

## Welsh Grit Selected Area Guides

# Craig y Fotty

## *An Interim Climbing Guide*

By Dave Williams

(Photo-topos © Mark Davies/Great Western Rock & Steep Stone)

*"Craig y Fotty deserves popularity. It is very nicely positioned, with relatively easy access, excellent rock, a sunny aspect and a good range of grades."*



Steve Culverhouse &  
Martyn Davidson on  
*Flight of Time HVS 5a*  
© DAVE WILLIAMS

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## The Rhinogydd

The **Rhinogydd** are a range of mountains located in Central Snowdonia, south of the Afon Dwryd, east of Harlech, west of the A470 and north of the Afon Mawddach.

*Rhinogydd* is the Welsh plural form of *Rhinog*, which means 'threshold'. It is thought that the use of Rhinogydd derives from the names of two of the higher peaks in the range, namely Rhinog Fawr and Rhinog Fach.

The Rhinogydd are notably rocky towards the central and northern end of the range, especially around Rhinog Fawr, Rhinog Fach and Moel Ysgyfarnogod. This area is littered with boulders, outcrops and large cliffs, all composed of perfect gritstone. The southern end of the range around Y Llethr and Diffwys has a softer, more rounded character, but this does not mean that there is an absence of climbable rock.

### Steep Stone's Rhinogydd series of Interim Climbing and Bouldering Guides

*For the rock climber, the Rhinogydd is arguably one of Wales' greatest yet least-known treasures.*

Work is ongoing on **Steep Stone's** new **Welsh Grit** guidebook, which will detail the very best of over 1800 single and multi-pitch climbs and boulder problems. The previous Climbers' Club *Meirionnydd* 2002 guidebook unfortunately did the area few favours. Poorly written and edited in part and somewhat lacking in inspiration, its overly complex and consequently confusing description of the area and its climbing effectively did little to motivate any real interest. As a result, a whole generation of climbers may now be unaware, or at least unsure, of the Rhinogydd's climbing potential.

**Steep Stone's** *Welsh Grit* aims to right this wrong. While work on the new guide steadily progresses, Steep Stone will also produce a short series of definitive interim guidebooks with the aim of encouraging climbers to take a serious look at what the Rhinogydd has to offer. Building on the success of **Steep Stone's** 2018 **Central Wales - Elenydd** guidebook, these well-researched, free-to-download PDF interim guides will provide easy to follow access notes, together with accurate route descriptions and photo-topos.

### The Welsh Grit Selected Area Interim Guide Series

**Cefn Cam**  
**Craig y Beudy**  
**Carreg yr Ogof**  
**Craig y Merched**  
**Craig y Fotty**  
**Craig y Ffridd**  
**Cwm Nantcol Lower Craggs**  
**Rhinog Fach and Cwm Hywel**  
**Moel Ysgyfarnogod**

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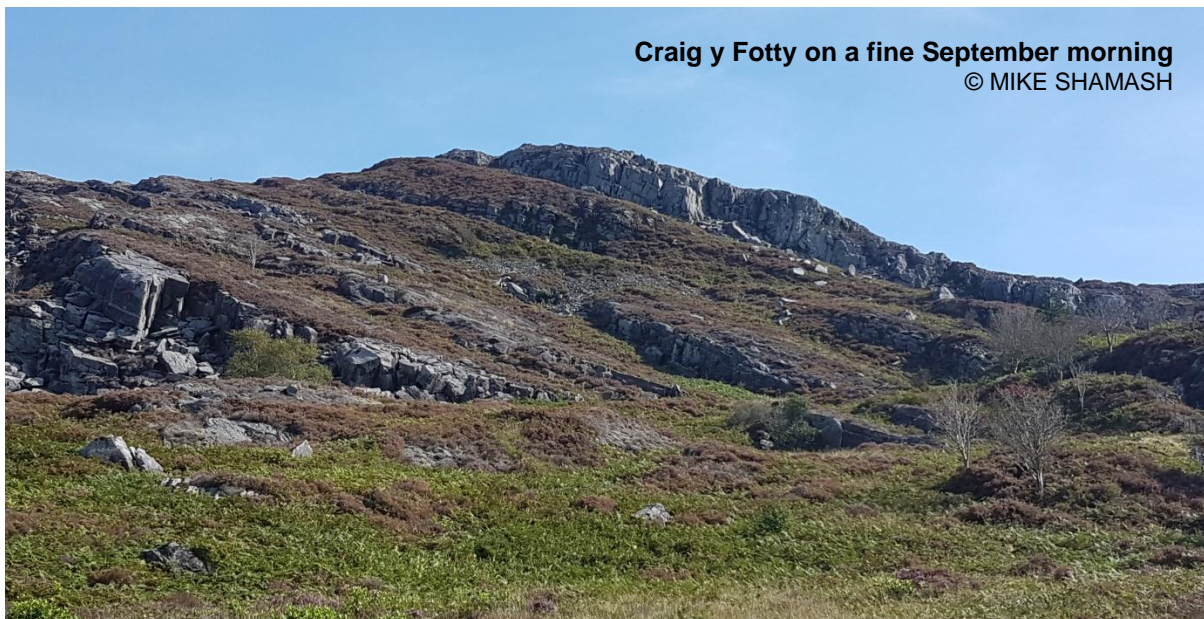
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**Craig y Fotty** *Crag of the Summer Dwelling*  
aka **Carreg Clust** *Ear Rock*

