

FMC Trip Report: Sinbad Gulley 2016  
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Photos by Jarrod Alexander and Troy Mattingley

In January 2016 Troy Mattingley, Zac Orme, Jake Handyside and I all met in Milford sound with the intention of heading to Sinbad Gulley for Rock Climbing. The Sinbad wall is a remote 300m high big wall in the Darran Mountains. Undoubtedly the steepest wall of its size in the country as it overhangs by nearly 50 metres. Currently, the wall contains two established routes Shadowlands (27) the first route on the wall, originally an aid climb that was freed by Derek and Mayan. The second route is Weatherspell (30) was a much more recent addition to the wall which was freed by a multicultural team of four over a few months in 2013. Both routes were still awaiting a second ascent (attempt).

Jake, Zac and I arrived in Milford on the 10<sup>th</sup> to a grim looking forecast. Over the next ten days only the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> had somewhat decent weather before a large low pressure system took over on the night of the 12<sup>th</sup>. I was still feeling sub-optimal as 4 days prior I was still in the UK. Despite this we still went for it and on at 7:00am on the 11<sup>th</sup> we rolled out of Homer Hut. Our alpine start however was futile as we later found out the first Heli ride wasn't until 10:00. After three hours of pick up sticks, expensive beverages and illicit showers at the the Milford lodge we were soaring over the sound and up Sinbad Gully. Within five minutes we were hovering over a large boulder which would double as our humble abode for the next three nights. After a solid five minutes of coming to reality about being in the raddest place of our lives we hunted for our bivvy which subsequently was closer than we thought. We dumped our packs and set off to the wall asap. For the sake of speed, we split into two groups; One for each route. Jake and I took Weatherspell while Troy and Zac chose Shadowlands.

Once at the base we were introduced to the first obstacle of the wall, a constant waterfall pouring off the top of the wall. Due to its steepness the wall remains dry on a still day as the water pours straight down. However, with a slight breeze the torrent can be directed back into the wall, soaking the lower pitches.

Both routes share the first pitch and Zac got the first lead and made short work of it, a grade 20 slab into an overhanging corner on gear. After Troy met him at the anchors it was my lead and I portrayed a much more shambolic display on the now wet slab moves, nether the less I made it up. After the first pitch is where the two routes split, Shadowlands has a big traversing pitch rightwards and Weatherspell has a long grade 25 pitch also known as 'The Quarry Pitch'. Jake made a mighty fine effort while onsighting, even this pitch without the right sized gear for the crux. Next was a wondering 22 pitch on mixed bolts and gear. Due to a severe case of Pussy-itus I asked Jake to lead this pitch also. This was my loss as after the first 10 metres this pitch turned into a 3 star line on good crimps. As dusk drew nearer we were determined to reach the next big ledge at the start of pitch five. However, a 45 meter right trending traverse stood between us and it. Jake once again put on his big boy shoes and charged into the void. After a long brave lead he reached the anchors as night was falling, he fixed one of his leading ropes so that I could jug the pitch, hoping to reach the ground before the dead of night. We failed. I'm no aid climber and when I finally reached the ledge it was time to get a hustle on. Both of our teams had hauled up static ropes to fix to that we could ascend the wall to out high point the next day. We set our line and then descended the A Team's fixed lines down Shadowlands. After reconnecting ourselves with

the earth we got back to the bivvy around 11:00pm to find Troy and Zac worried sick, drinking a few calming beers.



