

# hard grit II?

Richard Heap describes himself as a 33-year-old film-maker, photographer and source of low quality innuendo. Best known as the director of *Hard Grit*, Rich also starred in and directed *Salathé Wall* which won the Kendal Film Festival best climbing film last year. He has just completed a new bouldering film *Stick It*, whilst working on the TV series *Peak Practice* and shooting a pop music film. He has climbed E7 on grit and redpointed F8c. Rich somehow made time to talk to fellow film buff **Jude Calvert-Toulmin** and tried to explain why he wouldn't be making *Hard Grit II*.



**A**s I said to Richy Heap, the old adage still holds good: "If you want something done, ask a busy person."

Richy is a very busy boy at the moment but he managed to slot this interview in between working on *Peak Practice*, the TV programme and editing a Slackjaw film about the '70s and '80s Sheffield music scene with the working title *Made In Sheffield*.

I'm running late, but minutes to go I'm finally ready and Richy appears in the back garden on his mountain bike.

He's wearing a very snazzy shirt on which I compliment him. "Ah yes. Well I didn't like the sound of you doing big close-ups in the photo session," he quips, "So I thought if I wore a shirt like this you wouldn't be able to resist doing a medium close-up instead."

Wrong Richy. I don't want yer bod luv. I want those gorgeous glittering eyes looking all moody and soulful, so the big-close-up idea stays!

I usher him into the newly converted dining room, which is now a spacious glass-block walled kitchen, lit with banks of spotlights suspended from the ceiling and covered in

coloured lighting gels. Richy sits down at one of the breakfast bars cooing "Wow" and looking around in admiration "This is some kitchen Jude. WOW. I wish I'd had the courage to do this. I wanted to do something like this in my house but just didn't have the courage."

Now to be told by a climber of Richy's courage that I'm braver than him in even the tiniest aspect has put me on one.

**J: Do you make a living from filming?**

R: Yes. Generally I've just been making a living off *Hard Grit* and other little odds and sods like, I did the BMC *Safety in Mountains* video.

**J: So, you're still getting royalties from *Hard Grit*?**

R: Well we own the rights and we still sell to shops. Obviously it's tailed off markedly but it did shock us. It probably sold five times more than we expected.

**J: So the success of *Hard Grit* came as a surprise then?**

R: Did it surprise me or not? Well, when you film Jean Minh falling off Gaia and Seb doing

50% of Meshuga all within the first day... as soon as I'd shot both of those I knew I had an absolute classic on my hands. They were just amazing moments. And I think that's the point when I realised that we had to actually do justice to all the footage we'd got. We had really good music that tried to sum up what the whole experience of climbing hard grit was.

**J: Do you think it defined a special moment in climbing history?**

R: I don't know. There was a grit renaissance in the late '70s and I'm sure a film could have been made that was as good as *Hard Grit*. There was a kind of bandwagon effect of grit climbing at that time, and maybe just making films made it a more pertinent time than it probably was. Although it was probably the zenith of hard head-pointing, I suppose. People have moved on from that stuff now.

**J: How stressful was it filming your mates doing dangerous things?**

R: By the end I really didn't want to go out filming anymore, especially after Jean Minh had fallen off, I was really nervous. I'm not

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really a bold climber myself and a lot of the time it was terrifying. I said I wouldn't go out filming again after Jean Minh and then two weeks later I was filming Leo [Houlding] on End Of The Affair. (laughs) So it didn't mean anything at the end, I just got obsessed with making a good film. I didn't actually film Seb doing Meshuga, Mark Turnbull did, I was

**J: What would you most like to film now?**

R: I haven't got anything that stands out at the moment that I'd like to do. I always knew that I had a trilogy of films in me. At some point at the end of *Hard Grit* I thought I'd like to do a big wall film. I'd discussed it with Johnny Dawes before and it hadn't left my mind that I'd really like to do a big wall, to

Airlie Anderson, Katherine Schirrmacher.

Went to the Peak with Jerry and Ben and John Welford, Zaf Ali, the usual guys.

