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# ARMY MOUNTAINEER



The Journal of The Army Mountaineering Association

## Top tips for climbing coaches

1. Don't be upset that not everyone wants to be a climber - give them credit for trying.
2. If you have to encourage and cajole someone every inch of the way up, you may have chosen the wrong route.
3. Never work beyond your ability, experience or insurance cover.
4. Learn about the local flora, geology and history. Your days out will be richer and so will those of your clients.
5. Protect yourself. If you are not attached to something you are not setting a good example to your group.
6. Try to belay where you can see your seconds, even if that means that you don't belay where the guidebook suggests.
7. Appropriately used, a guidebook with the grades removed is a good tool to help with the mental issues associated with breaking through personal grade boundaries.
8. A group with time on their hands and nothing to do will find something to do. It won't always be sensible!
9. If you allow your client to check everything with you every time, what will they do when you're not there?
10. Don't second-guess your assessor; you'll be trying to work out what they want, instead of concentrating on what you should be doing.

The above tips are an extract from "Top tips for climbing coaches" by Paul Smith which is published by Pesda Press [www.pesdapress.com](http://www.pesdapress.com). It contains over 300 top tips and handy hints for climbing coaches. The book is a must have for all aspirant Rock Climbing Instructors.



Also available is Climbing Games, also written by Paul Smith

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CLIMBING GAMES

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# Appointments



## Foreword

Foreword by Chairman

### Chairman's Foreword by Colonel Paul J Edwards MBE

I am writing this just before embarking on the AMA Exercise Alpine Arc, which sees AMA members attempting to ski tour the whole length of the Alps from Eastern Austria to the French coast in a single season. Led by Tania Noakes this is another example of the quality and initiative shown by our members in organising demanding and interesting expeditions. As I write our members are preparing to take part in both the British Army Everest 2015 expedition and the Ghurka 200 expedition which aim to attempt Everest by the North Ridge and South Col respectively.

I am also delighted that we have several other super expeditions lined up for our members. Al Mason is taking a trip to Boliva in June and for those with a Rock Climbing and Big Wall interest Will Brant is taking a team to the Bugaboos in Sep. The next opportunity to get involved in a big mountain trip is to apply for the Joint Service Expedition to Dhaulagiri which depart in 2016. Details at: www.dhaulagiri2016.com

Of course our sport climbing activity also continues unabated. This seasons Tri-Service bouldering league is well underway, and had an exciting presence at the Telegraph Outdoor, at the Excel arena London in Feb. Later this year the Army Festival of Climbing will take place in North Wales over the week 18-22 May. It will not be long before the competition season starts with the usual round of single service and inter-service competitions. If you haven't taken part or attended I thoroughly recommend that you get involved. They are all good fun, and except, possibly for the elite level, all very friendly.

Please note the early warning of the AGM date, which is in its more usual slot of the last weekend in September, the 25/26th, and also for the AMA President's dinner which will be held on Friday 13th November, location TBC. I do hope to meet up with many of you at the AGM, the President's dinner, at one of our meets or perhaps just bumping into you on the hill.

### AMA Journal Editor Update

It always amazes me how quickly the months fly by in-between journals! As soon as I finished this edition, I have immediately started on the next. I would like to say a big thank you to all that have submitted articles and photos for the journal, without your help the journal simply wouldn't exist.

Since the last edition the AMA has improved the way it contacts members via email. We can now email the entire membership in one hit, which allows us to update you of membership benefits, events and meetings as and when they occur. If you are not

receiving AMA emails, please update your contact details with the Membership Secretary.

Looking ahead to the next edition, please keep the photos and articles coming. Don't constrain yourself to producing a diary of events in your articles. It's your experiences and lessons learnt that make the most interesting reading. Lastly, we are trying to be more than just a repository of AMA expedition reports, articles on gear, skills etc are always more than welcome!

### AMA Webmaster update

Well it has been just over a year that the new and improved website has been up and running and hopefully everyone has had chance to have a look around. I will not be resting on my laurels in 2015 and have many exciting ideas and updates I would like to make.

ideas however small they may be. The website is a great tool for all members to be able to communicate as an association.

If you are more inclined to use Facebook or Twitter, the AMA is also making the best use out of these social media sites.

This however can not be done in isolation and I call upon all AMA members who have an opinion to drop me a line with any

I look forward to your continued support throughout the year and will endeavour to improve our social media sites as I can.

### AMA Membership Secretary update

My name is Sam Fletcher and I was appointed as the AMA Membership Secretary in November 2014. Please may I kindly ask all members to keep their contact details up to date, make sure its on the 'to do list' when moving between postings,

we had a record number of journals returned which is hugely expensive and a loss to the organisation. Simply send an email to secretary@armymountaineer.org.uk and I will amend the database. I look forward to hearing from you!

### PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

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

# Membership benefits update

## - a quick trip around the bazaars...

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



### PHD (Pete Hutchinson Designs)

PHD have spent 2014 racking up even more awards for their exceptionally well made specialist down and synthetic clothing and sleeping bags. Small but perfectly formed and the choice of many mountaineers, alpinists and difficult expeditions.



### Jottnar

Those of you at the 2014 AMA AGM would have had the opportunity to get intimate with the new range from Jottnar. Garm (a soft-shell), Hymir (an over-the-head lightweight waterproof), Fjorm and Fenrir (hydrophobic down jackets) and Uller (a yak wool long sleeved base layer) are amongst the outstanding additions to this top-end collection of mountaineering clothing.



### DMM have some fine new gear arriving in early Summer 15.

**Chimera** - The Chimera is DMM's latest biner and the perfect example of carabiner evolution. It's the ultimate in lightweight, high performance clean nosed biners: suited to trad or alpine adventures - also available as 12, 18, 25cm quickdraw lengths on skinny 8mm dyneema.

**Grip** - Revolutionary single rope belay device. Clever mechanics are behind the Grip's startling holding power.

**Pivot** - Multi-use lightweight belay device. Innovative pivot gives optimum performance both belaying from the harness and direct from the anchor.

**Mantis** - Super lightweight classic belay device made better for use with either single or half-ropes where direct belaying is not required

DMM's harness range has been expanded with the addition of four lightweight sport and all-rounder harnesses.

**Maverick 2** - DMM's lightest padded harness with the 'feel like its not there sensation' (Vertesse - women's specific fit equivalent).

**Mithril** - Perfect lightweight all-season harness (Venture - women's specific fit equivalent).

*Details of all this new DMM gear is available to drool over in their new brochure which can be downloaded from their website.*



### Cotswold Outdoor

Are sponsoring a "Life and Times" lecture tour by our very own Sir Chris Bonnington, as well as sponsoring the Best of Banff Mountain Film Festival Tour of the UK. Details on their website.



# AMA DISCOUNTS

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

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

# DIARY

Mark and record the dates below and get involved. Further details where not stated can be obtained through the Meets Coordinator and will be on the website closer to the time. We are always looking for people to help organize. If you feel you could contribute, please contact the Meets Coordinator.

## PROPOSED AMA MEETS PROGRAMME 2015

Date	Event	Location	Lead	Remarks
25-26 Apr 15	Pembrokeshire Meet	Penally Camp	Billy McIntosh	
29 Apr 15	Support Command UK South Climbing Championships	Reading Climbing Centre	Sgt Andy Stewart	See DIN
TBC Apr 15	Support Command UK Midlands Climbing Championships	TBC	SSgt Ricky Stevenson	
TBC Apr 15	Support Command UK North Climbing Championships	TBC	TBC	
6 May 15	RAF Climbing Championships	Awesome Walls, Sheffield	Fit Sgt Jim Jarvis	Open to guests
13 May 15	RN & RM Climbing Championships	The Quay, Exeter	Lt Duncan Turner	Open to guests
18-22 May 15	Army Festival of Climbing including the Army Climbing Championships	Capel Curig and the Beacon	Lt Col Pete Skinsley and WO2 Dave Cross	Week long festival including the Army Climbing Championships, outdoor climbing, coaching and lectures
June TBC 15	AMA Novice Meet	Wye Valley	Capt Ryan Lang	
22-26 Jun 15	European Military Climbing Championships including the Inter-Services Climbing Championships	Capel Curig and the Beacon	AMA	Week long festival including the Inter-Services Climbing Championships. Army Team of 30 selected from the Army Championships
11-12 Jul 15	British Bouldering Championships	Awesome Walls, Sheffield	BMC	
TBC Jul 15	Portland/South Coast Meet	Portland	SSgt Simon Goyder	This is being run by the Army Climbing Team.
5-17 Jul 15	JSAM			See DIN
TBC Aug 15	Lake District Meet	Lakes	TBC	
TBC Sep 15	RN & RM Bouldering Competition	TBC	Lt Duncan Turner	Open to guests
26-27 Sep 15	AGM	JSMTCC (I) N Wales	TBC	
3 - 4 Oct 15	British Lead Climbing Championships	Awesome Walls, Sheffield	BMC	
15 Oct 15	Tri-Services Bouldering League Round 1	TBC	Maj Tom Odling	
TBC Oct 15	Roaches Meet	Roaches Bunkhouse	TBC	
11 Nov 15	Tri-Services Bouldering League Round 2	TBC	Maj Tom Odling	
9 Dec 15	Tri-Services Bouldering League Round 3	TBC	Maj Tom Odling	
13 Jan 16	Tri-Services Bouldering League Round 4	TBC	Maj Tom Odling	
TBC Feb 16	Tri-Services Bouldering League Round 5	The Outdoor Show, Excel, London	Maj Tom Odling	
TBC Feb 16	Army Bouldering Championships and Tri-Services Bouldering League Round 6	The Indy Wall, JSMTCC(I), Anglesey	Maj Tom Odling	

## Meets round-up

For those of you who weren't at the AGM or read the minutes on the website last year, we had around 100 AMA members attend meets throughout 2014. For the first time, meet leaders had all commented afterwards that it wasn't as hard or as complicated to run as they thought. The hardest decision was deciding what to buy with their DMM voucher!

Since the last edition of the journal (and up until I wrote this update) there have been three great meets; the articles of which can be found inside these covers and are a good insight into what a meet is about if you haven't been on one. If not, why not?

Good news for Veteran members, the rules on meet attendance has been updated so that attendance on normal meets is possible. See the 'AMA Safety Management Plan and Guidance For Meet Leaders' on under the documents area of the website for the info on insurance etc.

As you can see in the diary of events there is plenty of opportunity to get out with other association members on meets and competitions as well as civilian events to go to and get inspired and enthused to climb harder.

## Meet leaders required

The meets don't just happen. Someone needs to organise them and ensure that the weekend runs as smoothly as possible. There are a few meets that still don't have a leader as can be seen in the diary. If you would like to run one please get in touch via my email as listed in the appointments page near the front of the journal or message via the Facebook page. You don't have to have any qualifications as you can arrange the admin, whilst a suitably qualified person manages the risk.

Running a meet isn't as hard as you might think, there is an article on the website to provide guidance. You will be helped the whole way through the process and as a thank you there is a £50 voucher for DMM or Cotswold Outdoor once you have given a meet article to the journal editor.

## Last thought

Keep an eye on the events page of the website, the Facebook page and Twitter for updates on meets and lots of other useful info.

# Beta Monkeys

Spread around this edition of the AMA journal you will see some cartoons. They are the work of Leicestershire based climber and psychology teacher Ed o' Grady. If you look closely you might even see one with a subtle hint of MTP which was commissioned from Ed and is unique to the AMA.

Ed can regularly be found at The Climbing Station in Loughborough climbing with his son Joe, or taking his stylus to his iPad and capturing a word, phrase, photo or idea for

Betamonkeys. A lot of his ideas stem from the banter at the wall and crags, and a lot of his friends can recognise themselves in the cartoons. To be fair a lot of climbers can see themselves in the cartoons!!

You can browse the whole range of Ed's work at [www.betamonkeys.co.uk](http://www.betamonkeys.co.uk)

Let us know what you think of the cartoons and we may just make them a regular feature in the journal.



# Lake District Meet

15-17 August 2014

I'd been thinking of planning an AMA weekend meet for a while. I had been putting it off; assuming it would be overly complicated, long-winded and would take up a disproportionate amount of my working day. Therefore the ease and speed it took to set it up surprised me; I was also able to choose the time and the venue it would take place and make it exactly what I wanted it to be.

I did also think that planning a meet in the middle of August would guarantee excellent weather with dry rock, clear skies and fantastic views allowing everyone to get a lot done. What we did get, however, was torrential downpours, howling winds and very low cloud! Our weekend climbing in Langdale quick became a weekend walking.

Friday proved to be the best day and an afternoon excursion to White Ghyll Crags did yield a route. Being the first to arrive on an overcast, but dry, afternoon WO2 Dave Allan and I made our way up the classic multi pitch route of 'Slip Not' VS 4b. The route takes a clean and obvious line up to an overhanging roof before a 'thought provoking' move around a corner leads to easier ground. While at the belay a short rain shower stopped play and we abseiled back down and made our way to the pub.

Over the late afternoon and evening the rest of the group trickled in and convened in the National Trust Stickle Tarn Pub next door to the New Dungeon Ghyll. Surprisingly the AMA funded free weekend only had 10 takers and the bunkhouse was quite spacious. The venue was perfect with the enormous Pavey Arc crag being a short walk away and the steep and rocky Crinkle Crags and Bowfell providing the outdoor playground.

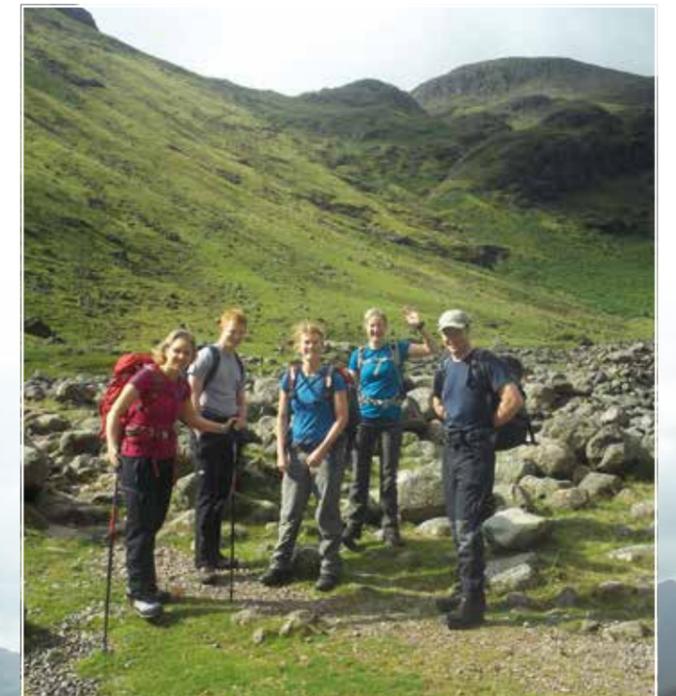
Maj Tarquin Shipley and an intrepid group decided to tick off a few low grade classics on Pavey Arc on Saturday with the weather being quite dramatic. A short walk to the base of the rock was swiftly followed by an ascent of 'Crescent Slabs' (Mod) and after crossing the 'must do' scramble of Jakes Rake ascended 'Gwynne Chimney' (Diff). Describing the routes as a slime-fest probably best describes their day! It was a quality mountain day though and after an early(ish) start they stumbled into the bar at 1930hrs with tired but smiling faces.

The rest of us made short work of walking up Crinkle Crags and Bowfell. Capt Claire Leggett and Maj John Hoban were busy preparing for their future Summer Mountain Leader assessments

and expertly navigated the group to the summits. Lt.Col Liz Dallyn gave a number of coaching points to make their performance even slicker.

Thunder storms on Sunday sealed the groups fate with half going to the newly refurbished Kendal Indoor Climbing Wall, Dave and Ruth Allan going in search of a lost belay plate and the remaining daring few venturing out onto the fells to stretch their legs. The climbing group covered the basics and gave a base of climbing knowledge or a refresher to those less regular climbers.

I would recommend organising a weekend away to any member. A motivated group of people in a mountain location is such a pleasant way to gain your log book days or have some refresher training by better qualified members (they need log book days teaching too). It's very easy and the support from the AMA staff (with paperwork and funding) was second to none. I am that much of a convert, by the time this goes out to print, I hope to have another one organised for the New Year. The DMM voucher incentive is also the perfect thank you from the committee...



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# Book Reviews

Written by Tomo Thompson

A quick note of thanks to Vertebrate Publishing who do a sterling job of publishing some culturally and historically important books from the UK climbing and mountaineering scene AND give a 30% discount to members of the AMA. Some of these books are theirs, some are from other publishers, all are from my obsessively large bookshelves ....

## Statement - Ben Moon by Ed Douglas

Yes, yes, yes I know it isn't in the photo, it wasn't in print when I wrote this. On 14 June 1990, at Raven Tor in the Derbyshire Peak District, twenty-four-year-old Ben Moon squeezed his feet into a pair of rock shoes, tied in to his rope, chalked his fingers and pulled on to the wickedly overhanging, zebra-striped wall of limestone. Two minutes later he had made rock-climbing history with the first ascent of Hubble, now widely recognised as the world's first F9a.

Born in the suburbs of London in 1966, Moon started rock climbing on the sandstone outcrops of Kent and Sussex. A pioneer in the sport-climbing revolution of the 1980s and a bouldering legend in the 1990s, he is one of the most iconic rock climbers in the sport's history.

In Statement, Moon's official biography, award-winning writer Ed Douglas paints a portrait of a climbing visionary and dispels the myth of Moon as an anti-traditional climbing renegade. Interviews with Moon are complemented with insights from family and friends and extracts from magazines and personal diaries and letters. I've ordered mine!!!

## Mont Blanc - the finest routes Philippe Batoux

Some books quickly achieve "coffee-table" status for their sheer size and the quality and structure. This is one of them.

Mont Blanc - The Finest Routes is a collection of the 100 must-do climbing routes in the Mont Blanc Massif.

Modern alpinism is a multi-faceted activity for which the Mont Blanc Massif is the perfect playground. Classic routes to which every mountaineer can aspire are surrounded by the towering rock faces, huge mixed walls, precipitous ice shields, serrated ridges and narrow gullies that define the massif's harder climbs.

In order to attain these prestigious summits via the most

interesting itineraries, this book presents a modern selection of 100 must-do routes, ranging from historic classics to more recent lines, described in order of increasing difficulty.

Author and mountain guide Philippe Batoux provides a comprehensive account of each route, outlining its history and atmosphere and giving all the technical information needed to climb it. These written descriptions are complemented by photo diagrams and detailed topos. In addition, every route is illustrated with superbly evocative photos that make best use of the book's large format.

The routes were chosen for the quality of the rock, the reliability of the in-situ gear, the beauty of the surroundings, the prestige of the summit and the enthusiasm the route inspires.

Preference has been given to routes in the modern idiom, whether they are gullies that only form in winter, difficult free climbs on high-altitude cliffs, long ridge scrambles or traverses of major summits. There are routes here for all tastes, from famous classics such as the Cosmiques Ridge on the Aiguille du Midi, the American Direct on the Petit Dru, the Whymper Couloir on the Aiguille Verte, the Walker Spur on the Grandes Jorasses and the Kuffner Ridge on Mont Maudit to more recent gems such as Je t'ai conquis, Je t'adore on Pointe Lépiney, No Siesta on the Grandes Jorasses and Le Vent du Dragon on the Aiguille du Midi. A thing of beauty.

## Beyond Limits - a life through climbing by Steve McClure

So what's this bloke ever done on err .... oh alright then.

To be honest I didn't quite "get" the book until the accident (am I alone in not previously knowing that McClure had a genuinely horrible climbing accident ???). The book took off then, for me anyway. There will never be a book about crap HVS climber, they're all about the very best, and McClure is the best of the best. A genuinely interesting read and a compelling case for committing your all to the thing that dictates and shapes your life. I know this is a short review but really, seriously, go buy a copy.

## One Day as a Tiger - Alex Macintyre and the birth of light and fast alpinism

John Porter

What to say .... err ... it won the Grand Prize at the Banff Mountain Literature Festival. Let me begin with the words of God ....

*'A book on climbing both humorous and perceptive, as close to the essence of our life as you can get.'*

Doug Scott

I must have been in my early teens when I saw a plaque on a footbridge in Cumbria dedicated to a bloke called Alex Macintyre and inscribed with the words "better to be a tiger for one day than a sheep for a lifetime". We didn't have the internet back in the mid-80's so it was a fair while until I realised who he was. On reading this outstanding book I was struck by just what might have been if that single rock hadn't snuffed out one of the finest, brightest, wildest, most driven mountaineers Britain has ever produced, on Annapurna in '82. Not only focussed on Macintyre this deep and engaging book chronicles a period when Britain genuinely did rule the world of cutting-edge, highly ambitious first ascents on the global mountaineering stage. An outstanding book.

## Beyond The Mountain by Steve House

I have slipped this in as it is undergoing a re-print. I'll let Ed Douglas be brief ...

