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New Zealand 2006-2007

This report covers the period from April 2006 to April 2007. The alpine grades are based on the Mt Cook system, and the rock grades on the Ewbank system.

Darran Mountains

The alpine and rock climbing region of the Darran Mountains (Fiordland) continues to be the area of New Zealand that is generating the most climbing news and new routes of note. In late 2006 the New Zealand Alpine Club published Craig Jefferies' new guidebook to the Darrans. The guidebook's 312 pages capture more than a decade's worth of new route activity since the last edition, as well as revealing the enormous scope for new climbs that this region still provides.

A Hillary Expedition grant from the Government organisation SPARC enabled a group of (mostly young) and highly motivated individuals to make some major first ascents this summer. The 'Rock Solid Progression' team of Derek Thatcher, Mayan Smith-Gobat, Kester Brown, Craig Jefferies and Paul Rogers pooled their talents to make the first free ascent of *Shadowlands* (27) on the remote Sinbad Gully headwall, near Mitre Peak. This sustained 300m route has multiple pitches of hard climbing, including three of 27 and two of 26. Following this, they helicoptered onto the Ngapunatoru ice plateau and rappelled into the isolated 1300m Kaipo Wall, adding the first new route since the 1974 first ascent. The team rapped to a shelf at the base of the upper wall, placing bolt belays, and then Thatcher and Smith-Gobat climbed back out via 11 pitches of varied and often difficult and committing climbing up to grade 25.

At the beginning of their summer Darrans stint, Thatcher and Smith-Gobat teamed up with 2006 CMC/Macpac Mountaineer of the Year Jonathon Clearwater for a quick and inspired first ascent on the NW face of an iconic Darrans mountain – Sabre Peak (2162m). *Tora Tora Tora* (24) takes a direct line up the face right of the *Original Line* and was established on-sight, ground up and with no fixed protection. It is the first new route on the face in over 20 years.

Closer to the Darrans climbing base, Homer Hut, a four-pitch project on the Mate's Little Brother was completed to make the hardest alpine free climb in the Darrans: *Armageddon* (21, 28, 28, 25). This powerful route climbs directly through the *Second Coming* roofs and was redpointed by Derek Thatcher and Stefan Hadfield. The Barrier Face (Gertrude valley) had a new five-pitch line established 200m right of *Joker* by Al Ritchie and



141. Mayan Smith-Gobat on *Shadowlands* (27), Sinbad Gully headwall, Fiordland, during the first free ascent. (Craig Jefferies)

Sam Bossard. *Scrabble* (18, 18, 20, 18, 22) was bolted and climbed over several days. Late March saw two new routes added to the NE face of Barrier Knob by Mark Watson and Kristen Foley. *Utu* (25, 22, 24) is the hardest line on Barrier Knob and features intricate slab and face climbing while *Forgotten Silver* (16, 18, 20) climbs a sweep of nicely featured rock. Both routes were bolted and climbed over four days.

New route activity continues at Babylon, with the pace driven by Bruce Dowrick and Jon Sedon. Attention has recently turned to the reportedly Arapiles-like Little Babylon – a very promising cave above Babylon and a number of routes have been added here already. Watch this space.

Queenstown

Winter in the Queenstown region saw the exploration of Cigar Creek in the Eyre Mountains as an ice-climbing venue. A few new routes were established. Rupert Gardiner and Johnny Davison made the first ascents of *Kapa O Panga* (WI5) and the *Cold Light of Day* (WI4+) – the latter reportedly fell off soon after being climbed! Andy Mills and Davison climbed *Balloons and Knives* (WI4), with Mills taking a huge whipper off the top of the route, narrowly missing the ground. A classic 60m moderate was also climbed, *Divine Symmetry* (WI3) and *Hybrid* (WI3+) by Dave Bolger. In great early season conditions Rupert Gardiner and Dave Bolger climbed a new route on the SE face of Double Cone, Remarkables. The route follows mixed terrain and is called *Warthog*. A new route was also done in the South Wye valley, *Bush Lawyer* (WI4), by Adrian Camm and Mal Haskins.

