Great Britain 1988

The *Alpine Journal* has in the past reported British developments under the heading of Scottish Winter. It seems natural to extend these reports to other areas of the United Kingdom. The emphasis will be on mountaineering rather than cragging; this will tend to mean winter climbing. This volume of the journal adds to Scotland the current state of winter climbing in the Lake District and Wales; future reviews will be on an occasional basis.

Scottish Winter 1987–88

KEN CROCKET

Quiet rumblings about the present system of winter grading stayed at the ripple level, indicating that climbers were either content with the *status quo*, or could not be bothered to stick stamp to envelope. I suspect the former. The following notes will be shorter than of recent years, as Scotland suffered (?) a disastrous three-month spell of virtually constant thaw. Considering the number of climbs done during the thaw, it seems a miracle that so few teams were avalanched or bombed by falling ice. (This does not imply, however, that any of the following routes were climbed in such conditions.)

In the Northern Highlands, the continuing slow pace of research for the next edition of the *SMC Climbers' Guide* to this vast area has maintained a chronic confusion, the intensity of which is inversely proportional to the amount of *SMC Journal* reading an individual explorer is prepared or able to do. Thus we have three routes on Beinn Dearg Mhor which do not refer to pre-existing lines: Fat Man's Folly (220m III/IV), Broken Finger Gully (250m IV), and Spring Maiden (250m V), climbed by combinations of A Todd, D Curr and G Taylor in March or April 1987. Mick Fowler continued to bomb up the winding roads on quick raiding sorties which produced, among other routes, a IV and a IV/V on An Teallach (Bowling Alley and Bottomless Gully, in April and March respectively), and a V/VI on Beinn Dearg in March (Ice Bomb, on the Upper Cliff of Coire Ghranda, named after the prominent ice boss which forms on the cliff). Martin Moran, living in Strathcarron, found a 200m IV on An Coileachan in the Fannichs in December 1987 (The Turf Accountant).

In the Torridon Giants a dozen lines were recorded, including three at IV and one easier line on Liathach. The hard climbing was on Beinn Eighe, however, with the Far East Wall – thus far reserved for steep rock routes – now seeing outrageously steep winter climbs. Cunningham and Nisbet climbed the Grade VI Vishnu, a 100m line up a major fault-line left of The Rising Son. Protection was found to be poor. The same duo made a winter ascent of Kamikaze at V/VI, noting that because of much chimneying sacks were better left off. Both of these routes were climbed in February. On the Eastern Ramparts Cunningham and Nisbet climbed Gnome Wall in February, at V, finding the last pitch much harder than earlier ones. Finally, on 5 April Fowler and Morrison climbed West Central Gully on the Triple Buttresses at VI. The gully was easy except for the crux section, a 65m, ice-smeared, overhanging chimney.

On the SE Cliff of Fuar Tholl, Jenkins and Moran found the 220m, Grade V Evasion Grooves, providing a mixed alternative to Tholl Gate by climbing the large buttress to its right.

Further east, Lochnagar continued to provide winter ascents, with Findlay and Strange recording several routes, including Sepulchre on The Cathedral at IV in December, and Eclipse at IV/V on Shadow Buttress B in March. Postern Direct on Shelter Stone Crag provided a hard VI for Nisbet and

Cunningham in early March. The crux was the last pitch, climbed via the wide corner crack immediately right of the summer line. As the summer route is in a dangerous condition following a rock-fall in the spring of 1987, a winter ascent is probably safer. In January the same energetic duo avoided heavy powder snow conditions on other crags by climbing the 170m V/VI Windpiper on the Stag Rocks, a combination of Windchill and Sand-Pyper Direct.

S Richardson and R Clothier (he of the 12 axes a winter) had a great time climbing Citadel on the Shelter Stone, a four-hour wait just below the top allowing the moonlight to point out a finishing route via the Sticil Face (Citadel, Moonlight Finish, 60m V).

On Ben Nevis the thaws did climbing little good. We should go back to the previous winter, however, and mention the burst of soloing on 20 March 1987 by the French climber François Damilano. In one day: Point Five, Orion Face, Zero Gully, Sickle, and Smith's Route. There were things done on the hills surrounding the Ben by other energetics, including a V on Aonach Beag's W face by Everett and Richardson, in addition to several easier routes. Also requiring a long walk were the routes recorded on the N face of Ben Alder in January by Everett and friends, including a IV and a V, both about 250m in length.

Glencoe activity was confined to the Grade V Para Andy on Stob Coire nan Lochan's N buttress (Cunningham, Nisbet and Newton, January), Intruder at V by Rab Anderson and Grahame Nicoll on the same buttress (February), and two Grade VIs on the N face of Aonach Dubh. Against All Odds by Fowler and Watts lies between Kuf and Fingal's Chimney, and apparently had been a glint in Fowler's eye for a long time. It is very hard, and has much climbing on frozen tufts of grass, pitch three requiring three pegs for aid on an overhanging (and tuftless) section. Further right, Taylor and Anderson climbed the summer route Fall Out, Anderson providing his mathematical individual pitch grading: 140m, Grade VI (3) (7) (7) (7) (4). Apart from their unsightliness, one wonders how much such pitch gradings (and pitches) will be affected by varying conditions, and consequently how useful such a Ward-Drummondish grading system would be.

Finally, we have pleasure in seeing in print the new *SMC Climbers' Guide* to Arran, Arrochar and The Southern Highlands. Of interest to winter climbers will be the section on the Bridge of Orchy Hills, bringing to a wider audience the delights of Beinn an Dothaidh and Beinn Udlaidh, to mention only two hills. Recent exploration in this area has seen the maturation of the NE Coire of Beinn an Dothaidh, and several hard routes on the two cliffs of Coire an Dothaidh, facing Bridge of Orchy. Lucifer Rising at V by McEwan, Crocket and Walker, on Creag Coire an Dothaidh in March, was named partly to contrast with Messiah, VI, on the other cliff, Creag nan Socach, by Little in January. The 88m corner of Messiah had been eyed by a few teams for over a decade, but with virtually no drainage coming down the cliff little ice ever seemed to form.

At the left end of the same crag, a December ascent of The Glass Bead Game, V, by a party of five, with Bob Duncan leading the crucial slab pitch on this poorly protected cliff, made up for an earlier retreat during a snowstorm. The snow on the actual ascent was of just the right amount; too much, and toeholds for front points will be obscured. This was not the problem on Lucifer

Rising, where the sun was thawing the frozen turf and slowing the party of three. Once it was freezing again, the possible dangers of exposure to starlight forced a left traverse across the upper part of the cliff. By the time you read this, the wished-for finish will (hopefully) have been done. Buy the guide to find out about the other fine routes on this cliff, and the others of the region, including the wonderful ice-falls of Beinn Udlaidh.