

Mountain high

SCOTLAND IS RENOWNED WORLDWIDE AS ONE OF THE TOUGHEST AND MOST REWARDING PLACES TO CLIMB IN WINTER.

MIKE PESCOD FROM ABACUS MOUNTAINEERING PICKS FIVE AREAS TO TRY

PHOTOGRAPHY: MIKE PESCOD; PETE MACPHERSON

1 Aonach Eagach, Glen Coe

The famous 'Notched Ridge' that forms the north side of Glen Coe is a justifiably popular expedition. It includes two Munros and nearly two miles of narrow ridge line, half a mile or so of which involves continuous grade II climbing with no escape. Unlike many ridge climbs, the easiest route follows the crest all the way along, demanding skill and confidence. The floor of the glen 900m below is always visible below your feet while the view along the ridge only reveals more improbable looking ridge crest.

GETTING THERE

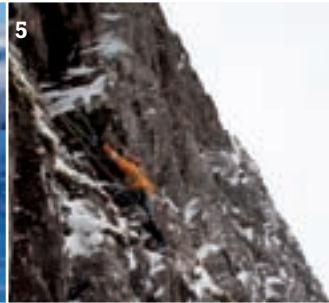
90 miles north of Glasgow on the A82 by car or bus. The Clachaig Inn in Glen Coe is a perfect base. www.clachaig.com

2 Ben Nevis, Lochaber

The home of Scottish ice climbing also has many fine mountaineering challenges. The Ben's five great ridges offer routes of increasing commitment and challenge. At grade II, Ledge Route is the best route up the north face at a quite reasonable standard; Castle Ridge is (relatively) short and punchy with a steep and airy crux; Tower Ridge is a classic with ever increasing difficulty, exposure and enjoyment; North East Buttress pushes the mountaineering into the realms of climbing with the perfectly named 'Man Trap' at its top; and Observatory Ridge is always a full-on day (and sometimes night) even for the most experienced mountaineer.

GETTING THERE

Fort William lies at the foot of Ben Nevis and is 100 miles north of Glasgow on the A82. Try the excellent Caledonian Sleeper Train service. www.scotrail.co.uk/sleeper



3 An Teallach, Northwest Highlands

'The Anvil', near Dundonnell, is widely considered to be Scotland's best ridge traverse. This is truly wild country, with more deer and eagles likely to be spotted on the full traverse than people. Self-reliance is the underlying principle of Scottish mountaineering and it is keenly felt here on the rounded sandstone ledges of the ridge's two Munros. Approach the ridge by the rough corrie holding Loch Toll an Lochain and the deep, narrow cleft of Chockstone Gully (grade II) for an immense sense of space and exposure.

GETTING THERE

Dundonnell is 57 miles northwest of Inverness. Follow the A835, then the A832.

4 Cuillin Ridge, Isle of Skye

In summer, traversing the full ridge of the Cuillin is a world-class achievement. In winter, it epitomises the challenge of Scottish winter mountaineering. Being so exposed to the weather from the west, the snow conditions on the ridge change quickly. Being able to judge the best time to make a traverse is essential. In good conditions, much of the ridge is easier and quicker than in summer; in poor conditions it is an intimidating place and travel along it can be nearly impossible. At least one overnight bivouac will be required, so more equipment is needed. A few lucky people have been in the right place at the right time to complete a winter traverse in good conditions. Nobody has managed it in poor conditions.

GETTING THERE

Take a bus or drive over the Skye Bridge at Kyle of Lochalsh on the A87, or take the train to Mallaig, the ferry to Armadale and a bus to Sligachan Hotel. www.sligachan.co.uk

5 Beinn Bhan, Applecross

Beinn Bhan in Applecross is currently home to some of the biggest and hardest winter climbs in Scotland. One route, 'The God Delusion', has seen only two ascents – unsurprising given that it is grade IX, 9, nine pitches long and requires 14 hours to climb. With nobody for miles around and any form of rescue hours away, the route has to be seen as one of the toughest winter mountaineering challenges in Scotland – and therefore the world.

GETTING THERE

On the A896 between Lochcarron and Torridon. You'll need a car.

Essentials

With impressive mountains and enlightened access laws, Scotland is a special place for adventurous pursuits, but be warned: Scottish winter climbing demands good mountaineering skills and self-reliance. Hiring a guide is recommended for all but the most experienced.

"The Mountaineering Council of Scotland recognises that climbing and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions and involvement." www.mcofs.org.uk

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