

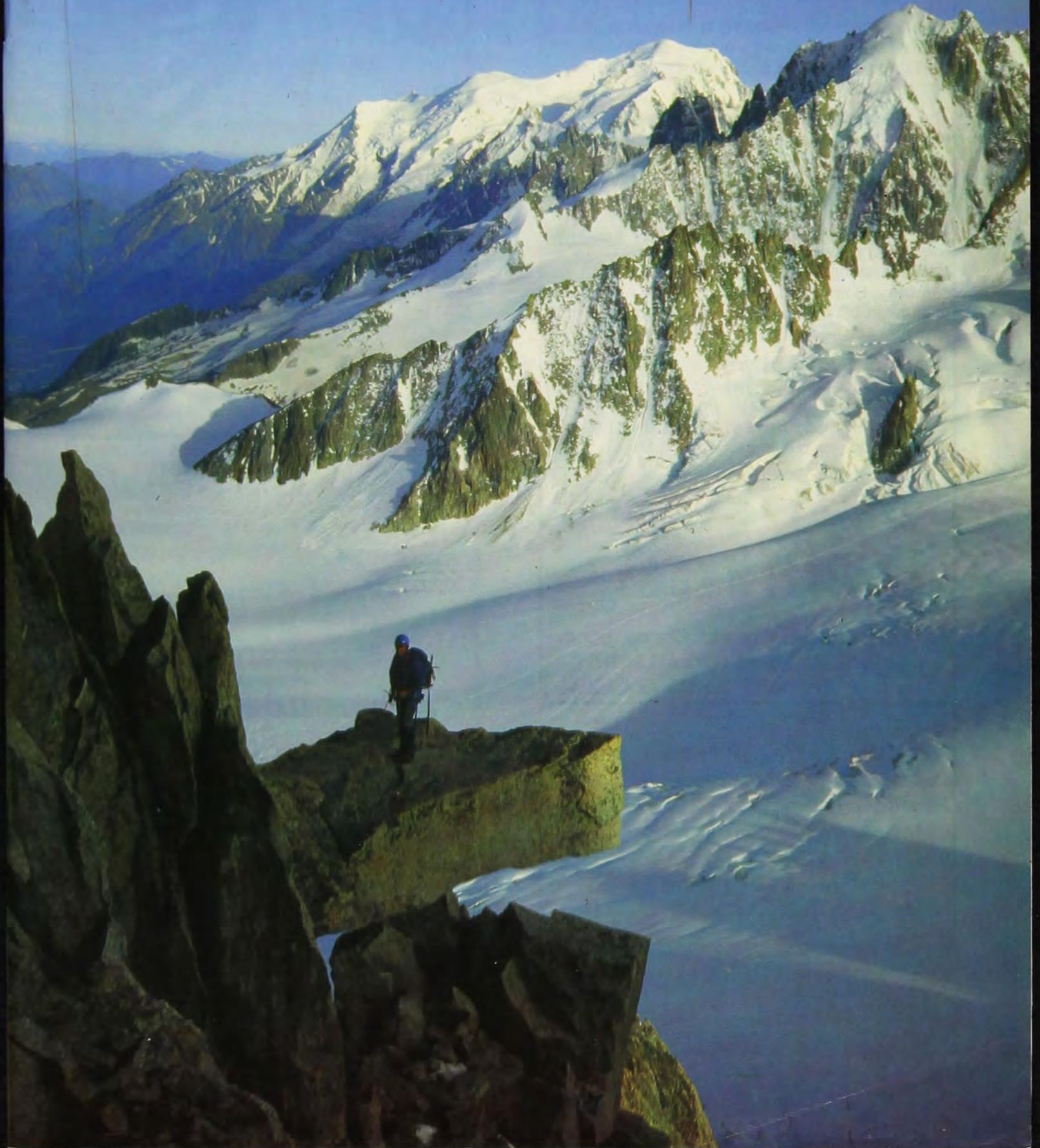


SUMMER 1993

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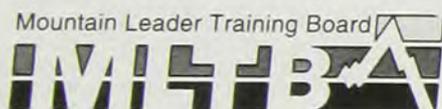
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# ARMY MOUNTAINEER



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### WINTER 1994 EDITION

Please send or fax your contributions for the Summer 1993 edition to the editor by the end of August 1993. Photographs and slides (which will be returned) should be accompanied by a suitable caption.

While typed, double spaced copy will delight the editor, please do not hesitate to send in articles in your own fair handwriting if you are not on speaking terms with a typist.

### On the cover . . .

*Pte Anderson standing on the table of 'Table du Roc', Aiguille du Tour.*

*Savage Highlander article in next edition.*

*The Army Mountaineering Association  
Summer Edition 1993 was Designed and  
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## The AGM Meet '92

It happens every time. We enjoy it so much - the climbing, talking, eating and drinking - that nobody stops to write anything down. The 1992 AGM was one of the best ever. 'Awesome activity' might sum it up. I certainly packed quite a lot in to the weekend.

On the Friday I raced up to Wales with Ian Drew, arriving at the foot of Carreg Alltrem at 3p.m. We did Lavaredo in two slimy pitches but the crag was drying fast. Lightning Visit went in 40 minutes as a single pitch, leaving us just enough time to dash off to the PYG for the 5 hour Committee meeting.

On the Saturday four of us drove to Tan y Grisian where it poured so we moved on to Tremadog. Chris Field and I potted up Merlin and Grim Wall while the editorial team did something desperate on Craig Pant Ifan. We all just made it back for the excellent buffet, a very enjoyable talk on Everest 92 by Nigel Williams and the prospect of another crippling hangover.

The AGM on Sunday was punchy, productive and mercifully short. Afterwards, Marcus Hawthorn persuaded me to join him on Main Wall, Cyn Las. The wind and wetness gave the expedition a certain classic authenticity. A further night at Capel enabled us to savour the delights of Oxo, Clogwyn y Wenallt, before heading home on Monday afternoon. We had over 50 at the Meet and despite the middling weather I think we all bagged some good climbs. It is a great way to meet old friends and voice your views, - What about coming next year?

Maj. M.T. King.

## Flying High

Three members of the AMA have just returned from Ecuador, having spent a month there climbing volcanoes as part of an Army Air Corps expedition. WO2 Fred Salt, the leader of the expedition, Sgt Graham Green, his assistant leader and LCpl Nick Holly climbed a total of 5 volcanoes and introduced young AAC soldiers to high altitude mountaineering.

The expedition began with a flight on KLM (Dutch) Airlines to Quito, the capital of Ecuador via Amsterdam and the Dutch West Indies. The capital, a huge sprawling city surrounded by volcanoes, owes its comparative wealth to the oil boom in the seventies. Although not a rich country by western standards the people, mostly ethnic Indians, are a happy lot and not short of any of the basic necessities of life. Quito was to be the expedition base, with small trips mounted from there to the mountains. Situated at 9500 feet and covered in smog it proved ideal as the lack of oxygen in the air helped the teams acclimatise. This combined with a relatively decent hotel and good food lifted the morale of the team after a few hard days in the mountains.

The first objective was the 'Pinchinchas', two volcanoes situated 10 kilometres due west of Quito; these would be ideal as a training and 'shake-out' climb. The idea was to climb Rucu Pinchincha then trek to Guagua Pinchincha and bivvy there on the first day. The next day would involve the climb of Guagua Pinchincha and the long walk out prior to the trip back to Quito. Although not normally snow covered, the mountains, at 4794 metres / 15730 feet are only 40 feet lower than the summit of Mt. Blanc the highest mountain in the Western Alps.

With the heavy packs being carried it would be a good test of the teams fitness and resolve. The climb went well and both mountains were climbed in good style with only one team member failing to reach the summit of Guagua Pinchincha through sickness.

After a good nights sleep plans were laid for the next expedition, this was to be Cotopaxi. This mountain 5897 metres / 19348 feet high, is the highest volcano in the world. It has a dramatic history of many violent eruptions with debris causing massive destruction and death as far away as Esmeraldas, a town on the Pacific Coast 250 kilometres to the west! The expedition hoped it would behave itself while they were attempting to scale its flanks.

A few days training on its lower glacier and a recce of the icefall, and the expedition were ready to give it a try. The climb proved to be a tough one but was well worth the struggle. On 10 June eight members of the AAC stood on top and unfurled the AAC flag, it was a proud moment for all. The huge smoking crater, surrounded by overhanging snow cornices was breathtaking as it appeared out of the passing mist, before vanishing again in another cloud, leaving the climbers seemingly perched on a small knoll of pure white snow; a stark contrast to the heavy pollution of Quito. The view south to the massive of Chimbarazo our next objective was stunning. After a difficult descent on the snow, softened by the hot equatorial sun, the team headed back to Quito and some well earned fillet steak and a beer or two!

A couple of days rest shopping in Quito and the expedition was ready to attempt Chimborazo. Over 20000 feet - nearly 4 miles high - this mountain would test any group of mountaineers. For the young AAC soldiers it would be a supreme test of their fitness and determination to succeed. Chimborazo 6310 metres / 20703 feet is a huge mountain and was long thought to be the highest mountain in the world. It still retains the distinction of being the point on the earths surface which is farthest from its centre: this is because of the earths equatorial bulge. It also has the distinction of being the nearest point of the surface to the sun.

The journey south to Chimborazo was fairly straight forward - apart from our guide taking a wrong track after assuring the team

# In The Andes

he knew exactly where he was going! He only admitted defeat when the expedition bus came to a river crossing. The supports for a bridge were there but the bridge was still to be built sometime in the future! Needless to say from this point on the team took more interest in navigation. At the end of the track leading to the Chimborazo refuge the team started the climb, with very heavy packs up the desert-like landscape. It was only a short climb, but at 4800 metres the climbers felt like it went on for days, though it was not long before everyone was settling into life in the refuge.

Two more days of training followed with a recce to 18000 feet before the leader decided it was time to select the climbing team. Some were feeling ill and much too weak to attempt this difficult climb so it was decided to leave them in the refuge at Base Camp. Acclimatising to altitude involves some physiological changes in the body and not everyone is capable of achieving these changes, even after a prolonged period at altitude. Living at nearly 16000 feet in the refuge had taken its toll and only 7 climbers were deemed fit enough to attempt the climb.

The weather had not been too good the last few days with snow and high winds, but the snow had now stopped and the winds eased a little so it was decided to give it a try. At 10 pm on the 17 June the seven climbers with the aid of headtorches started up the scree slopes heading for a tongue of ice that marked the start of climbing proper. After about an hour of stumbling over the loose steep rock in the dark, the glacier was reached and they roped up into two teams. Salt leading Skinner and Bacon, while Green took Hudson, O'Brien and Bickerstaff. It was not long before it became obvious that Bickerstaff was having trouble keeping going and had no hope of reaching the summit. He was going very slowly and could only manage a few paces before resting. It was decided to leave him part way along a rocky ramp above the first ice field and underneath some overhanging rock. It was too dangerous for him to return down the ice alone and he would be safe there for a few hours. He had good equipment and clothes



*Ex Blue Triangle June 1992.  
On the summit of Cotopaxi 5897 metres/19348 feet.*

ledge cut out of the steep ice slope. He was clipped into an ice screw to prevent him falling off in case he fell asleep and then helped into his bivvy / sleeping bag and wished a fond goodnight. He would be alright for a few hours if a little cold and lonely.

The remainder of the climbers made up one rope and continued up the mountain. The wind continued and it was bitterly cold. The summit was reached much earlier than expected at around 0335 am, it was dark and misty. A difficult decision was now required. Did they wait until dawn so that pictures could be taken at the summit or descend immediately. With experienced climbers the leaders would have dug a shell scrape and waited out of the wind. With the young relatively inexperienced climbers it was different. The weather was very cold and windy and one or two of the climbers had very cold feet and wanted to get down before any serious damage was done. Even if they stayed on the summit there was no guarantee that the visibility would improve at dawn, so the leader decided to descend right away. Good time was made on the descent and the two lonely climbers were picked up none the

worse for their forced bivouac. It was a tired but happy crew that arrived back at the refuge to congratulations and hot drinks at around 7 am. It was a good effort on the part of all concerned and quite an achievement. The trip back to Quito went without incident and everyone looked forward to the R&R phase.

The expedition now split into smaller groups and went their separate ways. Some went to the west coast to Esmeraldas and Manta to find the hot sun and sandy beaches while others went to



*Ex Blue Triangle June 1992.  
One of the many crevasses on Chimborazo 6310 metres/20703 feet.*



*Ex Blue Triangle June 1992.  
Ice Splendour on Cotopaxi 5897 metres/19348 feet*

the beautiful islands of the Galapagos with the giant tortoises. The group that went to Manta decided to hire a car and drive over the Andes and through the western jungle. While interesting it proved to be a very exhausting trip over terrible roads, not a journey to be repeated. The best form of transport in Ecuador is the aeroplane, it is fast, cheap and comfortable.

The group that went to Manta returned to Quito early, determined to attempt another volcano. The mountain chosen was the twin peaked Alleghenies, which at 5263 metres / 17268 feet is the sixth highest mountain in Ecuador. Salt and Hudson reached the summit by a route on the east face at 1230 pm after a tiring climb in cold weather on 28 June. This was the fifth volcano that the expedition had climbed and provided a fitting end to a very successful trip. Details of the volcanoes are listed on page 4.

Rucca Pinchincha	4787 metres / 15706 feet	12 to summit
Guaga Pinchincha	4794 metres / 15729 feet	
Cotopaxo	5897 metres / 19348 feet	8 to summit
Chimborazo	6310 metres / 20703 feet	5 to summit
Alleghenies	5263 metres / 17270 feet	2 to summit

The expedition leader will be back in South America in December, this time for a solo attempt on Mt. Aconcagua 6959 metres / 22834 feet, the highest mountain in the Western hemisphere.

Finally the team would like to thank the AMA for the very generous donation made to the expedition.

**WO2 (RQMS) Fred Salt**



*Ex Blue Triangle June 1992.  
Chimborazo 6310 metres/20703 feet from the Chimborazo refuge*



Ex Blue Triangle June 1992.  
Struggling near the summit of Cotopaxi 5897 metres/19348 ft

## JSAM 92 Report

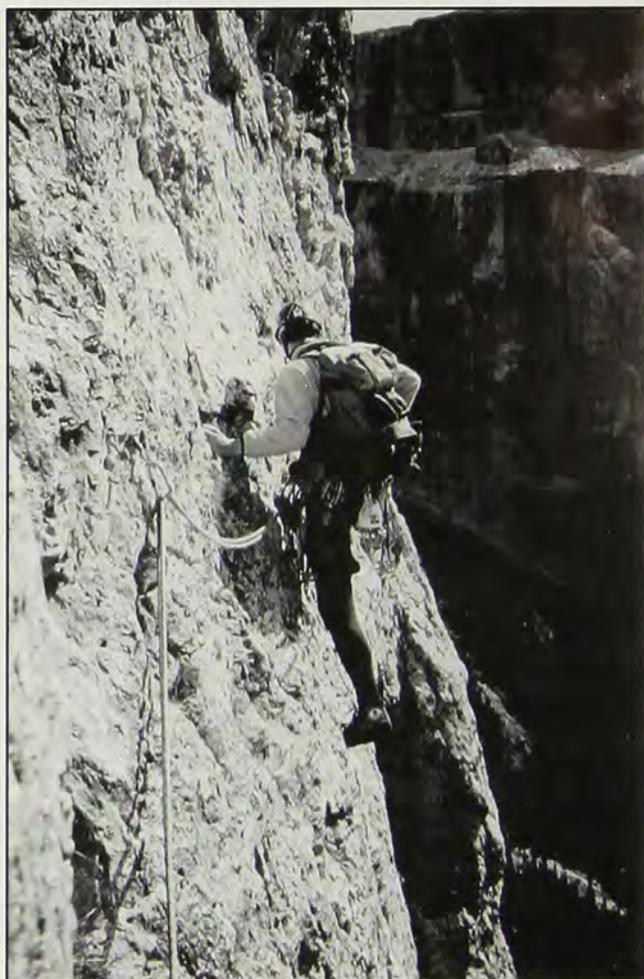
The Dolomites of northern Italy provide a truly remarkable setting for a Joint Services Alpine Meet. The many thousands of feet of vertical limestone, dramatically slashed by abysmal gullies and lethal stone-chutes and conveniently divided by boulder covered scree ledges and grass terraces, are interlaced by a network of cable cars, chairlifts, multi-hairpinned roads, huts, way marked paths, *via ferrata* and the colourful rope lacing of the climbing hordes. It was to this climber's playground that the members of JSAM 92 set forth on the 28th of August, travelling by a variety of means from BAOR and the UK.

