

How to Write a ... MiniGUIDE

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by Alan James and Mick Ryan

Version 1.0 - July 2002

Thank you for downloading this ROCKFAX guide to writing MiniGUIDES. Once you have read this document then you will have a better idea of what is involved in producing guides. If you are not put off, and still think that you could produce a MiniGUIDE to somewhere of interest contact:

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ROCKFAX MiniGUIDE design by Alan James and Mick Ryan.
Published by ROCKFAX Ltd. July 2002 © ROCKFAX Ltd.

MiniGUIDES
from rockfax.com

La Poltrana near Cala
Gonone in Sardinia.
Photo: Chris Craggs

Have you ever wanted to write your own guidebook to a climbing area? Are you dissatisfied with the lack of coverage currently available to your local crag? Have you climbed a long mountain route so many times that you are the indisputable expert on that route? If the answer to any of these questions is yes, then the ROCKFAX MiniGUIDE system may be the answer to publishing your own guidebook.

MiniGUIDES are eBooks stored in **PDF (Portable Document Format)** format. This format is useable across virtually all modern computers and the documents can be downloaded, printed and compiled into a compact guidebooks.

This document is a basic guide to preparing the crag and route information, and to drawing topos, for ROCKFAX MiniGUIDES. It is intended to be used by budding authors to help prepare the necessary topos, photos and descriptions needed to compile a guide.

The tricky process of designing, laying out and publishing the finish PDF is not covered in detail in this MiniGUIDE but Rockfax can offer help with that (see below). The finished MiniGUIDE will be distributed by ROCKFAX from the ROCKFAX web site. The system allows us to charge for the guides so there are funds for paying authors commission, however, the returns are only very small, so if money is the main motivation, then the MiniGUIDE system probably isn't for you.

2005 - How is the system working?

We originally set up this system with a view to producing MiniGUIDES to areas across the World. Since then it has become apparent that the sales of MiniGUIDES are not really great enough to merit allocating Rockfax production time to them, unless they are for important areas (eg. Cala Gonone, Skye Ridge, Tenerife). Minor venues just don't sell in sufficient quantities, although we will consider them if they are leading towards a printed publication. So what we are now saying is, if you want to produce a MiniGUIDE, then you will also need to take it through the production stage, ie. layout the text, topos, maps and photographs in an application like InDesign, QuarkXPress, PageMaker or even Word. We can provide help with this including template files, and the fonts necessary for the symbols, plus we can help with the complex process of PDF creation. Email for details.

What kind of MiniGUIDE

The beauty of the MiniGUIDE system is its versatility. It is possible to produce MiniGUIDES for any type of outdoor adventure; from long single multi-pitch routes in the mountains to small road-side quarries with a hand-full of sport climbs.

Fast-developing or badly covered crags

If your local crag has been neglected in recent years, or the current guidebook is way out of date, then a MiniGUIDE could be a great way to bring the information up-to-date. Recently-bolted sport climbing areas are obvious candidates, as are newly-developed bouldering venues. Quality crags covered by ten-year-old guidebooks are also worth considering. The chosen location must be of sufficient standing to attract interest from more than just you and your mates. For example; we would not produce MiniGUIDES to very small bouldering areas covered with minor eliminates.



*The Skye Ridge MiniGUIDE
by Andy Hyslop.
A single mountain expedition in a
portable little booklet.*

Travel Destinations

This is probably going to be one of the major attractions of the MiniGUIDE system. Getting hold of local information before you go on holiday is often a big problem and a MiniGUIDE which can be downloaded from anywhere can give great general coverage, including travel information and accommodation, as well as an overview of the local climbing. Where there are local guides these will be promoted and the coverage will be kept at a level which won't damage the sales of the local guides.

Single Routes or Mountain Expeditions

Another possible candidate for a MiniGUIDE is an alpine route where there is no published information, or the existing published information is incorrect. The ability to be constantly up-to-date is an obvious benefit of the system, to take advantage of routes which suddenly become popular for whatever reason, or correct dangerous mistakes elsewhere. Another advantage is the compact nature of the finished guide. It can be downloaded and printed and weighs next to nothing. If you trash it then you can just print out another one on your return.

Of course there are many other possibilities you may wish to consider, just get in touch and let us know.

Who will be annoyed if you produce a MiniGUIDE

In our experience it is virtually impossible to produce a guide to anywhere without annoying someone. This could be because they produce their own guide, or they are the local guru who resents someone documenting their patch. There are many reasons and some are more valid than others. It is important that we know who may be annoyed, and why they are annoyed, so that we can deal with it at an early stage for a satisfactory resolution for all concerned.

What you do, what we do

As a MiniGUIDE author your job is to provide the contents of the document. This includes all the photos for the photo-topos, all the drawings if drawn topos are being used, all the approach maps and all the text descriptions for the routes and the general crag information. Action photographs are also useful although these may be sourced elsewhere. All the core information must be original and produced by you (or your associates) and we will credit (and pay where appropriate) all contributors.

We will take your photos and process them into crag shots. They will most likely be returned to you then for the route lines to be added to print outs. We will then produce the finished photo-topos and drawn topos in the correct format. We will also process your text into the familiar ROCKFAX-style descriptions with symbols. The final document will be produced into the standard MiniGuide format and then you'll be sent a proofing copy of the PDF. Once proofed the document can go live with its own little web page and be available for paid downloads. We will promote all new MiniGUIDES via the ROCKFAX web site.

Payments

Payments for MiniGUIDES will be made based on the amount of information supplied. The payments tend to be paid every three months according to sales over the preceding three months. The only exceptions to this will be very fast or very slow moving guides, where the payment period could be altered accordingly.

