

ARMY MOUNTAINEER



Summer 2014

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The Journal of the Army Mountaineering Association

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ARMY MOUNTAINEER

The Journal of The Army Mountaineering Association



Top tips for climbing coaches

1. Don't be upset that not everyone wants to be a climber - give them credit for trying.
2. If you have to encourage and cajole someone every inch of the way up, you may have chosen the wrong route.
3. Never work beyond your ability, experience or insurance cover.
4. Learn about the local flora, geology and history. Your days out will be richer and so will those of your clients.
5. Protect yourself. If you are not attached to something you are not setting a good example to your group.
6. Try to belay where you can see your seconds, even if that means that you don't belay where the guidebook suggests.
7. Appropriately used, a guidebook with the grades removed is a good tool to help with the mental issues associated with breaking through personal grade boundaries.
8. A group with time on their hands and nothing to do will find something to do. It won't always be sensible!
9. If you allow your client to check everything with you every time, what will they do when you're not there?
10. Don't second-guess your assessor; you'll be trying to work out what they want, instead of concentrating on what you should be doing.

The above tips are an extract from "Top tips for climbing coaches" by Paul Smith which is published by Pesda Press www.pesdapress.com. It contains over 300 top tips and handy hints for climbing coaches. The book is a must have for all aspirant Rock Climbing Instructors.

Also available is Climbing Games, also written by Paul Smith



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ON THE COVER –
Maeshafn Quarry, Mid Wales photo: Tomo Thompson

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www.armymountaineer.org.uk

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Foreword

Foreword by Chairman

Chairman's Foreword by Colonel Paul J Edwards MBE

As I sit to write these words the AMA is as busy as it has ever been. Our mountaineering programme goes from strength to strength and I will be joining many of you this summer in the Alps for the Joint Service Alpine Meet. Later in the year the AMA will be taking the lead for two concurrent major Himalayan expeditions, one to Nepal to attempt Kyajo Ri, 6186m and another to India with the objective of Satopanth 7,075m. Starting in the winter of 2014 the AMA will take the lead on exercise Alpine Arc, an attempt to ski tour the whole length of the European Alps (Link to the DIN is on the AMA website) and next year our members will be involved in the two concurrent attempts on Everest: The British Army Everest expedition 2015 which will make an attempt on the North Ridge and the British Gurkhas 200th Anniversary expedition via the South Col. If that was not enough, this will be followed by the next quadrennial Joint Service Expedition to Dhaulagiri in 2016, an expedition that is still looking for Army team members in its main and development teams. www.dhaulagiri2016.com

The level of mountaineering activity is at least matched, if not overshadowed, by our successful sport climbing activity. The ever popular Tri Service bouldering league has now concluded for this year, but will begin again in the winter season (watch the website and Facebook page for details), and we have just seen the regional

Army climbing competitions conclude with resounding success. Indoor sport climbing is, for many, a route into the wider sphere of mountaineering, but increasingly it is seen as a sport in its own right and the AMA continues to champion all who take part, whatever their ultimate goals. To this end we continue to manage top quality competitions, as well as pursuing the Chain of Command to build better climbing wall facilities in all of our new garrison towns.

Despite this level of success elsewhere, our meets programme continues to struggle. The advent of an increasingly stringent Army risk management system, known as 'duty holding', is placing an increased level of scrutiny upon our meets activity and the future viability of our 'on duty' meets programme is by no means certain. Your executive committee continues to lobby hard with the chain of command to maintain our privileged status, and I am confident that this will, to some extent, be achieved. I do expect, however, that we will have to draw up some stricter guidelines for our future meets and this work is already in hand.

I do hope to meet up with many of you at the AGM in North Wales, which is now postponed to 1st/2nd Nov, or at the Presidents dinner at Sandhurst on 21 Nov.

A note from the Editor and Webmaster

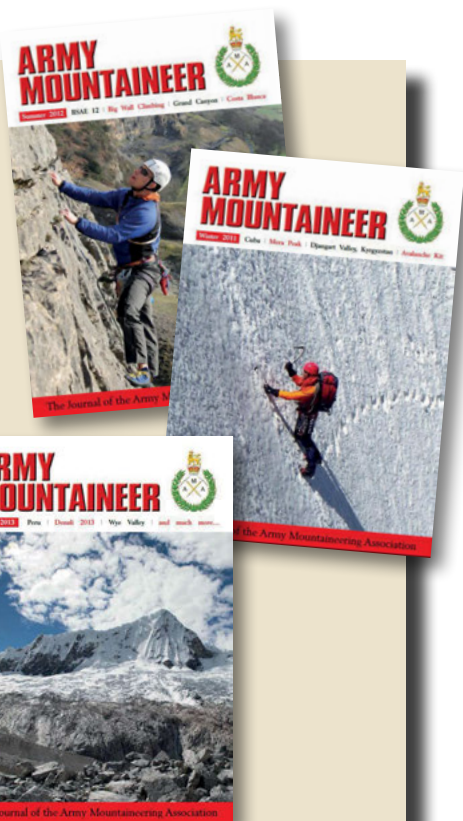
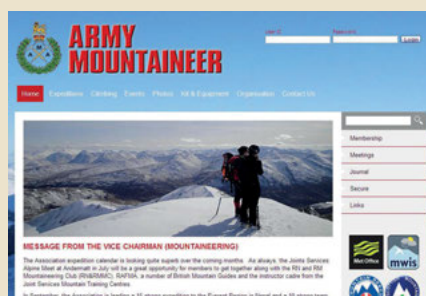
Since the delivery of the Winter 2013 journal, there have been a few changes that will be of interest to the membership. The most notable is the launch of the new AMA Website in March 14. The Webmaster has worked hard to deliver the new website on your behalf. Please support him by providing feedback so that it can evolve and improve.

Service life can be hectic considering the amount of times you move around in your career. Please remember to update your contact address with the AMA secretary so that the journal can be sent to the correct address. We still receive lots of journals returned in the post which costs money to re-send. If you have changed address, please use the AMA membership application form (which can be downloaded from the website) to update your details.

The journal can also be accessed online. All the AMA journals dating back to

1993 have been digitised and can be downloaded from the AMA website.

Finally, the journal relies entirely on your support. The journal exists to provide the membership with an update of what you have been doing on the many exceptional expeditions both at home and abroad. Please continue to contribute with articles and high quality images of your various exploits so that we can all read about them. In many cases reading about an expedition becomes the inspiration to plan your own!



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.

Beat the credit Crunch

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. The businesses retain the right to refuse these discounts.



Summit Mountaineering

A **20% discount** is available to AMA members and families. Summit run a range of walking, scrambling and climbing courses from the Wye Valley and Snowdonia; specialising in learn to lead and technical development. Call Summit Mountaineering on 07896 947 557, info@summitmountaineering.com www.summitmountaineering.com



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POC - Nick Thomas - 01286 872222, nick.thomas@dmmwales.com
www.dmmclimbing.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
www.phdesigns.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



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



Jöttnar

Jöttnar offer a **30% discount** to AMA members. Enter the discount code at checkout. Your credentials will be checked prior to your order being despatched.
www.jottnar.com

AMA DISCOUNTS



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

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EQUIPMENT

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

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!

DIARY

Mark and record the dates below and get involved. Further details where not stated can be obtained through the Meets Co-ordinator and will be on the website closer to the time. We are always looking for people to help organize. If you feel you could contribute, please contact the Meets Co-ordinator.

PROPOSED AMA MEETS PROGRAMME 2014

Start date	Event	Location	Lead	Remarks
13-14 Sep 14	Army Team training weekend	Climbing Works, Sheffield	Capt Paddy Snow	Army Team
8 Oct 14	TSBL (Tri-Services Bouldering League) Round 1	TBC	Maj Tom Odling	
10-12 Oct 14	AMA Novice Climbers meet	Symonds Yat	Capt Ryan Lang	Possibility of SPA Trg/ Assessment if required
31 Oct - 2 Nov 14	AGM	Indy	Maj Tarquin Shipley	
12 Nov 14	TSBL Round 2	TBC	Maj Tom Odling	
21 Nov 14	Presidents Dinner	RMAS	Lt Col Dallyn	
10 Dec 14	TSBL Round 3	TBC	Maj Tom Odling	
14 Jan 15	TSBL Round 4	TBC	Maj Tom Odling	
12 Feb 15	TSBL Round 5	TBC	Maj Tom Odling	
28 Feb 15	Army Bouldering Championships 2015 and TBSL Round 6	N Wales (Indy)	Maj Tom Odling	
18-22 May 15	Army Festival of Climbing	N Wales	AMA	Week long festival including the Army Climbing Championships, outdoor climbing, coaching and lectures
21-26 Jun 15	European Military Climbing Championships 2015	N Wales	AMA	Week long festival including the Inter-Services Climbing Championships

AMA AGM

The Army Mountaineering Association AGM will be held at JSMTIC Indefatigable from Friday 31 Oct - Sunday 2 Nov 14. The format for the weekend is still being finalised but the itinerary so far is:

Friday evening 31 Oct – Social meet and greet in the bar. This will be a good opportunity to catch up with old friends, make some new ones and also plan your weekend mountaineering activities.

Sat and Sun daytime – Quality Mountaineering Day, there will be instructors available, don't worry if you don't have a partner, we will ensure that you are placed with an appropriate partner or group.

Sat evening – AGM followed by guest speaker and social in the bar. This has been excellent in the last few years!

The AGM will be a fantastic opportunity for you to contribute and voice your opinion on your association! It can only be a success if people make the effort to attend. Car sharing will be advertised on the AMA Website.

More information will be posted on AMA Facebook and the AMA Website in due course.

Bugaboo Trip

The AMA will be conducting a development expedition to the Bugaboo region of Canada in Sept 2015. The aim of the expedition is to inspire and develop 8 -12 future AMA alpinists in a region outside of Europe. Further information will be available on the AMA website and Facebook page. A DIN will be released in the near future.



Exercise Turquoise Goddess

Post Exercise Report – Cho Oyu 8201 metres

Written by Chris Good

Stood outside my tent at Camp 3 at one o'clock in the morning on 1st October 2013, I could feel the extreme cold, lack of oxygen and a surge of excitement rushing through me. We had spent weeks acclimatising and hauling equipment and food up the mountain and were now only 700 metres and six hours hard work away from the summit of the sixth largest mountain in the world, Cho Oyu at 8,201 metres. However, although the 'Turquoise Goddess' had been kind to us so far, I wondered whether our luck and the worsening weather would hold?

My ambition to climb Cho Oyu had been prompted the year before on an excellent Joint Service Alpine Meet in Andermatt, Switzerland. Keen to build on my experience of climbing at altitude in the Alps, I was determined to tackle an 8,000 metre peak and recognised a superb opportunity to visit Tibet as well. Cho Oyu lies in the Mahalangur Himal along the Nepalese/Tibet border and is a technically straightforward climb which provides a fantastic introduction to the world's fourteen highest peaks.

This was a civilian non-guided expedition that met in Kathmandu, Nepal and then travelled across the border to neighbouring Tibet. Unlike the lush green hills of the Hunku Valley on the Nepalese side of

the border, the drive to Base Camp across the Tibetan Plateau was set against a moonscape of rock and moraine. However, the small Chinese military camp and a concentration of yak herders at Base Camp brought the 'Himalayan Highway' to an end and signalled the start of our approach march to Advanced Base Camp (ABC) at 5,700 metres.

The move to ABC proved to be an adventure in itself and our truck load of equipment and supplies made their way to our 'home' for the next four weeks on the back of a herd of temperamental yaks. Once established, ABC provided the bedrock from which the team could conduct its training and launch five successive surges up the mountain to establish camp 1 (6,400m), camp 2 (7,200m), and camp 3 (7,500m). Remarkably, the height gain (and loss) achieved during the five lifts was the equivalent of climbing the mountain three times and the team welcomed a three day rest period at ABC prior to the summit attempt.

Other than tents and oxygen cylinders, the team elected to carry all of its own equipment and supplies up to camp 3 and did not use porters throughout the expedition. However, the herculean effort of our three sherpas, Phurba, Lakpa and Ongchhu, must not go



Me at Puja Ceremony (Advanced Base Camp) where the 7th Para RHA flag was 'blessed' prior to the climb



Me with Regy flag at Camp 1 at 6,400m

unmentioned and they were instrumental in establishing fixed lines and forging the initial steps in deep snow during the start of Cho Oyu's two week weather window. A window that is dictated by the high jet streams which only reduce in speed for a few days a year and allow mountaineers to climb above 7,500 metres without being ripped off the mountain.

Finally, all that was left to do prior to our summit attempt was participate in the traditional Tibetan 'Puja' ceremony where I had my ice axe, crampons and 7 Para RHA's regimental flag blessed by the local Lama. Neither religious nor superstitious, I was surprisingly moved by the event which served to consecrate our remote 'home' and set the right tone for the next five days in which we would transit through each of our high altitude camps and climb the 2,500 metres between our rocky sanctuary and the summit.

Despite two diametrically opposed weather reports, the decision was made to start the summit attempt on 28th September and six climbers and three sherpas set off with high hopes in clear conditions. By now, camps 1 and 2 felt very familiar as did our bodies reaction to the oxygen starved air. Despite this familiarity however, I still found it staggering that two consecutive footsteps warranted a stop and two deep breaths before moving on. At over 7,500 metres this increased to five deep breaths! Likewise, it took two hours just to boil just one litre of water and simple tasks such as cooking required a great deal of effort and time. Fortunately, bottled oxygen lessened the debilitating effects on our bodies and our cylinders supplied us with two litres per minute between camp 3 and the summit. This lifeline thinned the blood sufficiently to prevent fingers and toes from freezing solid and seemingly reduced the weight of our packs and heavily insulated boots.

On summit night the darkness and morning chill eventually gave way to a crisp dawn and a breath taking view of the countless 7,000 metre peaks that surround the vast bulk of Cho Oyu. Unfortunately, it also exposed an approaching weather front that denied the team a view at the summit of neighbouring Everest, Nupste and Lhoste. However, this did not overshadow

an enormous sense of achievement and a jubilant team who were quick to take photos and even quicker to descend in order to avoid the worsening weather.

The return journey to Camp 1 now lay several hours ahead and once again I was reminded of the maxim 'you are only half way at the top!' A mixture of exhaustion and oxygen deprivation is a dangerous mix and total concentration was required on the way down, particularly on the near vertical sections of the climb. The safety of camp 1 proved to be an agonising ten hours away and only half the team actually made it beyond camp 2 without an overnight rest. Fortunately, none of the teams on the mountain had any accidents and everyone eventually returned safely to ABC for a well earned beer and a rest.

Although this was a private venture and personally funded, the expedition simply would not have been possible without the full support of the chain of command. I would also like to thank the Army Mountaineering Association, 7 Para RHA, the Berlin Infantry Brigade Memorial Trust Fund, Royal Artillery Institute, Parachute Regiment Charity, Raytheon and the Royal Artillery Centre for Personal Development for their moral and financial contribution.



WINNER OF BEST ARTICLE

Prize: DMM Dragon Cam





Using an altimeter in the mountaineering environment

Written by Sven Hassall

“Right grid reference, wrong map?!”

A wrist watch altimeter offers a more reliable method of sensing altitude than GPS which can be inaccurate under trees, near cliffs or building and in close proximity to some radios. It also provides a much more useful and quicker method of [re]location when used in conjunction with a traditional map and compass.

Barometric altimeters don't actually measure altitude directly; rather they are constantly measuring the relative pressure in the atmosphere around us and comparing it against the pressure at sea level, in order to calculate the altitude (above sea level). Physics dictates that the higher up we go, the lower the pressure around us becomes, due to the reduced mass of gas and suspended molecules weighing down upon us: the air pressure. Pressure can also change however due to relatively high and low pressure bodies of air, move around the earth (causing

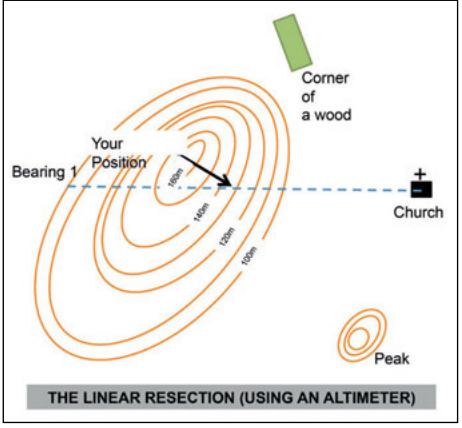
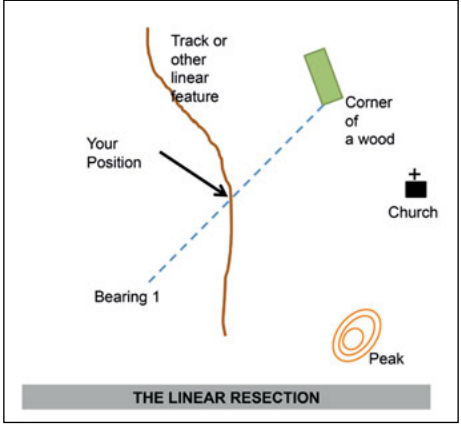
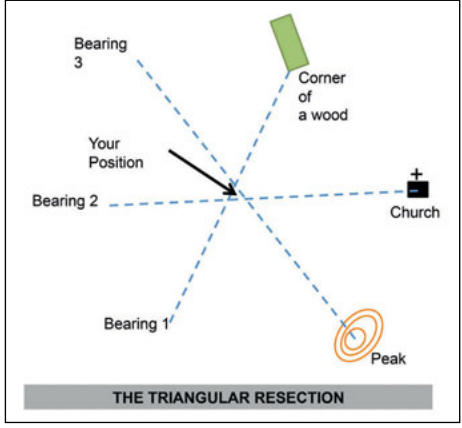
weather). When calculating our height from this method, we must account for these changes by recalibrating from time to time against known heights (from the map), ideally throughout the mountaineering day and ALWAYS before we are lost or might need to calculate our height! It is a good habit therefore to calibrate your altimeter in the car park, on the summit and any other positively identified points in between, such as track/stream junctions or trig points.

