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The Journal of The Army Mountaineering Association

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# ARMY MOUNTAINEER

The Journal of The Army Mountaineering Association



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## Foreword

by the Chairman Lieutenant Colonel Martin Bazire



The common thread among all AMA members is our love for the hills and crags. Yet in order to function as a club we need to make sure we are up to speed with membership matters, and this is theme that follows.

The Army Mountaineering Association is 45 years old, and it is significant that the number of members has just passed the 2000 mark.

This figure is in line with our plans for running as a club and supporting activity among members, although our finances are subject to some unpredictable factors. We have long since been the largest club affiliated to the British Mountaineering Council, and we are roughly twice the size of our sister service climbing clubs combined! We are looking at how we can use our size to advantage.

You will be aware that we have been employing our part-time Membership Secretary for around six months. During that time Mrs Sue Hughes has transformed our membership database, which now shows exactly who is paying their subscription, so we can declare our current membership figure with confidence. Sue is working hard to keep the information accurate and consistent, but she relies heavily upon members: it is sad that many Journals are returned due to incorrect addresses. You can help by informing Sue of any changes to contact details. If you have not done so, you are also encouraged to complete a Gift Aid form.

At the end of October we held our first AMA President's Dinner, at Oxford University Officer Training Corps, and thanks go to Steve Willson and Paul Edwards for the arrangements. We were delighted to see our Honorary President Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Tony Streater. The dinner was a most pleasant occasion, and we hope it will be repeated. Our President Brigadier Cottam announced the appointment of Colonel (Retired) Meryon Bridges as our third Honorary Vice President, joining Sir Chris Bonington and Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) John Muston. Meryon is delighted to accept the position, and he says that he will now not put away his Alpine mountaineering gear after all!

I would like to pay tribute to all AMA Committee Members, who volunteer their time and energies to ensure that the AMA continues to thrive, by providing the necessary background administration that supports worthwhile mountaineering activity. It is important that the AMA Committee hears your views. It is 5 years since we conducted an AMA Survey, and we are planning a follow-up soon. Watch out for this, and do use the opportunity to express your opinions on the AMA. It is your club!

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*On the Cover: Sherra Tenzeng high above camp 3 climbing the fixed rope - see "Dabbling with the Dablay"*

*This edition was edited by David Reith.*

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# APPOINTMENTS

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## AMA Expedition Radio Set and Digital Camera For Hire!



### RADIOS

The AMA owns a set of radio equipment for use by its members and others. The set consists of eight hand held Motorola GP68 VHF sets, one GM350 VHF base station, solar panels, video battery charger and all the ancillaries. This service has been provided by the AMA from the contributions you make as members of the association, therefore the equipment is yours and you should make full use of it. The set has been tested world wide and found to give excellent service in the mountains. The hand sets (5W output) provides a good line of sight service up to 5km and more when used with the base station's 25W output. The set, or part set, is available by booking it through the Publications Editor, Steve Willson, with the following conditions.

1. The radios must be insured by the expedition for the replacement cost, details on request.
2. A hire fee, to cover maintenance and renewal, of between £50, for part of the set, up to £150 for the whole set paid to the AMA on collection.
3. The expedition must book their own frequencies through which ever country they are visiting and then inform the Publications Editor to program the radios prior to collection.

The equipment is very good and it will improve the command and control of any expedition not to mention the increased safety cover.

### DIGITAL CAMERA

The AMA has added a Nikon 990 Coolpix digital camera to it's collection. This is a very high quality professional device that is capable of capturing impressive images that can be used for web pages, presentations or just snaps of your climbing. Any member of the AMA can hire this equipment for £25 (up to a month) or £50 (up to two months) for use on climbing/walking trips. The AMA Journal is also always in need of quality images and the camera will be available at AMA meets to capture the action. This will be at nil cost to the meet organiser.

If you have any questions about the radio set, digital camera or their availability please give the Steve Willson a call on 94256 8351 or 01865 255351 email [stevewillson@msn.com](mailto:stevewillson@msn.com) - Please make use of this kit!

# EDITORIAL

By the Journal Editor  
WO2 (AQMS) David Reith

Well this is quite a moment for me; to see the first edition of the Journal published with me as editor. As such the first thing that I must do is to thank Steve, and of course Amy, Wilson for all there hard work on the Journal. I must give a special thanks to Steve for all of the invaluable guidance and assistance that he has given me whilst I struggled with this edition. It is only now that I realise how much work he really has put in to take the Journal from a newsletter to a professionally published full colour magazine which is the envy nearly all other forces associations. Thank you Steve and Amy from all AMA members.

As the new editor of your Journal I feel you deserve to know a little about me and my interest in mountaineering. The first thing that you should know is that I believe I am a relative novice to climbing and mountaineering; my first alpine season was 2000 which, coincidentally, was also my first season back on rock since 1990. I have always however been a keen woolly hated trekker. I have found in this short space of time that alpine routes are my great love although just to be outdoors is generally enough during these busy times.

So what of the Journal? Will the new editor sweep clean and completely re-work the style and content of the Journal? Absolutely not. I believe that the formula that should be used for an association journal pretty much smack on what we've got now. That not to say that I won't try the odd tweak here and there, I will. One thing I would like to see more of are letters from AMA members. What should the AMA relationship be with G3 PAT and the Army Sports Board? How do you feel about army AT at the moment; is it delivering all that it should? Has the AMA lived up to what you expected of it? If you have an opinion on these or any other matter relating to the AMA write in and lets get a public discussion going.

I'll close by thanking all those who contributed to this edition of the Journal and ask that you all send me as much material and photographs as possible as it is always in short supply.

David Reith

### Notes on Articles

I will take this opportunity of asking that as many members as possible send me articles, be they fifty word snippets or ten page epics they will always be received gratefully. All I do ask is that they are sent as hard and electronic copy, with the electronic copy in Word format. Photographs are also always in short supply so if you haven't got a good article but would like to see your happy snaps in print send them to me and there is a good chance that you'll see them soon after. As always I will return everything that is sent to me shortly after the Journal is published. Remember this is your Journal if you don't like what in it or would like to see more of the same let me know.



## Expedition Report - Exercise Shrivvenham Slovak

By James Moore and Dave Luke

An expedition to Eastern Europe with only one member of our party with any experience in the area, caused a near intimidating mix of excitement and anticipation. On arrival at Prague airport the western atmosphere successfully lulled us into a false sense of security. This was soon dispelled several hours later standing on the platform of the train station in the early hours of the morning, awaiting our night train to Slovakia. The remnants of the old communist regime were evident even to our ignorant eyes.

It seemed a far cry from six months earlier when we were sitting in the mess toying with the idea of Exercise Shrivvenham Slovak. Our team of 8 O/cdt's from Shrivvenham spent this time researching and planning the Army's first Slovakian expedition.

The first introduction to the Tatras Mountain range was a days sport climbing on Limestone crags, in Slovakia this is known as a 'Climbing Garden'. Our guide Jan Peto used this as the first part of his assessment of

our abilities. The following day's planned endurance test turned out to be a long ridge walk introducing us to the in situ chains along the route. These chains are standard practice in Slovakia on hard sections of scramble routes. Based on our better than expected performance Jan introduced a more ambitious programme, which turned out to challenge the entire group.

The luxury of a 0600 reveille to a mountain day was a refreshing change to the standard alpine 0200. From the Sliezsky Dom mountain hut, we started our now routine, 'hare and hounds' race with the guides to the bottom of the route. Group 1 was the first to encounter, 'Bomb Alley' a gully containing scree and fridge sized boulders, careful foot placement was not enough to prevent heavy rock fall. On several occasions this came much to close for comfort and proved true adventure training with serious risk to life and limb! Once finally on top we scrambled along the ridge towards Bradavice, which was a grade II-III scramble. This allowed us to climb four smaller towers on the main summit, one of which was affectionately known as, 'the wart'.

The final part of stage one brought an entirely new aspect to the expedition. After some serious storms the water level in the canyons of Slovak Paradise had risen enough to ensure that we were all destined to get wet!

Andy Richardson, Jenny Lockett, Dave Stanley and our guide Jan Peto with Bradavice in the background.



The hybrid walk/ climb through what some felt was an enormous kids playground had us hopping and jumping over fallen trees and clambering over the in-situ ladder labyrinth. Soaked to the skinned we descended back through Pielom Horna'du (Hornet canyon) using trails following the river's edge. With our spirits high we headed back to our base in Kosice.

After the initial taster at the start of the expedition we awaited our return to Koisce with bated breath. The city holds a cosmopolitan air, is sleek and slender and like the mountains is far from humble. Very good food and fine wine came at McDonald's prices, kick starting a night to be remembered! It is no wonder that much of Milan's catwalk contingent is Slovakian.

One of the most successful days in the Tatras was spent on multi pitch mountain routes. Group 1 climbed Volia Vera's south west wall, while Group 2 climbed Osarpance's south west wall. Group 1 walked in towards the dominant facing wall at the end of the valley, they then climbed the ridge, 7-pitches graded at UIAA III. After lunch they were ready for the slabs of Staflova, this was graded at UIAA V and was an awesome mountain route. For Group 2 the walk in took an hour and a half. With heavy sacks this proved an adequate warm up for the long day ahead. The first route was a cracking 6-pitch climb covering

every aspect of climbing, from delicate slabs to exhaustive chimneys called the slab of Plsek, graded at UIAA VI. The descent was an exposed abseiled in two stages from fixed bolts. In the afternoon two of the group decided to continue with the guide up the ridge of Osarpadee UIAA III. This consisted of 5/6 pitches, with a mixture of scrambling and climbing with multiple abseils. In this environment the use of pitons is common and many of the popular routes have in-situ pitons and bolts. Thanks to certain members of the party that number has significantly increased.

Having to travel back to the UK via one of Europe's most intriguing capital cities, we thought would be the icing on the cake, the fact that are hotel accommodation was doubled booked meaning that we were upgraded to a four star hotel made us question, 'could things get any better?'. The answer was yes, sampling the tourist sights by day and the "culture" by night. Some of the main sights attract much attention but are worth queuing and cramming, such as the astronomical clock or the Charles Bridge.

Now back at RMCS, long forgotten are the uncertainties and apprehensions first encountered with Exercise Shrivensham Slovak, hopefully paving the way for future expeditions to discover the country and experience that is Slovakia.



James Moore climbing on Velicka Stena.

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# AVOIDING THE HORDES ON KILIMANJARO

By Majors Mark & Bridget Smyth



As a walker's mountain, Kilimanjaro attracts a lot of people who are mountaineering virgins. The Roof of Africa stands at 5895 metres and is therefore subject to its own weather system and the typical cold you would normally associate with altitude. Sadly, many of the walkers who select this mountain for their first foray into the mountaineering scene are poorly prepared for the challenge, and their trip results in disappointment. This often has much to do with the fact that they have just flown in to Tanzania, have spent absolutely no time at all acclimatising, and 3 or 4 days later find themselves struggling to put one foot in front of another as the effects of exhaustion or Acute Mountain Sickness make manifest.

Despite the popularity of the mountain, it is still possible to select a route that avoids the majority of the hordes. Our destination this summer was Kilimanjaro via the Umbwe Route. Before embarking on this trek we decided that an acclimatisation peak would enhance the overall enjoyment of the trip. Mt Meru is the 3rd highest peak in Africa; it stands at 4562m and can easily be done in 4 days staying in huts along the route. The trek begins at Momella Gate in Arusha National Park. Each group has to be accompanied by a rifle toting park ranger just in case the buffalo, wart hogs or baboons try to get a little too frisky! The path meanders through rain forest up to Miriakamba Hut at 2600 metres, opening out into Alpine scrub at Saddle Hut (3500 metres) on day two. Little Meru at 3801 metres is easily accessible from the Saddle and it affords a great view of the summit path. The route to the main Meru peak consists of soul destroying scree fields interspersed with little oases of easy scrambling. An Alpine start at 2am ensures that sufficient height has been gained by the time the sun rises over Kilimanjaro for some absolutely stunning views that make it all worthwhile.

After Meru we were ready for 'Kili'. There are a number of access routes up to the summit of the highest peak in Africa, the easiest of the three main ones is known as the Marangu or Coca Cola Trail. It is the least scenic and the most gentle of climbs; mountain refuges on the way ensure its popularity with less hardy mountaineers. The Machame or Whisky Trail, another popular route, is more scenic but



sleeper and the huts along the route are for the use of the Tanzanian campsite guardians only resulting in a need to carry tents. The Umbwe Route is the steepest trail of the three and not recommended for inexperienced climbers. This ensures that it does not get overused and mountaineers are able to enjoy the beauty of the forest and the later airy ridges in a solitude, which is one of the reasons that makes it all worth doing. Umbwe is not technically difficult, although it does involve the occasional easy scrambling move. It affords the climber with classic views of Kilimanjaro looking up the Great Barranco, and an opportunity to dream, when Messners Route, 200 metres of vertical and overhanging ice, comes into view.....

Our route joined the South Kibo traverse at the Great Barranco Campsite, and as a consequence we were joined by a number of other parties. However, being well acclimatised, we were able to move quickly enough to avoid the worst of the crowds. To put these people into perspective, at the top of the Great Barranco we stopped to wait for our guide. An American female was overheard saying "that was the hardest hunk of rock I've ever climbed", I think I used my hands once on the whole route!

The summit bid is made from the Barafu Camp, which once again is a busy and crowded site, however it buzzes with summit fever. Traditionally, prospective summiteers depart at midnight in order to reach the summit between 6 and 7 am when the sun is rising. Even though we had been consistently faster than all of the average times along the trail, our guide was uneasy about letting us start for the summit any later than midnight. So we consoled ourselves with the fact that at least we wouldn't be held up by any other groups on the route. We reached the summit at 0515 hours; it was, not surprisingly, deserted and we sat there cocooned in our duvet jackets awaiting the sunrise for 45 minutes on the Roof of Africa. As we prepared to leave, the first of the hoards began to arrive. We bounced past them whooping with headrush and glee at the glory of the long scree run that would take us back to the campsite.

As the popularity of mountaineering increases it becomes ever harder to find peace and tranquillity on the more accessible mountains. However with careful route selection and a good acclimatisation programme, we were able to enjoy Kilimanjaro at its best and in relative solitude.

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# Exercise Bavarian Jubilee 04-19 May 2002

## The adventures of Mr. Beaver!

From the 04-19 May 2002 Exercise Bavarian Jubilee took place, unsurprisingly in Bavaria, Germany. The aim of the exercise, was to develop in individuals the qualities of moral and physical courage and leadership, through challenging team and individual adventurous activities. It was the culmination of a number of Deep Ranger adventurous training weekends and courses and on 04 May 2002, 22 enthusiastic candidates set off for Germany from Grantham.

For those that aren't aware, Deep Ranger is the adventurous training unit for the RLC TA. It runs weekend, week and two week long courses sometimes in the UK, sometimes abroad. Activities range from hillwalking to kayaking to rock climbing and mountaineering and Deep Ranger caters for all levels of experience. If this sounds like it may be of interest, you should make contact with your unit representative in the first instance.

