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ARMY MOUNTAINEER

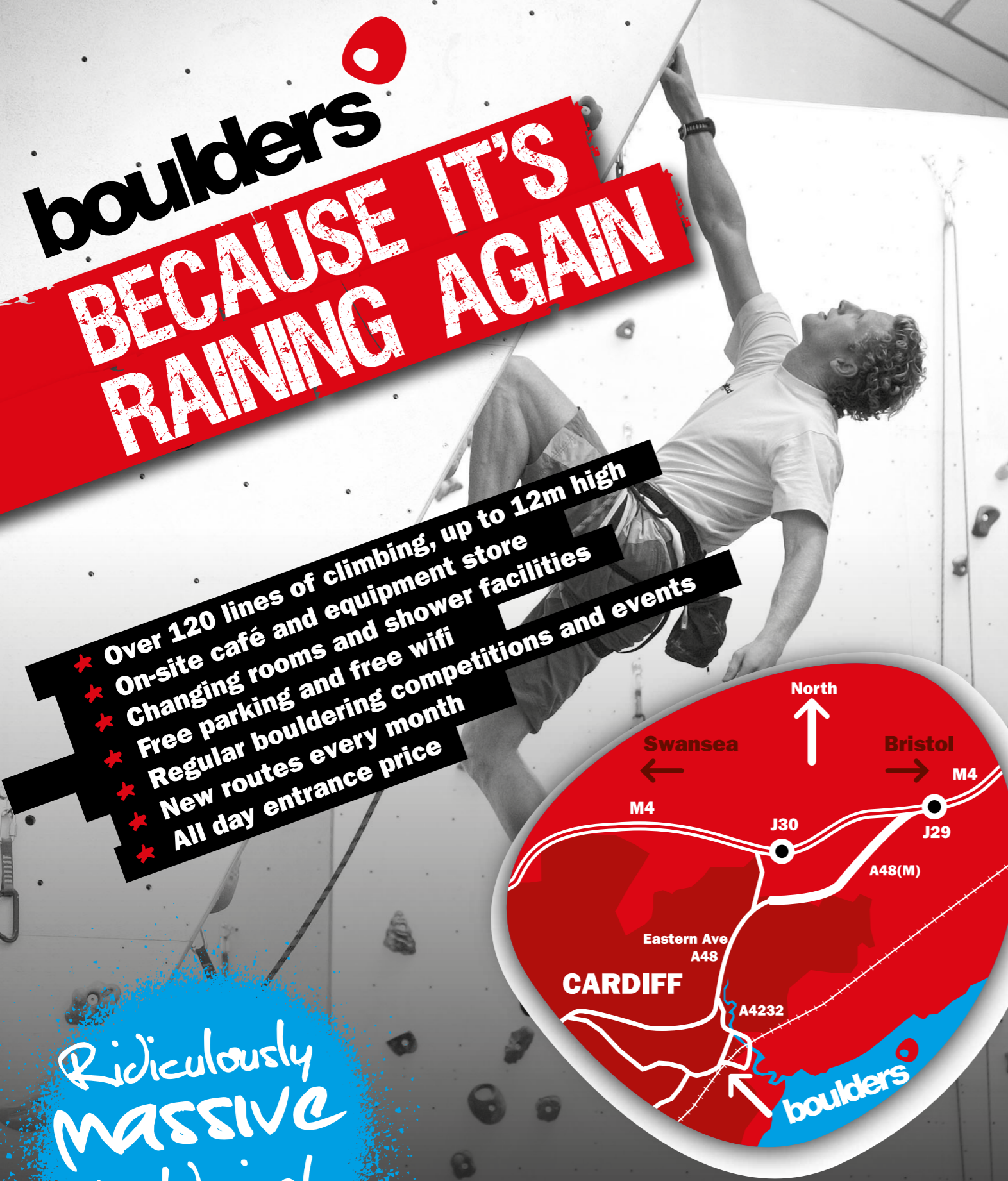


Spring 2016

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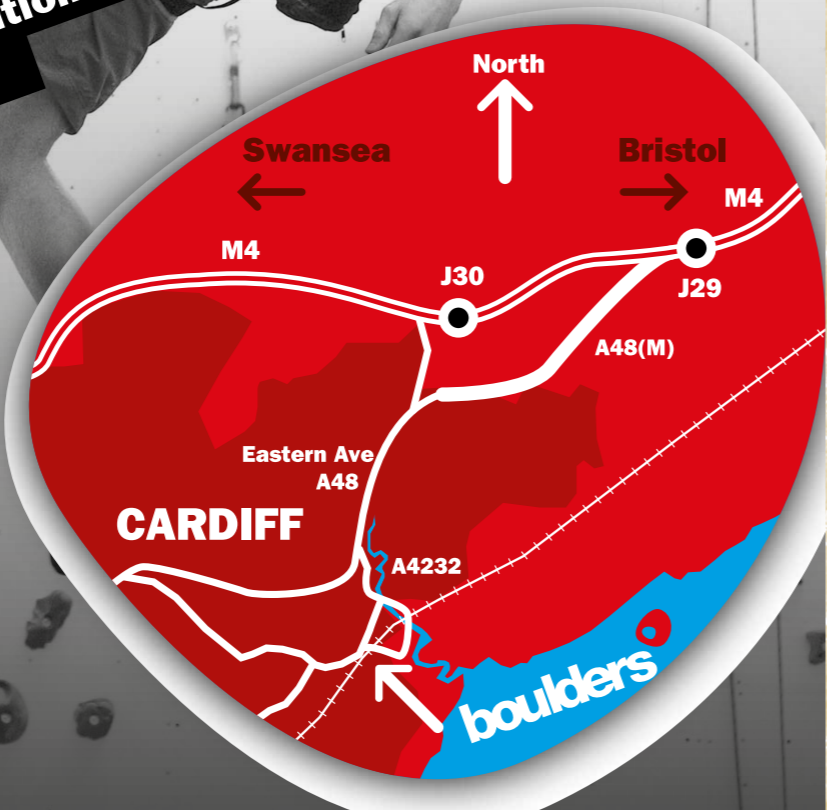


The Journal of the Army Mountaineering Association



boulders
BECAUSE IT'S RAINING AGAIN

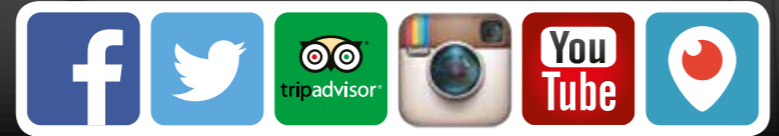
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ARMY MOUNTAINEER



The Journal of The Army Mountaineering Association

Top 5 Smartphone Apps



In the last edition we provided a list of the top 5 smartphone Apps that you may find useful when out and about. Here are another 5 Apps that are available from the App store, why not download them and try them out!


-  **Climb Buddy** – If you are travelling all over the place and need to get your climbing fix, but don't have a partner, this may be just the thing. It allows the user to search for and message other climbers and walls nearby.
-  **YR.NO** – This Norwegian weather App is truly best in class. It provides plenty of useful and accurate weather data at the touch of a button. It also has a rather cool 'Meteogram' which provides a visual representation of cloud cover, precipitation, temp, air pressure, wind speed and direction. Most importantly, it seems to be pretty accurate too!
-  **Flora & Fauna** – If you are considering becoming a Summer Mountain Leader or higher, you will need a good knowledge of the flora & fauna around you. This App is useful in helping you identify Butterwort from Tormentil and Club Moss from Spagnum Moss.
-  **iGeology** – Another great App for the budding ML or MIA which has been produced by the British Geological Survey. This provides info on the geology that makes the mountains that we all know and love. Fairly simple, just a map with info on both the bedrock and superficial Geology underneath your feet!
-  **UK Map** – This App costs £7.99, but all the UK map data after this initial charge can be downloaded for free and in different scales. It also has a good 3D map function which is useful to help visualise the terrain.

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Cover photo: Approaching Tashi Lapcha High Camp

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CLIMBING NEWS

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Appointments



Foreword

Foreword by Chairman

Keeping the AMA going - the 'real thing' Col Paul J Edwards MBE, FRGS

The AMA has been successfully supporting mountaineering in the Army for almost 60 years. We now have a bigger membership than we have ever had and our members are active in a wider range of mountaineering activities than ever before, with our reach now spreading from indoor bouldering, through to hill walking, rock climbing, alpine climbing and expeditions to the poles and greater ranges. I am thrilled to see that we continue to provide the competitions, UK meets and expeditions that our members want. In addition, all of this is supported by an excellent website, an outstandingly good Journal, a super social media presence on Facebook and Twitter and access to very generous grants from the AMA Memorial Fund.

So what's the catch? Well, of course you can still be involved in mountaineering in the Army without being a member of the AMA, and the huge growth in the quality and availability of Adventurous

Training courses from the Joint Service Mountain Training Centres has made the AMA's role of 'training' our members partly redundant. We do, of course, still offer opportunities to gain some 'quality mountain days' or additional rock routes for your logbook, by attending our meets, and more recently we have been offering first class coaching for those members of our sport climbing teams. Mostly, however, it is the real thing that the AMA offers, not the training. We continue to deliver first class climbing competitions and expeditions to our members, and these are at the core of the Association's offer to our membership.

The trouble is that delivering the real thing takes time and effort to organize. The AMA executive committee are always looking for people to come forward to help with organising meets, expeditions or competitions. Other than Emma, our secretary at Indefatigable, all of the committee offer their time voluntarily. If you feel that you could help, even in a minor fashion, please contact me, or any other member of the committee. They will be glad to hear from you.

AMA Journal Editor Update

It seems like only yesterday that the previous journal was published. 6 months gone in the blink of an eye!

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this journal, it is great to see so much going on within the AMA. Please keep the articles and photos coming for the next edition which is due out in December.

Whilst it is great to read about what everyone has been doing recently or planning to do in the near future, it is still important to remember where the AMA came from. There have been many great expeditions and achievements undertaken by AMA

members over the years. This journal includes an article written by Meryon Bridges (joined the AMA in 1969) about the 20th Anniversary of the successful JS Gasherbrum Expedition in 1996. This was the first ascent of an 8,000m peak by the Forces after Everest 20 years previously.

Please continue to update the Membership Secretary when you change address so that we can continue to successfully deliver your Journal on time and to the correct address!

Well done to those that have won a prize in either the photo competition or article competition. And a big thank you to Crest publications who not only produce the Journal but also judge the winners for each competition.

Update from the Webmaster

As previously mentioned the website is constantly evolving and moving with the times. I continue to update and ensure the most current information is readily available. I urge you all to help me by sending me pictures, news, updates or any general mountaineering information that you would like to share with our members. I am hoping to add a shop section for anyone wanting to purchase AMA items so watch the website for details. I will end by saying that if there is anyone out there with any ideas as to what I can offer or change in the website, please do not hesitate to get in touch, or pop in for a brew if passing MOD Stafford.

Update from the Membership Secretary

The AMA members list has been growing well this year; we currently have 2,477 with new applications coming in daily.

It is always important to update me with any changes to your details so please let me know either by e-mail or by phone so we can make sure your record is up to date and more importantly that you receive all the journals.

If you have any questions, concerns or anything at all please just contact me on 01248 718364 or Mil 95581 7964 or by e-mail on secretary@armymountaineer.org.uk. The office times are Monday to Thursday 9.00am to 15.45pm.

PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

The AMA 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.

AMA Membership Discounts Summer 2016

As members of the AMA we continue to enjoy excellent support from leading manufacturers and retailers of equipment and clothing. Please see details below and note that these businesses do have access to the AMA membership database to validate membership. They will request your AMA number when you order. All of these businesses retain the right to refuse, amend or withdraw these discounts.

DMM

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You need to use the AMA specific order form from DMM to place an order

POC – Holly Lindop – 01286 872222 – holly@dmmwales.com

www.dmmclimbing.com



ToughTags

Toughtags is a company that makes personalised, waterproof and tamperproof identification tags for climbing gear. They are a great way of identifying your own gear. Toughtags is able to offer AMA members a discount of web price - 20% + postage. This discount is for personal use only. To make an order, or to begin an enquiry please email tagit@toughtags.co.uk

Beyond Hope – Evolv, Metolius, Prana and Rock Technologies

Trade price + VAT + carriage deal to all members of the AMA.

POC – Lee 01457 838242,
RickBeyondHope@aol.com

www.beyondhope.co.uk

Terra Nova

AMA members can set up a Pro User account. Once you logged in, the discount is automatically applied.

Call Terra Nova on 01773 833300, info@terra-nova.co.uk

www.terra-nova.co.uk

Paramo

AMA members can benefit from the Páramo Mountain Pro Scheme: mountaineering qualifications and/ or experience of applicants are assessed by Paramo, with an increasing scale of discounts plus loyalty points available, as well as special offers and limited editions. This scheme treats each applicant individually, so speak to Paramo personally - POC Jeni or Katy on 01892 786445.

www.paramo.co.uk/mountainpro

Cotswold Outdoor

A 20% discount is available in-store on production of a valid AMA membership card. You MUST be in possession of your card. No card, no discount. For on-line orders, the AMA discount code is available on the secure section of the AMA Website.

www.cotswoldoutdoor.com



PHD (Pete Hutchinson Designs)

PHD offer a **25% discount** off all standard items to the AMA.

POC – Emma Harris –
01423 711212,
office@phdesigns.co.uk

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DIARY

ARMY CLIMBING FORECAST OF EVENTS – AS AT 14 APR 16

2016

Date	Location	Event	Organiser	Remarks
TBC Jul/Aug 16	Portland	Army Team training weekend	SSgt Simon Goyder	Will double as an AMA Meet
7-12 Aug 16	Cairngorms, Scotland	AMA Meet – Cairngorms, Scotland	Capt Sean Mackey	Contact details on AMA website
TBC Sep 16	Fontainebleau	Army Team training camp	Capt Andy Young	
14 Sep 16	TBC	RN & RM Bouldering Competition	POPT Jonny Logan	Fun comp for all abilities. Open to guests. This comp is not part of the UKAFBL
22-25 Sep 16	North Wales	AMA Autumn Meet & AGM – N Wales	Capt Ryan Lang	
24-25 Sep 16	Awesome Walls, Sheffield	British Lead Climbing Championships 2016	BMC	UK Armed Forces Team representation by invite
7-9 Oct 16	Wye Valley	AMA Meet – novice Wye Valley meet	Capt Ryan Lang	Contact details on AMA website
12 Oct 16	TBC	UK Armed Forces Bouldering League Round 1	Maj Tom Odling	DIN to be released
TBC Oct 16	TBC	UK Armed Forces Climbing Team training	Capt Oli Lewis	Prep for CS Team for Euro Champs
TBC Nov 16	TBC	European Military Climbing Championships	TBC	UK Armed Forces Team selected from the Inter-Services Championships. Pending invite
9 Nov 16	TBC	UK Armed Forces Bouldering League Round 2	Maj Tom Odling	
14 Dec 16	TBC	UK Armed Forces Bouldering League Round 3	Maj Tom Odling	

2017

Date	Location	Event	Organiser	Remarks
11 Jan 17	TBC	UK Armed Forces Bouldering League Round 4	Maj Tom Odling	
16 Feb 17	The Outdoor Show, ExCeL, London	UK Armed Forces Bouldering League Round 5	Maj Tom Odling	UKAF Team selection post this event
16 Feb 17	TBC, London	AMA President's Dinner	TBC	
25 Feb 17	The Indy Wall, JSMTC(I), Anglesey	Army Bouldering Championships 2017 and UK Armed Forces Bouldering League Round 6	Maj Tom Odling	
TBC Mar 17	The Climbing Works, Sheffield	Climbing Works International Festival	TBC	2 x UK Armed Forces Teams selected from the TSBL
TBC Apr 17	Tielen, Belgium	Bouldermania	TBC	UK Armed Forces Team selected from the TBSL

AMA AGM 2016

Dates: 22 – 25 September 16
Location: JSMTC Indefatigable

What's on?

DMM Factory tours
Thursday 22nd & Friday 23rd (Free)

Contour only Navigation class
Friday 23rd (£25)

Climbing Psychology workshop
Friday 23rd (£25)

Snowdonia Geology, Flora & Fauna workshop
Saturday 24th (£25)

Two day REC certified Mountain First Aid course
Saturday 24th & Sunday 25th (£50)

Evening presentations by guest speakers
Friday 23th & Saturday 24th (Free)

AGM including free raffle Sat 24th

What else do you get?

Curry dinner on the Saturday evening
Free engraved DMM snap-gate karabiner
The event will be available soon on Eventbrite, the cost is £10 per person. Workshops are extra as above, there are limited spaces available! Please keep an eye out on social media and email for updates!

AMA DISCOUNTS

If you have any issues with the various discounts scheme, or know of any other companies willing to offer discount to the AMA, please contact the AMA membership benefits secretary.

Finally, please use these discounts for personal purchases only!

Dawn to Dusk to Dawn

Nick Bullock

In 2013 I was invited to the Banff Mountain Film and Book Festival and I was sat talking to Steve Swenson, an American climber with more experience in the mountains than almost anyone I know. A group of us from the festival ate in a restaurant in the centre of Banff. Steve leaned conspiratorially closer, his black hair, sharp eyes and slim athletic frame belied his years. "Don't believe a word Slawinski says, he's the biggest sandbagger in Canada." Outside, the wind scythed the street. Snow scuffed the road.

A few days after talking to Steve, I was sitting, totally worn-out, in a large brown leather chair in the Canadian Alpine Club in Canmore, I stare at the sparkling snow weighing the branches of pine and hiding the bands of strata on the Three Sisters. Three Coyotes – puffed, grey, red and black, slink past the window. They miss nothing. They see everything. Life is a hunt. Later that evening I sit and watch a pine martin, with his arched back and thick jumper bounce across the wooden patio.

The Maul had been recommended by Ian Welsted. Ian climbs with Raphael Slawinski, and some of Raphael's craftiness was obviously rubbing off. When I spoke to Raphael – my sandbagging and understated friend – he did say, "Oh yes, The Maul, it's so good I've done it twice."

A freight train trundles the tracks, row after row of old hoppers dragged behind tractors. Some of the hoppers are new and painted, but most are old and rusty.

The Maul had been a long and at times tenuous warm up – we had started in the dark and finished in the dark, the route was everything to be expected from a Slawinski M7. We had chopped a rope and pulled out the stops. Greg Boswell, my partner on this trip to Canada and someone I respect as his youth does not affect his maturity or his outlook, we continue with Man Yoga, Victoria's Secret, Rocketman, Nemesis. All test-piece climbs in their own way and all world-class.

I was thirty-five years old when I first visited Canada in 2000. I had travelled to Canada with my friend Bruce French, ex Nottingham and England wicket keeper. Bruce and I were equally matched on the ice and the trip was a great success. We toured around while listening to Faithless, Sunday 8PM, taking in the massiveness and openness and the cold and the trees and we climbed icefalls – generally two pitch icefalls, apart from Professor Falls, Polar Circus and Weeping Wall – but most days, more often than not, we finished climbing by mid-afternoon and headed to the coffee shop.

In the evening there was loads of time for sorting gear and preparing food and there was always beer and crisps for Bruce and red wine with salad for me. Icefall climbing in 2000 was holiday with only the occasional discomfort. Bruce and I climbed our first proper WI6 on this trip, Whiteman Falls – my imagination could see the picture of Barry Blanchard soloing the same massive petals of ice I smashed with my straight shafted Pulsars. After three weeks Bruce and I flew back home happy, albeit with swollen knuckles.

I returned to Canada in 2003 with Dave hunter and it was during this trip that things began to go a tad leftfield, when I suggested to Dave we should attempt a very out-of-condition Sea of Vapours. Big whippers, ripped pins, one point of aid and an eighteen-hour day. Bloody hell, did I want that route! And at the end of that eighteen-hour day, we had it. This was possibly the start of the weirdness, when the two of us sat in the Alpine Clubhouse above Canmore at one a.m. knackered, battered, wearing thousand-mile stares but overwhelmed by the experience.

2008 with Ian Parnell was, I suppose, the nail in the coffin for the pleasant two pitch outings and coffee shop finishes. Ian and I threw ourselves at multi-pitch test pieces one after the other, day after day. The trip was full of three a.m. starts and ten p.m. finishes, almost every route we climbed - Nightmare on Wolf Street, French Reality, Terminator 2, Riptide, Suffer Machine, Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot – was wide-eyed, bicep burners. The time we climbed a two pitch icefall, even one with the reputation of Curtain Call, it almost felt restful. It was this trip that converted me to leashless climbing, as leashes made these lines almost impossible, such was their physicality.

I returned to Canada in 2012 with Rob, Chopper, Greenwood, or Bobby Big-legs, whichever you prefer. This trip was a trip full reinforcement of everything Ian Parnell and I had previously learned, but with Rob it was loads of laughs and litres of red wine – No Use in Crying, Replicant, Exterminator, Southern Comfort, Fiasco. There were still a few short easy days – Call of the Curtain and Nemesis – but no coffee shops and certainly no mid-afternoon finishes. On this trip, even the easier, shorter days would have been routes of the trip a few years before. What was happening? What was I thinking, where had the holiday atmosphere gone? The day Rob and I, climbed the plane steps, leaving a cold and windy Calgary, we both had aching legs and heads full of memories.

It was this trip with Rob that opened my eyes to possibilities of Canadian climbs on natural protection when we climbed Jon Walsh's and Rob Owens', No Use in Crying, on the Upper Weeping Wall. M7 on gear felt similar to Scottish 9. Teetering – front points pushed to small limestone edges and fingers wooden – high above my last nut and scraping fresh snow where ice should have been – I would like to say this was the most terrifying part of that day, but it wasn't, the drive back with snow exploding in waves across the bonnet and the roof of the rented town car, then hitting ice at 80kph took that prize. Another lesson learned, always hire a 4x4. This trip also had me looking at the new Jon Walsh and Jon Simms

line Man Yoga, and the line to the left put up by Raphael Slawinski called Victoria's Secret. But a dump of snow near the end of the trip put pay to that idea.

