

CARVE YOUR OWN LEGEND

New Winter 2015 range available from mid-October.
Special AMA rates apply

**JÖTTNAR**
CONQUER GIANTS

www.jottnar.com

ARMY MOUNTAINEER



Autumn 2015

The Alps | **Bolivia** | Croatia | **Alaska** | and much more...

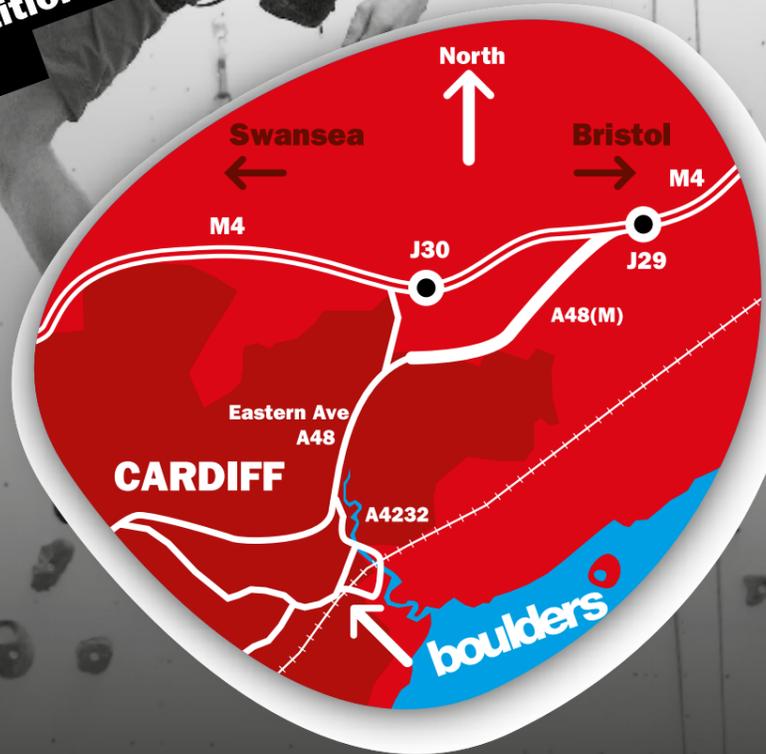


The Journal of the Army Mountaineering Association

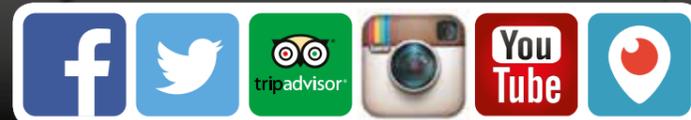
boulders

BECAUSE IT'S RAINING AGAIN

- ★ Over 120 lines of climbing, up to 12m high
- ★ On-site café and equipment store
- ★ Changing rooms and shower facilities
- ★ Free parking and free wifi
- ★ Regular bouldering competitions and events
- ★ New routes every month
- ★ All day entrance price



FIND US ON: WWW.BOULDERSUK.COM



Ridiculously MASSIVE bouldering!

For more info on events, lectures & comps check out our website

For further information please call us on 029 2048 4880 or email info@bouldersuk.com

ARMY MOUNTAINEER

The Journal of The Army Mountaineering Association



Top 5 Smartphone Apps



There are some that will say "Leave your phone at home", there are others that will utilise their smartphone as much as possible. If you are the latter, try looking at the following apps which are all available for free in the App Store.



Rockfax – This new app from Rockfax allows you to view Crag Topo info direct on your phone. It stores everything offline so doesn't require a signal to operate. The App is free but crag info can be purchased as required.



BMC – This app allows you to search for nearby crags on your smartphone. It provides a wealth of crag information including rock type, number of routes and most importantly crag restrictions!



OS Maps – If you purchase an OS paper map, you now also get the free digital download for the map which can be viewed using this App. You can also download map data using your data plan.



OS Locate – Provides you location in either British National Grid or Lat/Long. Altitude is also provided in Metres or Feet. There is also a virtual compass which can be used in Mils or Degrees.



UKC – This App allows you to locate Climbing Walls, Outdoor Shops, Instructors, Climbing Clubs and Accommodation nearby or based on your own search criteria.

Reflections on the AMA. from the PYG	6
Exercise Alpine Arc 2015	8
Stove Review	12
Ex Altiplano Tiger – Bolivia	14
Membership benefits update	16
Army Festival of Climbing 2015	17
The European Military Climbing Championships 2015	18
Cold Comfort keeping your extremities warm this winter	20
Crag Of The Month – Dinas Rock	24
Belay device trial	26
PHOTO COMPETITION	30
Croatia	34
Timing is everything: Hard and fast on the Cassin.	36
Ex Bugaboo Tiger Of Mice, Men and Mountains	40
Climbing meets	44
Exercise DRAGON MONGOLIAN ODYSSEY	46
Over the Top	48
Ex Northern Red Rocks AMA	52
Exercise NORTHERN ATLAS 2015 – Expedition Journal	53
Training for Rock Climbing	54

Cover photo credit: Rich Simpson –Tour to Breite Krone

© Copyright: Any opinions expressed in the articles in this magazine are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the policy and views, official or otherwise of the MOD, Army or Association. No part of this publication may be reproduced without the permission of the editor or publisher. No responsibility for the quality of goods or services advertised in this magazine can be accepted by the editor, publishers, Association, Army, MOD or printers and all advertisements are included in good faith.

The Army Mountaineer is published for The Army Mountaineering Association by:
Crest Publications, 1 Rothwell Grange Court, (Junction 6 A14), Rothwell Road, Kettering, Northants, NN16 8FB
Tel: 01536 317000 Email: jayne@crestpublications.com
www.crestpublications.com



Please help us to maintain the environment in which we live, work and play, by recycling this magazine wherever possible.

Why not visit our web site at:
www.armymountaineer.org.uk

CLIMBING

Committee Members



President

Maj Gen Ivan Hooper
late R SIGNALS



Chairman

Col Paul Edwards late RLC MBE
paul.edwards334@mod.uk
Mil: 94222 7808
Civ: 01252 787808



Vice Chairman (Mountaineering)

Maj John Howell-Walmsley
R SIGNALS MBE
john_howell_walmsley@me.com
Mil: 94777 2250
Civ: 01904 662250



Vice Chairman (Sport)

Lt Col Pete Skinsley RLC
chairsport@armymountaineer.org.uk
Mil: 93755 7801
Civ: 07742 194128

(Hon) President

Lt Col (Retd) RA Streater OBE

(Hon) Vice President

Lt Col (Retd) AJ Muston MBE
Sir C Bonington CBE
Col (Retd) M Bridges OBE
Lt Col MH Bazire MBE
Brig (Retd) J Watson
Lt Col CMM Davies MBE



General Secretary

Lt Col Liz Dallyn R SIGNALS MBE
lizdallyn@yahoo.com
Mil: 93605 5627
Civ: 01923 955627



Expeditions Grant Secretary

Maj Chris Wright R IRISH
cwright_2@hotmail.co.uk
Civ: 07711 053774



Meets Co-ordinator

W02 David Cross REME
david.cross773@mod.uk
Mil: 96798 2646
Civ: 030679 82646



Journal Editor

Capt Ryan Lang R SIGNALS
ryan.lang111@mod.uk
Mil: 95481 7356
Civ: 01249 897356

Sports Climbing Secretary

Capt Paddy Snow RE
paddysnow@gmail.com • Mil: 95371 7194 • Civ: 0777 033 5852

Treasurer

Maj Tarquin Shipley R SIGNALS
jsmtc-hq-2ic@mod.uk • Mil: 95581 7902 • Civ: 01248 718302

Membership Benefits Manager

Maj Tomo Thompson R SIGNALS
Ian.Thompson959@mod.uk • Mil: 95712 7348 • Civ: 01526 327348

Cadet Forces Representative

Maj (Retd) Kevin Edwards APTC
kevin.edwards@ccat-hq.com • 01690 720308 • 079205 45608

Membership Secretary

Miss Emma Pritchard
secretary@armymountaineer.org.uk • Mil: 95581 7964 • Civ: 01248 718364

Webmaster

Capt Daz Edkins R SIGNALS
darren.edkins572@mod.uk • Mil: 95551 7132
• Civ: 07747 031826

Appointments



Foreword

Foreword by Chairman

Why do we Climb? Some thoughts from the Chairman, Col Paul J Edwards MBE, FRGS

Why do we climb? Sitting at home this evening I wondered what to write as a foreword to this Journal and I asked myself why? Over the years I have taken part in almost every aspect of the sport, from bouldering and indoor sport climbing, to trad climbing, big walls, alpinism, ski mountaineering and expeditions to the greater ranges and Antarctica. It is a sport that I love and one which gives me an intense feeling of both exhilaration and also of contentment; it brings me to a sense of inner wellbeing.

Given all of this the answer to the question why? should be obvious, but I also find myself looking at the risk. Big alpine faces and the greater ranges clearly bring risks that are apparent to all, but, of course there remains risk in almost all aspects of our sport. I noted this evening that over my almost 40 year climbing career, 6 of the people that I had climbed with had been killed in mountaineering accidents, and two more had suffered 'life changing' injuries. As a husband and father of two, my desire to push myself has diminished, as has my youthful aura of invincibility, but still I climb,

perhaps not as hard as in my 20's and 30's, but still into the Alps, and on trad routes in the Peak, North Wales and the Lakes.

So why? What is it that we gain from climbing? The fear of dying undoubtedly brings exhilaration, but, certainly for me, it is not the exhilaration that keeps me coming back. I'm too old to be an adrenaline junkie, and I have nothing left to prove to anyone, not even myself. So Why? Well perhaps it is all about that inner sense of wellbeing, that closeness to nature. When I come down from a good route, whether it is abseiling down a crag, or the long walk off a Welsh peak, I get a great sense of a job well done, perhaps like a craftsman who places their finished article down and admires their handiwork. Even more, I get of sense of being alive, and perhaps that it is it, perhaps we climb as it reaffirms our life, our place in the world, our very essence.

Whatever your motivation for climbing, I hope it gives you the years of satisfaction and contentment that it has brought me. I look forward to bumping into you on the hill one day. We can discuss why? on the walk down!

AMA Journal Editor Update

A big thank you to all that have contributed to another AMA Journal! I would also like to thank everyone that took the time to complete the online survey regarding the Journal content. There was some very

useful feedback which has been extremely valuable.

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

Well done to those that have won a prize in either the photo competition or article competition. And a big thank you to Crest publications who not only produce the Journal but also judge the winners for each competition.

Message from the Webmaster

The website continues to evolve with input from our members across the association. I am continually on the look out for more ideas how you would like the website to look and work. If you do notice any errors or can see any problems with the site please contact me direct as per below.

REMEMBER WE NEED YOUR PICTURES

Any pictures from out and about or any Expeditions AMA members have been on please send them to the Webmaster.
darren.edkins572@mod.uk
army.mountaineer.webmaster@gmail.com

I look forward to hearing from you.
Capt Darren Edkins
AMA Webmaster

Message from the Membership Secretary

I have been the Membership Secretary for the Army Mountaineering Association since the end of March of this year in replacement for Mrs Sam Fletcher; I thoroughly enjoy the role and I am very lucky as I live in a small village 10 minutes away and am able to bring my dog to work every day.

Currently we have over 2,400 members. It is very important that you let me know of any changes to your details, address, bank details etc; please either fill in another application form (this can be found on our website) or just drop me an e-mail.

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 I will be available at these times unless I have taken my loyal pooch Angus for a walk.

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.

COTSWOLD
outdoor

UNBEATABLE KIT
THAT'S UP FOR EVERY CHALLENGE

20% DISCOUNT*
FOR MEMBERS OF THE ARMY
MOUNTAINEERING ASSOCIATION

STORES NATIONWIDE
COTSWOLDOUTDOOR.COM

*Not to be used in conjunction with any other offer or discount. Only valid on production of Army Mountaineering Association identification in store or use of discount code online. Offer expires 31.12.16.



DIARY

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

PROPOSED AMA MEETS PROGRAMME 2016

Date	Event	Location	POC	Remarks
9 Dec 15	Tri-Services Bouldering League Round 3	The Project Climbing Centre, Poole	Maj Tom Odling	Details in DIN
13 Jan 16	Tri-Services Bouldering League Round 4	The Climbing Depot, Nottingham	Maj Tom Odling	Details in DIN
11 Feb 16	Tri-Services Bouldering League Round 5	The Outdoor Show, Excel, London	Maj Tom Odling	Details in DIN
27 Feb 16	Army Bouldering Championships and Tri-Services Bouldering League Round 6	The Indy Wall, JSMTCL, Anglessey	Maj Tom Odling	Details in DIN
20 – 26 Feb 16	Winter Meet	Rothiemurcus Lodge, Scotland	Capt Sean Mackey	Meet details on the website
TBC Mar/ Apr 16	Support Command UK Midlands Climbing Championships 2016	TBC	TBC	Enter on the day – guests welcome
TBC Mar/ Apr 16	Support Command UK North Climbing Championships 2016	TBC	SSgt Frazer Mathias	Enter on the day – guests welcome
TBC Apr 16	Support Command UK South Climbing Championships 2016	TBC	Sgt Andy Stewart	Enter on the day – guests welcome
18-19 May 16	Army Climbing Championships 2016	Boulders, Cardiff	Capt Stacy Oliver	Open to guests DIN to be released
Aug 16	Aug Meet	Lake District	TBC	
TBC Jul 16	Army Team training weekend	Portland	SSgt Simon Goyder	Will double as an AMA Meet for all.
22-25 Sep 16	AGM and skills meet	North Wales	WO2 Dave Cross	

Meets round-up

We have had some more great meets since the last edition of the Journal including the Army Festival of Climbing which got lots of us and also non-members out on the crags in North Wales. A big thanks to all the instructors for helping us out through the week.

As you can see in the diary of events there is plenty of opportunity to get out with other association members on meets and competitions. If anyone has any ideas of where they would like to see a meet then please get in touch.

Thanks to everyone who responded to the AGM survey. We will be using the results to shape the next AGM and as such have decided to hold it from a Thursday to a Sunday with the option of joining or departing mid meet. We are also planning some skills sessions for all of the mountaineering disciplines including sports climbing coaching. More detail to follow via our various media outlets.

Meet leaders required

Like I always say the meets don't just happen and I'm always looking for meet leaders. I would like to have a meet every month so need people to step up and run them. If you would like to run one please get in touch with me via my email next to my face in the appointments page near the front of this journal or a message on the Facebook page. You don't have to have any qualifications as you could run with all of the admin side of the meet and I'll get someone qualified to run the risk side.

Running a meet isn't as hard as you might think and there is a piece on the website about how to run one. Also you will be helped the whole way through and as a thank you there is a £50 voucher for DMM or Cotswold Outdoor once you have given an article of the weekend to the journal editor.

Lastly

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

ROCK + WATER adventures

Climbing Coaching
Mountain Training Coaching and Instructor courses.
Repswork for Mountain Users.

Paul Smith
paul@rockandwateradventures.co.uk
07968075793

Reflections on the AMA. from the PYG

"Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place."

LEWIS CARROLL.
THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS



Sat in the Pen-Y-Gwryd Hotel looking down Nantgwynant and with Moel Siabod struggling to reveal itself through the clearing rain (it does sometimes rain in North Wales doesn't it), I wonder how much time I've spent over the years since I first came to the PYG, looking at this same view. And it is the same view. That's surely one of the nice things about mountains. In a world where change is all about us, mountains are relatively constant. That's handy because – stand fast the notoriously fickle and elusive, 'great winter conditions' – if you don't get up a route first time, you know it will always be there next year, or next time. I suppose it's also why when we do see change in the mountains, it can be so unexpected and unsettling; whether it's a manmade contraption (harrumph) or the recession of the Mer de Glace, Bossons or Argentiere glaciers.

But look around inside the PYG and there is ample evidence climbing itself has changed: the nailed boots hanging from the ceiling and the memorabilia from Hunt's 1953 Everest Expedition, stand in stark contrast to the pile of breathable waterproofs and GoreTex-lined boots piled below. Certainly in the 35 or so years I've been climbing, a lot has changed. Equipment of course has moved on – and no, I did not start in nailed boots – but the sheer numbers participating, the rise of lightweight over siege expeditions, the rocketing of technical standards, and the appearance of new facets of climbing – sport climbing and bouldering as activities in their own right and dry tooling (who knew?), to name just a few.

Now, in parallel, a lot too has changed since I started soldiering. The Army I joined 30 years ago was focussed on the troubles in Northern Ireland and the threat posed by the Warsaw Pact: the British Army of the Rhine alone numbered over 70,000 troops. Today the Army is transforming to optimise for a contingency, rather than the campaign footing which has dominated our thoughts and actions for the last 10 years. And the Strategic Defence and Security Review promises more change to come; the next evolution. At the same time, the very high quality Generation Y "millennials" joining the Army and taking to the mountains, crags, walls and boulders today, may have the same core values in abundance but they have different aspirations, different priorities and different ways of living, working and communicating than their predecessors.

So what? Change is constant. The Red Queen's remark to Alice in Lewis Carroll's "Through the Looking Glass, is at the heart of the "Red Queen Hypothesis" which proposes that all organisms must continually adapt and evolve, not just to gain competitive advantage but simply to survive. For organisms, read organisations and for that matter, associations too. In the context of the AMA I'm not suggesting the issue is about survival but more about relevance. And so it seems right that we should, from time to time, hold a mirror up to ourselves to ensure we are still relevant: relevant to the Army and relevant to our 2500 strong membership.

History is instructive. In his account of the formation of the AMA in "Mountain Moments" John Muston refers to the original 1957 proposition to the ASCB, which emphasised the "training value of mountaineering and the greater mountaineering possibilities that would come from an Army-wide [as opposed to cap badge based] club". At the first formal AMA meeting, as well as arranging the first AMA Alpine Meet, the group considered "those matters dear to the hearts of all climbers such as cheap access to huts, insurance and cheap travel to the Alps...the AMA knew its priorities from the start. Within 6 weeks they had also negotiated a 5% discount with a London climbing shop." To me that seems absolutely relevant today: promoting military efficiency by encouraging mountaineering in the Army; knowing what the membership wants; and delivering tangible, practical benefits to members.

But of course there is scope for considerable debate around how the AMA should approach this. The AMA has always benefitted from a broad spectrum of views and lively and robust debate, and quite right too. So, a while ago I wrote to the committee and the Honorary Vice Presidents to canvas their views, as experienced members and climbers, on the role of the Association. What is the point and purpose of the AMA? How should we operate and what are the 'crown jewels', or if you prefer, the vital ground? Finally, what do we need to do to ensure that the AMA is fit for the challenges of today and the future: to ensure that it remains relevant? In his foreword the Chairman has touched on the 'Why' of climbing. This is about the 'Why' the 'What' and the 'How' of the AMA.

So, below I have attempted to draw out briefly the key themes from the replies I received. A couple of caveats are necessary. First, this is not, of course, a representative sample of AMA membership but these folk know the AMA, and they know climbing. Second, what follows is not the single 'view' of that group – there is no such view – rather, it is my take on the main ideas, threads and themes that emerged. Last, in trying to draw together perspectives, I have shamelessly trundled a boulder through some fine contributions which were far better written than the patchwork that follows. So if I have diluted the message, omitted anything or misrepresented anyone's views, then I apologise! So enough excuses: what did they say?

In terms of the role, the original aims of the AMA evidently still resound: both the promotion of mountaineering in the context of military efficiency and as an 'end' in itself, across all sub-disciplines. Most saw the AMA's primary role as championing all aspects of climbing in the Army; leading, supporting and sustaining expeditions, events, competitions and the network of Army climbers,

to encourage mountaineering and develop mountain leaders of the future. A recurring theme was the need to work in conjunction with AT rather than as an arm of AT delivery, focusing on where the AMA uniquely can add value: for example by enabling members to gain additional experience, routes and quality mountain days, in support of the JSAT scheme. We also must maintain the "fun" and recreational element of the sport.

A number pointed to the evolution of the AMA since its creation. Meryon Bridges puts it well:

"...back in the '50s and '60s the AMA effectively was climbing in the Army. It developed the guidance; it oversaw the training given in Towyn and Glenmore Lodge; it organised most of the climbing events and expeditions; it provided the voice of expertise and experience in advice to authority; and generally it dominated the sport."

Since then the AMA has operated at a number of levels across both AT and sport, without a formal 'SME role'; we have for example, no formal responsibility for approving JSATFAs. This is not the place to unpack the issues around JSP 419, Duty Holding and peer group climbing. While some felt that we should seek to achieve that formal role, most saw a clear role for the AMA to continue to lobby and to work with those with formal authority, to shape clear and unambiguous policy and practice to enable safe accessible climbing, with the minimum necessary administrative and bureaucratic overhead. There was also recognition that as a body, we possess a huge volume of experience and subject matter expertise, which we should continue to offer wherever and whenever appropriate.

As to the Crown Jewels, there were some diverse views. There was little debate that expeditions have their place, both large expeditions to major peaks with 'summit' and 'development' teams and small 'elitist' expeditions with ambitious aims. The quadrennial tri-service expedition drumbeat was seen as a good framework for development of leaders, and in terms of the organisation, leadership and membership AMA expeditions, as well as our contribution to of tri-service expeditions, we have much to be proud of. For some the 8000's still have a draw and a certain cachet. For others, they have become commercialised and prohibitively expensive and the only way to go is small and light – or as one put it, quick and dirty – and exploratory. More than one suggested that to our younger members the AMA has an unhelpful image as a 'big exped' organisation. Everyone (bar none) praised the AMA's achievements in promoting and sustaining sport climbing and the extraordinarily high quality of the events run by Pete Skinsley & Co. Many pointed to the further opportunity to leverage the power of sport climbing in the AMA and to promote and encourage progression – in either direction – between boulders and big mountains. The Festival of Climbing was also cited as an exemplar of the way in which we should operate.

Predictably enough, a vibrant meets programme was for all, fundamental to the success of the Association. The demise of the Winter Meet was much lamented. A number suggested a more regionally based AMA structure to better enable meets and there

were many good ideas to offer more around meets, from lectures to qualifications, to social activity to build and sustain the network of Army climbers. More ambitious was the suggestion of an AMA hut, potentially shared with another civilian club: challenging perhaps, but maybe within the reach of the largest mountaineering association in the UK. Working with the RAFMA and RN&RMMC was generally seen as a good way of achieving critical mass and being able to offer more, without becoming the default setting and there were positive suggestions around interaction with civilian clubs.

So what of the future: how does the AMA remain relevant? I suggest that most of the views here can be grouped under "engaging the membership". Everyone who replied to me highlighted the criticality of communications: *certa cito*, music to my ears. All felt that we should leverage the full potential of Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Instagram and the website; indeed some of the more passionate advocates were very clear that while they had no idea how to use social media they were nevertheless completely persuaded of the benefits of it! There was also huge praise for all that Ryan and Daz and their predecessors have achieved with the Journal and website. Communication of course is a two way thing and there was strong support for a regular survey of the membership and better use of the data we have and hold, both to connect members and understand where we can add value. It was generally felt that the AGM has a place but that if we are going to do it, then wherever it is, we should make it worth the trip by offering and promoting a rich weekend of climbing and social activities. The idea of using social media to allow more of our membership to vote at AGMs was popular as was the need to ensure that the committee so far as possible is representative of the full breadth of AMA members and their interests. .

So food for thought I hope, and I'm grateful to all those who took the time to reply and to you for reading this far. Of course having read this you may well conclude that it's all quite obvious: "No, really Sherlock", or similar. Fair enough. Maybe not much of this is profound or ground breaking but maybe that's because the AMA is in fair shape. Let's not beat ourselves up too much. Without being complacent, I judge that what we are doing now, measured against the original intent of our founders, is worthy and appropriate. We remain relevant. There is much that we can do to build on our successes: we must and we shall but we must also remember that for none of us is the AMA a day job, although some put in enough hours to make it so. Martin Bazire, as ever, hits the nail squarely on the head:

"I am well aware that bright ideas, even when filtered, still require the drive of a faithful and diligent core of protagonists, and I take my hat off to those who are carrying the flame".

So enough now. The PYG is a fine place to reflect on things but I see now that the cloud has lifted and I can enjoy the view. It's the same view; a great view!

Ivan Hooper
Major General
President AMA

Exercise Alpine Arc 2015

It is now a month since the final team from the AMA Exercise Alpine Arc arrived at the shores of the Mediterranean; successfully completing the final kilometres of an extraordinary ski-journey through the European Alps. A journey which began in Puchberg am Schneeberg in Austria before winding its way through 1100kms of snow-locked mountains; accumulating almost 80 thousand metres of ascent and descent before arriving in Menton 82 days later.

The idea for Exercise Alpine Arc 2015 had been inside me for years. As a Reservist Officer with Oxford University Officer's Training Corps I have organised and run a good number of challenging ski-tours, but it wasn't until I qualified as a British Mountain Guide in September 2013 that I found the courage to commit to organising an expedition of this scale.

The aim of the expedition was for a British Army team to traverse the entire European Alpine chain on skis during one winter season. Such a journey has been completed before by other groups, but never by a Military team regardless of nationality. This would prove a considerable challenge, not just physically and mentally for those taking part but also logistically for those involved in making it happen. The practicality of such a long ski traverse crammed into a single winter meant that the majority was conducted during high winter; those months of the year when the snow pack does not stabilise as quickly due to the colder temperatures which meant the constant concern of higher avalanche risk.

Fortunately I have a very supportive, positive and forward thinking Commanding Officer in Lt Col Simon Mason who right from the conceptual stages of the expedition backed me one hundred percent. Without his belief, hard-work and support behind the scenes Ex Alpine Arc 2015 simply could not have happened.

Similarly on the financial side of running a big expedition like this, it was never easy. Thankfully the Army Mountaineering association came on board early and helped give me a boost towards securing the financial backing for this adventure. There were many times when I simply had to have faith that it would all come together somehow, through hard work and inspiring enough people to believe and support the project.

At one point in the planning process I had to head to Vienna to sign with the Austrian MOD for all costs arising from using Austrian Military Mountain Guides to work alongside on the phases in Austria. This added a potential £10 000+ to the cost of the expedition but fortunately the day before I had to agree to pay this or lose Austrian support the Ulysses Trust came on board with a firm guarantee of this amount as a booster grant for the expedition. Such belief and encouragement has been one of the most positive and uplifting aspects of the whole planning process for me. I cannot thank the Ulysses trust enough for their firm and substantial backing, unwavering support and shared adventurous spirit!

