

Cracking Routes in the Lakes

The Lakes is one of the main areas in the UK for trad climbing and features many different types of rock, each offering many styles of climbing. Within the area, the climber can find granite, sandstone, slate, limestone and the most common – volcanic rhyolite. All of these offer some good crack climbing with something for everyone, at a wide range of grades.

***Hopkinson's Crack* HS Dow Crag, Coniston**

First climbed in 1895 by gentleman crack-addict C Hopkinson, whilst his brothers were round the corner doing the first ascent of *Intermediate Gully*. This is a superb old-fashioned crack climb that takes the big corner crack on the right side of the Amphitheatre – a forbidding part of the mighty Dow Crag. Just because this route is over 125 years old, you shouldn't expect to find it easy. You will earn extra bonus points by climbing in tweeds and nailed boots. A classic experience.

***Fortiter* MVS Grey Crag, Buttermere**

Another classic route in a true mountain environment. The Grey Wall sits high above Birkness Combe in Buttermere. It provides a beautiful clean wall with several routes of a similar grade. *Fortiter* takes the prominent crack-line right of centre. It gives fabulous climbing in an impressive position. Having done this, it is well worth scrambling over to Oxford and Cambridge Buttress. If you haven't had enough crack climbing, then tackle *Dexter Wall* – another 3-star route at top-end VS. Alternatively, you could plump for the slightly easier, eponymous *Oxford and Cambridge Direct Route* at MS. Any combination of these would make for a memorable, high-level day with a mountaineering feel.

***Innominate Crack* VS Kern Knotts, Gable**

Kern Knotts is a superb crag of steep, rough rock in a sunny position with a stunning outlook down to Wasdale. It feels remote but is reached quickly and easily, particularly via Styhead Pass from Seathwaite in Borrowdale. The route is brilliant, providing lovely, well-protected climbing at an amenable grade. Be sure to do it in the morning to get the best of the sunshine. If this isn't enough you can then tackle its neighbour to the left - the slightly harder *Kern Knotts Crack*. Another classic of a previous era- climbed by OG Jones in 1897. Kern Knotts is a great stopping-off point on the way to or from the Napes. Enjoy the climbing; enjoy the view.

***Samson* HVS High Crag, Buttermere**

Back to Buttermere and to the relatively easily reached High Crag, which sits in a most attractive location on the hillside above the lake. *Samson* takes the crack up the smooth wall at the left side of the crag. To reach the fine crack, traverse right, above the large guarding overhang. The crack gives great climbing on perfect rock. There are plenty of other excellent routes at a similar grade, ensuring a great day out. If you want more crack climbing head over to *Gethsemane* – another 3-star belter on the right side of the crag, just a touch harder than Samson. Whilst it isn't a crack climb, it would

be rude not to mention *The Philistine*, one of the most photogenic pitches in the Lakes. Fabulous climbing up the clean, laid-back arete right of *Samson*.

***Crocodile Crack* HVS Napes, Gable**

Seen by many as the birthplace of British climbing. The Napes with the famous Needle provides some historic routes in a great location, looking down from its lofty perch, high above Wasdale. *Crocodile Crack* is just along from Napes Needle. It gives excellent climbing up the obvious wide crack above the area known as the Dress Circle. You can feel the history in the rock hereabouts. Even though this was climbed in 1960, it is flanked by true classics. You can imagine those Victorian gentlemen in their tweeds and nailed boots using combined tactics to ascend magnificent routes such as *Eagle Nest Ridge Direct*, *Needle Ridge* and of course *Napes Needle* itself. All captured by the Abrahams brothers in their iconic photos of the day. *Crocodile Crack* is the best routes of its grade in this area – but be sure to savour the many easier options and just have a mind for their history. The routes around here are the original precursors to our sport.

