



Southern Alps: Summer and Winter Highlights

New Zealand, Southern Alps

Ruari Macfarlane during the first wintertime Torres-Tasman traverse. Photo by Gavin Lang
The New Zealand summer of 2019–'20 was typified by stable spells of warm, dry weather interspersed between significant storm fronts, the worst of which hammered the South Island ranges in early February, when Milford Sound was drenched by over half a meter of rain in a single day. Despite the fickle weather, plenty of climbers braved the odds, and while there wasn't an abundance of new routes, some noteworthy first ascents were established.

Michael Eatson, George Loomes, Olivia Truax, and Sam Waetford climbed a new line on the north face of Newton Peak (2,543m). Forbidden Fruit, III, 4 (grade 16/5.8) follows an obvious cleavage to the left of The Tears of Allah (McKinnon–Vinton-Boot, 2008). In early March, Gavin Lang and Ruari Macfarlane teamed up to climb a 400m alpine rock route from the upper Malte Brun Glacier to the crest of the West Ridge on Malte Brun (3,198m): Biophillia, IV, 4 (grade 14/5.6).

The COVID-19 pandemic then placed the country into a state of lockdown from late March through mid-May. Ongoing travel restrictions all but eliminated any chance to climb internationally, which resulted in a glut of motivated climbers stuck in New Zealand—with the net result being one of the most productive winter and spring climbing seasons in recent years.

Daniel Joll and Karl “Merry” Schimanski kicked things off in late May, when they climbed the aptly named Straight Outta Lock Down (175m, 25/5.11d) at Copper Point, a cliff accessed by boat on the south shore of Milford Sound. Bruce Dowrick, Llewellyn Murdoch, and Jon Seddon made the first ascent of Big Fish (150m, 28/5.12d) at the same area, and then Murdoch paired up with Steven Fortune to establish a third route, the seven-pitch Taratahi (24/5.11c). Joll, Schimanski, and Rachel Knott put many days of work into the first ascent of the Mile High Club, a 700m route on the Airport Wall (see report here). Following the first ascent in July, Joll returned in September with Schimanski to complete the first free ascent and again in November with Fortune to claim the first one day (free) ascent. All four of these routes utilize a mixture of natural and bolted protection while climbing on high-quality granite in a maritime setting, which, despite the proximity to the ocean, maintains a distinct alpine feel.

Ben Dare established two new routes during the annual Darran Mountains winter climbing meet in July. Lit Up (III, 5) takes a line up the right-hand side of the main wall in McPherson Cirque, between the Thrill Frenzy Ramp and 1964 HQ Holden (both by Uren and Vass, 1992). This was followed up with the first ascent of the south face of Pyramid Peak (2,295m) via a sustained ice and mixed route (see report here).

July also saw two new routes climbed on the south face of Tititea/Mt. Aspiring (3,033m). George Loomes and Ruari Macfarlane climbed the 500m Shooting Tahr, IV, 5+ (M5, WI4). Starting up the Whiston-Hyslop (1976) through the lower rock band, they then followed new ground to the Coxcomb Ridge, between Shooting Star (Dare-Joll, 2014) and Thales (Heung-Kirchner, 2016). Meanwhile, Sooji Clarkson and Gavin Lang started just to the left of the Chocolate Fish Route (Beavan-Uren, 1997) to climb a new 300m ice and mixed route to the Coxcomb Ridge: Kia Rapu i Tōku Māramatanga (Seeking the Light), IV, 5 (WI3, M4). To round out the month, Macfarlane, Jaz Morris, and Maddy Whittaker found great ice conditions on the south face of Mt. Joffre (2,091m) when they climbed Antics, III, 5 (WI4), 500m.

In Aoraki/Mt. Cook National Park, Lang and Macfarlane claimed the first Torres-Tasman traverse (Cleveland-Hamilton-Lange, 1951) in winter. After a two-day approach to Katies Col along the Fox Range, the pair traversed over Torres Peak, Mt. Tasman (3,497m), and Lendenfeld Peak, then descended via the “ever dwindling” Fox Glacier to reach the car after a 19-hour day.

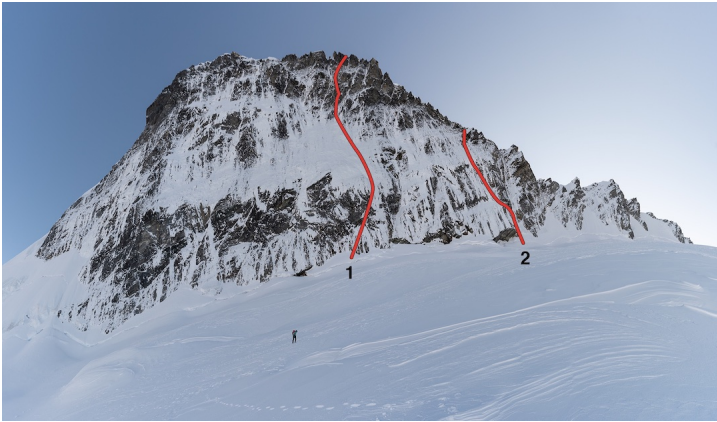
Soon after, Bia Boucinhas, Owen Lee, Petrouchka Steiner-Grierson, and Chris Tipper teamed up to climb a new mixed line on the west face of Mt. Humdinger (2,796m): Nota14lol, II, 5 (M4), 300m. On the eastern side of the Main Divide, in late July, Macfarlane climbed a pair of new routes on the southeast face of Vampire Peak (2,645m). Firstly, he and Mark Evans climbed Twilight, IV, 4 (WI3), a seven-pitch ice route between Bram Stoker (MacFarlane-McLeod, 1993) and Swiss Virgins (Blackburne-Nash, 1983). The very next day, he set out alone on Single and Searching V, 6 (WI5, M6), a 500m direct line to near the summit (see related story).

Following these climbs, Macfarlane set his sights on the Inland Kaikoura range to climb a single-day triple linkup on the southern aspects of Mitre Peak (2,621m), Point 2,578m, and Mt. Alarm (2,877m). In the process, he climbed three new routes: Milford Wanderer, II 3 (M3) on Mitre Peak; the Central Gully, II, 4 (M4) on Point 2,578m; and finally The Good Shepherd, III, 5 (M5), 250m, on Mt. Alarm.

The last word of the spring season went to Clarkson and Loomes, who climbed a variation to The Band-aid Route (Dickson-McLeod, 1992) on the south face of Mt. D’Archiac (2,875m). Lust, V, 5+ (WI5), adds a new direct start and finish to the route.

— Ben Dare, New Zealand

Images



The south face of Tititea/Mt. Aspiring, showing (1) Shooting Tahr (500m, IV,5+) and (2) Kia Rapu i Tōku Māramatanga (300m, IV5). Many other routes not shown.



Sooji Clarkson starting up Kia Rapu i Tōku Māramatanga on Tititea/Mt. Aspiring.



The southeast face of Vampire Peak, showing the new routes Single and Searching (Macfarlane, July 2020) and Twilight (Evans-Macfarlane, July 2020).



Ruari Macfarlane on Antics, south face of Mt. Joffre.



Ruari Macfarlane descending Torres Peak during the first wintertime Torres-Tasman traverse.



Ruari Macfarlane during the first wintertime Torres-Tasman traverse.

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