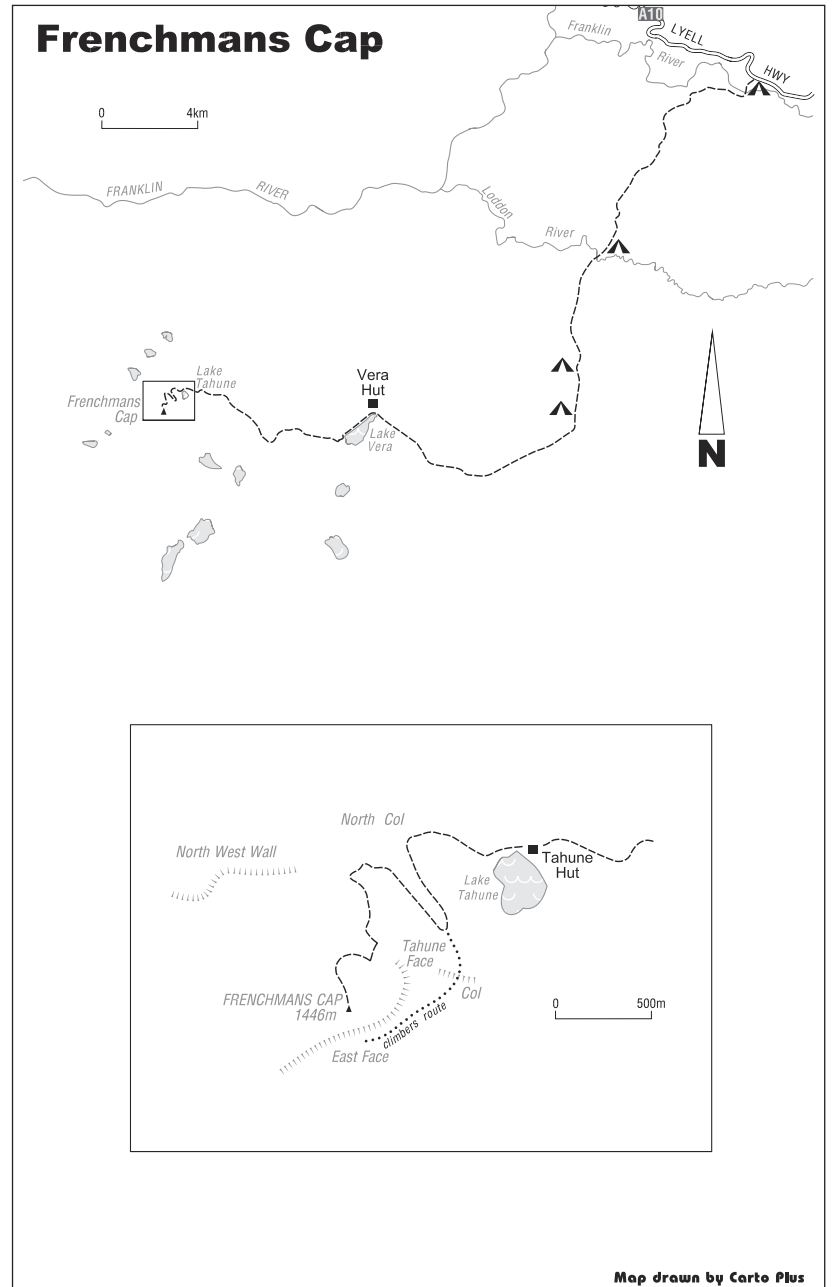


# FRENCHMANS CAP

## Frenchmans Cap



## ■ INTRODUCTION

Frenchmans Cap has one of the biggest cliffs in Australia, with its' magnificent wall of overhanging quartzite almost 400m high. It is possibly the premier wilderness climbing venue in the country, and there are 70 recorded routes on the various cliffs and peaks in the vicinity. Jagged peaks rise from the ridges surrounding the Cap, and beautiful lakes lie in the valleys below. On a clear day the scenery is breathtaking, with views stretching for many kilometres into the distance.

Endless torture is one way to describe the 25km walk to the Tahune Hut at the base of Frenchmans. The 'sodden Lodden' plains are an interminable bog hole and the track has many uphill sections, but the landscape is spectacular, and the climbing more than makes up for the arduous walk. There is a great sense of achievement from climbing here, knowing you have worked hard for an ascent.

Climbing on that ocean of white quartzite is a unique, exhilarating, serious and intense experience. The face climbing is superb and the exposure is mind blowing. The protection is often spaced and requires creativity to find placements during a typical Frenchmans runout. The rock is generally sound, but there are sections of dubious quality on most routes, and the Sydney route in particular, takes several days to dry out after wet weather. Route finding is tricky at times with a lot of traversing involved. Climbing on the big face is a serious undertaking and you should allow at least 10 hours to complete a route.

If you strike it lucky with the weather and actually manage to do some climbing, it is bound to be an unforgettable experience.



Gern Cooper traverses out across the void on the 2nd pitch of the *Great Flake* (22), Frenchmans Cap. Photo: Gerry Narkowicz

## ■ LOCATION AND ACCESS

There is a well made track which starts on the south side of the Lyell Highway, just over 200 kilometres from Hobart and approximately 50 kilometres from Queenstown. It is 25km from the highway to the hut at Lake Tahune. Most people take a day and a half to get to Tahune Hut, spending the first night at Lake Vera Hut, and the return walk is generally done in one long day. The section from Lake Vera to Tahune Hut is steep and strenuous. People take a risk when leaving their vehicle at the start of the walking track, as they are sometimes vandalized.