As a way of boosting morale throughout the trip, by highlighting faux pas and misdemeanours a special member of the Deep Ranger Team came along. Standing just three inches high, covered from head to toe in fur with a shiny black

nose, this team member came to Germany with a mission. His mission was to accompany those whose mouth often works without first contacting the brain, those for whom the thought process often starts after the event and to give them time to think about their wrong-doing. May the Deep Ranger Team introduce to you Mr. Beaver.

If you had the pleasure of Mr. Beavers' company for the day you had to keep him dry, in your possession at all times and upon the cry of 'Challenge Beaver' show him within thirty seconds to the challenger. Easy...hmmmmm!

Fortunately for all of us being the professional that he is, Mr. Beaver keeps a diary and has kindly allowed us to use it for the benefit of telling everybody about the expedition.

**Saturday 04 May 2002.**  
After an uneventful crossing through the channel tunnel and France and Belgium I'd had no one to spend the day with. I knew that it wouldn't be long and sure enough Lt Hinton (the event organiser) became my first carer after displaying some rather unorthodox convoy skills in his turbo-charged Sherpa van. We

stayed overnight in Rheindalen in transit accommodation.

**Sunday 05 May, 2002.**

Not much to say about today really. Three mini buses and a transit van travelling through Germany on the autobahns - that's as exciting as it gets. We arrived late afternoon at Haus Magnus, an Army-run guest-house situated in Wertach, Bavaria, Southern Germany. The standard of food and accommodation was good so we looked set for a good fortnight.

**Monday 06 May 2002.**

After two days on a mini bus, every body was in dire need of fresh air and leg stretching. So in small groups we set off on gentle day walk through the Bavarian countryside, from Wertach to Nesselwang. Wertach is situated at approx. 900m above sea level and we reached a height of 1250m on route so nothing to strenuous, but enough to get some clean air in to your lungs and some oxygen in your blood. During our walk SSgt Paul 'Dolph' Dodwell decided that it would be beneficial for us all to learn more about the local flora, fauna and wildlife. This for him involved dissecting local bird faeces and discussing what said bird had been eating. Guess who I was going to spend the next day with? In the afternoon we all took a swimming test in the local pool, followed by an hour of childish energy burning in the water slides.

**Tuesday 07 May 2002.**

Today we split into two groups. The brave and the stupid. The

brave went climbing at a place named Tiefenbach and the stupid went drowning... sorry... kayaking. I was attached to SSgt Dodwells' climbing helmet for the day which was great in the sunshine but I was kidnapped by Lt Claire Sapwell whilst he was performing some rock hugging on a more difficult climb. Unfortunately this meant I was to spend another day with Dolph - but this time down the front of his trousers to avoid further kidnapping incidents.

**Wednesday 08 May 2002.**

The group split into three today.

**Group 1 - Alpine walkers** set off to the top of the Hochgrat mountain (1834m) via cable car. They undertook a ridge walk taking in four peaks. The walk was overshadowed for Pte Sharon McMahon by SSgt Paul Dodwell's imitation bird noises and everybody pointing to imaginary birds.

**Group 2 - Kayakers** were joined by members of HQ 4 Div (who were also staying at Haus Magnus) because their kayaking instructor had injured himself. So Capt. Jim Strickland agreed to help them out and take them under his wing.

**Group 3 - The alpine mountaineering group** set of in the Zugspitze/Hollental valley in search of some snow. They undertook a day walk up to the snow line along a path with an impressive 500m sheer drop of to one side.

WO2 Yvonne Woods nearly got to take care of me when she tried getting out of her kayak with the spay deck still attached, as did Dolph when he decided to throw some of his climbing equipment down the rock whilst climbing. But the Chef Cpl Paul Merrony saved both of these. It is worth explaining that Paul lives and works in Bavaria and has done so for a number of





years. After assuring us there was no need for a map whilst travelling to Garmisch, we promptly got lost. Garmisch is home to Germany's highest mountain, the Zugspitze, and it was only when SSgt Dave Smith suggested that if we were heading towards said mountain, wouldn't it be good if it was in front of us, not behind. The chef conceded it was a fair point. So I got to spend the next day with him.

Thursday 09 May 2002.

Kayakers continued practising their skills, the Alpine walkers again walked some further peaks in the Hochgrat area and the alpine mountaineering group set off in the cable car for the top of the Zugspitze. First of all they undertook a skills refresher session, practising the essential skills, such as ice axe arresting (not a way of detaining criminal ice axes, but a way of stopping yourself sliding should you fall whilst walking on snow and ice) and snow belays. For some this involved some more basic skills such as putting your waterproof trousers on the right way around. Yes my new guardian was decided when Capt. Alvin Ward didn't realise that the fly on the trousers goes at the front. The moment is fondly captured on video, just in case the ex-RSM should forget.

Friday 10 May 2002.

Again Kayakers continued kayaking, but the other two groups swapped around. Group 1 went off to Garmisch and walked up the Wank mountain (not a subjective comment but the name of the hill). I'm led to believe they also honed their retail marketing skills by spending the GDP of a small African country in the PX (American Forces equivalent of NAAFI but better). The other group undertook a day walk up the Grunten (1820m).

The kayakers haven't had much press as yet, so Capt. Jim Strickland (the kayaking instructor) wanted to adjust the balance. As a kayaking instructor there are a few things, it's fair to say, that are essential. Like a wetsuit, spray deck and a kayak. Well two out of three isn't bad Jim! So he became my guardian for the next day.

Saturday 11 May 2002.

The kayakers were still kayaking/drowning but now the group in Garmisch was headed for the snow up on the Zugspitze. They spent the day practising essential mountaineering skills until they had to rapidly evacuate the mountain upon receiving a severe weather warning. The other group went back to the Hochgrat area to undertake a challenging 9 peak day walk from Hochgrat to Mitteberg. After a physically demanding day the group opted for some recreation at the local swimming pool. Sadly I was left in a locker by Capt. Jim Strickland. His absent-mindedness earned him another day in my company.

Sunday 12 May 2002.

A fairly uneventful day. Apart from the kayakers the whole group went to the Stiefen indoor climbing wall. This was a fantastic complex and a haven for indoor climbing fanatics. Apparently this was one of the first centres in Germany as is still run by a group of hardcore climbers. Due to Capt. Strickland's continued absent-mindedness I got to spend yet another day with him, but was presented to him in a kayak made especially for me.

Monday 13 May 2002.

Apart from the kayakers and four of the group who had gone to attend a Rock Climbing profi-

ciency course, we all headed for the Nebelhorn. Back on snow again. We all roped together and undertook a ridge walk culminating in summiting the Nebelhorn (2234m). The descent was just as impressive as the ascent as we got to bum slide down the snowy slope for the best part of a kilometre. It was a beautiful sunny day and the views were spectacular. We were lucky enough to see some wild Chamois (small mountain deer). For some of us, seeing properly in the bright glare off the snow was more difficult than for others. SSgt Paul 'Dolph' Dodwell forgot his sunglasses and so we were reunited.

Tuesday 14 May 2002.

The kayakers were off to practise eskimo rolling – voluntarily submerging your head whilst still sitting in the kayak. The rest of us went to the Hinderlanger area to undertake some climbing, abseiling and prosuking. This was really to make the best of the day, as the weather was appalling. I think it's fair to say that everybody enjoyed themselves regardless. Pte Don Williamson became my new owner after forgetting to bring his climbing shoes to a climbing session.

Wednesday 15 May 2002.

Back to the Hinderlanger area but this time in fantastic sunshine. For climbers this is what the sport is about. Good weather, good company and a variety of challenging routes to climb. Routes climbed included Tom, Jerry and Hong Kong Fuey. If nothing else they look great in the logbook! Climbing is about learning the rules of the sport, practising them and progressively climbing harder

and harder routes applying these rules and techniques. Lt Claire Sapwell had a momentary lapse and decided to use some of the metal work put in the rock for protection from falling, to give herself a little lift up a difficult part of the route. Oh no, no, no say the purists. So I got to spend the next day with Claire.

That really was the end of adventurous training part of Exercise Bavarian Jubilee. Just the journey back to England over two days. Every body returned home happy, with no broken bones and a suntan. I think it's fair to say that everybody also had felt they had taken part in the 'Adventurous' part of Adventure training. This is a credit to the instructional team of Deep Ranger because in a over regulated environment we can sometimes lose sight of our aim and get bogged down in paperwork and bureaucracy.

I think it is therefore worth saying a thank you to the team at this point as they managed to put together an adventurous, challenging programme throughout the exercise and achieve the aims of Deep Ranger as stated at the start of this article. Lt Allan Hinton (OIC EX. Bavarian Jubilee), Capt. Jim Strickland, WO2 Andy Rowlinson, SSgt Tim Bird and SSgt Dave Smith all contributed their considerable experience (both Military and Civilian) into the event and I'm sure everyone who participated feels they have gained something from the experience and instruction of these people.

2Lt Andy Gibbs.  
Diary extracts courtesy of Mr. Beaver aka. Cpl Phil Edwards

# EX PILATES PYRENEES

By Major Cath Davies, Vice Chairman

Exercise Pilates Pyrenees was two-week mountaineering expedition to the Spanish Pyrenees. Soldiers and officers from A (Royal Scots) Company of 52nd Lowland Regiment based in Edinburgh and I drove down to Plymouth where we over-nighted in the Royal Marine Barracks at Stonehouse before catching the overnight ferry to Santander. This ferry trip cuts out the long drive through France and, if the weather is kind and the Bay of Biscay smooth, it is a relaxing start to the trip.

From Santander, we drove through the foothills, then mountains of the Pyrenees to reach Bielsa, a picturesque village on the edge of the Ordesa National Park.

This beautiful area contains numerous peaks but specifically Monte Perdido, at 3355m the second highest peak in the Pyrenees. It is more often climbed from an adjacent valley, which offers an easy approach to a high mountain hut, leaving a straightforward summit day. In the interests of gaining experience for the novices and to meet the aims of adventurous training, we were tackling Monte Perdido from the south, which necessitated a long approach climb through the head of the glacial, U-shaped valley, followed by an exposed high camp on the glacier below Perdido. The summit day held its own challenges, not least gaining access through a steep rock band onto the higher snow slopes.

We established a base camp at the head of the valley across the river from a smart 'Parador', one of a string of hotels housed in castles or old-fashioned mansions. This one had not doubt been a hunting lodge before National Parks were invented. After spending a day unpacking, sorting kit and repacking, the next day we set off through the woods in the valley bottom to gain the path marked on the map that crisis-crossed the steep head wall of the U-shaped valley.

The climb was strenuous, with large packs, over very varied terrain, including funnels of consolidated snow, and concluded in a final very steep snow field of over 300m in height leading up to the glacier. As this, for some of the novices, was their first use of crampons 'in anger', as one might say, and you could see the minibuses from here, 1000m below on the valley floor, it was quite interesting!

Late afternoon saw us setting camp on a small exposed area of rocky ground surrounded by the snow of the glacier. Tents were guyed to rocks and water for cooking and filling water bottles had to be melted from snow. The long climb had obviously taken it out of some of the party and some tempers were getting frayed as these tasks were accomplished.

Scrutiny of the rock band across the glacier in parallel with the description in the guidebook indicated two possible weak points, either of which could have been the route indicated in the guidebook. Nothing is every easy.

A pair of British climbers appeared, but apart from that we were the only people on the glacier. We turned in early, most people quite

tired. Again, the guidebook guesstimate on the time of ascent to where we were camped had been far less than we had actually taken. Through the night a very high wind picked up, not dying down until just before dawn. As the others got ready, I watched two climbers descending towards the rock band. This enabled me to identify the natural route. They appeared at the bottom in about 15 minutes. Good, I thought, must be banked up with snow, given how much there is on the glacier. Straightforward. My heart sank, however, when a party of four approaching across the glacier from the north, went into the cleft in the rock bank, then reappeared and started to scale the seemingly sheer wall to one side! Then good old Thatcham (well, it's not anymore, its Bicester but just as black!) put a spanner in the works. The marine ML in the party, who was leading a rope, had put his crampons onto his plastic boots only to have the shell crack right along the sole line on one foot. The boot looked fine and one can only surmise it was cleaned with a substance that made the plastic brittle, or had been exposed to extreme cold, allowing it to subsequently fall under light use. To compound matters, the gallant four scaling the rock band had now retreated and the earlier descendents passed our camp, wiry, long-haired alpinists who looked as though they had overnights on the summit for fun and were now going to get in another top before breakfast. Further removed from our motley crew they could not have been. After a brief confer, the decision was made to use the morning for snow skills on the ideal lower slopes of the mountain side, leaving the hors de combat ML to strip the camp, then we would descend.

A variety of reasons lead to this decision such as the tiredness of the party, the inequity of leaving people out of the summit party as a leader was now missing equipment but a main factor was we did not have enough rations to stay up an extra day and night as we would have had to, to summit and descend in safety. It was clear the conditions had made the gully in the rock band a serious undertaking and it would take a long time get novices either up or down it.

Snow skills went well and on completion we returned to our camp, passing the other two Brits who had camped near us. They had decided for similar reasons to us to sack it, not so much for the difficulties but they too had been misled by the guidebooks on timings and were tired by their previous days exertions.

The descent had its moments as our novices discovered snow slopes seem steeper on the way down! But only one person slipped and those on either side of the rope responded well. We regained our base camp early evening, sad not to have summited, but with a much better idea of the challenges of the mountaineering.

The following day we packed up and drove further east to Benasque and found an inexpensive hostel in which to overnight. This small, medieval village is now surrounded by modern alpine style developments, much in the French style but less obtrusive by dint of a smaller scale. Our next goal was Pico d'Aneto, at 3404m the highest Pyrenean peak. Aneto stands two thirds of the way

*Pyrenean Mountain panorama*



along a spine of mountains, with ridges and glaciers on each side. The area is a designated National Park and in the high season (July/August) access by private car is restricted, with a shuttle bus service in place to reach the road head. We were able to drive and park at the road end, from whence we made our way up to the Refugio d'Aneto. In the process of being expanded, this mountain hut offers standard sleeping platform accommodation and meals if required. The evening meal was good, very substantial with a far higher 'fresh' content that you come across in huts in the Alps. Using the hut also enabled the novices to learn 'hut etiquette' which is the same all over Europe. The next morning saw an alpine start complete with obligatory head torches as we negotiated the rocky lower slopes. The route follows one side of a ridgeline, which it then crosses to drop down for a long traverse over the glacier. The final steep snow ascent leads to an airy traverse along a ridge of rock slabs and ledges, where great sport is to be had in watching the variety of rope work being practiced and the sheer ill manners of many European mountaineers! The route is reversed to regain the Refugio and walk out to the road head.

Having bagged one peak and had a good mountaineering experience on the other, the trip was deemed a success by all concerned. Whilst the mountains are less spectacular than the Alps, the greater remoteness, lack of mechanical uplift and lack of crowds give a far greater perception of being reliant on the team rather than external factors, thus assisting in achieving the aims of adventurous training. The area is highly recommended for introducing novices to the alpine environment, with numerous high-level treks as well as mountaineering and also offers great scope for paddling, if a multi-activity expedition is required. The cost of living is substantially cheaper than elsewhere in Europe and affordable accommodation is readily available



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# EXERCISE SHRIVENHAM SIERRA AN ACCOUNT OF THE EXPEDITION

**“SPOONS, LIGHTERS AND VIBRAM SOLES”**

By Major Ian Comber

The following is an account of an ascent of Huascarán Sur (6768 metres), the highest mountain in Peru, located in the remote Cordillera Blanca region.

