

ARMY MOUNTAINEER



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The Journal of the Army Mountaineering Association



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ARMY MOUNTAINEER

The Journal of The Army Mountaineering Association



LIFE ON THE LEDGE

Keep it short he said, so let's not begin at the beginning, wherever or whenever that may be. We'll start at the Zwischenjoch, not a Swiss curtain-rail innovation, but the col above the Almagelleralp that links the Portjenhorn with the SE Ridge of the Weissmies.

The pre-dawn, torchlight procession was over and the iconography changed as we looked across to a burgeoning dawn. A thin, orange luminescence lay squeezed between a blanket inversion and a blue-black, brightening sky.

Kitted-up we moved onto the slope. The snow was crisp underfoot and we trudged up the towards the rock ridge rising on our left. A short pause to remove crampons and stow axes and we set off behind a French guide and his five charges. 'Le Grand Fromage' encouraged, cajoled and pulled his sometimes, reluctant 'etudiants' upwards. Ali and I followed, Ali often choosing the better line as 'Les Rosbifs et Le Grande Fromage' vied for hill position. Arriving together at the top of the ridge, we re-applied 'tin toes and tools' and moved along the narrow crest towards the summit.

With spectacular 360-degree views, the Weissmies offers some of the best panoramas in the Vallais.

Photo opportunity over, the snow descent began and passed without incident. Sinister seracs, with icicles, hanging like fairy tubular bells, provided welcome distraction from the almost routine nature of the descent. Other parties were pulling their weary torsos upwards as we continued our downward trend towards the welcoming, calf-easing glacier. Not a time to relax but already we were reflecting on a great day and an excellent traverse of an impressive alpine peak.

Ultimately great memories consist of people and places, but when the best nature of both and the philosophy they engender coincide, we welcome them back and seek to repeat them. At JSAM, the mountains and the people met once again, not in competition but in community.

Lt Col Duncan Strutt PWRR and Cpl Ali Allsop RAMC

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On the cover: Capt Pete Hodgkinson with Lt Tang Hi Bo at 6150m on the top of Tilicho Peak – the highlight of the 6 week Nepal Army High Altitude Mountain Warfare Course

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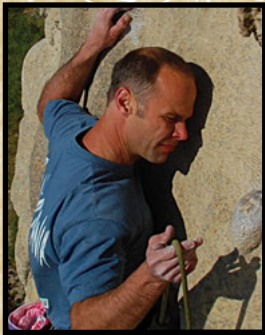
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Foreword

Brigadier Ivan Hooper

It gives me great pleasure to take over from Brigadier John Watson as President of the AMA. My own climbing career started on the sea cliffs and Tors of Devon and Cornwall and has meandered through university days in North Wales to many enjoyable seasons in Scotland, Bavaria, the French and Swiss Alps; as well as trips further afield to the USA and Nepal. I am delighted to join the AMA team and have the chance to make a contribution to Army Mountaineering.

In John's time as President much has been achieved: membership has risen; BSAE is launched and has great momentum; JSAM has been reinvigorated; a number of successful expeditions have run

under the AMA banner; and the sport has been recognised properly and now enjoys much of the financial support and the 'on duty' status that it needs and deserves. It has been a period of tremendous progress and achievement and on behalf of the AMA and all 'military mountaineers' may I thank John for his vision, energy and hard work as AMA President. I look forward both to continuing this work with the AMA over the next few years and to hopefully meeting many of you on the hills over the forthcoming months.

P.S, Only decent(ish) photo avail. I shall make sure it is a climbing shot before the next edition!

Editorial

SEX APPEAL!

Did the title catch your eye?

All great climbs come to an end, some get weathered off, some reach the summit and some end in the bar the night before (you know who you are!). It is with some regret that I have to start this editorial with notice that my tenure as editor is sadly coming to an end; other commitments are demanding ever more time and I am forced to withdraw from the post.

One of the things I most enjoy about our sport is the sense of anticipation standing before something massive and new and it is that feeling that, with a recent house move and young family that I am enjoying; it does help that the house is 400 metres away from a crag mind you!! It is also that feeling of challenge and reward that is once again on offer to anyone willing to step up to the breach and take on the role of editor. Interested? Call me on 07818 016 766 or mail amajournalofficer@armymail.mod.uk

An established project with procedures in place to minimise the work load, each edition demands around 10 hours work to put together and you'll be supported through that with a thorough handover and joint preparation of your first edition by the committee, the publishers and myself. The only qualification you need is a genuine enthusiasm for all things mountaineering. What would you want to see in a magazine?

Oh, sex appeal would be stretching it, but you do feel a little cooler inside each time you see the magazine in print!

**Regards,
Sven**



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.

MAP AND COMPASS OUTDOORS.COM

Map and Compass Outdoors.com have teamed up with Mountain Equipment to offer a truly fantastic prize in this edition: A black Mountain Equipment Morpheus jacket worth £229!

www.mapandcompassoutdoors.com are a leading internet retailer in the UK outdoor market and pride themselves in offering a superlative service. Take a look at their website and I think you'll agree; they have an extensive product range of thousands of items carefully selected from all the leading brands. Competitively priced and able to source specialist equipment out of the scope of other retailers, making them a one-stop-shop for expeditioners and weekend warriors alike.

Mountain Equipment have done it again with what is bound to become a favourite jacket for a wide variety of users. The Morpheus Jacket is designed as a lightweight but full spec mountain walking and climbing jacket. The simple construction and new hard wearing, but light GORE-TEX fabrics make it the lightest jacket in it's class; an XXL only weighs 435g!

To win this generous prize, all you have to do is e-mail amajournaleditor@armymail.mod.uk stating the number of Mountain Equipment products there are on the site. Don't forget to also send in your Jacket Size.



FEATURES & BENEFITS:

3-Layer GORE-TEX® Pro Shell Ascendor fabric gives great durability and breathability

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- Manufactured under ISO9001/2 conditions, tested at an independent laboratory and backed up by certificates of conformity so we have a complete paper trail relating to each batch.

- Provides the correct amount of active ingredients, with each sachet providing the correct serving and is formulated to mix effortlessly with water, or milk. All products are packaged in lightweight, water resistant sachets that are easy to store and carry.

Mountain Fuel can be purchased online at www.mountainfuel.co.uk or from selected specialist outdoor retail outlets in the UK.

The team at Mountain Fuel are committed to excellence and know why outdoor extreme and endurance sports athletes need to keep at the top of their game. That's why they have kindly donated 3 Day Packs (known as the 'Weekend Pack') for three AMA members to try. Each pack is worth £60 and contains:

- Morning Fuel
- Xtreme Energy Fuel
- Ultimate Recovery Fuel
- Night Fuel

All you have to do to win one of these packs is e-mail the editor with the answer to the following question: In which flavours is Xtreme Energy Fuel available?



INSTRUCTORS/ LEADERS WANTED

1 CS Bn REME require 2 x mountaineering leaders/instructors to support a level 3 expedition to the Mont Blanc Massif.

Each instructor must be JSME(L/W) qualified as a minimum. In priority order, it is also preferable (but not essential) that candidates are Alpine Mountain Instructor or Alpine Mountain Leader qualified.

The expedition will take place in Mar/Apr 2011 and last approx 2 weeks with the following aims:

Conduct distributed trg in WMP/AMP.

Summit a number of peaks (via non-technical routes) above 2500m.

Summit Mont Blanc.

Instructors will be required to advise the expedition leader during the planning phase of the expedition and support all aspects during execution.

Any instructor interested in accepting this thrilling opportunity should contact the Expedition Leader, Capt MJ Gregory, REME, on Catterick Military 947 31 4475 (civ 01748 874475).

NO RINSE WATERLESS BATHING PRODUCTS



NoRinse is a range of waterless bathing products that allow you to get fresh and clean without any water, whatsoever!

Originally developed for the NASA space programme these clever hair and body products are liquid based and require no water; all you do is apply the liquid to your hair or body, massage to release oil and grease into the milky lather and remove by thorough towel drying.

It's the towelling action that makes the product so effective. They can be used long term and leave no sticky residue. If you click the NASA link on the home page of the norinse.co.uk website you can see an astronaut floating inside the space station with a bottle of NoRinse!

NoRinse is available for purchase at www.norinse.co.uk or by calling 0844 20 90 888 and the company have kindly donated a number of their 'Survival Kits' for AMA members; all you have to do to win one is to visit their website and tell us what's in the kit and what size the items are. The first three winners out of the favourite smelly sticky will win.

www.norinse.co.uk



Tri-Service Bouldering League 2010-11

6 Oct 10 – Rnd 1 - Craggy 2, Sutton, London

10 Nov 10 – Rnd 2 - The Climbing Works, Sheffield

8 Dec 10 – Rnd 3 - Boulders, Cardiff

– Rnd 4 - The Climbing Academy, Glasgow

12 Jan 11 – Rnd 5 - City Bloc, Leeds

12 Feb 11 – Rnd 6 - The Indy Wall, JSMTC(I), Anglesey

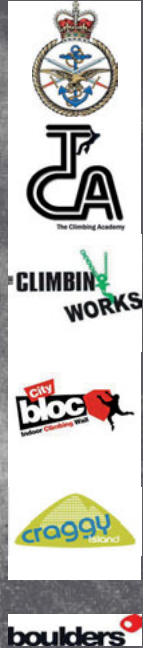
The league is open to serving regular and reserve personnel from the Royal Navy, Royal Marines, Army and RAF

Registration @ 1200 - Competition starts @ 1230

25 blocs – 4 hours
Best 3 scores to count

Entries on the day - £10 per competitor

For further details read the DIN or contact the organiser:
Major Pete Skinsley
on mobile: 07742 194128
or email: amavicechairsport@armymail.mod.uk



DIARY

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

**6th Oct 10
Tri-Service Bouldering League(1)**

Craggy 2, Sutton, London

23-24th Oct 10

South West Meet

Devon or Cornwall

Including sea cliff climbing workshops and the opportunity for guided climbing.

Contact: Barry Whale 07979963820

23-24th Oct 10

BSAE

Lake District

Antarctica team training.

Contact: TBC

26-28th Oct 10

Inter Services Climbing Champs and European Military Climbing Champs

EICA, Ratho, Edinburgh

Contact: Pete Skinsley 07742194128

10th Nov 10

Tri-Service Bouldering League(2)

Climbing Works, Sheffield

27-28th Nov 10

ACT Meet/BSAE

Hereford/Wye Valley

Coaching, climbing and the regular curry!

Contact: Sven Hassall 94475 5652

02nd Dec 10

UKSF Climbing Champs

Stirling Lines

All details via ECC ISTAR 22 SAS

8th Dec 10

Tri-Service Bouldering League(3)

Boulders, Cardiff

8th Dec 10

Tri-Service Bouldering League(4)

Climbing Academy, Glasgow

29th Jan – 05th Jan 11

Winter Meet

Cairngorms

Details are still TBC and the meet desperately needs someone to step in to organise it. This is the most successful and well attended meet of the year. If you can give some of your time to ensure it remains so, please do contact Barry Whale as soon as possible. Keep an eye on the website for details.

Contact: TBC

2th Jan 11

Tri-Service Bouldering League(5)

City Bloc, Leeds

12th Feb 11

Army Bouldering Championships and Tri-Service Bouldering League (6)

JSMTC(I), Anglesey

Details at www.ArmyMountaineer.org.uk

VALEDICTORY LETTER FROM BRIGADIER JON WATSON, OUTGOING PRESIDENT

My time as President of the Army Mountaineering Association has been enjoyable and rewarding in equal measure. During the past few years I have used every excuse I could muster to join you on the crags and in the mountains, and now have a store of unforgettable experiences and happy memories. For the most part, though, I have simply enjoyed basking in the reflected glory of all your adventures and successes in the high places of the world. Through your efforts, not mine, the AMA is going from strength to strength, refreshing its energy and vitality by recruiting ever more young members and enhancing its reputation through your enthusiasm, skill and courage in mountain ranges throughout the world.

During the last 4 years the membership has increased, and now stands just short of 2500. This increase has much to do with the exponential growth of indoor and sport climbing in the UK, which reaches a pinnacle in the AMA with your hosting of the European Military Championships later this year. Equally though, it is the vibrant and friendly atmosphere of the AMA, and way you have spread the word among individuals and units in the Army, that has attracted a consistently high level of interest despite the unprecedented operational tempo we are experiencing in Afghanistan; because of this, the AMA's future is secure. So too is your home at JSMTC Indefatigable, an institution that is proving to be a reliable and trusted partner in the pursuit of the goals of the Association and the aims of adventurous training. The way the JSMTC stepped in to take on the running of the annual Joint Services Alpine Meet amply demonstrated their commitment to a shared vision, creating a model for the delivery of AT qualifications and experience whose obvious value for money is clear for all to see and a model of its kind.

