

WINTER CLIMBING IN THE LAKE DISTRICT 1870–1941

A list of first recorded ascents and early attempts

Compiled by Mike Cocker & Colin Wells

Introduction

In an article published in the F&RCC Journal in 1997 (F&RCC, Vol 26, 76, pp 197 – 213) one of the authors attempted to indicate the extraordinarily high standard of winter climbing which pre- Great War Lakeland climbers achieved (including routes up to Grade V). The intention was to draw attention to the fact that Lakes -based climbers had effectively reached '1950s' standards of 'Scottish' style mixed winter climbing a good half-century before these became commonplace north of the border. What the article was *not*, was an exhaustive list of first winter ascents of the period, a task which required a considerable amount of further historical sleuthing. Since the original work was published, continued archival ferreting has unearthed a plethora of extra evidence of early winter ascents embedded in journals, logbooks, and reminiscences. The new data both confirms the original thesis that the Lake District (rather than Scotland) was the arena in which technically difficult winter climbing was first practised regularly in the UK, and also corrects some inaccuracies concerning the dating of some ascents and *dramatis personae* present in the 1997 article.

The research indicates that a small and tight knit group undertook many of the earliest winter climbs (up to the early 1890's) and, fortunately, recorded their activities quite carefully. So we probably have a reasonably accurate record of the very first ascents for this period. After the late nineteenth century, however, when the numbers of participants start to expand, the data becomes 'fuzzier' and we are sometimes less confident that the 'first recorded' ascents really are 'the first ascents'. Some activists (such as the excessively modest Hopkinsons, for example) took a dim view of recording anything at all, and may have been up to all sorts of things a year or two ahead of their peers. Nevertheless the data still undoubtedly possess a sufficiently robust general chronology to prove that the standard of winter climbing was very high at a very early period in climbing history.

An opportunity has also been taken in the current review to extend the record up to the Second World War. This has thrown up further surprises, such as the discovery that the first Grade VI mixed climb was evidently accomplished as early as 1919 - decades earlier than previously considered likely. And unlike the Victorian and Edwardian periods, the documentary record for the inter-war era has been augmented by interviews with some of the surviving pioneers from that time. Indeed the authors would particularly like to thank the two outstanding winter pioneers of this period, Jammy Cross and her late husband Sid, for their hospitality and forbearance as they were quizzed about their activities. We would therefore like to dedicate this article in honour of the memory of Sid, one of Lakeland climbing's great pioneers and characters.

Sid
Cross



Lakeland Winter climbs: A list of first recorded ascents 1870-1941

1870 JAN 10th **SOUTH GULLY - BOWFELL** (Grade I)

G.H. Wollaston, A.R. Stogdon, J.Stogdon.

The very first recorded winter ascent in the Lake District.

The group set off from Elterwater on a clear morning with a sharp frost to climb Bowfell by “ the great couloir” and then continue on to Wasdale Head. John Stogdon takes up the story:

“The slope got steeper and steeper, steps were always necessary, and at last having come up 350 feet or more, we found ourselves within a few feet of the top on a slope of 63°, with an overhanging cornice of ice above us, and snow nearly up to our waists for a few feet below the top, which I could just reach with my axe. The next few minutes must have been pleasant to my friends below me, as the cornice was gradually tumbling upon their ears in a shower of icy fragments. Then I pulled myself up by my hands on to the level snow field above, and a short run up easy slopes soon bought us to the top.”

Stogdon, J. 1870, “ The English Lakes in Winter”,

Alpine Journal, 5, 34-38.

1873 MAR **SHARP EDGE - BLENCATHRA** (Grade I)

George Seatree and party

First recorded winter ascent.

“ In March 1873 a party of us ascended when the first part of the steep slope from the edge to the summit was snow and ice covered. In those days there were no ice axes or ropes used, and in fact we came very close to a serious accident by reason of the conditions.”

Seatree, G. 1910, “Reminiscences of Early Lakeland Mountaineering”,

F&RCC, Vol 2, 1, 8.

1880 APR 4th **CUST’S GULLY - GREAT END** (Grade I)

Arthur Cust and over twenty members of the Alpine Club. Who said crowds on Great End were anything new?

First recorded winter ascent (but almost certainly ascended prior to this by Cust)

“ On Sunday the party.....leaving the carriages at the farmhouse above Seatoller, climbed Scafell Pike by a very interesting chimney or couloir, which, being filled with snow and ice, gave unexpected satisfaction. There is a very remarkable natural arch in the couloir, which Mr Cust claims to have been the first to discover, and he was therefore entrusted with the guidance of the party.”

Freshfield, D.W. 1882, “Alpine Meeting at the Lakes”,

Alpine Journal, 10,

45.

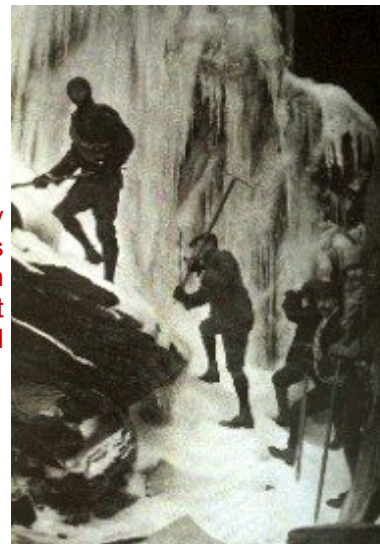
(A.L.Mumm and J.E. King glissade down Cust’s Gully in 1882.)

1881 EASTER **MICKLEDORE CHIMNEY - SCAFELL** (Grade III)

A.L. Mumm

First recorded descent.

Early
pioneers
on
Great
End



Mumm's article contains an account of the descent of the chimney, he also comments:

“ What we.....were keen about was first finding steep snow slopes, preferably hard enough for us to cut steps in and pretend we were in Switzerland and secondly, getting as long a glissade as possible on the way home. The gullies on Great End provided the largest amount of amusement of the former kind, and I once remember having a sitting glissade down Cust's Gully.”

*Mumm, A. L. 1924, “ Some Rambling Recollections of Wasdale Head”,
F&RCC, Vol 7, 3, p 325 - 329.*

1882 EASTER **DEEP GILL – SCAFELL** (Grade I/II)

A.L.Mumm, J. E. King

First recorded descent.

“ In a time of extremely deep snow two men, both strangers, walked down the snow the whole way without knowing they had done anything remarkable.”

*Slingsby, W. C. 1903, “Reminiscences of a Few Days Climbing in the Fell Country”,
F&RCC, Vol 1, 3, 253 – 260.*

“ I did, in fact, know exactly what I was doing, and had learned enough about Wasdale to be well aware that to find Deep Ghyll choked up with snow must be a very rare occurrence.”

*Mumm, A.L. 1924, “Some Rambling Recollections of Wasdale Head”,
F&RCC, Vol 7, 3, p 325-329*

1885 MAR 1st **PILLAR** (Unknown, but possibly including Great Doup /West
Cove Gullies Grade I)

Hastings W.C. Slingsby, J.A. Slingsby, W. Ecroyd, G. Hastings & C.

“ Found the snow in most splendid order, were five hours climbing gullies and couloirs around the Pillar Rock.”

*Jackson, H.M. 1980, “ Lakeland's Pioneer Rock Climbers” - Based on
the Visitors' books of the Tysons of Wasdale Head,*

1876 – 1886. (Row Farm)

1886 MAR 27th **PILLAR (probably the same gullies as above)**

G.Hastings, J. Mason, W.C. Slingsby

“ Had a capital day on the Pillar Fell amongst the snow couloirs, though in thick mist.”

