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WINTER 2019

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ON THE COVER: AN ALPINE START ENSURES A SUCCESSFUL SUMMIT OF THE EIGER FOR AMA MEMBER, STUART MCDONALD.

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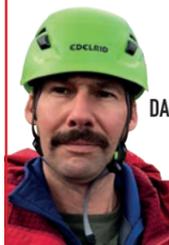


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CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

It is my privilege to have been appointed as the new Chairman of the Army Mountaineering Association following the AGM in September. Having been a member of the Association for many years (some more active than others), and more latterly fulfilled the role of General Secretary, I am continually impressed by the commitment, enthusiasm and dedication of both the Committee and its membership. With circa 2700 members, a varied programme of activity for all abilities, and an extensive range of wider benefits, our Association continues to go from strength to strength. I only hope I can do justice to the appointment and look for your continued support, energy and commitment.

In doing so, and on behalf of the Association, I would like to take the opportunity to pass on my thanks to my predecessor, Lt Col Pete Skinsley, for his extensive service to the Association over the years, especially to Sports Climbing. We look forward to seeing you back on a rope soon when time allows.

I would also like to extend a warm thank you to Lieutenant General Ivan Hooper, who on retirement from the Army, also stands down as our President. Whilst the role may be relatively invisible to many of the members on a routine basis, it is exceptionally important to our Association to help influence the senior echelons of the Army, our sponsors, and support the Committee. Despite being in exceptionally busy appointments since assuming the role in 2010, General Ivan has always made time for the Association. His wise counsel, good humour and engagement skills have been appreciated by all. We all hope you get to enjoy a slightly more leisurely pace of life, and more importantly, have more time to enjoy the great outdoors, be it on the hill or on the water. At the time of writing his successor as President is to be confirmed. However luckily, we have not lost General Ivan to the Association as at the AGM



EDITOR'S FOREWORD

Welcome back! Another six months has now passed since I last sat down to craft Army Mountaineer and it seems you've been busier than ever. There have been some big expeds going on over the last few months and you can read about those funded by the AMA inside.

Our guest article this time comes from North Wales local and frequent JSMTIC instructor, Rebecca Coles. Rebecca and her hand picked team of pioneering female mountaineers have been embarking on Project ALPINE SPIRIT, attempting to be the first all-female team to summit all 82 of the Alps' 4000m peaks in one season. See how she got on inside.

It wouldn't be Army Mountaineer without our usual suspects: the AMA benefit details, meets and photography competition results; did you win £100?

I'm always available for your comments and suggestions 24/7 via email: journal@armymountaineer.org.uk. Let me know what you like and what you don't. Otherwise, dive in and enjoy the Winter 19 edition of Army Mountaineer.

Al Topping



he was also appointed our next Honorary President.

I hope you continue to enjoy and find inspiration from the various articles in the rest of the Journal; of note, I would like to draw your attention to the expedition organised and led by WO2 Will Brandt (Brains) to Baffin Island, which was undoubtedly a phenomenal achievement and success. Wishing you all a very safe and enjoyable Winter season.

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY FOREWORD

Currently we have over 2600 members – our highest number ever! I hope this number continues to grow.

For some of you, things may have changed since the last edition of Army Mountaineer. Therefore, if I don't have your up to date contact and bank details there's a chance this may be the last journal edition you receive for a while. Please let me know if things have changed and I will ensure you receive your next journal in the post on time.

For this and any other enquiries, 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



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



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11 – 19 JAN 20
RJUKAN, NORWAY
AMA RJUKAN TRIP
CONTACT: CHRIS COOKSON
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15 JAN 20
BOULDERHUT, CHESTER
AFBL ROUND 4 (ALSO ARMY CHAMPS)
CONTACT: KENNY GEOGHEGAN
Open to all. 2019DIN10-032.

21 FEB – 8 MAR 20
NORWEGIAN LODGE, SCOTLAND
AMA WINTER MEET
CONTACT: DUNCAN FRANCIS
Open to all.

12 FEB 20
ROCKSTAR, SWINDON
AFBL ROUND 5
CONTACT: KENNY GEOGHEGAN
Open to all. 2019DIN10-032.

MAR 20
CLIMBING WORKS, SHEFFIELD
CLIMBING WORKS INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL
UK Armed Forces Team representation by invite

1 APR 20
SUBMISSIONS FOR AMA JOURNAL SUMMER EDITION

APR 20
LOCATION TBC
ARMY (SOUTH) CHAMPS
CONTACT: MARC HILTON
Open to all. DIN to follow.

APR 20
LOCATION TBC
ARMY (NORTH) CHAMPS
Open to all. DIN to follow.

APR 20
LOCATION TBC
AMA MEET
CONTACT: RYAN LANG
Open to all.

APR 20
TIELEN, BELGIUM
BOULDERMANIA
UK Armed Forces Team representation by invite

2 – 22 MAY 20
YOSEMITE
AMA YOSEMITE TRIP
CONTACT: SEAN MACKAY
Info only. No spaces remaining.

MAY 20
N WALES
AMA MEET
CONTACT: MICHAEL DALEY
Open to all.

JUN 20
LOCATION TBC
AMA MEET
CONTACT: RYAN LANG
Open to all.

JUL 20
LOCATION TBC
AMA MEET
CONTACT: RYAN LANG
Open to all.

JUL 20
LOCATION TBC
BRITISH BOULDERING CHAMPIONSHIPS
UK Armed Forces Team representation by invite

SEP 20
LOCATION TBC
AFBL (ARMED FORCES BOULDERING LEAGUE) ROUND 1
Open to all. DIN to follow.

25 – 27 SEP 20
JSMTC INDEFATIGABLE, N WALES
AMA AGM
Open to all.

1 OCT 20
SUBMISSIONS FOR AMA JOURNAL WINTER EDITION

OCT 20
LOCATION TBC
AFBL ROUND 2
Open to all. DIN to follow.

OCT 20
LOCATION TBC
BLCCS (BRITISH LEAD CLIMBING COMP)
UK Armed Forces Team representation by invite

TO BE CONFIRMED...
ARMY CLIMBING CHAMPIONSHIPS 2020
Open to all. DIN to follow.
RAF CLIMBING CHAMPIONSHIPS 2020
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RN&RM CLIMBING CHAMPIONSHIPS 2020
Likely open to Army guests
INTER-SERVICES CHAMPS – OLYMPIC FORMAT
RN lead. By invitation. Army Team of 30 selected from the Army Championships

OCT 20
LOCATION TBC
AMA MEET
CONTACT: RYAN LANG
Open to all.

NOV 20
LOCATION TBC
AFBL ROUND 3
Open to all. DIN to follow.

DEC 20
LOCATION TBC
AFBL ROUND 4
TBC
Open to all. DIN to follow.





ADVENTUROUS TRAINING AND LEADERSHIP

TRAINING FOR ENHANCED EFFECTIVENESS OR JUST A WEEK OUT OF THE OFFICE?



During a Rock Climbing Skills course, three soldiers have each been set the task of demonstrating how to set up a safe climb at a rock climbing venue. The Instructor looks on in silence as they busy themselves in their task. The tension is palpable.

The three soldiers are demonstrably nervous, looking across at each other to see if they can glean any clues; talking to themselves; tying and re-tying the same knots; and even sweating a little under

the pressure of trying to get it right. They begin to rush, and, inevitably they make errors; errors that could compromise the safety of a climber. Eventually, they run out of time and the Instructor brings the group together to ask about the task. Their actions are deconstructed and they discuss how they can each develop better coping strategies to help to overcome the strains of working under pressure. The Instructor asks 'why might it be important to remain calm in a stressful situation?' 'For the sake of safety' they reply. The

Instructor asks if developing these strategies during a climbing course might be relevant elsewhere – 'on operations' they reply. A rushed decision or a mistake on the ground could compromise the whole mission, or even cost lives.

It is fairly apparent that while AT may be viewed as a nice way to spend a week away from the office, there is a whole lot more to it than first meets the eye. The aims of Adventurous Training are clear, even if the perception of AT isn't.



Army Doctrine states that the moral component of fighting power consists of enabling personnel to have motivation, moral cohesion and an ethical foundation. These three tenets ensure that the fighting force is effective, reliable, bound by common principles, and united by a single vision - this is exactly what AT targets.

AT has one objective – to enhance operational effectiveness in participants. It aims to do this in three ways:

1. Supporting participants to develop effective coping strategies (in other words, building resilience);
2. Developing participants' leadership skills and behaviours;
3. Developing participants' understanding and integration of their particular Service's Core Values.

That all sounds very noble and if you quoted that while asking for permission to attend an AT course, it would probably go down very well. However, the question really is does AT actually achieve these aims? If you participate in an AT course, will you have increased your operational effectiveness? Will you have met any of the three aims?

Experiential learning such as that found in adventurous activities has a practical application. A review of outdoor literature recognises that in youth populations alone, there are 40 agreed learning outcomes that are positively impacted by exposure

to what is termed 'outdoor experiences' – in other words, AT. Furthermore, both The Outward Bound Trust and others actively promote the opportunities available in outdoor experiences for developing leadership behaviours and encouraging team working skills. It has been found that rock climbing provided participants with opportunities for emotion regulation and agency (i.e. the sense of control over one's actions), which in turn have positive benefits for self-esteem and mental health.

Leadership research has demonstrated the positive impact of Transformational Leadership (TL – also expressed as the Army Leadership Code) within a military setting. Indeed, TL was found to be a predictor of training outcome for recruits as well as their experience of training. One of the three pillars of AT is 'Core Values' because it gives personnel a united vision of their Service's principles and ethos. Indeed, Core Values are the fundamental and unifying principles of all three Services. For example, in the Army the tenets of Courage, Discipline, Respect for Others, Integrity, Loyalty and Selfless Commitment are all key to engaging and unifying staff. This is manifested within TL as 'Inspirational Motivation,' expecting leaders to create a united vision for their followers (known as "encourage confidence in the team" in the Army Leadership Code). Demonstration of this behaviour within AT is a fundamental part of TL, and encourages followers to perform beyond their own expectations. Furthermore, the Army Leadership Code is easily transferable to the outdoor environment, giving participants a framework to compare

scenarios of leadership in the outdoors and translating that back to the work environment. Rather than a knowledge and theory-based approach to learning about leadership, AT offers a practical approach where participants can see and use leadership in situ, and are then guided by their Instructors to transfer the learning to alternate environments.

AT meets a direct need for enhancing and embedding leadership behaviours in participants by the very nature of its consequential environment. In AT every action has a consequence, some of which are way beyond the boundaries of the normal workday outcomes.

In this way, AT is able to demand more from the participants because every action counts. This exposure to real life consequences allows participants to engage with making informed and intelligent decisions in an often stressful environment while under the supervision of safe and supportive Instructors. When then placed back in operational roles, the participants have already developed a variety of coping strategies and leadership skills to aid them in situations where consequences can also be life threatening.

Aside from action-consequence, AT allows participants a space to 'fail safely'. Failure is not something that sits comfortably with most people, particularly in a military context. There is often no room for failure in operational situations. Failure, however, is a part of life and should we wish our staff to be confident to take measured risks and be more ambitious, then experiencing failure in a safe environment first is surely a good way to develop this capacity.

For example, speaking with an AT instructor who jumps out of planes for a living, it was surprising to learn that he found himself up against a complete psychological block when trying to abseil down a rock face. After much support and guided coaching from the Instructor, he eventually completed the abseil. His view of fear, failure and emotional dissonance had been completely altered by attempting a new task in a new environment. He said that he had been forced to rethink his normal coping strategies for something that had become routine in his work life; he had let fear of failing at the task overcome him.



This concept might alter our perception of the traditional Comfort, Stretch, Panic Model in that we seldom experience real panic, but are more often faced with a fear of failure or looking foolish, which may sometimes lead to panic. Perhaps our model now includes a fourth layer between stretch and panic, called the 'fear of failure zone'. If we are aware of this, we can begin to find strategies to overcome the obstacles. AT does not set its students up to fail, but places a need for an intelligent expectation that failure might be an outcome, not just of AT, but of experiences in general. As with the rest of the Comfort, Stretch, Panic Model, if we repeatedly experience failure and learn to overcome it, we can shrink the fear of failure zone, encompassing it into our learning zone.

As with our parachutist-turned-abseiler, the military needs its personnel to develop resilience and not simply be capable in their roles. This is essential for the realities of the environments that military personnel operate in. Being able to develop new ways of thinking, of coping with failure, and not succumbing to it leads to a more aware, more flexible and more resilient workforce. If we never encounter failure, how can we learn to do better? How can we develop a new coping strategy when we have little experience of having done so before? Getting things right first time is not guaranteed, so how do we cope if we don't succeed at the first attempt?

If our personnel have gained experience through AT of trying, failing and learning, whether or not ultimately successful, then this allows for increased opportunity to learn and develop ways of actually succeeding. Self-efficacy (how much we believe we can succeed at a particular

task) is directly linked to previous mastery of experiences. Those with higher self-efficacy (albeit not over-confidence) have a growth mindset, and approach tasks with a solution-focused attitude – they can recover more quickly after failure, and they have a lower risk of stress and depression associated with task failure. Further, self-efficacy and in turn self-esteem (how much we value ourselves) are directly and positively impacted by outdoor experiences such as those found in AT.

We face a cultural battle too. In a world where life is fast-paced and the next thrill can be accessed at the touch of a screen, training has to keep up to maintain the attention of its participants. The research is divided as to how long a person's attention span actually is, but suffice it to say, we can recognise the limitations to classroom teaching. AT limits the time spent in a classroom so as to maximise kinaesthetic learning experiences. Indeed, a study over 13 years demon-

'In a world where life is fast-paced and the next thrill can be accessed at the touch of a screen, training has to keep up to maintain the attention of its participants'

strated the lasting positive impact on self-concept (how we view ourselves) of a single mountain summit experience in a group of adults. It would appear that AT is indeed memorable as well as having a direct transfer of learning to other domains. This transferability is possible when we become more experienced at overcoming obstacles, by facing failure and growing more resilient. Mastery



only comes with experience, so we must expose ourselves to new experiences in order to develop the capacity to reflect, overcome problems and transfer any learning to the next experience.

Does AT meet its objective? Does it meet the three aims? Research in this particular stream is limited, and would be an interesting and beneficial path of enquiry. Until then, we must draw on the extant literature which quite clearly demonstrates the positive impact of AT in the outdoors on participants. The only question we have to answer is this – is there any other type of training that has been shown to develop its participants as AT does?

If we want to develop and retain cohesive, more resilient personnel, who are more effective as leaders, then AT is definitely more than just a week away from the office.

Authors

Dr Samantha McElligott is a leadership consultant and has been an active outdoor practitioner and expedition leader for more than 17 years. She specializes in research-led leadership development, particularly in the outdoor context. Her research interests include quantitative examination of the impact of leadership; transformational leadership development; and the effects of outdoor learning on outcomes such as self-esteem, leadership and teamwork.

Major (MAA) Al Seaton RAPTC is the OC of the Joint Service Mountain Training Wing (Llanrwst) and has led JSMT's Leadership Development Training Programme. A former Physical Education Officer in the RAF, he has worked in AT since 2003 and for JSMT for the past 11 years.

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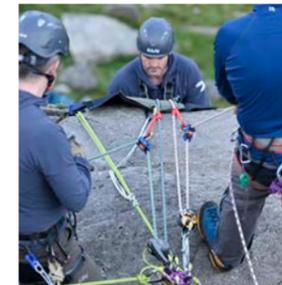


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PROJECT ALPINE SPIRIT: A YEAR OF CLIMBING THE ALPINE 4000M PEAKS

By Rebecca Coles

It was April this year when a late season dump of snow blanketed the Alps. Excitement for powder skiing was offset with worry about the increased avalanche risk to negotiated. We'd skied the Strahlhorn the previous day, huffing and puffing our way up this low angled 4000m peak in the Pennine Alps near Saas Fee. This summit kicked off our bid to try and climb all the 4000m peaks in the Alps. The next day we decided to head towards the Rimpfischhorn. It was slow going breaking trail through foot-deep powder. An exposed short section of glacial ice barred our way. Donning crampons Lou led up awkward ground with skis on her back, placing an ice screw as she went. She stopped abruptly, attaching herself to an ice screw and reaching down to her boot. Her left crampon had sheared at the toe bail. There was nothing for it but to turn around and head back down. It was just our second peak, of 82, and we had already been unsuccessful.

