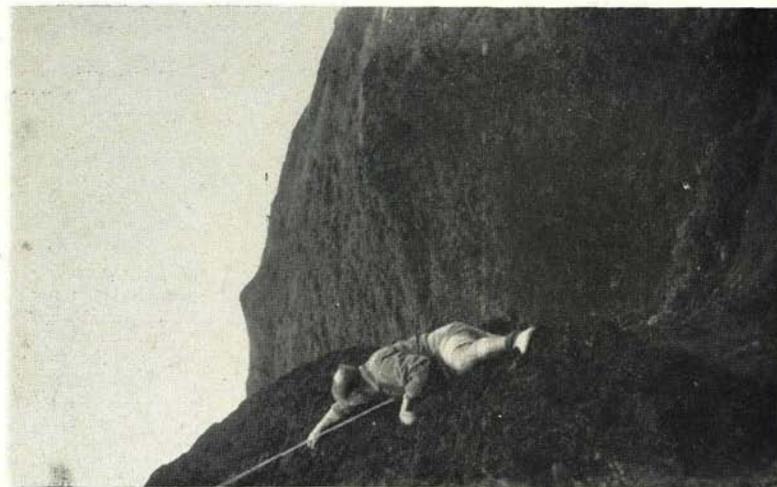




**IVY BUTTRESS, MALVERN**

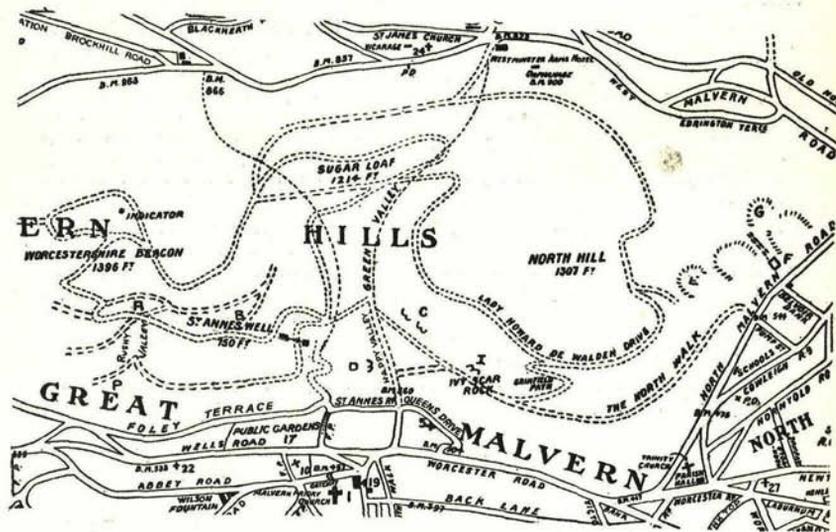
*H. Restall*



**ON IVY BUTTRESS** *J. Byam-Grounds*

# ROCK CLIMBING IN THE MALVERN HILLS.

R. P. CHASMAR and H. SUTCLIFFE.



MAP SHOWING POSITION OF THE MALVERN CLIMBS.

- |                     |                       |                  |
|---------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| A—Overhanging Wall. | D—Peters Slab.        | G—Red Slab.      |
| B.—Saints Wall.     | E—Gt. Western Quarry. | I—Ivy Scar Rock. |
| C—Nameless Rocks.   | F—Clock Tower.        | P—Problems.      |

## INTRODUCTION.

The long whaleback ridge of the Malvern Hills on the border of Herefordshire and South Worcestershire is well known both as a landmark and as a haunt of the Rambler. The walk down the whole length of the ridge from North Hill to Chase End Hill is one of the finest in the south of England.

In 1942 the vagaries of the war brought the present authors to Malvern and it was soon noticed that the quarries and rocky outcrops along the sides of the hills gave opportunities for rock climbing. During the following year a fairly complete exploration of these possibilities was made.

Although natural outcrops of rock occur all down the length of the hills they only exist in appreciable numbers at the northern end around the slopes of the Worcester Beacon and North Hill. They are always small, providing as a rule only short problems. Ivy Scar Rock is the largest of these, having a maximum height of fifty feet. This has to be climbed in the form of a single pitch, as natural belays are completely lacking. This natural rock is moderately rough and excellent in quality.

The quarries which occur all too frequently, especially in the region from the Wyche Cutting northwards, provide a complete contrast. Here the height of the rock face is often two hundred feet or more, but with one or two exceptions is rotten and covered with dirt and loose stones. Nevertheless, taking all in all there is enough climbing in this small area to give a day's good sport, and what is lacking in length and continuity of climbing is compensated for by the sylvan surroundings and magnificent views.