So, we know how high we are but how does that help us with navigation?

You may already be familiar with the principles of a 'triangular resection', the technique of identifying three points (or more) on both the map and the ground: the navigator takes a bearing to the known point (e.g. a church spire or the corner of a wood in the distance) and then converts it to a back-bearing by adding or subtracting 180 degrees. This bearing is then plotted on the map from the known point. You

repeat this from three points and where the lines dissect, is your location.

A much more useful technique, due to the short time and effort it takes, is the 'linear resection'. That is, if you are on a linear feature such a road, track, edge of a forest or even a ridge, then all you need to do is identify a single known point and plot that back to where it crosses your linear feature; you now know exactly where you are. A great technique clearly, but obviously it only works on a linear feature right? This is where we all raise a glass to Nevil Maskelyne and friends, who whilst trying to measure the size of the earth by conducting experiments on Schiehallion, invented what are now known as contour lines. What Maskelyne et al found by accident, mean that we are now always on a linear feature - a contour line; all we have to do is find our altitude to tell us which one we are on.....



Book Reviews

Written by Tomo Thompson

From waiting out for a weather window in Camp 4, to killing the hours until sun up in a Cairngorm snow-hole, a good book on the outdoors is a must. I own about a thousand and have selected six new ones, and one reasonably old one, as suggestions for the months ahead wherever you may be.

Reviewed in brief from left to right on the bookshelf photo, I have left out retailers, prices and websites as an internet search engine will do all that for you in seconds.

Training for the New Alpinism - Steve House and Scott Johnston

Reinhold Messner considers Steve House to be the leading alpinist of his generation. This book is not only everything he knows about the art of training for cutting edge fast and light alpinism, but a training manual for how you can emulate his proficiency. The book is huge (464 pages), and this short review cannot do it justice. The who's who of contributing alpinists (Twight, Steck, Habeler, Gadd) adds even more kudos to the text. Johnston is one of the most respected coaches in the US and the physical and psychological coaching therein is world class. It is a deliberately deep, often scientific and complex read, and one that can be continually dipped in and out of.

Alpine Mountaineering - Bruce Goodlad

I guess the best short review of this is to quote the foot note to the title ("essential knowledge for budding alpinists"). Bruce is a UIAGM guide and has written almost a Janet and John text on how to prepare and equip yourself for your early alpine adventures. Simple words, loads of pictures, clear diagrams and an annex of suggested training areas and beginners and intermediate routes. Getting started in the Alps can appear overwhelmingly complicated and this book, for less than twenty quid, is a sound investment for any aspirant alpinist

The Walkers Guide to Outdoor Clues and Signs - Tristan Gooley.

Tristan is amongst the most knowledgeable natural navigators in the world. This book is essentially a compilation of everything he has learnt in the last two decades, and six years of instructing, researching and writing. Including over 850 clues and signs on how better to interpret and understand the natural environment it is a truly valuable book.

I guarantee in the first few pages alone you will learn stuff you never knew.

Microadventures - Alastair Humphreys

Having an impressive expediting pedigree on his CV, Al is now on a one man mission to make us all make far better use of our valuable spare time by introducing us to microadventures. A close to home, cheap, simple, short guaranteed way to refresh your life by taking the spirit of a big adventure and squeezing it into a few days or even a few overnight hours. This is a colourful, brash, get-off-your-backside-and-go-and-do-something call to arms.

Feeding The Rat - Al Alvarez

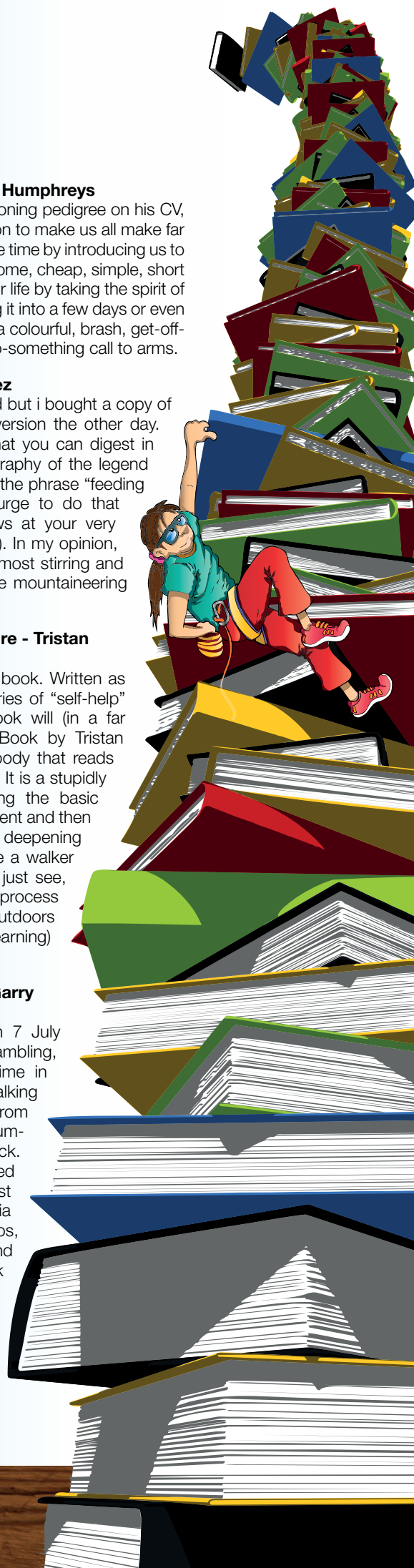
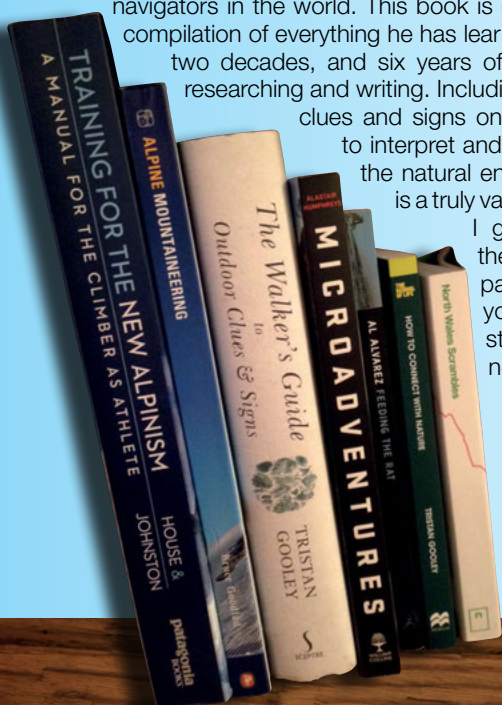
Yes i know this is 26 years old but i bought a copy of the Bloomsbury paperback version the other day. Feeding the Rat is a book that you can digest in a few hours. It is a part biography of the legend that was Al Rouse. It created the phrase "feeding the rat" (the rat being the urge to do that thing, that activity that gnaws at your very soul when you're not doing it). In my opinion, for its brevity, it is one of the most stirring and impactful books written in the mountaineering genre.

How To Connect With Nature - Tristan Gooley

This is a small but important book. Written as part of the School of Life series of "self-help" mini-guides. In short this book will (in a far pithier way than the other Book by Tristan above) change the way anybody that reads it encounters the countryside. It is a stupidly simple manifesto for grasping the basic blocks of the natural environment and then slowly and simply growing and deepening that understanding. If you are a walker or climber that wants to not just see, but understand the features, process and systems in the great outdoors (without a pile of scientific learning) read this book. It is brilliant.

North Wales Scrambles - Garry Smith

This is hot off the press on 7 July 2014. I am big fan of scrambling, of the action of spending time in the hinterland between walking and roped climbing, far from the queues and unencumbered by the full trad rack. Garry has revised, refreshed and written up 50 of the best scrambles in the Snowdonia National Park. Colour photos, simple topos, and clear and concise writing. A great book that takes the "Rockfax" approach to digitising guidebooks thereby making the Wainwright type guides look like museum items. Thigh pocket size and really well put together it is a must for scrambling aficionados.



Peak District Meet

09/05/14 – 11/05/14

Never having climbed with the Army Mountaineering Association before, I was slightly nervous about what to expect. Worst case scenarios plagued my imagination on the long drive from Newcastle to the association's weekend meet in the Peak District.

Over the past few years I had stood atop peaks in the Alps and summited at high altitude in the Himalayas, however, my experience of true rock climbing was limited. It consisted only of a childhood of rain soaked scout camps, a few days in the Alps and hour after hour spent watching Alex Honnold videos on Youtube. A resume which I was sure the AMA's rock gods would be far from impressed with.

But at least I didn't have to face them alone. I had roped Dan Thompson, a fellow second lieutenant from 201 Field Hospital, into coming down to Derbyshire with me. Eventually after a few wrong turns, stopping for food, fuel and then food again, we arrived in Froggat, our base for the weekend. We would be staying in a Climbers Club property called The R O Downes Memorial Hut, opened in honour of Bob Downes, a talented young British climber who tragically lost his life on Masherbrum in 1958.

As we unpacked the car outside the hut a horrible thought struck me, perhaps the discipline of the officer training from which I had just emerged would also be a feature of this weekend. Looking down at my favourite faded jeans and scuffed trainers, I started to wish I'd opted for a set of crisp MTP or at least some trousers free from holes.

However, all concerns were soon put to rest. We were met at the door by a beaming Mike Smith, the weekend's lead. "Alright guys,

the other lads are already off down the pub if you want to join them". Maybe jeans weren't such a bad shout.

The rest of the evening was spent in The Chequers Inn, a short walk down the hill from the hut. Where despite being a group of strangers, the AMA party found common ground over ale and climbing anecdotes, both of which flowed freely until we were all well acquainted.

Saturday dawned bright but with a lingering threat of rain. Mike had risen early to prepare a full English breakfast for everyone which was gratefully received. As the last of the bacon was being polished off, Mike informed us that the weather was due to close in by early afternoon, so an early start was our best bet in order to get some good climbing in. Eager not to miss the weather window, myself and Dan headed off to Stanage Edge along with Mike and Kate Hannaford, both of whom had kindly agreed to give us some tuition on the basics of outdoor climbing.

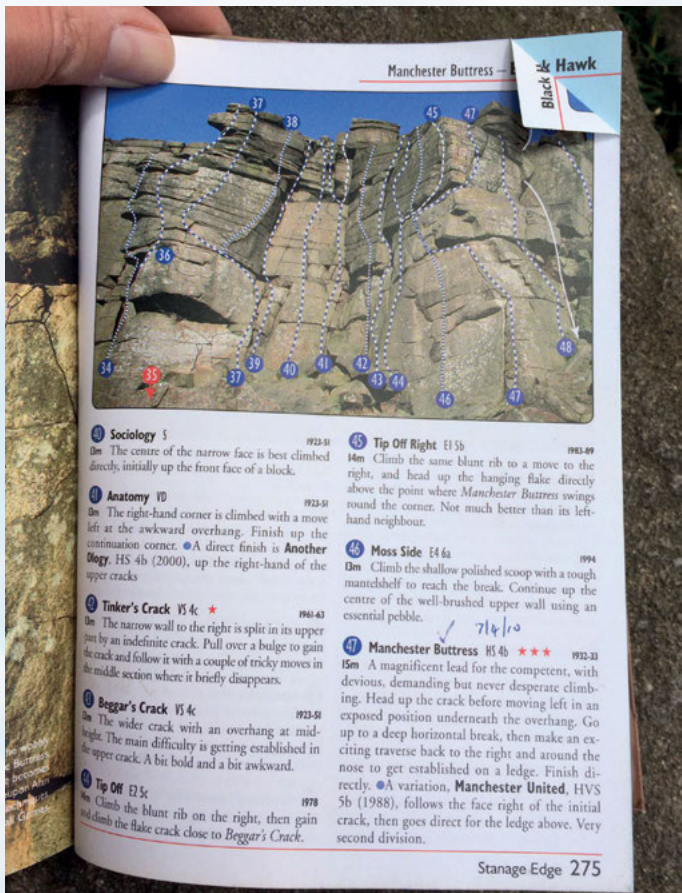
Although I had visited the Peak District National Park before, this was my first trip to Stanage Edge. It didn't disappoint. Overlooking the village of Hathersage, the 4 miles of gritstone face extending far into the distance of the Derbyshire countryside was an impressive sight. Although I was a novice, with 658 climbs of varying grades, this was the perfect place to get to grips with outdoor climbing.

After a quick safety brief and being shown how to tie in amongst other basics, it was time to start climbing. So after pulling on my newly acquired rock shoes, which the sales assistant had assured me were meant to be this ridiculously uncomfortable, I made my debut on Derbyshire gritstone.

Grotto Slab (M) was our first test. Mike ascended the 12 metres effortlessly. Myself and Dan followed, and although neither of us would have scored many points for elegance or technique, we both clawed our way upwards and soon were standing proudly atop the edge. Sweeping panoramic views across the surrounding valleys offered a fantastic reward for our efforts.

Emboldened by our success, we moved on to Mantelpeice Crack (D 4a), an attractive 8 metre crack which slants to the right. Again Mike made short work of the face, followed at a more leisurely pace by myself and Dan, before Kate scampered up the rock with ease to bring up the rear.

Moving now with growing confidence, we set our sights on Small Crack (VD). This proved a more challenging route with some slippery footholds which made me glad I invested in a pair of rock





shoes, even though I was now questioning whether sensation would ever return to my big toes.

Next on the agenda was Anatomy (VD), a brilliant 12 metre route with a testing move to the left across the face owing to an awkward overhang. However, from the top it was clear that the weather was deteriorating. The wind had picked up and ominous clouds were pouring over the hills ahead of us, but we decided to chance our arm and bag one more route before the inevitable downpour.

Our final challenge was Sociology (S 4a), a 12 metre groove which proved slightly more testing for both us novices. Predictably, as I was halfway up the face feeling above my head for a suitable hold, the heavens opened, and rain lashed against the face in the strong wind. However, all of us managed to scramble up to safety before making a desperate dash back to the the cars.

It appeared as if the day's climbing was over just as myself and Dan were getting into the swing of it. Luckily Mike had an ace up his sleeve, and we were soon on the move towards Sheffield, to get some practice on indoor routes at Awesome Walls Climbing Centre Sheffield. Although not comparable to the Derbyshire countryside, with 312 routes, 2 bouldering areas and a café all housed in a converted factory, the venue was certainly impressive. And more importantly from a novice's perspective, the café's sausage sandwich got top marks.

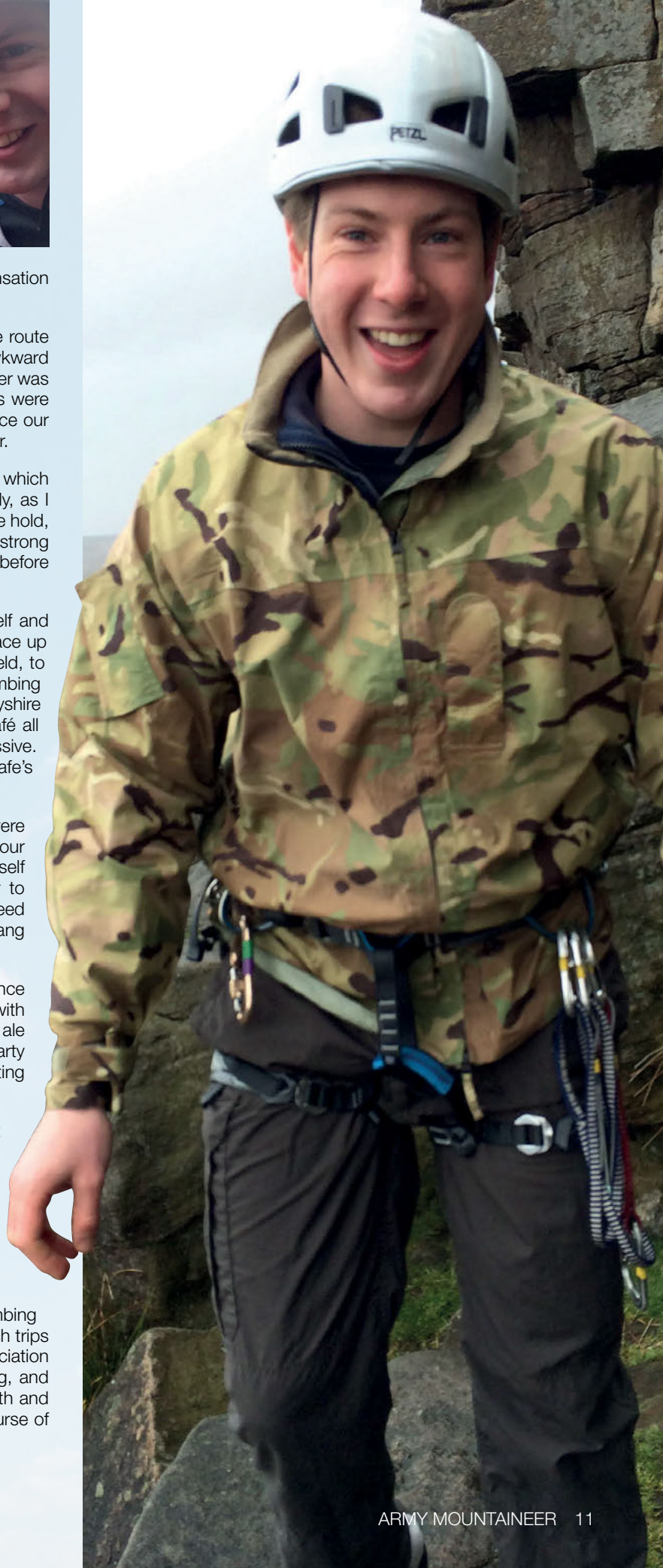
Kate had taught us how to belay earlier in the day, so we were set free to test ourselves against the 15 metre walls, whilst our tutors moved onto routes more suited to their ability. So myself and Dan spent a fantastic afternoon pushing each other to tackle increasingly challenging routes, however, we both agreed to leave the competition wall complete with 12 metre overhang until the next time.

