



# ARMY MOUNTAINEER

*THE JOURNAL OF THE ARMY MOUNTAINING ASSOCIATION*



Summer 1994

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# ARMY MOUNTAINEER



## THE JOURNAL OF THE ARMY MOUNTAINEERING ASSOCIATION SUMMER 1994

### Winter 1994 edition

Please send your contributions for the Winter 1994/95 edition to the editor by the end of October 1994. Photographs and slides (which will be returned) should be accompanied by a suitable caption.

Sketches, maps and cartoons are also welcomed and article subjects can be off-beat as well as main stream climbing / mountaineering.

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### on the cover:

*The highest bagpipes in the world - from Kula Pattur with Everest in the background. They sounded pretty bad too!*

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# ACONCAGUA (6960m), Argentina, South America.

## GETTING THERE:

Best via Santiago, Chile or else Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Permits: Must go to Mendoza to get permit for Aconcagua National Park. Address for permits is: Subsecretaria de Turismo 1143 San Martin Mendoza 5500 Argentina

Tel (including int'l code from UK): 010 54 61 242800

Transport: A private car from Santiago to Mendoza for 2 persons and gear costs approx US\$ 110. Bus or taxi costs approx US\$ 20-30 per person from the Bus

Station Sud in Santiago. From Mendoza to Puente del Inca is approx US\$ 10 per person by bus taking about 4 hours, with departures most days at 6am and 10am.

## ACCOMMODATION AND CAMPSITES:

Penitentes: Bunkhouse with bar, restaurant and showers:

c/o Andesport (David Vela)  
Rufino Ortega 390  
5500 Mendoza  
Republic Argentina (Telefax 054-61 241003)

Confluencia (3368m): Running water, plenty of space for tents

Plaza de Mulas (4210m): 2 sites - Hotel on west side of valley, and Campsite on east side:

Hotel: Showers, bar, food and accommodation. Typical prices:  
Rooms US\$ 20-40

Shower - US\$ 5

Helicopter to Valley - US\$ 120/person (includes sack and grip)

Sandwich - US\$ 5

Tea/coffee - US\$ 2.5

Beer - US\$ 4

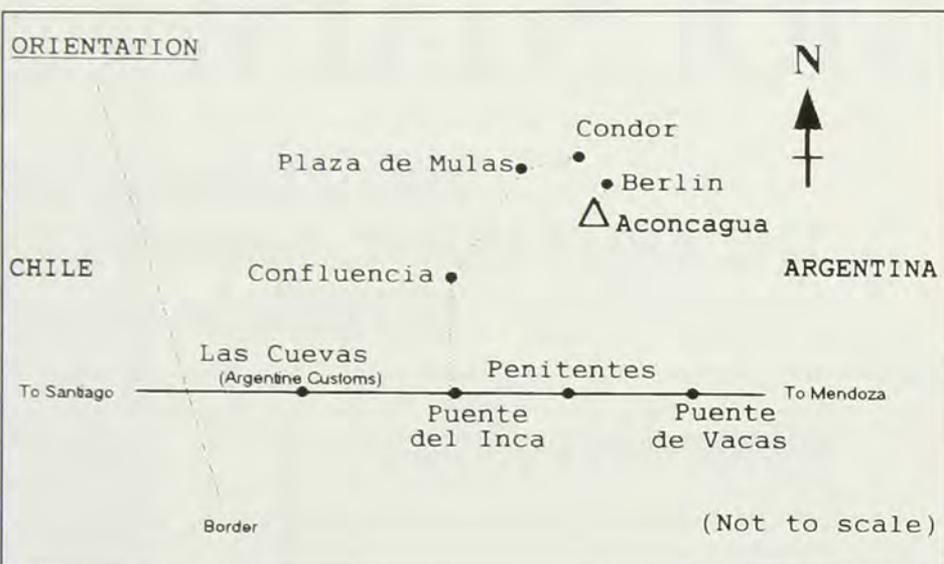
Campsite: Running water (streams) except at night and early morning

Camp Canada (4900m): Small (<10 tent sites) on a buttress with no running water (melt snow) exposed to winds

Camp Condor (5560m): Flat, wide area with unlimited campsites. No running water (melt snow) and invariably windy.

Camp Berlin (5800m): Disgustingly dirty and insanitary small area with only limited immediate area suitable for camping. One derelict hut (no roof) and 2 cramped shelters with room for about 3-4 persons each. Rubbish up to 1.5m deep. Melt snow.

## MISCELLANEOUS TIPS:



Take US\$ in cash. In Argentina US\$ are accepted on 1:1 with local currency. Travellers cheques and credit cards are virtually unusable to get cash, especially in Argentina, but BUCI Bank in Mendoza will cash US\$ 200 on VISA or American Express.

The 'Normal' route is not technical but crampons are advised in case conditions have changed.

All camping is on rocks and gravel, not grass. Gear has been stolen when left unattended, especially if obvious, ie in deliberately collapsed tents, or if on main ascent/descent path (s). Mountain is exposed and very windy at almost all times.

Sterilise/purify all water due to insanitary conditions found at all the mountain campsites. Food should be bought in Santiago or Mendoza.

Despite recent reports in UK press, Epigas is not readily available in Mendoza or Santiago. White gas, a solvent quite good for high altitude use, is available for MSR stoves: do not use kerosene which is very dirty. White gas cannot be taken on buses but is available at Penitentes at US\$ 4/litre.

Permit is valid for 21 days but this does not appear to be rigidly enforced.

Aconcagua is a rather tedious mountain - by the normal route - but there are a number of more attractive peaks (> 5,000m) to be climbed from Plaza de Mulas. The Polish Glacier (east side) has 2 or 3 variations in what is reputedly the most attractive area. Some technical assistance is required for the regular Polish Glacier route.

Data was gathered January 1993 and subject to change.

# A Salutary Experience

A J Muston

*(Special Note: Because of the requirements of the Sexual Equality Act, no overt reference can be made to the sex of any person featured in this article. All characters should therefore be deemed to be possibly male, possibly female or possibly something else.)*

In those halcyon days between the arrival of William the Conqueror and the invention of bits of paper giving you permission to walk or climb on British hills and when a friend was composed of flesh and blood not a weird assembly of cams and springs I went to Glencoe one winter - with a friend. We stayed at the youth hostel which was then run by Big Ingrid but that is another story.

After warming up on Bidean and the Buachaille we felt capable of tackling the Aonach Eagach ridge. In January days are short and the ridge clearly had snow and ice on it. Our planning must have been overheard (a sad lapse of security I must confess) and we were approached by two others keen to join us on the traverse. We appraised them from head to toe and they were well kitted out - according to the dictum then in vogue - in big Vibram-soled boots, 2 pairs of thick wool socks, Derby tweed breeches, cotton anorak and bobble hat so we agreed that they could join us.

We set off clutching our trusty wooden-shafted Aschen-brenner ice-axes (well, what else do you expect when an ageing climber writes an article on past experiences. Ask some members of the AMA for an article and they will talk about alpenstocks!) up the path beside Clachaig Gully. Perhaps we should have done a re-appraisal of our guests when they did take a long time to get up to the ridge. Incidentally, I know that everyone nowadays does the ridge east to west but they have cars which we did not have and our appreciation of the situation - recently practised at Sandhurst - was that it was better to do the ridge in the short hours of daylight and walk back along the road in the dark if needs be.

The ridge was iced with a lot of verglas which did not cause my friend and I much concern but for our guests it was a different matter. They were very unsure at any point with exposure and devotees of the ridge will know that there is quite a lot of this. Every sliver of ice was seen as a portent of doom and disaster and a rope was soon called for. This we had in the shape of 100 ft of No 3 hawser-laid nylon (all readers under 30 should now find an older climber to explain what this was) and we roped the pair along as best we could. Even in those days the carrying of a torch was advocated by Barford in his 'Climbing in Britain' (the 'bible' of the day and available price one shilling from Pelican Books) and this we had. What that excellent manual did not specify was the size of torch and we had assumed that any torch would do. Sadly we were soon to realise that a small No 8 battery was of little value on big mountains. By last light we were only about halfway along the ridge and I was expressing some modest concern. Clearly we should make the efforts to get off the mountain ASP and so the south side took our fancy (yes, I know you cocky young so and so who has just done his course at Ballachulish would have a petzl headtorch and 27 spare batteries not to mention at least 4 halogen bulbs and you would have gone on along the ridge to descend by the path down to Hamish's cottage but Petzl and halogen did not exist in the days of which I am writing).

We descended slowly with our two guests stumbling at every turn. They would not grasp the point that if you do without a torch totally one soon gets quite good night vision. We arrived at the top of a cliff and there seemed no way round so I suggested that a quick abseil was the answer. Our guests know nothing of such gymnastics but I can resort to brutality when all else fails and soon they were wrapped in the rope in the approved fashion. Old hands will already realise that this was in the days before descendeurs and the classic method was used which can bring cries of agony from males and a seraphic smile and 'Oooh' from ladies.

Another cliff loomed but this time they knew what abseiling was and the possible 'Oooh' factor was outweighed by stark fear. More brutality ensued. Let it suffice to say that we finally reached the road at about 2030 where we were found by a certain Mr MacInnes in his van and conveyed back to the hostel. As I recall it we only had about 4 minutes on the folly of being out after dark in winter. Ever since then I have liked to know more than a little about the capabilities of those with whom I go climbing or walking.

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# Exercise Croz Diamond

*T Palke*

After having been told by my former CO Maj Hassel that I would be the one to go on a "kind-of alpine battle camp" with 14 Signal Regiment in the early summer and after intensely studying the outline programme, I arrived in Osnabrueck seemingly well prepared for the exercise on 21st May 1993.

The next day proved to be my first real confrontation with rock climbing as Neil took me to a rock climbing training area near Ibbenbuehren. There, I soon realised that even an easy-looking mini rock face can be impossible to tackle.

The following day was spent packing all the issued kit and all the personal luggage.

## Monday 24th May 1993

Having arrived in Zermatt after a 14 hour journey that began at dawn, we found ourselves confronted with a unique phenomenon: Two new measurements for length and time had entered our world. No longer were there those familiar things like the metre or the hour, instead there were now the "Rutland-metre" and the "Rutland-hour". The physical basis for these new measurements were too obscure for us to understand, so we gave up and accepted them as they were. We were soon to get a feeling for what they meant.

After we moved into our rooms in the Chalet Diana, we had dinner and went out to sample the local infrastructure.

## Tuesday, 25th May 1993

The first full day in Zermatt gave us a general introduction to hill walking, as we went around the area just south of the town and took in the beautiful scenery.

## Wednesday 26th May 1993

We had our first real go at rock climbing on that day when we went down to Schweigmatten, where a couple of boulders can be used for training purposes.

We were introduced to the arts of knot-making and belaying by Neil, who together with John supervised the whole event. Nearly all of us managed to climb the boulder, with some having a bit of support from gravity-repelling forces that worked from below. We then had a go at how to rescue ourselves if we should ever fall into a crevasse, which at that point seemed only a far-away possibility. We were then told about a few more safety rules and went home again, ready for an early night because the next day would have an early start.

## Thursday 27th May

Wake-up time was 0300hrs to give us plenty of time to walk up the Triftbach area towards the Matterhorn. After slight confusion at the beginning about where the actual path was and after having been nearly drenched by a wild hose-pipe we were eventually on the right track up the mountain. This turned out to be quite strenuous as the path was very steep. Once we reached the upper part the prediction by a certain non-British member of the team, that we would be hit by a hailstorm turned out to be correct.

In view of possible avalanches and the deteriorating weather conditions we turned back before we reached the Matterhorn and began our descent down to Zermatt, however, on a slightly different route.

We arrived back at the chalet at about 1300 hrs and everyone took advantage of the couple of hours that were still to go before dinner and took a rest in order for the batteries to be recharged for the evening that lay ahead.

## Friday, 28th May 1993

God decided that Sunday should be a day of rest, but we chose Friday instead.

Still wrecked from the previous day's undertakings, we took things easy and spent the day relaxing ready for the big adventure ahead.

## Saturday, 29th May 1993

Getting a really good view of the Matterhorn was the aim of the day. We went up to the Schoenbielhütte along some magnificent scenery that included the Stafelalp and the Zmuttgletscher area.

When we arrived at the mountain hut we were treated by a superb view of the Matterhorn set against a cloudless sky. Just before we left an avalanche began to start on the opposite mountain face which led everyone to either unpack their cameras again or just to express their excitement about such a display of nature verbally.

So, charmed by what we saw on that day we all went back happily not knowing what would be demanded from us on the following two days.

## Sunday, 30th May

The day began with Sunday lunch because we were off on a twoday expedition that included staying overnight at the Monte Rosa hut.

In the afternoon we set off to take the Gornergratbahn train to Rotenboden from where our route began. The first bit had us ploughing through a large snow field which then turned into a mountain path that ran beside the Gornergletscher and provided some spectacular views. Once the path ended we made preparations to cross the glacier. We all tied ourselves together and took off. The first group was headed by Neil who acted as pathfinder, while John was at the back making sure that nothing would happen. Our morale was not helped by the fact that two groups of skiers warned us not to cross the glacier on foot, as the snow was apparently much too soft. But that did not deter us, we put on a brave face and went boldly where no man had gone before (well, not this year anyway!).

Although we were sinking into the snow all the time nothing happened until I got my foot stuck at the top of a crevasse and could not get it out. Thanks to John's help I got it out eventually but the experience did not exactly do any good for my morale, and as it turned out others would soon adopt the same attitude.

The Scottish faction did not fare any better, as Jock managed to fall into a hole up to his shoulders causing considerable amusement and comment from his team mates.

Eventually we reached the bottom of the mountain on which the hut was. Since there was no apparent path leading up to the hut, we took the direct approach, going up the mountain straight.

When we finally reached the hut we put on dry socks and settled down for our evening meal. After we had been allocated our bunks in the dormitories, we tried to find them, but that proved rather difficult as no light could be switched on in the hut. It took a while before we found our beds. So, when we reached our haven of rest at last we could safely put ourselves into Morpheus' arms and dream of the return journey that lay ahead on the following day.

#### **Monday 31st May 1993**

When we got up at 0630hrs after having been woken up already once before at 0200hrs by a group of skiers we decided on an early start for our way back across the glacier.

Once the early morning fog lifted we climbed down the rock face again and began our walk across the glacier, our minds permanently focused on not stepping into a deep hole or into a crevasse again. We were all quite surprised that it took us only about half the time compared to Sunday to reach terra firma again. A definite improvement on morale and humour could also be noticed with all team members.

When we finally reached the Rotenboden train station again, two members tried to convince everyone else that the best way back would be by train. However all attempts of trying to stage a mutiny were rigorously squashed. (In reality, the two lone rebels gave in because they did not want to lose face!)

So we took the foot path down to Zermatt, which was a bit difficult to find at first because of the snow that still lay around and covered most of it.

We eventually reached our "base camp" again in the afternoon, and were all quite glad that we made it back safely.

#### **Tuesday, 1st June 1993**

Tuesday was another well-earned day off and it was broadly used to recuperate. Most of us thought we had tackled the most difficult bit, but we were soon to learn different.

#### **Wednesday, 2nd June 1993**

The target of the day was to reach the Hoerlihuette, which is the base for all climbing parties who attempt the climb the Matterhorn.

We went up to Furgg by cable car and set out on our path up to the hut which could only partly be seen due to a dense layer of cloud.

After we reached the Schwarzsee station it was decided that Jock and Horse would not continue the attempt to reach the Hoerlihuette because of the bad state of their feet. Therefore, it was left to the remaining eight to go ahead.

The weather started to get worse and worse by the minute, until we were completely surrounded by swirling snow. However this was not considered bad because part of the way

led us across a few ridges from where it was a long way down to the ground on both sides. Had we seen how far down it was I am sure it would have turned the butterflies in some peoples stomachs into woodpeckers.

After a few of us had already looked death defiantly in the eye and after the weather deteriorated even more Neil eventually decided to call the attempt off.

Once we were back at the chalet we were treated to a nice, hot soup that John had cooked.

#### **Thursday, 3rd June 1993**

Our last full day in Zermatt was spent by a gentle stroll along the Gornereschlucht.

In the afternoon we had time to pack our things, buy a few last-minute souvenirs and started to bring all the heavy luggage back to the minibus.

In the evening we paid our farewell visit to "The Brown Cow" and got to bed early ready for a 0300hrs start on Friday morning.

#### **Friday, 4th June 1993**

With the Matterhorn set against a setting full moon we left Zermatt at about 0400hrs.

The journey back went better than expected since there were no traffic jams or breakdowns that held us up. Even the few litres of super fuel which mistakenly went into the tank could not hold us up.

And so, after a long journey we reached Quebec Barracks again at about 1630hrs.

#### **Conclusion**

When I was first told that I would go on exercise CROZ DIAMOND, the immediate image in my mind was me having to climb gigantic mountains with a group of experienced alpine mountaineers and me hanging in rock faces hundreds of metres above the ground with my life attached to a bit of rope.

Luckily, neither of those nightmarish visions ever came true. The whole event was always in the capable and safe hands of John and Neil, who made sure that nothing would go wrong.