'As a window on what's required to break barriers in the world of modern alpinism, this book is as good as any I've read. It's full of action, full of crisp, often harsh sentiments. The narrative is often as jagged as the peaks he climbs, a series of interlinked snapshots rather a predictable arc. People die, relationships fail, but the restless hunt goes on. It's not comforting, and it's not romantic, and the laughs are rare. This is a serious game played by a brotherhood that takes itself very seriously. Not since Joe Tasker's Savage Arena have I read a book by someone so uncompromising in his commitment' - Ed Douglas

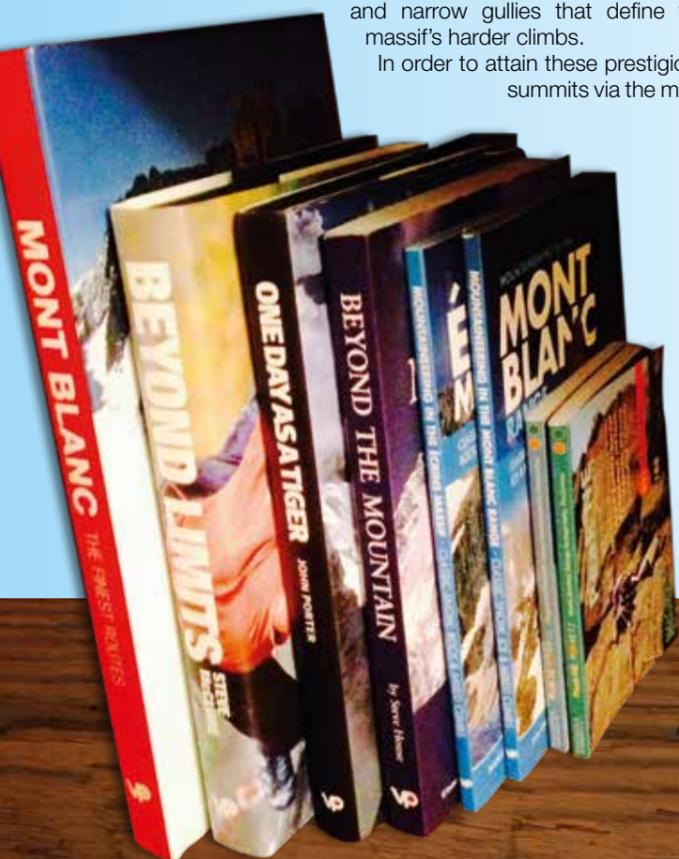
## Mountaineering in the Mont Blanc Range by Laroche and Lelong and Mountaineering in the Ecrins Massif by Chevallot, Grobel and Minelli

Just a bit bigger (but much much thinner) than standard alpine guide books these two publications are both great guides and really useful sources of information on the areas. They contain routes in the F to AD+ range. Easy to interpret topos, clear colour photos of the routes and a load of "off the beaten track" routes make these useful for all mountaineers visiting the Alps however seasoned they may be.

## Peaks NE and Peaks SE (Pokketz Guides) by Chris Craggs and Alan James (Rockfax)

I have included these last 2 as they have proven their utility to me this last Summer and Autumn. The Pokketz guides are very small concise guides to routes in the Peaks in the grade range Moderate to HVS.

Now that all the members of the AMA that on-sight E8 have stopped reading .... the guides cover almost every notable crag in the Peak District. If you climb in the "popular" grades you won't have to rummage through a house-brick sized guide looking for stuff to have a bash at. You still get typically good Rockfax topos and a little bit of beta on access and directions. Each guide has about 500 climbs in it for £9.95 each. In a climbing media industry obsessed with 8c+ and the next E11 it is refreshing to find books specifically written for the average human being.



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# Heading into the Mountains this weekend?

If the answer is 'Yes', bring your smart phone!

Written by Ryan Lang



It has been estimated that over 360,000 walkers reach the summit of Snowdon every year, never mind the hundreds of other hills and mountains in the UK. It is no wonder that with the large amount of human traffic in our mountain regions, many at some time find themselves in a precarious situation either being lost, injured or both.

Mountain Rescue Teams have saved the lives of thousands of people in the UK alone. Volunteers give up their spare time in the hope that they can help people in their time of need. Locating these people can be a time consuming business.

SARLOC (Search And Rescue LOCation) is a system that can be used to locate a lost person by using their smart phone as a type of personal locator beacon.

Russ Hore volunteered in Mountain Rescue for 20 years. Whilst working for Ogwen Valley Mountain Rescue Organisation (OVMRO) he thought that it would be useful if the MRT members could be tracked via their GPS enabled radios. Being a computer programmer, he began working on the project, but soon discovered that a colleague in one of the Lakes teams, Dave Binks, had developed an application called MR Map that did just what was needed and is used by all MRTs in the UK and Ireland.

At this point, Russ decided to re-focus his efforts on developing a system that could be used to locate lost persons via their mobile phone. With the ever-increasing use of smartphones he felt there must be a way for the user's phone to provide location data to MRT.

Using features of the 'phone's web browser, Russ developed SARLOC which was first used to locate a lost person at 12:45 on the 27th of May 2011 from Snowdon. The Llanberis team took a call from a party lost somewhere on Snowdon but the call was cut short when voice communication with the party was lost. The team sent a SARLOC request to the number and within seconds had a grid reference for the party. They directed the helicopter of the grid and it was soon hovering above the lost party.

Russ very kindly agreed to be interviewed by the AMA to discuss the evolution of SARLOC and allow me to test it on a recent trip to North Wales.

## How does SARLOC work?

SARLOC works in three slightly different ways.

### 1st Method

When the MRT is informed of a lost person, the team uses SARLOC to send the lost person a text message that contains a web link. Once the lost person clicks on the link, SARLOC interrogates the phone for its location. Once the location has been determined, it is added to a database and then displayed on MR Map within the MRT HQ.

### 2nd Method

A mobile phone can be used to send a text message containing a lost persons phone number to SARLOC. SARLOC responds by sending a text message with the web link to the lost person. Once SARLOC has located the lost person, it sends a text message with the lost persons location to the mobile phone which first initiated the request. This is invaluable when the team does not have access to the internet as all communications is via SMS.

### 3rd Method

The lost persons phone number is entered into MR Map using a drop down menu. MR Map then requests SARLOC to locate the lost person. SARLOC responds with the lost persons location and displays the result in MR Map.

## What benefit does SARLOC provide to the MRT?

The greatest benefit is MRTs can pinpoint a lost person in any weather conditions, day or night, saving many hours of searching. At a recent MR conference it was estimated SARLOC has saved

over 2.5 man years in search time. If a lost person is injured, getting to them quickly is very important. SARLOC drastically cuts the time required to locate a casualty.

In many activations of SARLOC, the team has not had to send any team members out. They have simply directed the lost person to the nearest path (where it is safe to do so).

## What are the advantages of the SARLOC system?

SARLOC is free. It has been provided to many different rescue agencies world-wide absolutely free of charge.

SARLOC works without the need to install any application on the lost persons phone. Other similar location systems require an app to be pre-loaded onto the mobile phone.

## Does SARLOC work on any smartphone?

SARLOC works on most smartphones, however Blackberry phones cause problems as they use a different API to obtain location.

## Are there any configuration settings that are required for SARLOC to work?

The most important point is that location services on the smartphone must be set to On. If they are not set to On, SARLOC will respond with an error message that explains to the user how to enable their location services.

## How many UK rescues has SARLOC assisted?

Currently SARLOC has been used on over 300 callouts in the UK.

To date, SARLOC has been activated operationally on 478 live call outs. Where suitable the team will ask the lost person to activate SARLOC a number of times as they walk off the hill allowing the team to track their progress.

## How many rescues in rest of world has SARLOC assisted and in which countries?

SARLOC has been tested around the world but it is difficult for me to know if it was on a real callout or just somebody testing it. The Norwegian JRCC has a version of SARLOC for north and south control centers which has been activated over 200 times. The first use in Norway is documented here: <http://www.go4awalk.com/the-bunkhouse/walking-news-and-discussions/walking-news-and-discussions.php?news=710222>

The new system, called SARLOC, was tried out several times over the holiday weekend. "But this incident in Nordland was the first time it has saved a life", said the regional boss in Hordaland Red Cross, Jahn Petter Berentsen. "People don't have to read coordinates - they only click 'OK' and a link. We don't have to do a search, we can go straight into a rescue.

## SARLOC Testing

So, once I had found out all about SARLOC, it was time to put the system to the test and see how it performed in a live situation. On the 24th Jan '15, I travelled to North Wales for a weekend of winter mountaineering. The weather was typical for January, it was cold and the cloud base was fairly low, perfect conditions for getting lost!

Lyndsay and I chose to start in Ogwen valley, head up to Pen yr Ole Wen, Carnedd Dafydd and Carnedd Llewelyn. Throughout the day I tested SARLOC by clicking on the web link provided by Russ, which provided my location back to the SARLOC system. I was able to check the result by browsing to a web page provided by Russ.

## Results

### Coverage

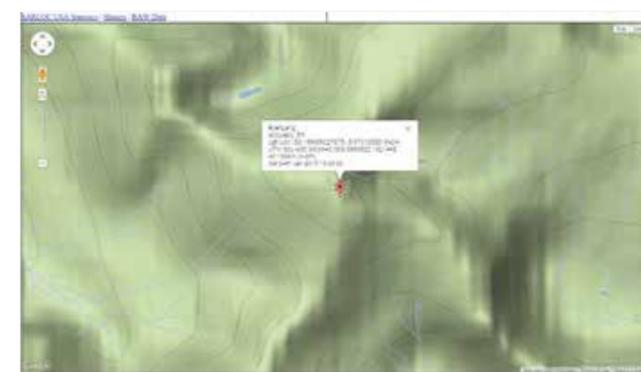
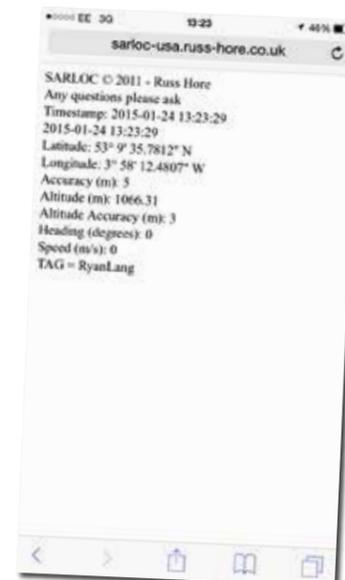
The first thing that I noticed was that I actually had 3G coverage throughout most of the day (EE is my service provider). Therefore there was no issue in receiving the text and responding by clicking

on the web link. On the few occasions that my coverage was reduced to GPRS, SARLOC performed just as well, albeit slower due the reduced bandwidth available.

## Accuracy

Throughout the day I performed numerous tests at various locations. I compared the SARLOC result with my GPS and found the results to be very accurate. When SARLOC successfully interrogates the location of a phone it provides the user feedback which instils confidence in the system. The picture right shows the feedback I received when using SARLOC on the summit of Carnedd Llewelyn.

The picture below shows my location on the SARLOC system which would have been displayed in the MRT HQ.



## Summary

SARLOC has revolutionised how MRT conduct rescue operations. If a lost person has a smart phone and coverage, they can be located in a matter of seconds. This saves crucial effort and time that would otherwise be required to locate someone before they can be rescued.

The advantage to SARLOC is that there is no requirement to pre-install any application or register your phone beforehand.

Not so long ago, general advice provided from numerous sources was to never rely on mobile phones. Whilst that advice is still sound, coverage and smart phone use has increased exponentially. SARLOC makes best use of this fact and does it remarkably well. On behalf of the AMA I would like to personally thank Russ for his time and effort that has greatly assisted me in writing this article.

If you want more information you can contact Russ at [sarloc@russ-hore.co.uk](mailto:sarloc@russ-hore.co.uk) or join the SARLOC Rescue group on Facebook.



# Wye Valley climbers meet

10-12 October 2014

by Ryan Lang

The AMA Wye Valley meet was held at Symonds Yat, set within the picturesque Wye Valley. It is the third year in a row that the meet has run and has become popular with the AMA and pub landlord alike!

The meet was advertised using the plethora of tools now available to the AMA, which meant that there were a healthy number of applicants. This resulted in the meet being oversubscribed which bodes well for the future AMA climbing meets. We had a total of 26 members during the weekend that had travelled from all corners of the country. Some very committed members even travelled from Ballachulish, Ripon and Indy after completing various AT courses that week. Some had to begin drying their kit before the weekend had even begun!

The vast majority of people arrived on the Friday evening, just in time for some hearty food, cold beer and a roaring log fire. Guidebooks were scrutinised and plans made for the following day, all aided with a few more beers before the 20 meter walk to bed. As I tried to drift off to sleep in amongst the other 25 people, I made a mental note to bring my earplugs next year!

Breakfast was served early on the Saturday morning which was followed by the mandatory safety brief. People were placed into groups which depended on ability and aims. Overall there were three groups, SPA training – delivered by Tony Penning (MIA) and Sven Hassall (MIA), Novice climbers – Coached by Paul Smith (MIA) and Intermediate climbers – coached by Ryan Lang, Dave Cross and Billy Mcintosh.

The weather was slightly against us, the rock was damp, the ground was muddy, but after a few minutes of searching we found some dry rock on one of the many crags at the Yat.

In my group we concentrated on developing climbing skills that would allow a pair to become proficient and self reliant out on the crag. This included gear placement, belay construction and belay technique. After a spot of lead climbing instruction we stopped for a spot of lunch at the Symonds Yat Café. Some opted to spend money at the café, others were spoilt rotten by having lunch delivered to the crag by the Olde Ferrie Inn staff!

After lunch, we moved onto 'Snoozin Suzie', a personal favourite of mine which is the first multi-pitch I had ever climbed when I first started climbing. I climbed the first pitch and began to belay the second when the heavens opened. The Yat limestone turned into slippery mess, which caused the second an absolute nightmare. I was just about to set up an assisted hoist so that the second could get over the crux on the first pitch, thunder and lightning put paid to that idea. I quickly de-rigged my belay and abseiled back to the bottom.

After the thunder had dissipated, we opted for another brew and covered some rope work before heading back to the bunkhouse at the end of the day.

After everyone was safely back at the bunkhouse, we sat down for a hearty dinner where the usual AMA Symonds Yat Man v Food competition began in earnest. I am sad to say that I was easily beaten this year by Al Kirk, who must have more tapeworms than I do!

Sunday morning arrived all too quickly. Another breakfast consumed before heading to the crag. The SPA group went to

Wintours Leap, the Novice group went to Plump Hill Quarry and the Intermediate group continued to brave it out in Symonds Yat.

The weather was no better than the previous day, still damp but this time it was extremely foggy too! I was working with a different student for the day, so after a quick discussion we decided to cover both sling and rope belay construction before climbing a few routes. It was only once we topped out that we realised how foggy it was. The Wye Valley was completely invisible!

After a spot of lunch we decided to finish off on the iconic pinnacle and climbed 'Vertigo'. The sun had now decided to do its job and burn off some of the fog as this time the view down the valley was clear for all to see!

After we abseiled off the pinnacle, it was time to pack up and head back to the bunkhouse. Once everyone had reported in safe, we all headed home after a busy and fun weekend.

All in all it was a productive weekend. 8 people had successfully completed the 2-day SPA training course, another 8 people had made the transition from indoor climbing to lead climbing outdoors under tuition from Paul Smith. Finally a few intermediate climbers developed their skills making them more self reliant so that they can begin logging the pre-requisites for the next rung on the JSAT ladder!

A final note is that the weekend was easy to arrange, there is a lot of experience within the AMA regarding organising and running a meet. Any prospective meet organisers reading this should just go for it! The admin under the Meets Organiser (Dave Cross) has become very slick, there is no onerous burden of paperwork. Dave has created all the templates, in many cases all you have to do is change the location and date! What did I get out of this? The satisfaction of seeing other people enjoy a weekend of climbing and camaraderie, that is one of the reasons I joined the AMA in the first place. The added bonus was the £50 voucher to spend in DMM, which is available to all meet organizers that submit an article. The next quest is to decide what to spend it on...



# Roaches Meet

29 – 30 Nov 2014

by Dave Cross

I met Gary Duffy on the Wye Valley Meet a little earlier in the year and managed to persuade him to be the admin lead for the Roaches; the fact that he lives just down the road helped out what with him being so well placed.

We had a few chats on the phone and he busied himself with writing an admin instruction, getting applicants and booking accommodation. Ryan Lang stepped up to oversee the weekend from the safety standpoint.

Anyway enough about the admin stuff let's get on with what happened on the weekend.

Friday saw some very eager arrivals getting to the Roaches Bunkhouse (our digs for the weekend) at around half past four only to find the place locked up and the man in charge not expecting anyone until 6 at the earliest so they headed off to the local town for coffee and supplies. Eventually the bunkhouse was open and others had started to arrive the best plan was dump your kit and head to The Rock Inn.

Ryan promptly devoured a monster steak that came out on a superhot rock slab making every have a bit of food envy. A few beers and more people arriving and the discussions started to turn to the plans for the next day.

Having a climbing meet on grit in November is always going to be a gamble and unfortunately the weather wasn't in our favour.

Ryan and Gary shot off at breakfast to have a look at the rock to see just how wet the rock was. Their prognosis wasn't great but the weatherman had promised that the sun would burn through so some were hopeful. So we split into groups and headed off to... the café for a brew to let the sun do its thing. Another few guys headed to a local wall (the Kiln Works in Burslem) hedging their bets that inside would be the best option. Gary and some others had a look at some other crags to see if conditions were better elsewhere; they weren't so they decided to take a popular walk to Lud's Church before heading back to the Roaches to climb a few routes until last light.

Coffees and teas dispatched (and Ryan polishing off a nice fry-up) we headed up to the upper tier. Given the weather we took the people that wanted some instruction for a bit of footwork skills on one of the large boulders and then went through gear placements and building belays. Everyone got something out of this including some of the newer instructors getting to practice teaching some very enthusiastic students.

Once this was finished we split down into climbing teams and head off to do a few routes to finish the day. The rock was definitely still wet and some of the cracks were nice and slimy.

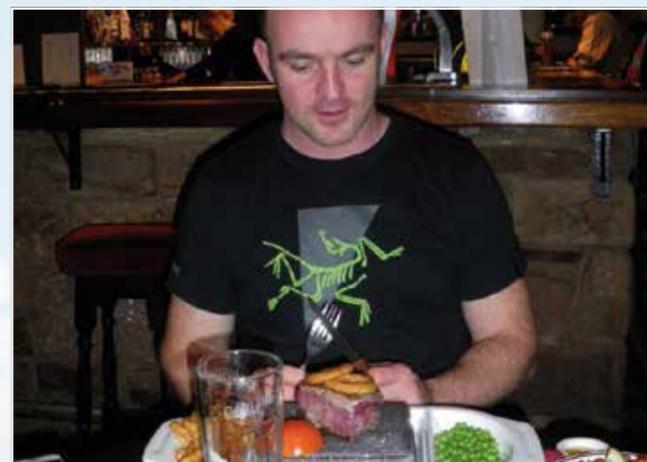
The only place to go after we were back down was to head up to the pub for tea of course. Ryan went for another huge steak on the hot slab and many others went for this option too. Ian Lynch and I went for the mixed grill and I still think he fed some of his to the dog it disappeared so quickly. The talk tonight was of the day's activities and again planning of different courses of action for tomorrow.



On waking the next day the weather was the same as Saturday so the best option was heading to a climbing wall so we went to the Kiln Works as there is an abseil tower there meaning we could go through some other skills such as self-protected abseils etc. Escaping the system was taught at ground level to those that wanted to go through it whilst everyone else did some climbing with new partners. We all headed off at about 1500 for the journey back home.

The others that went to the kiln works on the Saturday went up to the Roaches to try and get some routes done. They said that the conditions improved as the day progressed but were still not ideal. They managed to get on Crack and Corner (a much lower grade than they usually climb) and found it to be much harder than expected due to the conditions.

All together there were 29 AMA members on the meet with 10 of them from the Red Rocks team who used the weekend for some training towards their expedition. We all had a great weekend despite the weather and know that everyone on the meet would join me in saying thanks to both Gary and Ryan for putting it together for us.



# Sleeping Mat Review

by Tomo Thompson & Ryan Lang

It's not too long before the winter snows will melt and thoughts will turn to late spring and early summer camping trips. A good night's sleep is important anywhere, but knowing that you have the right mat with you for the conditions and terrain can make or break a trip. Cotswold Outdoor kindly gave the AMA two types of camping mat to test...

## Thermarest NeoAir XLite

The Thermarest NeoAir XLite is an award winning (editors choice by Backpacker magazine, top pick by Outdoor GearLab) air mat that packs down into a water bottle sized stuff sack. It is warm, comfortable and extremely lightweight. The manufacturers (Thermarest) proudly state that The NeoAir XLite mattress delivers more warmth and comfort per ounce than any other three-season air mattress available.

As a high quality 3 season mat it is definitely small – a bit smaller in stowage size than a 1 litre Nalgene bottle.

For the gear geeks it has 2 innovations ... ThermoCapture™ technology which is a patent pending reflective lining to the mat which traps and reflects back your warmth, and Triangular Core Matrix™ which means the internal baffling to the mat is designed to add strength, minimise heat loss and improve durability. The mat comes with a stuff sack and repair kit included.

	Small	Regular	Large
Weight	230 g	350 g	460 g
Width	51 cm	51 cm	63 cm
Length	119 cm	183 cm	196 cm
Thickness	6.3 cm	6.3 cm	6.3 cm
Packed dimension	23 x 9 cm	23 x 10 cm	28 x 11 cm



The mat is definitely amongst one of the lightest mats on the market on which you can actually get a decent sleep. There are others (like those made by Klymit) that are lighter, but you forfeit width, depth, length and insulative qualities in favour of weight.

Inflating the mat was very easy and took just over 1 minute. Deflating the mat was also very simple, as the valve allows air to escape very quickly and allowed the mat to be deflated and packed into the stuff sack in less than 2 minutes.

One of the downsides of the mat is that it is terrifically noisy to sleep on ... the nylon face fabric makes it sound like you're kipping on a crisp packet (you could conquer this with a pair of ear plugs!). Other reviewers have also experienced occasional problems with using the mat in very cold conditions where the air (your breath) used to inflate it can sometimes cause moisture issues inside the mat. To counter this just look after it and dry it well after use. Try before you buy because like a lot of other testers I found the mat quite narrow.

My conclusions for this one are not dissimilar to those of the Exped DownMat in that you are getting what you pay for. Put up with the noise and narrowness and the mat is WAY warmer than a traditional Thermarest or a blown foam mat. If you look after it, it will last a long time and serve you well. If you bivvy on shards of Llanberis slate it may not. It has justifiably been awarded some fairly hefty awards in the gear geek world.



### NEOAIR XLITE

Inflation time	★★★★★
Deflation time	★★★★★
Comfort	★★★★★
Durability	★★★★★
Cost	★★★★★

## Exped Downmat Lite 5M

The first thing that strikes you when you open the Downmat is the weight, or rather the lack of. The first thing you notice when you have figured out how to pump it up (no mouth required), is the warmth ....

Light in weight: the DownMat Lite offers great performance at an affordable price. Aimed at the cheaper end of the down mat range it is a good introduction to the enhanced warmth and comfort that down filled mats can provide. When you unwrap the mat you will realise that there is no "traditional" valve for you to blow in to. The mat is inflated with what looks like a whoopee cushion - a mini pump - In order to avoid getting any moisture in the down filled baffles.

