



ARMY MOUNTAINEER

THE JOURNAL OF THE ARMY MOUNTAINEERING ASSOCIATION

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THRESHOLD SHIFT**

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KIT REVIEWS

COSTA CLIMBER 2017

SUMMER 2018

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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.

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WHY NOT VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT: WWW.ARMYMOUNTAINEER.ORG.UK



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LOOKING TO THE FUTURE



Whilst the last couple of editions of our Journal have given us the opportunity to reflect on the past 60 years of Army Mountaineering, it seems only appropriate that this reflection also focuses on setting the foundations of the Association for the future

One thing I have learnt in my Army career, is that whilst we may not be able to predict what it is, change is inevitable. Be this people, organisations or equipment. However what is still a really positive and stable message is the continued investment and importance that the Army continues to place on Adventurous Training and thus the continued role and importance of our Association. In peacetime I personally believe that there are few other environments that can develop leadership, team work, risk management, physical and mental resilience, and decision making that a challenging expedition offers. And no doubt, technology will continue to make it easier for us to access some of the more remote areas of the world, our kit becomes far lighter (and our bank accounts!) and our batteries last longer. I do however hope that the one thing that we do not allow to change is the beauty, challenge, inspiration and satisfaction of being in the mountains (as well as the coffee and cakes afterwards), be it in rain or shine, on boots, skis or

tethered to a rope....viewing mountains on a screen from the comfort of my arm chair still does not quite cut it...!

As we look to the future of the AMA this also includes the need to review how we exploit the technology available, to ensure we make being a member of the AMA as easy and accessible as possible. For example, the work being done by Major

'There are a range of other opportunities that both change and technology will bring'

Roy Davies to outsource the management of our membership database to Tardah and ensure we are GDPR compliant. Our Journal Editor, Capt Al Topping is looking to make our Journal more accessible online; hard copy journals may well soon be a thing of the past, hopefully alongside with plastic bags and disposal coffee cups! Whereas 60 years ago our predecessors

would probably have been thinking about whether they needed to be in the Phone Book or Yellow Pages. I have no doubt there are a range of other opportunities that both change and technology will bring; it is for us to embrace and exploit these opportunities to set the conditions for our successors whilst ensuring in doing so, we find more time to enjoy and promote the great outdoors.

As I sign off, I do wonder what our successors will be saying and drawing from the archives in another 60 years' time....hopefully whatever it is, they will still have a very positive story to tell focused on challenges, teamwork and exciting expeditions. From everything the AMA is currently up to and has planned over the next year or so, you are all contributing to that legacy and the AMA continue to need people to assist in making this endure for the next 60. Please enjoy your summer, make the most of being in the great outdoors, stay safe and I look forward to seeing as many of you at the AGM in September as possible.

Lt General Ivan Hooper

EDITOR'S FOREWORD



MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY FOREWORD

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.

Emma Pritchard

Summer 18 is now the largest edition produced in recent years

There's more content: more expeditions, more meets and more reviews. Our Pro Mountaineer article this time has been written by recent Piolet d'Or winner and all round nice guy, Nick Bullock. There're reviews on Páramo, Terra Nova and Wild Country outdoor kit along with an explanation on triple rated ropes from our Grants Member, Sean Mackey.

In an attempt to bring the Journal into the present age, you may notice things looking slightly different to what you're, perhaps, familiar with. I hope you like it and I hope you find navigating around this edition easier.

As always, if you've got an idea for an article, have been somewhere or have done something unusual, even if you want to contribute but don't know how, regardless of rank, send me an email at journal@armymountaineer.org.uk

Al Topping

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Photographer: Oli Prince

To receive discount:

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AMA DISCOUNTS & MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

SCAN QR
CODE TO
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BENEFITS
CODES



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.



Beyond Hope

DMM

Trade price + VAT + carriage deal to all members of the AMA on most of the range. You need to use the AMA specific order form from DMM to place an order
Steph - 01286 872222 - steph@dmmwales.com

www.dmmclimbing.com

MONTANE

Montane are a British company with an outstanding record of innovation in clothing and equipment for mountain sports spanning more than two decades. They have kindly agreed to make their entire range available to members of the AMA at their Pro Price including VAT. See the ordering process and T&Cs on the AMA website.

PARAMO

All AMA members benefit by joining Paramo's Mountain Pro Scheme. Mountain qualifications and experience are assessed by Paramo, with an increasing scale of discounts available plus loyalty points, special offers & gear testing opportunities.

Email pro.sales@paramo.co.uk or call Jeni on 01892 786445.

Apply at www.paramo.co.uk/mountainpro with your AMA number.

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

VERTEBRATE PUBLISHINGS

Vertebrate Publishing are a super enthusiastic UK based publisher of climbing, mountaineering, cycling, mountain biking and walking books. Exclusively for AMA members they have set up a discount code offering a reduction of 30% off all books bought on both the Vertebrate Publishing and Baton Wicks websites. All orders will be checked to confirm the purchaser is a member of the AMA before the discount will be honoured. The most up to date code is available in the members' area.

www.v-publishing.co.uk

PHD (PETE HUTCHINSON DESIGNS)

PHD offer a 25% discount off all standard items to the AMA. Emma Harris - 01423 711212 • office@phdesigns.co.uk

www.phdesigns.co.uk

TERRA NOVA

AMA members can set up a Pro User account. Once logged in, the discount is automatically applied. Call Terra Nova on 01773 833 300, info@terra-nova.co.uk

www.terra-nova.co.uk

BEYOND HOPE - EVOLV, METOLIUS, PRANA AND ROCK TECHNOLOGIES

Trade price + VAT + carriage deal to all members of the AMA. Lee 01457 838 242 • infoBeyondHope@aol.com

www.beyondhope.co.uk

*If you have any issues with the various discount schemes, or know of any other companies willing to offer discount to the AMA, please contact the AMA membership benefits secretary. **Finally, please use these discounts for personal purchases only!***

DIARY 2018

VISIT OUR WEBSITE FOR MORE EVENT INFORMATION:
WWW.ARMYMOUNTAINEER.ORG.UK

2018

22-24 JUN 18

TREMADOG
AMA MEET
CONTACT: RYAN LANG
 Open to all.

29 JUN-1 JUL 18

LAKE DISTRICT
AMA MEET
CONTACT: MARK GREGORY
 Open to all. Contact details on AMA website.

18 JUL 18

SOUTH WALES
INTER-SERVICES CLIMBING CHAMPIONSHIPS 2018
CONTACT: PADDY SNOW
 By invitation. Army Team of 30 selected from the Army Championships

TBC JUL 18

LOCATION TBC
BRITISH BOULDERING CHAMPIONSHIPS
CONTACT: TBC
 UK Armed Forces Team representation by invite

6-8 JUL 18

N WALES
AMA MEET
CONTACT: TBC
 Open to all. Contact details on AMA website.

TBC AUG 18

LOCATION TBC
AMA MEET
CONTACT: TBC
 Open to all. Contact details on AMA website. Doubles as Army team training event.

12 SEP 18

CLIMBING WORKS
AFBL (ARMED FORCES BOULDERING LEAGUE) ROUND 1 (ARMY CHAMPS)
CONTACT: KENNY GEOGHOGAN
 Open to all. See DIN.

8-9 SEP 18

N WALES
AMA MEET AND AGM
CONTACT: SEAN MACKEY
 Open to all.



1 OCT 18

Submissions to AI Topping for AMA journal winter edition
CONTACT: AL TOPPING

6-7 OCT 18

EDINBURGH
BRITISH LEAD CLIMBING CHAMPS
CONTACT: TBC
 Invite only

11-13 OCT 18

WYE VALLEY
AMA MEET
CONTACT: TBC
 Open to all. Contact details on AMA website.

10 OCT 18

DEPOT, BIRMINGHAM
AFBL ROUND 2 (RAF CHAMPS)
CONTACT: PAUL EASTON
 Open to all. See DIN.

TBC OCT 18

LOCATION TBC
BMC WOMEN'S CLIMBING SYMPOSIUM
CONTACT: BMC
 UK Armed Forces Team representation by invite

14 NOV 18

BLOC, BRISTOL
AFBL ROUND 3 (NAVY CHAMPS)
CONTACT: TBC
 Open to all. See DIN.

TBC NOV 18

LOCATION TBC
EUROPEAN MILITARY CLIMBING CHAMPIONSHIPS
CONTACT: TBC
 By invitation. UK Armed Forces Team selected from the Inter-Services Championships. Pending invite.

TBC DEC 18

PRESTON
AFBL ROUND 4
CONTACT: KENNY GEOGHOGAN
 Open to all. See DIN.

2019

9 JAN 19

LOCATION TBC
AFBL ROUND 5
CONTACT: KENNY GEOGHOGAN
 Open to all. See DIN.

22 FEB 19

INDY
AFBL ROUND 6
CONTACT: KENNY GEOGHOGAN
 Open to all. See DIN.

23 FEB 19

INDY
STANDALONE BOULDERING COMPETITION
CONTACT: KENNY GEOGHOGAN
 Open to all. See DIN.

MAR 19

TIELEN, BELGIUM
BOULDERMANIA
CONTACT: TBC
 Invite Only

APR 19

FONT
ARMY TEAM BOULDERING Training Camp
CONTACT: TBC
 Invite Only

APR 19 TBC

LOCATION TBC
ARMY SOUTH CHAMPS
CONTACT: ANDY STEWART
 Open to all. See DIN.

APR 19 TBC

LOCATION TBC
ARMY NORTH CHAMPS
 AI Topping, Andy Young
 Open to all. See DIN.

13-17 MAY

TBC (LIKELY N WALES)
AMA FESTIVAL OF CLIMBING



VIEWRANGER SMART PHONE NAVIGATION APP

SCAN
QR CODE
TO VIEW
WEBSITE



By Al Mason

Have you ever found yourself in the situation where you did know where you were, but now you don't? Navigational embarrassment is not uncommon and everyone has been known to suffer from it from time to time. The remedy was shown to me earlier last year in the form of a smart phone app called ViewRanger. Whilst it is possible to extract a 6 figure grid from an old Garmin E-Trex or get a OS position on an electronic map on a GPS, why carry another device when your phone, which you are carrying anyway, can transform into a navigational aide par excellence. If you're worried about smart phone battery life, I've found there is enough power to easily last a whole day. In the evening you can either charge by mains, solar or battery pack – on an iPhone, when flight mode is enabled your GPS is still able to function and will save your battery while still allowing you to route find. If you are worried about lack of phone service, fear not: if you download the mapping you need before setting off, you only need your phone's GPS enabled without using any data. This is especially good given most areas we like to tread have limited or no service.

So how does ViewRanger work? Well, apart from testing it for yourself or googling reviews online, I can tell you it's free to download and comes with free basic mapping that pretty much covers the globe. For me, this has been sufficient to navigate on tracks in Iceland (and work out I was on the wrong one), glaciers in Switzerland and tors on my native Dartmoor. Another AT colleague has used the free mapping to navigate off Aconcagua in a blizzard. However,

to move things up a notch, you can also buy low cost national mapping tiles of particular areas eg UK – Dartmoor South, Switzerland – eg Arolla, or instead buy a whole region of a variety of country areas in 1:50:000 and 1:25,000, such as the Lakes in the UK, Canada, France, Norway etc.

So, what can you do with the mapping? Well quite a lot to be frank. Apart from adding the usual waypoints and following a route you can upload gpx files used for sharing routes, tag data to locations and a number of other functions.

I've now gone for the whole hog and bought the entire UK in 1:50,000 and 1:25,000 and intend to prepare myself for Winter ML by using this tool to check my navigation. I'll also be using the free mapping in Nepal during an exped to Mera peak.

Mountain Training clearly state in their Hillwalking Handbook that GPS/smart phone navigation apps should not be used as a substitute for traditional map and compass. However, whilst I always follow the MT advice, I have found that a quick look at my location in any country in the world on my phone using ViewRanger has been easy and reassuring. ViewRanger's functionality compared to the high cost of numerous overseas maps, and comparatively bulky, expensive, single-purpose GPS devices, in my opinion, makes ViewRanger an attractive proposition. Go on, try it out – it's free for the basic service and will offer you the remedy to any navigational embarrassment in the future; wherever your next adventure takes you. Note: other navigational apps are available.



TRANSFER OF MEMBERSHIP DATABASE ACROSS TO TAHDAH

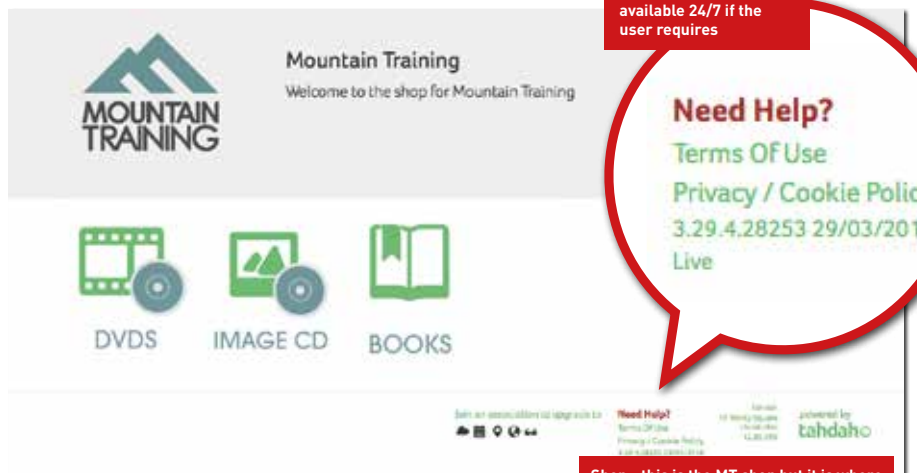
By Roy Davies

At the 2016 AMA AGM it was agreed to migrate our, rather antiquated, membership management system to that provided by an external contractor called Tahdah. Tahdah are a Welsh company, based in Llandudno, who also provide the professional service seen on the Mountain Training (MT) website and are responsible for the digital logbook capability MT users have access to. The need to change from our current management system comes from the necessity to comply with new European regulations that dictate how personal information is managed by businesses; we are legally obliged to comply with data and information protection rules, namely General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). Tahdah enables this compliance.

‘For those who already have an MT account, it is possible to link the accounts to allow access to both from a single log-on’

The AMA has been able to negotiate a service with Tahdah for its members and would permit integration with all the services found with Mountain Training without having to register as an MT user.

The first step is to migrate the current AMA membership over to its new home and this is taking a little longer than ever anticipated. However, the plan has been reviewed and will continue with the current membership period (ending in Jan 19) being the last under the existing process. Below is a short update on how the transition will be managed



Online assistance is available 24/7 if the user requires

Need Help?
[Terms Of Use](#)
[Privacy / Cookie Policy](#)
 3.29.4.28253 29/03/2018
 Live

Shop - this is the MT shop but it is where any e-commerce can be conducted for bits that the AMA may wish to sell in the future - note the 'Need Help' link

Firstly, quotes for a new annual membership card are being sought. We will then put in place a contract that will enable membership cards to be produced and sent direct to members within a month of the new member's direct debit payment being taken. For current members, the membership cards will arrive prior to the start of each membership period. Membership cards will have an expiry date to prevent any abuse of membership privileges. Details on the membership card will be extracted direct from the membership database hosted on Tahdah.

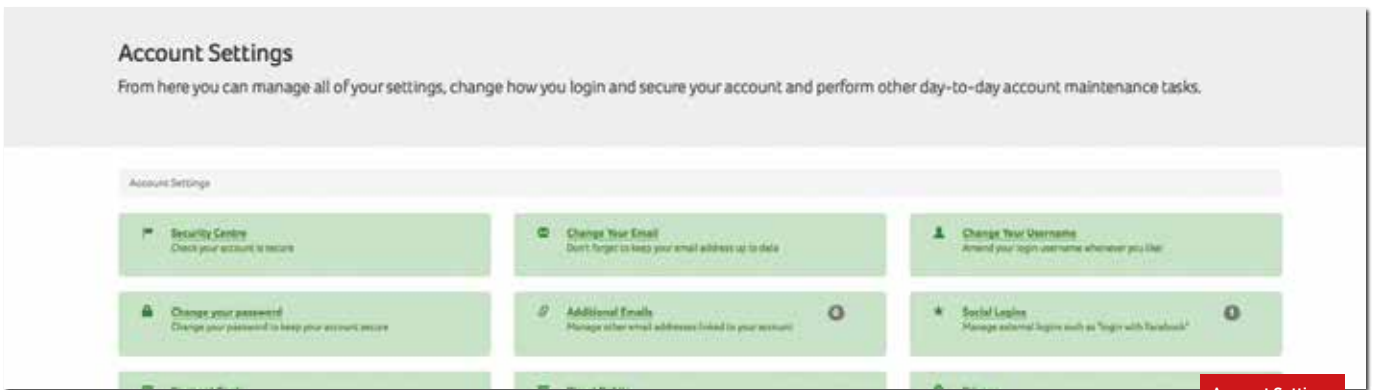
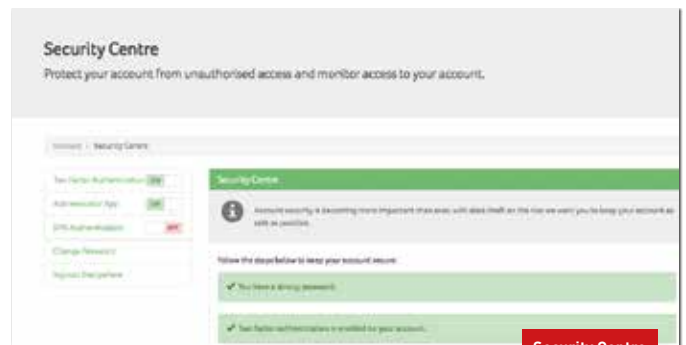
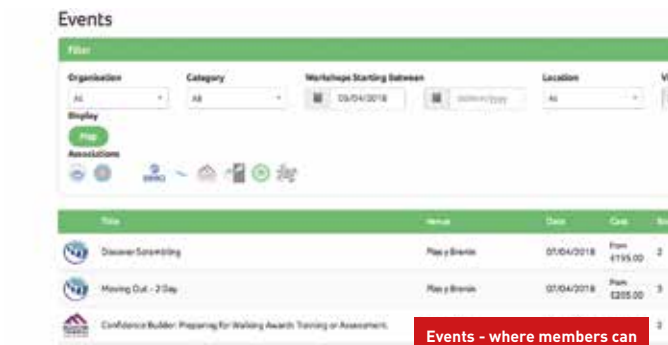
Next will be to bulk transfer Direct Debits from the current manual system which Emma, in her role as AMA Secretary, conducts every year for every member, to the automated Tahdah system. This will be conducted over the next few months. Members might, depending on their bank be separately notified of the change by their bank. The Direct Debit will not be taken until Jan 19 in line with the current Jan to Jan membership period. No action is required by members; current

Direct Debits will be cancelled as part of the transfer period to ensure no double payment is taken.

When the system is live, new members will establish their Direct Debit details as part of the set-up, payment will be taken within 14-days and once payment received their membership card will be sent directly to them.

‘Membership cards will have AMA and the individual member's details on the front, including an expiry date. On the reverse will be the details of at least one of our leading sponsors’

Once these steps are completed and a trial period has been conducted, a copy of our database will be transferred onto the



GDPR definition: “...any freely given, specific, informed and unambiguous indication of the data subject’s wishes by which he or she, by a statement or by a clear affirmative action, signifies agreement to the process of personal data relating to him or her...”

Tahdah servers. A ‘Go-Live’ date will be published. A meeting between the AMA and Tahdah will take place to confirm everything is good-to-go.

An instruction will go out to all members, so they can understand how the system will work, what to expect etc. It will be sent out by Mail-Chimp, posted on Facebook, printed in the Journal and printed on the AMA website. For example, expect membership renewal reminders even if no action is required; use two-factor authentication; Service desk/help line email/tel number.

Once transition to the new service has completed we will then be able to exploit the benefits that Tahdah offer including the set-up of events, adding products to

the e-commerce page, and searching the membership database for specific criteria.

As part of the introduction of GDPR there may be a number of subtle but additional changes. Key is consent for the holding and processing of personal data. Investigations with Tahdah are ongoing to try to ascertain if the granting of consent or otherwise can be enabled and recorded when an individual member logs into their Tahdah account for the first time.

If there are specific questions, please email them into Emma in the AMA office (secretary@armymountaineer.org.uk) where they can be appropriately addressed and responded to. Questions and answers suitable for wider awareness will be responded to on the Facebook page.

From 1 June 2018 the Army Mountaineering Association are changing our payment processor for Direct Debit payments. Our new processor, GoCardless, will be responsible for all Direct Debit collections from this date.

There is no action required from you to continue paying by Direct Debit, and the change will not affect the service you receive in any way.

The only change you will notice is that GoCardless will appear on your bank statement. All your payments will continue to be fully protected by the Direct Debit Guarantee, as detailed below. If you have any questions about this change, please call the Army Mountaineering Association office.

