

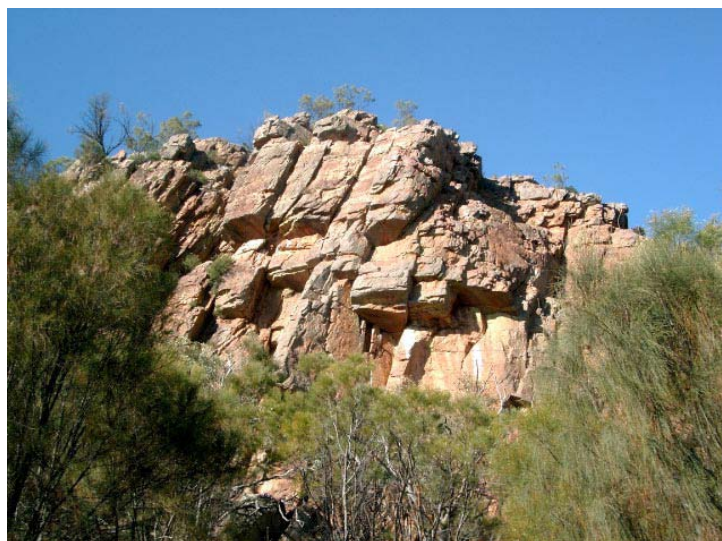
GO CLIMB THE ROCK

Another logo written on a T shirt in Yosemite? Well, maybe. Rather than reading or wearing it though, how about doing the real thing?? It lies about 40 kilometres south of Wagga Wagga and only about 3½ hours travel from Canberra. The Rock is situated a stones throw from the township of The Rock and has the shape of a squatting lion proudly surveying the southern inland plains. Need a change from Booroomba, sick of the sea view at the Point, tired of the speed boats at Thompsons, want a change of diet from Blue Mountains sandstone, then this compact quartzite crag might be the place for you.



The Rock – Not the perfect lion’s profile from this angle

I had first heard about The Rock when I climbed with Jeff Boynton in the mid 1980’s in the Blue Mountains. Jeff spoke highly of the crag, as he was one of the areas earliest developers. A chance presented itself to visit the area in 1990 when Fantini and I passed through the town on the way from the Warrumbungles to Buffalo. One look at the head of the lion was enough and we were speeding along the trail with our ropes and gear in readiness. "However, the distant view is tantalisingly deceptive. Close up its clean profile was punctuated by blocks that rivalled in size many of the whitegoods sold by Harvey Norman." Unimpressed, we continued to the summit, took in the mighty view and then continued our southern push to the smooth, but coarse delights of Buffalo. But the idea of climbing there festered in my mind and over time I gleaned where the best climbing was located. It is not a bum steer to say that it is located at the arse end of the lion!!!