After a tiring but rewarding day, the AMA party regrouped once more at The Chequers Inn where over dinner we caught up with what the different members had been up to. As before, the ale and anecdotes flowed until, once again, we were the last party in the pub. Only taking our leave when the staff began setting the table for breakfast around us, hint taken.

On Sunday we woke to another Mike Smith cooked breakfast special, and unfortunately, wall to wall rain. Although we tried to wait out the weather, spending the time eyeing up kit in the surrounding climbing shops, by late morning the weather seemed to have set itself for the day. Sadly we had to accept that further outdoor climbing wasn't going to be a possibility, and so we set out on the long journey home.

Looking back, I thoroughly enjoyed my first experience of climbing with the AMA, and I hope it will be only the first of many such trips I take with them. I wish to express my thanks to the association for giving me such a fantastic introduction to rock climbing, and I would also like to express my gratitude to both Mike Smith and Kate Hannaford for all their help and guidance over the course of the weekend.

Robert Crooks (2Lt Crooks, 201 Field Hospital)



Roaches Meet

22 – 24 Nov 13

Written by Dave Cross



Another's attempt on sifas quid inside route. (Credit: Kierran Sumner)



The Author doing a bit of caving! (Credit: Kierran Sumner)

With fingers (and toes no doubt) crossed for favourable weather 17 AMA members travelled up to the Roaches Bunkhouse in Upperhulme on the Friday night.

Some old friends, familiar (and thankfully new) faces arrived, grabbed a bunk then sat by the beast of a fire that Henry Crosby had sorted for everyone. Most were perusing the guide books and plotting their routes for the next day. It seemed that everyone had found a partner so less work for me already. The arrival of the rest of Henry's group brought some tantalising smells from the kitchen area; this continued through the weekend and certainly made me have a bit of food envy!

The morning brought one more climber who was swiftly paired up and then a quick brief and finalising of all the groups' plans and daily risk assessments and out to the crag for a brilliant days climbing.

Name the route (opposite page) which Sam Marshall and Chris cruised up amongst many other classic routes on the Saturday.

Of course you have to try wriggling up Sifas Quid inside route... don't you? I got stuck This time! I will try again. Tarquin Shipley also got stuck but I dare say he won't be attempting it again in a hurry; the air was fairly blue on that go. Anne Gumbley tried too but alas was also denied this time.

Henry used the opportunity of the weekend to finish off some Distributed Training with 3 of his guys from his unit with assistance from Chris Warner. Saturday was spent honing their single pitch skills and the Sunday was used to get a few multi pitch routes in.

Sat evening was whiled away in the local for some great food and a few bevs and reliving the 'caving' attempt by a few earlier on in the day.

Sunday brought a less favourable forecast and on this some went to Sheffield for the day. The rest of us set out hoping to prove the weatherman wrong. He wasn't and it did rain but everyone managed to get some routes in.

Anne and I got a multipitch route plus a handful of single pitch routes in before the wet stuff arrived. Once it did we decided to

head for the café. Most of the others had the same plan and we all met up on the way down.

Just before leaving the crag we stumbled upon another group (civilian not one of ours) limping one of their friends along after he had taken a massive fall and damaged his ankle. Tarquin and I were eager to help having come straight from our Mountain First Aid course up at Indy. Instead Henry came along and in typical Sapper style, without breaking step, he hoisted him up onto his rucksack and straight down to their car. Medevac complete it was time for coffee and cake before heading home.

A good weekend for all involved with new friendships made for future climbing sessions I'm sure.

It also showed some how easy it is to run a meet and they may be running one for you in the future.



It's E3 in these boots!
(Credit: Kierran Sumner)



Name the route Sam Marshal is on.
(Credit: Chris Dowd)

Cadet Centre for Adventurous Training (CCAT)

CADET ALPS – ITALIAN DOLOMITES

17-27 AUGUST 2013

Written by Kevin Edwards



The Dolomites are a large, complex area of limestone mountains situated in the north-east of Italy. These mountains are generally lower than those in the better known central Alpine regions, with the Marmolada at 3343m being the highest summit. However, what they lack in height, they make up for in the sheer amount of climbable rock. Vertical rock walls rising out of green meadows or fields of scree are the norm. Glaciers are small and confined to the highest northern facing mountains, so rarely is the climber faced with snow or ice to negotiate on the routes that access the numerous rock climbing towers which are the main attraction of this area. The weather is generally more stable in this region, although late afternoon thunder storms are an ever present threat. What the peaks lack in altitude they make up for in continuous steepness and what they lose scenically in the lack of large snow or glacier fields, they make up for in the abundance of mountain rock climbing routes, probably the best in Europe. All the mountain groups in the area have excellent paths, frequent mountain huts and fantastic via ferrate (iron ways), thus enabling the scrambler to penetrate high into the mountain environment, elsewhere the sole preserve of the experienced rock climber. There are numerous via ferrate, protected cableways and ladder mountain routes of all grades, providing many exciting challenges. Many of the original via ferrate were installed by specially trained Alpini troops during the 1st WW to enable efficient troop movement through the high mountains. They established elaborate tunnel systems to provide cover from fire and site gun positions, thus enabling them to use the high ground to dominate the valleys. The whole area is well connected with good roads and many uplift systems, giving easy access to the climbing areas.

This was the reason the Dolomites was chosen for this year's annual CCAT Introduction to Alpine Mountaineering (IAM) course. As it was a central location, we were based in the Marmolada campsite in Canazei. This small town is well blessed with all the essential facilities, with two supermarkets, a tourist information office with weather forecasts in English, plus climbing shops for guidebooks, maps and the hire of via ferrata equipment.

Ten Army Cadet Force students were selected for the IAM course, comprising five Cadet Force Adult Volunteers (male and female) and five Senior cadets (male and female). Due to the required climbing ratios, six highly qualified and experienced leaders were employed to deliver the training. After investigation, the cheapest option was to drive from Capel Curig via the Dover Ferry which, with stops, was a journey of 26 hours each way. This left us with seven days of training.

Day one was a training day at a one-pitch climbing venue near Torri Sella to check that the students had the essential rock climbing skills to progress to the more challenging aspects of long, multi-pitch climbing routes. Not only was this essential for the instruction of the students, but as importantly, for the confidence of the instructors, who would be belayed by the students! We experienced our first thunder storm that evening, with torrential rain leading to a dull and cloudy morning, so the plan to multi pitch high on one of the Torres was shelved. Instead, we hired the necessary equipment and opted for one of the more challenging via ferrata, the 1500m Della Trincee ridge route on the opposite side of the valley to the Marmolada. This would lead us eventually to a height



We had a very impressive tally of routes to our credit:

Cinque Torri

Torre Grande SW Face, Via della Guide 120m Grade IV
Torre Lucy, N Face 135m Grade IV
Torre Romana, S Chimney Grade III
Torre Quarta Bassa, S Face 110m Grade IV
Torre Quarta Alta, 100m Grade IV
Torre Inglese, SE Face 50m Grade IV
Torre Baranchio, N Face 120m Grade IV+

Sella Torri

First Tower, NW Arete 'Steger' Route 250m Grade IV+
Second Tower, Kostner Route 185m Grade III+
First Tower, Via Normal 250m Grade II

Torre Grande Grupo

Torre Piccalo, Guides Route 240m Grade IV+
Torre Piccalo, Scoiattoli Route 310m Grade IV+
Torre Grande, Lussato Route 220m Grade IV
Torre Grande, W Ridge 220m Grade III



Grande, then on what was to be our final full day, we returned to Cinque Torri, which we had decided was our favourite of the areas.

The next day, which would have been a short day anyway as we had to pack as much as possible before an early departure on Monday, it rained and we decided to chill out and pack leisurely. By now we had amassed a total of 5155m of different rock climbing routes completed, which meant many more metres were amassed by the whole team, as some routes were ascended by more than one rope team.

Once packing had been completed as far as possible, we went into town to a large and bustling restaurant and shared a celebratory meal, during which all the students received their coveted CCAT IAM certificates. We were also able to show our appreciation to our leader, Kev Edwards, for all the planning and hard work he had put into making the expedition possible.

As the accompanying photographs illustrate, these were all very steep, challenging rock climbs that required complex multiple abseils as well as negotiating steep mountain terrain to descend. The leaders did a magnificent job and more importantly, the students rose to the challenge, displaying growing confidence in their abilities and developing their skills to a high degree of competence. It is highly likely that this is the first time anyone from the Cadets organisation has scaled a Dolomite rock tower. The students confirmed the experience had exceeded all their expectations and they are to be congratulated on their significant achievements.

of 2750m so it would be good for acclimatisation too. This proved a good plan, as the day brightened as we progressed and all cloud had disappeared by the time we got high. As the photographs show, this route was continuously interesting and testing and gave the students a taste of exposure in a safe environment.

The next day dawned gloriously, so we headed off for the iconic Cinque Torri, a collection of five rock towers set at various angles atop a mountain two valleys away. After an adventurous drive of hairpin zig zags up to and down from each pass, we finally caught sight of our destination on the skyline. Once parked, access is gained by a chairlift and a whole 300m walk in! As the Italian school holidays were still in full swing, this popular tourist attraction, with its easy access, was awash with families of all ages enjoying the spectacular scenery, but the best views were reserved for those who earned them, from the dizzy heights from on high on the towers. The rope teams split up and climbed various multi-pitch routes before meeting up at the Alpine hut for well-deserved refreshments and walking back down. This was an auspicious start to the climbing phase.

The following day found us on Sella Torre, the massive escarpment that dominated our own valley. This presented a more difficult route finding conundrum and a more adventurous multi pitch abseil off, but the students were becoming more confident and adept and all went well. The next day we drove one valley away to climb on Torre

What is the purpose of a logbook?

The purpose of a logbook is to help the candidate demonstrate their experience in a given activity. For the purpose of a course application it demonstrates that they achieved the course pre-requisites, for example 40 independent climbs at a given grade.

However the logbook offers far more information than demonstrating course pre-requisites. It is their professional CV, it is a snapshot of who they are, showing their variety and depth of experience.

From an instructors point of view the logbook holds the useful information such as:

Have they climbed in a variety of climbing venues and rock types?

Have they had to navigate to big mountain routes in different weather conditions?

Have they had to deal with difficult situations?

How long the candidate has been doing the activity, is it a few months or many years?

This information can instantly show the difference between a fast track candidate and one who has a long term passion for the activity. This is useful to help understand the candidates experience, limitations and strengths.

What is the assessor looking for when reading a students logbook?

Using rock climbing as an example, I am looking for quality routes at the required grade. If the course pre-requisite is 20 multi-pitch routes I want to see that the candidate has met this requirement and there is no duplication of routes. A candidate that has satisfied the pre-requisites will usually be able to attend the course and participate fully, therefore gain most benefit without any concerns. On JSAT courses there is a lot of information to take on board, particularly at the leader and instructor level. Candidates that don't have the pre-requisites generally struggle to keep up and may fail the course a result.

What are the implications of submitting a poorly maintained logbook?

First of all, it reflects very badly on the candidate. You wouldn't expect a job interview if you submitted a poorly written CV. Likewise candidates shouldn't expect a place on a course if their logbook is poor. In some cases candidates have been refused onto the course. In some exceptional cases candidates have been accepted

at risk. In a lot of cases the candidate's lack of experience is immediately apparent. Their skills are lacking, they are either not safe, or overly safe by continually checking everything but failing to do the fundamentals. The latter point highlights a candidate that has limited experience.

How much detail is required?

Keep logbooks simple, that way its easier for the assessor to read. Using a Quality Mountain Day as an example, its perfectly adequate to enter "Snowdon Horseshoe" as this is simple to understand. A list of grid references is pointless!

What is the worst example you have come across as an assessor?

There have been occasions where it is blatantly obvious that a logbook is an act of fiction. The routes they have logged don't make any logical sense. Worse still, when the candidates have been questioned they couldn't answer any basic questions about the route. It is very disappointing when this happens. Thankfully it is very rare!

Is it best to be hand written or typed?

There is always debate over this point. For my point of view as long as the candidate has a log book, that's key. A written logbook can be more personal and authentic, but must be neat and legible. Handing an assessor a memory stick is not acceptable.



Would you advise using electronic logbooks such as UKC?

Electronic logbooks are very useful, particularly when you can search for a route name and the rest of the information is added for you. This greatly speeds things up. If you are going to print off your logbook from an electronic system, make sure that it's easy to read and formatted correctly, handing the assessor an unorganised bunch of pages is not acceptable. Mountain Training UK now uses the Candidate Management System (CMS), which is entirely electronic.

Summary

Logbooks are an essential to record your personal experience. They demonstrate to the assessor that you have the pre-requisite experience, knowledge and currency required to attend a course or assessment. When a logbook is not at the required standard, the assessor will begin to scrutinize the candidate which puts them under more pressure. It is beneficial for all concerned if the candidate puts the effort into the logbook from the start.

Written by Damon Jones – Ultimate descent Ltd

Personal Multi-Pitch Rock Climbing

Date	Crag and guidebook	Route name	Grade	Category LP/LB/AL/Se/S	Comments
17/04/14	Bosigran – West Country Climbs Rock Fax	Doorway	S (4A)	AL	
17/04/14	Bosigran – West Country Climbs Rock Fax	Doorpost	HS (4B)	AL	
18/04/14	Bosigran – West Country Climbs Rock Fax	Andrew	S (4A)	AL	
18/04/14	Bosigran – West Country Climbs Rock Fax	Little Brown Jug	VS (5A)	AL	
19/04/14	Bosigran – West Country Climbs Rock Fax	Dong	S (4B)	AL	
19/04/14	Bosigran – West Country Climbs Rock Fax	Ding	VS (4C)	AL	
22/04/14	Craig Bwlch y Moch - Tremadog – Climbers Club	Shadrach	VS (4C)	Se	
22/04/14	Craig Bwlch y Moch - Tremadog – Climbers Club	Grim Wall Direct	E1 (5B)	Se	
22/04/14	Craig Bwlch y Moch - Tremadog – Climbers Club	Leg Slip	E1 (5B)	Se	
22/04/14	Craig Bwlch y Moch - Tremadog – Climbers Club	Chwys	E2 (5B)	Se	

Category: LP = led, placing protection, LB = led, bolt protection, AL = alternately led, Se = seconded, S = soloed

Brunton equipment review

By Ryan Lang

I'm convinced we have all been in the situation where your mobile phone battery has died just when you needed it most. At the very least it's an inconvenience however in a worst-case scenario it could have very serious consequences.

Mobile devices are becoming more and more useful which results in our ever-increasing reliance upon them. The disadvantage in all of this is that battery technology is not developing at the same pace, which means we are always looking for a plug socket so that we can charge our phones up. In normal day-to-day life this doesn't usually present a problem. However for those that venture into the outdoors for more than a day away from civilisation, this is where our power problems can start.

Useful tip!

The vast majority of portable electronic devices use lithium-ion polymer batteries. This type of battery uses a fast charge to reach 80% capacity, then switches to trickle charging. Using an iPhone as an example, it will take approximately one hour to charge an iPhone to 80%, then another hour to fully charge it. In other words, fully charging your phone takes twice as long as an 80% charge. The moral of the story is, don't waste time fully charging your phone unless you really need to.

There are many portable charging systems available on the market which can help you ensure your devices stay charged whilst out and about. This report has reviewed two devices from Brunton, which were kindly provided by Rosker Ltd.

The first device is the Brunton Metal 4400, which is a Lithium-ion portable back-up battery that is charged via USB.

The second device is the Brunton Hydrogen Reactor, which is a device that uses Hydrogen fuel cartridges to create power by relying on a chemical reaction with Oxygen.



Brunton Hydrogen Reactor

The first impression of the Hydrogen reactor was that it looked like a very capable device that would be at the very top of the packing list. As it turned out, looks are very deceiving! The reactor has one USB output which makes it less versatile compared to the 4400. The reactor is not robust and has a rather plastic feel which didn't inspire confidence in its longevity. The reactor requires to be operated upright and needs ventilation, which means it is not suitable for use in a bergan top pocket whilst on the move. The device comes into its own when there is no other power available, as it generates power using the hydrogen cartridges, therefore it is useful when deployed for extended periods of time. The cartridges are heavy for the amount of power generated. Careful consideration should be given to the amount of cartridges required to reduce weight. There is a useful calculator on the Brunton website that assists with this.

Advantages

- Does not require power to recharge (Uses Hydrogen fuel cartridges).
- Good for long duration expeditions
- No natural discharge
- Airline approved for carry-on luggage

Disadvantages

- Slow charge time (240 mins to charge iPhone to 80%)
- Cost
- Difficult and costly to get Hydrogen cartridges recharged
- Requires a constant air supply to operate
- Hydrogen cartridges are heavy (96 grams)
- Not very robust
- Features ★★★★★
- Design ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Value ★★★★★
- Overall ★★★★★

Brunton 4400

First impressions of the 4400 was that it is solid in construction and simple to use. The device has two outputs (USB and micro USB) which makes it useful to the majority of electronic devices, as they either use USB or have cables that do! The device is charged via a USB input which makes it easy to charge (laptop, iPhone charger etc). Once the phone was connected to the device, it immediately started charging and also displayed the amount of charge left in the LED display. The 4400 is compact enough to slip into your pocket without being overly bulky. The one slight problem with the device is that the integral charging cable is very short, which means it is left hanging from its power source whilst charging. This could possibly weaken the cable over time.

