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500

WOMEN WHO ROCK

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WOMEN ROCK



From daring to wear trousers in the mountains to knocking on 9a, the story of British female climbers is one of rebels and disrupters, trailblazers and game-changers. **Sarah Stirling** reveals 50 women who refused to be tied down.

For one whose pinnacle of carefree climbing was over 70 years ago, the achievements of today's women, occasionally glimpsed on a screen, are awe-inspiring.

It's hard to take in. The routes, the moves, the standards, are over the top. Surely they are pushing too hard... it's wrong. And then one replaces panic with judgement and watches. And you, the observer, see that the climber is physically powerful but delicate, not fighting the rock but working with it; she's in control.

There is some security from modern equipment, but the high standards of today are not a sudden phenomenon: they're the product of an organic movement, an evolutionary chain, and it didn't start from nothing. Power, balance, courage, endurance: how much of that did Lucy Walker have, Le Blond, Richardson, in their hobnails and hemp ropes, or their successors in tricounis and hundred-foot run-outs with no security and the imprinted maxim that "the leader does not fall"?

Female climbers haven't changed, there are just more of them, inspired by those grand pioneers and all themselves hooked by books and now film, by that initial move from the floor to a climbing wall or that first thrilling glimpse of a crag through mist or rain or sunshine: rock waiting, like a lover, to be loved.

The sport has changed but only cosmetically. Customised equipment, beautiful functional clothing, helmets: climbing has become safer. It's no coincidence then that so many women are seeking out the wilder places: pristine and unexplored, dangerous. Not alone – and this is a most laudable characteristic of women mountaineers; for every lone maverick – who may yet enjoy the company of her peers when she comes in from the cold – there are untold teams of women working in small cohesive groups from Alaska to the frozen south, from St Kilda to Mongolia, bonding. When I started climbing, we were young and naïve and thought we could change the world. As climbers we knew we were different. Nothing's changed only, so far as women are concerned, in this free mountain world they found themselves.

**Gwen Moffat, Lake District,
October 2018**



Gwen in action.



Gwen at home.

Hazel Findlay free climbing the upper headwall of the Salathe Wall, Yosemite. Read on to discover our other 49 game-changing women.

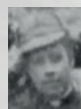
Lady-like alpine psyche

The few Western women who climbed did so hampered by long skirts and Victorian moral codes, receiving more incredulation than credit. When a woman did make headlines, plaudits often went to the gallant fellows who must have hoisted her up there. However, by the early 1900s, women were photographed on summits from Peru to the Karokoram holding 'Votes for Women' signs and the Ladies' Alpine Club had formed. Changes were afoot.



Lucy Walker

Legendary Liverpoolian who made headlines with the first female ascent of the Eiger in 1864. In 1871, after hearing Meta Brevoort (the first female mountaineer to dare to wear trousers) was planning on bagging the first female ascent of the Matterhorn, Lucy couldn't have that. She got there first, in a long flannel skirt and on a diet of champagne and sponge cake. Lucy completed 98 alpine climbs and several female firsts with her guide Melchior Anderegg, always chaperoned by her brother or father. Acclaimed as the pioneer of Western women's climbing, Lucy became second president of the Ladies' Alpine Club in 1913.



Katherine Richardson

This Yorkshire vicar's daughter was one of the first women to climb without a guide. Tough and utterly tireless, she never married and dedicated her time to ground-breaking ascents in the Alps with French friend Mary Paillon. The "legendary Miss Richardson" was fast and athletic. She climbed the Zinalrothorn, Weisshorn, Matterhorn and Monte Rosa in one week, leading one male climber to exclaim: "She doesn't sleep, she doesn't eat and she walks like the devil!" She only retired after Mary's sight failed. Her final tally? 176 alpine routes: 116 major lines, six first ascents and 14 female firsts.

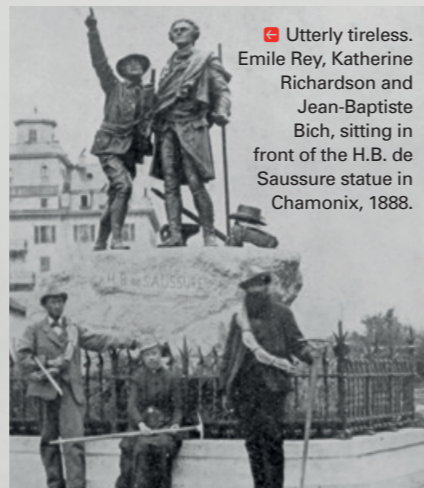


Where it all started. Lucy Walker with her father Frank (left) and guides Jacob Anderegg, Melchior Anderegg and Adolphus Warburton.



Lily Bristow

London artist who gained renown for making the first female ascent of the Grands Charmoz. After she made the second traverse of the Grépon with Mummery, he wrote: "All mountains appear doomed to three stages: an inaccessible peak, the hardest climb in the Alps, an easy day for a lady." Lily lugged a half-plate camera up the Grépon and soloed sections to capture some of the world's first mountaineering action shots. That year, she also topped-out on the Dru and Matterhorn. Lily led much of the former: "The climbing was pretty stiff, I must say, though not nearly so difficult as the Grépon, which is a real snorker."



