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# ARMY MOUNTAINEER



Winter 2017

AMA'S 60th ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL EDITION



**THE JOURNAL OF THE ARMY MOUNTAINEERING ASSOCIATION**

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# ARMY MOUNTAINEER

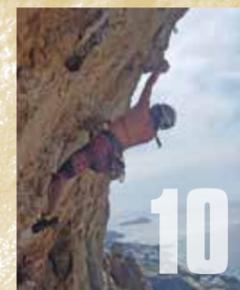
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Cover photo: Heading south from Puyehue, Chile on Ex TIGER ANDES



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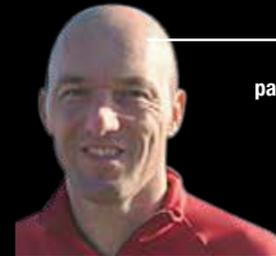
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# Appointments

## Foreword

Foreword by Chairman



## 60 Years and Going Strong

### Col Paul J Edwards MBE, FRGS

By the time you read this article the AMA will have passed its 60th anniversary. Formed in 1957, the first meeting was held on the 24th of May at the Ministry of Supply in London. Back then the emphasis was very much on expeditions, and although this remains a key component of the AMA's activity the Association has ensured that it has remained contemporary by embracing both sport climbing competition and more recently bouldering. I feel that this willingness to adapt is at the foundation of mountaineering philosophy. As mountaineers we have adapted to modern equipment and methods and continually adapt our actions to the prevailing conditions of weather, rock and snow. I am certain that the AMA will continue to adapt as time goes by and remain as relevant to the Army's mountaineering community as it ever has.

I will be standing down as Chairman at this year's AGM. After 5 years as Chairman and 28 continuous years on the AMA's executive committee I feel that my time is up and that I should now stand aside for the next generation. I feel confident that my successor will inherit an active and vibrant Association. We currently have a membership of circa 2,500 members who participate in a wide variety of sport climbing and mountaineering activities. Our competition scene is well respected and we continue to hold

regular development meets across the UK. At the time of writing the AMA's 60th Anniversary expedition is underway in Nepal, hoping to follow in the footsteps of the legendary mountaineer and early AMA member, Lt Col Jimmy Roberts who in 1954 climbed Putha Hiunchuli, the world's 95th highest mountain.

It will be a poignant moment for me when I hand over on the 9th of Sept. I am proud to have served the AMA for over a quarter of a century and I have many fond memories. The AMA has given me many opportunities to develop as a mountaineer, as a soldier and as a person, and in return I have tried to reciprocate by giving back as much as I can to the Association and its members. The AMA's constitution requires it to 'Promote military efficiency by encouraging mountaineering in the Army' and this is exactly what I think the AMA has done, and is doing. My small part has been to help that process, but I could not have done so without the help of so many others who have served on the executive committee alongside me. I would like to thank all of them for their help.

So, finally, I hope to see many of you at the AMA's 60th Anniversary 'Festival of Climbing' over the week 9-15 Sep, or at the AGM on the 9th. Otherwise, perhaps I will bump into you on the hill or at the crag.

#### AMA Journal Editor Update

Having been passed the baton from Ryan at the AGM in 2016, I am pleased to see the Summer 17 edition of the AMA Journal published. Not only for it being my first as Editor but because it marks the start of two editions celebrating the successes that have come from 60 years of the Army Mountaineering Association.

In this edition we take a look at what you've been up to in the past 6 months, see what James Roddie has up his sleeve for improving footwork in Scotland and hear from the AMA team on the pursuit of previous AMA first ascents in Nepal.

As I have rapidly become aware, this journal could not come close to being complete without your input. For those who have submitted articles, photos or comments, thank you and please keep them coming; you never know, you may even win some cash for it.

Finally, you may notice something different about this copy of the Journal. We've added a double-sided tear-out poster advertising the AMA on one side, and the Army Festival of Climbing on the other. These are there to help advertise what we do. Please tear it out and put them up in your offices, accommodation blocks and brew rooms and let people know about what we do and what's going on.

#### Update from the Membership Secretary

Currently we have over 2500 members. It is very important that I am informed of any changes to members details such as address, e-mail, bank details etc; all you need to do is drop me an e-mail to the address below.

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

#### PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

The AMA recognises that climbing and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions.

# AMA Membership Discounts Spring 2017

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



**ToughTags**

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

**DMM**

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# DIARY 17/18

## ARMY MOUNTAINEERING ASSOCIATION FORECAST OF EVENTS

| Date                 | Location                      | Event  | Organiser                             | Remarks   |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|---|
| 8-9 Jul 17           | Cliffhanger, Sheffield        | British Bouldering Championships 2017                            | BMC                                   | UK Armed Forces Team representation by invite   |
| 12 Jul 17            | The Foundry, Sheffield        | Inter-Services Climbing Championships 2017                       | RNRMMC (Sgt Kenny Geoghegan Army POC) | By invitation. Army Team of 30 selected from the Army Championships   |
| TBC Jul 17           | TBC                           | AMA Meet   | Capt Ryan Lang                        | Open to all. Contact details on AMA website.  |
| TBC Aug 17           | Portland                      | AMA Meet & Army Team training                                    | Capt Ryan Lang / SSgt Simon Goyder    | Open to all. Contact details on AMA website. Doubles as Army team training event.   |
| 9-15 Sep 17          | Capel Curig and Indi Wall     | AMA 60 – Army Festival of Climbing                               | Lt Col Pete Skinsley                  | Open to all. Week long festival including the AMA AGM (9 Sep), first round of the Bouldering League (13 Sep), outdoor climbing, walking, coaching, workshops and lectures. See DIN. |
| 23-24 Sep 17         | EICA Ratho, Edinburgh         | IFSC Climbing World Cup – Lead and Speed                         | IFSC                                  | Provisional date  |
| 6-8 Oct 17           | Wye Valley                    | AMA Meet   | Capt Ryan Lang                        | Open to all. Contact details on AMA website.  |
| 7-8 Oct 17           | Awesome Walls, Sheffield      | British Lead Climbing Championships 2017. BMC Lead Cup - Round 3 | BMC                                   | UK Armed Forces Team representation by invite   |
| 11 Oct 17            | TBC                           | AFBL Round 2   | Maj Tom Odling                        | Open to all. DIN to follow.   |
| TBC Oct 17           | Climbing Works, Sheffield     | BMC Women's Climbing Symposium                                   | BMC                                   | UK Armed Forces Team representation by invite   |
| TBC Nov 17           | TBC                           | European Military Climbing Championships                         | Maj Tom Odling                        | By invitation. UK Armed Forces Team selected from the Inter-Services Championships. Pending invite.   |
| 27 Nov 17 – 8 Dec 17 | Costa Blanca, Spain           | AMA Hot Rock Meet  | Capt Sean Mackey                      | Open to all. Contact details on AMA website.  |
| 8 Nov 17             | TBC                           | AFBL Round 3 and RN & RM Bouldering Competition                  | Maj Tom Odling                        | Open to all. DIN to follow.   |
| 13 Dec 17            | TBC                           | AFBL Round 4   | Maj Tom Odling                        | Open to all. DIN to follow.   |
| 10 Jan 18            | TBC                           | AFBL Round 5 and RAF Bouldering Competition                      | Maj Tom Odling                        | Open to all. See DIN. UKAF bouldering team selection after this event.  |
| TBC Feb 18           | TBC                           | AFBL Round 6   | Maj Tom Odling                        | Open to all. DIN to follow.   |
| TBC Feb 18           | TBC                           | AMA President's Dinner   | TBC                                   | Open to all.  |
| 26 Feb – 3 Mar 18    | Scotland                      | AMA Winter Meet  | Capt Sean Mackey                      | Open to all. Contact details on AMA website   |
| TBC Mar 18           | TBC                           | AMA Meet   | TBC                                   | Open to all. Contact details on AMA website   |
| TBC Mar 18           | The Climbing Works, Sheffield | CWIF (Climbing Works International Festival)                     | TBC                                   | By invitation. 2 x UK Armed Forces Teams selected based on AFBL performances.   |
| TBC Apr 18           | Tielen, Belgium               | Bouldermania   | TBC                                   | By invitation. UK Armed Forces Team selected based on AFBL performances.  |

# AMA DISCOUNTS

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

*Finally, please use these discounts for personal purchases only!*



# Six of the best...

## Scottish gorge scrambles

By James Roddie

Gorge scrambling is a discipline that is part mountaineering, part caving and part traditional scrambling. It shares a lot of ground with 'canyoneering' and can take you into equally serious and wet terrain, but it usually falls short of requiring bouyancy aids, swimming or jumping into pools.

To be safe whilst gorge scrambling requires the ability to climb on wet and sloping holds, to rig abseils whilst being showered with water, to make the best use of questionable belay anchors and to show good judgement whilst cold and soaked to the skin. You need to have good footwork and balance where everything is slippery, and you need to be able to stay alert in an environment which can change very rapidly.

These are all attributes which can significantly improve your abilities and safety on traditional scrambles in the mountains, as well as being essential to more advanced mountaineering and climbing.

In a nutshell, becoming a proficient gorge-scrambler can significantly improve your overall mountaineering skill-set, and it can allow you to enjoy the mountains in an entirely new way.

Whilst gorge scrambling is quite popular in areas such as the Lake District and North Wales, it is often ignored in the Scottish Highlands despite there being a large number of high quality routes. In this article I highlight six of the best gorge scrambles across Scotland. They range in difficulty from an easy river traverse to a serious multi-pitch descent.

It should be noted that whilst I have included grades, it is difficult to apply traditional scrambling grades to gorges. The seriousness of a gorge can vary wildly depending on water levels and you should always enter a gorge with an open mind as to the difficulties you may encounter.

The approaches and return routes have not been described, as in most cases there are numerous possibilities that can be chosen. However I have provided the grid reference for the best entry point into each route, and stated whether the route should be tackled as an ascent or descent.

### 1 Ailnack Gorge (Grade 1)

#### Tomintoul, Cairngorms (NJ 123 105)

Ailnack is the mother of all Scottish gorges – 6 miles long, 100m deep and Scotland's largest glacial melt water channel. A traverse of Ailnack's full length is possible but only in rare periods of drought, and even then will require swimming. The route described here only takes in the gorge's southern (upper) half and exits just before the start of the lower ravine. It is safest to only attempt this route after at least a week of no rain, preferably more.

#### The route – descent

Enter the gorge at its southern end, via a walk almost to the summit of Cnap Chaocan Aitinn and then heading west to join the river a few hundred metres south of The Castle. If there is any sign of water levels rising do not continue from this point. The river constantly varies in depth and many deep pools and rapid sections have to be by-passed, often via easy traverses on either bank. There are no sections distinctly more difficult than others and in general the scrambling is very straightforward. Where a large stream enters the



main river from the left at Ca-du Ford, escape up the west bank of the gorge via a small path onto the hillside.

### 2 Allt a'Gharbhain – (Grade 2)

#### Ullapool, Ross-shire (NH 183 824)

Ullapool is the gorge 'capital' of the Highlands, with a number of adventurous and lengthy routes concentrated around the head of Loch Broom. The Allt a'Gharbhain gorge is one of the best in the area, and it is less overgrown and more sustained than some of its neighbours.

#### The route - ascent

Enter the stream near to the two houses at Garvan. The first steepening comes after less than 100m – a series of easy, low-angled rapids. A slightly bigger cascade is soon reached, climbed most easily via its right hand side from a knee-deep pool. A second cascade of similar height comes shortly afterwards, again tackled via its right-hand side. The crux of the route can be heard up ahead – a waterfall of about 10m height which is quite intimidating. Start up on the right (very wet) and continue up an exposed rib that runs down the centre of the fall. A small gorge and another fall lead on from the top, after which an impossible waterfall is encountered on the left. Leave the gorge here via steep vegetation to reach the open hillside.



2

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

#### Meall nan Ceapairean, Strathcarron (NG 951 465)

A very high quality route that features both enclosed gorges and open scrambling up mountain waterfalls. Whilst easily escapable in several places, tackling it as directly as possible will ensure a challenging trip. Combining this route with one of the mountain routes on An Ruadh Stac would provide a very long and excellent day of scrambling.

#### The route - ascent

The route begins as an attractive stream enclosed by trees. The first cascade is soon reached – an easy-angled fall which requires delicate moves to climb. At the top of the fall comes an easy section followed by a number of small cascades. All of these are probably climbable at varying degrees of difficulty but at least two have to be avoided by traversing above and around. Another long easy section follows, but there are still many deep pools which have to be carefully traversed around. A more pronounced gorge comes next. Enter this via a careful traverse on the left to reach a sloping shelf, and then cross the stream to another ledge. Two more falls follow before the gorge opens out and the route becomes far more open. A large cascade coming in from the left signals the start of



3

more sustained scrambling – climb this via a wall on the right and continue up a rib to the top of the fall. A section of flat slabs runs along the stream above this and it is a short walk to two more big falls, again climbed via their right sides. Further easy scrambling leads to Loch Moin' a' Chriathair.

### 4 Allt nan Corrag (Grade 2/3)

#### Sgurr Dubh, Torridon (NG 961 550)

A varied route ending with a magnificent chasm. It features everything from steep scrambling on dry rock to 'vertical grass' and cascades. If you continue uphill after the gorge ends, this route can provide a memorable way on to the two Corbetts of Sgurr Dubh and Sgorr nan Lochan Uaine.

#### The route - ascent

The gorge starts as an easy stream with no obstacles at first. After some distance a steep 15m 'slot' of rock is encountered as the route bends left. Climb this directly via a clean rib in the middle of the slot, steepening at the top. Above, briefly leave the stream behind and aim for the obvious deep gorge ahead. A number of short cascades must be climbed after the narrowing in the gorge walls, after which comes a much higher (and probably very severe) waterfall. At the foot of this waterfall, make a bold step right onto a short rock wall and climb into a steep, heathery gully for a few metres. Above this the safest option is to briefly exit the gorge - climb loose rock flakes at the top of the gully (care!!) and walk for a short distance uphill until above the waterfall. An obvious



4

loose slope leads back down into the gorge. Here the walls form a deep, vertical slot which can be easily walked through for a short distance. A few more easy cascades lead to the top.