Advantages

- Simple to use
- Rugged
- Cost effective
- Charge level indicator
- Simple to recharge (USB)
- Has USB and Micro USB outputs
- Fast charge time (65 mins to charge iPhone to 80%)

Disadvantages

- The integral charging cable is very short which means it will usually end up hanging from the charging source. This may weaken the integral charging cable over time.
- Features ★★★★★
- Design ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Value ★★★★★
- Overall ★★★★★



Summary

The Brunton metal 4400 is a simple and effective portable charging unit. It will meet the need of most users that require a portable charger, for short periods away from conventional power sources. It is robust, small and lightweight, making it a valuable addition to the outdoor enthusiast.

The Brunton Hydrogen Reactor is more suitable for extended periods of time away from conventional power sources. It is more complex and expensive to operate than the Brunton metal 4400. It has a slow recharge rate which makes it unsuitable for charging devices quickly. To date, it has been very difficult to find a shop that offers a cartridge recharge service.

Both devices are useful and are suited to different tasks, however the clear winner in the trial is the Brunton metal 4400 due to its lower cost, simplicity and ease of use.

	Size	Weight	Time to charge iPhone to 80% (actual results)	Amount of iPhone charges	Cost
Brunton Metal 4400	10.5x5.5x2.5 cm	206 grams	65 mins	2 full cycles	£50 RRP
Brunton Hydrogen Reactor	13.5x7.3x3.4 cm	242 grams (with 1 core)	240 mins	3 per cartridge	£135 RRP



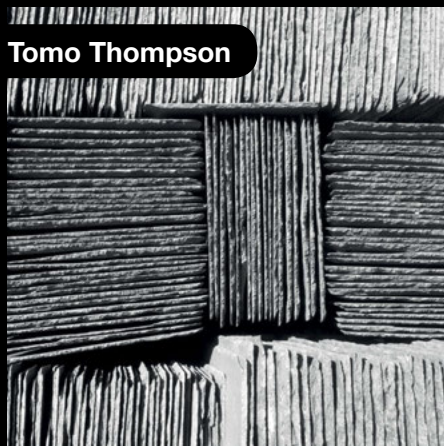
PHOTO

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



Tomo Thompson



Ryan Lang



Paul Edwards



Keith Geldard



Ex Blue Tour



Ryan Lang

Tarquin Shipley



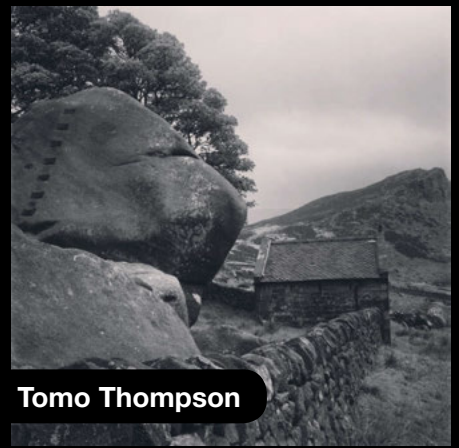
Sam Marshall



Tomo Thompson



Tomo Thompson



Tomo Thompson

Sam Marshall



DMM climbing bags trial

DMM have recently released a range of new bags specifically designed to satisfy all flavours of climbers from sports to trad. DMM kindly provided the AMA with a sample of their new range of bags for review. This article reviews the following bags:

The Vector – trad climbing bag • The Zenith – multi-pitch climbing bag • The Flight – sports climbing bag

The Vector by Ryan Lang

The Vector is an exciting new trad climbing sack with some superb design features.

- Neat top opening gives very fast access to your kit
 - Bright inside fabric reflects light in, making it easier to find kit items
 - Reinforced opening of the bivi extension makes packing easy
 - Perfectly sized at 45 litres to carry all your trad climbing kit
 - Easy grab Racksack makes gear storage snag free
 - Twin soft grip grab handles for a quick and easy carry
 - Internal and external pockets for guidebook and valuables
 - External compression straps for stability and extra comfort
 - Front grab handles double as kit racking daisy chains
 - Light but hardwearing materials throughout the construction
 - Internal arc stiffeners keep the sack's shape and allow it to be free standing
 - Flow Airmesh back system, shoulder straps and padded waist belt for comfort
 - Reinforced areas around the lid and base
- Weight - 1225g



Before I first got my hands on the Vector, I was trying to imagine what a “Trad sack” would look like and what features it would have. My first impression of the Vector was that it looked very different to any other rucksack I had ever seen. After my initial shock of having a rucksack without a normal closing lid had subsided, it was time to fully investigate the Vector and all its features.

The top opening of the Vector gives fast access to your kit, while the internal stiffeners allow the sack to keep its shape and be free standing as you pack or unpack your kit for the day. No more fumbling, just quick, easy loading and unloading – which means less faffing and more time spent climbing! The inside walls of the sack are lined with a bright yellow material which reflects light, making it easier to find what you are looking for.

When it's time to go home, packing the Vector is just as quick. The wide, reinforced opening makes packing easy. Once your kit is in, the sack is closed and ready to go in seconds. The draw cord tab sits snugly against the base of your hand as you cinch it down; and if rain has stopped play, you can fold the lid to deflect the water away on the way home.

At 45 litre the Vector is the perfect size for trad climbing. You can certainly fit in everything you'd want for a full day out.

Once of my favorite Vector features is the supplied easy-grab Rack sack – this neat feature makes storing your rack simple and snag free and allows the rack (the heaviest items in your bag) to be stored together at the top of the bag. It also stops your rack from picking up dirt and grit too. There is also an internal pocket for valuables and a large guidebook pocket on the external side panel.

The Vector has a quick-drying Flow Airmesh back system and shoulder straps, plus padded waist belt – all of which makes for a comfortable carry. External compression straps give extra stability and stop heavy items shifting about in the sack. The Vector also has twin soft grip grab handles which make it easy to lift and move.

Vector Summary

Overall the Vector proved to be a fantastic trad bag. The load carrying ability and ease of packing make it absolutely ideal for getting yourself and your equipment to the base of the crag. It has everything that you would expect from a high end trad climbing sack without the need for any bells and whistles. The only very minor criticism is that the guidebook pocket is slightly on the small side. It's the perfect size for a small guide book, but I struggled to fit in the slightly larger Rockfax. This minor problem was overcome by packing the guidebook in the pocket prior to packing the main compartment. Fashion is not something that I would normally associate with the climbing scene, however, this sack is a head turner and has started many conversations at the base of the crag. If you're in the market for a new rucksack for climbing, my best advice would be to make best use of your DMM discount and order a Vector ASAP!

VECTOR	
Features	★★★★★
Design	★★★★★
Performance	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★★

The Zenith by DMM

The Zenith is a small but powerful bag carried on long multi-pitch routes. The Zenith. Smooth profile reduces the weight. Low profile base allows easy access. Easy access zip panel operation. Additional gear loops and daisy chains. External and internal valuables pockets. Perfectly sized at 18 litres to carry all your trad climbing kit. Flow Airmesh back panel and shoulder straps. Removable waist belt for extra comfort. Grab handle and yoke on top. Light but hardwearing materials throughout. Streamlined profile helps to reduce weight. Weight - 580g

When I received my bright red Zenith bag, my first thoughts were that it was impossible to lose it in the crag. This was followed by me thinking that it was too much kit in it at all. However, I saw this little pack very differently.

Firstly, the colour; I am a fan of red as possible when out in the crag, sometimes to the extent of being a bit of this reason alone meant that the Zenith was a winner. However it is available in other colours if you wish to remain a bit more subtle.

Secondly the size; as mentioned, it is a small pack. I thought it wouldn't be very useful, however again I was proven wrong. I coped with a pair of approach shoes, a belay jacket and a spot of trad gear. The ergonomics of the pack were perfect when fully packed and I could carry it for a long bag. If you were carrying more gear, the extra gear loops on the top would be useful.

Inside the pack there was a hydration sleeve which I did not use. I actually used the sleeve for my cash with the watch. The carrying handle was perfect on any belay and made it very easy to use. The Zenith's easy zip opening and internal pockets were also very useful.

I wore the sack for the trial and found it very comfortable. It has an air mesh back which is very comfortable. It has a waist belt that sits around the waist and I noticed that this could be useful for carrying a sternum strap fitted to the pack.

Zenith Summary

This pack has proven itself to be a very useful addition to my climbing gear. I can't see me being without it in the future. It is a great bag for banks or do as I have to do. If you need it, and get onto it, it is yours today.

az Edkins

highly featured climbing sack designed to be routes. The following features are the hallmark

- potential for snagging
- easy access to harness racking & chalk bag
- lining & bucket style design to limit spillage
- daisy chains on the side panels
- multiple pockets with zip openings
- to carry all your kit on a multi-pitch route
- and shoulder straps for a comfortable carry
- extra security
- top for a quick and easy carry
- materials throughout the construction
- to reduce wear and tear

green Zenith climbing sack. I was sure that it would be dark. This was closely followed by the fact that it wasn't going to fit on my back after a very short time and I was differently.

I was a fan of being as bright as the hills or climbing, and not offending others, so I was glad the pack was onto a bright green. Available in other colors if you want more inconspicuous.

Mentioned at first glance, I was very useful with regards to my gear as proven wrong. It easily fits my

climbing shoes, the guide book, waterproof jacket, and lunch. Overall it is advertised with an 18 litre capacity and the pack meant it did not get in the way even though I could easily access all my gear loops and chalk bag. I can carry more gear than your harness could fit there are no unused sides of the pack that could be used.

There were a number of useful features including a top pocket I did not use however this was simple to work out, a pocket for the guide book. The internal zip pocket was very handy to secure my car keys and a key clip very handy to secure my car keys and a key clip on the top meant it was so easy to secure my gear. It was very easy to get my gear in and out due to the bucket design.

For an entire day so it was a relief that it was so breathable. The mesh back that allowed any sweat to dry quickly, and the shoulder straps above your harness to stop it moving around. I was removed if you do not like wearing them. There were a few things which I did find very comfortable to have



ZENITH

Features	★★★★★
Design	★★★★★
Performance	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★★

to be a valuable piece of gear and I will not be afraid to raid your piggy bank to convince the DMM and order

The Flight by Tom Odling

The Flight is a highly featured sport climbing crag sack, combining rope bag and rucksack. The Flight contains the following features.
 Perfectly sized at 45 litres to carry all your sport climbing kit, plus an 80m rope
 Maximum 'carry on' hand luggage on most airlines
 Suitcase style opening for quick and easy access
 Rigid sidewalls for easier packing and unloading
 Quickdraw rack, rope tarp and pockets to keep your kit well organised
 Flow Airmesh back system and shoulder straps for comfort
 Grab handles for a quick and easy carry
 Light but hardwearing materials throughout the construction
 Reinforced areas around the lid and base
 Weight - 1560g



Bottom Line Up Front: The DMM Flight is a great pack for a day of climbing but I take more to the crag than DMM think! I can carry enough for a full day out but I end up carrying my rope on the top meaning I can't carry a second rope up there as DMM suggest.

I'll get to the size of the bag in a bit but before I do let's discuss the features. The Flight is a 45litre pack designed to carry all your kit for a day of sport climbing in a clam-shell design with several internal sections for managing your crag admin. It's a design several manufacturers have followed and it works. DMM's unique selling point is that the Flight is designed to be just small enough to be allowed as carry on luggage on a plane. Although regulations mean you can't take climbing gear on the plane you can fill the Flight with your clothes and put your gear in your hold luggage so it is a useful feature.

On the outside of the pack there is a top pocket big enough for a large guide book and lots of other small items. I tend to use this for my phone, wallet, keys etc because you can access them from the outside. It's a brilliant, large pocket. There is also an elasticated fold away helmet cover; this is great for carrying your helmet but as I rarely wear a helmet sport climbing I tend to use it as an easy access carrying point for my down jacket or hoody while on the walk in to the crag. Again this tucks away when not in use. On one side there is an elasticated water bottle pouch which does what it says on the tin. On the top there are two straps for carrying a coiled rope, which tuck away when not in use, they work well although limit access to the easy access top pocket.

Inside there is a bright yellow rope tarp with straps to hold it in place on one side of the open clam-shell, and on the other side is a separate compartment with a mesh cover and zip opening. This has a gear loop for your quickdraws and the mesh is designed to allow your climbing shoes to breathe. There is also a small internal pocket for other small items such as tape, sand paper and nail clippers.

All the features are neat, well thought out and effective which brings me to my only gripe, I wish it was just slightly bigger. DMM claim the bag is big enough to carry an 80m rope, harness, quickdraws, chalk bag, spare chalk and rock shoes inside; and a helmet, water bottle and second rope on the outside, and it is. Unfortunately I tend to also take spare rock shoes, flip flops, shorts, a down jacket, maybe a waterproof, a load of food, another bottle of water if it's hot and some other guff to boot. I can't get it all in with the rope inside. Is this a problem? Not to me as I rarely need two ropes and I simply carry my main 70m on the top; this leaves me with loads of space for everything I could possibly want to take to the crag on the inside; so it's all good. Away from it's core purpose I have also used the bag for bouldering, family days out and it is now my climbing wall bag of choice, it is super versatile.

Flight Summary

The Flight bag is a great crag pack. I would say it is equally adept for trad or sport climbing (so long as you aren't going to climb with it) and it is also equally good for short haul flights and family picnics! I question if you could really use it for a full day out with two ropes but this does not detract from it's utility for me at all. I think it's ace! It's not cheap at full retail of £85 but is broadly comparable to its main competitors and loads cheaper than some. At the AMA discount price it is a ridiculous bargain and knocks the socks of anything else in its price range. Score 4.5/5 (would be perfect if it was just slightly bigger)

FLIGHT

Features	★★★★★
Design	★★★★★
Performance	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★★

Exercise Peruvian Cat

Cordillera Blanca and Cordillera Occidental – 23 April – 23 May 14

Written by Damian Warren



In the Spring of 2014, twelve soldiers from 101 (City of London) Engineer Regiment (Explosive Ordnance Disposal), many of whom had recently returned from serving in Afghanistan, and East Midlands Universities' Officer Training Corps, completed a 30-day expedition to carry out high altitude mountaineering in the Peruvian Andes, culminating in the successful ascent of Coropuna (6425m), Peru's 3rd highest mountain. Other than the two instructors, the team consisted entirely of other ranks and junior non-commissioned officers. A key tenet of the expedition was to introduce novice and intermediate mountaineers to alpine mountaineering adventurous training with the hope of inspiring the soldiers to lead similar expeditions in the future. The participants were Maj John Tolan, Capt Damian Warren, Cpl Jim A'Hara, Cpl 'Chuck' Berry, LCpl Ant Bayliss, LCpl Tom Eaves, Spr 'Benny' Hill, Spr Dan Sheldon, Spr Chris Wagstaff, Spr Sam Roslyn, Spr Matt Dalley and Spr Jordan McDonagh.

This article has two primary aims. The first is to describe the expedition in terms of the challenges faced and the successes achieved. The second is to act as a reference for future expeditions, whether planning to conduct adventurous training in Peru or high altitude mountaineering elsewhere. The AMA readership is wide-ranging, from that of novices to knowledgeable mountaineers. It is hoped this article will be useful to all.

Expedition Synopsis

The team undertook thorough preparatory training where all members gained the winter mountain foundation qualification – basic winter mountaineering skills (using crampons and ice axes while moving over snow-covered terrain). Additionally, all of the team completed a Scottish training exercise (based at Inverness), on which three remote Munros, Scottish mountains over 3000ft, were climbed in typically adverse Scottish conditions. During the main expedition to Peru the team completed an acclimatisation phase with everyone reaching heights over 4600m, just 200m below the height of Mont Blanc. The acclimatisation treks were set

in rural Peruvian locations bringing home the hardship of the local people who live off the land on the most incredible gradients. The indigenous Peruvians could always be spotted in their colourful attire between the maze and corn fields, normally accompanied by a menagerie of animals, key to their livelihood.

The first mountain phase saw the team move to the steep-sided and jagged-walled Ishinca valley. Alpine skills were taught by Major Tolan, the senior instructor who has been to the valley many times before, Captain Warren who was both the expedition leader and alpine mountain instructor and 2 local guides. The lessons included crevasse rescue, abseiling, moving together while roped up and further practice in wearing technical equipment – ice axes and crampons. Towering above base camp was a snow covered glaciated mountain called Ishinca (5530m). The team set off to climb the mountain which, being early in the season, had deep snow and very few previous tracks to follow. After 9 hours of negotiating crevasses, ice cliffs and steep snow slopes the entire team reached the summit of Ishinca, a really impressive feat just nine days into the expedition.

After the initial success of climbing Ishinca the team's morale was high and the plan for the next phase was to climb Copa, a huge 6000m mountain. Unfortunately, significantly high snowfall resulted in an immediate escape to the valley floor between two nearby avalanches. Notably, the team made it to the high camp at 5200m carrying full mountain packs crossing boulder fields and ascending a loose scree gully – all credit to the team's determination to climb a 6000m mountain. The unstable snowpack and prediction of continued dangerous conditions resulted in a quick adjustment of the plan, forcing the team to move to Southern Peru to attempt the volcanic giant, Coropuna, 6425m.

The unexpected move required the team to be flexible and change objective to an unplanned mountain. The move from Northern Peru to the town of Arequipa in Southern Peru required over 24 hours of bus travel covering nearly 2000km. The team then moved



in 4x4 vehicles to a base camp in the volcanic wasteland below the slopes of the now extinct volcano. The following day we ascended through moraines and giant boulders to a high camp at 5400m. The human body will never fully acclimatise to this altitude and in such an inhospitable location plants and animals cannot survive. It is never pleasant waking up at 0030 hours to start the day, but at 5400m in a frozen tent with significant wind chill it requires some sort of motivation – luckily the challenge of scaling Peru’s 3rd highest mountain was just what was required! The climb from high camp immediately started on ice-hard snow with just the glow of head torches and some moonlight to find sound foot placements. Shortly into the climb crampons were donned and the team moved onto steeper terrain to ascend through ice covered rock buttresses; it was probably just as well it was still dark.