I was also fortunate to win the support and endorsement of Gen Sir George Norton, who enthusiastically came on board as Patron of the expedition. His firm belief in the value of adventurous training for Service personnel and his quick recognition of the considerable challenge all participants would face helped keep my morale up throughout the 18 months of planning and organisation.

I divided the journey into 11 stages of approximately 8-days duration that ran sequentially through the winter. Each stage was undertaken by a different team of 6 skiers, sometimes from the same unit but mostly formed of individuals from different units. 58 British military personnel took part in; 29 Regular Army, 27 Reservists and 2 from the RAF. Sadly some of the available places on the expedition were not filled and this has been my greatest regret.

I planned fixed start and finish points for each stage in order to simplify logistics but within each stage the itinerary was flexed to take account of the weather and prevailing avalanche conditions. The expedition was supported on the stages in Austria, Switzerland



and Italy by a Mountain Guide provided by the respective host nation military.

In Austria I worked alongside Military and IFMGA qualified Guides who all proved to be both highly professional and excellent company. My deep gratitude and lasting friendship goes to Stefan Redtenbacher(1&2), Gregor Haas(2&4), Daniel Ploner(3), Andy Eicholz(4), Sepp DelMarco(5), Harry(5), and Klaus Zweiker(5). The AUT Forces also kindly provided accommodation for the Support Team in local barracks following the route.

Switzerland provided IFMGA Mountain Guides Thomas Villars(6), Stephan Ruoss(7) and Johann Filliez(8) to join us; proving invaluable with their detailed local knowledge of the terrain, conditions and local history. They assisted our safe passage through the Swiss mountains despite very difficult conditions, particularly during stage 8 which resulted in many changes to the planned itinerary. The Support team were also kindly accommodated in barracks in Chur, Andermatt and Sion during the expedition's passage through Switzerland.

All this support from the Swiss Armed Forces was graciously provided as a special sign of support for constructive bilateral military relations between GBR and CHE. Without this the expedition would not have been so successful or as rewarding to the British service personnel who took part. Therefore we owe a special thank you to the Commander of the Swiss Army, Lt Gen Dominique Andrey and to Special Officer Jean-Louis Hug for arranging this.

In Italy from the Grand St Bernard Monastery to the border with France Valsavarenche/Vanoise the team enjoyed the good company of energetic Italian Military IFMGA guide Loris Buzi. Keeping up with his fast transitions and enthusiasm for red wine proved a challenge. For the last days in Italy Ettore Tauffer joined us, allowing us to benefit from his detailed local knowledge during

our passage over the complicated terrain on Mont Rutour and moving us safely into France.

For the final two stages through the Vanoise, Ceres, Queryas and Mercantour it was a great shame that France was unable to provide any support to the expedition. Fortunately I know these French sections of the Alps rather well and we were able to make a very pure ski-traverse through this area involving practically no road moves at all.

The whole expedition was supported logistically by three young officers to whom I remain indebted for their flexibility, hard-work, professionalism and good humour. Ocdt Sam Davies from Oxford UOTC and 2LT Rupert Knight and Ocdt Simon Prince from Wales UOTC formed the "Support Team". This was the vital beating heart of the expedition, coordinating and executing all necessary in-country logistics. Their responsibilities were many and varied, including picking-up each new team from the airport, issuing and maintaining equipment, report writing, food resupply of the main team, updating the website and Blog and dealing with any and all unforeseen problems.

The three months of Exercise Alpine Arc 2015 now form such a rich and vivid collection of memories for me that it is hard to know where to begin sharing with you what happened.

The hard facts you already know; the distance, the ascent and descent, the days and weeks of effort involved... To gain more oversight of this you can always visit the expedition website www.alpinearc2015.com if you couldn't follow our progress at the time.

And of course we did complete the aim of the expedition, and with fewer significant changes to the itinerary than I had anticipated during the planning process. However there is so much more to the expedition left unsaid. So many experiences shared along the way, with each team and the other guides with whom I worked. Memories interwoven into such a vast fabric of experiences, and so completely, that it's difficult now to identify a single thread on its own. In fact I can sense a resistance inside me to try to do so.

Moments of great beauty now etched in my memory – fragile images of the mountains in the half-light of dawn; the flickering of the wood burner in the winter refuge; a smile shared with friends in recognition of a challenge overcome; wind-blown snow-devils dancing skyward; a signpost heavy with rime ice; the clean line of our skinning track left behind as evidence of our passage through a vast white ocean. The knowledge that not a single trace of our passage now remains...

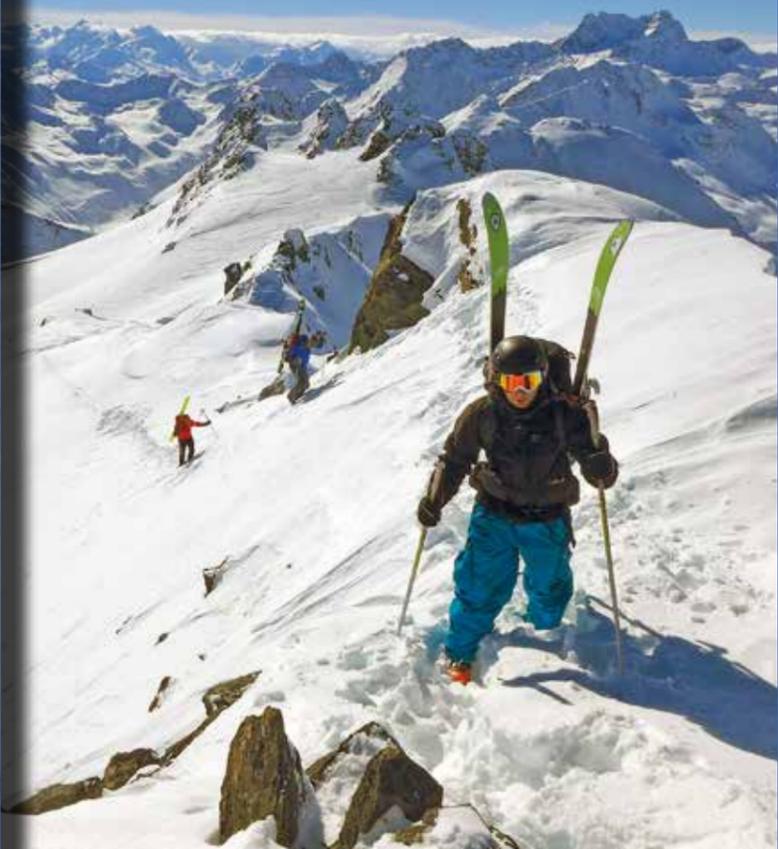
The physical effort involved and the deep satisfaction of spending three months engaged in a single challenge. The feeling that each day we arrived a little closer to this goal. Sensations of warmth



and of cold, of excitement and of fear, of satisfaction, success, of frustration and disappointment. All shared with an amazing group of people who largely arrived not knowing each other, worked hard as a team and left as friends. These memories have now become part of who I am and of what drive me forward to meet the future and I'm sure that the same is true of every single person who was part of the expedition

Every day I learnt something new; about the mountains or about those around me with whom I shared this unique journey and also at times about myself. This stands out in my mind as the best part of the experience as a whole. I have learnt so much during the course of this winter that it has further opened my eyes on just how rich and varied and amazing a world we live in – and how much is to be gained if only you are prepared to take on the challenge.

It seems true that we value most that which we have fought hard to achieve. Exercise Alpine Arc was for me an unspoken dream which I decided to commit to making real. Of course there were risks involved, not just during the expedition itself whilst skiing in the mountains, but also whilst setting the expedition up. Although I had many enthusiastic supporters who backed the project there were also many individuals who were very negative and saw the project as overly ambitious and destined to fail. This is true to all ambition and all challenges in life.. Those people who listen to these detractors and are not prepared to take the risk that they may fail to reach their goal accept immediate defeat by not trying. I for my part am very glad that we tried and even more satisfied that we succeeded.



Stove review

by Ryan Lang

Sponsored by Cotswold Outdoor



Jetboil Sol

Weight: 300g
Dimensions: 16.5 x 10.4 cm
Average half litre boil time: 2 min 15 sec

The Sol comes with the standard 0.8 Litre cup which is a suitable size for individual use. The stabilising tri-pod is sturdy and provides a good support base for the stove. The cup connects easily to the burner via a simple and positive twist lock system. A pot adaptor is also included which allows the burner to be used with other pots rather than just the supplied cup.

The measuring marks are visible inside the cup which makes it easy to identify how much water has been poured into the cup. Lighting the Sol with an un-gloved hand is simple using the integrated push button igniter, but a bit more awkward to do with mountaineering gloves. From personal experience I always carry a lighter as the push button igniters have a tendency to break.

The gas regulator is extendable which makes cooking temperature easily adjustable even when wearing gloves.

The Sol is sturdy and simple yet still reasonably lightweight compared to most of its competitors. When everything is packed inside the cup, there is an annoying rattle but this can easily be rectified by stuffing a pan scourer inside the cup. To be fair to the Sol, this rattle seems to affect all stoves!

Overall	
Weight	★★★★★
Cooking time	★★★★★
Robustness	★★★★★
Usability	★★★★★
Cost	★★★★★



Jetboil Titanium

Weight: 245g
Dimensions: 16.5 x 10.4 cm
Average half litre boil time: 2 min 30 sec

The Jetboil Titanium is virtually identical in design to the Sol except that it has a Titanium pot. This accounts for the extra cost and reduced weight. Therefore most of the points mentioned in the Sol report are also extant for the Titanium.

The interesting point about the Titanium is that it cannot be used to melt snow or cook food. It is only supposed to be used to heat water. This may be a fairly limiting factor for many users, which may or may not justify the extra cost to save only 55g. At a cost difference of £30, this means that you are paying approx 50 pence per gram saved. If saving weight is paramount and you are only heating water, the Titanium is possibly the system you should go for. However if you carrying slightly more weight doesn't bother you, I would recommend the Sol every time.

Overall	
Weight	★★★★★
Cooking time	★★★★★
Robustness	★★★★★
Usability	★★★★★
Cost	★★★★★



MSR Windboiler

Weight: 432g
Dimensions: 17.1 x 10.2 cm
Average half litre boil time: 2 min 30 sec

The Windboiler comes with a slightly larger 1.0 Litre cup which can either be a plus or negative point depending on your view. 20% larger than its rivals, but 20% more hot water or cooking space!

The stabilising tripod is sufficient but less sturdy than the Jetboil equivalent. This can be an issue considering the size of the system, when it's full it can be top heavy and unstable. The cup connects to the burner with ease and has an extendable regulator so there is no problems when using it in winter whilst wearing gloves. There is no self igniter on the windboiler which means you must carry a lighter.

Overall	
Weight	★★★★★
Cooking time	★★★★★
Robustness	★★★★★
Usability	★★★★★
Cost	★★★★★



Primus ETA Lite

Weight: 400g
Dimensions: 15 x 10 cm
Average half litre boil time: 2 min 36 sec

The ETA Lite is yet another example of a Jetboil like design. The immediate noticeable difference is that the stabilizing tripod does not fit inside the cup, which means it will likely end up getting lost. This seems to be a design flaw as there is no discernable reason why the tripod was designed to be the size it is.

The other noticeable difference with this system is that it comes complete with a stove hanging kit so that it can be used above ground, suspended of a tree, or used where the ground isn't flat enough to be ground mounted. This is something that some may find useful, I personally didn't.

The ETA also comes with 3 pins that are screwed into the top of the burner so that any pot can be used. This system is a particularly poor design and ultimately they will end up getting lost as they are small and fiddly.

Performance wise, the ETA was the slowest in the field and the second heaviest, so not a lot going for it! The plus point is that it is the cheapest in the test.

Overall	
Weight	★★★★★
Cooking time	★★★★★
Robustness	★★★★★
Usability	★★★★★
Cost	★★★★★



Unlike conventional backpacking stoves, the Windboiler does not have flame jets, which makes them impervious to windy weather so that they burn hotter and longer on the same amount of canister fuel. It is actually quite hard to get this stove to simmer as it is so efficient. On a few tests, I actually switched the stove off by mistake when trying to turn down the temperature.

The system has an internal trip mechanism that shuts the stove off if it becomes too hot. The stove can be reset once it cools down by following a few instructions. In my opinion this makes the system overly complex.

Overall the Windboiler is a good system, but slightly larger and heavier than its rivals. It performs very well in the wind compared to others but most people would probably seek shelter when cooking anyway. The lack of self ignitor may be a problem for some.

Summary

There is a wide range of cooking options available to the outdoor enthusiast. The gas personal cooking system has earned its place as the most popular amongst outdoor enthusiasts. The Jetboil design which was first introduced in 2001 has flatteringly been used as design template by most other manufacturers.

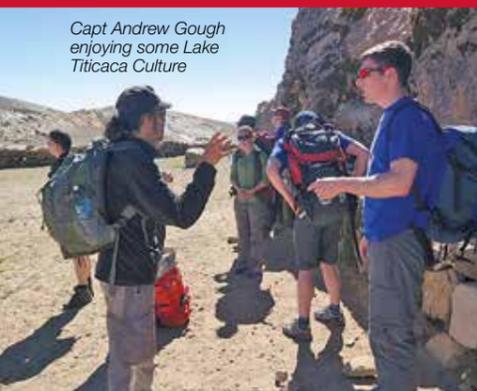
The MSR Windboiler performs well in windy environments but is heavy. The Jetboil Titanium is the lightest but is let down by its water only use. The Jetboil Sol is the all-round winner as it is lighter than the MSR but more useful than the Titanium.

The AMA would like to thank Cotswold Outdoor who kindly provided the stoves that enabled this trial to take place.



Ex Altiplano Tiger – Bolivia

June 2015



Capt Andrew Gough
enjoying some Lake
Titicaca Culture



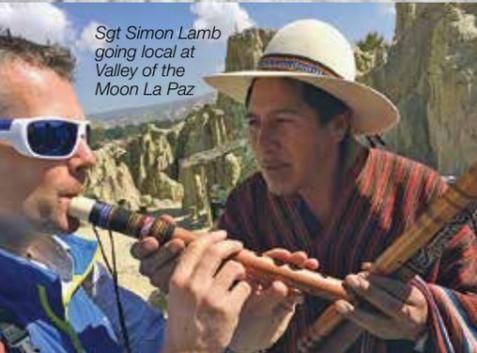
Sgt Conrad Earl
and Cpl Kris
Woodhead on
Alpamayo



Sgt Conrad
Earl and Maj
Al Mason and
guide on Huayna
Potosi



The Ex Altiplano
Tiger team at
high camp below
Illimani



Sgt Simon Lamb
going local at
the Valley of the
Moon La Paz

Why do we do, what we do?

"The highest mountain I'd ever climbed before was Ben Nevis, this is just insane"
LBdr Josh Burgess.

It was a stupid idea, just stupid. My tent is cold, it's dark outside and I'm sure my watch says 01:07AM. Who on earth convinced me to attempt to summit a 6500m peak in the middle of Bolivia for fun. This isn't fun. Sitting at a beach bar watching the sun set over the Maldives on a scuba diving Adventurous Training jolly is fun where your table is littered with empty beer bottles and your hotel room has ensuite.

I look around my tent and my ensuite consists of an almost full Nalgene bottle that was once used as a drinking vessel. It's always a tough decision, when faced in the middle of the night, in desperate need of the toilet whether to extract yourself from the warm cocoon of the sleeping bag to brave the sub zero temperatures outside or to carefully aim into a Nalgene bottle ensuring that there is sufficient capacity to avoid a mishap and a damp sleeping bag. I'm not sure whether the thumb inside the bottle as an top up indicator is helpful or not.

Berating myself for not having more ensuite capacity my alarm goes off at 01:15AM. My mountain clothes are a week old and serve as my pillow. I can vaguely smell my own odour. Time for an invigorating wet wipe wash in the important areas and teeth cleaning. Here the lack of wash facilities just becomes annoying with toothpaste rinsing. Do I spit outside risking toothpaste over my boots? There's always the nearly full Nalgene bottle laying luke warmly by my side. Choosing the lesser of two evils I decide to swallow the minty dilution rather

than enduring a waft of urine and the danger of splash back. Why didn't I learn to scuba dive?

I hear muffled voices outside my tent, the flash of head torches as other team members gather for breakfast. As I unzip the tent shards of frost fall from the fabric having condensed overnight. I search for my boots, these are a single leather, a bit too thin for my liking but that's all I've got. I would've liked to have had double boots where you get to wear the liners inside your sleeping bag and start with warmish feet. Here my toes squeeze into a very cold and stiff boot. I try and get the right tension on the laces so that I can climb and descend without the boot slipping or being overly tight and reducing circulation. Such a faff trying to tie a double bow wearing gloves too. Tell me why I'm doing this again? Finally dressed I emerge into the brisk, nocturnal world of alpinism

Other team members are standing around a hot water urn. Dragons breath of condensation are illuminated by head torches as talk is kept to a minimum. The apprehension of the climb weighing everyone down. Its definitely below freezing. Hot chocolate and a bread roll for breakfast and then it's time to start the ascent we've all been thinking about.

My climbing partner is tied into a rope a few metres behind me. All I care about is the pool of light in front of me illuminating a small world of snow, ice and footprints. I keep my feet moving in a slow, plodding rhythm and follow the line of head torches in front.

Shortly into the climb my thumbs start to hurt. They're getting cold and it's painful. The ice axe, albeit necessary is draining the heat from my hands. On each zig and

zag of the slow ascent I alternate hands in pockets to try and keep the blood flowing. It's no good, I've lost the battle. I stop, breaking the walking rhythm and pull out the big down over mitts. I apologise to my partner for the delay and continue, now restricted to wearing technical oven gloves.

We cross a small crevasse and enter onto a long exposed ridge. It's still dark and the wind has picked up. My face feels the biting wind and tingles with pins and needles. It's a battle with the elements, the wind parries with an icy blast, I repost with a balaclava pulled up over my nose. My toes are painfully cold, the elements are definitely wining.

A glimmer of hope appears on the skyline as the sky begins to turn from black to a light turquoise. We continue to climb.

There's a certain hypnotic rhythm to high altitude climbing. It's the challenge of keeping the ascent fast enough to avoid descending on soft snow in blazing sunlight verses inducing a heart attack from the thin air and generally working too hard for the conditions. I'm pleased to say I'm winning. The mountain and elements today are letting me ascend.

There's a definite light blue haze over to east. The sun will soon be here. My feet are still cold, stomping and wiggling my toes seems to help a little. I wonder whether it's worth buying a set of double boots for future trips?

Ahead a rope team has stopped on a small col. We catch up and have a brief chat about progress. They've decided to head down. Their feet and hands are cold, the descent down a rock ridge is tricky having taken a party of six Chilean climbers a few years before. Small metal crosses on the ridge mark the fatal incident.

The rope team's decision is a difficult one having spent so much effort to get to the col, a mere 300 m from the summit. Everyone is responsible for their own safety

and the summit is only the half way point. Most incidents occur on the descent and that collection of small metal crosses far below is a stark reminder for getting it wrong. The group descends wishing us luck for our summit push.

There are only two teams in front of us now. It's getting lighter and we can switch off our head torches. The rising sun gives us hope and lifts our spirits as we continue higher. We meet another team descending, their smiling faces confirming we're not far from the summit, "No esta lejos". Spanish for not much further, I hope so.

The ridge line in front curves slowly away, a severe drop to the right. The angle eases and I can see a small party atop a small dome not far away. The walking angle levels out and I realise we've reached the summit, elation, joy and big smiles.

Why do we do this? Endure the early morning starts, cold hands and feet, urinating into empty bottles, feeling tired, headaches, upset stomachs and strange foods. It certainly isn't just to reach the summit of distant mountain. That's just a bonus. I guess it's the friendships you make on the journey to the summit, your fellow climbers. Some were friends before you started, others have become friends along the way. Meeting guides, porters and cooks and sharing a love of the mountains which transcends all language barriers. Why do we choose to put ourselves into such places when there are easier, warmer alternatives out there. For me, it's the privilege of being in a special almost spiritual place that requires all that effort and self determination to be there.

The glory of the summit is taken in with relief, elation and summit selfies. As much as I'd like to be able to stay and soak in the majestic views and sheer grander of the Illimani summit we must descend.

The return journey goes by so quickly with flashes of the ascent in reverse. There was the col we stopped at. It seems not that far

from the summit now. My legs are feeling the day, trying to keep a steady pace and not trip over my crampons or catch a gaiter.

We break before the final ridge descent, take in some water and food from our pockets. My water bottle has blocks of ice floating inside and one large piece inside the neck. The water has a sharp, clear quality from the coldness. It saps some of the warmth from my core but gives me energy. Time to descend the final leg, the metal crosses nearby haunting us of the consequences of a mistake.

We enter onto the high glacier camp for hearty greetings and congratulations. Tales are swapped of the ascent and epics of defeat for some.

Although the legs are tired my body feels strong with the lower altitude and warmth of the sun. The day is not yet over as tents need to be dropped and kit packed ready for the afternoon descent to base camp. Another long walk. Why am I doing this again?

Ex Altiplano Tiger was organised by Major Al Mason, AGC (ETS). The expedition was conducted in Bolivia in June 2015 and was aimed at introducing soldiers to high altitude climbing. The majority of the team as a minimum standard had a Winter Mountaineering Proficiency qualification and very little experience of alpinism or overseas travel to developing countries. The team used High Earth Climbing Expeditions based in La Paz for all travel, guide, Portering and catering requirements. The team successful summited the following:

- Condoriri Region
- Point Austria 5300m
- Pyramid Blanca 5300m
- Alpamayo 5400m
- Illusion (5330m)
- Mirador Peak (5325m)
- Huayna Potosai via the normal route 6088m

And finally,
Illimani via the Normal route 6438m



Ex Altiplano Tiger Team



4 old blokes at the summit
of Illimani 3 being reservists

Membership benefits update

- a quick trip around the bazaars...

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

DMM

Trade price + VAT + carriage deal to all members of the AMA
POC - Jill - 01286 872222,
jill@dmmwales.com
www.dmmclimbing.com



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



Toughtags is a company that makes personalised, waterproof and tamperproof identification tags for climbing gear. They are a great way of identifying your own gear or of labelling gear for centre use or PPE inspections, or for a variety of other uses. Toughtags is able to offer AMA members a discount of web price - 20% + postage. This discount is for personal use only. To make an order, or to begin an enquiry please email tagit@toughtags.co.uk



Summit Mountaineering

A 20% discount is available to AMA members and families. Summit run a range of walking, scrambling and climbing courses from the Wye Valley and Snowdonia; specialising in learn to lead and technical development. Call Summit Mountaineering on 07896 947 557, info@summitmountaineering.com www.summitmountaineering.com

Beyond Hope - Evolv, Metolius, Prana and Rock Technologies

Trade price + VAT + carriage deal to all members of the AMA.
POC - Lee 01457 838242, RickBeyond-Hope@aol.com
www.beyondhope.co.uk

Paramo

AMA members can benefit from the Paramo 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

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
www.terra-nova.co.uk



Jottnar

A British company with a small range of top end mountaineering and ski mountaineering clothing. A significant discount is available for members of the AMA. Please see the Jottnar information inside the AMA website members area. The new Jottnar 2016 range is released in October 15. You can view the range at

www.Jottnar.com



PHD (Pete Hutchinson Designs)

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

POC - Emma Harris -
01423 711212,
office@phdesigns.co.uk

www.phdesigns.co.uk

Army Festival of Climbing 2015

The Army Festival of Climbing took place on the week commencing the 18th - 22nd of May 2015, as a team from 4 Armoured Medical Regiment we took the long trip up to Capel Curig Training Camp, in Betws-y-Coed North Wales. To begin the climbing festival, on arrival we were given our competition numbers and a programme for the week, which told numbers 1-49 would be competing in the qualifiers the following morning. As a few of us in the group were complete novices at rock climbing this was quite nerve-racking. So in preparation that evening groups went over some training to prepare for the qualifiers.

The semi-finals were held at the JSMTI Indefatigable climbing centre, the qualifiers consisted of 8 top rope climbing routes, which ranged in levels, and using only the nominated colour holds, with a double hand finish on the top hold. As the competition went on some of the novices soon realised they had quite the technique for rock climbing and it wasn't as bad as they presumed. As the allocated personnel, number order went round the climbing routes in an order like a "sausage factory" which Lt Col Skinsley liked to call it, I soon realised that some routes were more difficult than expected. This resulted in numerous people swinging from the top rope on the final route, which for some of the people swinging was a very heart pounding situation; but for fellow climbers was very amusing.

The second half of the qualifiers competition included a bouldering competition. Many of the problems were found to be strenuous and extremely demanding, where the novices had to use initiative and confidence over experience to make some of the holds on the bouldering walls. As a complete novice, I found the bouldering was challenging but enjoyable with an extreme sense of achievement on completion. The qualifiers for numbers 1-49 were completed and people had been placed. The results would be finalised the following day when the rest of the competitors had attempted the semi-finals.

The next day for many was their qualifying round. The remainder, including our group, all went outside onto a relaxed day of bouldering. Our group went along to the RAC boulders just down the road from our main camp and practiced bouldering; it was quite a difference from using obvious man-made holds to trying to find the natural holds on the rock. This required so much more looking and thinking, which I believe makes outside bouldering more challenging than indoors. Many of us fell multiple times from the small heights of the boulders onto the crash mats below as a result of poor guessing!

The Thursday morning was back indoors to continue the competition; all competitors didn't have a clue what the routes looked like or what level they were. A few of us managed to see the tiny sneak preview that they gave us via the Army Climbing



Members of 4 Armd Medt Regt Climbing Team having a great time! From left to right, Capt Stacy Oliver, Pte Oliver Denne, Pte John 'Goody' Goodsell, Pte Georgina Harvey, Pte Kimberley Sterling, Pte Dan Quinn and Pte Conor Jones

Facebook page (a picture which looked at just 2 holds!). We made our way to the Beacon Climbing Centre which was noticeably taller than JSMTI and finally the semi-finals routes were unveiled. Demonstrations were given of each category's route by the route setters, who have a natural ability to make them all look so easy. The semi-finals began with the Open Males and Females groups, with the Novices' Top Rope competition beginning shortly afterwards and lastly was followed by the Elite Male category.