Standing in Gatwick Airport security area being informed by American Airlines that all our aired and empty Sigg bottles were being confiscated and destroyed is probably not the best way to start an expedition. The journey to Peru via America was long and tiring and our first experiences on our taxi ride through Lima involved having the windscreen washed by a man high on drugs and witnessing a man

lying dead in the road having been run over by a bus. The bus was still on top of him as we drove past! We awoke early to mist and drizzle. Lima is overcrowded and fairly dirty and it didn't help that we were introduced to the Monday morning rush hour. Most journeys are best completed by taxi to cover the large distances and avoid the endless stream of beggars; they are very cheap and it also reduces your intake of smog. We spent a day in Lima relaxing before setting off on the long 8 hour bus journey to Huaraz the next day. We used the Cruz Del Sur company who arranged the trip like an airline flight

complete with stewardesses, “in-flight” meal, films and an extra payment for excess baggage – the first time that I have ever paid it for a coach journey. The coach was half empty so I am still mystified as to the logic of this policy! We also played a game of bingo en route – bizarre!!! The trip was interrupted on the outskirts of Lima when we drove into a full-blown riot. A number of bricks were hurled at the bus but the windscreens took the impact and the driver managed to reverse down a side street. It delayed us for an hour whilst the police tear gassed the crowd and made random forays with armoured personnel carriers, but it turned the trip into a full South American experience.

The city of Huaraz is at at 3000 metres altitude above sea level (and helped the acclimatisation process). We spent the next day getting provisions – food, fuel (benzine) and replacing the fuel bottles that American Airlines had kindly destroyed for us. We stayed at Jo's Place, a really nice hostel run by an ex-pat Brit who was the fountain of all local knowledge including guides, arrieros (mule handlers), porters, mule hire, routes.....and drinking holes! Huaraz was a great improvement on Lima with all the facilities centrally located and a friendly local population. Our last night in Huaraz before departing for the mountain was spent quietly (in Bar Extreme listening to Nirvana). We recovered to Jo's Place for an early night but the South American experience conspired to prevent too much sleep – car horns, engine noise, rabid dogs, chickens, drunks, school children all joined in the nightly soundtrack.

The next morning we set off in a taxi (minibus) with a large amount of kit and travelled to the tiny village of Musho which is start of the trek up to Huascarán base camp. As we arrived we were immediately accosted by the head arriero and loads were weighed, packed into plastic sacking and loaded onto six mules, all looking par-



ticularly unhappy at this stage. Another arriero controlled the mules although he spent most of his time chasing them as they kept wandering off. We did learn 'though that a good tip to make a mule move faster is to continually stone it!! The ascent was gradual along well-defined tracks with the biggest difficulties being the avoidance of the presents that the mules kept leaving us in response to carrying our heavy loads.

It soon became apparent that we had entered a "spoon vortex" at base camp. Every time a spoon was put down it disappeared only to mysteriously re-appear hours later with everyone denying having used it or seen it. Paranoia set in with meal times becoming a period of tension and suspicion. With 4 officers in one place we should have foreseen this!

The next day (Day Two) saw us make a leisurely start leaving a local "watch man" in place. Although this was quite an expensive service it gave peace of mind and also ensured that the SAT phone would not disappear whilst we were on the mountain. The plan for the day was to do a load carry alongside the porters to Camp One at 5250 metres, drop off the equipment and then descend all the way back to base camp to spend the night. The route was over fairly steep glaciated slabs marked with cairns. We passed the Refuge Don Bosco Huascarán, a new hut built at 4670 metres, and then started a gradual ascent of the Raimondi Glacier towards Camp One. It seemed never-ending with heavy loads but we eventually reached our destination, put up a tent and stowed all the equipment. We made a rapid descent back to base camp which we reached in two hours. We then spent the last hour of daylight brewing up to re-hydrate and cooking before settling in for an early night. Having descended we now suffered less with the altitude and consequently all had a good night's sleep.

Day Three arrived with base camp significantly quieter than when we had arrived. A guided party of ten Germans on a commercial expedition from Munich had departed and they had removed their huge collection of cook tents, toilet tents and admin tents and had allowed their large team of locals to descend with them in order to continue carrying out any menial task that became too much for them to personally carry out at altitude. The Germans seemed genuinely bemused to see the team of four random "DIY" Brits in the tents next door. We again had a relaxed start as the plan for Day Three was to re-ascend the glaciated slabs and spend the night in the relative luxury of the Refuge Don Bosco Huascarán and involved no snow work. It was also the next stage in the load carrying process and we would not return to base camp until the end of the expedition. The refuge has only been open for two months and is in pristine condition although it is quite expensive. We arrived in time for lunch and the afternoon was spent relaxing and re-hydrating in preparation for the following

day when we would continue load carrying up to Camp One.

Day Four saw another day of good weather with a pleasant walk up to the edge of the Raimondi Glacier where we put on crampons and re-ascended to our previously set-up tent. We erected the second tent and re-hydrated. This had its own difficulties as we reached the Camp at midday and it was baking with no shade. We could also see the start of the next day's route which involved difficult glaciated terrain with huge crevasses, lots of dead-ends, some steep faces and complicated serac bands.

We set off on Day Five in daylight and although this meant that the snow had received some sun, the terrain was too complex to negotiate in darkness. At the top of one particularly steep face John Kerner made the decision to turn back. He was having ankle problems and an Italian pair were heading down at the same time. John was able to rope up with the Italians ensuring a safe descent back to Camp One





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where he would wait for us. He was fine as the camp was well stocked from the load carries, and he distributed his equipment amongst the remaining three of us who continued negotiating sixty degree slopes with heavy sacks at a height of 5600 metres; an experience that can best be described as "emotional". Route finding was difficult with huge, gaping crevasses, delicate snow bridges and teetering seracs. A number of potential routes petered out as the snow bridges had previously collapsed and we wearily entered the area of Garganta ("the throat") at six o'clock in the evening. The Garganta is the saddle between Huascarán north and south peaks. We were just short of the designated Camp Two area at 6005 metres but were happy to set up our tents here. The other camp areas were pretty filthy and we only had half an hour's daylight left. We rapidly erected the tent, brewed up and attempted to eat some noodles. This did not appear to settle well with Simon Hutchings, although to his credit he did reach the bell-end area of the tent before vomiting. Due to John's retirement earlier in the day, there were now three of us in one tent which warmed it up but made any admin, or indeed movement, more difficult.

A group decision had been made that the next day would be a rest day – we were all extremely tired from the load carry. We awoke on Day Six to a mixture of good and poor visibility. The clouds would roll in, instantly creating "white out" conditions. Our camp at 6000 metres was fairly comfortable and we spent the day eating and drinking. Our problems began late in the afternoon when all our fire-lighters decided to pack up at the same time. We were left with full water bottles for the next day but without the option of cooking, making more brews or melting more snow. This was fairly serious as the next day was the planned summit bid. We ate sweets, tried to eat cold tins of tuna/sardines (revolting!) and drank neat tins of condensed milk (gagging!) So our summit attempt was to be carried out with our currently filled water bottles and plenty of sweets. Chocolate filled limes have never tasted so good!!

We awoke at four thirty with a planned start time an hour later. After all we didn't have any cooking or brewing up planned prior to setting off! We began across easy angled terrain and then immediately encountered more steep sixty degree slopes that involved a high degree of controlled deep breathing to reduce hypertension. These difficulties continued with airy traverses, plenty of serac movement (everyone looked at each other with a weird expression on their face when we felt the "whoomph" nearby – but what were we all planning on doing?) and some gnarly crevasses. Many of these involved taking off our rucksacks, throwing them across and then carrying out "Jonathan Edwards' impressions" planting our axes in to reduce the chance of sliding back in. Finally we came out of the shade, having negotiated the difficulties to find ourselves on a never-ending snow slope of sun baked slush in oven-like temperatures. Being a convex slope there were also a number of false summits to create a new meaning to the word "demoralising". Finally at two thirty in the afternoon we reached the summit at 6768 metres. However, elation was not the word to



describe the feeling; concern would be a better description of our emotions. We were all extremely tired, had very little water left, had not eaten properly for twenty four hours and clouds were rolling in. The obligatory summit photos were quickly completed and ten minutes later we were racing the incoming storm clouds. Within half an hour we were in "white out" conditions with a light smattering of snow falling. Re-tracing our steps became increasingly difficult and with the effects of altitude, everything appeared in a dream-like state. Towards the bottom, the route became obliterated and we ended up in some cul-de-sacs. This was made even more frustrating as in the breaks in the weather, we could see the speck of our tent on the glacier below. Eventually we reached the tent and sorted out our gear. It was four thirty and we decided to hunker down for the night rather than risk heading all the way down to Camp One in the poor conditions (weather and ourselves!) Of course this meant that the food and drink "fast" would continue for another night, our third at 6000 metres.

Day Seven began at first light, 0630 hours, and we braved the bitterly cold morning to prepare to descend to Camp One and then onto base camp. We quickly sorted ourselves out (the cold generally encourages you!) and we headed down. Conditions were crisp and clear and we made good progress. Eventually we reached the steep section above Camp One. We could see John Kerner and the approaching two porters but we had an extremely dangerous piece of terrain in-between. By a mixture of down climbing, lowering and abseiling we reached easier ground below only to be met with more route finding difficulties. In the heat we had to wearily re-ascend a number of times before finding a safe route to the camp where we took on some fluids and sorted out loads between us and the porters.

We descended via the Refuge in order to rediscover the joys of food and water. The descent was notable by the change in conditions of the glacier lower down. In the week that we had spent on the mountain the area of dry glacier had increased dramatically and the melt water streams that we now encountered on the slabs were overflowing where before they had been a trickle. Base camp was reached and we over-nighted before descending with an arriero and five mules back to Musho. We returned to the valley to find a festival in full swing and little sleep was achieved for the next twenty four hours.

Huascarán is a beautiful mountain but objectively very dangerous. The threat from crevasses, avalanche and serac fall is very real – between eleven and seventeen people (depending on the source) have been killed on the mountain between June and September 2002 and there are numerous posters and signs asking for details on individuals lost on the mountain in previous years. Transport to the area is easy via numerous bus companies and Huaraz is a bustling and friendly town. However, it is recommended that you take additional eating and firefighting implements in order to enjoy the experience in a little more comfort than we did!

The expedition consisted of the following personnel;

Major Ian Comber Royal Artillery (Expedition Leader)  
Major John Tolan Worcester and Sherwood Foresters (Volunteers)  
Major John Kerner Royal Logistic Corps  
Major Simon Hutchings Royal Logistic Corps

The expedition would like to thank the following sponsors;

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# ARMY MOUNTAINEERING ASSOCIATION (AMA) ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (AGM) AND MEMBERS WEEKEND 27-29 SEPTEMBER 2002

By Captain K P Edwards APTC, AMA Meets Secretary

The AMA AGM 2002 was a tremendous success despite it not matching the bumper level of attendance from the previous year. Seventy-four members converged on JSMTC, INDEFATIGABLE representing a broad mix of the old and bold and young tigers as well as a strong representation from our female mountaineers. There were many new members attending their first meet as a taste of what the AMA has to offer that included some last minute bookings from personnel who had been on a course at JSMTC during the week leading up to the AGM. Being an all-inclusive Club they were welcomed into the fold despite the hiccups that it caused in the administration of the weekend. It is at the heart of our ethos to never turn away any new comers. It was particularly pleasing to have a strong contingent from Northern Ireland who had been encouraged to attend through their Chairman, Lt Col Sharpe.

In spite of the long journey, endless road works and traffic queues the first order of business for most members was a well-earned drink in the bar. The Friday programme was kicked off by a presentation by Col (Retd) LeG Bridges who held the audience spell-bound recounting his epic journey of exploration by an AMA Team on Mount Api, Western Nepal in 1980.

As we were still under the influence of an Indian summer, the weather was unseasonably good for the AGM weekend. Our members made the most of their good fortune by grabbing some fine mountaineering and excellent climbing routes. On the Saturday morning the main majority of the members dashed off into the mountains to enjoy a rewarding day indulging in their activities. A group of individuals without partners were swiftly organised into teams led by a qualified leader who arranged suitable objectives to match their aspirations. Rock Climbing part-

nerships spread themselves across North Wales, each achieving a significant crop of routes from the more traditional (Craig yr Ysfa, Amphitheatre Buttress, VD, and Muir y Newl, VS) to ascents of hard lines at Tremmadog (Vector, E2, Barbarian E1 and Leg Slip, E1 to mention but a few). Thanks to all those Leaders who offered their services to instruct on the Saturday.

The AGM commenced at 1900hrs and the main focus was to highlight the work and ongoing development being carried out by the committee on behalf of the membership. The following bullet points briefly summarise the AGM.

- The following were elected to the committee: Captain Stevens, Chairperson BFG, WO2 Reith, Journal Editor. WO2 Wilson steps down as the Journal Editor but remains as Equipment Manager and was congratulated for being awarded AGs Commendation for his services to Mountaineering. WELL DESERVED! We also welcomed our new part-time Membership Secretary based at JSMTC.
- The Club has healthy membership standing at over 1900 personnel almost twice the membership of the next nearest Club affiliated to the BMC.
- The Expeditions Secretary updated the members on the splendid expeditions that had been successfully launched throughout the year and the Meets Secretary appraised members on the flourishing Meets and Workshops programme that had been organised. Both expressed the need for more Leaders to come forward to enhance both the amount of Expeditions and Meets organised within the current calendar. We are seeking someone to organise Exercise ICE MONKEY in 2003. Members were also informed about the arrangements and location for JSAM 2003 and the forthcoming expeditions to Mount McKinley and the Canadian Rockies. The Vice-Chairman put forward her thoughts on establishing a long term Mountaineering Plan. The new Directory of AT Facilities produced by ATG (A) was distributed to the membership.
- The Sports Climbing Secretary reported on developments and the exceptional growth of participation within Sports Climbing and the successful schedule of events that included for the first time Divisional Competitions. Look out for the dates of planned events in 2003 through the Newsletter.
- The Communications Secretary outlined the huge success of the Web Site with more information being brought on line in the near future. An enormous amount of publicity work had been carried out with talks to Phase 1 Recruits as well as raising the profile of the Association through articles in Soldier Magazine (October Issue). The AMA Database has been fully updated with the current information of the membership, however, there was a plea for members to inform the Membership Secretary of changes of address at the earliest opportunity. Both the Journal and Newsletter continue to thrive and are the main communication tool within the Association but each of them would benefit from a more diverse range of articles from the membership (not just articles to satisfy the grant application process).
- The financial account is healthy and it was agreed to maintain the current subscription level at £15pa.

