



# ARMY MOUNTAINEER

THE JOURNAL OF THE ARMY MOUNTAINEERING ASSOCIATION

# OFF-PeAKS

# THE LOCKDOWN EDITION

**INSIDE...**

**BRONCO LANE INTERVIEW  
PERFORMANCE TRAINING AT HOME  
AMA RJUKAN 2020**

SUMMER 2020

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Emma Twyford field testing Dragonfly Micro Cams on her headpoint of Once Upon a Time in the Southwest (E9 6c), Dyers Lookout, Devon. Photo: Ray Wood



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SUMMER 2020

# CONTENTS

## AMA HQ

FOREWORDS.....	5
MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS.....	6
DIARY 2020.....	7
BMC FUNDAMENTALS 1&2.....	8
STANDARD LEARNING CREDITS FOR MOUNTAINEERS.....	10

## GUEST WRITER

AN INTERVIEW WITH BRONCO LANE.....	12
SNOWDONIA PEACE.....	16
REFLECTIONS FROM A MOUNTAIN RESCUER.....	18

## EXPEDITION NEWS

EX 900.....	20
EX COSTA CLIMBER 2020.....	24
EX DRAGON LUNDY.....	27
EX TIGER AMA RJUKAN 2020.....	31

## MISC ARTICLES

BOULDERING.....	34
CYPRUS ROCKS.....	36
WHAT TO DO?.....	40
PERFORMANCE TRAINING AT HOME.....	42
IS IT JUST ME... OR IS IT COIRE AN LOCHAIN.....	44
WINTER MOUNTAIN LEADER THOUGHTS.....	47

## PHOTO COMPETITION

BOOK REVIEWS.....	52
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## SPORT CLIMBING

SPORT CLIMBING.....	54
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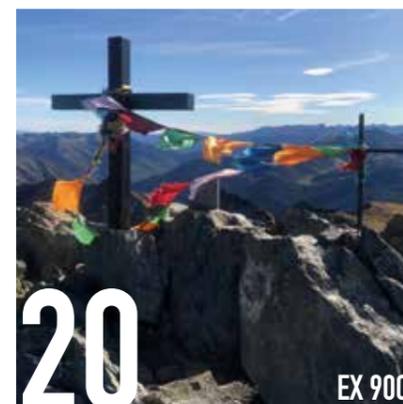
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BMC FUNDAMENTALS



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SNOWDONIA PEACE



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EX 900



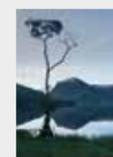
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EX COSTA CLIMBER 2020



50

PHOTO COMPETITION



**ON THE COVER:**  
**THE LONE TREE OF BUTTERMERE**  
**JAMIE GIBBIN.**

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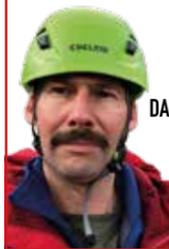
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# CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD



I find myself writing this forward at a time when both the Nation and International Community are battling to combat the spread and impact of the Coronavirus. Trying to fast forward to where things will be by the time this edition of the Journal drops through your front door is near on impossible; however sadly as I write this at the end of Mar, I sense the situation will have got worse before getting better.

As a result, AMA events for 2020 are being postponed until further notice on a rolling basis as the situation unfolds. As you can all appreciate, we expect very little to happen over the forthcoming summer months both home and abroad, and still need to wait to see what the rest of the year will bring. We will do our best to keep you updated. Fortunately, we did manage to have very a successful expedit to Hemsedal in Norway ice climbing (thanks to Chris Cookson), a Winter Meet in Scotland (thanks to Duncan Francis) and a climbing trip to Spain (thanks to Mike 'Arthur' Daley) before the world changed.

I would also like to take the opportunity to extend a very warm welcome to our new President, Maj Gen David Southall CBE, who has taken over the role from Lt Gen Ivan Hooper (who still stays with

us as the Honorary President). Once this is all over, we look forward to introducing you to the Association and seeing you at various events in the future. Rather than me providing a more detailed introduction here, we will save the next Journal Forward for the President.

I also have no doubt that whilst many of us will be frustrated we cannot enjoy the great outdoors, we will be busy trying to offer our services in some way. For those serving on the Front Line of the NHS, on behalf of the Association I would like to extend our appreciation to all you do in these particularly challenging times. Many of those still serving, be it Regular or Reserve, will have been mobilised along the way, whilst others will be key workers in a range of roles. Even if not called upon directly, I expect many of you will have 'self-mobilised' to support your community.

So that brings me to the virtues and wider benefits that organisations such as the Army Mountaineering Association and Adventurous Training contribute in such times of crises. Firstly, a sense of Belonging and Service; which we tend to transcend to our place of work and communities. Secondly a range of personal and professional attributes; including leadership,

teamwork, risk management, organisational skills, trust, emotional intelligence and awareness of others are but a few that spring to mind. So, whilst we may all be feeling very frustrated right now that many of our plans for outdoor adventures or trips to the climbing wall have been curtailed, they will still be waiting when this is all over. I leave you with the following quote from Sir Edmund Hillary:

*"It's not the mountain we conquer but ourselves".*

**Due to current COVID-19 restrictions, the AGM weekend has been delayed to 13-15 Nov. The fallback plan if unable to run as a Meet is to use a webinar platform to run the AGM element only. Updates will follow nearer the time via email and Website.**

# MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY FOREWORD

After the delivery of each journal edition I receive phone calls and emails from members who have not received their copy. This is usually due to members' details not being correct in our database. Unfortunately a member calling the office is the only way I am able to update such information and so I rely on you letting me know. If am informed I can make any changes necessary to the details we hold such as your address, e-mail and bank details etc; all you need to do is drop me an e-mail to the address below.

**If you have any questions, concerns or anything at all please contact me on 01248 718364 or Mil 95581 7964 or by e-mail to secretary@armymountaineer.org.uk.**

The office hours are Monday to Thursday 9.00am to 15.45pm.

Emma Pritchard

# EDITOR'S FOREWORD

We're now into Summer 2020. It isn't the kind of summer any of us would have expected and the bottom line is that expeditions have, understandably been cancelled, reviews have been hard to come by and that's added to this edition being slightly different. So, I offer the following as an alternative to many of the features you're used to finding within the journal.

I've tried to fill this edition with new content from a balance of authors you'll have heard from before, like Mike Raine from Plas-Y-Brenin, and our own committee members, and some new 'faces' some of you might not know, like Jim Langley of Ogwen Mountain Rescue.

I hope, given our current extreme situation, you're all staying safe while being productive. This is, perhaps a blessing in disguise to get things done which you wouldn't otherwise get to. If you're struggling for ideas, our Recruiting Officer, Lee Magowan, has some thoughts on page 38 and if this is the first of a few editions of its kind then we'll scour the net for the best of these to keep the stress of not going outside as low as can be.

Hopefully, there'll be some of you who find yourselves at a loose end and might want to get involved. If that's the case, send me an email at [journal@armymountaineer.org.uk](mailto:journal@armymountaineer.org.uk) and let's chat.



Al Topping



# AMA DISCOUNTS & MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS



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



## Beyond Hope

If you have any issues with the various discount schemes, 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!**

### COTSWOLD OUTDOOR, SNOW & ROCK, CYCLE SURGERY & RUNNERS NEED

A 20% discount is now available in-store and online for products sold by Cotswold Outdoor, Snow & Rock, Runners Need and Cycle Surgery. Purchases in store will only be approved on production of a valid AMA membership card. No card, no discount. For online orders, the AMA discount code is available on the secure section of the AMA website.

[cotswoldoutdoor.com](http://cotswoldoutdoor.com)  
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[cyclesurgery.com](http://cyclesurgery.com)  
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### DMM (VIA HELIX)

All AMA members receive a special discount of TRADE + VAT which is approximately 30% off SRP. If you run a unit climbing club contact us to set up a unit account to receive the same deal. We also offer a RoSPA certified PPE Inspection course. We are able to provide access to other top brands for expeditions, please contact Helix Tactical for details. Call 01286 873 583 or email [sales@helixoperations.com](mailto:sales@helixoperations.com)

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### JOTTNAR

Jottnar are a British company with specialist clothing items and equipment for mountaineering. They have kindly agreed to make their entire range available to members of the AMA at 20% off RRP. They are now only available online and you won't see this brand in the shops. See the ordering process and T&Cs on the AMA website.

### PARAMO

All AMA members benefit by joining Paramo's Mountain Pro Scheme. Mountain qualifications and experience are assessed by Paramo, with an increasing scale of discounts available plus loyalty points, special offers & gear testing opportunities. Email [pro.sales@paramo.co.uk](mailto:pro.sales@paramo.co.uk) or call Jeni on 01892 786445. Apply at [www.paramo.co.uk/](http://www.paramo.co.uk/) mountainpro with your AMA number.

### TERRA NOVA

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### VERTEBRATE PUBLISHINGS

Vertebrate Publishing are a super enthusiastic UK based publisher of climbing, mountaineering, cycling, mountain biking and walking books. Exclusively for AMA members they have set up a discount code offering a reduction of 30% off all books bought on both the Vertebrate Publishing and Baton Wicks websites. All orders will be checked to confirm the purchaser is a member of the AMA before the discount will be honoured. The most up to date code is available in the members' area.

<https://www.v-publishing.co.uk>

### PHD (PETE HUTCHINSON DESIGNS)

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

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### TOUGHTAGS

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. 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](mailto:tagit@toughtags.co.uk)

### BEYOND HOPE - EVOLV, METOLIUS, PRANA AND ROCK TECHNOLOGIES

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POC - Lee 01457 838 242

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# DIARY 2020

VISIT OUR WEBSITE FOR MORE EVENT INFORMATION:

[WWW.ARMYMOUNTAINEER.ORG.UK](http://WWW.ARMYMOUNTAINEER.ORG.UK)

## SEP 20

TBC  
AFBL (ARMED FORCES BOULDERING LEAGUE) ROUND 1  
CONTACT: TBC  
Open to all. DIN to follow. TBC

## 1 OCT 20

N/A  
SUBMISSIONS FOR AMA JOURNAL WINTER EDITION  
CONTACT: TBC

## OCT 20

TBC  
AFBL ROUND 2  
CONTACT: TBC  
Open to all. DIN to follow.

## OCT 20

TBC  
BLCCS (BRITISH LEAD CLIMBING COMP)  
CONTACT: TBC  
UK Armed Forces Team representation by invite

## OCT 20

TBC  
AMA MEET  
CONTACT: RYAN LANG  
Open to all.

## 13-15 NOV

JSMTC INDEFATIGABLE / WEBINAR  
AMA AGM  
CONTACT: TBC  
Open to all.

## NOV 20

TBC  
AFBL ROUND 3  
CONTACT: TBC  
Open to all. DIN to follow.

## DEC 20

TBC  
AFBL ROUND 4  
CONTACT: TBC  
Open to all. DIN to follow.

## TO BE CONFIRMED...

RAF CLIMBING CHAMPIONSHIPS 2020  
Likely open to Army guests

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# BMC FUNDAMENTALS 1&2

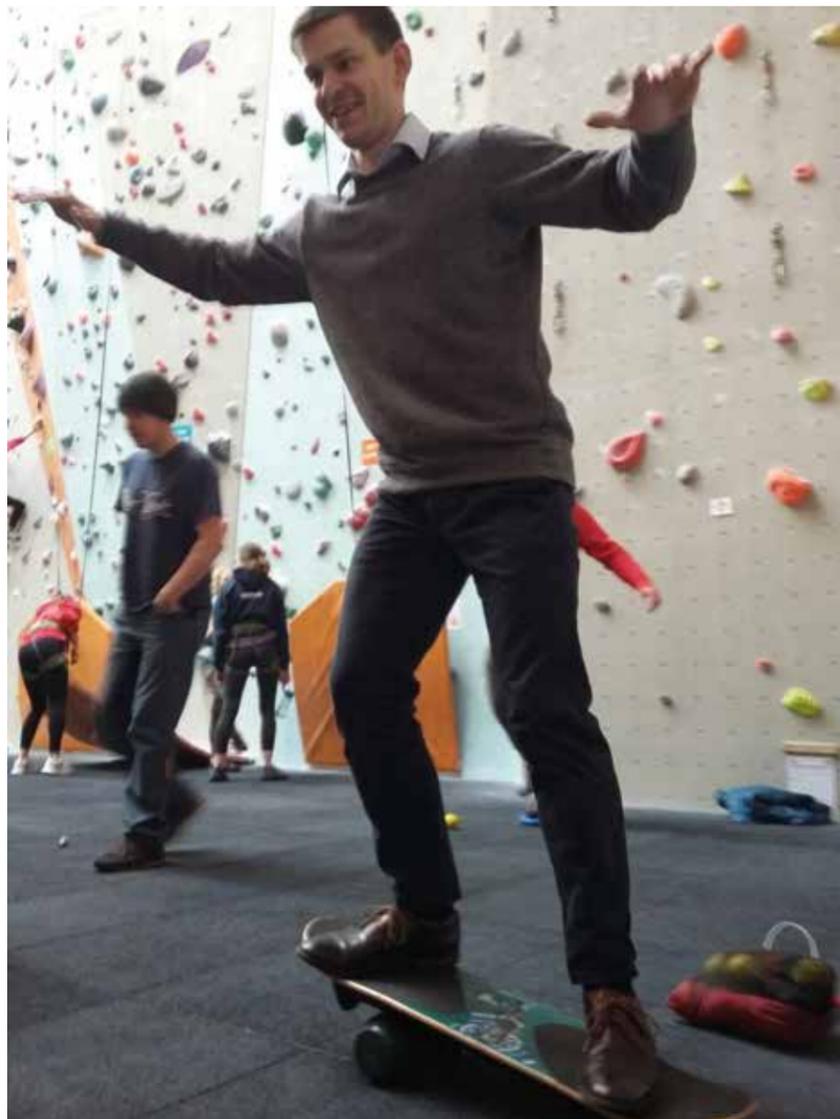
## 14-15 DECEMBER 19

Al Mason, Vice Chair, Mountaineering

Winter is arguably the best time to be indoors at a climbing wall, and a December weekend, with constant gales and flooding proved the perfect backdrop to the AMA facilitating the BMC Fundamentals 1&2 courses at The Quay Climbing Wall in Exeter.

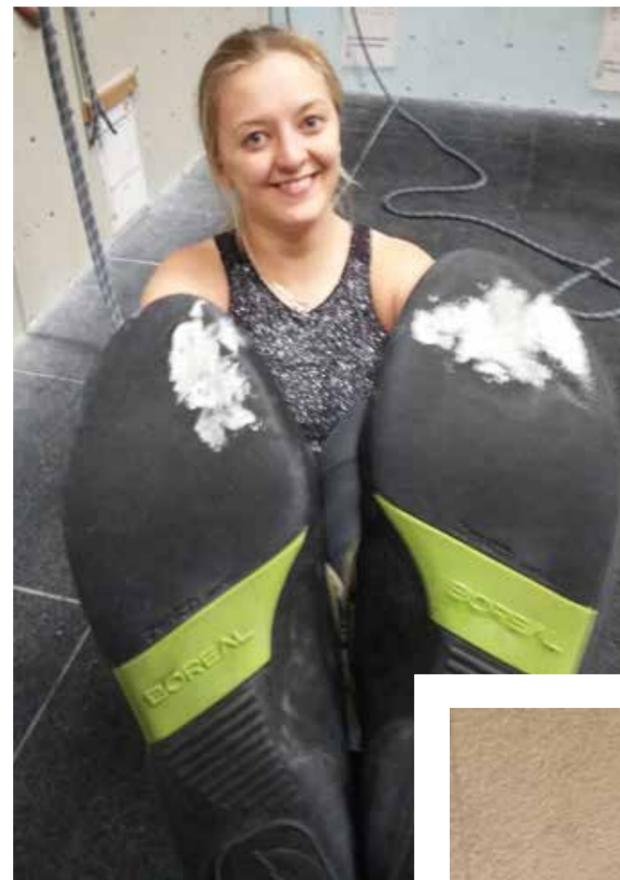
The courses are explained on the BMC website, but essentially, they are designed to introduce a person to training people without breaking them. Fundamentals 1 lasts one day and looks at a person's long-term physical development in the context of climbing training. It also examines climbing warm ups and exercises to develop the core skills of Agility, Balance and Coordination. Hands and feet are then discussed, and ways in which to make both more efficient are explored. This then leads into the principles of Head, Hands, Hips and Heels (& Habitat & Head-mental) as parts of the body to be controlled whilst moving. Finally types of holds and features are discussed and then everything is put together to round off the day.

Fundamentals 2 also lasts one day and starts with a revision of Fundamentals



1, so fits nicely into a 2-day package. The course moves into focusing on most of the techniques required for climbing common features such as cracks, aretes, slabs and overhangs. The group was then sent off in syndicates to demonstrate various climbing moves such as smearing, bridging, laybacking, flagging and dropped knee using the

IDEAS coaching model (Intro, Demo, Explain, Activity, Summary) and focusing on BOSS (Body, Order, Shape, Speed). Not only did the team have to think about how to breakdown a technique, but also where best in the wall to teach it – not an easy task at a busy wall with limited features (maybe a midweek course might be best?).



What was interesting is that everyone from crusty seasoned JS RCI to hardcore beanie wearing boulderer with limited JS quals got a lot out of the course and everyone went away with a far better idea of how to bring on new climbers and also how to analyse their own technique and that of others. In many ways it compliments the JSMTTC courses that tend to prioritise ropework over climbing movement and coaching. It also made the group think about further awards facilitated via the AMA such as Climbing Wall (Development) Instructor, MT Rock Climbing Instructor, Foundation Coach and Fundamentals 3.

Whilst this was an AMA facilitated event, the BMC (and Mountain Training) runs many of these courses throughout the year and SLCs are eligible. SLC application forms are on the members area on the AMA website, but remember an Education Centre member of staff needs to sign the form off before you start the course. Alternatively, you the reader could volunteer to organise a bespoke AMA course! Please contact a member of the AMA committee to discuss this idea if you are interested.





# STANDARD LEARNING CREDITS (SLC) FOR MOUNTAINEERS

## USING YOUR £175 ANNUAL ALLOWANCE

Al Mason,  
Vice Chair Mountaineering

The MOD provides its personnel with two types of funding for personal development activities: Standard Learning Credits (SLCs) and Enhanced Learning Credits (ELCs). Both have been around for a long time but only recently have SLCs (not ELCs) been made available to Reservists as well as Regular military personnel. Both awards are ideal for offering financial assistance to those AMA mountaineers who want to conduct continuous personal development. ELCs are only available after a set period of Regular Service. Further details about ELCs can be found at <http://www.enhancedlearningcredits.com/>. For SLC, the financial assistance comes in the form of offsetting 80% of the costs of a qualification up to £175 for each financial year.

Examples of previous successful claims for SLCs for mountaineering include:  
ML Refresher course at PYB  
Navigation Masterclass  
Rock Climbing Development Course  
Scrambling development Course  
MIA Refresher course.  
BMC Climbing Fundamentals courses  
SPA Training  
SPA Assessment

The SLC policy is contained within JSP 822 Pt 1 (V3.0 Mar 17). Page 130, para 6j states that SLC Eligibility criteria is as follows: Courses and qualifications which are required for the **coaching and management** of sport or AT in the Services are eligible for SLC, provided that they are in support of a Service Person's Personal Development Plan, and recorded, are eligible. There must be evidence of intellectual development. Cases of this kind are to be examined by Ed Staff and where there is any doubt, they should be referred to appropriate single Service Authority. Service Personnel must prove either that the activity is **not provided under the auspices of Joint Service Adventurous Training Schemes (JSAT)** or that a place is not available on such a course (ie those listed in JSP 419 and on the JSMTTC course booking system). In some cases, qualifications are available through courses sponsored and authorised by single Service Sports Boards. Ed Staff will check availability before approving the use of SLC.