	Small	Medium	Large
Weight	600 g	645 g	735 g
Width	52 cm	52 cm	52 cm
Length	162 cm	183 cm	197 cm
Thickness	5 cm	5 cm	5 cm
Packed dimension	24 x 13 cm	26 x 13 cm	24 x 14 cm

Inflating the mat took just over 1 minute. The best way to do it is imagine the pump is a heart and that you are performing CPR. Make sure you place the palm of your hand over the hole, otherwise you will be there for ages! This was not in the instructions, I had to find out via YouTube. Deflating the map is a little more involved and requires a small plastic pin(included) to be used to hold the valve open. The quickest method was to lie on the mat and squeeze the air out. It took over 3 minutes to fully deflate the mat and pack it into the stuff sack.

Unlike traditional air mats, welded baffles between the down filled chambers eliminate cold spots and create a comfortably supportive and stable air cushion. The mat also has a cradle design: raised perimeter baffles prevent sliding off the mat. In practise this makes the mat feel a bit like a hammock.

Reading lots of reviews on the Downmat you may be forgiven for thinking it is mega fragile; it isn't; however you do need to bear in mind that this isn't an issue green sleep mat, nor is it as robust as a bomb-proof Thermarest. I have used it in tents, bothys, bivvy bags and a van and, employing a bit of common sense, I have been rewarded with a far comfier nights sleep than on any other mat. The 650 down fill is in effect the same as having a thin duvet underneath you, you are effectively insulated from below. I would just have a moment before you build your bed space wherever that may be, and remove all keys, crampons, climbing hardware, knives etc as it is fairly fragile. It does however come with a repair kit. Be sure to read the manufacturers sizes because, like most mats, it comes in three lengths, this model measures 5cm thick by 183cm long by 52cm wide. Accessories to pimp your Downmat include a mattress cover, a chair kit and a doubler kit. The mat comes with a 5 year warranty.

If you cannot guarantee that the mat can be treated with "kid gloves" then go for a more robust model, or a more traditional air-filled or foam mat. If you can avoid the risk of puncture and want a mega comfy sleep with great insulation choose this one. They retail for about £90.

*A big thank you to Cotswold Outdoor for providing both mats for review.*

They can be viewed at:  
[www.cotswoldoutdoor.com](http://www.cotswoldoutdoor.com)



### DOWNMAT LITE 5M

Inflation time	★★★★★
Deflation time	★★★★★
Comfort	★★★★★
Durability	★★★★★
Cost	★★★★★



# PHOTO COMPETITION

This is your chance to be both rich and famous!

Submit your favourite mountaineering photograph along with credits (Who, where, when?) for the famous part, and, if chosen as the best submitted in the edition you'll get £100, £75 or £50 for your trouble. Ok, so not quite the rich part but it's a weekend in Llanberis or a slap up meal!

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



# When is a big wall, not a big wall?

By Rich Mayfield

Let's define what a big wall is first, Wikipedia says: "Big wall climbing is a type of rock climbing where a climber ascends a long-pitch route, normally requiring more than a single day to complete the climb. Big wall routes require the climbing team to live on the route often using portaledge and hauling equipment. It is practiced on tall or more vertical faces with few ledges and small cracks."

So no time or length restrictions. Bearing in mind that for some El Capitan at 900m high and grade of 5.13 is an afternoons' cragging! The record stands at 2 hours 23 minutes.

Ok I don't have El Cap on my doorstep but I do have Puig Campana. Her vital statistics aren't that impressive at first glance standing at a mere 1406 metres above the sea. What is impressive is the south face a massive and incredibly complex buttress which is almost 800 metres high, full of pinnacles, cracks, corners, ridges and super clean walls. For a big limestone mountain it is also remarkably solid.

This buttress is so complex that no single route actually summits the peak instead they are sectioned into huge features and strong independent lines.

About eight years ago a couple asked me what the longest route on the Costa Blanca was, I thought long and hard about it and decided that it wasn't a single route after all, but a mountaineering epic combining several routes one on top of the other. This is what we climbed.

## Aristoteles 500 metres 4+

At the very base of the buttress at the very lowest part of the cliff sits a large, clean and slightly intimidating wall which is over shadowed and often over looked by visitors by the main attraction of the upper cliffs. The line of Aristoteles takes the right hand side of this feature in 17 pitches. Winding its way up an elegant arête which turns into an airy ridge scramble complete with an abseil mid ridge. The route terminates on an inescapable pinnacle! Well almost, a

Aristoteles

two pitch abseil accesses the amphitheatre at the base of the main cliff.

It is possible to walk with a short scramble to this point. If you feel the need to cache water or food, or just decided you've beaten off more than you can chew.

This is the most popular area on the mountain. From the amphitheatre a few dozen routes lead up, but the quintessential line has to be.

## Espolon Central 440m 4+

This line is so strong and so obvious it can actually be seen from the moon! In the centre of the main face a graceful arête soars in nine long and exposed pitches, to what appears to be almost the summit. But don't be fooled by this foreshortening effect, you'll have only done 940 metres so far!

At the top of the Espolon a makeshift horizontal Via Ferrata leads off eastwards to the gully feature in the centre of the mountain and a straight forward escape route should you need one. If you were thinking about a two day climb then doing the Via Ferrata in reverse and stashing your sleeping gear and perhaps food and water here, a few days earlier, would definitely save weight on the big day.

From here an easy scramble of about 200m, just left of the main ridge or on it for the fast and brave leads to the next line. You will know when you get there because you will want to put a rope on, the exposure to the left is truly biblical!

## The Original Finish 120m 5

Twenty metres of super exposed knife edge ridge crawling will see you at the base of the pinnacle. Climb the pinnacle slightly on the left, it is easier than it looks. From the top of the pinnacle abseil off to a large chock stone. The temptation now is to squirm your way up the gully, don't do it, it's

Espolon Central

## Here are a few top tips:

1. Know your route. Not having to stop and read a guide book or consult a topo will save a lot of time and give you confidence to move faster. The route described above can be split into three days of independent climbing.
2. Be prepared. Only take what you really need to climb. Weight is your enemy.
3. Use a Camelback. Being able to drink without taking you pack off is priceless. Consider using IsoStar Carbo or something similar. It will help reduce any glucose lows.
4. If it's easy, run it out. Just because you haven't put any gear in during the last 50 feet of climbing does mean you have to if you're walking on easy ground.
5. If you aren't belaying or climbing, we're doing it wrong! Background activities like eating and drinking, taking

you feet in and out of rock shoes or rope management. Should all be done whilst your belaying. This will take a little practice to ensure you retain appropriate belay technique.

6. Be confident in the dark, no one ever died of "dark", but plenty of accidents have occurred because people have made mistakes or panicked in the dark. During the summer months I have climbed Espolon Central at night to avoid the heat of the day. Consider what the moon is doing and the weather conditions. Don't forget your head torch!
7. If anyone fancies doing this route and wants to email me for further info about other long routes on the Costa Blanca please use this address. rich@theorangehouse.co.uk

Happy pseudo big walling!!

pricky and loose! Instead stay on the blunt rib on your left which is easy and quite safe after the first protectionless 10m. The last pitch takes a right ward leaning line on brilliantly threaded limestone, this is one of my favourite pitches.

Follow a faint path into the nationally famous "Roldan gap". Legend has it that Roldan's lover Alda was fated to die when the last of the sun's rays shone on her so Roldan cut out part of the mountain in order that the sun would take longer to set ensuring that Alda would live a few moments longer.

It is possible from here to escape Eastward again, with a 25 metre abseil and a short scramble into the gully, but we've come this far let's not show cowardice in the face of a big wall!

Looking at the far side of Roldan Gap a small wind battered tree down to the left (North) this marks the next pitch. A number of historic pegs encourage you up in two grade 5 pitches to the summit ridge. From here an easy scramble to the Col and the end of a seriously epic days' climb. The top of the mountain is only a ten minute walk from here, and it would be rude not to summit, even if it is dark!

The escape ability and the lack of steepness of this combination of routes probably means it is not really a "big wall", but the route measures 1500 metres of climbing and scrambling. That's almost a mile!

## How do you climb a monster like this?

What do you need to tackle a monster route of 30 plus pitches? Speed and more speed but this doesn't mean risk and more risk, this mean efficiency and controlled risk management. I see many people every year getting caught out by inefficiency sometime on relatively short routes of three hundred metres.

Any big route requires a little planning and forethought. Let me try and put speed into perspective. Assume there are twelve usable daylight hours. Thirty pitches in twelve hours is twenty four minutes a pitch. I call this the "Pitch to Pitch Time". The time it takes for the leader: To lead the pitch, build the belay, call safe and take in any slack. The second to: strip their belay, climb the pitch, make themselves safe and sort the rack. Finally for the next leader to leave the stance.

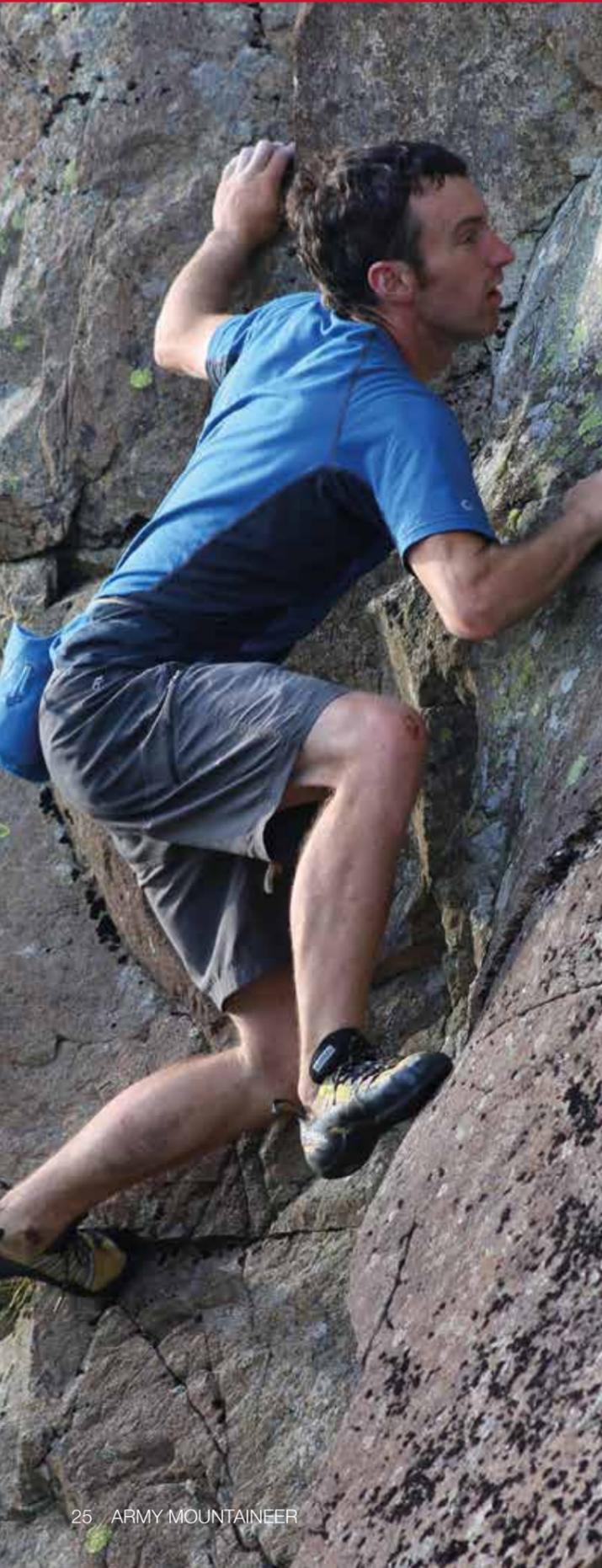
If you were to take five minutes to build a belay, seems reasonable, followed by five minutes for the second to sort and strip their belay, over the day this translates to FIVE hours! Almost half your usable time scale.

## Further reading

"Escaladas en el Puig Campana" ISBN 8460635287 or the Costa Blanca Rockfax.



# James McHaffie Interview



On Monday the 23rd of June 14, James McHaffie made British climbing history by climbing 100 extreme routes in the Lake District in one day! What made this feat even more spectacular was that they were all climbed solo in 20 hours!

At the time of writing Caff was climbing in Spain, but very kindly took the time to answer the following questions for the AMA.

#### What inspired you to climb 100 Extreme routes in one day?

Big Rons 100 extremes in the peak and doing a lot of soloing in the lakes in my late teens helped to form the idea. I thought about it in the late 1990s but didn't do it till last year.

#### What was the overall distance from start to finish, how long did it take?

I had my car in Langstrath waiting and ran from Scafell into Langdale then back over via Pavey Ark into Borrowdale. After that it was just the distance to the crags, Goat, Reecastle, Castle Rock etc. It was probably 20 miles plus or minus 2 miles. I originally wanted to do it without a car but am glad I didn't as I wouldn't have made it I think. It took just under 20 hours.

#### How would you compare the feat of 100 Extreme climbs in one day with your ascent of Salathe Wall?

The comparison from this and Salathe is tricky to make, both require a lot of experience and general stamina. Doing Salathe ground up was quite hard with some exhausting days and it was uncertain whether we would have the time and food to free it as it hasn't received many 'ground up' repeats anyway, the crux pitch is 50m long and near the top. We reached it in 3 days and spent another 4 just doing this pitch. The Lakes thing was basically harder though, I knew the terrain pretty well. I've a very good memory for moves and moving fast over moderate climbing and recovery are some of my fortes. It still felt really hard for the last 3rd. Salathe was just a fitness push, if your sport fit and have a crack climbing background it isn't too bad.

#### Which did you find harder to overcome, the physical or mental challenge? How did you overcome it?

I was fit from Yosemite, the climbing and the hauling as well as moving fast over rock. Physically I was exactly where I wanted to be beforehand so it was mainly a mental push of preparing the logistics and contemplating doing it at all. When I set off the mental bit was easy, as soon as I was up CB I felt in a great place to do it, the mental factor disappeared but I hit a wall physically around the 70/80 route mark, partly because I wasn't leaving any rest time between the routes. Any endurance activity is as much about the mind as it is physically. I used a few tricks along the way, such as when arriving at my car in Langstrath I pretended I stepped into a fresh body. At the 70/80 route mark I realised I was unlikely to complete it so said to myself I just wanted to get to the 90 mark, after a rest to get to Castle Rock though I got a final wind to complete them.

#### How did you prepare?

I'd revamped soloing a little bit in Wales and the Lakes. I redid some old ones like Vector, Silly Arête and Fingerlicker. I went and did 15 big solos up to E4 at Gogarth and did 20 or so solos in an afternoon in the lakes in March. I did also did a bit of running. The week before the 100 in a day I did a key recce. I parked at Langstrath and ran up to Bowfell and Flat crags then went via Neckband, did 3 solos there, onto Gimme, Pavey, Sergeant crag slabs, Heron and Bleak How Buttress. It was one of the best days out I'd had and at the end of it I felt I had plenty more in the tank. I didn't want to do any more preparation than this, it wasn't meant to be some super rehearsed circuit. I wanted to leave much of



it to how I felt on the day, but having the knowledge of that key distance from Flat crags to Borrowdale was the key link in my mind to knowing that it was totally achievable.

#### Prior to this, had you attempted anything remotely like this before?

When I was 20 I soloed 35 or so extremes in the Borrowdale region in an afternoon but no I'd not attempted anything like it before. It was always going to be interesting to see how my body would deal with it when I got to 50+ routes. This was an unknown to me.

#### What's next on the agenda?

I haven't got a specific agenda for the year yet, but am keen for revamping bouldering and sport climbing which have been set aside the last 2 years really. I nearly did Megalopa on LPT before the Yosemite trip in May so I'd like to do that and Rainshadow. I want to narrow down the Extreme Rock ticks this year as I want to complete all the routes in the book sometime next year. I've got a 100 list for Wales I was going to do the week after the lakes thing as well but I'll see how I'm feeling. There are some 9As in Spain I'm keen on doing next winter. The key thing for them is time and resting as after a hard day I need 2 rest days for skin and forearm recovery which makes doing hard routes a matter of having time on your hands. I look forward to making the goal lists as much as doing some of them.

#### What was the carrot that kept you going to the end?

The carrot was that it was the best days climbing I've had out of a shitload of great days. The opportunity of the lakes crags being dry, of being very fit and of having the longest day of the year nearby were there. It's not easy to say "Hey, I've come this far but I'll just stop and try again next week". I was contented for weeks afterwards, a rarity! I was also very tired for a while.

#### How long did it take to plan the event? What difficulties did you have to overcome?

I can't put a time frame to the planning as I'd had the idea for 15+ years. When I was planning to do it in my early 20s I'd included a lot of harder routes, Bitter Oasis, Grand Alliance, Dry Grasp, at one point I was even going to finish it on Esk Buttress on the Cumbrian. The plan I'd made last year changed week by week. I'd think through the distances, which crags to take in? Which routes? Then on the day it changed again. I missed out Black Crag, Borrowdale and lower Falcon. These are crags that I know

well and love but had to disregard because of the extra distance and time and I worried that it would jeopardise the finish. I did at least want to reach Castle Rock. Some routes I wanted to do were too dirty, some were too loose, I soloed The Go Between in March, there is a block on it which is waiting to go, fine if your leading, not for a soloist! It was pointless chatting to people about it other than Hock as most thought it a ludicrous idea. So being ignorant of other people's opinions was in this case an asset to its success!

#### At any point did you think you were going to fall or fail in your challenge?

From around the 60 mark on Shepherds I felt tired and it was dawning on me it wasn't going to be a walk in the park. By route 80 on Reecastle I didn't think I'd complete the challenge. I knew I needed to rest a bit more, I re-aimed for 90 or so. Process based goals are much more likely to succeed than outcome based ones. I'd told myself if I felt too screwed I'd stop. Around route 90 I had one near miss on a short E4 which made me more cautious. After a rest on the drive round to Castle Rock I got a 2nd wind and knew I might be able to finish it. I climbed fast for an hour.



# Exercise Dragon Venturer Canada 2014

by Cath Davies

Why should cadets have all the fun? There have been a number of international trips for cadets in recent years but this was the first overseas trip designed specifically to allow CFAVs the opportunity to broaden their mountaineering and climbing experience. OC CCAT, Maj Kev Edwards, who came up with the idea, did all the hard work of planning and fund raising to make the expedition happen. He roped in his usual suspects of alpine instructors and little persuasion was needed to encourage a bunch of ACF and CCF adults to head out to Canada to experience the best of the Rockies. Based at a hostel on the banks of the Bow River in Banff, the group spent three superb weeks exploring a small portion of the climbing on offer in the Bow valley, the Yoho National Park and the Kananaskis valley.

The first day was spent settling in, victualling and familiarisation. On long trips, this is time well spent for the smooth running of the remainder of the expedition, but is often overlooked by people with limited experience of long, overseas trips. Establishing a solid base and setting ground rules is all important. Adventurous Training is about more than the hard skills of climbing technicalities; it is funded because of the opportunities it offers for service personnel to stretch themselves physically and mentally, take responsibility for their actions, exercise teamwork, make dynamic risk assessments and demonstrate leadership.

Good weather windows on arrival, with some variable weather forecast thereafter lead to the decision to go high early and get a mountain day under the belt. The day on Mt Lorette 2467m gave an early indication of the climbing conditions in the area and the inaccuracies in the guidebooks! Lorette was described as a good introductory peak, 6-8 hours in duration with an easy descent down a scree gully. Fifteen hours later a somewhat shattered bunch had completed their first peak. The exposed pitches and knife-edge ridge traverse were truly exhilarating but the slog up to the ridge and the scree gully and bleached rock river bed descent that had, in part, been washed out by the 2013 floods, made for a challenging first day.

After that first mass ascent, the group split into three teams, choosing different areas in which to work. Over the 3 weeks, Kevin/Cath's team managed 1675m of pitched climbing on multi pitch routes, over a vertical mile of climbing. If you consider each climb necessitated at least 3 hours of walk in and walk out, you get some idea of the nature of the undertaking.

*Notable ascents by various groups included:*

North East Ridge of Ha Ling Peak, Canmore. Formerly known as Chinaman's Peak, this mountain can be summited by a tourist track, but the more adventurous 12 pitch climb with sections of 5.6, was of epic proportions. With the usual hazards of stone-fall, route finding and lack of protection, there was the additional entertainment of being lapped by Argentinian and Canadian parties! Technical traverses and a bold 90m corner/slab section led eventually to a top out amongst brazen chipmunks trying to steal sandwiches. The one great relief was the descent, an easy, if long, switch back route following the fore mentioned tourist track.

Takakkaw Falls in Yoho National Park was for many the highlight of the expedition. The 350m waterfall presents an imposing sight at the entrance to Waterfall valley. "Nine pitches of sheer awesomeness" and a 75m tunnel crawl through pica droppings made for an exhilarating climb to the lip of the falls. Whilst shielded

from the falls for much of the climb, stepping out next to the thunderous rooster-tail on pitch 6 was an awesome experience. The crux section went at 5.7 but most, other than a rather awful 5.2 pitch through a shale band, was a combination of enjoyable 5.5 - 5.6 pitches and exposed traverses. If nothing else, we provided a spectacular sight for the hundreds of tourists who stood at the base of the falls looking on in amazement and photographing the hardy souls above.

Mt Rundle dominates the eastern side of Banff and the Rundle Horn is a classic guide route on the arête. Five delightful pitches of slab climbing provided first sport leads for a number of group members and a lesson in accurate foot placement for all. On the arête itself, the climbing became more mixed and the rock less solid but the views evermore spectacular over the Banff Springs Hotel and the Bow Valley.

Cascade Mountain looms over Banff to the north and Cascade Falls is the first sight that many people see as they turn off the TransCanada Highway at Banff. A little to the right of the falls lies Mother's Day Buttress, an exposed and exciting route that consists of 8 pitches of good climbing in the 5.5 - 5.6 grade range. On a sunny day the rock is warm to the touch and views outstanding at every stage. Not all the groups were so fortunate with the weather however, climbing in mist and rain for the majority of the route.

Yamanuska is one of the earliest areas climbed in the Rockies, with the first routes put up by British climbers. The route chosen was Easy Street, so called as one of the easier routes on the crag, a 6 pitch route going at 5.6. No surprise then, that 3 of the 4 parties on the entire crag, a huge escarpment rising up to 18 pitch routes, were closing in on the same route! Fortunately for us, the party ahead backed off and the party that followed us seemed to experience some difficulties on the first pitch and never caught us up, despite the fact that we had two teams on the same route. As we bush bashed our way off (yes, another guide book inadequacy!), we could still hear the cries of the only other group further along the crag. One hates to think what time they got off.

