



MCSA

THE MOUNTAIN CLUB OF SOUTH AFRICA

EXPLORE • DISCOVER • CONNECT • PROTECT

May 2026 Newsletter



Contents

1	President's Rambles	3
2	Trad climbing reflections	4
3	Cableway Crag while Pregnant	8
4	Why Climb Trad	10
5	Trad is Tops	12
6	The Splendour of the Climb	14
7	Drakensberg Trad: A Wholesome Adventure	16
8	Trad Climbing: Adventure Beyond the Grades	20
9	A First Little Trad Mentorship Programme	22
10	Flight of the Bumble Bee: New Route Tradding on Table Mountain	24
11	The Trad Yap	30



The Mountain Club of South Africa is one of the oldest mountaineering clubs in the world, but what sets us apart? Certainly, our members and our focus on mountaineering and mountains, we are established for the sole object of promoting the interests of mountaineering, primarily in South Africa, as a recreational pastime and on a non-professional, basis conducting all its activities in a manner that is for the benefit of, and widely accessible to, the general public. Our objectives include to:



- **Organise and Facilitate Mountaineering**
- **Procure and Protect Real Rights in and Access to Mountains and Mountain Areas**
- **Initiate and Support Actions towards Protecting the Natural Beauty and Wilderness Character of Mountains and to Promote their Effective Conservation Management**
- **Promote the Safety and Training of Mountaineers**
- **Provide Search and Rescue Resources**
- **Promote the Study of Mountains and their Environments, the Preservation of Historical and Archaeological Sites thereon and**
- **The Dissemination of Information on Mountains and Mountaineering**

Certainly, one aspect of our Objectives that sets us apart from other hiking, expedition and outdoor Clubs is our love for Rock Climbing and in particular "Trad Climbing", whilst we and our members embrace all forms of mountaineering, and climbing, when you think of Alpinism and Rock Climbing, you think of the MCSA. So, after engaging with a number of legendary (or is it LedgeEnd") Trad Climbers, they expressed the concern that we need to do more to promote Trad Climbing...well even that is a newish term, not long ago (depending on your number of circuits around the sun) there was just Rock Work.

In the 1896 MCSA Journal, (actually the "Mountain Club Annual") we find the following:

"Generally speaking, it may be said that rocks are climbed by means of the hands and feet, but there is hardly any portion of the body which cannot be of service in certain situations...

It is probable that the beginner's movements are too spasmodic, that he use his hands too much and his feet too little, that he does not test the hold sufficiently, that if a rope is used he jerks it both in front and behind, that he is never quite certain of not slipping, that he would be knocked over if one of his companions fell, and last, but not least, that he dislodges loose stones with his hands or feet....

On difficult rocks alone is it that parts of the body other than the hands and feet ought to be called into requisition. The knee, it is true, may often be used for a long step even on easy rocks, but it is only where hand and foothold are wanting that the climber discovers how many portions of the human frame are adaptable to the exigencies of mountaineering. The back, the knees, the elbows, the shoulders, and even the head and the nape of the neck may occasionally prove necessary in climbing a difficult chimney or crack...

The ascent of rocks sometimes makes demands which cannot be met by unaided effort, the holds being for the time too far apart to be made use of even by the tallest. In such cases those below can often render most effectual assistance to the leader, and if a foothold low down is all that is needed, it can generally be supplied by the hands of a comrade...

It may be said, therefore, that while some are very brilliant cragsmen, others are not; and yet, those who work slowly but surely up difficult rocks are as good climbers as their more showy compeers. Dash is very pretty, if successful, but it is neither safe nor sound, and it quickly departs as years roll by; whereas careful, steady rock-climbing depends on a basis of slowly acquired skill, admits of improvement through a couple of decades, and is only gradually lost as age creeps on and joints become less supple."

(Mountain Club Annual 1896, Miscellania, ROCKWORK)

I have never been accused of Dash, but I have used the hands, head and shoulders of a comrade, and may have been seen to use my knees, including when I asked for contributions from the eminent mountaineers below, I am grateful to those that obliged!! Thank you!

So, I devote this Newsletter to the "Rapture of Rockwork", the exuberance of climbing in the hope of promoting "Trad" or "Rockwork" and encouraging climbers **Transcend & Transport To Trad!**

2 Trad Climbing Reflections

by Edmund February

I'm standing on a small stance looking straight down to Tienie and Andrew perched on the tiny ledge directly below me. The grey rock of the magnificent 300 m high wall on Du Toits peak expands off on either side of me as I look directly down to the scree slope and little stream more than 100 m below. Above me the wall is slightly overhanging, the rock quality a little dubious and protection in the event of a fall non-existent. I call down to my friends to express my anxiety and all I get back is "you'll be fine".

I look up again at the line of weakness in the rock that I must follow, and the world shrinks around me to the immediate zone I am in and the task at hand. All my senses are focussed on what



At the top of the 3rd pitch on *Mediocrity*

I am doing as I move up the wall in my little self-insulated bubble where there is no time. A bubble that only dissolves as I stand on the ledge slotting in the belay and my senses take in the outside world again as I look out to the

surrounding peaks and wonderful location that is spoiled only by the distant murmur of traffic on the Du Toits Kloof pass.

As I belay my companions up to my stance, I ponder the subtle nuances of climbing where I am



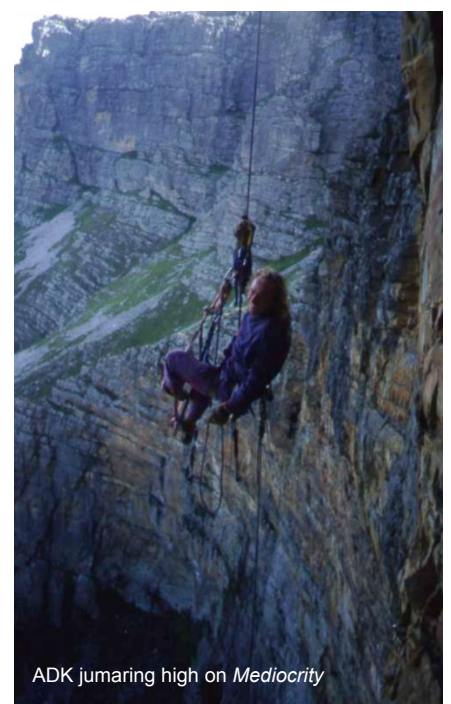
leading with a total focus that does not allow the fear of falling to override what I am doing to seconding where I can just enjoy the beautiful dance over rock that climbing at its core really is. I am in this beautiful location with two good friends whom I trust implicitly. The climbing is testing us to the full, but we believe in each other and our ability to do the route. This is trad climbing at its best. A beautiful dance over rock, on a big wall, testing our ability to the full, with good friends. Yes, it is dangerous, I'm not deluding myself, I've seen enough evidence of what can go wrong with trad climbing, BUT, and there is always that but.

I have never felt more alive than after completing a trad lead that has tested me to the full. I have never been happier than when I have just completed a hard lead and then watched

and subsequently followed my extremely competent companions on the harder pitches that follow.