The Direct Debit Guarantee

- This Guarantee is offered by all banks and building societies that accept instructions to pay Direct Debits.
- If there are any changes to the amount, date or interval of your Direct Debit GoCardless will notify you 3 working days in advance of your account being debited or as otherwise agreed. If you request GoCardless to collect a payment, confirmation of the amount and date will be given to you at the time of the request.
- If an error is made in the payment of your Direct Debit, by GoCardless or your bank or building society, you are entitled to a full and immediate refund of the amount paid from your bank or building society – if you receive a refund you are not entitled to, you must pay it back when GoCardless asks you to.
- You can cancel a Direct Debit at any time by simply contacting your bank or building society. Written confirmation may be required. Please also notify us.



THRESHOLD SHIFT

By Nick Bullock

I never much thought of the danger when I started out all those years ago. I never imagined the pain, the grief. Heroic... I was indestructible... I saw myself breaking the shackles, becoming free...

In my defence, it's difficult to see the pain when you don't really value what you have at the time, it's easy to make light. Life is cheap and time is a giveaway. But of course, life is never cheap and time goes one way only.

Several miles uphill from basecamp, the river sprinted from the glacier. In the morning, the river was subdued – noisy, but the day's sun had not yet melted the glacial ice, the volume was less. Later in the day, as the grey rushed, polishing the rocks, the noise increased. After a day or so, the noise became less invasive, obviously, our minds had decided it wasn't important anymore. Threshold shift.

Two days passed before Paul Ramsden and I began our acclimatisation exploring the wilderness above basecamp. We were in Tibet to try and climb a new route on the North side of the Nyainqentangla West Range. To our knowledge we were the first Westerners to explore this valley on the North of the Nyainqentangla peaks.

"No that's not the side to climb from. It's too steep, no one has climbed from that side." The locals said.

Truth be told, hardly anyone had climbed from either side, the small sub-range range, which holds the four highest mountains in the whole of the thousand-mile East and West Nyainqentangla was something of an enigma, a very-difficult-to-get-permission, a magician's trick. But the large Yorkshire man who was now sat on my right had somehow managed it.

Until now we had only seen a few long-distance photos taken by Tom Nakamura, great shots that teased with possibilities,

"No that's not the side to climb from. It's too steep, no one has climbed from that side." – The locals said

but we would need to walk the seven or eight miles to become involved and for this relationship to begin.

Walking. Following Paul's pugilists frame into the unknown above basecamp. Into even thinner air. Following the river, that



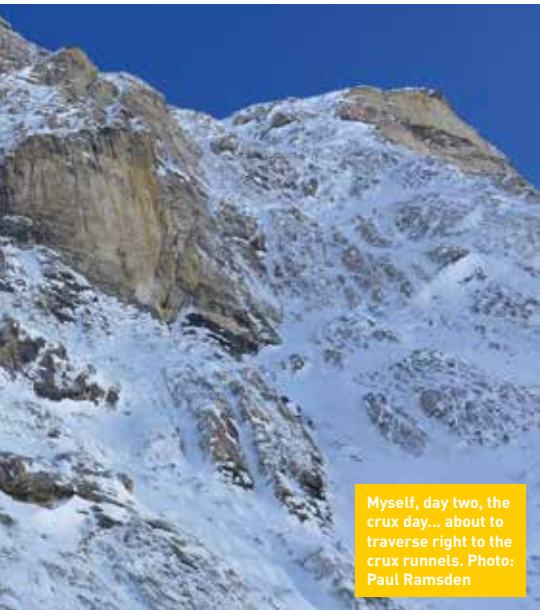
was still grey, but growing shallow with its width. Yaks grazed on either bank. Boulders rubbed smooth by glaciation and the river randomly scattered along the wide valley base. Redstarts with feathers the colour of paprika perched on top of the larger snow covered boulders.

The mountains, their danger, their noise was similar to the noise of the river. There, always there, always roaring, much as it had been for over twenty years of my life. But my mind, its voice, its own roar had dumbed the danger. They can be made safe. It's the same as when you are young and you see an older person push their glasses from in-front of their eyes before sitting them on the top of their head. That will never happen to me, the glasses thing. But of course it has, and like reading that newspaper with my glasses propped on the top of my head, I could now clearly see the mountain's print and the text reads "risk". My mountain threshold had gone full circle.

Paul and I continued our acclimatisation and on day two we walked around a corner and in-front of us, from no-where, there was what we thought was an unclimbed 7000m mountain that wore a 1600m north facing buttress. I was instantly beguiled and once again I fell head-over-heels and once again I was addicted and thrilled. What a pushover. No-one knew about this buttress, it was a rabbit from the hat, unseen by the mountaineering world and immediately my ego wanted to put a stamp on this unknown hill. I could read the climbing



Selfie with me after the route. Photo: Paul Ramsden



Myself, day two, the crux day... about to traverse right to the crux runnels. Photo: Paul Ramsden



Myself approaching the buttress the night before the start of climbing. Photo: Paul Ramsden

headlines already. I wanted the attention that climbing this mountain would bring. "I don't need to look any further" I said. "If we don't do it you can't publish its picture anywhere." That's what Paul said... But we had to do it... I had decided this was my final expedition to the Greater Ranges, yet here I was, standing there amongst boulders and moraine and grassy hillsides and snow and my mind had gone from climbing, to writing, to awards and failure all in one flip. And already my mind was plotting a return. I was a failed addict; I had fallen from the waggon even before the waggon had been put into gear.

Over the next three days of acclimatisation, Paul and I studied the buttress and decided on a line to the left of the more direct gully. It looked more doable and less likely to flush us should something fall down the face above. I liked the look of the line, it covered more open, interesting ground that would give perspective and a view.

Just before leaving for Tibet, Kyle Dempster and Scott Adamson had gone missing while attempting to climb a new route on Ogre II. I did not know Scott, but I had rock climbed with Kyle when we first met in Italy and we had continued to bump into each other around the world, always laughing and chatting and bullshitting. Canada, France and the States, always laughs and jokes. I liked Kyle, he was rough and raw and obvious. I couldn't get the image of him out of my mind, or at least the image of where he once was. It was a large empty shape. As I caught the

plane to Tibet, I still clung to the belief that both Kyle and Scott would stagger in to their basecamp with another story. Sadly, I was wrong.

It snowed through the night as we camped beneath the buttress on the first attempt to climb, so we returned to basecamp. Three-days later, we sat again beneath the buttress waiting to start. And it was at this point, while lying in the little tent pondering that question... why I climb that I came clean with myself. Possibly my first honest answer to my questioning mind in over twenty years. 'Life affirmation, the challenge, live life to the full'... it was true

'Life affirmation, the challenge, live life to the full'

at some point and is for some still but it was now clichéd, marketing bullshit from the folk who peddle themselves and their wares and fill their bank accounts living from the ignorance of others. The most honest answer I can come up with is to know what you are and what you have to do when you wake in the morning. Plain and simple. Today I will walk to the foot of something that intimidates and begin to climb, but even this is untrue, even this is my minds marketing, the real reason is for the after, the adulation and acceptance and slap on the back, I'm getting mine, how about you? Immature? Definitely. But at least I'm being honest, and possibly this is my answer, this is why I do it. Honesty is easy, honesty is open. Honesty

is a weight off. Honesty is no secrets and once discovered, honesty is peace.

Maybe it was the picture that got me thinking this way. Luca Signorelli took the photo six years ago at the 2010 Piolets d'Or outside Le Majestic hotel, Chamonix. Andy Houseman laughs while placing a flower in Kei Taniguchi's hair. I wrap one arm around Kei and one arm around Kyle Dempster. Alexander Ruchkin and Vitaly Gorelik crouch at the front. Everyone is smiling. Now, Kei, Kyle, Alexander and Vitaly are all dead.

After the heavy snow from three days earlier we were post holing from the word go, at times the unconsolidated snow was waist deep. A slightly inauspicious start given the 1600m left to climb to the summit. I plunged and waded remembering the butterfly. Two days earlier a Red Admiral, with one slightly dried and faded section of wing, had stuttered into the basecamp tent and landed on my sleeping bag. I carefully cupped it in both hands and returned it to the outside, but as it took off a gust of wind sent it to the fresh snow. I offered the back of one hand. The butterfly with its damp wings took hold and crawled aboard before I placed it in the sun, on top of a brown boulder inside a fold free from snow. Half an hour later I looked up and watched the butterfly take to the air.

"I can get down from any mountain in any condition." That was how Paul put it. I didn't doubt Paul was strong, he was strong, you can tell he was strong, it was



Paul, day 6 on the descent after the storm, one more night on the hill after this found us back in the village where the LO was staying. Photo: Nick Bullock

obvious from his experience and the way he looked. Big legs. Dark Yorkshire tea. Paul told me he ran the Bob Graham Round when he was 17. Paul reminded me of the Shar Pei dog, the Han Dynasty's favourite fighting breed, I had photographed in Lhasa – loose skinned, so he could still turn and bite you, although the Lhasa Shar Pei looked old and flea ridden. Paul didn't look like he had fleas and he is three years younger than me.

Leaving an iced gully with an overhanging section at its top, I post holed until stood on a perfect tent platform. I looked out to strange rounded mountains and Lake Namtso, the highest salt lake in the world at 4,718 meters and the second largest lake in Tibet. When I met Paul over a year ago, before I had agreed to the expedition, he had given me the hard sell to get me on-board, he had said we would use his and Mick Fowler's proven formula for success: "Light and fast spells failure – take a few extra days' worth of food, stop when a good ledge presents. Eat well, have a restful night, start early and do it all again the next day." Paul had fibbed. I pointed out the platform, but 2pm was even too early for the Ramsden and Fowler master plan, so we continued until late in the afternoon, where we reverted to the Bullock norm and had an open bivvy squeezed onto a tiny snow step. Conned!

I was done. I had decided a year ago. 2012 had been my last expedition to the

Greater Ranges and I was done, finished, nada... Then Paul visited and showed me a picture. Maybe one more time? Go out with style, out with a good one? People asked why I thought younger climbers were not going on expeditions. The reason was easy for me to see. Expedition success was as addictive as crack cocaine but in the hands of an addict, more dangerous. I was a pusher. I wrote about what I found, the high, the biscuit at the bottom of the barrel, the release, the escape. But like Paul I had lied and as I pushed the glasses to the top of my head at last I could see clearly. At last I could write with honesty. I was some kind of throwback from a line almost extinct.

Threshold shift. Western society, or maybe society as a whole doesn't appear to want to wait anymore. Some climbers don't seem to want to wait either. Hardship over an extended time-frame is out of vogue so who can blame them? Instant... instant reward, instant success, instant gratification, instant pictures, instant recognition, instant fame and instant fortune... I'm getting old. And as for platitudes, I didn't want those either. All of the platitudes can be left behind because I don't ever want 'he died doing what he loved' Please never use those platitudes for me. Dying young or even dying old but still healthy is desperately sad and heart breaking and over rated and should not be celebrated, it should be seen for what it is, a terrible waste. Life is the prize. Living more so.



Day 2 bivvi after climbing the crux. Paul's mother in law made the snow nappy the tent was pitched on. I took the outside! Photo: Nick Bullock

Day two on the climb was what Paul and I had christened the crux day. The steepest section of the face, was almost impossible to describe without using superlatives. It was a dream: it had runnels, ice, fields of snow, arêtes – the face twisted and turned in some warped massive monster Matterhorn way. We calculated that the climbing started at 5400m and we knew the summit was a reported 7046m, making the face a mouth-puckering 1600m. Paul and I now stood beneath a welt of thinly iced runnels criss-crossing the almost vertical band of compact rock. This was it, this was the test, but of course it wasn't, the real test was continuing, the test is always the continuing. "It's never as bad as people think." Paul said twelve months before, "They always think it's much worse than it actually is and come down." Fair enough I thought, sounds reasonable. "You just have to wait it out

and then carry on up, don't come down." But if it got bad I really wanted to come down, staying up was not a good idea in my mind, too many better climbers than me had stayed up, staying up was not something I wanted.

The day consisted of threading one thin ice runnel to another. I imagined myself climbing the Colton/Macintyre on the North Face of the Grandes Jorasses, but the air was thinner and the situation lonelier. No one knew where we had decided to climb or even the mountain we had decided to climb. Our original plan was for the ridge line on Nyainqentangla I. Tashi, our liaison officer knew we had a permit for the range, but he had no idea where we planned to climb within the range. We were on our own.

The mountains and their lines are perceived as majestic. They are in fact majestic. But in the hands of the human they are twisted into something from which to boast and display. Ego. And at the head of that podium I stood, all bowed, ready to accept my medal.

Paul's wife Mary isn't fooled, before we left I could see it in her eyes. She is, I think, more open to the possible outcome than Paul himself who appears to have bought into the story that he has told to Mary and his daughter Katy. Denial. But then again maybe it isn't. Paul is obviously very good and he almost believes in all he says and his track record is almost exemplary.

A few years ago, I bumped into Scottish alpinist Rab Carrington in the old chapel on Llanberis High Street that is now a gear shop. Around us, climbers pulled on new rock shoes smelling of glue and rubber. Couples wearing new and crunchy, vibrant-coloured jackets looked at each other and at themselves in a mirror. The coffee machine gurgled to the smell of espresso. I asked Rab why he had given up mountaineering at a time when he was still in such good form. "I wanted to continue living," he said.

I've told myself it's going to be the unsuspecting thing that ends it all. But of course, this isn't true, it will be the mundane, the same as everybody else, it will be the bad weather and the slab avalanche or pinned down until exhaustion gets the better of me. It will not be the exotic and I'm quite

happy about that. The bear whose claws had brushed me aside as it rushed to bite Greg Boswell, my climbing partner on my last trip to Canada nearly took the prize for exotic. For a while I thought it may be the same or similar in Tibet. Tashi and our driver, a young guy who wore his white sunglasses on the back of his head, and the village leader all sat together inside the village leader's house, we never did get his name but he was very generous, all be it in a slightly stand-off kind of way,

'The steepest section of the face, was almost impossible to describe without using superlatives'

the kind of stand-off that tells you more about yourself than the person doing the standing off. He was tall and thin and wrapped in a fur lined, wine-red coloured coat that touched the back of his knees. His nose was as dark as the earth itself and as rounded as a planet in a Roman way and inside that nose he regularly snorted some white powder that left a pale smear on the outside. I liked him, although I'm not sure the feeling was mutual but he was still very generous.

The three all sat together speaking Tibetan. Paul sat alongside me. I wasn't really taking much notice, I was spinning a little as we were now sat at 4700m after being in the country for only five-days, until the conversation was broken by

action and it was an action that I could not help take notice.

"What was that Paul, what was that they just acted out?" I asked.

Paul sat upright. Tashi looked concerned before he said one word that caught my attention.

"Bears."

"What does he mean, bears?"

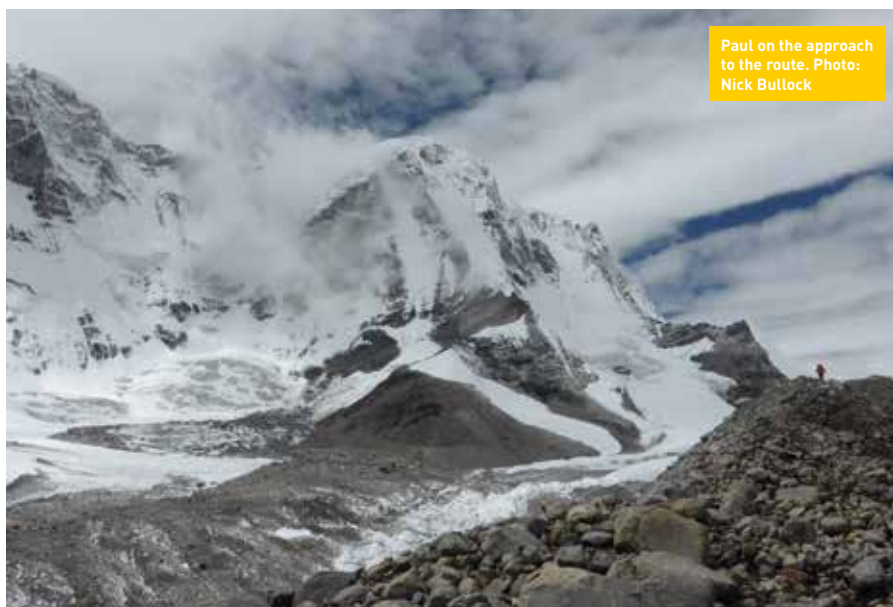
"Bears." Tashi repeated.

"Paul, tell him to stop saying bears."

I pleaded.

But instead of stopping the three Tibetans then went full flow and Tashi mimed walking through boulders and a bear springing to bite him in the face and with that all three of them, in unison yelled 'raaaaaaaaaaaaa.'

A week or so later, Paul and I sat in our tarpaulin kitchen at basecamp when a yak herder called in for a visit. We sat huddled beneath the plastic stripes and attempted to converse. Paul, who had never had any close-hand experience of bears, thought it all very funny and brought the conversation around to his chosen subject. The yak herder shook his head, "No, no bears." "There you go, no bears." I said with relief. The yak herder pulled out his smart phone and began pressing the screen until at last he found what he was searching. I moved alongside to look at the screen. "No bears." He pointed at the phone and the picture on the screen. "Lions."



Paul on the approach to the route. Photo: Nick Bullock



I pulled from the top of the overhanging ice gully, the final difficult pitch of day two. We had succeeded in finding a way through the steepest band. My fingers felt wooden. Paul joined me and together we began to excavate a ledge from which to pitch the small tent.

The weather in the range was complicated. Most days had sun, rain, snow, wind, sleet, cloud, storm, hail. No day was the same and the weather of the moment generally only lasted for a little while before some other form of meteorological bruising took over. This climb was not going to be one of those wait for a perfect five-day forecast, which was ok, given we had absolutely no way to get one.

That night I sat upright with a headache pulsing behind my right eye and a sharp pain in the eye itself. It wasn't until the morning I realised I was suffering a mild form of snow blindness. I'm not sure Paul believed it as we had been in the shade and it had been cloudy for most of the previous day, but when he began to suffer exactly the same pain and in the right eye also, he knew my diagnosis was correct. We both wore sunglasses after that.

Dawn of day three. Looking up the face we hoped to link three snow fields on the right of our present position which would finally lead to the summit. However, with 800m remaining, the mixed pitches to join the snowfields looked steep and hard. Standing in the deep snow, with what we hoped was the most technical day below us, we didn't really want much more of

technical and hard, we wanted an easy ride. A wide snow ledge, leading direct to the central crest, which in turn appeared to lead directly to the summit without too much obvious hardship, was the way we chose.

I've been climbing full time and writing and no fixed abode now for thirteen years. I

“Bears.”
“What does he mean, bears?”
“Bears.” Tashi repeated.

say this as a fact, it's not a challenge or a boast so please don't take it as such. But in this time, I have sat and watched many people rush and push and strain while attempting to wring the life from their short, precious period of time away. They almost appear to want to cram a lifetime of experience into a weekend and who can blame them as the life some people are returning to on a Sunday evening, I'm sure, is testing, not wished for, maybe even disliked. Have you ever stood back and watched, really watched, there is so much unsatisfied unhappiness? Life moves one way only.

Two more nights on the central crest, led at last, to the 7046m summit, a windblown snow sculpture that didn't really mean anything but meant everything. After twenty minutes stood together on the summit Paul led-away following the East Ridge, the ridge which we hoped to descend until its lowest point, a good way away, where we would turn left to walk

down a gentle snow-slope back into our valley and finally basecamp.

Leaving the summit, as if, on cue, the clouds chose to wrap us. Yet somehow, like a homing pigeon, Paul led across ridges and down and around dubious snow-slopes, stopping whenever the cloud turned pea-souper. But the cloud became even thicker, and the snow whiter and the angle and territory more dangerous. And after falling into three bergschrunds, we stopped and pitched the tent in one of the holes found by Paul himself.

I wasn't worried: we had summited and the weather wasn't that bad. If only the cloud would bugger off and then tomorrow morning, in the clear, we could find the top of the hidden gully which would lead to the north face and the lower ridge, and finally the snow slope back to the valley bottom.

Soon after dark it began to snow, and snow and snow some more. I lay, not sleeping at all, while admonishing myself for not forcing the issue to abseil the line we had climbed. Now we were stuck somewhere teetering on a ridge above 6500m in a dump of snow with limited food and an even more limited knowledge of how to get off, while all of the slopes and faces that surrounded us became treacherous. What were we thinking? We had climbed the line, we had our prize, this was just the way off, it didn't matter, it was a bloody way off, that's all. And it was going to kill us.

Day six, still snowing and still white-out. We would have to stay put, but by 9am the winds abated, the snow stopped and we launched, well, we teetered and staggered. I couldn't help but voice concerns about the amount of snow that had fallen through the night but what were we to do, sit there and hope for some kind of non-avalanche terrain miracle?

The Yorkshire homing pigeon pulled a master stroke finding the exit gully leading from the upper ridge to the lower ridge via several abseils directly down the north face. Paul's ability to sniff out the line and cover technical ground was astounding, his years and years of Alpine climbing experience easy to see and easy for me to respect. Eventually, after covering several



Summit selfie's.
Photo: Nick Bullock

pockets of slab which chose to stay-put, we reached the lower ridge and after a few technical sections hit our turn left, but the mess of glacial holes and overhangs changed our plan, so instead we turned right into the south valley before at last, night six since beginning to climb, we stopped on a flattening.