Before setting out to climb on this project to climb the alpine 4000ers I felt that pit-of-stomach sickness. It was the feeling of fear but not fear borne from the climbing which lay ahead, the danger of rockfall, avalanches or falling in a crevasse, but the fear of shame from not succeeding.

The higher and more technical a peak, the greater the uncertainty of reaching the summit. These are the odds an alpinist accepts. However, to reach the summit of 82 peaks, with so many different variables which need to fall in our favour, the chances of succeeding are very small. In fact, there is a very high chance of failure.

If I could have left for the Alps having not said a word to anyone about my intentions, then I would have. However, I needed a team, and the team needed funding, so this wasn't an option. As I planned and researched routes more unanswerable questions kept popping up. Would the weather and conditions make this challenge possible? Would we have the skill, fitness and nerve for such an endeavour?

Over several weeks we skied peaks in the Pennine Alps, the Bishorn and the wide,



Team summit selfie. The author, Lou Beetlestone and Mo Barclay



Traversing the Nadelgrat



Preparing to descend the Bishorn



Climbing the Finsteraarhorn

open expanses of the Bernese Oberland. We returned to the Rimpfischhorn, acclimatised and fit, and made an ascent from the first lift and back to the valley in a day without a problem. We finished our Spring on skis in the Bernina. Escaping the Easter weekend crowds, we approached the Piz Bernina from the Italian side and enjoyed an ascent of this, the most easterly 4000er, captivated by the wild and remote feel of the area. I made a note that this was a place I'd like to return to.

Our initial failed attempt on the Rimpfischhorn was easy to reconcile, an equipment failure was a justifiable explanation to descend empty handed. Later, when we returned to the Alps in June, things were going well. We climbed a few peaks from the Saastal which were still under a lot of snow. Then, donning our skis again, made an ascent of the highest peak in the Bernese Oberland, the Finsteraarhorn. Back at the Jungfrauoch we climbed the Mönch and Jungfrau before taking the return train journey through the Eiger. A stable forecast then prompted us to head to the Monte Rosa where we traversed the range, often breaking trail through fresh snow and forcing the route from the Zumsteinspitze to the Dufourspitze and across to Nordend. This four-day foray bagged us a satisfying 16 out of the 18 Monte Rosa 4000m summits.

After a couple of day's rest in the Rhône valley, which was baking in a blistering June heatwave, we headed into the mountains again. We climbed the Matterhorn via the Hornli Ridge and then the next day made the comparative amble up the Breithorn western and central summits, which we'd had to miss out when traversing the Monte Rosa due to avalanche risk. The following week, in the Mont Blanc Massif, we warmed up on the iconic Dent du Géant. The next day, in the crisp pre-dawn stillness we crossed the

'Our confidence was sky high from success after success, but the mountains have a habit of bringing you down to Earth when you least expect it'

bergschund and made our way up to the Aiguilles du Diable. This route comprises five rock pinnacles of sublime granite climbing, with the trickiest climbing on the very last spire, an exhilarating finale. As the sun dipped, we made our way over Mont Blanc du Tacul and descended to a deserted Col du Midi.

Our confidence was sky high from success after success, but the mountains have a habit of bringing you down to Earth when you least expect it.



The wide-open spaces of the Bernese Oberland

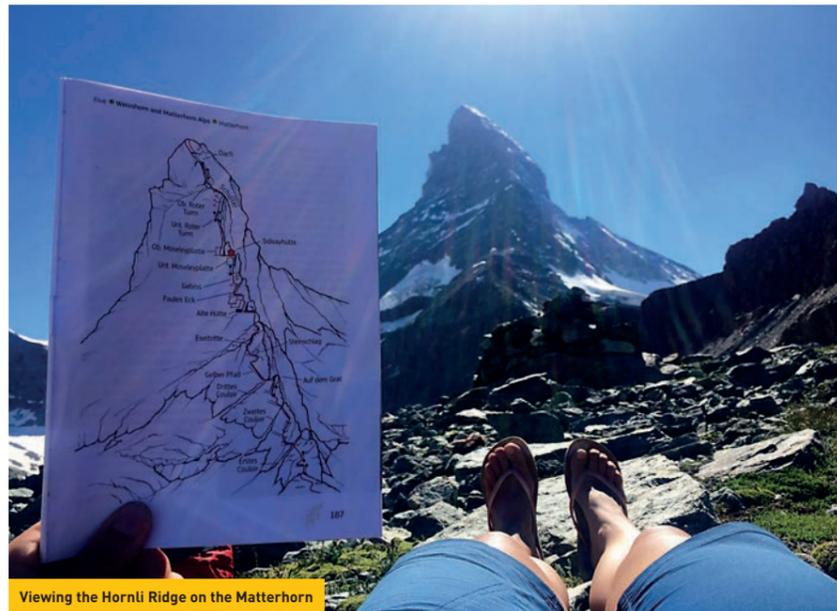
When the idea of climbing all the 4000 m peaks of the Alps popped into my head, and I began researching in earnest, I couldn't believe how few people had climbed them all.

Why was this? Was it impossibly difficult? Was the idea that I could do this laughable? The idea of giving it a go scared me. Yet it nagged, like an itch that had to be scratched.

Research led into tedious definitions of 4000m peaks. It seems like a simple task, to composing a list of all peaks in the Alps over 4000m. However, because of differences in what defines an independent peak from a subsidiary summit, there are multiple lists. A list of 52 peaks, published in 1971, was made up of peaks with a prominence of 100m. Martin Moran came up with a list of 75 peaks which, impressively, he completed in one continuous journey in 1995. Most recently, the UIAA came up with a list of 82 peaks. The UIAA took a more holistic approach in composing their list, choosing peaks over 4000m which had mountaineering interest. People have completed various lists, often taking decades, a handful taking a single summer. Only two Brits had completed the UIAA list of 82, Steve Hartland and Ben Tibbetts, both of whom are British Mountain Guides. According to our research no all-women's team had completed any of these lists, over any amount of time.

As I tried to image what it would be like to climb 82 alpine peaks more questions whirled around my head.

How would my body cope? I'd climbed 4000m peaks before and all I remembered was being exhausted afterwards. Could I physically manage climbing back-to-back peaks? Would anyone else want to do this too? As with most climbing you need at least one other to join you to



Viewing the Hornli Ridge on the Matterhorn

make a climbing team. Could we tolerate each other for such an extended period, under such intensity? Do I have the skills and knowledge for all the peaks? Can I stay motivated for that length of time? I had never taken on something as long, physically demanding and technical as this before. It would involve over 50 alpine starts, and would be relentless in nature. Would I simply have had enough halfway through? Would the weather and conditions make it possible? A few weeks of poor weather could destroy our chances as we would quickly lose time to complete the routes in the short spells they would be in optimum condition.

I was in view of the hut when it started raining. "It won't take me longer than 10 mins to get there." I thought, "I won't dig my waterproofs out my bag. It's forecast to be a light shower." The intensity of the rain increased rapidly, and I was drenched by the time I got to the entrance of the Refuge du Couvercle. Whilst we ate dinner we silently watched the rain slowly clear. We'd planned to climb the Droites the next day, before the last possible route on this peak was made impassable by yawning crevasses and rockfall. Now, uncertain whether the route would have enough time to freeze overnight, due to the prolonged, unforecast rain and overcast conditions, we switched objectives to the Aiguille Verte via the Moine Ridge.

A midnight start is never conducive to enthusiasm. In the short hours of rest, I had tried to dry my trousers between my

liner and the itchy hut blanket which had also dampened my spirits. We groped our way in the dark to the bergschrund, crossed this and grovelled our way up a damp and icy gully. We weaved around

'We weaved around the rocky face, never quite sure whether we were on route or not'

the rocky face, never quite sure whether we were on route or not. Dawn came but the route-finding difficulties didn't abate, and it was slowing us down. After 8 hours, and still unsure about the line, we made the decision to turn around and head down.



Abseiling off the Aiguilles du Diable

This failure cut deeper than on the Rimpfischhorn two months earlier. Firstly, we'd not succeeded due to our personal skills, or lack of it, rather than equipment failure. Discovering that, on this day, you are not good enough is always a bitter pill to swallow. Secondly, it was likely that this was the last chance we had to climb these routes this summer. The intensity and the early timing of the June heatwave had accelerated the opening of crevasses and bergschrunds, plus caused an increased risk of rockfall as the snow and ice melted, which was effectively gluing loose rock together. In all, this meant that we'd now missed the conditions window for these summits. As we made the long walk back down the Mer de Glace and up the long ladders to the Montnvers train station we knew for the first time that we wouldn't complete our Alpine 4000m peaks project in a year.

If an outcome is unknown, then it can be said that there is uncertainty. Fear of the uncertain is a normal human response and can result in feeling stressed and anxious. It is no wonder that as humans we crave certainty. Predictability means that we can plan our future, which provides security. We shy away from uncertainty, stay within the known, our comfort zone, and avoid the unknown which initiates this stress reaction. The trouble is life isn't certain, we don't know what will happen to us tomorrow, let alone in a decade. Coping well with uncertainty is a life skill. Having confidence in our adaptability and ability to cope builds resilience to life's stresses.

However, in the mountains there is a genuine risk of injury or worse, so fear can also keep us safe. There is a fine line between testing ourselves and getting out of our depth. A steady progression to more technical, remote or physically demanding challenges builds good judgement. This, together with humility, can protect us from crossing that line.

But what would happen if never put ourselves into a situation where we face uncertainty? How will we find our limits and therefore, conversely, our potential? How can we learn how to cope with uncertainty if we don't ever experience it? The problem is that to face uncertainty we have to be prepared to fail more and this is an uncomfortable situation to put ourselves in, and a downright absurd thing to do when on holiday!

After we'd recovered, both physically and from the disappointment of not having succeeded on the Aiguille de Verte, we picked ourselves up and continued. Fantastic mountain days stretched into the hot alpine summer. The Zinalrothorn and Ober Gablehorn above Zermatt, the Dent Blanche, a valley-to-valley ascent of Gran Paradiso in a 9 hour round trip and then the long and beautiful walk-into the Dent d'Herens, a peak which surpassed all our expectations. A road trip to the

'One of the real highlights of the summer was climbing the Schreckhorn, a 4000er in the eastern Bernese Alps adjacent to the Eiger'

Écrins for a swift ascent of the Dômes de Neiges together with the Barre des Écrins as the summer began to show the first hints of Autumn. Following by a traverse of the Nadelgrat, starting in the Mattertal and finishing in the Saastal. A couple of long days with a biting wind but we were rewarded with five more 4000ers, including the Nadelhorn and the Lenzspitze.

One of the real highlights of the summer was climbing the Schreckhorn, a 4000er in the eastern Bernese Alps adjacent to the Eiger. In the same very long day out we traversed from the summit of the Schreckhorn to the Lauteraarhorn in perfect conditions. A few days earlier,

we'd made the not so technical, but long (a 1700m summit day), ascent of the Aletschhorn from the Oberaletsch hut and then afterwards the beautiful, but brutally steep, Weissshorn. That week we totalled nearly 9000m of ascent, and descent, and climbing up to D+. If anything represented how much we'd come on as a team, both in fitness and technical ability then this was it.

Going to the Alps to attempt to become the first all-women's team to climb the 4000ers opened my eyes to the fact that I didn't need to look to the other side of the world to find 'firsts'. And, and if you do a little digging, it's not that difficult to find others. I know, for example, that no British military team has climbed all the Alpine 4000ers, maybe any military team...

Those who are prepared to fail will also have to face being told that it's not possible and fight an inner turmoil of balancing responsibility with ambition. Those that doubt them may be provided right, or they may not. Less than two months after Roger Bannister broke the 4 minute mile, John Landy not only also achieved it but he beat Bannister's time. Over the next few years multiple other athletes ran sub-4 minute miles, suggesting that the 4 minute mile was as much a psychological barrier as a physical one.

Or as Nelson Mandela said, "It always seems impossible until it is done."

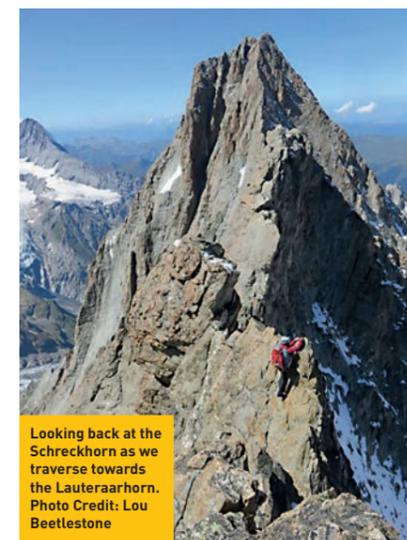
We climbed a total of 56 4000 peaks in 2019, more than any other British women have in a single season. Pursuing a list of 4000ers took me to places in the Alps I'd previously known little about, and gave me ideas for where I'd like to return. The extend amount of time climbing allowed me to improve as an alpinist immeasurably. And, by facing uncertainty I learnt a lot about myself, gaining so much from being prepared to fail.

We didn't complete the list of 82, we still have 26 to go. Did we succeed, or fail? I think it depends whether you see the glass half full or half empty.

We'd like to thank our sponsors Montane, the BMC, Stance Socks. As well as funding from the Austrian Alpine Club and support from Leki UK, Julbo Eyewear, Firepot Outdoor Food.



Descending Gran Paradiso after a long day



Looking back at the Schreckhorn as we traverse towards the Lauteraarhorn. Photo Credit: Lou Beeststone



The Schreckhorn towers above the hut



The Author on the Aiguilles du Diable



EXERCISE ARCTIC MOUNTAINEER

Boldly going where no British Army personnel had gone before; Ex Arctic Mountaineer saw a team of 12 Army personnel venture into the remote wilderness that is Auyuittuq National Park on Baffin Island during the Spring of this year. Situated in the Canadian Arctic, Baffin Island presents unique challenges: its harsh climate; the brutal but stunning terrain and the sheer remoteness



The awe inspiring sense of space and remoteness struck the team as they made their way into the National Park; granite mountains towered over the river valley, sheer rock faces giving way to the occasional glimpse of a glacier. Wow. Ski mountaineering blends the disciplines of skiing with mountaineering to enable access to more remote and challenging terrain – something some of the team had never had the opportunity to do before. It wasn't long before they were strapping skis to backs and precariously balancing across ice and rocks, a good way to get rusty skills back to the fore in preparation of what was to come. The expedition brought together a range of skills the team had learnt on different courses, such as use of an ice axe and crampons, awareness of risk in mountainous environments, using an ice axe or a skis as a belay, and some of the more technical elements of ski touring.

The environment was merciless and unforgiving, with temperatures dropping to -35 at their lowest; you know it's cold when your eye lashes start to freeze together! But the opportunities to explore were endless. The team based

themselves at the southern end of Summit lake, protected from some of the winds whipping through the Akshayuk Pass. The expedition was based on an exploratory model, with daily activity being planned in accordance with the terrain in which the team found themselves but also dictated by the weather and avalanche conditions.

The team wasted no time exploring, separating into small teams to recon routes on both sides of the valley. Lean snow conditions meant lots of boot packing over terminal moraine but worth the effort for the snow covered glacial fields beyond. With plenty of gullies, snowy peaks and ice falls around, the team was spoilt for choice. Some summits were limited without full scale climbing but a number of the team summited Mt Tyr, skiing up though a layer of cloud to be rewarded with perfect views across the Auyuittuq National Park. A large part of the team also summited a potential unclimbed peak, having seen the subsidiary peak on a previous day the route started as a gentle ski, getting

steeper until switching to full mountaineering mode to bag the summit.

A long day tour around the foot of Mt Asgard was a particular highlight; conditions were perfect, and the views out across the frozen lakes and mountains stunning. It was slightly concerning to stumble across fresh polar bear tracks but soon forgotten as ascending further up the glacier, Mt Asgard came into view. Reaching up 2000m into the sky, Asgard is famous for featuring in the opening sequence of The Spy Who Loved me and was an impressive sight; unsurprisingly it is the most famous of the Baffin Mountains. Surrounded by such fantastic views it was impossible not to be completely inspired; a privilege to be part of something so unique.

As one of the team members said on return "Ignite a passion early on in your career, find something which you like doing and work at it. You never know where it may take you". Adventurous Training can really take you to the ends of the Earth.





EX DRAGON MONGOLIAN ODYSSEY

By Jodi Longyear

Genghis (or Chinggis) Khan was a strong leader, powerful diplomat and seasoned traveller according to most Mongolians, who revere him

In the west and the Islamic world the view tends to focus on some of his more negative attributes. Focussing on the positives you soon realise that Genghis Khan had many of the skills required of a British soldier. He was a great judge of character and leader of men, he was adventurous and brave and he also pushed the boundaries of what was possible.

