group of peaks, six Italians almost reached the summit of Fitzroy using a new line situated between the French (1979) and Polish (1984) routes. 50 metres below the summit the Italians had to retreat. The well-known Italian climber Casimiro Ferrari, with G Maresi, climbed the extremely difficult ENE buttress of Cerro Norte (2950m), on 1 January.

There were several other important climbs, some of them perhaps new routes, in the same district, but the main event of the entire Andean year 1986 belongs to two very young Argentinians. S de la Cruz, 17, and G Ruiz, 21, climbed Fitzroy by its 'supercouloir' in winter (25 July). The two climbers had made an ascent of Fitzroy in the summer months and knew the mountain well.

Scottish Winter 1985–86

Ken Crocket

The winter season of 1986 was a productive one, with a probable record number of first ascents being recorded, particularly from the Northern Highlands. Of necessity, and to allow many of these routes to be accorded their due merit, following a decent interval and subsequent re-ascents, this is a summary of the harder climbs from each area, from November 1985 to April 1986.

Starting with a very light fall of snow in December 1985, the winter moved into a very cold and sparklingly clear spell just before the New Year. This built up an impressive amount of ice, not all of which was removed by the regular January gales. In January, indeed, the ice continued to build up, many new and classic routes being climbed. February saw another cold spell, unbelievably lasting for several weeks. Much of the snow was then unconsolidated, but ice prevailed, giving the happy hookers many severe ice problems. March was as March often is, and the season extended right into April, allowing routes with long approach walks to be tackled in the long daylight hours.

On Arran, (where, to give away a well-kept Scottish secret, there are many plum lines waiting to be climbed for those of an energetic and masochistic bent), Graham Little continued his list of first ascents in February with the major line of the 350m Once in a Lifetime (V/VI), on the NE face of Cir Mhor (with D Saddler). This line is sufficiently independent of the summer line Silo to deserve a different name. Certainly, the start took to an ice-filled groove right of the normal start, which was virtually snowless. The route then moves left into the top of the chimney line of Silo, climbed on relatively snowless rock on this occasion. Difficult mixed climbing above finishes what is undoubtedly a major mixed route, on a face mostly repulsive in summer, but transformed in a good winter into a superb climbing arena.

On the Isle of Skye, two parties made an attempt on Waterpipe Gully on Coire a'Mhadaidh. On 24 February, B S Findlay and G Strange avoided the thawing lower section of three pitches, while four days later C Downer and D Scott made a complete ascent, the crux pitch being the first. Despite its

apparent fine line, both parties found the route disappointing, with short pitches. M Fowler was on the island in March, climbing the 160m Icicle Factory (V) on Coire a'Mhadaidh with A V Saunders on the 1st, and the 100m Grade IV White Wedding in Coire a'Ghreadaidh with A V Saunders and C Watts the next day. The first route in particular, climbed on almost continuous ice, seems to be very fine, with an ice-column for an impressive, 45m final pitch.

The Southern Highlands, another superb area for winter climbing frequented almost exclusively by the enlightened few, saw a few routes of Grade IV. The easy-angled face of Beinn an Lochain saw an ascent by W Hood and B Williamson of Tonton Macout (IV), taking the obvious (and almost certainly previously climbed) central ramp. On the Brack in February, K V Crocket and A Walker climbed the lower buttress (named by them The Inglis Clark Buttress, after the famous Edinburgh climbing family) by the interesting line of The Abyss (180m, IV). This route, long by Southern Highlands standards, included an amazing deep cleft in the upper rocks, bridged over with a fear of falling into the mountain rather than off the mountain. Elsewhere in the Southern Highlands, waterfalls received repeat ascents, such as the 150m Eas Anie (IV), on Beinn Chuirn above Coninish Farm, the left-hand fork of which was climbed by G Ross & C Macleod.

