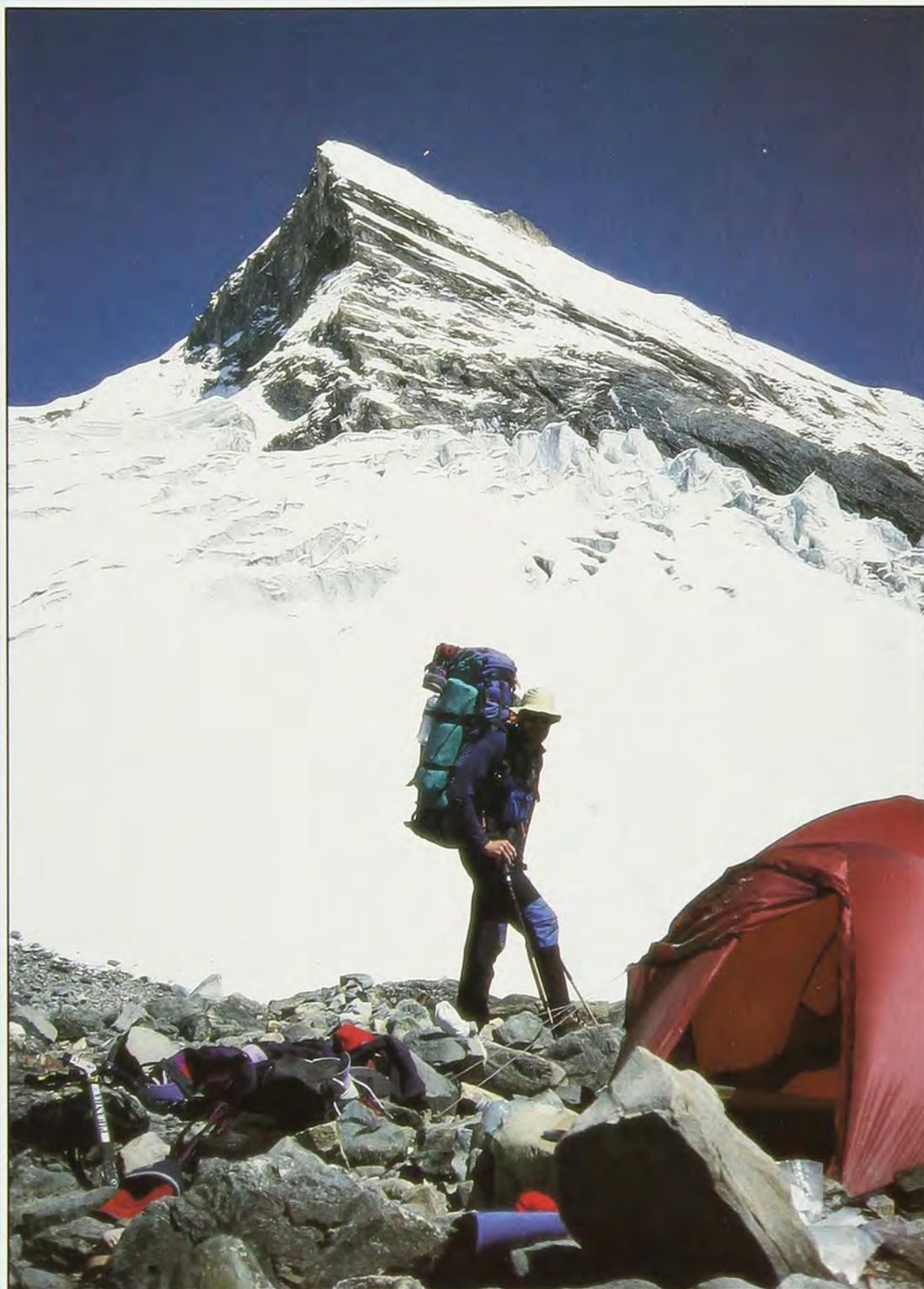




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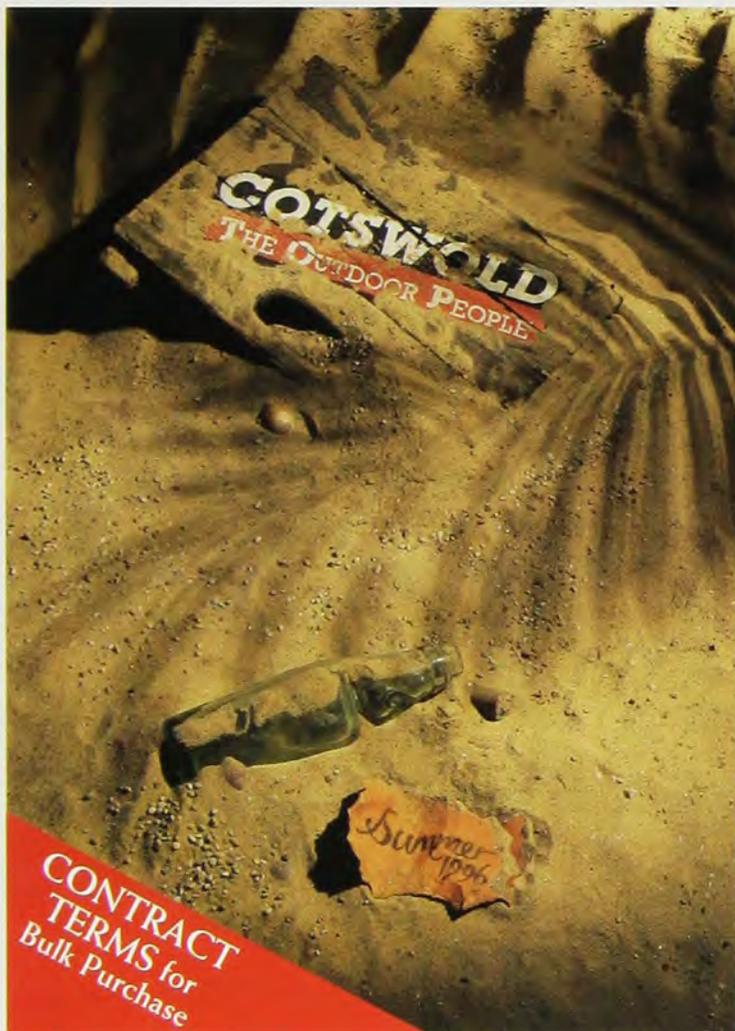
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THE JOURNAL OF THE ARMY MOUNTAINEERING ASSOCIATION

Spring 1996

Message from the Chairman

Brigadier NJ Cottam OBE

In the course of my service I have enjoyed watching the influence and achievements of the Army Mountaineering Association extend and increase. Individual exploits in high mountains and team efforts in a wide variety of mountain ranges both characterize the organization. To me it is the Army Mountaineering Association's ability to support and encourage both team and individual ambitions that is its greatest strength. I know I have benefited over the years from the advice and information exchange provided by the Association and by our excellent Army Mountaineer magazine. I hope you will also.

My own contributions to Army Mountaineering and to the Association have been to say the least patchy. My expeditions into different mountain ranges may have been quite frequent in the past but they have all been undistinguished. I enjoy, as I hope you do, reading of the challenging mountain endeavours of association members on rock, ice and snow. Changes in the world's political boundaries may open up new mountain frontiers for British Army mountaineers. I hope so and I would like, as your new chairman, to see full advantage taken of these opportunities. Your efforts in bringing on novice mountaineers and in attempting new mountain challenges are together what will keep the Army Mountaineering Association as lively as it is today. I will try to play my part. In the meantime enjoy this superb edition of the Army Mountaineer.



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Autumn 1996 edition

Please send your contributions for the Autumn 1996 edition to the editor by the end of September 1996. 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.

ON THE COVER:

Descending with Tharpu Chuli in the background.

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*Exploits of a**by WO2 Neely*

Safety Conscious Climber

I'd always wanted to go to the Alps and this seemed like as good a time as any. The 'IN' tray was reasonably under control and there were no exercises on the horizon. So when the opportunity arose for a place on JSAM 95 I went for it.

Being a very safety conscious type of climber (namely cowardly) I decided to take up the offer from some friends from RAF Leuchars Mountain Rescue Team to tag along with them. It seemed a good idea really and what better for a safety conscious climber than to have his own mountain rescue team accompanying his ascents.

What I did not take into account was that devil, self ego, in my head, which soon went racing off thinking about doing difficult climbs involving danger. No self-confessed safety conscious climber would ever entertain such thoughts, which is why I was amazed to find myself walking with the rest of our team along Zermatt's High Street heading for the Matterhorn.

I would have liked to say our goal was the North face, however, even my ego was not that mad! That was for real climbers, so the Hornli ridge would have to suffice.

My companions included Cath Davies who had recently returned from a climbing trip to Spain, where she sustained a broken leg whilst climbing. Despite her recent injury Cathy was having little problem keeping up, on the contrary, I was personally glad of Cath's reduced mobility as it gave me a better chance to keep up with her!

My other four companions were that strange breed of creature, the Mountain Rescue Trooper. Innes, Steve, Andy and Squelchy, all four mega-experienced climbers with previous Alpine and Himalayan trips under their belts (I do hate talented people, especially if they are RAF).

Everything seemed fine as we sauntered up Zermatt's cobbled traffic free High Street. No carbon monoxide poisoning here, just the smell of fresh horse manure wafting through the nostrils, from the horse drawn carriages.

It was not long before my first cock up revealed itself. As I strode along quietly checking off my kit in my head, "yes got the crampons, boots, gloves, hat etc", you know the score, I eventually came to head torch. Shit, my head torch was still in the campsite, I remembered using it last night as I staggered back from the bar. I quickly began to empty the contents of my rucksack into the High Street, hoping against hope to find my head torch, but to no avail. It was back at the camp site.

Now Steve, being the elder of the Mountain Rescue lads, soon came up with a cunning plan. "Lets buy one in Zermatt". Now if you have ever been shopping in Zermatt you will know this to be a totally irrational suggestion. I would have to mortgage my house to buy a head torch in Zermatt, even people with Swiss bank accounts don't shop in Zermatt. The only alternatives I had were to mug the first climber I saw wearing a head torch or go back to the camp site in Tasch. I chose the latter and two hours later I caught up with my friends in one of the many cafes in Zermatt, discussing the exploits of yours truly.

With my first catastrophe behind me we all headed for the telepherique up to the Schwarzsee. It took us over an hour to reach the



Hornli Ridge, Matterhorn.

Hornli hut from the Schwarzsee and we quickly scrambled inside out of the torrential rain which had begun.

We were surprised at how empty the hut, which is the starting point for most of the routes on this famous mountain, was. The hut guardian soon explained the reason for the lack of numbers although it didn't really take the brains of an arch bishop to work it out; the weather forecast for the next 48hrs was poor and only a handful of parties were going up the Hornli ridge tomorrow. It was decision time; stay, risking bad weather or head back down.

Innes was the hard climber of the Mountain Rescue bunch and confidently solos Scottish grade 5 or E3 before breakfast. He was keen to stay on and risk bad weather, however, the rest of the group, the sensible people, decided to go down. After all the mountain would still be here another day. This seemed a good excuse for a safety conscious climber to withdraw with dignity, but before I realised it, my ego had taken control and I agreed to partner Innes. It seemed a good match after all, he solos E3 and I top rope VS, what could possibly go wrong!!!

We said our good-byes to the rest of the group heading down the mountain and then quickly settled down to dinner and a study of the guide book.

We awoke to the sound of the few climbers in the hut jostling in the dark with their equipment. We quickly joined them and after some unappetising compo rolled oats and chocolate we headed into the darkness of the night. The rain was drizzling down and not a star could be seen through the blanket of cloud. "Don't worry, Dave, this drizzle and mist will soon burn off" explained Innes. I couldn't help thinking that a safety conscious climber should be somewhere else.

Innes suggested not roping up as the ground was reasonably easy with fixed ropes in place at all the difficult sections. This seems a good idea when you solo E3 but not so good when you top rope VS. Before I could protest Innes was off into the night. I quickly followed muttering comments which questioned his parental status amongst other things.

Dawn soon came and revealed the huge rock buttresses we had been scrambling over in the dark. As we climbed higher the drizzle turned to rain and the cloud thickened leaving ones sense of

direction disorientated. We sighted two guided teams on their way down. I quickly asked them how long to the top and they replied, over 1 hours climbing. The guide then pointed to the sky and warned that the weather was getting worse.

It was decision time again, do we turn back now and follow the guides down, or risk benightment or worse. The sensible choice was to turn back, however as all climbers know we don't always do the sensible thing, so we turned and headed upwards.

We soon reached the upper slabs which are the crux of the route and the final barrier to the summit. The ground here is exposed and possibly hard severe, if you climb it ethically not using the fixed ropes. I thought for a second on the ethics of the problem and then went straight for the ropes. This was not the place to make a mistake. So I quickly tied into the fixed rope with a sling and followed Innes upwards. We eventually reached the top of the last fixed ropes and scabbled up to the summit. It had taken 8 hours.

