Monkey Business
A Guide to Climbing in Margalla
2012 edition

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Introduction
Few capital cities in the world come close to matching Islamabad for the quality and accessibility of climbing right on the doorstep. The only wonder is that it’s taken so long for much of it to be developed. Or rather, to start being developed. While the number of climbs has trebled in the last few years to now stand at over 50 bolted lines, the next ten years will hopefully see hundreds more added.

What we have now is a good range of crags, steep and slabby, sunny and shady, and a good range of grades (4a-8a).

Equipment
Almost all routes are well equipped with expansion bolts and lower-offs to give very convenient sport climbing. The best routes feel more exciting to lead than to top-rope, yet don’t involve genuine risk. Some of the older routes have only a single bolt at the anchor. At present only one route (Cultural Divide, at Well Hidden Rock) offers a true trad experience.

For all of the sport routes a rack of 10 quickdraws should suffice. For a few routes a 60m rope is needed – notably Puzzled Monkey at Jungle Rock and Trekking in the Dark at Said Pur View. More generally a 50m rope will be enough.

While top-roping routes repeatedly please use a locking karabiner at the anchor rather than passing the rope directly through the in-situ anchor chain ring. This will greatly extend the life of the anchor chains.

Grades
Standard French sport climbing grades are used, consistent with many of the more recently developed crags in Western Europe. One particular factor is the unusually big range of temperature and humidity experienced in different seasons. Because of this many of the routes will feel hard for the grade in summer and some perhaps may feel soft in winter.

Responsibility
Climbing is dangerous. With good knowledge and careful use of equipment the climbs in Margalla may be climbed in relative safety. However, all climbers are responsible for their own decisions and actions, including the need to assess any fixed equipment and not to rely on any bolt or other in-situ equipment unless they have personally judged it to be reliable.

This is a guide to where the climbs are, which lines they take and how hard they are. It is not a climbing instruction manual and is not guaranteed to be free of errors. Any advice contained herein should be seen as complementing an existing competence in climbing and decision making. If you’re not certain you can climb and make your own decisions safely you probably can’t, so please find someone who can help you learn. There’s plenty of people around only too happy to help.

One cause for concern at some crags is the possibility of pulling off holds. The newer routes in particular often shed holds before becoming stable, and I can’t emphasise enough the importance of being careful. Wearing a helmet can be far more useful while you’re belaying than while you’re climbing, although better still is to also develop the good habit of never standing directly beneath a climber, and to make sure that others in your group do the same.

Access & Conservation
There are no serious issues preventing access to climb on any of the crags contained in this guide. However, Margalla climbing is becoming more popular and as it does so climbers should be careful to avoid behaving in such a way as to threaten the good relations we currently have with park officials and local people. This means not leaving litter, clearing the litter of others, not making undue noise, not adding graffiti, etc. It isn’t rocket science but it is important.

To keep the routes in clean condition some removal of grass and small bushes will be necessary. Indeed every climber should see it as their duty to keep routes from becoming overgrown with unwanted vegetation – it only takes a few seconds while descending from a route to clear a tuft of grass or a nascent sprig from a crack or a ledge, and if you don’t do it who will? Otherwise climbers should avoid cutting trees or bushes wherever reasonably possible; this will have the added advantage of keeping the Margalla climbing experience as different as possible from that of the urban city or artificial climbing wall.

Climbing in Margalla is a real treasure. Please treasure it.

John Arran
July 2012
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Jungle Rock

Character
Margalla’s premier crag for harder climbing where every route is overhanging. The rock is excellent, most routes are long and continuous, and even the shorter routes are sustained and pumpy. Gets shade from early afternoon and stays dry in all but very prolonged periods of rain.

Approach
Over the road from the big Daman-e-Koh car park is a police checkpost. Follow a trail from here (signed to Cactus Ridge) for 2 zigs and 2 zags, then head directly up the fire-clearing. At a shoulder the tall crag will be seen to the left, and 100m or so later a small path leads leftwards though the trees to the foot of the routes. 20 minutes walk.

