up slabs to a flake. Get bridged in the groove above, move R with difficulty on friction then up, with more difficulty, into the inverted V groove. Once established in this, shake hands with the congratulations handhold and continue more easily up and out onto the R rib then R to below a notch in the next overlap. Move up through the notch and continue near the L edge of the slab to the lower off. An alternative finish clips the penultimate bolt, steps delicately R from the notch and climbs the centre of the slab leftward to the lower off with no further protection (runout F6a). FA: H. Walmsley, C. Calow, 03/07/2015.



Penmaen West Quarry Bottom Level: right hand routes

Link up (projected)

Go West, 150 m (+ scrambling) F6b+: A project linkup of Dark Matter, Into the Light, Brundrit's Slab, Penmaen Groove and Reincarnation that gives a lot of good climbing. Unlike equivalent slate linkups,

the connections are made with extended scrambling and by crossing broad plateaux rather than relatively narrow ledges so the climbing is less continuous.

Climb Dark Matter and belay at the first lower off. Climb Into the Light but continue past the lower off by scrambling up past a BR (the LH of 3, the other 2 are old). From the BR step left and scramble up steep heather to a BB about 25 m above the Dark Matter belay (about 60 m from the ground if you want to go for it in one). From the BB traverse R then up a diagonal heathery ramp and earthy rib to the edge of the Bottom Level (all easy scrambling). All remaining links are horizontal walks across the levels.

Descend either by the inclines or, longer but arguably more pleasant, reverse the Penmaen West approach to the Wales Coast Path and follow this (waymarked) back down to Pendalar. This descent does not pass the base of the route so you will need to take everything with you.

Old fixed gear encountered not on any recorded route

Two bolts and two pegs in upper left half of Fence Buttress

Two bolts on the ledge above Black Slab about 8 m below my 2014/2015 access bolts.

Two bolt runners up the middle of Gt Slab (Seiriol) and 2 belay bolts at the top.

Two bolts and a peg (latter now removed) on the line of Reincarnation in Penmaen West Quarry Upper Level .

Ring peg in Whodunnit.

Bolt with hanging rope attached just L of Triskelion.