## 5 Eathie Gorge – (Grade Moderate)

### Eathie, Inverness Area – (NH 772 640)

An escoteric but highly enjoyable descent. A long, easy stream, interspersed by a series of short but serious abseils. All abseils are rigged from trees of varying stability. All waterfalls should be descended on their left (northerly) side. It is overgrown and difficult to access during the summer months so best done in dry weather between October and April.

#### The route - descent

Enter the gorge down an easy slope from the road to quickly reach the 1st abseil (8 metres). A few metres on comes the 2nd abseil (10 metres). A few hundred metres of easy, shallow streamway follows with some easily descended cascades. At a narrowing of the gorge walls comes the approach to the 3rd abseil (12 metres). A precarious 4 metre step down a cascade is required to reach the abseil head – made easier by rigging a handline from a tree a few metres upstream. From the bottom of the abseil comes more easy streamway for some distance to reach the 4th abseil (10 metres - crux pitch). This is awkward to rig and the anchor is a slender tree of questionable strength. A deep pool at the bottom must be



5

crossed, and then a final stretch of easy stream brings you to the exit of the gorge at the sea. Equipment required – 1x 30m rope, 1x10m rope for optional handline, 4x 100cm slings.

## 6 Eilde Canyon (Grade Difficult)

### Lairig Eilde, Glencoe (NN 166 536)

A serious route which has seen very few full ascents, tucked away amongst stupendous mountain scenery. Loose rock and a lack of protection makes some of the climbs quite intimidating and bold. The atmosphere of the upper canyon is unlike almost anything else found in Scotland. Note – this gorge is blocked by snow during most of the winter and early spring months in an average year.

#### The route – ascent

Walk into the stream above two initial cascades and follow it easily upstream between deepening walls. Before long a knee-deep pool is reached with a short cascade above. Climb this to reach a left-hand 'kink' in the gorge with a 6 metre waterfall coming in from the left. By-pass this via a slimy, loose rock pitch (unprotectable) a few metres to the left to reach the start of the main canyon. This is around 250 metres long, 15 metres wide with walls 20-40 metres high. A section of walking brings you to a long series of cascades. After the initial, easy angled cascades, a steeper 4 metre waterfall is reached. Climb this directly on its left edge to reach the next waterfall – the crux. This is around 8 metres high, falling into a deep pool. Climb on the right edge at first before moving left into a small 'bowl' in the fall, and then climb the upper water shoot directly. Again this pitch is unprotectable, but a belay can be made around a large boulder in the stream above to bring up other members of a team. An easy angled cascade follows for the next 20 metres before you reach a split in the gorge, marked by



6

two waterfalls coming in from either side. These are both extremely difficult or impossible so this is where the route ends. Escape can be made via a long scramble up steep grass and moss to the left of the left-hand waterfall. This is slippery to say the least however and a fall would have dire consequences. Another (potentially safer and more satisfying) option is to descend the entire route the way you've come. (This can be done with a minimum of two abseils and a number of bold down-climbs). Equipment required – 1 x 20m rope, a selection of long slings, a selection of rock nuts.

# AMA's 60 Anniversary Expedition to Putha Hiunchuli

## The Story So Far

So at in the next best thing to the Royal Geographical Society's Ondaatje theatre, that being HMS Indefatigable's Lecture room, the participants of the AMA's AGM 2016 sat enthusiastically to hear the AMA's Chairman, Col Paul Edwards, reveal the expedition plan which would mark the 60th anniversary of the Army Mountaineering Association. Surrounded by great company and with an air of inquisitive enthusiasm we listened to the plan unfold.

The aim: to climb a 7000m peak in the remote region of Dolpo Nepal. This peak was chosen not only to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the AMA but also for the link, we the AMA, have shared with this mountain for some 63 years.

During an exploratory expedition post monsoon 1954, Ang Nyima & Jimmy Roberts became the first to summit, claiming first ascent. This mountain's name has resonated within each member of the selected team ever since the initial AGM brief. Her name, Putha Hiunchuli 7,246m.

*A man's reach...*

Robert Browning's quote "a man's reach should exceed his grasp" comes to mind from Jimmy Robert's intention on climbing Machapuchare, which he first set eyes on in Lehra, India. His later summit bid in 1957 was held off due to a weather front some 150 metres from the summit.

This feat of endurance and metal was one of many. His military career included a first operational parachute descent into North Burma, ultimately winning him the Military Cross, to the battle of Sangshak, where, over 6 days and nights, he was involved in hand to hand combat in order to prevent the Japanese advance on Kohima northern India.

For most, leave during military service was R&R, but for Jimmy Roberts in 1941 it culminated in a first ascent of Dharamsura 6,446m.

Reading through his address to the Alpine Club, dated March 29th 1955 and entitled, 'Around about Dhaulagiri' along with his obituary in 1997, it spurs on the thought of the type of man he was - quiet

comes to mind, but coming into his own when faced with adversity. With what little I know, it's fair to say we live every moment of our lives to the maximum when faced with adversity. Jimmy Roberts had a life time of adventure, exploration and adversity. And by doing so lived his life to the maximum.

Now it's our turn to tread in his footsteps, walk where he walked and climb where he climbed. And in doing so learn a little of what he learned from the Dolpo.

*The mountains will define us in general and in detail, I look forward to the outcome*

Discipline requires quite distinct attributes, of which like-minded people gravitate towards. Hence the phrase: 'like attracts like'.

Even at this stage prior to departure it's quite difficult to distinguish a divide between climber and trekker for this expedition. I'm sure the significance of each team, however apparent, will become more pronounced once on the ground.

A friend once asked me "why are you drawn to the mountains?" I replied "because they are like mirrors". Her reply reflected an affiliation to mine, but with a refined rhetoric, I might add!

Now sat writing this, some miles away from HMS Indefatigable's Lecture room in the darkest chasm of Richmond Library, I wonder what both teams will learn from Jimmy Roberts's 1954 exploratory expedition. Not only in the company of each other but in the company of monoliths, mountains.....mirrors.

*With every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks*  
– John Muir

Dedicated to James Owen Merion Roberts, Army Officer and mountaineer. Born 21 September 1916; MC 1942; MBE 1955; died Pokhara, Nepal 1 November 1997. The father of trekking - AMA number 046.

## Is your phone registered with the emergency SMS service?

The emergency SMS service was established originally for deaf, hard-of-hearing and speech-impaired people. It allows users to contact the UK 999 services by sending an SMS text message.

Many outdoor organisations now recommend registering for this service which can be used to summon 999 assistance in the hills when mobile reception is poor and there is not enough signal to make a call. As of May 2012 there were over 32,000 phones registered with the emergency SMS service.

### How the emergency SMS service works

The emergency SMS service is an add on to the existing 999 and 18000 services that are available in the UK. Your SMS text message will be connected to 999 through the Text Relay 18000 service. A relay assistant will speak your SMS message to the 999 advisor, their reply will be sent back to you as an SMS message. If you send another SMS text message the relay assistant will read it to the 999 advisor and send their reply back to you.



### Registering your mobile phone

You need to register your mobile phone before using the emergency SMS service. This is best done before you need help. You can register by sending an SMS text message from your mobile phone.

To register using SMS text messages you must:

1. Send the word 'register' in an SMS message to 999.
2. You will then receive SMS messages about the service.
3. When you have read these SMS messages reply by sending 'yes' in an SMS message to 999

You will receive a SMS message telling you that your mobile phone is registered or if there is a problem with your registration.

### Checking your Registration

You can check your mobile phone registration by sending the word 'register' in a SMS message to 999. You will receive a SMS message telling you if your mobile phone is registered or if there is a problem with your registration.

### Unable to Register?

If you try to register and do not receive an SMS message from the emergency SMS service please check with your mobile communications provider to make sure they support the emergency SMS service.

# Come climb with us

## Capt Emily Palmer

Just under a year ago, a couple of months into my first posting in the Army, I arrived in Cardiff on a weekday evening ready for the Army Climbing Championships. I was nervous because I didn't know anyone, other people seemed to know one another, and there were a lot of them! Who knew the army had so many climbers? Luckily, the girl in the bunk next to mine was super friendly and offered me a lift to the wall the next morning. I was happy I had someone to arrive with, and from then onwards I forgot all about not knowing anyone. I noticed groups of people wearing red 'Army Climbing' t-shirts and my ambition was to come away with one: I wanted to be a part of it. We climbed routes on top rope the first day, eight of them as far as I remember, starting very easy and gradually getting harder. In the evening we went to the pub opposite camp, and participated in a pub quiz. If you'd like a challenge, try participating a pub quiz with a whole round on darts and,

and another on football, with a group of climbers... needless to say we did not do very well! Luckily no one seemed to mind.

The next day we were divided into novice, open and elite categories for the finals. The novices had a top rope final, the rest of us lead climbing. Everyone watched and cheered in the friendliest way possible, which was both pretty cool and pretty intimidating! I climbed well enough to earn my red shirt and came away delighted and full of enthusiasm.

Since then I have attended a number of Services Climbing events. The Inter-services, which we won; several Army climbing team training days where we have professional coaching; three of the six rounds of the winter bouldering league which are held all in various locations in England and Wales and which keep us entertained and motivated during the winter.

I also got to experience the Climbing Works International Festival, which is a bouldering competition held in Sheffield. It's nails, and it was both frustrating and inspiring to see people climbing at that level, especially as a lot of the people climbing really hard in our round were teenagers!

Most recently I spent a week in Kalymnos training with the Army Climbing Team. Kalymnos is hands down the best climbing venue I've visited, a chilled out Greek village with as much climbing as I could want or imagine stretched out behind it, all well bolted and with a sea view. We climbed every day, swam in the sea, did yoga on the balcony, and ate fresh fish in the local restaurants where the owners had a habit of bringing us free dessert, and sometimes free wine. We even spent a couple of hours in Athens on the way over, making



the most of a long layover to see some of the tourist sites.

All in all a great year, and I remain delighted and full of enthusiasm. If you have any interest route climbing and/or bouldering please come along to events, you may leave feeling the same way! As a team we are particularly short of girls, and of guys under 25. I have met girls who climb but are anxious about competing. Come along anyway. I realise I had an advantage being new to the Army Climbing scene as I was already an already experienced climber, but I think regardless of that we are a very friendly group. Competitions are always aimed at a whole range of abilities with routes or problems starting very easy and progressing from there. And hopefully, as I did, you will soon feel a part of it.





Army competitors for the 2016 Patrouille des Glaciers during training in France

# Ski Mountaineering

Premeditated suffering can be addictive! Ski mountaineering has become one of the fastest growing winter sports across Europe and in North America. Ski Mountaineering? Rando-racing? SkiMo? What is this sport really called?

Let's just call it ski mountaineering... As a competition it perfectly suits the Military Ethos in the same way that biathlon or alpine ski racing does. It straddles the boundaries between Adventurous Training and Sport, and I hope to demonstrate that it is something that we ought to embrace in the AMA as it offers a challenging outlet to men and women who have been introduced to ski mountaineering in the Armed Forces.

Competitive ski mountaineering is a timed racing event that follows an established trail through challenging winter high-alpine terrain while passing through a series of checkpoints. Racers ascend and descend under their own steam using alpine backcountry skiing equipment and techniques that are specially adapted for

racing. The competitor requires the stamina and aerobic endurance of a Nordic skier and the prowess of an alpine skier in descent. Frequently the skills of a mountaineer are required too as competitions take place in glaciated and avalanche-prone terrain, and crampons and ice axe may have to be utilised on mountain ridges during an event – conditions depending. It is useful to describe two types of events: one could be said to take place in a “controlled” setting, the other in an “uncontrolled” setting. In the controlled setting, the terrain is sub-glacial, the route is marked in ascent and descent by wands and a track is cut. Exposed ridgelines are equipped with fixed lines. Typically the maximum altitude reached is in the region of 3000 meters. In the uncontrolled setting the competition takes place in glaciated terrain at very high altitude (up to 4000 meters) and long portions of the course may not be way-marked, neither will a track be cut beforehand by the marshals. In both types of event, the avalanche risk is assessed, controlled and mitigated by international mountain guides (UIAGM / IFMGA), and this may on occasion result in a race being cancelled,

or the course significantly altered to avoid avalanche hazard. Events are open to individuals and to teams – typically of two or three competitors and in this way they are similar to the Patrol Race that many of us are familiar with in the Nordic world. All good stuff!

International competition is sanctioned by the International Ski Mountaineering Federation, while other bodies sanction national competitions, for example the United States Ski Mountaineering Association (USSMA) or the Fédération Française de la Montagne et de l'Escalade (FFME) in France. In the UK it is a growing discipline and is governed by the British Mountaineering Council (BMC), which highlights the fact that this is competitive mountaineering, rather than traditional winter sport. There are multiple events staged across the Alps during the winter, and it is planned by the Union Internationale des Associations d'Alpinisme (UIAA), to include ski mountaineering as an event within the 2018 Olympic Games. The inaugural ski mountaineering World Championships were held in the winter of 2002 in the Serre Chevalier valley, which will be



Capt Tania Noakes (R) and Ursula Moore, British Women's Ski Mountaineering Team, World Championships 2017



The ascent of the Rosablanche couloir during the 2014 Patrouille des Glaciers

familiar to Army personnel as the home of the Army Ski Championships. In 2004 the second edition was held in Val d'Aran in Spain. During this event, our own Major Nigel Mockridge (RE) competed in the four man British team, which placed 17th out of 29 teams overall. Roll forwards to this winter, and Captain Tania Noakes (Oxford University OTC) competed at the 2017 world championships as part of the British women's team. The championships were held in Alpage-Piancavallo Italy from 23 February to the 4th March, and involved athletes from 25 nations participating in 5 races: Individual, Team, Sprint, Vertical Sprint and Relay. This was Tania's first foray into racing at the world championship level. The competition from the much larger squads from the Alpine nations was both daunting and inspiring at the same time! In the Individual Tania managed to place first GB female and then partnered with Ursula Moore in the Team Race to achieve 11th place.

The “Triple Crown” of races world-wide (collectively known as “La Grande Course”) are the Patrouille des Glaciers (PdG) held biennially in Switzerland, the Trofeo Mezzalama in Italy which alternates with the PdG, and the Pierra Menta which is held over four days annually in France. In the PdG, teams of 3 compete against each other on the 56 kilometre course across the Valais Alps from Zermatt to Verbier, at altitudes exceeding 3,500m. It is the premier sporting event in the Swiss Military calendar, and originated in 1943, when it was designed as a competition to test the readiness of Swiss mountain troops and their ability to reinforce border villages during World War II. Today the Swiss invite European neighbour nations to each send three representative military teams, and I have had the honour to lead teams from the British Army in both the 2014 and 2016 editions (sadly, the 2016 edition was cancelled due to adverse weather and snow conditions on the eve of the event).