## ■ CAMPING

There is a campsite near the road at the start of the walking track, and there are others at regular intervals along the

track. There are huts at Lake Vera and Lake Tahune which most climbers will prefer, rather than carrying a tent as well as the weight of climbing gear.

## ■ CLIMATE

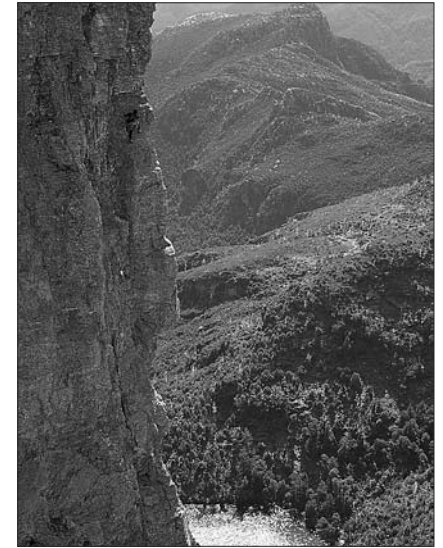
Being an alpine area and at an altitude of 1443m, climbers should come prepared for wet weather, and even snow, at any time of year. Many climbers have gone to Frenchmans Cap and spent a week sitting around the hut in mist and rain. However, the most settled weather occurs from February until Easter, and people should try and time their trip to coincide with high pressure systems over the state. An early start is advisable on the big routes, and from December to February, daylight saving allows for a late finish to climbing, up to about 8.p.m. The shaded southerly faces will generally be colder than other areas.

## ■ HISTORY

The first recorded rock climbs on Frenchmans Cap were done at Easter time in 1962 by people such as Mike Douglas, John Fairhall, Peter Sands, Robert Lidstone, Robert Hosking and Doug Cox. Routes such as the Western Slab route, North-east Passage, Deceptive Gully, Gwendolen Buttress and Solomons Sanctuary were done at this time. Cox and Douglas also made an audacious attempt on the main face in the vicinity of De Gaulle's Nose. Wearing gym boots and equipped with a piton hammer, 3 mild steel pitons and a couple of slings, they headed up with a thin no.2 laid rope tied around the waist. They climbed about 60m up De Gaulle's Nose before making an epic retreat and abseil from a single dodgy piton placement.

The first breakthrough on the main face came with the ascent of *A Toi la Gloire*, otherwise known as the Sydney Route, by Bryden Allen and Jack Pettigrew in 1965. The route is a classic and is the cliff's most often repeated climb. A team of Victorians including Chris Dewhirst, John Fahey, Philip Stranger, John Veasey, Chris Baxter, Val Kennedy, John Moore and John Ewbank provided the next major development in 1968. Routes such as *Chimes Of Freedom*, *Valerie*, *Waterloo Road*, *Fleur-de-lis* and *Tierry le Fronde* were climbed on this trip. One of the greatest achievements on Frenchmans was the ascent of *Conquistador* in 1972 by Chris Dewhirst, Dave Neilson and Ian Ross. It was the first route to blast straight up the middle of the main face and was a serious and sparsely protected climb which also involved an overnight bivouac.

The next major new route development was the ascent of *The Great Flake* in 1982 by Kim Carrigan and Evelyn Lees, an outstanding and obvious line on the main face. Carrigan



Climber on *Tierry le Fronde* 16, Frenchmans Cap. Photo: Simon Carter

## Frenchmans Cap

returned in 1983 with Mark Moorhead and climbed the hardest route on the mountain to date, the mighty De Gaulle's Nose which is the arête between the SE face and the E face.

From the late eighties to the mid-nineties, the main activist was local climber, Peter Steane. He added 15 routes to the area with partners Garn Cooper, Doug Fife, Roxanne Wells, Nikki Sunderland and Colin Moorhead. The best route to emerge from Steane's activity was The Lorax, a magnificent climb up the main face between the Great Flake and Conquistador which he climbed with Garn Cooper in 1988.

### GUIDEBOOK

For comprehensive descriptions of all routes in the area, consult the Frenchmans Cap guide put out by Rock Magazine or the online guide by Jonathon Nermutt and Phil Robinson at [www.thesarvo.com](http://www.thesarvo.com)

### ROUTE ACCESS

For routes on the South-East and East Face, allow an hour to 90 minutes walk from the hut. From the hut, take the summit walking track to the point where it begins to zig-zag underneath the Tahune Face. Leave the track when close to the col on the small ridge, on the L side of the Tahune Face. Aim for this col, then drop down a gully and keep traversing L around the base of the East Face. The going is remarkably easy and scrub free for the most part. Descent is via the bushwalkers track from the summit.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Peter Steane edited the notes and provided topo and action photographs. Garn Cooper also assisted with route descriptions and topos. Peter Jackson provided a sketch of the SE face which appeared in Phil Robinsons' 1979 CCT guide to Frenchmans. This updated guide now appears online at [www.thesarvo.com](http://www.thesarvo.com) with thanks to Jonathon Nermut and Phil Robinson for accessing this information.

