

ARMY MOUNTAINEER



Summer 2012

BSAE 12

| Big Wall Climbing

| Grand Canyon

| Costa Blanca



The Journal of the Army Mountaineering Association

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ARMY MOUNTAINEER

The Journal of The Army Mountaineering Association



LIFE ON THE LEDGE

Top ten signs that your climbing partner might be dangerous:

1. You often hear the faint clink of Tequila bottles whenever he racks up.
2. Complains about cigarette burns making his rope a "b#tch" to rappel on.
3. Commands such as "Slack" and "tension" must be prefaced with "HEY! WAKE UP".
4. Always 20 minutes late because he has to unwind climbing rope from Jeep winch.
5. On first night out in double portaledge, wakes you at 3am wondering "hypothetically" if Spectra would be damaged by spilled battery acid.
6. Been known to extol the virtues of the high speed Dulfersitz method.
7. Uses the words "granny knot" and "bomber" in the same sentence.
8. After fifth pitch, asks for water to wash down the Prozac.
9. Mentions wanting to buy new pro while thumbing through Walkhigh Mountaineering sale flyer.
10. Prefers clapping, rather than shouting, to give encouragement while belaying.

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ON THE COVER -
Andy Clamp leads , Gold Phlash, VS 4b, Trevor Rocks.

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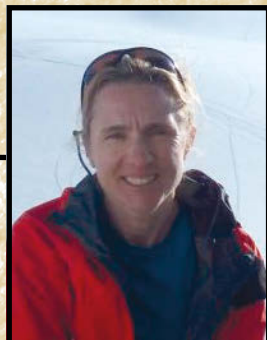
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ARMY MOUNTAINEERS



Foreword

Foreword by President

Looking back at the first 8 months of 2012, Army Mountaineering has a great deal to celebrate and be proud of.

The British Services Antarctic Expedition 2012, which has for some of its members been a 2-3 year enterprise, returned safely in February, having achieved successfully its mountaineering and scientific objectives: over 20 peaks climbed, including 12 likely first ascents and a scientific programme of work which will inform research into climatic change for many years to come. Truly "in the Spirit of Scott". The expedition represents not only a fantastic achievement for the 12 soldiers and AMA members on the expedition but also a significant success for Army Mountaineering, which took the lead role in this quadrennial tri-service commitment.

Meanwhile in North Wales, the Festival of Army Climbing, including the Army Sport Climbing Championships, saw 90 Army climbers (and a few welcome friends) enjoying Welsh rock in perfect Spring conditions. Indoor sport and outdoor trad climbing; bouldering; coaching; some inspiring evening lectures and 'lively' social interaction contributed to a terrific event.

June saw the AMA AGM in less favourable Welsh weather and some important issues raised by the 60 or so AMA members who gathered at HMS Indefatigable. The need to put in place a 'fit for purpose' meets programme has been taken on by Tomo Thompson. The plan is good but of course it can only be executed with the committed help of volunteers to run specific meets: please get in touch with Tomo if you are willing to help. There was firm agreement on the need to continue to improve the website; a much more

realistic proposition now that MoD constraints have been relaxed. A new constitution was also approved subject to amendments being made on the nomination and election of committee members. We have a new committee to take these and other issues forward and a new Chairman, with Paul Edwards stepping up to take over from Cath Davis. As President, I would like to thank the last committee – noting that some club officers are serving on in the same or different roles – which put a huge amount of personal time and effort into getting Army mountaineers into the hills and onto the crags. In particular I would like to thank and pay tribute to Cath Davies, our Chairman for the past 6 years. Cath's contribution to the AMA committee over 16 years has been immense. As Chairman she has led the Association into our 50th Anniversary, navigated through some difficult policy issues and championed the AMA at every turn. AMA members everywhere are deeply in her debt.

Looking forward: as we go to print Ex INDIAN TIGER is in its final training stages on JSAM while for 2013 the AMA's flagship exercise will tackle Denali, the highest peak in North America. We will hold an AMA President's Dinner in the autumn and look forward to a rich programme of meets through the year. Finally, our Army is going through a period of great change and we need to consider how we shape the AMA in order to meet our objectives in support of Army 2020. The committee needs your views and ideas so please respond to the General Secretary's invitation (page) and help shape the future of the Association.

Winter is almost here. See you on the hills.

Editorial

Preparation is everything and few of us need reminding of this. We are all familiar with the endless checks on weather, kit, route and the team whether going onto the hill, rock or glacier. It is developed and honed through training and the incremental increase in challenge. Effective preparation is a core skill which weighs the outcome in favour of success and provides options to deal with the unexpected. However, routinely, our human preparation is limited to physical fitness whether finger and arm strength, cardio capacity or to enable quick acclimatisation. But how many of us consider mental preparation and do we need to? Modern

equipment increasingly offers better mobility, safety and protection and better information enables better defined plans. This in turn allows more finely judge risks to be taken. Do we need to mentally rehearse our actions at belays and transition points in order to maintain vital momentum and do we need to envisage success not just in terms of route completion but at key points of difficulty and during the recovery factoring in weather changes and worse case scenarios? To many this may seem at odds with the mountaineering ethos. But with margins finely judged do we not need to consider every weapon in our armoury?

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.

Despite the economic hardship that the industry is currently facing, we continue to enjoy excellent support from leading manufacturers and retailers of equipment and clothing. Please see details below and note that these businesses do have access (securely) to the AMA membership database and will know if you're a paid up member. They will request your AMA number when you order. The businesses retain the right to refuse these discounts.

Cotswold Outdoor

The 20% discount code for the AMA at Cotswold Outdoor Ltd is AF-DFMC-P2. The old code (A3000) will not work anymore. Additionally, YOU MUST BE IN POSSESSION OF A VALID AMA MEMBERSHIP CARD TO USE THIS CODE IN STORE. No card, no discount. Cotswold Stores have a copy of the AMA card. Cotswold has been particularly supportive of the AMA, but has had several problems recently with customers attempting to claim AMA discount in store without cards. Please carry the card and be polite to one of our key sponsors. Cotswold is using an intelligent retail management system to monitor usage of the new code.
www.cotswoldoutdoor.com

Summit Mountaineering

Summit run a whole range of walking, scrambling and climbing courses from their bases in the Wye Valley and Snowdonia; they specialise in learn to lead and technical development. 20% discount to all AMA members and their families. Call 07896 947 557 info@summitmountaineering.com quoting AMA number.
www.summitmountaineering.com

PHD / (Pete Hutchinson Designs)

POC – Emma Harris, can be contacted on 01423 781 133 or via the e-mail address. PHD offer a 25% discount off all standard items to the AMA.
www.phdesigns.co.uk/index.php

Beyond Hope – Evolv, Metolius, Prana and Rock Technologies

POC – Lee or Rick 01457 838242
Trade price + VAT + carriage deal to all members of the AMA.
www.beyondhope.co.uk

DMM, Crux, Lightwave and Mammut Ropes

Trade price + VAT + carriage deal to all members of the AMA
POC - 01286 873580 Anne Rhodes or Katrina Spinney.
www.dmmclimbing.com

Montane

POC – Kris Garrick 01670 522300 x 210 kris@montane.co.uk
UK Pro Price List for AMA Members applies. All orders must be via the Montane Customer Order Form.
www.montane.co.uk

Paramo

A new scheme is now in place whereby the mountaineering qualifications and or experience of an individual are assessed by Paramo and then turned in to a sliding scale of discounts within their Pro User scheme. As this is a scheme which treats each applicant individually, you need to speak to Paramo personally. Ring Alex Beaumont via +44 (0) 1892 786446.

Millets

Most High Streets have one – 10% off with AMA card and your MOD90
Mountain Equipment (via Magic Mountain shop in Glossop) – 20% discount. Phone Magic Mountain on 0161 3665020 ask for mail order department, quoting your AMA number.

Terra Nova

They now operate a system similar to Paramo whereby AMA members need to contact the company direct and set up a Pro User account via password. When you then re-log in to the Terra Nova site the price list will auto adjust to reflect your discount. Magic !!
info@terra-nova.co.uk +44 (0) 1773 833300
If you have any issues with the scheme, or know of any other companies willing to offer discount to the AMA, please drop me a line.

Lastly, a reminder, please use these discounts for personal purchases only!

Tomo Thompson

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DIARY

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

PROPOSED AMA MEETS PROGRAMME/JSMTc CONCENTRATION 2012-2013

Date	Area	Event	Location	Notes
2012				
5-8 Oct 12	Wye Valley	New Members Meet	Ferries Inn Bunkhouse	POC/Admin Volunteer Needed/RCIs Needed.
25 Nov-7 Dec 12	Calpe Area, Spain	JSMTc Span Rock	TBC	- Single and multi-pitch rock climbing in the Calpe area of Spain - Run in two 5 day blocks with candidates applying for one of the blocks. - Purely experiential, no Level 4 qualifications will be assessed. - All ability levels catered for with the opportunity to lead or be led on multi-pitch routes depending on logbook experience. - RCF is the minimum experience level required. - POC Sgt (SI) A Hogarth RAPTc, JSMTc Indefatigable, Tel Mil: 95581 7916, Civ: 01248 718316.
16 Dec-3 Jan	Cairngorms	AMA Winter Meet	Norwegian Lodge	POC/Admin Volunteer Needed/WCIs & WMLs Needed.
2013				
1-8 Mar 13	N Wales	Late Winter Meet	Nuffield Centre	POC/Admin Volunteer Needed/WCIs & WMLs Needed.
22-29 May 12 (inc BH W'end)	Lakes	New Members Meet	Ambleside Hut	POC/Admin Volunteer Needed/RCIs Needed.
30 Jun-13 Jul	Alps	JSAM	Andermatt	Apply via DIN.
16-18 Aug	South West	Sea Cliff Special	RM Hut Cornwall	POC/Admin Volunteer Needed/RCIs Needed.

Army Mountaineering Association President's Dinner, 9 November 2012

The President of the Army Mountaineering Association, Brigadier Ivan Hooper, has the great pleasure of inviting you to the President's Dinner, to be held on Friday 9 November 2012, at The Royal Military Academy Sandhurst.

The President's Dinner is held to mark the significant expeditions and achievements that have been made throughout the year and to thank those who have supported and assisted the adventurous training that has been undertaken by the association members. It also provides an opportunity to offer inspiration to the future expedition leaders and members present, through the invitation of a number of key guests, both military and civilian, from both within the climbing and mountaineering community and those who support it.

The evening will commence at 1930 hours in the Medal's Bar, New College, at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, with dinner served at 2000 hours. Dress for the dinner will be black tie. Tickets will cost £35, and requests should be made on the enclosed proforma. Various options for accommodation are available in the local area within both Messes and local barracks and this should

be booked on an individual basis. Contact details for these options can be provided on request.

If you have any questions regarding the event, please do not hesitate to contact either the Membership Secretary, or the undersigned.

We do hope you can join us for the evening.

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BRITISH SERVICES ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION 2012

The Quadrennial Joint Services Mountaineering Expedition

Lt Col Paul Edwards

Shortly after Christmas 2011 twenty four service personnel from across the three services departed for the Antarctic Peninsula. They were deploying on the British Services Antarctic Expedition 2012 the 'Spirit of Scott' expedition which took place in the centenary year of Capt Scott's Terra Nova expedition¹. Thirteen of the team were members of the Army Mountaineering Association, who had the lead on this quadrennial Joint Services Mountaineering Expedition, and the team had a rank range from Cpl to Lt Col with a full spectrum of time-served. For almost all of the team this was the culmination of two years of intense planning and training which had begun at the initial selection weekend in North Wales.

Shortly after the last Joint Services Mountaineering Expedition the Joint Service Mountaineering Committee identified the appropriateness of an expedition to Antarctica in 2012 and the planning wheels were set in motion. Capt Scott journeyed to Antarctica in the name of science and exploration and it was fitting to follow in the same vein to commemorate their achievements, but the area they visited has now been well documented and has limited appropriate mountaineering objectives. The Antarctic Peninsula, however, is a mountaineer's paradise, not fully explored, and a focal point for climate change research as the fastest warming place on this planet.

Therefore, BSAE 2012, it was decided, would deploy to the Antarctic Peninsula in the "Spirit of Scott", "seeking to further the bounds of human exploration and knowledge." This was, the Higher Management Committee felt, entirely in keeping with the ethos and



spirit of the original Scott expedition. By going to a remote and largely unexplored area and attempting first ascents of unclimbed mountains, alongside a cutting edge science programme, BSAE 2012 would be worthy of the strap line 'Spirit of Scott'.

The further South you go on the Antarctic Peninsula, the less explored the area is, and after several military expeditions to Brabant island and the Wienke and Danco Coast area it was decided to go further South to the Loubet Coast. Getting there is difficult and expensive, with pack ice and poor weather being major constraints. To be assured of independent transport and support it was decided that the expedition should charter a steel hulled motor yacht to get the team to the peninsula and to remain there for the duration to support the expedition. However, as the expedition numbered 24, and the yacht would only accommodate 12, a complex logistic chain was put together that involved flying the second 12 down the peninsula to the British Antarctic Survey base at Rothera, where the yacht would rendezvous with them.





With the outline in place, and the initial squad selected, a planning team was appointed to lead each of the eight staff functions and get the expedition off the ground (J1 to J8 in good military fashion!). This was an enormous effort by all involved especially as the initial training squad was very large so that a significant number of reserves could be held. All of this work required significant coordination and I found myself being permanently seconded for 12 months to work for the expedition leader, Lt Col Paul Edwards, but at least I was guaranteed a place on the expedition! By the time the expedition deployed several personalities from within the planning team, and many more within the wider training squad, had been forced to abandon their dreams and hand over to someone else, either because of deployments, work commitments or personal reasons. After the countless hours of diligent preparation and training that each of these individuals had committed the whole team really felt their disappointment. Without their efforts the expedition would not

have been successful. Disaster for one, is of course, an opportunity for others, and inevitably some people got a short notice call forward to deploy.

The training programme for BSAE 2012 was comprehensive. Managed by Flt Lt Steve Riley the expedition members were committed to train for around one weekend per month over a two year period. The squad gathered for specific expedition skills training on these weekends but many were also required to conduct further individual training through courses at the type 4 centres. The training package included alpine skills, ski-touring, rock climbing and ice climbing, small boat training, pulk management, rescue skills (especially crevasse rescue with pulks!), comms training and first aid. On top of this the squad deployed for two weeks of training on JSAM in 2010 and 2011 as well as a full Mission Rehearsal in La Grave, France in the November before deployment. During the





training period individuals raised their individual skill sets and gained JSAT qualifications ranging from RCF to AMI. As a team the collective training package allowed each of the three teams of 8 people (Red, Blue and Green teams) to have a high degree of cohesion and common skills. The depth of training was critical to the subsequent success of the expedition.

