

# ARMY MOUNTAINEER



The Journal of The Army Mountaineering Association



**RED ROCKS**

**CANADIAN ICE**

**AMA SURVEY 2003**

**DENALI MARATHON**

**MOUNTAIN WARFARE TRAINING**

**Summer 2003**



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## Foreword

by the Chairman Lieutenant Colonel Martin Bazire



While recent events have caused various climbing plans to be revised, a number of activities have continued. Capt Stu Macdonald led a successful trip to Denali, Maj Kev Edwards has masterminded Ex NORTHERN CHALLENGE, aiming to climb many 3000 metre peaks in the Canadian Rockies; and Capt Cath Stephens has taken a party to Bolivia.

JSAM 2003 and the New Year Meet remain in the calendar, and watch out also for climbing meets in Germany. We look forward to seeing accounts of all these exploits, and others, in due course. New leaders for AMA expeditions are always sought, so please make contact if you wish to assist.

On the indoor scene, the season began with a good attendance at JSMTIC Indefatigable for this year's Army Indoor Bouldering Competition. At Divisional level, 2 Div help their competition. In May, this year's annual Army Sport Climbing Championships took place at the WICC. As the tenth such event, they were held over 2 days, and were thoroughly enjoyed by the 85 who took part. Well done to WO2 Steve Willson, Capt Jason Ainley and others who stepped in and made it work. In June, the Army Team acquitted themselves well at the Inter Services Sport Climbing Championships at The Rockface.

It is great that the AMA is able to maintain its publication of our twice yearly Journal, thanks this time to Steve Willson. New articles are always welcomed, whether reports on climbs or book reviews – keep sending them in.

Your AMA Committee is undergoing a number of changes, and these details are contained in the accompanying Newsletter. There is a vacancy for a Meets Co-ordinator, and we would also like to see AMA representatives in the divisions (further details in the Newsletter): please step forward if you are interested – it really would be good to hear from you. Your new Committee will be confirmed at this year's AGM: this is the only formal bit of the AMA Annual Weekend from 26 – 28 Sep 03. Do take advantage of this excellent opportunity to meet up with climbing chums. I look forward to seeing you there.

Martin Bazire

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### On the Cover:

*Kat Clouting climbing a grade 5 in Corsica,*

*Photo by Tim Bird*

*This edition was edited by Steve Willson*

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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 94561 3453 or 01412 243453 email [stevewillson@msn.com](mailto:stevewillson@msn.com) - Please make use of this kit!

# EDITORIAL

## By the Journal Editor

Well I did not expect to be doing the editor's job again this quick! Dave Rieth's tenure as the editor was brought to an unexpectedly short end by his posting to Oman. He offered to continue in post but the job of editor becomes difficult as lines of communication are extended. Thanks go to Dave for the excellent Winter 02/03 edition and the initial collation of this journal's material. I'm sure you would join me in wishing him and his family a all the best in the middle east and if he needs any ideas on how to spend that extra money I have some good equipment deals!!

Now to this edition. We have been very lucky with the quality of articles provided and the outstanding photos that accompany them. The picture, by Tim Bird, of WOCdt Kat Clouting on the front cover is a prelude to the quality of pictures inside this edition. It is also good to see that one of my own favorite places in the World, Alaska, still has the magic to capture the imagination and plant the seeds of future mountaineering in the minds of whoever visits this untamed land.

As usual the Journal is always looking for good quality articles on any mountaineering subject. The articles do not have to come from a trip, other wise we run the risk of becoming a PXR magazine, they can be about anything from a good bit of gear you have used or a rock route that has left you with a lasting memory, or scar. If you do put pen to paper, it is best in Word format hard copy and disk, and send it to the new editor:

Maj Howie Barnes, CAST(S), LWC, Warminster, BA12 0DJ  
Tel:01985 222655

Now it only leave me to apologize for the delay in getting this edition out to you and wish you all success in the mountains and on the crags in the coming months.

Cheers Steve Willson

## AMA PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION 2003

The AMA photo comp is here again. A chance to show you exploits off to the rest of the gang. If you would like to enter you can take photo's along to the AGM or send them to the AMA Publicity Officer (contact details on appointments page). There will be prizes for the best three pictures in both the Mountaineering and Rock Climbing categories.





# RED TAPE & CLIMBING ROPE - THE GORDIAN KNOT

by Maj RJ Spencer, SG

From Capt Edwards' use of the term "inflated qualifications", I deduce that at least some of his letter<sup>1</sup> relates to an article I wrote in ATDN #17. I write in response.

I disagree fundamentally with his suggestion that "we are in fact providing a scheme to develop competent and effective JSAT Leaders / Instructors." We are not. **"The aim of adventurous training is to develop, through challenging pursuits and within the outdoor environment, leadership and the qualities necessary to enhance the performance of military personnel during peace and war."**<sup>2</sup> In other words, I should be able to task a junior commander with planning and conducting an Adventurous Training exercise for his soldiers, which he then leads, just as he would on operations. AT develops the physical and moral components of fighting power: it is a J7 and not a J1 function.

The problem is that a commander is often indispensable to be spared for expeditions by the time he (or she) is a Sergeant / Major (say 10-12 years?). To progress beyond entry level, most AT pursuits require some rank (3 years?), after which the soldier will have to complete at least two long career courses (with no opportunity for AT in those 2 years?). This leaves 5-7 years in which to complete all the log-book experience and courses up to a useful supervisory level. This may seem a long time, but for OTP, ITDs, RAAT, course availability, family, etc, etc. Thus while

Adv Trg proficiency should be complementary to military competence for commanders, it has become almost mutually exclusive.

During summer leave, I climbed Mt Ras Dashen in Ethiopia. The planning and preparation took 1 week. To have climbed a comparable peak militarily would have required a JSMEL(W) and 2 months' notice. Too few units have either the instructors or the time. The net result is a decrease in Level 3 expeditions, and in currency of qualification.

I concur with Capt Edwards' point about NGB<sup>3</sup>, but vary on 2 points. NGB candidate supervisors have neither undergone demanding leadership cadres, nor are their supervisees trained and disciplined personnel. Servicemen take part in military exercises the nature of which is beyond the comprehension of many civilians: much is relevant, none is admissible.

Whilst I am a member of the AMA, I disagree strongly with the suggestion that discussion of the failings of the JSAT scheme should be restricted to

"the relevant Army Association": much of the problem with AT is the Closed Shop! If AT is to flourish, non-AMA etc commanders must understand the military benefits of AT.

The ATDN article following mine stated that PSBC does not "teach you to navigate across the Ben Nevis summit plateau at night in winter having climbed Tower Ridge". It does not (quite). PSBC does, however, teach a soldier to keep functioning as a leader of men (and to navigate) when cold, wet, tired and hungry. But just think how much more capable a leader that PSBC-qualified soldier would be, if he did have the benefit of the soft skills that came from being able to climb Tower Ridge....

<sup>1</sup> Army Mountaineer Winter 2002

<sup>2</sup> AGAIs Vol I Ch 11, para. 11.0003



Two young mountaineers on the AMA Winter meet.



# SEARCH FOR THE SUN

By Davina Budd DUOTC

Exercise Hot Rock it was called. "Wet rock more like," I thought as I sat on my rucksack in the pouring rain. The beautiful rocks of Corsica were barely visible through the low cloud, and the temperature wasn't exactly what I'd hoped for.

Inspiration for the expedition had come from precisely the same situation. Sitting at the bottom of a wet crag in Derbyshire, the British weather had just about done enough to persuade me that if I really wanted to enjoy rock climbing, I was going to have to find somewhere warmer. So off to the Mediterranean it was.

Seven OCdt's and instructors WO2 Steve Willson and SSgt Tim Bird joined the Oxford UOTC expedition, led by myself. The trip was split into two phases: Trekking in the Haute Corse region of Corsica, where we would walk for several days on the GR20 route (one of France's toughest long distance treks) and ascend the island's highest peak Monte Cinto (2706m). The second phase was rock climbing, where the aim was to award beginners their Rock Climbing Proficiency, and to improve the skills of more experienced climbers.

We were flown to Corsica on perhaps not the most direct of routes! From London

Heathrow, we flew to Paris, Charles de Gaulle Airport, got a bus to Orly Airport on the other side of Paris (conveniently missing any sites of interest along the way), and then boarded our second flight which took us to the Mediterranean island of Corsica.

We stepped off the plane into glorious sunshine and hopes were up for returning to the UK with golden tans. But as we drove into the heart of the mountainous island for the trekking phase of the expedition, the weather got worse and worse. The rain did hold off long enough for us to sample some of the local wine during pre-trekking drinks around our campsite, however the thunderstorm that arrived not long after returning to our tents was a sure indication the weather wasn't quite ready to improve.

The walking over the first few days was steady, through a mixed terrain of wooded valleys, rocky ridges and grassy hills. The overcast skies and intermittent drizzle didn't dampen spirits, and made the Chocolat Chaud bought from the refuge at the end of each day seem well deserved. Evenings were spent listening to stories of student banter or more often than not tales from the past of Steve and Tim's escapades in Germany or on some climbing trip the pair had been on.

Day three of the trek followed along the most spectacular section of the GR20 route – the *Cirque de la Solitude*. Over a distance of 800m the route descends 250m and ascends 200m of very steep rocky terrain where ladders and metal chains have been added to aid walkers. We were very conveniently travelling in the opposite direction to most people which caused a few bottle necks, but also gave us the opportunity to appreciate the surroundings. The day was thoroughly enjoyed and several hours of sunshine left the group with a healthy glow...for the mean time.

In the early hours of the next morning we, one by one, serenaded the remainder of the campsite with a chorus of "sickness in the dark". Without going into too much detail, it wasn't a pretty sight or sound! Hence our ascent of Monte Cinto was delayed by a day while recovery took place of what can only be described as a 24 hour bug, suspected to have been picked up from the previous camps water source.

With our strength mostly regained the slog up to the top of the island was tough, but enjoyable. The temperature remained steady in the twenties however it was enough to cause a heat haze that prevented clear views of the valleys below. After the obligatory summit photography session we made our

way down a succession of scree slopes and boulder fields on the other side of the mountain. Our finish point was the campsite from which the trek had begun five days earlier.

Next followed a few days R & R. We explored the historical inland town of Corte and then headed to the coast for some beach volleyball, fine cuisine (a cheap BBQ bought in the local village) and Corsican beer. Having experienced a few early morning swims and the delights of sand *everywhere*, it was time to pack up camp and head back inland for the rock climbing phase of the expedition.

For the first stage of rock climbing we were based in the village of Zonza and used the huge mountain playground of Col de Bavella to introduce climbing techniques, lead climbing, protection placement and multi-pitch climbing. The rock was good and offered a range of difficulties from French grades 3a to 6b. Each member of the team discovered their initial abilities and worked on improving their confidence by trying harder routes. The crags were well protected with bolted routes offering more security to push the limits.

After three days in the Col de Bavella we chose to move on to escape the weather – mornings were generally clear and sunny, by midday the



Steve Willson leading a group.



The start of the Cirque de la Solitude.



Davina Budd on a route at Corte.



mountains had become overcast and the afternoon brought with it heavy mist and thunderstorms. As much as we enjoyed a plate of frites in the shelter of the crag side café, the rain was preventing our progress on the rocks.

We returned to Corte and established ourselves at the Premiere Ecole in the Restonica Valley. The crag had good access and similar graded climbs to those in Bavella. Everyone had caught the bug by now and the challenges being set were becoming harder. No-one was prepared to be beaten by a route and if the unspeakable did occur then it left a scar and a pledge to return. Again the weather plagued us and it was time to retreat to the coast in search of unbroken sunshine. So it was off to the holiday resort of Ile Rousse we went.

Arriving mid afternoon meant we had time after setting up camp to get in a few more routes. In the early evening sunshine we climbed on rocks near the waters edge below the lighthouse tower. The final climbs took place with the setting sun and gave way to a beautifully warm night. This gave us the opportunity to relax in the old town and try out the days catch with a feast of sea food.

During the next couple of days we got our wish with long days on the rocks and temperatures in the mid-thirties. It was real climbing in bikini weather! The new



The team on the summit of Monte Cinto.

location gave way to new challenges with a more technical style of climbing required and less brut strength needed. Our last full day climbing was spent on a few multi-pitch routes. Each person got the chance to practice the skills they had learnt and either lead or second a five pitch route that unveiled beautiful views of the mountain valley below.

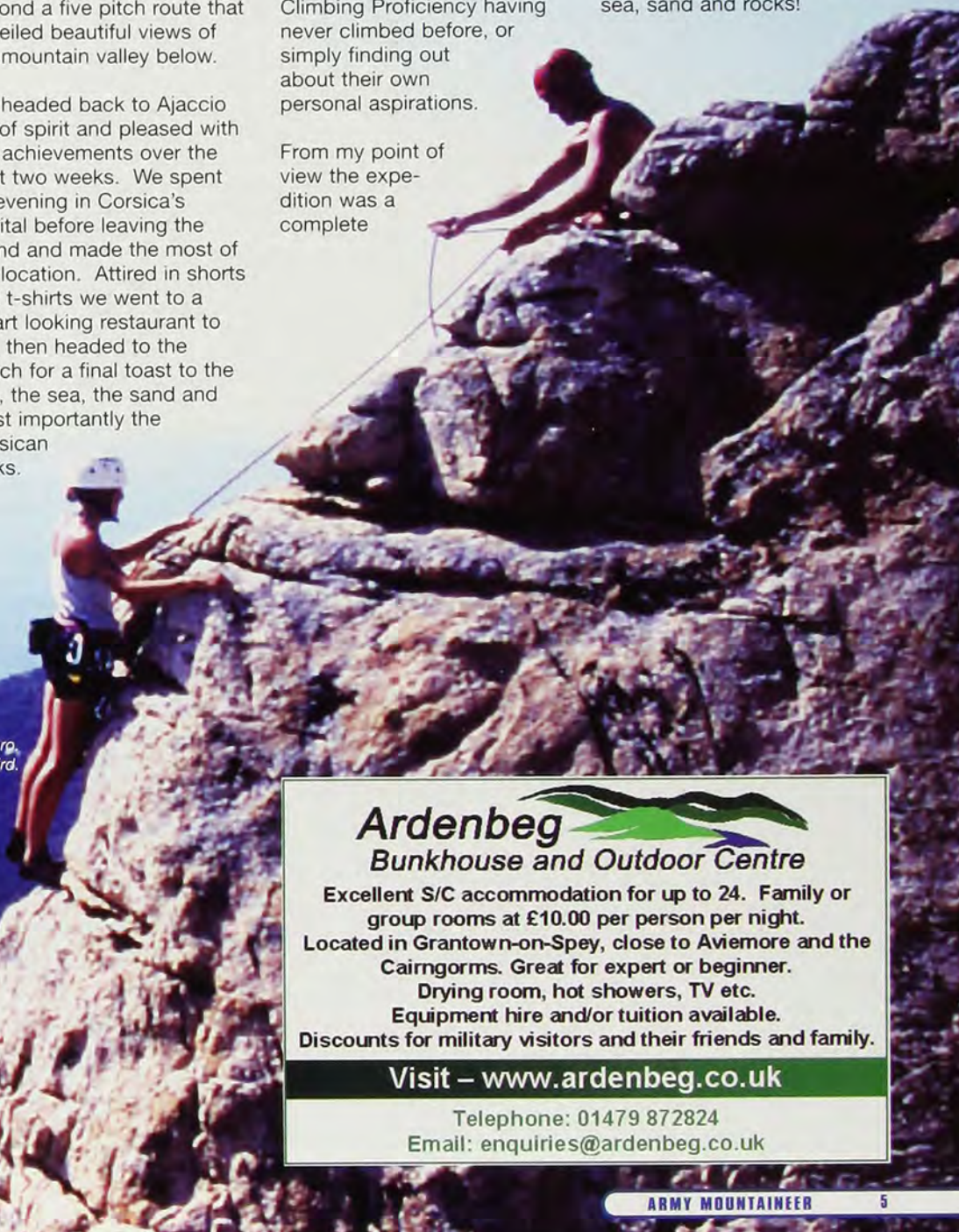
We headed back to Ajaccio full of spirit and pleased with our achievements over the past two weeks. We spent an evening in Corsica's capital before leaving the island and made the most of the location. Attired in shorts and t-shirts we went to a smart looking restaurant to eat, then headed to the beach for a final toast to the sun, the sea, the sand and most importantly the Corsican rocks.