ROCKFAX guidebooks rely heavily on their diagrams but these would be nothing without the text to support them. Getting the text right is essential and will make the difference between an 'okay guide that looks nice' and a great guide! This section covers the writing of the text; the main introduction, the route descriptions, the crag descriptions and the general logistics information. There are ideas you should think about, things which shouldn't be missed and a general guide to the sort of style we are after. Large MiniGUIDES with several crags will require separate introductions for each crag as well as a general introduction.

General Crag/Area Introduction

The introduction to a crag, or area, should give a general overview which is interesting to read, inspiring and realistic. It can mention some of the best routes, or even unusual routes, at various grades. This is often the best place for a personal story or a touch of humour. The list below details a few of the key points which should be covered in a crag/area introduction.

1) Is it a major crag appealing to all climbers?

- *The best crag in the area famous for its towering walls of superb compact limestone providing classic climbs of all grades.*

2) Is it of interest only to a specific group?

- *If you are after unprotected overhanging wall climbs on slightly dodgy rock, then this is the place!*

3) Detail its physical appearance and its setting.

- *A beautiful buttress perched high above the river with magnificent views to the south.*
or - *A scrappy little quarry with a plethora of car wrecks at its base.*

4) Brief notes on its development and history where they are of interest.

- *Mega Crag discovered in 1994 by Barry Rugosity has thrown Norfolk climbing into the 21st Century. Its steep uncompromising lines, up meaty pockets and huge jugs, are all protected by equally meaty bolts and have provided those with big forearms and little brain with hours of endless fun.*

Introduction from Cala Gonone MiniGUIDE

Masses of primo limestone, cheap flights, great scenery, a warm late-summer sea, astounding beaches and as much pasta and pizza as you can possibly eat!

Sardinia is the second largest island in the Mediterranean and is roughly the size of Wales. Like most islands in the Med, it possesses a wild and spectacular rocky interior and coastline. In recent years many fine crags have been developed across the island with countless sport and trad routes and the weather from October to May is ideal for climbing. The climbing is too extensive to sample on a single trip, however a good starter-venue is tucked away on the east coast. The amazingly attractive region centred on the beautifully-situated village of Cala Gonone, with its small harbour and gorgeous beaches makes a pleasant change from the high-rise fleshpots of the Spanish Costas. Single and multi-pitch climbing is in abundance, mountain cragging and waterside venues are easily mixed and matched and there is sport for all with lots across the grade range from perfect slabby 4s to tendon-searing 8s. All the climbing in this region is on limestone but the variation in the crags is what makes this spot so appealing. Mornings can be spent gently roasting on huge walls of boiler-plate slabs, the afternoons tugging on pockets and tufas whilst an evening saunter up a huge pinnacle or buttress will set the scene for some entertaining Italian-style apres-climbing indulgences.

5) The type of climbing.

- *One hundred percent commitment is required on this 300m crag which is situated 25 miles from the car park. The routes are up to 10 pitches long, route finding is difficult and loose rock is always encountered; but the rewards are high!*

The aim is to make people enthusiastic about the place without being dishonest. Even the quarry with the car wrecks must have some redeeming features. If it really is worthless then why are we writing a Miniguide?

Access

Helping to safeguard access to the cliff covered by your MiniGuide is one of the most important jobs for the MiniGuide author. You are representing the climbing community and one silly mistake or oversight could jeopardise access for everyone.

Find out who owns or manages the land and politely inform them you are writing a guide to the area and ask if they are okay with this. Importantly, are

there any messages that they would like to include in the MiniGuide? This is doubly important if the cliff has not been included in a guidebook before. Also talk to other local climbers and get their opinions on the access situation.



There are certain places where the access message in the book is different from what is actually practiced by climbers. In the case above the guidebook must state that you are not allowed to abseil from the fence posts. Photo: James Dunlop

Specifically these questions need to be addressed and the answers included in your MiniGuide.

- 1) Where is the best and safest place to park your car or truck?
- 2) Are the current paths/trails OK to approach the cliff?
- 3) Do you have to ask the land owner permission before you climb?
- 4) Do you have to purchase any sort of permit to climb?
- 5) Where is the best place to go to the toilet?
- 6) Are there any cultural or archaeological sites nearby that should be avoided?
- 7) Are there any seasonal restrictions because of nesting birds or rare plants?
- 8) Do climbers need to keep a particularly low profile because of nearby houses or other recreational users?

Before publication we will fact check all your access information with the relevant landowners, land managers, and climbing organisations (e.g., the BMC, the Access Fund and local climbing clubs). We will also include, where appropriate, a brief sidebar on climber behaviour relevant to the cliff you are describing.

Crag Approach

This is one of the most important sections of the guidebook to get right. Any mistakes or unclear statements will be noticed by everyone and will have a significant effect on people's opinion of the guide. One problem with many guidebooks is that the local author has climbed on the crag for years and has taken certain aspects of the approach information for granted. Another problem in writing approaches is that many people are basically stupid and are hopeless at reading maps. This is why all descriptions should stand alone without the aid of a map. Having said this we will always use maps. With the more complex approaches it is often a good idea to walk it yourself with pencil and paper in hand. It is also a good idea to test your approach descriptions on other people who don't know the area very well.

Start with an introductory sentence stating its approximate position.

- Stoney Middleton is situated above the A625, to the west of Sheffield.

Then cover the specific details starting from an easy to find parking space, or some other major point. You have to use your own judgment in deciding where to start describing the approach from bearing in mind that space is limited and that even though some people are stupid they should still be able to find a large town in a road atlas. In some cases this description need only take you to a climbing area since from there each crag may have a different approach. These can then be covered on the crag pages.

Approach to Les Campanilles in the Costa Daurada

Park at the La Mussara Refugio. Walk past the front of the refugio along a footpath. After 250m you will pass the tongue-in-cheek-named Sector Fantastic; a short crag with stuck-on holds. Another 50m will bring you to a footpath signpost. Follow the way marked 'Vilaplana'. The path becomes a series of switchbacks. Start counting the bends (including the first two short switchbacks). On the eighth bend, take a footpath which heads off right (west). The footpath from bend eight is marked with a rock that has blue paint on it and an orange cross. If you lose count, the section between bend seven and eight is fairly long and after bend eight, there are a couple of short switchbacks.