JSP 822 then explains in para 8e that SLC **cannot** be claimed for 'all sporting and AT, or courses where the aim is solely to

learn the sport or activity or improve by undertaking that sport or activity.

Therefore, the key element for a successful claim is that the course of study must lead to (not necessarily give by itself) a recognised qualification, have substantial developmental value and directly benefit the service by enabling you to coach or manage the activity. However, you will not obtain SLC for a mountaineering course if your aim is solely to learn the sport or activity or you can do it via JSMTTC.

### The SLC process is as follows:

#### Applying -

- o Prior to committing for the course Complete MOD Form 1950 (on AMA website) → Get Line manager's approval on the form → Submit to your local Education Centre for further approval → Once approved individuals can commit to the course.

#### Claiming -

- o On completion of the course submit Receipt of Payment + Proof of successful completion to your Unit education centre → Service person's receive the SLC as part of their pay (depends upon the JPA main cut-off point)
- o You are able to claim 80% of your course fees up to a maximum of £175 per Financial Year.
- o SLC is a refund scheme and operates as an annualised allowance from 1 Apr to 31 Mar each year. It does not operate as an account in which the allowance can be carried forward from year to year.
- o The scheme does not permit retrospective payments from previous financial years, except in exceptional operational or compassionate circumstances. SLC monies are paid to claimants upon completion of learning.



The SLC policy, guidance and SLC claim form have been put onto the AMA webpage in the members' area under documents. The information can also be found, for those with access, on Dii/ MoDNet and is contained within JSP 822 Part 1 Training and Education. You can also get further information from your local Army Education Centre (details available from your unit), who will also need to sign off your application form before you start the course.



# AN INTERVIEW WITH...

# BRONCO LANE

Interviewed by Sean Mackey

**M**ajor Michael Lane MM, BEM is well known in the AMA and was part of some of the early expeditions and first ascents the association were involved in. Known as 'Bronco' he is a highly decorated Special Forces soldier with service in Aden, Oman and Northern Ireland- he had an exceptional military career. He became a noted speaker and lecturer along with being a published author after his retirement. Unfortunately, he has developed Alzheimer's and struggles to remember all the detail from his life. I caught up with him on a 'good day' in his lovely home in Hereford to talk through what he remembers.

#### So how did you start off in the Army?

Well I started in Junior Leaders in Nuneaton and it changed my life really. I was a bit of a Manchurian job- I worked on the Market and as a delivery boy. I hadn't really done anything until I went into boys' service in Nuneaton and we had some bloody good instructors...I was just 16. We had a great troop and headshed in Milne Troop. We did things as well the boys service drills, we went outward bounding.

#### Was that your first experience in climbing?

No, I was outward bound as a boy and I did a three-week stint in Ullswater. That really turned me onto the outdoors, which meant in the military I was always looking for extras. I joined 7 (Para) RHA from boy service as it sounded like a bloody good outfit to be involved in.

#### But they throw you out of perfectly serviceable aircraft?

Absolutely, the trick is to remember where the reserve is! I had three years with 7RHA and then Aldershot began to get under my skin. I was a single bloke living in barracks and been in Aden two or three times and it was Garrison, Garrison, Garrison. I heard about 22 SAS from listening to the seniors talking. I was doing a job called a technical



assistant where I looked after all the detail of where the rounds landed.

#### Where you heavy gun or light gun?

Light gun (105mm) (ed. Which is still in service). Being Paras it's the only thing you can get out of an aircraft. I got involved with thinking outside of the box. In Aden we'd been supporting 22 SAS and we'd been in the NAAFI chatting away as you do, and they made a comment of 'I wonder how the boys are getting on back in Hereford?'. Hereford? I started listening more to gossip and for details on the SAS. We weren't recruited, I just went in the Sergeant Major one day when I'd had enough and said I wanted to go on selection- I heard they couldn't turn an application down! They can make life bloody miserable for you until you leave though...

My Troop Sergeant was known as 'Sass Boyer' cause he'd done some time with the SAS ten years before. He was a likeable fellow, a fairly strict disciplinarian, but as soon as I said I was applying to go to Hereford on selection he said 'Are you? We'll have to get you fit...go join the boxing team'. I became part of the boxing team- I had one fight and got beat by a lad in 3Para. Everyday there was training-

The army at the time was pushed to filled day with useful things so we did a lot of physical training. Meanwhile I am hearing all about Hereford (Boots and navigation). I wasn't a bad navigator as I was a trained technical assistant so mapwork came as second nature. I went on selection and was told 'Don't come back'. That was just the right poke for me as I would never have dreamed of coming back to the mainstream army. He did it deliberately. I was on selection for three weeks. I was a round peg in a round hole as the whole ethos was selection is self-motivated. I was okay with that!

#### How did you get involved with the Army Mountaineering Association?

When I joined 22 SAS, I joined A Squadron and as I walked through the door with the other successful lot (There were about 8 of us) they were dishing out troops. The SAS Officer was doing it as we walked past (Mountain, Mobility, Boat, Air, Mountain, Mobility, Boat, Air). No chat about your interests- You're a soldier you'll do as your told. I went 1 Tp A Sqn which was mountain luckily. The two seniors were good instructors and there were other lads who could climb,

but these two seniors were really good. Every spare minute between courses and exercises we went climbing. They said 'I am going to teach you to climb at night having never been here before' that was the aim. Bloody hell! Its hard, much harder than selection. A month later I was accepted into the troop. They had their own selection and they tried to get the natural climbers.

#### Did that make it easier to get on expeditions?

It did because we trained hard and you brought something to the party. We were so into it we did it in our spare time too. Single blokes you know- North Wales wow! I actually went to Chamonix for three weeks and that was a big boost- really eye opening!

#### Was that in the 60's and 70's?

1967 or 1968 I think?

#### Because that was a long way to go and not many people used to leave the country back then.

We did it in proper kit too. We did Mont Blanc, Matterhorn and the Grand Jorasse. I never kept a logbook of climbs (I never have in my life) and even now my brains befuddled I can't remember with any certainty what we did. I've tried to write my biography, but I can't remember any of the detail. So, all my books are non-technical and stories basically.

#### You did your first season in Chamonix. What trips did that allow you to go on?

I really wanted to go on a big one. My first was to Canada and then the Indian Himalaya in 1972. It was a total success for me personally and I was teamed up with a chap called Noel Dilly (who a civilian medical chap working in the Navy).

We also did a FA on Nupste and I did Everest three times- Two of which were AMA trips and one that I led. So, when I

led one it was a 22 SAS expedition from Hereford.

#### Expedition leadership is stressful. What are your thoughts on this? Any top tips?

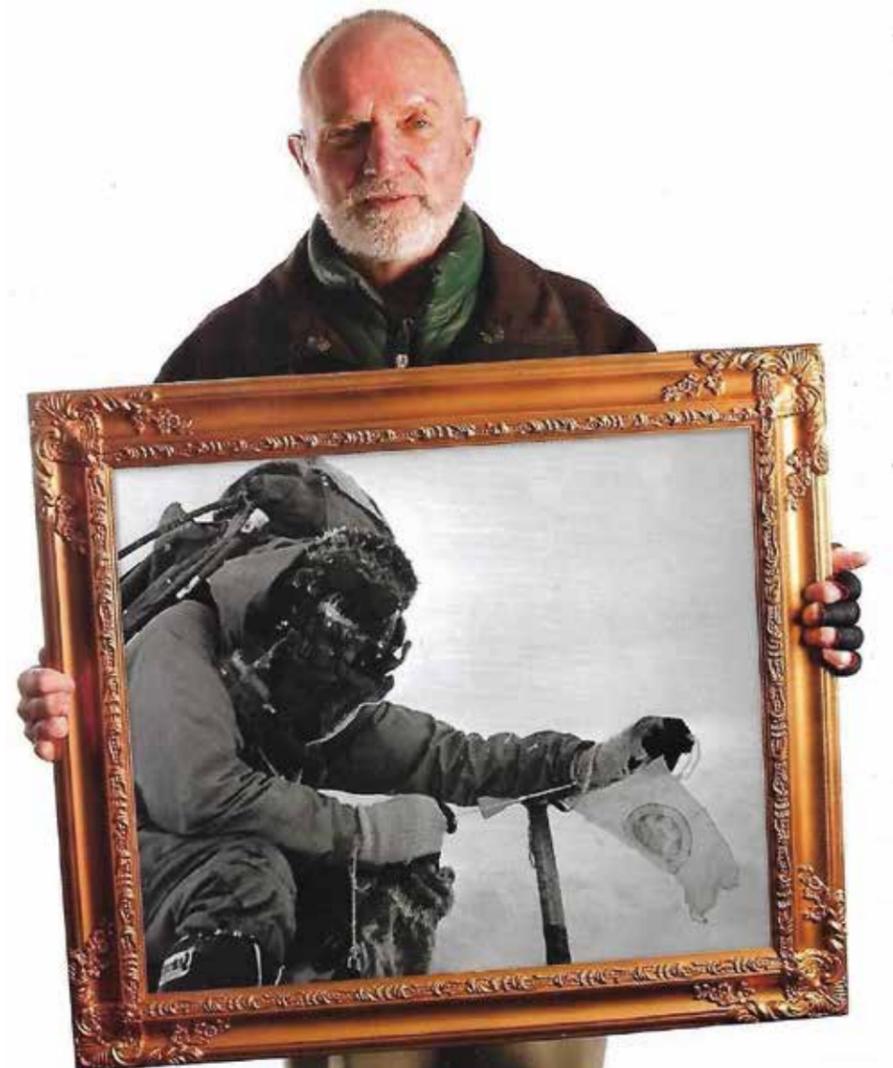
Get to know your fellas and use them as much as possible like any leadership situation. Not use them in a negative sense but task them. Ration man, medic, communicator.

Selecting a team is not easy. Self-selective is probably the easiest and as good a way as any. It was always by invitation in

my day and we only took good climbers that you know. I never had to balance a team with ranks, genders or anything. I wouldn't ask them if I didn't want them to come!

#### A lot of the pressure we feel now is to select a team that is a cross section of the army.

The word used to go out and people would come and find you. In my time it was never formal, there was a headshed in the AMA, but there were so few of us, so we all knew each other. A small group there was only forty active members.





**Wow. At the moment we're hovering just below 3000 members and are the biggest mountaineering club in the country.**

I think the military get their moneys worth and if people go on these big expeditions maybe 80% will want to stay in the Army. They've had an experience that translates into military work. Being under fire and stretched.

**Even back then you were thinking about retention with these expeditions? Using them as a way of keeping valuable people in the Army?**

They retained themselves. If they're happy they stay in their unit. Given my unit I was luckily belonged to they were on the edge. Politically, militarily, manpower and financially the SAS wasn't covered in gold like a Cavalry Regiment.

Particularly on the manpower side. People would just wear out- they'd have five years of constant stress and pressure then their original parent cap badge would dangle promotions and rank. They'd get good jobs after tours in Hereford to get them back in their units. Not easy.

So, if one is bone headed enough to put together an expedition that would also be a good recruiter. Because it is- Its putting something in full view that is military and positive. It put the military teams in full view of the civilian climbers too. The civilians used to love the military climbers and would want to get us involved. Joe Brown would pull us into his shop or the pub because we were out there doing real stuff.

**Do you still get the AMA journal and keep up with current stuff?**

I haven't really looked at them. To be honest now I first look through to see if there are any deceased that I know- The obituaries you know.

I do read it through a couple of times to absorb it.

**Do you think the current expeds are as cutting edge as some of yours or do you think the Army is more risk adverse?**

I think they're still doing the same sort things. How do you sell risk- Its bloody difficult especially amongst soldiers that are in constant danger a lot of the time? What I used to emphasis to senior officers or sponsors was that the soldiers and the Army gained. The soldiers got to go

climbing in amazing places and they Army got skills they wanted.

The civilians couldn't believe the expeds we used to go on and the support. They'd often say 'What you get all your rations paid for? You get flights into Nepal? You're lucky buggers you!' All good craic you know. There is a real history or mountaineering and sailing expeditions on the military- We've been doing it for a long time you know. Mixed up and living off each other.

The thing I never got into discussion about, I just did it, was the join of military operations and mountaineering. The similarity of a small climbing team and a recce team are so similar. Self-contained. I don't know if anyone was written it yet but the skills are very similar. You have to look after each other on the expedition. The strain in both fields are the same.

My bosses, especially Mike Wilkes , always used to joke about what I was up to next. They'd never expect a 20-page report detailing what we were doing on their desk next Monday. They gave us such freedom!

**You're quite famous for the AMA 1976 expedition to Everest. The North Ridge wasn't it?**

Yes, we did. Me and Brummie Stokes. We were on Nupste as a work up and it was next door. Brummie and I did a lot of talking and listening during that exped. The Nupste expedition was hard emotionally, mentally and physically so it focuses the brain for staying alive and growing. I was a Lance Corporal and looking at Everest wanting to get on it. The 1976 expedition was open to all the talent in joint services. I made sure I was always in the picture by just being there and quietly being seen getting on with it. I never went out of my way to push myself forward I was just always there with a brew ready to go.



Others were asking 'Why am I not in this climbing team' or 'That climbing team'.

I had quite a lot of credibility with the Everest team as Bronco and I were the only two to survive out of our six-man team of that Nuptse exped. So that experience and my 'survivability' gave us a boost. On that expedition (Nuptse) we moved when we had to move and could move. We never thought we've got two days rations we must be down in two days; we would have made two days last two weeks- we were going to get down alive! We watched the first two go and the we knew they were dead it was radioed up to us. Nuptse was harder on our brains that Everest, physically as well, I think.

**Why do you think that was?**

The loses gave us a lot of mental strain, much more than Everest. When we went for the North Ridge Brummie and I said we're going to go for it. Another team member stepped forward and said he wanted to join us. I said, 'I don't think so, mate, Brum and I are going for it and might not be coming back'. We never went to die, but that guy had a wife and kids and I didn't want that to happen again.

**How well did you know Brummie Stokes your fellow summiteer?**

He was SAS as well but had a proper infantry background. I was just a scabby gunner. He was Green Jackets and we met in the same (mountain) troop. He lived in the bed space next me. We had that bond before we went. We'd go on expedition and it was normal for us as we did it all the time. Geordie Allan was perceptive bloke on the Everest exped, and he said, 'I've been with you two buggers three months now and I've never heard you talk to each other!'. We didn't need to you see. I knew what he was thinking, and he knew what I was thinking. We had done three tours

in Oman together and we had been living for each other many times before. We were perfectly in sync and that made for a brilliant climbing partnership. We didn't have to communicate I knew he'd do the right thing at the right time. I done two trips prior to the Nuptse one and it was Brummie's first one. So, I could say this is what I think is going to happen, this is what I am hearing. We chatted everything through. We discussed the other climbers and always kept an eye on the ones we rated, which was quite a lot in that expedition.

**Do you think you both would have been so successful if it wasn't for that partnership?**

No. I knew what he was thinking before he did. About anything! We had been five years in the same patrol and all that time on tour, climbing trips, training exercises the jungle as well as time down the town. It was a strength and never a burden. If someone asked me what Brummie thinking I'd say, 'Go and ask him. He might bite your ear off, but you need to speak to him'.

For five years we did an expedition a year and an Op tour so you're well registered.

**How did you find the North Ridge? Is it technically difficult?**

I think we used out knowledge from the normal route and Nuptse to our advantage. Especially with understanding the weather. We didn't try and do stupid things that others tried; like doing a 1000ft in crap weather- You'll die!

Just take it easy and let it flow. It might take two week or it might take two months.

**So, there was no end date for the exped? Return flights?**

There was provisionally a flight back, but really you had to finish first. The flight coming home were always a big question mark especially if someone had got hurt or worse as you had to look after them? It takes time.

We were pre-monsoon and the Chris Bonington SW Ridge expedition was post monsoon. So, I suppose that would have given us an end date.

**So you didn't have much to do with the other expedition?**

The two leaders Tony Streathers and Chris Bonington were tight friends. They were both doing big jobs, so it suited them both

to use each other, not in a negative sense, positively. But why not. The competition is between route and the weather so you don't need it between mates.

**Tony Streather has got this almost mythical or legendary expedition leader status along with being a very accomplished mountaineer. What was he like?**

Tony was a senior Ghurkha Officer and spoke Nepalese fluently. He was a very astute man and knew everything that was going regardless of whether it a Sherpa or team member.

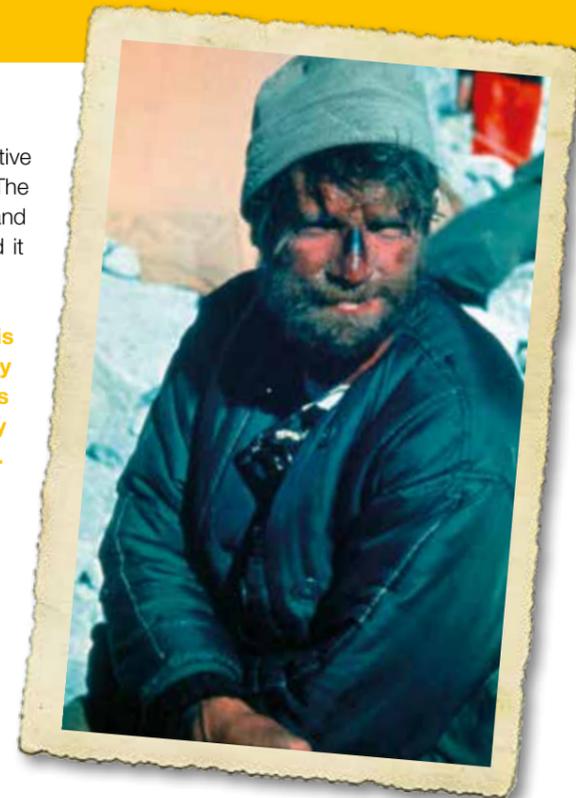
He always used to 'ask' you to do something. He never told you. 'Brummie will you go and have a look at so and so for me and tell me what you think?' He was calm, collected and had been through it militarily. His background was he'd been a Platoon Commander in Korea, Company commander and Battalion Commander in Borneo, he spoke Ghurkali extreme well and understood Nepal. Politics, military and the locals very very well. He put people at easy extremely quickly always smiling and gave you a gentle bollocking when you needed it! You used to come away from them agreeing that you need to improve.

**He was Chairman of the AMA and also President of the Alpine club. That's quite the pedigree.**

He knew Nepal. The rulers had all been through his hands and the locals used to respect him as they knew his reputation from the Ghurkhas. He used to collaborate and combine and knew that you worked better together.

**Do you keep up with the current mountaineering scene? Did you follow Nims Purja on his Mission Possible?**

No not at all. I am glad to see people busy. I am not involved with any mountaineering at all. I don't miss it at all. I just can't do it now I am too old, and you should always quit while you're ahead. I nearly missed that bus stop a few times. I never regretted doing anything, but I have regretted its past. There are other things in life now- Like staying alive!



I can totally honestly say I that I did everything I wanted to do. When I had something I wanted to do, by god, I'd take some stopping. You had better ask some of the guys I climbed with what I was like. I did six AMA expeditions, training with the SAS and unit expeds so I am more than happy that was leading a single SAS soldier's life and doing this as well. As the years went on, I got to point when I retired that I felt relieved that I didn't have to lead anymore expeditions. I was still ahead of the posy.