Based at the little village of Canazei, nestling far below the Sella Pass, JSAM 92 was provided with all the ingredients for success: an excellent turnout, plenty of sunshine, and close proximity to the Sass Pordoi, Sella, Sassolungo, Piz di Ciavazes and Marmolada climbing areas. Many climbs proved to be within a short walk of a convenient car park or lay-by (as little as 10 minutes to the Sella Towers), while for the more imaginative (and wealthy) the excellent variety of huts provided access to the remoter cliffs. For those of a pedestrian inclination, the abundant *via ferrata* provided much entertainment, particularly in the wake of the occasional storm, while those with itchy feet took themselves off variously to Brenta, Catanaccio, Civetta, the Pala Group and the Tre Cima di Lavaredo.

In truth the weather was somewhat too fickle for comfort. September is relatively late in the season, and the torrential rain that met most meet members on arrival at the waterlogged campsite boded anything but well. Predictably, the locals soon yielded the customary intelligence that this had been the first rain for months, but to be fair the sun was soon out and drying the rock. The fortnight saw a mixture of bright warm sunshine, ferocious storms which produced deep frost and snowfall, and, towards the end of the meet, lingering mist and rain. Most avoided being caught out by the worst of the weather, with the exception of those young Sapper NCOs Andy Copley and John Allison who found themselves sheltering from the lightning in a cave on the Marmolada, and one or two ill-advised folk who chose to do a *via ferrata* in quasi-winter conditions. A number even entered into the spirit of winter mountaineering by climbing the glacier on the north side of the Marmolada, an easy but entertaining (!) outing.

The meet was not without its share of characters, and the Army was represented by a total of 17:-

The prolific team of Cockwell and Kivell, who as young officers and university students had no shortage of time and energy and



Mike Smith on Piz Ciavazes, S Face Direct (IV)

laboured to great effect and to a high standard.

The pedestrian team of Manuel and Johnson, who concentrated on *via ferrata*, but also completed some good routes.

The dynamic team of Watson and Smith, whose 'warm-up' route proved to be one of their hardest.

The technical team of Hardaker and O'Connor, who developed a taste for the roadside delights of the Sella Towers.

The noisy team of Smith and Spivey, who indulged in 'fishing' off the Sella Towers, mused on the callowness of youngsters who had never even been to Pillar Rock, and sprinted for the occasional

cable car.

The unhealthy team of Anderson and Dewsnap, whose climbing was rudely interrupted by a bout of food poisoning.

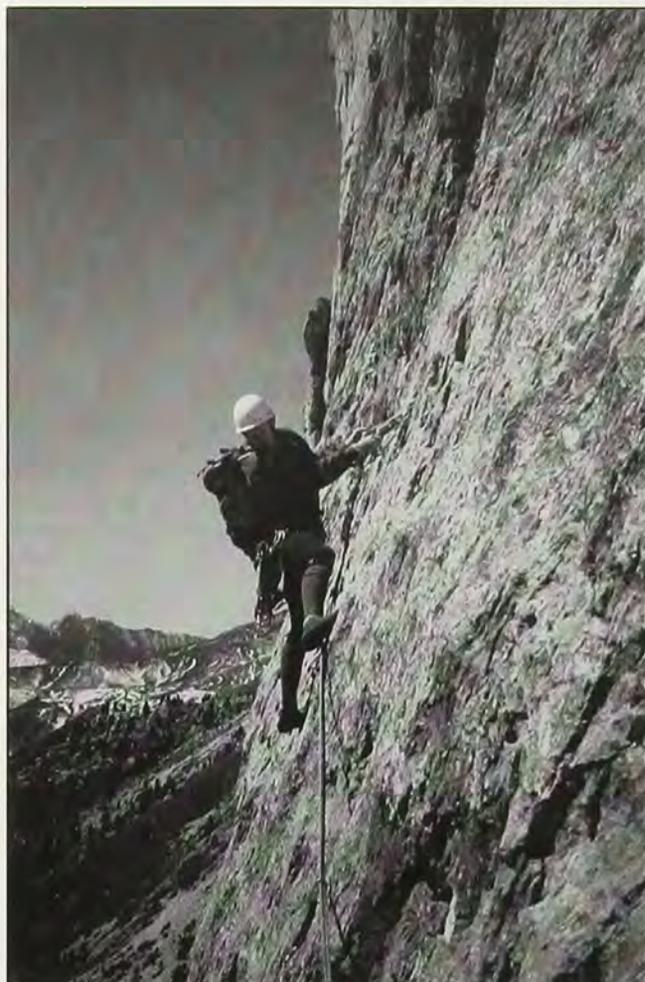
The ambitious team of Nichols and Abram, who tested the occasional rope and attempted a few new routes.

The eccentric team of Allison and Copley (see above), who variously 'sacked it and rammed it' throughout the fortnight.

And the odd man out, Chastney, who teamed up with a light blue partner to do some impressive routes.

The base campsite in Canazei was characterised in the main by a dense conglomeration of semi-permanent caravans, in which the

Ser (a)	Area (b)	Route (c)	Done by (d)	Remarks (e)
1.	Sella Towers		Nichols/Abram	
			Hardaker/O'Connor Anderson/Dewsnap	
2.		1st, South Face (Pillastr) IV and V	Spivey/Smith Nichols/Abram	
3.		1st, SE Chimney III	Hardaker/O'Connor	
4.		1st, Fiechtel IV	Hardaker/O'Connor Anderson/Dewsnap	
5.		2nd, North Face IV+	Watson/Smith Cockwell/Kivell	Or was it the North West Ridge Direct?
6.		and, Messner VI-	Kidd/Cockwell	
7.		3rd, West Face V	Cockwell/Kivell	
8.		3rd, Sw Face III+	Hardaker/O'Connor	
9.		3rd, Vinatzer VI-	Cockwell/Kivell	
10.	Piz di Ciavazes	South Face Direct VI	Watson/Smith Cockwell/Kivell	Well polished!
11.		South East Face (Ramp Route) IV	Smith/Spivey Copley/Allison Hardaker/O'Connor	
12.		Kleine Micheluzzi IV+	Smith/Spivey	
13.		South East Arete VII or V+/A1	Watson/Smith Cockwell/Kivell Chastney/Kidd	Free
14.		Shubert VI/A1	Chastney/Kidd	Aid pitch free at E2 5c!
15.		Possnecker VF	Dewsnap/Anderson Smith/Spivey Watson	
16.	Sassolungo	Cinque Dita Traverse IV	Watson/Smith	
17.		Via Ferrata Oskar Schuster Group E	Hardaker/O'Connor Anderson/Dewsnap	
18.	Marmolada	Trincee VF Group F	Watson/Smith Smith/Spivey	
19.		Ordinary route	Cockwell/Kivell Abram/Nichols	At least VS!
20.		Via Ferrata Contrin (6136 and 602)	Johnson/Manuel	
21.		Via Ferrata in Collac	Dewsnap/Anderson	
22.	Sass Pordoi	Piaz Arete V+/A0	Cockwell/Kivell Watson/Smith	
23.		Via Maria IV	Cockwell/Kivell Nichols/Abram Kidd/Copley/Chastney	
24.		South West Face V+	Cockwell/Kivell Watson/Smith	Ron James must have done a different route!
25.		South Face IV		
26.	Catanaccio	Vajolet Towers South West Ridge IV (Torre Delago)	Nichols/Abram	
27.	Vajolet	Towers South France (Delago Chimney) IV	Kidd/Chastney	
28.		Vajolet Towers traverse IV	Cockwell/Kivell Nichols/Abram	
29.		1st Vajolet Tower IV	Johnson/Manuel	
30.		3rd Vajolet Tower IV/IV+	Johnson/Manuel	
31.		East Face Direct (Steger) V+	Cockwell/Kivell	
32.		Punta Emma NE Face (Piaz Crack) V, or IV, A0	Cockwell/Kivell	Double 50m needed for descent
33.	Piz Boe	Piazzetta VF Group G	Watson	Reversed
34.	Cinque Torre	Torre Inglese SE Face IV-	Hardaker/O'Connor	Well bolted
35.	Tre Cima	W Face Cima Grande V	Chastney/Kidd	



... Jon Watson following

idler (and usually continental) campers lived their comfortable lives. One well-groomed family of Italians was even observed to smuggle armfuls of take-away pizzas into their luxurious abode. By contrast, the members of JSAM 92 took up residence at the bottom end of the campsite, well away from all this opulence, and established a temporary village of Vangos, Winter Gear geodesics, makeshift awnings, and even the odd family frame tent. Here, despite extensive 'civilianisation', we were no doubt easily recognisable by the ubiquitous Ron Hills, our inability to master the 'hole-in-the-ground' toilets (how do they manage it?), and our propensity to consume vast quantities of pasta. The initial period of acclimatisation included the discovery that one was only allowed

out of the campsite after 0800 (which stymied one or two early forays), working round the 4-hour Italian siesta, and the continual requirement to divide by 2097 during shopping trips. It was suggested at one stage that a few 'O's be removed from the end of their prices, and perhaps also from their words.

On the rock, it took a little time to get used to being overtaken by the occasional pushy Austrian or Italian team, whose members were not averse to doing some knitting on the cramped stances, clipping into one's runners and exploiting one's carefully established abseils. This distressing process was, however, often reversed at the start of *Via Ferrata* by the simple expedient of jumping onto the wires and disappearing upwards without resorting to the usual complement of slings, krabs, helmets and gloves. Judging by the muttered comments that this performance generally elicited, the overtakes were in no doubt as to our nationality! In a welcome restoration of national pride, once our budding hard men were warmed up and in full flow, it was frequently us Brits who were doing the overtaking. It soon proved surprisingly easy to escape from the masses by dint of careful route selection and brisk climbing.

By the end of a very productive meet the climbing roll of honour included the routes shown in the table:

The result of these exploits was a highly successful meet. Few parties enjoyed more than 1 or 2 rest days in the base camp, though bad weather did force the occasional short spell of inactivity. By the end of the meet all were looking fit, hardened and weather-beaten, and there was much evidence of damage to knuckles and fingertips thanks to the unforgiving rock. Thankfully there were no accidents or other disasters; a combination of careful briefing and common sense meant that all were able to perform within their abilities without sacrificing the desire to extend the boundaries of their mountaineering experience.

Finally, some words of advice and caution to future JSAM coordinators:

- The RAF managed to get a higher rate of CILOR than the Army, despite every effort to secure supplements, uplifts etc from HQ LONDIST. This is an increasingly familiar story.
- The Services Booking Centre provide an excellent service, and can offer discounts of up to 40% on most cross channel ferries.
- Route Approval Cards are essential, and must be closely supervised.
- Pay close attention to matters of insurance, including travel and breakdown, third party liability, medical and theft/damage of equipment. Meet members must be properly covered, despite the expense.
- The business of individual adventurous training grants can be troublesome. Members of JSAMs are eligible for grants, and they must be provided with a clear letter of authority to attach to their claim.

And last but not least: the JSAM has been accused of being a subsidised holiday for gladiators. It is not. JSAM 92 proved that for sheer quality and intensity of adventure training at all levels and for soldiers of all ranks, abilities, experience and ages it is very hard to beat.



Sass Pordoi from Piz Ciavazes

# Summer in The Yukon

by Major Lauriann Owens

In response to Ian Drew's statement in "Army Mountaineer" Summer 1991 that the AMA will be "letting in women next!" here is an article from a woman member. I am sure too that there must be many more of us out there.

On Tuesday 23 June 1992 I set off from Brize Norton to Calgary with seven men to participate in 'Exercise Yukon Cheechako'. In the year 1898 miners invaded the Yukon in search of gold. They were divided into two classes: a "Cheechako" - a miner new to the goldfields and a "Sourdough" - who had weathered the winter and survived. We reckoned that one month later we could be elevated to the status of "Sourdoughs"!

At Calgary we rented a 12 seater minibus for the 2000 mile journey up the Alaskan Highway to Whitehorse, capital of the Yukon. As seven of us could drive the journey was just about bearable, at least the route was virtually straight. We enjoyed a wonderful stop at Laird Hot Springs en route and resolved to stop there again on our return journey. Whitehorse was reminiscent of a wild west frontier town and we halted there to stock up before driving further north to Kluane Lake. We booked in at Sheep Mountain for our briefing on bears and collection of bear bins, before starting a three day trek upto Slims River. It took 6 hours to reach the camping ground and although we saw plenty of evidence of bears we did not (fortunately) spot the real thing. I think SSGt. "Dickie" Davies and Bdr John Hottens jingling coke cans had something to do with this. The next morning we climbed Observation Mountain. After 5 hours in the scorching heat we reached the summit. The resulting view over 4 lanes of the Kshawash glacier was well worth the effort. It took only about one and a half hours to descend and get back to camp. The third day we did the return trek back down the valley. Then we returned to Whitehorse to celebrate Canada Day and re-supply for the icefield phase of our trip. We had arranged to charter an aircraft through the Arctic Research Institute of Edmonton University. Andy Williams was our pilot, a laconic Welshman who had emigrated to Canada some years previously. We were briefed by the Kluane National Parks Superintendent who inspected all our equipment and assured himself that we were well enough equipped to go up onto the icefields. The flight over the Kluane glaciers was incredible and all of us were awed by the strange sights below us.

Andy flew us up in three flights and we set up our base camp on the edge of a huge plateau at the foot of Mount Queen Mary. The Plateau was ringed by ridges and mountains, and from our tiny tents in this vast space we faced out onto the huge mass of Mount Logan.

For the first day or so we roped up and practised crevasse crossing, ice arrests and generally getting used to our equipment. Our leader was Lt Ian Clarke RM. He led one rope while Lt John Owens RE took the second rope. The complete lack of other life was eerie and the silence was broken only by the distant avalanches. At 4am on our third day we began our ascent of Queen Mary's Poodle (3340 ft.). Due to the hot sun we had to be



The author sunning herself at base camp.

finished by early afternoon as the snow became far too soft. It did not get dark at all this far north and so we could see well whatever hour it was. Some parts of the route were equivalent to Scottish grade 2 and 3 and some slopes were very icy. We reached the summit after 3 hours and were rewarded by a magnificent sunrise and almost 360 degrees clear view of the other peaks such as St Elias, Mt. Steele and beyond.

Once back in camp we rested for the remainder of the day and at 7.30 the following morning we set off for a ridge line across the plateau. The ridge was heavily corniced and the scree was crumbling badly. We took 8

hours to traverse the ridge and two and a half hours to return to camp. After 12 hours of walking and climbing we were all pretty shattered, the weather had been overcast and miserable all day. LBdr "Wez" Westerman had slight frost nip and Gnr "Taff" Davies suffered a near miss from a rock fall!