The deployment was achieved in two phases either side of the New Year and flying down to Punta Arenas in Chile. Chalk 1 flew on further to Puerto Williams, a Chilean naval base, where they met the expedition's yacht, Australis, and her crew, and also the container of stores that had been shipped out a few months previously (stores that got stranded in Santiago for a few weeks causing the expedition leader a near heart attack trying to get it released!). Having tested the small boats and repacked much of the equipment, over 90 barrels of food and much additional equipment was stowed on-board Australis in preparation for the long crossing of the Drake Passage. This fearsome crossing had all of Chalk 1 nervous, and this was fully justified by the roller coaster ride that Australis took crossing the passage. Setting out with all of our kit and a full load of fuel meant that Australis departed 2 inches below her 'mark' and therefore she wallowed crazily in the heavy seas, throwing about all on board.

By the time Australis had got about halfway down the peninsula the sea-ice situation had become a serious concern. The winter pack-ice that should have broken up and dispersed several months before was being pinned in against the coast by strong, cold, North Westerly winds, leaving our intended target area completely inaccessible. By this stage chalk 2 had already arrived at British Antarctic Survey's research base at Rothera and the expedition leader was facing the strategic failure of the expedition, with Chalk one not able to get within 200 nautical miles of Chalk 2 at Rothera. Numerous nervous telephone calls and satellite studies revealed a potential area 100 miles further South, with only a partial covering of sea-ice, and so an alternative plan was drawn up. This required Australis to sail round Adelaide Island and approach Rothera from the South, before the expedition attempted a landing on the Fallieres coast. This is an area of coastline just South of the Arrowsmith Peninsula and immediately South of the Loubet Coast.

Eight days after setting sail from Chile, and following a sleepless nights spent on the reconnaissance of potential landing sites, Chalk 1 landed a four man team to investigate the end of a narrow glacier for routes in-land, and a to examine potential for a base camp site. A suitable site was finally found and the team ramped up its efforts. Within 48 hours the whole expedition was safely ashore at base camp and ready to conduct a quick refresher training session and to start hauling stores inland.

Once on the ice the teams could settle into their routines, both tent and climbing, and start getting used to the conditions. With the 24 split into their 3 teams of 8, Red, Green and Blue, there were a mass of aims and objectives for us all. The Blue team had the initial priority with a crossing of the peninsula from West to East and then back again. On the way they would conduct a program of scientific tasks

including ice-coring, sampling and UV level recording. The food and equipment for their three week crossing was enough for three loads by each of the 24 over several days transporting it up onto the Avery Plateau. The Green team forged ahead with the first loads, finding the routes and establishing camps whilst the Red team shuttled between the lower few camps so that the Blue team could progress as fast as the weather, and their 100kg pulks, would allow.

The first couple of weeks on the ice brought fairly grim weather, with poor visibility and low cloud, but the team learnt quickly and adapted to the conditions. These early lessons shaped the way we worked for the remainder of the expedition and the time spent ferrying loads to and fro gave us an opportunity to have a good look at the surrounding area and possible objectives. By the time the Blue team were had been firmly established at the edge of the Avery Plateau, Red team had sailed a few miles north to attempt the first few major peaks of the expedition. This effort broke down into two parts, the first consisted of a day raid to climb two amazing peaks on what we hope no name the 'Westminster Peninsula', followed by a more concerted effort to climb a series of peaks a little further North. These mountains proved much harder and required detailed reconnaissance and heavy load carrying over difficult moraine and crevasse fields. Eventually two of the easier peaks were climbed, but two mountains each repulsed two separate attempts on them. There are still a few scores to be settled here!

Whilst Red Team were making these ascents Green team completed their support to Red team task before attempting a number of peaks around the base camp area. After a week or so Red and Green teams did a 'tag team' with Red team taking on the mantle of support to Blue team and Green team took the opportunity to exploit further afield on Australis. Numerous further peaks were climbed during this period, a number of them being unclimbed. Eventually Blue team returned from their successful crossing of the Avery Plateau and they then supported Red and Green with stripping out base camp so that it could be moved to a new location





some 20 miles further north on the Lliboutry Glacier. From here we hoped to attempt the highest peak in the area, Mt Rendu, and find a route up onto the Boyle Mountains.

The last two weeks of the expedition produced some of the most successful climbing days, with some better weather (this is all relative in Antarctica!) and exemplary conditions for expeditionary mountaineering the team made the most of their last opportunity to climb before coming home. Red and Green Teams were working at the East end of the Arrowsmith Peninsula, whilst Blue team finished of their Scientific tasks before attempting peaks at the West end of the Peninsula. At first this new region tested the skills and resolve of Red and Green teams, with several mountains ejecting us just below the summit. Good, safe, lines were hard to find. Eventually, however, the teams shared information and regrouped. Picking a gap in the weather a mixed Red/Green team of 5 made an Ascent of Mont Rendu in excellent conditions. I will let them tell you the epic of tale of their return when you meet them, but I will tell you that the tale involves a crevasse!

By the end of the 50 days the teams were tired and showing signs of fatigue. But each had the satisfaction of their success, being able to look at the many of the peaks that we surveyed from our base camp and knowing that we had been the first to scale their lofty heights. Despite our fatigue, it was with a slightly heavy hart that the teams stripped out camp and boarded Australis.

Although we had less stuff to bring back (we had eaten a lot of it), loading Australis for the return journey was a time consuming task, especially as we did not have the benefit of a jetting or wharf to load from. The equipment had to be brought back on board with the small boats and then cleverly managed to ensure that the kit required for the crossing and the kit to be unloaded at Rothera were accessible, yet secure, in the correct areas of the yacht and with an appropriate weight distribution.



Eventually Chalk 1 were dropped off at Rothera to be flown back via the Falkland Islands, whilst Chalk 2 encountered some remarkably favourable conditions across the Drake Passage to arrive back in Puerto Williams. All of the team arrived back in the UK to a surprising amount of media attention, with the expedition leader and a number of other team members appearing on BBC South Today and ITN evening news.

In the next edition of the AMA magazine I hope to write a little more and describe some of the Ascents in more detail and also give greater detail about the scientific programme. Until then I hope that you have enjoyed the pictures!

Capt RF Scott RN and the Terra Nova expedition of 1910-1913

Capt Scott led the Discovery Expedition of 1901-1904 during which he pioneered the first part of his route to the Beardmore Glacier with Shackleton and Wilson. The Terra Nova expedition's main objective was to be the first to reach the South Pole but with such a heavy emphasis on science that he refused to change his plans to directly race Amundsen so that he could complete the science program.

In November 1911 the polar team set off with a support team that would turn back having carried stores forwards to key caches for the return journey. By the beginning of January 1912 Scott had selected his final 5 and they set off to cover the last 2°26', reaching the Pole on 17 January. Close to exhaustion they spent a couple of days confirming the location of Amundsen's tent which they found there before heading off on the long march back.

Day by day, their conditions deteriorated as they made their way back across the polar plateau and then down the Beardmore Glacier, recording conditions and collecting geological samples. On 17 February, Evans died at the foot of the Beardmore Glacier after a fall and then one month and 400 miles later Oates made his incredible sacrifice in an effort to save the remaining three. On 19 March they ground to a halt, unable to continue because of the weather and eeking out the very last of their food and fuel until Scott made his last diary entry on 29 March: "*Had we lived, I should have had a tale to tell of the hardihood, endurance, and courage of my companions which would have stirred the heart of every Englishman. These rough notes and our dead bodies must tell the tale, but surely, surely, a great rich country like ours will see that those who are dependent on us are properly provided for.*"

The bodies of Scott, Bowers and Wilson were found the following spring with all of their records and samples intact. The results from those findings and the rest of the expedition are still being used today to further our scientific understanding of Antarctica and the global climate.



£150
ARTICLE

EXPEDITION APOSTLE TIGER 2

By SSgt (SSI) Asher RAPTC &
Capt (MAA) Best RAPTC

Capt (MAA) George 'Best' RAPTC feeling exposed on the Half Dome, Yosemite Valley

In September 2010 Capt (MAA) 'George' Best RAPTC was the driving force behind the adventure training exercise Apostle Tiger. Apostle Tiger was an integral part of the RAPTC 150th Anniversary celebrations. The expedition was conducted in the Yosemite Valley and comprised of six members of the RAPTC. At the end of the expedition Capt Best showed a keen interest in a second expedition in 2011.

On arrival to Yosemite Valley it was clear to the more experienced members of the team climbing in Yosemite was going to be more challenging than we had anticipated. To prepare the team adequately for the aid climbing techniques that would be required, a specific training programme was followed. After the training was complete it was evident that big wall rock climbing is both physical and mentally demanding.

The goal was set to attempt the South Face of The Washington's Column. In the TOPO the Washington's Column is documented as the easiest big wall climb in Yosemite Valley and comes recommended as a must for first time big wall climbers. The climbing on the Washington's Column is graded at V,5.10 A2.

It was decided amongst the team that two three man teams that would attempt to climb the South Face of the Washington's Column. Team one started their ascent followed by team two with a day's interval between. It was apparent early in the climb that the logistical requirement for the ascent was going to present potential problems. Hauling large amounts of water is extremely difficult and slowed both teams. After two days of intense climbing both teams successfully climbed the route.

After the success of the expedition in 2010 Capt (MAA) Boocock and Capt (MAA) Best discussed the possibility of a second expedition. Due to the experience gained on the first expedition the team started to research what routes could be achieved.

The team for the expedition was made up of four of the original team. Capt (MAA) 'George' Best RAPTC, Capt (MAA) 'Dave' Boocock RAPTC, SSgt (SSI) 'Ed' Hargreaves RAPTC and SSgt (SSI) 'Mick' Asher RAPTC. After trawling the RAPTC for candidates Sgt (SI) 'Vic' Reeves RAPTC and Sgt (SI) 'Rachel' Mackenzie RAPTC was selected. With the team selected Capt (MAA) Boocock organised a training weekend in the Peak District which was specific for the technical climbing that would be experienced in Yosemite.

The team had various levels of experience with Sgt Mackenzie and SSgt Asher holding Rock Leader Training (RLT) qualifications. The four remaining team members held the Joint Services Rock Climbing Instructors (JSRCI) qualification. All instructors had many years of climbing and mountaineering experience. Sgt Reeves had recently passed the arduous Heeresburgführer Military Mountain Guide Course.

On the 25 August the team flew from Heathrow Airport heading for San Francisco International Airport. On arrival in to Yosemite Valley it was agreed that the team would accommodate themselves in the famous Camp 4. Camp 4 is a notoriously overcrowded, basic camp site that attracts thousands of climbing enthusiasts and backpackers from around the world this is due to its location in the heart of the Valley. After settling in to Camp 4 the discussion of potential climbs was on everyone's mind. Capt Boocock and Capt Best had decided to climb the Half Dome. Sgt Reeves and SSgt Hargreaves had set their sights on the Nose on El Captain.

The Half Dome rises nearly 5,000 feet above the Valley and is a true Yosemite icon. There are several ways to reach the summit of the Half Dome. The most popular route is by the fixed cables that sees thousands of people hike to the top. The iconic vertical rock face of the Half Dome hosts a number of very technical and challenging climbs. The Regular Northwest Face route (5.12 or 5.9 C1)

is the most commonly climbed route on the Half Dome. The route consists of 23 pitches and takes typically fit climbers three to four days to climb.

The Nose on El Captain is long sustained and flawless. On paper the Nose sounds easy but it is not. With 31 pitches of 5.14a or 5.9 C2 of steep, exposed and strenuous climbing sees a very high failure rate. The Nose is a very popular climb and takes typically fit climbers five to six days to climb.

SSgt Hargreaves and Capt Best departed Camp 4 at 0500 hrs to retrace the start of the North West Regular route on Half Dome via Death Slabs. The aims were to confirm the approach route for the attempt next day and to ascertain whether the springs were running as this would negate having to carry 35 kg of water in the following day. After some difficulty in finding the climbers trail and three hours of pulling on thread bare fixed ropes, dodging rock fall and sweating excessively SSgt Hargreaves and Capt Best made it to within 10 metres of the base of the Half Dome. Unfortunately, no springs were seen. At Camp Four Capt Dave Boocock prepared the equipment, food and water for the attempt next day.

Capt Boocock and Capt Best departed Camp Four at 0430 hrs. In order to preserve energy the rest of the team would follow carrying the bulk of the water and the haul bag. Capt Best and Capt Boocock travelled in light order carrying enough food and water for half a day and sufficient ropes and hardware to climb and fix the first three pitches. After three hours the assault team reached the base of the Half Dome and was in total awe of the size and verticality of the route. They were less impressed by finding the springs running right at the base of the rock as they were mindful that the remainder of the expedition members were soon to be walking up Death Slabs with the water and remaining equipment. Capt Boocock completed the first two pitches with Capt Best free climbing the third pitch. The bivvy site at pitch three looked uncomfortable and cramped. At approximately 1500 hrs the remainder of the expedition team arrived at the base of the Half Dome sweating excessively as a result of the temperature and the weight of the water and the pig (equipment bag). The team became noticeably more vocal having seen the springs. When declared safe to approach, the team Capts Boocock and Best descended to the ground laughed, thanked the team and collected the pig. Time was on the team's side but the pig, true to its name, became stuck during being hauled up the first pitch. After a concerted effort of problem solving the team manage to free the pig but not without incident as the freeing of the pig resulted in both members falling 3 metres simultaneously, a good start. After a challenging first day the pair reached their incredibly cramped bivvy at pitch 3.