***Razor Crack* E1 5a Neckband Crag, Langdale**

Neckband Crag is an ideal location on a busy weekend in the height of summer. It has an outcrop feel to the place and is generally fairly quiet, needing an hour's easy walk up The Band from the Old Dungeon Ghyll Hotel. *Razor Crack* is one of a handful of excellent routes at a similar grade. It climbs the superb crack up the clean wall. While the climbing can be strenuous, it is well-protected and there are resting points along the way. It is proper crack climbing with a variety of techniques required to ensure success. It only just deserves its E1 grade so ideal for anyone trying to break this elusive barrier. As you sit at the top, belaying your partner and feeling justifiably pleased with yourself you can savour the beautiful view over the upper reaches of Langdale, but spare a thought for those poor souls on Gimmer Crag on the opposite side of the valley as they battle with the crowds and fight for space on their belay ledges while desperately trying to find some shade in the heat of the afternoon sun.

***Leverage* E1 5b East Buttress, Scafell**

Scafell provides some of the best climbing in the country. It is a high crag requiring a decent spell of weather, but *Leverage* is recognised as a route that dries quickly. It sits at the right end of the East Buttress, just down from the col at Mickledore, by the gearing-up point. The striking line follows the impressive crack, which can prove to be quite stiff in the lower reaches, but never really eases up. The rock is superb, as expected on this tremendous crag and the climbing is absorbing at its grade. This route is a must for anyone visiting Scafell and climbing around this standard. While there, it would be traditional to then climb *Chartreuse*, several metres to the right. This also provides some excellent crack climbing. Both routes were first climbed on the same day in May 1958 by a raiding party from north of the border – much to the dismay of the locals.

***Codpiece* E2 5c Armathwaite, Eden Valley**

Armathwaite provides excellent sandstone climbing in an idyllic location, set in beautiful woodland above the River Eden. The routes here are no pushover and often the protection is illusory. So, no pressure then! *Codpiece* follows a thin, flaring crack up a steep slab. It may yield to poor jams, finger locks and layaways. There is an easier option, which heads up and left along the rising ramp at two thirds height but for the full experience keep going. Indeed, if you are really feeling up to it, avoid stepping onto the ramp at all. This will nudge the grade up to 6a. There are plenty of other testpieces to entertain any visitor to Armathwaite, but while you are in crack mode, test yourself on *Cally Crack* – very different to *Codpiece* but given a similar grade.

***The Sting* E2 5c Steel Knotts, Borrowdale**

At first sight, the crack of *The Sting* looks like it will only be overcome by pure hand-jamming, which is exactly right. It gives the impression that someone has drawn a knife down the crag using a very straight edge. It is unwavering and except for a brief respite from a small ledge at half-height you are going to have to rely on pure hand-jams. But fear-not, the jams are perfect. This is your archetypal splitter-crack. To add to the excitement, finish up the short airy rib on the left. Brilliant! If these jams were all just a bit too perfect and you don't feel you have suffered quite enough – try the off-width of *Tottering Tortoise* at HVS – how hard can it be?

***The Vikings* E3 5c Tophet Wall, Gable**

Described as one of the most awesome archetypal Lakeland cracks – determination is essential to achieving success. Tophet Wall is an imposing crag with an incredible range of routes from *Tophet Wall* HS to *Breathless* E9 7a. *The Vikings* follows the overhanging crack between *Tophet Grooves* and *Incantations*. It ranges from steep to very steep to overhanging, with a delightfully flared niche thrown in for good measure. Expect to work up a sweat and don't be afraid to add some grunting to help you up the crux on the second pitch. That evening's pint will taste extra sweet and be well-earned. Or if you haven't yet had enough – and just when you thought it couldn't get any harder, the aptly named *Sacrificial Crack* over on the right side of this impressive wall, has seen many a leader sacrificed on the high-altar of the crack-climbing deities. This unforgiving route takes an intimidating line up the right side of the crag with only a belay on the exposed traverse of *Tophet Wall* as respite before the relentless challenge that waits above. Coming in at E4 6a, it is steep, strenuous, sustained and requires good technique but rest assured there are perfect jams to be had – if only you can hang on to use them. This was Jeff Lamb at his best – and it had to wait another nine years for a repeat. Get up this and your mates should be buying the drinks.