Utterly tireless. Emile Rey, Katherine Richardson and Jean-Baptiste Bich, sitting in front of the H.B. de Saussure statue in Chamonix, 1888.



Elizabeth Hawkins (AKA Lizzie Le Blond)

Irish aristocrat who travelled to the Alps to find a cure for her lungs, yet discovered a penchant for alpine winter. One of the first Western females to lead parties, she thanked the mountains for knocking her from "the shackles of conventionality". Lizzie wore a hat over her thick brown hair and a skirt over her climbing pantaloons until above the cow-line (this backfired when she left her skirt on the summit of the Rothorn and had to re-ascend to retrieve it). Lizzie, who partied with Prince Edward, was a mountain photographer, one of the first female filmmakers, an author and the first President of the Ladies' Alpine Club. After she bagged the first winter ascent of the Aiguille du Midi, celebratory canons were fired in Chamonix.



Gertrude Bell

In photos of British officials in the post-WWI Middle East, there's a sole woman, wearing the cloche hat and pencil skirt of jazz-age Baghdad. Born into a family of progressive thinkers in County Durham, Gertrude gained a First in History at Oxford, ticked peaks including the La Meije and Mont Blanc, made several first ascents, survived 53 hours on a rope in a blizzard on the unclimbed north-east face of the Finsteraarhorn and travelled the world, teaching herself archaeology and five languages. Gertrude particularly loved the Middle East and worked for British Intelligence, mapping routes for soldiers.

An early selfie. Lizzie LeBlond takes a self portrait on Durmaalstind, Norway, c.1900.

During WWI, women had slipped off men's ropes and many found it hard to go back. Manless climbing became a thing and French climber Etienne Bruhl famously groaned: "The Grepon has disappeared... now that it has been done by two women, no self-respecting man can undertake it." Rock climbing grew into a sport in its own right and the British scene blossomed: climbing and mountaineering were no longer the preserve of the upper classes.



Emily 'Pat' Kelly

Lakeland lass and true rock artist. Pat pioneered balance climbing and soloed many major mountain routes – including Owen Glynn Jones's route up Scafell Pinnacle – reveling in the skill and heightened consciousness. Pat, along with Eleanor Winthrop-Young, founded the first women-only rock climbing club in 1921, explaining: "As in other walks of life, women wanted to find their own feet." In 1922, Pat died after a fall on easy ground on Tryfan. Her legacy was to be the ranks of strong women emerging from the Pinnacle Club.



Mabel Barker

Rumoured to have subsisted almost exclusively on cigarettes and strong tea, Mabel was the first woman to climb Central Buttress on Scafell (E1 5b) in 1925 – then the hardest climb in Britain. Afterwards, Claude Deane Frankland gleefully recounted how two men on a neighbouring VDiff had asked what route he was on when up popped Mabel, seconding this testpiece. "There are moments when it is rather good fun to be a woman," observed Mabel. She became the first woman to traverse the Cuillin Ridge that same year. Extremely well-educated for the times, Mabel had a diploma in Geography from Oxford, a degree in Geology and wrote her Geography PhD in French. She opened an Outdoor Ed school, teaching children to leave no trace.

Women who rocked



Cordée feminine: Micheline Morin, Nea Morin with Alice Damesme at the Aigle Hut after their 1933 Meije traverse.



Dorothy Pilley climbing on the Calyn face.



Dorothy Pilley

Cool, beautiful, Camel-cigarette-smoking Dorothy was the best-known female climber between the wars, and one of the rare few who kept climbing during WWII. She rebelled against her father's ambitions for her to become a top-end housewife, achieving self-sufficiency through journalism, working for the proto-feminist British Women's Patriotic League and escaping London to climb. Dorothy took her knickerbockers and boots to rock faces all over the UK and the Alps in a sack, changing out of skirts out of sight. She proclaimed: "Women should take full responsibility for climbs within their power". In 1928, she made the first ascent of the north-north-west ridge of the Dent Blanche. She helped found the Pinnacle Club, and left her fortune to an Oxbridge College.



Nea Morin

Climbing was in Nea's blood. Nea's father offered sixpence for his first child to solve a boulder problem, and Nea would later climb with her own daughter, Denise, to become one of the most successful mother-daughter teams in climbing history. One of the finest British women climbers of the inter-war period, Nea advocated cordée feminine (climbing only with women on the rope): "The most difficult part of climbing as a female team was shaking off the guys." Nea and Denise's first female ascents include the north ridge of Weissmeis and the Mer de Glace face of the Grépon. Nea also made the first female-led ascent of the Matterhorn, with her son Ian. Until comparatively recently, she was one of the few females to make UK first ascents. You may have climbed one: Nea in Llanberis Pass.