The cramped slot dictated the sleeping arrangements, Capt Boocock on his side with his legs hanging off the edge and Capt Best positioned himself so his feet were up towards the summit. Jet lag and the fact that the pair spent the entire night almost touching faces resulted in a sleepless night. To provide relief from the uncomfortable belay the team started climbing at first light 0430 hrs. The pair were very confident that achieving 6 pitches in 15 hours of daylight would be well within their grasp. The route description detailed that some of the pitches would be of a more amicable grade and therefore, should be quick resulting in more time at the bivvy to relax. Eager to start, Capt Boocock aid climbed Pitch 4 in the semi darkness. He suddenly became more focused when a piece of protection ripped out of the rock and then fell into the dark. Capt Best free climbed pitches 5, 6 and 7 but ran out of hard wear to set up a belay after a 145' pitch. Calling on his knowledge and skills gained over the years improvised to make a belay with the rope. Unfortunately, the weight of Capt Boocock, the Pig (80kg) and the action of Capt Best hauling took its toll on the rope and the sheath became damaged exposing the inner core. After inspecting the damaged rope and weighing up the options the team decided to try not look at the offending threadbare rope and continued on. During climbing the updraft from the wall was constant and refreshing in the 30 degrees heat. However, the pair noticed that it momentarily relented after Capt Boocock dropped the Topo (route map). The map landed and the wind ceased providing just enough time for

Capt Boocock to rescue the invaluable item. The team soon found that in reality easy climbing in the guide did not mean easy climbing on the wall as sections were very poorly protected and loose. Capt Boocock climbed over 120' with only one piece of protection; a fall from this would have resulted in a massive swing with a side impact and sustaining at least a very nasty scratch. The fear factor continued to increase for Capt Boocock when a foothold, the size of a tennis ball fell off during climbing the poorly protected section. With the final pitch of the day insight Capt Best completed the famous Robbins Traverse without incident and the team arrived at pitch 11 at 1800 hrs. The bivvy site was yet another uncomfortable, rocky and cramped affair and the team had just enough time to cook tea, reflect on the day's events, say "never again" and go to sleep.

Still jet lagged the team woke up at around 0430 hrs had breakfast whilst trying desperately not to look up at 4 pitches of chimney climbing above. Capt Boocock comfortably aided the first pitch but on hauling the pig became stuck in the chimney which took precious time to release. To make up time Capt Best agreed to free climb the three chimney pitches. After much sweating and superfluous amount of whining Capt Best manage to struggle his way up to the belay at pitch 15. Capt Boocock followed climbing and wrestling with the heavy Pig to ensure that it did not get stuck, again. At the belay Capt Boocock (AKA Butter Fingers) once again, let the Topo fall from his grasp. Once again, the updraft ceased the map landed on his foot and he retrieved the piece of paper just before the wind picked up again. The team was now certain that they had some sort of guardian angel looking after them. Pitch 16 was reached without incident and they were pleasantly surprised to be able to hear the 100's of tourists some 780' above. By now the pair were feeling physically tired from the lack of sleep and jet lag, battered from the aid climbing and hauling the Pig and emotionally exhausted from being gripped by fear for the past three days. The team were very relieved to arrive at pitch 17 "Big Sandy Ledge" by 1800 hrs. Although Big Sandy should have been named "Medium, Gritty, Sloping Ledge" the pair found a semi-decent ledge for a good night sleep. At 2100 hrs a couple of Belgium climbers arrived at Big Sandy after getting lost on the route. Unfortunately for them the only place left on the ledge was a very narrow and at the very edge of the wall, Capt Best and Boocock quietly gloated.

Capt Boocock and Best only had enough food and water for one more day so had to summit on day five. As the Belgium team were free climbing the whole route and should be faster Capt Boocock and Best encouraged them to have an earlier start, 0500 hrs. The early start and a poor sleep might have been responsible for the Belgium team falling off a number of times and providing team with some light but unnerving entertainment. Subsequently, Capt Boocock soon dispatched pitches 18, 19 and 20 the infamous "Zig Zags" with little problem. As seen on the TV, Capt Best intended to walk across Pitch 21 "Thank God Ledge" but taking into account the drop off to his left, the bulging wall at his shoulder, the bulky equipment he was carrying and being a little anxious, he decided to half crawl, half climb and whine the whole pitch. At the end of the ledge, Capt Best had a choice, climb yet another chimney or free climb a section of C2 with little protection. Taking into account the last chimney horror show, it was an easy choice and he opted out of climbing the chimney. Unfortunately, this resulted in little protection being placed along the traverse and providing Capt Dave Boocock with another opportunity for a very long and painful pendulum fall. At Pitch 21 Capt Boocock reached the top of the bolt ladder only to find that several bolts were missing. Despite using all his height, 5' 4" he resigned himself to the fact that the team could go no further and returned to the belay. Spurred on by the sound of tourists coming from above, the fact that they were quickly running out of water and food and that there was no option for failure at this point Capt Boocock suggested that Capt Best free climb the space between the bolts. Capt Best soon dismissed this idea as barking mad due to the blankness of the rock (that's why there are bolts there). After some head scratching Capt Best donned his stickies one more time and performed some dynamic and non-recognised climbing moves with the assistance of inventive belaying to overcome the missing bolts and both team members hung from the final belay one pitch from the top. The last pitch had successfully scrambled Capt Best

nerves so Capt Boocock took up the final aid climbing pitch. The last pitch could be aided but would take a considerable amount of time and light was limited. Dressed in his approach shoes and eager to finish the journey and be patted on the back by the many tourists at the summit Capt Boocock manned up and frenzy free climbed the final pitch. Shortly after making the summit, Capt Best joined his fellow team member and was greeted by the crowds of tourist. Unfortunately, the crowds had gone home as night was quickly approaching and only one person remained at the summit to take the obligatory photo of the successful pair and hug.

After drinking any remaining water the team decided to walk off that night. The nine mile hike with 80kg of equipment proved to be just as gruelling as the climb, steep, rocky and difficult to navigate, especially when dehydrated and exhausted. After a few twisted ankles, two hours finding the correct path and five hours walking the team finally made it to the pick-up-point and were very grateful to meet the rest of the team despite their concerns about travelling with a pair of extremely dirty and smelly pair.

Whilst the attempt of The Regular Northwest Face was underway, SSgt's Hargreaves and Asher and Sgt's Mackenzie and Reeves were busy training on routes such as the Salathe Wall. The Salathe Wall was chosen to train on due to its ideal location on El Captain and its sheer vertical rock face which was ideal for hauling practice. The three days of training that followed allowed the team to develop their big wall climbing skills. After climbing five pitches on Salathe wall it was agreed that any problems that might be encountered on the Nose could be overcome with confidence.

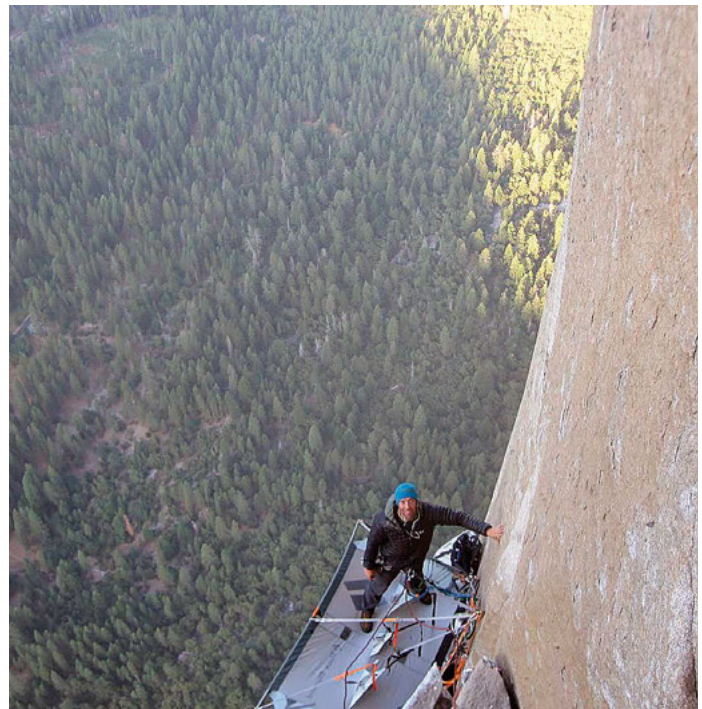
Sgt Reeves and SSgt Hargreaves had been researching in depth. On a daily basis Sgt Reeves was checking climbing reports on the internet and was in regular discussions with climbers who had climbed or attempted the Nose. These discussions motivated Sgt Reeves to get his credit card out and head down to the local climbing shop. Thirty minutes later Sgt Reeves was 500 dollars poorer having purchasing some much needed off set cams that would come in useful on the Nose.

SSgt Hargreaves and Sgt Reeves started their in-depth preparation for the climb. After two days of preparation the haul bag was packed and weighed over 90kg. From researching the climb it was agreed that day one would be spent climbing the first four pitches to Sickle Ledge. Once the haul bag was safely secured, Sgt Reeves and SSgt Hargreaves would abseil down and return to Camp 4 for their last night's sleep on solid ground. It was agreed that returning to the valley floor and starting early next morning would be the best plan.

Sgt Reeves and SSgt Hargreaves started early at 0500 with the intention of getting a head start on the intense Yosemite heat. The heat was a major concern for Sgt Reeves as the larger walls in Yosemite are normally climbed in late September when it is cooler. With the intense heat, daily consumption of water was estimated at 3 litres per person which works out at a staggering 12 gallons (45 litres) of water for the climb.

After ascending the four pitches to Sickle Ledge the reality of the climb started to dawn on Sgt Reeves and SSgt Hargreaves. Climbing speed on the Nose is very important and a mixture of free climbing and aid climbing is incorporated to make progress as fast as possible. The complex pitches can take anywhere between three to four hours. The climbing speed on the wall is one thing that cannot be altered as this can compromise the precise calculation of water and food that is need for a successful ascent. With these long drawn out pitches keeping yourself comfortable is challenging. Sgt Reeves had done his home work prior to the expedition and had constructed a DIY belay seat. The belay seat would offer some comfort when sitting on the very exposed pitches with the only company being your thoughts.

After settling in to the daily routine Sgt Reeves and SSgt Hargreaves would spend their first night on the portaledge, this would present them with new challenges. Setting up the portaledge for the first



Sgt (SI) 'Vic' Reeve RAPTC belaying from his portaledge. The Nose El Captain

time proved to be hard work. After all of the hard work the portaledge was really appreciated and allowed for refuelling and some deserved down time. It was reassuring that there was the option to set up the portaledge on any pitch no matter what time. The first night on the portaledge saw SSgt Hargreaves in state of panic when he thought that the belay bolt was working its self lose. This thought was soon changed from panic to relief when he saw a mouse in his food bag trying to sabotage his bagel supply.

As SSgt Hargreaves and Sgt Reeves started to master the art of aid climbing, and their big wall administration was improving, Sgt Reeves would find himself being tested to the limit. The last pitch on the Stove Ledge Cracks would test Sgt Reeves nerve and climbing expertise. The protection on the pitch was non existent and Sgt Reeves found himself with a 35 metre run out. All the time in the back of Sgt Reeves' mind was that if anyone of the two cams that were protecting him failed he would be facing a fall of around 70 metres. Sgt Reeves stated to climb the pitch following the Pancake Flake and found himself on the most awkward hanging grove with only micro brass offsets and tipped out offsets for protection.

After some terrifying climbing from Sgt Reeves, SSgt Hargreaves took over the lead and started to climb the long and poorly protected chimney. SSgt Hargreaves found himself wedged in to the most awkward and terrifying chimney he had ever climbed. Due to the formation of the chimney, protection was limited. With a potential fall of 30 metres, SSgt Hargreaves had to rely on his previous climbing experiences to keep his calm.

The Nose presents climbers with a number of challenges, some of which have never been faced before. The famous King of Swing is a 30 metre pendulum swing where the lead climber is lowered down by the belayer. This pitch saw SSgt Hargreaves running the 30 metre pendulum 16 times. Every failed attempt resulted in SSgt Hargreaves being aggressively thrown in to the wall. Once SSgt Hargreaves had successfully completed the King of Swing he thought the hard work was over. How wrong he was. Sgt Reeves found himself ascending a stuck rope that had jammed after complex deviations which if it had worked its self lose would have resulted in a serious fall.

After five long days of challenging, complex and exhausting climbing the end was in sight. It was the first day on the wall where the weather was showing signs of change. The intense Yosemite



Sgt (SI) 'Vic' Reeve RAPTC approaching the Great Roof. The Nose El Captain

heat was being compromised by a potential thunder storm. As SSgt Hargreaves finished the last pitch the heavens opened.

The walk off the Nose is renowned for being long and extremely dangerous. The falling rain made the walk off even more challenging. Not only were the rocks steep and slippery but the haul bag had not been backed properly and there was a strong smell of human excrement leaking out. After the four hour walk off Sgt Reeves and SSgt Hargreaves returned to Camp 4, only to find an empty pitch as the Team's permit has expired. Luckily Capt Boocock was there in the transport to take them back to the new camp site.

Back at the camp site the rest of the team were eagerly awaiting Sgt Reeves and SSgt Hargreaves return. When Sgt Reeves and SSgt Hargreaves returned to the camp site the stories of the climb were eagerly discussed amongst the team. Both climbers had lost a significant amount of body weight and they were looking forward to a well deserved pizza.

Whilst the assault on the Nose was happening the remaining members of the team were climbing some of the famous free climbs in the Valley. Capt Best and SSgt Asher climbed over 20 multipitch routes raging from of 5.7 to some challenging 5.10. The highlight of free climbing marathon was seeing Capt Best try and overcome his fear of chimney climbing. Due to the small dimension of one chimney Capt Best found himself completely stuck and unable to move. After a lot of cursing from Capt Best and hysterical laughter from SSgt Asher, Capt Best finally reached the belay.

Capt Boocock and Sgt Mackenzie were busy preparing themselves to attempt to climb The South Face of Washington's Column. This route was chosen so that Sgt Mackenzie could practice her newly acquired aid climbing skills. Following the successful ascent of this route in 2010 Capt Boocock decided that this would be a good introduction in to big wall climbing for Sgt Mackenzie. The day before the climb was spent organising the haul bag and walking in the water supply.

Due to the popularity of the climb an early start is essential to get in front of slower parties. Capt Boocock and Sgt Mackenzie started the walk in at 0500. Capt Boocock had set a goal of reaching the first bivvy which is commonly known as Dinner Ledge before last light. As predicted there were several inexperienced climbing parties who were holding up the climbing. The first night on Dinner Ledge was shared with 3 other climbing parties. After a good night's sleep Sgt Mackenzie was ready to climb the overhanging Kor Roof.

After successfully negotiating the roof, a further two pitches were climbed. However, because the were not maintaining the required speed and this was having an adverse impact on following climbers, Capt Boocock made the decision to return to Dinner Ledge and abort the climb.

After the success of Apostle Tiger 1 in 2010 it was inevitable that there was going to be a follow up expedition. Big wall climbing is a serious activity where knowledge, equipment and training are fundamental requirements. The experience and knowledge that has been gained on both expeditions will hopefully be utilised in future expeditions to the Valley. Both expeditions have been a huge success and an amazing experience for all personnel that have been involved.