Climbing with Greg Boswell is as good as it gets – Greg is from Scotland, but unlike some of my other Scottish friends, he doesn't appear to carry that aggressive Scottish nationalism. I don't mean to belittle this fierce nationalistic pride. I'm sure if I had been part of a minority that had been ruled by suits in the south, I would feel the same, but Greg appears to place all of his fierceness into his climbing and when he is not climbing he is generally relaxed and good fun to be around.

Greg and I had similar ambitions in Canada and wanted to try the same lines, but Greg doesn't mind having rest days and whenever I don't want to lead a hard pitch, or kick the trail, I can bring in The Boswell. This almost makes up for the lack of afternoon coffee... Almost. We also hired a 4x4 which eased the mind, but another lesson learned, heated car seats are the death of getting out on crappy mornings...

Two years after this successful trip with Boswell in 2013, I visit Canada for the ninth time. It was half-past-midnight when I arrive in Banff, the last person on the white shuttle bus that had carried five passengers from Calgary Airport. I sat in the back of the bus in the dark. A freight train bullies its way through the centre of town. Red lights flash and an X marks the spot. The deep bass of the train blurts solid. A grey cat with white stripes skitters across the tracks. It's almost twelve years to the day that I walked from the door of Leicester Prison for the final time. That was the end of my fifteen year, self-imposed sentence. And in the twelve-years I hope I've learnt – I know I've changed.

I had arrived at the start of October 2015, spending a month at The Banff Centre writing my second book before moving to the Alpine Club of Canada's Clubhouse.

I collected Greg from Calgary Airport on the 16th of November, passing the familiar hotels and bright lights of the Olympic Park and its ski jump. Driving the long empty road towards Canmore with deserted fields blown by snow, I always remember the first trip with Bruce as I travel along the Trans-Canada Highway towards the mountains.

Before Greg arrived it had been so warm I had been rock climbing and alpine climbing in the Bugaboos. But a few days after his arrival, the temperatures dropped and a metre of snow had fallen. Winter was again with us. Our first climb had been one of those long lusted for climbs, The Real Big Drip. After this climb, we returned to the Stanley Headwall climbing Dawn of the Dead and Nightmare on Wolf Street, two more big mixed classics. We thought we would try going even bigger after these routes and attempt the second ascent of a climb called Dirty Love. Dirty Love is a five hundred metre; twelve pitch alpine climb, high on Mt Wilson which is situated off the Icefields Parkway, the road that runs from Lake Louise to Jasper. No coffee shops, no people, just wilderness, emptiness, deserted, alone... almost!

Jon Walsh and Raphael Slawinski had climbed the first ascent of Dirty Love in April 2008 grading the climbing M7. The climb had taken them twenty-three hours from the car to the summit of Wilson and another eight hours to descend. The trouble is, there is a very technical approach which includes several mixed pitches and approximately four hours of slog through trees and alpine terrain before the bottom of the huge gash, something like Cenotaph Corner on steroids is reached.

Greg and I aimed to put a track in to the base of the climb to become knowledgeable about the approach and return in two days to attempt the second ascent. Everything was going well, although the three loose and difficult mixed pitches after an hour's walk didn't really match Jon's description and took us longer than we had hoped. We assumed there was supposed to be ice on the approach but after the days of snow and the subsequent days of

minus twenty, today was warm and the sun had chosen to melt anything exposed.

At the top of these initial pitches, we slogged snow for an hour in the fading light before climbing an M5 mixed pitch in the dark. Engulfed now by the last of the forest on the highest level of Mt Wilson, Jon's description said, 'two hours forty-five of snow-slope to reach the climb'. We had come this far, so we both felt it was pointless not putting in a track even though we were in the dark, high on a mountain in the deserted wilderness of Canada. We left ropes and some gear at the top of the mixed pitch and after five minutes we also left axes and anything heavy before attaching snowshoes and bushwhacking through thick forest. Eventually we escaped the trees and found the snow gully that lead up to the climb. At seven thirty we decided we had done enough to establish a track that we could return and follow in two days. Retracing our steps to consolidate the track, I walked in front with Greg behind until the edge of the forest was reached.

The moon had yet to rise and darkness wrapped around our two forms following a track glittered in the light of the headlamps. I kicked as the snow clung knee deep, we had stashed the snowshoes to make a boot track. Small spruce lined the edge of the forest and all I thought was how in two days' time we would return, fresh from rest to attempt the stunning looking line we had taken photographs of earlier. This was one of the things that made me so feel so fortunate and alive, this being able to search-out the different, being prepared to forgo guaranteed in the hunt for esoterica, it was this experience that made my roving so fulfilling.

Greg was behind, and then I heard something that spun me...

I spun. Turned. Twisted. My headlamp caught blue as Greg flailed past, all arms and legs fighting deep snow... and just behind, just behind, but moving quicker with even bigger arms and legs than Greg, in the light of my headtorch, I could see a grizzly bear. Dark bottomless, fathomless eyes turned and latched my prone form. Erect ears, a broad snout, an open mouth full of brown teeth and attached to this beautiful powerful head, a head etched with pale flecks surrounding those fathomless eyes, was a muscular, bounding body propelled by pistons. The snow lapped the bear's belly and didn't appear to slow it. Frozen, terrified, my torch lit the snorting carnivorous freight train that was now rattling inches by, dusting me with spindrift, I stood. I stood frozen, terrified, helpless. Incapacitated. For a second, the bear looked at me, for just one second and for just one second I thought 'this is it, this is really fucking it.' Or I would have thought this if I could have formed thoughts, but I couldn't, my mind was white noise, it was a TV screen in the times before twenty-four hour programmes, my mind was from a time when the screen became horizontal bars and the sound was a constant beeeeeeeeeeeee. And in that exact second the bear had seen Greg fall and continued past. I ran, I ran as fast as I could. I ran uphill. I ran in the opposite direction, as fast as the deep snow would allow. And my now functioning mind screamed and amongst that scream was another scream. Greg had fallen on his back and watched as the bear bounded towards him. Screaming and shouting, Greg kicked at *Ursus arctos horribilis* and it bit straight through his boot as if it were a carpet slipper. It lunged again and crunched into his shin while placing a paw on his other leg before lifting him from the ground.

"Nick, Nick, help, it's got me aaaargh, HELP Nick, NICK HELP..."

I stopped running, and hearing my friend, the high pitched pleading, my mind screeched, 'the bear has got Greg, let it eat him, run away, run as fast as you can.'

But on hearing the chilling terrified scream, my survival instinct subdued. I stopped and turned, but I'll tell the truth, the thought of running back to face the bear, armed with only a ski pole slowed me. My limbs and mind were unravelling but Greg was shouting my name, I couldn't stand there. I just couldn't stand and listen to my friend as he was torn apart. I began walking toward the bear and



Greg knowing this was it, I was about to die, I was about to return to die and enter the stomach of another living creature, when out of the dark, out of the black, a shape came speeding toward me. The skin at the back of my throat tore. But the shape coming at me was Greg. My torch shone into his ashen face and I saw something I had never seen before.

We both yelled, attempting to sound big but feeling insignificant with primeval coursing through our veins. Feeling helpless, feeling a part of the food-chain, we ran into the woods following our tracks. The trees and branches, closed in, caught and ripped and tore as we crawled and clawed, and stumbled.

"Watch me, stay with me, watch me..."

After what felt like hours of waiting for the dark to ambush, we found our crampons and axes, which meant the ropes and the tree from which we could abseil and escape this ledge and the bear were five minutes away.

"Keep a look out."

Greg packed gear into his bag. I stood, shining my headlamp while brandishing axes.

"If it comes, no running, no running, we stand together, were in this together, side by side, no running, hit the bastard."

"Yeah, were in this together, hit the bastard, hit it as hard as fucking possible, in the head, in the eye."

But in my mind we were now starring in the film *Aliens* and I watched the bear shrug an axe as easy as a bullet bounces from that slippery black alien skin. 'They mostly come at night... mostly.' And in my mind I knew, I knew if the bear attacked again we would



be torn apart and eaten, we didn't have a chance, not a hope, the creature was powerful and feral and unhuman, it was a beast that survived to live and eat and raise young, it couldn't be talked down, controlled, there was no compromise to be made, no gentle words to be spoken.

We launched again into the woods, sweating and swearing and shouting and banging axes, following our trail. But we discovered it wasn't our trail we had been following, it was the bear's trail, and after an hour we had become hopelessly lost. We crawled beneath a massive tree. It was an anomaly as all of the other trees were big with wispy branches, this tree was massive with thick branches.

"Let's climb the tree and wait for the morning and daylight."

I looked into the branches and imagined being sat in minus sixteen with Greg bleeding and suffering hypothermia. "No, we need to find the ropes and get out of here."

"Let's head for the cliff top." Greg said before throwing himself over snowed up rock shelves which were just above the cliff face. Down - down and down, cartwheeling. Powder exploded. We were about to launch over the cliff and a small part of me hoped we did.

Greg shone his torch. I kept watch. We stood on the edge of the cliff looking down, peering into dark space. We had come too far right. We had to retrace our steps, head back, back into the woods, back towards the bear. I knew I had to be forceful because Greg, normally very sure, was losing blood, he was going into shock and his thinking was not to be trusted. A part of me felt we were never going to find the ropes, we were going to be stuck up here, stuck up here in this nightmare, stuck up here with the bear and if we weren't attacked again, Greg would surely bleed out. 'We had to retrace our steps.'

Another hour, crawling, bushwhacking, following our steps, we at last discovered where we had gone wrong. Within minutes we found the ropes and the place to abseil. Greg abseiled first. I sat on the cliff top, looking into the dark, looking into the trees while all the time expecting them to explode with a freight train of growling fur, while holding both axes. I hadn't clipped-in, thinking, if the bear came, I would jump. Eventually Greg shouted and I followed and after reaching the snow, the two of us waded the middle shelf between the two sections of a climb called Shooting Star.

We screamed and shouted making as much noise as possible and in the distance wolves howled in reply. "Nick, stop howling, the wolves will get us." Greg's boot was full of blood, squirting from the tooth hole every time he stepped. I followed wondering at what distance bears can smell blood?

Reaching the bolted anchor above the first section of Shooting Star, Greg rigged the abseil, and again, I looked into the dark holding my axes. The abseil was from a twisted single bolt. My mind was calming and I thought how ironic it would be to now die of an abseil anchor failure.

Three abseils later we landed and waded our tracks for another thirty minutes until reaching the road, it was twelve forty-five a.m. and at two thirty Greg and I entered Banff Emergency Hospital after I had driven us. The friendly nurse asked me if I wanted a drink, but there was no wine on offer so I had ginger beer. Greg couldn't drink anything as the five huge holes in his shin, which were so swollen now his shin resembled his thigh, might need surgery. I savoured the ginger beer and I told Greg it tasted good.

I don't quite know how my Canadian trips went from coffee shop afternoons to middle of the night grizzly bear attacks and ginger beer, but I can honestly say, I prefer coffee.

Triumph and disaster – Les Courtes 1993

Colonel Paul J Edwards, MBE

Way back in 1993 my erstwhile climbing partner Simon and I decided to attempt the 'Swiss Route' on Les Courtes. Although Les Courtes is just below 4,000M its North face sported a number of good routes to test an aspiring Alpinist. We were an experienced team and together we had already successfully climbed the Brenva Spur on Mont Blanc, North Spur of the Chardonnet and the Rebuffat route on the Aiguille du Midi. The Swiss Route was within our ability, and as long as it was in condition we felt that it would be a great culmination to our season.

The Swiss route sits directly opposite the Argentiere Hut, and on a hot August afternoon we trudged our way up to the hut. Even in 1993 it was clear that there was less and less ice on routes in the summer, and although climbing in August was still considered 'normal' there was a strong chance that the route would be unclimbable. It was not until we sat on the porch of the hut, cradling a warm brew, that we could see if our walk in had been worthwhile. You can see from the picture that the route was 'in', but only just. The hut warden told us that the route had not been climbed for many days, however the forecast was for a hard freeze that night, and the route should be possible in the morning.

The route looked very thin, and we were worried that the morning sun might make the upper reaches of the route very dangerous, or worse still, release stones on to us if we were stuck lower on the route. As most of the route acted as a natural funnel to a point (the crux) at about 1/3 height, this latter possibility posed a real risk. After some deliberation we decided to depart the hut really early and climb most of the route in the dark.

We set out from the hut about one in the morning and walked purposefully across the glacier. The moonlight still gave us some view of our route, but it was a crescent moon and due to set shortly. We made straight for the base of the route only to be thwarted by an enormous Bergschrund. Without a ladder, it was completely impossible to cross anywhere close to the logical start of the route and it was only after almost two hours of searching and trying that we finally found a way across, but very far to the left of our route. Having finally crossed we moved crablike rightwards across the face, initially moving together, but after a while, instinctively we started to pitch. The moon was now gone and our weak 1990's head torches only illuminated a small patch of ice in front of our faces. We felt our way sideways until it seemed correct to head upwards more directly.

The ice was good, and the ground was steepening into an area where we knew the crux of the route lay. I got in two good ice screws and Simon lead on above me, at first confidently, but then a little more hesitantly. I could tell by the way the rope had paid out that we had no protection, and we were close to running out of rope. I could hear a lot of scraping and finally the call came 'Paul, climb when you're ready', but followed by 'Don't fall off'. This, as most of you will understand, is code for 'the belay's shite and if you fall off we are both going to die'. I climbed gingerly up



to Simon, where I found him standing on a ledge the size of a brick, belayed only on his ice axes. The ice had gradually become thinner as we had ascended and now consisted of no more than a few centimetres of ice over a featureless slab. 'I think we might be off route' Simon offered. 'No F***ing shit' went through my mind, but all I said was, 'I think we might have drifted too far right'.

I stood below Simon and we both peered into the gloom looking for the route. The very first glimmer of the dawn's light was now starting to show and I could sense as much as see that the ground to my left seemed slightly easier. I set off carefully, leftwards and slightly upwards. The ice quickly started to thicken and after about half a rope length I round a large boulder frozen into the slope, ideal for a sling and some psychological relief. I could now see more clearly. The crux was directly above me and 20 metres of steep climbing led to a good stance.

From there on the difficulties eased and we made steady progress. After a while we started to move together again and by mid-morning we were on the summit. We sat down, drank and ate and talked about the route and our climbing ambitions. The stress of the climb quickly dissipated and, perhaps because of this, we tarried too long. We knew the descent was technically quite easy and that we had all afternoon to get back in time for the last train from Montenvers. It was not until after midday that we finally began our descent.

As the route was technically easy, we had unroped. Because of the afternoon sun, on what was now a South facing slope, I had taken my helmet off. Using only one axe I was happily descending, facing inwards and kicking big steps into the soft sugary snow. Suddenly I fell into a hole (created I think by a hidden boulder). The weight of my rucksack pulled me over backwards and the lip of the hole took my legs from under me. Before I knew it, I was heading headfirst down the slope on my back and accelerating

fast. We have all practiced our ice axe breaking, and numerous weekends in Scotland, North Wales and the Lakes now showed their worth. Instinctively I put out my axe as a pivot, twisted onto my front and reapplied the axe with all of body weight and effort. Just as I felt myself starting to slow there came a bone juddering impact with some rocks. I was thrown into the air and came down amongst some more boulders, where I instantly made a 'starfish' shape which brought me to a stop only some tens of metres from a long drop to Talefre glacier.

By the time Simon had climbed down to me I was sitting up, somewhat dazed. I was not severely hurt, but I had suffered a bang on the head and a nasty cut and some grazes. Of equal concern my left thigh was badly bruised and I had some trouble walking. 1993 was before the ubiquitous now 'mobile phone', and our best hope of getting to safety was to walk down ourselves. It was a long journey, mostly roped together and with Simon having to lower me down the steep ladders at the Couvercle hut. Not wishing the ignominy of a helicopter rescue, we continued past the hut and down to the Mer de Glace. This was a decision I later regretted, as I started to tire and stiffen badly.

Much to Simon's horror I slowed down even more and we were soon benighted on the glacier. Only some desperate route finding eventually brought us to the Montenvers ladders. In 1993 these were not as long as they are now, but it was still a weary climb up to the station and a cold bivouac on the platform waiting for the first train. As I sat on the platform that evening I reflected on Kipling's poem 'If', one line of which goes "If you can meet triumph and disaster and treat these impostors both the same". I came to the realization that the 'triumph' of our successful ascent and the 'disaster' of our subsequent descent were indeed both imposters. The reality was the route was about camaraderie and shared experiences, not about triumph or indeed disaster. Perhaps that is why this story has been over 20 years in the telling.

Goodbye Mr Blue Eyes

John Henry (Brummie) Stokes 1945-2016

I first met Brummie on something called Exercise Alpine Roundabout in the summer of 1974. It was held in the Alps and went on for weeks, with different AMA groups going off together to climb and then swap round so that everyone got to know everyone else.

Brummie and his partner Bronco Lane were both in the SAS, friendly but perhaps a little suspicious of the many Ruperts (officers) among us. It was only when we began to share hardships together that the mutual trust between us grew. Bronco had a head start on Brummie because he had been with us on the Axel Heiberg Island trip in 1972 and Brummie took a while to accept that the rest of us could be relied upon in the mountains. I don't remember Brummie standing out as a technical climber but he was tough, determined and methodical. He also had the bluest eyes that I or anyone else had ever seen. When we saw a party getting into difficulties on the glacier below the Mountet hut, it was Brummie and Bronco (known by then as The Lads) who immediately sprang into action and with John Muston organised the crevasse rescue. The Lads had arrived.

In 1975 an AMA team led by Jon Fleming attempted the South Face of Mt Nuptse, the lowest of the Everest triangle but technically far harder than either Lhotse or Everest itself. I was just a reserve but at the last minute John Swanston had to drop out so in March 1975 I found myself on the walk-in with Brummie, Bronco and the rest of the team.

Nuptse was an epic. It taxed us to the limit both physically and technically. We literally fought our way up it and then just when we should have been celebrating victory our top pair were avalanched out of the summit couloir to their deaths. The weather became so severe that we had to abandon all further attempts for a while but we could not afford to stay high because problems with our stoves made all of us dangerously dehydrated.

By this time Charlie Walshaw and I were at Camp 5 helping climbers who had been at higher camps to get off the mountain. We were expecting 4 of them but they seemed to be taking forever. Late one night after we had almost given up hope we heard Brummie calling. After guiding him and Bronco down by torchlight we threw them exhausted into our bags and spent the rest of the night brewing water in a desperate attempt to re-hydrate them. The other pair never made it and having gone up to Camp 6 and back the next day in appalling conditions to search for the missing climbers, Charlie and I realised just how incredible it was that The Lads had survived the journey all the way from Camp 7.

We took a very strong team to Everest the following year but The Lads were always in the frame for the summit attempt once the time came for it. They were invariably the first ones away in the morning and despite taking a full part in carrying loads and making the route, they were going stronger than ever when we reached the South Col.

Brummie and Bronco's day-long climb to the summit through thigh deep powder, their night spent out just below the summit, the frostbite they suffered and their subsequent rescue by the second summit pair, John Scott and Pat Gunson, are recounted in 'Soldiers On Everest' by Jon Fleming and Ronnie Faux and also in Brummie's book 'Soldiers and Sherpas'. The privations and injuries they suffered in 1976 changed their lives but both were determined not to let that stop them. They both regained operational effectiveness, Bronco winning the MM in Northern Ireland soon after he had learnt to walk again.

It is fair to say that Brummie became obsessed by Everest. He went back in 1984 to the North Face and again in 1985 to the only remaining unclimbed (NE) ridge. After suffering a broken neck in an avalanche in 1984 and several bouts of cerebral oedema in 1985 it was time to call it a day.

To many of us Brummie's greatest achievement was neither his Everest climbs nor his fine military record. Brummie reckoned himself very lucky to have escaped from his wayward young life and find comradeship and purpose in the Army. He wanted to give other inner city kids the taste for adventure and a new sense of self-worth that would help them to raise their game in the way that he had. He started the Taste For Adventure Centre with Lynn his wife in 1991. Twenty five years on and the Centre is still changing young people's lives for the better.

Many of the old Everest gang attended Brummie's funeral in a packed Hereford Cathedral. He had touched so many lives and they came in droves to say goodbye. At any funeral there is a lot of looking back but what struck me about Brummie's funeral were the many stories told afterwards by those kids, now grown up and some with their own families, to whom he had passed on his taste for adventure and given a brighter future. We salute his memory and remember him with affection but they are his enduring legacy.



Exercise PATAGONIAN CADET

Royal Military Academy Sandhurst Officer Cadet Bowen

It is now six weeks since 11 participants of Exercise PATAGONIAN CADET returned from the varying climes of the Patagonian region of Chile. Nine Officer Cadets from Sandhurst, accompanied by two mountain leaders – Sergeant Davies (RAPTC) and 2Lt Joe Robertson (RE), navigated the 'O' trail of Parque Nacional Torres del Paine over six days.

The expedition was organised by OCdt David Landells, a keen mountaineer, who jumped at the chance to organise an expedition to an area he has long wanted to tackle. The aim was for eight of the nine officer cadets to achieve their Summer Mountain Foundation (SMF). Helpfully, the Patagonian summer goes from December to February.

The group departed Sandhurst in two waves, with the first leaving immediately after the end of term Sovereign's Parade. No sooner had No. 1 dress been left in our rooms than we were relaxing in Heathrow departures, all looking forward to getting some sleep on the flight to Madrid, from where we would be heading directly to Santiago.

