



Outlying Wannies Climbing Guide

Simon Litchfield

Aid Crag

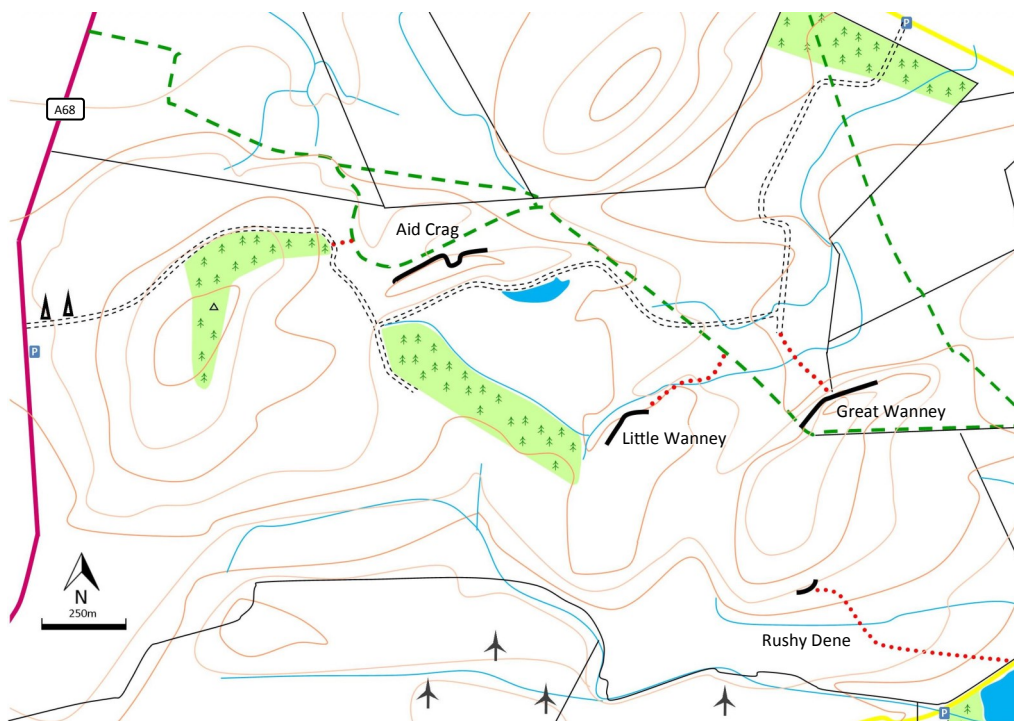
Little Wanney

Rushy Dene

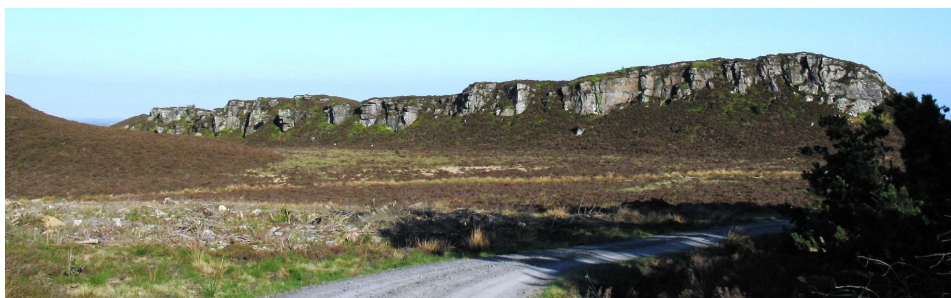
Outlying Wannies

By Simon Litchfield

Around Great Wanney are a number of smaller outcrops. Many of these crags are linked with the early development of climbing in Northumberland but have fallen out of fashion as access to other crags has eased. Great Wanney is undoubtedly the jewel in the crown of the area but there are a few hidden gems and as a collective the minor crags offer a fair number of enjoyable routes and problems that enthusiasts may wish to seek out and explore. Over the years many lines have been climbed at these crags up to E3 6b (indeed there are at least 25 recorded climbs at Little Wanney alone), however, many of these were poor lines, with dubious rock and are now severely vegetated. This guide has tried to pick out the best routes, but some may still require a clean (with a plastic brush).



Above right: Simon Litchfield inspecting the arête of *Ambulance on Standby* before the first ascent
 Cover: Rounding off a great evening on *Hypotenuse*



Aid Crag

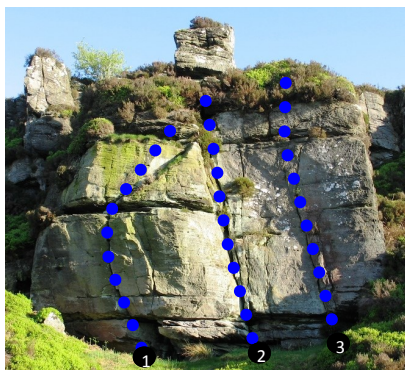
The Climbing

General

A collection of small and somewhat rambling buttresses dwarfed both in size and quality by the neighbouring Northumbrian gem: Great Wanney. With a fair amount of poor, loose and dirty routes it is easy to overlook the crag. However, intermingled are a collection of good routes, which, given the ease of access from the A68 (5 mins by bike), can provide alternative entertainment on a summers evening.