Lt Col Pete Skinsley has been instrumental in establishing Sport Climbing within the Services. It has a foot in both camps: it is simultaneously sport and AT. Folk may be introduced to rock climbing through AT, but they can then choose to enjoy it as competition as well as in its most traditional form for its own sake. It is my hope that those of you who become hooked on ski mountaineering now have this option too, and that we will establish an Army Ski Mountaineering Team to compete on the UK and international circuits. To this end, if this excites you, please write to me and indicate your interest at: [petedavis@doctors.net.uk](mailto:petedavis@doctors.net.uk). I look forwards to hearing from you!

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to Col Nick Richardson, Commander ATG (A), to Col Paul Edwards, Chairman AMA and to Lt Col Fiona Gordon, CO Oxford University OTC for their support to Ski Mountaineering in recent events.



Lt Col Pete Davis and Maj Nigel Mockridge at the Col de Riedmatten above Arolla, halfway around the 2014 Patrouille des Glaciers



Major Nigel Mockridge and Jon Morgan, British Ski Mountaineering Team, Val d'Aran, Spain 2002



British Women's Ski Mountaineering Team, World Championships Alpage-Piancavallo, Italy 2017

# EX TIGER ANDES

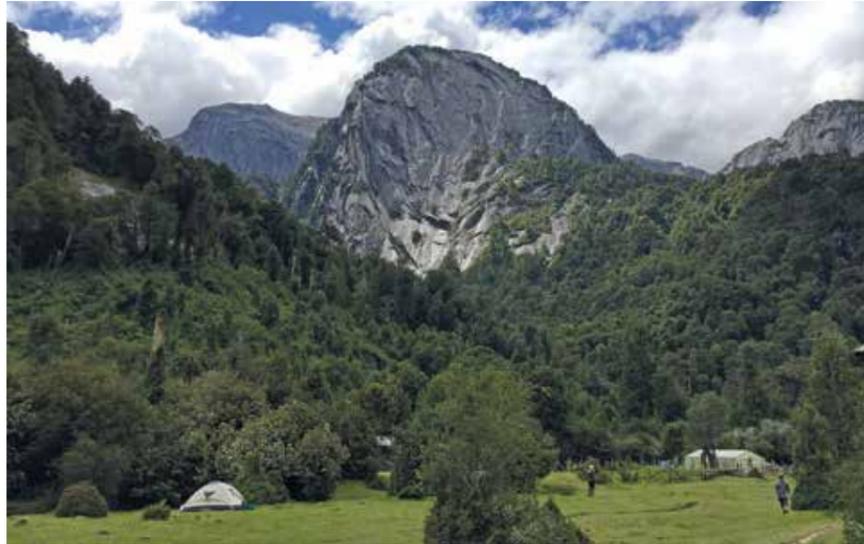
Climbers from across the Army Air Corps felt the South American heat as they deployed to Chile in January 2017 to tackle rock and trekking terrain.

At a distance of 6,500 miles, and with news headlines detailing major earthquake activity in the fortnight prior to deployment, the deployment had all the hallmarks of an adventure.

The country certainly offers all the necessary ingredients. The landscape varies hugely from desert to alpine to jungle to arctic. The people are welcoming and happy to help, if a little laissez-faire. And the mountaineering opportunities are fantastic, but they do reserve the biggest rewards for those who are willing to work hard.

The exped began with team training sessions in Snowdonia, allowing the group to gain rock climbing foundation quals and scrambling experience. By the time we RVD at Heathrow Terminal 5, those who began as 'novices' were now armed with a range of shiny equipment and new techniques, and the group of individuals were a formed team.

On arrival in Santiago, the team found a sprawling, vibrant, smog-covered city of 8 million people - over half of the country's population. Climbers fired into action on single-pitch sport crags around the area



and slowly began to adapt to the searing heat. The Chilean capital's local crags offered good sport although hot, dry and dusty.

The second phase of the exped switched focus to mountaineering terrain, and Volcan Puyehue was the objective. Steaming fumaroles and hot springs reminded visitors of the ever-present tectonic activity and the last major eruption in 2011 has changed the landscape significantly, ensuring that maps were well out of date. The team took

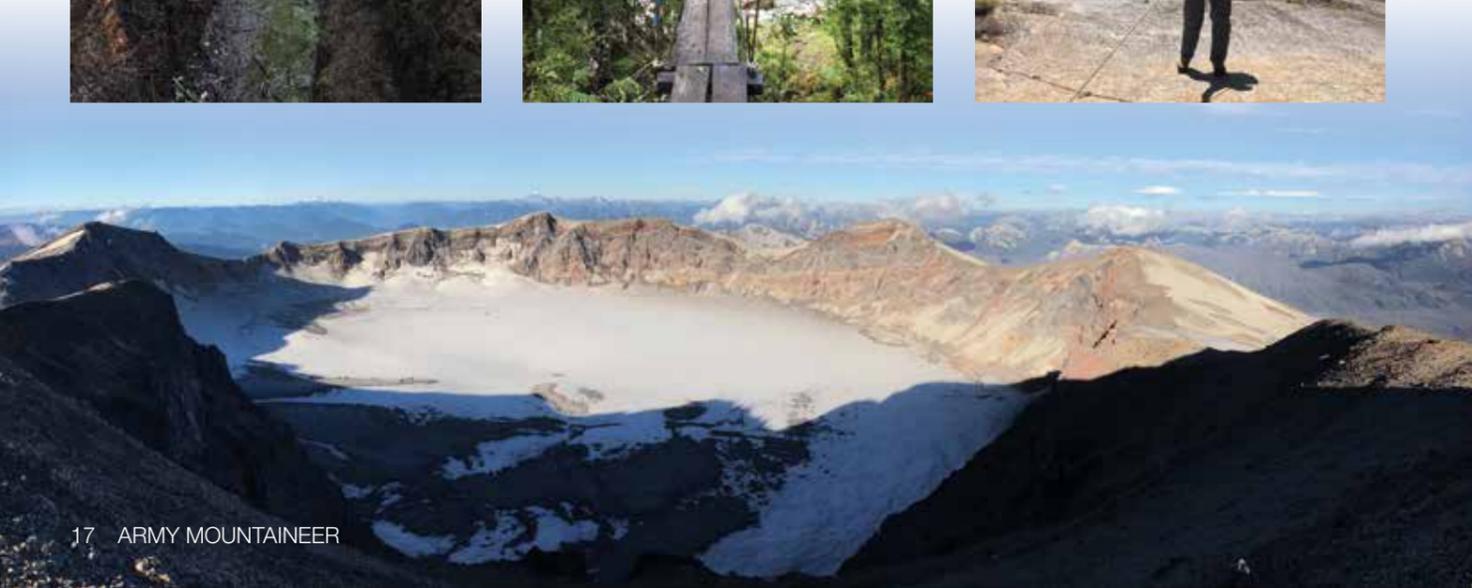
on a tough ascent of 1900m from base to summit in one push, emerging from jungle onto lava fields for the final third of the trek. Brilliant visibility showcased fantastic views from the peak, including the ice-filled crater of Puyehue itself, several surrounding volcanoes and alpine peaks, and across the nearby border into Argentina. The team descended back to the treeline - at 1390m, higher than the summit of Ben Nevis - and a basic bivouac for the night.



Moving further south, the landscape of northern Patagonia is best described as a mixture of Switzerland, western Scotland and the jungle. Snippets of information were available about the remote Cochamo valley, but quite what was to be found remained to be seen upon arrival. The description of Cochamo as 'the Yosemite of South America' gave us a clue, although the locals prefer to call Yosemite 'the Cochamo of the north'. Having made the dirt-road drive to the trailhead and entrusted a local gaucho and his horses with our basecamp kit, the team set off up the 11 km jungle approach from the trailhead to the valley. Sight of our objectives finally came as the canopy thinned during the final few hundred metres of trail. At our valley basecamp the team was surrounded with 1000 m granite faces on all sides. This was an imposing and inspirational setting. Having received our kit, checked out the hand-drawn topos and tapped up other mountaineers for info, we began to push out from the campsite and explore the opportunities. There is no doubt that Cochamo is one of the finest climbing locations in the world, and that it's popularity will explode over the next few

years. It is also a serious location for rock climbing; with long, committing, hard routes accessed by arduous approaches. There is no helicopter CASEVAC or mountain rescue service. The team spent lots of time on the trail and covered lots of ground. Options are aplenty for those climbing hard, but most require long approaches. A further four-hour battle on steep jungle terrain from basecamp to the area known as Antifeatro placed us in a huge granite basin. The setting gave one the feeling, as described by a team member, of a spider trying to escape a massive granite bathtub. A trek into another part of the valley exposed the huge, overhanging sport crag of Pared Seca, which satisfied the most voracious appetite for rock. The grading can be best described as tough!

On return to Santiago, the team made a thorough exploration of the city and soaked in the wine-making culture of the surrounding Andean foothills. A couple of long evenings surrounded by enthusiastic travellers gave sufficient inspiration for future plans; opportunities, information and motivation were provided for a new generation of AAC mountaineering expeds.



# OUT WEST

Article by Henry Crosby

I have recently returned from an accompanied secondment to the US Army Corps of Engineers in Baltimore, MD. In our 15-month posting Jo, my wife, and I aimed to get out into the great American outdoors as much as possible, primarily by clocking up road miles travelling up and down the East Coast but also on a couple of trips out West. Our hope was to experience all we could and include as much climbing, backpacking, skiing and where possible Alpinism into weekends and leave periods over the 15 months.

For short trips we resorted to camping in order to enable us to do more trips but for longer trips interspersed bouts of camping with motels; avoiding the dodgiest, by and large! As a result we learnt a bit about some of the nuances of traveling and mountaineering out there. Here are a few top tips we thought useful for those planning holidays or expeditions to the USA (or indeed Canada). Some might resonate with peoples' previous experiences but hopefully some will be new to others:

Plan early! We all try and fight JSATFA timelines and do things last minute but in the USA everyone books early. If you are late off the mark you might struggle to find accommodation etc. If you were planning on going to a National Park I would recommend starting the planning for this a year out. You don't have to book that early but you do have to consider the timelines for booking and funding prior to that.

Interesting stuff requires backcountry permits. If you want to hike through the Grand Canyon or walk top down through the



From sun to snow. Rock Mountain NP, Colorado

Virgin Narrows, for example, then you'll need a backcountry permit. Each National Park administers them differently so check their websites...early! Also don't rely on being able to email permits, some of the NPs love a good old fax machine or mail. If the permit is an online form then do expect it to crash due to the onslaught of people all trying to apply!

Think Bear! Protocols for preventing bears attacking campsites are routine. But if on a road trip not leaving a car unattended for a few nights with food in it can present logistical challenges.

Smaller than bears and not so easy to find are ticks. In the summer when camping and/or having been hiking, make sure you check yourself for this pesky little insect that can carry Lyme Disease. Make sure you pack tweezers to remove them safely and expect them to put up a struggle.

Rules is rules. Traditionally the British have a 'healthy' disdain for rules. Many Americans, especially those who might be gatekeepers to your permits have a more binary attitude to rules.

Ask for a military discount on everything. Sometimes it'll work, sometimes they'll just be for US forces. It's worth asking but not begging!



Looking down from Angel's landing. Zion NP, Utah



Before the burning sun at the bottom of the Grand Canyon, Arizona

Plan for everything including water and lost comms. If you are 'out West' it is not uncommon for there to not be showers, or even water at some campsites. If you stick to the National Park campsites (which are great!), information will at least be available on their websites and so planning can occur prior to arrival. As for comms it might be a first world country but it's a big place and sometimes it's just not worth putting a mast up!

Rangers are a wealth of information. Most National Park campsites also put on Ranger talks in the evening. These tent to be good entertainment when out in the wilderness and they are often experts in their field.

Check your travel insurance. The USA and Canada are often excluded by low cost providers as healthcare is expensive on the North American continent.

Sales tax. It is irritating at first but the sales tax is different in every state and is added at the checkout rather than on the advertised price. This is worth thinking about when putting together a budget for an expedition or just to avoid being shocked when buying flights, accommodation etc.

If anyone's planning a trip 'out west' and needs an instructor then call. Indian Creek anyone!



The river is the path; also colder than expected! The Virgin Narrows Gorge, Zion NP, Utah



Dead Horse State Park, Utah

If you've been somewhere different recently and think others would want to go, why not let us know about it? Contact the Journal Editor for details.

# EX DRAGON CHILEAN VOLCANO

On 20 Jan 17, 10 soldiers from 30 Sig Regt deployed to Chile to attempt to become the first British Military expedition to reach the summit of Ojos Del Salado, this was to be the culmination of 14 months planning and 12 months of training. Ojos is the world's highest active volcano at 6,893m and second highest summit in the Southern and Western Hemispheres, it is also ranked in the top 50 most prominent mountains (height from mountain base to summit). For comparison, Mt Everest is 8,848m. Statistically the success rate for summiting Ojos is 25%, compared to 27% on Mt Everest. So, people who go to Everest have a higher chance of successfully reaching the summit than those attempting Ojos Del Salado. During the early planning stages we discovered that Lt Col Smith (REME) was leading an Army HQ expedition (EX TIGER BURNING BRIGHT) with the same objective. Unfortunately for them, due to illness of instructors, they were not able to summit Ojos, but did gain the first British Military ascent of Nevado San Francisco (6,018m) and had an amazing trip. Lt Col Smith also provided information that helped the successful planning of our expedition. I would like to thank him for that, as I know he was preparing for another attempt himself.

*LCpl Ben Willett was asked to produce this article from the diary that he kept whilst on Ex DCV.*

As soon as I saw Ex DCV advertising for participants I knew that I wanted to be part of it. We were assured that the objective was within the reach of novices so I committed to the trip and the pre-training packages that were essential for final selection. We left sunny England on the 20 Jan 17 and began our long transatlantic flight to Santiago, we were all excited about the challenges that lay ahead. As a team we had been training for this moment for almost a year and felt ready to test our skills and resolve. After the previous attempt to summit Ojos by Army HQ there was some concern about the difficulty, but we felt prepared and wanted to be the first military team to get to the top. However, after an informative 3 days in San Pedro de Atacama; acclimatising, visiting local historical sites and geographical features, it became apparent that mountaineering in Chile was very different from that in the UK. Altitude suddenly became an issue. We'd all received concise briefs about the effects of altitude sickness and recognising the signs and symptoms, but I doubt many of us novices thought it would actually hit us. Why should it? We're all young and fit soldiers. How wrong we were.



