

Carborundum – Mt Tibrogargan

A reminiscence of the first ascent, 5th August 1956, some 50 years on

It was a relief to enter the chimney; the previous pitch had been worrying – vague protection on puny Italian hemp rope, home made pitons, early Stubai krabs and Dunlop ‘Volley’ sandals, the best footwear available at that time. Nylon tape and ropes, chocks, high tensile pegs, vibram soles, rock shoes, cams and dependable carabiners were years down the track. The golden rule, and not a bad one, given the existing gear, was that the leader never fell. This was strictly verboten, emphasised in all the climbing texts of the time; to do so courted death or serious injury. Needless to say we were young and indestructible and golden rules were often ignored. Just the same, I was happy to reach the cosiness and coolness of the chimney, after the smooth and fiddly wall below. Glasshouse Mountain’s rock did not lend itself easily to reliable protection; good peg cracks were few and far between and more often than not runners were tied round the most significant looking shrub in sight.

I remember being quite chuffed that I was probably the first person ever to be in this great chimney. The climb was very much a spur of the moment thing, although I had brooded over it ever since I had climbed the first pitch in the course of a practice cliff rescue.

In 1956 I was 20 years old, besotted with mountains, and an enthusiastic member of the Brisbane Bushwalkers Club. A small, somewhat anarchistic group of us, within the club, tended more to climbing than bushwalking. Apart from our small clique, there was a strong group of climbing enthusiasts in the University of

Queensland Bushwalking Club who put up a number of superb routes on Tibrogargan, The Steamer and Nimbin Rocks. In 1953 I climbed Central Rib on the South face of Beerwah with two of the UQBC members – Jon Stephenson and Geoff Broadbent; my first really prolonged and technical rock-climb.

The early 50s were halcyon days to be bushwalking and climbing in South East Queensland. So much was still new, unwalked and unclimbed. I remember my first climb of Mt Barney in 1952. As a naïve 16 year old hitching down from Brisbane Friday night, walking in through the moonlight for 8 km to bed down at 2am. Up at first light and climbing Logan's Ridge solo. Pussyfooting around a cranky Tiger snake, and the exultation of the summit, not another soul on the mountain. The descent of the recently climbed S.E. ridge led to my straying from the normal route. A fraught abseil on parachute cord (the forerunner of nylon rope and jealously scrounged from war disposal stores) over a huge drop, then the long walk out and more hitchhiking back home arriving in Brisbane around 11 pm Saturday. We thought we were indestructible, above harm.

Mt. Barney is always close to every Brisbane bushwalkers/climbers heart. We climbed it many times in summer throughout the night, to avoid the heat, and once lugged a 78 rpm wind-up gramophone to the top, simply to play shellac discs of Moussorgsky's 'Night on Bare Mountain' and Wagner's 'Ride of the Valkyries' amidst the swirling mist of the summit rocks at 3 am.

I was introduced to Mt Lindesay and the Glasshouse Mts by the late and great Bertie Salmon when I was 16. Sleeping in Cave 2 on Tibro and in the sand under the great overhangs of Beerwah on one of my first trips with the BBW has never been forgotten. Bertie kindly lent me many volumes of his extensive mountaineering literature, which further kindled the flame.

In April 1954 I was climbing with a close friend on the North face of Tibrogargan in the Glasshouse Mountains when Mick fell past me and came to rest some 200 ft. below on a scrubby shelf. In a state of shock I abseiled off a rope I knotted through a grass tree, and after reaching and securing my unconscious mate went for help. After a very long and involved rescue operation with an unwieldy Ambulance stretcher and a marvellous Ambulance officer, Mick sadly died from his injuries in Brisbane General Hospital. This was most traumatic, both for me personally, Mick's family and friends and for the Club. After the accident much soul-searching ensued on preventing similar accidents. A saviour shortly appeared in the shape of Bill Peascod, ex-Lakeland guide, who had recently arrived in Australia. Bill had put up many new climbs in England including the great classic – Eagle Front in the Lakes, 1940. Apart from the time Bill spent with the BBW, he and Russ Kippax first climbed the Breadknife and Vintage Rib on Crater Bluff in 1954. I subsequently made the second ascent of the Breadknife with Ron Brooks a little later.

Bill's knowledge and experience on climbing and mountain rescue techniques were a huge boost to myself and members of our club. Previously all my know-how had come from books – Let's Go Climbing/Colin Kirkus, Climbing In Britian/Barford (Penguin 1947, which I still have) as well as the golden epics – The White Spider/Harrer, Nanga Parbat Pilgrimage/Buhl, Himalayan Quest/Bauer, The Matterhorn/Rey, Conquistadors of the Useless/Terray, Alpine Tragedy/Goss(spell-binding, an early treatment of the inevitability of many accidents from small cumulative errors) and Brenva/ Graham-Brown. I still read and re-read these great classics as well as the more recent Rock Climbers In Action In Snowdonia/Smythe and the continuing works of Bonington and Simpson (I was thrilled to attend slide show/lectures in Canberra by Chris and Joe in the mid 1990s).

Shortly after completing my stint of National Service with the Army in Wacol, I was leading a BBW trip to Emu Ck and the Steamers in Easter 1955. An RAAF Lincoln mercy flight from Townsville, with a nurse and infant on-board, woke us early in the morning thundering down the cloud-covered valley before crashing into Mt. Superbus nearby. The rest of the long weekend was a blur of leading senior RAAF officers up to the crash site and the recovery of bodies. This again spurred thoughts of an expert mountain-rescue team liaising with the police.