I placed in the novice category, which was a yellow hold route and apparently was about a level 6b. This route was challenging for many in the novice category, including myself, which sadly I didn't make to the top to complete - it was the hardest thing I had tried yet. Three from our category went onto the finals for the novices. Once all semi-finals had been completed, we went on to complete in the Team Climbing event. In teams of three, we attempted the Crazy Climb Challenge, with the fastest team winning this round. This area of the climbing centre is defined as, 'rock climbing with a difference.' One climb had holds that were spinning wheels, another had big massive purple blobs, to another which had small round holds on a glass pane; all weird and meant to be fun as well as challenging. The three above named examples were the competition climbs; one member from each team had to go as fast as they can up the wall to the top, once the first partner had hit the top hold, the next partner would go. This was an extremely enjoyable part of the festival, and I would recommend anyone visiting the Beacon Centre to try the Crazy Climb part, as well as the many good climbing routes it has.

Overall I extremely enjoyed my time at the Army Festival of Climbing, and think both climbing centres were perfect choices for the qualifiers, the semi-finals and finals and would recommend both centres for novices and talented climbers. I will definitely continue rock climbing within my spare time, and try and in courage others to do the same. I personally got an extreme thrill, when climbing the routes and the immense urge to push further even when the hold you're clinging onto is slipping away from your grasp. Everyone within the Army climbing team was extremely friendly, polite and approachable for advice and help with technique and working on points. This for the novices within the group was extremely helpful.

I would like to finish this review with a big thank you to everyone who made the climbing festival such a successful and enjoyable week for me and my fellow climbers from 4 Armd Med Regt.



Members of 4 Armd Med Regt intensely watching the demonstrations

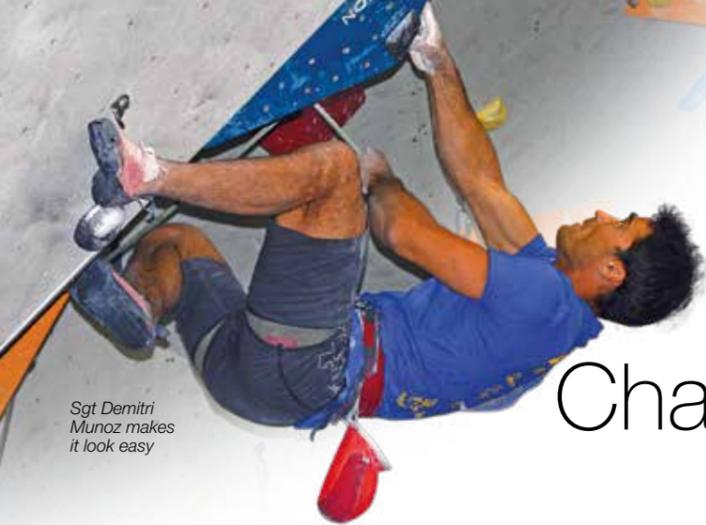


Pte Emily Allsopp nearly completes the Novice Top rope climb

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!



Sgt Demitri Munoz makes it look easy

The European Military Climbing Championships 2015

An impressive sounding title, but what was it all about? This event was a combination of the Inter-Services Climbing Championships, as well as a heated competition with climbers from the Belgian, French, Irish and Spanish militaries all hoping to be crowned the European Military Climbing Champion.

There were to be 84 of the best climbers from their respective Armies, some of which had the reputation of being 'a bit good.' For example, the Spanish representative Sldr David Lorden was reputed to climb at a sport grade of 8b – which is considered good for a top level competitive climber that wasn't employed by the Army!

The competition was held over 2 days at the Beacon Climbing Centre in Caernarfon, which features walls reaching up to 17m high. For the unpractised, there was definite scope to run out of stamina

half way up! Given the level of the competition, it was estimated ladies should look to climb at 6c and 7b for the men to qualify for the Semi-Finals of the International Mens/ Ladies competition. As it turned out, there were to be no female international competitors, so the ladies focused on the Inter-Services Championship and the Men were conducting both the Inter-Services and the International Competition concurrently.

The qualifiers were on the first day, as well as a bouldering competition. The format of the qualifiers was that there were 6x climbs and you had to pick 3 to attempt out of a grade 5+, 6a, 6b, 6c, 7a and 7b. You had one attempt on each of your chosen climbs, but there was a small catch. For example, if you attempted the 6b and fell off, you could not climb any harder climbs, you could only go down a grade; you could only progress onto a harder

climb if you topped out the climb. So this meant the climbers had to be tactical with their choice of climbs. As the other risk was that if you fell off a climb, the points of how high you reached would only count if you topped the previous grade of climb. So this required an honest appreciation of your own ability with this and whether to risk the harder climbs to ensure you were the top of the qualifiers but possibly fail, or whether to climb safe and risk not having enough points to qualify. This was the choice that the 21 ladies and 63 gentlemen had to make over the course of the qualifiers. Team Army had a plan and that plan was to win.

At the end of the Qualifiers, the results stood that the top 26 males had qualified to compete in the International Male competition, 30 males would compete in the Open Male category of the Inter-Services competition and the remaining 13 males under 25 would compete in the Junior Inter-Services competition. Only the top 15 ladies were through to the Semi-Finals for the Inter-Services competition. The same evening the Bouldering results were announced and for the Ladies, the Army had dominated with Capt Aimee Hutton RLC, Sgt Sam Butterworth and me taking 1st, 2nd and 3rd place. For the International bouldering category, we were spectacularly defeated by WO2 Arnaud Bayol FRA, SSgt Stanislas De Closmadeuc FRA and Sldr David Lorden ESP who claimed 1st, 2nd and 3rd respectively. But for the Male Inter-Services Bouldering, again the Army won it all, with Capt Laith Selman RLC, Capt Paddy Snow RE and Capt Tony Musselbrook RLC taking 1st, 2nd and 3rd place.

The following day was to be a tough competition even though we were technically only climbing 2 climbs all day; less the Inter-Service Male and Junior male competitors who only had to compete in the Finals. The competitors were permitted to come out and look at the climbs now the tarpaulin had been removed. We were only given 2 minutes to look at the route and plan how we were to climb it before being taken away to isolation to wait our turn.

My efforts had landed me 6th in the running for the semis and I was anxious to see how I would perform. From my short glimpse at the climb, I estimated it was roughly about a 6b+ to 6c climb, which I wasn't 100% certain I would finish, but would certainly attempt. Following a technical start and a wobbly finish, I successfully managed to top the route, much to my own surprise! Out of the remaining ladies only 4 others topped out after me and this resulted in the top 7 qualifying for the Finals. The male Semi-Finals were impressive to watch and the climb they were on was easily around 7b – 7c. Only the top 10 male climbers qualified for the International Finals. The Juniors had finished climbing by the time the Semis were completed and once again, Team Army was taking all three places with LCpl Tim Read REME taking 1st place, followed by Cfn Sam Sanders in 2nd and Lt Ben Ledsom RE in 3rd. The Open Male competition resulted in 2 Army climbers finishing in the same position and needed a 'climb off' to decide the overall winner.

Following a Team Climbing event, it was back to isolation for the remaining climbers. I always find the isolation bit quite daunting, listening to the people cheering for the competitors one by one and never quite knowing how far they've gotten; wondering if you'll be able to push harder than them and top the climb. So it's usually at this stage I put my headphones in, crank up the music on my iPod and try and get psyched for the climb ahead. A bit of Voodoo People (the Pendulum version) certainly settles the nerves. The two Open males went out first and this concluded all too quickly before the ladies started to filter out for their attempt. Before too long, it was my attempt and I was excited and dreading it at the same time. From the preview, this climb easily was 6c and maybe harder towards the top, but I had to get a grip (literally!) and push myself to see how far I could get. About 2 quickdraws from the end (about 3 meters), I made a silly mistake where I grabbed an awkward small hold with the wrong hand. I realised the second I had done it, but before I could try to rectify my mistake, I got 'pumped' and fell off. As I was lowered down, I could only hope my efforts were enough for the Army team to gain position. There were 4 ladies to climb after me; 2 Army Ladies and 2 RAF ladies left to fight it

out as to whether the Army or RAF would come out on top. I sat watching the remaining competitors battle it out and when the climbing chalk had settled.... the RAF won 1st and 3rd meaning they won the Ladies champs overall. It was a tough heat, but Ft Lt Hannah Stock RAF won hands down; Sgt Ruth Matuska REME placed 2nd and Ft Lt Berenice Barnes RAF placed third in a stunning competition.

This just left the Male International Champs to go and it was going to be a tough heat for the Army vs the French, the Belgians and the Spanish. The competitors filtered out one-by-one and each time, the next one got 1 move further on what looked to be a 7c/8a grade climb, which was beyond ridiculously technical in my mind. It looked like an awkward boulder problem, followed by some of the smallest holds the setter was able to find. Any mistake with the route reading and like me, the contestant would get spat off; there was no room for mistakes at this stage. Everyone was tired; everyone wanted to win for their respective Army. And then it was all over. The final winner was Sgt Demitri Munoz from the French Army (the 2014 European champion) with a spectacular climb! However, close on his heels in 2nd place was Capt Tony Musselbrook RLC for the Army and Sldr David Lorden for Spain.

It wasn't long after the Finals that we all changed into our uniforms for the prize-giving ceremony, which was presented by the President of the Army Mountaineering Association, Lt General Hooper. As all the prizes were given out, it was clear how much the British Army had dominated majority of the events at the Inter-Services level; from the Team Climbing, to the Bouldering and getting in the Top 3 for the International Climbing Championships. And yet, unlike some sports, there was absolutely no animosity. We were all there to climb at the end of the day, and meeting so many like-minded individuals from across the UK and Europe was an absolute pleasure. This event successfully bonded us to our European climbing cousins and I have no doubt they will host us with some tough climbing events in their home countries in the near future. Time to start the training for the Tri-Service Bouldering League next and hopefully, some exciting overseas competitions to follow! .



Capt Stacy Oliver working through a technical section



Team Army getting Psyched



Team Army plus trophies



The Semi-Finals are Revealed



1st Sgt Demitri Munoz, France, 2nd Musselbrook RLC, Army and 3rd Sldr David Lorden, Spain



Cold Comfort

keeping your extremities warm this winter

by Tomo Thompson

We've all been there; you take a glove off to adjust a crampon strap in winter and, at best, you get the hot aches when the blood refills the capillaries in your fingers and it hurts like hell for a short period. The hot aches have often been seen as just part of being in the mountains in winter, something to be expected, but that's not necessarily the case. Common sense combined with modern equipment can ensure that your extremities stay warm and functioning. This article looks at some of the gear available today to help keep your extremities warm, dry and functioning. This is in no way a definitive guide, and others with much more experience may have different approaches and opinions

Fundamentals

- Carry flexible layering options for hands and head – and use them.
- At the first tingle of cold DO SOMETHING.
- Keep warm BUT NOT TOO WARM
- Use zips and vents on your upper body clothing system
- Be proactive so that drinking, eating and managing yourself on the go are all second nature
- Be acquainted with your gear before you head out – if there are any limitations you have discovered you can adapt your gear or manage yourself accordingly – add longer zip pulls to zips, retaining straps to mitts etc.
- Stay well fed and adequately hydrated

Head

Within the human body the brain is king. If the brain is not warm, well fed and happy it will start making wrong decisions. It is important to have a flexible system in your pockets that allows you to regulate the warmth of your head. Suggested layers could be;

- Layer 1 Buff or Powerstretch headband / earwarmer
- Layer 2 Thin Powerstretch helmet liner hat – ideally windproof and long enough to cover the ears. Using a thin Powerstretch or Helly Hansen type balaclava rolled up for this layer gives you the ultimate option of hiding inside it when the weather turns Scottish.
- Layer 3 Softshell warm hat (that fits under helmet, and over Layer 2 if required).
- Layer 4 The hood of your shell jacket.
- Layer 5 The hood of your belay jacket.

The hard-working uphill walk-in to a corrie may require you to only wear a Buff. Static and gearing up (and cooling down) may require you to put a hat on. Buffs cost little and weigh little – carry a few of them to seal gaps, insulate your neck, use them as wrist warmers. Merino ones are available.

Take your helmet and goggles to the shops when you buy your hat to ensure it fits. Ensure that your shell hood will still go over your head + hat + helmet and function correctly. Finding out that your left ear pops out from under your super smart Christmas hat (and is exposed to the elements) whenever you raise your arms above your head is a lesson to be learnt in the shop not on pitch 3 on the Ben. The current crop of branded beanies might look mega cool on the High Street advertising your brand loyalties but serious winter weather demands a “proper” hat.

- Close but not tight fitting
- Windproof
- Breathable
- Allows you to hear through the fabric
- Has the ability to be cinched down in epic weather (chin cord).

- Seals well with your goggles
- When you find that perfect winter hat buy a spare one.

Brands worth spending time trying on include Mountain Equipment, Lowe Alpine, Montane, PHD and Outdoor Research. If, like the author, you are blessed with a massive melon head, then consider buying the tech fabrics from PennineOutdoor and getting a hat that actually fits made for you. I got one that would cover Anglesey made for me by Brenig.co.uk.

Hands

Using only your clenched fist try turning the bezel on a compass, screwing up a krab or doing up the zip on your shell. Hard isn't it ? but it affords the same amount of dexterity as a painfully cold clump of skin and bone on the end of your wrist if you let winter conditions get at unprotected hands. Cold hands lead to a world of hurt. Gloves in winter need to be layered appropriate to the conditions and activity, and spares for the important layers need to be carried. Layering. Layering. Layering. Spares. Spares. Spares.

For general hillwalking a windproof fleece or softshell glove combined with a waterproof (and possibly insulated) over glove for wet or deep cold.

For climbing and mountaineering it's a similar process to the layering system for your head. Walk-in in something like a thin softshell glove. For the climb, whilst mitts are acknowledged as being warmer than gloves, they lack dexterity, and placing protection in a mitt is a mare. Find a warm, dextrous, robust glove that allows you the full range of motion for climbing ... then buy at least 2 pairs. Once one pair get wet stuff them inside your sack and put on a warm, dry pair. If you are at a belay for a while, an outsize waterproof synthetic mitt or a Buffalo mitt, to go over the top of everything, works well. An alternative to this system, especially for people who really feel the cold, is to wear a dextrous insulated softshell glove under a very warm climbing proof mitt to climb in, dropping the mitt, to hang off on wrist cords, whilst placing gear. If the route off the mountain requires you to function properly (an hour long nav off the Ben at last light) then pack a third, or even fourth pair of gloves.

An important factor for keeping hands warm is keeping wrists, where blood passes very close to the surface, well insulated. A base layer with long sleeves and thumb loops can do this, a pair of Buffs can do this, and role specific Powerstretch wrist warmers from the likes of Marmot do it too.

A suitable glove layering system for winter costs a lot of money. Fact. The inability to keep your hands warm in winter could end up costing you more than money. Fact.

Between them, Mountain Equipment, Terra Nova, Black Diamond, Rab, Lowe Alpine and Buffalo probably offer the most comprehensive choice of high quality gloves and mitts. The aforementioned Marmot wrist warmers are no available in the UK too.

Feet

You've spent £300 on your mega (insert name of Italian boot manufacturer) winter boots, but by pitch 2 you already have no feeling in your pinkies. What's going wrong ? Well as well having your boots professionally fitted, what you put between your foot and the boot makes a lot of difference. Sock technology has evolved beyond the white issue Arctic sock (yes, really !!). Liner socks should insulate, breathe and not be so tight as to restrict blood flow across the ankle. Buying a merino wool and nylon winter sock that is well fitted, at least mid-calf in length, flat-seamed, pads the shin from the boot cuff, and mates seamlessly with your liner sock is a good start.

Expect to pay over £10 for a good liner and £20 to £50 for quality winter socks (Darn Tough, Lorpen, SmartWool and Bridgedale have the market covered).

A good base layer legging can fit snugly over the ankle joint and make sure that the blood here is kept warm. Like the wrist joint, exposed, or under insulated ankles haemorrhage body heat. Although some people think of them as very 1970's, a good gaiter to seal in the boot and lower leg can add valuable insulation. – Black Diamond and Outdoor Research make good ones.

Useful Accessories

- Powerstretch Wrist Liner from Marmot
- Buff – particularly the merino wool ones for winter, dozens of uses
- Long zip pulls – available for a few quid from AlpKit.
- Heatmax pads – fit under the insole of boots and produce about 38c for 6hrs for £2
- HotHand pads – fit between glove layers and produce about 52c for 10hrs for £1.50

Discounts

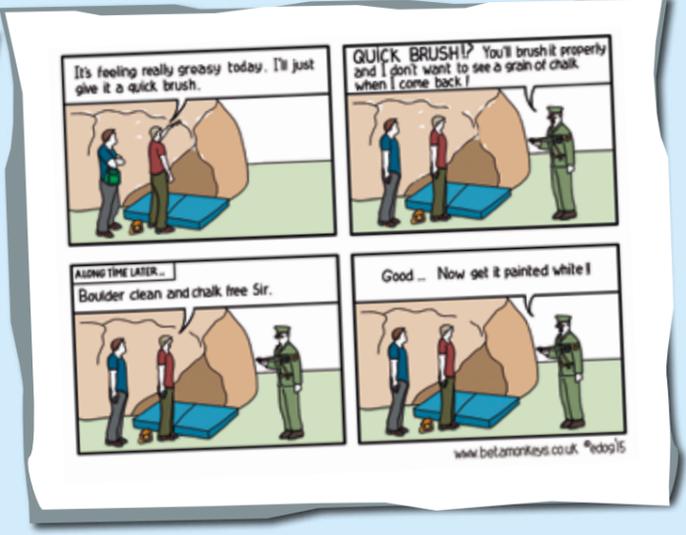
Good gear is expensive BUT please remember that AMA membership entitles you to discounts on a lot all of the gear listed in this article.

Additional Reading:

Excellent BMC Article on avoiding and treating frostbite – <https://www.thebmc.co.uk/only-skin-deep-looking-after-your-skin>

Andy Kirkpatrick Gear Knowledge – <http://andy-kirkpatrick.com/articles/gear>

UK Climbing Gear Review Pages – www.ukclimbing.com/gear/



The start of the Adventure

Adventures have to start somewhere. For some this can be in childhood, for others it can develop later on in life. But we all need a start point; some event in life where we take that next step forward, a shot into the dark that might pay off. A time comes to no longer remain a passenger sat comfortably in the safety of someone else's experience. This time, we were on our own.

But this is not how I thought it would be. I'm hunched over my poles, struggling to control my breathing. Pace yourself. I can barely tilt my head for fear of falling right back down from where I just came. In the meagre light all irregularities in the snow have now completely vanished and I am left with no reference; no idea how far we have gone or have yet to go. Someone behind calls out and confirms we are on the right bearing and I set off again, step after monotonous step. It had snowed all through the previous day and it was time to pay for the coming pleasure. Each thrust of the ski was exhausting as I moved through the deepening powder. I had been breaking trail from the outset, absolutely intent on doing my bit for the group. But the snow concerned me, we didn't know much about the pack below and it was now covered in deep powder. With each 'hurumph' of the ski my mind raced through the consequences of what would happen if the snow failed us. Should we just turn back here? I called back through the whiteout to Lachlan. He couldn't hear me. He could barely see me. I focused in on the effort of sucking on air. It was all I could do to distract myself. As the slope steepened I began to feel my nerves rise. This wasn't how I thought this trip would end.

It all started with a memory. Some five years prior to this point I had driven through the Lyngen Alps in Norway and was struck by the uniqueness; where mountains punctured out of the water and raced for the sky. The volume and immensity of these mountains was striking. I held onto this small scrap, this faint image of pulling over and taking in the beauty. And so it was, five years later, that I found myself forging on up the NW Face of Daltinden, 'a must for dedicated ski mountaineers'. It offers 1300m of uninterrupted vertical descent and we hoped it to be the one to remember at the end of our week. It was certainly shaping out that way. But perhaps not how I hoped. I was tired. All week we had pushed hard to reach peaks regardless of the weather and it was taking a toll. My mind shot back to the snow, am I ready for this?

We all had varying degrees of experience and have flirted with adventure in other dimensions; one had never ski-toured at all and another was split boarding for the first time. For others it was a



continuation of some basic skills they had already picked up but what we all sought out so desperately, was a chance to go it alone. We wanted an opportunity to be self-sufficient; to accept the risks through our own decisions. We wanted to draw out our own journey that would take us away from known comforts and a step closer to the adventures we have only ever read about.

But on this final day I began to question myself, I was questioning my ability. I was falling further and further away from what I was comfortable with; I felt like I was no longer in control. My mind raced with consequences but yet I edged further and further forward. I turned back hoping to get reassurance from my friends but Lachlan simply nodded and through the growing wind, struggled to say something about being close. This was our design and I had to accept this. There was no reason not to continue, but I was tired and I had lost my confidence. This wasn't the romantic push to the summit where the world fell away to reveal all; it was a cold, miserable slog that dragged endlessly upwards. No breath-taking view and no respite. And then it appeared. A pre-historic snow blasted hulk of rocks. It was my lighthouse guiding me safely to the summit. I could feel the excitement pulsing back through my body warming me up. This would be my story. This was my start; that first foot forward on the long road of experience. I was on my way to bigger things and I don't plan to step off. All adventures start somewhere; this was mine.

Spider Pig

Rock climbing with limited use of an arm? Or with one leg? Or no legs? What's the point in that? Surely it's hard enough already without an additional hurdle to overcome. If that is what you think, then you're missing the point. As AMA members will surely appreciate, there is much more to this great pastime than simply the achievement of getting to the top of some previously unconquered peak: the pure physical exertion, the environment and landscapes, the camaraderie, the kit (admit it!) – and I'm sure that there are many other more esoteric and individual reasons for getting out on the rock and giving it a go. Everyone has a personal set of motivations which blend to get them out there.

Adaptive sports have grown in popularity across many genres in recent years. In the military context, the Battle Back initiative, supported by H4H, has been at the forefront of this growth. Sure, many climbs are (literally) out of reach for the adaptive climber, but in reality this is the case for the vast majority of us: those (me included!) who linger over the unreachable whilst browsing a Rockfax from the cosy comfort of the sofa, but flick rapidly past the E6 (or even the E1) whilst route spotting at the foot of that distant crag.

Battle Back was launched in 2008, and initially focused on downhill skiing as the medium through which to achieve its objectives. It has since grown to encompass most sports and adventurous activities including – but not limited to – the 9 officially recognised adventurous training (AT) disciplines. It is not a charity, but an MOD initiative. Battle Back HQ is located at Lilleshall, near Telford, with adaptive input and students coming from the Battle Back team based at DMRC Headley Court near Epsom. It exists to ensure the seriously injured have access to the same opportunities in sport and AT that are currently available to the able bodied.

Through Battle Back, which is a tri-service organisation, seriously injured service personnel are encouraged to participate in sport and AT as part of their rehabilitation process and beyond. Just like conventional AT, Battle Back has been shown to make a huge difference in lives – physically,

mentally and emotionally. The AMA and its members have been great advocates and supporters of Battle Back from the outset. One example of this support has been to provide sponsorship to an annual adaptive Level 3 climbing expedition to Spain – now in its 5th year. Based in the popular Calpe region, the expedition, latterly known as Exercise SPIDER PIG, has taken a wide range of serving military personnel with a variety of injuries, and given them an enhanced experience of sport and trad climbing, often introduced in a muggy English climbing wall, and then developed on warm Spanish rock in the well-trodden Calpe region. The latest of these expeditions, in November 2014, saw 10 students and 6 instructors tackle an impressive array of single and multi-pitch climbs, comprising a mix of old favourites in Echo Valley and Sierra de Toix, and well as some new to the Spider Pig in Sella.

Planning and conducting an adaptive expedition is really no different than any other. All the usual issues of location and accommodation, participants, funding, instructors and qualifications, equipment and transport, paperwork etc. However, some of the factors to be considered within the following headings are different, for example:

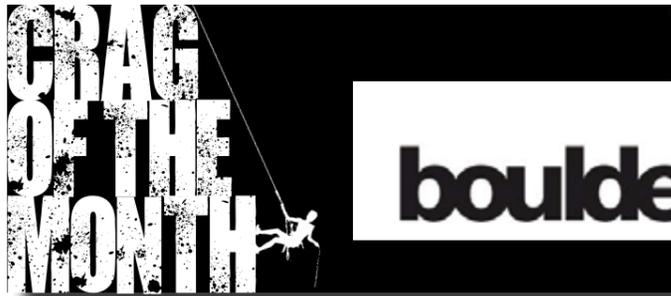
Loan pool climbing equipment is almost universally adaptable and thus suitable for adaptive use: it is by its very design flexible, and lends itself to novel and adaptive applications. There are a couple of exceptions: providing grip to prostheses has followed a number of avenues and could form a lengthy article all of its own. Early attempts with rubber from old climbing shoes grafted to nylon pucks were moderately successful. Rubber floor tiles less so. A recent experiment with a section taken from a high-quality MTB tyre produced promising results, which will be followed up on a future expedition. Climbing techniques too take some adaption, and the emphasis – depending on disability – is often on balance rather than strength. This is something that many able-bodied military novices could usefully learn! Disabled access both for accommodation and to the foot of crags is a significant issue. The first is easily solved by using the excellent Finca Asmoladora in Parcent, as advertised in the Costa Blanca



Rockfax, and on line at <http://www.finca-la-asmoladora.com/>. This has flexible, adaptable accommodation, with good wheelchair access and walk-in showers. It is also well placed for most of the climbing venues. The resident owners Pam and Derek Cornthwaite have proved to be generous, understanding hosts over successive visits – and offer a good military discount. It has to be said that an added advantage of the quiet rural location is that it is well removed from the fleshpots of Benidorm. This puts temptation an expensive taxi ride away, and focuses attention on the main purpose of the trip: climbing and team building. Crag selection, and in particular crag access is a more challenging issue: how far would you be prepared to crawl on your knees or be carried (the latter rarely occurs), in order to get to the foot of a climb? Fortunately there are some first rate novice-friendly crags with bolted routes in the lower grades – eg at Echo Valley and Sella with just the level of drive-in access required. By way of example, evergreen favourite routes, all of which can be accessed almost directly from the concrete access road at Echo 1.5 include Bicton ITC (4) and Flake Drum (4+). The popular group comprising Shield (3+), Fat Boy (3) Live Wire (3) and Pro Wire (3) have perennially provided an excellent learning environment for students progressing to lead climbing. Rick Mayfield at the Orange House is to be thanked for establishing and bolting this great facility. Sierra de Toix has proved a little more challenging in terms of access. However, it is well worth the effort for the quality and length of climbs (for more mobile students) and the spectacularly evocative sea views. Firm favourites include the single pitch array on Toix Far Oeste (centred on the appropriately-named Help for Heroes!) and various multi-pitch climbs on Toix Placa including Ruwa (5), Lofi (4+), Lara (4+) and the impressively long (5 pitch) Gliber (5+).