Exercise DRAGON MONGOLIAN ODYSSEY was an opportunity for soldiers from 42 Engineer Regiment (Geographic) to visit Mongolia and challenge themselves. The key objectives of the exercise were to complete the Alpine Mountaineering Foundation course, to climb some of the highest peaks in Mongolia and to develop leadership and diplomatic skills while dealing with each other and local people

The Altai mountain range in Mongolia is very remote and the first challenge was to get there. Flights to Beijing, Ulaanbaatar and finally Ölgii got the 11 person team close. Next was a 200km journey in 4x4 minibuses on dirt tracks which proved to be an early test of endurance and nerves. The final part of the journey was a short trek into Base Camp 1 with the aid of camels to carry our kit.



Base Camp 1 gave everyone the opportunity to acclimatise, learn or revise alpine skills and get into the routine of camp. Our group were the only ones based here and the only visitors were occasional herders. Hawks guarded our tents against adventurous rodents



whilst herds of camel and horses watched our flanks.

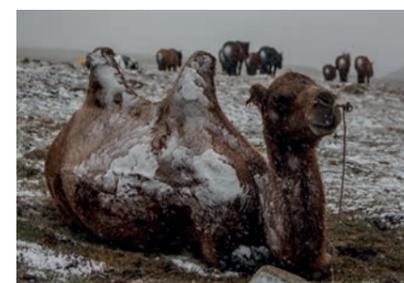
Stunning rock ridges proved on closer inspection to resemble poorly balanced fridge sized Jenga blocks. A number of routes were none the less delicately climbed. Much use was made of the Lyen Granye glacier for AMF training. Crevasse rescue techniques were learnt and then ignored as we simply pulled each other out of the various crevasses we found ourselves in. Day time temperatures of 25°C and night time temperatures of -5°C were a pale reflection of the 70°C temperature swing that this part of Mongolia suffers annually. After a week we set off for Base Camp 2.

From Base Camp 2 attempts were made on three of the highest peaks in Mongolia. Friendship Peak (Nairamdal) is a 4100 metre high mountain on the border with China and Russia. The whole team survived a period of zero visibility to rendezvous at the top of this peak without blundering into the wrong country. At the small cairn on the peak one member of the rope team could stand in the largest country in the world, one in the most populated and the third in the country with the lowest population density- very Geo!

Malchin Peak, at 4050m, proved a more friendly peak, with reasonable visibility across the border with Russia and a group of Mongolians, French and Germans enjoying lunch at the top.

The next, and final, peak was Khuiten Peak (4374m). Khuiten was a more technical challenge and was attempted from an advance base camp. Despite a 4am start, an unfortunate amount of snow cover and a fierce wind one rope team made it to the top of Khuiten. Spurred on by their colleagues success two rope teams made a second attempt at summiting Khuiten the following day, departing at 2am. Constant snow and wind drove these teams back to the mess tent for tea and breakfast.

With the adventurous aspect of the trip completed everyone returned to Ulaanbaatar to visit the world's largest equine statue and the British Ambassador enjoying lunch at the top.





EX ALPINE TORCH 7-15 JUN 19

By Mike Sheeran

On 7 Jun 19, 8 members of the AGC(ETS) deployed on a 9-day expedition to climb Mt Blanc in France. The aims of the expedition were to summit Mt Blanc, develop the next generation of AGC(ETS) mountaineers to participate in large-scale Army/Joint mountaineering expeditions in the future, and to highlight the opportunities available in the AGC(ETS) for recruitment and retention purposes.

Supported by a 4-strong instructor group including 3 x Reserve soldiers from the RAMC (LCpl Eddie Tomkins), AGC(ETS) (Maj Al Mason), the RAF and a locally-based British Mountaineering Guide (BMG), the group travelled from Worthy Down to Chamonix via the Channel Tunnel and the long drive through eastern France.

Rather than staying in the Chamonix area, the expedition would acclimatise in Italy; within the Gran Paradiso National Park. Set just over the border, Gran Paradiso (4061m) is widely used by groups to prepare for its larger neighbour. Based out of the Chabod Hut (2750m), the expedition spent two days developing the rope work skills and conducting crevasse training to safely attempt the climb on Mt Blanc. The intent was to summit Gran Paradiso as well, but deep wet snow and strong winds made the attempt unachievable forcing the expedition to return back to the Chabod Hut and the Valsavarenche Valley.

A further failed acclimatisation attempt at the Torino Hut (3500m) due to thunderstorms meant the expedition moved



back into France and the Chamonix valley without being properly acclimatised at altitude. Anyone with any high-altitude experience understands acclimatisation is essential to deliver success in the high mountains. However, the weather gods had conspired against the expedition meaning the attempt on Mt Blanc would be even tougher.

Despite the issues, spirits were high as the expedition arrived at the Belvedere cable car, which would take us to the Gouter



Ridge route starting point at 1900m. Weather conditions were not forecast to be particularly helpful on route to the Tete Rousse Hut (3167m) with heavy snow and strong winds expected. These conditions severely hampered progression. The route to Nid D'Aigle (2300m) was fairly simple with a small element of snow cover in places. However, the remaining part of the route was tough. Heavy snowfall and deep snow on the route made the ascent to Tete Rousse treacherous and tested all the expedition members, including the instructors. This route is normally fairly easy with no snow and takes 3-4hrs to ascend. The expedition achieved it in 6hrs displaying bags of courage, determination and good mountaineering skills to navigate up the ridge in low visibility and blizzard conditions. We then hunkered down in the hut to enjoying a traditional alpine meal with a few other hardy groups had made the trip up to the hut (a large number of groups never made it due to the weather conditions).

Weather conditions did not improve with more heavy snowfall occurring overnight. Our BMG instructor and a few guides ventured a little further up the mountain to inspect the Grand Couloir. This is normally the most dangerous part of the mountain; where most deaths occur from rockfall. The Couloir was full of snow; a dangerous avalanche risk for anyone attempting to cross. The expedition leader in



conjunction with the instructors decided this was a risk not worth taking; and made the decision to head back down the mountain. This decision was vindicated by no other groups attempting to cross the Couloir either. This was a major disappointment but the right decision; getting down the mountain from Tete Rousse would be hard in itself in the deep snow and strong winds.

'Huge avalanches thundering down the mountain due to the sheer amount of snow that had fallen overnight'

Kitting up and operating in 4 x rope teams, the expedition slowly made their way back down the ridge. Conditions were testing and really pushed each individual and instructor to ensure each team got down the mountain safely. Descending, the

ferocity of Mt Blanc and the surrounding ridges was made clear, as the slopes began to purge – huge avalanches thundering down the mountain due to the sheer amount of snow that had fallen overnight. This further focussed the expedition to get down the mountain safely back to Nid D'Aigle, the Belvedere cable car and a late booking at a Chamonix-based hotel.

With two days still available in the valley, the expedition conducted a day's Via Ferrata activity. Many of the expedition had never attempted Via Ferrata before – a great activity high up on a rock face overlooking the valley. The expedition also attempted to plan a high ridge scrambling day up around the Aiguille du Midi (3800m) but was thwarted again by strong winds, which closed the cable car to the summit. Therefore, a day's rock climbing was conducted in the valley before the





long drive back to Worthy Down via the Channel Tunnel again.

Whilst Ex ALPINE TORCH didn't achieve its aim to summit Mt Blanc, it was great expedition, which has proven to be an excellent recruitment and retention tool. The interest from current serving AGC(ETS) members to conduct further big mountaineering expeditions has been extensive; so much so, the Expedition 2IC is already



putting together plans to return to Mt Blanc next year. Many of the expedition members

'All left better instructors from their experiences on ALPINE TORCH'

are keen to return and two individuals have put their names forward to participate in



the British Armed Forces expedition to climb Mt Everest in 2024.

The expedition unfortunately fell foul of some pretty poor weather conditions; the worst June weather in the Alps for a number of years. However, the conditions absolutely tested, not just the mountaineering skills of each individual and instructors, but also stretched the determination and motivation of every single part of the expedition. This ultimately is the aim of Adventure Training; to stretch Service Personnel so they develop to better soldiers, sailors and airmen on operations. The expedition also was incredibly beneficial for our Reserve instructors. All were highly experienced operators in the mountains as Alpine Mountain Leaders, but had not experienced such treacherous conditions as group leaders before. They learned a huge amount from the BMG instructor and all left better instructors from their experiences on ALPINE TORCH.

The Expedition Leader and the whole team would like to thank the AMA with their support enabling us to deliver this expedition.

EX TIGER ARRC AN INSTRUCTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

By Glenn Bloomer

Bruce Bynorth initially contacted me in mid 2018 with a proposal to instruct on his planned expedition to Eastern Greenland in the summer of 2019

I knew Bruce from old so I immediately said that I was interested but didn't really think that the expedition would gain traction due to the logistics, cost and the lack of previous military expeditions to the area. I contacted a couple of extra instructors that I knew would be interested and then put the trip to the back of my mind as I had a large scale expedition to Nepal to deal with first. To his credit, Bruce persisted with his plan, gained the funding, provided preparatory training and hey presto, Bruce contacted me to tell me the expedition had been green lighted but had been highlighted for a High Risk and Remote presentation... not entirely unreasonable as it turned out!

of 'is this really happening' which was continued by an overnight stop in Iceland, all very civilised so far...until on the flight into Kulusuk Airport and our first sight of icebergs in the ocean, followed by an incredibly mountainous archipelago full of glaciers. Excitement mounted as we landed and met our expedition outfitter, Matt, who casually turned up to meet us carrying a rifle....as you do. At this point my thought process turned to 'this IS really happening', a short walk into the small Inuit settlement of Kulusuk followed with Matt informing us that the rifle was necessary due to the presence of Polar Bears and their disdain for the usual anti bear drills, shouting 'Woah Bear' and not running.



Approaching Point Albion

up trip flares, myself, Bruce and the other instructors sat down with Matt and began to plan ahead. It became apparent to myself just how 'High Risk and Remote' we actually were, particularly when we moved into the second phase of the expedition in the area of the Karale Glacier. We would be approximately 80km from habitation with no immediate rescue options, less ourselves. The nearest helicopter rescue

Meeting the team for the first time at Luton Airport added to my feeling

As the team members prepped our kit, packed food and worked out how to set





was over two hours away and across the Greenland Icecap...exciting times indeed!

The next day we deployed to a nearby island and set to work delivering the AMF course based around the unnamed peaks surrounding the Apusiaajik Glacier. If an instructor could dream up a perfect training environment to deliver an AMF course, then Apusiaajik would be it. A superb base camp, short (enough) approaches to the glaciers, relatively benign glaciers and spectacular peaks with enough technical interest to keep everyone's minds focused. Truly a magical few days and definitely the first time I've mountaineered with a loaded rifle.

With the team now fully into 'expedition life' we were picked up by local Inuit hunters and transported north via boats, the trip up to the Karale Glacier was mind blowing, with huge narrow fjords, massive icebergs and glaciers tumbling down to the sea...the only time our eyes were averted from the endless mountaineering opportunities was when the excited shout of 'whale' was heard! Unbelievably we had chanced upon two feeding



humpback whales, words fail to describe the joy in seeing these leviathans in their natural habitat.

Phase Two Base Camp was on the south side of a huge fjord, unnamed on our maps. Surrounding us on all sides where glaciers and directly opposite the campsite a glacier calved into the fjord all day and all night (which was actually light due to being so far north). It was

'...we were incredibly remote, in a little explored area, with very poor maps coupled with the fear of falling into crevasses or being eaten by a bear'

at this point that I actually felt pangs of anxiety, we were incredibly remote, in a little explored area, with very poor maps coupled with the fear of falling into crevasses or being eaten by a bear, both very real possibilities in our minds. With this in mind, I chose to keep our margin for risk very much in the manageable bracket



by using our first day to recce a large glacier to the west with a view to checking its complexity and identifying access and exit points for later routes. What ensued was a 'quality mountain day' with three glaciers crossed and 20km covered over moraine and ice. Upon returning to camp we exchanged information with the other instructors who had been turned back on their objectives by a very complex crevasse field high on the mountain. With this info tucked away we set out the next morning with a 'just have a look' mentality. We could still see the other teams tracks from the previous day and just before their high point, I spied a subsidiary peak that look accessible with a little route finding. After carefully traversing the glacier we reached a beautiful snow arête that led to a short scramble to the peak. With no name on the map, we decided to name the peak Point Albion and the snow arête, The Hammersley Arête, named after, the now demolished, Hammersley Barracks in Aldershot where myself and Bruce had completed our RAPTC Probationers course. On the descent from Point Albion back to Base Camp, I spotted a shapely peak that looked like it might be accessible with a nose for route finding and a bit of luck. After relaying this information to the other instructors, it was decided that all three teams would make an attempt the next day. Incredibly the hope for simple access turned out to be as good as we could have hoped for, with a physical but technically easy approach up dry glaciers before crossing a hanging glacier to reach a rock ridge. This ridge turned out to be the Crib Goch (ish) of Eastern Greenland and led to an isolated subsidiary peak with huge drops on three sides, incredibly we had bagged another virgin summit, our second in two days. Point Cadell was named amid much back slapping from the entire team who made it to the summit one after the other.

By this stage of the expedition, bodies were starting to flag, however I had



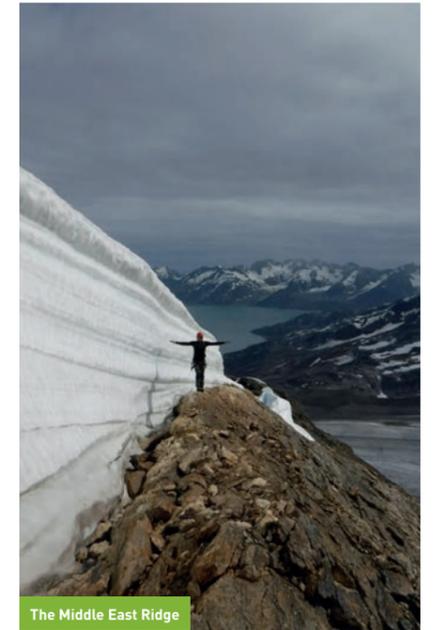
Point Albion, First Ascent

finally started to feel 'comfortable' in the environment and so with one day remaining we gave the team members a choice of a day off, spent trying to eat the last of the rations or trying 'one more route'. A few hardy souls volunteered, and a quick reshuffle of the teams led us to try 'The Middle East Ridge' of Pt 1450, another unclimbed objective that was only an hours walk from Base Camp. Duncan and his student took a direct line up the largest lateral moraine to access the ridge whilst I decided that the glaciated slabs might provide a more interesting (and physically easier). What ensued was 400m of superb grade 1 (2 in some spots) scrambling before a short snow gully led us onto the ridge above the moraines. We named this new route 'The Falls of Flora' after Bruce's little girl whose birthday it was back in the UK. Now on the ridge properly we continued to climb until meeting Duncan and Struli descending. Sadly they had been forced to turn around

about 400m before the summit due to the nature of the route changing and becoming a lot more loose and technical. With only one day remaining of the trip and not wishing to push our luck any further, this was the right decision. We followed in their footsteps to their high point, built a small cairn and the descended safely.

The following day we waited for our boat pick up with tired bodies but happy hearts and listened to the sound of silence being broken occasionally by a newly 'birthed' iceberg being released into the fjord and onwards in its journey to the open sea.

Exercise Tiger ARRC was a truly ambitious expedition that was incredibly successful in terms of achieving its stated aims, delivering JSAT qualifications, building teams and the bonds of friendship. We were also incredibly privileged in



The Middle East Ridge



Karale Glacier

ascending two previously unclimbed peaks, climbing a new route and narrowly missing out on another unclimbed route and peak.

From a personal point of view, it was a deeply satisfying expedition that stretched me as an instructor. Greenland has left a huge impression upon me, I cannot wait until the next time!





EX NORTHERN LION 3

HQNW/4 LANCS – AUG 2019

By Lee Magowan

As with any expedition, the question is...what needs to be achieved? Well this expedition was to push novices and those who have some experience of Klettersteig to a whole new level...stretch (elastic) but not break!

HQNW and 4 LANCS jointly delivered an expedition to Bavaria in southern Germany. Those in attendance were from a number of cap badges, there were reserves, FTRS, Regular, soldiers and officers, a right mix!