Wasdale Hotel Visitors' Book 1885 – 1891, p. 44

1886 MAR 28th **DEEP GILL - SCAFELL (Grade I/II)**

G. Hastings, J. Mason, W.C. Slingsby

First winter ascent and first ascent.

Detailed account in:

Slingsby, W.C. 1903, “Reminiscences of a Few Days Climbing in the Fell Country”, F&RCC, Vol 1, 3, 253 – 260.

(On March 2nd 1885 W.C. Slingsby and G. Hastings had attempted *Deep Gill* but, “ fail on the first block on account of the ice glazed rock”.

Slingsby, W.C. 1903, “Reminiscences of a Few Days Climbing in the Fell Country”,

F&RCC, Vol 1, 3, 253 – 260.)

(Second ascent in winter conditions, J.W. Robinson and T.G. Creak 7th January 1887. Wasdale Hotel Visitors' Book 1885 – 1891 p. 107)

1886 MAR 29th **BRANCH GULLY – GREAT END (Grade I)**

G. Hastings, J.Mason, W.C.Slingsby

First recorded winter ascent, may have been climbed earlier.

“ The same party made a variation on Mr Cust’s Gully on Great End. They made first for the great or central gullies up which one of this party and a friend had climbed on Easter Monday 1884, but as during the previous night about four inches of snow had fallen on the old hard snow, it was deemed to be unwise to attempt such a steep and awkward gill so they turned to the smaller gully. A grand glissade could have been made from the mouth of the gill down almost to the footpath below. The party cut their way with axes steadily forward and instead of going up through the

natural arch of rock, which looked most weird through the mist, they turned up the right hand branch, and after one short awkward climb over a fallen block of rock, and a fairly steep snow slope they found themselves on the top in a furious snow storm. A few good glissades and a scramble down the side of Grain's Gill ended a most enjoyable mornings adventure." W.C.S.

Wasdale Hotel Visitors' Book 1885 – 1891 p. 46.

1887 JAN 4th **WATERFALL GULLY - PILLAR - Attempt** (Grade IV)

J.W. Robinson, T.Creak.

A near successful attempt on a grade IV climb.

“ The deeply drifted snow gave us easy passage over the first fall, and in a few minutes the upper fall was before us, a solid column of hard ice. This was so vertical, and as no opportunity presented itself of gaining support from the wall of the ghyll, progress was no easy matter. Steadily cutting step over step with a deep notch for hand holds, we were able to get within six feet of the top – when down came darkness, and we quickly realised that we must make tracks at once or spend the night in that uncanny place.”

Robinson, J.W. 1907, “A Novice in Snow”,

F&RCC, Vol 1, p. 16.

1887 JAN 4th **GREAT DOUP GULLY – PILLAR** (Grade I)

J.W. Robinson, T.G.Creak

First recorded winter ascent, but probably climbed earlier (see Slingsby on Pillar, March 1885 above).

“ Mountains covered with ice and snow. Ascent of Pillar via Great Doupe, very tough near the top owing to frozen snow and the cornice.”

Wasdale Hotel Visitors' Book 1885 – 1891 p 107.

“ We now decided to try our luck up the Great Doupe, for the moon was beginning to show and the light increasing. Formidable indeed, as we looked up, was the steep snow slope at the head of the hollow, surmounted by an immense cornice.

“ Shall we want the rope?” I asked.

“ Oh no, it's in the sack and it won't help us!”

I did not feel at all sure about this, as, unable for the moment to get any further, I crouched under the great protruding lip of the cornice, and looked into the black and uncertain depth below.

“ Can we get out,” I said.

“ We must, so here goes, hold my feet on this big step whilst I try to cut down the overhanging edge.”

Ten minutes more, a struggle, a gasp, and breathless we emerged into the moonlight of the Pillar – 6.30 p.m. We scurried away to Wasdale, and never were climbers more thankful for their suppers.”

Robinson, J.W. 1907, “ A Novice in Snow”,

F&RCC, Vol 1, p 16.

1887 FEB 5th **CENTRAL GULLY – GREAT**
END (Grade II/III)

G.Hastings and party (including some or all of the following C.Hastings, J. Mason, J.A. Slingsby, C.H. Slingsby, A.E. Preston, H.A. Beeching.)

First recorded winter ascent, but may have been climbed earlier. An entry in the Visitors' Book in 1886 March 29th, for example, mentions that Central Gully had been climbed at Easter 1884 by Slingsby or Hastings. However, without a record of the conditions we have no way of knowing if this was a winter ascent.

“ Climbed up Great End by the Central Chimney which starts at the head of the long scree close to Grains Gill. The snow came well down onto the scree, and was in good order; we took the left-hand branch and had to take to the rocks to overcome the “block”. We then crossed over the Pikes to Mickledore, the rocks of which were very wet. The early part of day was very wet, snowed hard while we were in the “Central Chimney” and did not cease until we got on to Scafell, when it cleared up, and we had a glorious view of the mists rolling up out of the valleys, and disappearing leaving all the hills quite distinct.”

Wasdale Hotel Visitors' Book 1885 – 1891 p 108.

(Second recorded winter ascent J.W. Robinson, E. Carr, G.Hastings, E.Peile and W.A. Wilson. 1890



Central Gully on Great End, ca 1890
(FRCC Abrahams Brothers collection).

December 26th or 27th.)

“ The central gully in Great End took about 2 hours with the help of the steps cut by Mr Robinson’s party a day or two before in the magnificent upper ice-fall. Without their assistance it would perhaps have been barely possible within the limits of a winter day.”

R.C. Gibson, 28th December 1890.

Wasdale Hotel Climbing Book 1890 – 1919, p 38.

1887 MAR 7th **SKEW GILL – GREAT END** (Grade I/II)

G.Hastings and party (including some or all of the following E.L.W. Haskett-Smith, C. Hopkinson, W.C. Slingsby)

First recorded winter ascent, but may have been climbed earlier.

“ Ascended by Skew Gill, a very interesting and neat cut to the north face of Great End. We climbed, duly roped together the western gully on the north face by the snow, and turned up the left of the two forks (Cust’s Gully) and after many hundred steps had been cut in the hard snow by our axes, we went through the well known arch of rock and, after one hour forty minutes step cutting we stood in the sunshine on the top of Great End. After a short walk along the top we looked down the fine Central Gully, and Hasting’s pointed out to us the steps he had cut on the ascent of this gully on February 5th. After a capital glissade, we made our way over the moors to Stickle Tarn to attempt the ascent of Pavey Ark by the Central Gully.”

Wasdale Hotel Visitors' Book 1885 – 1891 p 111.

“ To go by Grainy Gill and this one [Skew Gill], and so up Cust’s Gully, has for many years been the regulation expedition for the first day of a winter sojourn at Wastdale Head.”

Haskett Smith W.P. 1894, “Climbing in the British Isles ”, p 144.

1887 Dec 30th **SCAFELL PINNACLE - SCAFELL** (attempt)
Attempt by C. Hopkinson, H. Woolley, H.W. Holder, E.W. Bury.

"Three of the party, led by Hopkinson, made an attempt on the Deep Ghyll Pinnacle from the entrance to Lords Rake. They succeeded in climbing 150 to 200 feet, but were stopped by a steep slab of rock covered in ice. From this point, however, a good traverse was made to the first gully, or chimney, on the left. They forced their way up this gully to the top of the chimney. At the top of which was a trough of ice about 30 feet long, surmounted by steep rocks glazed with ice, which brought the

party to a stop. They descended the chimney again and returned to Wasdale, unanimous of the opinion that the day's excursions had afforded one of the finest climbs the party had ever accomplished"

Wasdale Head Hotel Visitors Book 1885-1891, p168

Herman Woolley probably made the entry in the visitor's book. O.G. Jones refers to this ascent in his book "Rock Climbing in the English Lake District", and records that the Hopkinson party climbed up the Pinnacle face until they were forced leftwards into what is now known as Hopkinson's Gully, which they subsequently descended. Although the exact line the party took has never been determined, this ascent has become part of British climbing mythology, variously described as "one of the greatest tours de force that will always be spoken of with bated breath" and "an expedition second to none in the history of English rock climbing". Al Phizacklea, author of the current Scafell guidebook, after reading the original account, believes that the Hopkinson party never went onto the Pinnacle face. He suggests that they climbed the lower tier of rock, starting near the memorial cross, up to the Pinnacle Terrace, and then traversed left into Steep Ghyll, which was ascended as far as the narrow chimney, just above where Slingsby's Chimney Route climbs out on the right. This latter-day explanation fits well with the original route description and is probably the more accurate interpretation of events. Although its originator admits to a degree of disquiet at the debunking of such established climbing tradition.

