

## MY FIRST ICE CLIMB

SHARON STRONACH

As the only member of the Cairngorm Club taken out by the Club's climbing 'experts' to do an ice climb last winter due to the dearth of suitable climbing conditions, I have been asked to write about this unique event.

After a great deal of nagging, interspersed with generous quantities of pleading, I finally convinced Stuart (Stronach) to take me out on an ice climb. The resistance I experienced led me to believe that I was asking Stuart to break one of the commandments of Scottish ice climbing: "Thou shalt not allow women near ice climbs." The excuses were abundant: "You don't have plastic boots. – You don't have crampons suitable for going ice climbing. – You don't have a proper climbing axe. – You won't like the cold."

I finally got my wish on April 18, 1993, when the Club had a bus meet to Cairn Gorm/Bynack More. My rucksack held my shiny new crampons and ice axe along with gloves, hats and extra fleeces so that I could survive the intense cold I had been warned about.

Stuart and I planned to climb a Grade I climb – Faicaille Ridge. As we walked up, we saw that the Goat Track that led up the back of the corrie was completely snowbound which meant no backing out now. It was the climb or nothing.

Before we started the climb, we bagged the demoted top, Faicaille Coire an t-Sneachda. The snow was sparse at the bottom of the climb and so we brought forth our ice axes but left our crampons – which would be more of a hindrance than a help – in our rucksacks. At that point, since the ridge was wide and looked easy, we decided not to rope up, just as well really, considering we had left the ropes in the bus.

Roughly one-third of the way up the climb it started to snow. Underfoot, the going had become more treacherous and so we decided to stop and put our crampons on. This was achieved sheltering under an overhanging rock complete with icicles, on a two-foot ledge. The crampons made a big difference and I felt much more sure-footed, as a result my confidence soared.

I followed Stuart up a bit farther and was thoroughly enjoying myself. The climb became steeper and I found myself using the front points of my crampons.

"This is what it's all about," I thought. Stuart kept making sure I was doing okay. The huge grin on my face would answer his question. I was having a whale of a time.

As we reached another steep section Stuart asked if I would like to go first. But, of course! Off I went, feeling like a real mountaineer. Stuart took some fairly unflattering photographs of my rear end during my ascent. Still, at least it was proof of my adventure.

The climb was over much too quickly and I would quite happily have gone

back down the hill and done it all over again. I was feeling exhilarated and immediately told Stuart I wanted to be taken ice climbing again. I had just soloed a Grade I, now there was no stopping me.

That day, we went on to bag three more tops, another demoted top and, of course, Cairn Gorm. I had a wonderful day and I am looking forward to ice climbing this winter. And, I liked my climbing instructor so much that I married him.

## HIGH ON THE MOUNTAIN

*The sun fades gently out of sight  
behind the tall pine trees  
and ends again a day so pure  
that nature sleeps in peace*

*But nature sleeps throughout the night  
as darkness shrouds it in  
and in the morn a peewit's call  
resounds the mountain o'er*

*The grassy slopes, the craggy rocks  
where small flowers cling to life  
awaken as the sun sweeps out  
and brushes off the night.*

ROBBIE MIDDLETON

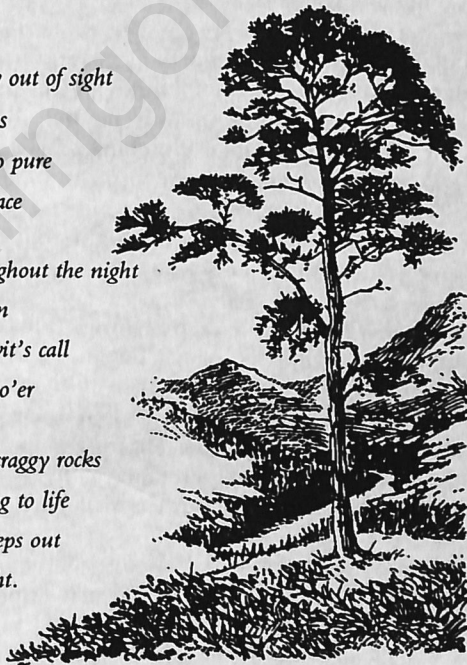


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