



WINTER GRADING SYSTEM IN SOUTH AFRICA

By Gavin Raubenheimer, MDT MIA

In South Africa and Lesotho snow and ice climbs are grading on the international system with a few adaptations for local conditions. W I prefixes are used on all pitches where Water Ice is likely to occur.

In the SA system the following aspects of a route are covered:

- 1) The commitment grade given in Roman numerals gives an indication of the difficulty of the approach and descent as well as how sustained the climbing will be.
- 2) The technical grade is simply how hard any single section of climbing is likely to be under average conditions. Grades range from 1-6. Technical rock grades are included if mixed ground is likely to be encountered. Note, that in keeping with international trends the rock grade is given in "how it feels" to climb a section of rock in heavy boots, crampons and so on. It is not given as how difficult it is if climbed with summer rock shoes and warm hands.

Commitment Grade

Roman Numerals I to III.

"I" – A route with an easy walk-in of less than 3 hours and easy navigation to and from the route. Descent by walking off and with escape routes from the pitches. Characteristically these routes would seldom be more than 2 pitches in length.

"II" – Routes which could have walk-ins of several hours in remote areas. Descent could be by abseil or down unmarked routes. A good degree of mountain experience will be needed for the approach climb and descent.

"III" – A route which will demand small expedition organisation and will usually require a few days round trip. Camping or bivvying at high altitude in a remote wilderness area is required. Climbing will usually involve multi-pitch, sustained climbing. Descent or retreat will be most likely be by abseil from rock or ice "V" thread belays. (Abalakov Sandwich)

Technical Grade

Grade 1 - Easy walkable slopes with perhaps short steeper sections.

Grade 2 - Easy angled front pointing, short sections of 80 degrees with good protection.

Grade 3 - Sustained climbing up to 80 degrees between rests. Could have short sections of steeper ground. Good resting places and requires ability to place protection while on front points.

Grade 4 - Sustained full pitch of off-vertical ice or shorter sections of dead vertical ground.

Grade 5 - Long sustained pitch of near-vertical ice with few or no resting spots. Areas of chandeliers, bulges or featureless ice could be encountered.

Grade 6 - A pitch of dead vertical ice or near vertical with sections of thin highly technical ice or other obstacles such as overhangs or bulges. Protection will be scarce and placed whilst in very precarious positions. To date, no climbs of this grade have been opened in the Berg.