



Wild Country Helium Friend **RRP from £52**

Wild Country has kept the classic format of the 13.75° camming angle and single stem and axle but has re-worked everything else, including the sizing. Why has Wild Country done away with sizes that most climbers were very familiar with? Well, the size range of the original Friends evolved from just a few sizes and as new sizes were added between existing ones the result was that the gaps between sizes were a little uneven. The re-sizing gives a logical, even spread with a fairly consistent overlap between sizes. Heliums are much lighter than previous Friends but claims of extra range are perhaps a little over-stated. I got the Heliums quite late on for this review and had less time to test them than I did the other cams so I might find more to fault if I use them much more but...I was surprised by how impressed I was. Superficially they don't look all that clever but Wild Country has got a couple of subtle aspects of the design spot on. The springs are good and strong, at least on the prototypes I tested. That might mean they feel less smooth in the shop but it also makes them a little less prone to walking and also very slightly reduces the chance of the unit slipping at the point of loading (as the rope comes tight in a fall the load isn't constant - there is usually a bit of 'flutter' which can lead to cams slipping and a strong spring helps minimise this). Wild Country has also increased the trigger length in the smallest sizes so you get more reach and so the second can get to the trigger easily for removal. The Heliums felt reassuringly stable in use, they went in placements first time and stayed put. Overall, they are a very good unit and there isn't much to fault. To cover a range from 19-100mm you would have 7 units weighing a total of 949g.

Pros: Stiff springs than other models; long trigger; lightweight
Cons: Not much

No cams were hurt in the making of this photograph - they really are that flexible.
Photo: Tom Napier