One thousand miles down, one thousand to go.



*Resting on the ridge climb with Queen Mary's 'Poodle' in the background.*

Two days later we had a night start on Mount St Mary. Two of the party turned back due to the affects of the cold air and at 4.30am three more returned to camp. The party had reached the summit of the "Poodle" but the snow was too soft to ascend Queen Mary. By 7am everyone had returned. We radioed through to Andy and asked to come off. We had now achieved all that was possible and our plan was to head up to Alaska and the Wrangell Mountains. Unfortunately the weather had turned bad and we ended up spending a second week waiting to be rescued. We suffered a whiteout and heavy snow and wind, plus lack of food. In fact, for the final three days we rationed ourselves to one meal each, pasta or oats ! The radio batteries faded and we could no longer transmit, although we could still hear Andy. When the weather began to clear he announced that he would pick us up. Once back in civilisation we thanked Andy, paid the bill and made a dash for Haines Junction Bakery and their delicious french bread pizzas.

There was not enough time for Alaska now and so we decided to return to Calgary via the Rockies, stopping at Mount Robson, Jasper and Banff. The only excitement on our return journey involved Dickie's toy gun (a gift for his son) which caused a security alert at Calgary Airport, and leaving Wez behind at Calais with his newly acquired mountain bike.

The expedition was led by my husband John Owens, and Ian Clarke led the mountain phase. Other expedition members were SSgt "Dickie" Davies, Bdr John Hotten, LBdrs Dominic Williams and John Westerman and Gunner Greg Davies. All expedition members wish to thank AFFAS; Harding King and Partners; Lloyds Bank, Amesbury and Mandrake Associates for their very generous sponsorship.

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## Elbesandstein

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Have you ever thought of trying somewhere different? Well pack your bags and head for Dresden. With Autobahns nearly all the way it's not as far away as you might think. But why Dresden I hear you ask ? Well there just happens to be quite a lot of rock there, infact the guidebook we had claims an astonishing 1600 routes on 93 cliffs (there are 8 guidebooks to the whole area), enough to keep anyone going well into the next century.

Myself and Denis visited the 'ELBESANDSTEIN GEBIRGE', which is situated in the Sächsische Schweiz area of the former Eastern Germany, in August. Sadly this was only for a weekend, although I have a feeling it will not be our last visit. For what is a relatively small area, the amount of rock is overwhelming, it is literally everywhere that you look.

Armed with a German guide book, one of six for the area, we set of on our initial recce. We had every intention of climbing, however, I was under the impression that climbing after rain was not allowed, it had just been raining for the previous 12 hours. The first cliff we visited was Pfaffenstein. This lump of rock covers approximately 5 x 3 kilometres in area and averages some 50 meters in height. The cliff comes complete with restaurant, tourist paths and caves. Although not very busy while we were there, the area is a popular tourist haunt as well as a climbers paradise.

Our first chilling thoughts as we looked around Pfaffenstein were about the protection, or at least the lack of it! This area is not for those of a nervous disposition. The main protection is in situ,

and comprises huge rings attached to bolts which are cemented into the rock. Quite secure but, usually a good 15 - 20m apart with frightening blank walls inbetween. Pfaffenstein is a wall or chimney climbers dream come true. There are lots of towers of dark sinister sandstone and many deep ravines and chimneys around every corner.

We soon learnt that the rule about not climbing after rain was incorrect however there are a lot of rules associated with this area. All the rules are however quite justified as anyone who has climbed at Harrisons Rocks will appreciate. Sandstone is pretty soft stuff, after the outer protective hard layer is worn through it is not long before the rock just starts to disintegrate. Rules such as no metal gear, stoppers, hexs, friends etc: no pitons: no chalk. There are in fact almost fourteen pages of rules in the guide book.

After a quick sprint into Czechoslovakia to send the postcards, Denis and I decided to look for something to climb on. We picked a small tower called Nonne, described in the guide books, as ideal for beginners and children! We were quite taken aback by what the local climbers consider a good cliff for novices. Nonne is a satellite of a much larger group, again with its restaurant and steps. There were about 15 climbs on the tower ranging from II to X (East German grades) The character of the rock was equally diverse.

Armed with only slings and the rope I attempted the first route. To my surprise, and relief, I found that protection was reasonably easy to organise, there were plenty of spikes and threads however,



Mike Smith starting Sudwestwand VI, Nonne.



A small corner of Pfaffenstein.

the jammed knots were most definitely a bit 'tongue in cheek'. We both lead a couple of routes each then put a top rope up on Nonne's test piece. This was an excitingly overhanging wall totally different in character to the rest of the cliff. Although fun to top rope, a lead would have been very serious as failure to clip any of the three bolts would have meant a fatal ground fall.

Day two was spent at Lillienstein. Although another massive tower, climbing only appears to be on part of the cliff. It was a picture in the guide book that had lead us to this cliff, so we decided to start with the route in the picture. The route was Westkante. The start was a long but easy traverse following a large natural fault line. As the ground at the base



Lillienstein

of the cliff slopes away exposure and remoteness increase and the break leads, in two pitches, to a spectacular hanging belay 40m above the ground. Fortunately this was on two large ring bolts. The next pitch launches off from the stance to a steep wall, after only a few feet this eases off and is followed by a fantastic

holdless arete. This leads to the next stance. In the 35m of climbing there was one ring bolt and a jammed knot. This climb saved its difficulties for the last two pitches which although short proved quite hairy due to the marginal protection. Rope drag was also a problem which was caused by the extremely rough nature of the rock. At the top of the route we were mobbed by camera pointing, awe-struck, sensible-shoe-clad tourists. The route had taken us about three hours. We quickly rushed past the crowds and down the steps to the start of another route.

By now it was quite hot, and with the sun on our backs we polished off another two routes in much quicker style. Most of the climbers here climbed in three's, didn't go to the top of the cliff, and abseiled off from about 45-50m up. All the locals we spoke to were very friendly and quite happy to give advice on the routes

and cliffs in the area.

Sadly it was soon time to pack the gear and head for home. The next trip to Elbesandstein will definitely be longer. The climbing is brilliant as long as you can put up with the many rules and committing nature of the routes. Real adventure climbing!

## FACT FILE

### Directions

*From North of Corps area*

A2 To Magdeburg, B71 To Halle, A14 To Dresden, B172 To Konigstein.

*From South of Corps area*

A44 To Kassel, A7 To Kirchheimer Dreieck, A4 To Dresden, B172 To Konigstein.

### FUEL

Dresden Nord. Southbound on B170. BP & ESSO. Both take coupons.

### GUIDE BOOK

SÄCHSISCHE SWEIZ (BAND 1-8)

Kletter Führer Sport Verlag ISBN 3/328/0041/1-8.

### CAMPSITE

Various but 'Campingplatze Ostrauer Mühle' in Bad Schandau highly recommended.

### GEAR

Ropes. 11 mm or Double 9mm for harder routes.

Slings. Narrow tape for threads. Heavy duty for spikes.

Knotted slings. Various sizes from 5mm to 11mm.

### GRADE COMPARISON

<i>East G</i>	<i>UIAA</i>	<i>UK</i>
III	III	3c
VIIIb	VI	5a

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# Exercise Mera Diamond

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At 1230 on the 12th of March 1992, six members of 25 Engineer Regiment, stood on the summit of Mera Peak, 21,246 ft in the Hinku valley of the Khumbu Himal, Nepal. It was the culmination of two years of planning by the team leader, Capt Russ Waller AGC, and six months of preparation and training for the eight man team. The entire team of Exercise MERA DIAMOND successfully reached the summit, in two separate groups, after having trekked for two and a half weeks to reach their base camp. The eight man team consisted of:

Capt Russ Waller AGC  
Capt Ian Redwood RE  
Lt Patrick Smith RE  
SSgt Chris Fern RE  
Sgt Tom Rutherford REME  
Cpl Jim Ross  
LCpl 'Zippy' George  
Spr Jason Lamb

The whole venture began on the 6th of February when the eight man team left Roberts Barracks in Osnabruck for Heathrow. From there they flew to Kathmandu, via Dubai. Pakistan International Airways greeted us on the aircraft not with a safety announcement, but a call to prayer to the Prophet Mohammed - it set the tone for the entire trip.

The team spent eight days in Kathmandu, wrangling with customs and third world mentality, trying to get our freight out of a bonded warehouse. It was decided that the team should begin its trek in, without Russ Waller, who was to remain in Kathmandu to argue, cajole, bribe, punch, swear or flatter the customs agent, whichever was required, depending on how negotiations were going. Russ probably used every one of these tactics at one time or another. The freight was eventually released for the sum of £700 import tax, and Russ and it moved to Lukla to meet the rest of the team.

Before we could even start to climb the mountain, we had an eight hour coach journey from Kathmandu to Jiri, and then seven days walk from Jiri to Lukla. Base Camp was a week and a half further on from there. As the coach laboured up the hill out of Kathmandu, we rose out of the smog of the Hippy Capital and got our first taste of the size of what we were to face. Huge green mountains and ridges, stretched in all directions towering above the bus, terraced from valley floor to summit. Looking at the map showed that most of these 'mountains' were bigger than Snowdon. These were only the foothills. As we drove towards Jiri they got bigger and bigger. Even so people over the ages had terraced almost every single square inch, much on impossible looking slopes. We arrived in Jiri by late afternoon and as the coach that had brought us drove off in a cloud of dust, it finally sunk in that we were now on the hard slog road to the summit, a road pot-holed with difficulties, with no certain conclusion.

The next morning began much like all the others on the trail. Up early, with the dawn leaving the lodge we had stayed in overnight, walk until we got to the lodge for the next night, stop, and to bed early, often seven or eight o'clock, just after dark. A simple routine that changed little over the next week. The beautiful views changed, the lodges came and went but the people were friendly wherever we travelled, and the hills, those foothills always appeared from nowhere, always went on forever, and always had a valley on the other side that we had to cross. Slowly we inched out way to the Solo Khumbu. On the

sixth day we rounded a corner to find Russ at a lodge waiting for us. Having ascertained that he had the freight, and no criminal record in Kathmandu, we had a celebration on Chang, a Nepali rice wine, and brandy. Next day we moved on to Lukla, which was our admin base before moving onto the uninhabited Hinku valley.

Two days later, the team and our twenty-eight porters moved out of Lukla and crossed a high pass, supposedly free of snow at this time of the year. Well, the pass was there, but so was the waist deep, soft snow. At dusk the last group of flip-flop shod porters clambered up the snowy gully at the top of the pass. The next day was a comical bob sleigh ride down the other side, through waist deep sugar snow that just slid from under every footstep. The valley floor was also deep in snow and the primeval woodland, although beautiful did nothing to help progress. As the days passed however we climbed to above the treeline heading up-valley and the snow thinned and eventually disappeared. During this period our movement was constrained by the needs of acclimatisation, which meant half-days were common, the afternoons spent lazing in the sun, reading or sleeping. These times seemed so far away, sitting in a crevasse sheltering from stinging spin drift on Mera Peak some days later.

On Tuesday 3rd March, the team arrived at base camp, below the snout of the Mera glacier, at 4200m. The sound of seracs collapsing on the glacier, and of avalanches sweeping down off the mountain had been a constant companion to us on the way up the valley, but it suddenly had a new poignancy. We spent a day at base camp training, sorting rations and planning for the start of our summit attempt.

The team was split down into two summit teams; Russ, Ian, Patrick and Jason were team A; Tom, Chris, Zippy and Jim were team B. On Thursday the 5th of March both teams set out to establish Advance Base Camp on the Mera La. Team A was to remain there overnight and push on the next day, while Team B who had been pack horses for the day were to return to Base Camp for the night and move to the Mera La on the 6th.

The 5th of March saw our first real experience of the ice conditions on the mountain. The Mera glacier was quite deeply crevassed though bare of any soft snow. Both teams reached Advanced Base at around 3 o'clock in the afternoon. We quickly set up the tents and got to the serious business of cutting snow blocks for water, and cooking food. As the B team moved off to Base Camp the feeling of isolation became tangible in Advanced Base. The passing of a Japanese mountaineer who said he had failed on the summit ridge because of a large crevasse, did nothing to help our mood. As the evening wind strengthened shouted conversation between the two tents became impossible. We spent an uneasy night.

Seven o'clock the next morning, we set off for High Camp. Progress was slow as we came off the La and into a major crevasse field. We threaded our way through, marking the route with bamboo poles, for the B team, and for our descent. As we came onto a ramp below the obvious rock band where our high camp was to be, crevasses were replaced as our main concern by the normal afternoon wind, which was strengthening by the minute. Half way up the ramp, the wind had become a real problem, stopping movement totally for long periods. All we could do was lean low on our ice axes and hang on.

Russ decided to establish a high camp where we were, and the weather continued to deteriorate as we set up the high



*Thursday 5th of March. 1200 hours. The team climb up the nose of the Mera Glacier. This was our first experience of the snow and ice conditions on the mountain. At this point the ice was rotten and difficult to gain a secure footing on.*

altitude tents. Low cloud scudded across the ramp and even collecting snow blocks was a chore. The wind continued all night bending the tents out of shape, and cracking the sidewalls like sails. Needless to say the night only held fitful sleep, and all four of the A team were beginning to really feel the altitude. Slight movements could leave you breathless, and a major undertaking like lacing boots could become exhausting.

We started early on the 7th to attempt the summit. The wind was still strong and we could see spin drift flying off the summit ridge, but we hoped for a lull later on. We moved slowly up to the rock band and half an hour beyond it, and then the wind really picked up. The previous night seemed calm in comparison to this icy, buffeting blast. Some gusts literally took us off our feet, leaving us lying spread-eagled on the ice hanging onto an ice axe.

We sought shelter in a crevasse, while we discussed our options. The team could retreat or we could press on in the face of awful conditions in the hope of a change. It was not a difficult decision and it took us only 50 minutes to reverse the work of the morning with the wind to our backs and gravity on our side. Russ and Jason decided to retreat to Base Camp as they were both suffering badly from the altitude. Nausea, intense headaches and laboured breathing were all symptoms. Ian and I stayed at High Camp in the hope of another summit attempt on the 8th. Late in the afternoon Tom and Chris came up to join us. We spent another restless night, with the wind all around us. One of the high altitude tents suffered a broken pole in the gale and it took the four of us over half an hour to mend it, stripping off our gloves for a minute at a time to manipulate

the broken pole. It took an age to warm up again after that.

The next morning we woke at 0500 and set off at 0715 with the lightest packs consistent with safety. The wind had dropped considerably and we made good progress up to the crevasse we had rested in the day before. The route flattened for a while after that and then turned right up a steep snow ramp. We had established a routine by now, in our roped pairs. Each pair would walk 25 double paces before both stopped, to rest by leaning on our ice axes. We could do no more paces, before becoming too breathless, and our rest periods became longer as we got higher.

As we climbed, the ramp crossed two major crevasse lines. One snow covering sagged and collapsed under Ian's weight, but he managed to recover himself onto the far side of hard ice. As I crossed on my stomach the snow crust punched through under my knees and elbows. Every move seemed to break more snow, and I thrashed for several minutes before I was free. Finally across we carried on up the first col in increasing wind. We had half formed the idea that the indistinct bump to the right of this col could be the summit; however when we reached we could see that it was a product of wishful thinking. The summit ridge was away in the distance 200m higher. On we plodded up a second snow ramp and over a second col, to see clearly our way to the summit ridge. This was guarded by a deep bergschrund from the western summit that looked big, even from a distance. Could this be the crevasse that the Japanese climber had talked about? We dropped down on to the top of the steeply sloping snow field between us and the summit, and worked our way around to the obstacle. It was

three foot wide and one foot down to the far side and required bottle to step across the perfectly smooth-sided crack having come so far we would not be beaten. Safely on the far side the summit was undeniably close. As we crested the summit ridge we could look down into the valley on the far side, 9000 ft straight down into the valley we had walked up days before.