As we flew home we tried to adjust to the thought of returning to our everyday lives. Each member of the group had triumphed in their own little way; whether it be trekking to the highest peak on the island, carrying on with activities despite illness or injury, gaining their Rock Climbing Proficiency having never climbed before, or simply finding out about their own personal aspirations.

From my point of view the expedition was a complete

success – we achieved our aims, were flexible enough to alter our itinerary to suit the changeable weather and all came away with smiles on our faces and sun kissed skin! Infact 2003's rock climbing expedition is already in the pipe line, with Spain to be host to the sun, sea, sand and rocks!

Steve Willson and Kat Clouting climbing at Solonzaro.  
By Tim Bird.



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# WHAT I DID IN MY HOLIDAYS!

By James Spencer (aged 31½)

As a young(-ish), single(-ish) man with three weeks block leave in sight, and far too little adventurous training behind, something weird and wacky called Ethiopia with its weird and wonderful fauna, flora and history seemed the perfect place. I rang a (civilian) friend to suggest the trip: he jumped at it. I bought the Bradt Guide, a copy of the 1:2,000,000 country map in Standfords, and even succeeded in tracking down a copy of the 1:100,000 Simien Mountains trekking map. We started reading to see where to go.

Knowing my friend of old (and his erratic life-style: he's an art director for films), I made no concrete plans. Sure enough, ten days before we were due to go, he had to pull out with a short notice job, complicated by Acute Girlfriend Trouble. The best laid plans had already gone astray!

On the Saturday before we had been due to leave, he rang to nominate a couple of last minute replacements (his 38 year old sister, and a 32 year old maths teacher friend), and suggested that we should meet for lunch the following day. Four roasts and several bottles of wine later it was decided: we would go for it.

On my way to work on Monday morning I dropped the visa application form off in the Embassy having downloaded it that night. A slightly nervous wait ensued: the application form had asked for occupation and superior: Developing World countries seem to be rather bashful about soldiers, but not, it would seem, Ethiopia. I told the other two, and picked the visa up on Thursday lunchtime. An afternoon telephone call to DOMA confirmed Ethiopia was not off limits. That evening, I packed a bergan, having rung Trailfinders for a ticket. On my way home from work on Friday, I picked up the ticket, rang my insurance, and finished my packing. We met up at Paddington, and were off!

The first week was spent in sight-seeing and getting a feel for the ground (and more importantly the air: Addis Ababa is at 2600m, while Mt Ras Dashen rises to 4543m). We registered at the British Embassy, then set off. We flew first to Axum the C5th AD capital, and location of the Ark of the Covenant. There we stocked up on some supplies, before bussing for two days to Debarq, a tiny market town on the edge of the mountains. We got there mid-afternoon, and checked in with the National Parks Office, bought permits, and hired a guard, a muleteer and a "guide" (whose main role was as naturalist and translator: the route is fairly simple and concurs with the Swiss made map.) Having bought some

additional supplies, we arranged an RV the following morning, had several beers (named after the peak) and went to sleep.

The following day we began our trek, of which there are various different permutations possible, ranging from a 6 day hard tab to an excellent 10 day trek through some of the most amazing terrain in the world: steep mountains dotted with giant lobelias and tree heathers, and home to rare Walia Ibex, Simien Fox and Gelada Baboons as well as many birds unique to Ethiopia. Amongst these graze sheep and cattle in the care of herdsmen of kindergarten age.

We reached the summit of the fourth highest peak in Africa, doing passable imitations of stranded goldfish, and had been gratified to see some of the locals doing the same at the pass 300m lower. After taking the customary photos, and catching the necessary breath we returned to our camp at Ambikwa, to a well-deserved supper (tuna and tomato pasta!) accompanied by thyme tea, a local speciality. From there it was a question of tabbing out the following day to Chenek, thence to Sankaber and finally to Debarq. The mountains had one final trick to play: it poured with rain during the night, and we awoke to Brecon-like damp! The ford was in spate, so a detour via a WFP/DFID funded suspension bridge was preferable to all except the mule, which took some persuading. When we reached the other side of the valley, we saw that the tops we had climbed the day before were dusted white with snow!

There are no electricity, sewers, roads, or telephones in the Simien Mountains; the only running water flows in the stream, and the nearest thing to a 4x4 is a mule to carry most of your baggage! It is some of the



Imel GoGo from the west.

most elemental country still remaining, and the scene of some amazingly successful British expeditionary warfare: Napier's relief of Magdala in 1867 (although his troops were less impressed!), and the campaign by Wingate and Sandford with Haile Selassie's Patriots against the Italian Occupation in 1939-40.

If you are after sight-seeing Gonder, and particularly the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela are awe-inspiring. If you have "done" the Simiens, there are always the Bale Highlands.

For those optimists (with comparable log-book experience!) tempted to try it as an adventurous training expedition, bad news! Ethiopia is a Table 3 country (I doubt anyone has re-classified it since the fall of the Mengistu government<sup>1</sup>), but remarkably relaxed; area mapping is relatively easily available (though in lat & long!);



Loading up at Geech, with assembly helpers.



and the cost of living (once in country) is relatively cheap. For me the lack of hassle / JSATFA more than made up for the additional expense.

The food would knock most vindaloos into second place, and the beer isn't bad either: 5 brands of lager or Guinness Foreign Extra Stout. The *tej* (mead), however, is not for the faint-hearted or weak-livered. It was an amazing experience, wonderful trekking and an excellent way to spend some leave.

#### Notes for those tempted to try:

**Books and mapping:** The most up-to-date guide-book is Bradt: Jan 2002, but they seem to have missed out updating the bit on the Simiens! Simien Mountains map from the Map Shop: Tel 01684 593 146 or themapshop@btinternet.com The 1:2,000,000 of Ethiopia from Standfords, National Map centre etc (NB Inda Selassie stage between Axum and Debark is known locally as Shire.) Lonely Planet do an English-Amharic phrasebook: but you're on your own for their reply! Of dubious relevance, but I found someone who spoke Arabic everywhere! If you are interested in a bit of "kultsha", try Stuart Munro-Hay's "Ethiopia an Unknown Land" London: IB Taurus 2002.

**Flights:** Try Trailfinders, or www.opodo.com for a ticket: a BA subsidiary called British Mediterranean flies to Addis via Alex (although they lost my bergan for five days!) If you don't book your internal flights in advance (highly recommended to do so) the Hilton Hotel has an Ethiopian Airlines bureau with influence!

**Food:** Basic food is available in Debark, but at a premium. Buy staples in Addis / Axum / Gonder. If you hanker after any exotics (Marmite!) bring it with you from UK. Likewise, if you've got the space, some tins of (UK) tuna / corned dog etc won't go amiss. There's a bakery on the main square for bread, and the market 50yds up the Park road will sell you sugar, salt, fresh fruit & vegetables, rice, paraffin, honey, tea / coffee etc. Take a couple of ? pound bags of green coffee beans into the mountains (it's manners to offer some if you are entertained in a home.)

**Water:** You will have reasonable access to water (as does everyone else, but not sewers...) I used a Millbank bag and iodine (if you rely on boiling, remember you're at some altitude.) Bottled water is available in most towns, so is beer!

**Medical:** I took a full trauma and primary health care into the hills. Ethiopia has AIDS in plenty: take plenty of canulae. You will be pestered for medicines (the nearest chemist is a week's walk away!) If you are prepared to take the risk of litigation, recommend aspirin, 'brufen, and tubes of cream for conjunctivitis. I never worked out what the Amharic for Diamox was, but everyone had half an aspirin with breakfast, just in case.



On top of Mt Ras Dashen.

**Kit:** You can hire most things in Debark, at a price, but some is fairly ropey. Cutting wood is in the park forbidden, so take a stove. Ras Dashen is more of a plod than a technical hill: BCH / trail boots would suffice (your "guard" will wear flip flops!) Amazingly, GPS caused no ripples (and solves Lat and Long problems without resorting to a chart table and rolling rule!) Take waterproofs & a tent during the rainy seasons- 80% of the Blue Nile falls on the Ethiopian Highlands! I did without a sleeping bag: a roll mat and waterproofs sufficed. Binos are useful to see the endemic and elusive fauna.

**Orientation & convoy:** When you get to Debark, you will be dumped in the N-S town square, with the route to the Mountains off to the east. You need to travel south ? mile past the Simien Park Hotel (ask for Rm 11: it has its own shower and loo @ Br60/p/n. The hotel also has left luggage lockers) then round several bends take an unsigned cobbled drive diagonally up to the right / west to the Park Office (Tel: 251 08 11 34 82.) There you must purchase tickets to the park, prices as in Bradt.

The compulsory "guard" is a stealthy injection of cash into the local economy: they are senior members of the community whose presence is your laissez-passez-

they may also invite you to coffee in their home. Hire a mule: you'll enjoy the trip far more! They can carry up to 75kgs of kit. Buy / bring 3 2m ropes for baggage straps, and some plastic sheeting for waterproofing. The muleteer can "guard" the camp on your summit day. I recommend you hire a (Park Office) "guide": they were trained by the Austrian VSO, and can explain customs etc for you, and point out the various fauna and flora. If he is a chap called Da'oud, it is the Thick (not "Tick") Billed Raven, and the Augur (not "Ochre") Buzzard! Take some food for them, as they will give you the big brown eye treatment otherwise, and tip them a day's pay at the end.

**Various:** The road goes past Chenek to Buwhait, and a 4x4 pick up can be arranged at a cost (if you've lost 5 days thanks to BA loosing your bag...) The park huts on the trek in have been re-built and are available for accommodation, at a price. Remember that you are in the Developing World, cast off your inhibitions, smile and haggle! The bridge is a mile south / down stream of the direct Chiro-Leba to Ambikwa route, near Mender Selam.

If anyone has more queries, I'll be delighted to answer them. Good Luck!!



Campsite before/after "Summit Day". Church in background, shrouded body to right is "Guard"



# A DENALI MARATHON

## An Expedition to Alaska, by Stuart Macdonald

*The Denali Marathon Expedition had originally hoped to establish a new route on the North side of Mount McKinley (Denali). The team was split into three, with a ski team intending to join the dogs, and two climbing teams. The planning was a nightmare, and things never went quite to plan. Want to know more? Then read on.....*

### Ski Team:

Lt Cdr Clive Woodman RNR (Team Leader), Sgt Elliot Williams ,  
LI, Cpl Judy Dunn (Exped Treasurer)

### Alpine Team:

Capt Tania Noakes R Sigs (Team Leader), Capt Olly Bryant WFR (Dep Ldr),  
Cpl Andy Dee (Exped Food), Lt Martin Hoather RN (Comms), Pte Jules Ratcliff PARA  
(International Relations Officer)

### Denali Team:

Capt Stuart Macdonald RE (Leader), Maj Nick Short RGBW (Dep Ldr), Maj Chris  
Allewell RE (Journal), WO2 Jude Shenton APTC (Eqpt), Cpl Woody Woodhead RLC  
(Transport), Pte Rob Smith RAMC (Medic).

## Ski Team

It all sounded so simple in concept as Stu Macdonald sold the idea to me over a few pints of beer: Take 3 experienced skiers, send them out to Alaska with instructions to buy almost 1200 lb of expedition food, pack it all in 20 bear proof wooden crates, and then, with the help of a team of husky dogs, tow it all onto the Muldrow Glacier where it was to be cached ready for the main DMX climbing team who were to attempt a new route on the north side of Denali later in the season.

That was the theory and in February a ski team consisting of myself, Elliot Williams and Judy Dunn found ourselves in Anchorage crating up the largest pile of food we are ever likely to come across in our lives. With the help of a very understanding minibus driver we managed to get ourselves and the 20 crates from Anchorage to Talkeetna. However, that was where the practice started to diverge from the theory. With Alaska suffering its warmest and driest winter in living memory there was one vital ingredient missing - snow!! This meant that the local dog sled team had been unable to move to Kantishna where we were meant to R/V with them. Undeterred, we flew into Kantishna to carry out a recce of the route in the hope that the snow might yet materialise and the dogs arrive. There we discovered a very light dusting of snow on the track leading into the park from Kantishna which allowed us to ski for the first 10 km of the route. However on reaching Wonder Lake, the snow ran out and we had to resort to bashing through the thick tundra undergrowth on foot and snowshoes. After 2 days of exhausting bushwacking towards the mountain, during which time we managed to advance no more than a few kilometres, we could not avoid the

inescapable conclusion that getting the food to the planned cache would be impossible unless the snow and the dog sled teams arrived.

Although Denali obliged us with some of its finest winter weather - brilliant crystal clear blue skies and temperatures as low as -40°C - no snow was forthcoming. We spent our remaining time exploring the area around Wonder Lake before it was time for our prearranged pick up flight back to Talkeetna. Despite the failure through circumstances outside of our control to achieve our original objectives, the expedition still provided us with a wonderful and extremely challenging wilderness experience. Just living under canvas on the north side of Denali in winter conditions provides more challenges than most would care to accept. It also offers a degree of isolation that is difficult to match outside of the polar regions - there was not another living person within a hundred miles of us and our only means of escape in an emergency would have been to call in a plane using our mobile sat phone (always assuming that the weather over the mountain was good enough to allow flying !!)

We all left Alaska having had a fantastic time and vowing to come back one day. Hopefully next time there will be some snow to greet us!

Clive Woodman  
Leader - DMX Ski Team

## Alpine Team

The 'Ruth Glacier Team's Extravaganza':  
by OJHB

"Don't worry about the bump, it's not the wing falling off" my pilot shouted to me as we screamed in to land. My first expedition to climb in the

Alaskan mountains began with an adrenalin filled Cessna skid-plane landing. The two foot deep soft snow got the better of my pilot and we skidded to a halt with one half of the undercarriage buried deep: the snow shovels saw their first action - I am obviously destined to be forever in the Infantry.

No plan survives contact with the enemy, or in our case the Alaskan weather. The Ruth team had their well prepared MacDonald plans dashed. So instead we opted to explore an area 20km south of the Denali massif called Little Switzerland for two weeks and then move up to the Ruth glacier South East of Mt. Denali for two weeks. Little Switzerland is renowned locally for its good granite rock routes and short routes (though only by Alaskan standards!). We hoped it to be a good practise ground for the Ruth gorge - renowned locally for its towering cliffs (9000ft) over 1000ft deep glaciers.

It was through good fortune that I was able to join Pte Jules Radcliffe Para [JR], Cpl Andy Dee RRV [AD], Lt (RN) Martin Hoather [MH] and Captain Tania Noakes [TN] Ex R Signals. Unfortunately other team members had been called to the Gulf, and I happily jumped to fill the spare deputy leader slot - last minute e-mails to expedition leaders are always worth it. My kit was packed and was knee deep in snow preparing our Pika glacier base camp three weeks later.

