

CICERONE

WINTER CLIMBS

GLEN COE

Snow, ice and mixed climbs
in Glen Coe and Ben Udlaidh



Mike Pescod

WINTER CLIMBS: GLEN COE

**SELECTED SNOW, ICE AND MIXED ROUTES IN A
TWO-VOLUME SET**

by Mike Pescod

CICERONE

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CONTENTS

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Topos key	4
Preface	5

INTRODUCTION	7
Winter climbing: a recent history	9
Types of winter climbs: snow, ice and mixed	12
Weather	28
Avalanches	35
Access	37
Equipment	38
Additional safety precautions	40
Using this guide	40

GLEN COE	47
Aonach Eagach	51
Buachaille Etive Mòr	55
Stob Dearg	55
Stob Coire Altruim	69
Lairig Eilde	71
Sròn na Lairig and Eilde Canyon	71
The Lost Valley (Coire Gabhail)	74
Lost Valley Buttresses	76
East face of Gearr Aonach	82
Coire nan Lochan	89
North-west face of Gearr Aonach	89
Stob Coire nan Lochan	91
Far Eastern Buttress	106
North face of Aonach Dubh	109
Coire nam Beitheach	114
West face of Aonach Dubh	115
Bidean nam Bian	122
Stob Coire nam Beith	129

GLEN COE – OUTLYING AREAS	135
Beinn Udlaidh	136
Sgùrr na h-Ulaidh	142

Card sleeve: Climbing Minus One Gully, Ben Nevis (photo: Hamish Frost)
Front cover: Climbing The Great Gully, Garbh Bheinn



