

Hiddenite E2 5c Iron Crag

"One of the best single-pitch E2s on a low-level crag in the Lakes" Some accolade and very much deserved.

Location and setting

Iron Crag consists of three very different buttresses, which sit on the western side of the delightfully secluded Shoulthwaite Gill valley to the west of Thirlmere. The Right-Hand Buttress is the ridiculously steep outcrop that can be seen when looking up the valley. It is home to some very impressive test-pieces including Western Union (E6), The Iron Man (E7), Phoenix in Obsidian (E7) and If 6 Was 9 (E9) – recently extended into Final Score (E10) by Neil Gresham. Up and left from here is the disappointingly loose Central Buttress, which is best avoided. Further up the hillside again is our main area of interest. This is the Left-Hand Buttress, a steep crag with plenty of routes in the lower extreme grades, plus a few harder ones. The rock is very clean and catches the sun all morning and into the early afternoon. All the routes here are of a good quality but the best of them all is Hiddenite. It takes the groove and wall on the right side of the crag and has a much bigger feel to it than it should.

History

Iron Crag first started to be developed in 1981 by Pete Whillance. This was a time of other similar crags being 'discovered' around the Lakes – Pete had recently been working on Raven Crag, Threshthwaite Cove. There was a with a flurry of new routes in June and July of that year – first with Jim Loxham and then with Dave Armstrong. It was Dave and Pete that produced the gem of the crag, which is Hiddenite. Dave explained that the name came from the apparent green tinge to the rock which is like the hiddenite gemstone.

The Route

Hiddenite comes in at a very amenable E2 5c. It is only a single pitch but packs in a lot over its 32m. The route starts from a comfortable perch behind a large, embedded boulder below the wall – somewhere comfortable for your second. As soon as the leader sets off however, the steepness of the ground below the crag is felt and there is an immediate sense of exposure. The climbing starts easily but is not very well protected as you traverse across sloping ledges that feel somewhat precarious above the immediate drop. Put all that aside and focus on the climbing and you'll reach a groove below the slim pillar that rears up above you. Some welcome gear is available before you move up and rightwards. The protection is adequate but not generous however the climbing at this point on the route is on good, positive holds. Next comes a committing move up the wall to reach a thin horizontal break and a good hold out on the arete. The break will provide some small but secure protection for the crux moves to come above. You are now in a fabulous, exposed position on the edge of the wall with the valley dropping away below you to your right. It is a fairly comfortable spot from which to survey what is to come next. Looking up there is a small overhang with good holds on the right. It is apparent that this is your next objective – but how to reach it? I will leave you to figure that out but suffice it to say that the only chance you have of success is to get on with it – trust in the holds and go for it. Beyond here the positive holds keep coming. You might stop to place more protection but beware of those arms as they tire on the steep wall. You might just want to crack-on as the top is almost at hand.

A fantastic route with a bit of everything that should be on every E2 leader's tick-list.

My Own Experience

I have climbed Hiddenite on many occasions. It is a route I will happily revisit time after time. I remember the first occasion whilst on a university climbing club weekend. I was comfortably leading E4 at the time so expected it to be little more than a warm-up for some of the harder routes we had lined up for later. The low traverse was fine, I wasn't troubled by the lack of gear as the climbing is easy. Into the groove went fine and I now had some protection. Then comes the start of the true challenge. It soon becomes obvious that you need to commit yourself to stepping up and right onto the wall – not a move that would be easy to reverse. I'm at the thin break with the hold on the arete. I place the protection available – at the time it was only a sideways wire, good but not the solid little cam that people tend to use nowadays. I can see the holds I want to get to, but how to get there? Dave Armstrong had the benefit of a long reach on the first ascent, I'll have to use a precarious high step and balance. It's all in the head – commit, set-off and trust it will all work out.

Whilst up at Iron Crag, make a day of it by doing the excellent E1s Granolithic Groove and Solidarity. The long, left to right traverse of Steel Band is also really worthwhile at E2. If you're feeling fit, then step up and do Marble Staircase at E4. The climbing is straightforward, but you are moving away from your protection on the crux, albeit the gear is bomb-proof. It was whilst I was writing the latest FRCC Eastern Crags guide that I spotted an obvious gap, which I managed to fill with Amabilite, another fine E4 to add to the mix.