Alice 'Jammy' Cross

Alice fell in love with mountains as a girl guide, but her parents banned her from climbing cliffs until, true to her nickname ('jamais') she came of age and ignored them. Jammy believed the biggest obstacle was older male climbers who viewed women as shackles; after meeting climber Sid Cross working at the K Shoes factory in Kendal, the pair named a first ascent 'The Shackle' – and then got married. Jammy was the first woman to lead Central Buttress on Scafell. She also did a huge amount of unreported significant winter climbing, in hobnailed boots and wearing pyjamas under her clothes. In 1937, together with Sid, she co-led the technical Bowfell Buttress in Langdale (grade VI) using a scout knife as an ice-dagger. Jammy and Sid took over the Old Dungeon Ghyll to create the infamous post-war climbers' bar.

Jammy Cross on top of Central Buttress Scafell in 1939, after making the first female lead.



PHOTO: JOHNNIE LEES



Gwen Moffat

As a young Army driver, bored in post-war North Wales, Gwen followed a climber-god in bell-bottoms off life's beaten path: "He was big and hard and golden in the sunlight." She lived a wild, bohemian life for years, making real choices between finding food and going climbing, washing her cropped curls in lakes and often ascending barefoot. Her adventures in Snowdonia, then the Lakes, Scotland and the Alps led to her becoming our first qualified female mountain guide. Later she became a successful crime writer. Gwen was back in the limelight in 2017 when our film based on her life, Operation Moffat, won 20 international film awards and inspired a new generation. Gwen is one of the first female honorary BMC members.



Brede Arkless

Irishwoman who moved to North Wales and became the first female to hold the coveted UIAGM international Mountain Guide badge. A Brit guiding in the Alps, let alone a woman, was viewed with disbelief to near-horror by many European guides, so Arkless proved herself by beating them at arm-wrestling. With strength, determination and her cheery smile, she ignored many raised eyebrows over her life, as she organised women-only climbing courses with Jill Lawrence and made several all-women trips to the greater ranges, all while raising eight children.



Alison Chadwick-Onyszkiewicz

Alison carved a niche as the most accomplished British female high-altitude climber of her day. She exuded a cool temperament from dark eyes, had incredible stamina and was renowned for her early commitment to alpine style. In 1975, she made the first female-only ascent of Gasherbrum II (8,035m) and then topped that with the first ascent of Gasherbrum III (7,952m) – then the highest unclimbed peak in the world. One of the first women to become a member of the Alpine Club, Alison famously said: "This is a woman's climb after all. We don't really need Sherpas." Alison died on the 1978 American women's Annapurna expedition – her legacy lives on with the Alison Chadwick Memorial Award.

■ Gwen Moffat on top of the Aonach Eagach Ridge.

■ Alison Chadwick on the Dutch Rib of Annapurna in 1978.

1950s - 1970s

So macho

PHOTO: ARLENE BLUM

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THE MOUNTAIN PEOPLE



80s style: Alison Hargreaves climbing The Toy (E1 5c) at Curbar.

Jill Lawrence becomes the first British woman to climb E5 with this ascent of Right Wall.

BIG, BRASH 80S

The big, brash 1980s left the beige of the 70s behind and exploded into full colour. Anything could happen – including all-out nuclear war – but no-one had any time for that. This was the decade of advertising, Thatcher, giant shoulder pads – and climbing competitions, better rock shoes and climbing walls. Cordless drills arrived and launched a bolting revolution. The first SportRocchia event was held in Italy in 1985 (later becoming the Rock Master) and French climber Catherine Destivelle took first place, before going on to inspire women across the world (including Shauna Coxsey) in a Mali soloing film.



Geraldine Taylor

Allegedly responsible for the Lycra trend. Over a four-month transformation, Geraldine shot from mild extreme to E5. The Climbers' Club journal recorded: "1983 saw the emergence of several women climbers, the best of the bunch being Geraldine Taylor." At 50, she made headlines for still ticking heaps of E5s, including making annual ascents of London Wall at Millstone: "The important thing is to get out on the rock rather than spend time talking about it." A retired teacher, she lived by her words: Gerry doesn't have much time for Facebook, but was last tagged in 2016, sporting a deep tan and a body of pure muscle on Kalymnos.



Jill Lawrence

The first British woman to break the E5 barrier with Right Wall in 1984, on the BMC Women's International Meet. Jill had been given confidence by the 1980 French Ladies' Meet (also organised by the BMC) when French climbers came over and fired off E3s – a grade never then climbed by UK women. "Climbing with other females is definitely more important to me. Seeing other females do a route provides an incentive. If she can do it, so can I," said Jill.



Angela Soper

Prolific isn't a big enough word. Angela began climbing in the sixties and at 77 shows no sign of stopping. Angela has spent 50 years bringing women together to climb harder. She organised the seminal 1984 Women's International Meet, has taken part in many other BMC international meets, talked at the Women's Climbing Symposium and won her first bouldering competition aged 50. She was the first female vice president of the BMC, former president of the Pinnacle Club (now honorary member of both) and her personal highlights include Right Wall and the Old Man of Hoy.