Unfortunately we were not greeted with spectacular views on the summit, visibility was reduced to 10 metres and the weather was worsening. After a quick drink and choccy bar we headed straight down. We decided to abseil down the fixed rope stanchion to avoid any slips on the icy rocks and as we progressed downwards the worsening visibility began to make route finding difficult. Soon nothing looked familiar and we found ourselves on a scree slope; we were definitely off route and lost.

I didn't at first see the stone fall, I only heard the cracking above as the rock impacted. Soon volleys of loose rocks were bouncing down the cliffs, leaving a whoosh which told you they were too close. I began to get that nervous feeling in my stomach, this was not the place to linger. We quickly ran across the scree slope searching for a safer area, ourselves setting off fresh stone falls below us as we ran along. The rock fall stopped as suddenly as it started and after a few four letter words we continued to probe our way downwards.

Tiredness was now becoming a major factor, seven hours had past since the summit, much of that spent on a sight seeing tour of the mountain looking for the route down. A bivvi was looking a good alternative when suddenly the clouds cleared allowing us to glimpse the Hornli hut to the left below us.

Having now seen our destination we realised we were too far to the right of the descent route which was actually on the East face. We moved slowly and carefully leftwards looking for the tell tale signs of crampon scratches and fixed ropes to guide us downwards. We soon found them and an hour later we arrived back at the Hornli hut, knackered but safe. We spent the night in the hut and returned the next day to the safety conscious world of Zermatt and the familiar smell of horse manure.

Exercise Snow Hog Tiger

The AMA December 95 meet

by Major Graham Tanner (Meet Leader)

Snow Hog Tiger, this year's Army Mountaineering Association New Year meet, was held at the Inverness Training Camp Centre in Newtonmore. Despite the Army's operational commitments the attendance was strong, with twenty-nine members crowding into the hut. After the previous year's damp experience in the Lochaber region it had been decided to move to the north east to find colder, drier conditions. This was more successful than we anticipated. It was bitterly cold when we arrived, with ice on the interior walls, but the next few days provided clear blue skies, powder dry snow, and crippling low temperatures, with a minus 27C overnight record at Grantown-on Spey just up the road. This proved too much for some of the members cars, but the welcome addition of a minibus to the exercise enabled activities to continue.

Despite the cold, the Cairngorms were virtually ice free, leaving the harder routes almost bare. Sensibly most of the climbers kept on the lower grade routes, and Coire an Sneachda received a thorough going over. Kitting up in the shade in such intense cold was an experience to be remembered, but then so was the splendour of being perched high on a route with the sun sparkling on the frost

covered rocks and the undulating white carpet of the Highland scenery stretching out from beneath your feet.

The weather broke on the 30th Dec, with low cloud joining the low temperatures, and 50 knot winds, which forced most of the members to opt for the 800m tops to the north end east of Loch Morlich. One hardy group bothied overnight by Loch Ericht for a Munro bagging attempt on Ben Alder but were beaten off by storm force wind. Another group had a mini epic attempting Staghorn Gully on Creag Meagaidh and were also defeated by a combination of poor ice and severe weather, and they brought a few scars back to prove it. The rest of the meet then kept to Munro collecting and navigation practice in the Monadhliath and Drumochter areas, with mountain hares appearing underfoot everywhere. There was still energy enough to enjoy the New Year celebrations, particularly at the Newtonmore street party where free draughts of "Stag's Breath" liquor provided the much needed anti-freeze.

From the results, this is one of the strong events in the AMA calendar, with challenging conditions, an interesting mix of old hands and new members, a competitive spirit on the hill, and a great sense of fun. Get your bids in early for next year!

AMA Winter Meet - Scotland 1996

This years meet will be held at TULLOCH over the period 27 Dec 96 to 3 Jan 97. Bids should be made to Maj Ray Evans, 1 Bn WG, London SW 1E 6HQ. Tel: 763 3344. Fax 763 3350

There are 20 vacancies on the meet. All applicants must be experienced at winter mountaineering and self equipped. Meals will be self catering.

Closing date for applications is 20 Oct 96.

Climbing in Gibraltar

by Barney Barnett

Rock Climbing in Gibraltar has had a varied past. Much of the pioneering work on the faces was done back in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The North face was not successfully climbed until 31 Aug/1 Sep 1971 and has had about two ascents per decade since.

Many of the first ascents were carried out by Lt Cdr Richard Brooke in 1959 and as Mike Banks joined him later that year they are presumably the 2 who had climbed Rakaposhi in 1958. Routes were logged by hand in a hard backed book that remains in the Gibraltar Services Recreation and Adventure Training Centre (GSRATC). The first guide book was published in 1963 for the Joint Service Mountaineering Association by AD Marsden who was stationed here with the RAF. The guide book is remarkably wide ranging but makes no mention of the potential of the North Face.

There is very little record of climbing during the 1970s and 1980s but we have a few routes recorded in the original book. There are tantalising signs of activity scattered about, with the odd sling and peg indicating signs of an epic retreat. As for civilian climbers, there has been very little interest as they are largely put off by ill informed authors who discount its potential out of hand with remarks such as "a lot of routes and rubbish!"

For those of us fortunate enough to be posted to Gibraltar we are blessed with the opportunity of developing new routes the whole year round on crags often closer than the local corner shop back in UK. The possibilities for climbing here are considerable, only being limited by a lack of imagination, pioneering spirit, or an airline ticket! It is only fair to add that access had always been in the hands of the military here and now that is no longer the case, we will have to proceed with care to gain the necessary clearance from the Government of Gibraltar.

The rock is jurassic limestone which lends itself to climbs of differing lengths across the complete spectrum of abilities. Natural protection is plentiful although sometimes a little suspect, which all adds to the excitement of climbing on this little piece of Britain in the Mediterranean.

At the time of writing we are exploring the potential of bolted sport climbing routes. With the aid of Brian Tilley from the Royal



Marines, high grade routes are being bolted in the hope that the rock entices climbers of all abilities. He remains confident that there is enough scope to lure everyone from enthusiastic novice to hardened sports climber who knows no bounds! We have also been visited by Brian Davison (who vies with Mick Fowler as the loose rock specialist) and Lindsay Griffin who put up an impressive 14 new routes in a week, including each of the four tiers from sea to summit at the southern end of the rock.

On the military side we have just had a successful visit from Capt "Mac" MacKay of JSMT(CW) to endorse the area as suitable for running both Rock Leader Proficiency and Rock Leader Training courses. As such we will be in the enviable position of being able to train people in preparation for assessment at the JSMT(C)s all year round.

So what is on offer for the AMA member I hear you say? On the official front HQBF Gibraltar is more than happy to host official rock-climbing expeditions. There are limited CNFP flights (but very cheap flights to Malaga), accommodation is available and equipment can be borrowed from the GSRATC. What about holding a meet in Gibraltar or combining it with your visit to El Chorro? You couldn't ask for a better introduction than Col Henry Day (first to climb the North face) who is presently No 2 to CBF in Gibraltar; he would always welcome more people with whom to climb.

For more information contacts are as follows:

Colonel M W H Day (Henry): CSO Ops & Plans HQBF
Gibraltar BFPO 52 Telephone: 00 350 53510 home: 53513
(Until end 1996)

WO1 (SMI) Holden: Staff Assistant J3 (PAT) (new post Dec
1995) Telephone: 54416



Escalada Diamond

By M Jeffers

As an alternative to the well established and highly successful UK based Hot Rock expeditions, Escalada Diamond took place in December last year aimed at giving BFG based AMA members an opportunity to climb in this fantastic area. The Costa Blanca is very well known for its excellent single and multi-pitch climbs and is an ideal area for both beginners and seasoned climbers. The exercise was aimed at Rock Leaders so climbing could continue even when our guide was taking others on the multi-pitch climbs that surround the area. Unfortunately the exercise was hampered by last minute deployments to Bosnia and with five days to go the numbers had dropped from the original ten to four. So the question, "Anyone want to go to Benidorm for DM 100" was spread around and un-surprisingly we managed to get to people to come along.

The journey down was from Steibis in Bavaria and took 23 hours, so was not recommended for the faint hearted, especially if the mini-bus battery starts gassing after a paltry 1200 km (this was Capt Martin Kitsons excuse for his atrocious driving and speeding fine)

On arrival in the small town of Finestrat about 10 kms North of Benidorm we were met by our guide and hosts for the week, Rowland and Betty Edwards and their son Mark. Their company, Compass West, completely organised the accommodation which

was more than comfortable but it must be noted that Self Catering in Spanish means that nobody will cook for you and does not imply that there will be facilities to cook for oneself hence the funny looks we got as we trudged in with loads of uncooked pasta and soups!

The weather at that time of year was unexpectedly bad and the climbing was hampered by two days of atrocious weather (this is far from being the norm at this time of year). However on the first day it was beautiful and we went to an area called Sella that is renowned for having loads of single pitch climbs ranging from VS to Spanish grade 6. This gave our guide the opportunity to look at our climbing skills and introduce new knots and techniques while assessing what each one of us was capable of achieving. Even with the lack of Rock Leaders or experienced climbers we completed at least 12 routes on the first day which is more than some had ever done before.

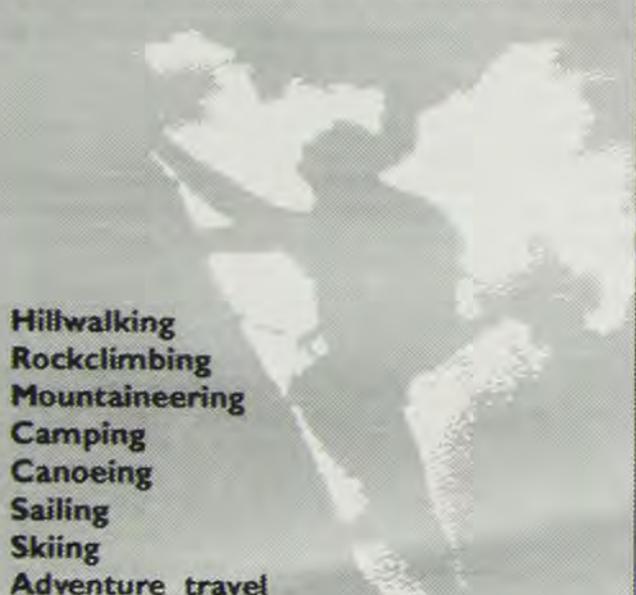
The next two days saw climbing both in Honserat and Toix where the rock is of superb quality and the routes challenging for both the leaders and the seconders. Rowland took 2Lt Jim Folkes of 16 Signal Regiment (alias the Man from Lundy), Bdr "Dicky" Dyer from PGATC and Tpr "Mac" Mchoul, QDG, on a 7 Pitch excursion up "Aristotle Edge" on Puig Campagna, a route lying to the left of the better known "Esperro sur Central". The route was very challenging (for all except Roland) and included three abseils in ascent and several more in descent. While this was going on the rest of the group climbed the imaginatively entitled Red, Green and Blue routes at Toix, half an hour down the road.

Thursday brought rain and a very cold wind and so gave us the opportunity to look around the local towns and quiz Mr Edwards on his experiences and opinions on such things as bolting routes. His knowledge and experience as a UIAGM Guide is immense and he is fascinating to talk to. Personally speaking the whole bolt debate bores me rigid, I will never place one, but nor will I ever climb past one and not clip in! Roland added a new dimension to the argument by explaining his new invention, the removable bolt. He described it as a cross between a "friend" and a bicycle quick release skewer, allowing a bolt hanger to be quickly placed by hand in a pre-drilled hole, giving the climber the option of a traditional or bolted ascent with minimal damage to the rock. One for the future?

The final day saw Capt Kitson and 2Lt Carne go off with Rowland to discover the delights of Spanish sea cliff climbing with a full 50 metre free abseil and then a clamber down some very precarious ladders to get to the bottom and begin to go all the way up. With good weather 2 sea cliff climbs can be achieved in one day but once again the rain came down. The potential for new routing on the sea cliffs below Toix is vast - so get out there!

It is widely known now that the area around Benidorm is superb for climbers of all abilities and is recommended as an ideal venue for winter climbing. Hiring a guide is recommended if you want to sample the best of the "classical" mountain routes, only a handful of which appear in English guidebooks, and scarcely many more in Spanish ones.

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on the Haute Route

by Capt Nicholl

The plan was to tackle the route with the assistance of a guide, Peter Cliff the author of the popular guide book for this ski mountaineering route. We arrived in Chamonix after an atrocious spell of bad weather ended and blue skies appeared over the Aiguilles. Fortune favoured our programme as we were able to enjoy a stable period of 8 straight, clear days. Weather conditions were crucial to the success of our venture.

Two training days had been built into the plan which took place on the Grands Montets. This period exposed some home truths exposing certain individuals to accept that their ski-ing standards were lower than they had believed. One member was destined not to start with another 2 under no illusions that they would have to work hard, very hard.