- It was decided to approach the membership to seek direct customer feedback through a survey questionnaire that will be distributed with a newsletter in the near future. This will be your chance to tell the committee what you want from your Association!

Following the AGM members were treated to a hot buffet supper that was essentially an opportunity to sit and chat with old friends and reminisce. Naturally people then graduated towards the bar where they were held to ransom by Captain Stu MacDonald to raise funds through a raffle and auction for the AMA McKinley Expedition 2003. Once the fighting over prizes had subsided the audience were captivated and entranced by a truly inspirational presentation on the exploits of Dr Sundeep Dhillon to the Seven Summits and his two attempts on Mount Everest (Chomolunga).

As the weather stayed fine quite understandably most of the members disappeared back into the mountains. This unfortunately resulted in a disastrous bouldering competition as only six competitors turned up from the many that registered their interest on the Application proforma. As we had paid a large sum of money for this facility the bouldering competition is one aspect of the weekend that will be taken out of the programme for next year although the Indoor Wall will remain available on the normal entry basis.

It was a fantastic weekend and hopefully everyone enjoyed the programme. I am always seeking new ideas for inclusion in the schedule; one thought is to have a member's second hand climbing/mountaineering equipment and book sale. Any thoughts or ideas to improve the weekend are most welcome. I look forward to hearing your views.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### LEADER/INSTRUCTORS AND A SAFE SYSTEM OF TRAINING

By Captain K P Edwards APTC S03 Land Accident Investigation Team (LAIT)

Much has been written recently criticising the current system of training and the structure of the JSAT scheme. Healthy debate is always welcomed if it is underpinned with constructive ideas for improvement and not simply to pick at the fabric of a good concept that has been continually developed over the last 30 years.

Whilst I applaud those who have the courage to voice opinions on issues that they feel deeply about, I would question the basis on which these opinions are formed? I am not wholly unsympathetic to the plight and frustrations of Leaders attempting to organise AT, particularly when it appears to create barriers. However, when the Safe System of Training is brought into question through the perceived requirement for inflated qualifications, I would like to respond to that debate with some of my own thoughts based on my background of experience.

Through my work at LAIT I am required to investigate accidents in which people have been seriously hurt or killed whilst engaging in Adventurous Training (AT) activities. We are not a blame organisation but simply look at the facts and make recommendations to enhance the safe system of training where necessary. Indeed in many instances, we praise and highlight the actions of our Leaders/Instructors as examples of good practice. The first question to ask is have the authors of these articles ever talked to the parents or partners of those who are seriously injured and tried to provide the answers as to why the accident happened? Have they talked to the Leaders/Instructors who have been subjected to a Board of Inquiry or Police Investigation and asked how they feel when their judgement is being called to account? The Safe System of Training I believe provides the firm foundations for safe management in AT in particular through the risk assessment process and if used correctly actually aids the Leader/Instructor to fully focus on the inherent hazards and the necessary controls to minimise exposure to unnecessary risk.

The second question - what are we endeavouring to develop in our JSAT Leaders/Instructors? I would suggest that we are in fact providing a scheme to develop competent and effective JSAT Leaders/Instructors. What is a competent Leader/Instructor? Under the definition provided in the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 'A person shall be regarded as competent where he/she has sufficient training and experience or knowledge and other qualities. The JSAT scheme is designed to provide a progressive level of training further supported by the requirement to consolidate skills with additional experience and then to be assessed for a level of competency. The criteria on which we assess our potential Leaders/Instructors are Knowledge, Technical Ability, Management of Training, Communication and Judgement. I am very proud of, and would vigorously defend, the fact that we produce good quality Leaders/Instructors. However the development does not stop there, as we require our Leaders/Instructors to maintain currency with their qualifications in order to remain competent. It is in this area where unfortunately we do not currently have a robust quality assurance system currently in place.

The third question links the first and second question - why do we need competent Leaders/Instructors? The fact is that every Leader/Instructor is responsible for the safety and welfare of those in their charge. This does not mean that students totally abrogate responsibility for their own safety. After all, the training should be seeking to develop initiative, self-reliance and inter-dependence. The bottom line is that when you are responsible for the delivery of training or leading a group, whether in a one-day context or throughout an expedition, then it is a fine balance between exercising judgement and control without overly stifling the experience. The students will naturally focus on the person with the qualification and expertise to ensure that they gain maximum benefit from the training without being exposed to unnecessary risk. This is not fundamentally about litigation - it is a moral responsibility that depends for its success on the competence of the Leader/instructor.

The issue of Quality Assurance is partially addressed through the Divisional S02 PAT Desk Officers through whom all expedition training is authorised including the High-Risk or Remote (HR/R) categories. Have any of our authors been actively engaged with the HR/R process? Having been a member of many HR/R vetting panels, the majority of the Expedition Leaders comment on how helpful the Subject Matter Experts have been and far from creating additional hurdles, the advice and guidance had been instrumental in ensuring the success of the exercise. I would go so far as to suggest that the whole help desk structure, not least the Army Expedition Advisory Cell, goes out of its way to assist Expedition Leaders in every way to realise their aspirations. They will however reserve the right to question the over ambitious projects when the experience and skills of the Leader and the ability of the group do not sit comfortably with the aims of the expedition.

I mention Health and Safety because as a Government Organisation we are subject to the laws of our country and that law fundamentally binds us all. The Secretary of State for Defence produces a Health and Safety Policy for the MOD. The fact is that the MOD is increasingly drawn into and compared with the industry norm, in other words the National Governing Body (NGB) awards scheme. The JSAT scheme has to stand up to the scrutiny of training and assessing our Leaders/Instructors to the same level of competence when compared against the NGB equivalent awards and arguably exceed the level of competence due to the worldwide caveat (NGB qualifications are UK restricted).

My final questions in this debate - are the authors of these articles members of the relevant Army Association (e.g. AMA, ACU) who provide the suitable forum to express concerns about the JSAT scheme? When did they last attend a seminar or workshop or organise a meet and canvas the views of the actual activists? How many activists share similar concerns?

As a result of the many workshops and meets I have arranged, the activists that I meet through my work and the expeditions I have organised, there have been many opportunities to discuss a whole host of issues including the ones mentioned in the articles. Some of these issues I have subsequently taken forward to the appropriate forum to influence change in the structure of how Joint Service Adventurous Training is organised and conducted. May I suggest that there are many ways to improve upon the existing schemes rather than just wholly condemning the structure outright!



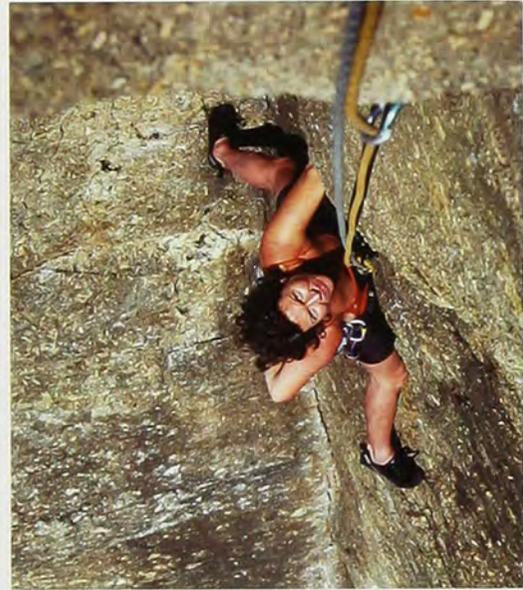


1st Prize - Dr Lenora Elliot climbing "Rasndron" E15h Borrodale. By Lianne Callaghan.  
 Andy Simpson on Flying Buttres. By Steph Scott.



2nd Place - "Aconis". By Tom Martin.

## AMA PHOTOGRAPHIC

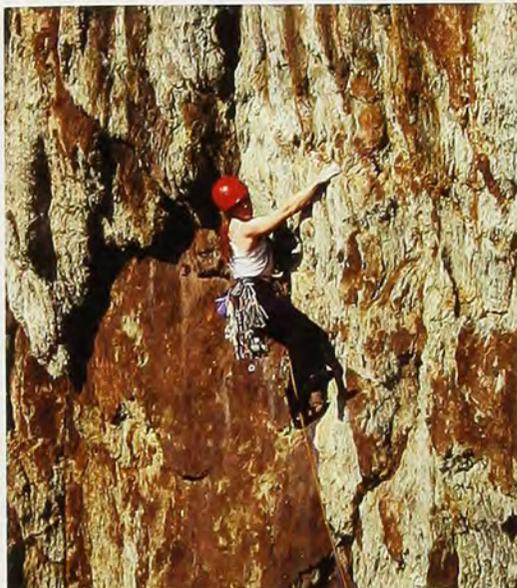


Dr Zoe Billingham on "Sunny Corner Lane" E3. Corn Barra, Cornwall.  
 Dr Lenora Elliot on "Prince of Darkness" 5.10c - Red Rocks, Nevada.





## COMPETITION 2002



Lianne Callaghan on "Centrefold" E35c Rhoscolyn Sea Cliffs.



3rd Place - Charesky Mountain Range NE Siberia. By Cpl Woodhead.



# Dabbling with the Dablam

After 18 months of bartering with Nepalis via emails, dead-cert people dropping out, and everyone wondering if we'd be killed by Maoist terrorists, I was finally on my way to Nepal to climb Ama Dablam. My idea was to organise an expedition and invite all my friends. Doing it at cost, rather than, say, paying Jagged Globe or any other expedition company, I hoped to make it more affordable. It still cost £2k per person and still required a month off work, which proved too much for many people. So the end head count was myself and two friends, Dean and Chris, along with a guide I know, Smiler, with Dean D, Mark D, and Mike.

In order to climb on the big peaks in Nepal you have to use a Nepalese trekking company to deal with the government on your behalf. They then organise your peak permit, sherpas, cooks and porters, liaison officer, radio permits, and garbage deposit. I used a trekking company that had supplied me a porter for the Annapurna Circuit a couple of years before. They were very experienced organising treks and trekking peaks (small – in Himalayan terms – climbing peaks), but this was to be their first full mountaineering expedition. I figured on not needing much assistance above base camp so their experience should be good enough.

By and large, this rationale worked well, although the two sherpas we had hired proved not to be much good on the mountain. The eldest Sherpa had summited Everest 4 times and had been on fourteen major expeditions. However, he wasn't a technical climber and at 44 years old was sporting a belly like Buddha-incarnate. We quickly realised he wouldn't be much good on the route – indeed when it came to it he 'developed' altitude sickness and stayed in base camp. He did prove to be a very effective Sirdar however. The younger Sherpa was keen but inexperienced and would qualify for his high altitude license if he summited.

Because of the Maoist insurgency in Nepal, all Nepalese had to carry identification or face being shot. For porters this meant they had to be registered as such and many of them had not done so. This meant that those that had registered were a scarce commodity – a fact they were acutely aware of, which pushed the price up from £2 to £5 a day to hire them. On one of the few problems we had with the trekking company we found that they significantly under-estimated the amount of porters we needed to carry all our climbing hardware and our food (mine particularly!). We ended up using 21 porters on the trek in to base camp for 8 climbers! I felt like I was leading a legion of thousands and so requested a sedan chair! This was out-voted by the rest of the team.

The trek in to base camp follows the Everest base camp route for five days before branching off at Pangboche. When I came this way in 1999 it had been atrocious weather and I didn't see a single mountain. This time it was quite different, with clear skies and a vista to die for – beautiful and famous mountains all around. When we reached Namche Bazaar we could see Everest

peaking over the top of Lhotse – breathtaking to say the least (or that might have been the big hill we were slogging up!).

Normally, the trail is teeming with people going up or coming back down from Everest base camp but because of the troubles we found it all but deserted. For me, this put a bit of a dampener on the trek. It's great to meet loads of different people and there's always a good buzz in each of the villages, particularly Namche, but this year it was eerily quiet.

After five days trekking we finally reached base camp. We then experienced what was to be the pattern of daily weather for our whole time here. In the morning it would be bitterly cold until the sun rose above the mountains, then it would be toasting hot until mid day, by which time cloud would rise up from the valley below and envelope us. Then we'd have either freezing fog all afternoon or snow. Today it was to be snow. Four inches of the stuff in one afternoon! All of us shuddered to think what conditions would be like further up the mountain.

Also joining us in base camp were two other teams, each led by mountaineering superstars. The German team was led by Hans Kammerlander who holds the record for the fastest ascent of the North ridge of Everest and for skiing down the North Col. His team was sponsored by a major German satellite channel and they made live broadcasts each day from base camp. His goal was to climb Ama Dablam in a single push from Camp 1 to Summit, wearing a head mounted camera and broadcasting live as he did it (nobody likes a show-off!).

The other team was American, led by Fabrizio Zangrilli. His claim to fame is accompanying Alan Hinkes on several of his ascents of 8000m peaks. At 29, he has already climbed Everest, Lhotse, and had backed off K2 in order to help some other climbers! Last winter he climbed the North face of Kusum Kangri, the hardest of the trekking peaks, in 24 hours. And then there was me. Feeling out of my depth? Moi?

Fabrizio had already been there for a couple of weeks and he and his client were struggling to place fixed rope along the route to Camp 2 due to the poor conditions. If someone like him struggles on what should be a straightforward route, then that should tell us something. Smiler informed me that the protocol in these situations was for us to offer to pay in some way for the use of his fixed ropes. We had only brought 100m of 8mm for fixing, as well as 600m of polypropylene (Fabrizio reckoned this was no better than washing line!). Hans also had a good quantity of decent fixed rope as well as a producer with a big budget, so the outcome of the horse-trading was that we just handed over the 8mm rope! Bargain!

Unfortunately for us, because of the conditions on the route Fabrizio never got above Camp 2 before he ran out of time and had to leave. This meant either Hans or us would

have to fix higher up. We had hoped to use fixed rope in situ from the previous season but these tended to be buried under snow or not following the line of the climb any more due to changing snow conditions.

And so we started our work, carrying loads up to Camp 1 and acclimatising. Camp 1 was 1000m higher than base camp, at just below 5700m, and was a 6-hour walk. We decided to use an advance base camp at half distance and height to improve our acclimatisation. We spent a night here before carrying loads to Camp 1. The altitude took its toll. The two Deans were suffering with headaches that weren't clearing – a sure sign that they were acclimatising badly – whilst Mike had developed a bad cough). If he went any higher before it cleared he stood a good chance of developing pulmonary oedema, which is fluid on the lungs. After only our 3rd day on the mountain, Dean and Smiler's two clients decided to quit. Their conditions were getting no better. It was a sad day when Dean left because it only left Chris with me now and my idea of an expedition with all my friends was looking dodgy. Chris had caught Mike's cough and was now getting worse himself.

So, with four of us remaining we pushed on to Camp 2. Fortunately Fabrizio had fixed this portion so we moved along quite quickly – about 3 hours. From Camp 1 to Camp 2 involves following a ridge, generally rock scrambling, until just below Camp 2, where you jumar about 40ft up a vertical wall. It's graded about HVS, but with big sacks and boots on, there was no way I was going to try climbing it. Camp 2 is used more as a kit dump rather than an actual camp. It gives great views up the route to Camp 3. Hans was just ahead of us on this day and he pushed on up towards Camp 3, fixing more of the route. Ideal – less for us to do. We returned to Camp 1 that day and descended to base camp for a rest.

