

# Runestone Quarry

GR: 307 025

Alt. 250m

East and West Facing

## Introduction

Runestone is an old slate quarry, correctly known as Betsy Crag Quarry but given its new, more poetic name by climbers at the time of its original development in 1990. It lies on the hillside above Little Langdale with spectacular views over this delightful valley and towards Pike O' Blisco and the Langdale Pikes. There are actually two separate quarries running up the hillside: Lower Quarry and Middle Quarry (there is actually a third – Upper Quarry, which is still a working quarry, so stay away). They form a slit running north-east / south-west up the hillside meaning some routes are always in the sun. The rock is slate, but with much better friction than usual making for some excellent climbing – the delicate, tiny finger holds of slate but with more options for your feet.

The original development was initiated by Mick Miller, later assisted by Elliott Blaylock, Tony Peak, Pete Hadfield, Andy Hyslop and Vic McClelland. The early routes were bolted “...but not as we know it, Jim!” Most routes had only one or two bolts with other protection provided by the odd dodgy peg, a crafty skyhook or poor wires. With this in mind and the quality of some of the routes being questioned it is no surprise that the venue failed to gain much of a following as the climbers of the day tended to favour the other quarries in the vicinity such as Hodge Close, Parrock, Tilberthwaite and Cathedral.

Roll on a generation and this, somewhat forgotten backwater was dragged out of obscurity and given a new lease of life. Starting in November 2019, with the help of equipment provided by the Cumbria Bolt Fund and a band of willing volunteers, coordinated by Ron Kenyon, Runestone was transformed into a fabulous sport venue with plenty of routes for the low and mid-grade climber in search of some varied routes in a delightful, sheltered setting. All the existing routes, along with many new additions are now very generously bolted and equipped with lower-offs, most of them the very handy ‘pigs-tails’ that don’t require any untying. The details of all the routes are to be found in the recent FRCC Lakes Sport and Slate guide, produced under the Wired collective. As excellent as this new fun-packed edition is, you might find some slight discrepancy between grades given here and those found in the guide – trust me, what you find here are much more accurate and future editions of the guide will be updated. If you enjoy the routes, please consider making a contribution to the Cumbria Bolt Fund ([www.cumbriaboltfund.co.uk](http://www.cumbriaboltfund.co.uk)) to help pay for all the equipment that has gone to produce this modern playground on your behalf.

## Approach

As the parking for Cathedral Quarry is now closed off and Little Langdale village offers limited parking space, the best approach option is to park as for Tilberthwaite Quarry. This is reached by taking the single-track road signposted to Tilberthwaite off the A593 Coniston to

Ambleside road – NOT the road signposted to Hodge Close, which runs parallel but on the other side of the beck. If approaching from the Ambleside direction, you will see the Hodge Close road on your left. Keep going for another 200m, round the corner and be prepared for a very sharp right turn. Park at the large car park then, on foot, follow the road to the farm. Take the left-hand track through the gate, which rises steeply up the hill. After about 1km the track levels-out with a spectacular view of Langdale Pikes in front of you. Up on the hillside to your left is a large spoil heap with a conspicuous left to right inclined track, which leads to the bottom end of the quarry. From the main track, take the second, vague path on the left, which leads to a wall and gate below the incline. Follow this to the Lower Quarry. The approach takes about 30 minutes. If coming from Little Langdale/Cathedral Quarry side, follow the track alongside the river to some cottages and a climbing club hut. Continue up the track away from the river. The spoil heaps will be seen up on the hillside. Take the track to the left, going through a gate to where the path heads off right towards the wall, gate and incline.

### **The Lower Quarry**

This is the first point of arrival. There are a number of routes here on both sides of the quarry. From the arrival point, looking down and left is a featured slab with a couple of pleasant routes *Caspian* (F5) is the right-hand line, which is the better of the two. The next feature on the left (East) wall is a large pillar with an impressive looking arête. This is the line of *Gandalf* at F6b+. An excellent route with some delicate moves – now thankfully protected by more than the original dodgy peg and single bolt! Follow the arete - do not be tempted right towards the peg – inviting as it looks. The narrow wall to its right has recently been bolted to produce *Buttocks* (F6a). On the opposite side of the quarry the wall at this point has a distinctive wall-then-slab feature with several routes breaching the initial steep sections before teetering up the delicate slabs. On the right is *Monster Dog* (F6c+) with a particularly butch sequence required to get established over the bulge before following the hairline crack. Further left is the excellent *Ska Train* (F6b). Getting established on the slab is easier but beware the very thin, smeary move on the slab. To the left again is the recently bolted slab with *All I Really Want to Do* (F6a+). There are a number of routes here, all of which provide interesting climbing. *New Booties* (F6c) makes its way up the steep wall opposite the *Ska Train* slab. The once-dodgy flakes have been glued back in place providing a good fingery exercise. Further up the quarry there are more newly bolted routes on the left wall: *Lynn-er Motion* (F6a+), *Evergreen* (F6c+) and, part way up the scree slope - *Fancy a Jump* (6b+) with a tricky, undercut start. All of these provide very worthwhile, entertaining climbing. At the very top of the Lower Quarry is a pleasant, flat grassy area known as The Gallery. There are a dozen or so good boulder problems between V1 and V3. The prominent arête is *Phantom Arête* V3. If coming to here it is best to follow the path up the right (west) side of the Lower Quarry.