Expeditions of this magnitude do not happen on there own. A special vote of thanks has to be passed to Capt (MAA) 'George' Best and Capt (MAA) 'Dave' Boocock. Without their motivation and desire to climb the aims of the expeditions would not have been achieved. The team would also like to thank the RAPTC for the funding that was allocated for both expeditions.



The Team at Glacier Point Yosemite Valley:
 SSgt (SSI) Asher RAPTC
 SSgt (SS) Hargreaves RAPTC Sgt (SI) Reeves RAPTC
 Capt (MAA) Best RAPTC Sgt (SI) Mackenzie RAPTC Capt (MAA) Boocock RAPTC

In praise of the Costa Blanca

£50
ARTICLE

Capt Tomo Thompson R SIGNALS

Twenty four hours ago I was in the sunshine in Spain. My hands were sore but I didn't care as it was a symptom of another excellent trip to the Costa Blanca. In any case I was using that tried and tested remedy for the pain by wrapping them around a cold glass of beer! Now I am in the car on my way to the airport again but this time it's 0500 hours, it's raining, and I'm going to Glasgow for the day.

This was our third trip as an HQ to the Costa Blanca to take advantage of the superb mix of climbing, scrambling and Via Ferrata that is available in the winter sun. The access is simple and cheap – we were climbing on one of the crags in Echo Valley within 7 hours of getting out of our beds in Innsworth – with dozens of flights, and cheap car hire and accommodation options. My recommendation on the accommodation would be to use The Orange House though. Sam and Rich Mayfield run a great set up and give a discount to AMA members. Kit, local advice, and the guidance of an MIA (Rich) are all available but the atmosphere is also really good, with some hard-core (for example Steve McClure just before we got there) and many not so hard-core climbers. The village of Finestrat also has excellent restaurants and bars for the evenings when you don't feel like cooking. In the same vein, Rich will run up a very tidy barbecue at a reasonable cost.

The instructors went out a couple of days early to recce some areas and routes we were unfamiliar with. This included an ascent of the Puig Campana via the 13 pitch, 450m, Hard Severe called Espolon Central. It was a superb trad route with stunning exposure, and some quite delicate climbing high up. The ascent then finishes with a couple of hundred meters of scrambling and the descent follows the main gully down the centre of the mountain. If you do it, head for the paths to the left of the lethal scree! It was definitely a big day out and we had that warm glow of achievement as we tucked into a beer or 2 in the village that evening.

We mixed the week up for the group with a bit of everything as we had an abundance of instructors, and a wide range of experience in our students. The week began with everyone on the Ponoch Via Ferrata, which is well equipped and spectacular, and immediately provides the students with a hundred metres of air beneath their heels. It finishes with a 50m abseil (it can be split into 2 if necessary) and is highly recommended as a half day activity. We then moved on to a couple of the crags in Echo Valley to work on the climbing and belaying skills. Echo 1.5 (both Abajo and Alto) provide perfect venues for this, and in very easy reach of the parking area. The routes range from 3 to 6b in difficulty so there is something to test most people. Please note you won't find these crags in the Rockfax Guide to Costa Blanca – contact Rich if you want to download the topos he provides from The



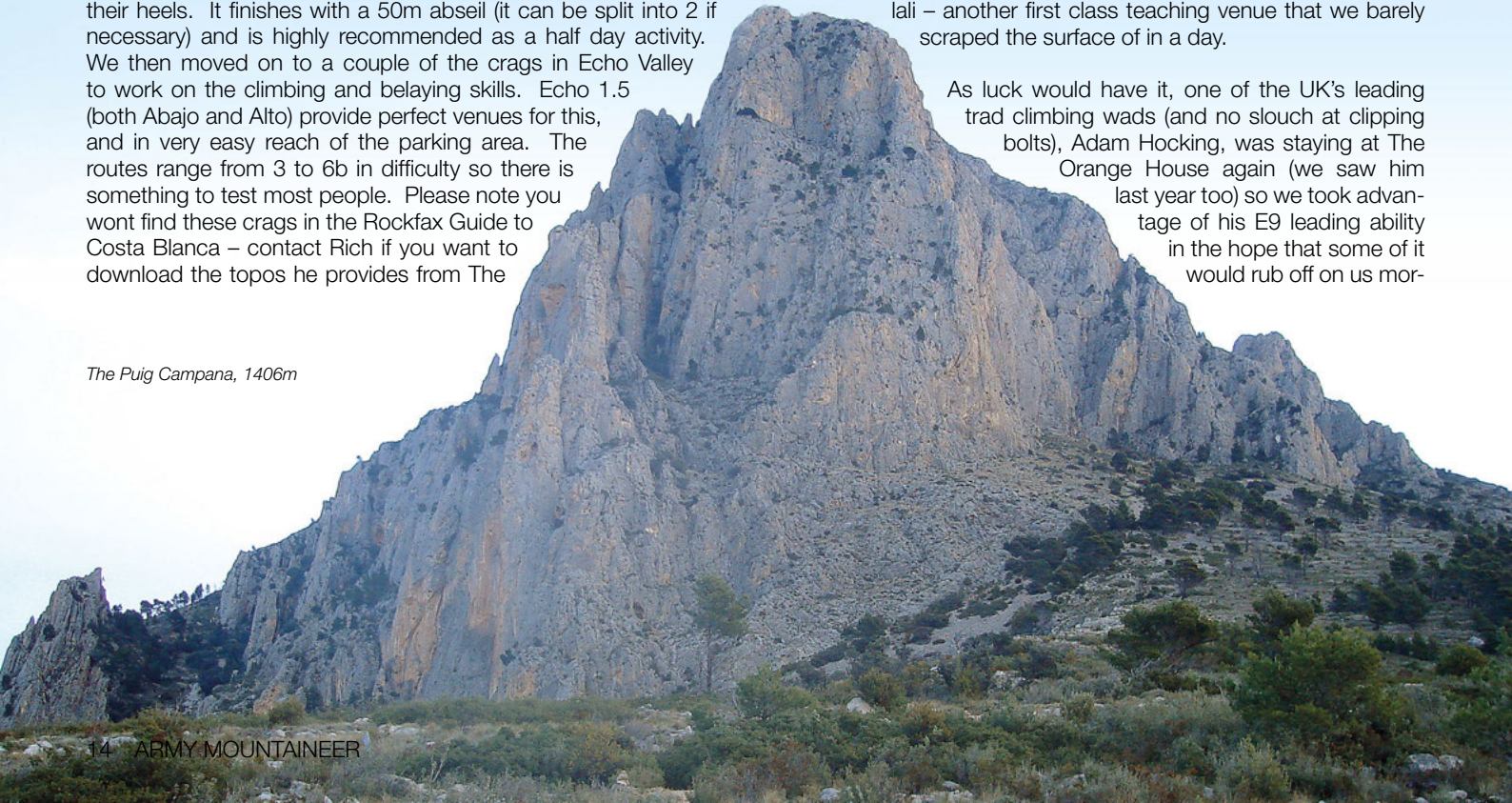
Capt Tomo Thompson climbing Espolon Central, 450m, HS on the Puig Campana

Orange House website (www.theorangehouse.co.uk). He has also made up topos for the Via Ferrata and ridge scrambles, and they are regularly updated as more crags are developed.

On the following day we split into groups, with Tomo taking Angie and Maria onto his beloved Castelletts ridge (see UKC and the AMA Journal of Winter 2011 for details). They came back having visited that place called 'stretch' as the ridge is a serious proposition and delivers soaring exposure relatively quickly. John took our Mountain Troop representative (name withheld for obvious reasons – let's just call him Dan) up the Puig Campana for a big mountain day out, and Ian and I concentrated on bringing on Ryan at a crag called Alcalali – another first class teaching venue that we barely scraped the surface of in a day.

As luck would have it, one of the UK's leading trad climbing wads (and no slouch at clipping bolts), Adam Hocking, was staying at The Orange House again (we saw him last year too) so we took advantage of his E9 leading ability in the hope that some of it would rub off on us mor-

The Puig Campana, 1406m





The Orange House, Finestrat



Sgt Maria King on the Ponocho Via Ferrata

tals. Adam gave us a very worthwhile day of coaching at the internationally renowned set of crags at Sella, with some clean leads at 6a/6a+ being achieved. It is hard to believe how much limestone is within easy reach of The Orange House, and Sella (with over 500 routes) is only 20 minutes away. Adam had something for everyone regardless of how hard they were climbing, and everyone picked up invaluable tips. We also all reaffirmed in the Bouldering Room back at The Orange House that unlike Adam we could not do one armed pull ups never mind ones using only 2 finger tips.

The progression throughout the week now put us in a position where it was time to get some multi-pitch climbing and some leading tuition done. To get the most out of the day we headed for Toix Oeste where we could combine some amenably graded multi-pitch routes with a great single pitch crag that was ideal for getting them on the sharp end. The crag is on the coast at the end of the Bernia Ridge and has great views. The main wall of Toix Oeste can get quite busy as it is such a good teaching crag but there is plenty more on offer within minutes of there. Toix Far Oeste has some very nice multi-pitch routes beginning with the gentle 2 pitch 4+, Espolon Gris.

For trad climbing we chose the Castillo-Wasp area of Echo Valley (again, only about 20 minutes from The Orange House). The crag has a good range of easier graded single pitch climbs and eats gear so it was perfect for our needs. It also has a number of slightly harder multi-pitch routes, and it was of great satisfaction to me to alternate lead a 4 pitch VS 4c with Ryan, who made his first outdoor lead earlier that week, and just shows what a concentrated period of good weather and tons of rock can do in terms of progression.

So the verdict – as many of you know the Costa Blanca is difficult to beat as a location for sport and trad climbing in the winter sun. The combination of seemingly limitless limestone, easy access from the UK, cheap living costs in country and dependable weather make it a superb destination for winter adventurous training. We combined serious scrambling, spectacular Via Ferrata, limitless sport routes and trad on single and multi-pitch venues, got 2 students through their RCF in the process, ate really well and squeezed in a few sociables. Not a bad week or so in work, and our thanks to the AMA for helping to finance it.



WO1 (FoS) Ryan Lang belays Maj Angie Tarlton on Espolon Gris, 60m, 4+, Toix Oeste

PHOTO COMPETITION

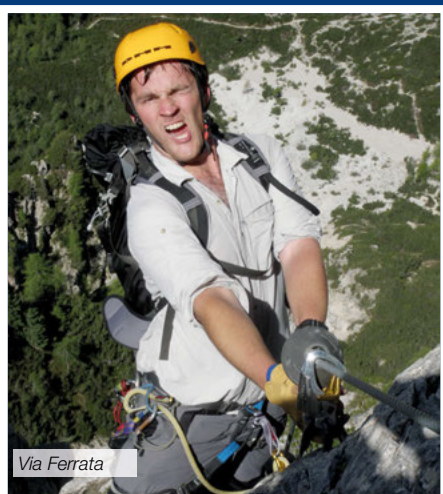
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(Photos should be the highest quality possible and e-mailed to the editor, along with a credit and caption) amajournaleditor@armymail.mod.uk



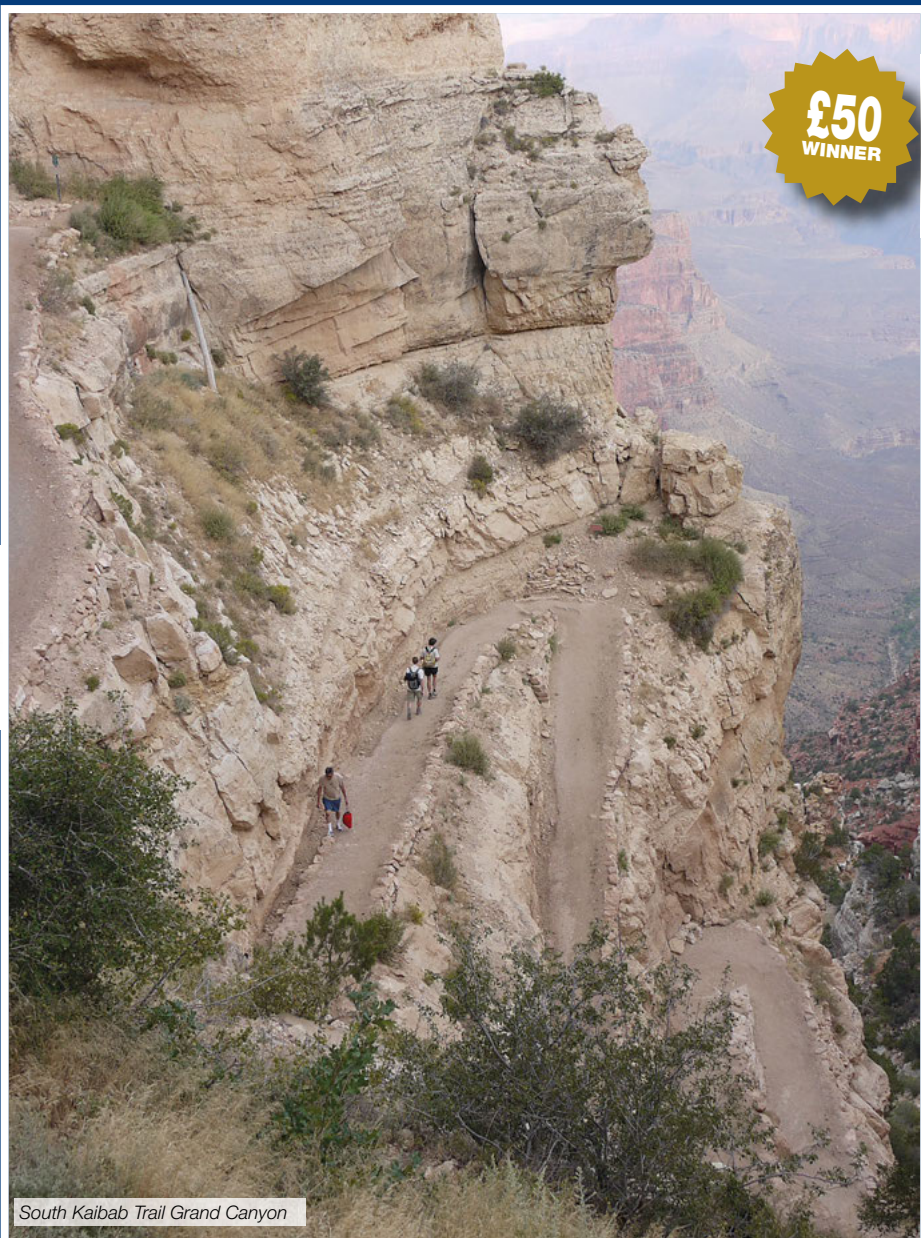
Whitney Creek Sierra Nevada



Via Ferrata



Alpsize Ferrata with Andy Rose and Ray Peace



South Kaibab Trail Grand Canyon



Andy Clamp enjoying the sun on Gold Phlash VS 4b Trevor Rocks January 2012. Photo by Colin Leggett