Bonny Masson

Multi-talented Bonny Masson was the first British woman to lead a new E2 (China Girl on Craig Dhu in 1984). "This is very significant; women are starting to make inroads on the new route scene," reported the Climber's Club Journal. Bonny went on to put up plenty of other trad routes, many on northern limestone, become a telemark ski instructor and lead expeditions all over the world.



Julie Tullis

Julie found her climbing niche when she was a 40-something mother of two: an expedition to Nanga Parbat kick-started a Himalayan addiction and high-altitude filming career. Over the following years, Julie filmed on the North Ridge of K2, the unclimbed North-East Ridge of Mount Everest and Broad Peak. In 1986, she became the first British woman to summit K2 but, along with four other climbers, never made it down. Her legacy lives on in the Julie Memorial Award.



Gill Kent

Gill was the first British woman to climb E6: Indecent Exposure at Raven Tor. This was at the cusp of the sport-climbing revolution before routes got re-equipped, so the line was a mix of old aid bolts, pegs and tat. Gill lived the life of a full-time climber with her then partner, rock-god Ron Fawcett. A funny writer with a sharp wit, she became the first female editor of a climbing magazine after buying On the Edge magazine. Despite two replacement hips, she is now firmly into everything cycling.



Ginette Harrison

Ginette was the best British high-altitude mountaineer of the day, battling it out across the world against the media-savvy, yet guided, Rebecca Stephens. Modest, tough Ginette was never too concerned about becoming famous: financing most of her expeditions through her work as a doctor. She was the second British woman (after Rebecca) to climb Everest, where she met her future husband Gary Pfisterer. They reached the top of the world hand in hand. She ticked the Seven Summits and made the first female ascent of Kanchenjunga in 1998, writing afterwards: "Over the years, four women had died while attempting to climb Kangchenjunga and it made me appreciate all the more how lucky I was." A year later she died in an avalanche on Dhaulagiri, aged 41.



Alison Hargreaves

On May 13 1995, Alison radioed her son and daughter from the top of Everest: "I am on the highest point of the world, and I love you dearly." She had just become the first woman in history to climb Everest without bottled oxygen and fixed ropes (only Reinhold Messner could match her style). The greatest British female mountaineer of all time, Alison left school at 18 to lead a life unashamedly devoted to climbing. She made the first British female ascent of the Eiger North Face when six months pregnant. Her next big challenge was climbing all six famous Alpine north faces in one summer, alone, during a long camping holiday with her husband and children. This was a first for any climber. After Everest she was in the media spotlight, but it was to be shortlived. Exactly three months later, she made the summit of K2 before dying with five others in a storm, aged 33. Her ambition had been to climb the three highest peaks in the world without oxygen; she had managed two. The stinging media backlash against a mother who dared to climb is still remembered to this day. Her son, Tom Ballard, has become a phenomenal alpinist.

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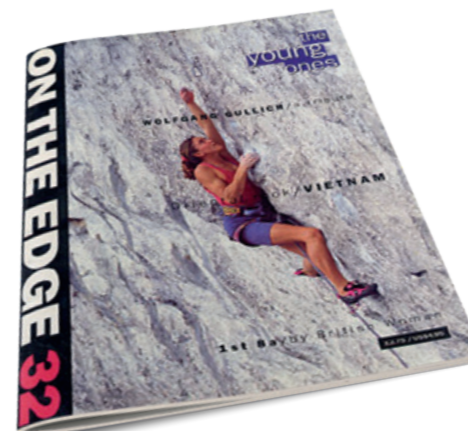
"IT IS BETTER TO HAVE LIVED ONE DAY AS A TIGER THAN A THOUSAND YEARS AS A SHEEP."

Tibetan proverb and favourite saying of Alison Hargreaves.

1990s

The third wave

Britpop and Brit rock. The 90s was a glorious fusion of British culture. Mixing it up was also the name of the climbing game: indoor walls multiplied, British women competed internationally alongside the world's best and bouldering burst out of the shadows. Lynn Hill lights a fire underneath every female climber when she becomes the first person in history to free-climb The Nose: "It goes, boys!"



The classic OTE cover of Rachel Farmer climbing Raindogs (8a) in 1992.



Fliss Butler

Trad queen who became national champion. Fliss – who grew up in the Peak – could hang on forever and became the first woman to regularly climb E5 and onsight E6 (Dreams and Screams at Rhoscolyn). She quietly ticked one hard route after another before becoming British Champion in 1992, aged 34: "Onsighting trad routes with bad protection helped me for competitions."



Rachel Farmer

In 1993, Sheffield medical student Rachel became the first British woman to climb 8a with her ascent of Raindogs at Malham. She was immortalised, ever stretching for the chains on the cover of On The Edge magazine, yet that same month she died after slipping from a walkway at Buoux in France. Her life – and surely her contribution to British climbing – had been cut short. "Face dancer" Rachel had been a ballet dancer before she moved to climbing, and her grace and poise shone through.