DAY 1 AND 2:

We set off from Fulwood Barracks in Preston and drove to Dover where we sailed to Calais. This sounds like a simple task and really boring but the usual administrative hurdles will always be there, European driving matrix, left hand drive familiarisation, radios, bonnet briefs, European shell cards, sat nav's and driving hours had to be mashed together quickly to ensure a smooth journey. And of course as this was a flash expedition and we were out of the Bicester loan pool timelines (Ridiculous 60 days) to get kit, so a local purchase enabled the expedition to be suitably prepared and much more comfortable than issued kit from Bicester.

Now we were on the continent and moving close to an adventure, it's a fairly long drive from the French coast to Bavaria, particularly Oberstdorf. Many stops, espressos and croissants, change driver and pedal to the metal into Germany! (Felt like the race to Bagdad to be honest).

The expedition leader chose to stay in the Oberstdorf hostel just outside of the main town, it was a great choice and a quiet isolated location, its perfect to prevent people from wandering off easily, highly recommended.



The first thing was to get into the accommodation, kit issue and then kit demonstrations, fitting and technical discussion... Cpl Stafford had his tightest PTI top on for the demonstration; it was hit with some of the older local German men.

The expedition leader Lt Col Johnny Lighten, 2IC CSgt Paul Cockram and guest instructors Capt Lee Magowan and Cpl Shane Stafford got together to discuss the plan for the trip with alternative plans for poor weather; this is necessary and absolutely required to be reviewed on the

hoof. The plans didn't change except a few tweaks here and there to give a bit of variation to the itinerary mostly reactionary due to unwanted weather systems.

DAY 3:

It was hot and steep... yes it's the Klettersteige Tegelberg that remained constant the whole day, for some it felt like it was never going to end. Regrettably the group experienced the sight and sounds of a climber fall past them; the fall was seen by our lead group and the impact and settlement of the body, including the whole search and rescue procedure

was seen by everyone on the mountain that day. It really focuses the mind on the task ahead, this was also an opportunity for the leaders to hammer home safety, courage, teamwork, resilience and finally trust. The sight of a body being winched up and then flown off is very surreal for many and for some it's not new... but at least it wasn't a hot HLS.

The route was enjoyable except the tragedy bit, the tegelberghaus hut at the top was very entertaining, live cultural horn blowing with a bit of singing, a few lemonades later and there were a couple of different descent plans, some by foot and some by cable car. The cable car way down is 14 euro and takes 5 min... I knew instantly which one I was choosing!

The evenings were a mix of cooking and people purchasing pizza or other food items locally, the option to purchase food for self-catering option is difficult in the hostel, particularly as there are only two small fridges that cater for up to a hundred plus in the hostel. Our plan B... we choose to repack the fridges to our advantage. Arrival on a Sunday is not recommended, it's a nightmare to get anywhere that is open or able to deliver any distance...of course McDonalds is open for those who like to eat rubbish!

DAY 4:

The second day of activities began with a programme change, looking up and seeing lightning flashes and then checks of the weather over the normal apps dictated being on the wire wasn't advised, the safe option after considerable deliberation and risk assessment was to go

to a local indoor climbing centre. This was the perfect wet weather solution as it gave us an opportunity to work on people's foot and body movement for some of the harder routes we would attempt later in the week. The instructors got the group warmed up and did some simple bouldering movement to get them thinking; the group then moved onto bottom roping on easy routes and were coached throughout. It was a worthwhile day at the wall as some members had never had that level of tuition or coaching indoors.

'I was forever shouting "straight arms, strong hands"... and as a consequence for not doing it correctly a couple found themselves on their "chin and teeth"'

DAY 5:

We crossed the border into Austria and made our way to the town of Riezlern where we took the cable car to the station at the top where the Kanzelwand faces you immediately. The group raced to the start point in anticipation to be the first on it, again broken down into the most suitable groups, we set off. The Walsersteig-Erlebnisklettersteig is the easier of the two routes on the Kanzelwand, it is a B/C with an entertaining Burma bridge in the middle of the route. It took no longer than an hour to complete as the group was fresh and full of beans.

The second challenge was to go for the 2-Lander-Sportklettersteig around the corner; this wasn't everyone's cup of tea but certainly an enjoyable route. This was an absolute challenge for some, this route is a pumpy route for those who haven't learnt to trust their feet and haven't cognitively learnt body positioning as yet. I was forever shouting "straight arms, strong hands"... and as a consequence for not doing it correctly a couple found themselves on their "chin and teeth". The best thing about the route is when the fog closes in, you look down over the shear drops and it's just fog, can't see anything and for some it's terrifying and for others it's a distraction from seeing how far up they are, or how far the ground is away! It's a great option as it's highly accessible, cable car up and a short walk in to get started and a shorter walk off. Tip – Don't do the sports Klettersteig in wet weather, its highly polished in many places and it added to it difficulty, consider that with novices...if you're not one for advice bring a rope and know what to do with it. I found that having good knowledge of rope rescue techniques is a must and not all Klettersteig leaders have that, especially the non-rock Leaders/Instructors.

DAY 6:

After the great performance of the group over the last few days, it was time to take them on an adventure with an overnight stay in a mountain hut; the route would be the Mindelheimer-Klettersteig and a stay at the Mindelheimer hut at the end of the route. This route isn't technically difficult mostly A/B with one B/C section, however it's a long day on the ridge. The ridge is also the border; you start in Austria move



Mindelheimer ridge



Nearly there on the Kanzelwand



YMCA in the falls



Team PhotoGenic...[Not]



along the border and sleep in Bavaria, get up in the morning and move back to Austria to get the transport to go back to Bavaria. On the bus off the bus! The group loved the route, beautiful views and weather, awesome pictures and poses (Shane).

We left the hut about 0830 and set off on our way back to the transport that had been strategically placed so we didn't have to walk back to the cable car but rather finish in the next valley. The group on the way down managed to visit an impressive waterfall for photos and stop for a cold drink in one of the valley huts that processed their own cattle for milk, cheese and yogurt, the milk is amazing... it's a must.

DAY 7:

This would be the final day on the wire, this would be perfect to push grades and challenge those who took a step back, this would be the Kanzele-Klettersteig, a short but amazing feratta at the conglomerate rocks of Kanzelefeldsen. It's got 4 routes to choose from, they are all interconnected and fantastic, you have the option to incrementally build your students here. I would use this as a day one option in the future, however as there is options for A through to E it's a great one to stretch those who haven't experienced many D/E previously. It's a beautiful area next to a castle and in the lower valley a stunning lake, the nearest town is that of Bregenz, swing by for an ice-cream or a swim in the lake.

Day 7: The return journey...I won't bore you with the detail, it's was a long drive, ensure the drivers rest the evening prior and have plenty of stops during.

In summary, the expedition was fantastic and it achieved more than we anticipated, the participants excelled and achieved more than they expected... a couple had a fear of heights and by the end of the week were leading on grades that petrified them at the beginning. It is a privilege to take someone like that and see their progression and building of

'The young officers showed incredible courage and leadership and played a huge part in the success of the expedition whether they knew it or not'

confidence and how much they invested in their instructors and trusted their teams. I can say honestly that all the aims of AT were met and so much more. The young officers showed incredible courage and leadership and played a huge part in the success of the expedition whether they knew it or not.

Special thanks must go to Lt Col Johnny Lighten who planned, organised and executed the expedition with the help of his HQNW staff, WO1 Twigg, CSgt Cockram, Kgn Clifford.

It is a must to mention for those who have never organised an expedition or has little understanding of the many working parts. I have planned and delivered eight overseas expeditions, it's not a simple process, the funding bids, management and spending of monies, the kit bids, collection and distribution from loan pool at Bicester, the JSAFTA and associated documents, itinerary, risk assessments, authorisation notes, transport, flights, accommodation bookings, feeding plans, receipts, medical plans, admin/ exercise instructions, insurance and that's just some of the hurdles in place before you get there. Then of course delivering the activity, ensuring people eat, have the correct equipment, driving temperamental vehicles, catering for requests and the possibility of delivering a foundation course, dealing with injuries and so on...

Just remember all those things that have to be done many months in advance to enable an opportunity for you to attend a type 3 (Overseas) AT expedition. Someone or a couple of people will have given their own personal time to conduct this activity outside of work and then the most amusing of all is when your there and plan a BBQ on an evening, just as you're flipping burgers...the vegetarians and vegans all of a sudden pipe up" what you got for me".... and on that note I shall finish!



EX TIGER MERA

By Sean Mackey

For the past eighteen months I have been on a journey toward (and on) an expedition. Its had its ups and downs but generally I have enjoyed it.

It all start with my first day at a new posting. As with most things in the military I had been directed into the post and I was less than happy about it- The job was dull and monotonous and as far away from mountains as you can imagine. My boss knew that I wasn't looking forward to the next two years and threw me a bone to keep my motivation up; I was asked to organise an expedition. I jumped at the chance and settled (after much deliberation) on Mera Peak (6476m) in the remote Hinchu Valley in Nepal.

While I have an extensive background in climbing and walking in the UK and Europe, this would be my first trip to the greater ranges and I'd also be leading a team of 10 soldiers! Mera Peak was first climbed in the golden era of the 1950s by Colonel Jimmy Roberts and is one of the most popular routes in the Himalaya due to being the highest trekking peak in

Nepal. I chose Mera Peak as I wanted to take novice military hill walkers and give them the opportunity to do something extraordinary. As the sole planner for the expedition, my organisational skills were pushed to the limit and the age-old adage of 'Amateurs talk tactics; Professionals talk logistics' certainly rang true.

Unsurprisingly I was inundated with applicants for the team, but once we had selected the ten members, we began the challenge of training them up. Our UK training consisted of a skills week in North Wales covering disciplines such as navigation, rope work and equipment, followed by a Winter skills week in Scotland focussing on the use of ice axes, crampons and movement across frozen terrain. Finally, we completed a remote emergency care course concentrating on Acute Mountain Sickness (Altitude related illnesses), advanced

trauma and procedures for dealing with casualties. With the skills that the team have learnt and developed over the last year of training, most of them are now booking onto Mountain Leaders courses to become instructors themselves.

The team were all motivated, fit and enthusiastic volunteers. We all got on really well and I wasn't concerned in the slightest about the team work and inter personal relationships. Over the build up training the team forged and, as we all worked together in our day jobs, strong relationships were made. One of the biggest characters was also one of the smallest. Short and stocky he spoke at a thousand miles per hour in a thick Scottish accent. He was brilliant, funny and just the sort of man you trust. It was devastating when I got the phone call at 1am three weeks before we were due to fly telling me he had tragically taken his own life. We were shocked and



overwhelmed by the news. He was friends with all the team and best mates with a couple in particular. A week later the airline we had invested our carefully managed (and limited) funds in suddenly closed and went into liquidation... Everything was hanging in the balance.

Some people talk of leadership moment and this was definitely mine. I pulled the team together and we spoke honestly about the situation. We all wanted to continue and do this trip in his memory and also give ourselves some closure. We decided to continue- if we could get the money back from the now defuncted airline. One of the joys of the British Army is the inefficiency of the HRG booking system. This central booking hub is notoriously poor, but this time it worked in our favour. Although they had booked the flights they hadn't paid for them. The money was safe and further last minute flights were booked.

Arriving in Kathmandu was a culture shock. The constant noise, smells and sights overload the senses and leave you a little overwhelmed; it's hard to believe that people live in this hub. Kathmandu is the fifth most polluted city in the world and the sheer volume of waste and rubbish left me somewhat disappointed. Our forward thinking Sherpa asked us to take all our rubbish out with us (within reason) and I was glad I took rechargeable batteries and bars of soap rather than anything that would be disposable. For outdoor enthusiasts, this experience can only be tolerated for a short time before the call of the mountains become too strong and you yearn for those open places.



It was with relief that we started our route at Phaplu, a remote air strip that has been carved out of the forested mountainside. Landing here is an experience in itself, the runway is a little over 300m long yet feels like landing on a matchbox with a sheer drop at the end. Peering out of the window at the steep drops either side was utterly terrifying. The village of Phaplu isn't on any of the established trekking routes and as such, is now growing in popularity for people wanting to sample a true slice of regional Nepal away from the tourist traps of Lukla and Everest Base Camp.

'The first six days of the trek took us through the forested region and provided some of the richest experiences for us'

The first six days of the trek took us through the forested region and provided some of the richest experiences for us. Meeting locals that view tourists as a novelty rather than the norm was a refreshing change after the chaos of Kathmandu. The trails leading up to the arid mountain region were genuinely some of the best I have ever walked. The route is predominately narrow, yet interesting pathways leading you to some precarious positions, twinned with tantalising glimpses of snow-capped mountains through the foliage keeps your excitement levels high. One of the many highlights is the 250m long rope bridge over the Dudh Kosi river (a must for any serious kayaker apparently). This rope bridge leads you into a part of the national park that houses the endangered Red Panda.

The kit and equipment we had with us was as multifunctional as possible. Base layers worked well on their own during the high intensity trekking phase where the humidity left most of us soaked through with sweat, but also formed a vital piece of a layering system in colder temperatures. We carried most of our equipment ourselves so keeping the weight to a minimum was vital. Finding items of clothing that don't smell after a few days use is definitely worth investigating before you go. All of the equipment was packed into a 40L rucksack and our bulky sleeping systems were compressed and taken by porters. One of the most vital pieces of kit was our Solar Chargers, which was needed for satellite phones, cameras, radios and other electronics required to make the expedition successful.

Three days after leaving the forest, the team reached Mera Peak base camp at the village of Khare (5050m). Here we had to change our mindsets from trekking mode into climbing mode. Whilst in Khare we changed boots, clothes and dug out our harnesses and mountaineering equipment before continuing the journey. This staging post is higher than Mont Blanc in the European Alps and is one gruelling day away from the glacier and high camp. It was at this small village we noticed one of the team begin to suffer with AMS and behave uncharacteristically. He was moody, out of breath at rest with a head ache that was obviously crippling him. He could barely walk and an excretion by foot done narrow paths at this altitude would have been too dangerous. We called in the helicopter rescue and he was whisked away back to Kathmandu to an extended stay in the hospital there. He



later admitted there was a six hour black out that he can't remember.

Crossing moraine fields on our way to the glacier needed maximum concentration and subsequently everyone felt drained and empty when we reached high camp at 5900m. With only 50% oxygen and a few days of fatigue behind us, this was the most physically demanding day we experienced. This precarious camp is perched on a rockface with tent platforms built out of its fallen rocks. The view from this overnight stop is not to be missed. On one side a valley falls steeply away at your feet and on the other, the mighty pyramid peak of Makalu, one of the 8000m giants dominates the horizon. Being handed a cup of sweet tea and sharing the view of this perfect piece of the Earth with one of my good friends will stay with me forever. After a surprisingly tasty evening meal provided by our cook in an austere mess tent, the team were in their sleeping bags by 7pm. The plan for our summit bid was a 1am start to summit and to get back down to Khare in a day.

What was the summit like? I don't know. My rope team had a member displaying all the signs of hypothermia along with quite a few symptoms of AMS at 6200m. Despite being so close to the summit, putting his life in danger would have been nothing short of reckless. The other half of our team did reach the top and described the elation of summiting and witnessing the most flawless view of Everest as a lifetime highlight! My feelings that day were bitter-sweet; the triumph of leading the team that achieved the summit left me feeling proud and accomplished yet not getting up there myself left me slightly

disappointed on a personal level. It is not uncommon to fail to summit Mera Peak – the Nepal Mountaineering Association who issues climbing permits state that only 22% of those who have a permit issued for Mera Peak do summit. The Nepalese government describing it as a trekking peak; that's a stretch of the imagination! During the ascent we were roped up for all of our time on the glacier and utilised all the movement skills on snow and ice that we had perfected back in the UK.

We returned to Kathmandu via Lukla and congratulated ourselves on our choice of starting the trek from Phaplu. Getting on the tourist trail back down to Lukla airport saw prices rise, standards fall and the depressed faces of time-strapped moun-

'The Nepalese government describing it as a trekking peak; that's a stretch of the imagination!'

taineers who thought they were being savvy by taking a shorter route to the mountain. There are two distinct ways of getting to Mera Peak base camp, with most visitors having to compromise between time and acclimatisation. The Phaplu route we took sticks to a gradual ascent of 450m per day over a longer period of time. The quicker route from Lukla passes over the Zatrwa La (4700m) pass on their first day which has a mammoth 1800m of ascent with no account of steady acclimatisation. Strolling down through the pretty Rhododendron forests while these poor



souls climbed up reminded me of how far we had come. This expedition had tested everyone's physical fitness, mental resolve and commitment while also pushing my team management skills to the limit.