Follow this path for 350m through trees and vegetation, until it joins up with a dirt track. Where a track forks back left (east), continue straight on (west) for 180m, just beyond the end of the La Mussara abandoned village headland up on your right. Now take a small footpath left (south) at a small tree and marked by two cairns. Follow this for 70m until you come to a dry stream bed. Follow this downhill until you come to the top of a water shoot. Skirt around this on the right (facing out) joining back up with the obvious limestone drainage. Follow the course of this drainage until you can go no further. At its abrupt end there are some iron rungs, climb down these. At the bottom head left (facing out) around the bottom of the rock buttress. Scramble up to the ledge at the base of the crag via pruned trees and after 100m from the iron rungs you will arrive at the first route of the crag by the old dwelling.

Les Campanilles in the Costa Daurada is a great crag but for years nobody, except those with local knowledge, has ever been able to find the place. The description above was used in the Costa Daurada ROCKFAX in conjunction with a very detailed map. This description highlights the degree of detail which is sometimes needed.

BE SPECIFIC; especially with road names and numbers, distances, junctions in the road, etc. Talk about real places that people know or notice like pubs or strange-shaped buildings. Always keep in mind that climbers will be visiting the crag using your directions, your map, your local knowledge. They will often be visiting the crag for the first time and it's infuriating if the directions are bad. If they can get to the crag, then they can climb.

**REMEMBER WE ARE CATERING FOR CLIMBERS
WHO MAY HAVE NEVER HEARD OF THE CRAG BEFORE!**

EAST and WEST/LEFT and RIGHT? - Since many people don't have a natural ability to know where east, west, north and south are, we are try and minimise their use in descriptions. Although it is clumsy, the phrase *start at the left (looking in) end of the crag* is a very clear alternative to *start at the east end of the crag* for those who don't know where east is.

Conditions

This section includes information about which way the crag faces, when it gets the sun and when it gets the shade. Expand on these details if it is appropriate.

- This is a great crag for getting some sun in the Spring months but from May onwards the crag is usually a sun trap climbable only in the cooler evenings.

Also cover other information like seepage and greasy holds and how exposed the crag is to the wind. Tidal sea cliffs need full information on to what extent they are effected, and where you can find tide tables. This section doesn't need to be written in fancy prose, simple functional statements will do.

The following headings probably only need to be included in the general MiniGUIDE introduction, for MiniGUIDES covering more than one crag. These headings are just rough guidelines; use any others that are appropriate to your chosen venue.

Gear

The details required here varies from crag to crag.

What sort of rack is required?

Are there any particular nuts or cams that may be found more useful?

Are there any very important special gear requirements like the need for an abseil rope?

If it's a sport crag, how well bolted are the routes?

Are the lower-offs solid and clippable?

Do you need an especially long rope to lower-off?

Logistics

MiniGUIDES need to have a certain degree of self-sufficiency since they may well be purchased by people without any other local information or alternative guidebook.

Accommodation - Camping, bunk houses, villas or apartments. List some contacts.

Food and Drink - List the local cafe and supermarket. Include a mention of any pubs or bars and include details of how to find them if they aren't obvious.

Local Climbing Gear Shop - Give a full address and phone number listing of the local gear shop. This should be done whether or not they are advertising in the MiniGUIDE.

Tourist Information - Accept the fact that we can't provide all the info and find out the number of the local TI office.

Other Guidebooks

We don't published MiniGUIDES to rival other publications so list other guidebooks and mention where they can be bought. This latter point is particularly important in travel destinations.

THE ROUTE TEXT

Getting the route information correct is key to every guidebook. This is the bit people read when choosing a route and providing the correct level of inspiration and accuracy can make or break a guide. Saying every route is brilliant when they aren't disappoints people, conversely not enthusing enough makes people think there is nothing worth climbing.

Route List

Make sure route names are correctly spelt; especially important in areas where the names aren't in English. Always try and number the routes from left to right across the crag, even if you approach the crag from the right-hand end. This is vital for the production of the pages.

Route Descriptions

Significant routes need a line of introduction. Enthuse and summarise them to attract attention.

- A magnificent route up the blank, leaning wall on the left of the crag.

Then get stuck into the description. Be precise, clear and to the point while you describe where the route goes. That's not to say you can't use interesting adjectives, anecdotes, a bit of historical data or humour - please do - but not all the time. Only mention important gear that is either useful for route finding or utterly crucial for protection. Finish by saying where the route ends.

- Climb the slim groove to a horizontal break and some gear. Move left a then pull over the bulge onto the delightfully-positioned slab. Tip-toe up this until you reach the easy finishing corner. belay on the top.

On multi-pitch routes good descriptions are essential since a topo may be useless high on a cliff. Accurate pitch lengths are also useful.

Remember that sport routes don't usually need anything like as much description. In fact a lot of sport climbers prefer to know very little about a route before they climb it.

Things to Avoid

- 1) Try and describe the route without forcing people to read the description of another route. (This is not always possible.)
- 2) Avoid the common guidebook mistake of starting successive routes with the phrase, *Start just to the right of..., 2m further right is..., The next route to the right...*
- 3) Avoid using the word *obvious* unless the feature really is obvious. In my experience guidebook writers usually use the word obvious to describe an obscure feature that they can't think of any other description for.
- 4) Avoid using puns (Chris!).

Long Routes

Long routes can be described using a pitch for pitch description for a big wall or long free routes, or, for alpine routes, a more general description is usually better to describe the more subjective route options. Always include a recommended gear list as well.