Nanny Goat Crag, sitting alongside the famous Yamanuska area, is a popular multi-pitch destination with a shorter walk in. Keelhaul Wall provided an enjoyable 5 pitch outing going at 5.6 but with a couple of moves that really concentrated the mind. The final pitch was a text book example of smear climbing on slab limestone (with obligatory long run outs!), its very roughness indicating how little travelled these big routes, although close to civilisation, are.

Pinnacle Mountain (3047m) lies near Lake Louise. According to the guidebook and despite its height, it is a seldom visited mountain but has a fabled visitors' book located somewhere near the summit. The ascent from the car park followed a steep but well defined track that was littered with bear warnings and an insistence on group travel only. After a few kilometres an amphitheatre of three major peaks loomed, with Pinnacle at the centre. After an arduous 2 hour scramble up a scree slope the technical ascent began. Two climbing teams assaulted separate gullies. Each gully had a dark and eerie atmosphere made worse by the amount of loose rock and shale. For one group, the first pitch was about 40m of grade 5.5 and although the climbing was not challenging, progress was hampered by desperately poor rock and the danger of rock fall. The second phase of the climb was a steep scramble up the remainder of the gully. Here the rock fall was incessant and made the climb arduous, taking a further two hours to gain 100 metres of ascent.

On reaching the first ridge, a traverse was made under a ledge into a smaller side gully of about 30 metres to climb up to the second and final pitch. Each climber made their way to the short gully one at a time whilst the remaining climbers took cover under the ledge and was subjected to a rock fall bombardment that lasted for over an hour and a half until the final climber had moved through. At the base of the second pitch, 70 metres short of the summit, and with time and conditions against them, the decision was made to retreat back down the mountain. The other party had taken this decision after only 3 pitches of difficult route finding on poor rock, avoiding verglas and rock fall. Descending, their misfortune was to be caught in the horrendous rock fall caused by the first group who had continued on. Never was there a better illustration of the importance of making the right call at the right time. The move back down to the car park took a further four hours. Overall, Pinnacle proved to be a challenging mountain that was a much of a test of good decision making as it was of skill, teamwork and nerve.

Mountain weather can never be relied on and during the three week expedition we had our fair share of glorious sunshine, torrential thunder showers and celtic clag. Spells of good weather were used to the full but poor weather did curtail activities on several occasions, reducing us to the indoor climbing wall in Banff and single-pitch cragging on several occasions. It did also give opportunities for well-deserved rest days; 12 pitch multi pitch climbs preceded by 2 hours of ascent and followed by 2 hours of walk off take a toll both physically and mentally. It had always been the intention to climb some big, alpine peaks, but the changeable weather earlier on precluded this. The long-range forecast indicated that weather windows of sufficient length were limited but the hope was to finish the trip on a high, summiting Mt Athabasca 3487m during a favourable window in the final week, the first opportunity. The group headed north on the Ice fields Parkway, a stunning highway showcasing the most spectacular mountain panoramas. Our objective was the Athabasca Glacier. An afternoon was spent perfecting the skills required for efficient glacier travel, dodging the tourist snow-coaches (yes, they really do drive across the glacier itself!) and marvelling at the beautifully sculptured ice forms and glacial-fluvial features. Unfortunately, late in the afternoon the storm clouds grew and the weather became evermore threatening. During the night, a spectacular thunderstorm raged loudly and very brightly through the valley and as we woke at 4am it became apparent that the weather was not stable enough to attempt an ascent on Athabasca. This was a disappointing outcome but a decision that no one questioned in the less than favourable conditions.

It is fair to say that every member of the group has thoroughly enjoyed the Canadian expedition and has had the opportunity to develop their climbing technique, confidence and resilience. Alpine climbing, whether it is on mountain ridges, big face climbs or snow peaks, is a fickle beast that requires sound judgment and a healthy respect for the scale of the undertaking. The CFAVs are very grateful to the CCAT instructors who led their teams so expertly during the expedition and imparted their collective years of experience and we are all grateful to the funding bodies who made the expedition possible, including the Ulysses Trust, BIBMTF, the AMA and ACFA/CCFA. Most of all we are grateful to Kev Edwards for having the inspiration to make the project happen through his dedication and hard work. The CFAVs return home inspired to continue their climbing progression and further promote adventurous training within the Cadet organisation, which is what it is all about.





# Tri-Service Bouldering League at the Outdoor Show!

by Tom Odling

This year's TSBL has been the biggest and best ever with over 350 entries to the first 5 rounds. For the first time ever round five was held at the Outdoor Show in the Excel Centre in London's Docklands. The comp was held on the brand new MOBOCO competition wall. MOBOCO (Mobile Bouldering Company) is a new organisation and round 5 of the TSBL was the first competition to use their brand new 80ft wide by 4.5m high international standard competition bouldering wall. With angles ranging from 20 to 30 degrees overhanging there is nowhere to hide. MOBOCO has strong links to the military and is headed up by a team of three; Pete Skinsley (AMA Vice Chairman Sport Climbing), Alex Haslehurst (DMM Sales Rep and long time supporter of the military climbing teams) and Andy Long (professional wall builder and route setter who sets for the Army Climbing Championships annually). In addition to this the wall was part built by REME tradesmen who welded together the structural framing for the wall!

The competition itself was seriously tough. Even some of the visiting DMM sponsored climbers were having trouble and losing skin – particularly on the 30 degree overhanging jamming crack! Top score on the Day was 190 from a possible 250 by LCpl Tim Read REME but there were 6 others with scores between 180 and 190.

At the time of writing the last round of the league is less than two weeks away but the podium slots are still all to play for going into the last round at the Indy Wall at JSMTCL on 28 Feb. Look out for a full report in the next AMA journal.



# Good Morning Yosemite

By Toby Dunn

Since I'd arrived in Yosemite Valley, a small part of me had felt ill at ease, though I loved the rocks I'd travelled to the United States to climb. I craved an ideal of wilderness a barren desert, an open sea, an endless forest, a towering mountain face. I wanted to live as close as possible to the alien, bleak comfort of the great unknown. SNUFFLE SNUFFLE. The sound is muffled through the hood of my sleeping bag, which is drawn up around my head. SNUFFLE. I open the draw cord just enough to see a particularly obese squirrel rooting around on the ground a foot or two from my head. Many of the animals in Yosemite Valley are swollen, distended versions of their cousins elsewhere, such is the volume of the diet of food scraps left by careless visitors that they live on. I could probably overtake this vast specimen without leaving my sleeping bag. This supersized country impresses its lumbering identity on you, even inside your sleeping bag on the ground in a forest. I sit up out of my little patch of dust, and try to shake the dirt from the clothes I have been using for a pillow before putting them on. My shoulders feel sore from climbing the previous day, as I squirm into a jacket. A thin mist of misty cloud hangs around the pine trees in damp tendrils. I gather my sleeping bag and mat, and walk through a clutter of giant trees and boulders down towards a car park, serried with rows of motor vehicles of every size and shape. Vast motor homes, trucks, shiny saloon cars sit alongside total wrecks. There are state plates from all over the lower 50, a good range of the disparity of wealth in this vast country is aptly displayed in this parking lot. My battered Honda Accord sits low down in the automotive social pecking order. I toss my sleeping things into the trunk, exchanging them for a slightly grimy coffee mug, and resecure the lid with a few strips of duct tape and a broken zip tie. Some hikers, smartly dressed in clean, well fitting outdoor clothing emblazoned with designer logos appear to try their best to affect total ignorance of my presence.

Camp 4 is a sandpitfreak show of rock climbers and assorted eccentric derelicts in a bouldery corner of the pineandmeadow valley floor. It is Yosemite's cheapest legitimate accommodation: a Spartan arrangement of grubby tent sites and a toilet block. Camp 4 is the favoured temporary home for rock climbers who flock to the valley to scale its cliffs. The early autumn morning is freezing; the dry air is cut with the ragged roar of petrol fuelled camping stoves, and the low clunk of gear being stuffed into huge vinyl haul bags. These bags are used to carry everything one needs to live on whilst climbing the larger of the cliff faces in Yosemite, sometimes up to a vertical mile of rock, which can take many days. In this athletic commune of vibrant squalor is everything I know; Camp 4 and its environs feel as much like home as anywhere else on the planet, far from the wilderness I craved. The residents are an assortment of committed rock climbers, wannabe rock climbers, and various derelicts and lost souls who find in its anonymity, and shifting population some kind of stability. Each place in the campground is a patch of dirt; sectioned off with some lengths of timber, with a low, metal 'bear box' at one side of it. The boxes are an essential of life here – the scavenging bears will tear open tents or cars to get at food or even cosmetics left

in an unarmoured container. I would regularly see bears wandering about if I woke at night, as I was always outside, but they seemed unconcerned and uninterested in me. They usually seemed far more interested in shiny SUVs in parking lots that may contain an unfinished bag of pretzels or some other tasty snack.

The regulations in staying in Yosemite Valley are extremely strict – two weeks maximum in the high season, four weeks in the off-season. The average visitor to the national park spends about four hours there. The amenities and transport in the Valley are organised with efficiency and a focus on turnaround time reminiscent of a budget airline. Rumours are flying around the climbing community that the National Park rangers fined a large group of Spanish climbers \$200 each at the weekend. Dozens of them had crammed into two or three little tents to avoid paying. Rangers raided in the middle of the night, unzipped the tents, and took pictures of them asleep to identify repeat offenders. It is remarkable how similar their methods for 'dealing' with the problem bears and problem climbers are. The bears have been an increasing problem in Yosemite since the 1970s, when the Park authorities used to feed them for the entertainment of tour groups. The bears learnt quickly that the presence of people equalled food, but visitors didn't like their cars being damaged by hungry paws. So now the bears were herded away every night by rangers firing rubber bullets.

It's only six o'clock in the morning, and there is already a queue at the campground ticket booth to be first for the 'walk in' places; most places are gained by booking. A row of bodies is lined up, huddled in sleeping bags or duvet jackets, hoping to be spending tomorrow night in a tent.

A pair of Korean climbers heave several large portable padded mats, known as crash pads, over to one of the huge boulders that litter the forest around Camp 4. The pads cushion falls from small climbs of up to twenty feet or so; this style is known as 'bouldering'. Many climbers travel to Yosemite purely to climb on small rocks like this. They have no interest in the milehigh behemoth chunks of stone, which dominate the Valley, and for which it is so famous. They will try to complete a short series of very difficult movements, often over a period of days, rehearsing them like a complex dance or an intricate skateboard trick. While one of the Koreans climbs, the other sits on the ground, knees inches from his face, contemplating the moment for the next go. They follow each attempt is followed with a sparse exchange accompanied with gestures – refining their sequence for the few moves of the climb, like a dancer in front of a mirror. Other than this, they do not talk at all. There is a quiet beauty in the



monomania of their concentration on this set of holds. I think of the coach loads 'doing' the entire National Park of 1,200 square miles in less than four scant hours; and the focus of these men who have travelled thousands of miles to sit in meditative contemplation, interspersed with intense physical effort in front of one facet of one lump of silvery granite for days on end. Both indulge a human nature for acquisition, seeking fulfilment through either the insignificant ascent of a fairly arbitrary expanse of rock, the other to take photographs as near to the ones they saw in the holiday brochure at home as possible.

Climbing on these boulders seemed at once a beautiful introspection, squeezing an intense experience from every grain of the substance of this vast National Park, and a tedious fixation. I wasn't sure if they had become blind to the greater possibility and experience that lurked outside their narrow domain of five or ten handholds. I exchange smiles and nods with the Korean pair. We have done this every morning for the last week or two, our routines crossing for a mere minute or two in a daily rhythm of climbing, eating and sleeping. Most of the Camp 4 residents are content to fester in their tents until later, waiting for the pinefiltered sun to warm the air.

The cafeteria in Yosemite Lodge is already a hubbub of activity; hundreds of chairs and tables surround a gleaming rank of cauldrons under bright lights, with every conceivable foodstuff that the Western world might consider breakfast. Hulking pensioners pile bacon, sausages, pancakes and eggs high onto plates; hulking teenagers take towering carddeck stacks of pancakes. More vast specimens of humanity cradle plates, loaded with what appears to be the daily turnover of bakery – a melange of bagels, buns and muffins. Oversize parents shepherd oversize offspring to 4seat tables and enforce a formal and selfconscious enunciation of grace before the devouring of their oversized bounty. As well as being a dining hall for the residents of the 'Lodge': Yosemite Valley's 'midrange' accommodation option; the cafeteria serves as an impromptu foraging ground and meeting point for the clutches of semiferal rock climbers. The climbers live, temporarily or semi permanently in Camp 4, or like me, in the surrounding rocks and woods. The staff at the cafeteria turn a blind eye to climbers wandering in and helping themselves to the 'bottomless' coffee refills, and various items of food without payment.

I have arranged to meet a man called Zack, with whom I have arranged to climb today. Zack works for the Delaware North Corporation, which runs all of the amenities in the Valley, and employs over 1,800 people over the summer season. He does maintenance and upkeep on the buildings in the valley. Zack joins me at my table carrying a plate stacked with waffles, pancakes and a scone, all topped with a huge glob of rapidly liquefying whipped butter. He enthusiastically adds a solid cupful of maple syrup to the plate, and begins to load forkfuls of the spongy mass into his mouth. He glances at my coffee cup and porridge bowl, face expressing something between disapproval and apology.

'I'm big on breakfast,' he says.

"So how long have you lived in the valley?"

I ask, trying to make some dopey early morning small talk.

"Nine years."

He masticates in a purposeful, workmanlike manner, as a frightening amount of waffle disappears.

"It hasn't made me a good climber, but it has made me crazy," he adds quickly.

Zack answers my questions with a gravity and sincerity worthy of a job interview.

I try a new tack, not wishing to pursue the issue of mental stability before seven am.

"So do you live in the Lodge employee accommodation with the job here?"

"No."

By now, the waffle has almost disappeared, and a scone is being equally swiftly dealt with.

There is essentially nowhere to live permanently in Yosemite Valley; although some workers get billeted in cramped bunks in portacabins, some do not get provided with accommodation. This means they have to commute over 100 miles a day, or live rough. This situation places employees at constant risk of being fined by the same company that employs them. Zack explains that it is worth this risk to him to be allowed to be able to spend the entire summer season in the Valley every year. I am reminded of unscrupulous Victorian Mill owners setting up brothels on their workers' way home to their families, to reclaim the wages that they had just paid them.

We walk out into the thin dawn air, and head for a battered Honda Civic. "As you can see there's no passenger seat," he says, motioning me to sit on a plank of plywood that runs the length of the vehicle. "This is my accommodation." "O, and mind the spikes, they help discourage dangerous driving." Screws project down from the ceiling at a number of points, part of a homemade roof rack. The back of the car is strewn with a few clothes and some cracked plastic stacking boxes which are leaking karabiners, bits and tatty rope and fragments of climbing chalk into the rest of the vehicle. Zack's ragged clothes, unkempt appearance and Spartan living conditions contrast with the smartly turned out National Park officials and tour guides who patrol the Valley. The climbing culture seems at once an inconvenience and an attraction to them; much as the bears were in the 1970s. There are scruffy people cluttering their stores and trying to stay longer than they are allowed to, but the open top buses always stop beneath the cliffs that we climb on. Even when hanging onto tiny finger holds, a thousand feet above the trees, it is common to be able to hear guides explaining your progress with the aid of a megaphone to their sedentary human cargo. The National Park Service call Yosemite Valley, 'Not just a great valley... but a shrine to human foresight, strength of granite, power of glaciers, the persistence of life, and the tranquility of the High Sierra.'

I thought a 'shrine to human foresight', sounded as though it were some municipal building project or a scientific achievement. Nowhere in their paradigm of understanding is a reference to what I saw in Yosemite Valley: an ancient, elemental place that predated and would outlast human observers. Here it is absorbed into a national image, as a concept to use. It had become something to stir the heart with a salute to the flag, a flickbook picture with a silhouette of soldiers on Iwo Jima, the Statue of Liberty and presidential faces on Mt Rushmore. In a land, which spoke a version of English, largely overrun with descendants of Europeans, I had expected to find more to identify with than in many places on the globe. However, I found a culture more alien to me than animism, feudalism or a dependence on the donkey as a mode of transport where wilderness was an act of Congress.

The Wilderness Act, passed in 1964, defines wilderness as "an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." How could the men who wrote this foresee that these words might come to be employed to turn an experience of 'wilderness' into an operation of conveyorbelt efficiency? The production line of Yosemite Valley allows people in and out as quickly as possible, certainly without 'remaining' but for the express purpose of maximum exposure and income generation.

Whether the people rushing in and out of the valley are San Francisco residents on a summer weekend daytrip, or coach tours of globe trotting tourists, they all line up, toting black bags stuffed with cameras to record the moment. Coaches stop at intervals along the Valley loop road, and the 50odd occupants train their lenses on the vast cliffs of Half Dome or El Capitan, or one of the towering waterfalls. These are all undeniably sights to inspire every superlative and cliché available to whichever language you favour. However, it seemed that few of these eager photographers paused to actually look. To me, they resembled a bank of machines; cyborgs with a huge extendable single eye apiece, emblazoned with the legend of their tribe: 'Canon' or 'Nikon'.

Zack and I scuttle along a pine needle strewn trail through the rapidly warming air to our chosen climb for the day. We are starting early because our route up Cathedral Rock is about 2000feet high, and is likely to take us most of the day. Slower parties are often forced to spend an uncomfortable night shivering on a tiny ledge if they fail to reach the top before nightfall. I've heard through some other friends that Zack is a quick and competent climber, so I am not too worried about this possibility. As we make steady progress up the vertical rock face, the tops of the towering pine trees shrink away below, and features on the ground start to lose their definition. We are absorbed by the strenuous moves, and the psychological challenge of the route – it contains several sections where a fall would mean serious injury or worse, so we climb with quiet concentration. On one section, I hesitate, swapping my hands on holds smaller than a matchbox. I rub chalk onto my fingers from a pouch that I carry on my waist to assist my grip. I consider the next move, which holds to grab and in which order? The consequences of a fall here do not bear thinking about, but I realise that I feel at home in this wilderness of rock, happy in a quiet, active concentration. Far below me, the throngs eke a different rat race out of their annual vacation. I feel more akin, I realise to the 'alien' wilderness that I had sought than to the culture of the country that I was in, or many of the people who travelled in it.

Here, men in crisp uniforms package, sell and present a confection of 'wilderness' that is easily consumed through the coach window, the camera lens or the gift shop. This was the reason for my unease since arriving here, despite a powerful love for Yosemite Valley, there had remained a hollow disappointment somewhere in my experience of it.

The afternoon wore late; Zack and I reached our summit without incident, tired but still moving quickly as the descent was long and difficult. We took off tight rock shoes, clipped them to our safety

harness belts, and jogged barefoot down a steep, rough trail on the flank of the great monolith we had just climbed. Pine needles spiked the soles of my feet, and grit lodged underneath my toenails. My hands feel sore on tree bark, as I grab trunks to swing around each hairpin in the path. A thin trickle of dark blood coagulates in the hair on my leg from a knee scuffed earlier in the day. I feel utterly contented. A couple of hours later, a few stars start to show in a purpleorange sky as the air cools. We reach Zack's shabby carhome, and drive to the store to buy some beer to celebrate our successful ascent. We sat on the floor outside in the parking lot and sip on beer so cold it makes your teeth hurt. Families and tour groups walk quickly past and risk only the briefest of glances at us, as though we were an unwelcome species. I glanced up with a grin when I heard familiar British accents. They gave us a wide berth, and deflected their children's questions about whether we were climbers. Sometimes the most foreign thing anywhere on Earth is your fellow tourists.





# Army Cadet Expedition Kenya 2014

by Larry Hallett, Cheshire ACF



“Hippos – kill more people in Africa than any other animal” said Julius, the Ol Pejeta Game Park Ranger to me as he pointed to the 1.5 ton mammals basking in the brown river water less than 20 metres away. “If they attack, run as fast as you can and climb a tree” he exclaimed with a grin as wide as the Rift Valley. After 2 weeks of rock climbing, gorge trekking, traversing the rim of an extinct volcano, climbing a 4,985 metre mountain, hill walking the Aberdares Forest and white water rafting – I doubted if I could summon more than a gentle trot!

These were some of the words and thoughts on the 2014 Army Cadet expedition to Kenya that took place over July and August. 19 cadets and 9 adults from all over the country made up Group 2 of the expedition (a similar sized Group 1 deployed earlier) with the North West’s total contribution coming from cadet RSM Louise Dunn of Merseyside ACF, cadet SSgt Adam Whitehead from Greater Manchester ACF and cadet Jacob Ingham-Gore (Arnold School CCF), joined by four Cheshire based people - cadet Sgt Jamie Whittall, cadet LCpl James Lea & the expedition commander Lt Col Richard Ayres, all of Sandbach School CCF, and lastly me, a Mountain Leader from Cheshire ACF. Lt Col Ayres is also the Cadet Forces Adventure Training Advisor and he made the organisation of this bi-annual Africa Cadet expedition look breathtakingly simple.

The whole venture started last year with a selection process and Summer Mountain Foundation (SMF) course run by the expedition adults for the cadets, with a continuation training week in spring of this year. All this gave an excellent foundation for us to build as we boarded British Airways flight BA0065 from Heathrow to Nairobi in late July. Excellent in-country support was provided by Savage Wilderness, a Kenyan based adventure activity company with James Savage being with us at every stage.

On arrival, we quickly found ourselves on a varied acclimatisation programme beginning in the Great Rift Valley, climbing and trekking in the forebodingly named Hell’s Gate National Park. Here we spent the day rock climbing the testing slopes of Fisher’s Tower, a jagged pinnacle near the park entrance and a short trek through the bush (accompanied by giraffe and zebra). The day ended with the setting up of a tented camp on a hillside plateau and the start of a good routine of camp craft among the cadets. Each day of the expedition, the cadet group divided into 3 parties – 1 group to prepare and cook food, the second to wash up and a third group covering general camp duties. Fresh rations were

provided throughout, with most of the food being cooked by the cadets under local supervision on open fires and then served to all, hot-plate style.