Approach

The crag is best approached from the A68, just south of Ridsdale / West Woodburn. Park in the Fourlaws layby, where a couple of telephone / radio masts are visible. Follow the well made forestry track east through a gate for approx 1km. Where the track bends sharply right and the crag is visible take a small path off left (straight on), crossing a small pipe / stream and turning right towards the crag. This path runs beneath the whole crag. An alternative approach can be made when approaching the Wanneys from the north, by keeping to the forestry track which swings round above the crag.



Situation and Character

Facing north northwest the crag catches the glow of the warm evening summer sun and offers good views over Ridsdale and back towards Great Wanney. The crag is a bit dirty and loose in places, but there are some nice routes on good rock. *Thompson's Rib* is worthy of a star, *Cabbala*, *Cosmic Egg* and *Ankh* are strangely classic, *Guilty* and *Legal Aid* are steeper and on better rock than expected, and the steep overhanging *arête* of *Ambulance on Standby* / *ICU* proves to be the outstanding line. Some of the other routes more rambling and not all are included as there are many lines of a similar nature and grade.

Rock: Ottercops Sandstones *Carboniferous, Dinantian*
(Lower Limestone Group)

Access issues:

Peregrines usually nest here around the left hand quarry and *Cabbala* and their breeding season is between March and July. They make themselves known with a mewing call - so please keep away if you see them, but the right end of the crag stays mostly unaffected. Historically Hen Harriers nested here. To encourage the return of this red status bird, if approaching from Wanney, instead of approaching direct please stick to the track and skirt round to approach the crag from the western end.

History:

The 1950 NMC guidebook included many routes at Aid Crag, suggesting that it was one of the first crags to be explored. This popularity may have been owing to the fact that before its closure to passengers in 1956 climbers would usually take the North Tyne Railway (also known by some as 'The Beer Line') to Bellingham and walk to Great Wanney, passing Aid Crag en route. In the 1960's Gordon Thompson and friends added half a dozen routes. A few more were added by S Nagy, J Dalrymple and S. Madgwick in 2001 and possibly the best two in the quarry were added by Simon Litchfield in Sept 2009 before returning after two years to put *Legal Aid* to rest.

Aid Crag - Cosmic Egg and Quarry

The climbs are described from left to right. Starting at a small buttress with three cracks.

1. CABBALA 9m VS

(4c) The left hand crack has a kink right.

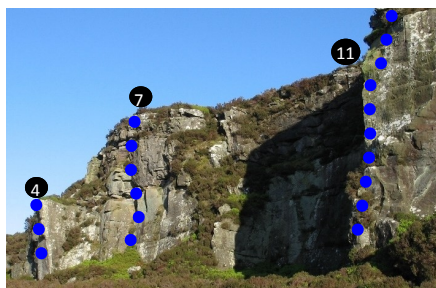
2. COSMIC EGG 8m MS

The central main crack.

3. ANKH 8m VS

(5a) The thin right hand crack.

The following routes are on the prominent arête on the east side of the quarry



4. AMBULANCE ON STANDBY 9m E3 *

Good, unprotected climbing up the left hand side of the overhung arête. One of the best routes of the crag. (6a). Start below the arête and climb to a ledge. From the ledge step left round the arête and commit to hard and insecure initial moves. Higher up the climbing eases but is bereft of gear.

FA Simon Litchfield and Karl Wood (29 September 2009)

5. ICU 9m HVS

Delicate climbing up the right side of the arête on good rock.

(5b) Start as for *Ambulance on Standby*. From the ledge ascend the right side of the arête, with surprisingly delicate moves at towards the top.

FA Simon Litchfield and Karl Wood (20 September 2009)

To the right of the prow is a broken looking wall with a number of cracklines.

6. QUAKER 11m D

A route up the wall on the east side of the quarry

7. SHAKER 11m S

(4b) The overhanging crack just to the right with poor protection and loose rock.

8. FAKER 12m MVS

(4c) Start beneath a small overhang in the central wall (arrow in rock). From a niche move right and up to a ledge. Continue up and right to a bulging wall and finish up left.

There are a number of lines right of *Faker*, but all are poor. On the right bay

9. JUST A LITTLE GREEN 10m E2

(5c) The green wall on the right hand side of the quarry. Better than it looks.

FA Gordon Thompson (1970ish)

10. SICK, SICK, SICK (THE BEAST) 10m E1

(5a) The unstable looking flake right of Green Wall is as unstable as it looks.

