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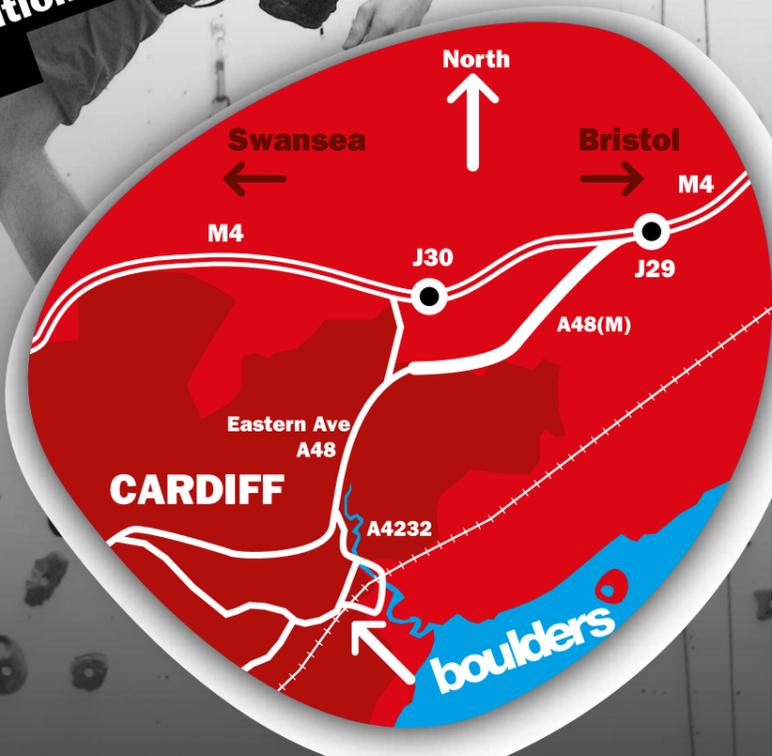


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ARMY MOUNTAINEER



The Journal of The Army Mountaineering Association

Top tips for climbing coaches

1. Enjoy yourself – because the group will know if you are not.
2. In Winter, if the car park is full you are possibly setting off too late.
3. Use rules for novices. Use principles for intermediates.
4. People value you for the quality of your feedback, not the amount.
5. 'Bank time' by being efficient at the beginning of the day in case you need it at the end.
6. When retreating use the gear you need, not less. You can buy new gear but not a new spine or skull.
7. When you've stopped learning it's time to stop teaching.
8. You wouldn't like waiting for clients so don't make them wait for you.
9. Clients don't always know their own abilities or experience – assess them yourself.
10. Being faster at your belay changeover is better than having to climb fast.



The above tips are an extract from 'Top tips for climbing coaches' by Paul Smith which is published by Pesda Press www.pesdapress.com. It contains over 300 top tips and handy hints for climbing coaches. The book is a must have for all aspirant instructors.

Ex Ice Maiden	6
Ex DRAGON'S TROLL	8
Ex DRAGON NORTHERN VALAIS	10
Army HQ on Ojos del Salado	12
Crags of the month: Shipwreck Cove	14
Ex DRAGON REMEC Greenland	16
Book Reviews	22
Photo Competition	24
British Services Dhaulagiri Medical Research Expedition 2016	26
Musings and Route Description from the Main Team 26 – Dhaulagiri Basecamp	28
Six of the best	30
Dolomites	32
Location review: Grindelwald	34
Sport Climbing	36
Climbing meets	38
Kit on trial: DMM Switch	44
Tides. Wuthering and erosion.	45

Cover photo: REMEC Ex Dragon Greenland

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Appointments

Foreword

Foreword by Chairman



Value for Money!

Col Paul J Edwards MBE, FRGS

When I joined the AMA in 1989 subscriptions were £4.25 per person. This rapidly rose over the next 10 years or so, in a series of small increments until it reached £15 where it has stuck ever since. At the Association's AGM on 23 Sep 16 the AMA Executive Committee recommended that the Association's subscription be raised from £15 to £20. There followed a lively debate at the AGM which culminated in an (almost) unanimous vote to accept the proposal. The annual AMA membership subscriptions will, therefore increase from £15 to £20 with effect Jan 17.

The Executive Committee recommended this rise as the AMA's running costs have increased significantly and we have taken on a part time member of staff to manage our office at Indefatigable. Thus far we have managed this increase in running costs

by successfully claiming Gift Aid on your subscriptions and also by obtaining sponsorship from Team Army and from Deloitte as well as gaining grants from the Army Sports Control Board. The Executive Committee noted however, that further modernisation was now required and that our database, membership cards and Direct Debit system required review. The subscription rise will largely go towards this modernisation effort, but any excess funds will be put towards the provision of better meets, improved competitions and larger expedition grants.

To put things in context, in 1989 petrol cost £0.38 per litre and beer £0.98 per pint, so our subscriptions have continued to show good value for money. Let us hope that we can keep the subscription at £20 for the next 25 years!!

AMA Journal Editor Update

Another six months have flashed past since the summer 16 journal was published. I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this journal, it is great to see so much going on within the AMA. Please keep the articles and photos coming for the next edition which is due out in June 17.

I hope that you all enjoy this edition of the journal which is my last as editor. I have really enjoyed being the editor over the last three years and have found the position to be both rewarding and challenging. Nothing lasts forever, and with that in mind I decided that I should step down as editor and provide someone else the opportunity to take the journal forward.

Al Topping was appointed as the new editor at the AGM and will take over from the New Year. I wish him every success and kindly ask that you support him as much as you have supported me over the last three years.

Please continue to update the Membership Secretary when you change address so that the AMA can continue to successfully deliver your journal on time and to the correct address!

Update from the Webmaster

Well hopefully by now most of you will have seen the new and improved website. One of the new features includes a password reset function that allows you to automatically reset your password when you have forgotten it. There is still plenty to do and I am always after ideas and suggestions. Remember this is YOUR website and I welcome people getting involved and telling me what you want to see. As always please send me your pictures, articles or anything, that we as mountaineers find interesting, and if suitable I will find a space. See you on the mountain soon, Daz.

Update from the Membership Secretary

Currently we have over 2,500 members. It is very important that you let me know of any changes to your details, address, bank details etc; please either give me a call or just drop me an e-mail to the address below.

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

PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

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

AMA Membership Discounts Autumn 2016

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

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Cotswold Outdoor

A 20% discount is available in-store on production of a valid AMA membership card. You MUST be in possession of your card. No card, no discount. For on-line orders, the AMA discount code is available on the secure section of the AMA Website.

www.cotswoldoutdoor.com



PHD (Pete Hutchinson Designs)

PHD offer a **25% discount** off all standard items to the AMA.

POC – Emma Harris – 01423 711212,
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Trade price + VAT + carriage deal to all members of the AMA.

POC – Lee 01457 838242,
RickBeyondHope@aol.com
www.beyondhope.co.uk

Terra Nova

AMA members can set up a Pro User account. Once you logged in, the discount is automatically applied.

Call Terra Nova on 01773 833300, info@terra-nova.co.uk
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Paramo

AMA members can benefit from the Páramo Mountain Pro Scheme: mountaineering qualifications and/ or experience of applicants are assessed by Paramo, with an increasing scale of discounts plus loyalty points available, as well as special offers and limited editions. This scheme treats each applicant individually, so speak to Paramo personally - POC Jeni or Katy on 01892 786445.

www.paramo.co.uk/mountainpro

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 2017

ARMY MOUNTAINEERING ASSOCIATION FORECAST OF EVENTS

Date	Location	Event	Organiser	Remarks
16 Feb 17	The Outdoor Show, ExCeL, London	AFBL Round 5	Maj Tom Odling	Open to all. See DIN.
16 Feb 17	Honourable Artillery Company, London	AMA President's Dinner		Open to all. Contact details on AMA website
TBC Feb 17	TBC	AMA Winter Meet	Capt Martin South	Open to all. Contact details on AMA website
25 Feb 17	The Indy Wall, JSMTC(I), Anglesey	Army Bouldering Championships 2017 and AFBL Round 6	Maj Tom Odling	Open to all. See DIN.
10-12 Mar 17	N Wales	AMA Meet – Climbing, Walking and Scrambling	Capt Ryan Lang	Open to all. Contact details on AMA website
TBC Apr 17	TBC	BA(G) Climbing Championships 2017	TBC	Open to all.
TBC Apr 17	TBC	Regional Command UK Midlands Climbing Championships 2017	TBC	Open to all.
TBC Apr 17	TBC	Regional Command UK South Climbing Championships 2017	Sgt Andy Stewart	Open to all.
TBC Apr 17	TBC	Regional Command UK North Climbing Championships 2017	TBC	Open to all.
21-23 Apr 17	Lake District	AMA Meet – Climbing, Walking and Scrambling	Capt Ryan Lang	Open to all. Contact details on AMA website.
17-18 May 17	TBC	Army Climbing Championships 2017	Capt Stacy Oliver	Open to all. See DIN.
12-14 May 17	N Wales	AMA Meet – Climbing, Walking and Scrambling	Capt Ryan Lang	Open to all. Contact details on AMA website.
10-11 Jun 17	Dartmoor	AMA Meet – Climbing and Walking	Lt Col Pete Skinsley	Open to all. Contact details on AMA website.
TBC Jun/Jul 17	TBC	Inter-Services Climbing Championships 2017	RNRMMC (Capt Andrew Young Army POC)	By invitation. Army Team of 30 selected from the Army Championships
TBC Aug 17	Portland	AMA Meet & Army Team training	SSgt Simon Goyder	Open to all. Contact details on AMA website. Doubles as Army team training event.
9-15 Sep 17	N Wales - Capel Curig and Indi Wall	AMA 60 - Army Festival of Climbing, including the AMA AGM, AFBL (Armed Forces Bouldering League) Round 1	Lt Col Pete Skinsley	Open to all. Week long festival including the AMA AGM (9 Sep), first round of the Bouldering League (13 Sep), outdoor climbing, walking, coaching, workshops and lectures. See DIN.
10 Oct 17	TBC	AFBL Round 2	Maj Tom Odling	Open to all. See DIN.
6-8 Oct 17	Wye Valley	AMA Meet – Climbing	Capt Ryan Lang	Open to all. Contact details on AMA website.
8 Nov 17	TBC	AFBL Round 3 and inaugural RN & RM Bouldering Championships	Maj Tom Odling	Open to all. See DIN.
13 Dec 17	TBC	AFBL Round 4	Maj Tom Odling	Open to all. See DIN.

Ex Ice Maiden

Exercise Ice Maiden, the first all-female military transantarctic crossing planned for November 2017, is the brain child of expedition leaders Captain Nicola Wetherill and Major Natalie Taylor. The two adventurous Army doctors hope that the expedition will inspire others, particularly women, to seek adventure and to engage in arduous outdoor activity. In addition, regardless of who achieves a place on the final team in 2017, the leaders hope that the selection and training process which the women will have been exposed to by that point will have equipped them to plan and lead their own expeditions in the future. Lastly, the Exercise Ice Maiden team members will be closely monitored and tracked during the expedition. It is envisaged that the data collected will provide a unique insight into the effects which fatigue, extreme cold and prolonged periods of arduous exercise have on the female body.

Such a demanding final expedition requires a thorough and lengthy selection and training procedure which began with the paper applications made by around 250 women in the summer of 2015 and will continue until the final team of four plus the expedition leaders depart for Chile in October 2017. As part of this process a team of twenty hopeful Army soldiers and officers, including seven Reservists, plus two expedition leaders travelled to northern Norway on Sunday 28 February 2016 for Exercise Ice Bambi, the first of three ten day training and selection exercises ahead of Exercise Ice Maiden itself.

The group stayed at the Allied Training Centre and enjoyed the hospitality warmly extended to them by both British and Norwegian forces. The aims of Exercise Ice Bambi were to introduce the beginners to Nordic ski touring and to consolidate any pre-existing

knowledge amongst the others, expose all candidates to a harsh environment, teach basic survival skills and educate the team in relation to the use and maintenance of appropriate clothing, kit and equipment.

The first five days were spent under the supervision of British forces personnel. The extremely experienced tutors, Dan and Ian, provided the team with detailed information and demonstrations on various aspects of cold weather survival, including nutrition, tent routines, marching routine and the kit and equipment they use.

This period of classroom based tuition was followed by four days out in the field putting this new found knowledge into practise and sharpening these routines each day. After a morning of snow shoeing, the group had some basic skiing tuition followed almost immediately by a night ski. The use of head torches was discouraged by the tutors as skiing 'blind' encourages the skier to trust the 'messages' received by their feet. This approach was met with mixed reviews from the women initially but it was generally agreed that a vast amount was learnt by all during a relatively short period.



The tutoring responsibility was then passed to Norwegian Captain Vibeke Sefland from the School of Winter Warfare. She provided a further few days of invaluable training tweaked to the unique challenges faced by women in the field, including the sharing of a number of tips gleaned from her decades of experience both as a mountaineer and as a cold weather specialist. Her enthusiasm was infectious.

After the conclusion of the second phase of the trip, the expedition leaders had to make several difficult decisions regarding who would be brought forward to the next round of the selection process. Ten of the twenty women, plus two in reserve, from across the rank structure were chosen to progress to Exercise Ice Ready in November 2016.

Upon returning to the UK, the group had further administrative tasks to complete and those progressing to the next round engaged with the Army Media Team and began to plan their forthcoming training weekends which will include a mountain marathon, tuition in navigation and kit and equipment repair, crevasse training, tyre hauling, further team bonding and a much anticipated introduction to roller skiing.

All of the women would like to extend their thanks to the AMA for the invaluable support generously offered to the expedition.



EX DRAGON'S TROLL

By Martin South

As any avid back-country ski video fan will know, at the top of Scandinavia sits one of the most famous back-country ski areas in the world – the Lyngen Alps. This area has a superb variety of ski-touring and mountaineering terrain, and so was the venue for 14 Sig Regt (EW)'s Ski Foundation 3 and Ski Leader 1 development exped. By means of a good word from SSgt Richie "Bergführer" Simpson, I was able to secure the skills of that very rare breed, a Ski Mountaineering Instructor in WO2 (QMSI) Geordie Taylor, yes readers, the Geordie Taylor to teach on DRAGON'S TROLL.

After flying to Norway, the exped stayed overnight in Tromsø at the Viking Hotel, which gave the juniors an opportunity to experience Norwegian prices for food and drink. It was whilst looking at a picture on a glass in a restaurant LCpl Dave Gomez realised "we're inside the Arctic Circle!" Over 220 miles inside the Arctic Circle, Dave. The Norwegian weather certainly didn't disappoint, and it snowed fairly heavily that evening. A good indication for the conditions the exped was to have for the week ahead.

Although the journey from Tromsø to Lyngseidet is nearly 2hrs, it continued to snow which made for carefully driving to the car ferry at Breivikeidet. The Arctic experience continued at the ferry crossing, with a couple of the juniors opting to remain in the cars on the ferry, rather than enjoy the arctic snow, wind and fog on the fjord. The journey across to Svensby on the Lyngen peninsula only takes approx 20mins, and the cars were soon off-loaded for the journey to Lyngseidet. The views of the Lyngen Alps on the drive to Lynseidet gave the exped a good idea of the sort of terrain that they would be tackling throughout the week. The scenery was absolutely stunning; a hybrid of being very Scottish-looking, but seeming alpine in scale, or alpine-looking but Scottish in scale. I couldn't decide which one.

The accommodation the exped booked was excellent, being on the harbour-side by the ferry terminal for the crossing to Olderdalen, to the other side of the fjord. That afternoon was spent at the local supermarket, buying supplies for the week. As exped OIC, I was concerned that due to high prices in Norway, that the



Arctic conditions on the ferry to Svensby

food budget would be tight, but with sensible food choices and careful shopping, the CILOR allocation was comfortably sufficient throughout the week. Apart from Sgt Bez Green spending £18 on nine chocolate bars. He was relieved of shopping responsibilities immediately afterwards.