Both accommodation and climbing venues are equally suited to and recommended for a more conventional AT expedition, with further details available in the several Spider Pig PXR's or from the author. The flexibility and adaptability of climbing, in particular in the natural environment, lends itself very well to the Battle Back ethos, and adaptive climbing, like all adaptive endeavour, focuses on what can be achieved, not that which cannot. See you on the rock!





Dinas Rock

Found in the Neath Valley, south Wales, in an idyllic location this beautiful gorge is home to some of our best inland limestone and really does offer something for all tastes. Over the years this has been a testing ground for locals and visiting climbers alike and many have left there mark here with some truly impressive ascents.

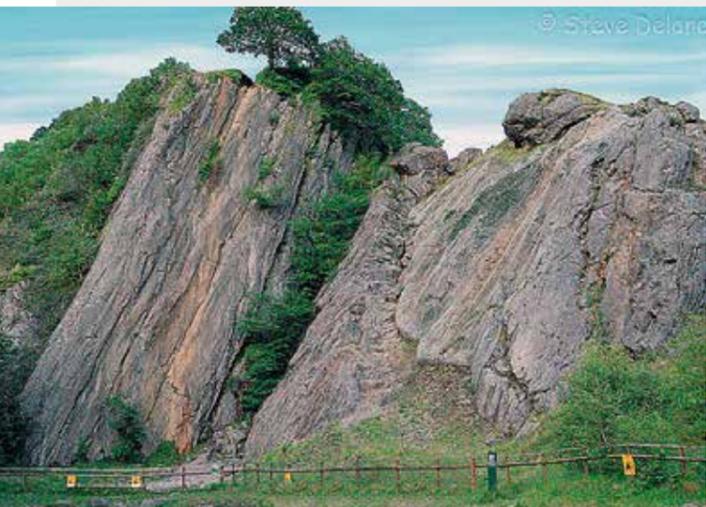
The Crag

Dinas Rock is situated along side the 'Heads of the valley' A465 just by the village of Glyn Neath, and is a major tourist draw for many recreational users. This is waterfall country! As such there are many stunning trails that lead around the steep wooded valleys that will guide you to the numerous waterfalls. Due to the relative ease of access this is extremely popular in the summer so get to Dinas early or parking can be tricky.

The waterfalls bring another outdoor activities group to the area other than climbers. This time it's the Gorge Walkers, kitted up in wetsuits and buoyancy aids this is a popular stag and hen do activity that involves swimming and jumping around in the river, best seen as a crazy assault course. All summer hundreds of people participate in gorge walking at Dinas and as such demand on the carpark is high so it can be good to time your visit in the week when you will probably have the gorge at its best – to yourself!

Once you park up you will straight away be struck by the carpark face which is home to some great trad lines, unfortunately these do not see much traffic these days and as such are quite dirty. This car park area is often used by local activity centres for novices and is probably best left to them, for the more serious climber there are far more delights awaiting.

Following the path around from the carpark and you soon discover the tranquil gorge and notice that there are a series of cragettes dotted along its side. Each of these spots offer an abundance of sport climbing across the low to intermediate grades, although there is the odd 'desperate' here the majority of routes are in the 6's.



Eventually a corner is turned and Kennelgarth wall is visible, this is home to South Wales's most popular bouldering spot. Endless problems from V1 to V11 abound this steep wall with almost all of them requiring a cunning mind as well as steel fingers.

Opposite kennelgarth is the Lower Cave a more recent addition to Dinas rock with a few super steep climbs that unfortunately seep most of the winter so defiantly on your summer tick list.

From here it is possible to ascend the short rock step that is guarded by a short water fall and make your way onto the upper track and in turn to the Main Face. The Main face at Dinas is an incredible sheet of limestone that is pleasure to climb on most of the classics hear are in the 7's but there are some great 6's found on each flack on the wall.

It should also be said that Dinas has a few brilliant trad routes and a few of these are found on this very wall. 'Giant killer E6' is and impressive piece of roof climbing found on the left of the massive roof that is not for the faint hearted. On the Right of this roof is one of the worlds hardest crack climbs, Dina Crac E9. This is the hardest trad route in South Wales and weighs in at around F8b+ in difficulty, add to this all the gear is placed on lead this route is a serious challenge!

The far right of the main wall is home to some slightly eaiser trad routes. Here you will find 'Groovy tube' which is a brilliant E1 climbing through an incredible tube of rock that feels as if you have entered the bowls of the cliff. Spain (E4) is also a classic and worth finding for those into the trad thing!

How to Get there

The crag is simple to find from the village of Glyn Neath were following the brown tourist signs for water falls will see you pass a pub 'The Angle'. From here take the right fork in the road and at its end you will find the forestry commissions carpark (which is free at present). Once you are on foot simply follow the path on the right hand side of the carpark and the crags become apparent in a few minutes. The main crag is no more than a 10 min walk with a short scabble once past kennelgath wall.

What's in my pack

Dinas rock offers such a variety of climbing that a little planning is required to know what best to take. For most who intend to boulder simply a Bouldering mat, shoes and chalk and you are good to go. The landings are flat and the height insufficient to require more foam. I would suggest a good pair of aggressive shoes, such as the evolv nexxo's, with a toe patch for the bouldering as all manner of toe and heel hooks are required to solve a lot of the problems.

If you are interested in sport climbing then a 50 mtr rope will see you safely of almost every line here although it is still best practice to tie a knot in the dead end of the rope. 12 quickdraws are enough for almost all climbs but those interested in some of the longer lines on the main face may require a few more and some longer extenders can be off great benefit to reduce rope drag.

Most or the lower crags are in the shade of the wooded hill sides so a warm jumper for the evenings is a must but the main wall can be a sun trap, so some sun block and a hat can be useful along with some water! The walk back to the car from the main crag is not one you want to do more than once a session so check you have everything before leaving!

As it's a sport venue you will need to know how to thread a belay to get down safely along with all the normal sport climbing issues.

If your into redpointing a gri gri and clipstick could be useful as a few of the first bolts on the harder lines are quite high above the floor. A lot of the chains have Karabiners left in place so you can simply lower back down after a climb please leave them there! But

it is worth threading the belay if you intend to strip the line as some could have been in place along time.

If you are interested in the traditional climbs than a normal Rack is sufficient with few cams. Most of the trad lines have some in situ threads that I would seriously consider baking up as they have been there for some time.

What ever you choose to do at Dinas take so insect repellent! As the sun starts to set midges can be a real pain at Dinas especially on the lower crags but a good spray can make the difference.

The Beta

Tidal status – Non Tidal its inland!

Crag height – 10 to 3meters

Routes

Below 6a	F6a –F6c+	F7a –F7c	F8a and above
9	38	56	9

Many climber have a tough time on there first visit to Dinas rock as the climbing is almost always technical and requires more problem solving than brute force, the holds are not always obvious but I can vouch that they are there!

The first crag that you walk past has two great lines with a great F5 'Fromage Frais' Being a good warm up for most. There is also a great F7A+ 'Rob Roy' that goes direct to the same belay and is a lot of peoples first at this grade.

From here a stone throw will se you at the next crag which is home to some great f6's 'Charlie's Rusk' and 'the deflated dick head' are the pick of the bunch, also of note are the 4's found by the track which climb some crazily feature rock.

The slab that follows is deceptively hard, although it looks quite easy due to its less than vertical inclination, don't be fooled the 6's here are technical and not easy.

Before moving up to the lower cave the last crag you walk past is, The love of Ivy sector and again a few great 6c's and low 7's, 'Morticia' probably being the most popular are be found. Also of note is the amazing ability this part of the crag has to stay dry in the rain. Don't ask me how but I have climbed on dry rock here even in monsoon type weather.

The lower cave is obvious and found on the adjacent riverbank. 'Rose line F7b' and 'Smashed rat F7c' are the two must do's. But the cave does have some other lines all in the 7's and one very difficult link up 'tiger Cut 7c+'

After the short scramble you will find Dinas main cliff. How do you pick a line on the main cliff? They are all so involved and tremendous routes. The obvious place to start is on the left of the main roof were a 6b, call a spade a spade, is a worthwhile warm up. From here walk under the massive roof until you find 'Berlin'. This route is often listed in top 100 route in the UK so has to make an appearance here and should be on anyone's tick list who operates in the high 6's or 7's. The start is a brutal battle over the first roof followed by some dreamy slab climbing sequences that will baffle most.

'Chimes of Freedom7c', 'Harlem F7b' and 'H1N1 F8a' are also regional test pieces that also seem to have the benefit of staying dry in most weather conditions.

Après' Climb

Once you have finished climbing a short car journey will see you back at The Angel pub which is were most climbers seem to stop to discuss the events of the day and plan their next adventures.

Bring your wall back to life!

Climbing is a growing sport, moving away from the image of the scary outdoor adventure activity that only the most eccentric take part in to a wide reaching, inclusive activity for all ages and abilities. This has led to a move away from the old pub meet ups and towards the local indoor climbing wall being the new social hub, where climbers meet up to train, plan their next outdoor excursion or just drink good coffee. Most climbing centres will offer facilities that cater for beginners, those operating at the highest end of the sport as well as those with a physical or mental challenge to overcome.

The Army has access to climbing walls all over the country but not all of them are regularly used or overseen by keen climbers and so often the full potential of the facility is not realised or worse the wall is not used at all!

So what can you do to help bring your gymnasium climbing wall to life?

- Find out who is currently responsible for the wall. It may have been entrusted to a non-climber, in which case they may not realise the huge amount of activities that the wall can be used for or how to go about getting it open for use. Often the task is perceived to be to daunting or complicated a prospect, with little return in comparison with "mainstream" sports. Getting a disused wall up and running again isn't hard, it just takes a bit of knowledge and someone to take it on.
- If the wall has not been used for a while, try and find out where the documentation is kept. There should be reports covering the last structural inspection and procedures for undertaking regular checks on in-situ metal work, ropes and equipment. If there aren't any then you have no way of knowing how safe the wall or equipment is. In this situation, a trained competent person should be used to inspect and sign off the kit before use.
- If there is matting, check for soft areas and rips. Damage to safety matting can reduce its effectiveness in absorbing impact forces and holes or rips can trap limbs and lead to injury. Damage like this will probably require the mats to be replaced.
- Establish if there are measures in place to ensure the competency of the people using the wall. In the first instance limiting access to only people with qualifications or those under instructor supervision will prevent most accidents but it prevents a lot of climbers from getting involved.
- Don't try and do too much too fast! Having access to a climbing wall is a fantastic opportunity to make the sport available to people of all abilities but start small. Try getting a climbing club going once per week on a set evening, this way you can start creating or bringing together a community of climbers and hopefully find someone else to help you grow the club's offerings bit by bit.
- If you don't have specialist knowledge yourself, you can hire in experts to teach the basic procedures for checking and teaching competence using in house qualifications. You could even consider only allowing top roping to start with. The priority has to be towards safety of all those involved and hopefully the sustainability of the club and wall long term. After all, injured climbers can't climb!

Winter is coming up quickly and the training season is approaching. Regular, quality route setting will ensure repeat visits from wall users and set the tone of the wall. Too easy and you will lose the "wads", too hard and the social, fun climbers will not bother coming. It is a difficult skill to balance and there are many professional route setters around the country that you can approach for partial or full wall sets to bring variation and challenge to your wall.

Have fun!

There is a whole wealth of knowledge out there in how to get climbing facilities going. Boulders provides a full range of wall consultancy services, from undertaking all Health and Safety checks to providing advice on getting the most out of your wall and help with establishing clubs and competitions. Please contact us for more information on any of these areas, as well as route setting, instruction and performance coaching.

02920 484880 • tom@boulders-climbing.com

Belay device trial

by Ryan Lang

There are thousands of items of shiny rock climbing hardware that lure the unsuspecting climber into shops trying to convince them to part with cash! One of the most important and most used items is the belay device. After all, it allows you to hold a falling partner, lower them safely and even abseil if required. There are so many to choose from, the type you choose will ultimately depend on what type of climbing you do.

From my own personal experience, the first belay device I purchased was simple and did the job but I soon outgrew its functionality and ended up purchasing a new device soon after. My advice would be to try and choose a device that will future proof your requirements. For example you may not need a guide-mode belay device when you first start out, however a few months later it may be the functionality you wish you had.

For this article, I have compared three separate guide-mode belay devices which are the Black Diamond ATC Guide, the Petzl Reverso 4 and the DMM Pivot. I have chosen a guide-mode device as I believe it represents good value for money as it can be used in a variety of situations such as:



Standard belay mode – The most widely used belay method used whether climbing indoors, outdoors, top/bottom roping or lead belaying.



Guide belay mode – A slightly more specialist method, where the leader can belay up to two second climbers simultaneously.

Petzl Reverso 4

The Reverso 4 is basically the same as the much loved Reverso 3, except it is much lighter. It is a multipurpose belay / abseil device with braking adapted to different rope diameters.

The Reverso 4 is the lightest of the three devices by some margin. I have not owned the device long enough to be able to ascertain its long term longevity. However I have looked at other peoples devices that are a few months old and they seem to show their age quickly compared to the Black Diamond ATC Guide.

The Reverso performed well with both half ropes and a single rope. There was no noticeable difference in rope handling compared to the other two devices. Even despite the fact that the device accepts a reduced rope diameter range on paper.

All three belay plates were tested using an 80 Kg weight. This was done to provide an indication of how easy it was to release a climber who has fallen whilst being belayed in guide mode.

Abseil device – Most devices can be used for abseil descents once you have topped out on a route.

Before buying a new belay device it is important to ensure that you choose one that is compatible with your ropes. It is far cheaper to buy a device compatible with your ropes rather than ropes that are compatible with your belay device! The table below illustrates the rope ranges that can be used in each of the devices under test:

	Petzl Reverso 4	DMM Pivot	Black Diamond ATC Guide
Weight	59g	72g	88g
Rope diameter			
Half	≥ 8mm	≥7.3mm	≥7mm
Single	≥8.9mm	≥8.7mm	≥9mm
Twin	≥7.5mm	≥7.3mm	≥7mm
Cost (Cotswold)	£28	£27.50	£25

Standard belay mode	★★★★★
Guide belay mode	★★★★★
Robustness	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★



DMM Pivot

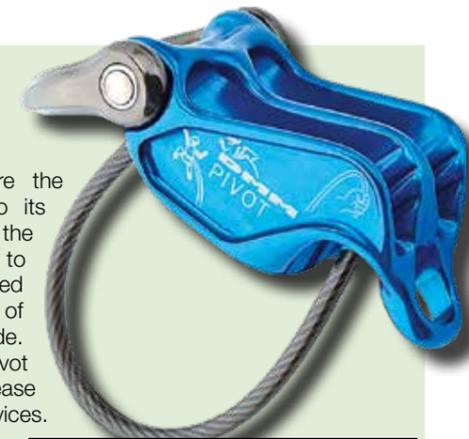
The DMM Pivot is the new boy in town and sports the innovative pivot action which makes releasing a locked guide plate much easier. The Pivot won an industry award at the Outdoor show in Friedrichshafen in July 15.

The Pivot feels slightly less robust than the Black Diamond ATC, and after a few weeks use it is already showing signs of premature ageing. Whilst a lot of this is purely cosmetic as the anodized finish looks amazing when new, but soon scratches off! The slight worry is how quickly the underside of the belay device began to 'burr' due to the karabiner striking the underside of the device. This happens in all belay devices and should be checked as it can cause damage to your ropes!

The Pivot performed equally as well as the other two devices when using half ropes. When used with a single rope it seemed to be slightly slicker than the other devices which is why it is now my favourite device for single rope use.

Guide mode is where the Pivot really came into its own. The pivot moves the point of rotation closer to the load for easily initiated and controlled lowering of a second in guide mode. In plain English, the Pivot is much easier to release than the other two devices.

It was also much easier to finely adjust the speed of release with the Pivot. It was also easy to feel the point at which rope would start to feed through the Pivot, whereas the other devices were much harder to gauge.



Standard belay mode	★★★★★
Guide belay mode	★★★★★
Robustness	★★★★★
Value (Based on DMM Discount)	★★★★★

Black Diamond ATC Guide

The Black Diamond ATC Guide is a popular choice amongst mountaineers. The most recent version is now even lighter than previous models due to windows machined through the body. It has been around for a few years and won an award in the Kletter magazine in 2011.

The ATC Guide is a robust piece of kit which is no surprise considering it's almost 20% heavier than its nearest rival! If weight is not a concern, then it's worth considering the ATC, as it will last a long time, I have had mine for 3 years and it's still going strong. That said, I have seen a few examples wire loop breaking which makes the device unusable.

The ATC was found to perform well with half ropes and was fairly slick when there was the need to pay rope out quickly. However when using a single rope, the device was found to be fairly sticky and less responsive. The ATC had a good adaptive breaking range due to the fairly prominent 'V' notch.



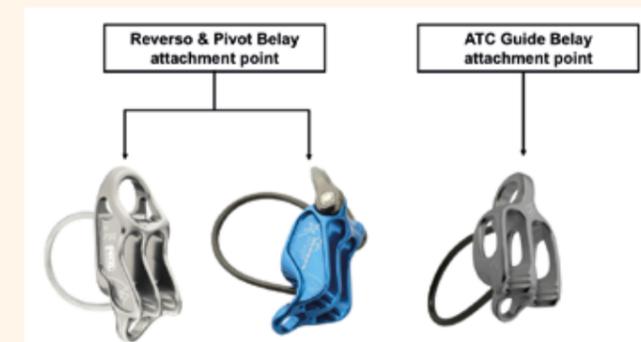
Standard belay mode	★★★★★
Guide belay mode	★★★★★
Robustness	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★

When used in Guide mode the ATC performed well. The ropes moved slickly through the device without any problem. One slightly annoying point is the orientation of the anchor attachment point. This is 90° different to the other two devices as shown below:

This causes the ATC to be slightly squint when attaching the device to certain fixed (non-sling) anchors.

The ATC wasn't particularly easy to release when the 80 Kg weight was used. A screwgate was used as a lever to help release the ATC which made things easier, but it still felt a little precarious and I felt that I had to be really careful not to let too much rope through the device to quickly.

When used as an abseil device, I found that the 'V' notch provided too much friction. This is easily overcome by turning the belay device round by 180° so that the teeth are at the top.



Summary

The three devices all performed well under test whether used in standard belay or guide mode. The Black Diamond ATC can be awkward to attach to fixed anchors when used in guide mode due to the orientation of the attachment point, but it's not a show stopper. It is a robust device and has lasted the test of time.

The Petzl Reverso 4 is a great all rounder and its easy to see why it's a popular device and on its 4th evolution.

The DMM Pivot is the newest on the scene and is already winning awards. It has shown its age pretty quickly but considering the hefty DMM discount, I will just buy another one when and if the time comes. The pivot action sets this device slightly ahead of the pack and gets my recommendation.

Book Reviews

Written by Tomo Thompson

The books are reviewed left to right in the picture. The books that are listed as published by Vertebrate Publishing (of which Baton Wicks is part) are available at significant discount to AMA members, full details in the Members Area of the AMA website.

Title – Lake District / Mountain Landscape
Author – Alastair Lee
Publisher – Vertebrate: Price £25

Many of you will have seen a climbing or mountaineering film that has had Lee behind the camera. A man of many talents, this book is 176 pages of the mountains and high tops seen through the lens of a climbing cameraman. As well as gracing any coffee table, the book is also of immense use for spying potential routes in summer and winter, I found myself pulling out the FRCC guides and relating Lee's outstanding photographs to identify crags. You might be relieved to read there are few "honey pot" photographs of the lakes and meres of this part of the world, the high mountains in often savage weather are to the fore here. Of particular note is the "Mountin Craft" chapter which includes superb photographs of climbers such as Dave Birkett on high mountain classics like Scafells East Face.

Title – In Some Lost Place
Author – Sandy Allan
Publisher – Vertebrate: Price £24

Had the Olympics not been taking place in 2012 the climb on which this book is centred may well have attracted immense multi-national attention, and justifiably so. Two blokes in their fifties achieve what ten previous expeditions had failed to do; ascend the ten kilometre long Mazeno Ridge to the 8126m summit of Nanga Parbat. "Epic" is a word tossed around modern mountaineering at will, but this route, and indeed this book, truly are epic. A three day descent after an eleven day climb tested the pair to the edge of their being. Awarded the Piolet d'Or for their climb, the book has also been shortlisted for the Boardman Tasker award. It is a brilliant book written with wit, perception and a true appreciation of the mountains, and deserves a place in any serious mountain literature collection.

Sandy Allan lectured at the 2014 AMA AGM.

Title – A Dream of White Horses
Author – Edwin Drummond
Publisher – Baton Wicks: Price £10

I read a small bit of this book, and several of the reviews a few decades ago (it was originally published in 1987). Stuart Peggall of Climbing Magazine considered it to be "the most challenging, disturbing and provocative piece of climbing literature" he had ever read, adding "the consistent brilliance of the writing is astounding"

I perhaps better start the review by saying it is definitely not everyones cup of tea. Part rant, part poetry anthology, part essay collection. The Boardman Tasker judges refused to even shortlist it, and multiple U.S. publishers rejected it. I found it a difficult read; jarring, hugely imaginative, nervous and edgy. Think the best of Mark Twight, Andy Kirkpatrick, John Edwards, Al Alvarez and John Redhead crushed up in to words, poems and actions. Definitely certificate eighteen; definitely thought-provoking; definitely a classic of the genre.

Title – The Storms / Adventure and Tragedy on Everest
Author – Mike Trueman
Publisher – Baton Wicks: Price £12.99

This memoir by ex-Gurkha Officer, Trueman, gives a candid account of life on the inside of multiple expeditions to the Himalaya. In August '79 he got his first taste of the savage potential of nature when he was caught in the storm that became known as the Fastnet disaster. Seventeen years later Trueman descended Everest during the May 1996 tragedy, using his two and half decades of military experience to co-ordinate the rescue effort at Base Camp. Three years later, Trueman summited Everest with Mike Matthews only for Matthews to disappear on the descent.

More than a fair share of close shaves and bad luck, but also a lifetime of deep experiences.

Title – The Beginners Guide for Climbers
Author – Sophie Mirchell
Publisher – Rockfax: Price £9.95

I have put this book in to this review for one simple reason; in my humble opinion it is the best (by which I mean easy to understand) book to introduce the basics of climbing to children and teenagers. I have also given copies to adult novice climbers to help them consolidate their early lessons. The handbook of the National Indoor Climbing Award Scheme it is full of witty cartoons and jargon-busting explanations. The clincher is that the reinforced back cover has holes in it with a picture of a harness drawn over them so that the reader can practise tying-in (the book comes with a length of cord). If only all mountaineering technique books were this easy to understand!

Title – Eastern Grit
Author – Chris Craggs
Publisher – Rockfax: Price £29.95

The third edition of the UK's best selling guidebook. The original 2001 version arguably changed the format of guidebooks for ever. A significantly revised edition was published in 2006 with 100 extra pages and 900 extra routes. Eight years on to 2015 and the new book has been expanded with more coverage of the main cliffs and the inclusion of many of the minor venues that were left out last time round. It is now a massive 560 pages with over 4000 routes! The book includes a superb set of inspiring action photographs from some renown photographers plus a plethora of graded lists. Weighing in at about the same as everything else in your sack, it is a beast. A brilliant new guide to one of the most popular climbing areas in the world.

Title – Lake District Climbs and Scrambles
Author – Stephen Goodwin
Publisher – Vertebrate: Price £16.95

It's small. It has proper OS maps in it. It's clearly written. If you are the kind of mountain goer that likes to blur the lines between high mountain walking, scrambling and lower grade climbing, and likes to indulge in two if not three of these on a long mountain day, then, like me, you'll really appreciate this guide. Twenty routes from 5km to 16km and with scrambles up to grade 3 and climbs up to Severe.

Title – Uncommon Ground / A word lovers guide to the British landscape
Author – Dominick Tyler
Publisher – Faber: Price £16.95

I am allowed one esoteric book. This is it.

Whilst taking the photographs for the book Wild Swim, Tyler observed a whole range of odd words used on maps and in place names to describe parts of the landscape. He then went on to find, understand, explain and photograph a whole wonderful book full of them.