Beyond JSAM, the activity levels you have generated have been truly astonishing. A whole series of mountain expeditions of all shapes and sizes have taken place in the Himalayas, from mighty 8000m peaks such as Everest and Makalu, to the more modest challenge of Island Peak and much in between. The AMA 50 bonanza was a special highlight that included exploratory mountaineering in Greenland, ski mountaineering on Shishapangma, an adventure on Lotus Flower Tower and the famously gnarly Hard Rock Challenge. On top of this there have been many hundreds of rock, ice and alpine meets in the UK and abroad, a hugely successful Festival of Climbing in North Wales and no end of bouldering and sport climbing events and competitions

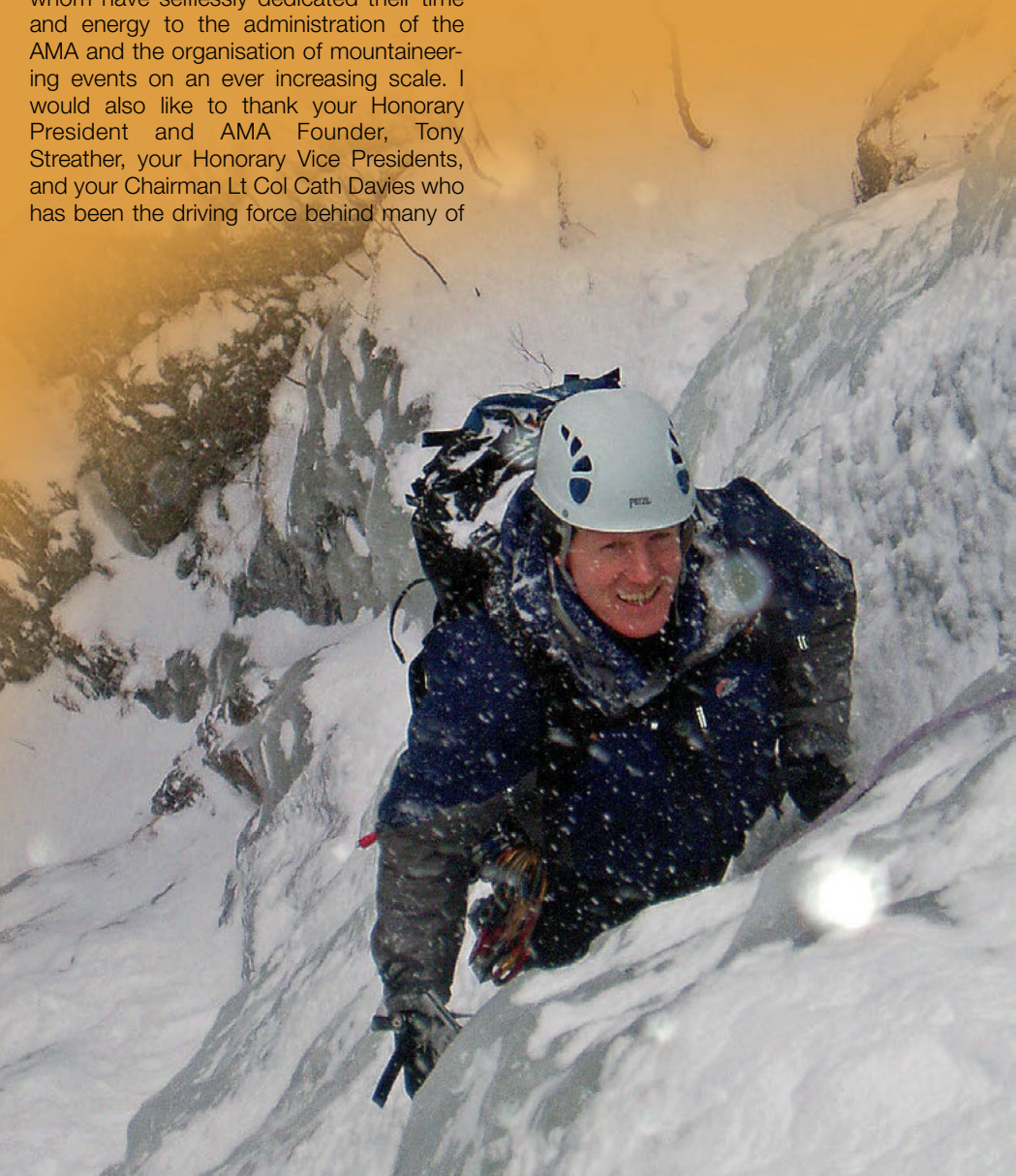
both indoors and out. All this activity has taken AMA members around the world: to North and South America, Iceland, Greenland, India, Nepal, China, Europe, Africa...indeed to every continent bar the Antarctic, which you will be tackling in 2012 along with our fellow mountaineering associations in the other 2 Services.

So as I hand over my role as President to Brigadier Ivan Hooper, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many expedition organisers, leaders, instructors and guides who have made all this possible. Despite holding down busy and demanding jobs and responding to the regular calls for operational deployment, you have found the time to pursue your passion and achieve your mountaineering ambitions, as well as giving opportunity and encouragement to the next generation of young climbers and AMA members. I must also give hearty thanks to the members of your AMA Executive Committee and to Helen Smith our Membership Secretary, all of whom have selflessly dedicated their time and energy to the administration of the AMA and the organisation of mountaineering events on an ever increasing scale. I would also like to thank your Honorary President and AMA Founder, Tony Streather, your Honorary Vice Presidents, and your Chairman Lt Col Cath Davies who has been the driving force behind many of

the AMA's recent achievements and advances. I have thoroughly enjoyed working with them and learning from them, as I have with and from all members of the AMA.

As we enter a period of uncertainty and change under what promises to be a radical Defence Review, I would hope that the AMA continues to champion the role of adventurous training in the development of leadership, courage and character, to maintain the place of mountaineering in the forefront of that effort, and to keep looking for new frontiers to cross and new peaks to scale. In this endeavour I wish you every good fortune for the coming years.

Carpe diem, quam minime credula postero. Good luck and good climbing.



AMA Spring Meet 2010

Den Healey

After the initial flap of not being able to find a campsite willing to accept the AMA, and on a bank holiday, the Burns Family Campsite just outside Keswick came up trumps (with a wee bit of haggling). The numbers attending kept changing from week to week as the meet grew closer; by the Wednesday beforehand we were firmly at 12.

Baz and I managed to evade work early and head North at the speed of a thousand gazelles, staying just ahead of the hoard's of people due to descend upon the Lakes for the bank holiday weekend. Up at sparrows fart the following morning and keen as cheese we were walking into Dow Crag for some multi pitch action – Weather just holding out!!! With our route identified we were on. My admin true to form was not prepared for the snow blizzard on pitch 2. Chanking!!! However, all in all, still a fantastic day out.

By day two the weather had deteriorated enough to warrant heading into Borrowdale for a slice of cake and a pot of tea, and an opportunity to climb the classic Little Chamonix. On arrival we were pipped to the start post by two older gentlemen. One of which exclaimed how he been climbing here since before the road passed through the valley. Initial thoughts were we will follow these two and save time looking at the guide book. How wrong were we?! By pitch 2 they had us left us for dust with only the polish to guide us. We eventually finished, and with this super-classic in the bag we retired back to the café as the weather once again closed in. Late in the afternoon a window of opportunity from the sun allowed us to bag a couple of multi pitch routes at Castlerock Crag.

Holiday over(!) and back to the campsite and await the arrival of the other 10 attendees.

Just as the last glimmers of light were fading on the horizon our numbers had grown to 13 and with the help of every AMA member's friend: Stella Artois, the Meet began!!!!

Up even earlier than the sparrow's fart, and at a time my digital Suunto watch does not recognise the 4 members attending from Sennybridge, (Ruby, J, Alex and Claire) were sparking into action! The rest of us poked our heads out of tents and vans at a more suitable 7am to find that we had been joined by 2 more members

who assumed it would be ok to just turn up on a bank holiday weekend at an already overcrowded campsite! After wolfing some breakfast down our necks and putting the finishing touches to the risk assessments, Sam Marshall organised some training and development for the few who had requested it in the form of workshops and we all headed into Borrowdale to the Café, as the weather threatened to strike again. This was a hardy bunch of Army climbers however, and in next to no time people broke away in pairs and groups and were finally making use of their climbing shoes.

Whilst in Borrowdale we all thought (as did most of the climbing community that weekend), to come and not do Little Chamonix would be a crime; and with a queue of around 15 most of us waited. That in mind I decided that this would be a great opportunity to go over assisted and unassisted hoist, and I turned to the mountain of knowledge himself: Baz Whale. A great Army tradition of background activity; with some great reminders and quality instruction it all came flooding back.

Day two brought more of the same weather and again the Sennybridge team where up and good to go; not as early as the previous day, but still earlier than everybody else none the less, and had a good day's climbing on the 'Pinnacle'. Almost everybody else headed off to Castle Rock for some more lead training and then to put their new found skills into practice; whilst myself and my 2ic went for the easier option of Borrowdale and went back to basics with some easier climbing.

The end of the day unfortunately saw Baz and Sam head off into the sunset and that left the remainder of us to conduct our own training on Monday. Most had decided to go to Castle Rock whilst the others headed to the hills for a stroll and some much needed rope work.

All in all a very good weekend, with some good quality climbing, mountaineering and the instruction that was issued was second to none; as well as a good chance to meet new people, with the same love for the sport and a passion for all the things that go with it. I look forward to getting the chance to attend more meets and would encourage people with even minimum experience to attend and bolster their knowledge and log books.



£100
ARTICLE

TRAINING WITH USAIN

Henry Crosby

Building up to an event athletes train specifically, building up to their ultimate goal by breaking their sport down into its constituent parts and then building it back up again. Take Usain Bolt for example he'll spend time on practicing starts, running drills and doing weights to target certain muscle groups all scientifically measured. He doesn't go to every training session to race and break records: so why do we? Why every time we go to the wall do we aim for that red route on the competition wall with that tricky drop knee because we'll get it next time: that's right I've been watching you!

Athletes and sportsmen train, whereas climbers just climb and climb hoping to get better. Climbing is indeed the best training for climbing; however, it needs to be more structured than just going to the wall every week and trying the same route again and again. This doesn't mean you can't still aim for those dream routes occasionally and keep your training interesting by mixing up the routes you train on.

So how then? I'm not advocating that all climbers must immediately swap to a strict programme overnight, that's unrealistic. Instead I'm talking about making a few subtle changes to your routine to make it more interesting and effective. By looking upon your wall session as an athlete might a training session, you can make some big gains.

We'll talk here about two things: the warm-up and drills. **Firstly the warm-up,** this is not just a couple of traverses across a wall and a couple of cursory shoulder shrugs. Think back to your last PT session: In the warm-up you were stretched a little,



your heart was pumping and you were in a little discomfort. I'm not going to try and get you to do knees to chest on a crash mat for two minutes before starting your session because it won't happen, but you do need to achieve a number of things from your warm-up. You need to raise your heart rate, mobilise your joints and lightly stretch.

Here are some options: Run, cycle or walk to the wall. You could do laps around the wall or around the car park but you won't because it does look stupid. I know some days it is raining a little or it might be cold but if you live close to the wall there is really no excuse. If you live a little further away what about parking a little further away so that you have to walk in a little way with your kit at a brisk pace just like the walk-in to the crag it needs to be enough to get you puffing.

That done and out of the way lets move into the wall. Remember all those arm circles and shoulder shrugs you did before your last circuit session, that's mobilisation so include some of that too. It really is mainly about the arms and making sure the joints are lubricated. Work all the way up your arms:

- a. Clench fists to work fingers – Use a foam ball or that finger strength trainer you bought years ago.
- b. Rotating the wrists – These need mobilising for any sidepulls, gastons or crimps you may encounter.
- c. Work the elbows briefly.
- d. Rotate the shoulders – Raise them up and down, roll them, stretch out the chest. Remember the shoulder is the most mobile joint in the body and needs a bit of work on it.

All that can realistically be done on the walk-in, whilst getting changed or chatting at the start of a session and **none of it**

involves spending twenty minutes on a yoga mat in the corner its just simple stuff that will help you climb better and allow you to climb for longer before arthritis sets in.

Right now you are at the wall, changed you've been mobilising your joints whilst catching up with everyone rather than just doing it sat on the bench. Now for some drills and this is just your cursory traverses taken to the next level. I want you to do four traverses, every time you go to the wall; always using big hand holds and smallish footholds. Big handholds because you are still warming up and are not at full strength and small footholds because you can't practice good footwork on jugs. Your four traverses then, each time you should concentrate on the next thing:

- a. Silent feet – Move across the wall without scuffing, banging, adjusting or testing. Every foot placement should be the best it can and then use it without changing it.
- b. Straight arms – Obviously not possible all the time but as much as possible not using your biceps, bending your legs instead and swinging like a monkey, hanging on your skeleton.
- c. Fluid linkage – Pivoting on your feet you should flow between holds, rather than stopping to consider each move in turn.
- d. Breathing – Finally breathe: I'm serious. When you try you'll notice that you don't. Concentrate on breathing normally throughout the traverse rather than holding your breath between moves.

The idea here is to move progressively concentrating on these different elements individually. As you concentrate on straight arms your footwork will naturally suffer a little, but in time good footwork will become second nature as with the other components. At the same time as doing this you are now focussing on your climbing, not work, not the kids or even your next climbing trip; focus on the session in front of you.

My piece is said: well nearly. You are now warmed up and focussed you can go and **climb and enjoy your session** better than before. You are warmed up generally but not specifically, this means if you are planning on bouldering you still need to build up rather than heading straight for that Font 7a and if you are doing a leading session don't go straight for that drop-knee you still need to build the grades but you have laid the foundation. Go train...



Army Sport Climbing Championship 2010

The Army Sport Climbing Championships returned to Boulders in Cardiff on 20–21 May. The annual competition takes place over 2 days, is designed to cater for all abilities and aims to find the Army individual and team sport climbing champions. The turnout was the biggest for 3 years with 103 competitors, including guests from the other 2 services and the civil service.

The Boulders staff had been busy over the previous few weeks and a series of “Skymasters” volumes were unveiled and the stage set for plenty of upside down swinging around in the rafters! Andy Long and Rob Lamey returned to route set and this time came with their devious heads firmly attached. Moving holds have not featured at this competition before and they were set to provide entertainment and trepidation in equal measure!

Day 1 saw everyone attempt 6 top roped routes set to challenge even the best. Getting steadily harder from Fr4 to 7a+ and with a variety of techniques required to succeed, the routes gradually spat off all but two of the competitors and split the field nicely for the second day. The bouldering, which kept everyone busy while waiting for their routes’ start time, was also a tough proposition. 20 problems at all angles tested the men from the boys and it went down to bonus holds to decide the winners. Capt Tom Odling (1 RRF LAD REME) finally came out on top of the men and Cpl Charlotte Shaw (114 Pro Coy) the women.

Day 2 dawned with weary arms and some fuzzy heads from sampling the Cardiff night life. Everyone makes it through to day 2 but are split into 3 categories depending on their performance on day 1: the Elite category for the top 20% from day 1 and with the majority of the Army Climbing Team, the Open category for the next 40% and the Novice category for the final 40%. The Elite and Open categories face knockout semi final and final lead climbs while the Novice



category face a top rope final. All categories climb in reverse order from day 1.

The Open category was first up and a technical semi final achieved the aim, finding the best 8 for the final. The Novice category was a straight final with competitors getting stumped by a Saturn ring and some small holds at the top. A clear winner emerged in the form of LCpl Craig Gillies (3 Med Regt), who got within touching distance of the finish.

The Elite category needed to be soundly tested and Andy created a masterpiece of 3D climbing across 3 walls and one of the hanging volumes. Speed and accuracy were key to avoiding the build up of lactic acid and some spectacular falls from the volume and high on the route eliminated all but the best. LCpl Ruth Matuska (11 Trg Bn REME) was by far the best of the female competitors and although she did not make the Elite final she took the women’s title.