For someone like me who had hitherto only been used to hill walking in the Harz or on the more gentle slopes of Germany the chance of trying more difficult routes proved an interesting and enjoyable challenge. It certainly did not put me off from trying out something similar in the future.

Adventure training of this kind is difficult to come by in the Bundeswehr, where it is mostly reserved for infantry units etc, and even there it is rather rare compared to what is offered by the British Army. I am therefore glad that I was given the chance to take part in such an event.

Finally, my thanks go round to everyone who helped make the exercise an enjoyable event to remember. To John and Neil for taking good care of things in general, to Tim for his cooking, to John A, for his ability to always find a sarcastic comment and of course to the other seven members of the CROZ DIAMOND team.

# Exercise TUSK '92

Capt Alan Blackwell . R SIGNALS

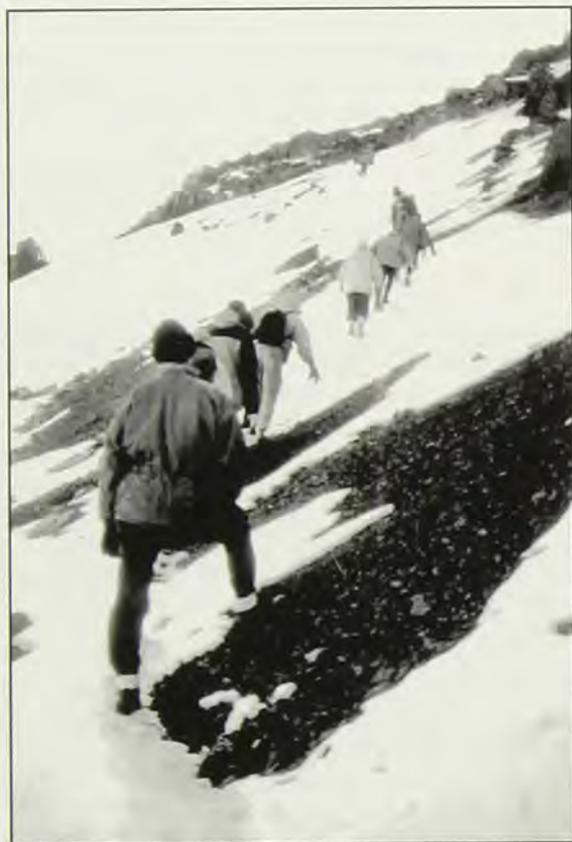
**T**usk 92 was a tri-service expedition to Kenya, held over three weeks during August and September. The expedition had two main aims; to carry out conservation work with the Kenyan Wildlife Service and to climb Mount Kenya to Point Lenana. Some 45 service personnel went out to Kenya and three separate attempts were therefore made at the peak.

All three groups used the Naro Moru route, starting at the park gate and walking up to the Met Station (3050m). Although it is possible to drive up to this point - and indeed the porters did just this - we decided the three and a half hour walk would be useful acclimatisation. The hut at the Met Station was comfortable, especially for the groups which had already spent a couple of weeks in 12x12s on the Abadares National Park. We had running water which, although it needed boiling before drinking, was clear. The huts themselves each accommodated ten people (on mattresses!) and had a cooking area outside.

The second day was the hardest work, starting with the usual 6am start in order to be walking just after 7am to get the best weather. After about half an hour we reached the 'vertical bog', when the scenery opened up and we had quite spectacular views of the mountain and the plains below. In the early afternoon, as we passed 4000m, light cloud began to swirl around us and there was a noticeable chill in the air. This was the first point at which most of the group went into fleece jackets and leggings. Mackinders Hut (4200m) was reached by 2.30pm and we had a snack in the company of the scavenging rock hyraxes. Mackinders also proved more luxurious than many were expecting, with mattresses, running water and a cooking area inside.

3am the next morning the group, carrying only daysacks and wearing headtorches, started the climb up to Point Lenana. The sky was starry and crystal clear and the weather, not surprisingly, dry and cold. The ascent was incredibly quiet and peaceful and, despite the fact it was dark and the limit of our vision largely determined by the range of our torches, everyone sensed the sheer size of the mountain. We reached the Austrian Hut (4790m) at 6am, just as the sun was coming up. A short break was taken; some of the group put on extra clothing for the final, more exposed, part of the ascent and we left half an hour later. The final walk up the glacier was easier than many had thought, and soon everyone had the confidence to kick in and trust their boots. Point Lenana (4985m) was reached at 7.05 and all the essential photos quickly taken before anyone got too cold.

The descent was faster but, for many, quite painful on the knees down the scree slopes. After re-packing kit and picking up our porters again at Mackinder's we started the walk back to the Met Hut, which we reached by 3.30pm. A long day, but one which few in the group will ever forget. The final day's walking was very short and groups were ready to be picked up from the Park gates by 10am.



Of the 45 people who attempted the peak, about two thirds were successful. Everyone got as far as Mackinders hut; those who did not go further were suffering from either the altitude or stomach complaints. Each group had either a doctor or a medic (RMA 1).

The porters were cheerful and, whilst we were there, desperate for work. Many had not worked for two weeks or more and their Union insisted that we take different porters on each of the three ascents in order to spread the work out. We paid 135 Kenyan shillings per day (about £2); we heard various rates quoted and met some Americans who had paid 400 shillings. Anyone whose experience of porters is from the Himalayas should also note that the maximum load for a Kenyan porter is about 15kg; above this they will simply refuse.

The climb to Point Lenana was ideal for the largely inexperienced groups which went up. It presented no technical difficulties and no dangers which could not be overcome using a little common sense. We were lucky with the weather and the good visibility, which added to the sense of achievement when we reached Lenana. Finally, it was noticeable that those who had been living on the Abadares National Park (around 2000m) for the previous one or two weeks found the climb considerably easier than those who went straight up the mountain.

Exercise

Capt A D Stevens

# ISLAND WANDERER - KHUMBU

In May of this year I received a call from Major Nick Brehaut in HQB Kathmandu who invited me to act as Deputy Leader on an expedition to Island Peak at over 20,300 feet or 6,198 m high. The other three members, selected from members of the Hong Kong British Forces Climbing Club, were Captain Colin Wallace (1BW), Cpl Ian Combellaack (RAF Sek Kong), and LCpl 'Les' Leslie (Geo Branch). Our equipment was provided by HKPATC and the RLC Regional Depot at Thatcham. We flew to Kathmandu on 14 September and spent a day in the worlds' most weird and polluted city. We sorted out our Trekking Permits and bought the final few bits of kit from the many kit caves in the Thamel district.

On 16 September we started our 10 day trek to Namche Bazaar, the capital of the high mountains of the Khumbu. It took us 8 hours to drive to the end of the road at Jiri. The best description of this village is to liken it to a wild west town, the only thing missing was a gunfight! Our Sidar Phu Tsering Sherpa, quickly hired a few porters to carry out expedition sacks and began walking to Shivalaya. Unfortunately, we set off late on in the afternoon and ended up walking 2 hours in the dark until we reached our first camp by the Khimti Khola river.

Over the next few days we fell into a regular routine of tea at 0600 hrs followed by washing water fifteen minutes later. Breakfast was either rice or oat porridge followed by an egg (fried, scrambled or made into an omelette). We normally started walking by 0730 hrs, taking pictures when the rain eased. I quickly found that our best pieces of kit for the trek in, were an umbrella and a ski stick. The foothills were a lush green and obviously very fertile, the staple crops were potatoes, maize, millet and wheat. The walk from Jiri to the Dudh Kosi crosses several high ridge lines, the highest being the Lamjura La pass at 3,530 m. This pass takes two days to climb up the trail, on the top I treated a porter with a badly infected ankle. The only thing I was able to do was to drain off the puss, getting a mouthful in the process and then dress it after a liberal application of antibiotic powder. At Jumbeisi we spent a welcome night in a lodge and had a shower! The rain remained with us as we went through Nuntalla and onto the Dudh Kosi. One of the hazards in the foothills are leeches, Les won the championships having been sucked eleven times before we left those bloody hungry little creatures behind.

On day 6 we reached the mighty Dudh Kosi with its roaring white water, a real challenge for even the worlds best paddlers. We turned north and followed the Dudh Kosi, it is an immensely deep valley, at times over 2,000 feet deep. Streams tumble down its lush green sides and form waterfalls hundreds of feet high.

Our evening surgery was especially busy at Bupsa which sits on a spur and is threatened by a massive landslide area on the approach trail. Nick and I treated seven patients including a young boy who had a string tightly tied round his thumb. Removing the string and a plaster revealed a white and cold thumb. The string had been on for four days and I held out little hope for the boy's thumb but we had to try. We got him to run around outside swinging his arm and pumping his hand to try to restart the circulation. A loose dressing was applied and thankfully the next morning colour and warmth had returned.



Major Nick Brehaut and Captain Andy Stevens on the summit

By day 8 we had used a third of our medical kit and non of it on ourselves. We continued on the trail walking through dark green forests with tree trunks covered in a deep velvet moss. We go up and down each day as we cross the mountain streams feeding the "Milk River" far below. At Surke we risk a wash in freezing glacier melt water, it is one of the quickest ways to wake up I know. We were joined on the trail by a couple of mule trains and porters carrying 50 kg loads of rice from the plains up to Namche Bazaar to the Saturday market. The rain continued to follow us, the heavy monsoon clouds swirled on the top of the valley sides limiting our views. The beauty of beginning our walk before the start of the trekking season was the feeling of discovery and isolation as we met very few westerners on the trail. Those we did come across shared our love of the mountains and were totally different to the fashion conscious tourists we were to meet on our descent two weeks later.

Above Nagbug we came across our first prayer wheels which we willingly turned as we would need all the help we could get in the thin air to come. On our ninth day of continuous walking we entered the Sagmartha (or Everest) National Park. We walked down stone steps through the narrow pass and were greeted by a valley which rivals the beauty of Yosemite Valley in California. Impressive waterfalls tumbled down both sides across unclimbed rock walls and down to the wild water below carving its way through the hills. Our final climb of the day was up over 2,000 feet to the unofficial capital of the Sherpas, Namche Bazaar. Namche nestles in a small col and although at first glance looks like a slum district it is in fact a masterpiece of engineering. All the houses, fields, paths and market place are built on a series of terraces which is unrivalled by even anything in Hong Kong, especially when you remember that everything is made without the aid of any machinery. The village has the luxury of electricity (evenings only) and a nearby hospital at Kunde which is manned by Canadian and New Zealand volunteers on a two year posting with only 6 weeks holiday.

We paid off our porters and changed our loads to yak-cattle crosses called 'dubchuck'. 'Rest day' involved a battle through the Saturday market which will cure any shopperholic in just twenty minutes, the meat stands have to be seen to be believed. A strong stomach is required to view the decapitated heads of a couple of buffalo. We visited the hospital at Kunde and our Sidar's house in the neighbouring village of Chuckung. The following day we were back on the trail with more rain and mist. We passed a number of yak trains, their bells giving warning of their coming, although timid these bison sized animals accidentally kill and wound several trekkers each year. After crossing the Dudh Kosi by a precarious wire, rope and slat wood suspension bridge we made the long and steady climb to the Tongbocke Monastery. The trees were a delightful tapestry of orange, yellow, green and red. This was our highest point so far at 3,867 m, we managed to get a blessing from a Buddhist monk for our climb on Island Peak, we were given a prayer scarf, an orange thread and rice to offer to Buddha once on the summit.

We continued onwards and upwards passing through Pangboche, Shomare, Periche and eventually camping by the massive Khumbu Glacier at Loboche, at last the monsoon had lifted and the weather was excellent. Our acclimatization walk up Kala Patar at 5,549 m began at four in the morning. Colin reluctantly turned back half way up the 'Black Hill' with severe chest pains, he was accompanied by Sherra Zambu one of our experienced Sherpa guides. Later in the day he descended to Penriche for a days rest at lower altitude. We were able to watch the sun rise from behind Everest, one of those magical moments which remain with you. Kala Patar sits in the shadow of Pumori at the end of the Khumbu Valley and only 8 kilometres from Everest. The views are spectacular. We slowly returned to camp where we rested after a brilliant day out. We moved the following morning to Dingboche where we got our first real view of Island Peak at the end of the Imja Valley. At over 6,000 m this mountain is dwarfed by the 8,000 m walls of snow and ice of Lhotse and Lhotse Shar. Two days later we were at base camp at the foot of our target. We had a much needed rest day which we used to rebuild the memorial to two RAF climbers and a Sherpa killed by an avalanche in October



The summit ridge leading to Island Peak.



"Lamma in a basket".

1989. We also cleared the area of rubbish left by previous groups. A final check on our crampons and ice axe straps and we were ready. We had decided on a two day climb, high camp was made on a well sheltered ledge to the left of the main gully leading to the hanging glacier.

At 3.15 am we began our climb using head torches to light our way upwards through the gully and up a precarious ridge. We reached the snow line at 6.30 am where we stopped to put crampons on and rope up. As if by order the mist cleared to give us perfect views of the high peaks around us. We were now over the 6,000 m mark and the going became harder and harder. With less than 50% of the oxygen that there is at sea level we were stopping every twenty paces to suck at the thin and cold air. We successfully crossed the glacier and then 100 m above us the knife edge ridge led to the summit. The 100 m high snow and ice wall was a formidable barrier, we ascended with the aid of a fixed rope. It was one of the hardest climbs I have done and involved several stops before forcing front points in and slowly moving on.

From the top of the ice wall it was a 20 minute walk along the ridge and onto the summit. We all made it to the top, an excellent feeling of achievement filled us all. We blasted off a few rolls of film before heading back down to base camp. Colin led the way back over the glacier and we cautiously jumped over the crevasses.

So it was over, we slowly walked down to Lukla and were pleased to be leaving as there were now hundreds of tourists and porters moving up to the big hills. We flew from Lukla which must be the most exciting airfield to take off from. We managed an hectic day in Kathmandu before flying back to the concrete jungle of Hong Kong.

The expedition members would like to thank CBF and the SO PT in Hong Kong for their generous grants. And I would like to thank the AMA for their grants to both myself and LCpl Leslie.

# A CAUTIONARY TALE

*A case of high altitude pulmonary oedema*

*Captain RDM Weekes RAMC*

Climbing high mountains is not without its perils. Those of avalanche and the weather are commonly recognised, but the threat of altitude related illness is perhaps less understood. This anecdotal account aims to raise awareness of the dangers, and to suggest methods of prevention and treatment.

August 1993 saw a group of sixteen arrive in Kathmandu to attempt to climb Pacheramo, a 20,000 foot mountain in the Nepalese Rolwaling Himal. The group contained a range of differing experience, fitness and stamina and included both males and females. After the usual sorting out of kit a bus was taken to Dalakha at 4,000 feet, north west of Jiri. From there we trekked up into the foothills following the Tamba Kosi river for five days through rain forest infested with leeches up into the alpine zone above 10,000 feet. We climbed steadily until the last point of habitation was reached at Na, 13,720 feet. Thus we climbed about 10,000 feet in 7 days. We rested at this height, and acclimatised for a day, before climbing on up onto the Trakarding glacier to establish Base Camp at Gauri Shankar, 15,7000 feet, at the snout of the Drolambo glacier. Four days were spent here, practising ice climbing techniques and acclimatising further in the thinning air.

At 15,700 feet five members of the group developed Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS). Their symptoms included headache, nausea and Cheyne-Stokes breathing (a condition where the person experiences a ragged breathing pattern during sleep where long periods of not breathing at all are followed by a period of deep sighing breaths). This is caused by the low oxygen concentration in the air and the associated changes in body chemistry. All five responded well to treatment with diamox (a mild diuretic) and to rest for a day or two. They were able to resume their ascent after four days at base camp. People who fail to respond to this regime should descend the mountain in order to recover fully before resuming the ascent. Failure to do this can have serious results as we were about to find out!

On 18 August the group ascended the ice fall at the snout of the Drolambo glacier to establish advanced base camp at 17,500 feet. This was at the foot of the Teschi Lapcha pass, and below Pacheramo, the mountain we had come to climb. A further two days were spent at this height, and two more people, one of them a porter, developed AMS, and were successfully started on treatment.

On 20 August we climbed an un-named peak on the western side of the glacier, at 19,800 feet. This involved a long steep ice and snow pitch, perhaps a thousand feet, and so we roped into teams of four and donned crampons, harnesses and ice axes. Two hundred feet short of the summit one of the girls complained of exhaustion and said she would wait for us at that height. The remainder went on, reached the summit and began to descend. When we reached the girl she was breathless and giddy, so we quickly began to descend the snow and ice pitch. Thick snow began to fall, balling the crampons badly and several of the less experienced members of the group found the going daunting. I

was helping one of these when the word was passed up to me that the girl had collapsed. I unclipped from the rope and glissaded down the steep slope, the most unconventional route to a casualty I have yet used. On my arrival she had indeed collapsed, there were no signs of breathing, and no palpable heart beat. Mouth to mouth followed a vigorous precordial thump and she slowly regained consciousness. After a short while she was able to cooperate with our efforts to get her down off the slope. Thirty feet from the bottom the same thing happened again, and mouth to mouth again proved effective. We were now on a rocky shelf, with a steep rocky slope below down to the surface of the glacier. Our sherpa had been sent ahead to fetch the oxygen supply from advanced base camp and had shot off like the wind. We decided to stabilise the girl here, and got her into dry clothes and inside both sleeping and bivi bags as it was still snowing and getting very cold. She was very confused and uncooperative, fighting our efforts to get her dry and warm. This exhausted her and she collapsed once more. Shortly afterwards, and in less time than really seemed possible, our sherpas arrived bringing oxygen, tent and brew kit. The oxygen worked wonders for her, as did a cup of tea for us, although we had difficulty keeping the mask on her face, and I was able to give her some diuretic. With the aid of the oxygen and of the sherpas we got her back to camp, arriving just before night fall. A stag roster was organised to watch her through the night, and she passed a restless eight hours slipping into unconsciousness and being revived with oxygen.

