

SA MOUNTAIN

SOUTH AFRICA'S DEDICATED CLIMBING MAGAZINE

ISSUE NO. 98 SEPTEMBER – NOVEMBER 2026

DUIWEL's DIRECT

ON A DARK AND
DUBIOUS WALL

BLACK DIAMOND
2026 TRADATHON

JANJA GARNBRET
CLIMBS **BIBLIOGRAPHIE** (9b+)

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Sam Nightingale on the superb crux pitch (19) high on the pillar on the lower third of the wall of *Duiwel's Direct*.
Photo TONY LOURENS

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Taking a quick break, new routing on Cogman's Buttress

Climbing, by definition, draws on physical and mental strengths, the amounts of which vary, depending on how far you are pushing the boat out on a particular route. This of course is different for all of us. And how we deal with the psychological demands of a particular route is very much a personal experience, depending on lots of variables. But this is the aspect of climbing that is the most important factor which makes climbing what it is. If we removed the fear or potential danger from climbing, the game we know and love would instantly cease to be.

I'm sure I speak for most climbers (particularly trad climbers) when I say that the preparation – mental and physical – leading up to a demanding and often scary lead, is a space that is owned by you alone. Only you can work your way through it. And then comes the process of actually keeping all those variables in check and piecing together the moves, the gear and holding that necessary feeling of fear at bay. Total concentration. Nothing else in the universe enters your bubble. During that short period, you are on the most important journey of your life. Then the top-out, and that indescribable feeling of euphoria. Slumped on the rope after clipping the chains, that huge cauldron of emotion all comes rushing through. Some shout at the top of their voice, some break down in tears and others just sit in silence, often in disbelief at what they have just pulled off.

What I am trying to say is that every climber has the right to choose where they want to place themselves in the risk arena. Their experience and mind control should dictate to them what routes they are capable of climbing or working towards climbing. And they alone decide that.

If a route is too scary, or too run out for you, then move on and find a route that suits your abilities – there are many. Routes with a 'reputation' need to be there. They are there for climbers to aspire to and this is what makes climbing what it is.

The *Bachar/Yerian* route on Medlicote Dome in Tuolumne was opened in 1981, it is graded 5.11c R/X. This equates to about grade 24 with a high risk of very long falls, potentially resulting in serious injury or worse. This route has a serious reputation and hard climbers, climbing way above its grade, take this route very seriously and train especially, to make an ascent of this classic. No one would dream or in fact dare to add extra bolts to make it 'safer'. The route is what it is. Climb it if you have the cojones, or walk away and find a route that suits you. Simple as that.

Be safe in the hills

Tony

THE RIGHT TO RISK

When *Snake Dike* on Half Dome in Yosemite Valley got retro-bolted a few months back, social media exploded with all sorts of keyboard battles. Lots of people for, and lots against the bolting. Some put forward reasonable arguments, others ludicrous, and everything in between.

The furore actually started quite a few years ago when Anna Parsons, from New Zealand, took a long and nasty fall on the route, severely injuring herself. Many people were outraged that a 'popular' route could be so perilous and pose such grave danger to anyone wanting to climb it.

The only surviving first ascensionist of the route (which was opened in 1965), Eric Beck, was consulted and he said that he wouldn't mind if a few extra bolts were added to make it safer. Then, earlier this year, Eric Sloan went up and popped in 16 extra bolts, which, to most pukka climbers, was unacceptable. This started the whole commotion again. Keyboard warriors came out in full force.

I would just like to put my opinion across: First of all, non-climbers (of which there were many commenting on social media, judging by the comments) have absolutely no licence or authority, in any shape or form, to weigh in on this. It is like me commenting on a thread relating to crossing the Atlantic solo in a canoe – I know f-kall about it!

Let me start off by saying that the 'game' of climbing is a very personal experience. It is a powerful emotional journey that is part physical, part psychological, very spiritual and deeply passionate. Everyone is on their own journey, and climbing does not have the same power over every individual the same way.

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COVER PHOTO: Probably the most classic *Duiwel's* photo – Garrreth Bird midway across the spectacular traverse pitch, high up on *Duiwel's Direct*, Banhoek mountains, Western Cape.
Photo SAM NIGHTINGALE

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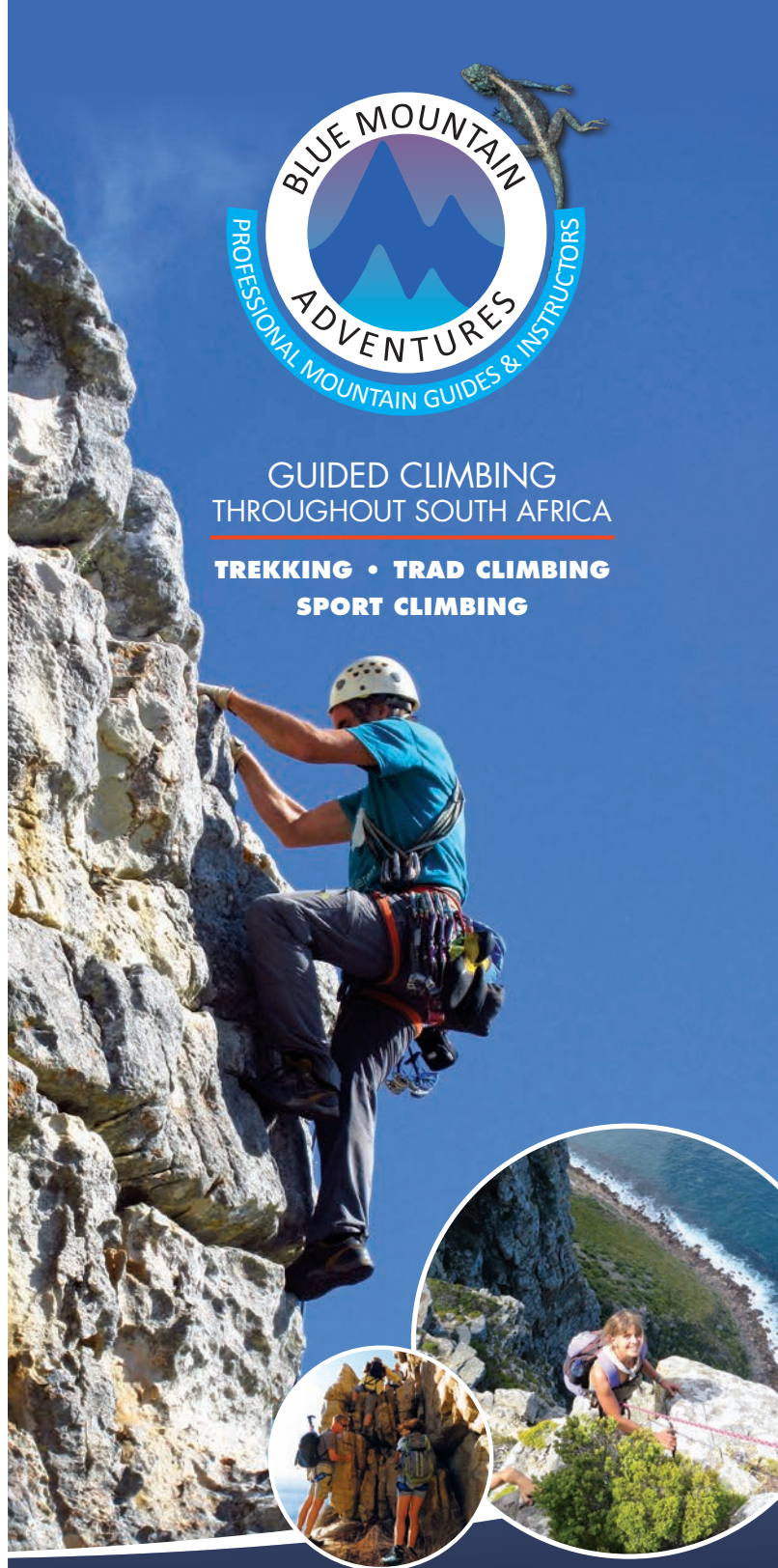
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On a **DARK & DUBIOUS** Wall