Julia Bloomer climbing Metamorphosis HS 4b at Carreg-y-Barcud (Pembrokeshire) in March last year. Photo taken by Barry Whale

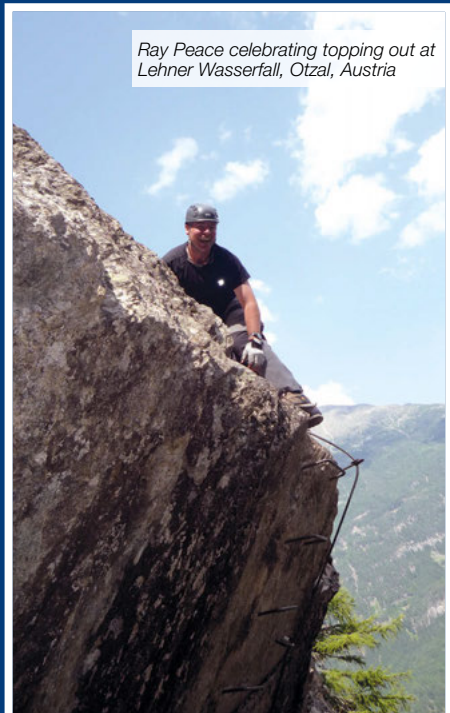


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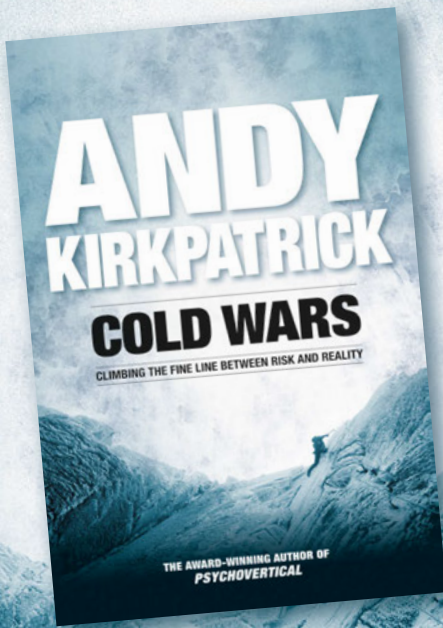
Barry Whale topping out on Big Phlash VS 4a at Trevor Rocks January 2012. Photo by Colin Leggett



Butterfly Belay. Alpspitze, Bavaria



Ray Peace celebrating topping out at Lehner Wasserfall, Otzal, Austria



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"I was aware that I was cold – beyond cold. I was a lump of meat left for too long in a freezer, a body trapped beneath the ice, sinking down into the dark.

"I was freezing to death."

In this brilliant sequel to his award-winning debut Psychovertical, mountaineering stand-up Andy Kirkpatrick has achieved his life's ambition to become one of the world's leading climbers. Pushing himself to new extremes, he embarks on his toughest climbs yet – on big walls in the Alps and Patagonia – in the depths of winter.

Kirkpatrick has more success, but the savagery and danger of these encounters comes at huge personal cost. Questioning his commitment to his chosen craft, Kirkpatrick is torn between family life and the dangerous path he has chosen. Written with his trademark wit and honesty, Cold Wars is a gripping account of modern adventure.

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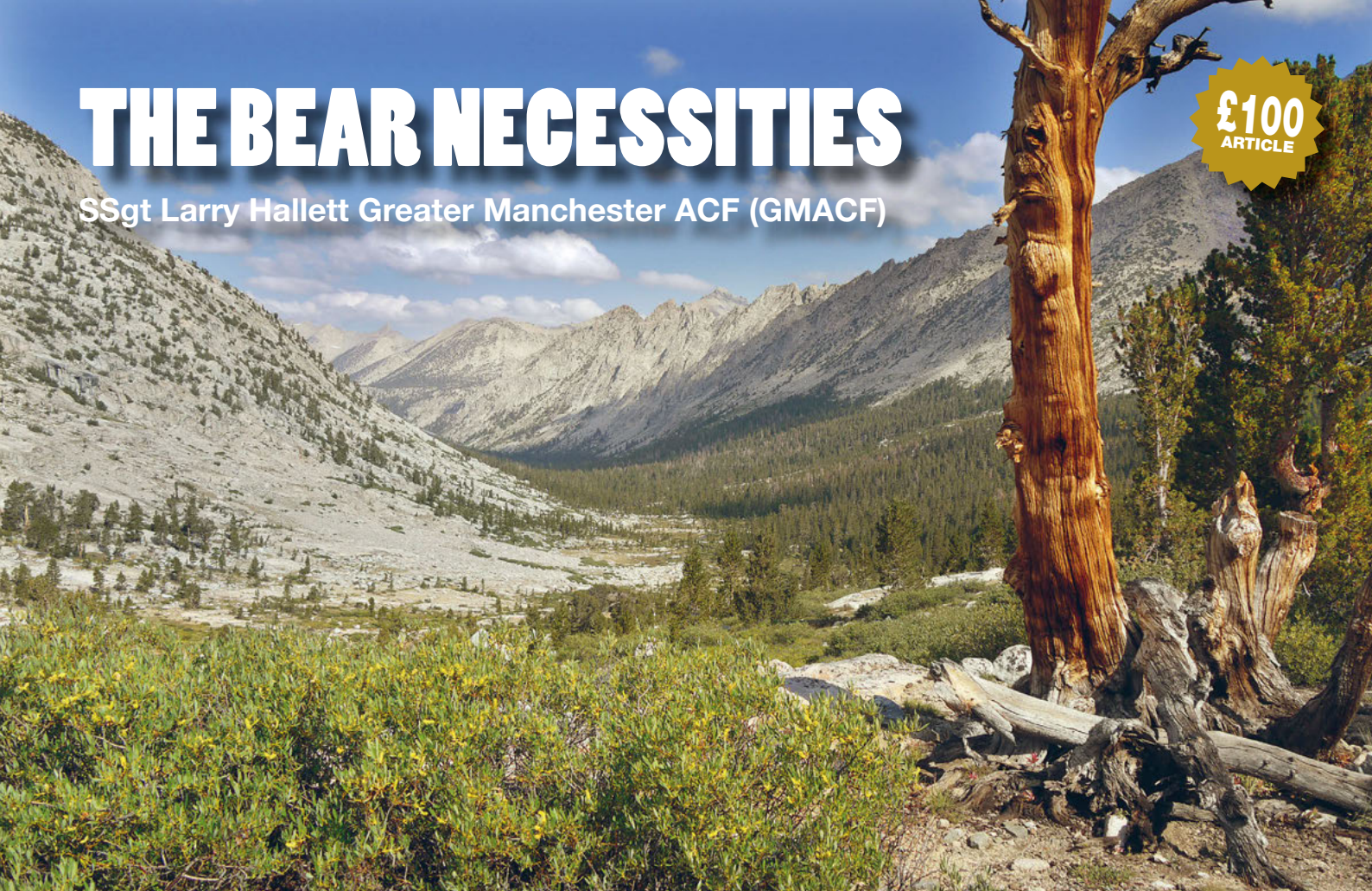
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THE BEAR NECESSITIES

SSgt Larry Hallett Greater Manchester ACF (GMACF)

£100
ARTICLE



“Mmm – I’m still concerned about bears” said Cadet Sergeant Tom Richardson as he looked at me across the hills at Holcombe Moor Training Camp. We had spent part of this USA expedition training weekend in the Lancs Pennines, covering wild animal encounter drills in depth, camp craft and trekked in the local hilly areas. Still – when you consider that a hungry Californian Black Bear has a nose seven times more sensitive than a bloodhound, it does highlight the acute need for slick personal admin, such as tightly packing our rations along with our food rubbish and human waste in the same outer receptacle when in bear territory.

These were just some of the opening words and thoughts of Exercise Northern Rattlesnake Venturer 2011; GMACF’s trekking expedition to western USA. The whole exercise was the brainchild of the current Commandant Col Les Webb. Relating to the personal experience of having completed expeditions in the Western USA many times before, he made the organisation of the whole endeavour look breathtakingly simple.

An overview of this action packed expedition to explore the Grand Canyon and California’s Sierra Nevada mountains on foot over 2½

weeks, left me in no doubt that this was a trek that started where the tourist trail ends! With generous sponsorship, grants and things like discount clothing from the Bear Grylls Craghopper range – this venture gave great value for money for staff and Cadets alike.

After landing at Las Vegas, the expedition group deployed to TEN-X Campground in Grand Canyon National Park and divided into 2 trekking teams and 1 support team. Here, all personnel spent time honing skills such as familiarisation with US Army issue MRE rations and water purification from natural sources with Col Webb; together with wilderness first aid and hygiene with our expedition medical experts. On top of this – much time was spent on practice walking in the park, before venturing in the canyon itself.

Time to look at our first objective: to trek to the bottom of the Grand Canyon, camp overnight and then return the following day. The National Geographic maps we were given illustrated our routes and individual group campsites well. But were these contour lines – or modern art? A closer look determined that we were indeed trekking 4800ft (1800m) to the bottom of the canyon! The thought of it could have had the same affect as telling a grouse to calm down on the 12th of August – but in practice, the trails were excellently engi-



neered; with carefully graded switchbacks designed for the passage of pack animals - making life much easier.

My team (Team 2) set off first but the other team was never far behind. Time and again I would be greeted with the sight of Col Webb and his team of mainly female Cadets meandering around a set of closely packed switchbacks to meet us for lunch & other short stops. The regularity with which this happened, quickly prompted me to Christen them the 'switchback sisters'!

After 5 hours we arrived at the bottom of the Grand Canyon. We'd gone down so far – I fully expected to meet a red man with pointed ears & tail – holding a 3 pronged fork! In reality though, our campsite location was heaven - a shady glade called Bright Angel Campsite; surprisingly complete with a crystal clear brook running through it. The other team passed through our site, taking a chance to swim in the stream en-route. We gloated over our lucky location as we waved them on to their overnight camps a bit further back up the canyon. (In reality – we would pay for this by having the furthest to trek the following day. Who were the real lucky ones – us or them?) The girls also played a master stroke; By resting their team at 'our' creek for a few hours, the setting sun shaded and cooled the rest of their journey.

We quickly made the best of our new home and the guys were keen to learn something of the local area from Park Rangers; including real time scorpion hunting, returning with the photos to prove it. Cheers guys – that really made me sleep well, as I very firmly zipped myself in for the night! After a long slow climb back to the South Rim the following day – I treated the team to ice cream and coca cola at the main cafeteria. I don't know what hurt me most, the trek out of the canyon or the bill for the treat! Following a BBQ laid on by our support team, we headed west into Nevada the following day for our next challenge.

"Goodbye death valley" said a trembling Jefferson Hunt as he stared back at the enormous abyss that almost cost him his life. In 1849 he was part of a wagon train of prospectors that headed west as part of the California gold rush. The hapless 'miner 49ers' were the very first to traverse the area named after his anxious words. They ended up having to kill their weakened oxen and burn their wagons to cook the meat into jerky before narrowly escaping the area with their lives. Luckily – our planned 1 day/night stop over at Wildrose

Campground in Death Valley Nation Park was far less harrowing than Hunt's, as we re-organised and re-packed our kit

We crossed the Stateline into California and Onion Valley Campground the next day. Col Webb had planned us to stay 2 days here to experience high altitudes and prepare our ration and re-supply plan for the forthcoming 8 day venture; the highlight being the ascent of contiguous USA's highest mountain – the 14,450ft Mt Whitney.

While we were a beehive of activity at Onion Valley, our support team were busy liaising with Jeff Winchester who ran a packed mule station at Horseshoe Meadow. Halfway through our week long trek, we intended to be re-supplied with 4 days food from a 3 strong packed mule train.

The time to step onto the trail came far too soon – and as ever, team 2 set off first. As I led the team trudging through soft sand, Cadet Sgt Jordan Woodcock shouted to me from the back "Is it all like this?" as he chewed the dust thrown up by our footsteps. This grey dust was to stick with (and on) us until the very end. If my wife ever complains about dust on the TV again!...

With a daytime temperature of 27deg C, walking 8.5 miles and ascent of 2500ft, we wild camped at Vidette Meadow. Not a vehicle or even a road in sight, it felt as quiet as a dodo's graveyard with only about 150 people in an area the size of Lancashire & Yorkshire combined. Despite the heat, water was plentiful wherever we went and the expedition water purification pumps gave excellent service from whatever source we tapped into. In the evenings we made the most of remaining daylight to relax and carryout essential admin before darkness set in at 19:30hrs. Banter was obligatory and Cadet CSM Holly Buckley from Lancs ACF and myself enjoyed much cross border friendly ribbing, that the average local American could never quite get their head around!

Having crossed the 13000ft Forester Pass on our 2nd day, I bedded down but was awoken by the sound of pattering on my tent. Damn - it's raining! I'll have to get up and put my rain cover on my bergan. To my abject horror I saw that the precipitation was not rain, but SNOW! Heck – the temperature was in the high 20s just hours before! It was a sure sign that were gaining at altitude though. This cool snap was to last the next 4 days however, and although the



snow only made a brief appearance at our altitude, cool temperatures and rain were never far away.

As a matter of fact, although not severe – this was the most unseasonal weather in the Sierra Nevada for last 12 years! We neared our ultimate goal Mt Whitney, but were strongly advised by the resident National Park Rangers at Crabtree Meadow about the risks of walking on up rocky mountain trails that would eventually be covered in 10” of snow at their highest, and steep drops to the sides. Reluctantly but sensibly, we carried out ‘plan B’ – moving South to lower altitudes (and warmer weather) and closer to our exped exit point. We spared a few thoughts though to the hardy trekkers who had walked almost the whole of the John Muir Trail (250 miles) only to be turned back within 10 miles of the trail’s end on the big mountain itself.

As scheduled – from Cottonwood pack station, our re-supply mule train arrived at the expedition halfway point. Personnel gleefully swapped their rubbish and laundry for 4 days food and fuel re-supply. The support team had also thoughtfully included soft drinks and some very welcome fresh fruit. With the aims of AT met despite the above disappointment, we could leisurely stroll along taking in the sheer remoteness, solitude and continuing to ‘get the system out of our system’.