**What would say to a young LCpl in the Royal Horse Artillery now? What advise would you give them?**

Do it! What ever you want to do; work out a plan and do it. Don't wait and get demotivated. If you want to do a course or learn a language or climb just do it. Its really easy to make excuses! Civilians aren't paid to go on expeditions they must find the money before they can even think about it.

I mean service men are in good positions once he has established himself in his unit, but he must never let the unit down. If they have the shout for a last-minute op be there. Don't moan or let anything get in the way. Do as many Ops and expeds as possible. One year I only spent 22 days in Hereford!

Soldiers are normally quite selfish but remember to put your family first occasionally and your desires second for their wellbeing.



# SNOWDONIA PEACE

Mike Raine

Hello, I'm writing to you from a locked-down Snowdonia. It's quiet, very quiet. I know there have been a few, well publicised breaches of the government-imposed lockdown, but believe me, it's quiet here and the vast majority of people have done the right things.

We are well into the fourth week as I write and, I have to say it's actually all very nice. I'm in the fortunate position of having wages paid and time to spare. I live in a beautiful place; I'm actually feeling a little guilty. I could, to be fair, walk further than I do. I do, however, play sensibly, simply out of respect for those working extremely hard on our behalf and for those who might be less fortunate with their geography. So, I do a little less than I could, but I'd be a fool not to be out walking or cycling, from our house into the remote woods and hills behind my house.

The peace is, from time to time disturbed by lawnmowers, wood chippers, and chain saws. It isn't disturbed by speeding cars, racing motorbikes and even the RAF seem to be out a little less. There are few vapour trails in the sky as most planes are grounded, the train, down our valley, isn't running and there are limited busses. Our cars move once week to shop.

What is absolutely wonderful though is watching the spring encroach. Spring is my favourite time of year and I love being

in the hills right now, before the bracken sets, before the hills get summer crowds and while the spring migrating birds are arriving. This is, it would seem, a time for the birds. The bird song we can hear at home is wonderful; sounds we've never noticed before, as we walk into the woods the cacophony builds especially at first and last light. As we wander up on to the moor there are different sounds, there are skylarks and the tweet-tweet of the meadow pipit.

I've never heard the chiff-chaffs quite so prominent. Their two tone, automated call, rather like a squeaky see-saw is all around the woods. As you head higher to the edge of the woods, it's the newly arrived willow warblers that catch your hearing with their descending call. Both of these are tiny birds weighing around 10 grams, being about 11 cm long and



Rhinog Fawr and Rhinog Fach - visit the Rhinogiau for some quite, wild walking. There's some great rock climbing here too.

with a wingspan of around 20 cm. They look incredibly similar and if you saw the two side by side, you'd be hard pushed to spot the difference, never mind tell the difference. Chiff chaffs winter in the Mediterranean and West Africa, whilst the willow warbler makes an even more remarkable journey to southern Africa for the winter. I think it's safe to say these two species will enjoy an uninterrupted breeding season this year.

I have high hopes for our local hen harriers too. This is a bird whose population has been decimated over the years by people. A nice quiet spring might be just what they need to start increasing their numbers. There is a worry though, and that is wildlife crime. Whilst our upland birds should do very well this year, there will be no one around keeping an eye out for wildlife crime which is hard enough to detect at

the best of times. The Scots have banned the 'muirburn' a process of burning the heather to create new growth upon which grouse feed, but burning off gorse has continued longer than it should here. They believe grouse numbers, will therefore be down this year and it will be a poor season for driven grouse shooting, if it happens at all. On the other hand, this might mean some space for other species to thrive, maybe it'll be good news for hen harrier and other, allegedly, targeted birds of prey, maybe it'll be good for stoat, fox and badger. It'll be interesting see how these species are faring when the movement

restrictions are lifted. Naturalists are both optimistic and pessimistic.

But what will we as mountaineers and walkers see? How will the Covid -19 lockdown affect the places we tread? Well there should be more vegetation growth, there should be recovery of eroded footpaths, there should be a breathing space for trampled crag bottoms and tops. I hope this is the case, I do. I hope Snowdon can breathe a little and let some green return to its overpopulated summit. I suspect its overused paths are looking a little forlorn at the moment, I hope the scars of recreation can heal a little. We're in a month long drought as well, which after the wettest February on record is not exactly as we'd like or expect.

The crags, too, will have a little space to breath. The bases won't revegetate, but those trees we grapple with will have little break, those birds that nest nearby will have a little more space (have you ever seen the wren that lives in the undercut just right of Faith on the Slabs?). Tremadog will need some attention, feel free to tug away at the brambles and ivy as they encroach on to routes. On the other hand, the rhododendrons can continue their spread, any stuck sheep will remain stuck and the goats won't be moved on from the precious arctic-alpine sites. I'm also concerned about our rate of return. If we all turn up on day one post-restrictions at the Cromlech or the Milestone Buttress there will be a severe impact. The parking problems will be laid bare once more, the erosion will reappear instantly, and nature will be in for a shock. So, on day one, go somewhere different, off the beaten track, leave the honeypot sites alone, they will be crowded, and crowd's on cliffs increase danger. If you are walking head to the Arannau or the Rhinogiau, they'll be busier than in the past, but still much quieter than northern Snowdonia. If you are climbing seek out the 'Alternative' list in the Llanberis guidebook, Cloggy is dry as a bone right now, so should be climbable throughout the summer. Just take the opportunity to go a different way,



Cwm Cywarch - Try the Cwm Cywarch Horseshoe over Glasgwm and Aran Fawddwy for another alternative to northern Snowdonia.

or to a different hill, or to a crag you've never visited before.

There is an irony though. Snowdonia needs, walkers, climbers, and mountaineers, it needs tourists, as does the Scottish Highlands, the Lake District, and other rural areas. I hope you haven't been put off by the nastiness of some of the 'stay home' brigade who seem to have revelled a little too much in the idea of closing the countryside. The unarguable fact is that tourism brings in money to the hills whereas hill farming brings in subsidy. It is potentially a matter for debate as to who is really 'working the land' these days. We do need to find some effective solutions to the peak time transport and parking issues though, any ideas?

## I hope the scars of recreation can heal a little

It's been a shame to miss the spring blossoming in the hills. There are stands of damson, crab apple and blackthorn in blossom now. The spring flowers are rampant, our lanes are full of stitchwort, celandine, wild garlic, dog violets and the bluebells are beginning to make an appearance. On the hill the tormentil and milkwort will be appearing. Of the arctic alpine we got to see the best displays of purple saxifrage before the shutdown, if we were there now, we'd be seeing the starry saxifrages and the mossy saxifrage making their appearance.

I think when we return to the hills; they will look greener, they will look a little ragged and wilder, there maybe a little more bird song. But, for how long? It will return to as before, there will be many people,

maybe even more than usual heading up Snowdon, the bikes will return to the valleys and the lakes will be swum in again. People will return. I hope nature has had a good recovery period, it did during foot and mouth. I know nature will have, overall gained, but do be mindful that a minority of landowners may have seen this as an opportunity to do some bad things; we'll see. Maybe, just maybe we'll all appreciate the natural world a little bit more. So maybe we'll wish to see our uplands in a more natural state, a few less sheep, a few more trees, a wider range of flowers and birds. I hope so. I hope we'll all appreciate the great outdoors that little but more than we ever did. The sheer joy, the sense of wonder, the specialness of a walk in the hills, these are our places, we need them, we want to share them, we want to care for them, let's work very carefully, as effectively as we can to be a voice for being in the hills, for exercise in the hills and for, above all else, nature in the hills. I do hope you get to enjoy your summer and return to the hills just as soon as it is possible and safe to do so. Look out for change, take a moment to stop and listen, do you notice anything that is different?

*Mike is the author of Nature of Snowdonia (Pesda Press 2020) which can be purchased from [www.mikerraine.co.uk](http://www.mikerraine.co.uk) where you will also find details of his Nature of Snowdonia workshops. You can follow his Notes from the Hill page on Facebook which features podcasts, videos and updates 'from the hill'. On Twitter he is @mikerraine. His mission is to improve environmental and nature awareness amongst hillwalkers, climbers and mountaineers.*



Cwm Crafnant, with a deserted and closed Snowdon in the distance. - For a quiet post-Corvid 19 walk try the Crafnant Horseshoe



# REFLECTIONS FROM...

# A MOUNTAIN RESCUE VOLUNTEER



Jim Langley

## Jim Langley

A notification popped up on social media this morning of an event I'd planned five years ago. The event was to see 125 people light up the night timeridge of our most iconic mountain in Snowdonia – Tryfan. There were rescue team members past and present involved, along with the mountain rescue team from RAF Valley and a raft of supporters, some of whom had been rescued in the past and some that had never been on a mountain at night before.

It was planned as part of a year of celebrating fifty years since the Ogwen Valley Mountain Rescue Organisation (OVMRO) came into existence. As I reflect back on that amazing event from my current lockdown position at home, I think of my time with the team over the past twelve years, the experiences I have had, what it has meant to me and how, as a team, we are ready and able to deal with any challenging situation that arises.

Its now four weeks since the country entered the stage 2 'delay' phase of the corona virus outbreak. The financial impact of social isolation is starting to bite. I run a small business in environmental training and also work as an alpine trekking guide. Overnight all my work for the next five months came to a crashing halt. With huge uncertainty of when the restrictions will be lifted, I'm unsure when I will be able to return to work and start earning money again.

This concern is shared by the wider outdoor industry, some of who are also dedicated members of mountain rescue teams. There are, however, far greater concerns for operational rescue team

members who are key workers and who face a greater risk to their own health as frontline doctors, paramedics and NHS workers dealing with the crisis.

The impact of the lockdown has put pressure on all mountain rescue teams, who are well known for their resilience and ability to support the emergency services. As news spread of an epidemic in early March the team closely monitored news channels and began contingency planning around the main risks.

Statements were published in accordance with government guidelines advising people to stay home and we began to tighten our operational procedures and introduce precautionary measures. Non-essential meetings and all training events were cancelled or postponed and the use of video conferencing was implemented to ensure resilience as

a rescue service whilst controlling the spread of infection.

Our new call out procedures aim to minimise 'troops' on the hill and also to rely more heavily on the use of technology, such as PhoneFine or SARLOC, in locating and bringing casualties off the hill, without the need to deploy team members, if appropriate. For all injured casualties we will follow clinical guidance and if there is immediate threat to life, the Coastguard helicopter is still available. We also provide a capability to assist civil aid emergencies such as flooding and extreme weather events and will continue to provide this where possible.

Our team currently has fifty members but our capacity has reduced considerably, with 30% of members self isolating due to their age and/or medical conditions whilst others maintain social distancing as key



Trg horiz lower Tin Can with y Garn

team is one of the busiest mountain rescue teams in the country and last year we attended over 120 incidents. By early April we were already ahead of the number of incidents for the same period last year, having clocked up twenty-nine incidents. Four of these occurred in close succession at a time when the government were beginning to restrict people's movement but still flocked to the mountains to escape and to self-isolate. The following week the government clamped down on non-essential travel.

We were called out to three technical mountain rescues over four days beginning with a young, ill-equipped, man with two dogs who became cragfast on Tryfan as daylight faded. A few days later another cragfast man, again in light clothing, became stuck on steep ground ascending Pen yr ole wen.

The third incident was an early morning call-out to a lone male who got into difficulty descending the north ridge of Tryfan, after driving up from the Midlands to watch sunrise from the summit. Since then the team has responded to just one incident to assist SARDA, a search dog team, with a lowland search for a vulnerable person near Bangor.

Our usual procedure to respond for a call-out is to text our availability, get your hill kit together and head to 'Oggie' base near Llyn Ogwen from where we are assigned a role in the search or rescue.

Our revised plan, given the current circumstances, is to message availability and wait out at home, only attending base if requested to do so. On getting to base strict procedures for infection control, the use of PPE and social distancing are to be followed and the ensuing rescue party, comprising minimal team members, would conduct the rescue.



Rescue stretcher carry Idwal gate 2

Following a rescue the casualty would usually be taken straight to hospital (by ambulance or helicopter) or returned to base if uninjured and not requiring urgent medical treatment. Here they'd be treated to a warm cuppa and snack followed by a debrief after which they are also encouraged to join our support team known as 'treble three' (333.org.uk) which raises funds for the team. None of this currently happens, the team return to base, decontaminate any kit used and return home in isolation.

Since these recent events all has been quiet as the public have heeded government advice to stay home. Easter came and went without incident and large areas of Snowdonia National Park have been closed to the public restricting access to honeypot sites such as Snowdon and the Glyderau mountains, giving people no opportunity to visit the Park. Social media has played a big part in spreading this message about staying home.

One of our recent rescues on Tryfan generated a huge reach of hundreds of thousands of people and created an outpouring of support for the team but also concern about people's attitude to this unnecessary contribution to the epidemic health risk.

The message has sunk in and the mountains lie quiet, beyond the reach of man and have become a haven for wildlife

once again. The challenge continues though, as our access and freedom have been severely limited and it now is a battle to keep our mental as well as physical wellbeing going. The regular training events and social debriefs down the pub are no longer possible and the sense of camaraderie and team is currently on hold. The impacts go further still as our team has a significant role and provides great support for the local community. Our calendar of talks and base tours, fundraising events and attendance at local events lays empty.

With plenty of sunshine and time on our hands it is so frustrating not to be able to climb the mountains yet we can find alternative ways to enjoy the outdoors from cycling the empty roads to exploring the open paths closer to home. On the flip side the reduction in visitors has seen a massive reduction in incidents so the pressure on the team has reduced as a consequence. When conditions return to normal and people's work life balance resumes then their quest for mountain adventures will see them pour back into the Ogwen valley and sadly so may the need for mountain rescue - but we always hope not.

Jim Langley runs Nature's Work and provides environmental training workshops for the outdoor industry. He is also author of 'The Alps – A Natural Companion' [www.natureswork.co.uk](http://www.natureswork.co.uk)



# EX 900

## 6MI BN RETRACE A WW2 ESCAPE ROUTE OVER THE PYRENEES

By Ed Brooker-McGee and David McGee

Soaked wet through the team sat leaning against their packs on the steep rocky ground with the cloud swirling around them. The cloud was low with the group having been in it for several hours as they slowly climbed up towards a col. Despite the strong winds and heavy rain, it was eerily calm as there was a pause while a navigation check was being made. Even at the limits of their stretch zone, maintaining a calm approach with the Summer Mountaineering Foundation syllabus helped keep the mind focused. The ML looked around checking for dangers – steep off the track, wet and rocky, with plenty of slip hazards – but safe. After all, testing ones stretch zone is a key part of Adventurous Training. “Keep focused on your footing” the ML shouted as they stepped off. Any form of bone or muscle injury at this time would be a true test of the teams’ character. The group was quiet now as they concentrated on their footing, ignoring the aches from the previous two-days of trekking and wild camping through the Pyrenees. They continued up and soon through the cloud the Col de Craberous came into view. A steep cliff to the left and high ground

forming a ridge line to the right gave protection from the elements. However, you could see the cloud rushing through the pass just above and the hear howls that went with it. As they stepped up onto the Col, the wind and rain hit hard. Finding their balance, they could see the steep descent coming in and out of view through the cloud. The track zig-zagged down giving a safe path so the confidence rope was staying the bag for now. After a few fist bumps and hand shakes a voice came from a face cocooned in a hood “err its rather windy can we save the handshakes for later and get down now please.”

Later that evening we managed to find an empty shepherds hut. Squeezed around the small table with the fire lit, a Detective Inspector, Civil Engineer, an IT Service Delivery Manager, a PHD Psychology student, a political lobbyist and a Financial Investigator sat huddled keeping themselves warm. Taking in the moment, reflecting on the day’s challenges and achievements, they smiled and joked. Two things brought that team to that location at that time: their individual drive for seeking adventure and being members

of the UK Army Reserves; 6 Military Intelligence Battalion.

In the summer of 2018, the CO of 6MI Bn handed over a book titled: “Escaping Hitler” to a naïve One-Pip wonder. He suggested it would be a good idea to incorporate a Battlefield Study and Adventure Training Expedition looking at the Escape Lines in the Pyrenees. A holiday with his pregnant wife gave time for reading and soon the 2Lt was dreaming of parachuting into Northern Europe, running for trains, hiding in Café’s waiting for agent meets (throw in a HUMINT exercise for jokes) and being chased by the French police (acting as the Gestapo) through the towns of France as they would re-enact the Escape Lines through France and Spain... Twelve months later, with the reality of time, the JSATFA process and risk assessments (as well as the French sense of humour – probably best not to suggest role-play!), the plan changed to a more realistic concept. A Study period at Chicksands followed by a five-day expedition in the Pyrenees following the Chemin de la Liberte. The aim was simple – give them knowledge, push them hard out of their comfort zones and then reward.



Sunrise

The study period started on Sat 28th September with three guest speakers. A serving member of the UK Defence Humint Unit (DHU) presented on modern day Escape & Evasion which brought the idea and reality of it into perspective. Second up was an introduction to MI9 by Dr Helen Fry. Set up in the late 1930’s, MI9 was the department that managed everything to do with Prisoners of War – including captured Germans brought to the UK, our own imprisoned service men abroad, as well as those supporting the escape lines supporting escapee’s back to the UK. This also included running an interrogation facility in London – that ironically became the Russian Embassy. Dr Barbara Bond followed, an expert on the escape maps printed on silk and codes used to communicate between the POW camps and London. The maps were smuggled by MI9 who were tasked with providing practical support to would be escapees. The day’s entertainment was rounded off with a dinner in Chicksand’s Sergeants’ Mess and a talk from Col Fox (Rtd) who told stories of three escapees who dared the Pyrenees crossing including Virginia Hall and her wooden leg nicknamed “Cuthbert”.

The name “Exercise 900” came from Room 900 of the Old War Office. During World War Two the room housed Lt Col Airey Neave, himself an escapee from Colditz, who set up and supported many of the escape lines throughout Europe.

The next day saw a flight to Toulouse where the group were met by the support team. Transported to St Giron on the Salat river, a base was established at the Hotel Eychenne where kit was distributed, and packs prepped!

The hotel’s elderly owner cheerfully told stories of how during the war, upstairs rooms were used for escaping British and American service men. Sprinkled within those numbers were a few SOE female agents who had overstayed their welcome in occupied Europe. It was wondered if Virginia and “Cuthbert” had been accommodated?

Early Monday and the four groups (Tom, Dick, Harry and George) individually set upon following two routes, with the aim of meeting up four days later in the foothills of Mt Valier. Groups Tom and Dick headed south via a small village of Alos. Harry and George would take the route through the hamlet of Moulis.

### Ed B-M starts the story of Team Tom:

“Groups Tom and Dick made their way South via a quaint village of Also and then onto Cap de Bouirex. Group Tom pushed up to just east of the summit prepping for a dawn ascent. With an early start, they were not disappointed with the sunrise lighting up the Pyrenees. After a replenishment at the Col de la Core their route then took them along the GR 10D and into the foothills and passes of Mt Valier. With

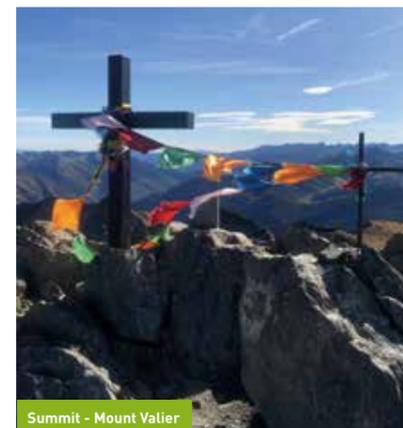


Refuge - clouds

thunderstorms moving in and the threat of lightening, the groups came together and took the rough protection that the Cabane de Subera offered. On the third day they split as they made their way south.

