



## Climbing Review: Double Rope Technique by Glenn

Within Australian climbing, the use of double ropes has been associated with chubby, beard-stroking middle-aged punters who took up the activity when dinosaurs still roamed the valleys. They then travel overseas (Britain), drink warm beer, eat cold pies and contract some sort of nervous condition that compels the inflicted to forsake the single rope and take up doubles: living happily ever after. However, over the last two decades, leading British sea cliff and hard gritstone climbers, through necessity and self-preservation, have placed a high level of trust in and devoted a great deal of time refining double rope skills.

Invariably, ascents of sea cliffs and mountain crags involve traverses and rising diagonal pitches, which have a tendency to reduce climbing partners to jibbering wrecks at the sight of long unprotected sections above swirling seas or gaping yawns. The only way of protecting the second and third climbers on these pitches is by the use of double ropes and high runners. Climbers embarking on the large faces and weaving lines of Frenchmans Cap Tasmania or the Warrumbungles NSW without double ropes would be considered quite foolhardy, if not completely insane. In the event of having to bail out on a climb through bad weather or injury, an additional 50-60 metres of rope comes in rather handy.

When dealing with dubious rock, or protection that is somewhat less than confidence inspiring, double ropes allow numerous pieces of backup or directional gear to be easily arranged (without rope drag lifting it out) distributing the force of a fall between ropes and equipment, reducing the impact on everything. Double ropes also provide additional security and confidence when climbing in areas with sharp rock, such as slate, limestone or quartzite.

Long gone are the days of the beefy 11 mm single



*“Why Me”, 25, The Gap NSW*

and 9 mm half ropes, the now preferred rope diameters are 10.1-10.4 mm for the single or main rope, which is held in reserve for the crux or potential nasty section, and 8.5-9 mm as the second or half rope, used predominantly to eliminate rope drag. Significant advancements in modern rope construction, with increased core strength and sheath density, have allowed for a reduction in the overall weight and bulk of ropes. *Sterling Ropes USA* for instance, have increased the woven material in the sheath construction of their *Marathon* range by 25%, producing a series of five ropes that have become highly favoured by full time climbers and guides alike. In the modern era of climbing, very few ropes are retired due to exceeding the fall factor specified by the manufacturer. More commonly, ropes are retired due to wear of the protective sheath. However, many manufacturers now recommend that ropes be retired after 5 years of use, regardless of any visible wear.

The advantages of using double ropes over the single far outweigh the slight disadvantages of additional weight (approx. 2 kg) and rope management issues (the addition of an extra rope in the belay system) with one rope often being taken in as the other is being fed out. To ease proceedings, the two ropes should be of different colours; the leader indicates which colour should be payed out or taken in as he/she progresses. With time, the processes become second nature. With the absence of rope drag, the belayer can feel every inch of their climbing partner's progress.

**It is strongly recommended that parties wishing to enter the big beautiful world of double roped climbing should practise on relatively safe routes at a lower grade than normally climbed with a single rope so that they become familiar with all aspects of managing double ropes.**