OS Ref SH 676 214

<b>Overview:</b>	<b>A very nicely positioned linear outcrop with excellent quality rock, a very sunny aspect and a relatively straightforward approach with some interesting industrial archaeological remains <i>en route</i></b>
<b>Altitude:</b>	300 metres (Craig y Fotty (main) crag)
<b>Approach:</b>	<b>AG1:</b> Easy walking on a former mine track (public bridleway) and footpath to within 10 minutes of the lower crag and 15 minutes or so of the main crag.
<b>Approach time:</b>	30 minutes (Craig Tŷ Powdr (lower) crag); 40 minutes (Craig y Fotty)
<b>Aspect:</b>	South west facing
<b>Drying:</b>	Very quick drying but with some seepage in places after prolonged rain
<b>Winter sun:</b>	Yes
<b>Summer sun:</b>	Yes, until mid-evening
<b>Access Land:</b>	Yes
<b>Grade Range:</b>	VD – E4

This very attractive and well-positioned crag overlooks the little-visited glacial hanging valley of Cwm Llechen on the southern slopes of Mynydd Cwm Mynach, affording excellent views northwards to Diffwys, the highest peak in the Rhinogydd, and southwards to Cadair Idris and the Afon Mawddach estuary. In addition, the total absence of forestry in this valley makes for an extremely pleasant contrast to the adjacent Cwm Mynach valley, which is just to the east.



**Craig y Fotty on a fine September morning**  
© MIKE SHAMASH

The crag appears to have two names. The original name is **Craig y Fotty**, but locally it is more commonly known as **Carreg Clust**, a name given to it by 19<sup>th</sup> century manganese miners. (The reason for the name **Carreg Clust** may become obvious when looking at the crag from the opposite side of Cwm Llechen on the walk-in.)

There are two separate crags; the small, lower, compact outcrop of **Craig Tŷ Powdr** and the much larger **Craig y Fotty** main crag, which forms a long, north to south escarpment along the hilltop above. Both crags are visible more or less the whole time on the walk-in and cannot be missed.



**Craig y Fotty** is a hidden gem which deserves popularity. It is a lovely place to climb; its myriad variety of clean slabs, walls and cracks are well worth sampling. It is very nicely positioned, with superb views, relatively easy access, excellent rock, a sunny aspect and a very good range of grades. The crag takes little seepage and dries quickly. Climbing is possible here throughout the year, including on dry and sunny winter days. It is, however, quite exposed and catches the wind. The only note of caution is that the highly jointed and blocky structure of the cliff means that some loose rock may be encountered, particularly on descents. Note also that wide cracks feature on a few routes and, consequently, very large cams (eg. Camalots 5-6, Dragons 6-7) can be useful additions to a normal rack if undertaking these particular climbs. Climbs are described from left to right throughout.

#### A note on the use of Approach Grades **AG**

The Rhinogydd are different and here you'll rarely find the close-cropped grass of the rest of Snowdonia. This is predominantly a rough, scruffy terrain with boulders and heather. As a result, a Rhinogydd mile is about as long as a Scottish one. Covering ground can sometimes take ages due to the Rhinogydd's *Three Amigos* of heather, bilberry bushes and boulders - with an added *soupçon* of bracken when in season. Rhinogydd devotees will know what to expect, but the first time or occasional visitor may be caught unawares.

As a guide, the approaches to crags have been very subjectively 'graded' from 0-3 according to the ease of walking, or indeed, the lack thereof....