1890 JAN 3rd **SOUTH EAST GULLY - GREAT END** (Grade III)

R.C. Gilson and party.

First recorded winter ascent.

"At the point where the gully forks, less than half way up, we chose the steeper left-hand branch, but finding it very full of hard ice took to the arete between the two branches and crossing this with some trouble followed up the right hand side to the point where the branches reunite, hence over easy rocks to the top. Time 3 hours 20 min: every ledge being choked with ice or glazed snow."

Wasdale Hotel Climbing Book 1890 – 1919, p 12. (The entry in the climbing book kept at the Wastwater Hotel (today the Wasdale Head Inn) is signed "A.G.", which is confusing as it was certainly written by Cary Gilson, the man who donated the climbing book to the hotel.)

1890 DEC 29th **NAPES GULLY (EAGLES NEST GULLY)** – GREAT GABLE
(Grade II)

R.C.Gibson

First winter ascent.

" Ascended the gully to the left (as you face the mountain) of the gully coming down to the left of the Needle. This gully does not seem to have been described before and I have no idea how it goes in summer. On this occasion it presented no

particular difficulty except, just above a large boulder about one third of the way up, where a smooth slab was thinly glazed. Near the top we passed to the left onto the arete, and then rushed down Hell Gate screes to escape the blizzard on the ridge.”

Wasdale Hotel Climbing Book 1890 – 1919, p 38.

1890 DEC 30th **SHAMROCK GULLY - PILLAR** (Grade IV)

J.W. Robinson, C. Hopkinson, G. Hastings.

First winter ascent and first ascent.

“ This has only once been ascended previous to the ascent recorded below and on the first occasion 5 feet of snow gave a good start in surmounting the vertical wall on the right side of the stone...

Yesterday Geoffrey Hastings followed by Charles Hopkinson and John W. Robinson succeeded in passing successfully up the gully and taking the right hand side of the boulder completed the first ascent without the aid of a snowdrift. They afterwards went onto the Pillar Rock which was unusually tedious owing to the iced state of the rocks.”

J.W. Robinson.

“ Mr Robinson’s note above shows what may be done in the depth of even the severest winter. It is hard to imagine rocks in worse condition for climbing than during the past ten days, though the enormous accumulations of ice have probably rendered some waterfalls possible which are very rarely so.”

R.C. Gibson. Wasdale Hotel Climbing Book 1890 – 1919, p 37.

(Previously climbed in semi-winter conditions 5th March 1887 by E.L.W. Haskett Smith and G. Hastings with the aid of snowdrift. Detailed account in: *Wasdale Hotel Visitors’ Book 1885 – 1891 p 110.*)

1890 DEC 30th **SLAB AND NOTCH - PILLAR ROCK** (Grade III?)

J.W. Robinson, C. Hopkinson, G.Hastings

First recorded winter ascent.

“ Ice and snow... up over Notch and down Ledge and Chimney Route. The Slab one mass of ice, Hopkinson led during the ascent and I was last man in coming down, time 1-hr 40 mins in ascent 20 mins coming down. Took one hour to cross the Slab.”

“J. W. Robinson’s Climbing Diary”, F&RCC Archive, Cumbria Records Office.

(Semi-winter ascent of Slab and Notch February 6th 1887, by G.Hastings and party.

“ Bright sunny day with hard frost. Ascended Pillar Fell by gully direct from Mosedale. Climbed Pillar Rock by easy way and then descended down the gully to the west side and ascended the rock again, descending again by the easy way. The slab on the rock was coated with ice which had to be cut away.”

Wasdale Hotel Visitors' Book 1885 – 1891 p 108.)

1890/91 NEW YEAR

GRAINY GHYLL - RIGHT-HAND BRANCH

A.M. Marshall and party.

First winter ascent.

“ What is marked Grainy Gill in the Ordnance Map (situated between Skew Gill and Greta Gill, the left hand branch of Piers Gill) is, in reality two water courses, distinct though separated in parts by a very narrow ridge. The right hand branch (facing the mountain) which it has been proposed to call Corney Gill, contains two very fine falls, ascended so far as is known for the first time by Prof. Marshall's party this winter.”

Wasdale Hotel Climbing Book 1890-1919

The exact date of Professor Marshall's ascent is unknown but it was, almost certainly, the first ascent of the gill in winter conditions and quite possibly the first recorded ascent of a pure water ice climb anywhere in the world. To date this route has not been included in any editions of *Winter Climbs in the Lake District* and could still be awaiting a second ascent.

1891 APR 1st

CENTRAL GULLY - GREAT GABLE (Grade III)

Arthur Marshall, H.B. Dixon, A.G. (H.A. Gwynne?)

First recorded winter ascent.

“ Up Central Gully on N. side of Gable. Snow in good order.”

Wasdale Hotel Climbing Book 1890 – 1919, p 40.

1891 APR 3rd

PROFESSOR'S CHIMNEY – SCAFELL (Grade II)

A.M. Marshall, H.B. Dixon, W.I. Beaumont, A.G.

First recorded winter ascent, but may have been climbed earlier.

“ After heavy snow storm of day before Deep Ghyll was nearly full of soft snow. Had to cut a channel 4 – 5 foot deep through the powdery snow. First obstacle quite easy. Second obstacle just impossible to do straight up. Had to return and go up chimney to left. This was very bad owing to the rocks being iced under loose snow. Up Professors Chimney which was comparatively easy. Took 7 hours from Hotel to top of Scawfell.”

Wasdale Hotel Climbing Book 1890 – 1919, p 40.

1891 APR 19th **MICKLEDORE CHIMNEY** – SCAFELL (Grade III)

O.G. Jones, W.E. Sumpner, C. Munro

First recorded winter ascent. Possibly climbed earlier.

“ This proved to be very difficult the snow being 6 or 7 feet deep and very rotten. At the obstacle we were brought to a stop for the rocks on the left were ice covered and no handholds seemed available. O.G.J. managed to climb up after a struggle and returned by Broadstand, the others descended the chimney again.”

Wasdale Hotel Climbing Book 1890 – 1919, p 41.

(There is also a detailed account of this ascent in:

Jones, O.G. 1900, “Rock Climbing in the English Lake District”, p 39 - 42.)

(J.W. Robinson and T.G.Creak had also attempted to climb Mickledore Chimney on January 7th 1887.

“ We made an attack on the chimney from the bottom and, strange to say, found it full of snow. Beaten back we sat down and glissaded again. Often have I looked since that day at the chimney in Mickledore, and wondered what strange fate it was which enabled us to begin a glissade seventy feet up that usually almost vertical place.”

Robinson, J.W. 1907, “ A Novice in Snow”,

F&RCC, Vol 1, p 17.)

1891 APR 21st **NEW PROFESSORS CHIMNEY** – SCAFELL (Grade
II/III)

O.G. Jones, W.E. Sumpner, C. Munro.