Day seven was a long arduous day following no path just a jumble of moraine and a river which after seven or eight hours popped us back into some form of reality near the village from which we started where the house Tashi, our Liaison Officer was staying.

At the moment, in my mind anyway, Britain is a land that appears to have forgotten how to care for people, especially people with little in their lives, and returning to the mountains with their honesty was cleansing. I've thought long about what it was that ignited this climbing passion within me. There was always some part of me that wanted to be a hero, inspiration for



the underdog, but there was also a part of my makeup that wanted to be absorbed into something bigger, something better, something to be proud of. But as that same flesh and bone becomes withered and brittle so does my mind and I'm not sure anymore, the world is changing, climbing is changing. A shift? I'm not

sure all of climbing is a collective in this day and age, it seems to be more each for their own and the louder an individual can shout, the more pictures a person can post, the better they are thought of. And loyalty, what of loyalty? But what do I know, because as I write my glasses are sitting firmly on-top of my head.





EXERCISE COSTA CLIMBER

When in Spain...

by Sean Mackey

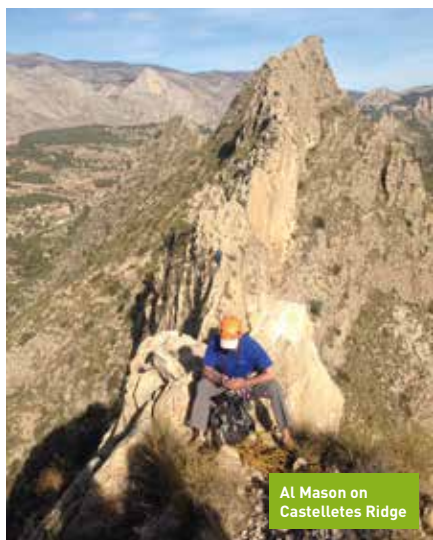
While many units have visited the Costa Blanca region of Spain to sample the delightful rock climbing and mountains, the AMA haven't been out for a number of years. When someone suggested a two week trip prior to Christmas I jumped at the chance of organising it.

Spain is the most mountainous region in Europe and has some of the best and most easily accessible sport climbing venues. Its limestone cliffs can be steep and intimidating on one hand but also slabby and technical on the other- in essence, it has something for everyone. Also, AMA member Rich Mayfield runs an amazing base in Finestrat that we could launch our days from. The itinerary was basically writing itself.

The Orange House is fun and comfortable accommodation for climbers and has a really good atmosphere with people from all over the world staying, making for a really good craic. Ten AMA members came along (myself included) and were a friendly bunch from all arms of the army. As with all AMA meets people's aims did differ, but we managed to pair people up fairly well and mixed up groups on a daily basis. Many wanted log book days, experience instructing multi pitch climbing or indeed just wanted to climb until their arms fell off.

After arrival and a day of admin we made our way to Marin around an hours drive from Alicante. Along with roadside access and free parking, the routes ranged from 3 through to 7a and had a fair mix of multi pitch to single. Many individuals surprised themselves and pushed their grades on the first day on rock and also ticked off a few classic routes in the process. The Rockfax guidebook to the area is very comprehensive and gives easy to use topos for all. Unfortunately this momentum didn't roll into the next day due to a wide weather front passing through and a solid day of rain and low cloud spoiling all the fun.

After the weather cleared our well rested (and well fed and watered) group moved to Sierra de Toix. Al Mason and Jamie Waddington successfully found their way up 'Magical Mystery Tour' 5a pushing the JSMT group along from the rear. This is a fine route that wanders around the sea cliff and finds an easy line through the steep and imposing sea cliffs. Meanwhile,



Al Mason on Castelletes Ridge

Michelle Hordern and I went and sought out 'Parle' 6a+ (a top fifty climb in the guide book) which has the most scary and committing abseil either of us has ever experienced. Other pairs went and smashed out as many single pitch sport routes as their arms could cope with in a sunny, but windy crag with a lovely southerly aspect overlooking Calpe.

Continuing with single pitch, Rich Mayfield kindly took the group to some new and freshly bolted routes at Sella. The access issues experienced a few years ago have all gone now as the Orange House has purchased a large proportion of the land. The trees at the bottom give welcome shade on this south face crag that catches every ray of sunshine. Among many notable ascents Tom Bevan led his first 6a!

After the experience of the first week it was decided to step it up a gear. Al Topping and I went onto 'Diredro UBSA' HVS (5+) and Al Mason and Jamie Waddington to 'Via Valencianous' VS (5) on the Penon. Both routes are classics of the crag and as the wall is south facing catches sun all day. Meanwhile the remaining group

went to a new bolted crag that has been secretly developed by the Orange House. The grippy and sharp holds (rare things for a popular limestone area) was a hit with the group and had an impressive range of routes from 4+ through to high 7s. Indeed it was so new the locals were surprised and frustrated to find a group of Brits there!

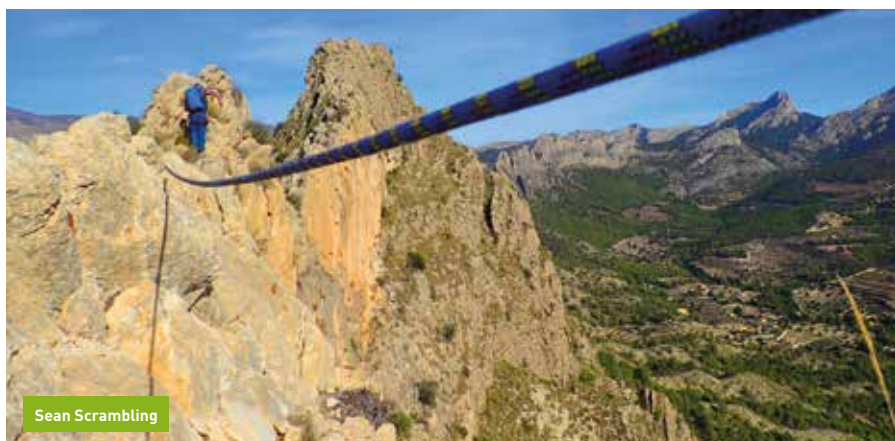
The most imposing mountain in the area has to be the Puig Compania (1406m) located a 10 min drive from our base. It was the mountain loving Al M and Al T who decided to head up the Puig and climb 'Espolon Central' HS 4+. This is a test of route finding, endurance and efficiency on one of the largest routes in the Costa Blanca. The 14 pitches are on excellent, sound rock and gives airy situations on a wide ridge. Both men returned with smiles on their faces, but only ate their supper and headed straight to bed that evening. The rest of us headed to Echo Valley and Guadalest for some single pitch routes in one of the picturesque villages in the region. The high cliffs and towers are topped with monasteries and walkways and are truly breath taking. Matt Thompson was pioneering the use of the clip-stick and worked several routes up to 7b.

On the penultimate day Jamie Waddington and I went on a mission to El Dorado at Sierra de Toix, which is now is one of my most memorable climbs of the trip and was an adventurous experience. The route tackles a steep and imposing wall in three pitches and each one has a very different character. The jugs and crimps on the second pitch were a pumpy and scary experience that was one hell of a physical challenge. On the same day Si Hall discovered the 'Beta Bee' on a visit to Echo Valley 1.5. The insect was buzzing around Si during a difficult

ascent and generally irritating him. All of his anger soon left after the bee showed him a hold that eased his strain. Unfortunately the bee couldn't be persuaded to stay for the rest of the trip, however, the 'Whipper Wasp' did turn up on a couple of occasions though.

While the sport climbing is legendary in Spain the ridges are also notoriously good and John Hoban, Matt Thompson and Si Hall decided to sample the Castelletes Ridge. A full day outing graded at grade 4+ with high quality scrambling. After this glowing recommendation on the final day of the trip I took Tom Bevan along the Castelletes Ridge while Al Mason took Michelle and Kate. The views were spectacular and I had plenty of time to appreciate them and practice my guiding skills as I led Tom across knife edge ridges that he mostly negotiated by leopard crawling the flats and gripping the flakes with white knuckles. The exposure is quite impressive as you negotiate the various pinnacles and towers.

While I organised the trip, and therefore have a bias, I believe everyone had a good time on this grown up and mellow expedition. Everyone filled up log book pages and had experiences that will improve their climbing and mountaineering (you can make your own judgement on which is more important). Recommending this area for a trip isn't really enough and I feel doesn't do justice to the beauty and quality of the routes. If you consider yourself a climber you must go there!



Sean Scrambling

FACTS



LOCATION: FINESTRAT, COSTA BLANCA, SOUTHERN SPAIN

ACCOMMODATION: THE ORANGE HOUSE

WHEN: 27 NOV – 8 DEC 2017

CRAGS: SELLA, SIERRA DE TOIX, MARIN, PENON, PUIG COMPANIA, GUADALEST, CASTELLETES RIDGE

NUMBER OF PERSONNEL WHO DEPLOYED: 10





EXERCISE SELVA BACKSTOP 2017

Developing Leadership Through
Adventure Training

by Dave Latimer

Climbing the Svolvaer Goat



Lcpl Gray reflecting after a day at Paradiset

Ex SELVA BACKSTOP is the premier Adventure Training event in the ARRC calendar. The 2017 exercise (SB17) took place between 2-16 June 2017 in the Lofoten Islands, Norway; a stunningly beautiful archipelago where sheer, rocky mountains rise dramatically from clear blue seas. SB17 was a mountaineering expedition focused on mountain walking and traditional multipitch rock climbing that provided a superb opportunity to develop leadership skills outside of the typical military environment. Sixteen officers and soldiers from the ARRC Group, representing six different nations, participated in the exercise. The participants were broken down into two sub-groups, walking and climbing, for the majority of the expedition. This article will focus on the climbing group.

The climbing group began their training at the sea cliffs at Paradiset, home to a huge range of low grade climbs with a spectacular view across the sea to mainland Norway. Here the novice students were taught the basics of climbing, such as knot tying and belaying through to the more advanced systems required to climb as a team of three on multipitch climbs. The short nature of the climbs at Paradiset (less than 20m) allowed the teams to practise climbing techniques such as basic footwork and hand placement to 'jamming' in a relatively friendly environment. As the difficulties of the climbs increased, the ability of the climbers to assess and solve problematic climbing moves in an increasingly uncomfortable (and sometimes daunting) situation developed rapidly. The teams

progressed over the next few days to multipitch climbs up to 150m high on cliffs overlooking the picturesque fishing village of Henningsvaer. These routes allowed the teams to further hone fundamental ropework skills and practise their climbing techniques before moving on to greater challenges.

By day four, a relatively short space of time for the more novice climbers, the teams were ready for the 400m high route named Only Bilberries, which is regarded as one of the best routes of its grade in the world. <<Maj Waterston and Capt Russell belaying on Only Bilberries>>

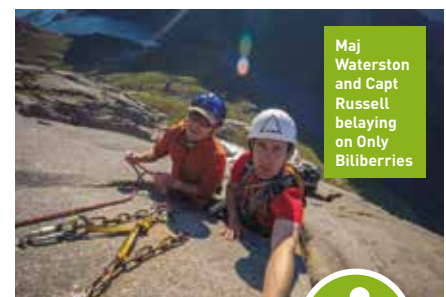
The start point of the climb is over an hours walk from the nearest road at the end of a scenic fjord. The psychological pressure of operating in an extreme, difficult to access, vertical environment, combined with the potential risk of falling meant that the teams would have to show a great deal of courage to conquer Only Bilberries. After seven pitches of sustained, difficult climbing followed by a number of exposed abseils, the teams successfully completed the route; a significant achievement and an unforgettable experience.

By this stage of SB17, the teams had developed excellent cohesion, through mutual trust and effective communication. Throughout the remainder of the trip they went on to climb a number of outstanding routes of a similar nature to Only Bilberries. Of particular note was an ascent of Sea Eagle, a gruelling slab climb which took several hours of constant climbing. The stunning Artic 'midnight sun' present in Lofoten during this time of year ensured there was no risk of the climbers having to climb or abseil in the dark. The discipline required to stay focused on safety critical tasks such as belaying during a length of climb like this is substantial. On another day, one of the teams ascended the highest peak in Lofoten, Vagakallen (943m). An arduous walk, followed by a tricky scramble to the rocky summit gave a tough outing which required considerable robustness and determination from the team.

The real highlight of the trip was perhaps the ascent of the Svolvaer Goat. This 100m high detached pinnacle overlooks the town of Svolvaer with two rocky

'horns' at the summit. Although shorter than many of the routes climbed, the steep ground on the approach to the pinnacle made the climbing phenomenally exposed. Having reached the top, it is traditional for climbers to step across the gap between the 'horns'. This seems simple when standing at the base but on the summit standing in a wildly precarious position, it becomes an extremely bold move and requires total confidence. The abseil from the 'horns' is equally terrifying; hanging from an awkward belay, the teams had to conduct a 'free' abseil (dangling in space without touching the rock) to gain the sanctuary of flat ground.

In summary, many linkages can be found between mountaineering and military challenges. A difficult climb is comparable in many ways to a demanding military operation. Conditions for both activities can be arduous and complex, requiring personnel to possess a high level of training, understanding, physical and mental robustness, and good communication skills. Understanding the balance of achievement of the objective (such as the summit for climbers or the mission on operations) against the risk involved is also critical. Success or failure in both activities is often defined by leadership and the strength of the bond within the team. The valuable experience of the participants on SB17 will therefore enhance the operational effectiveness of the ARRC in the future.



Maj Waterston and Capt Russell belaying on Only Bilberries

FACTS 

LOCATION: LOFOTEN ISLANDS, NORWAY

ACTIVITIES: TRAD MULTIPITCH CLIMBING, HIKING

DEPLOYED PERSONNEL: 16

CRAG LOCATIONS: HENNINGSVAER, SVOLVAER, PARADISSET



VRATSA main face
from the road

EXERCISE NORTHERN BULGARIAN LION

By Lee Magowan

The concept of climbing in Bulgaria was born when chatting to Rich Mayfield in Spain, just prior to the Mayfield's buying their property in Bulgaria



Rich was enthusiastically showing me the VRATSA climbing guide whilst I was IC of a 2 LANCS expedition based out of the Orange House in Costa Blanca. This concept took 15 months to come to fruition and it was worth the wait.

Immediately after Ex Northern Spanish Lion 2 PXR was complete I submitted the business case and financial projection to my CO for authorisation. The winning pitch was that this would be the first rock climbing expedition to Bulgaria from the British Army, deal done, time to plan for Ex Northern Bulgarian Lion for 2 LANCS.

Ex Northern Bulgarian Lion would be delivered in March 2017, mainly due to the Expedition Leader (EL) leaving the Infantry as he had gained a commission to the RAMC, March was the only time the climbers in 2 LANCS could get this expedition due to commitments.

The expedition consisted of four RCIs and eight novices. The aim of the expedition was to deliver the RSF syllabus, develop the club member's confidence and skills for RCS immediately upon return. The unit climbing club was very well supported by the Commanding Officer and was increasingly growing in popularity with the exciting stories coming from the climbers.

The location chosen for the expedition would be near the Mayfield's in the village of Musina/Miatsi, this is a small village off the beaten track but is a quiet rural location for an expedition such as ours. It meant we were not seen, behind high compound

walls and with people who knew the area with many local connections. The Mayfield's were the reliable, dependable and familiar factor to the exped, everything else was an unknown.

There are climbing areas in the mountains to the south of Sofia where you will fly into, the Vitosha, Rila and Pirin mountain ranges, these were not explored due to time restrictions and how remote they were. Rila was the only one I was willing to explore if time permitted.

Moving North from Sofia to the mountain range at Vratsa is amazing and should not be missed, no matter what. To assist you in your climbing is the new guide written by Nikolay Petkov. The best rock climbing guide on the market is centred for Vratsa (Vratsa climbing guide, Bulgaria guide 2014). A visit of 3 or 4 days would be a sufficient amount of time as it's road side cragging, you've got to see it to believe it - the team and I didn't want

'A visit of 3 or 4 days would be a sufficient amount of time as it's road side cragging'

to leave, however, there are plenty of other amazing climbing country wide. Have a look at www.climbingguidebg.com for further info. If you buy a book it will come with an access code for further info, enter this code and it will unlock a lot of useful info on the website. Vratsa is the largest climbing area in Bulgaria; the rocks are located west of the town with the same name, on the northern slopes of the Vratsa Mountain (Part of the Balkan Ridge). There are other guides you may be able to buy local but are of no great detail and written 30 years ago, so much has changed.

Moving West to an area known as Karlukovo is the famous "Gods eyes" this is an open cave system and perfect for the wet or hot days. A limestone site with tufas, huge cave climbing, climbing is possible in wet weather even with seepage. The place is truly unique and very impressive, especially the symmetrical eyes in the roof of the cave which floods the cave with plenty of light for climbing. If you are brave enough you can abseil from the outside



roof into the cave from a rail system at the top, apparently you can also climb from the cave floor, overhanging and top out, not for me or many indeed. This stunning and not to be missed gem is accessed from Vratsa by driving through Mezdra, Roman, Stoyanovtsi and Karlukovo, parking in a small bowl, access is one min down steps into the cave entrance.

From the "Gods Eyes" cave moving East along the E772 you will eventually come to Veliko Tarnovo (VT), this is a small city but with a rich history of climbing, on the outskirts to the west is where the Mayfield's have bought property and are developing the Orange House (Bulgaria). I have been to their new house and the potential is truly amazing, especially what will be offered to climbers and military groups wanting to expand their climbing to somewhere very different and culturally exceptional. The brand and their hospitality should be enough to tempt any climber over to explore the country.

The local crag to their house has been developed entirely by Rich Mayfield, this is called Musina crag and is a really well hidden gem, we were the first group to climb on it, and we managed to get Rich to agree to name some of the climbs with a LANCS military twist. There are enough climbs to entertain a group for a full day, the grades range from 3+ to 7+. Plenty of rocks and trees on top of the crag to set up top and bottom ropes for SP climbing.





Moving into VT there are two main climbing areas, Trinity rocks and Uesto West/East. The exped explored these areas and are truly amazing in their offerings, a short walk into both from nearby parking areas.

Trinity rocks is a massive expanse of rock above the railway lines in VT, there is a monastery directly under the cliffs, the options for Sport and Traditional climbing are truly unique, hundreds of routes, however a 70 meter rope would be useful for some sections, also the grades were viewed by the RCIs as underrated. A few people were massively tested, on one particular climb it seemed as if a 5+ turned into a 7, three bolts up, this happened a few times along the extensive cliff. There is no current guide book for this area and it's all test and adjust territory, Rich is developing mini guides for Trinity rocks, we tested out some of his draft guides, very helpful but currently only covers particular parts of the cliff. We were also there on a very cold and damp day, perhaps its better in the glorious spring and autumn, you will have to go and see! I know that I will be back but in a better time of year.

The other main climbing area is Uesto East/West, this is two cliff expanses' split by a river and road in the valley floor, Uesto is a strange place, off the beaten track next to an abandoned housing complex, lots of teenage youth hanging around, we didn't experience problems but be cautious of potential theft. The climbing there is polished in places and the bolts/pegs are not consistently spaced, however do not let that put you off as it's an impressive area and there are some quite amazing routes to be ticked. Oddly there is a mini

house built into a cut out and bolted and positioned part the way up the cliff, it is an interesting feature to the cliff and a must see, you can walk along a small edged path with bolted wire supports as a hand rail to access the small house, it is worth a look. You can also climb from the base of the cliff and top out onto the balcony of the house, just the way any climber should arrive home for dinner!

We also explored Dryanovo monastery as there are surrounding cliffs there, very impressive, but grades were higher than we would have liked and with no guide it was an area we decided to not explore further to prevent time being wasted. A beautiful monastery is at the base of the cliffs and worth a visit, cheap to park and free entry, it's a must, a 30 min stop will allow sufficient time to see everything there.

We drove to the top of the Balkan ridge in the snow to visit the abandoned Buzludzha monument, this was formally the house-Monument of the Bulgarian Communist Party. We approached from

'Oddly there is a mini house built into a cut out and bolted and positioned part the way up the cliff'

the south via Kazanlak up the steep slopes in the SUVs. We managed to park near the torch monument however on foot we couldn't make it on the path to the monument due to white out conditions and not being prepared for the walk in. However the monument sits on the highest point, it has an impressive dome and auditorium with remaining communist symbols intact and mosaics of Friedrich Engels, Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin. It is an impressive structure, for historical and cultural value a must to visit in better weather.

FINANCE The cost of the expedition was much cheaper overall than the equivalent in Spain, the food, accommodation and the flights were the majority of the savings were achieved. In better seasons, I would expect flights and accommodation to rise but not enough to prevent a visit. On average a 3 course meal is £6 and another £2 for drinks. Parking is cheap

and on a declared hour basis, about 50 pence an hour to park in the centre of the city. CILOR for 12 people for 11 days is sufficient for self-catering, unlike the food costs in western European countries where additional funding is required to sustain an expedition.