**AG0** 'A walk in the park'

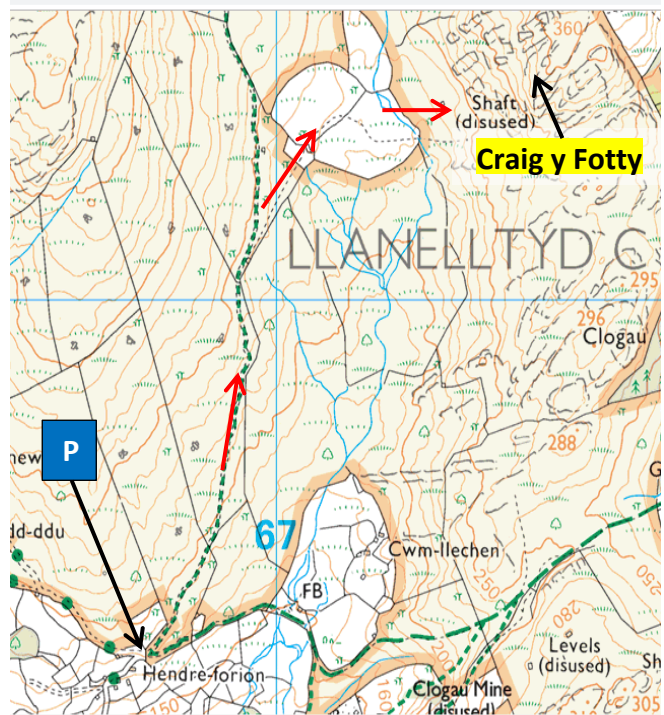
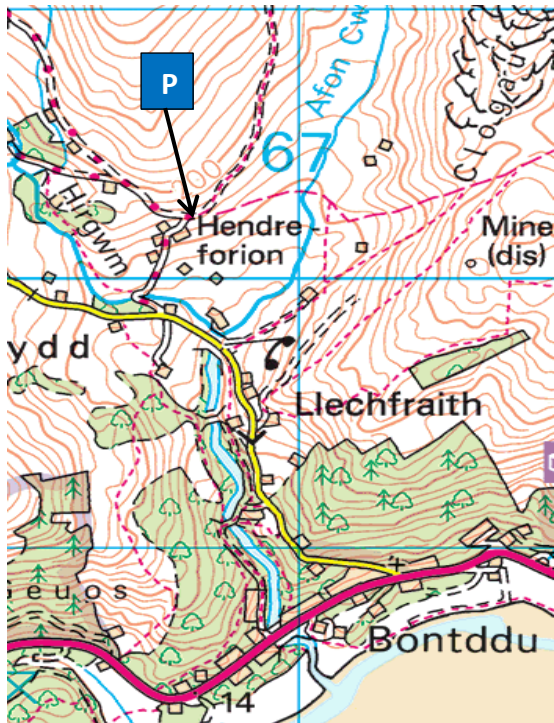
**AG1** Relatively easy going, reasonable paths

**AG2** Hard going on mostly pathless terrain

**AG3** Extremely difficult, pathless terrain

**Approach:** From Dolgellau take the A496 road to Bontddu. Turn right by a bus stop in the centre of Bontddu and take the steep, narrow road up the hillside. Cross a bridge over the Afon Cwm Llechen and then take the first road on the right down to a second gated bridge over the Nant Hirgwm. Pass through the gate and continue uphill around a sharp right hand bend and on past Hendre Forion farmhouse on the right. Just beyond is a sharp left hand bend with a gateway and stile on the outside of the bend; park here. (OS Ref SH 666 202)

Note that parking space is very limited, with room for a couple of cars only. A single vehicle can be parked to the right of the stile and there is room for one other on the very inside of the bend. Park considerately; allowing enough room for farm machinery to swing wide on the sharp bend. **Do not block the gateway to the hill as this is in regular use. If both parking spaces are taken, park further back down the road; again avoiding blocking access and gateways.** The local farmer is extremely kindly disposed towards climbers, so all courtesies should be maintained.



From the stile, follow the former New Diffwys Manganese Mine track which undulates as it rises along the western side of Cwm Llechen towards the head of the valley. At a fork just beyond a gateway in a wall (OS Ref SH 669 210), take the right hand track, past an ore loading platform on the left which leads down to the Afon Cwm Llechen, ending by a stile over a wall and an old stone miners' bridge over the river. From the bridge, faint and usually overgrown paths then lead past the disused Fotty Mine adit and workings to both crags. The path to the upper main crag of Craig y Fotty can be particularly difficult to find, but it does exist. At least it is not that far to walk from this point. The walk-in can be very water-logged after prolonged wet weather and, even after a dry spell, it may still be wet in places.

The crag is probably at its best before the bracken is in 'full bloom' but, even so, the quality and variety of climbing on offer here means that a visit in high summer should definitely not be precluded.

Also be aware that this is very much a habitat favoured by both ticks and adders, so a certain vigilance is advised.

Craig y Fotty's snakes and adders →

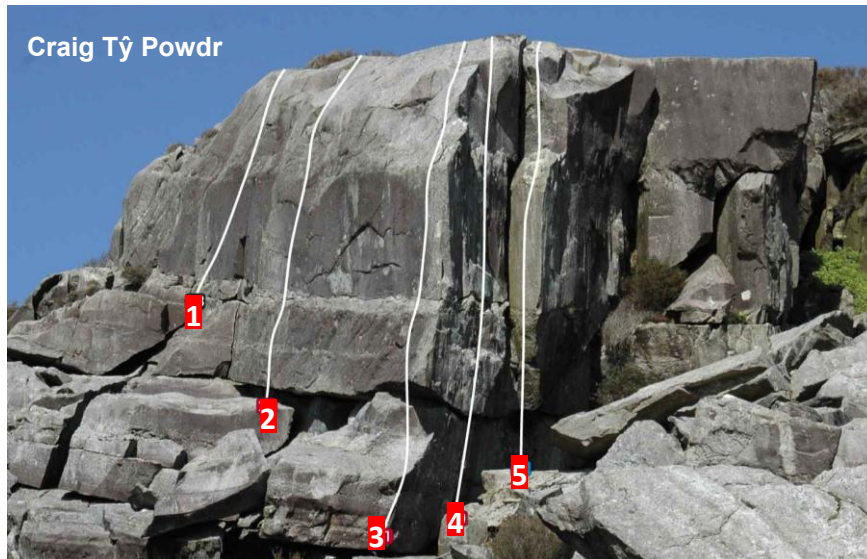
© MIKE SHAMASH



**Craig Tŷ Powdr** *Powder House Crag*

OS Ref SH 674 213

The small lower buttress is composed of top quality rock and towers above a jumbled chaos of huge blocks and boulders. The crag derives its name from the former manganese mine's explosives building, or powder house, the remains of which are nearby. It may only be 10 metres high at most, but it is an impressively imposing little outcrop with some very challenging climbing.