“Along the route was a monument to a crashed RAF bomber, some parts of the plane still seen lying silently in the gully bringing home the isolation of the area. Despite the rain and poor visibility, the air was calm and quiet with the vast mountains providing protection. A moment was held before the ascent continued. With rocky ground, a big drop to the left and low visibility, the rugged path took them up to Col de Craberous and worsening weather conditions. Making the pass, the wind hit hard, and the rain stung as it found bare skin. The effort of the climb was soon forgotten as people’s attention sharpened quickly with the change in situation. A very short moment was had to celebrate the climb – but it was time to move and get to lower protected ground. Descending quickly, they dropped into the gully finding shelter from the wind to spend the night.

“The following day the weather had dramatically changed, with clear blue skies and cloud down in the valley below. Group Tom continued south and ascended to



Summit - Mount Valier



Group with Corp Flag



the pass of Cap de Pouech at 2462m. The route was rocky and hard but with clear blue skies the reward was worth it as the view at the pass was simply epic. Mt Valier was towering up on the left, with rugged spurs making a dramatic view that went on for miles... and there, 240m below to our right was the reward Refuge des Estagnous."

"After dropping down to the Refuge for simple lunch of bread and cheese (it was good to have something other than rations), the team headed up Mt Valier. A steep and strenuous climb in the hot sunshine was well rewarded with the views and achievement levels. It's amazing how the concentration levels shoot up and voices drop when you're on a narrow path with a steep drop on one side and your shoulder rubbing the cliff on the other. After photos, jokes and a moment of reflection at the summit, we descended to the Refuge for a hot meal, cognac, coffee and wine!

**As for groups Harry and George, David McGee continues:**

"Dropped at Moulis, the vertiginous hills of the Lez river valley climbed upwards. The first objective of the day was perched over us in the form of a ceremonial crucifix, some 200m skywards. Ascending the steep valley of Beech we were introduced to the seemingly infinite variety of fungi and mushroom along the isolated track. Here the track on the map corresponded to that underfoot. This would not always be the case.



Team Tom

"Legs stretched by the steep introduction team Harry took a grateful rest. Our destination on the first night was Cabane de Caplong and was arrived at with relative ease. The cabane proved a disappointing venue but a spot further along our route with a nearby stream was more suitable.

"The author's confident attempt at speaking French to a passing shepherd and our request for any supply of milk, cheese or bread, was met with a sympathetic stare. The shepherd's mutterings of 'Le Anglais Imbecile' remain untranslated. A bucolic pasture was our campsite for the night.

"The next morning, we set off in a southerly direction and at 1650m we ascended

Tuc des Pelades. After a few dog legs in our journey we entered a deep forest of beech, with its dense canopy above making vegetation growth below sparse. Walking underfoot was relatively easy. However deep within the forest there were no discernible landmarks to sharpen our map reading skills. When paths on the map bore no resemblance to the reality underfoot the walk proved troublesome. Eventually superb navigation skills we spotted, among the trees a loggers track.

### The shepherd's mutterings of 'Le Anglais Imbecile' remain untranslated

"Through the wood came the unmistakable sound of English voices and we had stumbled upon team George. Handshakes and tall tales of our 24 hours in the wilds of France were exchanged.

"Due to time constraints it was decided that we would walk the couple of miles to meet up with the trek's resupply team. Thanks to the thoughtfulness of Capt Parry, WO1 Daulton, WO1 Robb, SSgt North and LCpl Beverley, feast of French baguettes, cheese and hams was presented. As it was getting late in the day and the clouds were darkening over the surrounding peaks we moved to our overnight camp, the Cabane De Camplus on the Russeau de Camplus. The forecast rain swept in and stayed. We enjoyed the refuge of the cabane, with a warm fire and bad jokes.



Refugee De Estagnous

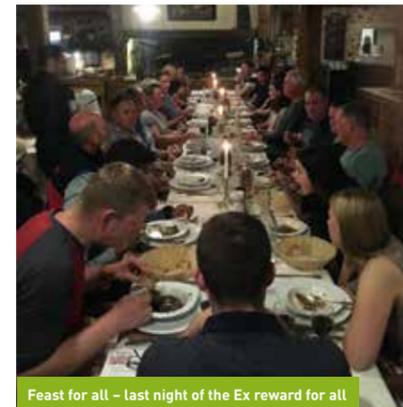


Team Harry in the woods

"Next morning, we set off through the Bois de Rams. In the UK it would be difficult to imagine a more isolated place. We arrived before dusk at the Maison du Valier, a restaurant and campsite in the Foret Domaniale de Bordes Sur Lez.

"After a dinner of rations a telegram from London informed the group that the local partisans had arranged for a hot meal at the lodgings at the foot of Mount Valier. The lofty Mount Valier, at 2838m would be the group's final destination. Moving upwards the Etag Rond, a perfectly formed glacial tarn came into view. As we strolled into the grounds of Refuge des Estagnous we spotted our sister groups. Handshakes all round, the views and the stunning scenery raising every one's spirits.

After a team photograph, Padre Newman hushed the group to dedicate a few words to the memories of those men who passed this way in their search for freedom.



Feast for all - last night of the Ex reward for all



Groups Harry and George at a crossing in the valley.

"In one of the most striking moments of the trek, as the padre spoke the Binyon's famous poem, 'At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them' the sun, in a act of breath-taking serendipity descended behind the Piz Renoué to our west. The group, joined by onlooks, remained quiet and pondered those brave men and women walking beyond this place to Spain and their freedom.

"Later a welcome meal of French onion soup, lamb pasta stew and wine filled bellies before a rewarding night sleep in the Refuge. The following day groups Harry and George climbed Mt Valier as Tom and Dick had summited the day before. The mountain was shrouded in fog, but nevertheless the teams started through the moraine of broken mountain to a clear summit with breath taking views. Tom and Dick made their descent along the route that Harry and George had taken the previous day.

"By 1800 all the groups had returned to the Hotel Eychenne in St Giron. With the admin finalised it was out for an end of expedition dinner in a fantastic French restaurant where wine, banter, shanter and good food was enjoyed by all.

"The next day we returned to our various regional outposts of 6MI Bn. The peerless organisation of the weeklong training was completed by Lt Brooker-McGee. The selfless endeavours of the support team with a positive can-do attitude deserve a major recognition."

**"The selfless endeavours of the support team with a positive can-do attitude deserve a major recognition."**

#### A Final Thought By Ed B-M:

With the trek being the highlight, the whole process of planning and organising of such an expedition, although daunting at first, should never be frowned upon. It gave an awesome opportunity for learning and development for those involved. To step out into the mountains an additional 1x SML, 4x SMLTS and 8x Team medics were trained up. Also, an additional 8 personnel were able to gain the Team Medics qualification and 15 gained the Summer Mountain Foundation qualification. Multiple AT courses attended, and a selection weekend put on in North Wales. The result: people of all ranks and backgrounds were given opportunities, pushed to their limits, gain AT qualifications and be rightly rewarded.

It cannot go without highlighting the support from the permanent staff of 6MI Bn both Regular, Reserve, FTRS and civilian. Namely, Maj Stephens (RAO), Captain Hawkins (RCMO), Capt Parry (61 PASO) and Sally Bond (Civilian Admin Officer). Without their continued support and guidance – despite minimal reward – it would have been a non-starter!



# EX COSTA CLIMBER 2020

By Arthur Daley

It was early 2019 when Ryan Lang asked me if I'd organise the AMA's annual trip to Spain in 2020. I jumped at the chance as I'd be leaving the Army mid-2020 and saw this as an opportunity to do one final trip before entering civilian life. So, the task was at hand to make this trip as memorable as possible with some awesome climbing thrown in.



Firstly, I decided to make a break from the norm and avoid staying at the Orange House and Finestrat. Not that I have anything against the Orange House as a venue but I wanted to be based in Calpe, closer to the climbing and book accommodation that we'd have the sole use of. I managed to find an amazing place called Villa Lina in Calpe that slept 22 with 11 bedrooms, 5 bathrooms, free Wi-Fi and a pool. All for less than the Orange House would have cost.

The next question would be how many to take. I eventually settled with 10 as an acceptable number. This would not crowd the venues or provide group management issues that you might get with a larger

number. In hindsight this proved an odd number. With 3 RCIs 9 would have been easier to manage or 12 with 4 RCIs. But 10 was the number I'd settled on, so it was with great excitement that the group met for the first time at the Jet2 check-in desk at 5am in Manchester Airport.

After a reasonably short flight, we arrived at Alicante Airport and collected our baggage. Hire cars had been booked through Centura with premium option, no deposit, no excess and with an additional driver. This worked out cheaper and easier than using the military Clarity system as they wanted us to collect from the train station. Additional drivers were picked based on who's bag came out first. With hire cars collected and bags loaded we drove the hour or so to Calpe to collect the villa keys. Plus Holidays office is located in Calpe centre and parking was a nightmare. Road rage was close to making an appearance when a Spanish drive came right up behind me as I was trying to parallel park in the only available space. I survived this and parked, eventually. Keys were collected and off we went to find the villa.

We decided, with some persuasion from Ryan, to dump our kit and get straight round to Sierra de Toix to shake out and get some climbing done. This proved invaluable as it allowed the RCIs, me, Ryan and Richard to see the group tie in, belay, and climb. With a good understanding of the group a plan for the week started to form.

The first real climbing day saw the group going back to Toix. This time those

Road rage was close to making an appearance when a Spanish driver came right up behind me as I was trying to parallel park

Kris on Aniversario 5c



View of the Piton from the pool area

that needed it completed Multi-pitch Competency Assessments and those that didn't got some great climbing done. With the entire group RMT or above or having a competency assessment meant the Jamie McGrory (RML) would be able to lead climb with anyone in the group. It was also the first introduction to multi-pitch climbing for some members of the group. This trip would become a baptism of fire into multi-pitch climbing for some.

The next day we ventured out to Echo Valley 1.5 to get the group pushing their grades. We also spent time confirming the group were competent in re-threading the anchors and could lead before letting them loose. This was time well spent as we visited Alcalá the next day. With big routes and harder grades, even the 4s seemed hard, we pushed ourselves and some learnt to use their feet and not their arms. It was at Alcalá that Laura Stead managed to produce the worst rope coil I've ever seen, blaming it on Ryan's instruction.

On Wednesday we woke up to rain. This was looking like it was going to be a wasted day as we sat nursing our coffee and watching the rain. After a slow start we decided to drive to Decathlon and get some much needed, or not, gear shopping done. In the afternoon it was a bit drier but not great so we went back to Echo Valley to do some trad leading instruction. Richard spent the afternoon jumaring up a static line coaching the leader through their protection placements. In the meantime, Jamie and Kris went off getting as many trad leads in as they could for their next JSAT qual.

Thursday saw the group venture further afield to Marín. The allure of some top 50 multi-pitch climbing was too great and so we made the hour and a half trip. Here we split into groups based on JSAT quals



Laura convincing me this is how Ryan showed her how to coil a rope

we left Marín very tired after having climbed some pretty awesome routes on quality rock

and got some fantastic, short multi-pitch climbs in. Including the top 50s Prats and Jhony. Ryan took Jess and Laura off and jumared up along side them while the alternate lead Jhony. So it was that we left Marín very tired after having climbed some pretty awesome routes on quality rock.

Friday, the trip was drawing to a close and we thought it was about time we bagged a big adventurous route. With an audacious plan to get the whole group up the Peñón de Ifach on Vía Valencianos VS 5+. It involved an early start, walking into the route before sun up. As we were



Richard coaching Jess as Laura hangs around getting those killer snaps

trying to get everyone up the route, each team needed to move fast. Luckily no other teams were on the route and as it happened, we had it to ourselves all day. This is a fantastic day of climbing with 8 pitches from sea level to the top of the Peñón that towers over Calpe presenting amazing panoramic views. For some this was the longest they had spent on a climb and so it truly tested their resolve. Everyone completed the climb no



Jess leading the first pitch of Johnny under Ryan's expert supervision

### The group had proved their metal over the week

problem and after a very polished walk back down we enjoyed a much-needed coffee (beer for those not driving) and cake in the café at the bottom. As we sat sipping our drinks and looking up at the imposing Peñón you couldn't help but get a real sense of achievement knowing we'd climbed that.

It was with a tinge of sadness that the last day of climbing came around. We'd had 7 days of climbing so far with the majority climbing at their limits and pushing grades. It was little surprise then that everyone was feeling stiff and a bit sore that morning. These aches and pains needed to be pushed aside though as once again we were off for an adventurous climb. This time to the sea cliffs at Toix with another Top 50, Magical Mystery Tour HVS 5, as our goal. This route is not recommended for novice climbers, with an epic 60m fee hanging abseil to the base the only way out is to climb out. The group had proved their metal over the week and especially the day before on the Peñón, so it was with confidence that we made the committing abseil.

Once again, we had the whole group on one route meaning the teams needed to move fast and chase each other up the route. With the sun on our backs and the Mediterranean Sea crashing below, I couldn't have wished for a better route to finish the trip with. It was almost obligatory for each team member to stop for an Instagram worthy shot as they topped out.

Topping out on Magical Mystery Tour marked the end of the climbing. All that was left now was to clean the villa ready to



Laura and Fletch back stacking the rope at the top of pitch 5. I am keeping a close eye on Laura after her earlier efforts

hand back and pack for the flight home. Once our admin was squared away, we headed into a local steak house in Calpe for one final meal together as a group. Here we enjoyed cold beer, tasty food and some very good company. As I sat listening to the group laughing and telling stories of adventures, they'd had over the week I couldn't help but think how well we'd gelled together over the last 8 days. I'd set out to organise the best trip to Spain I possibly could before I left the Army. The reality is that the AMA members that came along made it the best trip I'd either organised or participated in over the last 23 years. My biggest regret in my career is not joining the AMA earlier, however it's not over and I look forward too many more adventures with the AMA as I start my Reserve career.



Arthur working out the crux moves and taking a cheeky breather



The group enjoying a beer or two and some silly hat fun

# EX DRAGON LUNDY

## A TEAM OF KEEN CLIMBERS, LUNDY AND STORM LORENZO

By Huw Gilbert

Storm Lorenzo, the eastern most Category Five Atlantic Hurricane ever recorded, was certainly a factor that we had to work around during 104 Regiment's October rock climbing expedition, Exercise Dragon Lundy. Above my amended expectation we actually travelled out as planned on the MS Oldenburg from Ilfracombe to the Bristol Channel island of Lundy. I'd made that journey a number of times before but this was as rough a crossing as I can remember. Some of the team had an exhilarating two hours enjoying every deep pitch and roll as the ship crashed its way through the white crested waves. Laying down with my eyes closed was a fairer description of my outward journey but unlike a good number of fellow passengers this approach did allow me to keep my breakfast on the inside.

The concept of the trip was to take those in 104 Regiment who have some kind of rock climbing leader or instructor qualification and give them a good dose of further knowledge and experience in a challenging environment in order to help them move on forwards through the Joint Service leader and instructor award scheme. For those unfamiliar with the Joint Service Adventurous Training leader and instructor awards they are much more modularised than the equivalent civilian award schemes. On one hand this means that attendance on a higher number of training courses might be required to reach the highest level. It also means however that once the first stepping stone is taken that service person has an award which they can then use to lead others to one degree or another. Those that we had on our trip typically held awards which

would let them set up and run bottom rope and abseil sessions or perhaps the award which would let them lead one other service person on a multi-pitch rock climb. Allowing the training to happen this time were six Joint Service Rock Climbing Instructors which included myself, Ian Hothersall, Chris Wright, Tarquin Shipley, Miles Hill and Gary Mason.

If sailing to schedule the Oldenburg slides up to the quay on the sheltered south-eastern corner of Lundy at around midday. For the visiting climber this allows an afternoon of climbing which although some being slightly green around the gills we were certainly all excited for. Lundy is one of the 'A list' venues for British sea-cliff climbing which is in itself a very British aspect of the wide and great game of mountaineering. The island is three





miles long, around half a mile wide and at the nearest stretch is twelve miles distant from the mainland. Plateau like along its broad back the highest point rises to 125 metres above the surrounding sea. To borrow a phrase from the rock climbing guide book it 'lies defiantly across the mouth of the Bristol Channel, where the silt-coloured waters of the Severn Estuary meet the cold, clear Atlantic Ocean'. To further borrow from the guide book 'The island's west coast is one of almost uninterrupted granite cliffs and must be one of the most impressive coastlines in Britain'. Add to that the second highest tidal range in the world plus the island's exposure to Atlantic swells and despite being on our geographical doorstep there's a real expedition feel to any climbing trip to Lundy.

Breaking down into pairs or threes for the first afternoon Miles, Chris and Ian went



off with the 'development team' to start chipping away at the much prepared Lundy 'tick lists' which included that afternoon the Flying Buttress classics of Diamond Solitaire (VS,4c) and Double Diamond (HVS,5a). Meanwhile Gary, Tarquin and myself rounded up the third cohort within our party, those who were to varying extent climbers, but without any formal qualification yet. The not too distant and relatively easily assessable Pilots Quay was our venue of choice where over the course of a still breezy but bright afternoon we refreshed and refined skills on the very pleasant single pitch climbs of Quay Hole Corner (V Diff), Newquay (HS,4a) and Quay West (HS,4a).

**there's a real expedition feel to any climbing trip to Lundy**

Despite the sensational headlines regarding the potential devastation caused by the approaching storm the Met Office surface pressure chart always had the second day of the exercise down as a good day. With this in mind we determined to make the most of the opportunity and with plans set around a mid-afternoon low tide off we set under a bright and clear sky. Miles accompanied by Chris Hughes and Harry Leppier went straight for the routes with the big name billing: The Devil's Slide (HS), Albion (VS,4c) and



Satan's Slip (E1,5a) all on the magnificent rock sweep of The Devil's Slide which could well lay claim to being the largest granite slab in Britain. Gary, Ian and their respective teams of Frankie Maynard, Sophie Short, Gareth Twigge and Luke Head joined them to start with before spending the afternoon on an outing to the sea stack of Needle Rock. The stack can be reached at low tide by a boulder hop from the base of the Punchbowl Cliffs. It's a long abseil to reach this point however and then a climb back out before the tide turns. Down on the stack Gary climbed The Obverse Route (Sev) whilst Ian, seconding for Luke, ascended by The Ordinary Route (Diff).

My own particular plan with Jack Clare and Xavier McWilliams was for a morning at Beaufort Buttress, a crag which can be reached at high tide given a calm sea, followed by the an afternoon at Landing Craft Bay. Chris and Tarquin accompanied by Martin Corfield and Emille Forrest-Jones were on the same itinerary and at the former venue we rotated around the single pitch climbs of Streaky (VS,5a), Capstan's Arete (VS,4b), Force Eight (Sev), Stuka (VS,4b) and Stuka Direct (VS, 4c). All were brilliant and on superb golden granite.

Access to Landing Craft Bay is by the more typical approach to the start of a Lundy rock climb, a long abseil which when for access to areas not previously visited feels very much a slide into the unknown. Therein lies one of the major attractions of sea cliff climbing I suppose. Will it be possible to get back out again? If one of the ingredients of adventure is having the outcome uncertain then Lundy delivers adventure in spades. There was of course a way out. Ultimately up the three star and three pitch classic climb of Shamrock (VS,4c). This wasn't before we'd bagged another pitch of magnificent climbing however with Road Runner (VS,4c).