First recorded winter ascent.

“ Instead of continuing straight up Deep Ghyll, they turned up the gully to the left, from which

springs Professors Chimney. (This gully apparently is a yet nameless). There appeared to be too much snow on the rocks in the Professors Chimney so they continued their ascent up the nameless gully and reached the top after cutting through a fine ice cornice.”

Wasdale Hotel Climbing Book 1890 – 1919, p 42.

1891 Easter **NEEDLE RIDGE** (Grade II)

G.A. Solly, W.c. Slingsby, M. Schintz

First winter descent

“ It was not till Easter, 1891, that I had a chance of attempting any of the serious courses. I was staying at Seatoller with W.C. Slingsby and M. Schintz, and on our way downfrom Great Gable, we descended the Needle Ridge. It had then, I think, been only once ascended, and this was the first descent under winter condidtions...Slingsby led and I came last.”

Solly G.A. 1909, “ Some Early Recollections”, FRCC, Vol 1, 3, pp 235-242.

1891 DEC 25th
(Grade V/4)

STEEP GILL – SCAFELL

J.N. Collie, W.L.W. Brodie, E.W.
Marshall

First winter ascent.

There are just three brief references to this remarkable and futuristic climb, the first grade V recorded anywhere in the UK, and probably the world. It has previously been erroneously recorded as having taken place on Christmas Day 1890. Careful scrutiny of the records shows it was in fact, Christmas 1891, and that Collie's partners were Brodie and Marshall and not Hastings and Robinson as previously thought. Much of the confusion is likely to be due to a deliberate policy of Collie not to draw attention to the climb because of its 'unjustifiable' severity.

“My recollection of the latter [Steep Gill] in snow and ice, is that it is one of the most dangerous climbs I ever made.”

Collie, J.N. 1926, “Reminiscences”, F&RCC, Vol 17, 2, 214.

“Another party of three strangers – Dr Norman Collie, Messrs. Wilfred L.W. Brodie, and E.W. Marshall had arrived, and on Christmas Day made a desperate climb of Steep Ghyll under frozen conditions, while Robinson’s party climbed on Great End.”

Jackson, F.W. 1925, “Some Early Climbing At Wasdale And An Episode”, Rucksack Club Journal, Vol 5, 3, 302-309.

“ Norman Collie, E.W. Marshall, W.L.W. Brodie, J. W. Robinson, G. Hastings, W. Wickham King.

All or some of the party made the following ascents – The Napes Pinnacle on Gable and the arete – face of Great End above Sprinkling Tarn between Central and Southern Gully (small cairn marking exit at top), ascent of Scafell Pinnacle by way of Steep Ghyll (N.C., E.W.M. & W.L.W.B.) a much better way to the top is by the rock arete between Steep and Deep Ghyll – an interesting climb was had on Black Crag on the Ennerdale side of the Steeple – Ennerdale



Climbers in Needle Gully 1890s, the leader could be O.G. Jones. Note the lady in the long dress (FRCC Abraham's collection). Note also the large amount of snow on this south-facing crag.

Pillar and descent by the west side – Buckbarrow was ascended from the Fox’s Earth to the Hawks Nest (crag fast sheep was released). A first ascent was made of a fine pinnacle on the east side of the great gully and a stone cairn was erected – Broad Stand and Deep Ghyll Pillar both very much iced amidst a snow blizzard. ”

Wasdale Hotel Climbing Book 1890 – 1919, p 59.

(Second winter ascent 1938/39 S. Cross, A. Nelson, A.T. Hargreaves, R. Hargreaves. Believed at the time, and until recently, to have been the first winter ascent.)

1891 DEC 25th **SOUTH EAST BUTTRESS – GREAT END** (Grade II/III)

J.W. Robinson, G. Hastings

First recorded winter ascent.

Jackson’s article (1925) quoted above says “ on Christmas Day……. Robinson’s party climbed on Great End.”

“ Up S. Gully then out onto right hand face and straight up, built cairn at top with Hastings.”

“J.W. Robinson’s Climbing Diary”, F&RCC Archive, Cumbria Records Office.

1891 DEC 26th **NORTH CLIMB - PILLAR** - Attempt

N. Collie, E.W. Marshall, W.L.W. Brodie, J.W. Robinson, G. Hastings

An epic ascent in icy conditions, they get as far as The Nose and Robinson tries the first ascent of the hand traverse and takes a 50ft fall, his hands having become numb with the cold. They then down climb the route in heavy rain.

Jackson, F.W. 1925, “Some Early Climbing At Wasdale And An Episode”.

Rucksack Club Journal, Vol 5, 3, 302 – 309.

1892 MAR / APR **WETHERLAM - unknown route**

H.A.Gwynne

“ On the west face there is a bold cliff that stands between two steep gullies. The cliff itself can be climbed and in winter either of the gullies would afford a good hour's hard step – cutting. Just now, after the late snowstorm, the mountaineer would have the excitement of cutting through a snow cornice when he arrived at the top. The precipice itself is fairly easy. I happened to find it in very bad condition. All the rocks were sheeted with ice and extremely dangerous. In one part there was a narrow, steep gully ending in a fall. It was full of snow and looked solid. I had scarcely put my foot on it when the snow slipped away with a hiss and left me grabbing at a knob of iced rock that luckily was small enough for me to grasp. This climb in ordinary weather is by no means difficult.”

Gwynne, H.A. 1892, “Winter climbing in Lakeland”, Pall Mall Gazette.

(There is a copy of this article in the Wasdale Climbing Book 1890 – 1919.)

1892 DEC 27th **GREAT GULLY - WASTWATER SCREES** (Grade III)

J.N. Collie. J.W. Robinson, G. Hastings

First winter ascent and first ascent.

“ It was on a perfect winters morning, many years ago now, that we started for the great gully in the screes. Not a breath of air stirred; hoar frost covered the ground: the trees were a mass of silver, glittering in the morning sun.....

Perpendicular walls rose on both sides for several hundred feet; above us stretched cascade after cascade of solid ice, always at a very steep angle and sometimes perpendicular. Up these we cut our way with our axes, sometimes being helped by making steps close to the walls and using any small inequalities on the rock face to steady us in our steps.”

Collie, J.N. 1902, “ Climbing On the Himalaya and other Mountain Ranges”, p 254 – 256.

“ Great help was afforded by the waterfall being almost completely ice and the turf also being frozen hard” .

Wasdale Hotel Climbing Book 1890 – 1919, p 77.

(It is interesting to note that this ascent was made the day after the first ascent of Moss Gill, during which no mention is made of ice or winter conditions. This must have been a sustained period of high pressure with hard frosts overnight and little or no snow)

1893 JAN 6th **OBLIQUE CHIMNEY - GREAT GABLE** (Grade IV/ 5)

O.G. Jones, H. Kempson, Leo Amery

First winter ascent and second ascent overall.

In pure technical terms, one of the two most difficult winter climb undertaken prior to the Great War.

"The smooth walls of the gully were black and shiny with ice," recorded Jones, but this failed to deter him and he set about the challenge with characteristic gusto - an hour later he emerged triumphant. His partner Leo Amery, was more circumspect about the joys of winter climbing, 'I remember being able to look down between my legs into what seemed a bottomless abyss of writhing snow. It had been snowing all day and by the time we had overcome the chimney and were nearing the top of the mountain it was not only blowing a blizzard, but it was dark into the bargain."

Jones, O.G. 1900, "Rock Climbing in the English Lake District", p 119 –130

Amery, L.S. 1941, "Juvenilia", F&RCC, Vol 13, 14-16

1893 JAN 9th **MOSS GILL – SCAFELL** (Grade IV/4)

O.G. Jones (solo)

First winter ascent and fourth ascent overall.

