

MOUNTAIN MOMENTS



*A Miscellany Celebrating
40 Years of the
Army Mountaineering Association*

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Edited by Lt Col (Ret'd) A J Muston



Gasherbrum I from Camp I at 5800metres,



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INTRODUCTION

by Lt Col (Retd) John Muston

In early 1995 the Vice-Chairman of the Army Mountaineering Association, Colonel Chris Field, suggested that we should celebrate, in 1997, the 40th Anniversary of the Association being formed. Various ideas were suggested but the final decision was to produce this publication. Agreement to do so in 1995 gave a two year lead time so it could be a well planned military operation. Having been at the committee meeting which agreed this and looking the wrong way at the wrong time I was duly 'volunteered' for the role of editor. Any praise for the contents should be heaped upon those who have contributed while any brickbats should be aimed at me. That is the role of an editor.

The aim was to solicit from members contributions which would encapsulate an experience, be it uplifting, frightening or dramatic, during their time in the hills. The hope was that these experiences would span the 40 years. This, broadly speaking, has been achieved and no-one has been pressured to write about an experience in a specific time frame in order to fill a gap.

The fact that Lord Hunt has, very kindly, bucked the system by submitting a contribution dating from 1935 allows me to make the point that 1957 was not the start of Army mountaineering. Long before then soldiers of the British Army were making forays, both operational and recreational, into the mountains. One only has to look at the membership of the pre-World War II Everest expeditions to see the military involvement and during World War II a whole division was trained in mountain warfare - only for it to go into action below sea level in Holland ! That, I would hasten to add, was a War Office decision not a navigational error on the part of those in the division.

That the contributors range from a Lord to a L/Cpl demonstrates better than any words of mine the universal appeal of the mountains to soldiers and the breadth of the AMA membership. Soldiering and mountaineering both require that most magnificent quality - self discipline, and it is perhaps not unexpected that when Wilfrid Noyce, a fine writer and well known mountaineer wrote his study of survival case histories, *They Survived*, he came to the conclusion that the best survivors were likely to be trained soldiers who were also mountaineers. On that self-satisfying note I invite you to enjoy the following mountain experiences.

LONG BEFORE THE ARMY MOUNTAINEERING ASSOCIATION

by Brigadier(Ret'd) Lord Hunt of Llanfair Waterdine.

The then Colonel John Hunt sprang to worldwide fame in 1953 as the leader of the first successful Everest expedition but by the time he was posted to India in 1931 at the age of 21 he already had six Alpine seasons behind him before his Himalayan foray to the PirPanjal as half of a two-man expedition. In 1956 he left the Army to begin a second career devoted to public service in fields too many to list in this short piece but the mountains remained as a background to whatever else he did. He was the first Vice-President of the AMA. It is perhaps typical of Lord Hunt's enthusiasm for mountaineering that, even in his mid-80s, he submitted the following contribution quite unsolicited as soon as he read that this book was going ahead.



This photograph is of an early Joint Services expedition of 60 years ago. This was our party on K36 (now Saltoro Kangri 25,400') in Baltistan, 1935. The middle row consists of (left to right) Flt Lieut Stewart Carslow RAF, Lieut John Hunt 60th Rifles (Greenjackets), Lieut James Walter KA, Flying Officer Rowland Brotherhood RAF.

The two Sherpas, Palden and Dawa Thondup, were on the 1935 Everest Expedition. Dawa was one of the leading Sherpas before World War II and was one of the heroes who helped the Germans from a storm on Willi Merkel's ill-fated Nanga Parbat expedition. He took part in other Everest expeditions and, as a veteran, twice reached the South Col in 1953. The three standing men are local Baltis who took part in our attempt on K36. We had to turn back in a storm from 24500'

THE FORMATION OF THE ARMY MOUNTAINEERING ASSOCIATION

by Lt. Col(Ret'd) A J Muston.

JOHN MUSTON (Member No 152 !) has been climbing since 1955 and has managed to do so in 12 countries during 15 expeditions. There are some who make the libellous suggestion that he has had a mountaineering career with a bit of soldiering as a hobby. Despite this experience he still describes himself as a modest mountaineer who thinks E grades are something added to packets of food.

Elephants, I am told, have a gestation period of two years. The formation of the AMA did not take that long but it was a slow and steady process. In the middle 50s both the Sappers and the Gunners had mountaineering clubs as had one or two regiments but it was felt that these did not have the strength to organise alpine meets or expeditions to the greater ranges and that an Army-wide club could do this. While a number of people had been talking about forming an army climbing club the possible problems rather than the opportunities provided the bulk of the discussion. However in Nov/Dec 1956 a flurry of letters between 2 Lt Chris Bonington, Major Hugh Robertson and Colonel Gerry Finch produced some clear proposals. On the 18 December Gerry Finch, as chairman of the RE Ski and Mountaineering Club wrote to Colonel Christopher Cocks of the RA Alpine Club seeking his support for an approach to the Army Sports Control Board.

In January 1957 the proposal to the ASCB was drafted with overt emphasis on the training value of mountaineering, the fact that the other two services already had such clubs and the greater mountaineering possibilities that could come from an Army-wide club. The unmentioned covert aims were to get funding for the first five years and to use the ASCB to provide a permanent secretariat. A draft charter was also produced which ran to all of half a page of foolscap - in double space typing. The current AMA constitution runs to four A4 pages in single spacing ! This draft was circulated to a number of active climbers in the Army asking for their comments. Capt. Tony Streater was then an instructor at RMA Sandhurst and thus had a view on young officers joining the Army while a Capt Chris Beeton replied with a number of suggestions regarding training, that it should be open to Other Ranks and "as a matter of interest, are the Womens Services included ? I did know one or two quite keen QA mountaineers !" The AMA has been in the forefront of sexual equality ever since.

What appears to have been the first formal meeting to consider the establishment of the AMA was held in a scruffy office in the Ministry of Supply in London on 24 May 1957. Gerry Finch took the chair and also present

were Majors Robertson and Lindsay, Captains Jenks, Streather and Deacock and Mr. Stallybrass - an RMAS lecturer. The chairman reported that the previous day the ASCB had approved the formation of the AMA, made an initial grant of £100 and agreed £150 per annum for the next five years - subject to 'the organisation being integrated as far as practicable with the Army Ski Association.' It never was and the AMA remained independent. It was agreed to invite the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (Field Marshal Sir Gerald Templer) to be President and Brigadier Sir John Hunt to be Vice President. Both accepted. All those at the meeting were press-ganged into accepting an appointment in the new body and others were nominated to be representatives in the various Commands in UK and abroad. An Army Council Instruction was to be published and this duly appeared on 10 August 1957.

There were to be two grades of membership. To be an Associate (soon to be termed Ordinary) Member you paid five shillings (25p) per year. To qualify for Full Membership, and pay ten shillings per year, an Ordinary Member had to 'show suitability to take a place as a member of a first season mountaineering party in the Alps. Stamina and ability to master very difficult rock climbs must be demonstrated.' In those days (i.e. before any form of protection had been invented) V. Diff. was quite a reasonable standard. An Alpine Meet was agreed for August - only two months hence. Those matters dear to the hearts of all climbers such as cheap access to huts, insurance and cheap travel to the Alps, were also discussed at this first meeting so the AMA knew its priorities from the start. Within six weeks they had also negotiated a 5% discount with a London climbing shop.

Some printed notices outlining the aims of the AMA and the advantages of joining were rapidly printed and this required a badge to be invented. Gerry Finch, clearly not a man for rule by committee, told everyone that he had taken the Army Ski Association crest, changed the wording, and substituted crossed ice-axes for the crossed skis and that is what we still have today - and long may it remain so ! The seven who attended the initial meeting plus two others appointed themselves Full Members and were thus empowered to recommend others to be Full Members. Those who were already members of civilian 'pukka sahib' clubs e.g. the AC, SMC, CC etc. were also deemed to meet the requirements of Full Membership.

The planned meet was based at Zermatt and 18 attended. Sadly, just after the meet ended, the AMA suffered its first fatality when a Captain Reid fell on the Dent Blanche. The first AGM of the AMA was held in London on 6 November 1957 and with this it might be said that the formation of the AMA was complete. How it would develop only time would tell but only two days after the AGM the irrepressible Gerry Finch was writing to Tony Streather suggesting the first AMA Himalayan expedition should

take place in 1959. Perhaps if I were to single out one person who really got the AMA going it would be the now Brig (Ret'd) Finch.

Two last gems need to be recorded. The first members rightly gave themselves the early membership numbers and attached to a copy of the first Membership List is a scruffy note saying 'Streather not paid up member as he was away on Haramosh and then recovering from accident. No. 7 was kept open for him until he was fit and joined.' So our President not only failed to pay his sub. on time (although he did have a modest excuse in that he was falling off a Himalayan peak at the time) but he bears for all time the annotation - 007. 20 years ago when, as General Secretary I was trying to trace these early members, I was able to find and contact all but Member No. 001. Many were the telephone calls I made and letters I wrote all to no avail. Eventually 003 (a cunning RASC officer called Gavyn Jenks) could contain himself no longer and told me that there never had been a Member 001. As the first Membership Secretary he deliberately left it blank - to see if someone would start a witch hunt in later years!

SANDHURST MEETS AT HELYG

by Bill Stallybrass

Bill Stallybrass helped to make climbing history in 1931. As the second who failed his leader on the Central Buttress of Scafell he paved the way for Menlove Edwards to make the first unaided ascent of the Flake Crack as a layback. He was a founder member of the Sandhurst Mountaineering and Exploration Club and was recruited by Tony Streather as a founder member of the AMA.

As a Sandhurst lecturer and a keen supporter of the RMAS Mountaineering and Exploration Club, I was delighted to be invited by Tony Streather to join him and others in founding the AMA.

As I look back on 70 years of mountain holidays, my happiest recollections are of introducing officers and cadets to rock climbing through meets at Helyg, the Climbers' Club hut in Snowdonia.

We who ran the club were not happy at the way the College and Company Commanders pressed their weaker cadets to join our meets and we strongly resisted pressure to write reports on them; we felt that at weekends and on leave they should be free to enjoy themselves without being watched for "officer qualities".

One such cadet at Helyg volunteered to cook the breakfast each day. The first two mornings he failed to produce any tea to drink complaining that there was too much for one man to cope with. "As an officer", I told him, "you will not be expected to do everything yourself; the thing is to enlist the help of others. Why not grab the first person you see and ask him to make the tea?" Next morning I looked in to see how he was getting on. A wicked grin passed over his face. "Ah Sir, will you make the tea please?" For a dangerous moment my pride as the man in charge reacted. Then I said "Of course! I see you got the point". He later passed out well.

I did not get on well with Chris Bonington as cadet secretary, but his honest admission of his own failings has built a real friendship between us: "... ideally we should have taken novices out, but we didn't. We were totally elitist and just used to go out and do our own climbing; we actually discouraged beginners!" (Desert Island Climbs with Chris Bonington in Craggs, April / May 1981)

A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT 007

Lt. Col (Ret'd) H R A Streater. OBE

Tony Streater's early career as a soldier and mountaineer would be the envy of any young officer today and it is sad that such opportunities no longer exist. He went straight from school to India, as a Cadet, towards the end of the war. At OCTU his room mates included a Sikh and a Rajput and so, from early days, he learned about the people and their language. Just as he had completed jungle training for Burma, the bomb was dropped and so he went instead to the North West Frontier to join his Indian Army regiment. Here he soon seconded to the irregular forces, The Frontier Scouts, and remained with them for the next happy and adventurous six years - The Zhob Militia, the Tochi Scouts and the Chitral Scouts. This was true Boys Own stuff, living and working with the Pathan tribesmen, patrolling the Afghan border, sometimes with horse and camel, but mostly on foot. The mountains were all around him - climbing steep ridges and crossing snow covered passes were just part of the daily routine. No wonder he became a mountaineer! Tirich Mir in Chitral was his first mountain and this was to lead to many others, including Everest with the AMA in 1976. Following Everest he took over as our President from Lord Hunt and later also became President of the Alpine Club.

Mountaineers are well known for being pretty independent minded sort of people ! When I was approached in late 1956, about the possibility of forming an Army wide climbing club of some sort, I was not particularly enthusiastic. If people wanted to climb they would get on with it without other people having to organise it for them. I was, I later realised, being very selfish and had not appreciated just how fortunate I had been so far and that others had not had the same chance.

When I returned to the UK at the end of 1950 to join the Gloucestershire Regiment, following my time with the Indian and Pakistan armies, I had just climbed Tirich Mir with the Norwegians . I was surprised to find that I seemed to have become known in mountaineering circles. I was invited to join the Alpine Club and was considered as a possible for the 1953 Everest Expedition. This was not to be but I did go that year to K2 with the Americans . As a result of this I was on Kangchenjunga in 1955 and then invited to lead the Oxford University Expedition to Haramosh in 1957 . I was busy preparing for Haramosh when I was approached about the Army Climbing Club and hence my lack of interest . On my return from Haramosh I found that the Committee had assumed that I would join in due course and had kindly kept a number for me as a Founder Member of The Army Mountaineering Association - 007. I have Colonel Gerry Finch, whose idea it was to form the Association, to thank for this

John Muston's excellent article tells of the early days of the Association and of Gerry Finch's proposal for our first Himalayan expedition. I was asked for my ideas about this and was firmly of the opinion that the expedition should be so planned that new blood from the Army would be introduced to the Himalayas . The plan should allow for the maximum amount of travel and climbing by small parties within the expedition. There was little point in just collecting together the few Himalayan 'old hands' who were serving at that time, with the object of making a desperate attempt on the 'highest unclimbed' or the ' most difficult ' Himalayan peak. These ideas were accepted and ,in due course, I was invited to get on with it. I was not over enthusiastic about this as I had hardly recovered from the traumatic time we had had on Haramosh and I was meant to be studying for the Staff College.(I never did get to the place!). My family too had been through enough already. However, the idea of a return to Pakistan was always attractive and I thought I had better make sure that I hadn't lost my nerve. Having forfeited some months of seniority, pay and service towards pension while away on K2, I insisted that we should be considered as on duty. This was eventually agreed and so the seeds for Adventurous Training were sown. The area selected was that of the Tirich Gol in Chitral. This would have given access to the mass of glaciers and unclimbed peaks that lie along the Afghanistan border to the north of Tirich Mir. But at the eleventh hour we heard that political permission

had not been granted so we went instead to the Chogo Lungma area to the north of Gilgit. This proved to be ideal for what we planned to do.

Our stated aim was 'to introduce personnel with some background of mountaineering or expedition experience to mountaineering and travel in High Asiatic terrain, with a view to training a nucleus of instructors for organising expeditions in future years'. It seems hard to believe now but we had some difficulty in raising the numbers we required. Other than officers, we could find only one who qualified, Sergeant Mike Quinn, who at that time was an Instructor at The Army Outward Bound School at Towyn.. There was Gwen Moffet ,WRAC, an accomplished climber, but at that time having a female in the party was quite unthinkable as far as the War Office was concerned! Two officers from the Royal Navy joined us as did three from the Pakistan Army .Of these Captain Javed Akhter went on to become one of Pakistan's most distinguished mountaineers. Sadly he was killed in the Bangladesh war. The Pakistan Army helped in every possible way and their Commander in Chief, Field Marshal Ayub Khan, became one of our Patrons.

We had a most successful expedition . We climbed six new peaks between 17,000 ft and 23,000ft .These included the first ascent of Malubiting East and both Gloster Peak and Engineers Peak were over 19,000 ft. These names were purely for our own identification but they seem to have found their way onto the Karakoram map ! We also visited several new passes on the Hispar Wall .

But the measure of any success must be in the laying of a sound foundation for future expeditions. There have been so many since then and I wonder if it is ever going to be possible to publish a full list ? Not only are our members now at the forefront of expeditioning all over the world but we are equally active with our rock and sport climbing. There is room for all . From Gerry Finch as member 002 through to Cpl Beasley at 5000, our membership has gone from strength to strength. As I write, our latest team are on their way to Gashabrum . Long before this journal is published we hope they will have returned safely from a successful venture. There was no problem in finding the numbers for this team, rather it was a question of selecting from the many hundreds who could have qualified for a place . The Army Mountaineering Association has certainly come a long way in the past forty years.



ANOTHER DAY ANOTHER DOLLAR

SOME CLIMBING ANECDOTES

by Maj(Ret'd) Alun Davies

Major Alun Davies started climbing on a CCF camp in Snowdonia at Easter 1964. He considers himself very lucky to have been active in the hills throughout the 27 years he spent with the Royal Regiment of Wales. His main interest has been ski mountaineering which, he continuously maintains, is the most demanding of the Alpine pursuits. He retired in 1992 and is now managing director of Grosvenor Waterside: a property development company.

It was Easter and I was about 14 years young - we were attending the Cadet Force Arduous Training Camp in Scotland. Like most things in life it was not what it seemed. It was neither arduous - nor was there much training and it was not much of a camp. In fact we were living in that well known bothy, otherwise known as the Kingussie Drill Hall. I remember going on long walks by day and being much more interested in watching the TA doing Bren Gun drills in the Drill Hall in the evening. To a young school-boy that was real excitement. The odd night we stayed in old bothies and enjoyed their spartan charms. Over ten years later I was still a member of the Mountain Bothies Association - is it still alive I wonder?

Another camp with the Cadets took us to Snowdonia during Easter 1964 and I remember the physics master, Tim Akrill, taking me rock climbing for the first time in Ogwen. Commando boots were really popular and we thought we had the latest kit. With hemp waist lines and wooden chocks we had a lot to learn. Perhaps the most memorable trip was a visit to a Norwegian army unit one year and they let us sleep in tents with a firebox on the main tent pole for warmth. We tried to ski and ate raw fish - and I still have a picture of Oz Clark peeing in the snow - he is now better known for his knowledge of wine!

During one winter holiday while still at school, and having caught the mountain bug in the school cadet force, I saved up to go on a winter climbing course run by Hamish MacInnes in Glencoe. Based in the SYHA hostel we spent days walking out to the hills - long before the ubiquitous minibus became known. God, those Hawkins leather boots hurt - I remember bashing them with a poker to get my own back for the pain they caused, and to soften the leather. Apart from the usual dramas on Stob Coire a few of us went off to climb the Clachaig Gully in our spare time. My mate Pete Cavanagh led off up the great cave pitch and was soon out of sight. Seconds later with a yell he came flying down head first; but luck was with us and the runner on a tacky tree held and I belayed him easily. That was enough for the day and so to the Clachaig Inn for the usual beer and bravado.