Barron Saddle – Mt Brewster Region

With plums still to be picked, this extensive and remote mountain tract between the Aoraki Mt Cook and Mt Aspiring areas has seen continued activity from a motivated few. Guidebook author Ross Cullen teamed up with Nick Shearer to make the first ascent of the E ridge of Mt Hiwiroa (2281m), a seven-hour scramble. Paul Hersey's name regularly pops up in NZ Climber magazine, and in the past year he and partners have climbed a number of notable first ascents. During winter, with Mat Woods he climbed *The Grr Room* on Peak 2200m, four pitches with a crux of WI4. Also during winter Kester Brown and Jono Clarke climbed a very obvious thin waterfall flow at the head of the North Temple valley, *Temple of Doom* (M6/WI4). New ice routes were also climbed in Bush Stream, off the Aoraki Mt Cook highway.

Hersey's name pops up again, this time with Graham Zimmermann. The pair made a first ascent on the S face of Taiaha Peak. The classic-looking line, *I've Found Cod*, is 500m, 4+/WI3. In February 2007 Hersey and Danny Baille headed into the Ahuriri and climbed a 700m new route on the S face of Mt Huxley. *Hey I Ordered a Cheeseburger* (4 –/16) followed rock most of the way with a mixed section at the top. The same pair also made the first ascent of the E face of Peak 2237m in the west branch of the South Temple

valley, a 400-500m rock route with a crux of 14 (3+ overall). On Glen Lyon, at the entrance to the Hopkins valley, Hersey with Mat Woods climbed *Vote For Hillary*, a six-pitch 15. Glen Lyon now has a number of multi-pitch rock routes on its flanks.

Aoraki Mount Cook and Westland

The Aoraki Mt Cook region has been particularly quiet in terms of new-route activity and ascents of the harder routes, suggesting that there are fewer people heading into the mountains for hard climbing, or that they are directing their focus elsewhere. Perhaps it's to the Westland névés as this region is seeing increased activity and busier huts. The popularity is due in part perhaps to the relative ease of access to climbs once based at a hut, and the scope for technical and mixed climbs.

Winter at Aoraki Mt Cook saw an ascent of the E face of Mt Sefton (3151m) by Andrew Rennie, Jon Loeffler and Graham Zimmermann, via the *Direct* route. During August a new mixed route was climbed on the SW face of Conway Peak (2899m). *Life in the Fridge* was climbed by Allan Uren and Johnny Davison and graded 4. Later in the season on Conway Peak (2899m), Allan Uren completed his project *The Vision* with the first ascent of this grade 6+/A1 mixed project. The route had thwarted previous attempts due to marginal climbing and a scarcity of protection. Uren finally succumbed and placed two bolts at the crux on lead – and in the process may have pointed the way for future ascents in the region with bolt protection. In contrast to this style of ascent Uren then climbed a long and sinuous mixed route, named *The Mutant* (6+) on the W face of Mt Lendenfeld (3194m) in December with Julian White and Tim Robinson. Uren said 'the lower five pitches contain some of the most sustained and difficult climbing I've done up there, and some of the most aesthetic.'

Canterbury climber Guy McKinnon has once again been showing his drive for daring solo ascents with his first ascent of the 1400m N face of Hochstetter Dome (2827m) in September. This face was one of New Zealand's largest remaining unclimbed faces. In January 2007 he picked off an oft-looked-at line, an 800m buttress on Mt Whataroa (1988m) – visible from the West Coast highway. It's great to see the adventurous spirit of first ascents in the New Zealand mountains retained with McKinnon's style. Back over the Divide, Daniel Joll and Steven Barratt climbed a new route on Nun's Veil in the Liebig Range (east Tasman Valley). *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (4+) takes a line up the SE buttress.

Canterbury

A couple of new alpine routes were climbed in the Canterbury mountains in the past year. Guy McKinnon, alone again, climbed a new 350m route on the E face of Mt Evans (2620m). Mt Franklin (2145m), in Arthur's Pass National Park was climbed via a new route up the SE face by Don French and James Wright. The eight-pitch route is graded 5–.



142. *The Mutant* (6+) on the west face of Lendenfeld. Allan Uren, Julian White and Tim Robertson, December 2006. (By courtesy of Adventure Consultants)

Central North Island

Richard Thomson's new guidebook to Tongariro National Park may have kicked off some fresh enthusiasm, or maybe it was the good early season conditions; either way, some great looking ice and mixed routes were climbed last winter. In the Mangaturuturu Cirque Kester Brown and Jono Clarke climbed *Free Radicals* (WI5), *The Glass Spider* (M4), *Pope's Pillar* (WI5) and *Strung Out* (WI5). On Puggy's Buttress, on the SW face of Matiaho, Clarke climbed *Scratch and Win* (M5).