Ruth Jenkins

When Ruth crimped her way up Peak District testpiece Caviar (8a+) at Rubicon, quickly followed by Zeke the Freak (8b), she was the first British female to climb both grades, giving British female climbers a glimpse of the future. Formerly on the GB Climbing Team, Ruth set up a woman's coaching business out of the back of her van with Anne Arran and went on to become a stunt woman, working on Jonny English, Inception, Batman and Harry Potter.



Airlie Anderson

Dark-haired London whirlwind Airlie Anderson climbed rock, ice and snow. She famously exclaimed that "It's not the climb that counts, it's the grade," resulting in a storm of outrage. Her quest led her to be the first British female to tick a grit E7 (Master's Edge), controversially for the time carrying a mattress to the crag to pad out the start. Her famously no-nonsense, outspoken attitude caused turbulence from more conventional climbers but attracted the attention of sponsors.



Anne Arran

Best-known for free-climbing first ascents of big walls in remote corners of the planet: "It's really exciting to plan your own way up the cliff and stand where no-one else has stood." Anne led several E5s, was the third British woman to climb 8a and was the 1996/7 British Lead Champion. She started the first-ever children's climbing club at a UK climbing wall and coached the Junior team. Former youth and training officer for the BMC and president of the UIAA Youth Commission.



Naomi Guy

A key figure of the 90s British scene, redheaded, poetic Naomi first went to the US in 1996 to compete and fell in love with Colorado: "It didn't take long for me to find the centre of the climbing universe, as the gravitational pull is very strong in Eldorado Canyon." She loves climbing onsight – "it's the gift that keeps on giving". Big falls from boulders wore out her knees, but Naomi is still climbing after a knee replacement last year.



Glenda Huxter

A relentless trad-climbing machine, Glenda once said: "Climb from your heart and don't over-complicate your thoughts." She followed her own advice, becoming the first British woman to onsight E7 (The Bells! The Bells! at Gogarth) and plenty of E6s. She had a real appetite for creating new trad routes, many ground-up, most notably in North Wales, the islands of Lewis and Mingulay, Pakistan and Greenland. In 1997, she climbed one of the few big Karakoram walls to be climbed by an all-female team: Beatrice Tower with Kath Pyke and Louise Thomas.

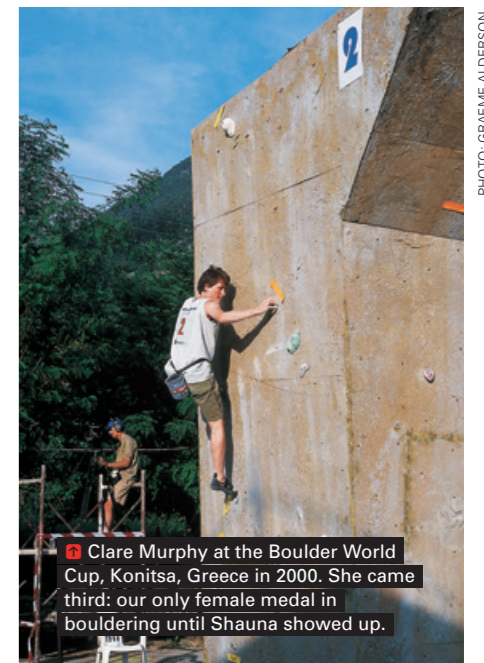


Louise Thomas Turner

Once described by Jerry Gore as "probably the hardest woman on the planet", Louise spent much of the 90s questing up huge rock walls. She climbed extensively all over the world and made many major first ascents from Baffin to Borneo, Greenland to Madagascar, Mali to Norway, Pakistan to Patagonia. Back home, she climbed VIII/7 in Scotland and E8 in Wales. The third British female to qualify as an IFMGA Mountain Guide, Louise worked at Plas y Brenin for many years, becoming Chief Instructor, and helped develop Mountain Instructor qualifications.



Anne Arran: happy on a big wall.



Clare Murphy at the Boulder World Cup, Konitsa, Greece in 2000. She came third: our only female medal in bouldering until Shauna showed up.



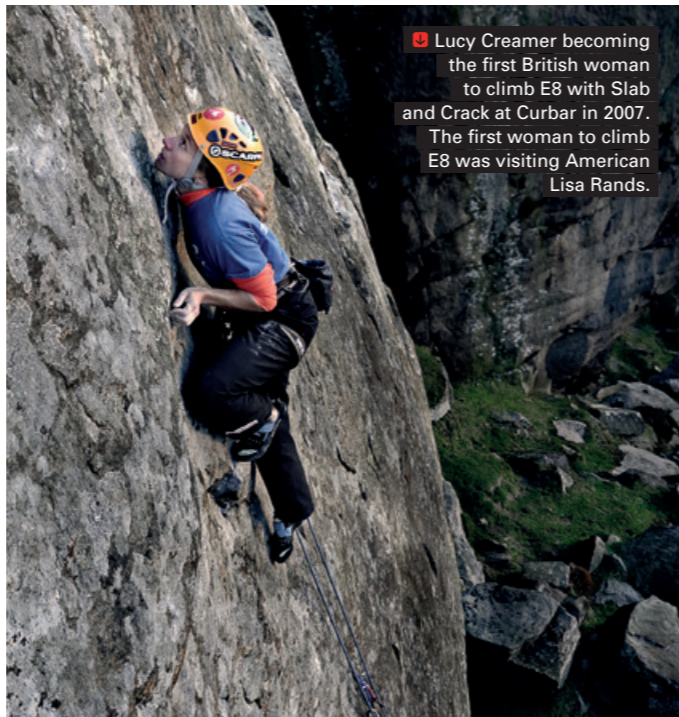
She could hang on forever. Fliss Butler at Rubicon.