In Glencoe, the Buachaille saw the serendipitous ascent of Ephemeron Gully (IV) at the end of December 1985, by P Craig, K V Crocket and A Walker. This line of icy grooves under the W face of Broad Buttress gave a sustained climb, though easy for the grade, with only the middle pitches being roped on a brilliant day of hard frost. Later in the season, in February, C Murray and T McAuley climbed the impressive ice-fall that had built up over the summer route Waterslide Gully, the wall-climb on Central Buttress (IV). The same winter saw ascents of The Chasm, with the Direct Finish out of the Cauldron being a ribbon of continuous ice.

On Bidean nam Bian, Mimsy (IV) on the E face of Gearr Aonach received an ascent by R Clothier and D Hawthorn in January, while on the lower N face of Aonach Dubh, King Cobra (V/VI), by M Duff and R Nowack in February, started up the Viper direct start to Venom (three pitches), then took to the very steep and thinly iced wall on the left. Another route by M Duff and R Nowack in February was Silent Running (nice name that!), a Grade IV/V on the W face of B Buttress. The hard teams had been up very early on for two ascents on the N buttress of Stob Coire nan Lochan, where in November R Anderson and M Hamilton recorded Crest Route (IV), and in December A Nisbet and M Duff climbed People's Friend (V/VI), the groove line above N C Gully.

The routes recorded on Ben Nevis up to the end of 1985 have been included in *Ben Nevis—Britain's Highest Mountain* (reviewed on p267) but several others are included here for completeness. A winter ascent of Raeburn's Arête was finally accomplished in January by D Lang and C Stead (IV). Routes on either side of Vanishing Gully were climbed, with the January ascents of Pirate (IV) by M Duff and A Nisbet, starting about 20m right of Vanishing; Bydand (IV/V) by M Duff, M Aldridge and J Woods, lying between The Italian Climb and The Chute; and in February, Running Hot (IV/V) by M Duff, J Tinker &

R Nowack, starting just left of Vanishing, and climbing steep slabs and grooves. Minus One Gully had several ascents.

There was much activity by the hard men on Carn Dearg Buttress, where PM, the summer VS first recorded by Ian Clough, was climbed in February by the late Alan Rouse and B Hall. In the excellent conditions met, the route was probably a hard IV, but obviously will more often be a Grade V. 110m long, PM took the grassy grooves between Route I (not 1 as so often written) and PM, joining PM after two pitches to finish up steep rock right of Route I. Earlier that same month, M Duff and J Tinker had climbed Ring The Alarm (V), starting up the buttress between Route II, Direct Start, and The Shadow, taking the very exposed slab lip as for Adrenalin Rush to gain the groove of Cowslip, then up this to finish up Route II. Also in February, J McKenzie and K Spence climbed Centurion in two days, finishing up Route II.

The Cairngorms, as in previous years, saw the largest concentration of hard routes, with several at Grade VI. On Lochnagar, the 130m Trail of Tears (VI), by D Dinwoodie & A Nisbet, on the Tough-Brown Face, was climbed on 7 March, taking the first two pitches of The Outlands and finishing up Post Mortem. Deirdre of the Sorrows by the same pair, 150m Grade VI, took a very sustained line of corners and grooves between Dirge and Post Mortem. But perhaps the most impressive display of difficult winter mountaineering in the Scottish style came from S Allan and A Nisbet on 25 January, when they made a 19-hour ascent of The Rattrap (350m, Grade VI) on Central Gully Wall of Creag on Dubh Loch, finishing by the light of a full moon with 11 pitches and four points of aid, three on pitch seven which took the bulging crackline of Gulliver, pitch two, of 10m, climbed the summer crux of Dubh Loch Monster and was yo-yoed. In November, A Cunningham and A Nisbet made a free ascent of Vertigo Wall, at Grade V. They consider this to be one of the best mixed routes in Scotland.

Elsewhere in the Cairngorms, a long walk-in by W Moir and N Ritchie in November gave them an ascent of Snake Ridge (IV/V) on Coire Sputan Dearg. On Hell's Lum, A Cunningham and I Fox climbed Hell's Lump (IV/V) on 6 January, while one month later A Fyffe and B Barton made an ascent of the Towering Inferno (IV/V). The Northern Coires continued to provide routes, with perhaps the most interesting being White Magic (110m, V/VI) in Coire an t-Sneachda, climbed in December by A Cunningham and A Nisbet, and Damnation (100m, V) in the same coire by J Grosset and M Sclater, in November. In Coire an Lochain, A Cunningham and A Nisbet climbed Fallout Corner (V) in December, and The Migrant (95m, V) in March, while, in January, W Todd and A Cunningham climbed the punningly named Torquing Heads (125m, V).