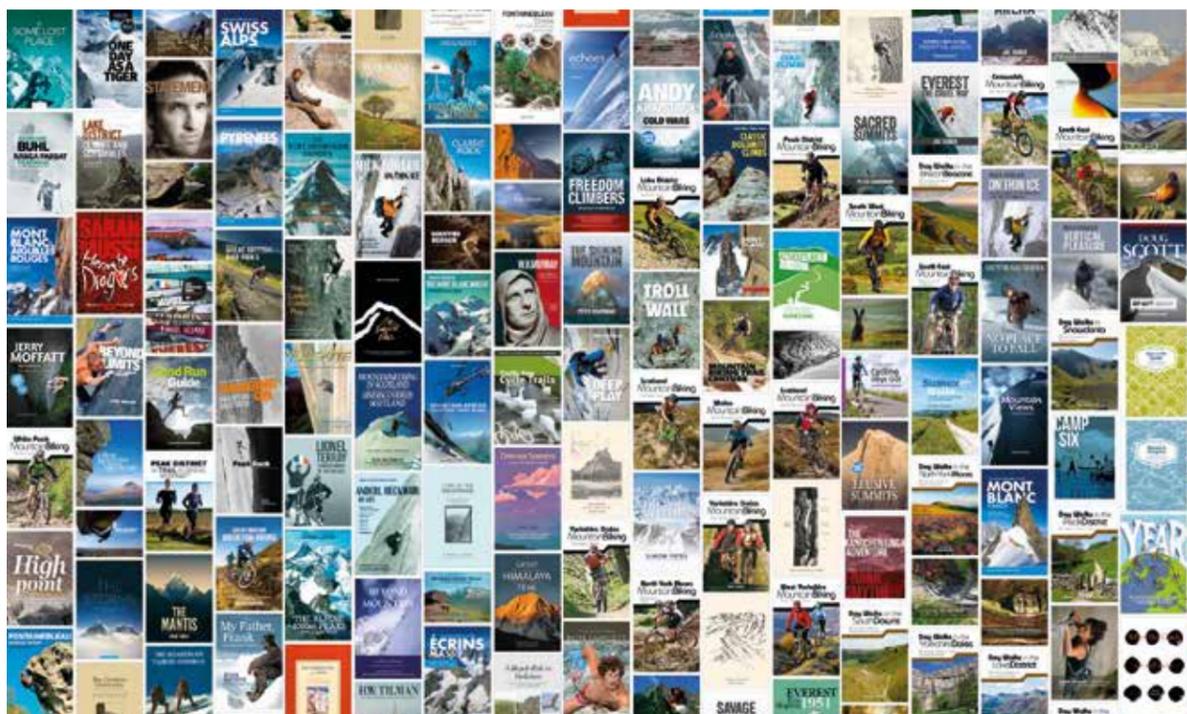
Clitter. Mire. Haareis. Caochan. Grike. Erratic. Sarn. Stunpol. Ait. Marfer. Zawn.

Title – Climbing Wall Leading
Author – Ian Fenton
Publisher – PesdaPress: Price £9.99

Same size and style as the very successful Climbing Games by Paul Smith, this great little book is full of exercises to aid the progression towards leading indoors. The exercises are progressive, easy to understand and well photographed. It will be an asset to any climber wanting to learn to lead, or indeed any instructor or coach that needs to refresh their box of ideas for teaching indoor leader



Vertebrate Publishing Award-winning mountaineering and outdoor books



www.v-publishing.co.uk •
 [www.twitter.com/VertebratePub](https://twitter.com/VertebratePub) •
 www.facebook.com/vertebratepublishing
 Discount available for AMA members – see AMA website for details



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!

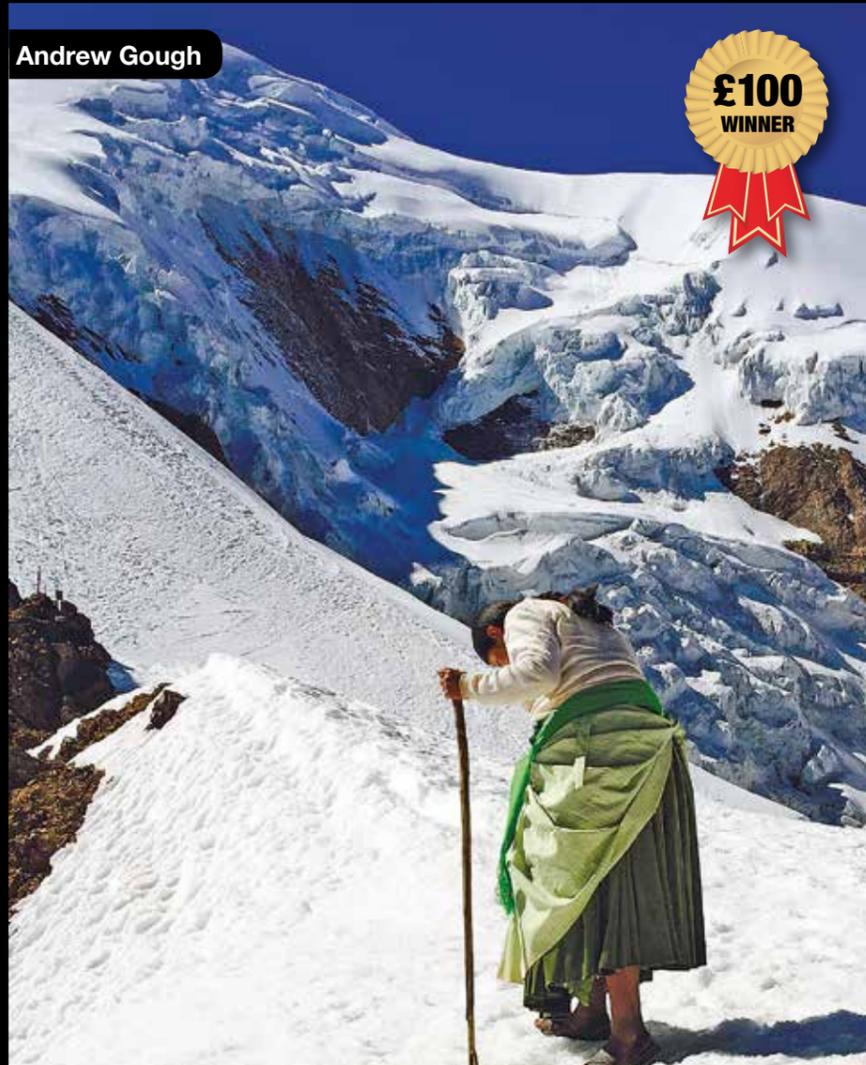
(Photos should be the highest quality possible (not less than 2Mb) and e-mailed to the editor, along with a credit and caption) journal@armymountaineer.org.uk



Ryan Lang



Jake Allitt



Andrew Gough

£100
WINNER



Chris Morley



James Massey



Ryan Lang



Tania Noakes

£75
WINNER



Rich Simpson



Roy Davies



Emma Dempsey

£50
WINNER



Andrew Gough

CCAT SCOTLAND 2015

Rain and Midges did not stop play

The Cadet Centre for Adventurous Training (CCAT) moved its training operations to the Cairngorms for the last week in August. Unfortunately, Britain experienced an unusual combination of weather fronts that week, making the Central Highlands unremittingly wet. This resulted in the instructors spending the evenings scouring weather maps and coming up with cunning plans to escape the rain, using all their ingenuity and knowledge to ensure the best possible experience for the students.

Four groups of students, a mixture of Senior Cadets and Cadet Force Adult Volunteers (CFAVs) undertook Intermediate Rock Climbing, Scrambling and Ridge Walking, Sea Kayaking and Mountain Biking Foundation courses. Whilst escaping the rain meant long journeys in the vehicles, the students certainly saw a lot of Scotland, travelling to areas probably that very few Scots have visited.

For the rock climbers, the need to escape the rain was paramount and this meant trips north to the Moray Coast to the single pitch venues of Burghead and Cummington and west to Binnein Shuas and Poll Dubh in Glen Nevis to complete multi pitch routes. The walk in to Binnein Shuas was one and a half hours each way, but worth it for a route the quality of Kubla Khan on the Fortress Wall, a two star multi pitch route in a spectacular position. Whilst the aim of the course is to produce competent seconds able to climb multi pitch routes, CCAT always encourages the students to develop their skill as far as possible. As the students were all competent climbers, the training focused on teaching them to lead climb. Building belays and placing protection was covered and by the end of the week, all the students had led traditional routes, placing their own protection and belaying their compatriots.

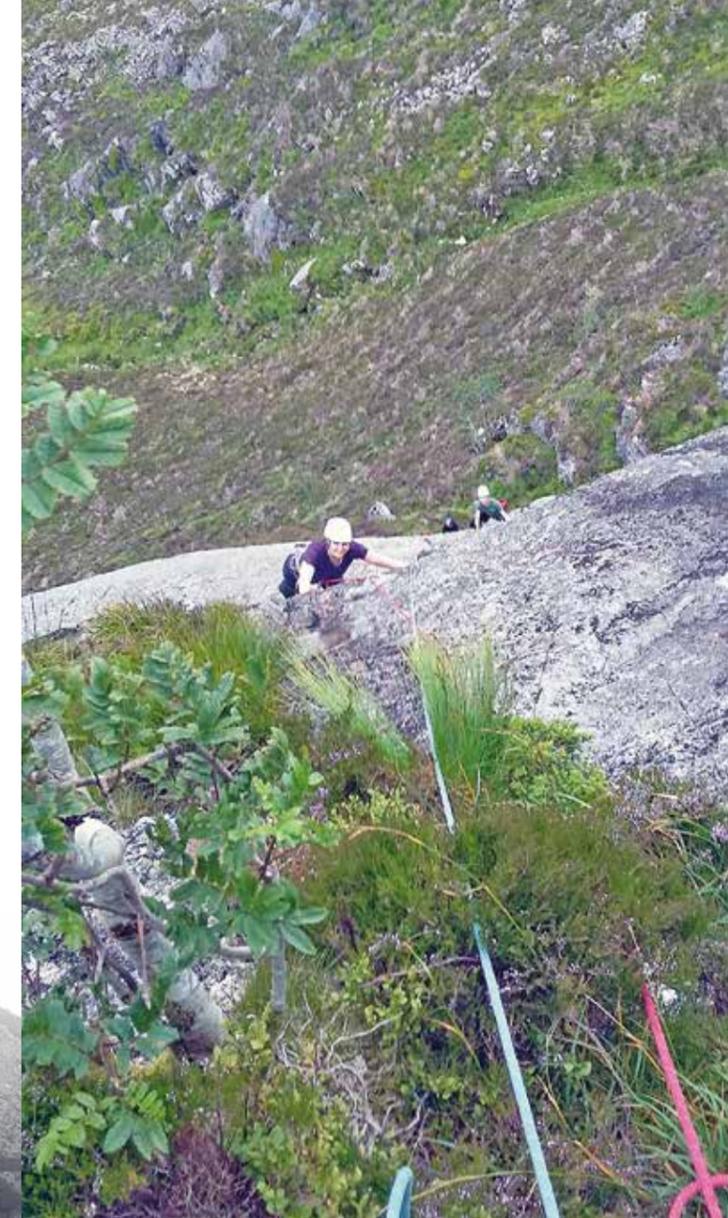
The mountaineers, all of whom had already completed their Summer Mountain Foundation (SMF), set out to tackle adventurous ridge routes. On the first day, they travelled north west to Stac Pollaidh, the long drive rewarded by a windy and therefore midge free ascent and excellent fish and chips in Ullapool on the way back! Then it was west to complete the West Ridge of Aonach Mor, the walk in eased by using the uplift. Although cloud made the route finding difficult it was a tremendous Grade 2 scramble. Another foray west took them to Ben a'Chorain, where the west ridge provided

a Grade 1 scramble in a perfect position with great views. After a day of climbing, their final day forayed into the Cairngorms to complete the Fiacail a Coire an Sneachda. Scrambling involves moving together on the rope as well as pitching more difficult steps and requires confidence and judgement to move safely and efficiently. This course was a great opportunity for the students to increase their experience and knowledge gathering invaluable log book experience.

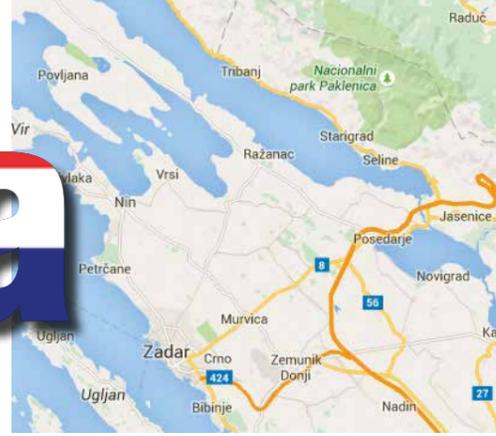
The marvelous coast line landscape of both the north-west and north-east Scotland provided the back drop for the sea kayakers, who ranged far and wide to develop and hone their skills. Their trip to the Summer Isles afforded not only flat, calm water but the sighting of a pod of dolphins and incredible rock architecture to paddle through. The sea state round Fort George proved a bit lumpier, but when they paddled round the light house off the Tain Range, they had seals for company. Their trip to the Moray coast, putting in at Burghead, provided the adventure of paddling through sea caves. Not only did the kayakers cover all the skills and techniques necessary to complete the Foundation Award, but they had some wonderful experiences in fantastic Scottish scenery.

Mountain Biking Foundation is a new departure for CCAT and the students were issued brand new equipment to augment the shiny new bikes being used for the first time. The bikes' condition at the end of the week clearly showed the tough and adventurous routes tackled by the students, some of whom were complete novices. They too had to travel far and wide to optimise conditions, but this meant the students experienced many different areas.

Major Kevin Edwards, OC CCAT, put together a team of very experienced instructors, whose willingness to go the extra mile (quite literally!) in searching for the best conditions meant the students got the best out of their week and it is hoped that this experience will further fuel their appetite to participate in Adventurous Training.



Croatia



There can be no doubt that the Costa Blanca is the place to go for a Winter sun sports climbing trip, but after many trips there in the last four years I was keen to try somewhere different. So after a bit of online research I opted for a Summer climbing trip to Croatia.

Where to go

The National Park of Paklenica is at the heart of Croatian rock climbing and is known as one of the top European rock climbing areas. Paklenica is a place of outstanding natural beauty, situated close to the sea near Starigrad-Paklenica.



The rock climbing is very varied from single pitch sports routes to big wall rock climbing routes up to 350m long, catering for the absolute beginner to the most experienced rock climber. In total there are over 340 routes here on good quality limestone rock, of which the majority of the routes are bolted.

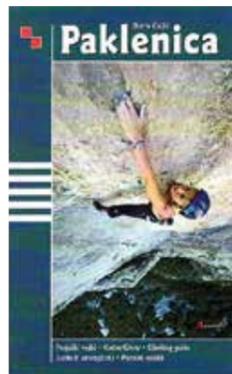
There are over 170 single pitch sports routes mainly located at the entrance to the park, only a few minutes walk from the car park. The rest of the routes at Paklenica are multi-pitch with a mixture of pure bolted routes to trad routes requiring the placement of nuts and cams. The classic Anica kuk face has some big wall multi-pitch climbing up to 350m long.

The National Park is ideally located in a very steep gorge which provides shade or sun depending on your preference all day long. Coming from North of the border, I am not hugely keen on sunburn, so found the shade very welcoming. There are even a multitude of routes where you can belay whilst standing in a stream!

There is an entrance fee for the park, but it is very reasonably priced ranging from less than £5 for one day or a 5 day pass at just over £14.

When to go

The best time of the year to visit Paklenica is from April through to late October. The winter can be very windy and wet, whilst in the high summer it can get very hot, though there is always shade to be found in the sports climbing area of Klanci to the north face of Anica kuk. The graph shown below provides the annual temperature range.



Guidebook

The best guidebook for the area is called "Paklenica" written by Boris Cujic and published by Astroida. The majority of the routes described in the guidebook are shown on good clear topo diagrams. Each pitch is graded (using French grades) along with the overall length of the route. Published in 2013 (6th Edition), the text at the start of each crag and/or section is in Croatian, German, Italian, Slovenian and English text. The book is widely available online.

Grades

There are a wide range of grades to suit all levels of experience. The routes are generally very well bolted where it matters. It is advisable to bring a small rack of extra wires and cams to supplement the

Style of Climbing	Total No. of Routes	Up to 4c	5a to 5c	6a to 6b	6b+ to 6c+	7a to 7b	7b+ to 7c+	Over 8a
Single-pitch sports routes	176	17	35	63	32	15	8	6
Multi-pitch sports routes	125	13	17	39	27	12	14	3
Multi-pitch trad routes	44	25	3	8	5	3	0	0



bolts when necessary. When we climbed Mosoraski (350m – 10 pitch) on the Anica Kuc, I was glad that we had a rack (despite the guide saying it was fully bolted). The bolts were very spaced at approximately 5 – 8m apart.

Logistics

Getting there is simple, there are many airlines that fly from the UK to Zadar, which is the nearest airport and is ideally located approx 35 mins from Starigrad.

Hire cars are widely available from the airport, however we opted to do without and decided to use a taxi all week, which proved to be the most cost effective option.

Accommodation is plentiful, cheap and literally a stones throw from the beach!

There are lots of seaside restaurants and bars that are ideally situated in Starigrad. The food is a little basic but is nice and good value for money.

To Summarise

Croatia as a climbing venue didn't occur to me as a climbing venue until I began researching suitable Summer weather climbing spots. It has everything to offer whether you plan to go as a pair, or arrange a full-on expedition you will not be disappointed.

It has a wide range of climbs ideally located in the sun or shade and when you have had enough for the day, your accommodation is more than likely located on the seafront which is ideal for an afternoon dip!

The acid test for me is whether I would go back? It's not a question if, more a matter of when.....



Alaska had been on my horizon all winter, an agreement between my partner Roeland and me that we would share an adventure further afield on a big mountain in the spring. It had been on my horizon but just slightly out of sight, for Exercise Alpine Arc 2015 had dominated all of my time, first in organising the project and then in leading it. Roeland proposed the Cassin Ridge, a famous 2 500m Grade V route on Denali in Alaska. (Denali at 6194m is the highest peak in North America.) The route is also in the famous book "50 classic climbs of North America" and has been an aspiration goal of mine for many years. He agreed to plan our adventures in Alaska entirely, allowing me the freedom to just say yes.

So I said yes in 2014, several months before the start of what proved to be a very busy winter and at the time I firmly meant it.

In April, after prolonged report writing closing down Exercise Alpine Arc, combined with a vague feeling that I just needed some time sat under a tree (reading a book and listening to the wind blow softly through the branches above me), I was not prepared for the physical and mental rigour demanded by a big trip to a cold snowy mountain. The timing, for me, proved terrible.

Nevertheless Roeland and I travelled to Alaska with the hope of getting the weather and conditions which would allow us a shot at the famous South Ridge of Denali; the Cassin route. That first week of acclimatising, dragging sleds across many kilometres of glacier, battling through wind and snow, digging in camps, building snow-block walls, shovelling out the tent, peeing into a bottle above my sleeping bag, emptying said pee-bottles, shitting into plastic bags in cans and sleeping constrained within my sleeping bag in a frost lined tent... and I just wasn't ready for it. I wasn't in the right state of mind to have to put the effort in, and considerable effort was required; is always required just to survive out on the glacier, let alone climb a 2500m technical climb to the summit of a 6194m mountain. I felt guilty at having said yes to Roeland, to a project that I clearly wasn't in the right state of mind for. I certainly wasn't the best climbing partner for him at the start and I was acutely aware that I had let him down.

The first week passed and we'd made good progress, established a camp at 14,000ft and checked out the fixed lines above before a couple of bad weather days set in. Bringing 90kph winds and several feet of new snow and bringing some welcome tent-bound rest. I spent the morning of my birthday wrapped in the cosy warmth of my sleeping bag listening to the wind howling outside



the tent as Roeland gallantly did the first round of snow shovelling. Preventing us being entirely entombed in the growing snowdrift. Later I managed to rouse myself and take my turn... :)

After a few days settled in at 14 000ft, reading books, chatting and eating, whiling away the bad weather (and not hauling a heavy sled uphill on my bruised hips) I began to feel more content and happier to be there. Then finally we gained a break in the weather and the stunning scenery and sheer grandeur of the place began to take a hold... and I started to feel more motivated and better about being there and our chances of success on the mountain. Roeland never stopped believing that we could do it, and also that we could climb the route fast, in a single push. His faith and thorough planning helped me start to believe as well...

The satellite weather forecast that Roeland had arranged told us that we had four good days of weather coming up and then another, bigger storm which would probably mean the end of



our chances at climbing the Cassin ridge during the time we had available. It was now or never.

I was very sure that I wanted to have already summited by the West Buttress route and stored the route on the GPS before we attempted the Cassin. This would not only help our acclimatisation, which would be crucial in our plan to climb the route in a single push, but also help us get off the mountain safely in the case of bad visibility. Clearly that meant that we'd have to be very careful how we used those four days! So we decided that the first day we would leave as much gear as possible, including the rope and go fast and light from 14,000ft to the summit and back in a day. Then we would be able to use the second good weather day to rest, eat and dry out any gear. The third day we could then use to approach the base of the climb down the West Rib and Seattle '72 cut-off route, and then on the fourth day we would climb the Cassin. A tight schedule but possible... so we decided to go for it.

Our first climb to the summit on the West Buttress went very smoothly. Most people on the route seemed to be waiting for the middle of the good weather window and so very few people summited on the first day of this period – which meant we had the summit practically to ourselves. We were back in the 14,000ft camp for dinner that night, feeling a little tired but both having felt good at the summit with no acclimatisation problems.

Two Austrian aspirant Guides who were camped next to us had left that afternoon to walk into the Cassin and we knew that by the end of our "rest" day the next day they should come back from their climb and we'd be able to get lots of info about conditions from them.

An immensely enjoyable lie-in the next day followed by an easy day in the sunshine and relative warmth of a 14,000ft camp without wind followed. Finally at around 8pm the Austrians returned, tired but happy with a successful 20hr ascent of the Cassin under their belts. They reported a good track in place and several of the bivvi

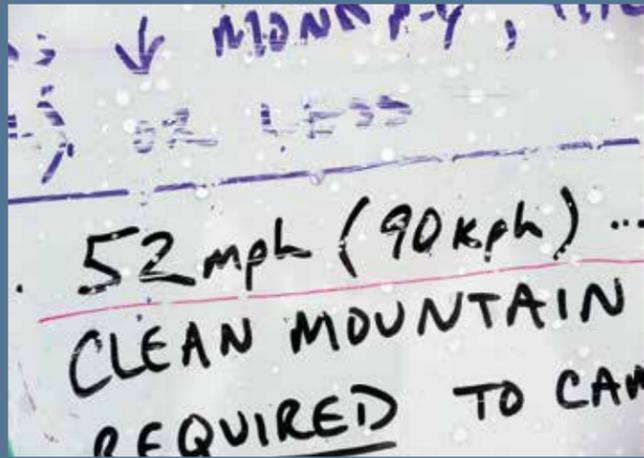
sites (at the base and at the end of the cowboy arête) already dug out by a team engaged on a four day ascent and currently at the cowboy arête camp. This was great news and very reassuring. With good conditions and a track we were more confident that we could climb it relatively fast. My two remaining concerns then became how difficult the down-climb of the West Rib and Seattle '72 ramp would be and if the bad weather would come in early...

Midday on the third good weather day of our 4-day window, Sunday 3rd May, Roeland and I left 14,000ft camp with light sacks and a weather forecast that confirmed we had until 10am local time Tuesday 5th May to be down before another storm would hit the mountain. In addition to our technical climbing gear we took sleeping bags and a sleeping mat each, 2x250g gas canisters, an MSR reactor stove and pan set, and 2 de-hydrated main meals each. No tent, no bivvi-bag... and a bigger sense of commitment than I've ever had on any of my big Alpine North Face routes in the Alps.

By 4.30pm we were relaxing in the sunshine on a bivvi platform at the base of the Japanese couloir. Relaxing.... hmmm.....

The base doesn't go into the shade until about 9pm, when some of the sun's heat is blocked out by the West Rib, but the light remains. Roeland had planned to set off at midnight and sleep for a few hours at the base, but once I was there, at the base of such a famous route... I started to feel the nerves that so often accompany an endeavour where you are taking a calculated risk. I have several very talented friends who have climbed the Cassin Ridge before and I knew that it had taken them several long days and bivouacs to complete the climb... here I was with Roeland daring to try to climb it in a day. I confess to feeling too nervous to sleep. I insisted we set off earlier... as soon as the couloir was properly in the shade... at 9pm. In hindsight it would have been better to wait. Without sleep we effectively strung two days together and hit a tiredness barrier later in the climb which was worse than just physical fatigue. We're both convinced now that a few hours'

Timing is everything: Hard and fast on the Cassin.



sleep at the base would have made a huge difference to our speed in the latter stages of the climb.

At 9pm we set off... through the Japanese couloir with the technical crux of the climb and the only pitch of steep ice, past the Cassin ledge, the striking and memorable cowboy arête to our first pause in the small hours of the morning at the bivvi-site at the end of the arête. We both had something to eat and drink and a little chat, I put on another layer as the cold was beginning to slowly seep through to my core and my hands and feet were cold...then we set off again.

The first rock band... the second rock band... the promised good weather proved to be offset by a cold wind much stronger than forecast and we both felt the pressure to keep moving to keep warm... Finally the sun hit the face late morning and we began to worry less about the cold. At the top of the difficulties the tiredness hit us and we both felt we needed to sleep a little before we continued. We made a platform and took two-hours to doze and melt more water before continuing onto the upper slopes. We began to slow down... The climbing is nowhere very difficult, but it's serious terrain and often icy and exposed, particularly to the wind which was bitterly cold that day. It's the first time that I have been wearing all the clothes with nothing else in my rucksack and been unable to properly feel my feet... knowing surely that if the wind picks up any more or it gets any colder then I could very quickly be in serious trouble.

I felt.... committed. "Out there"... more than on any other climb I have completed. I had made a decision and there was only one

sensible exit strategy now... and that was to keep climbing and be off the mountain before 10am on Tuesday the 5th May; before the bad weather returned. The endless upper slopes drained both our energies but my drive to be off the mountain helped me set a steady pace for us both. Every now and then I would rest my head against the snow and accept that it was beginning to feel like I could fall asleep whilst climbing.... not an entirely advisable course of action on the summit slopes below Kalhitna horn. Finally I began to recognise the summit ridge we'd climbed much more easily only two-days before.... we were almost there! Working together and keeping a steady pace we crested Kalhitna horn at 7.30pm on Monday 4th May. Tired.... empty... cold... probably a little dehydrated but immensely happy. We headed quickly down, having climbed the Cassin route in 22 1/2 hrs. Three hours later we were safely back in 14,000ft camp and ready for sleep.

We had already decided that if everything went to plan we would break camp the next morning and try to use the small weather window to get back to the airstrip before the storm shut down movement on the mountain. This again turned out to be a wise move... although still tired from an intense four days of effort, we struck camp, returned to our skis at 11,000ft and skied out to the strip in deteriorating weather. It was snowing hard by the time we arrived at the strip on Tuesday 5th May at 9pm. We stowed our gear, pitched the tent and crashed into a deep and well-earned sleep.... whilst it snowed continuously for the next 48hrs. Safe in the knowledge that sometimes timing is perfect.