An amazing tour de force by Jones, arguably his finest hour. Climbed solo despite the encumbrance of a clinometer and broken ribs sustained by a fall from the Collie Step (luckily saved from worse thanks to the backrope he had fixed through a chockstone).

Detailed account described in:

Jones, O.G. 1900, "Rock Climbing in the English Lake District", p 43 – 53.

(Second winter ascent of Moss Gill Feb 11 1893 by R. Williams, H.Woolley and W.C. Slingsby.)

" The sides and floor of the ghyll were all coated with ice hence the difficulties, at no time slight, were on this occasion very great indeed. The ghyll ought not to be climbed except when rocks are dry and quite free from ice".

Entry by Slingsby in Wasdale Hotel Climbing Book 1890 – 1919, p 86.

Pre 1894 **STRIDING EDGE - HELVELLYN** (Grade I)

" In winter it is sometimes an exciting approach to Helvellyn, in summer just a pleasant walk".

Haskett Smith, W.P. 1894, "Climbing In The British Isles".

There is no record of when the first traverse of Striding and Swirral Edges was made, it may have been members of the Alpine Club during the 1860 and 70's who occasionally visited the district in winter for practice in step cutting. One of the first was Professor J. Tyndall who sometime before 1859 climbed Helvellyn from Grasmere when "all the summits round us were white, and it required no great stretch of the imagination to fancy ourselves in the heart of the Alps". On reaching the summit "one of us lay down while the other descended to inspect Striding Edge and Red Tarn", but the day was stormy and shortly after they "scampered down the face of the mountain to the Keswick road".

Tyndall, J. 1859, "A Stormy Day on Helvellyn",

The Saturday Review (Reprinted in The Climbers Club Journal 1903.)

Pre 1895 **C GULLY -THE SCREES** (Grade IV)

" This gully is said to have been climbed throughout in winter. As there is no account in the book we shall be glad if our description elicits further information."
Wasdale Hotel Climbing Book 1890-1919, p138

This was recorded after an attempt on the gully in April 1895 by G. Lawrence, J.Simpson, and C.W. Patchel. The first winter ascent of the gully remains unknown.

1896 Dec 25th **NAPES NEEDLE**

O.G. Jones and party.

First winter ascent?

On Christmas day 1896 O.G. Jones and several other made an ascent of Napes Needle when it was covered in snow. A photograph of this, taken by the Abraham brothers, was published in the second edition of Jones's *Rock Climbing in the English Lake District*; the date of the ascent and a note identifying Jones as one of the climbers in the picture appeared a few years later in a magazine article, written by one of the Abrahams. It is doubtful if the Needle is ever anything more than a snow covered rock climb but ascents have been made when full winter conditions embraced the fells; Jones's may have been the first. George Sansom led three others up the Needle on 3 rd January 1911 finding it "fairly stiff with snow on it". The meet report in the FRCC journal for Easter 1913 records ascents of the Needle and Needle Ridge when "the fells were covered in snow and ice [and] nearly all rock work impossible".

1897 JAN 1st **HIND COVE GULLY**

R.C. Gilson

First ascent and probably the first winter ascent.

Gilson left a short note of his ascent in the *Wasdale Climbing Book* remarking only that “the pitch at the bottom is of the cave type and presents no difficulty”. He makes no mention of snow or ice but as it is known that winter conditions were present three days earlier (the Abraham brothers recorded an icy and somewhat epic ascent of Shamrock Gully on the 29 th December) it seems likely that this ascent was made in winter or semi–winter conditions.

Pre 1899

NEEDLE GULLY

The first ascent of this gully is unknown but a photograph, taken by the Abraham brothers, shows a party in the lower part of the climb when it was snow covered. O.G. Jones attempted it in “soft snow” in January 1893 but retreated and left it for another day. The writer thinks the leading climber in the Abraham photograph is Jones (who was killed in the Alps in 1899), hence the speculative date pre 1899.

1899 JAN

CURTAIN AND ARETE – PILLAR

O.G. Jones, G Abraham

First recorded winter ascent

Jones and Abraham visited Pillar in early January, a few days prior to making the epic first ascent of Walker 's Gully. Soft snow and ice cover the rocks. They didn't know that the Curtain and Arete had been climbed before and thought this was a new route

“Though ice and snow masked the rocks insidiously, there seemed a chance of success”. Abraham, G. 1910 *Mountain Adventures at Home and Abroad*.

1899 APR 8th

NORTH CLIMB – SCAFELL (Grade III)

Cowley, Davey, G.Barton, C. Barton.

First recorded winter ascent.

“ The wind had gone due N. & with the snow as well things were moderately alpine....this was our first encounter with snow and ice...

North Climb proved moderately hard under the present conditions.”

"Barton Climbing Book", F&RCC Archive, Cumbria Records Office.

1899 APR 11th **SCAFELL PINNACLE VIA STEEP GILL AND
SLINGSBY'S CHIMNEY - SCAFELL** (Grade V, 5)

G.Barton, C. Barton, Cowley and Davey.

First recorded winter ascent.

Along with Jones' Oblique Chimney, this was technically the hardest winter route achieved prior to the Great War

" encounter with snow and ice on difficult rocks "

They were three and a half hours on the climb with an "entirely incompetent climber" and came to the conclusion that the route " is no where really difficult barring the 60 ft in the middle of the climb which includes the Slingsby Chimney"!

Nevertheless the Bartons admitted that; " Our position on the Pinnacle wall was chilling in the extreme.... it was quite by chance we did not get frost bitten."

"Barton Climbing Book", F&RCC Archive, Cumbria Records Office.

1901 DEC 26th **GREAT GULLY - PAVEY ARK** (Grade III)

Two unknown Climbers Club members.

First recorded winter ascent.

" The cave and the small climb immediately above were successfully passed: then came a steep snow slope of 40 to 50 feet, and a short vertical climb, beyond which lay another slope terminating in what was considered the Mauvais Pas of the ascent, an almost "A.P." wall of 20 to 30 feet securely incased in ice.....

The leader...had got up some twenty feet...when hearing a rush of snow below he turned his head and was astonished and dismayed to behold his companion disappearing down the gully on his back. A bundle of Harris Tweed, enveloped in a cloud of snow, shot over the pitch immediately beneath, and the leader waited for the jerk, which he knew he would be powerless of withstand. But the jerk never came, for the second man, during his enforced idleness, noticing a large rock tooth on the left side of the gully, had swung the rope round it in a loop. When the platform of snow...gave way... the rope so jammed that it never even tightened between the leader and the tooth."

1902, *"Christmas at Langdale Head",*

Climbers Club Journal, Vol IV, No 15, p 147-148.

The climb was successfully finished and two days later repeated by an “augmented party”.

1902/03 NEW YEAR **NEW WEST CLIMB – PILLAR**

W.F. Wright, L.K. Meryon and two others.

First winter ascent

The party started the route around midday and almost immediately encountered difficult icy conditions. At the second traverse, giving access to the chimney, the leader, W.F. Wright, tossed a coin to decide if they should retreat or press on. They continued but progress was extremely slow and darkness fell before they reached the final ice sheathed slabs. Only light from the rising moon allowed them to continue. Halfway across the slabs Wright slipped and disappeared into the darkness. The second man, Meryon, held the fall and remarkably the hemp rope stood the strain. The last man, who at that moment was making the delicate rightward traverse out of the chimney, at the shock of seeing the leader fall, lost his balance and went “banging pendulum like across the cliff” until he jammed, semi-conscious, in a crack below. They were now in a desperate situation with the leader and last man dangling on the ends of the rope, the temperature well below freezing and their cries for help unheeded. After several failed attempts they eventually managed to get the two shaken and bruised climbers back into a secure position. Meryon took over and after much difficulty led the party up to the summit of the High Man. They returned to the Wastwater Hotel in the early hours of the morning, just as a rescue party was setting out to look for them. George Abraham relates this story in *Mountain Adventures at Home and Abroad* and *British Mountain Climbs*. Three of the party were killed a year or so later in a climbing accident in the Italian Alps.