We began our exploration of the Pika glacier surrounded by snow which had fallen in the previous week. This hampered our exploratory zeal because the 'great' rock routes were inundated with snow. The fine sunny weather gradually consolidated the heavy snow covering but also meant very slow movement in snow shoes after midday; we quickly learnt that this was extremely tiring. The day temperatures were well above freezing and though cold at night it was not below -10°C. We decided that the 'gnarly' rock routes - the Throne, the Trolls and the Royal Tower - were in poor condition (read dangerous unconsolidated snow) so we focussed on training. This quickly progressed to doing moderate snow routes up small unnamed snow ridges (6300ft), near a peak named Italy's Boot - comparable to Scottish grade II. These routes were



made a little more interesting by being forced to wind our way through a number of gapping crevasse fields in order to reach their base, I was paired up with the able AD.

We were happy with our luxurious three tent base camp (two 3-man "Hyperspace" tents and the larger 8-man "Cosmos" tent) and soon got to know our surroundings on the granite ringed Pika glacier. The Cosmos tent was invaluable as a social area/ kitchen / gaming room, philosophy parlour and sleeping area for all by the end of the expedition. We expended little effort in moving it during the expedition, since we were able to pitch base camp near to the makeshift aircraft landing area on both the Pika and Ruth Glaciers. I was struck by how remote we really were, and for two weeks in Little Switzerland we only saw four other mountaineers – a real wilderness.

We were very well provisioned at the beginning of the expedition. This was due to the efforts of the ski team who had preceded us. We were particularly pleased with the amount of chocolate that we had, and the freeze dried Mountain house food; Martin and Jules being definitive calorie counters by the end. That was all to change!

On returning from a particularly hot hard day climbing on a side glacier we discovered that one of our chocolate bar caches had been raided... Humans? Bears?

No, the bird print evidence pointed to ravens. The first time the little rogues attacked they took 80 chocolate bars, and we were not happy. Foolishly we then neglected to bury everything else and the dirty vermin got some of our freeze dried food and all of our beef jerky – a tragedy for all and rationing had to be imposed.

The highlights of our time in Little Switzerland were the ascents of four peaks to the south of the Pika, in an area which is very infrequently visited. We decided to shift campsites for better accessibility, and moved to a sun drenched location, with direct sunlight from 0400 to 2230. I volunteered to drag the pulk which was easy work for the first two hours, up and over a glacier covered saddle under the heavily corniced Crown Jewels. We gazed wistfully at the dangerously corniced west ridge; a route for another time. The one steep slope that we had to climb (perhaps, 400ft high) was an alpine style effort of strenuous pulk hauling. It reminded me of Bergfurther stories that I have heard about lugging military kit up the Alps (if they are true), or the field gun competition on a vertical slope.

We soon realised that alpine starts were required to make the most of hard packed snow. The first ascent was a



*Olly Bryant leading mixed ground in Little Switzerland.*

relatively straightforward climb up snow slopes to the south west of camp 1 and MN and JR summited first; they reached the top of a believed previously unclimbed peak of (approx 5700ft), which I christened "Bear's Claw." Descending to the glacier and travelling 1200m North West, we took in a second believed virgin summit via Alaskan grade 1 slopes (Scottish grade II). On discovering raven's footprints right at the top of the peak, we had to christen this peak (6132 ft), as "Raven's Haunt." Not being a superstitious individual, I had to smile to myself after our interaction with Ravens during that first week: the hotelier of the YHA in Anchorage had wished me bon voyage to the mountains with the comment:

"May the spirit of the Raven go with you."

The other two peaks were a little more adventurous; the first involved circuiting the south side of Coronet ridge on firm snow and walking up Pt Pico, a small rock arête. From there we traversed on easy mixed pitches to a col where we rested for a photo shoot. A single rock pitch traversing left then up a chimney led the team slightly short of the ridgeline. This technical pitch then led



*Olly Bryant on the Mooses Tooth.*

the team up and over the cornice to the believed previously unclimbed south summit of the Coronet (approx 7100ft) – route AD-. A long series of abseils and careful down climbing took the team over loose snow on the northern face and back to camp, a long 13 ? hour mountain day. The sunny weather held so we managed to focus on crevasse rescue training and a spot of sunbathing the next day; with some humour thrown in by JR for good measure.

Our last Little Switzerland ascent began with a nine pitch 400m Alaskan grade 1 gully. This was followed by a flat traverse and then a 150m ascent including a difficult cornice, led by TN, which took us to a spectacular ridge. Walking 100m along the ridge in superb conditions took us to the summit, for which the name of "Camelot" is proposed (6200ft). Slow going in the softening snow returned us to camp 1 in just under 14 hours.

Our air insertion to the Ruth Glacier took place on Tania's birthday, an opportunity for a rest day – setting up another base camp and having surprise squashed birthday treats. The aerial route took us on a close up recce of the peaks we were intending to attempt over the next



*The team at the SE Fork.*



two weeks, the flight was spectacular and perhaps a little daunting – seeing the scale of the Ruth glacier (4km wide) and the Great Gorge (2km wide) for the first time.

As the most straightforward local route we decided upon Mt Dickey (9545ft) as our first larger peak. It involved a high camp and was a 2-3 day round trip from base camp on snow shoes, or so we thought. We were unlucky enough to be caught in our first two days of bad weather – and were storm bound up the mountain two days. Out came the neoprene face masks for the first time. The possibility of having to do a two day round trip back to base camp to resupply loomed due to being low on food. However, we were greeted by good weather on the third morning. So full of motivation, but precious little else (I had a mars bar and two dried apricots), we summited at midday with fantastic views of Mt. Denali et.al. Eventually we arrived back at base camp just before midnight, after a tortuous descent through 2 ft deep snow – travelling just over 8km in 8 hrs - with the sound of Chuck's exclamation from the previous week ringing in our ears:

"You guys came to Alaska without skis? ...!" (US mountaineer on the Pika glacier)

The Ruth team's ascent and return from Mt Dickey is definitely one mountain experience that the five of us will never forget.

Fully satisfied with long trips away from base camp after Mt Dickey we kept closer to home and crossed the Ruth Glacier to the north to climb a small unnamed peak, Pt 7272. As the day wore on we progressed on increasingly soft wet snow, a little interest was added by multiple avalanches on the sun drenched cliffs of Mt Dan Beard to our north. We were greeted with fantastic views of the whole base camp area from the top and could watch the peculiar procession of small planes landing containing tourists to stand on the glacier for ten minutes!!

We interspersed out climbing with a number of rest days, some taken purely for that reason and others were forced upon us by bad weather. During a break in the weather following the Glorious 1st June (one of my regimental battle honours – that strangely no other members seemed that excited about), we opted to storm the nearest peak to base camp - Mt. Barrille(7659ft). The evening ascent was a fast alpine affair lasting six hours and finishing at midnight. We did not quite have 24hr daylight but very nearly. OB, MH and AD accepted the challenge and took the direct route straight up the east face. This involved a lot of front pointing and was a hard calf burning exercise (and

MH thought OB had large enough calves as it was).

We began the ascent in hot sunshine and were eventually chased off the peak as the temperature plummeted and clouds rolled up the Great Gorge to engulf us.

The finale of the expedition was the ascent of the Moose's Tooth (West Peak 9800ft), Alaskan grade 3/4. With a watchful eye on the weather (via distant local radio and satellite phone calls) we planned to put in an advanced camp half way up the west shoulder. However, we crossed the Ruth amphitheatre in good time weaving across a large crevasse field on the far side and ascended the west shoulder by 0930hrs. TN was most keen to continue and the rest of the team were persuaded when we checked the weather forecast; there was a storm 'a coming' from the Pacific (laden with moisture apparently). We had decided due to disparate experience that the group would split in to two rope teams TN and MH, and OB and AD. JR helpfully volunteered to set up and man advanced base camp. TN then set off at a fast pace up a steep snow slope that quickly had our hearts racing. We then had to make tricky mixed traverse that took us in to a steep snow gully. This lead on to the ridge in 5 steep pitches. The ridge was a fantastic open route up to the West peak, with some protection using either ice or rock. MH led the last pitch up and round an 'interesting' snow covered ice cornice which he expressed to have 'enjoyed'; OB and JD followed the traverse with vigour. The down climbing and abseil off was slow in the softening snow and with tired limbs. We reached the advanced camp at midnight after a 19hr mountaineering extravaganza with spectacular views throughout, to be greeted by JR and hot food.

Our return to the 'real' world was thwarted by the weather, and we were tent bound at base camp for three whole days. TN and OB force fed MH and JR on the first day expecting to fly out, though we had the foresight to save some porridge and a few other meagre portions. We all retired to live in the main tent and this tested our camaraderie over the three days. We passed the test, and are still talking.

The out going flight was a scenic extravaganza once again, the snow, ice and majestic peaks slipped past and gave way to the green foothills and vegetation of the Alaskan wilderness. We could be happy with our memorable adventures, in Messner parlance 'It felt good'.

Though we had probably not climbed over 10,000ft nor experienced the rigours of Mt Denali that one might hope

for as a mountaineer in the Alaskan Mountains we visited two very different areas with interest for many different tastes. Later in the season Little Switzerland would be a rock climber's delight and the Ruth Glacier a maelstrom of crevasse fields. I would recommend the two areas that I was lucky enough to go on, for future adventurous training.

JR commented in Little Switzerland that the ascent of the Coronet was" far scarier than anything I did ... (in combat)...in Iraq".

Before we left, Andy and I visited the cemetery in Talkeetna. There is a memorial to lives lost on the greater Alaskan peaks and the following words are inscribed:

"Let children walk with nature, let them see the beautiful blendings and communion of death and life, their joyous inseparable unity, as taught in woods and meadows, plains and mountains and streams of our blessed star, and they will learn that death is sting less indeed, and as beautiful as life." John Muir

Food for thought!!..... But not to be eaten by ravens!

## Denali Team

Ex DENALI MARATHON (DRAGON) had pretty much taken over my life since I started planning it in detail about a year beforehand. The planning had to be spot on if we were to stand a chance of reaching the summit. The clothing, equipment, food and transport were just some of the things that we couldn't afford to get wrong. After about a year of writing letters, changing plans, filling in forms, changing plans, begging funds, changing plans and panicking about unforeseen Operational Tours we clambered out of a light aeroplane onto the snow of the Kahiltna glacier and stared up at our objective towering in the distance. Despite the fact that it was 20km away it dominated the skyline and made us all feel incredibly small. Put simply, it was huge.

Our revised plan (the most recent one anyway) was to acclimatise on the standard West Buttress route before heading over to the North side of the mountain to climb the seldom attempted North West Buttress.

It could be said that no plan survives contact with a big mountain, and this expedition was no exception to the rule. While acclimatising on the West Buttress of the mountain Chris Allewell was struck down by a mystery illness and had to be evacuated by helicopter. It was a serious blow to morale so early in the trip.



After a group conference we decided to carry on with the original plan. We waited for a good forecast, packed our gear, and headed round to the North side of the mountain to attempt our main objective - The North West Buttress. We set off up the route the next day, full of energy and enthusiasm. We were all struck by how wild the North side of the mountain was. There were no people, no tracks in the snow, and not a sound to be heard. Just being there was an adventure.

Again though, luck was not on our side. Due to an unprecedented lack of snow caused by the warmest Alaskan winter on record the route was totally out of condition. Even modestly angled slopes were treacherous blue ice sheets and after 3,500 feet of ice climbing it was a tired team that arrived at Camp 1. We weren't equipped to deal with so much ice and were forced to retreat off the route the next morning. The descent involved down climbing, abseiling, and crossing horrendous crevasse fields. Back down on the glacier we put up our tents and looked forward to a long sleep to recuperate. That night however, the wind began to pick up. We became stranded in a powerful storm that threatened to crush our tents. Trivia quizzes really did get obscure, and reading the labels on food packets soon became a favourite past time. The tent poles buckled under the load, but after 48 hours we emerged to a calm afternoon on the Peters Glacier.

If we had started in 2002 with plan A we had now run out of Alphabet! Not wanting to join the line of punters engaged in the world's longest conga on the West Buttress we selected the West Rib as our new objective, and so had to re-ascend Mount Capps in order to get to the start of the route. Two days after leaving the Peters Glacier we were camped at 9,600 feet on the North East Fork of the Kahiltna glacier below the West Rib. This was it. The team was tired and worn down after the past two weeks on the mountain and this was our last realistic shot at the summit. We were climbing Alpine style, but even so our packs were still heavy enough. We would simply keep climbing, camping where necessary, until we reached the summit. It was going to be a committing climb, involving 10,500 feet of ascent with some difficult ground to negotiate. However, we were fired up for it and couldn't wait to get going.

We set off the next morning and soon reached the base of the "Chicken Couloir" that is the technical crux of the route - 1500 feet of steep snow and ice that led to easier ground above. We moved together and made rapid progress, cruising past a team of climbing Rangers who had camped at the base of the couloir. We soon reached a potential campsite at 13,000 feet where we rested

and brewed up for a while before continuing up steep ground to a gentle slope at 13,500 feet where we dug a platform for the tents. That night we listened on the CB for the weather forecast and were shocked to hear of bad weather approaching. We had little choice but to either abandon the climb or bring the summit day forward.

The next morning we left camp and slogged our way through fresh snow. It was hard going but we eventually reached the 15,000 foot camp where we had intended to stay for the night. Due to the forecast however, we kept climbing, aiming to get to the 17,000 foot camp where we would rest for the night before going for the summit. At 16,000 feet Nick could no longer feel his feet due to the cold. We continued to 16,500 feet where there was an escape point from the route. All his efforts to re-warm his feet had failed and I was worried about the onset of frostbite. Three of the team continued up the route, while I descended with Nick past the crevasses until he could walk safely to the Ranger station at 14,200 feet on the West Buttress where his feet could be treated. I then retraced my steps and eventually arrived at 17,000 feet on a very chilly night to find the team chipping away at the ice in order to make a platform large enough for our tents. It was a fatigued foursome that went to bed that night.

We set off for the summit with high spirits. We were plodding steadily upwards, but our pace was slow due to the altitude. After about half an hour Woody was feeling sick. He stuck it out for another 15 minutes before descending back to the tents. By this stage just myself, Jude, and Rob remained. Every step upwards the air was colder and thinner. The climbing itself wasn't difficult, but the ground was steep enough that the result of a slip would have been catastrophic. The rest stops became longer and more frequent as we got higher. We were all digging deep just to keep going. At about 19,000 feet we stopped to put on our duvet jackets. The wind had increased and the temperature was bitterly cold. By this stage we knew we were close.

As we rounded a corner we looked out across a plateau at the summit ridge. We could see other teams moving slowly upwards like ants. We were cocooned inside our clothing, but even so the cold bit through to our souls. At 19,800 feet I felt the rope go tight on my waist. I turned round to see Jude slumped on her knees. She was totally exhausted and said that she didn't think she had the energy to get to the top and back down to the tents. We gave her some chocolate and encouragement but it did little to help. I was about to suggest that we all turned round when Rob looked at me and told me to get to

the summit. I was choked with emotions as we all stood with our arms around each other for a moment. Rob took Jude and found a place to shelter from the increasing wind. I had a lump in my throat as I turned to face the summit ridge. We had been through so much together that I couldn't believe we weren't all going to the top together.

The climb to the summit took far longer than expected. The wind was gusting 30-40mph and the still air temperature was about -35 degrees. I don't think I spent more than two or three minutes on the summit, quickly snapping off a few pictures, before heading down as fast as I could. Conditions were getting worse by the minute. I found Rob and Jude and we roped together for the descent to high camp. At about 9.15 pm we arrived back at the tents to be greeted by Woody who had the brews ready for us. Despite the altitude no-one had any problems sleeping that night.