Before writing any descriptions for routes make sure you read Page 13 - Typing Text Descriptions and Symbol Keyboard.

ROCKFAX Symbols

The trademark ROCKFAX symbols need to be carefully assigned to each route. The enhance the appearance and give a good general indication of the type of climbing. The individual symbols are explained opposite and on page 13.

Grades


Give the grade that fits the route best; sport grade for a sport route, V-grade for a boulder problem, UK trad grade for a trad route in the UK, etc. Don't be afraid to re-grade if you disagree with other sources; that is what guidebooks are all about, enhancing and refining the existing information, however, gain a consensus opinion and don't go out on a limb. There will always be odd grades which you can't agree with but which everyone else is happy with but a guidebook is no place to be pig-headed. Avoid split grades (eg. E3/4, 6a/b) unless you really don't know the grade.


First Ascents


Try and get as much first ascent information as you can and make sure it is accurate. Include leader and second plus any details, anecdotes and stories relating to the first ascent. It adds to the interest of an area if you can sample some of the history of your chosen route.

Star rating

Stars have become a very important and powerful tool for the guidebook writer. They need to be carefully dealt with. Give too many and you degrade the system, give too few or none and you channel the people onto the over-used classics. The ROCKFAX idea is to use the following criteria:





















 - A classic of the area. Remember this is a guarantee that it will get ascents and ultimately it may become worn-out.

 - A very good route. This is often a good way of highlighting unsung gems.

 - The single star. Spread this liberally across the guide. Give it to any route which is fun to climb.

No stars - There shouldn't be too many no-star routes. Giving a route no stars is saying "don't climb me" so only give them if that is what you think.

ROCKFAX Route Symbols

Keyboard	Symbol	Description
1		1 Star - A route that is worth climbing
2		2 Star - A very good route
3		3 Star - A superb route
5		A route of unknown quality - a new route
b		A bag. A very poor route. This symbol shouldn't be used much.
t		technical climbing involving complex or trick moves
p		powerful moves requiring big arms
s		sustained climbing, either long and pumpy or with lots of hard moves
f		fingery climbing - sharp holds!
r		A long reach is helpful/essential
g		Rounded holds may be found. Common on gritstone.
o		A dynamo is required. Usually only used for boulder problems.
h		heart flutter climbing with big fall potential (but not too much danger)
w		w - a sit-down (bum) start. Only used for boulder problems
d		death route. Use sparingly.
l		Some loose rock may be encountered
a		Route with an access problem eg. bird or bee's nest
n		A traditional route requiring nuts and other gear
x		A standard tick box
c		A large tick box

“The visual impression is more like visiting the crag than thumbing a guidebook.”

- Ed Douglas, *Peak Gritstone East* review, *Climber Magazine*, February 2002

ROCKFAX guidebooks have always been very visual productions. We rely heavily on topos or photo-topos to give a clear representation of routes and crags. The current aim is to use photo-topos where possible, backed up by drawn topos. Certain crags are impossible to photograph adequately and, in this case, basic drawing skills are essential for a potential author. These techniques are covered in the next section.

Photo-topos

Photo-topos have been used in guidebooks for years but, until recently, they have almost always been in black and white and have seldom given as good coverage as that offered by a drawn topo. Colour printing, online distribution and digital photography have changed all that. It is now relatively simple to produce very clear photo of a crag with route lines overlaid. The ROCKFAX version of this was first developed for the print guidebook *Peak Gritstone East*. We can use this method equally effectively in MiniGUIDES.

Cameras

Digital photography is by far the best method of photographing crags. The ability to take multiple shots and to stitch and enhance the photographs means that we can create extremely vivid images. A digital camera should preferably have at least 3 MegaPixels although in certain circumstances a 2 MegaPixel camera can be used. Photos can be taken on 35mm slide film but the scanning process adds delays and expense to the production. Colour prints seldom offer the desired quality level.

Techniques

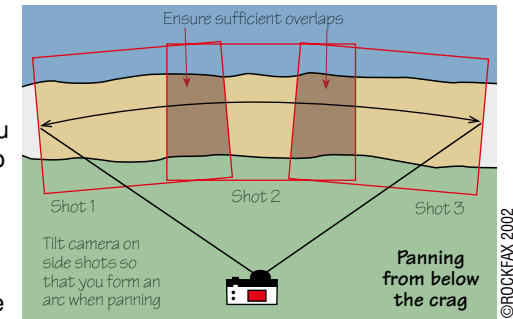
The best place to take photographs from is below the crag with near climbers-eye view. Stand back from the crag far enough to fit in a sufficient section of the crag. What is sufficient varies from crag to crag but as a general rule aim for about 20 routes on short crags down to 4 or 5 routes on multi-pitch buttresses. Sometimes getting the correct distance away from the crag is tricky owing to trees or steep slopes. Climbing trees and scrambling across tide-washed boulders are all techniques that have been used in the past.

Exposure - Digital cameras work brilliantly at low light levels but less well on over-exposed areas. We can save and enhance dark under-exposed shots far more effectively than bleached over-exposed shots. Often an exposure on dark rock is back-lit by a bright sky and there is a temptation to expose for the crag but, be careful, you are likely to get an over-exposed shot if you do that. If you do expose for the crag then drop it a couple of stops and take multiple shots.



An under-exposed shot of Birchen Edge can be easily manipulated into the clear shot below. An over-exposed shot can't be rescued in this way.