Alison Hargreaves on the summit of Everest 1995. Using no fixed ropes or oxygen, only Messner could match her style.



Ruth Jenkins crimps her way up Zeke the Freak, Ben Moon's classic 8b, way back in 1998.

PHOTO: NALL GRIMES.



Lucy Creamer becoming the first British woman to climb E8 with Slab and Crack at Curbar in 2007. The first woman to climb E8 was visiting American Lisa Rands.

PHOTO: TIM GLASSBY.



MOUNTAIN HERITAGE TRUST: DISCOVERING STORIES

This article was created with the help of the Mountain Heritage Trust. As the charitable heritage arm of the BMC, the Mountain Heritage Trust houses some of the most significant material on British climbing and mountaineering. They're always looking for donations to continue a future where its vibrancy can be experienced by all.

From the first rock climbs on Napes Needle, to daring first ascents in the Greater Ranges, and incredible feats of competitive athleticism; their archive of films, images, books and artifacts echoes with some of Britain's most iconic achievements and its boldest personalities. Our community is founded on such history and they're working to inspire the next generation.

They began an ambition at the turn of the millennium to tell the stories of those who came before us. Now, however, they are looking to the future, and asking what stories might lie amidst the crags and climbing gyms up and down the country? We all have our own climbing history, and in 2019 the Mountain Heritage Trust is telling those inspiring stories from our incredible community.

FIND OUT MORE:
www.mountain-heritage.org



Clare Murphy

Dark bouldering horse Claire Murphy started climbing, aged 26, in 1996. Six months later she was winning competitions and by 1999 was British Bouldering Champion. In 2000 she became British Lead Champion and then moved to the states for the rock and the yoga. It worked. In 2002 she became the first British woman to boulder V10 and, in 2003, the first to reach V11/V12.



Lucy Creamer

Lucy thought she was scared of heights until she started climbing, yet went on to become the standout British female climber of her generation. For over a decade, Lucy was ahead of the game whilst others scrambled to keep up. She was seven-times British Lead Champion, a British Bouldering Champion, the first British woman to onsight 8a, redpoint 8b+, onsight E7 and climb E8. She also made the first ascent of an M9 mixed route in Colorado. Once said that she was "an obsessive climber but not obsessed with climbing".



Fiona Murray

In 2004, Fiona took a year off working as an Edinburgh civil servant, climbed some of the hardest mixed dry tooling routes in the world and featured in a movie, All Mixed Up. Fiona has ticked her way through countless Scottish winter routes and has several M10+s under her belt, including Canada's treacherous Caveman and Fast And Furious in Scotland. Both, as our Canadian cousins said, were 'First Dickless Ascents'. An early dry-tooling enthusiast, Fiona was regularly the oldest competitor in the annual Scottish Tooling Series, yet blew away younger rivals to win.



Libby Peter

Exudes a calm groundedness and literally wrote the book on climbing. IFMGA Mountain Guide Libby authored the handbook for the Single Pitch and Mountaineering Instructor Awards. Based in Snowdonia, Libby spectacularly smashed into the E5 grade in 2005, onsighting three in one week: "I love being high above runners. I often climb better once there's no option of any more gear, so you just have to get on with it."



Karin Magog

Pharmacist and under-the-radar trad heroine who is still climbing hard: last year Karin redpointed 8b+ and flashed E6. Karin climbed E7 back in 2000 and her first ascent of Stolen (8b) at Kilnsey in 2006 was probably the hardest new sport route by a British female at the time. When Hazel Findlay posted on Facebook recently that she was offering mental coaching, she was surprised when Karin, her childhood idol, got in touch. It turned out Karin rarely falls off routes and Hazel coached her in fall practice by phone. Karin reported: "This is the way forward, but I don't find it easy."



Emma Alsford

The most prolific new route activist in Britain? Emma and her partner Paul Donnithorne earned the nickname 'Mrs and Mr Pembroke' for the major part they played in the production of the definitive Pembroke guidebooks. In the process, between 1988 and 2008, Emma added over 350 new routes to Pembroke's cliffs as well as repeating hundreds of the area's routes up to E5. After cleaning up there, they then fell in love with the Jebel el Kest region of Morocco, developing more than 500 new routes and, yes, writing a definitive guidebook.