by Sam Nightingale

Garreth and Sam nearing the base of the wall. The route follows the protruding pillar (left of centre), then veers right and up. Photo TONY LOURENS

Setting an alarm for 3am feels uncommonly painful. It feels more like a late night than an early morning. Nevertheless, Tony had suggested meeting at first light, and that involved an early start. He probably had a point given the amount of climbing we had ahead of us. As it turned out, it was a wise decision.

Tony [Lourens] had persuaded me and Garreth Bird to climb this huge backcountry route for his new book, *Great Rock Climbs of the Western Cape*.

It seemed *Duiwel's Direct* is rarely climbed, so Tony had little photographic reference to illustrate it and little accurate information on which to base a topo. And I had never even heard of the climb before Tony's message. The fact that yet another ~450m face of rock was to be found just an hour outside Cape Town is another win for a city famed for its bouldering, but with seemingly endless adventurous trad routes.

The existing topo (cobbled together by Tony) was fairly crude. We had asked around but couldn't find anyone who had climbed it recently enough to have any useful memory of the route, so we would be onsighting relatively blind. The old G grade translated to ~19, so should be fairly straightforward, but we have experienced old-school 19 before and it is not to be sniffed at. It is fair to say we were a little intimidated by the day ahead. A feeling not improved by vague rumours of loose rock and a wandering line.

Camping in the Duiwel's Kloof is no longer allowed, so sadly a bivy at the base was not an option. This is a shame, as it is a beautiful kloof with wonderful swimming pools and camp spots next to waterfalls. Instead, this was to be a Cape Town-to-Cape Town day mission. This approach suited Garreth's better half anyway, given new parental duties, and he was no longer a stranger to a 3am wake-up call.

We pulled into the car park just as the glow of dawn touched the horizon. Tony had brought a friend to keep him company at the base and share photographic duties, while Garreth and I climbed. At 74, Willie Koen is still climbing regularly, supported by a regular climbing partner who is two years older than him. This inspiring fitness stopped Garreth and me whinging about our aging bodies, particularly when Willie insisted on carrying our ropes.

Duiwel's Kloof is a dramatic, narrow, high-walled gorge, hidden from the road below by a steep pinnacle of rock that guards its entrance. There is a popular hiking path that tracks along the valley base, so the walk in is fairly easy, even in the dark. Within an hour or so we were in the kloof itself and, as we rounded the corner, the objective became clear. A huge clean wall of vertical darkness rose up from the scree ahead of us, imposing and somewhat intimidating. Our hearts raced a little faster.

The first few pitches follow an obvious pillar, then traverses right for 50 metres into a groove. We pored over the topo trying to map the pitches beyond that, but foreshortening made this nearly impossible above halfway. The top section would have to be worked out on the hoof.

Anxious to get going, we scrambled up the approach pitch and tied in at the base of a corner that forms the first pitch, graded 15. I made some comment about wanting to move fast and run it out, before getting completely shut down by the first three metres of climbing. After several groans and a few shouts of 'watch me', I made it past this corner gateway to easier rock above, feeling slightly nervous about what a 19 would feel like if I was cruxing

out on a 15.

After that, I found a rhythm and was able to climb to the end of the rope. A quick check of the topo in my pocket showed that I had run three pitches together, 20m, 30m and 35m, with a 60m rope. This was the first clue that the topo might not be as accurate as we had hoped.

Another surprise was that this pillar was littered with dozens of bolts and several bolted anchors. Garreth recalled that his old climbing buddy, Voytek Modrzewski, had talked about finding a direct line up this face. Sadly, Voytek drowned in a tragic accident six years ago and his line remains unfinished; a worthwhile project for someone with a lot of time and a touch of masochism.

As we climbed higher, we found Voytek's haul bag, bleached by the sun and peppered with the shrapnel of rockfall. We considered lowering it down, but the bag perished as we touched it. We climbed on, humbled by this sober reminder of an eccentric member of the climbing community, who lived life to the full.

As it turned out, the 19 crux pitch was excellent, involving vertical crack climbing with technical finger locks and stemming. My enjoyment was only slightly dampened by Tony's drone buzzing over my shoulder, and the fact that I was sweating into the bright orange rain jacket that Tony asked me to wear for the pitch to make the photos 'pop'.

With the pillar dispatched, we traversed right into the groove above. To this point the climbing was clean and high quality, and we were making good time. I commented to Garreth that there was no sign of the choss we had been warned of. I spoke too soon. The next pitch was one

>>



Traipsing off into the darkness en route to Duiwel's.
Photo TONY LOURENS

of those Jenga piles where you don't want to pull too hard on the hand jams for risk of dislodging the lot. I debated whether to place gear behind blocks that made a hollow noise when tapped. It would be nice to have protection on such insecure ground, but if I did fall, the expanding cam could pull the mountain down on top of me. I elected to run it out.