On we moved to Longonot National Park, and our first real test at altitude – a trek around the rim of a 2700 metre high extinct volcano. A challenging ascent was followed by what some described as a trek on a rollercoaster track or over a dragon’s back! This very undulating 7km circuit was successfully completed by all, with accompanying expert local commentary given by James Savage. With this early confidence booster under our belts – it was time to up the anti with an arduous 2 day trek in the Aberdares Forest with a wild camp at 3000 metres. We were armed with crude local maps while the accompanying Park Ranger settled for an AK47 assault rifle, we packed our full rucksacks along with 5 litres of water and under his watchful eye – made our way through thick hillside forestry through a 250v electric fence that could stun an elephant and onto our hillside wild camp site in a small clearing. “Ow!” I said as I set up my tent on the grassy pitch. “Watch for those stinging nettles” said James – “I got badly stung by those type last September and it was February before the tingling went away”. “Thanks for the warning mate!” I replied... We settled in for a chilly night in the highest camp the cadets had stayed in to date. The trek back to park HQ was accompanied by Lt Col Ayres relating to previous experience and giving expert commentary on the local tribal community in their ‘bandas’ (wood and thatched homesteads). We concluded the day back at our new tented camp for much needed admin and the best chicken curry dinner I’ve ever tasted!

Well, that was the appetiser over; now for the main course – the ascent of Mount Kenya. This imposing 4900 metre mountain gave the country its name and we were to tackle this giant with the assistance of 62 porters to get us, our personal kit and the group camp equipment up the mountain. A logistical feat as big as the mountain itself I thought!

We started gently along a clay track but were met by constant drizzle from mid afternoon onwards; the day concluding at a somewhat cramped and uneven campsite strewn with roots and shrub branches as a base for the tents. “I’ve gotta read the Tripadvisor review for this campsite” I thought as I tucked myself into my 4 season sleeping bag for a patchy night’s sleep. By the morning the rain had passed but someone enquired if every day

was going to be rainy in this strange eco-system where we were getting ever higher and ever colder. “There’s no guarantee of good weather here at any time” said Lt Col Ayres; “If you want a guarantee – buy a toaster!” it was exclaimed... Day 2 and onwards fared better though, with dry days and stunning scenery.

The attitude started to tell as we exceeded 4000 metres and arrived at Mintos camp, a large and flat site. It felt as if I was breathing through a straw all day as my lungs demanded oxygen on the slow and steady ascent. I passed the time counting the porters as they effortlessly loped past us, carrying our main rucksacks, their own kit and any group camp kit they were given – those guys earned their money!

Day 5 was summit day Point Lenena (4,985m) on Mount Kenya. I don’t think many of us slept soundly the night before – we had a big step into the unknown with the most challenging terrain in our way. By this time, ice was a constant companion overnight as water could freeze in personal bottles and the inside of every tent was coated in a crisp layer by dawn. An early start took us at a really slow speed and all of us made the summit, with numerous breaks by midday. A fantastic feat and a personal triumph; the highest I’d been previously was the 4500 metre Ras Deshan in Ethiopia. Time to descend to Camp Leki North now though – a tortuous descent much of it through a scree (gravel) field. I think I was on my backside more times than Todd Carty before we finally arrived to a welcome lunch in a grassy valley. Day 6 took us out to the National Park trail-head and transport to a lodge for a good meal, timely admin and a real bed.

Time for a bit of R+R. Ol Pejeta Game Reserve provided the venue for a 2 day bush safari and camp. A leisurely time where the objective was to drive around at random, observe and photograph any of the wild animals that roam freely over the hundreds of acres of bush-land. Early mornings and late afternoons provided the best times to spot the numerous animals that typified Africa including elephant, giraffe, rhinos, wildebeest, hippo, gazelle, ostrich and baboons. We weren’t disappointed; many of us took more photos here than anywhere else. After 4 game drives though, everyone was quietly anxious that we hadn’t come across any lions. We mentioned it in evening conversation to Daniel our Kenyan driver, but Lt Col Ayres once again said “there’s no guarantee”. We hoped against hope that our last game drive before breakfast the following day would answer our prayers – and literally before we’d

driven 10 minutes on it, a whole pride of fourteen lions straddled the track we were driving down! We could have sworn that Daniel had pre-positioned them – a great spectacle!

The final part of our Kenyan venture was an important one – assistance to build and decorate a local village school close to James Savage’s Sagana venture grounds. Tasks included mixing cement for paths, drainage ditches and wall rendering along with wood shuttering, wall and mural painting. We had 4 days to complete what the previous expedition group had started; a tall order, but all we set out to do was achieved, and well appreciated by the locals with huge attendance at a handover ceremony. The Cadets and adults were treated to dancing by the school pupils and thankful speeches by local dignitaries.

The flight home arrived all too quickly with many memories of a fantastic venture to carry with us. Would I do it again in the future?... Sure I would – but there is strong competition for places on these expeditions from many very able Mountain Leaders countrywide. So, as someone once said... there’s no guarantee!



# DMM Ice Axe Review

by Ryan Lang & Tomo Thompson

When winter arrives every year, it usually means the end of outdoor rock climbing for a few months. All is not lost, one of the attractions of the UK is that whilst it is widely known for its iconic rock climbs, there is also a lifetime of winter mountaineering just waiting for you.

There are a few items of equipment that are universally used no matter what the season such as harness and helmet. Ice axes are an important piece of safety equipment that are unique to winter mountaineering that you may well consider adding to your arsenal at some point.

DMM have a wide range of ice axes that cover the entire spectrum of winter mountaineering from winter walking, ice climbing and mixed climbing. They very kindly supplied a sample of their ice axe range so that the AMA could review them for the journal.

Before we begin, there are a few ice axe basics that will help anyone considering purchasing their first axe.

There are two main types of ice axe, those used by mountaineers and those used by ice climbers. Most mountaineers and mixed climbers tend to use a basic axe whilst in the mountains. Whereas ice climbers, unless on easy angled terrain, use specialised ice axes which are a modified version of the traditional ice axe.

There are three main components of an ice axe, the head, the shaft and the spike.

**Head:** The head of the ice axe is the component that can vary the most between different types of axe. The head is usually made of steel and comprises of 3 parts, which are the pick, adze and karabiner hole.

The pick is the 'sharp' end of the ice axe head and is used to penetrate the snow or ice. The pick angle will vary according



the type of axe. Mountaineering axes have a shallow pick angle whilst ice climbing axes have a much steeper pick angle. The pick has serrated teeth which are used to grip onto the snow and ice. Finally, the pick is used for self-arrest situations whilst on steep terrain. When on steep terrain, the pick is carried with the sharp end facing rearward which is often referred to as the reverse position.

The adze is the broad end of the head that is shaped like a small spade. It is used for cutting steps in snow and ice and for clearing belay ledges and gear placements. When walking with an axe, the adze usually faces forward.

The karabiner hole is used to connect a karabiner to the axe for use in a belay, but can also be used to connect a leash to the axe.

**Ice axe shaft:** The ice axe shaft can be made from different materials such as steel, aluminium and carbon fibre. Steel is very heavy but strong. Carbon fibre is very strong and light but also very expensive. Aluminium is generally the best as it is both strong and light.

A straight ice axe is best for general winter mountaineering as it is easier to use for self arrest, building a belay and easily plunging into snow. Whilst curved shafts are designed to increase the power of a swing into ice and are used for technical mountaineering, ice and mixed climbing.

**Spike:** The spike is the sharp point on the bottom of the shaft which is usually made of steel. This is used to assist the axe in plunging through snow or ice. It is also used to provide balance when walking across snow.

**Axes under review:** This review will concentrate on the Fly which is an all round mountaineering axe and the Apex which is designed as a top end technical axe.

## The detail

The Apex replaces the Rebel as DMM's top-end all-rounder, however it performs best on steep ice climbing and hard mixed routes. The most noticeable feature is the extent of the curve - more pronounced than on most other manufacturers current 'traditional' (no offset handle) designs giving the Apex an extra cm or more of clearance. This means that the DMM Apex will clear ice bulges and cauliflower ice with ease, but still be comfortable to hold as a leashless tool. It's also especially comfy and stable when holding the axe high up, when punching your way up snow slopes or snow fields. As the grip is not ergonomically shaped like the Petzl Nomic or Ergo the Apex can be plunged well in snow, a bonus when negotiating snow slopes and snowy sections of climbs. DMM have even supplied free Grip Tape with every tool for the shaft. The Apex's curve almost exactly matches that of the Petzl Nomic and BD Fusion 2 - both very well proven on vertical and beyond ground.

At 635g (adze) and 620g (hammer) the Apex isn't the lightest out there, but is by no means hefty either. Removable pick-weights



Length: 50cm  
Weight: See article  
RRP: Circa £175 each  
(before AMA discount)

## Features

- Hot forged, ergonomic handle
- Dual handrests for leashless climbing
- High clearance shaft
- Pick weights for bullet hard ice and customised balance
- Supplied with grip tape for handle/shaft customisation
- Mixed and Ice specific picks available separately.
- Shaft rating: CEN-T certified
- Pick rating: CEN-T certified
- Leash included: No
- Materials: Aluminium, Chromoly Steel, Stainless steel
- Every axe has a unique serial number for ultimate traceability

## DMM Fly

Length: 50cm  
Weight: See article  
RRP: Circa £140 each  
(before AMA discount)

## Features

- Hot forged ergonomic handle
- T Rated Integrity Construction
- Bottom hand rest for optimum support
- Optional add-on upper rest enables matching and leashless climbing
- Can be fitted with the Raptor pick sets for less technical terrain
- Versatile - The axe has been designed to cope with ice and mixed terrain climbing.
- Strong 7075 aluminium - It is made of high quality 7075 aluminium which provides a good balance of strength v weight.
- Adaptable comfy grip handle - Injection moulded handle is grippy in wet or dry conditions and provides good insulation.
- Leash included: No
- Every axe has a unique serial number for ultimate traceability

## The detail

The iconic DMM Fly has been the hallmark of DMM for some time and has been in use for over two decades. The axe has been tried and tested all over the world and is a jack of all trades. It was originally designed for Scottish winter mountaineering as an all-round climbing axe but was updated for 2012. The recent updates to the axe have taken modern climbing into consideration with an improved handle, pick set and hand rest.

The changes to the Fly add features that are ideal for coping with steeper more technical terrain encountered on modern routes. The redesigned tip allows more positive penetration. Shaft is slightly

are available giving the ability to tweak the balance and swing.

The T rated standard ice picks work well straight off the shelf - the bevelled tip penetrates well and hooks edges securely, the low profile initial teeth make extraction easy, and the long front tooth will allow for a fair amount of sharpening. Towards the shaft, bigger teeth give good bite hooking flakes and chockstones. A serrated top edge gives stein-pull and crack torquing bite, though will damage glove palms if used lots in walking mode. As with all very curved axes, the adze and hammer are to some extent blocked by the shaft and best used by holding the shaft about halfway up. The ice picks feature a small adze, serviceable for chipping small footholds, and the hammer is a simple low-profile design that serves its purpose if needed.

The picks are laser cut so they fit extremely well and can be replaced very easily, even on the mountain. The Apex comes with the one piece, T-Rate Ice Compact Adze and Ice Compact Hammer, which comes out of the factory sharpened and ready to use. There is also a T-rated Mix Compact Adze and Mix Compact Hammer available

curved for better clearance and more natural plunging when used in the reverse position.

At 720 grams, the Flys aren't lightweights, but have a solid, well-balanced feel - the weight in the head gives them a burly, simple swing into ice or turf but as the weight is balanced between pick and adze/hammer they don't feel excessively head heavy and unwieldy when clearing snow or hooking on steep ground.

The beefy T-rated pick and big chunky adze and hammer are only slightly changed from the original design. The business end of the pick works well - penetrating well for a reasonably chunky design, cleaning easily, and hooking well.

For those that find the hammers and adzes offered on most modern tools a bit weedy, the Fly keeps it's very effective big simple hammer, and big shovel-shaped adze - perfect for torquing in fist cracks, clearing snow and ice, digging bucket seats and T-axe slots, or hacking through cornices. While the Fly's have much less pick clearance than the Apex, the gentle curve still makes a noticeable difference compared to a straight shaft, and unlike higher clearance axes, the shaft doesn't in any way restrict the easy use of the adze and hammer.

## Summary

The DMM Fly is the ultimate all-rounder axe. If you are looking for an axe that will do everything, then the fly is perfect for the majority of climbers. One very minor criticism is that the pick and hand rest require different sized allen keys.

**The AMA would like to thank DMM for all the continued support and for providing the axes for review.**

More information on these axes can be found at:  
[www.dmmclimbing.com](http://www.dmmclimbing.com)

(sold separately), with a steeper angle on the pick for maximum holding power on tiny rock edges and slots, great when pushing it out on rock. DMM have even made a third pick unit with a full size Adze, called the Mountain Adze. If you have a new fangled minimal winter sack just make sure you can stash the Apex on the existing axe holders - or buy some shock cord and improvise.

**Summary:** The hefty discount that DMM offer the AMA makes this axe a serious option for anyone that requires a true all-rounder which will be ideal for making best use of the limited time and fickle conditions that many of us have to negotiate to get a winter fix. Mountaineering, ice fall climbing, Scottish mixed and Alpine big faces the Apex has it covered.



# Exercise Black Gendarme

## A tri-service expedition to Makalu South East Ridge 2014

By Gareth Steel

It is rare to have the opportunity to take part in an expedition to an 8000m peak, rarer still to be invited to help establish a new route on such a peak. Therefore I count myself extremely lucky to have been part of Exercise BLACK GENDARME. This expedition, which comprised of members of all three Services, aimed to be the first to climb Makalu solely via its extremely long and demanding South East (SE) ridge. From the start this was to be an ambitious project, something that we were all acutely aware of. Three previous attempts had been made on the ridge by service expeditions with the team in 2008 reaching 8000m. However, the summit remained elusive. Our team leader, Wg Cdr Colin Scott, had been on all three expeditions and therefore knew the mountain and the route intimately.

At 8463m Makalu is the fifth highest mountain on the planet and enjoys an intimidating reputation for defeating even the strongest of expeditions. Due to the sheer scale of the SE ridge (in excess of 10 km long) and the time likely spent above 7500m (at least 4 days), the route required thorough planning and preparation. This began with team selection: not everyone wishes to throw their hat in the ring for an endeavour with long odds of success. It would be fair to say that at the outset I thought our chances were probably only in the region of 10-20% and yet as an objective it still captured my imagination. Fortunately for me the route's reputation, coupled with a change of dates from a pre to a post monsoon attempt, kept enough talented mountaineers at bay to allow me to slip through Colin's selection process and on to the team.

Training serials included a week in the Cairngorm Mountains of Scotland and an Alpine serial centered on Saas Grund, Switzerland.

Importantly, from the outset I felt that we had a strong and, most importantly, compatible team.

We were fortunate to have 'Chips' Rafferty on board as our performance consultant. Formerly of the Army PT Corps, Chips was an invaluable source of information on training for performance. He was also fond of reminding us that all these gems of wisdom were handily available in a book he had co-authored and presumably continued to profit from! Chips' regimen was not for the faint hearted: everything from early morning pre-breakfast runs to naked open water swimming and breath holding in the bathtub were prescribed. Later in the training programme 100 mile cycle rides on minimal food and water were a feature. Most alarming was the fact that despite being of a certain (unspecified) age, Chips was still setting the standard personally! There was no doubt that those who could survive the exacting training would be adequately prepared both physically and mentally. Fortunately, time spent on military exercises and my civilian job meant that my personal training was tempered to a level which allowed me to survive and I was undoubtedly the stronger for it.

Of course, no expedition can thrive on PT alone! Thus there was much running around, letter writing and pleading with potential sponsors to be done. Personally I was responsible for sourcing and arranging the expedition food for the mountain phase. In these lean times sponsors were not easy to come by. However I would like to mention Tunnocks, Mountain House, BeWell, 9Bar and Mountain Fuel who were all kind enough to either provide us with free goods or offer us substantial discounts on their products.



Our rations on the mountain were to be centered on three dehydrated meals daily. Our breakfast, dinner and dessert would yield around 2700 calories, with the remainder of daily intact made up of snacks throughout the day and beverages. We sourced a wide range of meals in order to allow for personal taste and for the most part these were highly palatable and well received. Snacks were purchased in country albeit one member suffered from acute Jelly Baby deficiency. Symptoms include child-like behaviour, moaning (about Jelly Babies) and mathematical confusion.

Other members of the expedition pulled together the specialist kit, communications equipment, camera gear, medical supplies and assorted paraphernalia which would allow us to operate in a remote area for the several weeks necessary to ascend the mountain. It was therefore a well prepared team which gathered at Heathrow to start the long journey to Kathmandu. Suddenly, preparation was over and the adventure began!

I had never previously been to Nepal but it shares many attributes with our recent theatres of operation in being hot, sweaty and chaotic. In-country we were extremely fortunate to be under the wing of Himalayan Ecstasy, the trekking company charged with getting us and our not inconsiderable amount of baggage to base camp. Endra, one of the founder members of the company, proved invaluable throughout our trip. Nothing was ever too much trouble and in the best traditions of Nepali culture there never seemed to be a problem which was insurmountable. In a feat which was to be emulated time and time again we were smoothly transported from the airport to our modest accommodation in Kathmandu's Thamel area. Tired after a long trip we immediately reconnoitred the immediate area for liquid refreshment. Such refreshment is to be easily found in Thamel. In fact, so much so, that overindulgence is not uncommon amongst visitors to the area. Obviously, our military discipline meant that we were almost unaffected by that particular problem. The following day was spent buying last minute items of equipment and ensuring we were well fed prior to further evening of cultural reconnaissance.

During our short admin phase in Kathmandu, our solar power equipment was set up on the roof of the hotel in the blazing Nepalese sun. 'Comms', our naval equivalent of Star Trek's Lt. Ohura was interested to note that the cumulative output of our entire solar array was approximately zero Volts, with a current of zero Amps, giving us a total power generating capacity of zero Watts. No amount of disbelief on Colin's part could rectify the problem. Unfortunately we were to be plagued throughout the trip by difficulty in getting enough power to keep our IT equipment functioning. We were saved only by the provision of a generator by Himalayan Ecstasy. The moral of the story is that all equipment must be tested prior to departure, preferably with any dependent paraphernalia, to ensure compatibility in a timely fashion. In our defence, much of the equipment was only available shortly prior to our departure.

Due to bureaucratic barriers imposed by Nepali customs our freight was not released prior to our departure for base camp.



Fortunately we had packed it with such an eventuality in mind and so we began the journey to base camp, leaving it to follow on in the capable hands of our trekking agent. We were also lucky that our climbing leader, Dick Gale, was scheduled to leave Kathmandu later due to other responsibilities. He was therefore well placed to ensure the smooth forwarding of our vital equipment.

Our journey began with a short internal flight to the airstrip at Tumlingtar (400m), before travelling by truck to the road head at Num. The road to Num is not yet fully prepared and as a result the journey was bone-jarring. On arrival in Num our evening meal was the ubiquitous 'dhal bhat', rice with a lentil soup and vegetables, a dish that became our staple food throughout the walk-in. Whilst perhaps a little bland by our usual standards, rice was always served in enormous quantity and chilli sauce was always on hand to enhance the flavour. Our diet was probably as healthy as any of us have ever eaten.

After overnighting in Num we commenced the ten-day approach march. On waking for breakfast we were greeted with a spectacular view of the surrounding hills which were covered in verdant jungle, interrupted by terraced farmland and small hamlets. We had only just started our journey and yet already the terrain was incredibly breathtaking.

Before setting off we had a quick tour of Num's shops which sold an astonishing variety of goods.

As we left the trading centre we witnessed some pack animals (mules) being loaded up with goods to be traded further up the trail. Immediately descending 3000ft to the Arun Khola River before ascending the far side of the valley the trail from Num to Sedua was reasonably well prepared and well used by locals and trekkers. Though a remote part of Nepal, the Makalu-Barun National Park was clearly seeing an increased level of tourism.

As our journey progressed the trail grew narrower, the terrain more rugged and the vegetation more alpine. However, what remained unchanged throughout was the friendly nature of the locals and their willingness to help. Our porters were locally sourced and it was impossible not to admire their fortitude. Young, old, male and female alike carried our baggage. Often when negotiating a steep slope you would be somewhat embarrassed when an elderly local would trot past carrying twice as much, either barefoot or in flip-flops. It was truly humbling. Much is made of the physical adaptations of the peoples of the Himalaya but in both the porters and the Sherpa alike physical toughness and the need to earn an income appear to play a far greater role in their capacity for work than any genetic adaptation. In short, we've gone a bit soft.

On arrival in base camp we were greeted by the sight of our objective, towering over our partially constructed base camp. The word 'massive' hardly does the mountain justice and breathless from the altitude at 4800m, the scale of the task we had set ourselves was suddenly apparent. Fortunately we were also greeted with a superb lunch, including chips, which instantly

lifted moral. Food would play a vital role in sustaining us not just physically, but psychologically.

As part of our acclimatization process the first few days at Base Camp were spent exploring the local area, gradually increasing the altitude of our excursions. I'll certainly admit to having a few sleepless nights due to headaches. Our doctor, Wg Cdr Jon Naylor, had encouraged us to keep diaries including details of our oxygen saturation and other physiological parameters. It was slightly alarming to discover that my oxygen saturation was a mere 69%, given that normal at sea level it would be perhaps 97% and above. Although only at 4800m already our bodies were exhibiting the kind of oxygen saturation figures that would alarm any paramedic anywhere in the UK. It was difficult to believe that we might eventually adapt to the mountain's upper reaches.

Once fully established at Base Camp we were able to hold the obligatory Puja, a ceremony traditionally conducted by a local Lama (holy man) prior to any members of the expedition stepping on to the mountain. Prayers are uttered and offerings made to the mountain gods asking for safety on the mountain. Our enthusiasm for the blessing was slightly increased by the apparent need to consume 'Tuborg' and 'Royal Stag' at 0800 hrs as part of the ceremony. Once the god(s) had been appeased we made our first, somewhat inebriated, trip to Advanced Base Camp (ABC). This would be the first of many trips up and down the ridge needed to acclimatise and build the chain of camps that would finally put us in a position to make a summit bid.