Forty-five years later, I am now 70, have numerous injuries resulting in both wrists being fused and only about 50% use of my right hand. I dabble a little on sport routes, but it really is trad that I live for. Nicky and I have retired to Montagu and are glad to no longer deal with Cape Town traffic. Out of the blue my good friend Snort, a.k.a Dr Charles Edelstein walks through the door blasting us out of our quiet existence. In typical fashion he informs me that he is going through to Prince Albert to climb in Swartberg pass with Willem Boshof. When I point out to him that he is two hours in the wrong direction he tells me that is because I will be going with him. I tell him that the proposed

route may be a little hard for us he points to Willem leading the hard pitches. With that I cannot help myself but agree to go along, the allure of a big wall, with testing climbing, in a new place is just too much for me to resist.



ADK jumaring high on *Mediocrity*



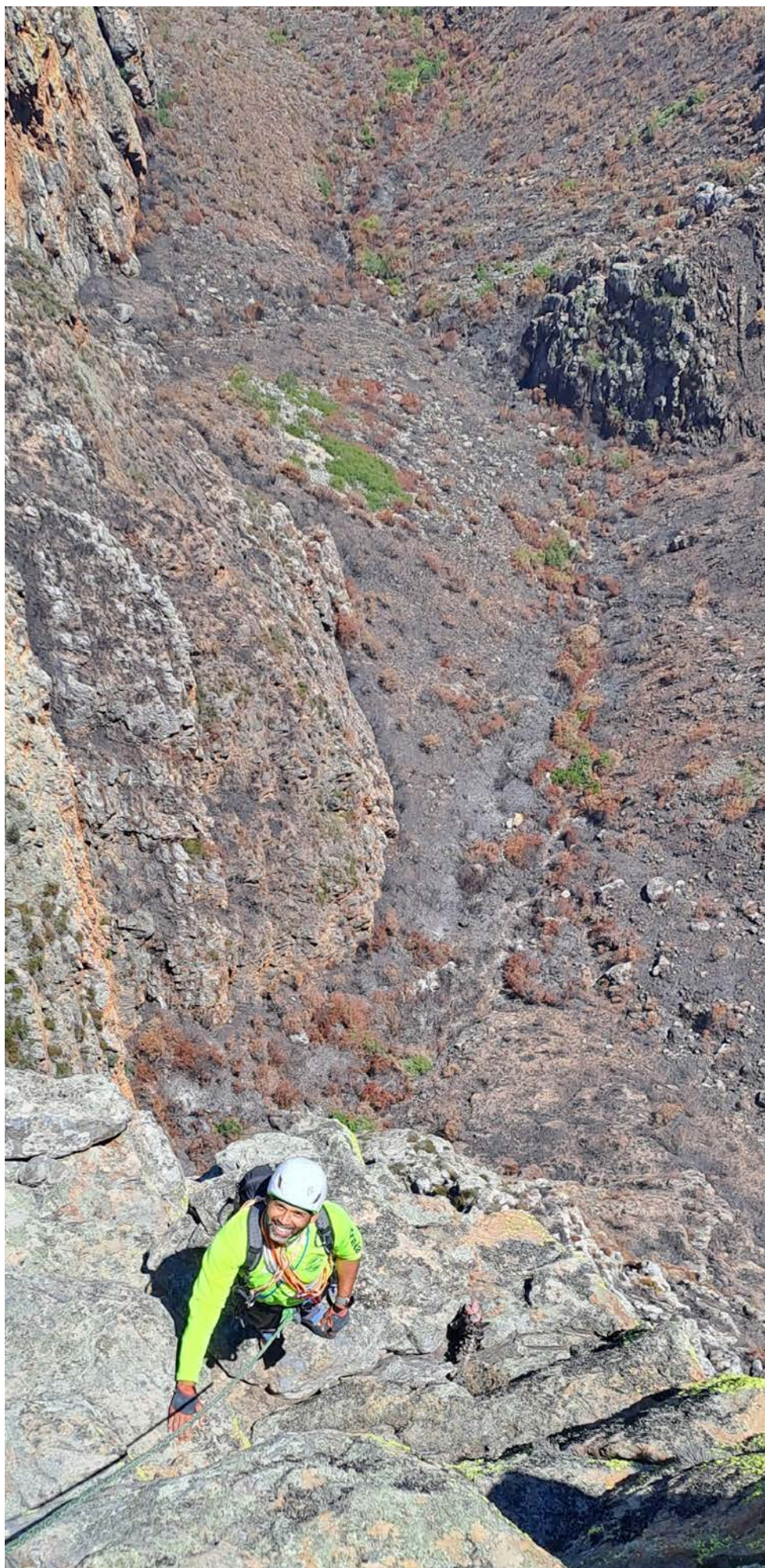
The next day I find myself leading the easiest pitch on the route that again tests me to the full as the rock is not the best quality and gear placement not easy. I hang at the stance and belay Snort while he leads the next pitch, but it is belaying at the old eagles' nest, watching and then following Willem on the hard pitch that really and truly makes me happy.

That was a hard lead made even more so by incredibly friable rock. On following I was extremely impressed by what Willem now and Clinton Martinengo on the opening ascent had done. There is no time to admire the beautiful location that we are in at the rugged start to the Swartberg pass, a huge tourist attraction.

The climbing here is a very slow dance where every hand or foothold must be tested before weighting. Balance is key and focus total. Even abseiling down is tense as the high winds that had come up blow our ropes into the rock threatening that they may get stuck. I am back where I belong. I am living again. Trad climbing at it's best. Good friends and a great outing that tested us to the full. What more could we wish for.

LEFT: Ed on *Desert Eagle* Swartberg Pass.

RIGHT: Garvin on the last pitch of *Green Pillar*.



3

Cableway Crag while Pregnant

by Julia Wakeling-Bird | pics by Garreth Bird

At 7 and 3/4 months pregnant, with an extra 14Kg on board, my husband and I went to climb Cableway Crag. Conditions were perfect on that side of the mountain, but as we walked out of the top cable station, the siren signalled the closure of the cable car because of high wind.

If we went to climb, we would be walking down. I made the call that we should climb. And how glorious it was! Harder

than normal, more huffy-puffy and more pumpy with the extra internal load, and a few more pieces of gear than we would typically place, but it made our souls sing.

We bathed in sunset on the final pitch and packed up by headtorch. It was still blowing hard on top, but with all the right gear, food and water, it felt fantastic to be out in the elements.

The walk down was very slow, the exhaustion by the end very high and I ate dinner in a sideways position on the couch!

What a memorable last climb on Table Mountain before our baby arrived a month later!





Climbing is a natural activity, and anthropologists will explain that until 'Lucy' fell out of her tree some 3.2 million years ago climbing was mostly what we did.

Climbing mountains happened for all sorts of reasons, such as Antonia da Saldanha wanting to see if he had rounded the Cape yet.

Although humans have been climbing mountains for 5000 years in some places and times people were forbidden to climb because the Gods lived there.

In 1492 the ascent of Mont

Aiguille was ordered by the King, and his subject used mechanical means to make the

ascent. The birth of rock climbing though is usually credited to the ascent of Napes Needle in the Lake District in 1886.