Living in Surrey I managed to get to the sandstone Harrisons Rocks quite often. Good fun was had sleeping under the cliffs and always eating sandy sandwiches. Strenuous climbs with few good holds, and this long before the arrival of friction shoes.

In 1966 I went to RMA Sandhurst and soon joined the climbing club. This was real freedom. What a huge treat it was to be able to book a Land Rover with trailer and driver for the weekend and get away to Swanage, Derbyshire and Snowdonia. In those days we could camp at Pont y Gromlech beneath the big cliffs of the Llanberis pass - within easy reach of Nant Peris. As I sit typing this thirty years later I can see at the end of our sitting room an oil painting by the leading Welsh artist Kyffyn Williams of the Llanberis pass looking up from the end of Nant Peris to Pen y Pass.

Not long after leaving Sandhurst I was on a mortar course at Netheravon and spending the weekend in the Pen y Gwryd when I heard a call for the rescue team. In those days Chris Briggs was the landlord and he was fit and useful in the hills. At first light I joined the rescue at Pen y Pass and it turned out that an old friend from New College - Andy Marshall - had fallen down Parsley Fern Gully below Crib y Disgyl. We walked up and found his body and carried him back. It was my first unhappy climbing incident.

In the late 60s I was at the Welsh Brigade Depot at Crickhowell and was able to spend a great deal of time in the hills. The limestone quarries of Breconshire were always available and we almost wrote the guidebooks. The snows on the Brecon Beacons were always tempting though the quality of the ice on the North face of Pen y Fan was never really good enough to offer the climbs it should. I found a great opportunity for going on courses and through the generosity of HQ Scotland I went on every course that Glenmore Lodge ever ran - at that time. The Winter Survival was very entertaining. The most dramatic event was our failure as a course to find the "victim" who had been buried in daylight on the Cairngorm plateau. Hours later, the dogs lost the scent and when finally found he was in a state of advanced hypothermia.

The Mountain Rescue Course was made all the more exciting by the arrival of Hamish MacInnes who brought along his latest system for bringing cliff accident victims off with an aerial ropeway. These Heath Robinson efforts were as likely to kill the rescue party as the victim but in the meantime they produce a lot of laughs. Another highlight was the arrival on the course of Yves Chouinard who had come over from the States to lecture. On his second day he was avalanched in one of the Corries. The Scottish slopes just have no respect.

At this time, when not in Scotland I manage to spend a good deal of time at the Army Outward Bound School in Tywyn. I did every canoe and climbing course they ran and was very much taken with the idea of working there. Mike Wright the Chief Instructor was my hero with his great

Labrador Thor and we became good friends over the years. Ron Reilly will never be forgotten for his huge enthusiasm and his loquaciousness, nor for his home made tent which weighed a ton and blew away on the Carnedd's one windy day.

Some people may know the story of Mike Wright going to Scotland to climb with John Cunningham at Glenmore. John always swore by the shortest axe and gave Mike one so short that the adze barely came out of Mike's fist! Some time later Mike entertained the great Cunningham at Tywyn and taught him to canoe - and presented him with a modified paddle which was about three foot in length!

One sunny summer's day as the sun was going down Mike and I were somewhere above Cenotaph Corner and talking about me transferring to the Outward Bound staff. Mike advised me against it. I took his advice and never regretted it. With a scar on his face, a handshake like a vice and a ready smile he was a legend in his time. I have not seen "the hod" for years but he is happily married in Norway where he works for the electricity board. For those that know him I cannot resist telling the story of Mike and one or two others retreating from the Valsorey hut on day 3 of the Haute Route on skis. It was a real blizzard and Mike was leading off down the Valley when his skis hit a rock - the covering of snow dropped off and revealed a petrol pump. Without noticing it they had skied into the middle of Bourg St Pierre.

Years as a subaltern in Germany meant bouldering on outcrops and top roping in the Oker valley with the odd skirmish into the Alps. I met my wife in Zermatt and suddenly took more of an interest in skiing. Not wanting to give up the mountains I took to ski mountaineering and joined a party from AMTC Silberhutte who were doing the Haute Route from Chamonix to Saas Fee. The Commandant and leader was Nick Cooke whose skiing ability earned him the nickname of the "abominable snowman". While a sensible and experienced leader he was utterly unable to stay on his feet and his antics caused great good humoured mirth on the hills.

I was totally taken by the ski mountaineering bug and during the 1980s organised half a dozen expeditions to the mountains of Europe. An early success was finding a guide in the shape of John Ellis Roberts - who was employed as the Head Warden in Snowdonia National Park. John proved a steady and experienced guide and we have remained good friends for fifteen years. He is well known to many AMA members from his work in North Wales and with the MBE, OStJ, and Jubilee medal has more on his chest than most of them!

These expeditions became highly organised. The ideal group seemed to be eight in a minibus of whom two non skiers did the driving and admin. This great flexibility meant that the six could be dropped on the hills and

recovered a few days later often in another country. We carried small VHF sets to link between the hill and the valley party which allowed us to change the RV and this often saved many hours of walking. Over the years we got the hang of arranging accommodation in the various host nation barracks both in France and Italy. This was always a great bonus and offered convenience and hospitality that is hard to match as a civilian.

The good companionship, which of course paid no heed to rank, was an aspect I remember particularly well. Sitting in the high huts preparing a meal of Arctic rations after a long day was always a treat. Bad moments were thankfully rare though we had the inevitable epics over the years. One French military guide led us down the middle of the Geant icefall and fell down the first crevasse himself. We got him out and we all limped in to Chamonix much later. Perhaps the most frightening experience was late morning one day in April. We were practising on the snout of the Glacier du Bossons which is just south of Chamonix town. Another couple of groups were there as well and we were all practising front pointing, and placing ice screws. Some of our party were in the middle of the little valley cut by the glacier and some were on the sides when up above us, from the area known as the "junction", we heard a big bang and looking up we saw a serac falling away. Great lumps of rock the size of cars were bounding very fast down the glacier. It was so steep at the top that they were almost falling free. As they fell they dislodged rocks which joined in melee. As the ice blocks hit rock they exploded into meteors the size of minis. A French Army group had posted a sentry who yelled out the alarm and we all started to seek shelter. I front pointed like a demon and found a crack to hide in as these blocks got nearer and closer. To my horror I saw that two of our party were in the centre line of the glacier and too late to move to cover. In seconds a massive block was flying along at waist height and, as it was about to wipe them both out, they dived to the ground and the ice sailed past the spot on which they had been standing. It was extremely hairy - and like many dangers it had come when we least expected it. The adrenaline had certainly improved my front pointing skills. I then found that I could not reverse my climb! All's well that ends well and we had a story to tell over the beers in the Bar Nat that night.

Well it is now 1996 thirty years since I joined the Army and I must have been a paid up AMA member for about 25 of those years. I am a Managing Director of a property development company and the only things I climb are the stairs of the office blocks we build. With luck I may get to the Alps in the spring for a week of ski mountaineering. For some years I have been a member of the Alpine Ski Club (really a club dedicated to serious ski mountaineering) and am now a Vice President.

The Army gave me a great deal of opportunity to enjoy the mountains and I will always be grateful for that. I hope soldiers in the future will be able to get as much pleasure from their membership of the AMA as I have.

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE LIKELY LADS

by Major (Ret'd) M.T. King

We hear a lot nowadays about the Internet's World Wide Web but such things are nothing new. The AMA has had a world wide web for years. You could call it the equivalent of African talking drums. It is hard to define exactly but means telephone calls, fax machines, the AGM, the Newsletter, the Journal, who said what in the pub and reading the DCI; it means putting your money where your mouth is, who pays for the petrol, sending the map, finding a fixer, taking a chance on it, a first class stamp; it means happy coincidences, missed opportunities, chance meetings, big ideas, attention to detail, the posting order, the answerphone, the weather forecast. Above all the original AMA Web is about AMA people communicating.

Unlike many other mountaineering clubs, the AMA is a loose association of members who are, for the most part, constantly moving from location to location as their jobs change. At any instant, many AMA members are employed outside UK. We have no club hut in North Wales or local pub to act as a regular meeting place. Our committee members are often holding down busy jobs while trying to satisfy the needs of what is now one of the biggest climbing clubs in the country. In these circumstances the Web helps members to share ideas, to spread the news, make plans and sustain enthusiasm, so let me introduce you to one small part of the AMA web and see how they have progressed.

The Likely Lads were prominent members of the 1968 Exercise Monte Bianco (MB III). It was only the third such exercise to be held on the Italian side of the Mont Blanc range at the invitation of the Italian alpine troops and had not yet settled into the orderly routine of later years. The Alpini were a little unsure of what they had let themselves in for and we did not know what to expect from them. Our climbs regularly went from exhilaration to exasperation and back again.

Some of the Likely Lads were already AMA members and some like myself were encouraged to join the AMA soon afterwards. Our achievements were modest - Mt Dolent, Dent du Geant and Mt Blanc, the last by the normal Italian route and the old Brenva route - but those few weeks in the Alps started many climbing careers. They also created another piece of the AMA Web. Over the years, the mini-web created on MB III has been steadily enmeshed with others. Each of the Likely Lads has made a contribution and this is surely true of every AMA member. Of course bits of the Web die. Perfectly decent climbers become ensnared by other earthly pleasures. Some even turn to golf. Despite that, the AMA Web survives,

continually renewing itself so that its extent and complexity is one of the abiding strengths of the Association.

Anthony Hazell

I mention Anthony Hazell, the leader of MB III, mainly because he had connections with the very beginnings of the AMA, through Jimmie Mills. Jimmie had made his mark as the leader of the successful Alaskan expedition in 1957 (See his book "Airborne to the Mountains") and was an early member of the Association. Anthony was an enthusiastic alpine mountaineer on Jimmie's King Yang Chish expedition of 1962, on which Jimmie himself was killed. He left the British Army soon after MB III, went out to Canada to run Outward Bound Canada and made it a very successful venture.

Gerry Owens

Gerry Owens was the deputy leader of MB III and was arguably the finest mountaineer that the Army has produced. While on MB III, Meryon Bridges, Gerry and I attempted the Aiguille Noire de Peuterey. We had route-finding problems and eventually backed off but Gerry's speed of movement, strength, confidence and irrepressible cheerfulness left a lasting impression on Meryon and me. In the late sixties he teamed up with Fred Salt (of whom more later) and did hundreds of routes around UK and abroad.

In 1969 Gerry was in the summit team on the second ascent of Tirich Mir, an AMA expedition led by Jon Fleming. The AMA then mounted an expedition to climb Annapurna by the original route in 1970, at the same time as Chris Bonington's team was climbing the South Face. Gerry reached the top of Annapurna with Henry Day, just ahead of Don Whillans and Dougal Haston. Their climb was only the second successful ascent of the peak.

Those were golden years for the AMA and Gerry helped to make them golden. As Fred Salt testifies "his superb temperament made him a very easy chap to get along with and Gerry's ability to keep up a relentless pace at altitude was well known among army climbers". Another Himalayan trip was mounted to Kulu in 1973, during which Gerry and others climbed Indrasan and Deo Tibba. Then in 1975 Gerry went on Jon Fleming's AMA Nuptse expedition. His strength and energy were astounding: he was head and shoulders above the rest of us and was going for the top when he and Richard Summerton were swept to their deaths from the summit couloir.

Meryon Bridges

MB III was the start of Meryon Bridges' mountaineering career, as it was for me. With Taffy Morgan we were members of a very strong RMCS Shrivenham club, based mainly on the Bristol crags and North Wales. We climbed every weekend and spent our summers in the Alps. Meryon was famous for his apparently effortless style and disdain of runners (I think he only put them in for other people's benefit). After MB III we were "encouraged" by Hugh Wright, our military boss and an AMA fanatic, to join the AMA.

Like many AMA members Meryon is an accomplished offshore sailor and is always vulnerable to the call of the sea but has managed to keep climbing high on his personal agenda. In 1971 he went to Greenland on one of John Muston's innumerable expeditions, followed by an ascent of Mt Kenya in 1972.

He was then a member of two major Services Himalayan expeditions in 1973 and 1974 so was a natural choice for the 1976 Everest team. Unlike many of us who were drawn away to other areas after Everest, he has been back to the Himalayas regularly! He was on Api in 1980 with Crispin Agnew, Kirat Chuli (reconnaissance) in 1984, Kirat Chuli in 1985 and Everest in 1992, all with Mike Kefford. In 1996 he crowned his Himalayan achievements by leading the successful Joint Services Expedition to Gasherbrum 1.

Fred Salt

Fred Salt was a section 2IC on MB III and one of the strongest climbers in the group. He had started climbing in 1950 with his father. He joined up in 1963 and by 1968 was already a seasoned alpinist and expeditioner. With Gerry Owens, his OC in 1 WFR at the time, he enjoyed a perfect partnership, Fred leading on hard rock and Gerry taking over on difficult ice - "We complemented each other in many ways". They shared many climbing days (and cold bivouacs) in UK, Gibraltar ,the Alps and the High Atlas before Gerry went off to the Marines in 1968. "I never did climb with Gerry again and was gutted to learn of his death on Nuptse."

After MB III Fred continued to build up a formidable list of mountaineering achievements, leading successful expeditions all round the world including the Himalayas and the Andes. Now a civilian, he is still going strong after over forty years of climbing and says, "I hope to go on as long as my body will let me". Fred's part of the Web is probably as big as anyone's because he has managed to bridge the age gap successfully and is still a very active member of the Association.

Taffy Morgan

Taffy Morgan had been climbing longer than any of the other young officers on MB III and like Anthony Hazell provides links back to another era. He cultivated a Don Whillans look - fag between teeth and flat hat - and his experiences on MB III, especially his Brenva Face climb with Gerry Owens and Fred Salt, inspired him to lead our 5-week alpine bash in 1969. For £40 he found an old Transit which at the time was used as a mobile chicken coop on a Welsh hill farm. We cleaned it out, Meryon fixed it mechanically and with the Hon Rupert Manners - possibly the scruffiest aristocrat to grace the summit of the Matterhorn, we set off. In 5 weeks we climbed two dozen of the finest peaks in the Alps, the high spot being an epic 3 day traverse of the entire Mischabel chain in terrifying conditions. After this Taffy, newly married, turned more to hill walking - still a favourite pursuit - and faded from mainstream AMA activities.

Tim King

MB III opened my eyes to alpine mountaineering. Like Meryon, I had come late to climbing but had spent every available moment on rock. After MB III we could think of ourselves as "proper" mountaineers. Meryon and I were so entranced by the Alps that we stayed on in Val Veni, living under a large rock and sharing our meagre rations with a mouse. I don't think we did much more climbing and were soon hitching for home. Some of our lifts were pretty bizarre, including a nun on a motorised tricycle. The 1969 trip further whetted our appetite for the Alps and Rupert Manners and I returned in 1970 for more big peaks by easy routes.

After Norped in 1971 I had my first taste of the "real" Arctic, when, in 1972, I went with Phil West, Roland Ebdon and others on John Muston's Axel Heiberg Island expedition. John, of course, is the biggest Web site in the AMA as he seems to know everyone. For nearly two months we "pulked" around in small teams, making first ascents of anything that took our fancy and giving them rude names, most of which were totally unacceptable to the Canadian authorities! Sadly Ken Scaife, a member of Noel Dilly's team, was killed in a crevasse accident and Noel himself had to be rescued by Bronco Lane but I was well and truly bitten by the Arctic bug and longed to go back.

I passed up the chance to go on the Kulu trip in 1973 in favour of a trip to Denali with Charlie Le Gallais and others. Several of us were badly frost-bitten in the Alps on the pre-Denali training and I thought that my climbing days were over. Luckily I was posted to Chepstow and found, Len Atkinson, Rick Broad and a multitude of climbing apprentices to prove me wrong. Chris Field was also there but strangely we did not climb together, possibly because our tours did not overlap sufficiently. 1974 was

spent climbing in the Alps, the Dolomites and all round the UK. I really enjoyed my climbing that year. Len and Rick were a great pair and on Alpine Roundabout - an AMA alpine extravaganza masquerading as training for the Himalayas - I teamed up with Crispin Agnew for my most enjoyable alpine season so far.

I was a reserve for Nuptse in 1975 and only went at the last minute when John Swanston had to drop out. Everest in 1976 was followed by domestic bliss but little climbing. After East Greenland in 1980 I was posted to Nepal for 2 years, trekking alone when I could get the time off and occasionally making solo ascents of small peaks near the Border. Needless to say my "All Over Nepal" trekking permit came in handy. Despite the modest nature of my own achievements, I did have the satisfaction of smoothing the way for AMA expeditions in the area.

Since 1982 I have struggled to maintain the old level of activity. I led two small Greenland trips in '89 and '92 and spent the winter of '91 in Kenya, climbing. I went back to the Alps in the summers of '94 and '95 with my son William, also now an AMA member, and we climbed together in Burgundy in the summer of '96. I try to attend local meets and still find the Members Meets and AGMs a great source of encouragement and ideas for future projects, as well as good opportunities for climbing. Like Fred Salt, I hope to go on until I drop.

Of the Likely Lads, two have moved away from mainstream AMA activity, three are still strong Web sites and the Most Likely Lad is dead but at some time in the life of the AMA all of us have been active; expeditions, climbing trips and winter evenings at the climbing wall have brought us together with other AMA members, many from completely different parts of the Association, and these meetings have spawned further connections. The pattern is typical across the AMA but the world is changing. The Association is on the Internet and, who knows, quite soon may be running its own World Wide Web site, with reports of climbs even as they are happening, a future meets programme that actually arrives in time for action and, miracle of miracles, book reviews that can be read before the books are in the shops.

No doubt we will let technology take the strain but I cannot help feeling that no electronic wizardry will ever entirely replace the original AMA Web. People need people: on-line, interactive climbing CVs are no substitute for eyeballing your prospective expedition members. Virtual reality, like climbing walls, may be fun but it cannot compete with the real thing. Even as I write, new Web links are being forged - over the telephone, in the pub, on the rock - and long may it stay that way. Let technology help, as I am sure it must, but apart from the individual talents of its members the real strength of the AMA lies in the all-pervading, enjoyable and extremely effective camaraderie of the original Web.

MY FIRST EASTER MEET - 1970

by Maj (Ret'd) Ben Smith

Ben Smith is a "front - page " member of the A.M.A. which makes him far from young . He started climbing in 1966 and was old then . The Vice Chairman once said of him that "He has climbed more VS's badly than anyone else I know " . He was General Secretary of the AMA, and is a member of the Climbers Club . Despite all of this, he is still patiently awaiting his election to Honorary Membership .

