



LAND OF PLENTY

A SHORT TOUR OF RECENT (AND NOT SO RECENT) ROCK CLIMBING DEVELOPMENTS IN THE WAKATIPU.

CRADLED BY the Central Otago ranges the Queenstown region is an exceptional landscape of lakes, valleys and mountains—a slice of New Zealand endowed with both intense beauty and a bounty of natural resources. Rock abounds here and there are endless crags and climbing possibilities.

Not only does Queenstown have an ideal climate for climbing, but it also has some of the best and most diverse rock climbing locations in New Zealand: there are remote areas, massive cliffs, casual approaches, sport crags, classic trad routes, overhangs and slabs—there are even crags in the middle of the town.

Although Queenstown has often been described as the adventure capital of New Zealand, you can easily escape the hustle and bustle of the town to taste freedom and solitude.

Sport climbing development in the Wakatipu region ignited in the early 1990s with the enthusiasm of mountain guide Dave McLeod and new route activist Ian Binnie, among others. Areas such as Wye Creek gained a reputation over the following years and local crags yielded a popular collection of sport and trad classics on the compact Otago Schist. Just a decade later some caffeine-driven locals have found new lines, crags and a handful of enthusiasm to put up many more new routes; there are now more than 500. Regardless of your climbing level, Queenstown is certainly an everyman’s destination. From beginner to expert, from top ropes to run outs, the Wakatipu basin is full of splendid challenges and a great variety of routes.

Inspired by the recently published ‘Queenstown Rock, Ice and Mixed (Wakatipu Climbing Club), this article celebrates not only those many crags and routes that have been established in recent years, but also the region and its climbers. We invite you to grab your gear and discover these new playgrounds.



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**PHOTO ESSAY BY
GUILLAUME CHARTON**

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THE SUNDIAL HIGH ABOVE

There is something mystical about finally being somewhere that you have been dreaming about for years. A full sense of satisfaction rises up from deep inside as you reach this place and lift the veil off this much wanted gift. For the majority of Queenstown climbers the Sundial is the kind of place that's often seen but rarely visited. It first caught my attention back in 2001 when I bought my first *Queenstown Rock and Ice Guide*, a stapled resource written by locals. On its back cover was a green and white picture of a striking arête with a climber scaling it, that had to be it: the Sundial. A few years later, the dream is within reach and we are walking up the steep tussock-covered slope. As we claw our way up onto the ridge there it is: a golden piece of schist—40 metres high—sitting gracefully on the edge of the world. The breathtaking backdrop fills the rest of the scene, with Lake Wakatipu surrounded by jagged mountains and gentle hills. The bolted climbs are all superb—just to fit with the stunning location, and as if this was not perfect enough, a couple of thousand metres above the sun emerges from the Remarkables. On the way down, something tells me that this dream will last for a while.



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SOUTH WYE OF SCHIST AND MEN

Fresh rock, a new crag. As you venture into the South Wye, you will be overwhelmed by the rock faces rising on either side of the valley. Yes, the possibilities are endless, and without doubt you will look at the rock with fresh eyes before scaling the glacially carved schist. The old adage 'you can't have your cake and eat it too' makes sense here: to reach this playground you will have to endure an approach with a heavy pack on sometimes steep terrain, but then the reward is won as every single route is worth climbing, with most of them stretching over four pitches on solid rock.

An improbable home perhaps—kilometres away from Queenstown—but this seemingly uninhabitable location feels cosy. The alpine flora tints this place with bright colours while the river fills the valley with its music. 'Home sweet home' some will say.

A moment of clarity—The bitter breeze passing above the sleeping bag; the warm body within shivers, awakened with a cold kiss of morning dew, taking in the first mountain breath, witnessing the rest of the world awakening in the distance. The smell of fresh coffee brewing in the bivvy makes it a welcoming place. The shelter allows you to have a place to gather your thoughts before and after the effort. Full credit should be awarded to our local bivvy builders: Aaron and Sally Ford and Tony Burnell, whose sweat and hard labour has made this place a safe haven.





THE BONEYARD A MINI CALANQUES NEXT TO QUEENSTOWN

It's the middle of winter and the temperature is below zero around the country. It is so cold and crisp that you can almost touch the air. All that's needed for a good climbing session would be a sunny and sheltered place away from the crowds, that's still nearby.