We came to the crevasse described by the Japanese mountaineer and quite honestly could not see what the difficulty was. It was a long step or a short jump, depending on how you looked at it. We were getting blasé about these things now, and crossed without another seconds thought. The way was now clear for us to reach the summit. Ian and I strode confidently onto the domed peak, and looked into the face of the wind coming up the valley. We could only spend a couple of minutes on the summit before the wind and the cold drove us off again.

We had a chance to look down onto base camp thousands of feet below, only visible at the snout of the massive Mera Glacier because of the blue speck that was our mess tent; we managed to take some photos of both of us on the summit holding all the goodluck charms we had been given by people who had supported the expedition; and we had chance to identify the majority of the famous names in mountaineering. All around us were the peaks that have inspired mountaineers for generations; Mount Everest, Lhotse and Nuptse, Makalu and Kangtega, Ama Dablam and Pumori; all laid out in front of us.

Soon the cold became too much and we beat a hasty retreat back down the dome of the mountain. On the way down we met Chris and Tom who had been forced to turn back by altitude problems within striking distance of the summit. Gravity helped

our heavy legs make the weary slog downhill, past all the hazards we had encountered on the way up, but each one now taken with the relief of tired men. We trudged down through High Camp, on to Advance Base Camp and pushed on to Base Camp itself, undoing the work of four days in several hours. We talked little, both deep in our own thoughts.

Safely back in Base Camp, all team efforts concentrated on the next attempt that was to put the remaining six members of the team on the summit. First, a couple of rest days were needed to prepare the team, so on the 11th of March the second wave set out. The plan was to miss out Advance Base Camp altogether and to force the issue by heading for High Camp immediately, so as to save a day that might be needed should the weather turn bad. Time was running short.

The second attempt at the mountain was harder for some team members; they knew what to expect and even their improved acclimatisation did not reduce the sheer physical effort involved. The climb became one of patient determination, taking each step as it came. The team reached the summit on the 12th of March. They were able to spend over an hour on the summit taking photographs of all the major peaks. The weather was calm but bitterly cold. It was 1230 hrs.

Exercise Mera Diamond had achieved its major aim of climbing Mera Peak and also its secondary aim of getting every single team member to the summit. Each one of the expedition had gained a deep insight into the Nepalese people and their culture, and had learnt many lessons about teamwork under the pressure of high altitude mountaineering. A marvelous experience.



*Friday 6th March. 10.30 hours. The first roped pair moving through the crevasse field between advanced base camp and high camp. The pair carry bamboo poles to mark the way through the maze of cracks and crevasses. The small pimple left centre of the skyline is the central summit of Mera Peak. The summit we were climbing to is slightly higher and to the right. In this photo it is hidden by the rock and snow crest forward and right.*



Thursday 5th of March. 16 hours. Captain Russ Waller (right) and Captain Ian Redwood (left) at advanced base camp. This was on the Mera La and the photograph looks back in the direction of base camp, (over Russ's shoulder, over the edge of the glacier). The second summit team have now gone back to the base camp. Two of the tents accommodated the climbing pairs of the first team; the third was a stores and ration tent. Soon after the photo was taken the wind increased dramatically and forced the occupation of the tents until next morning.

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# The Eastern Arete of Nantle Y Garn and the Nantle Ridge

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A midweek trip on two warm August days to this remote corner of Snowdonia bought some ideas as to its suitability as a marvellous introduction to mountaineering.

All I had to do was to promise my wife a root of heather from the Nantle Ridge and it was off to Rhyd Dhu to start this classic expedition over the hills.

Looking across the eastern arete of Y Garn, the purple heather below the hill mingled with the steep grey boulder strewn slopes. I set off along the path onto the ridge breaking off right at mid height onto the scree, the boulders rocking and cracking together as I leapt from one to the other. Finally I arrived in a lather of perspiration at the front of the eastern arete.

Graded at mild severe, it is easy enough to climb, but it has just enough about it to give younger climbers a taste of really thrilling mountaineering. The first pitch was a chimney full of loose debris, a bit of a struggle to get into and at first I was having doubts about the validity of a solo route, but once I had lodged my unfit frame into its recesses I thought that I might as well keep going.

The next fifty or so feet led to a broad sloping ledge which was almost square and called the Study, a rather good place for afternoon tea depending on how much the chimney and walk in had mauled you. At the back of this was a short corner, up which the route trended rightwards on peculiar holds. The edge then eased off to mere scrambling but I kept on anchoring the rope as there was a disconcerting drop to the right into the deep cleft of a gully. I found myself to be particularly rusty on this kind of mountaineering route and the different skills in ropework needed. This is due to too much time spent on short sharp Peak District routes.

The next piece of work was a short crack with plenty of jugs about twenty five feet long, and above that the arete continued more easily to the final chimney. It was a bit awkward abseiling

down the arete to retrieve the slings and chocks as it was anybody's guess which side you would swing to if you blew it "en Rappel"!

The arete steepened again to vertical, then a sharp chimney again with lots of jugs brings you onto the top. The view is amazing, Snowdon, Crib Y Ddysgl and Crib Goch, the Moelwyns and Anglesey, plus villages and farms nestled in the fertile valleys in between, all surrounded by the vast panorama of the Welsh sea coast.

It was sunny mid evening, so I set off over Mynedd Drws Y Coed then dropped down into the Cwm below. Pairs of large black birds flew past and reminded me of the privilege of marital status and of how solving a mountain route is made all the richer by having someone to recount it to afterwards, something I could not do when single.

I am not in any way advocating soloing difficult routes, and certainly nothing over the severe grade should be undertaken and even then the climber should be roped up, but this again is only my opinion for what it is worth! I would not want to impose limits on anyones enjoyment of climbing.

After a night camped in the Cwm, I set off along the Nantle ridge over Trum Y Ddysgl and down into the Cwm of Galt Yr Ogof with its sweeping slabs. On the gentle descent I picked a heather root for my wife and slowly threaded through the lanes onto the long valley road back to Rhyd Ddu. Nearing the end of the valley road the eastern arete of Nantle y Garn reared up proudly above its surroundings beckoning aspirant young climbers to come and enjoy its rocky splendour.

14 August 1992

Mike Cookson

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# The Royal Anglian South Georgia

By Captain JE Harris

Sitting now in the warm and pleasant surroundings of home, South Georgia with all its dubious attractions seems not such a bad memory. It's strange, no matter how unpleasant things may seem during the event, time slowly covers them in a rosy light to such an extent that after a while you are able to start kidding yourself that you actually had a good time and perhaps the decision to sell all your climbing kit was a bit rash after all!

The Royal Anglian Expedition to South Georgia was my second experience of the Island. Previously Maj Richard Clements and myself had been OC and 2IC of the Garrison there in



*PO Tim Hall driving one of the two Flextracs whilst advertising.*

1989. It was during this spectacular four month tour that we decided we must return, however this time with an expedition and no military commitments as distractions. Richard was keen to canoe, being a land lubber I personally thought he was completely off his trolley; anyway, each to his own.

Richard and myself hatched the plan, the time scale was tight with the Expedition only being officially approved some nine months before departure. We were to take eight mountaineers and four canoeists. In essence the plan was for the mountaineers to establish a base camp at Little Molke Harbour and the explore inland and south via the Ross Pass. It was hoped, using the two all-terrain scooters (Flextracs), there would be enough time to explore a substantial part of the Islands southern interior, climb some peaks and resupply the canoeists. The programme for the canoeists was starting from the Garrison Base at King Edward Point (KEP) they would explore as much of the coastline as possible working in a clockwise direction. Having had previous experience of the weather we decided to deliberately keep our aims vague; it all depended on the weather.

We had chosen to go in the Austral spring as weather studies conducted by the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) indicated that this was when the most stable weather could be found. In addition it was hoped that the more complete snow cover on the glaciers would ease mobility. By mid April the team was beginning to firm up. Originally it was hoped that the Expedition would be made up entirely from Royal Anglians however it was not foreseen that all three battalions would be deployed on operations either in Northern Ireland or the Gulf. This meant that the net had to be cast further a field but nevertheless a team was assembled and after training in North Wales we got to know each other.

After many trials and tribulations and being suddenly called forward for the flight, the team left in a hurry on the 28th August

91. This meant we had ten days in the Falklands, somewhat longer than planned; however as it turned out this was for the best as nearly all our time was spent repacking and preparing equipment and stores. The Expedition embarked on the RFA Grey Rover for the three day sea voyage to South Georgia. The Grey Rover had a fairly full programme on arrival at the Island, assisting the Garrison and BAS. After seven days afloat we were landed at Little Molke harbour by a combination of rigid raider and the RFA's work boat. It was now the 16th September and winter was supposedly ending. The landings were hampered by severe winds gusting to over 70 knots and freezing temperatures. At one point the operation had to be abandoned as the rigid raider was in danger of being lost; the bowman having to be pulled off with exposure. When the landing recommenced just before last light we were forced to land our heavy gear, including the two Flextracs, in Molke Harbour a more sheltered bay a few kilometres around the headland. As the ship sailed into the distance that evening the mountaineering party was at last ashore but split between the two landing sites with the majority of the heavy gear in what appeared to be an ice-locked site.

The canoeing party, after helping us land our stores, returned to KEP to set off from there. Fortunately for the first week ashore the weather was kind and we enjoyed some glorious days. Our main task was to establish the base camp proper by moving the equipment landed at Molke Harbour to Little Molke Harbour. Because of the very steep and difficult terrain, this load carrying was a back-breaking task and we had to establish fixed ropes on the most exposed sections. Our main problem however, was how to get our two Flextracs out of the bay. From the limited mapping there looked to be a way onto the glacier system but after four days of winching, pushing and cursing we were to run up against an unmarked thousand foot rock wall; not an uncommon happening in SG. Eventually Tim Hall our navy photographer found a high level pass route that he thought would go. I must admit I am glad I didn't see the descent from the pass in daylight as it involved lowering the two Flextracs over three hundred feet from a very crumbly belay in the dark. Having succeeded in this



*High Tea at Base Camp  
L-R Lt Chris Stevenson, Spr John Allison,  
Capt James Harris, Capt Dick Pattison.*

operation base camp was only some seven kilometres away down the glacier; after nine days we finally drove into Base Camp late in the evening of the 24th September.

Meanwhile the canoeists had spent a happy week paddling from

# Expedition – 'A Winter's Tale'



*The Team L-R Standing: Pte Nick Bliss, Cpl Owen Jervis, SSgt Steve Willis, Capt Dick Pattison, Capt James Harris, Maj Roland Gill, WO2 Mick Jennings. L-R Kneeling: Spr John Allison, PO Tim Hall, Maj Richard Clements, Lt Cmdr Clive Waghorn, Lt Chris Stevenson.*

western side of the Island and from there south on the extensive glacier system to Drygalski Fjord and the southern end of the Island. The Ross Pass Depot, being a round trip of some 22 Km, meant that the Flextrac with a laden sled could, depending on weather, complete 2-3 trips a day. Unfortunately by this time we were down to one machine as a stripped gear in the other one made it irreparable. These depot laying trips were often interesting, as we now only had one machine the planned method of movement of two machines roped up was not possible. Instead, to guard against crevasse fall, the driver was roped to a skier who was towed behind and to one side, the idea being that if the Flextrac did fall into a crevasse the driver would be arrested and only the machine would be lost! Fortunately we never had to test this theory.

Because of the danger of crevasse fall and the unknown ground beyond the Ross Pass it was decided to press on south route-finding by ski. On the 1st October, 16 days after landing and 5 days after the canoeists had left base camp, a four man team led by Capt Dick Pattison set off to establish a snow hole camp on the Spenceley Glacier and press on south from there. The remaining mountaineers continued to move stores up to the Ross Pass. By now the weather was starting to get worse, the sunshine seen during the initial couple of weeks was becoming increasingly rare. In base camp one of our four man tents had been destroyed and the remaining two had to be taken down to stop a similar fate occurring. The ski party, after establishing a large snow hole on the Spencely Glacier, pressed on once again as the weather cleared on the 4th October. Unfortunately this break in the weather was only for a few hours and the party were caught on the exposed glacier in a blizzard. Battling on in a white out trying to find some sort of shelter the lead man fell down a large crevasse. The classic 'brute force' method of crevasse rescue pulled him to the surface and the team decided to make camp where they were. The storm continued to rage for three days and despite regular digging out of the tents on the third night one of the tents was buried. The occupants had to be dug out during the night in desperate conditions, their tent was lost and the majority

of their belongings soaked in the process.

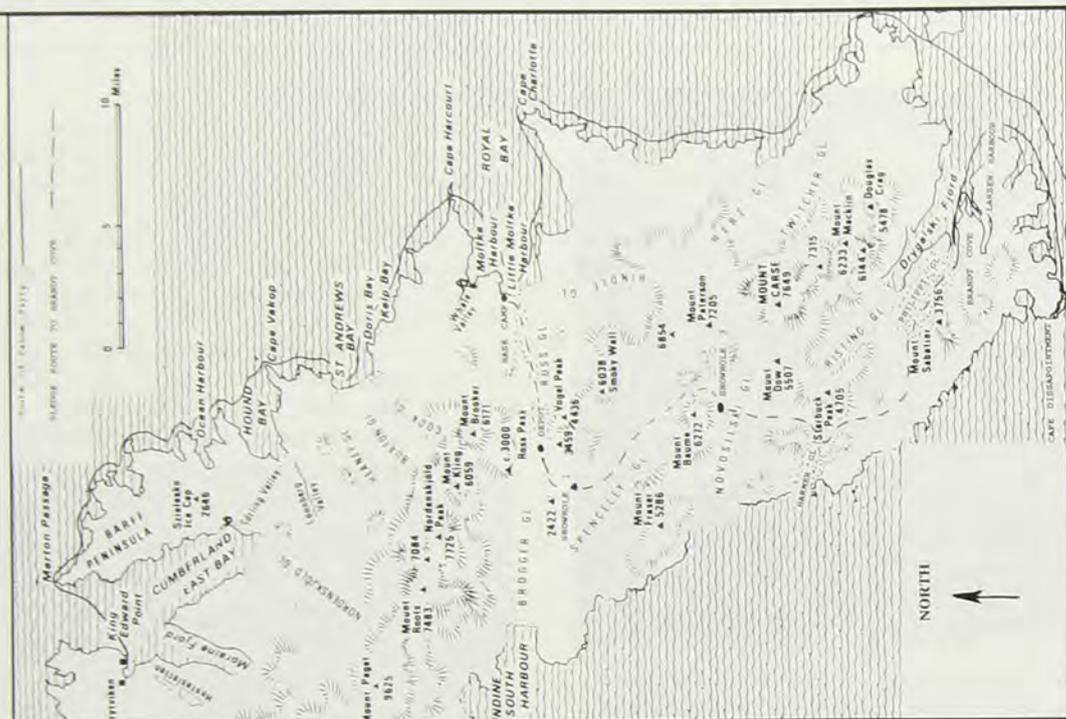
The situation was now getting serious, the canoeists had reached Cape Disappointment(!) at the southern tip of the Island and had found that due to the severe sea state they were unable to paddle any further. They had by now had to go onto quarter rations and the first of a number of penguins had been killed to supplement their diet. The initial ski party were unable to continue as they had lost a tent and their sleeping bags had become wet and frozen. The storm cleared and myself and PO Tim Hall made a dash on the remaining Flextrac to the devastated Spencely camp. We arrived in a white-out locating them with the aid of radio and flares. Richard Pattison volunteered to come with us in an attempt to reach the canoeists. The others would return to the relative comfort of Base Camp to dry out and recover. The following day we set off in fine weather making rapid progress on the Flextrack. Unfortunately it was not long before the second machine broke down whilst returning to the Ross Pass depot for further supplies. That evening found us camped just below the Spencely Col with the prospect of having to ski, dragging the sledge the remaining 36 km to meet up with the canoeists at Brandt Cove.