It was clear that we had to get her to a lower altitude, and more oxygen as soon as possible. A difficult choice confronted us however. Behind us, the way that we had come, lay the steep ice fall, two glaciers and a trek of at least ten days before a radio could be reached. Ahead lay the Teschi Lapcha pass, higher than we were at 18,500 feet, but beyond that the ground fell steeply to Thame below the helicopter ceiling at 12,500 feet, and only two days march away. We opted to go on, leaving at the crack of dawn the next day. With the aid once again of the sherpas and the oxygen we got over the pass and the following day to Thame. With descent the girl improved rapidly, but it was not for several days safely in Namche Bazaar that she realised how ill she had been. She later confessed to having had quite severe headache and nausea at advanced base camp, but had not revealed this in case she was not allowed to climb higher.

The girl had developed High Altitude Pulmonary Oedema (HAPO). In this condition the lungs begin to fill with fluid, and this coupled with the low oxygen concentration in the air had lowered the oxygen in her bloodstream to the point at which she had collapsed. She then suffered a respiratory arrest. HAPO affects up to 15% of people who ascend rapidly to high altitude, and can occur as low as 8,000 feet. Young people are more at risk, especially young males. In people who had survived one episode the risk of reoccurrence is put at 60% on reascent to altitude. Mortality is put at 44% without descent or treatment, and 11% overall. The best way to avoid high altitude illness is to limit the rate of ascent, and thus allow acclimatisation. The Himalayan Rescue Association recommend the following regime:

*cont.*

- a. At the 10,000 feet level stay three nights before going higher.
- b. Above 10,000 feet stay two nights for every 1,500 feet gained in sleeping altitude.
- c. Climb high during the day and return to sleep low.
- d. Eat a high carbohydrate diet and keep well hydrated.
- e. Prophylaxis with acetazolamide (Diamox) should be reserved for people who have previously been affected, or for those who require to go high quickly, such as rescue workers.

Treatment is primarily by descent, as quickly as possible to a level where symptoms abate. Acetazolamide may be given together with dexamethazone and oxygen in order to gain time whilst descent occurs.

The girl on our expedition would therefore seem to have been unlucky to suffer, as our rate of ascent was fairly slow and within the above guidelines. She was however ill advised not to have declared her illness whilst still at a more treatable stage, as did others in the group.

*The author is at present Regimental Medical Officer to the 2nd Battalion The Royal Green Jackets, and has an interest in expeditions and high altitude medicine.*

### Expedition to

# Mount Kenya and Mount Kilimanjaro

Captain Peet

**18** months, a trip to the Gulf and plenty of applications and phone calls, later 12 of us found ourselves on a RAF plane bound for Kenya. The team, in retrospect, was quite large; 12 of us including a doctor, of whom 3 had a reasonable amount of climbing experience. The team was selected during a week of trekking and climbing in Bavaria the previous summer and we were fortunate enough to get on some empty Grand Prix flights over the Christmas period.

It was almost too good to be true and it was; the RAF decided to spend an unscheduled 24 hrs in Cyprus. Then for good measure we went via Bahrain to eventually land at Nairobi.

Because of the delay in flights and the need for some members to fly home early our time on the mountain was limited. Almost at once the decision was made to transfer our effort to get as many people as possible up Pt Lenana, rather than trying for Nelion or Batian.

After a few brief hours at Batisk we were transported to the Naro Moru side of Mt Kenya and after some lengthy delays acquiring guides, negotiating and renegotiating rates, we set off, from the Park Gate to walk to the Meteorological station.

It very quickly got dark and we soon realized that our packs were extremely heavy. The porters made lots of loud calling noises in order to frighten off any game that might be around, and one of the sappers had an acute back problem which meant two people trying to carry it, as well as their own packs; more of a commando trek.

The following day, the altitude started to really take its effect at the meteorological station up to McKinders Camp. Splitting headaches and nausea were fairly equally shared around the group. Three people were fit enough the next day to go up Pt Lenana while the rest of us just rested.

The remainder of the party managed Pt Lenana the following day, the final parts being a scramble in very soft snow and on boulders. Our achievement was slightly dampened by Nicholas, a helper at Mackinders Meteorological station who decided to follow in mackintosh and a pair of wellingtons!

On the way down, at a rest stop someone dropped his rucksack which then slid down the side of Pt Lenana onto the Lewis Glacier. Here was a use for one rope at last! I roped up and



*The Author at Pt Lenana*

using Nicholas and Cpl Mann to belay me round a convenient boulder I descended detouring round a small crevasse to recover the offending object.

Descent was rapid the following day; the increasing oxygen levels being very welcome as was the beer in the Naro Maru Lodge that night!

Seven of us went on to the Kilimanjaro phase. The 'bus' move to the park gates could merit an article in itself. After some protracted negotiation with the park authorities and the agency who were to provide our compulsory guide we eventually set off for Mandara but (2700m). Two days later we had reached, Kibo hut at 4700m.

At 1am the next morning we began the ascent to the summit 6 hours and 3600 ft later we reached Gilman's Point, on the summit crater. Despite our improved acclimatization several members of the expedition were really suffering; vomiting and diarrhoea, are not very pleasant at 18000 feet in sub zero temperatures. Determined to succeed we eventually reached Gilman's Point and enjoyed a short rest before doing the gently rising traverse to the highest point in Africa, Uhuru Peak. Feelings of immense satisfaction all round followed by a very rapid descent to Horumbo hut and then back, the next day, to Nairobi (another interesting bus ride).

# The Attempted Ascent of Mount Kun

*Kashmir, Himalaya,  
September 1993*

*John Harris Schwelm FRGS*

Whoosh! SShhhhhhh!! The sound was unmistakable, even more so when the unbroken verbal barrage of swearing erupted in the early morning. I knew the sound of a spindrift avalanche when I heard it and assumed Darren had caught it full force in his bivi hole. He had, and to make it worse, his snowholes roof had collapsed forcing snow between him and the precarious stance he had called home for what was to be our last night on KUN. Six days out from our advance base camp with no food, water and fuel had taken its toll on us both and with it the chance of succeeding with it. The high point of 6000+m had been obtained with the usual mixture of blood sweat and tears but with the onset of minus 20C temperatures and a wind that tore at the core of ones soul and stamina it had been an exceptional deed.

Morning arrived with the daily ritual of breathing warm air on bivi bag zips thus enabling us to unzip them and get some fresh air. The rime ice was heavy in both bivi and sleeping bags alike. God, I wanted to be back with other humans and quick. "Darren, lets call it a day mate", and with the look that came my way I knew the right decision had been made.

The 1000m ice face we had painstakingly climbed in a gruelling pitch after pitch torment of monotony was reversed in a breathtaking fashion. The ideal spincter exercise it was. The fact we had intended to climb the mountain alpine style and descend down a different route had left us with only the minimum of equipment. That being a single rope of 45m and an assortment of screws and pegs. Call us what you will but in the mountain spirit we were trying to make a molehill out of this mountain and limiting our gear to the basics made us rely on our abilities rather than technology, or something like that. "We'll have to cut ice bollards mate" and keep the abseils ever so short, a right daunting and sobering fact as those with big mountain experience will no doubt agree with. "I'm in" was the reply from the once chubby cheeked man at my side. He looked bloody awful I thought to myself but had a spirit that was downright infec-

tious. "Hows your self arrest technique 'ol man"? I asked, pointing down the huge abyss. In deteriorating conditions we set off like automatons and made our way down. We both had been on the hill some 6 days with only each other for company and were aware of how tired we had become. Time seemed to be never moving and the scenario was staying the same.



*The Ugly, L to R, John Schwelm, Darren Roberts.*

Whiteout conditions here in the UK or the continent are bad enough, but in the Himalaya, where statistically, 1 out of 4 climbers will bite the bullet, it becomes paramount to survive, there is no second chance. Even as I write this report for the AMA Journal, it is still very foggy in my mind as to how close I was, and indeed both of us were on the "edge".

I do remember seeing our advance base camp and AK Uniyal our LO hours before we arrived, and when we finally did, how we both collapsed into his arms as he helped us with our rucksacks. A hot cup of Darjeelings best went down a treat and soon the ever rising cloud of unconsciousness blacked out everything. I do remember asking Darren before I slipped into sleep if he had taken refuge from the wind behind the phone kiosk like I did. I thought it funny next day and even more so when Darren confided he had been offered tea from a stranger at 6000m. Oh Yeah!! I only mention these bizarre facts to prepare others as to what games the mountains can play on the human mind and there was some mind games being played on KUN this past September.

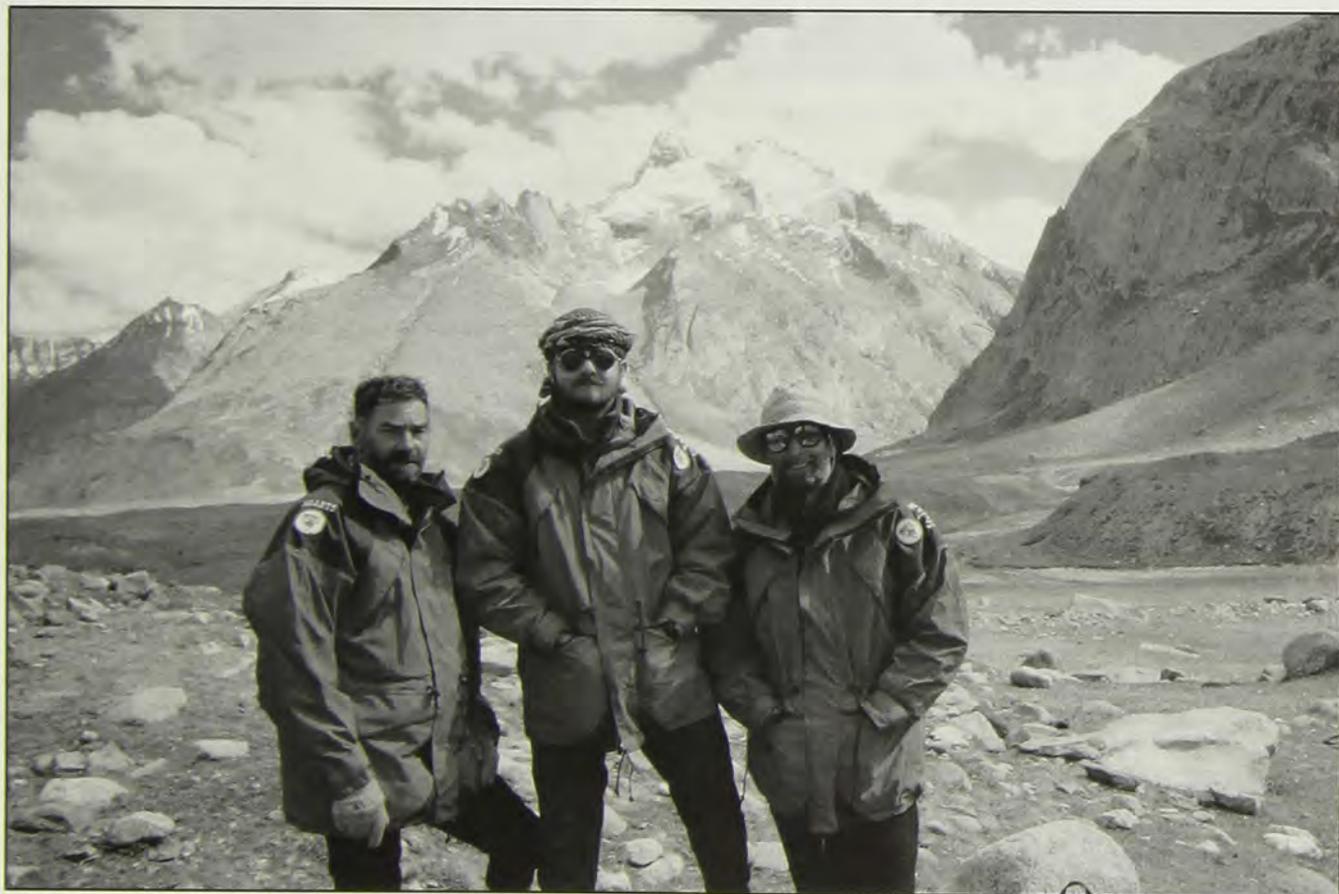
The expedition to KUN (7077m) was first thought about 2 years ago in Zanskar while leading a support trek for an expedition with the big man himself John Barry. While he was unsuccessful on his chosen peak due to terrible conditions I and 2 clients made the second ascent of a 6000m peak (Capel Curig) and from its summit loomed an impressive massif to the north. The twin peaks of NUN-KUN were to implant themselves in my thoughts for the next two summers. Enquiries

clipped any further thoughts when I was told it was totally booked years in advance. Easy come, easy go as the saying goes. The following year after a successful season in the Zaskar himalaya I found myself at an impromptu gathering in Delhi of Indian Mountaineering officials and airline people, (you know the sort), when I was asked ever so casually if I would be interested in KUN for September the following year. An Austrian team has cancelled Mr. John. "Are you serious I asked?" Why yes, Mr. John all we need is a small deposit to secure it and before he could go any further I was peeling off my fleece jacket "Here I said, its worth a few bob, consider it secured." Perhaps that was not ethical but it worked non the less. My problem was I had nobody to climb it with me and my program for 1993 had already been finalised in my brochure which was at the printers. You may remember last year in the winter edition of the AMA Journal my request to the editor looking for anybody with the time and money to join me. Well consider this a big thank you from the heart to the AMA as two very competent mountaineers took up the challenge. Ted Tombling (Cpt Retd), KUN base camp manager and Darren Roberts a UK Marine Commando coporal of 7 years came forward with the kind of attitudes that make the British climbing fraternity what it is, the best. We all got together numerous times through the spring and summer talking and drinking till



*Retreat in horrible conditions.*

the cows came home. Don't worry Ted, your boozy secret in LEH is safe with me. A good team was at hand. While the expedition went as good as they go we had an unforeseen hiccup after arriving in Delhi. The airport in LEH, Ladakh was closed due to snowstorms for several days which put us behind from the start and with a detour to Srinagar in Kashmir and a 2 day bus ride delayed a further day due to landslides on the road. The expeditions chances were diminishing rapidly, we would have to have perfect weather and conditions in order to succeed. We had neither. But by heck as in the famous words of someone who must be equally famous "We gave that mountain our bloody best".



*The Team, L to R, Ted Tomblin, Capt. Retd. Corporal Darren Roberts, Jon Schwelm (Former US Army Staff Sgt.)*

# First View of Kun



*Second peak from right in background 7077 mts.*

# Everest! - I must be dreaming

*a recollection of thoughts from the DARC Star Expedition*

*B. Stadden*

*Pte 6th Bn Light Infantry, Bath - Avon*

"Well it looks like you're going to Everest Bry" Jon Tinker's words hit me like a ton of bricks and were to remain fixed in my mind over the ensuing months. Going to Everest was not a dream, it was real but there was going to be a lot of hard work ahead to make it work. The Darc Star team had just completed a planning/training exercise in Vermont U.S.A. - a hectic 2 weeks in which the expedition had been brought from a somewhat shaky stance to a firm foothold and on the road that would eventually lead to Nepal.

That was February 1992 and some 8 months later we were ready to depart for Katmandu. The intervening months had been hectic enough but the month of October was particularly chaotic, what with press receptions, a farewell reception at Kensington Palace with our Patron H.R.H. Prince Charles, last minute hitches with the oxygen system, and the icing on the cake another daughter arrived just 4 weeks before departure. Looking back, I was fortunate that the expedition departure date had been pushed back as it gave me a short spell to enjoy Jennifer who provided a wonderful escape from the pressures of the expedition.

Attempting to fit in training however, became quite an adventure in itself. I could often be found trudging over the Brecon Beacons, before sunrise on many occasions, so that I could finish early and spend more time at home helping my wife, Hilary. She proved to be an absolute diamond throughout, rarely complaining realising that I needed her full support to be able to leave home at this moment: you may imagine I wasn't exactly flavour of the month with the in-laws. To add to my problems, I was right in the middle of building an extension to our house so had to ensure everything was going to keep functioning while I was away:- I can assure you life was pretty hectic.

Katmandu - the third world - it hits you the moment you leave the airport terminal - noise, smells, pollution, poverty and wealth all mixed in - it was everything I had ever imagined it would be and lots lots more. I had read books and seen films from other expeditions many times but now here I was acting out my own fantasy as a member of an Everest expedition - surely a dream come true at last - I felt very lucky indeed.

