



Chris Sellers reports on the beourgeoning bouldering scene from the much-maligned but locally loved rocks that are the closest climbing to London

# SouthernSandstone

Southern Sandstone gets bad press and has a reputation for being 'that sandy choss on the way to Fontainebleau', but as a Sandstone local and a climber that has been fortunate enough to have bouldered around the UK, Europe and beyond, I think it at least deserves a fair go.

British wads such as James Pearson, Johnny Dawes, Mark Croxall and Lucy Creamer have all graced the area - even the infamous hoaxter Si O'Connor claimed ascents, so it must have something to offer.

One of the biggest problems with sandstone bouldering is the lack of documentation - unless you are in the scene, chances are you are missing out. Early problems such as the classic traverse Tobacco Road at Bowles were written up in the 1995 edition of the Climbers' Club Guide, but were hidden amongst the many routes.

With the acceptance of crash pads and sit starts, bouldering gained momentum and in 2000, David Atchison- Jones published the Jingo Wobbly Sandstone guidebook, which gave specific problems Font grades. These were mainly at Bowles and High Rocks; some argue that classic problems were turned into Peak

limestone-style eliminates, but to the masses there was now something in a book to tick. The 2008 Climbers' Club Guide now includes most of the classic and hard problems, but there is still no specific bouldering guide to Southern Sandstone.

Each of the main crags has its fair share of good bouldering. Happy Valley is the choice for beginners, with flat landings, low height and nothing above Font 5. Stand out lines at Stone Farm include Ian Stronghill's *Stinging Nettle* and its variations, weighing in at Font 7a-7a+, or the old school 7b highball route *Quoi Faire*.

Harrisons North Boulder makes a nice circuit with *Finger Flow* (Font 7a) the pick of the pop and hardest problem on the boulder. On the main crag, Mr Stronghill's Font 7c sit to the fragile route, *A Killing Joke*, is one of the crag's hardest. Bowles is a great venue that dries quickly, catches the sunshine and gathers the crowds, but as it is in private ownership it will cost you £3 to climb there. The Fandango Wall has many hard eliminate problems ranging from the punchy *Phasis* at Font 7c to the more amenable Font 7a *Indigo*. Bowles also caters for non-eliminate lovers with the pumpy 7a *Fandango* traverse, highball 6c Cardboard Box

and the 6c+ slopers of Banana Hammock. Plenty of easier problems such as Fandango start at 5c, and Mick's Wall arête at 6a to name but a few.

Sandstone's main new routers also happened to be the strongest. The likes of Ian Stronghill, Ian Huffton, Pete Zeigenfuss and Chez George spent most of their time putting up new and hard lines at Eridge Green and High Rocks. These two locations contain the good stuff and this is where Sandstone bouldering gets interesting.

Eridge Green is owned by Sussex Wildlife Trust and is an area of Special Scientific Interest (SSI) so please treat with care, keep chalk use to a minimum, stay out of the banned areas and treat with maximum respect or climbing will be banned, which would be a real shame.

Arriving at the car park the high 7b Watchtower is easily spotted, and around the corner lays Ian Stronghill's Sansara, one of the hardest 7a's on Sandstone. In the next cave sits the Pete Zeigenfuss 7c, Yankee Affair, and he is also responsible for Night Fall hard 7c+. The Stronghill classic, Hypersonic, has only recently been repeated at 7b+/ 7c. Ian Huffton adds another nice line with Azazel at 7a/+ , and on

the same piece of rock the peachy 7a Indian Traverse and the hard 7c+ traverse, The Read Line, put up by Ben Read, completes a hard circuit.

High Rocks is the jewel in the crown as far as Sandstone bouldering is concerned and contains many problems of Font 7a and above, as well as the hardest problem in the area. This is another sensitive crag as it lies on private ground. So what's the problem I hear you cry? Stupid, selfish climbers breaking fences, not paying and abusing staff, that's what. The High Rocks management have always charged for entrance, it used to be £3, increased to £5, and at the time of writing it's up to £10 per visit or £45 for a season ticket. My advice is that if you think it's too expensive, go elsewhere! Not paying will get climbing banned at the best crag in the south.