Russelvfjellet is recommended as an introductory peak to the Lyngen Alps, so it was a good choice for the first day. A fairly gradual initial slope through a thinly wooded area helped with the introduction to skinning, and the use of Alpine Touring skis. The conditions were excellent, which meant superb views out onto the Arctic Ocean when the summit plateau was reached. A short stop at the top, a ski-transition to 'fun-mode' (fun for everyone apart from me, as I was already regretting my decision to come off my telemark skis onto Alpine Touring kit, and I would have happily just skied uphill with free-heels for the week). The descent was in quality condition, and LCpl Manon Roberts' experience certainly showed through, as her skills as a skier put the majority of the exped to shame, as it looked as if she was skiing on different snow to everyone else, as well as looking as if she was in a Crystal Holidays brochure. Upon arrival back at the cars, LCpl Sid Sidwell realised that he had clipped his knee on a ski edge whilst falling-over on the descent. The ski had cut both his trousers and knee, leaving a gash. On return to Lyngseidet, I took Sid to the local out-of-hours clinic for a professional opinion. The duty doctor was a keen climber and skier and as Sid and I were to find out, had a mischievous sense of humour as well. After an inspection and cleaning the wound, the doctor decided to put two stitches into the cut. He then said "I'm sorry to say that your days of skiing in Lyngen are over..." Sid and I's faces fell, then the doctor added "...only joking! You'll be skiing again tomorrow no problem!" The doctor was confident that there was no reason to stop skiing, so Sid would be back on the mountain the following day

Not many ski days begin with a journey on a car ferry, but an early start with the boat from Lyngseidet to Olderdalen took the exped across the Kåfjorden to the day's ascent of Storhaugen. Starting from the churchyard at Bjørkli, a pleasant skin through trees took the



Sgt Green on the ascent of Rørnestinden (1041m)

exped onto the main NE face of Storhaugen where a steady climb to the summit was rewarded with outstanding views of the Lyngen Alps, the Lyngen fjord and out to the Arctic Ocean. The conditions on Storhaugen were superb, and even though many readers of this journal will know that Geordie Taylor is a much-accomplished ski-mountaineer, even he regarded the descent as one of the best days on skis he's ever had. Quite a compliment to the Lyngen Alps. The exped returned to Lyngseidet via the Olderdalen car ferry, the passengers being an interesting and bizarre mix of brightly dressed ski-tourers (i.e Bez) and more soberly dressed locals.

The next day was true summit-to-sea trip, and in an outstanding mountain atmosphere. The ascent of Stetinden starts literally at the fjord-shore and climbs through a wooded area into a dramatic coire. The climb to Flatfjellet was steady, but there were no shortage of kick-turns on the steeper final push for the summit from the western shoulder of Stetinden. Dave and Cpl Ed Edgar led the juniors in amusing themselves by giving each other "Strictly Come Dancing" type scores on each others' kick-turns on the steep approach to Stetinden's summit. The ascent seemed quite relentless, but eventually a pair of ski tips was spotted through the cloud, and the exped topped-out on Stetinden. As the conditions were quite cold, no time was wasted, and the party packed away skins and began to ski down the mountain. Fortunately, the weather started to clear as the exped descended, which allowed the party to enjoy the mountain atmosphere of the coire, and the subsequent view to the Lyngen fjord. Skis were eventually removed metres from the shore, ski boots stood on gritty sand and seaweed as they were taken off for trainers for the journey back to Lyngseidet

The party split on the Monday, with me taking Manon to the local clinic for a medical opinion on her blisters and foot pain, and Geordie taking the remainder to Daltinden, a mountain close to Lyngseidet. Geordie's party set out, and the route began with a 4-5km gradual journey up the valley floor, interwoven with a variety of wooded and rocky areas and then wide open flood-plains, all under the gaze of huge glaciers some 1000m above the group. There was some discussion with regard to the best route to the start of the climb proper, with lots of map and compass work providing little in the way of output. However, after some 4.5 hours, including a detour and minor ski down, the group made it through the trees and to the start of a 1200m face to the summit. The next few hours were a spent in 30 minute blocks of hard slog up the mountain with short breaks to take on food and water and only the occasional pause to marvel at the single point avalanches on the other side of the valley that roared like jet engines as they fell a thousand metres to the valley floor. As the group neared the summit the ground levelled off and Sid took the opportunity to race to the top, with the remainder of the group more than happy to continue to plod some distance behind him. After a quick photo stop the group changed in to 'fun-mode' and began the long descent. The initial slope was wide and even, providing good conditions for some very tired legs, however once down at the tree line the group faced a 'fighting withdrawal' over rocky, icy and tree covered terrain. The last hour was spent with skins back on the skis as the group picked its way down the valley towards the cars. After a day in the hot sun the



snow tracks had become ice, resulting in testing conditions for individuals' sense of humour as repeated slips and falls pushed tired bodies more than any other day.

An early start for the final on-mountain day in order to carry out two car-ferry crossings to reach Uløya island. The aim for the day was a ski along the ridge on Uløya, taking in the peaks of both Kjelvåggtinden and Blåtinden. The group shared the early morning ferry from Lyngseidet to Olderdalen with the usual mix of ski-tourers and locals. Then, a drive up the coast to Nybo, and the group had the Gárgu ferry all to themselves...for longer than expected. Unbeknownst to the exped, the ferry (or BoatyMcBoatface (or should that be BøåtyBøåttfåcesøn?) as it was soon christened) continues up the coast of Uløya island to pick up additional passengers in the manner of a rural bus service. So after the unexpected but spectacular short fjord cruise, the ferry returned down the fjord and docked at Gárgu. Geordie and I then drove round the island and dropped-off one of the cars which would ferry the exped back to Gárgu at the end of the tour. The tour started with an initial ski through woods, followed by a long but reasonable skin up the mountain. Once the summit of Kjelvåggtinden was reached, the decision had to be made to either return to the base of the mountain, or take the chance with the time remaining, to ski along the ridge to Blåtinden. The opportunity to ski both peaks couldn't be missed, so Geordie led-on to the next peak, and with quite breath-taking views out to the Arctic Ocean and the Lyngen fjord, the party had a superb descent on excellent snow down a wide slope to the tree-line above Åsheim. The descent to the car through the tree-line probably couldn't be described as quite as superb, but it certainly made for some challenging, and (admittedly) in places, fun skiing. The majority of the group were in agreement that this was probably the best day so far, so a great ski to end the exped on.

In all, a superb trip, made all the more so by Geordie's patient instruction and a group of juniors that couldn't have been more enthusiastic. Ex DRAGON'S TROLL 17 is already booked...



The exped on the summit of Russelvfjellet

EX DRAGON NORTHERN VALAIS

65 WORKS GROUP RE



Team at the PdG start in Zermatt



Ridge traverse during the Ecrins 2016 skimo race



Ridge descent during the Ecrins 2016 skimo race

The Patrouille des Glaciers (PdG) is a biennial ski patrol organised by the Swiss Army in the Valais Alps of Switzerland and involves a continuous ski from Zermatt to Verbier (110km) with a shorter option from Arolla to Verbier (53km) in teams of three along a course set by the organisers and secured by Swiss Army and local mountain guides and taking in a number of glaciers, high passes and peaks including the Tete Blanche (3650m) and Rosa Blanche (3160m) and a total of 3994m of ascent.

Originally a military event started in 1943 and designed to test the capabilities of the Swiss Mountain Troops patrolling Switzerland's border region with Italy and Austria, it was opened to civilian teams in 1984 and now attracts over 6000 entries with only 5000 securing places. Due to the large number of entries, teams are allocated a place in one of two separate events which take place three days apart. Nations are allocated places for three military teams and the 2016 event attracted entries from the UK, Austria, Germany, Spain, Russia, Sweden, Italy, France, Andorra, Belgium, Slovakia. International military teams only compete in the full length event from Zermatt to Verbier which was scheduled for 21-22 April.

After a rigorous selection/scrutiny process by Adventurous Training Group (Army), two teams based around 65 Works Group RE based in Chilwell, Notts and 26 Engr Regt based in Tidworth securing places for the 2016 event. Both teams were a mix of Regular and Reserve personnel with ranks from Cpl to Lt Col and ages from 27 to 53 and a wide range of experience in both ski mountaineering in general and event-specific experience from the 2014 event. This article focuses on the team from 65 Works Group RE which was led by Maj Nigel Mockridge RE (Reservist) and comprised Lt Col Pete Davis RAMC, Maj Andrew Crockett RAMC (Reservist) and Capt Mel Birtwistle (now Rigg) RE, who was put forward as our reserve but with the option to switch with another team member if required.

Organisation of the exped started early in 2015 with the administrative paperwork to secure the release of personnel and the funding, and the initial planning for the acclimatisation and technical training in the weeks leading up to the event. Jumping through the various hoops associated with a 'high risk and remote' exped proved to be quite a challenge with the exception of the medical plan (we had two Doctors in the team!) but by January 2016 everything was in place to allow planning of a detailed itinerary for the exped and the purchase of the specialised lightweight ski equipment and race attire.

Achieving our target finish time of 13 hours was going to require a significant amount of ascending during the training phase, ideally a minimum of 15,000m, and some ski mountaineering (skimo) race experience at local and regional races in order to practice transition drills between ascending and descending, which can save a lot of time if done efficiently. Clothing and equipment had to be ultra lightweight and high performance, with skis weighing

about 1.5kg a pair and boots around 1.8kg, i.e. about half as light as the equipment provided through Loan Pool stores! One-piece skin suits and lightweight helmets and packs completed the set up.

Some team members bagged useful race experience at the Grand Beal skimo race which took part in the Queyras region of the French Alps on 3 April over a 20km course with 1360m of ascent. This was an early test of both technique and equipment but also the tempo of transition drills and nutrition.

After further technical training and accumulation of ascent, the team joined with 26 Engr Regt for the Ecrins two-day skimo race based in Puy St Vincent on the NE edge of the Ecrins National Park on 9 & 10 April. Presenting a more difficult challenge than the previous race in terms of length and ascent, the teams put in a solid performance within a very competitive field and attracted much interest from the organisers and their fellow competitors as there had been no British interest in previous years. Unfortunately we didn't podium but five of the seven team members won something on the raffle!

After a rest day we spent a few days training in the stunning Beaufortain area east of Albertville, which despite recent warm conditions and the subsequent prevalence of wet snow avalanches held enough snow cover to allow us to tour to the Refuge de Presset (2514m) and past the impressive Pierra Menta (2714m), which gives its name to an annual four-day skimo race in early March.

The next phase of training involved familiarisation with the middle part of the PdG course based out of Arolla (the half way point) and further acclimatisation including a night at the Refuge de Bertol (3268m) which presents stunning views of the Mont Miné and Ferpècle glaciers once you ascend the three sections of steep ladders to reach the Refuge!

After a day touring out from the Simplon Hospice monastery in the Simplon Pass (the only passable route between Switzerland and Italy in winter) and with only five days to go before the event it was time to move to our final training base location at Fiesch where all international military teams would be hosted by the Swiss Army until after the event.

We decided to complete the first half of the PdG route in slow time over the next two days so set off from Zermatt on 18 April and reached the Refuge de Bertol later that day. In the early hours we witnessed the steady stream of teams in the first outing of the full distance event as they ascended to the Col de Bertol and descended to Arolla.

With only 3 days to the event we completed our course familiarisation by returning from the Refuge de Bertol to Zermatt via the Tete Blanche (3650m) and headed to the Rifugio Guide del Cervino

(3480m) above Zermatt for some final acclimatisation. We had the runs to ourselves the next morning as we descended into Zermatt and returned to our base at Fiesch for a rest day on 20 April.

Moving to Zermatt on 21 April for the final preparations before the event we were informed that the start would be pushed back by 24 hours due to poor weather and snow conditions along the course. Not only did this allow for more retail therapy (not that we needed more) but also additional rest and time to fine tune equipment. Overnight and in the morning we started to hear rumours of avalanche issues out on the course which would endanger competitors and the Swiss Army outposts and indeed these were confirmed when the organisers reluctantly decided to cancel both the short and long events. This was a bitter disappointment after the months of preparation and training, but the conditions on the course gave the organisers no other choice. So we packed up and made our way back to Fiesch.

But then we had an idea.....

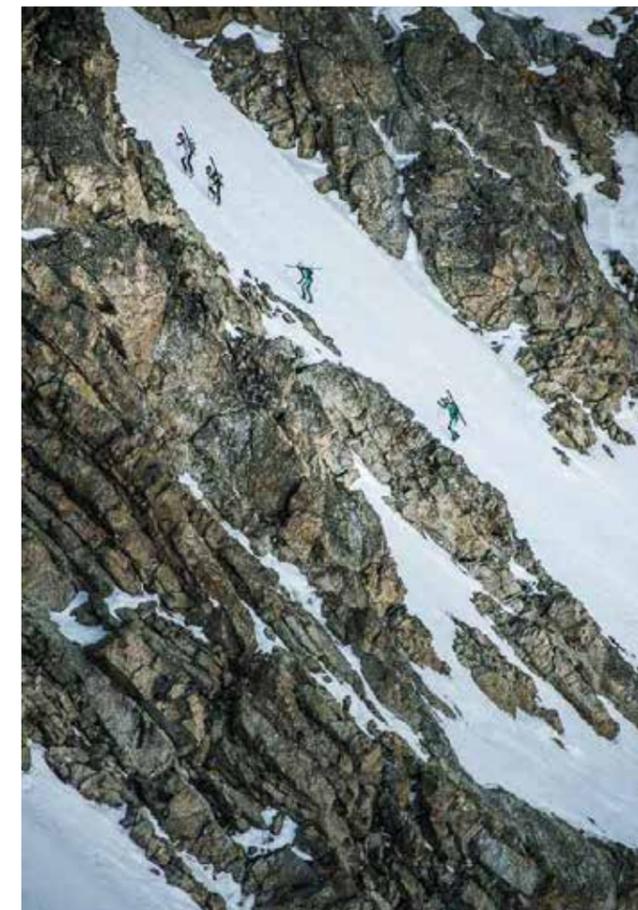
We had targeted the Trophee des Haut-Forts skimo race in Avoriaz on 24 April as a possible build-up race for the PdG but the dates clashed and we quickly discounted it. After some on the hoof planning (we had to enter via a website while returning to Fiesch!) we decided to drive to Morzine and stay overnight ready for the race the next morning. Unfortunately, Mel had to return to the UK so we talked Matt Hickey, a US Army Capt, into joining us. Rain turned to snow overnight which freshened up the course but also introduced some risk and so the course was shortened slightly. After a mass charge across a snowy field in race boots we were soon into our stride over what turned out to be a challenging but enjoyable course with many transitions and several boot-ups. Having prepared for a 13-hour slog on the PdG and been disappointed with its cancellation we released our pent-up energy and achieved a decent placing in the senior race. The finish was high above the start so after a semi-competitive descent it was time for the prize giving, meal and raffle, which the locals managed to string out over the rest of the day. Competitors were presented with a traditional French folding knife at the finish (even the children!) and herded reluctantly to the mountainous buffet lunch complete with free wine – or we assumed it was free! We didn't have the same luck on the post-race raffle (not sure how we would get the TV or the legs of ham home on flights) but came away having experienced a great local race which partly made up for the cancellation of the PdG.

Looking back on the exped, the major challenges were the physical effort of the build-up races and the organisation of the training phase as a whole in terms of determining the best locations and routes for the preparation bearing in mind the predicted weather conditions and avalanche risk. The plan did not survive contact on quite a few occasions but the teams pulled together and ensured that we were trained for the event to the best of our ability.

A number of benefits resulted from the exped; excellent integration and collaboration between Reserve and Regular personnel; the Swiss organisers were impressed and appreciative of our involvement and we forged links with other nations; we established a clear vision for British Military participation in international skimo races and are well placed for competitions next season; specialist skimo race equipment has been acquired that can be used by whoever wants to compete; and we explored the organisational and funding arrangements for the next PdG in 2018 and future skimo races in terms of team selection and organisational responsibilities.

We are very grateful to the AMA for the grant that we received for this expedition.

Here's looking forward to more skimo racing and the next PdG in 2018!



Steep ascent during the Ecrins 2016 skimo race

Army HQ on OJOS DEL SALADO

Army HQ deployed a 10-man expedition team to Chile – target: the summit of Ojos del Salado – for 3 weeks earlier this year. A typical expedition from Army HQ tends to be skiing or sailing but the intent here was to do something different, something very different: this is thought to be the first British Services expedition to set foot on the mountain. At 6893m Ojos del Salado is the highest active volcano in the world, highest mountain in Chile and the second highest outside Asia.

9 months before deploying, the initial calling notice attracted 25 potential mountaineers for 10 places on the expedition. Natural wastage and expression of commitment through organisational duties ensured a simple selection process.

The High Risk and Remote brief was all about mitigating the most likely risks; Acute Mountain Sickness and extreme weather – there was nothing we could do about the least likely risk of volcano activity! Accordingly, a Pre-Deployment Training package was assembled; using Standard Learning Credits we contracted a Plas-y-Brenin instructor to deliver a High Altitude First Aid course in Andover and we convened a Winter Mountain Foundation course in The Cairngorms. These events brought the team together and enabled deployment without a doctor and into an environment where extreme weather might require basic winter skills.

The expedition ran on rails until summit day. Three

days in the relative comfort of Portillo ski resort (2900m) proved to be a very worthwhile shake-out of equipment – no longer could we add to our gear, we had what we had. A domestic flight to Copiapo took us into the Atacama Desert – the driest place on earth – and into the ‘field’. Our contracted logistic providers – Chile Montana – met us with three 4x4 vehicles and all the equipment for a base camp, knowledge of the harsh environment and supplies for 14 days.

After a single night at Valle Cito we pressed on by 4x4 to Laguna Santa Rosa at 3800m. From here we could see 6000m peaks in the distance and flamingos and lamas in the foreground; the only wildlife bar eagles seen all expedition. This was also the base for our first acclimatisation trek; Siete Hermanos at 4890m. The climb was long and slow as we sucked in the altitude step-by-step, breath-by-breath; for many this was their first experience of adjusting the body to altitude. The complete team arrived at the summit in good order after the 1000m+ / 7-8 hour climb. A much quicker descent was rewarded with a bar-be-que meal and a welcome rest overnight.