We dropped down to the 14,200 camp on the West Buttress the next day and collected Nick before continuing all the way down the mountain. The expedition was over. It had been marred by illness and injuries, poor conditions and bad weather. Op TELIC and Op FRESCO had both taken their toll with over 15 reserves being called forward. Despite all of these though, it had been a great success. We had constantly changed our plans to cater for the team and conditions. Most importantly we worked well as a team under the most extreme conditions and as a result had triumphed against all odds. Every one of us had been pushed to our limits and beyond, both mentally and physically, but had been strengthened by the experience. We had all developed a deep respect for each other and for the frozen mountains of Alaska. High risk, remote mountaineering is seriously committing, but as Winston Churchill once said "To truly learn the rules of the game you must play for more than you can afford to lose."



Tent being nailed on the Peters Glacier.



# TAKING THE FIGHT BACK INTO THE HILLS

52 INFANTRY BRIGADE MOUNTAIN WARFARE TRAINING

by SO2 G3 Training (Mountain) 52 Infantry Brigade, aka AMA Vice Chairman, Mountaineering.

My current appointment is SO2 G3 Training (Mountain), a unique appointment in the British Army. The reason I hold this appointment is because on 1 April 2002, 52 (Lowland) Brigade, the Regional Brigade in which I served, reformed to become one of two Infantry Brigades designed to provide a training focus for Light Battalions. In addition, 52 Infantry Brigade was directed to become the LAND proponent for Mountain Warfare.

The British Army is no stranger to mountain warfare. Campaigns in Afghanistan, well before the current OP JACANA, come to mind. One of the battalions in 52 Infantry Brigade, 1st Battalion The Highlanders, has a battle honour, Kandahar 1880, to prove they were there, all those years ago. But mountain warfare has, for some time, been the preserve of the Royal Marines and some specialist Army personnel serving with 3 Commando Brigade. The last time the British Army carried out mountain warfare training was in the latter years of the Second World War, when ironically, the predecessor formation to 52 Infantry Brigade, 52 (Lowland) Division, trained in mountain warfare in the Highlands of Scotland. This mountain capability was aimed at operations to recapture Norway. The fact that 52 (Lowland) Division was then committed to combat in the Low Countries below sea level is another story.....

But back to 52 Infantry Brigade, the LAND proponent for Mountain Warfare. Being given direction is one thing, implementing it is quite another. The Army had no system of military mountain training and no means of qualifying instructors. Whilst general equipment, such as tents, stoves, hats, gloves and flasks were held to support

the cold weather warfare training carried out by Army personnel in the Allied Command Europe Mobile Force (Land) in Norway, no technical climbing kit suitable for military operations existed within the system.

Working on the age old principle of trying not to reinvent the wheel, I approached the Royal Marines to find out where they got their kit from and then bought what I thought we would need. This one sentence scarcely does justice to the hoops I had to jump through, but suffice to say, the task was achieved. A RM officer in the appointment of SO2 Mountain and Cold Weather Warfare, established at the Land Warfare Centre, became our entrée to the new training regime FLEET were developing, using their existent Mountain Leaders (MLs) to deliver lower level packages. RM candidates undergo a seven month training package to become a ML 2, then move into an established ML post, of which there are about 70, to gain experience before qualifying as a ML1. This type of specialisation would not work in Infantry battalions, with frequent arms plots and role changes, and indeed, we are not trying to create a specialisation but produce a capability that will compliment that of the Marines.

Thus were the Mountain Warfare Instructor (MWI) course and Mountain Warfare Training (MWT) module created. MLs would train MWIs from 52 Infantry Brigade units, who in turn would run MWT packages for their companies, supervised by MLs. We are now half way through the inaugural MWI package, being run from Kinlochleven Hostel, well positioned between the mountains of Glencoe and the Mamores. Using those who qualify from this course, we will run a MWT package for a company group in June, then two more later in the year.



Point to Point navigation training.

The MWI package covers a lot of ground, especially for those with no previous experience of climbing. The aim is to produce an instructor who can recce, secure with fixed lines and then lead troops over routes in a mountainous environment. To do this safely, the MWI must be trained to climb, with another MWI, on ground graded well above that which we expect troops to be able to cross. This works on the assumption that the MWIs must be able to get themselves out of trouble if their route recce turns out to take in harder ground than they had imagined! The troops will only move over ungraded ground (below moderate) but the instructors will lead over

ground graded difficult. This might seem modest to the human flies reading this, but time on the course is spent ensuring the candidates can set up safe belays, place good protection and operate safe rope systems. Further climbing skills can be developed in time by those who are keen.

The MWIs will also cover abseiling (descending a fixed line) and some of the haulage techniques the Marines use for vertical cliff assault. In the 52 Infantry Brigade context, these haulage techniques will be used to move heavy equipment, such as support weapons and ammunition, over steep ground or obstacles.



On a fixed line in bad weather.



Heavy emphasis is placed on mountain navigation during the training and all the usual subjects such as weather, mountain hazards and river crossing are covered. In fact, in addition to the military elements such as the effects of cold on arms and ammunition, the candidates gain a good, all round mountain education.

Accordingly, the aspiration is to be able to award suitable adventure training qualifications to those candidates who reach the appropriate standards. The Course Training Plan for the MWI encompasses the Enabling Objectives for the RLT and MLT courses and it is hoped that successful candidates will achieve these qualifications in addition to MWI. Much of the work to ensure this happens has been carried out by SSgt Nick O'Shea, the Physical Training Corps Instructor with another of our Battalions, 1st Battalion The Green Jackets. He is not only a Heerbergfuhrer (having completed the one year long German Army Mountain Guide Course), but also Systems Approach to Training (SAT) trained.

What does this development mean for the AMA? Effectively, within the Brigade, we will have a pool of instructors who will be used to deliver formal MWT packages to three company groups a year (other commitments permitting). This introduces a minimum of 300 men to the mountain environment annually. In addition, MWIs can carry out training within their own battalions

that could range from a session on the gymnasium climbing wall, an afternoon top roping and abseiling on a local crag or a micro navigation exercise on suitably rugged, broken ground. More importantly, because all these activities will now contribute directly to developing a military capability, their importance will be recognised by the system, rather than being seen as a 'nice to

have', as AT, despite the set targets, often is. This increased exposure to mountain activities across the Light Battalions in 52 Infantry Brigade will give a greater number of Army personnel the opportunity to experience for themselves the challenge and enjoyment on offer in the mountain environment. I feel this can only contribute to the health of the AMA in the years to come.



Team on a summit of one of the many mountains climbed.

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# AMA EASTER MEET AND WORKSHOP

28 MARCH - 02 APRIL 2003

By Major K P Edwards

Picture the scene, it is the end of March when it is supposedly the prime time of the winter season as the steady build up of snow has consolidated to produce firm nevee and glistening ice that echoes from that reassuring thud at the first strike of the climbers tools. This is the paradise of every winter mountaineer and climbers dreams.

The reality was unfortunately very different to the dream as I drove though to Fort William passing Craig Megadaih, Aonach Mor and Ben Nevis on route with barely a patch of snow in sight. In stark contrast to the winter scene that I had virtually promised to those attending the Meet I was now confronted with green mountains. How was I going to convince them that it was worth the 6-10 hour travelling time to get to Ballachulish?

If there was one oasis in the desert of despair it was that the weather seemed to be set fair and as a result the rock crags were in perfect condition. Being optimistic as ever and not wishing to miss an opportunity Captain Graham Carter and I grabbed our rock climbing gear and snatched a few early season routes (the Web E2 5C (Pollidubh) and Prana HVS 4C (Buchaille Etive Mor)) on the Friday before the Meet started..

There were 27 glum faces in the audience during the initial brief on Saturday 29 March. They were staring at me hard trying to draw comfort from my words of inspiration. The fact was that despite the dismal scene there were in fact reasonably good snow and ice conditions albeit high on both Aonach Mor and Ben Nevis. 'Seek and you shall be rewarded'

Teams were organised from within the mountaineers and climbers each with their own instructor to guide them. We were extremely fortunate to have 2 x JSMTIC Instructors to assist with the Meet, Mr Andy Nelson and Sgt Dusty Miller RM whose expertise and local knowledge were invaluable. In addition, Lieutenant Commander Dave Barrett, HMS SULTAN, had kindly agreed to help me with the delivery of training to 8 x WMP candidates.

## The programme:

### Sat 29 Mar

Aonach Mor, basic winter skills refresher. Interest Lecture – Charesky Mountains by Andy Nelson

### Sun 30 Mar

Aonach Mor/Ben Nevis, winter skills continuation and ice routes

### Mon 31 Mar

Ben Nevis, ice routes. Lecture – SMLTB Qualification Schemes by Alan Fyffe

### Tues 01 Apr

Buchaille Etive Mor, Curved Ridge

Selection of routes achieved: **Point 5**, Grade 5 (Stu MacDonald & Rob Smith), **Green Gully**, Grade 4, **The Scoop**, Grade 3, **Good Friday Climb**, Grade 3, **Gardylloo Gully**, Grade 3, **Inverness indoor climbing wall**, exceptionally difficult, **The Laroch**, repeated ascents, **Easy Gully**, Grade 1, the day after the Laroch.

It was particularly pleasing as the Meet Leader to see a broad mix of ranks, Lieutenant Colonel to Lance Corporal as well as male and female participants turning up for an AMA event. It is the second year that an Easter Meet has been included in the AMA calendar and yet again the universal feedback was that it had been extremely successful. I would like to express my thanks to the Commandant for his continued support and to Captain Graham Carter and his team for their overwhelming hospitality.

To show how the participants found the workshop here is an short article by Sgt's (SI) P Chiddle & (SI) D Doyle APTC.





## 'THE IDEAL ENVIRONMENT TO LEARN'

One way to enhance your knowledge is through your own personal experiences. So I and Sgt (SI) P Chiddle APTC, having both recently completed Winter Climbing Proficiency (WCP), were looking to get back to Scotland before the end of the season to do just that.

The Joint Services Winter Workshop seemed like as good a place as any to begin, but due to normal instructor to student ratios etc, the question in our minds was could we really get out and do what we needed to do?

After meeting up at Ballachulish on the Friday, we discussed our plans for the week, but still being skeptical, we thought it best to wait until after the opening brief on Saturday morning. Saturday began with a detailed safety brief and an outline plan of what the meet hoped to achieve, this was dictated by what individuals wanted to gain from the week's activities. The meet was then split into groups/pairs based on experience, qualifications and needs. It was at this point we realised that we were in the ideal environment to learn and enhance our knowledge; we had access to all the resources at the center, including the expert advice of the staff that had volunteered to assist with groups throughout the week. After the initial brief, groups departed for the hill, the Winter Mountain Proficiency (WMP) groups and a number of others went up to Annoch Mor for an introduction/refresher into basic winter skills. Due to the time restraints the rest of us opted for a days climbing at Poll Dubh.

The second day saw groups disappearing off to various locations for different activities. We and another climbing pair departed at 0600hrs for the Ben, to get on the routes early. Firstly we arrived at Tower scoop, grade III, there were already people on the route and the other climbing pair with us were kitting up to get on it. So we opted to ascend Gardyloo Gully, grade II and go and look for another route. During the ascent of Gardyloo we unexpectedly came across a little ice pitch, this increased the grade to about III. Having conquered the ice pitch and then questioned if we were on the right route, we

headed off towards No 4 Gully, the usual and easiest of the Gullies to descend. On the decent we opted to go for Green Gully, grade IV mainly because the route had no one else on it, but it would also leave us with enough time to bag North Gully, grade II. 3 ascents and 3 descents later we headed back to the car park to await the other pair, who to our relief had also opted for Gardyloo gully to top out and came across the ice pitch we had.

The Third day the majority of the groups were heading into the Ben, with others departing for the Ring of Steel and the Cairngorms. On arrival at the Charles Inglis Clark (CIC) hut everybody went their separate ways; we headed off for Comb Gully, grade IV and the other pair opted for our previous route, Green Gully, the rest of the groups headed off towards Gardyloo (guess what's coming) Gully, to top out on the Ben. Comb Gully turned out to be the best and final route for us. I climbed the first 2 pitches, which entailed two short steep ice pitches that were very poorly protected. Sgt Chiddle finished the climb with the crux move at the top, which continued to dinner plated for about 5 minutes before we topped out. Due to time restraints we headed back to the car park and met up with the other pair who had just climbed Green Gully on the way back. We waited at the car park for the other group to return, after about 1 and a half hours, we realised that they had opted for the Gardyloo option, 2 hours later the group returned looking as though they had just completed a 24hr endurance march, according to them it felt more like a 48hr march.

On the final day of the meet the weather took a turn for the worst which saw people heading off down south to end the week on a high, a few opted for the climbing wall option, whilst the rest of us headed off to finish the week with curved ridge. All in all it was a very successful week, to which I would recommend to anyone who is interested in either trying something new or building on the knowledge they already have through more personnel experiences. We would like to end by thanking Maj K Edwards APTC for organising the meet, the staff at JSMTW (B), Dusty Millar RM and Andy Nelson for all the advice, but not the ice screws, and finally Coleen for the excellent cuisine and hospitality.



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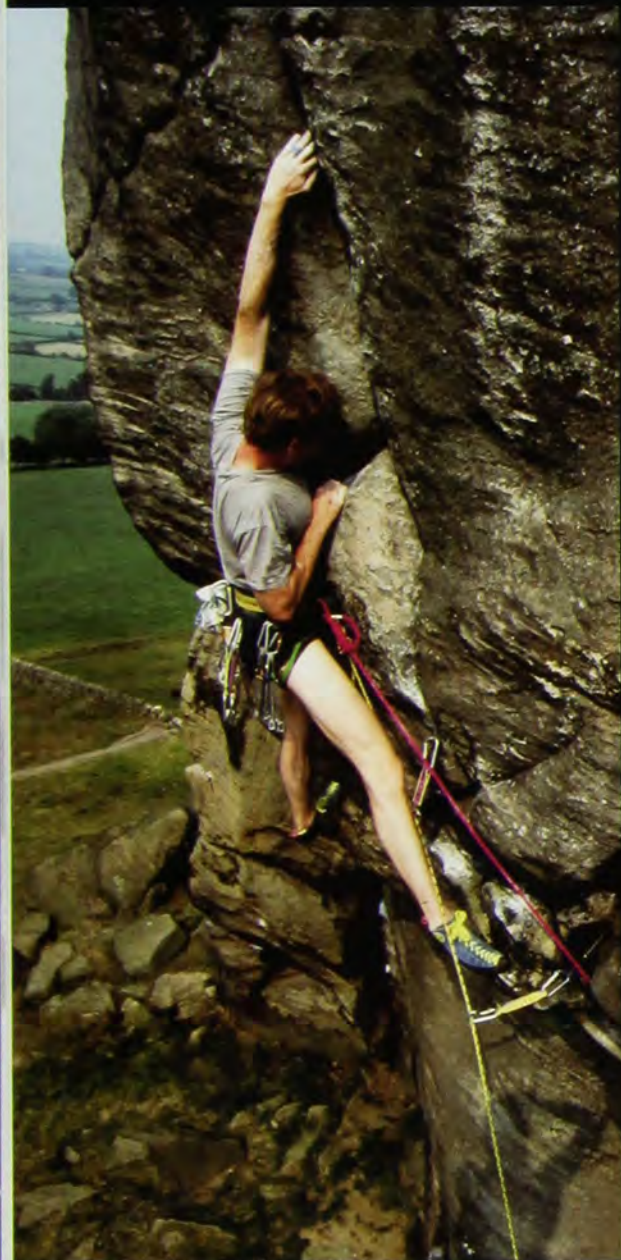


Climbers at Lost Horse Valley, Joshua Tree



Will Woodheal, belay on The Message IV.6.

# AMA CLIMBER



Rich White on Western Front E3 6a, Armscliff.



