



Adventure on Margarine Ridge

Nik Zwaneveld

Multi-pitch rock climbing: Margarine Ridge is a 333m grade 13 multi-pitch climb in the Grosse Valley.

Now, I've been climbing for a couple of years and I've come to realise that since I drink beer, rarely go to the climbing gym and am generally a fat, unfit bastard it is fairly unlikely that I am ever going to become an awesome world champion sports climber or, in fact, climb much over a mid 20s grade. I decided to look for different ways to challenge myself and so began multi-pitch trad climbing.

As anyone who has done any climbing will tell you, it involves strength, technique, a bit of fear and lots of practice. Sports climbing tends to focus on technique, where the difficulty of the climb lies in the moves rather than focusing on the (lack of) protection. In trad climbing on the other hand there are no bolts, so some of the challenge lies in how you protect the climb, where are the placements? Will this placement hold? Which route should I take to get over that block? And so on. For me this is what climbing is supposed to be, out in the middle of nowhere, picking a route up an exposed

cliff, looking for where to place my next bit of pro, looking down at 300m of vertical drop below me before starting a lead or sitting on a ledge feeling pleased with my achievement whilst belaying somebody as they follow me up.

This brings us to Margarine Ridge. Margarine ridge is a 330m climb nominally done in 14 pitches and graded at 13. The climb is situated at Mt Hay in the Blue Mountains and overlooks the Grose Valley. Me, Gareth and Iain planned to camp at My Hay the night before in order to get a dawn start. We arrived at Mt Hay about 10pm on the night before we intended to climb only to find that the suggested camping ground at the top of Mt Hay was so exposed that the wind would have blown us off. Luckily we found a drainage ditch about 500m down the road that was much more protected, so we set up our tent, had a beer or two and talked about our plans for the following day

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before turning in for a relatively peaceful nights sleep. We awoke at 5am (after 4hrs sleep) to the most spectacular sunrise I've ever seen. From the top of Mt Hay you could clearly see the silhouette of Sydney against the glowing red of the sunrise. We breakfasted on cereal and bottles of "V" and started on the 1hr walk down to the start of the climb. I won't go into too much detail about the climbing because nobody wants to read "... and then I moved my left hand..." But some of the highlights I will outline. (cont'd page 2)



Quick News

- **First meeting of the year**

The first meeting of '05 will be at 7pm upstairs in the Sam Cracknell pavillion. Come to meet all the other new and old members, have a few beers and find out how the club works.

- **Upcoming trips:** (see the website for more details, and to post any new trips).

25/Feb	Free Rock Climbing Friday – the Ledge (every fri till during session)
27/02/05	'Georges Gander' 6hr metrogaine – <i>Tristan Blakers</i>

01/Mar	First Club Meeting – Sam Cracknell pavillion, 7pm
11/Mar	Boree Log (big camp for everyone)
02/Apr	Beginners Canyoning – <i>Nik Zwaneveld</i>
02/Apr	Beginners Climbing – <i>Ali Parsyar</i>

Adventure on Margarine Ridge (cont'd)

We found the start of the climb fairly easily, we think...

One of the great things about adventure climbing is that there is so much freedom in the route that you take. This is climbing terminology for "getting lost". The first 3 pitches involved some "creative route picking" but we eventually joined up with the described route at about pitch 3, we recon... maybe...

The morning started with some pleasant climbing, the first 2 pitches were lovely faces that would have been infinitely enjoyable if it wasn't for the fact that every second hold would snap off in our hands. After the second pitch the rock firmed up and provided some more interesting corners and arêtes as we climbed up. One memorable moment was stepping around an arête in the howling wind to look strait down 250m off cliff to the valley floor.

When we arrived at pitch 5 we had to make a decision, we had reached the last chicken out point. Either we go on, or we stop now. We were less than half-way through the climb but it was before midday and we had plenty of time. However, it was windy and rain was predicted in the afternoon. We could already see the clouds building at the other end of the valley and didn't particularly want to be sitting on an unknown cliff being pelted by water. We judged that we probably



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had an hour or so before they started to drop any rain.



“Bugger it... no guys no glory” we concluded. With half an eye on the clouds I struck up the cliff, a rather run out slab that went up and traversed around a roof. A good 55m pitch (nice on our 60m rope). The pitch was quite run out but the rock was good and the climbing easy. Then about 20m up things took a turn for the worse... it started raining, damn... we can still back off now... no damn it, it's not that heavy, just keep going you big wuss... another 5m up and my right arm started cramping... then my left (oh Jesus) then my left calf... bloody hell what is going on? After about 5 minutes of stretching and crapping myself in the soft rain (I was 10m above my last bit of pro) I continued on. The last bit of the pitch was getting nasty. The 55m of rope behind me was dragging me down so I had to pull up 2m of slack

before each move, and I was run out. At one point I got tangled around a tree branch and couldn't get back around it so I had to take out the saw in my pocket knife to cut the offending branch off (and to think, people complain about me carrying a “belay knife” ever since Touching The Void came out). We continued up the next few enjoyable pitches without further issues or mishap.