Fortunately, it turned out this pitch was not hard (actually grade 15 this time) and the rock soon became more secure. We continued up to belay at a huge block before a stunning traverse back out left. With the pinnacle framing the backdrop, this was a major photo opportunity, and Tony's drone again buzzed about us. Garreth made the airy traverse above clean rock stretching down to the valley floor. The exposure at this point was incredible. Below is the vertical face which we bypassed by taking the 50-metre traverse after the pillar. This face is presumably the direct line that Voytek's bolts follow, and is a beautiful feature.

This stunning pitch led us to the upper section, the part we had not been able to see from the base. Unfortunately, this is where things stopped going to plan. Try as we might, we just could not make the topo fit what we saw in front of us. By now the sun had found its way into the upper kloof and we were baking in the heat.

I had a particularly uncomfortable belay being swarmed by biting ants. I ended up having to dangle myself by my harness so no part of me touched the ledge, intermittently flicking persistent ants off the rope as they tried to access my body via the only bridge left available to them. How these ants survive perched on this improbable ledge I have no idea, but it seems they have been there for some time as Brian Honey's 1967 write-up of the FA talks about being 'eaten alive' by ants.

Garreth led on, aiming to access the large exit ledge system above where the climb traverses out to the summit. After two sketchy attempts and precarious downclimbs, he eventually realised that he was already on the exit ledge! We had somehow skipped a pitch, and were higher than we thought, not helped by the exaggerated pitch lengths in the topo.

We transversed out and made it to the top, relieved to be off the exposed face and the unrelenting blast of the sun. The long descent hike loomed, which involves hiking to the far end of the kloof where it can be entered and descended. >>

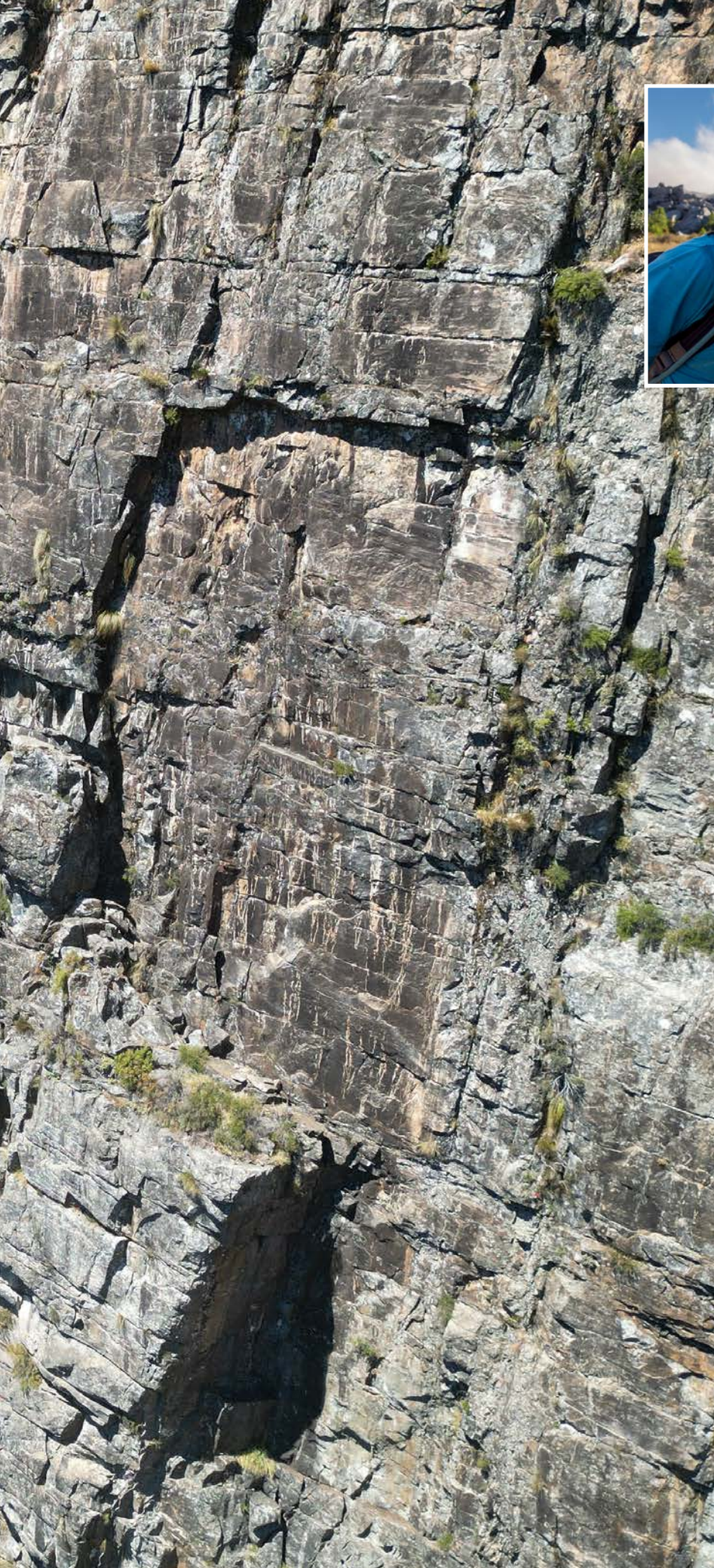


ABOVE: Sam following a typical *Duiwel's* pitch high up on the wall. Photo GARRRETH BIRD
OPPOSITE: Sam getting sandbagged on the first (15) pitch. Photo TONY LOURENS





Garreth and Sam, specks on the huge wall, with Garreth traversing out on the money pitch about two thirds up the route, with huge exposure dropping away into the bottom of the kloof. Photo TONY LOURENS



Sam and Garreth, looking a little shagged out, after topping out, on their way towards the descent gully. Photo GARRRETH BIRD

By this point I had completely run out of water, and was starting to hallucinate mirages that patches of sand were puddles of water. Apparently Voytek has bolted a rap line to the base, and it would be a very nice addition to know where that goes!

Once in the kloof, the river started to flow, and our thirst was quenched. We got back to Tony and Willie at the base, who were confused about what had taken us so long. Given our good pace on the first half, they had expected us to top out long before, having lost sight of us on the top section. We explained our epic at the top, and pledged to improve the topo so others could avoid our mistakes and enjoy this incredible route.

