



Helen Rennard enjoying superb early season conditions on the first pitch of Savage Slit. The route is perfectly rimed after the first storm of the winter

Joris Valmer

SAVAGE SLIT

Grade: 90m, V,6

Location: No.4 Buttress, Coire an Lochain, Cairn Gorm

Route Base, Aspect & Rock Type: 1100m, North-east facing, Granite

First Winter Ascent: George Adams, Jim White & Fraser Henderson, 21 April 1957



Cubby Images

Looking across the cliffs of Coire an Lochain towards No.4 Buttress

The first winter ascent of Savage Slit was a landmark in Scottish climbing history. The 1957 winter was a lean one, and by the end of March spring was well on its way in the high Cairngorms with many cliffs already snow and ice-free. However, a late cold snap towards the end of April left a covering of fresh snow on the tops, which prompted Cairngorms pioneers Adams, White and Henderson to visit Coire an Lochain and have a look at Savage Slit. This route had first been climbed as a summer Severe 12 years before, and their ascent in winter conditions was a tour de force. "The slit itself between the chockstones was blocked out partially with old ice, partially with packed powder," reads their account in the 1961 Cairngorms guidebook. "The upper chockstone provided the hardest moves. These were heavily iced and the walls of the slit sheathed in verglas."

Although the route was originally graded IV, it was almost certainly the most difficult Cairngorms mixed climb achieved by that date, and nowadays it fully deserves its V,6 rating. The first ascent highlights the 'conditions conundrum' for this route. Later in the season the lower section can fill with ice and become a little easier, however this will inevitably lead to harder climbing above with icy cracks making protection difficult. As a result, Savage Slit is best climbed as a pure Snowed-Up Rock route – there is no frozen turf and no ice is required – making it the perfect early season climb.

Savage Slit is justifiably popular and many climbers think of it as a rite of passage to harder Cairngorms mixed. It is a sustained route and an intimidating lead, and some prefer to climb inside the chimney rather than take the more elegant approach bridging up the outside. Either way, Savage Slit will provide a memorable experience, and should be high on the tick list of every Scottish winter climber. And as you wrestle your way up the corner, just remember, as one recent ascensionist noted; it's "wicked, squirmy, chimney, torquey, fun!"



Jeremy Windsor

Battling up the second pitch of Savage Slit in stormy weather. Climber Rob Marson

Approach

From the Coire Cas car park at the top of the Cairn Gorm ski road, follow the path that leads south-west. After 400m (NH987057) the path splits. Take the right-hand branch (the left-hand leads to Coire

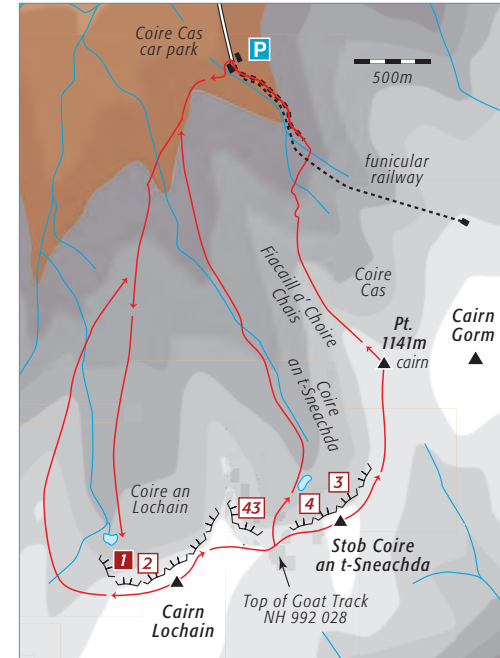
an t-Sneachda) and cross the burn of the Allt Coire an t-Sneachda. After 100m the path divides again. Either of the two branches ultimately leads to the two lochans at the foot of the corrie. The choice will depend on the depth of snow and whether an

Alternative routes

If Savage Slit is busy, **Deep Throat** (V,6) and **The Third Man** (V,6) are good nearby alternatives on No.4 Buttress, and if the weather is poor, **Sidewinder** (III,4) is a good fall back option. All these routes are possible at the beginning of the season. If you are there later in the year, and Savage Slit is unhelpfully icy, then **Gaffer's Groove** (V,5) may be a more suitable option. Alternatively, **Oesophagus** (III) is likely to provide an easier icy alternative.