We caught the first cable car of the day and began the route by descending the Argentiere Glacier in difficult icy conditions. These conditions took their toll on the weaker members slowing down the party as other, faster parties overtook us. By the time we reached the glacier we were faced with a stark but obvious choice. We could abandon the route and opt for something less demanding or, and it was a big or, send down the slower members and continue with a nucleus of three. There was never really any doubt about the outcome and it was made by the 2 slower members. With a heavy heart we watched as they descended back to Chamonix whilst we fitted skins and harnesses and ascended the Col du Chardonnet.

It was a long hot climb and an equally long hot day before we reached the sanctuary of the Trient Hut. Rehydrated and rested we silently reflected on the next days events. An early night with an early Alpine start to the next day we faced a relatively short distance for the descent into Champex. Excellent conditions were again present requiring frequent and liberal applications of sun block. Three hours later we had reached the roadside and were enjoying a huge slice of strawberry cake, sheer hell! Our overnight stop was in a Swiss hamlet called Bourg St Pierre, a delightfully quaint and scenic stopping place, not that we had a great deal of time to enjoy our surroundings as we took full advantage of the good weather with an extra early start for day three. This is a straight forward 6 hour climb to the Valsoray Hut, starting on foot before dolming ski's to complete the second half. Stunning scenery unfolded as we gained height and the last leg was a steep section that required good edging. By now we had established a rhythm that was working well, teamwork was also second nature.

Day four began with a steep climb to the Plateau du Coulior in crampons and ice axe. However the snow cover was well consolidated and provided firm going despite the degree of exposure. Good conditions contributed to good progress. The descent to the Chanrion Hut was completed in superb snow with spectacular off piste ski-ing. The Chanrion Hut boasted an interior toilet which was well received and well used. Sadly the Guardian lacked any welcoming features refusing to serve a meal on our arrival. AB biscuits were a poor alternative. The penultimate day offered a choice of routes to the Vignettes Hut and as the mist closed in we had to settle for the long monotonous grind up the Otemma Glacier. Little can be said to alleviate the tedium of a featureless leg except that the sight of the Vignettes hut was extremely welcome.

The Vignettes Hut is sited on a truly spectacular spot, clinging to a granite outcrop against a panoramic backdrop. It was also the busiest hut with an international client base jostling for space and creating a lot of noise in the process. At four in the morning we reassembled in darkness for breakfast, and after a 30 minute wait we cut our losses and headed off without food or drink. It was important to make good use of the time and we could improvise breakfast on the move, it was galling to have paid for such an appalling service.

The last day was also to be our longest day, full use of available time had to be made. Visibility wasn't a problem but the clouds threatened with an ominous black presence. Trailing in our wake was an extended line of black dots indicating other parties who had sat it out in the forlorn hope that breakfast would appear. It never did. Low cloud prevented the Matterhorn from revealing its impressive outline denying any photo opportunities. Snow ran out about 5 miles from the Furi lift forcing us to reluctantly attach skis to packs for the walk. Before we descended into Zermatt we stopped at a convenient hostelry and forced ourselves to enjoy a couple of celebratory beers.

Fatigued but content we relished the creature comforts of the Bahnhof Hotel, clean sheets and hot water, luxury. We rounded off the trip with a days ski-ing under the Matterhorn before driving back to Chamomonix. Lady Luck had been extremely kind by allowing good weather to prevail throughout the attempt, torrential rain greeted us on our return to France.

The ideal outcome would have been for all 6 members to complete the route but success with 3 was preferable to none. The Haute Route is worthwhile and enjoyable whilst representing a considerable challenge. It is not cheap, hut costs ensure that you will pay about £30 per head for the privilege of a nights stay with meals. Breakfast is a lottery.

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ice climbing in Northern Ireland

by *Matty Wells*

It was the beginning of February 1996. Andy Longman and I were three months into a 6 month tour of Northern Ireland. The cold weather we had at the time had us thinking "how can we get over to Scotland for one weekend". Due to work commitments it soon became obvious that there was no way over there at all. So I started to have a few "MAD IDEAS" as I call them! One idea involved trickling a fire hose down the side of the MT hangar to form a large ice smear. However a few people advised me it wasn't such a good idea! So I went in search of another. Just as I was about to give up, I stumbled upon an old climbing guide of the Mourne Mountains. The last two pages of the guide had a few winter climbs listed, One that stood out read Thomas Mountain "Black Stairs" 50 metre grade three good two pitch route following deep cleft.

The route is actually a water fall in summer, and it's low elevation (350 metres) means it rarely comes into good condition. However the last week had been very cold and I expected it would be "worth a look" even if it was out of condition. That evening I waited for the BBC weathergirl to give me a reliable forecast! For once my luck was in they predicted another sub-zero night. That night Andy and I prepared our kit ready

for an early start on Sunday 4th February. We left the Maze at 0630 to be first in the queue on our route. On setting off from Newcastle RUC station at 0745 it was still dark and very cold. The sky was clear and soon gave way to the rising sun and the first glimpse of blue sky we had seen in weeks. As we approached the climb, it became noticeably warmer. I started to wonder what, if any, conditions the route would be in. As we came out of the Donard forest we caught a glimpse of our route. We saw that the top pitch looked quite iced up, but the bottom pitch looked a bit thin!

Excitedly we stood below the bottom pitch of the fall, it looked thin but the temperature was rising and the ice starting to melt. A snap decision was needed "to climb or not to climb", easy decision! Two minutes later we were stood geared up ready to go. I lead off up the first pitch, on thin water ice - so thin in places I'm sure it was rock! I came to a large chock stone that I passed on the left. With much grunting and groaning, I carried on upwards towards the top of the first pitch. I pulled over onto a large platform that was the top of the first pitch, the platform resembled a small duck pond! Walking across it I fell through a crust of ice into knee-deep



The Author approaching the top of the second pitch.

water! It was then I realised how much warmer it was. As I set up my belay, I noticed the centre section of the top pitch had a small trickle of water coming down it! I shouted down to Andy that we should get a move on. Andy arrived at the stance slightly wet!

The small trickle on the top pitch had turned into a small running stream! 30 metres up a melting ice fall we decided speed was of the essence. We unroped and completed the last 15 to 20 metres solo! As the angle eased, we broke off to one side of the frozen stream to safety. After a hot cup of tea we descended. Walking out, we met another party who were contemplating the climb. After giving them our account of the route they decided their heart wasn't in it and descended with us. A few hours later we were back at the Maze contemplating our next "MAD IDEA".

No matter how poor the conditions were we had a really good day out.

SUNSHINE and water ice

After a busy Christmas of guests, washing up, headaches and 'James Bond' films there appeared a gap in our social programme. A Failed attempt to go skiing on unconsolidated boulders, at Fort William's Aonach Mor, left us struggling to make the most of a beautiful winters day. The alternative found us sitting on a protruding rock in the middle of a frozen lochan on Rannoch Moor. Munching our way through peanut butter and jam sandwiches Ali and I assessed our damage limitation exercise as fairly successful. We sat in temperatures of around minus 15 celsius surrounded by 4 centimetres of hoare frost scattered like autumn leaves and soaked up the atmosphere in, what must have been, the most beautiful scene in Scotland.

Contented by our tasty but rather chilly picnic we headed off for home in Fort William but en route were drawn, as if by some magical force, to the Clachaig Inn, home of the bearded and unshowered. As we stepped into the smellie's bar sure enough there were the bearded and unshowered, Dave and Robbo. Their kit was scattered all over the place and they picked at their sandwiches and flasks like ruminating cattle totally oblivious of the barman's perplexed expression. As I surveyed the sorry scene however, an opportunity to climb suddenly revealed itself. After a rather pleasant pint and an exchange of up to date adventure stories Ali and I headed for home to prepare rooms for my unexpected climbing partners.

Day one saw us in the northern corrie of Beinn Udlaigh near Bridge of Orchy. 'Cold Climbs' offered us the only guide to the routes so, trusting to instinct we headed off, guidless, as the first ascensionists would... with feelings of trepidation and excitement. Two sound routes later, we returned to the comforts of a centrally heated home and talked climbing. Two days later, and with advice from two local climber friends, we headed off for 'Blue Ribbon' a three star grade V1.5 water ice route in Glencoe. First climbed in 1979 and allegedly last in condition in 1986, it unassumingly cut a line up the southern slopes of Stob Coire Leith on the Aonach Eagach Ridge.

The three of us set off early on 29 December in starry skies and a sub minus 10 celsius frost. We headed off in a rough direction only spying our objective as the light silently crept down the glen on its way westwards. For what first appeared to be a short distance, the walk took in a very long 50 minutes. 40 minutes behind us a pair of climbers set off in our footsteps, the race was on! After eyeing up the first pitch, I did the honourable thing and (without a moments hesitation) offered it to Robbo who, much to my suprise accepted. The pitch was substantial and consisted of around 15 metres of mainly vertical ice. Dave belayed, I photographed as Robbo began his ascent in torrents of water! The freeze had not yet completed its job. Robbo, in a vain attempt to keep dry, (or less wet) stepped left to place a rock runner and rest on a foothold which started him doubting the wisdom of his enthusiastic dash for the lead. A certain amount of light hearted encouragement saw him take the bull by the horns and step right, back into the path of the oncoming cascade. He climbed it well (for those of you who are interested) with a pair of Mountain Technology Alpine picks. By now we were on a run and our two

recently arrived companions could only admire our ascent of Glencoe's best showering facility for miles.

Dave set off after Robbo, with me bringing up the Rear. It was steep and 'gnarly' (unidentified but commonly used ice climbing term) and it was very damp. The ice was sound but the incessant spray was quite distracting. Despite the shower, it was a great pitch although quite pleasant to join the others on a belay 'ledge'. The belay was the size of a double garage so allowed space for a little confidence inspiring banter; that is of course easy to give when it is not your pitch next. With little need for a proper belay, I set off up the second pitch with the consequences of a fall being a hard landing next to the belayer, and probably a good ribbing too!

After placing a screw high and to my right almost out of reach, I set off on the steep bit this time, thankfully with no shower. There is a school of thought that advocates minimal protection in exchange for high speed over steep ground, therefore saving energy. The 'Aspirant Guide' who, on the first pitch, gathered some serious 'air time' some weeks later would probably dispute that. The two screws he placed roughly the same height prevented his headlong plunge towards the ground from being his last.

With the prospect of a rest up to my right and feeling slightly jaded at this point I continued on with thudding replacements until I could place a 'friend' to one side. Sadly our relationship was only luke warm! I headed up a reasonable angled and tremendously enjoyable ice runnel only stopping to earn myself a pint from friends who had accidentally discarded on ATC on a previous ascent. I'm sure it was placed there to see if we really had done the route! As I reached a sound belay stance on the right the sun hit a jumble of ice and rocks on the left. There was no difficult decision, I contrived a belay on the left in glorious sunshine surrounded by gleaming ice. Dave and Robbo came on up to the sun trap.

Dave took the third pitch, slightly less steep at technical IV-ish but looking quite fantastic bathed in sunshine. The ice chips sparkled in the sunlight before they crashed on to our helmets and soaked my camera. Several less difficult pitches were ahead, but my race with the sun had begun! Robbo remained bathed in sunshine for the rest of the climb while I, despite climbing at top speed, failed to catch the sun again until we had finished the route.

A long traverse followed by an abseil from a convenient tree, found us in the relative safety of grass and scree slopes covered in powdered snow. The breeze we had left by the car earlier picked up and set us off hastily in the direction of comfort and warmth as it was still early afternoon. At the top of the first pitch the other pair beat a hasty retreat after discovering continued difficulties and after Robbo's pessimistic assessment of the remainder of the route!

We had been most fortunate with the route; with the exception of a little moisture at the bottom it had been a delightful experience, especially for a group of three. Rarely are the highlands in such a condition, we were fortunate to be in the right place at the right time. For that magical week before Christmas and the west coast was a climbers 'garden of Eden' and the Blue Ribbon was certainly one of the 'forbidden fruit' which could not go untouched.

Exercise

Nepal

By Capt W J Manners RE

The Team

Maj Pete Aldwinkle	RE	Capt Will Manners	RE
Capt John Fahey	RLC	2Lt Chris Allewell	RE
WO1 Marek Kowalewski	REME	SSgt Andy Gallagher	RAMC
SSgt Darren Vincent	REME	Sgt Paul Duke	R Sigs
Sgt Sam Marshall	REME	SSgt Tim Bird	REME
LCpl Mark Salter	21 SAS	LCpl Matty Wells	RE
LCpl Andy Longman	RE	Pte Jerry Duggan	PARA

Ex AMA Ascent was an AMA sponsored adv trg ex to the Annapurna Sanctuary led by Maj Pete Aldwinkle. The idea of a relatively large number of AMA members climbing so called 'trekking peaks' had been discussed for some time. The responsibility of organising it fell to Pete in 1994, a little over a year before the proposed ex date. The responsibility for the accounting for the £20,000 budget fell to Carrie, Pete's RLC TA wife!