How to sum up a season which saw over 50 first winter ascents in the Northern Highlands? As in the Cairngorms, the indefatigable A Nisbet was in evidence, as were several other names seen elsewhere in this column, all of them making considerably more difficult the unenviable task of editing a new edition of the Northern Highlands Climbers Guide. Unless otherwise stated, all ascents were made in the long cold spell enjoyed in February. On Foinaven, A Cunningham and A Nisbet climbed The Third Waterfall (150m, V), while W Todd

soloed The Fourth Waterfall the same day. An interesting ascent, also of a waterfall, was that by A Cunningham and A Nisbet, when they climbed the 200m, Grade IV/V Eas Coul Aulinn of Assynt, often claimed to be the highest waterfall in Britain. One route made the same month was surely unique, as its potential had been bequeathed by Mike Geddes to Alan Rouse. Geddes's Gully (250m, V) on Chadha Dheirg, was climbed by B Hall and Rouse. The left wall of the gully was climbed in March by C Downer and D Scott to give Captain Patience (280m, V). The remote hills and coires of the Fannichs were visited in February by D Dinwoodie and D Hawthorn who climbed Venus Fly Trap (250m, V) on An Coileachan. On Beinn Eighe's Sail Mhor, B S Findlay and G Strange tackled the steep, narrow cleft right of White's Gully to record Achilles (250m, IV/V), impending darkness forcing a traverse left below the top to gain the finish of White's Gully. On the sandstone tier of Central Buttress, the slimy summer approach to the terrace known as The Chimney was climbed by R Anderson and G Nicoll in March (60m, V).

Liathach also gave a selection of fine winter lines, with The Executioner (140m, IV/V) climbing the back-wall of the coire right of Footless Gully by A Nisbet and J Mothersele, and K Hopper and C Rowland making an ascent of the unnamed SE buttress of Spidean (180m, IV). In Coire Dubh Mor, The Salmon Leap (200m, V) was ascended by a four-man party: A Cunningham, A Nisbet, R Arnott and G Rowbotham. This last route climbs the left side of Poacher's Fall, the quality of which has been confirmed by recent ascents. Two other ice-falls were climbed here: Snow Goose (230m, IV/V), by A Cunningham and A Nisbet, and The Deer Hunter (200m, V), by the same team.

In Applecross, perhaps one of the least in-condition areas of the north, Sgurr a'Chaorachain was productive throughout February and early March. In the unnamed coire south of the Cioch Nose, P Long and B Owen found Excitable Boy (120m, IV/V) on the east-facing headwall of the coire, as well as Blade Runner (110m, IV) to its right. On the NW buttresses, A Nisbet and J Mothersele found Voyager (350m, V), just right of North Gully, while M Hamilton and G Cohen climbed Turret Buttress (200m, IV). In Coire na Feola, C Downer and D Scott found In XS (250m, V) on 1 March, climbing thin but good ice for four long pitches on the steep face left of Y-Gully.

M Fowler and C Watts were active on the SE cliff of Fuar Tholl, climbing the 190m, Grade V line of Fuhrer. This took a prominent groove on the left-hand side of the cliff. One possibly unfortunate ascent was Martin Moran's solo ascent of Cold Sweat at Grade V. This was spread over two days, the first 45m taking in the first day with a jumar up a fixed rope to start the second day, and back-ropes for protection. The consensus in Scotland seems to be against such tactics.

The spectre of a revision of the winter-grading system has risen again, with the New Routes Editor of the SMC Journal (himself at the forefront of developments) asking for correspondence on the subject. The recent rise in standards has seen the top of the grade expand at an unforeseen rate, with some of the latest routes being, apparently, several grades above the older, established Grade V's. Opinions, please, to: A D Nisbet, 13 Orchard Walk, Aberdeen AB2 3DT.