It behoves me to say at the outset that there was nothing particularly 'special' about my first Easter Meet . It was not quite my first trip to Scotland to climb, and nothing of nail biting consequence was achieved . Somehow, though, it remains a kind of minor milestone . A previous " career " consisting (save one week) of short routes in Devon and Cornwall really started to broaden out a bit . It was the time of the bottomless MMA pit when one merely had to twitch to initiate a 1000 mile claim at Public Transport Rate; sadly missed these days no doubt . On this occasion, however, I took the sleeper at public expense to be met by Peter Breadmore at the Fort . We were to be interned at Ballachulish . Pete has now sadly left the Army and these shores some 10 or more years ago; a most charming man, a fine mountaineer, but an even ropier rock - climber than me; too big and bulky to be very smooth above V . Diff (p.s.don't send him a copy) He had his girlfriend with him, now his wife, and she stayed with us in the Drill Hall . If there were any other occupants I cannot recall them, but we were fed and accommodated even in those days .

The weather was consistently fine, and apart from one abortive walk to the foot of the Ben and a hesitant start up Gardyloo Gully, abandoned in the face of falling ice (we decided that this meant a dangerous thaw was in progress) we confined our activities to Rock Climbing .

Three routes particularly stick in my memory . One day we did Crowberry Ridge followed by Agag's Groove, a longish day but we were younger then. Crowberry Ridge gets a starless mention from Kevin Howett in " Rock Climbing in Scotland " and starless it deserves to remain . But Kevin, I protest, even in those days I didn't wear tweeds and even now I'm not bald ! But back to the route . After what is now rated as the "severe" traverse then wall on slopies, the route deteriorates into Moderate and moderately boring padding . Of Agag 's I remember nothing . We obviously didn't know in those days that January Jigsaw was far superior or we would have done it . The descent down the North of the Buchaille was memorable for a hundred foot fall come slither down a snow slope, which immensely impressed a party of girls at its bottom . They thought it was deliberate !

The third route I remember was Clachaig Gully . We did it on a scorching hot day and I needed a drink . Being a discerning sort I waited until above a dead sheep found lodged in the Gully before taking a sip from the Gully stream, only to count a further eleven dead sheep before reaching the top . Luckily, as I recall, there were no lasting effects . We descended down the side of the Gully; in those days not overly hairy but now distinctly frowned on as a descent from the more popular Aonach Eagach Ridge . Of the climbing I remember little even though I repeated the route in 1982.

We did other routes in Glen Nevis and it may of been on this meet when I espied a certain John Muston frolicking there with some prospective team members, whilst training for probably his seventeenth Greenland trip . But I don't recall him staying at Ballachulish ? So that was my first Easter Meet, and I have lost count of how many I have been to since, but it has to be between twelve and twenty . Someone once wrote in the Newsletter that the first thing they noticed on their slightly late arrival was that Ben Smith wasn't there —ah, what fame ! They are a fine institution and I hope that the three Services manage to keep them going (or have they binned them already ?)

CLIMBING IN JAPAN

by Brig (Ret'd) Paddy Ryan OBE

Paddy Ryan started climbing in Austria in 1960 and after 10 years hard work was climbing to V Diff with some difficulty. After that it was all downhill, a horizontal member of the Alpine Club, and for the last fifteen years editor of the DHO Journal, the house magazine for the "Downhill Only Ski Club of Wengen"

As the Japanese business-man struggles home on his jam packed commuter train he congratulates himself that his business has survived another day - business and in fact life in Japan is a matter of day to day survival. This short term outlook encourages a sense of zestful living in the Japanese and nowhere is it more apparent than in the mountains. The reaction of the foreign resident is either to wall himself up in his apartment and hope for home-leave or to roll with the tide. This latter reaction often looks like hysteria to the outsider but given a strong constitution and a robust sense of humour the average AMA member will survive and enjoy his outings in the mountains.

Unlike England, Japan's greatest ranges are close to the capital. Lying between 40 and 100 miles west and north west of Tokyo are the Japan Alps, usually divided for convenience into the Northern and Southern Alps.



A Bon Viveur Horizontal Climber

The Northern Alps run southward in a great chain for 100 miles while the Southern Alps are a triangular mass 50 miles in length including at the southern end Mount Fuji (3776 m). The Northern Alps can be reached by car or express train in about four hours; the foothills of the Southern Alps in an hour by commuter train.

The Northern Alps are the climbers' paradise in Japan. At around 3000 m there is a great choice of peaks. In August of 1976 I spent 10 days in the Northern Alps with a small party from the Japan Alpine Club (JAC). I say small party advisedly because she was! Like a lot of things in Japan climbing trips don't always turn out the way you first envisaged them. When I arrived in Tokyo in March 1976 I got in touch with the JAC with a view to finding an elderly horizontal climber like myself who fancied a day or two pottering round the huts in August. There were frequent conferences during which it became clear that the supply of elderly bon viveurs was running out - and with it knowledge of the English language.

It all ended on Ueno Station in Tokyo when I joined Miss Hashimoto, about 5 feet tall weighing no more than eight stone and carrying what I swear was a 100lb pack. She was a lawyer's daughter and a member of the JAC. Thank goodness for propriety's sake -there was also a young man!

We spent the first night at the Tokusawa Lodge about 2 hours walk up a broad wooded valley from Karnicochi, a mountain village a little like Zermatt on a sunny day. It's here that you have to make your mind up about raw fish and sleeping on the floor because if you don't like either there's not much point in continuing. Sleeping on the floor in an airy

room with balcony is no hardship. The floor itself is "tatami", a series of springy thick straw mats measuring about 6' x 3'. On to the tatami is unrolled a mattress on which you lie covering yourself with a quilt. In the morning the whole lot is bundled into a cupboard giving you free use of your room uncluttered by furniture.

Raw fish is something again and its easier to tackle it methodically. Raw slices of tuna look and taste not unlike smoked salmon. By easy stages you are into cod, bream and more anonymous kinds of fish until the day you graduate to your first piece of squid. At this point the amateur cries halt while the true professional goes onto the joys of blow-fish or the restaurants where the fish is still protesting vigorously while your helping is lifted out of his mid-section.

From the Tokusawa Lodge it was a pleasant trudge up through trees to the Karasawa Hut lying in a bowl surrounded by 3000 m peaks. From the hut we set out daily to the summits of Mount Karasawa (3103 m), Mount Oku Hodaka (3190 m), Mount Maehotaka (3090m), Mount Kitahotaka and other lesser peaks. The day usually started about 7am with a near vertical scramble to the first peak, then a breathtaking ridge traverse to nearby peaks and down by about 4pm. From every summit little lines of climbers could be seen on every face or path. Most parties were like us heading for a peak and then traversing on to a second peak before returning to the hut. The Karasawa Hut could accommodate about 50 so the balance lived in a great orderly tented city on the scree in the bowl.

The Japanese are cheerful climbers despite the enormous loads they carry. They are keen buyers of all the latest gear - Troll and Karrimor products for example are seen frequently - and they climb in the hottest weather in thick wool shirts and stout tweed breeches. A participant in any activity in Japan likes to show participation by the right hat - painters and other followers of the visual arts may be identified by their berets - and so in summer the climber wears a little soft corduroy hat with a narrow brim. Some of the young show their non-conformity by a jaunty base-ball cap, the English were told no-one in Japan wears hats so in my case I was identified by a sun-burnt bald spot.

It is in the evenings that the European climber misses his native hut-life. The last meal of the day is heralded by a bell at 5.30pm. There is a rush of stockinged feet to the dining-room and then a flat out ten minutes to take in fish, raw vegetables, a little pickle, enormous bowls of rice and small cups of bland tea. The last toothpick has been carefully manoeuvred beyond a screening hand by 5.50pm and by 6pm everyone is back in their tatami rooms for the night.

Miss Hashimoto carried everything on our day trips and she almost carried me up the last 100 metres on some days. However at or a little below

the summit of some of the peaks was a well-placed hut. By hut I don't mean a 'rifugio' but a full blown cafe with crates of iced beer and dormitories with beds. These are all established by private enterprises and are invariably stocked by helicopter. The bliss of staggering to 3000 m and then pushing 100 yen coins into electric canned beer dispensers should not be too lightly dismissed by real climbers - we horizontal men take our refreshment seriously.

In the winter and early spring there are heavy snow falls on the northern coast and the Northern Alps become serious winter climbs only tackled by the very best or the foolish. Temperatures drop by day to 0°C and by night to -10°C with fierce winds. During the winter we ski or keep our mountain trips to the areas further south and nearer home.

Within one hour of leaving our local station at Yotsuya we can be taking those first puffing steps up an 1800 m peak. By pushing further out to the two hour radius we get into a national park measuring 15 x 50 kms with accessible peaks up to 2000 m within a single day's reach. In the winter there are exhilarating hill walks almost all below the tree line but giving 6-8 hours of clear views and sharp summits. In the winter north facing slopes without benefit of sun must be taken seriously and what in the summer is a steep grassy slope becomes an ice and snow face in January. It was on the northern slopes of Mount Nokogiri last March that we encountered the Man with the Bicycle: only in Japan would this be possible and hence the warning about the symptoms of hysteria sometimes perceptible in foreigners trying to penetrate the Japanese mind.

Sue, (my wife) and I had just climbed on our own to the top of Mount Otake (1266 m) and sat in a sheltered niche in the rocks eating our lunch and looking at Fuji away to the south. On the way down our circuit took us north over three subsidiary peaks on a ridge and then down a steep north slope to the valley. It was on the first 100m of the path on the north face that Sue found a bicycle pump. At the time I thought this was odd. About 100m lower down I heard a voice below me saying "Excuse me", the literal translation of the Japanese phrase starting "sumirnasen ga", the only way a stranger could approach you politely, and I saw crawling up an ice-chute just below me a bloodstained figure lightly clad, his feet encased only in socks. The immediate problem was to get him up to our ledge and this we did although - and I hope John Muston will skip the next bit after all our lengthy talks on mountain safety - we had neither rope, ice axes or crampons. I regret to say I even had no gloves. It transpired that he was a student who being a keen cyclist had thought he could push his bike up a forest road to the col above us and then bring it down the footpath to join another forest road below. All had gone reasonably well until on the north

slope he had slipped carrying his bike and fallen about 50m down an ice-chute. Sure enough just below us was a smart red racing bike, lodged in a tree stump and without the pump. We made one or two rather feeble efforts to get the bike but decided as the afternoon was drawing in we had better get our cyclist down to civilisation. The Japanese are accustomed to shoes made in the form of slippers, the most famous are the wooden 'geta'. When faced with canvas shoes the young will usually tread down the heels to convert them to slippers. Shod in this manner he had started to carry his bike down. Inevitably when he fell he lost both shoes. Sue had a bar of chocolate which she pushed into him: we determined that most of the blood came from a number of dislodged teeth and a tap on the nose. Then we set off firmly with him between us talking in encouraging English voices about the joys of the Japanese hills in spring. We finally got him to a youth hostel where we left him after restoring his bicycle pump. What brings out the hysteria is the knowledge that we can only tell our closest Japanese friends of this encounter - the rest would be highly embarrassed by the story. Our foreign friends frankly wouldn't believe us.

THE BALLAD OF AVON GORGE

By Col(Ret'd) Meryon Bridges

Colonel Meryon Bridges owes his introduction to expeditions to J Muston who took him to West Greenland in 1971. From then on he pursued a career mainly in the Himalayas going to Himachal Pradesh, Dhaulagiri IV, Api, Kirat Chuli (twice) and Everest (twice). He has indulged in some Army service including the Gulf War, and 1996 saw him leaving the Army after leading the successful Joint Services Expedition to Gasherbrum 1.

The route was a graded VS
A pleasant Sunday outing.
And after several rope's progress
'Twas over, bar the shouting

Luigi led the crucial pitch
His progress like a tank.
By inching slowly up and up,
He took it on the flank.

The rope ran slowly out and out,
With many pensive pauses.
It might be thought that it was drawn
By irresistible forces.

Then came a pause that grew and grew.
His second grew concerned.
For now the crux was past, and thus
No problems were discerned.

At last, and after many calls,
Luigi answered back.
“You can come up now, if you like.
I’m taking in the slack”

The second upward made his way,
It met the guidebook’s claims.
But as he did, he smelt a smell,
Of Kennomeat and drains.

The source was just below a ledge.
The pong grew foul and more.
For on that small stance Tim had shit,
Where none had shat before!

His second sought to remonstrate.
“You’ve crapped upon the climb!
You are a dirty, loose bowelled, sod.
This rock’s a mass of grime.”

Luigi said, “I’m sorry, Mate.
But as I’m sure you know,
It’s just that when you’ve got to go,
You see, you’ve got to go.”

The second struggled to the top,
All conversation died.
And when he viewed his once new rope,
The second could have cried.

The climb was not attempted since
This foul besmirch came known.
His second always leads his climbs.
Luigi climbs alone.

THE REASON WHY

By Col.(Ret'd) Meryon Bridges

Oh, I have trod the lonely ways of height,
Seen starlight sparkle on the midnight snow,
Gazed speechless on the beauty of the morning light,
And gone where only favoured mortals go.

'Cross many trackless paths of air I've stepped,
My shadow on the clouds beneath my feet.
Upon the great ice rivers I have slept,
And heard their grumbling talk within my sleep.

I've watched the dawn light chasing down the hills,
Shared the still silence of soft settling snow.
In battered tents, fast shredding into frills,
I've watched black hours, 'neath the storm wind's roar.

Days begun in darkness, numbed fingers fumbling,
Soft cursing straps and buckles, clogged with snow.
In haste to be away, cold feet fast freezing,
Reluctant to begin, deep burdened, stepping slow.

A time of silent struggle, laboured gasping,
Sensation just of breathing broken glass.
A step, a breath, a step, throat sore and rasping,
And longing that this time of toil might pass.

Moonset, and the stars begin to fade.
And soon pale dawn disperses sombre grey.
Now blue, soft apple green, and pink displayed
In breathless beauty comes the sun, and it is day.

But other times the day comes in with storm;
Thick cloud and spindrift lashing on the wind.
The slopes above with deepening new snow burdened
A dread of avalanches weighing on the mind.

A bitter test of will, stretched over days
Relieved by scenes of beauty beyond word.
Courage, determination, comradeship and joys
Unknown to members of the common herd.

And if the Reaper calls out one. or more,
A life extinguished in the cold, without a sigh;
Or in outrageous maelstroms swept away
Unheard their silent screams, engulfed, they die.

Yet toil, nor fear, nor death deter elation.
To reach the peak makes hardship worth the while,
And all receding future fades from focus,
For on the summit, all the world is mine.

A WINDY NIGHT ON THE ROOF OF AFRICA

by Major Mark Perry MBE R Signals.

Major Mark Perry is a keen mountaineer who has travelled as widely as his limited funding arrangements permit in pursuit of technically straightforward peaks and remote trekking routes. This has included such exotic destinations as the Andes, Himalayas, Africa and the Vale of the White Horse. He is a founder member of the RSMC - an exclusive and secretive organisation governed by very obscure rules particularly regarding eligibility.

This anecdote concerns an expedition mounted by six keen young subalterns from the Royal Military College of Science during their summer vacation in 1984. In order to spare the blushes of various pompous majors and also some budding “captains of industry”, they will remain nameless throughout this article.

The expedition plan, like most ideas conceived by young officers was simple enough and involved the somewhat dubious justification of spending six weeks touring East Africa (hence avoiding the horrors of a military attachment) by an ascent of Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. Mention must be made at this point of the rations plan; the simple philosophy of maximum self-sufficiency was adopted. This was to be achieved by the purchase of vast quantities of a well-known brand of freeze-dried meals. These answered to various exotic descriptions and many readers will be familiar with their taste and texture, as well as the extraordinary and somewhat explosive side-effects.

The route chosen for the ascent was via Marangu on the south-east side of the mountain, commonly known as the “Tourist” route because of its popularity and the well-trodden path between the “mountain villages” run by the National Park authorities in order to accommodate the large numbers of visitors. The fees charged by the National Park at the time were quite

substantial and since they were based on a daily rate, most people attempted to get up and down as quickly as possible, regardless of the risks of altitude problems. In outline, the generally accepted routine was to take three days to get to the top hut just below the main peak (Kibo) and then make an early start in order to reach the summit and descend to the Park gates in two days.

Being impoverished young officers (is there any other type?), we decided to conform with this practise and duly arrived at Kibo Hut (4700m) in the middle of the afternoon of the third day. The hut is a large, solid building, with a superb view of the mountain and plains below. It is comfortable and well sited for summit attempts and suffers from only one major drawback, which is that no water is available. However, we were prepared for this and had carried sufficient quantities for our evening meal and copious brews to wash it down. The sleeping accommodation comprised of bunks and mattresses. We reserved a room for ourselves and set about making it look as if a bomb had gone off inside, as we prepared for an Alpine start the next morning. Late in the afternoon, we were joined by a lone Japanese lady, who had obviously seen us on the way up and no doubt felt reassured by the presence of the cream of the British Army. She spoke no English and even the most talented linguist amongst us (famed for his ability to get "discounts" at Indian restaurants on the strength of once having met a Gurkha officer) was unable to establish communications. We therefore smiled and carried on with our business.

That night was bitterly cold with winds and a storm passing through. Most people felt generally uncomfortable as a result of the altitude and also the knowledge of the physical challenge facing us. The guidebook advises an early start in order to make the most of the frozen scree and to avoid the demoralising sight of the length and steepness of the climb that is necessary to reach the crater rim. This also allows climbers to reach the summit at dawn, which is a truly memorable experience. Throughout the night the windows of the hut remained firmly shut to repel the elements and suffice it to say that it was also a noisy and active night inside the room, as a result of the digestive processing of the evening meal; so much so that actually most people were glad to get out and underway the next day. It must also be noted that for large sections of the scree slope, there was an element of jet propulsion to help with the ascent. This no doubt played its part in all of us reaching first Gilman's Point (5685m) and then some 40 minutes later, proudly signing our names in the book at Uhuru Point (5896m). We did not remain long at the top and returned to Kibo Hut in time for a late breakfast, prior to descending further.

We arrived at the hut to find our Japanese companion also packing up, having decided against a summit attempt. As we packed our kit in the room, she began to leave, but at the door she turned and with a totally straight face said, "Aih neffah knew Blitish Army was full of skunks". She then smiled and left us, helpless with laughter (of the embarrassed variety!).

SCOTTISH WINTER CLIMBING -

A PHILOSOPHY

by Capt. Will Manners RE

CAPTAIN WILL MANNERS realised he was a climber and mountaineer in around 1982. Since then he has climbed extensively in the UK and has climbed in the Alps, Spain, Norway, Iceland, Kenya, Nepal, Canada and the USA. Latterly, Will has completed a 28 month tour as the OC of JSMTTC Ballachulish gaining the Mountain Instructor's Certificate and a strong pair of legs in the process.