1905 FEB 1st **“E” GULLY (MARES NEST GULLY) - PIKES CRAG**
(Grade I/II)

G.H. Almond, E.V. Oulton, C.T. Beecroft,

W.I. Cumberlandidge, P.R. Parkinson.

First recorded winter ascent.

“ Climbed this gully completely in ice and snow. It afforded interesting climbing and has one difficult pitch which was turned by a previous party. The pitch was ascended by backing up the left wall with the aid of shoulders and ice axe from below and jamming the left knee in between this wall and the chockstone. Probably the gully is uninteresting in summer but in winter it is worth a visit.”

P.R.P. Wasdale Hotel Climbing Book, 1890 – 1919, p 222.

1906/07 NEW YEAR **WEST WALL TRAVERSE** - SCAFELL (Grade I)

A large party of Climbers Club members.

First recorded winter ascent, almost certainly done much earlier.

Over twenty climbers - including George Seatree, Geoffrey Hastings, the Abraham brothers, Lehmann Oppenheimer, and A.E. Field - were staying at the Wastwater Hotel; the majority as part of a Climbers Club meet. Heavy snow had fallen recently and large teams struggled up Skew Ghyll, Deep Ghyll, Lord's Rake and the West Wall Traverse. This is the first recorded winter passage of the latter route but it had certainly been done earlier, possibly in the 1880s.

Repeated in April 1908 by A.E. Baker and Rucksack Club members.

“ We slowly and cautiously made our way over the loose and treacherous snow on the West Wall Traverse”.

Baker, A.E. 1909, “ *Arctic Conditions in Lakeland*”,

Rucksack Club Journal, Vol 1, No 3, p 185-186.

1907 **EASY TERRACE** – DOW CRAG (Grade II)

S.H. Gordon, H. Goodier.

First recorded winter ascent.

“ Easy Terrace. Finish up intermediate in ice and snow.”

“*Coniston Parkgate Climbing Book*”, F&RCC Archive, Cumbria Records Office.

1908 EASTER **RAKES PROGRESS** – SCAFELL (Grade I/II)
BUTTRESS BETWEEN A AND B GULLIES – PIKES
CRAG (Grade II?)

F&RCC parties.

First recorded winter ascents.

“ There was an unusually large quantity of snow on the fells, particularly on the North face of Scafell Pike. Ice and frozen snow abounded...Rakes Progress...presented genuine difficulties, being so choked with ice and ice covered snow that a party of

three took over two hours to traverse it, cutting steps nearly the whole way from the foot of Lord's Rake to Mickledore Ridge. At the same time another party were experiencing a good deal of trouble with the buttress between A and B gullies on Pikes Crag".

1908, "The Club Meets", F&RCC, Vol 1, 2, p 190 – 192.

Pre 1909
(Grade 1)

ANGLE TARN GULLY – HANGING KNOTT

First ascent unknown.

"In wintertime ... Hanging Knott is well worth a visit".

I Abraham, G. 1909 *British Mountain Climbs* .

1910 EASTER KESWICK BROTHERS CLIMB - SCAFELL (Grade IV?)

T.C. Ormiston–Chant, Scantlebury.

First recorded winter ascent.

" I lost my axe when half way up Keswick Brothers Climb. It was nearly dark and Scantlebury and I spent a weary hour in chipping steps with a wedge of rock in a huge fringe of ice above Botterill's Slab, hoping to avoid a descent. A cheery hail from Hollow Stones brought two good Samaritans to the top of the climb, and the ring of their axes in the hard ice kept us company for another hour whilst they cut down to within a rope length of us. The rescuers were Worthington and Gemmel."

Ormiston-Chant, T.C. 1919, "In Memoriam: Claude Swanwick Worthington",

F&RCC, Vol 5, 1, p 91-93.

"Easter 1910 - Scantleberry and I started up Keswick Brothers Climb as dusk came on and found the finish so badly iced as to make it impossible. We were hauled out by two kind hearted companions."

F&RCC Wasdale Climbing Book 1907 – 1938.

1910 EASTER ENGINEERS CHIMNEY - GREAT GABLE (Grade IV/V)
C.S. Worthington, J.D. Gemmel

First recorded winter ascent. The third of the quartet of Grade V climbs to be achieved by pre Great War Lakeland climbers.

"During this Easter holiday the two (Worthington and Gemmel) did nearly all the severe and very difficult climbs in the Pillar, Gable and Scafell crags. A notable climb was Engineers Chimney with a considerable amount of ice in it."

Ormiston-Chant, T.C. 1919, " In Memoriam: Claude Swanwick Worthington", FRCC, Vol 5, 1, p 91-93

1910 EASTER **NORTH GULLY – BOWFELL** (Grade II)

S.F. Jeffcoat, T.W.Oliver, J. Wilding.

First recorded descent in winter, may have been climbed earlier.

The party "set out with the intention of climbing Bowfell Buttress by Oppenheimer's route, but returned with an account of a traverse of the buttress on snow. On arriving at the climb, they were unable to distinguish the route owing to mist. They therefore took to the snow in the gully to the left of the buttress, and by this reached the top...It was therefore, decided to descend the gully on the right side of the buttress which contained steep snow, in which good steps could be kicked all the way down."

1911, "Easter Meet, 1910. Langdale",

Rucksack Club Journal, Vol 2, No 1, p 66-67.

1911 JAN 1st **ARROWHEAD RIDGE DIRECT – NAPES**

G.S. Sansom, W. Brunskill, J.C Woodshead and A. Woodshead.

First recorded winter ascent .

"There was a good deal of snow on the ridge and we had a fine climb."

Sansom, G.S 1982 *Climbing at Wasdale Before the First World War*

1911 **GREAT GULLY – DOW CRAG** (Grade IV/4)

T.C. Ormiston-Chant, Balfour, Smith, Parker, Huntley, Pidcock, Lyon.

First recorded winter ascent.

“ Fells snowbound, rocks about Great Gully badly glazed with ice... Two thermos flasks were smashed during the climb” (*The start of a great Lakeland tradition*).

“*Coniston Parkgate Climbing Book*”, F&RCC Archive, Cumbria Records Office.

1912 **BLACK CHIMNEY – DOW CRAG** (Grade IV)

L. Hardy, G.Milligan, H.C. Diss

First recorded winter ascent.

“ Black chimney (snow).”

“*Coniston Parkgate Climbing Book*”, F&RCC Archive, Cumbria Records Office.

1912 **WOODHOUSE’S ROUTE – DOW CRAG** (Grade IV)

D.G.M., Miss Eckland, L. Hardy.
This is almost certainly Dennis Murray. Len Hardy took the photo.

First recorded winter ascent.

“Woodhouse’s Route of B Buttress (ice).”

“*Coniston Parkgate Climbing Book*”, F&RCC Archive, Cumbria Records Office.

Murray R. 1913, “A Blizzard on Doe Crags,” F&RCC, Vol 3, 1, p 44-47.



Some of the party on their way to a snowy Dow Crag in 1912 where they made the first ascents of Woodhouse's Route and North Gully. (Len Hardy)

1912 **“ELUSIVE GULLY” – NORTH GULLY - DOW CRAG**
(Grade III/IV)

Rosalind Murray and three others

First recorded winter ascent.