We hiked down to the car, Willie again carrying our ropes. When I finally made it to bed it was almost midnight – a 21-hour day on the move. But perhaps these sorts of climbs wouldn't be fun if everything went to plan . . . the odd epic is useful to test the nerve and strengthen resolve. 'Character building' I think they call it!

The first ascent in 1967 sounded like it involved several such epics. Tony Chinery, Brian Honey and Brian Watts climbed the route after six attempts, the first five ending in retreat with long abseils on old hawser laid ropes. As always, these historic climbs are particularly impressive when considering the equipment at the time. It is remarkable to have ascended that cliff wearing *takkies*, no harnesses and no cams. We passed several pitons which were helpful route markers. Garreth clipped one, only for it to come out of the rock with only the weight of the quick draw!

Sixty years on, modern climbing techniques and bolting may open up a more direct line through the clean vertical expanse of this huge cliff, completing Voytek's vision. Perhaps for someone, *Duiwel's Super-Direct* awaits. ♪





Black Diamond[®] TRADATHON 2026

by Deidre Pieters

RAM Mountaineering has just hosted the 13th edition of the Black Diamond Tradathon. As an event organiser, I have now celebrated my 10th Tradathon, and one thing has become abundantly clear: no two are ever the same.

The weather changes. The routes change. The faces in camp change. New climbers arrive, seasoned climbers return, and each year brings its own stories and memorable moments.

But some things never change.

The stoke. The laughter around the braai. The excitement of tying into a route you've dreamed about for years. The friendships formed over shared ropes and nervous leads. The joy of watching someone place their first piece of gear or step beyond a comfort zone they never thought they'd leave behind.

That is the heart of the Tradathon.

For those unfamiliar with the event, the Tradathon is difficult to define because it doesn't fit neatly into any category. It isn't a rock rally. It isn't a climbing competition. It isn't even just a social gathering.

The Tradathon is a celebration. A celebration of traditional climbing, of the remarkable places climbing takes us, and most importantly, of the community that makes it all possible.

For many climbers, The Tradathon serves as an entry point into the world of traditional climbing. For others, it is a place to reconnect with old friends, discover new routes, and continue a lifelong journey of learning. It is a support system for climbers of every level – a good belay when you need one, a safe catch when things get exciting, and sometimes the unexpected beta that changes everything.

This year's event was no exception. More than 100 climbers descended on Montagu for a weekend dedicated to >>

Stephen Bartleet on the stunning arête of *Countdown* (23),
Lost World, Montagu. Photo GARRRETH BIRD

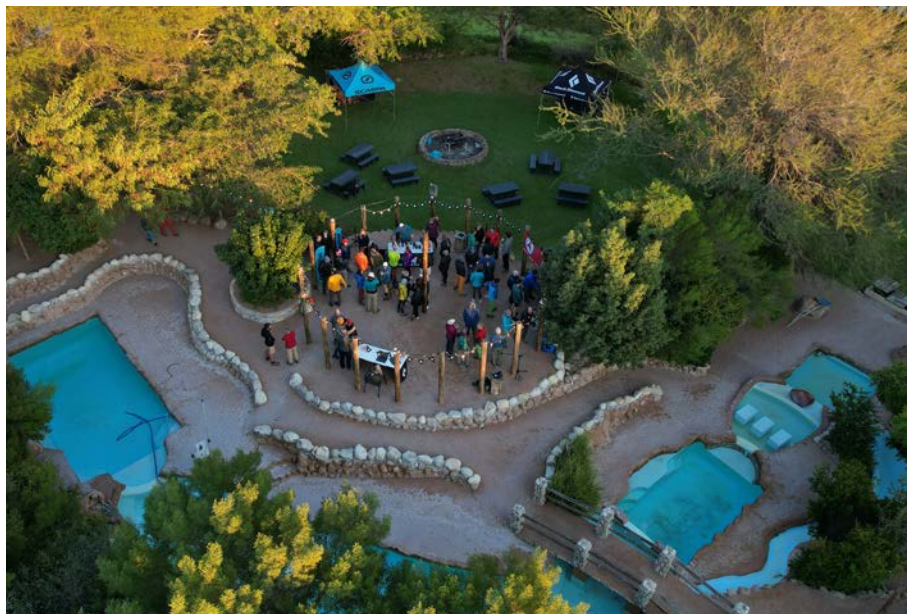


Photo JAN FISCHER



Photo GEORGI DORWARD

climbing, learning, sharing knowledge, and celebrating everything that makes trad climbing so special.

The weekend began on Friday evening with registration, fireside catch-ups, and a relaxed bring-and-braai. As always, it was the perfect opportunity to reconnect with familiar faces, meet future climbing partners, and build anticipation for the days ahead. The Montagu climbing community once again brought the vibe, and Guano Caves welcomed everyone with the warmth and hospitality that has become synonymous with the event.

Saturday started early with a briefing and much-needed coffee from the Jetboil coffee station run by the RAM

Mountaineering team. From there, climbers spread out across the crags of Montagu, including the recently reopened and ever-popular Lost World.

What followed was an epic day on the rock.

Routes were climbed. New skills were learned. Confidence grew. Comfort zones expanded.

Across the valley, ropes stretched skyward as climbers challenged themselves, supported one another, and experienced the unique rewards that traditional climbing offers.

Education has always been a cornerstone of the Tradathon, and this year 11 participants took part in dedicated

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Photo JAN FISCHER



workshops, including the Tradathon Intro to Trad Course (following) and a Self-Rescue Workshop. These sessions provided valuable opportunities for climbers to build essential skills under the guidance of experienced guides, mentors, and instructors.

As the sun dipped behind the mountains, everyone returned to camp for an evening of good food, great company, and inspiring stories. The traditional spitbraai brought climbers together once more, while guest speakers Ed February, Tony Lourens, and Simon Larsen shared their experiences and insights into the history of climbing, and passion and hopes for climbing in the future.

Moments like these are what make the Tradathon special. Not just the climbing itself, but the conversations, the shared experiences, and the collective appreciation for the climbing life.

Of course, none of this would be possible without the people who generously give their time and expertise to make the event happen.

A special thank you goes to our incredible workshop guides: Tony Lourens, Kent Jennings, Garvin Jacobs, and David Webster. Their willingness to facilitate workshops at significantly reduced rates helps make trad education accessible to more climbers, ensuring that knowledge, safety, and mentorship continue to strengthen our climbing community. Your passion and commitment are deeply appreciated.