ACCOMMODATION We stayed in the Old houses www.theoldhousesbg.com in Mihaltsi run by a Scottish Lady who moved to Bulgaria 20+ years ago, she is fluent in Bulgarian and a key figure in the local communities. The compound where we stayed was safe and had security alarms; it was warm, dry and large enough to house 16 plus in 3 cottages each with their own kitchen and bathrooms. In the summer it has the swimming pool filled and a self-help beer fridge on tick. This is ideal so prying eyes can't see you, shiny cars and shiny kit. Bulgaria, Romania and other boarding countries have cultural issues with Gypsies; sticky fingers can be a real issue.

MEDICAL – There is sufficient medical facilities in VT and small local clinics and pharmacies in surrounding areas, it is worth doing a recce to check they are still operating and haven't closed down or moved. It is a must to understand how the medical and emergency procedures work in Bulgaria; nothing can be taken for granted. We managed to buy over the counter drugs for individuals; in the UK these perhaps would need a prescription. Nothing serious was needed during our time but investing in time to recce and speak with English speaking Bulgarians to get the answers is worth the time spent.

INSURANCE Theft isn't such an issue in the area where we stayed as it was rural and remote, however theft can be an issue in the city at night and especially in the tourist areas of Bulgaria, such as sunny beach, pick pockets and direct or threatening theft is common (FCO advice). We experienced no such feeling or atmosphere, just be conscious when leaving the cars to go climbing for the day, take everything, opportunist thief's are global!

EQUIPMENT For a pair or tri climbing in all areas, the recommendation is a full leader rack, 60 meter ropes, 15 Sport draws and plenty of tat and Malians as we learnt early on, the top of many climbs may have two

hanging plates or pegs but with nothing else, rigging something to descend on that you are happy to leave behind rather than a krab is a key consideration. I bought and used 12 Malians and over 20 meters of tat just for me on various climbs; the tat was a mix of rope, tape and prussic.

If you are on a military expedition to Bulgaria, on arrival, immediately after the immigration check, a Bulgarian Army Officer will be stood at baggage collection, he will be in uniform and you will be in civilians, he will be looking for the group. It's an official welcome but also a personal check of your documentation and to confirm accommodation details and when you will be leaving the country. You will be issued paperwork explaining your purpose in Bulgaria, this will be issued from the embassy prior to departing the UK through your Desk Officer, that must be shown to authorities if you as a group is stopped, this will prevent you from being arrested and accused of Spying, the Bulgarian authorities are suspicious of anyone foreign. As a military expedition you have official reason to be there, as a private trip it may be a significantly prolonged experience.

COMMUNICATION There is a marked difference between the rural and urban communities, lots of pointing, hand waving and strange accents come out when dealing with people in the countryside, however in the city, on the street, in the cafes and restaurant's it's a lot simpler, many speak broken English or very good English.

TRANSPORT The expedition had 4 SUVs and was much needed for the access and

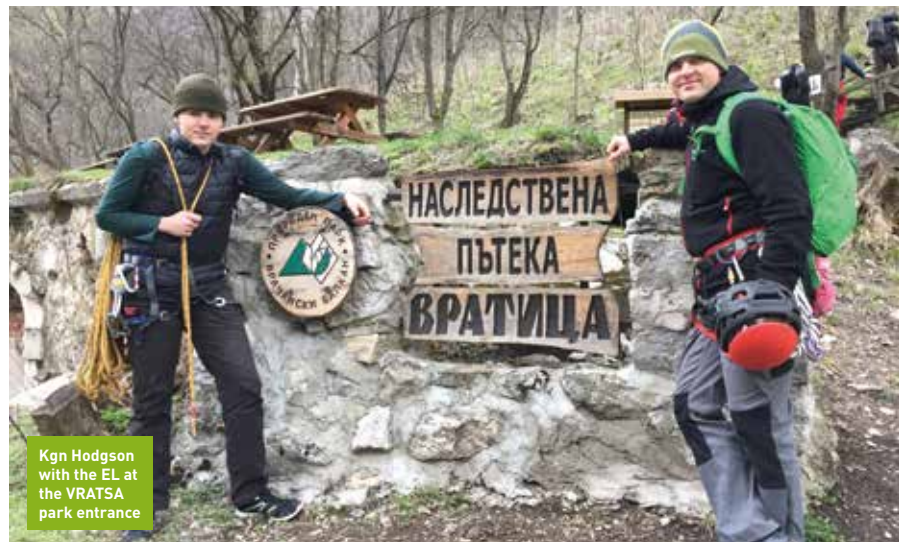
comfort on the road network including the weather experiences. We drove over fields, down grassy mud tracks, up the central Balkan ridge in full snow, through fords and every day over roads with potholes the size of bodies. The roads can be dangerous without the local drivers; locals are proficient on the scariest overtaking situations, tailgating and speeding. It is also Lada central, slight nostalgia from growing up in the 80s. The majority of local cars are 10/15 years plus, so be cautious if getting taxis (Pick the one with shiny brake pads and discs and hope for the best).

Overall the expedition was a great success, in part it was with the help of Rich and Sam Mayfield and their contacts, everyone involved had an enjoyable time, climbing and the many stops to monuments and cultural points. Bulgaria is an untapped climbing gem and its potential is only now being realised by us western Europeans. All the students passed their RSF course, Multi pitch competencies were achieved and Rope work taught in preparation for RCS, overall the RCIs really delivered an incredible experience for the novices involved.

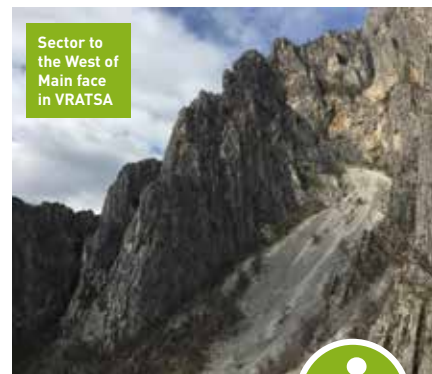
2 LANCS climbing club has really come far in the last 4 years, it has managed to get up and running the redundant outside climbing wall in Weeton Bks, reset the indoor wall on a regular basis, train and qualify over 19 RSFs, 4 RCSs, including 2 RMTs, 1 RML and 2 RCIs. It has managed to take expeditions to Kenya (Batian 5199m), Spain twice and Bulgaria once. Soldiers are engaging and entering climbing competitions both military and civilian; many military climbers have joined

civilian clubs local to the regiment and to their homes. The investment of £3500 by the regiment to purchase rock climbing equipment has allowed this success, introduction to climbing sessions are run monthly for interested parties, without the investment of money or time 2 LANCS wouldn't have been able to achieve the huge amount in climbing they have.

2 weeks after the Bulgarian Experience, I commissioned into the RAMC and left 2 LANCS to join 3 Med Reg in Preston, I have taken the model I created in 2 LANCS and introduced it to 3 Med Reg. At the time of this publication we in 3 Med Reg will be in Spain on Ex Northern Spanish Serpent, staying at the Orange house, conducting a mission repeat... If it's not broke why fix it (Eat, Sleep, Climb, repeat)!



Kgn Hodgson with the EL at the VRATSA park entrance



Sector to the West of Main face in VRATSA

FACTS



LOCATION: MUSINA, BULGARIA
- (PLEASE INCLUDE A MAP OF WHERE BULGARIA IS IN RELATION TO THE UK)

PERSONNEL DEPLOYED: 12

7 CLIMBING LOCATIONS VISITED ALONG THE BALKAN RIDGE.

79 CLIMBS RECORDED IN ALL THE AREAS CLIMBED.

3 FIRST ACCENTS AT THE 'EYES OF GOD' CAVE, AND SOME REGIMENTAL NAMES GIVEN TO CLIMBS AT MUSINA CRAG.

OVER 800+ KM DRIVEN DURING EXPEDITION.

MANY CULTURAL VISITS CONDUCTED, AN AMAZING OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP AN UNDERSTANDING OF HISTORY AND CULTURE.



CADET CENTRE FOR ADVENTUROUS TRAINING

WINTER WONDERLAND

By Cath Davies

On Saturday 10 March ten intrepid volunteers arrived in Aviemore to undertake a week's winter training with the Cadet Centre for Adventurous Training (CCAT), which had deployed from its headquarters and home base of Capel Curig to Feshiebridge Lodge. One candidate was undertaking Winter Climbing Foundation (WCF) and the other nine were on Winter Mountain Foundation (WMF). The climber was an ex regular holding JSRCI but the nine mountaineers had a very varied range of experience, from none at all (the only cadet on the trip) to recent trips to the Higher Ranges. As several were ex regulars, they had participated in alpine mountaineering on occasions like BATUS tours, but these experiences were now distant memories! This is one of the joys of CCAT, the very varied groups who end up operating together.

Accepting everyone had travelled a long way, after supper Kev Edwards, the OC of CCAT, gave the welcome brief and let them settle in. We issued kit on Sunday morning, let everyone pack a rucksack and headed out locally to practise use of boots and ice axe. Once this was squared away, it was time to find a steep slope and get sliding! Kev wisely has a store of old waterproofs for this activity, so we

went at it with gusto and had an enjoyable few hours nailing self arrest from sitting, frontwards, backwards, feet first and headfirst. We then moved further up the valley to find a slope to dig a snow pit and demonstrate a Rauch block, before regaining the Cairngorm car park by sitting glissade! The climbers headed into Coire an t Sneachda onto Twin Ribs for a training session, then ascended via the Fiachall to the plateau and bagged a couple of monros before descending via point 1141.

'The top part is steep and one of the novices experienced the shock of exposure and froze'

Monday dawned sunny and windless, so our plan to head into Coire an t Sneachda to find ice for crampon work then ascend onto the Fiachall Ridge and thus gain the plateau was sound. Kev joined myself and the other SMF instructor Glyn to lower ratios and we trekked in to the bowl of the coire in perfect conditions to introduce the novices to crampon work and enable those who had previously worn crampons to refresh their skills. Once everyone was confident and competent, we demon-

strated our skills by a mass Dancing on Ice impression, me of course demonstrating a perfect Pas de Bas, being Scottish! Then it was straight up the snow slopes to gain the shoulder of the ridge at the start of the difficulties. The top part is steep and one of the novices experienced the shock of exposure and froze. Kev was



able to convince her by physical presence and persuasion that she could manage and she did.

We then followed the ridge, turning the difficulties and gaining the plateau in perfect conditions. It was decided we had time enough to carry on out to bag Cairn Lochan, before returning via Stob Coire an t Sneachda to point 1141 and thence descend. Cloud came in on cue, enabling us to carry out navigation legs and realise the different skills required to navigate in full winter conditions before descending back via the lower ski slopes. The climbers worked elsewhere, progressing to a grade 3 gully, climbing North Gully (RH) on Lurcher's Crag in the Lairig Ghru, with the student leading grade 2 ice.

The best weather was forecast for the west on Tuesday, so after an early start we drove over to Glencoe and walked in perfect sunshine up the path to Stob Coire an Lochan, whilst the climbers carried on to the end of the glen to undertake a winter traverse of the Aonach Eagach ridge. I unfortunately had to descend from below the snow line with the senior cadet who had aggravated an old rugby injury by twisting her ankle on the stone path and could not continue but the remainder summited. The first group had sunshine on the top and great views over the Aonach Eagach and out over Glen Etive, but even the others had great views on the way up and down. I met the climbers, Billy and his student, after their successful traverse in excellent conditions with a banked out Pas Mauvais, which had made life easier! We drove down the glen to meet the walkers. One candidate had found the terrain difficult and slowed considerably, but his team supported him well, staying with him to encourage and one even taking his pack. They eventually descended and we headed back east.

After a long day and in response to a forecast of extremely high winds, on Wednesday it was decided to have a later start and work locally. Accordingly, after a lecture on emergency shelters, we introduced the novices to transceivers and carried out searches in the environs of the lodge, before driving up the ski slope road to walk into some steep snow slopes we had identified previously on the bends of a valley stage river. They would provide suitable shelter sites. The

climbers utilised them to practise ice and snow belays, whilst after more transceiver searches, this time for buried rucksacks to give the novices experience of using snow probes, the group set about fashioning emergency shelters. There is no way of describing how hard digging with only an ice axe is, it has to be experienced. They were incredulous when I told them that in the olden days, to pass ML(W), you had to get yourself out of the wind in 20 minutes!

'The walkers headed out locally to do a bit of navigation'

Thursday had to be a short day as all the equipment had to be handed in and the minibus packed for an early start Friday. As high winds were still forecast, the climbers headed over to Kinlochleven to have a session in the Ice Factor, a frozen box of artificially made Scottish névé. This tested their skills on steep ground to the limit, as the walls are variously almost vertical, vertical and overhanging! The box is booked in two hour blocks and the climbers agreed two hours was enough. The walkers headed out locally to do a bit of navigation on some very rough, unforgiving terrain beyond the Ryvoan bothy. The team all worked hard and even though there was no snow cover as we were so low (the extremely high winds precluded moving higher) a lot of experience was gained.

'The aim is to increase the number of AT qualified CFAVs in order to improve the quality of AT carried out in the ACF and CCFs'

Once the admin was completed, we all sat down together for a traditional Burn's Supper which John our excellent chef, had prepared. One of the candidates, although English, could play the pipes and had his with him, so he piped in the haggis and I addressed it, albeit using a tablet to supply the words! It was a fitting end to a fine week of Scottish mountaineering.

CCAT runs JSAT and NGB courses to qualify Cadet Force Adult Volunteers (CFAVs) in the AT disciplines, largely at



weekends and during school holidays to fit with their availability. In addition to operating in the UK, courses are run in Bavaria, the Alps, Norway and even Canada, wherever the conditions meet the needs of the activity. The aim is to increase the number of AT qualified CFAVs in order to improve the quality of AT carried out in the ACF and CCFs by ensuring personal development is front and centre. Whilst in the Regular and Reserve forces AT is used to develop physical and mental resilience in order to improve operational effectiveness, the Cadet Charter states that military, adventurous and community activities are used to achieve personal development in order to make better citizens, more able to be their best and contribute to their communities.

Unfortunately, much AT carried out currently does not serve this aim. As ACF National Adviser for Adventurous Training, I enjoy working with the grass roots of the organisation and always use it as an opportunity to gather intelligence about what is actually happening on the ground. I can then talk with authority about the reality of cadet AT provision rather than the system's espoused view, but that's another story!



EX DRAGON ECUADORIAN ODYSSEY



By Jodi Longyear

Julian Assange, quinoa, the equator and volcanoes seemed to top the 'pub quiz' answers connected to Ecuador. So when the question 'Do you want to go on an expedition to Ecuador?' was asked the obvious answer to me was 'Yes'

As a trained geography teacher who'd never quite managed to cross into the southern hemisphere the lure of the equator was great. Also, the expedition was planned for January when the weather in the UK was guaranteed to be cold, dark and miserable. I'd read enough Joseph Conrad and Jules Verne to know that the equator would be delightfully warm. The lure of some actual, real volcanoes rather than Youtube videos narrated by Professor Iain Stewart was also a draw. I'm a big fan of quinoa as well though I hoped the local cuisine wouldn't rely too heavily on this Andean superfood.

mountaineering and lastly to peak on some very high mountains.

Aim 1. Ecuador did not disappoint. It is a stunning country with friendly people, a varied and interesting cuisine including just enough quinoa and beautiful scenery. A real bonus which added hugely to the trip was our engagement with a group of Ecuadorian Special Forces. No matter what level of language skills we shared these guys were a real boon to the trip. On the steepest climbs they showed us the way forward (as they tended to be at the front) and we also gained a ton

of cultural knowledge. A highlight for me was watching Capt Smith's face when he came into the room to see me playing Ecuadorian Rummy for cash with three of the toughest guys in Ecuador.

The balance of the trip between mountaineering and acclimatisation (work and play) was pretty much perfect. Free days in Otavalo and Quito allowed for rest, a little shopping and a chance to practice some rope work. Free days also allowed us to scope out restaurants for the evening meal. Good food proved quite easy to

Everyone's aims for the expedition were slightly different. Some people would be totting up log book experience, others revisiting old haunts and for some it might be a life changing experience in a new culture. My aims were threefold: firstly to have an enjoyable and rewarding cultural experience, next to push myself on the physical and technical aspects of 'alpine'





source though good tea and coffee were a little harder to find.

Aim 2. One of the joys of acclimatisation is that altitude is built up gradually. Our first days in the mountains involved gradually longer and higher trips with very different attributes. Our first walk was around the rim of Cuicocha crater- an enjoyable family stroll. Next was a Dartmoor style slog around a damp Laguna Grande De Mojanda finishing up with a British style drenching. Cerro Negro introduced us to paramo grasslands and 45 degree slopes. This was a tough combination as we followed camouflaged Ecuadorians up to 4212 metres. Fuya Fuya was a similar challenge, 40 metres higher and with the most stunning views so far.

Though we hadn't had to use ropes, crampons, axes, etc. in anger yet, we had had the opportunity to train with them. In Quito this involved practicing rope work in the hotel car park. This drew some strange looks especially as we were wearing winter gloves in 25 degree heat. A mountain shelter and track provided the perfect places to practice self-rescue and team crevasse rescue. Whether these were new skills or skills to be practiced I think every member of the team benefitted from these sessions.

A lot of the rope skills were finally used on the ascent of Imbabura, a 4630 metre

peak with 1300 metre height gain and a long, rocky ridge marking part of the former volcanoes rim. Though Imbabura was just short of the snow line (it had a dusting) we used Alpine tactics to keep safe. Alpine mountaineering involves being roped together in small teams so slips, trips and falls can be arrested before they become serious. It also involves walking very quickly so as to limit exposure to rock fall, inclement weather and being behind anyone else. This day was a good example of how tough experiences can be amongst the most rewarding.

'This day was a good example of how tough experiences can be amongst the most rewarding'

Aim 3. If my glass was half empty, aim 3 might be regarded as a bit of a failure. Despite all the training, practice, acclimatisation and planning we didn't manage to get to the top of either Cayambe or Chimborazo. In fact, on both mountains we got to about 5700 metres; which is a great success. 5700 metres is almost twice as high as I'd ever been before. Conditions are tough: it is cold, the air is thin, walking is hard and potential dangers are everywhere. On Cayambe we were turned around by deep snow delaying us by so much that melting snow bridges



over crevasses was going to pose a real threat. Chimborazo had perfect weather conditions but an avalanche threat on the glacier which meant heading back down was the only option.

Also, by not completing aim 3 it means aim 4 comes into existence: return to Ecuador, enjoy the culture again, use some of the skills learnt on this trip and have another crack at Cayambe and Chimborazo.

FACTS

i

UNIT: 42 ENGR REGT (GEO) - 135 GEO SQN RE

ACTIVITY: ALPINE MOUNTAINEERING

DESTINATION: EQUADOR

DEPLOYED PERSONNEL: 10



EXERCISE COLD COMMAND AND COLD CRAFTSMAN

By Si Smith

A pair of winter mountaineering expeditions to the Cairngorm mountain range in Scotland were conducted by 4 REME in early 2018



Lured into a false sense of security with great weather on Day 1



Maj Baddeley with just the cornice to overcome of pinnacle gulley



Aaaaaahhhh - LCpl Saini

The first was for the command group and the sequel for 12 junior soldiers. The conditions were perfect; cold, snowy, icy, some patches of sun and plenty of wind. These exercises are proof that “decent AT can be had for next to nothing”; service accommodation (Norwegian Lodge), service equipment (loan pool), service transport, service instructors and CILOR (food) meant the personal contribution was zero - there was no budget.

Previous experience enabled Ex COLD COMMAND to progress onto Grade I ground quickly and by the end of the week we had summited Cairngorm (6th), Ben Macdui (2nd) and Ben Nevis (highest mountain in UK), along with the Goat Track, Pinnacle Gully and No4 Gully on respective routes. More importantly, the

Standing Unit Plan was written during the 10 hour minibus drive north via a 6-device hotspot WLAN; it includes plenty of AT.

Lack of previous experience forced Ex COLD CRAFTSMAN to start with the very basics; tying boot laces (Pte Nana),

‘Previous experience enabled Ex COLD COMMAND to progress onto Grade I ground quickly’

putting one big foot in front of the next (Cfn Harley) and not being blown away by the wind (Cfn Clerk). For every bit the weather tried denting morale, LCpl Saini found another amusing story to restore it. We claimed the Grade I Faicail

Ridge, some of which remains under Cfn Dabinet’s clinging nails, on route to Ben Macdui and performed smoke signal communications from the summit (LCpl McCune). MATT 5 - map reading - was nailed out of sight.

In summary, 18 Winter Mountain Foundation (WMF) awards were granted, 3 munros were ‘bagged’, 4 Grade I routes scaled, lots of comfort zones explored stretched and mountaineering appetites whetted (thanks to ‘Everest’ and ‘Meru’ movie nights). A final word of thanks to the enablers; WO2 (WML) McPhillips of 101 REME, Sgt (Admin) Critchley, Cpl (Chef) Hayward and Cfn (Driver) Wylds. Soldiers of 4 REME can look forward to more mountaineering; in the Rockies after Ex PS1/18, the Alps during the summer and maybe Mt Kenya...