“ It was only my fourth attempt at climbing, and I had never climbed in snow...It was I was assured a very easy climb under ordinary conditions...This time, however, the “under ordinary conditions” was a saving clause, for our conditions were not

ordinary. The rocks were covered with two inches of solid ice; genuine ice that had to be cut through with an ice axe before any hand or foot holds could be found”.

Murray, R. 1913, "A Blizzard on Doe Crags", F&RCC, Vol 3, 1, p 44-47.

1913 EASTER **NORTH CLIMB** - PILLAR (Grade IV)
S. Herford, G Sansom
First Winter Ascent.

" Herford was a very efficient leader under icy conditions. I well remember him leading over the Nose of the North Climb on Pillar when the rocks were covered in snow, and also up Walkers Gully on a New Years Day when it was covered in ice."
Sansom G.S. 1974, "Goodbye To All That", FRCC, Vol 22, 64, p 119-124

" Fells covered in snow and ice... nearly all rock work was impossible...North on Pillar was ascended by a party of two, a very fine performance under the conditions, the same two also did Overbeck Chimney."
1913, " Easter at Wasdale Head", FRCC, Vol 3, 1, p 108-109

Second winter ascent R.S.T. Chorley and Katherine Hopkinson 5th January 1925.
"Ascended under fresh snow" *FRCC Buttermere Climbing Book.*

1913 EASTER **OVERBECK CHIMNEY - OVERBECK** (Grade III/IV)
S. Herford, G. Sansom
First Winter Ascent.

"Fells covered with snow and ice ... nearly all rock work was impossible, but easy routes (of summer) provided good sport, and plenty of step cutting was obtainable. The following climbs were made by several parties; Needle and Needle Ridge, Old West Climb Pillar (requiring three to five hours)...Slab, Notch and Arête, Central Jordan, all affording good practice under these conditions, High Level Route very fine. North on Pillar was ascended by a party of two, a very fine performance under the conditions, the same two also visited Overbeck Chimneys”.

1913 " Easter At Wasdale Head", FRCC, Vol 3, 1, p 108-109

1913 EASTER **CENTRAL JORDAN – PILLAR**

FRCC party
First recorded winter ascent.

See *Easter at Wasdale Head* in entry above.

The second winter ascent of Central Jordan in 1926 by G. Basterfield, T. Graham–Brown and three others, also included the first recorded winter ascent by a canine: “In a snowstorm & icy rocks Dinky the dog hauled up Central Jordan in a rucsac”.

FRCC Wasdale Climbing Log

1913/14 NEW YEAR **WALKER'S GULLY - PILLAR ROCK**

(Grade V/4)

S.W. Herford, G. Sansom, C.F. Holland.

First winter ascent.

The fourth and final Grade V route achieved by Lakeland climbers before World War One. The trio found a steep fearsome gully encased in thick ice. What Holland was to describe as, "a truly Homeric struggle" with the route ensued culminating in a titanic battle with the crux upper pitch. Herford "commenced a devastating assault on the upper ice-fall...occasional boulders joined in the bombardment, one of which made a gallant effort to cut the rope. The leader, after much toil, succeeded in attaining a somewhat doubtful position on a slope of ice below the top boulder". The climbing was so severe that the unthinkable happened - Herford, perhaps the ablest climber in the country at the time, took a leader fall, "an experience, for him, out of the ordinary". Holland described the crux encounter with exquisite understatement, "The first attempt [to surmount the boulder] failed...and the leader's quiet remark 'I am coming off now', was immediately justified". Despite this he was held and succeeded on a second attempt. The climbers battled up verglased final rocks to finish a magnificent ascent.

Holland, C.F. 1914, "Walker's Gully",

F&RCC, Vol 13, 3, p 71-73.

(O.G. Jones made the first ascent of this route in semi-winter conditions in 1899. There is a fine account of his epic ascent in; Jones, O.G. (1900), "Rock Climbing in the English Lake District".)

1914 FEB 21st **Various routes - Dow Crag**

There is a record in the Coniston Parkgate Climbing Book of Worthington, Herford and Sansom teaming up (along with A.R.Thompson and W.B.Gourden) and climbing several routes on Dow Crag on 21st February 1914. **Jones' Route** (Easter Gully), **Black Chimney**, **Blizzard Chimney** and **South Chimney** were all ascended.

Although details are not sufficiently detailed to prove that these climbs were in true winter condition, the fact that 'six inches of snow lay on the fells' that day suggests that there was a good chance that they were and given their previous record the climbers were certainly capable of tackling the climbs in this condition some of which would probably merit grade V today.

1913/14?

BOTTERILL'S SLAB – SCAFELL (Grade V/5)

G.W. Young, H.V. Reade.

Possible first winter ascent?

“ A little later another lesson was driven home, when we came upon Fred Botterill, upon whose eponymous slab on Scafell H.V. Reade and I had just made the first winter ascent cautiously and admiringly, much adrift upon the iced holds of the Professor's Chimney, which gave our Alpine technique no pause.”

Young, G.W. 1951, "Mountains with a Difference", p 9 – 10.

This reference to this alleged first winter ascent is a little puzzling. The mention of the “ Professor's Chimney” which lies at the head of Deep Gill for example is confusing. Also the tone suggests that they first met Botterill shortly after their ascent. It is known that Young met Botterill at Wasdale Christmas 1907 (1908 “The Club Meets”, F&RCC, Vol 1, 2, p 190 – 192.) and may have met him earlier, yet the records credit Herford and Sansom with the second ascent of the route in 1913. Young wrote this brief account many years later, so we may never know what really happened, but the reference remains intriguing. If he really did make the first winter ascent of what is now regarded as a modern winter classic, it would have been a remarkable achievement by England's finest Edwardian alpinist.

1918

EASTER GULLY-SCOOP ROUTE DOW CRAG (Grade III)

Mr & Mrs Murray, Mr & Mrs Ormiston-Chant, 'W.A.', 'J.P.R.' and one other.

First winter ascent

"Easter 1st pitch, traverse west... S. Chimney... good scramble in hard snow"
Coniston Parkgate Climbing Book

An ascent indicating the rapid recovery of winter climbing standards in Lakeland immediately after the Great War (unlike Scotland) and also the early participation of women climbers.

1919

INTERMEDIATE GULLY - DOW CRAG (VI, 6)

PR Masson, C. Alexander, George Bower

First winter ascent

'Very badly iced'

Coniston Parkgate Climbing Book

Described in the current guide as 'A tough mixed route', and erroneously recorded as being first climbed in 1978, this was first Grade VI recorded anywhere in the country and a major unsung achievement of the veteran Bower and his relatively unknown companions.

(Bower and Borrowman also record that they climbed Intermediate Gully in 1918 'in snow'. Unfortunately, the entry in the Parkgate Book is rather too vague to ascertain whether the gully was in true winter condition, or simply that snow was falling)

1919 January **NORTH GULLY - LOW WATER CRAG** (Grade I),

JJ Bower and RP Vickers

First winter ascent

"Snow gully from Low Water to Old Man Ridge (gully slopes up to L just to right of crags). Much step cutting... Time c. 4 hrs"

Coniston Parkgate Climbing Book

1919 February **C BUTTRESS - DOW CRAG** (Grade IV)

TC Ormiston-Chant, G.Wilson, D.Pilley and others

First winter ascent

"Dorothy Pilley and I will never forget Ormiston-Chant's astonishing lead of C Buttress on Dow when it was a solid mass of ice, about half of the climb being made in pitch darkness owing to the time spent in lowering various members of the party who had succumbed to the cold."

Graham Wilson 1957, FRCC, Vol 18, 1, 51, pp 87-88.

