

Coromandel Castle Rock Exploration

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Saturday 2012-01-21 everything fit together for a day-out climbing trip. The weather, family commitments, equipment, and partner, Michael Greer, all conspired for a great trip somewhere near my home town of Hamilton.

Recently, I have been hearing about a place called Castle Rock in the Coromandel with some very tall rocks. I had heard it was in a developing state. It has few climbs on it compared to old stand-by's in Wharepapa South, but it has a beautiful rustic feel to it.

I have been climbing for a while, but I have less experience in many different kinds of climbing than I would like. This area promised some minor bush bashing, seclusion, beautiful vistas of the Hauraki Gulf by the Coromandel Township, and a different kind of rock.



Castle Rock

Freeclimb.co.nz has a pretty description of how to get there and how to find each of the climbs that have been bolted.

We made it up to the forestry road, parked, packed up our gear, and made our way to the trail head. The entire hike up the hill took us about 30 minutes. The trail didn't waste a lot of time meandering back and forth serpentine style, but instead went straight up quite steeply. At the top it split into two directions. Freeclimb has an excellent visual to help you get through this.

We started with Kookmyer wall. To get to this wall, the directions stated to take the left fork and then one meter later to take another trail to the left. The trail to the left was more like 10 meters and not very well marked. There was some minor bush bashing to get there, but we finally ended up at a gully between two tall vertical rocks.



Michael at the top of Nice Touch Wilbur.



Mark at the top of Nice Touch Wilbur.

What was not mentioned in the guide is that this area is a wind tunnel! The wind never let up and was quite bracing. The trees at the bottom of the gully only had branches only on one side revealing that this was not an unusually windy day for the gully. I can honestly say I had never climbed in a wind

breaker before. The wind direction was generally downwards filling the space in the gully and hence climbing upwards took yourself out of the high wind area.

Michael and I started out at *Nice Touch Wilbur* (18). At 27m there wasn't a lot of extra rope left abseiling down from the top! It was definitely interesting climbing because the rock was certainly different. I do a lot of ignimbrite and consequently end up doing a lot of sharp pockety climbs. This rock had quite a bit of friction, but not so many pockets. It had more like dimples and friction. Nice for a change.

After this we went around to the lower edge over to *Sleeping Boy Catches No Fish* (18). It wasn't so much of a trail as it was a general direction to go... mainly down. There was a tiny flat area right at the bottom of the climb which was sufficient for our needs though. The guide says the climb is 50m, but for the life of me it certainly didn't look that high. We took up two ropes and sure enough it was quite a long climb.



Michael demonstrating how to climb Sleeping Boy Catches No Fish. The viewing angle of the rock is quite deceptive.

I watched my partner Michael climb asking myself why he was being challenged by it all. He's an excellent climber and he's certainly better than me, but the climb just didn't look all that hard from where I was standing. Once it was my turn I could see the angles were incredibly deceiving. What looked like a slabby wall up higher was nearly vertical with challenging holds. It was an interesting

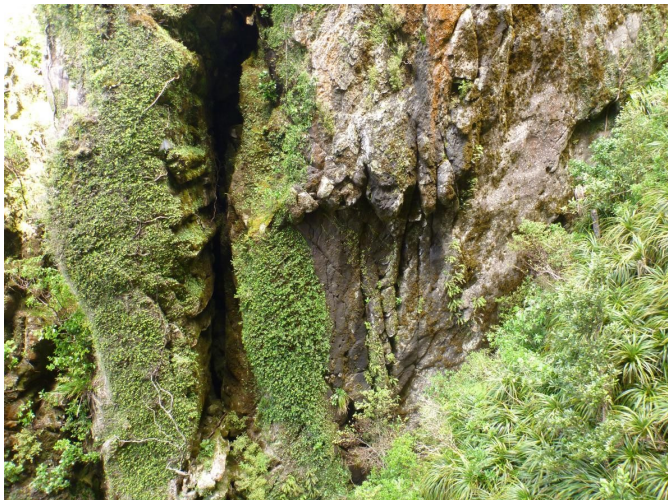
climb and more than once I had to throw in a hail mary to get to the next point. Heck, I fell off three times just starting it. I could feel my inexperience on slabs making itself known.

Our next point of rock started at the top. The guide talked about *Ganesh* (17) which seemed interesting. We had to hike back the way we came and over to the peak. Once there, some obvious top anchors showed us the way. One rope was setup for abseil and the other brought down for the climb.

On the way down it became quite clear that although the rock was undulating quite a bit, the really solid holds were few and far in between. There was also a ledge and a gap that had to be pushed through. So much for a 17! Anyway, I was committed to having fun on it. Even more than that, I was committed to making the climb. We had to; we had abseiled into it. The ledge at the bottom was not very big, but it was solid enough for a decent belay point. My partner took point and grunted and cursed his way through it, much like I would learn to do shortly.



Michael starting on Ganesh. The nature of the rock is clearly visible.



The opposite wall of the Ganesh gully didn't seem to have been touched by man for a very long time. The colors and vegetation were beautiful.

The wall we were climbing was part of a gully between two vertical walls. The other wall had not seemingly been touched by man. It was green and purple and filled with all manner of life. It was very beautiful. The ground, if you could call it that, sloped away very fast so that it would be difficult to call it a forest floor. The swallows flew like crazy in that gully. When they were flying near me the insects disappeared, but when they started flying near the top of the rock, they would all start happily buzzing around again.

When it was my turn, I was surprised it was a 17, but I could just chalk that up to my recent focus on ignimbrite. It was challenging and a good experience.

It was amazing the way the time passed. I've only described three climbs, but that took most of the entire day. We picked at food and drink as the time went on as it was possible between climbs and hence the day went by quite quickly.

As long as we were there we figured we'd go and find *McBirney-Gillman Direct* (15). Like *Ganesh*, it starts off with an abseil from the top. It wasn't entirely clear where exactly it was, but after some

searching it was located pretty close to where we were searching.

The guide states: “You could walk down there - staying right, but tripping up would mean goodbye cruel world” and “Don't send beginners down just because they're doing that grade.” I believe both statements. We opted to setup an anchor at the top and then abseil down to the bottom of the climb passing the top of the climb on the way.

The ledge down there was monstrous as compared to the others. It turns out that this one was only a few meters above Sleeping Boy Catches No fish, but not connected. What was great about this climb was that even though it was a 15, it had some nice exposure. You had to walk out to the arete a meter or so out from the ledge and it was pretty much a 60-70m drop to the ground from there.

Surprisingly, for a 15 it had a small roof structure to climb through. It wasn't too hard to imagine a big rock coming away when pulling on it, but it turns out it was pretty solid.

We were racing the sun at this point so it was probably time to call it quits. We packed up and headed back down the hill. Going down those steep trails is always harder for me so I had to be extra careful with my tired body.

Neither of us had ever been to Coromandel Township so we opted for some eats and a beer at any local restaurant. We ended up at the Admiral Arms. It was a pleasant environment with good food, but golly gee, i'm not sure how they could have been slower. I ordered some stone grilled seafood which shows up raw and that took literally an hour. The good news is that gave us more time to watch the sunset from the balcony, to drink beer and to share climbing stories.



Looking up McBirney-Gillman Direct and a small roof to climb through.



So, it was a great day out climbing in the Coromandel.