There was one notable perk of being in the first group, this being a day of acclimatisation in Santiago. This was followed by a nights rest prior to the journey to Puerto Natales (via Punta Arenas), where we were scheduled to meet the rest of the group and catch a three-hour bus to the park. Group B had a more restricted journey, whereby they went straight through from Santiago to the southern town of Punta Arenas, where they spent one night, before getting the bus up to Puerto Natales.

The internal flights were surprisingly good, covering the 2000km journey from Santiago to Punta Arenas in no time and with some decent Christmas films on board too.

As a region, Patagonia presents some interesting challenges, from experiencing all four seasons in one day, to the extremely diverse environment. It really is a mountaineer's paradise. If you've seen the Top Gear Patagonia Special (the one with the angry Argentinians), then you'll get a good idea of the variety in terms of terrain and conditions.

Once we'd all arrived in Puerto Natales, we accustomed ourselves to temperatures near enough identical to those of the UK in December. It made a change from the 30-degree heat in Santiago. The benefits of being closer to the equator!



Getting into the Christmas spirit!



The view from the start

That day we conducted arguably the hardest navigation of the entire trek – the local supermarket – where we purchased our rations and some last minute niceties (in my case, coffee) before we grabbed the bus to the national park.

The trek began later that day, where we first stepped foot on to the 'O' trail mid-afternoon. Fortunately, it was a shorter day, which allowed us to get used to kit and equipment and set off at a decent pace. Overall, we aimed to complete the trek in 6 days, rather than 11-12 as stated in some guidebooks. The entire route would span roughly 120km with the greatest height gain and loss coming during the middle of the expedition, when we started to traverse the ground around the North-North West of the park.

As we reached the campsite, we were treated to something resembling a half-decent arrangement. Showers, toilet, small hole-in-the-wall shop and tap water. They wouldn't all be like this, but then again, there were also the refugios to look forward to.

It became clear early on that we wouldn't need excuses to take photos. It's a stunning environment to be in, and it is clear why the Chilean government is so adamant as to the protection of this natural environment.

The group moved well and we covered the ground quickly. We managed to live quite comfortably too, with some decent food and coffee fuelling us on our journey. A staple dinner consisted of: noodles, chorizo, soup sachet (as a sauce) and a handful of fruit cake, which most of us used as some kind of pillow/protective padding at the bottom of our rucksacks.



One of the many footbridges crossed above Lago Grey

As we moved around the trail, many of us saw our first glaciers and also some of the local wildlife. Within six hours of starting, we encountered a puma strolling around the low countryside near the campsite! Unfortunately, I didn't catch sight of it, however, I was manning the numerous Jetboils and pocket rockets that were sorting out our evening meal, so I like to think it was a good reason to miss it!

Our trail eventually became the 'W' trail, or vice versa, whereby the south west – south east stretch around the famous Torres (towers) meanders towards the finish. There are some noticeable differences between the 'O' and the 'W'. After tackling the John Gardner pass in the north west, reaching the established routes of the 'W' and meeting some of the other people in the park, it became clear that the 'W' trail, where the majority of the viewing points are, is well trodden and quite touristy. The refugios were more like hotels and the array of kit and equipment hanging off people's daysacks signaled a slightly less intense few days ahead.

The terrain we encountered across the park involved some exciting additions, such as wobbly rope bridges, ladders held together with rope, planks over numerous bogs (an idea we might try to sell to the UK)

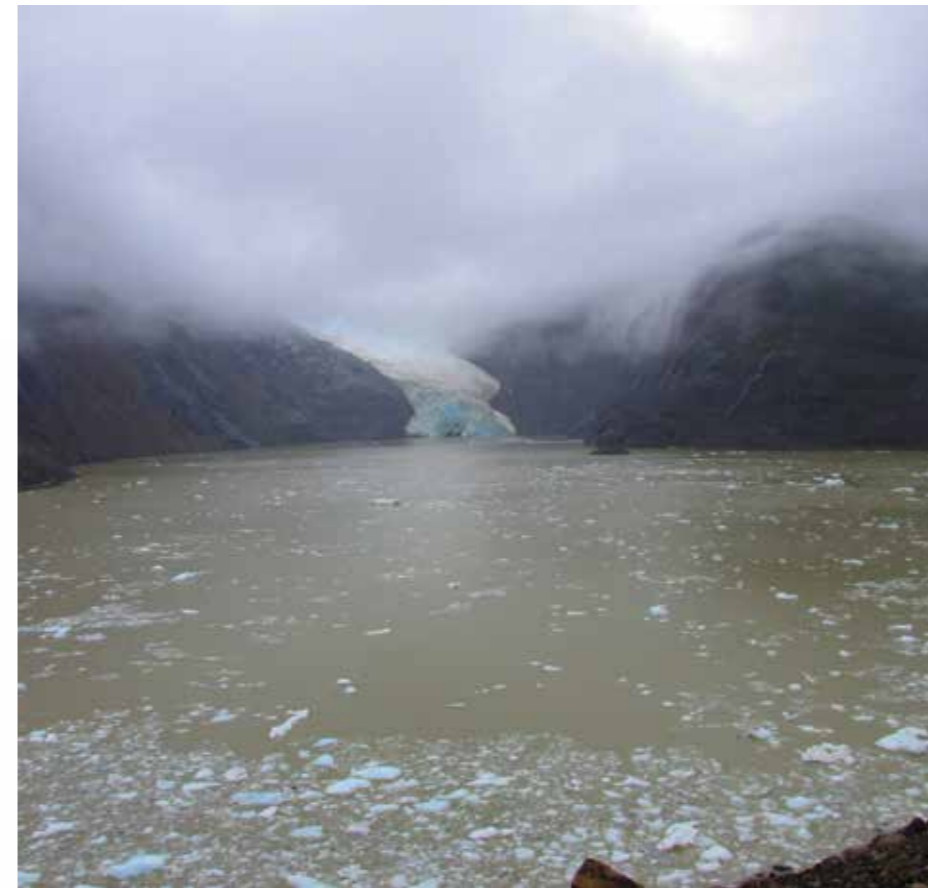
and fixed ropes to aide safe descent. However, most of these also provided great photo opportunities, which always helps!

Our final day welcomed a 0300 reveille in order to catch a glimpse of Las Torres. We threw ourselves up the steep 1.5km to the viewing point overlooking the Towers, so we could get the sunrise view of this iconic landscape. We made it up there in 32 minutes (in the dark), well surpassing a German group who made the trip in daylight in 45 minutes the previous day. As you can see from the photograph, it was a striking image and one we will all remember. After enjoying the sunrise, we made our way down to the start point, which we'd left six days previously. We even managed to grab a decent breakfast there and a boatload of coffee. Seeing as the bus wasn't for a few hours, we thought: 'why not!'

Patagonia proved a fantastic region to visit for Adventurous Training. For many, this was their first 'proper' expedition and to visit somewhere a bit further afield and to push oneself physically was a great way to spend the week. It's also a great reminder of the realms to which one can go within military AT. Furthermore, it was a great lesson in how to organise and conduct adventurous training; especially for the regiments and corps we will all be joining.

Our thanks go out to Officer Cadet David Landells for his tireless work in organising the expedition. Furthermore, our thanks go out to the Army Mountaineering Association for its financial and administrative help.

The team atop the John Gardner Pass



Day 2 - Our first glimpse of glaciers and icebergs



OCdt Roberts smiles at the sight of the ropes

Approach Shoe Review

By Tomo Thompson and Ryan Lang

The purpose of the review was to test a number of shoes that do actually do what this genre of shoe were originally designed to do ... to boldly go. We asked a number of shoe manufacturers to send us a shoe that was made specifically for the crag rather than the High Street, and that would meet the following criteria (in summer)

- Suitable for approaches to crags (both on footpaths and more technical ground)
- Suitable for low grade climbing and scrambling
- Ideal for day long use when instructing or guiding climbing

It's probably worth noting here that you can get a good enough trainer that will do some of what these shoes will do, for a lot less money, however we deliberately sought shoes suitable for the "demanding user".

The shoes were tested on approaches, low grade climbs, scrambles, indoor wall work, instructing and drinking coffee in the Peak District, Lake District, NW Scotland and the Costa Blanca over a period of 8 weeks.

The vast majority of "best in test" decisions in outdoor magazines are miraculously aligned to how much advertising a brand has purchased in the magazine. To that end, we haven't selected a best shoe, it should be apparent what the strengths and weaknesses of the shoes are from the short write up on each one. Each of the shoes can be bought on-line or in-store in the UK. AMA members qualify for 20% discount from Cotswold who do stock some of these shoes. As the fit on some of the shoes is quite technical, and in some case much like an actual climbing shoe, we would suggest trying them on in store first.

La Sportiva Boulder X

Successor to the Cirque Pro shoe, the Boulder X has been around for a few years now but remains very very popular in the climbing community for its robust build quality, unique lacing and levels of comfort. The first thing you feel when putting them on is protected, as if you had put a suit of armour on your feet. Whilst the actual toe isn't as narrow as some of the other models, the down-to-toe lacing and the fact that the lacing continues all the way round the ankle, allows for a very customisable fit which, coupled with the La Sportiva Fit-Thotic insoles equals very very comfortable. They were more of a workhorse shoe than an out and out climbing shoe, able to shrug any amount of abuse at the crag, but not the best for edging and delicate footwork. Of the shoes on review these were the preferred option for long approaches over technical ground, especially when wearing a heavy sack. The soles are part sticky, the rand is high almost all the way round the shoe, and the uppers are made from very durable reversed leather.



Five Ten Guide Tennie

Rumour has it that the original Guide Tennie was indeed the first ever "proper" approach shoe some 30 years ago. This latest incarnation keeps the model up there amongst the most popular approach shoes in the world. I've owned several versions of this shoe over the last ten years and what struck me on receiving this new pair was how much more robust and torsionally strong the shoe now is. The toe of the Guide Tennie is now hand ground and bevelled (much like a true climbing shoe) so that the toe rand wraps seamlessly in to the sole at the front to afford very good edging and placement in the front third of the shoe. The heel block has been beefed up, and the unique Five Ten "Dotty" sole provides good levels of sticky grip. In use the shoes have a more trainer like fit as the lacing doesn't extend down to the toe, but they can still be cinched tight and perform very well on edges. The sole design makes them more suited for on or near the rock use as there is little grip on wet or loose surfaces. Doubtless climbers will still be hanging out in Guide Tennies in another thirty years.



Salewa WildFire Pro

First things first, the colour. The majority of approach shoes are shades of green, grey or brown. To be fair this is probably because sooner or later, especially in the UK, they'll end up mud coloured anyway. "What on earth are those ???" is a question I was asked all the time whilst wearing them. I like them a lot because the design is a bit odd, the colours are in your face bold and they are really really comfy. They're just not "approach shoes" in the same vein as the others. The WildFire Pro is a really really good general outdoor robust trainer. It doesn't edge very well (because it isn't very supportive torsionally). I could however go for a short run in them, then do everything I needed to do setting up group climbs at a crag. I just had to put stickies on if I wanted to climb lower grade routes. In addition to a very robust and supportive heel block, the shoes have a wrap tongue on them (the tongue is essentially a single part of the upper, with the lacing assymetrical), and they come with a blister-free guarantee from Salewa. The female version come in a slightly less-loud blue and yellow colourway. Definitely the most general purpose of all of the shoes we reviewed.



Scarpa Crux

Low-volume. Stiff. Hard wearing. Down to the toe lacing. High quality midsole. Fifty percent recycled polyester on the mesh and lining. Many boxes ticked. I don't climb particularly high grades,



but almost everything I tried to climb in these shoes I got up. I'm more a Anasazi Guide man than a Sportiva Muira, and therefore I found these shoes almost as useful on rock as my stickies. Volume wise there is less of the shoe than the others, and the toe is definitely the narrowest of those reviewed, it may well be worth trying these on. As with most of the shoes reviewed here, the Crux costs over £100 a pair, and so I refrained from wearing it "down the pub" and kept it for "proper use". I think by doing this you get a lot more life out of a high quality approach shoe. The tread on all of these shoes isn't very deep, therefore they wear out quicker, obviously, if you wear them all day every day. The technical fit of the Crux might not suit some wearers for all day use anyway.

Haglofs Mens Roc Icon GT Shoe

When I first looked at the shoes I thought, "Wow", they are very brightly coloured indeed! This is probably because I usually wear the rather dull coloured La Sportiva Boulder X. From the moment I started wearing them, people kept asking what they were and how they performed! Probably clever marketing by Haglofs there!



Initially the shoes felt very snug and secure, almost like wearing a walking boot. After a few outings they began to break in and now feel very comfortable. I am not a fan of Goretex lined shoes as my feet usually get too hot. However after wearing these shoes for a week of rock climbing instruction in Spain, I can report that they were very comfortable and that my feet remained cool enough to wear them all day. I have wide feet so tend to opt for boots and shoes designed with this in mind. The Roc Icon was very well sized



for me, even when wearing slightly thicker socks. The asymmetric lacing system provided a fully adjustable fit which was really good.

I usually judge an approach shoe by the grip it provides on sloping rock whilst on approach to the crag. The Rock Icon certainly did not disappoint in this test. The Vibram sole is exceptionally grippy, probably even more so than my normal shoes.

The shoes have a rubber reinforced toe and heel which gives the shoes an armour plated feel. The jury is out on how long these shoes will last compared to what I already wear. I have no reason to suspect that they will not last as long if not longer.

The shoes are definitely ideal for use as an approach shoe, but the remit goes further than that. I have used these shoes for scrambling, easy climbing and teaching lead climbing. They were more than up to the job in all cases.

At 1kg a pair, they are not light. They are almost 25% heavier than my normal approach shoe. I certainly noticed the difference when they were clipped onto the back of my harness.

Our thanks to Salewa, Haglofs and Five Ten for providing shoes.

BookReviews

By Tomo Thompson

Let's Go Climbing Colin Kirkus

Kirkus wrote this book in 1939, and it was published in '41. The Wellington bomber that Kirkus was a navigator on in 1942 failed to return from a raid and was lost over the North Sea. Kirkus left two indelible marks on British mountaineering; a magnificent series of rock climbs, and this unique guide to the skills and techniques required for the art and craft of climbing. It ought to be sufficient in a review of a climbing book to simply state that Joe Brown and Don Whillans have both referenced the book as being hugely influential to them. Well if it's good enough for them

Imagine you had a father or grandfather that was a very very talented climber and that they had written you a "how to" guide to climbing in a caring, approachable, hand-on-the-shoulder style. A book that paired advice with anecdote and practical application, and was very easy to read. If you have such a relative then you're very lucky; if not then Kirkus has written one for you. Colin Wells described Kirkus's writing style as " delivered with a warmly paternal reassurance which would make the parents of any middle-class 1940s schoolchild happy to send their adorable little bunny off to tackle the Eigerwand" !!!

Anyone interested in the evolution of climbing in Britain will find the book of interest. The current reprints of the book from around 2004 carry several pages of warnings about how some of the techniques and systems in the book are outdated. Indeed the drive for republishing the book was as a historical narrative rather than a modern instructional book. Hopefully, when you read about belaying without karabiners, or putting nails through your climbing boots you'll appreciate that a few things have moved on since the thirties.

There are copies of this book on the web for a mere £2. Any discerning climbers bookshelf isn't complete without it.

Punk In The Gym Andy Pollitt

Once upon a time there was breeches

woollen socks and fibre pile jackets in climbing. Then along came Pollitt. All lycra tights, Hollywood looks, vests, fags and the ability to establish and repeat some of the hardest routes in the 80's and 90's.

Like many a climber, Pollitt's story begins with a chance encounter with climbing through a school teacher. Hooked, like many, it began to take over his life, and then became his life. This book, more so than many climbing biographies of that era, dives as deeply in to the "human cost" of the climbing as well as the prowess of being among the very very best of his generation. As an analysis of just what it takes to be that good, the book pulls no punches. The self-doubt, the depression, the drinking, the womanising, the injuries, and bigger and bigger run-outs in life as well as on the rock.

The "inside story" of his early repeats of outstanding routes like The Bells The Bells! On North Stack Wall, as well as his own routes like The Hollow Man (E8 at Gogarath) and Knockin' on Heavens Door on Curbar (given E9 and described as "desperate" and "high in the grade") are here in detail. I will recommend the book, massively. I won't spoil the ending however. Forty four days spread over three visits on a route located on the other side of the world is really quite some commitment.

One of the very best biographies of the era. Available at discount to AMA members from Vertebrate Publishing (see AMA website members area for details).

Make or Break (Don't let climbing injuries dictate your success) Dave Macleod

"Getting strong is easy, getting strong without getting injured is hard" - Wolfgang Gullich

In an interview about the book with UKC, Dave wrote the following; "Basically I want to help other climbers enjoy their climbing. I set out to write the book on how to maintain your body as a lifelong athlete that I wish I'd had when I was 16. I'd certainly have climbed a lot more and harder if I'd had it. Receiving all of the feedback I've had from 9 out of 10, I get reminded every day that knowledge I've gained the hard way over 20 years can be so effectively spread through the medium of books. Specific and reliable knowledge on how to deal with climbing injuries is very hard to come by. With the internet, there is more poor quality, non-specific and downright dangerous advice that you could ever trawl through. It's pretty ironic that the information you really need (the high quality scientific research) is largely hidden behind a paywall unless you are part of an academic institution....So the book is a shortcut to getting the key information from the cutting edge of research out to the climbers who are suffering the injuries."

So, if that doesn't persuade you to buy it nowt will. I wonder, had Dave had all of this information 20 years ago, how much harder

than already being one of the very best all rounders in the world, he would have become.

I bumped in to Dave, and his wife Claire (who designed the book), at the Fort William Mountain Festival this past winter. Declaring myself to be a book reviewer of international repute, (ahem !!!) they kindly mailed me a review copy. At that time, and indeed since late '15, I had / have been suffering from _____ elbow (insert any one of 50+ diagnoses that I have been given over this time. I flicked through the book and this quote jumped out at me;

"For every complex problem, there is an answer which is clear, simple and wrong" - H.L. Mencken

Suffice to say my elbow is much improved (not totally better) by following the advice in the book. Dave is a climber, NOT a medical practitioner, but this book, founded on over two decades of his own experience, study (at MSc level) and understanding of climbing injuries has helped me more, and I believe will be of more use to climbers, than a lot of the routine medical and physiotherapy interventions. The book is at times difficult to read (take your time), and at £29 it isn't cheap. However what price would you put on not being able to climb for months or years, and battling with dead end advice and tens of metres of "new injury taping techniques" every month? Buy the book before you are injured, and also visit DaveMacleod.com which continues to be amongst the most articulate, intelligent and inspiring blogs in climbing.

Kiss or Kill Mark Twight

This isn't new. This isn't like every other book. This isn't very palatable. This isn't meant to be. Have a visit to marktwight.com to get a gist of the man. You can buy this book from him at gymjones.com (and also see what became of this exceptionally driven alpinist).

The original book was a collection of some 24 articles that Twight wrote between 1985 and 2000. This book is the 2001 appended version in which Twight adds a (then current) authors note to the articles.

Some people still recount the extremes that Ron Fawcett went to (on British rock) as one of the first to fully embrace training as a pathway to climbing brilliance. Twight did a similar single-minded obsession in training for alpinism. Few doubt that he took it a very very long way indeed. A difficult, jarring, challenging read.

"Twight's punk-fueled writing put the soul back in to climbing literature" - Will Gadd



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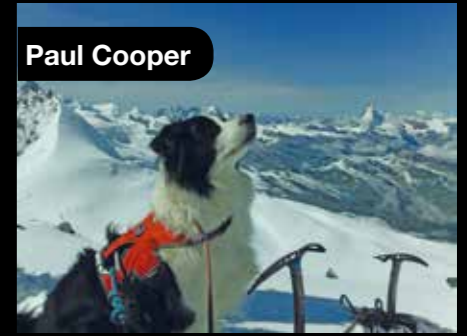


PHOTO COMPETITION

This is your chance to be both rich and famous!

Submit your favourite mountaineering photograph along with credits (Who, where, when?) for the famous part, and, if chosen as the best submitted in the edition you'll get £100, £75 or £50 for your trouble. Ok, so not quite the rich part but it's a weekend in Llanberis or a slap up meal!

(Photos should be the highest quality possible (not less than 2Mb) and e-mailed to the editor, along with a credit and caption) journal@armymountaineer.org.uk



Introduction

Ice Climbing

Course

Six days of challenge and adventure by a mixed team of four Senior Cadets and two Cadet Adult instructors. Arrived safe and well in Rjukan after a very long day travelling.

LOWER GORGE

My first step into ice climbing on steep ground today was awesome, it really took my climbing back to basics and made me focus on my footwork and personal movement skills during the climb. The climbing area today was in 'Lower Gorge' which is under the Vermork Bridge. The area is famous for 'Heroes of Telemark' and the daring commando raid on the hydroelectric plant in the Second World War.

The temperature today was a cool -10c at the start of the day which made for a brisk start, but nicely warmed to -8c as the day went on!! The gorge itself never gets any sunlight between October and March, so whilst we could see the sun shining on the hills, we never actually benefitted from feeling the heat, apart from the heat we generated from the work needed to ensure our axes and crampons would bite into the ice!!

After a short but demanding walk down the gorge we reached our first two climbs. The ice varied from bullet hard, into which a crampon point would barely penetrate, and soft snow ice which swallowed the whole axe pick. Our key lessons from the day included trying different clothing systems, our first taste of hot aches in our hands resulting from gripping our ice tools too tight and seeing how the crampons and picks best bite into the ice. We also learned not to look up when you hear the shout "ice" and how to eat frozen bananas during lunch.