The Malvern Hills are composed of a hard core of igneous rock overlaid by beds of the older sedimentary rocks. The great hardness of these ancient rocks accounts for the exceptional age of the Malvern Hills. From the point of view of the rock climber, the hard trap-like nature of the rock makes rubbers the natural footwear. This is not to say that many of the problems are not feasible in nailed boots, but in the case of a steep outcrop such as Ivy Scar Rock the use of nails would put the standard up considerably. In the following notes the standards given are for rubber footgear.

Recently Mr. C. W. F. Noyce and Mr. P. Holmes have made a number of explorations, particularly in the big Great Western Quarry at the northern end of the hills. One excellent route, "The Great Slab," has been worked out by them and repeated by the authors. Provided that great care is taken with the rock we can recommend it as a route of considerable character. Mr. Holmes has also worked out a number of problems in Happy Valley.

We are indebted to Noyce and Holmes for permission to include their descriptions of these climbs.

## THE CLIMBS.

### IVY SCAR ROCK.

This is situated at a height of about 800 feet above sea level on the eastern spur of the North Hill. It is easily reached by following the 'Happy Valley' out of Malvern and taking the first path to the right. The 'Happy Valley' is the gap between Worcester Beacon and North Hill. The rock stands beside the path and is reached in about a quarter of a mile. It is approximately 100 feet in extent and has a maximum height of 50 feet. There are a number of problems among the broken rocks on the left. Three climbs have been made on the main face. An excellent abseil can also be made down the steepest part of the buttress.

### IVY BUTTRESS. 50 feet. Just severe.

Goes up the steepest part of the rock just to the left of the big right-angle corner. Climb the blocks to a small ledge. (There is a stance here, but it is better to lead straight on.) A delicate step is made to the right on to the main face and then up steeply past the overhang on good holds. The angle eases in a few feet and an easy slab leads to the top.

### THE HANGOVER. 40 feet. Very difficult.

Starts about ten feet to the right of the corner.

Up the slab to the prominent bulge. On to the bulge—awkward—and to a sloping ledge where the angle steepens. A long stride requiring careful balance is made up and to the left, and good holds in the crack against the left wall can be reached. A few more feet and one can scramble out on to the grass.

**THE SIDLE. 40 feet. Difficult.**

Starts on the lower slab to the right of 'The Hangover.'

Follow the natural line up and to the right until the overhang is reached. To pass below this the balance is awkward, but good holds in a crack are soon reached. The exit is by a slab away on the right.

**RUSHY VALLEY.**

The Worcester Beacon throws down a long prominent spur to the east. The valley immediately to the north of this is known as Rushy Valley. The walls of this valley and particularly the main ridge itself are rich in small rocky outcrops. These provide many problems on sound rock, and it is an amusing and direct route to the top of the Beacon to follow this spur taking in the problems on the way.

The ridge can be reached by following the lower track that skirts the side of the hill southwards from 'Happy Valley.' Alternatively, one may make directly for the ridge from the Great Malvern to Malvern Wells road. The first outcrop is then found about 200 feet above the road just before the main hill path is reached. Here several problems will occur to the eye of the enthusiast, including a short lay-back that gives very good sport if tackled in boots.

A little higher up and in the centre of the valley is a steep thirty-foot buttress with a markedly overhanging base. This outcrop is easily located, as it is at the focus of a number of footpaths. It provides several interesting problems and one pitch that merits the use of a rope.

**OVERHANGING WALL. 30 feet. Difficult.**

Start in the centre of the overhang and pull up on to the ledge above. Traverse delicately to the left and then up the groove on the left of the buttress. The climbing is more difficult than it looks as the balance is frequently awkward.

**HAPPY VALLEY.**

This is the main valley that divides North Hill from the Worcester Beacon. The path across starts from the centre of the town immediately beside the Unicorn Inn.

**PETERS SLAB.**

A thirty-foot slab on the left about two hundred yards up Happy Valley from the Malvern end.

**ORDINARY ROUTE. 25 feet. Moderately difficult.**

The obvious line up the right-hand side using the grass ledges.

**Pitch 1. 10 feet.** Up without difficulty on good holds to the grass ledge.

**Pitch 2. 15 feet.** Walk to the foot of the smooth slab and climb up and off this.

**THE SLAB ROUTE. 15 feet. Difficult.**

Up the left-hand scoop. Break out to the left where further progress is barred.

**THE STICKY FINISH. 30 feet. Severe.**

Up as for the ordinary route but instead of going right to the grass ledge continue straight up on small holds. Finish by a stride to the right and a swing on the arms across the smooth slab. This move is awkward.

## THE NAMELESS ROCKS.

The mass of rock high up on the north side of Happy Valley. It is split into two sections.

