
SIMON RICHARDSON
Scottish Winter
2022-23



Chris Huntley on the first ascent of *International Groove* (IV,4) climbed during the International Winter Meet. (Simon Richardson)

In 2016, Greg Boswell and Guy Robertson raised the Scottish winter climbing bar by climbing three new Grade Xs in the same season. Since then, standards have remained largely static, but they moved forward again during the 2023 winter despite often limited snow and patchy conditions. In December, Boswell and Robertson made headlines with the first winter ascent of *Nihilist* (IX,9), an oft tried problem on Lochnagar, followed by *Vortex* (X,10): a bold and technical route breaching the main wall on Cùl Mòr. But it was Tim Miller and Jamie Skelton who turned heads with the first winter ascent of

Stone Bastion (X,10) on the Shelter Stone in early January. This seven-pitch route up a sustained summer E4 deep in the Cairngorms is one of the longest Grade Xs climbed to date and caught everyone's imagination. A little gloss was taken off when they explained that they had pre-inspected the crux pitch from above.

A week later Greg Boswell revisited Lochnagar with Jamie Skelton and Hamish Frost. The weather was poor with spontaneous avalanches cascading down the gullies but Shadow Buttress A was free from danger. Boswell set his sights on the three-metre horizontal roof guarding the blank looking wall on the right side of the buttress and after two false starts he rounded the lip to do battle with the technical headwall above. *Bring da Ruckus* (XII,13) is the highest graded route in Scotland to date. The two existing Grade XIIs (*Anubis* on Ben Nevis and *Banana Wall* on Cairn Gorm) had taken numerous separate attempts but *Bring da Ruckus* was climbed on the first visit and sits fully within the ground-up ethic.

Boswell and Robertson continued their new-route campaign with first ascent of *Delusion Direct* (X,9) in Coire an Fhamhair on Beinn Bhan. This six-pitch line is the direct version of *The God Delusion* and takes the obvious continuous crack-line cutting straight through the wandering lower wall in two long, hard and sustained pitches (both IX in their own right). In March they visited An Teallach's Hayfork Wall to climb the *Headmaster* (X,10), the most difficult of their routes on the wall to date. Also of note were the second and third ascents of *Banana Wall* (XII,12) in Coire an Lochain in the Cairngorms by Calum Muskett and Dave MacLeod.

Away from the cutting edge it was a relatively quiet season but several good mid-grade routes were found. In early December, Jack Morris and Neil Kerr climbed *Last Resort* (VI,6) on Church Door Buttress in Glen Coe which takes the left side of the rock needle that rises from the centre of Central Gully. Later in the month Joe Barlow, Rosie Rothwell and Bruno Cullinan visited Druim Shionnach in Glen Shiel where they climbed the excellent looking *Aubergine Pickle* (V,6) that takes the exposed right side of Boxer's Buttress.

Nathan Adam added two good new routes to Skye in January. Together with Dominic Mackenzie and Ben Smith-Price he climbed *Slaying the Badger* (V,6) on Am Basteir. This striking, left-facing chimney corner high on the left side of the north face starts from the traverse line of *The Deadline*. Fortunately, it was much easier than it looked and was very accommodating for placements and runners. Four days later, Adam visited the west face of Sgùrr a' Mhadaidh with Ali Rose, where they climbed *Sunshine Rib* (V,7) to the right of Thuilm Ridge. On Ben Nevis, S Pigden and O Miller climbed *Icarus* (VII,7), a bold route starting up the short left-trending corner left of *North-West Face*.

The Scottish Mountaineering Club organised the 2023 Scottish International Meet that ran from 25 February to 4 March. The meet was based at the CIC Hut on Ben Nevis and comprised eight guests from Korea, Poland, Italy, Germany and Singapore hosted by 12 British climbers. Ice conditions were excellent high on the mountain and the weather was superb.



Greg Boswell on the first ascent of *Bring da Ruckus* (XII,13) on Lochnagar. (Hamish Frost)

Over 120 ascents were made ranging from the great classics of *Tower Ridge* and *Point Five Gully* through to modern offerings such as *Big Wednesday* and *Flight of the Condor*. Eight new routes were climbed including *Hot Barszcz* (V,6), the icy wall left of *North-West Face* on Observatory Buttress by Willis Morris and Jan Gurba from Poland. The same pair also climbed *Red Aurora* (V,6) the ice line that cuts through *The Blue Horizon* on Raeburn's Wall. On The Comb, Scott Grosdanoff and Italian climber Dario Eynard had a good find with *Solar Wind* (VI,6) which takes a series of direct variations to *Naïve Euphoria*, and on the Carn Dearg Summit Buttresses, Chris Huntley and Simon Richardson found *International Groove* (IV,4), which is set in a magnificent position at the head of Castle Corrie.

There were several good additions in the northern Highlands. On Stac Pollaidh, Iain Young and John Higham climbed the spectacular *No2 Buttress* (IV,6), which approximates to the summer line first climbed in 1956. In the Glen Carron area, Mark Robson, Roger Webb and Neil Wilson found the excellent *Still Life* (V,5) on Glas Bheinn, and on Sgòrr Ruadh, Will Rowland and Garry Campbell ascended *Wide Buttress* (IV,5), a natural line left of *Narrow Gully* on Raeburn's Buttress.

In early March, Hamish Frost, Guy Robertson and Greg Boswell visited An Teallach and climbed *Grand Old Master* (VI,6), a magnificent 300m route taking the right crest of Major Rib. Most appropriately, the route was named in memory of the great pioneering Scottish winter climber Jimmy Marshall, who had passed away a few days before.