Late season snow cover on Tower Gap, Ben Nevis

INTRODUCTION

The view towards Garbh Bheinn from Stob Coire nan Lochan, Glen Coe

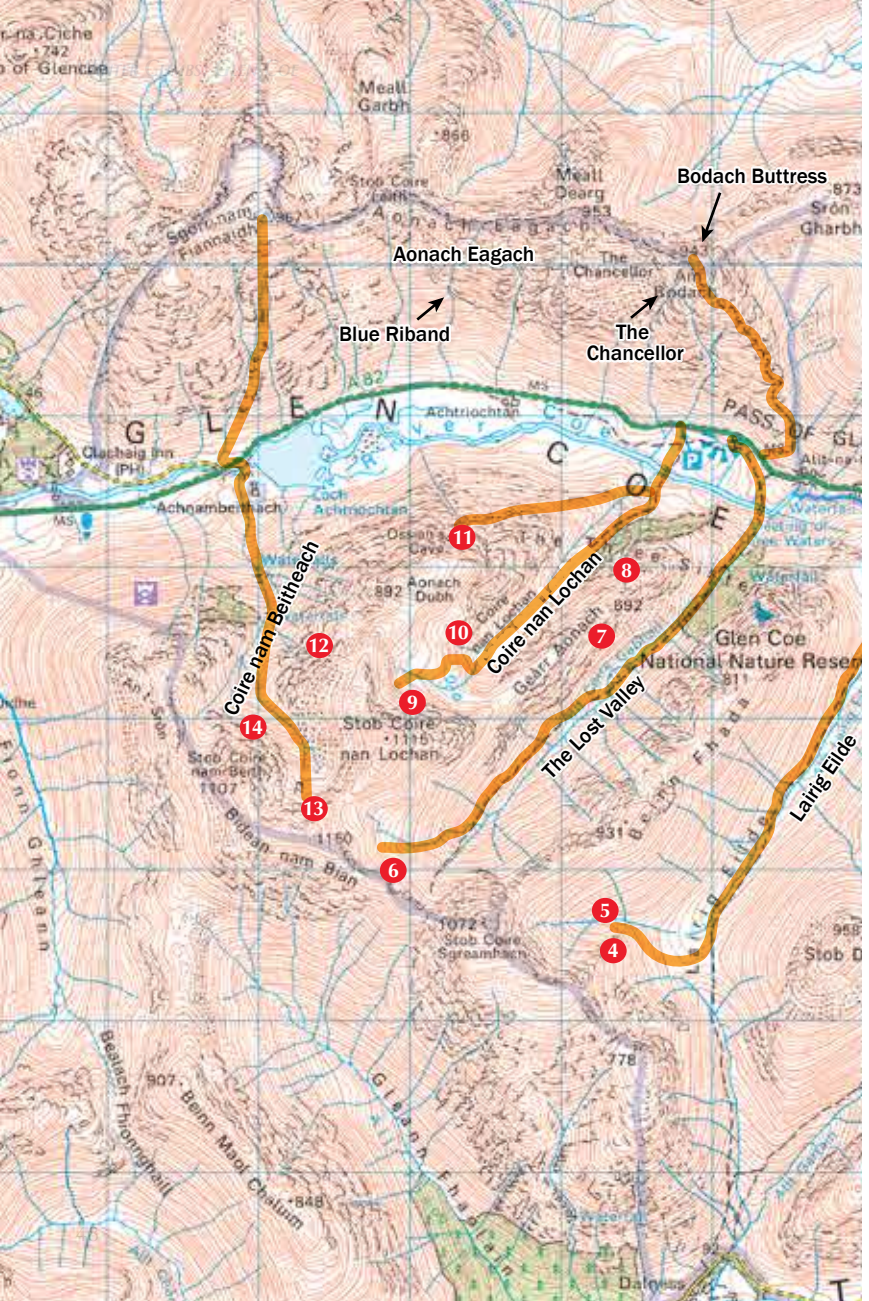


Scotland is world-renowned for its adventurous climbing, the scale of which reaches far beyond the modest scale of its mountains. There is a strongly defended tradition of climbing style that maintains the adventurous nature of the challenge. This style also ensures that we raise our standard of climbing to meet the challenge, rather than bringing the challenge down to a level at which it is more easily achieved.

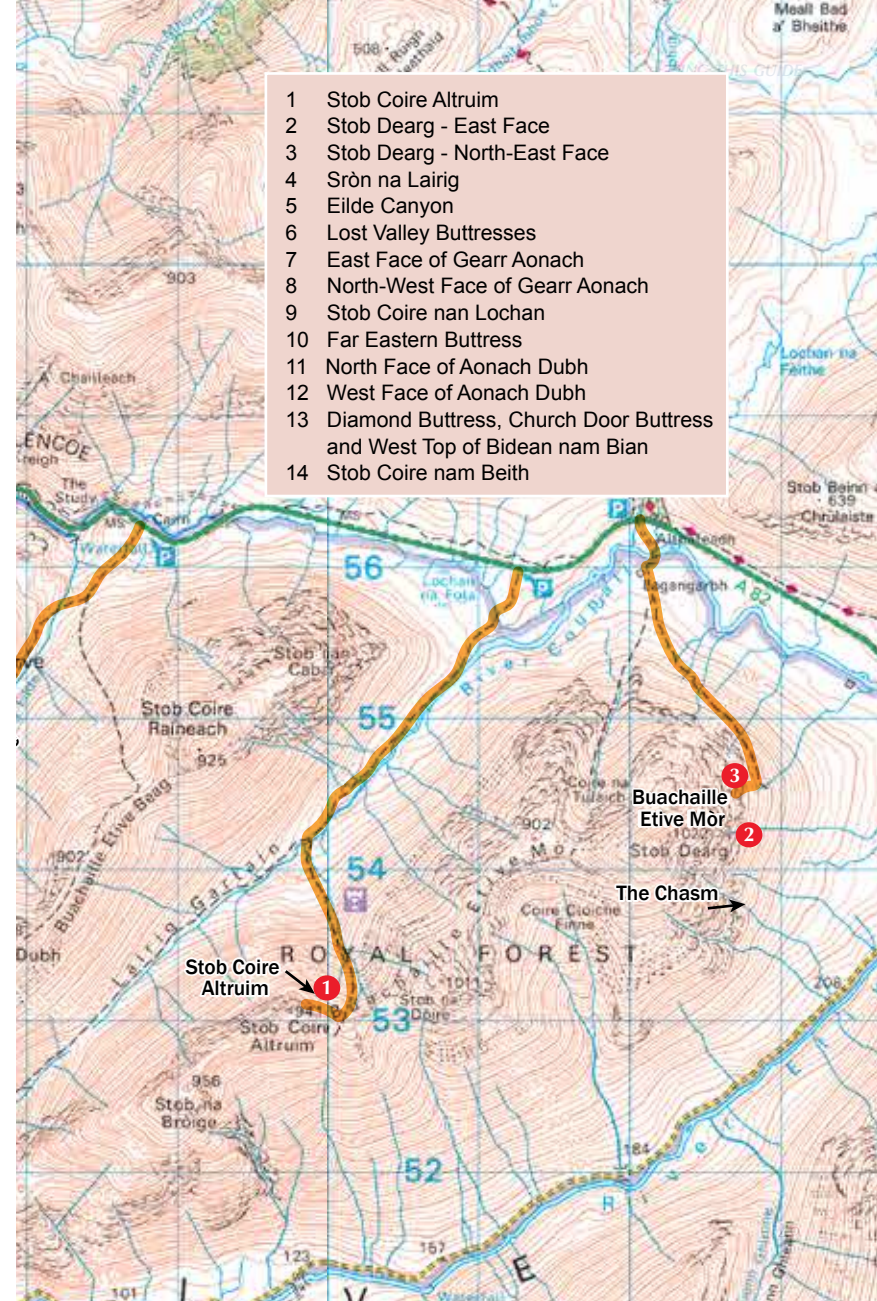
A long apprenticeship is often required to learn all the skills demanded by the climbs in this book. Rapid changes in the weather bring

