

Bowles...

is one of the 'must visit' venues of Southern Sandstone. To a newcomer, Bowles has the feel and appearance of a heavily managed, if not manicured crag. Given its location in rural Kent Bowles is never going to feel like a wilderness crag, but the tarmac road running beneath the crag, the toilets and the adjacent activity centre kill any lingering thoughts that this is the final frontier! And there are those climbers that will dismiss Bowles on this basis – but it is their loss for the rock architecture and the climbing are quite superb. The trick is to forget the surroundings and to get stuck into the actual climbing and then the true experience of Bowles will shine through. And once bitten, chances are that you'll be back at some stage. For many of the locals Bowles offers a great day out; if you can forget the nonsense of the adjoining centre and concentrate on the climbing, you too will go home happy.



Featured Routes: Fandango (6a) has been a Bowles classic ever since way back when. The tricky boulder-problem start soon leads to better holds though a bulge protects the upper reaches. Success hangs on the air as a result. Sandman (6b) is a much more subtle affair, though quite a bit harder as well. The moves to the all to obvious, and all to distant, break are the crux. The rest still requires a degree of concentration though.

Tips: Experience, if not an affinity with the intricate nature of sandstone wouldn't go amiss on either route; though both are quite different. Confidence will pay dividends on Fandango whilst a blend of power and subtly on Sandman should prove a winning combo.

Clips: Both routes have been soloed but only those climbing at their very best would

consider such as thing – top-roped ascents are much more usual.

'Must Do's': Hate (6a) is another obvious and tasty classic, as are Temptation (6b) and Digitalas (6a). If it's something a little less demanding that you're after, Pig's ear (5c) or Pig's Nose (5a) are highly recommendable.

Alternatives: The nearby High Rocks, especially now that many of the biggest trees have been felled, is another great location for those looking to get big-grade ticks. It does suffer from seepage/condensation though so be warned that conditions have to be good for some time to enjoy High Rocks at it's best.

Rest Days: With London and the south coast equi-distant, the choice of rest day activities is about as wide as it gets.

Essential Beta

How to get there: From Tunbridge Wells head for Crowbridge on the A26. Leave the main road and follow the signs for Bowles Rocks just before Crowbridge itself.

When to Visit A major plus for Bowles is its southern location and hence its agreeable climate in the 'off season'. The bulk of the climbing gets afternoon sun. Finally, as with all sandstone, avoid bearing down on small edges following rain.

Where to Stay/Shop: Hotels, as with B&Bs, are scattered across the area. The only campsites in the areas are the Julie Tullis Memorial Campsite next to Harrison's Rocks and the Crowbridge Camping and Caravanning Club site.

Which Guide: The Climbers Club have published a new guide (2008) to the entire area covering both the routes and the bouldering. David and Carrie Atchison Jones have also authored a guide published on the Jingo Wobbley logo.



Photos: Main: Neil Gresham on Fandango (6a). Secondary: Neil again on Sandman (6b).