My sincere gratitude also goes to the RAM Mountaineering team, whose hard work behind the scenes transforms an ambitious idea into a reality year after year. Events like this are built by people who care deeply about climbing and community, and their dedication never goes unnoticed.

Thank you as well to our valued sponsors and partners – the MCSA, SA Mountain, ClimbAble, and City Rock – for your continued support of trad climbing and the broader climbing community.

The Tradathon was originally Simon Larsen's dream, an idea born from a love of climbing and a desire to preserve trad climbing for future



Stephen Bartleet taking the obligatory whipper on the classic test piece, *Technicolour Darkness* (26), Lost World, Montagu. Photo GARRRETH BIRD



Photo GEORGI DORWARD



Photo GARRRETH BIRD



Photo JAN FISCHER



Photo GARRRETH BIRD

generations. It has been an absolute privilege to play my small part in helping that vision continue year after year.

As I reflect on my tenth Tradathon as an organiser, I find myself returning to the same conclusion I have reached many times before: The climbing is cool, but what truly makes the Tradathon special is the people.

Thank you to every climber who made the journey to Montagu, shared a rope,

attended a workshop, encouraged a fellow climber, or simply contributed to the atmosphere that makes this event what it is.

You are the Tradathon.

And we cannot wait to do it all again next year. 

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Deidre

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AT THE 2026 BLACK DIAMOND TRADATHON

by Paul Carstensen
pics by Tony Lourens

After attending the 2025 Black Diamond Tradathon in Monteseel, I vowed not to miss another and before we knew it, it was time for the 2026 Edition of the Black Diamond Tradathon in Montagu. Some of us have been on a mission to promote trad, prompted in no small measure by legendary climbers who reminded me that the objectives of the MCSA include:

1. to organise and facilitate mountaineering,
2. to promote the safety and training of mountaineers.

The MCSA constitution records that the club was established for the *sole object of promoting the interests of mountaineers as a recreational pastime and on a nonprofessional basis conducting all its activities in a manner that is for the benefit of, and widely accessible, to the general public.* Thus, the objectives of the club are not limited to be of benefit only for club members.

So, with this in mind, and appreciating that one aspect of our objectives that sets us apart from other hiking, expedition and outdoor clubs is our love for rock climbing and in particular 'trad climbing', whilst we and our members embrace all forms of mountaineering, and climbing, when you think of Alpinism and rock climbing, you think of the MCSA. So, after the trad focused national newsletter, we embarked on a trad road trip which included Monteseel, the Magaliesberg and culminated in the highlight of the trip: the 2026 BD Tradathon.

The Tradathon took place from 19 to 21 June 2026 at the Guano Caves Resort (and surrounding crags) in Montagu, Western Cape. Facilitated by RAM Mountaineering and Black Diamond, the event served as a non-competitive, community-driven gathering aimed at celebrating traditional climbing culture and sharing skills among climbers of all experience levels. The festival offered structured courses from intro to advanced trad courses, allowing 'trad-curious' sport climbers and beginners to learn gear placement and safety from seasoned climbers.

It certainly was a highlight, seemingly hundreds of young and a few not so young trad climbers descended on Montagu. The venue was incredible, the weather perfect, and the hospitality and organisation of Simon Larsen and his Ram Mountaineering team exemplary.

Well, Montagu is a fair distance (some would say 'worlds apart'), from Gauteng, so we travelled down on Thursday (and went back to the 'big smoke' on Monday).

After late night wining and dining with Caryn, Frog, Tony and Patsy on Thursday, we decided that the best way to kick off the Tradathon weekend was to do some climbing at Legoland on Friday. Yes, I know it is sport climbing, but it seemed like a good idea at the time, plus not only did we need to become accustomed to the Montagu rock, but with Ed February, Tony Lourens and Andre 'Frog' Dalais all of one mind, who was I to disagree? Well, the climbing turned out to be awesome, if not a little sandbagged. I eventually, in an attempt to regain my dignity, led one of the easier climbs, but even that had traverses, ledges and runouts which compelled focus and concentration.

After cream scones and debating the moves of each route, Friday night saw quickdraw clipping and other competitions at the Tradathon main venue, then, more wining and dining with incredible hospitality with Ed and Nicky, Andre and Sandra Schoon. This resulted in another late night, as is the tradition with Trad.

Saturday morning saw all the climbers gather, copious coffee consumed, meeting old friends (all who look younger and



younger), and then we dispersed to the various crags. Whilst the 'hard ones' went to Lost World to warm up on 19s, we decided wisely to head to the Sanctuary, and in support of Eseltjesrus Donkey Sanctuary, to climb the three pitch 17, *Donkey Serenade*, which included a thin rib, ramp and flake system and a magnificent open book. Again, the weather was awesome, as was the rock and company. With four on the rope, we had climbers who have been trading for over 50 years and a climber on her first trad climb! The route turned out to be aptly named, as I was selected to lead the last pitch, and was serenaded constantly with a stream of useless beta. A single abseil almost landed us on a scorpion, who was less than impressed, but not intimidated.

That evening involved a scrumptious dinner at the main venue, talks (tales?) by Ed and Tony, prize giving, the raffle draw for a BD Trad Rack, and another late night, to ensure we were focussed the next morning.

An early start and wee hike brought us to The Bold and the Beautiful Crag, so naturally 'The Bold' Roger Diamond joined us and pushed us to test our limits of grades and endurance! No injuries, so the bonus was a reward of more wining and dining.

The Tradathon has become a focal part of trad climbing in SA, and we have the RAM team to thank for this initiative which certainly promotes mountaineering, and you should not miss the next one.