We left San Pedro to begin the mountaineering phase of Ex DCV and moved to a campsite 3kms south of a small settlement called Guatin. Guatin is approx. 30kms north of San Pedro and at a height of 3,000m. Some of our group began to feel the effect of altitude on their bodies. Our normally relaxed walk into the hills and mountains turned into a tiring bumble that Grandma Willett would be ashamed of. However, our instructors had organised a good programme for acclimatisation that incorporated long recovery periods after each hike.

Our original plan had been to remain in Guatin for 3 days then move to a higher elevation at Machuca's Rocks Campsite. Unfortunately



for us we had arrived in Chile at a time when low pressure systems were causing a lot of rainfall and mountain snow, something we were not expecting in the most arid desert in the world. In fact, this freak weather eventually proved to be more than 'just a bit of rain.' On the third day of acclimatising, having just successfully reached our first summit (Cerro Mirador, 4,600m), we heard an ominous rumble of thunder nearby. With an almost black sky, this storm was close and was getting closer. Our plan was to set camp at Machuca's Rocks, after summiting, to continue the acclimatisation process and move to a location closer to the next two acclimatisation summits. However, whilst we were eating dinner Juan Carlos (base camp manager) was informed that the campsite was closed, so was his Plan B location, due to the impending large storm. Therefore it was decided that we should head back to our previous camp near Guatin. As we arrived it began to spit a little rain so tents were hastily set up. Literally as soon as we finished, the heavens opened and gave us hell. After abandoning setting up camp we jumped into our vehicles for safety and watched as hail, lightning and flood level rains battered our campsite. After 1 hour and no obvious break in the storm it was decided that the safest option would be to abandon camp and head back to the safety of San Pedro for the night. As we drove south the amount of rain that had fallen was made even more apparent. We encountered blocked and flood damaged roads, flooded rivers and many landslides. It seemed that Chile was really determined to stop us from acclimatising.

After a long night locating a hostel to provide shelter from the storm, we awoke to a bright sunny day and were able to see the damage caused in San Pedro. The town had been battered. Streets were completely flooded, windows shattered, electricity down and trees were felled. Our exped leader, SSgt Col Kingshott, arranged a meeting with the Chile Montana staff to chat about weather forecasts and check synoptic charts, to see the impact of the daily storms on our acclimatisation plan. All forecasts indicated that the weather systems closer to our objective were much more stable. It was therefore decided that we would retrieve the abandoned tents and head south the following day, to the Ojos region, where we would begin the acclimatisation process again. It took all morning for the roads to be cleared by the local authorities before we could



gain access to our battered campsite. Fortunately the tents were intact and only minor damage was sustained to the cook tent. After a good night's sleep we packed the vehicles, waved farewell to San Pedro and headed south to the seaside mining town of Taltal. It took 7hrs of driving on seemingly endless, arrow straight desert roads to get there. A short journey in Chilean terms. Taltal is an uninspiring village with a beach in a tsunami risk zone. It is halfway between San Pedro and the Ojos Region, so is a logical place to stop on route between the two areas.

Our next campsite was near a large salt flat called Salar de Pedernales. From here we could see the next acclimatisation objective, Don a' Ines (5,085m). Our camp location resembled a Star Wars set. An abandoned ruin of a farm, with disintegrating mud walls baking in the desert heat and a breeze covering us and our equipment in dust. The plan was to spend two nights at this camp (approx. 3,500m) steadily building up our tolerance to altitude. Don a' Ines summit day was clear and still, after a 2hr drive we arrived at the vehicle drop off and steadily made our way to the highest top of the twin peaked mountain. The ground underfoot was difficult, a mix of scree with large loose boulders, meaning that sometimes it seemed we were making no upwards progress. Breathing was difficult and we got our first true taste of walking at high altitude. Reaching the summit provided amazing views and photo opportunities. The trip back down proved to be fun and much easier than the route up. Some of the more experienced team members were able to run down the scree, whilst others preferred to pace themselves. This altitude was a new high for most of the expedition, with all now fully understanding the determination and physical effort required to succeed in thinner air. It felt good to have ascended a 5,000m peak, even if we were all exhausted. A BBQ evening meal was enjoyed by all and the following day we moved to Laguna Verde.

After the vehicles were packed we headed towards Laguna Verde for the final phase of the expedition. The road towards Laguna Verde passes through some amazing mountain scenery, and we were able to gain the first sight of our final objective. It looked amazing and certainly rejuvenated morale levels after the problems in San Pedro and days of long car journeys. As the area around





Laguna Verde is volcanic there were naturally occurring hot springs in the campsite that allowed us the luxury of a warm and relaxing bath. Our first night here was difficult as bodies adjusted to the higher altitude (approx. 4,300m), with most not sleeping particularly well. Our first acclimatisation objective in this area was to be a walk to a foresummit of Tres a' Meurte. Tres a' Meurte is 5,800m high, but we were going to be ascending to a point at 5,300m. Although the path we were taking was initially very good it soon deteriorated and the conditions underfoot proved to be the most challenging yet. Sharp, loose rocks and sand made for hard going. Whilst we were having our lunch stop we were able to see our objective for the following day, Nevado San Francisco (6,018m). As usual the walk down was much quicker and a good evening meal was eaten before an early night in preparation for the alpine start the next day.

Waking at 0430hrs was shock to the system! It was cold outside with a light frost on the ground, the stars were still shining and the mountains looked dark and uninviting. After breakfast we drove up an increasingly rough track to the start of our walk. We began at approx. 5,100m in bitter cold, not helped by the wind. Although the track up Nevado San Francisco was good and well-trodden, it

was relentless in angle and seemed to go on forever. As the sun started to creep around the edge of the mountain we were treated to some stunning views, it also warmed the air a little which raised our spirits. Eventually the path relented as we approached the extinct crater at the centre of the mountain. We stopped for some food and a much needed drink before caching bags before the final summit push. This being our third summit we were well aware of the need to draw deep on our mental and physical reserves to ensure that we made it to the top. When we finally got to the summit the feeling of pride on reaching a 6,000m summit was immense. Seeing all the other mountains around us was amazing, we even got views over to Ojos. After such a hard route up this was our reward. We spent a little time taking photos and enjoying the scenery before beginning the route down. As altitude was lost the walking became easier. A couple of team members had altitude headaches and felt a little sick, but after the evening meal everyone was fine again. After two hard mountaineering days it was decided that the following day would be a rest day to allow us to recharge before the final days on Ojos.

During our rest day SSgt Col Kingshott was shown the weather forecast for the next few days. This didn't look good. With strong

winds and exceptionally cold temperatures forecast, SSgt Col Kingshott, the Chile Montana Staff and the other Exped Instructors had to come up with a plan to allow us the best chance of summiting. It was decided that a further weather check would be completed the following morning, to confirm the forecast, then summit day would be brought forward by one day. Although this represented a risk, it did mean we would be able to make best use of the good weather window. Unfortunately weather is unpredictable, to be successful in high mountains chances need to be taken or objectives aren't achieved. Ex TBB was in everyone's minds now, as they had felt that bringing forward their final summit day had been a major contributing factor in their instructors getting altitude sickness, and ultimately the team not getting to the summit of Ojos. On Saturday 4th February, a day early, we loaded the vehicles and moved to the Atacama Refuge. Some snow had fallen during the night which made the roads difficult to negotiate, but our drivers got us there safely. When we arrived we set up tents for our return journey, had a final bag pack to further reduce our loads, then began a slow walk to advanced base camp at the Tejos Refuge at 5,800m in preparation to summit the following day.

After a poor night's sleep, either because of the effects of altitude or nervousness, to my delight I woke the team with my stern voice announcing "its 3am, time to get up". Everyone began the morning routine by eating an energy packed breakfast of boil in the bag muesli and energy bars so that they were ready for the extreme cold and arduous physical challenge of the day ahead. Going outside to use the toilet quickly demonstrated how cold it was. It was extremely cold, we would be wearing at least 6 layers each (including down jackets), for the whole day. After a bit of fuff, we stepped off at 0420hrs. Walking in the beam of a headtorch past near extinct glaciers (penitents), straining to see ice and snow on a seemingly obvious path took concentration but we soon adapted and got into a rhythm. After a few hours the skies were beginning to brighten and we could see the summit. It didn't seem so bad after all. It looked so close that we thought we would make this in no time. How wrong we were. It took almost eleven hours of painstakingly slow walking, zig zagging up endless slopes that must have been at least 40 degrees. Eleven hours of breathless-

ness, getting tougher the higher we went. We started off in a tight group, but ended up about 20 metres apart from one another. Two of our team, LCpl Zac Hampton and LCpl Nayim Mjahed, took to the very slow but very successful technique of 'walk 5 steps, take 30 seconds rest and repeat.' They claimed it was that or go down now. After the crater there was a gully which led to a short scramble onto the summit block. One by one we reached the small summit pyramid and congratulated each other. Col was first to reach the summit then Nayim, Zac and the rest. I'd like to say the feeling was brilliant for us all (it was for some) but for me it was simply emotional. It was so hard that I was worn out and tired. We just needed to get down now.

We eventually arrived back to Tejos Refuge where the gravity of what we had just achieved really started to hit home. We had made the first British Military ascent of the world's highest active volcano. Over the next few days we spent time reflecting on our achievement and relaxing. On route back to Santiago we stopped off at two seaside locations, first was Pan de Azucar. This is coastal campsite in a national park located on a beach overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Juan Carlos cooked a fantastic final meal and we had a good night with our brilliant guiding company, Chile Montana. We all watched the sunset over the Pacific and enjoyed ourselves immensely. Next we had an overnight stay in Bahia Inglesia, a lovely little village with a buzzing centre.

Eventually we got to Santiago after a short flight from Copiapo and spent the next few days conducting some cultural visits and dining out in the local restaurants before making our journey home. The mood was one of quiet contemplation upon arriving back in the UK, all of us knowing what an incredible journey we had been on. Recognising and appreciating each other's strengths and discovering new things about ourselves and what we could achieve if we set our minds to it. On reflection I can honestly say that it is by far the hardest physical challenge that I have ever undertaken and also the most mentally draining. Yet we did it. We got to the top of the world's highest volcano and we all feel proud of what an immense achievement we have completed. This is memory that will last a lifetime.



# BookReviews

By Tomo Thompson

## Something old, something new, something borrowed and something... poetic.

### THE POWER OF CLIMBING – DAVID B A JONES

Publisher – Vision Poster Company

I came across this book after it was mentioned on the (really rather good) Jam Crack Podcast. Essentially, it is a collection of really good black and white photographs of some very good and well known, some very good, and some 'who the hell are they' climbers, most of whom were climbing at or above 8a, in the late eighties. There are 45 interviews therein and, if you believe the climbing forums, the interviewees may have been prompted to make the odd controversial comment or two!

Dawes, Boysen, Redhead, Moffat, Pritchard, Moon, Nadin etc etc etc.

If you are in to reading about the extraordinary characters and talents that were at the centre of sport climbing the best part of thirty years ago, and or have an appreciation of great climbing photography, you can pick this book up online from the likes of Abebooks for circa £25.

### MOUNTAINEER – CHRIS BONINGTON

Publisher – Vertebrate Publishing

Many of you may well own the original coffee table version of Mountaineer, which remains very highly regarded as a photographic biography of mountaineer, writer, photographer, lecturer and AMA founding member, Chris Bonington. This revised 2016 version will take up less room on your book shelf, but, despite the reduced size, the quality and quantity of photography therein remains exemplary. From his first climb on Ash Tree Gully on Dinas Bach in 1951 to his ascent of the Old Man of Hoy in 2014, the 500+ photographs provide a photographic journey through the life of one of the icons of mountaineering. A must have amongst British mountaineering biographies.

### 1001 CLIMBING TIPS – ANDY KIRKPATRICK

Publisher – Vertebrate Publishing

A revised, re-designed and re-printed edition of tips from 'Hull's second best climber'.

Chapters on Basics, Safety, Big Wall, Ice, Mixed, Mountain, Training and Stuff.

Many of these tips you may never find yourself in a position to need to know, and many of them come from the dark frigid corners of the worlds hardest big walls and North faces that Andy seems to thrive on. The lay-out is excellent and easy to read, the photography is great, and the text and diagrams are deliberately simple. In compiling the book Andy grants the reader permission to 'suck his brains out' and perhaps learn a thing or two from his exceptionally deep well of knowledge.

### NORTON OF EVEREST – THE BIOGRAPHY OF E.F. NORTON, SOLDIER AND MOUNTAINEER – HUGH NORTON

Publisher – Vertebrate

In his foreword to this book, Wade Davis describes the collective work of the Norton family in writing it as having delivered "a literary gift to the mountaineering world", and I can but agree. It will be of particular interest to readers of the AMA journal as it shines a bright light on those qualities of a soldier, learnt in battle, that, in later years served Norton exceptionally well in the Greater Ranges and, in particular, during the Everest expeditions of 1922 and 1924. Whilst many military forces around the world use 'adventurous training' as a preparatory tool for enduring risk, stress and hardship, Norton, in fighting in almost every campaign from Aisne through to the German spring offensive of 1918, did things the other way round. He took his experiences of leadership in combat and applied them to mountaineering. That he was promoted quickly in the field, was Mentioned in Dispatches three times, and was awarded the Military Cross and the Distinguished Service Order illuminates the calibre of the man. The second chapter of the book ('Soldiering') would stand well on its own as a biography. There is much to be observed and learnt on Norton's character, bravery and decision making here that comes to the fore later in the Himalaya.

The chapters concerning the two Everest expeditions illuminate the respect that the mountaineering community had for Norton, and his abilities under the most demanding tests of leadership. It's also not just about Norton the mountaineer. The 'third' part of the book centers on his short notice appointment as Acting Governor of Hong Kong from July 1940, and continues through to his retirement. Soldier to mountaineer to diplomat. It is somewhat ironic that the brief 1922-24 interlude in

his soldiering career, spent on those two expeditions, is reported almost everywhere other than in this book, as the highlight of his life.