I considered the flight to Phaplu to be quite hair raising, but nothing prepared me for the short hop from the Tenzing-Hillary airport in Lukla to the capital. This airport is infamous for its runway; The strip of tarmac starts on top of an incline and runs a short 100m off the edge of a cliff. The hope is that, with the slope, the aircraft can gather enough speed to keep going once it goes over the edge. In March three tourist died when their aircraft crashed on landing and the wreckage has just been pushed to the side of the small airfield – not something that fills an nervous air passenger with confidence!

When I returned to Kathmandu and popped the metal cap off a bottle of well earned Ghorkabeer, I had time to reflect on one of the biggest mountain experiences of my life so far. Having adventures and challenging experiences is part of being a soldier and is core to our business. Mountaineering in Nepal is extreme. The altitude, environment, situations encountered and weather are all far more complex and dangerous than anything we're used to in the UK yet it is an experience that will remain with me for the rest of my life. Mera Peak is an achievable objective for all if you don't under estimate the mountain because of it's status as just a 'trekking peak'.





AMA AUTUMN MEET & AGM

20-22 SEPTEMBER 19

By Ryan Lang

The Autumn Meet and AGM was held in late September and was based at JSMTc Indefatigable



First Aid Course



AMA AGM 2020
25-27 SEPT 2020

September seems to be a suitable time as most members have finished Summer leave, there is still enough daylight and the weather is usually still favourable. Whilst I have your attention, **please reserve the 25-27 September 2020 as that is the date for the AGM next year.**

This year we had a total of 63 attend which included a mixture of some of our

most experienced honorary members, some very new joiners from Newcastle University OTC and everything else in between. It was great to see old and new faces all sharing a beer and stories as the weekend unfolded.

If it's not broken, don't fix it! North Wales continues to be a popular venue for the AGM, yes it might a bit of a

drive for most, but it is the spiritual home of the AMA and JSMTc are great hosts. The Nuffield accommodation is a fantastic asset and we should all do what we can to spread the word to ensure it gets used more often. It is secure, comfortable and very reasonably priced.



AMA Member, Maddy



Maddy and Kate climbing Faith



Maddy and Kate topping out on Piton Route (VS 4c)

Lots of people arrived on the Friday evening and either opted to socialise in the Indy bar or head into the local village in Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrob-wlllantysiliogogoch or as most people call it, Llanfair PG.

The Saturday morning started with breakfast followed by the arrival brief. The weather was fantastic, so good in fact, I felt sorry for those that had opted to do the two-day mountain first aid course as they would be sat inside for most of the day. There was also a contour only navigation masterclass and a climbing psychology workshop all were well subscribed. The remainder of the members who had not booked a workshop were then split into groups and headed to the various brilliant crags and mountains in North Wales.

I was paired up with Kate and Maddy, after a quick discussion we decided to head to Idwal Slabs. This was to be Maddy's first ever multi-pitch climb. We climbed Hope (VD) and after a spot of lunch we decided to do Piton Route (VS 4C). It was a very social day out as there were another two AMA pairs climbing next to us. Dan and Phil, followed by James A and James B who met us at the big ledge and continued up Lazarus, after this Dan and Phil opted for a Groove Above (S 4B) whilst the two James's decided upon The Arete (VD).

By the time we descended and got back to the van, there was no time for coffee and cake at the Siabod Café, I felt guilty after telling the girls about how good the cakes were, only to deny them at the very end! The reason was we had to get back for an early evening curry supper prior to the AGM. During the AGM we

said goodbye to General Ivan Hooper who has been the AMA President for the last few years. In a fitting tribute, he was presented with two gifts as a token of the AMAs appreciation for all his support and guidance during his tenure. Our newest AMA member Tom Clayton presented a book, whilst one of our honorary Vice Presidents, Lt Col (Retd) John Muston presented a wooden walking axe.

A quick pause for a drink at the bar was swiftly followed by the icing on the cake for the evening which was a lecture by Simon Yates from 'Touching the Void'. It was a real privilege to hear about Simons exploits. One could not help but feel inspired by his achievements, so much so that he sold many signed books in the bar that evening!

The rest of the evening involved socialising in the bar. We were supported by Helix and Paramo for the evening. Both companies brought along some equipment to demo and sell which was very much appreciated by the members. It is fascinating to see how much of a bargain some shiny new kit appears to be after a few beers have been consumed! Sean Mackay kindly organised a raffle which resulted in some very happy people walking away with some great prizes.

It was great to see so many people attend the weekend and get on well together. It is encouraging to see new blood join the AMA, we need them to keep the association going. It was also brilliant to chat with our retired members who have so many great stories to tell and wisdom to share.

Sunday was far less kind and promised rain. We couldn't really complain as the

previous day had been utterly amazing. Some went climbing others went walking and scrambling. Once the days activities had finished it was great to get messages from so many people saying, they had a fantastic weekend. Afterall, this is what it is all about.

The AGM was very well attended, and long may that continue. I would like to thank all the instructors that attended and put the students' wishes before their own. Some people approached me to ask if they could volunteer to run meets in the next year. If you are reading this and you fancy running a meet, the answer is a resounding yes! Thanks to everyone that made the effort to attend, I hope to see you again next year. One final request, if you enjoyed it, please encourage others to attend with you next year.



The President presented with his Axe by the longest serving member



The President presented with his book by the newest AMA member



AMA TREMADOG MEET

14-16 JUNE 19

By Ryan Lang

This is the second year in a row that the AMA has had a dedicated climbing meet held in Tremadog. It is no wonder that the BMC bought Craig Bwlch y Moch back in 1979, it is such an amazing venue that gets better weather than the mountains and is a roadside venue! There are routes suitable for the newest novice all the way through to the seasoned pro.

This year 18 members of the AMA travelled from all over the UK to meet in Tremadog on what turned out to be a lovely Friday evening. We arrived at the café (which has been managed by Gareth and Jo since last year) only to find out that the huge loose block that has been perched on Shadrach was no more! The classic VS climbs, Shadrach and the Brothers are sadly gone forever. As previously reported, some very loose dangerous blocks were identified on these routes. After a thorough inspection, the BMC had no option but to commission a professional rock-engineering company to remove the blocks. I was very thankful that I had climbed this route with Arthur Daley only 12 weeks previously.

That evening most of the arrivals ventured to the Golden Fleece Inn in Tremadog for some food and a beer or two. Afterwards we made our way back to the bunkbarn, campervans or tents that we had booked



Dinner in the cafe



Angus on the last pitch of Hail Bebe



Evening Lecture



Outside the cafe

for the weekend. Morning was soon upon us and it was with great delight that I was met with glorious sunshine when I opened the curtains in my van. Gareth and Jo from the café were busy in the kitchen making all the attendees a Full English which was very well received. Soon after the breakfast we had the safety brief before teaming the instructors with the students for the day. We spread out across all the crags in Tremadog so as not to monopolise any one area. Teams went to Pant Ifan (upper and lower tiers) as well as Craig Bwlch y Moch.

I was teamed with Rich Turner and Angus Foster-Hall, we decided to climb Hail Bebe (VD) followed by Oberon (S 4b). Our plan for the morning was to introduce Angus to multi-pitch climbing and to help Rich with instruction techniques to prepare him for RCI. We managed to get up both climbs in good time before conducting an abseil descent back to the bottom. After a spot of lunch in the café, I left Rich and Angus to go and climb another route, whilst I paired myself up with Jamie McGrory. Jamie had

spent the morning at Pant Ifan upper tier delivering some single pitch training, so we decided to get another route in before dinner. We opted for Rienetta (HS 4a) which we ascended in good time before heading back to the café.

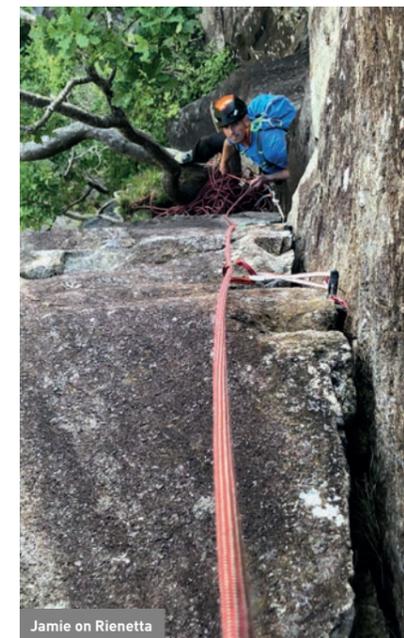
That evening all 18 of us sat round the table and enjoyed some of the best pie, mash, mushy peas and gravy we had ever had. This was helped along with a beer and ice cream for good measure. Afterwards we retired to the campsite where Sam Leary gave a fantastic lecture on her ascent of Mount Kenya whilst working with Jagged Globe. It is always an inspiration to hear someone tell of their exploits in far off places. It excites the mind and makes us all wonder if we could do that sort of thing too. If you are reading this and haven't been to a meet yet, maybe now is the time to sew a seed or two. You never know where it may take you. A great piece of advice I was given is that we apparently will never regret the things we tried, but instead regret the things we didn't do.

After the lecture had finished, our amazing hosts lit a huge fire in the fire pit for all of us to sit around and drink some beer. Their hospitality stretched even further as they brought out more pies for the group to devour. The day had been fantastic, everyone went to bed glad that they had attended.

The next day started in a very similar way to the first. Breakfast, brief then climbing. The teams all departed for various climbs prior to getting on the road back home. I hope that the meet will run again in 2020 and that it is every bit as successful as the previous two. Keep an eye out in the forecast of events for next year!



Rich teaching Angus



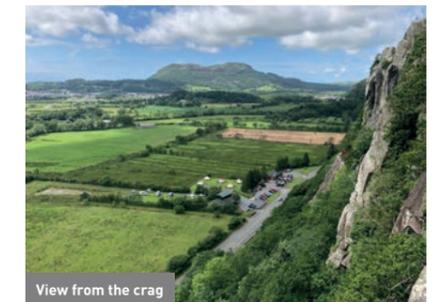
Jamie on Rienetta



Rich teaching coiling



Shadrach gone forever



View from the crag



LAKE DISTRICT MEET 13-14 JULY 19

By Arthur Daley

The July meet this year took place in the Lake District National Park. The White Horse Inn was chosen once again as the venue for the weekend, having just had a refurbishment it offers a 22-bed bunkhouse complete with free Wi-Fi and attached to a quaint old English country pub

Friday night saw the members arriving one by one, finding a bed in the bunkhouse and then making their way to the pub for a bite to eat and a tippie or two.

Saturday morning, we all met outside, as the weather was good, and worked out the day's activities. Those that wanted to get in a quality mountain day made plans to climb Helvellyn in the sunshine. That left the majority of people wanting to climb. Unfortunately, we only had 3 RCIs attending the meet and so multi-pitch climbing would not be an option for everyone.

Lee took Fletch and Vinny off to Shepherd's crag to get some good multi-pitch climbs in, including the VDiff classic Little Chamonix.

While Richard and I took the rest of the climbers over to Wodens Face for some single pitch climbing. This plan meant those with an RMT qualification could get some lead climbs in their logbooks while the others where coached on technique, bottom roping some harder climbs in the process.

Between climbs some of the group took the opportunity to wander down the track to check out the impressive Bowder Stone. This is a massive boulder that fell over 200 meters from Bowder crag over 10,000 years ago.

With the day's activities at an end the various groups made their way back to the bunkhouse for a shower before hitting the



Georgia on the sharp end at Wodens Face

pub. This is always a great time to socialise and make new friends over a drink or two.

Sunday morning rolled around and it was time to pack up and vacate the bunkhouse before deciding the day's activities. Those with particularly long drives headed off to beat the traffic. While the walkers decided to tackle Blencathra, as it is just behind the bunkhouse.

This time it was decided that all climbers would make their way to Shepherd's crag. Rich took a couple on Donkey's Ears while I took two on Jackdaw Ridge. Lee and the remainder went further round to Brown Slabs for more single pitch climbing. We all met in the café at the bottom of the crag around mid-day for tea and cake before saying our goodbyes and hitting the road. Drawing an end to yet another successful meet in the Lakes.



Lee, Fletch and Vinny on top of Little Chamonix at Shepherd's Crag



Liz's group on Blencathra



View from the bunkhouse over the pub and across to Great Dodd

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 produced in the Winter 2017 edition of Army Mountaineer.

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.



Harry Brown



Roy Francis



Glenn Bloomer



Sven Hassall



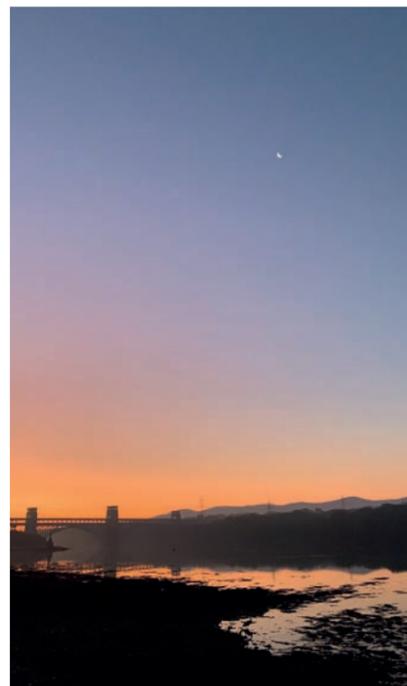
David Harris



Simon Lamb



Alan Ahmed



Johnny Black



James Brennan



Sujan Limbu



£75
WINNER

Lachlan Bucknall



Duncan Francis

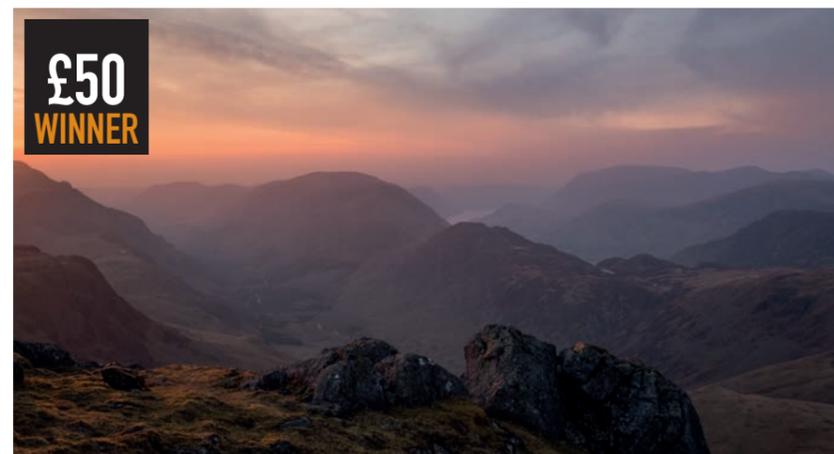


Peter Warner



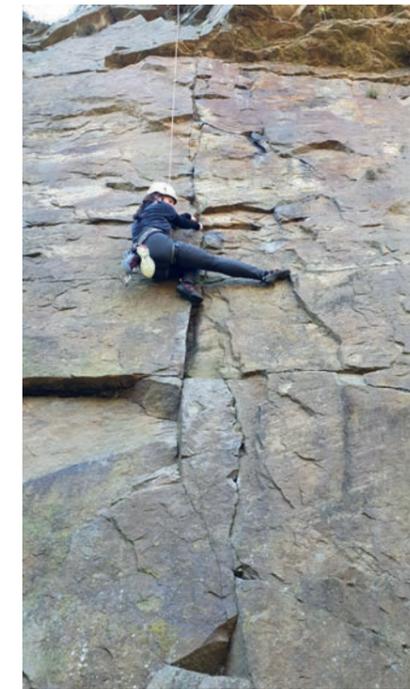
£100
WINNER

Stuart McDonald



£50
WINNER

Jamie Gibbin



Rachel Bowyer



Laurence Hallett



Yogen Gurung



James Gordon



Russ Williams



Puka Shah



AMA SPORT CLIMBING IN 2019 A 3-MINUTE UPDATE...