So rock climbing was done traditionally (hence TRAD), or 'free' of mechanical aids, and was a 'risk taking adventure'. Free climbing included soloing (historically frowned on by the MCSA) and bouldering. Then in the Alps and Dolomites appeared the dreaded PITON, which was later developed by the Yosemite climbers using Chrome-Moybdenum and new shapes.

Yosemite may also be where the first Bolts were used in the 1950's, and in SA the first bolts used here

were often no more than handiman's Rawlplugs. This mechanical approach was all AID climbing.

Then climbers training may have spawned climbing walls and eventually the High Tech Gyms and the practice of clipping bolts on a route made it SPORT climbing.

Climbing progressed from TRAD to AID to SPORT which enabled harder and harder routes to be opened. The hardest grade when I started rock climbing in 1962, was G (18/19), and it

is now in the 30's.

But are the climbers at the top of the game now reverting to TRAD or Bouldering to bring back the cleanest mental and physical challenge? Trad climbers revel in problem solving, kinetic muscular activity, experiencing the rock texture and the outdoors close up, and the moral and psychological satisfaction of leaving nature as they found it. Only the chalk marks spoil this image..

My introduction to Rock Climbing was when Ken Howes-Howell took me up Spring Stepover, and after that I couldn't get enough !

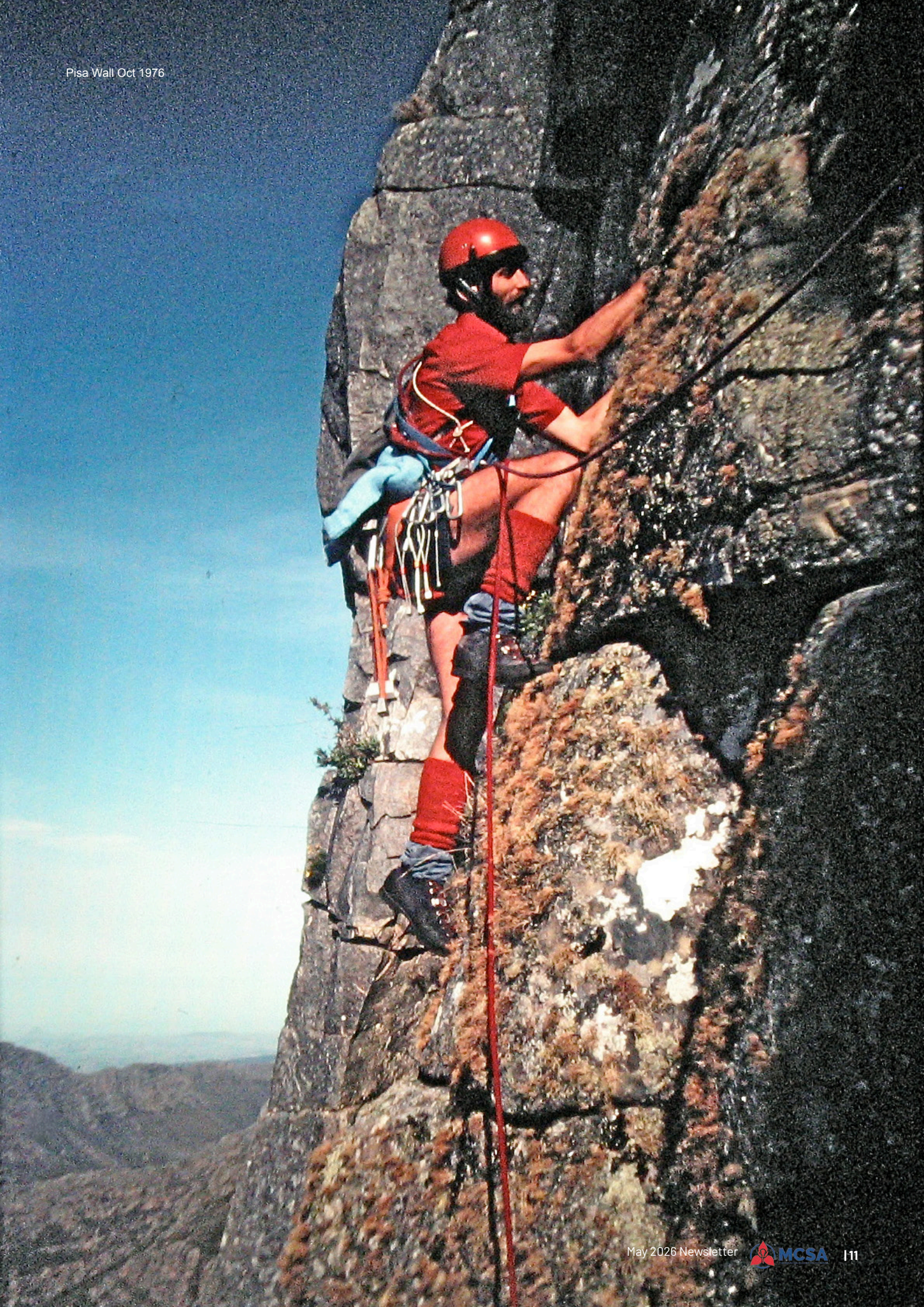
One result was my ambition to climb all the known routes on Table Mountain, which I completed on 5/7/1975 with Peter Attenborough, and my wife Doreen carried up the Champagne and glasses for the celebration.

I wrote articles for the Journal some years back about the Hardest climbs and the Best Climbs, which are not always the same thing.

The example is in my early years with climbing partner Gabriel Athiros we did the first truly free ascent of Fernwood Gully, and he recalls that was the scariest and most difficult route ever.

However, the Best climb of mine was when Stan McCrea let me do my first ever lead on Arrow Final, and that was where I experienced the full exhilaration of Trad climbing.





I'm often asked about the difference between trad, sport, bouldering, and gym climbing. Forgive me, but I started trad in 1972, when the other forms of climbing hadn't been invented. So I'm biased.

So here's my take. Gym climbing is vertical exercise. Bouldering is low-altitude problem-solving. Sport climbing is safe, outdoors, and hard, but not adventurous or (to me) interesting.

Trad, on the other hand... I once described it as vertical chess.

First, you have to find your route (your chessboard), which is sometimes difficult in itself. When the route, first described in 1965, says: "Start between a small tree (cairn) and the face," you know you won't find the cairn, and the small tree may be big or not

there at all.

Then you have to find your way up the route (Angle up to the left to a loose block). I have often opened new pitches on established routes that way.

Then you have to place gear. Your placement is a small science in itself, but then there's the "will it hold" factor. Then, of course, you have to find a place to place your gear. My longest leadout was at Kransberg, where I climbed 30m of 19 without pro.