A break in proceedings over lunch allowed for the traditional speed relay event, which is the culmination of the team competition: 3 lines, 3 climbers, a running clock and the fastest wins. Bags of energy, forget your feet and go for it are the order of the day and the entertainment value for the spectators is enormous. Testosterone flowed and after 3 years of trying the boys from Hereford finally took the team title.

For others it was a different set of emotions. A mixed aura of calm, nerves and sweaty palms descended over the small groups that made the Open and Elite finals. Isolation beckoned while the routes were re-set and the audience gathered. First out were the Open finalists. A variation on the Elite semi final was in stall for them and they viewed the hanging volume with some trepidation, along with the other two thirds of the route above it! Capt George Best (ATR Pirbright) and WO2 Rob Short (Para) almost mastered the challenge and both got within a whisker of the top. It went to count back and George won on his semi final score.

The Elites came out last and a final surprise was in stall for them. Not only did it involve 2 other hanging volumes but it started from atop a pillar and finished at the far side of the wall and as high as you can get. Oh and throw in a long final run out to boot! A real man test in endurance, technique, brute force and bottle. Finalists employed a variety of techniques to wrestle with the initial volumes – hooking, campusing, even hugging them! A no hands rest at the end just ate into the time allowed so it became a balance between recovery and going for it. Up through the main arch followed by a 3 metre drop down and then a rising fight through the barrel roof to a very droppable finish. All tried but only one tamed the route – reigning champion SSgt Jon Leighton (135 Ind Geo Sqn RE (V)) was the only one to top out and reclaim the title.



Brig Jon Watson, the AMA President, was on hand with the sponsors to award the prizes. The event was supported by Cotswold, Entre-prises, The Orange House, Boulders and Motif8 who provided plenty of trophies and prizes for all the categories and without whose generous support the event would not have taken place.

Everyone departed thoroughly exercised, weighed down with raffle prizes and looking forward to next year. We left the staff of Boulders working out how they were going to top the event for entertainment value again when we return in 12 months time!

COUNTRY ROADS

David Jordan

In February of this year (most of) the squad of Exercise TIGER KARAKORAM assembled at the Dundonnell Hut in Northern Scotland for a week of winter climbing. The aim of the exercise, led by Matt Hing, is to take 12 Army Mountaineers to the Himalaya of Northern India, with the intention of climbing several 6000m+ peaks.

The first few days of the trip were characterized by clear and sunny weather more like the Alps than the traditional Scottish experience. However the high pressure brought cold air, which also meant that fresh snow remained loose and unconsolidated. My own aims were to get a tan and some cool photos, and so, on balance I preferred the good weather, despite the poorer climbing conditions.

We got up at 0900 on the first day, some having arrived late the night before. We walked into Beinn Dearg and Sven, Mark and I ended up starting up Emerald Gully (IV) far later than we should have done. The crux was an ice bulge near the top of the route and there was just enough stretch in the rope to take me to the bottom of it every time I fell off. The sun had set as Sven had led it, and so I didn't see the chunk of ice that hit me in the face that knocked me off again. My rope then pinned Mark, who was higher up the route than me; I think we were both having one of those questioning moments that come more frequently than we like to admit on some routes: "Why am I doing this again?!" This feeling, of course

immediately disappeared as soon as we reached the summit, and I'm happy to say didn't return during the rest of the week. Sven even saved my ego a bit by pointing out my lightweight axes weren't up to technical winter climbing.

Later in the week, whilst returning to the same crag and reviewing photographs from other members of the squad it became apparent that what we had actually climbed was a new route (Now known as Ivan Lissin, IV), not often in condition but this year exceptionally so after the prolonged cold weather.

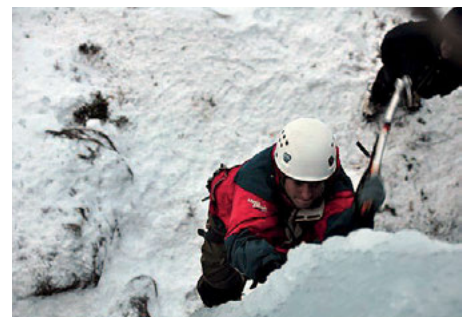
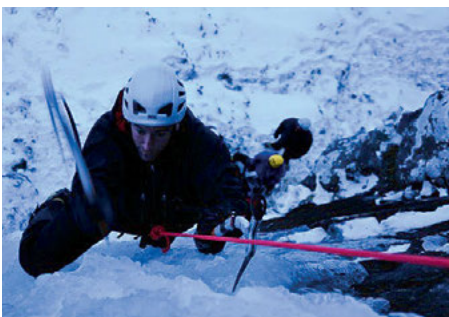
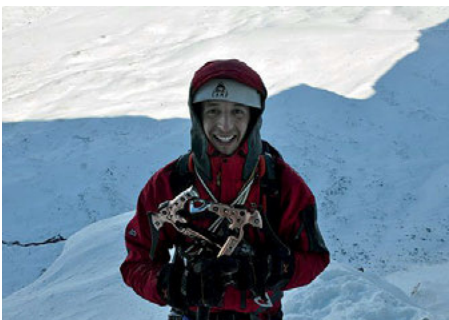
Over the next few days climbing teams swapped around and selective route choices allowed us to climb despite the loose snow. Several of us climbed routes on Sgurr Mor and I made a quick phone call at the summit to make sure my university tutors knew I was ill. We also climbed other routes at Beinn Dearg. The walk off here was extended by a couple of hours or so by meeting a mountain photographer and his wife and stopping for a 'quick chat'. Finally the sun moved behind the ridge, and it became too cold for the one-sided conversation to continue.

The weather turned towards the end of the week. Snow cut us off from Ullapool, the nearest town, but the owner of the Dundonnell Hotel just up the road generously provided us with some essentials. Prevented from climbing, we practised other skills relevant to the expedition;

avalanche transceiver use, snow caves, anchors and jumarring. We top roped some lower and harder routes in the area.

One of the best experiences of the trip didn't occur on the hill. After dinner one evening we all went to the Dundonnell Hotel's bar, where a local music group were playing. We listened appreciatively at first, but Sven and Mark Dowland opened the floodgates by getting involved on the guitar. Soon all the rest of us had some kind of instrument, ranging from maracas to a wooden fish and stick (for me), and were getting involved as best we could (unfortunately, not very well). They probably regretted giving us the words to some of the songs, particularly after we repeated the chorus of Country Roads, Take Me Home for the fifth time!

This week not only allowed members of the squad to train in climbing skills, but also to start working as team. As I write this, I look forward to climbing with the squad again on JSAM.



£50
ARTICLE

FAUNA IN THE UK

Barry Whale



In the previous edition of ARMY MOUNTAINEER I attempted to introduce you to some of the more common flora of our upland environment; in this edition I hope to similarly enthuse and educate regarding some of the mammals and birds that make a day in our unique mountain environment so rewarding.

Peregrine Falcon

Camouflaged in a dark grey and with distinct pointed wings, the Peregrine Falcon is thankfully making a comeback in the UK. Previously a rare sight, they are benefitting greatly from a reduction in agricultural chemical use that built up in their food chain and from climbers respecting access agreements that protect their vital nesting areas high on North facing vegetated cliffs. Approaching the nests is still illegal as they may not return to their young if disturbed by humans. They can produce some exhilarating displays high in the air and when swooping to catch their prey they can reach speeds of over 200 miles an hour! There is often a distinctive loud bang when a Peregrine Falcon takes out a smaller bird; a noise you won't forget in a hurry.



Meadow Pipit

This is believe it or not the most common song bird in the British hills. You will very often see them whizzing around in pairs like true acrobats particularly over grassy/heath areas. They are very small birds (approx 14cm long) and weigh in at a maximum of 25g. It is more common to find them when you stumble close to their nests in the spring, when they take to the skies in an effort to draw you



away. Close up the Meadow Pipit will appear a yellowish colour, although you may catch sight of its white outer feathers in flight. They live on insects and small seeds and berries.

Adder

After recently being startled by the biggest adder I have ever seen in Britain at Tremadog I thought it prudent to add them to the list! Adders are the only snake that can be found as far north as the Arctic Circle and the only venomous one in the British Isles. You will normally find them basking in the sun on or around rocky and heather areas. Adders will feed on mice, voles, lizards, frogs and other small animals. Bites to humans will only occur as an absolute last resort by the snake and it is more likely to hiss frantically at you first. If you are unlucky enough to get bitten, rest assured that death is rare, although I suspect its going to hurt a bit! The male Adder grows up to 80cm long and has a bright white or grey body with a black zig zag pattern down its back. Whilst the female has a brown body and a dark brown zig zag on her back.

It was once thought that dried Adder skins could cure rheumatism and headaches, whilst powdered Adder skin was believed to cure



constipation. Legend has it that those who ate the flesh of white snake would be able to understand animal languages.

Feral Goat

Goats were originally introduced into the wild to graze on the steeper upland slopes unsuitable for sheep. This proved to be very inefficient and so they were left to their own devices. In dry weather the goats will often be found low down off the hills looking for water when they may also go on the hunt for yummy plants in gardens that back onto the hills. They are very efficient at causing mass damage to woodlands and new growth in the wild. In the spring female goats will form separate herds away from the males. They leave their young to older goats (nanny goats) who will show them the ropes and introduce them to their territory.

Shrew

Usually the only signs of this small elusive animal are the small tunnels in the grass, heather or hollows that will criss-cross their territory. Shrews are avid predators of small invertebrates and are active all year round, trying to eat enough to keep up with their very high metabolic rate. They are about 7.5cm long with its tail about half the size of its body and has a distinctive point nose. The shrew is a territorial animal and is frequently hostile to other shrews that may stray into its 'patch'. They need to be, there is only so much food to go around and they need to eat 80-90% of their body weight each day in order to survive! It is rare to see them in the open but they do have a high pitched shriek that may hear through the summer vegetation.



Mountain Hare

This is Scotland's only true arctic-alpine animal. They are smaller in size than the more common brown hare. They have a remarkable method of concealing themselves through changing the colour of their coats in different seasons. You can distinguish them in summer by their greyish colour and in winter by their white coats. Brown Hares won't usually be found above 400 meters so you can be pretty sure that above this height that you are looking at a Mountain Hare. These animals do not burrow, instead creating well concealed scrapes under heather. They will frequent woody vegetation, especially near tree seedlings. It is usual to see their bounding prints in snowy conditions whilst out on the hills in winter.

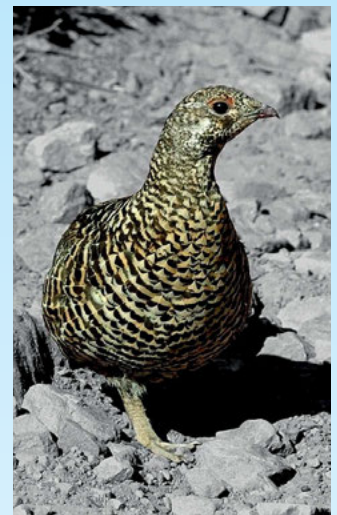


Red Deer

There are many different types of Deer in the UK; Red Deer are pretty common to come across in the uplands of Scotland. They are often confused with others such as the similar Sika Deer. Sika are slightly smaller and have rows of white spots in summer. Red Deer prints can often be seen on the hills with the Stags having much larger prints and their forefeet slightly larger than their hindfeet. They leave droppings in piles wherever they have been feeding. Red Deer will leave signs in woodland such as fraying and bark stripping as well as shed antlers and wallows.

Ptarmigan

This is another remarkable animal that changes its colour depending on the season. They are shaped like slender grouse but their plumage is unmistakable. In summer their wings and belly are white whilst the rest of their feathers appear a subtle grey in colour. During the winter season they are pure white other than a black outer tail. The males can be identified by their thin black line from bill to eye. They are masters at concealment; you could be led to believe you are alone on the hills, when all of a sudden they let themselves down with their resonant calls similar to the croaking sound they make in flight. Be sure if you find any white feathers high on the hills that they once belonged to a Ptarmigan.



Herring Gull

Last but not least. Everyone's favourite bird!!! This is the commonly seen large 'seagull' on the hills in Britain. As soon as you take a break and crack open your lunch a Herring Gull will appear with its eyes fixed on your tucker. They have been seen raiding climber's rucksacks that have been left unattended, waiting until climbers are well on route before striking. These are the scavengers of the skies; they will settle anywhere food is readily available. Climbers and walkers who drop apple cores and other perishable goods are to blame for these birds moving inland and into the mountains. They nest on difficult to access open ground like small islands.



“IT’S SH*T, BOSS, I’M GETTING OUT”

Nick Fisher

“It’s sh*t, boss, I’m getting out.” These words lingered with me as I packed to head off to JSAM – the Joint Services Alpine Meet. They were uttered by my final patient of the day – a young soldier who had signed off and for whom I was performing a release medical – when I had asked him his reasons for leaving. Sadly, he had never been involved in adventurous training or Army sport. As I got my kit together and prepared to travel down to Switzerland, I wondered if he had done, whether his opinion would have differed.

JSAM is an annual event, and is a unique opportunity for service

personnel of all ranks and abilities from complete novices to high-level experts to gain knowledge and experience within the beautiful setting of the European Alps. This was my first attendance as part of the build up training for Exercise IMJA TSE- a Defense Medical Services expedition to Nepal in October this year. As with all adventurous training, the aim is to introduce a new skill set to a serviceman or woman, to allow them to build on that skill set and then to pass what they have learned on to the soldiers they work with- it should be enjoyable, but is frequently arduous, sometimes dangerous and should put the individual in situations where they are out of their comfort zones. For me, this meant starting at the bottom of the pile from an alpine mountaineering perspective and doing the Alpine Mountain Proficiency course as part of JSAM 2009.

There are several aspects of alpine mountaineering that differ significantly from the climbing which can be done in the UK. The peaks are higher- many above 4000m and as such have snow and ice on them all year round. Many have glaciers, and gaining knowledge and experience of walking and climbing on glaciers was a fundamental part of what we gained from the AMP. Day 1 saw us fixing crampons to our boots, many for the first time, and learning the ‘John Wayne’ walk to ensure they didn’t catch on loose trouser legs.

We were also introduced to the concept of crevasses – cracks in the glacier that may be several meters wide into which the unsuspecting mountaineer can, and frequently does, fall into. With this somewhat unappealing thought fixed in our minds we were taught the methods of firstly avoiding this situation and secondly how to minimize the danger by roping up in teams and ways of rescuing each other and ourselves should anything happen. With newly learned knots, ice tools and techniques racing round our heads, we returned to the campsite to prepare for our 4 days out in the mountains and to relax with a well earned pint.