Sixteen AMA members from 15 units started on their allocated tasks early in 1995; some were glamorous, some painstaking and some requiring cunning and stealth. Three peaks accessible from Annapurna Base Camp (ABC), in the Nepalese Himalaya had been chosen as the objectives. Each was different in character but each was misleadingly called a 'Trekking Peak', they were:

Tharpu Chuli or 'Tent Peak'. 5600m. Very much alpine in style offering insignificant technical difficulties, (GR I/II).

Singu Chuli or 'Fluted Peak'. 6500m. Beautiful peak offering technical climbing at altitude. The easiest route up being around GR.III. Several possible routes by minimal guidance from books.

Huinchuli 6400m. Technically difficult. The easiest route is very long, in fact any ascent is long! Limited ascents are made of this mountain.

The aim of AMA Ascent was to increase the level of greater ranges mountaineering and expedition planning experience within the AMA. The idea hopefully being that members saw the process of organisation and were later inspired and keen to mount their own exercises. The plan was, based from ABC, to make lightweight alpine style ascents for the 3 peaks. Before you flick to the end of the article to see if we managed it or not here is the result:

Tharpu Chuli. All 16 summited.

Singu Chuli. Nine reached over 6000m. Two reached around 6300m and 3 teams attempted the mountain.

Huinchuli. Attempts were made on the North Face gully route. After three days teams had completed 16 of an estimated 20+ pitch gully up to around 5000m.

Despite reaching only one of the 3 summits the ex was considered to be a great success. It is not essential to reach the summit to achieve the aims of adv trg, it is disappointing not to have the mountain beneath one's feet but rewarding to have given it a good go.

The events prior to our arrival in Nepal could fill an article as could our adventures trekking in and out, or perhaps the adventures of the team's Para contingent! The team flew with Pakistan International Airways (PIA) via Dubai and Karachi to Katmandu and was greeted by Porna Sherpa, (Porna pronounced Buna) our Sirdar for the ex. Few of the 16 had visited Nepal before so every moment was an adventure not least because of our 850 kgs of baggage which we managed to get through without freighting.

Our stay in Thamel, Katmandu lasted around 36 hours and involved small groups dashing around town gaining "best price" and "best rate" for technical equipment and a small fortune in Rupees. Chris's ability to obtain "best price" was second to none. Despite Pete's efforts, threats, bribes, etc. we left Katmandu without our visa extensions and trekking permits. Once in Pokara after a death defying bus journey, (which incidentally started with us getting split up and lost in Katmandu!) Pete again applied the thumb screws and a man with a parcel arrived in the night.

Leaving the clean sheets and bright lights of Pokara after a day of waiting, we set out on the 5 day trek to ABC up the 'Modi Khola' the river valley which was to lead us up to the Annapurna Sanctuary. The trail was excellent, easy to follow and reasonable under foot. After hearing horror stories of the leaches we were prepared; trousers in socks, repellent and fag end at the ready. Our blood sucking nightmare never arrived thankfully, I saw four during the 5 days although Sam was found concealing one under his shirt and was subsequently mobbed by fellow trekkers brandishing fag ends!

After exhaustive, (exhausting!) briefings in the UK, Katmandu and Pokara the team went iodine crazy and turned vegetarian. (If the briefing doesn't convince you check out the meat market). Real bowel troubles avoided us until yours truly closely followed by Paul Duke "went down". I really can't apologise enough to the owner of the sleeping bag I was using!!

The team successfully reached ABC, 4150m after 5 days only for yours truly and Sam to develop AMS and spent 2 days feeling sorry for ourselves lower down. In the meantime the ex had recce'd and packed off to Tharpu Chuli with the obligatory 30 to 35 kg rucksack. Moving self contained had its price. The team crossed the rather rocky South Annapurna Glacier and with the dangerous rocky gully behind them, dumped kit and acclimatised. With the snow level around 4900m much of the trekking was on Scottish highland type landscape. High camp was around 5000m in a beautiful position sat on a moraine ridge. The first group of 8 led by

AMA Ascent

Oct - Nov 95

Pete summited 5 days after arrival in ABC and despite the odd illness, (Andy 'G' losing it a bit!) the team descended with little drama. The next team led by Paul summited a few days before my group. The route itself involved ascending the side of a glacier, traversing it at a flat point and ascending it to the fluted North West Ridge which led easily along a snowy arete to the small summit. It was all rather a nice introduction to the Himalayas, (apart from the headaches).

Singu Chuli was different. We approached it from the SE which involved a descent and ascent to 5100m over 3 days with another day needed to reach our high camp. The first attempt crossed to the East Face and Chris and Matty made an attempt from 5600m reaching probably around 6300m after 10 hours of climbing. The final seracs and exhaustion put a stop to their attempt. Pete led a second attempt and climbed the South Face to gain the South Ridge. Temperatures below -15C and high winds forced a 10 abseil retreat at around midnight!

The third and final attempt involved 5 of us setting off from the high camp at 5750m again in -15C but this time with no wind. Reaching the previous teams high point we pressed on up the magnificent South Ridge which was steep on both sides and made up of overlapping cornices forming a knife edge. The climbing was around GR III and thoroughly enjoyable. Unfortunately fate had already played its hand and Andy 'L' who had already spent time high and seemed well acclimatised, was showing progressively worse signs of AMS and the sad decision to descend was made. We had reached around 6150m (around 20,000ft) and in the face of it made the right choice.

On returning to ABC having run out of food on the mountain news of efforts on Huinchuli was inspiring but thoughts of success had vanished. The 'easiest' and safest route involved the ascent of an 800m GR III gully with the usual 30 kgs sack. Whilst pushing the route and the line of fixed anchors higher Mark and Chris by radio checked on the progress with Pete in ABC who assured them that all was going well. About 3 hours later and in the dark they checked in again with, "Can you see my light?" "Am I nearly there?" The reply, much to the amusement of the ABC residents who were peering into the darkness from the door of the mess tent was "Not that I want to be the bearer of bad news but you are f***ing miles off!" After much discussion it was decided to abandon the attempt on Huinchuli. The gully wouldn't go without fixed ropes with our team.

The logical decision was made to set off to Pokara. The nature of our attempts had allowed the minimum of logistical support, ie, if it would not go in your sack you left it behind. Singu Chuli, was too far for us to even consider resupplying therefore each team had one shot at the top and then ran out of food and gas. Our failure on Singu Chuli, on account of our limited supplies, was due to an inability to spend time acclimatising, carrying out recess and no chance for second attempts. The answer to the resupply problem is to either get to the top first time or drop down to collect more food. Huinchuli required more commitment, equipment and time even jumaring 800m on fixed ropes with a 25kg sack at 5000m would not be easy.



'The final ridge of Tharpu Chuli'

The walk out took some 2 days and some 4 days. We left as it started snowing and so the time seemed right. A little over a week later the accumulation of snow in the Everest Region caused a huge avalanche with well reported consequences. Pokara was a welcome sight as was the soft bed good food and drink. Less welcome was the night chorus of the town's dogs. No amount of padding around at 3.00 in the morning, ski pole in one hand rocks in the other, would keep them quiet. C'est la vie! Again our flight home could fill an article in itself, PIA have a lot to answer for. Despite trying to placate its passengers with a five star hotel in Karachi it will no doubt be receiving numerous letters of complaint for getting us back 30 hours late.

Ex AMA Ascent was a successful ex. Whilst not reaching the summits of all of its objectives the aims of adv trg were achieved. Every member of the team was at some stage given responsibilities along with their normal service duties. Decisions were not necessarily made and advice not necessarily sought based on rank, all opinions were listened to. Teams were formed based on ability on the mountain and acclimatisation, again, not on rank. Of the 5 1/2 weeks spent in Nepal relatively little time was spent in plastic boots or swinging around on axes and front points however individuals benefited from the ex well before it deployed and will continue to realise its benefits long after it's returns.

For those who took part in the ex we all look forward to reading of you mountaineering exploits. For those who have to be bitten by the exped bug I hope you get bitten soon! Regardless of which you are just remember that a bad day in the mountains is considerably better than a good day in the office!

Exercise Remera Diamond

By LCpls Aspinal & Wooton

From the German Harz mountains to the Swiss and Italian Alps it was only a matter of time before 21 Engineer Regiment's mountaineering team found its way to the Nepal Himalayas. The aim of the exercise was to climb two peaks, Pokalde (5800m) in the Everest region and Mera (6471m) in the Hinku valley. After almost a years planning and preparation, including the selling of post-cards and many begging letters to prospective sponsors we were finally on our way. After a long but free coach journey, courtesy of Transline, we arrived at the Union Jack Club, London, on the 18 March. The following morning we flew out to Kathmandu via Dubai and Karachi. On arrival we were met by our 'Sirdar' (guide) called Puna, who with the help of his porters had us swiftly loaded into waiting mini buses for a nail biting journey to our Hotel. After a hectic couple of days making final preparations, writing post-cards and soaking up the vibrant atmosphere of the city, we were ready to take the long road trip into the mountains.

The nine hour bus journey up through the foothills was an experience in itself, the road meandered along high mountain passes until we reached Jiri, literally the end of the road. From here on all travel would be by foot. The next morning we were rudely awoken by the dreaded local rooster and embarked on the days trek. The next seven days consisted of climbing hills only to lose the height again to our next stop, crossing several rope bridges that Indiana Jones would have thought twice about.

Eventually we arrived at Namche Bazaar perched precariously on the side of a mountain, Namche is the main market town for the area and a perfect location for a well earned rest day as the views were fantastic. The following day we set off for Tengboche, a Buddhist monastery, it was here that we caught our first glimpse of Everest. The following evening we had reached Dingboche, the last settlement at the foot of Pokalde. Early in the morning we set off leaving 2Lt Tony Breen behind who was suffering from food poisoning aggravated by the altitude. After a few hours steady climb towards Base Camp LCpl 'Sid' Wooton started to suffer from a similar ailment to Tony and rejoined him at Dingboche.

The rest of the team finally reached Base Camp which had already been set up by Sgt 'Robbo' Roberts and the porters, the latter quickly descended back to Dingboche leaving us to fend for ourselves. We quickly prepared ourselves for the summit attempt which was due to start at 4 am the following morning. In time honoured tradition a huge pot of compo chicken supreme was made before retiring to our tents. At 4 am it was well below freezing, the inside of the tent being covered in frost from the condensation. After a quick breakfast we set off in our teams, W02 'Phil' Jackson and myself, W02 'George' Sisson and Spr 'Cliff' Brock, LCpl 'Balders' Newton with Puna and Robbo.

Soon after setting off I started to feel the first effects of altitude sickness and decided to descend with Cliff who was also feeling ill. At Dingboche we met up with Sid and Tony who were feeling better. Later in the afternoon the rest of the team returned, George and Phil had had to return to Base Camp because George had taken ill. This left Robbo, Balders and Puna who successfully made the summit. Although our first goal had not been an overwhelming success we had all gained some acclimatisation value ready for the main objective Mera Peak. We returned to Namche Bazaar without incident, where we chose our lodgings more carefully as we suspected possible food poisoning from our previous stay there. Soon we reached Lukla a lively town with an airstrip, for another welcome rest day.



The Hinku Valley

From Lukla we headed east away from the beaten track, into the uninhabited Hinku valley, and up towards Mera itself. The next six days were a series of contrasts, walking through jungle, then snow covered passes and then a wide glacial valley before reaching the foot of Mera. The time spent walking each day was shortened due to the amount of altitude being gained each day. The evenings were spent resting in our tents listening to the occasional avalanche come crashing down the valley and the constant slow creak of the glacier around us. The next day we set off for Base Camp (5500m) carrying all our own stores up because it was too dangerous for the porters to negotiate the glacier without the proper equipment. From now on we were on our own, we fixed our crampons, waved goodbye to the porters and set off up the glacier.

Base Camp was situated just below a col on the few remaining patches of rock, we set up our tents and practised our roping up and rescue techniques. Soon the weather had changed for the worse and we retired to the shelter of our tents for a long cold night in the snow. The next day we were off up the glacier again to High Camp which appeared closer than it turned out to be. The views from high camp were spectacular but after the cloud came in we had nothing to do except cook some food and try to get some sleep ready for a very early summit attempt the following morning. It was here that most of us developed the characteristic headache of altitude sickness and so at 2 am we got up having had very little sleep. As soon as we left the relative shelter of our tents the cold air started to freeze our fingers and toes with 'Balders' suffering particularly badly from frost nip.

It was still dark when we set off with only the moon and our head torches lighting our way as we tried to pick out a safe route up onto the ridge line. At about 6000m 'Sid' started to show the symptoms of Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS) and it was decided that George who was suffering from a stomach upset would descend with 'Sid' down to High Camp. The rest of the team carried on

...a soldiers report

until 'Cliff' decided to stop, so he unroped and would wait for us while we pushed on for the summit. The progress was slow but steady and we had a quick rest at the base of a steep pitch just below Mera itself. The sun was starting to rise over the horizon giving us a clear view of High Camp, and the tiny dots that were our tents, below us. A quick scramble later we were lying exhausted on the top, feeling as if we were on top of the world. Everyone shook hands, congratulated each other and the 21 Engineer Regiment flag came out for a posing photo to prove we had made it.