At the end of the mixed snow and rock ridge the sun was beginning to rise, bringing much needed warmth to the team struggling with the freezing temperatures – water bottles were frozen solid, down jackets and even full balaclavas were being worn. By this stage, movement was slow and methodical, requiring immense perseverance and overcame fatigue and hardship beyond the levels ever experienced by the soldiers before. It all paid off and the whole team were standing on the summit of Coropuna – a truly incredible and hard won experience.

Due to our move to the south of Peru there was an opportunity to visit the world heritage site of Machu Picchu. Although further long distance overnight bus journeys were required, the stunning and simply spectacular ancient city was a highlight and fitting end to the expedition.

With military operations likely to focus on the prevention of conflicts and overseas nations’ capacity building, there were many cultural and geographical similarities with the remote Peruvian regions visited to those likely to be encountered in the future, making the experience even more valuable for the soldiers present. It not only improved fitness but also the soldiers’ understanding of cultural differences and their ability to operate in small teams in remote and hostile environments. The expedition was both mentally and physically challenging and increased the team’s effectiveness as soldiers preparing to go on future operations by fostering qualities of team spirit, robustness and initiative.

Huge thanks given to the very significant support of the Army Mountaineering Association, Ulysses Trust, Support Command, Adventurous Training Group (Army), Richmond Hill Trust Fund, Services Sound and Vision Corporation, Felix Fund, Royal Engineers Corps’ Funds, Blythe Sappers and Berlin Infantry Memorial Trust Fund (BIMTF). Without such kind and generous support, expeditions of this nature would not be possible.

Questions for Snowdonia First Aid



Written by Steve Howe – Snowdonia First Aid

What is the history of REC first aid? Rescue Emergency Care was formed more than 20 years ago by Dr. Bob Phillips. He was one of the pivotal figures involved in the British Association of Ski Patrollers First Aid Course. This was characterized by a practical, hands-on, no big technical terms approach. Dr. Bob thought this philosophy could be applied to First Aid in all other outdoor environments.

What is the difference between REC first aid and a conventional first aid course? Conventional (sometimes called “carpet first aid”!) tends to assume that expert help will follow on in a relatively short time. REC assumes that help could very well be a couple of hours (or more) away. That means that we have to consider climate and possibly the necessity of moving casualties. In practice, that means that we have to get a bit more physical and robust!

How did you get involved in first aid? I needed a ‘ticket’ for my National Governing Body awards (ML etc.) I then got involved in the Mountain Rescue Teams, firstly as a member of the Ogwen valley Team, then became a Search Dog Handler and am now a member of the Llanberis Mountain Rescue Team. We are the busiest team in the country, literally dealing with about 180 Rescues a year. I hold the ECMR qualification (Emergency Care in Mountain Rescue) the highest MR in-house First Aid qualification. I’ve been a First Aid Trainer for 12 years and hold the position of REC Regional Director for Wales.

What are the 10 most useful items you carry in a mountain first aid kit that most people may not think about? Something to ‘stick’ with (black nasty) (one of the keys to improvisation) • Something to cut with (the other key to improvisation) • Tick

Remover • ‘Blizzard Bag’ • Aspirin • Face shield • Nitrile Gloves (several pairs) • Tweezers • Dental First Aid Kit (on expeditions) • Glucose Gel

What item is the most versatile first aid item that no one should leave home without? As above, something to ‘stick’ with, something to cut with.

What has been the most rewarding rescue you’ve been involved in? Tricky one that! Some that have actually been life-saving (see You-Tube ,Snowdon Winter Rescue – I’m doing the First Aid, inside the yellow group shelter – I’m the one who gets blown off his feet towards the end) and some where it has turned out to be a mate!

What’s the most preventable situation you’ve been involved in? Tricky again – there have been so many! A recurring theme is people going out in winter without crampons and ice-axe (in that order....)

What are the most common first aid mistakes people make when in the mountains? Not insulating serious casualties from the ground. Believing that a casualty has ‘serious’ (i.e. life-threatening) bleeding. (try pouring a pint of water over a tee-shirt!)

What’s the best piece of advice you’d give to someone before they go into the mountains? Come on a Course with us first!

Snowdonia First Aid is run by Helen and Steve Howe and can run courses anywhere in the country. They also run ML and SPA training and assessment courses. For further information contact us at: 07885133758 or info@snowdoniafirstaid.co.uk

Interview with Emma Twyford

Emma Twyford became the second British woman to climb E9 with an ascent of the bold arete climb Rare Lichen, in the Ogwen Valley, North Wales. Emma has been at the forefront of British women’s climbing for some time, with onsights of 8a abroad, 8a flash and 8b redpoint on UK soil. Emma kindly agreed to be interviewed by the AMA.

What inspired you to become a climber? My Dad and his friends from the Mountain Rescue team took me climbing. I used to swing on the trees at the bottom and they took me up some easy multipitch climbs at Shepherds Crag in Borrowdale. I got hooked pretty quickly.

I was very lucky growing up in the Lakes. My dad and his friend Mike Park started me off and showed me how to lead and place gear well. Having Mike as a mentor was great as he taught me how to climb safely and competently. Then as I got older I went out climbing with Caff (James McHaffie) which was great as we did lots of cool climbs together and he really pushed my standards whilst being super chilled and psyched.

What is your most memorable route? It’s always changing! There are so many but I guess the one that stands out at the moment is Fiesta Los Biceps, a 7a at Riglos in Spain which I did with Alex Haslehurst. Amazing multi-pitch climbing in the sunshine with vultures soaring about!

What is your favourite climbing destination? Gogarth on a beautiful sunny day!

What specific areas do you concentrate on to improve your trad climbing? Just getting out as much as possible is key and getting my gear placements smooth. Also pushing myself on sport climbing really improved my trad climbing standard.

What is your top tip you would give someone trying to improve their grade? If you don’t push yourself outside of the comfort zone and try stuff that you’re not good at then it will be more difficult to improve.

All climbers irrespective of grade have an element of self doubt, how do you overcome this? I have plenty of self doubt – usually self talk and a positive mantra helps but getting the ball rolling is a big thing. Once you know you can do something its easier to repeat.

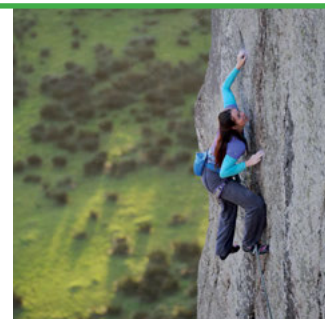
Does your background in Sports Science assist with mental preparation? Sometimes, I think it makes me more aware of what I can do to help myself.

What is next on the agenda for you? I have a few projects in mind but as with anything its hitting form, currently I have a few injuries so it’s a bit of a slow start. At the moment I’m just ticking over getting out in the sunshine.

What is your long term plan? I’m not really sure as its always changing. Hopefully to keep on pushing myself as much as I can.

The gap between men and woman is closing at dramatic speed, what has been the catalyst for this? I think the gap is still fairly big but there are now more facilities for training and as with anything once one person has done it people start to realise that it is achievable.

Emma is sponsored by DMM, 5.10 and Mountain Hardwear





Remec 8000 Manaslu Expedition

by Jim Stacey

The Royal Engineers Mountaineering and Exploration Club (REMEC) mounted an expedition, to the Nepalese Himalaya in the post monsoon season of 2013. The main team attempted Manaslu, the 8th highest mountain in the world and the development team climbed Peak Larkye (~6200m) and completed the Manaslu circuit trek.

The REMEC 8000 expedition began in October 2012 with the expedition leadership under Chris Allewell conducting interviews during a selection weekend which also saw personnel getting to demonstrate their mountaineering skills. Further training meets at weekends to cover mountain emergencies, two weeks in Scotland to hone winter skills a week in N Wales and some time in the Alps saw the making of the main and development teams and numbers dropped from an initial 45 after the first weekend to a main team of 8 and a development team of 14.

In mid August the G4 team of Jon Evans, and Jim Stacey arrived in Kathmandu to sort out the expedition freight and take delivery of the oxygen systems we would use on the mountain. Once the rest of the team arrived, liaison with the British Embassy, the Nepalese tourism ministry and trekking agency completed the pre departure administration and we commenced with an epic bus ride to Arughat.

The bus journey which took 8 hours saw us swap the entire expedition freight to a four wheel drive bus halfway, get bogged in twice and with some rather large drops to one side

walk a lot of the route as it was quicker and safer. After a night in Arughat, we watched the porters depart carrying all our kit and equipment and then we began ours at a rather slower pace. The journey to base camp took nine days in total largely following the Budhi Gandaki river.

Initially this was almost a jungle environment replete with leeches and mosquitoes before slowly cooling down as we moved further up the valley. The journey was through a landscape straight out of Avatar with clouds constantly draping the peaks and the valleys very steep sides amplifying the constant roar of the river with its mass of water thundering down the valley (grade 5 for any paddlers wanting a trip), the constant waterfalls hundreds of metres high and the odd landslide from the last of the monsoon rain which accompanied us. After 7 days on the trail, we finally arrived at Samagoan (3750m),

the last village before Base Camp. We were surprised to be greeted by a sign saying that the AMA group prohibited horse riding in the village. Whilst it is widely known that the RLC have taken over the AMA committee, we were surprised to see that their control of mountaineering movements extended to horse riding at altitude!

After two days acclimatising we started the 4 hour uphill trek to Base Camp, a pretty tough day as you move from 3750m to 4850m and the altitude makes itself felt. The next few days were spent acclimatising and sorting equipment for the hill. In comparison to the commercial expeditions at base camp, we





looked like paupers despite all 8 of us having our own 2 man tent and having a heated Mess tent (sorry environment but it was worth it), 2 huge stores tents, a hand pumped shower, along with a toilet - well a barrel with a plastic bag in it.

The day came when it was time to begin the rotations but before we left, the mandatory Buddhist blessing ceremony -Puja took place, a Lama carried out the blessing as the prayer flags were raised. As part of the ceremony our boots, harness and crampons were also blessed and liberally covered in rice that we would continue to find for weeks to come. After a couple of hours the ceremony came to a finish the Sherpas settled down for some serious Chang drinking and we gathered our kit together for the first rotation to camp 1. The plan went along the lines of:

- BC (4750m) to C1 (5400m) stay overnight, back to BC,
- Rest day/s
- BC to C1, sleep C1, touch C2 (6200m) then return to C1, sleep, then to BC,
- Rest day/s
- BC to C1, sleep C1, to C2, sleep C2, touch C3 (6800m) then return to C2, sleep C2, to C1, sleep, to BC,

Following this we should be ready to make a summit attempt.

As it turned out, Chris C and Ben required medical attention in Kathmandu and the schedule had to be amended as Rob (the exped medic) and Chris A shuttled individuals down to Sama Goan for a MEDEVAC. Unfortunately this resulted in both Chris and Ben ultimately being returned to the UK. They have now made a full recovery.

Back on the mountain, we slowly we made our way to camp 1. The first 30 minutes from BC was spent walking through other expeditions camps as they stretched over the narrow moraine ridge that provided the only safe area from the avalanches of Niake to the North and the main Manaslu glacier to the South. A further hour was needed to get to crampon point - the edge of the glacier. From here it was a gentle 2hr walk through the crevasse field until you hit a long steep hill with C1 at the top. The hill was only about 250m long but took about 30 minutes to get up it. C1 was objectively safe (which proved very useful later in the expedition) and afforded spectacular views down across to the Tibetan plateau.

The route from C1 to C2 was the through a large icefall and arguably the hardest day on the mountain. With ice frequently falling around

us, and the constant creaking of the tottering blocks that made up the icefall, we tried not to hang around for long, although this is easier said than done jumarring vertical ice carrying 30kg at 6000m. A long day saw us into C2 on our first visit and not many had the energy or inclination to tag C3 the following day.

We required five days of good weather for a summit bid and waiting in Base Camp after our acclimatisation, we realised from the weather forecasts we were receiving (mdekeyser@weather4expeditions - brilliant service, accurate and highly recommended) that it wasn't coming soon. In need of a change in scenery and to further aid our body's recovery we headed to Sama Goan for two nights. After much forecast perusal and discussion we decided to start our summit attempt on 2nd October.

We knew that the weather could delay us at one of the camps and we were prepared for this but, we would be in the right place for when the weather was good. Winds and snowfall throughout the mountain saw us marooned at C1 waiting for the avalanche risk to reduce, whilst at C2 the Sherpas (a day ahead of us) escaped a huge avalanche by 5m that buried our previous sleeping platforms. After 24 hours of consolidation, but still in marginal conditions day we headed through the icefall again to C2. The route was much harder now, with the fixed ropes buried and loaded slopes requiring ballet dancer footsteps to cross. The only positive aspect was that some of the avalanches had filled in some difficult crevasses.

Moving up to C3 was relatively easy and not as technical climbing, with just a couple of steep sections, however a large crevasse had opened up just above C2 and having run out of ladders we required a long detour to bypass it. The weather as predicted wasn't the best and the winds were picking up and expected to be high during night but easing off during the early hours of the 9th.

The team had elected to sleep on oxygen¹ at C3 & C4 as the loss of Chris C and Ben gave us some spare, the sleep in the storm at C3 was made a fraction more uncomfortable by a nasal cannula, (softest silicone it may be, but sorry gimps it's just not normal to have a tube up your nose) but significantly warmer from the extra oxygen circulating around our bodies. The wind battered the tents throughout the night and when morning came it didn't ease at all. We delayed our start for C4 as long as possible and amid a slight easing of winds we began the journey to C4 (7600m) in late morning.



So far clothing has just been normal winter mountaineering clothing but at C3 with windchill at minus 35°C it was time for a full down suit. With the wind hurling the loose snow in our faces, goggles were a must and to top it off, the oxygen mask. Pretty much covered from head to toe we were all quite cosy as it was just like a nice Cairngorm storm (minus the oxygen) and well prepared we watched individuals from other teams turnaround after only a short time in such extreme conditions. With the oxygen flowing and the ability to adjust the flow rate to our exertions, we were all feeling good as the wind tried to blow us off our feet. Progress was slow up the face below the top seracs due not only to the gradient, but our fixed rope was buried under the windblown snow. About 250m short of C4 the ropes were buried under the snow and further on had vanished under avalanche debris. Under the conditions it was unsafe to continue and the difficult decision to abandon our summit bid was made. We stayed for a few moments, gazing east to Everest and west to the Annapurna massif only a short distance away, but before we chilled and remained in the spot forever headed down.

Moving down to C3 we rapidly packed the tents anxious to be out of the freezing wind and headed with colossal sacks down to C2. After a night in C2 we continued down to BC collecting C1 en route. This meant a lot of equipment on our backs and the remainder towed, pulk like behind us in canoe bags so we could strip in the hill in one go.

At BC we began to load all the kit in barrels ready to return to Kathmandu and although extremely disappointed at not making summit, we were all hugely grateful that we returned safely and with all fingers and toes still attached. In the words of Geordie the expedition Sage, "Accept fate, it just wasn't meant to be. That we tried in such testing conditions is testimony to each and every one of us, we should be humble enough to allow ourselves that much".

WARNING The expedition used DOGTAG insurance. They have proved highly ineffectual in paying the helicopter company for the rescue of the two climbers. The air rescue companies in Nepal are now refusing to fly if the underwriting is by DOGTAG **WARNING**

The expedition used Summit Oxygen (<http://www.summitoxygen.com>) and it proved very efficient, very reliable and very comfortable. Their new system is highly recommended and is being adopted by the major commercial companies (HIMEX etc). The expedition witnessed several other systems in use which appeared neither particularly reliable or efficient. In particular the Topout system was widely disliked by Sherpas and Climbers and from reports was unreliable.



2 Signal Regiment Ex NORTHERN GOKYO KEYS

Written by Joshua Ingold

Exercise Northern Gokyo Keys was a 2 Signal Regiment level 3 High altitude trekking expedition to the Sagarmatha (Everest) National Park in Nepal over the period 2 – 24 Feb 14. The expedition, one of only fourteen HQ ATG (A) sponsored expeditions this year would see a team of 14 personnel from the unit set out to reach Everest Base Camp (EBC) (5364m) whilst also conducting ascents of Kala Patthar (5550m) and then trek to the less frequently visited Gokyo lakes area with a view to ascending the peak of Gokyo Ri (5360m). Our team, led by the Regimental Ops officer Maj George Hume, included a wide range of ages, ranks and experience which was drawn from across the Regiment's three Squadrons and included seven members from the Corps, five Queen's Gurkha Signals, one RAMC and one AGC (SPS).

Our flight out to Nepal with Oman air via Muscat passed off without incident and the team arrived safely at a bustling Kathmandu airport late in the evening. It was discovered that security scanners were an inconvenience only necessary for locals. Braving the chaos of the arrivals area we were greeted by a gang of 'assistants' and after the mandatory flower garlands had been laboriously handed out we made our way to the hotel. Everyone was amazed that the task of loading our bags required the labour of seven people although they all seemed happy to have found employment. After a short ride through Kathmandu, we arrived at the Hotel Manang located down an improbable looking side street in the Thamel district of Kathmandu.

An administration day followed, where we met our head guide, Kumar. After conducting a day of last minute shopping and final admin, we took an early morning bus ride to the airport for the infamous flight into Lukla. Despite LCpl Andy William's confusion as to whether he should present the security staff with a boarding pass or a knife, we made it onto the plane. It is true that the landing into Lukla does look a little precarious as the runway seems impossibly small and the mountains perilously close.

Whilst Capt Kirsty Davies-Walters enjoyed the view of the underside of the seat in front, the pilots expertly landed the plane and we were on our way. The first day's trek through the Dudha Koshi valley was a fine way to warm up for the days ahead. We wound our way through the steep valley passing a number of small villages on the trail. Occasionally a re-entrant would provide a gap and we would glimpse snowy mountain summits some 3000m above us. These scenes would become familiar in the days ahead. We arrived at the optimistically named Green Field lodge in Phakding for our first nights stop and ordered our first of many Nepali set meals. Rice, dhal and potato curry was one of the great certainties of the expedition, as we would come to find out. Day two saw us leave the relative security of the valley and climb up into the National Park proper. The climb up

to Namche was tough in the heat of the day and the first real challenge that we faced, today it was 25 degrees, we were soon to experience what minus 25 degrees felt like. The climb up from the valley to Namche is 800mtrs on the map, however your heart, lungs and legs climb over 1800m during the trek up to Namche Bazaar, with the final 600mtrs in the last 4km. Despite this, Capt Henry Chandler still found the energy to descend a considerable distance to collect a misplaced walking pole - his second fineable offence of the day.