UFO-like clouds over Ben Macdui Summit

FACTS

UNIT: 4 ARMD CS BN REME

ACTIVITY: WINTER MOUNTAINEERING

LOCATION: CAIRNGORMS, SCOTLAND

ACCOMMODATION: NORWEGIAN LODGE – DIO SCOTLAND

DEPLOYED PERSONNEL: COLD COMMAND: 9 INCLUDING 2 ADMIN STAFF,

COLD CRAFTSMAN: 16 INCLUDING 2 ADMIN STAFF

BUDGET: THERE WAS NO BUDGET!

WHY THE WYE?

By Kate Redfern

Last year saw the sixth climbing meet by the AMA held in the Wye Valley. The first meet was held back in 2012 and has been a firm favourite every year since

The “Wye” meets have proven to be well attended and a firm favourite with members; some returning year on year myself included.

The 2017 meet proved just as popular and attracted members from as far afield as Germany and Northern Ireland. On planning the meet, this made me question why the location and time of year proved to be so popular.

This meet, as in other years, was based at Symonds Yat in the Wye Valley, near Ross-on-Wye. Lying close to the Welsh border, the Lower Wye Valley benefits from the shelter of the Welsh Hills and the surrounding high woodland means that the areas around Symonds Yat are often dry. Yet again this year we were blessed with some excellent weather conditions and the waterproofs stayed firmly in the bottom of the bag! At a 2 hour drive from Tidworth it is a convenient location for a vast number of AMA members based around Salisbury Plain. For those travelling from further afield, Bristol airport is just over an hour away.

Symonds Yat is relatively easy to navigate but caution is required! For the uninitiated the village is split into two parts by the River Wye; Symonds Yat East and Symonds Yat West. The most direct route between the two takes 11 minutes by car. Thankfully no one fell into this trap, however, one of our number was confused by the concentration of public houses in the Symonds Yat West. After an hour and a pint he realised from the messages on the WhatsApp group he

was in fact in the wrong pub on the wrong side of the village!

The Wye Valley is a popular location for tourists, especially in the summer being a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The views I have seen from the top of the routes I have climbed here are spectacular and can be as rewarding as the climbs themselves. Fortunately, during October there are considerably fewer tourists, making the mission of finding a parking spot considerably easier. The 2017 meet, like previous years, attracted a variety of climbers of differing abilities, experience and objectives for the weekend. The Lower Wye Valley offers a great variety of climbing in this area, which the meet took full advantage of.

‘The aptly named Vertigo, which is on a pinnacle called Needle Rock, was a particularly popular route’

Multi-pitch climbing is always a draw for those attending these weekends. This meet was no different, with the majority of attendees climbing multi-pitch routes on either one or both days. One of the popular locations was Symonds Yat East, a stone’s throw away from where we stayed in Symonds Yat West. Five of the six groups headed to the eastside of the river on the Saturday and another three returned the following day. The routes at Symonds Yat were able to satisfy both novices on their first outdoor climbs to those individuals who are preparing for



higher JSAT and NGB qualifications. Although the routes here are mainly single pitch, the groups found enough quality multi-pitch routes to keep them busy and to achieve the aims of all.

The aptly named Vertigo, which is on a pinnacle called Needle Rock, was a particularly popular route. I found myself seconding this climb with Cleo Bishop after making an off-hand comment about a post card of pinnacle at lunch. This was interpreted by Ryan Lang as a request for the location of the next route. For Cleo, this was her third ever outdoor climb, which highlights the opportunities and excellent instruction that we are lucky to receive on these meets. The view down the Wye Valley afforded from the top of the pinnacle is outstanding and it is easy to understand from this perspective why the area is designated an AONB.

As on my first Wye Valley meet, a small group of climbers spent the Saturday climbing at Plump Hill Quarry with Paul Smith, a civilian instructor hired for the meet. This was a good location for the novices to learn basic skills on top and bottom rope, as well as those who want to progress onto leading or just improve their climbing technique. The coaching that I received from Paul helped build my confidence on returning to climbing after a prolonged period away and iron out some of my bad habits! The area is also

home to wild bore and the evidence of their presence can often be seen in the overturned earth on the walk in.

With around 400 sport climbs in the lower Wye Valley of which 222 are from F2+ to F6b, the area is also a good location for the sports climber. On the Sunday, the majority of the meet took advantage this. One group of more experienced climbers headed to Shakemantle to climb some more challenging sport routes whilst another explored the Wyndcliff Quarry for an introduction to sport climbing. This culminated in the majority completing some climbs as leads. I personally led my highest graded sport route and was able to consolidate my technique of rethreading at lower offs.

As I have come to expect from an AMA meet, the enjoyment from the climbing is reinforced by a good social. Again, the Wye Valley meet does not disappoint. The bunk house that we use is handily located on the side of a pub which serves a fine selection of ales and food. The group made good use of the facilities after a hard day climbing! It also served as an excellent location to conduct the briefs in the morning, after the full English breakfast, which is included in the bargain price for the weekend of £20.

The 2017 Wye Valley meet really did prove why the Lower Wye Valley is such a good venue. Whether your persuasion is Trad or Sport Climbing, you want to challenge yourself and tackle the harder routes or you're a complete novice, this meet has something to offer. From multi-pitch or single pitch or if you prefer to climb in a location with a low chance of rain, there is something for everyone. And if that's not enough there are the spectacular vistas.

The question, which is now firmly fixed in my mind, is when is the next Wye Valley meet. The date for the 2018 meet is already pencilled in for October 2018 and all that is required is someone to contact Ryan Lang the meets coordinator, to volunteer to run the meet.

Photos: Danial Bradford - <https://www.ikigaidesigns.co.uk>





AMA WINTER MEET 2018 ROYBRIDGE, SCOTLAND

By Martin South

Winter Meet time again! Everyone arrived in Roybridge, near Fort Bill on the Sunday and considering the disappointing year the Winter Meet had in the Cairngorms in 2017, this time Scotland certainly had delivered, as the conditions were superb on the Ben, Glencoe and the Mamores.

A big Meet this year, with eighteen students and nine instructors that were able to cover a wide range of training from introduction to Scottish winter mountaineering to Grade V mixed climbing. Unfortunately, although after the hard work helping to make the Meet happen, poor Sean Mackey was missing this year, not even in a guest-starring instructional role. Next year Sean, next year...

26 Feb 18. First day on the mountain, and the range of instructors gave everyone

the opportunity to really focus on their training aspirations. Gemma Grewar took the group that required both Quality Mountain Days and skills training for their own upcoming WML courses. Lots of navigation and WML skills on Creag Meagaidh to get her group dialed back into all things Scottish winter. Col Kingshott also headed off to Meggy, climbing with Dunc Bishop. Tarquin Shipley set the standard on the first day, taking Guy Davies onto Comb Gully (IV, 4***) on Ben Nevis, so not only a three-star route, but

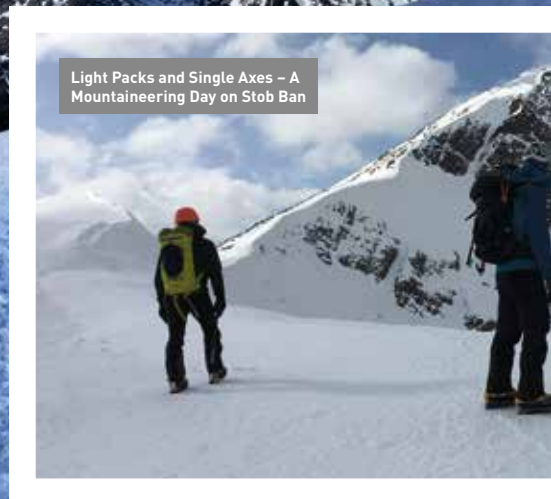
a Cold Climbs classic to boot. Glenn Bloomer did his very best to maintain the Cold Climbs theme with Ryan Anderson on The Curtain (IV,5****), but unfortunately it wasn't quite in condition, but as they're certainly not folk to be beaten, Glenn and Ryan still ticked-off a Ben four-star with Ledge Route (II****). Chris Dowd and I headed down to Coire nan Lochan to climb Boomerang Gully (II*) and enjoyed the top-out on Bidean nan Bian under alpine-blue skies with stunning views over Lochs Leven and Linnhe, to the Mamores



Ben Nevis and the Mamores from Glencoe



Superb conditions for climbing in Glencoe



Light Packs and Single Axes - A Mountaineering Day on Stob Ban

and a cloud-free Ben. On the descent on that path from Lochan, Chris usefully invented a new grading system for the treacherous solid turf that bordered the iced-up path back down to the A82. Now known as "Grade 3 Grass" (note for any AMA members serving with CDT, not that type of grass...) it was Hobson's Choice between the ice of the path or the ice of the turf. A wide range of activities for everyone in superb Scottish conditions. A great first day. Apart from Chris and I's walk back to the A82. That was rubbish.

27 Feb 18. Lionel Fairweather took an east-coast option, climbing Fiacail Ridge (I) in Coire an T-Sneachda with Nick Morall. Although it was possibly/probably a wily excuse for a visit to the Mountain Café in Aviemore, the Fiacail is always a favourite. Tarquin maintained his pace, with Glover's Chimney (III,4***) another Cold Climbs classic on The Ben with Ben Powell (no relation. Probably). Gemma took her group through a mock WML assessment in the Meggy area, and Glenn Bloomer took Guy Davies on Crowberry Gully (IV,4****) on Buachaille Etive Mor. Niall Archibald and Lyndsey Wilson took Luke Payne, Sally Webster and Mike Critchley to Choire nam Beitheach for some introductory winter skills training. Andy Hogarth of JSMTTC(B) fame treated Phil Coleby and Ryan Lang to a WH Murray classic on Buachaille Etive Mor, climbing Crowberry Gully in superb conditions. In a truly selfless gesture, Ryan graciously let Phil carry both half-ropes during their week with Andy, ensuring Phil was able to make the very most of the cardiovascular training opportunity that carrying that additional rope provided. Glenn also went for the Crowberry Gully option as well with Guy. Never one to let an opportunity slip, Col Kingshott maintained the Cold Climbs



theme, climbing Zero Gully (V,4****) with Dunc Bishop. Chris Wright also chose a Ben option for Ryan Anderson, making the best of the excellent conditions for the day. A great Scottish season for Ryan A, as he seems to have spent more time in the Highlands this year than Nessie.

28 Feb 18. Gemma kept her WML training group of Al White, Sip Powers, Josh Mackey and Nick Morrall working hard, with more snow skills near Coire Ardair. A really great bunch for Gemma to have in the hill, plenty of time for Sip to pass on his outdoor gear fashion advice "...just think...do I look like a fishing float? Yep? Then you've got it...!" Andy H focused on student lead climbing with Ryan L and "Two-Ropes" Phil on Aonach Mor, developing winter leading skills. A mountaineering day for Chris D and Tarquin, as they took Dunc, Josh, Luke and me on the South Gully of Stob Ban. The Mamores are a superb area at the best of times, and on that day the conditions remained stable, with visibility far into

"...just think...do I look like a fishing float? Yep? Then you've got it...!"

the Southern Highlands and north to yet another cloud-free Ben (Nevis, rather than Powell...). Chris W and Ryan A practically ran laps of Stob Coire nan Lochan, ticking three routes in a day. Lionel and Ben Turner also enjoyed Lochan, although maybe not so much the return walk to the A82, as that was a test of everyone's patience during the week. I think that the Members' choice of catering for the Meet needs highlighted here, from Guy's food supplied by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II herself (handily provided in a small brown box, primarily for a 24hr period) to Ben Turner, Nick, Lionel and Al, whose nightly "Come Dine With Me – Roybridge Edition" which without question, put everyone else to shame. Superb effort on the food from Lionel's gang, it was fantastic.

1 Mar 18. A mock WML assessment and micro-nav training in testing conditions for Al, Sip, Josh and Nick, as Gemma kept up the pace with the aspirant WMLs. Glenn took Sally Webster to Ben Nevis, and despite the varied conditions, managed to get some intro climbing in Coire na Ciste done. Chris D and I had the same



ambitions, but on the snow skirt to our chosen climb, Chris thought that due to the wind speed, it looked as if we were taking Effective Enemy Fire, discretion was the better part of valour, and we reluctantly returned to the CIC Hut for de-gearing and the long walk back to the North Face Car Park. The wind speeds certainly frustrated the climbing that day, with Lionel and Ben T also having to admit defeat to their climbing plans. In what was certainly a wise move, Niall and Lyndsey enjoyed a low-level walk in the Glen Nevis area. Tarquin kept at it, climbing Moonlight Gully (II) and No 5 Gully (I) with Luke.

2 Mar 18. Due to the weather conditions and reduced personnel numbers, the volume of training reduced on the Friday, but those who were still able to commit to training had another excellent day. Gemma's group, now down to the redoubtable Sip and Josh, kept at the WML training, again focusing on micro-nav for the day. Phil was lucky enough to have Andy H for one-to-one climbing instruction and so managed to squeeze in one more day's rope-carrying practice at the end of a superb week's training.

A sincere thanks to each and every individual's efforts in making this year's Winter Meet such a success. From Sip and Col's outdoor fashion advice, to Nick, Lionel, Al and Ben's cooking, to Ryan and Sean's work in supporting me in making the Meet work, thanks again. Over to Sean again for 2018, see you up North next year for our annual Scottish pilgrimage.

Andy, Phil and Ryan climbing on The Buachaille. (Phil would particularly like you to note both of the ropes that he kindly carried in...)

NORTH WALES MEET

By Khemchandra Gurung

The members of Army Mountaineering Association planned to get together for the annual North Wales Meet over the weekend of 24-25 Mar 18

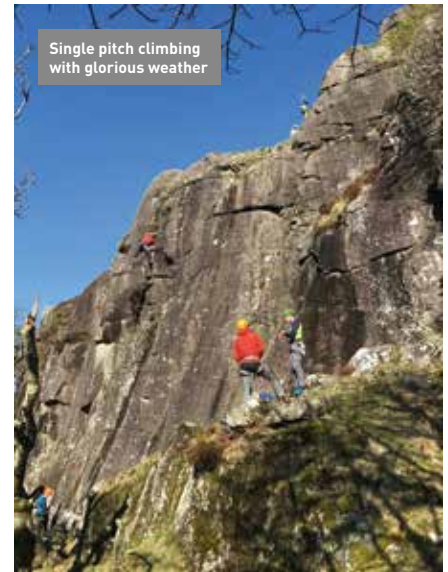
With kind acknowledgement by the Commanding Officer 16 Signal Regiment as the DDH, the event was planned and advertised on the AMA website. The applications soon started flooding in and the tri-service Nuffield Centre at Anglesey was booked for accommodation. Its first class accommodation and close proximity from the Snowdon National Park resulted in it being an easy choice.

After Training Over Private Land authority for the event was granted and UAAT form signed off, the participants arrived at Anglesey on 23 Mar 18 for the adventurous weekend. On the morning of 24 Mar 18, the senior instructor Capt Lang briefed the team on essence of the keeping within the remits of JSP 419. Then, the participants were teamed with respective instructors for the activities (multi-pitch climbing and hill walking). With competent skill levels in the hill walking team led by myself, the decision was made to hike up to Snowdon summit through Rhyd Ddu path and descend using Watkin path. The route provided plenty of opportunity to challenge our navigation and technical skills. The team embarked on the hike from the car park, along the stream and piles of slate rocks. With good weather forecast, the team were accompanied by other hiking groups notably youth groups on DoE award scheme. Upon reaching the summit, the temperature was around 0°C. Re-energised after quick lunch break, the team set off on the steep descent along Watkin path. The team stopped at various places to admire the scenery and the history of the desolate mining site. After necessary end-of-hike stretch, the team headed back to accommodation to reflect

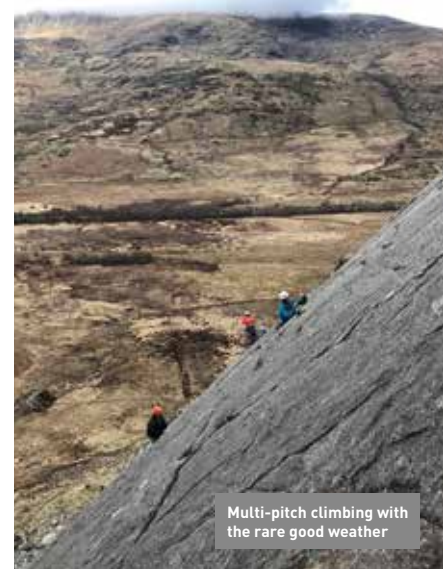
on the achievements of the day. Some participants made the most of self-catering kitchen whilst others resorted to facility at the local public house.

Next morning, the participants gathered for the brief with weary eyes. The activity for the day was 'Climbing' at Termadog. Soon after handing over the accommodation, all participants gathered at the Pant Ifan crag for single pitch climbing. Rock Climbing Supervisors amongst the team grabbed opportunity to lead and setup the climb. The activity continued till lunch time. With exhausted arms and legs, all participants thanked the senior instructor, Capt Lang, before making their way back home.

All in all, the aim of the meet to practise summer mountaineering skills including climbing and hill waking was thoroughly achieved. All participants fully enjoyed the event and are planning to attend future AMA meets.



Single pitch climbing with glorious weather



Multi-pitch climbing with the rare good weather



Nick and Sally full of enthusiasm on route down via the Watkin Path

MEETS UPDATE

By Ryan Lang

Another blink of an eye, another few sleeps and I have the AMA Journal Editor chasing me for this article!

It was agreed that constantly writing about meets in the same diary of events fashion was due for a change, so here it is. There are still a few meet reports in this edition of the Journal from the various meet organisers that we have had this year. It will always be important to report on what we do, so that we can all remind ourselves of how good we were all those years ago! Not only will the reports act as a reminder of what we did, but they also demonstrate to new and potential members what is on offer for the small sum of £20 a year.

I am always looking for keen volunteers to help run a meet. One question I am constantly asked is where and when can they take place? The answer is simple, pick a month, pick a location and go for it! Since the last journal we have had five meets in three locations run by four different people. The future is looking equally good in that we have another three meets in N Wales, a meet in the Peak District, the Isle of Skye and Bosigran to look forward too. As the AMA Meet Officer, I try and ensure there are about ten meets a year, roughly one per month with a gap over December and January. This is not a hard and fast rule, we have successfully run two meets in one month in the past, we even managed to run two meets over one weekend in different parts of the country. The moral of the story is if you are keen to run a meet, the location and date is completely up to you. There is no set template to follow, well apart from the annual Wye Valley meet of course! I promise you that running a meet is not complicated, there is help available and you will benefit from the experience. Once you have run a weekend meet, the process for arranging a week long climbing meet in the Costa Blanca is very similar indeed!

I think it is worthwhile to remind ourselves the true value of a meet in a monetary sense. If you were to book into Plas-Y-

Brenin on a weekend course to conduct walking, scrambling or climbing, the costs are soon going to mount up. By the time you have paid for transport and the course you are looking at an average of £300 for the weekend (beer not included!) The cost of an AMA weekend meet is £20. The accommodation we use is not as plush, you may have to feed yourself, but the value is second to none.

Attendance over the last six months has been high. Over 87% of meet spaces have been filled, the 13% non-attendance can be attributed to service life, last minute change of plans and the other-half putting his or her foot down! It is always encouraging to see new faces on the meets, out of the 92 attendees over the last five meets, about 50% of the attendees have been new to the AMA which means we are advertising what we do and when we do it quite well. There is always room for improvement though and we won't rest on our laurels.

“It has been encouraging to see meets start to move elsewhere and lesser visited areas too”

I have attended the vast majority of meets in the last three years and have noted that participants can be broadly pigeon holed into one of three categories. The first is the novice, who is happy to be instructed in whatever activity they choose (Instructor dependant). The second is the Instructor who is willing to take novice members out, thereby using the qualifications to best effect. The third is the person that has a qualification but lacks the experience or confidence to use it. Most meets have all three categories and it seems to work out fairly well. There is now a drive to help the less experienced instructors by pairing

them up with an MIA or MIC so that they can learn from experience and develop as the weekend progresses. Therefore, if you are reading this and place yourself in the third category, please come along as you will receive some professional input which will enable you to be a better instructor. This will help AMA meets thrive in the future as you progress into the second category.

There are a lot of instructors that don't have the time to attend a five-day JSAT course which means they will not progress to the next level on the Military system. Please remember that all is not lost as you are able to use your Standard Learning Credit for Mountaineering courses as long as the same award is not available from Service sources. It is possible to do many courses over split weekends if you can't attend a continuous five-day block. MIA, MIC, RCDI etc are all eligible for SLC use. If the acronyms mean nothing to you, please look at the Mountain Training Website mountain-training.org.

If you have been a member of the AMA for long enough, you will see repetition in the meets calendar. There are numerous N Wales meets because there is so much to do in a small geographical area. The winter meet will always be in Scotland for obvious reasons. It has been encouraging to see meets start to move elsewhere and lesser visited areas too, Loch Lomond being a great example of this. If you have an idea, don't keep it to yourself as it may be the seed that needs to be sewn that turns into a fantastic idea for the next meet. Wild camping in the Scottish wilderness, a weekend of climbing in Lundy or a sports climbing meet are all within scope and just need to be arranged by a willing volunteer. If you are interested in helping out, please contact me, my details are in the contacts at the start of the journal.