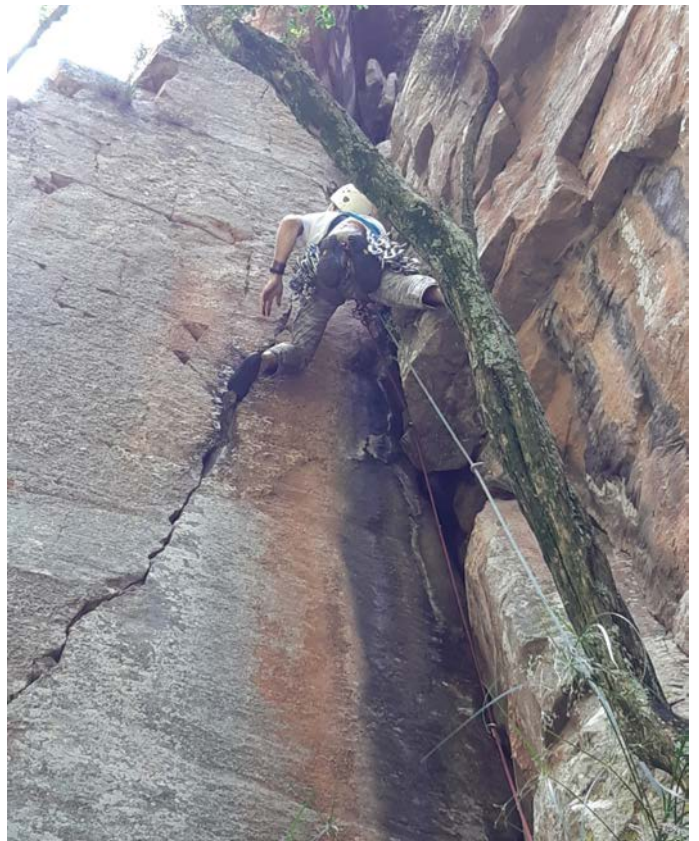
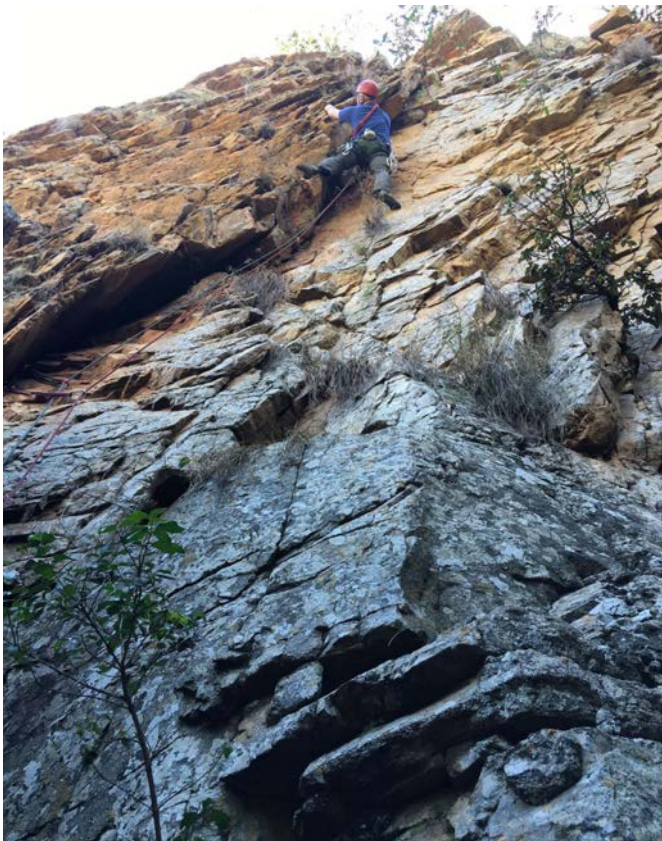
Then, you have to do the sport-climbing thing, but without the chalk markers, problem-solving your movement up the face.

And, you have to do the mental thing. Control your thoughts, damp down the fear, deal with the present, before wondering what comes next.

Finally, you have to communicate. Trad climbing calls are syllable-based, even though you use specific words. "Slack" has fewer syllables than "Rope up." Because often your belayer is out of sight and around the corner, so he only hears "XXXX" or "XXXX-XX" You have to reconfirm as well. "Climb when ready... Climbing...Climb on." I don't see any of that in the other forms of climbing.

And ultimately. You're outdoors and far away. Birds, animals, sounds, and smells. There's nothing like sitting quietly on a stance and gazing out over the kloof. There's no one there except your climbing partner. All is at peace.

Trad is the king of climbing.





Despite the dictionary definition, memory is not merely the recalling of facts. It is actually the discriminatory recall of experience and perception. Most of what I remember about the trad climbs I have done over the years have been washed with a feeling of glowing well being. In hind sight, at times this was more a feeling of relief than anything else. But, very soon, even the day after the climb, any danger or discomfort were forgotten and the sense of achievement and memory of wide open spaces and pleasure remained in their purity.

The birth of our child, Josie, has made sport climbing and bouldering an easier climbing alternative in the last few years. Trad climbing can only be done on those few special occasions when domestic arrangements permit. So when Linda Antoncich, an old trad climbing friend, came over from Australia on holiday, we decided to do a climb on Table Mountain together, as a special occasion and for old times sake. When we started climbing together in the mid eighties, we had spent most of our time ticking off easier routes on Table Mountain accumulating epic stories and also contributing to the first female ascent of routes.

On the day of our climb we caught the cable car up to the top of the mountain, keeping in mind that all time saved was less time away from our families. Walking around to Fountain Ledge, Linda noted that the path was pretty precipitous in places, something

we hadn't given much thought to before. After having children one sees paths from a safety point of view.

After discussion we agreed to do a mix of routes on Fountain ledge, starting with Cableway Crag, moving onto Farewell to Arms and finishing on either Touch and Go or Cableway. I led off on the first grade 14 pitch up a ramp type of feature, noting that this was my first trad lead in over two years. Linda, fortunately, had had more exposure in the last few years and ably led the grade 21 pitch of Farewell to Arms that followed, standing on the arête of Cableway Crag. I followed with some grunting on the small roof and exclamations that the jam was not as secure as I had remembered it.

After a brief break and discussion on the way forward, I led through across the remainder of the Cableway traverse getting rather pumped trying to put gear in, despite the technicalities of the climbing itself being very basic. Part of my difficulty

stemmed from the fact that Linda had all the mid range friends back at the stance (the safety of which I was very grateful). However the security of the stance did not assist me with my task and after some fiddling and stuffing in what was definitely an over-cammed friend I bolted for the end and flung a sling over a horn, clipped it into my rope and took a deep breath. After some untangling of ropes on Linda's side she made her way across the traverse, coming to an abrupt halt at the over cammed friend.

By this time the sun was beating down on us, and I, ensconced in the Barbers Chair, was beginning to wilt. After an exemplary effort Linda freed the friend and reached the stance. Since occasions like this didn't happen very frequently, we had a small photo shoot, Linda retracing her steps back across the traverse and myself leaning out from the barber's chair to take some snaps.

Once all this had been completed Linda climbed up the





last pitch of Cableway Crag, both of us anxious to complete the climb. We had not remembered how long these climbs usually take and had not brought any water or snacks. I reached the hanging stance below a small roof where Linda had set up a stance, unsure of how to proceed. I plugged in a big friend as a further backup and put Linda on belay while she scoped out the route. She had an idea to investigate what lay directly above but then decided to move leftwards to what appeared to be a wider ledge further over. All of a sudden I heard a shout ROOCCCKKK... and the whoosh of Linda falling over me and landing up a few metres below. The jerk onto the belay gear was a heart wrenching moment, during which I expected to hit the scree below. The prospect of our kids being left as orphans was

somewhat horrific. Fortunately none of this transpired and we were left rather shaken but intact, or so we thought.

