

Dean Rollins takes us on an adventure down the spine of Tasmania's Cape Raoul

It's a Saturday in November and it's raining in Hobart. Miserable. No surprises there. Jake and I discuss the plans for tomorrow—the weather forecast is good.

Dean: 'Are you and Simon (Young) still heading out to Cape Raoul tomorrow?'

Jake: 'Nah, he's bailed. He met three German girls on the ferry back from the mainland.'

Dean: 'Really?'

Jake: 'Yeah.'

Dean: 'I hope for his sake they're hot.'

Jake: 'Apparently one has the best pair of legs he's ever seen.'

Dean: 'I've heard that before. Anyway, I talked to Doug last night and we were thinking of coming along. Just to have a look around.'

Jake: 'Cool. I'll give Kim a call and see what he's up to.'

Kim was keen, but first we had to get the SES to surgically remove him from his office chair. Soon enough, we had a crack team assembled: Jake Bresnehan, Kim Robinson, Doug McConnell and myself. That evening, the text message

The long spine of Cape Raoul with routes and features marked. Roger Parkyn

The Pillar at the End of the World

Pole Axed

Pole Dancer

The Wedding Cake

Jihad

Rain of Terror

Seal colony

THE PILLAR AT THE End of the World

came from Doug: 'Meet at mine at 5.30 am at latest.'

On the road

It was a clear and unassuming morning when we drove down to the enigmatic Tasman Peninsula. Since all four of us had already done Pole Dancer (22)—the flagship route of Cape Raoul—the idea was to

not that there's anything wrong with bolts in general. However, since Douglas and co published their exploits and reasoning in a circular article, I suppose they hoped that any future parties would give that particular piece of rock the same consideration. Ever since reading about it, I had thought the same: if someone went to attempt the route, I hoped that they would respect the decision and efforts of the

ing us fleeing. Jake and Doug got wet and were quite lucky not to be swimming with the seals (and sharks). Time to get out of here.

The seals

At the eastern end of the shore platform was a short chimney. Jake hastily led up this to a block from where he could see the seal colony. After doing his

been spending more time brushing and cleaning new boulders recently than tied into a rope. Soon we were all on a spacious ledge below the seaward face of our objective—the pillar.

I had always wondered what this face looked like. Would the rock be any good? Was there any gear? Was it climbable?

It did not disappoint.

Paper, scissors, rock

Jake and Kim had had their leads—good ones too. Now, it's over to either Doug or me. The face above us looks amazing. We both want to do it, and we both know the other wants to do it too. The only way to settle this dilemma is with a round of paper, scissors, rock: the winner leads. Here we go...one, two, three...

The Pillar at the End of the World

Doug wins. Respectively, joy and disappointment spread across our faces. It is settled. He starts racking up. I look up at the pillar again. While it looks amazing and we both want to lead it, it doesn't look like there is much gear. A small part of me is happy that I lost.

The weakness up the face is faint, but clearly identifiable. Some holds on the right-hand side lead to a horizontal break. Traversing left along this would get one to the opposite arête. Just right of the arête appears to be a finger-crack/seam, which we hope will take gear, and above that is what appears to be the crux—a blank arête above a short rooflet.

Doug ties in and Kim puts the ropes through his belay device. I whip out my camera. Doug starts to climb. He gets a bombproof wire just below the horizontal break. It will protect him for a while, but after a few metres of traversing it will be useless. Undaunted, he dances sideways across the break. The holds are positive, but liberally spaced. The feet are smeary, while the break itself is flared—trying to fiddle gear in would be futile.



head out to the end of the Cape and have a little snooze around. We didn't have any big plans; it was just going to be an easy-going day, chilling out at the end. But we were particularly interested in checking out The Unclimbed Pillar at the End of the World, aka The Last Pillar of Cape Raoul. We'd heard murmurs that the dark horse himself, Steve Monks, was interested in it as well...maybe we'd see him out there?

Sensing a big day ahead, we walked in quite briskly (it's an hour and a half walk). I'd asked my friend Dave James about the journey right out to the end. He'd done it before (one of the very few who had, I imagine) and recalled it becoming more involved the further out you go. We were about to find out.