1. ** Dog’s dinner, 6b+, 12m (2011 JA)
   Great 3-d climbing left of the stalactites with a hard crux move just above half-height and an airy leftward finish
2. ** Girls and other animals, 7a, 12m (2011 JA)
   Steep climbing from the tree stump up the right side of the line of stalactites
3. ** Wishful thinking, 6c+, 15m (2011 JA)
   Technical moves up the left side of the short overhanging wall left of the cave lead to an awkward pull onto the ledge. Finish steeply on big holds and vines.
4. ** Moving in mysterious ways, 7b+, 15m (2011 JA)
   A technical start above the cave, a cool rest, a swing left and an urgent finish. Low in the grade
5. *** Puzzled monkey, 6c, 30m (2010 JA)
   Traverse beneath the second bolt then sustained all the way to the chain
6. ** Out of action, 8a, 30m (2010 JA)
   Completely independent between the first bolt and when it joins Puzzled Monkey at the top
7. *** Action direction, 7b+, 25m (2010 JA)
   Pocket pulling at 2/3 height may be the crux but save some strength for the top ‘rose’ move
8. ** Pig party, 6c+, 25m (2010 JA)
   6c if the 3rd bolt crux is avoided on the left
9. *** Inner Actions, 6a, 30m (2012 JJ)
   An excellent route with a crux moving rightwards after the first bolt
10. ** Jungle Boogie, 6b, 15m (2011 JJ)
    A good route worth seeking out, about 50m left of and slightly lower than Dog’s Dinner
Jasmin Corner

Character
A very accessible, convenient crag for beginners. Routes are short, easy and solid. Will be in shade during much of the day except in summer.

Approach
Park in a small car park on the right of the road next to a pond. Cross the road and follow good paths into the bushes and leftwards to the crag. 5 minutes walk.

Approach map for Jasmin Corner (JC), Music Lounge (ML) and Holiday Rock (HR)

Easy as I, II, III

1. I, 4b (2008 JS)
2. II, 4b (2008 JS)
3. III, 5a (2008 JS)
Music Lounge

Character
Some very fine compact grey rock offers good climbing. Faces north but because it’s slabby the face doesn’t get midsummer shade until late afternoon.

Approach
See approach map above for Jasmin Corner. 10 minutes walk

1. * Finger killer, 6c (2009 GF)
   Good footwork and finger strength needed at the top
2. ** Diretissima, 6b (2008 GF)
   A hard move on the headwall
3. ** Fringe benefits, 6b+ (2010 JA)
   With good technique it can feel easy
4. ** You can do it, 6a+ (2008 SD)
   Keep left of the bolts
5. ** Benissima, 5b (2008 BT)
   Easier climbing to the right of the bolts

Holiday Rock

Character
An excellent place for summer shade and gentle climbing, with a quiet atmosphere and a great view over the hills and the city. The routes are relatively sustained and clean but take care with loose rock while they’re still new and please help prevent bushes from returning, particularly to Eid Mubarak.

Approach
See approach map above for Jasmin Corner. Approach as for Music Lounge but continue 100m further to just before a small clean slab (anchor ringbolt on top). Take a small path up the hillside and follow it left above the small slab, then continue in the same direction for another five minutes. The climbs will appear on your right, just before Islamabad comes into view. 20 minutes walk.

1. ** Eid Mubarak, 5b, 15m (2010 JA)
   The left hand route starts up a slab, a short corner, over a bulge (crux) to finish up more slabs.
2. ** Merry Christmas, 5b, 15m (2010 JJ)
   The right hand route heads up a knobbly wall (crux) then over a roof on big holds.
Said Pur View

Character
One of Margalla’s taller crags, it has both hard and amenable routes. In shade from early afternoon.

Approach
Driving beyond Daman-e-Koh the road zigzags up the hill. At the third zig (sharp left bend) is a covered picnic building. Park here then take a very small path directly behind the building. The path soon rises and reaches more level ground. Shortly after, the path veers left through a small rocky gap. Follow it until it’s possible to head down rightwards for 100m or so, keeping right until just before a rounded rocky ridge. The end of the crag will then be seen 100m or so down to the left. Shortly before you get there either keep on the faint path to the crag top and abseil (30m), or scramble easily down from a sloping platform of sharp rock, past a large tree to the foot of the routes. 15 minutes walk.