Next stop Laguna Verde – base for 5 nights at 4600m – and the first sighting of Ojos on route. The Atacama Desert was just as barren as we had anticipated but with wind and dust beyond expectation. A daily pattern emerged where wind would pick up from early-afternoon into the evening and then lull through the early hours into the morning. It was a weird feeling to be higher than most

European Alps summits yet cutting around in shorts and t-shirts with volcanically heated hot springs nearby to relax in.

From here we completed our second and third acclimatisation treks; up to a ridge on Mulas Muertas at 5600m and to the summit of San Francisco at 6018m. Both climbs were long and slow with depressing rate-of-ascent statistics and further reminders of altitude effect on the body. It was great to get all team members – which included several beginners – to the summit of a 6000er in good order. Back at base, pulse oximeter readings were being taken every breakfast and dinner to add to the evidence of mild headaches and Lake Louise scorecard discussions; we were at serious altitude and one or two individuals were starting to show the signs.

Just about acclimatised sufficiently for the main objective, it was time to plan the summit strategy. Based on the progress of the group and a closing weather window (high winds forecast) the decision was taken to advance the itinerary by 24 hours. This meant only one night at Refugio Atacama (5200m) and no load-carry to Refugio Tejos (5850m). We would climb from Atacama to Tejos and after a short rest and feed (which we always knew would not be a time to write home about) depart for the summit the following day at 0400.

The jump from Laguna Verde to Refugio Atacama to Refugio Tejos in little more than 24 hours proved too much for two of the group whose AMS symptoms prevented their summit day departure from Tejos. The remainder of the group set off in minus 15 degree stillness of the night reaching 6300m before the last JSMEL was struck by dizziness and unable to go onwards. With six of the

group fighting fit and in sight of the summit it was a brave and tough decision – but certainly the right one – to turn the whole group around and descend immediately when the group might have pressed onwards under the local guide; the mountain is there for another day as they say.

So the first British Services expedition onto Ojos del Salado will be recorded in the archives as a ‘fail’. However, a more holistic summary of the expedition will record 12 High Altitude First Aid awards, 10 Winter Mountain Foundation awards and 10 successful ascents of a 4000er, 5000er and 6000er not to mention the priceless experiences of leadership, planning, decision making, surviving in remoteness, teamwork and acclimatising at altitude. Back in Copiapo at the end-of-expedition night out there was plenty of talk of ‘what and where next?’... AT is a drug.



Crag of the month: Shipwreck Cove

This month's crag of the month is one of the most picturesque crags in our region, as well as one of the newest to be developed. Found on Rhossili beach, Shipwreck Cove is an amazing venue for climbers offering fantastic sport climbing straight of the beach. Boulders head coach, Simon Rawlinson, tells us about a venue that's very close to his heart.



Adrian Berry climbing Airshow 8a+

The Crag

Several years ago I started surfing and in doing so I started seeing the Gower coastline from a different perspective. I had previously heard rumours of a potential super crag located on Rhossili beach, but it wasn't until surfing here one day that I noticed the large cove with its steep walls.

Coming back at low tide a quick inspection highlighted to me that indeed this was a crag that offered huge potential, so myself and a few friends set to work. First off it was necessary to gain permission from the land owner; in this case the National Trust. The guys and girls at the Trust were great in dealing with this, and in fact were always very supportive of the concept. After a site survey was conducted and boundaries set it was time to get to work. I soon realised that this was going to be an epic task and so after a quick text to Adrian Berry and Rob Lamey a team was assembled.

The first abseil into the cove with Adrian was an eventful one with Adrian parking his van on top of the cliff and setting the abseil up off his alloys! The day was gruesome with rain and mist but our excitement was

high as we slowly inspected the wall and discovered that the rock was good, and most importantly it had holds!

Fast forward a year and the three of us had developed the cove with many 3 star classics. For some time this was as far as the development went, but as the cove became popular many climbers raised the issue that there was an abundance of rock that could offer more routes (in the 5's and 6's). Until now we had paid for the development out of our own pockets, which is the normal in the UK. But resources can only go so far and realistically we were bolting lines that we were interested in climbing ourselves. Adrian then hatched a plan to raise funds from the climbing community to pay for the bolts required to develop the remaining areas, turning Shipwreck Cove into a venue that everyone can enjoy.

The campaign to raise the funds was a huge success and coupled with a huge amount of hard work from a few, Roy, Dai, Gordon, Joe, Alun alongside myself and Adrian, we soon set to work bolting the rest of the cove.

We are now left with a venue that is fantastic for all climbers. Offering climbing from F2 upwards with many routes in the 7's and 8's, including the regions first 8c. It is an amazing venue in it's own right, but coupled with the fact that it is found on the golden sand of Rhossili beach it makes for a special venue indeed.



Leah climbing Lemon Soul 6a



Rob Lamey climbing Venerne 7c+

How to Get there

Simple, head to the Gower and then on to Rhossili. Once there you will find a large carpark (£3.50) at the end of the road. The carpark is next to the pub which will come in handy later. Along side the pub is a path that leads down to the beach, once there you will need to walk along the beach towards the cliffs (on the left as you look out to sea). It takes about 5mins to get to Shipwreck Cove once you are on the beach.

Whats in my pack

Lots! It seems whenever I head to the beach I take a whole manner of equipment. I will try just to mention the essential stuff.

A lot of the routes here are longer than normally found on Gower and as such you will need a 50 metre rope as a minimum. Along side this at least 15 quickdraws and you should be set to go. As the climbing is set straight off the sand you are going to want to protect your kit by using a rope tarp, the larger the better!

All the normal stuff is required from food and drink to suncream, take a first aid kit and consider wearing a helmet as there is the odd loose rock around the cove (more of a problem if someone is climbing above you).

As it's a sport venue you will need to know how to thread a belay to get down all the lower offs are glue bolts or have rings to lower off.

If you're into redpointing a gri gri and clipstick could be useful although no clips feel too far apart, although the first one can be quite high off the ground due to the shifting nature of the sand.

The Beta

Tidal status – 3hrs either side of Low for Shipwreck itself, 2hrs either side of low for Mermaid wall. Crag height – 15 to 30 metres.

Routes

Below 6a	F6a – F6c+	F7a – F7c	F8a and above
30	30	7	6



Ben West climbing Helvitia 8c

Once at the crag you will probably be shocked by its steepness but don't worry there are plenty of not so steep routes to be found. The first bay you come across is the original site of development and is home to many of Gowers best hard routes. 3 of the earliest routes stand out head and shoulders above the rest. One ton depot 7b+ is pure class and named after the pile of rock that was left under the route after Lamey cleaned away all of the loose blocs. In doing so he unearthed a gem! Vennerne

is next and at 7c+ it is simply one of the best routes you will find in the UK. AirShow 8a+ is Adrian's offering to the cove and has already become possibly the most popular grade 8 route on the Gower due to its quality. On the opposite wall Par 3 is a great 6c that is often used as a warm up by the strong boys and girls before they attack the harder lines.

Turning the corner into the second bay brings you to Castaway Cove which is a recent development and home to some great routes in the 6's, but if you continue out to sea you find Mermaid Wall which is a sector of real significance for Gower. The wall itself has over 40 routes with grades from F2 upto 6c at present and is without doubt one of the best venues for lower grade climbs to be found on Gower. Lemon Soul 6a and The Naughty Step 6a are both amazing climbs in a fantastic location. It is worth noting that Mermaid wall has a smaller tidal window than the cove, and as such you do need to keep an eye on the rising tide to prevent you becoming cut off!

On top of these 3 main sectors there are numerous smaller areas in between that house some great shorter routes such as Black Wall with its obvious challenge of Black Adder 6b+. And the great news is that development has not finished yet, with Roy and Dai still adding to the number of routes under 7a it will be a while before you have outclimbed this venue, and even then there is always surfing as an option!

Guide books

Currently there are two great options for guide books and neither of them are in print! Fortunately this is because they are both available online, first you will find all the info on the South Wales Mountaineering Club wiki

If you are into smart phones and all the modern advantages they seem to bring, then Rockfax has a downloadable guide for your phone. This guide is for the Gower and cover almost all of the sport climbing



Emily Slade climbing King George vs the Suffragettes 7a+

on offer and as with the wiki has the advantage that it is constantly updated with any new developments meaning your guide will stay current! and at no extra cost from the initial purchase. Hopefully soon there will be a new South Wales Guide book that will include this and the many other new venues that have been established since the last guide was put to print.

Après' Climb

Leaving the crag and returning up the steps to the car park leave you with some great options for Apres Shipwreck. The first is simply carry on climbing as there are many non tidal options with in 5min walk of the carpark, Trial Wall being the most obvious. If you are climbed out then the pub offers all the normal pub stuff but with one of the best views in South Wales. If its food you are after then drive back a few miles and search out The King Authur for a great evening!

All pictures courtesy of www.simonrawlinsonphotography.com



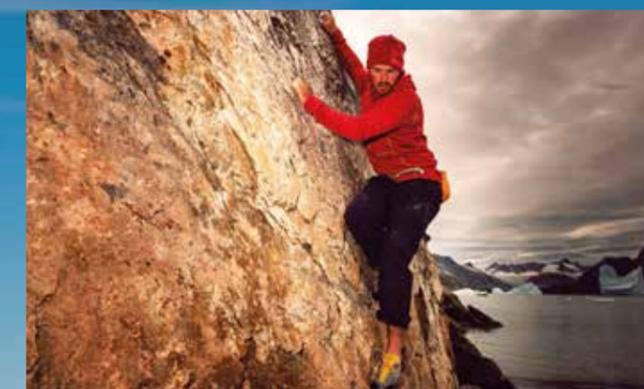
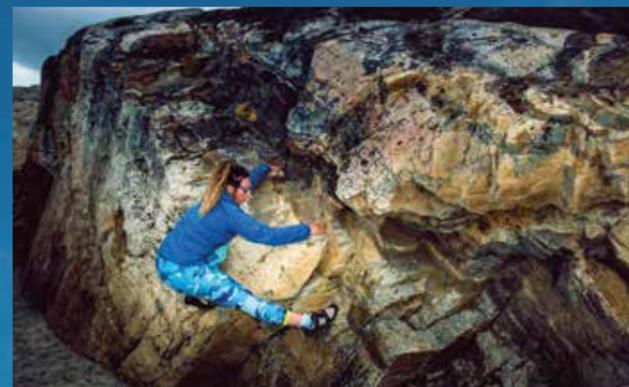
EX DRAGON REMEC GREENLAND

In 2016, REMEC deployed to a remote and mountainous region of East Greenland to explore and climb. The expedition sought to develop the planning and risk management skills, teamwork, personal courage and character of the Royal Engineers personnel by safely conducting an arduous mountaineering expedition in an austere environment. Not only were mountaineering objectives for the experienced instructors required, there was also emphasis on qualifying novice personnel in AMF and RSF during the expedition. In addition to mountaineering, the Danish Geological Society requested that the expedition collect rock samples for future scientific research.

The expedition consisted of 24 Royal Engineers and one Royal Army Medical Corps NCO and ranged from experienced mountaineer to relative novice. During the planning and risk assessment

stages it became clear that a significant period of prior training and preparation would be needed to ensure that every member of the team would be capable of safely operating in this austere environment for several weeks. Due to the isolated nature of the location, casualty evacuation could take a much greater length of time than one might expect in an operational theatre, so much of the expedition training focussed on contingency planning, avoiding likely hazards and dealing with accidents. The training weeks in Scotland and Wales were vital for the team to conduct medical and rescue training; discuss risk management and decision making skills; ROC drill 'actions-on'; and pack and prepare the kit and equipment.

The expedition aimed to deploy to a remote and unexplored area of East Greenland. Most of East Greenland falls into this category, so





after a deal of research, plus advice from a mountain guide based in Kulusuk, an area 40-60km north of Kulusuk was chosen: it was accessible by boat in a day and had very little identifiable evidence of previous mountaineering expeditions. The few expeditions into this region tended to focus on heading inland to climb larger peaks, Alpine style. This was probably due to civilian expeditions being short on time and few in personnel and needing to try to bag an obvious single 'big' objective. REMEC's expedition had the luxury of time and numbers, so were able to 'swamp' an area and perhaps climb peaks and routes that would not have been as obvious to smaller expeditions. In addition, there was no evidence at all of any rock climbing having occurred here, which was perfect for our strong climbing party.

Finding a good base camp was a primary concern as there did not seem to be too many sites on the steep coastline that would take this size group and the expedition did not want to waste days ferrying equipment far inland. To mitigate the risk, a small advance party (senior climbing leader, plus RCI, AMI(T) and AML) was deployed a few days ahead of the main body. The local Mountain Guide (Matt Spenceley) had worked up some options with his local Inuit guides, based on the general area the expedition leadership had identified from Defence Geo mapping and Google Earth. Happily, the summer of 2016 has been uncharacteristically warm

and there was no sea ice to contend with, which enabled a larger bunch of options to be recce'd than was expected. The team found a perfect base camp location in Depot Fjord, at the mouth of a spectacular glacier flanked by magnificent alpine peaks. It was on a vast, flat, south facing glacial plain, with plenty of fresh water and sufficient space to observe polar bear approach. The crags and peaks surrounding base camp ranged from 100-1300m, offered 3 routes onto higher glaciers inland and several rock and Alpine climbing route options at the right grades (PD, VS). The magnificent beauty of the place was enhanced by its isolation, clear air and the stunning, iceberg studded, deep blue ocean backdrop. The expedition enjoyed nearly 3 weeks of 20 hour days in solid, clear stable conditions, so was able to set to the task of exploring these hills without any hindrance. Indeed, the concern turned from whether there would be sufficient time to explore, to worry over burning the teams out too early.

Base camp was close to numerous enticing rock climbing multi-pitch and single pitch objectives. The climbing was all conducted within a couple of KM of base camp. This enabled a good deal of climbing to occur, but also aided safety as no group was ever far from a rescue party and an HLS. An additional unexpected bonus was that the area



around base camp on was littered with vast boulders offering several fantastic bouldering problems. This significantly helped individual's develop their technical ability. The rock climbers wasted no time in dominating the local areas and climbing new routes. The rock condition varied greatly from poor, chossy, flaky and dangerous to superb, clean and solid. The shout "BELOW!!" followed by a loud crack and thud became all too familiar to those sat in base camp. There was also often a lack of gear placements, ironically especially on the rock that was most solid. The instructors were further challenged by the differing abilities of their novice partners. As solid belay positions were often few and far between and each climber had to remain adaptable and fast thinking to ensure that the teams remained safe. In the end, bouldering routes aside, the team established over 37 rock climbing routes, graded between moderate and HVS.

Much like the rock climbers, the key hazard to the Alpinists was weak and loose rock, though the potential bear threat (which never materialised) meant that the teams deployed in all cases with rifles and flares. The Alpine teams explored all the valleys near base camp and stretched as far as 25km inland, on the higher glaciers. Trial and error established the best routes to a number of advanced camp locations, some of which were bivouacs. Although the principal glaciers were very dry, they were also very large and in most places ribbed, cut, dented and pock-marked by the action of freeze-thaw and flow. Crossing any of the glaciers was mentally and physically draining and perhaps best described by a leader as trying to walk across an impact area. That said, the views, again, were just astonishing and clusters of unexplored alpine style peaks stretched away north, west and south as far as you could see. The alpine teams spent between 4-6 days at a time at advanced camps climbing objectives in the local area before returning to base camp for more food and supplies. A mixture of skills were needed with some teams pitching rock ridge routes and others being treated to steady snow plods to the summits. As there were no guide books, the selection of routes was an interesting challenge. Instructors had to be ever ready to change plans on the march, measuring the ability of the group and the changing conditions of the rock. There was no room for summit fever and competitiveness, the teams had to be constantly aware of where the other ropes were on the mountain

in order to provide assistance if required. Although some Alpine groups found cairns on a handful of peaks, especially to the south of the AO, most of the peaks appear to be first ascents. In all, the Alpine teams reckon on having ascended twenty unclimbed peaks, and set 37 routes on them (coincidentally the same as the number of rock climbs).

In summary, East Greenland exceeded the expectations of the whole team and cannot be recommended more highly to soldiers seeking to undertake the adventure of exploratory mountaineering in spectacular surroundings.



Book *Reviews*

By Tomo Thompson

The book shelves creaked when this lot arrived from Vertebrate.

Some very big books this time round...

WILD COUNTRY – THE MAN WHO MADE FRIENDS

Mark Vallance

Amongst gear geeks the story is almost biblical, Ray Jardine carrying his prototype 'sliding cam' round in a blue nylon bag, and having secretive discussions with Mark Vallance about manufacturing his new invention that, to fend off the prototype copying hounds of the climbing industry, he

called his 'friends'. And so the name stuck. An apt name

it is too if, with disco leg and pumped arms, you're desperate to cram some protection in to a parallel crack or break.