We had arrived as the main party which also included a trekking group made up of wives, friends and spouses who were to accompany us to Base Camp. An Advance Party had already arrived 2 weeks previous to us and were already on the trail shepherding some 15 tonnes of kit, to Base Camp. By the time we would arrive, they should have established base camp and hopefully fixed the ice fall ready for us to start work establishing Camps 1 and 2 straight away, that was the master plan anyway. Expeditions of this scale are always beset with logistic problems and ours was no exception, despite the meticulous planning.

My own problem came sooner than expected however - at the airport terminal. Nick Neve (ABC Manager) informed me that

the Russian oxygen hadn't arrived amid rumours of leakage problems - I suddenly felt empty unable to enjoy the moment like everyone else. I had arranged for the expedition to purchase 10 titanium cylinders through a distributor in the U.S.A. that were destined to be used solely for the summit bids, so were paramount to the success of the expedition!! In order to make use of these cylinders, I had had to adapt them to work with the regulator and mask sets that we had obtained from B.S.E.E. 92. We were extremely fortunate to have been able to make use of oxygen apparatus they returned to the U.K. and the help and advice offered by their oxygen member - Major Bronco Lane certainly made my life easier in assessing our requirements. So instead of enjoying the sights of Katmandu, I was busy chasing our missing cylinders:- still what was I here for anyway - sight-seeing or to climb Everest? Believe me, trying to contact people in the U.S.A. and Russia is not at all easy from Katmandu; if you manage to avoid the frequent power cuts then either the telephone or fax machine breaking down will eventually get you.

When I left for Lukhla the cylinders still hadn't arrived but I had at least obtained firm guarantees that they had been despatched and would arrive shortly. We had arranged for our agents "Asian Trekking" to collect the cylinders and send them on to Base Camp. I left Katmandu now a much happier man and relishing the prospect of the trek to Base Camp and that first magical glimpse of Everest.

The plan was to take 17 days trekking at a leisurely pace to ensure good acclimatization. We would not be burdened with any expedition equipment or hassled with organisation - in other words a little holiday before the real work started. My initial impression of the Everest Trail was how busy it was. The numbers of trekkers had obviously contributed to the extensive development of the area, many new lodges, hotels, tea houses had recently been built to accommodate these vast hordes. This didn't detract anything from my enjoyment of the trail, but for someone like Phil Neame who last visited the area in 1976 it was quite a shock. Who were we to grumble anyway, with an advance party escorting some 600 porter and yakloads strung out on the trail ahead of us.

The trail takes you through Namche Bazaar the Sherpa capital, an extraordinary collection of hotels and shops situated in a natural amphitheatre. Above Namche is situated the Everest View Hotel, built by the Japanese to give that glimpse of Everest in complete opulence complete with draught oxygen on tap in each room. It is totally out of character with the area and at \$100 per night wasn't going to get any of our custom.

Onto Tangboche and the famous Monastery: here we attended a ceremony to bless the expedition. The ceremony was somewhat bizarre:- it seemed like more of a tourist spectacle than a religious ceremony - it left me somewhat bemused as to its real value: it kept the sherpas happy anyway and that is all impor-

tant if you want any chance of succeeding on Everest. Here the party split into two groups:- one to follow a high level route via Gokyo lakes and over the Cho-la Col at 18,500 ft. whilst the others would follow the normal trail via Pheriche. I made a blunder here and decided to join the Gokyo group although at the time I wasn't feeling particularly well - it was my turn for the round of stomach bugs. I soon found out that altitude is particularly unforgiving, and my condition quickly worsened, forcing me to descend and then follow on behind the main party. I ended up in a bit of a pickle as I was now a few days behind them, on my own and burdened with more equipment. It was tempting to rush on and catch them but I had to hold back and rest until I felt stronger.

I eventually arrived at Base Camp only a day behind the others, it was snowing heavy and visibility was poor. I had been making my own way zig-zagging across the moraine of the Khumbu Glacier for several hours, quite unsure of where I was going. At Gorak Shep the last settlement you pass through, I was told the trail was quite straightforward just follow the line of 'yak' droppings!, well that was fine until the snow descended and covered everything up. As I stumbled into base camp, I was greeted by a massive avalanche coming off the West Shoulder of Everest which combined with the moonscape landscape gradually emerging out of the gloom made quite an eerie first impression, what had I let myself in for I wondered? By the following morning however, the skies had cleared, the sun shone and Base Camp looked a much more amenable place to spend the next 2 months. The camp was already well established - the advance party had worked wonders and were already working on the route through the ice-fall. Things were buzzing around camp and I quickly realised that the holiday had abruptly ended and the real work would now begin.

Things had not gone smoothly, however, Jim Wilkinson our Base Camp Manager had already been evacuated through illness and the route through the ice fall was not open. We had arranged for the route to be kept open from the post monsoon season so as to speed progress for an early summit bid as soon as possible after the start of the official Winter Season - December 1st. This had not happened and the expedition was delayed in re-opening the route. Nevertheless Camps 1 and 2 (Advanced Base Camp at the head of the Western Cwm) were established at the beginning of December and by mid month Camp 3 (7400m) on the icy Lhotse Face. During this period we had been receiving very accurate weather predictions via satellite using fax messages from Bracknell in the U.K. The weather was typically quite good at this time of year - clear skies, temperatures not too low and wind speeds reasonable. This combined with very little snowfall since the autumn put the team in a position to mount an early summit bid.

Phil Neame had decided to take full advantage of the situation and press on ahead without waiting for the camps to be fully stocked according to the logistic plan. Ferrying loads to Camp 1 and 2 became a daily routine - although I will never forget my first carry through the ice fall.

So this was it I thought to myself - into the great Khumbu

Icefall; to say I was a bit worried the night before is an understatement, this was as yet an unknown factor and I only hoped going through it would ease my worries. Lying in my tent at night I would often hear ominous creaks and groans from far into the icefall as it continually moved on its way down the valley.

It was still dark and bitterly cold as we headed across the moraine to a kit-up point at the start of a wanded section leading into the icefall. The sherpas had already raced on ahead with full loads and would undoubtedly be back for lunch, we would be lucky to be back in the daylight. Once into the icefall, I was amazed at the intricacies of the route through this mass of tumbling seracs and crevasses, it was a real maze. It was thanks to a Sherpa dubbed the 'Icefall Doctor' that a good route had been established. This guy was truly amazing; at 57 he was amazingly fit from doing this job for the last 20 odd years. We reckoned he could qualify for the most dangerous job in the world but he didn't quite see it that way, he carried so many religious charms that he thought he was invincible. Thinking about it, I suppose you had to have that sort of faith to keep on doing the job for so long.

Sections of the ice fall had been given nicknames by the team for instance the deepest crevasse, and I swear it was bottomless was called 'Harry's Hole' after Harry Taylor one of our lead climbers. He never owned up to having fallen into it so I presumed he was just instrumental in building the bridge across it. Just keep going and don't stop for lunch is the best policy to get you through so there I was rushing past ominous seracs at a pace slightly faster than a snail, anything quicker and I would have collapsed in a breathless heap which was in fact quite often the case.

The Sherpas appeared all too soon having already been to Camp 1, they were laughing and joking and virtually running down the fixed ropes looking as if they had been out for a Sunday afternoon stroll. They stopped to talk and were continually grinning - was it at my pathetic appearance I wondered. They had obviously seen it all before but I wondered if they really understood the effects altitude has on us Westerners or did they really think we were just plain unfit!

The sight of Camp 1 brought welcome relief even though it was only halfway; so after a much needed drink, it was back down to Base Camp. Descending didn't seem much easier at times so when I reached the moraine with the sun setting, I was just about all in. What a day! maybe I'll do the same thing again tomorrow and then the day after.

This was to be the routine I had to get used to at Base Camp in the early stages of the expedition. I had formed part of an elite group dubbed the "Icefall Warriors", who were responsible for ferrying most of the loads to Camp 1. John Batty later changed this title to a more apt "Icefall Worriers" - which was definitely the case.

Rest days were spent preparing loads however, as oxygen member I concentrated mainly on ensuring the complete team were conversant with the system even though in reality only a few

# Everest in Winter



Brian Stadden with oxygen cylinders .



Khumbu ice fall.

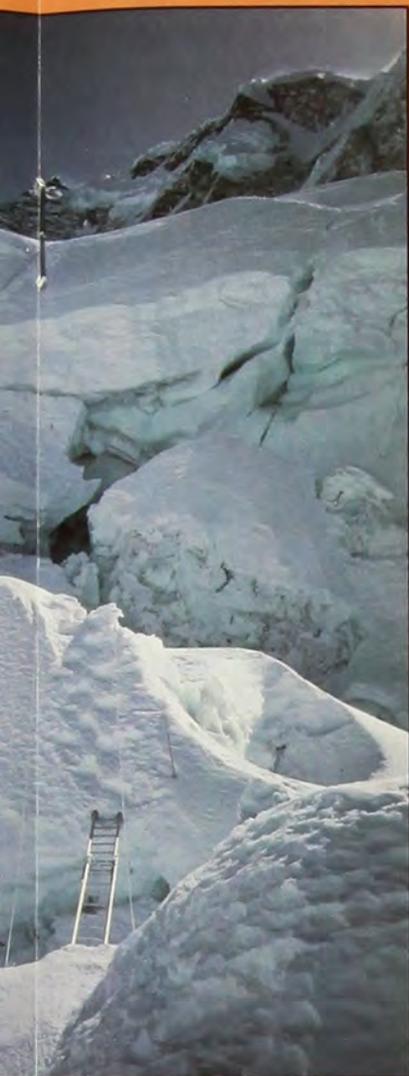


Avalanche off West Shoulder of Everest crossing route through ice fall

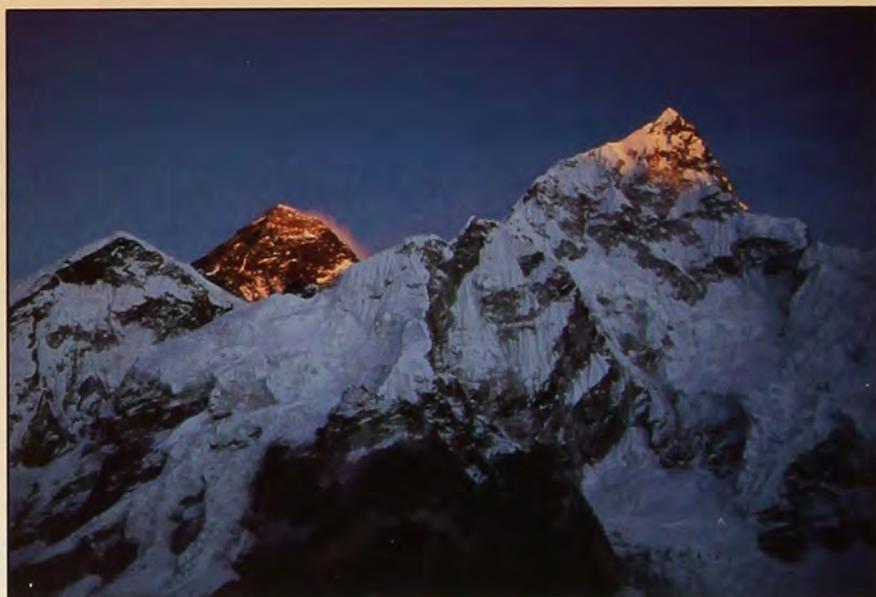


Ama Dablam from Tangboyché .

# ter 1992-1993



*Team at Base Camp.*



*Sunset on Everest and Nuptse from Kala Puttan.*

would use it in anger. It was quite obvious from the outset who would be in the summit team: several of our lead climbers had proven Himalayan Winter experience unlike many of us for whom this was our first Himalayan expedition, let alone in Winter and on Everest. There could be no acrimony about who did what and certainly none existed - everyone strived for the common goal - to try and put a team on top.

Base Camp life settled into a routine; for those of us involved in the medical research and in particular looking at weight loss at altitude, Christine the Doctor would come calling for her blood samples in the early hours of the morning. We gave her the nickname Miss Mengele and often jibed her about it, but she managed to carry out detailed research in quite difficult conditions with largely unwilling volunteers. For instance those involved in the sleep study tests meant having your head covered in sensor pads and being wired up to a monitor all night. The arrival of mail was always exciting: with a new daughter at home it was particularly welcoming to receive news together with the latest photos; tinges of homesickness often returned for a while but then it was back to work and they were quickly gone. John Rennie and I spent several days modifying the pole sections of the summit boxes. The interlocking of the poles was so precise that assembly even at Base Camp was so difficult it left us gasping - the thought of doing the same on the South Col. at 8000m. made me wonder if they would ever manage to get it erected.

During this early phase of the expedition we had our first incident to deal with. Mike Woolridge who had been working up to Camp 2 had become ill forcing him to descend. By the time he reached the bottom of the icefall, he had virtually collapsed being totally dehydrated and was carried into base camp quite incoherent. The medics swung into action and soon the medical tent resembled an operating theatre with saline drips and lanterns hanging from tent poles. Within a couple of hours Mike was completely transformed as the fluids breathed life back into him. We all breathed a sigh of relief ourselves - the crisis was over and so it was back to the main event.

With progress going well on the mountain an early summit bid looked hopeful. I had now spent a couple of nights at Camp 1 and was preparing to load carry to Camp 2. I felt uneasy during my stay at Camp 1 as the glacier often settled with a disconcerting thump that left you quite anxious.

Reports had filtered through that the whole place settled several inches once and I had visions of the complete ice block tottering over on its way down the ice fall.

From Camp 1, "the Western Cwm" - the gateway to Everest stretched away before us: the picture I had formed of it being a smooth glacier was totally wrong. The start is very heavily crevassed forcing the trail to zig zag right across its width considerably lengthening the route. Hemmed in by the icy flanks of Nuptse and the West Shoulder of Everest the Cwm feels very foreboding, especially so in Winter as most of it is perpetually in the shade and with the wind funnelling through it was always bitterly cold. Once past the West Shoulder, the Cwm opens out and the true scale of Everest takes on lifesize proportions. I will

never forget my first view of the awesome South West Face immortalised by the successful Bonnington Expedition of 1975. From the gloomy depths of the Cwm the face looked stunning as the yellow rock structure glowed in the sunlight leading directly to the summit of Everest. The Winter winds had stripped away most of the snow leaving vast expanses of bare rock exposed.

Situated right at the foot of the face, I could now see a tiny speck that was Camp 2. The route was now straightforward, the glacier was now smooth although gently sloping uphill with Camp 2 always beckoning in the distance. At times it never seemed to get any closer; and at that altitude progress was always very hard work. Taking a rest about 20 yards out of the camp may seem ridiculous now, but, on that first carry I was so exhausted that if I hadn't stopped I reckoned I would have just collapsed.

This early frantic effort unfortunately proved to be in vain, as the weather window fizzled out and a period of unsettled weather moved in. I found myself caretaking Camp 2 with John Rennie whilst the team moved back to base camp for a rest. Phil's parting instructions were quite simple:- "look after the camp, if you can get up to Camp 3 and work on the route then great go ahead".

At Camp 2 life became somewhat routine: its position deep in the Cwm meant it received only 4 hours of sunshine each day. The sun hit the camp about 10.00 as it appeared over Lhotse but by 13.30 hours the sun disappeared behind Nuptse and the temperature instantly plummeted and we were soon searching out our pits for the next 20 or so hours.

During our time at Camp 2, I tried twice to move up to Camp 3 but was forced to turn back at the foot of the Lhotse Face suffering from altitude fatigue. By December 15th we had received reports that another weather window was developing for around December 20th. Phil Neame, Mike Smith and a posse of sherpas were quickly up from base to take advantage of this. John Rennie moved up to Camp 3 occupying it with Mike Smith who was to spend the next 10 days there in a remarkable feat of endurance. Phil was happy to be back at the sharp end where he could have more effective control and also be in a position to make his own bid for the summit if the opportunity arose.

The route above Camp 3 proved to be much harder than expected. It had been hoped to find fixed ropes in place from the post monsoon season but this was not the case and the hard ice of winter made progress very slow. I recall spending many hours at Camp 2 watching Mike and John's progress by telescope wishing I could have been up there doing the business. I tried once more to move up to Camp 3 but failed again this time not even reaching my previous high point. It was obvious that I was not recovering at Camp 2. I had been up for 12 days so would soon have to descend to base camp.

The summit team - Mal Duff, Harry Taylor, Bill Pelkey (USA)

and Jon Tinker had now arrived and were busy preparing equipment for their attempt. The weather window had now shifted slightly to 23/24 December; it was looking more likely for a Christmas Day summit bid. I told them to pack a few Xmas puddings but they declined although they offered to take some brandy if available.

The team got very interested in the oxygen system once again as they would soon have to use it in earnest: each member had a different approach to using it. The main problem was visibly due to misting of goggles/glasses when using the face mask. Harry and Mal for instance had decided to use the flimsy disposable medical sleep mask as their main climbing mask packing a few spares in case they broke. Bill seemed to like the system as intended whilst Jon had little faith in oxygen system's from previous experience and would just make do. He expressed concern about the reduced visibility especially of his feet.