rapid changes to winter climbing conditions and create almost unique styles of climbing. In this dynamic environment it can be very difficult to choose the best route to climb on any given day, especially when there are so many different types of climb to choose from.

The art of choosing the best route to climb is one that is learned through many years of trying – and often failing – to decipher the varied influences of the weather. As well as helping you to find and follow the routes, this book aims to speed up your learning of the dark arts of winter route choice



- 1 Stob Coire Altruim
- 2 Stob Dearg - East Face
- 3 Stob Dearg - North-East Face
- 4 Sròn na Lairig
- 5 Eilde Canyon
- 6 Lost Valley Buttresses
- 7 East Face of Gearr Aonach
- 8 North-West Face of Gearr Aonach
- 9 Stob Coire nan Lochan
- 10 Far Eastern Buttress
- 11 North Face of Aonach Dubh
- 12 West Face of Aonach Dubh
- 13 Diamond Buttress, Church Door Buttress and West Top of Bidean nam Bian
- 14 Stob Coire nam Beith



and craggy slopes. There are one or two reasonable escape options to the north, leading to Loch Leven.

Some fine cascade ice climbs form on the south flank of Aonach Eagach, below the pinnacles, during sustained freezing conditions. A small parking area at NN 153 572, or the bigger one 500 metres to the west, should be used. Climb the hillside due north to the foot of the route. Blue Riband is the obvious steep cascade with a pillar of ice at its base.

Blue Riband 600m V,5***

J. MacKenzie and G. Rooney, 18 February 1979

Three ice falls lead to easier (grade 3) ice. Above this, there's one short and steep icefall to climb or avoid on the left before easy snow slopes lead to the top, which is just east of Aonach Eagach's pinnacles.

Further up Glen Coe, the south side of Am Bodach is made up of dramatic buttresses and gullies high above the glen and running all the way up the mountainside. They face south, so they don't collect much snow and any sunshine melts it away quite quickly.

Vice Chancellor Ridge 210m III**

H. MacInnes and Glencoe School of Winter Climbing (GSWC), 18 February 1969

The big buttress left of The Chancellor, starting at the foot of Big Chock Gully (III) which runs up the left side of The Chancellor. The buttress is climbed to an imposing tower, climbed by a central line. A third tower leads to narrow snow crests and slopes to the top.

The Chancellor 400m IV**

W. Skidmore and R. T. Richardson, December 1965

The prominent buttress jutting out into Glen Coe south-west from the summit of Am Bodach. After a very good freeze and plenty of snow this makes a fine climb with a few tricky sections and one distinct crux up the front of the obvious tower. From the parking at NN 168 569, walk north-west then go north up the stream coming out of Old Man Gully. Follow the west bank of this to the foot of the buttress. Find your way up the turf, mossy buttress with an excursion to the left and back to the crest before the steep tower. Easy but narrow, beautiful crests lead to the top.