Only later after scrambling out up to the cableway station did Linda realise that her one ankle was pretty damaged and she was having trouble walking. Added to our woes was the fact that the toilets had no water and so, desperate, we approached the restaurant for a glass of water, speaking through parched and thick tongues. They pointed to the fridge with the commercial bottled water which was useless, neither of us having a brass bean. We found a very large ice bucket with some smart bottles of wine in it and proceeded to help ourselves, dipping the wine glasses into the bucket, all this amidst polite enquires from tourists. We made quite a sight – Linda's long hair, now freed from

a day under a helmet, stood out at right angles and mine looked even worse.

After I had fetched the packs, and we had both made some recovery we made our way to the cable way station. We caught the cable car down again in order to save time away from our families. Once down at the car park, we limped our way down the road towards our car only to be greeted by the lady car guard who said "Eventually!!!" We were very glad her side kick, who had had a lot to say earlier on had left.

Now, a few days later, all I can remember is the splendour of the climb and how much of a joke it was staggering into the restaurant. But then of course, climbing isn't anything to do with the recall of facts at all. (Featured in Issue 5 (June 2003) of SA Mountain).



Drakensberg Trad: A Wholesome Adventure

by Bref Grenouille

...with The Incompetent, The Inexperienced, The Elderly, and The Woman.

The events described below took place more than four decades ago. The resemblance of the protagonists to any person living or dead is purely intentional. Real names have been withheld to protect the guilty innocent.

Their glorious leader and climbing muse, The Incompetent, whilst possessed of a large rack of shiny equipment including a full set of the newly-invented Friends, had a climbing resumé as short as any in the annals of mountaineering. Further, he was well known for his extreme timidity in the face of adversity, or any kind of climbing challenge – and whenever this was pointed out (which was often) would subside into loud bluster to cover up his shortcomings. Much like most politicians.

The Inexperienced, tall and laconic, was just that – inexperienced at any sort of rock climbing activity, although he was capable of putting on his Whillans harness the right way round and even correctly tying a bowline. As an aside, The Inexperienced had been voted “Mr Best Legs” by the hiking ladies in the Mountain Club, who had closely followed those limbs for many kilometres all over the Drakensberg. Sadly, this accolade did little to bolster his climbing C.V.

The Elderly, senior in years to the other two by almost two decades, had come late to rock climbing and had not, as yet, set the climbing world on fire with his exploits. Nor was he ever likely to. He had followed The Incompetent on various single pitch routes of very moderate gradient, where his surplus avoirdupois was less of a restraint than on steeper ground.

Thus, the intrepid trio who proposed to climb Mponjwane at the end of May. One would have preferred one of those younger rock tigers to bolster their ranks, but as these were all occupied with various projects of extreme difficulty, and generally disparaged climbing in the Drakensberg, the existing party would have to do. A welcome addition to the troupe was The Elderly’s romantic partner, The Woman, as Safety Officer in case of a rescue, and independent observer of the goings on. The Woman, with her profusion of tertiary qualifications, inter alia a PhD in Psychology, was eminently suited to her observer and commentator status.

It was felt that the Standard (original) Route on the peak would be sufficiently challenging for the climbing party, as volubly expounded by The Incompetent, armed with photocopies of the route description from the relevant Mountain Club Journal. “We’ve got three days, so we’ll walk up to Mponjwane cave in a day”, said the leader, “which

will give us two possible days to climb, in case of bad weather”. Feeble protests from the others regarding such an undertaking loaded with climbing gear were swept aside with The Incompetent’s usual bombast – “It’s either that, or we don’t go!!”

Arrangements made, logistics sorted (and with enough climbing gear to scale a multi-day route on El Capitan), they travelled to Mweni via the usual Friday night detour to the Nottingham Road Hotel bar. Much later, at the Mweni Police Post, The Woman had ample examples for her ongoing notes, of the ineptitude of the male gender when erecting tents under the mild influence of intoxicants. When the slightly hysterical laughter had subsided and the tents were (sort of) assembled, the crew retired after midnight to their well-earned sleep.

There were rumblings of discontent on departure (rather late...) the next morning, as the reality of packs loaded with tents (just in case), gear and food (including the substantial summit libations) goaded sensitive shoulders. In those far off days, it was considered entirely dishonourable to hire porters, or indeed devolve any of the burden onto the lightly laden non-climbing Safety Officer. Machismo at its best. Under the harsh African sun, the party sweated along the Ntonjelane valley, past Maquela’s kraal, to an overdue lunch and welcome rest

at the base of Rockeries Pass.

After a deliberately unhurried meal, and under the impending pass rising steeply above, discussion began on the advisability of continuing further that day. All arguments in favour of staying were brusquely dismissed by their glorious leader, and it was a half-hearted crew who followed him slowly up the trail. The party's ongoing travail was intermittently punctuated by sotto voce mutterings of "bloody slave driver"; "stupid shithead" and much worse, from the malcontents – but progress was made, debouching the party at the top of the pass as the sun was setting.

A rest and snack, a hurried conference, collection of water from the stream in Lesotho, extra clothing put on and the group set off in the rapidly fading light, and falling temperature, up the last steep hill to the cave. The Inexperienced took over the lead, his head torch twinkling before the other three falling behind, as if on a giant elastic band, bleating occasionally for directions in the darkness. The journey of the Magi may have been a Sunday picnic by comparison. Eventually the party was reunited under the very welcome shelter of, not a stable in this instance, but Mponjwane Cave.

A lively debate commenced during supper, and continued long after, as to the prudence of climbing the next day. Limbs and muscles were extremely tired, with spirits fairly low, and the eventual consensus (though not unanimous) was to have a rest day, and explore the tortuous approach from the cave

to the base of the climb. This would hopefully save time on day three, which would involve not only the climb but also the long hike back to the car. On reaching this somewhat disputed conclusion, the party took the (now unanimous) decision to break open the summit libations, which regrettably did not long survive the onslaught. More slightly hysterical merriment, with the official christening of The Inexperienced as "a certified dork". He had brought his canoeing helmet replete with abundant ventilation holes, and had carefully plugged said vents against the chilly wind with the team's supply of toilet paper – which made him look like something from 2001: A Space Odyssey. There were ribald comments about the use to which the toilet paper could be put during the climb. Fortuitously, the libations expired before any serious damage was done. The Woman was seen making supplementary notes to her prior observations, in particular the macho and rather high pitched banter which was served up to paper over the especially obvious cracks in the various male psyches. The crew were very late in retiring to their sleeping bags.

The rest day commenced sluggishly, owing in part to lack of vigour under the weight of previous exertions and late nights. Discussions continued before, during and long after breakfast regarding details of the climb and the respective merits of various pieces of gear. The Incompetent strongly proclaimed against the use of traditional pitons, to cover up

the fact that he hadn't brought any – due to having been unable to locate his piton hammer previously appropriated from the University Club supplies. The Woman continued to record the usual behaviour of climbers in their natural habitat, including the hitherto extensive talks about climbing, but no sign of any actual climbing activities.