Succinctly this is a book about the bloke that made the bit of hardware that revolutionised rock climbing. But it's so much more than that. Explorer, engineer, visionary, 8000m summiteer, businessman, Parkinsons disease sufferer, legend.

British climbing has a rich vein of real characters who often brought much more than just challenging first ascents to the table, and Vallance is up there amongst the best. A really good book.

HANGING ON – A LIFE INSIDE BRITISH CLIMBING'S GOLDEN AGE

Martin Boysen

Am I allowed to confess that apart from hearing his name occasionally mentioned in the same sentence as the likes of Brown, Whillans, Scott and Bonnington, I knew very little about him. I have started listening through the back catalogue of a (highly recommended) podcast called 'JamCrack' by the author / speaker / climber Niall Grimes, and one of the episodes was an interview with Boysen. He struck me as having had at least one hand hold on many many things that happened in British climbing for no less than 55 years. That podcast was excellent and this book is even better. An unusual childhood, and the cutting of his climbing teeth on the sandstone outcrops of Harrison's et al, and the great shenanigans and exploits of varied climbing groups and clubs through the sixties and seventies.

The pages between the chapters in the book contain guide book descriptions of many of the new routes that Boysen put up. The book is very well written, entertaining to read and offers a different perspective on many of the important events of British climbing over the 60's, 70's and 80's from the discovery and first routes at Gogarth, to the first ascent of the South face of Annapurna, and a lifetime of climbing in between. Boysen has been writing this book, by his own account, 'on and off for thirty odd years', and it's a damn good book he has finally finished.

ALPINE EXPOSURES

Jon Griffith. Foreword by some bloke called Ueli Steck

Essentially this is a portfolio of the best work of one of the best mountain sports photographers in the world. A book that in both content and construction is simply wonderful. Griffiths is the photographer of choice for a raft of the major brands and athletes in the vertical mountain sports

industry and this book, showcasing a decade of his work, bears justice to the lofty heights in which the industry hold him. Two hundred and eighty odd pages of some of the best alpine climbing, mountaineering and ski mountaineering photography ever taken. A big book with a big price tag but so inspiring.

WILD BRITAIN

Barry Payling

This book intrigued me as it marked a full circle return in the art of outdoor photography. Payling. He practises 'pure photography' which, to you and I, means that no form of manipulation whatsoever has taken place. No autofocus, no zoom, no editing. Nothing. Just a man with a mechanical camera waiting patiently for the photograph that his eye told him to take, and faithfully reproducing these images on to fine paper and in to this collection. Some of the colour in the photographs is exceptional. As well as appealing to anybody with an eye for outdoor photography, the book introduces the reader to some of the more remote landscapes, especially in Scotland. The shots of Melvaig Beach, for example, are extraordinary in their detail and colour.

PEAK ROCK – THE HISTORY, THE ROUTES, THE CLIMBERS

Phil Kelly, Graham Hoey, Giles Barker and others

Are you the kind of climbing guide book reader who soaks up the historical anecdotes that the best guide books always have contained within their pages ? Tales of derring-do on first ascents, of the mavericks, legends and hard men of a particular area and era ? If so, ask Santa for this book. He'll have a job getting down the chimney with it as it is nigh on four hundred pages long and weighs about the same as a grit trad rack. Did I mention that it is absolutely brilliant ? Rather than being a general history of Peak climbing it is, unashamedly, a celebration of the cutting edge and significant developments across the years since James W Putterell first tied on (to an old length of hemp cord)

All of the books reviewed here are available at discount to AMA Members direct from Vertebrate Publishing – details on the AMA website.

at Wharncliffe in 1885. JWP wasn't the first climber of grit outcrops in the Peak but he was the first to explore, record and develop the area for rock climbing.

To do the book justice would take every page of this journal. The who's who of Peak ascensionists through the decades is literally a roll call of the extraordinary talent of climbing this country has produced, the routes they established and the folklore and legend surrounding them. Birtwhistle, Brown, Birtles, Fawcett, Dunne, Allen, Moffat, Moon, Pollitt, Dawes, Pearson, Randall, Whittaker to name but a few of them.

What it lacks in the height of its crags and edges, the Peak more than makes up for in the number and variety of its climbs. This enormous, and enormously important tomb of a book does justice to the area, its climbs and its climbers.

THE GREAT MOUNTAIN CRAGS OF SCOTLAND – A CELEBRATION OF SCOTTISH MOUNTAINEERING

Compiled by Guy Robertson and Adrian Crofton

If I were to observe that this big book is very much in the vein of the Classic, Hard and Extreme books that the uber talented Ken Wilson compiled, then that should illuminate the quality of the book. Split in to four sections (South West, North West, The Islands and The Cairngorms & Central Highlands), the book contains superb writing and photography (often original pieces) from the likes of Andy Nisbet, Martin Moran, Malcolm Bass, Nick Bullock, Blair Fyffe, Dave 'Cubby' Cuthbertson and Dave Macleod.

Big routes on big imposing mountains through all seasons. A terrific book to delve in to with a big brew and a notebook and pencil and create a bucket list of amazing climbs to do at the top end of this remarkable island of ours.



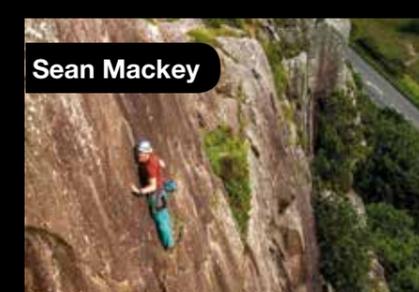
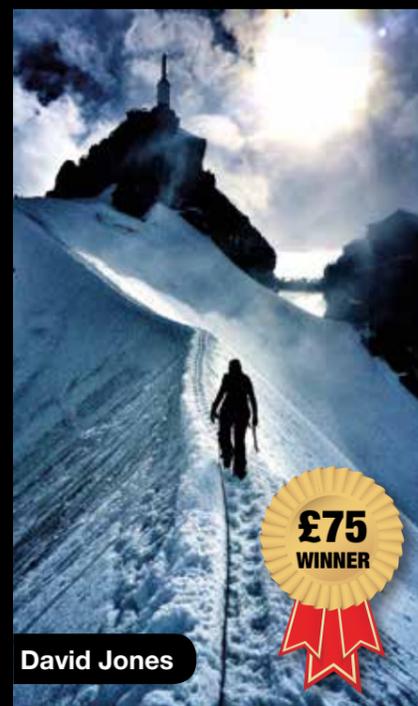


PHOTO COMPETITION

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



British Services Dhaulagiri Medical Research Expedition 2016

“Endurance Builds Character”

The Joint Services' Mountaineering Committee (JSMC) sponsors a quadrennial programme of expeditions to the Greater Ranges, with the aim of developing personnel mentally and physically by operating at the extremes of physical possibility, in the most austere of environments. The last quadrennial expedition took place in 2012 to Antarctica and 2008's expedition made a successful ascent of Makalu, the World's 5th highest mountain. This year's instalment, the British Services Dhaulagiri Medical Research Expedition 2016 (BSDMRE16) was a Royal Navy lead and aimed to:

1. Develop individual courage and leadership skills through controlled exposure to risk, in a challenging outdoor environment, in order to enhance Operational Capability.
2. Develop future military mountaineers with an ascent of Tukuhe peak 6900m.
3. Develop experienced military mountaineers with an ascent of the NE ridge of Dhaulagiri (8167m), the World's 7th highest mountain, in a lightweight style, without supplementary oxygen.
4. Enable academics within the MoD and in collaboration with civilian universities to investigate the effects of high altitude through medical research.
5. Inspire the uptake of AT across the military.

The expedition would see a total of 123 British service personnel conduct some sort of adventurous activity in the Nepali Himalayas. 24 of those made up the High Altitude Development Team (HADT) and the Main Team (MT), collectively known as the climbing teams, would venture from the relative comfort and safety of Kathmandu, via the towns of Beni and Marpha, to the Dhaulagiri massif where the aims became more mountain focussed:

1. For the MT to climb Dhaulagiri (8167m), without supplementary oxygen and in a lightweight style.
2. For the HADT and MT to acclimatise by climbing Dhampus Peak (6035m) and then to climb Tukuhe Peak (6900m) from a base camp in the Hidden Valley.
3. To complete the trek of the Dhaulagiri circuit with a number of independent trekking teams.

This article will be in two parts. The first is written from the perspective of a member of the HADT, the second is the author's account as a member of the MT. In Sanskrit, Dhaulagiri translates from Dhavali giri, meaning "White Mountain." Dhaulagiri is the highest mountain that lies entirely within Nepal.

Thoughts from the High Altitude Development Team Shawn Stock – BSDMRE2016

Seventy-one million years ago the Indian Tectonic plate was positioned below the equator. Ten million years ago it collided with the Eurasian Tectonic plate creating a mountain range so great that it stretches from Pakistan through India, Nepal, and Tibet to Bhutan, a distance of 1,500 miles. She houses ten of the world's highest peaks; the remaining four are situated in the Karakoram. She commands your attention and in doing so commands your respect. She is majestic in every aspect; she is known as the Himalaya - home of snow.

GREAT THINGS ARE DONE WHEN “MED” AND MOUNTAINS MEET

April this year saw the departure of British Services Dhaulagiri Medical Research Expedition 2016, BSDMRE2016. A Joint Service Expedition to conduct medical research at altitude in the Dhaulagiri Mountain Range of western Nepal. Examining the prospects of iron infusion into the human cell, and whether this can aid in acclimatisation for people working in an environment which at present is prohibited where unrealistic ascent profiles are in place.

Further data was collated including bloods, echocardiograms and lung capacity. Prior to departure the team volunteered for a minor operation which involved a Reveal implant being placed under the skin, over the left pectoral muscle. This device recorded cardiac activity throughout the expedition. The data recorded was then sent back to the cardiology department at Poole Hospital for ongoing research into the effects of altitude on the human body.

Our objectives as Development Team were to summit two peaks. The first being Dhampus 6035m elevation and the second being Tukuhe 6920m elevation. Dhampus was a trekking peak and used as acclimatisation for future summit attempts. Dhampus' summit offered a grand panoramic including Tukuhe, which proved more arduous than anticipated. Setting up camps 1 and 2 on Tukuhe required every effort from the expedition. Climbing teams inserting these camps endured weather fronts which would prove impossible to operate in for any reasonable period. The conditions endured on Tukuhe and work put in enabled a select few to make a successful summit attempt via junction peak to west summit 6848m.

With time on our hands and only a few days left at Base Camp 5100m, Al Mason, Stu Quinn and myself set our sights on another peak to the north west of base camp. This particular peak has no name and so harboured the thoughts of a first ascent. Al soon put a stop to my fantasy after mentioning that he spotted a tin can half way up. The peak was not technical and fairly straightforward apart from one or two crevasses near her summit. The approach to summit was slow, expectant and encouraged an enquiring excitement that only a mountain can evoke.

SOME THOUGHTS FROM THE EXPEDITION

Tri Service

Like any expedition, people learn, become accustomed and get to know one another very well. This was my fourth time in the Himalaya but first time working alongside personnel from RAF and RN. I find it quite humorous that each arm has its own personality. The Army, with its robust and slightly sadistic humour. The RAF, very civil but eventually succumbing to the Army's robust and slightly sadistic humour. And then the RN, who would never succumb to the robust and slightly sadistic humour of the Army, or anything of the sort.

Culinary Delights

On occasion the will to except more (which we all have) was challenged. In this case it was with a meal which I can only describe as "glacial squid" the likes of which I've never set eyes on or tasted before. This was much to the Sherpa's / Porter's delight and humour as they watched - with plenty more in hand - as we tried to consume the meal. God knows what it was. Our faces adorned with question, curiosity, revulsion. Yet the will to except more was ever present.

On Reflection

I'm fairly sure that after any enduring period in a remote and austere environment that it becomes you, and you become it almost like a refinement. The very fabric of the environment encompasses an individual, tailoring them to it. In doing so a piece of you stays there, which is why we choose to return. The result being an affection and comfortability attained by acceptance.

Gaining a position on the Development Team was a privilege and something of which I'm sure we all reflected on, and learned from. Like any expedition it encompasses everything you expect and more, including memories that can never be captured on camera.

BSDMRE16 Team in Hidden Valley



Musings and Route Description from the Main Team

27 April 2016 – Dhaulagiri Basecamp (DBC) – 4800m

Matt Howard – Main Team – BSDMRE2016

The entrancing sound of Dowa Lama's religious incantations and bell ringing that were now part of our daily sensory experience, came to end. The puja, or act of worship, was nearing its conclusion too. This marked the spiritual unlocking of our attempt to climb the World's 7th highest mountain. The game was on. We gathered around the area in DBC set aside for the ceremony, sipping on our can of Tuborg lager (part of the ceremony!) and nibbling on the snacks that represented the blessed fuel we would require to achieve this colossal goal, when an incredible roaring sound diverted our attention. A massive serac fall on Dhaulagiri's north face, to the west of the now infamous 'Mini Eiger', had just released. As the huge cloud of snow, ice and rocks settled, it offered a timely reminder of the potential danger that lay ahead, sobering the most intrepid among us. The game was on but so were the risks.

The following day we set out in teams of three, assisted by Pasang Sherpa and Dowa Sherpa (also our Lama) to tackle the mammoth task of establishing a series of staging posts, or camps, en route to Dhaulagiri's summit. Three were planned; Camp 1 at 5800m, Camp 2 at around 6700m and Camp 3 at 7600m. This would hopefully leave a mere, manageable, 600m of final ascent for any summit attempt. For the next 20 days the twelve MT members would push themselves both physically and mentally at altitudes of between 4800m-7600m, in an attempt to tame the white mountain. It had taken us 4 weeks to get to this stage after departing the UK, including a gruelling in part, 3-day walk in, and the Himalaya had already demonstrated many ways in which to avert our objective.

DBC – Camp 1 – The Slog

On departing DBC south, the first stage of the route involved navigating an undulating moraine field that we would later note changed its appearance several times throughout our stay. This took around 30 minutes to do and brought us to the foot of the first steep section of the climb. Directly under the Mini Eiger. The route for the next 45 minutes was a 60° slope that negotiated two near vertical rock steps that frequently iced over. This meant a jumar and fixed line were probably the most secure and efficient method in tackling this. On reaching the top of this slope, we would almost definitely find ourselves breathing fast and deeply and wondering if we had actually acclimatised at all! Perfect preparation perhaps for the next stage; a traverse under the now legendary Mini Eiger. This section would take about an hour, before the route broke out onto the main glacier. The traverse had two vertical runnels which would frequently avalanche, one of which allegedly originated at



Main Team, Dowa Lama & staff – Puja



Camp 1 looking toward Dhaulagiri

around 7000m. A little like running a high altitude gauntlet, the exped leader and one other would later experience one of these avalanches first hand, with a near miss of a very narrow 30m! The route then snaked its way across the relatively level glacier to the start of the uphill approach to Camp 1 which negotiated ever changing crevasses and the odd serac fall. All in, roughly a 5 hour journey with the crux firmly in the first 60 minutes!

Camp 1- Camp 2 – The Harder Slog

Due to the hanging seracs that overlooked, and crevasse field that surrounded Camp 1, this part of the route picked a zig zag path steadily uphill for 45 minutes to the more secure ground that marked the start of the NE ridge. From there, the slog upwards to Camp 2 really began. When the visibility was good, one could see all the way to the upper part of Camp 2 and to where our lead team had dug in and positioned our tents. In one sense a massive psychological own goal, as when we slogged the final steps towards our camp, we would find ourselves passing climbers in their tents, resting and getting the all-important administration underway. In another sense, a head start on the way to Camp 3. I'll let you the reader decide on which you'd have preferred! This part of the route also appeared to be particularly prone to static electrical storms. On at least two separate occasions, teams were forced to ground themselves and detach from all metal work until the buzzing had subsided, which could take up to an hour. Another element of high altitude mountaineering that worked against the climber! However, during periods of sound visibility, this leg of the route offered some of the most breath taking views of Annapurna, her foothills and the Kaligandaki Valley.