The evening was spent refreshing our rope work skills so that the climbing flowed more smoothly and we had a presentation on winter mountain hazards so that we were armed with the knowledge to be self-sufficient in the very cold environment.

OZZIMOSIS

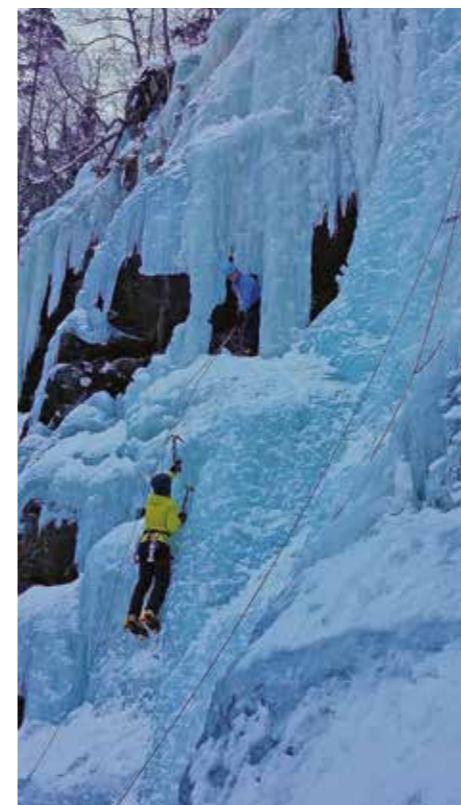
Day two in the big brother hostel! The initial plan was to head up the valley to Krokan which was quickly ditched when we discovered that it was Baltic with an air temp of -11c with a ferocious biting wind sending it even lower! A second plan was quickly hatched and we decided to jump back into the vehicles and descend down the valley to an area called Ozzimosis which was much more sheltered. The three main routes today were Skruéis WI3, Anakje WI3 and an unknown route at roughly WI2, where Mike did a perfect demonstration of how to re-fit a crampon whilst climbing!! The focus of the day was really about climbing on steeper ground and honing the skills learnt, particularly footwork and organising ropes etc. The view from the top of the climbs was awesome, being able to see back down the Rjukan valley.

Highlights of the day included belaying from a cave.

BOLGEN

This was our big multi-pitch day on two big water falls, and it did prove to be a true. adventure.

The more experienced team managed to get down by 4.30pm having climbed a popular and famous route called Bolgen (WI3), the cadet team's descended in the dark using torchlight. This was a test of endurance for the cadets as they had to focus fully on



their rope work and be an active part of each rope team in order to descend to the valley in a reasonable time although it resulted in a long day out.

The two ice falls climbed today were contrasting in that Bolgen was narrow in places with areas of very steep arm pumping ice whilst the cadet teams climbed a shallower angle icefall which allowed them to focus on the six pitches of multi pitch climbing.

The day was topped off by heading straight to the restaurant for some well-earned food. Everyone happily tucked into the meal and reminisced about the adventures.

Bolgen WI3 (4 pitches)
Kvitaa WI2 (6 pitches)

LOWER GORGE

A great day climbing in the lower gorge, taking in a couple of much shorter routes after the previous days long tiring day. That said, the routes climbed were still physically testing with the cadets starting to be far more proactive in organising ropes and belay points without being prompted. One route was still climbed in three pitches which honed the additional skills learnt from the previous day. Russ managed to complete his first lead on ice, taking in the final pitch on Knerton. The feeling of being let off the security of the top rope being in place really did test me and made me think about the basics of climbing on ice.

The cadets enjoyed filming each other and generally having a much more relaxed day.

LP Platter WI3
Curstruta WI3
Knerton WI3

UPPER GORGE AND VERMORK BRIDGE

Nedre Svingfoss WI3
Vermok Brufoss Ost WI4
Host WI4
Deuterium WI3

Today saw the team descend into the upper gorge which has a real atmosphere to it as you are in a wide rocky fissure cutting through the valley with steep rock and ice on either side. It is also the scene of numerous world class ice routes which has visitors from around the world coming to do. The routes were all in top condition and allowed the team to jump onto some quality ice from the word go. Being in the gorge allowed the team to watch other climbers on more serious route's including one called Saboteurfossen. All teams started on a pleasant winter ice 3 route called Nedre Svingfoss. The teams then went various ways with WI 4 routes being climbed well by teams today including VermorkBrukfos Ost and Host. The day was topped off by the cadets organising a lovely evening meal in the hostel, we even had candles.

KROKAN

Kjokkentrappe WI4
Unknown Pillar WI4
Various unknown route's WI3

The story of the day was to allow everyone to push themselves that little bit further, all teams showed some courage on some winter ice 3/4 routes which had some very steep sections, a notable route was an unknown route, which included a fully formed ice pillar. This route made climbers consider their foot placements more and also using the hooks already in the pillar. Tisha did an interesting move leaving her ice axe hanging in the ice, whilst falling off! She then had to pull herself back up using just one hand and super girl powers!

Two cadets successfully completed their first ever lead on winter ice, which was a fantastic testament to their own perseverance and skill. Angus said that the experience was totally different to being on a top rope and really channelled his skill set.

This expedition was so much fun due to the people who were there experiencing this type of adventure. The memories will last for a long time and friendships will continue. "This was one of the most enjoyable learning experiences ever had" said Hannah. Comfort zones got pushed to new levels and cadets learnt more about themselves on this course than on many others.



Mount Kenya

By Baz Whale

‘Boss, I have packed a set+ of wires and a full set of offset wires. 4 x 8ft slings and 1 x 16ft sling. 8 x extendable runners and 2 x short runners. A handful of Krabs and most of my BD Cams. 2 x 50m 8.3mm half ropes. I have a lightweight down sleeping bag. A down jacket and a lightweight warm jacket. As well as a lightweight set of gortex and gloves! Also my approach shoes and boots. I have 2 x maps. A guide book and contacts in Kenya. I’m sure I am well over weight but don’t care. Will give you an update when I can. See you out there!’

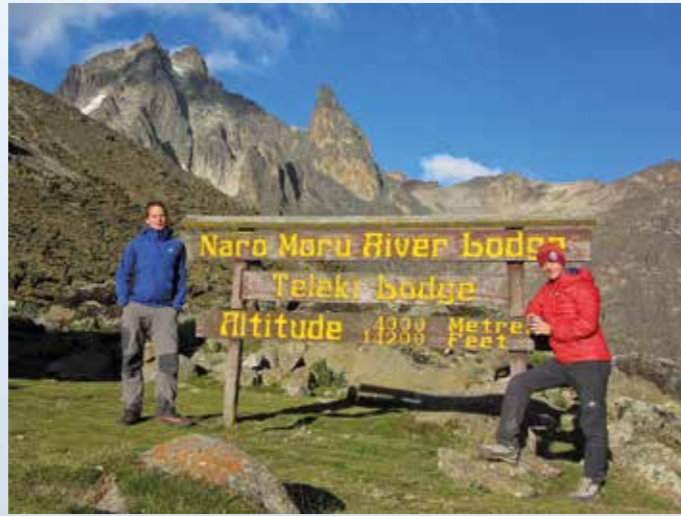
Rewind a couple of months. When I found out 1 R Irish were supporting 2 Rifles Ex Askari Storm I was straight on the blower to Tony Dixon to facilitate our own trip climbing on Mount Kenya after the LF.

With no JSATFA in place we both knew we would have to put our hands in our own pocket. What the hell we were already in Kenya!! So whilst Tony was finishing the CALFEX off I busied myself with the frustrating task of trying to get local Beta on conditions and routes on the Mountain.

Jenny from the Mountain Club of Kenya (Facebook) was a great help with putting me in touch with Tom, Julian and Polly who run www.africanascents.com. A Mountaineering Company specialising in tailored trips to climb Bation and Nelion on Mount Kenya. Whilst indulging in local coffee Tom spent some time clarifying the route into the Park and also clarity on the climb itself and where to find the abseil stations. This was all to prove a valuable steer as we were entering unguided and there are many horror stories of climbers getting lost and some having an epic retreating off the Mountain.

A point to make at this stage is that the locals will tell you that you have to take guides and porters with you into the Park. Abiding by this we hired a porter to stay on side with the locals. The requirement to take porters and guides is nonsense but a useful commodity for carrying some of the heavier load.

A few days on Tony returned from the CALFEX and we got straight into packing kit well into the night. We had decided to walk in on the Naro Moru route. The quickest route in with most ascent and



climb only Nelion as we didn’t have axes and crampons for Bation as well. We got dropped off the following morning at the Mount Kenya National Park Gate and after a quick bluff to get a cheaper rate with the guards we began walking the first 9km. The Kenyans all tell you to go ‘Polepole’ which translates as slowly, slowly. This being due to the altitude normally kicking some westerner’s ass. So that is exactly what Tony and I did. The track through the rainforest allowed us to chew the fat and discuss our thoughts and concerns about the Mountain.

Early in the afternoon we arrived at the Metrological Centre (3,400 meters ish) more than glad that there was no more walking for the day. I can safely say we were both astonished to find the huts there well-furnished and that two of the well-known BATUK staff were there, Rick Lynch and Tam Lyndsey. They were attempting a fleeting trip trekking up to Point Lenana (4,979 meters) before both being posted. The point is they had a whole team supporting them. This Tony and I chuckled about until that evening we salivated in envy as they tucked into a candle lit three course fresh roast chicken dinner with Regimental music being played. Needless to say Tony and I scurried off and made the most of our ORP.

Awaken after a comfortable night’s sleep by monkeys dancing on the roof and attempting to break into our hut like the Hatton Garden thief’s we were up and eager. The second day marked the longest day and the most amount of ascent. So again ‘polepole’ we stepped off. The first hour was steep but initially chilly. A ground frost in the lush green rain forest served as a reminder of



the altitude. Once clear of the trees we trudged through some bog and were able glean a quick view of our inspiring surroundings. The strange tropical like plants that you can read about were everywhere in this bizarre terrain. Kind of a cross between being in Scotland then open heath/grassland then some hot boulder field. Needless to say it took us just shy of 4 hours to reach Mackinder’s Camp at 4,300 meters and we only walked 11km thereabouts.

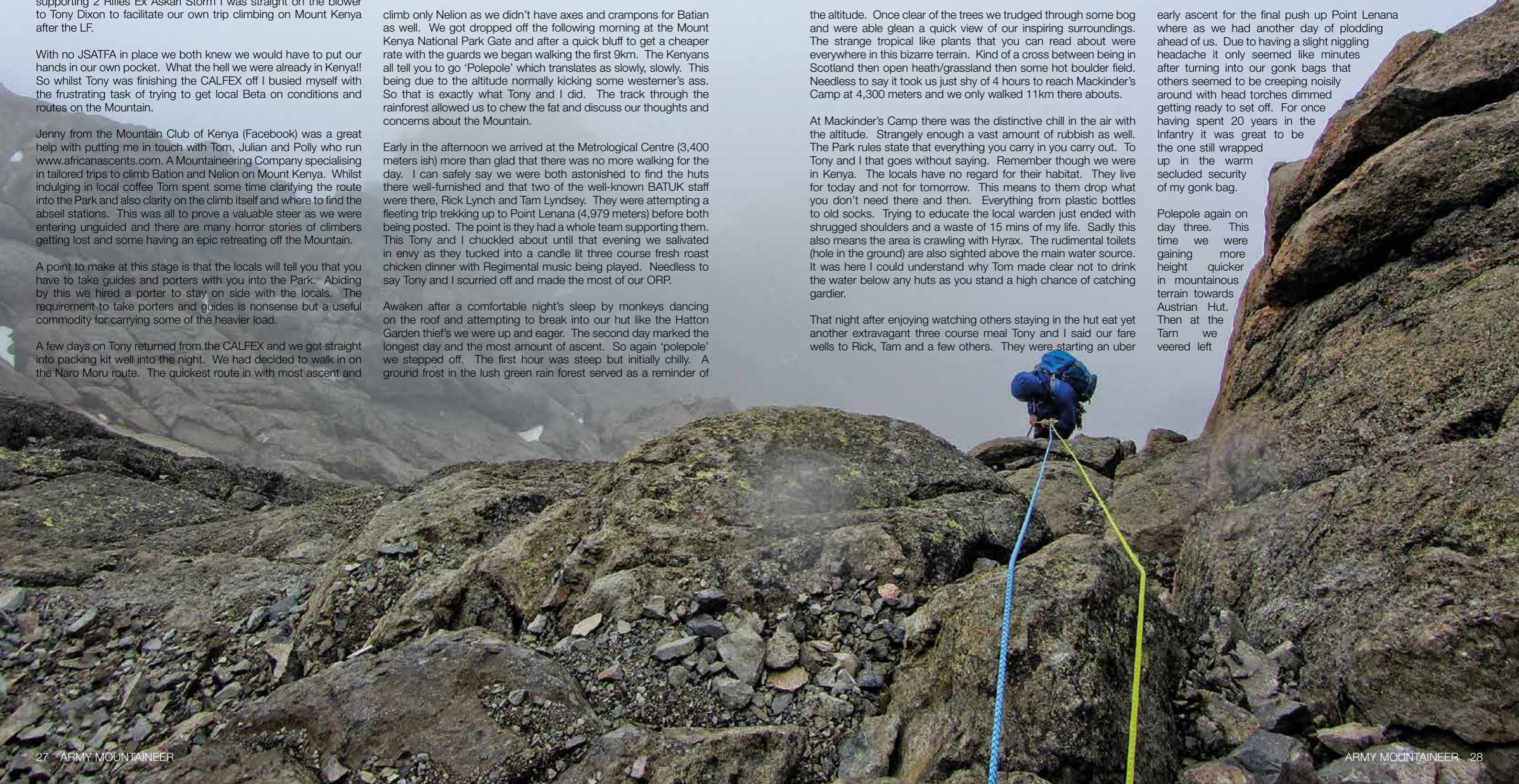
At Mackinder’s Camp there was the distinctive chill in the air with the altitude. Strangely enough a vast amount of rubbish as well. The Park rules state that everything you carry in you carry out. To Tony and I that goes without saying. Remember though we were in Kenya. The locals have no regard for their habitat. They live for today and not for tomorrow. This means to them drop what you don’t need there and then. Everything from plastic bottles to old socks. Trying to educate the local warden just ended with shrugged shoulders and a waste of 15 mins of my life. Sadly this also means the area is crawling with Hyrax. The rudimentary toilets (hole in the ground) are also sighted above the main water source. It was here I could understand why Tom made clear not to drink the water below any huts as you stand a high chance of catching gardier.

That night after enjoying watching others staying in the hut eat yet another extravagant three course meal Tony and I said our farewells to Rick, Tam and a few others. They were starting an uber



early ascent for the final push up Point Lenana where as we had another day of plodding ahead of us. Due to having a slight niggling headache it only seemed like minutes after turning into our gonk bags that others seemed to be creeping noisily around with head torches dimmed getting ready to set off. For once having spent 20 years in the Infantry it was great to be the one still wrapped up in the warm secluded security of my gonk bag.

Polepole again on day three. This time we were gaining more height quicker in mountainous terrain towards Austrian Hut. Then at the Tarn we veered left



towards Point John and up through striking boulders, moraines and scree slopes. It took a few hours of fighting up through the boulders to finally pass the ever shrinking Lewis Glacier on our right and find ourselves staring at the base of the 'Normal Route'. Reality kicked in. The weather was changeable of every ten minutes and the steep silent lure of the rock seemed almost imposing. We sat and discussed where we thought the route lie and my concerns of route finding were pretty evident. Still we were here. It was early afternoon and we decided to strike camp in the rocks 20 meters below. The wind was noticeably fresh and there were flurries of snow from time to time. Now remember we came to Kenya on exercise so were not massively equipped. Tony set straight to melting snow for water whilst I had a chance to crow it and build up the walls of our bivi at 4,700 meters. It didn't take long before it was raining then pelting us with snow. By now both of us were zoned out like we were on our first ever exercise in training. The act of doing anything seemed pointless now. Plus every ten paces we took had us blowing out our backsides. Early that evening we had laid the ropes out to give us some insulation from the freezing rock. A couple of paracetamol, a mouth full of water and a fight to get undressed and into our bivi bags in Olympic timings saw us get 12 hours of fairly comfortable rest despite the snow ice and wind doing its best to disturb us. At this stage the weather was making it doubtful as to would we even tie on to ropes tomorrow.

The faint glow of daylight creeping over Point Lenana gave way to an incredible change in the weather. We were on. We hurriedly packed and raced to the base of the route. Helmet on. Gear up and away we went. By 0715 we had already completed the first three pitches. Fairly straight forward and pleasant climbing across jug fested holds gave way to the odd slightly more trickier move. Never more than about HS in grade. Despite many saying the route was difficult to find I have to disagree. The route just when in doubt always seems to have tat or a rusty peg tucked away giving you insight to the next pitch. Then all of a sudden the hut on the ridge at about halfway jumps out of nowhere. We hit it on our 8th pitch. Immediately above the hut stands Mackinder's Gendarme. It's from here the route gets a bit trickier. You cross over the ridge and into the lee of the North side of the Nelion. There are substantial snow patches here that need to be manoeuvred around. Of course now the temperature drops, the snow kicks in again and our friend the wind has a go to. The crux pitch goes apparently



at about VS and I have to agree when you can't feel your fingers. A steep section involving some good foot movement (not my best as an amputee) up some thin cracks now leaves you high up and exposed to the traverse. This section is reported to freak a lot of unwary climbers out as they stare straight down to the base of the amphitheatre. Fortunately now it was raining consistently and our view was obscured by dense cloud. Tony made light work of what I would say was another VS pitch on wet rock around 5,000 meters. This time as I swung into the belay to lead off the rock became friable and somewhat chossy in places. Still despite the wet we pressed on and ran it out. It took just another 2 pitches to reach the summit of Nelion at 5,188 meters. It had taken us just over 5 hours to climb the route and the only disappointment was we had no view from our achievement. It had warmed up but the cloud had not dissipated. No quicker had we taken a few snaps at the bivi shelter we were off back climbing the last pitch to the first of many abseil stations.

Stepping off the ledge into the cloud over a huge headwall whilst attached by a single bolt at well over 5,000 meters is not something I have done before. This one made my bum flinch. It also set the president for more of the remaining abseils. A point to note now is that it is very easy to lose the ab stations which we did. We scrambled around a fair bit and even did some down climbing before using some tat. Then all of a sudden we hit the stations again and painfully continued to the ground.

We hit the ground at about 1600 hours that day and were ecstatic about the achievement. A slow and painfully achy walk back down to Mackinder's Hut allowed us both to reflect on where we had been. Neither of us had bivied that high before and certainly never climbed that high before. I had been struggling with the lack of appetite at altitude but found myself tucking into a host of ORP. The realisation as well that I am an amputee and that great adventure can still be had overwhelmed me that night. Although not for long as the exhaustion kicked in I soon found myself fast asleep with no headache any more. Sometimes you just need to go and have these adventures. Tony and I are very grateful to 2 Rifles who without the support in Kenya would have meant we would not have had the opportunity to climb an African Giant!!!!



Fact File...



Entry to Mount Kenya National Park is expensive unless you can get your hands on a British Army Training Unit Kenya (BATUK) residency letter. It makes a big difference to the cost as highlighted below.

Entry

US \$90 a day without a residency letter.

KSH 1,000 a day with a residency letter (£6.80)

Don't pay for more than 4 x days KSH 4,100 because if the weather is poor and you walk out you don't get any refunds. You can pay the additional costs when you exit.

Hut Fees

You can camp for a considerable cheaper option. But the huts will make it a lot more comfortable. We paid KSH 10,000 (£68) each for 1 x night at the Metrological Huts. Then 2 x nights at Mackinder's Hut. Different huts attract different fees.

Porters & Guides

Porters will cost you around KSH 20,000 upwards for a 5 day trip. KSH 40,000 with food supplied. This will include their hut fees.

Guides will cost you anything from US \$600 to guide you on the route only (African Ascents with certified equipment/ropes) to KSH 30-40,000 with the locals (racks resemble something from the 1980's).

For guiding I recommend www.africanascents.com

If you only require porters then Solomon is BATUK's contact on +254 0723087042

Climbing Equipment

An Alpine rack will see you through fine for the Normal Route. We had too much gear. If I went again I would take:

- 2 x 50 meter half ropes
- 1 x set of nuts
- 6 x Cams
- 4 x 8ft slings
- 2 x prussuks
- A nut key each
- 6 x Karabiners
- Belay device each

Guide Books & Mapping

There is only one 1,50:000 map of the Park. It is useful for planning. We had no real cause to use it. You just head to the big Mountain in front of you.

There are two guidebooks in existence. Neither gives much modern detail about the route. Hence talking to Tom at African Ascents was more than useful.

The Mountain Club of Kenya Guide to Mount Kenya and Kilimanjaro – Several editions (mine was the 1998 latest version)

Kilimanjaro and East Africa – has some fairly good topos worth photocopying

Insurance

We paid £96 for ten days cover through Dog Tag. This included being at high altitude above 5,000 meters in the cover. Tropic Air who also work for BATUK are the company who fly helicopters at altitude if something goes wrong in Kenya. I wouldn't want to test them.

