



[Back to online version](#)

GuardianUnlimited travel: Print version

On the rocky road

Susan Greenwood welcomes the arrival of a Boulder Bus service that's connecting UK climbers to the spectacular Forest of Fontainebleau rocks in France

Susan Greenwood

Guardian Unlimited Monday September 3 2007

More on...

Travel

Adventure travel
Climbing holidays
France



Rock hard ... hanging from a rock is not the time to be suffering from the effects of a long journey. Photograph: Redlink/Corbis

The problem with being a rock climbing junkie is that it is rarely a lifestyle which affords slick modes of transport. Having the sun on your back and the wind in your hair as you heel hook a risky overhang is certainly an alluring way to spend your time, but not if it takes seven days in a clapped out old Citroen to get there.

So the introduction of the Boulder Bus earlier this year has proved something of a lifesaver to Blighty based rock climbers eager for their fix at the famed French climbing site in the Forest of Fontainebleau. The sandstone boulders here have lured climbers from all over the world since 1889. Located a 30-minute train ride outside Paris the site is, in theory, the most spectacular bouldering destination within easy reach of the UK.

In practice though, with several hundred square kilometres of terrain to cover, plus the general lack of motor vehicles within the climbing fraternity, feeling that delicate symbiosis between man and rock has sometimes proved a rather stressful affair. And when you are attempting to pull your entire body weight up a rock without ropes, using just your little finger, stress can be counterproductive.

The Boulder Bus provides a hassle-free service direct to the site. Departing from east London's Mile End Climbing wall on Friday nights it ferries

passengers seamlessly across to a campsite in Fontainebleau refreshed and ready for two days of climbing before heading back Sunday night. Refreshed? After 12 hours on a coach, surely not?! But if you are prepared to spend a little bit more for the deluxe service which includes private berths complete with duvets and blackout blinds, lounge and kitchen then yes, refreshed you will be.

On top of all this you get to pick the brains of owner Ian Wilson who has been climbing in the forest for years. Split into different areas of boulders, navigating Fontainebleau without local knowledge or a good guidebook can be tricky. "After years of trying to work out the best way of getting to Font without being knackered, we came up with the Boulder Bus," says Ian. "People who haven't been before see us as an all-inclusive trip so it's a good way to start."

Fontainebleau gets its second wind in September and October as the heat of summer dies down and the onset of autumn puts some friction back on the rock. With channel crossing and campsite fees included in the price, Boulder Bus may be just the ticket to taking some friction out of getting there.

- Boulder Bus costs from £89 standard (£159 deluxe) for a weekend departing Mile End Climbing Wall at 7.30pm on Friday evening.
boulderbus.co.uk; 0700 341 8591