Our last night by a quiet lake was shared by Neil & Jed, 2 retired Californian cowboys who were leisurely drifting north over 3 weeks, each riding a horse with 2 mules to bear their tentage and provisions. They invited us over for a coffee and a chance to sink my weary bones into the first chair I’d seen for 6 days. Ahhhh - REAL coffee made by REAL cowboys! Altogether it was a sombre occasion; we’d not seen a vehicle or even a road for almost a week. I felt fully contented that over the last fortnight we had ‘seen the world as it should be seen’. After a cool night, we enjoyed our final back-country breakfast before a cloudless pleasant morning oversaw our departure to journeys end. The welcome from our support team was a warm one as we loaded our dusty rucksacks onto the cargo truck at Cottonwood Pass. We then headed into Lone Pine, a real wild west town and a popular jump off point for short time hikers tackling Mt Whitney from the east. At a renowned hiker’s café dear to Col Webb’s heart – I tucked into a full breakfast I thought I’d need two men to lift! Before we knew it, it was time for our end of course dinner and a real bed. Next stop – the flight home, via some R & R in Las Vegas, but that’s another story!





Adventurous Training as a Leadership Development Tool

Brigadier David Robson

Brigadier David Robson has been keenly involved with adventurous training since joining the Army, and is a qualified Rock Climbing Instructor, Advanced Mountain Leader, Klettersteig Leader and Formation Skydiving Coach. He has run mountaineering, kayaking and skiing expeditions to the Alps, Rockies and Pyrenees, skydiving expeditions to Florida and Cyprus, and numerous other exercises in Germany, Spain and the UK. He was prompted to write this article after reading the CV of Major Dan Ashton, who is currently commanding 4 Mil Trg Sqn in 11 (RSS) Sig Regt.

Introduction

Major Dan Ashton's CV expresses his love for mountaineering but more specifically, and related to his current role, identifies adventurous training (AT) as 'defining the qualities of effective administration, skills and leadership that is essential to success in the British Army'. I have long held the same view based on my personal experiences of AT and the evidence I have seen in the units in which I have served. So why is AT so different, indeed unique, as a training tool?

JSP 419, the Joint Services Adventurous Training (JSAT) policy document, provides us with this explanation for the reason why we use AT in the Services:

Armed Forces personnel require mental and physical robustness to withstand the rigours of military life. Out with active operations, AT is the only way in which the fundamental risk of the unknown can be used to introduce the necessary level of fear to develop adequate fortitude, rigour, robustness, initiative and leadership to deliver the resilience that military personnel require on operations. AT contributes to recuperation from the mental stress of operations, by re-introducing the concept of fear in a controlled environment. AT is therefore a core military training activity, which supports operational effectiveness and the ethos of the Armed Forces. AT has most effect when delivered as part of a wider programme of through-life personal and professional development.

The policy statement identifies a number of reasons why we use AT to improve our operational effectiveness, and cites the inducement of fear as being the essential element that is needed to derive the effect we seek. The ability to handle oneself, and in particular the critical requirement that our leaders understand themselves and how they will react when frightened or under extreme stress, is key but the value we derive from AT as a leadership development tool is much broader than that in my view. The planning and conduct of AT exercises offers a powerful medium for leadership development in our officers and NCOs. It demands the full range of practical and intellectual skills that we look for and value, and teaches other crucial lessons such as effective administration and logistics. It requires our instructors to acquire teaching and coaching skills, and nurtures self-confidence, all of which have direct read across into our mainstream military roles as I hope to demonstrate in this article.

Fear

Before I expand on the planning and development benefits of AT I want to return briefly to the subject of fear. Why is it so important that our leaders in particular experience fear in training? It is critical because we must know ourselves ahead of the point when the lives of our soldiers are dependant on our ability to think and act when the perceived risks to life and limb are high. If we analyse how we react when we are scared, or in the hands of a good coach have that analysis done with us, we will be alive to how we are likely to behave in the future when 'gripped'. This allows us to mitigate any less useful traits we may have, and devise coping strategies where necessary. Let us be absolutely clear here, fear is not a weakness¹, it is a fundamental human emotion that serves to enhance our chances of survival as an individual and as a species, and it affects individuals differently (not better or worse, just differently). A lack of fear when the odds are shortening is every bit as dangerous as an inability to act, if not more.

We need a level of self awareness that enables us to train ourselves. We must be able to say to ourselves 'I'm not brave, and I know it. I know that my instinct will be drop to the back but because I know it I will guard against it and drive myself to the front. I know how I will



Student navigating the Upper Isjar, Grade 3, Austria

react because I have been here before and I can already visualise and rehearse what I am going to do'. It is not just about our tendencies to avoid, or rush headlong at, physical danger, we also need to understand how our cognitive processes will be affected. Do I become indecisive? Do I grasp the first idea that comes into my head because any activity is better than none? Do I stop listening? Do I withdraw to work out the next move? Do I get shouty? I have always found it is easier to spot the traits in others before we spot them in ourselves!

Exercise Planning

So fear, and more particularly our response to the sensation, is an important facet of AT but my thesis is that the practical value of AT for our leaders goes way beyond the conduct of the activity, and is as much in the planning as it is in the execution. The planning of an AT exercise, even a low level and short duration one, requires the leader to address every facet of the expedition. Unlike our military exercises, the idea for the expedition will normally be the product of the imagination and research of our junior officers and NCOs, and they then start the plan from scratch. No-one is going to issue them a set of orders from which they can extract their part. The leader will decide on his/her aims, take advice as necessary from the QMSI, RATO2 and others, and request copies of relevant Post Exercise Reports from Adventurous Training Group (Army).

For 'High Risk and Remote' expeditions there are additional complications and scrutiny but assuming our potential leader has more modest aspirations they will now address the various factors that will lead to tasks, freedoms, constraints or information requirements (sound familiar?). Costs and the availability of funds/grants to offset them are always high on the list and very often lead to a 'Question 4' moment. Equipment is generally available to support most aspirations but decisions on what kit to bid for need to be taken sufficiently early to meet the DSDA3 timelines. Transport needs to be planned whether air, road, rail, or donkeys and is often far less simple to organise than one would imagine. The leader needs to source the necessary maps, try to find guide books printed in English, or be able to translate them. They must produce a medical plan. If freeze dried food is required it must be purchased and planned for in the baggage and so on.

The exercise leader will seek the guidance of the MTO, RMO, Media Officer, RAO, QM(T), RCWO, and external HQs, and are way beyond their routine boundaries (this process is of course common to many such training activities including a sports team touring overseas, battlefield tours and so on, and not limited solely to AT). Once they have a plan they must also gain the necessary political clearances. During the execution phase of an expedition they are the MTO, RAO, and so on – responsible for every element of direction and administration for their soldiers, vehicles, rations and equipment across the range of G1 to G9 activity.



Lead climbing on Grim Wall, Very Severe 4c, Tremadog, North Wales

Type 3 AT – Expeditions, and Type 2 AT – Unit Training

The execution phase of an expedition (known as Type 3 AT in the JSAT Scheme) brings unique challenges for our young leaders as they embark into the unknown. In the extreme they will be in a foreign land that may have very limited or unreliable mapping, communications with the local people may be limited to gestures, there may be no medical support in reach, and no way of communicating with the outside world short of sending a runner back down the valley (this may sound like France to some less adventurous readers). Uncertainty becomes a fact of life, and the impact of a hole in the plan will not be rectified by a quick call on the mobile phone or

popping back to camp. Big holes in the plan may have disastrous effects on the exercise participants.

We must also be cognisant of the fact that there is no discipline system to fall back on in the hills or on the rivers. Dealing with misbehaviour or an unwillingness to participate is done at the most basic level through raw leadership ability. You can't invoke the assistance of the chain of command, and the threat of formal disciplinary action (although in serious cases it may be the final result) is going to be of little help with another 2 weeks of isolation ahead of the group. The expedition members must have confidence in their leader if the exercise is to be successful. Above all the leader must lead by example and be sensitive to the needs of the group – listening is an often overlooked but essential element of leadership.

Planning and running Type 2 AT (as Unit Challenge Pursuit type camps are now defined in JSP 419) may not have the isolation, risks or foreign travel elements common in expeditions but they still demand first class organisational skills, and the planner must still navigate through the complexities of land clearance, equipment bids, ration and MT accounts. They demand effective delegation and organisational skills as you tend to be dealing with often quite large groups of individuals, which comes with its own challenges.

Instructor Qualifications and Coaching

Having discussed the benefits of the planning and execution of AT exercises let me now turn to the merits of our people becoming qualified as AT instructors and coaches. The reader should note that there is widespread muddling of the terms leading, instructing and coaching⁴, and the terms are employed differently in each of the disciplines.

Leader qualifications under the JSAT Scheme are primarily about giving soldiers the opportunity to experience an activity or environment, rather than being about teaching skills. The definition is not hard and fast though, and in specific cases (for example the Joint Service Mountain Expedition Leader) qualified leaders may award Foundation⁵ level qualifications through the Distributed Training scheme (see below). We should not mistake AT Leaders for some sort of tour guide though. In fact, almost uniquely, in the mountaineering environment the safety of the leader depends in a most fundamental way on the ability of their charges to carry out the actions they have been taught quickly and effectively (belaying being the obvious example). Even relatively simple days out are, therefore, an excellent vehicle for the development of teamwork, mutual trust



and self-confidence. The Instructor awards permit the holder to teach the discipline to students. They also allow for the conduct of Distributed Training on behalf of the JSAT Centres and enable the holder to assess students for Foundation Awards. The syllabus for the training and associated supporting material is supplied by the lead JSAT centre.

The instructors in paddle sports are known as Coaches. This reflects the fact that you can teach strokes, how to read the river, safety drills and so on (skills) but once the leader lets his charges loose on the river there is actually precious little that can be done to prevent them from getting themselves into trouble. You can shout instructions, use hand and paddle signals, and then rescue the individual and their equipment but you never have control over their movement. Being a good paddle sport coach demands plenty of experience and the ability to read your students well. As with all AT, good judgement by the leader is fundamental to success and to safety. For the students it is about applying the skills that have been taught, managing their fear and getting themselves through the rapid (preferably the right way up) as no-one else can do it for them!

In parachuting you have Instructors and Coaches (and confusion between the 2 labels). The Instructors teach the drills and basic skills to progress from static line descents on to freefall, canopy handling and so on. The Coaches teach and practise students in the physical skills that will for example allow them to alter their fall rate, move relative to other freefallers, and to handle their canopy with skill and accuracy. As with paddle sports there is little that can be done to help a student if things go wrong, and although malfunctions are rare they are 'emotional' and without fail will be life-threatening. There is also a fundamental difference between the skills required by the instructor who despatches his/her charges from the aircraft and watches them fall, and the coach who goes out of the door with them.

It is a fact that when faced with danger, whether perceived (subjective) or objective, many people will refuse to do as they are told, at least initially. The experienced AT instructor has heard all of the excuses before about why it is simply not possible for the student to take the next step, leave the aircraft or break into the current, and has strategies for dealing with them. Naturally the technique that will be effective varies depending on the student, and is chosen based on the coach's observation of the student's performance and how much objective danger is present. Even after watching their peers complete an action an individual may not be persuaded that completing it themselves is not going to be fatal. Parachuting may be the most clinical example where the only decision/action required is to complete the exit drill, after which nothing will reverse the process.

Coaching Theory

It is worth a short dip here into a bit of coaching theory, and how it has practical application outside of AT. People learn in different ways, which is no revelation to the Army and is the reason why



Freetail parachuting display, Herford, Germany



Student navigating the Upper Isjar, Grade 3, Austria

PTIs, trade, skill at arms and drill instructors use the Basic Instructional Techniques mantra of Explanation, Demonstration, Imitation and Practise with the aim of catering for all types of learners⁶. This is not desperately efficient though, and it is not always possible in the AT arena.

If you want your charges to learn a new skill you need to enable them to pick up that skill in their own way, and that applies to teaching MATTs and trade skills as much as it does to AT. Coaches understand (at least) the fundamentals of this theory and can apply it to the other training tasks they may have. It not only makes them effective instructors, it also means that they know how to plan training.

Summary

AT in the Services is not about individuals becoming good rock climbers, skiers or parachutists, it is about giving our soldiers experiences that will stimulate, stretch and satisfy them. For our leaders it is much more than that and develops leadership, administrative and planning skills that are essential to the Army and to the conduct of operations. The processes and skills that are crucial in teaching, coaching, and testing in AT have a direct read-across into our daily work. They build confidence in our junior leaders and give them highly valuable opportunities to show what they are capable of.

'Together we knew toil, joy and pain. My fervent wish is that the nine of us who were united in face of death should remain fraternally united through life.' Maurice Herzog, Annapurna 1950.

(Endnotes)

- 1 Fear is a combination of physical and emotional reactions to stress and is almost identical to the effects of excitement. It is the way that we interpret the responses that is different.
- 2 Regimental Adventurous Training Officer.
- 3 Defence Storage and Distribution Agency.
- 4 My terminology is literal, rather than relating to the specific levels of AT qualification in the JSAT Scheme – Foundation, Leader and Instructor.
- 5 The Foundation level qualifications indicate that the holder is competent to handle themselves in a given environment but does not allow the award holder to lead others.
- 6 The way that we learn best (our Learning Style) is a combination of how we prefer to receive the information/the stimulus and how we then process it and in turn learn. There are various models, for example Felder and Soloman who describe learning characteristics along 4 axes (Active-Reflective; Sensing-Intuitive; Visual-Verbal; and Sequential-Global).

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EX ANNAPURNA TIGER 2011

OCdt Adam King

Nepal is best known for its towering mountains and peaks that have challenged humans to their very limits but Exercise Annapurna Tiger focussed on a slightly different trail in the Himalayan kingdom. The Officer Cadets of Exeter University Officer Training Corps (EUOTC) may have dreams of one day conquering Everest but the aim of this trekking expedition was to reach Annapurna Base Camp at a maximum elevation of 4130m. The route follows the Annapurna Sanctuary Trail, which is arguably one of the best treks in the world, giving a true demonstration of the staggering scale of the Himalayas and its beauty.

