



A Rich Climbing Heritage.....

During the late 1950's, climbing in Britain was undergoing a major revolution both in participants and techniques. The post war population explosion unleashed an **unprecedented number** of people onto the **hills** to take up a sport, which was traditionally, the privileged domain of the wealthier upper classes. At this time, an **increasing number** surpassed old standards of climbing difficulty, and the old gear was seen to be totally inadequate for the **new techniques** and situations.

Hemp ropes, though still around at that time, were rapidly **disappearing** from the scene, and the clink of **tricounis** on rock was a **thing of the past**. Hemp waist lines and **steel karabiners**, often ex-army issue and of unknown strength, were around in abundance, and **nylon ropes and aluminium alloy karabiners** were only just becoming available to the climbing public. Then as now only the bold ventured far into the unknown but then, unlike now, the leader had little other than his own abilities to rely on. To venture onto the **ever-steepening walls** needed not finer nerves, but **better equipment**.



Troll's first home, 1966



A youthful looking Alan & Paul

It was in **this era** that climbers throughout the country began developing and experimenting with new methods of **aid and protection**. As ideas and **innovations** spread, more and more climbers advanced to the outer limits of their vertical environment. With the **safety element raised**, thresholds of difficulty were pushed even further, and the demand for more **refined equipment continued to escalate**. Consequently, like many others nurtured in this exciting time of expanding frontiers, three people, who were later to form Troll, Alan Waterhouse, Paul Seddon and Tony Howard, each individually became involved in developing **new concepts** in climbing gear.



.....and Tony!!!



The Troll Wall

By the early 1960's, the standard **engineering hexagon** nut had been discovered as a useful artificial chock, and natural progression from this led to the present day range of nuts. Alan Waterhouse and Paul Seddon, each working on their own designs, were probably the first individuals to **commercially produce** a range of chocks for sale to climbers. At the same time, Tony Howard was involved in the design of one of **Britain's first safety harness the Mark 1**, later to be superseded by the Mark 2, and also in the initiation of a range of tapes designed specifically for the climber. Using this equipment, the first ascent of one of **Europe's greatest rock climbs, Norway's Troll Wall**, was successfully achieved over a period of 5 1/2 days by Ammatt, Tweedale and Howard in 1965.

Following this climb, Alan Waterhouse and Tony Howard teamed up to design and produce climbing gear based on their existing knowledge of chocks and webbing, and the **concept of Troll was born**. Paul Seddon went it alone with a small but **aesthetically pleasing range of hardware** under the name of 'Parba' and it was not until 1970 that merging interests and a prolonged trip to the Yukon by Tony Howard led to the three teaming up to combine their resources and ideas.

During this period a number of **new concepts** had already emerged and the name of Troll had already become synonymous with advanced design and quality. Our equipment was going on expeditions to **South America and the Himalayas**, being used at outdoor centres and also appeared on television epics such as the **Old Man of Hoy ascent in 1967**. New designs created by Troll, and in demand at this time, were the Mark 2, The Climbers Belt, the Chest Harness, sewn etriers and most **revolutionary** of all, sewn slings, now a standard item of every climbers kit but previously unheard of. All were based on the already **renowned Troll Tapes**, and at the same

time we were finding increasing demand for our large selection of wedge, hexagon and tee chocks.

With this proliferation of equipment, climbs

and expeditions were taking on ever **more technical challenges** which as before, led to a demand for even more sophisticated gear. The ultimate trip of that time was the **Annapurna South Face**, and to meet the totally new requirements of such an undertaking, Don Whillans conceived the idea of his sit harness. Originally a rather bizarre object, the idea was worked on and modified by the Troll team over a period of six months and the result was hailed as the **most indispensable piece of gear on the climb**.

Following this **success**, Troll, already familiar in parts of Europe and the States, became **internationally known**, and expeditions from all over the world were using and recommending our gear.

Over this period all our existing gear was increasingly refined based on comments from leading mountaineers the world over, and our own discoveries whilst on the mountains. In 1973 we received the ultimate accolade from **Chris Bonington** after an attempt on the **South West Face of Everest**. He stated that all members of the expedition considered **Troll's Whillans harness to be best in the world**. It was not surprising therefore that in 1975 Troll harnesses and tapes were chosen yet again for what was to be the successful ascent of Everest's South West Face. Troll harnesses went all the way to the summit.



Don Whillans, South Face of Annapurna, 1970

It was during this same time period that our bandoliers, high-steppers, easy risers and chock slings were designed, all combining **traditional designs with new ideas**. At the same time, our range of chocks was modified and wired to suit the exacting demands of climbers looking for protection on routes previously only possible with the aid of pegs. The 'iron-age' had passed. Aided by **technically advanced equipment**, the seemingly impossible had almost become with everyone's reach and the climber's code of ethics was tightening.



As climbers stuck their necks even further into the unknown it became obvious that more advanced safety systems were required to take shock loads imposed on the body by big falls. By the time the **U.I.A.A** were beginning to consider specifications for such a harness, we at Troll had already been experimenting for two years with various designs. By 1976 our extremely versatile body harness had achieved world wide recognition and was used together with our **single point Hammock** on the west wall of **Changabang**, one of the boldest and most difficult Himalayan ascents ever undertaken. It was the first time such equipment had been really necessary in the Himalayas and once again Troll had provided the technology for a **significant advance** in the frontiers of mountaineering.