1. ** The crack, 7c+, 15m (2010 KH, JA)
   Technical, fingery and very sustained. Direct up the arête is 8a
2. ** Feeling groovy, 8a, 15m (2010 JA)
   Great moves that may not be possible in summer!
3. * Sidewinder, 6c+, 20m (2010 JA)
   Good but short. Slither right past the proboscis
4. Snakes in the grass, 5c, 20m (2010 JA)
   Be careful of loose rock near the top, and standing below
5. ** Slip sliding away, 6a+, 25m (2010 JJ)
   Good contrasting climbing The slab is the crux but solving the roof may be tricky too
6. *** Trekking in the dark, 6a+, 30m (2010 JJ)
   The best route of its grade in Margalla. Pulling left onto the slab under the roof is memorable, as is the roof itself
Said Pur Area

Approach
Park in Said Pur village, then walk directly through the village and continue over the stream and onto a very wide path. After crossing back over the stream the valley splits into two, with the main path following the right fork. On the hillside directly in front of the split is the Belvedere. God Rock and the Beetle’s Nest are just beyond this, on the left and right sides of the main path respectively. 15 minutes walk.

God Rock
Character
This radically overhanging face gets no sun at all, making it a fine choice in summer. Stays dry in rain.

While all three routes are fine and generally very solid higher up, the first few metres are inherently very loose so great care is needed. Once past the loose band Blame God is magnificent.

From the main path below the left side of the crag follow a scree-filled channel up right for only 10m or so, then vague paths lead up more directly to the foot of the rock.

1. ** Blame me, 6c, 25m (2010 JA)
2. * Guilty as charged, 7b, 25m (2010 JJ) Starts up Blame Me
3. *** Blame God, 6b+, 20m (2010 JA)

The clean arête left of Blame God will make a fantastic route one day, at a grade of at least 8b.
Belvedere

Character
Climbs here offer great technical challenges on superb rock although the difficulties are often short-lived. The sun is on the face most of the day, making it a great winter venue but only suitable late in the day in summer.

Approach
Pass to the right of the crag on the main path then head leftwards up the steep hillside, past a short rock ridge, and round left to the base of the climbs.

1. * Bushman, 6b+, 15m (2009 GF)
   Starts from a ledge a little higher than the others. Holds are almost imaginary on the crux
2. * Lizard, 6b, 18m (2009 GF)
   Looks like a crack but doesn't climb like one
3. ** Get up, stand up, 6a+, 18m (2009 GF)
   Passing the first bolt provides a classic technical problem
4. * For the girls, 6a, 20m
   Boys can try it too if they're good enough!
5. ** Monkey tower, 4c, 30m (2009 MP)
   A fine introduction to Margalla for new climbers
6. * Bon plaisir, 5c+, 30m
   Difficulties higher up can be avoided on the right but that would be missing the point
Beetle’s Nest

Character
Margalla’s only multi-pitch route so far also has some of the best rock and best climbing. Gets plenty of sun so a poor choice in summer. Unfortunately local villagers seem to have made off with the bolts from the easier lines.

1. * Hang loose, 5b (2008 SD)
2. ** Saxony ramp, 5b (2008 JS, bolts since removed)
3. *** Teamwork (2008 GF, JS, MP)
   i. 4a Very easy slab (bolts removed) to ringbolt, then right past tree to ledge and bolt
   ii. 5c Follow bolts right and up the crack, stepping down right to belay
   iii. 6b+, 25m From the tree go right to the crack, up this then left on jugs to belay
   iv. 6c+, 30m Pass the bulge on its right then follow the arête to a hard crux just below the top
4. *** Maverick (3rd pitch variation), 7b+, 25m
   Top-rope only - not yet bolted. Powerful moves across the roof contrast with the delicate face climbing above
Descent is usually by abseil. Two ropes are useful to abseil 40m directly from the pitch 2 belay.
Approach
There are two paths leading from the car park at the foot of trail 3, one from the centre of the car park and one from the right hand corner.

For Legacy Wall take the left path and follow it until almost level with the foot of the crag, then find a small path on the left through the bushes. 15 minutes walk.

Hidden Rock will be hard but not impossible to find without being shown the way. Take the right hand path from the car park. To avoid unnecessary walking follow the sign to Trail 5 for 30m and walk up the direct fire-clearing until the 3rd cross path, just after passing the lookout building. Then turn right and follow the trail (with some shortcuts higher up if you like) for another 20 minutes or so. The place to look out for is a left switchback very soon after a right switchback, where there’s an easy way off the trail onto a small clearing. Follow a small path across the hillside, rising slightly. As it curves leftwards look out for another small path on the right, leading down through the bushes into a muddy gully.