Panning and sticthing - For crags where you can't get far enough back it is possible to take adjacent shots creating a photo-set which we can stitch together using image editing software. For successful panning you need to stand in one place and try and keep the camera in roughly the same position. You also need to ensure sufficient overlap on the photographs. This is especially important when using lenses less than 35mm since the distortion at the edge of the photos means that you can only stitch



together the central part of the shot. However, wide angle lenses can be vital to get enough height on the photo-sets. As you pan across the crag, the camera needs to be tilted on the edge shots so that your panning action forms a smooth arc - see diagram. If you don't tilt then certain sections of the photographs can be missing when we try and join them. The degree of tilting depends on how far below the crag you are. If you are level with the mid-height point on the crag (which is unusual) then you don't need to tilt the camera at all. If you are at ground level then a gentle curve is enough. If you are in very close, if the crag is quite tall, or if you are taking more than two shots to fit the buttress in, then tilt the edge shots even more. In this case experience is everything and this is another benefit of digital cameras since extra shots don't really cost, just make sure you take enough alternatives. A pan consisting of more than 3 shots tends to suffer from distortion and is seldom successful. When panning you also have to be careful not to get different exposures on the photo-set. Exposure lock on the section with the most even light and then take each shot, based on this exposure.

Weather - The weather conditions when you take the photos are vital. Bright sunny days for sun-facing crags are fine although the shadow contrast on roofs can cause problems. An even light under thin grey clouds can give good photos even though they may look dark when you first take them. For shady crags, bright and sunny days are hopeless. Shady crags are best taken on grey days with limited back-lighting from the sky. Under-expose and take several alternative shots.



Knights Move buttress at Burbage North was impossible to take with a single photo owing to the trees below the crag.

The two shots above were stitched together into the perfect shot below. The overlap was large which made the job much easier. The end result is a fine crag photo with a virtual climbers-eye view of the buttress.



Sometimes taking photos of a crag is impossible. Trees often get in the way or steep slopes below the crag make getting in the correct position impossible. A very tall crag can also be difficult to photograph properly. In these cases a drawn topo should be used.

The ROCKFAX style of topographs lies midway between true symbolic topos, which are often over-complicated; and artists drawings, which are usually useless when it comes to route finding. They should look like the crag when viewed from a distance but also show enough detail for the climber standing below the routes.

The topos use a combination of 'as seen' features and symbols representing features, although symbols are kept to a minimum to avoid the constant need to refer to a key. Where symbols are used they should be virtually self explanatory. The main symbols are aretes, corners, V-grooves, ledges, flakes, shadings (or fills) for roofs, caves, crag colours and vegetation.

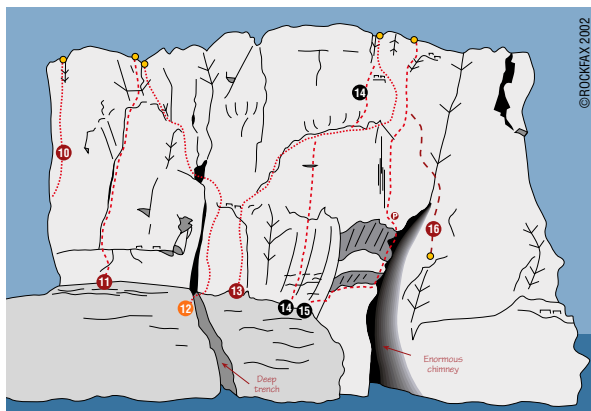
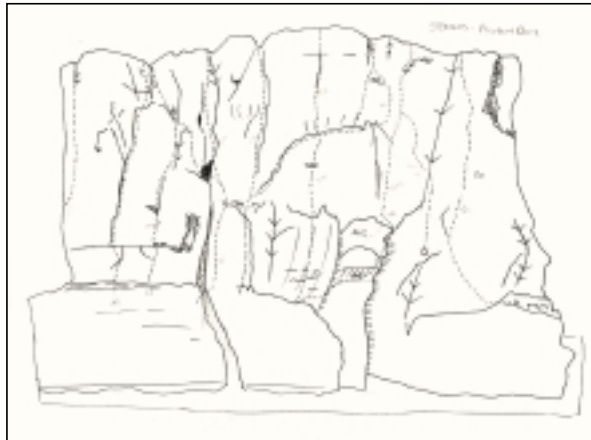
Before drawing a topo, check the Topo Drawing Crib Sheet on page 12.

Drawing Crag

First draw the outline of the crag or section from a distance. Next lightly draw any features you can see from the distant point and try and get them in relatively the correct position on the crag. This is important since everything becomes foreshortened when you look at the crag from below.

Now approach the crag and stand at various short distances away from it and draw in the features and symbols from a climber's eye view. Get all symbols and features in the correct relationship to each other and in proportion and fit them to your lightly-sketched main features. Use vertical guidelines to keep a check on features at the top and bottom of the crag. Sometimes getting the distant view is impossible and then you can only draw the crag from below.

Once this is done lightly pencil the route lines in (dashed line) and any belays and lower offs. Write lots of notes on the topo and indicate any changes in the colour of the crag. Don't draw every fracture and crease - just the major and important features. If you try to do an artistic interpretation the topos become messy and hard to follow - they are not supposed to be works of art.



Top - The inked-in drawn topo for Stennis Head in Pembrokeshire
Bottom - The resulting full-colour version of the topo

Avoid scribbling random lines on complex features (a popular mistake with many topos) just indicate that the section is complex and draw it more simply. A good general rule is - **If it's not there, don't draw it.**

Trees and other vegetation must be roughly drawn however don't spend ages drawing detail on vegetated sections where there are no routes. Just indicate these sections on the topo. Artistically remove trees which block a view. If there is actually a tree stump there make a note of it on your topo.

Once finished - check, check and check again - there is nothing more frustrating than realising that you have missed out some vital information when you are back at home.

Fills and Shading - Sometimes part of a crag will be distinctively darker or lighter than the rest of the crag. For example, part of the crag may be permanently in the shade, often in the shade, dirty or severely overhanging. To indicate these differences and enhance the overall look of the topos different grey levels of fill can be added on the computer. These must be indicated on your original drawings for use by whoever generates the computer topos. The method I use is to write a '20', '30', '40', etc. in the outlined darker area which is proportional to the darkness of the area. This method can also be used to distinguish streaks of different coloured rock, water stains, lichen streaks etc.