Having only taken four hours to reach the top we left the summit and proceeded to slip and slide our way back down to High Camp, picking up Cliff on the way. Our kit was packed into enormous loads and we made our way back down to the edge of the glacier where the porters were waiting to relieve us of some of our load. Maybe it was the thought of a hot shower and a cold beer, but it only took us two days to get back to Lukla. Sure enough there was a small celebration at Lukla, which involved drinking a lot of 'Chang' (Rice Wine) with the porters and feeling bad for it the next morning. The flight out of Lukla to Kathmandu is not recommended for the squeamish, the runway is situated on the steep side of a hill with a large drop at one end into the valley and the plane just bumps down it, plummets off the edge and hopefully gains enough airspeed before it hits the mountains on the other side. Needless to say 'Balders' made good use of the little paper bags available!

Arriving back in Kathmandu well ahead of schedule we embarked on a frenzy of sightseeing, shopping and frequenting the hundreds of restaurants and bars. On the day of our departure, disaster struck, for some reason we had arrived at the airport too late and our tickets had already been sold. Luckily we managed to get three seats and Sid, Phil and myself drew the long straw to get on the



In the Hinku valley

plane, leaving George, Tony, Cliff and Balders in Kathmandu for another four days sunbathing. Overall the expedition was a great success, the scenery and the friendly locals made all the hard work worthwhile. It was an unique experience to spend six weeks in a country with such a diverse and lively culture and one that will never be forgotten.

First Aid for Mountaineers

I was updating my log book with my latest weekend walks when I glanced at my Red Cross First Aid certificate. It was crumpled and dog-eared from years of abuse in my log, more importantly it was out of date. We all know that we pass our first aid training annually but if out on the hill something more substantial is required. It was, I decided time to regain a professionally recognised chit. I had noticed in climbing magazines numerous adverts by first aid instructors who run courses specifically for mountaineers, normally over a weekend. Strangely enough a couple of weeks later I was informed by our publishers that they had been approached by one of these instructors who had taught other military personnel who told him that an advert in the AMA journal would be useful. When I became aware of this I decided to phone him have a chat and possibly go on a course. That was how, in October 1995 I arrived at the Tyn Y Coed in Capel Curig along with 10 others (all civilian) to attend a First Aid for Mountaineers and Instructors course.

The course instructor was Andy Sherriff, who lives in Bethesda and once instructed at Plas Yr Brenin. He is a recognised instruc-

tor by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and runs full HSE first aid courses, on top of these he also runs weekend mountain first aid courses recognised by the MLTB.

The weekend consisted of Saturday in the hotel being updated or taught first aid techniques and procedures including: vital signs, examining the casualty, emergency life support, control of bleeding, injuries to bone and soft tissue, expired air resuscitation and cardiac compression. Each subject was covered in a theory session followed by a hands on practical period. Sunday comprised of: shock identification and treatments, cold and heat injury, casualty triage, management of neck and spinal injuries and casualty lifting and transportation. The Sunday culminated with a casualty evacuation exercise which lasted 3 hrs on the slopes of Tryfan.

Everyone passed the course and agreed it had provided them with the confidence required to undertake lifesaving procedures in a wilderness environment. The weekend was extremely enjoyable and if your first aid ticket is not in date you should consider attending a course like this.

Exercise AMA Ascent



'High on the South Ridge of Singu Chuli with Huichuli in the left background'

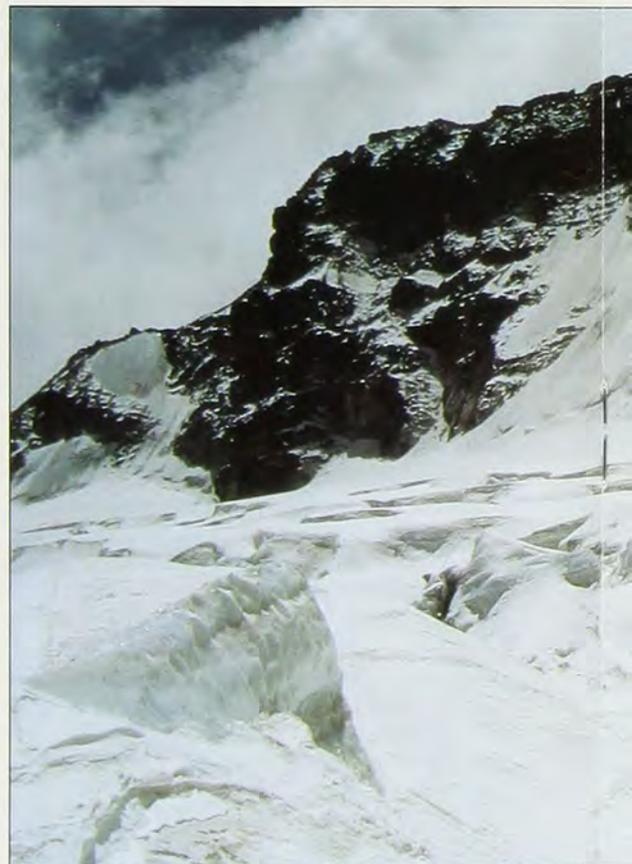


'The South Ridge and South Face of Singu Chuli'

Exercise Reme

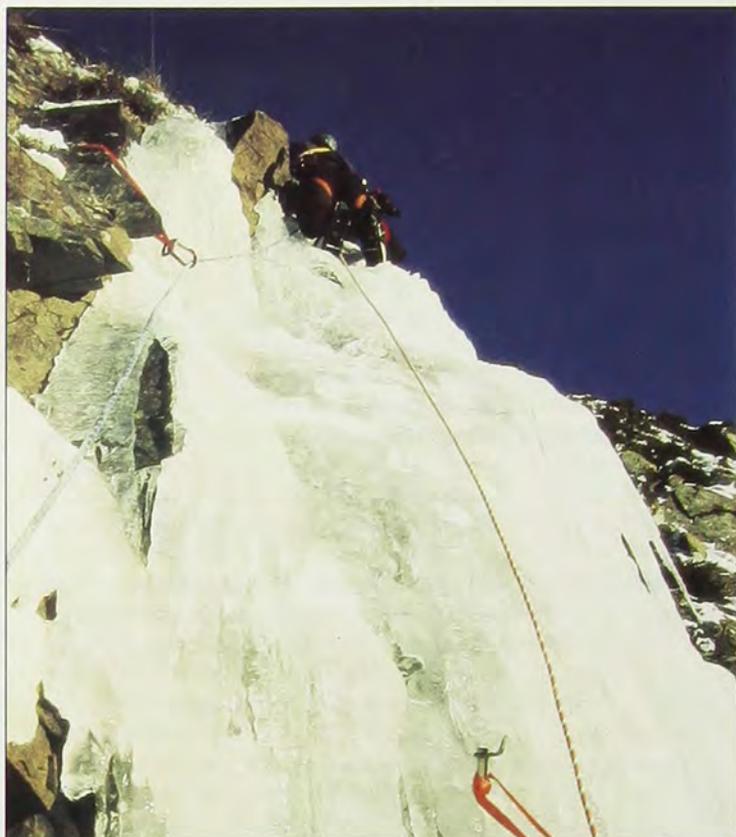


'Approaching the Hera. La.'



Sunshine and Water Ice

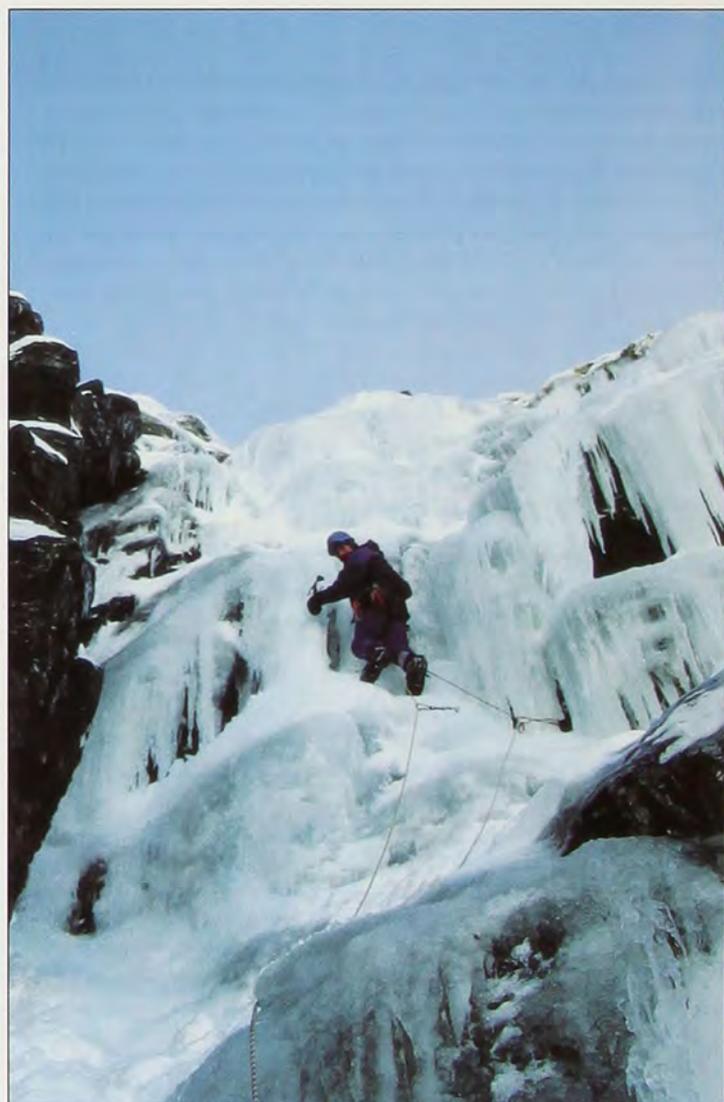
Camera Diamond



The big freeze on South Gully Beinn Udlaidh.



Approaching High Camp on Hera.



Ecuadorian

by P Cooke

In 1993 Cpl Paul Cook (5th Bn The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment) and Pte Mark Anderson (3rd Bn Duke of Wellington Regiment) climbed the three highest peaks in Kenya (Batian 17,058ft, Nelion 17,022ft & Point Lenana 16,355ft), whilst over there celebrating we had to set another goal, "why not climb over 20,000ft" Mark said. "There are some good mountains in Ecuador". Two years later we reached our goal by climbing Mt Chimborazo 20,703ft.

Ecuador lies on the west coast of South America, and as its name suggests the equator runs through it, (just north of Quito the capital). There are 30 volcanoes scattered across the Andean mountain range, and a main Pan American Highway running north to south through a long and gentle valley flanked by two parallel ranges of high mountains and active volcanoes this is called "The Avenue of Volcanoes", we knew we could not achieve all these mountains in just three weeks. The ones we were interested in were Mt Chimborazo, being the highest peak in Ecuador and due to the earths bulge is also the furthest point from the centre of the earth as a result, the nearest point on the earths surface to the sun, and Mt Cotopaxi which is believed to be the highest active volcano in the world.

Preparation for the trip was easy, there were only two of us, we both had climbed together on several expeditions and although Mark lives in Sheffield and myself some 215 miles south in Guildford, we managed to work out a plan, three days before we flew out I went to Sheffield to pack and buy last minute items. We flew from Manchester airport on Friday 9th June to Amsterdam to catch a Boeing 737 KLM plane bound for Quito. We booked into a hotel and planned to stay in Quito for two days, to settle in, acclimatise and to collect food and supplies.

We opted to start north near Quito move south using the Pan American Highway stopping off at as many volcanoes as we could leaving enough time to reach Chimborazo (which is the furthest south we wanted to go) then to head back to Quito for the flight home.

Our first move was by bus from Quito south to Lasso then a taxi through to the heart of Cotopaxi National Park to Mt Cotopaxi 19,348ft (5897m). This colossal mountain stood high dominating the horizon in the eastern Cordillera, a perfect cone covered by a thick blanket of snow which shines so brilliantly at sunset that it seems detached from the azure of the sky.

Cotopaxi is said to be the more beautiful of the mountains with its gentle curved snow slopes.

Navigation was easy all we had to do is follow the marker posts (known as Wands), and footprints left by fellow climbers, but this was our first mountain of the expedition and we found it difficult. Every step was a struggle, it was so boring and tiring just one plod after another. We had the added danger of crevasses some taking 20-30 minutes to cross. We reached the summit with not much to look at as the cloud was covering our position, but then a break in the clouds uncovered a huge hole next to the summit the crater steam coming out of this giant plug hole in the mountain.



Cpl Cooke and Pte Anderson on top of Chimborazo, 20,703 ft.

After a couple of photo's we made our descent arriving back at the refuge hut totally drained. Cotopaxi to the locals is called "Cuello De Luna" which means "Neck of the Moon" to us it was a pain in the neck.