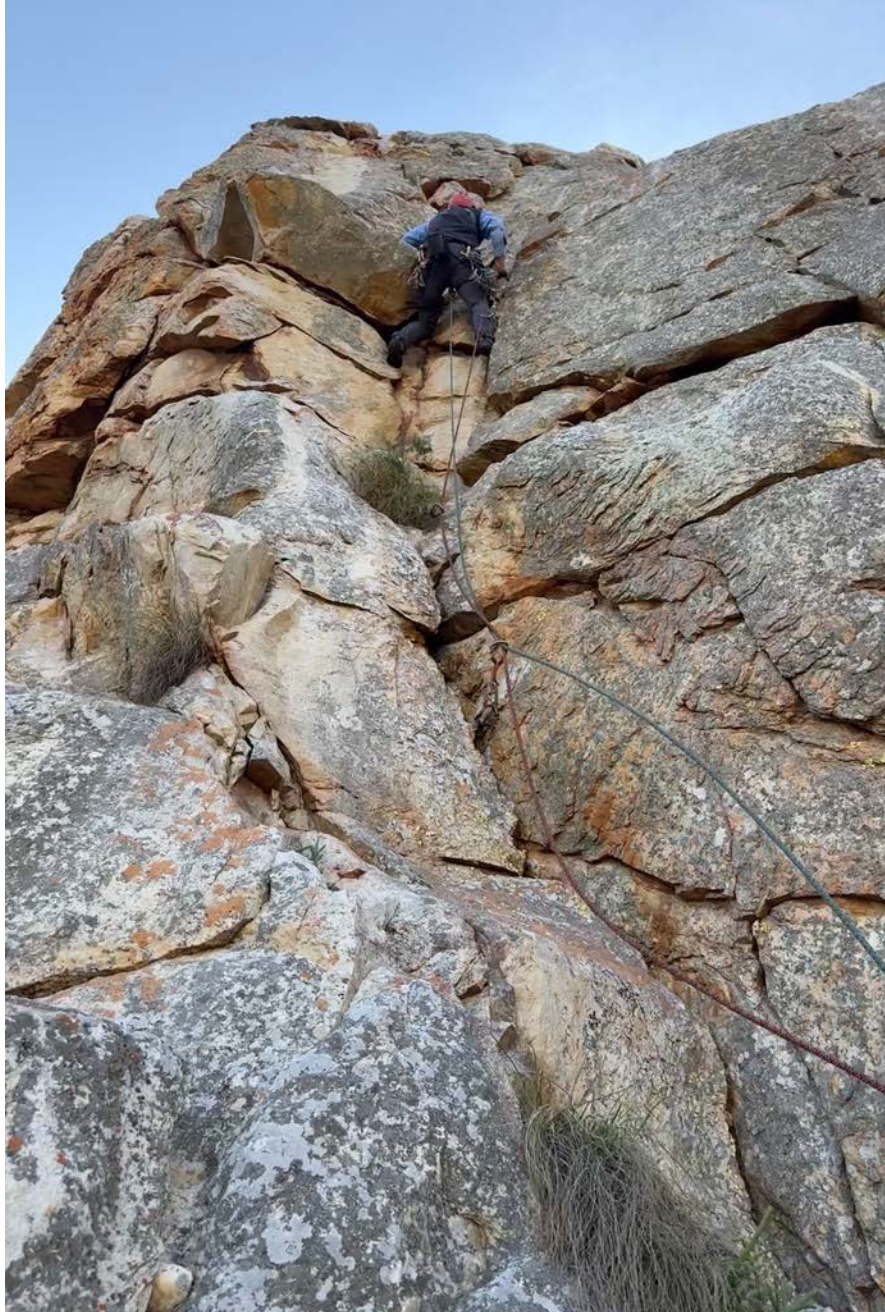


Photo PAUL CARSTENSEN



Some reflections on the 2026
Black Diamond Tradathon
in Montagu, and my
unexpected on sight of

Technicolour Darkness

by Jeremy van der Riet
pics by Garreth Bird

It's been a few weeks now since the Black Diamond Tradathon, South Africa's only annual roaming trad festival, which took place in Montagu for the first time this year. Recently, Tony [Lourens] reached out to me to write a small reflection on the event, and more specifically, my onsight of *Technicolour Darkness*, [one of Montagu's famous trad test pieces – ed]. However, in the process of writing the piece, I was sparked by a curiosity about the history of the route. Not just in the other ascensionists who hadn't had the pleasure of taking some of the legendary 10-metre whippers that the route is famous for, but also in my own relationship with the route, which I had forgotten about, but had taken hold and stayed there, from all the years prior when I had first come across it. The first time I encountered the name, *Technicolour Darkness*, I had happened across the ClimbZA 'Trad Hit List', on one of my climbing lore deep dives. We've all been there. The first thing that struck me was . . . "There was Trad Climbing in Montagu!?" Followed swiftly by the brackets, after the route name, that said "[area closed]".

For whatever reason, I didn't go much beyond that in my curiosity of the climb at the time, but the name stuck with me as one of *the* trad climbs in the country to do. The grade, however, I knew was well beyond what I was capable of at the time. But I hoped one day I'd be able to find a way there, to this inaccessible secret location, somewhere in Montagu that harboured these strangely un-bolted, but apparently stellar climbs.

Fast forward a few years, and just after Covid, the Lost World Revival Festival

took place, with the first opening up of access to the Lost World Kloof in many many years. Somehow, I hadn't got the training memo over lockdown, and arrived at the festival severely underprepared in comparison to the hard men and women, who were laying siege to the Wall of Darkness that day. I have subsequently read accounts of the various almighty sends of *Technicolour Darkness* that took place that weekend, by the likes of Willem le Roux, Douw Steyn, Clinton Martinengo (repeat), and of course the superb evening send by Gosia Lipinska (claiming the first ever female ascent), yet I don't recall actually seeing any of them myself, apart from Gosia clipping the chains in the evening dusk. I think I was deliberately averting my gaze, knowing I was nowhere close to being worthy of pulling on at that point.

However, by this year when the Tradathon rolled around, I had managed to improve my climbing fitness a bit since then. I was also in the very fortunate position of having recently received a sponsorship by Black Diamond South Africa (through RAM Mountaineering). So, the gauntlet was thrown down in various conversations, albeit sometimes jokingly (it certainly was in my head), that I should try and onsight *Technicolour Darkness* at some point, and the Tradathon inevitably became the day.

Walking up to the crag that Saturday morning, we were the second group up in Lost World, only slightly behind Squeaks and Greg. My expectations were pointedly low, if non-existent for the day. I knew I wanted to give the route an onsight go, but more as a formality, perhaps just to get it out of the way and then get on with getting to grips with the route and hopefully sending it by the end of the day. That was really the plan I had in my head. But since you only get one shot at an onsight, I thought I'd give it my best go, so I opted to let a few of the other climbers who were keen on it jump on it first. That way the holds would be better chalked up for me to find and hopefully brushed.

After a warm-up on a pretty chossy 19 around the back of the Wall of Darkness that did little to warm me up, all the while hearing Steven taking monstrous falls on the other side, I decided that a little bit of hang boarding would have to suffice for a warm-up, and to begin my first attempt of the day on the route.