Ben Pritchard kept going out to film every time Ben Moon was trying 8 Ball at Gardoms, but Ben was feeling the pressure of the camera being there and kept failing on it. Then we went to Wales one weekend and when we came



belaying and I think it's probably the most amazing experience of my life seeing that and being part of it, it was just amazing to see someone commit themselves to that route. I'd top-roped it a lot with Seb, been out a lot with him just belaying as a friend, and to witness it was just incredible.

**J: What would you have done with the footage if you'd filmed someone's death?**

R: I dunno because you don't go to those days expecting someone to die, it's all well rehearsed. If you have faith in the climbers...

**J: Yes but look what happened to Paul Williams, he'd soloed Brown's Eliminate on Froggatt two or three times already that day, and just because of a loose flake he fell off and died and so many people, so many people were devastated by that. It can happen.**

R: But it's improbable. Anyway I don't know what I'd do. You don't know until you're put in the situation. Although at the time I was scared, filming it. But you have to have faith in the climbers' ability.

look at the more painful side of climbing and the rewards that you could get out of the sheer investment. And then do something that was fun and frivolous, which is what the new bouldering film *Stick It*, is.

**J: Is it a short or a feature?**

R: *Stick It* is getting longer by the day, it'll be about 45 minutes, we shot about 30 tapes of 40 minutes so the shooting ratio was about 30 to one. We did shoot a lot of footage.

**J: Where did you film?**

R: We went to all the major areas and met up with the local people who are developing bouldering. We went to Wales to the Llyen Peninsula. And filmed Paul Higginson, Simon Panton, Mark Katz, Chris Davies. We went to Scotland, to Ben Nevis and Dumbarton, and filmed Neil Busby, Malcolm Smith, Dumby Dave and Dave Cuthbertson. We also went to Northumberland, to Bowden Doors and Kylee with Andy Earl, Malcolm Smith again, Andy Harris, Ben Moon, Richard Davies.

Also we went to Yorkshire with Matt Birch, Sam Whittaker, Ben Bransby, Lucy Creamer,

back Ben had done it. It's a shame really, because that would have been a really nice element of the film, there was a lot of effort going in to what was going to be the hardest problem in the peak. It was 8b+ the way Ben did it and then instantly an easier way was found for the end and it came down a grade.

And Loz (Laurent Derioz, who shot *Hard Grit* with Ben Pritchard) has just finished filming down on Dartmoor with Dave Henderson. It's taken ages for it to open up because of the foot and mouth.

It's odd because there're so many areas, it could be so extensive, but you've just got to draw the line. And then within that we've tried to get different feels, we've tried to get that feeling of just going going out to the crags with all your mates, just larking around and also going out and trying really hardcore stuff, being out in beautiful surroundings, going out on your own, so we've tried to get various moods, but that's all that the film's trying to evoke, it's not trying to tell any story or anything, it's meant to be an escape video, it's meant to be for repeat watching.



**J: So who's film is it? Yours or Ben Pritchard's?**

R: Well it's a Slackjaw collaboration really. I haven't really had much input into the film until now, at the editing stage. Ben Pritchard's filmed most of it. I just wanted to do something fun and relaxing after the stresses of Yosemite.

**J: Do you enjoy editing?**

R: Yeah, I've really enjoyed editing the bouldering thing because you've got *carte blanche* to do whatever you like. Salathé was a lot different because I wasn't editing I was direct-

ageing process, just how you get on the wall, you're clean shaven, you're really fresh. So I was saying, we want to start off with lots of close-ups, get that freshness and then by the end, still doing close-ups and getting that tiredness, that weariness, those puffy eyes, the knackered hands. All that was laid down before we started, but the climbing was always going to be paramount, because it was a race against time. Ben and Loz, and Robin, who rigged it, were all tuned in to the fact that the climbing wasn't going to stop, they were going to have to get it all first time.

I just off-loaded the whole pressure of film-

ation and when you think that *Peak Practice* shoots at Black Rocks with 75 people and Salathé was shot by three people... No one can say that anyone on the Salathé shoot was an un-sung hero. The whole team, they were all heroes. And Neil as well, crikey, bloody hell, just amazing.