When we returned a day later we needed to plan how we were going to tackle the next section of the mountain. As always when mountaineering, we had to trade off what food and equipment to take. Our young Sherpa, Tenzing, chose to bring the smallest rucksack possible, which was annoying, as we wanted him to carry the gear. We all had to carry big loads, which was no fun at all. Not when you've paid two locals £1000 to be your sherpas!

Smiler and his client opted to go first, taking Tenzing with them. They intended to camp at Camp 2 then move on to Camp 3 the next day. Chris and I would follow the day after and push straight on to Camp 3. By the next morning Chris had developed a chest infection and was struggling to speak. Sadly, this spelt the end of his climbing and he returned to base camp where he remained for the rest of the time.

This left me on my own at Camp 1 with the decision whether to climb alone and catch the others by the end of the day, or descend. I chose to climb. (cheesy or what!!) This was a safe thing to do as the route was all fixed, so all I had to do was clip on my jumar. But the feeling of isolation when I set out was intense.

I thought of Al Hinkes doing many of his routes in the same way and marvelled at his drive to keep pushing himself in these scary circumstances for days on end. For me it was only to be one day, but that was long enough.

I reached Camp 2 after the laborious jumar and could clearly see Smiler on the next section of mixed ground. Why hadn't they got further? Was there difficulty that I couldn't see and would it stop me, seeing as I was alone? I stopped to watch Smiler for a while, getting my composure for the next section. It was clear from watching him that they were moving very slowly, almost certainly due to the size of their sacks. I wasn't looking forward to this, and then seeing Smiler fall about 10 feet as a fixed rope anchor he was resting on failed didn't bolster my confidence in any way either! Once I was sure that anything they dislodged wasn't going to land on me I moved off.

The mixed climbing up the next section was littered with loads of old fixed rope. I found myself constantly having to swap my jumar as each different line that I picked ended abruptly. At this stage, I was using my jumar merely as a safety device rather than pulling up on it. The grade was probably Scottish II/III. This was tough work and the ice was rock hard. The mixed climbing turned into some good ice gullies, which were a joy to front point up. I constantly had to search out ledges to rest my calf muscles and lungs, and I used them as aiming marks for each burst of energy. I climbed until I got to each ledge, then collapsed, gasping for breath.

Finally the gullies topped out on to a snow ridge which was heavily crenellated and very exposed. This was a bit of a shock to me as

I had assumed, in my mind's eye, that Camp 3 was only just a short way above me, but I could now see it was still some distance and height along this scary ridge. I had nearly caught up with Smiler and the others by now. Tenzing was at the back, which surprised me. Smiler told me later that Tenzing had been sick that morning and had delayed their departure from Camp 2 by a few hours. He had tried to get Tenzing to descend; fearing altitude sickness, but Tenzing had refused. The day was getting on and we were all tired. At about 6200m this was the highest we had been so far and our unacclimatised bodies were feeling the effect of it.

Previous seasons' fixed ropes were either buried or suspended high in the air due to the changed shape of the ridge over the seasons. We didn't have our fixed rope with us as Hans had told us it was fixed to Camp 3, but it wasn't. Not sufficiently anyway. We had intended to bring it with the next load. Exhausted as we were, we decided to pitch tents for the night. Fortunately there was one spot on the ridge big enough for this and we had just passed it. After an hour or so of chipping away at ice to make a decent platform, we pitched tents and got a drink on. This was quite an airy perch to say the least.

I shared a tent with Tenzing, who was still not well. During the night he got a lot worse and I suspected cerebral oedema, where fluid around the skull crushes the brain. I fed him full of the dexamethasone I had, but he was constantly vomiting, so its effect was minimised. The only real answer to this situation is immediate descent. But it was now dark, we were all shattered and there was no way we would safely be able to evacuate him, so we had to sit it out until morning. Tenzing



AMA Dablam showing the route.



Packing up.

The author.



was convinced he was going to die (and I wasn't too sure he was going to make it either). During the night I woke him every hour to check on him and assess his consciousness. I felt completely helpless.

Amazingly, Tenzing did make it until morning, and even more amazingly he seemed to have recovered. This made me wonder whether he had just suffered from AMS rather than full blown cerebral oedema, and that due to his inexperience this had freaked him out, fearing that he did indeed have oedema. Having suffered quite a fraught night with him I wasn't too impressed. Smiler's last client decided to throw the towel in at this point so Smiler had to accompany him down. After a night like Tenzing had just had, he should have descended as well, but he refused my advice for him to do so. If he had, my expedition would have been over so I was kind of selfishly relieved that he refused. However, once we got higher, would the same thing occur again, I wondered?

Both of us were extremely nervous during the following day. We continued along the ridge, retrieving old fixed rope and using our climbing rope to fix through to Camp 3. It was clear we wouldn't have got there the previous day. Camp 3 felt quite airy and we could now look directly up to the Dablam – the hanging seracs half way up the face. The summit was only another 500m of ascent away. What we now should have done was collect our tents and return to Camp 3 – now we had fixed rope these were about an hour lower down the ridge. This would have given us a better chance at the summit. However, we were both tired and our nerves were frayed after the last 24 hours so we returned to the tent and made our tea.

The next day was to be our summit attempt. Seeing as we had no fixed rope I decided that we would climb alpine-style using our climbing ropes. We left the tent by 6am and it was bitterly cold. Within 10 minutes of leaving the tent I could no longer feel my hands. My feet were quickly following the same way. We've all had cold numb hands when ice climbing before, but this was the next stage. There wasn't a feeling of numbness, it was just nothing. This scared me. I wasn't about to lose body parts over this, so I stopped and warmed them until I could feel them again. Tenzing was going well and reached Camp 3 before me. When got there I could see he had only brought one axe with him. His other was back at the tent. The slope above is about 55 degrees and definitely not one-axe territory. He started trying to bluff me, telling me he'd be all right, but I knew he wasn't going to be leading today. Some Sherpa guide he turned out to be!

To gain the face we had to cross a bergschrund. Tenzing tried this with one axe and all his ice screws all over the shop – hanging like tin cups and frying pans off the back of his sack. I lost the plot. I shouted at him to come back and pulled all the rope in. He returned like a sulking child and sat down. I took all the gear off of him and organised it on a sling around my neck like a bandolier. I then set up a belay with a couple of snow stakes and set off on the lead,



The Team.

vowing to get my money back from the trekking agent when I got back to Kathmandu. When I had climbed 50m and belayed myself, Tenzing just climbed the rope with his Jumar. We did a mixture of pitched climbing and moving together up the slope for five or six rope lengths. This was horrendously hard work. My calf muscles were killing me and I needed to stop often, letting my breathing return to normal and put my lungs back in.

We were moving painfully slow, a fact later confirmed by the others in base camp who could see us, and the weather was getting progressively worse. By 2pm we were just above the Dablam with only 300m until the summit. Tenzing was now complaining of a tingling sensation running through his back. I didn't really comprehend what he was describing through his pigeon English, but then the thunder clapped and lightning struck nearby us. I immediately knew what he meant then! We were right in the centre of a lightning storm.

That was it – endex. There was no way I was prepared to push on any further. Our snow anchors were pretty poor due to the conditions and I didn't want to rely on them if one of us got hit by lightning. There were some rocks nearby, but I didn't want to shelter under anything like that as lightning likes things like that as well. There was no alternative – I was going down. At this point Tenzing cried. We were tired, in a lightning storm near the top of a mountain, with no shelter and no fixed rope to retreat down, and I now had a grown man crying. I was getting quite stressed and a little panicked and so Tenzing got it with both barrels from me. I didn't need this right now. I was trying to work out how to get down.

I had some rock pegs, so we moved over the rocks and I made a belay. Doubling our climbing ropes we then descended down. There was a fairly substantial old fixed rope buried just under the surface of the face that I had been partially excavating as I climbed up – just in case, I had thought to myself. This proved to be a good move as it gave us a good 100m abseil. I went first, getting Tenzing to use the climbing ropes as my safety backup. Once we were sure it would hold, Tenzing followed me. When we got down to Camp 3 the storm eased off. That had been pretty scary. We moved back to our tents and just laid there absorbed in our thoughts. That night I coaxed the last of the gas from the canister to cook our tea.

I had now been on the go for four days, working extremely hard, carrying big loads, eating very little, and most of the time either on my own or just with Tenzing. I was knackered. The others were back at base camp. We had now run out of gas. Time to go home.

I told Tenzing that I'd had enough and was going back down. He was clearly upset as it meant that he wouldn't get his high altitude license. Quite honestly, I didn't think he was ready for it, as he didn't possess the technical climbing skills necessary to lead others. For him, it would be difficult to get on another expedition without it and so it directly affected his future income.

We rested for the night before heading down. I was physically exhausted, having been so high and exerting so much for so long. Clearing everything from our Camp 3 and taking it down in one go meant huge rucksacks. The descent to Camp 2 was tortuous beyond belief, constantly having to switch abseil ropes as each one ended. I had to keep my crampons on nearly all the way back to Camp 1 due to the amount of snow that fell in yesterday's storm. Just to finish as I had started, it snowed all the way from Camp 1 back to base camp. I used the radio to get the cook's boy to come up to meet me and carry my sack back for me. I would never dream of doing this normally, but I was so tired. We met at advanced base camp and he had brought a flask of tea with him, for which I was really thankful. He then took my sack and ran at the double back to base camp. I had been looking forward to an unladen saunter back but I was embarrassed that he was moving quicker than me whilst carrying my sack and if I went slow he'd have to wait for me in this snowstorm with poor clothing. So he doubled me all the way back. Little sod!

When I got back to base camp it was all very emotional. The head sherpa (now recovered from his rice wine-induced altitude sickness) greeted me in tears, Tenzing had arrived earlier and had been in tears, Chris and Smiler greeted me with stiff upper lips and I realised it was all over and I hadn't summited. Not a good moment.

We had a massive meal that night but I no longer had any appetite. The cook was quite put out, but I just couldn't eat. We talked about the route and then we talked about everything we wanted to do when we got home, and then we turned in for the last night. The next day we were up early breaking camp. Hans and the German team had stayed in base camp since we had last seen him because the conditions weren't good enough to film in. During his live broadcast we sauntered past in the background, trying to get in to shot. He was looking at leaving a day or so after us. I later heard he 'bimble'd' up to the summit a

couple of days after my magnificent attempt. Our yaks arrived at about lunchtime and we left the sherpas to organise the loads for us. We gave all the staff their tips in a short little ceremony and then headed off for the long walk back to civilisation. By now I had inherited Chris' cough, whilst his had got better. By the time I got back to Kathmandu three days later I was in a poor state. Our trek back and our time in Kathmandu was uneventful. The trail was still pretty empty of people and Kathmandu was gripped in a Maoist-imposed national strike, so all the shops were shut.

So how do I feel now, six months later? Part of me looks at it positively. I organised a big expedition and nearly summited. I knew when enough was enough and turned back. Surely I'm richer for all that? But I'm still gutted that I didn't summit. I've got half a notion to do it all again to finish it off, but I know I never will. Things could have gone better, but we didn't fail because of just one thing. People got ill (unavoidably) and this affected team morale and the logistics of the climb. We never trained as a team before we went and consequentially lacked a unity of purpose or commitment. The weather made things quite unpleasant most afternoons and curtailed the day's climbing. The two sherpas were of no use above base camp, so we had to do that work ourselves. When we got to camp 3 we should have moved the tents there and returned to Camp 1 to rest, rather than trying for the summit. All these things had an affect and all of them contributed in some way.

I've climbed at altitude twice now and like many people say you can climb harder, more technical routes faster in the Alps, so unless you really get off on the hardship side of high altitude then it's not for you. In this case it's no longer for me. Where's my next challenge? I'm still thinking of it.

To conclude on one of Smiler's many pearls of wisdom, no doubt poached from someone else... "Come back. Come back safe. Come back friends"





Below rock step on Hohlaubgrat on Alairhorn.



Rescue Helicopter.



The author.

Rob - summit ridge of Ober Gablehorn.



## Joint Service Alpine Meet (JSAM) 2002

by Damien Gartland

I don't know what it is about the JSAM but I only ever seem to find the time, or should I say get the permission to attend at the end of a 2-year tour. This has the clear advantage of allowing you sufficient time to organise travel, finances and plan routes with little feeling of guilt (The CR is in the bag and that glorious "days to do" feeling makes everything so much more enjoyable). However the flip side to this euphoria is that I inevitably start a new job as soon as I return and the necessary administration, debt clearance with the RAO and the compulsory PXR are difficult to fit in. To that end, I now find myself in mid November, finally finding the time to write my AMA article. So my apologies if I miss you out, but my memory is fading with the passage of time and fuddled with too much new information.

I had been looking forward to a responsibility free JSAM, but unfortunately the Army Leader, Andy Stevens was forced to pull out with an injury at the last minute. Fortunately for me, Andy had already completed the vast majority of the administration and selection, making my roll as stand in, far from taxing. On behalf of everyone who attended JSAM 2002, "Thank you Andy".

JSAM 2002 was based in the small Swiss village of Saas Grund and it was the Royal Navy who had the task as this years lead Service. The overall Meet Leader was Lt CDR Neil Hicking, a highly experienced and technically proficient alpine mountaineer. His advice and guidance were invaluable and his witty bar room tales legendary. He too deserves our thanks.

The Mischabel campsite in Saas Grund proved to be more than adequate and the staff were extremely helpful. As is becoming the norm, not all the AMA participants reported for duty. I find this action very ignorant and totally unacceptable. What made this year's failures

all the more intolerable has been the fact that those AMA members also failed to get in touch before or after the exercise. No explanation has been given nor apology offered (But enough of my griping). Those that did attend showed immense dedication. Richard Hathway completed a solo journey that fully fitted the criteria for a screenplay of Planes, Trains and Automobiles II, while Jeanne Ebling and Sean Stewart both had an interesting 24 hours without any baggage. Following 2 different flights, to 2 different airports, on 2 different airlines, they achieved the same result; both were left in the clothes they stood in and not a climbing harness between them. Ingenuity and a healthy credit rating soon solved their problems.

JSAM 2002 was unusual in that the Joint aspect of the meet was more pronounced than in previous years, and this is in my opinion is a very good thing. Members of the Joint Service Makalu expedition formed a tri service group of climbers, in preparation for their forthcoming trip. The Joint Service High Altitude Team trained together throughout the week under the expert tutelage of Martin Price an ex RM ML and the venerable chairman of the RN&MMMC Andy Hughes. The remaining individuals joined together on a number of mixed service ropes in the friendly melee that was the campsite. Much debate and banter followed the foolhardy statement by Rob Magowan that a climb completed outside the guidebook time did not count. The overarching aim for all ascents became "good style" and to be recognised as a Brit was decidedly bad form. (This proved somewhat difficult when climbing with Sam who habitually dressed in cut off Ronhills, but we tried).