A little history lesson

Earlier in the year I had had a bad shoulder injury, so spent a fair bit of time in the State Library reading through old Climbers' Club of Tasmania (CCT) circulars. These date back to the late 1960s and are full of inspiring stuff. There were a lot of trips to Cape Raoul back then—it seemed a popular picnic spot back in the day. The first attempt to climb one of the Pillars of Hercules occurred in April 1967! In September of the same year, the route up that pillar (second from the end) was completed via a 'bolt-bash to the summit' by Mike Douglas and Geoff Batten. On a subsequent trip, the team of Douglas, Allan Keller and Mike Hinchey made their way further along the ridge, right out to the end, to climb The Last Pillar. This pillar is about 15 metres high and starts from a wide ledge at the tip of the cape, about 60 metres above the sea. On reaching this ledge, the team realised that to get to the top they would have to place a few bolts. They decided not to climb it.

A question of ethics

This was probably one of the first 'ethical' decisions regarding bolts in the state: they thought that they weren't good enough to do it without bolts and that bolts would detract from the route, so they walked away. Sadly, this doesn't happen often enough today;

previous party by not placing any bolts. Obviously, the best way to make sure that no one goes out there and bolts it is to do it without bolts first...

Back to the story

We reached the end of the walk in, abseiled down the access gully and slid along the eroded path to the base of The Wedding Cake. After climbing the access routes (Rain of Terror and Jihad, both 18) to the top of the Cake, we walked to the far end and abseiled down to the western side of the ridge. Scrambling along a bit further, we neared the notch where the approach route to the Pillars moves back on to the ridge.

However, Jake walked along a bit lower than the normal route and ended up at a ledge above the shore platform on the western side of the cape. He was soon joined by the rest of us, peering down at the shore platform below and the suspicious absence of waves...

After a brief discussion, we built an anchor and fixed a rope. Jake rapped first and his call of 'Off rope!' came a few moments later. By the time the second person was down, Jake had run off along the platform like a giddy schoolboy, disappearing around the tip of the cape and out of sight. The rest of us followed eagerly, and within ten minutes we were all standing in the sun at the base of the cliffs at the very end of the cape.

The ocean

It was an unusually calm day, but even with a modest swell it's hard not to feel vulnerable when standing a few metres from the Southern Ocean—especially when you aren't clipped into anything. One big wave would have wiped us out like a bowling ball collecting the last four pins for a spare. Unfazed, we lingered, gawking up at cliffs that few would have seen from this vantage point.

The platform was relatively unthreatened, but a couple of larger waves encouraged us to press on rather quickly. A particularly big wave came in, send-

ing us fleeing. Jake and Doug got wet and were quite lucky not to be swimming with the seals (and sharks). Time to get out of here.

best seal impersonation, he pressed on and belayed Kim and Doug up from a ledge below a gothic-looking chimney system. Being last, I was delegated the task of looking for a potential escape route back up the ridge from the seal colony. An old trip report from the circulars mentioned that the seals 'added to the atmosphere in more ways than one'—not a truer phrase has been written since.

Despite being as nasally stimulating as ever, the colony was pretty quiet, the seals enjoying a swim in the warm weather. As a result, I was able to stroll freely along the carpet of white shit to the other side. Above, a set of ramps stretched to the base of the Pillars; we could get out easily if necessary. I reported back to the others and we decided to head up the chimney above for a look. If we got stuck, we could rap down to seal level and ramble up the ramps above the colony. At this point we still didn't really have a plan; we were just bumbling around and following our nose (except regarding the seal colony, of course).

The climb

The first pitch started with some tricky jamming that widened to a bit of a squeeze. Jakey B took to this pitch like a wall rat up a dolerite drainpipe, the rest of us struggling after him with varying degrees of gracefulness. Jake belayed us up from a notch in the 'centre' of the cliff—he was at a boulder choke in the middle of a chasm formed between three separate pillars. An opening to the south-west gave us a broad view of the vast ocean and the southern tip of Bruny Island. Above us, skyscrapers of dolerite thrust up to the heavens, streaks of blue sky between them.

Meanwhile, Kim was racking up for the next pitch. Over the course of the day he had gradually emerged from his shell, and by now he was a weapon unleashed. He set off and finished up the continuation of the chimney, thrutching onwards to a small ledge back on the eastern side. After a short, desperate crack, he was at the next belay ledge. Not a bad lead from the office boy who had



Clockwise from top left, Doug belaying Jake up to the top of the pillar, the Southern Ocean below. The boys racking up prior to Jake leading the first pitch: from left, Doug (trying to lick his own nipple), Kim and Jake. Doug again, this time leaping the gap on the journey back up the Cape. Jake chimneying up the off-width first pitch. Doug leading the crux pitch of Pole Position (24). All uncredited photos by the author

Down below, the three of us are getting nervous. Doug is now facing a decent fall on to the ledge, which would give him a matching pair of broken ankles. This is not the place to have an accident. Morbidly, Jake and I move away from the landing zone—there's no need for us to be injured as well if Doug craters.