Tamia Noles in the Ruth Glacier Area.



Stu Macdonald on



Sunset on the hills. A





*Rab Black at the Junkyards, Canmore, Canada.*

# RS IN ACTION



*Pulling Pulk uphill, Athabaska Glacier, Canada.*



*ald on summit of Dinali.*



*Olly in Little Switzerland.*



*Dan Sturman climbing at Bow Lake Falls, Canada.*



*hills, AMA Eastr Meet,*



# THE MADONNA EXPERIENCE

By Maj Rich Baker

It had seemed a fantastic idea 9 months ago, 2 weeks in Spain, climbing near Barcelona. The prospect of the sun, the Spanish mountain scenery and of course the climbing, filled us all with anticipation and enthusiasm during the depths of the 1998 British winter. We had asked the CO for three weeks, he offered one, we settled for two, the deal had been done. All we had to do now was to get fit, plan the expedition in detail and write those polite letters, begging for funds.

11EOD Regt RLC is an unusual unit within the Corps, not being based in one single location and with its substantial sprinkling of other cap badges. The team venturing on Exercise Madonna Tiger was therefore to consist of 4 persons from the RLC, 2 from the R Signals and 2 from the AGC. All the participants had an interest in climbing; half climbed regularly, half wanted to learn to climb, all volunteered. Having been inspired by an article in a climbing magazine, the area of Montserrat was chosen as

the expedition destination. The Montserrat Mountain overlooks the valleys of Catalonia from its commanding position, 40 km NE of Barcelona. Precariously built on the side of the mountain is the Monastery housing the Sanctuary of the Mother of God of Montserrat, patron Saint of Catalonia. The monastery has been a centre of pilgrimage since ancient times and is still one of the most famous within the Catholic world. Every year, thousands of coach loads of worshippers visit the monastery to pay homage to the image of Saint Mary, placed in the Basilica. Our place of worship however was in a far more inhospitable place, far above the tourist circus below. In addition to the religious attractions, Montserrat is also a premier climbing area, renowned for its unique towers and intimidating climbs.

After being transported to Spain by Easyjet, we collected our pre-booked hire cars in Barcelona and began our journey away from the night clubs and bars of the city, much to the dismay of



On a multi pitch route.

Sgt Dave Clark and Capt Simon Fyfe. The view of the mountain as we drew close was far beyond any of our wildest dreams. From the valleys of Catalonia, Montserrat rose thrusting its massive spires to the heavens. Not a word was spoken in either car. The impressiveness of the situation did not relent even at the campsite that was surprisingly built into the side of the mountain, looking down upon the monastery.

The first morning can only be described as shocking. We had forgotten the monastery

bells and the fact that monks enjoy ringing their bells at 5am in the morning. That morning we made ourselves believe that we could endure such torture for the next 13 days. The climbing turned out to be equally soul destroying initially. In the UK, climbing can be made relatively safe using the latest protection equipment. In France, fixed protection is pre-placed to ensure the safety of the lead climber. In Montserrat the situation was far different. The rock is conglomerate and thus resembles coarse, reinforced concrete, and to our surprise



The team in Spain.



it did not allow the use of any of our traditional equipment. Local ethics had also prevented the liberal use of bolts. All we needed now was bad weather to really dampen our spirits.

### The aim of Exercise

Madonna Tiger was for every member of the team to make an ascent of a multi pitch route on a suitable tower on the Montserrat Mountain, after a period of concentrated training. As I sat on the belay ledge on day 9, I had severe doubts as to whether LCpl Louise Adams and LCpl Fay Hutchinson would reach me. They had to climb 30m up a polished pebble dotted slab at grade 5 (British Very Severe) which I had just wobbled up without displaying any style or grace. To my surprise they both arrived, eyes bulging, forearms pumping, brows sweating. They were not impressed at the news that there was only another two pitches to go, both as equally as hard as the previous, both increasing in exposure the higher we travelled. The next pitch steepened yet the tenacity (and fear) of the girls overcame the difficult moves in what can only be described as a 'sea of rock'. The last pitch was to be the real test of nerve. Okay, it was only graded severe but not one piece of protection in a full 50m pitch would make even the boldest climber perspire a little. Sgt Dave Clark and LCpls Louise Adams, Rob Head and Fay Hutchinson all succeeded in climbing a 3-pitch route up Gora Marinera and then face the horrors of a multi-pitch abseil. Quite an achievement after just 9 days of climbing.

Having survived 3 rather unpleasant storms by day 12 of the expedition and with more bad weather on route, only one climbing day remained. Throughout the entire expedition the more experienced climbers of the team had quashed ambitions to climb Cavall Bernet, the infamous symbol of Catalan independence (the insolent erect finger), due to a mixture of fear and the pretence of responsibility to the rest of the team. With our departure looming there

was to be no more hiding. Cavall Bernet proudly holds the title of being the most striking feature on the Montserrat Mountain. As we stood beneath our intended route the hope of rain faded. Capt Simon Fyfe climbed the first pitch with only one piece of protection in 40m of climbing. A smile crept across his face as he clipped the bolt at the belay; it disappeared as the bolt wobbled in his hand. Capt Andy Parry led the next and hardest pitch of the route slowly and confidently without incident. It was now my turn. Above the belay an incredible looking corner, snaked skyward for 40m, overhanging gently at the top. It would have been easy apart from the water oozing from the crack at the back and the old, rusty pegs that I clipped tentatively. I thought of the bargaining in the COs office then was suddenly brought back to reality by the shouts from my now cold and concerned friends beneath, hanging in their harnesses on dubious, wobbly bolts. After one more pitch we each in turn arrived on the summit of Cavall Bernet, to be met by a percaireously perched, contemporary artistic impression of the Madonna. After grasping the photo opportunity, the Madonna proved to be a very safe and welcome abseil anchor for the start of our descent.

The expedition did not pass without incident. 3 nights were spent wondering whether the campsite would exist in the morning or would it be swept down the mountain as a result of the unrelenting rain and hail. And were those snorting noises in the middle of the night really a wild pig? Not forgetting the seventies night in Barcelona that provided a welcome break from the mountain and is a must for any visiting John Travolta. In conclusion Exercise Madonna Tiger proved to be highly successful expedition. The expedition aim of getting every team member up a multi-pitch route on the Montserrat towers was achieved and surpassed. And no, none of us slept through the daily 5am early morning call from the monks.



Top rope training.

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# AMA RED ROCK 2003

By Capt Mark Stevenson

Red Rock was the AMA's first purely rock climbing expedition in several years. In December 2002, 12 AMA members spent 2 very successful weeks climbing in Red Rocks, Nevada and Joshua Tree, California.

Despite being more work to organise than I anticipated and then dislocating my shoulder on the 3rd day of the expedition, it was still a superb trip and a most rewarding experience. If you are reading this and have even the smallest glimmer of an idea for a future AMA Expedition, get in touch with the committee and set about making it a reality.

I cannot rate Red Rocks and Joshua Tree too highly as destinations for a climbing expedition. If you would like any more information/advice or a copy of the PXR (or equally importantly if you would like to get out climbing in Northern Ireland) drop me an email at [mark@climbers.net](mailto:mark@climbers.net).

Rather than the traditional narrative from day 1 through 16, the photographs and the following three short articles will hopefully convey something of the atmosphere of the trip:

## Grimson Chrysalis A Route to Freeze For!

By Sgt Robert Stevenson

In Juniper Canyon just out of the winter sun (all day), is the start to a world-renowned climb. On 18th December with only a couple of days left of the trip and with the weather closing in, Crimson Chrysalis (5.9) was one of the last starred routes that was a must do.

With only ten hours of daylight, an hour and a half walk-in, 9 pitches, an abseil descent and the walk back, it meant an early start. With frost on the ground and ice on the rock two climbing teams set off.

George (Griffin) climbed with Cath (Stephens) and I was with Al (Steele). The route was fantastic with thought, skill and technique needed to complete each pitch. Every time we were seconding or belaying we were wearing padded jacket and gloves. The route was exposed looking straight down two thousand feet but fighting the cold and the approaching darkness we ran it out pitch after pitch.

The top arrived suddenly. The achievement and amazing situation were enough to banish thoughts of numb hands and feet from our minds. We abseiled back down the route itself, sometimes not quite believing that we had actually managed to climb the rock were now descending. As the first of us reached to bottom, the last of the light left the canyon.

A route I will remember and climb again, but next time when the weather is warmer!

## MOD Forms, Morphine and Climbing Madness

By Capt Mark Stevenson

In case you wanted to know, Morphine is great stuff, absolutely superb. It makes you see stars, literally. It was the 10th of December. I was sitting on a hospital bed deliriously happy whilst Richard (Baker) was rather upset I had just ruined a perfectly good days sport climbing thanks to some atrociously bad climbing technique.

It was glorious overhanging, pocketed sandstone. Feet high, I lunge upwards with my left arm for the next jug hold. Muscles screaming, grip faltering, feet slipping, I make another increasingly desperate lunge rightwards. I latch the hold but left hand slips and feet swing free. My right shoulder didn't like this one bit and it let me know this in no uncertain terms.

Well I hadn't spent six months shuffling paperwork – JSATFAs, Risk Assessments, LLANDSO 4402 Annex Bs, Grant Application Forms etc. – to sit around at the campsite just because my arm now happened to be in a sling. Therefore suitably equipped with a map, and a copy of 'Hiking Las Vegas' I decided to go for a short walk.

It was around 2pm. I was somewhere on the far side of Rainbow Mountain, the result of a circuitous route off the edge of the map and about 4000' feet of scrambling. I was balancing up a rather blank sandstone slab, one handed. I was not concentrating. I was desperately not concentrating on the massive exposure and the small matter of the 400' drop below me.

The next morning I was still coming to terms with the fact that my short walk hadn't been the most well advised endeavour. 9 hours of scrambling had left my quads in such a state I could hardly walk!

Several days later in Joshua Tree I was still handling my non-climbing status remarkably well. However, despite protests, I couldn't resist climbing at least one route. A one-handed ascent of a starred 5.7 (Double Dogleg) on top-rope therefore helped preserve my sanity for a bit longer.

All joking aside, as expedition leader I was so concerned that everyone else got something out of the trip that my own injury was not nearly as demoralising as it could have been. Having 11 other climbers all thank me at the end of 2 weeks of climbing was far more satisfying than completing any route would have been.

*Postscript* – Back in the UK, I headed off to the AMA New Year Meet intending to rest my shoulder and do a bit of gentle winter walking (all my winter climbing gear safely left in the Mess at Arborfield). As you may guess that plan didn't last. By 10a.m. on the 31st of December I had borrowed a pair of axes and was soloing up The Runnel in Coire an t'Sneachda. I was not concentrating. I was desperately not concentrating on the vertical soft snow cornice that was slowly disintegrating under me, and the small matter of the 400' drop below me.



## Black Orpheus

By Capt Cath Stephens

Black Orpheus (graded 5.9+ in one guide book, 5.10 in another) was by far the best route that Maj George Griffin and I completed. At 9 pitches and 450m of fairly hard rock climbing, it was an experience not to be missed!

The approach was a fair slog, hopping along a boulder field in a dry stream bed, then swift steep scrambling 250m up the side of the valley, trying to stay ahead of the American couple close on our heels. In the end however we were happy they were there; they had already recced the route the day before and knew where it started. The guide book simply said "Climb the obvious left facing corner", which in a huge rock amphitheatre of left facing corners wasn't too helpful!

I got the 1st pitch, which although graded only 5.7 was surprisingly hard; a warning of things to come! The climbing continued at a reasonable level, until a while later when we hit easy ground, and were able to move together, combining a few pitches into one. The rest of the route looked ominous however, disappearing up a long chimney up to the summit, which was still along way above us. Although it was a sunny day the air was bitter, and with darkness upon us by 5pm each day we were concerned to move quickly.

George had the good fortune (?) to lead the next pitch. As he was out of sight in the chimney, I had no idea what he was going through, until I set off to follow. The pitch was fantastic - sustained, steep, challenging for the entire 50m rope length. Had I been leading it I would have been a nervous wreck by the time I reached the end! It was also one of those typical American pitches, where you need the same size friend over and over again to be able to protect it properly. Luckily someone had been kind enough to

get a few of theirs stuck in the cracks, so had left them for future use, so George wasn't quite soloing.

Breathing a sigh of relief upon reaching George on the belay stance, I gave him my congratulations for a fantastic climb, sure that that was now the crux pitch over. A quick glance at the guide book informed me of my mistake; the crux was yet to come, and on my lead. Time was of the essence, and after a few brave attempts I handed the pitch over to George, who upset me even further by making it look easy. Morale was restored to me on my next lead however; 50m of fantastic layback climbing, with only a smooth rock face to balance off.

Happy with the day's climbing, we hit the top at 4pm. The guide book recommended a gully off to the right for the descent, stating that as long as down climbing ability was of a reasonable standard abseils would be unnecessary. 12 abseils and 5 hours later we reached the bottom, having been forced to climb back up to rescue the ropes once, cut a metre off each rope another time they got stuck in a crack, and finally abandon them on the last abseil when they got stuck again. (Don't worry - we went back and got them the next day). Exhausted, we made our way back to the campsite, and unanimously decided that we needed a day off!

Climbing at Joshua Tree



# ASPIRATIONS AND ICEFIELDS

by SSgt Mark Bradbury

"Right then I think it's about time we concentrated on the next task which is unfortunately changing the toilet barrel".

This comment was then met with several worried looks due to the fact it was foul weather at the time and the contents of the said item was close to overflowing.

Such is the etiquette within the huts of the Alpine Club of Canada.

However before anyone could be delegated for the objectionable task a smiling WO2 Vince Barrett appeared in the hut and informed us that he had changed the barrel. He went on to tell us that at times it looked more like a task for ATO than an aspirant mountaineer. "A job well done".

In July 2002 I led a team of novice mountaineers from 6th Regiment, Royal Military Police based in Northern Ireland into the Canadian Rockies in order to attempt an ascent of Mt Columbia (3747m) under the guise of Exercise Alberta Finn.

Following our arrival

in the Rockies unseasonably bad weather had tried to put a complete damper on the expedition. Fresh snow, whiteout conditions and crevasses deep enough to hide a house in had only added to the sense of anticipation.

However having waited patiently as a novice mountaineer whilst being subjected to the usual long apprenticeship that so many potential mountain leaders whinge about the time was fast approaching to test all the training and overcome any problems that we would encounter.

The chosen location for training our happy band of mountaineers was the Athabasca glacier, a tongue of ice six kilometres long, which forms part of the Columbia Icefield. What then proceeded was two days of intensive training in the way of the axe and crampons. This was all coupled with the obligatory crevasse rescue demo and practice sessions.

The phrase "Good I think we are about ready to do some mountaineering," was met with even more foul weather on the icefield.

Aspirations of a summit attempt on Columbia now began to fade. Temperatures were falling below zero at the valley base and the prevailing low pressure system looked like it was going to stay put.

With the attempt on Columbia shelved a plan to gain the headwall of the glacier and top out on the lesser imposing summit of Snow Dome was hatched. This plan was put into operation and we set off in good order to attempt the peak. Things were going well until we came upon the debris field of the mountains infamous serac field. It didn't disappoint as the serac field put on a small show for us reinforcing to all the objective dangers we all faced. A hasty but organised retreat to safe ground heralded the end of any attempt to gain the headwall and we had been beaten. However no time was wasted and top-roped ice climbs completed our foray on the Athabasca glacier.

A day's rest in Jasper followed before the team set off to attempt the Wapta traverse, a 5-day high level tour incorporating the remote mountain huts that dot the region.