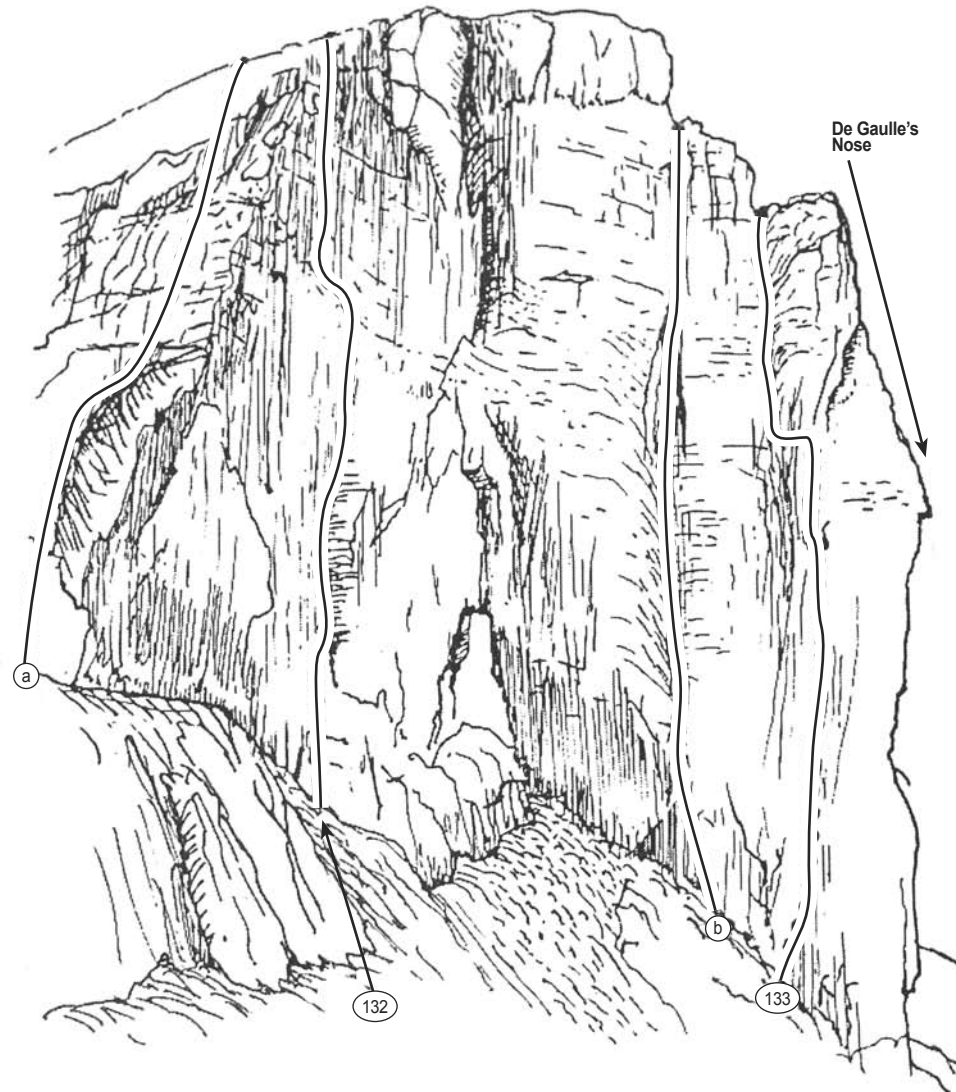
## SOUTH-EAST FACE

The face left of De Gaulle's Nose.