'Okay, this bit looks tricky', he says, noticeably disturbed by Jake and me fleeing around the corner. A high smear and a balancy layaway get him to a

decent foothold. He pulls up to a stance of sorts, staring directly at the finger-crack.

The crack takes gear willingly, and Doug fills it with all the pieces that will fit. Despite none of them being super, he is confident that collectively they will hold. He shakes out and then goes up and down a few times, unsure of what to do with the holds (or lack thereof). Confused, he sits on the

rope around the summit makes the anchor much more secure too). Then Kim comes up, and lastly Jake. We are all on top of The Pillar at the End of the World. The position is amazing. To the north are the other Pillars of Hercules, standing tall and proud. Looking over to the east we can see Cape Pillar, Tasman Island and Mt Brown; and to the south is a vast expanse of deep blue ocean. We look at

ably abseil into it from above, but first we would have to jump over a gap between two pillars on the spine of the cape, directly above the notch where we had ended the first pitch. I mention the jump to Doug. 'What does the jump look like?' he asks. 'A piece of piss', I say, 'like Albert's Tomb in nappies', referring to a similar leap on our home crag of Mt Wellington.



A happy climber: Jake on the way back up the Cape (with Doug partially obscured). The pillar visible in the background is climbed by the immaculate Pole Dancer (22), which takes the right arete, mainly on the left side.

gear, partly for a rest and partly to confirm that it actually will hold. It does. Doug takes the opportunity to wipe grit off the smeary footholds and peek around the arête.

He pulls on and works his feet high, slaps up the arête, and then again up to a hidden edge. He fondles it, sets his feet, then pulls on the edge. An instant later, the hold parts with the pillar and is flying down the nose of the cape. Doug takes to the air, the nest of gear below bringing him to a halt.

After a calming rest he goes up again. This time he punches through the crux, inching further away from his gear before reaching a jug. He continues to the top, elated, and justifiably so: he is the first to ever be up there.

Doug calls down and asks who is coming up next. We look at each other, unanimous in our thoughts—no one else is going up, he is coming down and leading it clean. Dutifully he obliges, precariously slinging the top of the pillar and rapping off to re-join us at the ledge.

After a brief rest and with intimate knowledge of the pitch above, Doug leads it cleanly and smoothly: it is done.

The summit

I second the pitch and join him on top. Straddling the top of the pillar, I tell him I'm safe (sitting on the

each other with congratulatory smiles—each of us is in total disbelief at what has just happened.

Okay, now let's get off this fucking thing

'Where's the drill?' someone jokes.

No drill. But Kim and Jake had sorted out a strategy earlier and we quickly put it into practice. Doug lowers Jake back to the starting ledge and the three of us use his body as a counterweight to rap off the back of the pillar. It works a treat, and soon we are on a little platform below the ridge-side of the pillar. But now the rope is stuck. After a few minutes of flicking, it is really stuck. Bugger. Eventually we free it and fling it down the side so that Jake can top-rope a short crack to join us on the platform.

The jump

The day has been long, but there's still one more hurdle—getting the hell out of there. While Kim and I were straddling the top of the pillar, we looked for a potential passage back along the ridge. The alternative would be to prusik up the fixed line on the western platform. No thanks.

The most promising option was a ramp leading up to the base of the other pillars. We could prob-

ably abseil into it from above, but first we would have to jump over a gap between two pillars on the spine of the cape, directly above the notch where we had ended the first pitch. I mention the jump to Doug. 'What does the jump look like?' he asks. 'A piece of piss', I say, 'like Albert's Tomb in nappies', referring to a similar leap on our home crag of Mt Wellington.

The perfect day

Getting back to the other pillars from there was pretty straightforward, but still out of the ordinary. Jake found an old piton, probably belonging to Reg Williams, as well as a bunch of chunky stainless-steel bolt hangers from the 1960s. Not bad souvenirs to cap off a great day. We reversed the approach swiftly, just in time to get back to our packs as the last of the daylight left this special part of the world.

On the walk out, and in the days to come, it was hard to believe what had happened. To have done the route bolt-free was the icing on the cake. Hopefully other climbers will be inspired to head out somewhere, anywhere, for their own adventure, just like we did on Pole Position (18, 22, 24). **R**

Dean Rollins and Doug were students until recently. Now they are officially engineers, they plan on not using their degrees for as long as possible, preferring to drink beer and go climbing instead. At the time of writing, Jake was climbing in the Torres del Paine, Patagonia, while Kim was successfully re-attached to his office chair by eight o'clock the morning after this little adventure.

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