Finally to the mountaineering. Day 1 saw all JSAM participants attending a mandatory Glacier Revision day. The Army contingent guided again this year by Mac, moved up to

the Langeflue Hotel in appalling rain. After one aborted attempt and rejuvenated with a fiendishly expensive hot chocolate we finally put crampon to ice. The revision day is always useful and after lots of debate, demonstration and practice, we at least knew what each rope would do in the event of a fall. Mac stayed with his novice group throughout the first week, introducing them to the realities of the lengthy walk in, the practicality of the speedy (but expensive) cable car option and the obligatory delights of hut living. During the week they bagged two 4000m peaks and a number of worthwhile routes. More importantly they all became proficient in glacial travel and were eager to branch further afield in the second week, in what proved to be an excellent introduction to alpine mountaineering. I hope to see some of them again on future JSAMs.

The weather throughout the period was mixed. Fortunately the dreadful rain of day 1 was not repeated, but high winds, cloud and snow prevented the classic high ridges in the area from seeing much action. Good news for North faces though, and a number of parties climbed the NNE face of the Allalinhorn, (a short and easy for it's grade AD+/D-) and the NNE face of the Lenzspitze, (an altogether more sustained and serious outing at D+). It is worthy of note that this year's alpine lunatic, a Dutch man, sharing our campsite, was in the process of attempting to ski down this route. His early practice was very unsuccessful and resulted in a monstrous black eye and a 20m fall (or so he claimed, and he had no reason to boast about it) down the bergschrund. It was decided that this was not, "in good style", as he fell without the aid of a rope, a climbing second or 2 axes. On the plus side, no one mistook him for and Brit.

As is always the case in the Alps, the best routes appear to be located in the next valley. As a result, Zermat saw a number of visits, with Castor and Pollux offering some good routes. I climbed the ENE ridge on the Ober Gabelhorn just before the weather closed in

(again) and recommend it as a long, committing but extremely fine outing. Rob declared it "a classic AD" and for once I had to agree and could not complain about my alpine nemesis, Christian Klucker the first ascentist (But he would catch up with me again later in the trip). The Matterhorn finally came into condition during the closing days of the trip and saw a number of ascents on the Hornli ridge. A naval traverse of the Smut / Horneli should be noted (though not for it's guidebook time) and their account is almost enough to lure me back to that dreadful peak.

However most of the action was undoubtedly focussed in the Saas valley. Numerous ascents of the Weismiess and Lagginhorn and the Alphubel and Allaninhorn made the Britania and the Hosaas huts seem like a NAAFI bar. But for the most part the area is big enough to find some solitude if that is your preference. The Army contingent fulfilled the full range of alpine climbing activities. Snow plods in abundance, mixed routes, popular valley cragging and even a spot of via Ferratta on the Jegihorn. The activities were slightly marred by a late climbing accident, which resulted in a helicopter rescue and unfortunately I was more than involved.

After a night at the Schonbielhutte in the middle of week 2, we were climbing as 2 ropes of 2 on the S ridge of the Pte de Zinal. We remained true to our principles of jointery and rope one consisted of Rob (RM) and myself, while rope 2 combined Sam (Army) and Simon (RAF). The first obstacle (and the start of the climbing) was a short 4m abseil into a breche followed by a 6m climb back to the crest of the ridge. Rob and I had abseilled down and Rob had climbed on to rejoin the ridge. Sam and Simon had followed into the breche and were pulling through on their rope as I began to climb. The breche was formed by a tight corner and a block the size of a phone kiosk, which reduced the break in the ridge to a matter of inches as its base. Having climbed the large block I moved onto the face, stepping up onto a 12 inch ledge. Suddenly the rock to



Who knows where?



Grand Gendarme ENE ridge Ober Gablehorn  
S ridge of Pte de Zinal - Matterhorn in background.

Simon rescue.





*Comice on ENE ridge Ober Gablehorn.*

my left fell away causing a further rock fall below. As the rocks fell Sam and Simon watched helplessly. We have all read accounts of infamous accidents in climbing books (and this is as close as I ever want to come to having one) but everything did slow down and for a split second everything was calm and surreal. Fortunately both Sam and Simon were on a long anchor and had freedom to move. Sam gained some cover under a slight protrusion directly below the main fall and Simon moved flat against the far wall of the corner. In a matter of seconds the fall ended. The kiosk-sized rock was gone and the corner was now a very noticeable breche across the whole ridge. The breche was now much different, much more open and more exposed. Sam, (shaken not stirred), was fortunately not injured. Simon however had his leg trapped under a lager boulder the size of a wide

screen TV. An attempt by me to move proved that the face was still loose, but also that Rob still had me on a tight rope from above. He quickly lowered me the 3m to the unstable platform below.

Sam reacted quickly and I can confirm that he has a firm if matronly bedside manner. The rock was moved sufficiently for Simon to drag his leg free and Sam administered more first aide. (His bandaging, while highly effective did not score well for artistic merit). On closer inspection Simon had a perfect halfpenny side hole in the flesh above his shin and a number of scratches that were bleeding heavily. He was in a lot of pain and was quickly going into shock; we prescribed high power "Duncans" chocolate, for a diagnosed a broken shin and cleverly assessed that he could not climb out. Fortunately the following party had caught

up and were now looking down from the top of the abseil and asking if we required help. In true military fashion we were planning cunning hoists and clever pulleys, improvised stretchers were high on the agenda and so was self-evacuation. However with true German effeciency they suggested we call the mountain rescue. They were right. One short Teutonic phone call later and the helicopter was tasked. All we had to do was make ourselves safe and wait.

It took some minutes for the last of the rocks to stop echoing off the glacier below and it was only then that we realized the full potential for the disaster we had so narrowly missed. Attempts to recover the abseil rope buried in the rock were soon stopped when we realized that the jumble of boulders that we were stood on was far from consolidated. We backed up our rock protection, again.

*Accident S ridge Pte de Zinal.*





*N Ridge of Weissmies.*

The views were spectacular down over the Schonbiel glacier and across to the steep walls of the Wandflue. I certainly felt very small and very vulnerable. Unfortunately any thoughts of a helicopter ride to the valley (and I was seriously contemplating them) were dashed by bootneck determination. "You're not injured, so you are climbing up" was Rob's logic, and it was hard to fault.

Soon we heard the helicopter and moments later saw it sweep into view. Having assessed the situation the guide was lowered to our position. He met every stereotype imaginable. Young, tanned and fit looking he was dressed like an advert for Black Diamond. He did not once remove his Oakley sunglasses (despite being in deep shade) and refused steadfastly to clip into our system (perhaps he knew something we didn't). Fortunately he was also very profes-

sional and the fact that he was risking his life for us was not was not missed. He arranged for Simon to be lifted off first and then despite Sam and my protests, while we waited he began to hack at the buried rope with Sam's ice axe (his own were far too sharp and prytaine to waste on rock and rope). The whole jumble of rocks juddered, moved, then held. He decided to leave the rope and we sighed with relief. All too soon the helicopter returned, Sam was lifted off, followed by the guide and all too quickly, I was alone. The whole incident from initial rock fall to last man off had taken less than an hour.

When Rob had finally finished taking photos and talking to the ever growing number of international spectators (accidents make for great viewing) he took me on a very tight rope and up I climbed. He was totally unfazed by the incident and was enjoying his

part as rescue coordinator, helicopter handler and international interpreter. Life was very different at my end of the rope. I did not want to be there and I had serious doubts about the sanity of climbing. Bobble hatted hillwalking suddenly seemed very appealing. These doubts were not helped as Rob set off along the very narrow ridge only to perch on a visibly teetering pinnacle above a much larger abseil. The international crowd gasped, gesticulated then sighed, as Rob returned and eventually found the true abseil point. The next 2 pitches were personally unpleasant and I focussed very closely on the rock to my front. I was very conscious of every move, critical of every hold; my world had reduced to limits that I could touch. It was not until the 3rd pitch that my confidence returned, as did the views and the glory of the position. For the most part the route is as the guidebook says on good rock and it was thoroughly enjoyable. I noted the first ascensionist with amusement, "C Klucker", strikes again.

A sense of responsibility saw us turn our back on the Mountet hut and the Zinalrothorn, our proposed objective for the next day. The slog back down a very slushy glacier in the early afternoon was unpleasant and the long walk back to Zermat and then Tach was long, hot and sweaty. When we finally arrived at the hospital in Sion blistered and sore Simon had come and gone. An x-ray had revealed a chipped, but not a broken shin and he had been cleaned up with a series of internal sutures and sent on his way. I was expecting a large burden of paperwork and administration, but Richard, the RAF leader had already informed the appropriate authorities and everyone appeared happy. We found Simon hobbling around the campsite in a state of alcohol fuel sedation and euphoria. The next morning he was fine, but sore; his JSAM was over. Neil even made a joke about it (which he then continued to repeat to anyone prepared to or foolish enough to listen) "The Army caused the accident, the RAF suffered the casualty and did the administration, but the Navy picked up the bill". It was, as I said earlier, a truly "Joint" JSAM.

Having got straight back into the saddle (I can not recommend it strongly enough) and with the weather holding, everyone headed back up the hill to climb one last mountain. A deep patch of unsettled weather was threatening from the SW and time was clearly running out. We chose the N Ridge of the Weissmies, another route that comes with a top recommendation. Following an enjoyable clamber along a broken ridge and a good steep plod on firm neve to the top we summited just in time as cloud enveloped the whole chain in a still eerie whiteness.

All good things come to an end and so did JSAM with the onset of bad weather. Overall it was a very productive 2 weeks. Some excellent routes were climbed (all in guidebook time, if you allow for stoppages and helicopter rescues) and the aspiration of "in good style" was met in full. My only problem now is how to engineer a mid tour JSAM for Chamonix in 2003.

*Accident S ridge Pte de Zinal.*



*Abseil on S ridge of Pte de Zinal.*



# MANAGING ADVENTURE AND RISK

By Nigel Williams, Glenmore Lodge

Although I am no longer close to adventure training (AT) in the services and therefore unaware of all the facts, I am still very involved with the outdoor "industry" (terrible phrase). I have to agree with some of the recent articles from Tania Noakes, Rowland Woolven and also Mark Hedge. They all seem to be saying that the adventure is being taken out of AT. I see similarities between the military and civilian world of outdoor education v education and training v AT and the need for credibility.

In the civilian world of outdoor education / activities we have to operate under a government Health and Safety Executive licensing scheme, run by the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority (AALA) or "Allah". (Briefly, this scheme only applies to organizations offering specific outdoor programmes to under18 where payment for the activity is involved. Schools, clubs, and youth organizations are currently exempt).

The services use AT generally for similar aims to civilian outdoor programmes but the justification for adventure and real personal challenge is perhaps more obvious. Military AT should provide realistic planning and leadership challenges, opportunities for soldiers to face perceived and occasionally real risk there by developing confidence and coping strategies when faced by personal challenges both as individuals and importantly, as teams. Adventure training is a wonderful medium for teaching soldiers the theory of leadership and teams as well as simple things like how to cook and survive long periods on 24 hour ration packs. (They have time to cook and experiment and the CQMS is not going to arrive after only one day).

Personally I think that AT as with outdoor education in our schooling has not been able to sell itself because of the holistic and often spiritual nature of the activity. We live in a time where education requires empirical evidence of results not statements from the heart about the activities being challenging, developmental, sometimes life changing.

If they think about it, most AMA members go out into the hills to recreate, the words are re - create. We re - create our inner selves through our connections to the environment and the landscape. Nothing to do with qualifications or training!

## I blame the media

The issue of qualifications and responsibility is a very challenging one in this litigious society and we also face a media barrage when anything to do with the outdoors comes along. The press have always loved stories of daring do going back to Whympers time.

As far as I am aware over the 35 years or so that the ML summer award has existed there is no record of a death to anyone being looked after by an ML summer holder so long as they have been operating within the remit of that award. The minimum requirement to gain an ML is 40 quality hill days, 11 days training and assessment and a first aid certificate. It is therefore interesting to consider that around 20 hours training and experience with a 1 hour test and no first aid training will get you a driving license - 3,500 people killed every year on our roads, around 100,000 deaths over the same time span. Sadly a proportion of those are service personnel. The building industry has over 100 deaths per year. More people die of accidents in the home or even just falling down stairs than in the mountains.

## Experience is recognized in the civilian world of AT.

There is no legal requirement for a qualification in the UK to instruct outdoor activities. But going through the process of qualifications provides one with a lot of experience along the way. As head of training at the National Centre in Scotland, each year I employ as many as 70 different free lance staff to help run our programme. Occasionally I will employ someone known to be experienced & competent for the proposed level of activity, but unqualified. Usually they will have had some form of recognized training. In the civilian world this is totally acceptable within the AALA guidelines. A well-qualified mountaineer (a technical expert) can authorize and take responsibility for another competent mountaineer to lead or teach others. However they should have spent time with that person and observed them working in that capacity and should formally record the process. You can find yourself making a judgement about someone else's judgement.

I do not really know whether this happens these days in the services, I am sure it does with new members of staff at the JSMTCs which have plenty of technical experts. The problem in the regiments is that the CO is often not a technical expert and there may be none in the regiment to offer advice. Perhaps there is a mechanism where in certain situations a technical expert can be brought in to have a practical session with the aspiring leader, and take a thorough look at what is proposed and how the risk is going to be managed prior to approval being granted.

## Risk and responsibility

We need to be very careful to talk about RISK not safety and MANAGING not minimizing the risk. It is a leadership responsibility to manage risk and that is best done by those with experience which leads to sound judgment (not necessarily qualifications).

The problem for those in senior positions of responsibility is that the risks in adventure training are (incorrectly) perceived to be very high due to the media interest, (the insurance industry makes the same mistake), so it is difficult for them to accept that experience in AT like every thing else in life comes from accidents and making mistakes. Admittedly though simple mistakes in AT can often have sad consequences, but it is the same live firing or driving. They can use the statistic about ML holders above to justify that qualifications equals safety. It therefore seems logical to those with responsibility for safety to regulate it, it's much easier to administer a system that says qualifications only.

## The Credibility of Adventure Training.

I think that there are links between risk management by MOD and the uses and abuses of AT. There have been years of abuse of the ethics of adventure training largely brought about by the "I want every soldier to have two weeks adventure training this year" statements by COs, (often under pressure from above) when there is patently not the instructors or equipment in the unit to enable this. Those junior officers faced with the predicament of having no qualifications could plan little that would provide them with funding, they simply had to adopt containment strategies to keep the soldiers out of the pubs yet amuse them cycling, swimming etc. all in the name of AT. (Believe me - I know I have been one of those young officers and 20 years on, Norwegian Lodge set aside for service groups to adventure train from is the next building to my house!) It is therefore not surprising that when these folk reach senior decision making appointments they are cynical about the value of AT. Of course the CO sees the planning and leadership side away from the routine of barracks a very important development for young leaders, and so it is, but not on the back of AT. Call it something else, and give AT a proper credible identity. The more AT is abused and watered down the less credibility it will have and the less interested senior management will be in supporting and managing it in a pro active manner.

With little in the way of a structure and learning outcomes to provide credible evidence

of the good use made of adventure training senior management has an excuse for not wanting to be seen taking risks with employees partaking in what they perceive as trivial pursuits.