Chancellor Gully 500m III/IV**

H. MacInnes, 1960

(no photo topo)

The big obvious gully running up and then leftwards, up the south face of Am Bodach. It is directly above the parking at NN 168 569 and turns left below the vertical chimney called The Slit. Walk up the east bank of the stream and get into the gully below The Slit. You might need to go up the left bank of the gully at first to find the water-ice that will lead to the top in lots of pitches.

Bodach Buttress 120m III,4*

A. Nelson and A. Hogarth, 30 December 2017

(no photo topo)

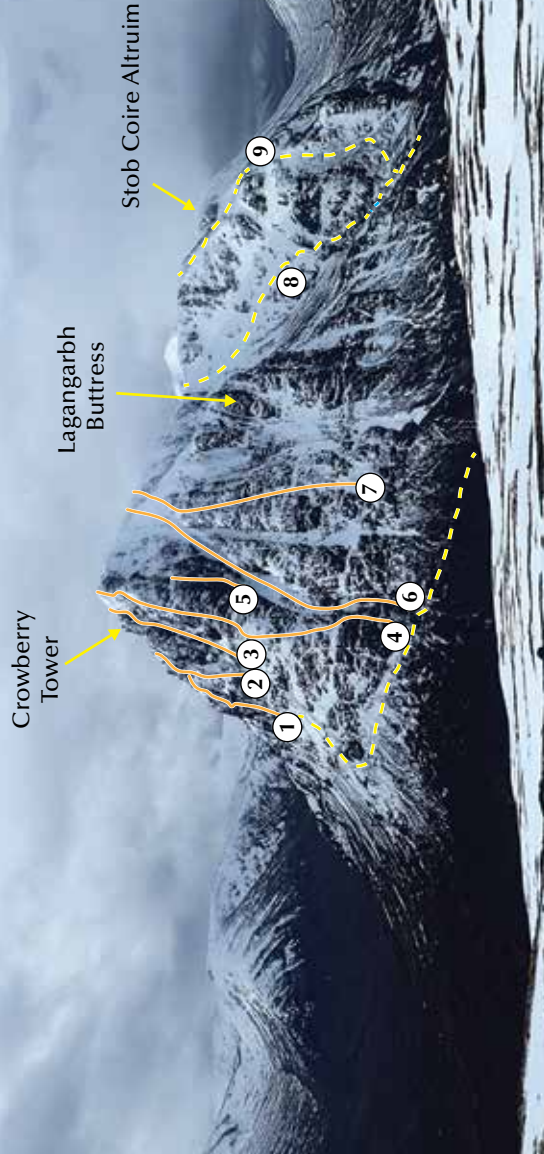
This is the north buttress dropping straight down from the summit of Am Bodach. Walk up Coire an Ruigh to reach the col at 816m, north-east of the summit. Traverse across the slope to find the buttress and climb it in four pitches over slabby rock and useful patches of turf.

BUACHAILLE ETIVE MÒR

Stob Dearg 1022m (NN 223 543)

Start	Altnafeadh on the A82 (NN 220 563)
Time	1hr 30min
Crag base altitude	600m
Route lengths	60–1000m
Route styles	Mixed climbing and some snow-ice
Avalanches	Crowberry Basin and Great Gully are both notorious for avalanches.

Buachaille Etive Mòr is a long ridge with four tops. Stob Dearg is the north top – a beautifully symmetrical cone standing dominantly over Rannoch Moor. This might be the most photographed mountain in Scotland, and rightly so. It's the highest of the four tops, the only one that gives much climbing, and it's generally referred to as 'The Buachaille'.



Buachaille Etive Mor

- | | | |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|
| ① D Gully Buttress IV,4** | ⑤ Raven's Gully V,6*** | ⑨ West Ridge descent |
| ② Curved Ridge III,3*** | ⑥ Great Gully II/III | |
| ③ Crowberry Gully IV,4*** | ⑦ Ephemeron Gully IV,4* | |
| ④ North Buttress IV,4*** | ⑧ Coire na Tulaich descent | |

The mountain is an excellent summer rock-climbing area, while in winter its natural ridge and gully lines are among the best in Scotland. The view from the area surrounding Curved Ridge is one of the most striking panoramas from any British hill.

The most popular routes are all on the central section of the mountain above the Waterslide Slab, but many fine climbs can be found on the area overlooking Glen Etive between D Gully Buttress and The Chasm.