Day 2 saw us leaving early for the Bordierhütte, our overnight rest stop. We set off into a beautiful blue sky day with a river running along side us, making progress up the valley to the Reidgletscher, a vast glacier wall which we climbed alongside before eventually crossing. Here we got our first view of crevasses – but not our last and certainly not the closest! On arrival at the Bordierhütte we sorted out our kit for the morning, had a hearty meal of pasta and sauce and settled down for the night in the ‘massenlaage’ – imagine 10 people in one long bed and you’ve just about got it.

On our third day we had the skills we had learned on day 1 really put to the test. In teams of three each of us took turns to literally be thrown down a crevasse. Some slid in almost gracefully, the largest of our team however decided to add a bit of realism and threw himself in with an enthusiastic shout, requiring some rapid and aggressive use of ice-axes and crampons to prevent him disappearing too far! Once the fall had been

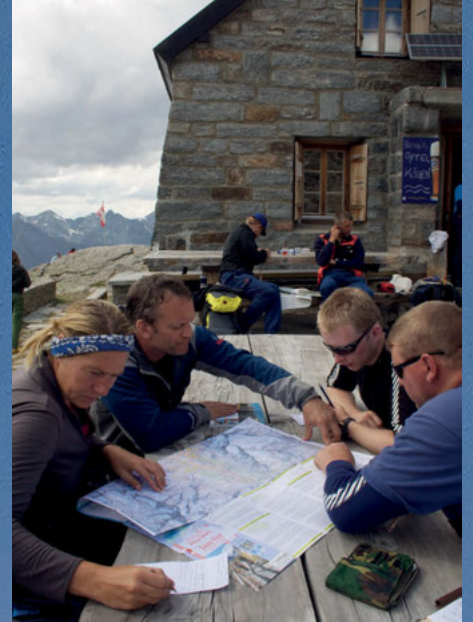
arrested, the other two members of the team set up the necessary belay devices to rescue him, and by the end of the day each person had had at least one chance to experience hanging around in a crevasse and several opportunities to perform the rescue; we were ready for our first peak.

Four a.m. on the 4th day and we set off in 3 teams to climb the 3925m summit of the Ulrichshorn. By 5 a.m. we had reached the glacier and were roped up again- ever wary of crevasses but reassured that there had been no recent snow fall to hide them. At

just after 6 a.m. the dawn broke with purple and

golden fingers of light extending over the summits of peaks all around us. In the distance dark storm clouds were looming and under the instruction of our highly experienced guide Simon, we quickened the pace. Reaching the summit was an awesome feeling, on one side the glacier fell away, on the other a rock face, almost vertical, dropped for around a thousand metres. The views were stunning. Was I out of my comfort zone? Certainly; Was I loving every minute of it? Absolutely! A few sharp words from Simon reminded us that most accidents occur to climbers on the descent after summiting and encouraged us to pay even greater attention on the way down than on the way up. Thankfully we descended without incident and arrived on the Mischabelhütte at around 8.30 am where we were welcomed with a large pot of tea and a well earned nap. The weather closed in shortly afterwards and we were glad to see the rest of the teams arrive in good order having beaten the worst of the weather.

Sadly, the high winds on the peaks meant we were unable to climb the Weissmies-our second intended objective-



and, after arriving back in Saas Fee town, we were back to practicing the belays and pulley systems of crevasse rescue again. As Simon pointed out, though, 'peaks mean nothing if you can't get your mates out of a crevasse', and all in all we agreed the week had been a resounding success.

Every member of our team was awarded their Alpine Mountain Proficiency award and most are already planning to return to the Alps next year to build on the experience and work towards the next level, the Alpine Mountain Leader. The aim, of course, is to be able to introduce more soldiers to the stunning scenery and fantastic experiences available in this truly beautiful part of the world. I would recommend the AMP course as part of JSAM to anyone who has an interest in climbing alpine mountain peaks and would encourage them to apply, via the JSMTTC at Indefatigable, for JSAM 2010. Because anyone stood on top of one of those peaks would be unable to say, "this is sh*t boss, I'm getting out."



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 up to £100 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 and emailed to the editor, along with a credit and caption) amajournaleditor@armymail.mod.uk

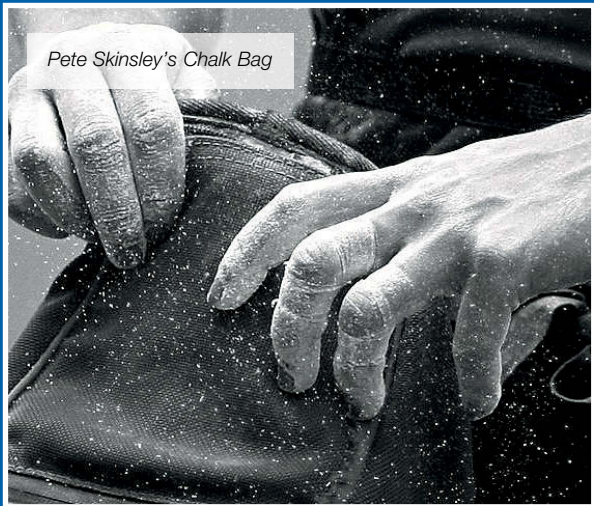
**£50
PRIZE**

Wonderful sunset over camp on the sea ice by Jonjo Knott



**£100
PRIZE**

Nepal by Levison Wood



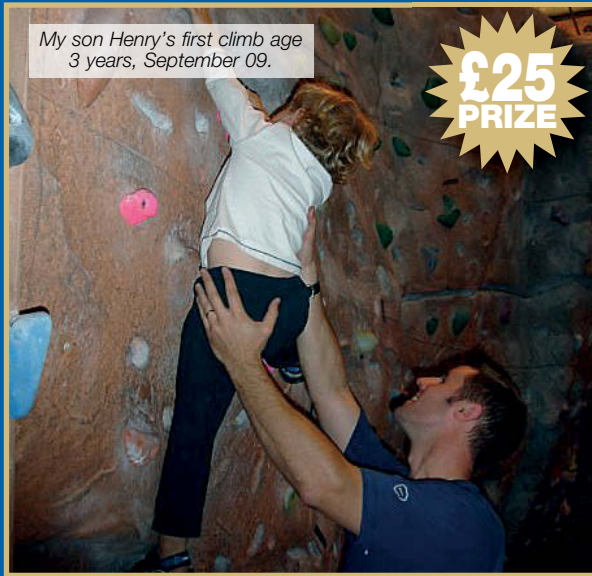
Pete Skinsley's Chalk Bag



Signpost by Brian Jeffreys



Peruvian Football



My son Henry's first climb age 3 years, September 09.

£25 PRIZE



Via Ferrata Italian Dolomites Apr 08
John Higginson

£150
ARTICLE

SKI TOURING IN THE ALPES

Philip Maddox HBF

Sgt Richard Simpson (famed for being splashed all over the front cover of 'The Wire' during the 2007 SP07 exped) and his Regt'1 2IC Maj Bob Lovett both fancied completing the famous and notoriously classic Haute Route by way of ski mountaineering.

A big thank you must therefore go out to my boss, Maj Jez Tose Regt'1 2IC 2 Signal Regiment for allowing me the time to lead this trip.

With the Regt'1 2IC being involved this exped was always going to 'go ahead' and so that is where I (Philip Maddox) became involved. Sometime late last year (c.a. Dec 2009) Richard asked if I was busy over this period and if I would like to Guide his expedition over the Haute Route. Yes sprung to mind immediately as it is a classic and very arduous and very enjoyable experience I thought. Not a chance to be missed.

We were based out of Les Contamines and although limited to local ski mtn'ing and glacial areas to perform training days, there was still enough to do for me to get a look at the group and assess the ability, knowledge and fitness before actually committing to the HR.

The Haute route is a high level ski or walk traverse of the French & Swiss Alps, historically commencing from Chamonix across to Zermatt. There are a hundred and one variations and there are





also other Haute Routes known by their region name for example: The Italian HR, The Oberland HR or The Verbier variation HR. All still with varying difficulties and degrees of isolation and inherent high alpine dangers we associate with travelling in the mountains.

None of these trips should be considered without first doing some research into what the whole trip entails; including snow conditions, weather, ski ability, personal fitness, equipment requirements, group numbers and the list goes on. Although these trips are undertaken by a large number of enthusiasts yearly there are also a number of trips cut short or groups evacuating early from their chosen route due to a number of factors including dehydration, poor level of personal fitness, level of personal skiing ability and a whole host of other reasons.

So, the trip starts. Day 1 is a shake out ski day on and off piste up on the slopes of Les Contramines-Montjoie. The snow is fantastic and the off piste is pretty good too. Due to there not being a massive amount of snow but still plenty to ski on & off piste late into April; there was apparently an unprecedented amount of high winds for most of the winter season bringing lots of pressed, hard wind-slab in lots of off piste areas. A hint to watch out for slab avalanche as we progress out onto the more isolated ski mountaineering routes.

All of the guys were skiing well and even with day bags on there didn't seem to be too many problems. The weather really closed in and so made for an interesting ski down the 'Bumps field' without actually being able to see the bumps until they hit you! Some said they were attacked by the snow which made them fall over?????

So to the real stuff of ski touring & ski mountaineering: The local glacier and mountains to Les Contamines are The Tre La Tete glacier and the mountains of Domes De Miage and Le Pain du Sucre and Mt Tondue; All easily accessible from the Tre La Tete & Les Conscrits Alpine huts. I must add that some of the Alpine huts would probably be 4★ hotels in the UK! Indeed most who have travelled through the Alpine hut system will declare that they would rather stay in them than some outrageously priced hotel in the UK!

So we set off up the hill with skis strapped to the side of our day bags and walked up the hill until we met the snow line or the hut, whichever was to come first. We met the snow line but decided to press on walking to the hut rather than strap on skis as it was not much further up the hill. It is generally approximately 2-3hrs uphill walking to the hut and is always a welcome sight.

Alpine huts are sometimes very full and even though the hut wardens rarely turn anyone away, it is always strongly advised to





topic, in this case informed by the forecast from the warden and lift stations in Les Contamines prior to the journey; local avalanche threat is always a close second.

Route planned and discussed and off we go to bed in order to rest before the next days tour.

The weather was to be kind to us and brought warm, clear blue skies. We went onto the glacier and put skis on to tour along the Tre La Tete glacier until we could see the Les Conscrits hut high up on the left side of the valley, and the Mt Tondu high up on the right. Which one to choose? My decision was to go to the Conscrits hut and complete some Crevasse Training in a safe area before embarking on a fairly major ski tour. I was concerned that we had not yet done this and that there would be plenty of fall potential to come. The Conscrits was a very comfortable hut with spectacular views and amazing setting, with no crowds of 'punters' in their one piece ski suits and lack of respect for mother nature!

phone ahead and book your bed space. Some huts at the height of skiing, touring or walking seasons will be full to capacity and it would be very harsh and embarrassing to be turned away; especially as you would have to either ski down to the valley on horrible wet old snow or tramp back to the last hut and hope there is still room at the inn!

We had the hut to ourselves and were soon drinking coffee around the fireplace. The hut wardens also like to take bookings so they can prepare the evening meal and breakfast for the following morning; they often also prepare a packed lunch. A map appeared whilst we sat around the table enjoying our drinks, and we planned the next two days touring. Planning and discussing routes is a very important part of any day's excursions into the mountains. Weather is normally a favourite

Warm drink and bed spaces are a difficult thing to leave, even for crevasse rescue training in the sun. This is vital though for anyone travelling across a glacier; it could be anyone of the team that needs rescuing or pulling out of a very deep dangerous ice cave. We practised assisted & unassisted hoists and the variants there are to each system and finished off with every member having a go at falling down the hole to be rescued.

Up early the next day and after being fed and watered, we carefully put our skins on the skis and off we went. The plan was to tour up to the Domes De Miage that although not a very high mountain in the alps (around 4000m), it all helps with acclimatisation and getting used to being at altitude. It is known that people will generally feel the effects of altitude as low as 2000m. Most people are affected in some way or another. Regardless of 'sea level' fitness, being at altitude has a whole different way of attacking your red blood cells and muscles and making things a bit more difficult to perform as you would down at sea level.

One of the group was already feeling the effects and struggled almost all of the day, especially where the snow conditions were not very good for a ski descent. An early sign of Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS) is slowing to a snails pace not being physically able to go faster. The fastest known recovery for this is to descend back to a level where they feel at ease. Thankfully in this case descent was not required.

Once at the top of Domes De Miage we decided to descend

as quickly as possible and not stand around on the summit too long as the temperature had plummeted and the winds were picking up; a typical Alpine pattern in the afternoons: The winds pick up the higher up you go and the temperature drops and as the air cools once the sun starts its descent; cold air then sinks down the mountain and can be a danger to unsuspecting tourers out later than expected.

The ski off was terrible as the snow was a double layer of crust which grabs your ankles as you try to ski, resulting in lots of falls or lots of frustration as it is very difficult to get turns in where or when you want them. We eventually skied all the way back down the glacier and back to the Tre La Tete hut where we had a drink and a sandwich before skiing most of the way back down to Les Contamines for a days rest and a shower.

AMS had affected another one of the guys, so Nick Hesp stayed in for the next tour, recovering well and continuing thereafter. It did mean though that he missed the first of four mountains over 4000m in the Swiss Alps. Oh well there's always next time Nick! From Les Contamines we drove (thanks by the way to TP & Danny the dedicated drivers for the duration of the exped), to the Swiss town of Tasch which is sited just down the valley from Zermatt (Matterhorn country). The town is a car free (most of the time) commune of Switzerland serviced by a train from the huge car park below. We walked through the beautiful village and up to the lift station taking us to the Kleine Matterhorn.

From the top of the Kleine Matterhorn lift which is already at about 3800m, we only had a height gain of just over 400m. This is probably the easiest of all Alpine 4000'ers and is therefore very popular. So we set off up the hill and followed the tracks already in place left the countless other groups from previous trips during the season. The route is very straight forward and although not much of a height gain is still over 4000m. Maj Bob Lovett was starting to feel the altitude and had now slowed to a snails pace. As fit as a fiddle at sea level, Bob was no exception to altitude.