By Paddy Snow – AMA Vice Chairman – Sport Climbing

2019 has been another successful year for Army Sport Climbing, with several new competitions, a further increase in participation, and the continued dominance of the Army Team at the Inter-Services

The planned centrepiece of the 2020 UK Armed Forces Climbing season will adopt the novel Speed-Boulder-Lead format in celebration of sport climbing's Olympic debut in Tokyo. Final details of this event, led by the Royal Navy, will be announced in due course. The live Forecast of Events can be found on SharePoint, with a versioned copy available in the members' area of the AMA website.

Apr 19) to be run by Andy Stewart, who has handed over the 2020 reins to Marc Hilton. As ever it was extremely well organised and Andy deserves a special thank you for all his efforts over the years. This was followed by a highly successful Army (North) competition (24 Apr 19) run in Edinburgh by Dan Lee-Mikus of 51X; this is the first such event I am aware of and one that we will look to repeat in future years.

INTER-SERVICES
This year's event was run by the RAF and held in the Foundry, Sheffield. Sadly for the RAF, this didn't help them overcome the extremely strong Army Team, who walked away with all the team prizes for the 3rd year in a row (Men's, Women's, U25 Men's). Another outstanding performance.

BOULDERING (JAN-MAR 19)
The year began with another well-run UK Armed Forces Bouldering League (thanks to Kenny Geoghegan, the Army Team Captain and organisational rock for the AFBL). As described in the last journal (Summer 19), this culminated in the Armed Forces' inaugural IFSC-style bouldering competition (21-22 Feb 19), which was a great success. The bouldering season finished with the UK Armed Forces Team competing against the global bouldering glitterati at the Climbing Works International Festival in March 2019. As usual, we succeeded in avoiding embarrassment, although not in progressing to the semi-finals!

ARMY FESTIVAL OF CLIMBING (10-17 MAY 19)
The highlight of the lead season was the Army Festival of Climbing, which, as with the 2015 event, saw almost 80 people get stuck in across the whole spectrum of rock climbing under the perfect blue skies of North Wales. Much valley rock climbing, mountain cragging, and scrambling was done. A significant number of novices caught the climbing bug. Some great ticks at E2, f7A, and at least 7 Font 7A+/V7 ticks. The main event, the Army Sport Climbing Championship, was a great success with some outrageous routes from the world-class setting team led by Andy Long. Thanks to Michelle Hordern for running the competition, and to Geordie Havenhand, Tim Read and Kenny Geoghegan for helping me with the overall event.

LEAD (APR-JUL 19)
The lead season started off with the last Army (South) lead competition (3

A LOOK FORWARD
By the time this journal lands on your doormat, the 2019/20 bouldering season will be in full swing, with the first 3 events in Oct 19, Nov 19, and Dec 19. Keep your eye on the live Forecast of Events (available on the AMA's Army Sport Control Board SharePoint site and AMA website) for the latest information on events and dates. This is particularly important for the Army Lead Champs, which may be incorporated within an expanded Olympic-style Inter-Services event in Sep 20. On a personal note, I will be taking some extended leave to spend time with my family between March 2020 and summer 2021 look forward to seeing you all when I get back; I'll be leaving you in the capable hands of the Sport Climbing committee until then.

DOWN vs SYNTHETIC

The reoccurring questions is always 'Which type of insulated jacket is best?'. This is normally a straight choice between down and synthetic. Although many people will have a personal preference the recent advances in technology means that the performance gap between the two is narrowing, but it'll still be your choice as to which one will suit your needs best.

Even the most experienced summer mountaineer will pause and think what extra kit will be required to transition to winter for the first time. This could be any thing from a trip to Alps or Greater Ranges through to operating in the harsh Scottish Conditions. Incredibly low temperatures, driving snow, horizontal rain, and gale force winds all whilst being at a distance from the nearest shelter makes the dependency on quality equipment all the more important. While most bits of kit will be able to operate happily in both summer and winter, some will not.

This lofted space in the jacket from the down traps the heat generated from your body and stores it.

The outer of the jacket is usually in a light weight pterex (type) material and will have a 'Fill power' number printed on it. This fill power refers to the quality of the down that has been forced into garment. In essence, a jacket with a higher fill power

'This lofted space in the jacket from the down traps the heat generated from your body and stores it'

For arguments sake, I am going to describe 'Down Materials' as the small soft feathers found close to the bird's body (duck or goose normally). Although it's a little more complicated than that with other non-feathery and fluffy particles (Tendrils and Fibres) making up the down. Down is a natural lofting material that can be compressed and will expand over and over again if properly cared for and stored.

will have better down in it and consequently the warmer you'll be. The reason for this is that better quality down has more fibres and tendrils in the feathers and therefore traps more air between them in these spaces. So you can get a better performance from a jacket with less down material and bulk by having a higher



Elvar Jacket



fill power. These thinner jackets (with a high fill power) allow for easier movement and makes climbing or performing other tasks a little easier. You must keep in mind that a big bulky lower rated fill jacket may still be warmer as it will just have so much down to compensate, but be much bigger and heavier. The standard top rating is 900 fill power, but companies have odd garments at 1000 fill power.

The benefits of down are numerous. The jacket can be compressed down into a small size that takes up less space in your rucksack. The small size also means less weight, which can make a massive

difference during long walk ins. Down jackets are normally the warmest on the market- After all down material keeps most wild animals warm in harsh winters.

'Down material works well in cold dry conditions (like the Alps or Nepal), but fails in cold and wet conditions (such as a Scottish Winter)'

A few draw backs are if the outer material becomes damaged it can be difficult to patch without losing too much of the

precious heat retaining down filling. You'll often see people walking around in down jackets with large pieces of gaffer tape holding the outer material together to prevent the loose feathers falling out. This is both a practical thing when out on an expedition with the need to patch your kit on the move, but also the light weight outer material is difficult to stitch or glue. This ruins the look of your expensive jacket if you plan to use it as a normal winter coat too.

The biggest negative aspect of down is that once it becomes wet the small soft feathers compress and absorb water, which means it won't loft and this compressed material won't allow the heated air (generated by your body heat) to be stored. Down material works well in cold dry conditions (Like the Alps or Nepal), but fails in cold and wet conditions (such as a Scottish Winter).

The traditional remedy to the wet and cold issue is to use a man-made synthetic fill.

The major benefit of a synthetic fill is that it will remain lofted when wet and hold the heat. Therefore, if you're stuck on a belay ledge and wet through you'll still remain fairly warm. The synthetic material also driers much quicker- The body heat you generate will make the garment act in a capillary action and push the water out. Cleaning your synthetic jacket is much



Goose duck down



Hydrophobic down

easier than down as most can be done in a domestic washing machine. The old school recommended way to clean down was to wash it and then to use a tumble drier full of tennis balls to bash the jacket and revitalise the feathers allowing the loft action to happen again. In my opinion the synthetic jacket takes much more punishment and is less needy for individuals to maintain and get a full life out of the jacket.

Traditional synthetic material is bulkier and weighs more, which could take up valuable space in your rucksack. Many companies have been independently developing technologies to get a down weight and warmth performance into a synthetic material. In simple terms, synthetic material has been shaped and designed to look like down feathers and it also generally behaves in that way too. This allows the jacket to be compressed and lofted more times than traditional synthetic fill, thus retraining more heat for the lifetime of the jacket. This new feather shaped filling doesn't absorb as much water as it did in the traditional form, but it does still retain the quick drying properties that set the traditional synthetic jackets apart. Some will argue different, but this simulated down isn't as warm as its natural counter parts for the same bulk. In my opinion the synthetic jacket does offer a greater versatility, but comes at the cost of weight and size.

TREATED DOWN

By treating the down and coating the down feathers in a chemical treatment it can make it perform better in the wet for a time. Although there are many types of treated down on the market the most common is hydrophobic down. This process coats the feathers in a chemical that repels waters for an extended period

of time and then dries quicker once it has become wet. As the feathers aren't compressing under the weight of the water the lofting action remains and the jackets remains warm. This does come only for a period of time and at some point the jacket will just 'wet out' like traditional down.

Caring for your down garment is easier than before and can be tech washed. This is like cleaning your Goretex waterproof in NixWax- You wash out the dirt that maybe preventing it doing its job and revitalise the chemical coating. There is no need for the tennis ball trick in a tumble drier, instead the down springs back into life by its accord.

'Hydrophobic down treatments usually mean the cost will be higher for whatever garment you're buying'

Hydrophobic down treatments usually mean the cost will be higher for whatever garment you're buying, but some companies won't offer anything other Hydrophobic Down. This brings me on to a contentious point and one that people buying down must understand. In order to get this feathery material, it must be farmed and produced on an industrial scale. Some cheaper down garments will be filled with feathers from birds that have been 'live plucked'. Basically, the bird is stripped of its feathers while it's still alive and once it has eventually grown back will happen again. This cycle continues until the bird dies – usually in quite a lot of distress. While I like a bargain, I know that cheap down jackets are at that low price because the expensive down material has been produced in this way to lower

costs. You can get three or four 'plucks' from a bird before it dies and lessen your over heads of buying new duck or geese. Please consider your part in this cycle when you buy cheap down products. Most decent companies are aware of this and will display on their website and labels if the down has been ethically sourced.

In an ideal world the best thing to do would be to have two jackets (one of each) or more and use them as the weather dictates. However, as you can probably guess this is impractical in most outdoor adventures and quite expensive. The choice of which to buy is yours, but keep in mind that the top of the range super sexy and colourful jacket might not be the best for your adventures.

Deals open to the AMA members include the Jottnar Fenrir Jacket (£295) which has both of these technologies with the synthetic fill in the cuffs and neck where water is likely to sneak in through your waterproof jacket on wet days on the hill. Their down treatment will stay dry up to ten times longer than untreated down, which will keep you warmer for longer. Mixing the two materials keeps the jacket light weight with a small pack size, yet with a great warmth to weight ratio. The outer material is a 30 Denier weight, but does boast a micro rip stop weave which should prevent a small snag becoming a larger tear. They also supply the Elvar Jacket (£249), which is a mid layer synthetic jacket for use under a waterproof in winter. This comes with a stretch outer shell which has much more give than the traditional silk like material and allows for a little more movement.

AMA BOOK REVIEWS

By Sean Mackey

QUEST INTO THE UNKNOWN

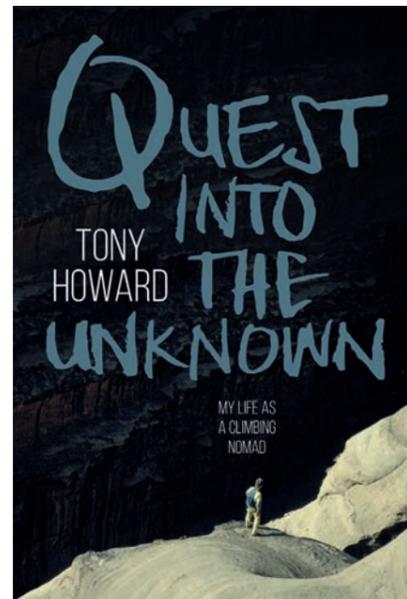
TONY HOWARD

I like to consider myself well informed and enjoy mountaineering history, but I must confess I had no idea this author was so prolific until this book landed on my desk. That is more a reflection on me than on Tony Howard and his exploits. He has authored two books so far, his first 'Troll Wall' describes his first ascent of the Norwegian rock climbing test piece back in 1965, which has been described by Joe Brown as 'one of the greatest ever achievements by British rock climbers'. If anyone remembers the now out-of-business mountaineering company 'Troll', famous for its harnesses and other pieces of climbing technology, then you will also know Howard's other talent was in gear design.

This latest instalment has covered much more of his life with stories from the Himalaya, Middle East and Thailand to name a few. While none of these regions

sound that exotic compared to some of the expeditions we do today, they were monumental for their time. Most had never been visited before and were chosen on pictures and from film footage. If you have had the opportunity to climb in Oman, Jordan or Morocco it was only because this man went out and opened up these places as climbing venues in the 1960s. A true pioneer with a passion for new routing and exploring; This book describes one man's search for fresh challenges in unknown places.

While I enjoyed the chapters I did find the book hard going. It is quite a sizeable piece of literature and rather than my usual habit of gorging on a book and then mourning its loss, I read it over a few months and found it easier to digest.



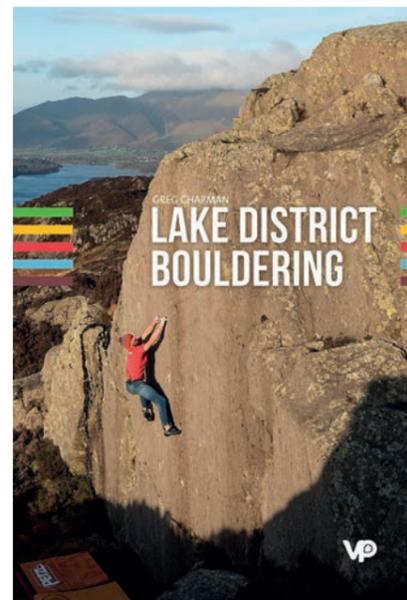
LAKES BOULDERING

GREG CHAPMAN

While I don't consider myself a boulderer I wanted to become one after browsing through this lovingly written book. The level of detail, photos and descriptions have obviously been a labour of love for the author. This is a comprehensive and easy-to-use guide for the Lake District boulders.

The descriptions are clear and the photographic topos are fantastic, leaving no doubt in the route finding. As the first of its kind to this region it is as big a leap forward as those early rockfax guidebooks to the peak district!

To say I am impressed is an understatement. While I don't operate in the higher grades there is enough for everyone with over 3000 problems at 70 venues with grades from VO through to V13. As I am inherently lazy I particularly like the layout of book. The national park has been split down into sections and the book contains not only actual ordinance survey mapping, but best parking areas, campsites, pubs and shops. This really is the one stop shop if you're planning a specific trip to the region or if you're simply transiting through and want to stop off and stretch your legs for a quick boulder.



QUEST FOR ADVENTURE

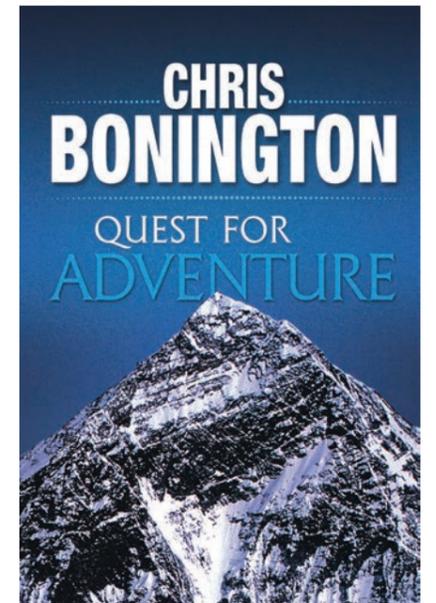
CHRIS BONINGTON

This is a reprint and update of Bonington's 1981 classic adventure book. However, this is slightly different to his other published works which focuses on his own story and achievements. This describes other people's exploits and Bonington has selected some of, what he considers to be, the most daring or ground breaking in their fields - not just mountaineering. Many of the 17 stories are in fact books in their own rights and have their own wonderful and colourful back stories. His story telling is masterful and he has the ability to bring to life the situations these individuals were under. I imagine this is because he has been in a few of them himself and understands them better than most. As Wally Herbert famously said,

'Those who need to ask, will never know the answer – Those who understand the answer, will never need to ask.'
Wally Herbert, British Trans-Arctic Survey

It is Bonington's rich and detailed understanding that provides the backbone for this spectacular book. I thoroughly enjoyed this updated version that includes additional feats in the forty or so years since it was first published. If you haven't read it before I would fully recommend it - not only will it entertain, but it will also give you a further reading list of great mountain books that you will want to get stuck into.

I am a huge fan of Bonington and really enjoy the clear no-nonsense approach that he takes to mountaineering, and it was gratifying to see him also bring this quality to his writing. His mountain credentials are faultless, and he is a former officer in the Royal Tank Regiment and a Sandhurst alumnus. His greatest exploit must be how instrumental he was in setting up the Army Mountaineering Association and being one of our Honorary Presidents though...



