

'Vivre la difference!'

By Andy Cloquet

The name Khyber is unique in UK climbing. It now holds an unassailable position across both sexes in mountaineering's Who's Who.

You will remember Mark Khyber but do you know that the media-heroine Chrissy is also a Khyber? I certainly didn't until very recently and it's staggering to find that Chrissy, who is the most vocal in denying her celebrity status, is a climber of equal class to. Mark, of course, will always be remembered for his audacious solos of Greenland's 'Inuition' & 'Eskimobility' and the yellow-streaked, politically touchy, 'Lemon Curd' in Northern Iraq. I doubt, though, you'll know much about the real Chrissy other than the glib, fabricated dross repeatedly churned out by the glossy climbing comics.

When I watch Chrissy climb I can't help myself seeing Mark's style, grace and composure and maybe that's why she rarely speaks about him: she wants us to see her for who she is: a daring, skilful, competent world class climber. Take a brilliant Lucinda, dazzling Lucy, peerless Lynn, matchless Libby and an enduring Liv then scrunch them into the DNA melting pot of life with more than a dose of Mark and you'll end up with Chrissy. Don't try to make too many comparisons with Mark, though, as she's far from his shadow.

She's tall, leggy and brash; she's sassy and self-opinionated but what's most important, she climbs like Roadrunner on Speed. It's as if she's taken a combination of vitamins, Viagra and Vanceril in a solution of Adrenalin.

You can easily see Mark's high cheek bones and his ever-present, face-splitting smile in Chrissy and she shares the same alluring brown eyes as Mark.

She has the same drive as Mark, edged with the finesse of femininity. Mind you, Chrissy wouldn't have shown-off for the cameras like Mark! Oh, what a mess he made of himself, that day on the once hidden Palace Boulders in Edinburgh.

Having just been given the rocks and a surrounding acre of land by His Majesty, the custodians of the Caledonia Mountaineering Clubs Federation stood back to watch Mark dance over the boulders as the cameras devoured every nuance of his movement.

Mark's only mistake was to attempt the unbouldered, horizontal roof that is finished by a rounded, leaning arete and suggest that a photographer position herself underneath for a more dramatic shot. It was some sight as Mark was stretchered off to casualty theatre with half a tripod still impaled in his upper thigh. Chrissy's now claimed the line calling it *Holyroof*.

We never really saw Mark again. Apparently, he went on to some quasi-spiritual, life changing experience. Six years on we have Chrissy Khyber: not only taking his place but surpassing him in British and World climbing.

She boulders at V7 / F7a+ (*Quartz Not* - Glen Torridon & *Gneiss Touch* - Flowerdale Crags) with the typically tenacious, yet dexterous & familiar gritty Khyber power and she leads new routes at E5 (*Cwm On Gals* - Yr Moel).

If that's not enough, she can dry tool with surgical precision at VI; and that's when she is meant to be resting. Whilst on her climbing marathons she smacks the balls of lesser men into oblivion; leaving those left in the group to collapse beside the nearest boulder. Who cares whether she just missed repeating Fawcett's *100 Extremes* in one day of daylight? Fawcett's average was E2, Chrissy's was E3 until rain stopped play on route 93: even Mark dipped out on route 92 when some weird hormonal pills started to get the better of his de-hydrating exertions.

If that's not enough, take my word for it. I met with her just after she'd returned from Beinn à Bhuridh where she had led the first free ascent of *Papal Condoms*; the undercut pinnacle that soars out to the right of *Vatican City*. We made the interview whilst linking the best Cairngorm crags in a two-day hike, climbing in Mescalitos and choosing nothing less than 4b on each of our 6 multi-pitch routes.

I've never experienced such intensity and drive from one individual, yet all the time I was with her, I couldn't get Mark out of my head. Also, I knew that he was the one subject sure to evoke a mood swing of gargantuan proportions. So, in our Petzl illuminated cave (*cheque in the post, please for blatant product placement!*) under Carn nan coire Lurcher, just before dawn signalled my first lead of Day 2, I popped the question: "Where is Mark, Chrissy? He just vanished from the scene leaving an unmatched legacy of beautiful routes and then you appeared; what's happened to him?"

The ensuing tense silence was quietly broken by Chrissy as she slam-dunked British climbing history into meltdown. Turning round, she slowly peeled off her Patagucci rock pants and it was with a cold sweat of realisation congealing on my face that I was drawn to the violent scar on her thigh. How much more life changing could Mark's absence have been?

("Vivre la difference" from *Boys Will Be Boys* by The Hooters)