Bob soldiered on and we all topped out to enjoy the view from the summit of the Breithorn; Marvelling at the Matterhorn standing proud and all on its own, looking very intimidating and spectacular all in one! After a few moments and the obligatory photo shoot on the summit we decided to clip the skis into ski mode and ski down the lovely steep mountain back to the top of the lift station. From the Breithorn you can ski down the 'Szwartor' gully and over to the Monta Rosa hut and then down to the valley from there. However, the snow cover lower down was not very good so it was decided to go to the top of the pisted area and



ski all the way down; plus it was a better choice for those not dealing so well with the altitude. I would much rather effect a rescue from the pisted slopes than deep in Off Piste/Back country area.

The next day was a Battlefield tour from WWII. Sometime early on in the war the German Mountain Troops led an assault UP HILL! From Courmayeur on the Italian side of the Mont Blanc Massive, up to the Turino Hut which is balanced precariously on the edge of the Mare De Glace. This glacier divides the mountain between Italy & France and during the war the Germans attempted to cross the glacier and invade France from high up in the Alps and down into



Chamonix. Due to the usual 'Communications' break down, urgent messages regarding equipment requirements, shortages of ammo and men and the lack of support for the initial assault up the hill to Turino Hut, the French had already massed their own Mountain Troops and arrived at the top of their side of the mountain (Aiguille de Midi), and were waiting for the Germans.

There was a pitched battle on top of the Mer de Glace, resulting in the French keeping their side and the Germans retreating back down the hill back to Courmayeur to rethink their next move.

So, with the scene set, we set out from the Turino Hut to cross the glacier underneath famous routes such as the Tour Ronde North face to our left and Rochefort Ridge to our right. Then, further on, the Pyramide du Tacul, Mt Blanc du Tacul and the Cheri Couloir before hitting the Cosmique hut. We then circled round under the Cosmique Arete before coming up the very steep col just below the lift station of Aiguille de Midi. At over 3800m this is a very noticeable point of interest within the Chamonix sky line and a very good target indicator to get your bearings. Unfortunately none of these points of interest were seen throughout the whole day as the 'clag' was down and it was almost 'white-out for the duration!

Well, I earned my money that day, it was up an uphill day all day which had about 350m height gain and took about 5hrs. Although not a long tour it was a demanding one due to the lack of visibility, poor weather and constant incline; it certainly took it out of you, having to concentrate fully for the duration.

We drove back from Chamonix to Les Contamines and discussed the next few days tours. Although by now I had made the decision NOT to even attempt the Haute Route; I, as did the rest of the guys, wanted instead to attempt some of the other famous summits in the Swiss Alps. We planned to drive back over to Saas Grund (just below Saas Fee) and stay over night in a hotel and get up the hill the next morning.

In the morning we took the Allalin Express lift and train to just below 3600m and toured round and up the Allalinhorn. At a little over 4100m it is a very accessible and non technical 4000'er. Nick was now back to his normal self and was able to rejoin the party. We set off and roped up all the way to the summit in a little over 3hrs. Maj Bob Lovett was still feeling the effects of altitude but was in fine form and made the summit with only a little difficulty. This time however, the ski descent was absolutely fantastic!

One of the primary reasons people ski mountaineer is for the fantastic virgin powder snow from some of the fine summits they have just scaled. This was to be no exception; we skied in really good powder all the way down to the middle lift station, the best way to finish a days touring.

We were booked into the Langfluh hut and seeing as it was still only about 1300hrs we made use of the sun and chilled out on the 'Terasse', dried our kit, discussed repair kits, and what is in each others day bags before retiring in for coffee and cake.

The next day was to be our last day on the hill and to date the longest, with most amount of height gain. We were to attempt the

Alphubel, at 4207m this was a height gain of 1335m and was up hill all the way from the hut to the summit!

Frickin hell! I hear you say. Yes this summit was going to be a test piece for us all. Maj Bob Lovett made good his escape and had skied off the hill to fly home for an important meeting back at camp; only to be thwarted by the cancellations of all flights over Europe and mainland Britain due to the volcano eruptions in Iceland. Bob got home about 2days later after quite a lot of driving and train journeys.

After a very lovely and hearty evening meal in the hut, and a nice glass of wine with the warden to end the night, it was off to bed nice and early (2245hrs?!), and up again at 0445hrs! A simple breakfast, lashed down with hut tea and then outside to get roped up and set off up the hill; we set off at 0630hrs just as the sun was peeking it's cap over the skyline, but not enough heat to warm the air just yet. We didn't want that yet anyhow, with all that uphill climb coming up we all wished the sun would stay down a little longer and not make it too hot for the climb.

At about 0930hrs we stopped for our first big break only to find out that Lt Si Tucker had difficulty with his bindings. They had worked loose and one of the main holding screws at the front had come out. This rendered the ski almost un-workable. It didn't help that Si, weighing in at over 90kgs was skiing on a pair of 165cms skis; lesson identified for next time! He continued for another 45mins before the final steep ascent; this would have been an hour and half of climbing and would have totally wrecked what was left. He had no option but to continue on crampons and leave the skis there ready to collect on the way down.

We all successfully topped out about 1230hrs after six hours of uphill climbing; a long ascent by any standard. The summit was sunny and not very windy and the views were outstanding. Hundreds of miles lay before us in every direction with all our previous summits lost in the view. Awesome.

We removed the skins that aided us grip the snow and ascend to the summit, and started our descent. This was the best ski descent of all the expedition; we skied from 4207m down to 1990m all the way down to Saas Fee village in some of the best snow we had experienced in 10 days and at angles of 38-40 degrees, all the way down to the village.

What a way to end the trip. Even though we never achieved the Haute Route we managed to get some famous other peaks and 'bag' a few 4000'ers that are usually conquered in summer by climbers on ropes, with ice axe and crampons. Now that is a sense of achievement!

Oh, and I completed it all on my TELEMARSK skis! Get on Tely's and ski the original way. It's a world more satisfying this way.

Free your heel man, & free your mind dood!



The Mad Ramblings of a Devonian Rambler

Mark Gregory

So what defines a quality mountain day? Many would argue that it is the distance covered or the height climbed. As I penned this opening paragraph I had just summited Guilvan in the West Highlands. In total I had travelled some 25 odd kilometres and ascended over 1000m to reach its lofty peak, so was it a quality mountain day? Hardly! Within 30 minutes of departure I had crashed my bike in a stream and the day would culminate in my submersion in the Fionn Lìghe; all-in-all, not a quality experience. So what does make a quality mountain day? I would argue that it's not the height climbed or the distance travelled, although for many (including myself) this goes a long way to defining the challenge that draws us to the mountains. It's a personal affair comprising those activities and occurrences that make a day memorable. Bagging Munros is my current fad, but it does not define me. It merely provides the motivation required to coerce a visit to Bonnie Scotland; however infrequent this may be.

For the best part of the year I must achieve my 'fix' elsewhere and for those of you who know my West Country roots will understand that I am forever drawn to Dartmoor. Its rich cultural heritage, historic significance and folklore is as enticing now as it ever has been, but sadly my time here is equally rare these days. Therefore I must satisfy myself with the views I witness each month from the calendar that adorns my office wall, a gift for which I will be eternally grateful. Despite being 31 years of age my Mum still furnishes me with each new edition every Christmas – God bless her.

The Dartmoor folklore and campfire stories that filled my youth appear to have vanished these days, superseded by the ghastly and ghostly tales that transmit through our television screens. Mercifully there are none of these fictitious creatures in the great outdoors; no Hairy Hand, no Hounds of the Baskerville and definitely no tormenting Raven. As I walk I must entertain myself with thoughts so diverse and random that at times I question my own sanity.

*'Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore,
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.*

*"'Tis some visiter," I muttered, "Only this and nothing more."
"That I scarce was sure I heard you", here I opened wide the door
Darkness there and nothing more.*

*Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter,
In there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly days of yore.
"Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou," I said, "art sur e no craven,
Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the Nightly shore.*

*"Wretch," I cried, "thy God hath lent thee by these angels he hath sent thee
Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian shore!
And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
Shall be lifted nevermore!"*

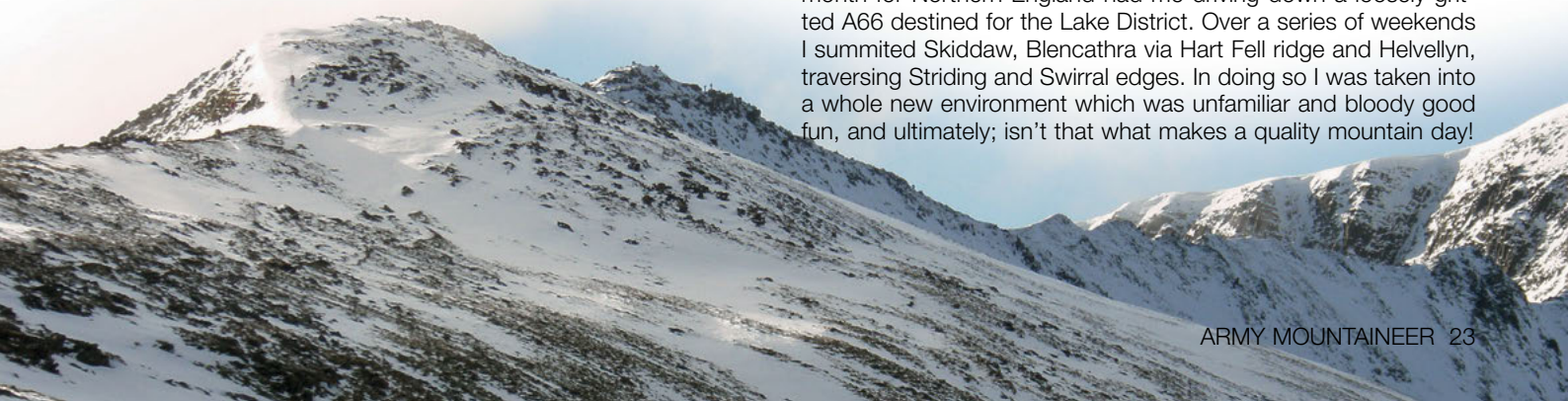


The words of Edgar Allan Poe; how many times whilst battered down in a canvas refuge have we wondered if there was truly something out there. Speaking of mischievous creatures; sheep! Why is it that they always seem to mirror our every movement? Many times I have been out amongst our eminent moors and fells and come across small herds of these sometimes inquisitive, but often nervy creatures. Unsurprisingly they are startled by my sudden presence and feel the need to re-locate, but why do they insist on sticking to my chosen route just mere metres ahead, at a pace equal to my own as if acted upon by some strange and unforeseen force? An intriguing act of nature that I feel would even baffle the great Isaac Newton.

Suspicious night-time noises and stalking sheep aside there is always an inherent risk in what we do. At times that risk brings an element of unease – an unease that is controlled, producing a sense of pure exhilaration as the adrenalin kicks in. Risky business; yes, but it's all part of the adventure. My girlfriend Helen worries for my safety as I do tend to solo mountaineer. Naturally, I reassure her that all will be fine and I sincerely hope that someday fate does not deal me an ironic hand. A slightly morbid way to look at things I know, but none-the-less, a good opener to my epitaph. Another thought on the concept of fate - I am not a suspicious man, but how many times have we mountaineers neared the end of our hill day commenting that we had not fallen once only to spend the best part of the final hour on our backsides?

Since meeting my dear Helen I have been pulled between two mistresses, each one equally loving and beautiful, baying for my time and company. It's funny really! I love every moment I spend with Helen (even when she deliberately toys with my "OCD"), but I just can't keep the mountains from my thoughts; however when I'm with Mother Nature, my thoughts quickly turn to Helen. A real mental struggle if ever there was one, which I'm certain, will see me dragged off to the funny farm before long.

With many summer mountain days under my belt I decided last year to venture into the domain of winter with the Winter Mountain Proficiency course. Completed in February 2009 in very poor snow this marked the end of the season for me and it wasn't until December that I could chase the snow again. An unusually snowy month for Northern England had me driving down a loosely gritted A66 destined for the Lake District. Over a series of weekends I summited Skiddaw, Blencathra via Hart Fell ridge and Helvellyn, traversing Striding and Swirral edges. In doing so I was taken into a whole new environment which was unfamiliar and bloody good fun, and ultimately; isn't that what makes a quality mountain day!



BATTLE BACK – SPANISH SUMMIT

Carl Roberts

Expedition TIGER SPANISH SUMMIT was a dual service, multi-unit climbing expedition to the Calpe Region of Spain. The expedition involved a team of mixed ability climbers from across defence, including a number of rehabilitees who were at various stages of recovery.

The expedition was organised from within Through Life Support (TLS), part of DE&S. To fulfil a key aim of the expedition, early engagement with Battle Back was established to offer 4 of 12 places to service personnel recovering from injuries. It was planned to maintain a high instructor ratio, of 4 instructors to 8 climbers and the final composition achieved 4 instructors, 2 JSRCIs, 1 JSRCL and 1 JSRLT, and included regular and TA personnel. Rehabilitees came from the Kings Tp RHA, 20 Fd Sqn RE, 209 Sigs Sqn and QRH.

The aims of the Expedition were met and exceeded. A team ethos rapidly developed within the group, resulting in an excellent atmosphere and swift skill gain. The attitude to training was high throughout the expedition, with the pace of development, especially noticeable in the novices, surprising all. The physical demands of climbing, combined with extended days in the heat provided a significant challenge and encouraged a standard of leadership and maturity beyond that expected from experience and rank.

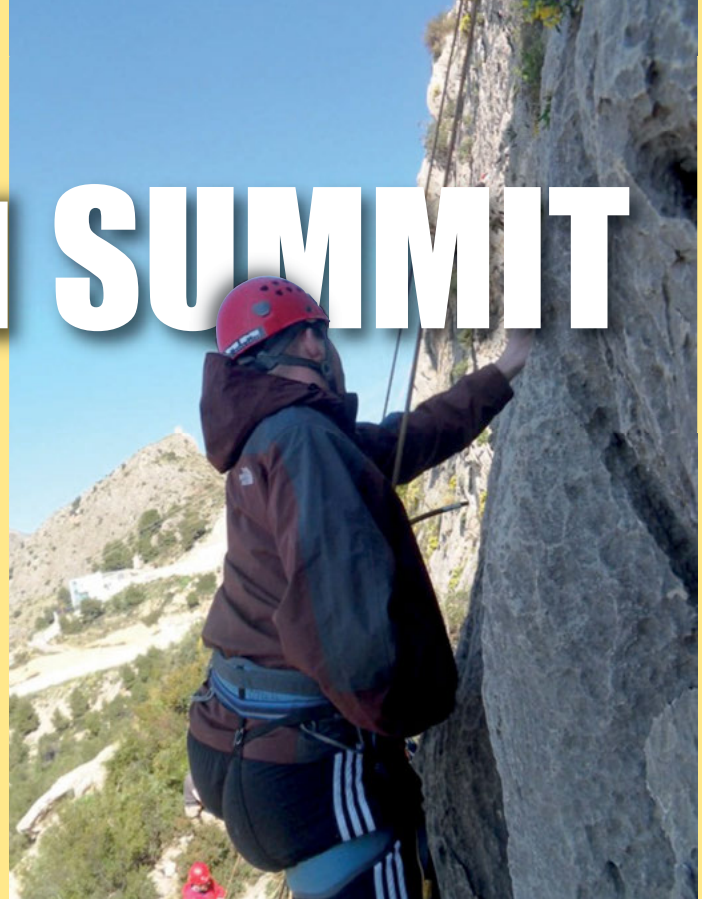
Day 1 Monday 08 Mar 10

Since there were several people who came from the other side of the country it was decided that those who wanted accommodation would be looked after by someone else on the expedition who already lived in Bristol. Michael Stoker was to be the exception, as he was going to fly straight from Germany to Alicante. We all arrived at the airport at 0700hrs so that bags could be weighed in order that we did not exceed the excess baggage allowance and once the bags were handed in we boarded the plane and took off on time.