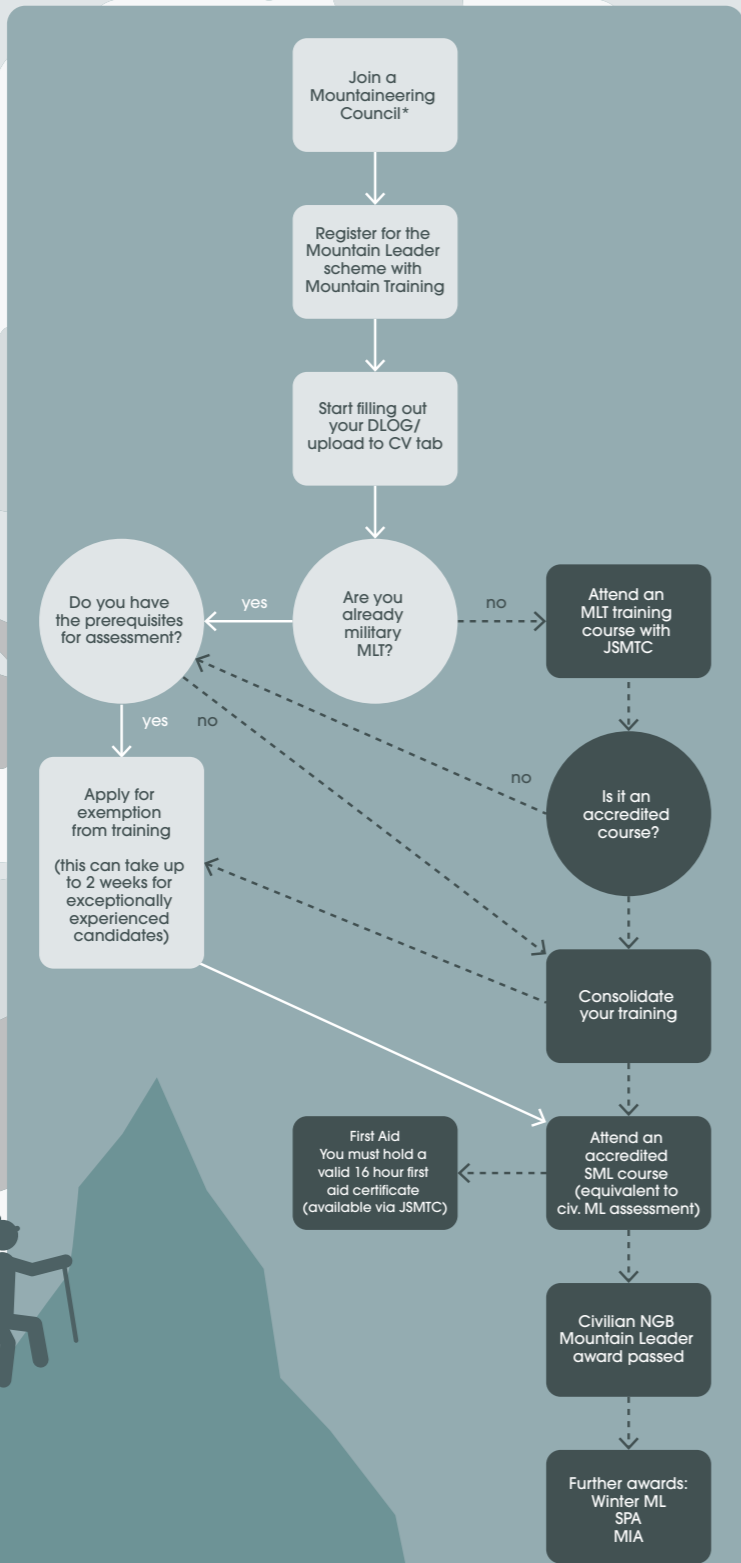
Park Details

All information is subject to who you speak to at the time. You can seek more beta at www.kws.go.ke or email marketing@kws.go.ke

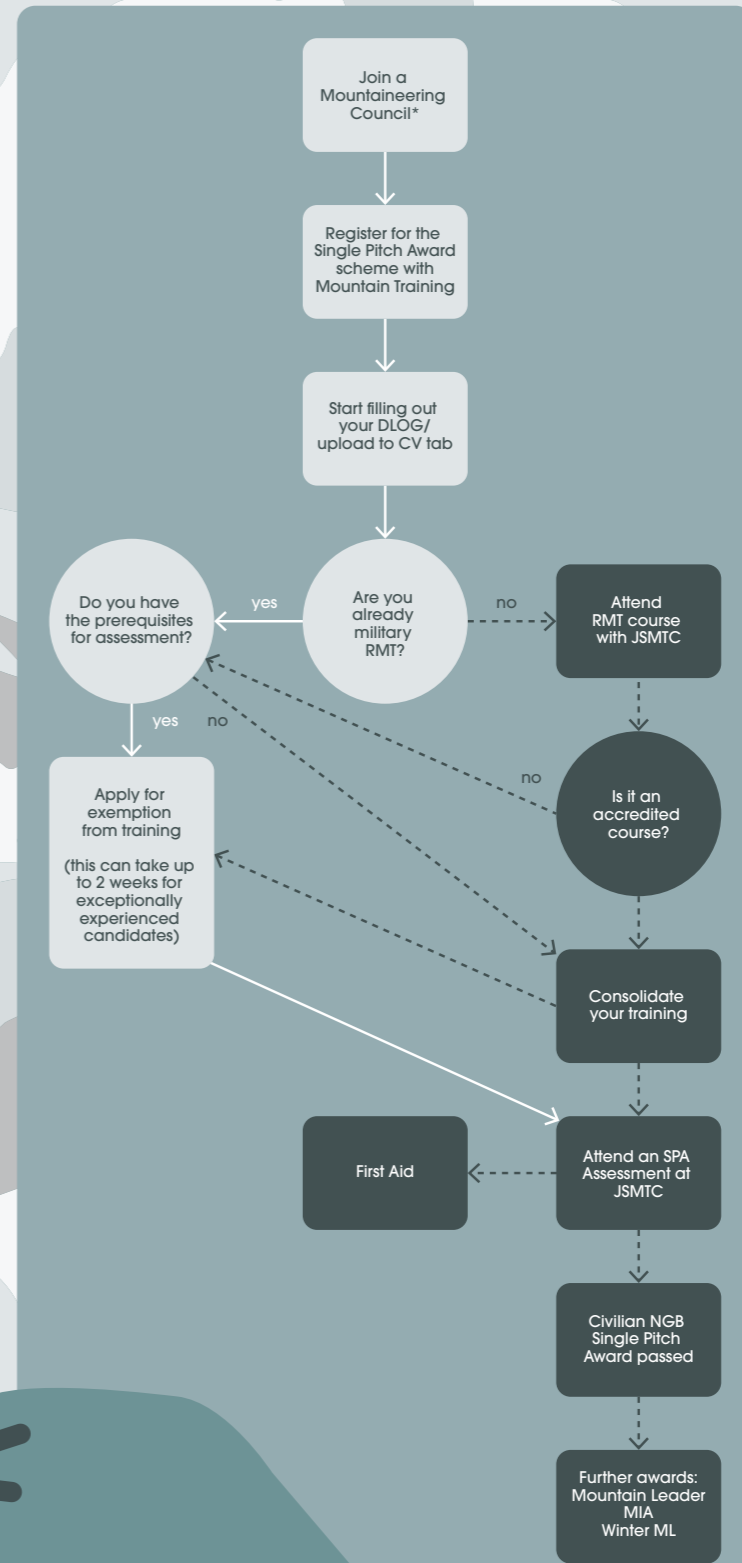




MOUNTAIN LEADER



SINGLE PITCH AWARD



MONEY
Consider using Standard Learning Credits to assist with costs. Registering with Mountain Training before MLT will significantly reduce the cost.

*Or an affiliated club. For example the climbing section of the Army Mountaineering Association, the Royal Air Force Mountaineering Association or the Royal Navy/Royal Marine Mountaineering Association are affiliated to the British Mountaineering Council.



MONEY
Consider using Standard Learning Credits to assist with costs. Registering with Mountain Training before RMT will significantly reduce the cost.

*Or an affiliated club. For example the climbing section of the Army Mountaineering Association, the Royal Air Force Mountaineering Association or the Royal Navy/Royal Marine Mountaineering Association are affiliated to the British Mountaineering Council.



Advanced Scottish scrambles

– 6 of the best routes

By James Roddie

The hills of the Scottish Highlands are some of the best in Europe on which to learn the skills required for high-end scrambling. Learning to move quickly but safely over steep and exposed ground can take time, and the Highlands contain endless scrambling routes suitable for learning to cope with many difficulties and types of terrain. Becoming proficient at scrambling is an essential step towards bigger things such as Alpine mountaineering. Reaching many of Europe's higher summits involves long sections of scrambling which must be completed rapidly to leave enough time for more difficult climbing or glacier crossings.

The routes I have highlighted here present a varied set of outings, and in some cases the boundaries between scrambling and climbing are blurred. I have made few references to the use of a rope, as it is up to individual teams to judge how much rope-work, if any, is appropriate for their ability and the conditions found on the day.

Scrambling is potentially a dangerous activity, but it is also one of the most enjoyable ways to experience the hills, with



Suilven Traverse

a feeling of uninhibited freedom that is hard to find elsewhere.

The Traverse of Suilven – Grade 3 – Assynt

Assynt, Inverpollaidh and Coigach form a world-class mountainscape - a jigsaw of abrupt peaks and sparkling lochs that helped form humanity's understanding of geological time. Suilven forms the centrepiece of this peerless area. This, the full traverse of Britain's most unlikely-looking hill, is one of the great ridge scrambles of the Highlands. It has not gained the fearsome reputation of An Teallach or Liathach, yet it is a similarly serious undertaking - with stiff exposure and hard scrambling in a remote location.

The route – Head east from Bealach Mor first. A path ascends in the direction of Meall Meadhonach before a notch is met in the ridge with an optional Grade 3 wall on the other side. A section of broad, level ridge comes next and an impressive view opens up towards the main ascent of Meall Meadhonach. Descend steeply towards another notch and follow a track up through boulders on the other side. The track now ends at a steep band of rock which cannot be avoided, and you must be comfortable with down-climbing this on the return trip. Climb up towards a block resting on a ledge, and then traverse left to an awkward move up right. Above this, move right to a hollow 'tower' and climb up steeply just to the right of this to reach easy ground. The broad, flat summit leads to another deep notch. Trend left up loose



Coire Lagan

ledges to reach the top of Meall Bheag. Return the entire route to Bealach Mor. From here the summit of Caisteal Liath can be easily reached in a few minutes.

The Coire Lagan Round – Grade 3/ Diff **** – Isle of Skye

One of the finest mountaineering days in the UK, the Coire Lagan Round offers continuous interest and superb scrambling over one of the best sections of the Cuillin Ridge. It involves a wide variety of terrain and requires a broad skill-set to complete safely – from abseiling to highly exposed arete climbing. However all of the most difficult pitches can be by-passed to make this an easier, but no less worthwhile route.

The route – From the top of The Great Stone Shoot, climb the short South-East Ridge of Sgurr Alasdair to the summit. Reverse this back to top of the Shoot and climb a steep wall to gain the South Ridge of Sgurr Thearlaich. Descending the North Ridge brings you to the complicated descent into the Bealach MhicCoinnich. The most natural line down the ridge brings you to an abseil, but this is avoidable via a Moderate-graded by-pass on the western side of the ridge. From the Bealach take the superb Collie's Ledge, and double-back onto the second Munro summit of the day. Descend the north ridge of Sgurr MhicCoinnich quite easily, and again you are faced with two options. An Stac Direct can be avoided via scree and slabby ground to the left, but tackling it head-on is one of the highlights of the Round. Steep Moderate climbing on good holds brings you to the view of the finale - the Inaccessible Pinnacle. This can be easily avoided if necessary. Climb the extremely exposed East Ridge for the climax of the whole Round. A 20m abseil from a chain at the top takes you off the "In-Pinn" onto easy ground. Descend via the West Ridge of Sgurr Dearg back to Glen Brittle.

Allt Moin' a' Chriathair (Grade 2/3) Lochcarron

Gorge scrambling is quite a strange discipline - sometimes more akin to caving than mountaineering. Often almost every hold you use will be wet, slimy, sloping or loose, and you may have to pull on roots and vegetation to pass obstacles. These are all things that would usually denote a poor quality route, yet with gorge scrambling they are part of the appeal. This route is a lengthy outing that features both enclosed gorges and open scrambling up mountain waterfalls. It is a very wet outing even during a dry spell and should avoided after heavy rain. Whilst easily escapable in several places, tackling it as directly as possible will ensure a challenging trip and a test of your sure-footedness. Take a midglenet and prepare to get a thorough soaking.

The route – the route begins as an attractive stream enclosed by trees. The first cascade is soon reached – an easy-angled fall which



Allt Moin' a' Chriathair

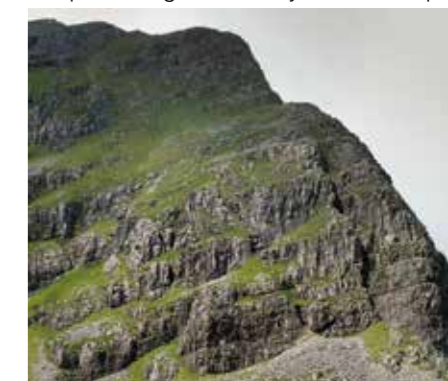
requires delicate moves to climb. At the top of the fall comes an easy section followed by a number of small cascades. All of these are probably climbable at varying degrees of difficulty but at least two have to be avoided by traversing above and around. Another long easy section follows, but there are still many deep pools that have to be carefully traversed around. A more pronounced gorge comes next. Enter this via a careful traverse on the left to reach a sloping shelf, and then cross the stream to another ledge. Two more falls follow before the gorge opens out and the route becomes far more open. A large cascade coming in from the left signals the start of more sustained scrambling – climb this via a wall on the right and continue up a rib to the top of the fall. A section of flat slabs runs along the stream above this and it is a short walk to two more big falls, again climbed via their right sides. Further easy scrambling leads to Loch Moin' a' Chriathair.

Raeburn's Buttress, Sgurr Ruadh (Grade 3/Difficult) – Lochcarron

A route belonging to a different era. The mountain areas in this part of the west coast are defined by soaring buttresses of sandstone and quartzite, many of which are classic winter climbs but less frequently climbed in summer. Raeburn's Buttress has retained an exploratory atmosphere as it is

often ignored in favour of more well-known climbs on other nearby mountains. It forms an impressive line that dominates the view throughout Coire Lair, and promises a memorable adventure on a face that you'll almost certainly have to yourself.

The route – If the lower wall of the buttress is climbed the route overall gets a grade of Difficult, but the climbing at this grade is short-lived and the rest is scrambling (the lower wall can be by-passed via a gully to the left to make the route Grade 3 overall). Start at the left-hand side of the steep wall. The first few moves to get established on this pitch are the hardest on the entire route, and it can be hard to find the best line. Climb steeply for 20m to a terrace below another steep section. A ramp trending left takes you to the top of



Raeburn's Buttress

this, and the route now becomes easier. However loose holds and vegetation are now an issue so don't let your guard down. A steepening leads to a section of walking along a grassy ridge, after which you are confronted by a number of rocky towers. The line of least resistance is fairly obvious throughout, but be prepared to occasionally pull on heather. The final tower is the most intimidating of the bunch and makes an exciting finale before easy ground leads towards the summit of Sgorr Ruadh.

Pygmy Ridge (Moderate) – Cairngorm

Scrambles in the Cairngorms are limited, but those that do exist are usually on superb granite and offer a different style of scrambling to most routes in the Western Highlands. Pygmy Ridge is one of the best easy mountaineering routes in the area and proves memorable despite its short length. For a longer outing, combine it with Afterthought Arete on Stag Rocks which is of similar quality and difficulty.

The route – The first few metres of the ridge are the steepest on the route and this would usually be climbed as a 25m roped pitch. Climb straight up the middle of the first wall on excellent granite holds, or further right for a slightly more difficult start. After a few metres, trend left and continue up the wall to a comfortable stance. Above this taking a line on the left is slightly easier and the ridge starts to level out. Be careful of loose blocks here especially in the first few months after the winter. Two very small pinnacles come next before a tower that is best climbed from the right, then the route is over all too soon.

North Buttress (Stob Dearg) - Aonach Eagach enchainment (Moderate) Glencoe

The link-up of two great Glencoe classics. Taken individually, either of these routes are a worthy objective for a full day. Climbing them back-to-back in one go however is a challenge only for extremely fit and



Aonach Eagach

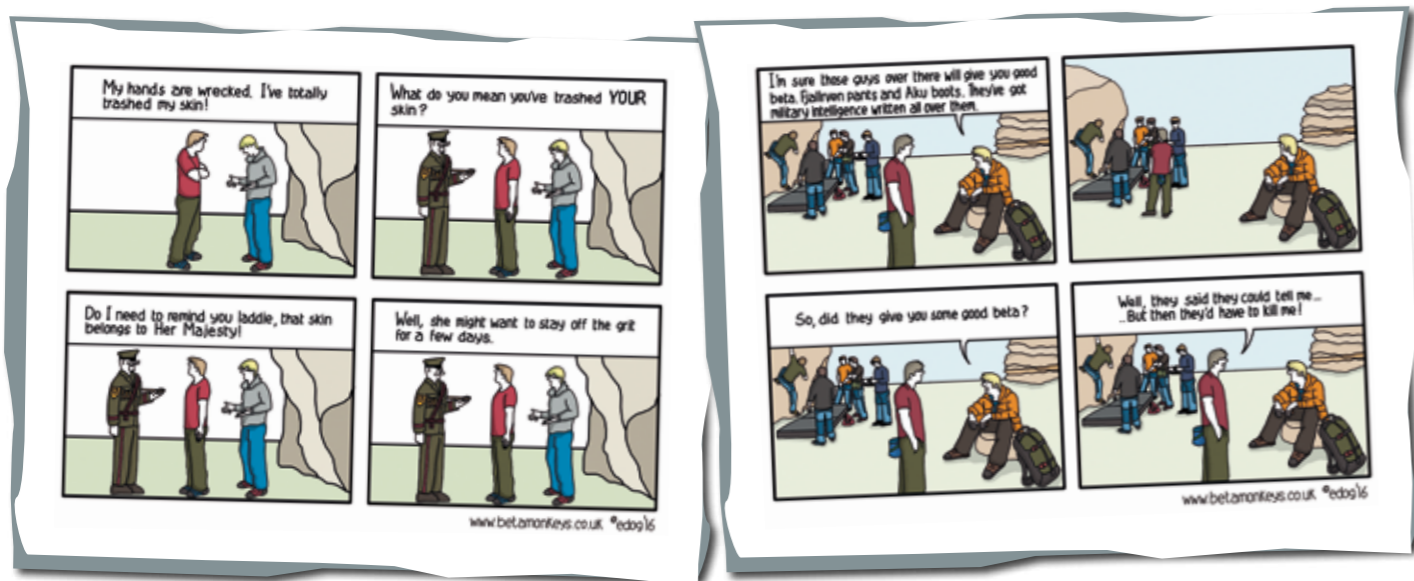
proficient scramblers, with a combined ascent of almost 2000m. You should be confident soloing Moderate-graded ground to attempt this enchainment. Driving between Stob Dearg and the start of the Aonach Eagach avoids a lengthy section of walking.

The routes

North Buttress (Moderate), Stob Dearg
On the climber's track beneath the cliffs of Stob Dearg, aim for two prominent boulders on the skyline. From here, start heading up the broad lower section of North Buttress towards an obvious line of chimneys above. The chimneys are all steep and many teams will decide to climb these in roped pitches. However in general the holds are very positive and the route finding is quite easy. Near the top of the line of chimneys, take an obvious break out right to easier ground that leads to the summit of Stob Dearg. Descend down Coire na Tulaich to the car and drive to the car park beneath Am Bodach for the start of the Aonach Eagach.

Aonach Eagach (Grade 2)

A ridge scramble too long and complex to describe in detail. It is important to state that there is no safe descent off the ridge after Am Bodach until you reach Sgurr nam Fiannaich, and in no circumstances should this be attempted. A steep down-climb from Am Bodach's summit proves an abrupt start to the scrambling. An easy section leads to a chimney which signals the start of the hardest scrambling. The 'Crazy Pinnacles' are narrow with gaping exposure, but don't attempt to outflank them by paths on either side - instead climb them directly. The best line is polished so therefore quite obvious. There are several down-climbs on the ridge which can be intimidating but they are never hard. Once on Sgurr nam Fiannaich do not descend the Clachaig Gully path to the glen. It is loose and unstable and has been the scene of numerous casualties. Instead, descend easily to the north west and find the well used Pap of Glencoe path. If you can, hitch a lift along the road back to the base of Am Bodach, or 'enjoy' a walk of several miles back to your car.



kit on trial

DMM Dragon 2 Cam Review

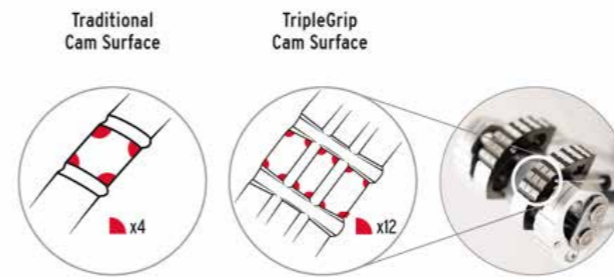
By Ryan Lang

I first reviewed the original DMM Dragon Cam in August 2013, the performance resulted in me buying the whole set. I have been happily using these ever since and have never looked back. DMM kindly provided me a sample of the new Dragon 2 Cam in September last year to review.

What's new?

The most obvious change is the thicker Cam lobes which has increased the surface contact area on the rock. The devil is in the detail, as this change has also increased the amount of corners by a factor of 3. It is the corners that bite into the rock, therefore it stands to reason if there are more corners, there should be more grip.

There is also a new raw aluminium finish on the Dragon 2. The reason being that the anodised finish on the original Dragon is less grippy. This will explain why I was advised to scratch the anodised finish off the original Dragon before use.