### 132 The Chimes of Freedom 270m 17

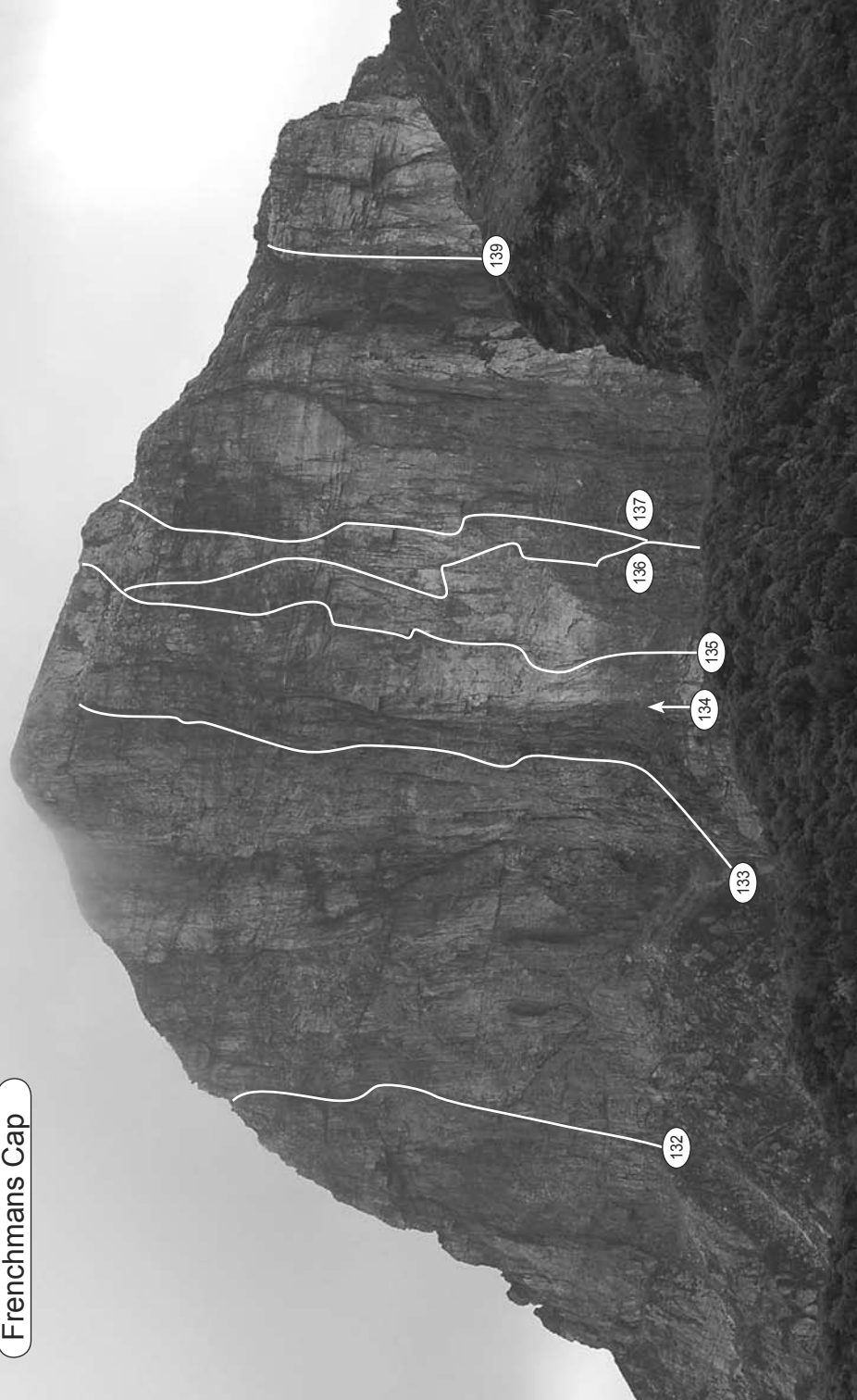
The route up the L side of the face, using a prominent ramp in a L-facing corner low down on the climb. Start from a small col below the ramp. **1)** 30m. Up in the direction of the ramp. **2)** 30m. Straight-forward climbing to the bottom of the ramp. **3)** 24m. Continue to a vegetated ledge. The first 3 pitches could easily be done in two pitches. **4)** 18m (crux). Up a corner to a small belay ledge on the R. **5)** 35m. Ascend the crack in the corner to the foot of a chimney. **6)** 27m. Either climb the chimney or its R arete to a big ledge. **7)** 20m. Move L and up a sparsely protected pitch to the base of a dark corner. **8)** 18m. Climb the corner until possible to head R and up to a ledge. Move back L to another corner. **9)** 35m. Ascend the corner for 18m before heading L over loose blocks. **10)** 35m. Step L around the corner and climb easily to the top. FA: John Moore, John Ewbank (alt)18-2-68. (three aids on pitch 4) FFA: Dave Neilson, Chris Dewhirst (alt) 1/70

## Frenchmans Cap (South East Face)



other routes  
a - Southern Parapet 10  
b - Valerie 16 M4

Sketch by Peter Jackson  
from 1979 CCT Guide by Phil Robinson

**133 A Toi la Gloire 380m 17**

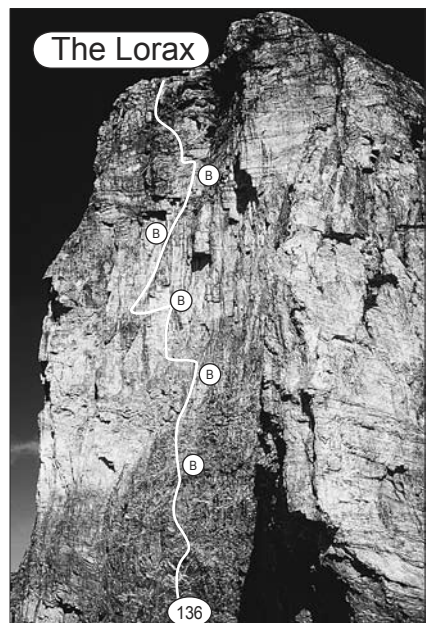
Translates as "Thine Be the Glory". Commonly referred to as *The Sydney Route*. This was the first route up one of the big faces, and is quite popular. It takes a prominent weakness just L of De Gaulle's Nose, and after a spectacular leftwards rising traverse, takes an easy chimney / gully to finish just R of the summit. Start by going up scree in the gully L of *De Gaulle's Nose* to locate a vegetated crack. **1)** 35m. Climb the crack to gain a ramp. Move R along the ramp to belay. **2)** 35m. Move R aiming for the base of a chimney and climb it. The real climbing starts here. **3)** 18m. Climb to the rocky terrace diagonally over to the L. **4)** 35m. Trend diagonally R to a detached pinnacle. **5)** 24m. Up a chimney for 12m then move past the overhang via the suspect rock to the L of a small corner. **6)** 30m. Climb the chimney up to the R, then continue up the L crack before heading R and up to a belay. **7)** 30m. Climb a corner up to the R, then up past a ledge on the L. **8)** 30m. Traverse 6 m L round the corner to a weakness leading up to a good ledge. Climb 3m higher to the top of a block. A sparsely protected pitch. **9)** 20m (crux). Up across the L wall to the arete and a small ledge. This pitch is known as *L'Escalier du Diable (The Devil's Stairway)*. **10)** 35 m. Downclimb L into the chimney leading to the top. **11)** 30 m. Climb the chimney with the large chockstone. **12)** 30 m. Continue up the line. **13)** 30 m. Easily to the summit. FA: Bryden Allen, Jack Pettigrew 7-1-65. FFA (one aid on pitch 9) Chris Dewhurst, Dave Neilson (alt) 1-70. **Direct Start 14:** A more pleasant start to the route, beginning from a grassy knoll directly below the route. Head for the big chimney of pitch 3. **1a)** 27m. Follow the obvious line up L. **2a)** 35m. Continue up L to eventually gain the large ledge. Move R to the large chimney and continue as for *The Sydney Route*. FA: Bryden Allen, Reg Williams (alt) 2/75