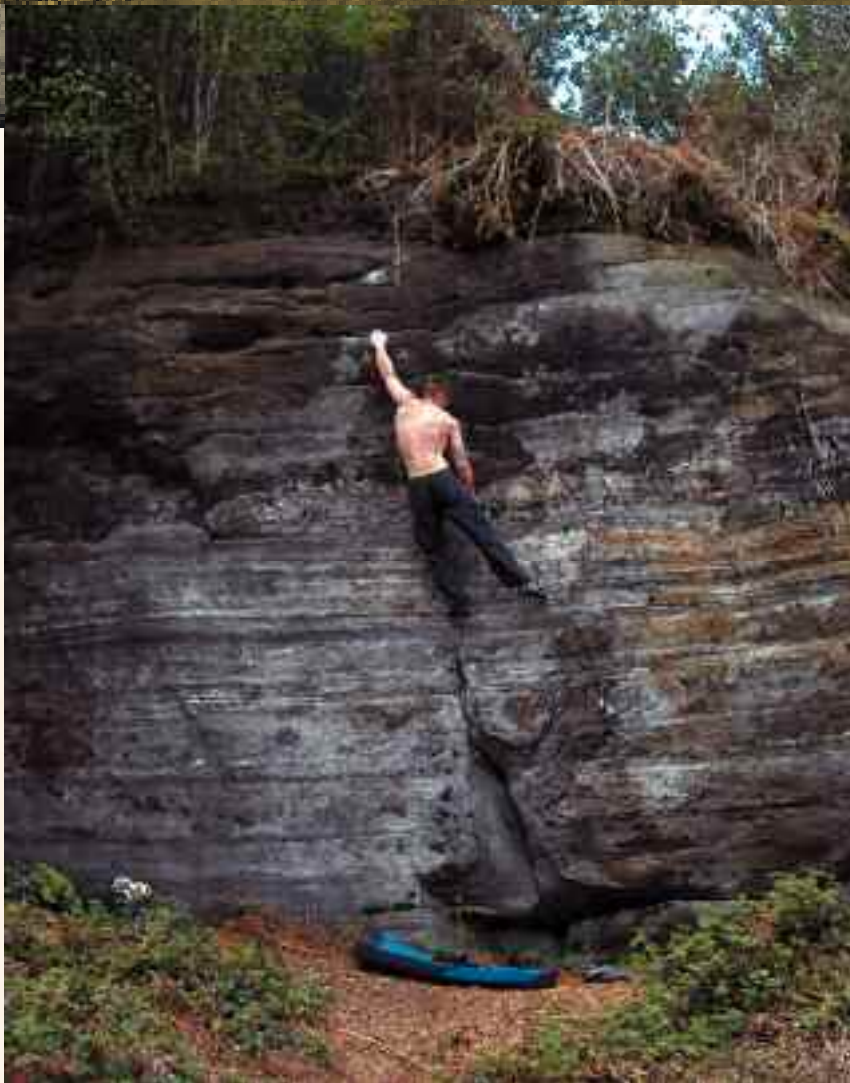
The problems. Where to start? Many of the first selection of problems are the start to existing routes or don't top out. Far left of the crag you have the first of Chez George's many problems with the 7b Clowns Pocket dyno. Moving right, two old aid lines are now boulder problems graded at 6c and Wonder Boy 7b. Ian Stronghill's hard line, Resurrection, is graded 7c and is near to Jim Wardell's steep 7b+, Vandal. Other hard lines include Dog Town and Pet Cemetery, both in the 7b+ range. Other 6c-7b problems in the area that are of note are Spanked and Magnetic, the lovely slopers of Poppet's Persistence and Jonny Dawes addition of Snow Drop.

Slab lovers will enjoy Porg's Progress and its direct neighbour at 7b. In the same bay Kinda Lingers sit gets 7c and the tall Darth Vader 7a. Another Chez dyno leaps between good holds at 7b, and lovers of the old school will be pleased that Shattered is now being considered a highball Font 6c.

The Bowling Green and Isolated boulders hold the class lines of Chez Arête, Greenside Mantel, The Mojo and its variations. The Ian Huffton 7c dyno Final Destination is easy to jump, but hard to hold. The Secret Garden traverses Cross Town Traffic and its lower companion Bum Dragon are both considered worthy of 7c.

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Opposite page: Ian Huffton on the Font 7c dyno Final Destination - easy to jump, but hard to hold. Below: Hypersonic Font 7b+ Eridge Green







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1. Ian Stronghill on Superfly 7a+ at High Rocks
2. Ian Stronghill on Yaniro Font 6c Bowles Rocks.
3. Ian Hufton on Mick's Wall Arete 6a at Bowles Rocks
4. Holly Stevens on Original Route on the North Boulder at Harrisons Rocks.
5. Ian Stronghill on Dogtown 7b+/7c at High Rocks



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The tour ends on the Matterhorn boulder where you can find another three traverses; Pete Zeigenfuss's The Slow Pull hits 7c+ and is accompanied by the 7b+ Neil's Eliminate and Old Kent Road/ JPS 7a. Breneva sit it rated 7a+ along with many easier and eliminates lines.

Since the likes of Huftton, Zeifgenfuss and Stronghill have gone on to other things, new problems have been established, but at a slower rate. Most of the best lines have already been climbed, so where does that leave Sandstone now? The proximity to London has opened the door to a

wealth of foreign talent with a group of Polish climbers, including Michal Potepen, Peter Wycislik and Maciek Badwoer, repeating anything and everything – literally!.

In September 2009 Peter opened a new chapter in Sandstone bouldering after completing a longstanding project on the Matterhorn Boulder. Don't Pierdol was graded 8a+, and in April this year, fellow Pole, Madiek Badwoer, repeated it and confirmed the grade. Projects such as Chimera Direct have been touted at 8a, so there are still lines available within the limited rock for the strong. 🗨

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#### Preservation of Sandstone

1. Don't climb on wet or damp rock, you will destroy problems.
2. No chipping or hold improvement – ever.
3. Clean your shoes (bring a bit of carpet) – this will preserve the hard outer layer.
4. Go easy on the chalk and keep tick marks to a minimum.
5. For cleaning purposes a rag to 'thwack' holds is very effective. Brushing should be kept to a minimum and only with a soft-bristled brush.
6. Use a pad, it will protect you and preserve landing areas.
7. Carry out your rubbish including cigarette butts and banana skins. On your way round why not give something back and pick others litter up.
8. If top roping use non stretch set up slings and set karabiners over the edge.
9. Respect the rules of the crag and pay if you should do. Don't jeopardise access for others with stupid behaviour.
10. On researching this article I found differences in grades for a fair few of the problems. As always, grading is subjective.



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