Once in Alicante Airport we picked the 2 Mini buses we had hired through www.Doyouspain.com which turned out to be cheaper than we thought during the planning phase. We arrived slightly later than expected at the accommodation due to a navigation error but once the rooms had been allocated (1 x snorer per room) the instructors went on a recce while the others were left to organise the rations and equipment. Following their return and a hearty meal, everyone got together to discuss the expedition aims, personal objectives and individual's relevant experience. After the details were agreed for the expedition ahead, the remainder of the evening was spent relaxing and getting to know each other over a local beer.

Day 2 Tuesday 09 Mar 10

The first morning we woke to find that the blue sky that we were hoping for had not arrived and one of the coldest winters that the area had seen was still here! Nevertheless, initial activity centred on the climbing basics, from fitting a harness to tying into the system. Although a refresher for a number of the team, those with experience were able to assist the novices making an effective start to the expedition.



The instruction was jointly led by JSRCIs Chris Campbell and Malcolm Sperrin, with Ian Blanks and I helping out with anything and everything we could. The weather took its toll on people's hands and the sun peaked through the clouds occasionally.

By the early afternoon everyone had picked up the basic skills and knowledge required and were climbing on a number of grade 3 and 4 routes. Trust and confidence were developing as you had to lean back, let go of the rock and the rope and trust your belayer to lower you safely. A little later the sun came out and Dan Richards had got to grips with the problem of climbing with only one hand!

Day 3 Wednesday 10 Mar 10

After the first days climbing everyone had found new aches and pains that they never thought they would have. Paul Findley had found the walk to the crag tiring due to the fact that he was on crutches; he was also going through the rubbers on the end of his sticks rapidly. Since he has no feeling in his right foot due to nerve damage after being injured in Afghanistan he only knows when his foot is a firm surface by looking at it.

Looking outside the window the weather looked a lot more promising but first there was time to go through some training videos and therefore follow the syllabus for RCP. Once this was



*Paul Findley lower making sure his right foot has good purchase on the rock
Dan Richards getting to grips with climbing with one arm*

complete we returned back to the Sierra De Toix, Far Oeste and concentrated on La Roja Una, Asom Broso, Costilla and Bernd. The climbing was progressing well with Michael Stoker finding that he was extending his range movement considerably. Michael had been in a vehicle that had been hit by an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) and has extensive burns to his body. The Physio was very impressed but his work after climbing was increasing daily.

It was also decided that a couple of guys who had found the rock shoes were not suitable for their feet should have the chance to purchase some from a local climbing shop. We were lucky enough to find the last 2 pairs of Size 12 (canoes) rock shoes and the expedition fund helped out with the costs.

Day 4 Thursday 11 Mar 10

There was still sun to be had on the 4th day and some of the guys coming on quicker than others it was decided to split the group in two. Sierra De Toix was again the preferred rock to work on since if the groups needed to discuss anything they could be easily join up again. Half the group were going to tackle Toix Placa while the others were going to be given an introduction into lead climbing on Oche fixe, La roja seis and La roja tres.



Michael Stoker introducing his body to lead climbing

As with most novice climbers there was a little uncertainty when it came to lead climbing. One of the members whose main aim of the expedition was to get over his fear of heights found this day extremely difficult to come to terms with, so much so that it was decided he would not be able to complete his RCP. This was a real shame since there was nothing physically wrong with him but more of a mental block that prevented his progress.

At the end of the day and after discussions with both Dr and Physio we decided the next day would be in a different area which would hopefully have easier access to the rocks.

Day 5 Friday 12 Mar 10

Friday again started with some training videos and a quick check of the local weather showed that the temperatures were on the increase even though the nights were still chilly. Echo Valley was the agreed rock climbing area, the roads are very close to the rocks and although Paul Findlay found some of the tracks very narrow it took half the time to get to the base of the climbs as it did at Sierra De Toix.

This day proved very successful for Kev Juka, who while on adventure training in Canada had fallen of a horse and broken his back and pelvis. He now requires a walking stick and has trouble extend and flexing his right leg. As he had already climbed before his accident most of the climbing came naturally.

Echo Valley gave an opportunity to do some Trad as well as Sport climbing with solid bolts in for those that did not have the confidence to hang of gear that they had put in. Big Bootie, Little Bootie and The Wasp where all climbed.

The day finished about 1630hrs due to the weather closing in and the tired limbs of some of the rehabilitees. Andy Wareham the Physio also needed more time to work on the injuries.



Kev Juka taking it easy

Day 6 Saturday 13 Mar 10

After discussions with the Physio it was decided the Paul Findlay needed to have a rest day and the rest would finish at the latest 1500hrs. Since Echo Valley was such a success we drove to the same location and more routes in the Castillo area. The progress was very good and with 4 people attaining their RCP grade. Chris Campbell also gave a good presentation on what he had learnt in his time as a mountain rescuer. This gave a great insight as to what problems you can come across on the rocks and how it was possible to remove someone safely.

We left the rock at 1500hrs and manage to get back to the accommodation and see some of the 6 nations. Planning for Sunday was determined by the abilities and health state of the rehabilitees. For those that wanted to the Puig Campana would be attempted, while others would go on a cultural visit to Valencia and those left would rest ahead of the next couple of days climbing.



Figure 6 Michael Stoker belays for Ian Blanks

Day 7

The next morning was an early start for those brave few who took on the Puig. Esponal Central was the route taken which they left for at 0600hrs to ensure they returned in time for dinner. Although the weather started warm and sunny by the time they reached the summit the clouds had closed in so much so that they had to wear everything they were carrying. A bout of stomach cramps made life very difficult for Ian Blanks and also delayed the return until 1900hrs.



Ian Blanks & The Puig Campana

It was also an early start for those who went to Valencia since there was a festival on and the traffic was horrendous. Everyone was back safe and sound in Calpe by 2100hrs though. Unfortunately due to work commitments Malcolm Sperrin had to return to the UK late Sunday evening which left us a little short on instructors but not enough to prevent everyone from climbing for the last two days.

Day 8**Monday 15 March 10**

Although everyone had rested a couple of the rehabilitees were still struggling even though they wouldn't say so; after a discussion with the Physio again and the fact that the RCP syllabus had been completed it was decided we should return to Echo Valley. Both Single and Multi Pitch climbs were completed and it was an altogether pleasant day since the wind had eased from Sunday and the sun was warm on your back.

Sunday 14 Mar 10

Nobody else seemed to be having the stomach cramps that Ian Blanks had the previous day but it was something that kept a few people off their feet when we returned to the UK. Since there was a delay in everyone having them it seems as though it wasn't the food but an airborne infection.

Day 9

The weather was defiantly getting better and today was the warmest so far. Sella was the destination and a lot of other people had the same idea. There was at least another 5 groups so good admin was a must.

To make one of the climbs a little more interesting Chris Campbell decided to try and climb with one hand behind his back. It showed just how far Dan Richards had come when Chris only just managed to get up a climb in the El Cajon de Los Cuartos area to the top and it took him double the time Dan had taken. As the sun came down we made our way back to Calpe where we fired up a BBQ and had a delicious meal.

Tuesday 16 Mar 10

Sella on the last day of climbing

Day 10**Wednesday 17 Mar 10**

The group departed Calpe at 0930hrs having handed back the accommodation in a clean and tidy condition. The flight timings did not allow much slack but did give everyone enough time to grab a postcard and a souvenir. On arrival at the airport the group were greeted by the news that the flight was delayed by 30 minutes, but this time was all but made up during the flight and we arrived 5 minutes late into Bristol Airport. Unfortunately Michael Stoker had to wait until 2100hrs for his flight back to Germany and as we left him I'm sure we saw a tear in his eye. Once at Bristol everyone dispersed either back to their unit or in Paul Findlay's case to Scotland to see his family before a major operation due on Mar 24th.

A unique expedition and opportunity.

THE ARCTIC CIRCLE TRAIL- WESTERN GREENLAND

Mike Laing (3 Royal Welsh)

Way up North and just within the Arctic Circle in Western Greenland is a true gem of a trekking route – a very well kept secret that doesn't seem to have made itself known to many in the UK. The Arctic Circle Trail (aka The Sisimiut Trail) offers 150km of remote trekking through true wilderness and doesn't require a huge logistical effort to reach – in fact it starts adjacent to the international airport at Kangerlussuaq. The trail is regularly traversed during the short summer months mainly by Scandinavians but also French and other continentals. This may soon change though with the publication in the UK of a dedicated guide later in 2010 (author Paddy Dillon, ISBN-13: 978 185284 624 4, Cicerone Press). The trail is off the inland ice-cap and therefore sees snow-free conditions during July, August and September.

Eleven members of 3 Royal Welsh accompanied by a member of The Royal Signals made what is thought to be the first JS traverse in September 2009 taking 8 trekking days to complete the trail from Kangerlussuaq to the coastal fishing town of Sisimiut; an additional day was spent resting midway along the trail. The trail is briefly described in Torbjørn Ydegaard's guide, *Trekking in Greenland* (Skarv Guides) and some limited information is available via the web. Overall though, detail is scant and the best resources are the three large scale West Greenland Hiking maps which cover the area; the Kangerlussuaq, Pingu and Simiut sheets.

There are no direct flights to Kangerlussuaq from the UK though Air Greenland flies from Copenhagen most days of the week. Most

undertake the trail in a Westwards direction from Kangerlussuaq to Sisimiut and return to Kangerlussuaq via a 30 minute flight from Sisimiut. Doing the opposite is equally feasible.

Being remote and 150km long, the trail ticks many of the JS AT Scheme boxes. Map reading and route finding skills need to be good. Participants need to be robust and fit as food, fuel and equipment for up to 10 days need to be carried. Self-reliance and team work are essential in equal measure. A SATPHONE is a must in case of emergency.

The trail itself seeks out the easiest route between Kangerlussuaq and Sisimiut and there are no permanent habitations en route. During our traverse we encountered only two other trekkers, a pair of Danes headed in the opposite direction. They were armed with a rifle for hunting caribou and seemed astounded that we were unarmed!! The trail itself is faint but discernable for much of the way though does at times disappear without warning. There are some cairns marking the way but most are not discernable from a great distance and therefore of limited use. The scenery is simply stunning; deep blue lakes, white-capped peaks and rich red and brown vegetation underfoot. Wildlife can also be seen; mainly caribou but the more shy arctic fox, arctic hare and muskox can also be observed with patience and a pair of binoculars.

The trail though has other delights: In the summer, the rivers abound with fish which can be easily caught with simple line and spinner or as we did, by tickling. Also, and

in an effort to attract trekkers, the municipality of Sisimiut has pre-placed trekkers' huts along the trail. These vary in capacity from the tiny 3-bunk huts to a couple of spacious 12-bunk huts. These huts are in very good condition, unlocked and free to use. One, at the West end of Amitsorsuaq Lake, is an abandoned canoeing centre complete with Canadian canoes, buoyancy aids and paddles. We made good use of these huts and on one occasion, slept 9 of us in a 3-bunk hut!! On other occasions we elected to camp alongside the huts.

As we were carrying stoves and fuel, we elected to take proper lunch stops daily. This allowed us to have hot food and drink in the middle of what was on average, 8 hours of daily trekking. The weather was somewhat mixed and ranged from warm and sunny (not much of that), continuous drizzle and also snow, night temperatures fell to sub-zero. September was nearing the end of the trekking season so whilst we encountered the first of the winter snows, we also avoided the insect swarms that plague traverses made earlier in the summer. By all accounts, these insect swarms are near unbearable. Additionally, a September traverse meant the 24-hour daylight season had passed and we were able to observe the Northern Lights in the evenings.

On reaching Sisimiut at the trails end, we felt sad that it was all over. One gets into a routine, adapts to the challenges of the trail and to existing on the contents of your rucksack. You also relearn the lesson that much of our usual existence is just 'fluff' and that the essentials of life are few, simple and for free.





Alpine Mountaineering Proficiency (Amp)

A Story Of Blood, Sweat And *(Low Alcohol)* Beers

Matt Welch

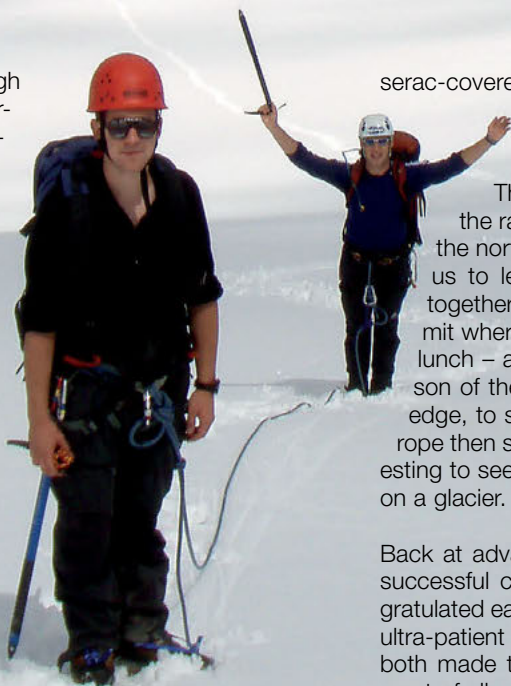
A night spent rallying through the Swiss Alps was not perhaps, the best preparations for a good day's mountaineering but after 20 minutes sleep, I was ready to go. The sight of the Matterhorn in the morning sun was enough to shake the weariness off as we took the telecabine up to the Kleine Matterhorn. Our mustached British Mountain Guide and part-time Bruce Grobelaar impersonator, Eric Pirie led us down to the Theodulgletscher and we promptly set about making holes in it – in fact the more we tried to avoid crevasses, the more we kept finding and dropping into them. Luckily we had all been drilled well enough to keep our ropes tight that the falls merely frightened the victim and amused the rest of the group. Cursing the snowboarders still coming down the piste we trudged down to the telecabine station and nursed our sun burnt bodies, pleased to have survived the first day.