The EUOTC recruits students from Exeter, Plymouth and surrounding South-West universities and just like any unit in the British Army it has a strong emphasis on adventure training with personal encouraged to get involved. Students are also encouraged to organise adventure training so Officer Cadet (OCdt) Adam King started planning for Nepal in January and became the expedition leader. OCdt Emily King (no relation!) became the second in command, thanks to her mountain leader training, and the group was joined by two senior instructors, Corporal David Gleave from the RAF Mountain Rescue Service and Sergeant Gary Naylor, Royal Engineers. The group of 15, consisting of nine male and six female personnel, met in Wyvern Barracks on the 31st August to get kitted out with everything they might need and flew out to Kathmandu the next day in high spirits!



After a hair raising fast decent into Kathmandu, due to the plane having to go up and over the mountains, we arrived and experienced true Gurkha hospitality. A small army of Gurkhas from the British Gurkhas Nepal HQ had been sent to assist us through passport and visa control and drive us to the HQ compound in the city. Anyone who has visited this part of the world can tell you that driv-





ing through the cities is a fantastic assault on the senses, especially coming from the relative calm of the West Country! The bus pulled into British Gurkhas Nepal HQ and we met Major Bill Kelsall, the commanding officer in Nepal. The rest of the day was spent in briefings or on general admin. The next day the group set off in Gurkha transport on the 8 hour journey by treacherous mountain road to Pokhara. The views throughout the drive are impressive but unfortunately you spend most of the time on the road in Nepal fearing the other drivers or sizing up the drop below you whilst dodging the visible land slide damage.

The rucksacks were slung on and the trek begins! This is where the Officer Cadets really stood out from most expeditions to Nepal as it had been decided that porters would not be used. This was an important element of the experience as the expedition leader had decided that the Officer Cadets would gain a greater sense of achievement if they carried their own kit. This would ensure that Officer Cadets would develop their physical fitness as well as their teamwork, as they may need to assist each other along the way. Each group member carried roughly the same amount of personal kit regardless of their size without a word of complaint throughout the whole expedition and for most of us it was entertaining to see the three smaller girls turn into walking rucksacks! Another main decision that defined the expedition was the choice to trek in early September knowing that the monsoon was not yet finished. This turned out to work in our advantage as it meant that the trail was completely empty of tourists. We were told that a week later the trail would have turned into a steady caravan of trekkers all tussling for space in the tea house accommodation. As a result we only had to deal with two hours of rain a day they fell at midday, which really didn't matter as we were under cover having lunch anyway.

Each day of trekking in the Annapurna region offered something very different. The first few days were a steady climb in the highly fertile

foothills past swollen rivers and giant waterfalls. As we ascended to Ghorephani and the 3000m mark the mountain range opened up and we saw the vast scale of the rock and ice surrounding us. We started the second day with an early morning excursion to Poon Hill at 4am to catch the sunrise cast light on Machapuchare or the 'fishtail'. The two pronged summit of this sacred mountain, which is regarded by the Nepalese as the 'Queen of Nepal', has never been climbed out of respect for the culture. As we ascended past 3000m the climb began to steepen each day through tropical forests or along narrow paths with 1000m drops alongside. We mainly used stone staircases but as the trail continued these became less common and we started to navigate round land slides or over swollen monsoon rivers.

Each day the group stopped at tea houses along the route, which provided basic accommodation and a delicious variety of local food. Rooms and toilets were basic but after a hard days trek uphill in humid conditions it felt like a five star hotel. On the 7th day we ascended to our goal of Annapurna Base Camp (4130m). Again, we started at 4am while it was still dark with head torches on and walked in silent anticipation. When we were a kilometre short of the base camp the sun rose on the far side of the valley illuminating the tops of Annapurna and the surrounding peaks in a spectacular display of light. All 13 Officer Cadets from the EUOTC achieved the goal of reaching Annapurna Base Camp and not only were there no injuries but they can all be proud that they carried their own weight. Excitement grew in the group as we walked through the small cluster of huts, stood between prayer flags on the ridge and looked up. At that point you just have to pause and take in the feeling you get when you realise that you're standing between some of the highest and most impressive mountains in the world and let them put you back in your place.



EXERCISE

BALMAT CADET

OCdt Churcher

Things did not look up as we arrived in Chamonix on Saturday 13 Aug 12 after our gruelling 20 hour drive from Sandhurst. How it took 20 hours I will never know but it did and it was raining. We spent the day thinking about what we were going to do if it rained all week and came up with one realistic solution, get wet. So we headed off into town to check the out the maison du Guides; find out about the weather and the conditions up on the mountains. Heading back to the camp site we came up with what would be our basic itinerary for the week if it continued to rain or if fingers cross the sun came out to play. We then settled down for a rather damp dinner and bed in our new 8 man nylon home.

We had an early start at about 0700, but not in the Sandhurst sense of the word, so really a bit of a lie-in. We packed the camp site up as we thought that, as we were going to live on the side of a mountain, we could save a few pennies by moving out. These student ways stayed with us as we hit Le Supermarche and bought anything that looked like it contained more calories than a battered mars bar but still cost less than a Euro.

The aim of this trip was to go up the Valley to a place called Le Tour and walk up to the Albert Premier Hut 2700m and bivvy out for the night. The walk up was a bit of a shock to the system as a whole. We thought that coming out of 6 months of training at Sandhurst we would be ready for whatever the Alps could throw at us. We were wrong. The French day trippers over took us in their matching bum bags, and the climbing boots, which were two days old and not exactly broken in, and the army issue alpine packs, which seemed after a few hours to be made of cheese wire, took their toll. Despite this, the weather held out all day on the walk up to the bivvy site and the evening sitting outside in the fresh air eating something reconstituted rapped in fat looking over the Chamonix valley was the ideal way to finish the day.

On Monday morning it was back to in the Sandhurst way of doing things; up before it was light eating a biscuit and drinking a litre of water. All that was missing was a good screaming of the national anthem and an angry Colour Sergeant. The plan for the day was to head to our first summit the Petite Fourche climb it and then move onto a safe area to conduct emergency drills. Petite Fourche is described as Facile which means easy and it looked pretty straight forward even for the complete novices in the team. There is though nothing easy about learning to walk in crampons, especially on rock. We set out, being dragged behind our two instructors over the glacier to the base of the summit. It was all relatively easy going except for OCdt Pendlebury who managed to rip, with much swear-

ing, his shiny new trousers. OCdt Churcher spent most of the time regretting that he said, he knew what he was doing and he didn't need that wind proof jacket. Reaching our first summit and our first milestone for the expedition was a real highlight and something which we wanted to savour for longer but time and deteriorating snow and ice was on our minds. On the way back to the bivvy site we went through the drills of what a group should do if one of the team falls through one of these gaps in the ice. For two hours we went through what would hopefully not be needed life saving drills.

These drills were nearly needed on the way back down to the bivvy site as OCdt Pendlebury fell through the ice luckily only about two feet. Lucky, as the person roped up to him, and supposedly going to rush to his rescue, could hardly move for laughing. However, we all made it back down in one piece ready for some more of our culinary delights and a night under the stars.

Following our success of the previous day, we decided to try something a little harder, a summit which would hopefully test the whole team out not just the novices. We were heading up the Aiguille du Tour (3542m) rated as Petie-Difficile. There was though nothing little difficult about it. As the snow line was lower than expected we had to start our climb much further down the mountain than planned. The rope teams set off at a slow but steady pace moving up the vertical rock face using a small gully cut out by the ice melt as our guide. Soon the icy water coming down started to take its toll on our hands as they went completely numb. Not feeling your hands isn't that much of a problem but when you can't feel whether you are holding onto the rock face or not you soon start to feel a little nervous. The worst is when you get up above the start of the water fall and the warm blood starts to move once again around your frozen fingers. The pain as we were told whilst trying look macho and military is a good thing. The shooting pains apparently mean you haven't got frostbite and your hands are going to survive.

The rest of the climb to the summit was a mixture of more steep rock climbing and some less taxing scrambling over loose rocks. Reaching the summit made all the work worthwhile. Again short lived but one of the most rewarding as the climb up was by far the hardest of the trip.

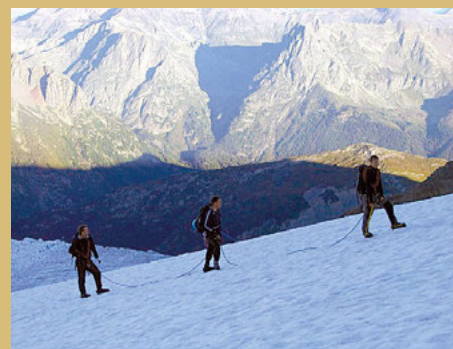
The route back to the bivvy site and then off down to the valley floor was one of the least enjoyable experiences of the whole expedition. Having spent eight hours getting to the top we knew it would be another six hours before we reached the bus back to our camp site.



Arriving in a wet Chamonix and preparing kit



Bivvy site the Albert Premier Hut (2702m)



Our first summit the Petite Fourche via NW route 3520m



Aiguilles du tour via Table Couloir 3542m



NW Ridge Le Petite Aiguille Verte 3512m



Descent to Chamonix

The next day was spent sleeping until we were bored and telling each other about how heroic we had been on the previous day. OCdt Churcher having never done any climbing before was now an expert in multi-pitch alpine climbing and knew more about the Tour glacier than the French. The rest was needed as we had plans to go higher the following day and start to build up some of our resistance to the high altitude which would become vital if we wanted to summit Mont Blanc. OCdt Beresford proudly showing the group why he thinks he is the best BBQ chef outside of Australia by cooking a massive meat feast getting us ready for the next climb.

Setting off early and now knowing full well what we were getting ourselves into, we got the Grand Montets cable car up to the 3295m station. We would have said this was cheating a few days before but after the trip down from Le Tour the cable car was the only sense able thing to do. At the cable car station we set out for Le Petite Aiguille Verte (3512m) a summit rated as Petite-difficile but promised to be more on the petite than the difficile side of the grading. The climb was relatively easy going and feeling confident we decided to abseil from the top and use our crampons and ice axes to climb back down to the cable car station. This was the first time OCdt Churcher had done any abseiling but after a quick exchange of views it was decided that off the side of a mountain was the best place to start.

From the cable car station we pushed on across the glacier d'Argentiere to the Argentiere hut where we thought we would throw off our student robes and sleep inside and have a proper cooked meal. Worth every euro, the beds were soft, warm and under a roof. The food was not only edible but delicious, setting us perfectly for the next day. This is how alpine climbing should be done.

A rude awaking at 4 am saw us set out for the summit of the Aiguille d'Argentiere with a steep climb up the glacier which had no let up or easy point to stop and get your breath. After about two hours of scrambling over loose rock trying to get onto the base of the glacier, OCdt Hutton who missed the breakfast of "man up" had to be taken back by OCdt Beresford, leaving just Ocdts Pendelbury and Churcher. Time was not on our side. We had to reach the summit no later than 0930 or we risked not making it back down to the cable car. With the recent experience of the last decent still fresh in our minds we picked up the pace. The remaining team made it to the summit at 0924 after what was the longest single slog of the trip. The glacier seemed to just keep on going and going with false summit after false summit. The only thing spurring us on was the knowledge that we were going to summit one more peak the OCdt Beresford.

Having made the summit with minutes to spare we headed down to pick up the other rope team and head for the cable car. The weather was perfect which meant that the decision was made that we would head back to camp, rest and then the next day, try for Mont Blanc.

After a bit of a lazy morning and some driving around getting lost we found ourselves heading up the cable car to reach the small mountain train which would take us up to about 1500m. This was all going well until OCdt Beresford informed us that we had taken the wrong lift and had an extra 45 minute walk ahead of us. We were about to climb Europe's highest mountain so what's a little extra walking (300m of Accent). We would regret our over confidence on the

way back down. We headed up to the Refuge du Gouter (3817m) where we decided we would bivouac for the night and make an early start for the summit. That afternoon the temperature dropped to around -10 degrees and OCdt Beresford's water froze solid.

With a 2am start, pushing it even for Sandhurst, we set off on our last climb of the expedition and the highest. We knew it wouldn't be too technical and the build up had more than prepared us for what was about to come. The only unknown was the altitude. Going higher than anything most of us had done before meant that we couldn't take the climb for granted. Both teams set out together, staying relatively close until about 500m from the summit when OCdts Beresford and Hutton's rope had to stop for a bit of personal admin. The other rope team set out for the summit reaching it just before dawn. The view from the top took about 30 minutes to take shape as the light started to filter in between distant mountains. The only thing missing from making it a truly great sunrise was the lack of a second rope team. We were short three people.

Having waited as long as our frozen hands and feet would let us we headed down looking for the others. About 500m down a group of German climbers informed us that the other group had turned back; one of the members was suffering from altitude sickness. We headed back down with a bit more purpose as we wanted to find out the news and to check that everyone was feeling OK and had no lasting effects. We met up at the hut to find out that it was one of the instructors who had succumbed to the effects of the altitude. After a quick chat to make sure everyone was OK, the chat soon turned to the fact the OCdt Beresford still hasn't climbed Mont Blanc and OCdt Churcher and Pendelbury made it to the top on their first attempt.

The climb to the summit of Mont Blanc really showed that altitude sickness can hit anyone at anytime, no matter how experienced you are. The affects were so strong that OCdt Beresford had to take over the team, physically man handling his instructor and leading them back down to the safety of the hut at the 4200m point. From there they took on some hot fluids and rested before heading slowly back down towards the hut.

The rest of the climb down was hard, partly because of the exhaustion but partly because we knew that we had a 45 minute walk back up to the cable car. This quickly turned into an hour one of the least enjoyable of the trip. In total the group had climbed 2500m up and down in 36hrs.

Back down at base camp there was time for another Beresford BBQ special and a few well earned drinks. Having conquered five peaks in nine days people were feeling pretty pleased with themselves. Some more than others, but we had all pushed ourselves and done something that we could be proud of. All that was left was a night out in Chamonix so OCdt Churcher could tell the locals how to climb and OCdt Hutton could cut some dangerous shapes on the dance floor.

After the night's celebrations/comiserations, the group lounged around the campsite resting and nursing some sore heads. The vehicle was packed ready for the next day's journey home.

DRAGON HAWAIIAN

Climbing the Summit of Mauna Loa

SSgt Paul Chamberlain

Ten members of 258 Signal Squadron, 3(UK) Division Signal Regiment, based at Bramcote, Nuneaton conducted a trekking expedition to Mauna Loa volcano, Hawaii, USA between 7 – 23 July 2011.

This involved a lengthy trip via Houston, Texas and Los Angeles before finally arriving on the 'Big Island' of Hawaii, home to the Volcano National Park and most notably the world's largest active Volcano, Mauna Loa, 13,679ft.