It was with some relief that I took up climbing again with Bill. One of our memorable outings shortly later was an attempt on a new route on Tibrogargan, which started a bit too late in the afternoon, and we subsequently wound up 80 m off the deck in the dark. It was my first experience of abseiling of a mangy peg, and then a doubtful tree, in the dark on manila rope, that just barely reached the ground. This climb, called Faith, was subsequently completed (Bill Peascod, Neill Lamb, Julie Henry) and graded Hard Very Difficult, Grade 5 in the quaint terminology of the times.

The BBW had a long established Search and Rescue Section, which was continually upgraded, and a then state-of-the-art Neil Robertson stretcher was purchased. Bill came to Queensland to bring us up to speed on mountain rescue techniques. A number of exercises culminated in a day on Tibro where in a training rescue was set up in May 1955. A likely looking ledge to the left of the start of Caves Route and Faith was chosen and the 20m wall to reach it was soon overcome. This subsequently became the first pitch of Carborundum. The rescue was made as realistic as possible. With some 30 members of the club assembling, Margaret Kentwell nee Hammond was chosen as our willing lightweight patient/victim, who had supposedly fallen onto the ledge and suffered a broken arm and head injuries. Eight of us

assembled on the ledge with 200 m of rope and much ironmongery. After a frenzied bout of first aid, bandaging, and snapping of snap-links Margaret was securely trussed into our you-beaut Neil Robertson stretcher. Bill and I abseiled using a twisted knot in one hand whilst guiding the stretcher with our free hands. The rock wall was damp and greasy and we came down in bare feet. A gently rotating descent took us down the slightly overhanging wall laying some 20m to the left of the start to Carborundum. Four crane-men on the ledge looked after the actual stretcher lowering. The "rescue" took only an hour or so, after reaching the accident site, to get the patient off the rock. Carry teams took the stretcher down the lower slopes to transport. All concerned found the day most instructive and all good fun. Whilst I was engaged setting up abseil points on the ledge I took the opportunity to examine the wall above. The great crack now looked surprisingly accessible and I resolved one day to return and give it closer attention. The neglect of such an obvious line on Tibrogargan was hard to follow and I could only assume that the lower wall had deterred any attempts.

In August 1956 (not 1955 as appears in many guides) I returned in company with Mark Andrews, a fellow bushwalker. We'd previously done a new route together up the front of Tiberwoocum and were happy climbing together. The now familiar first pitch was quickly surmounted, and after wandering up a scrubby gully and short wall arrived at a prominent tree directly below the chimney. A short and nervous pitch up water polished rock led into the chimney itself and a comfortable and unique belay point. Excitement mounted as the chimney above us appeared quite straightforward. We were hailed by a party on Caves Route – "What are you silly buggers doing over there?", "Look out for the thing in the chimney". Enjoyable climbing followed in a wonderful situation. A passage of strenuous thrutching and bridging now led through the narrowing walls, past and around a number of chock stones where I placed sling

runners. Exposure on the edge of the flake quickly became exciting, and the abrasive quality of the rock soon apparent in our tattered clothing and scraped skin. Hence the climbs name.

Easier broken ground was reached and a scrubby traverse brought us, flushed with success onto Caves Route and after a scramble to the summit, we followed its easy descent. Some three weeks later I returned with Ron Brooks and repeated Carborundum before carrying on up the broken remnants of the chimney to the pinnacle and its eagle's nest crest; launching place for great climbs some 20 years down the track. A short bout of hitching returned Mark and I to Brisbane. This climb, although technically easy, has always brought me an immense amount of pride and pleasure and I'm delighted that now, nearly 50 years on, people are still getting swallowed up by the great crack – "Carborundum".

Bill Peascod took up painting and had considerable success in the Australian and English art world. He returned to England in 1980 and bought a farm in Lakeland, just around the corner from Chris Bonington. An Indian summer of climbing and painting ensued. He was filmed for BBC TV repeating his great classic 'Eagle Front' in company with Chris Bonington ; there is a lovely photo of Bill & Chris sharing a bottle of champagne on the back-cover of Bill's book "Journey After Dawn" (Cicerone Press). Bill developed a close friendship with Don Whillans and it was in Don's company, on Clogwyn du'r Arddu in 1985, that he suffered a heart attack and died. Sadly, Don Whillans passed away in his sleep not long afterwards.

As for myself, I'm still infatuated with the peaks. Other new climbs I made around the time of Carborundum were 'Reptile' on the Funnel, 'Titan' on Mt Lindesay, the front of Wollomombi Falls and probably best-forgotten routes in the Glasshouses. I came back to climbing in the mid 60s with the advent of the Brisbane

RockClimbing Club for a few years, and enjoyed leading N.E. Buttress on Tibro on 3 occasions, once with Merv Moriarty, the great painter as well as repeating many of my old climbs. In 1979 I realised a boyhood dream by climbing the Matterhorn and later Mt. Kinabalu in Sabah. A few years ago I was privileged in a week of glorious weather to see the vast array of unclimbed routes in the Antarctic Peninsula and to subsequently visit and walk around the great spires of Cerro Torre, Fitzroy and the Torres del Paine