Guidebooks

The Cairngorms (SMC), *Scottish Winter Climbs* (SMC), *Winter Climbs in The Cairngorms* (Cicerone).



existing trail is in place. The left branch leads directly to the first of the two lochans whilst the right branch continues to a burn crossing at NH980044 from where it is possible to strike up into the corrie. From the inner lochan, go right (to avoid the Great Slab – avalanche risk) and then back left to reach the foot of No.4 Buttress (1hr 30mins).

Descent

It is not straightforward to return to the base of the route. The quickest descent is to the west. Follow the corrie rim to the south-west and descend the north-easterly slope back into the corrie. (Continuing down the ridge will avoid any potential avalanche risk). Alternatively, follow the corrie rim to the east and climb down the Goat Track (as for The Message) or continue to Pt.1141m (NH999040) and descend easily to the ski area from there.

Conditions

The high altitude of No.4 Buttress and its exposed location on the northerly edge of the Cairngorms plateau means that the cliff rimes quickly with North-westerly winds. As a result, Savage Slit comes into condition very rapidly, and is often the first route to be climbed at the beginning of the season (which can be as early as October). Savage Slit is the archetypal Snowed-Up Rock route, and just needs a coating of snow and/or rime to bring it into condition. No ice, consolidated snow or frozen turf is required.

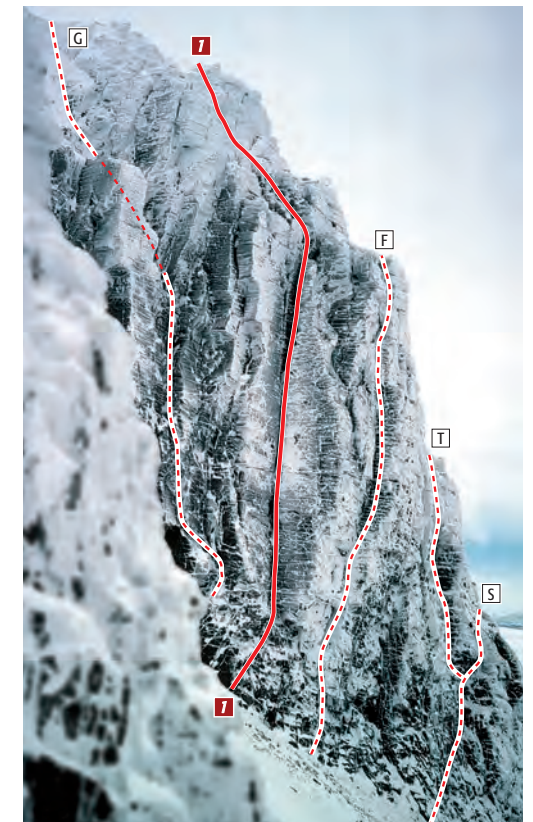
Top Tips

It's best not to lead Savage Slit wearing a rucksack, but descending back to the foot of the route is awkward, so consider combining rucksacks and giving it to the second to carry. Alternatively, make a full 50m abseil from the top of the third pitch (anchor quite low down) above the right wall of the corner, back to your gear. Take care to avoid abseiling down the chimney as it can be difficult to retrieve the ropes.

Route Description

An outstanding line up the prominent right-angled chimney-corner in the centre of No.4 Buttress.

- 1. 15m** A short initial pitch (harder than it looks) leads to a belay below the corner.
- 2. 25m** Climb the chimney-corner to belay on the large chockstone at half-height.
- 3. 20m** Continue following the chimney to a good ledge at its top.
- 4. 30m** Ascend a left-trending gully and finish up a short wall at the top.



Tom Prentice

1. Savage Slit (V,6)
G. Gaffer's Groove (V,5)
F. Fallout Corner (VI,7)
T. The Third Man (V,6)
S. Sidewinder (III,4)