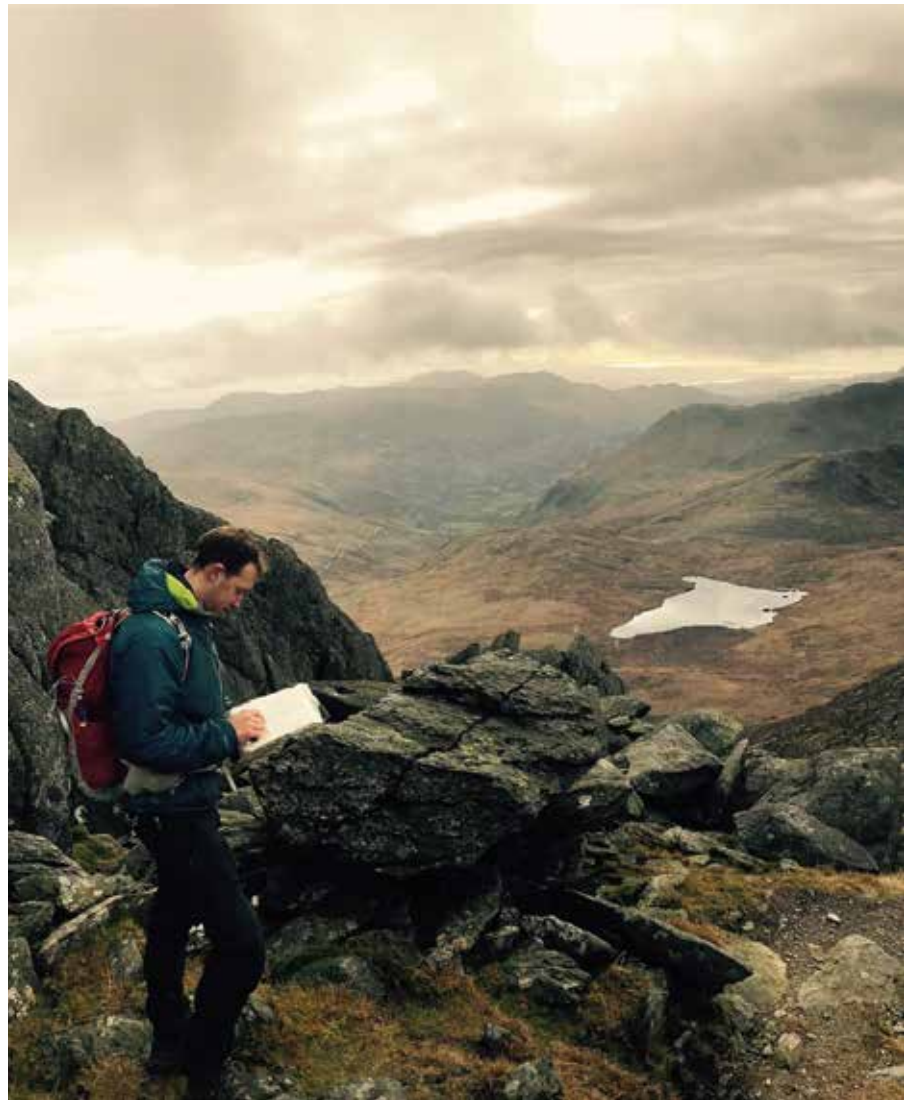
NORTH WALES MEET / 17-19 NOV 17

By Martin South

“November without a Bens’ Meet? Nah, we can’t have that...”

...were Ryan and I's thoughts as he needed someone to organise (I'd like to think it's now) the annual November Meet at Ben's Bunkhouse just outside Llanberis. A really healthy rank-range and mix of both Regulars and Reserves met up at the Bunkhouse for a weekend's climbing and walking. I'd be lying if I said that the weather is normally on our side on the November Meet, truthfully it's normally the opposite, which certainly makes for a more "sporting" experience for any hardy soul that makes it to get up to N Wales for the weekend. Particular kudos must go to Liz Dallyn and Toby Dudley, who still made the November pilgrimage to Llan-B even though they were only able to enjoy the Saturday's activities. We'd a couple of Meet first-timers as well, which is always great to see. Welcome to the AMA!

Friday evening mainly consisted of me ticking the names off my sheet, with individuals bomb-bursting to the Veynol Arms, the chippy in Llan-B, or cooking in



the group kitchen to various degrees of impressiveness, from not very (me) to very (Callum Patton and Jamie Waddington).

The weather on the Saturday wasn't actually that bad, certainly the best that I've seen it on a November Meet Saturday, so after Ryan's quick session of grouping everyone together for their chosen

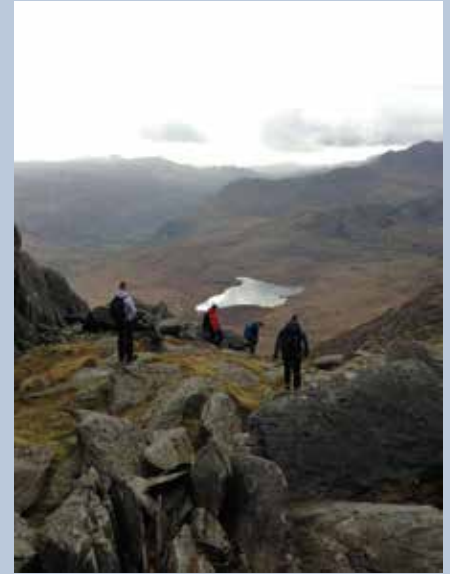
'The aptly named Vertigo, which is on a pinnacle called Needle Rock, was a particularly popular route'

activities, we all split-up and headed for the hills. Jamie and Jase Till headed off to Tryfan Bach for some multi-pitch work, Ryan took Cleo Bishop-Bolt and Karl Jackson onto Idwal Butress for some quality scrambling, Liz took a big group to the Carnedds, Toby and Will Cathcart joined Ryan, Cleo and Karl in Cwm Idwal, the pair climbing 'Hope', and Phil Dyer



and I headed to Tremadog for some RCS revision work, and maybe a climb or two.

Phil and I's first stop was Eric Jones' Café, and we were privileged enough to be served a brew and cake (me...) by the



great man himself. We shared the café with a Welsh-language rock band and a camera crew filming for S4C, which was great fun. After a song or two from the band, we headed up to the crag, as “18 Nov 17 – Sat in Tremadog café eating cake and listening to some quality tunes in Welsh” would never impress anyone in a logbook. Although the weather was fairly kind, the rock was pretty damp and we were sharing the crag with a uni and PyB group. Still, a worthwhile day revising RCS work though. What was interesting was watching the other individuals on the crag. I think we forget sometimes the quality of instruction that we receive through the JSAT scheme. The level of safety awareness of those other groups seemed odd to someone JSAT-trained, and it certainly made me thankful for the quality of instruction that we receive in the military. So to any AMA military instructors and JSMTTC staff reading, thanks, the quality of your instruction is very much appreciated. I’m no Andy Kirkpatrick, but making the last move to the top a route and shouting “safe..!”, doesn’t actually mean you’re safe...

Everyone had a quality day, and sadly we had to say goodbye to Liz and Toby, who headed back south again. The majority of folk head to the Vaynol on the Saturday evening, enjoying some decent food, good beer and a nice open fire. A late

wander back to Bens’ in the dark, and over to the duty snorers to do their thing...

Ryan Anderson and Will Cathcart cut-away Sunday morning, so the remaining Members split into two groups, Ryan taking Phil Dyer and Matt Edwards onto Idwal Buttress, and Heloise Goodley taking the rest up the Glyders. Luckily for the Glyder-group, Heloise is a Geology graduate, so we had a really informative day of Igneous, Sedimentary and Metamorphic-based facts from her, which made for an unusual day. A really good bunch, who all enjoyed the day on the hill, especially Cleo getting her photo taken on



the Cantilever Stone on Castell y Gwynt. On the descent, we met up with Ryan, Phil and Matt as Ryan was showing off his drone-flying skills to a selection of very impressed children by Lyn Idwal. An AMA trip to N Wales isn’t complete without a visit to the Moel Siabod Café, so we all headed-off for some quality food at the Siabod before heading off back home.

Thanks again to Ryan for his help running the Meet, it was very much appreciated. Definitely same time in 2018 for the annual Nov Ben’s pilgrimage.

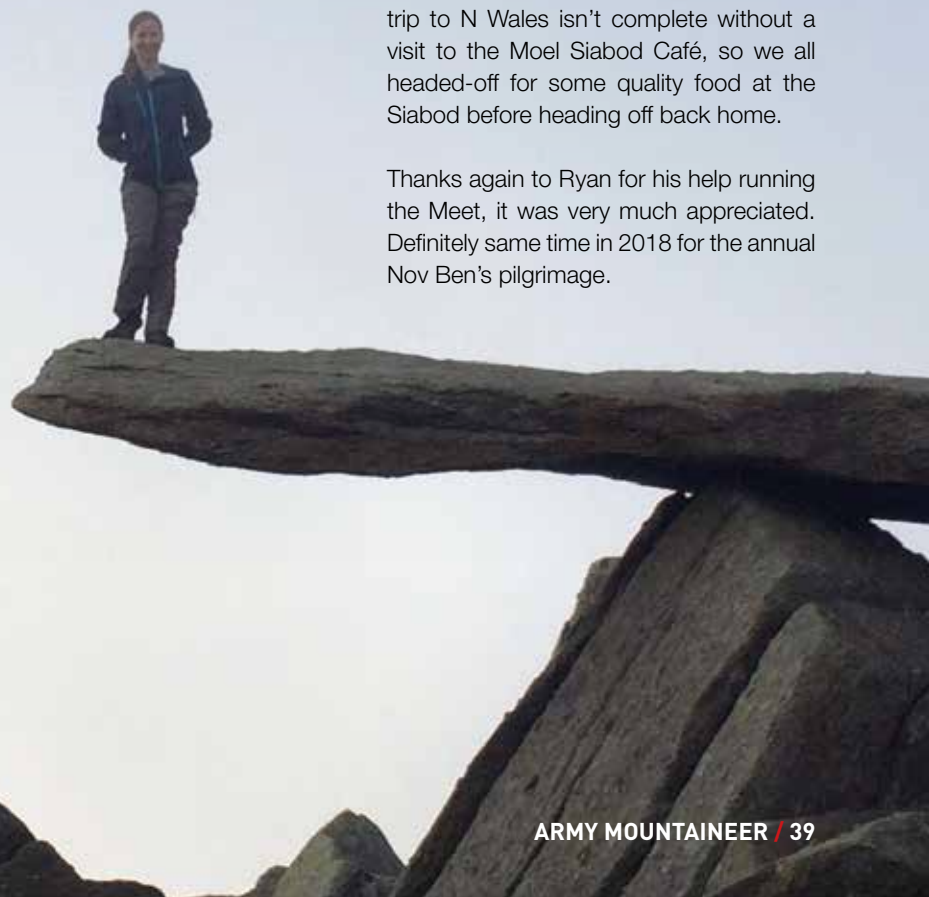




PHOTO COMPETITION

Each edition of Army Mountaineer contains a photo competition. Whether you've been out with friends, deployed abroad to nice places or have participated on a large scale expedition your photos can win you some cash!

Prizes range from £50-£100 and will be paid into the winners' bank account as soon as possible. If you haven't yet received your winnings, please get in touch with the Editor.

For tips on how to improve your images, see the 'How to win the AMA photo

competition' article produced in the Winter 2017 edition of Army Mountaineer.

Photos should be sent at the highest quality possible (not less than 2MB) and emailed to the Editor with the filename: AMA_Number-Forename-Surname.jpg. In addition, any images that are suitable

for AMA recruiting and promotional purposes will be turned into glossy flyers and posters. It is assumed that all photos entered into the competition have the consent of the photographer to be used for these purposes unless stated.



■ Andrew Gilmour



■ Marcus Dickens



■ Daniel Fitzgerald



■ Anna Flight



■ Adam Cairns



■ Harley Nott



■ Andrew Mackay



■ Matt Duerden



■ Lawrence Hallett



■ Simon Lamb



■ Ross Davidson



■ Callum Sapsford

TERRA NOVA EQUIPMENT

By Al Topping

Terra Nova have been making shelters, of all kinds since 1980 when they were known under their original company name Wintergear. Their experience really shows in their complete line of tents, bothys and bivi bags that cater for all budgets and requirements. AMA members are afforded significant discounts on their entire catalogue giving reductions from 20% upwards. Below is a selection of their product range giving an overview of what's available.

As far as shelters go, a tarp is as simple as it gets. As most will have experience with the issued basha, I'll be using this as a benchmark in which to make a comparison.

Smaller than the issue-tissue, the Adventure Tarp 1 is a single person lightweight nylon sheet. It doesn't come with pegs or any poles but the positive here is that it gives you the freedom to customise these parts to your own tastes. There are ring eyelets at the corners as you find on the issued basha and one additional eyelet along each edge in the centre for attachment with string, bungees or to peg straight into the ground.

Weighing in at only, 367g it's the second lightest option in our reviews this edition, coming second to the moonlight sleeping bag cover. The advantage to this additional weight is that it gives you a modest amount of room for covering your kit and providing somewhere to cook or change out of wet clothes. It's not a huge amount of space and you'd need to be quite selective over when and where you choose to use it. But, for emergency stop outs or for lightweight multi night trips, this is the ideal companion to your kit locker. There is a larger option, the Adventure Tarp 2, and for an extra £10 gets you 2.9m x 2.48m of material.

If you're looking to buy something that stops you from standing out by being the one person with a camouflage basha then the Terra Nova Adventure Tarp is a good place to start.



The Moonlite is Terra Nova's top end bivi bag retailing at £160 but is available to AMA members for £84. It's a waterproof and breathable bivi bag with taped seams and has an integrated hood that has a mesh net to cover the face.

Bivi bags usually sit in two categories, those with lots of space, and those which are more fitted; the Moonlite sits firmly in the latter category and has weight saving

you're taller than average or have broad shoulders this particular bag may be a bit too snug for comfort.

The Moonlite is a mummy shaped bag with fitted area at the bottom for your feet. It's got a hood that can be zipped up and this includes a midge net. Upon testing I found it difficult to use this zip as I found it a bit tight to move about inside and would prefer more space. You certainly wouldn't want to put your boots inside overnight if out in winter conditions and operating the zip in the morning might be more challenging than your QMD ahead.

In summary, if you're below average height and have less broad shoulders than me then this is a worthy option to add to your kit locker. If not or are looking for something to give you space for you and your kit you may wish to look at other options.

Most emergency shelters I've used before are very similar in design and comprise of a large sheet of waterproofed nylon with

'AMA members are afforded significant discounts on their entire catalogue giving reductions from 20% upwards'

at the forefront of the mind. It's achieved this by coming in at only 180g and packs down to 21 x 6 cm (If you squash it, it will compress to less than this). This then makes it ideal for lightweight expeditions and for those situations where the unexpected happens. However, if

ADVENTURE TARP 1

TYPE: SINGLE LAYER TARP

AMA PURCHASE PRICE:
(RRP £40) £28

SIZE: 2.4 X 1.4 M (UNPACKED)

WEIGHT: 367 G

POLES, PEGS, BUNGEEES

INCLUDED: NO

RATINGS:

FEATURES: 3.5/5

VALUE FOR MONEY: 5/5

PERFORMANCE: 4.5/5

WEIGHT/SIZE: 4.5/5

OVERALL: 4.5/5



BOTHY 2

TYPE: EMERGENCY SHELTER

AMA PURCHASE PRICE:
(RRP £35) £24.50

SIZE: 2 PERSON

WEIGHT: 370 G

POLES, PEGS, BUGEES

INCLUDED: N/A

RATINGS:

FEATURES: 4/5

VALUE FOR MONEY: 5/5

PERFORMANCE: 5/5

WEIGHT/SIZE: 4/5

OVERALL: 4.5/5



MOONLITE SLEEPING BAG COVER

TYPE: BIVI BAG

AMA PURCHASE PRICE:
(RRP £160) £84

SIZE: 200CM X 76CM (UNPACKED),
21CM X 6 CM (PACKED)

WEIGHT: 180 G

POLES, PEGS, BUGEES

INCLUDED: N/A

RATINGS:

FEATURES: 4/5

VALUE FOR MONEY: 3.5 / 5

PERFORMANCE: 3.5/5

WEIGHT/SIZE: 3.5 / 5

OVERALL: 3.5/5



an air vent and possibly a window and, as a whole, resembles a large plastic bag. What makes this any different? Well to be honest, not a lot. But, when a design is proven to work, why change it? It's a bombproof piece of kit that'll give you opportunity for many toasty warm lunch stops, or if problems do occur, somewhere to regain some heat and do a nav check out of the weather before continuing on.

The Bothy 2, is, as the name suggests, is a bothy bag for two people. There are also four, eight, twelve and even a twenty man version of the same product to cater

for larger groups. What I do like about this is the weight and pack size are small, and the stuff sack is attached to the bothy material so it can't blow away in the wind. To repack it, you simply turn the bag inside out and push the bothy back in.

The Bothy 2 includes a low temperature PU window and an additional 'socket' in the middle of the roof, whereby inserting a walking pole or two into it allows the bothy to be 'erected' like a tent. Terra Nova state this gives the overall structure more support however, having tried this, I can confirm it does, but the same results can

be achieved by pressing against the sides of the bag in multiple directions to prevent the middle part of the roof from sagging.

Overall, if you've not got one, then this is as good as any other, but this one from Terra Nova comes with an AMA member discount. As mentioned earlier, if a two man is not enough, the four man is available for £35, eight man for £45.50 a twelve man is £59.50 and the big-daddy twenty man is discounted down to £84.00.

PÁRAMO FABRICS

A DIFFERENT WAY OF THINKING

By Al Topping

Having moved from sunny Aldershot up to (even sunnier) Catterick earlier last year I have enjoyed the opportunity to discover parts of the UK that I'd not climbed and hiked in before. Whilst doing this, it has become quite obvious that those in 'the North' have a different perspective on suitable outdoor attire. Some, like those in some northern cities, prefer a 'fight light' outlook, wearing, not a lot, at all L, while a majority of others, who spend time outside where it rains have favoured Páramo. There's quite a distinct proportion of the population of northern outdoor goers who are favouring this brand of fabrics and I've been curious to understand what they clearly know, and I don't. After all, there must be something in it, as Páramo clothing is issued to students at JSMTTC's Ballachulish wing near Fort William for their winter courses.

Speaking with Páramo's marketing team and subsequently from testing two of their 'Analogy' outer layers and a base layer over 8 months I have become enlightened. Páramo are making something very different to traditional barrier membranes.

HOW ARE THEY DIFFERENT?

Owning a Páramo jacket will mean you're going to think of things differently: if you're out in torrential rain in a Páramo waterproof you're going to be dry all day, however, if you put your elbow or knee into a puddle, you'll get wet. This is why, as some of you may note, there's no publicised hydrostatic head value for the material, which in turn makes it difficult to directly compare against breathable membranes. This fact may sound pretty damning for a piece of clothing that's primary function is to keep the wearer dry, but it's not. As soon as this happens the fabric starts doing its thing and it quickly pushes the water back out again meaning shortly after you'll be dry again - I said they required a different way of thinking.

The next thing is that it can also extract water vapour and liquid water – membrane jackets typically only remove vapour and hence why after a long active day in heavy rain you're more than likely to get soaked to the bone and frustrated having paid a lot of money to stay dry.

When water vapour comes into contact with the inner surface of a membrane it will most likely condense into water droplets. This is the biggest contributor to internal moisture when ascending peaks on a cold day or at altitude. Do too much of this and it won't go away at all. In the Nikwax Analogy fabric that Páramo uses, this is drawn outwards by the fabric's pump liner and helps keep you drier for longer. Páramo call this capability Directionality and is the foundation on which their fabrics are made.

'Páramo are making something very different to traditional barrier membranes'

An additional benefit for Páramo wearers is the renewability of water-repellency with Nikwax. You may have already come across Nikwax before and a large portion of you will have used it too. Nikwax is a water based elastomer that is washed into the garment during manufacture. The outcome is a discrete but highly water repellent and breathable layer. You can also purchase it to re-proof your kit. Nikwax also claims to increase the tear-strength of fabrics over non-treated fabrics and does this by allowing the layers to move over each other more easily. In previous versions the Nikwax layer needed to be heated after being applied for it to work properly but a more recent change means



CAMBIA T-SHIRT

there's now no need to do this and so they can just be air-dried – No more spins in the drier are required.

CAMBIA T-SHIRT

PRICE TO AMA MEMBERS: (RRP £40) £32

WEIGHT: 136G

COLOURS: ORANGE, GREY, DARK BLUE, LIGHT BLUE, BLACK

WOMEN'S SPECIFIC:

RATINGS:

FEATURES: 4/5

VALUE FOR MONEY: 4/5

PERFORMANCE: 4.5/5

WEIGHT/SIZE: 4/5

OVERALL: 4/5



Directionality not only works to expel moisture to keep you dry, it can also promote cooling. Looking into their base layers, like the Cambia T-shirt, the user can choose which way they want to wear the layer depending on the environment they're in and activity they're going to be doing. With the smooth side on the

outside, the Cambia reduces the pooling of perspiration to eliminate cold spots after exercise. Turning it inside out so the textured side of the fabric is next to your provides a warmer layer. I tried a short sleeve version and found it to be excellent at keeping me dry on warm sunny days whilst carrying a bag uphill. Most notably, at the top, when it was time for a break, I noticed there was very little moisture around my lower back that normally forms from sweating whilst carrying a bag.