**J: After Ben Pritchard's comments about his huge pendulum alongside Neil Bentley's article in OTE 104 about Salathé, a mate commented to me that there should have been another belay at the top. Why was there only one belay?**

## Slackjaw projects in Production/Development

**Dreamtime (25 mins) – Retail Video Project (Director/Camera)**  
A group of English climbers travel to Switzerland to pit themselves against some of the hardest bouldering in the world. Will their ego's survive intact?

**Stick It (40 mins) – Retail Video Project (Producer/Editor)**  
A fast paced look at Britain's bouldering scene presently in post production.

**A Bouquet of Steel (52 mins) – Indie Production for Worldwide TV Distribution (Co-Editor/Camera)**  
Featuring The Human League, ABC, Cabaret Voltaire, Pulp, Heaven 17 and more.

**Moto – Independent Film (Co-Producer)**  
A fusion of circus theatre and film following the fantasy world of Moto, a cyber-punk scrap-yard junkie.

ing the edit and there was such a wealth of material and obviously I was in it, which always makes it really difficult. I just had to sacrifice myself for the film. It doesn't matter if I come across as a twat. And Neil... (laughs)

**J: (laughing too.) And Neil what?**

R: Yeah, it was kind of funny that. Because Neil [Bentley], in that film Neil will always be king, and just seeing that he was falling off all the time (cracks out laughing)... Yet when we went onto the head wall we were doing huge lengths and being really successful, doing a lot of climbing on it, but you've only got one minute to sum up what went on. Which was that we *failed!* (laughing) So the only way you can convey that is just by showing us falling off lots, and Neil got... (laughter trailing off here) well, Neil got a bit miffed at that...

**J: Did he? Well, understandably I guess. How much direction did the cameramen get?**

R: Well you know, we were pointing out things we really wanted to look at, which was the

ing it onto the camera people who did a brilliant job and you have to have utter faith in their ability. Ben Pritchard and Loz are never in front of the camera but it was a team effort. There were five people going out to film on a 3000' wall, and everybody pulled their weight, and everyone was stressed and that just goes to show that everyone was involved in the process right from the beginning. Robin spent a whole day on the top of El Cap with nobody when we started, just abbing down and rigging the top 800' of the cliff on his own, with no support. It's not seen, and again Loz, abbed down 800', hanging there all day in his harness with a tripod somehow attached under Great Roof, till dusk, then jumarrated out, got out when it was pitch black and then came back in again four hours, five hours later, again pitch black and abbed down to get us hanging on our portaledges first thing in the morning. It was one of the reasons why the film ends with us all on the top, all kind of euphoric at it having ended and it being like a team, everyone being recognised and named, pictures of Loz and Ben and Robin on the top, just so that there was recog-

R: That was my fault. I'd just been jumarring out and didn't know that it was a traverse so I didn't leave any runners in, so as soon as he unhooked he just took a massive pendulum.

**J: And how did you feel about that?**

R: I felt awful. I felt really, really awful. It's one of those situations where you need somebody and you've just caused them intense pain and there's just nothing you can say.

**J: You told me earlier that when you got back you were in a really dark mood. Had this incident got something to do with your mood?**

R: No. It was just how exhausted I was. I don't know whether I was depressed or worn out by the whole experience of going out there and doing it by the seat of your pants, and the climbing element which was utterly exhausting.

**J: Yeah, but the end of every shoot's a big downer isn't it?**

R: It's like a relief almost. But there was all the build-up as well. I was editing one film

Stick It! is getting longer by the day. We did shoot a lot of footage. There are no compromises. I'm making this for climbers, for boulderers...



with Mark and trying to organise this trip at really short notice and having to train up two cameramen and get really fit. I just put myself through it.