**EAST FACE****134 De Gaulle's Nose 330m 23**

Ascends the main arete between the SE Face and the E Face, with the 'nose' being the large roof seen in profile. 50 m R of the nose at the top of some vegetated ramps, is a chossy corner. Start here. **1)** 40m Climb corners to bushy ledge then move L to trees. **2)** 40m, 20. Move L to base of corners, then up past old piton and over blocks to ledge. **3)** 15m, 21. Up shallow corner on R to horizontal break. **4)** 50m, 23. Go L to crack, then up past roof and steep crack to ramp. Gain large ledge above via crack on the L. **5)** 50m, 21. Move to LH side of ledge and climb diagonally to shallow corner. Climb this corner then trend diagonally R to big flake. **6)** 50m. Move to arête on the R and up easy ground to big ledge. **7)** 40 m. Ascend front of buttress easily to ledge. **8)** 45 m. Up the nose, then move R into groove. Continue to the top with some loose rock. FA: Kim Carrigan, Mark Moorhead (var) 31/1/83

**135 The Great Flake 370m 22**

The obvious great flake on the E Face. Start at the corner down and R of the flake. **1)** 90m. Climb to the base of the corner. **2)** 25m, 16. Ascend the corner and exit L to a ledge. **3)** 40m, 20. Move L for 8m then up to gain a shallow corner. Climb this to a small belay stance. BB. **4)** 40m, 20. Climb the loose flakes above to gain a ramp leading to the foot of a corner. **5)** 40m, 19. Up the corner to the roof, then turn it via an undercling. Up the off-width to a bulge, then R on to the face and up to a sloping ledge. **6)** 40m, 22. Turn the roof



then off-width to a bulge before heading R and up to a shallow corner on the arete. Move 5m R to belay. **7)** 21m,21. Ascend the corner above for 5m, then L for 8m into the next corner. Climb this up to a belay ledge. **8)** 40m,18. Up a short slab and the wall above to a ledge. Move R to avoid roof then back L to the base of a shallow corner. **9)** 30m,18. Overhang and corner to a ledge, then move 5m R and continue to top. FA: Kim Carrigan, Evelyn Lees 29/1/82

