

LEFT WALL FALL

by Ian Wyatt

After an early start and a three-hour drive, they pull into the lay-by at the Cromlech Boulders. It's only 10:30 but a late summer mist has already lifted leaving a clear, bright blue sky.

"Looks like we've got the place to ourselves Em'." Said Cassie, as she climbed out of the tattered Cinquecento.

Emily stretched as she walked a little way from the car, looking up and around at the hills. "Yeah, well that's the beauty of getting out midweek."

Along the way, they had talked about their course, friends, relationships, just about everything. Not deciding to head to Dinas y Gromlech until shortly after crossing the river Conwy, their choice of route remained a silent question. Now keen to get on the rock, they shoulder their rucksacks and set off up the steep sliding scree. Reaching the foot of the crag about half an hour later, sweaty, soaked, breathless.

"Shit... I hate that walk."

"Me too. Drink?"

"Thanks. So what are you thinking Em'? I was wondering about *The Corner*."

Emily had decided weeks ago, she wanted to do *Left Wall*. "Hmmm... How about 'the most fallen off pitch in the pass'?"

Cassie's face spread out in a broad grin: "Oh yeah. You can sooo do *Left Wall*. Get on it!"

"Yep, I think you're right. I think I can." Emily quietly sorted out her gear while Cassie uncoiled the ropes.

The moment arrived: "Okay. You got me?" asked Emily with soft confidence.

"Yeah," Cassie glanced down, one last check. "You're good to go. Enjoy."

In a final backward glance, Emily nods at Cassie before setting off. She moves fluidly up the rock, her movements confident and graceful. Pausing only to place protection and search out how to best use the rock with least effort, she looks quite at home. Few words pass between them.

Despite their colourful clothing, the two tiny figures on the left edge of a huge

vertical sheet of rock are barely visible to the casual passer-by. Absorbed in their world of rock and movement the two climbers, conjoined by fine bright threads, are conscious of nothing else. Emily's breathing becomes short, shallow, erratic but her breaths of effort and then fear are replaced by deeper, focused breathing regulating her movement, 'I'm okay, this is fine'. Calm and controlled she reaches out with her left hand, a fingertip search of the next hold, exploring its dimensions and direction, but it promises more than it delivers. Her right arm starts to tremble with the force going through it. Reaching back for another dip in her chalk bag, the reassuring caress of magnesium carbonate and Fibrepile relaxes her forearm. She places her hand back on the hold with deliberation and a fresh coating of white dust, 'that hold must be better?' As she presses her right foot into the edge of the fine vertical crack the left blindly skates across the rock looking for purchase.



The mighty Dinas y Gromlech in the Llanberis Pass. *Left Wall* takes a line up the wall catching the sun to the left of the corner in the centre of the photograph. Photo: David Simmonite

'Shit. Shit. Shit. Come on you're not that pumped. Stay cool, the gear's good. Focus. Breathe'.

"Watch me!" She shouts down to her attentive partner.

Cassie is watching and anticipates Emily's every move as she holds and pays out the ropes. Her cries of encouragement drift up the 30m or so of vertical rock. "Yeah! I've got you. You're lookin' good. Go on, go for it. You've got this."

Emily starts to move. Hands, fingers and feet pressed under maximum pressure as she initiates the next sequence in a three-way dance between body, rock and gravity.

"Whhooaaaa..." Fingertips and feet ping off the small holds, a cloud of chalk wraps itself around her as the rock rushes past in a featureless blur. There is a momentary hesitation in her downward flight as the top piece of protection, a wire, rips out of the rock.

All she registers is a slight bump in her fall until she sees the nut coming down the rope towards her. She stops as suddenly as she fell. The next piece of protection holds, the wire hits her in the chest, just missing her face. Feet flat on the rock, held by the ropes she looks back up the line, the route. "Bollocks. Shit. I thought I had that. What happened there?"

Cassie calls up: "Dunno, you just popped off. But you can do this. You know you can."

Confident in Cassie's ability to protect her with the ropes, Emily relaxes into her harness. She soaks up the late August light and heat as casually as if she were sat outside a café not perched on the edge of the left hand 'page' of the iconic formation of Dinas y Gromlech: two vast sheets of seemingly blank rhyolite, 40m high, at right angles to each other. She moves her gaze away from her climb to look across the great sweeping expanse of the grey-green walls that make up the open book corner.

Comfortable with her position in the vertical world, she takes in deep draughts of clean air, as she unconsciously shakes the lactic acid from her arms. Emily mentally prepares for the next attempt: 'C'mon you can do this. You've done harder climbs. Trust the training. Just relax. Relax'. With a beaming smile she turns to look down at Cassie holding the ropes. "Okay, I've got this." She moves comfortably back up to her previous high point, without stopping to replace the protection that came out. Breathing steadily she travels easily from the top of the crack, she feels solidly in control as she moves leftwards across thin flakes to the arête and on upwards to the top of the climb.



"Whooooo. Gooood effort. Nice one." Yells Cassie.

Cassie follows Emily's route up the climb, breathing heavily she joins her at the top. "Wow Em' that was a great lead. Good effort." After smiles, hugs and high fives they sit in silence, two people perched on this great volcanic sentinel standing high over the valley.

Their shared experience requires no more words, just sit and be, absorb. Their eyes follow the bright green line of the

valley floor, where tarmac, drystone walls and managed fields follow the river, skirting along the shadow of Snowdon, to Llyn Padarn. The modest humanised strip is narrow and brief, just above it lurks a wild world of dark shadows, raw skylines, sombre cliffs, slopes of wild grasses and bog; promising new adventures. A wildness made ancient and more wild to them by its Celtic name, Yr Wyddfa, as they breathe this now into their souls. ■

A climber on the stunning and much sought after *Left Wall* (E2 5c). Photo: Mark Reeves