



The Expander in Winter

Poland, High Tatras

Spre z yna (“Spring”) was the nickname of Polish climber **Maciej Gryczyński**—the name given because of his curly hair. In the 1960s he put up now well-known and classic routes on four mountains, and all four routes are called Spre z yna: the northeast face of Mały Młynarz (350m, climbed variously in 10 to 16 pitches, VI-/VI); the northeast face of Kocioł Kazalnicy (200m, 8 pitches, VI/VI+); the east face of Mnich (160m, 4–5 pitches, VII-); and the short but high-quality west face of Kościelec (90m, 3–4 pitches, VI+).

In the late 1980s, legendary Polish climber Krzysztof Pankiewicz came up with the idea of linking all four Spre z yna in a nonstop push. He achieved this with Piotr Panufnik in just 17 hours during September 1989. The routes are located in three separate valleys, and the link-up involves a total distance of 32km, crossing four passes, and 3,000m of ascent. The four Spre z yna have been thought of as the four springs on an old-fashioned “chest expander” exercise device, and the linkup is thus called The Expander.

The Expander was repeated in 23 hours during August 1996 by Krzysztof Belczyński and Marcin Tomaszewski; by Czesław Szura, solo, in 25 hours during August 2014; and most recently by Łukasz Mirowski and Kacper Tekieli in 15 hours 52 minutes during July 2019. Although each route was climbed in winter decades ago, no one had completed the winter link-up. This fell to Maciek Ciesielski, Piotr Sułowski, and Kacper Tekieli, who completed The Expander in winter in 43 hours 50 minutes, from March 2–4, 2021.

The three took no bivouac gear, opting to travel as light as possible. On the first day they climbed Mały Młynarz free, and during the night Kocioł Kazalnicy, free at M7. The following day they climbed Mnich with some aid, and that night Kościelec, also with some aid. They had no support or preplaced caches. They had one hour of sleep and a few short breaks (a total of around three hours), and employed a strategy that involved the climber who was neither leading nor belaying having a nap.

Although all three were experienced at climbing long routes in a single push, they all “hit the wall” on this outing, fortunately not at the same time.

— Information from Kacper Tekieli, Poland

Images



On the initial pitches of the Sprężyna route on Mały Młynarz, the first of four routes in The Expander link-up.



Maciek Ciesielski on the first pitch of Sprężyna route on Mały Młynarz, the start of the winter Expander.



On the summit of Mnich after completing the third route of The Expander.

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