Zac leading the grade 20 trad first pitch of both routes



The author jugging up the fixed lines on day two

The next after a casual alpine start and a two-hour mission jugging back up our fixed lines, Jake and I were back on the ledge at the base of the fifth pitch, and Zac had just sent the second 27 pitch of Shadowlands. The plan was just to forge on until the weather system came in that night. Jake tied into the sharp end and forged up the fifth pitch, a long 25 with one bolt and a big traverse to start. He dealt with the cruxy moves on the traverse with ease but broke a hold on the upper slab and lobbed off onto a big wire, 150 metres off the ground. He continued up to the chains and by the time I seconded up and met him the storm had arrived early and was in full effect. We were at the base of the 6<sup>th</sup> pitch, the first grade 27 pitch and we could see it was soaked. Looking across to Troy and Zac slightly below us we could see their climb was in a similar state. We had to bail and with the forecast for the following day looking equally grim we made the decision to pull all our fixed lines down too. After somewhere between two and three hours we finally touched down after cleaning all our gear off the wall. We arrived back to our bivvy saturated after scampering back across the boulder field in a Fiordland downpour and settled in for a stormy night. The following morning, to our surprise we arrived to find no rain. I considered going back up the wall to attempt to free the Quarry Pitch which I had fallen off of, but the wall was still wet. Instead, Zac, Jake and I quested up the slabs on the left side of the gulley, from the top of which you could see right back to Milford. While Troy volunteered to stay behind and renovate our sleeping quarters and rescue our drying clothes in the event of more rain. The next day was go day. The decent from Sinbad Gully is down a narrow canyon, the decent must be made early in the day as to minimise the amount of snowmelt pouring down. After six abseils, a few sketchy traverses, one rock jump and a Tyrolean traverse for our bags. We found ourselves at the base of the canyon, all that was left was a five to six hour walk back out the gulley and a boat ride back to civilization. Looking back on the trip now I have mixed feelings. Climbing on that wall was one of the scariest things I have done in climbing. But sitting here, back in civilization, All I can think about is planning my next trip





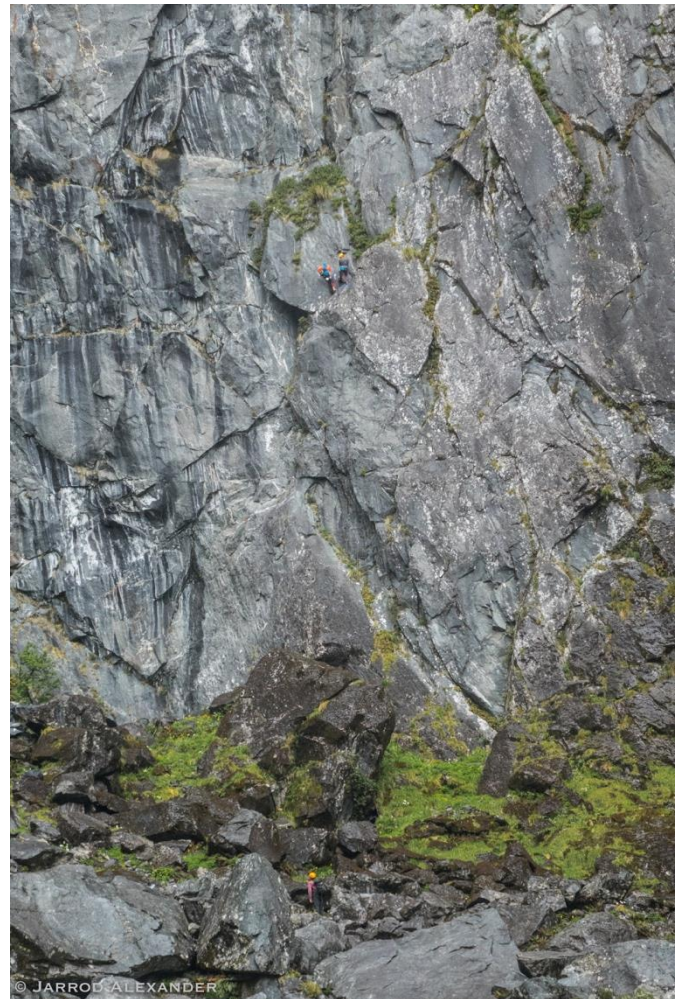
Troy on an exposed traverse across to the next abseil anchor



Zac and Jake looking back along Sinbad Gulley with Milford in the distance



The Upper Sinbad gully meadow



Troy and Zac at the anchors of the first pitch





The Sinbad Wall. Blue: Shadowlands (27)  
Red: Weatherspell (30)