Again the weather broke and it was not long before we found ourselves in a similar position to the first party, digging out the tent almost constantly. Between us we decided that our camp was untenable so despite the blizzard we broke camp and skied on. After a couple of kilometres in the whiteout we stumbled upon a filled in crevasse just below Mt Baume. On climbing into it we decided it was suitable for snow holeing, so we set about making a home.

The following day the wind had dropped slightly but the dense whiteout remained. We decided to press on as the canoeists position was by now serious. The journey over the next three days was one of little reward, the weather rarely cleared and hour after



*Capt James Harris crossing the ridge between the Brogger and Spenceley Glaciers.*



SOUTHERN HALF OF SOUTH GEORGIA

hour was spent skiing into a whiteout on a compass bearing dragging the sled. However all was not in vain on the 13th October we reached the canoeists who had managed to paddle back to Brandt Cove; seldom have I seen such gratitude for an arctic ration pack!

By now our own food was running low and we had to turn round almost immediately to ski back.

Since leaving our snow hole we had been on two thirds rations, this was to enable us to hand over as many rations as possible to the canoe party. On the return journey we gratefully supplemented this with penguin given to us by the canoeists. Our 3 man team arrived back at the snowhole at the base of Mount Baume on the 15th October. The remainder of the mountain party met up with us there after hauling more supplies up from base camp.

The canoeists now had enough food to see them through until pick up, but we had still to climb a mountain and time was running out. Although tired by nearly a month in the mountains in almost constant bad weather, three of us decided to make an attempt on Mt Patterson, standing at 7205 ft. To most mountaineers uncustomed to Antarctic mountaineering, this may not sound much however when you consider temperatures of  $-25^{\circ}\text{C}$  and gale force winds were at the time common at the altitude of our snowhole the severity of the task can be understood. We once again waited in our snow hole, for a suitable

chance to appear. After a few days the sun shone and the wind dropped so we moved as quickly as we could and made a camp at about 4500ft on the mountain. We were now poised, it was less than one days climbing to the summit and we had a weeks worth of rations all we had to do was wait for the weather to clear, in true South Georgia fashion it didn't. In all senses of the word we 'survived' for four days on the mountain in what were the most unpleasant conditions I have ever been in.

Our time and our own food was rapidly running out, we had to get back down to base camp to be picked up by the beginning of November; and so began the final epic chapter of the Expedition. We set off from Mt Patterson in what can only be described as marginal conditions. I knew it was not going to be a good day as after fighting to take the tent down for nearly two hours we were all blown onto our backs just as we were about to set off. The whole day was a white out with incredible winds, eventually we decided we could go no further and it was time to camp. Much to the delight of Tim and myself, Dick living up to his name announced the tent poles had fallen off his bergen. The glacier was completely flat so our only option was to try to find the side of it and hence somewhere to snowhole. Fortunately for Dicks health we found a suitable bank shortly before dark, and just over an hour later we had yet another new home.

The following day the weather was slightly improved and once again off we skied. After some interesting and creative navigation we found our way to the Ross Pass Depot. We were all by now suffering from cold injuries and fatigue, Tim's feet were giving him particular trouble. Despite this we pressed on encouraged by the proximity of Base Camp. The wind by now was blowing on our backs strongly enough to push us along on our skis. This added to our fatigue caused the 'ski fall rate' to go up 10 fold. The frustration of being roped to other less able skiers was felt by us all and being only 6km from safety on a glacier we new well we decided to remove the rope that had joined us for nearly a month (Do I hear you shouting "you'll never catch me doing a thing like that!"). Tim being the most competent skier went ahead to tell the others at Base Camp of our return. Dick and myself plodded on down, needless to say the inevitable happened: the ground opened below me. Suddenly I was looking down a very large black hole hanging by the shoulder straps of my rucksack that was thankfully wedged across the lips of the crevasse. I was unable to move, praying for the Berghaus stitching to hold, this I am glad to say it



Manhauling loads around the headland between Molke and little Molke Harbours.



*Base Camp at Little Molke Harbour October 91.*

did and Dick managed to get me out after 40 minutes of freezing trepidation. An hour later we were safely reunited with the remainder of the mountaineers back in Base Camp, they too had many stories to tell of their exploits but space precludes their telling here.

On the 29th October the canoeing party were successfully extracted from Larsen Harbour by the Oil Mariner, a civilian ship on charter to the Navy. The plan to pick up base camp and the mountaineers the following day was foiled by bad weather. We had to wait a further two days before the ship was able to pick up the mountaineers. By this time we were down to two-man tents in base camp as the rest had all be destroyed. By midday on the 31st October we were all safely aboard and enjoying our first fresh meal for nearly two months. That evening we arrived back at KEP



*Dusk falls on a camp site on the Harmer Glacier.*

and so began the 8,800 mile journey home.

We found on arrival in the Falklands that the winter in South Georgia had not only been very late but it had also been one of the worst on record; as you can imagine this cheered us no end! Despite this we had achieved our aim to explore the southern end of the Island. The canoeists had paddled over 100 miles of previously uncanoeed coast line. The mountaineers had traversed many previously un navigated routes both on ski and by skidoo, this included a round-trip sledge journey of over 140 km to the southern end of the Island. The expedition had also survived for nearly seven weeks ashore in some of the worst weather South Georgia could produce. Unfortunately, we were unable to get a decent peak in the bag, but then South Georgia always has to have the last word.

## EXPOSED

Dear Nige,

I thought I'd drop you a line as a bit of a nudge over my cash for exercise Blatant Bike Ride. I am surprised the Committee failed to discuss it at the last meeting as I can't entirely accept that 3 days is insufficient notice; it's not as if we were going up Everest.

In fact I thought your last letter on the subject was a trifle heavy and had some nasty undertones, almost as if you had doubts about the trip. I tried to ring you before the AGM to give you the answers but as ever, other priorities got in the way.

You seemed to be questioning the mountaineering content of the expedition. My view and that of my wife is that an ascent of the highest peak in every country of the European Community is a pretty ambitious and relevant project, calling on all the qualities of planning and execution which should attract maximum interest and sponsorship and indeed, grant from the AMA. I have only left out some countries after a great deal of agonising having convinced myself that their inclusion would not add significantly to the overall objectives and achievements of the trip.

Denmark was ruled out due to their lack of commitment to the community as was France after their pretty pathetic endorsement of Maastricht. As a Germany based battalion it seemed a bit daft crossing the channel just to climb Ben Nevis so Cpl. Smith has written to his Auntie to see if she could do it on our behalf over Easter. Mt. Blanc takes in two countries in one go which seemed a bit of an easy option, which I am against, so we ruled that out. I was definitely for the Wildspitz but as I have been told that Austria isn't in the Community it seems wrong to include it. We did the Zugspitz last year and anyway it probably wouldn't meet your mountaineering content parameter due to the cable car although I think you are being a bit purist, no worse than using oxygen really. Apparently Spain is spoilt now according to Tpr. Martindale and no one could tell us which was the highest peak anyway. I don't want to take any unnecessary risks so to be on the safe side we ruled it out. Ireland is out on security grounds and for

administrative ease we've grouped Portugal with Spain so that's out.

You also questioned our use of mountain bikes. I must admit that I agonized a bit over that one and I have to concede that strictly speaking most of the Benelux high points could be reached on road bikes but that is not the image we would wish to portray in the AMA. (Luxembourg is ruled out as being too small, by the way). I hope that the summary of Ex Blatant Bike Ride puts your mind at rest and gives you enough ammunition to steer our bids for funds past the Committee.

The whole subject of finance is tricky and a little sordid but as you are pressing me I have produced a short statement. I realise that the cost of the 15 mountain bikes seems extravagant but good kit doesn't come cheap. The extra 5 are replacements but if pushed I could reduce this to 3. We hope to recover all the bikes from the mountains and make them available to future trips. The high cost of rations is simply due to the prices charged in restaurants in Belgium and Holland. Its okay living on fish and chips in Fort George but you should try the real world sometime!

Your final, and I thought rather snide, aside on the eligibility of the expedition members are now, all will be fully paid up members of the AMA. As you know, I have been in for several years. My wife is also a member, although she is not strictly on the trip, as she will be visiting her sister in Gent. Cpl Smith joined ages ago but thinks you must have lost his application and can't actually remember making out the standing order. Pike, Laver and Barker have said that they are interested in joining, but prefer to see whether the grant covers the cost of membership. Application forms for the other four are attached and all have said they will be happy to deduct the cost from the £200.

Well Nige, I Guess that just about squares it away. Do your best for us at the meeting and see you soon. Yours ever . . .

**Christian**

*p.s. Dont mention Greece.*

# Over or Through?

by John Muston

Ordnance Survey sheet 33 is one of the most interesting for a mountaineer. It depicts no less than 1600 sq. kms. and yet only one major road, the A87, traverses it. Minor roads are in the same proportion. In simple terms it is all mountains and lochs with a bit of sea on the western edge. For the person whose ultimate delight is to put a sleeping bag and a few days rations in a rucksack it is paradise - although the weather sometimes has its moments.

The area has enough 3000 ft. plus peaks to keep you enthusiastic Munroists happy for a week or two but I would submit that it is an area for going through as much as over the mountains. Where you leave your car is of little matter; almost any glen is a good line of access. Go up the glen, over the bealach and you are into wild and rugged country. Take the minimum of gear plus possibly your binoculars, camera, sketch pad, or a companion according to choice.

You might even be very daring, but only if you are really competent, and go alone. For some that is the ultimate delight and it also breaks the rules! Let me take you on a 4-day journey suitable for any AMA member; we will encompass the 'Rough Bounds of Knoydart', as they are known.

Turn off the A87 at the Tomdoun sign and follow the (very) minor road for a mere 22 miles to Killoch Hourm. You cannot get lost, there are no turnings. There is no shop there so come with all you need. Take the path, as I did in June '91, along the south side of Loch Hourm. For the next four days you will see mountains in whichever direction you look and yet you will not go to the top of any of them, but I venture to suggest that the views you see, especially if you are a photographer or artist, will be more entrancing than you will see from the summits.

For me the morning weather was dull but I am sure it will be better for you. The path to Barrisdale is easy and clear and the estate bothy provided a pleasant objective for lunch. It would also have provided a roof for the night but I had other plans. I turned NW and followed the coastline trying to take the easiest path where such existed. A perfect campsite revealed itself on the tip of the peninsula opposite Eilean a' Mhuineil but it was too early to stop. My travels are full of perfect campsites as yet uncamped.

I had anticipated that the building marked Li would be no more than a ruin in such a remote spot but I arrived to find that it was very much in use with a conservatory at one end! I met no one who could find out who lived there but my guess is that it was no longer a shepherd or stalker; both are unlikely to have such a sign of affluence as a conservatory. In such a location everything must come in by sea, there is only the most vestigial of footpaths.

Beyond Li I must admit the going gets tougher. I had to climb and descend to avoid rocky outcrops and in other places mossy woodlands on steep slopes did nothing to ease my path, but finally I crested the col at Creag an-t-Sagairt and looked down on my planned residence for the night - The Fish Box Bothy - so-called because it has some fishboxes in the construction.

This is not the building marked at Croulin but a tiny hut not marked on the map and delightfully situated at the head of the tiny bay by Rubha an Daraich. Looking at the map after a brew I calculated that I had climbed some 2700 ft. during the day although I had never gone over about 500 ft. above sea-level. I had also walked about 15 miles so my effort output was the same as I might have expended on a good mountain day. More brews and a good meal brought my day to a happy conclusion and an early night.

The next morning was as perfect as one could find anywhere in the World. Clear sky, lots of sun, and no wind, was a pressing

invitation to eat the morning porridge, pack up and move, which I did by just after eight. The path was clear and easy keeping more or less at sea level. All the buildings, despite their remoteness are occupied and most had modern double glazing fitted. I decided not to cut the corner and go through Gleann Guiserein to Inverie but to keep to the coast path even though it becomes a road from the hamlet of Airor. This road is something of an oddity in that it has no link with the rest of the world. If you want to bring a car into Knoydart you bring it on an old landing craft (at a cost of £60) from Mallaig.

I diverted to the memorial marked near Cnoc na h-Aodainn and discovered it was to an officer killed at Ypres. Part of the inscription included Stevenson's wonderful lines "Home is the sailor, home from the sea, and the hunter home from the hill." looking across the Sound of Sleat to Skye with the Knoydart Hills for a background, I can think of no finer location for a memorial.

Dropping down to Scottas I spied a figure cutting across the moorland to intercept me. He proved to be a 16/5 L officer enjoying a few days leave. We talked of the Gulf War in which he had taken part and of the hills. More materialistically he told me not to miss the seafood meal available at the restaurant by the pier.

I had planned the inevitable meat granules followed by dried apple flakes with which every soldier is familiar but I was willing to succumb to temptation and very wisely, as I later discovered. A monster platter was put before me and I staggered out an hour later very full indeed. 30 years ago when I first passed through Inverie it was a gloomy estate village with nothing to detain one. Now it has blossomed, attractive, whether you want a pub, a hotel or even the very comfortable bunkhouse where I pitched for the night.

Yet another splendid morning dawned and I set off round the coast heading for Kyleknoydart. The going was mixed but acceptable with a lot to see and watch by way of birds, flowers and trees. Being more or less south-facing the vegetation was near tropical in parts. A couple of workmen were rebuilding a burnt out cottage at Kyleknoydart but they were the only people I met until past Camusory where I met a man walking in his underpants such was the weather.

I stopped early on, soon after four and camped beside the River Carnoch at GR 888995 which is just about the remotest spot in Knoydart with 10 or 11 miles to go in any direction to anything which might indicate "civilisation". I was back to granules and apple flakes on a hexamine cooker as a sad change from the previous night's repast.

The night had been windy and wet so I left at 0600 and continued up the glen, turning east towards Loch Quoich through a narrow gorge which even involved a couple of rock climbing moves!

I partook of breakfast, as they say in the best of circles, in the ruins of two stone built huts a couple of hundred feet above Lochan nam Breac on the north side. From here a good stalker's path took me to Loch Quoich and a steady plod along the north side as the rain began. Once on the road it was downhill back to the car.

Not a mountaineering trip you may say. Maybe in the sense that I achieved no summits but I ascended about 7000 ft. and walked about 60 miles and during the three and a half days I had been totally in a mountain environment with the hills on all sides. Try going through rather than over sometime. It is worth it.