Camp 2 – Camp 3 – The Rocky Ridge

Perhaps the simplest with regards to the nature of the route, this leg was the consistently steepest part of the ascent thus far. It was also the part of the route that led me to make the decision to let the other two members of my climbing team crack on without me. Having developed a fairly nasty cough at DBC, it had deteriorated with ascent, meaning that at 6900m I was struggling to recover between coughing fits. Whilst I attempted to crawl for the next hard-won metre of the climb, it stung as the realisation hit home that the summit was beyond my grasp. All the hard work and preparation wasted? With retrospect, an easy decision in actual fact, as I would unlikely have improved with increased altitude and would therefore have become a casualty, forcing my colleagues to deal with me; ruining their chance of summiting. The rock (when

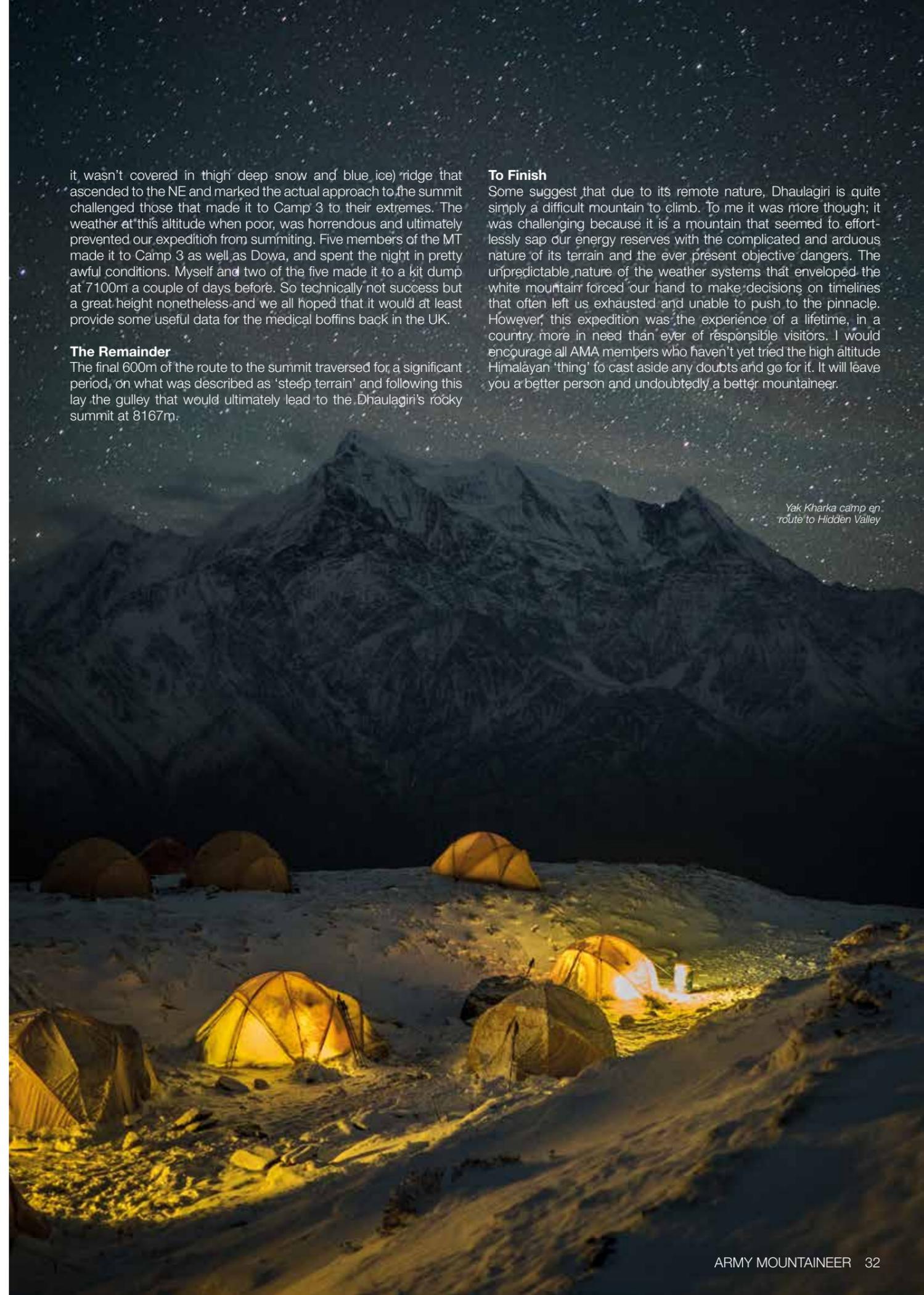
it wasn't covered in thigh deep snow and blue ice) ridge that ascended to the NE and marked the actual approach to the summit challenged those that made it to Camp 3 to their extremes. The weather at this altitude when poor, was horrendous and ultimately prevented our expedition from summiting. Five members of the MT made it to Camp 3 as well as Dowa, and spent the night in pretty awful conditions. Myself and two of the five made it to a kit dump at 7100m a couple of days before. So technically not success but a great height nonetheless and we all hoped that it would at least provide some useful data for the medical boffins back in the UK.

The Remainder

The final 600m of the route to the summit traversed for a significant period, on what was described as 'steep terrain' and following this lay the gully that would ultimately lead to the Dhaulagiri's rocky summit at 8167m.

To Finish

Some suggest that due to its remote nature, Dhaulagiri is quite simply a difficult mountain to climb. To me it was more though; it was challenging because it is a mountain that seemed to effortlessly sap our energy reserves with the complicated and arduous nature of its terrain and the ever present objective dangers. The unpredictable nature of the weather systems that enveloped the white mountain forced our hand to make decisions on timelines that often left us exhausted and unable to push to the pinnacle. However, this expedition was the experience of a lifetime, in a country more in need than ever of responsible visitors. I would encourage all AMA members who haven't yet tried the high altitude Himalayan 'thing' to cast aside any doubts and go for it. It will leave you a better person and undoubtedly a better mountaineer.



Yak Kharka camp en route to Hidden Valley

Six of the best...

Low-grade Scottish winter routes (that you may have never heard of)

by James Roddie

Scottish winter climbers operating in the low to mid grades can sometimes get stuck in a rut. Returning to the same reliable corries makes sense on many levels – you may only have one week a year to get the ice axes out so you want the best possible chance of getting something done. However if conditions aren't great it can be easy to get into a cycle of climbing many of the same routes year after year, and sometimes frustration or even boredom can spoil the relationship before it has properly begun. For the reward to justify the effort, perhaps a step into the unknown is required.

The Northern Corries, Ben Nevis and Stob Coire Nan Lochan are great climbing venues with dependable conditions, but they can also be very crowded with queuing likely for the most popular routes on good-weather days. There's a lot of information available online about these popular areas, too – blogs and conditions reports are great, but you might start to feel that they take some of the mystery out of winter climbing.

Remoteness, uncertainty and solitude can add to the character of a route and can sometimes feel more important than

the quality of the climbing itself. There are plenty of very reliable routes throughout the Highlands which many climbers may have never heard of, offering quality days out amongst remarkable surroundings. In most cases you'll never have to queue and you could easily have the entire corrie to yourself. There may not be any conditions reports for the route you are interested in, or even a single reference to it online, but the uncertainty adds a whole new dimension to the overall experience.

Here are six great winter routes that you may have never heard of...

Ceannacroc Couloir (II**), Sgurr nan Conbhairean, Kintail

One of the most reliable west coast grade II gullies north of Lochaber, Ceannacroc Couloir is a long route (300m) that is often still in condition after a big thaw. This is one of many routes that disproves the notion that low-grade gullies are all the same. A steep and straight snow gully runs for some distance and takes you to an unexpected neck on the side of the hill's East Ridge. Some meandering ground gains the upper part of the ridge, taking you to a highly memorable and unusual finish along a very narrow and exposed snow arête. On

a blue-sky day this feels remarkably like a miniature version of the summit ridge of Castor in Switzerland. You top out almost directly on the summit which offers good opportunities for spotting golden eagles. Conditions – needs firm snow on north to east-facing slopes for approach and gully to be safe. No cornice. Avoid in strong winds as snow arête finale would be very spicy indeed.

Further reference – SMC Northern Highlands South (2007)



Central Trinity Gully (II*), Coire na Caimhe, Torridon

When the snow is still unconsolidated on the higher crags of Glencoe and Lochaber more favourable conditions can often be found in Torridon. Coire na Caimhe is a long way from the road but it offers a large number of great routes in one of the most beautiful corries in Scotland, and Central Trinity is one of the best lines. This route is all about the situation – the central of three straight gullies splitting the formidable Northern Pinnacles. One or two ice steps can be encountered or it can bank out to steep snow. From the top of the gully, the last section of the Northern Pinnacles takes

you to the summit of Mullach an Rathain, and continuing along the main Liathach ridge traverse makes this one of the best long mountaineering days in Britain. Conditions – one the highest routes in Torridon so worth a look even if things look more 'black' than you'd expected. Avoid when north to east-facing slopes are unstable. Most reliable mid-season. No cornice.

Further reference – SMC Northern Highlands South (2007)

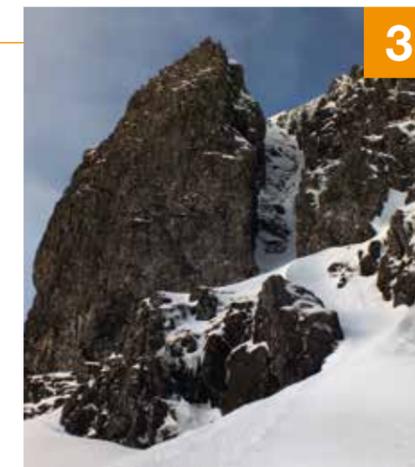


Nutcracker (II/III*), Stob Coire nam Beith, Glencoe

A highly enjoyable but barely known low-grade ice route tucked away behind a ship's prow buttress in a corrie filled with great classics. Though quite short, this route is steep enough to make it a good step up from (for example) Forked Gully on Stob Coire nan Lochan. If you want to start leading grade III, this could be a good route to ease you in. In good conditions Nutcracker will consist of a narrow ribbon of ice running down the right-hand side of a gully, with the steepest section feeling more like grade III. Climbing North-West

Gully as a prelude makes this a superb day covering several hundred metres of high-quality ground. On a day when Deep-Cut Chimney or SC Gully have queues, Nutcracker will almost certainly be empty. Conditions – if SC Gully is in condition then Nutcracker could be a good bet. Can be badly affected by the sun during late-season. The whole corrie is quite avalanche prone so choose a day with good snow conditions.

Further reference – SMC New Routes 2010



Eskimo Gully (II/III*), Lurcher's Crag, Cairngorms

During the busiest periods the Northern Corries can sometimes become a bit of a circus. Lurcher's Crag is usually quieter and provides numerous ice and mixed routes of good length, and although the walk-in is longer it still doesn't take long. This west-facing crag is also regularly a good option if the Northern Corries are buried in powder. Eskimo Gully provides a good alternative to the two classic grade III gullies on the crag, and it sits amongst several other worthwhile but unfrequented

routes. A groove leads through the slabs at the base of the crag and is followed by a steep ice pitch, after which an easier gully above gives you the option for several different exits. Conditions – requires a good cold spell. A useful option for days when west-facing slopes are safest. Usually not in condition later in the season and prone to damage from sunshine.

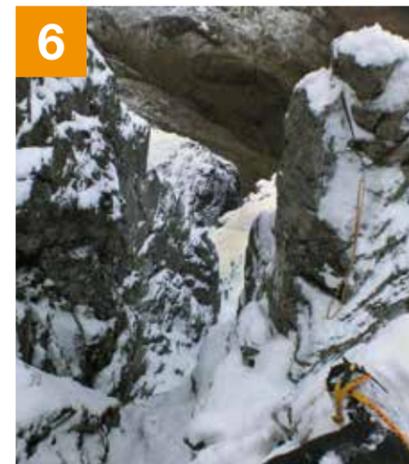
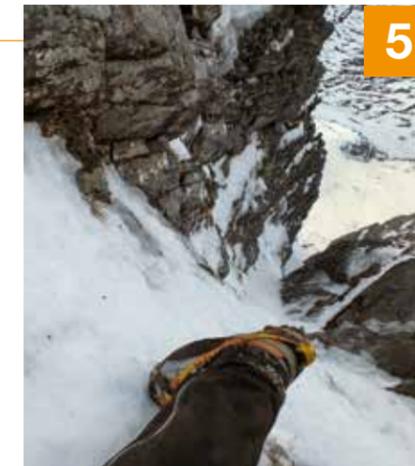
Further reference – SMC New Routes 2008

Pioneer Gully (III*), Creag Coire an-t Slugain, Glen Shiel

Many people only really think of the Forcan Ridge when it comes to winter climbing in Glen Shiel, but the glen actually contains a wide range of high-quality routes. It's a great base for a low/mid-grade climbing trip. Coire an-t Slugain is one of the best corries – usually empty and a good place for climbing several routes in a day. Pioneer Gully is good fun, close to the road and a suitable route as first grade III. Three ice steps and steep snow lead to a minor bifurcation – taking the left option leads into an icy groove which gives access to a blunt snow arête and an exit through

a small cornice. The views into Knoydart from the top are staggering so it's worthwhile saving this route for a good day. Conditions – Glen Shiel tends to get a lot of snow, so Pioneer Gully might easily be in condition when routes at a similar altitude/aspect in other glens have succumbed to a thaw. Low avalanche risk on north to east-facing slopes essential for a safe approach/descent.

Further reference – SMC Northern Highlands South (2007)



Archie's Ridge (III,4*), Aonach Dubh West face, Glencoe

A significant step up in terms of seriousness from the other routes listed, Archie's Ridge is found in a rarely visited area of the intimidating West Face of Aonach Dubh. Climbing here is always an adventure due to the committing and very steep nature of the face. Apart from on Dinnertime Buttress, or when the highly desired ice routes are in condition, you'll almost always be alone. This route is a good option during a hard freeze or on a wild day with easterly winds, so long as fresh snow isn't being deposited on the face. A long traverse from the right of the face across the Upper Rake makes for a serious approach – but it's the most straightforward way to get to the buttress. Archie's Ridge is found on the left

side of the buttress and begins with a short groove, above which the route narrows and steepens. Enjoyable climbing up steep blocky ground suddenly brings you to an unexpected pinnacle. The move around this and across the gap on the other side forms the memorable crux of the route, after which another groove and some scrambling leads to easy ground. Conditions – needs a hard freeze for the turf to be in condition. Often good during early season. Avoid when west-facing slopes are avalanche prone. Sheltered on a day of strong easterlies but be aware of the top out and descent.

Further reference – SMC New Routes 2010

Dolomites

by Ryan Lang

I was first introduced to the Dolomites in 2015 by Gary Mason, I was an instructor on his expedition for two weeks. It is the best expedition I have ever been on! If you have never been to the Dolomites and are thinking of planning an overseas summer climbing trip, I would seriously recommend going.

HOW LONG SHOULD YOU GO?

The Dolomites cover a large area in Northern Italy and are steeped with a unique mix of Austrian and Italian culture. There is literally a lifetime of climbing in the region so its important to choose the right venue for your trip. On the assumption that you will drive across from the UK, I would suggest that you go for a minimum of two weeks. The drive takes two full days each way with an overnight stop, any less than two weeks would not be worthwhile.

HOW DO YOU GET THERE?

If you are driving across from the UK, it is going to take two days to get there, so an overnight stop is a must. Try and go via the channel tunnel and choose a morning departure so that you can get the first days driving completed before dark. There is a great little campsite called Campingplatz Vogelsang which is located on the outskirts of Brodenbach town on the banks of the river Moselle. This is located approximately half way. An early start the next day will see you drive through the remainder of Germany into Austria then into Italy. All being well, you will arrive in the Dolomites in time for supper. It is easy to select routes that don't involve tolls, and the journey time isn't that much longer! One thing you will need to purchase is an Austrian Vignette which will cost approximately €8.80 each way.

WEEK 1 ACCOMMODATION

Cortina d'Ampezzo is located in the NE of Italy and is a popular winter sports venue. Camp sites in the local area are excellent by UK standards. I would recommend the "International Camping Olympia" campsite which is ideally located no more than 5 minutes drive from Cortina. The site has hot showers, many pitches, a restaurant, bar and laundry facilities.

WEEK 1 CLIMBING

Assuming you are working with a mixed ability group, which includes some complete beginners, there are many suitable locations which will provide a progressive first week.

Cinque Torre (five towers), perched high in the Falzarego pass above Cortina is one of the iconic climbing venues in the whole region. The area is regarded by locals as the ultimate training facility. It has single and multi-pitch climbing which caters for a wide array of climbing styles. There is something for everyone here with grades going from 3 to 8b. It is not uncommon to spend two or even three days in the first week of the trip in this location, it has a lot to offer.



Falzarego pass – reaches an altitude of 2105m and played a pivotal role in the First World War. It was strategically important for the Italians and Austrians and there are trenches visible throughout the pass today. There are numerous multi-pitch venues in the pass, lots of which are suitable for a relative newcomer to second. Classic routes such as the South Arete of the Hexenstein and the Comici South Arete – Torre Grande should be on your tick list.

The two locations above have more than enough to keep even the fittest groups occupied for a full week. That said, if you find that you fancy a change of scene then why not pop along to Monte Popena Basso. There are numerous routes on this crag, all which feel fairly mountainous! I would recommend Via Mazzorana-Adler which has a great exposed traverse on the second pitch.



WEEK 2 ACCOMMODATION

Once you have spent a week in Cortina, it is time to move on to Canazai, which is 40 miles west of Cortina, the journey will take about 1 hour 40 mins due to the steep mountain pass terrain. The best campsite to stay at is Camping Marmolada which is located in the town of Canazai. The facilities are not as good as week one, but there are plenty of restaurants and pubs within a 5 min walk. One of the liveliest pubs in the town is the 'Kaiserkeller', which is great for an end of trip party!