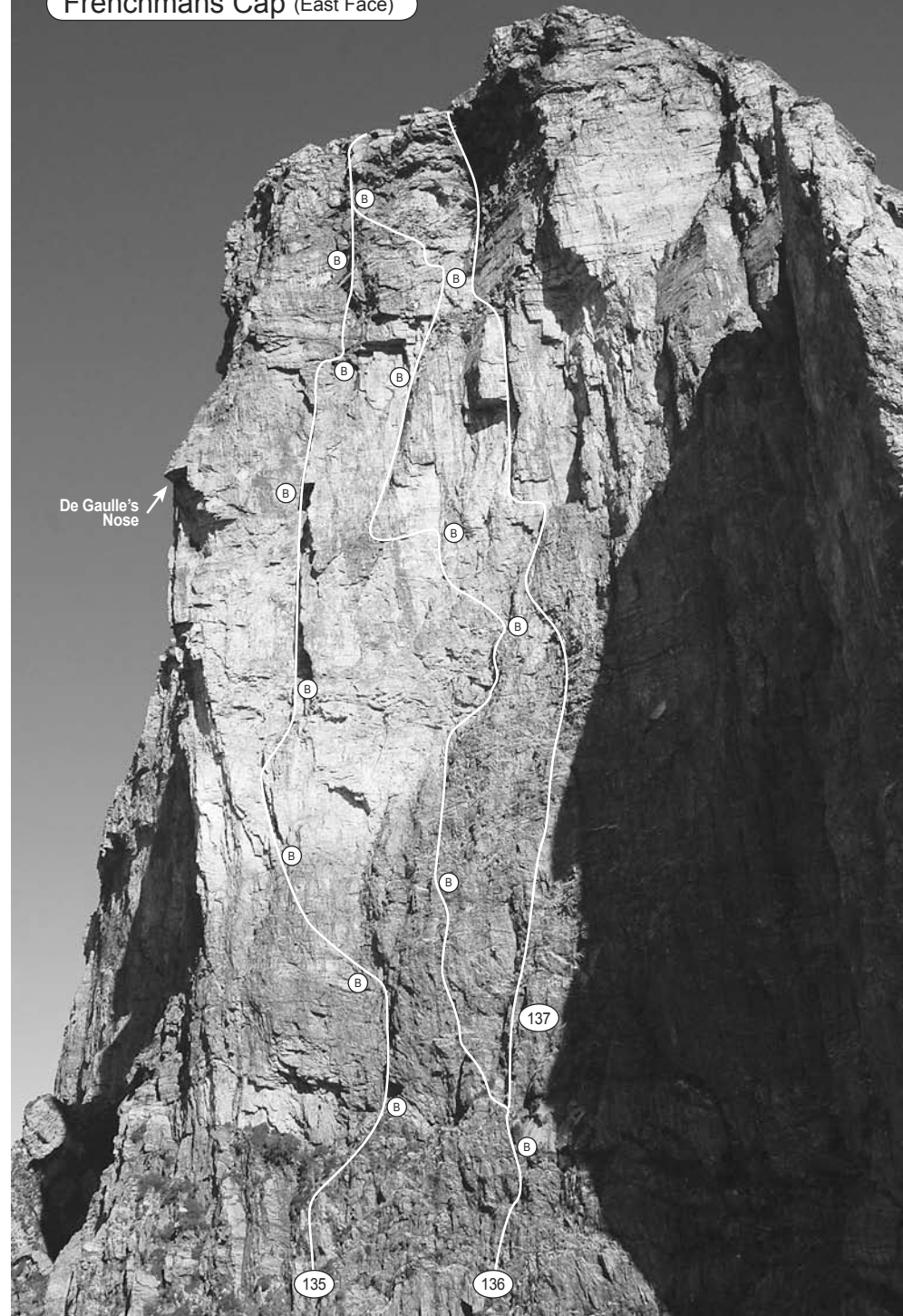
**136 The Lorax 380m 20**

A great route up the face R of *The Great Flake*. After a steep crack pitch and an outrageous traverse, it takes the R leaning corner level with the upper half of *The Great Flake*. Sparsely protected on pitches 6 and 7. **Start:** There is a grassy ramp about half way across the East Face and 60–80 m up. Solo to the top of this ramp to begin. **1)** 55m. Diagonally L up ramps for 15m then up the wall L of prominent corner. **2)** 50m. Up 5m then L and up 10m to the border

between the steep white rock and the black rock. Follow R-leading diagonal to large bollard belay 20 to 25 m diagonally L below Bus-stop Ledge. **3)** 35m, 20. Traverse 10m L to cave, then climb the overhanging crack (difficult) for about 15m to belay at top of R-leading corner. **4)** 50m. Traverse 15m L along obvious ledge, then up corner to good ledge on L wall. **5)** 37m. Step R around the arête to spacious ledge. Go up juggy wall and short steep hand-crack to a ledge under, and slightly left of, the big black corner of *Conquistador*. **6)** 38m, 19. Up 5m, L 6m, up short steep bottomless corner (difficult) and wall above for 6m, L7m and up corner to belay on commodious ledge, R of obvious deep cleft. **7)** 40m, 18. Up wall for about 4m, step L and continue up wall then corner, passing small roof, to a ledge below a big steep black mossy corner. Step up and R around the arête and traverse easily R to belay at the top of a small chimney. FA: Peter Steane and Gam Cooper (alt). February 1988

**137 Conquistador 360m 20**

A sparsely protected, serious undertaking, but with some superb climbing. The main feature in the middle of the face is Bus-stop Ledge and the climb starts below the L side of it. **1)** 35m. Climb the most obvious line of weakness in the vicinity. **2)** 35m. Up a corner, then move R to a ledge. **3)** 35m. Trend R to a corner with a block in it. **4)** 15m. Traverse L for 12m to a good ledge. **5)** 35m. Climb the steep wall direct to a piton belay. **6)** 43m. Up the loose corner to Bus Stop Ledge. **7)** 27m. A fingertip traverse L for 5m leads to the base of a corner. Climb this to a bolt belay. **8)** 35m. Climb to the top of the V corner then continue to ledge. **9)** 35m. Move L along ledge to corner, then climb this to large ledge. Continue until it is possible to step on to the R wall. PB. **10)** 40m. Up then R aiming for a small ledge on a detached block. Move diagonally L for 6m to PB. A grade 15 pitch with not much gear. **11)** 24m (crux) Climb to the loose blocks, then move L, then back R. Some say this pitch is more like grade 22.



FA: Chris Dewhirst, Dave Neilson, Ian Ross (var) 5/ 6-1-72. FFA: Adrian Herington and Phil Cullen made the second ascent in January 1983, eliminating all aid except for one point on pitch 11. First completely free ascent David Jenkins, Rohan Hyslop (alt), Lucy Collaery (last point from pitch 11) 2/90