Starting early from Jasper (0400hrs) we arrived at the start point above Peyto Lake, fresh snow had fallen so progress would be determined on the snow conditions encountered. This was to prove pertinent as the traverse unfolded.

Misty conditions met us as we made our descent towards the lake this was followed later in the day by clear blue skies and brilliant sunshine. We roped up at the glacier and moved steadily towards the first object, the Peyto hut. Arriving first we had the whole hut to ourselves, however this was short lived as other teams of climbers arrived to fill the hut.

The following morning we were met by complete whiteout conditions. Careful navigation and 6 hours later we arrived safely at the Bow hut tired but triumphant. The location of the hut is fantastic it lies on the edge of the moraine surrounded by peaks and serac's of gigantic proportions. The hut is the largest on the Wapta and is an ideal base for winter expeditions. A large communal area with kitchen facility and in the middle of this a wood stove which we employed to not only heat the hut but to dry

*The nose of the Athabasca Glacier.*



damp items. In essence a real home from home. The hut is utilised extensively by Yamnuska Guides the Canadian equivalent of Plas Y Brenin, for introductory courses in alpine mountaineering. Stories of mountaineering prowess could therefore be heard all around the hut as the evening drew on.

Day 3 would be a hard day from the Bow to Balfour hut but would prove to well worth the effort. A hard pull up from the Bow hut in cold but clear conditions towards the St Nicolas/Olive Col set the tone of the days efforts. The combined efforts of the previous days were beginning to tell this coupled with dwindling food stocks focussed the real need to conserve energy levels. As the Col was gained a lengthy rest period was taken. This gave us all the chance to wonder at the grandeur of the scenery and savour the moment. A few hours later we made the Balfour hut. In the middle of nowhere and with the whole hut to ourselves we enjoyed a sense of solitude, which reinforced the team's dependence upon each other.

Checking the route ahead from the comfort of the hut it was clear that we might encounter problems. The Balfour High Col lay ahead and conditions appeared to be less than favourable. An early start from Balfour would be needed so we set off after first light in order to gain the Col before snow conditions deteriorated. As I climbed up a small snow ramp the snow pack under foot seemed to settle with a disturbing unease. We all stopped and I then move to safe ground to check the pack. A snow pit was dug and the slope was tested. When pressure was applied above the pit a 20cm slab of snow sheared off with little effort, all bets were now off!

Back at the Balfour hut a plan was hatched to stay in the hut overnight and head back towards the Bow hut before moving back to the valley. The Sat phone was sparked to life and the Alpine Club of Canada was



*Crossing onto the ice field.*

contacted who stated that we could use the hut for a second night and once again we would have exclusive use, happy days.

As we planned a days activity in and around the hut the weather took a turn for the worse and total whiteout again engulfed the hut. The correct decision had been made at the right time to back off, which is the art of mountaineering.

A full day's training in further snow and ice techniques on a large piece of permanent snowfield took place before we retired to the confines of the hut. The main topic that evening was the remaining food supplies that we were carrying. The dry rations we were consuming were making our bodies crave for real scoff so thoughts of freshly baked Pizza's and steak and chips came to all.

An early start on the fifth and final day meant that good time was made. The ambient air temperature was -10 and patchy mist gave the early morning a sense of foreboding. We retraced our steps to the Bow hut and rested briefly before starting the long walk back to the valley. The descent back to Bow Lake and the safety of the valley lead us through forest tracks which hand railed a ravine. We were now focussed on the possibility of an encounter with a bear albeit a Brown or

Grizzly. We had seen a Grizzly on the road from Jasper 4 day's earlier and so as much noise was made as possible to avoid such a meeting. Singing proved to be the best method of generating the required volume and people's repertoire was becoming stretched as we arrived safely at Bow Lake and civilisation. The expedition was now

drawing to a close but spirits were high and although Mt Columbia hadn't been gained the team greatly benefited from their experiences, which made the venture a complete success. It has hopefully acted to increase the level of awareness within those, which attended to the aims of AT and raised the profile of the sport within the Regiment too.



*Training on the icetield.*



# ROMAN TREK!

A diary of 10 Tpt Regt RLC expedition to the Drakensberg mountains.

Tue 18 Jun 02. Equipment sorted, bergans packed, then unpacked and the contents halved and then re-packed, all that was left to do was to parade for a team photo and then head off in the minibus with high spirits to Heathrow. We were full of great expectations and our imaginations were running wild over sun-baked South African hills, gazelles grazing in golden grasses and perhaps the odd leopard or two to contend with. After a slight delay, the flight departed at 2130hrs, and crammed into narrow seats with no leg-room, we settled down as best as we could to watch the in flight movies.

Wed 19 Jun 02. After an uneventful 10-hour flight we arrived at Jo'berg International Airport at 0905 hrs and collected two VW Microbuses, which felt luxurious compared to the meagre seats in economy class on the plane. We spent the day heading down the N3 highway to our destination of Pietermaritzburg. The start of the journey took us over the South African Low Svelt in golden sunshine and temperatures hovering around 14°C. We stopped en route at "Nandos" for a quick lunch and people commented that whilst the temperature was pleasant, it was not as hot as we had been expecting. This was a theme that was to run throughout the trip! We finally arrived at Pietermaritzburg at about 1630hrs, and exhausted after spending the last 17 hrs sitting down we were keen to get out and explore the area. We were accommodated very comfortably in the Ngena Lodge. Our landlady, Sandy in fact made us so welcome that (due to our numbers) she moved out of her flat and we moved in!!! After a quick shower we found a Spar Shop and bought our food supplies for the next eight days.

Thu 20 Jun 02. Capt Moverley had planned a later start in order to allow us to recover from our anticipated "jet lag" the day before. Our constitution was marginally helped by the local brew found in "De Vincis" the previous evening, however, nothing prepared us for "Sani Pass Carriers". This was the transport, which was to take us to the trek start point about 3 hours away however it resembled a rather shoddy cattle truck but with less space. Once again we were shoehorned in with our bergans towed behind in a trailer. Just on the outskirts of Pietermaritzburg we turned off the highway and began the steady climb into the Drakensberg Hills, only stopping off at Underberg for a leg stretch and coffee. We arrived at Vergelegen National Park campsite early

that evening and were shocked at how much colder it was at altitude. We donned our Gortex jackets and set up camp before the light failed. It was then that we realised that:

We would need to stop walking by 1600 hours in order to give us time to set up camp in daylight and carry out basic administration. The sun tan lotion was going to remain redundant for the trip!

Fri 21 Jun 02. Day one of the trek itself. Within 15 minutes of setting off we encountered our first hill. It was straight up with numerous false summits and almost on hands and knees we hauled ourselves up. It was a harsh introduction to the Drakensberg and our strength continued to be tested all that day. The days walk took us along a ridge, however it was not flat and continued to climb up to peak after peak. After a brief stop for lunch next to a clear mountain stream it was time to descend from the ridge we were on and head West crossing a number of further ridges until we got to our campsite for the night. The area selected next to a good water source which was the only requirement the group required as we were totally self sufficient for the seven of the eight days. The walk was exhausting and our packs felt heavy on our un-toughened shoulders. The descents were as strenuous on the knees as the climbs and we soon realised that the "paths" marked on the map were (if you were lucky) no larger than a goat track, which more often than not disappeared into the long grass. Thus we spent most of the day walking on ankle-wrenching tufts of grass; the only respite was when we could walk along a firebreak or when the path would suddenly re-emerge. It was a hard start to the trek and unused to the weight people often tumbled. By the end of the day the expedition leader was concerned that we had fallen behind schedule, however the terrain was much harder going than anticipated and realising that people were exhausted and that light was fading we set up camp just short of our intended destination. Here we discovered just how cold the mountain water was...or at least that was Capt Guy Moverley's excuse!

Sat 22 Jun 02. After a night sleeping on ground that felt as though someone had put rocks in the bed, we woke up stiff and aching but better for the 12 hours sleep (the one advantage to having long nights)! It was a cold start though not too damp, and we soon warmed up by tackling the hill that we hadn't been able to face the previous evening. Our desti-

nation was Sulphur Springs, however to reach it we had to continue crossing the valleys, which meant further punishment to our knees. Cpl Ian Boyle was delegated the task of leading this leg and we climbed one ridge that offered superb views, looking down on the ridges we had tackled the day before. Whilst he kept the pace steady, there was one descent which we had no way of avoiding and was so steep that we had to literally slide down on our backsides - all of us except Capt Guy Moverley who was like a mountain goat and oblivious to any gradient! Of course having got to the bottom (which took the best part of an hour and a half) we ended up in a steep gorge and all of us knew that there was only one way out, straight up! Deciding that it was not challenging enough Cpl Ian Boyle then chose the most difficult route to ascend. This involved a scramble up a rock face using three points of contact, or 73 points of contact if you are SSgt Rennie Poulter including "teeth firmly clamped on the grass" a new technique he devised but soon put into practice by all. Capt Shauna Godber offered assistance by pushing at one end and WO2 Andy Relph ("Shrek") pulled the other and eventually we made it to the top. We arrived at Sulphur Springs by 1700 hours and in fading light we set up our camp at 2300m with panoramic views and complete with small waterfall.

Sun 23 Jun 02. This time it was Capt "Phoebe" Smiths turn to lead and for a change we began the day by going straight up a hill on for once a well-defined path. After the initial steep climb there was another steep descent but not before the path totally vanished, only to re-appear at the bottom on the other side of the river. At this point it is worth mentioning that Cpl Vikky "I'm a PTI" Bell had a penchant for river crossings! It might not matter how fit she was or that she had reached a certain level in gymnastics, with a bergan on her back that was almost as large as herself, her centre of balance had vanished and wobbled precariously over every crossing. Deciding this was good entertainment for the rest of the group we ensured that where there was a river we would cross it, sometimes 2 or 3 times! The day was spent steadily climbing to 2600m heading towards the Lesotho Ridge where we were to ascend via the Mangaun Pass. By "pass" most of us expected a recognised route through the mountain range. In the dictionary a pass is described as "a narrow passage through mountains". What we faced once we had traversed around the spur of yet another hill was what looked like an impassable rock wall 400m high





with dried out waterfalls, and if you could get high enough, a steep grassy embankment with another cliff face and then another dried waterfall. Where was the path? And quite which part of this wall was considered the pass? With stomachs churning, and not wanting to accept the inevitable, we consulted the map. The nearest accessible pass was 16km south (another days walking)! Biting the bullet we set off up the re-entrant! It took 3 hours of sweat and blood and a considerable helping of nerves to reach the top, but finally and with huge relief all thirteen of us made it. Without doubt every single person learnt a lot about themselves and about each other on the climb. The team pulled together and encouraged one another to conquer the challenge. We even had a chance to use the rope that we had been lugging around and Capt Guy Moverley finally put into practice his knowledge of knots. Just as we reached the summit the weather closed in and it started snowing. The temperature had plummeted, visibility was reducing and we still had another 6km to go. It was imperative that we got off down the mountain. Digging deep, we traversed, climbed and finally descended onto the Lesotho Plain; our destination was Sani Top Chalet, the highest pub in Africa. The thought of a cold beer, warm bed and fresh rations motivated everyone and soon we were motoring, however we did not reach our destination before darkness fell. Fortunately it was a full moon and we could see the lights twinkling, and apart from a quick exchange with some Lesotho Bushmen nothing was going to get in our way. Sani Top is a very basic establishment run by a South African called John. It provides simple accommodation in the form of bunkrooms, relies on log fires for heating but the food and hospitality is excellent and if you're quick the showers are warm. Outside the temperature had plummeted to  $-4^{\circ}\text{C}$  (not taking into account the wind chill factor) and we had walked for over 10 hours. We were grateful that for one night we would have a good nights sleep uninterrupted by rocks.

Mon 24 Jun 02. John's local knowledge told us that the stores marked on the

map no longer existed therefore he gave us a lift to a local village where we re-provisioned for the next 5 days. The choice was limited but adequate and the prices cheap. Cpl Vikky Bell led this leg, 4 km down Sani Pass (which was a decent rough road) and then cutting off cross country. The ground was frozen hard and the cloud was down so visibility was not good. After an hour or so it started to snow again and the wind picked up so it was back on with the Gortex Jacket. Having spent several hours contouring the hills we eventually headed down the valley and into a warmer climate. As soon as we were off the hills the snow stopped, the sun came out and we had to strip back into T-shirts. The valley we were trekking along was one of those glacial valleys with superb rock formations carved out by centuries of ice. We camped in a bow bend of the river in a valley full of moonlight and tents crisp with a heavy frost.

Tue 25 Jun 02. We awoke to the calls of baboons and in the freezing cold morning settled down to the routine of cooking and washing in the ice cold water. WO2 Andy Relph sat down with his porridge and scanned the rocks for these elusive animals. The rest of us had, one by one, realised that the only baboon in the area was the one behind the rock, namely Capt Guy Moverley; oh and Andy Relph of course once he realised that he had been taken in! The valley opened up into a plain on which we saw a herd of Eland grazing in the warm sunshine and then further on a family of baboons. At last we felt that we genuinely were in Africa and not Sennybridge. We descended from the high svelt and stopped by a crystal clear river for an hour to wash our clothes and ourselves and have lunch. This was probably the most idyllic moment of the trip, however the hour was soon up and we went on our way. We headed through another valley and came out on a plateau that overlooked Underberg away off into the distance. It was the only civilisation we had seen since setting off with exception of our brief stay at Sani Top. LCpl Blackburn was leading and we were heading for Siponwengi Caves but once again the terrain and lack of paths got

the better of us and we had to camp just short of the destination. The main problem that we had encountered apart from the rough terrain (and would continue to encounter for the rest of the trip) was the early evenings and the fact that as soon as the sun went behind the mountains the temperatures plummeted.

Wed 26 Jun 02. This time it was Pte Chris Pay's turn to lead. We headed down to Cobham Station and then turned back into the hills up another valley, which again would lead us to Siponwengi Caves. The morning was spent climbing steadily until we reached another wide plateau where we stopped for lunch. Within the imminent area there was supposed to be a cave and National Monument. As with the South African wildlife these sights remained elusive until Capt Guy Moverley discovered the cave, which was in fact an overhang. As everyone was eating lunch and recovering from the climb, Capt "Phoebe" Smith went to find the National Monument. This proved to be more difficult than originally planned, as she had no idea what the monument would consist of and





therefore did not know what it was that she was looking for. She pressed on and suddenly came upon a plaque stating that on the rock wall were the most important cave paintings to be found in the Drakensberg and that due to their importance they had been declared a national monument. The rest of the group then ascended to the monument to see what all the excitement was about. We continued in the afternoon, crossing the plateau and then descending down the other side. Vast areas of the Drakensberg have firebreaks burnt into the hills and often we would find ourselves walking along these. Whilst it was easier to see our footing, it also meant that we became covered in ash, which meant that everything we touched or carried became black and smelly. It started to get late, however we knew that we were close to Mzimkhulwana Mountain Hut so we decided to push on. The honesty hut was clean, had spacious bunkrooms and even a shower block with ice cold showers and a sit down loo! Once again we used the opportunity to get all our washing done. We tucked into another large meal of yet more rice or pasta and then, because we were lower and therefore the temperatures were warmer, we were able to sit outside well into the night.