Aesthetically, the Cambia T-Shirt I tried has a high quality look and feel, well-tailored finishing with a comfortable fit. If I was going to be critical I'd highlight that I found the neckline to be a little low compared to other t-shirts that I own which contributed to a sunburnt neckline below where my other T-shirts may have covered otherwise.

On top of this base layer, I've been able to test two Analogy jackets from Summer 17 through to Spring 18. The Velez – with a full length zip, and the top-end mountaineering specific model - the Enduro. Both use the Analogy waterproof fabric system but the Velez has the lighter weight fabric - Analogy Light. This has all the same waterproof characteristics but is not as heavy (approximately 20% lighter) is less durable than the Enduro.

PÁRAMO VELEZ

PRICE TO AMA MEMBERS:

(RRP £285) £228

WEIGHT: 605G

COLOURS AVAILABLE: ORANGE, BLUE & GREY, MAROON & NAVY, BLACK

WOMENS' SPECIFIC: YES

RATINGS:

FEATURES: 3.5/5

VALUE FOR MONEY: 4/5

PERFORMANCE: 5/5

WEIGHT/SIZE: 4.5/5

OVERALL: 4.5/5



The Velez comes in two variations, a full length zip or a half zipping

smock – I tested the full length version. The cut is designed to be harness compatible and comes with a stiff peaked hood. There are two double-zipped pockets on the chest allowing ventilation that provides storage and somewhere to

warm hands. In addition, there are two front-of-arm vents to add additional ventilation options. This is a simple jacket with basic features. Hook and loop tabs on the wrists keeps heat in and moisture out, or when required, the sleeves can easily be pulled up to further allow for ventilation. The light weight material is soft, near silent, flexible and warm and allows for unrestricted movement on those rock climbs where

'The light weight material is soft, near silent, flexible and warm'

you have to become one with the rock to get anywhere. It has elasticated drawstring pulls to fit the hood to the wearer and once zipped up fully, the jacket is a comfortable fit exposing only the essential skin to the elements. Zips have glove-friendly tabs on the end to allow opening and closing in the harshest weather.

VELEZ



The one thing I'd change about the Velez is the hood retaining system...that doesn't exist. For whatever reason one has not been added and is a significant drawback to an otherwise exceptional jacket. Because the Analogy Light material is 20% lighter than the heavier weight Analogy it has the tendency to move around and that becomes a problem particularly when bending over to pick up your gear or when it's windy. I've tried rolling it up and I've tried stuffing it down the back of the neckline but this is neither practical nor comfortable.

Some of you may have seen the Velez Evolution <<Velez Evolution>> that won a Gold Award on show at ISPO 2018. This is, as named, an evolution to the current model (smock only) and most notably increases the amount of ventilation possible by the entire front panel being removable. At an RRP of £330 will this make current Velez owners go out and buy a new one? Perhaps not, but as a new consumer it will give you something else to think about. Will it have a decent hood retaining system, hopefully so.

PÁRAMO ENDURO

PRICE TO AMA MEMBERS:

(RRP £425) £340

WEIGHT: 800G

COLOURS AVAILABLE: ASYMMETRIC BLUE/RED, NAVY/GOLD

WOMENS' VERSION AVAILABLE: NO

RATINGS:

FEATURES: 5/5

VALUE FOR MONEY: 3/5

PERFORMANCE: 4.5/5

WEIGHT/SIZE: 3.5/5

OVERALL: 4/5



The Enduro has been designed for extreme conditions. It uses the full

weight Analogy fabric (with hard wearing stretch panels) that gives greater resilience to abrasion and tearing and is cut shorter and more athletic. It has two chest pockets to store essentials and both have been designed to take an OS map. The left chest pocket has a rigid plastic loop on the outside to enable attachment of items on chord/



laneyards. A simple concept but not one I've seen elsewhere.

The most striking aspect to the Enduro, particularly with the blue/red combo that I trialled, was the asymmetric design pattern. Being a bit of a traditionalist, this design style isn't to my taste, some may really like it, however, as all the available colours are of this type you either have to deal with that knowing you're going to be getting a really capable piece of kit or suck up the idea of not owning one. Hopefully Páramo will consider a more traditional style option for future versions.

Given the multiple layers of fabric in this jacket, there's a consequence of having directionality. That is heat. The Velez and more-so the Enduro are warm jackets. Having tested these two in all conditions over the summer and through to spring, it's clear that ventilation is required. When wearing the Velez, if the ambient temperature is more than 10 degrees, it became too warm for wearing with anything more than a base layer. Ventilation via the various zips solves part of the problem but it's not going to be enough for summer conditions.

In winter, this heat retention can be your best friend and is where the Enduro excels. Specifically for higher altitude and cold winters, the Enduro is designed for die-hard enthusiasts and professionals working in extreme climates. If you're not in these categories I'd suggest, as much as it's a fully loaded jacket, it's probably

ENDURO



not right for the environments or activities you intend to do.

AFTERCARE

Cleaning and re-proofing are simple activities requiring a domestic washing machine. Nikwax Tech Wash is used in place of your regular detergent and fabric softener. Once the cycle has finished, check for waterproofing by splashing

water on the garment. If it beads then it doesn't require re-proofing, if it doesn't then wash again but with the reproofing fluid. Once this has finished, hang the garment to drip dry. Job done! As a rule of thumb, unless excessively dirty, each garment will go for five washes before needing to be reproofed.

And if you damage your jacket you no longer have to worry as much as Páramo can sew up most rips and tears without losing the waterproof properties. If significant damage has been caused Páramo will first quote for repairing it and if they can't repair it then you can trade it in for significant discounts on a new purchase.

SUMMARY

At the start of the trial Páramo told me that most reviewers of their kit tend to sit in one of two categories; those who give their kit back at the end of the trial period and those who won't. I firmly sit in the latter category and will be keeping the Velez and putting my Gore-tex Pro up for sale.

In moderate climates the Velez has offered considerable flexibility. Layering with other Páramo garments gives greater thermal benefits whilst retaining the directionality properties and most of these can often be worn over the top of an Analogy layer too giving total environmental protection without having to disrobe first. It does require a different way of thinking but the benefits outweigh the costs – if only there was a way to tie the hood down!



**CONTRIBUTOR DEADLINE FOR THE
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Cost: £10 plus food. There is a pub in the village.

Spaces: Max 18.





WILD COUNTRY BLIZZARD 2

By Al Topping

What better way to test a tent than to take it out into a hurricane. A little risky, perhaps, but when the opportunity to test the 4 season Wild Country Blizzard 2 came up, really, it was all that was available – a night with Storm Dylan would have to do. I had hoped there'd be snow on the ground too, but it seems, arriving in the Black Mountains on the eve of New Years' Eve 2017 was a day late for prime winter conditions and the snow had all but gone. Still, the wind speeds and arctic chill was sufficient enough to ensure gloves would be kept firmly on and a lot of time would be spent inside the tent making sure it met the standard expected.

The Blizzard 2 is a tunnel tent with a single opening at the front. It's rated for 4 seasons, meaning it should be strong enough to withstand excessive wind (let's hope so), a build up of snow on top, and be warm enough without being too heavy to carry. It is sadly only available in one colour – red but has been made available to AMA members with a hefty 27% discount. Hurrah!

Due to it being designed for all weather conditions throughout 4 seasons the tent has a low profile. There's a modest porch that is separated from the main sleeping compartment by a single layer of material



that can be zipped off to one side and stowed away in the adjacent pocket. This makes getting in and out repeatedly quick and easy as you don't have to fight with excess fabric getting in the way or being trodden on. There are 2 internal pockets per side for small items and a ring in the centre of the roof for suspending a torch, lightweight lamp, or in our case a cyalume.

The poles and pegs came in their own separate bags and the fabric parts wrapped around them into its own lightweight bag too. The walk in was comfortable enough given the 2.2Kg of weight, however, as there were two of us, it could be separated out quite comfortably into two, reasonably equal portions for transport to our wild camp site.

In our haste to erect the Blizzard 2, whilst awaiting our nemesis for the evening, Storm Dylan, and while gloves were still firmly on, it was still very straight-forward to do so. Setup time, having found a bit of dry ground out of the wind (as best we could), was still only around 10 minutes. Instructions were given a stiff ignoring and we were gently guided through the process using intuitive colour coded poles and free sliding sleeves over the flysheet. Tensioning the flysheet was easy also and was managed without the normal rigmarole while trying to get the last pole in with an overly taught flysheet. The end result was a flysheet that was suitably tight and that covered the inner almost to the ground. Normally, on other tents, including the Terra Nova Southern Cross

‘The tent itself stood up well to the 80 mph winds we were promised and highlighted its strength’

2, this didn't seem to go close enough to the ground and resulted in the inner fabric becoming wet as wind pushed the rain and snow underneath. This wasn't the case for the Blizzard as it was still dry in the morning despite what panned out to be quite an ordeal.

Within the tent package received from Terra Nova was a flysheet, an inner



compartment, three colour coded poles but an insufficient quantity of pegs to peg out all the guy lines. I mention this as, given the impending apocalypse we were expecting, knowing there were enough tent pegs would have been quite reassuring. However, not without a spirit for adventure we persevered and made best use of those we were sent. Making a judgement call on likely wind direction on the lee side of a windy col, pegs were distributed towards the side catching the wind and this actually seemed sufficient. A nervous check of pegs throughout the night demonstrated our fine experience in ill-prepared tent packing and expeditionary skills had paid off and we were likely to make it to the morning without much drama.

The tent itself stood up well to the 80 mph winds we were promised and highlighted its strength but also the attention to detail put in to its design. A welcoming sight in the morning was to find moisture present on the inside of the flysheet but it had not, despite the winds, made contact with the inner compartment and I put this down how there was a sufficient air gap between internal and external fabrics.

The porch is a little cramped. If, like us, you decide there's no justification for putting your boots in your bivi bag to keep them warm, you can then afford for them to go in the porch. For two sets of boots, gaiters and perhaps your gas cooker, you've pretty much filled the space available making getting in and out, particularly with a low hanging doorway a little bit of a challenge. As a result, we had to stack our bergans in the centre of the porch to stay covered while the weather raged outside.

Inside, there's enough room for two adults and a dog plus a small amount of personal kit.



WILD COUNTRY BLIZZARD 2

TYPE: 4 SEASON

AMA PURCHASE PRICE: (RRP £330) £210

SIZE: (PACKED) 42CM X 15CM, (FOOTPRINT) 150CM X 290CM

WEIGHT: 367 G

POLES, PEGS, BUNGEEES

INCLUDED: INSUFFICIENT PEGS SUPPLIED WITH TENT

PRODUCT LINK:



PROS

- Inner door - zips open to the size so can be stored open in size pocket - see image
- Good ventilation
- Easy to put up / quick
- Warm
- Poles didn't really snag when putting up. Putting the last bits together wasn't so tight it was a struggle
- Didn't have to readjust a lot to get it tight.
- Can totally remove front door
- Easily withstood winds. Edge of fly sheet was low enough to cover ground sheet edges
- Room for two and a dog
- 3x 2 internal pockets.
- Comes with a small repair patch
- Good separation between inner and outer skin
- Weight can be easily shared between a pair of campers
- Good colour coding for poles

CONS

- Doorway was difficult to get in and out of accepting the need for a lower profile tent for 4 seasons
- Peg quantity was insufficient for all peg locations
- Putting the fly sheet up inside can be tricky with gloves on.
- No midge liner for the internal door.

RATINGS:

FEATURES: 4/5 - NO LINER

VALUE FOR MONEY: 3/5

SUITABILITY: 4.5/5

QUALITY: 4.5/5



TERRA NOVA SOUTHERN CROSS 2

By Al Topping

The Wild Country Southern Cross 2 is the bigger sibling to the Southern Cross 1. A lightweight 4-season tent intended for 2 people to camp in most weather conditions, particularly those found in the UK. With an RRP of £600, it's a pricey bit of kit for the occasional camper, however, there are a number of features and weight saving measures that have been designed into it to make a multi-day expedition as comfortable as possible in all weather conditions, both while sleeping in it and while carrying it in the hills.

OUTER

I tried this tent throughout the cold snap, labelled as the 'Beast from the East' – I'm sure you remember it. Snow was the name of the game and the Southern Cross didn't disappoint. It demonstrated it was more than capable of withstanding the downward force from what did fall – around 2-3 inches overnight, as well as some pretty significant wind. Terra Nova have designed the Southern Cross tents to be free-standing i.e. they don't require the guy-lines to be in place for it to be erected. However, there are 4 Dyneema lines (one on each face) to add stability in the case things outside get a little 'exciting'. While not the most reassuringly thick, the climbers among you will be familiar with Dyneema elsewhere and will know of its tensile capability. The guy lines can be configured using the lightweight black clips <<Southern_Cross_2_7>> that slide along the length of the cord until rotated whereby it grips the edge of the cord in place; the good news here is, these are glove friendly too.

The Southern Cross 2 requires two colour coded poles to be added to put it up. The larger of the two produces creates 4 'legs' that are connected together at 2 50p-sized aluminium 3-way joints with a main spur that runs along the longest



dimension of the tent. The 4 legs provide the structural support to the corners of the tent to keep it rigid when loaded by snow or when battered by strong winds and give a comfortable amount of headroom within the sleeping compartment. The smaller blue pole slides through a sleeve and crosses the width of the tent and adds additional structural support in the middle of the flysheet and also gives the frame surrounding the doors. This mix of pole fixings, particularly the visible one above the fly gives it an unmistakable identity.

Requiring only a modicum of intelligence to correctly erect the Southern Cross 2 in less than 5 minutes with gloves on and no build instructions for miles, it's quick at providing a comfortable sanctuary from the elements.

Unlike the Wild Country Blizzard 2 this tent came with all the required tent pegs needed to tie down each corner and guy line. The supplied pegs are basic in design and are not suitable for snow or exceptionally firm ground, however, they are lightweight, a good diameter to prevent distorting under reasonable abuse and come in a nylon bag with a draw cord at

the top. This in turn then fits in a pouch on the side of the pole bag – another nylon bag with draw cord.

INSIDE

Inside, if there are two of you staying the night, things initially seem quite claustrophobic. <<Southern_Cross_2_Floorplan>> There's not a huge amount of floor space internally in the sleeping compartment but it's enough for two average sized roll mats side by side. There are two vestibules for easy access for both campers, one on each of the longest sides with space inside for each person's equipment or making a brew without compromising comfort within. <<Southern_Cross_2_2, 3 & 4>> These are accessed from sizeable doorways that are large enough and open wide enough to allow for getting in and out without catching the upper-most edge with your back/rucksack as well as providing a nice panorama when the weather (and your pitching skills) allow. In dry weather this doorway can be kept open by attaching the flysheet door to the red pole that runs above the tent. In wet weather a side folding door makes getting in and out easy enough whilst forgoing the risk



of catching the edges of the door and depositing moisture into the vestibule area that may have your kit in.

At the foot and head of the sleeping area are two large triangular air vents with netting to prevent access from any undesirable. There are also two net storage pockets in each corner for small personal items.

IS IT ANY GOOD?

The average consumer would have to really want one of these to pay £600, however, when the AMA discount is provided, a whopping saving of £269 pounds is applied and that makes this a serious contender for anyone looking for a capable tent that can handle all year round conditions. Weighing in at a mere 2.29Kgs (packed) for a 2-person tent is not a lot! There are lighter alternatives out there, and from Wild Country / Terra Nova too, however, if you're looking for something which is comfortable all year round then this is a good option.

There are a few things that I prefer about this design to tunnel tents in particular and this starts with the double access/ vestibule areas. Not only do they give greater flexibility for getting in / getting out without having to disturb a second camper, but they allow greater space for storage of kit outside of the sleeping areas. This is particularly helpful in wet and windy conditions where storing wet kit outside in a waterproof bag or worse, in the sleeping compartment, is undesirable. I don't tend to need much inside the sleeping area when I'm in it: roll-mat and sleeping bag are a given, perhaps a warm layer, some snacks and a drink, torch, and the map for the following day's activities. And in winter, add to that your boots and gloves leaving the rest in the vestibule out of harm's way. The Southern Cross 2 sleeping area can

fit all this in, along with your tent buddy's equivalent items without struggling for space and a comfortable nights' sleep. If you needed more I'd be questioning the need to have spent so much on a lightweight tent in the first place.

Pitching a tent inner first just seems bizarre! Why would you do that in the UK, I do not know. Clearly designed by someone who hasn't seen the weather here. Outer first is a good second place, decreasing the time required to pitch and get inside (and dry) but this over-the-top design with a hung fly and inner method is pretty quick. Particularly where there's a need to do it in gloves too, I really like this method.

SUMMARY

I found the Southern Cross 2 to be very capable and have enough necessary features to make a winter, or more moderate temperature trip comfortable. The pack size is acceptable and with some investment in more capable pegs it is a full package. The price tag may be an area for discussion but the AMA discount goes a long way to resolving this. If you take your mountaineering seriously or just want to splash out on a tent that will last, this would certainly be an excellent purchase.

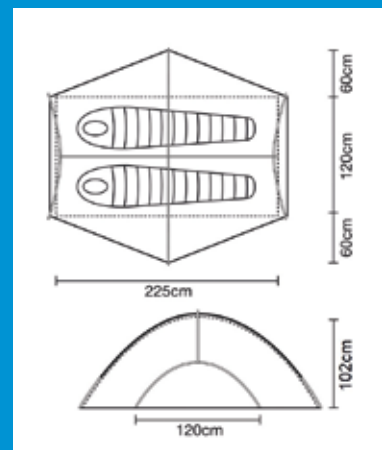


FACTS

- SLEEPS:** 2
- SEASON RATING SPEC:** 4 SEASON
- BACKPACKING**
- FREE STANDING?:** YES (TENT CAN BE PITCHED WITHOUT GUYING OUT)
- MINIMUM WEIGHT:** 2.1KG (4LB 10OZ)
- PACKED WEIGHT:** 2.29KG (5LB 10Z)
- NUMBER OF PORCHES:** 2
- NUMBER OF DOORS:** 2
- PITCH TYPE:** FLY AND INNER PITCH TOGETHER
- PITCH TIME (ESTIMATE):** 5MINS
- PACKED SIZE:** 47CM X 16CM
- RANGE:** 4 SEASON BACKPACKING
- PEGS:** 10 ALLOY 11G
- RRP:** £600
- COST TO AMA MEMBERS:** £371

RATINGS:

- FEATURES:** 5/5
- VALUE FOR MONEY:** 4/5
- PERFORMANCE:** 4.5/5
- WEIGHT/SIZE:** 4/5
- OVERALL:** 4/5



ONE ROPE TO RULE THEM ALL...

Triple rated ropes and their uses by Sean Mackey

Like most people I learnt to climb on a fat single rope at classic top roping venues as part of a large group. I remember looking at the thick cord; feeling reassured by the weight and diameter of it and how it would obviously hold my weight. As I learnt more in the early years of my climbing career the dizzying array of ropes confused me and I stuck to what I knew and trusted - single ropes. My first rope was a 'Zero G' 10.5mm single that I bought for a bargain £60 in 2005 and it lasted for 3 years of solid abuse. The beauty of single ropes is that the diameter normally sold (usually 9.5mm to 11mm) means that they're fairly robust and take a beating. Being used on their own has this requirement as it does mean if it fails it's catastrophic.

It wasn't until I was venturing onto longer wandering multipitch routes that a friend introduced me to the 'half rope system'. What a revelation! Less rope drag, longer abseils and easier handling.

Half ropes normally come in narrow diameters (say 8mm to 9.5mm) and are designed to be used as a pair - you need two half ropes to make the whole and climb safely with. Clipping alternate gear placements or managing the ropes so your left rope clips the gear on the left and your right rope clips the gear on the right reduces rope drag considerably and shares some of the load over two placements should you fall. It takes some practice to get right and belay stances need to be well managed, but it can be a much easier system for the leader when out on the sharp end. Half ropes shouldn't be placed through the same piece of gear as this can increase the fall factors considerably.

The fact you have two ropes on a route means abseil retreat can be done over a much longer distance and you have many more options at the top, however, making sure you use an appropriate knot is crucial.

Twin ropes aren't used much in the UK as they don't really have the versatility of

the half rope system. Twin ropes should be clipped through every piece of gear together and are essentially treated like one strand of rope. This can make climbing straight routes (like crack lines and snow gullies) quite easy but it doesn't eradicate the rope drag that a half rope system can on meandering routes. As with half ropes the fact you have two ropes on a route means abseil retreat can be done over a much longer distance.

ONE ROPE TO RULE THEM ALL...

While I wouldn't call my first experience of rock a defining moment, it has shaped my life in several ways. My knowledge and experience has since developed over the years and while some genuine innovations have been seen on the market, the one that stands out in my mind is the triple rated rope. This jack of all trade will work on its own as a single rope or part of a pair as a half rope or twin rope system being safe in any configuration.