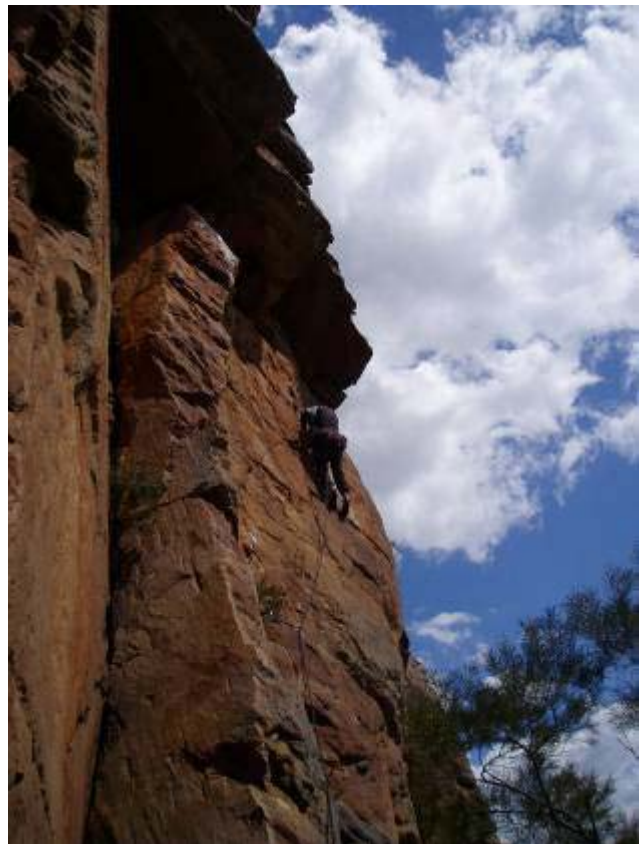


“The Towers” – A view from the plaque

In order to extract ourselves from our Canberran winter torpor Brian Mattick and I rocked down there in mid October 08. While towering it is not, this leonine glutinus maximus of the climbing world has been called 'The Towers'. Access is easy, just turn right off the Olympic Way into the 'main street' and then keep following it for about 3 or 4 kilometres until a signposted gravel road is reached. Turn left into this and park at the top right hand side of the parking area. Walk diagonally towards the mountain from the top corner boundary posts and after moving through undulating mullock heaps of gravel for about 100 metres or so a track will be reached. Turn right and follow it for about twenty minutes to reach the base of the crag. Just before reaching the crag at the top of the upward haul there is a plaque and a visitor's book. It is worthwhile reading the plaque and having a look at the book before moving on.

There are 40 climbs at The Towers, most of which are single pitch with many some 35 to 40 metres in length. Easy grades through to harder ones are available and many are nice if not classics. Once topping out, move leftwards for about 100 metres to where an easy scrambling gully descends to the base of the cliff leaving a straightforward walk back down to the packs. Some of the climbs have been marked and this allows the positions of others to be ascertained. We did not have a guide; just a list of climbs and their grades from crag.com but this was sufficient to ferret out most of the climbs. Protection on all of the routes that we ascended was good but bolts are very scarce and the NP&WS prohibits their placement. The cliff has a northerly aspect so it gets very hot. Even in October, it was getting towards the upper limit of discomfort from mid afternoon onwards. Make sure that water is taken, as there is none available near the cliffs.

In two days we climbed about 10 climbs, the hardest of which was **Lest We Forget**, a 17. It starts out of a groove and moves across a wall to a fine rightward leaning crack, which was capped by an intimidating roof. This was the highlight of the trip and was an absolute classic. It is worth making the trip just for this climb.



The author leading "Lest We Forget" grade 17. Note the roof.

Angie at 15 was also very good but was marred by two 'loose' blocks underneath the roof traverse. These required some tentative and delicate moves to negotiate but if this were solid rock it too would be another classic. Even so, it was very good.



The author finishing the roof traverse on **Angie**, grade 15, 35m. The blocks can be seen under the roof in the left photograph.

Staircase 21, 35m is left of Angie. It has two bolts for the sports climbers amongst us.

Outside Edge 19, 35m follows Angie to the roof then takes the crack on the right.

Scratched Knees was another classic that we climbed graded 15, 35m. It went up an acrobatic, groin stretching twin crack then through some beautifully sculptured bulges to the right. Now being in receipt of a guide book it seems that this route goes straight up but the detour that we made featured some very pleasant steep climbing.



Left. Negotiating the bulge on **Scratched Knees**. The wall crack below is **Wall Flower** 19, 35m.

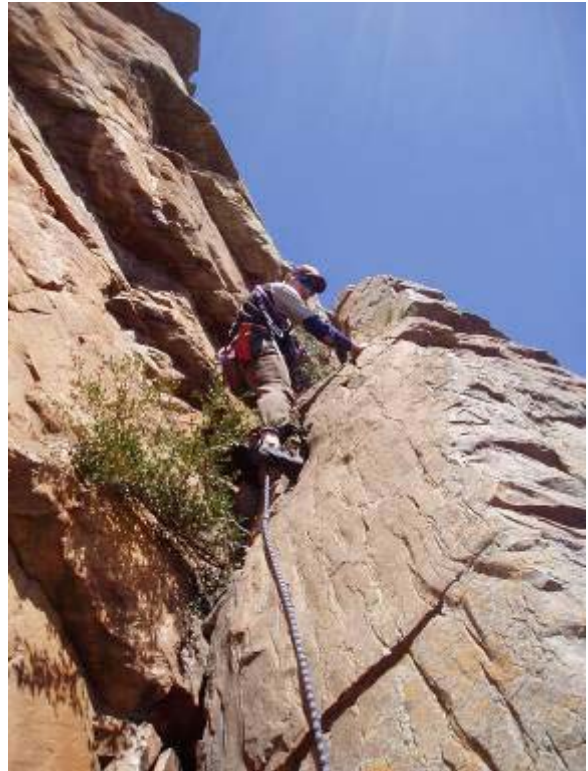
Below. Topping out with the knees intact.