Although the book is big on detail, and draws heavily on diaries and letters that Norton wrote, it is not as hard-going for the reader as some books of late concerned with this era of British mountaineering. There is much to entertain both the military historian and the mountaineering historian. The book also contains a number of sketches by Norton of the environments and people he met during a life very very well lived.

### THERE IS NO MAP IN HELL – STEVE BIRKINSHAW

Publisher – Vertebrate

This is a a very honest (blisters, bowel problems and broken bodies) account of the running career of Steve Birkinshaw from his first orienteering event aged seven, up to, and just after his successful attempt to beat the record for a running traverse of all 214 of the Wainwright (Lake District) summits. The record, set by Joss Naylor in 1987, demands a 320 mile (515km) run with 36,000m (118,000ft) of ascent.

As well as being an enjoyable and entertaining autobiography, and an account of a remarkable feat of physical endeavour in the mountains, the book is also part training log, event diary, logistics plan, route plan and equipment list. This hard-earned information and advice will be of significant use to anyone keen to undertake long distance challenges on the fells.

Challenges of this order do not come without very significant physical and mental challenges and both Steve and his support team, are very candid in their recollections of the effort and misery that Steve endured. A recommended read for any outdoor enthusiast (however fast you move!). There is also a film about Steve's traverse of the Wainwright's, by Alastair Lee, that really compliments the book, and is available via the SteepEdge adventure film portal.

### HANDS OF A CLIMBER (A LIFE OF COLIN KIRKUS) – STEVE DEAN

Publisher – The Ernest Press

I reviewed the exceptional and influential 'I chose to climb' by Colin Kirkus in a recent copy of the AMA journal. This book, by Steve Dean, is the biography of Kirkus.

In his thirty two years alive, Kirkus wrote a book that still inspires generations of climbers, and left a line of first ascents across Britain, the Alps and the Himalaya that are of the highest standard. This biography is very well researched and shines a light on not just the outstanding climber that Kirkus was (the author climbed almost all of Kirkus's routes in his research), but also the unassuming, quiet, office worker that Kirkus spent much of his short adult life being.

It is an informative and illuminating biography of a bold and talented climber, and an insight in to the climbing scene of the 1930's.

### JUDGEMENT DAYS – TOM RICHARDSON

Publisher – High Peak Books

If you visit the Peak District at all, you may know about an outdoor equipment shop there called Outside. A slim 50 something year old bloke runs their boot department. Friendly. Engaging. Knowledgeable. Tom Richardson is also, very probably, the most experienced mountaineer and expedition leader in Britain. He has done more than twice as many expeditions to the Greater Ranges as he is years old. Think about that for a second. He is over fifty.

This book, by Tom, aims 'to reflect on decisions and judgements he has made in the mountains and tries to draw some conclusions about them and their sometimes life and death experiences'.

I review a lot of books, and i struggled to come up with a descriptive for this one. It is 'important' more than 'good'. It is a small book (printed and published by a small publishing house in the Peak District), that genuinely adds value to ones interpretation of risk, decision-making, and the vitally important process of reflecting on, and making sense of, very serious events.

Spend the twelve pounds on it. Read it, digest it, learn from its deep and rich vault of hard earned experience. You may one day save yourself far, far more than the sum of twelve pounds

### PEAK BOULDERING – ADRIAN BERRY AND ALAN JAMES

Publisher – Rockfax

I know it came out in 2014, but I haven't yet got round to doing it justice and giving it a mention.

If you climb, chances are you've got a Rockfax guide on your bookshelf. Their layout, accessibility and photography raised the bar for climbing guides, and their publications continue to win awards. So this is a load of bouldering routes in a book. A big book. A book so big that if the weather is rubbish you could just do arm curls with this and save the price of going

to the wall. You might remember the 1994 bouldering guide that Rockfax did ? well that was big for a guide book. This one is on steroids. 544 pages. 3394 routes. 60+ bouldering circuits.

It has the 'usual' Rockfax layout to the guide, as well as all the helpful stuff on the logistics of bouldering in the Peak, the important 'access' stuff, and a 'how to boulder safely' section. Geographically it covers almost every bouldering location from Wimberry in the far Northern Peak to the unique little gem that is Churnet all the way down near Alton Towers.

A life time of well photographed, easy to understand bouldering for less than the price of this years must have beanie ...

### CHAMONIX – A GUIDE TO THE BEST ROCK CLIMBS AND MOUNTAIN ROUTES AROUND CHAMONIX AND MONT BLANC – CHARLIE BOSCOE WITH JACK GELDARD

Publisher – Rockfax

Oh my. If Carlsberg did climbing guides.

Imagine your favourite guide book and your favourite climbing-action-photo book and the most useful how-to guide to climbing in the global honeypot of alpinism all rolled in to one.

In writing the guide, the authors have aimed to 'create a book that would give maximum benefit to the majority of alpinists'. They have omitted the super hard, and have instead focussed on routes that are (relatively) safe, accessible from the Chamonix valley (you don't need your own transport for most of the routes), and, importantly, they have included a variety of routes across many disciplines of climbing in the alps.

The logistics section is 15 pages long and super informative.

It's got grade 2 road side top-roping stuff for beginners and young families, and it's got the Walker Spur on the Grandes Jorasses, and almost everything in between.

Whether you have never visited the Alps, or indeed you spend 3 months every Summer there, a lifetime of alpine climbing laid out before you, in great detail, with superb topo and action photography, for £35

is exceptional value for money. A brilliant guide book.

### NO MAP COULD SHOW THEM – HELEN MORT

Publisher – Chatto & Windus

'The stand out poet of her generation' – Daily Telegraph

Poetry?

Yes, poems. That stuff that you did fleetingly in O level English.

That genre that has (probably) no representation on your book shelf amongst all the tales of derring-do by bearded men in North Face everything hanging on, against all odds, to the crimp of doom.

This is a book of poems 'on the heights we scale and the distances we run, the routes we follow and the paths we make for ourselves'.

Its subjects include Kinder Scout, Alison Hargreaves, The Old Dungeon Ghyll, Hathersage, Kalymnos, and Heinrich Harrer's Motorbike.

It is poetry of the highest order, and it stands proud and equal amongst the many forms of media used to convey a story in this rich cultural tapestry that is mountaineering.

You really should try it.

My continued thanks to everyone at Vertebrate Publishing, and also to Rockfax and Tom Richardson for providing books for review.

Vertebrate Publishing have offered AMA members a significant discount on their publications for over a decade now.

Further details (including the discount code) are available on the AMA website.



# SPEAR17

By Lou Rudd

**E**x DRAGON POLAR PILGRIM (also referred to as SPEAR17, South Pole Expedition Army Reserves 2017) first came into being over two years ago in November 2014. The original plan was for a team of Army Reserves to ski 730 miles from the coastline of Antarctica to the geographic South Pole. This was to be an unsupported and unassisted trip with each man hauling his own pulk (sledge) containing everything he needed to survive out on the ice for up to 50 days. Man-hauling is the purest form of polar travel and doesn't utilise wind assistance from kites or use resupplies of food. This was deemed a considerable but achievable challenge for a team of well-prepared Army Reserve soldiers.

However, in Jan 2016 a tragic incident took place that changed all this. A great friend of ours, Lt Col Henry Worsley MBE, sadly lost his life while attempting a solo unsupported full traverse of Antarctica. An epic 1,100 mile journey that would have been a polar first, he fell just 110 miles short of reaching his goal. I had the honour of completing an 800 mile trek to the South Pole with Henry back in 2011 and he was a huge inspiration to me. So, after extensive discussions with the team and sponsors it was decided we would use our trip to honour the legacy of Henry. This was achieved by altering our route and we would now attempt a 1,100 mile full coast-to-coast traverse. Henry's wife Joanna became one of our patrons and she very kindly loaned us Henry's compass that we used to guide our expedition. The plan now was to complete his route in his memory, a serious undertaking. Previously only 3 expeditions (totalling 6 people, all full time professional explorers) had ever managed a full foot traverse of Antarctica, and it had never been done by a British team. More people have walked on the moon (twelve) than have traversed Antarctica. It was a bold and ambitious undertaking by any standards. After rigorous selection, I had a team of five motivated and fit Reservists. But they were polar novices, some had never been on skis.

After 2 years of intensive planning, preparation, selection and training, our team of six headed to Punta Arenas in southern Chile in late Oct 2016. There we were reunited with our equipment and conducted final preparations. It took us 4 solid days just to prepare our 80 days of freeze dried food per man. Once the pulks were fully packed they weighed in at over 120kg per man, a significant weight to be dragging over 1,100 miles across the most inhospitable environment on the planet. We then focused on enjoying our last bit of civilisation for 3 months and stocked up on steak and fine Chilean red wine while waiting for a weather window to land safely in Antarctica. Finally, in mid November 16 the weather gods were kind and we were flown into Union Glacier and from there to our start point on the coastline of Antarctica at Hercules Inlet. As the six of us watched the ski plane depart the sense of isolation truly kicked in and the enormity of the challenge before us came into sharp focus. One of the biggest challenges for Polar expeditions



has always been team dynamics. If we were going to make it, we needed to work seamlessly together.

Our first leg was a 730 mile ski to the South Pole and we needed to crack it in good time to have any chance of completing the full traverse. We pushed hard right from the start and quickly settled into a routine of skiing for 10 hours a day. We would ski in single file and change over the lead man every 70 minute. Slick routines became essential to making good daily mileage. Breaks were reduced to the minimum – enough to grab a drink and some food, and swap over the lead man before clipping in and setting off again. At the beginning, we experienced temperatures around -20c which we were fairly comfortable with, but as we gained altitude they dropped into the -30c's. We started at sea level and climbed to 9,300ft by the time we reached the Pole. In the 40 days it took us to get there we only had one no travel day due to one of the guys getting a foot infection and requiring antibiotics. Incredibly we arrived at the South Pole on Christmas day and having made such good progress were able to rest up there for 2 days before heading out on the next leg. While at the Pole we conducted medical assessments and measured weight loss and it was decided that one of the team members was in a dangerously weak state and would not continue with the expedition. We had all lost on average around 16kg, having been burning around 10,000 calories a day while only consuming 6,500, but the team member who finished at the Pole had lost far more muscle mass than the others.

On the 28 December 16 the remaining 5 of us headed out into the wilderness once more from the relative comfort of the South Pole. This next leg was a 400 mile journey out across the polar plateau and across the infamous Titan Dome, which at 11,000ft is notorious for being particularly desolate, cold and windswept. Temperatures now averaged -45c and katabatic winds hammered us daily. We couldn't sit out the appalling conditions, knowing they were just as likely to continue and we had to make the pick-up point before the weather closed in for the season, we made hard-won miles each day. We all suffered from frostbite, including one team member whose cracking and bleeding mouth made eating and sleeping a daily



hell. At that point, the decision to continue from the comfort and relative civilisation of the South Pole seemed like madness.

After a very challenging 16 days of hard slog we eventually reached the top of the Transantarctic mountains on the far side of the continent. This was the point where Henry had ground to a halt and was a very poignant time for the team. We scaled a nearby mountain peak that had spectacular views back across the plateau and down the Shackleton Glacier and conducted a memorial service. All rounded off with a tot of whisky and one of Henry's favourite cigars, although lighting it in a howling gale at -53c was a challenge. It was a fitting tribute to a great man who many counted as a friend.

We were then pinned down in the tents for 36 hours in a full-on blizzard before we could begin the final stage of our journey. We had now covered over 1,000 miles in 9 weeks and arrived at the top of the Shackleton Glacier, our gateway to the coastline of Antarctica below. We had hoped that the 90 mile descent would be a straight forward finish to our journey, but how wrong we were. We had very little information as no one had ever descended via this route. The glacier proved to be a jumbled mass of disturbed ice, crevasses and moraine. Skis were swapped for crampons and suddenly the pulks became out of control - accelerating downhill on the slightest gradient to smash into the backs of the legs of the unwary and wipe them out. We were falling into snow-covered hidden crevasses up to 20 times a day and regularly having to send out recces to try and find a route through. Finding campsites on the diamond hard blue ice with sufficient snow to melt for our drinks and food became a real issue. The utmost patience and perseverance was required to navigate this alien-like terrain.



But, in the words of the great Polar explorer, Shackleton, 'through endurance we conquer', and after 6 punishing days the somewhat battered and bruised team emerged out of the mouth of the glacier and onto the Ross Ice Shelf. Here we had to select and mark a suitable runway to get the ski plane in for our pick up. Finally, after 68 days out on the ice we spotted the small black dot in the sky that signalled our taxi ride home. It had been epic!

The expedition was a resounding success and we were the first British team to traverse the continent and the first ever to complete our specific route. The expedition generated a huge amount of positive publicity for the British Army across a range of media channels including appearances on Sky News, BBC's The One Show and BFBS/Forces TV channels and feature stories in national and regional press. It also served as a fitting tribute to the late Lt Col Henry Worsley MBE. To date we have raised over £35k for the Army's national charity, ABF The Soldiers' Charity. We would like to pass on our thanks to the AMA for their support.



# EX DRAGON'S TROLL

By Martin South

The Lyngen Alps. On any ski tourers tick list. Lyngen offers a superb variety and quality of terrain from introductory touring to superb ski-mountaineering terrain. The aim of the exercise was to introduce and train soldiers in ski-touring, providing valuable log book experience for junior soldiers for further Joint-Service AT qualifications. The exercise provided both the Ski Foundation 3 (SF3) qualification, and training also focused on those individuals progressing through the JSAT instructor scheme.

Although those already holding the SL qualifications are strong skiers, their mountaineering experience can be limited. Therefore, time on-mountain is particularly valuable in the development of skills such as quick and efficient personal administration, navigation, mountain awareness, weather patterns, and how they affect the snowpack etc which were all repeatedly highlighted during the training in order to reinforce the mountaineering aspect of skiing. Luckily, I had both Richie Simpson and Geordie Taylor's experience to rely on as my two instructors. Richie as the SL3 for my SF3s, and Geordie Taylor for my SLs. Luckily Geordie left his Brompton bike at home this time around, unlike the Winter Meet in Aviemore...

