

Big Stones

By Cliff Ellery

If Multi pitch sport climbing is your thing then Waikato's Buck Rock and Coromandel's Castle Rock need to be on your bucket list. If not then hopefully it soon will be. I struggle to find a bad word to say about Buck and Castle Rock, the rock is sound, the climbing varied, the routes long and the views are stunning. I have travel over the ditch and around the globe to do multi-pitch climbs inferior to those found at these 2 crags.

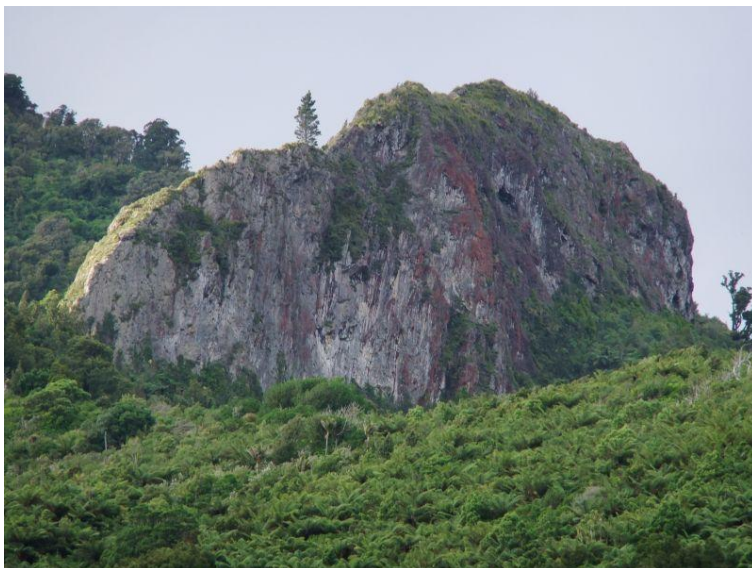
When I mention how good these crags are to other climbers the question I am asked is "if they are so good why haven't they been climbed on and developed earlier". Honestly I don't know, but that's New Zealand climbing: So much of the good stuff is sitting out there in plain sight waiting to be done. Maybe it also has something to do with the fact developing new crags is bloody hard work and you have to be insane to spend your valuable climbing days scrubbing rock and bolting. Thankfully though there are a few nutters amongst us and slowly and surely NZ's pool of climbs is growing in number, variety, grade and quality. So, today I am happy to report there is more than a few weekends worth of multi-pitch sport climbs to be had in the Waikato and Coromandel area.

Guides for both crags can be found on www.freeclimb.co.nz, please read these and study the approach and descent for all routes. So, download the guide, grab your climbing partner, pool your quick-draws and ropes and head out on what I can guaranteed will be an adventure packed trip. Below is my hit list of multi pitch routes and a small commentary on each route to get you salivating.

Buck Rock

How the biggest bit of stone in the Waikato can be unknown by so many climbers even though it is less than a 50 minutes drive from Hamilton is bizarre. Situated high on the southwest ridges of Mt Te Aroha, Buck Rock faces south giving a fantastic view of the Kaimai's and South-East Waikato. The hard quartz rock is unlike any found in the North Island and is generally void of pockets but offers up a multitude of edges. Facing south, and losing the sun at around 11am, it is an ideal summer crag but can be climbed on all year round.

Buck Rock



Bring Back Buck 45m Pitch 1 (18) 25m, Pitch 2 (18) 20m

A great intro' to climbing at Buck Rock: The bolts are where you need them but there is enough air between them to give you that feeling of exposure. The climbing is honest 18 all the way and the 1st pitch gets you to and an amazing natural saddle in the middle of the wall. The 2nd pitch is what multiple pitch climbing is all about. To bridge the groove you are forced to keep your hands down low and your eye's focused on your feet, meaning you can't help but notice all that air between you and the ground. Your heart will be in your mouth when you clip the crux bolt at top of the overhanging groove. Fantastic!

MADELEINE VAN DEN BRAAK ON THE 1ST PITCH OF BRING BACK BUCK



Pass the Buck 80m. Pitch 1 (18) 25m. Pitch 2 (20) 25m. Pitch 3 (18) 30m.

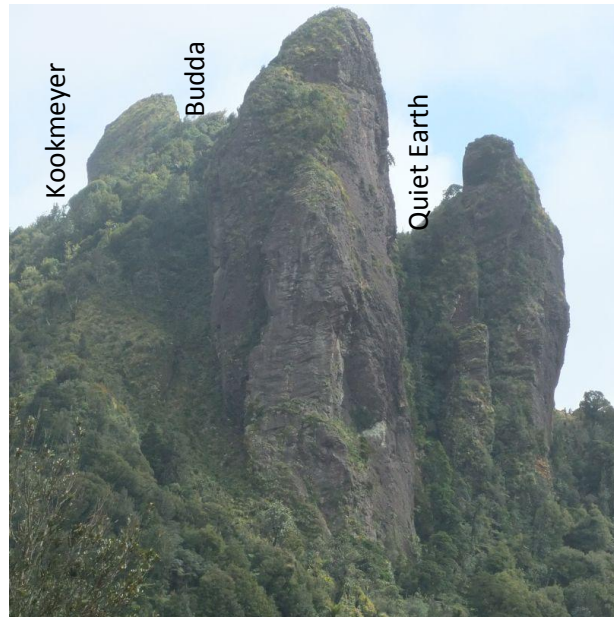
The 1st pitch is technical, the 2nd thuggy and steep and the 3rd an alpine experience. Lead the first pitch, as an intermittent drip from high up misses the rock but gets your belayer every time. Most find the 1st pitch crux low down and there is little doubt the top section is easier. Pitch 2, it's out there! Committing moves on big holds gets you through the overhang, the technical crux, however most find leaving the ledge above this section and getting established in the groove the mental crux. Pitch 3 has a distinctive alpine feel in both situation and rock quality, BUT HEY it's a 3 pitch climb in sight of suburbia, you've got to do it!