Later, the climbers congratulated themselves on successfully navigating the descent route to the base of the peak, where they left a rucksack of gear and water for the next day. The weather continued to hold to its normal pre-winter pattern, with clear blue skies and a sly wind necessitating the wearing of fleeces. The rest of the day was completed with a short hike across the escarpment to view the Mweni cutback, before an early supper and final preparations for a quick start in the morning.

Rising in the pre-dawn gloom, after a hasty breakfast a short lecture was given to the Safety Officer in the event of late return – "unless otherwise instructed, give us at least 24 hours before raising any alarm" – problematic, of course, as this was long before the era of cellphones to assist in communications. With goodbyes to The Woman, the climbers retraced their steps down the gullies, which seemed rather steeper and scarier than the afternoon before. Nothing was said on the descent, or when racking up for the first pitch, each alone with their own reflections. The Incompetent was trying to prepare psychologically for the leads above, in particular

the traverse pitch of unknown difficulty (he had previously experienced some well publicised tribulations with traverses). The mental strain was compounded by his awareness of the group's climbing inexperience.

Once moving on the rock, however, doubts were temporarily cast aside and the party made deliberate and fairly swift progress up the initial pitches. The Incompetent found reasonable running placements for his extensive gear, which helped to dull his nervousness, and the belays were well protected whilst he brought up the others, climbing simultaneously.

The start of the traverse to the right was quickly attained, which reawakened their leader's subliminal anxiety. However, in a magnificent emotional effort, he sailed across this pitch and with a whoop of mixed relief and delight at the belay, pronounced it "piss-easy, an absolute cakewalk!". The Elderly, familiar with The Incompetent's unreliable judgement of climbing difficulty, insisted on a back-belay for his attempt, which was duly implemented. The problem, though, was The Inexperienced's newness to operating a back belay, which meant that with his indecorous squawking at the crux moves, The Elderly was pinned on a whip-taut front and back rope and utterly unable to move. Harsh words were spoken. Order was soon restored, and the team scrambled around to the other side of the peak below the final pitches.

At the last pitch, The Incompetent found himself

facing his old demons in adversity, where he tussled with a committing move some distance above his last runner. The rope went up, then down, then up and down again a few more times as he struggled to execute the move, an almost entirely mental rather than physical problem. With some encouragement from below (and unwelcome comments about being benighted), he finally made the required moves and lay breathing heavily at the top of the pitch before setting up the belay.

Success! The usual shaking of hands; summit photographs of the climbers and the expansive views; waving and shouting to The Woman on the escarpment, whilst mentally preparing for the abseils to follow. Quite apart from the statistic that most climbing accidents occur on the descent, their leader had a particular dread of abseiling, compounded in this case by embroidered stories he had been told of using marginal chockstones as abseil points. Unsurprisingly, in proper application of Murphy's Law, after abseiling from the summit chockstone the party could not retrieve the jammed ropes. Their leader unenthusiastically ascended on a prusik to re-set the ropes, which fortunately ran smoothly after his descent. Thereafter, The Inexperienced was sternly tasked with bringing down the ropes without getting them wedged, on pain of personally having to re-ascend in the case of failure. At the base of the route, their leader sank to the ground and announced that he was unable to muster the energy to go any further, after the physical efforts and

pent-up tension of the day. The diagnosis of this not unusual condition amongst mountaineers in the Club was "T&E" – Tired and Emotional.

The others took to carrying the gear, and chivvied The Incompetent slowly back to the cave. The afternoon was already well advanced, and little time was wasted on an overdue lunch, and a packing of rucksacks before setting off. Whilst the party may not have been accomplished climbers, they were experienced hikers, and with gravity assisting and slightly lighter loads, found new reserves of energy. The long walk down passed in a blur of effort, reaching the final crossing of the Ntonjelane river just below Moliva's store as the light was fading. The last kilometres along the road to the Police Post were slowly ground out by the waning lights of their torches, and the weary group finally reached the car with relief after a seemingly interminable day. The Woman drove back to Town, with the gentle rumble of self-satisfied snores heard from the climbers above the hum of the engine. She probably had sufficient material from the weekend's proceedings for another doctoral dissertation (it must be pointed out that The Woman is now a distinguished Professor at a University of international repute)

PS. None of the climbers ever rose to any great heights in the climbing firmament, but perhaps mediocrity, raised to an art form, is its own reward.

2026

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8

Trad Climbing: Adventure Beyond the Grades

by Gavin Raubenheimer

We found ourselves one morning beneath a three pitch bolted route in the Free State. It was not our first choice. What we had hoped for was a demanding five pitch climb—something that would test both forearm endurance and mental resolve, with delicate moves ready to punish the slightest lapse in commitment.

But the day was heavy with moisture. Fine drops of rain fell higher on the crags, and a steady, chilly breeze swept in from the eastern Free State vlakers. Keen though we were, the weather forced us to divert to something easier. We settled on an old standard. With damp hands we chalked up, climbed to the top, and abseiled back down—feeling somewhat cheated.

This experience highlights a fundamental distinction in climbing. Sport routes, with their fixed bolts, resemble the hundred meter dash at a school athletics meet: it is about speed, precision, and personal bests. Either you win, or you push yourself to achieve your fastest possible time. Yet, as age or circumstance erodes performance, the race loses its meaning.

Had we been trad climbing that day, the outcome would have been very different. Even with ambitions of hard grades and tenuous holds, the weather would not have ended our adventure. Instead, we would have racked up, carefully considered our gear, studied the guidebook, and moved cautiously on damp rock. Each placement of protection would have mattered. Route finding, stance selection, and safety checks would have become part of the challenge. What might have been trivial on a dry day would, in wet conditions, transform into a rewarding test. It can be rough and ready, even pulling on a piece of gear for direct aid through a very damp section would be acceptable.





At the summit, we would have known we had earned it—not through sheer difficulty, but through judgment, safety, and exploration of unmarked terrain. The descent would also demand focus: every abseil point triple checked, every rope length measured with care. A morning of mini adventure, fulfilment and

good times. Trad climbing is the original game. The spirit that once drove noble men and women to conquer Alpine summits in the Romantic era is alive today. Equipment and ethics have evolved, but the essence remains: adventure, danger, and challenge. Sport climbing, by contrast, sanitizes

the experience—bolts reduce anxiety to near zero, stripping away the unknown. It is instant coffee compared to hand ground, percolated brew.

For sport climbing, the grade is often the point. For trad, it is the journey.





A First Little Trad Mentorship Programme

by Julia Wakeling-Bird

Mentorship is a cornerstone of trad climbing's culture and safety. In Cape Town, there have been fewer trad meets in recent years. Historically, climbers regularly met at the start of India Venster at say 7am on a Saturday to walk up and climb on Table Mountain. These meets haven't happened in many years. One idea why not is that as people have cellphones now, they prefer to operate in small groups or pairs and make decisions last minute based on the weather. Many climbers also have the annual cable card and so don't walk up to climb. It's therefore harder to organise a meet long in advance, because leaders want to make their own decisions.

In 2021, Garreth and I organised a trad meet on Table Mountain. We got 47 people on the mountain, all in pre-agreed pairs/trios, climbing different routes to avoid queues. The deeply frustrating thing for me was that some people "used" the meet to basically be guided up the mountain. They (and I) knew they would not trad again. For that reason, a mentorship programme with a smaller group of dedicated people was more interesting to me.