The next day it was the turn of the Triftgletscher to bear witness to our skills and we learnt more about Crevasse rescue than one would ever want to know; in groups, in pairs, setting up systems, hauling out by force, climbing out – we did it all. Exhausted from our exertions we headed down to the Weissmieshutt and the non-meat eater in our group discovered that the Swiss consider a slice of cheese an acceptable vegetarian alternative to a full meat dinner. The Fletschhorn provided an important lesson in judgment and prudence, turning around less than 200m from the summit, despite some of the group's pleas, and then watching the weather close in violently on the upper slopes. The next day, which the group unanimously decided was the best, had an early start and a typically meager Alpine breakfast at the Hohsaas Hutt. The Weissmies was a fairly straightforward snow plod up the snowy,

serac-covered slopes which led to the amazing view of cloud-sea in the valley far below and calls of "Bergheil!" for those who had never climbed a 4000m peak before.

The final journey was firstly a slightly miserable walk in the rain up to the Cabine de Moiry and a glorious ascent of the north ridge of the Pigne de la Lé. This was the vehicle for us to learn short roping and practice our skills of moving together on steep rocky ground. It was another beautiful summit where it was so warm that we were able to have a spot of lunch – a complete contrast to the previous day. The last lesson of the course saw us jumping off a (perfectly safe) snowy edge, to simulate falling into a crevasse, and the others on the rope then setting up the system to rescue the victim; it was interesting to see how hard it actually is to get someone out of trouble on a glacier.

Back at advanced base camp – Randa - the team celebrated a successful course with a few low alcoholic beverages and congratulated each other on a successful week. Thanks go to Eric, our ultra-patient UIAGM Guide and Rob, our Pongo-hating AML who both made the week, ensuring it was extremely educational but most of all, extremely enjoyable.



Stove Review

Joe Garton



A team of eight climbers originating from Royal Artillery units within 1st Artillery Brigade conducted a successful expedition to summit Aconcagua in Feb 2010. Aconcagua (6962m) is the highest mountain in the western hemisphere, located in Western Argentina near the Chile border. Temperatures ranged from 35-40°C on the walk in through the semi desert environment to -20°C in the final camp. Camps ranged in altitude between 2500m on the walk in and 5979m at the highest camp.

We used four different types of stoves on the trip in order to allow greater flexibility; the following therefore is my subjective view of their performance; although no definitive testing criteria were followed it was felt that future expeditions may benefit from the experience gained and the comparisons drawn between the different options. Inevitably, different models score more highly in specific areas so although there is no overall "winner" the article intends to better inform the reader to choose the correct option for a specific use or environment.

The following stoves were chosen for the expedition:

- 3x Jetboil Personal Cooking System – Purchased for the expedition
- 3x Primus Omnifuel – Drawn from Bicester
- 3x Primus EtaPower MF – Drawn from Bicester
- 3x MSR XGK 2 – Drawn from Bicester

Fuel – Gas vs Liquid

The major advantages of liquid fuel stoves over pressurised gas stoves are the hourly operating costs and the versatility. The liquid fuel stoves chosen by the expedition

can all run on a variety of fuels. If you are going to a very remote area where white gas or pressurised canisters are hard to get hold of then a stove that can burn unleaded, kerosene and even diesel is an advantage. Beware though that liquid fuel isn't always as simple to find as you might imagine. On our expedition we purchased 20 litres of white spirit from the local ironmongers(!), his yearly stock.

Gas canisters are often labelled as bulky as you have to carry out the spent cartridges. Although they are bulky they are robust and we found them equivalent to carrying a full fuel bottle in and an empty fuel bottle out. Gas is also cleaner and you do not get strange looks from the hostel owners as you accidentally spill white gas all over the place when siphoning it into your own fuel bottles! Gas is also considerably easier to pack as it, not usually needing any additional protection.

Stoves

Primus EtaPower MF (£135)



The PRIMUS EtaPower comes with high recommendations and awards according to the PRIMUS website. It is a multi fuel stove with a pre-heating coil and a rigid metal wind shield. The stove and pot combination is bulky and inflexible as you cannot pack away the wind shield and it is designed for cooking larger meals. This model was chosen due to its large capacity and integrated pot for cooking as a group.

The EtaPower was tested on a training weekend in the UK prior to deployment and was found extremely difficult to use.

Priming is tricky as visibility of the coil is obstructed. On nearly all occasions overflows occurred that were not identified until ignition when the stove and surrounding ground would ignite. The stove also proved difficult to disassemble for cleaning and appeared to burn less cleanly than other.

It may not come as a surprise to hear that we did not take the stove to the mountain. This stove is not recommended for use anywhere!

Primus Omnifuel (£135)



The Omnifuel is Primus' most advanced stove working with virtually all liquid fuels as well as gas canisters. It has two control knobs that appear fiddly at first but when you are familiar with it they give you the simmer capability. The stove comes with the usual heat reflector/wind shield and a multi-tool for assembly/disassembly and changing the heads.

As with all multi fuel stoves there is a knack to using the Omnifuel. The heads need to be changed with each different type of fuel which means carrying various different parts everywhere you go (although these are stored in the supplied pouch). Again as with all stoves it does have a tendency to flare up and it is vital that excess fuel in the pipe is burnt off prior to turning the stove off in order to avoid spillages.

The greatest advantage we found was its usability. The Omnifuel could just as easily do a pasta meal for four in one huge pot as it could boil enough water for a thermal mug for one. The simmer capability was extremely useful and avoids the superheat and vaporise modes of the MSR stoves.

Due to its movable legs and flexible fuel line the Omnifuel packs down into a small material bag unlike the MSR XGK with its solid fuel line.

The downsides of the Omnifuel are few but significant. The burner plate has a tendency to spring off leaving the stove inoperable unless it is found. For this reason always carry a full service kit. Service kits are available from Bicester but are not standard on the shelf in high street stores. If you are thinking of buying an Omnifuel then get a service kit via the internet.

The Omnifuel has the ability to use a gas canister but this is by no way as effective as a stove designed to use gas canisters alone. Purely due to the design to allow the stove to use liquid as a fuel it stands to rea-

son that it won't burn gas as well. There is also some amount of leakage when connecting the canisters.

It is reasonably heavy and expensive but is available at Bicester rendering the cost irrelevant.

MSR XGK2 (Superseded by MSR XGK EX- £130)



The XGK 2 has been a world leader in multifuel stoves for years and was familiar to many of the team. For this reason it took less time to master and appeared easier to prime and ignite than the Primus stoves. It only has one control knob and a simple on/off function. The MSR comes with heat deflector and wind shield and is a truly robust and well built stove. It has a shaker jet that allows you to unclog the jets with a vigorous shake – this was not necessary for us due to white gas being a very clean fuel.

As with the Omnifuel the MSR could cope with large or small tasks but does not have

the simmer function and did cause some horrendously burnt pots and pans (although this may be more to do with the operators).

The XGK has a solid fuel line which does not allow it to pack down as compactly as the Omnifuel but it was found that the solid fuel line gives the whole platform a more stable footing and prevents spills. The stove itself has a small base so this is important. The MSR XGK EX that has replaced the XGK 2 has a flexible hose but has a different stove design with wider legs for stability.

Although the stove is absolutely bulletproof the fuel pump itself is plastic. This caused us no issues whilst on the expedition but the Omnifuel metal pump feels a lot more robust to use.

For full on vaporising action and a robust stove the MSR is excellent with a cost of larger pack size and no simmer. It also sounds like a fast air sortie if you fancy doing a show of force with your cookset!!!

Jetboil Personal Cooking System (Price £70)



Compared to the multifuel stoves the Jetboil is a cheap and cheerful equivalent. As its title suggests the Jetboil is a personal cooking system that can heat a boil in the bag with enough water for a brew in one go. You can fit two BITB but they do not heat as well. It is a gas stove but with a difference. As with all stoves the heat of the flame is not as important as the actual amount of heat that is transferred to the pot and not lost around the sides. The Jetboil design ensures nearly all of the heat produced is focussed on the base of the pot and can heat a cup of water in under a minute.

The Jetboil has a spark ignition that proved to be extremely reliable and the system is clean. For brews in the tent and when on rations the Jetboil was the stove of choice by everyone on the expedition. It also has a lid for the mug and a neoprene cover allowing you to use it as an insulated mug around camp.

Bivvy Basics

By Toby Cowern

Whilst many people's first experience of the outdoors normally stems from a camping trip of some sort, those of us that progress onto an interest in survival activities quickly yearn to cast off the need to carry a tent and associated gear on our trips.

However, anyone that has built an 'all natural' shelter of any description, from scratch, realises how time consuming a process this is. So what do we do when we want to take overnight trips but be able to have the freedom to practise a lot of skills and not get tied down to a time consuming shelter building session? The ideal solution is to 'bivvy out'. Especially as the seasons progress, the warm nights of summer firmly behind us and with winter fast approaching, gone are the days for this year, that we could brave 'overnighting' with just our clothes and a fire to stay warm.

A bivvy bag, quite simply is a waterproof, normally breathable cover for a sleeping bag. This enables the user to sleep out without the requirement for further shelter as the bivvy will ensure that the sleeping bag is protected from the elements.

That said, bivvying out does have some pitfalls, and the purpose of this article is to maximise your comfort, enjoyment and safety when trying out 'bivvying'.

I use my bivvy system heavily, even in the middle of the arctic winter, in fact especially so, due to the types of snow shelter I use; I find it gives me a great combination of freedom, ability to lighten my load and flexibility in

my options. Bivvying is a viable option in all seasons in the UK; it not only has the advantage of reducing the weight you need to carry, it gives you great opportunities, with uninterrupted views to observe nature and the night sky all the way through to morning. I bivvied out on the edge of a tree line next to a frozen lake in March this year and woke up to find an arctic fox not 5m away from my face trying to figure out what I was doing there. Had I have been in a tent, I'd have seen his tracks the following morning but nothing more. One of many fantastic experiences I've had whilst bivvying out.

So what makes up a bivvy system? Essentially, there are only 3 components:

- A sleeping bag.
- An insulative mat.
- The Bivvy bag.

With this in mind, here is the first thing to remember. Your going to put you sleeping bag in the bivvy bag to protect it, right? OK, and the insulative mat is to minimise your heat loss to the ground. So you want to stay on that mat whilst your sleeping. To do so, put your insulative mat inside the bivvy bag as well. BUT, before you do so, make sure it is dry. ANY moisture you introduce inside the bivvy system is going to have a direct effect on your ability to keep warm and therefore the quality of your sleep.

The above point is an important consideration when buying your bivvy bag and insulative mat, make sure you can fit one inside the other. Obviously closed cell foam style mats can be trimmed to shape, but you don't want to try cutting up a thermarest or similar!

Next point to think about. Bivvy's are great, but you still have to get an appropriately rated sleeping bag to put in it. With the best will in the world if you take a +5 degrees sleeping bag out in the middle of winter, its just not going to be fun, in fact it's totally unsafe, so make sure your sleeping bag is appropriate for the season.

Now that we know what makes up our bivvy system and how it goes together I can give you a list of top tips/practices to maximise the effectiveness of this great system. So here they are:

If you aren't building a shelter, don't ignore any natural shelters or windbreaks that are available in the area that you have chosen to stay, every little helps!



Due to the users military background and the types of food that were used on the mountain the Jetboil scored highly. It was extremely easy to use, it required no cleaning as it was only ever used to boil water and it was fast and efficient.

The downsides are significant depending on your intended use. The Jetboil is tall and thin leading to two issues. It is very unstable and needs to be placed on firm level ground and nowhere near your entry/exit point of the tent. Numerous brews were spilt during our trip as people knocked the stove over. The second issue is the limited foods you can eat. Boil in the bags and dehydrated rations are all good but the shape of the design means that pastas and noodles tend to burn at the bottom and do not cook through at the top. This then leads to the inevitable stirring issues and subsequent cleaning problems.

The Jetboil is very compact if you use a 150ml canister as the stove and canister fit within the mug. The 150ml canister was too small for our use and the 250 or 500 ml

canisters had to be carried separately. This takes up extra volume which is exacerbated by the empty space left inside the mug where the smaller canister would sit.

The Jetboil is of limited use for group activities but was excellent for personal cooking of rations and boiling water.

Conclusions

Both multifuel stoves (less the Etapower) and the Jetboil were tried and tested up to 5000m and all functioned well for specific uses. The expedition used the multifuel stoves for group dinners and the Jetboils for rations and brews within the tents.

For the summit attempt we did not have the luxury of carrying both types of stove to the high camp (5979m) and each tent pair chose their preferred stove. Based on their experience and the types of rations used in the high camps every pair chose the Jetboil for the high camp.

With an ambient temperature well below freezing at night and the requirement to

melt snow the Jetboil was in constant use when the team were in camp. There is no doubt that the gas was less efficient at this altitude but the stoves ignited first time most of the time (second time if not first) and once lit could be ignored until the water was boiling. They could be handled with big gloves on and required no handling of pots and pans with the water just poured out into the dehydrated rations with no spillage.

Unfortunately the time taken to boil water at 6000m with the Jetboil could not be compared with the multifuel stoves but it is significant that all tent pairs chose the Jetboil and would do again for similar situations.

So in conclusion the choice of stove needs to be a function of the type of food being cooked, the numbers of people being cooked for per stove and the availability of fuel in the area where you are travelling.



When I have set my bivy up for the night and decide it's time to get in there, I perform the following routine: I make absolutely sure I have taken care of all my camp tasks including going to the toilet. Once I'm in my bivy, I don't want to get out until morning. Then I place my backpack at, but above the head end of the bivy. I sit on this, keeping me off the ground and making it much easier to get into the top of my sleeping bag. Whilst sat here, I'll remove my boots and socks and put them on one side. Normally at this point, weather permitting, I'll inspect, dry and powder my feet. With that done, I'll strip the bottom half of my clothing system down to my thermal layer and then quickly slide into my sleeping bag up to my waist.