There is a short, unclimbed chimney on the left side of the buttress.

**1. No Time for Tears** 7m E4 6a ★ †

Bold and precarious climbing above a terrible landing; protection is illusory. Climb the short slab 2 metres left of the short chimney to reach a small overlap. A good edge above needs matching before rocking up and right to an easier finish.

FA T Taylor, solo (*After practice on a top rope*) 9.5.11

To the right of the chimney there is a blank-looking little wall.

**2. La Saison des Pluies** 7m E2 5c †

Layback up the wall just to the right of the chimney. There is a very high and precarious step up at the half way point.

FA T Taylor, solo 9.5.11

**3. Gilt Edge** 10m E2 5c ★★

Start below the arête forming the right edge of the blank face and pull up onto the ledge up left. Balanced layaway moves past micro-wire protection bring good holds within reach. Pad up the slab to finish. Excellent climbing.

FA T Taylor, C Taylor 24.4.11

To the right of the arête is a second steep little wall split by a deep chimney-crack.

**4. Slick Feelings** 10m E3 6a ★ †

Start 1 metre right of the base of the arête below a vertical crack. Use the arête and crack to go directly up, then make a hard and committing move to gain a good hold at the top of the arête. Pull up onto the easy slab above to finish.

FA T Taylor 24.4.11

### 5. Golden Nuggats 10m VS 5a ★

The vertical chimney-crack is a classic struggle. Enter it with difficulty, then battle desperately and determinedly upwards, hopefully leading to a finish on the right.

FA T Taylor, solo 24.4.11

## Craig y Fotty Main Crag

The first few routes are located on a hidden slab a short distance left of **Four Crack Wall** on the crag's upper left-hand side. A feint path leads up to this area from near **Carreg Holt**, generally keeping well to the left of the block scree, but this may be obscured by bracken later in the season. If so, a weaving approach over the blocks beneath the crag itself may then prove easier.

**Descents:** Descents are possible in a variety of places on the main crag and are not described individually. Some climbs finish on the top of immense detached blocks separated from the parent cliff by deep crevasses (eg routes 1-7, 11-12); descending from these involves some easy down climbing as walking off is normally not an option.



On the very far left of the escarpment is a steep, clean, North-facing slab. Left again there is a partially hidden, deep rock fissure which is crossed by the scramble descent from the top of climbs 2-6.)

### 1. In the Shade 6m S 4a

A perfect route for a blisteringly hot day. To the left of *Time of Flight* is a deep fissure in the rock which is approached by scrambling over large blocks. At the entrance to the fissure there are several huge blocks overhanging the cleft about 2.5 metres above. Start under the first two overhanging blocks. Climb the steep, well-protected crack in the wall and go through the gap between the overhanging blocks to finish.

FA M Shamash, K Kaur 15.9.19

### 2. Time of Flight 8m HS 4b ★

The slab is bounded on its left by an easy angled corner. Take a direct line two metres right of the corner to finish up the crack.

FA T Taylor 26.3.11



**Martyn Davidson on  
*Time of Flight* HS 4b**  
© DAVE WILLIAMS

**3. Flight of Time** 8m HVS 5a ★

The slab is bounded on the right by a good edge. Start two metres left of the edge and go directly up past some good breaks before finishing up a short crack. Quite sustained, but with adequate protection.

FA T Taylor 26.3.11

**Stay Little** 8m VS 4c

Essentially this is just an easier (and inferior) start to the next route which is rather bold in its upper half. Climb directly up the very right edge of the slab to join *The Edge of the World* at the obvious horizontal break and then continue as for that route.

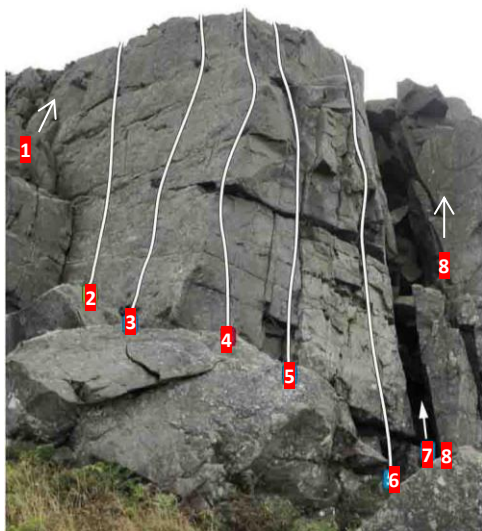
FA M Davies solo 23.9.13

**4. The Edge of the World** 12m E2 5b

This takes the edge bounding the right side of the slab. Start directly under the edge and follow it, passing a short, hard and committing sequence, to gain the horizontal break and the first (and only) gear placements. Step left and continue more happily up the arête on its left hand side to the top.

