

## Imperial College Union Outdoor Club: Winter Tour Report

### Just to think it all began on a long-forgotten morn...

With hangovers subsiding on January 2<sup>nd</sup> ICU Outdoor Club winter tour began. Minibus, the speed limited mode of transport of choice for a pleasant 10 hours driving through the night to Scotland and the mountains of the Cairngorm National Park. Arriving 2 hours before intended a short sleep in the minibus was required to refresh tired eyes before a day on the hill. Regrettably no one had told the thermostat this, which remained at a balmy -13°C outside the bus.

Needless to say convincing people to get out the bus to get changed was no easy task, people suddenly realising quite how ugly the true face of Scottish Winter could be. For many of the participants of the trip this was their first Scottish winter experience, and getting packed and ready in the dark bitter cold was a shock for the system. After an hour or so and a minor bus fail the whole group were off walking to Coire an t'sneachda, and the climbing within. Some of the routes which were climbed in the first few days are illustrated in the picture below.



At 4pm at the end of the first day (3<sup>rd</sup> of January) everyone rallied back at the minibus to drive over to the accommodation we were staying.

### Try imagining a place where it's always safe and warm...

Our accommodation was a ski lodge at Badaguish Outdoor Centre (picture below), which is located very close to the popular climbing areas, and about 20 minutes from Aviemore. The accommodation was excellent, and compared to normal trips was of a luxurious standard, just what you need after a hard day on the hill. Being out of season for many people, we were alone on the site which meant the roads weren't gritted, leading to some tense driving moments on very icy roads.



### **In a world of steel-eyed death, and men who are fighting to be warm...**

For the first four days or so the same pattern was repeated involving getting up at 5 or 6 in the morning, eating as many calories as one can during breakfast and then spending the daylight hours climbing a route (or two if the team was especially fast or the route was short). The participants divided into small teams (2-4 people), with each team climbing a different objective. The groups were lead by one (or 2) of the 8 experienced members of the club depending on the difficulty of the route. This provided the 11 participants new to the sport a chance to learn how to protect climbs of this style safely and to experience climbing in a new environment. Towards the end of the week several of the more confident novices had taken to the opportunity to lead at least one Scottish winter climb. All others had seconded harder routes up to a very impressive Scottish IV,5 in several cases. This bodes well for the future of Scottish winter climbing within the Outdoor Club.



### **And if I pass this way again, you can rest assured. I'll always do my best for her, on that I give my word...**

After 4 days of climbing it was decided that a rest day was in order, and so after a relaxed morning we headed over to the Cairngorm Brewery in Aviemore. A fantastic day was had sampling their entire range of ales, finally selecting a seasonal one, White Lady to take back to the accommodation

in a 40 pint keg. Alcoholic tendencies may have been revealed in our reactions to being told it had to be rested for 24 hours before consumption (as it had just come out of the vat). Surprisingly however it did manage a full 24 hours. Stunned? So were we.



Our tour to this area enabled one of our members to partake in formal professional mountaineering training through the Jonathan Conville Trust. This is a heavily subsidised mountaineering training course designed to introduce young people to Scottish Winter walking and climbing. The member benefitted greatly from this course and will be an asset to the club passing on this information in future years.