### 138 The Ninth of January 160 m 19

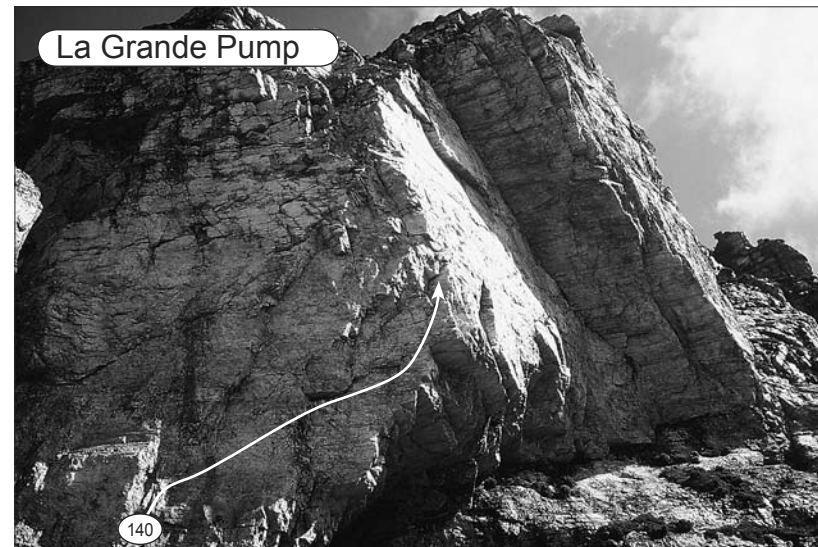
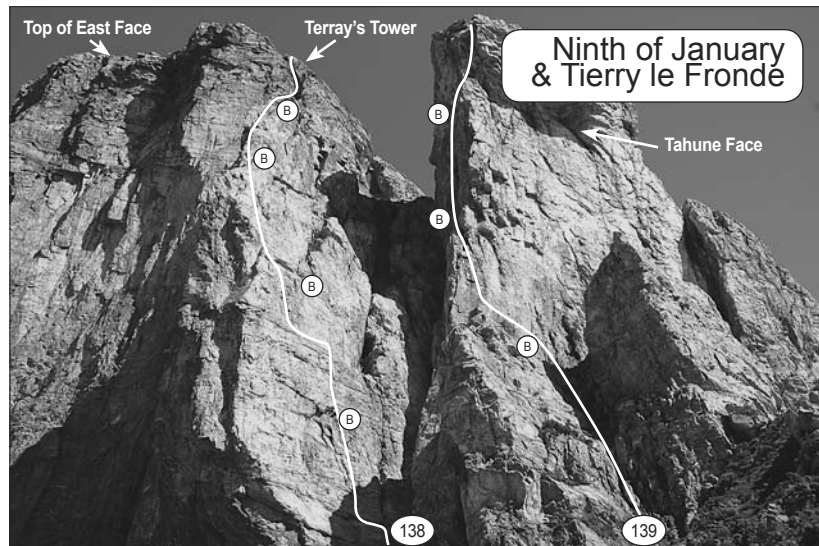
This route takes the obvious and appealing flake on the north side of Terray's Tower, the leftwards traverse half way up it, and then the arête to a beautiful summit. **Start:** In the gully R of Terray's Tower, at the R-trending crack. **1)** 40m. Climb crack for about 15m. Traverse L about 6m and then up to semi-hanging belay below roof/flake. **2)** 25m. Crux. Up flake about 8m past bulge until angle eases. Now ignore the easy continuation of flake, and traverse L about 7m. Now go up and back R to belay above traverse (or alternatively go up L to belay on the arête). **3)** 40m. L to arête and climb it to a large bushy platform. **4)** 55m. Move L and climb front of tower through short bottomless chimney to top. Descent: Abseil 10m into gully, scramble up it and descend. FA: Pete Steane, Garn Cooper (alt) 27/2/86

## TAHUNE FACE

The cliff facing the hut and Lake Tahune.

### 139 Thierry le Fronde 147m 16

The L arete of the Tahune Face which finishes through the summit overhangs. Climb 60m up the gully L of the Tahune Face to start below an obvious crack at the top of the small buttress on the L, at the foot of the face. **1)** 30m. Climb the wall and crack to gain a ledge. **2)** 24m. Move L to the arete and up crack to a ledge and spike. **3)** 27m. Up the arête



to a ledge where it's possible to traverse L. **4)** 27m. Traverse L for 6m, then up for 15m to another ledge. Move R and around the corner for 6m and belay below the roofs. **5)** 39m. Up through the overhangs to the top. FA: Phillip Stranger, Chris Dewhirst (alt) 15-2-68

**Direct Start 1a)** 45m, 16. Climb the buttress to the start of the first pitch instead of climbing the gully. FA (unknown) 75. **Direct Variant 4a)** 25m, 17. A good variant which avoids the two traverses by climbing the overhang on the arete and the wall above. FA: Mike Law, Chris Baxter 3/3/84

## NORTH-WEST WALL AND ENVIRONS

This is the gentler slope of Frenchmans Cap which faces Lake Gwendolen. Access is over the N Col. The main face consists of a very complex array of buttresses and pinnacles. The prominent buttress slanting down to the bottom R of the face is Gwendolen Buttress. The large pinnacle in the middle of the face is Coxs Castle. Solomons Sanctuary is the large gully to its R.

### 140 La Grande Pump 60 m 21

About 200m W of the North Col, start L of the big roof which forms the L arete of a striking overhanging corner. **1)** 35 m. Up R to vague curving flake and undercut arête, then up to hanging belay. A sparsely protected pitch. **2)** 25 m Up R of arete to white wall. Up this (exposed, spaced protection) to rest. L round arete and up (easier). FA: Mike Law, Chris Baxter 4/3/84

## Frenchmans Cap

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### 141 Electra 100m 17

Excellent rock and good pro. Find lowest major roofs on front (N) side of Coxs Castle. Just L of roof is attractive corner. Possibly cairned. 1) 40m Line to good ledge. 2) 60m (Easy, with alternatives possible.) L up juggy crack for 4m or so. Wander up towards big corner high above. Up corner to steep section with slightly schisty rock. R for 3m, then up easily. Finish up R-facing corner. To descend, solo down back of Coxs Castle for 15m to highest point of terrace behind. Sidle R to top of the Arches (the 50m wall below Solomons Sanctuary) and descend by 50m abseil. FA : Doug Fife, Peter Steane (alt) 22/1/92

## THE ARCHES

There is a natural bathtub in the creek which flows from Solomons Sanctuary. Abseil near here to the bottom of a white slabby wall about 50m high and 100 m long, with some thin lines. It is distinguished by L-slanting arches.