### **The Middle Quarry**

This is best reached by following the path up the right (west) side of the Lower Quarry to a flat area between the two sections, from where the lower part of the Middle Quarry can be seen. The path crosses between the two quarries and continues up the left (east) side until an impressive entrance with a huge capping stone can be seen. This is the entrance to the Middle Quarry. This part of the crag provides most of the routes and the best selection across a spread of grades, with steep fingery test-pieces, easy-angled slabs and a couple of intriguing groove lines.

The first route to be found lies on the left and is currently the hardest offering available. It is marked by a low overhang above which is a fine arête. *Hang Like a Hound* (F7a+) pulls over the overhang then precariously climbs the left side of the arête. Right of this are a couple of easier lines at F6a then another, larger overhang, which guards a slab. The aptly named *Clutching at Straws* (F6c) requires a desperate move to get established on the slab before following easier ground up the groove above.

Continuing into the quarry is a small, walled enclosure. Above this is a diagonal flake/crack providing perfect sized hand jams. This leads to a small niche from where a step onto the slab above can be made and followed to the top. This route-of-two-halves is *Belly Button Slab*, an excellent F5+. Right again is the Hats Off Slab home to 10 routes from F4 to F6b+. These provide some enjoyable slab climbing with that lovely combination of small but positive edges with better than usual friction for the feet. The close proximity of the lines means that clips can be moved across, from one line to the next to speed up the ticking process.

Right again is a taller slab with three longer routes. The best is the right-hand *Lucid Dreams* (F6b) with its hardest moves at the very start but continued interest all the way. At the very head of the quarry is a striking, clean corner. This is *Kryten Korner* (F6b+) and it provides interesting, technical climbing. Even more interesting and very technical is the very conspicuous, clean corner up the wall opposite *Belly Button Slab*. It is even more fun than it looks! In the guidebook it is listed as a project named *Contagion* but is now known as *Three Cheers For Boris* (6c). The foot of the corner can be reached, with care, by scrambling up from the left. The corner itself provides an intriguing puzzle – straight up the middle using tiny edges? Back-and-footing ‘*Quarryman*’ style? Or swinging wildly out onto the left arête? You figure it out! There is sometimes a sling round the tree at the top for a lower-off but you might want to take one with you just to be sure. It can be easily retrieved by walking round to the top after the whole party has had their fun and games – seeing how many different solutions you can find to achieving success.

There is still plenty of scope for further development and new routes are currently being added. Since its recent redevelopment, Runestone has rightly become very popular, providing as it does, a good spread of grades in a sheltered location with one of the best outlooks in the Lakes.

As with all old slate quarries you need to treat the rock with some care, but the generous bolting means that if the odd hold does snap off, you’ll never have far to fall and with all the traffic the routes are getting they are becoming quite trustworthy. Similarly, the floor of the

quarry can be a little unstable if veering off the main paths. There are a number of interesting caves and tunnels so you might want to throw a headtorch in the sack. The cave at the bottom (northern) end of the Middle Quarry is known as Lanty Slee's Cave. The story goes that this was the location of an illicit moonshine whisky still, operated by the eponymous Lanty Slee - a notorious farmer, quarryman and smuggler of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. His whisky was alleged to have been smuggled over Wrynose and Hardknott to Ravenglass where it was sold to "*discerning local gentry and professional classes*". These days I would recommend getting your preferred tipple at the Three Shires Inn at Little Langdale.

#### Recommended Routes

Route Name	Grade
<b>Lower Quarry</b>	
<i>Caspian</i>	F5
<i>Ska Train</i>	F6b
<i>Gandalf</i>	F6b+
<i>Fancy a Jump</i>	F6b+
<i>New Boots</i>	F6c
<i>Monster Dog</i>	F6c+
<b>Upper Quarry</b>	
<i>Wide Open</i>	F5
<i>Runestone Cowboy</i>	F5
<i>Belly Button Slab</i>	F5+
<i>Hats Off to Linten Miller</i>	F6a
<i>Self-Isolation</i>	F6a
<i>The Burning</i>	F6a+
<i>Lucid Dreams</i>	F6b
<i>Kryten Korner</i>	F6b
<i>Clutching at Straws</i>	F6c
<i>Three Cheers For Boris</i>	F6c
<i>Hang Like a Hound</i>	F7a+

#### Fact File

Accommodation:

Camping at:

- Coniston Hall Campsite,
- Hoathwaite Campsite,
- Langdale Campsite
- Baysbrown Farm, Langdale

Hostel accommodation at:

- YHA Coniston
- YHA Coppermines
- Ambleside Backpackers
- YHA Ambleside

Provisions. Small but adequate shops in Coniston and Ambleside. Climbing equipment in Ambleside or Summitreks, Coniston

Nearby climbing. There are many options for other climbing venues in the area. See FRCC guidebooks: Lake District Rock and Lakes Sport and Slate – both produced by local volunteers under the Wired Guides cooperative.

Climbing Walls: Ambleside, Kendal and Ulverston

Other Local Attractions: Grizedale Forest, Coniston Water attractions, many fabulous walking opportunities from the easy Tarn Hows to the more challenging Coniston Old Man and surrounding summits.