Other routes that we climbed were **Virgins' Crack** 14, **Honourable Harry** 12, **Jammer's Delight** 9 and **Mrs Fairy** 12. All were good and followed crack systems, which largely, but not always, became slabby towards the top.



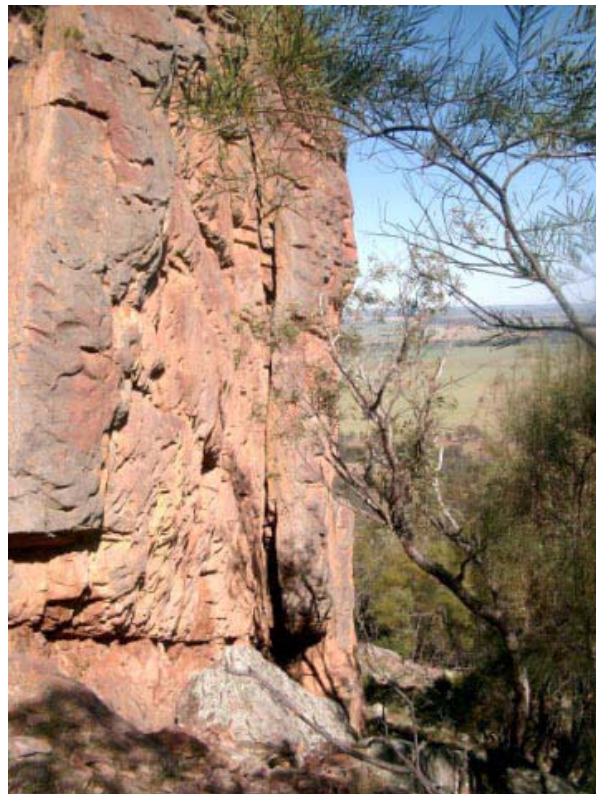
Above. Exiting **Virgin's Crack** 14, 40m



Above. Starting **Jammer's Delight** 9, 40m. Several variants are available above here at much the same grade.



Above. **Honourable Harry** 12, 35m. The start has some tricky moves for the grade.



Above. A general view of the crag around the **Virgin's Crack** area.

A shelter shed with tables and a BBQ is located at the parking area. From memory, water is available here but to be on the safe side it is best to bring your own supply. The Yerong Trail to the summit of The Rock also starts here. While camping is not allowed on the reserve, a camping place is available closer to the township. This is on the right as you move out of the 'main strip' towards the reserve. Make a right turn at the bowling club and the camping area is at the back of the park behind the swimming pool. The allotted area is not an organised site and although level and grassed has very basic amenities. Water and toilets are available at the adjacent park.

We can recommend the 'tin tents' at the Uranquinty Caravan Park 15 kilometres back up the Olympic way towards Wagga and just north of the little township. The caravan was clean, cheap with a good amenities block nearby and the proprietor and his wife were very friendly and obliging. The Uranquinty Hotel was a convenient watering hole that also provided an excellent meal with very friendly service. For the well heeled, there is a motel on the Olympic way immediately at the turnoff to The Rock.



Brian slumming it at Uranquinty

So there you have it. Not an area that provides a week of non-stop climbing but there is enough to keep you going for two to four days. While very convenient to Canberra it could also be visited en route to or from Victorian cliffs such as Buffalo or even Arapiles. We had a very pleasant weekend of climbing and would recommend others to "Go climb The Rock". We will certainly return to tick off some good (and perhaps harder) routes that escaped our attention this time.

Keith Bell

Photographs Brian Mattick
Keith bell