With a disconcerting hiss the wind flushed yet another torrent of spindrift down the gully. Pete had finished and was by now making polite conversation over the top with some rather critical looking climbers. With everything to lose one final heave on my seventy five centimetre walking axe found me, frightened witless, but safely over the cornice of South Central Gully in Glencoe to complete my first winter climb, solo! It was a 'negative experience' that fortunately drove me to learn and improve rather than hang up my wet leather boots and sell off the little gear that I owned. Motivation is obviously a pretty personal thing but there is no harm in trying to answer the unanswerable question!

Fourteen years have passed since this first 'epic'; Pete is now a sun tanned power boat instructor and I am still straining under an overloaded rucksack making slow progress up the Allt a Muilin towards the CIC hut. When folk ask why I climb words rarely do justice. 'If they have to ask the question then they won't understand the answer!' (Name that book). At times I have questioned my motives and others for that matter especially when cold, wet and tired. Phil Bartlett in a recent article suggested that "Climbing, when one is young at any rate, is motivated more or less by ambition and the hope of glory to come, and it is only after the event that one discovers the truth". It would appear to be a combination of a number of things including ambition and glory. The unquantifiable and unexplainable feelings and emotions experienced whilst climbing on a clear winter's day in the Scottish Highlands defy description and possibly justification.

Whilst walking into Creag Meagaidh in the winter of 1996 with a well seasoned climbing friend, spurred on by the knowledge that things were in 'nick' I asked him why he climbed. Initially stumped he eventually replied that climbing was like 'sex' (the mind boggles). After further thought he continued that he could climb a different route each day. Many climbers fail to come up with serious reasons for this obsessive and selfish passion which clearly creates problems when looking for sympathy or a weekend 'leave pass' from the other half.

Perhaps analysing one's reasoning or justification for climbing and mountaineering could lead to 'The Answer'. I hope not, that would give me nothing to quiz friends about as we wander in the hills, My own reasons must lie somewhere within the challenge, comradeship, commitment and the situations I often find myself in. Not least of all the pure rush of adrenaline when running it out on one of Scotland's classic ice lines.

The thrill and excitement of climbing and mountaineering, or more generally adventure sports, has over the years and in countless publications, been described in many by using anecdotes or models. On many occasions I have heard adrenaline junkies describing themselves as being right on the edge, that is only just in control. The nearer to the edge the more the excitement, the greater the actual or perceived risk. Whilst climbing and mountaineering especially in the Scottish winter, I find myself walking a tight rope or quite literally walking along a cliff edge gently stepping as near as I dare to the edge. With an almost morbid fascination I often find myself taunting the void to come and get me. The thrill and excitement is only there when I'm close to this imaginary edge. A similar thrill grips me when I lead on an indoor wall but the equation is not complete, for me it is not quite complete unless it is winter and the time is right. There is little doubt that adrenaline if delivered at a respectable rate and in controllable quantities is steps ahead of any artificial stimulant. If only inner cities had the resources to prescribe more thrill and excitement generated adrenaline.

Whilst the challenge, comradeship and commitment and of course the thrill draw me to climb and mountaineer they tend to have their own special moments, overlapping but dominating. Walking into a route in *Scotland generally leaves enough breath to converse and enough time to exhaust a subject*, (unless of course one is blessed with -20°C and ice dripping down to the roadside.) Some of the topics I have discussed or heard being discussed can be pretty diverse, from the 'other half' to politics. One tends not to be experiencing excess thrills or strong feelings of commitment more an affinity or bond with a rope partner; feelings generally stronger and more open on the way out or not as the day may dictate! Half way up a pitch thoughts of comradeship and commitment are often flooded by feelings of fight or fright. (or was it flight?). Maybe one of the attractions of the adventure is the whole package of emotions, unwritable, unrepeatable and sometimes unbelievable.

Does it really matter how one gets the thrill? Is it important what level one participates at. Achievement is a personal thing and is relative. Over the years one's aspirations and ambitions change and evolve and may even settle down. Others may constantly be searching for the ultimate challenge, be it the most stunning and desperate route or the most captivating moun-



Ben Nevis - The Garden of Eden

tain day in the best conditions. Regardless of the rapid development of mountaineering equipment the Highlands should always offer the same level of challenge provided GPS remains less reliable than the compass and Lochaber MRT go easy on the aluminium posts!

For me and (selfishly on my part) sadly for an increasing number the Scottish Highlands in winter seem to 'hit the nail on the head'. It may well be that for the British Scotland is the only accessible, (and dare I say reliable), yet remote winter play ground. For me, at the expense of not exploring the potential of North Wales and the Lakes in winter it is up the M6 and across the Erskine Bridge. If I lived in the Canadian Rockies I would be raving about the reliable and plentiful ice falls and the endless powder ski slopes. The Highlands are incredibly accessible and varied and offer some of the best and arguably some of the most concentrated winter climbing in the world. In such a densely populated and technologically advanced part of the world the Highlands still offer an escape from reality for many as far south as London and sometimes just for a weekend!

GOOD GUYS VERSUS THE BLONK

by Maj Phillip Brown, R.Signals

This episode, written by Maj (then Lt) Phillip Brown, refers to an outing that he and Mr (then Lt) Simon Lowe made whilst attending the JSAM 85. At this stage the pair had climbed together in the Canadian Rockies, Peruvian Andes, Mount Kenya, French Alps and the UK.

It's not often that climbing is likened to boxing and I don't attempt to make a comparison here, rather use boxing's point scoring system to illustrate the changing fortunes that many climbers experience during an epic. And so to the sparring.

Chamonix, July 1985. Lowie and I teamed up with like minded souls namely Dave and someone from the TA SAS, referred to as TA because I can't remember his real name. They were preparing for the Himalayas and fancied a crack at the Aiguille de Bionassay.

Getting beds for the night in the alpine hut just below the face, having walked for under 2 hours since leaving Cham, was definitely 10 points to

us in Round One. The Blonk won these back easily in Round Two, by ensuring that we were dehydrated and totally knackered having subjecting us to the hot and grunt filled atmosphere of the dorm. Still there is nothing like a wholesome and totally refreshing breakfast following the warden's gentle reveille at O Christ hundred hours- and there still isn't.

Round Three. It wasn't long before we were easing our way up the gentle gradient of the 3000 foot face - it was probably less but I stopped counting after the first 45. The route steepened and we witnessed a classic alpine dawn - another 10 points to us. The promising fine weather dissipated along with our meagre rations and the pace slowed. Still, we saw a broken spectre and warmed up our front points on the last couple of pitches to the top. The Blonk, however, was out to cut our lead because it was now 4pm, mild, and clouds were rolling all over us. Dave and TA were already on the Frontier Ridge, working like a well oiled Japanese digital watch. The last words I heard from Dave that afternoon were along the lines of 'I've got a family, even if you haven't'. I got the impression he wasn't enjoying the 'I'll lead and you hang on' strategy that TA had adopted.

Round Four and half an hour along the ridge, the Blonk was definitely raining with heavy blows. The snow was soft, patchy, corniced and, as knife edges go, pretty dodgy. It was 3000 feet down to either France or Italy. The scene might have been comical but for the fact that I had never experienced such prolonged pangs of anxiety (fear). Where the route permitted, the 'anchor man' would sit astride the divide, and the other would teeter along the edge, clamber over the belayer, and proceed, whilst the belayer turned the other way to resume his highly questionable *a cheval* stance. We had an understanding that in the event of a leader fall he would shout: 'By George, I've lost a leg, see you in Waterloo hospital'. The other would simply throw himself over the Italian side. This wonderful, although unproven, theory did contain fundamental flaws; the first and obvious one was if the leader was already on his way to Italy, and second, if the leader and the belayer couldn't actually see or hear each other. I have to admit that there were some outrageous thoughts running through my mind at this time, such as 'Have I paid my final mess bill from Shrivenham?' and 'Did I leave the car unlocked in Les Rosiers?' and 'Where the hell is that helicopter that's going to pluck us off this awful place?'. After two adrenaline depleting hours, the Good Guys were off the hook and determined to wipe out the Blonk's newly acquired, massive lead.

We hauled ourselves over the Dom and followed an eastern star that seemed to settle over the Vallot, or was it just the glint of sunlight reflecting off the tin roof. Either way, we knew we must be close when we stumbled across the trail of frozen turds. The hut provided some protection

more importantly, thrust a warm drink into our grateful hands. After a quick comparison of horror stories, it was time to sleep and ignore the scoreline. Of course, no one makes lightning alpine ascents carrying their sleeping bags! It would have been a good time to spurn traditions but, alas, it was too late. There were, however, a few blankets in the hut and TA had had the good and noble sense to reserve a couple for Lowie and me. Unfortunately he was now in a totally comatosed state and wrapped up in them. The strategy involving Waterloo hospital didn't seem too bad after all. Round Five was going painfully inactive.

At 4 am, the first of the day's urbanites dragged themselves in, en route for the top. This, I would not have minded except they spoke no English, were disagreeably noisy and seemed not to care too much about spiking my carefully thrown rope, (which was decorating most of the floor), with their hired crampons. Two hours later the trickle of punters had turned into a torrent. The combined effect of a bank holiday weekend and the promise of high pressure had sent the Continentals into a frenzy. I looked along the now busy final ridge to Blonk's summit. In the distance I could just make out the traffic lights, but much closer was the unmistakable figure of a gendarme checking passports and collecting the toll for the trekkers' equivalent of an autoroute.

The Good Guys, we decided, had made their presence felt and given the Blonk a bloody nose. We awarded ourselves one hundred points each and descended quickly for fear of being overheard. Prizes were awarded in copious amounts in Chamonix that night.



The Successful Gasherbrum I Expedition

A Fitting Finale to the First 40 years.

This completes a trio of 8000m peaks - Annapurna, Everest and Gasherbrum - on which AMA members have been successful.

John Doyle and Steve Willson in the Gasherbrum Icefall.

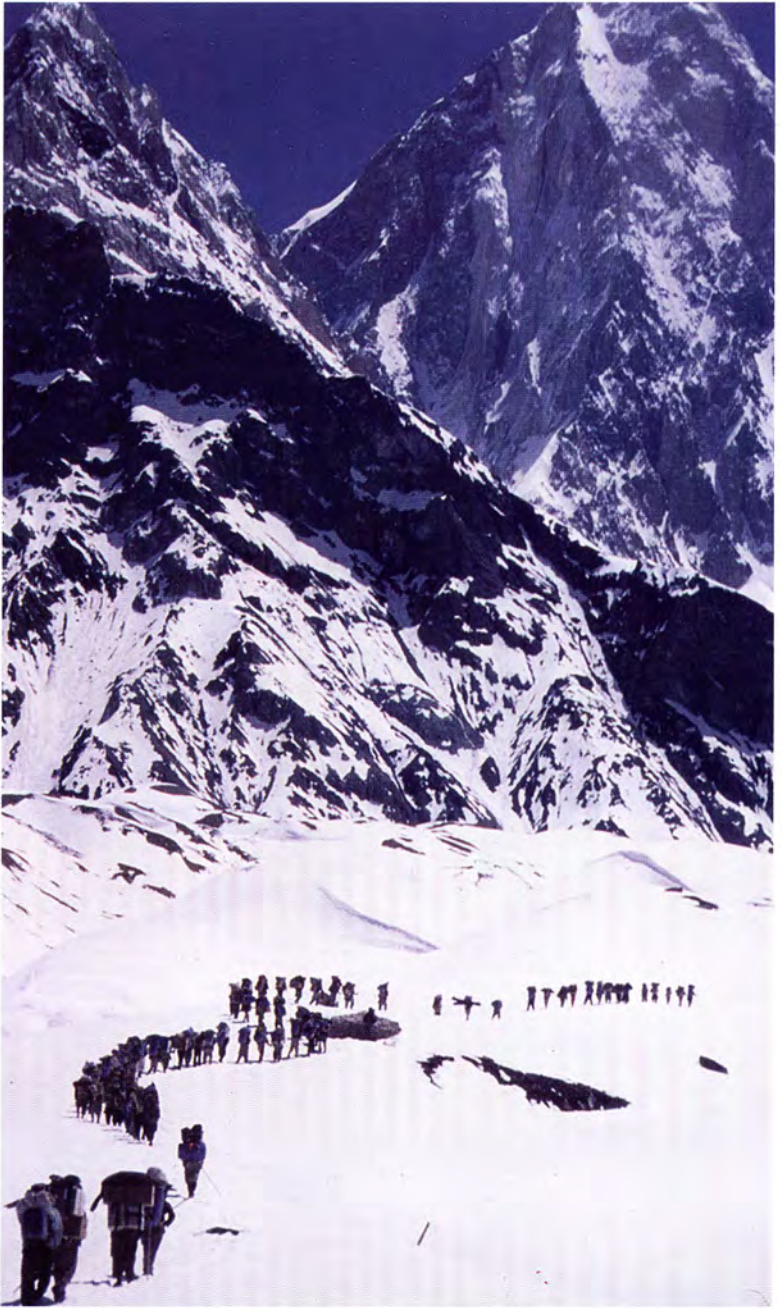




The Summit Party, Gasherbrum 10 July 1996



John Doyle in the Japanese Couloir Below Camp 3.



Porters Moving up the Baltoro Glacier towards Concordia



Basecamp at 5000m with West Wall of Gasherbrum

THE MILITARY ARTIST - AMONG THE MOUNTAINS

by Sgt Mike Paterson.



Snowdon Horseshoe M. Orr Paterson

Former Sgt.-Instr. MIKE PATERSON served with BAOR 1947-48. Since employed variously as Curator/Conservator (latterly at the RAF Museum, Hendon), teacher and tutor in adult education. Exhibited "Galloway Sketches" Church of Scotland, Kirkcudbright; "When Men and Mountains Meet", Alpine Club, 1994. Member of AMA since 1985. Some of his drawings are, or were, at JSMTTC (Wales) and with Robin Watts at Capel Curig. Two were published in the Journal of ABMSAC - Swiss Alpine Club.

It was a German artist, Emil Nolde, persecuted by the Nazis between the wars, but not a satirist like Grosz or Otto Dix, who declared "Everything original and primitive fascinated my mind. The vast, roaring sea, the wind, the sun, are still in their original state". And he might have added, the mountains.

Artists have included mountains in their pictures since quite early times but as backgrounds to their figure-subjects to begin with. A brisk stroll round the National Gallery will bear this out - most notably among the Italians. There is also a remarkable "Winter Landscape" by C.D. Friedrich that has a moving, spiritual quality: a crippled climber, having cast away his crutches in the snow reclines beside a rock in front of a solitary crucifix.

On my last visit to this Gallery I was pleased to see a picture on temporary exhibition, apparently by a serving officer Michael Wardley, a lively copy of John Constable's "The Cornfield." Flat as a board, of course, being East Anglia, but finely atmospheric. Constable did also paint in the Lake District and his sketches are in the Victoria and Albert Museum, with some by his host, John Harden, at Kendal.

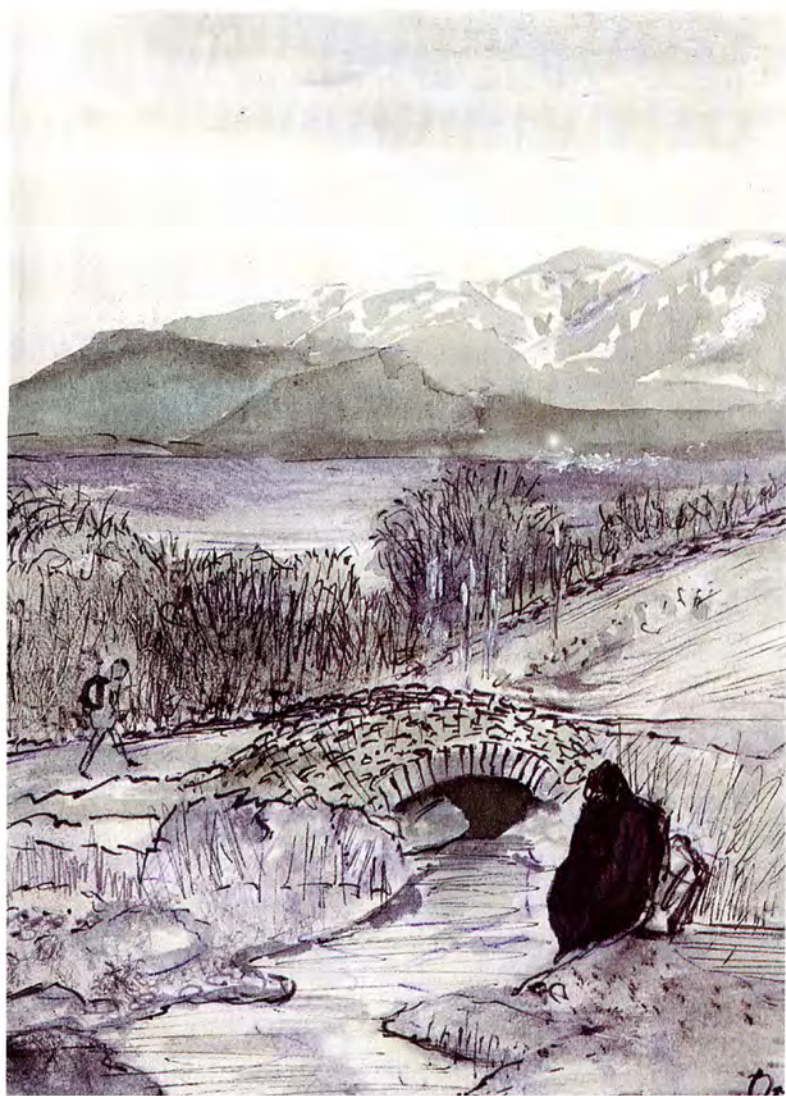
One of the pioneers of watercolour drawing in England was Paul Sandby, who was drawing master at the RMA in Woolwich in the mid 18th century and with his brother Thomas also made military maps and plans, but more influential still was John Cotman, several of whose mountain drawings are in the British Museum. His work was similar to John Varley's, but freer and more original. Varley's unfinished drawing of Snowdon shows how he concentrated on the mountain itself, leaving the trees to be filled in later.



Unfinished Watercolour by John Varley (courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum)

A Col. G.F. White made sketches in the Himalaya in the 1840s, and these were praised by Turner. It is worth noting that the eminent Lord Leighton who was to become President of the Royal Academy, having joined a Volunteer Regiment in Victorian times, rose to become Commander of the Artists' Rifles. There are few mountains in his pictures, except as background details, but plenty of decorous young women.