I was disappointed having to leave Camp 2 as the summit bid was in progress but I had fulfilled my task and a new shift had now moved in - such is life on a large scale expedition. Descending the icefall was an absolute nightmare!, in the 2 weeks since I last came through, it had changed dramatically! The expedition had been stretched for manpower and consequently maintenance of the icefall had not been carried out as planned. The "Icefall Doctor" for instance had been used for load carrying up to Camp 3 as we were operating at half our strength of high altitude sherpas due to illness and domestic problems. Many of the ladders were now unsupported as crevasses had opened up and the safety ropes had been stretched so tight you could play tunes on them. When John and I reached the moraine in the gathering gloom, we both wished that we wouldn't have to go back through it - we had had enough - mentally and physically!

Back at base the summit bid unfolded dramatically, by December 21st the team had occupied Camp 3 whilst Camp 4 on the South Col. still did not exist, although the route had been opened. A big sherpa lift was planned for December 22nd to establish Camp 4 with the team following on behind to occupy the camp. Back at base we were all listening avidly to the radio schedules as the drama unfolded higher up. Suddenly a bombshell was dropped, the sherpas hadn't made their planned carry - Phil was furious - the weather had remained good but it was now too late to go. The prospect of the weather window holding after the 23rd/24th December was slim, it really was now or never.

What could be done to salvage the situation? Later that day the answer came from the team at Camp 3:- the plan was for Bill and Harry to move to the South Col supported by Mal Duff and Mike Smith who had now stepped in to replace Jon Tinker who was feeling unwell and would remain at Camp 3. They would carry only an inner tent and poles and take no sleeping bags to cut down on weight. Harry and Bill would then leave early on the 24th for the summit with Mal and Mike remaining at Camp 4 to hopefully keep it intact and assist on their return. At base

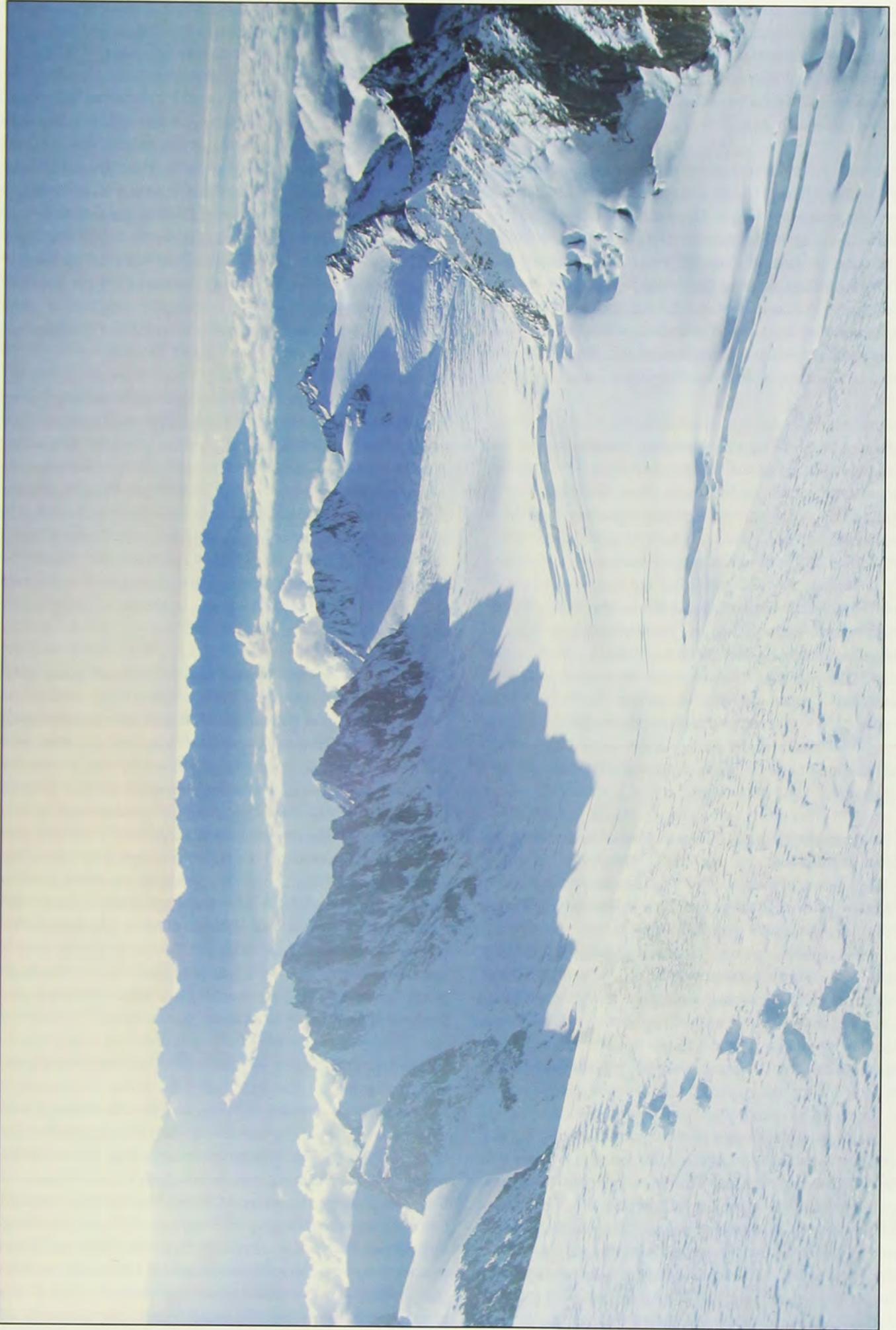
we all felt excitement and worry: it was a tremendous risk. I was impressed at their resolve and commitment but the risk of a major trauma incident was a distinct possibility. Phil agreed the plan, it was all that was left, this one chance or nothing.

On December 23rd they climbed to 7700m before using supplementary oxygen but were making very slow progress due to snowfall and increasing wind speeds. By 16.30 hours they had reached 7850m just below the South Col but an unexpected storm had developed and they were fighting for their lives and attempting to return to Camp 3. Temperatures plummeted and the winds gusted to 90 m.p.h. destroying many of the tents at Camp 3 and Camp 2 and blowing climbers off their feet. The team had a nightmare descent to Camp 2, with two of them developing frostbite and one a dislocated shoulder when he was blown over on the fixed ropes.

Harry Taylor vividly described their final night at Camp 3 over the radio saying the inside of the tent resembled a snowstorm and they had spent all night trying to keep it upright. When they left, the box tent instantly turned into a box kite and was last seen heading off over the South Col. to Tibet. There was much relief when everyone eventually emerged from the icefall safe and sound. There was no crisis, no rescues, we could all enjoy Christmas. The team did literally get into the "spirit" of Christmas drowning our sorrows; the atmosphere was mixed with relief at being safe and sadness in that the expedition had ended unsuccessfully.

Christmas Day - Everest Base Camp and it wasn't going to be a white Christmas here either! Phil assessed every team members views on where the expedition should now go - the result being to quit. The general opinion was that everyone was knackered and would need a couple of weeks back at Namche to recuperate. Statistically later in January the weather patterns became more disruptive and the chance of another weather window materialising is considerably reduced. This combined with the fact that a few of our lead climbers were now out of the game due to frostbite put us in a seriously weakened position and the actual feasibility of mounting another summit bid would be very slim indeed. Phil summed up his feelings "3 years of effort has been ended by a 36-hour storm, such is mountaineering". The storm was later described by Bracknell as a "disruptive vortex" and was totally unexpected - it was certainly disruptive as far as we were concerned.

We all had a high point on Christmas Day when we phoned home using the satellite link thanks to "Today" newspaper. It was quite unreal listening to Hilary and the kids at home- they were busy unwrapping presents - it was Christmas morning at home and there I was chatting to Joanna about her new doll's house whilst sat at base camp, such is modern technology. Dare Star had ended unsuccessfully but when assessed overall, it was a very successful project. The years of planning, training, making new friends was a fantastic experience for me and I feel extremely fortunate to have been part of it. I felt at the time like many others that I wouldn't want to go back but "time" is a marvellous healer and who knows if I get another chance ...!!



*Paldor Glacier East seen from the top of Tilman's Ridge*

# Paldor - A Himalayan peak

Capt. D Penry, INT Corps.

Trekking Peaks, Alpine Peaks, - whatever the Nepalese Mountaineering Association choose to call their lowest categorised summits, these 18 peaks seem to hold a continuing attraction to Army expeditions of small size, with small budgets and with only a small amount of time available away from work. The reasons are obvious enough. Climbing permits come to a very reasonable US \$ 300 maximum; logistics are pretty straightforward; it's just - well, it's easy, isn't it.

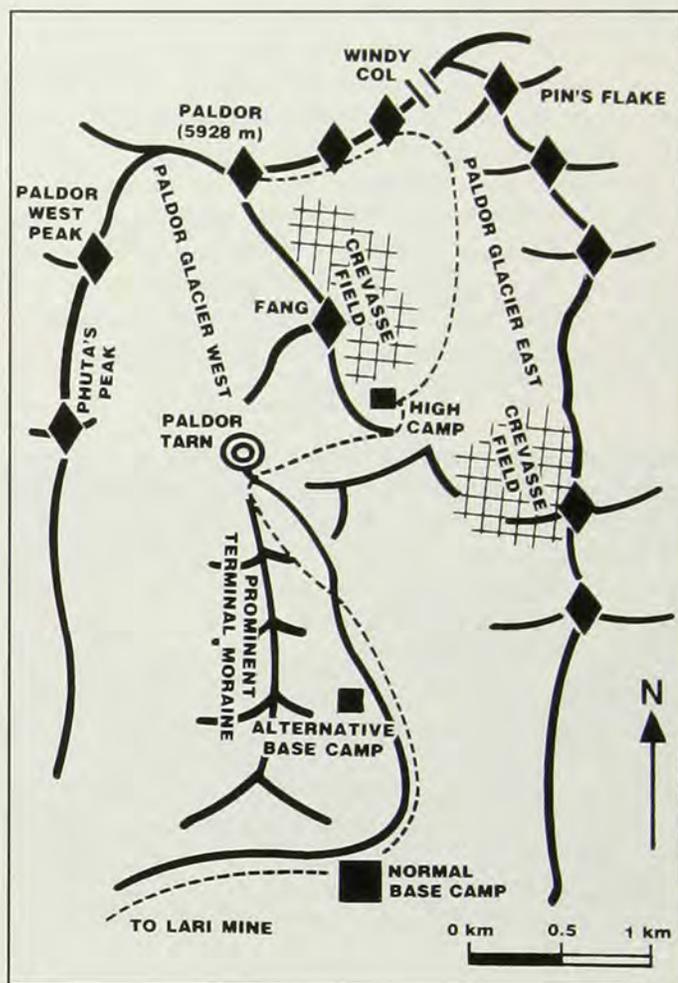
But perhaps no small reason for this popularity is Bill O'Connor's widely read book *The Trekking Peaks of Nepal*, (Crowood Press, 1989). Supported by a succession of photos and sketch maps, Bill takes us up all the peaks and along the treks that lead to them. It is the only readily available source of information on many of these mountains, and his enthusiastic text, steering the reader through the bureaucracy and planning and then on to the hills themselves, is practically guaranteed to act as a powerful itching powder on the feet of any self-respecting climber.

Nothing wrong with that you might say, and more power to Bill for providing the past and future catalyst for so many worthwhile excursions. But it is worth remembering that books such as this are prone to going quickly out of date, not least because conditions and circumstances in the Himalayas can and do change very quickly indeed. A foray of ours to Paldor Peak in October 1992 provided some valuable reminders of this, and the differences between what we expected and what we found may be of interest to future expeditions who are considering Paldor or any other of these fine peaks.

At 5928 metres Paldor is one of the less difficult of Nepal's Alpine summits. It rises from the Ganesh Himal in the border regions to the north of Kathmandu, west of the better known Langtang Himal and in country considered remote even by Himalayan standards. The first ascent was probably by another Bill, Bill Tilman. In *Nepal Himalaya* (Cambridge University Press, 1952) he briefly touches on three days spent climbing 'this modest mountain', apparently with few complications. Forty years on Bill O'Connor describes his five day trek to Base Camp from the trailhead at Dhunche, and goes on the detail a days haul up some moraines to a High Camp, then across the 'flat and uncomplicated' East Glacier to the North-East (Tilman's) Ridge, and thence to the summit. He grades the route Alpine AD.

All pretty straightforward, and attractive given our circumstances. We were, at 5 people, a small undertaking; we were on the sort of skin-tight budget that meant the words 'Individual Responsibility' appeared regularly down the clothing and equipment list; and, most critical of all, we had only a fortnight away from work to bag ourselves a peak. We had to rely on the careful study of Bill's information to give us the best possible chance of success.

Deviations from the expected became evident from soon after



our trek agent had presented us with garlands of dead flowers at Kathmandu's airport and taken us into town. The Rum Doodle Bar, one of this city's most famous landmarks, and more importantly our exercise namesake, was found to have closed down. There was careful deliberation before we agreed to carry on with the trip regardless, but this unexpected turn so early seemed to set the scene for other surprises later on.

Travel to Dhunche and the subject trek into Base Camp proved to be much easier and quicker than we expected. Due to the expansion of a small mining complex at Lari and the supporting labours of a Nepalese Army engineer regiment there is now a motorable road all the way from Dhunche to the hamlet of Somdang, a days walk below the usual Base Camp site. Even on foot the way was fast, although it meant bypassing some scenic villages we succeeded in reaching Base Camp in just three days to allow us to spend more of our previous time on the hill later on.

Paldor's austere Base Camp is set amid the rubble of two terminal moraines. It receives direct sunlight for only a short time each day, and there is little in the way of shelter for porters and, despite being equipped with extra clothing against the cold, ours did not fare well. Later on the conditions were poor enough for me to authorise the early striking of the camp in

order to save them another miserable night there, despite two of us still being on the mountain.

We found that we underestimated the length of time required to reach a workable site for our High Camp. It took eight hours of difficult, albeit unroped, scrambling before we eventually settled for a deep snow pitch in the shelter of some prominent rock outcrops on the true right bank of Paldor Glacier East. Our speed can be blamed partly on the high winds and low visibility encountered in the afternoon, but we also misread Bill's sketch map, which seemed to play down the steepness of the ascent and the necessity of gaining Paldor Tarn before turning east to traverse across the snout of the east glacier and on to a camp. Coming down later we discovered that the route is marked by small cairns, but unless you are looking on the way up it is easy to miss them, as we did.

A bad night at the new altitude led to a late start the following morning. The snow conditions in the glacier bowl put an end to this first summit attempt after only a few hours, but seeing the glacier in the clear light of early morning did at least enable us to spot some other unexpected features. Far from being flat and uncomplicated, the glacier rises up along its true right before collapsing into a jumble of crevasses, flanked by a wide bergschrund. There was no clear way up to the south ridge, should we have been looking for that alternative ascent route, so it was as well that our way lay towards Tilman's Ridge, straight up the centre of the bowl towards the obvious dip of Windy Col on the ridge lines. The col is indicated correctly by Bill, but reaching it required weaving around numerous small crevasses and over some decidedly dodgy snow bridges. This took time and concentration, and our first summit attempt ended after three hours, at the foot of the ridge, with an exhausted and dehydrated team.

Most of the team returned to Base Camp that same afternoon, but two of us stayed on at High Camp for a further night and managed the alpine start that should have been made the day before. Conditions before sunrise the next morning were excellent. We made rapid progress by following Bill's sound advice on taking a diagonal line of ascent to the obvious boulder outcrop on the west shoulder of the col and dawn saw us on top of the heavily corniced Tilman's Ridge at about 5700 metres. Once more, sad to say, the snow conditions deteriorated rapidly in the sun, adding to our fatigue and thirst and eventually forcing us into turning back just 500 metres from the unexpectedly steep summit cone.

Well, that's life isn't it, and there are no regrets about making what was the correct decision at the time. The view from the ridge was stupendous, encompassing the Tibetan borderlands and the mighty Shishipangma, and it will live with us for as long as the transparencies survive. Yet on returning to Kathmandu it became apparent that our experience of a Nepalese Alpine Peak was not unique. We talked to a pair who were stopped on Singu Chuli after badly underestimating the time needed to reach the summit. Since our return, a well known AMA Committee Member has related privately his storey of an 'epic' descent from Pisang Peak after being caught

out by the angle and condition of the face. And within a month of unpacking our sacks we had heard of a further two Army expeditions to Paldor making almost exactly the same assumptions and mistakes as ourselves, with the result that they too missed the summit.

The important point is that no expedition can afford to take Bill's book, or any other like it, at face value. Particular care must be taken in interpreting grading systems. It is surprising just how little a classification of Alpine AD can add to the understanding of a Himalayan route when no account is taken of altitude, climate extremes or the difficulties associated with a lengthy approach march. Any climbers' own interpretations of what are necessarily rough sketch maps will always result in the lie of the land being not quite what was expected.