WEEK 2 CLIMBING

There is an abundance of places to climb in the second week. Most will be much more mountainous and adventurous than week one, however there are still single pitch crags available too. The Sella pass is fantastic and has many long multi-pitch routes. Be aware that some of the descents may require instructors that are Advanced Summer Leaders as well as RCI.



A fantastic route which provides a long day out is 'Rampa del Torso' which is a UIAA grade IV, ten pitch route.

There are other great routes in the immediate vicinity such as 'Rossi' 8 pitch grade IV and 'Via del Guide' 8 pitch grade VI-.



The First Sella Tower has some shorter routes which are less committing. Chimney Direct is a six pitch grade V which has the added bonus of having to jump across a 110 cm gap near the top of the route. It might not sound like much, but it feels different at the time!

Without any shadow of doubt, the jewel in the crown for any Dolomites trip is the Vajolet Towers which are made famous in the opening scenes of 'Cliffhanger'. A visit here is a must and something that I will never forget! This will involve an overnight stay in the Alberto Rifugio which is 2621 m above sea level.

The logistics for this are fairly simple. Book the hut via telephone, the number is in the Rockfax guidebook and available from tourist information. It is best to book as early as possible. If you need to cancel for any reason, please inform the hut guardian. Drive the short distance from Canazai to the Ciampede chairlift in Pera. Park in the large car park and catch the shuttle bus up to the Refugio Gardeccia. From here it is a pleasant walk up to the Refugio



Vajolet where there is a fantastic restaurant for lunch.

The more adventurous approach to the hut involves a well bolted four pitch route called 'Via vuoto d'aria'. This will certainly build an appetite for lunch when you get to the top. There is also a Tyrolean traverse to negotiate!

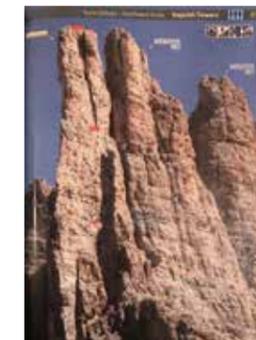
After lunch it is another steep walk up to the Alberto Refugio which will take less than two hours. Once here you can chill out with a few beers and have your evening meal. The rooms are comfy but make sure you bring a sleeping bag liner and ear plugs. If you stay for more than one night it is wise to bring a small sachet of shower gel and a travel towel so that you can use the shower. Ensure you bring sufficient cash for your stay, there is free Wi-Fi in the hut but they don't take card.

It's time to talk about the climbing as this is why you came. Without doubt there are certain routes that are need to be added to your bucket list. The Vajolet Towers are made up of Torre Delago, Torre Stabeler and Torre Winkler. They are possibly the most famous towers in the Dolomites.



Torre Delago is on the left as you look out from the hut and steals the show. It is a six pitch route graded as IV+. The second pitch is utterly amazing and the exposure is the best I have experienced. Once you step round the arête, you are presented with a sheer drop of 500m below your feet. If you want to avoid the crowds, get up at the crack of dawn and walk the short 5 mins to get to the start of the route first.

Torre Stabeler and Torre Winkler are much less dramatic but still lots of fun. If you make the effort of getting to the Vajolet towers, you may as well do all three when you're there. Torre Winkler appears in the opening credits of Cliffhanger, that is reason enough to climb it! Be careful on the descent. It is easy to go the wrong way especially if using the Rockfax description.



WHICH GUIDEBOOK?

There are a few guidebooks for the Dolomites. The most obvious choice for UK based climbers is the Rockfax as it's what a lot of us have now become used to using in the UK. Unfortunately for the Dolomites it is the wrong choice. The routes here are far too long to be accurately described with a photograph and short description.

The best books by a country mile are by Mauro Bernardi. They include a photo of the route but also have a hand drawn sketch with symbols depicting the features you should see on route. When I used the books for the first time they were in Italian and German (I can read neither) yet they were still much easier to understand than Rockfax. Bernardi has now just released a book in English (Aug 16) it doesn't get much better than that.

WHAT GEAR DO YOU NEED?

The routes are long so I would recommend bringing 60m ropes. Half ropes are fine, but triple rated ropes are better as they offer more flexibility. The vast majority of the routes are bolted and have ring belays, but be prepared as it can feel a little bit run-out compared to normal. It is wise to bring a small rack of wires and cams to supplement the spaced bolts.

SUMMARY

The Dolomites are a fantastic climbing venue which should be high up on your list of places to go. There is a lifetime of climbing here with routes to suit all abilities; the area is particularly good for long multi-pitch routes. A trip here is easy to plan and execute and is suitable for late summer trips. Two weeks is the minimum time you should spend here as there is so much to see and do. Finally, a trip to the Vajolet Towers will be the icing on the cake!

Grindelwald

Article and photos by Al Topping

If you're anything like my, given the infinite array of opportunities available to go climbing, hiking and or mountaineering, having the ideas in the first places is the greatest obstacle. Therefore, in this new series of articles, I thought I'd add my own experiences following a recent family excursion to Switzerland and more specifically, the Grindelwald valley, just south of Interlaken.

The area around Interlaken has a wealth of opportunity to be exploited. Vast mountain panoramas, an abundance of well labelled and varied mountain trekking options and, of course, imposing snow capped mountain giants with even greater reputations, for instance: the Eiger.

The aim of this trip was not to recce a potential area for a future expedition, however, upon arrival it became obvious that the area is littered with opportunity.

Irrespective of what activity you are looking to partake, whether it is for a personal holiday or a military exped the planning elements are going to be pretty similar. Grindelwald offers sport rock climbing, summer and winter mountaineering, mountain biking and paragliding. Given the popularity of the area to tourists, there is a wealth of information on the internet for finding specific objectives to meet your expedition's aims. My suggestions are based around where I travelled at the time.

Logistics

If you are driving down to Switzerland from the UK, then Google Maps will tell you that the drive is around 10 hours beyond Calais. Depending on your appetite for French toll roads this may require additional hours to circumnavigate Reims, perhaps making your way through Belgium instead.

On arrival at the Swiss border, there is a CHF 40 / 40 Euro charge for use of the roads (based on 3 people driving a small van into the country). We were less prepared for this, having not originally planned to go to Switzerland at all (and in no way had forgotten that Switzerland has its own currency!) Interlaken is then approximately an hour or so from the boarder at Bern.



If you plan to fly, then flights land regularly in Zurich and takes approximately 2 hours on excellent Swiss trains to the Interlaken region.

Once in the Grindelwald valley, a vehicle will help you to get some more remote climbing areas but is by no means absolutely necessary. We parked up at our campsite and left it there for a majority of our time there in favour of walking and using the excellent train system that runs up and down the valley. Be warned though, that the cost of trains can become quite expensive if you want to use them beyond moving up and down the valley and visit the higher altitude towns and tourist spots.

Food and drinking opportunities are as you'd find in the UK but with the added expense factor to consider. Most supermarket shopping trips resulted in resorting to 'student food' to get by without breaking the holiday budget but if you can be creative with your cooking then it's possible to do. Going fully catered may be a more sensible option for a larger group.

Information for trains in the area can be found at each of the train stations along the route, by visiting the tourist information centre in Grindelwald/Interlaken or by visiting <http://www.jungfrau.ch/en/tourism/travel-information/>

Climbing

There are a few guide books for the area. The one we picked up is named 'Interlaken Vertical' and covers a selection of the classic spots around the Interlaken valley. There are 32 named climbing areas within the pocket sized book which range from the very easy and beginner friendly to steep multi pitch epics and deep water solo areas around Iseltwald. There's something for every ability contained within the book as well as info on the climb's technical features and gear requirements – just what you would expect from a good quality guidebook.

Our trip took us to the hills above Wildeswil where we found around 80 sport climbs ranging from 5a – 7c. Although we didn't visit other crags in the book (we had a lot to cover in our 5 day window in the area) there's plenty to go at. If you're looking for somewhere to go



on your next climbing exped, there's enough in the area to deliver a RSF course or get the miles in for your RCI.

Hiking

Whilst we did not climb the Eiger – disappointing, I hear you say, but less practical with a 1 year old and two spaniels in tow, we did take advantage of the trails at the base of the North Wall, and around the Eigergletscher. We found local route maps for the area in the tourist information centre in Grindelwald and consequently bought suitable 1:25k maps at a local outdoor shop on the main street in the town. Unfortunately, on our trip, with Brexit still being fresh in people's minds, the pound was quite low and these maps cost in the order of £30 each! Both can be purchased on Amazon for between £12 - £20.

The route we chose for one of our days in the area was taking in the sights of the North Wall of the Eiger (a must!), the Eigergletscher and the base of the Jungfrau which is locally known as being the 'Top of the Europe'. For the less mountain fit, a train can take you from Kleine Scheidegg up to the observatory at the top of the Jungfrau for a mere CHF 60. A point to note is, if you travel into the mountains do not expect to be able to purchase anything with a debit or credit card as the mountain huts and train stations are not wired for internet connectivity and so cannot process the payments – a mistake we made on our return down the mountain but were rescued by an American man and his daughter who witnessed our despair at the ticket office and very kindly offered us the cash to help out.

Our short time in Grindelwald was not enough to even scratch the surface. What this article clearly avoids is the opportunity for serious mountain days – it was never meant to explore this area. However, if, like me you want to go somewhere different from the standard issue Calp or Newquay for your unit's Type 2/3 AT package then Grindelwald certainly offers all you could need.

What did it cost?

Item Description	Cost
Camping – Ben's Camping (Gundlishwand) / pitch / night (incl tax)	CHF 20
Motorway Tax	CHF 40
Map (can be found cheaper online)	CHF 32
Pizza & Pint	CHF 20
Train to Grindelwald from Gundlishwand (Single)	CHF 6
Train to Kleine Scheidegg	CHF 60

At the time, the exchange rate afforded approximately £1: CHF 1, this equated to a costly trip for a family of three, but with suitable pre-exped planning, particularly by taking food from the UK or buying it in Germany or France on the way in to the country, the costs could be reduced to more acceptable levels.

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



SportClimbing 2015/16

“October was here, and psyche was high for the bouldering league”

Wednesday 14th October marked the first round of the 2015/16 Armed Forces Bouldering League. What would follow is five months of intense bouldering competitions across the country with members from the Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force all fighting it out for the title of Armed Forces Bouldering Champion. Many of the die-hard boulderers see this as the main event in the annual climbing calendar, whilst some of those who enjoy strapping on a harness see the AFBL as a warm up to the sport climbing competitions later in the year (an argument I won't go into, but I'm sure the AMA Vice Chairman Col Pete Skinsley will agree, bouldering is best).

Bouldering has grown massively in popularity in recent years, and this was evident in record attendance numbers at this year's league; with the exception of the initial round in Glasgow (which is a little too far for those living south of the M4 to travel), each round saw an average attendance of 100+ competitors. Each round consisted of 25 problems graded V0 (easy) to V8 (really hard...and often painful). The climbs all vary in style from basic 'juggy ladder' problems to funky, acrobatic numbers that involve a combination of technical, dynamic and powerful movements.

Every year the five AFBL rounds are held in different locations across the country. This year, competitors took time out of their busy schedules to travel to rounds at Glasgow, Chester, Poole and Nottingham, each with their own memorable moments. For the fifth round competitors were subjected to climbing in front of a public audience on a custom-built wall set up London's popular Outdoor Show.

Members from the Army Climbing Team made a great contribution to the attendance and immediately began to show the RAF and Navy teams that they meant business. The Army had the

greatest number of competitors at each round of the AFBL, with the exception of the Chester round which served a dual-purpose as the RAF Bouldering Championships. With the final round at Indy in Anglesey being cancelled, the stage was set for a showpiece final at the Excel Centre Outdoor Show. On a world cup standard wall with nowhere to hide under its steep and scary walls, the league would be decided. Crowds gathered in anticipation, and they weren't disappointed. Nearly 100 competitors, including the Belgian military climbing team, battled it out over a long, hard four hours. It was only fitting that the event should end in a grand final of a tie-breaker to decide the overall male winner. Once again, it was LCpl Miles Hill who secured the overall victory for the year in the Mens Open, whilst Cpl Yasmin Geoghegan dominated the Women Open, despite not being able to attend the final round. The Under-25 category was won by 2Lt Ross Davidson, who also managed to hold onto first place despite missing rounds due to an operational deployment midway through the league. A whitewash was snatched from us by the RAF with Sgt Paul Easton wrapping up the Veteran's category and retaining small amount of RAF pride. Overall, the league was a great success for the Army, winning 3 of the 4 categories. The attendance was the highest yet, and with the popularity of the sport rapidly increasing, it looks set to get even better next year.

For most, the final of this year's AFBL marked the time to start dusting off those harnesses and start training reading for the sport climbing season, but for the league's top performers it marked the time to start training harder. Those who achieved the highest scores were selected to compete at two further competitions in the year, the Climbing Works International Festival (CWIF) and Bouldermania (a European military climbing championships). Attendance at the CWIF (a world-class civilian competition) is a great opportunity for military climbers to mingle with the pros, but it can be very humbling (bouldering here is on a whole new level,

and usually leaves the team lying on the floor... literally). Two teams of four were entered into the CWIF, and out of a maximum score of 300, a few were lucky enough to just break the 100-point barrier (a feat that prompted personal congratulations from one of the route setters). As always, the competition was stiff and, unfortunately, none of the team made it into the finals, but a great day was had all round. The atmosphere is always amazing, the psyche is always high, and we'll keep going back year after year.

Next on the agenda for the team was a more realistic prospect... Bouldermania! Five members of the Army team made up part of an eight-person Combined Service Bouldering Team. A tiring 40-problem round over six hours lay ahead. The Russian, Italian and French teams had all sent pro climbers, so the fight for 4th place was on. With the 3 best scorers per team to count, Sgt Geoghegan, Sgt Easton and LCpl Hill put on a strong performance to snatch 4th place from the Dutch.

...Later in the year, there were some lead climbing competitions... the end (only joking).

The South command championships and the Army championships were as popular as ever, and the field looked strong. With another great turnout, the team managers were spoiled for choice for the climbers that would make up the Army team at the Inter-Services in July. In fairness to the other services, rumour had spread that the RAF, and RN were also entering strong teams. The stage was set for what would be the final event of the year.

The climbing teams of the Army, RAF and RN descended on Awesome Walls, Sheffield on Wednesday 13th July 2016. Awesome Walls is one of the tallest climbing walls in the country and has

one of the steepest competition walls anywhere, so everybody had turned up expecting a tough day out.

First up were the men, who were gifted a relatively simple warm up far from the shadow of the steep overhanging walls everybody was worrying about. Every member of the Army team topped this route, and it became clear early on that getting to the final would be a case of 'top problem two, or you're out'. The Army made up 11 of the 16 climbers in the final, and occupied the top six spots after qualification. The final route proved a different beast, and saw nobody top it. SSgt Burson fought off tough competition from the rest of the team to claim first place by just one hold.

The women came next, and again found themselves on their first route where everybody made it to the top. The second route split the group up, and saw the Army take 5 of the 6 final spots. The final was eventually won by Lt Palmer, again, the top 3 climbers, all Army, were split by just one hold.

The under-25's routes proved the most challenging of the day, and competition was hot amongst the youngsters. With two Army climbers and one RAF climber tied for points going into the final, this was to be the closest match of the day. After an exerting effort, LCpl Sanders took the gold by a mere tickle of the penultimate hold.

The Army ended up taking all but one of the podium places, and being crowned Inter-Service Champions 2016. This finished off a very successful year for Army climbing, in both Bouldering and Sport Climbing. Psyche is already high for the start of the next AFBL later in the year, let's hope for another awesome one.

AMA Autumn Meet & AGM

21 – 25 September 16

By Ryan Lang

The Autumn Meet and AGM was held over a period of four days rather than the usual weekend and was based at JSMTC Indefatigable. In recent years for whatever reason the AGM weekend has struggled to entice large numbers so when we organised it this year we decided to throw everything at it!

People started arriving from Wednesday night onwards and the event gradually became busier until we reached 70 people by the Friday night. We used the Nuffield dorms which provided 50 beds, the remainder were in a combination of family rooms and the main building.

THURSDAY

The morning started with breakfast followed by the arrival brief. Shortly afterwards the first of the DMM factory tour group set off for Llanberis. The rest of the members were split up into groups according to their aspirations for the day and returned in time for evening meal.

The DMM factory tour allowed those that attended to gain an insight into the processes used by DMM to manufacture the hardware that most of us know and love. Seeing all the steps involved in making a screwgate from start to finish makes it difficult to understand how DMM can make a profit, especially when we get such a generous discount!



The event wasn't only about the workshops, many attended to climb, walk and scramble. The weather forecast as always was pessimistic, but we were lucky enough to have four days of good weather which allowed all activities to go ahead as planned.

I teamed up with Paul and Andrew for the day. After a quick chat we opted to go and climb at Tremadog to climb XMAS Curry. The weather had prevented us climbing Little Chamonix at the Lakes meet in April, thankfully the weather at Tremadog was more kind.