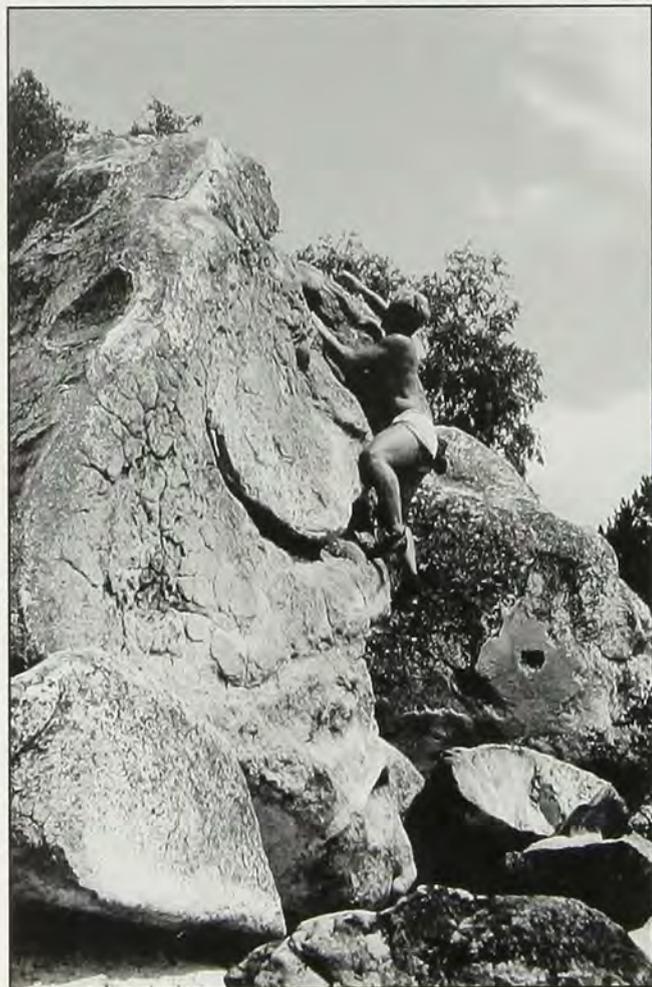
# Fontainebleau

'Small but perfectly formed'  
by Sgt Wayne Willson

The Forest of Fontainebleau, fifty miles south of Paris, contains hundreds of sandstone boulders and is perhaps the best bouldering area in the world. Imagine climbing all day on clean sandstone boulders, usually between ten and twenty feet high, with the odd large problem, upto thirty feet high, but with soft sandy landings just in case you slip, no ropes or harnesses to get in the way. The boulder problems contain a variety of features, overhangs, slabs, arêtes and steep walls with no more pockets than the latest Berghaus jacket. Tiny flakes and edges as sharp as any on a slate, are finger ripping good, and mantleshelfing onto 'gritstone' sloppers, at the top of the routes, tests the balance.

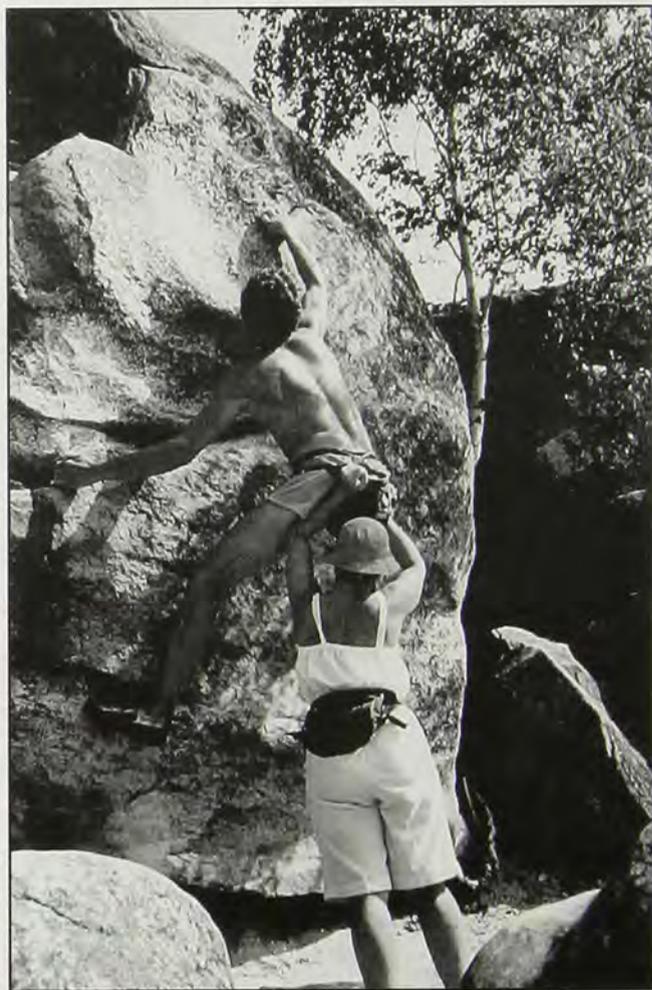
The boulders are divided into areas and within these areas, problems of roughly the same difficulty, are marked into coloured circuits. The easiest circuit is yellow (PD) up to British 4a, followed by orange and green (AD) upto 4c, then blue (D) with problems, each marked with a coloured number and arrow, showing the line. When or if you get to the top, there is another arrow pointing in the general direction of the next boulder. The powerful nature of the climbing, tends to take its toll on your arms, so its a good idea to warm up on an easy circuit. There are always a few stoppers in the circuits, problems that seem desperate and can take ages to crack.

The only gear you need is some rock boots or slippers and a full bag of chalk. A mat is handy for keeping your feet out of the sand,



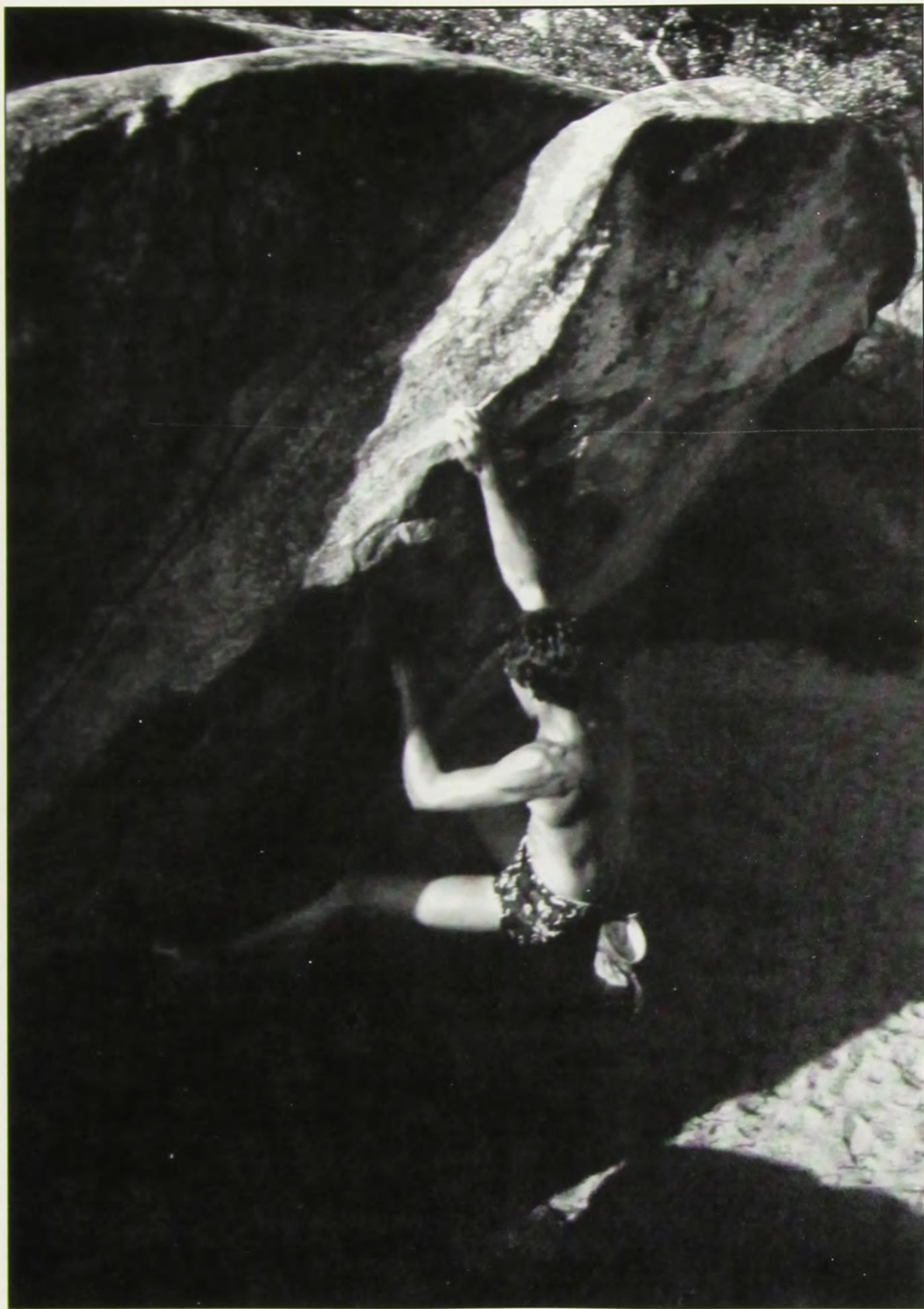
Great Positions (95.2)

while if you are under six feet tall a breeze block helps reach some tricky starting holds. It is also a good idea to take a picnic, with lots to drink on hot summer days. Ropes are not necessary, but it is good to get somebody to spot for you on the bigger or steeper routes. There are more than twenty areas, each with its own character and enough rock to keep you busy for years. One area, Trois Pignons is the largest and most concentrated area of desert, or should I say boulders, including the famous Cul de Chien and 95.2 with its fingery climbing.



Getting a helping hand, or two (95.2)

The boulder problems at Fontainebleau are very addictive and ideal as a stop off, on the way back from Chamonix or Southern France. Or maybe a long weekend from BAOR or the South of England. The 'Rock Climbing Guide to Europe' by David Jones, gives you enough information to get there and find the circuits. There are some French guides that give a breakdown of difficulty of each problem, but the grades are Fontainebleau grades, not French. French IGN map sheet 401, helps locate the start points and get back to the car at the end of the day. There are many good camp sites and supermarkets are the best bet for food and alcoholic beverages. So despite their small size, the boulders of Fontainebleau Forest are an excellent climbing area, widely used by the top rock stars, but just as good for mere mortals, so go there and just do it!



*A steep little number at Cul de Chien.*

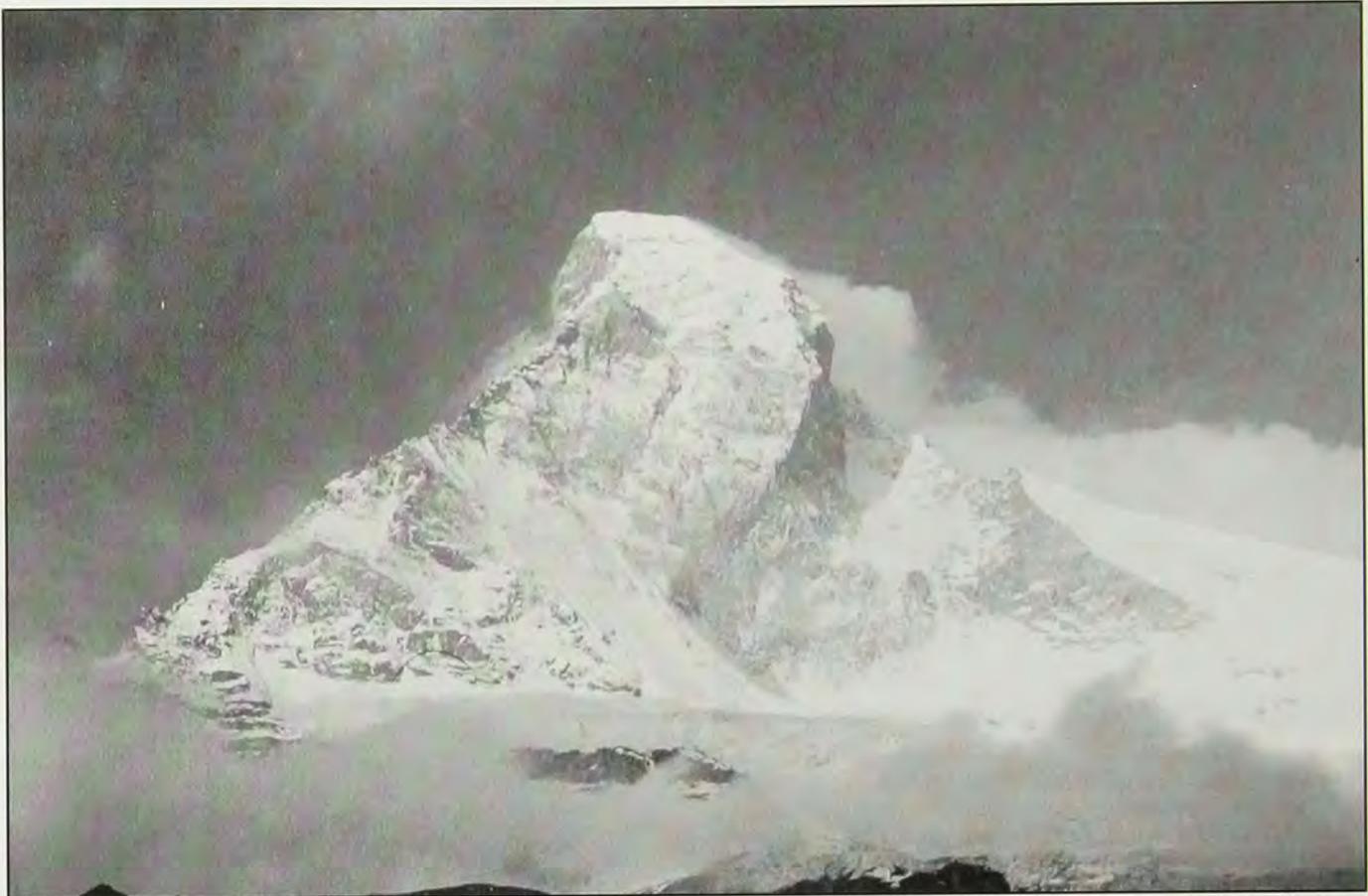
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# Exercise Whympers Diamond

15-25 June 1993

by Sgt John Rutland R Signals

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*Matterhorn North Face.*

It was decided in December 1991 that this years Adventure Training would consist of something different. so rather than sitting back and letting someone else do ,all the planning, I took it upon myself to come up with something different.

ZERMATT, SWITZERLAND was chosen as I had already been to that area before and with which I was quite familiar.

ACCOMMODATION, CHALET DIANA. This again I had already stayed at before, so there was not any trouble with having to complete a recee beforehand, to confirm the amount of men that it was able to accommodate.

TIME PERIOD. Due to other operational exercises the only time slot was the period 15-26 June. This also carried the problem of exercises directly prior to and after this.

JANUARY came and after a few consultation interviews with the RATO the paperwork started. With help of the extract from the journal of HOW TO PLAN AN EXERCISE, all the various applications were made.

Before I knew it time was ticking away fast, and slowly the various applications were authorised.

CILOR

TRAVEL GRANT

GUIDES FEES

REGIMENTAL ASSISTANCE

SQUADRON ASSISTANCE

THE HIRE OF THE PRI MINI BUS

THE LOAN OF POOL ADV TRG ITEMS FROM DULMEN

REGIMENTAL EXERCISE CLEARANCE

DIVISIONAL EXERCISE CLEARANCE

HQ BAOR EXERCISE CLEARANCE

MOD EXERCISE CLEARANCE

DA BERNE GAVE THE FINAL POLITICAL CLEARANCE

Then there was the equipment to collect from Dulmen. I opted to collect this personally because if there was any discrepancy with the equipment then I could at least correct this before returning to camp.

All exercise members were issued with a standard equipment pack. This proved to be a lot easier for accounting purposes.

15 JUNE was now upon us and the exercise was under way. The journey down was a long but uneventful one.

The travel time from CELLE to ZERMATT was eleven and a half hours.