To be fair, Bill warns his readers about many of these pitfalls. His own expedition to Paldor was in 1985, and seven winters is enough time to alter the geography of any glacier system. But as we waited in Kathmandu at the end of our expedition, mourning the passing of one of the world's favourite climbing bars, it seemed worth remembering that W E Bowman, in *The Ascent of Rum Doodle*, did us all a favour by pointing out that 'To climb Mont Blanc by the Grepon route is one thing; to climb Rum Doodle, as Totter once said, quite another.' By reminding us that Alpine climbing in the Alps is not quite the same as Alpine climbing in the Himalayas, it seems that this is one book still capable of giving undated advice for Alpine - that is, er, Trekking - Peak enthusiasts.



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# Himalayan Beat 1991

*"A Motley Crew from NI in the Indian Himlaya"*

WO1 Roy Francis MM

## The Team

	Leader	WO1 Roy Francis QDG	
	Deputy Leader	Mark Trevillyan RADC	
Capt Sarah Yearsley	QARANC Medical	LCpl Jonathan Spencer	I Corps
Lt Giles Hill	PARA Cash in India	Cpl Richard Barlow	RAOC
Cpl Bernie Winters	9/12L	Pte John Sichel	PARA
Cpl Rick Richard	QDG	Pte Robert Powell	PARA
LCpl Bill Billingham	17/12L	Pte Garry Read	PARA
AEM Aids Wills	RN	Pte Jonathan Watson	PARA
Cpl Sue Marsh	WRAC	D/Sgt George Dawson	RUC

In 1990 I took a mixed party of novices from Northern Ireland to the Kullu Valley, Himachal Pradesh. The team was made up of RUC officers, army nurses, prison officers, pilots and a couple of civilians. The aim of the trip was to introduce the members to expeditioning, and after a period of training get as many as possible to the top of a modest peak. The venture was a success with all but two reaching the summit: the nurses made it! I was happy with the trip but felt at fourteen the party was too large!

In January 1991 expedition fever hit me again and I set about putting together a similar trip but with a slightly different aim and for a smaller party. I tried to recruit a team from within my own unit and intended to keep numbers down to ten. I then had a phone call from a young officer in 1 PARA who had heard of the trip on the NI bush telegraph and wanted to know if there was any chance of including a few airborne warriors. What the hell I thought, fifteen is as easy to manage as ten but I didn't want odd numbers. We eventually left for India with 12 soldiers, 1 sailor, 1 QARANC, 1 WRAC and an RUC Detective Sgt.

Of the sixteen, only myself and our nurse had been to the Himalaya before and only one other, Mark Trevillyan, had alpine experience. The remainder ranged from a rock athlete, to several that enjoyed nothing more than a weekend walk in the Mournes. yours truly was the senior citizen of the party at a little over 39, the youngest was an airborne warrior of 19 complete with beret. Nothing like a bit of variety in a party!

The aim this time was to carry out a high altitude trek of about 130 miles involving some 16,000 ft of ascent and crossing two high passes, the Chanderkahn Pass 12,000 ft and Animals Pas 16,000 ft. The middle section of the trek would involve glacier travel and a small amount of snow work. To this end it was planned to take two or three days out before the glacier to train up the team. All the best laid plans etc, etc.

As normal we were requested by the British high Commission to send out an advance party to receive briefings and tie up loose ends. Myself and Sarah volunteered to undertake this chore and arrived in Delhi four days before the main party. As the briefing only took ten minutes and there were no loose ends we made good use of the hotel pool!

The main party arrived at Delhi airport just after midnight on the 18th of September, passed through customs without a hitch



Team at the high camp. Deo Tibba and Inderasan in the background

and within an hour were loaded onto the "luxury air conditioned coach", for the twenty hour drive to Manali. A coach is not the easiest way to get to the hills but it is the safest and the only mode of transport that can be relied on. It is possible to fly up to Kullu but the plan is a white knuckle job and reservations in India does not actually mean you get on!

We booked to stay in Manali with an old friend and the local Mr Fix-it, John Banon of Manali Orchards. John's grandfather, a retired soldier, was one of the original settlers and planters of the Kullu valley. His guest house provides pleasant colonial accommodation in an original apple orchard. Two days were spent in Manali sorting ourselves out and packing the gear into pony loads ready for the trek. John's wife is a native of a village a little further up the valley. Every year they have a festival when the Gods are brought out for an airing, there is much drinking and dancing and generally having one hell of a party. We were lucky enough to be invited to this very special festival. Brits never slow at coming forward, the boys and girls sampled the local brew and entered a PARA team in the hoopla competition.

On the 21st of September we left Manali in jeeps and travelled the spine shattering ten miles down the east bank of the Beas river to Naggar where we met up with our ponies and porters. Naggar is the old regional capital and is complete with a fortress, now a hotel, perched high above the valley at a little over 7,000 ft. After taking tea on the veranda we set off with

bold step followed by the ponies. That lasted until we came to the first real hill, we then stood aside and let the caravan through. By then it was noon and the air temperature was about 25 C, the climb was steady but bodies unused to the heat and moderate altitude soon began to wilt. There was no argument when just above Rumsu village lunch was called.

After gallons of tea, chapati, cheese, jam and honey we walked on again until we reached our first camp site in a meadow at about 8,000 ft. This is where the learning began. For many this was to be the first night in a tent for a long time. Not much call for tents in NI. After a practical demonstration the tents rose and the camp took shape. The porters set up the kitchen and soon had the first brew steaming in the middle of our settlement. That was followed soon after by soup and chapati with the evening feast of curried vegetables, salad, rice and dhal served just before dusk. Once the last morsel was devoured Bornvita and rum were provided as a welcome night cap.

We woke the following day in ice covered tents and for those at the bottom of the learning curve much frozen gear! Bed tea was served at seven closely followed by a bowl of warm washing water, sheer luxury. By now we had attracted an audience. Shepherds on their way up to their pastures took time out to marvel at this spectacle. So many white bodies stripped to the waist, all in a row washing and shaving. The girls bowed out and did their ablutions in the tent! By eight thirty we had enjoyed a breakfast of eggs, chapati, honey and plenty of tea and by nine we were on our way leaving the porters to have their breakfast and load the ponies.

At about 9,000 ft the path left the forest and climbed steadily towards the ridge of Chanderkhani. Such is the scale of the area the pass looked little more than an hour away but at four pm we made camp and had only reach 10,000 ft. At this altitude one or two began to feel a little off colour and the first Panadol was handed out.

With a couple of exceptions the remainder of the walk-in passed without incident. Worthy of note was the third night when we were forced to share our camp with a shepherd, his flock of sheep and goats and half a dozen sheep dogs. In the early hours we had a visitor in the shape of a large Himalayan bear. After a battle that went on for more than an hour the dogs eventually managed to drive him off. Most of the action had taken place outside the girls' tent but steadfast as ever they did not panic and were ready with their Swiss Army knives!

Once we had settled into the routine of the trek individuals took



Captain Sarah Yearsley QARANC holding clinic on the walk-in



The party practising ice axe skills with Deo Tibba and Inderasan in the background

time out to do their own thing. George Dawson was never without his video camera and eventually shot over five hours of tape! Bill Billingham turned out to be the team's artist and could normally be found sitting on a rock with sketch book and pen. Bernie and Rick took on the guise of apprentice cooks hindering/helping Karma as required. Their prize effort was spit roast lamb at base camp. Sarah was fully employed treating our ponymen and the villagers that gathers when they hear Doctor Memsahib was coming. One poor chap had cross eyes and wanted them fixed there and then! The PARA lads enjoyed walking up hill as fast as they could carry logs, thanks to them we had a luxurious mess shelter at base camp complete with flagpole and some sort of red flag!

Our objective for phase one of the trek was to reach the base of the Malana Glacier, there set up a camp and carry out training before moving up the ice towards Animals Pass. Four days should have seen us at base camp but it did in fact take us five. This was no great problem and did allow an extra day to acclimatise.

Having lost a day on the walk-in we lost no time at base camp and on the first day out went a recce party led by Mark to find the best way onto the glacier. We knew the route lay through a very narrow gorge with the glacial river thundering through it. They returned mid afternoon very down hearted having found the normal route onto the ice to be in poor condition, narrow sloping ledges, poor belays and not really a goer. We were now two days adrift and facing the possibility of losing at least one more.

The following day we moved equipment up to the gorge and did a further recce. We pushed through on to the glacier but I was not happy with the route. It would have been risky to take a party of competent mountaineers through never mind an inexperienced team such as ours! From above we noticed an ice wall on the east side connecting with the glacier. We thought this could be reached by crossing a snow bridge at the mouth of the gorge thus avoiding the suicidal normal route. We reached the wall without difficulty and soon had it climbed and fixed. As we thought this led straight onto the main glacier. The gear and rations were now hauled up the wall, the route was improved with steps and more fixed rope before we once more returned to camp. We had now expended all our spare days but at least we had a safe onward route. The plan now was that the ponies would return to Naggat with the heavy equipment and we, accompanied by a couple of porters would set off for Animals Pass. Once over the pass we would descent to the Tos

glacier and on down to a rendezvous with more ponies at Shamshi Thach.

On the 28th we left base camp and gathered at the base of the ice wall. "How do we get a party of novices, some of whom had never used crampons up a fifty foot ice wall?" Easy, make the girls go first, the men then followed on not showing any signs of apprehension! The exercise was completed in a little over two hours and we were on our way. Once onto the glacier proper it was a case of head down and plod. We were now about 14,000 ft and a few were finding the extra weight a bit of a problem. It was slow going but by the late afternoon we had reached the cwm below Animals Pass. As if by magic there was a superb camp site and plenty of melt water. The situation was breath taking, below us stretched the Malana glacier and to the west were the summits of Deo Tibba and Inderasan. In front of us we could see an uncomplicated icefall followed by a snow plod to the ridge. Supper took a little longer than usual, self service, boil in the bag, but first there was the problem of lighting stoves at this altitude. One or two were back on the learning curve!

If lighting stoves had been a problem for supper then breakfast the following day was a nightmare! Some tents must have used a weeks supply of matches to get the brew on. There is only one way to get experience and they were getting it! At about 8.00 am we moved onto the icefall. Frozen fingers with frozen crampons and there was the occasional blue word!

Initially the route was straightforward, not too steep and we moved unroped making good time. We then encountered an intimidating steep section that would have caused problems had there been a slip so it was climbed and a hand rail provided. Only once more did we have to use the rope on our struggle to the ridge. By 1 o'clock the strenuous work was over and we stood together at 16,000 ft able to look down into two valleys. Time was taken for photographs and a snack before beginning the descent in worsening weather. Again there was no great technical difficulty but we did encounter a near vertical pitch just before leaving the ice. To save time and the possibility of a slip this was fixed with an abseil. We had hoped to make it down to the Tos glacier that evening but we were slowed by a difficult moraine and had to make camp in a snow storm about 1,000 ft above the glacier. Sue was suffering from a combination of altitude and cold but soon improved with a couple of brews, some food and a warm sleeping bag. Strangely enough everyone else seemed to be enjoying themselves!

An early start on the 30th saw us united with the spare ponies and tucking into a second breakfast at Shamshi. Travelling light again we had an enjoyable and relaxing couple of days walk-out to the road head at Manikaran. Not only was a coach waiting as requested, it contained a couple of crates of cool beer. We sank the beer and set off for civilisation. We had gone only three miles when we came to a traffic jam. On investigation we found a local bus had gone off the one lane road and was hanging with its right front wheel in space. There were Indians all offering advice to the poor driver but very little was being done and all traffic was at a standstill. We took control, attached our ropes to the side and rear of the coach and with the Indians divided into teams pulled the stricken vehicle back onto the road. We went on our way to rapturous applause and back slapping!

Within two days we were leaving the Kullu valley and retracing our steps to Delhi. Here we enjoyed a brief R&R period

including a trip to the Taj Mahal at Agra. All too soon Himalayan Beat was over and we were back in the province. To a man/woman all had enjoyed the expedition and had learnt a great deal. One or two have even asked to be considered for the next Beat!



*Crossing Animals Pass and heading for the Tos Glacier. Distant Peaks include White Sail 6446m. and Tigers Tooth 6249m.*

#### Logistics

##### Credits:

The total cost of the expedition was a little under £18,000. Each member donated £700, the balance was found from sponsorship and AT funds. Thanks are extended to all those who helped with fund raising.

Equipment came from the adventure training stores NI and Thatcham. Many thanks.

Flights, transport and accommodation below Manali were arranged through Cable Travel of Porthmadog. Bob Cable talks our language and has much Indian experience. Many thanks.

The main party spent the night of 17 Sep as guests of The Guards Depot, Pirbright, thanks to Maj Ali Bagnall and hands.

Thanks to John Banon and his wife for their hospitality.

Transport, porters, ponies, food and fuel for the trek were provided by Capt Padam Singh of Paddys Treks, Manali. Paddy is ex cavalry and the son of a Maharaja, what more can be said!

Karma and his team of porters, cooks and ponymen are the most professional and helpful I have worked with. Dhanyawad.

Last but not least I would like to thank the team. I have been on a few expeditions, but this "Motley Crew" were probably the best companions I have had in the hills for a long time. Cheers!

##### Problems:

Our main problem was political clearance and the issue of visas. A British civilian group had recently upset the Indian Authorities by allegedly using an unauthorised transmitter in a border area. We eventually received the thumbs up two days before take off!

# BRITISH SERVICES MOUNTAINEERING HISTORY

## 1945 - 1995 A Synopsis

Bronco Lane

..... "God damn! Now I know why you Brits keep winning your wars!" chuckled Ned Gillete, as we made our way gingerly down the Khumbu Icefall together in April 1992. I was deputy leader of a British Joint Services attempt on the West Ridge of Everest and Ned, top American Cross Country skier, author and adventurer, was with the New Zealand International team, attempting the South Col route. We had both been lifting loads to Camp One, at about 20,000 feet and were glad of each others company, as we wove our way down beneath threatening ice serac towers and across yawning crevasses. These were surmounted if such a powerful sounding word can be used, by a series of light aluminium ladder sections bolted together. One particular wide chasm was spanned by no less than four of our 8 foot ladder sections, the centre two boldly marked "maximum span two sections only". What the Dutch manufacturer had not realised was that one of our team, who lead the Khumbu Icefall construction group, Moryon Bridges, was a professional Royal Engineer Officer, well used to the liberal interpretation of safety instructions, when needs must!

I had been explaining to Ned about the British Military Adventure Training system that was underpinning our expedition, how and why it was formed, what was considered Adventure Training, what the 'system' allowed in allocating resources, the user ethos and the perceived benefits by our military masters.

The conversation and Ned's reaction to it, started me thinking more deeply about something that had been responsible for giving me an opportunity in 1976, that was to change my whole life. That spring, Brummy Stokes and I were fortunate enough to be selected as the first summit pair, during the British Army South Col attempt. We became the 54th and 55th to have reached the summit, when on the 16th May, in a snow storm and poor visibility, two very tired and insignificant amateur mountaineers, crept up "when nature had it's back turned", as we say to those who talk of "Conquest". A lot of water had passed under the bridge since those days and here I found myself once again grappling with the BIG ONE, in this case more concerned with team morale and health, logistics, high altitude oxygen systems, rations, and base camp rubbish, than the technical climbing mechanism's of "knocking the bastard off".

Later that week, whilst carrying between Camps One and Two, in the company of the Expedition leader, Mike Kefford, veteran soldier, traveller, mountaineer and expert Nepalese speaker, I outlined my idea of a book about the Services Mountaineering History. Mike's initial reaction was I think "Bronco's got a little Cerebral Oedema, better keep an eye on him!" However, I found, as a way of taking the mind away from the excruciating toil of a hot late morning carry up the Western Cwm, it has few equals. I decided that the target group must initially be fellow service men and women mountaineers, particularly those of the future.

The second group would have to be the mountaineering community at large, their knowledge of service climbers usually being tainted by selective memory and possible twinges of jealousy? And last, but by no means least, the general public, who should know, how, where and why, some of their hard earned Defence budget taxes are spent.

I didn't want the story to become a tabulated account of climbs, with the emphasis on who said or did what, when, too whom. Instead, more about those people responsible for the ethos as enjoyed today. About the specific Military units that have a mountaineering role, and the end results of the Adventure Training investment. With such a wealth of historical background to choose

from, my next thought was that of time span, where to start? Before or after General Bruce of 1920's fame? Earlier than World War 2? Include Polar exploits? The sheer volumes of potential material available was overwhelming, hence my intention to concentrate on only the last 50 years.

The average service person is naturally drawn to participation in outdoor pursuits and activities. It is an area where some calculated risk taking is the norm, be it on an Alpine ice slope, a turbulent white water river, suspended by a clutch of man made fibres hurtling to mother earth, crawling around its bowels, skiing over its surface, diving into or sailing it's oceans. Post World War 2, as the retraction speeded up from our old far flung Empire and its punitive wars, so the desire by service people to stretch themselves increased. As we British are by our very history, an adventurous people, this structured channelling of energy by our Armed Services; responding to a new physical and mental challenge, must be viewed as constructive and beneficial.