Paul Cezanne, on the other hand, who is now one of the most highly-regarded French painters of that period, produced over 60 versions of



Ashness Bridge, Derwentwater. M.Orr Paterson

Mont Ste. Victoire, near his home at Aix. For him, “the grandiose gets tiresome after a while...for every day a simple little hill does well enough. Out of the two World Wars emerged many good artists; most active in the twenties was David Jones (Dai Greatcoat), a book of whose drawings, “A Fusilier at the Front”, has recently been published. One who did not survive was Rex Whistler, a tank-commander in the Welsh Guards, killed in

1944. His diagram of the kit-layout for use in his Company was similar to that of the Royal Scots when I attended their Training Depot at the foot of the Pentlands in 1946. He painted a mural in 1927 for the Tate Gallery Restaurant, flooded in the following year when some of Turner's mountain sketches were also affected which are to be seen upstairs. Another mural of 1936-38, at Plas Newydd on Anglesey, shows in part a mountainous view which can be seen from the A55 coast road between Bangor and Conwy.

In World War Two, Lt.-Col. Sir Edward Dunlop (RAAMC) drew the River Kwai and Elephant Mountain, Tarsau, during his time as POW and Camp Surgeon in Thailand, c.1943 (illustrated in *The War Diaries of 'Weary' Dunlop*, 1987, now in paperback). His style of figure-drawing resembled that of Sapper Ronald Searle, whose "Prisoners Cutting into the Mountain at Konyu" is in *To the Kwai and Back* (Collins/IWM, 1988), showing the effective use of different-coloured inks and tinted paper.

I first gained an enduring interest in this genre of painting on visiting a Lakeland artist, Delmar Banner, in Little Langdale in the '50s. He was a contemporary of Heaton Cooper, author of "Mountain Painter" (1984), where he wrote that climbing and painting combined "the contemplation, the challenge, the quick decisions and the sheer joy of arriving occasionally at the place where one longed to be."

Beside me as I write now are colour-prints of Keith Shackleton's painting of Everest, and of Lincoln Rowe's pastel of the summit peeping over Lhotse. In 1992 Rowe was a member of the British Joint Services Expedition where he painted and sketched through to Camp III and climbed to 23,500 feet. Also associated with Everest, Sir Charles Evans published a Sketchbook, some pages of which are reproduced in "The Mountaineer's Companion", edited by Michael Ward (1966).

Those who wish to take up, or to further their skill at this absorbing and potentially rewarding hobby may like to look at David Bellamy's "Painting in the Wild" (Harper Collins, 1988).

In this article I have not mentioned any of the great mountain photographers, and the use of the lightweight camera, indispensable in these conditions. Superlative photography is the making of Brian Blessed's recent book, "Blessed Everest" (Salamander, 1995) an account of Steve Bell's successful expedition of 1993. Even to summarize the work of the photographers and of the many other excellent artists would need at least another 1000 words.

TRINITY TRICKS

"A Climb with Wayne and the Captain"

by John H Schweim FRGS - Winter 1987 - North Wales.

John Schweim is a former U.S. Army NCO. He first tasted climbing in the Tirol and established the NATO climbing club. He is director of the mountain and trekking company Capricorn Adventure. He led the British 1993 bid on Mt Kun (7077m) in Zanskar and continues to thrive in the Himalaya. Currently holds the altitude record for a mountain bike at 5995m. He lives in Glanwydden, Gwynedd with Glenda, Joshua and Ashleigh.

One o'clock found us in the shadows and freezing wind roping up on the patch of snow affectionately called the spider. The Eiger direct you might say!, No, not hardly. This wasn't the Alps hut North Wales in the jolly old month of November. We were just below the familiar gullies known to all as the Trinities. They are virtual motorways when they are in condition with a healthy coating of ice. That wasn't the case this day.

The day started several hours earlier when myself, Wayne, a friend of many years and outings, and a young army Captain who for some years was in charge of a military centre in North Wales. I won't bother to name him as he has his career and family to consider. The Captain came along as we thought it proper to invite him as he was leaving Wales after a three year stint of service. We took exception when he revealed he had never been on the snow or ice during that period. Well!!, I never thought it possible that one could be in charge of an Army outdoor activities centre and never venture into the realm of magical winter climbing. We departed Wayne's house very early in search of the elusive ice and began with a quick nose to the falls in the back of Dolwyddelan village. Please don't go there as this is a secret climbing place where conditions are perfect 6 months of the year. It is for locals only. Local or not we trundled across the crisp and frost covered grass at the end of track. Things were looking good at this point as we could not hear any water flowing down the length of this 200ft+ waterfall. It wasn't until we actually reached the iced up fall that we could see the water churning through the thin veneer of ice that was present. It churned with such contained anger it almost seemed to be boiling. A slight tap of an axe chipped a hole the size of a cricket ball and the contained water spewed out with glorious relief. The Captain took it full frontal and was fairly wet in a matter of seconds. Back to the car and its noisy heater we drove off peeved we had wasted time and because nothing was really in condition except the higher tourist climbs. What the heck, we agreed and took off as it was already mid-morning. The Captain told us how he would miss the wilds of North Wales as he was to be posted in a place called Aldershot. It is a big paper pushing place and apparently

not very nice. Although Wales deals out a lot of hardships it is a beautiful location to exist - I could sympathize with the change he was facing. I was hoping we would find something to climb and crossed my fingers that he would enjoy himself one last time before returning to the big smoke.

We had decided the days calling was to be Right Hand Trinity high on the flanks of Mt. Snowdon in the Snowdonia park and soon brought the old Volvo into a sliding stop in the iced up car park at Pen-y Pass. Conditions look pretty good if this car-park is anything to go by and the three of us began the laborious trundle up the MinersTrack. The skies were filled with their azure promise, and yes, conditions were beckoning us along and within the hour we found ourselves roping up amid the sound of strong chilly winds, the sound of laboured breathing and of course a dog whining ever so quietly. Ohhh, the poor dog, who in their right mind would leave an animal tied to a weighted ruck-sac here of all places. The poor dog, a sheepdog mix was shivering and to keep its feet warm was standing atop the sac. The unmistakable sounds of steel scraping rock up above led us to believe that his owner was getting a climb in. It came to pass that the climber above was none other than the Adonis look-alike called Ed. Ed Stone was quite a competent climber and just recently was making the national climbing press for his bold first ascents down in the rock jock heaven of Llanberis. Wayne and I both knew him very well as we had all worked together in a climbing shop in Betws-y-Coed. This was Ed's first climb of the winter season and he did this route every year to judge his personal condition for the up-coming season. After yelling up to him somewhere above and out of sight we said our hellos' and good wishes and prepared for our own ascent. We decided to use the ropes we had carried unlike the superstar above who chose to proceed without their safety. The Trinity gullies are a popular training ground for just about everybody that gets into the thrills of winter mountaineering as they afford good airy stances with the illusion of being safely confined in the recesses of their rocky clefts. Like I said it is an illusion and they should be taken seriously with more than a pinch of salt. Our line consisted of following the ice upwards over a bulging buttress and turning it up and to the left and again up for several hundred feet. In guide book conditions not much of a problem, just a good warm up for greater things. The season barely started and not quite seeing the middle of November the conditions were just a little lean, meaning we could have done with a bit more ice. As it was the rock had only a slight covering of verglassed ice that seemed to complicate an easy climb turning it into something that would need the utmost amount of care as the ice was a mere 6 inches and screws could not be driven in and utilised. It was down to rock climbing safety gear which was fairly abundant between Wayne and myself. Ensuring his Hamlet was well and truly alight Wayne set off onto the first pitch or rope length. The snow was light and crunched loudly under the cramponed boots. It was actually perfect except for the fact there could have been more about. It was slow going

as the Captain's crampons were not fitted properly and kept falling off. The first pitch took about an hour and the promise of a dark ascent was on the cards for sure. "Well, lets get on with it" someone yelled against the howling wind and all attentions were focused on the climb. We found the climbing at the harder end of the given grade and enjoyed the slightly iced challenge. Wayne leading as usual was picking his way up the crux of the climb and in sheer frustration took off his mitts and set about the delicate lead. Our friend Ed must have been a bit hesitant about the crux when he came through here without a rope. One slip and he would have been sitting back with his dog very quickly indeed. I think to this day had we not come when we did he probably would have come back down but being the competitive lad that he was just gripped his axes tighter and continued upwards. Wayne had only just retired from the UK Army and had been a mountaineering instructor for most of his 24 years. He has this uncanny knack of making anything look easy. Dare I say it, he is almost inspiring in his methodical appreciation of the situation at hand and I for one will never tire climbing with him. Inching up the slippery crux on crampon tips and feeble hand holds not placing any gear was really fun to watch, It went without saying that the Captain was going to be in for a hard time following his lead. He is one hell of a grumpy bastard, more so than I, but I think its because he is older than I and has had more time to cultivate it.

Grunts and groans and the sounds of scraping axes and crampons indicated from above that the Captain had well and truly come to grips with the crux. Swearing was abundant, some say that it helps. Big chunks of plate ice and rocks were falling and bouncing all around me as his struggle increased in its ferocity. By the time the Captain yelled out his joy at reaching Wayne higher up the gully the fact the sun was setting and the temperature had fallen considerably, was noted. It would be a dark descent after all. The poor dog below was howling as the moon was beginning to take on an eerie glow and it was all I could do to contain my anger that someone let alone Ed would bring an animal out in this extreme cold. The only consolation was that he would be on his way down by now and the poor beast would soon be home where it belonged. The hour I was waiting was a long one and it was welcome news when Wayne yelled down for me to climb. It was difficult but to my advantage the Captain had knocked off a lot of the ice exposing good rocky hand holds for me. "Thanks" I kept repeating in my haste to reach the gang. It was a good lead as Wayne had used no protection except for the odd piece that wouldn't have held a fly falling off. My hat also went off to Ed for his very bold solo climb of the route. Bravo!

We soon found ourselves huddled in the gully like sardines standing on a beaten ledge of snow. It was cold now as the sky was devoid of all clouds that would retain the days heat. The sky was black and the twinkling of stars and the buttery moon glowing above lent to us a feeling of being

benighted on a giant alpine climb. It was a magnificent situation and I for one was enjoying this Welsh classic climb.

Wayne passed out some Hamlets and turned his attentions into the remaining gully above. One could just make out the ribbon of ice loosing its sheen and fading into grey through the dark chasm of the gully. Straightforward climbing was left and in no time at all he had finished the route and was atop the summit snowfields. As the Captain began his exit up and out I chanced to see a shooting star blasting silently across the heavens. What an evening to be out, the winds had died down and left a silence that was broken by the freezing dog below. His owner had got back to him now and was yelling up to us but we could not make it out. I was glad the pooch was going home. My dreamy existence was shattered by loud yell from above. Looking up I saw a light tumbling down the gully, bloody hell I thought, somebody is falling down. Knowing I was secure to the rocks by no less than three points and was not going anywhere I stepped across into the centre of the gully preparing to let him collide into me. I hoped I could stop him without too much pain. I once had a chap swing his ice axe full arc into my thigh in Norway so the thought of 24 sharpened crampon points wasn't a comforting thought. My mind was racing with wild abandon when to my surprise a head torch came bouncing to a stop at my waist knot. It had been fixed to the rope with a snaplink. How pleasant I thought that nobody was attached to it. I could hear Wayne laughing above. He could guess that I thought someone was falling but at the same time knew me well enough to know that I wouldn't have brought a torch and simply sent me down a spare he had brought along. In all seriousness it took several minutes to relax the grip I had on my axes and peel myself from the vertical spread eagle position I was in. I climbed on up cursing and swearing at the both of them but was drowned in their bellowing howls of laughter. It all of a sudden seemed hilarious and soon we all three were smoking and laughing under the stars. Thermos' were dragged out and cups of Brazils best were being held up high toasting the Captains Last Climb.

Post Script. Late in 1992 it was sad to hear of the loss of brother Ed Stone. At the beginning of the winter season of 92-93 he was again climbing on Snowdon solo and unfortunately slipped and fell to his death. His was a bright star.



A MODEST LOVE AFFAIR WITH THE HILLS

by Ian Drew

It may surprise you to learn that membership of the AMA isn't just the preserve of regular Army members. There are many members who are either retired, serving in the TA, or related to people in the above categories, or as was originally the case with me, work for the MOD Civil Service.

So why did I join the AMA you may well ask? Well, it seemed like a good idea at the time is probably the short answer!

I began to develop an interest in shouldering a pack and disappearing into the hills in my late teens. This was further fostered by the Directorate I was working for at the time which organised, or rather press-ganged the latest, newest, greenest second lieutenant into organising various week-long adventurous training exercises in the wilds of Scotland, Wales and Plymouth (?) for a mixed-bag of 'Soldiers and Civil Servants'. Ummm...Sounds like a good title for a book to me... These trips were designed to foster leadership skills, team building and good relations between the two parties. I'm sure they accomplished all this, and more, though the parties mentioned above tended to be the ones involving much abuse of alcohol, usually to the detriment of the following early morning starts.

In 1989 I met Tim King, a long-standing member of the AMA who was quite obviously mad as he intended to mount an expedition to East Greenland in the coming summer. I say he was mad because, ((A) he was relying on the RAF to supply a C130 for the trip (£5000 per flying hour - or something like that?) and (B) after talking to me for twenty minutes he'd offered me a chance to go on the trip. Desperate and Mad!! Having promptly bitten his hand off at the chance to go I never really expected the trip to come off. Needless to say, the good old RAF came up trumps and we spent a glorious five weeks in the mountains and at various times, adrift in small boats. Never again the association with small boats and the Arctic I promised myself. Altogether we climbed something like 70,000 feet of mountains and covered over 200 miles. Some peaks were almost certainly first ascents and this was particularly satisfying for a novice like me. But most importantly we enjoyed the trip and came back a happy and united party. The prime lesson I learned on that trip, besides keeping your matches dry in your top pocket and avoiding sharing a tent with the snoring Ian Smith was that of the attributes needed by participants on trips like this are a balance of fitness, mountaineering ability and ability to get on with others. I soon realised that the first one is a bit of a misnomer. If you're not fit at the beginning of the trip, you certainly will be before long -

so knock that from the list of mandatory requirements. So long as you don't collapse after climbing the stairs you should be OK. Mountaineering ability - well for Greenland and most trips I was interested in, this wasn't of major importance. As long as you know how to wear your helmet at a jaunty angle and not spear too many people with your ice axe then all is probably well. The final one, ability to get on with others is the crux - a real 5a pitch (that gives you a clue as to my climbing ability). If you're going to enter voluntary confinement with seven other people in mainly uninhabited parts of the world then you'd better be pretty sure that you're compatible with your fellow members. We've always been very fortunate. Whether my fellow expeditioners would say the same of me is another matter entirely. I came back from Greenland with an increased appetite for the hills.

A switch of jobs led me to work on a project where there was a frequent need to visit sites in the Bath area. Morning meetings and afternoons of climbing down at Wintours Leap, Symonds Yat, Shorncliffe and the like, where I was volunteered for the role of professional seconder, being dragged up various Very Severs. "Does the grading system start at VS Tim?" 'Yes, that's right - now just keep climbing' was the usual reply.

In early 91 I was privileged to be offered the chance to take part in Exercise Kenyan Stackers, organised by Capt Adrian Oldfield. I had been on the reserve list and some of the party had dropped out due to the cost of the trip. £300 for four weeks in equatorial Kenya and Tanzania. Bargain - I even paid for my own flight out. We had a marvellous time with successful ascents of Point Lenana on Mt. Kenya (3 of the party also did the standard route on Nelion) and Mt. Kilimanjaro. Ah, the delights of a rarefied atmosphere on the metabolism. The best part of this trip was the final jaunt up to Lenana enabling me to capture this trekking peak which I'd missed due to joining the expedition late. I'd managed to convince Tim King that he wanted to guide me up Lenana, he having already been up twice. This is where I learned another important lesson about expeditions - that the perfect size for an expedition is two, reasonably fit individuals who get on with each other. Some believe the perfect expedition is one - themselves - I wouldn't argue. We had a great time on the mountain, completing the traverse in ten hours, a journey which normally took about 2-3 days. The only down-side were the Anti-Rabies jabs which I had to have after I rather stupidly got myself bitten by a Rock Hyrax - a large Guinea pig type creature with close family ties to the elephant! So much for feeding it porridge oats from the arctic pack - 'cruelty to animals', I hear you say?

In September 91 Capt Marcus Hawthorn and myself (the AMA editorial team at that time) spent two weeks in the Dolomites - my first experience of European climbing. I'd only been rock climbing for about 5 months at this stage and up until then a good days climbing was three 70' ascents at Symonds Yat or wherever. Was I in for a shock. By the end of the two

weeks we were completing 700 metre climbs, the final one being on the Cima della Vezzano where we managed to get ourselves benighted on a ledge for a cold and sleepless night four pitches from the top. The final pitch on the following day, nearly ended my climbing career and my living career for that matter, when a rock the size of a volleyball landed at my feet where I'd been standing a few moments before. I was suddenly reminded of my own mortality.

In May 1992 I got married and my short-suffering, soon to be long-suffering wife Kate waved me off on an expedition to West Greenland eight weeks later. This trip had looked like it wasn't going to happen and the whole expedition area, team make-up and duration changed five days before the off. Adaptability being another good asset to possess meant that East Greenland became West Greenland, eight people became five and five weeks became four. It was nevertheless a great trip and the area around Sondrestrom fiord abounds with opportunities for great mountaineering and simply 'enjoying the ambience'. The mountains were good, the mosquitoes terrible, the boat engines unreliable and we had a fantastic time. I've got a serious hankering to go back to Sondrestrom fjord to an area of mountains at the far (western) end of the fjord where we spied some spectacular peaks just waiting to be climbed. O for a couple of good Mariner engines. It's funny how easily I forgot the promise to myself three years previously about small boats and the Arctic. As I boarded the Hercules for the return trip, I had this definite feeling that I'd be back, I just didn't know when.

Nowadays, I've settled into more modest escapes into the hills whenever I can manage it which isn't often. I've tried to get to as many AMA meets as possible which normally meant the May and September meets. I also felt honoured to be able to play a small part in the AMA Committee as the Newsletter Editor and very much enjoy the opportunity of re-establishing friendships at meets and look forward to a long association with the club.