Thu 27 Jun 02. Another bright day dawned and Capt "Phoebe" Smith to introduce the team to Maize Meal. She had never had it, however the little village shop at Sani Top did not have porridge and this was supposed to be the native equivalent. As long as a lot of sugar was added it really was not too bad, however She failed to convince the rest of the team! Pte Ryan Mulvey led the team up another climb, which began steadily, but once again the path disappears so we scramble up a steep gorge to get to the plateau at the top. After seven days strenuous walking the toll is beginning to take effect. People are now beginning to dig into their reserves and the thought of climbing more hills begins to dampen moral. However, this is soon restored by an early finish at our next campsite. Good progress had been made over the last two days and by 1430 hours the discussion arose as to whether to push on to the finish or whether to stop as planned. According to the map there was at least another 7 or 8 km to go. It was already 1430 hours so some of this would have to be done in the dark. Some of the group was keen to push on, however others were tired and therefore it was decided that we would camp by the river just short of the road. This allowed us the rest of the afternoon to swim in the river and warm up afterwards in the sun. This part of the river had a particularly large pool, which looks enticing until your big toe touched the water. Then it was a matter of pride and endurance to go in. Most people rose to the challenge but one or two

shied away! For those who did jump in it was very refreshing and worth the heart palpitations.

Fri 28 Jun 02. The last day of the trek and all the aches and pains were forgotten as people had their breakfast and packed up their tents. After only 2 or 3 km cross-country the team reached the road that led to our final destination, the Drakensberg Garden Hotel and Campsite. The pace was set, the heat was on and Cpl Vikky Bell had to refrain from calling out "Break into Quick March!" At the hotel we arrived hot, stinking and half starved (even though we had stopped at the only shop in a 35km area for an impromptu feast of pork pies, chocolate and coke. So much for the healthy diet! Having passed the campsite on the way in, we went to register and at the last moment Capt Guy Moverley relented and arranged for the expedition to sleep in small self-catering chalets. Before he could change his mind, we were in, showered and then eating steak and chips! WO2 Andy Relph, Cpl Ian Boyle and SSgt Rennie Poulter headed off to the golf course (which to their horror involved walking up hills). Capt Shauna Godber, Capt "Phoebe" Smith and Sgt Paul Byrne went horse riding for 2½ painful hours and the remainder watched South Africa beat New Zealand in the international rugby under 21s tournament. Then we tackled the "all you can eat buffet" before introducing the South Africans to renditions of some of our less well known marching songs!

Sat 29 Jun 02. With sore heads and aching legs we were up early and putting our lives into the hands of Sani Pass Carriers for a long and tiring drive back to Pietermaritzberg. We arrived in the afternoon, shaken *and* stirred, after almost coming off the road whilst the driver was reaching for her mobile (yes ladies *she* let the side down with *her* driving). With a group predominantly made up of RLC Drivers the error of her ways was not so subtly explained to her. We then transferred into another two VW Microbuses and under our own steam made our way North to Durban to the Battlefield Lodge. Arriving late, we found a fire blazing outside and a BBQ stocked ready for us to cook the food that we had bought en route. For some it was an early night whilst for others it provided another opportunity and a fresh audience to entertain with more songs about the RCT.

Sun 30 Jun 02. Another early start and another drive to pick up Neville Wellington, a retired South African Farmer who was a local expert on the Zulu and Boer wars who was hired to take us on the battlefield tours of Isandhlwana and Rorkes Drift. Neville proved to be a font of knowledge and spent the entire day teaching us about the massacre of the 24th Regt at Isandhlwana and the subsequent suc-

cessful defence of Rourkes Drift where 11 Victoria Crosses were awarded. It was a long but fascinating day and culminated with a big home cooked meal around a fire back at the Battlefield Lodge.

Mon 1 Jul 02. This was the day of the visit to the Ithala Game Reserve, however it was approximately 120 km away which meant another prompt start. It was a beautiful game reserve that reputedly had four of the "Big Five". Unfortunately the day we arrived the animals had clearly "gone out to lunch" for with the exception of lots of arrogant wart hogs and elegant impalas, of the Big Five the team only saw Buffalo. Still it was fun to be driven around the hills for a change. The visit finished with a superb lunch on a sunny veranda before heading back to the Battlefields Lodge. On the way back we stopped off at a local African Craft shop in Durban in order to buy the mandatory presents and souvenirs and this gave the girls their first "shopping fix" of the trip.

Tue 2 Jul 02. Our last early start and it was back on the road to Johannesburg. The plan was to get there at lunch time in order to allow a couple of hours shopping before checking in at the airport. In Jo'burg the boys headed to the bar whilst the girls shopped and then all met up at the transport to go to the airport loaded with presents and souvenirs. Before going to South Africa we had been warned about level of crime and had been told to stay in groups and avoid certain areas. On the way to the airport, the lack of road signs led to a detour through a less civilised part of the city in vans laded down with bergans and presents! We locked our doors and tried to look inconspicuous, even when Cpl Vikky Bell, SSgt Rennie Poulter and WO2 Andy Relph all hit the floor simultaneously after a car backfired! The flight departed at 2045 hrs and this time the trip was smoother and more comfortable. Maybe it was the fact that we had spent 8 days "sleeping rough" however whatever it was it worked.

Wed 3 Jul 02. We landed at Heathrow airport at 0730 hrs and were out of the airport and into the transport that had come to meet us by 0815 hrs. Then it was just a relatively short drive back to Colchester. Maybe it felt short because we had covered far greater distances in South Africa or whether it was because we slept throughout the return journey. All too soon we were back in camp and facing a barrage of accusations about having had "an easy time". This was definitely not the case. The expedition was without doubt both challenging and physically demanding. The team was stretched physically but more importantly, stretched spiritually. The entire group have returned knowing themselves better and feeling more confident of their abilities than when they set out. The only problem remains is where to go next!



# 'IRAN' PLUS FOUR WELSH MOUNTAINEERS

## THIS MUST BE A GOOD STORY!

An expedition from the Alpine Ski Club (ASC), which included four Welsh mountaineers, has successfully put climbers on the summit of Damavand. Damavand at 5761m is the highest mountain in Iran and is a thousand metres higher than Mont Blanc.

The expedition chose Iran because it is very accessible with good and economical air flights from UK. It has two main mountain ranges with over forty peaks over 4000m. And it has a rich cultural heritage with many fine tourist sites from the Caspian Sea in the North to Shiraz and Persepolis in the South.

The four Welsh members of the party were Hywel Lloyd, a Vice-President of the Club, from the Cynon Valley; David Wynne Jones from Swansea; Phil Ingle from Llanberis, whose father Baz is a celebrated climber; and Alun Davies from Cardiff.

The first week was spent warming up on the Zagros mountains to the west of Isfahan. This remote area lacks good maps but has many fine summits and offers really adventurous ski-mountaineering. The ASC members use skis with skins stuck to the base of the skis to walk up hill, and then strip off the skin to ski down to the valley. In the old days these skins were made from the fur of seals, but now they are made from man made fibres.

On the second day of the Zagros phase a group of six was hit by an avalanche in mid afternoon, having abandoned an ascent because of bad weather. Three of them were caught up in this wall of snow what broke off and tumbled down the mountain. Hywel Lloyd was able to avoid being taken down but lost his ski sticks, while Alun Davies was held in the centre of the avalanche and was rolled and tumbled down the mountain for about two hundred metres. He lost both his skis, sticks and goggles.

Alun says – "Avalanches are the enemy of the off-piste skier and we learn how to avoid them when we can, and how to deal with them when caught; but no amount of text book study prepares you for the actual event. I had no warning other than a shout from a member of

the party as I was hit by this fast moving wall of snow. The next thing I remember was being rolled over and over – trying to swim and fight my way to the surface – choking on powder snow – everything going black as I was face down in deep snow. Then the avalanche seemed to stop – I was facing down I think. Then I was moving again – and while I thought I might be buried and die there I certainly did not see my life rushing through my mind; I was much too keen to stay alive and tried to remember all those tips for surviving in an avalanche. Try rolling out to the side – difficult when you are spinning anyway. Try swimming using a breast stroke style to the surface – difficult when you have a thirty pound rucksack on your back. Save your energy to the end so that you can clear an area around your head to breathe.

When I finally came to rest after no more than a minute of free falling – I was extremely lucky to find that I was on my back and I could see light above me. My right arm was injured and trapped, but with my left arm I was able to punch a hole up to the surface and could feel the fresh air rush in as I did so. Clearing the snow from around my mouth and face I realised that I was going to live – it would just be a matter of time before my mates came along using hand held avalanche transceivers which would allow them to find me and dig me out.

Surprisingly, despite waving my hand above the snow for ten minutes, no one came. I lay there fearing that most of the party were buried around me. The next concern for a buried victim is that the snow hardens and sets solid as concrete in the first twenty minutes. So using my good left arm I dug at my right arm and freed it. That allowed me to undo the chest and waist straps of my rucksack and then with much kicking, shoving and struggling I was able to fight my way to the surface and get my breath back."

It turned out that Alun had been very lucky indeed to survive a serious avalanche but it was a "wind slab" avalanche and not as deep as a "full depth" avalanche. He was particularly fortunate to end up near the surface and the right way up.

The remainder of the party had been split up by the accident and by the time they found Alun he had dragged his rucksack to safe ground away from the threat of further avalanches. Having lost his skis he spent the next four hours walking down the mountain until darkness and was then forced to bivouac in a deserted building where he and some others spent the night, before returning to base camp the next day.

In view of continuing bad weather the party moved to Tehran and the Elbruz mountains which are clearly visible just to the north of the capital. After some further days of acclimatization, living in mountain huts at high altitude and climbing 4000m peaks, the expedition set off for Damavand. Moving to base camp meant driving to the road head in a bus, transferring to Land Rovers for a further thirty minute hair raising ride, and finally using mules and donkeys to take skis and equipment to the lower of two huts which were to be used for the ascent.

It was at this stage that knowledge of the mountain weather was essential for the summit bid. It had been possible in Tehran to access the internet, and to download the relevant page from the [www.snow-forecst.com](http://www.snow-forecst.com) website. This site is a world-leader in snow forecasting around the globe and is based in Cardiff. The company had kindly provided a special web page for the expedition giving the predicted weather and snow fall on Damavand. The forecast for the week was strong winds, fresh snow and a summit temperature as low as -26°C. The only reasonably good day was Friday so the team made plans to be in position at the higher hut at 4000m on the Thursday evening. That night there was a violent storm which shook the hut and almost blew away anyone who ventured out of the small building. But the next morning was bright and clear, and though still cold and windy a party of five of the strongest mountaineers went off up the mountain.

Over the course of the next four hours three of the climbers came down with cold related problems but in the early afternoon our radios gave us

the good news from the summit that two of the team, David Hamilton and Alex Miller, had successfully reached the summit and were now on their way down. David is the director of High Adventure and was responsible for the excellent organisation of the expedition and can be contacted at [david@highadventure.org.uk](mailto:david@highadventure.org.uk)

Snow-Forecast had delivered accurate and timely information which allowed the expedition to take the one window of opportunity open to them. As a result the goal of the expedition was achieved. The following day was again as predicted with cloud, poor visibility and further fresh snow, vindicating the decision to summit on the Friday and proving the viability and accuracy of [www.snow-forecast.com](http://www.snow-forecast.com) Nick Russill the director of Snow-Forecast says "We were delighted that our forecast proved accurate and allowed the expedition to plan around it, and we congratulate the expedition on achieving their aim of climbing Damavand successfully."

The party returned safely to Tehran and spent the last days touring the amazing palaces and museums that are so devoid of tourists, and yet which display the vivid history and culture of one of the great countries of the world. The expedition was hosted in Iran by ARAZ Adventure Tours [www.araz.org](http://www.araz.org) who could not have been more helpful in arranging all aspects of the trip. Iran proved to be an excellent tourist destination. There was no hassle whatever from any angle. The people were kind and helpful and travel, food and accommodation were cheap. There is no longer wine in Shiraz as Iran is now an Islamic state, and that means no alcohol anywhere, and women have to cover themselves from head to toe in public but those are small penalties to pay for visiting such a rich and interesting country.

Contact Alun Davies on 02920 514141 or mobile 07802 767877

Nick Russill of Snow-Forecast on 08707 303050

David Hamilton of High Adventure on 02476 395422



# RIGHT IDEA - WRONG CONTINENT

An account of the 2003 Oxford UOTC Ski-mountaineering Expedition to the Canadian Rockies.

By Alistair Dinmore

One of the drawbacks of a military adventurous training exercise is that it has to have the diplomatic clearance and support of the host nation. Having spent two years planning a trip to climb Mt Aconcagua in Argentina, it came as a major surprise to be informed that we were not going to be allowed on to the mountain.

Apparently the mountain was "closed" on the dates that we wished to go, despite information to the contrary that I had earlier procured from guidebooks and official sources. We would be welcome into the country, but could not climb anywhere in the Aconcagua National Park. This naturally set the expedition planning into a state of turmoil.

Over the next two months, we looked at a number of alternatives. There was no question of cancelling at this point – we had assembled a team with six instructors, procured equipment and secured funding, all we needed was a mountain to climb. Mt Cook in New Zealand and Mt Blanc in the French Alps were considered, but we finally decided to make our new objective the peak of Mt Columbia in the Canadian Rockies.

Mt Columbia (3754m) is the second highest mountain in the Canadian Rockies. It lies on the western side of the Columbian Icefield, the largest glacier in the interior of North America, and can only be reached by a 2 day ski across glaciated terrain. With the inclement weather that we could expect in the early spring, it should prove to be a challenging and worthwhile objective.

Once the decision was finally made, my life became a lot easier. It is very difficult to put together the nuts and bolts of an expedition when you don't know where it is taking place.

The team of 24 assembled on 31 March with the usual flurry of last minute equipment issues and packing, before transporting the group to Heathrow. Working in freight aviation was a distinct advantage at this stage, and we were able to minimise the difficulties of checking in nearly 60 pieces of assorted baggage, including ice axes, skis and stoves. (Top tip – phone ahead and arrange group check-in if you ever find yourself in this situation!)

We based ourselves initially at the British Army facility in Canada called Trails End Camp. This gave us an opportunity to acclimatise to the temperatures (around -

15°C) and start teaching basic cross-country skiing in a controlled environment. My priorities were to give the team a good grounding in both skiing and crevasse rescue. Our preparations to date had not covered either, as they were not relevant to an attempt on Mt Aconcagua. We also had the opportunity to spend 2 days ice-climbing on superb routes local to Trails End and Lake Louise.

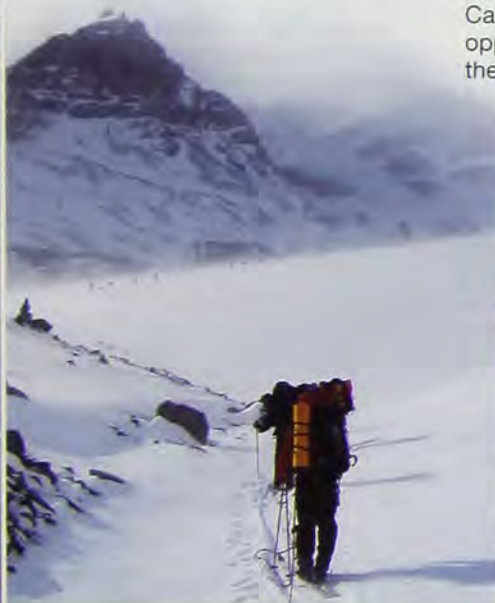
After a week in country, we were ready to tackle the main objective. A full day was spent purchasing food (7 trolleys and my biggest ever groceries bill), preparing pulks to carry our heavy kit, and general administration. We set out early in the morning for the long ascent of the Athabasca glacier. The weather, which had treated us well for the first week was now set against us, and we needed to get moving quickly in the strong winds and driving snow. Not ideal weather for mountaineering, but there was excellent training value in exposing our team of future Army Officers to these conditions, and we judged it safe to continue.