**We found the route but also the rain which started to fall just as we started to climb**

As any climber would have done we'd all gone on the exercise with the guide book well studied and a long list of climbs that



we'd like to do. Climbing doesn't often work like that though and that's I imagine more often than not the case on Lundy. The third day didn't dawn anywhere near as bright as the previous and with the winds and swell picking up we were much more limited in our choice of climbing venues. I opted for the shelter of the island's east coast and a route that wasn't affected by the morning's high tide. Lundy's east coast is far less rugged than the other side of the island but there are a handful of rock buttresses to divide the long slopes of The Knight Templar Rocks is probably the best of the climbs here. Three or four short but fun pitches which Harry did a great job of leading me and Jack up. Looking for a similar route for Harry to lead us up again we crossed over the island to seek out Long Roost Ridge (V Diff). We found the route but also the rain which started to

fall just as we started to climb. We could have escaped without too much bother but being at the bottom of the cliff with the bags at the top we thought that we might as well climb it anyway. It proved a nice climb. Appearing on the list of 'Lundy Esoterica' there's a good deal of lichen or 'brillo' growing on the upper reaches but it's a welcome soft touch to the hands after a few days of rough rock and brushes your shoes and kit off wonderfully well as you pass over it. Pretty much soaked to the skin and quite satisfied at gaining two climbs from the day we retreated to join the remainder of the party back in from their own adventures to Flying Buttress Main Cliff and Arch Zawn and now hunkered down in the Marisco Tavern. This fine establishment is another one of the joys of Lundy. An 'old world' inn where real ale is still the staple and the art of conversation holds sway. The technology ban





appears to have slackened since my last visit but those with the temerity to take in their mobile phones still have to sneak away to a shady corner to indulge in the modern day addiction of instant information.

The much vaunted Strom Lorenzo arrived during the night thundering through the camp site with some tents anchored only by the weight of their occupants come the morning. On peaking over the campsite wall there were at my count four large container ships and a deep sea trawler anchored up and battened down on the leeward side of Lundy. If that was good enough for them it was good enough for us so bending with the wind we went back to the east coast and spread ourselves along Flake Route (Sev) and its very worthwhile companion Bideford Ridge (V Diff). Once again Harry was given the lead and having done Flake Route the previous day we sought a second climb with 'The Constable'. The Constable is a twenty metre high rock pillar standing on the slope above the northern tip of the island. Its summit being beneath plateau level there was we thought an outside chance that the wind would be reduced to a manageable level. Our estimation with regards to the wind was just about right. We hadn't however reckoned on the wetness of the rock. The rain, or so we first thought, started as we made our descent down the slope. Foamy, salty rain, we observed, which of course wasn't rain at all but the spray from the crashing waves lifting hundreds of metres into the air. As with the previous day we'd made the effort to get there so we thought that we might as well climb, Harry gritting his teeth and leading us up via the easiest climb on the pillar, The Original Route (HS,4b).

At the other end of the island Chris and Martin had completed the east coast routes and attempted their own second destination break out. They tried for Kistvaen Buttress but the talk in the pub



later that afternoon had been of how they couldn't even stand in the wind on the coast path let alone get anywhere near the cliff top.

At some point during the night I was woken by the conspicuous silence. With the whip-crack noise of storm lashed tent fabric or coat hood a near constant back drop to the previous 36 hours it took me a while to work out what was missing. The swell of the sea took a little while longer to subside than the wind but the improved weather did allow for climbing on our last day. Ian and me accompanied by Luke, Jack and Gareth wandered along to Seal Slab beneath which a boiling sea appeared slow to calm down from the agitations of the storm. The route Seal Slab (Diff) takes a rising diagonal line across the crack seamed slab of the same name, easy climbing throughout but lovely and all in a magical setting. Gareth led me across the route while Ian and his pair followed on behind us.

**We hadn't however reckoned on the wetness of the rock**

Rain rolling in with a sea mist looked like it would stop play for the last time but having given us a thorough soaking as we coiled our now wet ropes the clouds parted and past almost as quickly as they had arrived. With a few hours left before boarding the Oldenburg Gareth and myself sought out

one last climb down at Kistvaen Buttress. Justine (Sev), Clea (HS,4a) and Bitter Lemons (Sev) all climbed in the sunshine and stripped down to t-shirts was a most pleasant way to conclude our stay on Lundy. For the record the return sailing on a far calmer sea was equally as pleasant and once more for me a journey that could be enjoyed and not endured.

A mixed week of weather then which on reflection added value to our aim of developing the knowledge and experience of the participating climbers. The challenges of tide and weather, the intricacies of finding your way among such a complex coastline and the decisions needing to be made about where to climb let alone how to best manage the climb itself can all be banked as experience and used when moving forward to the next level. That level for 104 Regiment is to run future trips like this using the leaders and instructors that we are developing to give as many of our reservist and regular soldiers as possible the benefit of exciting and challenging Adventurous Training as a way of promoting among other things; self-reliance, robustness, resourcefulness, courage and a can do attitude to get things done in difficult situations.

As a final note a large amount of thanks must be given to the Royal Artillery Centre for Personal Development (RACPD) and the Army Mountaineering Association (AMA) for their help in funding the exercise.



Climbing on Golsjuvet

# EX TIGER AMA RJUKAN 2020

## Al Topping

You might expect this expedition, being the second iteration of one that ran under the same name in 2019 to be a duplicate of its predecessor. However, this wasn't the case. For those of you not in the know, there were unseasonably high temperatures in Rjukan, Norway, at the start of January 20 and everything melted... a bit of a problem, particularly when it's two weeks out and you're the exped leader.

This was the case for Chris Cookson who was keen to replicate the successes of the 2019 exped for a new batch of willing participants who were all expecting great things having seen the article submitted in Army Mountaineer this time last year.

This is where Facebook stepped in and saved the day by highlighting great conditions further to the north in a town called Hemsedal. This is typically known as a ski resort but has a long history of ice climbing in Norway too. Recommendations were read and images scoured and Chris confirmed the exped would be moving North.

Skipping ahead two weeks, and as with most AMA expeditions, most do not originate from the same areas and so multiple APODs were on offer with two departure dates. One for instructors and then a second for participants the following day. Instructors were grateful for having the additional recce day prior to the main body arriving to see what was 'in'. What did become clear that there was lots in the 'in' category but some required the addition of snow shoes which, unfortunately, were not an option through Bicester at such short notice. Regardless, Chris had aimed off for unexpected circumstances and there was a percentage of the exped budget available to cater for this.

Conditions in Hemsedal were pretty ideal. A good amount of consolidated snow on hills with as much as a metre at the

valley floor in places. Roads were in good condition for travelling (more on this later) and this gave good access to almost all the locations in the guide book 'Hemsedal Ice'. Temperatures were comfortably lower than zero which helped to maintain good water ice for climbing. Overnight snow was prevalent and over some nights, caused a little too much grief on the routes into the crag the following morning. Concern did change throughout the week from 'is there enough to climb' to 'can we get to the ice to climb it'. Snow shoes prevailed and, if ever offered, I whole-heartedly recommend you take a set. You don't want to be that guy struggling to get to the base of the climb waist deep in snow. Trust me, the man-test is not worth it.

Hemsedal is located in a valley on a plateau where, in summer it's next to a large lake. Clearly that'd had been



The view from Ovredalen



Jon and Chris having fun



Snow shoes prevail



Hemsedal Ice: what more can you say?



Guy and Sally



It's not that one, is it?

covered by snow as had the mountains around which gave plenty of options. Above our eight room chalet 'mit (external) hot tub', there was a large area of flatland before more mountains and more possibilities. These were soon on James 'Flash' Gordon's list as well as it was on Chris' and Duncan Francis' too.

At the first opportunity a group of five, including Flash, myself and Andy Cox in one car, plus Chris Cookson and Phil Garnett in another departed before dawn to snow shoe into a valley high up above the plateaux where there was promise of fine mixed climbing. The route to the climb on Ovredalen took us along sleepy, snow covered tracks past many, even sleeper chalets before parking up at the end of the track... although this was the plan. Two hours before the sun came up, Chris Cookson did his best to sabotage the benefit of the early start by demonstrating his finely tuned mounted infantry driving skills carelessly steering his four-wheeled drive vehicle into the largest snow drift that he could find. Two and a half hours later,

the vehicle was free and able to move on thanks to the tenacity of some REME self recovery and the hard graft of Chris' co-driver, Phil who received no thanks for his effort from a red faced infanteer.

**Two hours before the sun came up, Chris Cookson did his best to sabotage the benefit of the early start**

We continued on with snow shoes and more hard graft to a climb we'd spotted during the two hour tab. Flash, Andy and myself were the first to ascend a, somewhat sketchy mixed climb whose name is still unknown, followed by Chris and Phil who had since backed off another climb to our right that looked 'in'. Due to the quantity of ice that forms in this part of the world, the locals are rarely able to name them because they're not very consistent in their location. As such, if it's there and it's in, climb away!

The area was to be further investigated by Duncan's group, including Stacey Cromey-Hawke and Matt Bye who were both undergoing a rigorous induction to winter climbing from Duncan who provided training and assessment for winter climbing foundation. Their exploits were deemed to be similar and had the added benefit of not featuring any infanteers on the route out. Both were subsequently awarded their qualification at the end of the exped.

Other teams had other experiences in the area. Jon Evans led multiple groups of climbers over the course of the week, as did Guy Davies and Chris Dowd, with supporting superstars Sally Webster, Luke Simms and Chris Grant. Each building upon experiences of former ice climbing trips, either in the UK or on last year's exped.

Favourite locations included: Golsjuvet, Flagetfossen and Torsetfossen as well as another Flash-Topping adventure to Skogshorn that had so much potential,

and another early start but was not to be because of snow conditions. However, if you're keen for a big day at the harder end of the grades - M5/6, W14/5 then this is the place to go, as would the Hydalsfossen (W14) - a 100m sheer wall of ice requiring 2 hour ski insertion before abseiling down to the start.

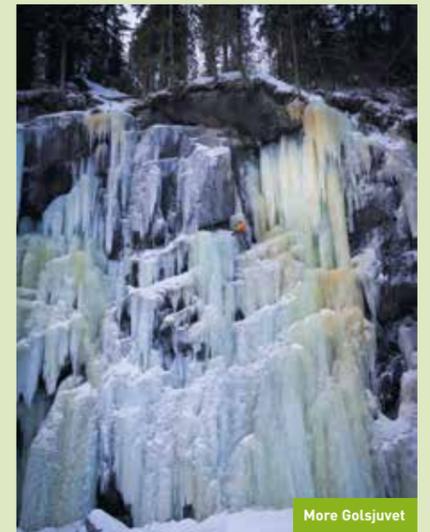
To conclude, it's fair to say that all saw this exped as a complete success and perhaps one which offers more than Rjukan would. You can't belay from the car, and to get to the really good stuff you're going to need to put some effort in. But the rewards of being remote in the Norwegian mountains, with epic panoramas and perfect climbing conditions are just unbeatable.

Even the exchange rate didn't hamper spirits (metaphorically and not) too much and I believe we even returned with change in the bank. Sure there weren't too many nights out but that wasn't the emphasis with this trip and all were focussed on having good hard, but rewarding days in the hills.



Duncan and Stacey

**a 100m sheer wall of ice requiring 2 hour ski insertion before abseiling down to the start**



More Golsjuvet

So, if you want to climb ice, snow shoe or ski, deliver WCF or WMF, this place is perfect. The locals were helpful, the information to do so was good and the conditions superb. Consequently, this is why Chris is offering another bite at the apple next year, subject to restrictions, between 26 Feb - 14 Mar 21. Novices will be invited to the first week, with more experienced climbers having an opportunity to stretch their legs in the second. Keep an eye out for further details as they emerge on Facebook and by email.

# BOULDERING

## THE UNPOPULAR SON OF ADVENTUROUS TRAINING

Eddy Tomkins

Why does no one ever organise bouldering, as an AT exped, in its own right? Military AT makes up about 30% of my work. All manner of expeditions pop up requiring instructors; some very creative, others transparently fulfilling an OC/COs will to climb over pressured mountains, popular mountains. Mont Blanc, Everest, three peaks etc are all oft repeated expeditions, solely because of the fame associated with that peak's name. Other disciplines are well represented too; kayaking, canoeing, skiing and sky diving are limited only by the organisers' imagination, and a DDH's appetite for risk. In all my years in the military as an AT instructor, I have only ever seen one exped dedicated only to bouldering. On most climbing expeds I've been on, given the opportunity, instructors will go out and play on local boulders if they're decent enough, and if there is an appetite for it. Often, they will take the Exped members with them and introduce them to the discipline of bouldering, but you'll always be limited by lack of pads and stickies, and it is always second fiddle to the overarching discipline associated with the exped.

I would imagine the default answer to the singular lack of bouldering expeditions would be the argument that "it doesn't fulfil the aims of AT", which of course I will attempt to challenge in this article. In terms of risk management it is extremely crude, but the act of spotting and laying pads, checking descents, and the walks in, are all examples of risk management, and assessing of risk; and there is real risk to manage. There are more injuries in bouldering than any other discipline of climbing; the risk, albeit not the severity, is higher in bouldering. There are many

factors to consider in this statement, and the research is pretty limited. Schoffl et al noted that injury incidence rate for lead climbing against bouldering in the 2012 world cup were: climbing 0.29 injuries per 1000 hours, versus 1.47 per 1000 hours for bouldering. It is an arena where soldiers can practice real time risk management albeit in a very simple, but necessary manner.

### There are more injuries in bouldering than any other discipline of climbing

In order to focus the discussion, I will endeavor to highlight the major benefits to the military for bouldering, starting with courage.

**Courage.** It couldn't be easier to test and develop than in a bouldering problem. You can grade appropriately for each participant, and most larger venues will accommodate high ball and low ball problems, with courage being tested proportionately to the height and difficulty of the boulder. I know plenty of extremely good sport and trad climbers who are too scared to climb to the top of some indoor bouldering problems, finding the threshold out of their comfort zone. This flexibility of personal challenge is extremely easy to achieve in a venue where people of varying levels of skill can all be challenged to push themselves in the same area, or even the same boulder.

**Leadership.** This is arguably a little bit harder to shoehorn in, other than the ability to motivate, solve the problem, and lead by example, there isn't much scope for it I admit. Perhaps leadership will be best tested during the planning of the trip, as is



the case with all AT expeds. The approach to the venue might also require an element of leading; many venues in the UK would require an ML to lead them in, such as the Clogwyn D Arddu boulders (or if you're a particular bouldering sadist a WML). That said a bouldering trip is limited only by your imagination: RAC boulders, for those with a "COs cup level of imagination, or Rocklands South Africa, Khuiten road head Mongolia, Tafraoute Morocco, for those with a bit more creativity, the more remote, the more scope for efficient and good leadership.

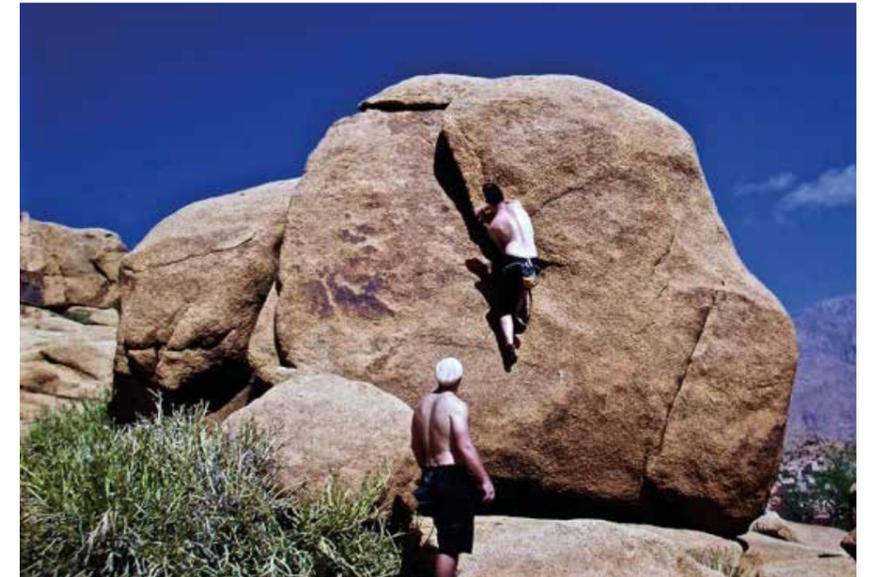
**Teamwork.** The beauty of bouldering is it can be done solo, a stolen hour after work, with no other commitments. However, in my experience it's much more fun as a social activity, each person adding a piece to a problem, or unlocking a particular part encouraging each other, spotting each other and giving beta to each other. The activity slowly and subtly morphs into a team activity, without people really noticing, and the opportunity to provide motivation and encouragement is infinite.

**Physical fitness.** I think most climbers would argue the hardest they've tried physically at climbing, and the hardest they've climbed is on a bouldering problem. Free of the technicalities of ropes, gear, and exposure, you can push yourself, push your strength, technique, and be as gymnastic as possible, attempting stuff you'd probably never do 10 meters off the ground. I suspect however, it's the physicality of the discipline that makes the military shy away from it, as being fit, and

athletic seems to matter less and less as priorities change, and no one wants to be reminded that they're unfit or unathletic. If you're a bit of a rope nerd you can get up a V diff with zero climbing talent, you'll still have a great adventure, but physically, and technically in terms of movement, have you really tested yourself? Whereas on a boulder problem, even some of the easier problems will require a level of athleticism, and a smidgen of technique.

### If you're a bit of a rope nerd you can get up a V diff with zero climbing talent

Hopefully this article has promoted the cause of bouldering against where it sits within the military aims of AT, however I suspect that's not the reason it's not in favour. I personally believe the biggest reason (and this is conjecture) is the snobbery that is inherent in all disciplines of climbing, Sport climbers look at boulders, and think "that's not real climbing"; trad climbers look down at sport, and think the same; winter climbers scowl with disdain at fair weather climbers; guides manage to have a unique look of both aloofness and pity when they come down to see us mere mortals, from their lofty heights. For me it's always been a set of different disciplines, that shouldn't be subjected to such scrutiny. The separate climbing disciplines should be compared with each other in the same way that some sports are, i.e. yes the skills cross over, and playing one would put you in good stead for the other, but rugby union, and rugby league, are



separate entities and unique disciplines. They benefit each other of course, but there's no loss in value for doing one and not the other. Bouldering has a slightly elitist appearance from the outside, and people are put off by it, as with almost all closed mindsets. It comes from a poor first experience, down to maybe poor instructing, poor venue choice or possibly poor feedback. Bouldering in the indoor wall can be intimidating enough with good climbers strutting their stuff. Climbers will contract an inferiority complex just from proxy, and this can be compounded by the fact that often the good climber is younger than your dog! The indoor bouldering wall is often used for poor instructors to demonstrate their prowess rather than encourage people into the sport, and added to this the curse of almost every climber, which is poor route choice. These will all lead to a poor bouldering experience. If you sandbag and flash pump yourself on the first sit down start you've ever done, which your instructor has just flashed, whilst a 7 year old dynos past you on a 7a, it's all going to contribute to a pretty poor first experience. The variability of grades as you move outside, makes trying to find a decent outdoor venue for first time boulders even harder, as they will find they can't match their indoor grade; in some instances they can't even come close to it, or navigate the difference between font or V grades - this will feed a negative cycle which can be hard to break.

There are good venues out there though and good instructors should find them. Although not that imaginative, the RAC

boulders are a fantastic beginners' venue and linking several venues in the Ogwen Valley would help you locate a wealth of beginner routes. Further afield, Font itself has an infinite amount of routes at all grades: they are out there.