In the morning we headed for Mt Tliniza which is due west of Cotopaxi which took two days to walk too. The first night we bivied in a ditch, and after a second day of walking we bivied on the side of the mountain. Tliniza has two peaks Tliniza Norte 16,818ft (5126m) which is just a scramble up volcanic rock and Tliniza Sur 17,267ft (5263m) a technical ice climb (one of the better peaks of our expedition), these took two days to complete. On the second day we wanted to get back to the highway as soon as we could so we could visit Banos. A chance for a shower for the first time for a week. A day sight seeing at the zoo to see native animals and Agoyan waterfalls. The following day we climbed Mt Tungurahua 16,733ft (5100m). It has been nicknamed "little hell" by many climbers and after a while I could understand why, it was very steep, very gravelly / sandy the mountainside was scattered with volcanic rock, it took us 4 hours to get to the snow line. We were both very tired and extremely cheesed off (to put it politely). We at last reached the summit another 4 hours later (what a great relief). On the third day we headed for Rio Verde waterfalls one of the most spectacular waterfalls in the world, you could not talk above the roar of the water. The next day was spent travelling from Banos by bus to Riobamba then a taxi to St Juan and a second taxi to Mt Chimborazo. On arriving at the hut we managed to get two hours of daylight to recce our intended route up the mountain, the sunset behind us lighting up the mountain. We made our attempt on Mt Chimborazo Summit 20,703ft (6310m), the local religious name for the mountain is "Taita" meaning father, it sure was the father of all mountains!

Escapade

The mountain is said to be similar to that of Cotopaxi not a difficult technical climb but because of its altitude makes it a hard mountain. Midnight we set off heading for the summit, Chimborazo is less interesting as a climb but holds a certain attraction by being Ecuador's highest peak.

After several hours of negotiating one steep slope after another, the process became something of a slog and I began to wonder if the summit will ever appear, we plodded onto what looked like the summit but as we approached it became obvious that the highest point was still in the far distance. In spite of the harsh physical demands the body had been under for what seemed like an eternity, the final summit came into view and our pace speeded up with excitement, well worth the effort, 8 hours walking saw us on the top. After the summit, we descended to the refuge hut, and a brief rest before heading back for Quito. It was once claimed by Charles Marie de la Condamine a French Scientific Explorer, to be the highest peak in the world. He was proved wrong by a English mountaineer Edward Whymper who became the first man to conquer Mt Chimborazo in December 1879. To get to Quito we headed west from Whymper hut round the mountain's lower slope to the road, to catch a bus to Quito.

We had achieved our aim and had also scaled three "bonus" peaks. It was a time for a break. So we booked a four day jungle trip to Cuyabeno Nature Park north near the Columbian border where we spent two days canoeing down the river to a lagoon, a day swimming with fresh water dolphins and walking through the jungle and then the last day in a motor boat back up river.

Twenty three days after arriving in Ecuador our expedition was over Saturday 1st July we flew back to England. The expedition was a great success We are now planning an expedition to finish off South America, by climbing Mt Aconcagua (22,000ft) in Argentina. We would appreciate any information that anyone has on climbing this mountain.

Rock Climbing *in Cyprus*

Cyprus is not the first destination one would think of for a climbing trip and in my eighteen months here I have concluded that there are far more appealing destinations to head to in search of warm rock. That said, many readers will at some stage visit the island either on posting, with the UN, as exercising troops or even on holiday. For those people it is worth packing boots and a harness.

Several areas exist which are worth a visit. In the East these are Cape Greco and, to a lesser extent, Pyla Cliffs. Both have routes at a variety of grades, though rarely above one-pitch. In the West there are some possibilities in Happy Valley (situated in Episkopi) and on the back of Aphrodite's Rock. The best climbing though lies in the extreme west on Drouseia Heights. Here some very sound rock can be found with a wealth of climbs of all grades. It is possible to wild-camp in the area and there is an excellent shaded camp-site in Polis, some twenty minutes to the north.

Recently the climbing scene has been markedly improved by two climbers from the UN. Sergeant Paddy Ryan and Bombardier Dick

Underwood used their six months here to climb and, more importantly, catalogue everything. They have produced a new guide to Cape Greco and will shortly publish a guide to Drouseia. These are a marked improvement on previous guides, being well graded and summarised and featuring Paddy's excellent topos. A journalist from 'On the Edge' magazine commented to me that they were of superior quality to MOST found in UK guides!

The other positive aspect to Cypriot climbing is the weather. Cyprus enjoys 300 days sunshine per annum and it is *extremely* rare for the temperature to reach freezing at the crags. In addition all the climbing areas enjoy stunning locations and the guarantee of never having to queue for routes. Whilst the climbing is certainly no match to that closer to home, I would argue that those already planning a visit would easily find enough to keep their hand in. Those seeking further information or copies of the guide should write to Major Crawford on the following address:

Commandant, CJSATC, BFPO 58 (Fax 4185).

Darwin, Bio Diversity and D Himalaya

by *D Robinson.*

What, you may well ask has this title got to do with the AMA? What indeed? The link being that I'm a soldier in the TA and a member of the AMA. The above was an expedition undertaken in October 1995 through my work. Within the TA I'm a soldier in 2 RGBW, at work I'm a research scientist working at the Institute of Hydrology, Wallingford, Oxon. As a slightly off beat article I thought it would be interesting to describe the expedition and work undertaken in a relatively poorly described part of the Indian Himalaya. It gives one an idea of what TA soldiers do when not grubbing around in the undergrowth.

The Darwin initiative was set up by the British Government following the 1992 Earth Summit - Rio. The initiative supports British scientific organisations to carry out work in biodiversity throughout the world in collaboration with local institutions. One of the projects currently being funded is being coordinated by the Institute of Hydrology to look at biodiversity in Himalayan rivers. Regional surveys are being carried out in Nepal, NE and NW India to sample the biology, sediments and chemistry of the rivers from the glaciers to the lowland plains. The data collected are analyzed to identify the gradients which exist across the Himalaya and also down the river systems. This can be used to show the impact of mans activities such as intensive agriculture in the middle hills. This work is related to a number of other projects being carried out by the Institute of Hydrology team which is aiming to quantify the sediment loads of these major rivers and to determine the ways in which pollutants are transported into the rivers. Computer models are being developed which will actually be used as management tools to help reverse the rapidly deteriorating water quality problems of the Himalaya. This project is coordinated by Dick Johnson of the Institute of Hydrology and the collaborating partners are Cardiff University and the University of Nanital (India).

My role in all of this was a bit of an accident and very fortuitous. I had mentioned to a colleague my interest in hill walking and suggested if a vacancy for any reason should arise on one of the expeditions I would like to be considered. Stranger things have happened but a number of weeks before the expedition was due to leave they found themselves a man down. After a number of telephone calls I was recruited to the team.

Within a few weeks of returning from the AMA meet at Capel Curig I found myself jetting off to the mystique of the Hindu Kush. Arrival in Delhi was at 2 pm on a sultry afternoon. After passing through Indian immigration we made our way through the hustle and bustle of the airport with a myriad of people all wanting to carry your bags. Driving into the centre of Delhi the first thing to strike you after the heat is the traffic and smell. One can taste the pollution having a kind of gritty texture to it. Having remained in Delhi overnight a few last minute preparations were made before an early morning departure to Nanital, a seven hour bus ride across the plain and into the mountains. After crossing the Ganges and the Ramganga on the plain our next stop was Haldwani. From here one begins to climb. There is a strikingly

abrupt change from plain to foothills caused by the uplift occurring as the Deccan plateau has surged into the Asian plate. There is also a marked vegetation boundary from the plain, where every square inch has a crop on it, to the hill slopes too steep for sustainable agriculture and so left covered with dense woodland.

Nanital is situated high in the foothills at some 2700m. The town with some three thousand inhabitants is a remnant of the days of the British Raj. It is situated on the hill slopes surrounding a large green lake, with a cricket pitch no less at one end. Overnighting here our journey begins the following day with a 10 hour jeep ride further into the mountains. All those days spent being bumped around in the back of a Landrover over Salisbury Plain is excellent preparation for travelling in India. Our final destination was a village on the far side of Gwaldam from where we were due to pick up our guides and subsequently our porters. I was hoping for some stunning views of 6000m peaks but as with so many mountain regions the cloud obscured the view.

Arising to a bright but hazy morning I caught my first site of the three peaks of Trisul (7122m) a distant snow capped summit in all its morning glory. From here the two teams split up to follow their allotted routes. The first was to follow the Pindar river up to the Pindari glacier and to within site of Nanda Devi (7816m) the highest peak in the Indian Himalaya. Our group was to head North towards Trisul and Nanda Ghunti (6273m) and then bear East to finish at Ghat in a fortnights time. Our team composed of 5 scientists, 2 guides and thirteen porters began its trail.

The route was not a regular trekking route indeed nor is the entire area. The main reason for any trekking in this area is the series of pilgrimage routes to Roopkund lake and Hom Kund. The fact that this was not a regular trekking area was much in evidence from our porters. As one of my colleagues who had extensive experience in Nepal commented, "they have nothing on the Nepalese who will carry anything from 30 kilograms." These guys were carrying 15 kilo's and walked at a very slow pace. Our real work began with the first stream we came across. I was to measure the sediment load and Roger my colleague was to collect samples which could be analyzed for their chemistry. Back in the UK this would be related to the geology and land use. The biologists set to work recording some 75 different biological parameters to describe the stream ecosystem.

The first few days were spent gaining height, climbing up through the extensive rhododendron woodland, unlike the those found in Britain these trees grow to heights of 20-30m. This route was to take us to the first pass we would cross. The tree line in this area is at just over 3000m after which one moves into rough grassland, surprisingly like North Wales. Going still higher the grassland gives way to barely colonised rock and then to the snow covered peaks. At this time of year the snow line is at about 4000m. The first pass we crossed was just below the peak of Jatropani(4048m). Whichever direction one looks in their is an endless sea of peaks

Development in The Garhwal India

as far as the eye can see. It's at this time that one starts to reflect at the seclusion of this area, especially as the Himalayan vultures and Lamergaiers circle over head. Our journey now headed down into the village of Wan. Here we managed our first real wash, stood naked under a water fall of a near by mountain stream. Naked white people are quite a spectacle for the local passers by to whom a European is still quite a novelty.

The first week nearly over and we began our ascent which was to take us to the highest part of the route. The first night on the route up was spent at Bedni a rest stop on the pilgrimage route to Roopkund. It consisted of a number of small stone built shacks at about 3200m. The following day took us over the first pass 4200m to Bagwpassa where there was another stone hut in which to spend the night. By now temperatures at night were dropping to 15 degrees below, a might chilly. This tends to make sampling rivers a little cold. Anchor ice had formed on the river beds making sampling a difficult task. At this point the ravages of Indian food in the form of rice and lentils, a cold and mild adema took its toll on me. The porters refused to go on over the snow covered pass beyond Roopkund lake and so it was decided to amend the route. After a cold night the rest of the team having come this far decided to go to Roopkund lake (4778m) and the top of the pass below the high Trisul massif. I remained behind spending the day feeling deeply unwell sharing the stone hut with a collection of vermin. It's times like this you think why am I here? and then you

look out from on top of the world and it all makes sense. The lake at Roopkund has been referred to as the 'mystery lake' this is because of the human skeletons found here. I was told that these were visible where the snow had been blown away. From Bagwpassa the journey was downwards to Sutol. Impressive views of both Trisul and Nanda Ghunti were afforded for the next few days as we walked down the ridge to the valley. From Sutol the journey was a straight forward walk down the valley to Ghat sampling as we went. A fortnight after we had begun, our journey ended in Ghat all that remained the two day journey back to Delhi.

For anyone thinking of travelling to this area the Garhwal Himalaya provides a beautiful, unspoilt area for trekking. The mountains are magnificent each rising in splendid isolation. Trekking routes tend to follow established paths between villages or pilgrimage routes. Most of them go above 3000m to cross passes, though lowlevel routes are available, but longer. Guides are best hired in a centre such as Nanital unless your Hindi is fluent. Food is an important consideration, if you go native Dal-Bat (rice and lentils) is the staple diet and can prove very monotonous. A plentiful supply of ketchup, peanuts and sweets proved invaluable. October is a good time to travel as it's dry though it does tend to become chilly above 3500m. A magical place and a trip which will remain in my memory for years to come.

Looking north from Palballa to Nando Ghunti.



Mardi Himal Nepal 95

By Spr Campbell

On 23 Sep 95 seven members of 22 Engr Regt set off aboard a decidedly ancient Aeroflot 747 for Nepal on Ex Mardi Himal. 23 hours and a stop in Moscow for a few drops of vodka later we off loaded in Kathmandu airport. We were greeted at the airport by a mob from our trekking company and were quickly whisked into the melee of cabs, rickshaws and people that forms Kathmandu, the gateway to the Himalayas.