Drawing from Photos - If you have resorted to drawing topos then it is likely that you couldn't get a decent photo of the crag in the first place. Even if you are able to get a decent photo it is still very difficult to produce a good topo from that photo. Having said this is, it always useful to have a good crag photo and most climbers tend to find these preferable when looking at a crag from a distance. They can also be invaluable for checking missed or unclear information.

Sport Climbing Crag - It is worth noting with sport crags that often all a climber needs is the position of the first bolt. In this case you can cut down on the overall detail and concentrate mainly on the major features to help locate each different area. Then a bit of extra detail at the base of the crag will help find the first bolt.

Drawing Long Routes (Alpine, Big Wall, Long Free, Sea Stacks, Towers)

There are five essentials to include for guides multi-pitch routes:

Photo-diagram - This should attempt to show all the features and pitches of the route as well as some approach terrain to put the route in context to the surrounding area. Flat light can often be better than full-on sun when taking the photograph.

Topo - Follow the basic instructions in the Drawing Crag section but make sure the topos are drawn in the "local" style: the European Alps and USA alpine and big wall areas have slightly different styles. Mark all main features of the route, any fixed gear and the belays. Annotate with any special gear requirements, instructions to move belays, and anything relevant that helps in route finding. Tracing from photographs can be helpful in drawing the initial outline of the route.

Route Description - For long free routes and big-wall aid-climbs, a concise pitch-by-pitch description is very useful. Describe the features climbed, pitch lengths, difficulty rating and gear needed. For more complex alpine routes a more narrative style to back up the topo or photodiagram is often more appropriate.

Escapes - These should be described including down-climbs, shorter escape routes or abseil (rappel) retreats just in case the weather turns bad, in case of fatigue or someone gets injured.

The Descent - A diagram is often appropriate to show descent routes especially if the route summits a peak and the descent is different than the route.

Drawing Bouldering Areas

Stand-alone boulders - Draw an aerial plan view of each individual boulder to scale on graph paper (use about 1cm to one stride). Mark where the problems are with a number and pencil in distinguishing rock features and floor vegetation/rocks. Mark north on your diagram and the name of the boulder. Then on a separate sheet write down the names, ratings, and description of each boulder problem. Once you have drawn all the boulders photocopy and reduce your diagrams. Take these back out to the boulder field with a very large piece of graph paper, a compass, a ruler and some glue, to make your overview of the bouldering area. Orientate and glue one boulder diagram on the big piece of graph paper, then take several compass bearings off other boulders or landmarks and pace out the distance to the next boulder (one stride per centimeter is a good scale). Orientate your diagram of that boulder and glue, and so on until all boulders are placed. Once this is done you can then add other landmarks of the area to help the user of the guide locate the problems. This method is difficult where the stand-alone boulders are in a forest and your view is obscured. Use your inner radar or a GPS unit (the future) in situations such as this.

Perserverance and patence
is the name of the game in
drawing complex assem-
blages of boulders.

Aerial photographs are very useful, although the resolution is rarely good enough to actually show the contour of a boulder they are useful for pin pointing the location of boulders in relation to other boulders and they also provide much information for overview maps. In the US they are often available from an areas land management agency or from the Internet.

The Pollen Grains

Big Dome

Beehive Ridge Area

The Visor

The Hive

The Apiary

Honey Bear Bong

Uphill

Clover

The Sting

The Beekeeper's Apprentice

The Mead Boulder

The Spectre Boulder

Slope

Gully

To parking area

From parking area

© ROCKEAX 2002

0 feet 50

N

The overview map for the free-standing boulders in the Pollen Grains, Buttermilk Country, Bishop, CA. In such complex situations accuracy becomes all the more important.

MiniGUIDES from **rockfax.com**

Crag and approach maps are a vital part of any guidebook. Described below are the different sizes of maps which may be used. This will usually result in two or three maps being needed to describe a crag, but can lead to long exploding map chains like the one to the right.

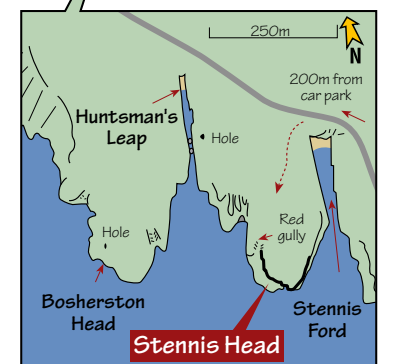
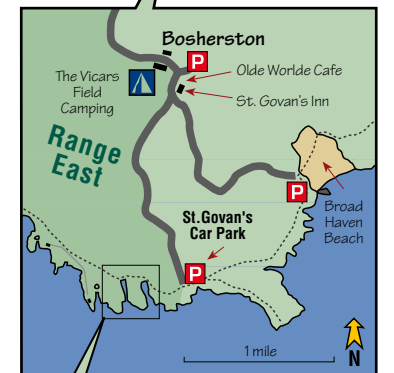
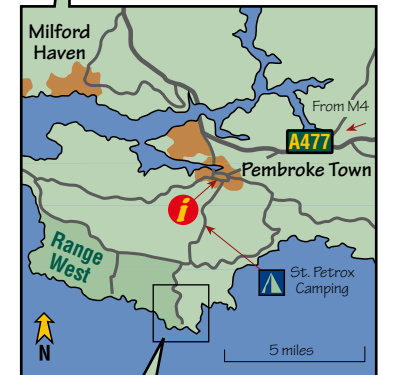
Detailed Crag Map - This has become a ROCKFAX speciality; the close-up, hand-drawn map which shows detail down to individual trees, blocks and sign posts. It is often the hardest map to draw but often the most important. These maps should include all the information needed for tricky approaches and are also useful in describing the layout of a complex series of crags or buttresses. On some occasions they can even replace the need for a topo when route numbers can be dropped along the line of the crag showing the rough route positions. The only method to draw this map is to walk along the crag with a blank piece of paper in front of you. Note down major features and the general outline of the crag.