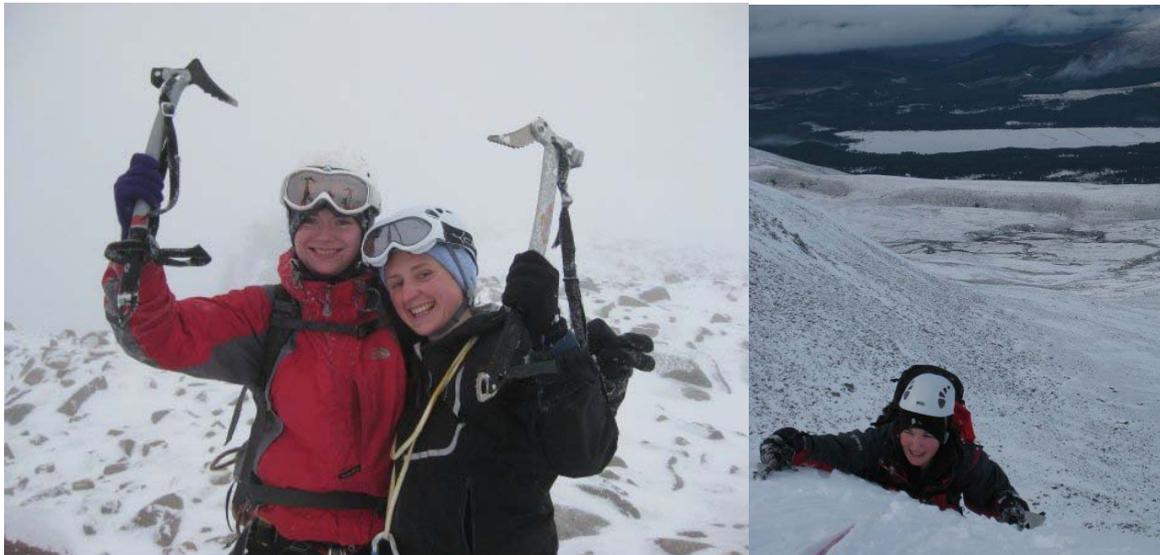
### **I was burned out from exhaustion, buried in the hail..**

Towards the end of the week the weather was beginning to deteriorate with winds becoming stronger, and there generally being more powder snow around. Powder snow and wind combined to ensure a near constant torrent of spindrift poured down the routes, burying everything it could. Undeterred teams completed routes in both Coire an Lochain and Coire an t'sneachda. Including Fiacall Ridge (I/II\*\*), The Runnel (II), Crotched Gully, Aladdin's Couloir, Central Gully (I), Mirror Direct (IV), Goat Track Gully, Fiacall Couloir, Red Gully (II\*\*), Spiral Gully, The Haston Line (III, 4), The Ventilator (II), Y Gully Right Branch (II), The Couloir (I), Central Crack Route (IV,5).



In addition on their rest days groups and experienced individuals went for winter walks in the areas surrounding the accommodation allowing them to practise winter navigation skills, a winter run was attempted but aborted due to falling over too often.

A visit to a local Inn for lunch was incorporated into one of these days by some of the participants of the trip. Mountain biking was not an option this year due the presence of thick ice on nearly all paths in the area surrounding Aviemore.



## **"Come in," she said, "I'll give you shelter from the storm."**

And so after seven exciting days, we packed up, cleaned the hut and drove back down to London. This took longer than driving up due high winds in the Cairngorms which gusted 100Mph on the day we left.

Overall the Tour was a great success ensuring that future members of the Outdoor Club will be able to be taught the skills of Scottish Winter climbing from those people who learnt this year. This Tour has ensured that there will be a sufficient bank of experience within in the club for the near future. From the feedback I have received the Tour was extremely popular and everyone had a fantastic week.

Bob Dylan played a major role in our Tour, albeit not personally, helping us wile away the time spent waiting for the road to be cleared of ice for the traffic in the morning. Fortunately there have been no long term effects of prolonged exposure. Roll on Summer Tour.

## **Acknowledgements**

The Imperial College Outdoor Club would like to acknowledge the financial support provided by Imperial College Union, and IC Trust for this Tour. In addition the loan of radios, maps and guides by the Recreational Clubs Committee was gratefully received.



## Appendix 1 - Location

The Tour was based in the Cairngorm National Park, (indicated 1 on map below). Accommodation was the Badaguish Outdoor Centre (near Loch Morlich) in a chalet-type lodge. Several major climbing areas are accessible from this location, namely, Coire an t'Sneachda, Coire an Lochain and Hell's Lum. These venues provide a variety of climbs of different styles in a range of grades suitable for beginners and experienced groups alike.



The drive from London took approximately 10hrs going to Scotland, and 11hrs coming back. Four drivers shared the driving, each driving ~2hrs, with one driver doing a leg at the beginning and end.

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