Essential knowledge is that the rating system for a triple is different for how you use it. For example the number of falls it's rated for will be different when used as a single, a half or as a double, and should be thoroughly checked before buying the rope so you know what you have got. These will differ between brands as they all have an opinion on what is a good rope and the compromise between durability, weight and number of falls.

DIAMETER

Of the common triple rated ropes on the market they all operate in the narrower end of the system; I have a pair of the Mammut Serenities at 8.7mm and they feel thin. Thinner ropes mean less weight and make those long walk ins to mountain crags slightly less painful and conserve that vital energy.

If these ropes are being continually used as a single it won't wear as well a single. The thinner diameter exposes the rope to more abuse and will make them less durable over time. While I have triples I would still take a thicker single rated rope to gym or a sports crag. Their thickness

will keep them in better order over prolonged use plus they're cheaper to replace. Therefore I save my triple rated 'best ropes' for trad, mountain and winter use where I want to keep the weight down and don't plan falling as often.

One thing to check before purchase is that your belay plate can handle this gauge and it won't be too slick when trying to hold a fall. The Serenities have worked okay in my Black Diamond ATC Guide, but are far too thin for some devices like the original Petzl Gri-Gri.

HANDLING

This is down to personal preference, brand and diameter and please bear in mind I haven't tested every single rope on the market to give you my opinion, however, the Mammut Serenities have handled extremely so far. The thinner diameter make tying in and knotting the rope easy and the dry treatment has a reassuringly pleasant feeling when being held. The outer sheaf seems quite densely woven and keeps out most dust and grit from working their way into the inner core.

USES

The Mammut Serenity will work well for the classic weekend climber who will be throwing them around in the Cairngorms in winter, sport climbing at Swanage for a while in the spring, spending the summer on Welsh trad and finishing off the year scrambling in the Lakes. If you are a climber who enjoys onsighting rather than working routes and does a bit of everything this rope will manage and not look out of place. Where I feel it would work to its fullest is in the Alps where you would transition from scrambling to pitched climbing to ice climbing to glacier movement all on one route. Its versatility would also make it a good option on expeditions where the climbing is exploratory or seldom done.

Selecting the right tool for the job is always difficult and I would not recommend a triple rated rope to a beginner who only gets out a few times a year.



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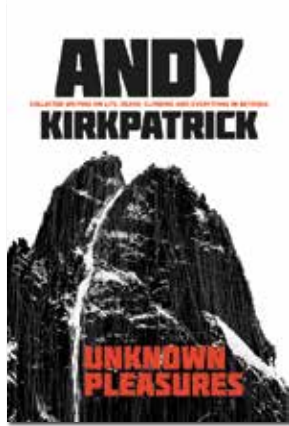
AMA BOOK REVIEWS

UNKNOWN PLEASURES

ANDY KIRKPATRICK

(by Vertebrate Publishing)

The sub-title sort of gives this one away, 'collected writing on life, death, climbing and everything in between'. Unknown Pleasures is the first 'collected works' of the climber, mountaineer, writer, comedian, poet, and film-maker Andy Kirkpatrick.



So if you happen to have the time or the inclination to read a broad church of literature of and associated with mountaineering, there is every chance you will have read some of the material before. Equally if you have seen Kirkpatrick live, you may well have heard him recounting some of the stories on stage.

First and foremost this book reminds me of Kiss and Kill (by Mark Twight) in that it is a collection of no-holds barred essays and articles from publications that were bold enough to publish angsty, confrontational, challenging writing. Well done them. Twight published the background notes to the articles in his book in subsequent reprints of it, Kirkpatrick has included his, to many of his articles, in the back of this book. These notes offer some small glimpses to where Kirkpatrick was (mentally and geographically) in some of his work.

In his foreword, about the contents of the book, Kirkpatrick writes 'within this book there will be words to love and words to hate, but I promise you, none of them will be boring', and he's right. Very right. Some of the opinion pieces will grate and some of his perspectives will annoy anyone that reads the book. He is what he is. His climbing CV shouts for itself, and on that alone, one could argue, he has the right to have and to voice an opinion.

The writing is sparse. Like it was in Psychovertical (winner of the 2008 Boardman Tasker Award for Mountain Literature), and Cold Wars (winner of the same award in 2012). It leaves space for the reader to use their imagination. It describes rather than evokes. It is high in protein and low in fat. His writing has already had plaudits heaped upon it by the mountaineering literature world, but this collection of work covers a far far broader subject area. Psychologists and sociologists would find stuff in here to dig their teeth in to.

The structure of the book is essentially five lots of articles of varying lengths (from a couple of pages to sixteen pages), interspersed with 'Bad Poetry', which again both is and isn't what it says on the tin. The articles relate (loosely) to the subjects of 'Climbing, Expeditions and Adventure', 'Looking On', 'Gear and Technique', 'Life, death and in between' and 'Unidentifi-

able'. The book is hand illustrated by Kirkpatrick. I would pay good money for many of those illustrations. Do take the time to read the short explanation of the origins of his drawing. It's anchored firmly, along with a lot of who he is and what he has become, in his childhood.

So if I were to list stand out articles they probably wouldn't survive contact with the next reader. But anyway ... 'The Troll's Gift' for an insight in to the psychological demands of big wall climbing in winter. 'No Better Knot' for Kirkpatrick finding his mooring. 'Pizza' for the words on trust. 'Rabbit Stories', 'Unidentifiable', 'Dog' 'A mile down the road' resonates deeply ... but again, this isn't 'just' a climbing book, it's thirty two stories about far far more than 'just' climbing, and therefore the hooks are many and varied. It's a very good book, and one that I would recommend not reading it in order. I can recommend reading the ones that grate or hurt or that you don't finish, perhaps going back to them later. If you've read "Kiss or Kill" you probably did a similar thing. They're similar books in many ways.

'Within this book there will be words to love and words to hate, but I promise you none of them will be boring'
– Andy Kirkpatrick

TIDES

NICK BULLOCK

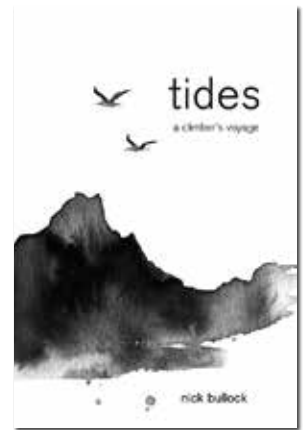
(by Vertebrate Publishing)

The second book (after the critically acclaimed Echoes) from that bloke that used to be a prison warden then jacked it all in to live in a small van and live that climbing life.

The title of the book, reflected across the chapters therein, refers to the ebb and flow of the climbing life that Nick has chosen to live. When the tide is high Nick is riding it and pushing the envelope across the full range of climbing disciplines, with some of the best climbers in the world today, from the cliffs of Gogarth to the massive unclimbed faces of the Himalaya. When the tide is out the doubts and the fears and the failings and the questions are left.

Nick's writing is rich in detail across all its subjects. Nature, humans, fear, the act of climbing, relationships, cold, patience, anger, loss, all of them detailed finely. His is a writing style that colours the pictures in for the reader. There is humour too, the type honed in high-security prisons. Dark, sharp, quick.

The book in essence is a series of short tight chapters, often interlinked, of his climbing life (since 2003). Several of the



chapters have appeared as articles in publications like *Alpinist* (arguably the current high water mark for the genre).

The chapters are often cut with memories, with the tides of 'normal' life. Childhood. Parents. Age. The tide going the other way back then. Sometimes it can take time, or a few more chapters, to see where that particular tide ebbs and flows in to the wider rhythm of the book. These reflections are extraordinarily well written. I get the feeling that, like a monk in a monastery, the nomadic van-based life that Nick has chosen, affords him far more time than many of us to think, to reflect, to tease out detail and observation and refine emotions.

In amongst writings about the climbs and events that you may have heard of in the climbing (and wider media) over the last fifteen years (that bear attack in Canada, the Piolet d'Or winning ascent of the North Buttress of Nyainqentangla South East in Tibet ...) there is a swathe of other very very well written stuff. The stuff that draws us as climbers in to books of this genre. The why? The people left behind? The sheer terror of the ascent of routes like The Bells The Bells, The nature and complexity of our climbing partners and relationships therein. There is no slack in here. There is much to relate to. Much to provoke thought within ourselves as we play the climbing game.

Tides ends with a chapter called Threshold Shift which was justifiably awarded the Best Mountaineering Article of the year award at the Banff Mountain Book Competition last year. Such is the calibre of this book that it's possibly not even the best chapter in it. A contender for the Boardman Tasker Award 2018.

'Tides gives a god insight in to what it takes to do super serious high-altitude mixed peaks and I was also impressed with Nick's observations of both botany and the characters and motivations of some of his friends. Be warned though Nick is almost as morbid as me'

James McHaffie

**KINDER SCOUT:
THE PEOPLE'S MOUNTAIN
BY ED DOUGLAS
AND JOHN BEATTY**

(by Vertebrate Publishing)



We made Kinder Scout, not just metaphorically, or metaphysically, not just with our stories and our battles, but literally changed its shape, from the peat washing off its summit, to the drystone walls that turn the hillside into a harmonious grid, the trees that are and more often aren't there, to the creatures that we've allowed to remain and those we've done away with. It's our mountain.'

In 1951 the Peak District was designated the UK's first national park: a commitment to protect and preserve our countryside and wild places. Sandwiched between Manchester and Sheffield, and sitting at the base of the Pennines, it is home to Kinder Scout, Britain's most popular 'mountain', a beautiful yet featureless and disorientating plateau which barely scrapes the 600-metre contour, whose lower slopes bore witness in 1932 to

a movement of feet, a pedestrian rebellion, which helped shape modern access legislation: the Kinder Mass Trespass.

But Kinder Scout's story is about much more than the working class taking on the elite. Marked by the passage of millions of feet and centuries of farming, a graveyard for lost souls and doomed aircraft, this much-loved mountain is a sacred canvas on which mankind has scratched and scraped its likeness for millennia. It is a record of our social and political history, of conflict and community.

Writer Ed Douglas and photographer John Beatty are close friends and have a shared history with Kinder going back decades. In this unique collaboration they reveal the social, political, cultural and ecological developments that have shaped the physical and human landscape of this enigmatic and treasured hill.

Kinder Scout: The People's Mountain is a celebration of a northern English mountain and our role in its creation.

'An exceptional book. The writing is rich with original research, the photographs glitter with strangeness and beauty, and the whole book rings with the passion, knowledge and vision of two people who have explored their subject for most of their lives, and fallen into profound acquaintance with it.' – Robert Macfarlane, author of *The Lost Words* and *Mountains of the Mind*

Vertebrate Publishing offers a significant discount off these books to members of the Army Mountaineering Association. Details are in the Members area of the AMA website.

tides
a climber's voyage
nick bullock
'Write a will, mate.'

ANDY KIRKPATRICK
UNKNOWN PLEASURES
*'I don't give a f*** about Everest.'*

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BOULDERMANIA

By Kenny Geoghegan

Following the Armed Forces Bouldering League, a team of the strongest climbers from across the three services was selected to travel to Belgium in order to compete in Bouldermania – An international level military competition organised as a European military bouldering championships.

A team of nine climbers was initially selected, however complications saw that team reduced to five climbers who made the trip to Belgium. Work complications saw a few of the RAF climbers drop out, leaving SAC James George flying the flag for the RAF. The remainder of the team was made up with Army team climbers – Capt Amy Johnstone, Sgt Kenny Geoghegan, LCpl Miles Hill and Spr Andrew Mawhinney.

Day one of the competition saw approximately 150 climbers arrive in Belgium to tackle a tough qualification round of 35 problems which were set between F5 (easy) to F7C (very hard). Having spotted that the French had a team comprised mainly of climbers based in Chamonix, and one IFSC world cup climber, it was obvious that it was going to be a hard day at the office.

Five hours and a lot of lost skin later, SAC Mawhinney, LCpl Hill and Capt Johnstone had all qualified for the final the following day – Sgt Geoghegan missing out on a spot in the finals by just one position, and SAC George missing out by Three.

After a relatively successful first day the UK Armed forces climbers competing in the finals engaged their strength and began an incredibly difficult set of finals problems. A mix of technical slabs, long traverses and steep power problems donned the walls during the final and the entire arsenal of the UK team would be tested.

After a brief slip on the technical slab, SAC Mawhinney then powered through the hardest problem of the finals to see him finish in first position ahead of a world cup level athlete - a feat which may scare a few climbers in next years bouldering league!

'A great performance by the UK team, and the Army and RAF climbers who took part has given us an incredibly strong finish to the bouldering season on an international level'

Capt Amy Johnstone improved on her fourth place qualification to split the French team and take a well deserved second place overall for the women.

Combined team scores in the team event saw the UK Team finish second overall, just behind the French team. A strong performance by the Belgian team saw them take third spot on the podium.



Bouldermania team

A great performance by the UK team, and the Army and RAF climbers who took part has given us an incredibly strong finish to the bouldering season on an international level. The future is bright for Army and UKAF bouldering.

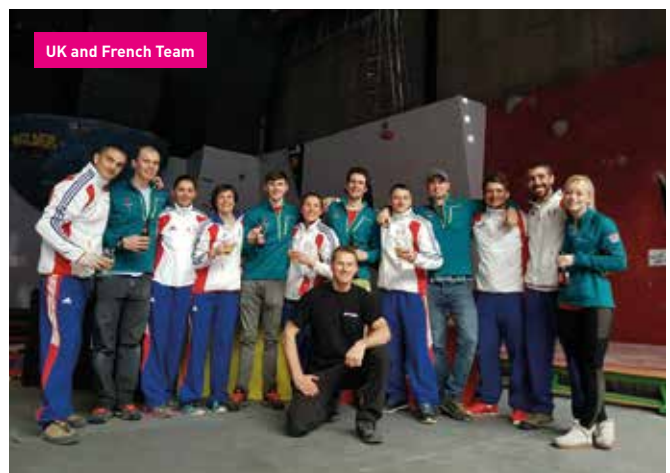
A massive thanks to the Belgian climbing team for inviting us along every year. It is always a fantastic event and something the UK is incredibly grateful to be a part of.

Of course, no trip to Belgium would be complete without stopping off in Fontainebleau en route home. The team enjoyed 2 days of bouldering in the forest of Fontainebleau before heading home back to the UK to prepare for the upcoming lead season.

Until next year.

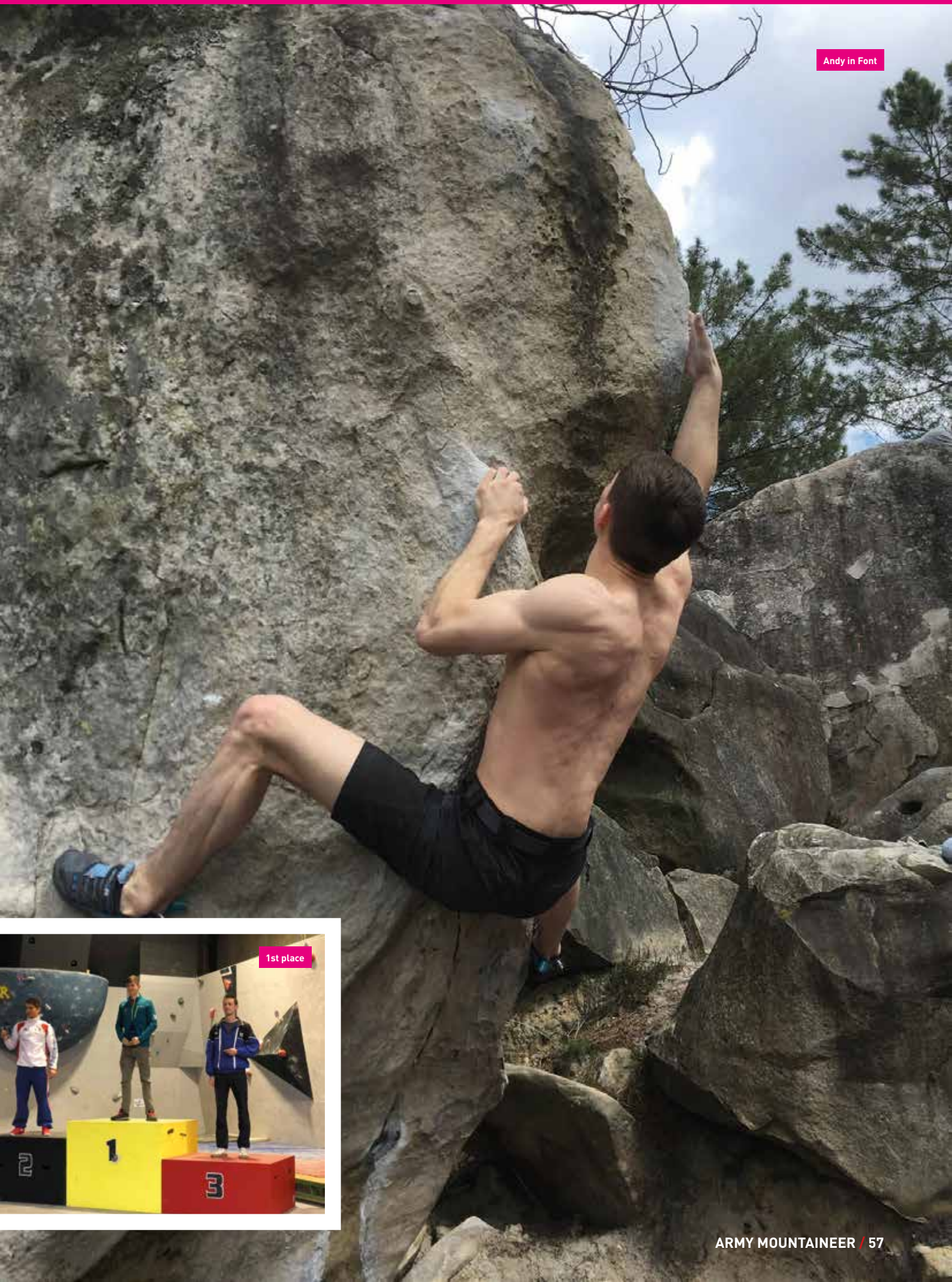


2nd Place women



UK and French Team

Andy in Font





THE ARMED FORCES BOULDERING LEAGUE 2017/18

By Kenny Geoghegan

Following the close of the 2017 lead season, and the Army domination the Inter-Service climbing championships, psyche was high for the upcoming bouldering season. As usual the league did not disappoint.

This year the league would start with a week-long festival of climbing. This saw climbers from all over the country descend on North Wales for climbing of all disciplines, however the main event was the first round of the bouldering league which would take place at the Indy climbing wall. Army climbers turned out in good numbers and for two of the newest members of the Army climbing team, this would signal the beginning of their dominance. Spr Andrew Mawhinney scoring 247 out of a possible 250 points – something that would become a strong habit – and Captain Amy Johnstone asserting her dominance over the female category.

The league would run over Six months. Six rounds set at different centres across the country. Following a strong start at the Indy wall, rounds would follow at The Climbing Works in Sheffield, the Depot in Nottingham, Bloc in Bristol, Rockstar in Swindon and another, final round at the Indy wall in North Wales. This final round would decide the positioning of the bouldering league and also double up as the Army bouldering championships in a standalone competition.

Spr Andrew Mawhinney showed that his display of strength in the initial round of the league was no mere fluke as he wrapped up the Army championships and the Bouldering League titles in his category (Under 25) as well as claiming the title of overall winner with an impressive 741 out of 750 based on his three best scores across the league.

Capt Amy Johnstone followed suite and wrapped up the Army championships



in the Female division in style as well as the overall female title in the Bouldering League with a strong score of 561.

WO2 Matt Burson, in his last competition before leaving the service, took first place in the Masters Division in the Army championships and the Bouldering League.

The Open male category provided some close competition and strong performances from RAF climbers Fit Lt Dan Heath and SAC James George pushed the final league positions all the way to the final round of the league. In the end LCpl Miles Hill took first place in the open division, followed closely by Maj Patrick Snow in second place.

In the end, 12 of the 15 final podium positions across the entire services were occupied by Army climbers and this cemented another strong, dominant year by members of the Army climbing team.

The AFBL is sponsored by DMM and Entre-prises. A massive thankyou to both for the support. Without them the league, and the awesome prizes, would not be possible!



AFBL Final Results

Competition	Rank	Name	Unit	Service	Score
Overall					
1	Spr	Mawhinney	1 RSME	Army	741
2	LCpl	Hill	3 R WELSH	Army	704
3	Maj	Snow	DA Shriv	Army	693
Male Senior					
2	LCpl	Hill	3 R WELSH	Army	704
3	Maj	Snow	DA Shriv	Army	693
4	Fit Lt	Heath	RAF Waddington	RAF	680
Female					
14	Capt	Johnstone	AMD	Army	561
24	Cpl	Cooper	MOD A	Army	449
25	LCpl	Wilson	32 Sig Regt	Army	442
Male Junior					
1	Spr	Mawhinney	1 RSME	Army	741
6	Rfn	Limbu	1 RGR	Army	651
17	Spr	Johnson	1 RSME	Army	536
Male Masters					
7	WO2	Burson	LEAT	Army	641
8	Sgt	Easton	RAF Cotswold	RAF	624
13	Cpl	Jones	RAF Aldergrove	RAF	571

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