FA T Taylor 26.3.11





The next two routes struggle to maintain their independence, but are still worth seeking out.

**5. Friend of the Ancients** 12m VS 5a ★

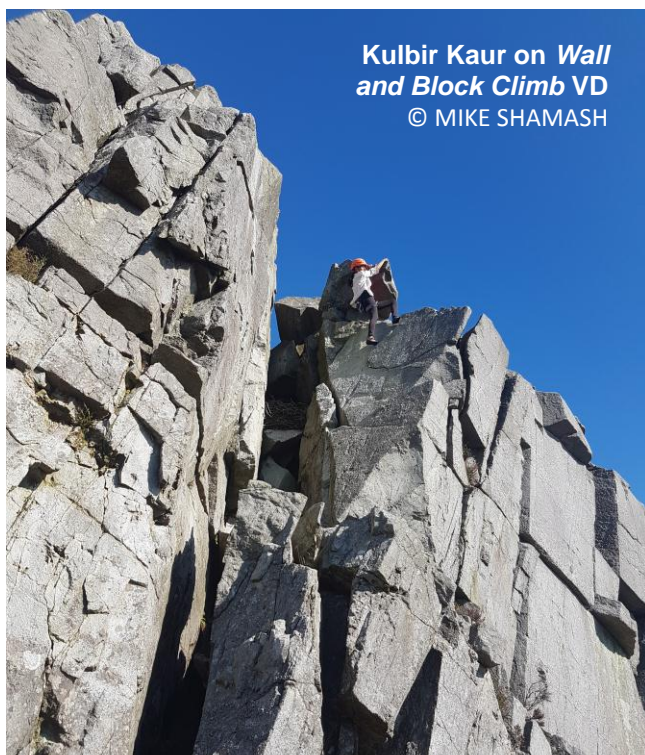
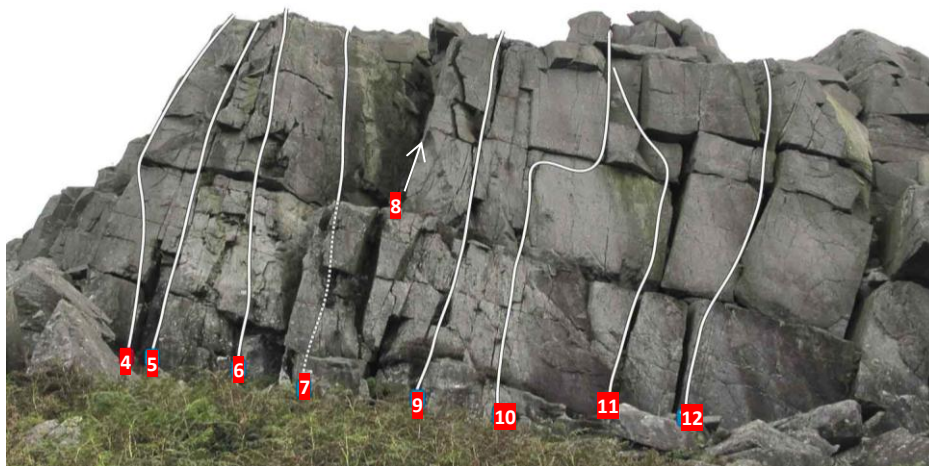
The awkward vertical crack to the right of *The Edge of the World* is followed directly.

FRA T Taylor, C Taylor 26.3.11 (So named as a very rusty cam was found near the top).

**6. Ragnorak** 14m HVS 5b ★

The right edge of this excellent, steep little wall has good protection and great moves. High in the grade, with sustained and interesting climbing.

FA T Taylor, C Taylor 26.3.11



**7. Reggaerock** 14m E1 5b †

This takes the vague groove in the wall in the gully to the right of *Ragnorak*. Stepping off the boulder onto the face right of the edge decreases the climbing by 4 metres. Take the centre of the wall to the top. FA T Taylor solo 26.3.11

**8. Wall and Block Climb** 10m VD

This climbs the wall opposite *Reggaerock* to the block at the top of the gully's right hand wall. Start, by squeezing through the gap into the gully as for *Reggaerock*. A lovely, well protected pitch with a nice finish. FA M Shamash, K Kaur 15.9.19

Next right is **Four Crack Wall**, a quality piece of rock.

**9. Golden Girl** 10m HVS 5a ★

Start directly below the left hand crack and gain the ledge. Follow the crack above past small (and hopefully securely wedged) blocks to the top.

FA T Taylor, A Taylor 31.8.11

**10. Aurora** 10m HVS 5a ★

Start 1 metre right of *Golden Girl* and pull onto the ledge. Move up the vertical crack to the horizontal break. Use this to traverse right and use a good layaway to make a gymnastic move onto the nose. Enter the niche and finish directly.

FA T Taylor solo 31.8.11

**11. The Midas Touch** 10m VS 4b ★

The flared crack is hard to start but eases as it goes leftwards near the top to finish as for *Aurora*.

