

## ½ a k “n” ½ a Day

By Cliff Ellery



It's may be no Huber brothers speed climbing feat but for a couple of aging climbers from the Tron the goal of climbing 500 metres of multi pitch climbing in half a day seemed a worthy challenge. The venue for this outing was the Quiet Earth Wall at Castle Rock Coromandel. We had just finished putting up "Archibald Baxter" a 5 pitch 140m long line at the left hand end of the Quite Earth wall. This brought the number of climbs on the wall to 4, totalling 18 pitch's, but more importantly measuring in at a little over 500m.

Like most climbers my early morning climbing intentions are always extremely optimistic and reality tends to fall well short. Despite starting with a long tick list a normal days climbing at Castle Rock consists of climbing 1 multi pitch route and then maybe a second single pitch line, about 5 to 6 pitch's in total, well short of the 18 pitch planned! So obviously some training would be required. Jess and I put in a couple of days at Buck Rock and managed to climb 9 pitch's in a day and a little over 200m. Back at Castle Rock we climbed 2 routes on the Quite Earth wall and 1 on the Kookmeyer, bring our days total to 11 pitch's and 330m. This was on top of 5 hours driving to and from the crag, so with a bit of luck and an early morning start we felt confident that we were good to go and this challenge was in the bag.



Then came the hard part, getting a fine weekend that we were both free and fit to climb. First the upper North Island turned on one of its typical wet springs. Castle Rock is within sight of Auckland and shares its weather patterns so a fine spell at this time of the year lasts about an hour. Then there were the climbers, every other weekend I was busy at Uni and then just when the weather gods delivered a couple of fine weekends Jess injured herself at work. So despite having planned to climb our "½ k day" in early November it wasn't till the night of the 21<sup>st</sup> of December that we set off from Hamilton destined for Castle Rock.

Arriving just on dark Jess set up her tent while I decided to save time and sleep in the car. Like all nights before a big days climbing I slept like crap, and woke early waiting for my alarm to go off at 5:00am. We downed our muesli, chucked the tent in the car and headed off up the hill just on first light. The plan was to base ourselves at the top of the cliff, climb light and fast, leaving all our food, water an excess gear at the top. We set off down the cliff fixing 2 x 60m ropes for this and subsequent abseils. At 7:00am just as the sun hit the cliff I set off up the 1<sup>st</sup> pitch of Archibald

Baxter. Having left both our 60m single ropes on the abseil we were climbing on my double 50m 8.5mm ropes. I enjoyed this immensely carefully planning out my clips to minimise rope drag rejoicing at how straight my two ropes trailed out behind me. At every opportunity I would point this out to Jess regaling her with stories of climbing in the UK and the advantages of double rope. Although she didn't say as much the fact that she clipped both ropes to every bolt on all her leads shouted out "you stupid old git who cares about your dumb double ropes".

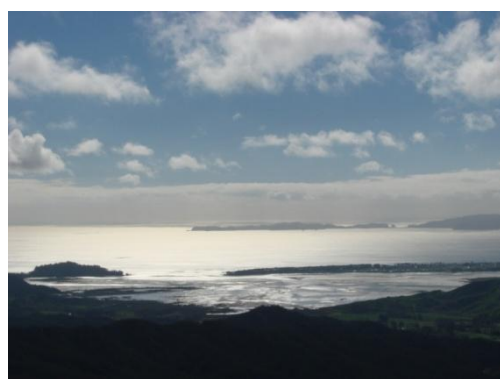
Despite our differing styles we were both climbing well and the morning sun was making climbing a delight. The Quite Earth Wall is a magic spot, it sits high above native bush and over looks some



of NZ prime beach front. It is also ideally suited for our little adventure getting the early morning sun and then moving into shade before the hot mid afternoon bakes climbers to a crawl.

I know all the theories of speed climbing, half roping etc, but for us this was first a day's climbing and secondly an attempt to climb 500m. We swapped leads at every belay and took seconding the pitch free as seriously as leading it. We top out on Archibald Baxter just before 10:00am, ahead of our 40 minute per pitch target. We had a quick bite and a drink then zipped back down our lines to start the next line "Quite Earth". The 1<sup>st</sup> pitch of Quite Earth is a no holds slab test piece and was Jesses nemesis, but it was her lead and she was determined to get this pitch clean. Well that was the plan, after 2 falls at the crux she lowered to the ground a little despondent. Today was all about speed with little time available for working routes, but she thought it was worth one more try and then "Success", she got it clean! After that the pitch's fell one by one with little resistance. The 5 pitch's of Quite Earth were bagged by 1:00pm. The "Naughty Climb" with it's direct start of "Alphabetical Disorder" offered up little resistants and was ticked off in 3 hours.

So at 4:00pm we were heading down the abseil lines for the last time with only the 4 pitch's of ANZAC Parade to go. Again the first 2 pitch's were sent no trouble. Then I found myself at the crux of the climb, the overhanging groove on 3<sup>rd</sup> pitch, were I got "ledged". Despite having lead this thing multiple times I couldn't get the sequence and I spent what seemed an age moving up and down trying to get established in the groove. After much cursing, and a small tantrum, I finally managed to find a sequence that worked and quickly moved through the next section to the last belay ledge of the day. Jess



followed and when she said I could lead the last pitch I realised that fatigue was starting to set in for both of us. With an hour to go and the end in sight I set off up the last pitch and topped out in the late evening sun. Jess joined me at 6:40pm, 20 minutes to spare. After coiling all our ropes we sat at the top of Castle Rock eating the last of our lunch looking out over Whangapoua bay and Mercury Island, what a bloody brilliant day!

**The Stats** . Start 7.00am, Finish 6:40pm, Time = 11hrs 40mins. 530m & 18 Pitch's, Grades 16 to 23, 348 Points, 200 + Bolts