Namche Bazaar is a shock to the system in a number of ways. A veritable metropolis high up in the mountains, it is a mix of knock off gear shops and lodges, a lot of whom are called the 'Everest View'. Like Val Thorens without the chair lifts, it is perched dangerously in a hanging valley at around 3400m. The next day was a planned acclimatisation day and involved a short but energetic walk up out of Namche to Syangboche airstrip and then onto the aptly named Everest View hotel, which differs from similarly named establishments in that it actually offers a view of Everest. The views from here were sublime. Everest was, from here somewhat distant but Ama Dablam (6856m), Thamskeru (6608m) and Kongde (6186m) were all clearly visible.

Moving on to Deboche, we negotiated a steep sided valley where we witnessed the effect that a landslide has on a metal bridge, accompanied by our ever present Yak train which carried the majority of our overnight equipment we climbed our way back up out of the valley floor. So crucial were the high altitude beasts of burden to our success that they were given names and corresponding personalities. Whilst Yakie Chan was agile on all terrain, Michael Yakson was less willing to be team player.

The walk to Dingboche took us into glacial moraine for the first time. The scenery changed dramatically to a high mountain environment where snowy peaks, now seemingly within walking distance, shot into the dark blue sky all around us. That evening, some of the team climbed up a spur towards the view point at Nankar Tshang pictured below, from where we watched the sun set over Ama Dablam.

As the sun went in, our Gurkha contingent produced down jackets that they had stowed in their day sacks. They were wise to do so, temperatures dropped to -20C that night! Descending back to our lodge, we sat around the much coveted wood (or yak dung) burning stove and drank the ubiquitous lemon and honey tea. The tea houses were themselves an excellent part of the trek. Providing an endless supply of rice and snickers bars, each one with its own unique charms to the trip. Our stay in them was perhaps made even more pleasant through the efforts of our very own local LCpl Tshring Sherpa. His tireless efforts to assimilate the rest of the expedition with local culture become one of the genuine highlights of the expedition.



The team at 5500mtrs on a glorious afternoon with Everest and Nuptse in the background. L-R Cpl Timo Boulton, WO1 (YofS) Steve Binks, LCpl Tshring Sherpa, Cpl Jayaram Puri, Cpl Dipal Gurung, Lt Josh Ingold, Maj George Hume, Cpl Jim Beck, Capt Kirsty Davies-Walters, Capt Henry Chandler, LCpl Ajay Gurung, LCpl Andy Williams and SSgt Damber Thapa Magar.



landslides to negotiate along the way. A final drop onto the glacier itself led to a snaking path around hidden ice towers and up towards the prayer flag adorned cairn that marks EBC. A diminutive site outside of the climbing season, it nonetheless represented a high point in the trip for all. The photo below taken at EBC on a day when we had the Khumbu glacier and EBC all to ourselves.

It was on the descent to Gorak Shep that we noticed a significant deterioration to the state of SSgt Damber, who had been stoically suffering in silence for some days. He had finally succumbed to Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS) and had to be helicoptered off to Kathmandu where the reduction in altitude saw him make a swift and full recovery. The rest of the group descended to Pheriche, reaching this small metropolis in the dark, where we were rejoined by Cpl Dipal who had gallantly volunteered to accompany SSgt Damber in the helicopter to collect his kit from the lodge in Pheriche.

Descending once more towards Phortse the weather, that had been so kind in that crucial 48 hour window, turned again. We decided, following a rest day, that it was no longer viable to trek to Gokyo. Whilst disappointed at this, the group had learned a valuable lesson in the necessity for restraint in the mountains and headed back to Namche knowing that the main aims had been achieved. We found Namche (just!) in another snow storm and settled in for a chilled out evening...I will not account for, in full, the events in Namche over the next 12 hours but they involved a local with a lump on his half frozen head, a British tourist who was lapsing in and out of consciousness, a lot of work for Capt Henry Chandler and a stretcher carry that would have brought a tear to the eye of any QMSI! After this unexpected adventure, we headed back to Lukla and our first non vegetarian meal in two weeks at a lodge owned by LCpl Tshring Sherpa's uncle, we reached it without incident.

The final days in Kathmandu were principally spent eating meat and buying pashminas and khukuris. We did however, also visit an orphanage and decided to donate money we had collected as fines for mishaps to the orphanage for the purchase of essential supplies.

Returning back to the UK, again via Muscat, we were able to reflect on a highly successful expedition that, for some, will be a once in a life time opportunity whilst for others it will have lit the fires of passion for AT in the Army. As a result of the expedition, two of the team gained their SML in the build up and 6 of the team attained their SMF qualification.

Another acclimatisation day followed before we set off for Lobuche and the bottom of the Khumbu Glacier. Hiding beneath a sea of moraine, the glacier stretches endlessly up the valley towards EBC (5364m). It's covering of rocks hides the dangers that have made the glacier so hard to negotiate for mountaineers throughout history. It was here, after a stiff climb up the Thukla pass and an all too close call for WO1 (YofS) Binks with some Yaks, that the weather turned for the first time. The spectacular mountain scenery quickly disappeared and we trudged, through falling snow, along the huge banks of moraine discarded by the glacier.

After negotiating a treacherous frozen stream, we arrived in Lobuche which sits in the awesome shadow of the peak of Nuptse (7861m) which shielded the sometimes elusive Everest from view. The next day we moved out early to Gorak Shep which sits on the slopes of Kala Patthar.

The decision was made to ascend up to the famous viewpoint that afternoon and we set off across the ancient lake bed and up towards the summit in bright sunshine. At 5500m, the rarefied atmosphere had an effect on all of the party and progress was slow but steady. The wind howled ominously as we climbed in the heat but slowly we gained site of the rocky prayer flag adorned outcrop that denoted the summit. Half and our later we were there with the entire Everest massif in front of us. The summit itself is clearly visible from Kala Patthar looming clearly above the surrounding peaks like a great dark pyramid with an endless plume of snow rising from its's wind raked crest seen in the middle of the photo below and yes the sky really was that blue and clear.

Far below the glacier snaked its way behind Nuptse and disappeared up the Western Cwm towards the South Col. Before the cold, and altitude related headaches could set in we took the photo that would add to the Corps Colonel's wrist band collection and descended back to Gorak Shep in order to make preparations for the next day- and the walk to EBC.

The next day blessed us with another cloudless sky and we moved with confidence towards our goal. The final trek along the moraine is an exciting one with huge glacial erratics and spectacular





Inter-Services triumphs for Team Army!

By Patrick Snow



In July 2014 a team of 30 climbers representing the Army overcame stiff competition from the RAF and RN to bring home two of the three team trophies at the Inter-Services Lead Climbing Competition: the Open Men's prize and the Women's. The third trophy, the Junior Men's, was a closely fought contest that saw the RAF edge the Army into 2nd place. The wins at Awesome Walls in Sheffield provide a fitting culmination to what has been a busy and successful year for competition climbing within the Army and wider Military. Hopes are high for continued success through the 2014/15 season due to some strong new members of the squad, a host of keen novices getting involved in the competition scene, and the driving force behind Army Competition Climbing – Sport Chairman Pete Skinsley – back from Afghanistan.

As you read this, in Autumn 2014, the Tri-Services Bouldering League (TSBL) is just beginning and so it is an appropriate time to reflect on the highlights of the 2013/14 competition season.

Bouldering (October 2013 to March 2014)

Depending on your viewpoint, the TSBL is either: the purest form of climbing and the highlight of the Indoor Climbing year; or a series of enjoyable training events whilst one awaits the start of the real (lead roped) climbing season in the spring. Regardless, the TSBL was a great success this year with strong attendance at each of the five rounds held across the UK. It is held on the second Wednesday of every month from October through to January and culminates in a weekend event at Indefatigable, Anglesey – enormous thanks and praise must go to Tom Odling for continuing to co-ordinate and organise this league.

Although used as a means of selecting the Combined Services Bouldering Team, the TSBL is notable for its accessibility to all levels of climbers. The wide selection of well-set and intriguing problems (25 per round) means there are routes for everyone in a relaxed and friendly environment. At the same event, one can find complete novices trying to figure out how to work their way up an unusual V0 (UK Tech 4b ish), through to the very top Combined Services Climbers staring in a slightly confused manner at a blank wall (allegedly V7/8, UK Tech 6c ish). This spectrum of problems make these rounds an excellent opportunity to bring a minibus full of keen Regimental Climbers, as I have discovered in my quest to establish 42 Engineer Regiment (Geo) as a hotbed of strong (and prize winning) competition climbers – the quest continues...

The season finale, doubling as the Annual Army Bouldering Competition, was held over the middle weekend of February 2014. Strong performances through the season were rewarded with podium places and a shower of excellent prizes from our much appreciated sponsors. In particular, the following individuals deserve special mention for winning their respective categories in the overall TSBL: Sean Hopkins (RAF), Junior Men's; Miles Hill (Army), Open Men's; Pete Skinsley (Army), Veterans'; Hannah Berresford (Army), Women's. The results for the Army Bouldering Competition were similar (perhaps demonstrating the strength of the top end Army Climbers) with the addition of 11 Trg Bn (REME) winning the team event and former GB athlete Tony Musslebrook, who won the Junior Men's.

The finale of the TSBL marks the end of the Bouldering season for all except the Combined Services Team. The CS team, with strong Army representation, went on to compete in the CWIF (Climbing Works International Festival - a civilian international event) and Bouldermania, a European Military competition. The CWIF is an inspiring event – it acts as a tool for the GB team selection prior to the World Cup and a practice event for international superstars. After struggling to get up one of the problems over four attempts, I stood aside and watched Shauna Coxsey (potentially World Champion by the time this journal is published) cruise it, followed by Alex Megos (recently the first person in the world to onsight Fr9a). Amazingly motivational. There are few sports or events where one can compete directly and rub shoulders with the world's elite! Inspired by their example I jumped straight back on to the problem, and failed, again. Back to the campus board for me for another decade or so then.

Bouldermania was an opportunity to compete against the best that the European militaries have to offer. Given that Switzerland funds its professional climbers by 'employing' them within the military, this event also saw stiff competition. Nonetheless, the CS team put in a strong performance, with Hannah Stock (RAF) gaining a podium place in the women's competition.

With the international events complete, it was time to put on harnesses once more...

Lead Climbing (March – Autumn)

As Spring began, a whole swathe of the Army's top competition climbers found that being able to perform one-armed pull-ups on fingernail crimps (*we wish*) was not necessarily going to stop them falling off 10m up an easy but pumpy lead route. This was never truer than for an un-named female member of the squad who looked genuinely confused when presented with quickdraws as a prize, being unsure how she was supposed to employ such complex pieces of equipment. Nevertheless, dragged into their harnesses by their highly motivated taskmaster (Pete Skinsley), and provided with expert coaching from Steve McClure, Sam Whittaker and Dave Mason, training began.

The lead climbing season broadly breaks down into formation-level comps in Mar/Apr (Sp Comd South, Sp Comd North and British Army Germany), followed by the Army Climbing Championships in May, all of these events being open entry and accessible to all levels of ability. These events are used to select the Army Team to compete in Jun/Jul at the Inter-Services competition, which in turn is used as a selection for the CS lead team, who will compete in the British Lead Champs in October 14 and the European Champs in Chamonix in November 14.

After a series of successful competitions in March and April, the Army Climbing Championships was held over 21-22 May at Boulders Climbing Wall, Cardiff. The setter, Andy Long, pulled out all the stops with an outstanding set of routes to test competitors, with the top-rope qualifiers ranging from Fr 5ish to around Fr7a+. As you might expect from one of the UK's top setters, the routes were fiendishly technical, with climbers mercilessly punished for placing their hands or feet in the wrong order or for clipping inefficiently. Every competitor went from the qualifiers on the first day to attempt a semi-final on the second day, with the field split into Women, Male Elite, Male Open and Male Top-rope. The semi-finals and finals were set by Andy Long on the evening of the first day, having assessed individual climbing standards during the qualifiers. The job of a setter is a difficult one. Set a final too easy and multiple people will 'top' it. Too hard and both the spectators and competitors will feel hard done by when everyone falls off only 3m up the route. Too 'cruxy' and competitors will fall off at the same point, failing to split the field for podium places. For each of the finals in the Army Champs (and indeed the Inter-Services later in the year), the field was split evenly with the winners topping the route, whilst 2nd and 3rd place fell at different points just below the top – the gold standard of route-setting and a great spectator sport! The Elite Men's final was a particular highlight, with a cunning route that went straight up to the top of the wall, and then meandered horizontally and at significant length on a hanging volume and across

three overhanging sides of the climbing centre, before finishing up a bold headwall – a veritable expedition with excellent fall potential to keep both the spectators amused and the competitors' anxiety at a suitably elevated level!

With the Army Championships complete, it was time for those selected for the Army team to start their preparation for the Inter-Services Competition at Awesome Walls, Sheffield.

The centre section at Awesome Walls is overhanging in a way that cannot be adequately described with words. The photos in this article show Tom Odling, the Army Team Manager, working his way through the roof section on the men's final, and Jimmy James having lowered some 15-20m out from the base of the wall where he started... suffice to say that by the time the finalists fought their way through the roof to the lip, only the eventual champion, Steve Glennie (RN) had the finger strength left for the boulder problem headwall! The Army's own Miles Hill, notably, had the finger strength to push through most of the headwall, but not enough to clip any of the clips on the headwall or to finish, with predictably spectacular results!

As the title of this article suggests, the Inter-Services were a success for the Army in the Team Events. The deserving individual winners were Hannah Stock (RAF) in the Women's, Dan Heath (RAF) in the Junior Men's, Steve Glennie (RN) in the Open Men's and Will Woodhead (Army) in the Veterans'.

Whilst congratulations are due to the winners of all these competitions, it would be entirely remiss of me not to extend a huge thanks to those members of the AMA who plan and execute these competitions and training sessions through the year. There are a number of people who are key to the various comps, but I want to extend a particular thanks to Tom Odling, who runs the TSBL, WO1 Rob Short, who co-ordinated the Army Climbing Championships and Pete Skinsley, who is central to Competition Climbing in the Army and, indeed, the Tri-Services.

And back round again...

And so we reach the start of the bouldering season once more. I would like to say that the Army's most dedicated (and/or obsessed) sport climbers are, right now, crawling out of their garages and cellars blinking into the quickly fading summer sun having spent the summer inside training single mindedly on their finger boards and woodys in readiness for the TSBL and British Lead Champs. In reality, of course, even the motivational training guidance from Pete Skinsley could not part most climbers from a sun-filled day on the crag or, if work and domestic commitments allow, a cheeky trip to the Alps.

As we head back into the competition season, I would encourage all of you to get stuck in to the events on offer, including the Army Festival of Climbing, which will be held in North Wales in May 2015. The various competitions are spread across the UK and all of the open entry competitions are entirely accessible to the full spectrum of climbing abilities. They are a friendly and relaxed introduction to competitive sport climbing, and a great way to get motivated to improve your climbing ability. You might even end up giving some beta to Adam Ondra or Shauna Coxsey at the CWIF.





Into the shadow

by Nick Bullock

Nick Bullock started climbing in 1993 while working as a Physical Education instructor in the prison service. This was a tough job, but it did leave Nick well placed to deal with the harshness of modern alpine climbing and ultimately propelled him forward into an extraordinary climbing lifestyle. Nick has been on over 20 expeditions to places as far flung as Peru, Nepal, Pakistan and India, bagging many first ascents. In 2009, Nick Bullock and Andy Houseman successfully ascended Chang Himal, a 6802m peak in the Kangchenjunga region of Nepal. 'Into the shadows' is a fantastic article and insight into that successful expedition.

A million stars flicker in a slow spinning sky. The moraine, a ploughed rubble strewn moon surface creeks. Old snow crackles. Chang Himal's north face – 1800-metres of snow, cold rotten granite, thin ice skin, fluted sugar spines – soars.

Houseman and I creep like thieves scared that the mountain should hear our approach. A neon moon lights the way. The weather was settled, but a strong wind had been blowing everyday. And everyday we had watched reefs of ghostly snow pour from Kangchenjunga's shimmering summit and possess the Mont Blanc du Tacul like mountains to the north. And everyday spirits tore from Chang Himal's summit crest.

In the moon's shadow, the entrance gully was deep and dark. Twisting, turning, leading us in, drools of ice cascade. I thought of the talented French mountaineer Eric Escoffier, blown without trace from Broad Peak the summer I had been attempting Savoia Kangri – an unclimbed mountain next to K2. The wind was an unknown, unseen quantity. But how does a person prepare for the unknown, the unseen? Stevie Haston's advice before I left Llanberis had been "Write a will mate."

Reaching the snow-cone at the base of what we had christened the narrows relief floods, the snow pack was hard. Then tension returns – I turn, and watch Houseman retching and vomiting. "That's not in the plan." I suspected there was worse to come. "Do you want to go down, try again in a few days?" "No, I feel really weak, but if you don't mind leading I'll keep going. I don't feel sick enough to justify turning."

I had only known Houseman for three years and he surprised me at times with his fortitude and drive. I called him Youth even though

he was twenty-eight. His looks reminded me of pictures of Pete Boardman, brown hair, gaunt face, dark intense eyes. I knew his climbing ability was similar also. We had shared an apartment together in Chamonix one winter and fostered a successful climbing partnership. I was fifteen years older. I thought the name Youth suited Houseman, he was young for his years and in the valley there was a definite generation or two between us. We were very different, but on the hill we very rarely had a cross word and mostly succeeded in everything we attempted. I enjoyed climbing with him; he was one of only a handful I would be on this face with.