For climbers new to this area it's advisable to drive along the main road towards the Kingshouse in order to view the main features of the mountain before choosing a route; or to drive down Glen Etive for a mile or so in order to decipher the various routes on the complicated face of Central Buttress.

Approach

The River Coupall is crossed by a bridge leading to Lagangarbh. Some 150 metres beyond the hut, a path leads south-eastwards, gradually rising, to cross the foot of Great Gully after about 1.5km. Immediately after Great Gully, a path goes straight up to climb the lower easy part of North Buttress with some scrambling. This approach to North Buttress can also be used to reach Shelf Route and Naismith's Route by bearing left towards Crowberry Ridge.

The usual way to Crowberry Basin follows the path from Great Gully around the foot of North Buttress, rising slowly to meet the Waterslide. From this slab, ascend straight up the steep and loose scree slopes to its left. From the top of the screes, a traverse up and right must be made above steep rocky ground in order to gain the foot of Crowberry Gully or Curved Ridge. Routes to the left (south) of D Gully Buttress can be reached by traversing left from near the top of the screes, or approached from the Glen Etive road.

Descent

There's only one reasonable descent route in winter. From the summit (NN 22363 54311), follow the fairly level ridge for 300 metres bearing 250° grid, or to NN 22104 54113. Then change course to 270° grid and descend to reach a shallow cairned col (NN 21637 54157) at the head of **Coire na Tulaich**. This section can be particularly difficult in white-out conditions. There are occasional cairns, but it may be necessary to stay roped up and take both front and back bearings to keep on course. The most common mistake is to continue too far south-west and descend into Glen Etive; this slope is not too difficult, but it's a long walk back on the road. Care should

be taken not to stray to the north too early, as there are some large crags at the head of Coire na Tulaich.

From the col, a steep initial slope leads down into the corrie. This slope is often avalanche prone and might have a cornice above it. A number of significant, fatal avalanches have taken place in this area.

There's a path down the left-hand side of the lower corrie above the gorge (west side), which leads easily down to Lagangarbh and the road. If the gorge is full of hard snow it makes an easy descent, but is also a big terrain trap for avalanches coming down from any direction. When the avalanche risk in Coire na Tulaich is too high, it's possible to avoid the corrie by ascending slightly from the col to point 902m (NN 214 542) and descending north by the ridge to the west of Coire na Tulaich. All the large outcrops on this **west ridge** descent are avoidable by moving left.

The routes are described from left to right.

STOB DEARG FROM GLEN ETIVE – EAST FACE

The area between Central Buttress and The Chasm is both complicated and huge in scale, requiring good judgement and climbing skills. There are no particularly easy exits until the summit of Curved Ridge is reached. This section of the mountain is recommended for experienced climbers who savour the challenge of long routes with an 'Alpine' feel. Due to its south-easterly aspect, this part of the mountain receives any sunshine on offer which can create good snow-ice, or give you soggy snow or strip the snow altogether. Snow conditions can change as height is gained, and a wary eye should be kept on the potential for avalanches.

The Chasm 450m V,6***

(no photo topo)

This route is approached from the Glen Etive road (NN 233 531), 2.5km from the main road junction. At this point two streams can be seen joining by the road on the map; The Chasm drains into the northmost of these. The route forms an obvious gulch on the hillside to the right (west), and is blessed with a short approach.