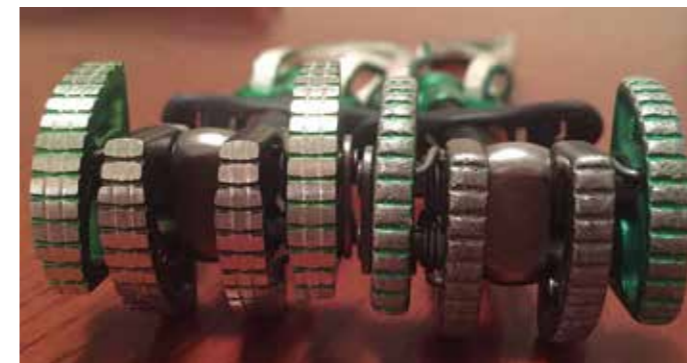
According to DMM the triple grip Cam lobes give increased holding power and torsional rigidity plus reduced 'walking'.

The next change that I noticed is the alteration of the thumb press. It has been made bigger and the grooves are deeper. According to DMM this will provide increased grip which should prevent fumbling and make first time placements easier to achieve.

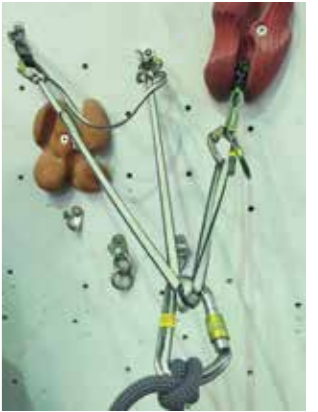
The last change that I noticed was the stitching of the dyneema sling. The Dragon 2 has more compact stitching and less heat shrink. This is to make re-racking of the Cams, quicker and easier.

How did it perform?

I began testing the Dragon 2 against the Dragon at ground level. I placed both Cams in numerous gear placements to see if there was any difference in holding power and walking.



I have never had any issue with placing the original Cam and was always confident that they would hold in the event of a fall. Once I had placed the Dragon 2 in the same placements, I immediately noticed that the grip was a lot more positive. I always give a Cam placement a couple of light tugs in the direction of fall just to check the seating. The Dragon 2 seemed to bite into the rock more than its predecessor and gave the impression that it was a more solid placement.



It was hard to test whether the amount of walking of the Dragon 2 was reduced, but due to the more positive bite, it would make complete sense that it would walk less.

From a psychological perspective, when I was climbing above a Cam, I was slightly happier knowing that it was the Dragon 2 below me. During the trial I carried both the Dragon and Dragon 2 in size 2. I found myself placing the Dragon 2 by default first, even if it was harder to access from my harness (I carried one Cam on each side).

I decided that the best way to test the thumb press was to conduct a blind test. Therefore I chose a Cam at random from behind my back with my eyes closed and mimicked placing it above my head at full reach. I then did the same test with the remaining Cam and then made a note of which Cam had the best thumb grip. Neither felt better or grippier. I think the only way to make the grip significantly better would be to have a knurled finish rather than grooves. However I don't recall my thumb ever slipping from the thumb grip when trying to place it. Perhaps this is a non-issue?

I found the Dragon 2 Cam easier not only to re-rack, but also to extend for initial use. The dyneema sling joint is 2.5cm shorter than before, but the sling loop is the same length. This means that there is 10% more sling to work with when trying to extend it or re-rack it.

Summary

The Dragon Cam is a great device to begin with, so the fact that DMM have managed to improve upon the original is great. I am really impressed with the extra grip provided with the aluminium finish, wider lobes and extra bite points. The improved dyneema sling also makes the Cam easier to use. There is nothing wrong with the original Dragon Cam, I still happily use them. If you are about to purchase new Cams, either the Dragon or Dragon 2 will be more than sufficient for your needs. If money isn't the deciding factor, I would recommend the Dragon 2.



Getting your Head into Gear

By Dr Rebecca Williams

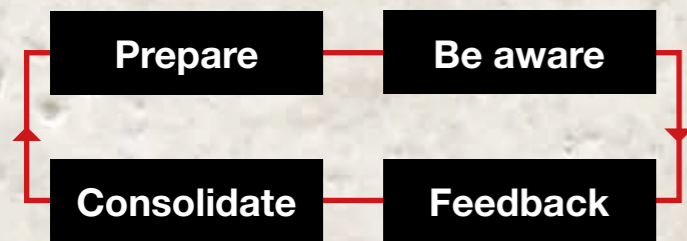
Blinking our way out of winter hibernation and hopefully emerging with a honed sense of excitement and expectation, many climbers will be thinking: 'This is it! This will be my Season.' A magical six months between April and October, where it feels like we might, we just might, make our climbing dreams a tangible reality.

Bodies and souls may be itching for some real rock after what's been one of the coldest winters for years, but brains must be re-ignited and engaged if we are to climb to our fullest ability. In this new series, I'll be bringing in principles from cognitive-behavioural therapy and mindfulness, as well as hypnotherapeutic techniques, together with demystifying some of the sports psychology literature and distilling it all into practical exercises for you to try at the crag.

To help train your brain to enhance your climbing - it's a muscle that needs exercising just like your fore-arms - we'll be working through a simple cycle.

The Cycle

As you step outside this spring you need to pay attention to these four critical elements:



Setting Your Intentions...

Prepare

Spending time visualising 'real rock' will pay dividends. Brains can get a little rusty, so kick-start it by seeing, thinking, drinking in rock and routes. This includes reading articles, guides and books, walking under crags, spying out boulders, gazing at inspiring pictures.

Set your goals, and be sure to elaborate these away from merely say 'Cemetery Gates' to something richer such as 'to go for an early morning lead on Cemetery Gates, feeling fit, focused and alert, with a partner I trust, ready to flow over the rock and see what unfolds.' Can you see it, taste it, smell it and dream about it?

Be Aware

How will you tiptoe towards your goal? What skills do you need to work on? What techniques, moves, gear placements and rock types? What are your weaknesses? These are all important questions to ask yourself.

Envisage how you will develop concentration and focus on the rock, tuning in to how your body moves. Become aware of self-talk and autopilot phrases that may have limited you on past climbs. Become aware of when and how you drifted out of the present and into mental dialogue. Your belayer is a valuable asset in this, as they will have often noticed tension or habits before you become aware of them.

Brain Stretch

To warm up your mind before a climb, begin by warming the body with some easy traversing or an easy route. Focus your attention into your body - start by feeling the feet, each movement, each sensation, breathe into you feet. Work up to your centre of gravity, your hips, again feeling each sensation and breathing into the centre of gravity. Repeat through the hands, particularly mindful of over-gripping and finally the face, where we often hold tension through grimacing, gritting teeth or frowning. If you find it difficult to keep your awareness within your body, try climbing very slowly and absolutely silently, so not even a foot-fall is heard as you traverse sloth-like in a continuous graceful fashion.

Consolidate

Your plan should be to start with routes that aren't too challenging; focusing on how you climb them, the here-and-now rather than thinking too far ahead, how gear is placed etc. all in minute detail. Imagine how you are going to tune in to the movement of muscles, spending time consolidating technical skills, improving weaknesses, or working on your dream route's specific types of move on similar routes.

Feedback

Elaborate your past successes and analyse but do not dwell on what didn't work. Focus instead on solutions and on seeing all the little things you did do well. Plan to focus your energies this season on what you wish to feed and grow. The intention is not to self-criticise.

When Climbing...

Prepare

Warm up! Your brain needs to warm up as much as your body, yet so few climbers spend enough time on this vital part of the day. Attend to the route, spend time visualising it, spot your rests and gear, even on climbs you know well or which won't challenge you. Practice within your comfort zone what will need to be automatic when you have left it. Make sure your belayer understands what it is you need from them for this route.

Be aware

Become aware of your pre-climb routines. Are they helpful to you, aiding the process of tuning in? Notice whether your attention wanders mid-climb. Practice 'locating' different parts of your body with your mind - where is your weight? Which muscle is most tense? Being able to direct our awareness to exactly where we want it is a skill that takes time to learn.

Consolidate

Focus on the process, develop routines and habits that keep your mind in the HERE AND NOW. Practice re-anchoring yourself in your body and the rock when your attention wanders (as it inevitably will).

Feedback

Review the day's climbing in video-journalism detail. This will help you develop planning, sequencing and visualisation skills, in addition to reinforcing a positive mindset. Keep a logbook perhaps and remember success is found not only in completing a route but also in each well-executed move, each carefully constructed belay, and in the shared moments of inspiration found within wild landscapes.

Climbing Smarter ...top tips!



1 Understand that although you think you need to be stronger and fitter, you are probably already climbing nowhere near your ability. Working on technique and tactics will stand you in good stead longer term, and takes longer to change. Start those skills now, fitness can come later.

2 Everyone gets anxious and that's totally normal - you're in a very small category of unreactive nervous systems if you don't! We are programmed to keep ourselves safe by being wary when up high. Our monkey brains haven't yet realized that nuts and ropes can keep us safe. Trying to rationalize your way out of fear won't work - monkeys aren't logical! Accept that you get nervous and then work on managing the symptoms of nerves (usually breathing, muscle tension and rushing).

3 The only question you ever need to ask yourself is, can I get to that first piece of gear? If you can, then you can try the route, regardless of grade. Too many people limit themselves by not trying routes because they are 'too hard'. If you've never climbed F7a, how do you know you can't make the moves, and how will you ever learn?

4 Avoidance is the biggest problem most of us have. We avoid moves and styles of climbing that we don't like. We avoid situations that make us feel nervous. We avoid climbing in front of people. We want to avoid feeling any fear. If you can identify and break down your avoidance, you will progress in leaps and bounds.

5 Similarly, be patient. Many climbers undo hard work by leaping up the grades too fast to allow time to consolidate, or try taking big whippers to tackle a fear of falling. Think high volumes of small steps. One hundred severes are better than 5 VS's. Twenty, two inch falls are better than two, twenty footers.

6 Break routes down. You'll have done this with long runs, long tours, long expeditions. Do it with routes too. If you focus too much on the top or the crux, you'll mess up lower down and rush at the end, knocking your confidence.

7 Anxiety plays havoc with our focus and concentration, and all of a sudden instead of pushing down into our feet we are having a mental conversation with ourselves about whether or not that piece of gear is going to hold. You haven't yet fallen off, so focus on what's happening now, not what might happen in the future - after all, that's the surest way to not fall!

8 Fundamentally, we are all slightly lazy and want to get better quickly. There really is no short cut I'm afraid - mental skills take the same amount of practice (if not more) than technical skills. Spending time visualizing routes and problems, working on perfecting your technique on easy stuff, practicing focus and concentration is never time wasted. Build it into your climbing sessions at the venues you climb at for the best results. If you're not sure how to visualize, ask someone to video you and watch it back to help you get going, or reverse a problem using the exact sequence you used to get up it. Both will help you get the hang of mind's eye practice.

9 If you are involved in an accident and you find yourself struggling to get back to climbing at your best, seek help. You might be suffering from some Post Traumatic Stress, or simply have a heightened level of anxiety which would benefit from a systematic approach.

10 Don't forget to have fun! Isn't that why we all started climbing in the first place? Being too achievement focused, where it's all about the ticks, will soon drain your motivation. Focus instead on the process of climbing - the pleasure in moving over rock fluidly, having a good crack and some friendly competition at the bouldering wall, the amazing situations and views that open up as you ascend that arête. The summits will happen by themselves if you focus on journey to them.

Black and White Thinking

Climbers tend to be very achievement and completion orientated and research has shown that this trait can result in what's called black and white thinking. This means seeing things in an all-or-nothing kind of way, quite a punitive way to view our performance, as only absolute success or total failure with no in-between. Try instead to appreciate all the nuances of your performance, notice the single moves or links you perform well, thereby not reducing a climb to a simple tick in a guidebook. This will provide you with much more realistic and helpful feedback, as well as maintaining your motivation to climb.

Wye Valley

Climbing Meet 2015

By Ryan Lang

This is the fourth year in a row that I have arranged the Wye Valley climbing meet. Year 1 had great weather, Year 2 and 3 had rain on at least one day. Therefore I was starting to think that Wye Valley in October may not be the best time to run the meet. However in for a penny, in for a pound, I arranged the 4th meet as it had now become a habit. I am glad I did as the weather was great for both days! 17 people arrived at the Olde Ferrie Inn throughout the evening, each grabbing a bed, some dinner and a few beers, not necessarily in that order. As I booked people in I realised that I had 2 Pauls, 2 Matts and 2 Ryans within the group. Mental note to self, I had to make sure that they were not in the same group the next day otherwise it could get just a little confusing!

The Saturday morning began with the usual Olde Ferrie Inn full English breakfast, which was more than enough to keep everyone fuelled for the day ahead. Although this year we decided to be sociable and have breakfast at 0900, giving everyone a lie-in and also allowing the sun to burn off what was left of the mist. After the safety brief, everyone was paired up with an instructor for day. The novices worked with Paul Smith (author of Top Tips for Climbing Coaches) and the rest of the group climbed with the various levels of JSAT qualified instructors.

In our group there was Daz, Liz, John and I. We climbed as two pairs and did, Snoozin Suzie (VDiff), Golden Fleece (HSevere), Vertigo(Severe) and Joyce's Route (Severe).

The other groups spread themselves out along all the routes that Symonds Yat has to offer, whilst the novices group spent the day at Plump Hill quarry under the guidance of Paul.

In the late afternoon, most opted to get back to the bar and have a few beers whilst watching the Rugby World Cup. A 3 course dinner was served for all at 1900, no-one attempted a man v food competition this year, therefore Al Kirk is still the reigning champion from 2014! Dinner was followed by a few more beers in an attempt to secure a good nights sleep over the various snorers that introduced themselves the night before.

The Sunday saw most of us head down to Wintours Leap so that we could make the most of the dry rock and many multi-pitch routes on offer. Liz, Ryan (2) and I opted to climb the classic 2 star Central Rib Route 1. Due to the time we finished breakfast then drove to the crag, we opted to climb the route with daysacks, therefore allowing us to top out and head back to the cars.

During the 4 pitch route we covered belay building and stance management. Prize of the day goes to Daz for picking a route where the crux was all the bushes he had to fight through to get to each belay! Paul and his group progressed onto lead climbing in a multi-pitch environment.

All in all the weekend was a success thanks to the instructors, students and weather. Did I say at the start of this article that the Wye Valley in October may not be the best venue? Oops, the 2016 meet has already been arranged!



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Winter meet 2016

By Sean Mackey

February 2016 saw my second go at organising a Winter Meet for the association. After difficult conditions last year on the west coast we decided to relocate to the more stable weather of the east coast and stay in Rothiemurcus Lodge. We were not disappointed and we were extremely lucky with improving weather over the week- by Wednesday we had bright sunshine with little wind, which stayed over the final few days.

Every trip I have made to the highlands has always been done while closely monitoring the weather conditions and avalanche risk. Many trips had been thwarted by Mother Nature and the avalanche risk is an ever present danger. This year, however, while the avalanche risk did rule out some north facing slopes everyone made the most of the perfect weather while they could. Each day saw a mixture of activities and many different objectives with a very climbing focused group of members eager to get out and push themselves in the mountains. After several last minute cancellations and no shows we had 11 enthusiastic people ready to make the most of these Scottish conditions. The banter and craic in the bunkhouse was constant and there was anticipation in the air of what the week would bring.

The first day was mixed and we experienced the worst weather of the week. Everyone stayed pretty close to home and took advantage of being right at the northern entrance of the Larig Ghru.

Normally if you want to walk into this area it's over a hour of soul destroying woods and paths before reaching the entrance to the huge valley. Staying in Rothiemurcus Lodge did have its benefits and reduced the time to a few minutes. Duncan Francis took Matt Chapman and Ian Campbell (in a questionable Royal Engineers knitted hat) on the technical and delicate Central Gully (III) on Lurchers Crag-a short hour walk in from Rothiemurcus Lodge. The remaining numbers went for a wander towards Breariaich (1296m) before being turned back by winds gusting upto 60mph only a couple of hundred metres short of the summit. In the end the Mountain Café in Aviemore took an awful lot of money off the Breariaich group in tea and cake.

The following day saw an improvement in weather and more was subsequently achieved. Chris Dowd, Martin South and I walked into Coire an t-Sneachda and climbed Jacobs Edge (I/II). Conservatively there were probably 15 groups all fighting for the same routes on the 'honey pot' that is the Mess of Pottage. Duncan Francis and his group wisely walked into Coire an Lochain and went up The Vent (III) which was full of fantastic fat ice. Vic Reeves also took the longer walk into Lochain with Liz Dallyn to climb The Milkyway (IV 4). Meanwhile Brendan Caris took a walking group up Bynack More (1090m) and clocked up quite an impressive 25+km distance!

Unfortunately Paul Cooper had his bags lost by the airline he flew to Scotland with and his first day on the mountain wasn't until Tuesday, with Paul and I following Chris Dowd and Martin South up Hidden Chimney (II/III); A lovely route with an exciting final pitch. Vic Reeves took a group to Lurchers Crag and climbed Central Gully (III) that Duncan had done a few days before. Brendan with



Ron and Matt went around the beautiful Coire an t-Sneachda horseshoe via the ever popular Fiacail Ridge (I).

Wednesday was a beautiful day and Duncan took Matt and Ian off to learn to lead climb on the classic instructional venue of Twin Ribs (I), which they both stated was the highlight of the week for them! I took Paul and Joe Robertson into Coire an Lochain to climb The Ventilator (II/III). Unusually we were the only group out and had the entire crag to ourselves for the whole day. With a slightly challenging upper section and serious spindrift on the rock face we soon forgot the ordeal after topping out onto bright sunshine on the plateau with an amazing, crystal clear view across the Cairngorm range.

The final day saw group scatter all over the Cairngorms. Chris Dowd and Martin South had a final fling on the Mess of Pottage and climbed Hidden Chimney Direct (IV 4). Paul Cooper and group spent a considerable time walking along the bottom of Lurchers



Crag trying to find their route in a white out. Others simply walked into Aviemore and potted around the plethora of outdoor shops and cafes.

On Friday the group dispersed to start the long journey home. Some did stay and continue to climb for the remaining weekend ascending Haston Line (III 4), The Slant (II) and Hidden Chimney (II/III) on the Mess of Pottage and also summits of Cairngorm in clear, bright blue skies.

The meet was successful due to the instructors who gave their time to help, instruct and guide others on the trip. The job of organising the meet is always fraught with the fear that there will not be enough winter qualified personnel to take out of less experienced members. Special thanks to Duncan Francis, Brendan Caris, Paul Cooper and Chris Dowd who worked tirelessly to ensure everyone achieved what they wanted to over the week and give some very personal and individual training (much of the time on a one to one basis).

If you are interested in attending next year please keep checking AMA website for details.



Lake District Meet

April 16 – By Ryan Lang

The Lake District meet was based in Threlkeld at the White Horse Inn pub. As far as I am aware, the AMA has never used this bunkhouse before, so there was no 'int' on its suitability. When I arrived after an epic 8 hour journey thanks to the M6, I was pleased to find a really pleasant pub that served great food and had a good range of ales. The bunkhouse was very swish compared to normal standards, there were even radiators in each room!

21 people turned up throughout the evening, one member even travelled all the way from Germany, very committed indeed! I have attended lots of meets in the last 4 years, it's always encouraging to see a group of strangers arrive, get acquainted over a beer, make plans together for the weekend, then depart having had a great time and made a few more friends. This meet was clearly from the same mould as the previous ones I had attended!

We had arranged to meet at 0900 on the Saturday for the safety brief before heading out. I'm glad I stayed in my van as by all accounts, some people started banging around in the kitchen at 0630 waking everyone else up in the process. Perhaps they couldn't sleep, couldn't tell the time or were just keen to get out for the day!

Once the brief was finished, the instructors amongst us found some willing volunteers to go walking, scrambling or climbing. We headed off in all directions, some ascended Sharp Edge on Blencathra, others went to the iconic Shepherds Crag in Borrowdale. I took Andy & Andy to scramble up Pike 'o' Stickle (Grade 3) in the Langdales. I have walked down the valley past the Pike on many occasions and always looked up in awe, so it was great to finally get up there and do it. The walk in is fairly steep, with a 350m ascent just to get to the start point. The scramble itself was enjoyable, with great views all the way up with the added bonus that the route finishes on the summit. After some self congratulation, we headed back into Langdale for a well deserved brew!

That evening we all enjoyed a pub meal together, which included the obligatory ale or two! The day's activities must have taken their toll as most were tucked up in bed way before last orders. That is a first for an AMA meet in recent memory!

The Sunday morning was quickly upon us together with a bit of snow. The majority of the group decided that walking was the preferred option, so off they went and bagged another QMD for the logbook. I had two keen members that wanted to go multi-pitch

climbing and learn about Trad climbing. We headed for Shepherds Crag (where else?) and began to climb Little Chamonix. The weather took a slight turn for the worse, so we abseiled off and ended the day by going through placing gear and building anchors.

All in all a great weekend was had by all. The bunkhouse has been added to the list of places where an AMA meet should be located due to the great facilities and location.

A final note is from Andy, who has recently joined the AMA. I asked him for his thoughts, here they are...