Katherine Schirmacher

Katherine started climbing at Leeds University with a madly motivated group of alpinists, but she quickly saw the light and turned to pure rock climbing, ticking 8a, E7 and 7c+ and competing for Britain. She has coached for almost a decade and played a key role in developing climbing coaching qualifications and coaching other instructors. "Climbing is my escape from the busyness of the world," says Katherine.



Lucinda Whittaker

British Lead Champion in 2002 and British Bouldering Champion in 2002/3, Lucinda applied her form outdoors to tick Brad Pitt at Stanage, a V10 in Hueco and a clutch of bold E7s. When she climbed End of the Affair at Cubar in 2010, she was one of the very few women to have climbed E8. After climbing Austrian Oak (8b) and Overnight Sensation (8a+) at Malham in 2011, she turned to coaching and is now a BMC talent development coordinator, helping to nurture the next generation.

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A NEW DAWN

The first climbing Olympics looms, and in drawbridge-raising times around the world, climbing takes a stand for diversity. The BMC's first-ever female president gets in by a landslide. Fran Brown is Britain's most successful-ever paraclimber. The cream of this female generation has typically grown up on the competition scene. But when they come of age, many swap regulations for a millennial life on the rocks and in vans with the gig economy as bread and social media for butter.

PHOTO: EDDIE FOWKE/IFSC



"THE ONLY CLIMBER IN HER FAMILY, SHAUNA COXSEY DECIDED TO BE A CLIMBER WHEN SHE WAS FOUR - AFTER WATCHING CATHERINE DESTIVELLE CLIMBING ON TV"



PHOTO: ALEX MESSENGER

Shauna Coxsey: our first Boulder World Cup champion.

Molly Thompson-Smith: one of our Olympic hopes.

Katy Whittaker joins the E7 club on Master's Edge.



Helen Rennard

Helen started winter climbing at 16 after reading her dad's copy of Chris Bonington's book *I Chose to Climb*: "The chapter about climbing Raven's Gully with Hamish MacInnes lit some kind of flame!" This led to a long, long list of first ascents and first winter ascents to her name, including Night Fury (IX,9) on the Ben and Southern Freeze (IX,9) on the Cobar. She was the first woman to tick the 36-mile, 18-Munro Tranter Round in winter: "I love being in the Scottish mountains in winter and my favourite days are long and tiring in remote areas."



Natalie Berry

Glaswegian whose slow and thoughtful climbing style earned her the nickname "The Sloth". Natalie started climbing aged nine and, after numerous comp wins, joined the GB Youth Climbing Team aged 11. Seven years later, she couldn't resist the outdoors. Natalie redpointed 8b almost as soon as she headed outside and then got started on trad. Almost more impressively, she has one of the most influential roles in contemporary British climbing: editor-in-chief of UKClimbing.



Becky Coles

Becky Coles can't be kept down in one place. She's led expeditions around the world, from South Georgia to the Wakhan Corridor of Afghanistan, making first ascents of 6,000m peaks and summiting 7,000m peaks along the way. She's also explored the world on bike, travelled overland back to the UK from Kathmandu and gained a PhD in Glacial Geomorphology. Becky is one of the growing number of women to have gained the Mountaineering Instructor Certificate, giving access to the cold, elite world of Scottish winter guiding.



Katy Whittaker

It's the three 8s for Katy. Katy grew up in the heart of the Peak District with her brother Pete. A regular on the competition scene, she won the British Bouldering Championships in 2007 but was inexorably drawn outside. A hard grit rampage followed. Slabs were her speciality – "size and gender don't usually matter – you have to rely on movement and the subtleties of the rock" – and she made the first female ascent of Knockin' on Heaven's Door (E8) at Curbar. A move to Llanberis and winters vanliffing on the continent saw her climb 8b+ and boulder 8A.



Fran Brown

Characterised by practical cropped hair and can-do attitude, Fran is our only World Champion. In 2006, a fall from height while working as a West End lighting designer left Fran with a spinal cord injury. She focused on gaining a first-class degree in physiotherapy and relearning how to climb, swim, ride a two-wheeled bike, sit ski and run in leg braces. Her trophy shelf must be heaving: amongst many other wins she's two-times World Paraclimbing Champion and current British Paracycling Women's Time Trial Champion. She's also the first female paraclimber to boulder 7B+ and lead 8a+.



Hazel Findlay

Adventure climber with a capital A. Hazel is a 5'2, straight-talking vanlifer who excels at whatever type of climbing she wants to: she's six-time junior national champ, first British woman to climb E9, free climb El Capitan and to redpoint 8c. A BMC ambassador, Hazel studied philosophy and is fascinated by the mental side of climbing. When she learnt to find even trad falls exhilarating, there was no stopping her. "The most likely limitation to our climbing performance is the mind, yet it's so often neglected," Hazel declared. Described by Beth Rodden as the future of trad climbing.