**J: Did the experience affect your friendship with Neil, long term?**

R: Not long term. There was pressure on it, especially when Neil got ill and there was a lot that went on behind the scenes that didn't make it into the film about what we were going to do and obviously I was under a lot of pressure because I had a Channel 4 commission and I didn't want to blow it but at the same time obviously, Neil was ill, and there was a worry about carrying on, but he's a really good friend. He wanted to carry on working, didn't want to let me down.

**J: What do you think of the quality of climbing vids that have so far been made?**

R: I wouldn't want to decry any climbing videos because everyone's just brought up on million dollar movies. They go to the cinema and see these films on telly all the time. Yet climbing videos have got no income attached to them really. You just can't dismiss them. Things like *One Summer* which quality wise was well down the scale just in production values and stuff, actually opened the door. Gradually standards will improve but when you look at it commercially you've got to make compromises. Seventy five crew were on the *Peak Practice* set. When are you ever going to get that on a climbing video? It's just not going to happen. And the two Bens [Pritchard and Moon] made more money on *One Summer* (well, they made £800 each or something) than they did on *The Real Thing* which is much higher quality. And the best climbing films are always going to be made by climbers. It's like this bouldering film, *Stick It*. There are no compromises. I'm making this for climbers, for boulderers – it's for us.

**J : How important do you think soundtracks are in films?**

R: Soundtracks are key. They're key. Music is such an important thing but it's just so hard to get hold of, without paying a fortune for. That's what I've been doing now, just going round Sheffield trying to get hold of any music, eventually it gets to the point where the effort... it's just very time consuming. I've been trying to get the rights for a Sam Cooke track and it's like...

**J: Oh GOD!!!**

R: Right! (laughs) You can't get it! Like any really decent music's gonna cost you £500 for three minutes. And in a 40 minute film you need ten tracks, that's like five grand! And that's 1000 video sales! And your average video sale's only 2000, so where's your income out of it? Where's your edit time?

**J: What do you enjoy most about the film making process?**

R: I think just making it happen really.

**J: What do you think about how climbing is portrayed in movies and TV ?**

R It's kind of interesting. Especially having been on the *Peak Practice* set, seeing just what kind of machine it is that you've got no control over.

**J: Who was climbing in that?**

R: Well it was the actors.

**J: (in disgust) ACTORS?!!!!**

R: " Well, we were there as climbing advisors and co-ordinators. It was quite good fun. Neil Bentley was doubling and they asked Grimer to be an extra. You should have seen the grin on his face as he had to take his position. His face just lit up.

We took people on routes and taught the actors to climb and got them into positions. But they're making climbing films for Joe Public, and what they're using climbing for is as a form of excitement. But as climbers we would have taken this gear out because it just looked stupid. However, to Joe Public these technicalities don't matter. But as a climber you just

take great pleasure in knowing that all that gear there looks stupid. You're seeing something that they're not even seeing. And stuff like *Cliffhanger*, that's really just bad characterisation. They're using climbing as some sort of macho testosterone thing. They've got the stereotype wrong. That's why the film's shit.

**J: How do you feel about the fact that in the climbing public eye you're now associated with films. Do you think that detracts from your achievements as a climber?**

R: It doesn't really detract from my climbing because I haven't done anything! I'm not really a great climber. You just get associated with what impact you make. You get what you deserve. Unless you cheat! I wouldn't say I was a great climber so...

**J: I love people being humble.**

R: Well being in Sheffield in climbing terms is a really humbling experience. You just go out climbing with brilliant climbers. You've got to be really deluded to think you're good. Or you've got to be really good! I mean, how can you think of yourself as a really great climber if you go out climbing with Malcolm Smith ? You can just see it. You can touch the same holds and fall off the same holds that they're pulling on...

Life's like a big therapy session really. By the end of it if you've learnt all your lessons then you're going to be content.

**J: So won't there be a *Hard Grit II*?**

R: Not from me there won't. Mark's got plans but he wants to make it more universal, going down the same road but on a national scale, including hard headpoints in places like the Lakes. I feel like I've done it, I've witnessed enough. That's why I didn't film *Equilibrium* and Mark had to set up two cameras himself.

*Stick It* is out now, available direct from Greenshires on 01536 382563.