Following a few days acclimatisation involving small treks around the Island's worthy notable features, it was time to embark upon the Exped for real. After an early start and a hearty breakfast in the Kilauea Military Camp (KMC), the group were collected by a volunteer from the Hawaiian Volcano Observatory and taken to the start of the Mauna Loa summit trail. At this point, personnel were apprehensive about what lay ahead, knowing they were to gain almost 5000ft over 7 miles towards the Red Hill Cabin whilst carrying an average of 25kg per person. The trail started through woodland before entering an open plateau of old volcanic lava flows which seemed to go up and up. These lava flows were undulating and difficult underfoot. However, the effort was worth the view that could be seen whilst climbing this trail.

The weather was hot at the start of the climb, however after a few hours a large grey cloud emerged and the heavens opened with

torrential rain. This remained until the later end of the days climb. However, morale was still high and the site of the Red Hill Cabin was a welcome relief to the group. Upon arrival at the cabin, a group of Canadian tourists were established there which the expedition leader was not informed about when booking the cabin with the National Park tourist office. Although willing to share the cabin, the other group decided to camp outside as some personnel had done that the previous night. The cabin was basic inside, providing wooden bunk beds with old mattresses and a kitchen area. In addition, the cabin had a rain water storage tank which thankfully had enough water that could be boiled for the overnight stay. Once the group was established, an evening meal of pasta was cooked by Cpls Rimmer and Graham to provide plenty of carbohydrates for the following day and water bottles were refilled with the boiled water from the storage tank.

The team awoke early ready for a 0630 start. Despite LCpl Barrington being extremely vocal whilst asleep, everyone had managed to get some rest ready for the day's ascent to Steaming Cone at 11,480 ft. This was where the terrain really started to have an effect on the speed of the team. It was constantly changing from soft Tephra to razor sharp A'a' flows. Fortunately, the weather was much more forgiving with the team basking in glorious sunshine for the duration on the day. Sgt Morris led with a steady pace incorporating regular welcome rest stops. As the team reached the planned overnight camp site the terrain, weight of the packs and





altitude had started to take its toll on our bodies. The team swiftly found relatively soft flat areas on the golden Tephra to pitch the tents and quickly set about cooking dinner.

13 Jul 11 was the day of the big push to the summit. Having spent the night acclimatising to the altitude and letting our legs recover, the team were in good shape and keen spirits to get going and reach the summit cabin. The terrain proved just as difficult and varied as the day before. However, after walking for three days the sheer enormity of the volcano began to dawn on the team. As the miles decreased so did the leg speed of some people but as the team reached the lip of North Pit and the edge of the summit region, morale increased and brought with it a bust of energy. The views west out across North Pit into the main caldera were breathtaking as were the views east towards Mauna Kea. The last two miles flattened out as we trekked along the edge of the 100ft cliffs that made up the Moku weoweo caldera.

At 1530hrs the Summit Cabin came into view and shortly after we had made it. The multi-storey bunk beds with 30 year old yellow foam mattresses were an extremely welcome sight. However, there was little time to rest as water had to be found before the sunset. Fortunately, our local contact, Frank, provided excellent guidance and after 20 minutes of searching we eventually found a crack in the ground containing permafrost and a small pool of glacial water. We filled our bottles and collapsible water carriers with enough water for the next two days.

Day four was a scheduled but well deserved rest day. Some members of the team had underestimated the strength of the unrelenting sun and had developed mild symptoms of sunstroke. With careful monitoring and rest, these passed by midday and they were able to join the rest of the team in enjoying the truly epic scenery that surrounded the summit cabin. The team spent the day carrying out admin and re-organising kit, equipment and supplies ready for the decent the next day. SSgt Chamberlain and Sgt Shovelton put on a handsome meal for all participants. The sunset was of particular note. The altitude and lack of light pollution meant the Milky Way was clearly visible along with views out across the Pacific Ocean.

The next day we started our descent. However, due to the current eruption from Kilauea, and based on local advice, Lt Jones and Sgt Morris decided to change to Plan B and descend via the Mauna Loa Trail, the same way we had ascended and not via the Ainapo Trail. It was another relatively early start, partly due to the distance that needed to be covered and partly to avoid the strong sun. Retracing their steps, the team made good steady progress throughout the day stopping for regular breaks and taking in the amazing vistas. As the altitude decreased so did the breathlessness and occasional headaches.

Despite having walked on the same trail on the way up the views were very different on the way down. Mauna Kea dominated our left side whilst direct to our front was the vast expanse of the North East Rift zone with its parasitic cones and fissure vents. The team arrived back at the Red Hill cabin at 1500hrs and set about boiling water for the final days trek and cooking dinner. That evening, we climbed to the top of the nearest cone to view the glow from the eruption at the Kilauea Caldera.

The final day followed a similar pattern as the team continued its descent via the Mauna Loa Trail to the Mauna Loa lookout at the stop of the Strip Road. This was a slightly shorter distance than the previous days with the team only needing to cover 8 miles. With the end in sight and the packs slightly lighter the team were in high spirits. At 1430hrs the team arrived at that finish point and relieved, yet elated, took off their packs for a final time. Whilst waiting for the transport to take us back to KMC we reflected on our achievement. The first known British military expedition to climb the world's largest active volcano had been a great success.

Following the arduous nature of the Expedition, the group took advantage of their location and 'island hopped' to Ohau – home to the better known Waikiki and North Shore – for some well deserved 'rest and recuperation'. This involved a fascinating visit to the Pearl Harbour memorial grounds which will long live in the memory.

A long flight home, via New York, resulted in a tired group on return to Bramcote but all had to admit to it being the experience of a lifetime.

CADET CENTRE FOR ADVENTUROUS TRAINING (CCAT)

Lt Col Cath Davies

WINTER COURSES-FEBRUARY 2012

Hit and miss, you have to grab the winter climbing/mountain-seeing opportunities that present themselves while you can these days in Scotland. Who could have predicted 'day after tomorrow' conditions one week followed by a global melt down thaw the following week. We considered ourselves fortunate!

The snow cover might have been thin but what there was above 700m was in brilliant condition. The buttresses may have been

stripped but the gullies were fat with first time placement snow ice. I have never used so many ice screws up to the hilt.

CCAT was based in Tulloch once again this year with a bumper number of students undertaking Winter Mountain Foundation, Winter Leader Progression and Winter Climbing Foundation courses.

Everyone had a great time. Here are just a few images to whet your appetite. We finished off the week at the Fort William Mountain Film Festival with two awesome film presentations.

EXERCISE NANYUKI TIGER

LCpl Becky Brown

On the 18th February 2012, thirteen soldiers of various ranks led by Capt Ross Mackenzie and Capt 'Sip' Powers (aka Bear Grylls) departed on an arduous seven day trek of Mount Kenya. The aim was to reach the highest trekking peak on the mountain, Pt Lenana. At 4985m Pt Lenana is the 3rd highest point on the mountain and higher than any mountain in the Alps. The team consisted of soldiers from HQ DRLC, 44 Sqn RMAS, 23 Pioneer Regt and 25 Regt RLC.

Arriving in Nairobi after a pleasant but long flight from Heathrow, we immediately travelled to the Timau River Lodge, via Nanyuki showground. At this point Capt Mackenzie decided to purchase his "lucky bracelet" from the local merchants, who had enough selling power to easily gain a slot on "The Apprentice", he was lucky to leave with only the bracelet and not an assortment of "must have" Kenyan goods. Timau River lodge is located approximately 10km north of the Sirimon Park gate, which was the starting point for the expedition. The quality of the accommodation ranged from large luxurious cottages to slightly more modest shacks!

After a very tasty and authentic local menu for the evening meal, the guys got stuck into their preparation and administration. This caused a bit of distress as the bergans seemed to be shrinking and the kit seemed to be growing!

On Monday 20th of February the team embarked for the start of the expedition to climb Mount Kenya. We got on the transport early Monday morning after a hearty breakfast, making our way to Sirimon Gate. Here we met our local guides, Solomon and Peter from the Mt Kenya guides and Porter Safari Club. After a safety brief from the guides and a quick water re-supply, we began our trek to Old Moses Hut. It was 9km, uphill all the way and it took the team 5hrs 30min to complete. On the way we were able to take in the breathtaking views. Having been advised to take it slowly, everybody started off at a good "military pace". As the altitude increased and the air thinned, the pace slowed to something considerably more sedate, and most people took their turn at the back of the pack.

With frequent rest breaks everybody dug in, the effects of the altitude being noticeable amongst all. Arriving at Old Moses hut was a huge relief for those of us unaccustomed to the altitude, but a worthwhile accomplishment. After the immediate admin was completed it was time to put the liquid fuel stoves to good use. This came easier to some than others as Major Fletcher showed off her

skills to the envy of other members of the team. After a hot meal and a brew we were then treated to a beautiful sunset, and a map reading lesson.

Tuesday 21st February started early after a restless night's sleep. Sgt Dave Munro, who has since admitted that he is more of a Scuba Steve than a Mountain Goat, was feeling the effects of the altitude so the expedition leaders decided to use this day as an acclimatisation day. Feeling good and only carrying day sacks, the team split into two and conducted some map reading skills up to a point called the Barrow, a distance of 12km. One team managed to reach the Barrow at an altitude of 4150m, the highest the majority of us had ever reached before. It was a great achievement and gave us a taste of what was to come with even better views of Mount Kenya. The second team didn't quite make the Barrow but did manage to get to an impressive 4050m.

Feeling more acclimatised and having had a good night's sleep we set off for Shiptons Hut on Wednesday 22nd February. The trek started quite easy but as we climbed in and out of a couple of valleys the weight took its toll and the altitude increased the challenge. There were lots of spectacular views with beautiful foliage to take our minds of the task, the team slogged on and the whole group made it to Shiptons Hut (4200m) in one piece. It was the longest day so far travelling 11km for a total 900m height gain which took 12hrs 30min.

Thursday 23rd February was meant to be another short acclimatisation trek in the afternoon. At lunch the decision was made to attempt our target, Pt Lenana (4985m). The weather conditions were excellent and, apart from Sgt Munro, the team were feeling strong. Conditions remained excellent and the summit was reached in three hours. The cloud cleared as we reached the top and we were treated to panoramic views of this spectacular mountain. Unfortunately as we had spent so much time taking in the views, some of the descent took place in the dark!

On Friday 24th February we departed at dawn and started on our return to the Sirimon Gate. We reached Old Moses Hut at 1130hrs and after lunch hitched a rather bumpy ride on the back of a truck back to the Sirimon Gate. Back at the Timau River Lodge we enjoyed a well-earned drink and BBQ to celebrate the finale of a hard weeks graft, even passing on a lemonade to Sgt Munro for his efforts.

We left the lodge early on Saturday 25th February to reach Nairobi airport in time for our long flight back to Heathrow. On the way back we were treated to some magnificent views of Mount Kenya at sunrise, an ideal end to a hard but satisfying week.

NB. Capt Sip Powers is planning the Ultimate Ultra-Triathlon to raise money for Battle Back. Please visit his website and donate www.battleback1000.com Capt Powers needs you!



“That’s me!”

Farewell, but not goodbye

Lt Col Cath Davies On handing over as Chairman

I first joined the AMA committee as a co-opted member: I had taken part in an AMA rock climbing exped to the Costa Blanca and volunteered to lead the one the following year, as a way of giving something back. Little did I know what that would lead to! I was co-opted in 1993 and even before we deployed on the expedition, I had become the General Secretary. That led to my becoming Vice Chairman Mountaineering before I stepped aside to take on the Project Officer post to organise our 50th anniversary celebration. This was a six expedition, worldwide event which not only highlighted all the different activities our members get involved in but also involved members at different stages of their mountaineering careers, from Foundation College students to high altitude mountaineers. I assumed the post of Chairman after returning from the 2006 AMA Everest West Ridge expedition, on which I had been one of the Development Team leaders, as well as a member of the Higher Management Committee.

I have gained an enormous amount from my involvement with the AMA, not just in the chances to be involved in amazing expeditions, but in the people I have met and climbed with, some again and again, others for just a day at an AGM weekend. I know some people revel in the solitariness of the mountains, but I prefer the enjoyment of

the joint endeavour, especially with people I know.

I have been lucky enough to find the time, initially as a reserve officer, then whilst working full time at a brigade headquarters, to get qualified in various disciplines and this in turn has allowed me to give something back by instructing on Distributed Training for units and acting as a leader on numerous expeditions, both AMA and at unit level. At the last count, I have completed 33 overseas expeds, 9 as leader and 21 leading teams.

Amongst that lot, it is quite hard to pull out the best bits, but there have been some highlights. Taking an officer cadet to JSAM as his first alpine trip and working on a guide book time times three protocol, hence the Forbes Arete took about 14 hours. Planning to take 100 AMA climbers to the Rockies for a month to try to climb all the 3000m peaks (as you do) and having Kev Edwards say ‘No one else in the Army Canoe Union will sort anything out for the members, I’ll have to do it, let’s take 25 paddlers too.’ Waving good bye to the charter plane that had landed eight of us on the tundra in a huge glaciated u-shaped valley in a remote unexplored area of north east Greenland, knowing we would see no other humans until the plane came back to pick us up

one month hence (we hoped). Exploratory alpine mountaineering there had an epic feel to it; everything was on a massive scale, you never knew what you would find when you turned a corner or breasted a rise, and the sun never set, it just moved round the valley. At least you couldn’t get benighted, but the days turned into 18 hour epics.

I could go on but suffice to say, I have enjoyed many fantastic experiences through my committed involvement in the AMA and I think that is the key: commitment. Members who have skills and energy must be willing to give in the areas they can, to make the AMA work, especially those who have benefitted from what the AMA organises. We have finally got the website up and running ‘outside the wire’, so I hope we will be better able to communicate with members, especially new ones, and get them involved. The success of our excellent sport climbing activities in attracting new members is proof there are plenty potential recruits out there. Having just successfully acted as lead Association for the highly complex JS exped to Antarctica, the AMA has proved it can operate at the very pinnacle of exploratory mountaineering; the next challenge is to mobilise and energise our grass roots activities.



	
<p>BLACK ICE JACKET EXTREME CONDITIONS MOUNTAINEERING EXPEDITION DOWN JACKET</p> <p><small>PRIMALOFF</small> <small>FREEFLOW</small> <small>PEAQ</small></p>	<p>FLUX JACKET HIGH MOUNTAIN FAST ALPINE ECO INSULATION</p> <p><small>PRIMALOFF</small> <small>ECO</small></p>

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