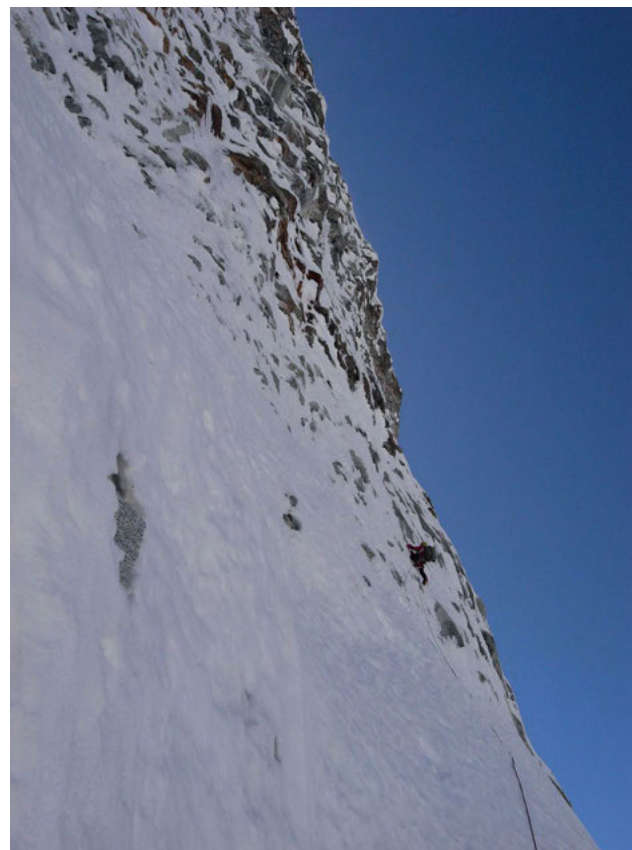
In the half-light of morning, heading left, back toward the central spur, features we had stared at from BC took form. The seracs above that may, or may not have poured down our line, were thankfully left behind. The angle increased and it was a surprise to find rock a few inches beneath a crust. The plan was to descend on ice screw threads. Kicking, heaving lungs, swinging axes, I pushed the thought of getting down to the back of my mind.

Houseman complained of feeling weak, climbing slow. I stopped and looked around at the mountains, the moraine, the tiny base camp tents, a twisting track cutting the crumbling brown moraine shoulder, 'welcome to my life mate.' Houseman was the same age that I had been when I first started to climb; it didn't seem that long ago but it was sixteen years and I certainly didn't feel as fit as I was then. Time on a climb is intense; it is special time, it is time that slows the clock but as with all time, it never stops completely.

Ropes were pulled from the rucksacks. We had reached the first in a series of questions, the lower and smaller of two rock bands.

"Do you mind leading this, I'm still feeling wasted?"

Ropes ran long, uninterrupted. A block, flat topped, an island in the middle of the pitch gave respite. I stood on my frozen block swinging my arm to encourage blood into wooden fingers... controlling myself, warming fingers, placing a good piece of protection, re-warming fingers, swinging an arm... I swap feet; hook a glass thin piece of ice and pull. The climbing was not really that difficult, but the snow and ice were brittle and rotten, my pack heavy, the air thin, it felt considerably more difficult than a grade would suggest. I scraped through the final bulge navigating crud



Left to right: Nick Bullock, day two starting up the crux pitch • Andy Houseman approaching Chang Himal • Day 2 on the first pitch of the day entering into the rock band • Attempting to find a way onto the upper face, day 3

and established myself at the foot of yet another sweep of snow. An hour later we were back in the centre of the face and digging.

I had been imagining our first bivvy in dreams – dreams before reaching Nepal, dreams throughout the ten day walk-in, dreams in the morning, lying warm and safe listening to the soft chime of Yak bells – Given Houseman's vomiting, I was amazed we were sitting on a snow step with a thousand metres beneath.

Sitting on the small step, I thought about Mick Fowler and all of his infamous bivvy's. Fowler had a bivvy comfort scale of one to five. Five was lying down, one was standing. I respected Fowler for his routes but I respected him more for his quest to fit as much as he could into very little time. Snow sloughed and blew. I zipped up my two jackets, pulled the sleeping bag around my shoulders and watched the base camp tent, a glowing dot in the distance. The previous summer in North Wales Tim Neill and I decided to climb a Fowler route called Helmet Boiler...

...It had rained forty days and forty nights in North Wales, the tourists had departed two by two, but dry was once again with us and the tempo had been getting softer all week. These were not the normal (hard) rock increases that can be explained or boasted about by a number or made instantly available by a bolt. No, as the rock had dried my mind and psyche took me down into the fiery depths – down into a Hieronymus Bosch painted world of soft and loose. Down into white guano sprayed, red, yellow grey metamorphosed quartzite. Strength of mind in this world of convoluted twisted seams was the greatest asset to a climber closely followed by a monster rack of gear. Unfortunately it appeared for once in Mousetrap Zawn at Craig Gogarth on the island of Anglesey, a monster rack was surplus to requirements.

Stuck on a lonely ledge, out in the middle of the zawn, the clock slowed, minutes lasted a lifetime. The groove I had to climb was overhanging. Ripples of thick damp mud coated soft grey rock. The ropes ran in a long traversing arc A quartz boss with a sling wrapped around it and a rotting twenty five year old peg were all that stood between me and a helicopter flight to Bangor A&E. I dug and scratched, scraping mud from the surface of more mud looking like a deranged person searching for a miracle, searching for something solid in a sea of overhanging soft.

I excavated a crack with the wire loop from a nut; the crack crumbled like feta. 'Why the fuck were we climbing this Fowler horror show?' I have been told that climbing is purely egotistical, but how could placing myself onto this climb be egotistical? Only a handful of people in the world knew the true horror and the grade would not impress anyone.

I climbed from the small lump of solid several times before reversing each time. Successful escape from my island depended solely on using a quartz boss jutting from the middle of the overhanging groove, but quartz bands, bosses and fins have a tendency to rip. I stepped-up for a second time wrapping a hand around the smooth boss, it reminded me of one of those breast shaped holds at the climbing wall that sick route setters like to place. This one was covered in mud though.

The Zawn beneath opened into a mess of boulders. Waves, unstoppable, washed in polystyrene fishing floats, tangled orange polypropylene nets, bubbled yellow scum. Seagulls cried and pirouetted, wheeling on the wind, flight feathers ripping like linen. I hung from the quartz boss, stepped-up and matched. I expected the whole lump to tear. Kicking into grey mud, inching higher, I could reach more quartz on the edge of the overhanging groove. My heart sank. The quartz was smooth. Digging, scraping, finger nails filled. I climbed back down – psyched up – climbed up, stretched and hung from the smooth quartz band and as I let go with my low hand to chalk-up, the quartz band snapped. I was falling. Time turned fast-forward. I saw mud and madness and pain... the ropes ran and ran, the crusty twenty-five year old peg looked woefully inadequate... I was falling, the clock hands spun, but just as quick, I slapped for the boss and caught it. And I was still there, still in this Bosche bedlam but physically un-injured. I screamed at Tim, who screamed back. The sea swept into the zawn, seagulls cried life. The clock hands slowed. Once more, minutes lasted hours – until eventually I slithered from the mud runnel's overhanging exit wild with experience...

...Houseman led straight from the bivvy. Day two – the second rock-band, and the biggest question of the climb, it could stop us easily.



"It looks ok." Houseman said. I thought it looked steep and difficult, and so did he after an hour. Seconding, nearly throwing up with the worst hot-aches of my life I clipped the belay; three stubby screws a poor wire and a half driven peg. I tried not to lean back. Youth pointed a big red mitt, "One of three ways I reckon?"

Looking up, boulders poke from an inversion of thin snow. Three very steep, thinly iced groove-corners presented. I didn't like the look of any.

Jamming into an overhanging corner, calves burn. Fingers for the second time that day were wood. The voice in my head screams instructions, asks questions. The first thirty metres of the pitch had been on good ice and the angle was just off vertical... 'It's going to be ok,' but the angle of the face increased and bulged. The ice became thin and hollow, detached. The ice spoke. "Write a will mate – no rescue – a million miles from anywhere." I placed some gear and swung left into a runnel and hooked sheen millimetres thin. I still wore my pack and it pulled. "Take the pack off you fucking idiot". But I didn't. I always have a feeling of not being good enough when I have to remove the pack. Youth had similar ethics and we were climbing the only way we knew. The leader attempted to free-climb everything and the second follows in the same style.

Hanging from picks tapped less than a couple of centimetres, a bulge pushed and more than a thousand metres of air pulled. I questioned my philosophy, mentality, mortality. We were over a week's walk and two days jeep ride from anywhere and I was climbing a pitch so insecure it would feel intimidating in Scotland. An overlap in-front of my face had to be passed, but the ice was an oil slick on the surface of the sea and the snow was yellow bubbled scum. Inching and tapping, crampon front points were placed on tiny rock edges, ice sheets shattered, snow broke off in lumps. Beautiful snow covered peaks were all around, but I saw nothing except the rock and ice in front of my face. Every move I expected to fall and still the difficulties kept coming. Wood fingers, wide eyes, burning arms – eventually the angle eased and the clock hands turned.

Three technical pitches followed until a steep snow field was reached. In the dark, I stood belaying Houseman and watched a light at base camp flash on and off... on and off... a lighthouse of

warmth and comfort. Buddy was signalling the same as he had the two previous nights. Cold penetrated, but seeing the light helped my feeling of separation. Youth climbed along side and in the dark we dug. The wind slung even more spindrift than the previous night. The stars in the dark sky flickered and the sky slowly spun. After only a few minutes of chopping we hit ice. On the Fowler one to five bivvy scale this was probably 2.5.

In the morning we traversed right aiming for the west ridge. The climbing was insecure – Peruvian style flutings and rotten rock, the face, a barren expanse. Emotions simmered. Mid-afternoon, three hundred metres beneath the summit we stopped, cut a cave into a fluting and worried about the way ahead. We had not crossed completely to the west ridge – to reach it we would have had to cross several deep flutings, convoluted monsters, twisted sagging seams of rotten snow – so we had opted for a direct approach. And a peak of aerated snow stood just above the bivvy giving no clue to whether we would be continuing to the summit or not.

We had made a mistake, I knew we had made a mistake, we were going to fail. Failure was going to tare my heart out. I sat all night in our small cave and worried. I made conversation in my head, "Why did you fail?" "We failed because of bad conditions, the poor weather, the dangerous climbing, sickness, we went the wrong way, the gear was stolen. We weren't strong enough-hard enough-good enough." For once, after a trip, all I wanted was to answer the question that everyone asked, 'Did you summit', with a simple, yes.

The wind gusted. Spindrift sliced into the cave. I sat holding the stove, the gas canister frosted. The flame sawed, pulsing blue. I could taste being on the top of Chang Himal. I could see myself on the summit. This is what I did, I imagined myself in these places, on summits or fighting spindrift, or stuffed tightly into overhanging runnels or bridging chimneys or climbing warm summer rock or pulling loose rock...

...for two years in North Wales I had imagined climbing a route called Rubble. Rubble was a Paul Pritchard and Lee McGinley route in Wen Zawn at Gogarth. The guidebook described it as the softest route in the world. Pritchard had been at the top of my list of inspirations when I was first climbing. I placed his climbs into



Left to right: After a very long day 2, we made it through the crux rockband to bivvy here for the night • On the summit • This is the bivvy on the 3rd night high on the upper face at approximately 6500m we used this bivvy on the 4th night after summiting as well • We reached the base and safety day 5 at approx 10pm • Chang Himal at night.

the legendary category. Until recently I had met him only once in 1997. Three friends and I were about to travel to India to attempt the Sharks Fin on Meru Central, a climb Pritchard had attempted in 1993 with Jonny Dawes, Noel Craine and Phillip Lloyd. We met in a Welsh pub to chat about it. Rain ran down the windows. I had only been climbing for a few years and so in awe, I didn't speak to Pritchard once, but last summer Paul had returned to Llanberis and I had begun to know him.

"Tell me about Rubble Paul."

His slim suntanned face cracked into a cheeky grin. Feathered with blond streaks bleached by the sun, his brown hair jutted in all directions. Etched beneath the stubble chiselled laugh lines grew. Crows feet crease at the side of eyes burning bright deepened...

...and he was there then, back in Wen Zawn, a place he had made his own –

Just for a second he was there. And in that second I was there with him. I could feel sticky salt on my skin. I could smell seaweed. My heart pulsed with camaraderie. The wind ripped through Wen's, hewn cleft. Grey seals circled beneath white-turquoise turbulent waves. Crashing rock, crashing sea, greasy rock – a dark intimidating place but one that had been lit by Pritchard's legacy – Then we were back in the packed pub, jostling and swaying, feet sticking to the carpet, a fug of sweat... and the rain ran down the window. Paul was standing, awkward and off balance. A large support brace wrapped around his ankle, a sling cradled his arm.

"It's HVS... except for the E7 bits!" Laughing he limped away bumping and blending into the throng, pint sloshing...

...In the morning I climbed and looked over the snow crest just above our bivvy. My heart leapt. A steep runnel sidewall led into another runnel system. "Its on, it's really on." We left packs hoping the lack of weight would help with levitation and set off aiming for the completion of our dream.

Deep into the guts, surrounded by carvings of sugar-snow like a winter Devils Tower in Wyoming, slicing air branded lung skin. I took my mind from the pain. Pritchard is badly disabled after a rock took half his head off while abseiling the Totem Pole in Tasmania

– Paul had obviously lived too many life-times, burnt too bright, but still he refused to give up, he was back climbing and he was still an inspiration. I dug into snow looking for ice but found none. Continuing, I wondered about my future, my remaining time.

Two of my friends from the Shark's Fin expedition were now gone, time for them had been cut tragically short. Time for Phillip Lloyd from Pritchard's Sharks Fin expedition had also run out. In the valley, the loss made no sense, but here, up high, surrounded by thousands of mountains, pushing my body and mind to its limit, living minutes that felt like hours, climbing and mountaineering made every sense.

Houseman took over the lead and eventually climbed out of the fluting onto a wild windy exposed summit crest. Belayed to a snow bollard we met. Taking no gear apart from that which I had collected on the way, I continued. The brightness of the sun lit my soul. I kicked and tried not to stop but the gusting wind had me repeatedly dropping onto my axes. Pumice granules scoured. Crawling, I prayed for no false summits. Crawling, I prayed for success. Kicking, a few more metres was everything. I swung an axe that cut the crest and there through the slot I could see Kangchenjunga's north face and Jannu's summit. I could see a million mountains. I could see contentment and peace, but then, in an instant, I could see the hands of the clock begin to speed.

Epilogue

After down climbing from the summit, a fourth night was spent at the highest bivvy. The fifth day on the face dawned cloudy and threatening. We decided to abseil our line in a single push until thirteen hours later I stood waiting for houseman to set up the last abseil before we would start to climb down the narrows. Above, in a slow spinning sky, a million stars flicker and in the still of night the soft jangle of Yak bells floats across the creaking moraine.

HQ Sp Comd (South and Central) Climbing Competition 2014

Written by Dave Cross



This year's battleground for the coveted South and Central champion was Reading Climbing Centre. The final routes proving as challenging as ever. More about these later. First of course; the preliminary climbs.

45 Climbers set about the initial 5 qualifying climbs to give us the splits between categories. The routes were graded between 4-6b/c and climbed in an increasing difficulty order. The last of these was a delicate technical slab route that proved to have a very cheeky second and third move spitting most off. 2 competitors topped out these first climbs; well done to them.

The top 7 climbers went through to the elite final at about 7b/c the women and under 25s climbing the same route for their final at about 6b/c and the open men and vets climbing their final at graded around 6c/7a. All the finalists went into isolation in the bouldering area so they couldn't see how well the other climbers did on their attempt.

Whilst the qualifiers were being climbed the bouldering was open and the points for these were crucial to the team scores. A total of 6 teams were entered this year with Pirbright entering two teams. The points for the team competition are the total of each of the three climbers in the team from the bouldering and the qualifying routes. The top two teams were very close but 42 Engineers beat a young SEAE team by only 53 points with Pirbright A team coming third.

The final route for the open men and vets had a hard crux low down on their route meaning everyone got the same height so they used the women's route for their super final. A close battle saw Capt Topping from Arborfield come out as the male open champion with Sgt Havenhand second and Cpl Kierran Sumner third. WO2 Si Goyder was this year's veteran winner ahead of Cpl Chinrey and Capt Brown.

In the Under 25s category Cfn Sanders from SEAE beat Gnr Myers and Cfn Taylor and all of them showing great promise for the future of Army climbing. The ladies showed great form and the field is getting bigger every year. This year the winner was Cpl Yasmin Geoghegan with an impressive climb beating LCpl Sarah Sumner and Capt Oliver who placed 2nd and third respectively.

The elite competition was fought out on a nice 7b/c route and with everyone looking on the pressure was mounting. Of course the guys didn't disappoint and they all put on a great show. It was Capt Paddy Snow coming 2nd above Sgt Tom Moulder who took a respectable third place but Maj Tom Odling cruised his way to victory climbing the route in remarkable style to become this year's Sp Comd (S&C) Champion.

As ever with these competitions it was good to see lots of climbers at their first ever competition and they all saw that it is a friendly competition and lots of fun too. If you haven't ever been to a climbing competition then get yourself to the next one. The Tri service bouldering league runs over the winter finishing with the Army bouldering champs in February; these are a great place to start; keep a look out for the DIN.

Again DMM supplied us with some brilliant prizes so thanks to them and also to Tom and the team at Reading Climbing Centre for hosting us again this year. Lastly I'd like to thank everyone who helped out with judging and other tasks throughout the day and see you all at the next comp.