The AMA is very a special association with a fascinating history and a bright future. It has many characters - you know who you are - and it's fascinating to listen to the mass of pooled knowledge over a beer or three. The AMA is a Club of equals - an unusual concept in a strictly hierarchical organisation like the Army, where the most junior of members can have his or her say alongside the Major General as Chairman - pretty unique in Army terms.

The future for me? The mixed joys of wife, family, work in the private sector (the real world) and less annual leave. It doesn't look too bright for future expeditions in the short term, but I know that one day I'll be back in the mountains of Greenland with good mountains, good climbing, good company and Arctic rations.

TREKKING IN THE PARQUE NACIONAL TIERRA DEL FUEGO

by Zoe Barker



Bahia Lapataia, showing Punta Estrada on the right, the snow covered hills of Chile in the background and the coastal footpath along the shore of the bay in the foreground

Zoe Barker was dragged up her first Alpine peak by her father at the age of 12 and has never looked back, leading expeditions to Greenland, South America, Africa and the Himalaya. After a career culminating as Head of Physical Education Faculty and a Troop Commander in 93 Signal Squadron (V) she now has the dubious honour of being an Army wife, currently exploring the Rockies while her husband works hard at being 2IC of 105 BATUS Squadron.

As the plane touched down in the Land of Fire the Fuegian baggage handler in the terminal building was peddling furiously to get the conveyor belt to move our rucksacks and deposit them unceremoniously in mid-winter at the end of the earth. Unsure of our welcome in Argentina we approached the immigration desk with some trepidation to show our UK passports - but all the locals could talk about was the TV documentary they had seen about Simon Weston and how he was going to come to Ushuaia (pronounced Ooo-shoe-why-ah) to sign copies of his book!

We must have looked lost standing by the Tourist Information booth with it's shutters down and 'Cerrado' sign as an Argentinean in huge sheepskin coat introduced himself as Edouardo, the owner of two hotels. He patient-

ly explained that in August few people visited because it was winter and looking at my torn padded trousers and patched Alpiniste he suggested the cheaper of his establishments, assuring me that it was nonetheless clean, warm, with a huge breakfast thrown in and a free ride to the Park gate in his four wheel drive. Sold!

There is that ancient oft-quoted saying that I have heard in Greenland, Canada and Pakistan as well as Tierra del Fuego, 'if you don't like the weather wait a minute because it will change'. This was certainly true, even the oldest locals in Ushuaia admitted to this winter being one of the coldest yet. The waves on the surface of Lago Roca deep in the heart of the park had frozen solid in their tracks, shot dead, bolt upright before they had a chance to reach the shore. Yes, it was cold at night; I resorted to hot stones in my sleeping bag, but the days were sunny with clear blue skies and unsurpassed views. The park was deserted and ours to explore, the winter advantages were free entry and being able to light big fires at night just like those of the native Indians that led to the name 'The Land of Fire'

The park is not large by American standards, but it is still big enough to get completely lost. Within its 250 square miles the Andes curve east and plunge into the sea, leaving behind parallel mountain ranges and deep scoured valleys. Not only is the park surrounded by the mostly unclimbed and largely unnamed mountains of the Cordillera Darwin, but also the jagged summits of the Cordon del Toro and the untamed wilderness of the Montes Martial. The first day was spent exploring the parks eleven miles of dirt roads on foot and then it was time to strike off into the unknown.

Hikes here are not for the faint-hearted as there are no detailed maps or accurate guide books, so one has to be a Victorian pioneer blessed with the spirit of adventure, or a member of the Star Trek crew prepared to venture where no man has gone before. From the safety of the Lapataia Bay track on the western edge of the glacial Lago Roca you can strike off up Cerro Condor at 840 metres. The snow was seemingly solid, an ice axe a distinct advantage but the terrain no worse than winter in the Scottish Highlands. On the way back down by the track that leads to Chile we were invited into the border guard's hut for coffee, once he had stopped waving his gun at us. We were not much better company than his crackling radio as our Spanish was non-existent but we must have relieved his lonely vigil for a while.

Heading along the eastern shore of Lago Roca gave us another foretaste of things to come, it was only possible to walk for about two hours on a vague animal path through woods or along the pebbled beach before the path became overgrown and intense bush-whacking would have been necessary in order to continue. We settled for a picnic and gazed across the water to Cerro Condor and upwards to Cerro Guanaco, the names of which give clues as to the wildlife you might encounter.

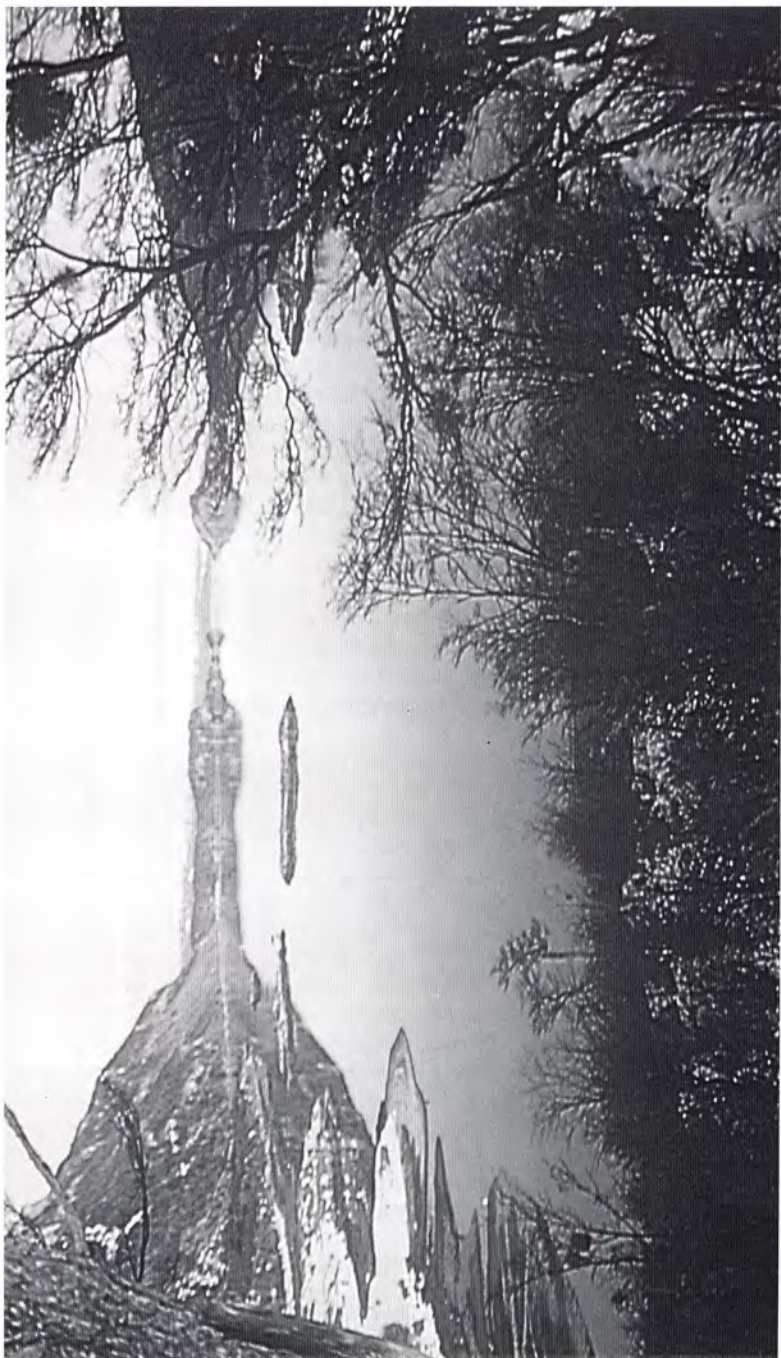
Having had two days of bush-whacking the pioneer spirit was waning thin so we resorted to hiking three easy trails each of which had surprises in store. Sendero Laguna Negra (Black Lagoon Trail) was one such surprise, a short loop around a lake in the process of becoming a sphagnum moss bog or a giant wet sponge. The Sendero de Los Castores (Beaver Trail) was another delightful if wet trail, leading south to Lapataia Bay past a series of beaver ponds and dams with fresh teeth marks in the wood. The beavers were introduced from Canada in the 1940's and are not difficult to spot, neither is the evidence of the forests they have drowned. The Lapataia Trail itself ends at the Bay, but continuing to Estrada Point was well worthwhile photographing ancient middens or heaps of clam, mussel and oyster shells left by the Indians near productive foraging sites.

What is it about easy day walks that makes one yearn for a heavy rucksack and rough terrain? We were determined to make one final trek lasting about a week. Hiking along the eastern side of Lapataia Bay leads below Bella Vista Hill to Ensenada Bay. Camping here was pleasant and would we see an otter, sea lion or seal? I think it was the wrong time of year. From here to Cerro Pampa Alta (High Meadow Peak) was perhaps my favourite day, travelling through forests of the unique evergreen beech, following streams and beaver dams before emerging in a clearing just below the summit. The view of the Beagle Channel, Ushuaia Bay, Navarin Island and far into Chile was endless.

That part of the trail was well defined, as was that to the Rio Pipo and beyond to the Cascada (waterfall) via the Canadon del Toro (Bull's Canyon). Not a particularly spectacular waterfall, but a beautiful campsite with the last ensuite facilities for some days, fire-rings, fresh running stream water and pit toilets. By far the most challenging part of the trek was yet to come, deep into the heart of the park where lay Lago Fagnano in the isolated northern section. This lake, the largest in Tierra del Fuego was carved by a glacier and extends seventy miles into Chile before emptying into the Straits of Magellan.

The Guardaparque (Park Rangers) would allegedly discourage you from going but they were obviously suffering from cabin fever and nowhere to be seen. What they did not know would not hurt them. We were self-contained and well able to trek the twenty or so miles following and crossing the Rio Pipo, across the Martial Mountains and past Lago Alto. Then tracing the course of Rio Alto we arrived finally at Bahia Grande on Lago Fagnano. It was well worth the effort of fighting through dense undergrowth on what sometimes amounted to no more than a rabbit track winding its way alternatively through crisp snow then continual marshy bog.

I believe it has become possible to carry on along the shores of the lake and then head south back to Ushuaia, but in winter the trail was even more indistinct than that we had followed, I was tired of being an explorer and anyway the Torres del Paine beckoned and my feet were freezing.....



The trail along the east shore of Lago Roca, Cerro Condor in the background.

More TREKKING
IN THE PARQUE NACIONAL TIERRA DEL FUEGO



Map of the park showing the key features mentioned in the text, (not to scale)

CLIMBING MOUNT RUBBISH

by WO2 Mike Smith

WO2 Mike Smith started climbing when a teenager in Carlisle. Living close to the Lake District meant a real apprenticeship in traditional rock climbing. After joining the Army as an apprentice he was actively involved in the college climbing club. While there he was introduced to winter and alpine mountaineering and later on, expeds to Peru and the Himalayas followed. Mike sees himself as an all-round climber enjoying every aspect of the sport from sport climbing, at which he is the current Army champion, to high altitude mountaineering. His main ambition is an expedition to Baffin Island.

The idea of going to the Himalayas to carry out environmental work is not new. However, combining both environmental work and mountaineering is a slightly more difficult proposition. In 1993 I was part of a joint Indo British expedition which tried to achieve both environmental and mountaineering goals in the Garhwal Himalayas. The expedition was spearheaded by the Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (EME) of the Indian Army. The British team consisted of eight REME soldiers, a PTI and a TA Doctor; all were members of the AMA and all but one of the team had never been to the Himalayas before. It was an ambitious project; to plant over 50,000 saplings; clear the areas of Dharali, Gangotri, Bhojbasa, Gaumukh, Upper and Lower Tapoban and Kedarnath base camp of as much rubbish as possible; and to climb Kedarnath 6940m and Kedardome 6831m.

Due to the size of the project two teams, an "Environmental Task Force" (ETF) and a climbing team carried out the various aims. The ETF was responsible for planting trees and clearing Gangotri and other villages below of rubbish. The ETF started the project by establishing a tree nursery at Dharali. The Gangotri Valley had not actually become deforested, but, there was cause for concern. The real aim of the tree planting was the education of the local population to the threat of excessive consumption and the future problems of surface erosion etc. The area was receded prior to the expedition and local villagers were consulted as to which would be best suited to the area, great emphasis being placed on fruit and fodder varieties such as Walnut, Horse Chestnut and Apple. Other varieties such as Juniper and Deodar were planted to stabilise hillsides and hopefully prevent landslides, a real threat as anyone who has travelled to Gangotri will know. The climbing team helped in the planting of over 1000 saplings.

The main job of the climbing team was to climb Kedarnath and Kedardome and remove rubbish from the areas above Gangotri. The rubbish, many will be glad to hear, was not just the produce of mountaineers. Gangotri is the source of India's most holy river, the Ganges, or at least its representative site. The glacier source has receded a further 19 kilometres South to Gaumukh. The area is steeped in Hindu Mythology with the gods Shiva and Bhagirathis in predominance. Due to the religious signifi-

icance of the area many pilgrims travel to Gangotri, either to bathe in the river or pray at the temple of Ganga. The modern rapid transport has seen a dramatic increase in the number of pilgrims visiting the area, consequently, the amount of rubbish has also increased.

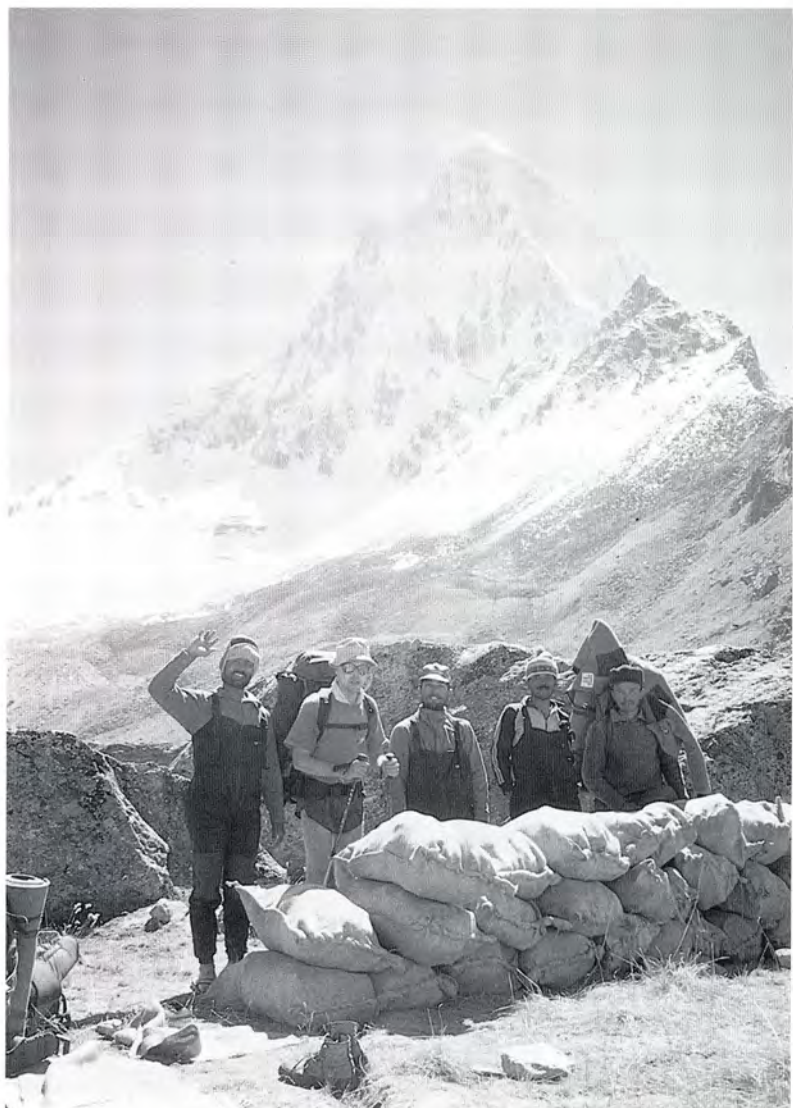
From Gangotri pilgrims travel on foot or mule to other shrines at Gaumukh and Tapoban, resting overnight at the tourist lodge at Bhojbasa. Other groups which deposit rubbish, although in smaller quantities, are trekkers, both Asian and Western; and Mountaineers, again both Asian and Western. The Western mountaineers are often considered the bad boys of the Himalayas, but without doubt the majority of the rubbish found in this area was of Asian (Indian) origin.

The specific areas above Tapoban (upper limit of most Pilgrims and trekkers) were fairly easy to clean. Rubbish, although in plentiful supply, had been thoughtfully deposited in small stone enclosures. This was bagged and removed. We hoped that for a short while visitors to upper Tapoban would not be greeted by a rubbish dump. The main difficulty was at the Kedarnath base camp, here a thick layer of snow meant excavating the rubbish as well as the tent platforms.

Lower down however the problem was far more severe. At Bhojbasa, at the tourist lodge, where the local tour operators go for max. turnover and max. profit the area was a disgusting mess. Rotting food, bottles, paint tins, toilet paper. You name it we found it and picked it up. There was no organised refuse removal so that everything that had been brought up was just literally thrown out the back door. In two days we managed to collect and remove over sixty bags of rubbish, but sadly this is only a temporary solution to the problem.

The actual mountaineering, although fairly non technical, was not without incident. The move from Gangotri to Upper Tapoban, pre-base camp, was to take three days. Unfortunately this was too quick an acclimatisation for some of the team. Two dramas unfolded at the same time with the Expedition Doctor collapsing on route to Tapoban and another team member slipping into a coma in Upper Tapoban camp. The Doctor was able to make it to Tapoban with assistance and was able to administer life saving treatment to the other casualty. Both casualties were casevaced back down to Bhojbasa, one on a stretcher. This was an incredibly harrowing journey. A 100m moraine slope, difficult in daylight, had to be descended in the dark. It then took several hours to cross a kilometre of glacier moraine. This almost exhausted the team of porters. Fortunately a platoon of Indian soldiers came to the rescue and literally ran the last five kilometres to Bhojbasa. The rapid descent to Bhojbasa was enough to stabilise the condition of both casualties.

Up to this point the weather had been generally poor. After the drama the weather deteriorated even further. For five days supplies were torturously inched up to Base camp usually through driving snow or torrential rain. Most of the expedition members had to brave moraine avalanches which



Accumulated rubbish collected at Lower Tapoban

poured down onto part of the route. This was affectionately known as Bomb Alley. Once base camp was fully established the weather cleared and provided several days of brilliant weather.