Crag Area Map - This is the one which gets you from the general area to the specific car park, and then from the car park to near the crag. As with the general maps, it should also be virtually self explanatory without a key and it can often be missed out if the approach isn't complex. This map needn't have great detail and can easily be hand-drawn if you know the area well but keep in mind the ever-important fact that you are writing the guide for people who have never been to the crag before. Avoid missing out things that you take for granted, having been to the crag 350 times!

General Area Map - We do tend to make the assumption that most people have access to a road atlas to get them in the vicinity of the Crag Area Map. Any larger maps used will be just to give a general view of the area perhaps relating to other crags. This map will usually be produced by us.

North and South - It is important to note down North on every map you draw since it is vital for working out which way the crag faces for sun and shade.

Scale - It is also useful to try and ensure that every map has at least a basic indication of scale. An approximation for the hand-drawn maps is good enough. Sometimes approach maps are not drawn to scale to shrink some distance. When this is done ensure that you note down crucial distance which can then be marked on the map.



FIELD WORK TIPS

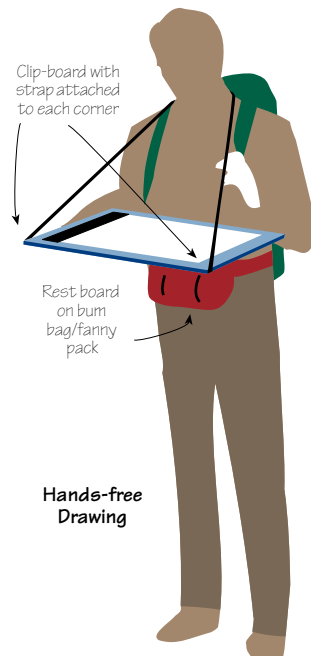
To write a guidebook you have to go to the crag, to explore it, to crawl inside it, to view it from the top of a tree, to re-climb to route you last did 10 years ago, to meet the people at the crag and to ask them what they think. To do this "field work" you need to be properly prepared and have the correct equipment with you.

When to Go

Weather is important (see weather tips in photo-topos section). Dry conditions are needed for getting around the crag and drawing, photography needs the correct light and the whole procedure requires plenty of time. Plan your day well to ensure that you have enough time and daylight.

Equipment to Take

- ☐ Paper for the drawings.
- ☐ A clip-board to rest your paper on (see right for hands-free drawing method).
- ☐ Several retractable pencils; much better than conventional pencils.
- ☐ Two erasers in case you drop one down some unreachable slot in the rock!
- ☐ Biro/ink pen, for annotating print outs and other notes.
- ☐ Compass
- ☐ Camera and spare film or extra memory card.
- ☐ Wide-angle lens (28mm)
- ☐ Binoculars (good for bolt counts or checking route descriptions).
- ☐ Plenty of food and water.
- ☐ Soloing gear for crags where this is appropriate in route checking.
- ☐ Print-out of page 10 - Crag Info Sheet
- ☐ Print-out(s) of page 11 - Route Info Sheet
- ☐ Print-out page 12 - Topo Drawing Crib Sheet



Other things that have been found useful by some authors are an **umbrella** for use in the rain; strap it to your ruck sack for hands-free drawing. A **mini-tape-recorder** for describing approaches and routes more quickly. An **abseil rope** and **jumars** for sea-cliffs with abseil approaches.

A Word of Caution

Guidebook field work can be very mentally exhausting. Your concentration can soon evaporate and the quality of your work will suffer as a consequence. Topos drawn at the beginning of a session are invariably much better than topos drawn at the end. Take plenty of rests and spread the work out over several site-visits if necessary.

FORMATS

MiniGUIDES from rockfax.com

The procedure of compiling guides becomes much easier if the original text, drawings and photos are supplied to us in the correct formats.

General Text - The general introduction, crag information, approach and other text can be supplied directly in *Microsoft Word* files sent as email attachments.

Route Text - The route text should also be supplied in *Microsoft Word* files but only in a special format. It is crucial that the correct procedure is followed exactly, down to every full stop and comma. If the text files are typed in the way then it makes turning them into a finished ROCKFAX page a simple procedure. **This format is described in detail on page 13 - Text Format for Route Descriptions and Symbol Keyboard Layout.**

Drawings for Maps and Topos - Once you have returned to base with your rough drawings it is a good idea to ink them in as soon as you get the chance. If you wait then the little notes and half-drawn items may fade from your memory. These inked-in drawings are all we need for processing into topos and maps. You can send them as photocopies through the post or scan them in *Greyscale* at a resolution of 300dpi and send them via email.

Photo-topos - There are several stages to creating a good photo-topo. Once you have the digital images then send the unedited photos to us for processing. If you are a very experienced Photoshop user then contact alan@rockfax.co.uk for further information on how to edit photos. The best way to send the photos is burnt on a CD or as an email attachment if you have a fast enough Internet connection. We will then send printouts back to you for the route lines to be added.

Apple Macs - If you are one of those lucky people who is using an Apple Mac for your work, then there could be an opportunity for you to have greater involvement in the production of a MiniGuide. This could range from simple image manipulation for the photo-topos to full scale dtp of the finished MiniGUIDE. All extra levels of involvement will be financially rewarded accordingly.

Action Photos

All MiniGUIDES need one vertical action shot for the cover. Most will only contain a few internal colour photos at most. This is to keep the finished PDF document size down. Action photos should be saved as TIFF images or hi-res Jpegs. Email alan@rockfax.co.uk for more information.

EXTRA SHEETS

Page 10 - Crag Info Sheet

Use this for quick reference compiling of the general crag information. The relatively self-explanatory Crag Symbols are included on this sheet.