In November 2024 I talked myself into starting a mentorship programme in which I would try and link mentees to mentors.

How the mentorship programme worked

To create a barrier to entry people had to fill in a short application.

Some people who were "super keen" on the programme just didn't end up applying (what a great first filter!). The programme ended up with 8 mentees, some very new to climbing, some strong climbers new to trad, and others already with their own racks and needed pushing. Each mentee came to an intro day. We covered basic do's and don'ts, anchor building, and then folks got to "lead" a pitch while on top-rope, so it was totally safe. The mentees and I are on one whatsapp group where they can share learnings and ask questions.

The scheduling – the back and forth of getting both the leaders and the mentees to commit to dates – was by far the hardest part of the programme. The mentees filled in an online calendar with their availability. I then tried to find leaders who would be a good match for them. It was deeply frustrating when after a day was set up in advance, the mentee got sick or the weather was bad!

In selecting leaders, I asked people who I am 100% confident in. I had about 20 leaders who I regularly badgered and 10 leaders actually went out with mentees. About 23 mentee days over 4 months (Nov 2024 – Feb 2025) (if 2 mentees went on one day, then it's counted as 2). At least 3 more days

were organised but didn't happen because the mentee was sick. After several months, 4 of the mentees (those who wanted and could afford it) did a 1-day self-rescue course with a professional trainer which was tremendously useful.

Was it a success?

Mentees reported that they appreciated access to information in one place; introduction to the "mean looking bunch" of a trad community; and a safe space to ask questions. Of the 8 mentees I would say 2 got a large benefit, 2 barely benefited and 4 were in the middle somewhere.

Time for Round 2

In February 2026, wanting the programme to continue in some form, I pulled in another organiser and we invited in a new cohort of mentees. Watch this space...







Excerpt from *Great Rock Climbs of the Western Cape*

I steal a quick cursory glance at my knot as I step off our airy stance. Our next pitch follows a slightly overhanging rail out to the skyline, with nothing but clear blue sky between my heels and Llandudno Beach a mile below. The moves are beautiful, the gear mind-settling, and the situation beyond sensational. The pitch goes smoothly enough, I pull up onto the stance, set up a

belay and sit back drinking in the setting, endorphins kicking and playing around my brain.

I've always loved climbing on Table Mountain's Bee Buttress, one of the lesser-known, but better, buttresses stuck high up on the slopes above Llandudno Ravine overlooking the stunning coastline of Llandudno Beach and Sandy Bay. I mean, there's nothing quite like starting a route with 80

metres of wild exposure tugging at your bowels from the very first move.

We were about midway up our chosen route that morning when I glanced off to my left. Enconced as I was on my belay stance, I noticed that there was quite a gap between the route we were on and the one way off to the left; but what excited me was the line of weakness I saw



running directly up that part of the wall, breaking through a few roofs *enroute*. I quickly pointed this out to Willie [Koen] when he joined me on the stance and we immediately decided that it looked spectacular and we should have a crack at it.

It was the height of summer, so we returned very early one morning, when the wall is bathed in deep shade, to claim our new route. But it was not to be. On reaching the supposed crux, a thin pull-across under a roof to gain a break, I found that the holds were disconcertingly bushy and covered in lichen, so I bypassed this and stanced out to the right. After Willie came up, I traversed back in above the bushy section and lowered off to do a bit of gardening, which revealed perfect white quartzite and good holds. At this stage the sun was creeping around the corner and we had to get off the wall, so we escaped up an adjacent route and scampered back to our bags for tea.

We decided then that it would be best to abseil the route and do one good gardening session, rendering the route clean and ready to climb. So another early morning saw us kicking off the top of Bee Buttrass armed with a small secateurs and a little brush to do the business. After a few hours of dangling and cleaning, the midsummer sun sent us back to our shady tea corner, but too late in the day to try the route.

As usual, life got in the way and a few months passed with *Flight of the Bumble Bee* fading a bit from memory, but still tugging at my heart. One morning I phoned Willie and said, "Listen brutjie, we



better go and klap that route, so I can get it off my mind.” He agreed and we decided to set the date on my birthday. I mean, what better way to spend one’s birthday.

So, a perfect autumn day in April saw us slogging up to the crag with Sean Langeveldt along as ‘official photographer’. After the obligatory cup of tea at the foot of the wall and a courtesy call by a curious, fat bumble bee, lavishly adorned with two bright yellow stripes, which I took as a good omen, we set off up the route. The entire buttress is undercut by a long roof at about two metres, with only a handful of decent breaks, and these have all been taken by existing climbs. So our first pitch takes an old Mamacos line to get to the first ledge, where the wall kicks back a bit. From here *Bumble Bee* takes a direct independent line straight to the top of the buttress.

Gear racked and chalked to the wrists, I glance at Willie for some inspiration, before casting off up the crux middle pitch. The first part is quite straightforward, and I arrive at a square break that leads up through some overlaps. After arranging some small, but good gear, I make a thinnish move to gain the rail below a bulge. More gear quickly and a quick glance at the sequence needed to get over the bulge. This is the point of no return. I reach above the bulge and crimp down on a small but positive edge with my right and swing to the left to gain the break. Some beautiful off-balance layback moves take me through to beneath the big roof. Here I can rest and place more gear, but one high cam takes away a perfect layback



slot. *Mmmm, rather have the gear and make another plan for a hold*, I thought. Underclinging the roof, I walk my feet up and reach over the lip to latch a thick flake. My eye spots a beautiful flat prong just a little higher that has ‘grab me’ written all over it, but something says to me, *grab that prong and you’ll take it with you*. Ignoring the prong, I reach for an okay side pull, then a higher jug, before my feet cut loose over 150 metres of salty coastal air. One almighty heave and a high step and I’m on the little stance above the roof. Relief and joy wash over me. I bring Willie up and at the big roof he pulls over the lip and goes straight for the flat prong. Ping!! The prong snaps, leaving

him dangling under the roof. I sit there thanking that little voice in my head.

I continue up the next pitch reaching a rail below another overlap. Moving over the overlap, more solid layback moves take me onto a steep wall with no reprieve for about five metres, before I finally latch a welcome jug and slot a bomber cam into a perfect rail. I cruise up steep, but friendly, rock to the top of the buttress. Willie follows quickly and we sit on top revelling in that special feeling. Two gubbas, with over 90 years of climbing between them, pumping each other’s mitts, African-style. This is a birthday I certainly will never forget.