Tony, hard at work!!

1977 saw Troll gear back where it began, when the Czechs and Poles inevitably chose it for their winter ascents of the Troll Wall. Tony Howard meanwhile, had been trying the gear out in other parts of the world, putting up new climbs in remote areas of Greenland, **Algeria's Hoggar Mountains and in Iranian Kurdistan**. It was during this period that Troll developed the first British 'snake' and 'quick draw' slings, once again leading the way in UK sling development. Quick-draws are now indispensable items of gear on every climber's rack.

Following on from the Troll Whillans, nothing brought quite as much change to the world harness scene as Troll's **revolutionary 'Belay Loop'**. It made the sit harnesses of the twentieth century, both climbing and industrial, possible. Over twenty years on, virtually all today's harnesses are based on the Troll design of waist and legs connected by a loop of web which was first introduced to the world on the Troll Mark 5 harness in 1978.



Height of fashion, 1984!!

Other innovations and refinements followed over the next decade, many aimed at reducing the weight of the increasing amount of gear that climbers carried. In the harness range we introduced the **Lightweight Whillans** (surely a contradiction in terms to all that knew Don!), and for the new generation of **super-climber**, the 9a, at under 200grams the lightest harness in the world. Other aspects of the sport to receive Troll's featherweight touch were lightweight sacks, lightweight protective clothing and lightweight climbing clothing, 'Trolls' and 'Omnis'. All these products set the trends in gear development and, as always, were inevitably **copied by others**. None were more successful than Omni climbing trousers, **first trialled in 1983**, their success continues to this day, forming the bedrock of Troll's clothing range. In fact, they are so good that some of the first ones are still being used on the hill today!

It was also in the **early eighties** that Troll expanded into the Industrial safety market, which we revitalised. Our revolutionary 'RAT' and 'RAM' **industrial harness designs**, based on our comfortable, lightweight and high performance climbing harnesses, brought a breath of fresh air into an industry where cumbersome, heavy equipment predominated. Together with the Allp, the first controlled **'hands-off' descender**, designed by our very own Dave Allport, our new approach to old industrial problems facilitated the change from traditional time consuming and often prohibitively expensive access methods, to what are now commonly used 'Rope Access' techniques. Troll were now **setting the standards** for industrial gear.

Troll has always maintained close links with active climbers. Over the years it reads like a who's who of the climbing world including names such as Don Whillans, Chris Bonnington, Doug Scott, Pete Boardman, Joe Tasker, Alex Macintyre, Kevin Thaw, Ron Fawcett, Pete Gomersall, Rowland Edwards, Bony Masson & Jibe Tribout.

With the advent of the nineties, **Troll sponsored Andy Perkins**, now Dr. Andy Perkins, Ph.D., to study harnesses, slings and the effect of falls on climbing and industrial equipment. With Andy on the team, the first products to arrive from the Howard/Perkins partnership were Troll's Proform Harnesses in 1992 and the **world's first Thermoform harness**, with its innovative breathable mesh liner, soon followed. The Troll **ABS buckle system**, foolproof and easy to use for beginners, was also a product of this period. Andy is still with Troll and is now also a Mountain Guide, spending half of his time in the mountains where he climbs high standard routes on both rock and ice.

In 1995 crag rat and competition climber Graham Desroy complete with flowery shirts, white flares and surfboards joined the Troll sales team. Evidently the thought of working with Graham was too much for the founders who swiftly retired after 30 years in the hot seat. Alan is a keen sailor and now spends much of his time on his beloved boat. Paul is still actively involved in the industry and still sits on the relevant **BMC and European Standards Committees**. Tony is still a consultant for Troll. He and his long time partner Di Taylor, a member of Troll's design team, continue to spend their time exploring remote areas of the world. Together, they are joint authors of **'Jordan, Walks, Treks, Caves, Climbs & Canyons'** and **'Walks and Scrambles in Wadi Rum, Jordan.'** In 1999 Tony received a **Geographical Award** on behalf of Troll from the **Royal Geographical Society** for the design and supply of expedition equipment.

Troll meanwhile progressed rapidly towards the millennium with top names joining the sponsor team including **Adam Wainwright, Lucy Creamer, Neil Carson, Chris Cubitt, Dave Cuthbertson and notably Ian Vickers** who became European Champion during his time with Troll. The link with all aspects of climbing styles was further strengthened by Troll's sponsorship of the **British Indoor Climbing Championships (BICC)**, which continues to this day. The modern real to the team became reflected in Troll's products both in the clothing and harness range. Troll became gear 'for real climbers'. Important developments include the remarkable Exoform range of thermoformed harnesses giving comfort at previously unheard of levels, coupled with the acclaimed Tie Dee tie in system, to centre waist pad and racking.



The Troll Factory

The **21st century** sees the Troll brand again moving forward with it's own range of karabiners and climbing helmets, together with new associations in the form of **Francois Legrand**, undoubtedly the biggest name ever in sport and competition climbing. New products are even now being unveiled for 2001 as the pace from Troll is constantly forced through its **enthusiastic climbing workforce and climbers**.