Page 11 - Route Info Sheet

Useful for jotting down route information at a crag quickly.

Page 12 - Topo Drawing Crib Sheet

Descriptions of the basic annotations for the topo features. Useful for quick and easy reference until you have learnt the different topo features.

Page 13 - Text Format for Route descriptions and Symbol Keyboard Layout Sheet

A vital page when writing your route descriptions. Print it out and pin it next to your computer.

Crag		Area	
<div>INTRODUCTION (250 words) General appraisal of crag.</div> <div>Some history (where known).</div> <div>Type of climbing.</div> <div>Aspect and weather.</div> <div>Best conditions for climbing.</div> <div>Gear type and lower-offs.</div> <div>Funny stories, quotes, etc.</div>			
<div>APPROACH (150 words) General location.</div> <div>Approach drive.</div> <div>Parking.</div> <div>Map drawn</div>			
<div>ACCESS CONSIDERATIONS</div>			
<div>CONDITIONS (150 words) Aspect - N, S, E or W</div> <div>Sun and shade</div> <div>Wind</div> <div>Seepage</div> <div>Greasy holds</div> <div>Tides</div>			
<div>CLASSIC (RECOMMENDED) ROUTES</div>			
<div>OTHER GUIDEBOOKS</div>			

Hours of sunshine

Early morning

Morning

To mid afternoon

From morning

Lots of sun

Afternoon

Evening

Not much sun

Walk-in time

Roadside

Abseil in

Route angle

Slabby

Vertical

Steep

Pitches/lower offs

Begin at top

Multi-pitch

Lower-offs

Character

Dry in the rain

Windy

Sheltered

Seepage

Wet

Restrictions

Good visibility

CORNER S

corner V-groove

90 degree corner - left facing

90 degree corner - right facing

scoop

open groove

slab to wall

pod

niche

V

for V-groove or corner, the arms go up.

ARETES

arete

right facing arete

left facing arete

rounded arete

A large bulging section or arete.

Arete and adjacent corner.

A

for Arete or edge, the arms go down.

SMALES

right facing flake

left facing flake

a hand traverse flake

undercut

Cracks of various widths

chimney

pockets

knobs lumps

tufas blobs

LARGES

leaning wall

roof

cave

bulging cave

thin overlap

bulge

complex bulge

SHADING

On crag

Ledges

Standard crag colour

Shaded sections or background buttresses

Darker shading

Edges of bulging caves or the sea

Standard roof fill

Caves and pockets

LEDGES

small ledge

larger ledges

easy angled rock

easy angled grassy rock

VEGETATION

large trees

conifers

small trees

spiky bush

tree stumps

bush

general vegetation

grass

ROUTE

lower-offs

route lines

route numbers

SYMBOLS

C

H

E

C

K

L

I

S

T

outline of crag

position and size of features

position of corners and aretes

position and extent of vegetation

route lines and numbers

clearly annotate drawing

note of peculiar features

take some crag photos

Route Text

Route descriptions must be written in the format below. It is vital that this is done down to the very last detail. The "2ptx" and "1sx" in these text descriptions correspond to the ROCKFAX symbols which are detailed below.

Example Single pitch route

3[SPACE]A Route[TAB]1sx[TAB]6a+[RETURN]
20m. A sustained single pitch with its crux at the top.
FA. [SPACE]Fred Smith, Joe Bloggs 5.6.02[RETURN]

This then can be transformed with the touch of a few keys to:

3 A Route[Rockfax Symbol] 6a+
20m. A sustained single pitch with its crux at the top.
FA. Fred Smith, Joe Bloggs, 5.6.02

Multi-pitch Route

4[SPACE]The Route Name[TAB]2ptx[TAB]6b+[RETURN]
This superb long route follows the impressive arete on the right-hand side of the main wall.[RETURN]
1) 6a+, 20m. Climb the slabby wall until it steepens. Make a few hard pulls up onto the ledge above.[RETURN]
2) 6b+, 25m. Step left onto the arete and climb it in a superb position all the way to the top.[RETURN]
DESCENT - Abseil off or scramble to the top of the crag and walk right to locate a descent gully.[RETURN]
FA. [SPACE]Joe Bloggs, Fred Smith 12.5.89

Which when transformed looks like:

4 The Route Name[Rockfax Symbol] 6b+
This superb long route follows the impressive arete on the right-hand side of the main wall.
1) 6a+, 20m. Climb the slabby wall until it steepens. Make a few hard pulls up onto the ledge above.
2) 6b+, 25m. Step left onto the arete and climb it in a superb position all the way to the top.
DESCENT - Abseil off or scramble to the top of the crag and walk right to locate a descent gully.
FA. Joe Bloggs, Fred Smith 12.5.89

The symbol keyboard

1	[Symbol]	2	[Symbol]	3	[Symbol]	4		5	[Symbol]	6		7		8		9		0		-	
q	[Symbol] A Queer Deep Water Solo.	w	[Symbol] W A bum start is needed.	e		r	[Symbol] A long Reach is helpful.	t	[Symbol] T technical climbing involving complex or trick moves.	y		u		i		o	[Symbol] A dynO move is needed.	p	[Symbol] P Powerful moves requiring big arms.	[
a	[Symbol] Access problem. Banned or restricted.	s	[Symbol] S Sustained climbing, long and pumpy or lots of hard moves.	d	[Symbol] Death route on which you can hurt yourself.	f	[Symbol] Fingery climbing - sore skin.	g	[Symbol] Gritstone style rounded holds.	h	[Symbol] Heart flutter climbing with big fall potential but little danger.	j		k		l	[Symbol] Loose rock may be encountered.	;		,	
,		z		x		c		v		b	[Symbol] A Bag of..!	n	[Symbol] Nut route	m		.		.		/	

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