### 142 Deviant Imagination 50m 20

R of the arch at LH end, climb the L-most weakness on wall. Move R near the top to finish. FA: Maureen Gallagher, Russell Chudleigh 3/84

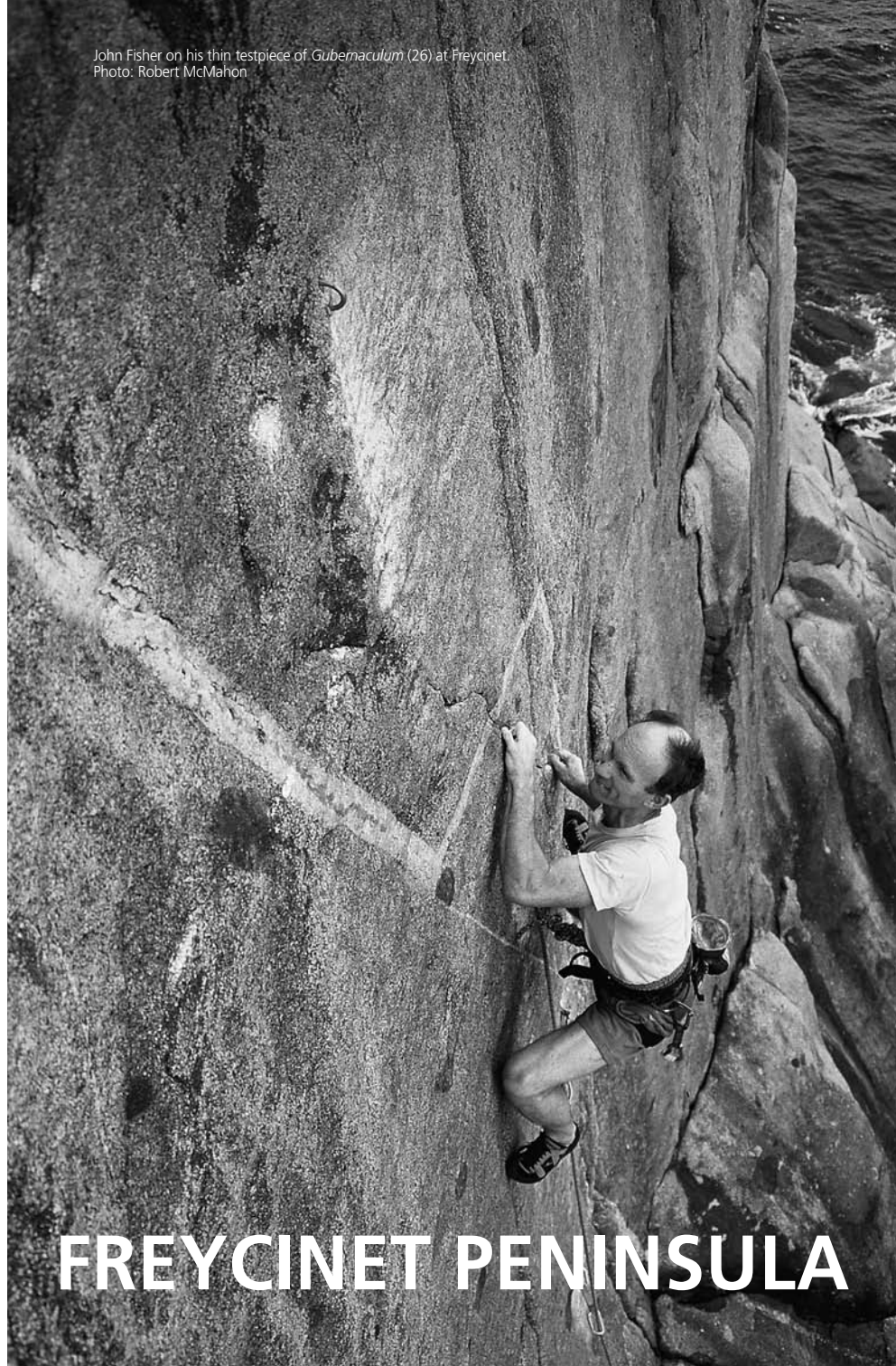
### 143 For Susan 50m 20

The crack R of *Deviant Imagination* with the bushes low down and the overhang on the R at 3 m. FA: Chris Baxter, Maureen Gallagher 6/3/84. The line through the L end of the overhang of the main arch is another quality route graded 21, but unnamed.

### 144 Culture Shock 160m 19

Located on the Shining Wall, the buttress of highly polished rock just R of the Arches. The L end has two prominent L-slanting lines. R of here the foot of the cliff is undercut. Just R is a small patch of scree. Start here. Solo up L to good ledge. Line heads up L below roof split by off-width. Superb, exposed climbing on lovely, orange rock. 1) 45m From L end of ledge, climb up for 10m. Now up L towards small, grey ramp at L end of huge, orange roof. Thin on lip of slab about 6m below and just left of off-width, with undercut wall below. Up and L towards grey ramp. From start of this, drop below it and climb L on juggy wall to arete. Up to small alcove. 2) 40m Take R alternative, up bulge. Continue on schisty but sound rock to good ledge below two grooves. 3) 30m. Scary. Up L groove on poor rock and minimal pro, heading L to short, R-arching flake. Rock and pro improve greatly towards end of flake (there is only about 5m of really loose rock.) Up. Step L just above flake. 4) 45m Up easily to big grassy ledge. Up flake-cracks on L. Peter Steane, Doug Fife (alt) 16/2/92

John Fisher on his thin testpiece of *Gubernaculum* (26) at Freycinet.  
Photo: Robert McMahon



# FREYCINET PENINSULA