It wasn't long (3hrs in fact) before Cpl Tex Laramy was leading some of the team in a taxi race through the city, not wanting to damage international relations too badly they decided to change vehicles when one of the taxis fell to pieces. They changed to rickshaws and were soon to be seen three abreast racing down the main street - Chris Boardman would have been proud, even if the police were less amused. On returning to the hotel later that night they decided to do a bit of skinny dipping in the hotel pool, a great idea until Lcpl 'Reiff' Reiffer was bitten by a rat. The expd leader decided that we had better get out onto the trail ASAP!

The aim of the expedition was to climb Mt Chulu East (6225m) and to walk the Annapurna circuit - 250Km through very varied terrain with some of the best views in the World. We had organised the trip through a trekking company and because of all the climbing gear we looked like something out of Shipton's era with 25 porters, cooks and guides as well as a dining tent and table and chairs.

We soon settled into the routine of 'bed tea' at about 6.00am followed by breakfast, an early start, lunch at 1130am and into the next campsite by about 4 pm. The first few days of the trek involved a steady climb up through forests and paddy fields, we were still in the 'rainy season' and so it was extremely hot and humid, much to the delight of Cpl Al Young AGC(SPS) who gave a good impression of a human waterfall. By day five however, we reached the high, dry Manang valley and our base camp at Hongde. This town had an airstrip, 150 prayer wheels and not much else. The people in the area were mostly Tibetan and needed to be tough to live in the very thin air at an altitude of over 10,000ft.

After a days acclimatisation we set off away from the main trekking route towards our objective. We were now beginning to notice the altitude which left us short of breath, our next campsite was in a stunning location looking south to the Annapurnas. At this stage however following the guide book description to "Make a long detour to the right to avoid the obvious waterfalls" we ended up going too far right into an area with no water and nowhere to camp. We had to climb up an horrendous scree slope to a col at 5300m before we could pitch the tents, this was 'too high too fast'



Crossing the Thorong La at 5300m.

and we spent an extremely uncomfortable night with most of the team suffering severe headaches. In the morning it was clear that we would have to go down. We could see the route that we should have followed but because we were short of time we decided to complete the Annapurna circuit rather than have another attempt at the peak and have to retrace the route in to the mountain.

The circuit continued along the Manang valley and up to the Thorong La, a pass at 5400m. At this stage we were well acclimatised and so we camped just below the pass. In the morning whilst we were sat drinking our tea and eating our porridge we were very amused to see the 'ordinary trekkers' struggle past having set off from the nearest lodge at 5.30am. As they were mostly German they were not amused to be greeted with a cheerful "Good morning, would you like some tea" in the best English accent. From the pass the remaining week of the trek continued downhill from the semi desert region of Muktinath to the paddy fields and hot springs at Tatopani before climbing again to Poon Hill, a famous view point. Our last campsite after 21 days trekking was beside the road and we entertained the locals by leaping straight into the river and washing under a waterfall.

We spent two days in Pokhara following a bus journey from hell with 61 people on the top of a bus - let alone those inside. Some of the team managed a days whitewater rafting on the way back to Kathmandu where we had a last few hectic hours before the flight home - the less said about that bit the better!

The expedition was organised by Capt JPC Owens RE and other team members not already mentioned were LCpl "Rolly" Rowlands, Spr "agent" I Connor and Spr "all the gear" Campbell.

Wandering

By Capt Manners

The rain pounded on the sloping windows of the Nevisport cafe, determined torrents had put paid to sensible mountain activities. Yet another day would be spent sitting out warm wet southerlies drinking coffee, leafing through well thumbed climbing magazines and fingering excessively expensive and flamboyantly coloured breathable water proofs. Valuable holiday time ticked away loudly. For the regular visitor to the Highlands of Scotland this will be a familiar story. So what else is there to do? Whilst the effect of this article, nestled in the glossy pages of the AMA magazine may be limited, (perhaps to keeping the rain off your head) it may give the reader a few, perhaps a little tongue in cheek, ideas when the only sound course of action appears to be a cafe crawl.

Fort William as Britain's answer to 'Chamonix' or 'Zermatt' to be fair does have two fairly crucial tourist culling weapons; midges and the weather! Without these the A82 would compete with the M25 as Britain's largest car park! The 'Fort' as it is known, is situated within a convenient distance of some of the most dramatic mountain scenery and certainly the best all season climbing and mountaineering in Britain. Arguably its main problem, as is painfully obvious to those who have lived and climbed in Lochaber, its the unpredictability of its weather. On a sunny day the west coast is second to none for mountain activities, when in monsoon it is unattractive and unwelcoming; or so it would seem....

On account of the tourist industry the 'Fort' is well furnished with accommodation, from patches of wet grass where masochists, (or students) pitch tents and look miserable to rather grand hotels where film stars chill out after a hard day on the set. There are few bunk houses within walking distance of the town centre, perhaps the only truly convenient one is Alan Kimber's; a 10 - 12 bed self catering facility half way up the hill side of Fort William. There are plenty of other rather less accessible bunk houses generally at around £6 to £7, sociable and communal but B & B's do provide tough competition when one is cold, wet and miserable. From around £10 in the 'monsoon' season B & B's are good value and have the added attraction of clean sheet, breakfast and usually a TV. Bunk houses can be very sociable but for a few pennies more a B & B is a pleasant alternative. The Tourist Centre in the 'Fort' has a comprehensive accommodation list and can generally put right the soggy bedraggled mountaineer who needs a break from the usual folded down car back seat. A number of caravan sites offer a reasonable standard of accommodation; 6 - 8 person 'luxury' caravans with hot water, heating, shower etc. all for a mere £25 per night. Again the Tourist Centre will oblige. For service groups Tulloch, at £1 per night must be the best value bunk house in Scotland and is well placed for both eastern and western mountain rangers.

Once appropriate accommodation is located one can hard target down the high street in an attempt to avoid the torrents of persistent rain and begin to explore the wealth of amusements available to pass the time. Fairly high up the order of priorities will be the requirements for food. Nevis Sport is hard to beat with the added attraction for those Goretex and guide book magpies amongst us. In addition weather reports are displayed as are details of future lectures. There are plenty of watering holes in the 'Fort' but the

Nevis Bar does offer an open fire, the history of mountaineering told by black and white photographs and a Ordnance Survey map of the central highlands from coast to coast. You too can rub your frothy finger over the Munros that could have been or that remote accentless climb now weeping with neglect.

Further afield there is of course the infamous Clachaig Hotel home of the mountaineering tall story and sanctuary to owners of offensively smelly polypropylene underwear. This is the place to start with the bottle on the left side of the top shelf and work right when mother nature is throwing a tantrum. Here too is the place to see larger than life 'Jimmy the Bush' ejecting would be flashers, trousers still around their ankles. In the event of characteristically atrocious weather bending tent hoops to the limit several pints of Heather Ale soon dull the comfort sensors and stimulate the effects of AMS the next morning quite well.

Back in the 'Fort' and in need of physical exertion without a soaking the Lochaber Leisure Centre may be worth a visit. Amongst other facilities the centre sports a bouldering wall which, if not too busy, can be used for 'fancy rope tricks'! If the intent is to bluff those city slickers back home that all was snowy and alpine then half an hour in the solarium may just be the icing on the cake. Less physical but with the attraction of Gillespies on tap is the 10 pin bowling alley behind both Safeway and MacDonalds drive through, (which should be completed by the summer). Less physical still are the various museums and displays, some of which are quite interesting and of course there is the Distillery Visitor Centre home of the 'Dew of Nevis' whisky, not shortage of raw materials here!

Despite the guarantee of a good soaking those who have travelled a long distance regularly go out in the hills regardless. Perhaps the thought of their shandy drinking southern mates wearing their 'I told you so' T shirts on their return is all too much. On a more sombre note every year weekend warriors are killed by their own determination to get something done every year despite the publicity in the climbing press and the tabloids. That said at the time of writing 30,000 people took to the hills in Scotland for the weekend there were no deaths only several broken bones, (involving 3 rescue teams searching for 14 hours!). I must admit I do admire those who are prepared to offer such commitment to their pastime passion but low level bothying or camping, low level navigating or even banging your way up a disused/unknown crag (controversial) can offer sport and enjoyment without playing Russian Roulette in the mountains.

In the event of bad weather conditions why not try a different venue? It takes only 1 1/2 hours to reach the Corrie Ciste car park in the Cairngorms from the 'Fort', conditions can be radically different. What price safety? With a little imagination the west coast has a great deal to offer despite the occasional period of unsettled weather. Don't despair there's more to it than meets the eye. Perhaps close scrutiny of the weather forecast and/or a quick phone call before coming up may avoid disappointment. If all else fails you can always dash back down south and get some credits in with the family or the in-laws.

Spaceshot

By Maj S J Derben & WO2 S Blake

Legendary tales of bad rock, tenuous protection, epic descents, inhospitable climates, poisonous flora and fauna and wicked vertical bushwhacking keep most American climbers from visiting Zion National Park's sandstone cliffs. Unfortunately, we were not aware of this and anyway we were so desperate to get a big wall climb in, to resurrect a poor encounter with the Californian weather, that it probably would not have made any difference.

The team had planned to climb routes on the big walls of Yosemite Valley. Unfortunately, we had been washed off Washington Column while half way up the Prow (V, 5.10a/A3, 1200 ft) and did not manage to get within 200 ft of the Nose on El Cap before we were given a good soaking (200 ft up it was snowing!) The forecast was much the same, so with spirits dampened we had headed for some sun kissed cragging in Joshua Tree, Southern California. After 3 days of wearing are fingers and knuckles to the bone, and bronzing are bodies, we drove up to Zion for a last attempt to get a big wall route in.

Zion National Park is a 3 1/2 hour drive from Las Vegas and a 4 1/2 hour drive from Salt Lake City. The park is host to many steep big walls ranging from 600 feet to 2,200 feet, all located along the Virgin River Canyon and its drainages. Zion's Navajo sandstone is soft and unpredictable; loose blocks teeter in cracks and on ledges, and flakes can break off at any time. When the rock gets wet it loses two-thirds of its strength and can crumble easily.

WO2 Steve Blake and I decided to attempt Spaceshot (V, 5.6, A2+, 1100 ft, 10 pitches), a moderate classic. As yet there is no route guide for Zion; Topos, which have to be copied, are held by the Rangers in the Visitors Centre together with bird restrictions and a recommended rack.

The following day we found ourselves on the last big ledge of the route, gearing up for the first aid pitch, having despatched the first three pitches in good fashion. It started with a bolt ladder of dubious quality. Luckily, being new to the game, I was marvel-

lously unaware of the different types. The distance between the first and second bolt was huge and I convinced myself I could not reach it. Steve had found a long stick with some tape on it at the ledge - a cheater stick. We had brought our own extendible version, but because of the small hole size on the hanger I could not clip it. Struggling I stepped up into the top step of my etriers to get a better angle and then realised I could reach it anyway! With the 70 foot bolt ladder out of the way I got into the crack proper. The gear was superb, all big nuts, and because of the nature of the rock they seated really well.

I was about three quarters of the way up when I heard a loud, dull clang. Steve shouted up, "good job I was wearing a helmet you've just dropped a wire on me! There's another one, it's raining nuts down here." I had badly clipped the medium wires back onto my chest harness and had lost 2 x No 5 rocks. Luckily they had landed on Steve's belay ledge. Pressing on, I was about 40 feet from the belay when I heard a rumble and 30 seconds later it began to rain. It was like the Prow all over again and within a matter of minutes I was soaked. I looked down at Steve who had managed to get his waterproof on. I knew this was our last chance to get a big wall route in, so shielding my eyes I moved on. The possible brittleness of the wet rock concerned me, but luckily the headwall was so steep it protected the route from the worst of the weather. By the time I reached the belay the rain had stopped.

The Sun came out for the next 2 pitches and we were treated to some fantastic scenery in a superb climbing position. The exposure was breathtaking. I had just led a superb 150 ft diagonal crack and was hanging on 2 dubious pegs with a friend backing them up in the crack. The pitch above looked a complete nightmare!

Steve: At this stage the overhanging nature of the wall made upward progress by whatever means preferable to retreat. The next 50 m pitch continued the diagonal and was too large for any of our nuts, moreover we only had 5 Spring Loaded Cams (SLCs) that would fit.

Steve Blake high up on the lead wall.



Zion Valley

A view down the valley taken from the route.

It had taken over half an hour to reach my high point and to reach it I had been leap-frogging the SLCs up the crack as far a part as possible. Below me I had to leave two in the crack; one 30' out from the belay and another at 60'; insurance should those my weight was on failed. I was now a long way above the last piece. It was scary work and my nervous tension could be felt through the rope by Scott below. His situation was probably worse than mine; while I had the technical difficulties to focus on, he was for the moment a passive participant who had all the time in the world to ponder our situation, the storm, receding daylight and the void between his toes. He rightly perceived that should the gear I was on fail, then there was scant chance that I would fall less than 60'. How the protection and the belay would react to such forces was the main course for a hungry imagination. In addition, the dawning realisation that seconding this pitch could prove more scary than leading it. With tremendous relief I hit the belay. It was here that Scott's problems would begin.