The survivor's guide to sea cliffs

(or how to avoid getting wet unless you want to...)

Article by Toby Dunn



Sea cliffs conjure up a range of responses and memories from most climbers. They are a curious mix of the relaxed and the wildly committing and adventurous.

For me, that is their enduring appeal. The sheer variety and challenge of the environment, and the fact that you can choose to have a relaxed day's climbing at the seaside, or a level of adventure that you would otherwise have to travel to a major mountain range or remote corner of the planet to experience is unique. Sea cliffs are also infinitely variable; the same crag can be friendly or a intensely exciting depending on the weather and sea state.

Of course, there is a lot to think about; tides, birds, sea state, changeable weather, rock rendered greasy by salty sea air, the list goes on. However, for me, it is always worth the effort. Days on sea cliffs in the UK are probably the most treasured, satisfying experiences I have ever gained through climbing, equalling having climbed in Yosemite, all over Europe, Africa, New Zealand ... As climbers, we have a precious resource in our coastline, and this article should inspire and inform you to start on your way to being able to enjoy this environment as safely as possible and have as much fun as you can into the bargain; whether you are after a multi-pitch adventure epic, or a quick couple of deep water solos.

Introduction

This article is relevant to those who are keen to get their first experiences of sea cliffs, but more experienced climbers might find the odd tip - to make their days out on the rock at the seaside pass a little more smoothly - very helpful.

The presence of the sea is the primary distinction between this and other aspects of climbing. It gives us both the atmosphere, and the potential for significant objective danger. As anyone who has done any surfing or sailing will know, the sea demands enormous respect. A little time spent informing yourself about tides, weather forecasts and ocean currents will often pay dividends when you are in a sea cliff environment. A full explanation of these factors is outside the scope of this article, but I'll try and condense some of the most useful nuggets of knowledge into a few tips to get you started ...

Top ten sea cliff tips

- **Tides.** Check the tides, remember they are always printed in GMT, and that it may well be BST and necessary to add one hour. Spring tides mean higher highs, and lower lows, neap tides are the opposite (i.e.: smallest variation). Tidal range can be fairly small - Swanage sea cliffs for example - or enormous: the Bristol Channel has the second biggest range in the world at over 15m. This can be crucial for deep water soloing, tide height can be the difference between a route being safe or extremely dangerous. Access for roped climbing is also often affected: you may have a limited time window in which to get to and climb your route. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/coast/tides/> has times for tides around the country, and some helpful information.
- **Surf.** Check the surf forecast if one is available for your area, the sea state can have a massive effect on your day out, and

be the difference between a pleasant mellow day and a gripping nightmare. Some surfing sites also have web cams on beaches, which can give a really good insight into local weather and sea conditions.

- **Birds.** Check the bird situation: is the route / cliff subject to restrictions? The BMC: <http://www.thebmc.co.uk/bmccrag/> should have the latest updates on access. Many sea cliff areas are restricted until the 31st of July - meaning August / September is prime season for these places.
- **Running away.** Think escape routes: sea cliffs can be difficult environments to climb in and it is wise always having an exit plan if your route does not go to plan: is there a route easy enough for you to climb in any weather? Can you prussic / jumar back up the abseil rope? Can you walk or swim around to get out?
- **Look before you leap.** Try and find a viewing point for your route before you start to relate rock features to a top or description. Knowing where you are going when you are embroiled in the climbing will make it a more enjoyable experience. If you are strapped onto a hanging belay just above the water with a dizzying mass of overhanging rock above you, it's not the time to get the guidebook out for the first time.
- **Drinking.** Take water: routes can be long, time-consuming, and the sun reflecting off the sea can turn some crags into very warm places indeed. Dehydration will not improve your performance, or comfort and enjoyment of the route.
- **Take precautions.** Always take a belay at the bottom of your route, even if the sea appears calm. An unplanned dip due to a boat wake/'freak' wave while your leader is mid pitch might seem appealing on a hot day, but is unlikely to prove popular at the other end of the rope. Make sure it can withstand multidirectional loading as well - a wave would lift you up before dropping you down again. A really solid thread or cam/wire combination is ideal.
- **Washing.** No, not you... wash your gear after close exposure to salt water environments. A good coating of brine and a month in the cupboard will result in an interesting powdery oxide residue covering most of your alloy gear (that's all your crabs, cams etc) and this does not improve their function or strength. Wash in fresh water, and oil cams with a light Teflon based lube, WD40 is not a lubricant (it disperses moisture), and will attract grime to cam springs if they are liberally sprayed with it. Wash ropes as well.
- **Strings.** Keep ropes out of the sea, not only because its nicer handling dry ropes, but they have an interesting habit of sneaking under submerged boulders if allowed to dangle in the drink. This may result in you having to take a knife to your rope and abandon a section of it. This goes for abseil ropes used for approach as well, stack them out of the way, above the high water mark, with no knots in the end when you have descended them once. This minimises chance of it catching on things when pulled up later in the day.
- **Chilling.** You are at the seaside... indulge in the bizarreness of combining exciting vertical adventures with beaches / swimming in the sea / ice creams / fish and chips / a cold drink or two!

Top ten gear tips

- **A guidebook cover** - having a guidebook at the bottom of the route is invaluable, in case your chosen route turns out to be wet / too hard / busy, and on longer routes where it is hard to remember the descriptions.
- **Prussic cord / tibloc / ropeman** - essential for escaping up your abseil rope should your route be un-climbable or in case of emergency. Re-ascending climbing ropes if you fall beneath a roof may also be necessary - lowering is not an appealing option if it means going straight into the sea! The mechanical mini ascenders are a great deal quicker and more efficient to use once mastered than a prussic, but a prussic is more versatile, and lighter. I would usually carry one tibloc and two prussic loops.
- **A lightweight windproof** - the modern lightweight windproofs will stuff into a pocket, or into a tennis ball-sized bag to clip to your harness.
- **A helmet** - wear one. There isn't really any excuse for not wearing one when they weigh about 200grams, are well ventilated and close-fitting.
- **Comfy harness with plenty of gear racking** - sea cliff routes often require carrying a lot of gear, and longer routes may mean long hanging belays so a super lightweight sport climbing model may start to feel like a false weight saving ...
- **Rope bag / bucket / tarp** - invaluable for keeping your climbing ropes dry at the bottom of routes, either in a bucket if on a belay suspended above the sea, or a tarp for wet sand. One with rucksack straps you can carry on the route is useful, but it is often possible to clip the bag to the abseil rope before you climb for less encumbrance while you are on the route.
- **Comfortable enough rockboots** - you are looking for a good snug fit as usual, but perhaps a slightly higher degree of comfort and support for longer pitches and routes. Something that fits your foot shape is by far the most important criterion in appropriate climbing shoe selection.
- **Decent approach shoes**: sea cliff tops are sometimes exposed, smooth and grassy, it pays to have a pair of approach shoes with a good tread. Fell running shoes have the benefit of also being light so that they are not too much hassle to carry on the route.
- **A fairly sizeable rucksack**: you'll be carrying more gear than for a day on the grit - weather is less predictable, extra ropes, a bigger rack.
- **60m half ropes** 50m is a false economy, belays on sea cliffs are often a very long way back from the edge, and pitches often long. A fairly skinny diameter rope will cut down on weight and rope drag, which will make life easier at the top of monster pitches.

Top Destinations & Classics

This is nothing more than an attempt to characterise each area and give an introduction to some routes there that are really good, rather than a best of list. The areas often vary vastly from crag to crag in character, but take this as a starting point for your investigations and adventures

Pembroke: generally solid limestone, steep and well protected (again, generally!) best for E1 and upwards, though there are plenty of easier routes at some venues it is in the extreme bracket that Pembroke limestone really shines. (Usually in a metaphorical sense, it's rarely that polished...) Mostly single pitch, abseil approaches.

A selection of classics:

HVS: Heart of Darkness

E1: Rock Idol

E2: Lucky Strike

E3: Pleasure Dome, Zeppelin,

E4: Star Wars, Witch Hunt, The Fascist and me

E5: Darkness at Noon, Beat Surrender, Grey English Morning

E6: Souls, Grezelda Grezelda, Always the Sun

Gogarth: quartzite, very solid on some crags, degenerating to substances which may still be rock but resemble something altogether less solid on others. Fantastic, adventurous routes from VS upwards.

HVS: Scavenger, Concrete Chimmney, Britomartis

E1: North West Passage,

E2: Atlantis/True Moments/ Freebird, the Strand

E3: Kalahari, The Moon, Winking Crack

E4: The Camel, Blue Peter

E5: The Cow, any Main Cliff E5!

E6: The Cad, Alien, Conan the Librarian

Swanage: limestone of a blocky nature, less wobbly than its reputation suggests, but some crags demand a healthy amount of respect. Relatively unpopular, but abounds in fantastic steep, juggy routes, mainly VS upwards. Also abounds in sport routes and deep water soloing.

VS: Silhouette Arete, Aventura

HVS: Finale Groove, Lightning Wall,

E1: Elysium

E2: The Conger (DWS), Tudor Rose, Calcitron

E3: Ocean Boulevard, Soul Sacrifice,

E4: Freeborn Man (DWS, 6c),

E5: Lean Machine, Relax & Swing, Polaris

E6: The Mind Cathedral, Mark of the Beast (DWS, 7c)

West Penwith - (or the bit around Land's End, if you're a Northerner): mostly very solid golden granite, short single pitch and committing multipitch.

D: Alison's Rib

VD: Commando Ridge

S: Flannel Avenue

VS: Little Brown Jug

HVS: Anvil Chorus, Cormorant's Bill,

E1: World's End, Bishop's Rib

E2: Bow wall, Sampson Arete

E3: Raven Wall, Dream, Cain, Grande Plage

E5: Atlantic Ocean Wall

North Devon and Cornwall: very variable in rock types and quality, pillow lava, sandstone, culm, greenstone, slate, sometimes more than one within one crag. Sometimes an extremely challenging environment, although some crags are much friendlier (Baggy Point, for example). Also wild, beautiful and eminently rewarding.

HS: Right Angle

VS: Kinky Boots

HVS: Lunakod

E2: Out of the Blue, Heart of the Sun

E3: Archtempter

E4: America

E5: Darkinbad the Brightdayler

E6: Guernica

South Devon: mostly limestone, very solid to dubious quality, surrounding the seaside fleshpot of Torquay. Scattered but excellent DWS and sport climbing.

VS: Gates of Eden

HVS: Moonraker, Incubus

E3: Dreadnought, Black Ice

E4: Call to Arms, False Gods, Renegade, Zuma

E6: Caveman, Carribean Blue, Shadow Beast

First sea cliff outing?

If you are deeply unsure about the whole idea of having the briny sloshing about beneath you whilst you climb, here are five suggestions for erm, dipping your toes into the waters of the wonderful sea cliff experience. Also fantastic if you are more experienced but after a fun and profoundly relaxing day out!

- The Bay of Rainbows, Portland. The full abseil in, belay above the sea experience, with short, well bolted sport routes on excellent rock. Beautiful on a calm, sunny day.
- Scratling Crack VD, Baggy Point, North Devon. A formidably ancient (est 1898!) sea cliff classic. Low angle, atmospheric, in a great area.
- Symphony Crack, VD, Rhoscolyn, North Wales. Similar rock to the better bits of Gogarth, with a lower level of commitment and technical difficulty.
- The Long Traverse S ish, Ansteys Cove, Torquay. An excellent DWS traverse, difficulty depends on tide height - gets pretty steep in places but on the biggest holds you could wish for, and above plenty of water. Some excellent places to throw yourself into the sea on a warm day, and a good view of the awesome Sanctuary Wall.



2 LANCES: Adventure training in Spain

MARCH 2014

I joined the Army a little over two years ago. During this time I have had the opportunity to attend a Foundation(RCF) climbing course in Canada and subsequently gained the Rock Leader Training(RLT) qualification at 'Indefatigable' (although I thought I had signed up for another climbing week not a single pitch instructors course!) Having been away for six months on Op HERRICK 18 I was greeted with the words, "Padre, we need you to run a rock climbing exped – we can't find an officer to do it!" So I was launched into the mysterious world of JSATFAs, generic risk assessments and diplomatic clearance.

Exercise NORTHERN SPANISH LION was straightforward to plan. Held in the Costa Blanca region of Spain this March, the rewards far outweighed the time commitment, and the hassle of putting an exercise together with the battalion on post-tour leave. I have the Army to thank for rekindling my love for the mountains (I hardly climbed for seven years prior to joining). In short, it was brilliant fun.

I took three Rock Climbing Instructors and two Rock Climbing Leaders which enabled us to award up to six RCF qualifications, and everyone to multi-pitch climb at the same time without leaving anyone on the ground. Two from outside the unit, Noel and Ryan, had experience of the area we were climbing in and their expertise was invaluable. Major Dougie McGill at HQ Sp Comd(N) was also a mine of planning information. His Aide Memoire on completing the Joint Services Adventure Training Form 'Alpha' was comprehensive - and the advice: "Decide on your aims and source instructors with the right qualifications early and the rest should fall into place".

We stayed at The Orange House in Finestrat, run by Rich and Sam Mayfield. They were brilliant hosts and understood Army groups well. The accommodation was plush by bunkhouse standards and we went full board (gaining authority to claim CILOR for cooked meals). Not having to shop and cater for ourselves gave us time for longer days climbing and to fit in the Foundation syllabus. No one told me it was only ten minutes by car to Benidorm though, or I would have included 'Nightlife' as part of my risk assessment!

A couple of observations are worth mentioning. The first occurred on our 'big' Grade 5 multi-pitch mountain day. Having climbed through an overhang, the instructor's rope became trapped underneath the bulge and he could neither climb on, nor reverse the route. Any heroics at this stage could have made the situation a lot worse. As it was he simply 'tied off' to an anchor point, shouted to the two novices to stay on the belay stance where they were secured and waited for help. Climbers 'passing through' shortly afterwards freed the rope and they were able to finish the climb. I was extremely grateful for Noel's measured and level-headed response (and yes, we would have gone back for you eventually. Honest!) Having small hand-held radios within the group proved invaluable in this situation.

The second is a more general observation on the perception of risk. Our soldiers have completed several tours both in Afghanistan and Iraq. As a result they assess danger in a completely different way from your 'ordinary' novice. One quote I heard in Canada, when a soldier was warned about 'Rope Below' was, "I'm not bothered, it's not an RPG!" Climbers themselves as well as their instructors should be aware of this distortion if novices are not to put themselves into situations they can't handle.

If there is one point to take away from this article, it is that anyone can organise an expedition with a little help and support from others. Would I do it again? Yes, definitely - I might even know what I'm doing the second time around! Thanks to CSgt Lee Magowan for twisting my arm in the first place.

Written by Philip Burrows - Padre 2 LANCES



Hands chalked, straps tightened on my rock shoes and the mutter of 'Climbing Now' rattling through the wind; the beginning of a typical lead on Exercise Northern Spanish Lion. The sun on my back, the grip of the rock and the rope dragging between my legs as I lead off, perfect!

As a qualified Rock Climbing Leader (RCL), leading multi pitch routes on limestone was an absolute pleasure. The days started early, the driving was long but often to roadside crags where the short walk-in more than compensated. Leading routes from 4 to 5+ at Toix (roughly equivalent to Severe through to Hard Very Severe UK grades) was an experience, especially when the wind started to gust sixty metres up. There was always potential to stray onto a harder route due to the close proximity of the bolted routes, which seriously focussed the mind.

When at the belay stances, it was the bread and butter of the RCL, organising the stance to ensure the rope was being back-coiled correctly, having my back to the exit - my route out - and ensuring the anchor was weighted at all times, all great practise. Bringing the second up, ensuring he was tight but not being dragged up was a challenge at times, often hearing, "Take-in" as the climbers were moving faster than anticipated; so called novices moving more like Ninjas on rock. If they made short work of the climbing, the exposure to height was often a different challenge. When entering the stances the 'seconds' displayed a variety of responses from hyperventilating to being really proactive and overly helpful, instantly starting to 'back stack' the rope rather than securing their own safety first! The really cool poses and impressive shapes being cut at the stances belie the seriousness of the adventure!

A couple of diary extracts from the lads give you a flavour of the trip and the banter:

Day One - Carwyn Dwyer. The day started off just the same as any other; wet and windy. After battling through the confusion ... to 'the pads estate' we finally managed to leave Weeton Barracks

for Manchester Airport! Everything went without a hitch. Expected a bit of a chill out Sunday for the first afternoon, to get our bearings with a beer of two next to the pool, however somebody had a completely different idea and we were up a mountain before you could say, "Ola!" Echo valley 1.5 was a big hit. Lessons for the day: Don't get in the car with CSgt Magowan and remember to hang on with your strong hand.

Day Two - Dave Payne and Chris Norris. We arrived at the coastal crag called Sierra de Toix around 0900 on the second day. It was a five minute walk from where we parked the cars and, once there, we set all of our equipment out and started to do 'top rope' climbs. The routes ranging from 4 to 6a in difficulty. As we gained in confidence we moved onto multi-pitch climbing. In the afternoon we then put these new skills into action and did two 3 pitch, multi-pitch climbs. Communication was very hard as the wind was gusting strongly, so we had to call it a day from there. All in all a great days climbing and whet the appetite for our big mountain day on the Thursday.

Two quotes sum up the week.


From the Padre. "No one told me that the village of Finestrat was only 10 minutes away from Benidorm!" From WO1 Ryan Lang, one of our military instructors: "I can honestly say that this was the best trip I have had out of 8 expeditions as an instructor. The lads were professional at all times and achieved results far greater than expected (.... multi-pitching effectively on their second day of climbing ...). It was also great that you ensured we had a variety of days with the culmination and icing on the cake being the mountain day. I would jump at the chance to work with 2 LANCs again. A good week of worthwhile training was had by all, pushing our boundaries and exceeding expectations. All I can say is, "Eat; Sleep; Climb; Repeat!"

Written by CSgt Lee Magowan



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