FA T Taylor, A Taylor 31.8.11

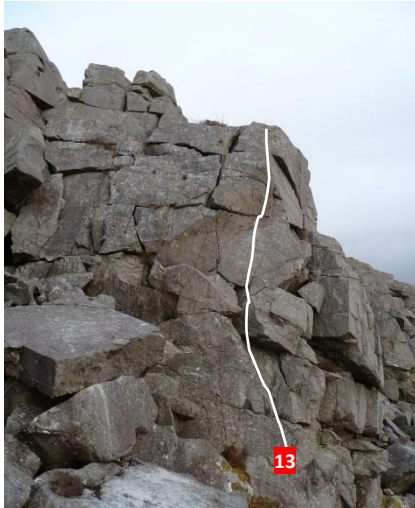


**12. The Dog's Pollack** 10m VS 4c ★

The right hand crack. Pull up onto the ledge then enter the flared crack with some difficulty. Nice moves lead up to an easier finish.

FA T Taylor, C Taylor 26.3.11

Right again is a short, slabby wall with a crack on the right. (**The Carat and the Stick** VD 8m FA T Taylor, A Taylor 31.8.11)



### 13. Crystal Tips 9m HVS 5c †

A well-protected eliminate on excellent rock which searches for difficulty up the impending wall just right of *The Carat and the Stick*. Climb the short chimney-groove to a sloping ledge below the steep wall and make a hard move up this to a good hold. The inviting crack on the left is strictly out of bounds at this grade.

FA S Day, D Williams 25.3.14

Those with a certain love of wide cracks will be very pleased to learn that around the front of the small buttress to the right is an enticing little off-width crack. Those less enamoured will probably just move swiftly on....

### 14. For Reasons Unknown 9m VS 5a ★ †

The curving, off-width crack is aptly named. The start is decidedly awkward, gaining the niche near the top thankfully less so. Very big gear (e.g. Camalots 5-6) will prove useful if you don't like soloing.

FA S Finch, D Williams 29.1.14



### 15. King Raven 8m E2 5b

Start below the right edge of the short steep face and make bold, committing moves to gain some good holds up and left. Pull up to finish directly. The start may be harder for the short.

FA T Taylor 18.3.11

To the right is a deep canyon with a huge, old raven's nest. The bay to the right of this has a vegetated corner at its back.

### 16. Frog Storm 10m HVS 5a

Start just right of the corner. Climb up to a tiny sapling and continue up the excellent, thin and sustained crack. Not to be underestimated; harder than it looks and quite high in the grade.

FA T Taylor 18.3.11

Right of *Frog Storm* is a section of broken rock. Right again is a small, clean, undercut slab.

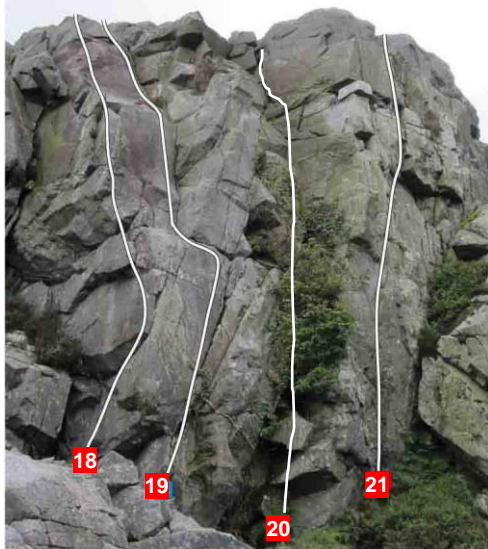


**17. Salty Dog Nuts** 7m S †  
 Extremely slight, but enjoyable. Step onto the exposed hanging slab from the left and climb it, past the rock scar, to the top.  
 FA D Williams, S Day 25.3.14

Right, beyond an area of broken rock, is the steep and impressive **Central Buttress**, which gives the longest climbs on Craig y Fotty. The buttress is split into two halves by a deep cleft; the striking line of *Titrwm Tatrwm*.

The cleft was once completely choked by ivy. A determined gardening session proved very worthwhile as it revealed an excellent chimney.

Central Buttress



↙ The leaning chimney of *Titrwm Tatrwm* – before and after some very determined ivy pruning

**18. The End of Extremism** 15m E2 5c ★ †

This takes the well-defined left edge of the buttress. Start by gaining the finger crack and make a difficult sequence of moves to the good horizontal break below a slim overlap. Continue up the rib directly above.  
 FA T Taylor 24.7.11



Martyn Davidson and Steve Culverhouse on *The Boot is on the Other Foot* HVS 5a  
© DAVE WILLIAMS

### 19. The Boot is on the Other Foot 15m

HVS 5a ★★

Excellent, nicely sustained and possibly the best climb on the main crag. Start two metres right of *The End of Extremism* and pull up with difficulty using a good deep crack. At the top of the crack move left, either high or low, before finishing up the easier groove.