I could also extol the virtues of bouldering in itself, the benefits for strength, flexibility, head game, technique, and problem solving, but there are many more eloquent examples of this, not least the fabled book '9 out of 10 climbers make the same mistakes' by Dave McLeod. Another is the excellent Eric Horst's 'Climbers Exercise guide', to name just a couple.

### Bouldering has a slightly elitist appearance from the outside, and people are put off by it

So next time you're in the wall with your soldiers, don't avoid it: watch the boulderers work; learn from them; get involved with it; dedicate a session to it; and if you think it's not adventurous enough, come bouldering with me in Colorado! Or, if it's not for you or if you think it's elitist, get yourself to Font; if it's not scary enough, come and do a high ball at Porth Ysgol, or you may just want to start out at The Roaches, or the RAC. Either way, you can leave all your trad tat behind and enjoy the freedom of bouldering.

*Disclaimer: other types of climbing are available.*



# CYPRUS ROCKS

Duncan Francis

So let's be plain about one thing. Cyprus isn't really in itself a climbing destination. You probably wouldn't go there for a climbing holiday. But if you find yourself there for another reason; a UN tour maybe, or on a posting, visiting for a project or on AT, then it has more than enough to make it worthwhile packing a rope, rack and some shoes. You can easily run a RSF there, in fact a really good RSF, and it fits well with mountain biking, sea kayaking and hill walking [despite the appalling maps...]. And it also has possibly one of the best single-pitch sports crags in the Mediterranean.

Geologically, Cyprus is apparently very interesting; [who knew?] one of the only places on Earth where the mantle has emerged through the crust for example, and it has an undisturbed ophiolite sequence, whatever that is! It seems that geologists come from all over the world to have a look around. However, as far as climbing goes, the island is mostly a big pile of tottering choss. As you drive around, you start to despair that you will find anything worthwhile to climb on; the chalky, unconsolidated limestone seems endless. However, dotted across the island there are a few small areas of really sound rock, forming excellent crags which are well worth seeking out. There



are also some climbing areas on rock which is rather less than excellent, but you just have to take the rough with the smooth, so to speak.

Most of the crags on the island have now been developed as sports venues, but there are also a number of crags which still have trad routes, in the true sense of the word; they are the traditional climbing spots. Cape Greko is the main one, of which more later. There is however little doubt that the sports routes are much better than the trad ones.

There is no climbing guidebook for Cyprus, but you can read all about it on [www.cyprusrocks.eu](http://www.cyprusrocks.eu). This is actually a pretty good online guide, lacking route descriptions, but with names and grades, and some reasonable photos of the crags and sectors, as well as Google Maps links to get you there. This lack of descriptions is somewhat made up for by the fact that many [but not all] of the routes have the name painted at the bottom. Can't see that taking off at Stanage, but somehow it seems OK here. A bit like sports climbing itself in fact.... The bolts on the island are supported by the Cyprus Bolt Fund [link on the CyprusRocks website; worth asking why the Joint Services AT Centre doesn't contribute to this when they use all the crags..... If you care to, please make a contribution if you climb in Cyprus; the British Military doesn't have a very good reputation on that front.

as far as climbing goes, the island is mostly a big pile of tottering choss



So, let's get to the nub; where to go? For ease of reference, I have grouped the crags with reference to the Sovereign Base areas and the holiday town of Paphos. You will need a car to get to all of these crags, less for those in Happy Valley in Episkopi; but then you probably won't want to go to those anyway....

## AROUND PAPHOS

**Alikou and Gerakopetra.** These two crags, known jointly as Droushia [don't ask me] are excellent outcrops of metamorphosed sandstone [although it looks like carboniferous limestone...] which offer a really good day out. Alikou is a smallish crag with half a dozen useful easy slab routes [F3+ - F4+]; great for a RSF introduction [go here in the morning, for the shade and then to Gerakopetra in the afternoon], and learning to lead. The harder lines all consist of difficult boulder starts [which are now overgrown] and are then much easier above [F3]; it is simple to traverse in to use the top parts as routes in their own right. And it has a great tree under which you can lounge and cast aspersions at the climbing style of your mates.

**Gerakopetra** is a different beast; with some 35 routes between F4 and F7a+, including a lot around F5a-6a, it is probably

the best crag on the island. In fact it is probably the best single-pitch venue in the Med [takes cover...]. It also has shade, and fantastic views out across to the West coast. The crag has a really friendly feel, and with its plentiful, well-placed bolts is both great fun climbing and a terrific place to teach climbing. Most climbs have hangers at the top. You won't be alone at weekends. Try FXXXXXX F5a, Frixos F5b, G.A.P F5c and Kathodigitis F6a, all great three star climbs, the first on the main slabby wall, the latter two with wildly overhanging climbing on bomber holds. To get there, take the road marked 'No Entry' up to the radar station, then the dirt track off the to the right; don't go further than the small parking area unless you have a big 4x4. Anyway, it's only a five minute walk to the crag.

There are other crags in the area, Koratgoi, Konefti, Vrachos Korakon and Droushia itself, but I honestly wouldn't bother with them. They are small and uninteresting, the rock is nowhere near as good, and thus they are [not surprisingly] overgrown. There is however some very good but short [and overhanging] trad climbing at Kokkinovraxos, as long as you can climb at least [quite hard] HVS.

**Dhiarizos.** Another really excellent crag, this time hard limestone and almost as



good as Gerakopetra actually, with over fifty sports routes between F4 and F7c+. Just that bit more serious. If you are really old, and remember back when the British were at the forefront of climbing in Cyprus, you will know this as Johnson's Rocks, a trad crag. Sadly that is all in the past, and everything is now bolted. The two main areas are either side of a sort of unusual rocky cleft; the Main Slab on one side [F4 – F5c] and the Main Wall on the right [F6a – F7b+, with most routes at the upper end]. The other routes are scattered around various smaller walls. The Main Slab routes can have bottom ropes set up by walking up around to the left, a rarity in Cyprus. Again, the bolting is well done [thanks to the Cyprus Bolt Fund; why doesn't the military contribute?!]. There is also a bolted anchor at the top for teaching abseiling. The Main Slab gets the sun first thing, and then gradually moves into the shade. The Main Wall is in shade for most of the day. The crag gets very busy, especially at weekends, with packs of local climbers [this is a roadside crag]; expect instructors to take up the easier routes in bulk, unless you get there early. Have a go at Parthena F5b, Katsufis F5b and Kalitechnis [given F6a in the guide, but widely felt to be F6a+], all three stars again.

**Episkopi.** Its Episkopi Jim, but not as we know it! A new area close to Paphos, next to the village of Episkopi, which is not the same as the town which gives the Episkopi SBA its name. TBH I haven't been there, but going by the descriptions at [www.kyriakosrossidis.com](http://www.kyriakosrossidis.com) it is an up and coming climbing area, with stacks of potential. More than thirty sports routes from F6a upwards. To make the most of it, you really need to be climbing upwards of F6c.



### TROODOS

So, the mountains of Troodos are high, volcanic [Gabbro anyone?], and get snow in Winter. They should offer excellent climbing, but sadly they don't, except in two small areas [so far at least]. The rock elsewhere is [apparently] hugely interesting geographically [lots of pillow lavas for example...], but for whatever reason it just isn't made for climbing on. However, the two crags which are up there are really worth visiting, with some very high quality sports routes.

**Troodhitissa.** Close to the monastery of the same name, I think that the rock here is gneiss, but can't be certain. Whatever, it only has four routes, F5a, 5b, 5b and 5c, but they are all excellent, and the scenery [it is in a small mini-valley with a waterfall and rock pools] is refreshingly different to elsewhere in Cyprus; extremely pleasant and much cooler than the plains below. Access is either by a track down from the road, or, better, by abseil from the National Guard abseil platform, also reached from the road. The routes are all under the platform and are

### I loved Pipistrellus, F5c, which gets your heart pumping, even though it is well bolted

well bolted. Each one is very different, and all are class. The left-most requires hand-jams, the second is excellent face climbing, the third starts with an overhanging layback, and the righthand route is more three-dimensional and slightly esoteric. Then you can swim in the stream. Winner!

**Kakopetria.** On the North side of the Troodos, and reached either by 4x4 [and a five minute walk] or by car [and half an hour walk], this is a big slab of Serpentine with overlaps and a scattering of tufas. Again, only seven routes, but all very different to the climbs elsewhere on the island, with great views, and well worth the time spent getting there. With grades from F5a to 6a+, progress depends on smears and small chicken heads in some pretty tenuous positions. I loved Pipistrellus, F5c, which gets your heart pumping, even though it is well bolted. A great wee crag, and well worth the effort of getting there. High five to the people who found it. You almost certainly won't see anyone else.



### AROUND EPISKOPI

**Exhibition, Piastre, Agios Georgios and Episkopi/Limassol.** Oh wow! There are crags around the barracks? On the SBA? Down in Happy Valley below the quarters? I could climb at lunchtime and in the afternoon and then head down to the beach for a swim? Quick, how can I get a posting there...?! Well, hold your horses. The website makes them sound quite enticing, but there are two serious problems. Firstly, you can't actually get to them. The man-eating thorny scrub hasn't apparently been cleared for years, and the tracks are overgrown. Even the path to the 'newly-developed' crag of Episkopi/Limassol. You can get cut to pieces just getting trying to get close. And the reason why no-one has bothered clearing away the scrub is that the rock is really unpleasant. It is that soft, yellowy-white grotty limestone which just doesn't seem conducive to climbing. Yes, there are routes there, and even a few bolts, [a lot of routes are trad] but without some serious work they are just not realistic, and certainly not pleasant. If they were good crags, then the Joint Services AT Centre would probably have made something of them. But they haven't. Which says it all really.

### I could climb at lunchtime and in the afternoon and then head down to the beach for a swim?

### AROUND DHEKALIA

**Cape Greko.** Cape Greko is an extensive area of crags down the road from the Dhekalia SBA. It is probably the best-known and most extensive climbing area on the island, and indeed is where climbing in Cyprus first started out. It is so obvious when looked at from afar, oozing promise. It has a multitude of routes, mostly trad but with a smattering of sports routes, great views out to sea, easy access, some anchors at the top and an ice-cream van. Sadly, it also has no shade [and is thus unbearably hot in Summer] and a lot more of that quite unpleasant soft, yet sharp-edged, grotty, orangey-yellow limestone. Sigh. It should be good, but it just isn't.

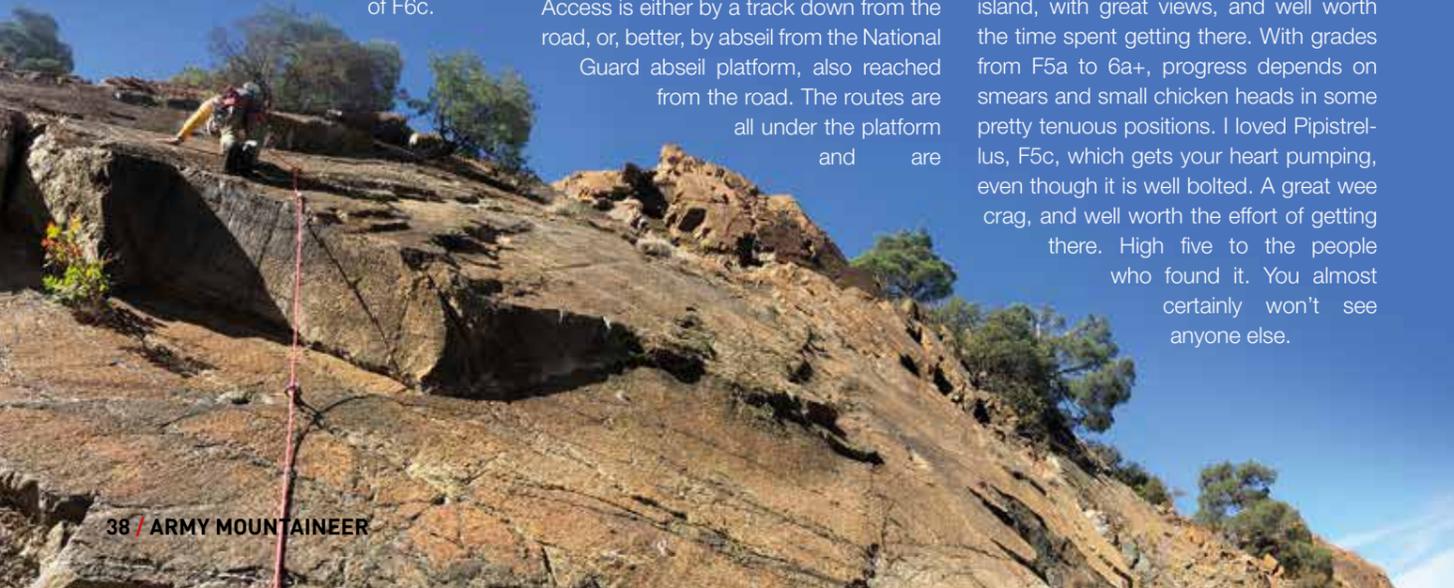
Now don't get me wrong, you can climb there, and a few of the routes on the main crag are not so bad. If I lived on Cyprus I would probably go there every now and then. If I were based in Dhekalia I would probably even make the most of it. It is useful on RSF for an introduction to trad climbing; nuts, hexes and cams all work. And you can abseil down or walk off the back [via the ice-cream van]. But don't try it for bottom-roping, and I wouldn't bother with anything apart from the main crag; the rock on the smaller walls is even worse. Look for the white bits [rather than the orange], remember that the sharp-edged rock makes for massive drag, choose your climbs carefully, and you can have a good day out. It is sad because it almost,



but not quite, has great potential. I haven't been to Pyla, which is close by, but from the website it looks pretty similar.

**Agios Irakleidhios.** So, I haven't actually been here. But I would like to. It's in the grounds of a monastery! How James Bond is that? The drawback is that access is only allowed on the first Saturday and Sunday of each month. But if you are there then, must be worth a punt.

**Pendadhaktylos.** Again, not been there. It's in North Cyprus, just past Nicosia, and of course now you can go there! Sounds promising; Garga Suyu is, quote, 'one of the top three sports crags on the island'. Downsides: it starts at F5c, snakes are common, and it is very close to a lot of quarry traffic. Make your mind up time...!



# WHAT TO DO AT HOME DURING A GOVERNMENT DIRECTED LOCKDOWN?

## STAY HOME, PROTECT THE NHS AND SAVE LIVES

Lee Magowan, AMA Recruiting Officer

**So what to do? What have I been up to?** I've been kept busy in many ways; my wonderful wife has given me a list and directed me to ironing and other domestic house chores, as necessary as these are, they are at the bottom of my list! As a super keen outdoor enthusiast and an AMA member what have I been doing during the lockdown?

**Week one:** Vision this... stood at the door to my brick outhouse looking in and all I can see is winter walking and climbing kit, sleeping and rucksack systems, rock climbing equipment, Via Ferrata kit, scrambling kit, various ropes, camping, walking, fishing kayak, bikes, caving, fitness gear and the countless bags of clothing.

So after a brew and coming up with a plan I begin to drag all of the equipment outside into various sections across the garden, next for another brew and decide what section I'm going to tackle first.

I've been busy inspecting and cleaning equipment, checking my rope logs and physically inspecting every piece of metal work and soft goods. Interestingly I found a few spider nests in my caving gear and snails in my wellies. The key objective is to ensure all my kit is serviceable and safe. I found one sling that was questionable and one helmet that I found a hairline crack in. These were retired immediately.

Whilst checking the ropes I ran every rope through my hands to feel for anything

unnatural and look for damage. I found one of my scrambling ropes to have a small tear, this I didn't notice when I checked it prior to putting into storage. It's so important to check gear before, during and after each use correctly.

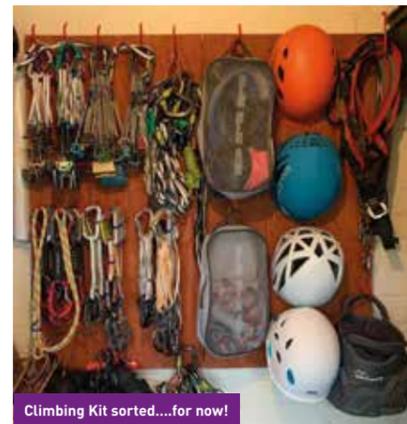
I cracked open all of my tents to air them out, waterproof the outer sheet and check it's still serviceable, to my despair the ground sheet is damaged and one pole has an obvious crack, I suspect this was the damaged caused on my ML assessment during high winds in Snowdonia. I'm glad I checked as this tent was the one I am meant to be taking to Iceland in Summer 20 (hold that thought).

Anyway the lengthy and painful project of going through all my toys has paid off with items found that are not serviceable and may have put me or others in danger! Check, check and check!

Okay the outhouse is now squared and looking fine, what next?

**Week two:** I searched for Mountain Training Association (MTA) website and logged onto the Candidate Management System (CMS) to check my info is up to date, at the end of each month I usually enter all my activity, admittedly I've just written it on paper over the last 6 months but now is the time to update it.

The CMS system is a great tool and speaking to some of my peers they haven't quite embraced it as I have, it's a must



Climbing Kit sorted....for now!

as you need to have your log book up to date prior to training and assessment. The logbook is called DLOG (Digital Log) in this system; it's really good but has one slight flaw as it doesn't quite drag all the data across from UKC logbook if you have one. Out of my 600 plus entries, I had about 35 that didn't transfer across; it took about two hours to manually enter these in. Once this is all transferred across and correct, DLOG is the central point you should really use when moving forward with your outdoor career.

So while I feel like a caged animal that still hasn't finished the ironing I might as well learn something.... So I have a look through many websites and facebook pages and come across the Mountain Training Association facebook page where other outdoor professionals are putting learning resources on where you read the information and conduct self-assessments or quizzes, you can self-declare



Hanging about with Daniel my apprentice!



Jacob (The swinging monkey)



Teaching? Or revision?

CPD points for these activities. This is a great and interesting aspect of developing knowledge. The CMS also will allow you to access official MTA Continuous Professional Development (CPD), these are fantastic but limited, I do hope MTA create more CPD content soon.

Scrolling through the many facebook pages belonging to outdoor professionals has been really insightful and I've learnt a lot. Most of us have seen the national outdoor centre versions and they are fantastic learning resources but some of the home based demonstrations have been less serious and quite entertaining... no names but some are hilarious.

**Week three:** This then encouraged me to get my harness on and begin practising systems in the garden, using slings off the trees in the garden to set up and put myself through scenarios. I've found it very useful to break it down, throw problems in and work out how to solve them. This is valuable time to get things straight in your head, it's not about reacting to set pieces but to be pragmatic and solve problems safely and be able to justify why you used that method, advantages and disadvantages of your choices or actions are important to understand, use the time to expand and develop your skills and knowledge, you will get back out to practice and gain experience soon enough.

**Week four:** Go through the millions of digital photos on the computer or in the cloud that have been taken on the many adventures, delete, keep, categorise or label, or indeed print to create an AT photo album. For those older members who actually had to print camera films, sort out those photos that have sat in boxes for years. I have chosen two old

photos to enlarge and frame of my best adventures.

I've measured up the side gable of my house to create a traverse wall for the kids (really for me), working on designs and costing up materials, the problem is that hand holds are so expensive for a small project like this. It may take a month or two to complete... I've seen so many people on social media building their own climbing wall projects, some are awesome and some need to go back to lego projects! (Not a self-assessment)

**What else...?**

I've been working on my MBA dissertation, oil and watercolour painting, planning trips, catching up on box sets and grooming my bonsai tree and dreaming of freedom.