I finally got around to joining the AMA at the end of 2015 and rather than just using my membership for the discounts available to AMA members I realised the opportunities to get the quality mountain days I need before attending further courses at JSMT. I had already attended my SMF last year so thought that by joining the AMA, I would be able to get more experience. In my day job I have the 'privilege' of sitting next to Ryan Lang who has arranged a number of these events. To stop him nagging me I thought I'd see what they're all about and applied to attend the meet in the Lake District. It was a really simple process, I just filled out the form on the AMA website and transferred £20 to the AMA account. I arrived at the bunkhouse on the Friday evening after a pretty rubbish journey up the M6 to meet a friendly bunch of people both regular and reserivist all wanting to get a weekend of experience in lakes, whether that was climbing, scrambling or hillwalking. A couple of local ales and pub dinner was a necessity after the long drive. The following morning I was off for a days scrambling up the Pike 'o' Stickle under the guidance of Ryan. I have never attempted a grade 3 scramble, so it was all a learning experience. The weather and views made for a fantastic day in the hills. Then it was off back to the bunkhouse for a few more ales and another cracking pub meal.

Day two I joined the walking group and we set out for 'quick' 13 miles in which we experienced, snow, hail, rain, mist and bright sunshine. Another QMD logged it was time for the long drive back to Wiltshire. I have not been in the AMA for long but have already decided that attending future meets is a must. The only problem I have now is deciding which AMA event I will attend next. All in all I found the meet relaxed, beneficial and exceptional value. If you are a prospective meet applicant wondering whether to dip your toe in the water or not, I'd thoroughly recommend coming along.



Mountaineering Meet – Nov 15

By Ryan Lang

The North Wales meet was held 13-15 Nov, based in the ideally situated 'Bens Bunkhouse' at the foot of the iconic Llanberis pass. Sixteen keen members either hadn't looked at the weather forecast, or just didn't worry about it. We all turned up in dribs and drabs on the Friday evening apart from Liz and John. They were super keen and attended the Presidents dinner first at Sandhurst before embarking on the journey to Llanberis. I seem to remember being woken at approximately 0200 as they arrived, before drifting back to sleep to the sound of gale force winds and rain!

The next morning after breakfast and a brief, the groups all embarked on their chosen activity for the day. No climbing was to be had anywhere due to the rain, most opted to either go hill walking or scrambling. My group consisted of Rob, Martin and I decided to ascend Idwal Buttress (grade 2) which seen us top out in the hanging valley near the start of Cneifon Arête. We met up with the other team, guided by Matt Stygall, before descending down Seniors Gully.

The weather was atrocious, the rain and wind was amongst the very worse I had seen in N Wales. Standing up when we topped out was very difficult, we had to wait for momentary gaps in the wind before moving. I was soaked to the skin, whilst my two compatriots were bone dry! They were wearing Arcteryx Hardshells which uses Goretex, I was wearing my Jottnar Hardshell which uses Polartec Neoshell. At that moment I instantly decided that it was time to upgrade to Arcteryx and went to Joe Browns there and then and bought a new Arcteryx jacket, I haven't looked back since!

Everyone arrived back at the bunkhouse safe and sound after the adventures of the day. The drying room was put through its paces, I don't think another item could have been squeezed in by the time we all got back.

Up until now we have managed to use bunkhouses that are rather conveniently attached to pubs. This time we had no such luxury and had to fend for ourselves for evening meal. There were all sorts of shenanigans going on in the kitchen, everything from pot noodle, to gourmet cooking! Still, we all survived and no one had food poisoning!

The Sunday saw no change in the weather, so the vast majority made a bee line for the wall at Indy. Matt Stygall(BMG) ran an excellent group session in everything from correct belay technique to anchor construction. This got excellent feedback from all that attended. Daz and I were put through our paces by Matt in the afternoon who refreshed us in self rescue techniques. We covered everything from the stuck screwgate all the way through to traverse rescues!

The weekend saw everyone that attended, gain something, whether it was a QMD or learning some new skills. The location was absolutely perfect, even if the weather wasn't. As you will see from this article, there are not many outdoor pictures as people were wary about exposing their cameras to the elements!

By the time this goes to press, there will have been a further two meets arranged from the same venue, hopefully you will have seen them advertised or better still managed to attend!



The Gasherbrum Expedition 1996

10th July this year is the 20th Anniversary of the JS Expedition to Gasherbrum I (8047m) in 1996, itself exactly 20 years after the ascent of Everest by the AMA in 1976, and the first success on an 8,000m peak by the British Forces since that landmark climb. In recognition of this, a short summary of the Gasherbrum Expedition follows.

Gasherbrum I is the 11th highest mountain in the world, and it was chosen because it is a fine individual peak, offering a challenging route which involves some quite technical climbing at altitude, and also because it provided an opportunity to visit in the legendary Karakoram. The route selected was that via the Japanese Couloir, and a team of twelve climbers; 6 Army, 2 RN, 2 RM, and 2 RAF, without supporting Sherpas/ HA porters, and without supplementary oxygen, climbed it in 33 days, of which 6 were completely lost to bad weather.

There was also a junior team of ten, consisting of a leader (RAF) and deputy leader (Army, RE) and 8 novice climbers, 2 Army, 2 RN, 2 RAF and 2 Civilians. They ascended the Biafo Glacier to the Snow Lake, an extremely remote and little explored area, where they climbed several peaks and returned independently.

One striking feature of this expedition was that, while earlier AMA expeditions to the Himalayas had in part been voyages of discovery, with decisions on details of the route and how to climb it being made as the picture unfolded, the amount of information available

on Gasherbrum permitted advance planning at a level of detail that defined the exact route and location of every campsite, the contents of every load required for each camp, and the movement of personnel up and down the mountain, before ever leaving UK. While small variations were introduced on the day, this meant that, barring the weather, there were no real surprises, and this significantly detracted from the sense of adventure and challenge in the experience. I believe that this should be a consideration in the choosing of objectives for AMA expeditions, pushing leaders and members into reacting to circumstance and thinking on their feet.

That said, the performance of the team was outstanding, and the expedition ran like clockwork. In the final 36 hours of the climb, the summit party of 4, with 2 in support, started from Camp 2 at 6,400m, completed the ascent of the Japanese Couloir, established and occupied Camp 3 at 7,100m, continued to the summit at 8047m overnight arriving at 09.10, (having made a trail for Al Hinkes and 2 Spanish climbers to follow them up). They were back down in Camp 3 by 15.00, and carried on down to Camp 2 where they arrived at 20.00. Job done! Really, quite remarkable. These successful heroes were: John Doyle, Dan Carroll, Andy Hughes and Steve Hunt. Their supporters were Steve Wilson and John Watson. The expedition was led by Meryon Bridges, and the deputy leader was Steve Jackson, who went on to lead the successful JS expedition to Kanchenjunga, (8,586m) four years later (in which John Doyle again summited without use of supplementary oxygen).



Porters approaching Concordia, West face of Gasherbrum IV beyond



Gasherbrum I



Entering the Japanese Couloir



John, Andy, Dan and Steve on the summit of Gasherbrum I

AMA Waterproof Jacket Review

By Ryan Lang

Introduction

One of the first items that people tend to consider purchasing before they venture into the mountains is a hardshell waterproof jacket. This is where the confusion begins, as there is a huge selection available. Which manufacturer? Which material? How much should I spend are all common questions that are considered by most when looking for a suitable jacket. The aim of this article is to inform the reader of the performance of two jackets that were tested from different manufactures.

The panacea

Buying a waterproof is a bit like having an insurance policy in that you pay a lot of money for something you hope you never have to use, but if you do use it, you normally end up wishing you'd paid a bit more for better cover. So what is it that we all generally want from a waterproof jacket? Generally speaking we wish to stay completely dry when it rains, whilst remaining at a comfortable temperature. In other words, we want the best of both worlds, excellent waterproofness and excellent breathability. Now if this User Requirement was submitted to DE&S they would no doubt deliver us an umbrella! As great a solution as it is, I don't think it will catch on in the AMA!

How is the waterproofness measured?

All waterproof materials have a Hydrostatic Head rating, but what does this mean? The Hydrostatic Head (HH) is a way of measuring how waterproof a piece of fabric is.

The manufacturer will take a clear tube and clamp their material over the bottom end. They will then fill the tube slowly with water and watch to see how high the column of water can get before the material lets drips through. This test is also referred to as the water column test.

A Hydrostatic head rating of 2000mm means that the column of water was 2 metres (2000mm) tall before the material leaked. In real-world terms, where you have wind and gravity pushing rain into a fabric you will need a measurement of around 1000mm to resist

Arc'teryx AR Alpha

The AR Alpha is manufactured using two types of GORE-TEX® Pro material. It is mainly constructed with a lightweight N40p-X body and N80p-X reinforcements in the shoulders, forearms and cuffs. The N40p-X fabric means Nylon fabric with a 40 denier weave with exceptional durability to weight ratio. The N80p-X is the same except with 80 denier fabric. Arc'teryx state that the Alpha series of equipment is suitable for climbing and alpine focused activity, the AR means it is meant for All Year Round use.

Features

- Hydrostatic Head rating (HH) – 25,000
- Weight 385 Grams
- Helmet compatible hood
- Two external napoleon style pockets
- Internal pocket
- Pit zips
- Harness hemlock system
- Watertight Vislon front zip

light showers. Heavy rain and driving wind will create more pressure on the fabric and require a higher number of around 2000mm. For any fabric to be considered fully waterproof it must be able to withstand the pressure of a column of water 10,000mm high without leaking. This is classed as a hydrostatic head rating of 10,000.

How is breathability measured?

Breathability is the ability of a fabric to allow moisture vapour to be transmitted through the material. There are different ways of testing this value, and most manufacturers will opt for the test that puts their material in the best light! Therefore it is hard to compare this measurement between manufacturers. One unit of measurement provided is gr/m²/day. In other words the weight of moisture vapour in grams that has passed through a square meter of the fabric under test in a 24 hour period.

When you walk into a shop and ask the assistant what the breathability v waterproofness scores are for each jacket, don't be surprised if you get a blank look in return, most shop assistants won't know these off the top of their heads. What is important is to understand in general terms, the more waterproof a fabric is, the less breathable it is and vice versa.

Jackets under test

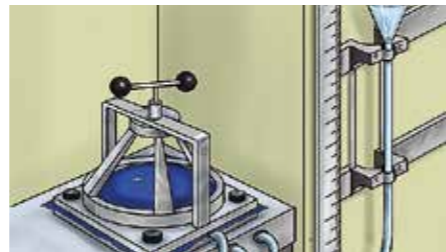
The two jackets under the spot light are the Arc'teryx AR Alpha which uses GORE-TEX Pro fabric and the Jottnar Bergilmir which uses Polartec NeoShell. Both jackets are deemed to be at the higher end of the market and are both similarly priced around the £450 mark.

Initial observations

When I first used the Alpha, I was impressed by how lightweight it was compared to others I have used. The fit was good and easily allowed me to wear my usual layers underneath. The jacket has underarm vent zips to allow some of the heat build up to escape.

The external chest pockets are a bit on the small side. They are just big enough to fit a full size laminated OS land ranger map inside, but it is a tight squeeze. The internal pocket can easily hold my iPhone 6 complete with a protective case, which is a relief, as I very rarely trust external pockets to keep electronic devices dry.

The helmet compatible hood was great and covered the helmet completely. The elastic adjusters were easy to adjust and stayed in position. The bottom adjusters also worked well. There are foam inserts that prevent the jacket sliding up past a harness when climbing.



Performance

I used the jacket for the first time in North Wales so that it could be properly tested against the elements. It performed remarkably well in heavy rain and I was bone dry! Even after months of use it still performs just as well as the first time it touched rain.

I was able to maintain a workable temperature when on the go and found that I hardly had to use the under arm vent zips to cool

Jottnar Bergilmir

The Bergilmir is constructed entirely using waterproof, breathable, 3 layer 80 denier Polartec NeoShell. Jottnar state the jacket delivers true softshell-like breathability and stretch with hardshell robustness in a mid-weight, fully waterproof package. It has been designed as a technical mountain hardshell for total protection and unmatched breathability in demanding conditions.

Features

- Hydrostatic Head rating (HH) – 10,000
- Weight 510 Grams (Medium)
- Helmet compatible hood
- Two external OS map compatible Napoleon style pockets
- Internal pocket
- Watertight Vislon front zip

Initial observations

When I first used the Bergilmir, I was immediately aware of how simple and clean cut it was. There are no bells and whistles, just the things that really matter. The fit is on the athletic side, but there was no issue in wearing my usual layers underneath. Whilst the helmet compatible hood fitted over my helmet (Petzl Meteor III), I found the elastic adjusters were annoyingly located on the inside of the hood which meant I had elastic trying to get inside my mouth all day long.

The external map pockets are excellent and can easily fit a full sized laminated OS land ranger map inside. The Bergilmir is one of the only jackets I have used where this is the case. The internal pocket can fit an iPhone 6 inside, but only if it's not in a protective case. I don't know of any mountaineers that use a phone that isn't protected, which makes this pocket rather useless.

The bottom draw cords which are used to adjust the jacket were easy to adjust with winter gloves, however I found that I was continually having to tighten them as they kept loosening off throughout the day.

Summary

Both jackets under test are similarly priced, but perform very differently due to the material used to make them. The Polartec NeoShell v GORE-TEX Pro debate has been going on for a while now and there are supporters in each camp.

From my perspective, the key requirement for a hardshell is that it must be waterproof. If it isn't, there is no point carrying it! GORETEX Pro is 2.5 times more waterproof than Polartec NeoShell, the figures speak for themselves. Breathability is nice to have, but its pointless being wet at the expense of breathability. Neoshell has been quoted as being 20-30% more breathable than GORE-TEX which is a significant difference. However if this difference is never realised, then it's a waste of time. For example, if I have to take a layer off whilst wearing GORE-TEX, I will almost certainly have to take a layer off when wearing NeoShell.

Ultimately, it will all come down to what activity you are doing and where you are doing it. If like me, you spend most of your spare time in the wet UK mountains and staying dry is a key requirement, GORETEX-Pro is the answer

down. The material appears to be fully windproof, as I couldn't feel the wind when I was only wearing a base layer underneath.

I have a very slight reservation about the robustness of the material, but this will be a matter of 'wait and see'. The jacket is manufactured with the heavier duty 80 denier material in the areas that receive the most abuse, so hopefully this fear is unfounded.

Performance

Again, North Wales was my chosen testing ground and I was initially happy with the performance, it kept me dry when it rained which is the main feature I was looking for. One thing that struck me straight away was that I could feel the wind through the jacket. The technical information for the jacket states that Polartec NeoShell allows air flow at a rate that is more than twice that of most other waterproof jackets. Air permeability seems to be a feature touted by NeoShell, but it did not appeal to me, as sometimes I choose to wear only a base layer underneath a hard shell. Feeling the wind cut straight through was less than ideal. I was able to wear layers when using the jacket, but this depended on what I was doing.

Once I had the jacket for a few months, I noticed that it seemed to wet out. It was on the North Wales meet in November 15 where things came to a head. Fair enough, the weather was atrocious, but I got soaked through which is not what I expected. The HH rating for the Bergilmir is 10,000, which means it should be fully waterproof, but it definitely wasn't! The other two people in the group were bone dry, they were wearing jackets manufactured with Goretex Pro material. It was at this point I started to doubt the effectiveness of Polartec NeoShell in very wet weather. This was a doubt I had confirmed later that day when I discussed the issue with others who have had the exact same problem with jackets from other manufacturers made with NeoShell.

My overall view of the Bergilmir is that it is made of the wrong material if you intend using it in wet UK weather. Perhaps in cold Alpine environments it will fair better, but as I don't go there often it's not the jacket for me. It was a costly mistake that I won't make again.

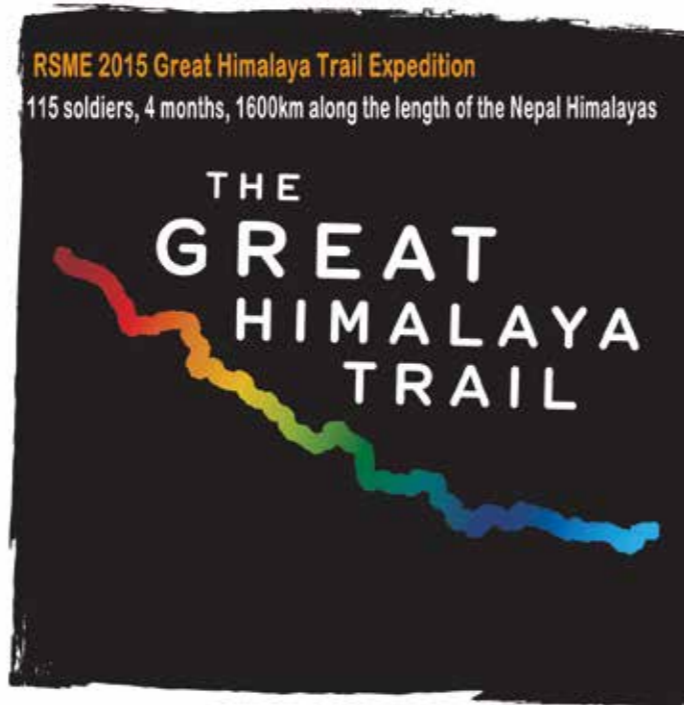


Exercise TIGER THULO TRAVERSE

Introduction – Maj Andy Gooch

Exercise TIGER THULO TRAVESRE (Ex TTT) set out to trek the 1600km length of the Nepalese Himalayas along a route called the Great Himalaya Trail (GHT). It was to follow in the footsteps of ex-Sapper Captain Doc McKerr who became the first person to trek the route solo, unsupported in 2013 in the incredible time of 66 days. This was to be a more sedate affair, but no less ambitious; 115 Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen from across the Royal School of Military Engineering (RSME) were to take 4 ½ months to complete the journey as a series of 8 sequential legs, each one led by a Regiment or Wing of the RMSE.

Legs 1 and 2 had great success and all was going well for Leg 3 when the catastrophic earthquake hit Nepal on 25 Apr 15 triggering an avalanche which injured 8 (4 x soldiers and 4 x Nepalese support staff) and tragically killed 2 of the Nepalese support team from Gurkha Adventures, the trekking company that has been involved from the start. This article aims to briefly cover the highs and low of what was achieved before the inevitable decision was made to cancel the remainder of the expedition and to show what can be achieved with forethought and planning.



Planning for the expedition began in September 2013 by first seeking Comdt RSME's buy-in and that of each of his Commanding Officers. The next hurdle was to secure a one of the slots for an AT expedition to Nepal in 2015 and a huge vote of thanks must go to the AT Desk Officers Maj (ret'd) Tony Phinn and Lt Col (ret'd) Dougie Peters in Support command and all the staff at Adventure Training Group (Army) for their support and encouragement. By late



Leg 1 - At the top of the Lumbha Samba Pass



Leg 1 - En route to Lumbha Samba pass - Near Cpls Jay Macfadyen and Paul Hudson far - Capt Ollie Wood RE and Tom Howe RE.

February 2015 all members had been identified and almost 100 were able to attend a 2 day training seminar at Gibraltar Barracks, Minley. With as much set in stone as possible, the Advanced Party of Leg 1 left the UK on 9 15 March 15 and departed Kathmandu on for the airstrip in the far east of the country at a place called Bhadrapur. This is where the story starts.

Leg 1, 3 RSME Regt. Kanchenjunga Base Camp – Tumlingtar – Capt Sarah Frost

The journey to the start of the trek was an experience in itself; a short mountainous flight from Kathmandu to Bhadrapur followed by a very bumpy bus ride to Taplejung before an equally exhilarating 4x4 ride Eastwards on some pretty hairy roads was a great start to our 4 week trek.. Although we were trekking the GHT in a Westwards direction we had a week's walk Eastwards to get to the start point of the trek itself, Kanchenjunga Base Camp (KBC).

The 5 day trek to Lhonak, the final settlement before KBC was long and strenuous with the effects of altitude and the cold being felt by all. The day after reaching Lonak was an early morning start in order to reach KBC (5143m) by mid-morning and despite all suffering from the effects of altitude all 14 members of the team made it to the foot of the world's third highest mountain and the start of the GHT proper.

Having retraced our steps back though Lonak, we turned West and prepared to cross the Lumbha Samba, (5159m), the highest part of this leg of the expedition. Two days before tackling the pass we were lucky to stay in a village where one of the porter's sisters lived and she put us up for the night after a miserably wet day. The opportunity to dry out and drink sweet tea was wonderful; a



Leg 1-Team in British Gurkhas Nepal at the start of the trek

good night's sleep was definitely required in preparation of the next couple of days.

The day we crossed the Lumbha Samba we had breakfast at 0300hrs and we then didn't stop for the next 12hrs. The early start was necessary to ensure the day was not spent sinking in the soft snow. An ascent of 1100m over mixed terrain proved difficult in some sections of the trail but all was worth the effort once the pass was reached in the late morning. Now all acclimatised, this walk was much more welcome than KBC; however fatigue had truly started to set in. The descent was not as straightforward as initially thought, with a couple of members taking a slide down the mountain. Thankfully the team all made it safely to their destination that day, Thudam; a small Sherpa town near a river where attracted quite the audience whilst eating our evening meal!

The group continued west to Hatiya when the decision was made to start the move south to Num. This was after a recon by the porters confirmed the high pass to Makalu was deemed impassable and the lower route to the Base Camp was also unsuitable for a large group due to the going and weather. The more the group descended the more there was to see. Villages appeared more frequently and were noticeably more developed, it was much greener with wildlife and a little easier on exhausted legs. 4x4 taxis were available for the final uphill stretch to Num and the next day to the airhead at Tumlingtar; the first day with phone reception and wifi which saw the end of interaction between the group members!

Leg 2, 1 RSME Regiment. Tumlingtar – Lukla

Leg 2 Overview

The ground covered by Leg 2 was the most technically demanding and toughest section of the GHT. It crosses 2 x 6100m+ passes that lie directly to the South of the World's 5th highest mountain, Makalu as well as crossing the infamous 5900m Amphu Laptsa Pass that links the Honghu Valley to the Solu Kumbu and the Everest Region. Due to the extreme height and unseasonably bad weather Leg 2 had a difficult time and a number of members of the team were evacuated with severe Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS). Despite this what they achieved was phenomenal and they became the first people this year to make the crossing of the 3 passes this year. Below are some memories of 3 of the youngest members of the Leg 2 team.