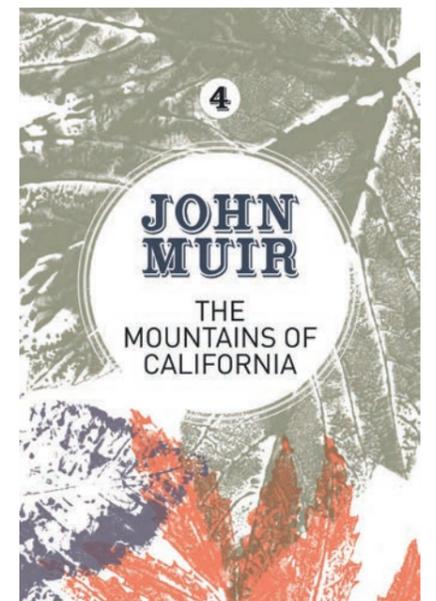
THE MOUNTAINS OF CALIFORNIA

JOHN MUIR

Muir is famous for his long-distance treks, exploration and rock climbs in California. He is often described as a free spirit who 'had' to be in the mountains with the wide open spaces. This is a reprint of one of his ten books that helped him rise to prominence and become the 'Father of the National Parks'.

Muir's writing is of its time and you often feel like you've had a literary meal, with some of his rather lengthy and tender descriptions. It won't appeal to everyone,

with the majority of the focus being on the natural world rather than the journey or exploits of the great man. It is most certainly not a biography, but I would call this a connoisseur's book and an absolute must for anyone visiting the Californian national parks.



Vertebrate Publishing have been supporting the AMA for quite a few years now and produce some of the best mountain books in the world. Some of its newest titles are definitely worth seeking out and adding to your collection. Check out the members zone at armymountaineer.org.uk for the 30% discount code on these titles and more.

ONE OF THOSE DAYS

By Duncan Francis

It was only when we were starting to drop down the awful track from Coire Domhain that we realised. We had met up in the car park, and had had the discussion about Goat Track versus Pt 1141, and then whether to go via Coire Raibert and along by the loch versus across to Domhain and down without even remembering.

We had been here before. The plan had seemed great; Spring was here, Winter was gone and the masterpiece that is The Clean Sweep beckoned. Facing South East on Hell's Lum, it was bound to be clear of snow, and the forecast was for warm and sunny. A blue sky day. The magnificent crux crack was one of the best VS pitches in Scotland. Perfect.

But that was what we had thought last year... in exactly the same conditions, the same week in the same month. How could we have forgotten? That time we had hauled all the gear across into the Loch A'an basin full of hope and joy, watching the ptarmigan croaking and the wee white cumulus tumbling through the blue sky; only to find that the warm sunshine was melting the snow which remained on the plateau, and that the route was running with water. Unclimbable..... We had saved the day that time by climbing the only dry route on the crag, Towering Inferno, which was good, it just wasn't The Clean Sweep.

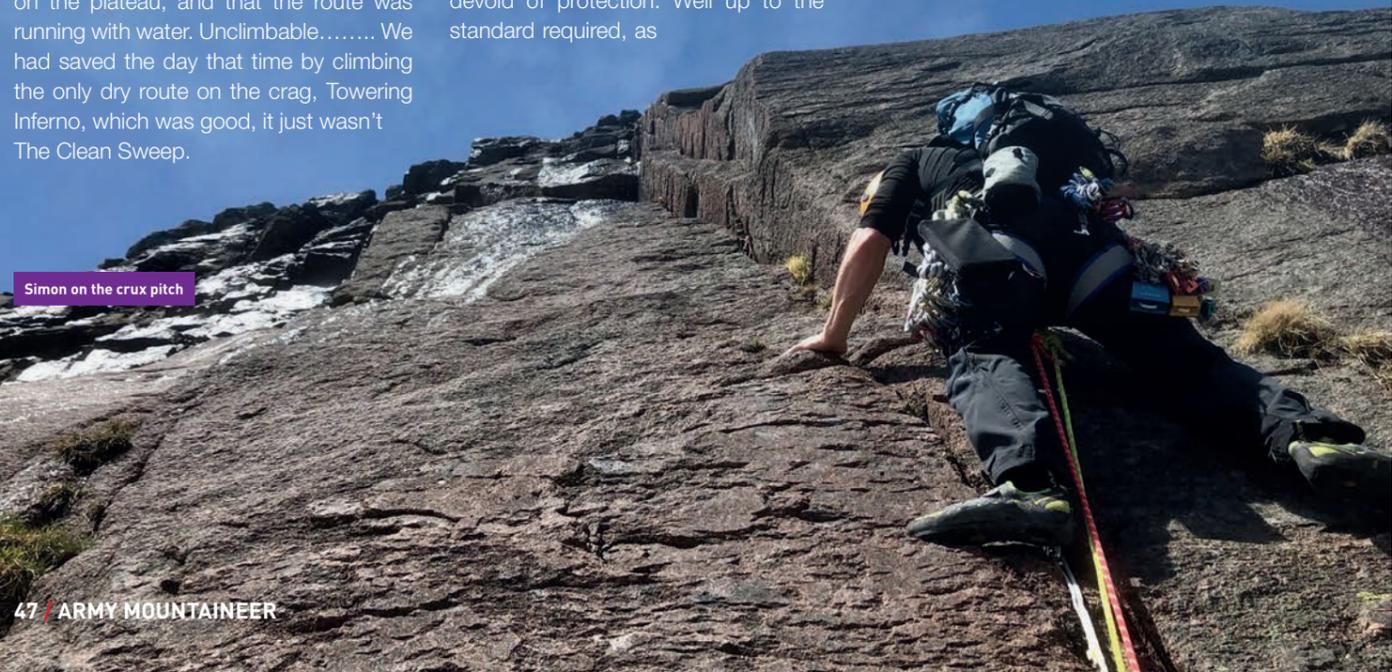
So we dropped down again across those awful boulders and slippery grass slopes, back past where we had stashed the packs last year, when we had slithered on down in our rock shoes, and around to the base of the route to find that while there was indeed some drainage, our proposed route seemed dry. Phew.

So we geared up and repacked our sacks and prepared to give battle. The first problem was that we had to cross the big snowfield at the base of the crag. Now you don't get that at Stanage. So we did this thing, crabbing sideways across it, slipping and sliding in our rock shoes, and dropped into the bergschrund, which was a stream. So much for warm dry rock.

Now, if you don't know The Clean Sweep, the first pitch is, shall we say, somewhat devoid of protection. Well up to the standard required, as

you might put it. But once I had cleaned the moss and damp off my shoes I managed to make the first moves and get established in the crack and soon all was well. Small but positive holds for the fingers, nice warm rough rock for the toes and then I was at the top of the whaleback, where the only belay is a low spike at foot level. But no matter, we were on.

Because the best pitches are the first and the third, we had decided that I would lead the first two, and then hand over to Simon for the next two. Now the second pitch requires a long traverse left and then a load of moves back right and up to get to a huge boulder at the base of the magnificent crux corner crack. Well this would have been fine, only being slabby and obviously in the wrong place as regards the increasing drips from invisible



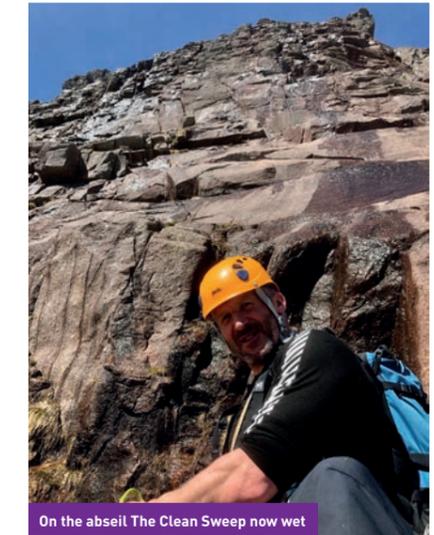
Simon on the crux pitch



Simon starting the crux-pitch



Simon below Hell's lum The Clean Sweep dry above him



On the abseil The Clean Sweep now wet

places high up above us, the whole thing was soaking. Hmmm. Well I picked my way up it, feet scarting around on the wet rock, water running down my arms; it felt decidedly sketchy and wasn't exactly what you would call three star climbing.

So now we were at the crux and it was Simon's lead. Great. However, in the time we had taken to do the first two pitches, things had changed somewhat. Above us the corner reared up above a slabby wall, passing through two overhangs, and various pieces of old gear waving welcomingly at us in the slight breeze. The problem was that the two overhangs were now waterfalls. We were an hour too late.

Nothing ventured, nothing gained, so Simon set off, clipping the old peg at about twelve feet, and then getting established in the main crack, which is gratifyingly full of gear placements. Various noises came from above, and I cast an eye at the ropes running up towards him, shifting uneasily on my stance. But he got up over what appeared to be the crux, the first overhang, with no more than an occasional grunt and a breathless 'watch me'; brilliant! We had cracked it!

But unfortunately we hadn't. As hard as he tried, this way and that, the second overhang was just too wet, too slimy. His fingers and feet slid off the holds. There was gear, but he didn't want to pull on it, not on such a classic route. We had done that on Eagle Ridge last year, climbing it in the rain, but that was close to the top, with six or so pitches below us, and we just wanted to get up. But no sirree, not here. Not on The Clean Sweep.

So down it was, tails between our legs, water squeezing out of the ropes as they passed through the abseil devices, back across the snowfield and recoup.

To cut a long story short, we headed across to Stag Rocks, completely snow free, and clambered up to the base of Groove and Slab, apparently a HS with a first pitch which is, quote, 'hard for the grade'. Well we should have known; gradings in Scotland are an inexact science. There are still those 'Scottish VS' sandbags out there, and Groove and Slab, as it turned out, is one of them. We found out later that this is well-known to many. 'That first pitch is absolutely brutal' WhatsApped my mate Tony, experienced Scottish master of rock. You don't say.

Steep, no gear, no holds, a yawning void beneath. Blooming heck. I tried several different ways, bobbing up and down with increasingly shaky fingers. This was not good. I was on the verge of giving up when I found that at full stretch I could just

reach an invisible crack which just took the smallest of my cams. The problem was, I couldn't actually see the crack, just feel it, so I had no idea if the cam was any good. And there still weren't any holds. Sigh. However by dint of scrabbling, thrutching, balancing on nothing, making a lot of noise and trying to push the fall potential to the back of my mind, I somehow managed to get up. But it wasn't easy. At least 5a would be my guess.

Simon took a while getting up.

When he finally arrived, blowing like a walrus and eyes swivelling, I just handed him the rack and pushed him off up the corner above. Let's just say that we got to the top before dark, and the walk back across the plateau was actually really enjoyable, in that way things are when you have survived, gabbling on about routes and grades and granite and Robin Smith and what a wonderful place Scotland is.

Next year, we will go in June.



On the easier upper pitches of Groove and slab

WAKE UP MATE, YOU'RE ON STAG

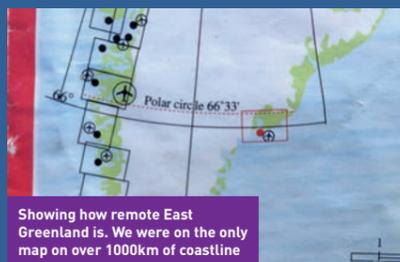
Also by Duncan Francis

An account of an expedition to the East Coast of Greenland. As yet still unpurchased by Donald Trump. And with no golf courses.

The tent zip opened slightly to reveal Al's unshaven yet grinning visage. "Wake up Mate, you're on stag" he whispered, before disappearing again. Outside, it was still daylight, even though it was also the middle of the night.

None of this would have made any sense on a normal AT exped, but this one was a bit different. We were on the East Coast of Greenland, just below the Arctic Circle. With Summer coming to an end, the sun was actually disappearing for a few hours each night, but it was just below the horizon, so the daylight remained. Apart from the small settlements of Kulusuk and Tasilak, two hours by boat to the South, there was no habitation for over 800km in any direction. None. Just nobody. Zip.

But there were Polar Bears. At least, there COULD be Polar Bears, and we didn't want that; a hungry Polar Bear would be more than capable of pulling a man from his tent and eating him. Hence we had rifles, and a stag roster at night. Hence me being called at 0200hrs.



Showing how remote East Greenland is. We were on the only map on over 1000km of coastline

The interesting thing was that none of us minded. The scenery was just so jaw-droppingly stunning, the weather so wonderful, the silence and peace so over-whelming, apart from the occasional roar of a serac dropping into the sea, that it was actually a pleasure to be out there alone, watching the icebergs drifting down the sound, listening to the drag of the surf on the beach and waiting to see if our friend, the Arctic Fox, would come along while you were on and take a piece of salami or a biscuit from you.

It had all been Bruce's idea. To be honest, I was never really sure it was going to come off until I was on a plane heading for Iceland. It



Struli on an unclimbed peak while doing AMF...

all seemed vaguely unlikely. I mean, who takes a unit AT trip to East Greenland? And not only that, we were meant to be running an AMF course; from a camp on the beach! But here we were. And East Greenland isn't like anywhere else. The mountains around us weren't that high; mostly not more than about 2000m at most; but they were glaciated. And there was a load of snow. And seracs, and icefalls, and moraines, and Alpine ridges, and big walls. And many of the glaciers, like the Karale up to our West,



Flying the flag on another first ascent



It is warm, honest...



Kulusuk



Traversing the Apusidjik icefield



Crowberry flowering in the brief Northern Summer



Glenn and the Arctic Fox



Basecamp in the Karale Sound



Medial moraines on the southern glacier



Rakesh, Umesh, Nims and James pondering crevasse rescue drills

actually reached down to the sea. The mist occasionally came in and enveloped us in a silent, mysterious world. It was an awesome, indescribably beautiful and magical place. And almost completely deserted.

So we went, and we climbed, and we mountaineered, and we went from the beach up the glaciers and steered our way through the crevasse fields, and

came out onto big ridges of shattered gabbro. And our students from the ARRC Log Sp Bn did their AMF course by climbing unclimbed peaks. Yup; first ascents. Not big peaks, but unclimbed ones. How many people can say that? Teaching Alpine skills and glaciation was easy; it was all right there. And we ice climbed too; on the beach! On the walls of those glaciers which stretched down to the sea. And we swam with icebergs,

and we swam in high mountain tarns. And we ate blueberries and cranberries and walked across slopes covered with Alpine flowers. And we saw humpback whales on the two hour boat ride up to our campsite, and we made friends with the Arctic Fox which came to our camp at night. Thanks Bruce, for coming up with the idea. Luckily, we didn't see a Polar Bear. But we might, next time. Because we will, absolutely, be back.



Another unclimbed peak. We also made the first ascent of the smaller peak across the glacier



The three amigos...

FANCY ANOTHER COSTA?

By Glenn Bloomer

THE BACKGROUND

In starting this article, it is worth pointing out that it is an opinion piece and reflects my own views and experiences built up over my 15 years as an AMA member and 25 years as a military mountaineer. You may agree with my points...or you may not. At the very least I hope to open up the readers to some climbing destinations that they may have heard of but had not visited and at best, inspire future expeditions both at Unit level and within the AMA. Failing both of those objectives however, I at least hope to stimulate some debate with an emphasis on tongue-in-cheek.

The genesis for this article was formed whilst sat in Base Camp on the Karale Glacier in Eastern Greenland, chatting to the AMA Vice Chair (Mountaineering) about upcoming expeditions and 'what if' and 'could we' expeditions. A recurring theme in the AMA journal, particularly in the last few years, has been rock climbing expeditions to the Costa Blanca region of Southern Spain be this from the AMA or Unit expeditions.

JUST SO YOU KNOW....

Those that know me well probably knows my connection with climbing in the Costa Blanca area, I've had the privilege of going on 9 trips (10 by the time you read this) since 2006 in either an instructional capacity, as an expedition leader and also in personal climbing with my family. In short, I think it's an awesome place to climb and have always enjoyed going back.

THE DEBATE

The nub of this article though is that, are military endorsed expeditions to the Costa Blanca becoming the norm/a holiday/the usual? This isn't something new however, in my previous military role, I was tasked with selecting applicants to attend Ex Spanrock, some of the application justifications included 'it's been awhile since I last climbed in Costa Blanca and I'd like to go back', 'I went last year, so would like to go again' and 'my Unit go every year but I wasn't able to attend this time, so I'd like to go on your trip'. Recently I've heard in conversation about trips to the Costa, 'it's easy to organise', 'I go every year' and, when I've suggested alternatives, 'can you go there?'.
 'It's easy to organise' – agreed, possibly only expeditions to the Lake District (Ambleside Hut), the Cairngorms (Norwegian Lodge) and N Wales (Capel Curig) have greater PXR totals. For a first-time trip or for a Unit on Operations (as is the case with Trip No.10) then it is a pretty perfect venue.

'I go every year' – really? Do you, or your Unit, not want to 'broaden their horizons' and develop yourself and your climbing cohort. For me, and I suppose it is personal, I always get a greater feeling of accomplishment by exploring new venues rather than simply the climbing on offer. I like and enjoy the challenge of working out 'how are we going to do this' and 'could this be done'.