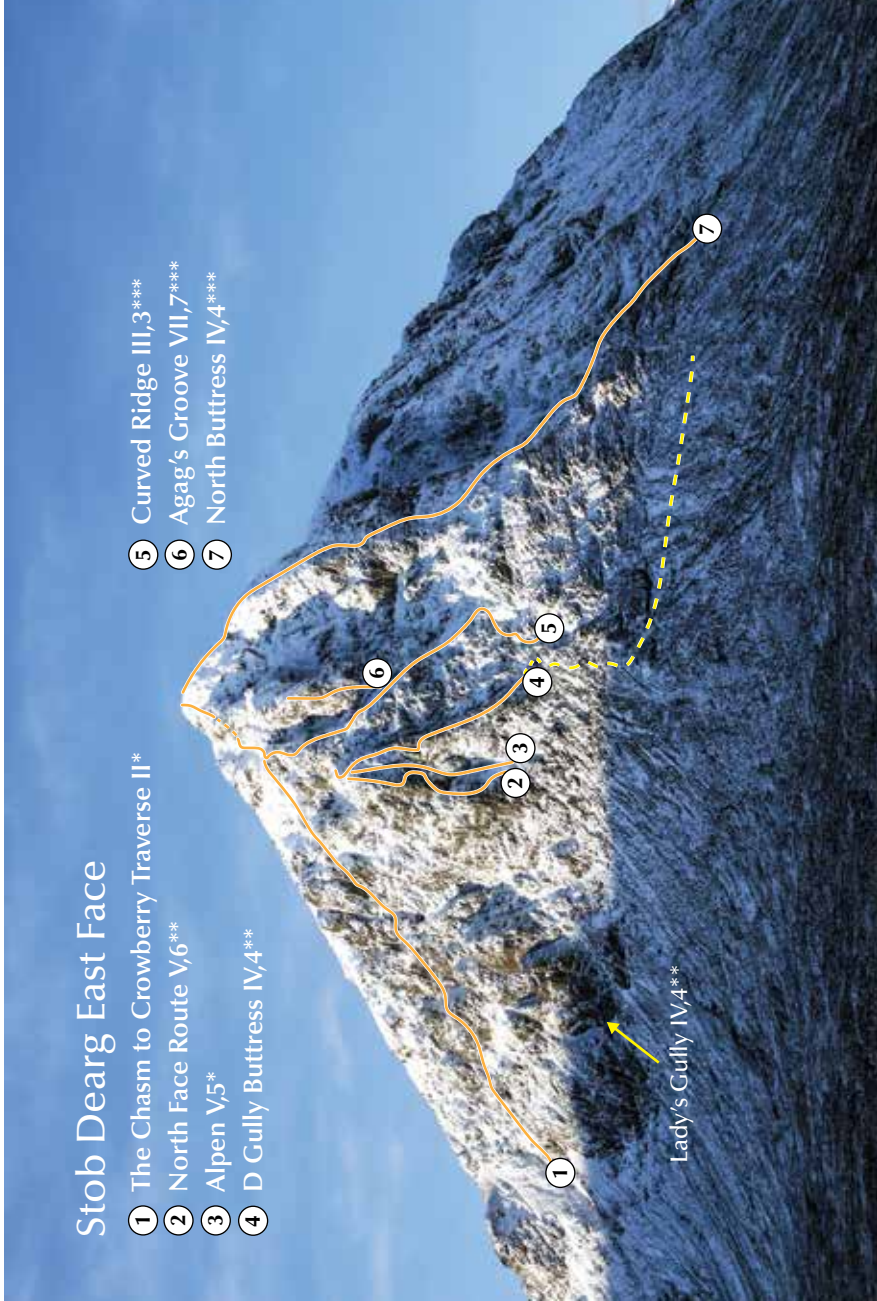
During winters of heavy snowfall to very low levels, this climb may be a bit easier. In leaner conditions several pitches will be faced to get up, over or around various chockstones, and the nature of the climb becomes hard and

Stob Dearg East Face

- ① The Chasm to Crowberry Traverse II*
- ② North Face Route V,6**
- ③ Alpen V,5*
- ④ D Gully Buttress IV,4**

- ⑤ Curved Ridge III,3***
- ⑥ Agag's Groove VII,7***
- ⑦ North Buttress IV,4***

Lady's Gully IV,4**





• snow, ice and mixed climbs • Ben Nevis, Aonach Mòr, Coire nan Lochan, Beinn Udlaidh and more • including Point Five Gully, Tower Ridge, SC Route and Aonach Eagach



Ben Nevis and Glen Coe remain at the forefront of Scottish winter climbing and hold a special place on the world stage of climbing. The classic climbs are highly regarded objectives. This selection of the best climbs across the area is enough to provide any climber with a lifetime of inspiration.

This is the first guide to categorise every climb and to describe in detail how they form, in order to help climbers choose the best route and judge climbing conditions. Being in the right place at the right time is a major part of winter climbing and, as well as detailing the routes, this book will guide you through the decision-making process to make more expeditions successful.

- from straightforward Grade I snow gullies and ridges to extreme test pieces above Grade VIII
- clear route description and illustrative photo topos
- comprehensive information on how the climbs form
- advice on safety and equipment

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