



The art of rock climbing

Staffordshire Life features editor, **BRYONY VALE**, speaks to Potteries-born artist Phil Gibson. Pictures: **LUCAS VALE**



WHEN he isn't clinging to the side of a rock face, Phil Gibson spends his time drawing them.

The Potteries-born artist has spent most of his career with a paint brush in hand and even during his early school years Phil had a strong interest in the subject.

He attended the Newcastle School of Art and went on to gain a BA Honours and then a Masters degree in Ceramic Design at the North Staffordshire Polytechnic, now called Staffordshire University.

"After I had done my training I went to work in the pottery industry," he said.



Phil Gibson at work

“I graduated in 1978 and then went on to work for Wedgwood as a designer for nine years. I then freelanced for 12 years when the industry was good and during this time I always painted in my spare time.

“I then went to work for Moorcroft for nine years and then two years ago I decided to freelance again. I’ve travelled a full circle really, designing and painting again, but now with the industry all but gone so I am tending to paint full time now.

“There is a bit of design work around but I am starting to do designs outside of the pottery industry, in areas like enamel giftware, cards and wallpaper design.”

During his time at Wedgwood, Phil worked with the legendary Susie Cooper during her last years at Wedgwood.

He also met his wife, Ruth, with whom he has two children. In 1987, Philip decided to pursue his career as a freelance designer and artist specialising in ceramics. Until 1997 he worked with leading pottery companies and print manufacturers on many



different commissions.

It was a busy time, with Phil promoting his own work, running his own quality design business and sustaining his creativity all at the same time.

But now Phil’s work surrounds the craggy rock faces he is so fond of climbing. Using the intricate and traditional pen and ink medium, Phil is able to create sketches and illustrations that can leave climbers in no doubt of their footing.

“I have illustrated guide books for the climbing world for many years, but now I am going down the route of painting and trying to make my work more appealing for the younger mass market. I am trying to create more wall art than illustrations now because a lot of people collect my work.”

Phil was recently commissioned to sketch a piece for the Climbers’ Club centenary celebration. His pen and ink drawing of Lliwedd was presented to Climbers’ Club members to mark the centenary of the first Climbers’ Club guide book, published in 1909.

“I draw and paint whilst I am out on the rocks but sometimes the weather is just too harsh,” says Phil.

“I occasionally work from photographs but I also do a lot of rough sketches. Sometimes though, it is almost too cold to draw, it is practically impossible. If I can work on site I will. I have to spend hours walking around the rocks, trying to find the right angle. The trouble with climbers is, you can’t use artistic licence. If you get something wrong, they will spot it. I am tending to do more watercolours now though.”

Phil has been climbing since 1973 and has climbed rock faces all round the world. But his favourite scenery is still in the UK, mainly in Scotland and Pembrokeshire.

Phil’s background in graphic design means that he is able to edit his own work on the computer, scanning his images in and reproducing them at a larger size more suitable for display. He already has several galleries ready to work with him.

For more information on Phil’s work, visit his website at www.philipgibson.co.uk or call him on 01782 625250