

Star Wars (E4 5c), Bosherton Head, Pembroke

An unforgettable big pitch up the impressive face.

Location, Setting and Access

Pembroke has so many great routes up impressive pieces of rock – it's what makes the place one of the best trad-climbing venues in the country (and hence the world). Yet here is one of the many routes that stands out above the rest. The rock is solid and sufficiently featured to provide adequate holds and protection; it ascends an audacious line up a beautiful wall that captures the best of the sun, sitting above the sea in a semi-sheltered bay. The East face of Bosherton Head is more closely associated with the mighty Huntsman's Leap. This clean looking wall sits to the left side, looking in, of the seaward entrance to the Leap. It is reached by a short walk from St Govan's car park, past the rear of Stennis Ford and Huntsman's Leap, walking above the West Wall of the latter to reach the grassy slopes that face southwards, out to sea. A sturdy abseil stake is easily found, which allows an approach down the corner and the left side of the wall. Consideration must be given to the state of the tide, as is often the case hereabouts, which only adds to the sense of adventure. There is a large ledge at the bottom of the corner, and it makes sense to start from this, even at low tide.

From afar, the wall looks impressively smooth and worryingly devoid of features, but this is not the case. As you are abseiling down, you will of course want to avert your gaze from the line of the route, yet if your eyes do wander in that direction, they will note that actually there are loads of features providing plenty of holds and just about enough protection.

The Route

E4 5c is a grade that will often strike fear into potential leaders. Whilst it suggests the actual climbing is not too taxing, there is clearly something about the route to warrant concern. Is it particularly run out? Is it overly strenuous? Or both?? In the case of Star Wars, the reality is neither of these. Being able to rely on your feet for most of the way, it never really feels too strength-sapping and whilst, at times you'll be leaving runners some way behind you, they are generally good placements, and the run-out sections are not where it's hard so you're unlikely to put them to the test. The route takes in some spectacular territory. As soon as you start to traverse out rightwards, albeit on ample ledges, you are soon out there above to sea, feeling quite lonely. There are no individual 'stopper' moves, more like a continuous series of sustained climbing at 5c or thereabouts. There are also a couple of occasions where it is possible to stop, *adjust your cap* as they say, and gather your thoughts before pushing onwards and upwards. The line takes in two prominent, arching grooves, which lead you always up and right above the large overhangs below. This adds to the tremendous position, providing an absorbing atmosphere of exposure – drink it in and enjoy it, it's why you are there!

Half-way up the wall, between the two curving features, a striking crack makes a dash directly for the top, trying to entice you to follow it. You can, but you'll be embarking on the next level of challenge as this is the line of Luke Skywalker at E5 6b. Maybe come back for

that on another day. For the time being we're still heading rightwards on small but positive holds that eventually lead us to a vague arete, which is followed, along with a short wall, to the top. Whoop with delight and prepare to bring your second up so they too can share in the fun.

E4 feels a bit generous but E3 wouldn't really be doing it justice. With that in mind, providing you know what to expect, this would make a great route for someone just breaking into the E4 grade. For anyone comfortably operating at that grade already, you'll have a blast. Able to relax a bit more, you can relish the position and the high quality of the climbing. When I did it on a recent trip, we had already done six routes at Stennis Head that day and could see the wall of Star Wars looking very enticing across the water. It was a lovely day but with quite a strong wind blowing from the north. Of course, as soon as we dropped down the wall we were sheltered and in the sun. It was delightful, with a calm sea. I can imagine the exposure would be ramped-up a few notches with an angry sea snapping at our ankles.

History

Star Wars was first climbed in the hectic period of frenzied new-routing activity during the summer of 1980. Ben and Marion Wintringham along with Charlie Hearn were the successful ascensionists on the same day as they pioneered The Deerhunter, a HVS round the corner at the entrance to the Leap. Steeplechase, which takes the corner on the left of the wall at E2 5b, had been climbed a couple of years previously and anyone climbing this must have peered over at the expanse of seemingly smooth rock to their right and pondered the possibilities that it held. The wall plays host to seven routes with nothing below E4.

Alternatives

How long have you got? There are so many top-notch routes at or around this grade within a few minutes' walk. Right next door in Huntsman's is the amazing Bloody Sunday. Stennis Head has the fabulously positioned Pleasure Dome and Stennis Ford is home to the long and adventurous Mysteries. Those should keep you busy for your first day. If you're feeling good then throw yourself at the Pete Whillance classic Tangerine Dream at St Govan's before relaxing on Sunlover at Trevalen with a host of others between.