I gingerly began my attempt, clipping the first (and only) bolt on the route, until one reached the chains nearly 30 metres higher. The bottom section was fairly smooth, and I was able to stand on my feet most of the time, allowing me to preserve my forearms for as long as I could, before the climbing really turned on. I also knew that the more pumped I got, the less inclined I would be to place protection the higher I got, so I made sure to create a couple of 'nests' of placements at various intervals. The higher I got, the more the pump began to build. While the crack was good and the moves superb, the places where I thought I could rest turned out to be more tenuous than expected. Try as I might to get a few shakes from a finger lock or hand-jam, I was never able to fully stave off the ever-encroaching pump that was growing.

Making it through the first crux, and finding myself at yet another disappointing rest that offered little respite, I realised I didn't have much time to hang around, and I'd have to set off again soon to fight through the upper crux to reach the 'final jugs', and glory climbing to the top. The battle commenced, and with gritted teeth, I just barely held on through a wrenching barn-door move. Luckily my feet stayed on (thank you Scarpas), and I was able to throw my way to those 'jugs'. To my dismay, they were quite the opposite (try slopers more like, or at best flat edges), and I remained just barely hanging on, while desperately trying some quick shakes to get anything back.

By this point I had stopped placing gear, as I thought, *surely, I'll be able to place again when I reach those jugs*. I had little thought for placements while fighting to stay on in my current position, but again I thought, *those next holds above me must be jugs, surely, I'll be able to recover and place gear when I'm there*. This turned out to be a false hope as well, and I was again reduced to continuing and somehow clutching on for dear life, while the pump reached truly eye-watering levels. By this point I realised, with a sickening feeling, as I looked down at my last piece now a good many metres below my feet, that my only hope now was to reach the chains, or face a truly transcendently huge fall.

With all the reserves I could muster, and getting only just enough from each frantic shake out to just about hold on to >>

the next move, I clawed my way upwards until I was standing alongside the chains. Yet even here, I could not, initially, hold on with enough strength to muster the ability to pull up the rope to clip the hanging chain links. And I required a couple of minutes before I could do so.

When I eventually did, I just sank into my harness and put my head between my hands. I couldn't yell, I could hardly breathe, I thought I was going to throw-up. I just sat there, barely comprehending. Eventually I had the breath to call down to my dad to lower, and catch a glimpse again of where my last piece was. Perhaps that was why my stomach didn't feel great either.

But I was also elated! I had given it everything I had, right to the brink, this incredible route had pushed me physically, and on this occasion, I had come out victorious.

Honestly, I thought I was done for the day, but after a couple of hours of snacking and belaying, a quick sunset ascent of *Nuclear Waste* called out to me, and it was glorious!

I had not set out to prove anything on the day, and in the end, I basked in being able to enjoy a quiet personal celebration. A fantastic conclusion to a greatly successful day! 

HISTORY

Technicolour Darkness was first opened by Andy de Klerk (AdK) in 1986 at grade 25.

Subsequently upgraded to 26.

Known fall-less ascents include, but are not limited to:

Dave Birkett, UK (onsight)
– giving it a British grade of E6 6b;

Ben Bransbury, UK (Flash);

Clinton Martinengo, RSA
(Flash – 2001);

Jeremy van der Riet, RSA
(onsight – 2026.



It was 2001. I was very new to trad and it was my first time in Lost World. Tinie Versfeld was mentoring me and we went to try the revered test piece, *Technicolour Darkness*. Tinie had also not done it yet.

Tinie went for it first. He got about halfway up, then decided he had enough and chose to come down. I think he lowered off a peg. He cleaned all the gear below him.

It was my turn. I knew the gear and moves for the first half of the route. I set off, got to Tinie's high-point and kept going. I remember being very nervous on the top half as I wasn't all that confident in my trad placements at that time. I also realised I was in for a chance to flash it, which added to the nerves. I was very pumped by the time I clipped the chains but ecstatic.

A better story is:

Sometime later we decided to go back and climb the route without clipping any of the bolts or other fixed gear. Tinie was nervous tying into the ropes. He set off, climbed past the bolt and up to where one can place the first piece of gear, which is pretty high. He only realised then that he had left his complete trad rack behind on the ground. And I also only realised then that I was practically standing on it belaying him. The thing nerves can do!

He managed to pull up the piece he needed and then lowered off.

In the end we both managed to climb the route without using any of the fixed gear.

Shortly after that Lost World was closed to climbers.

Clinton Martinengo





Adrenaline
Uncertainty
Determination
Release



THE FULL TRAD *Experience*

by Julia Wakeling-Bird

Atomic Breakaway (21) AdK 1983

The wall above me is daunting.
Unsure of where I am going,
I move up.
A tiny cam crunches against rock
crystals.

Adrenaline.

Slapping higher, I feel insecure
with no footholds.
The next move would be fully
committing.
Is this the way?

Uncertainty.

I downclimb, reassess, and try
another option.

Pain and fatigue flood my arms
and sap cognition.
My focus narrows to immediate
next steps.
With each move I commit further.

Determination.

I nearly come off.
I stick it and get to the top.

Release.

My body is buzzing.
Brain and soul cleansed.
I can relax,

and chat,

and giggle.

Peace.

Climbers on *Nuclear Waste* (left) and Julia Wakeling-Bird on *Atomic Breakaway*. Photo JAN FISCHER



RAW
EXPOSURE



Garvin Jacobs on his route, *Sabotage* (23/6c+), Rock n Roll Kloof, Montagu. Photo GARRRETH BIRD



Jens Munk *Impaled on the Wall* (22/6c), Sanddrif Crag, Cederberg. Photo TONY LOURENS





From Olympic Gold to Céüse's hardest route

Slovenian climber, Janja Garnbret, arguably the best female climber the world has ever seen, recently made the first female ascent of one of the most iconic and demanding sport routes. On 6 June 2026, in Céüse, France, Janja achieved a huge milestone in her already illustrious career, when she clipped the chains on the famous *Bibliographie*.

Confirmed as one of the hardest sport climbs in the world and a solid benchmark of the grade 9b+, only five other people have managed to successfully send the route.

The 35-metre climb, which was bolted by Ethan Pringle in 2009 and first climbed by Alexander Megos in 2020, has become one of the defining endurance test pieces of modern sport climbing.