I have two young boys who are being home-schooled between my wife and I, they are full of energy and need routine, so the mornings are mostly academic and the afternoons are practical and life skills... (My car has never been so clean)

The boys enjoy climbing, hill walking and kayaking... now is a time to try and educate them a little on the equipment and the basics of operation. They love making swings; this is perfect to teach them the fig of 8, clove hitch and overhand knots.

As a father, I have a concentrated period of time to bond further with the kids to encourage them to learn more outdoor stuff such as learning what plants are in the garden? What birds visit the garden and what clouds are in the sky and what do they mean?

We live near the beach and for our daily exercise we go for a family walk and

look for special stones, sea sticks and sea creatures along the coast or pick up rubbish...we chose to do this to stay away from people. There are many things to do, just be imaginative, do what you have been holding off, and plan that trip you want to do next year. We as a family are planning a Camino trail in Northern Spain next year or an Alta Via route through the Dolomites...maybe both?`

We are also looking at purchasing a van to spend more time with each other in the outdoors from Spring 21, I need to train my boys so I can take them to all the wonderful places I have been fortunate to go to through my time engaged in AT.

We all love our adventures in the military, now is the time to ensure my family have those adventures, trust me it will improve your life, you will all grow together and make memories that you won't forget.

I want to convey my gratitude and echo others who have praised those who helped during the lockdown, the doctors, nurses, shop workers, logistic movers, postal services, bin men, police and the countless volunteers across the country who have stepped up to help defeat this invisible enemy.

Remember to listen and act on the advice from the government, stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives! (Stay at home now, climb, walk, kayak, fish and play later)

And lastly an aphorism from John Lennon. I feel this is one that most succinctly captures endurance, perspective and hope:

**"Everything will be okay in the end. If it's not okay, it's not the end."**

# PERFORMANCE TRAINING AT HOME



By Patrick Snow

## Introduction

On 28 Feb 20 I began a lengthy stretch of Shared Parental Leave to look after the toddler and baby, to enable my wife to go back to work. To kick the year off, we were due to spend all of April in Fontainebleau, mostly bouldering in the forest with the children. Instead, we began our self-isolation on 12 Mar 20 (after my wife got a fever) and, together with the rest of the UK, downgraded our plans. Although something of a #1stworldproblem, the resulting lack of access to modern training facilities or crags presents a challenge for those looking to push their climbing performance. Of course, the challenge of maintaining performance with very limited access to training facilities and no access to actual climbing will be familiar to anyone who has been on an operational tour. This article outlines some personal thoughts on how to maintain, or perhaps even improve, climbing performance in these scenarios. It is written from a boulderer's perspective, although I hope it will be more broadly relevant. Should you wish to delve into greater technical detail (e.g. fingerboard routines, how to

build a climbing wall, etc), there are loads of useful resources available from experts online. I have tried to highlight these in the text and at the end.

## Be prepared

There is no dodging the fact that maintaining or improving performance will be easier if you have access to a variety of training apparatus at home. A good (and reasonably inexpensive) start would include something on which to pull up, a means of training finger strength (e.g. fingerboard/edge/pinch block), a resistance band, and some weights (whether gym weights or something more Heath Robinson). I have a fingerboard set-up, consisting of a Beastmaker (beastmaker.co.uk) mounted on a "Screwless Fingerboard Mounting Device" (from crusherholds.co.uk), which allows me to use a pulley system to offset weight and means I don't need to screw the fingerboard into the wall. I have mounted the fingerboard somewhere accessible, so it actually gets used; this has the added benefit that childcare and training are no longer mutually exclusive (using the little people as weights is quite

funny, but not recommended). Based on my experiences in 2020 thus far, I intend to buy/make a pinch block, which will be more useful when travelling away from home (if this becomes possible). In addition to this, I find a TRX to be very useful and have built a small garage woody (more fun than the fingerboard, but much of the training value could be replicated on the fingerboard). If you are interested in building one, the Metolius guide "How to build a home climbing wall" was of great help and is available for free online (www.rei.com). I would recommend something steeper than mine, which is currently 15 degrees overhanging.

## Pick your battles

More so than many other athletic disciplines, climbing performance relies on a huge range of factors. Movement technique is a big one, with finger strength, power, forearm endurance, core strength, and flexibility all playing a crucial role depending on the problem. That is not to mention the non-physical skills such as mindset, tactics, gear placement, etc.

There is no real way of credibly training much of this at home, or when deployed. Even with a home wall, the technique gains to be made from movement drills or 'just climbing' are really limited. Similarly, it is possible to train aerobic capacity (as a foundation for endurance) on a fingerboard using lots of counter-weights but it is (in my opinion) mind-numbingly tedious and therefore at risk of being regularly skipped by all but the most dedicated. This management of decline, for skills that can be quickly regenerated anyway (endurance, movement technique), is also an opportunity cost, given that there are other aspects of performance that are well-suited to being trained at home – namely strength. Strength takes longer to build than endurance (and longer to fade), and is relatively easy to train at home



(also much easier to fit around other tasks since sets are usually shorter). Isolation or tour is an ideal time to build a good base of strength that can then be applied once you are back climbing.

"You can argue all you want about technique and friction... but for me it really comes down to strength and how hard I can pull, I'm afraid" – Ben Moon

## Exploit the opportunities

Rather than manage decline, I have tried to take the opportunity to focus on a few areas that I have unfortunately neglected over the past few years: preventative exercises to build resilience and therefore avoid injury (e.g. shoulder stability), finger strength, flexibility, and more general strength (e.g. core). These sessions fit very well with a very regular and predictable routine. I used to include structured training in the vast majority of my visits to indoor climbing walls, with some time dedicated to just playing about for fun. Two children and a busy job torpedoed that approach, with 'playing about' prioritised during the valuable climbing time - at the expense of system boards, fingerboarding, antagonist training etc. The new 'ground-hog day' routine enables a focus on these important, but usually neglected, aspects – hopefully building a habit that will continue after we are able to return to the walls and crags. With a home wall (or a fingerboard), power endurance can also be developed to ensure that when you return to climbing you have a solid base of strength and power endurance. Power is more of a challenge, but can be trained, to some extent, on a pull up bar:



'Chasseur de Prises' start, 4-7A, Garage

"Gimme Kraft!" has some useful exercises for doing so.

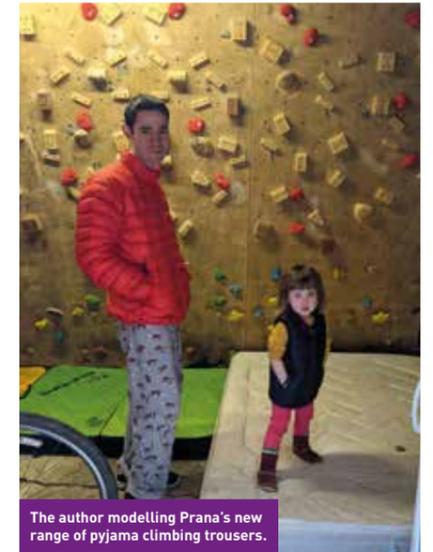
## Don't overtrain!

Given time to train, and no opportunity to actually climb, there is a huge temptation to ramp up the fingerboard and weights sessions to compensate or 'seize the opportunity'. I certainly felt that pull and it was largely the painful memories of past injuries and the resultant enforced breaks that stopped me throwing in 3-4 hard fingerboard sessions a week. The Lattice Team have uploaded some great Q&A sessions on this topic to YouTube. Variety of sessions, flexibility, and management of personal expectations are important here. Fortunately, I had built flexibility to my approach since my expectations were already being effectively managed by the toddler, who dropped her afternoon nap in week 2 of isolation – I was glad to be able to conduct strength sessions with short intense sets.

**"You can argue all you want about technique and friction... but for me it really comes down to strength"**

## Some final remarks

In the broader context, 'working out how to maintain climbing performance during this period of social distancing' is a very mild problem to have. Nonetheless, climbing is important to me and the AMA membership and, despite current access issues, I don't expect this to change in the medium/long term. I have therefore found



The author modelling Prana's new range of pyjama climbing trousers.

it helpful to use training as a focus during this period, and take the opportunity to address my weaknesses in order to come out more resilient and stronger, hopefully with better habits.

## Resources

The climbing community has responded very constructively to the lock-down, with lots of useful training tips posted online by coaches and instructors. I have highlighted a few resources below that I have found useful.

**Lattice Training.** Some great videos on training at home, plus Q&A sessions available online for free, and paid-for plans (which I would recommend).

**Gimme Kraft!: Effective Climbing Training.** Matros, Korb & Huch. Individual exercises to train strength and power.

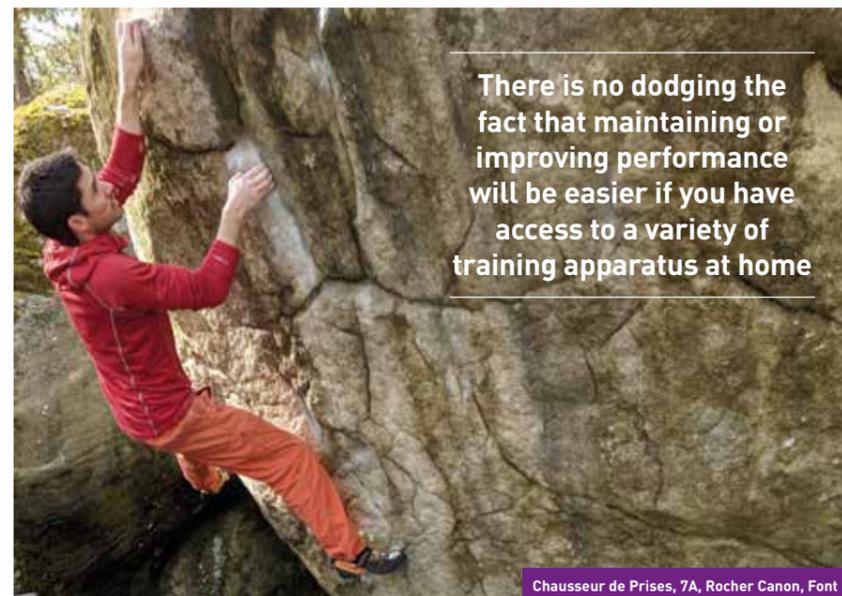
**Training Beta.** Podcast, including interviews focussed on training at home and (paid-for) plans.

**Metolius guide "How to build a home climbing wall".** Available at www.rei.com. Useful free guide for home builds.

**Home Climbing Wall Forum.** Facebook Group for people to share ideas, designs and questions regarding the construction of home climbing walls.

**Make or break:** don't let climbing injuries dictate your success. Dave MacLeod. Really useful for understanding the stresses that climbing places on the body and how to (try to) prevent issues.

**9 out of 10 climbers make the same mistakes.** Dave MacLeod. A classic high-level view of climbing performance. Holistic big picture stuff, but also drills down into simple practical tactical-level advice.



**There is no dodging the fact that maintaining or improving performance will be easier if you have access to a variety of training apparatus at home**

Chasseur de Prises, 7A, Rocher Canon, Font

# IS IT JUST ME... OR IS IT COIRE AN LOCHAIN?

**Duncan Francis**

Is it just me? Or is it Coire an Lochain? Now don't get me wrong; I love the Northern Corries. Along with Cha No, Hell's Lum and Lurcher's, they offer great climbing [Some Summer, but mostly in Winter] on every aspect, not so very far from a car park [although it may seem like it in deep snow]. But while Sneachda always seems welcoming and friendly, Lochain has a tendency to somehow complicate things. Or, as I say, maybe it's just me...

Even the name is questionable. On the maps and in the guidebooks it seems quite clear, Coire an t'Sneachda [the snowy corrie] and Coire an Lochain [corrie of the lochan]. And Lochain does indeed have a lochan. But then so does Sneachda. And

Lochain tends to hold the snow both earlier and later than its twin. So it is snowier... Which has led to a surmise often whispered that the two corries had their names switched at some point in the past. Maybe the Ordnance Survey is to blame. The names of Cairn Lochan [not Lochain] and Stob Coire an t'Sneachda may have come later... Who knows? It's probably not true; the famous Dr J H B Bell was talking about Coire an Lochain back in the twenties; apparently it has the highest loch in Scotland? Anyway, these days Lochain is Lochain, home of the Great Slab, itself home to numerous avalanches which have taken lives in the past, but which is now well-known enough that most skirt around the sides of it.

A steeper and more serious place than Sneachda, Lochain also takes annoyingly longer to get to. After all, it isn't that much further than Sneachda; only 3km rather than 2.5km. But for some reason best known to itself, it always seems to take a lot longer to get to Lochain than the map would suggest. Hours. Forever in fact.

That is, assuming that you find it. For such a large feature, it is surprisingly easy to miss in bad visibility, certainly in the happy days before iPhones and online maps. It should be simple; follow the track from the car park, fork right at the junction, cross the stream and then turn left and follow the track in. Yeah right. That assumes that there are tracks in the snow, and that you can even find the junction. And the terrain from then on is vague in that sort of way that means



in Winter you never go the same way twice. I went there once with another MIC Trainee [this was a few years ago now...] in fog so thick you couldn't see more than a couple of metres. Despite what we thought was decent compass work, we followed a track, found the stream which leads up towards the lochan, and went up it, only to find ourselves staring down into the void of the Lairig Ghru. We had completely missed the entire corrie. Parallel error. That took some living down. Not that we ever told anyone.

**"It's alright Chris, I've forgotten the rope..."**

It also brings out the worst in people. We set off once from the carpark in a howling gale with snow blowing all around, kidding ourselves that "it'll be sheltered from the Westerlies in the corrie". We got the bottom of what we hoped was the route on No 4 buttress, and steeled ourselves for a miserable time, neither willing to admit that it was all pants [holistic trap anyone?!]. We started to gear up, my partner trying to keep his eyes open in the driving snow to see where the first pitch went, when I looked up from my rucksack and said "It's alright Chris, I've forgotten the rope...". Back to the carpark and a café. On another occasion, we were most of the way there when another partner suddenly dropped his rucksack, fumbled around inside it, and looked up at me, face white "I've forgotten my helmet" he said... Café again. One all I think.

Now I've had my fair share of epics over the years, managing to survive them thus



far. But somehow, so many of them seem to have been on the beetling walls of this impressive corrie. Please don't judge....

Take Iron Butterfly for example. A good Grade III Winter route. All relatively straightforward, apart from just that one move... On pitch two, you climb up to a big boss of ice, and then move right across a gap onto a sort of sloping slab. Absolutely fine, except when it is bare of ice or neve; then it can be a real challenge as it is all very exposed and feels pretty tenuous. Did it with two students once and found it was unpleasantly thin. Having made the move and scuttled upwards, I was happily established up at the next belay, knowing that the worst was over. But various twitchings and toings-and-froings on the ropes eventually led to the message that neither of them could, or would, make that move. However hard they tried. Sigh. They were Marines too. So abseiled back down on a big hex in a solid crack, collected them and went back down. The worst was, the hex was then collected by a fellow instructor a couple of days later....and they still have it!

The Vent is an interesting route; it's the only one I am aware of in the UK that varies between Grade I-V, depending on conditions; and indeed sometimes it's just completely unclimbable. There

is an infamous chockstone; under good conditions, it is buried or at least very climbable. Under thin conditions it forms a cave and overhang with vertical sides. Agh. I have soloed it, been forced to reverse it, and on at least two occasions, rescued parties who were stuck on it. Misled by the guidebook, they both found themselves unable to make the crux moves, and unwilling to go back down due to lack of gear to abseil off. Luckily I managed to climb the crux both times, and then brought them up, as well as my own partners. So maybe that is a win... Still an infuriating route though!

Milky Way. So it's meant to be a two star Grade II/III, and most of the time it is. However. Beware of conditions. When buried in powder, it is easy enough climbing...its just that there is no gear. Or belays. Quite spicy in fact. And, if you do the open corner direct finish, then there is often absolutely no gear at all for 50m or so. You have been warned!

Ewen Buttress. Another Grade III with a couple of stars. Surely this one must be OK. Well it is, indeed it is often good fun, except when you try and climb it under deep powder when no-one else has been near it. I did wonder why... Perhaps after the Milky Way episode I should have known. And then I wondered why we did



it that time as well. But we did, which is to say that we swam up it, literally. Breast stroke, using the friction of head, arms, body and knees to shift away vast masses of snow in deep, flowing powder. No gear of course; you would have had to have dug down about six feet to find anything. Sigh. Maybe I should choose my routes better...

Y-Gully Right Branch. A three star Grade II. So what could go wrong? Well, quite a lot as it happens. Check out UKC; I'm not the only one. A few years ago, I reckoned that I should be able to solo anything up to Grade III with a single axe. Yes, I did. Yes, I know. Anyway, I went up into Lochain [I should have known] with a walking axe, intent on soloing this three star Grade II. Phew. Ever tried climbing apparently vertical frozen gravel with no gear, tenuous scrapings, nothing to aim for, an overhanging cornice at the top and your heart in your mouth? Obviously I survived, as I'm writing this, but for goodness sake, I should have known. This was Lochain after all.

**Ever tried climbing apparently vertical frozen gravel with no gear, tenuous scrapings, nothing to aim for, an overhanging cornice at the top and your heart in your mouth?**

Savage Slit. Now don't get me wrong, I love Savage Slit; what a great climb. A three star Severe if ever there was one.



A brilliant line. But of course there had to be that one time.... I had been over to do Robin Smith's classic Clean Sweep on Hell's Lum with Nigel Williams, and on the way back from a brilliant day we thought that it would be a good plan to abseil down Savage Slit and climb back up, to tick two classics in one day. So we abseiled down. Now this was a while ago, before the days of UKC and stuff, where you find out all sorts of useful information, such as ; if you abseil Savage Slit, make sure that the ropes run down the left wall [looking down] or they will get stuck. Which, once we had pulled about thirty metres through, they did. Of course. So, faced with a few unpalatable options, I elected to climb back up, protected only by a two prussiks on a single rope that was jammed on....well, I didn't know actually. Obviously [again] I survived, but when I got to the top, I found the rope jammed in a tiny crease in the rock. Lucky. So there you go; watch out if you decide to abseil down Savage Slit!

Western Slant. So this one is a IV,5, but that should be fine. So why is it that the only time I did it, we found ourselves in a deep cleft blocked by a massive chockstone, and couldn't get out? Well at least not [in the end] without some fine Victorian technique involving Mark stepping [in crampons] on my hands, shoulder and head? I'm sure I've still got the scars; maybe that's why I haven't been back to see if we were even on route.

And then, finally, to cap it all, having over the last ahem years managed to lose not one, but two wedding rings, my Mother gave me my Father's wedding ring, which he had managed to keep for some sixty years. A few months later I was in, well, I hardly need to say do I. And yes, it came off at some point when I was changing my gloves. It's still out there in amongst the boulders somewhere.

**So, is it just me? Or is it.... Coire an Lochain?!**

# WINTER MOUNTAIN LEADER THOUGHTS

By Sean Mackey

The Winter Mountain Leader Award is considered by many to be a 'Big Tick'. This award allows you take out groups and individuals into the most serious weather conditions the UK can throw at you. It also takes quite a long time to achieve with no direct entry point and a hefty amount of pre-requisites. Prior to assessment; You must have the Summer Mountain Leader Award already, completed the Winter ML Training course, have a minimum of 40 winter QMDs and 10 Grade One gullies or ridges. Unless you're blessed with living in one of Scotland's National Parks or can take some serious time off work, I doubt many people could achieve all that in one season maybe not even two!

I went and thankfully passed my assessment this winter before Coronavirus and COVID-19 shut the country down. I was lucky in as much as I had quite a few friends who already held the award and they gave me their advice freely.

What I have written in

this article are my thoughts and top tips on passing and making your life easier. You may disagree with them but these are solely my opinions and make of them what you will...