Now, obviously here, I'm not in a tent and in the main have no other form of overhead shelter (Although I will be covering basha/tarp usage in the next article) So I need to ensure I am keeping on top of my kit administration much more than if I was camping. So what do I need to look after first? If I intend to reuse my socks the following day I will tuck them inside the crotch area of my thermals to dry. That said, I am at the stage now, I will tend to carry at least one pair of socks for every day I intend to spend out. Developing a fungal infection around my groin is not high upon my list of things to do, and having suffered years of abuse I now try and treat my feet right and treat them to a fresh pair of socks each day. So my socks normally get popped into a Ziploc bag and stowed in my backpack.

Remember, ANY moisture you take into the bivy potentially is going to give you problems, this is a key consideration, in line with that, unless you put them in a waterproof bag, DO NOT take your

boots into your bivy system. If you are going to leave your boots 'outside' ensure you cover the tops over so they won't fill up with rain/snow if precipitation comes whilst your asleep. I normally use a small plastic bag over each boot and lace it in place to ensure it won't move overnight. Keep your boots in arms reach in case you do need them overnight. Clothes that I have removed go into a driesack in my backpack which I am no longer sitting on.

From this position if I want to cook, eat, read, nature watch or journal I can. When it is time to 'settle down' I remove my jacket, putting it into the top of my daysack if I have an insulative jacket or fleece I tend to roll this up and use it as an additional pillow, or alternatively, if it's really cold I will put it down inside the bottom of my sleeping bag as an extra layer of insulation for my feet. Now I should be down to my thermal top, if this is wet I'll remove it, put it in my driesack and if I have spare dry top put this on, or if I have no spare, go topless inside my sleeping bag. Before zipping myself in, and pulling all the drawstrings toggles etc, I'll reposition my backpack underneath the head end of my bivy bag to act as a pillow.

Two things to consider before settling down. I normally either wear a hat/balaclava or have it inside my sleeping bag with me, to give me some flexibility in what position I'm going to sleep, and secondly, in really cold environments where I absolutely don't want to get out of my bivy bag until morning I may have a pee bottle (empty) in my sleeping bag with me. Pee bottles should be a minimum 1l capacity, wide necked, EASY to secure/release the lid and CLEARLY LABELLED as such. I'll not describe here how we use a pee bottle inside our bag, you'll figure it out – and only mess it up once!

Bivvying out is a great stepping stone from camping to survival activities, so I'd encourage everyone to give it a try. Removing the need to carry a tent and ancillaries can really cut down on the weight your carrying, giving you much greater freedom to wander and practise more skills. Also, a bivy system is much more discreet than camping, it's one of the reasons we use them so much in the military. A bivy also gives you the chance to try out your shelter building and give you the confidence that you won't suffer to much from any mistakes you may have made whilst constructing it.

In our next article, I'll cover how we can supplement or enhance our bivy system with some simple non-natural shelters. Until then, practice your skills and enjoy the outdoors!

MAMMOTH EMU

By Kieran Heinich and Tom Tica.

This expedition saw ten aspiring officer cadets set off on an alpine mountaineering expedition that would push these budding mountaineers to their physical and mental limits and deliver them to altitudes and levels of exposure which they had never experienced before.

The trip lasted 3 weeks and was based in Saas Fee and Randa, Switzerland and Chamonix, France. During this time, all members of the expedition were taught the necessary skills to operate safely in an alpine environment and were successful in summiting a number of 4000m peaks including the coveted Mont Blanc (4810m).

The first few days in Saas Fee were spent on the Hohsaas and Llangflu Glaciers where the team undertook glacier training developing crevasse rescue techniques and other snow and ice skills. This was carried out under the watchful eyes of our two highly experienced and competent AML Instructors - Major John Tolan and Captain Matt Hilton who enabled us to achieve a great deal on this expedition including the AMP (Alpine Mountaineering Proficiency) qualification.

Climbing mountains requires careful consideration and preparation. The expedition members had a rigorous approach to hygiene, nutrition, hydration, and acclimatization was undertaken slowly and progressively. This is evident from the challenging yet achievable climbing itinerary which started with the relatively gentle ascent of the Allalinhorn (4027m). This provided an ideal first 4000m peak in close to ideal weather conditions. Following this a challenging Via Ferrata climb on the Jegihorn (3206m) was completed. Then a rock ascent of the Lagginhorn (4010m) and later the Weissneis (4023m) were all climbed with the expedition members utilising the relative comfort of the Weissmeis and Hohsaas mountain huts. This progressive exposure to more technical terrain allowed expedition members to greatly increase their competency and confidence throughout the expedition.

As with all expeditions to mountainous areas, the weather proved to be a major factor in the success of our trip. At one point, the Valais Alps experienced some inclement weather which ruled out the possibility of climbing the Nadelhorn and the Dom both of which were part of the original itinerary. However, it was not all doom and gloom and the expedition moved over to Chamonix where the weather conditions improved significantly. During our time in Chamonix we were fortunate to be introduced to the Office de Haute Montagne, a very useful location for mountaineers, not least of all for its weather station where one is able to obtain vital information about conditions of alpine routes.

The Chamonix valley also provided a wide variety of climbing and an ideal setting in which we found ourselves tested.

In order to get back into the swing of things following the 3 previous days of dismal weather, the team walked into the Albert Premier Hut where the following day we successfully summated the Tete Blanche via an interesting PD route and walked back down to the valley at La Tour. A day with 2500m of descent! We then took a rest day to recharge before getting the lift to the Aigle du Midi 3842m

Once arriving at the Aiguille du Midi lift station we descended to the Col du Midi in the hope of staying out in an overnight snow hole. Unfortunately, the snow was insufficient to put our shovels and saws to work, so instead we bivvied out in tents at 3500m. This was an experience which we all thoroughly enjoyed – the iPod and speakers were a surreal addition to the campsite at such high altitude as well as the snow block mini-church and tent walls.

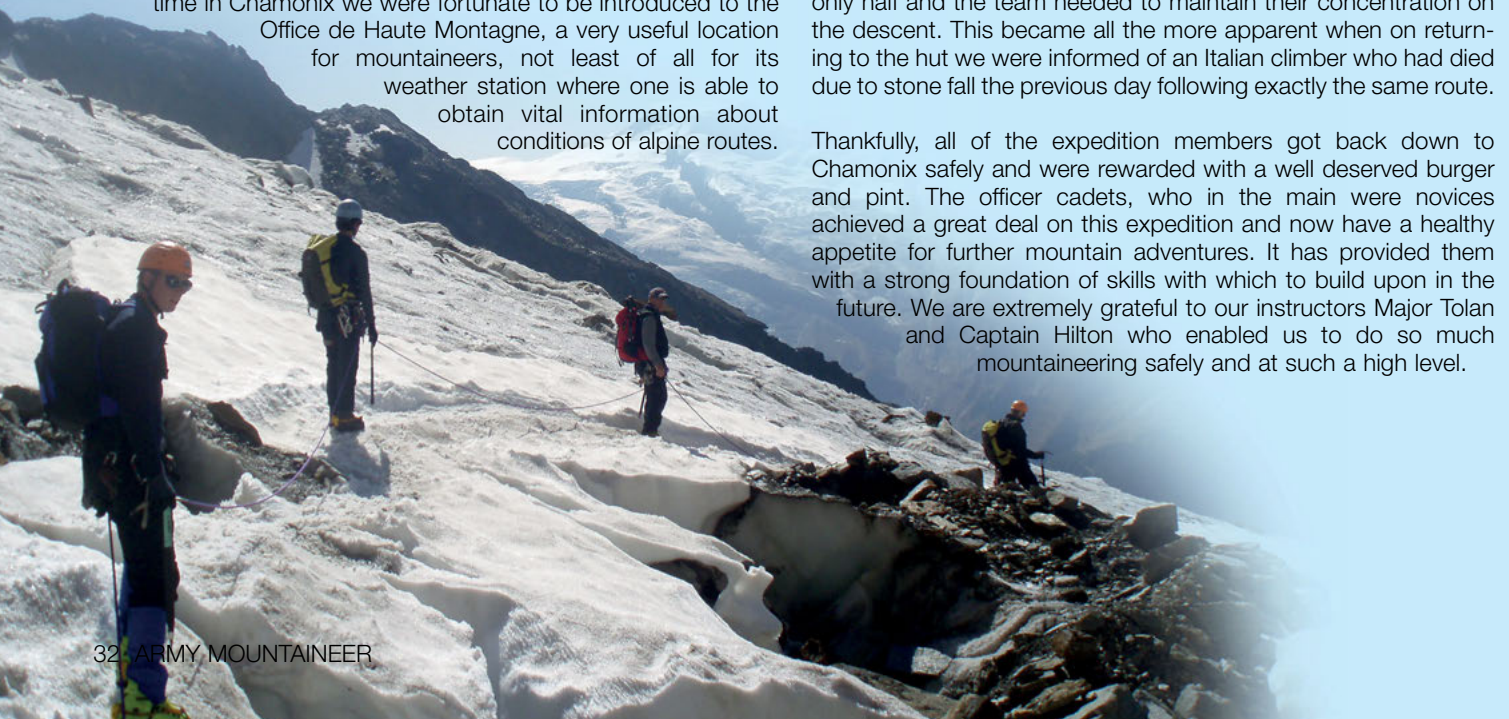
In the morning, the team faced the prospect of climbing the Cosmique Arête (PD) which would be by far the most technically challenging climb that we had yet faced. After 5 hours of precise manoeuvring along with some less than elegant climbing prowess, the team had held their nerve, reaching the summit in close to guide book time and rewarded with some spectacular views of the Chamonix valley and surrounding areas. This route was by no means a gift especially when considering that the majority of expedition members had only started climbing two weeks previously; this was an awesome achievement and one of which we were all proud.

Originally, the plan was to stay in the Cosmique hut that night and attempt the grand traverse of Mont Blanc the following day. Unfortunately on assessing the route and with avalanches observed on Mt Blanc Du Tacul that afternoon, it was obvious that it would be too dangerous to attempt and the decision was made to ascend Mont Blanc from the Gouter Route. This meant a quick and efficient camp disassembly was needed in order to make the last lift back down to Chamonix at 16:30 or walk all the way down!

Next morning the team caught the Bellevue lift at Les Houche to 1800m and then followed the TMB to the end of the railway, followed by a straightforward path up to the Tete Rouse hut at 3200m. An early start was required the next morning (01:00) in order to reach the summit while the conditions were still good. The route crossed the Grand Couloir to the Dome Du Gouter hut and then the standard route to the summit. The early start was worth it and the weather was perfect; some members did struggle with some minor effects of AMS but their resolve held firm and with a great deal of determination made it to the summit at approximately 09:00.

As with all mountaineering endeavours, reaching the summit is only half and the team needed to maintain their concentration on the descent. This became all the more apparent when on returning to the hut we were informed of an Italian climber who had died due to stone fall the previous day following exactly the same route.

Thankfully, all of the expedition members got back down to Chamonix safely and were rewarded with a well deserved burger and pint. The officer cadets, who in the main were novices achieved a great deal on this expedition and now have a healthy appetite for further mountain adventures. It has provided them with a strong foundation of skills with which to build upon in the future. We are extremely grateful to our instructors Major Tolan and Captain Hilton who enabled us to do so much mountaineering safely and at such a high level.



“That’s me!”

Long time AMA member and supporter, Rich Mayfield tells ARMY MOUNTAINEER about living the dream and climbing 8a+. Rich runs the Orange House in Finestrat and has a log book almost as big as the casa!

Please briefly explain your military connection(s).

I served with the RAOC and RLC from '87 to '95 and did a 2 year stint with Cdo Log Regt. Served in the first Gulf conflict, most high profile thing I did whilst serving was getting stuck down Low's Gully in Borneo in '94.

Please briefly describe your life and job description.

I'm a rock climber; I've been doing it since I was introduced to climbing on a school trip in '82. My first harness consisted of straps from my little sister's car seat which I adapted into a sit harness, it failed on an abseil at Worlds End, North Wales.

My uncle David (RAF) taught me how to climb, and bought me all my first gear. I led my first E1 at 14 years old. My first and only real climbing accident happened on the route Gogarth on Anglesey when I fell from the last pitch and had almost no gear in; I fractured my skull and had to make a scary abseil off and walk out. I had gotten to Gogarth on the back of my mates motor-bike, so I was taken to hospital on it too. Dave tied my hands together around his waist to stop me falling off the back of the bike. It didn't stop me for long but it did make me think long and hard about what I was doing, and the consequences of not knowing much about my sport.

So, I started reading the texts books by Nigel Shepherd and Allen Fyffe. Practicing rescuing skills became almost as much fun as climbing!

Worked at AMTC Silberhutte for 6 months in '87 after passing my JSRL, and I've been teaching climbing and mountaineering ever since. Passed my JSRCI in '90.

What's the worst physical pain you have ever experienced?

In '96, at a climbing wall, I blew the number two pulley in my index finger on my left hand. People around me heard it snap! I couldn't speak I was in so much pain and didn't climb for 6 months; I didn't climb above VS for over a year. It's mostly OK now but I'm still cautious of it and it is weaker than the other fingers.

The Plan?

I moved to the Costa Blanca on the Spanish south coast in 2000, the plan was to tour Europe and maybe parts of Africa in search of perfect rock. But, plans don't always occur as planned!

Now I own and run The Orange House, which is a Casa Rural (Spanish B&B),



Rich Mayfield on the crux of Dwm (E1 5b/6a or A2) during the Hard Rock Challenge.

camping, bunkhouse, posh rooms, bar, tv lounge, pool etc. I spend most my days out teaching rock climbing, pushing my own grades or new routing.

Last Christmas I led my very first 8a+, so there's still life in the old dog yet, I'm 40 this year! I'm amazed that I'm still improving and climbing harder than ever.

Best climbing trips, Russia in 2005 and Morocco in 2004, I need to stop working so hard and do more trips.

What is the greatest honour you ever received?

My favourite comment from a guest, "You're living the dream, mate, but you live in a village called Finestrat!" Mike Smith's first visit in 2005.

Top tip for climbing

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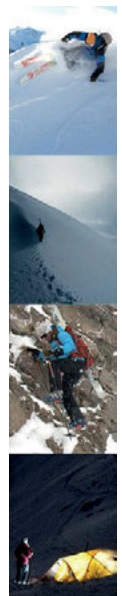
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