



AAC Publications

2023 Climbing Summary

New Zealand, Southern Alps

The austral summer of 2022/2023 started off with the first ascent of a route 30 years in the making. Situated on a sun-drenched north-facing wall in the Wilkin Valley near Wanaka, The Dark Side of the Moon (305m, 26/5.12c) climbs 13 pitches of compact schist and was climbed free by Rike Andree and Jochen Lenfert. Attempted by Allan Uren and Clinton Bevan in 1992, it sat dormant until 2021, when Uren returned to try it again, this time with support from friends Steven Fortune, Milo Gilmour, Roberto Gomez-Sainz, and Tim Steward. Over the summer of 2021/2022, they cleaned and bolted the route before Andree and Lenfert teamed up to claim the first ascent in October 2022.

Ruari Macfarlane has been one of the most active alpine climbers in the country over recent years, often seeking the paths least traveled, and this year was no exception. Departing from the Lake Marian trailhead in the Hollyford Valley, Macfarlane and Gavin Lang set out to make the first continuous traverse of the Darran Mountains from south to north. Lang had to withdraw on the third day, but Macfarlane continued alone to Martins Bay, having completed the full traverse in ten days. In the process, he reached the summits of all the main peaks in the range, including (but not limited to) Mt. Christina (2,474m), Mt. Crosscut (2,263m), Mt. Patuki (2,246m), Mt. Madeline (2,536m), and Mt. Tutoko (2,723m). Midway through, he met up with Ben Mangan and Quinn Yates to climb a new route on the north ridge of Madeline. Drawbridge Are te (400m, 18/5.10a) climbs from the prominent notch at the base of the ridgeline up to the 2,516m foresummit.

Macfarlane then teamed up with Troy Forsyth to complete the first traverse of the Banks Range from west to east over a four-day period. These peaks are located at the head of the Copland Valley in Westland Tai Poutini National Park, near the Main Divide and Aoraki/Mt. Cook National Park. During this outing, they completed new routes on the west faces of Sibyl Peak (2,411m) and Mt. Unicorn (2,557m). The west face of Sibyl was climbed in ten pitches at 15/5.7, while the west face of Unicorn provided The Secret of the Unicorn, with eight pitches up to 17/5.9.

Moving north again to the Cloudy Peak Range (a small range that runs perpendicular to the Main Divide in the Canterbury region), Grant Piper continued with his recent new route development on the western aspects of Cloudy Peak (2,403m). He teamed up with Kate Bailue, Kevin Barratt, Cliff Ellery, Bernard Frankpitt, and Richard Kimberly to equip and climb Sharp Shooter (350m, 22/5.11c) up the center of the Hourglass Wall, using a mix of gear and bolts. There are a number of existing routes on the wall, and Sharp Shooter is between Unbeliever (McLeod-Dickson, 1992) and Mission Impossible (Beare-Main, 1981).

With the onset of winter, the number of people venturing into the alpine dwindled. But those who persevered with the fickle weather and conditions at the annual Darrans Winter Meet in July were handsomely rewarded. The highlight was a new line on the east face of Flat Top Peak (2,282m), climbed solo by Ben Dare. Apparition (1,100m, 6+, VI) follows the prominent gully line up the center of the face before angling right through the upper headwall to reach the summit just left of Soulfly (Dare, 2021).

Among the lofty summits of Aoraki/Mt. Cook National Park, Sam Smoothy continued with his quest to ski all 24 of New Zealand's 3,000m peaks. Smoothy linked up with Will Rowntree and Jim Ryan on October 20, and the trio claimed the first ski descent of the east face of Malte Brun (3,199m), the sixth-highest peak in the country.

As temperatures rose with the arrival of summer, Daniel Joll returned for his annual pilgrimage to the Airport Wall near Milford Sound in the deep south. He paired up with Llewellyn Murdoch to make the first ascent of Adventure Tourism (405m, 27/5.12d), the third new line established by Joll on the wall in recent years, following Mile High Club (2020) and Dream Liner (2021). Climbed in 14 pitches, Adventure Tourism starts on the first three pitches of Dream Liner before ascending a rising, left-trending traverse for six new pitches to finish up the final five pitches of Mile High Club.

During the same period, farther north, Macfarlane and Keith Riley ventured around to the seldom-visited northern aspects of Mt. Brewster (2,516m) to make the first ascent of the north face via the Central Rib (650m, 16/5.8). About 350m of this was climbed up the rock rib itself, before a further 300m up snowfields and easy scrambling took them to the summit.

—Ben Dare, New Zealand

Images



Sam Smoothy scopes the spine panel crux on the ski descent of Malte Brun from a lofty perch.



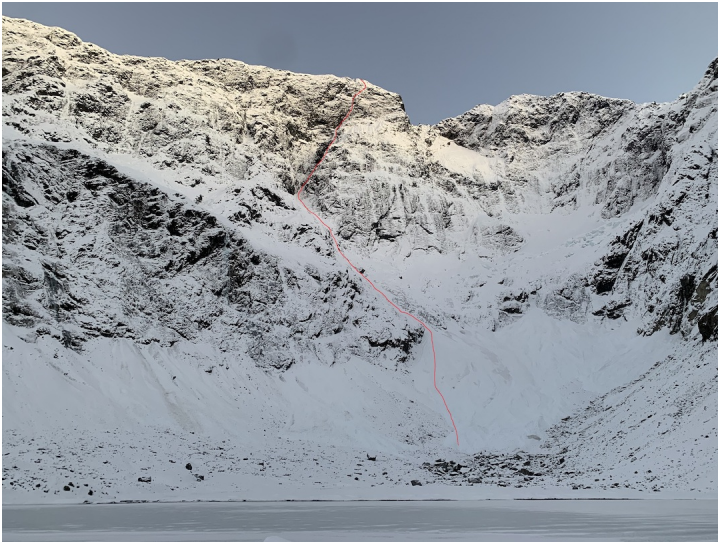
The line of the first ski descent of the east face of Malte Brun.



Will Rowntree starts into the first crux on the ski descent of the east face of Malte Brun, a tight choke with heady exposure.



Looking back at the east face of Malte Brun after the first ski descent.



The line of Apparition (1,100m, 6+, VI) on the east face of Flat Top Peak in the Darrans.



Daniel Joll on Adventure Tourism, a new 14-pitch link-up on the Airport Wall near Milford Sound.

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