### **APTC involvement**

I have watched, listened and participated in the arguments for many years and yes there have been some interesting appointments from time to time.... But, one Corps having the majority share holding has the advantage of being able to grasp this issue of structured training in a co-ordinated way and I believe it has the expertise at this moment in time. However there is an unhealthy side to this because senior management may or already have become remote from quality AT and consider it a minor subject and someone else's issue. Senior Officers and NCOs who are active AMA members are vital to keeping some of the ethos alive and in the minds of HQ staffs.

At one time I thought MOD needed to recognise the value of AT and that learning outcomes are boring bits of theory that take away the spontaneity and fun. But now I realise you can have both and use spontaneity and adventure to provide experiences that can facilitate learning. AT is a means to an end, not an end in itself. I think AT has got to justify its' value if it wants to be taken seriously.

A technical qualification does not indicate good training. How can a JSMELE or an MIC for that matter, facilitate training outcomes if they know little of the theory of developing individuals, teamwork, leadership, facilitation skills etc. that can be applied to military service? Could the AT world provide a course on this subject area which combined with outdoor qualifications would help AT raise its' profile. Similar notions are being expressed in the civilian world in order to try to get outdoor education recognition and on the main-stream education agenda.

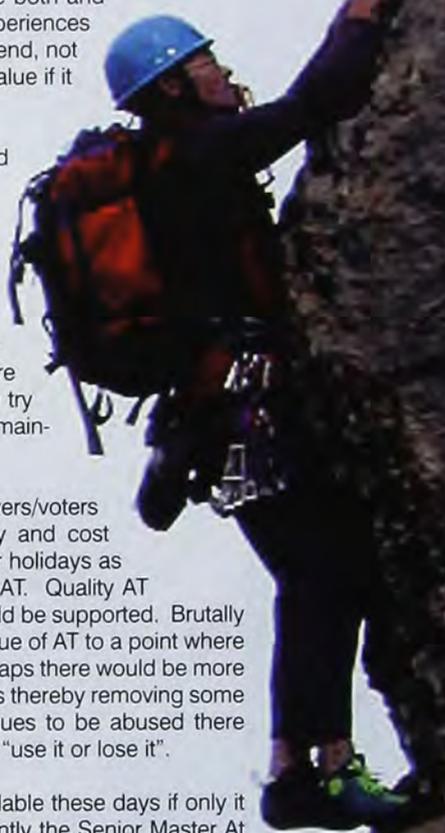
A dispassionate view might be this: tax payers/voters expect MOD to occupy its employees usefully and cost effectively so adventure for adventure sake is for holidays as are platoon outings that go under the guise of AT. Quality AT that is facilitated to meet training objectives should be supported. Brutally honest I know but it might suddenly raise the value of AT to a point where it was better understood, better funded and perhaps there would be more time made available for training and qualifications thereby removing some of the barriers over qualifications. If AT continues to be abused there might come a time when a "bean counter" says "use it or lose it".

There is a wealth of information and theory available these days if only it can be applied. Lt Col Phil Watkins APTC currently the Senior Master At Arms made some major in roads into the educational methods and benefits of AT more than 10 years ago but in general it seems to remain poorly understood and is rarely facilitated to good effect, but I'll leave that discussion for another day. Try looking at [www.outdoor-learning.org](http://www.outdoor-learning.org) in particular their book list is a treasure trove.

### **The AMA and adventure training**

Actually the two are at odds, the AMA is about enjoyment and adventure for ourselves in the outdoors not really about instructing, qualifications and learning outcomes. An AMA only expedition of enthusiasts ought to be able to go on a trip regardless of qualifications but with appropriate experience.

The regulations however are the same whether members of an association or not. The catch is we want to do it in working time and MOD say they support that principle but only with qualifications and not experience.



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reality and frustration for AMA members is caused by the fact that most have to carry out their AT with novices at unit level and so need technical qualifications. It is the level of the participants that needs careful consideration.

### What about the participants?

A key factor often overlooked in my view is the participants themselves. Much AT by the nature of its aims will involve soldiers with little real understanding of the activity and the risks involved, often they are not volunteers and they are under 18 which legally adds a significantly greater responsibility and duty of care onto the leaders. The aims should therefore be of an appropriate level and staff leading the training probably ought to be qualified. This in itself is a challenge, as training with novices tends to be a platoon or troop level responsibility often with young and inexperienced leaders. Good quality AT as part of junior officer and NCO training can help play a valuable part in managing this issue.

There is no easy solution to any of this, there have been a number of recent high profile debates about adventure and risk. The whole of society is struggling with it and the Services tend to mirror society. MOD have a duty to protect their employees, so followers who are young and those with little knowledge should be protected from over ambitious minimally qualified leaders. They are not there to provide opportunities for leaders to fill their logbooks. On the other hand members of a club are like-minded people, consenting to the inherent risks (and rewards). As with clubs and AALA it would be great if the AMA members could turn the clock back and be allowed to do their own thing under more relaxed guidelines yet crucially have it still approved as training. (Watch out for the platoon commander who gets his whole platoon to join the AMA in order to bypass the system, good for membership fees though).

Although perhaps there are two issues here, one of credibility and one of freedom to mountaineer, the profile of AT by the masses has not helped the case and the argument for technical qualifications is not the whole story.

Nigel Williams,  
Glenmore Lodge.

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## AMA Summer Bank Holiday Meet and Rock Climbing Workshop, 25-28 August 2002

By Capt K P Edwards APTC (AMA Meets Co-Coordinator)

The AMA Summer Bank Holiday Meet is a new idea to fill the gap between the Spring Meet in the Peak District and the New Year Meet in Scotland. The aim of the Meet was to offer the opportunity for rock climbers to experience a different area for climbing as well as organising refresher training and coaching workshops to improve personal performance. The Meet had the added attraction of providing the option to gain the Rock Climbing Proficiency award and MLTB SPA Training or Assessment. JSMTW Ripon hosted the Meet this year with the kind permission of the Commandant JSMTWC. As a result the participants had the benefit of the full facilities at Ripon, warm dry accommodation, showers, full messing arrangements as well as the resources available in the main centre.

Twenty-nine personnel gathered at Deverell Barracks arriving throughout Friday night and well into the wee small hours having braved the Bank Holiday traffic. It was pleasing as the Meet Leader to have such a fantastic turn out and made the organising of this event so rewarding. There was a good mix of personnel representing a broad range of ranks from a RAF SAC based in Northern Ireland to a Royal Marine Commanding Officer based in Southampton and included four budding female climbers. In addition we had three guest instructors, Henry Methold and Roy Henderson who were on loan from JSMTW, Ballachulish and Capt Graham Carter. They had volunteered their time to assist with the Meet as well as providing expertise as MLTB SPA Providers.

Saturday morning commenced with an introduction to the theme of the Meet as well as a safety brief. Despite many people turning up as a climbing partnership, many had also arrived without knowing anyone. It was therefore decided that everyone would go to the same climbing venue. Ilkley was chosen as the ideal site to introduce everyone to the peculiarities of climbing on gritstone. As we arrived the heavens opened with the first and only rain we experienced throughout the Meet. Undaunted we began the programme with refresher skills training on the belay chain. We split up into three smaller groups to facilitate the training, which was an opportunity for each person to share ideas on common best practice and discuss the merits from the basics to advanced rope work. This proved to be a great icebreaker and it gave time for the weather to clear and the crag to dry out. The remainder of the day was both hot and sunny. The group split into their old or newly established pairs and by the end of the first day everyone had enjoyed about seven routes with a healthy sense of competition emerging amongst the top climbers. The day was rounded off with a traditional pub dinner.

Sunday saw the entire team opt to climb at Brimham Rocks, a delightful venue. The day started with a personal performance coaching session organised by Graham Carter. In usual Graham

style he made it look so easy to crimp, rock over, mantle and jam. The climbers were certainly enjoying themselves by throwing themselves into the spirit of the session as well as learning a great deal to improve their technique. The conditions were superb for climbing and once again many routes were ticked off with many pushing their grades to new limits. The team decided to descend onto the take away pizza parlour in Ripon, grab a few cans of beer and were then treated to a presentation back at the centre on a recent AMA Mount Logan expedition by the Leader, Major Will Manners RE. The audience was spellbound by the exploits of Will and his team and it may just have inspired them to organise an endeavour of their own.

Monday and Tuesday were dedicated towards SPA Training and Assessment for the eight candidates with the remainder of the groups splitting up to accompany us to a choice of crags. The SPA Trainees visited Peak Scar and Almscliffe and the Assessment candidates visited Almscliffe and Slipstones. Again the weather stayed fine and many more routes were added to the bulging logbooks.

By Tuesday evening the feedback from everyone indicated that the Meet had been a tremendous success. Four had passed SPA, four had completed SPA Training and two had gained the RCP award. Although the hands were now beginning to show signs of severe gritstone rash almost everyone had achieved an approximate total of twenty-five routes each.

I look forward to seeing some of our new members at the AMA AGM. Look out for details of the New Year Meet (contact Sgt Belsham 01962 887464 or 07817 080407)

Feedback from the MLTB-Notes from the Executive Secretary

One of the on-going problems is the volume of applications for exemption from ML (S) Training from candidates seeking to go direct to a ML (S) Assessment.

In regard to the number of days of experience some candidates seem to think that they are trying to total either the 20 days pre-training or the 20 days pre-assessment. What the MLTB is after is BOTH. In other words the 40 days required before attending an Assessment.

The second matter is in regard to the nature of a quality mountain day. In the logbook the MLTB need some detail to work out the demands of that day so route taken, weather etc are all useful. This should be a daily record rather than a summary along the lines of "Spent a week in the Lakes and went up Helvellyn, Scafell and did a circuit of Langdale". The MLTB look for variety in venues and also expect that entries are not substantially repeated. They would also recognise that if someone is in a led party ascending Ben Alder then they have gained some experience but it is of a different order to the experience gained on a solo trip on the same route. So if days out are quite obviously in a led party or organised group they will tend to play down the value of that experience.

Overseas experience is an ongoing difficulty and all that the MLTB will say is that they leave it up to the judgement of the individual as to the similarity of the terrain, navigation and mapping to the UK. They do sometimes make judgements that lead them to disregard some foreign entries as part of the 40-day tally. The final point that they emphasise is that logs that just manage to make up 39? days by including all the days on the UEL/MLT course rarely impress.





## WHY SKI MOUNTAINEER? PART 2

By Damien Plant

*"The slow rhythm of the ascent as the sun gradually lights up the snowfields; the pleasure of the summit halt after a long and hard climb; the joy of the descent, picking a line down the untracked snow of an unknown valley; the pleasures of comradeship; the fun and banter when touring with old friends; these are just a few of the intangibles that go to make up our sport".*

### Introduction

This comment from Jeremy Whitehead (author of the *Alpine Ski Touring and Mountaineering Handbook*) provides one person's summary of the appeal of ski mountaineering. I use it here because I believe the beginning and end of the quote would immediately be recognised by Army mountaineers. The middle third however illustrates the added advantage for the skier - the chance of a quick descent that is at least as enjoyable as every other aspect of the route. Indeed it reveals that the descent on ski allows one to exit the mountains by a completely different route; often one which is more remote and will in any case allow the traveller to see an otherwise unvisited area.

### Going Down

Speaking personally I have to say that the descent on foot has never been a favourite; it either seems to be getting dark, slippery and grotty (Scotland), or hot and dehydrating (bigger mountains abroad). In either instance one is usually knackered and, dare I say this, devoid of enthusiasm. This gap is filled for me by the descent on ski, which is exciting, and can be immensely testing.

### Hmm, Compromise...

There are compromises involved. Some peaks do not allow a ski-ascent and, in order to make the most of a descent one needs to be fresh, meaning perhaps less testing goals. There is inevitably more kit involved and the danger that some of it will fail. Ultimately there is less choice, particularly if

## Ex-Alpine Serpent

Capt Jaishan Mahan

Ex-Alpine Serpent was a 7 man expedition from 16 Close Support Medical Regiment in the French Alps. The aims were to introduce novices to Alpine mountaineering and to climb Mt. Blanc. The highest point in Western Europe at 4807m. The team was made up of a mix of officers and soldiers from the unit, including a representative from our TA Squadron 144. The Ex started early one Monday morning in the age-old tradition of Army ventures, with a cookhouse fry up. 'Good for the spirit if not the heart' was the

general medical opinion. We then travelled to Gatwick to meet up with our guide Mac Mackay. Mac was an ex PT Corps mountain instructor and now works as a civilian guide around the world.

After a short flight to Geneva and a few hours on a coach, we suddenly found ourselves in the midst of the Alps. 'They're a bit big, aren't they?' was a sentiment expressed by one of our would be alpinists, and echoed by the rest of the group. We spent the rest of the evening settling into our hostels and preparing for the next day. The following found us on the Mer de Glace, a glacier used for training. Mac soon put us through paces, revising rope work and winter mountain

skills. We finished the day raring to go and keen to get into the big stuff! Wednesday morning took us up the Col du Midi for an acclimatisation trek that finished up at a mountain hut at about 3600m. Although not too long a day, the effect of the altitude left us feeling quite tired, to say the least. The pain was to spend a night at altitude and the attempt Mt. Blanc du Tacul the next day. Although a 4000m peak Mac thought as a 'fit' Army group it would be good fun! The following morning at 4am, picking our way up the 'Tacul' fun was not the prevalent emotion!

However, after a cold hard climb our efforts were rewarded by great views over the Alps,



one intends to use a hut system. This is likely given that major load-carriers tend to take the edge off one's skiing ability; there is only so much face planting one needs on a tour!

However

The compromises can be overcome however. Skis can be carried (or left behind) for final technical pitches, goals can be extended as one gains in confidence and fitness. The equipment can be fixed with a lightweight repair kit and some ingenuity. There is still a wide range of destinations where huts can be used (and they may often be in less populated areas) and, with a bit of organising, tented base camps can be established which allow lightweight tours off to a series of objectives. Finally, many options are opened up which are simply not feasible on foot. Snow-shoes don't quite achieve the same effect...

Life is a Journey

I have always been drawn to expeditions that involve journeying rather than laying siege to a fixed objective. This to me is ski mountaineering's strongest hand; allowing one to follow a natural line across a mountain range or glacier and including diversions to climb peaks or gain spectacular views. For those readers who are as inspired by the travels of Cook, Shackleton or Thesiger as by the feats of Whympfer, Hunt and Messner this will strike a cord.

In this article I have sought to communicate a bit more of my own personal enthusiasm.

As your ski mountaineering rep my investigations, so far, have identified a number of individuals with a shared passion, and far more experience. The British Mountaineering Council have approached me about the AMA getting involved in representing Britain at international competitions and I am regularly hearing about new contacts to follow up. One website I recommend visiting is [www.eagleskiclub.org.uk](http://www.eagleskiclub.org.uk).

The AMA will soon be sending out another census. I have fed in some questions, which I hope will provide some feedback to the committee on interest in ski mountaineering. Please let them know if you'd like to see more activity on this front by answering the appropriate questions.

