

Outdoor Club Winter Tour 2009-10

Report compiled by Philip Leadbeater

Dates: 2nd-10th January 2010

Location: Cairngorms National Park, Scotland



Aims and Objectives of the Tour

The primary purpose of this tour (dependent upon conditions) was to enable the more experienced members of the club to pass on their knowledge of Scottish Winter climbing to novices within the club. Experienced members aimed to increase their own skill level. In both instances this tour was intended to provide experience that will aid preparation for high altitude alpine mountaineering.

Scottish Winter climbing as a discipline involves assessment of weather and snow conditions, technical climbing and often difficult navigation.

Subsidiary objectives were to (dependent upon conditions) take part in skiing disciplines including alpine downhill and both Nordic and Alpine ski-touring.

The effect of unusual weather during winter 2009-10

Between mid-December 2009 and mid-January 2010 the UK, and in particular the East Highlands of Scotland experienced persistently low temperatures and heavy snowfall. The amount of snowfall that occurred within the Cairngorms National Park was reported to be the highest seen at that time of year for approximately 20 years. Throughout this period diurnal temperatures remained below freezing at all altitudes, preventing melt-freeze metamorphism within the snowpack – a process that is required to provide stable snow that is safe to travel and climb on. Without this process the snow retained a powder form, characteristic of Nordic and North American mountain environments

It was clear in the week leading up to this tour that the Northern Corries of the Cairngorms were being filled with large deposits of unconsolidated and unstable powder snow – as reported by the Scottish Avalanche Information Service and various local mountain guides. Deep unconsolidated snow is very difficult to travel through without snowshoes or, ideally, skis. In addition, unconsolidated snow on angled ground is liable to avalanche. Consequently, the avalanche risk in the Northern Corries remained High in the week leading up to, and the week of this tour. Such dangerous conditions made climbing in these areas an unacceptable risk – which greatly influenced the activities completed on this tour.

Tour successes/ Activities:

The following activities took place on this tour –

- Water Ice climbing
- Downhill skiing
- Nordic ski-touring
- Alpine ski-touring/ski-mountaineering

Clubs and Societies Board
10th May 2010

Statement of thanks and the wider implications of tours

The authors, on behalf of Imperial College Union Outdoor Club, would like to express their thanks to the IC Trust and Imperial College Union for their continued support of student activities. With your help we have been able to promote the development of hillwalking, climbing and mountaineering within the Imperial College community.

This tour marked the start of ICUOC's 65th year as a student society of Imperial College. Throughout the remainder of 2010 we hope to build upon the strengths of the club and will once again have club members on a first ascents mountaineering expedition in the Greater Ranges. These members were introduced to mountaineering through the clubs programme of Winter and Summer mountaineering tours.

Philip Leadbeater
January 2010

Ski Mountaineering