The Boneyard, a few minutes away from Wye Creek, has all of that.

Here we are: climbing metres from Lake Wakatipu. Waves lap the schist and create a background music. Moderate routes and easy access allow you to bring beginners. During summer water soloing is possible. The western aspect means late climbing with a postcard view of the lake. Another awesome day at the Boneyard, yet again I'm wondering why I left it so long before I started climbing here.



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**CELINE AUSTIN
CHEVAL** on the third pitch of the *Spell of the Barking Spider*, Shirt-Tail Bluff, Kingston.



KINGSTON: A CHARACTER ALL OF ITS OWN

Take in the scene: register the whistle of the steam train, observe the locals—the machinist, the driver, the owners of the local pub. Be dazzled by memories that have been brought back by this mechanical creature that weighs tons and breathes a simple mix of coal and steam.

After the pioneering rush to bring this part of New Zealand to life, Kingston was able to keep away from the development and to sit still, relaxed, by the southern tip of Lake Wakatipu.

Eighty years old, the healthy and well maintained Kingston Flyer is a trophy that the town holds high and proud, one of those reminders of times passed. In the mid nineteenth century, locomotives were used by thousands of people to access this side of the lake. Gold seekers would then board the TSS Earnslaw to be carried to a fate of hard labour for few nuggets.

However the asphalt won over the rail and from 1936, the tide turned and the steam quickly disappeared out of sight with a road sidling established along on the eastern shores of New Zealand's third largest lake. Nevertheless passionate locals have renovated the old beast and nowadays a journey on board of the Kingston Flyer can still take place—for fun.

Indeed, this climbing playground is very different from any others in New Zealand: not only have the new and old been mixed together, but the old is taking over the new—giving this place a look out of the ordinary.

So explore the crags and routes that sit just above Kingston. Take friends to savour the climbing on superb schist. While scaling the rock, listen to the birds in the surrounding forest criticising your footwork and analysing your technique. Observe the blank looks of the bogans and their jet skis two hundred metres below. Smile and keep climbing. Cheer wildly for your partner finishing the last pitch of the day. And when it's your turn to return the rubber of your shoes to land, turn around and absorb the grand view over the Southern Wakatipu, just absorb the contrast ... and your imagination may range out to a different time of history.





CHINA WALL A CRAG NOT FAR FROM PARADISE

We reached Paradise on a Sunday morning. Clouds lingered in the valley, pierced by mystical mountains showing off their snowy summits. The approach on the rough gravel road, with deep fords and dusty corners, made the drive an adventure and offered a respite from traffic.

When we arrived we expected gleaming gates, angels and trumpets (as for any paradise) but instead a zillion untamed sand flies welcomed us and were a strong reminder that standing still was not an option. Solitude beckoned as we left the car and followed the path through native forest. Playful fantails surrounded, and after a fifteen minute walk we reached our destination: China Wall.

Jutting some 70 metres above the beech forest, China Wall overlooks the Dart Valley. It's a serene place; multihued moss creeps over exposed roots, and a myriad of lichens thrive among the boulders. The grey schist is of good quality and offers lots of fun for sport climbers looking for routes in the twenties. There is a good variety of climbing styles: open handed holds to crimpers, slabs to overhangs. Routes launch themselves over two tiers of 25 metres each which allow a full sense of climbing. Once you reach the top of the first tier you can appreciate the view: a landscape that has been sculpted for millennia by the Dart River. China Wall is simply more than an ordinary crag and the location makes it an ideal climber's retreat.

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QUEENSTOWN: ROCK, ICE AND MIXED

The long anticipated guidebook to rock, ice and mixed climbing in Queenstown is finally out. After more than two years of intensive dedication on this project, editor Guillaume Charton has compiled a thorough guidebook: *Queenstown: Rock, Ice and Mixed*.

This book features hundreds of new climbs, new crags and also ice and mixed climbing around Queenstown. Many local climbers have assisted, including: Aaron and Sally Ford, Tony Burnell, Dave Bolger, Rupert Gardiner and many more.

Published by the Queenstown Climbing Club, this resource reaches new level of quality. Though there has been a colossal amount of research there are certainly going to be mistakes. Please feel free to email us with corrections: queenstownclimbing@gmail.com.

Watch out for it on the shelves from October, or order from the NZAC: www.alpineclub.org.nz
For more on the Queenstown Climbing Club visit:

