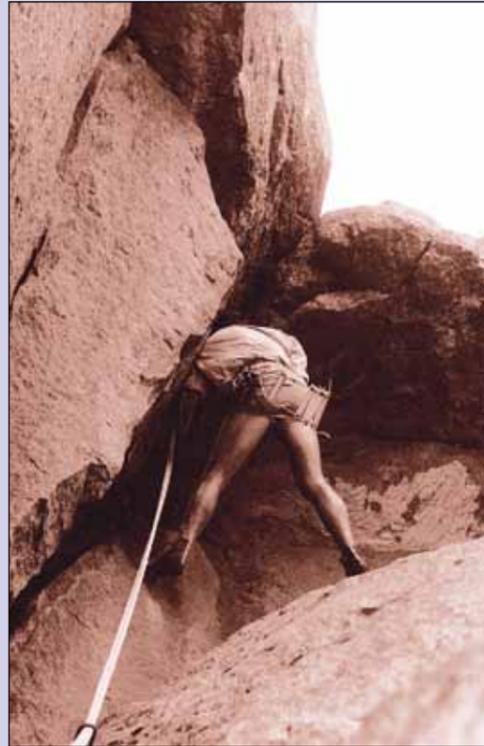
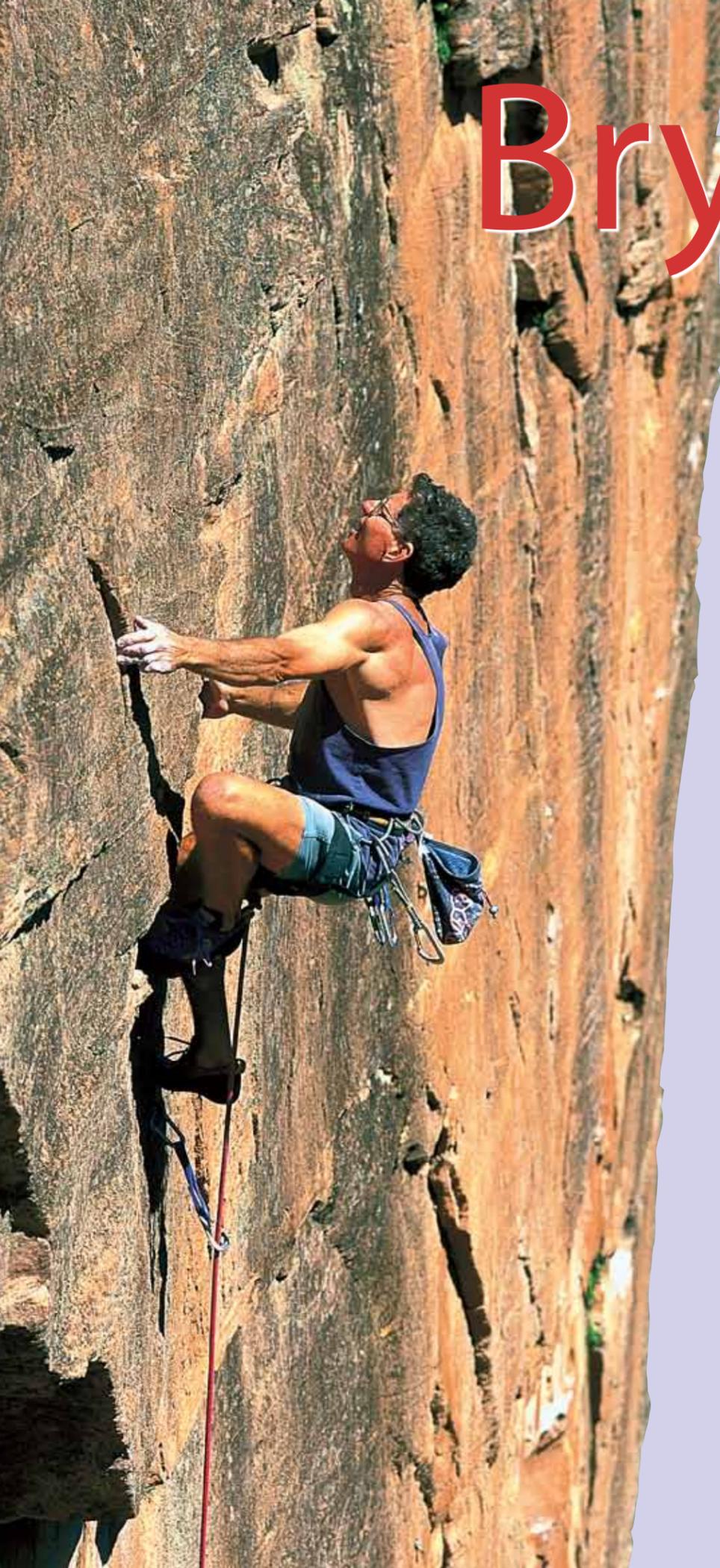


Bryden Allen A PROFILE

Peter Chaly catches up with one of the legends of Australian climbing



many ascents. When I tried the route again, the final chimney was all iced up so it was a bit harder. However, I was amazed that at that young age I had made a successful ascent of this fairly difficult mountain with no experience or equipment at all.

He might not have had any experience or equipment, but his interest in climbing had begun, and it was at university where Allen gained the technical skills he needed to progress. He joined the London University Mountaineering Club, learned as much as he could from the more experienced climbers around him and participated in the club's regular climbing trips.

But these trips weren't enough for Allen and he climbed the college buildings at night. The club even had a guidebook, which listed established routes. Allen added four new routes to the guide and was photographed for the university paper, soloing one route several storeys above the ground.

Allen's debut on the Australian climbing scene took place in 1962 after he moved back to Australia. He participated in a trip to the Warrumbungles during

Many climbers would know Bryden Allen as the inventor of the carrot bolt and bolt plate. Others would know him from his bold first ascents, which include Balls Pyramid, Tasmania's Frenchmans Cap, and climbs in the Warrumbungles and the Blue Mountains in New South Wales, and ascents of Sydney landmarks including the Sydney Town Hall clock tower, Sydney Harbour Bridge and Centrepont Tower. Others would have seen the classic Simon Carter photograph of Allen climbing Toyland—a three star, 30 metre, grade-25 climb in the Blue Mountains—at the age of 58. And still others, ignorant of his 'legend' status in Australian climbing circles, might just know him as 'that guy in the wheelchair' offering to belay

Left, the iconic shot of Bryden Allen on Toyland (25), Cosmic County, the Blue Mountains, is one of the few modern shots of Allen climbing. Simon Carter. Top left, Allen in 1965 on the first ascent of the 150 metre Northern Groove (18), Tonduron, the Warrumbungles, NSW. John Davis. Top right, Allen (left) and Jack Pettigrew at Tahune Hut, Tasmania, on the trip to climb Frenchmans Cap. Right, Allen and his Morris dancing group—Allen is the enthusiastic dancer on the right. All uncredited photos Bryden Allen collection

people at his local climbing gym. But when, in 1972, Thrutch magazine reported that Allen had successfully freed Kraken (21), the classic crack-climb in the Blue Mountains, and concluded with 'and then Bryden the enigma had to return home for Morris dancing practice', it was apparent that Bryden Allen wasn't your average rockclimber.

Allen was born in Canberra in 1940 and lived with his family on Mt Stromlo, where as a child he developed a fondness for climbing buildings and trees. At the age of 11, his family moved to England and Allen was enrolled at Hendon County School in Middlesex. He excelled in his studies, was a member of the cross-country team, became the school chess champion and captained the school chess team.

His report cards of the time were filled with comments such as: 'real originality of thought'; 'intelligent'; 'a very gifted boy'; and somewhat prophetically, 'quietly and tenaciously he maintains his high position'.

His father introduced him to the Scouting movement and it was during this time that his interest in climbing began to take hold. During holiday breaks he went with the Scouts on expeditions to

“I did the second ascent of a lot of Bryden's climbs...and they definitely have the funny quality that makes you want to close your eyes and pretend you're not really where you are and doing what you're doing.”

Corsica, Scotland and the Pyrenees. While on the trip to the Pyrenees he and his brother climbed Mt Perdido, which at 3355 metres is the third highest mountain in the range. Allen recalls:

We knew nothing about the mountain apart from the fact that we could see it and it was marked on the map. During my time off in 1995 I thought I would try to repeat these things. Paglini Orba in Corsica wasn't too bad, but I couldn't manage to repeat the ascent of Mt Perdido. The route I had gone up previously—I had been very much the prime mover on the previous ascent—wasn't the easiest and even now, with a special climbers' hut below, the route still doesn't get too



Easter 1962 and completed three major first ascents between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. The routes were Cornerstone Rib Direct (14), Out and Beyond (15) and Lieben (17). Each climb became a classic.

The period between 1962 and 1965 was very productive for Allen and he primarily focused on climbing new face-routes. In 1963 he wrote and produced the first rockclimbing guide for NSW.

Allen considers his 'big three' new climbs to be the face of Bluff Mountain in the Warrumbungles, the face of Frenchmans Cap and Balls Pyramid. At the time they were arguably the most significant climbing challenges in Australia.

Allen had scoped out the face of Bluff Mountain with Ted Batty, Jack Pettigrew and John Davis; each prospective partner decided that the climb would be too dif-

ficult. Eventually Allen persuaded a 16-year-old, John Ewbank, to attempt the climb by promising to buy his food for the trip. They spent a week on the project, and the face was climbed.

His ascent of the face of Frenchmans Cap also took some persistence. All previous attempts—by three Tasmanian teams, an English team, and a mainland Australian team—had failed. Allen, who was only 24 years old, teamed up with Pettigrew for the attempt. After seven days of persistent rain they had almost run out of food and were facing defeat.



Allen encourages a nervous Jack Pettigrew to jump into shark-infested water near Balls Pyramid.

But although tired, wet and hungry, Allen and Pettigrew succeeded. The resulting 380 metre, grade-17 route was named A Toi La Gloire (Thine is the Glory), but is commonly referred to as the Sydney Route.

During 1963 and 1964 Allen began to develop a bolt-belay system, to become known as the 'carrot bolt', that would be used by climbers all over the country. He conducted extensive tests on the various designs and experimented with different clipping methods. One of his first ideas was that the bolt could be hitched with a sling—an early version of the carrot bolt had a washer around the shaft that was intended to prevent the sling from slipping off the bolt. When he saw the limitations of this design he began to experiment with removable plates. The initial bolt plate had two holes in an angled bracket—one for a karabiner and the other, in a keyhole shape, that fitted over the bolt. It had a wire on the top end of the bracket that the climber would twist around the bolt head to keep the bracket in place. The breakthrough came when Allen combined both holes so that the karabiner was clipped into the hole that went over the bolt, thus preventing the bolt plate from being removed. And in doing so, the modern carrot bolt and bolt plate were born.

In 1965 Allen, Pettigrew, Davis and David Witham made the first successful ascent of Balls Pyramid, the imposing 562 metre volcanic pinnacle that juts out of the sea 16 kilometres south of Lord Howe Island. Other teams had attempted Balls Pyramid but they had all failed. Because of the nature of the rocky pinnacle, just getting on to the island was a challenge and some of the previous teams had failed to get even that far.

During his time in the UK, Allen had climbed near Cornwall where some of the climbs can only be reached from the

Davis and Allen climbed the Central Railway clock tower together, leaving a pair of old Dunlop Volley sand-shoes at the top as a sign of their ascent—an act Allen repeated on other building climbs and which soon became his 'signature'. Despite all of his building climbing, he was never caught by the authorities.

Allen set his sights on climbing the Sydney Harbour Bridge, but as it had been climbed before, he opted for a more spectacular ascent and established the 'Sydney Harbour Bridge Direct Route'. Instead of getting on to the archway earlier in the climb as other parties did, he decided to climb the longest hanger that runs vertically from the top of the

breaking and were forced to hide from security guards. They found two empty pipes on the roof and crawled into them and waited all day for the sun to set so that they could continue their climb.

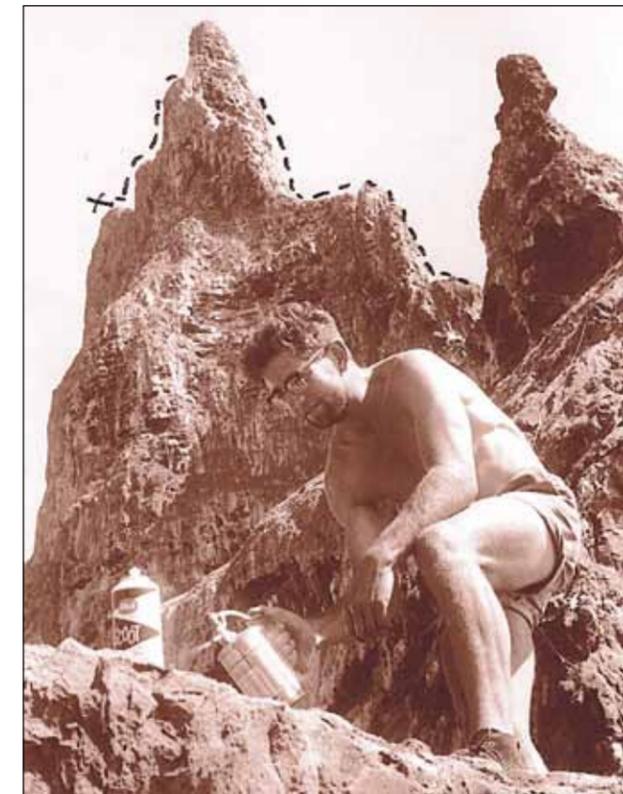
When they emerged from the pipes, they discovered that the cables that went from the base of the tower up to the crow's-nest were covered with a smooth plastic that thwarted their best attempts to climb them. The climb was aborted, they abseiled off and Allen went home to rethink the climb.

On the second attempt they were prepared, cinching slings around the cables to help to climb them. The aim was to get out to the end of the base of the crow's-nest: they successfully reached this point around 5 am but still had a lengthy abseil ahead of them. On the ab-

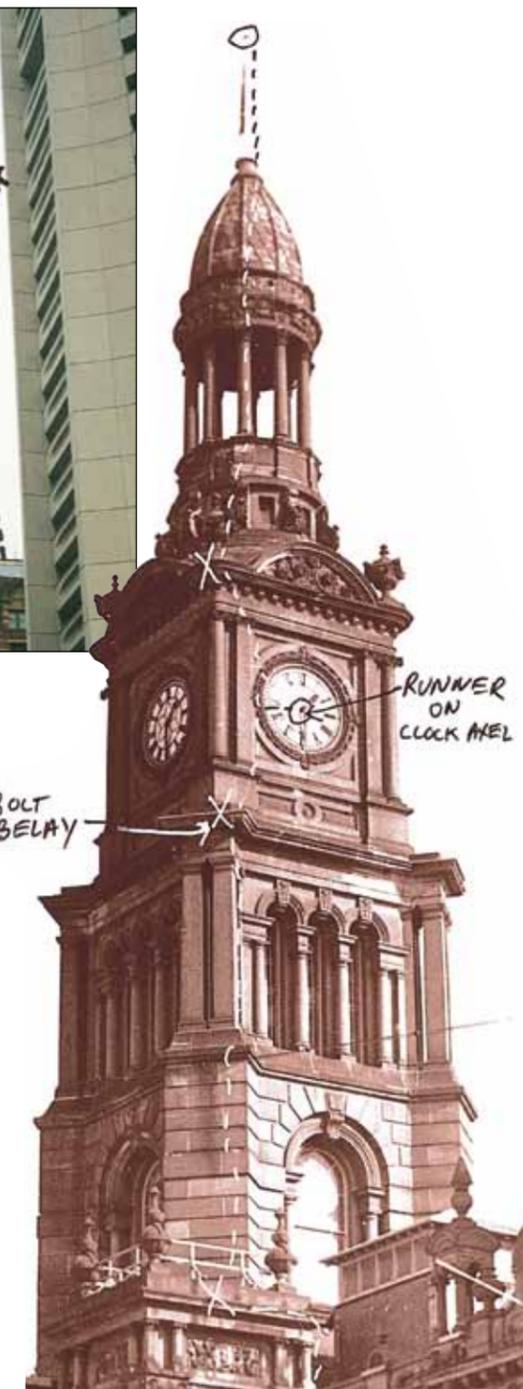
that he could focus on other pursuits. But he recalls '...as things turned out, I ended up having no choice in the matter'.

In the year before he had on-sighted some grade-23 climbs and he was determined to end his climbing career by on-sighting a grade-24 route. He had tried Language of Desire at Shipley in the Blue Mountains but had missed the on-sight ascent.

He went to Mt Arapiles to climb Orestes, but the first week was wet and he didn't get too much time on rock. He and Chris Jackson set out from the camp-site one wet day intending to climb something overhanging that would be relatively dry. While scrambling up some rock to inspect the climb and check that the crux wasn't wet, Allen slipped. He fell and hit a small ledge that sent him backwards, dropped another four metres and landed on his back over a sharp rock. He re-



Allen preparing centipede repellent at Balls Pyramid, with the route taken behind. Above right, the route up Centrepoint Tower. Far right, a 'topo' of the route taken up the Sydney Town Hall clock tower.



arch down to the roadway. Once he had reached the archway he had to stretch out to the lip of the arch, swing free with his legs—dangling approximately 130 metres above the harbour—and then mantel for all he was worth to get on top of the arch itself.

Allen soon added Centrepoint Tower to his list of must-do Sydney attractions. On his first attempt he was confronted with an initial climb up nine storeys before reaching the tower itself. He recalls that: 'the storeys were relatively easy if you were tall enough and strong enough. You stood on the railing of one storey and then reached up for a good hold on the next storey. My climbing partner Verne was tall enough, but I had to jump for each storey.'

He and his partner were on the roof at the base of the tower as daylight was

seil Allen forgot to put stopper knots in the ends of the ropes and had to wrap his legs around the cable as a backup to avoid dropping off the end of the rope. He stopped with half a metre of rope between his belay device and the drop to the ground. He secured himself, but when he and his partner pulled the ropes for the next abseil the ropes fell between two crossed cables and jammed tight. Allen had to climb up again to release the ropes and then descend. The same thing happened on the next abseil. In the end the two climbers descended in broad daylight, seen by people in the streets below, but somehow avoided the authorities and got away without being caught.

By the spring of 1999–2000, Allen had decided to give up serious climbing so

Before the moment, before the move

The scent of the eucalypts
And the sound of raindrops turned to ice
Suspended from the leaves
And tinkling in the wind
Like tiny melting bells.

Before the moment
Before the move
Before the big shift
Before the aftermath
Before the wheelchair
Before the fall
Back with the sharp shadows
Back with the morning light
Back with the long dusk
And the kangaroos
And the kookaburras
And the walk towards
The climb that got away.

There were coiled ropes
And uncoiled ropes
And heavy bags
And songs
And plans
And campaigns
And pencil torches
And headtorches
And priceless moments
And wasted moments
And always the next climb
The one to come
The one that would unravel
Everything.

There was Stanmore and Kings Cross
And Katoomba and Hobart
And unavailable girls
And available girls
And chin-ups galore
And oatmeal every morning
And broken twigs
And rusty bolts
And piton scars...

But it was more than all that then
And it's still more than all that
Even now.

John Ewbank

calls: 'I was out for an hour, but even as I became conscious and was being carried off, it was clear that my back was probably broken.'

He was flown by helicopter to Melbourne for emergency surgery, but the damage had been done: his T9 vertebra had suffered a complete break and he was a paraplegic. After four weeks he was flown to Sydney where he continued his recuperation at the Prince of Wales Hospital and later at Prince Henry Hospital. He spent a year at a halfway house while he reorganised his life and found a place to live that was accessible by wheelchair.

Since his accident, Allen has maintained contact with the climbing community and regularly turns up at his local climbing gym in Sydney to socialise and offer his belaying services. He also continues to run an annual bouldering day and barbecue at Lindfield Rocks in Sydney.

What many people wouldn't know is that in addition to his climbing exploits, Allen has written his own computer language, created his own word processor and has come up with an alternative means of space travel. He has also created his own language, complete with a dictionary and rules of grammar. And if that weren't enough, he has spent 15 years writing a 362-page document, titled 'Society

of Choice', that outlines his theories for a radically new society.

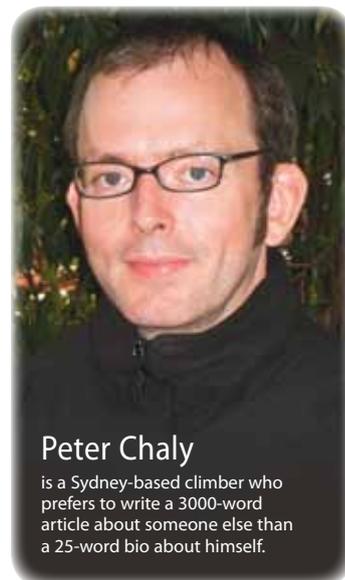
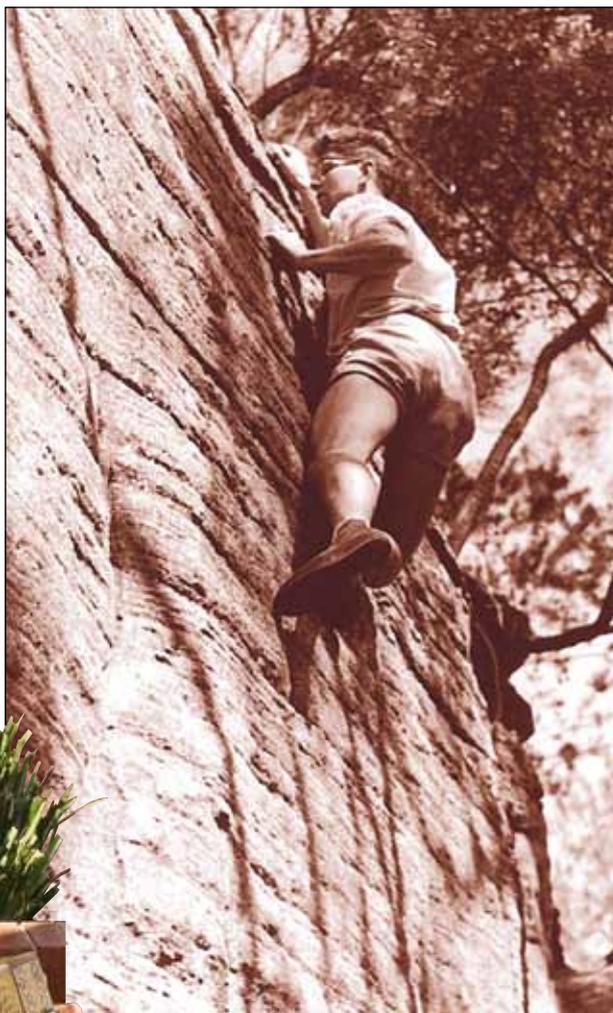
The final word on Allen comes from John Ewbank who, when asked about his days climbing with Allen, remembers:

I did the second ascent of a lot of Bryden's climbs, using more or less the same gear, and they definitely have the funny quality that makes you want to close your eyes and pretend you're not really where you are and doing what you're doing.

His consuming project at the time was to climb Echo Point, near Katoomba. He'd

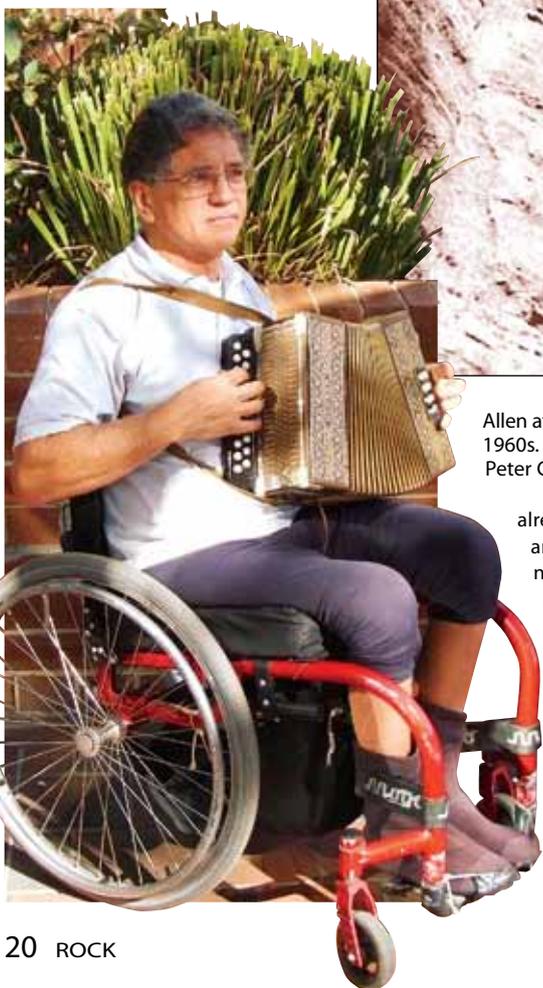
we got to Katoomba...I wasn't allowed to look at our proposed route until we got down the track as far as the bridge at Honeymoon Point on the Three Sisters. When we arrived there he had a really smug expression on his face and said okay, I could turn around and have a look. I turned and looked and nearly started crying! I thought, 'This guy's even more of a nutter than they said he was'. Then I started to think he was pulling my leg, so I started smiling right back at him. A few minutes later I realised he wasn't joking or pulling my leg at all...The cliff gave me a stomach cramp, just looking at it, but I couldn't back down, so I decided to take the gibbering wreck option and managed to exercise enough self-control to say something like: 'Mmmm. Looks good!'

In the end we spent five days on it, over three attempts, with two nights on the shale ledge and one night hanging in Bosons chairs. The method we used to get up is so hilarious in retrospect that it



Peter Chaly

is a Sydney-based climber who prefers to write a 3000-word article about someone else than a 25-word bio about himself.



Allen at Lindfield Rocks, Sydney, in the early 1960s. Peter Jackson. Left, Allen today. Peter Chaly

already used up five partners on it and was desperate for a sixth. I'd never even seen it, so when he asked if I was game I just tried to look very cool and said, 'Sure!'

We became something like the odd couple. He was 23 and I was 15—a very, how shall I say it, abrasive, competitive, combative whippersnapper. Bryden was very tolerant of my comic posturing. At the same time, he wasn't willing to just take all my crap without getting up to a few tricks of his own to put me in my place. When

probably bears recounting. On the constantly overhanging top half Bryden would simply drill until his arms and hands were too tired to hold a hammer. Then he'd set up a hanging belay, tie everything off and haul up the H-frames and a length of flexible electron ladder...To conserve karabiners he would only clip, say, every fourth bolt. My bit consisted of grabbing on to the ladder, unclipping and flying off into space. I'd climb up, he'd haul me back on to the rock, and I'd unclip again and swing back into space, and so on until we were both together again. We'd then get everything hopelessly tangled and confused, and then finally repeat the whole process. My knuckles were white for weeks and I was talking to Jesus all the way. Bryden's and my birthday are only one day apart and the weekend we got to the top happened to be those two days. Bryden had turned 24 and I'd turned about fifty-five. 