Then came Pitch 11, which was interesting because the guide we were reading suggested that you could use a double rope to reduce rope drag. Did we listen? Nooooo. We decided to go it on one rope, zigzagging our way up a chossy chimney and around a rather exposed face, all with the most mind blowing rope drag you could imagine. Finally the pitch ended up in a 1m high cave. It was a very chossy cave indeed. Our guidebook described the protection in the cave as being ‘poor’. The term ‘poor’ does not really do the belay justice. We were belaying off a couple of cams rammed into some sand and a few slings around knobs that I wouldn't even use as hand holds. The rope drag was so bad that I had to crawl out onto the cliff face and haul with my whole body to get any kind of movement out of the rope while belaying my second up. This cave was nasty. We all drifted into a sombre routine, everybody working with the objective of getting out of that damned cave. Finally we were all up Pitch 11 and started out of the cave and into the sunshine, we had reached the last ledge before the top and the mood of the party lifted monumentally. Gone was the quiet working that we had slipped into in the cave and we were joking around and laughing again.

The final pitch had once been described to me by a friend who said “we didn't have a route description and couldn't find the route so we went



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up this horrible off-width crack¹". This I had forgotten.

We started looking around for the route which was supposed to be 15m off to our right. After some deliberation we decided this must be referring to the obvious route up this really nice looking crack in the middle of the wall. Half way up the crack I had a distinct recollection of what my friend had once described. The holds had disappeared and I found my self in the middle of a horrible off width crack. We eventually hauled, grunted, bled and swore our way to the top and finally, we had finished! We were on top of the world. We sat for 20 minutes relaxing, joking around and looking over the view of the Gross Valley that we had just climbed.

We sat there, eating and drinking our last food, and looked back on the climb we just had done. We had estimated before hand that it would take us 8hrs and we were not far off, we spent 10hrs on the cliff face and 12hrs total including the walks in and out. The climbing wasn't difficult (except for the off-width crack) and we went up without any problems. The pleasure and challenge really didn't come from the climbing but it came from the location and the adventure, the hard part was finding anchors and picking our route and the pleasure was from the exposure and remoteness of our location. After leading a pitch I would sit at the top belaying, communicating through whistle

1. When climbing cracks you typically need to jam parts of your body such as hands feet, arms etc into the crack to gain purchase. An off-width crack is a crack slightly wider than any body part you might care to jam in it, but not wide enough for the next size up body part, in this case the foot. This crack was wider than the tip of the toe to your heel and there was no elegant way to climb it. It was too big to bridge a foot across and too small to fit a body into.



blasts without a single person in site, all I could do is sit there and admire the view. You feel very alone up there, you know there are people below you, but they can't hear you, they can't see you. You can't consult on whether you should go left or right...you are on your own and that's what makes it both scary and adventuresome.

In the end we had all set out for an adventure and we had found it. NZ





Mt York Climbing

Kid Kalanon

We started off from uni, bright and early on Sunday morning; headed to Mt York in the Blue Mountains. The clouds and fog were a little threatening as passed through Katoomba. But when we got there, the sun came out and put on a good show. We headed down to the western face of the ridge to Section 7.

We started off on two climbs to the right of "Mezzaluna", a little way up the gully. The climbs were a bit hard to identify as they had only recently been bolted. Brendan led his first climb on his first outdoors trip up the grade 15 climb. He was a bit shaky to begin with but came out good ("strong" in his own words) in the end and all were impressed.

Jette led the grade 17 climb to the right of Brendan. She also experienced a tricky start. The trick – for the non-purists out there who may be struggling – is to straddle your way up between the rock and a nearby tree before grabbing on to an easier hand hold further up the climb. We all had a turn at both these climbs, either to practice leading or on top rope and all were pleased.

Then there was the Mezzaluna, a "classic" grade 16 climb, near a corner of the cliff face, jutting out above the treetops. It's very picturesque and good opportunity to take a picture of the climber against the beautiful Blue Mountains backdrop.

Unfortunately, none of us had brought a camera that day! Helene started to lead this climb but decided to share the glory with someone. Brendan took up the call and completed the climb to the top.

Duncan had spotted dark clouds looming over the valley down below and thought it was time to get

the gear off the rocks and headed for shelter. The clouds took their time in coming, so we sat down in a little pocket in the cliff face and ate our lunch till all were satisfied.

As we became quite certain the rain was about to engulf us, we packed up quick smart and were on our way back to the car park. A little thunder and lightening hurried us along.

