
SIMON RICHARDSON

Scotland 1994-95

At first glance the 1994/95 Scottish winter season was a disappointing one. A warm November and April limited activity to just four months, and consistently wild and windy weather throughout January and February thwarted many plans. However, over 140 new routes were recorded: nearly as many as the previous winter which is generally regarded as one of the best in recent years. Standards were also high with over 40 new routes graded V or above, again a similar statistic to last season. Few ice routes were climbed and attention mainly focused on new mixed lines. A selection of the season's important repeats and significant first ascents are described below, and full details can be found in the 1995 *Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal*.

Northern Highlands

The SE cliff of **Fuar Tholl** was the scene for one of the finest new routes of the winter when Andy Nisbet and John Lyall climbed *Fuar Folly Direct* (VI,8), the obvious rounded pillar to the right of *Führer*. A little to the west on **Sgurr a'Chaorachain**, Nisbet and Brian Davison ticked off the all-too-obvious *North Gully of the Cioch* (III), and on the Cioch ridge, Martin Welch and Rob Shillaker added the excellent *Yodel* (IV,5), which takes the well-defined straight gully to the right of the descent route.

By late January, the icefalls on **Liathach** had come into condition, and the classic *Poacher's Fall* (V,5) and *Salmon Leap* (V,5) saw several ascents. On the S side of the mountain, Andy and Gill Nisbet visited Pyramid Buttress and climbed *Busman's Holiday* (V,5), the thin ice streak in the depression between *Pyramid Right Icefall* and *Right Edge*. Further north, in the Fisherfield Forest, Chris Cartwright and Ian Stevens made an enterprising first winter ascent of *Central Buttress* (V,5) on the remote N face of **Beinn Dearg Mor**. This impressive peak, which is prominent from many viewpoints to the north, is often talked about, but visits by climbers are rare.

Quinag, the most northerly, and previously one of the more neglected **Coigach peaks**, witnessed an unprecedented amount of activity. On the impressive Barrel Buttress on the N face, Roger Webb and Simon Richardson made a winter ascent of the *Raeburn, Mackay and Ling Original Route* (VI,7). This was Webb's seventh visit to attempt this compelling corner line. Most attention focused on Bucket Buttress however, which lies directly beneath the summit of **Spidean Choinich**. Although short, the crag

provides excellent steep and sustained climbing on good quartzite similar to that on **Beinn Eighe**. The cliff was discovered by Steve Aisthorpe and John Lyall in April 1992, when they added a couple of routes, including *Pick Nicker* (V,6), the superb central corner-line. Last winter Lyall set about developing the cliff in earnest, adding nine further routes mainly in the IV to V grades in the company of Malcom Sclater, Andy Nisbet and Emily Kane. At just over an hour from the road, the routes have a winter cragging feel, and the cliff could well become the far north-west's equivalent to the Northern Corries.

In the far north, Cartwright and Neil Wilson made a fine first winter ascent of *Seer's Corner* (V,5) on **Creag Dubh** on **Foinaven**. A good ice build-up on this VS summer route is a prerequisite for success. On Skye, Mick Fowler and Andy Cave visited **Sgurr Mhic Choinnich** and climbed the very narrow *Exiguous Gully* (V) to the left of *King Cobra*, which provided sustained steep climbing up a series of steep grooves and corners.

The Cairngorms

The **Northern Corries** were as busy as ever, but after the intense activity of recent years, new route possibilities are becoming scarce. There are still a few gaps, however, as demonstrated by Allen Fyffe and Jaz Hepburn who added *Appetite for Destruction* (V,7) to the left of *Demolition Man*, and *Coronary Bypass* (V,7), the crack left of *Auricle*. Also in **Coire an Lochain** was the long awaited second ascent of *Bulgy* (VII,7), the very strenuous and poorly-protected hanging groove on the left arête of *Savage Slit*, by Neil Main and Graeme Ettle.

Across on **Carn Etchachan** in the Loch Avon Basin, Andy Nisbet and John Lyall linked together the much-eyed line of cracks and grooves between *Route Major* and *Red Guard* to give *The Winter Palace* (V,7). The same pair also added *The Crystal Maze* (V,7) on the same area of the cliff, although this time they were accompanied by Ettle and Main who added a three-pitch variation start.

Lochnagar saw a high level of activity with a number of good new mixed routes including *Shadowlands* (VI,7), the untouched headwall on the front face of *Shadow Buttress A*, and *Hiawatha* (VI,8) possibly Lochnagar's last unclimbed winter buttress, to the right of *Raeburn's Gully*. The hardest new route fell to Alastair Robertson and Simon Richardson who took advantage of very snowy conditions in late February to make a direct ascent of the narrow buttress left of *West Gully*. The eight pitch *Quasimodo* (VII,8) takes in the crux of the summer HVS *Dod's Diversion* and continues up a direct line on the final headwall.

Without doubt, the Walker Spur of the Cairngorms is the 200m high *Mitre Ridge* in the remote Garbh Choire on **Beinn a'Bhuird**. The *Original Route* (V,5), which follows the diagonal line of weakness crossing from the

right to left, was first climbed by Brooker and Patey in 1953. It is a superb but serious expedition which has now become quite popular. In February, the true crest of the buttress was climbed by Richardson and Roger Webb. *The Cardinal* (VIII,8) proved to be a very sustained expedition, and hints at the possibilities for high-standard mixed climbing away from the more accessible areas and well-known summer routes. Also on Mitre Ridge, James Turner and Simon Frost made a rare ascent of the excellent *Cumming-Crofton route* (VI,6). They added to their adventure by approaching from Tomintoul and finishing at Aviemore, thus traversing the Cairngorms in the process.

Ben Nevis and Glen Coe

Heavy snow considerably restricted activity on Ben Nevis, although cold weather in late March brought some of the lower ice routes into condition. The hard classic, *The Shield Direct* (VII,7) saw at least one ascent, and Mark Garthwaite and Adam Wainwright picked a major plum with the fine ascent of *The Bewilderbeast* (VI,6), a counter-diagonal to *Gemini* on the N wall of Carn Dearg.

In Glen Coe, Garthwaite achieved another major coup by making the second ascent of *Neanderthal* (VII,8) with Pete Benson. This magnificent route, which takes an improbable line up the huge corner right of *Pterodactyl* on Lost Valley Buttress, was first climbed by Rab Anderson and Grahame Nicoll in February 1987, and has come to symbolise the best in Glen Coe mixed climbing.

Southern Highlands

Good conditions on **The Cobbler** in early January resulted in several new routes. On the South Peak, Colin Stewart and Tom Prentice climbed the strenuous *Aeon Variation* (VI,6), and on the North Peak, Robin McAllister and Dave McGimpsey added a fine technical test piece with the first winter ascent of the summer HVS *Direct Direct*. A bold first pitch led to a very strenuous final wide crack, resulting in a fierce VI, 8 grade. The same pair also made the second ascent of Rab Anderson's excellent, but intimidating *Deadman's Groove* (VI,7) on the South Peak.

Across on **Beinn Ime**, the highest peak in the Arrochar Alps, attention focused on the unclimbed buttress, cut by twin grooves, which bounds the right side of the classic chimney line of *Ben's Fault*. Tom Prentice, Charlie French and Simon Richardson were first on the scene and climbed the left-hand groove with a spectacular finish through the headwall above (V,6). Hot on their heels the following weekend were Rab Anderson and Rob Milne who climbed *Headfault* (VII,7), the steeper right-hand corner, with a long and sustained pitch through the headwall.