Insurance: what's it worth?

By Roy Davies

Foreword – a Update as at 1 Oct 15

Since this article was originally written, 2015DIN01-185 has been released. It unpicks some of the ambiguity over insurance for military expeditions. However there is still the on-duty status that may continue to cause issues. Moreover the need for expeditions when the core activities and objectives are publicly funded, the purchase of expensive mountaineering insurance should be questioned. The utility of travel and medical insurance which is a personal responsibility and therefore not publicly funded remains unchanged.

Insurance: what's it worth?

Caveat: This article does not supersede any direction and guidance given in AGAls or DINs. It is a reflection of the preparation for an expedition this summer to Bolivia (Exercise ALTIPLANO TIGER). The guidance contained within 2013DIN01-007 remains extant. What this article attempts to do is take the authoritative guidance given in 2013DIN01-007 and align it with what insurance options are commercially available.

Exercise ALTIPLANO TIGER was a mountaineering expedition to Bolivia. Bolivia has no formal mountain rescue organisation. Nor are there helicopters that may be tasked to support any mountain rescue effort. In short any expedition that ends up in difficulty needs to have the ability to conduct its own rescues; this could be supported by locally hired guides, porters, vehicles and donkeys. Hospital care within La Paz is available and can deal with all medical emergencies that one would expect to be associated with a mountaineering expedition. Outside of La Paz, medical care is at best rudimentary. The ability to be able to ensure a level of medical care and possible evacuation to the UK needs to be assured prior to deployment.

Initial investigations found three main providers that other military expeditions were using British Mountaineering Council (BMC), Austrian Alpine Club (AAC) and Forces Financial provided through TowerGate Wilson/JBI.

Forces Financial were quickly removed as they do not cover mountaineering activities, only trekking. Trekking was described as '...Not using ropes, picks or guides...' and below 4500m.

Austrian Alpine Club insurance is used by many members of the Army as they provide excellent cost effective cover for the alps. However once you leave Europe you are faced by numerous clauses that eliminated them from the running.

• Exclusions for Rescue Costs '*...accidents occurring in the course of taking part in expeditions in mountains with a height over 6000 meters as well as expeditions in the Arctic, Antarctica and in Greenland (see note on expeditions/trekking)...*'

• Exclusions for the Repatriation, Transfer and Medical Treatment '*...medical treatment of illnesses and of the consequences of accidents arriving from participation in expeditions as defined under 'Exclusion of Rescue Costs [see above point] ...'*

• The insurance whilst being valid worldwide has geographical limitations (see the two points above) and is designed for Europe and not the greater ranges: '*...Insurance cover extends to all of Europe including the island of the Mediterranean (excluding the islands in the Atlantic, Iceland, Greenland and Spitsbergen as well*

as the Asian part of Turkey and the Commonwealth of Independent States)...'

Some have used this insurance for peaks over 6000m as there is a trekking clause at the back of their policy document which reads '*...Expeditions/Treks. Organised treks do not count as expeditions are therefore insured (nb: for the first eight weeks). If, during the course of such organised treks, single day attempts on summits over 6000m are included, then these also do not count as expeditions. Insurance cover is provided...*'

This clause is intended for trekking peaks and not deliberate climbing objectives. As such Austrian Alpine Club insurance was deemed as unacceptable. This left BMC provided insurance. This is very common within the Army and other services as it provides a scalable level of insurance. Whilst expensive it is arguably the best cover, after all it is designed for mountaineering across the world including the greater ranges.

Given the ambition of Exercise ALTIPLANO TIGER the BMCs High Altitude and Remote questionnaire was completed and submitted. Immediately the question over duty status was asked by the BMC. Having found out that we were on duty they promptly refused cover. This refusal is due to the BMC understanding that the MOD will pay for any incidents during the mountaineering phase. Any expedition which the MOD pays for, even if only contributes a small element of the cost, is classed by the BMC as being 'on duty'. The policy is actually fully supportive of the direction given in 2013DIN01-007. This therefore prevented the use of BMC provided insurance.

At this point, clarity of what consisted as being Duty Status was sort. The MODs Directorate of Judicial Engagement Policy do not adjudicate on what constitutes Duty Status.

They refer to AGAls, Queens Regulations, 2013DIN01-007 and JSP 419; none of which is a surprise. But will not state whether a particular expedition or activity is covered or not.

However AT formally approved under JSP 419 is considered core business activity and therefore is covered. Just as important though is, insurance for activities not covered by the MOD's self insurance arrangements, must be covered by insurance purchased from non-public funds in accordance with 2013DIN08-005.

The Directorate of Judicial Engagement Policy did however provide a cautionary note about expeditions. On an expedition they warned that certain activities may be classed as being off duty. Therefore they would not be covered by the MODs self insurance arrangements.

This cautionary note is supported by the High Court Ruling by Mr Justice William Davis which ruled against a claim by a Royal Marine injured (he is now a tetraplegic and gave his evidence from his wheelchair) whilst swimming on an AT sailing expedition. Activities that might be considered off duty or fall outside of JSP 419 need to be covered. At best this could be a civilian travel insurance which has full medical cover. The insurance provided for example by Forces Financial can cover this and will cover the other activities that maybe undertaken during an expedition which fall outside of JSP 419. This includes social events.

Therefore participants need private, non-publically funded third party liability insurance to cover areas such as personal liability, injury or loss of, or damage to property.

So What?

In short, for the core activities approved under and conducted in accordance with JSP 419 the MOD provide the insurance through their self insurance arrangements; participants are on duty. For all other activities, insurance should be provided through a mixture of non-public funds or privately. The final decision over what is on duty and what is not may only be decided in the High Courts.

Ex Bugaboo Tiger Of Mice, Men and Mountains

Just as Karl and Lenny dreamed of alfalfa fields we dreamed of acres of granite spires dressed with 'splitter' cracks and bathed in glorious sunshine. Sadly though, our hopes of ticking off a few of North America's Top 50 routes were cruelly dashed, as ever, by the weather! As the team from Ex Bugaboo Tiger hauled our hideously overweight packs loaded with stores up to Appleby Camp the weather was decidedly Scottish.

After the walk in, the first couple of days in the Park were spent setting up camp in the 'atmospheric' conditions and a trip out onto the glacier to practice a bit of

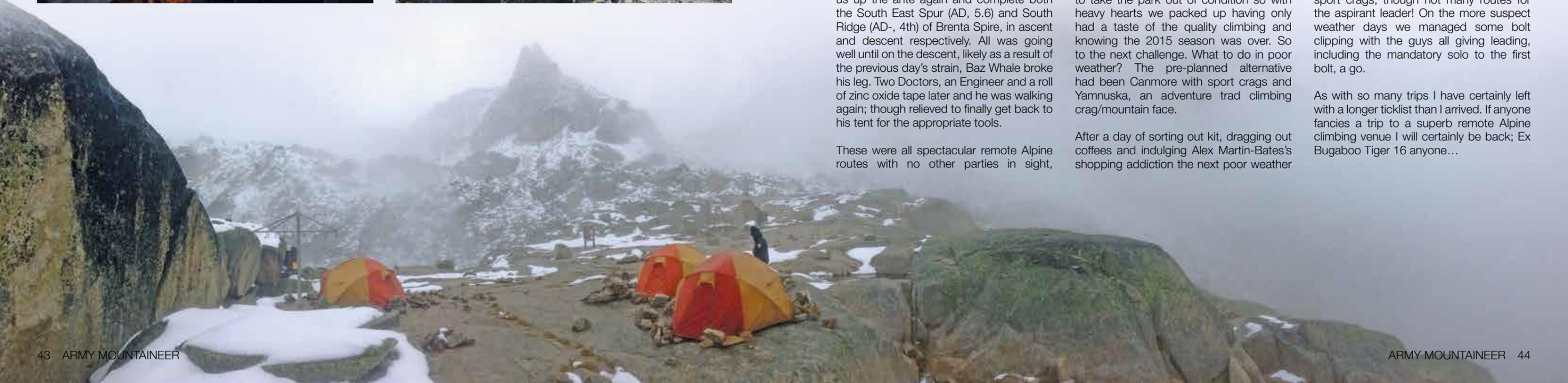
crevasse rescue. A day out on the glacier allowed for the rope teams to finally get tied together and allowed those who hadn't experienced the inside of a crevasse that pleasure. Alpine skills sharpened we were destined not to return to the glacier again!

Due to its remoteness it is difficult to get good information about conditions in the Bugaboo Provincial Park, which sits on the border between the states of Alberta and British Columbia in Canada. Deploying in early September it appears we had firmly missed the sweet spot in the volatile climbing season. There had been significant recent snowfall and most

importantly the Bugaboo-Snowpatch Col, which connects the campsite to the classic Alpine routes, was seriously out of condition cutting us off from a number of our objectives. So, in true military fashion alternatives were quickly sought.

The decision to turn from our objectives was a difficult one but, made by the whole team, one that reinforced to me the point of Adventurous Training. In hindsight, it appears it was also a good one as the one morning we heard, then saw, a boulder the size of a wardrobe dance down the approach to the col. One of the few times in my mountaineering career the difficult decision to not go has been corroborated by events.

After our gloomy introduction to the park that evening the veil of cloud finally lifted heralding a 3-day high pressure. After a late night of photography, lest the view never return, we were out of the gate early the next morning and headed up the North West Ridge of Eastpost Spire (F). A normally simple route was given a little spice with the unseasonal snow lying on it; a bit of exposure for those new to Alpinism.



In high spirits from this we aimed our sights on Lion's Way (PD, 5.6) on Crescent Spire, knowing it to be snow free. With only a short jamming section I may have been slightly over enthusiastic deploying the tape gloves but they certainly did no harm! Snow free on the ascent, the descent was a different story and post holing through rotten snow was the, rather tedious, order of the day! Our final weather window saw us up the ante again and complete both the South East Spur (AD, 5.6) and South Ridge (AD-, 4th) of Brenta Spire, in ascent and descent respectively. All was going well until on the descent, likely as a result of the previous day's strain, Baz Whale broke his leg. Two Doctors, an Engineer and a roll of zinc oxide tape later and he was walking again; though relieved to finally get back to his tent for the appropriate tools.

These were all spectacular remote Alpine routes with no other parties in sight,

although the pathless walk ins made for some long hill days. The plan had been to walk back down to our vehicle for a food resupply however the timing of the weather window closing, and some culinary ingenuity, coincided conveniently allowing us to avoid that unwelcome task.

The long range forecast showed no signs of breaking and heavy snow was forecast to take the park out of condition so with heavy hearts we packed up having only had a taste of the quality climbing and knowing the 2015 season was over. So to the next challenge. What to do in poor weather? The pre-planned alternative had been Canmore with sport crags and Yamnuska, an adventure trad climbing crag/mountain face.

After a day of sorting out kit, dragging out coffees and indulging Alex Martin-Bates's shopping addiction the next poor weather

day was spent sheltering in Canmore's rule obsessed climbing wall. A day on Yamnuska proved a healthy reminder of the North American definition of 'run-out' but the team made an ascent of Easy Street (5.6). The climbing was straightforward, but reliable gear and route finding were certainly more challenging!

Canmore has quite a few reasonable sport crags, though not many routes for the aspirant leader! On the more suspect weather days we managed some bolt clipping with the guys all giving leading, including the mandatory solo to the first bolt, a go.

As with so many trips I have certainly left with a longer ticklist than I arrived. If anyone fancies a trip to a superb remote Alpine climbing venue I will certainly be back; Ex Bugaboo Tiger 16 anyone...



The Way of the Fix

By Tomo Thompson

Question: Why do bears #### in the woods ?
Answer: Because they drink rubbish coffee.

The following article has nothing and everything to do with mountaineering. Is there a climber or mountaineer anywhere that can face the day without a hit of caffeine ? The following ideas will help you brew up very good coffee whether in the back of your T5 or the porch of your Quasar at Camp Four.

Notes

- Use good coffee from a proper coffee shop. Tell the coffee expert what method or device you intend making coffee with and he or she will grind the beans to an appropriate level.
- Use a normal size cup (a tin camping mug is ideal ((narrow insulated mugs don't work very well for some of these methods)).
- I would recommend, for the purposes of boiling water to make coffee, either a JetBoil or an MSR WindBurner stove.
- Carry a small widemouth Nalgene jar in which to put your coffee waste, you can then portage it out and grow your mushrooms in it at home.

The Simple and Effective Way

The easiest way to make excellent coffee outdoors.

Ask your coffee provider to grind a hearty coffee at Grade 0 (sometimes known as Turkish grade). Boil water. Put one heaped tea-spoon of coffee in your tin camping mug. Pour on water. DO NOTHING for 4 minutes. Coffee ground at this level will naturally sink to the bottom of the cup (leaving residue in the bottom) and provides you with excellent coffee that requires no fancy coffee gear whatsoever.

Recommended coffee – Cuban Crystal Valley

The Way of the Bialetti

For some the process and sounds of making coffee in a Bialetti is almost a daily religion. The sound of a Bialetti starting to gurgle is one of the finest sounds of the coffee world. Looked after it will

last over two decades, and will make almost espresso strength nectar with ease. The small one is just small enough to warrant backpacking with, and works over an MSR pocket rocket and small canister. Only ever rinse the Bialetti in hot water (no soaps). If you're in basecamp or in a VW larger Bialettis are available.

Recommended coffee – Ethiopian Yirgacheffa

The French Way

French presses come in many sizes and guises and most outdoor stove makers make a press to fit their models. The downside to these is that I haven't yet found one that works all the time, by which I mean the filter sometimes doesn't sit flush to the inside of the stove boiler, and you end up with gritty brown caffeinated water for breakfast. They are also inherently finicky. Getting the grind right on these can be a bind also. It may be worth taking the press part in to the coffee shop, or experimenting at home before you head off in to the great outdoors. Unless you thoroughly wash the boil pan after each brew, whatever you next use boiled water for will taste of coffee. MSR, Jetboil and Primus are amongst the companies that make French press adaptors.

Recommended coffee – Rwanda Inzovu Cup of Excellence

The MugMate Way

As mentioned above (in the French way) most of the stove add-ons for making coffee don't hit the mark, normally for construction or longevity reasons. MSR address this problem by offering their MugMate. It offers probably the second easiest way of making coffee in the Kalahari (or anywhere else). Add fineish ground coffee in to the mesh; sit the mesh inside your base camp mug, pour on hot water; contemplate your own existence; remove mesh; drink. Experiment with the amount (and type) of coffee at home first. The MugMate is also super easy to maintain too, and can be stored / protected inside most cups.

Recommended coffee – Dark Side of the Moon



Aeropress

The Aeropress Way

I once was a doubter too. Put a filter, some coffee and some hot water in to an outsize syringe; squeeze; and enjoy uber smooth coffee in about 30 seconds ???? Really ????

Yes.

The componentry can be a bit of a faff, and it isn't mega robust enough for three months in the Hindu Kush, but it weighs very very little, and makes wonderfully smooth coffee with ease. Indeed many of the worlds best caffeneries are now making with Aeropress. If you take yours in to the outback, a protective pouch makes sense (stick it inside an old ((clean)) mountaineering sock inside a small dry bag, or buy a second hand camera lens case). You can buy a permanent filter for it too, which will remove the requirement to carry paper filter papers with you. Try to not use boiled water with the device, 80°C works best. Another top tip is make sure that the mug you are pressing in to and the surface on which the mug sits are both solid. There are tales of folk with arms like Garth being covered in very hot coffee as their immense downward pressure broke the cup, or the cup skidded off across the worktop.

Simple. Fast. Smooth.

Recommended coffee – Sulawesi Jewel of the Rainforest

The Way of the Drip

For those who know what Chemex coffee drips are, I haven't included them here simply because I haven't yet found a Chemex drip that is robust enough to venture outside with. For the record some baristas consider Chemex to be the finest way of making coffee. Each to their own.

In the Great Outdoors a drip coffee maker needs to be very simple in design. SnowPeak make their delightful steel Collapsible Coffee Drip, and GSI make the Ultralight Java Drip. The first is a thing of folding beauty, the latter looks like you are making coffee through an outsize pair of Action Mans Y fronts. Both work. The Snowpeak requires papers (get advice; buy good ones), the GSI one has a hanging mesh filter. I didn't find the GSI one particularly base camp proof. The SnowPeak one (like most things they make) was spot on. Drip coffee also takes time and patience which, in a way, adds something to the end product.

Recommended coffee – Honduras Santa Rosa

The Way of the Pouch

Growers Cup is a company that has managed to stuff good coffee inside a decent filter inside a "disposable" portable coffee press. All you need to do to make good coffee their way is open the

packaging, pour in hot water and wait. Coffee pouches cost about two pounds for which you get two medium size cups of coffee. All the forms of coffee making in this article produce some form of waste (even the simple zero grind way leaves a coffee sludge in the bottom of your cup). The Growers Cup method however leaves you with an A5 size press that is destined for landfill. You can however cut the top off, add a bit of soil to the coffee sludge, and then plant some flowers in the packet. Mothers Day made easy.

Recommended coffee – whatever flavour you buy

The Cold Kick in the Head Way

This is how to make Cold Brew Coffee. Many people never do. Some who do wish they hadn't. Some who do never go back. Get a 1 litre clear container with a lid. Make a 1:10 mix of good medium grind coffee to fresh water ratio. Mix and leave in the fridge for 24-36hrs. Decant and filter through coffee machine filter papers in to a stoppered or screw top container (a Nalgene jar is fine) and store in the fridge. Keeps for up to a week.

Beware though. The long soak means that it is very caffeinated but will not be at all bitter. In fact it tastes a bit sweet. But it is strong stuff. Try half a tumbler topped with milk or ice. Yeah baby !!!

Recommended coffee – Papua Bird of Paradise

The Way of the Devil

The year is 2057 and all other forms of coffee making on earth have been removed by the fun police. The only thing that still exists is grown in the arm-pit of The Gruffalo and is known as "instant". Whatever your end of the world excuse is, and yes you will be damned forever and ever, you may, once in your life, have to use instant coffee. Via from Starbucks (available in uber low volume one-shot sachets), and Kenco Millicano (which even contains some real coffee), are the (almost) tolerable ones. Just don't get caught drinking them.

Some others to try:

Left of Arc

If you can't quite handle, or don't really need, the kick of full caffeine, then rather than selling your soul to de-caff, try a coffee that is naturally low in caffeine such as Thailand Doi Chaang Peaberry. Again, go to a proper coffee shop and ask an expert.

Right of Arc

If you haven't got any open heart surgery to perform today, and you don't need a steady hand, but you do need amongst the very finest of coffee kicks, indulge in Jamaican Blue Mountain RSW Plantation. A lot of JBM coffees are blends from the region. This one comes from one of the four highest plantations with authority to sell unblended. It is holy cow good. I was recovering from surgery once and was on morphine when I had a cup of this and I could still feel the surge over and above the effect of the drugs. Hold on tight.

Something for the weekend ?

Guadeloupe Bonifieur is grown at an altitude of 300-400 meters under the shade of banana plants on the mountain side of an active volcano in the Caribbean. Connoisseurs consider it one of the best coffees in the world and it is also one of rarest. You can read up elsewhere about the history of this extraordinary bean. The story involves an 18th century Mayor of Guadeloupe defending 3 coffee plants with his life. Bonifieur is not only the ancestor of Jamaican Blue Mountain but it is also the ancestor of ALL Central and South American coffees.

Coffee Recommendations

All coffees mentioned in this article are available from Imperial Teas (of Lincoln). In the humble, reasonably experienced, and unbiased opinion of the author, they are the finest provider of teas and coffees in the land. From the every day, through the unusual, to the absolutely extraordinary, Imperial advise and mail order across the globe, and do so without the arrogance and snobbery of some coffee houses. www.imperialteas.co.uk



Bialetti in the morning



Brewing up in the slate quarries

AMA Peak Meet

11/12 Apr 2015

Despite a very worrying weather forecast of strong winds and heavy rain 12 AMA Members negotiated the Friday traffic to get to Totley Range Hut, near Sheffield. This was to be the base for this years Peak Meet. Once again hosted by yours truly, retired Sport Climber Mike Smith.

The hut was booked for the meet by WO2 (SSM) Peter Doherty, who with his assistant, Marcus, dealt with all the admin.

The attendees were all at the hut by 2100hrs so it was down to the nearby hostelry, a whole 4 minute walk away, for a couple of local Ales. Those without climbing partners were quickly paired up and plans for the following day were made and re-made over a couple of beers.

The morning arrived with the remnants of a cold front which had past across the Peak in an Easterly direction during the early hours. After a splendid breakfast, cooked by Pete & Marcus, the group descended on Hathersage to wait for the wind to dry off the remaining moisture. The wind had been forecast to be gusting around 40mph – not believed by some! So it wasn't long before the rock was indeed very dry.

Everyone went to Stanage, and why not? possibly the best crag in Britain. One

pair zoomed round to High Neb but the rest settled for the very short walk to the Popular end, which was, as ever, quite popular.

Some went for quality and some for quantity, but no one was disappointed. The weather however did cause some discomfort. Fortunately Mark & Dan had been dissuaded earlier on from wearing shorts, something I think they quite appreciated. At one point a short shower of hail battered the crag but this soon passed.

Routes tumbled as the day progressed and at around 5pm most pairs called it a day having clocked up an impressive number of routes and a significant collection of stars.

The most notable achievement however was Pete & Marcus' recce of Yarncliffe and Lawrencefield Quarries, on foot from Totley. Possibly the longest walk in to a roadside crag, ever!

The evening started with a recce of some other local pubs. Evening meal was taken in the Cross Scythes 'Sheffield's No1 Gastro Pub' no less. We even got our own room to dine in! More plans were hatched for the following day with most considering Froggatt as the best option.



Sunday morning looked gloomy but the forecast promised to stay dry until after 2pm, however the wind had not abated and was probably even stronger. Another excellent breakfast was devoured prior to setting off for the days climbing.

The main group went to Froggatt while the 'novice' group went to Millstone and a small crag known as Hells Bells. It was reasonably sheltered but, unbelievably, there was a rave still in progress in Lawrencefield Quarry. The thump, thump of bass was being carried by the wind although it didn't spoil the morning completely. Both pairs climbed Embankment Route 2, one of the few easy routes on Millstone and most of the decent routes on Hells Bells.

Notable ascents on Froggatt were Todys Wall, Marcs first HVS and Trapeze Direct. By 2 o'clock all teams had set off for home, just before the rain returned.



Army Mountaineering Association Winter Meet – Fort William

By Sean Mackey

On the first week of March 2015 sixteen AMA members met in Fort William for the Winter Meet. Staying in the Legendary Alan Kimber's bunkhouse (a British Mountain Guide, he literally wrote the guidebook on Glencoe) was a really treat and gave us a warm place to base ourselves. The diverse group had Winter Climbing Instructors and Winter Mountain Leaders at one end of the spectrum and at the other complete novices who had only completed their Summer Mountain Foundations a few months earlier. Whatever the qualifications there was some great banter and a really pleasant atmosphere with everyone keen to get out and have a good time. However, the weather was less than pleasant and the week's activities resulted in lots of travelling and imagination to get things done.

The first day was spent revising the techniques and use of equipment up on Aonach Mor in gusts of 60mph winds. For some of the novices (I used the term for the six individuals who came and either had no JSAT winter qualifications or WMF experience) this was their first sample of full on Scottish weather. Al Kirk struggled to instruct ice axe arrests, Phil Carotte had everyone digging for avalanche transceivers and I went through movement with crampons etc. With the Gondola uplift not running due to the high winds the walk up and down were particularly gruelling. The ski centre in the car park does have some very good coffee though after the walk back down as a reward.

The following day was rather embarrassing for me – I managed to get supremely lost on the way to the car park at Creag Meagaidh. However, Brendan and Christian (our Winter Mountain Leaders) worked a productive day into the program even with the hour I lost us in time. After a short walk into the corrie we found a perfect snow holing site for everyone to practice or learn skills on. While I maintain that snow holing is for sadists we did produce a few very well made and comfortable shelters. The walk down was broken up with snippets of details on the flora and fauna on display with everyone chipping in stories and anecdotes about the plants, rocks or physical geography of the area. So much of the WML assessment and training, indeed this is the same for summer qualifications, is about having this broader knowledge of the mountains that everyone drank in the information.

The drive over to the east coast to Cairngorm takes about an hour and half but produced much better weather and a cracking day out. After parking in the ski area car park the entire group walked into Coire an t'Sneachda and completed Fiacail Ridge I/II*** to get up onto the infamous Cairngorms Plateau. For most this was their first experience of winter climbing and was quite the baptism of fire. Following this a brisk walk saw the mountain Cairngorm (1245m) summited and the group descend back to the ski area and march into the café. The drive back after this big mountain day was considerably quieter than the way out!

Following this day the group split; one lot heading back to Creag Meagaidh (1130m) for a successful summiting day and the rest of us heading into Glen Nevis for a wander around the Ring of Steall (1130m at its highest point and a grade I*** climb). Unfortunately the weather had started to warm up by this point and the freezing level was way above the summits resulting in a wet snow pack that had the consistency of porridge. The Ring of Steall was abandoned and that particular group (myself, Christian and Al) was back in the car park by 1300hrs. We were disappointed at not completing the route but had learnt some valuable lessons and gain a very real experience. The Creag Meagaidh group were much more successful and had Brendan teaching snow anchors, bucket seats and belay techniques in (sometimes) bright sunshine! We discussed the very different days the two groups had over a delicious curry and beer in Fort William that evening.

The last day before the weather completely failed us saw the majority of the group head back to the Cairngorms and summited Bynack More (1090m) via the Ryvoan Pass. Meanwhile Al and I, intent on practicing navigation, headed to Sgor Gaoith (1118m) in Glen Feshie for a day in whiteout conditions. 50mph winds battered everyone throughout the day and made walking in a straight line very challenging – especially when trying to follow a compass bearing!

The final day saw wind speeds in excess of 70mph and heavy continual rain across all of Scotland! Therefore a quick morning coffee in Fort William and slow walk around the shops – witnessing the eldest shop lifter in history being arrested in Cotswolds. The afternoon was spent ice climbing at the indoor wall in Kinlochleven.