Kedardome is a Mont Blanc style peak. It is not particularly striking to look at but it is massive. It is also surrounded by many far more stunning mountains, Shivling, the Baghirathis, Thaly Sagar, Brigupanth and Chaukamba. Climbing in this area was just so typically Himalayan in



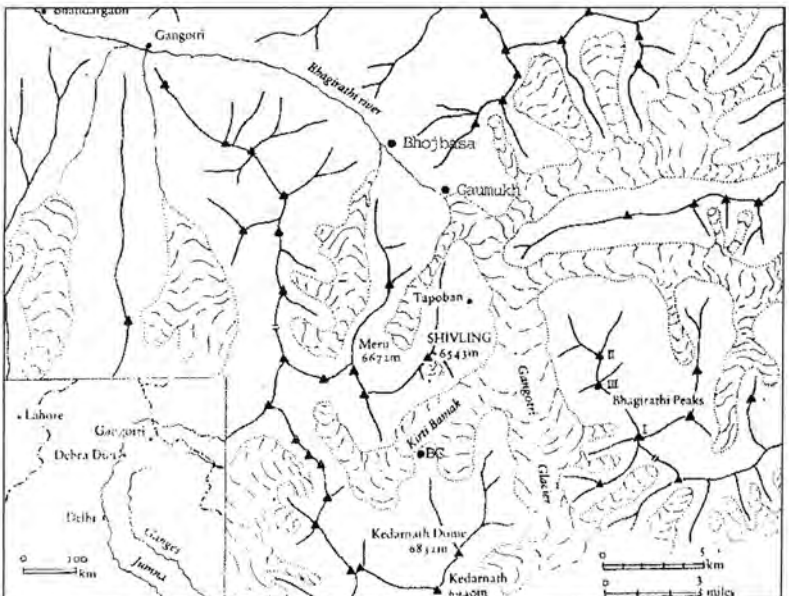
Camp One perched high above the Kirti Bamak Glacier.

grandeur. It was planned to use three camps to scale Kedardome, which initially may seem like an overkill. However, the limited experience of the party dictated a very cautious approach. None of the REME team had been much over 4000m.

The change in weather enabled real progress up the mountain to begin. The mountain was slowly stocked with enough food and gas for all the climbers who were to attempt Kedardome. Teams were organised into

assault groups according to fitness and ability. The better acclimatised climbers went first to break trail and ensure an early success. The strongest team was initially supported by the next team in the pecking order. This, in theory, gave the best chance of success for all climbers. Once camps 1 and 2 were established it was a simple matter of just moving up to each camp with personal kit. During a window of five days glorious weather we managed to get 21 climbers on top of Kedardome. This was one of the few successful ascents in the Garhwal that season; it was a real logistic and organisational success. Unfortunately, all too soon, poor weather returned. That and the 2nd phase of the clean up thwarted the attempts on Kedarnath.

Was the expedition a success? The key to the success of this expedition can not be measured in bags of rubbish removed or numbers on top of a peak, but, on how many people were educated due to our action in the Gangotri valley that year. Sadly it was mainly Westerners who showed the most interest, some offering help. The pilgrims and Indian trekkers however treated us as something of a novelty. Even members of the Indian team were spotted throwing sweet papers away after a day of collecting rubbish. The education of all concerned is going to be a long slow process but attitudes must be changed. Gangotri and Bhojbasra have probably returned to their original states by now. We did not totally clean up the Gangotri valley, however, a start was made. Despite all our efforts there is probably still a mountain of rubbish waiting to be climbed.



THE ANNUAL JOLLY

by Cpl Brian Jenkins

Brian Jenkins was first introduced into climbing at the age of 12 in N Wales (Criccieth sea wall) by his parents. He then went on to instructing in the Harz mountains with the odd ascent of local buildings and is working towards going to Yosemite with his wife who is now a particularly keen climber.

The time had come around once again for the annual summer jolly . Things this year were to be slightly different. No more visits to Jacob's Ladder and no more teach yourself canoeing in the Talybont reservoir. Last year's escapade was spent in El Chorro in temperatures of 40 degrees with the infamous Dom Nicholson whose usual climbing haunts are Croydon town hall with me in tow, but that is another story.

This year my climbing partner was in the far more attractive form of a young Bdr called Joanna Marie Parkes whose previous climbing experience consisted of a day's top roping at Swanage while all of mine was learnt reading the 'Handbook of Climbing' . So what we lacked in knowledge we made up for in enthusiasm. So where were we going to spend our hard earned leave? Scotland too cold, Chamonix too expensive, so we flicked through Chris Chraggs Andalusian rock climbs and we came across Tenerife. Perfect sun, sand and as much rock as you could possibly climb. So off we went to the travel agent who was more than happy to take £500 off us for two weeks and just sniggered when we said we were going for the rock climbing . Tenerife is hardly renowned for rock , or is it! We left Manchester fully laden with climbing gear, a change of clothing and our toothbrush, in great anticipation of what was in store. We arrived at night in a place called Los Gigantes and what was to shadow our balcony we could only have dreamt of. Huge great cliffs rising spectacularly out of the sea. If we could get a boat at least we would have somewhere to belay from. On closer inspection we found that even someone like Johnny Dawes would get vertigo. So we decided on a safer means of transport in the form of a Renault Twingo. We jammed it full of our climbing gear and off we went to explore all 800 square miles of the island .

Our first port of call was to be the magnificent Mt Teide all 12,195 feet of it. Our first introduction to the roads was on the C 821 from Grandilla and through to Vilafor. We emerged battered and bruised, my arms felt as though they had just dragged me up Cenotaph Corner wearing Scarpas and Bergen. We thought after the first mile of hairpins it would ease off but nine miles later we emerged. It was well worth it. The landscape subsequently developed into something resembling a scene out of Planet of the Apes. This isn't too surprising due to the fact that the majority of the

filming took place there. With Mt Teide rising out of the lunar landscape it was a perfect setting for some serious rock climbing, in an area known as Las Canadas. With grades ranging from V Diff to bloody outrageous there was enough to satisfy most appetites. We still had another 3-4 sites to look at but nothing held much in store, except the Arico gorge which has about 120 good routes to offer so you can climb to your hearts content. We had now got into the habit of a variation of the alpine start; it was called the canary start, and it meant that you got up at midday, climbed in the scorching sun and got back to your apartment at about ten at night. It seemed to work well and did wonders for the sun tan. What with all the climbing, one day on the beach with Hawaiian tropic factor zero and three days in the shade with cream E45 the holiday was starting to draw to an end. So what could be a more fitting finale than one more climb in Las Canadas.

We set off to a beautiful piece of rock called La Catredel. It was triangular in appearance and rose majestically out of the ground like one of the seven wonders of the world. What a fantastic way to finish a marvellous holiday. We went wearing our Merrills rucksacks. We got to the foot of the climb and things were not as first appeared, the left side was joined by a small saddle and the right housed a dodgy looking gully. We found a suitable route up the gully on particularly friable rock and off I went testing every piece of rock. With absolutely nowhere to put protection it was a scary first pitch made even worse by Joanna telling me how loose the rock looked. It felt like E3. Bergen and loose rock don't mix.

Once we conquered the first two pitches the rock became quite excellent with a lovely looking traverse that finished on a marvellous hanging belay. It was then up and left to the corner which suddenly went from being quite sheltered to bloody exposed and a ledge just large enough to fit one pair of size 8 stickies, so Joanna took the final lead. Six pitches and hours later we were at the top. It was time for a well earned drink of water and some obligatory photos and then we were off back down, but how? To our right was obviously used for abseiling but we only had one rope and I knew it was a long way down to the next stance. So there was nothing else for it, I was going to have to use my 10 m of 6mm Spectre. I cut a length off wrapped it around the nearest boulder and we were ready for the off. Joanna was slightly apprehensive asking me if I had done it before. My answer was obviously - "Yes - of course I have". There is a time and place to lie and this was it. So I went with a nervous smile to try and reassure Joanna. I was on my way and my eyes were fixed to the Spectre watching for any sign of fraying. I spied a belay place about 3m below me and to the right and I had 2.5m of rope left with a knot in the end, so I had to swing to my right and climb down. I was safe thank goodness. Joanna came down and she was safe. So far so good. Once again I found a rock, cut the

Spectre, and we were off like true professionals. We had hit the saddle that we had previously spied from the ground but we were not home and dry yet. I had 2m of Spectre left and a boulder that was about 3m in circumference. There was nothing for it, I was going to have to use my prusiks ; it fitted like a glove and we were on our way once again. Unfortunately the rock took an unfortunate change in direction from vertical boulders to horizontal ones shaped like traffic cones. Fortunately we were standing on one of these. What was unfortunate was that our only abseil point was approximately 2m below us to the left and shaped like one of these cones. All we could do was set up a horizontal spike belay. We had now been out approximately four and a half hours on a solid adrenaline rush, we were about 15 m off the ground,so, all we could do was just go for it and it worked. We were back on the ground safe. We donned our Merrills and walked back.What a marvellous ending to a fantastic holiday, rock climbing at its finest. The experience obviously had the desired effect because we got married one year later..

ALASKA - THE LAST FRONTIER

By Major Paul Fish

Major Paul Fish is an experienced and keen mountaineer. He has led expeditions to the Alps, Africa, North America and has climbed and walked in all areas of Europe. When not on duty he can be found on his favourite mountains in Wales. As far as he is concerned Alaska is the place to go. Anyone wishing to discuss mountaineering or other forms of adventurous training in Alaska will find his address in the 'Army Mountaineer'.

Alaska comes from the Aleut and means 'Great Land'. It was purchased from the Russians in 1867 and became the 49th State in 1959. It has 33, 000 miles of coast line and nineteen mountains over 14,000 feet. The highest of these is Mount McKinley also known as Denali and at 20,320 feet North America's highest summit . It does not matter where you have climbed in the world, until you have visited the vast mountain ranges in Alaska you will not have completed your mountaineering experience. Alaska has been visited by many famous climbers; Chris Bonington and Doug Scott amongst them. The comments they have made about their experiences explain some of the dangers and difficulties in mountaineering in such a place. The McKinley Range due to its northern latitude, approximately 62 degrees north of the equator, is one of the coldest areas in the world. Daily temperatures above 14, 000 feet commonly being -15 to -30 degrees. When I was last on McKinley in May 1994 the coldest recorded still air temperature at 17, 200 feet was -50. Due to its latitude and the curvature of the earth it is also accepted that above 11, 000 feet it becomes like climbing a mountain 2, 000 feet higher in other areas of the world.



Mount McKinley

The West Buttress is regarded as the easiest route to ascend, However it is not to be treated lightly. It normally entails spending between 15 and 25 days on the mountain. This is above the glacier landing strip at 7,000 feet. Once you have been dropped off you live on the glacier and it is 16 miles and 14,000 feet to the summit. The difficulty and remoteness of the mountain is shown by the fact that its first ascent was not until 1913. It has two summits, the South Peak is the highest while the North Peak at 19,740 feet stands two miles away across a plateau.

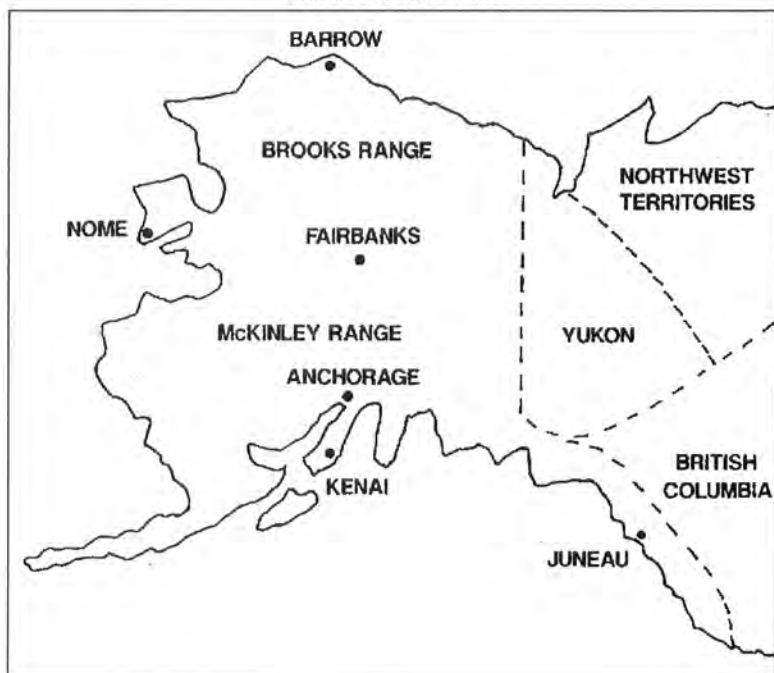
McKinley is surrounded by various peaks but two deserve a mention. Mount Foraker, at 17,004 feet is the sixth highest summit in North America. Like Denali it has a North and South summit separated by a half mile wide summit plateau. The smaller seldom climbed South summit is 16,812 feet. Mount Hunter, at 14,570 feet is the most difficult 14,000 foot peak in North America. It also has two summits separated by a 3 mile wide plateau.

The three mountains mentioned above are the most popular with mountaineers and there are various routes both climbed and unclimbed to their lofty peaks. The danger of the weather, the cold and the lack of civilisation makes contemplating climbing one of these peaks a serious and challenging undertaking. The West Buttress sees the most attempts. This amounts to approximately 800 people during the season which is April to mid July. However if you can stand the cold the best time is April as one of the first groups on the mountain. Then trail breaking and the virgin snow makes it seem like another world. You and your team seem like ants as you move up the glacier surrounded by these giant mountains and you become

embroiled in surviving and living with the awesome power of nature. If you choose any other route instead of the West Buttress or intend to climb Mount Foraker or Mount Hunter you will probably find your team alone on the route of your choice. That is what mountaineering is all about. Once you have visited the 'Last Frontier' it will catch you in its spell. It is such a vast land and contains such diverse climatic conditions that words cannot do it justice. I have returned since my first expedition in 1994 and as well as climbing other summits have taken time to travel and try to understand the secrets of this great land. Apart from the McKinley Range there is the Brookes Range which lies in Arctic Alaska and runs east - west across the top of the state. There are mountains and areas here that have never been set foot on let alone climbed. The logistics and safety requirements of climbing or even trekking on this range would demand careful planning and be in itself be a very challenging and demanding undertaking.

The most populated part of Alaska surrounds Anchorage on the southern coast of the state. This is 120 miles south of the McKinley range and some 600 miles south of the Brooks Range. It is a cosmopolitan city and has all the normal facilities. The state capital is Juneau some 550 miles South East. If staying close to Anchorage interests you, then climbing or trekking in the Chugach mountains to the East of Anchorage or the Kenai Range to the South should be considered. Throughout Alaska there are mountains to visit and routes to be walked and most of these seldom see

Alaska - The Last Frontier



human visitors. Incorporated with this is the ability to take a light plane or float plane to drop off and pick up points, then trek, cycle, climb or white-water raft your way through the wilderness. I must also mention that you will probably come across Moose, Reindeer, Eagles, Black and Brown (Grizzly) Bears on your travels. If you ignore them they will usually ignore you, after all you are the ones invading their home.

I hope these few words have wetted your appetite and you visit the 'Last Frontier'. There are trails waiting to be trekked, rivers waiting to be run and mountains waiting to be climbed. Go out and find your destiny.

THE TRAINING PROGRAMME

by Lance Corporal (Ret'd) Michael Cookson.

MIKE COOKSON was a L/Cpl in the Coldstream Guards and has been climbing since 1985. He has climbed in the Alps, on Mount Kenya and in Scotland. Now happily married he climbs all over the Peak District as often as he can get a friend or family member to belay him. His ambition is to lead Sloth and the 5b pitch on the Old Man of Hoy but he has not yet plucked up the stupidity to do either.

In this article I am going to outline a rigorous, headscratching, belayer's neckache training programme for the fat married man wanting to move up from 4c to 5a. The programme starts on your birthday, because it is your treat day and you can do whichever route you like. If you are awkward like me you chose to be born on 23rd December when it is usually wet or cold or both and the route I chose was *Goldstitch Crack* on the Balderstones. My 12 year old daughter belayed and I got up it to the tune of *When Daddy Got Stuck Up the Chimney*.

Next you do something to catch out the climbing bit of your brain completely by surprise and go canoeing at Matlock Bath. The body is lulled into a false sense of security, but suddenly you shock the living daylights out of it by going to Black Rocks and doing the very appropriately named *Fatman's Chimney* followed by *Lean Man's Superdirect*. However you go home in an Eeyore frame of mind because you pulled on the rope on the second pitch. However you are big enough to admit it, which is all part of the critical, self-analysis, 'where did I go wrong?' mentality that you must develop if you are going to get to 5a one day.

Now for your trip in a downpour of cold, stinging, soul destroying Staffordshire rain. It's February at Ramshaw rocks and it hurts. The route needs to be something like *Piledriver*. The rocks loom up phantom-like in the mist as you squelch towards them dragging your poor 12 year old daughter along and promising her a 500% pocket money rise every hundred yards. You pull into the route. It hurts. The grit rash will be there for weeks but on you go. Wife and children shelter beneath, lovingly, forgivingly (if that is a word). My wife is the best because she makes cocoa which goes right down to the bottom of your boots but we have to go to Leek market afterwards and spend some money.

Suddenly April comes and it's warming up. The rabbits are darting in the fields, you start to do pull-ups and go for a jog. Your pulse rate is down by two beats and you get off the scales elated at the loss of an ounce or two. Let's give some limestone the message so it's off to Dovedale with good friend Rob to do *Simeon*. No problems but you go beserk all of a sudden, cross the river to the church and fall off *Anaconda HVS 5b*. Steady now, not too fast, there's plenty of time. Why not go to HVS 4c ? Yes, Stanage and *Goliath Groove* with AJ the friend who teaches IT. Yes, I know I fell off but that was only because I was trying to teach AJ about layback techn....Oh, never mind. April closes so it's Symonds Yat for *Matchstick Man*, *Speedway* and *Red Rose*.

Now for a fiasco night. *Chequers Crack* at Froggat, a 20 foot lob (Oh, alright a fall if you insist) and you trash two friends on the way down. Ian is not impressed especially as you landed on him. In a frenzy of indignation you go for *Valkyrie* but you are still quivering from *Chequers* and you blow that as well. Just call it a day, man, and go down to the pub. "No way" you say to yourself so we go back and do *Chequers Route 4c*. This involves a traverse into the *Chequers* crack and a real head squashing, get your dratted helmet off belay. Ian comes round the corner. 'Oh, roight, and where am I supposed to go, loike' (We are both Brummies). Ian rests on the belay. 'Er, Ian, you're pulling us off'

'Olroight, I'm going'. Up he goes, 'Gosh, this is a hard day's night' after a hard day at work, him a waiter and me a carpenter, but we see a beautiful June sun go down over the Peak, rose glow on the hills. You drive home in the dark, itching from gnats, rope burned, fat but glad to be married, knowing that your big 5a day must soon dawn.

