



Nick Hancock climbing at Great Zawn, Bosigran. Being wise he has backed up the in-situ peg with plenty of gear!  
Credit: Turnbull.

**There is nothing like a friend's death to concentrate the mind. In 1974 Dave had enjoyed a successful first alpine season and disappeared to Cornwall to indulge himself on secure sun drenched granite prior to returning to medical school. He never did start the term.**

I still remember chatting to his father in London and watching him struggling to come to terms with his son's death. He showed me the equipment that the coroner had returned to the family. Blood stained helmet, harness and rope and there, still clipped in place, the shattered peg.

Of course, like all accidents there was not one simple reason. It was not simply Dave's reliance on an old rusty peg at the Seaward end of Bosigran. It was a question of judgement, of pushing one's grade in an unfamiliar area, of proving something, of an under graded HVS (now E3), lack of local knowledge and lack of experience. A Metallurgist may have phrased it in terms

of pressures, loads, oxidation, electro chemical reactions, salt action and solvents but the result was the same. Dave was dead.

Thirty years on I have climbed on sea cliffs from Hoy to Lands End, been held by rusty pegs on Gogarth, abseiled off sea stacks and watched pegs crumble to the touch at Swanage and Gower. I have no ethical qualms about replacing in situ pegs on my local Culm Coast and over the last ten years have made a collection of those that I have removed. Some of those shown are from abseil anchors, some from main belays and some key pegs protecting potential ground falls.

You do not need a science degree to see how this in-situ gear has corroded a few centimetres inside the placement crack. Just out of sight!

Enjoy our sea cliff climbing heritage, respect local ethics, use natural protection, back up in situ gear where possible but do not be afraid to be seen carrying a peg hammer and replacement pegs if the guide book mentions in situ gear of unknown age. It's worth the cost.



## HIDDEN SECRETS

### corrosion of sea cliff pegs

**What you see is often not what you get. David Hillebrandt illustrates why you should take in-situ gear with a pinch of salt.**



#### TECHNICAL NOTE

David highlights the need for real care when relying on any in-situ equipment - pegs, slings, nuts, and even bolts. When discussing pegs he makes an important point about the hidden nature of much of the corrosion. At the 1999 Technical Conference Pit Schubert (President of the UIAA Safety Commission) showed a selection of slides portraying in situ pegs, which looked superficially secure, and in good condition. When asked none of the relatively expert audience were able to tell which were good and which were bad. Pit then showed the post extraction pictures. All the pegs were fatally corroded to within a few mm of the surface; none would have held.

This is a salutary lesson and one to be remembered on sea cliffs and in the mountains where the cost of backing up is infinitely less that of getting it wrong.



(ALL PEGS) All these pegs are part of David Hillebrandt's thought provoking collection. Some came from established belays, others from crucial placements. None would have held a fall. Credit: Hillebrandt.