*Day 1*

Admin, and basic setup of the chalet. In the afternoon a short acclimatisation and loosening up walk.

*Day 2*

Early rise at 0330 hrs., and a day walk up to SCHONBIEL HUTTE. For most this proved to be a very arduous day. Firstly getting up at, for most an unacceptable hour, then the altitude and distance covered.

*Day 3*

ROCK CLIMBING AT FURRI. Started by a walk up to the area via the GORNER SCHLUCHT, which is a gorge that has a



*Rocking at Furri*

walkway in it. The rock climbing venue is an excellent area as it has the scope for all grades.

*Day 4*

This was the first day of bad weather, so rather than stay in and achieve nothing, a second option was taken of MOUNTAIN BIKING on one of THREE newly opened routes. This again for most proved a very arduous day.

*Day 5*

Weather still on the decline so a walk up to the TRIFT HUTTE. This gave every member an insight of how the Alpine weather changes so rapidly. The day again, because of the weather, made a normally easy walk very hard.

*Day 6*

With the promise of good weather we made contingency plans to walk over to the MOTA ROSA HUTTE. To save three hours



*Ascending to the Trift Hutte*

walk we took the GORNERGRAT RAILWAY up to ROTBODEN, to save time as 3 Km. of the walk is across the GORNER GLETSCHER. However heavy snows overnight and more on the way, made it too dangerous for the groups ability.

*Day 7*

Day spent visiting ZERMATT especially the ALPINE MUSEUM and ENGLISH CHURCH.

*Day 8*

The weather reports had said there was an improvement, so we went to the cable car station in the hope of getting the first car up to the TROCKENER STEG. We ended up waiting for an hour, so the group took the SCHWARSEE car up and walked below the MATTERHORN. Then a return route via BIEL to ZERMATT.

*Day 9*

This day was spent packing up stores and closing any local accounts made at shops etc. With any last minute shopping from the lads.

*Day 10*

This day was spent travelling back to CELLE.

On return, the PXR and all the secondary paperwork has now been completed. This enables the SFA to claim back all the monies that were advanced to us to enable the exercise to function.

Apart from the uncontrollable (the weather), the exercise proved to be a success and an enjoyable experience. To see a plan unfold and develop into a reality, only goes to show that there is always someone, somewhere, that is willing to help if you have a feasible idea or plan that has a good chance of working.

Plans are now being drawn up for next year, for an exercise to start where this one ended. (In CELLE? Ed)



*Group at the Trift Hutte*

# Exercise Chamonix Quest

13-12 April 1993  
by Cpl 'Robbo' Roberts

This was a ski mountaineering exercise to Chamonix-Mont-Blanc involving the staff from The External Leadership Wing, AA Coll, Chepstow. Who included:

Capt Andy Marsh RE  
SSgt Nick Moore RE  
Sgt Barry Albut APTC  
Sgt Harry Harris APTC  
Cpl Dave Bunting RE  
Cpl Robbo Roberts RR

The winter had been a mild affair in South Wales; escorting apprentices across the Brecon Beacons muddled into insignificance in comparison to what lay ahead.

The accommodation in Cham' on first impressions was not inspiring, Le Refuge Brevent Ski Station is dormitory style, a short walk uphill from the town square. A large dining room is shared by the clientele which numbered around 30, all fellow mountaineers and skiers, each cooking on 'blueys'. Robbo had stayed here before and had realised the advantage of staying amongst the wealth of experience and knowledge that was available within this crowd.

Following a visit to the Maison de la Montagne we soon formulated a plan according to the weather. The weather in the mountains was warm for April, with rain falling below 2000m. We were hopeful it could only improve, which thankfully it did.

April 5.

Ski mountaineering in the high Alps is a dangerous pastime, the

risks are minimised by the ability to travel light and quickly, this requires a degree of prowess upon skis.

Day one was to be a day on the Brevent ski slope, a chance to stretch off after the long drive from the day before and an opportunity to 'polish up' our skills on the forgiving piste snow!

By the afternoon with teething problems with bindings sorted we each felt that our skiing had improved sufficiently to progress onto some of the more technical aspects of this form of mountaineering. Nick began with a convincing lesson on the equipment we were using for our upwards travel, our ski skins and ski crampons were tested to the bewilderment of the tourists as we walked up the slopes. I heard an English voice confidently proclaim 'They must be British'! We played at ice axe arresting and the more difficult ski pole arrest, then in the conveniently approaching gloom and mist we put our PEIPS [Avalanche transceiver/skier locator] to use in finding each other. Finally, having practised crevasse evacuation we were ready for anything.

April 6.

With an improving weather forecast we headed off towards the Bossons Glacier to put our ice equipment to good use. Yet on route we were struck by the sun peeping through the cloud, realising that the weather was favourable for a day in the mountains. A rapid change of plan, 30 minutes saw us changed and squashed in the Aiguille-Du-Midi telepherique amongst singing Japanese Tourists! Andy surmised that people sing when danger is imminent and all else is left to chance! Thankfully the worried choir arrived safely at the summit station at 3800m.

Ahead was the Valleye Blanche, the longest off piste commercial descent in Europe, 18kms of crevasse festooned glacier lead back to the valley floor. The more adventurous piste skiers in the valley would climax there holiday by hiring an Alpine Guide to escort them through the dangers [parting with a small fortune in the process]. We on the other hand had Nick and Robbo, with a total of three descents between them, but much cheaper! We enjoyed fantastic clear views of the numerous peaks as the valleys were engulfed in a puffy blanket of cloud. The descent was long and exciting, requiring some demanding skiing at times, between gaping black crevasses. We exited through the final crevasse field, feeling confident and relieved that the majority of the danger was past. Unfortunately we relaxed too soon, as Dave on a clear descent, in the process of performing a perfect 'head plant' in the snow, twisted his knee. Not a problem initially, but one which would prevent him from skiing tomorrow.

As we arrived in the valley morale was high, true our skiing was not gaining many admiring glances from the local *femmes*, but our confidence was surpassed by none. Thus the preparation for our 'Randonnee Ski' was complete. With good weather forecast for tomorrow we planned a tour from Le Flegere to Le Buet.

April 7.

The second telepherique at 0830hrs deposited us at the top of the piste overlooking a clouded valley floor.

PEIPS turned on as we prepared to ascend with skins on skis towards the Col des Aig Crochues. Two hours and 400m ascent saw us warmed and breathless at the col. Views across the Chamonix valley towards the jagged Aiguilles had our cameras clicking, to the north and much closer was a rocky horizon incorporating Mt. Servos and Buet under a thick blanket of snow. The descent was a steep traverse to the right, crossing fresh avalanche debris from the afternoon before. The descent was harrowing and it was some 2kms before we could rest for lunch on level ground beneath a rock buttress, around which we would begin to ascend to the Col de Berard. The col was soon behind us, ahead was a 6kms descent, steep in places, yet always exciting



Dave Bunting with the Col du Passon down there!

into the village of Le Buet, Harry was heard to shout 'race' where upon the flag was dropped, controlled falls and numerous wipe outs saw us in the village with a beer in hand in no time. A liaison with Dave and Barry with tales of a good day of recreation on the Gillands crag.

This evening we opted to discover what night life Chamonix had to offer, only to find the bars empty at 2130hrs, the barmaid informed us that life did not begin until 1130hrs, she looked at us with a bewildered expression. Unfortunately it was a late night, with few memories and empty pockets in the morning!

*April 8.*

The group posed two possibilities for today, half of the team opting to ski at Le Flegere improving techniques, while Harry, Barry and Robbo planned to tour between the Brevent ski area and Le Flegere.

The aspirant tourers arrived at the top lift of the Brevent. Harry was horrified to hear Barry exclaim he had not brought his ski skins because in jest Harry had said he would not need them to go over the col! So feeling guilty Robbo and Harry departed upwards leaving Barry to ski alone on the piste. The tour was an easy climb towards the Col du lac Cornu, followed by an ascent of the Aig Pourrie Bne [2561m], feeling strong we skied to within 100m of the summit.

We descended steeply on ankle deep powder snow to arrive at the Flegere ski resort and a reunion with the team who were experiencing some fantastic snow. Dave having made a full recovery was in fast gear in search of the largest ski jumps to be found, with Nick in hot pursuit.

We were now beginning to resemble the local immigrant population, with good tanned faces and weathered looking hair, Harry even went to the length of purchasing a Cappa hat, all he lacked was a string of onions and a bicycle. All except Barry that was, his blond locks and his now lobster skin was being shed at a phenomenal rate, he was on his third layer to date and having to wrap himself into a silk scarf when ever the sun made an appearance.

*April 9-10.*

This was now to be the finale of the exercise, we had wanted to ski ascend a peak of around 4000m, we chose the Aig. D'Argentiere at 3900m affording an overnight stop at the Argentiere Mountain Refuge. The following day returning to La Tour via the Col du Passon.

So on boarding the first telepherique towards the Grands Montets it was with regret that we left Nick behind suffering with a flu bug. From the telepherique we descended to the Argentiere glacier. The Milieu glacier climbs its way up the south side of the mountain to within 300m of the summit. We began the ascent at 1000hrs still in the shade afforded by the steep rocky spires which flank the glacier. A steady climb which appeared deceptively short from a distance, yet now never ending as we worked our way upwards. Constant zig-zaging we arrived at the head of the glacier at 3600m by 1400hrs. Here we were to leave the skis and climb up a steep gully towards the summit ridge. The sun was high in the sky and consequently had transformed the snow into a sugary solution. At this point the decision to turn back was unanimous, as to our left a section of the slope began to avalanche, stopping just short of the tracks we had recently made. Time had beaten us, the mountain remains there for the future.

A relatively sleepless and noisy stay at the refuge saw us away on skis by 0700hrs, skiing towards the Col du Passon.



*A motley crew.*

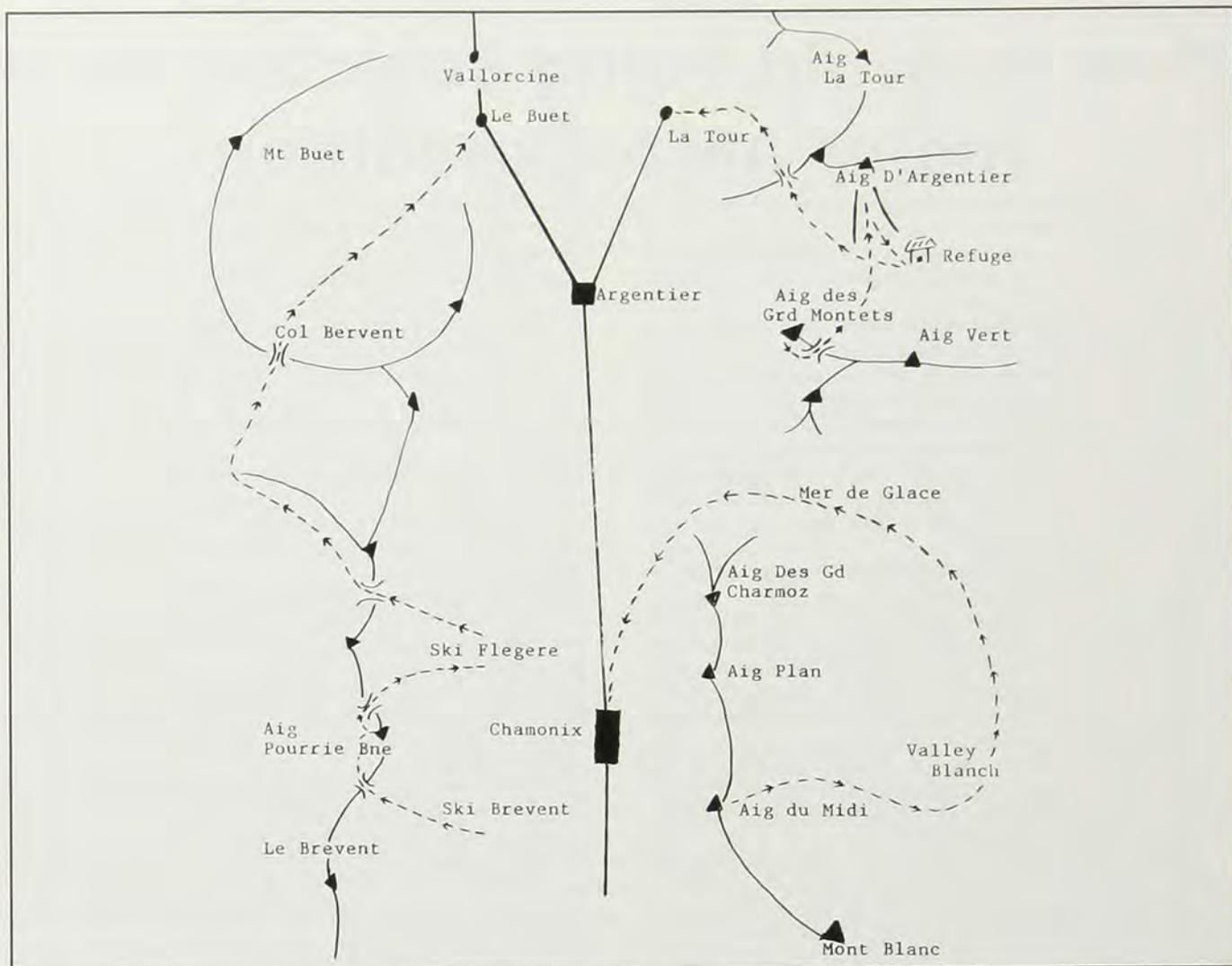
A steep ascent quickly gained us height, we were still in the morning shade with some 400m of ascent to push when Barry, while on a committing section of hard snow, lost his edge from one ski as he lifted his second ski forward. He began to move in slow motion sliding out of the track before his skis lost all traction, he cartwheeled off down the slope a full 100m before

managing to arrest himself with his ski pole, Dave was quick to his rescue, Barry was shaken but not stirred, his only injury being a scraped knuckle from the effort of arresting himself.

We ascended to the col relieved to be on safer ground and in the sun with a long descent ahead of us. What lay ahead was a 5km descent on the La Tour glacier. The descent was steep, its seriousness made worse by the sacks we carried, the best approach was to make wide traverses, Nerves were tested, it was with relief that we appeared at the start of the piste which led into the village of La Tour. A fitting way to finish this challenging week.



*The high Alps. View from Aig du Midi.*



## SAVAGE SLIT

By Cpl Paul Duke R.Sigs

Summer or winter in Coire an Lochaine is a real gem. Situated in the northern Cairngorms, is the most westerly of the famous climbing grounds of the Northern Coires. The impressive granite cliffs rise 600 ft. above the coire floor to level out onto the Cairngorm plateau at around 400ft. The coire sports some superb winter climbing, however, summertime can offer some comparable challenges.

Savage Slit, severe, is a classic line on Number 4 Buttress, the most westerly of the four huge buttress that form this all-season climbing playground. The most convenient approach is from the day lodge car park, follow the track heading west and swing south into the coire heading for the great slab. This slab is a notorious avalanche prone area, especially in the spring, so bear right of the slab and you will see, circa 1100 metres, the conspicuous open book corner that boasts Savage Slit.

To give some background to my article I shall set the scene. Two weeks leave at home in Scotland, an old climbing partner coming to stay, all we needed was the weather. Scotland in September is usually fairly settled, well somebody should have told the weather that. As Rob Sear and I walked up into the Coire n Lochain we felt a distinct chill in the air. Snow had fallen overnight on Braeriach, but this didn't worry us as we knew it would melt in the plus 4 temperature forecast. The BBC had told us porkies again, the temperature remained about zero all day.