PHOTO: JON CLARK

📌 Mina Leslie-Wujastyk joining team 8c with her ascent of Mecca Extension at Raven Tor in 2014.

📌 Rebecca Coles: MIC and winter warrior.

"CLIMBING, FOR ME, IS ABOUT ROCKS, THE WIND IN MY HAIR, EXPOSURE AND DAYS OUTSIDE WITH FRIENDS."

Mina Leslie-Wujastyk



PHOTO: REBECCA COLES COLLECTION



📌 "My legs have never been so tired." Helen Rennard on the summit of Ben Nevis after completing the Tranter Round.

PHOTO: KEVIN WOODS



Mina Leslie-Wujastyk

Mina leads the ultimate pro-climber lifestyle: focused on climbing outside in amazing places. A former BMC vice president, Mina has bouldered hard (8B in Rocklands) and high (Careless Torque at Stanage) and competed for Britain. She joined the 8c club in 2014 with her ascent of Mecca Extension at Raven Tor and with recent ticks of two more – Nordic Plumber, Flatanger (8c) and Raining Bats and Dogs, Malham – she's surely in the running for 9a. Mina – who enjoys public speaking and did a TEDx talk in April – used to worry that she wasn't contributing to society enough, but "realised that if I can help to inspire healthy outdoor lifestyles, that's not a bad thing".



Emma Twyford

Britain's reigning trad queen. Cool-headed Emma has headpointed three E9s (two this year) and climbed stacks of E8s – flashing one. Emma grew up in the Lakes, climbing with her dad and his strong friends. By 15, she'd climbed E4 and was hooked. She moved to Llanberis in search of a hardcore trad scene and hasn't stopped since. Emma has also climbed 8c, and could well be the first British woman to climb 9a. Working as a route-setter, Emma is down-to-earth and open; her blog talks about facing fears and bouts of depression.



Maddy Cope

Nine years ago, Warringtonian Maddy knew zilch about climbing. Then, at a terrible nightclub, someone told her an exciting story about the Alps and offered to take her to the climbing wall. They'd unleashed a stealthy, hard cranker: Maddy joined the 8c club last year and loves climbing variety, from UK trad to free climbing on El Capitan. Well, most of it: "I like watching people compete, but my passion is climbing outside and this is what motivates me."



Shauna Coxsey MBE

Steely determination, long blonde hair and a Red Bull ambassador hat? Enter Shauna Coxsey. As a child, Shauna decided to be a climber after watching Catherine Destivelle climbing in Mali on TV. Now she's Britain's most successful competition climber ever with an MBE from the Queen. Shauna has won every British Bouldering Championship she's entered, is the only Brit to have won the Bouldering World Cup and is one of only four women to have bouldered 8B+. A climbing nation hopes that she'll continue this unstoppable success in the 2020 Olympics. Co-founding the Women's Climbing Symposium, she's passionate about encouraging other women to climb. A BMC ambassador, Shauna is often found on Instagram doing acro-yoga with Leah Crane.

PHOTO: LYNN ROBINSON COLLECTION



Molly Thompson-Smith

Focused, confident and competitive, competitions are Molly's life. If she's not training, she's thinking about training: "I just love feeling satisfied after a hard session!" Molly couldn't live without her headphones and listens to beats to get in the zone. And it works: with over 20 national wins to her name, including British Lead Champion four years running, BMC Ambassador Molly will be training for the upcoming Tokyo Olympics. Now 21, she's also got into climbing outside and travelling. A van can't be far off.



Lynn Robinson

This June, Lynn Robinson became the 29th president of the BMC – our first-ever female president since our formation in 1944. Lynn, a senior NHS manager, is as happy climbing indoors, walking in the hills, mountaineering or tackling a big wall. She believes in an inclusive vision for the BMC's future, and that we have a crucial role in encouraging people to enjoy our crags, hills and mountains, whilst behaving responsibly and minimising impact. A passionate wide-ranging volunteer for 25 years, and former BMC vice president, Lynn received the George Band Award in 2017 for Outstanding Voluntary Contribution to Mountaineering.



Hannah Slaney

This 19-year-old from Bristol was talent-spotted when she tried her first climbs at a children's party, aged eight. This year she was crowned Britain's first World Youth Champion – winning gold in Bouldering out in Moscow. She's been steadily rising through the rankings: Hannah's also the 2018 British Bouldering Champion and the reigning British Lead Champion. She's now moving up to the seniors and we can't wait to see how she gets on. Watch out world. 🇬🇧

WHO WOULD YOUR 50 BE?

Who is a game changer? The athlete who breaks performance barriers or someone who lives life on their terms? British climbing and mountaineering are wild, diverse activities with a rich, deep history, and trying to tame our unruly heritage into a list is artificial. All we could aim for was to share inspirational stories of women and discover what connected them across the generations. We hope we succeeded, but know that there are many equally awesome women not covered in these mere 13 pages. To those, we can only say: bring on part two.

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📌 On top. New BMC president Lynn Robinson on the summit of Mount Elbrus.