FA Gordon Thompson (1960ish)

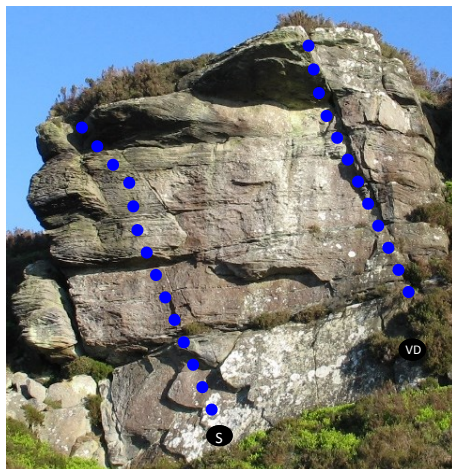
11. HYPOTENUSE 14m VD *

The long buttress bounding the quarry on the right. A good climb. Go up the short arête, work across a wall to the right and finish up the crack.

The next buttress contains a recess. This can be climbed by the left crack or up the narrow wall, both Mild Very Severe.

Further along is a buttress with two easy chimneys. The wall at the right end is Very Difficult.

The next buttress has an overhang atop it. The bulging left wall is Severe and the right end past the overhang is Very Difficult.



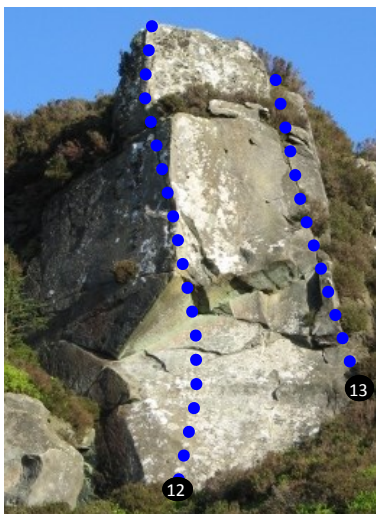
Further right is a small buttress consisting of a slab topped by a rib which has a clean crack just left.

12. THOMPSON'S RIB 7m E1 *

A small but perfectly formed gem with many contrasting styles of move.

(5b) Climb the slab, pull up to the foot of the short rib which is then followed to the top.

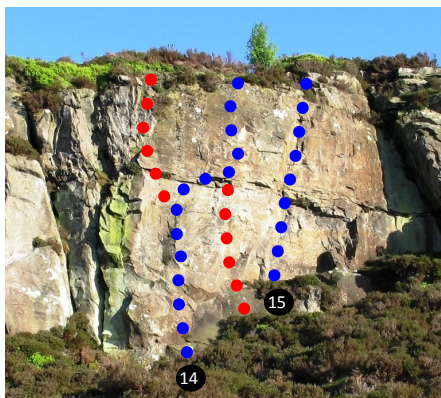
Aid Crag - Thompson's Rib & Legal Buttress



13. MADGE 7m S
The crack to the right of *Thompsons Rib*. Not great.
FA Steve Madgewick, Steve Nagy (Summer 2001)

On the right of the crag (and the first main buttress if approaching from the A68) is a higher quarried area, with a light sandy looking face with a thin crack on its right hand side.

14. LEGAL AID 9m E3**
A devious route that encompasses the finest climbing on the right hand buttress with some technical bouldery moves .
(5c) To the right of the broken crack on the left of the buttress is rib with a shallow scoop to its left. Technical



moves gain the rib. Two shotmarks are useful for gaining the middle break. Traverse the break right for 1m. Use the remains of a broken flake to reach a number of crimps up and left. Gain the top, keeping a cool head a fair distance above the gear. (Photo below)
FA Simon Litchfield and Matt Dowson (21st May 2011).



This route supercedes and encompasses the best parts of the following two routes:

AID AND ABET, E2 5c: Start as for *Legal Aid* but finish directly up (and is spoiled by) the rubble above the middle break

LEGALITY, E2 5c, the true direct start to the upper half of *Legal Aid* that starts 1m left of *Guilty*. A fair route, but the start of *Legal Aid* is better.

15. GUILTY 8m HVS
A decent route that climbs the thin crack on the right of the buttress
(5a) Climb the crack, on doubtful rock and suspicious protection.
FA Steve Nagy (Summer 2001)



Little Wanney

The Climbing

General

Extensively developed for the 1950s guide Little Wanney has a large number of chimneys, cracks and arêtes (that are mostly overgrown). Highlights include *Cave Chimney*, which is a real big boot adventure for all, and the bouldery start to *Hairy Diplodocus* and *Hole in the Wall*.

Approach

The ground in front of the crag can be boggy, so often it is best to keep to the main paths.