'Can you go there' – pretty much, yes! I've been extremely fortunate throughout my military career to have either come up with 'new' (in a military context) venues or had the opportunity to assist others who also have the same attitude. Some of these have included the first military climbing expedition to Lofoten, the first military climbing expedition to Sardinia and more recently (the genesis part of this article) one of the very few military mountaineering expeditions to Greenland.

THE OPTIONS

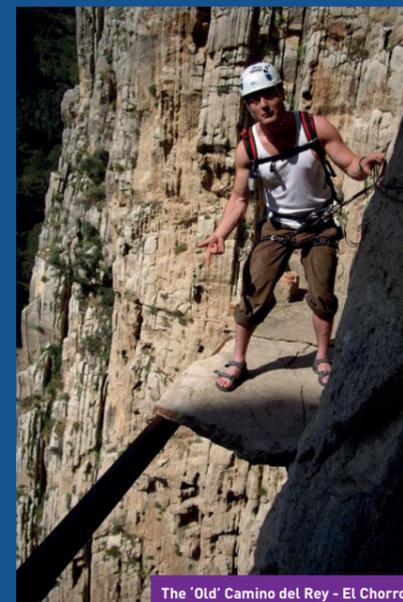
Where to start? I'll try to suggest venues that could be swapped 'like for like' with a winter rock climbing expedition to Costa Blanca. They are either expeditions I have ran, expeditions I've instructed on or expeditions that are still on my 'must visit' list (which weirdly gets longer as I get older!).



Mallorca - Formentor Peninsula

MALLORCA (SPAIN)

A great destination and very simple to access. Excellent climbing (and trekking) and has increased in popularity over the last 15 years. Mostly single pitch sports routes but also multi pitch routes at amenable grades. Hire cars are generally a must because the climbing is spread across the island but again, bargains to be had. Easy access from most UK airports, cheap flights and excellent accommodation options off season. The current Rockfax Guidebook is an excellent resource.



The 'Old' Camino del Rey - El Chorro

EL CHORRO (SPAIN)

Again, a very simple destination to access due the amount of flights into Malaga airport. The climbing is superb but a little less 'adventurous' than it used to be with the upgraded Camino del Rey. Accommodation is less plentiful than the Costa Blanca but is climbing focused if choosing the right one. Huge amount of single pitch and multi pitch climbing in a mostly rural setting. There is an excellent Rockfax guidebook available for the immediate area and a broader coverage provided in 'Andalucia Sport Climbing'.



Costa Blanca

COSTA DURADA (SPAIN)

An area I've yet to sample in depth but holds the world class crags of Siuranna and Margalef amongst others. Simple access through Barcelona and accommodation is plentiful. A hire car to sample the broad range of crags would be useful unless basing yourselves near the 'mega' crags. As an addition to this section and being very near Barcelona is the other worldly Monserrat, a venue discussed as a future AMA rock climbing destination.



Tete de Chien - Monaco

COTE D'AZUR - CALANQUES & MONACO (FRANCE)

When I first visited the Cote d'Azur I was blown away by the volume of rock available to climb, this is one of the birth places of 'sport climbing' and less popular (for the British) now than it used to be, which is shame because it is a phenomenal place to climb. Access is via Marseille or Nice Airports (amongst others) or taking the Route de Soleil straight down through France. I only had a fleeting visit to Marseilles Calanques but was blown away by the rock features and positions. Definitely on my (extensive)

Commando Rat Lines - Malta

list of 'must go back one day'. Interestingly this was one of the venues investigated when I was tasked with finding a new base for Spanrock many years ago (others included Corsica, Red Rocks, USA and Wadi Rum, Jordan). The climbing at Monaco is superbly situated and generally easily accessed. Climbing at the Tete de Chein is spectacular because of the views down into Monaco Harbour and its Superyachts. Guidebooks include Calanques Climbing and the ubiquitous Rockfax Cote d'Azur.

FINALE LIGURE (ITALY)

Another venue high on my previously mentioned list and just across the border from Monaco. A huge area that doesn't seem to get the 'traffic' from the UK it deserves. Access via Genova Airport with plentiful accommodation along the coast. If you've ever had to the chance to come across the guidebook for the area, you can't help but be excited... it's enormous!



Beach cragging - Cala Fuli - Sardinia



Deutsch Wall - La Poltrana - Sardinia



Beach Side cragging - Cala Luna - Sardinia

SARDINIA (ITALY)

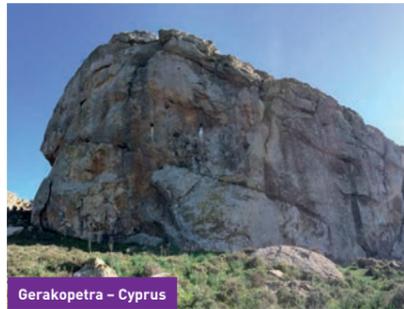
Wow is all I can say! I ran a trip to the East Coast of Sardinia a few years ago based in Cala Gonone. I could find no records of military rock-climbing expeditions to Sardinia and only a couple of trekking expedition PXR's, this was enough to motivate me after seeing some photos of friends climbing there. Simple enough access via Olbia Airport and a hire car to the beautiful village of Cala Gonone. Once there we didn't really need the car again because most of the crags were within walking distance of our apartment. Cheap accommodation off season, superb climbing and the clearest sea water I've ever seen on a very rugged coast. We used the Pietra de Luna guidebook but once on the island we managed to purchase a local guidebook (Arrampicare a Cala Gonone) which contained a huge amount of trad multi pitch climbs in the area. In hindsight, if I had known what was climbing was available in Cala Gonone, Spanrock would have been Sardrock since 2014! I can't recommend climbing in Sardinia enough, visit and be blown away by the quality.



Blue Grotto - Malta

MALTA

A venue I've not visited before but one high on my list after reading a trip report in the AMA journal a few years ago. It seems to be gathering in popularity with a few military expeditions visiting in the last few years. Access is easy through the modern airport and accommodation is plentiful due to its popularity as a tourist destination.



Gerakopetra - Cyprus

CYPRUS

Not a 'main' climbing venue but well worth a visit if nothing else but to climb on the amazing Gerakopetra crag at Droushia. I had the good fortune to instruct on an expedition in Cyprus a week before Christmas, temperatures were great as was the climbing. Whilst the climbing is not hugely extensive what is there is very good. I suppose the main 'selling' point of an expedition to Cyprus is the military infrastructure that can be accessed to reduce costs. Flights are cheap due to the popularity of the island as a tourist venue but potentially the 'trooper' flights could be accessed...worth investigating if costs are to be kept to a minimum? Climbing information can be obtained from : <http://www.cyprusrocks.eu/index.php>

...AND THE OTHERS...

Clearly there's also a huge amount of other venues based upon short haul flights or driving destinations and I'm sure there are readers of this article muttering 'he didn't even mention Sicily/Kalymnos/Corsica etc' but to list every climbing destination is not the point of this article. Some venues I have not mention because of prevailing weather conditions or complicated travel arrangements in 'off season' but, and this is the point of the article, nothings stopping anyone from carrying out a little bit of research on the Internet and scouring ATSYS for old PXR's. For me, the lack of PXR is not a deterrent but creates even more interest in visiting a venue!

Fancy another Costa? ...actually I fancy trying that new place down the road...



1.



2.



3.

Links:

1. www.climb-europe.com

2. www.rockfax.com

3. www.ukclimbing.com

ATSYS

THE STORY OF A CALL OUT

By Donald MacRae, team leader of Dundonnell MRT

The Dundonnell Mountain Rescue Team (MRT) spans the width of Scotland between Loch Broom in the south to the foot of An Teallach in the north. The area covers approximately 2600 Km and is known as the Great Wilderness with many areas being largely inaccessible except on foot.

The 35 volunteers of the Dundonnell MRT are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to keep walkers and climbers safe in this vast area surviving on charitable donations alone.

The following article is a typical diary entry from one member of the MRT and tells the all too often tale of long days and nights helping others in need.

21:30 HOURS

It's Friday night after a long week at work and I'm thinking about heading for bed. The phone rings. It's the duty sergeant at one of the local police stations. A call has been received by the police from a lady whose husband has not returned from a day's walk. A local police officer is with the lady gathering information. The chap had set off at 10 am and was due back at 7 pm after climbing a Corbett. The story so far... a man in his seventies; an experienced hillwalker having climbed all the Munros, set off on a six or seven hour walk. He was well equipped and dressed in dark clothing. I call members of my family to say I won't make our planned get-together tomorrow.

22:30 HOURS

I study the maps of the area and familiarise myself with the route. I contact the keeper of the estate to see if the car of the missing person is still parked up: it is. I call the Duty Sergeant in Inverness to update and to request a forward planning chat with the Aeronautical Rescue Control Centre (ARCC) in Fareham. Ten minutes later I take a call from one of the duty officers in the ARCC; thankfully the ringing doesn't wake the kids or my wife. We discuss options to engage an aircraft. I leave ARCC to speak to the aircrew.

23:30 HOURS

I call ARCC and agree that Rescue Helicopter 951 from Inverness is tasked to carry out an air search of possible routes

the missing person could have taken. Conditions are good for a Forward Looking Infra-Red (FLIR) search. We further agree a rendezvous (RV) for tomorrow at 7.30 am. I call the Police to update them on my plan.

01:30 HOURS

My one year old daughter wakes up with a sickness bug. My wife and I help sort her out and get her back to sleep.

02:30 HOURS

The air search is completed and nothing is found. I speak to the air crew and agree to recommence the air search at 7.30 am. I start to plan for a daylight search. Based on the information given I decide to commence a search at first light; 7 am. The local police officer calls to say he is now finished his shift and is heading home. I call the police to request an Airwave handheld radio; this is agreed and I quietly leave the house and drive to Dingwall police station to collect it and then drive to the RV.

04:30 HOURS

The area is vast with few roads and no mobile phone connections. I call the Search & Rescue Dogs Association (SARDA) to request two dogs. I also call RAF Lossiemouth Mountain Rescue Team to attend. They are in Aberfeldy so it will take some time for them to reach the area. I brief their Team Leader on the search areas as we will have no direct contact with them once they are deployed. I then phone my call-out officers to call out our

team to meet at 7 am at the RV. Because we cover a large geographic area it can take team members over two and a half hours just to drive to a RV.

07:00 HOURS

The first of our team arrive at the RV. I deploy them to walk the missing person's route, out and in. Rescue 951 arrives and begins an air search. The SARDA dogs and other members of our team arrive and are deployed in search areas.

09:30 HOURS

By now all land crews are deployed. The helicopter has flown back to its base in Inverness to refuel and has returned to continue air searches.

11:00 HOURS

The land and air search continues. I walk to the keeper's house and call Torridon Mountain Rescue Team to assist in the developing search; I am very aware that we will lose daylight at about 7 pm. I call the Police and give them an update. I then phone our call-out officers to ask them to contact team members who may have missed the first call.

12:30 HOURS

Rescue 951 departs and flies back to its base for a refuel and crew change. Search teams complete sector searches and are deployed to other areas as the search widens.

14:00 HOURS

I call ARCC to request Rescue 951. I am told this will be their last sortie with us. I call the Police and give them an update. We start discussions about extending the search and moving onto day two.

15:00 HOURS

I look across the loch and see a sole walker. Having not seen anyone walk past us this morning I begin to wonder if this might be the missing person. A short time later he emerges at our RV and is confirmed as the missing person. He is cared for by a team member while I call the



Police and inform them of his safe return. As I cannot contact the aircrew directly, I call ARCC to allow them to make contact with them. The aircraft returns and lands at the RV. I brief the crew and request they 'fly high' and make radio contact with all

hill parties to return to base. We have a great relationship with air rescue crew and they agree to fly all hill teams off the hill before they return to base saving us several hours of walking.

17:00 HOURS

After thanking all search teams, Dundonnell MRT head to a local hotel for a meal.

18:30 HOURS

I return home and start bath and bed time with my kids. At 8pm I head off to bed having been awake for 36 hours.

THE NEXT DAY

I complete a write-up of the rescue for Scottish Mountain Rescue statistical records. I then write a short press release and publish this to all our press contacts. A post of the incident is put on our Facebook and Twitter accounts.

MONDAY

I respond to emails and phone calls at work about the rescue as journalists prepare a story.

FOLLOWING SUNDAY

I hold a short debrief around the call-out at our next exercise.



I heard the queue for the step was long- But this is insane!



Good god! This isn't the queue for the step!

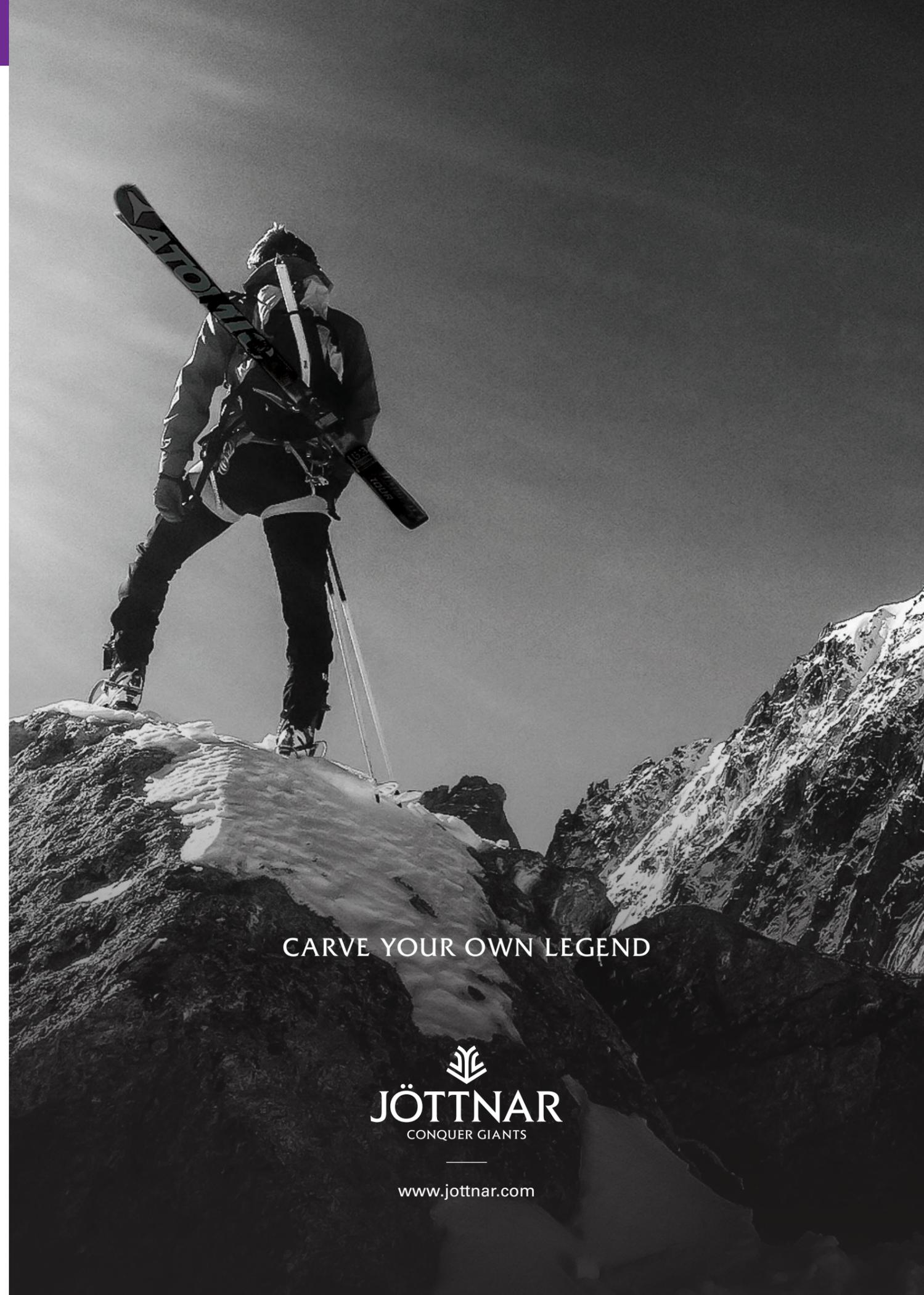


What!?



No- This is the queue to book your alarm call, so you can get up early enough to queue all day to apply for an application to fill out the request to book a place in the queue for the step.

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