A weekday, morning flight ensured no issues at Heathrow, and the party flew to Oslo on the first leg of the journey to Tromsø. A seamless transition to our

next domestic flight to Tromsø, apart from Callum Taylor, who selflessly donated his recently bought bottle of Captain Morgan's Spiced Rum to Norwegian Customs and Excise whilst passing through security onto our next flight. The expedition stayed overnight in Tromsø at the Viking Hotel, which gave everyone the opportunity to fill-up on complimentary waffles and coffee before going out for a quick sight-see, and for those new to Norway an opportunity to experience Norwegian prices for food and drink. The Norwegian weather certainly didn't disappoint, and there was snow on the ground all the way to the harbour's edge. A good indication for the conditions the expedition was to have for the week ahead.



## Thu 6 Apr 17

Russelvfjellet (794m). For the SF3 group, the first on-mountain day was an easy touring day to get the expedition familiarised with Alpine Touring equipment and to introduce new skills. Russelvfjellet is recommended as an introductory peak to the Lyngen Alps, so it was a good choice for the first day. This first day afforded Richie to legitimately claim that his skis had now seen both Arctic and Antarctic snow, and the party took to skinning through the trees in their stride. The light was fairly poor, although the party still had superb views out onto the Arctic Ocean. When the mountain's saddle was reached,



Richie paused the party and waited for the cloud to clear, and the very poor visibility to improve. Unfortunately, the cloud stubbornly sat at the 700m point, so he decided to carefully lead everyone down until the visibility improved. Out of the cloud and on quality snow, the SF3 group enjoyed a great descent to the cars.

Rundfjellet (768m). As part of their development and training the Ski Leaders were given the responsibility to choose a route from the guidebook that would be a good introductory touring day if they were leading their own group. Under the guidance and supervision of Geordie, the group chose Rundfjellet for its low peak and relative simplicity of approach. The actuality of this peak was a long convex hump-back of a hill that disappeared endlessly over the horizon, and it became known as "the hill that kept on giving".

## Fri 7 Apr 17

Storhaugen (1142m). Not many ski days begin with a journey on a car ferry, but an

early start with the boat from Lyngseidet to Olderdalen took everyone across the Kåfjorden to the day's ascent of



Storhaugen. Starting from the churchyard at Bjørkli, a pleasant skin through trees took the expedition onto the main NE face of the mountain where a steady climb and plenty kick-turn practice led to the summit, which was rewarded with outstanding views of the Lyngen Alps, the Lyngen fjord and out to the Arctic Ocean. The conditions on Storhaugen were superb, and the skiing on the descent was classic Lyngen, with everyone carving (in their own way...) fresh lines.

Staluværri (1251m). As the avalanche threat had been particularly high the previous week, the condition and stability of the snowpack was critical in the SL development group's choice of peak. Although the threat was now graded Moderate, the group chose an objective with 25°-30° slopes with safe approaches. Instructor development always being on Geordie's mind, he discussed with the SL group "looking the part" as a group leader, as part of instilling confidence in novices. With Bez Green going for the "continental ski-tourer" ensemble, and Manon Roberts looking very much at home in a Crystal's holiday brochure, this lesson was mainly (if not completely) directed at Dave Gomez and his "Ray Mears chic". Stubborn to

the absolute last, Dave insisted that his pack, which wouldn't have looked out of place on a West Highland Way walker, was the rucksack for the job. On the descent, Manon successfully managed to get as close as possible to Norwegian flora, but unfortunately at speed; as goodness only knows how, she hit a tree. Luckily, with nothing bruised apart from a bit of ego, her resultant GoPro footage was enjoyed by all (even her).

## Sat 8 Apr 17

Kjelvåggtinden (1004m) Blåtinden (1142m). An early start in order to carry out two car-ferry crossings to reach Uløya island. The aim for the day was a combined ski along the ridge on Uløya, taking in the peaks of both Kjelvåggtinden and Blåtinden. The group shared the early morning ferry from Lyngseidet to Olderdalen with the usual mix of ski-tourers and locals. The tour started with an initial skin through woods on a local løype, followed by a long but reasonable skin up the mountain. Both groups stopped for lunch and enjoyed the view across the fjord, and looked forward to the ridge above. Once the summit of Kjelvåggtinden was reached, both groups skinned together along the ridge





to Blåtinden. After some quite breathtaking views out to the Arctic Ocean and the Lyngen fjord, the party had a superb descent on excellent snow down a wide slope to the tree-line above Åsheim. The ski to the car through the tree-line probably couldn't be described as quite as superb, but it certainly made for some technical, challenging and (admittedly) in places, fun skiing. A long day, but a real all-round Lyngen experience for everyone.

**Sun 9 Apr 17**

Storgalten (1219m). Storgalten proved to be a relentless ascent, where poor kick-turns would not have been forgiven, and gave the SLs an opportunity to use their ski-crampons in anger. The conditions did give good examples and a variety of snow-pack change, and showed how the prevailing SE wind affected a NW face. Visibility concerns restricted the ascent, so the group aborted their aim for the summit, transitioned to downhill mode, then skied back down the bowl in superb snow conditions. Although there was no summiting that day, some quality mountain skills were learnt and reinforced, from appropriate clothing and layer management to the use of ski-crampons on difficult ground.

**Mon 10 Apr 17**

Stetinden (920m). Another classic Lyngen day for the SF3s, as Richie took the party on the ascent of Stetinden. A steady skin through the trees up the Bjørndalen valley, and then on steepening ground to Flatfjellet, although it felt anything but flat on the skin up. The push north onto the summit of Stetinden was a great opportunity for plenty of kick-turn practice, especially on slightly steeper ground. The group enjoyed the views on summiting Stetinden, and after a quick bite to eat, skied back down avoiding the rocks, and enjoying far better conditions on Flatfjellet. A real summit-to-sea day for the SF3s as the snow-line was on the beach at the edge of the fjord.

Kavringtinden (1289m). Geordie obviously thought that the SL group's aborted attempt of Storgalten to have constituted a half-day, so he chose a quality, demanding peak to make up for any lack of touring the previous day. Ski-crampons were again used in anger, and the ascent was an excellent opportunity to consolidate skills with the use of crampons on steep and icy ground. Even ski-crampons have their limits, so for the final 100m of ascent, it was a boot-pack to the summit. A careful descent followed, with even more careful defensive skiing before the slopes

opened-up, and the SLs could enjoy some carving on the albeit wind-scoured snow.

**Tue 11 Apr 17**

Rasmustinden (1210m). The same mountain, but two different approach routes for both the groups. An odd day, as although the visibility at distance was adequate, the low-light meant challenges in reading the terrain. Richie's group approached from the east on long approach from a subsidiary summit, and Geordie approached from the SW. This was a true mountain day for both groups, as an equivalent in the UK would be having the whole of the Snowdon Horseshoe or the Ring of Steall in the Mamores all to your own, with snow to sea level. A great experience for everyone, as that "big mountain" feeling and exposure was much more prominent on this day than on any other. In order to make the best of the low-light and keep the group safe, Richie choose a route into, and then boot-pack out of, a re-entrant below a col between both peaks. This boot-pack experience had the full gamut of reactions from "that was amazing!" to "hmmm...mountaineering. Off the list". Apologies, I lost one potential AMA member right there. Blame Richie. As Richie was concerned over the low-light level, he decided that the SF3s

would leave a summit attempt, and ski down the valley to the RV point with the other group. Light aside, the snow was superb and the SF3s had a great ski down the valley, until the ubiquitous Norwegian tree-line, where it was the usual fun then fight through the trees, with poor Adam Vickers always seeming to come off worst at least once on every ski through the woods. The SL group had a challenging day as well in similar conditions, with a wide variety of touring skills involved, from ski-crampons to another boot-pack to the summit.

**Wed 12 Apr 17**

Storgalten (1219m). Again. On their final day of Lyngen touring, it was only right that the SL group returned to vanquish the peak that had turned them back a few

days before. Storgalten is a popular peak, and had several groups of skiers on the mountain, a real contrast to the previous day's tour. The SLs had a good chat to the other tourers from all over Europe, although the popularity of the mountain did lead it to be dubbed "Val Thorens" by the group. Plenty of last-day energy took the SLs down the mountain, with the group making the very best of the conditions, with swooping turns and maybe a couple of jumps when the opportunity presented itself.

Gillavarri (1163m). One of the most popular mountains in the Kåford Alps, it's easy to understand why. A superb mountain, with even better views at the summit. The SF3 group travelled on the Olderdalen ferry, and propped their skis up against the sides of the car ferry for

the short sail across the fjord. The start of the route up Gillavarri is only a short walking distance from the harbour, so in superb weather the SF3 group headed up the mountain. Although there were a few other touring groups enjoying the ascent, they were easily absorbed by the size of the mountain. A long but straightforward skin led to the summit of Gillavarri, which gave an outstanding view of the fjord and surrounding mountains. As the snow on the upper area of the peak was superb, Richie let the group enjoy the descent in stages to the much-familiar Lyngen tree-line. After the now traditional fight through the trees, the SF3s sat by the small café at the Olderdalen harbor and enjoyed the sun and their sandwiches waiting for the ferry. An outstanding day to end the week in the Lyngen Alps. And the accommodation for 2018 is already booked.



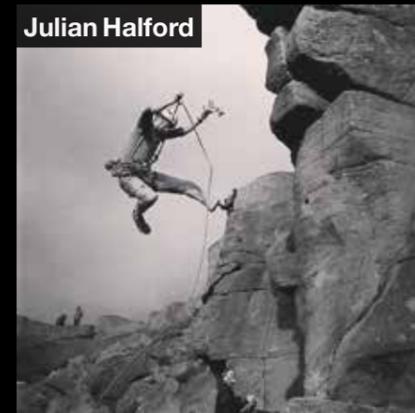


# PHOTO COMPETITION

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



# Going from strength to strength!

By Ryan Lang

Another six months has gone in the blink of an eye! It's time to report on the AMA meets that have occurred since the last journal in 2016. I decided to do things slightly differently this time around, rather than produce a report for each meet; I have opted to do a review of the last 6 months or so.

### Where have we had meets?

Since the last journal was published in Autumn 16, the AMA has had meets in the following locations:

- Wye Valley
- N Wales
- Dartmoor
- Cairngorms
- Lake District

The Wye Valley meet continues to be very popular and sells out quickly. The meet has been running every year since 2012 and continues to defy the odds by usually being dry enough for two good days climbing in October. One of the plus points of this meet is that it is renowned for being a very social meet. In fact all the AMA meets in recent years have been social, but there is something in particular about this one that makes it stand out. Perhaps it's the time of year? Perhaps it's the good food after a hard days climbing, in front of the log fire with some cold beer? Whatever it is, it's running again in 2017 so keep a look out!

The N Wales meets continue to be popular, which is why I have ran so many from there in the last two years. By the time this article is published, I will have run three meets from Llanberis since the last journal. The

fantastic thing about N Wales is that there is so much to do in a relatively small geographical area. It doesn't really matter what time of year we go as the weather doesn't limit us in any way, if it's too wet to climb, we scramble or walk. There is something for everyone! For the last two years or so we have also complimented the various levels of military instructor with a civilian instructor from the local area. People often ask why we do this, the answer is simple. A civilian instructor will always turn up as they have a reputation to keep and a wage to earn! Also by choosing to employ a BMG, MIC or MIA for the weekend, it allows the slightly more advanced instructors to conduct some continual personal development (CPD). In other words, everyone benefits from attending the meets and not just the more novice members.

Mark Gregory very kindly ran a meet based in Dartmoor at the tail end of 2016. Initially I was sceptical as it's a bleak place at the best of times, never mind in November! Mark pulled it off though and ran a very successful meet. There was climbing and walking on offer despite it being November! It also allowed our South West based members an opportunity to attend a meet without having to travel to the more traditional, but distant venues.

The AMA winter meet seems to be going from strength to strength. Martin South took on the mantle of arranging one of the technically more challenging meets that we run. The meet was run very well and had a great mix of students and instructors, backed up by two very experienced MIC holders. The conditions were lean, but the



local knowledge of the MICs meant that every opportunity to make the most of the conditions was taken. I'm very glad to say that Martin South and Sean Mackey are already planning the AMA winter meet for 2018 and it looks set to be a cracker with some of the things they have lined up!

Finally we have the Lake District meet which has run for the last two years from the same location. It's amazing the difference a year makes, we had snow on the ground the first year and a clear blue sky the next! Negotiating the M6 is always risky on a Friday, but I'm glad to say it was well worth the drive. Almost a full turn out, great food, ales and of course a weekend of activities. This is likely to be another meet that gets set in stone in the AMA calendar. Those that attended spread themselves all over the lakes for the weekend, climbers (both

trad and sport), scramblers and walkers made best use of the great weather that we had. It was particularly good to have some sport climbing and bouldering taking place, as neither really featured on the meets until now.

### What makes a good venue?

If you have been in the AMA for more than two years or so, you may be aware that I made the decision to make a small change for attending the meets. This has sparked debate but I will explain why the decision was made. Every time I arrange a meet, I ask those that attend whether they would prefer to stay in military accom for free or to pay approximately £20 for a weekend to stay in a civilian bunkhouse. The answers are unanimous; nobody wants to travel from their barracks, just to stay in another military camp for a weekend. They would rather break ties with the military environment and stay somewhere a little more relaxed. To quote one attendee "The last thing I want is to spend my weekend stuck to a green Army mattress" Almost all the venues we now use are civilian. Things I look for when choosing a venue:

- Non-military if possible
- Space for approximately 20 people
- Ideally a pub that serves good food no more than 5 mins walk

Some of the venues we use offer a full cooked breakfast on both days of the meet, others are self-catering. It amazes me to see what people actually consider to be breakfast in the morning. I have seen everything from Pot Noodles, to Chinese crispy duck spring rolls along with the full English fry-up! The big advantage of using civilian accom is that it provides freedom. There are none of the usual restrictions that you find with military establishments, such as adhering to meal times or curfews. The obvious exception to this is large events such as the AGM or Army Festival of Climbing, where JSMTIC Indefatigable or Capel Curig is perfect.