From a short way down the gully either break off right horizontally for 30m to the top of Hidden Wall, or continue down and leftwards, scrambling up onto a platform at the foot of Well Hidden Wall.
Legacy Wall

Character
Accessible, solid, well equipped and with a good range of grades. Most routes stay dry in light rain. In summer the wall comes into the shade mid-afternoon.

1. * Men holding hands, 7c+, 18m (2010 JA)
A hard move into Osama by bolt 3, not yet climbed direct

2. *** Osama bin climbing, 7a+, 17m (2010 JA)
A Margalla classic. The problem start provides the crux but the layback is the most fun

3. ** Reluctant fundamentalist, 7b, 17m (2010 JA)
Shares first 2 bolts with Osama but different climbing

4. ** God-shaped hole, 7a+, 17m (2010 JA)
Better and slightly harder to stay left of the Legacy ledge

5. *** Legacy, 6a+, 18m (2008 SD)
Start from the boulder at this grade, harder to start direct. Two variations to the right are possible at about 6b and 6b+

5a. Leg-up, 6b+, 17m (2010 JA)
(crus top moves, hard for short climbers)

5b. Leg-over, 6a, 17m (2010 JA)
The easiest way up the face

6. ** Progressive thinking, 6b+, 17m (2010 JA)
(includes the Legacy direct start)

7. *** Catfight, 7a, 17m (2012 JJ)
(includes the Legacy direct start)

8. *** Kidnapped by Jesus, 6c, 17m (2010 JA)

Approximately 50m to the right of Kidnapped by Jesus is a tall wall, approached by a 50m scramble directly from the main trail:

9. ** Family pressures, 6c, 20m (2010 JJ)

10. ** Cemented Marriage, 6b, 25m (2011 JJ)
The right hand line is hard to start
Hidden Rock

Approach
See detailed approach above. An abseil approach can be made from sturdy trees above Tarzan, from the bottom of which all routes can be reached.

Character
Good clean rock in a fine location high overlooking the city. Shade arrives shortly after lunch.

1. ** Puzzled Fahad, 6c, 15m (2011 JA) 
   Harder for the short
2. ** Hero of the day, 6b+, 15m (2011 JA)
3. *** Jane’s cry for more, 6a, 15m (2011 JJ)
4. ** Tarzan’s cry of joy, 6b, 15m (2011 JJ)

Well Hidden Rock

Character
A secluded crag of contrasts and with plenty of potential for more new lines. What little sun it gets disappears during the morning.

1. ** The dark side, 6c, 15m (2011 IJ) 
   Good climbing throughout. No bridging
2. *** Cultural divide, Trad VS (5a), 15m (2011 JA) 
   Protectable throughout with good wires. Start in the corner and step left at 4m. The crux is wriggling past the large jammed block at 12m
3. ** The optimist, 7a+, 17m (2011 JA) 
   Clip the first 2 bolts on The Dark Side, then follow and cross the Divide. Crux moves lead 3m horizontally right from the large foothold, then climb back up left almost (but not quite!) into the Divide before trending right again
4. *** Islamagood, 8a, 17m (2011 JA) 
   One of Margalla’s best. The crux is low down but the top is still feisty. At half height swing left to share one move with The Optimist before teetering back right and up.

Shaddarrah

One further climbing area exists at Shaddrah, a few kilometres north-east of Islamabad, reached by turning left off the Murree Road after passing Lake View Park (site of the excellent Ibex climbing wall) and continuing into a gorge in the hills, the small wall being adjacent to the road on the left. Unfortunately the few routes (5c or so) may soon no longer exist due to road construction.

Routes listed in this guide were established and bolted by:

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<td>GF</td>
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<td>IJ</td>
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<td>JJ</td>
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Thanks to Jens et al. for help with route info and topos of older routes. Many thanks also to the climbers who have made my climbing days in Islamabad so enjoyable, especially Jens-Jacob, Naveed, Fahad, Imran, Farah, Mil, Rebecca, Carl, Pierre, Karim, Izzy, Simon, Paul, Jens, Safa and Ali. Apologies to any and all I may have missed. I hope you will all be able to visit us in France:

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