Just as we were all about to head off, one of us (who shall remain nameless) locked the car keys in the boot. Right at that moment, rain started bucketing down and left us all huddled together on a table under a shelter. Why were we standing on a table, you ask? Well, flash floods came right up to our ears and we all had to climb on to higher ground! Nah, we just didn't want to get our feet wet.

In the mean time, we had called for help from Mr NRMA man. He came to rescue surprisingly quickly considering it was quite remote. When he said he'd be there in 10, he actually meant that literally. We hurried into our cars and all were relieved.

Having some time left to kill for the rest of the day, we decided to head to the pub in Blackheath for a beer and the famous meat pies. We were very disappointed when we found out there were no meat pies that day. However, we all drank and yakked on for a bit until all were merry.

Overall, I thought it was a good experience for my first trip with the club. Thanks to Duncan for organising and to all who came along and made it an enjoyable trip. I hope to see you again on the next one. KK

Attending people: Duncan, Jette, Jun, Helene, Ai Kim, Edmond, Kate, Brendan, Jarrod, Sean and Kid.



Canyoning Trip to Tiger Snake

Nik Zwaneveld, Gareth Milton,
Tony Granville, Leigh Archer

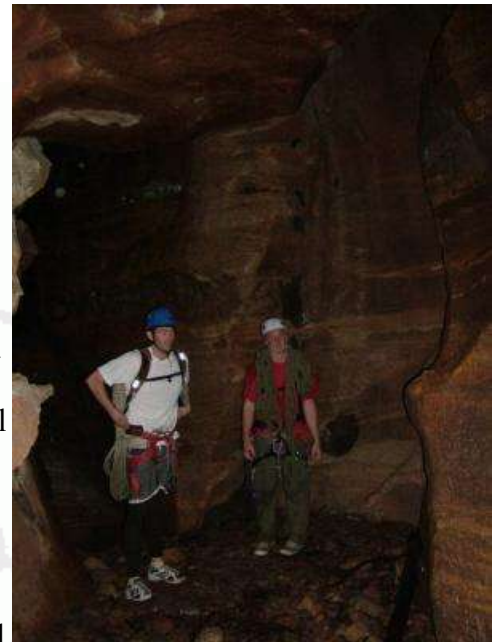
A small group of four people, led by Nik and Gareth, went to Tiger Snake canyon on the weekend of the 29th of September at Newnes. We started out by practicing basic abseiling techniques in Clovelly on Saturday afternoon for the beginners before heading out to the campsite up in Newnes for the night. After several beers and wine the night before, we started out to Tiger Snake on Sunday morning. Just before the first abseil into the canyon, there is this little waterfall winding through the cracks and recesses in the rocks, which yields a gorgeous picture with the sun breaking through the trees and cliff at the top of the waterfall.

The first abseil was so narrow; we had to pass our packs into the canyon by sling to one of the group locked off halfway down the abseil and then to the rest below. This was the first of many tight fits



into the canyon that day. Tiger snake constantly curves narrow and wide throughout the whole canyon pass. It was rather dramatic at times, when you barely squeeze through one section only to have the entire canyon open up to this

enormous expanse with cliff faces seeming to span up forever. In particular is this one chamber that opens up to a huge room with a natural rock bridge about 3 meters above the chamber floor. Some of us climbed



up to the bridge and crawled out to enjoy the view and the massive room. This area in particular was one of my favorites, and if you aren't too cold from some of the wet sections, would be a great place to stop and have lunch to spend extra time there and take it all in. That, and it is a little further than three-quarters of the way through the canyon.

Even though the canyon is "dry", there is water in the canyon although it is only as deep as your calves. There's one abseil where you'll drop right into the water, which is also just before the nice chamber. Unfortunately, this abseil also happens to be the trickiest, because your lines have a tendency to get hung up at the top. This is what happened to us, and Nik was forced to prussic back up the line to loosen it, abseil back down, and then pass it through to get our rope back. Because of this, we chose to break for lunch outside the canyon than in the chamber. But, where we stopped was just as nice. Just outside the canyon



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are these huge boulders laying all about this little cave entrance with some water trickling out from the canyon.

From this spot, we hiked our way back to the top and where we had parked the car. This hike has a little bit of simple rock climbs to it, the most scenic of which was the climb to the top of Pagoda Peak. Once at the top, you have a remarkable 360° view of the entire valley, our last glimpse of the mountains on our way back to the car. With plenty of daylight left after finishing the canyon, we decided to take a little detour on our way back to the campsite and went to the Glow Worm Tunnel. It's a gorgeous tunnel filled with hundreds and hundreds of glow worms lighting the walls of the tunnel like nature's own little planetarium. A rather relaxing, casual walk after the day's hiking, climbing, and abseiling and luckily, we got it all in just as the rain was beginning to fall on us as we were heading back to the campsite for the night. With the rain setting in, we decided to break camp early rather than do an extra canyon on the Monday holiday. Even with the rain, it was a great trip had by all. NZ

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