### What are the aims of the meets?

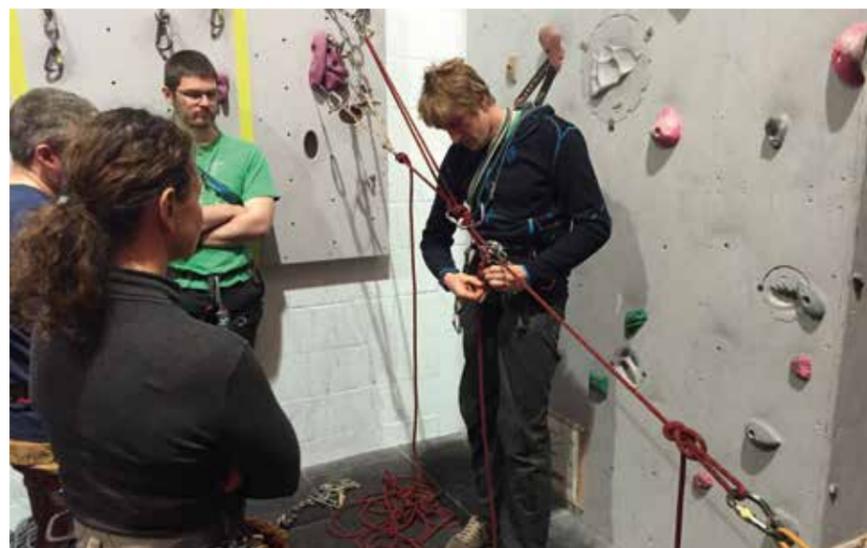
The aims of the meets are numerous:

- Have fun
- Learn new skills
- Gain experience in preparation for higher JSAT and NGB qualifications
- Make new friends

If you have never attended a meet, you can be forgiven for conjuring up an image of a strictly controlled weekend. One where there is no choice in activity, pace and difficulty. I am glad to say that the weekends are a far cry from this image that some may have.

All meets are conducted 'On-Duty' and in accordance with JSP 419. It's important that all instructors stay within the remit of their qualification. No plan survives contact with the enemy, I have never had a spreadsheet yet that hasn't had ink all over it, crossing names off or adding a last minute arrival. For this reason, I don't allocate students to instructors until first thing on the Saturday morning. There is nothing very scientific about it; it's a bit like picking football teams in school, with the instructors lined up on one side and the students on the other. Students are allocated to instructors depending on what they would like to do.

From a personal perspective, I have been involved with many people on the various meets that I have run. Some have wanted to learn to navigate, others to lead climb under instruction, some want to try multi-pitch climbing for the first time. Others have no idea what they want to do, but after a quick chat and a few suggestions a plan is usually made for the day. On the other end of the scale, some of the more experienced members have wanted to learn more complex skills and techniques. The basic principle is, if we can make it happen we will! The only thing we can't do is award qualifications, that is the role of JSMTIC, what we can do though is help you on your way!



The meets are also very relaxed. Yes we are all in the Army in one way or the other, but everyone that attends does so because of their shared love of the mountains and all they have to offer. The meets are not rank conscious in any way whatsoever. This is something that is very important to me as I originally joined the AMA in 1999, and left about three years later. Why did I leave? It was all to do with my perception of the AMA at the time. I believed that it was an Officer sport and not for the likes of myself at the time. I also thought that the AMA would be very 'clicky' and hard to break into. I left without ever choosing to find out the reality. I didn't re-join until 2012, when I discovered that I loved climbing. I also realised when I re-joined that I had missed out on over 12 years of mountaineering opportunities all because I let perception get in the way of reality. So, just to be clear, it doesn't matter what rank you are or which cap badge you wear. That is all left behind when you turn up for the weekend.

**Why are there more meets than before?**

There are many reasons why meets are becoming more popular and frequent than before. The frequency of meets is down to willing volunteers that step forward to arrange them. Without those willing people, meets just wouldn't happen. Secondly, it is the instructors, who give up their time to provide valuable instruction, again without them meets would happen.

The most important reason is that you, the membership want them. As long as they keep filling up, we will keep arranging them. Another misconception is that the

AMA is all about 8000m peaks. Having chatted to as many members as I could over the last few years, it has become crystal clear in my mind that the vast majority of active members want to meet up at a weekend and climb, scramble or walk. This is something that many units struggle to arrange from within so people look to the AMA to provide it.

**Social Media to the rescue!**

When I first began running meets, the AMA did not have a way to email the entire membership (circa 2500) at once. Try using your Hotmail account to email 2500 people at once and see what happens. Most accounts including the AMA limit the amount of recipients per email, which means prior to Mailchimp, we had to send the same email approximately 50 times to ensure a full distribution! This was a very laborious task for the membership secretary. Mailchimp has significantly improved the speed at which we can email the membership about up and coming meets. Since the last journal we have

sent out over 16,500 emails of which 29% were opened. This resulted in 138 people attending the last 7 meets, which is just less than 6% of our membership. This may seem like a very small amount considering the amount of emails sent, but it is actually higher than the ecommerce average!

Once we had solved the email problem the next issue was how to sell the tickets for each meet. When I first started arranging meets, I was receiving cash, online payments and cheques through the post, which was a complete nightmare! We started using Eventbrite which is an online ticket selling site. This makes the whole process much simpler, as the ticket invites are now sent to the membership at the same time the application form is made live on the website. This allows people to purchase tickets instantly, and allows the rest of the membership to have visibility of the remaining tickets. Once the meet is complete, the money is automatically transferred into the AMA bank account.

**What has this done for the AMA meets calendar?**

Last year we managed to arrange two separate meets in one month. The Dartmoor meet and N Wales meet were both held in November and were both full. Taking this a stage further, we managed to successfully run two meets concurrently over the same weekend earlier this year. Both the Winter Meet and March N Wales meet were full! If someone had said to me 12 months ago that we could run two meets at the same time, I would have completely doubted them. Social media and willing volunteers have made it happen.

**Meet Demographic**

I have looked at the stats over the last 7 meets and note that there is a healthy balance between regular attendees and newcomers, the AMA needs both to survive. Approximately 40% of meet participants are newcomers in that they have never attended a meet previously. Some of

those have only just joined the AMA; others have been members for years.

One disappointing statistic is that the SNCO bracket is very much in the minority of attendees, Pte-JNCO is higher and Officer is much higher still. This is concerning considering the Army rank structure is based on a pyramid, we should have many more JNCO than SNCO, we should have many more SNCO than Officer Etc. The current average split of attendees is:

- Pte – JNCO = 25%
- SNCO = 12%
- Officer = 63%

I am not sure why the figures have turned out this way. One reason could be that the average age of a Pte – JNCO is similar to that of a young Officer. Both groups may have more time on their hands if they have yet to settle down and start family life? Who knows? This is one for the AMA Recruitment Officer to sort out!

**To Sum up!**

Meets are becoming more popular which is great for the AMA. So much so, that we ran 15 meets in the last 18 months. Arranging meets is not complicated in any way, if you are keen to arrange a meet for the benefit of the membership, please get in touch. You will be given a £50 DMM or Cotswold outdoor voucher for your efforts. Trust me, it's easy, pick a place (that has a bunkhouse, pub and mountains), pick a date; the rest will fall into place.

Social media has greatly enhanced how we do things in the AMA, Mailchimp and Eventbrite greatly simplify how we advertise meets and take payment. This means there is even less for a prospective meet leader to do!

Lastly, if you are reading this and have never been to a meet, please consider coming along. It may be an Army event but it's not full of Bull\*\*\*t. Simply put, it's full of likeminded people that want to go out into the Mountains, long may that continue!



# Dartmoor Meet

By Mark Gregory

On a brisk November morning, the AMA took its first steps onto Dartmoor National Park in recent times. But why Dartmoor? Was it for the navigational challenges it offered, the vast open expanses of this moorland amphitheatre, the archaeology and its historic significance or simply because I wanted to re-live my childhood exploits that covered many miles of this wilderness in the pursuit of Ten Tors. In truth, it was all of the above. Offering an array of accommodation from B&B to camping, the Plume of Feathers Inn was an ideal location in the heart of Dartmoor to base our activities. A small town renowned for the infamous Dartmoor Prison, Princetown is ideal for anyone wishing to venture directly onto the Moors; either on foot or bike, and with a good variety of climbing venues within easy reach.

This weekend could have gone one of two ways. It could have been typical Dartmoor – cold, wet, claggy – or it could have been beautifully clear but bitterly cold. The latter conditions are how the small team of 9 were welcomed. So, on this bitterly cold Saturday morning the intrepid team of 6 climbers and 3 walkers headed to Burrator Reservoir to start their activities. The climbers ascended Sheeps Tor close to its namesake village from which a good day of single pitch climbing was had. Dartmoor is also renowned for its local legends and the church in Sheepstor Village features in one of these. The story tells of how the church's bell ropes were once tied together and lowered into Crazywell Pool in an effort to ascertain its depth but despite reaching some 160m, the bottom was never reached. The Tor itself, according to UK Climbing, consists of "excellent climbing for lower-grade climbers with routes up to 35ft; eminently worthwhile routes despite the lack of height". A day of good single pitch climbing that catered for all abilities was had by instructor and student alike – despite the aching limbs and cold figure tips. My thanks go out to the istructors who were able to lead this part of the meet.

The walkers departed Burrator Reservoir and arrived at Sheeps Tor just in time to admire some iconic 'man-leg' adorning the tor. The climbers were still setting up as they continued their journey through a string of tors around the South Moor; Gutter, Calveslake with its forked tongue re-entrant, Combshead, amongst others. The route took in the old warreners' house at Ditsworthy which featured in the film War Horse and assorted Bronze Age settlements and natural features as we micro-navigated our way around Great Gnat's Head



Roping up

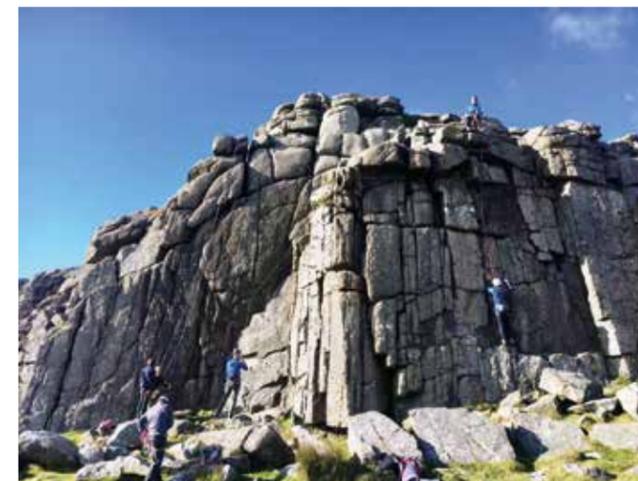
and Hartor Tors. This area is particularly impressive as it has a myriad of Bronze Age features including stone rows, huts, circles, cairns and standing stones mingled with more recent evidence of the tin mining industry on Dartmoor. Although their exact purpose cannot be definitively known, it is suggested that many of these prehistoric stone structures had religious, ceremonial or astrological purposes. Eylesbarrow mine is one of the best examples of tin mining on Dartmoor with the ruins still prominent to this day. It is a scheduled monument under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 because of its national importance. According to Historic England the mine is believed to date back to the 12th century, although no firm documentation existed until the 16th century.

Although seldom making a profit, the 19th century mine opened in 1814 and continued until 1852. It is these remains that have earned the mine its place as the "most informative example of large scale water powered tin mining in Britain". The final stop of the day was Crazy Well Pool. Although no attempts were made to confirm the pool's true depth, a moment was taken to reflect on the life of Marine Nathaniel Burton who, in 1998, unfortunately drowned in pool during his Commando training course. The pool itself is attributed to the tin mining industry and is believed to be the consequence of excavation. Retreating to Burrator Reservoir, a short drive to Tavistock and the Bedford Hotel was greeted with afternoon tea; a just reward for a hard day's work.

Following a night of fun, frolics, beer, steak, fireworks and bonfires, another cool and clear day dawned across the moors. The climbers went further afield to tackle Dartmoor's most renowned climbing venue – The Dewerstone. With UK Climbing reporting over 140 climbs, these crags are "a fantastic low to middle grade venue which remains climbable year round... consist[ing] of a number

of contrasting crags which vary from multi-pitch classics to single pitch micro routes". The disparate climbers, therefore, had the opportunity to progress individual and pair skill sets and experience within this multi-pitch environment where a good number of climbs were achieved. As with Crazywell Pool, The Dewerstone is steeped in legend. The Devil incarnate or Wisht Huntsman in other stories, Dewer roamed the moor with his hounds, chasing unsuspecting travellers to their death over the crags of The Dewerstone at which point they were devoured by his ravenous hounds.

The walkers headed north out of Princetown over North Hessary and Great Mis Tors and on to White Tor taking in the surrounding scenery and further treading the historic Bronze Age timeline. The route included yet more examples of stone circles, huts, cairns and enclosures. Uniquely, White Tor is also the site of a late Neolithic/early Bronze Age fort believed to be over 3000 years old although the remains are quite hard to detect. Over Cox Tor and down to Merrivale Quarry with its very own Inn (The Dartmoor Inn), we pushed on to King's Tor to meet the disused railway that once transported granite from the surrounding quarries to Plymouth. At Swell Tor quarry, corbels that were originally carved for the purpose of widening the old London Bridge can still be seen. Walking aside, this old railway is also an ideal location for 'leisurely' mountain biking that can be linked with other routes including the recently open Drake's Trail (by road) and National Cycle Route 27 for a longer outing to Tavistock, Plymouth and Ilfracombe. The route back to Princetown was level, quick and afforded enough time for yet more afternoon tea at the popular Two Bridges Hotel before this classy and civilised cohort went their separate ways. This coincided with the final 'tip of the hat' from the climbers who, with arms like lead and knuckles raw from 'dragging', were now making their own journeys home following another successful day on the crags. They all made it off in good health, so I can only assume that the infamous Dewer was left unfulfilled from the hunt – at least on this occasion.



View from Gutter Tor



Ponies at Ditsworthy



Great Mis Tor

# Winter Meet 17

**“...okay, no problems Sean. I’ll take on the Winter Meet.” First mistake...**

**By Martin South**

The Winter Meet is always a challenge to organise, but with Sean and Ryan’s help, we made a real effort to make sure that the Meet was a success. As getting enough winter instructors in both climbing and mountaineering can be difficult enough at the best of times, so as well as the support from winter-qualified Members, the Meet provided a civilian WML and two civilian MICs to ensure that the those who made the effort to get to Aviemore received quality winter training. The interest in the Winter Meet was high this year, across a wide rank-range, as well as with Regular and Reserve Members. Trying to square the circle of meeting everyone’s training aspirations for the week fell to me, and hopefully it worked (...ish).