Paul looking suitably pleased with his Anchor

Paul and Andy finishing the final pitch on XMAS Curry

Being mid-week, there was no queue, so it was full steam ahead. We took full advantage of the lack of other climbers and broke the route down into five pitches so that we could cover building belays.

Some of the others went to Holyhead Mountain under the guidance of Gary. The weather was just as kind at Holyhead, all that went had a great day.



Thursday evening saw most of us attend the bar prior to listening to the chairman deliver a fantastic talk on a previous AMA expedition to the Archangel ridge. It was great to hear about the exploits of a young chairman and I know it gave some of the audience some inspiration to plan future expeditions.

FRIDAY

The second and final DMM factory tour took place on the Friday morning. Ten people also spent the day with leading climbing Psychologist – Dr Rebecca Williams on the smart climbing psychology workshop. Rebecca spoke at the AGM in 2015 where she delivered an excellent talk on climbing psychology. If you have a fear of falling or are struggling to progress with your climbing for whatever reason, I strongly recommend spending a day with her. Your SLC can be put to very good use here!

I spent a short day with Anna and Jason at Little Tryfan where we worked on multi-pitch climbing rope work and stance management.

Friday evening = disaster! Sodexo had failed to open the bar despite confirming times the day before. Numbers were steadily increasing by this stage so the pressure was on! In the end we all piled into the lecture theatre to listen to Emma Twyford deliver the evening lecture on her climbing career to date. It was a great talk despite the lack of beer. Afterwards most ventured up into the village to enjoy the delights of Llanfair PG. I am sure the two pub landlords were delighted at the unexpected custom they received that night.



SATURDAY

Today was the busiest day of all as there were numerous things all happening at once. Ten people attended the contour navigation master-class with Huw Gilbert. Learning to navigate with a map that only has contour lines may seem odd at first, but once you have this mastered, map reading becomes a lot easier. I spoke to a few that spent the day with Huw, the feedback was very positive and I will be looking to book more workshops on future meets.

Eight people attended the Snowdonia Geology, Flora & Fauna Workshop day with Mike Raine (author of Nature of Snowdonia). Initially bookings were slow for this day, but soon gathered pace. I think a lot of people consider the subject to be a bit dry, but it is absolutely essential if you wish to become an ML or higher. I spoke to those that attended and they spoke very highly of the day afterwards. One comment that sticks in my mind is "It has made a day in the hills far more interesting than ever before".



Today was also the start of the two day REC Mountain first aid course. Sixteen people gained a three year REC mountain first aid qualification under the expert guidance of Steve & Helen Howe from Snowdonia First Aid. Steve and Helen are current in the first aid arena due to their hard work with the Llanberis mountain rescue team. Over the weekend they delivered real and pragmatic first aid which was well received by those that attended.

A few members who were not on workshops went to Little Tryfan for the day. We needed a short day to save ourselves for the



activities that were happening later in the evening. Danny and I set about the students, delivering training on whatever they asked. I covered building anchors with Allen, before teaching Martin to lead climb.

A good old fashioned military curry was served on the Saturday night after the AGM. I was really looking forward to the chicken curry, but busied myself selling raffle tickets, by the time I had returned to the hotplate it had all gone! Thankfully Sodexo had managed to remember to open the bar this time. We all had a couple of beers prior to the start of the evening lecture which was delivered by none other than James McHaffie. Caff has attended a few AMA events in the last few years. It is amazing how humble he is despite his achievements; it is always a privilege to listen to his exploits.

One of the final events of the Saturday evening was the charity prize draw. Various prizes were won on the night which raised £255 for the Ogwen Valley Mountain Rescue Organisation. The AMA is grateful to both DMM and Cotswold Outdoor who very kindly donated the prizes for the raffle. £50 vouchers, Dragon Cam 2, snaggates, T-shirts etc were amongst the prizes up for grabs.



SUNDAY

On the Sunday most opted to depart after breakfast to begin the journey home. The first aiders were hard at work again on the second day of their course. Lyndsay and I popped over to the Moelwyns for a quick climb before heading home whilst Danny and Paul went to Milestone Butress.

SUMMARY

The AGM was very well attended and long may that continue. I would like to thank all the instructors that attended and put the students' wishes before their own. Thanks to everyone that made the effort to attend, it was truly great to see you all there. Work is already underway to plan the event next year which will coincide with the Army festival of climbing, which will be a week-long event.



N Wales Meet

20-22 May 16

By Ryan Lang

N Wales has been the focus for many recent AMA meets for very good reason. It has everything to offer the mountaineer no matter the level of experience. A total of fifteen people made the journey to Llanberis for the weekend, arriving from all over the UK. We opted to put the meets budget to good use and hired Bens Bunkhouse which is just on the outskirts of Llanberis. It has 18 beds in three rooms, an excellent kitchen and a homely (but smokey) log burner. Most of the recent meets have used private bunkhouses rather than military accommodation as most members are happy to pay a small fee for better facilities and locations. A bunkhouse that provides a view of the iconic Llanberis pass is worth every penny!

Prior to the weekend starting I decided to make use of my Standard Learning Credit (SLC) and hired a British Mountain Guide for a day of personal scrambling tuition. Martin kindly agreed to attend the meet a day early to act as the third person on the rope. We ascended Dolmen Ridge then headed across to descend Y Gribin followed by a descent of Cneifon Arete. I have to say it was one of the best scrambling days I have ever had. We got back to the bunkhouse knackered, but in time for the arrival of the first attendees.

I have figured out over the last year or so that meets have a general theme. People arrive, have a few sociable beers and get to know the other attendees before trying to get a good night's sleep prior to the next day's adventures. It is always during the social that I try to figure out who the snorers are so that I can try in some vain attempt to divert them to a different room to mine. Every year I fail!



Sure enough, I gave up trying to get to sleep at 02:30 and opted to sleep in the campervan instead!

The weather on the Saturday morning was quite wet, so many opted to walk or scramble. Only a few die hard members opted to climb. I went to Idwal Slabs in the Ogwen Valley with Martin and Daz, we decided to climb Ordinary Route in big boots, it definitely wasn't a day for long multi-pitch climbing in climbing shoes. Off we went, accepting our fate but fully prepared dressed head to foot in Gore-Tex. Much to our surprise the weather began to improve and actually produced some dry rock after the half-way point. Who said it always rains in N Wales?

The next day I was teamed up with Holly and Hayley who had just joined the AMA the week prior to the meet. We went to Tremadog as the weather there was the best on offer. Holly and Hayley hadn't multi-pitched before so we decided to climb Boo Boo then Hail Bebe. Both routes allowed learning lots of new skills such as building belays, lead belaying and removing gear.



Over the weekend other groups went to Tremadog and Little Tryfan to name but a few places. Matt Stygall (BMG) worked with some of the novice groups over the weekend to ensure that everybody left with a lot more knowledge compared to when they arrived. Over the last year, there have been guest instructors at some of the meets. Feedback has been positive as external instructors provide different views and ways of doing things.

Overall the weekend was successful. The weather was slightly mixed, but this allowed for a varied weekend which allowed the attendees to climb, scramble and walk as they saw fit. A venue that has multiple options will always be more flexible than a one trick pony that only allows climbing or walking.

10-22 June 16

A mere three weeks later, again we are back in N Wales for another meet based from Bens Bunkhouse. If it's not broken, why fix it? Fifteen people arrived at the bunkhouse eager to get out and bag some much needed Quality Mountain Days. Only four of the fifteen were at the previous meet, so it was great to see new faces once again. The weekend was fortunate enough to coincide with the annual DMM Tradfest which was located about five minutes' walk from the bunkhouse. Many of the attendees paid £25 for Tradfest tickets, for which they received a T-shirt, guidebook, karabiner and other small random items.

Plans were made over a few beers on the Friday evening. I sometimes have the view that when in North Wales, if you plan early, you plan twice. This time however, I was pleasantly surprised; I had planned to go to Tremadog the night before and actually saw it through on the Saturday! I teamed up with David and Hayley, we climbed Hail Bebe followed by Rio. We tried to climb XMAS Curry, but the Tradfest weekend scuppered that idea, all the popular routes were gridlocked!



Lee, Chris and Pete opted for Milestone buttress and had a fantastic day out (apart from the requirement for midge nets now and then). Johnny and Nick opted for a day out in the Carneddau and by all accounts had a great day out. A reminder for Nick, it's 1 minute per contour, not 1 minute per kilometre, Naismith would have been turning in his grave!

Everyone finished the day in high spirits, due to the slightly better weather, most returned later than usual. Cooking was disregarded in favour of the pub. Most headed to the Vaynol Arms to sample the local beer and food.

On the second day I paired up with Chris and Nick(Naismith), we headed for the Ogwen Valley. This time we opted for a scramble and ascended Idwal Buttress. The midges were out in force, but thankfully we moved quickly. This allowed us to gain enough height and with it a welcome breeze that was just enough to do the job! Once at the top, there was just enough time for a spot of lunch prior to a quick descent.

Some of the other groups opted for the old favourite of Little Tryfan. A great crag for teaching, lots of routes at an amenable grade and a short walk in. It's perfect when time is limited and people need to get away early for the journey home.

Another weekend was all over before we knew it. The journey to N Wales is never usually a short one unless you are lucky enough to live close by. No matter what the weather it is always great to know that when you arrive, there is a like-minded bunch of people who have travelled just as far as you to enjoy the mountains. There will be many more meets in N Wales throughout the year, keep a look out on the AMA Website and Facebook for details.



Glencoe Meet

30 June – 3 July 16

by Ryan Lang

I have always wanted to climb and scramble in Glencoe, I had walked there years ago before I got into climbing and I had always wanted to go back ever since then. Back then, I was sat on the summit of Stob Dearg on the Buachaille Etive Mor eating my lunch. I could hear the noise of metal clanging against metal, I had no idea what it was as I tried to identify the source of the noise. Before long, three people roped up appeared over the crest towards me and the summit. I was in awe of what they had done to get to the summit compared to my following of a simple albeit steep path. I promised myself there and then that I would be back.

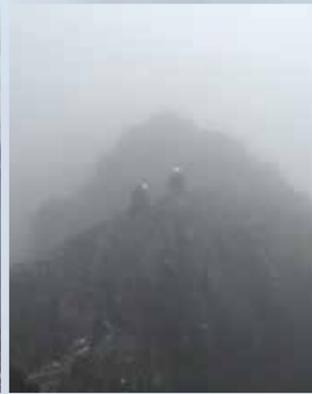
Fast forward nearly 10 years and the plan became a reality. In total we had seven people attend the Glencoe meet which ran for three days. Whilst the turnout was disappointing compared to other meets, the commitment shown by those attending set a new level! People came from far and wide, Phil had driven all the way from Woolwich!

We stayed in the Independent Glencoe Hostel and hired the entire bunkhouse for our sole use, I have to say it was the best bunkhouse I have stayed at in the UK, they even supplied duvets! Most arrived on the Thursday evening, after unpacking, we then walked up to the Clachaig Inn, which in my opinion is one of the best pubs in the world. We had dinner, beers and the odd whisky whilst making plans for the next day. The weather was not on our side, so we planned to scramble up Stob Dearg via Curved Ridge (Grade 3). Finally my plan was coming to fruition.



The next morning, we woke up in the plush bunkhouse, packed what we required and set off. We operated as two teams, Si and Sean were in one, Allen, James and I in the other. The weather was not the best, we hadn't been going for long before we decided to don full waterproofs. I was also grateful that I had researched the route beforehand as I had been advised that route can be difficult to find at times. The research had paid off as before long many of the images I had studied on the internet were now flooding back.

The route was fantastic from start to finish, the only downside was that the view across the Rannoch moor was hidden by the low lying cloud. Every now and then the cloud would briefly clear to tease



us with a fleeting glimpse of the view that we knew was there but couldn't see.

Before long we were topping out on the summit, the feeling of achievement was fantastic! It may not may Everest, but the plan to return which was hatched 10 years ago had now been completed, I was full of smiles that day! After a few obligatory summit pics, we jumped into the group shelter for lunch and a brew. We then descended via the normal path back to the start. Both teams once safely back down, headed into Fort William for some little required gear shopping.

Another night in the Clachaig ensued, more hearty meals and multiple ales were consumed before moving onto the fine selection of Whisky. The live band kept us amused for a while before the days activities eventually

took their toll on us all. Two more arrivals joined the group which increased our number to seven.

The Saturday morning weather was much the same as the day before, wet with poor visibility but spirits remained high. We decided to traverse along the Aonach Eagach ridge in three teams. The ascent up to the summit of Am Bodach (943m) to get to the start of the ridge had us all blowing! Layers were stripped off on a regular basis all the way to the top. Once at the start of the ridge, we roped up and got down to business. The view was non-existent as were right in the middle of the clouds which provided an eerie backdrop for the day.

The day was longer than we expected, we were all very tired by the time we returned to the bunkhouse. A shower and brew soon had us all refreshed which meant another trip to...you've guessed it, the Clachaig.

The Sunday saw most of us head off home as we had a long way to travel. Sean and Phil decided to go and bag a multi-pitch route in Glen Nevis. Overall the meet was great fun, the weather wasn't great, but it's the mountains so we just have to get on with it. The meet wasn't as busy as I would have liked, but those that attended certainly benefited from the experience.



DMM Switch

Reviewed by Paul Smith

The Switch is DMM's leashless all-rounder, it shares many features with its sister ice axe, the Apex (reviewed in Spring 2016? Issue of the AMA journal), including the same pronounced curve of its shaft, but the main obvious difference is the addition of an ergonomic handle, at the minimal cost of less than 100 grams of additional weight.

DMM have created an ergonomic handle that allows your wrists to be in a more relaxed position when climbing, and certainly on steep ice it felt that I wasn't having to use a 'death-grip' just to be able to get good purchase on the axe. With a full strength upper and lower rests as part of the handle, it allowed for straight forward hand swapping, something that was particularly handy on mixed climbs. These rests also provided protection to your hands when climbing less steep angled



ground. The downside of this handle is its size, it doesn't suit everyone's hand size or choice of gloves – for me personally it worked really well with thin to medium thickness gloves, while on particularly chilly days with extra thick gloves on, or while seconding a pitch after a prolonged belaying stint, I found myself struggling to hold the handle with the same amount of ease.

At the base of the handle is a rounded but still serrated 'spike' this does give a some amount of purchase on snow when the axes are used 'piolet canne', but it can and does bounce off hard ice, but have you really brought a Switch to use as a walking axe? This spike also allows you to clip a karabiner in to attach umbilical style tethers (for this test I used DMM's Freedom Leash) and there is also a small hole to attach cord if you wish to attach the tethers via this instead. I preferred this second option as you don't get any metal on metal rattling and it also limits the unwanted twisting and accidental unclipping.

On steep / vertical ice the Switch performed well and was certainly not the limiting factor in my climbing performance. But on less steep ground there were a number of little issues that kept coming up. The first was that the head of the axe was far too easy to bury, thanks to a combination of the pick angle and the curve of the shaft, sometimes this was a great relief, but mainly it caused the anxiety levels to rise as it proved difficult for to get the Switch to release its bite!

The second issue, was again on lower angled ground, the Switch, like many other curved handled ice tools, had a tendency to position your hands in such a way that you weren't put down on the placement, but pulling slightly up and out. I learnt to counter this but using the higher hand position more frequently to reduce this leverage effect.



You can climb mid-grade ice with the Switch without any great drama but you may need adjust your swing and where you aim due to the very curved shafts, particularly if coming from mid-curved tools like the Fly. If you think it is unlikely that you will be climbing harder than winter grade V or WI4, then a more general technical tool like the Apex could be a better choice, particularly if you are mountaineering with them and want a 'proper' spike at the bottom. But if your winter climbing mainly consists of plumb vertical ice, freaky wind-formed cauliflowers, over-hanging hoared-up rock then the DMM Switches should be the perfect choice.



FEATURES

- Glove friendly, hot forged ergonomic handle with full strength upper and lower rests and supreme stability
- T Rated Integrity Construction
- Full strength clip-in point accessible from either rest
- High clearance shaft

- Inboard eyelet allows threading of cord for use with freedom leashes
- Pick weights for bullet hard ice and customised balance
- Supplied with grip tape for handle/shaft customisation
- Supplied with T Rated Ice picks as standard

- Mixed and Ice specific picks available separately. Compact Hammer, Compact Adze, Mountain Adze (Large)

Tides. Wuthering and erosion.

by Nick Bullock. Slave to the Rhythm?
Chamonix. France. Winter 2006/07

The M6 leads to the M1, a blurred passing of white lines and lights. Full to overflowing, cumulous hang in the night sky and behind the clouds I know are stars. The stars are there, I know they are there, burning brightly over a million miles away – another life away. Cones, balustrades, chevrons. Cars, fields, rivers, electricity pylons. One day Kathmandu, the next Ynes Ettws in the Llanberis Pass and the day after, the road south. I call into my sister's house to collect ski and mountaineering gear before setting off again and visiting mum and dad. My parents are moored for the winter at a modern mariner near the centre of the large town, Hemel Hempstead.