The sheer boredom of cantonment life in BAOR drove many to drink, divorce or distraction, occasionally all three! To be dealing as a daily routine with the unthinkable Armageddon, meant that some highly proactive people needed a counter balance means of escapism. This development blossomed into many directions and more by default than planned fore-thought, came recognition that "Adventure Training was a good thing, to be actively encouraged." The pioneer's of this era are many and diverse, however, as always, some are more prominent than others. Whilst discussing the idea of a book with one of them, Tony Streater, he recollected the Norwegian's expedition to Titich Mir, Pakistan, in the early 1950's: he had forfeited seniority, was made to take unpaid leave and in the eyes of the Military Secretariat (Personnel Management), committed a career foul! As a young and then unknown junior Officer, his subsequent battles with senior Generals and Civil Servants to change this state of affairs, will remain a classic victory to the adventurous serviceman, in the historic tomes of our Military bureaucracy.

As individuals, the service climbers found negotiating with the Ministry of Defence somewhat daunting. In turn the Ministry could not deal effectively with a steady stream, of what to them, can best be described as absurd requirements and requests.

However, collectively it became a different matter and the formation of single service Mountaineering Clubs took place. Initially on a wing and a prayer, then, as they gained hard earned credibility, affiliation with the major civilian climbing institutions followed, for example the British Mountaineering Council (BMC) and the Alpine Club. This meant that the service individual's voice, of what ever rank, could be heard, a most fundamental break through in the then still autocratic, status conscious, service hierarchy. This ethos of "equality by competence" is one of the basic accomplishments of the clubs very foundation and is jealously guarded, even today, within their constitutions, rules and etiquette.

Formation of the clubs gave two-way communication, at times directly into the Centre of the Ministry decision making process. This in turn meant that the Centre could and did stipulate how, when and why, mountaineering would be officially endorsed as a legitimate service training pursuit. As can be imagined, a certain amount of indirect and devious lobbying took place to ensure that, for example, service rations could be legally requested and obtained for consumption on a bona-fide service mountaineering expedition.

In parallel and occasionally blurring the clear ethical club view of service mountaineering, was the establishment of the Joint Services Mountain Training Centres (JSMTC's). Initially these were organised as Outward Bound Centres, giving young servicemen and women a series of well proven character building and leadership situations, which in turn they could apply the lessons learnt into their respective service environments. Particular users were Army Apprentice, Junior Leader and Officer Training units. Reflecting demand from units for a better qualified instructor of Adventure Training at unit level, they additionally initiated courses which either mirrored or became part of a recognised civilian outdoor pursuit qualification. The JSMTC's are constantly undergoing an across the board reorganisation, directly related to the changing European situation and the shrinkage of the service.

It could be argued that at this particular moment in time, with the long awaited outbreak of peace in Europe, the need for the Adventure Training outlet has never been more crucial, if we are to keep our better leaders in a military career. Certainly my own, admittedly biased observations, leads me to believe that the opposite is actually happening and we as a nation, will sadly inherit the reward deserved for allowing this.

What then do the Ministry of Defence see as the beneficial attributes gained by allowing this military phenomena of Adventure Training to happen? Firstly any application is scrutinised by the "chain of command" to which the initiator belongs. Obviously a service person already warned off, say for a unit tour in Northern Ireland, will find few friends and sponsors should he propose a visit to South America to climb in Peru, 2 months into the tour!

In true service style the proposed expedition must exhibit an identifiable aim, be within the competencies of the intended party and allow for the services to be presented in a positive manner. I well remember in 1988 applying for a visit by a Special Forces team to Pik Communism, in the then Soviet Union. The proposition was rejected as politically unthinkable. My reaction was that the relevant Ministry Desk Officer had obviously not been reading the newspapers, as within 1 year, peace had broken out, with Gorbachov's "perestroika" taking hold. How easy it would have been for an over enthusiastic group of soldiery to jeopardise these world shattering events. It is this perception of effect, that climbers are not conscious of, as they pursue their personal and selfish desires, forever drawn to corners of the world with empty map detail, virgin summits or new routes.

The list of attributes that the Ministry expect to be demonstrated by an Adventure Training episode, reads like a short introduction to war. Indeed it should be viewed as some of the best training for a war possible. An excerpt from the current Ministry guide lines stated:

... "Participation in adventurous training adds an extra dimension to a soldier's life outside the normal framework of programmed unit training. It does so by placing him in an environment where he has to become accustomed to danger, hardship and challenge within the increasing restraints of peacetime service. It teaches basic skills and forms an additional framework for formal military training. It is invaluable in developing character and training potential leaders".

In the main, the above most certainly happens to service Adventure Training participants. It is effective in substituting some of the psychological impact and physical conditions of active service. It is worthy of note also, that the British are I believe, the only nation that employs this system for its service people.

In addition, the experience gained by the leader of such an exploit is quantifiable. Usually they will be either Senior Non Commissioned or Junior Commissioned Officers. The amount of leadership, responsibility, pre-planning, liaison, and financial awareness is far in excess of the individual's exposure that they would otherwise enjoy in peace time. The financial aspects alone

are quite deliberately construed to ensure that the maximum amount of required monies are raised from civilian sources. This has three effects; firstly, it weeds out the faint hearted, secondly, it encourages commercial sponsorship, with the allied value of a positive publicity and awareness of the services within the business community and thirdly, costs are kept to a minimum. Certainly my own opportunities of explaining a proposed plan to the hard pressed entrepreneur and persuading them that their involvement would be mutually beneficial, has been something of an eye opener and a most useful experience.

Invariably the proposed activity will be one that has a UK governing body or recognised expert. Their endorsement will usually be a necessary precursor before the Ministry agrees to a proposal.

In addition it closely scrutinizes the participants' qualifications and will seek further independent advice as to their suitability and overall credibility. Once they are convinced that the project is achievable and properly organised, the Ministry then take steps to smooth the way regarding Political clearance, give advice for fund raising, make necessary introductions and assist with negotiations for other service assistance if necessary. Whilst the leader is fully expected to provide the impetus, the Ministry will afford the strength of Her Majesty's Government, as appropriate. It is this feature that separates the service from his civilian climbing colleague. However, it should be born in mind that the service team will always be looked upon as representatives of their country (whether they like it or not!) and can therefore never act independently, with total flexibility, as can the civilian. This should be recognised by the civilian climber when he sees, what to him, appears to be well paid, well fed, service climbers with endless booty and rations. Indeed given that the majority of climbers both service and civilian alike, are usually bordering on being anarchists in their attitude to any control, it is a constraint that can be extremely irksome.

One other area where the two have a different perception is that of public profile. The service climber will be receiving their normal pay, minus a percentage contribution, whilst undertaking the Adventure Training activity, civilian colleagues will not. Therefore they must seek even more appropriate financial sponsorship and the inevitable high status that goes with the inescapable media attention. Usually the infamous "Yeti", "Base Camp Rubbish", or "Drama" story will be dragged out and aired over the satellite television link when all is quiet, or the team is about to pack in their attempt due to bad: weather, luck, rations, illness, porter strike or any combination. It also means that the service climber will not as a matter of course, launch into print. Not having a "public" he is not under any obligation to maintain an image and having a stable job, removes any requirement to become a member of the lecture and personality circuit.

Looking now at the military aspects of mountaineering, it is my goal to illustrate the units that have a requirement for climbing embodies in their actual existence. These are:

- The Royal Marine Mountain and Arctic Warfare Cadre.
- The Special Air Service Mountain Troops.
- The Royal Air Force Mountain Rescue Team.
- The Joint Services Mountain Training Centres.

It is my intention to explain their current roles, where they originated, how they select and train to meet the requirements and what are their historical mountaineering milestones.

Thank You! Ned Gillete. What started as a casual conversation, has now become a fascinating project that should, I hope, give you a better understanding of a "Uniquely British" method of military expertise. It has stood the test of time and incident and is established in the flexible manner that is characteristic of our Armed Services.

# Denali Quadrant *Ascent of Mount McKinley*

The highest peak in North America rises to a height of 20,320 feet (6294 metres). Mount McKinley is the overwhelming giant of the Alaska Range, a crescent-shaped chain of mountains that parallel the Pacific coast in southcentral Alaska. Named in 1896 for the 25th US president, it was long known to Indians of the region as Denali, 'The High One'. Mount McKinley lies only 250 miles (400 kms) south of the Arctic Circle and the temperatures often fall to -50°C. Much of its mountaineering grandeur results from the fact that it rises so dramatically above its surroundings. Mount Everest, for instance, is nearly lost among its enormous neighbours in the Himalayas. Mount McKinley's summit in contrast towers nearly 17,000 feet (5180 metres) over the adjacent lowlands - one of the greatest elevation contrasts of any mountain in the entire world. Cold and wintry conditions are normal. Reinhold Messner, the Austrian climber first to summit all 14 of the world's 8000+ metre peaks described it as the coldest mountain he had ever climbed. The normal climbing season runs from the end of April through to the beginning of July. April tends to have more settled weather, extremely cold but with a good covering of the glaciers. As the season runs, the weather gets warmer but much more unsettled with storms lasting up to 10 days as normal and the crevasses opening up dramatically. In May 1992 eleven people died on the mountain alone, some literally lifted off the ridge by the winds.

The prize was going to be a challenge for the six members of Exercise DENALI QUADRANT who departed Gatwick Airport for Anchorage, Alaska on 23 April 1993. A Royal Marine expedition, the team was extremely experienced. Climbers had extensive experience in the Alps and Himalayas including Annapurna, Manaslu and Everest with two members having been over 27,000 feet. Three of the team had worked as Chief Instructor/Instructor at JSMT(C/S) and BMIC Norway. One had commanded the Mountain and Arctic Warfare Cadre. The expedition doctor had climbed extensively in the Himalayas including Everest and was an authority on Arctic Mountain Sickness (AMS). The team consisted of:

Capt Nick Arding RM (Leader)  
 Surgeon Commander Alister Millar RN (Doctor)  
 Maj Pat Parsons RM, Maj Chris Short WFR  
 CSgt Richard Lake - Bullen RM, Gary Bryant

The flight to Anchorage took us 36 hours and included stops at Houston, Texas and Seattle. We had been assured that this was the cheapest route by the expedition leader who was obviously on a big back-hander from Continental Airlines. We arrived in Anchorage at midnight. I can remember it was dark and raining. We were met by Tom from Denali Overland Corporation Inc and shown to the most amazing stretch limo taxi in bright yellow. Big enough for us, all our stores, rucksacks and food, known as the yellow submarine. We were told there are only 2 like it in Alaska. First stop was a 24 hour supermarket about 2 hours north of Anchorage. Between 0100 - 0300 hrs we scanned the shelves, filled about six trolleys and spent nearly \$1000 on enough food for 30 days each - but how were we going to carry it?

We drove on into the dawn to Talkeetna, another 1 1/2 hours along the Alaskan Highway. A one-horse town without the horse, straight out of the gold rush era, sparsely populated by extremely friendly, mainly bearded inhabitants, mostly making a living from the trickle of mountaineers in the season. The day was spent adjusting to the nine hour time difference, repacking equipment and sorting out the masses of food.

To reach the mountain we had to fly in 3-seater Cessna light aircraft on a 30 minute trip from the small airstrip. Equipment was loaded into 2 aircraft and once we were squashed in we flew over

extensive marshlands, foothills and several glacier and peak formations. 'One Shot Pass', a narrow gap between 2 peaks, was successfully negotiated taking us into stunning winter scenery. The adrenalin already up, in misty conditions the pilots put us down on a stretch of the Kalheta glacier (7200') on their skids and promptly flew off before the weather deteriorated further. Several small light aircraft companies have grown up in Talkeetna servicing the mountaineers visiting the Alaskan Ranges. Sometimes known as 'bush pilots' many are ex-Vietnam veterans and fly in nearly white-out conditions. Books have been written about the characters who fly in the area and we were lucky enough to have the services of one of the better known flyers, Doug Geeting.

The team were firmly planted and the expedition proper started. 6 men, 30 days rations, tents, climbing equipment and skis at 7200' aiming to reach 20,320', just over 17 miles to the top.

The first few days involved moving to several camps up the Kalheta glacier in 2 ropes of 3, pulling heavily-laden sledges attached to a climbing harness, carrying a large rucksack and on skis. Several crevasses were encountered but mostly they were still snow-covered. Loads would be carried higher up the glacier and unladen climbers would return to the tents to sleep lower down. Wherever a camp is put up the tents have to be well secured and an enclosing snow block wall built to protect against the stormy winds. This process could take several hours in itself. The hard hauling and monotony of routine was rewarded with breathtaking views and each step put us closer to the top with each day improving our acclimatization.

We arrived at 11,000 feet. Things had gone well. A substantial cache of food and equipment had been left at 8000 feet at the junction with the northeast fork heading towards the Cassin and West Rib route. Our plan was to complete the West Buttress route and, time permitting, attempt one of the other more technical routes having fully acclimatized. The weather, although cold, had been sparse with snow fall and wind and did not hinder our progress. At this height the skis were cached and ice axe and crampons were used. Hard work saw us arrive at 13,000 feet, just short of Windy Corner. Several more load carries had us established at 14,300 feet. The scenery was outstanding with views to the summit, up the headwall, Messner Couloir and across to the West Rib route. Excellent views also across to Mount Hunter and Mount Foraker to the south. The cold really bit in at this altitude. At night the temperature was well below -40 C with the mouth of the sleeping bag covered with freezing breath.

An opportunity to rest and acclimatize was taken at 14,300 feet. Although extremely cold, equipment and rations were sorted out and checked. A load carry was achieved to 17,200' by the team in high winds and poor visibility, leaving food and fuel in a cache. The weather then deteriorated and one of the tents had been severely damaged at 14,300'. Considering the worsening weather, damaged tent and little food remaining, Chris Short and Gary Bryant opted to move to the 8,000 foot camp to collect another tent and food. Gary Bryant had been suffering from mild frostbite, his fingers were swollen, black and extremely painful.

The team now split into two groups with the weather worsening and a storm moving in, which confined us to our tents for five days. The tents were constantly battered by wind and snow which drifted almost over the tent each night with whiteout conditions persisting. Chris Short and Gary Bryant were stuck at 10,000 feet. Nick Arding and L-B were in a tent and Pat Parsons and Alistair Miller in a snowhole, both at 14,300 feet, their tent having been destroyed.

Five days in a tent in the storm was mind-blowing. It was desperately cold and so noisy that you could hardly sleep even if you wanted to. The highlight of the day was to put all your clothes on, goggles and all, crawl out of the tent to clear the snow less it collapsed with the weight of fresh snowfall. Mentally, but not physically tired we managed to move up to 11,000 feet after five days imprisonment. We met up with the four who had been trapped at 14,300 feet who had dropped down, being short of food and were heading for the 8,000 foot camp for replenishment.

The team came through the storm well. Several other teams were forced to retire and escaped down and away as soon as it had ended. We now planned for a push to the top again. In our pairs we moved up to 17,200' and established a camp. Four climbers were poised at 17,200' and 2 at 14,300'.

On the 18 May Nick Arding, LB and Gary Bryant left for a summit bid from the 17,200 feet camp. Although really cold, the sky was clear and the wind low. Six hours later they summited, having to wear full downsuits for the uppermost 1,000 feet.

On the same days Alistair Miller and Pat Parsons had moved up to join Chris Short at the 17,200 feet camp. Next day, while the summiteers rested, the next three headed to the top. Although exceptionally cold, conditions were crisp and clear. The first 1500 feet was steep, requiring some frontpointing and was still in the shade up to Denali Pass. Now the views opened up to the hitherto unseen northern side of the mountain as we emerged into the sunshine. Excitement and confidence were growing. The route now headed up a line of old fixed ropes and then over vast expanses of snowfields and ridges towards the summit headwall. From the 17200 feet camp to the summit and back is just under 4 miles. The base of the steep summit headwall was reached by mid-afternoon at around 19500 feet. Every effort was needed to drag each foot up the final obstacle. Several steps... then a breath, several steps...

then a breath. At last all three of us topped the headwall and stood on a knife-edge snow ridge. There was the summit some 400 yards away. Teetering along the ridge, one foot either side, we moved towards the top. The views were breathtaking, everything was dwarfed by our height. One side of the ridge steeply dropped several thousand feet with the Cassin ridge rising up in full view. Visibility was perfect. The top was reached. Elation! All our efforts had been worth it - the highest point in America. A good 20 minutes was spent on the top. Congratulations. Photographs. Appreciation of the outstanding arctic panorama. Returning to 17,200 feet the whole team were elated by our achievement, especially as we had seen several teams of strong mountaineers spurned by the conditions and retreat.

We moved down to 14,300 feet and then pushed strongly on down to the 7,200 feet aircraft pickup point. The weather was deteriorating, a storm was expected. Caught in heavy snowfall for 36 hours waiting for the aircraft, finally a small window of clear weather allowed us to escape and return to Talkeetna. The small Cessna aircraft came bouncing in onto the glacier. Engines still running we loaded madly. Two lifts and the team was away. For nearly a month all we had seen was snow, glaciers and mountains. As the aircraft came in to land on the tiny airstrip you could actually smell the bark and leaves of the trees, engine fumes, feel the moisture in the air and hear the birds singing.