Everyone arrived on the Saturday, and the prize for the most crazy and/or ecologically-responsible transport definitely went to Geordie Taylor for turning up at Rothiemurchus on his Brompton bike. Stubborn to the last, he even refused a lift from Aviemore train station and frantically pedalled from town all the way to the Lodge. A superb effort. But nuts. The rest of the Members arrived in more conventional transport, and settled-in for a cracking week’s winter mountaineering. Apart from one problem. There wasn’t any snow. It could have been July if you looked SW from the Lodge. Beautiful, but not very winter mountaineering-y. Undeterred, the search for snow (and maybe some ice) was on.

First day on the mountain, Guy Davies, Ben Turner and Ben Powell went out as a group and worked on their skills and logged a QMD. Col’s group were after the same, a good QMD, so he took Sip Powers, Phil Coleby and Ryan Anderson for some skills revision and maybe a Munro if the weather allowed. Nick Cannon-Jones, one of our civilian MICs took Jane Keenan, H Harris, Ian McNiven and Ryan Beckett out for their shake-out day. Continuing the QMD theme, Niall Archibald took Phil Seely, Mark, Ali Allsop and I out onto the Cairngorm plateau for some nav work and impart his particularly impressive knowledge of all things Scottish mountains (whether it be flora, fauna or historical) on the group. A great first day.

You know the conditions are poor when even Col Kingshott has one axe on his pack rather than two, so he took his team off for some more Munro bagging, as did Geordie (minus his Brompton, he left that at the Lodge), Niall and Gemma, our civilian WML. The aim of the majority of Members was to gain QMDs towards JSAT qualifications, but some were determined to climb, so Andy Hogarth (MIC) and Nick Cannon-Jones took climbing pairs out into Sneachta to climbing something. Anything. Sneachta didn’t disappoint, and Ali and I got some climbing in, as well as Guy and Jane. So although the season was pretty thin regards to conditions, on the high ground it was still winter, so the Members were still getting their QMDs ticked-off.

Geordie led his team to Coire Laogh Mor and went through snow anchors, bollards etc as training for future JSAT courses.

The QMD theme continued (Col was still only carrying one axe, he’s a better indication of conditions than MWIS), with Geordie and Gemma taking their teams on a ghost-hunt to Ben Macdui (strength in numbers I suppose) and Niall taking Phil, Mark and Alex out for some more quality instruction and Scottish mountain facts. Ali and I headed into Sneachta again, determined to have two axes out rather





than the one, and Nick C-J took Ryan x 2 out into Sneachta as well for some intro climbing. Ali and I (well, actually Andy) found some ice (!) and had a play as well as some intro to the use of ice-screws. So for all the lack of classic WH Murray-style Scottish winter conditions, we were still making the very most of what the Cairngorms had to offer.

The conditions were very changeable the following day, so the majority of the Meet concentrated on skills-practice in Coire Cas. Ali and I did some lead-climbing practice with Andy, and went through snow bollards as well as rock anchors. Niall's team did the same, and worked through good WML stuff on a snow bank under Fiacail a'Choire Cas. Gemma did likewise, leaving the climbing for the day to the remaining four Members. Luckily,

I had Sean Mackey guest-starring as an instructor as well, so we managed to get Chris Dale, Ben T, and Al Topping out climbing in Sneachta.

Final day, and we made the most of it. Gemma took her team out on a round of Sgor an Dubh Mor to Sgor Gaouth. For the climbers, it was back into Sneachta for Sean and Nick, taking Mark, H, Sip and Ryan B for some more work in everyone's favourite winter coire, and Niall took his gang out for their final QMD of the week. Ali and I won the climbing lottery, as Andy offered to take us to The Ben for our last day. We both felt very privileged as Andy had The Magic Key that gives access to the Forestry Commission track to the upper car park for the North face of the Ben, which cuts hours of the walk to the CIC Hut. The last day didn't disappoint,

and we had an outstanding day on the Ben, climbing the SW Ridge of the Douglas Boulder.

So was it a mistake saying yes to Sean? Nope. Not at all. A fantastic week in Scotland, despite the conditions, providing Members with QMDs to grow future instructors, as well as logbook routes for the climbers. I can't thank Geordie, Col, Gemma, Andy, Niall and Nick enough for their superb and enthusiastic instruction for the week. Special thanks goes to Sean and Ryan for their support, it was very much appreciated. And special thanks also to the chef who makes the cakes in Aviemore's Mountain Café for supplying the requisite calories to support the week's activities.



Kit On Trial

# Rab Top-Out Hoody

Reviewed by Sean Mackey

Rab's new rock apparel has been released and I have to admit I am impressed with the styling and attention to detail. Not only have the items been pretty well cut, but the materials are also fairly technical which makes them perfect for the crag and also for the high street.

Recently, I bought the new Top-Out hoody after seeing one at an outdoor shop in Llanberis. The fabric was the first thing that caught my eye. The drirelease® stretch fabric is thin, very breathable and is great to wear. Arcteryx have a similar midlayer in a similar fabric, but is over twice the price, which greatly influenced my decision to buy it.

The issue I have with most hoodies while climbing is the high neck, which does allow

for venting when you get hot after pulling hard on a route. The half zip is good for dumping heat and much easier to get on and off on cramped belay ledges. Although the fabric is clever and performs well it doesn't look like a highly technical mid layer, which is one of my main issues with most 'casual' crag clothing. The fit looks good when grabbing a post climb pint or wandering into a café.

I have worn it a couple of times recently and it's really good for cool summer cragging, where a tee shirt is just a bit too cold. The thin soft fabric also excels when part of a layering system as it holds heat but isn't too bulky when another jacket is chucked on top. A great garment I will definitely be using and abusing over this coming season.



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# AHEAD OF THE PACK

# Harness Review

Reviewed by Sean Mackey

I have approached reviewing these harnesses with a little trepidation. I am a (distinctly) average rock climber and an enthusiastic winter mountaineer, whereas the designers of these harnesses have probably had the input of Pete Whitaker and Alex Honnald. Both guys are amazingly good climbers and with years of experience operating at the highest levels.

My first ever harness in 2004 was a DMM and I only kept it a year. I found a few things about it annoying; it felt a little lumpy and I disliked the floating belt system to such a degree I had to invest in a new one, but probably most importantly it just didn't look cool. I gravitated towards Black Diamond and Mammut, which at the time were reassuringly expensive, and more importantly what the cool kids in my climbing group were wearing. I wouldn't recommend this

as the fundamental method of choosing your harness, but as the connection between you and the rock it's a pretty important decision and one you have to be happy with.

The items reviewed are all available from our amazingly generous gear deals at DMM and Cotswolds, as well as coming in under £75.00. I had a long discussion with a good climbing friend who made the point- 'If you spend more than £75.00 on an all-round harness, you might as well spend a little bit more and get a couple of discipline specific ones'. I do know many climbers who have a UK trad harness and also a winter climbing one, but these reviewed should be equally at home in icy winter conditions through to summer sport or trad climbing. They are 'all-round' harnesses and, as with most things in life, some are more all-round than others.

## Mammut Togir Click

RRP £60.00

I was pleasantly surprised by this harness and enjoyed playing around with it. I had an old Togir harness five or so years ago and while it did ok it never really blew me away as a really amazing piece of kit. The design has obviously been reviewed and I am impressed by how it has evolved. It is solidly made and has plastic reinforcements at some of the harder wearing point, which should mean it lasts longer and you'll get your money's worth out of it. My personal opinion is for £60.00 you get a lot of harness for your money.

The belt is comfortable for hanging in for short periods and has a similar laminating process as the Black Diamond Aspect, which prevents the harness absorbing water and becoming heavy when wet. It sat on my hips well and didn't slip too much when loaded with a heavy trad rack when worn for long multi pitch routes. It does have an 'innovative click buckle' which I didn't really get. It seemed to be a solution to a problem that I have never heard of.

The gear loops are of a good size and are slightly angled forward which pushes all the gear clipped on them to the front

of the loop. I like the idea in principle, but I found it bunched all my krabs forward and it did take some getting used too. Selecting that specific krab in a stressful situation would prove difficult if you were not use to the harness. The loops are made out of solid plastic which are amazingly easy to attach and remove gear from as they don't flex when pressing a gate against them. None of the other harnesses have this and I really like it.

The leg loops are fairly broad and spread the load well. They have straps to the main belt at the rear in the normal fashion, but these are attached via a hook and loop. I lost count of the number of times this came undone and hung down catching under my foot. I ended up wrapping a small amount of finger tape around the hook, which prevented it coming off again, but it was a disappointing issue for such a reputable brand.

I would recommend this harness to beginners and first time harness buyers who don't want to spend the earth, but have a fully feature harness that will be hard wearing.



|  |       |
|--|-------|
| Value for money  | ★★★★★ |
| Weight   | ★★★★★ |
| Fit and comfort  | ★★★★★ |
| Racking  | ★★★★★ |
| All round ability  | ★★★★★ |
| <i>Good for all conditions and the best for beginners.</i> |       |



|   |       |
|---|-------|
| Value for money   | ★★★★★ |
| Weight  | ★★★★★ |
| Fit and comfort   | ★★★★★ |
| Racking   | ★★★★★ |
| All round ability   | ★★★★★ |
| <i>A good well made harness that is a true all rounder.</i> |       |

## Black Diamond Aspect

RRP £75.00

I had a good ponder over this harness before committing to buying it. It is not the premier mountaineering harness from Black Diamond, but it is more versatile (it is also £30 cheaper). I like how this has been designed with features that are well thought out. Let me explain.

The gear loops are positioned to be used with a ruck sack and aren't as far to the rear making it perfect for Scottish winter mountaineering when you may feel restricted by bulky layers and clothing and cant reach to far around yourself. If I was being absolutely picky the gear loops are a little small, but there is fifth loop across the back, which does move some of the less immediate items out the way to the rear. This is constructed with cord rather than the usual plastic covered webbing to make it low profile for when a rucksack is sat over it.

The main belt of the harness isn't that comfortable for hanging in for extended periods of time ( I spent an uncomfortable 45mins being 'rescued' on an easy angled slab on my RCI course). It is pretty comfortable to wear though, even

while wearing weighty amount of kit it doesn't dig in or slip down. The laminate technology basically repels water, snow and ice keeping it much lighter when wet than others which absorb the liquid and weigh it down. The leg loops are adjustable making it easier to put on over layers of clothes, waterproofs or crampons.

I have a confession to make... I have been using this harness for 2 years and I have found it to be perfect for winter mountaineering, scrambling, rock climbing and even for messing around at indoor walls. It has done really well at all aspects but it has never seriously excelled at any individual discipline. Much to my delight it is in bright vibrant colours and makes me look much more 'street sophisticated' than I actually am and the colour stand out well on photographs. It is a true all-round contender happy in winter or in summer.

*Best in test!*

## Edelrid Zack Harness

RRP £55.00

While the Black Diamond was uncomfortable to hang in this was nothing but a delight to wear. The broad padded waist loop spread my weight well across my back and didn't feel too warm or sweaty. I have been using this harness for a few months and have found it to be one of the most comfortable out of the four reviewed.

The gear loop are solid and slightly flared out to allow an ease of clipping or removing gear. While I like the gear loops the rear ones are extremely far back and difficult to reach, especially if wearing a daysack or larger. It was really frustrating trying to reach that far around my back to get a karabiner quickly only to fumble around and waste time and energy. The gap between the front and rear gear loops on both sides are way too spaced for my liking. All of the wear points around the belay loop are robustly reinforced, which gives it a slight feeling of being indestructible.

While this harness will do what you want it to I honestly feel it isn't an all-round harness. It does become heavy when used in the rain and did annoy me in a welsh trad scenario. It did get into its own on a recent sport climbing trip though and was out standing in warm weather clipping bolts. The harness I reach for to head to the wall is the zack, but would be left in my kit cupboard on a trad climbing weekend and I wouldn't even consider it for winter.



|   |       |
|---|-------|
| Value for money   | ★★★★★ |
| Weight  | ★★★★★ |
| Fit and comfort   | ★★★★★ |
| Racking   | ★★★★★ |
| All round ability   | ★★★★★ |
| <i>Not perfect for all round UK conditions but would work well for sport climbers who do the odd bit of trad.</i> |       |

## Wild Country Syncro Harness

RRP £75.00

This is a piece of kit with an enormous amount of features (many of them revolutionary). The swiss army knife of harnesses.

The most striking feature is the design. The harness is made with a weave technology that is breathable and comfortable. The weave should contour itself to your body as it is significantly more flexible in construction than most other harness types. I took a small trad fall on it a few weeks ago and found very little shock was transferred through me and it was very comfortable to land in. This weave does allow an amount of air to move through the broad waist belt and it didn't become sweaty or clammy after a long hot day. This can't be said for the laminate coated waist belts, which while they repel water, also holds heat.

This weave is both a blessing and a curse as I found it does fold at the front between the two adjustable buckles and was a little frustrating. You did have to sit in a fairly bunched position for a while to get this to happen though.

It has six gear loops and capacity to add ice screw clippers for winter scenarios. This gives the wearer some serious options for racking. While I like the two extra gear loops as a storage solution the positioning is less than ideal. The middle loop is situated higher and overlaps the lower two. While this looks like a completely rational space for them, it causes a bit of a jumble and prevents you finding the piece of critical gear quickly. I have subsequently chopped them off...



WILDCOUNTRY

|                   |       |
|-------------------|-------|
| Value for money   | ★★★★★ |
| Weight            | ★★★★★ |
| Fit and comfort   | ★★★★★ |
| Racking           | ★★★★★ |
| All round ability | ★★★★★ |

*A heavy workhorse for regular trad climbers.*

### Summary

Please remember these are my opinions and the best way to make up your mind is to go out and try them on for yourself. In the final score there is very little between them and therefore you should make up your own opinion on what you want. I

would not buy a harness, pair of rock shoes or a helmet until I had tried on, compared and fondled them in a shop to see which best suits me and my needs. I advise everyone to do the same.

All I said Sir, was that if we were going to go to the effort of bringing ladders along, wouldn't it be sensible to use them all the way to the top?



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ALEXANDRA SCHWEIKART quick on the draw when it comes to Manatese (E4 6a), Dinorwig Quarry. Photo: RAY WOOD

# THE DRAGON BARES ITS TEETH



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  - Reduced 'walking'
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- › Ergonomic thumb press gives positive handling
- › Rated to 14kN from size 1 upwards



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