The first 60 feet of the route is fairly easy scrambling from where you can find a bomber relay and get on the route proper. We put both sacks into one and Rob led off up the first

pitch, the climbing was probably no harder than 4A, but with these temperatures and the relative dampness this route was not going to be an easy touch. Belay stances are at fairly regular intervals and Rob had gone on a good 80 feet before he bought me up. Something of a struggle had ensued, with two rucksacks, frozen fingers, and harder than expected climbing, I finally arrived at the stance blatantly out of breath. Taking great pleasure in dumping the large sack and in feeling the dubious pleasure of hot aches, I led off on the second pitch. With a couple of committing moves and spaced protection, things were going just about OK, but not for long. The wind suddenly whipped up and the cloud had great pleasure in dumping heavy snow/hail straight on top of us. With this I managed to get a bit of gear in and tied myself off. The snow was so bad Rob couldn't see me below so we decided on an impromptu NAAFI break. Within the quarter hour the snow had subsided and I got on with the job in hand. Finally finishing my pitch I bought a now shivering Rob up to the ledge. He led through positively running up the last semi-bridging/padding moves. Bringing me up the route had taken us nearly three hours, but was well worth the views to Braeriach and Glen Einich. An easy walk off the the western flank of Cairn Lochain brings you quickly down to the path.

In summary Savage Slit is well worthy of inclusion in Classic Rock and is a must for all of you that are into long walk-ins and the big mountain feel to your rock climbing. However, one small tip, choose a nice hot sunny day in July and don't be put off by the walk-in, these routes really are worth it.

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# How to avoid being selected for a major AMA Expedition

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1. Don't join the A.M.A.
2. If you do, then forget to renew your subscription. This will ensure you do not get the newsletters and thus will not read about future expeditions.
3. Never attend any climbing meets or other A.M.A. functions.
4. Only climb with your civilian climbing mates.
5. If you go on an expedition with your civilian mates then make sure no copy of the report or other information about it reaches the A.M.A. or, for that matter, the R.G.S. Alpine Club etc. Remember security and 'the need to know' principle.
6. Restrict your climbing to one area. Find something really small (and low) e.g. Avon Gorge. Certainly avoid the Alps or other glaciated areas. They are just pure, mindless slog and you can't bother with that sort of thing.
7. If you do read about a future expedition then don't write or telephone and ask to be considered.
8. If you do actually fill in an application form then make sure it is illegible and incomplete. This particularly applies to the paragraph asking what expedition job you would like to take on. Consider this an impertinent question and tell everyone so.
9. Tell everyone - frequently - that you lead E4 and anyone who does not climb to this standard is a wimp.
10. If, despite all the above, you are invited to attend a selection interview make it very clear to the grey haired old dodderers who comprise the board that they cannot possibly know anything about expeditions, climbing or anything else.
11. Make sure you know nothing about the proposed peak, the country it is in or the people, their customs, culture etc. After all you are much too important to bother about such trivia.
12. If they still insist on your selection for the expedition then grumble from the moment of your selection to your final return. Grumble about everything: the leader, the rations, the equipment, everything. Make it very clear that you believe they have selected the wrong peak in the wrong country at the wrong time of year.
13. Avoid washing, especially your feet throughout the expedition.
14. If sharing a small mountain tent insist on chain smoking in the tent.
15. Take care to avoid your share of load carrying and other chores. Make it clear you are saving yourself for the summit bid.
16. Never be ready to move off in the morning at the appointed time.
17. Treat all local inhabitants as the third class citizens you know them to be.
18. Make sure you spread your gear over much more than your share of the tent.
19. If their are members of both sexes on the expedition make sure you devote a lot of your time to unpleasant remarks about the opposite sex.  
Ditto if other services or regiments are represented.
20. Over indulge in the local alcoholic drinks as often as possible and make sure that you take plenty of alcohol ( for your private use) to high altitude.
21. If you loose or damage some of your gear quietly nick someone else's making sure you remove any name labels when you do so. If you do this you do not have to worry about looking after your own gear.
22. Always take more than your share of the rations; and remember to keep grumbling about them. The need to keep grumbling on an expedition cannot be overstressed.
23. Ignore all the advice from the M.O. about treating all water, not eating local fruit which cannot be peeled, avoiding sexual contacts etc. This is just the doctor being stupid and who is he to interfere with what you do.

If you apply yourself wholeheartedly to all the above points you have a very good chance of never being selected for an expedition or, if you are, then not being selected for a second one.

A.J. Muston.

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## Exercise Rhino Diamond

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### Summary

An account of an expedition to the Massif du Mont Blanc by members of HQ 1 Armd Div. Training was carried out in the Tre la Tete glacier area, the Aiguilles Rouges and on the Mer de Glace. Ascents of the Domes de Miage (east to west), the Aiguille de la Berangere (south west side) and Mont Blanc (from the Cosmiques hut) were completed.

The Chief of Staff smiled. It was a cautious, half hearted smile that betrayed his concern. 'So you really think you can do it?' 'Yes sir, I'm sure we can. It may be the highest mountain in western Europe but the easy route up it is precisely that - easy; and given the weather there's no reason why a small determined

band of highly trained, expertly led and well motivated men shouldn't get to the top'.

Even as he spoke he realised the enormity of the task he had just volunteered for. A group of fat old clerks from the Divisional Headquarters attempting to climb Mont Blanc? There had to be

easier ways to get two weeks in the Alps.

Thus began Ex Rhino Diamond. An adventure training expedition by members of the staff of Headquarters 1st Armoured Division with the specific purpose of putting as many expedition members on to the summit of Mont Blanc as possible.

Some months later, on 6 Jul 92, a lone minibus left Caithness Barracks, Verden and made a relatively early start on the long journey south to the Massif du Mont Blanc. On board were a team of twelve drawn from all branches in the HQ: Maj Bill Sharpe, Ptes Jason Martin and Paddy Boyle from G2/G3, Maj Rod Small and LCpl Mandy Fenemer from 11 PC Sqn, LCpls Paul Moorey and Steve Clarke from 71 Int Sect, Maj Jeff Williams and LCpl Tosh Simpkin from Tpt Ops, Sgt Chris Heaton from 1 Ord Bn, Capt Andy Rothwell from what was Ed and finally W02 Norman Faichney from Arty Int.

The next morning saw us in Chamonix having survived a broken water pipe in the minibus, a stop off at the Canadian Forces Base in Laar for some monstrous burgers and a short but much needed bivouac in a lay-by between Martigny and Argentiere. After buying up most of the local supermarket and the duty trips to the Bureau des Guides and Snells, it was time to drive around to Les Contamines, shoulder the now fairly weighty rucksacs and set off up the track towards the Coscrits hut. Unfortunately the lack of sleep, the rain and the rucksacs took their toll and it soon became apparent that we were not going to get to the hut that night. Fortunately the track goes past the Tre la Tete hotel (some hotel!) and we were able to spend the night there.

The Coscrits hut was reached the next day, but even as we arrived the weather looked iffy. The snow level was about 500 metres lower than usual and the snow itself was heavy, wet and still falling sporadically. With the hut not being quite as luxuriously appointed as one might have hoped (a drafty garden shed would have been preferable), the poor forecast for the next day and the shoulders still aching from carrying five days COMPO uphill for two days, it would be fair to say that team morale was not at its highest as we retired to bed that night.

0400 hours the next day came too soon for most of us but a sense of youthful enthusiasm overcame the lethargy as rucksacs were shouldered, crampons strapped on and ropes tied. We were not the only people out to do the Dôme de Miage that day but all groups were reduced to a snails pace on the trail which was by now under some inches of new snow. Eventually we turned off the Tre la Tete glacier and climbed up to the Col de Domes and the start of the ridge proper. By now the weather was a lot clearer and people were beginning to enjoy themselves. That soon ended as we moved up the ever steepening ground and onto the ridge line. On our right was the Val Montjoie with the villages miles beneath us basking in the early morning sunlight. To our left the valley we had just ascended with the Tre la Tete glacier leading up to the Col Infranchissable. Ahead was the almost unreal ridge of the Domes de Miage: a fantasy ridge so perfect and beautiful as to be on the very edge of reality and dreams. We made our way along it marvelling at the exposure and the magnificence of our situation. After some distance the dream started to fade as we descended over increasingly softer and more tiring snow to the Col de la Berangere. From here we could see parties experiencing difficulties with the continuation of the ridge up and over the Aiguille de la Berangere. As a result it was decided that an abseil and an escape down to the south east towards the Tre la Tete glacier and the hut was in order.

The full story of the abseil and the descent is a long one; suffice it to say that we arrived back at the hut some four hours later minus two ropes (jammed and abandoned on the abseil), much chastened (after a very nasty trip over a very, very unstable steep snow slope with many crevasses) and with a group of three Frenchmen in tow who were so grateful to their English saviours for getting them off the hill safely that they even tried to pay us!

As an introduction to alpine mountaineering the Dôme de Miage ridge scores about twelve out of ten and all members of the group felt justifiably proud of their efforts that day. The days effort had however taken its toll and the following day was declared a rest day. The next morning a smaller and even more

determined band left the hut to climb the Aiguille de la Berangere by the south west side. Normally the first part of the route is up a steep scree slope; this was however covered by snow which made the going slower and more tiring. Progress was further slowed by the disastrous state of the snow as we sunk up to our knees with every step. Dreams of crisp firm *nêvé* kept us going and eventually the summit was reached, but we were denied the view by the gradually thickening cloud. A race back down the same route saw us in the hut for an early lunch at about half past eight before a descent in the rain down the Tre la Tete glacier and the continuation valley to the welcome sanctuary of the campsite at Les Contamines.

The weekend passed in a blur of rain and serious eating with a short foray up to the Mer de Glace via the Montanvers railway to practise ice climbing techniques. The general gloom of a day of climbing ice in the torrential rain was relieved first by the arrival of two gorgeous French girls who decided to share our ice wall and then by Jason Martin who dropped his ice axe into what appeared to be a bottomless but waterfilled crevasse. When the weather started to clear the following day some of the group spent a day rock climbing in the Aiguilles Rouges while the others sampled the delights of 'velo tout terrain' or mountain biking to the non-cogniscenti.

With the arrival of the good weather plans were made for the attempt on Mont Blanc. Shock horror!! the Gouter hut was completely booked for the entire month - the trade route was therefore no longer an option. Back to the drawing board and the merits of the long route over Mont Blanc du Tacul and Mont Maudit from the Cosmiques hut against the shorter route from the Grand Mulet hut were discussed ad nauseam. Eventually we decided on the Cosmiques hut option and managed to book ourselves in for two nights.

The Aiguille du Midi cable car is an incredible experience and we were fortunate to do it in perfect weather. The descent out of the tunnel from the aiguille and round to the hut is also an incredible experience if you have a alpine novice with vertigo in tow. Despite this we all arrived safely at the very smart and comfortable Cosmiques hut. Even at this height the altitude was beginning to affect us and there was concern over how we would fare the next day.

Wednesday 15th July 1992 started at one o'clock when we were roused from our beds for a quick breakfast before roping up, strapping on crampons and heading off at just after two. The weather was absolutely perfect: a clear sky with a full moon and very cold. After a trudge across the snow basin to the foot of the north side of Mont Blanc du Tacul the real work began. The face was not seriously steep, but it was steep enough to make one think. The top was reached in the dark and we continued around to the foot of Mont Maudit in the growing light of dawn. This face is steeper again and involves a direct ascent followed by a traverse under a sheer ice wall before an open couloir leading up to the Col du Mont Maudit. Here we rested and it was here that three members of the team decided that enough was enough. The remainder carried on around to the foot of the final slopes and then up, it seemed forever, to the summit of Mont Blanc which was reached at about none o'clock in the morning. After a quick bite to eat and the obligatory photos we set off down again. Even this proved to be a struggle with the ice wall on the final section of the slope leading to the summit giving one or two problems as did the descent down the couloir from the Col du Mont Maudit and the big slope of Mont Blanc du Tacul which by now had degenerated in the sun and appeared a lot steeper going down than it had in the way up. It was a tired bunch of teddies that arrived back in the hut at about four o'clock in the afternoon after approximately fourteen hours on the route. The feeling of elation at having achieved our aim was overwhelmed by the irrepressible desire for sleep and we all collapsed in bed after supper. The next day saw us back in the valley for a celebratory dinner, where else but in the 'Bar Nat', and the festivities continued well into the night. An early start saw us back in Verden on the Friday with plans for a similar venture sometime in the future. So he had been proven wrong - the fat old clerks from Div HQ had done it!

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# Ben Hope

## The Most Northerly Munroe

### 29 August 1992

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Well I did get there in the end. Not on the same day as the annual lairg sheep sales on 12 August, but that can wait until another year. The Broch at Dun Dornaigl provides a good parking spot and there are several more just up the road to Hope. The cairn that can be seen from the broch is not the summit, which is a triangulation point some 300m further on.

There is a good path up the side of lovely vertical waterfalls of the Allt Na Caillich. I would think that those rock climbers who specialise in such things would find it a challenge. Do people climb in wet suits? At the top of the waterfall is a plaque to one Stuart Paul Davies who died on Ben Hope on 6 September 1978 aged 17. It does not say how. A salutary reminder, if one was needed.

I took the long anti-clockwise trek via the south west plateau, which gave early views over Ben Loyal and Caithness. Ben Loyal looks a fascinating day out. There is nothing problematic with Ben Hope on a clear day such as I had, but it is a big solitary mountain and on a grim day, could be a map reading challenge, I guess.

The view from the top was splendid, with only the far western horizon blocked by shower clouds. Morven was clearly visible 36 miles away to the south east and Ben More Assynt could be seen beyond Ben Hee to the south west. To the west, Foinavon seemed very close; what a strange grey-white peak it looks. Way beyond

Dounreay the Orkney Isles could be seen clearly over 50 miles away.

The way down was more dramatic because I stuck to the precipitous west side of the mountain which drops down to the road steeply. At one point I was surprised by the appearance of a 6-wheeled low pressure cross-country vehicle on Leitir Mhuiseil; a shepherd looking for lambs that missed the sales perhaps? Altogether a lovely short day. Car to summit to car in 5 hours at a gentle pace.

On the drive home I made a detour via Tongue to see Ben Loyal at closer quarters - what a dramatic mountain it is. One can imagine Gormenast sited within its realm. Then on home via Strath Naver. Half way up it, in the pouring rain (the western showers had moved in) I came across a monument by the roadside at Rough Hough commemorating the first gathering of the 93rd Highlanders in September 1800. They became the Sutherland Highlanders. The monument had been put up by members of the 2nd Battalion, The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders (the old 93rd.) in 1924 to ensure that the 93rd. were not forgotten following their amalgamation in 1881 with the Argyllshire Highlanders.

Plus Ça Change ?

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## World Challenge Expeditions

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During the past four years, selected AMA members have led expeditions for World Challenge to South America, the Himalaya and Africa. During the summer of 1993, they will be sending up to twenty expeditions abroad for one month. There are still leaders vacancies to be picked for the following destinations : Bolivia, Ecuador, Morocco, India, Borneo.

The requirement is for experienced and qualified leaders, which can be an enjoyable and rewarding experience for the right person. The company pays expedition expenses, including comprehensive insurance, and makes all expedition arrangements.

The ethos is one of development/leadership training for young people of both sexes from schools or colleges, between the ages of 16 and 20. Expeditions depart during June, July and August. This represents an ideal opportunity for AMA members to lead a worthwhile expedition whilst on leave.

Persons interested should contact Samantha Vaughan/Clive Barrow at World Challenge Expeditions, Sloan House, 305-315 Latimer Road, London. W10 6RA. Tel.: 081 964 5298 for more information and application procedure, early applications are strongly advised.

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