Great **ROCK** **CLIMBS** of the Western Cape

by Tony Lourens



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MCSA Cape Town
97 Hatfield Street

Tuesday 5 May 2026

Patagonia store,
V&A Waterfront

Thursday 7 May 2026

Montagu @ Die Stasie
Saturday 16 May 2026

Kirstenbosch bookshop
Wednesday 20 May 2026

Gone. Outdoor, Stellenbosch
Thursday 21 May 2026

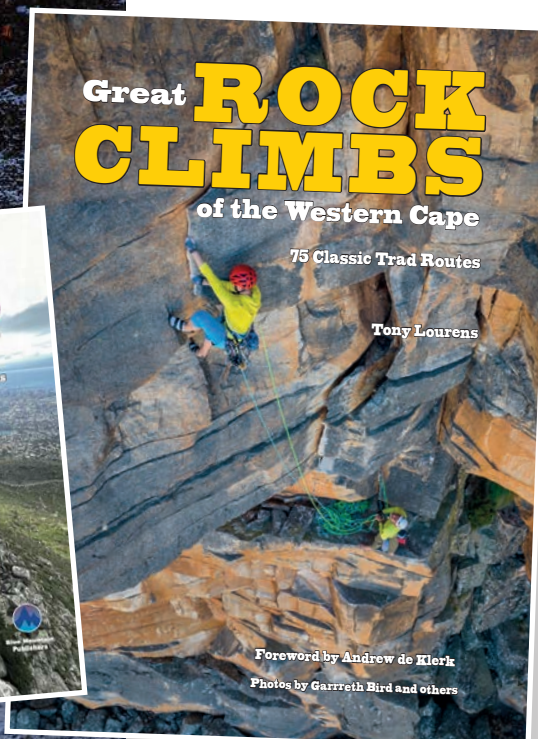
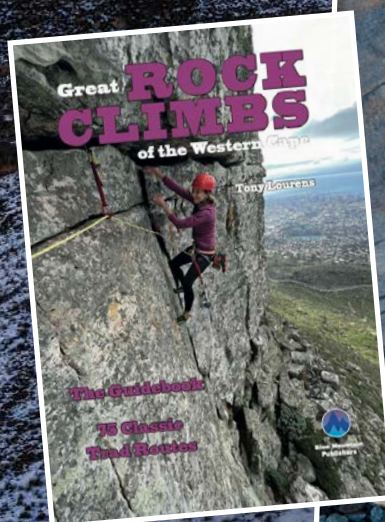
MCSA Paarl/Wellington
Friday 22 May 2026

MCSA KZN, Monteseel, Hacienda
Saturday 6 June 2026

MCSA Magaliesberg, Pretoria
Tuesday 9 June 2026

MCSA Jo'burg, Randburg
Wednesday 10 June 2026

Rocklands, The Hen House
Friday 3 July 2026







The Trad Yap

by Derek Marshall

Trad... what can I write about trad that hasn't been written a thousand times before? Another boring freedom-of-trad lofty pitch, the crack, trad vs sport, some epic...blabla

Bare with me...

A nameless death metal band member explaining what a human skull symbolises:

"The human skull is the ultimate symbol of diversity. From a skull you can't tell with certainty if the person was male or female. You can't tell age, race, nationality, politics or religion. Rich or poor. In death we become unidentifiable. Equal."

So-to you would not be able to tell a trad climber from a sport climber or a boulderer, indoor climber or hiker.... from their skulls! Somehow, we need to die to be truly free from ourselves, our labels, our identity & our egos! It does not matter how we climb. More important is the friends we make (and keep!), the great times and the fun we have. Have fun!

Trad is great, but it's not better than... it's just trad. It's not crazier or more extreme.....it's just trad. Trad is fun but so is sport and bouldering! Hiking is fun. Indoor climbing can also be fun. Much (perhaps everything?) depends on who you are with. Mountaineering, like most things are more fun with somebody or in a group. Cherish the people you are with.

Years ago, I embarked on a foolish endeavour to write a comprehensive Table Mountain climbing guide (might not even be possible(?)). This led to a huge rummage through the MCSA journals. The journals are amazing, they record amazing achievements, mundane history & great stories. The friendship & the comradeship are tangible, even the obituaries are cool to read. Through the years the journals have distilled out the club politics, rivalries, uncapped egos & dirty details. So much of our energy is spent on negative activities that don't make it into records or maybe can't even be recorded.

Let's distil our lives, tame our egos and die to self. Become that bare skull. Be Free!

Ja, trad is great! Great to do, not to yap about.

Christi Geldenhuys taking the lead, with bros, 3 x size 6 friends & a size 8! 23 on-sight! Totally crazy! At the bottom, you can see a kitchen sink. Possibly built by the British during the Boer War.



Emergency Contact Information for the Mountain Club of South Africa Search and Rescue

Gauteng

Base: Johannesburg / Pretoria

Tel: 074-125-1385 (MSAR Standby 1)

Tel: 074-163-3952 (MSAR Standby 2)

Convenor: 083-788-1610 – Mark Rolle

Note the Gauteng team also provides assistance in the Free State, North West, Limpopo and Mpumalanga. This may include referrals to closer rescue organisations

KwaZulu-Natal

Base: Durban / Pietermaritzburg

Tel: 0800-005-133 (Provincial Health Ops. Cntr.)

Co-Convenor: 082-546-7963 – Colin McCoy

Co-Convenor: 076-395-0119 – Paul Roth

Note the KZN team also provides assistance in the Eastern Free State and Wild Coast based on the incident

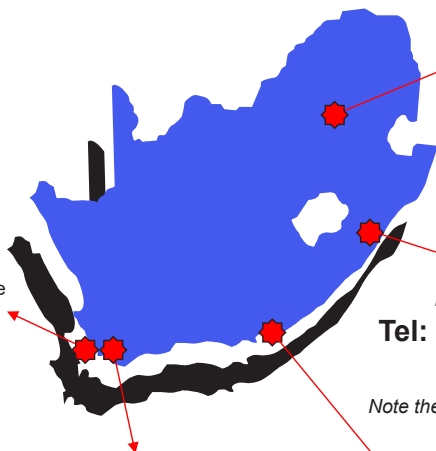
Eastern Province

Base: Port Elizabeth

Metro: 10177 / 041-585-1555 MSAR

Standby: 073-755-2250

Convenor: 082-904-3086 – Francois Searle



Western Cape

Base: Cape Town

Tel: 021-937-0300 (WSAR)

Convenor: 072-585-4294 – Brent Russell

For security / crime-related incidents in the mountains around the Cape Town Metropolitan area call the City Public Emergency Contact Centre (PECC) : **021-480-7700** (or 107 when using a traditional landline phone)

Hottentots Holland

Base: Somerset West

Tel: 021-937-0300 (WSAR)

Convenor: 082-601-5437 – Juan van der Meulen

- Internet: <http://www.mcsa.org.za/>, <https://www.facebook.com/MCSASAR> and <https://www.instagram.com/mcsamountainrescue/>
- The Mountain Club of South Africa (MCSA) Search and Rescue National Convenor is Steve Cooke – 082-554-4883
- All phone numbers are the emergency numbers that can be contacted in case of a mountain rescue emergency (primary numbers are in bold). Please specifically state that you are calling regarding a 'Mountain Rescue Emergency'. The primary cities from which the teams operate are shown in *italics*. Where a provincial coordination centre that uses MCSA Search and Rescue as a resource exist, the number of the provincial coordination centre is given as the priority contact number
- The MCSA does not charge for rescues, helicopter flight criteria applies, MCSA SAR reserves the right to perform its own assessment of incidents and may transfer incidents to more appropriate agencies or request additional assistance, assistance is dependent on resource availability, our resources provided on a volunteer basis
- Information correct as of February 2026. To be informed of updates on this list please send a mail to vdm.dean@gmail.com

SECTION DETAILS

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EASTERN PROVINCE

FREE STATE

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