July and it's really hot so I've got to get to those Roaches. We warm up on *Pedestal Route*, then down to *Third Cloud* with Matt. Rubberneck and somebody's dangling from it, 'I was just testing out the pro...' Anyway he gets back on again and does it. You watch his second carefully, he makes it look a cinch and probably knows how to do *Ray's Roof* on Balderstone

as well. Then all of a sudden you are away, 'Watch it, Matt', then up into the crack and it goes easier and easier and....'Yes !! It's HV blinking S5a !!'

Fanfare of applause and the Massed Bands of the Household Division in your head. 'Thanks Matt, that was great belaying, you can lead everything else. I'm having a five month break until 23rd December 1995 !

All good expedition reports have an Appendix so here's mine. Appendix A. - Crag Rations on D Day.

Comed Beef and Crisp Sandwiches

Beefburgers

Packet of Chocolate Chip Cookies (Matts)

Bar of Galaxy and Chewing Gum

Two Apples and One Banana.

KOSTA BLANCA - KARAOKE AND KLIMBING

by WO2 Dave Neely

WO2 Dave Neely is a veteran of Himalayan and Alpine expeditions and a steely climber who pushes the frontiers of V.Diff climbing. His present climbing ambition is to red point Napes Needle on sight.

It was Terry, one of my climbing partners, who first suggested the idea of sampling some Mediterranean sun and rock. We had just completed *Central Crack* Corrie an Lochan and were both tied up with the cold damp Scottish winters and short days. So after a few phone calls and bribing the OC to sign my leave pass we were off, heading for Calpe on Spain's Costa Blanca.

Calpe is a small fishing village which is located about an hour's drive from the flesh pots of Benidorm. During the winter months hoards of English and continental climbers flock to the area, attracted by the cheap tourist accommodation and inexpensive food and drink. The area is a Mecca for rock climbing offering 1000 ft alpine routes on the impressive Penon de Ifach or short technical sport climbing at Toix where the multitude of shiney new bolts allow even the most safety conscious climber to push out the grades.

Shortly after arriving in Calpe and settling into our accommodation we eagerly set off to recce the climbs on the Penon De Ifach. This 1000 ft tower of limestone stands like a huge titan thrusting out of the sea joined to the mainland by a narrow strip and totally out of place to the geographical feature around it. The route we had selected was called *Diedro UBSA*. A classic climb following a continuous flake up the left side of the steep south face, graded at British HVS or Alpine Mild Difficile. This 10 pitch route had something for everyone from lay backs to a nervous tension traverse. As we gazed up the massive south face searching out our route butterflies began dancing around our stomachs as we wondered what lay ahead.

Having sussed the route, we were now mentally committed for tomorrow's challenge. We headed back towards our apartment discussing the merits of either an early night or sampling the local night life, which included a karaoke bar. Unfortunately the latter won and it was a bleary eyed pair who rose the next morning still humming last night's karaoke version of "Bye Bye Miss American Pie". With alcohol induced headaches as opposed to an altitude induced one, today's route really would take on an alpine flavour.

The previous day's recce was well spent and we quickly got to the start of our route, despite the heavy sea fog which engulfed the Penon reducing visibility considerably. A quick toss of a coin to see who would get the first lead and we were off into our vertical adventure. After a disappointing first pitch which was considerably loose and chossy, the route began to show its true character as we laid back up the Flake. This was 4c/5a climbing at its best; large jugs with bolt protection available whenever the leader felt that nervous twitch as he looked downwards. We quickly arrived at the stance for pitch three which is the crux of the route according to the guide, a point which my partner vehemently disagrees as it was my lead. It is a series of sharp finger pulls on a selection of 5a holds which quickly lead to easier ground. It was here that I burst out of the sea fog into the sunshine. The view was spectacular; a carpet of cloud reaching out to sea and inland with the mountain tops of the Prig Compara jutting upwards out of the cloud like a scene from Disney's *Fantasia*.

The next four pitches lead straight up a crack system which runs down the sun bleached rock. At pitch seven we found two pairs of underpants on the belay ledge. Quite an odd find on any climb I'm sure you would agree. We muttered about this being an omen that the climbing above was about to become harder. We checked the guide hook, Yes! we were on route and there was definitely no mention of bringing spare underpants.

The reason for the change of underpants became apparent as Terry led off the next pitch to find that someone had screwed the bolt hangars off the



Terry in the Crack System

bolt mandrels. Had the ethical crusades of British climbing infiltrated Spain I wonder? Having enjoyed the security of the bolts below this was now a dramatic and worrying change. Terry quickly looked for some natural gear but finding nothing substantial resorted to tying off quickdraws around the shanks of the protruding bolt mandrels. After a shaky 50 ft runout and lots of verbal encouragement from yours truly informing him that yet another piece of gear had come out, he arrived at a large cave system and began to bring me up.

Once at the cave the next pitch leads out on a tension traverse, despite the big shiny bolt at this pitch the exposure is incredible as you look down the 800ft face. After arguing over who goes first; the safer option, I gingerly lowered over the edge and began the 50ft traverse to the next belay ledge, conscious of the large pendulum which would follow any slips. After setting up a tension traverse back to the bolt Terry followed eyes tightly shut muttering incoherently in his native Geordie dialect. The final two pitches although enjoyable were faded in comparison to the last traverse and we quickly climbed upwards over easy ground to the summit.

The climb had taken 4 1/2 hours and our vertical adventure had come to an end. We scrambled down the track which leads off the top back towards Calpe with the calming sensation of satisfaction which you only experience at the end, having risen to the challenge of a climb. All that remained to finish a perfect day was some good food and drink and of course "some karaoke".

DIARY OF A YOUNG CLIMBER

by L Cpl Huw Allen

L Cpl Huw Allen has been hillwalking and climbing since the age of 17. Since then (and he is still only 23) he has been to the Peak District, Pembrokeshire, The Lakes, The Cairngorms, France and Cyprus. He has his TR&A qualification and is looking for further qualifications.

WEDNESDAY

I'd been on leave for six days and I've just managed to persuade my student friend (Mathew) that the great outdoors has a lot more to offer than watching 'Neighbours' with his mum. So I pack my climbing and camping gear and he packs his scarf and birdwatchers book, we pop into the supermarket for some essentials (beans and beer) and we're off.

We decide to go to Pembrokeshire because of the excellent cliffs (and apparently the large colony of shags!?) When we get there we pitch the tent and I begin teaching my belay slave his task in hand, which is by all accounts to be forgotten the next day.

After the sensory overload, we decide to do something constructive and head off for the pub in St. David's and manage to insult the locals by speaking English. Several pints later the demeaning looks have left us and now they seem to be ganging up on a couple of surfers who have just walked in. We leave the warm embrace of the country folk at checkout time and stumble back to the tent.

THURSDAY

The first day of climbing and much to the dismay of Mathew I get up at 7 o'clock full of enthusiasm and start cooking breakfast, ensuring plenty of fat went into the frying pan.

We were staying at Caerfaer campsite, five minutes walk from Caerfaer crag which is superb for all grades and facing south. Knowing Mathew would have to second my lead I chose a VS route. After I reached the top Mathew clipped himself on and proceeded with all the confidence of someone totally out of his depth. As soon as he got used to it he was able to scramble his way up without any problems so, I decided he needed a bigger challenge. A nice big HVS was next on the list, I went up again and when I paused for a break about 30 feet up, I noticed the anxious look on Mathew's face and realised what he must have been thinking.

He wasn't persuaded by my encouragement so I put him in a three rope system and pulled him up so he could take out my protection. Once he finally reached the top, he lay on the ground and refused to move for 10 mins. We decided not to do any more climbing that day and drove to Broadhaven instead where we ate ice-cream and took holiday snaps.

FRIDAY

Up at the crack of dawn again and back to Caerfaer crag, this time the tide was in so while scrambling around to the climb, I ended up carrying a rack, two ropes and a bag full of heavy useless things while Mathew clumsily traversed the rock. We were able to get a couple of climbs in before dinner and then decided to head back as I had arranged to go climbing with another friend. We reached my house and timing myself it took me 25 minutes to dump my dirty washing in my mother's capable hands, pick up fresh clothes, get changed and pick up some extra kit for my friend in Nottingham.

My friend in Nottingham (by some strange co-incidence is also a student called Mathew) was also belay slave, but this time we were going to the Peak District to scope out the Mecca of rock climbing. In the rush I forgot to replenish my funds and as a result couldn't afford the train fare and had to get off at Birmingham in search of a cash point. Carrying three bags which weighed more than I did, I plodded my way through the City. I managed to walk in a complete circle (of what felt like 10km) around the commercial area of the City without finding a single Switch cashpoint. When I finally got to Nottingham it was morning and my bed was calling (unfortunately I had to inflate it before I could get into it)

SATURDAY

A late start this morning but determined as ever to climb, we got set and headed for Bamford, a crag about 2 Km from the station. To avoid walking up the hill everyday, we pitched up on top of the hill. By the time we pitched it was getting dark but I wanted to climb anyway. I set up a top rope system for Mathew and when we finished I had to take it down by torchlight.

Up early the next day, Mathew got chronic hayfever after a couple of hours and refused to come out of the tent unless I was going to the pub. Determined not to let it faze me, I decided to do some solos. I looked for climbs with soft landings, not that I doubted my ability, it's just my ability doubted ! I watched a group of students try to do HVS for about 20 minutes without success, I waited until they went in search of a Mod before I soloed on the route.

After that there was no stopping me. I found an impressive looking overhang and that's where I stayed for a couple of hours before I got distracted by an attractive lady further up the crag. All interesting rock climbing ended there while I endeavoured to know the girl who I later found out to be called Jennifer from Manchester. She was obviously impressed by my attempts to dangle upside down on an overhang sweating and groaning before falling off. I decided not to pursue the relationship any further when I learned that she was going back to Manchester the next day, "Love born of beauty, soon as beauty dies", and all that!

SUNDAY

As it was Sunday Matthew and I decided to go for a Sunday roast. We put on our Sunday best ie. walking boots, tracksuit bottoms and t-shirts and plodded down to the Fishermans Rest . There weren't any fishermen resting just families and business people who were obviously disgusted by our presence and after the humiliation of walking into the kitchen thinking it

was the toilet we decided to leave. Further down the road was a hotel where the real locals hung out (fishermen and all) and we seemed to fit in there a lot better. We got chatting to the owners and found out their son was in the Royal Signals and so we resided there until chucking out time came around again. I got Matthew to carry the waterbottle up the hill by pretending I was drunk, and he got me to apologise by pretending he was pissed off!

MONDAY

Matthew refuses to come out of the tent again so I'm finding some easy solos to do. I wonder where those students were climbing. It's my last day climbing so I climb the classics in my own unique Mod manner by getting halfway up and deciding I don't have the strength or the technical ability to go on, and then clumsily climbing back down.

We leave stopping only to buy junk food from the shop that's been closed all weekend. The woman behind the counter was waiting in anticipation for the "new age travellers", who have just invaded her shop to steal something. I didn't see it but I'd bet a months wages there was a revolver behind the counter. Luckily neither Matthew nor I possessed the criminal element and so we were spared our lives.

My rock climbing fantasies fulfilled the rest of my leave would have to be spent clubbing.

THE PERFECT DAY

by Col Chris Field

Colonel Chris Field has been an active climber since 1971 and a member of the AMA for most of that time. He was Vice-chairman from 1992 - 1996. Whilst describing himself as a climber rather than a mountaineer he is happy to make an occasional foray into the Alps: however, his real passion is Lakeland rock. He has a deep seated hatred for top ropers, abseilers, bolters, regulators and climbers with loud voices.

It is June 2057. Captain Jiggins walked slowly from the expedition dispatch centre of CAPEL CURIG MILITARY MOUNTAIN ENVIRONMENT EXPERIENCE AND PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT CENTRE towards the vehicle park where he was to pick up the rest of his team for the abbreviated mountain experience (outdoor) interactive sympo-

sium. To get to the waiting minibus he walked under the flashing neon sign above the Centre gates proclaiming the motto SAFETY IS ALL.

As he walked he reflected on the hundred and one things he had to consider to make the day a success. He had logged his application to climb *Hope* on the Idwal Slabs 6 weeks earlier to comply with the Park regulators and yesterday had received confirmation that his certification level and experience profile had been accepted for a daytime free ascent of the route (summer dry condition only) subject to final Ogwen Dispatch Office clearance. He had fed in the experience and certification profile of his team to the Centre Control which had now been cleared. He had made his final check on route availability via the park datalink and had been allocated a 5 hour slot commencing at 1100 hours. This was some relief as it allowed sufficient daylight to complete the climb and return to Ogwen Control. None of his team of 10 had a Low Visibility Terrain Crossing Certificate which meant that in spite of the adequate lighting along the tarmac from Ogwen to Idwal the rules explicitly stated that at last light non-certified parties had to stop and await evacuation. Otherwise his group had all the necessary entries on their datastrips. He had one senior NCO (daytime only) navigator and his deputy to get them to the start of the route. He personally had the coveted qualification Vertical Terrain Crossing Supervisor (free climbing) with endorsements for categories A,B, E-G. His deputy and assistant deputy were similarly qualified but without category G and were therefore restricted to single pitches. The remainder of the party held the balance of qualifications including medical, communications, health and safety, and law in the outdoor environment. He reflected proudly on the 23 years training the group had amassed between them to achieve this level of expertise.

As he arrived at the minibus he decided to carry out one final check on the equipment inventory. This was his deputy's task but lack of a single item at the final cliffbase inspection would bar him from the climb as well as getting penalty points on his datastrip and was not worth the risk. He plugged his inventory strip into the electronic route guide, keyed in “*clim;135,IDW” and waited for the datamatch and printout. The system listed each piece of protection required and the point on the route they should be used. Each piece was colour coded in accordance with EUROBERGREGS which could be matched to the coloured codes etched into the rock. It was an admirable system introduced by the French to remove risk and then greatly improved by the Germans to increase route throughput. It had not met with universal approval in Britain, the Scots in particular finding it hard to adapt to ice climbing. This did not affect military training as winter climbing had long since been banned for servicemen as being too dangerous with an unacceptable risk of litigation.



Huw Allen on Caer Faer Crag

He climbed into the front passenger seat of the minibus, logged into the passenger database and turned to the rear. **“Our mission is to provide Private Bonnington with an introductory terrain crossing mountain environment experience in accordance with current military, park, national and international regulations, guidelines and codes of practice”** He was about to repeat the mission when he noticed the object of the exercise huddled nervously in the depths of the back seat obviously perplexed by the enormous administrative and logistic effort being mobilised for what might have once been described as a morning’s cragging. Could it really take 9 highly qualified meticulously trained and fastidiously equipped adults to take one student up a climb. The answer was ‘yes’ Whilst it may appear to be somewhat bureaucratic, even cumbersome it was emphatically safe. The statutory risk analysis he had submitted to military control the previous evening had ascertained almost zero chance of an incident leading to successful litigation. The one small chance was that Mountain Student Bonnington might experience height induced trauma on the route. Whilst highly unlikely in view of her high score on the verticality aptitude section on the pre climb psychometric assessment one could never be one hundred per cent sure. Quite recently a corporal had been awarded Ecu3 7000 against the Ministry for stress suffered when being lowered off Napes Needle. (The Napes had now been removed from the Ministry’s approved list of climbs.). Jiggins briefly reflected on how one coped with the legal ramifications of climbing some of these madcap routes before fixed bolt protection was made compulsory under European Law. Napes without bolts. . .madness!

The move of the party to the foot of the climb via the Ogwen control was unusually smooth. The Park Ranger had even wished him a good day and hoped they enjoyed the climb. This perplexed him slightly as enjoyment was not factored into the experience. They had arrived slightly before the allotted time and having logged in and submitted to the final pre-climb checks settled down to watch the early groups setting of at exactly 9 min intervals. He always marvelled at the sheer slickness of the organisation as he watched the conveyor belt of climbers moving inexorably up the cables which delineated the different routes. Only *Tennis Shoe* was traffic free due to routine bolt refurbishment and resurfacing work on the first pitch. Not that he could have considered *Tennis Shoe* as it was above his permit level.

It was now the turn of his party to move off. Six, including the student would make the ascent. The other 4 could remain at the base of the slabs to carry out their safety and monitoring tasks or simply relax in the *Slabs Cafe* . A quick final check of clothing and equipment and they were off. He was wearing the distinctive red helmet of the designated leader and his deputy a blue helmet with 2 rings. All the others had black helmets with

the requisite symbol for their specific task the only exception being the student whose snow white helmet carried the distinctive red L. He clipped into the rising belay ring and gave it a light tug which caused it to rise up the cable until the connecting line to his harness was taut. He stepped up and the ring was automatically maintained at the right tension. The European Convention stated that in the event of a climber failing to maintain contact with the slab his downward progress must be arrested within 50 cm, still enough to give you a nasty graze. Even though he was protected by the moving cable he was still required to place the leader placed protection. This was necessary to maintain his logbook and level of certification and anyway it gave him a feeling of purpose and importance. The task was not onerous as he had racked each piece in electronic guidebook order. After about 90 seconds of steady upward progress the message came through on his helmet radio that the number 2 (protection checker) had commenced climbing. Excellent, bang on time so they should meet the 9 minute window.

It proved to be the perfect climb. Nothing happened. No equipment failed or jammed and no one became stressed or uncomfortable. At the top he was able to hand over responsibility to the Descent Leader comfortable in the knowledge that he had just acquired 10 credit points towards his instructor certificate. It was now just a matter of getting back down and returning to the security of the Centre as quickly as possible.

Back in the minibus and having radioed back 'Mission accomplished', he remembered the object of the day's excursion. He turned back to Bonnington who had regained her position and perplexed look . ' Well young lady', he asked in his special instructor to student voice, 'How did you find your first full interactive mountain environment experience?'

She thought hard. 'Well', she chose her words carefully, 'It was a complete waste of time. What was the point of it all. It was just so completely er completely so er safe.'

Jiggins exploded. ' Safe! Safe! of course it's safe. That's what it's all about you idiot. It's about being safe. This is 2057 for God's sake. Danger went out with the ark. If that's all you want out of the hills I suggest you join the AMA. They're still battling to enjoy the mountains. Quite mad.'

The short trip back to Capel was made in silence.





Gasherbrum from Camp One (5800m) route followed the left hand skyline