The next two articles will consider more closely the possibilities of Ski Touring and Ski Mountaineering (see the definitions in the last edition). Between now and then I am hoping to get off and actually do some touring, so there may also be an article about Ex Canmore Diamond. Until then those who are interested are once again advised to investigate the courses offered by JSMTI Indefatigable and the British Alpine Centre, Bavaria. Keep an eye out also for Ex Northern Challenge 3000, led by Major Kevin Edwards and which will include ski ascents of up to 25 peaks in the Canadian Rockies. He can be reached on 94740 2085. I remain contactable at:

Damienp@btinternet.com  
01634 822377  
Chatham Mil 2377



well worth the slog! The remainder of the day was spent descending to the valley to prepare for the big one the next day. The ascent of Mt. Blanc is not quite a simple undertaking, and every year several people lose their lives on the massif. A worrying fact, as causing the CO a manning crisis was not a stated expedition aim! The climb started with a long trek to a point known as the 'Grande Couloir', this gully acts as funnel for regular avalanches and rock falls. The exposed area is 100m across, and in this modern age there is a sophisticated method of crossing it, you run for it! Luckily, we all made it across in one piece, and continued on a classic alpine route of rock and ice to the hut. The Gouter hut at over 3800m was

our overnight stop. Unfortunately, by this point the strain was starting to show in our group. A couple of the party were thoroughly exhausted and not feeling well. After a bit of scoff we all hit the sack in preparation for an early start.

Summit day started at 3am, we were now down to five as two of the party opted to wait in the hut, as they weren't feeling too well. The pressure was on from the start as the weather forecast predicted high winds for later in the day, and the final part of the route was an exposed ridge to the top. After an hour, the guide decided to split the group, three of us would push for the summit and he would continue with the other climber who

was making slower progress. There was a narrow window in the weather and Mac was concerned about the conditions later in the day. The following few hours became a blur as we retreated into the recessed of our gortex jackets! The wind on the summit ridge was gusting to 50kph and the temperature was -30 deg C. However, we pressed on and finally made the top, tired and frozen. Our departure from the top was a little delayed though, as we had to thaw out our cameras for the obligatory photos. Mission accomplished, we raced down to the others and headed for the valley for a celebratory beer! In the words of our wise guide 'Never remember the climb, only the top or you'll never do it again!'

# EXERCISE ALPINE CHALLENGE – 14-18 JULY 2001, CHAMONIX, FRANCE

## JOINT RLC TA ADVENTUROUS TRAINING

By Major Lyndsay Wilson TD, 160 Tpt Regt RLC(V)

Team instructors like SSgt's Dave Smith and laterally Tim Bird have a habit of suggesting expedition ideas, producing a potential activity itinerary then saying "over to you boss, for it all to just magically materialise a year later. Having managed a weekend programme of UK based events for the TLC TA under the command of 5 Trg Regt RLC, for some decade or so; there was a need to test the skills and reward the commitment of many aspirant soldier, the French Alps seemed ideal.

Starting an exped on Friday 12th usually bodes ill for most superstitious people, however, 24 enthusiastic mountaineers, some experiences, some complete novices arrived at Grantham without incident bar-one forgotten passport which was collected overnight. The 14th started at 0800 hrs with the sorting, distribution and packing of kit en masse. CO 5 Regt, Lt Col Paul Smith cam to wave us off and discretely required I endeavour to return with 24 complete personnel. We were soon ready to begin the 18-hour journey to Chamonix, in search of sun, snow and large mountains. At 0700 15th July, bleary-eyed, we arrived on the outskirts of Chamonix. Macdonald's was shut and it was raining! However, by early afternoon and to the amusement of the existing campers, 12 tents were installed in the never-ending rain on the Les Arolles campsite, with the intention of holding this prime patch until the arrival of JSAM two weeks later. A hearty meal of pizza and pasta was enjoyed by all that evening and spirits rose despite the alpine tops remaining shrouded in mist.

Monday 16th there was hazy sun below 2000m. Regrettably, the first day of winter skills began at 2500m below the Index, in that familiar Scotch mist and fresh snow. Adults quickly became

children during ice axe arrest practice, cramponing and rope skills.....great fun but necessary for the demands of the fortnight ahead. Tuesday 17th the Monteverns train took us up to the "Mer de Glace", Dave Smith 275 Rly Sqn RLC (V) quickly recorded the train number for his diary as we ascended the height of 'the Ben' and a half to the glacier. Croissants and coffee not being on the daily programme we bypassed the cafes and commenced the descent down 50m of precarious steel ladders pinned to a rock face to the glacier. More practical glacial skills roped movement, crevasse rescue and a touch of ice climbing lifted a sunny day in awesome surroundings. Chefs, Sgt's Gary Shearer and Michelle Clarke RLC (V), Cat Sp Regt, created this amazing system of attending the majority of training as MLTs and still, either in rotation or together, managed to prep the most outstanding cuisine for the famished crusaders on our return from the tops. Rain stopped play for the start of the first 3-day exped so rock climbing at Les Thermals 900m lower, out the Chamonix valley, filled the day productivity and even encouraged some sunshine laterally. Next day, due to a continuing poor weather forecasted the exped was again delayed and white water rafting bunged in instead of a the end of the exercise. Probably just as well given the aches, bruises and exhaustion experienced by the majority. The first run proved interesting with the Pirates loosing their guide within 100m and the OC got "Moby Dick", with Pte Dean (Trev the Bull), diving in to rescue her from the Vader. A day in rubber always gets the pulse going!

Friday 20th July, teams 1 & 2 began their 3-day expedition. Regrettably, for the first day and a half they had thick cloud, but undertook some acclimatisation training before achieving the

Mer De Glace, July 2001. L-R: LCpl Currie, Maj Wilson, Cpl Dodgson, Pte Horton.



summit of Domes de Miage 3673m, a subsidiary peak of the great Mont Blanc on day 3. Pte "I'm not doing that" Dean 294 Sup Sqn, frequently bottled as the knife-edge arête unfolded only to find the rope taut and the only way forward. Then the long descent back to the start at Saint Gervais. Teams 3 & 4, including myself, had meanwhile undertaken more rock climbing at Les Gailands and an outstanding day walk from the Brevent telepherique at 2525m across the last snowfields to the mountain pastures and forest of Flegere 1971m, in brilliant sunshine with outstanding views to the alpine peaks. Then began teams 3 & 4 exped to changeover with the others and maximise Dave and Tim summer glacier qualification.....bless them. The long steep ascent through the forest to the Tre la Tete hut (2? hours) in hot conditions couldn't have been more different to the first groups. Beyond the hut and onto glacier, 3 hrs later we arrived at the campsite at some 2550m on the ice beneath the Refuge de Consceits. Next day 23rd Jul we acclimatised much as the others had, by the ascent to the Col des Chasseurs 2720m but with clear skies. Views up the Tre la Tete glacier to Mont Blanc at the head were outstanding and gave some idea to the sheer scale of our surroundings.

Exped day 3 had us on the move at 0400 hrs for the wee trek up the Domes De Miage. It was surreal negotiating the crevasses in torchlight and spying the pink tint of dawn creeping over the snowy tops. At the head of the glacier reality took over, as what would be considered the fittest exped member succumbed alarmingly fast to 'Acute Mountain Sickness' AMS, with stars and headaches, forcing our team to descend the 1000m with him immediately to the Refuge. A summit disappointment is only overcome by facing a threat to life and the team's attitude was outstanding and proved the real camaraderie of this type of training.

The other team joined us from the summit later before our long haul back down to be greeted by teams 1 & 2 t the start. With two 'power' days to go, plans were established to select two combined teams to attempt Mont Blanc du Tacul, which at 4248m, was a very worthy 4000der to provide the ultimate ex challenge. Cpl Hilton PC Sqn RLC(V) a complete novice to mountaineering had proved a stalwart summiting on the Domes, and though he managed to ascend to the camp below the Aiguille du Misi, he succumbed finally to a bug 'on the day of the Tacul'. Half of France, Japan, the Middle East and some British, waited hours to ascend the Midi to 3842m, killing any great plans groups 3 & 4 with myself to ascend an aiguille on the Helbronner side, whilst 1 & 2 experienced the snow arête descent from the ice tunnel with 2000m sheer drop left and 300m right..... tee hee, to their overnight camp. However, the cable across the great expanse of the Vallee Blanche and some snow skills with photos on the Italian border in the sun was....well! The return was enhanced by the moonie display of burns by SSgt Smith, Pte 'Shovel' Shelley 168 Pnr Regt RLC(V) and the camp crew as we passed overhead in the cable car.....promotion prospects nil.

Thur 26th, last training day and the tents were empty as we passed overhead en route for Helbronner. The Tacul summiters had left at 0400 hrs and we learnt later that bar Hilton, they had reached the top and witnessed another bum initiation ceremony by half the French Army, before their weary return to base. I took the remaining

Rear L-R: Jackson, Hilton, Dean, Jones, Shelley, Watson, Dodgson, Gibbs, Smith, Shearer, Clarke, Reynolds, Wood, Rowlinson.  
Front L-R: Townend, Jinnan, Bird, Hinton, Maj Wolson, Currie, Phipps, LCpl Wilson, Ford, Horton.



stalwarts of groups 3 & 4 to the Italian border and we did an interesting rock and snow scramble and arête before reaching the summit of the Aiguille Marbrees 3535m. Pte "I'm not sure about this" Ford 713 Ldy Sqn RLC(V) another complete novice, met her limitations, passed them and picked them up en route back! We met the Tacul team at the Midi station to compare stories and managed a restaurant meet before collapsing into deep slumber. 0600hrs Fri 27th saw final kit and tentage packed before the debrief and the long haul back to UK. Intact and complete, the attendees dispersed wearily to the four corners of Britain from Grantham by midday on Sat 28th. Me...I just sighed with relief, covered a business conference until Monday, then slept....before reliving the whole exped again in the PXR!!!!!! Interesting discussions take place whilst roped on a glacial trog, instructor definitions include:

#### Instructors Vocab:

"Different" to climb	=	Very hard
"Interesting" to scramble with a steep ascent	=	Very hard
"Tim, would you like to go first"	=	Rock climbing equipment required
"Path looks different with snow on it"	=	Wrong route taken (but new one found)
"Mont Blanc are" here somewhere	=	Mountain is around here somewhere
"Trust me" a mo I'll know in a minute think!	=	Give me

Footnote: Ex Alpine Challenge was the result of extensive UK Ex Deep Ranger pre-training, bringing individuals from 18 different RLC TA units together in a non-competitive team experience. Personnel were selected to reflect the best possible representation of unit skills, male/female and rank ratios. 50% were novices and knew each other before the ex!

Negotiating crevasses - Mer De Glace, July 2001.



Alpine Challenge Summiters - Mont Blanc Du Tacul. L-R: Lt Hinton, LCpl Watson, Sgt Shearer, LCpl Wilson, Pte Shelley, 2Lt Gibbs & Pte Dean



# AMA Equipment Deals

Well it has finally happened the AMA we are now actively seeking equipment deals for the membership. The way it is going to work is that I will seek out five items per season (summer, autumn, winter, spring) that will be advertised in the AMA publications. The items chosen will reflect the mountaineering activity of the coming season and the deals will last until the next AMA publication is issued (approx. 3 months). To order the items advertised contact the retailer direct quoting the reference/account number given, note these are not invoice accounts and all bills will be settled by you direct with the retailer. The

deals quoted are available only by using the contact details below, they are not available over the counter. Postage and packing will be charged at the retailer's standard rate.

The AMA has had close contact with many equipment retailers over the years, such as Cotswold Outdoor Ltd and HB Climbing Equipment, who have supported such events as the Sports Climbing Championships and we are interested in the maintaining this mutually beneficial relationship in the future. Listed below are also the contact numbers for the retailers that offer AMA members a good discount on a permanent basis so make use of them! If you have any questions about equipment deals please contact Steve Willson on 01865 255 351 or fax 01865 798 857. Happy shopping.....

## AUTUMN 2002 DEALS

### HB Climbing Equipment:

Contact 01248 363011 fax 01248 371150 email post@hbclimbing.com  
Quote: AMA Casual Account

**Hurricane Ice Axe/Hammer** 45/50cm Price £52.50 + VAT (each)

**Colichmarde 12 Point Step In Crampon** Price £34.58 + VAT (pair)

**9.8mmx 60m CIAP(Dry) "Rocky" Single Rope** Price £51.91 + VAT (each)

**Sphinx Adjustable Harness**  
(size S,M,L,XL,XXL Note: small fitting) Price £20.25 + VAT

HB also has a brochure with best price list and a clearance item list that is available on request.

### Cotswold Outdoor Ltd:

Contact 01285 643435 contracts@cotswoldoutdoor.com  
Quote: AMA Account No A3000

**Mountain Equipment Changabang XCR Jacket**  
with Karakoram DEL Pant (complete suite) size S - XL  
product code 911323: Price £355 inc VAT (set)

**RAB Batura Jacket**  
size S - XL product code 911324: Price £242 inc VAT (each)

**Scarpa Manta M4 Tech B:2 Mountain Boot**  
all sizes product code 911325: Price £121 inc VAT (pair)

Cotswold Outdoor also offer their standard contract price (15% off) to all AMA member on all their items, you can also use the AMA contract number in any Cotswold shop for over counter discount sales.

## AROUND MOUNT BLANC Walking Guide by Harmut Eberlein

ISSN 3-7633-4604-2 Cordee Books Price £7.99

Review by Paul Fish

This is a pocket-sized guide to 120 pages that described 50 walks in and around the Chamonix, Mount Blanc region of France. The name Mount Blanc conjures up too many a picture of steep, fissured glaciers, rocky pinnacles and grande mountain faces. However, although the gnarled mountaineer can find all he wants and beyond, of high, remote and challenging routes, there is another side to ones enjoyment of Chamonix and its environs.

This pocket guide is an excellent reference for the less technically minded and family orientated walker. Few of the routes require more than a 1000 meters of ascent and they range from short half-day walks to a full two-week circuit of the Mount Blanc massif.

Harmut uses a colour code to identify the different grades of walks:

**Blue (8)** - These are paths and perfectly way marked, relatively safe in poor weather. More importantly children and elderly can do these walks without any great danger.

**Red (29)** - These are adequately way marked but narrow and have short exposed sections. To be undertaken by sure-footed mountain walkers properly equipped.

**Black (13)** - These are to be done by experienced mountain walkers. Can be very exposed and require the use of the hands.

The guide suggests what maps, equipment, walking times should be and the best time of year to attempt the route. It talks about the valley bases to be used in France, Switzerland and Italy. In addition, to covering huts and accommodation.

Having been fortunate enough to have spent ten summers in and around the Chamonix valley, I was pleasantly surprised by the content and structure of this email guide.

Each route has a map outline, location of start/finish points, what food/accommodation is available on the route, the highest point reached and the total ascent made.

Each also has a paragraph write up of points to note/see while on each route and a breakdown of times between these points. Excellent colour photographs also support these short briefs

If you intend to visit Chamonix as a first timer then a copy of this guide is highly recommended. For those that have been before, a copy may surprise you, with a host of walking of walking activities to do when the high mountains are out of condition.

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