Many people register for the civilian award. Looking at the statistics from Mountain Training for 2018 (I'll ignore the more recent 2019 winter as it was particularly poor) 147 people registered for the award. These are all qualified Summer Mountain Leaders and under gone the process for a MT award before and know the score. However, from those only 134 people actually booked and conduct a training course, either at one of the national centres or with independent providers. Those that go onto an assessment and pass are much fewer still at 63 people. Of those that go for the assessment 72.5% get a straight pass, while 22% defer for a variety of reasons. It is only a very small amount who fail. Taking the journey as a whole, the statistics show that the assessment really isn't the stumbling block it's the consolidation period.

The attrition rate to gain the qualification is quite high which can be attributed to a number of factors, but mainly I feel its because you have to commit fully to the process and can't cut corners. Why am I sharing these statistics with you? Because going for an assessment before you feel ready is a waste of effort and time. You don't want to be in the 25% who didn't get the result they wanted.

Fundamentally, you can get yourself in a really strong position to pass before you even get there. I spoke to a Glenmore Lodge assessor and he looks for three things on day one of the course. The first is a bullet proof log book with more days than the required forty. The second is a well written and researched test paper. Finally, that you have all your own kit and equipment that is serviceable and has been well used.

The logbook speaks for itself. Brew a pot of coffee and spend an afternoon going through your logbook and be ruthless with yourself. If you think that something might not be a QMD then I can guarantee the assessor won't think it is and take it out.



Remind yourself of what makes a QMD in winter so you can make an honest appraisal of it. Make sure your day has enough detail – What route did you take, what was the snow conditions like, did you make any decisions that affected your route? The more you can put into this the better the day looks. I have heard of some candidates uploading a route logged on their GPS watch into the DLOG – this maybe great if the assessor has the same software. If they don't make sure you have described the day in enough detail anyway.

I don't know why the research paper is an issue but apparently it is. This is sent out a couple of weeks before hand and is an open book test. You can spend five minutes on it, or you can spend a few hours making sure it is completed to the best of your ability. The main problem is that some people have turned up without completing it or with unanswered questions. By doing this it makes it look as if you don't know the answers and don't know where to look to find them either. This seems to me to be a really easy way to p\*\*\* off your assessor with the easiest aspect of the assessment.

Kit and equipment is a really personal thing and everyone will have an opinion, so I am not going to get too involved with this issue. If you come on your assessment and have to borrow boots, rucksacks and ice axes the question in the assessor's mind will be- 'If they don't have this kit how have they been logging QMDs'. I am not an expert on kit, but I



know what works for me in the hills and who I trust to go to for advice.

The assessment week is five days long split into three sections;

- 1) Teaching Day
- 2) Steep Ground Day
- 3) Expedition- two night

The teaching day is one that you can also prepare for before the course starts. Teaching people how to use crampons & ice axes along with slipping and sliding can be thought out into lesson plans that you can do on the hill. Having a clear method of teaching a skill, communicated in a succinct manner with maximum class activity (MCA) is the aim. Don't waffle when showing someone something- try and make it as simple and easy as possible. If you can practice your 'patter' at home, it'll flow much better when the assessor is looking over your shoulder. Working in freezing conditions means that MCA not only keeps the group engaged with loads of opportunities to practice, but it also keeps them moving and warm. Sending people through one at a time isn't that efficient. Nothing will ruin your lesson more than the group switching off and becoming mildly hypothermic! One member of the team taught his self arrest lesson and recorded the students on his phone. He could then give coaching points back to them with that as a visual reference. Great if the weather allows so always have a traditional back up plan. The evening of the first day we went through our research paper.

The steep ground day needs a lot of judgement and practice. My assessment group was taken on a journey and we were told to do what was appropriate for the conditions & terrain in ascent and descent. It wasn't a set piece number of anchors or lowers by the assessor, they really wanted to see my judgement on what was right. Don't be afraid to go back to your summer skills for some of this- they expect you to. Spotting someone up a short step maybe the quickest and most appropriate way of getting them up or down something. Similarly cutting bucket sized steps shouldn't be discounted. Your position, coaching and communication needs to be clear and on point for all of this. Getting out loads and using your summer leadership skills with groups will make it easier when the conditions are against you. Remember that getting the rope out may not be the right thing.

**I am not an expert on kit, but I know what works for me in the hills and who I trust to go to for advice.**

When you do get the rope out though have an idea in your mind what you are going to do – think about the snow conditions and what will be the most secure. Along with demonstrating the usual anchors higher up the mountain I also had to bury my rucksack to back up my bucket seat as the snow was too soft lower down. I'd recommend practicing this if you haven't already as it's a bit of an art and took a little longer with the extra digging and thought process. Having a set method of cutting a snow bollard or burying an axe for example is a good idea. I have heard horror stories of assessors asking candidates to bury an axe multiple times because the student did something different each time and it spooked the assessor. Keep it simple and stick to your method.

Confidence roping should be slow and controlled while also communicating throughout. I think I only moved 200m in 20mins as I want to make sure I wasn't going to be compromised. Be careful and don't try to go to fast. Each step should be a belay! Check the distance between you and your 'client' and try to get it dead on straight away. Having to adjust it half way down a slope will ruin your flow and may cause you to rush.

The final stage of the assessment is the expedition. This will be the in-depth test of your navigational ability both day and night. Going out for two nights requires a lot more discipline than just one and your personal administration needs to be on point. Know exactly where everything is in your larger expedition rucksack and the quick way to access it. If you're anything like me you'll have your own method of packing for your daysack, so try to transpose this over to your expedition sack. Being able to quickly get to your goggles may well be a life saver when the wind picks up.

Keeping your kit dry is a challenge (especially gloves) and drying items inside your sleeping bag or being prepared to carry spares is the only answer really. Filling up a nalgene bottle with just below boiling melted snow can be a good hot water bottle, which will help with the drying process and will provide you with drinking water for the next day. When in a snow hole don't leave anything out in low areas as the cold air will sink into these and the temperature will still be around freezing. Boots are the biggest (excuse the pun) problem for this as they are generally too large to go inside your sleeping bag and nothing is more soul destroying than having to put your feet into a frozen pair of boots in the morning. I have size 13 feet so that may just be an issue to me!

With the navigation I still used the 5 Ds as my guiding principles. These are distance, direction, duration, description and discipline (or method). They should all speak for themselves and not come as a surprise to anyone considering this assessment. I found that when I was asked 'How are you going to get to this point here?' (imagine an assessor pointing to an obscure feature on the map) I naturally went through the 5 Ds anyway to describe my leg on the journey. They seemed very keen to know what method (discipline) I'd be using and why I had chosen that as my preferred technique, so be prepared to justify what you choose.

I carried a map in my chest pocket and a compass attached to my jacket with a spare compass in my rucksack. Two people in my team had the map blown out of their hands and had to dive on them to stop them blowing away. While I dislike it having the map attached it seems like a



sensible idea in really difficult conditions to ensure its security.

Being in the military nobody wants a bright head torch. We all want to emit as little light as possible to stop the enemy finding us. This assessment was not military though, so I got the most powerful headtorch I could find for my budget. One purchase and 700 lumens later I was merrily lighting up the hills and punching through the darkness. This allowed me to pick out features that other candidates were struggling to- it even got to the point where group members were asking me to lift my head up as it made their legs easier. Most had smaller Tikka sized headtorches and struggled with the light. While I am not recommending any special purchases a lighthouse quality headtorch really is worth its weight in gold and will make your life easier. I got the Black Diamond Icon 700 and spent a little more money on Lithium Ion batteries, but if I had the money I'd definitely have bought the Petzl Nao+.

**nothing is more soul destroying than having to put your feet into a frozen pair of boots in the morning**

Try to stay positive throughout and take each day as it comes. Tennis players often wipe their faces with a towel between each serve or set. Physically they may

well just be removing sweat, but some have stated psychologically they're wiping away their last performance (be it positive or negative) ready to start again and operate at their right level of stimulation. While you might think this sounds daft, I find it really easy for things to begin to multiply once I make a mistake or have a poor performance. Dwelling on mistake can't change them and the best thing to do is 'wipe your face' and move on. I made a conscious effort to do it on this assessment and I felt it worked well for me (I am going to try and take it into other areas of my life). What I am trying to say is have a coping strategy for when things go slightly pear shaped and move on constructively.

My final thought on the whole process is enjoy the consolidation and relish the training opportunities. I did a WML Prep Course at Glenmore Lodge and was surprised when some of the team didn't want to get involved with the scenarios and training. If you don't properly prepare for this then the result might not be what you hoped for. Go and tick off all those classics you've always wanted to do. Going out and continually mountain walking can take its toll if you are not psyched for the day. Pick out objectives that you really want to do that will also make you a better mountaineer.

Best of luck and enjoy the ride.



# PHOTO COMPETITION



SCAN FOR PHOTOGRAPHY TIPS

Each edition of Army Mountaineer contains a photo competition. Whether you've been out with friends, deployed abroad to nice places or have participated on a large scale expedition your photos can win you some cash!

Prizes range from £50-£100 and will be paid into the winners' bank account as soon as possible. If you haven't yet received your winnings, please get in touch with the Editor.

For tips on how to improve your images, see the 'How to win the AMA photo competition' article by scanning the code above.

Photos should be sent at the highest quality possible (not less than 2MB) and emailed to the Editor with the filename: **AMA\_Number-Forename-Surname.jpg**. In addition, any images that are suitable for AMA recruiting and promotional purposes will be turned into glossy flyers and posters. It is assumed that all photos entered into the competition have the consent of the photographer to be used for these purposes unless stated.



■ **Duncan Francis** – Icy in Sneachda



■ **Lee Payne** – W02 Glenn Bloomer leading the descent, Costa Blanca Nov 2019



■ **Edward Brooker** – Sunset in the Pyrenees



■ **Neal Khepar** – Over the hills and far away



■ **Matthew Bye** – Sunlight and Sprindrift, Bla Bheinn



■ **Jamie Gibbin** – The Lone Tree of Buttermere



■ **Edward Tomkins** – Snow holing is s\*\*\*



■ **Jim Gray** – Val Argentera, Italy on 13-FEB-20 - Coboldo caustico WI4+



■ **Simon Jeyes** – Just finished the last pitch of Charity on the Idwal Slabs



■ **Tony Purvis**

## JUST ANOTHER MOUNTAIN

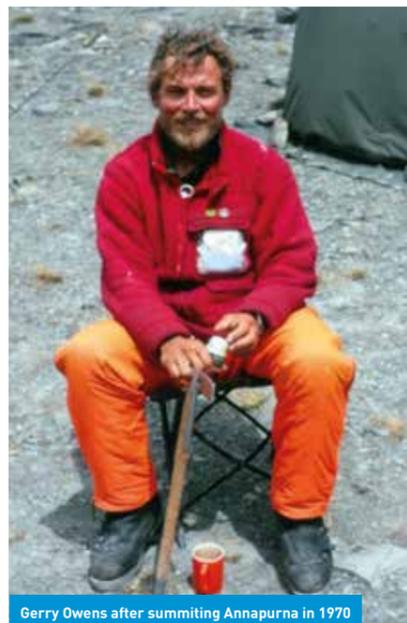
SARAH JANE DOUGLAS

Reviewed by John Patchett

Despite the title, this is not just another book about mountaineering. It's a frank account of lives lived dangerously in many dimensions, with no punches pulled. One individual's obsession with the highest hills of all leads to his death, which sets off a train of tragic events for his fiancée and her family. In due course the mountains provide redemption but only after struggles and temptations to follow an easier path.

Sarah Douglas displays a brutally frank style in parts and yet engages us with some heart-rending passages as she witnesses in close succession the deaths of those closest to her, her mother, grandmother and grandfather – "And I wondered how many times, and in how many ways, a person's heart could break." Cancer takes a steady toll and Sarah's extensive fund raising to "smash it in the face," along with her related blog writing, is a highly commendable reflection on her boundless energy, even when she too falls victim to the dreaded illness.

Sarah is the original self-taught mountaineer and some of her adventures include very close shaves with the hostile environment of the Highlands. Later trips to Kilimanjaro and Nepal



Gerry Owens after summiting Annapurna in 1970

continue the motion of enthusiasm exceeding careful preparation. But despite the odd navigational error, occasional indulgent lapses and a crampon catastrophe along with a helicopter rescue, Sarah earns our respect as a cheery survivor who, amongst many other achievements, completes the full round of the Munros. She is an accomplished artist, a qualified teacher of art and, with this book, a published author for the first time.

The account has particular relevance for Forces mountaineers of an earlier generation. Here are some well-remembered climbing personalities of the 1970s and historic locations, such as Fort George, which was once the home of the Joint Services Mountain Training Centre Scotland. The 1975 Army Mountaineering Association Nuptse Expedition, which included climbers from the Royal Navy and RAF, became the catalyst for this story, when four members died in two horrific accidents. They were all remembered by a recent expedition which rebuilt the base camp memorial, as was reported in 'Army Mountaineering.' Those of us who knew the indomitable Gerry Owens will find this account particularly moving, as well as harrowing in parts.

The Foreword comes from Sir Chris Bonington and there is a further



Sarah with her son Marcus in 2019



...don't just take my word for it that this is a book you must buy!

endorsement from Stephen Venables. These gentlemen are prolific authors and mountaineers of the highest order. That both have also suffered and survived intense personal tragedies adds further weight to their support for this unique account which encompasses much more of life's lessons than even the striking cover conveys.

Since publication in June 2019 this book has earned 55 reviews on Amazon, all 5 star ratings. In 'The Great Outdoors 2019 Awards' Sarah won the 'Extra Mile Award.' Her book came second in the literature category and she was also runner up in the 'Personality of the Year' section. So don't just take my word for it that this is a book you must buy!

'Just Another Mountain – A Memoir' by Sarah Jane Douglas was published by Elliott and Thompson on 20 June 2019. Hardback now costs £11.99, paperback £8.99.

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# SPORT CLIMBING UPDATE

## Vice-Chair Sport Climbing (Patrick Snow) + Will Jung

In March 2020, as I write this, the extent and duration of the disruption caused by COVID-19 remains unclear. The inaugural inclusion of sport climbing as an Olympic sport certainly won't happen in 2020. Neither will the Army regional lead competitions happen in spring, nor the Army champs in May. Will the delayed inter-services run in Sep/Oct? We don't know. Will the Armed Forces Bouldering League 2020/21 still happen? We don't know. Will next season be dominated by people who have spent 6 months hanging from their (previously decorative) fingerboards, or will all those people sit it out due to tendon injuries? We don't know. Will these questions seem unduly pessimistic, quaintly parochial, or even mis-judged? We don't know.

In the absence of any certainty about what the future holds, we can at least look back on the 2019/20 bouldering season as an outstanding success. Over recent years the Armed Forces Bouldering League has been becoming increasingly popular across all three Services, this has been clearly demonstrated by this year's attendance with the highest figures seen since the initial implementation of the league. The highest number of attendees at a single round of AFBL 2018/19 was ~80, whereas

this year the highest and lowest number of attendees at a single round were 173 and 125 respectively. This significant increase in popularity has in turn improved the standard of bouldering across the ever-increasing cohort of individuals who have been attending these events. This is greatly helped by the standard of the venues and the quality of the problems that have been set for the competitors.

Sports Climbing in general is a growing sport within the Armed Forces and the attendance this year at these events has been a true reflection of its ever-increasing popularity. The future is bright for Army Sports climbing.

This success would not have been possible without the tireless effort of the organiser (Kenny Geoghegan, Army) and the venues providing the opportunity to host the events. The 5 rounds in 19/20 were held at: The Climbing Works (Sheffield); Harrowall (London); Bloc (Bristol); Boulderhut (Chester); and Rockstar (Swindon). We sincerely hope that these, and the many other excellent commercial climbing walls across the country, will be able to re-open in due course.



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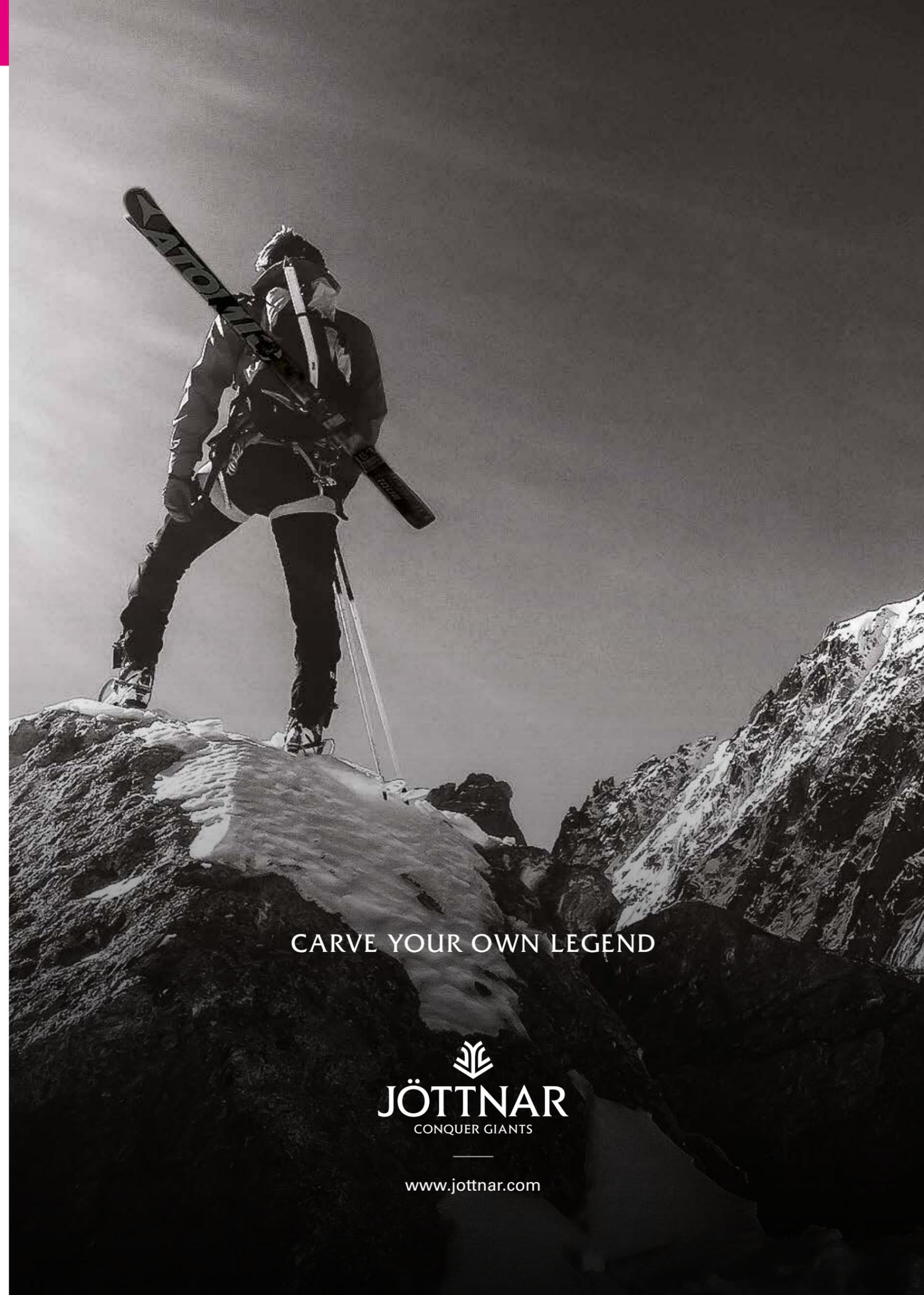
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