The mariner is clean and functional and convenient. There are shops close by and life for them, on the narrow boat, a new boat to mum and dad, but a second hand, more traditional and longer boat than their previous boat, Emma, appears ok. Mum is thin and grey but radiant in a tiered happy way and pleased to have the convenience of shops close at hand. Dad smokes and drinks tea and reads novels. Mum hands me a bag of Christmas and birthday gifts including a Christmas cake bought in Marks and Spencers for me to take to Chamonix.

A swan glides toward the boat and taps the hull for attention. Mum opens a small side door, twisting a brass knob with thin, arthritic fingers and with those same fingers breaks bread before dropping it onto the surface of the brown water. Hearing the door, the swan glides across the water and gobbles the bread. "There you go; I'll give you some more later."

They will be moored at the mariner for winter. I can tell, being stationary for a while, is welcome. But, no-doubt, once again in March, they will be ready again to begin exploration of the canal system. It's strange seeing my parents, people who were fixed for so long, appear to be so free and transient. I wonder why they waited so long, why did it take a doctor's death sentence for dad to wake them?

This will be my third full winter season in the Alps. I'm sharing an apartment in the Middle of Chamonix with my friend Kenton Cool. Kenton asked me if Andy Houseman, the young Brit I had last met in Peru, could also live in the house. I told Kenton I wasn't sure, the jury was still out on Andy, but the prospect of the rent going down



by a third, and the fact I had a room so I could get away and hide, swayed the decision, "OK Kenton, whatever."

Surrounded by new red brick, white concrete, glass and bright lights, I park close to mum and dad's boat and sleep in my van. Climbing gear is stacked all around and beneath. I lay in the dark and imagine the stars and their energy and power. In the morning, after saying goodbye to mum and dad, I began to drive south once more, this time heading to Dover and the sea and the ferry.

By early evening I reached the outskirts of Chamonix. Exiting the Les Houches tunnel, up above, in the moonlight, the slender spire of the Aiguille du midi is visible. Lights shine through windows that are cut into the slender rock spire and the light pierces the dark. The weather was settled and by phone, as I drive, I arranged to climb tomorrow with Jon Bracey.

"Don't be a slacker Bullock" Bracey had shamed me into action.

The day before, my first full day in Chamonix, Bracey and I had climbed the four-hundred-and-fifty-metre mixed climb on the East Face of Mont Blanc du Tacul called Scotch on the Rocks. Scotch was first climbed by Stevie Haston and Laurence Gouault, the name supposedly came about because Haston said climbing in Scotland was in decline and literally, on the rocks. I didn't know Haston, I had never met him, but the folk tales in Llanberis abounded, he appeared to be a forceful character with strong opinions, some of which I liked, some of which I wasn't so sure. Climbing appeared to be becoming more mainstream, more conforming and I thought it was ok to have someone unafraid to vent, someone who stirred it up and the stories about the aggression and the fights were surely exaggerated?

To climb Scotch on the Rocks, Bracey and I skied from the first Midi Téléphérique but we had bailed from above the crux pitch with two pitches remaining. Bracey said it would cause bother at home if he missed the last lift to the valley. I hated not finishing climbs, convenience and comfort always seemed a poor excuse



to bail. It made me wonder how a person went from being so free to becoming concerned about getting home on time? Though, maybe this was my problem, maybe this was why I was single once again?

After climbing Scotch, un-acclimatised, I skinned back to the Midi on my own. Bracey, acclimatised, fit and in fear of the fall-out should he not make it home, shot ahead. I skinned and accepted that I was in for a cold bivi in the back corridor of the Midi Station. Strapped to the side of my rucksack, top heavy skis weighed and bent me. Leaning against poles, I plodded the middle section of the steep Midi Arête gasping for breath. I stopped and looked up when a member of staff stood on the bridge crossing from the summit of the Midi to the subsidiary summit and shouted before beckoning. I was in, the staff were waiting for me, but I had to keep going. Reaching the tunnel, my lungs felt like they were about to explode but I caught the bin and made it down to the valley.

Later that evening Bracey called,

“Don’t be a slacker Bullock” He had said when I suggested a rest and going up again the day after tomorrow.

And here we were, once again stamping into ski bindings on the wind scoured col beneath the Midi Arête. The Grande Jorasses, The Dru, The Verte, snow dusted monoliths, so recognisable to me now, so solid and ancient, but young in comparison to the stars in the night sky and so attainable.

Bracey and I were hoping to attempt a new line we had spotted the day before on Point Lachenal, a small subsidiary rock face near the Tacul’s East Face and after stashing the skis, I follow Bracey’s steps until we stand beneath the intended line – a clean welt cutting through pink granite. A slither of ice, thinning to a dribble at the back of the welt, reminds me of the well documented pitch of the Twilight and Parkin route, Beyond Good and Evil and above is a slab, and the slab is topped by a turret of large and overhanging blocks which leads to the final spire and summit of Pointe Lachenal. At two hundred and sixty metres, the climb was short, but it was December the nineteenth and the daylight is even shorter.

Several hours later, engulfed by dark, torqueing, laybacking, swearing, I almost fall when I’m hit by a cascade of spindrift lifted from the snowfields on the slopes of the Tacul above. I shimmy an offwidth and at the top, stop, clear myself of snow and recompose. I can’t see a bloody thing, my head-torch is at the bottom of our one, almost empty, rucksack, which Bracey is carrying. Bracey joins me and sets off, shivering his way into the night until at last, pulls the top of Pointe Lachenal. I hear a shout of success, and our new route, which we later call Tentation, is climbed.

Climbing slows for Christmas – but in the space between Christmas and New Year, on the Petit Jorasses, Omega has a line of devotees as long as the streaks of ice that shine from its blank walls. On the count-down to celebrations, the crowds leave and Tim Neill

and I are left alone to clean up in a bitter cold auditorium. And on New Year’s Eve, a moonlit ski descent from L’Oile au Beurre Noir on the Petites Jorasses – a wave of water-ice leading to a steep silver pencil compressed by overhanging granite – leads us through heavy, thigh-deep crud in the shadow of the Grandes Jorasses North Face. Searing thighs. Lungs on fire. Two friends in the shadow taking as much as we can from the time we are given, shining bright, burning bright, awake, alive, free, but not for long.

Wind and snow batter the Leschaux’s aluminium skin. Fully clothed, I wrap thick woollen blankets around myself and dream with open eyes. A shaky forecast and New Year celebrations had no-doubt kept other climbers away and as 2006 slipped into 2007, I thought it fitting that my most prolific and successful year of climbing had finished with such an interesting and unusual route alongside a great friend.

The rock and ice up-high had been generous in 2006, and the crumbling, vegetated cliffs at the edge of the Irish Sea, forgiving. Experiences were packed away, stored like yellowing newspapers – people, places, climbs, countries – they would steal into and out of a mind that infrequently slows. Pulling the blankets around me, flushed with success, warm for a while, the thought of what I had lost in 2006 tempers my contentment. Maybe there are a finite amount of relationships out there that work, that really work, and the rest of us just take whatever comes to ease the passage?

New Year’s Day and the return to the valley is a wet one. Driving sleet and rain thrash the glacier. Tumultuous rivers cut gorges through the ice. The wind is almost gale-force. The hail and rain carried by the wind strafe. Climbing the ladders that lead to The Monteners Train Station, my fingers feel almost frost bitten they are so cold gripping the metal. But after an hour, Tim and I sit side by side, steaming and warm inside the train carriage. Celebrations tonight will have been earned and the stars in the night sky will appear to shine brighter.

Nervous, competitive glances in the hewn cavernous gloom. Numb fingers fumble crampons. Skis strapped to the side of the sack catch on the blue sculptured ice of the tunnel ceiling. Stepping from the tunnel, brightness blinds, but the open mountain vista always thrills. Clouds scud. Glaciers rippled and rough wrap around the base of the mountains and squeeze. Once again in this settled winter, a winter more suiting to climbers than skiers, Jonny Baird and I set off in aim of Pinocchio, another Haston route. And once again, many hours later, after climbing the route and in the dark, Jonny and I bow our heads; the torch beam picks old ski tracks etched by the wind – a hashtag of history. Ice mounds erupt out of the night, now shockingly familiar. Skinning. The winter wind burns our faces. Skinning. Spindrift scrubs like pumice. Skinning. Names of the routes successfully climbed keep time with the edge of the skis cutting the crust: Pinocchio, Scotch on the Rocks, Tentation, M6 Solar, Vol de Nuit, L’Oile au Beurre Noir, Slave to the Rhythm ...

...Slave to the Rhythm.

With head bowed, I take my mind from the effort of skinning and recall the day and the night Kenton Cool and I climbed Slave to the Rhythm...

Leaning from axes, with picks deep into a crack and twisted, crampons smear against smooth rock. Kenton is belayed in the gully directly below. The wind screams, lifting the snow from the Valley Blanche and slinging it across the East Face of the Tacul. Kenton screams, but not as loud as the wind. Spindrift and dirt mingle with sweat and fear. I look at the lump of rock sat firmly in my lap. It was as big as a football, though not as round or as light. I look at my cramponed feet skittering against smooth granite and I look at the surrounding rock and the walls and the snow. I wonder my future. Red to pewter to black. The day is once again night. I can feel the pull of the moon and the force of the stars. I sway and swither in the wuthering wind.

“WATCH OUT... WATCH OUT, WATCH OUT...”

Feet skitter. The rock’s weight pushes and gravity pulls. The dark and the wind scream, ‘So you think you’re good, big, a force...’ My stomach sags... I tilt my groin to the side. And the rock rolls.

A black comet lost to the dark. Screaming, clinging, waiting... waiting...waiting, waiting for the pull of the rope as Kenton is hit and killed, but thank God, the pull and scream doesn’t come. My calves ignite. My thighs shake. I return to smashing into the loose, smashing and scratting for something solid. And at last, with the smell of desperation, I hook a rock that doesn’t move and crawl above the lip of the corner.

Kenton and I escape Slave to the Rhythm, but unbeknown to both of us the crux of the day is still to come.

Two hours of skinning, Kenton and I cower beneath the Midi Arête, a shaft of diffused light bursts from the téléphérique tunnel and loses its battle to penetrate the clouds of wind-blown-snow. Kenton leans close and shouts in my ear, “We need to rope up.”

The wind howls and in the small cone of snow-filled-light from our headtorches, we struggle to tie frozen rope to our frozen bodies. Once the rope is tied, Kenton crawls into the dark. The wind drags a wave of white over the snow crest. We smash picks into the snow path that had been compacted by a thousand feet. Large lumps of ice fly into the air and reflect in the weak light escaping the tunnel entrance.

When the rope comes tight, I begin to crawl, but the rope had not really run out, we were probably only forty metres apart, but all sixty-metres billow in an air-born-arc over the north face. Chamonix street lights, light-years away, flicker and disappear and flicker. The rope pulls. I crawl. Picks and knuckles smash into compacted ice... knees grow sore. Eyes close. Thunk. Eyes open. Thunk. Eyes close. Two more placements. Two feet crawled. The rope pulls, the wind tugs.

“You have to admire how they have made a living.”



This is what people say when talking to me about people in the business of climbing, people like Kenton who has employed a PR company to raise his profile and make a healthy profit and live comfortably and I agree, a part of me does admire this form of drive, but it is not for me. Truth be told, I find the thought of dealing with people from PR companies, people who spray their marketing hyperbole and inflated adjectives and only see cash profit as success rather sickening. After this winter and three future winters living with Kenton in the French Alps, I watch my friend become fully immersed into the professional, high profile, promotional speaker circuit. And I watch as he appears to be climbing only for a profit, a profile, the next talk, the next pay cheque, the next performance and a part of me wonders, if he will regret this path? I read the social media and the advertising from Kenton and many others and it all feels false, lacking integrity, it appears to play on people’s ignorance. I wonder about my friend Kenton who once had a light and a passion and a need to climb so strong he crawled into the Northern Corries with broken heels. But maybe I’m projecting, maybe my cynical outlook is still with me, maybe our paths once following a similar course, with similar ambition and dreams, have moved in opposite directions and maybe, if this is really what he wants from life, I should be happy for him?

At ten p.m. fourteen-hours since we left the first bin of the morning, we enter the glowing tunnel leading into the warm-womb of the Midi and our climb, Slave to the Rhythm is complete.

Later in January, in the dark, beneath the stars, Houseman and I leave the Forche bivouac hut bowed like two aged men wrapped in layers, wearing balaclavas. We head to the base of Mont Maudite fighting snow flutings. And in the deep snow, ghostly, nine-year-old steps take form...

... Nine winters since the wind blew spindrift and the clouds swirled and Cartwright, with long legs stretched out in front of him, sat on the summit of Maudite wearing a goofy grin and giving a double thumbs-up. We had both sat on that summit burning with life, glittering with emotion, there was no ulterior motive behind our climbing, it was climbing for climbing and the experience of being together in a wild and empty place. But five years down the line, I stood at his wake, tear stung and angry. Cartwrights love and passion for climbing was a force to reckon, but near the end, even Jules was a little affected, I suspect he felt the pressure of securing a future. Are any of us free?

Houseman kicks a weaving trail for us to follow. Overcouloir, into Country couloir, a slender icefall flickering at a height of four thousand metres and almost hidden in a deep gully. Later that day, we are joined together by the rope, moving together, living together, trusting together. Down climbing the Tacul in flat light, I reverse an ice-overhang and the edge collapses. Screaming, tumbling, crashing – waves hit Craig Gogarth’s green cliffs. Cackling Guillemot’s bobbing in a line on white shit covered ledges, the old whiskered seal with big eyes... screaming, sliding – the swing of an axe, a tight rope and a firm stance from The Youth braced above, stop my fall. I drop my forehead into the snow and see a single cormorant standing with wings wide.



As the winter continued my attitude toward Houseman is changing. Maybe his attitude to me is changing also, maybe living with Kenton and I, two older people, is having some effect. Maybe for me the prison effect was beginning to dim and my attitude was also changing – smoothing like one of the pebbles in Mousetrap Zawn at Gogarth?

When there was just the three of us in the apartment, Kenton or I generally cooked and Andy washed-up. Andy's cooking skills were not as honed as his climbing skills and when he offered to make a meal, he usually went out, spent a fortune on ingredients, invited everyone over and then asked me to cook. I suspect his Mum catered for him most of the time he was living in Yorkshire!

One night Kenton and I were cooking. Kenton loved hot food and was making something with fresh chillies. Andy offered to preparer the vegetables and after slicing chillies, rubbed his eyes. Immediately the stinging fire burnt into his eyes. He ran to the bathroom and leant over the bath pointing the showerhead into his face before turning the cold water to full. His legs cycled the floor. Kenton and I still in the kitchen cried also.

The sun sets as Houseman and I burrow into the side of the Nant Blanc Face of the Aiguille Verte. Headlight beams illuminate the road between Chamonix and Argentière and I can see that road, its signs, the tennis courts, the river, the bars, the ski shops... familiar. The blood pumps inside my arteries. My head is bursting. Across the valley the piste-bashers are flashing yellow, smoothing snow for skiers who appear to find peace without discomfort. I can't. Not yet, not yet.

Streaks of glistening ice fill the folds of rock. The snow slope falls beneath our feet. Twilight and Backes, Parkin, Gabarrou and Silvy. I climbed here with Cartwright on a five-day hit from Britain. Five new pitches joining the ridge of the Brown-Patey, but still only halfway up the face, our crampons blunt from two days mixed climbing and kicking and kicking and kicking... Kicking, Cartwright and I exited the iron-hard runnel of the Marsigny-Moore. "I hate fucking ice-climbing" Cartwright screamed and on the abseil descent I remember him leaving cams as back-up, and this is when he said it, this was when he said the words that haunt, "When you do as much as this shit as I do Nick, it's a matter of percentages, you need to cut down the chance of being killed."

The start of There Goes the Neighbourhood, leading to the median slope had been in, but the top was dry, so The Youth and I traverse the whole of the Nant Blanc Face with memories as fresh as the ice of the British Route we now climb. The summit of the Verte rises above us like a massive toadstool.

A second night sleeping on snow. Street lights in Argentière quiver as I lie shivering. The helicopter beam swept the north face of the Dru searching for the Slovenian with a fractured skull.

Houseman and I return to town the same day as Prezelj, Anderson and House return from the Walker Spur on the Grandes Jorasses.



And that night, we party so much that Vince misses his morning flight.

The Difficult Crack, The Hinterstoisser Traverse, The Ice Hose, Death Bivouac, Traverse of the Gods and The White Spider – scraping stacked blocks on the final slopes of the Eiger North Face with The Youth belaying from below, I lose myself in the swirling facets and intricacies of the past months. I was changing. I had changed. All of the approaches in the early hours, sleeping in damp clothes, hunger, humility, success, togetherness, these things were honest, they had integrity, they formed me.

And standing on this summit now, this summit with so much history, I know the descent will be from numb-fingers and feet, from the hot-aches and the fear and it will lead me back to warm rock, swaying grass, bleating sheep, birdsong and appreciation. It will hopefully soften the blow of growing old, it will round the sharp and ease passage. My third winter in the Alps was at an end, it was time to return to Llanberis.



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