We worked in 4 man teams, each led by a qualified instructor and kept a mix of ability and experience between the teams. I was with Chris and Alanda, both

Officer Cadets and Matt, a Major in the reservist Parachute Regiment. The journey to the base of the mountain could take anything between 1 and 3 days, depending upon the weather and glacier conditions we encountered. We moved well at first, and made it most of the way up the Athabasca glacier, just below an area of major crevasses. We could have pressed on, but the wind speeds were now reaching 60 miles per hour in gusts, and it was likely that our tents would have been damaged or lost if pitched on the exposed plateau above us. A sheltered spot was found, probed for crevasses and the tents dug into the snow for the night.

We were to remain in this spot for the next 48 hours, whilst the storm raged around us, emerging from our tents every couple of hours to dig out them out from the falling and wind-blown snow. Finally, the third day dawned clear and bright and we were able to continue our journey.

All movement on the glacier was whilst roped together, due to the risk of fatal injury from falling down a crevasse. With the heavy snowfall of winter still on the mountain, many crevasses are obscured and there is no way of knowing whether the



The start of the climb.



Ice climbing at the Junkyards.



Pulka pulling on the Athabasca Glacier.



snow forms a secure bridge, or will collapse into the chasm below. Trying to keep a tight rope between individuals on skis, on very uneven terrain with a heavy pulk on the rope as well is a constant challenge. But a tight rope is essential if you are not to expose yourself to a fall and the subsequent shock-loading of the rope, which may well pull your fellow climbers into the crevasse as well.

This lesson was brought home when we were crossing a particularly tortuous section of the ice. It was Chris' turn to pull the pulk and he was doing well, but after skiing down into a small depression (crevasse?) he was struggling to pull it up out of the other side. At the time, I was keeping him on a tight rope from the edge of the depression but it was obvious he was not going to make it on his own. I signalled to Matt behind me, then moved into the depression to give him some help. I braced myself below the pulk and pushed hard.

Without warning the snow gave way and my legs dropped into darkness. The rucksack and my upper body remained on the soft snow, but I could see the crevasse below (although not the bottom!), and it was clear that I, Chris and the pulk were all sitting on a snow bridge less than 60cm thick. With a slack loop of rope between us, if either fell, we would certainly pull the other in, and possibly the remaining two as well. I told Chris that I had gone through and he had to get

himself and the pulk off the bridge as quickly as possible. With a huge effort he made it up the slope and braced himself as best he could. I was then able to roll further onto my side and carefully pull my legs and skis back through. Fortunately the snow held and I was soon back onto firmer ice.

The final slope of the glacier onto the plateau was about 30 degrees steep. The effort involved in skiing and pulling a pulk up a slope this steep is indescribable, even with 2 people on the rope. It is too steep for the skins on the skis to grip and tackle direct, so a zigzag route has to be taken. This means that the pulk is being pulled across the slope and naturally, tends to slide sideways. If not for the fact that our tents and food were on them, the pulks would have been smashed in frustration and hurled down a crevasse before we were even halfway up.

Once we reached the plateau, we finally had a view of our objective Mt Columbia, brooding magnificently at the far side of the icefield. The glimpse was tantalisingly brief, as the clouds soon swept across the glacier and once again hid it from view.

We pitched camp for the evening, with high hopes of fair weather for the next day. However we were once again to be disappointed. Although the winds had dropped, visibility was now down to about 20m in thick cloud. We waited the morning in situ, but eventually



Shopping for the expedition in Jasper.

I made the decision to abandon our attempt on the summit and return down the Sasquatchewan glacier.

It was a long hard route out, with much practice in the techniques of "survival skiing". Style and form take a back seat to all-out braking when you are on poor snow, steep crevassed slopes, and connected by a rope to a couple of novice skiers. And if all else fails, the best way of braking is to throw yourself off your skis and hug the snow. I have to admit that not all my emergency

stops were actually intentional either.

It was with some relief, therefore that we finally made it back to the roadhead. As I commented to one of my fellow instructors that evening over cold beer and pizza, it is good to go into the mountains, but it is great to come back again. The contrast between the danger and discomfort involved in tackling the greater ranges makes one far more appreciative of what we have in our daily lives.



Negotiating the crevasse field.

## Expedition Leaders Wanted

World Challenge Expeditions is a specialist in the provision of leadership, teamwork & personal development training for young people.

We require experienced mountain leaders and jungle trainers (ML or JSMEI qualified) to lead young people on a 4-6 week expedition to the developing world in summer 2004.

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# AMA MEMBER SURVEY 2003

It is now over 5 years since the AMA last conducted a survey of its members. Surveys are vital to inform the Committee, who do their work in your name, of your wishes and views. It is important that we learn these points of view, good and bad, so that we can continue to steer the AMA in the direction that you want.

The results of this survey will be compared with those from 5 years ago to see if its members are changing direction; but it is also much wider this time, and will collect much more information that will tell us how to improve.

Please take the time, no more than 10 minutes, to complete the following survey and return it to me (address below). I welcome all of your thoughts, good, bad or indifferent, and any criticism is useful. Whilst I cannot promise to action every point, if there is a groundswell of opinion in a particular area, you can rest assured that the President, Chairman and Committee will take note.

You are more than welcome to submit a return anonymously if you wish. However, to encourage replies, three equipment voucher prizes has been secured from our regular sponsors. The winner will be drawn from all those who respond and include their membership number. Obviously, to win this, we need to know who you are!

The closing date for replies is the end of October 2003, and results will be known in the New Year.

Please do take the time to let us know what you think. Take this opportunity to influence the direction of your Association. I look forward to seeing your views.

**Andy Parsons**  
Communications Officer

**FILL IN THIS FORM NOW**

JOHN  
MUIR  
TRUST

## John Muir Trust News

### Schiehallion Update

In last summer's issue we told how the John Muir Trust bought East Schiehallion in Perthshire – one of Scotland's most popular mountains. This popularity had led to the path to the summit becoming a boggy scar. The Trust set out to fix the problem by creating a new, narrow path on firmer ground and then to revegetate the old path so that it disappeared from view. We're delighted to report that since autumn last year volunteers and contractors have worked hard on the new path and by October over 3km will be completed – from the car park to the main ridge. Next year we will do low-key path work on the ridge and begin to revegetate the old path. Unlike many hillwalking paths, which just emerge from constant use and make a beeline up the hill, this new path has been carefully planned to have a consistent gradient and low impact on the environment.

### Butterflies and Bin Bags

Volunteers have been busy on the Trust's Ben Nevis Estate this year. Tasks have varied from surveying the rare mountain ringlet butterflies, to carrying off sacks of litter from the summit.

### For Sale

We have just launched a new range of stunning cards, reproduced from landscape paintings by David Wilson of

Fort William. These, along with the new illustrated diary 2004 and our Christmas cards and books are available online at [www.jmt.org](http://www.jmt.org)

### Run in the London Marathon

Once again the Trust has a few guaranteed places in the London Marathon 2004 (18 April). If you'd like to run for the Trust please contact Katie Jackson, 0131 554 0114 or [promotions@jmt.org](mailto:promotions@jmt.org)



Volunteers building a bridge for the Schiehallion path. Photo by Alison McGachy



Bla Bheinn from a painting by David Wilson



Looking for mountain ringlet butterflies on Ben Nevis (with Schiehallion about to be netted). Photo by Will Boyd-Wallis



**AMA MEMBER SURVEY 2003**

**Section 1 - General Information About You**

Your Age?								
Your AMA Number? (if you wish)								
How long have you been an AMA member?								
How many other AMA Members are there in your family? (please enter numbers)	Army	TA		Ex-Army			Civ	
Are you a: (please tick)	Hill walker	Rock climber	Sport climber	Mountain walker	Alpine mountaineer	Gtr range mountaineer	Other	
How often?								
On or off-duty? (On,off)								
Where do you do your activity? (please tick)	UK local	UK <100 miles		UK >100 miles		Abroad on exped	Abroad own expense	
What are your mountaineering ambitions for the future?								
If you rock climb, at what grade do you lead?	VDiff	S	HS	VS	HVS	E1	E2	E3+
What is your best ever lead?								
What are you happy to 2 <sup>nd</sup> at?								

**Section 2 - AMA Membership**

Are you aware of the permanent Membership Secretary as the first point of contact for the AMA?	Yes		No					
Is the annual subscription (currently £15) value for money? (please circle)	Yes		No					
What type of Member Services would you like to see offered by the AMA?	Comment:							
Do you know about the activities of the committee? (please circle)	Yes			No				
Do you feel the AMA fully represents the views and interests of the members? If not, what does it represent? (please circle)	Yes	Comment:						
	No							
Are you a member of any of: (please tick)	BMC (Individual)		AMI		Another BMC-affiliated club (please name)			
How important is 3 <sup>rd</sup> party liability insurance to you? (please circle)	Very		Fairly		Slightly		Not at all	
3 <sup>rd</sup> party liability insurance is free through BMC affiliation, but is expensive for the AMA? Would you want to pay extra for it if it wasn't via the BMC? (please circle)	Yes				No			
How much per year? (please circle)	<£5	>£5	>£7	>£10	>£12	>£15	>£17	>£20

**Section 3 - AMA Publications and Communications**

**Section 3 - Part 1** Please enter one of the following scale for the table: 1 = always 2 = frequently 3 = generally 4 = sometimes 5 = not at all

Does the AMA keep you informed?	
Is the frequency of the publications (Journal, Newsletter) sufficient?	
Do the publications get delivered in good time?	
Do you feel the information is out of date?	
Do you read the publications?	
Do you contribute to the publications (Journal article etc)?	
How often do you use the AMA Website?	

**Section 3 - Part 2** Please comment

What, if any, additional material would you like to see in the AMA publications?	
--	--

continued overleaf



How could AMA improve the marketing of itself?			
Have you got any comments, criticism, praise or suggestions about AMA communications?			
What do you think is the general image of the AMA in the adventure training community?			
Would you accept AMA publications sent by email? (circle and if "yes", add email address)	Yes	No	Email address:
Have you got any comments to make about the AMA website "user-friendliness"?			
Have you got any comments to make about the information provided in the AMA website?			

#### Section 4 – Meets, Expeditions and Training, FASTRAK, Expedition Equipment

What do you want from an AMA Meet?							
In what geographical areas would you like to have Meets?							
Why are so few members attending Meets? (please tick)	Distance	Cost	Diary clash	Family	Too cliquy	No interest	Other
Why do you think there are so few members organising meets?							
Would you like to lead an expedition? (please circle)	Yes			No			
If you do not have qualifications would you lead an exped if you had help to find the instructors? (please circle)	Yes			No			
If you would like to lead an exped but haven't, what is putting you off?							
Would you be more inclined to lead an expedition if there was more help and training in "how to", like the AMA expeditions symposium? (please circle)	Yes			No			
If you were not the leader, what type of expeditions would you like to take part in and where?							
Would you like to see more technical and refresher training organised by the AMA? (please circle)	Yes			No			
Do you know about the FASTRAK system? (please circle)	Yes			No			
Are you aware of AMA central equipment for hire? (please tick if aware)	Radios			Digital camera			
If you have used any AMA equipment, is rental value for money? (please circle)	Yes			No			
What additional equipment should the AMA own for the benefit of its members?							

#### Section 5 – Sport Climbing

Do you sport climb? (please circle)	Yes	No	Will never	Want to try
Have you ever entered a climbing competition? (please circle)	Army / AMA	Civilian	Climbing	Bouldering
How often do you use a Climbing Wall? (please circle)	At least weekly	At least monthly	At least 6 monthly	Rarely
What do you use a wall for? (please circle)	Bouldering	Top-roping		Leading
Which military wall do you use (if any)?				
Do you have any access problems (please detail)?				
What is it that either attracts or detracts AMA members from participating in Sport Climbing competitions?				
How could the AMA encourage more people to actively train on sport routes to raise their standard of climbing?				

Thank you for completing this survey; your answers are important to allow us to create a better AMA. Please return to: Maj A Parsons, AMA Communications Officer, DSTL Farnborough, A2 Building, Ively Road, Farnborough, Hants GU14 0LX.



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May 2003



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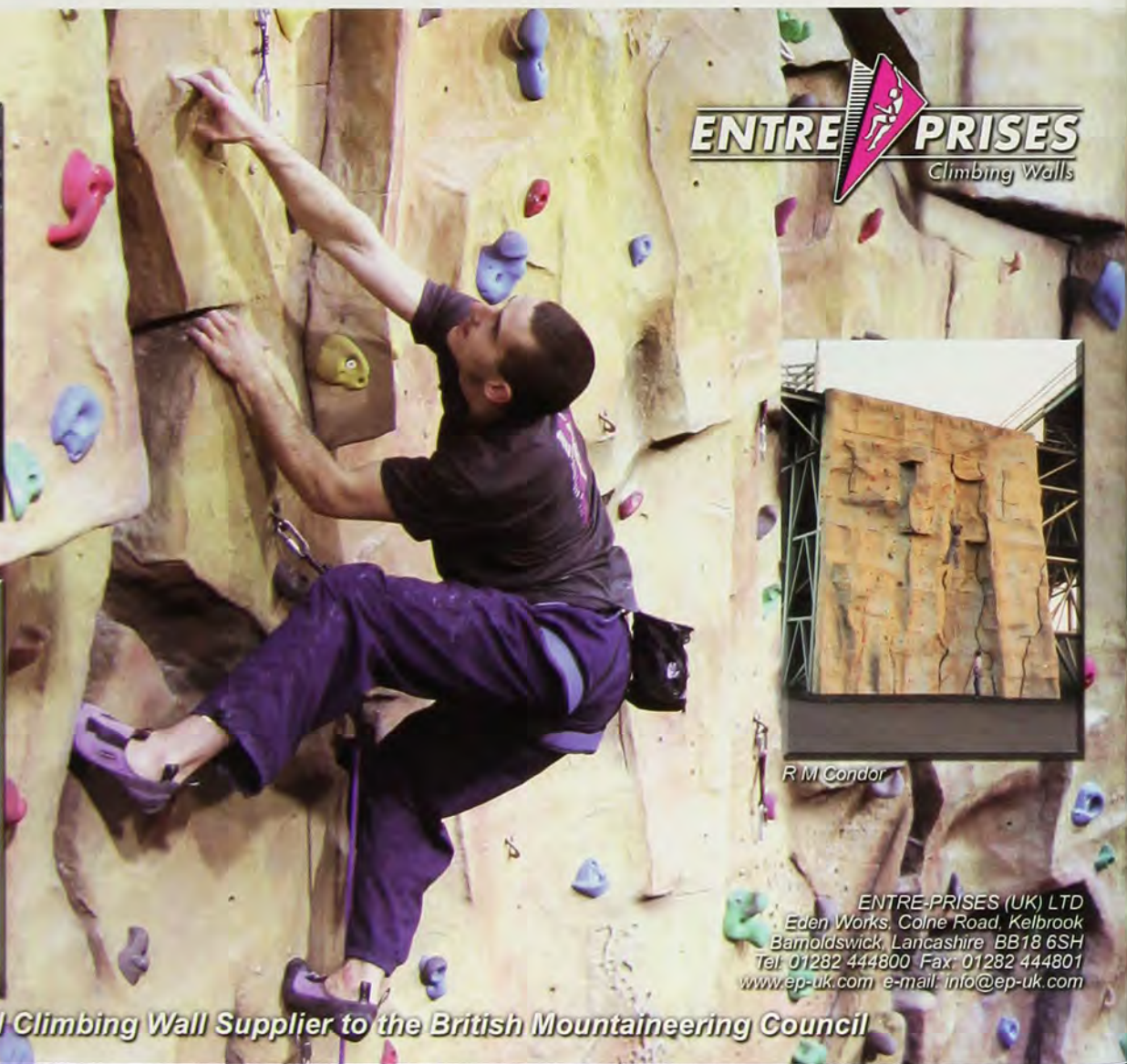
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