Scottish conditions are notoriously fickle and I was worried when organising the trip that we might be unable to achieve much due to inclement weather. While we didn't summit a mountain or climb a route every day we did what we could within the confines of avalanche reports, weather and what the group wanted to do. In essence, and most importantly, we tried to stay safe.

Overall a great time was had by all. Everyone had some quality days to log in their log books whether they were working towards WMT, WML or higher. Thanks to everyone who turned up, but especially to Brendan Caris and Christian Cheshire who worked like dogs throughout the meet. All things being equal I will be leading this meet again next year and hope to see some old and new faces eager to play in the Scottish Mountains in truly challenging conditions.

Exercise DRAGON MONGOLIAN ODYSSEY

Exercise DRAGON MONGOLIAN ODYSSEY 27 Jul – 23 Aug 15, was a level 3 AT expedition to the Tavan Bogd mountains, involving 10 regular and reservist personnel from 42 Engineer Regiment (Geographic).

Where are you going? "Mongolia, Altai Tavan Bogd mountain range" was my reply, "but that region doesn't even have a CILOR rate, and I can not find any examples of previous expeditions" was the confused reply from Brigade "exactly!" was how I ended the conversation. 2 years on, with 9 others at my side, we set off on what would become the journey of a lifetime.

For some an expedition would be a brutality they would choose to avoid. For we 10, the expedition would force us to trust strangers and lose sight of all that familiar comforts of home. Some days we would be off balance, tested and pushed while on others we would see true beauty. We would all learn that nothing is ours except the cold, warmth, sleep, dreams and vista on this expedition.

Before takeoff we hear the pilot's calm, confident and reassuring voice welcoming us on board and giving the details of the temperature outside. As the plane climbs in smooth steps, we see the airport building and the waiting planes grow smaller. London lies glittering beneath us, dropping further every moment as we start on this epic journey that would take us through Beijing, Ulaanbaatar, Ulgii and finally into the Altai Tavan Bogd mountains.

We are flying over the clouds and can look down upon the mass of soft cotton that floats below us. Now and then, there is a break in the clouds, which allows us a glimpse onto these strange lands far below. After 6 days we finally approach Ulgii. The landscape looks carefully handcrafted and manicured. In reality the town looks and feels like a movie scene from the Wild West. All that now remained was a 200km drive through the western plains into the Altai.

Crevasse rescue techniques being taught

The Altai Tavan Bogd contains the highest peaks in Mongolia, with stunning scenery of towering white ridgelines, glaciers, deep lush valleys, and large lakes. The park stretches for over 200km along the Russian and Chinese border and is divided into 2 regions; the Altai Tavan Bogd Mountains in the northwest where the expedition was based and the Lake Region to the southeast.

The aim of the expedition was to climb Khuiten Uul ('Cold Peak') at 4374m the highest in Mongolia, Nairamdal ('Friendship', 4180 m) and Malchin ('Herder', 4050 m). To do this the expedition would also have to navigate a 23 Square km bowl that was filled by the Potanin glacier.

The park entrance did not disappoint, all around we were incased in magnificent white peaks, with arêtes that demanded to be climbed. But there was no time to explore we needed to move the last 16km to base camp; so with camels in tow we set off on the last leg of the journey.

Borne below the ever-present white topped peaks that give this area a feel of total emptiness, we proceeded to base camp (BC). As the wind blew East across the valley floor we followed the glacial melt waters to the terminal moraine of the Potanin glacier and what would be home for the next 18 days.

The best weather window for this region is August, as the majority of summer rains have passed, and the temperatures is somewhat settled. The general weather pattern in this area is 4-5 days of clear sky, 20knot winds, day temps of 20° and night temps of -2°, followed by 2-3 days of low cloud, snow, 50+knot winds, days temps of -7° and night temps -17°.

With BCat 2900m, day 1 was made up of briefings followed by a simple shakeout out to stretch the legs and work our lungs. As you walk up the saddle of Peak Malchin you soon realise the scale and isolation in your undertaking; at this point it's to easy to let

negative thoughts dominate the mind. In good visibility the routes look simple and obvious, but in the dark and poor weather there are no distinct features from which to navigate. We all understood that poor weather equaled a day under canvas. If not to reinforce this feeling, we happened on a group of trekkers from Israel, desperately trying to locate one of their group, who had gone missing on the way down from Peak Malchin. We split into two teams, 1 team on the mountain while the other followed the route back to BC. After a few hours we located him to the relief of his friends; however their relief soon turned to anger, as the missing trekker was found asleep in his tent!

Day 2 would see the team split in two; team 1 undertaking winter and summer routes while team 2, under WO2 Mal Thomas (AGC(SPS)) took to the glacier. In the mornings the lower section of the glacier was dry, while the middle and upper section was wet and heavily crevassed; by afternoon the lower section turned into a river. As modern mountaineers we are used to a world of GPS and detailed mapping, however the mapping of this area was a sketch at best! There is no imagery, only old Russian 100k mapping, Mal would be sketching the glacial route as he went along, trying to locate a clear route to the mountains through the many rivers and crevasses that tore through the Potanin glacier.

By day 3 we were into a steady rhythm at BC, our camp, of a messing, shower and 5 Quasar tents soon felt like home. A home that was greatly enhanced by our Mongolian chef Tarack and kitchen-hand Sarah, never had I eaten such fine and varied fare while in the mountains, to be honest it was better than the Mess.

After 4 days of training, my group was feeling acclimatized and ready to tackle their first summit. Peak Malchin is a non technical climb of 5-7 hours, majority of which is on extremely loose scree that only cleared once you move onto the arête, for the final 2 hour push. This is a mountain of two sides; the northern aspect covered in avalanche angled snow; while the southern aspect is covered in the worst scree I've ever come across. The Tavan Bogd offers snow or scree, not a place for lead climbing! As you ascend the arête, following the Russian-Mongolian border you are offered a stunning view into this untouched landscape.

Luckily for the expedition, 42 Engr Regt Ops provided daily weather updates that helped shape our training for the following 24 to 48 hours. On 2 occasions the expedition would be confined to camp through heavy snow fall of 40cm accumulating to 70cm on the leeward sides. While the snow went through the freeze thaw process, we spent the time in camp discussing technical skills and snow man building.

Having covered the Alpine Mountaineering Foundation (AMF) syllabus and found a route through the crevasse fields, Mal's team was ready for the tri-national summit of Peak Nairmandal. The route was painfully slow due to recent heavy snow fall, taking all of 7 hours to reach advance base camp (ABC), a route that would routinely take 4 hours. ABC was located on the western slope of a rock band that dominates the middle of the Potanin glacier. An area free from crevasses was soon staked, a snow ledge was cleared, the stoves were fired and the brews flowed, as the team settled down for a rather cold and uncomfortable night. Waking up under a clear sunny sky the team soon got underway, reaching the summit before noon. After photos and medals on the Russian, China and Mongolian border and a bite to eat, the team headed back to BC for a well earned brew.

With two of the three goals achieved we started to push out from BC; Mal's group looking at the Alexander glacier, to the south of the

Potanin glacier; my group looking at a nameless 3763m peak, to the south of Alexander glacier, some 5-6km from BC. To gain access to this peak would involve a long and cold crossing through the water run off from the Potanin glacier. Having previously selected a safe crossing point 1km from the end of the terminal moraine, we headed off at first light. This would allow us the opportunity to cross before the melt waters had a chance to build. Luckily the water was no more than 40cm deep, so most people got across with dry feet. The initial going was good but at around 3000m we were exposed to a ferocious catabatic wind which had stripped all vegetation from the southern side of the arête, exposing the terrible scree. Everything your foot or hand touched would move or simply crumble, coursing one or two nervous moments within the group. After a few hundred meters in height gain, the winds dissipated and we moved onto the beautiful but exposed arête. In places you felt that you were soaring with the eagles. But lady luck was against us, for the route to the summit was block by seracs, some 400m from the summit, bummer. It was quite gutting having to turn from this route, a route I had coveted over a number of days. Still we had the 100m wide Potanin glacial run off to cross and it would be a little deeper too, joy. Boots off, trainers on and in we go, words can not describe the coldness of the water as it envelope your groin!

We switched the teams halfway through the mountain phase so both got the chance to undertake alpine and winter summits. All that now remained was Khuiten Uul ('Cold Peak') at 2000km from Ulaanbaatar this was as remote as we could get. At 4374m and with a stated grade PD, Mal was looking at an experienced three person team to climb our last objective. Unfortunately the weather duly arrived with a big dump of snow and our window passed. It was now time to strike camp and start the long but enjoyable journey home, Ulgii, Ulaanbaatar and Beijing hallo again.

This type of trip is not possible without the support of a number of key organisations and personalities, so it is beholden of me to thank: ATG HQ, AMA, RE Funds, Ulysses, RFCA, Hon Survey Society and our own Regimental HQ. Their support, in terms of both time and finance was fantastic, thank you all. I would also like to thank and recommend Mongolian Expeditions, the support, experience and catering provided was off the highest standards and I would happily recommend this company to anyone else venturing out to Mongolia. Finally, to the merry band who followed me on this journey, thank you one and all.

Capt Nessie Smith.



Crossing the Potanin Glacier

Shadows of familiar things – walls made from sawn snow-blocks, tents dug into drifts, skis standing to attention – stretched across the snow in the glare of the mid-morning sun. Rucksacks packed, Houseman and I left Denali's 14000 camp and headed for a prominent spur – The West Rib – high above the village of tents – what had been our home for the last three weeks. Following the well-trodden furrow, we walked past the board with the weather forecast and the ranger station with its ice encrust cables hanging from solar panels. I looked to the left, the Denali West Buttress human-train was heading to camp 17000 – mostly a long line of the overburdened, underprepared, very rich, very slow or Cassin Ridge dreamers. Since arriving on the Kahiltna I had encountered some strange people – a guy intent on soloing the west buttress with long bamboo poles in the shape of a cross strapped to his body, a middle aged woman who wanted to become the first Indian female soloist, a guy with chainmail draped over his tent and a large pole sporting several flags of countries he had no connection – the list was nearly as long as the line of people. It never failed to amaze me how a mountain with a significant number attached, attracted so many hunters of trophies.

Reaching the West Rib, we started down-climbing, abseiling and jumping the numerous crevasses – our tracks were a spider silk sticking a thousand holes and we felt like flies. Colin Haley had suggested the Seattle 72 Ramp for approaching The Slovak Direct – our intended climb – but climbing into, and out of the Northeast Glacier, I was beginning to wonder if Colin had a different take on what is acceptable. The Slovak Direct had seen five ascents since 1986, but this was the first time anyone had started the climb by this approach. I jumped down a three metre ice wall, having thrown my rucksack first and cursed Colin. The approach was an expedition in its own right.

Sprinting beneath upside-down smiling seracs cemented high onto the cliffs, lung skin shredded. Houseman, out front, sixteen years my junior, continued to jog and I, attached to him by the rope,



continued to gasp. Clearing the embedded debris from previous serac fall, I collapsed and quickly untied – at forty-six years old I was more in fear of further running than of falling down a slot.

We ate while sitting on a snow-step cut into the slope beneath the Japanese couloir at the start of the Cassin Ridge. I stared into the maw of the Kahiltna's North East Glacier, also known as The Valley of Death, the 'usual' approach for Denali's West Rib and The Cassin. The corridor was threatened by large ice slugs clinging to the steep sides of the valley – which in my mind were slipping – ever so slowly slipping – until they fell and crashed filling the valley.

The sun waned and clouds began to creep along the capillary of glaciers. Foraker's baulk poked from the cloud, a thick finger pointing to stars, stars which we would never see in the twenty-four hour daylight. I sat, and as I sat, I quietly prayed that this mythical



route, a route Steve House was quoted as saying was his first world class climb, would happen. It had to happen; I didn't want to dwell on the consequences of failure in such a remote place.

Two in the morning, stark emptiness. We climb onto the crest of The Cassin before several abseils down the original start land us onto the east-fork glacier. Cracks split the ice. The tension in the glacier transmitted through the soles of my boots, running up my legs and into my mind. This climb was a space walk away from the crowds. Our heads tilted. Transfixed, we watched the sun escape the grip of the mountain and begin to warm our route. Shadows of two lonely people smeared the creaking glacier. Unbeknown to us this was the final day of the settled weather. If the forecast had been correct, would we have set-off or would we have run-off. What a fragile line, at times, some humans walk.

Studying the serac hanging over the start of the route and the second serac to the right, a monster called Big Bertha that separated the fifty-eight technical pitches of the Slovak from the 'easy' three-and-a-half thousand feet of the Cassin, we decided to wait until evening and cold. Houseman erects the little tent while I lie on my mat. Surrounded by a semi-circle of some of the largest, sheer mountain cliffs in the world – we lie and wait, and wait and wait and wait like freshly cut flowers. Rocks rattle. Seracs release. The glacier groans. I groan, but sitting up and looking, really looking, I remind myself of the special emptiness that engulfs us ...

... A few weeks before flying to Alaska I was in London to present a lecture. Crossing the road in London City Centre, people pack the pavement. Wrapped against the rain, shoulder to shoulder, these blurred outlines pass other blurred outlines staring at the wet ground. I rarely visit the capital and whenever I do the city's frenetic activity always shocks. Where do these people come from – where are they going? Everyone appears to have an objective, a reason

to move fast. Sometimes I think this is how the mountains are experienced by many of the trophy chasers who grind the 'classic' climbs seeing nothing apart from the summit. Walking along the city's pavement I feel separated, blurs move all around my still form, on occasion my eyes meet the eyes of another – and just as quick, as if embarrassed, they look away.

A steel box attached to the wall near the door of a pub smells of wet tobacco-ash. High above the road, banners show models with perfect airbrushed bodies. Is this how some seethe mountains, a glamorous escape from the grind, a perfect airbrushed commodity – a once in a lifetime adventure as long as you don't mind sharing your adventure with hundreds of other like minded – as long as you don't mind walking through their shit?

The pavements, like the metal ash boxes outside the pubs, are full to overflowing. Life appears to suck the people of colour turning them grey. The guy sprawled on the concrete, leaning against the tiles of the underpass doesn't even lift his head, neither do I; I walk past him as if he isn't there. I pass his hat holding a few coins but I don't increase his collection. I feel ashamed ...

... In the night, which was, of course, day, feeling sucked dry and jaded, it takes a while to remember how privileged we are to be in this lonely place. Packing rucksacks, Big Bertha decides this is her time. An echoing boom and then icebergs exploding down the face. The carving serac fills the cirque with sound. "Shall we run?" "Damn right!" Grabbing bags, and crampons and water bottle and boots, Houseman being younger gets the better start. I stand watching snow-cloud eating glacier like the sea on a spring tide and stop trying to collect and accept. Bertha's freshly cut finger clipping loses power, but the wind and the crystals, like the shockwave of a blown-up tower block, dusts my clothes – covering me in perfect star shaped flakes.

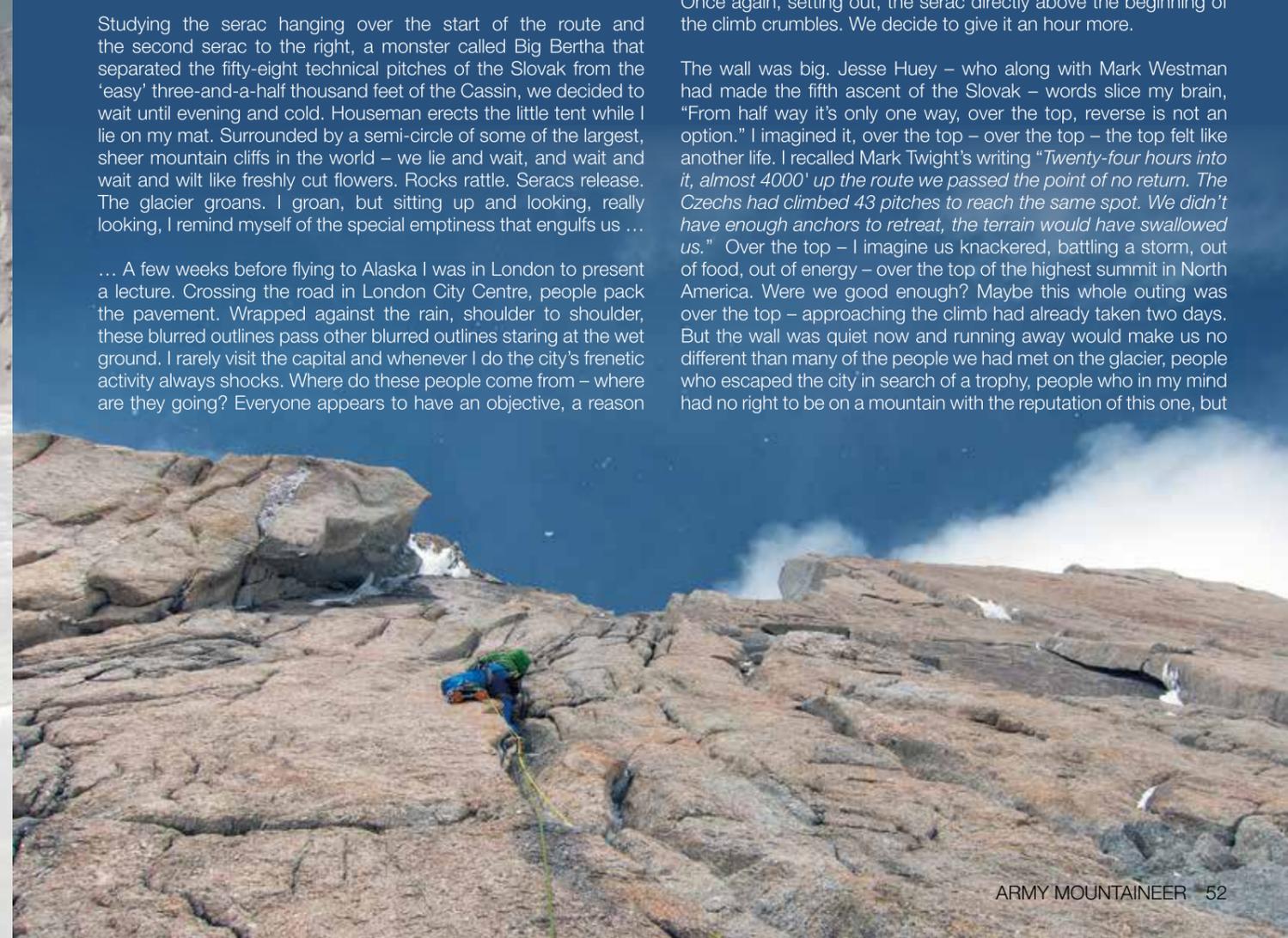
Once again, setting out, the serac directly above the beginning of the climb crumbles. We decide to give it an hour more.

The wall was big. Jesse Huey – who along with Mark Westman had made the fifth ascent of the Slovak – words slice my brain, "From half way it's only one way, over the top, reverse is not an option." I imagined it, over the top – over the top – the top felt like another life. I recalled Mark Twight's writing "Twenty-four hours into it, almost 4000' up the route we passed the point of no return. The Czechs had climbed 43 pitches to reach the same spot. We didn't have enough anchors to retreat, the terrain would have swallowed us." Over the top – I imagine us knackered, battling a storm, out of food, out of energy – over the top of the highest summit in North America. Were we good enough? Maybe this whole outing was over the top – approaching the climb had already taken two days. But the wall was quiet now and running away would make us no different than many of the people we had met on the glacier, people who escaped the city in search of a trophy, people who in my mind had no right to be on a mountain with the reputation of this one, but



Over the Top

By Nick Bullock



were we different, was our climb just a trophy and was my doubt more pure?

Crossing the Bergshrund, I snatch a glance at Houseman and catch him looking at the horizon. The blue sky from the past six days has disappeared; it's now strangled by grey. We were in for some weather. I turn and continue, swinging and kicking, the barrier in my mind has been crossed, it was similar to beginning a workout in the gym knowing that you are about to give everything. I accept but still feel neuseous. The door is open with only one exit – nine thousand feet of climbing. At this point it would still be easy to turn – take the 'sensible option' given the imminent bad weather, but I keep plugging without saying a word.

Four meals and five days of gels and bars – the food we had left 14000 with – already two of the meals and two days of bars and gels had been eaten. Granite cliffs, sheer and intimidating entice, stabbing the grey swirling mist that engulfs. The emptiness, the loneliness, it had presence. I thought of the Slovenians on the first ascent and the eleven days this climb had taken. Mahoney and Gilmore on the second ascent had taken seven days. Who the hell did we think we were to get on this face with so little food?

Climbing rotten rock, bubbled water-ice, rotten ice, an overhanging ice chimney, torqueing picks into cracks – joined by the rope we moved together and pitched. Large fat flakes of snow filled the sky. I zipped my hood and swore. Sometimes it doesn't feel right to push, but this time I felt angry and the anger fed my drive. Reaching a bergshrunsplitting the first ice-field we decided to stop. Huey had told us this was the only good bivy site on the whole of The Slovak, so after nine hours, a quarter of the way, we take it in preparation for a big second day.

"It's really windy up high."

3 a.m. setting out, we traverse the ice slope and follow thinly iced gutters. Like entering an underpass in the city, the half-light ignites my imagination, will we reach the steps that lead to the daylight on the other side of the road or will the mountain mug us? Tower blocks swirl. The sky between these monoliths is streaked red. Plumes of spindrift rip from the summit-slopes and flush the gutters between the skyscrapers. I think of the painting The Scream by Munch and continue to climb – climbing deep into the mountains mouth.

Houseman leads us deeper still, until beneath a huge corner with continuous dribbles and overhanging blossoms of ice. Seventy metres below, I can't see into the corner "What's it look like?" Houseman's answer was succinct, "Scary."

One hundred metres up the corner, I take the lead, forty metres remain. The wall to my left, a sheet of the most perfect granite, blushed and covers me in a vale of spindrift as if embarrassed by my floundering human effort. I pulled around an ice bulge pushing a front-point to a small imperfection on the left wall and felt like a blot on the most beautiful feature I have had the fortune to infect.

Sitting in the wind and the sun having escaped the corner, Houseman is still below being pounded by snow. He was still sucking skinny, exhaust fume, robbed of oxygen air, the powder clouds exploding



around him. We were getting somewhere, but behind me, a porcelain arête pointed the way to the most technical pitch of the route.

I've never really understood scissor, paper, stone, and stood next to Houseman, beneath the crux wall, it was obvious he didn't either. Like gunslingers, three times we had drawn gloved hands and three times we had pointed smoking scissors. I didn't know how a stone or a piece of paper was expressed, so on the fourth draw I pulled scissors again, Houseman pulled a clenched fist, a rock, and we both concluded I had won. It wasn't until I was about to set off we realised that a rock blunts scissors, I had lost. "Oh well."

Kev Mahoney, one of the second ascent team, had told Jesse Huey this A2 pitch would go free at about M8. Jesse had attempted to free the pitch but having run out of gear he rested, back-cleaned and aided. I stepped from the snow without wearing my pack feeling a fraud. I hate ditching my pack, in my mind it's not conducive to the ethics of Alpinism, it slows things and turns what should be a simple, pure experience, into a matter of engineering and engineering always made me feel inadequate.

Sketching, breathing deep, picks twisted in flared cracks, crampon points sparked, I was still climbing without resting or a fall – biceps drained of energy from the corner below, cramped. Nearly at the top of the wall, a few metres of hard climbing remained, but looking up, I could see there was going to be several more difficult moves with very few footholds. I had run out of cams to protect the climbing to come. My mind screamed, 'Do it, do it, get on with it.' And then in a flash, another voice shouted, 'What the fuck are you trying to prove?' I had spent too long on this pitch already, I had pushed and running it out risked breaking an ankle or worse and we were at the point where getting off this climb would turn into an epic, especially if injured. I reversed to my last gear. "Take." Immediately I felt a let-down – not good enough – the mind-set to be able to push in good style a million miles from anywhere is what makes the difference and on this occasion I had found myself wanting.

Houseman lowered me and took over using whatever style to get us back on track and in an hour or so we were both above the crux, heading into a barren wasted world. Into the grey of what would have now been night if night was something that happened. More than any other time on the climb, I accepted we had now reached the point where it was better to go up and over than reverse.

Houseman, battling was out front. Spindrift clouds wrapped around and blinded. Having tried so hard to climb the crux pitch, my energy levels had hit low. I cursed my stupidity. Huddled beneath a boulder, fighting sleep and cramp and cold, I belayed. Houseman fought avalanches pouring down the final technical pitch. We had been on the go for about twenty-two hours, there was still thousands of feet to climb. And for the first time in nearly twenty years, the thought that something could go really wrong was a shadow crossing my mind.



At 6 a.m. twenty-seven hours in to what was day two, but of course was now day three, my feet were blocks of ice – I had had enough, I needed to stop and warm them. Having reached the avalanche threatened slopes of the Cassin Ridge we found a flat spot behind a large boulder and crawled into the bag that should have been a tent, but the wind had made it impossible to thread the poles. Six hours later, in what had now become thigh deep snow, we set out again. Three thousand feet remained. Up and over the top in one final push, that's what we wanted, but we were shut down at 18000 feet by gales. Holding the tent, Houseman threaded poles – it flapped like akite. I imagined it lifting and taking me with it and flying over Denali's summit to join the streams of snow arcing from its highest ridge and then carrying me further until I was free from the constraints of the world.

Sixteen hours passed, and in these sixteen hours, neither Houseman nor I talked about being pinned down until weakness had taken over. I lay in the little single skinned tent – it buckled. I thought of Al Rouse who died of exhaustion on K2 and Iñaki Ochoa de Olza who died high on Annapurna. This wasn't a game we played, it wasn't sport – mountaineering for me will never be about beating the clock or breaking records, my climbing was about personal experience, it was the reason I get out of bed in the morning. Twilight, House and Backes single push of the Slovak was a ballsy leap – even though it was not the first time single push tactics had been brought to a major climb – it was about commitment and style and personal challenge, it was not about setting records for speed or making headlines. The experience on a testing, committing climb, the self-questioning, the ability to survive on the brink, no guarantees, this was what it was about for me and when I begin to race the clock or attempt to break records that will be the time to give up.

"Listen."

I pulled my head from the frozen sleeping bag. The wind had dropped. It was now or maybe never.