Graham Wilson's obituary published a few years later mentions that he attended his first FRCC meet at Coniston in Feb 1919 and the meet report says " the weather was delightful, beautiful fine and cold, while the mountains glittered under a vesture of snow, frozen so hard as to support the boot, but not so hard as to prevent the delightful crunch which only the nails of a climbing boot can make on hard snow." This strongly suggests it may have been the same meet during which the C buttress ascent took place, especially as the February Coniston meets in the following two years recorded mild weather.

1924 December **NEW WEST - PILLAR** (Grade IV),

George Basterfield, T. Graham Brown

First winter ascent

Ascended with “frozen snow on the slabs”. Basterfield and Graham Brown (best known for his triptych of classic routes on the Brenva Face of Mont Blanc) were also part of a large jolly New Year’s Day party in 1926 which included “Dinky the Dog” who was hauled up an icy Central Jordan Climb on Pillar in a ruscac during a snowstorm - possibly the first ascent of a winter route by a canine.

Wasdale Climbing Book

1925 Jan 4th **MITRE RIDGE - GREY CRAG**

“another” RST Chorley, KC Hopkinson, M Barber, GS Adair and

First winter ascent

Ascended “under snow”. However it seems likely this meant sweeping aside the powder to uncover rock, as the logs record the snow’s arrival occurring shortly before this on the 3rd January after three days of gales.

Buttermere Climbing Book

1928 January **FLEETWITH GULLY - FLEETWITH PIKE** (Grade II)

RST Chorley, Kathleen Chorley, GS Adair and KC Pilkington

First winter ascent

“Climbed under alpine conditions”.

Buttermere Climbing Book

Early 1928 seems to have been one of the few periods of the decade when good conditions obtained, allowing skating to take place on Bleaberry Tarn. Despite this, nothing else of note was achieved during the 20s - a stark contrast to the activity before the Great War.

Winter of 1936/37 **DOLLYWAGON GULLY, CHOCK GULLY -HELVELLYN** (Grade III and IV)

Sid Cross & Alice Nelson

First winter ascents

Sid & Alice also made probable first winter ascents of the gullies above Angle Tarn, Langdale as well as **Pier’s Gill** (II/III) and **Pavey Ark’s Great Gully** (III) and **Little Gully** (II/III).

Interviews with Sid & Jammy Cross, September/October 1996

Winter of 1937/38 **BOWFELL BUTTRESS - BOWFELL** (Grade V,5)

Sid Cross & Alice Nelson

First winter ascent

This climb, described in the current guide as, “a technical mixed climb, probably the best of its grade south of the border”, and justifiably graded a solid V, is characterised by tricky crack climbing and delicate moves on sloping, thinly iced rock. Cross remembers tackling the crux crack pitch using Nelson’s axe as a foothold while torqueing his own axe (an ancient implement given to him by the famous Lakes pioneer George Bower) higher up the crack. Later on in the climb (on which the pair led through) he displayed even more prescient technical skills when he used a Scout knife, which he carried on climbs for splicing hemp rope, as an ice-dagger. The winter ascent of Bowfell Buttress is especially significant in two ways. It regained the heights of technical difficulty which had been achieved before the First World War. Secondly, the co-equal role of a woman is remarkable on a route of this difficulty during the late 30s; it seems likely that with the ascent of Bowfell Buttress, Alice Nelson became the first woman in the world to lead Grade V.

Source - Interviews with Sid & Jammy Cross, September/October 1996

Winter 1937 **CENTRAL GULLY (DIRECT FINISH) - GABLE CRAG** (Grade IV, 4 - recorded as “The Smart Exit” in the current guide)

Sid Cross, Alice Nelson, AT and Ruth Hargreaves, Astley Cooper

First winter ascent

The route involved delicate cutting up frozen moss on the crux wall and tenuous moves to reach the top. Albert Hargreaves was due to address the Pinnacle Club’s annual dinner in the Sun Hotel at Coniston that evening and Cross remembers him practising his speech all the way up the climb - a fact which says much for the nonchalance and confidence with which they were approaching technically difficult and serious first ascents.

Source - Interviews with Sid & Jammy Cross, September/

October 1996

Winter 1937 **PISGAH BUTTRESS - SCAFELL** (Grade V)

AT Hargreaves, Sid Cross, Alice Nelson

First winter ascent

AT Hargreaves led the hardest pitches, after they had tossed a coin for the privilege.

Winter 1937 **HOPKINSON'S CRACK - DOW CRAG** (Grade VI, 7)
John Jackson & Ron Jackson (solo)
Possible first winter ascent

Although open to interpretation, John Jackson's description of his ascent of his and brother Ron's solo ascent of a frosty and verglased Hopkinson's Crack (this volume) sounds very much like the condition in which the route might be tackled using crampons and axes in the modern era. If this is accepted, their climb becomes the second Grade VI route to be recorded in Britain, and again it is from Dow Crag (the other being Intermediate Gully).

Jackson, J "The Iron Lung", F&RCC, Vol 28

However it was possibly climbed even earlier viz this intriguing reference to George Basterfield:

'In his very early days, he found himself in the arena of Eastern Gully. Hopkinson's Crack, snow filled, seemed to him the easiest way out, and knowing or caring nothing of its reputation, he forced a way up it.'

'In Memorium' George Bower FRCC 25, 3, 43/44, 382-3

Basterfield lived from (1877-1949). His first new route on Dow was in 1917, so presumably this ascent would date from about that time.

Winter 1937/38 **STEEP GILL - SCAFELL** - second winter ascent (Grade V,4)

Sid Cross, Alice Nelson, Albert and Ruth Hargreaves

A major achievement of the late '30s, again by the quartet of Cross, Nelson and the Hargreaves. Although the Gill had been ascended by Norman Collie in the winter of 1891, this has only become widely known in the last two years. In the winter of 1938/9 the climbers were effectively entering terrain of unknown difficulty. Steep Gill is today regarded as the most difficult and serious of the traditional Lakeland gully climbs, with sparse protection on the crux section and unthinkable consequences in the event of a fall. Nevertheless the Crosses recall the climb as "fun" and in fact have more to say about the tricky descent from an iced-up Broad Stand, which Alice (Jammy Cross) actually jumped down, such was her confidence. The reason for the hurry was the need to get down to Langdale before the daylight disappeared completely, in order to be able to cycle back to Kendal that evening so as to be ready for work the next morning. Walking 12 miles, ascending 3000 feet, doing a Grade V climb and cycling 20 miles would be a considerable test for any modern triathlete. Doing it for fun and still being at work at K Shoes the next day suggests astonishing levels of fitness and enthusiasm.

Late 1930s/early 40s? **INACCESSIBLE GULLY - DOVE CRAG** (Grade IV, 5)

J.Birkett

First winter ascent

An ascent which went unnoticed for many years thanks to Jim Birkett's famously reticent habit when discussing his activities and his opinion that Lakes' Winter Climbing was 'cold and nasty.' Hence, the exact dating is still vague. An impressive achievement, especially as Birkett climbed this steep, technical route 'wearing tricounis and sporting a single long ice-axe.'

Birkett, B (1983) 'Lakeland's Greatest Pioneers' Hale, p. 122

1941 April **BIRKNESS CHIMNEY - BIRKNESS COMBE** (Grade IV, 5)

Bill Peascod & Bert Beck

First winter ascent

An astonishing ascent - given that the climbers had brought neither crampons, gloves nor ice-axe! They made the ascent using rocks as ice daggers.

'It had taken us three hours; we had been on ice most of the way. With proper equipment it would have been so much easier - but it would not have been half so satisfying!'

Peascod, B (1985) 'Journey after Dawn', Cicerone, p. 77-79

Jack
Carswell
belayed
below the
main pitch in
Central Gully,
Great End in
the 1960s