Climbing in the Himalaya is portrayed as an action packed activity. Whilst there are undoubtedly moments where the adrenaline is flowing freely, it probably falls into the classic army definition of combat operations: 90% boredom, 10% terror. Countless hours are spent trudging up seemingly endless slopes, digging snow, brewing up, rehydrating food and trying to wear your Kindle out! However we were soon moving faster between camps. Journeys which had left us exhausted only days before became a morning's work, with plenty left over for another carry or a challenging afternoon's pottering. Our Sherpa often preceded us and could be relied upon to have a hot brew or wet ready on arrival.

In these early days we seemed to have eons of time and were progressing well. The arrival of a team of Gurkhas who were training for their 200 anniversary Everest expedition in 2015 were able to provide some additional support in lifting our gear up the mountain. It's hard to appreciate just what a massive effort it takes to climb and equip a route such as the SE ridge.

Rest days were vital. Staying fed and hydrated during a day's activity is surprisingly challenging. The dry air at altitude, combined with our high respiratory rates and the sometimes broiling sun, left us all dehydrated after a day's effort. The extended time it takes to melt snow for water and food made stove duties an extended task and a couple of hours at either end of the day were the bare minimum. During the day the need to stay connected to the mountain combined with the cold and wind deterred the individual from regular drinking and eating. Consequently, I found that I ate very little throughout a day's load carrying. As a result our rest days became an opportunity not only to give tired muscles a break, but to devour any available calories and drink tea continuously. These activities were only interspersed with our incessant need to put the world to rights, even when we were so far removed from it. It's amazing how simply the world's issues can be resolved when your brain is only receiving a fraction of the oxygen it requires!

Whilst we had a detailed climbing plan in place it had to be constantly revised as the situation developed. Our communications were never ideal as battery power was always at a premium. As a result it was vital that every individual understood the overall picture. Everyone had to be able to act, perhaps without guidance, so as to forward the expeditions progress.

As we gradually gained altitude on the mountain, we experienced some extremely challenging days. One particularly memorable day whilst ascending from Camp 1 (6100m) to Camp 2 (6800m) we



were hit with some progressively bad weather on route. As the weather deteriorated it became increasingly difficult to discern the route ahead. The blowing snow stuck to our goggles, blinding us. The extreme wind and cold made thick mitts essential, but rendered rope handling difficult. There were points when only the fixed line, stretching 2 or 3 metres ahead provided any clue as to the way forward. We eventually arrived well after dark, physically and psychologically drained. Unfortunately the fixed ropes ended short of camp and on the exposed slope we stood uncertain of our camp's location and wishing we'd stayed at home on the sofa. In the swirling blizzard yours' truly decided that we had no choice but to dig new tent platforms and erect the tents which we carried. After cutting most of a suitable platform and verbally encouraging others to assist, someone else announced that the tents of Camp 2 had been located and 10 minutes later we piled into our tents for the night. Three of us occupied a two-man tango tent. One person occupied 50%, whilst the other two had 25% each. It was a long night...not that I'm bitter!

Eventually, after weeks on the mountain we were almost ready to push alpine style for the summit. All, including the Sherpa, descended to Base Camp for 3 days to rest, recuperate and eat prior to the 'big push'. The final plan was for two summit teams, each comprising two expedition members and two Sherpa. Colin and Dick would form one summit team, Chris and I the other. Who would take the lead would be finalised high on the mountain, depending on who was performing best.

Fully prepared, we set off into a fine weather window expected to last about a week. Our system of stocked camps allowed us to move up the mountain carrying as little as possible. Unfortunately this was still quite a bit of kit. Still, four or five days would see us at Camp 3, above 7000m and ready for a summit push.

Undoubtedly altitude and long days took their toll and by the time we reached Camp 3, only Colin and I were available for the immediate summit bid. Others were just as fit, notably Jon, our doctor, and Chris. However, they had selflessly taken on a support role for the time being. So it was Colin and I who made the climb to Camp 3. Our Sherpa had done a fine job in establishing and stocking the camp with vital supplies; however, we had to carry our tent, food, gas and stove up there, along with the oxygen which we were now using to assist us. We were fortunate to have a very modern system from Summit Oxygen which used our limited supplies very sparingly. The climb to Camp 3 took an extraordinarily long time, fixed ropes seemingly stretching endlessly into the distance. The pace was painfully slow and we arrived cold and tired after dark. Nonetheless, tired or not, we'd have to get on with it tomorrow.

The morning was fine and after the ubiquitous porridge breakfast and plenty of tea we had a conflag with the four Sherpa who had made their way up. After an earlier injury to one of the Sherpa team only five of were fully fit and our sirdar, Nima, had remained lower on the mountain to coordinate lift and support. Thus only four were 'operational'; however, a further two declared themselves to be exhausted. In the end only myself, Colin, Pechumbe and Lakpa set off for Camp 4. After four hours or so it became apparent that

the route would need more preparation before we could reach Camp 4. We descended and spent the afternoon rehydrating and discussing options with Base Camp via our handheld radios. The Sherpa's form would be critical tomorrow. Our weather window was tight and we had to be off to a good start to give us any chance of summiting.

The morning didn't bring good news. The Sherpa had universally decided that they had grown too tired for a summit bid, admitting that they were perhaps used to the shorter periods spent up high on trade routes on other 8000m peaks. In addition, they presented food as an issue, although they had plenty of cooked rice available and didn't desire to share our rations. With much cajoling Pechumbe and Lakpa consented to accompany us as far as Camp 4. We would then be on our own for the two days it would take to reach the summit. One of the other Sherpa set out with us but soon tied off his load and descended. I grabbed what little kit we needed out of his load and continued up. Pechumbe did a sterling job leading and fixing the route - I followed him until, near dark, we left the security of the fixed ropes and began to traverse the ridge toward the Black Gendarme. This was the feature after which our expedition was named. A distinctive feature on the ridge, it comprised a tower of steep, dark rock, intimidating from below. Now, however, I could look directly across towards its precipitous slopes. I could see that its northern aspect could be traversed on snow and would present us little difficulty. For now though, we had problems. As it darkened the temperature dropped considerably; searching for a site for Camp 4, I noticed that the wind, which had been increasing all day, was now borderline gale force. I couldn't make out any suitable tent platform - a bivvy was possible but at just below 8000m on an exposed ridge it would be decidedly dangerous. After a brief discussion with Pechumbe, we decided to descend. I think I knew then that Makalu 2014 was over. As we descended we met Colin just below the ridge, Lakpa having turned back earlier.

At nearly 7500m even the descent was strenuous. Briefly grateful for some respite, we rapidly inserted ourselves into our down-filled time accelerators and got the stove on. After the evening comms schedule Colin and I spent the remainder of the evening trying to figure out how we might salvage our bid; however, the more we considered it, the less viable it seemed. The Sherpa had had enough and any attempt to summit as a solo pair would leave us extremely vulnerable. With the rest of our team lower on the hill and the Sherpa determined to descend to base camp as soon as possible we would be days away from any hope of rescue or support. We had to accept the likelihood that to make a successful summit bid would see us spend 2 nights in a bivouac tent above 8000m and would likely leave us very depleted. We'd then still have to spend a further four days descending the route, potentially in worsening weather. Colin had already sustained frost damage to one digit. Reluctantly and with heavy hearts we accepted the inevitable: it was over!



We spent the next few days getting off the hill. As we descended I began to feel stronger and stronger, and found myself second guessing our earlier decision. Intellectually I understood we had made the right call but somewhere deep inside a voice said we should have gone for it, thrown caution to the wind. We'll never know what the outcome of such a bid would have been but given the scale of the challenge I doubt that it would have been success.

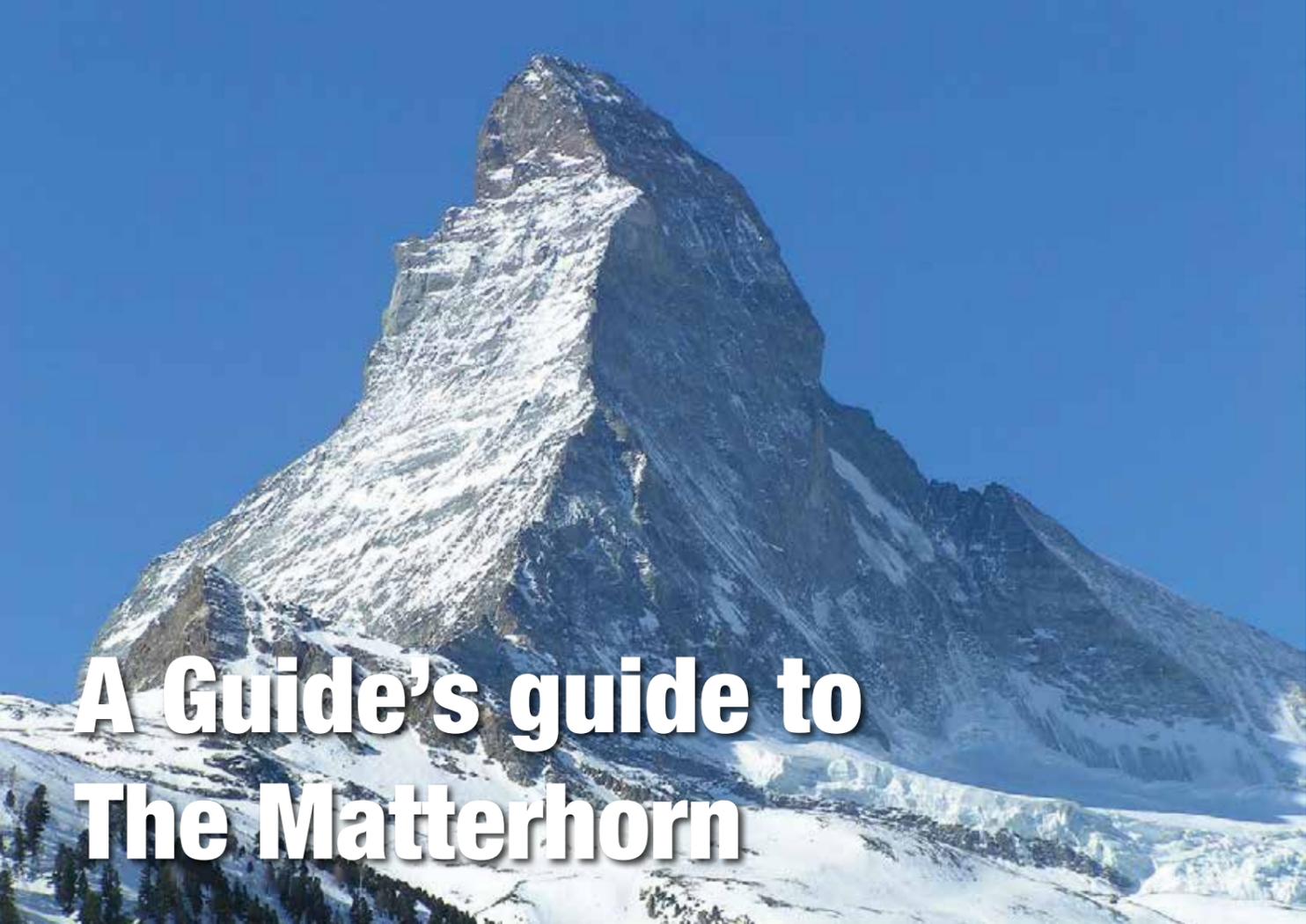
On arrival in base camp I reckoned I was two stone under my fighting weight, much of it lost in the past few days of extreme activity up high. Our calorific needs were perhaps 6000 calories daily and I doubt that we were forcing down more than 1500. Still, I had no time to feel sorry for myself as base camp was a flurry of activity. Already loads were being packed and leaving for Num and eventually Kathmandu. In only a few days we were ready to leave Base Camp for civilization.

Leaving Base Camp was an odd experience. Despite the remote location it had been home for a while and our routine had grown comfortable. We walked out in only 4 days, the first being particularly memorable. The extended distance resulted in us being benighted on the trail and our day ended with a seemingly endless ascent through the rhododendron forest to the lodge at Dobatu. On arrival, the tea-house was locked and in total darkness. We knocked on the door and were met with a few unintelligible grunts. However, before long we were met by the Nepali owner with the features of a Bond villain, who nonetheless proved to be very hospitable. A round or two of Tuborg beers served as an aperitif to a delicious dhal bhat cooked on a tiny open fire. Before long we were all suitably fed and slightly inebriated. All was well! The remainder of the trek to the airstrip passed uneventfully, our bodies growing accustomed to the increasing warmth and lower altitude.

On arrival in Kathmandu we were most generously offered accommodation by British Gurkhas Nepal (BGN). Our time was spent waiting for our freight, exploring the numerous cultural sites and surveying one or two of the local hostels in the evening. During the course of the stay in Kathmandu we were privileged to be invited to a party organised by Amelia Hillary, the granddaughter of Sir Edmund of Everest fame. Her father, Peter, spoke very well on the challenges of climbing in the high Himalaya and we were left with the feeling that even our modest efforts were worthy. I've heard it said that any expedition's objectives should be:

1. **Come back**
2. **Come back as friends**
3. **Climb the mountain**

*Well, two out of three ain't bad!*



# A Guide's guide to The Matterhorn

by Dougal Tavener

Few mountains in the world are as instantly recognisable or inspiring as the Matterhorn (4478 metres) on the Swiss-Italian border. It's easy to understand why its summit is on the wish-list of any mountaineer. This year is the 150th anniversary of its historic first ascent by Edward Whymper and his team on the July 14th 1865. Only three of them survived the descent.

Dougal Tavener, in his work as a UIAGM guide, has climbed all the classic routes many times. Below, he outlines what is involved and gives some advice on preparing for tackling the Matterhorn by its most popular and easiest route, the Hörnli Ridge.

"Firstly, to climb the Hörnli ridge in a safe and enjoyable manner I think it's really important to have more than enough experience for the route. Give this mountain the respect it deserves. The Hörnli is well over a 1000 metres long and despite being technically straightforward the route shouldn't be underestimated.

When you're high up on that mountain you appreciate how far from home you are. There is a good reason it took so long for this mountain to be climbed!

## Preparation

You should be comfortable with exposed AD (III) – ridge terrain. This is equally important in both ascent and descent; with and without crampons. Experience of route finding on complicated alpine ridges is necessary as this is one of the hardest things about the Hörnli.

Also, knowing what to do with the rope and making sure whatever you are doing with it, is safe. To climb the Hörnli safely in a reasonable time you need be nothing less than a short-roping Jedi, being able to make quick decisions between fixing the rope or moving together. You should never actually feel that you need the

rope, but it should always be there and used in a way that would protect you in the worst case scenario.

Being fit enough and acclimatised for a route like the Hörnli can mean a much more enjoyable and safer experience. Without a guide the Hörnli ridge can take around 12 hours and all of this on exposed scrambling terrain.

The best training would involve focusing on moving over this kind of terrain fluently and safely. Being efficient can make a massive difference over 12 hours! An ice axe martial art course might come in handy in case you try and overtake a Swiss guide!

Good training routes for this would be things like: Cosmiques ridge, Traverse of the Aiguilles Marbrées and the Aiguille d'Entrèves Traverse.

## On the Route

Due to the popularity of the Hörnli, the Zermatt guides have devised a 'pecking order' for safety and to minimise queues. The rules are: Zermatt guides leave the hut first, then other mountain guides and then independent climbers. At first I thought this was unfair, but actually now I think it's essential. If the first teams to leave the hut are slow or take a bad route it can cause problems with other parties following and going the wrong way. This can cause frustration and potentially dangerous traffic jams.

The Zermatt guides climb the Hörnli ridge with clients 'back to back' most of the season and know the 'up-to-date route' better than anyone. They also have a strict turn around time, meaning that generally it is unlikely that they will slow you down too much. Usually if they have not reached the Solvay Hut within 2.5/3 hours they will turn around. No matter how slow they are, they might not be particularly forthcoming in letting you pass.

If everybody willingly allowed faster parties to safely overtake, then the mountain would be a nicer safer place. Sadly this is not always the case. When parties behind have to initiate overtaking problems can start.

Route finding on the Hörnli is not easy and can make the biggest difference. Personally I have never found it particularly useful on routes of this length to be constantly checking a guide book description or topo. The first time I do a route like this I study whatever literature is available and then once on the mountain I try, where possible, to rely on experience and common sense.

If you are 'on route' on the Hörnli then the rock is relatively solid and compact, probably as a result of the traffic, 'off route' it can get pretty scary and loose! It is best to abseil or be lowered when descending the fixed rope section below the summit ridge.

In the old hut the doors were locked until the Zermatt guides had gone and you had to queue on the stairwell behind the door. Before getting in the queue you should be roped up and 100% ready to go. It is good to get in the stairwell queue early and be the first unguided party in the queue, leaving you behind a guide.

Your own pace is also important! Only you can decide this. Definitely steady and controlled. Where possible try to keep your breathing/heartrate at an aerobic level (should be able to talk).

With good clients and in good conditions I have needed around 7hrs on average for the round trip. This year I did it with an exceptional client in good weather, but with snow from half-way up it took 17hrs to the summit and back to the hut! The only other person to make the top that day went down in a helicopter. Planning a night in the Solvay Hut (4003 m) is not allowed. This is an emergency shelter and should be kept as one.

## Equipment

In my opinion the most important piece of equipment to consider for climbing the Hörnli is the right set of boots. In good condition the Hörnli is climbed to the shoulder without crampons. This is almost three-quarters of the route and is only rock scrambling to this point. Having a good set of flexible/lightweight B2 boots makes this much easier.

An ice-axe is generally only needed on the summit ridge after the fixed ropes above the shoulder, otherwise 80% of the time it's in your rucksack. A Cirque axe would be fine.

A lightweight alpine harness is ideal. Obviously, don't forget your helmet and crampons.

As a guide, rope-wise I use a 40 metre single rope. It is a rocky ridge so a single rope is a must. Techniques for guiding the Hörnli vary, but for myself and most other guides I know, 40 metres of rope is adequate. This should be the same for anyone else but

taking a 50 metre rope to give an extra buffer might come in handy if there is something you are not comfortable down-climbing.

## Logistics

This year is the 150th anniversary of the Matterhorn's first ascent. To celebrate this the local authorities decided to modernise the Hörnli Hut which has meant it has been closed during 2014 but is scheduled to reopen July 2015.

To make an ascent the weather window needs to be absolutely solid and there should be no fresh snow on the route. If the Swiss guides aren't going then generally this is a good sign not to go either.

It is also probably one of the most expensive huts in the world – 150 Sfr for a night's stay. The best time to climb the Matterhorn is usually mid-June to mid-August. You can get information on conditions in the Alpincenter-Zermatt.

On the day before you plan to climb the mountain, it is a good idea to arrive at the hut early, in order to check out the first section of the route in daylight. I would recommend going as far as the second couloir. In the morning, knowing the route to this point, will be a great help in the chaos and darkness of a Matterhorn mass start.

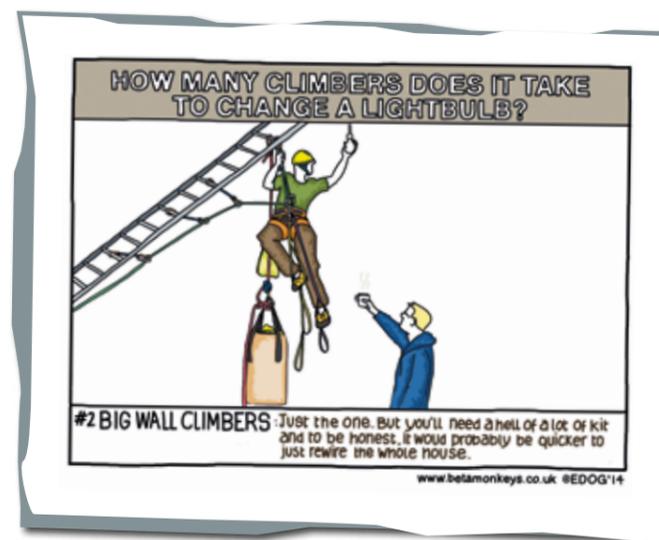
Zermatt is a beautiful place to stay but extremely expensive. Unless you really want to stay in Zermatt I'd arrive in the morning, have a look around the town, then take the lift up to Schwarzsee and walk straight up to the Hörnli hut (2hrs).

It is also possible to stay at the Schwarzsee Hotel. From here there is the great option of taking the Kleine Matterhorn lift and doing the traverse of the Breithorn.

I hope sharing some of this info helps and gives people a feel of what climbing the Hörnli is really about. Good luck if you have a go."

*Dougal Tavener is an UIAGM Guide based in the Alps: dougaltavener.com*

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# Exercise Cadet Rock, Spain

18-25 Oct 2014

**E**x CADET ROCK was an eight day climbing expedition to the Costa Blanca run by the Cadet Centre for Adventurous Training (CCAT). Four instructors which included Maj Kevin Edwards OC CCAT, Lt Col Cath Davies, Billy McIntosh and Dave Rees plus 8 x Cadet Force Adult Volunteers and Senior Cadets flew from Manchester to Alicante and onward by car to Altea arriving at the Albir Gardens Hotel, our base for the week. After settling in, the first task was to carry out introductions and find out what experience and abilities the novices had. This enabled pairs of climbers with similar abilities to be allocated to suitable instructors thus tailoring the RCF multi pitch course to the abilities and speed of development of the individuals. To give my experience as an example, the two senior cadets I climbed with had limited experience, having only completed the Basic Rock Climbing a year before and done little climbing since; on day one they were digging deep to remember how to tie a figure of eight knot! They both led three climbs each on the last day such was the huge leap in their ability and confidence.

The aim of day one was to assess ability and confirm safety considerations such as belaying technique, quite important for the instructor who is leading! To do this, we went west to a fantastically varied area in the Vall de Guadar called Echo 1.5. This offered a single pitch venue with easy grades, a harder sport climbing area and some multi pitch routes close by. Thus everyone was catered for and the pairs began their climbing development at their own pace. We climbed single pitch whilst others progressed to multi pitch on the first day.

The next day we travelled a bit further afield, west again, to an area called Marin. The advantage of being prepared to travel is you access routes less used and hence less polished. This was my team's introduction to multi pitch climbing and we completed three two pitch routes of excellent quality (two in the top fifty climbs in the area) in a superb setting. The views were great, but the sun shone hot and there was little shade to be had, so the stop for ice cream and cold drinks on the way back was much appreciated!