Alcoholic celebration ensued. Beards were shaved, bodies washed and stomachs filled.

The team had hoped to go to Mount McKinley and achieve several routes. In the end it took all our experience and determination to reach the summit by the West Buttress route. Success was had with a 100% summit achievement. However we all realised that the mountain had dictated our success and without a small window of mild weather none of us would have been able to achieve our goal.

## LONE BUT NOT LONELY

*Findhorner*

The AGM at Capel Curig was a very friendly enjoyable time, clambering around the local hills. We had a lovely day on the Carneddau, but what a lot of people. Never were we out of sight of 2 or 3 other groups and in places there were dozens in view. Now I know why I climb in the Highlands; I can go all day and hardly see a soul. This Summer was not so good because the cloud base never lifted much above 2,000 feet in August. However I took a leaf out of John Muston's book and stayed low.

My first sortie was to have a look at Seana Braigh between Lairg and Ullapool. I began at Croik up the River Carron from Bonar Bridge. I knew the name was familiar but could not remember why. It was not until I arrived (there is a good parking spot) and had a look around the church, that I realised that Croik churchyard was where the 90 tenants of Glencalvie, just to the south, had spent a miserable time sheltering in May 1845 during the Clearances. Many of them scratched their names on the window panes of the church.

Such gloomy history could not dispel what was to be a splendid walk up the Strath Cuileannach to Strath Mulzie. I only saw a shepherd and his 3 dogs and a pair of fisherman during the whole day. The area is being developed for forestry and at one point a huge, new road has been made across the moor. It looked strangely anomalous but in time will mellow as have its predecessors. The important thing is that it is keeping the Highlands alive and working.

I retraced my steps having reached Corriemulzie Lodge and seen the way up to Seana Braigh. There is a good bothy further up the valley at Loch A Choire Mhoir which could be used to break up a

circular route over the top and round via Gleann Beag and Gleann Mor to Croik. With an early start and late finish it would be a good long summer's day.

My second outing, and only accompanied one, was to Ben Wyvis which is a big saddleback of a mountain overlooking the Moray Firth. It is the sort of straightforward climb which is suitable for children with easy access from Garbat. There is a track which goes up the side of the Allt a Bhealaich Mhoir all the way to the southern summit of An Cabar. All looked set for a good day as the cloud base steadily rose. However it stuck at 2,500 feet and we decided to split up, with the children and one adult returning down the track, while 2 of us finished the climb in very cold miserable cloud. I don't think we would have bothered but my companion who, despite living in its shadow for 20 years had never climbed to the summit was keen to do so. With hindsight, of course, it was a very good day because the children learned that cloud is cold and disorientating (and somewhat frightening). Apart from 2 teenagers setting off as we descended, we saw no one all day.

My third walk was to Cam Kitty above Forres. I doubt that any member of the AMA has ever bothered to struggle across the grouse moors to reach its triangulation point. Its claim to fame is that in 1913 (?) the local landowners all met there to decide on their various estate boundaries. There are splendid views out over Findhorn Bay to the Moray Firth to the north and the old Dava Moor railway, which ran from Forres to Grantown until the Beeching cuts, to the west. With no one to be seen, it was another lone but not lonely day.

# Exercise Asterix III

*An Adventure Training Exercise in the French Alps*

Maj G F Tanner

“Pâte, fromage, et pain” the menu read, just the thing for a hungry climber. I thought. Bernard Lane, Peter Hall and myself were sitting in the glorified wooden crate that goes by the name of being the Conscrit Refuge hut on the Tré la Tête Glacier in the Mont Blanc massif. It was July 1993 and the three of us were part of a School of Electronic Engineering adventure training exercise to the French Alps. We had left our tents in the early hours of the morning and trekked up the Glacier to the hut for a look at the route up to the Aiguille de Berangere. It was now 1000 hrs and I was hungry. Pate, cheese and bread would make a quick cold snack that wouldn't delay our return too much and Bernard and Peter raised no objections, so I ordered the dish from Madame, the hut guardians' wife. The only other occupants in the cramped interior were a young girl turning over the blankets on the bunks that filled every corner, a visiting local who was apparently carrying out the annual fire inspection and a large shaggy dog.

Clouds began to form over the peaks around us, the temperature started to fall in the hut and the fire inspector began to dismantle a large red extinguisher on the table next to us. The extinguisher was well covered with the sort of labels that scream out 'danger' 'high pressure', but this did not deter him from attacking it vigorously with an outsize adjustable spanner. Nervousness was written on our faces as we weighed up our chances of surviving the likely explosion; and where was my meal? My companions were getting impatient and the dog was eyeing my leg as if it too fancied a snack. In my finest broken French I expressed my concern to Madame that I had now waited half an hour for a simple cold plate of pate and cheese. “You want it now?” she asked with an incredulous raised eyebrow, then shrugged and went off to fetch it and with a flourish placed a huge platter of lukewarm pasta, lightly covered in cheese sauce, in front of me. Stunned silence was followed by the painful realisation that pâte is french for pasta, paté is the savoury paste; the grammatical difference being merely an 'a' circumflex, the reality being an amorphous mass of gently congealing goo!! Bernard and Peter gave me that look that said 'You ordered it, you eat it - and you've got five minutes'. The exuberant fire inspector was now at the 'lets bash

the detonator' stage, and Madame stood grimly between me and the door to ensure monsieur enjoyed his meal. Five very painful minutes later we were out in the snow, speechless with pasta stuffed in every facial orifice and all feelings of hunger killed stone dead for the next few days. 'Thanks pals' I gasped 'Lets go home!'



SSgt Peter Briely and Major Graham Tanner. Tré la Tête Glacier July 1993

The exercise was aimed at giving some promising young (and a few old) REME climbers a push towards gaining more advanced mountaineering qualifications and in stimulating their interest in alpine routes. There were seven of us, myself as leader, Bernard as the mountain expert, Capt Peter Hall on loan from BAOR to provide the exercise with perfect

weather, Capt Stephen McIntosh and SSgts' Bob Robinson, Darren Vincent and Peter Brierly. The plan was to operate from a campsite in the Les Contamines de Mont Joie Valley and attempt the Aiguille de Berangere, Mont Tondu and the Dome de Miage, then move round to Chamonix and have a go at Mont Blanc via the Bossons Glacier and the Grand Mulets hut. The weather had other plans and greeted us with fresh snow down to 1,700m and avalanche conditions on most of the slopes. The Dome de Miage was definitely off limits that week but on a couple of good days we did manage to reach the top of the Aiguille de Berangere (3425m) and Mont Tondu (3196m). The Aiguille was a straight plod up an ever steepening snow slope, approached from the Conscrit hut. Unfortunately, the cloud prevented any good views so we made a fast descent back down to the hut, arriving in time to meet the sun chasing away the clouds and blistering all human life on the glacier. The chic locals decorating the rocks around the hut were mightily impressed by Stephen, who sported his best evening dress shirt under his Berghaus jacket, complete with cufflinks, and completed his ensemble by wearing bright yellow lipsalve!

Mont Tondu via the North West ridge proved a classic route, with a difficult approach across the Tre La Tete seracs, followed by three steep snow fields separated by rock bands, and a final 'pleasant airy traverse' (the guide book's words, not mine) to the second summit. The serac field terminated in a bergschrund gap that yawned like an icy miniature Grand Canyon.



An Old Poser! Major Graham Turner in a relaxed pre-lunch mood.

Bernard found a vertical fin of ice that jutted out towards the far side and roped together in two groups we front pointed out on one side of the fin and jumped the gap. A group of French climbers had followed our lead across the glacier but baulked at this last move. Their guide attempted to flatten off the top of the fin with his ice axe to give them an easier platform, but they were having none of it and decided to opt for the long way round and the 'tourist' route to the summit.

Up till then, we had not been too impressed with Peter Halls' weather provision, but our subsequent attempt on Mont Blanc led to a total sense of humour failure. The slog up to Mount Corbeau to camp for the night just below La Junction, was carried out in a rainstorm. Bernard, Peter Hall, Stephen, and Peter Brierly, all aborted that evening having run out of dry clothes, sleeping bags and tents, leaving just three of us to wait out the sleet, rain and snow. In the grey light of dawn we stood at La Junction where the Bosons and Tacconaz glaciers meet, and looked across to where the Grands Mulets hut could just be seen in the murk. Fresh snow covered the jumbled mass of snow and ice in front of us, making it hard to spot the smaller crevasses. As we stood there, thinking about a route to cross over to the hut, the whole centre of the glacier began to move, deep crunching sounds arose from the flowing mass, blocks as big as houses sank or tipped over and like a river of dirty white lava, the centre of the glacier streamed off down the mountain. We all stood there mute with awe at the spectacle. Then, as the crunching sounds died away below us, without a word we all quietly packed our gear and set off down to the warmth of Chamonix and home. We had enough Alpine experience for one season! (P.S. Thanks for the company, Peter, shame about the weather, don't call us, we'll call you!).

## CIVILIAN RECOGNITION OF MILITARY MOUNTAINEERING AWARDS

The Mountain Leader Training Board has been providing training for leaders, instructors and supervisors for thirty years. Its awards are recognised by the Department for Education and by many other civilian organisations. While the services have always maintained strong links with the MLTB, the two organisations have recently been working towards harmonising military and civilian awards.

### Mountainwalking Leader Award

It is now possible to attend Unit Expedition Leader and Joint Services Mountain Expedition Leader courses as an MLTB candidate. Provided you have already registered with the MLTB, the UEL course will count as training for the Mountainwalking Leader Award and the subsequent JSMEL course as assessment. Even if you didn't register with us but have got a UEL or JSMEL award then you could be eligible for exemption from training for the ML scheme.

### Single Pitch Supervisors Award

The Single Pitch Supervisors Award, introduced in 1992, is available to anyone with a genuine interest in climbing and group supervision. While the military and civilian awards are not yet harmonised, JSRCI, Rock Leader or even Top Roping & Abseiling awards would be considered as part of an application for exemption from training for the SPSA scheme.

### Mountain Instructor Award

If you already have a Mountainwalking Leader Award (Summer) and substantial rock climbing and instructional experience then you can apply to register with the MIA scheme.

For registration details and further information on any of these awards, complete the coupon below and send to:

**MLTB, Capel Curig, Gwynedd, LL24 0ET.**



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# ACCIDENTS ON BOLTED CRAGS

Mac Mackay

The numbers of climbers on crags at home and abroad is on the increase and this has brought about an increase in accidents on bolted routes. This article sets out to highlight the typical type of accidents occurring on these routes.

## Communication between Climbing Partners

The normal climbing calls are no longer being given in a clear and precise manner. Very often the calls are not heard or not given in a positive manner. The homely, laid back atmosphere on the crags becomes so soporific one could dispense with sleeping tablets completely.

On one such crag in Southern Germany (Oberaudorf) a lead climber said "hold me" and the second climber payed out the rope which resulted in the leader hitting the ground with drastic consequences. How could that happen you ask? Easy; the bolts were not spaced to be fallen upon and the leader was probably on too hard a route and did not comprehend the consequence of a fall. Another incident occurred when a leader asked the second if the rope run-out was OK, "Yes" replied the second - result another accident; too much rope run-out when the leader fell off - another serious injury.

In Konstein a second found himself on the belay stance of the final pitch of the Dohlenfels South Ridge. The leader was at the stance of the second pitch and shouted "on belay" and pulled the rope. Suddenly the rope pulled through his hands (cutting them to the bone) until the rope went tight on his belay anchor; what happened? The second had untied immediately and subsequently lost his balance, then fell the full length of the rope that the leader had taken in but not secured in the belay device; he was left hanging close to the ground with bad head injuries - he was not wearing a helmet!! Why the victim untied from the belay too early is unknown because he can only now talk after months of being in a coma and remembers very little of the incident. Perhaps he untied to release a snagged rope above the belay without trying to secure himself by another means. Both climbers have put it down to experience. A freak?

## The Second Bolt is the most important

The bolted crags have many routes where the second bolt is placed too high above the first which means the climber will hit the ground should he/she fall before clipping the second bolt (see diagram 1). It is still wise to carry a bit of lead gear, even on fully bolted routes.

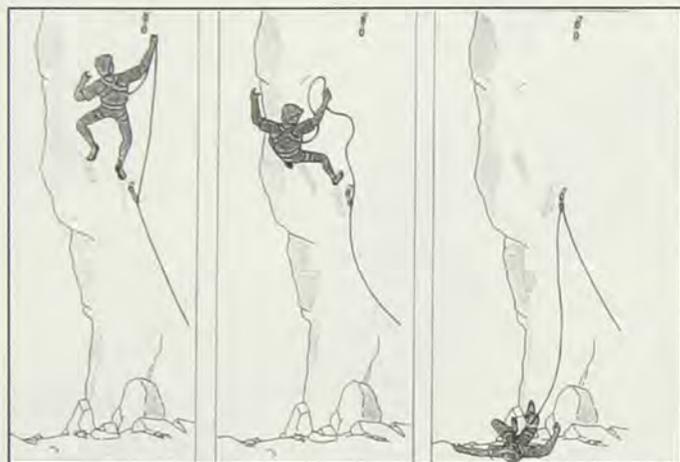


Diagram 1

## "Dangers with Buhler" Bolts

Buhler bolts are completely secure with a breaking strain of over 50 kn (500kp). The design on the other hand is far from safe as the pictures clearly show (see diagrams 2 and 3). It is therefore recommended that one uses a threaded short tape through the bolt or a larks foot which is the best recommended method. A screwgate karabiner can be used but they can break in high factor falls.

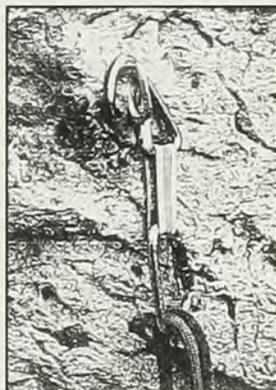


Diagram 3

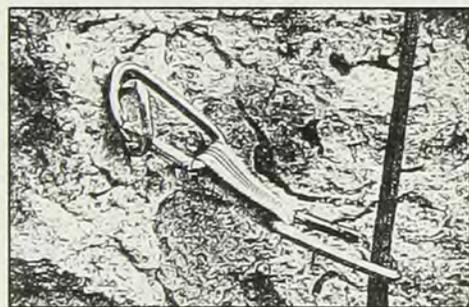


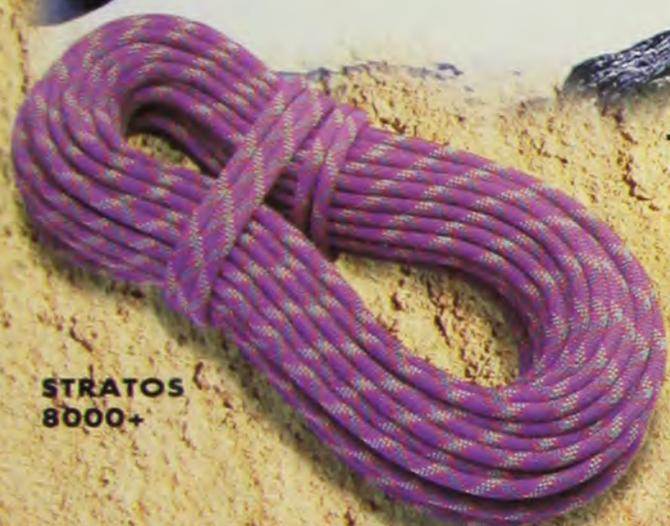
Diagram 2

## Helmet - Yes or No?

Helmets are no longer vogue. Particularly on the sport climbing type crags (bolted crags). The image is not correct. Hair styles cannot be seen for a start! Head injuries occur even with a helmet being worn but at least the injured party has the right of redress. I feel we should follow the motto: where danger lies we should try to alleviate it with the technical know-how available, with this in mind a helmet is the know-how and only 300 gms in weight. Protect your head - you've only got one!

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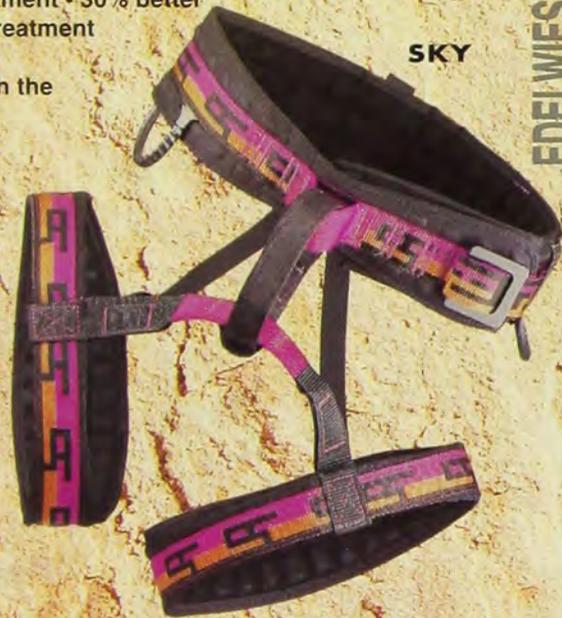
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