### **Western Section. THE GROOVE. 30 feet. Difficult.**

Up the obvious groove. Some undercut holds are useful. Finish by a move out of the groove to the left. An alternative finish is by a hand traverse to the right.

### **THE EDGE. 30 feet. Just very difficult.**

Up to the edge on small holds. The hardest line is taken as there is easy ground to the right.

### **Eastern Section. THE CRAWL. 25 feet. Difficult.**

Straight up the right-angled corner. The first move is the hardest.

## SAINTS WALL.

A fifteen-foot wall, smooth and vertical, beside the path from Rushy Valley to Happy Valley. It lies immediately above St. Anne's Well and provides at least one excellent gymnastic problem. The main difficulty is to reach the prominent spike high up on the wall.

## NORTH MALVERN QUARRIES.

These are situated at the north-east corner of North Hill. The best approach from the road is to follow the West Malvern road as far as the clock tower at North Malvern. (This can also be reached by continuing along the track past Ivy Scar rock.) A track immediately behind the clock tower leads up to a stretch of flat greensward above the reservoir (Reservoir Green). The western end of this is partly closed in by a steep 40-foot rock face. A climb has been made on this.

### **RESERVOIR CRACKS \*. 40 feet. Severe.**

An obvious nose of rock about 15 feet up projects from the right-hand end of the rock wall. The climb makes for this.

Up the wall on small holds to a ledge below and to the left of the nose. Move right up and on to the nose. Stance but no belay. Traverse right along a ledge and back left along another. Where the ledge peters out an ascent can be made straight up to finish on the grass. Exposed and difficult.

Away to the left of the Reservoir Green is a small excavation of sound rock giving some good problems and a 30-foot abseil. Further away and high up on the right is an unworked quarry containing a long slab of reddish colour. This has been named Red Slab.

## RED SLAB.

This big slab of fine appearance when seen from a distance is rather disappointing on closer acquaintance. It is about 100 feet in extent and more than 100 feet in height. The right-hand corner of the base over-

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\* This climb was prospected and gardened by the authors in 1944. A rope was used on the final section owing to poor rock and grassy finishing holds. The climb was first led throughout by C. W. F. Noyce in 1948, who gave it its name. (Climbers' Club Journal, 1949)

hangs. The rock although requiring a little care is generally sound. The angle is rather less than that of the Idwal Slabs and in rubbers one can wander over it almost at will, though care is needed owing to the considerable exposure of the upper parts. A rather artificial climb can be traced up the right-hand corner.

**COMRADES CRAWL. 90 feet. Moderately difficult (boots).**

Starts to the right of the subsidiary overhang on extreme right of slab.

**Pitch 1.** Traverse left under the overhang and then up to a flake belay at 40 feet.

**Pitch 2.** 50 feet. Up right and on to the corner of the slab. Follow this to a big block belay. Finish up broken rocks to the top.

The old quarry face to the right of Red Slab is steep in the lower part and very broken above. An easy slab leads up to the right and bypasses the steep section.

**SLAB AND GROOVE. 140 feet. Difficult.**

**Pitch 1.** 70 feet. Up the slab to a narrow grassy terrace; the exit is awkward. Twelve feet to the left is a small tree and a belay.

**Pitch 2.** 70 feet. Traverse left along the terrace to a sycamore sapling at the foot of a groove in the rocks above. Up the groove and out on to broken rocks where a belay can be found.

A further 100 feet of scrambling leads to the top. Great care is needed here owing to the rotten state of the rock. Near the top of the cliff several iron quarry spikes are useful as belays.

**GREAT WESTERN QUARRY.**

This is the first and highest of the North Malvern Quarries when approached from the direction of Ivy Scar Rock. It is over two hundred feet high, very steep and characterised by a prominent slab about half-way up the face. When first examined by the authors in 1943 it was rejected as a climbing ground on account of the loose nature of the rock. However, good things can be found on it as Noyce and Holmes have shown.

**GREAT SLAB ROUTE\*. 300 feet. Very difficult (120 ft. of rope).**

**Pitch 1.** 110 feet. Start immediately below the big slab and traverse right and up the 'Giant Steps.' The general line is towards the right-hand corner of the slab, but numerous variations exist. Belay.

**Pitch 2.** 110 feet. Move left round the corner and on to slab. Traverse left along the grassy crack in the slab until this peters out. The situation here is excellent. Move up and left on small holds to the overhanging wall that blocks the exit from the slab upwards. Making use of undercut holds it is possible to escape around the corner to the left and twenty feet further belay to a prominent iron quarry spike.

**Pitch 3.** 20 feet. Straight up the wall to the tree and traverse delicately right across the slab. Scramble finishes it.

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\* Note.—Since this Guide was compiled the Great Slab Route has been disintegrated by a landslide.