Thigh deep, avalanche prone snow had made the 'easy' part of this climb anything but easy – but here we were, six days since leaving 14000, slowly balancing Denali's summit ridge. Cloud filled the valleys. The afternoon sun, low in the sky, reflected from scallops. Denali was an untamed sea. Later, we found-out the weather had been so poor no-one had attempted to reach the summit for two days – and as I stepped onto that highest point in North America, I thought of something Ian Parnell once said to me, "We both know that the crux of any route in the mountains is the final step onto the summit." And stepping onto that summit I knew he was right and it is often the 'easy' things in life which are the most challenging.

TOUGH TAGS

The best way to get back your rack

Easy to use. Personalise your gear. Tough & waterproof.

www.toughtags.co.uk

Tough Tags Gear Deal

Toughtags is a company that makes personalised, waterproof and tamperproof identification Tags for climbing gear. They are a great way of identifying your own gear or of labelling gear for centre use or PPE inspections, or for a variety of other uses.

The business is owned by Jonathan Cluett who is a full member of AMI and is keen to be able to offer something back to the AMA community.

For more info about Tough Tags, visit the Tough Tags Website www.toughtags.co.uk

The Deal

Toughtags is able to offer AMA members a discount of web price - 20% + postage. This discount is for personal use only (i.e. member's name and address, or personal business name and address) but we will also be able to offer a reasonable discount to members who work at/run centres etc and need them for centre kit.

Ordering

To make an order, or to begin an enquiry please email us at tagit@toughtags.co.uk

Ex Northern Red Rocks AMA

By Marc Hilton

Exercise REDROCKS was an APC lead expedition, open to members of the RLC and REME. The aim of this expedition was to develop current and future climbing leaders and instructors in multi-pitch climbing in a challenging environment, and wow didn't it just.

"Unseasonably warm" was the quote from the weather presenter on our first day in the Mojave desert, Nevada. As we drove out to Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area that morning I don't think anybody was quite prepared for what lay in front of us (except Maj Andy Simpson APC, REME who had been before but as a student!). An imposing yet strangely alluring skyline loomed in the distance, contrasting against the blue hue of the sky behind. The variation in colour, shape and texture of the rock was evident even miles away from this colossal amphitheatre. The location had been selected as it offered over 2000 routes from VD-E8, single to 16 pitch all within 30mins drive of each other. It was an amazing location significantly better than anything available in Europe during the winter months for those of us wanting to trad climb.

The expedition members were from 8 units across the UK and Germany; as a result training together before the expedition was difficult. One of the ways the team prepared was blistering onto various AMA events, such as the AMA AGM, Roaches Meet and TSBL events. This assistance was gratefully received. However due to exercises and standing commitments, not everyone had managed to meet everyone else on the expedition until the first day, so it was spent getting to know everyone's abilities on shorter 1 and 2 pitch routes and conducting refresher training.

Day two onwards saw us go headlong into many classic Red Rock climbs of up to 14 pitches. Climbing partnerships and friendships were forged in a (sometimes) bloody battle with 1000 feet or more of glorious sandstone. On our first day climbing in Red Rocks Capt

Emmit Andrews Sp Comd, RLC, led Tunnel Vision, a classic 7 pitch – 3 star route climbing with LCpl Marc Hilton 7 Bn REME, The route gets its name for a poorly protected pitch travelling through a vertical tunnel created by a flake-which is not for the faint hearted. The same day Capt Matt Bowsley Scottish Tpt Regiment, RLC put his crack climbing to the test on another 7 pitch classic Group Therapy, climbing with Major Jenny Lockett APC, RLC. Maj Andy Simpson APC, REME climbed the classic 5 pitch Johnny Vegas climbing with Cpl Nev Nevison 39 RA Wksp, REME and Cfn Toby Wyatt, 3 Bn REME. This involved a full 60m abseil mostly in free space during the descent-an exciting route for the start of the trip.

For most the climbing was an extension to experiences of multi-pitch in the UK, but for some it was their first real taste of climbing properly. Cfn Steven Smith 7 RHA REME was a relative novice whose main climbing experience has been gained on the Roaches meet prior to climbing in Nevada. This trial by fire went well, by the end of the expedition he was a very competent second, had learnt to lead and had a log book that many more seasoned climbers would be envious of including Black Magic a classic 4 pitch 5.9 route.

Confidence grew steadily and midweek saw some huge routes undertaken. Solar Slab, a 9 pitch climb, which requires 4 pitches of another route to be climbed just to get to the vast terrace from where it starts, was attempted. Last light prevented its successful competition on this occasion but with slight adjustments to tactics it was picked off before the end of the expedition.

Mid way through the expedition a "rest" day was spent sport and single pitch leading giving the instructors a break who were starting to suffer from sore fingers and 1000 yard stares. Capt Matt Bowsley and Major Andy Simpson took the opportunity to step up a grade. Matt climbed Party Line a 5.10a (E1) steep trad route route up a narrowing crack with the crux just before



the belay. Andy climbed Party Mime, a sustained 5.10d (F6C) slabby sport route. Despite the increase in technical difficulty both felt tame in comparison to the regularly run out 50+m pitches of VS/HVS climbing.

After the day sport/single pitch climbing plans of how to complete an ever expanding wish lists of routes were devised and then implemented.

In the final few days of the expedition classic routes such as Olive Oil, Cat in the Hat, Johnny Vegas, Belluah's Book 5.9, Birdland, Frogland 5.8, Physical Graffiti, Lotta Balls 5.8+ and Dark Shadows 5.8 to name but a few, were ticked off in people's logbooks. All these routes are the equivalent of three star classic routes and proved worthy of their classification.

The expedition was a resounding success with over 450 pitches which is approximately 46,000' of Severe to E1 climbing completed by all members combined. Expedition instructors all led at least a mile of VS or harder rock.

Red Rock Canyon is an exceptional climbing area but should not be underestimated. Even the "easy" classic routes are challenging and although some have bolted belays and are possible to retreat from quickly, this is not always the case. Pitches tend to be 45–60m in length and require spaced protection, for those individuals who climb in the Peak or even many crags of North Wales there is clearly a step up in commitment. That said for the confident VS leader or better the climbing, weather and environment is exceptional.

This expedit was led by the Army Personnel Centre (Maj Jenny Lockett and Maj Andy Simpson who were keen to get away from JPA for a couple of weeks between boards!) but was for the most part made up of soldiers and NCOs from across deployable RLC and REME units including all instructors. It was made possible by a number of generous funding grants not least from the RLC, REME, Army in Scotland Trust and AMA. Logistical support from APC, 27 Regt RLC, Sp Comd Hq, 6 Armd CS and 11 Trg Bn REME were all key to the expeditions success.



Exercise NORTHERN ATLAS 2015 – Expedition Journal

By D A Sikora, Expedition Leader

On 14th April 2015, our intrepid team boarded flights to begin their journey to the High Atlas Mountains of Morocco. The aim of the expedition was to complete a demanding six day trekking expedition culminating in the summit of Jebel Toubkal, the highest mountain in North Africa, whilst increasing cohesion between our geographically disparate Squadrons. The team totalled 14; ten members of The Scottish and North Irish Yeomanry and four members of our paired Regiment from the Regular Army; The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards.

Arriving that evening, it was a quick haggle for a knuckle-whitening taxi ride through the streets of Marrakech, where the Highway Code is less a code and more a collection of optimistic suggestions, to our Hostel in the Medina. Although wearied by the day's travels, there was just time to take in the sights and sounds of the Jemaa el-Fna (central square) before bed. We rose in the morning to the first of many cups of mint tea before being whisked to the small village of Imi Ourhiad in the steppes of the High Atlas Mountains where we met our guides for the trip; two members of the native Berber population named Hassan and Ibrahim.

With the mules loaded with water, kit and equipment; we stepped off East, bound for another small village named Tidli where we would spend the night in a basic hut or 'gite'. Along the way we passed through a number of Berber hamlets, wishing hearty bonojurs to the local children as they turned out to try their luck for sweets and pens. Lunchtime was as much an equally fantastic feast for the eyes as the stomach; mint tea followed by an impressive presentation of curried beans, fresh fruit and vegetables on the banks of the Assif n' lmenane. The entire group enjoyed trying a new cuisine that contrasted heavily their usual ones! After a brief chance to soak up our beautiful surroundings we continued on, arriving at our accommodation in time to watch the sun drift behind the valley walls and marvel at the beautiful pair of red socks it had given to Private Dalgoutte.



The victorious team on the top of Jebel Toubkal (4,167m)

The breakfast each morning was a mountaineer's culinary fusion; the familiar elements of breads and spreads paired with the more adventurous yellow teas and fig jams, the perfect start for another day of trekking. We hiked up to the village of Oukaimeden, stopping briefly to barter with the locals for snacks and for Corporal Molloy to push his baggage allowance to the limit with geodes and fossils. The chance to interact with individuals from such a different background was an enlightening experience, particularly for those who had never ventured beyond English-speaking countries. We then descended through the Tizi nou Addi pass to Tacheddirt, where we were entertained by our guides and muleteers performing a selection of their traditional singing and dancing, eventually regretting the decision to get the expedition leader involved as he upstaged everyone with his rad shape-cutting. Not to be outdone by their hosts' performance, the expeditionary team returned with an angelic delivery of Wonderwall.

The next three days continued according to our acclimatisation plan; climbing high in the day and sleeping low during the night, gradually ascending to higher points with each day to get our bodies used to

having to work harder in thinner air. We were certainly working harder by day six, strapping on crampons to give some traction in the last of the winter snow as we slogged up the steep incline of the Azib Tamasout, which we elected to climb as the crow flies for the additional challenge.

On the final day of our expedition, we set out at 5 am for the summit of Jebel Toubkal. Our acclimatisation had prepared us well, and the hard work of the previous day made the final ascent much easier. We arrived at the peak to be greeted by stunning Southern views of the Sahara desert. After much hand-shaking and selfie-taking we began our descent by the Northern face back to the valley floor and then on to Imilil where we said an emotional farewell to our Berber companions and returned to Marrakech.

We were all extremely grateful to the various funds and charities for their generous support, without which we could not have enjoyed this opportunity to find challenge and build character with such a magnificent selection of new and different experiences.



If not now, then when?



TRAINING FOR ROCK CLIMBING

by Paddy Snow

Authors note: this article is written from the personal viewpoint of someone training for indoor competition climbing. Although much of it translates to training for trad, there are clearly going to be other limiting factors to efficient improvement in this discipline, notably dealing with the ingrained fear of falling that most of us have. In addition, neither Kenny Geoghegan nor Patrick Snow is a sports scientist, carpenter or structural engineer; the discussion below represents our views and experiences rather than expert advice! If you really want to know how to train effectively and efficiently (or build a climbing wall) then I would recommend that you book yourself some coaching sessions or ask someone who actually builds climbing walls for a living for their thoughts...

As this journal goes to press, the Tri-Services Bouldering League (TSBL) will be drawing to a close (October – February) and the lead competition season beginning once more (April – July). The final bouldering events will be the Combined Services team gearing up for competing with their European counterparts at Bouldermania in Belgium (April 16), and pitting themselves against the international civilian climbing scene in the CWIF (Climbing Works International Festival). Although perhaps the word ‘competing’ is a little too strong for our efforts in the CWIF!

A perfect time, then, to take a look at training for bouldering. Two reasons: firstly, getting results from training takes time – waiting until September 2016 to start to develop your strength and power is unlikely to help you a great deal for the 2016/17 TSBL; secondly, bouldering is fundamental to rock climbing. Whilst endurance and power endurance are vital to getting up hard routes and can’t be developed overnight, the fundamental building block of climbing performance is one’s ability to complete moves. It doesn’t matter how long you can stay on the wall, your ultimate grade ceiling is defined by the holds you can hang on to and move between. That means having power, body tension and, “above all, strong fingers” (according to the eminent authority Jerry Moffatt¹ and the less eminent authority, Paddy Snow). To quote another hero, Dave Macleod, “the most efficient way to get strong for climbing is bouldering...it’s hard to get strong fingers without the repetitive, maximal pulls on holds that are clocked up in bouldering sessions”².

¹ Revelations, Jerry Moffatt, 2009. An inspiring autobiography by one of the world’s most driven and outstanding rock climbers.
² 9 out of 10 climbers make the same mistakes, Dave Macleod, 2010. An excellent book to read if you want to get better at climbing (whatever the discipline) but are puzzled by how to get started or frustrated by your lack of progress.

Of course, to actually use this strength on pumpy lead routes, you will need to include some additional route-specific training (e.g. circuits on an overhanging bouldering wall, 4x4s, and lead practice), but these are to allow you to exploit the climbing strength that is developed most effectively through bouldering training.

In this article, I have included two people’s thoughts and experiences of training: my own and that of Kenny Geoghegan.

Training with the GB climbing team coach! (Kenny Geoghegan)

I started climbing when I joined the Army with a week of Adventure Training here and there. Two years later I entered my first bouldering competition at the Climbing Hanger, Liverpool. Completely out of my depth and having never competed against anyone before... surely I was merely there to make up the numbers?

I didn’t win but, to my surprise, I didn’t come last either! Maybe I should start training a bit?

Fast forward four years and I’m on the Army Climbing Team, I represented the Combined Services out in Belgium at Bouldermania last year (luckily for me, the stronger climbers were busy with work that week), and occasionally I get myself into the top 3 of a competition!

However, when I compare myself with some (all) of the top guys on the team, I am by far the weakest! I manage to punch above my weight somehow, with some fancy footwork and a bit of technique here and there, but ultimately, when the climbing gets big and burly, my game falls apart.

In October 14, I got an email offering me, along with five others, the chance to train with the GB Bouldering Team Coach, David Mason. After the initial surprise of being selected before so many other quality climbers, I thought that this was my chance to get strong and, maybe, push myself a little closer to the level I wanted to be climbing at. I was psyched to get started!

I arrived for the first of two sessions with David in October. Not sure what to expect, I warmed up and got started. It was a new experience, having someone critique my climbing, but I soon put it to the back of my mind. After being completely and utterly ‘beasted’ (for lack of a better word) we then moved to the pull up and fingerboard area where my lack of strength became apparent. I was

shattered and had no idea I should be training this hard off the wall to build the strength I needed to climb harder. The session finished and we discussed what needed to be done (loads of pull ups). I left feeling weak but focused on training and getting stronger.

Now, without turning this article into a training diary, my programme consisted of lots of climbing, pull ups, loads of push ups, pull ups, even more shoulder exercises, and finally... pull ups. After more pull ups than I think I’ve ever done in my life the training is topped off with the most horrible abs workout that I’ve ever seen. Let’s get to work!

Three weeks in and my body feels like it’s been hit by a train, constantly tired and sore! My normal climbing session would involve trying really hard projecting a few technical problems (usually slab or flat wall) then all of a sudden I was climbing nothing but steep overhangs, followed by a ton of pull ups. However, nearing the end of the first 6-week training block, I surprised myself by getting to the top of a relatively hard problem on a part of the wall that would normally scare me away... was all this pain/suffering/not eating pizza working?

I turned up for the second session with David in January (obviously feeling slightly fat after Christmas) wondering whether the last six weeks of training had made any difference...

The difference was there! I was being tested on harder problems than those in the last session and getting up them instead of falling off. 8a here I come right?... Not quite! Obviously this was foundation building with a lot more training needed, but I felt strong and confident!

The session followed pretty much the same structure as before, with more advanced training being introduced both on the wall and in the pull up area! Again, by the end of the session I was completely shattered but the noticeable difference was enough to help me leave with a smile on my face.

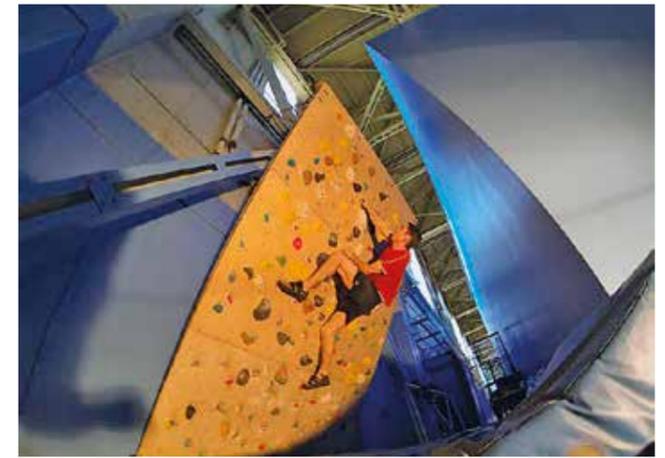
I feel this training has made a massive difference to my strength on the wall and has definitely improved my climbing more than I ever could have on my own without structured training.

Overall, it’s been a great experience. The only problem? The guys I’m competing against at the Army Champs have had the same coaching...

Making training work for you – a personal perspective (Patrick Snow)

I began climbing regularly over 10 years ago, and have always been keen to improve my grade. Despite these good intentions my attempts to ‘train’ for climbing have, until recently, taken the form of trying to go climbing slightly more often. Perhaps commit to a ‘good’ session once (or even twice!) a week. Or even a little stint on a fingerboard if I was feeling particularly motivated (but never enough or sufficiently sustained to really make much of a difference).

That approach works. Up to a point. However, when your training relies entirely upon having access to a climbing wall (and someone to drive you there) you can quickly run into practical and motivational issues. In addition, my ‘good’ sessions largely involved unstructured social meandering between interesting problems (normally slabs) or scattered attempts to onsight lead routes – neither are efficient ways of reaching the higher grades. I reached a plateau and realised I needed some structure to assist me. My first foray into the world of training was two years ago when I went for an assessment and training programme with Robin O’Leary, then a coach at my local climbing centre. It gave me a lot of ideas for how to train at climbing walls and really helped my performance. What I didn’t really address at the time, because it wasn’t much of an issue, was how to train without ready access to time or facilities. Together these two constraints can appear to be insurmountable (they certainly appeared that way to me at times), but with some



assistance from a coach (David Mason), some debatable DIY, and a very understanding wife, here are some of the ways I have addressed these problems:

Bite-size (useful) sessions. One of the key motivational issues I faced was an apparent lack of time for useful training. My time available for climbing-specific training consisted of lunchtimes and (some) time in the evenings. Given that my idea of training largely revolved around climbing walls, and that my nearest big wall is over an hour away, this was a clear constraint on what I could achieve. The very real risk, that I have fallen foul of before, is to rely on the big sessions for training; a few deadlines and/or a family commitments can easily lead to huge gaps in your training and, subsequently, a big hit to your motivation. One solution is to do a lot of flexible small bite-sized sessions (10-20 mins) that can be slotted in throughout the week to fit around work demands. I set the number of these sessions that I want to get done in a fortnight, but flex when I actually conduct them over the course of that period around my other commitments. These sessions include basic strength work such as press-ups, 10 minute core sessions (an absolute killer!) and TRX-type exercises, as well as fingerboard work-outs and stretches. You don’t need to spend a huge amount of money on equipment to experience the benefits. Something to pull up on is probably the minimum, although I have gone for a pull-up bar, some press-up bars, a fingerboard, some small weights, a foam roller (for stretching), and a TRX (the Decathlon copy, available for less than £40).

Make it easy to train. My fingerboard used to be set up in my garage. Even with music and a heater, wandering outside to train there still felt a bit like a punishment and a mildly tiring day at work was usually enough to break my willpower. It now resides happily in my kitchen. A relatively small change, the impact is huge – using it fits easily into daily routine and I find myself playing on it far more regularly. If you don’t have anywhere to put a massive fingerboard, how about a single strip of 20mm incut wood above a doorframe? Or rock rings somewhere easily accessible?

The same goes for a pull up bar; mine now sits in a doorframe in the most central location in my house, somewhere I can’t possibly miss as I walk around and, more importantly, somewhere I can use it whilst doing other things. It no longer feels like I need to set aside 15 minutes for a ‘session’, it just fits into my routine.

Train rather than perform³. At climbing walls it is easy and comfortable to slip into the pattern of trying to perform on every problem/route as if it was a competition or climb in a way that makes you feel better about your climbing. I was, and still am, guilty of this. It is a nice feeling to succeed and unless you are surrounded by people who are equally keen to address their weaknesses it takes a concerted effort to overcome this (self-induced) pressure. Unfortunately, this ‘fear of failure’ impedes efficient improvement.

³ Dave Macleod covers this ‘fear of failure’ much more extensively in his book.

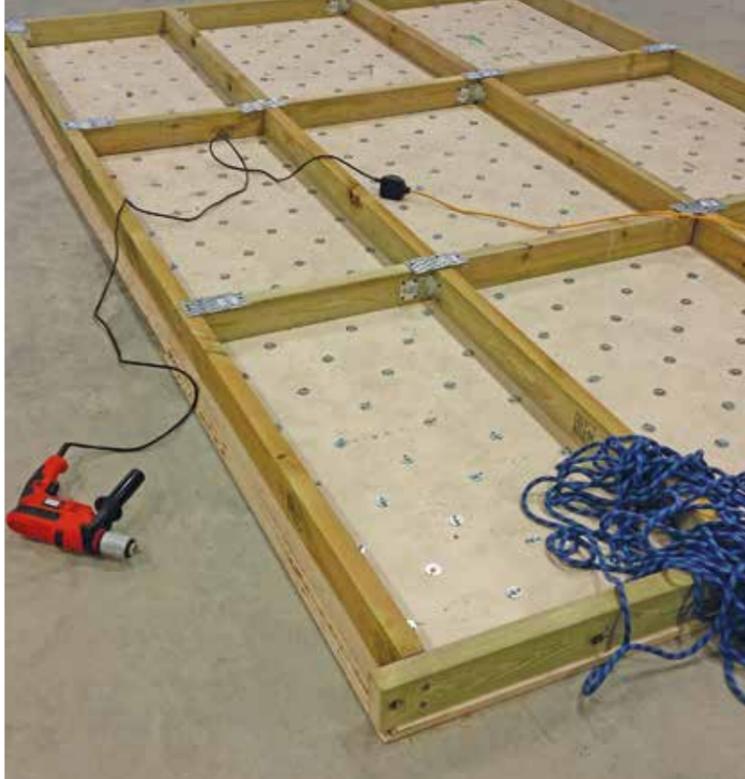
Perhaps this might involve staying within your comfort zone where you can 'climb hard' (e.g. slabs or crimp vertical for me); it might be working the problem that you can just about flash (and feel rather proud about) rather than the one you can barely touch the moves on and certainly can't link, but might be far more beneficial to your training during that particular phase; alternatively, it could be choosing to spend a session playing around on the fun-looking problems that you played on last week, rather than the conditioning session that you know would be more beneficial in the long run (e.g. 40 back-to-back overhanging problems averaging 60-90 seconds each). Adding structure to climbing sessions really helps to ensure that the sessions have training value. I ensure that there are sufficient unstructured climbing sessions/periods in my programme so that I actually stick to the structured training during those dedicated training periods in the knowledge that I can 'play' at other times.

Build a climbing wall (a little more extreme). With the nearest climbing facility some distance away, I decided that I would really benefit from having somewhere I could snatch a quick 30 minute session on in the evenings to supplement my wall sessions. I decided to build a woody. Stage 1 of building a climbing wall is having somewhere to put it, a stage that I messed up almost immediately. After gaining the relevant permissions from Station, my initial plan was to suspend it at an angle of 30 degrees from a massive I-beam in one of the disused aircraft hangers on camp. Great idea. Having bought all the materiel (4x2 for the frame, 18mm ply for the boards), I constructed a 12ft high x 8ft wide woody, which I positioned in this locked area on camp and attached all the holds. My magnificent world class training facility was finally complete! Unfortunately I had not, it transpired, ticked all the relevant boxes and no sooner was it up than I was forced to deconstruct it. This was easier said than done given the size, weight and construct. It took me (and my wife) several weeks' worth of evenings and weekends to get it all back to my house. Devastated.

Fortunately, the design allowed me to turn the board sideways and fit it into my garage. With limited experience of chipping I went for the fairly simple and (hopefully) over-engineered design shown by the photos. One of the key benefits of this design is that it doesn't rely on the structure of the garage to support its weight (except for something to butt up against at its base). That means that not only do I avoid destroying my garage, but it is easy to move when I am posted, and the angle of the board can be changed by drilling a few new bolt holes. A few happy evenings spent setting some problems (1 warm up circuit, 1 hard circuit, 1 futuristic circuit and a load of randomly positioned small holds) and I was ready to cram in training sessions 30 seconds walk from my bedroom! Again, the key benefit being its accessibility and the impact that has on how often and likely I am to actually do some climbing. There are better designs out there and if you have the time/money/contacts to speak with a professional chippy/wall builder you will definitely be able to come up with a more mobile, flexible and useful wall than the one I have built!

I have outlined some of the ways in which I have tried to mould my training to allow me to reach my climbing goals. Ultimately, most of these have come down to reducing psychological barriers to training by making it easier to fit around the rest of my life. Like most people, I am not an uncompromising athlete willing to make huge lifestyle sacrifices, and therefore this approach seems to me like it offers the best chance of success in the long run.

As a wider point, I am encouraged by the enthusiasm and interest in training and personal development that can be seen at any of the climbing competitions through the year. With a host of new talent stamping their mark on the current TSBL, I am very optimistic for the Army's prospects in the 2016 Inter Services Competition and the 2016/17 TSBL, although it does mean that I shall have to up my game to keep up!



WWW.DMMWALES.COM



Maverick 2

Maverick 2 shares the same minimalist construction as the Mithril, with fixed leg loops for the lightest option making it ideal for all season purest.



Mithril

Our new non-floating waist belt & streamlined racking system create a minimalist, light-weight harness, while adjustable leg loops allow for the perfect fit.

LIGHTEN UP YOUR COMFORT ZONE

Venture

A true multi-tasker tailored to female proportions, the Venture's adjustable leg loops make it ideal for those looking for the perfect fit.



Vertesse

Following the same female specific proportions as the venture, with fixed leg loops, the Vertesse is the perfect companion in situations where every gram counts.

DMM Harnesses

Whether training at the wall, running it out above distant gear or battling a fierce winter crux, DMM's new lightweight harnesses ensure the last thing you're thinking about is the lifeline round your waist. Innovative construction delivers lightness, breathability and comfort, streamlined racking options provide all season, fuss free gear selection, while a choice of fixed or adjustable leg loops gives you the option of simplicity or adjustability.