Characterised by sustained resistance climbing with more than 80 demanding moves, *Bibliographie* has seen only a handful of ascents in its six-year existence. Originally graded 9c by Megos, following his first ascent after 60 days of trying, the route was later downgraded to 9b+ by Stefano Ghisolfi after he made the second ascent – a consensus that has since been widely accepted.

Janja Garnbret climbs *Bibliographie* (9b+)

by Staff writer

pics by Jessica Glassberg/Red Bull Content Pool

>>





Garnbret, aged 27, first tried the route shortly after the 2024 Olympics and managed to send the route on her fifth trip to Céüse.

“It feels incredible,” she said. “It’s honestly really hard to describe. When the send happened, everything went smooth, everything felt perfect. You basically don’t feel what you’re climbing anymore.”

For Garnbret, the successful ascent was the culmination of a process that demanded not only physical strength but also patience and persistence.

She went on to say, “I think over the past five trips I learned a lot about myself. I learned a lot about Céüse and the route itself. I was maybe less nervous than on previous trips. I felt the strongest and felt like I was ready for the process. These two weeks really tested me in a way that nothing did before. It tested my patience.”

Rather than building toward a planned final attempt, the send came unexpectedly.

“On what was planned to be a warm-up on the route, I just felt perfect and kept going. I was just in my own bubble, in my own world, just doing what I love most. Unlike other days, not a lot of people were at the crag, so no loud cheering. It was one of the most serene moments in my climbing career.”

PERFECT CONDITIONS ON THE FINAL DAY

The successful ascent came on Garnbret’s final climbing day in Céüse, before returning to the competition circuit. After battling warm conditions throughout the trip, she finally found the window she had been waiting for. Significantly cooler temperatures and strong winds made for perfect conditions and ideal friction on the bullet proof limestone.

“This send is the accumulation of everything I learned over the past two years. This route taught me that with a calm mind and with patience, anything can happen. Never count yourself out – until the very last try. You need to fight hard.”

Garnbret describes the size of the achievement: “So, when it finally happened, it was an incredible feeling. All the work that I put in, all the commitment, the patience – when everything comes together, it feels incredible. Today my heart feels very full. This is something that will stay with me forever. It will help me in future rock projects, in competitions, in training and whatever I do in life.” >>





COMPETITION CLIMBER ON THE HARDEST ROCK TERRAIN

Widely regarded as the most accomplished competition climber in history, the 27-year-old athlete has won two Olympic gold medals, ten World Championship titles and set a record number of

World Cup victories. While her indoor achievements have redefined competitive climbing over the past decade, *Bibliographie* marks the most significant ascent on rock to date for Garnbret, and definitely one of the most significant ascents for women as a whole.

"This route lit a fire in me. It made me feel something special, and I kept coming back to it. It definitely helped me become a better athlete and a better climber."

Rather than focusing on grades or comparisons, Garnbret has repeatedly emphasised her passion for climbing itself.

"I'm not doing this to prove anything, I just love climbing and I think this is just the beginning," she said. "I want to inspire the next generation not to be afraid of the grade. It doesn't matter if it's a man or woman's route – it's a route!"



WATCH THE CLIMB



WE'RE OUT THERE ...

Enjoying the outdoors in the newly developed bouldering field along Krom River Dome, in the Du Toit's Kloof Mountains.
Photo: Grace Kapelus.



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Verto Speedlight Regular Trousers

by Tony Lourens

www.thenorthface.co.za

The North Face Verto Speedlight Regular Trousers are an excellent choice for anyone looking for lightweight, comfortable and dependable trousers for outdoor activities. My first outing with them was high up on Cogman's Butress on a blustery winter's morning. The temps were unfriendly and the wind was cutting! Manufactured with wind-blocking WindWall fabric, with a four-way stretch and water-repellent treatment, the Speedlights are designed for exactly these kinds of conditions.

Its wind blocking properties are impressive and I found them particularly well suited to climbing as well, where freedom of movement, durability and protection from the elements are all important factors. They are super comfortable, offering a combination of flexibility, breathability and practicality that I look for in outdoor clothing.

These trousers are designed specifically for moving comfortably through the mountains – climbing on exposed faces, scrambling along windswept ridges, general mountain hiking, or simply moving around the campsite.

They can be worn as a single skin in cool conditions or as a second layer if conditions get a little more serious.

The Speedlight comes with two hand pockets, a back pocket and a front thigh pocket, all with zips, to keep whatever is in them from accidentally falling out. The thigh pocket is particularly handy if wearing a harness, as it is totally unrestricted.

It also comes with belt loops to ensure a snug fit, and a cinching cord at the bottom of the legs to seal out the cold and keep them from interfering with your boots or climbing shoes.

Overall, I found the Verto Speedlight Trousers to be a really great and versatile piece of outdoor clothing. Its combination of comfort, freedom of movement, lightweight construction and protection from cool, windy conditions makes them an excellent all-rounder in the hills.

I was genuinely impressed with their performance, and would highly recommend them to climbers and general mountain users.



SPECIFICATIONS

- Windproof trousers – WindWall™, four-way stretch with water-repellent treatment
- Front closure with snap button and zip fly
- Two zip hand pockets
- One zip back pocket
- One cargo pocket on the front of the right leg
- Inner bottom hem adjustment
- Self-fabric belt loops

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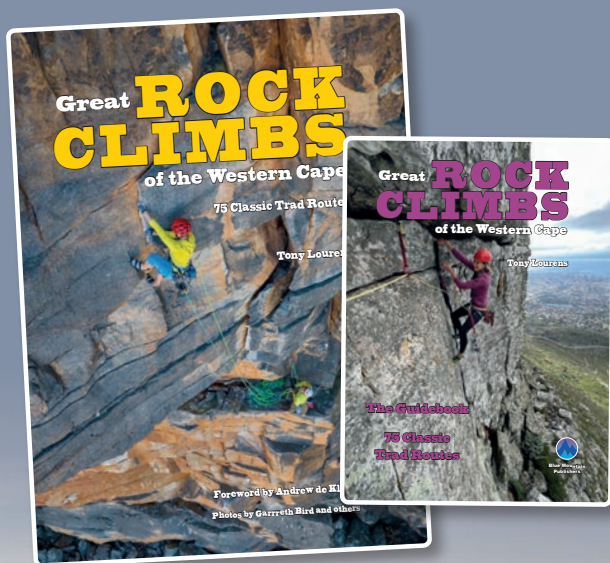
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