Day three we stayed more local and headed east to a rocky promontory called Toix, giving fantastic coastal views from a lofty position. The party split, half climbing on each side of the promontory. We drew the short straw as it turned out, because despite starting in the shade, once the sun hit us, it was the hottest day yet and our side had no sea breeze! Today's development

was to look at placing gear, belay building and carry out a stacked abseil on completion of a multi pitch climb, which we duly did, quite an experience for the novices.

Day four took us back to the Vall de Guadar, this time for a traditional route on the ridge of the Paret del Castellet, Via Esther, a four pitch 2 star route with an exciting bush bashing finish to get off. The other group tackled two more serious multi pitch routes, again traditional, and had quite some adventures getting finished. That, however, is the advantage of rope groups working in the same areas as they can offer mutual support, meaning more challenging undertakings can be considered.

Day five saw Kev and Cath head back to Toix Este, the other side of the promontory, whilst Billy and Dave headed back to Echo. We climbed a fantastic bolted and traditional route called Horst, which started off at 4+, then became easier at 4 and 3, allowing us to pre place runners and let the novices do their first lead. We had fantastic views over Calpe and the Penon de Ifach, that iconic mini Rock of Gibraltar sticking out into the sea where Spain turns left to head north to Valencia, and even a sea breeze. Flushed with the success of a first lead, we headed down to Calpe for a closer look at the Penon.

Meeting the aspirations of the novices is vital, and our team's wanted to go away confident in their ability to lead, set up a top rope and climb with a friend. To do this we returned to Toix Oeste, and braved the heat to practice building belays, lead climbing and setting up on single pitch climbs. Kev's team did the same but moved faster and fitted in a multi pitch climb as well.

Billy and Dave took their more experienced teams off for a serious mountain day on the Bernia ridge, a 2.8km technical ridge with a bit of 4+ climbing and some fantastic views of the Costa Blanca. For Dave, this was a long awaited chance to finally tick the box, for the remainder of the team it was a long day! After a leisurely wander the ridge began with a bit of easy scrambling then the ropes were out and it was into full mountaineering mode on an exposed technical ridge. It was a great chance to put into practice all the skills learned throughout the week and although the teams just made it for their evening meal, it was a fitting finale.

Our sincere thanks go to the Ulysses Trust who gave us a significant financial grant to make this exercise possible.



# Exercise Alaskan Bugle

In May 2014 a group of novice Army AMA members launched on Ex DRAGON ALASKAN BUGLE with the aim of summiting Mount McKinley (6,194m), the highest peak in North America. The team of 14, led by Capt Joshua Axford (1 RIFLES) was made up of two Officers, three NCOs, seven Riflemen and two attached Army Reserve personnel. On 15 June, 7 of the team successfully reached the summit in what had proved to be one of the harshest climbing seasons on McKinley in over 30 years.

Mount McKinley is found in the Denali National Park of Alaska, it is the largest mountain measured from base to peak and is also considered year round the coldest mountain in the world. The typical climbing route is known as the West Buttress route and was pioneered in 1951, this route involves progressing up the mountain through a series of 5 camps and takes on average 21 days to complete. There are no sherpas or mules so an expedition team is required to carry all equipment and supplies for the duration of the expedition in packs and pulks weighing over 100lbs. The climbing in Denali National Park is renowned for its independent and self-sufficient style along with severe sub zero conditions.

In the shaping phase of this expedition the biggest challenge lay in getting the team trained to the required standard in order to launch a safe, resilient and risk managed expedition. The team was largely made up of novice climbers who had never experienced any form of mountaineering before. This busy and critical shaping phase was 18 months in length and required the team members to attend a matrix of AT courses at various Joint Service Mountain Training Centres in order to gain the pre requisite qualifications.

On May 21 2014 the team flew on to the mountain by ski plane landing on the Kahlitna glacier at 2,100m. After a day of glacier skills and a conservative 2 nights acclimatisation at the airstrip, the first move was a steady and pleasant plod to Camp 1 (2,300m) at the base of Ski Hill. The following day, as the team began the ascent in earnest, an arctic blizzard moved in reducing visibility down to a few meters. The decision was made to dig an emergency camp at 2,800m and wait out the storm. Camp 1Alpha as we named it became a byword for a frozen hell which for a time no one thought that we would ever escape. Temperatures plummeted to -40C with wind speeds of up to 50 mph. So much snow was being blown on to our tents that a 24hr digging rota was enforced to ensure that nobody was buried alive. Conditions did not improve for 4 days. No one in the team will ever forget the experience of surviving at Camp 1Alpha.

Eventually conditions improved enough to allow for a concerted move to Camp 2 (3,400m) at the base of Motorcycle Hill. From this point on the team would be using crampons and double carrying loads up the mountain as the terrain was now too steep for snow shoes or heavy pulks. Fortunately a spell of good stable weather allowed the team to move past the infamous Windy Corner in perfect conditions. In previous years a number of climbers have met an untimely death on this perilous hanging glacier.

Now safely established at Advance Base Camp (4,300m) the team faced unpredictable weather which hindered progress for 10 days straight. Conditions would worsen rapidly and wind speeds remained above 25mph, making an ascent of the West Buttress Ridge unsafe.

Despite this delay acclimatisation to the high altitude was still an issue faced by a number of team members. Sleepless nights, lack of appetite and severe headaches were all symptoms of the reduced level of oxygen. When a break in the weather allowed movement towards high camp two team members suffered altitude sickness symptoms serious enough to halt the teams progress and require them to return to Base Camp. One rifleman's conditions were diagnosed as showing early signs of High Altitude Cerebral Edema (HACE). This is when a bubble forms on the brain and represents the most serious form of altitude sickness as it can cause death within just a few hours if the climber does not descend. Fortunately due to the decisions made on the mountain and despite the unseasonably bad weather conditions and issues with altitude sickness, none of the team suffered any serious or lasting injuries.

On the morning of the 15 June, the remaining team members, having climbed to High Camp (5,100m) the previous day in white out conditions, were faced with a marginal weather window in which to summit. An American Army team was also preparing to summit that day and so we worked together sharing the effort of placing protection and breaking trail. The weather deteriorated throughout the day so we had to move fast to avoid being caught out. Operating above 6,000m was the hardest physical challenge any of us had ever faced. However each step of the final climb up the summit ridge brought a heightened sense of euphoria as we got closer to our goal. The feeling at the summit was largely of relief. There wasn't really much of a view to speak of, as we were above the clouds, but we celebrated nonetheless and took a few moments relishing the feeling. Of course we were aware that this was only half the job, as we still needed to get down safely and there are a number of high risk areas on the descent, not least Denali Pass, AKA the 'Autobahn', a 50 degree slope of ice on which it is difficult to arrest if you lose your footing.

Fortunately we made it safely back to High Camp and enjoyed a well earned 'rest' at 5,100m. We were woken in the morning by a rally call to assist in the rescue of a solo Polish climber who had been stuck out on the mountain overnight with a broken ankle. It turned into another joint US/UK Army operation as we assisted the park rangers with the rescue of the injured climber. Exhausted we decided to descend all the way to the airstrip in one go to get off the mountain as quickly as we could and avoid an incoming storm. 4 weeks living on McKinley is quite an experience and an achievement of a lifetime none of us will ever forget. In all 7 of our team of 14 made it to the summit (well over the 30% success rate for the season). None of this would have been possible without the support of the Army Mountaineering Association.



## Deliverance

By Nick Bullock

From high above comes a deep throaty growl. Instantly, I know its source, and I desperately look around for shelter, but the only option, a single rock immediately to my left, is too small. The ropes snake down the gully, useless. I drive both tools into wet, melting ice and cower. When the heavy concrete snow hits me square on, I am plucked from the middle of the couloir and thrown down the face. I scream, deep, from the pit of my stomach. I know I am about to die.

Tumbling, hurtling down, I spin head over heels, smashing into rock upside-down with my left shoulder. My body collapses, concertinaed. My knees crash into my face, splitting the soft skin and forcing the air from my lungs with the crushing impact. My ribs, chest and back feel as though they are tearing apart. I black out for a second, then regain consciousness, horrified to find I am still falling.

Let the next one end the pain, I plead. I've suffered enough now. Please.

I hit deep, soft snow hard. I'm alive! The joy of living gives way to panic as I crash another two hundred feet, down the ice-cone, spinning, twisting, pushed on by hundreds of tons of heavy, wet snow. Surfacing, I gulp air, pulling hard for the side of the avalanche. My legs are twisted into unnatural angles; my joints are forced the wrong way. Still I fight, clawing, flailing. My resolve strengthens: I refuse to be taken under.

The snow slows; I claw and swim. As it starts to set, I pull hard to get high, pushing an arm into the air in the hope of leaving some part of me visible, something for Powell to dig out.

It never enters my head that he could be buried as well.

I shook my head, attempting to clear it of the memory of our attempt on this god-forsaken mountain twelve months earlier. Any sane person would avoid repeating such an experience, so why was I now bivied on the same rock step, waiting to climb the same evil chimney with the same deadly face above? Powell, sitting at my side, also looked reflective, his intense, dark eyes set deep in a gaunt face. Did he question what had made us return to this face as well?

Jirishanca is an icy, towering skyscraper of a mountain in a remote corner of Peru's Cordillera Huayhuash. Fringed, latticed icefalls, joined together by snowy ledges and steep compact rock, cover the upper three-quarters of its southeast face. The pointed summit is protected by mushrooms and fluted honeycomb snow that overhangs the concave face. Access to the unclimbed central area is via a massive snow cone and a tight, narrow chimney. As the sun strikes the face in the early morning it becomes a living entity. Everything falling from above is funneled down the face and flushed

through the chimney—the place where I had nearly died the year before.

The southeast face had seen only one ascent, in 1973 by a Japanese team that sieged their route over forty-five days. Several teams were coming to try their luck on the face this year. Al Powell and I comprised the second team. The first, Alex Fidi and Julian Neumayer, two young guides from Austria, didn't make it beyond their warm-up climb. While attempting a new line on Jirishanca Chico in preparation for the main event on Jirishanca, they were caught in an avalanche. Both had been killed.

We started soloing at 1 a.m. on June 15 with two days food for the nine-hundred-meter line. My stomach was playing up; I felt terrible. As we approached the start of the chimney, my breathing grew labored. Entering the chimney, fighting the desire to run away, I started the sprint on perfect névé. It was freezing cold, a luxury not experienced the year before. The deathly dark in the confines constricted my swings and kicks. Lumps of snow flew past; the odd rock whirred by. I desperately wanted to escape.

A crashing rumble broke the silence. Driving both axes into the névé, I pulled in tight and waited. And waited. Nothing happened. I swore at myself for being so stupid: it was a serac collapsing on Yerupaja Chico. God, was I tense. I quickly continued until finally the rock surrounding me opened out to a wide expanse of snow.

A large overhanging buttress to the right promised a haven of safety. In my mind's eye, I could see the picture of the face I had stared at longingly over the months. I could see the massive gargoyles of snow and ice stuck to soaring towers directly above. Why had Powell talked about earthquakes the day before? Where was he, anyway? I stopped and turned to look below. Yes, there he was: I could see the pin-prick of light still in the confines. He was still in danger, still plugging away as quickly as his body would allow.

A final sprint across the wide, right-leaning snow slope deposited me safely under the overhanging buttress, gasping for breath. Minutes later Powell caught up.

"Jesus, what were we thinking last year? This place must have been loaded with fresh snow," he muttered, as much to himself as to me.

"It'll be one of the best ice routes in the world if we do it," I replied, trying to keep the fear from my voice while glancing above, to the left, to the right, below, behind.

"That chimney went on forever. I though you said you were nearly at the ramp last year?"

"Yes, well, I did have other things on my mind at the time."

As Powell meticulously checked the pictures of the face he had blown up from slides taken the previous year, I had time to wonder how he felt. What drove him? A partner at home cared for their new-born baby; how would that affect me? Thirty-seven years old and single: there were no distractions or complications to interfere with my climbing. Did Powell find this as scary as I did?

Chalk and cheese, Powell and me: my aggressive, impatient character is tempered by his solid, quiet, laid-back approach. A partnership three years old, and already gnarled and knotted like an old oak lintel.

Dawn highlighted our spectacular setting. We clung to life in the middle of a great concave amphitheatre. Upside-down organ pipes hung all around in this cold cathedral, some as thick as tree trunks. The mountains behind woke for another day, lit with a deep red glow as the sun lifted above the horizon.

Immediately the warmth made its presence felt. A large serac broke from the wall above the chimney and crashed down, scattering into a thousand pieces. Minutes later, a second one followed. We covered with every resounding crash, insects in the bottom of an egg-timer.

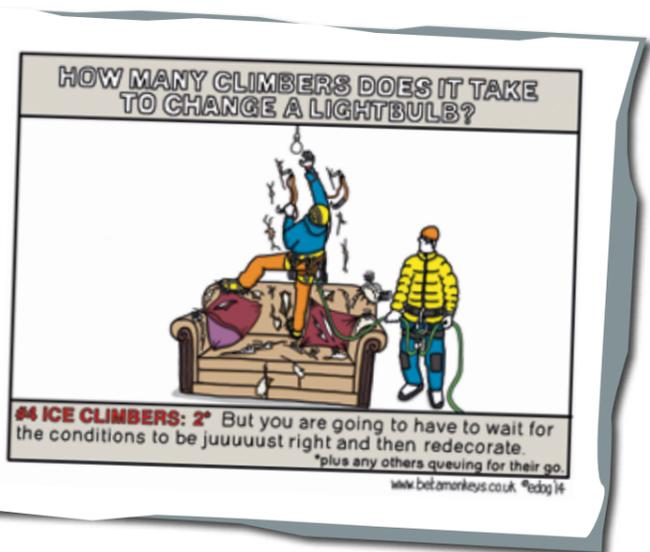
Powell cut across right, aiming for a great swathe of sastrugi-rippled ice. I moved toward him, crossing runnels furrowed by falling debris. We were pitching out the climbing now: the chance of something crashing from above and wiping us out was very real. Setting the belay—two screws, two axes—I stood between vertical ice above and below. Powell, obsessive about saving weight, had chosen to bring small fun-size chocolate bars for our food. Without that extra weight we would surely race up the desperate-looking ground above.

As Powell seconded the fifty-meter ice wall below I studied the east face of Siula Grande across the valley. It looked like hell. I imagined Joe Simpson and Simon Yates downclimbing the ridge above it. It was awe-inspiring to think of their epic struggle, which had taken place just one valley over. It was also daunting: If we were lucky enough to reach the summit, how would we get down?

A strained, serious face popped above the final bulge of the long pitch. Powell had struggled with the sustained climbing, shouting repeatedly to be held. Maybe he had some heavy full-size Mars Bars stashed in his pack?

"Jeepers, that was desperate," he said through clenched teeth. "I'm really not fit for this sort of stuff."

A winter of skiing in preparation for his guide's test had seriously affected his climbing. It didn't worry me that he was struggling, though; with more gnarly first ascents around the world than



anyone I knew, I couldn't think of a better person to be with on such a serious face as this. The Bullock/Powell partnership worked because with every pitch I threw myself at, Powell would address the balance with quiet control on the next. Unfortunately, I sensed the icicle fest above was about to be offered over.

The pitch looked innocuous enough except for the overhanging ice at the top of the gutter. Twenty meters out with only one screw between us, however, I decided I would really have to learn to say no. It came naturally enough back home at work in the prison gym; why not when climbing?

Out of balance, I frantically scratched and scraped, looking for any placements. I cleared powder from the rock for a precarious right pick placement on a rugosity, carefully weighted my right monopoint on a sloping edge, and released my left foot from the good ice. I prayed. I shouted to Powell to watch me. I held my breath, and matched my left monopoint on the sloping edge. The move was made. With both feet now in the middle of the gutter I could finally balance. I needed to step up right, but there was only smooth rock and a thin blob of rotten ice.

"Why do I always get into these positions?" I yelled.

"You always get yourself into those positions!" Powell not-very-helpfully answered.

Looking down I spied the screw ten meters below and Powell another ten meters below that. Math at school was my favorite class to miss, but the distance I would fall came to me in a flash: twenty meters onto the screw, forty meters if it failed. I regretted not missing more lessons.

Insecure moves, frantic, frenetic footwork, and various fumbling and scratching eventually found me under a large cluster of icicles drooling from the exit. Placing three screws into crud, one tied off, two wobbling, I made a move up, then another. Feet kicked, lumps of crud flew, Powell dodged, I swore, an axe ripped, I lurched, I reversed. I tried a second time, then a third. Both attempts failed.

"Any ideas?" I yawned to Powell. He hadn't made a sound the whole time I had been swinging around trying to kill us.

"Why don't you aid it?"

"On what? Everything is rotten."

"Just slap a sling on your top screw to stand in, then aid it on your axes."

The thought of aiding through rotten ice didn't appeal to me.

"I don't do aid!"

After an hour Powell realized I wasn't joking.

"I thought aiding was supposed to be less strenuous than proper climbing?" I yawned between gasps.

"It is if you know what your doing!"

Groveling up the unconsolidated snow at the top of the overhang I vowed never to scoff at aid climbers again.

Powell started to climb but quickly decided the sensible option was to jug one rope. I belayed him on the other while watching television-sized blocks of ice ring constantly down the steeple of rock on the other side of the overhang. When Powell came into view, he fixed me with a long hard stare. As he reached the belay he whispered those immortal words.

"You fucking nutter."

That pleased me. Obviously, he thought it was difficult also.

Two pitches of worrying, unprotected powder bashing placed us on a knife-edge arête beneath a great tilting serac fringed with a massive mouth of sharp, icy teeth. For the first time since daylight we could see down into the valley, the place we had spent so long waiting for this chance to climb. Our tent was a dot nestled among the capillary system of streams pouring from the tumbling glaciers that spewed from Yerupaja Chico, Yerupaja and Siula Grande. The dark rocky peaks of the Huayhuash extended beyond for miles.

For the last hour I had watched a storm track across the range. We went to work cutting a ledge from the snow. It wouldn't be long before bad weather hit. It was 5 p.m.; an hour and a half of daylight remained.

The storm came in, hitting us with snow and hail. The wind gusted and the views disappeared. The night arrived as we were enshrouded in our vertical world. I squeezed alongside Powell, shoulder to shoulder inside his homemade bivy bag.

"I suppose we can sit it out for a day if this keeps up."

For once I didn't have to strain to hear his quietly-hissed reply.

"No need. We can climb through this."

I thought of the slopes above loaded with fresh snow and how little it took to knock me off last year.

"Aye, I suppose we can," I replied, though with not quite as much determination.

Through the night the clouds passed over and to my great relief the sky cleared. As we eased the stiffness from our aching limbs, the sun came out, and the mountain began its morning song. Six pitches of weaving and groveling followed. Climbing vertical unprotected mush ate into the time somewhat, though moving together for a while clawed a little of it back.

Moving together is a part of mountaineering that doesn't usually worry me. In fact, most of the time I prefer it: the ground is covered quickly, and there's no messing with belays. This face was different. The uncertainty of the ground taxed the nerves, the chances of being hit by falling debris taxed the nerves, the weather and conditions taxed the nerves. The simplest formalities on this mountain were serious. I watched Powell kicking a stance beneath another vertical, rotten wall of despair and forced myself to get on with it.

It was with joy I tunneled through a wafer-thin cornice and crawled onto the East Ridge. At last the dark and foreboding face had been left behind. We were no longer threatened by the headwall of death and despair. We were also no longer on new ground: Austrians Toni Egger and Siegfried Jungmair had climbed the ridge in 1957. Celebration took the form of a fun-sized Mars Bar.

A panoramic vista opened in front of me: new valleys, intense blue lakes, grass, new mountains. I felt alive.

Dropping down from the overhanging cornice, I traversed to belay at the side of a large ice umbrella. The sight of Jirishanca Chico tempered my joy. A growing sense of guilt began to threaten my contentment. The police had left the previous day. The chopper blades thudding in the early morning had mingled with the sound of crashing ice. I knew the bodies of the two Austrians had been found: I could see the

holes in the snow where they had lain. We would later learn it had taken two days to remove them from the avalanche site. Had they been pushing too hard in questionable

conditions, trying to get acclimatized to beat Powell and myself onto this route? Was it worth it? Is any of this worth it?

We had aided in the search for the Austrian's bodies, leading the police through the icefall on the first search. The police were a happy bunch, just doing a job. Pointing to the southeast face, we told them we were going to try to climb Jirishanca. They looked at us like we were aliens beamed down from The Planet Pointless.

"You should go to the beach and meet women," one of them said. After the last two days, I had to wonder if he hadn't been right.

For the first time I had witnessed the pain of loss caused for those left behind. Was I selfish to pursue a life of satisfaction for myself? Perhaps; but an existence of work, warmth, comfort, and mundane regularity simply didn't cut it, didn't give me the reward I sought.

I wondered how people would view my demise if it came now. He lived life to the limit and died doing what he loved, I hoped they would say. A cliché, but true: the reward from climbing will always be worth the risk for me.

Powell traversed across and joined me, disturbing my morbid thoughts. He continued to climb the slope until beneath the wildest umbrella of ice, where he fixed a belay.

"You're going to love this!" he called.

As I climbed to meet him I didn't think I was. Belayed underneath the umbrella at the rear of a cave formed by erupting ice, Powell sat, a fly in the jaws of a Venus flytrap. At his feet was a hole looking directly down the face. I traversed a wall of thin, corniced snow that hung over the hole.

"Careful!" Powell yelled quite loudly. "You haven't seen how far that overhangs!" I hadn't, but as I minced around the hole to join him it became obvious.

"Why is nothing on this mountain normal?" I whined. "Everything has to be bigger, scarier, more rotten, steeper."

Powell ignored my moaning and set about digging a five-star bivy ledge. When he was done, we had a pulpit that overlooked a congregation of fine mountains.

The night drew in and for the first time in three days the afternoon bubble-up didn't result in a storm.