FA T Taylor, C Taylor 24.7.11

### 20. Titrwm Tatrwm 17m VS 4b ★

The well-protected, central chimney-groove is low in the grade and gives unusual and worthwhile climbing. The undercut start is awkward and once overcome, the trap is seemingly sprung. The cleft continues to give interesting climbing until the angle relents. Finish pleasantly up the open groove.

A direct finish (VS 4c), which climbs the chimney-groove until it is possible to finish directly up the wall above, is a little artificial as much of the climbing is very close to the original line.

FA D Williams 31.5.14

Direct Finish: FA M Shamash, K Kaur 15.9.19

### 21. Wicca 16m E2 5b †

Start in the small bay right of *Titrwm Tatrwm* and bridge up moving slightly right. A tenuous finger traverse then leads back left to the edge. Finish directly up the edge passing the huge ravens' nest on its right. Note that the prominent block beneath the nest is loose.

FA T Taylor 18.3.11

There is a huge shield of rock to the right with a clean, sharp edge on its right-hand side.

### 22. The Cian and I 16m VS 5a

Start below the fang on the left side of the shield and make a short, difficult layback to the cleaned recess. Step left and go directly up the easier slab to the big ledge before finishing up the short, stepped headwall. For those with an aversion to awkward laybacks, there is always the option of climbing directly up to the recess at HVS 5b.

FA T Taylor, solo, 22.6.12

Alternative start: FA D Williams 25.3.14



Martyn Davidson on *Titrwm Tatrwm* VS 4b  
© DAVE WILLIAMS

### 23. Raven Lunatic 15m E3 6a ★

Start 2 metres right of *The Cian and I*. After a difficult start, layback the good edge at the right base of the shield until it is possible to move out left onto the face. Finish directly. Good climbing, but protection is worryingly absent just when needed most.

FA T Taylor 18.3.11

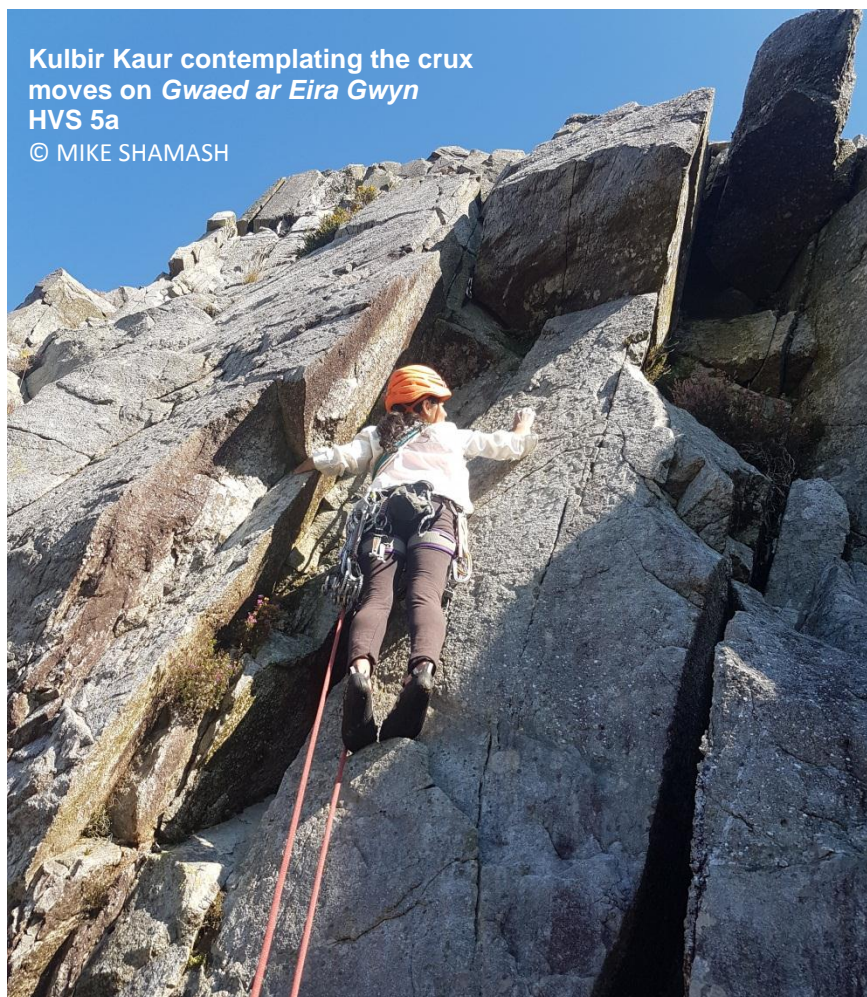


Immediately right of *Raven Lunatic* is a narrow inset slab which is capped by a small roof.

**24. Gwaed ar Eira Gwyn** 15m HVS 5a ★

Climb the slab to a good wire, then move delicately up to holds under the roof (crux). Step left and climb the short hanging groove to finish. Nice climbing, on superb rock, which may prove to be harder for the short.

FA D Williams 31.5.14



Right again, just beyond a scruffy capped corner, there is a cracked slabby wall.

**25. Numb of the Above** 15m S 4a

Climb the cracked wall directly, finishing up the obvious crack. A rattly block adds a little spice to the proceedings.