LCpl Sam Taylor and Spr Machpherson

Macpherson – When we first arrived at Kathmandu, we were all stunned by what the city was like. Motorbikes, little cars and people everywhere, coupled with the background noises; horns and power tools constantly sounding. Following the short journey through the city centre we arrived at British Gurkha Nepal (BGN),



Leg 2 High Camp before crossing the Sherpini Col



Leg 2 - Photo in BGN before leaving for Tumlingtar

which had a completely different atmosphere to the city centre. It was calm with fountains and well-kept gardens and it was very tidy

Taylor – We flew to Tumlingtar where we would spend our first night before starting our trek with a five hour journey by road into the mountains to the village of Num. The following day the heat and humidity in the jungle was incredible. As we progressed we reached the snow line and having only just broken the 3000m mark a few members of the group came down quickly with altitude sickness resulting in vomiting and some worrying changes in character. However, breaching the snow line in the Himalayas has got to be an experience I won't forget, partly due to the fact that I was wearing running shorts, trainers and a thermal top because of previously being in jungle conditions. It is fair to say I noticed the cold at that point.

Taylor – Early on we had to cross 4 x 4000m+ passes over extremely dangerous terrain and to add to this, bad

weather had recently caused a massive snow dump on the mountains above. The snowfall the night before made it very difficult to make out a clear path over the passes. Because of this myself and two other stronger members of the group volunteered to push forward of the main group and cut steps into the snow over the passes. I found this extremely challenging both physically and mentally. I really enjoyed the challenge of the day overall as this was exactly the type of thing I had hoped for on the trail. We all eventually made it to the teahouse and the next morning we woke to find snow leopard tracks around the teahouse. A few days later when we set off I felt different from the day before, this was to be the onset of altitude sickness. The first thing I noticed was the difference in my body rather than my mind-set. I felt strong enough to move at a good pace and wanted to, however no matter what I told my body to do I could not take more than just a few steps at a time. The next morning we set off to Makalu Base Camp and the headaches hit me hard. This was the point at which the decision was made to put me on medication as I was starting to retain water. We arrived at Makalu Base Camp to witness the most amazing scenery I have ever seen. Unfortunately this was to be the end of my trek as



Leg 2 - Enroute to Makalu Base Camp



Leg 2- At the top of the Sherpini Col - 6120m



Leg 2- Crossing the glacier between the two high passes

that night my condition became worse. The following day myself and four other members of the team were evacuated from the mountain by helicopter.

Macpherson – Once we were told that our plan was to make it to Makalu Base Camp, I was excited but nervous in case the altitude was to affect me further. The trek to reach it offered us some incredibly memorable views, however, the headaches and sickness returned to haunt me and after reaching Base Camp and I nights fitful rest I was told myself and 4 other members of the team would not be carrying on further up the mountain. Initially I was angry because I wanted to complete the task but when I understood the severity of what could have happened in terms of the AMS, I accepted the decisions being made were for our welfare. After trip by helicopter back to the heat, noise and pollution of Kathmandu we were told that it had been arranged for us to visit Pokhara, the home of Gurkha selection. This was an amazing experience and fascinating to see another area of Nepal. We stayed at another British Gurkha Army camp, which was a lot bigger than the one in Kathmandu.

Taylor – Nepal was an amazing experience and one I will hopefully experience again. From the time on the mountain to the time we spent travelling the country, it was definitely an experience of a lifetime. My only regrets are pushing forward of the group and the fall I suffered at the teahouse, I think this combined, cut short my experience. The team were a fantastic group of people and I made some great friends. The Nepali landscape allowed us to experience multiple surroundings and terrains from jungle to snow capped peaks, Nepal has it all and I hope to return in the not so distant future.

Spr Stone Continues the story from Makalu Base Camp

From Makalu Base Camp the rest of the team pushed forward into what seemed like a long white nothingness. We all knew what was ahead though: the hardest part of the trip, including 2 x 6200m passes, the Sherpini Col and West Col and then 2 days after this the Amph Labsta Pass. The Amphu Labsta is one of the most difficult passes in the Himalayas. and on average only 80 people a year cross it and this year none had do e so before us.

The day we crossed the High passes we set off at 2am and were on the move for nearly 20hrs. We crossed deep snow and proceeded to do a 100m abseil down an ice wall in crampons - certainly an experience to remember. Sadly the morning following this we had to evacuate two more members of the team, one due to frostbite and the other due to pulled ligaments in his back. After another memorable day crossing the Amphu Laptsa and eventually



Leg 2 handing the flag over to Leg 3 at Dingboche - 4450m

meeting in Leg 3 in Dingboche the walk back down to Lukla was a welcome chance to recover our strength and take in the fantastic scenery.

For me the trip has given me an opportunity to see how the Army operates on expeditions as my previous experience was in training. It was great getting to work with senior soldiers and see their approach to the various challenges. The trip has also without doubt given me the opportunity to push myself physically and mentally - further than I thought I would ever be able to go. A good example of this is when we had to do a 13hr day, crossing the Amphu Labsta Pass in snow up to my waist on nothing more than a bowl of porridge, a snickers and a packet of biscuits!

The trip has taught me a huge amount about how much teamwork matters, particularly in a dangerous environment. You really have to look out for your mates on the mountain, as the illnesses you are susceptible to can come on suddenly and can be very dangerous. Learning to check your mates are okay before sorting out your own needs has definitely been a huge learning curve for me.

This trip has had massive ups and downs. For me the worst point of the trip was losing my friends and teammates at Makalu Base Camp. Initially it felt like the support from friendship was lost and the dynamics of the group were altered and it is obviously nice to finish things as a full team. However you then regroup and focus on the next challenge. An unforgettable high point has to be receiving a KFC at 5900m at the high camp before the Amphu Labsta Pass - the 'Colonel's Recipe' has never tasted so good!



Leg 3 - A tired Lt Josh Warne in Na village post avalanche



Leg 3 - Approaching Tashi Lapcha High Camp

Leg 3, RE Warfare Wing. Lukla – Last Resort

This Leg of the GHT set out to traverse the Everest Region of Nepal and cross 3 passes in excess of 5000m and also visit Everest Base Camp itself. For the first part the team was also joined by the overall expedition OIC, 2 C 3 RSME Regt, Maj Andy Gooch, CO 3 RSME Regt, Lt Col J West and CI REWW, Lt Col R Morton.

The flight into Lukla, the gateway to the Solu Khumbu and Everest is renowned for being an exhilarating flight and it did not disappoint. It must be the closest any of the team would get to landing on an aircraft carrier. The first few days trekking gave a good opportunity to shake out and start to appreciate the effects the altitude would play and the team got used to the pace they would need to maintain. After an acclimatisation day in the Sherpa capital of Namche Bazaar the team awoke to find their tents covered in 20cm of snow. Something very rare at such a low altitude (3460m) this late in the season. The team pushed on through the snow to Dingboche (4410m) where they meet with Leg 2. Hearing of their adventures the realisation of the team had embarked on started to sink in. Leg 2 passed on their high altitude kit and some top tips before heading south to Lukla with the Exped OIC, CO and CI.

3 days later all the team made it to Gorak Shep in glorious weather and then on to Everest Base Camp (5143m) where the weather came in quickly turning snowing, windy and very cold. These adverse weather conditions meant nobody was keen to hang around at base camp (5346m) and after the obligatory team photo. The following day, 10 members of the 14 man team reach the summit of Kala Pattar (5550m) before then turning West, ready to tackle the Cho La (5420m) and Renjo La (5400m). However, at this stage the decision was made to evacuate one member of

the team due to worsening AMS symptoms. The descent from the Cho La was difficult and required individuals to wear crampons and helmets due to the steepness of the ice slope while the ascent to the Renjo La proved arduous after a series of long days. The sun made it incredibly hot at times but the view from the top of the Renjo La, across to Everest was spectacular and the best seen so far.

After a rest day in the Sherpa village of Thame the crux of this leg was crossing the 5755m Tashi Lapsa pass and the team did this on 25 Apr 15. They rose at 0030 for a 0200 departure already wearing harnesses as they knew there would be fixed rope sections on the ascent. The ascent was steep throughout but as it was dark it was just a case of following the head torch in front. Towards the top of the pass there were several fixed rope sections as a fall would result in a 300m drop.

The pass was reached at 0630 and the descent began, again involving roped sections. At around 1200 the earthquake struck Nepal which triggered an avalanche engulfing the entire group and sweeping away all equipment. It consisted of mainly hard rock and ice as opposed to powder and it was soon found that 2 of the Gurkha Adventures support team had been killed and there were a further 4 x British and 4 x Nepalese casualties. The injuries included head wounds, a dislocated shoulder, suspected broken ribs and shock. After liaison with the helicopter company and attempting to contact the Embassy the scale of disaster that had engulfed Nepal became clear and the team realised it may be some time before they were rescued. The decision was taken to walk to the nearest village, Na, as despite having casualties the concern was an aftershock might trigger a second avalanche. The walk to Na was extremely strenuous as there was little food and water and the



Leg 3 - Camping above Namche Bazaar before the snow



Left, Gurkha Adventures CEO Khil Thapa and right, Aas Gurung killed in the avalanche



Leg 3 making a hasty retreat from a bridge across the Dudh Kosi

majority of kit had been lost. After a further 10hrs walking the small settlement was reached where the team stayed for the next 72hrs while waiting for rescue before being evacuated to Kathmandu by helicopters. One piece of equipment that was invaluable during this difficult time, and indeed the whole expedition, was the Yellow Brick Tracking Device (www.yb.tl). It allows real time tracking via the internet with the ability to send and receive text messages. Any future remote expedition should consider using one.

By the time we arrived back at British Gurkhas Nepal it had been transformed into the operational Hub for the British disaster relief effort so was very busy and the next few days were spent trying to help out around the camp where possible and conduct post trek administration. After re-arranging flights the team returned back to the UK on 1 May 15.

Conclusion

With further earthquakes occurring and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office advising against all but essential travel to Nepal for the time being the decision had to be taken to stop the expedition. Instead, those involved in the GHT turned their attention to raising money for a GHT Memorial Fund to help support the families of those killed supporting us; Aas Bahadur Gurung, a guide on Leg 3

and Roshan Gurung a porter who had trekked with the team from the Kanchenjunga Base Camp. To date approximately £11,000 has been raised.

A huge number of valuable lessons were learnt in both the planning prior to the trip, the planned execution, and the response to the avalanche that can be used for future expeditions as few of which are outlines below.

As awful as this event has been for Nepal and it's people we must overlook what was achieved: 45 soldiers from 6 different capbadges and ranging in age from 18 to 52, 10 of whom had only finished their Army training weeks before leaving the UK, trekked a third of the length of the Nepalese Himalayas in just under 6 weeks. They crossed 8 passes in excess of 5200m and for Leg 2, they became the first people this year to force a way across the 6200m Sherpini Col and West Col beneath Makalu, the world's 5th highest mountain.

The RSME will return to Nepal in October 2016 to conduct a memorial trek to place commemorative plaques in the villages from where Roshan and Aas came from and then complete a trek around Mt Manaslu, the world's eighth highest mountain.



Leg 3 - Helivac from Na village



Leg 3 - REWW with the Gurkha Adventures team in Na village



Leg 3 on the summit of Kala Pattar



Exercise **TIGER TRAIL**

Cpl Ted Just, Soldier Development Wing (Sennybridge)

Exercise TIGER TRAIL was an expeditionary trek following the Chemin de La Liberte or 'The Freedom Trail'. It was, in its time one of the hardest escape routes for allied servicemen and women escaping and evading capture from the Vichy Regime active in France during WWII. The expedition saw members from the Army Training Regiment in Pirbright and Soldier Development Wing (Sennybridge) trek

across the mountains following the route through the foothills of the Pyrenees from St Giron's to the foot of Mont Valier and over the frontier over into Spain.

The Freedom Trail was one of the three main escape routes over the Pyrenees used by Allied Servicemen and French Evaders trying to reach the Free French Forces in North Africa. The Chemin de la Liberte was less travelled than the Pat O'Leary line centred on the Mediterranean coast at Marseilles or the Comet Line which ran near Bayonne on the Atlantic Coast. Some 782 French evaders and a significant number of downed British and US Airmen made the savagely tough crossing over the mountains of the Ariege to Spain and eventual freedom at its peak in 1943. The trail was used for 113 evasions. Physically, this was by far the hardest escape route of the three. The route was officially re-opened in 1994 but is even less travelled today than it was in the war.

Once undertaken, the trip followed the escape route through the foothills and mountains, forests and meadows with the party being accommodated and assisted by local refuges and bothy style gite d' Etape. All kit and equipment had to be carried as well as food for the duration,

with water being sourced locally by the thirsty trekkers.

Day 1: Travel to France – The trip to Plymouth was uneventful, Capt Claire Sapwell was picked up on route but the fun started once we arrived at Plymouth Ferry Port. Brittany Ferries rumbled our plan to save the Treasury money by under-sizing our vehicles. A lady with a tape measure discovered that we were over size (and height). Banished to the naughty children's corner till the ship was fully loaded we awaited our fate. Eventually we skulked onto the vehicle deck as the crew tutted and pointed at the 'Brits' who had held up the ship's departure. The trip over was comfortable, nice food and the magician's assistant was outstanding unlike the magician. The route from Santander to St Giron's was quiet other than the OC's and Cpl Just's credit cards taking a hit on the numerous Tolls on route (LI). The overnight accommodation in the Chateau de Beauregard, former Nazi HQ, was outstanding. Unfortunately, time didn't allow us to enjoy the Chateau but it made a fitting start point for our Chemin de la Liberte expedition as the start point was 300m away under the noses of the Nazi hierarchy that commandeered the building during the war.

Cpl Will Barnes-Smith and Cpl Ted Just talking about Louis Barrau, a teenager who aided the escapees and evaders, who was killed by the Vichy Police after being betrayed.





Cpl Paul Burgon speaks about the Vichy Regime on the St Giron bridge from where escapees would begin their route.



The Group dressed for the bad weather on the Col de La Core, just before hacking through the muddy forest to La Cabana de Subera.

Day 2: Saint Giron town (391m) to the village of Aunac (766m). The day started off with a continental breakfast and as much jam and bread as you could get, ensuring everyone had plenty of fuel in the tank to complete the 27km trek (which seemed even further). We started off with a brief on the Vichy Regime, by Cpl Burgon, on the bridge in the town of St Giron, where our fellow escapees would have jumped from the southbound trains as they started their escape. After a few roads and tracks we reached forest areas as we moved further into the foothills. Following the paths of the escapees through forest and farm land we stopped in a woodblock corner to eat dinner before Cpl Barnes-Smith gave a presentation on Louis Barrau, a French teenager, killed by the Vichy French police for aiding escapees. After a little history we continued on our path through the foothills

to the Pyrenees mountain range. After a final stop to fill water bottles in the Village of Aunac, and to rest sore legs we made our way through the village to the gite d' Etape for the night in the hospitable safety of a French family.

Day 3: Aunac Gite d' Etape (766m) to La Cabana de Subera or the Shepherds Hut (1499m). The day started early at 0600 by tucking into a breakfast of bread and marmalade dipped into bowls of coffee. A novel way to eat breakfast but we were assured that it was the way that the French do it so 'when in Rome'. After a short admin session we headed off at a sensible pace from the village, West to the Col de la Core, the path taking us across some of the Grande Route (GR)10 route. The weather began well but once at the col, when the height increased, the weather got worse.

Rain and fog slowed our progress but a hardy attitude and good clothing allowed us to progress further to the Cabana de Subera, our camp site for the night. The Shepherds hut proved a useful place to dry clothes and prepare food in a sheltered location, after a very muddy route through the forest and fields. The stream nearby allowed us a great opportunity to get back to nature with some natural ablutions and a good foot soak. Although the surrounding mountains looked foreboding every one slept well knowing that the next day was the most difficult and challenging of the trek.

Day 4: La Cabana de Subera (1499m) to Le Refuge des Estagnous (2245m). Today was to be the hardest day of the trip. It promised plenty of steep climbs from the start, complimented by a cold temperature



The Group around a Chemin de La Liberte monument in Aunac.



Cpl Tan Coult leading the way with high morale on the trail from la Cabana de Subera.

and frost on the ground. As the contour lines fell below us the view became more and more spectacular, stretching as far as the eye could see, high above the clouds in the valleys below. With the walking came a good mix of terrain including some hands and feet action on steep terrain and over boulders. Half way up the first ascent we stopped at the wreck of a Halifax Bomber which crashed after the war was over, sadly killing all 7 crew members. Cpl Pete Hollick gave a short presentation on the plane and a cross of remembrance was placed at the site. After that we ascended to the Col de Crabérous (2,382 m) our first col of the day. Along the route we were treated to views of some local wildlife such as the Griffin Vultures, Choughs and the Ptarmigan just getting its white winter coat. A last good descent over the Col de Pécouch (2,494 m), second high col of the day brought

The Breath-taking views North into Spain from the Col de Pécouch.

us down to Le Refuge des Estagnous, a mountain Refuge, rebuilt after it was blown up by the Nazis, which was used by the evaders and escapees during their tough crossing of the mountains. Here food and shelter were offered, but more importantly there was a mountain lake a short walk away, where people went to dip feet and soak ankles. No one braved a swim as the temperature was close to freezing even with the sunlight that shone until sunset. The temperature dropped rapidly and everyone made sure they were well tucked up in sleeping bags before too long. Everyone knew that freedom loomed over one more steep climb, and they wanted to be ready for it when the chance came.

Day 5: Le Refuge des Estagnous (2245m) over the Frontier Col to the village of Alos d'Isil in Spain. We awoke early



The view from the Refuge des Estagnous, south to the frontier. Our route took us down to the lake then sharply up to the left.



The group assembled prior to the morning's ascent towards the frontier.

at 0600 to sort out our packs and admin before a breakfast at 0700. Once again it was bread, jam and coffee from a bowl. We finished breakfast and began our descent into the valley bottom beside a crystal clear lake that was as cold as the glacial ice that filled it. A quick stop to shed the early morning warm kit before embarking on our final ascent, up a steep slope of scree. The going was tough, and with feet sore from days of work, backs heavy with packs and the ever present threat of our Nazi hunters close on our tail, the group was eager to make the final push for freedom. Every step was worth it as we finally reached the frontier on the Col de Claouère at 2500m high, tired, thirsty but nearly free. Thereafter followed the descent down the Spanish





The party above the frontier Col having a quick bite to eat before the descent into Spain and Freedom.

scree and grasslands following the river until the ground levelled off and allowed us to get to our collection point where we were spirited away into the Spanish towns for some well earned Tapas and a drink that didn't come from a mountain spring.

Day 6: Travel back to the UK. After a well earned rest at La Fenier Lodge in Vallie de Lys near Luchon, all the kit and equipment was checked and accounted for before we loaded up our transport and headed for the port of Santander. The spirit of freedom following in our wake, we made good time in good weather through France and into Spain, boarding the ferry with ease only dreamt of in our outward journey. All were in high spirits until a critical Rugby match between England and Wales was

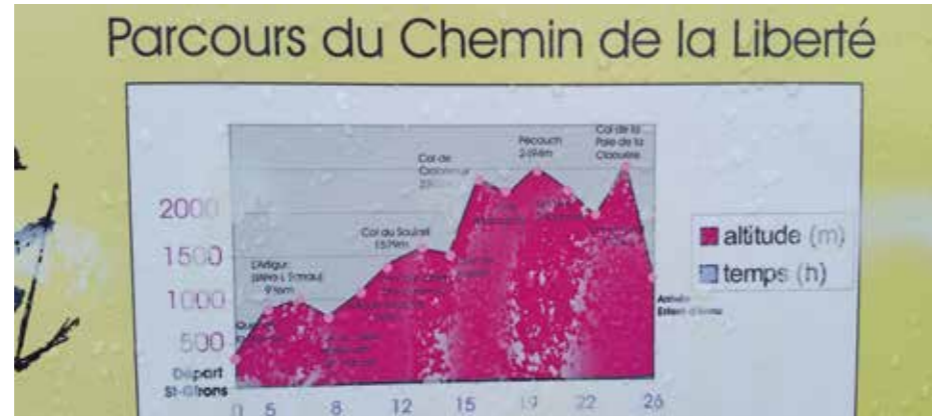
watched onboard with French subtitles. Some were left feeling saddened but glad they were able to watch it. A superior full English breakfast was eaten on the Sunday morning, no drinking out of bowls to be had here.

After conducting this arduous trek it was certainly more apparent to all members of the group, just how difficult it would have been during the times of WWII. When you consider that the escapees would have been dressed in hobnail boots carrying suitcases with a blanket for warmth, and a loaf of bread and some cheese for 4 days of arduous trekking all at night to avoid the Nazi hunter force of Specialist Alpine (Mountain) Troops. Among the military personnel were escaped prisoners of war, recently enlisted

men, army cadets and shot-down airmen, all driven by the same desire to re-join the Allied forces and continue the fight. It made us appreciate the extent of their mental and physical challenge over the route to freedom. By experiencing it first hand and by walking in the footsteps of the escapees we were better able to empathise with their struggle and the harsh conditions they faced. Although our crossing was late in September, during the war the route was open throughout the year, with many making the journey through freezing conditions and deep snow. The determination and the dedication of these escapees stands as a testament to the fighting spirit of the men and woman of the allied forces during the war.



Cpl Burgon leading the way around a snow field



A route sign depicting the ascent throughout the 63km trek; intimidating to see from the start but satisfying at the end



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