Bucking Fumblies 70m. Pitch 1 (20) 25m. Pitch 2 (17/21) 25m. Pitch 3 (19) 20m.

Actually this isn't a climb for F'n Bumblies, it offers up steep technical sustained climbing especially on the 1st pitch. There are 2 options for the start of the 2nd pitch, a steep 21 out right or run up the grade 16 ramp out left. The 3rd pitch climbs through some amazing rock sculptures, I know they support 80kg, I will leave the rest for you to figure out.

Castle Rock

At the risk of repeating myself Castle Rock is an amazing crag; in an amazing location with breath taking views and, in my totally unbiased opinion, the longest and best rock routes in the North Island. Once you start moving around the crag it becomes apparently that it is a collection of 4 rocky outcrops and pinnacles. To date there is only climbing on the 2 central outcrops; the southern has Kookmeyer and the Budda walls and on the Northern the massive 120m Quiet Earth wall. Below is my pick of the best multi pitch lines on each wall.



CASTLE ROCK

The Links Effect (18) 100 m Pitch 1 (18) 50m. Pitch 2 (18) 35m. Pitch 3. (18) 15m.

Probably the best introduction to multi-pitch climbing. As the name suggests this is a link up of 3 different routes producing a 100m long 18. If you have a 50m rope the 1st pitch is a real rope stretcher. Delicate slabby moves will destroy any chances of you looking cool and nonchalant as you struggle to get off the ground. The 2nd pitch move off the belay is the move of the climb. As you drop off the edge and swing around onto the wall your exposure goes from 1m to 50m in one move. From here you continue up a long ramp, pull over the roof at the end, and then continue traversing right. The 3rd pitch is a technical little number that will test your climbing pedigree. Top out and belay on top of the pinnacle.

CLIFF ELLERY ON THE 1ST PITCH OF "THE LINKS EFFECT" -- BRYAN MERCER ON THE 2ND PITCH OF "THE LINKS EFFECT"



Reclining Budda 75m Pitch 1 (22) (25m), Pitch 2 (19) (30m) Pitch 3 (19) (20m).

You abseil into this one so you can either do a 2 pitch 19 or go try the whole hog at 22. The crux on the 1st pitch is a short pump through a roof which is well protected, so if in doubt “give it a go”. The 2nd and 3rd pitch’s is what climbing on the “Budda Wall” is all about, low-angle slab climbing on large bulges that should be easy but are frustratingly difficult.

The Quiet Earth wall has three, 3 star routes all 120m long, ANZAC Parade (see “The off season” 2012 Climbing journal), “The Naughty climb” and...

Quiet Earth (22) 125m

Pitch 1 (22) 25m, Pitch 2 (20) 30m. Pitch 3 (19) 30m Pitch 4 (22) 20m Pitch 5 (19) 20m.

Saving the best for last. A long route with a long history and with a challenge in every pitch. 50 plus bolts and by the 3rd you will be scratching your head and questioning how the heck you’re going to get up this thing. The climbing on the rest of the pitch does ease up but you will know you’ve been climbing by the time you clip the belay at the top of the 1st pitch. The 2nd pitch starts easy enough and you gain height fast as you blast up the corner. This height then hits you like a brick when it comes to pulling through the overhanging head wall on what must be the most exposed move off the climb. The 2nd belay is out there and the only place where you can see the climb from top to bottom, it gives you a real appreciation of what it is you are tackling. The 3rd pitch is the easiest of the 5, but the crux is near the end so you can never relax. Pitch 4 is well bolted, a direct result of the number of explorations the 1st assenter had attempting this pitch, however because of this it is a sports route that would not be out of place at any world class crag. The innocuous looking move off the belay stance on the 5th and final pitch will bring on an overwhelming temptation to grab the draws. If you overcome this urge you will be rewarded with delicate climbing followed by a blast through overhanging rock on enormous holds that make you feel like the best climber on the planet. Now that you are finished stand on top of the crag and let out a holler that will shake the martini glasses off the Matarangi holiday home owners.

#1 CLIFF ELLERY LEADING THE 2ND PITCH OF QUIET EARTH. #2 JESS DOBSON ON THE 1ST PITCH OF QUIET EARTH