FA D Williams, S Finch 29.1.14

**26. Rain of Stone** 15m HS 4b

A poor climb which lacks balance. Start 1 metre right of *Numb of the Above* and make steep moves up a short, thin crack to a rubbly ledge. Step left and finish easily up the rounded rib.

FA D Williams, D Kerr 21.7.14

To the right, beyond some broken ground, there is a small buttress with a little square-cut roof split by a hanging finger crack on its right side.



**27. Fotty and Medals** 5m E1 6a/f6a+ †

Essentially little more than a highball boulder problem above a poor landing. However, roping up for the hanging crack gives a safe and worthwhile challenge, with some excellent moves.

FA S Finch, D Williams 26.2.14

Right again, beyond more broken ground, is a small buttress split by a very wide crack.

**28. Fotty and Biscuits** 8m S 4a

Starting from the base of the wide crack, swing left to the thinner crack and follow this with pleasant moves and good protection.

FA S Finch, D Williams 26.2.14



**29. Rock Addiction** 8m HS 4b

The surprisingly independent off-width crack is protectable with very large cams.

FA D Williams, D Kerr 21.7.14

**30. Pure Heroine** 8m VS 4c ★

The blunt rib just right of *Rock Addiction* gives very good climbing on immaculate rock. The crux is right at the very top. It can be adequately protected if very large cams are used as side runners in *Rock Addiction*.

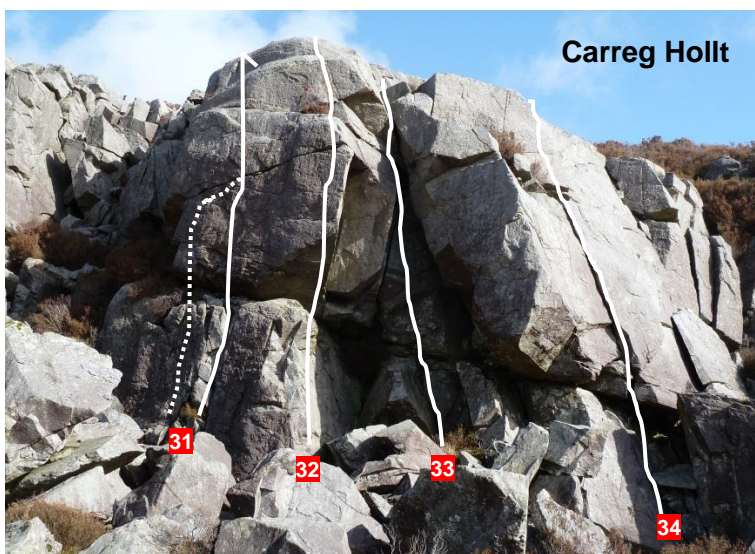
FA D Williams, S Finch 26.2.14

At the extreme right of the escarpment is a short, rounded buttress, **Carreg Hollt**, where an inverted V-chimney separates two walls.

**31. Half Cut** 8m E1 5b ★

The centre of the steep wall, with a long stretch past the undercut to reach the thin break, is adequately protected. Finish rapidly up the slabby wall above. The thin break can also be gained less awkwardly by starting just to the left.

FA D Kerr, D Williams 26.3.14

**32. A Cut Above** 8m E3 5c

The short arête leads to the undercut. A perplexing sequence using the right arête, poor undercuts and a knee bar is required to make a long reach to the good break (small cam). Finish much more easily up the arête. Protection is woeful and the landing is awful, but apart from that you will be fine.

FA T Taylor, solo 9.5.11

**33. Fotty Vice** 8m VS 4c ★ †

As the name suggests, the inverted V-chimney is a thoroughly traditional struggle, giving 'fun' of the Type Two variety.

FA S Finch, D Williams 26.2.14

**34. Hollywood Cliché** 8m HVD ★

A pleasant little route up the nice cracked slab right of the V-chimney.

FA D Williams, S Finch 26.2.14



To the right, beyond some broken and vegetated ground, is a narrow, clean little slab.

**35. Missing** 11m HS 4b ★ †

The tapering slab, starting just on the right, is climbed direct with a long reach at half height. Pleasant climbing.

FA D Kerr, solo 21.7.14

### **HISTORICAL FOOTNOTE**

*Craig y Fotty remained 'undiscovered' until a patient of Terry Taylor (a local GP) asked, during a consultation in 2011, if he had ever climbed on the cliff. Terry's new route campaign in Cwm Llechen began very shortly thereafter. The discovery of a long abandoned cam on "Friends of the Ancients" clearly indicated some earlier, unrecorded exploration.*

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### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

*The author is indebted to the following Rhinogydd devotees for their valued company on the crags, for patiently posing for the camera, supplying excellent photographs as well as providing helpful advice and valuable feedback:*

*Steve Culverhouse; Martyn Davidson; Morven Davidson; Stuart Day; Sy Finch; Kulbir Kaur; Doug Kerr; Mike Shamash and Terry Taylor.*

*Dave Williams  
Steep Stone Climbing  
October 2019*