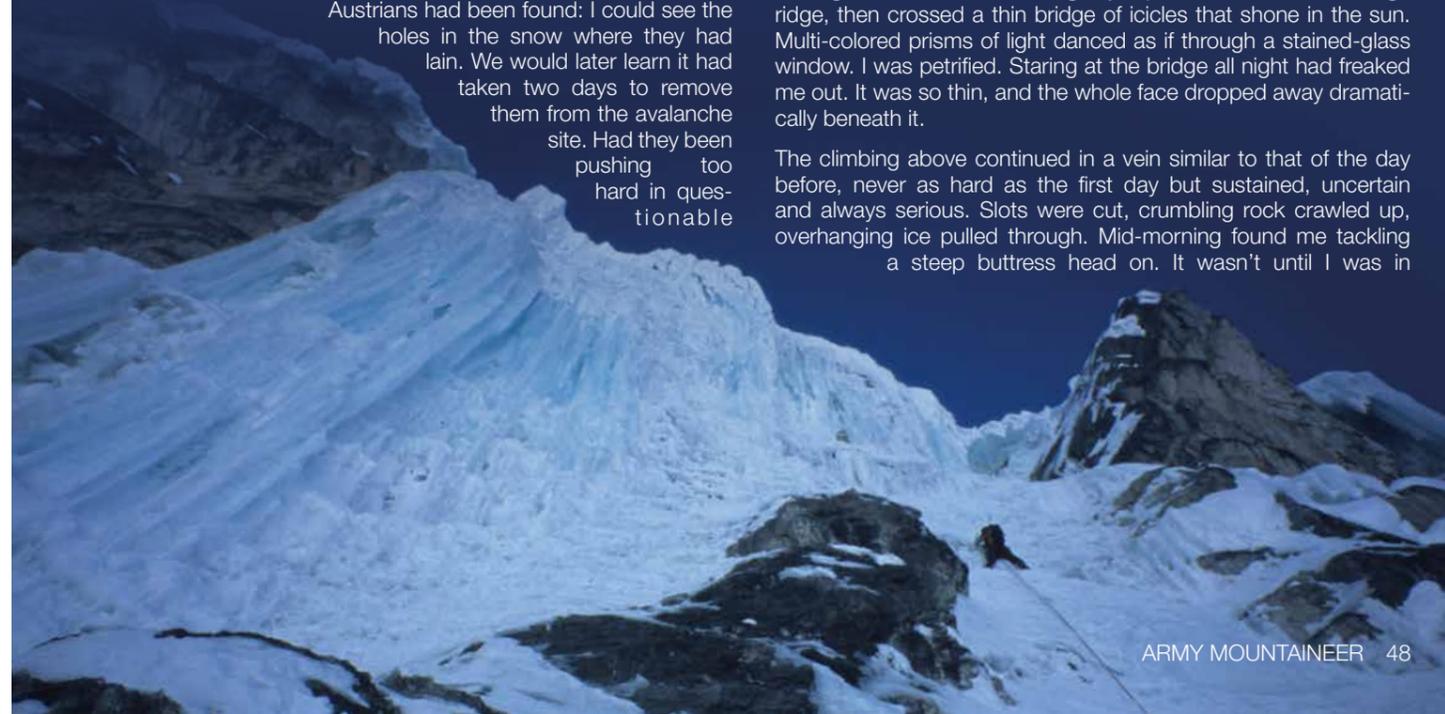
"The weather looks to be settling again—just in time for our summit bid, eh? Couple of hours, maybe?"

"Hmm," came the whispered reply. "Still a long way to go, I reckon."

Bastard, I thought. Why does he always have to spoil my illusions with the truth?

Setting off at 7 a.m. the following day, I tiptoed across the knife-edge ridge, then crossed a thin bridge of icicles that shone in the sun. Multi-colored prisms of light danced as if through a stained-glass window. I was petrified. Staring at the bridge all night had freaked me out. It was so thin, and the whole face dropped away dramatically beneath it.

The climbing above continued in a vein similar to that of the day before, never as hard as the first day but sustained, uncertain and always serious. Slots were cut, crumbling rock crawled up, overhanging ice pulled through. Mid-morning found me tackling a steep buttress head on. It wasn't until I was in





desperate trouble that I realized a snow slope to the right ran straight up the ridge.

“There’s a fucking simple slope there,” I yelled down to Powell. “Didn’t you think to check around the corner before sending me on this death pitch?”

I wasn’t really that angry; in the three years I had known Powell this was his first error. It was good to realize he was human after all. Still, throwing a little tantrum gave me a smug feeling of satisfaction.

A careful sideways shuffle to escape the buttress deposited me gratefully on the slope. Climbing it proved easy, apart from the effort of pushing, kicking, and swimming at nearly 6000 meters. There was no protection, but that was par for the course.

Powell swam to the base of the crumbling rock buttress to which I was attached. He intended to climb it. The rock was a pile of crumbling corn flakes. Rusty pegs sprouted from lumps of congealed mud and rotting slings hung forlorn, blowing in the wind. The angle of the buttress looked amenable for the first few feet but bulged higher. I pointed to a line I had spotted to my left. It looked more in keeping with everything we had already done and would be more new climbing. Powell set off around the corner to check it out.

“It looks like it’ll go,” he mumbled.

My old ears struggled. “Eh?”

“It looks OK as long as the ice isn’t rotten.”

“Oh, it’ll be desperate then!” I whispered.

The morning sun dazzled me as I belayed at the base of the buttress. Around the corner Powell, squeezed into the dark confines of a typical Scottish gully, was in a different world. Chockstones, overhangs, thin rotten ice covering compact rock: it was Minus One Gully on Ben Nevis at 6000 meters. No queuing here, though!

A very sustained fifty-five meters later he escaped the confines, pulled through an ice overhang and belayed at the base of a great tottering dollop of snow balanced on the crest of the ridge. I joined him with new-found respect. It is easy to forget the skill and determination that brings you and a close partner together in the first place.

Powell pointed me toward the third, vertical, unprotected death-fluting-excavation-pitch of the climb. I dug through it with surprising ease, emerging onto the steep summit ridge. With each kick in the rotten, sun-bleached snow I sang hallelujah: each step brought us nearer our goal.

I made a long traverse left, passing above Powell, who was hidden beneath the whipped-cream dollop twenty meters below, and then started to burrow through the Simpsonsque flutings of death. Halfway up one of the flutings I dug out some ice and belayed. Above looked to be the final ridge leading to the summit. Below, the seventy-degree runnel dropped dramatically away for thousands of feet. I pictured falling now without a single piece of gear between us and hanging in space over the headwall without a chance of pulling back onto the face. Powell wouldn’t have a clue if that happened; he was tucked away out of sight and sound. I didn’t fancy emulating Simpson’s Siula epic, even if it would make a good story.

Powell followed my weaving steps to join me at my confined spot. It was a tight fit, hemmed in as we were on either side by snow walls. Continuing directly up the runnel he chopped through the top of the fluting and followed a steep icy slope. The afternoon bubble-up of cloud had started earlier than normal; it now spit with hail. Spindrift soon poured down the runnel, hitting me. It continued to fall in great clouds that blew across the hundreds of fringed icefalls covering the headwall to my left.

“Come on, Powell, it can’t be far now.” I grew impatient; the weather had started to concern me. I just wanted to be up this thing, though the thought of getting off scared me stupid. At least on top nothing was going to crash on my head. I pictured all the shit thundering down the evil chimney and before I could stop it my head started to list climbers I knew who had been killed by falling debris. Sod that: I had Powell to get me down safe. I knew he wouldn’t take any risks getting us off.

I knew the summit was close. Taking the gear, I quickly scurried off before the clouds came in and blocked the view completely. The mist cleared for a second: I could see a flat ridge and a tower less than a pitch away. It had to be the summit, but what I saw scared me. The ridge looked deadly. On the right a curling cornice overhung the southwest face and on the left a perfect avalanche slope waited to be set off.

I belayed from my rucksack. Powell groveled back from checking the tower. Leaning close and shouting in my ear he delivered the bad news.

“It’ll go with a lot of digging! There’s no gear and no getting back. Maybe we can get down the other side?”

I didn’t like the idea of blindly forcing on in the teeth of a storm.

“How about digging a ledge to bivy and waiting for the weather to pick up? At least we’ll be able to see what we’re getting into.”

“No, we’re strung out with no food! If this weather continues we could get stuck up here!”

He was right: we had climbed all day on one bar of chocolate each. I could feel my body eating away muscle for fuel. My mind flashed to the scene that would greet me upon my return to work: the detox class would come into the prison gym fresh from the street, pale, rattling and drug-riddled. Taking one look at me, they would smile and wink, recognizing a fellow sufferer. If we bivied up here I was going to make the worse crack addict look healthy. Little would they know the drug of my choice didn’t come in tablet form.

We wanted to stand and rejoice on the tip of the summit, shake hands and celebrate, but the weather was robbing us of our crowning glory. Battered by large snow flakes, hoping for a miracle, we stood there for half an hour, but our prayers were not answered.

“We should start getting down; it’ll be better down climbing if it’s light,” announced a stoic Powell.

I didn’t want to leave. Neither did he. It just didn’t feel fair.

Fair is for dreamers, though; fair isn’t real. Life isn’t fair. Kicking angrily, I turned in and started the long scary way down to normality.

# Exercise Tiger Torres

In December 2014, 18 members of Recruiting Group took part in Ex TIGER TORRES, an arduous mountaineering expedition to Chilean Patagonia. The multi-capt badge group headed for Punta Arenas on the southernmost tip of the South American mainland and then onwards to the Torres del Paine National Park. The expedition group consisted mostly of complete novices, keen to get some trekking experience in an amazing atmosphere as they work towards gaining mountaineering qualifications in the future..

With a 30 hour journey to get to Punta Arenas and a further 2 days of coach travel into the Park the group found themselves in an hugely isolated and stunning mountain range. The Park has been voted the 5th most beautiful place on Earth by National Geographic and it did not disappoint.

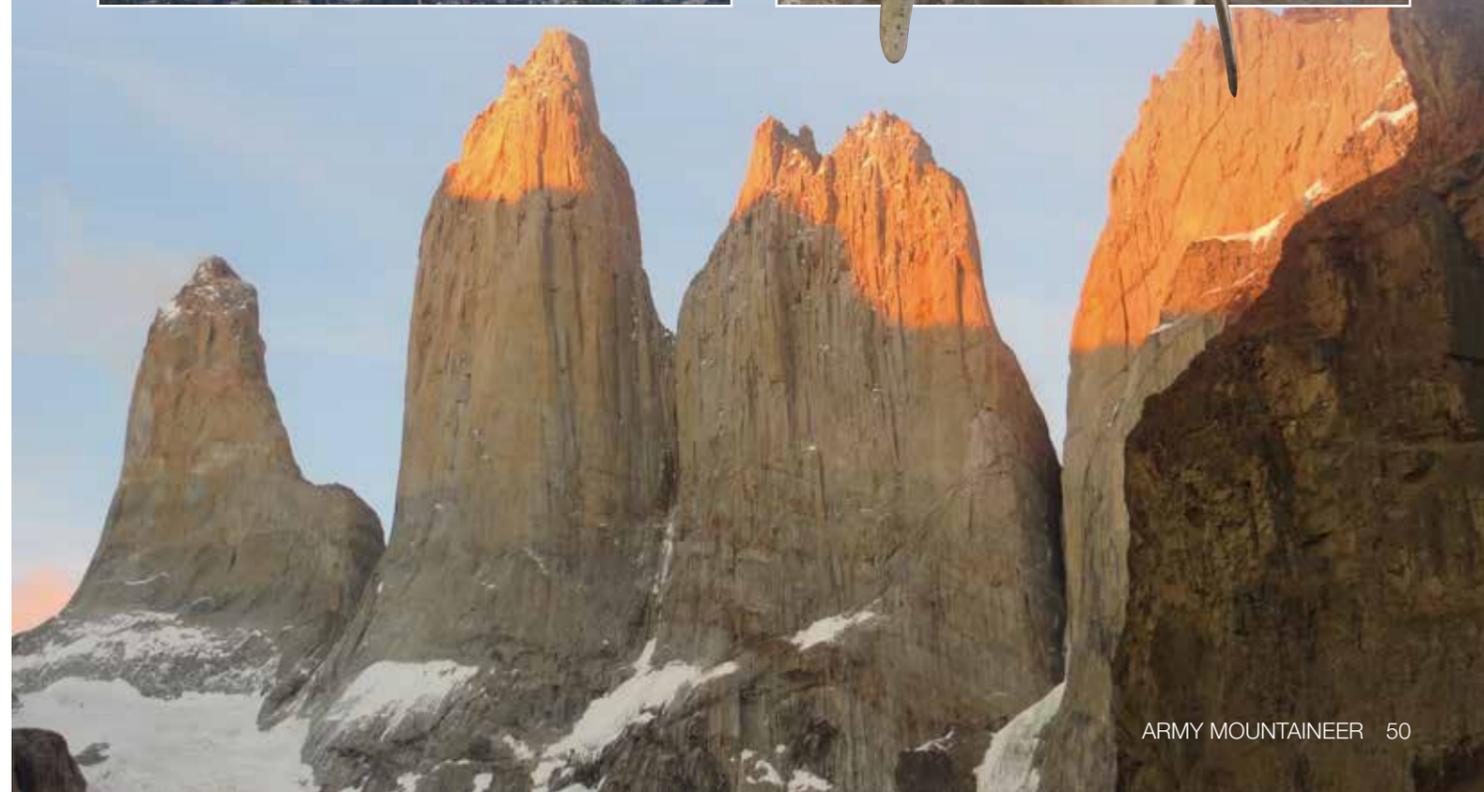
Trekking in the early summer in the Southern Hemisphere, the weather was warm but not without its challenges. Some of our more fair haired members underestimated the strength of the sun whilst we are all affected by the 100 mph Patagonian winds. The tents felt the strength of the winds too, some of them resembling flags as the poles snapped and the canopies ripped. We went looking for a challenge in nature and we found it!

Carrying all that we needed for the 8-day trek, the several climbs and descents around the mountains really tested the team. Fortunately we were blessed throughout with a stunning landscape.

The Park gave us large pine forests and eerie forests of charred trees remaining from huge forest fires of years gone-by. The several glacial lakes were a vivid blue, whilst the glacier that flows into the Park also filed one of the lakes with ice bergs. A particular highlight was a RIB trip along the face of Glacier Grey, during which Chilean boat driver took great pleasure in getting all concerned soaked to the skin with icy glacial water. We even got to walk on the edge of the glacier, witnessing the rock falls as the glacier pushed forwards into the lake. The other main highlight of the trek was seeing the Torres (3 granite stacks from an extinct volcano) literally glow orange as the sun hit them at first night. There were also snow-capped mountains and wild meandering rivers to entertain throughout.

On completion of the 100 km trek the group had two days of R+R. We travelled to the Isla Magdallena where we were surrounded by some 70,000 penguins. There was also an opportunity to go to the southern most tip of continental America, ‘the end of the world’ or ‘fin del mundo’, where Charles Darwin had visited and where original settlers had laid claim to Chile. Our final day was spent tasting the cultural delights of the Chilean capital, Santiago.

The exped allowed some of the group to gain extra AT qualifications, which will undoubtedly be used to plan future expeditions. Ex TIGER TORRES was a real once-in-a-career opportunity to visit a remote and spectacular part of the world.



# Resettlement into the outdoor industry



## Why is it a good idea?

A career in the outdoors is often well suited to ex-military personnel as some of the skills required include leadership, problem solving, teamwork and communication; all of which will have been developed during your time in the military. Work in the outdoor sector will often involve developing these skills (among others) in other people through activities such as climbing, canoeing and walking.

Most outdoor instructors don't earn a fortune but they spend their working hours outside, with the mountains, rivers and sea as their office. Opportunities exist to work all over the UK and Ireland, as well as further afield in Europe and the rest of the world.

## How accessible is it?

The amount of re-training required before you can start working varies immensely depending on what kind of role you are looking for and what, if any, Adventurous Training qualifications you have gained during your service career. Starting from scratch involves equipping yourself with some of the National Governing Body (NGB) awards commonly asked for by employers. Your progress through the awards, which all require a period of consolidation, is not time sensitive as long as the skills and experience are gained.

If you already have, or are planning to get, some Adventurous Training qualifications, this may allow you to apply for exemption from training in the civilian world, or even gain a civilian award at the same time as your Joint Services qualification. Courses held at the Joint Services centres are often civilian accredited, the key thing is to make it known in your application for Adventurous Training that you require the civilian Mountain Leader or Single Pitch Award and

register with Mountain Training, prior to the start of your training. It's also important to ensure you have the prerequisite experience in your logbook; this may seem a lot of effort at the time, but the alternative is to do a qualification only recognised by the military and have to redo a similar training course in the civilian world when you leave. All this costs money and time which could be better spent during your resettlement.

## What sort of work is available?

### Permanent outdoor instructor at a centre.

This work is often quite diverse and depending on the centre can involve work with young people from inner city areas, primary/secondary school groups or those with special educational or behavioural needs.

### Freelance outdoor instructor in the UK.

Being a freelancer involves less security as there is no guarantee of work, but often enables more flexibility because when and where you work is up to you.

### Overseas expedition leader.

There are several large, and many smaller, expedition companies specialising in overseas trips for young people. They always need leaders to run their expeditions which are often to 2nd or 3rd world countries and their requirements with regards to qualifications vary.

If the outdoors is something you're considering as a career, here are some key things to consider...

## DO

- Log the activities you do during your time in the armed forces. (Nearly all NGB courses require a logbook of your previous experience, which can be challenging to compile retrospectively.)
- Plan your resettlement early and take advantage of the opportunities available through the Joint Services Adventure Training Scheme
- Register with Mountain Training for the appropriate award prior to attending a Mountain Leader Training (MLT) or Rock Multi Pitch Training (RMT) course. (If your training is delivered by an approved instructor, it will be equivalent to the civilian Mountain Leader and Single Pitch award respectively and therefore recognised in the civilian world.)



## DON'T

- Use military terminology in your logbook. (Your average civilian will have no idea what Operation Dragonfield in the Brecon Beacons involved, so describe what you did/learned in a mountaineering context.)
- Assume that all the work you put in and the qualifications you gain in the armed forces will be accepted in the civilian world. (If you find out the details in advance there may be things you can do to ten years before resettlement that will assist you in your transition.)
- Leave it to the last minute; Mountain Training awards are largely based on experience which takes time and could be gained throughout your military career, rather than in a blind panic as resettlement looms.



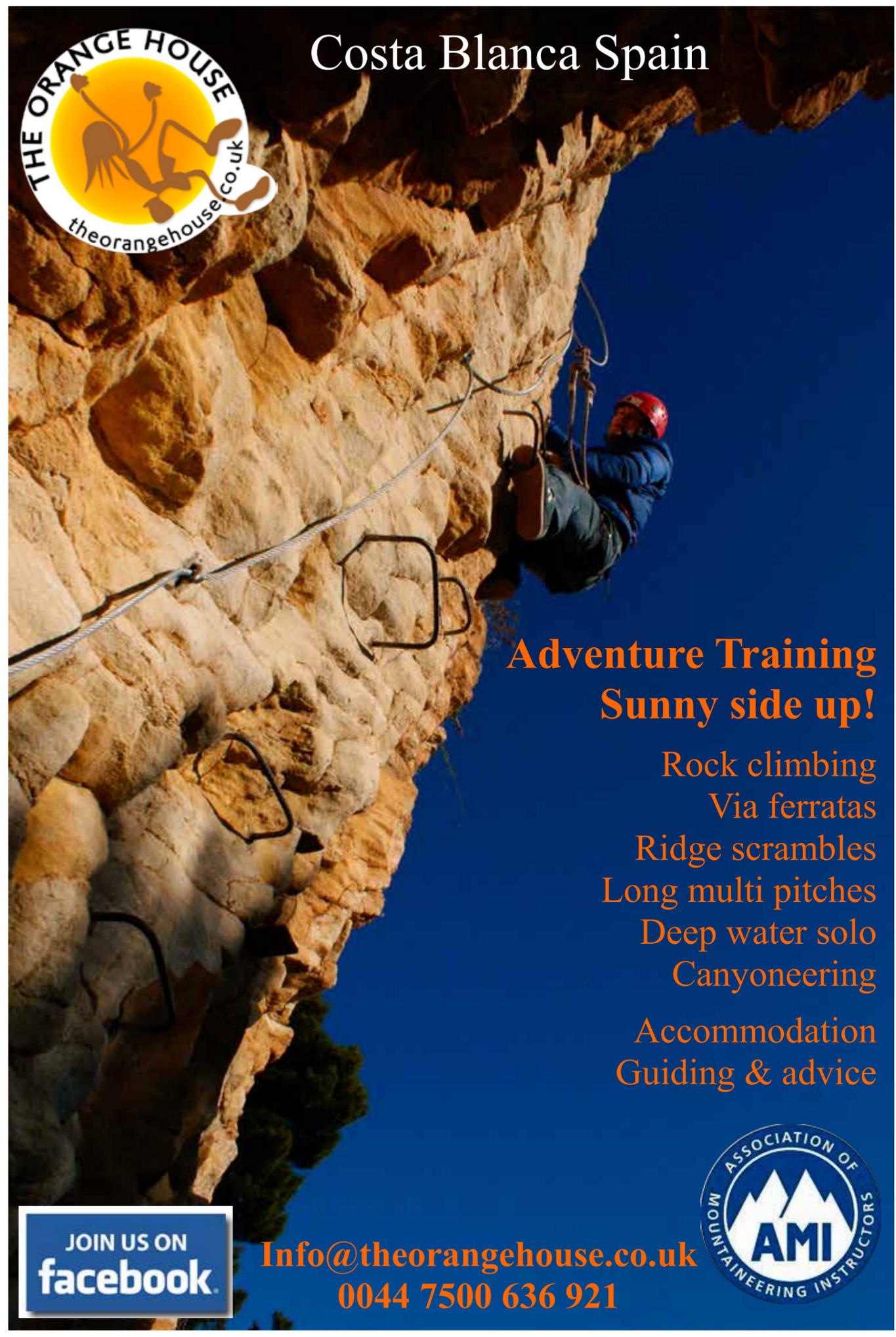
"Being able to introduce people to the outdoors is a hugely fulfilling job whether it is teaching them basic map reading, guiding a week long expedition in the wilds of Scotland or helping young people achieve the expedition section of their D of E.

Gaining Mountain Training qualifications is an enjoyable and rewarding experience which then gives me the opportunity to

pass my knowledge and experience on to others. The view from underneath the hood of a Goretex jacket in the mountains in the driving rain is definitely better than the view out of any office window!" Ed Boyden (left the military in 2009)

Mountain Training  
www.mountain-training.org

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