- From Aid: continue along the forestry track until you reach a post indicating a path leading to Great Wanney. This path takes you past the left hand edge of the crag.
- From Great Wanney: From the west end of the crag a footpath heads north west passing the crag.
- From the Northern Great Wanney Approach: Head as for Great Wanney but follow the track when it turns sharply right before taking the path (left) when the post is reached.

Rock: Ottercops Sandstones Carboniferous, Dinantian (Lower Limestone Group)

Access Issues

Please keep to the paths on the approach. Hen Harriers used to nest between Aid Crag and Little Wanney and attempts have been made to encourage this endangered red status ground nesting bird to return.

1. HS

The wall to the left of the crag. Reminiscent of the climbing at Curtis / Wolf.

2. CAVE CHIMNEY ***

For enthusiasts who feel they need a little bit more character. Enter the bowels of the beast and climb the right wall at the back. Traverse and bridge forward to the mouth and exit by the hole in the roof. Rumoured to be ungrarradable, but may only be (V)D.

3. THE HANGING GROOVE 7m E3

The obvious (over)hanging groove to the right of the chimney.

(6b?) Hard moves may gain the groove which eases with height.

A number of routes have been recorded immediately to the right, however, most are of little merit.



100m further right is Rickerty Castle, defined by its large capstone and further buttresses to the right.

4. TAU 6m D

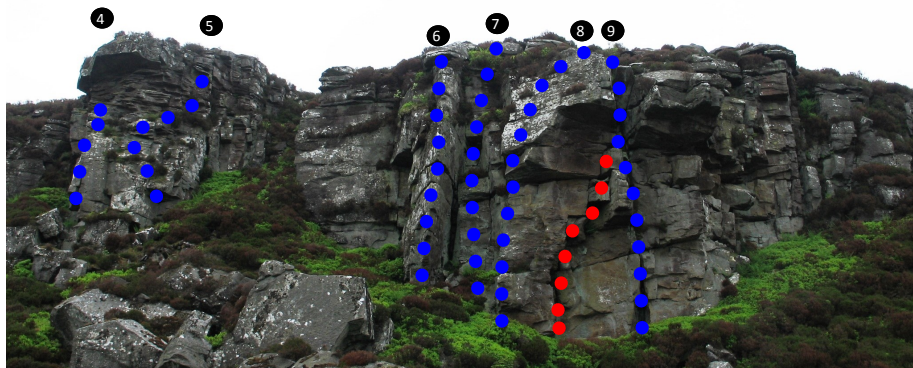
From the left side make a rising traverse right (long step) to the ledge and exit horizontally left.

5. SIGMA 8m D

From a gully on the right side traverse left under the capstone and climb airily to the right.

“ The Hen Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) lives in open areas of low vegetation such as the heather moors of Northumberland. The males are pale grey with females and juveniles being brown with a white rump and a long, barred tail which give them the name 'ringtail'. In flight they hold their wings in a shallow 'V', gliding low in search of food. Once predated free-range fowl, earning its present name, its UK populations have suffered illegal persecution, particularly on the driven grouse moors of England and Scotland resulting in local and regional extinction in many areas. ”

Buff Crag & Rushy Dene Boulders



The highest buttress at Little Wanney is Buff Crag

6. HAIRY DIPLODOCUS 12m E2 *

A fine highball, possibly the route of the crag

(5c) The obvious fin of rock left of *Chiasmus Chimney* is climbed on the right with bouldery moves to start.

FA Hugh Harris, Joe Webb (26th September 1991)

An inferior version climbs it on the left at 5a.

7. CHIASMUS CHIMNEY 11m D

The deep chimney. So named as it can be climbed with a choice of starts and a choice of finishes with a shared centre.

8. HOLE IN THE WALL 12m E2 *

A fine cimb with a naughty crux. Worth a star when clean. (5c) Climb the easy arête right of *Chiasmus Chimney*. Pull over with difficulty on good pockets to gain the base of the slab. Follow this to the top.

FA Gordon Thompson (10th August 1978)

9. PSYCHE 12m HS

A good line tackling the central hanging chimney direct.

(4b) The steep initial crack has is eased with hidden incuts. Wide bridging makes the upper chimney straightforward.

Alternative Start

(5a) A harder alternative, gaining the chimney by the broken crack on the left.

The rest of the crag to the right is connoisseurs territory.

Rushy Dene Boulders

GR: 930 827 (approx)

General

A set of boulders visible from the Curtis Crag – A68 road looking north towards Great Wanney. Park just east of the Curtis car park at a forestry gate. Head west-northwest towards the ridge to reach the boulders. Not especially worth the visit given the paucity of lines. The exception is a lone boulder with an excellent hanging crack (font 6a+) and a crackline (font 5) to the left. The bouldering crowd will also not be drawn to the jamming cracks behind: skin loss essential!



Above: Rushy Dene Boulders

Rear cover: Matt Dowson throwing shapes on *Thompson's Rib*



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