Scott: When I cut the haulbag loose it spun out in a dizzying arc 15' from the cliff and 40' to the right. It was really difficult to take the stretch up in the rope because the first piece of gear was 20' to the right and 30' above me. I managed to get a left hand jam in the crack and took the friend out. Releasing the jam I plummeted down, swung out and to the right all at the same time. It was the most terrifying roller coaster ride of my life!

Steve: Above I was engrossed in hauling the sac and sorting the gear, oblivious to the drama below, although I thought I heard the faint cry of an eagle in the distance. By now Scott was approaching the next piece and emboldened by his experience below repeated the process - but kept his eyes open! This time the noise was clear - we must have roused a sleeping Pterodactyl, or giant bird of prey, for the hullabaloo wasn't human. Scott cleaned the rest of the pitch at record speed fuelled by adrenaline and a desire to return to the merely vertical! A wide-eyed partner whooped onto the belay and we quickly sorted and exchanged gear ready for him to lead the last pitch.

Scott: I thought the last pitch was only a short bolt ladder. As it was I had to make a couple of free moves to get up onto a ledge. I looked down from the ledge that was only 18 inches thick and cantilevered out with a 1000' drop straight beneath it. It was exposure such as I had never experienced before. I followed an overhanging line of rusting bolts and drilled pegs. At the top I was forced to leave my etriers and make a couple of awkward and shaky free moves, including a 10' layback, to make the final ledge. When Steve cut loose the haulbag it swung straight out from the cliff some 40'. Alarming for Steve the same thing happened to him when he started jugging up! We spared a few seconds to congratulate each other before making for the top of the descent. The description was accurate and following some serious downward bushwhacking through 6 full abseils we finally got down.

Overall we took 14 hours to complete the route, a good time as many parties are obliged to bivouac on the rim and descend the following day. We had managed to get a big wall route at our very last opportunity before travelling home. Zion is well worth a visit for the aspirant big wall climber, especially if you get washed out of Yosemite!



Paper Chase

(or 'Life Beyond ML(S), AJSMEL and JSRCI')

by Maj R Woollven

BACKGROUND

So you want to become an MIA? (If you don't know what I mean by this, pass on rapidly to the next article). You may find the next few paragraphs of use and interest - I have just survived the assessment at Plas-y-Brenin so am qualified to talk on 'course survival techniques'.

I am assuming that you hold ML(Summer), have wide ranging experience of both general mountaineering and rock climbing and are experienced in both leading groups in the hills and teaching rockclimbing.

Firstly, are you sure you want/need the qualification? Your reasons are your own but you will be grilled as to both ability, motivation and applicability on your assessment. Every judgement you make and decision you take for 4 days and nights will be under intense-scrutiny and justifications will be sought (Think of it as the most intense command task you've ever done, double it and you're about there for pressure!).

If you are sure, you'll have registered (details from the MLTB) and attended training. Then, after a period of consolidation and further training, on to assessment.

Running as a common thread throughout the 4 days are the following:

- Do you look the part - is your clothing and gear in good order and appropriate?
- Do you meet the precise requirements of the assessment standards?
- Do you have, and can you demonstrate, sound mountaineering judgement in a wide variety of situations?

DAY 1

The personal climbing day. You will be expected to lead a route of at least VS 4c, arranging all belays and runners and keeping a general eye on a nominally competent second. Afterwards, a descent from the crag by abseil will be your responsibility. Don't show off by picking a harder route unless you know you will succeed - if you fail on it, it's 'Good night Vienna!'. Incidentally, there is not much quarter given for bad weather VS 4c in the rain and wind can be an interesting experience.

After tea you sit a general knowledge paper testing your all round mountaineering knowledge - get reading! (Historical, technical and ethical matters, natural history and legislation are all areas of concern).

After dinner comes the night navigation. This involves you in a minimum of 3 legs, using 1:25000 maps at speed over rough ground. Prisoners aren't often taken, so if at all unsure, practise thoroughly. You need to get it right first time, every time - do your confirmation privately, not by running around. You *should* be back in time for last orders.....

DAY 2

Improvised rescues. You will be placed in positions on the crag, given problems and expected to provide safe, efficient and slick solutions. If you have to think about it, you will have trouble! Unlike the RCL and JSRCI assessments, not all problems will be 'straight up and down'. Leader and second falls on traverses are likely to come your way. You could again be operating on VS 4c ground all day. One of the scenarios will indeed be 'the crag evacuation from hell' - keep your head and go for it! (Don't forget reassurance and first aid - the indian rope tricks are not the full solution). After tea and again after dinner you will attend and give lectures - 15 mins on a mountaineering related subject. Be original - and practise it - remember the 7Ps.

DAY 3

The client day - teaching climbing. You will be issued with 2 total strangers who you will have to brief, motivate(!), look after and take climbing. Be safe, get the miles in and get back to the bus on time! Make sure it is someone else who is the incandescent stress-ball high on the crag with 2 novices and a jammed rope at ENDEX - not you.

DAY 4

Scrambles and environmental day. You will be expected to produce a fluent and skilful performance whilst safeguarding 2 companions on the ascent and descent of Grade 3 ground. When not on the sharp end you will be being grilled by the assessor as to your ability to inspire novices by your conversation, knowledge and general attitude. Incidentally, the ability to follow a route in a scrambles guide book is very useful. When you reach the bus, relax - it's all over, for better or worse (As a small advert, the AJSMEL course at JSMTTC (Wales) gives a good grounding in scrambling).

RESULTS

After the assessment team debrief session you will be given a piece of paper with your name and result - pass/defer [1 or 2 day]/fail. Whatever the outcome, now is the time to retire to the bar for some anaesthetic! Your debrief, both collective and individual, comes on the morning of the last day, after which you are free to escape - or in my case, head for a long sleep.

SUMMARY

In conclusion, the assessment is very intense and tiring but, in a masochistic sort of way, highly enjoyable. Before you go for it make sure you want to do it, you are properly prepared and don't go early - a deferment is embarrassing at best and 2 sequential deferments on the same subject means you go back to square one - better to be 110% ready first time around. Good luck.

A Walk in the Park...

by Maj Nichols

The editorial in a recent edition of *Army Mountaineer* highlighted the lack of articles on small scale and UK based mountaineering activities. This piece, which is an account of 2 winter mountain walking days spent in the Lake District over my Christmas holidays, should help to redress the balance and may encourage others to try something similar. Both routes were adapted from W A Poucher. *The Lakeland Peaks* (Constable) and were chosen for their proximity to Kendal where I was staying with my in-laws and because I had not been on these routes before.

Day One. High Street (828m) from Kentmere via Nan Bield Pass returning by Kentmere Pike, 17 km, 5 1/2 hrs, adapted from Poucher Routes 98, 101. Conditions were perfect: cold, clear and very bright with hardly a breath of wind. Snow

glare ensured that I kept my sunglasses on for much of the day. I saw no-one else until I reached Nan Bield Pass after which I was rarely out of site of other walkers. Easy paths led up on to the gently curving plateau that is High Street, where I stopped for lunch and took in the magnificent views. I reversed the route to Nan Bield Pass through ankle deep snow then pushed on up to the ridge leading to Kentmere Pike, which took me back to Kentmere along easy slopes. This proved to be an ideal warm-up route which combined satisfying views with easy navigation and good going.

Day Two. High Street again, this time from the North, from Patterdale, returning via Grey Crag to Hearts Top, 17 km, 5 hrs, adapted from Poucher Routes 92, 90. Conditions were again excellent and I climbed steadily out of Patterdale toward Boredale Hause, with the valley bathed in bright winter sunshine. An early stop for lunch at Angle Tarn was fortuitous as the wind soon picked up. The next leg was a long haul over broken ground to the foot of High Street and up to the trig point. The wind here was fierce and bitterly cold - no place to linger - and I pressed on to the beacon on Thornthwaite Crag for a brew and to view my return route. Poucher's route, down the very steep side of High Street was obviously designed for summer walking and looked risky in deep snow, so I followed the spur down to Grey Craggs. This was well marked with cairns and fresh footsteps in the snow. The going was good until the final descent which was very steep. I opted for ski poles and glissading whereas others had bum-slid down. I



High Street from Thornthwaite Crag with Ventmore Pike in the background.

was glad I had an ice axe and crampons with me although I didn't use either. The trek back along forest paths to Patterdale was hazardous due to extensive icing up of puddles and streams, although detours were easily found.

Author's note: The author is the Meets Secretary of the Royal Engineers Mountaineering and Exploration Club (REMEC) which is a feeder organisation for the AMA as well as a long established club in its own right.

Gray Crag from High Street.



Book Reviews

ICE WORLD - *Techniques and Experiences of Modern Ice Climbing*

By JEFF LOWE

Questions: How do you make a completely safe abseil from a vertical wall of thick ice without leaving any gear behind? What is dry tool climbing? How do you "torque"? When should you rig ice screws in series and how? How should you modify the pick of any factory-made axe to give you the best possible performance? Answers: Read Ice World.

No amount of eulogising by me is really going to do justice to this book. It is all things to all men and by all men I mean all women too. To make the point most of the "instructional" photos are of women climbers or mixed teams. It is more than a just manual of technique, more than a history of ice climbing or the Jeff Lowe diary and more than a well written guidebook; in fact it seems to be in a genre of its own. There is one thing very definite about it, though: it is utterly inspiring, even to old alpenstock-and-tricouni buffers like me.

So what do you get for twenty quid? First A Brief History of Ice but a better one than you have read before and full of surprising facts such as that downward pointing curve on Anderl Heckmair's 1938 Eigerwand axe that was 30 years ahead of its time. Then, through The Ice Experience, you are given an insight into what makes ice men tick. Although the tales are told in straightforward style and with impressive humility you are made more and more aware, in these accounts of the desperately difficult and highly eventful, of the considerable contribution of the author to world ice climbing.

By page 90 you have already enjoyed two books of packed 9 point print - but read on! The next book is all about what its all about: what to wear, what to use, what snow and ice are, food, training, basic and advanced techniques and hundreds of other tips. You would have to buy it for the sheer range and clarity of these hundred tightly written pages. The author then launches into his final book: a survey of pioneering possibilities - yes folks, still plenty to do out there - and a survey of 16 of the world's best ice climb, leaving you with a feeling that there is possibly nothing more to be said on the subject. Which could be true. Four brilliant books in one. Can't be bad, eh?

254 pages with numerous plates, mostly colour. Although the print size is small it is in two column format so very readable. Published by The Mountaineers ISBN0-89886-446-1 paper; ISBN0-8988-471-2 cloth; Available from Cordee, 3A de Montfort St., Leicester or in all good book shops, price £19.95 (softback).

Tim King.

PEMBROKE - *The Climbers Club Guide*

Compiled by John Harwood and Dave Viggers

Currently on special offer at Cordee (see below)

We have had an abundance of riches recently. The CC Swanage Guide is definitive. So is Ice World. I have just bought Himalaya Alpine Style, another high quality production. Now we have this, the much awaited, much argued about and, for some of us at least, much wanted guide to the Pembrokeshire coast.

I have not climbed much in Pembroke and there has been no time to evaluate the guidebook fully but it is undoubtedly the most comprehensive guide to the region yet published and is likely to become - if it is not automatically - the authority. At four centimetres thick it is certainly the bulkiest tome so far printed on Pembroke rock and the editors have sensibly repeated the successful formula adopted for Cheddar and Swanage by splitting the guide into two volumes so that each can be removed from the protective sleeve and used separately.

The all-round quality of the guide is high, with good colour photos and a feature new to CC guides - mug shots of the main first ascensionists. Nipper Harrison has certainly grown a lot since he was one of the Bristol boys back in the seventies - he really was a nipper then. Don Sargeant has produced clear maps as he did for the Swanage guide and despite the use of a sans serif font the text is very readable. Frankly the whole guide is mouth-watering, packed with clear and concise information on hundreds and hundreds of routes of all grades. A particularly good feature is the section on essential access information. This, together with the words on climbing style - actually a plea for ethics - are a great help in an age where doing your own thing and damning everyone else has become all too prevalent. Another brilliant job - enough said.

830 - yes 830 - pages with numerous photos, diagrams and maps.

Published by The Climbers Club. General Editor Ian Smith. ISBN 0-901-601-57-8.

Distributed by Cordee, 3A de Montfort St., Leicester and available from them direct at the special price of £12.95 plus £1.50 postage.

Now, I really must stop reading all these books and get out on the crags!

Tim King.

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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 JSME course as assessment. Even if you didn't register with us but have got a UEL or JSME 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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DR Climbing Walls International

MOVING MOUNTAINS - DR CREATES FIRST MOBILE CLIMBING WALLS FOR BRITISH ARMY

DR Climbing Walls, world renowned for its innovative design and construction techniques of artificial climbing walls, has recently completed two commissions for the British Army. Both jobs incorporate unique design features which have been developed by Don Robinson, chairman and technical director of the company and the inventor of artificial climbing walls, with his team at their base in Otley on the edge of the Yorkshire Dales.

The first installation is an outdoor tower at the army field training centre at Warcop in Cumbria which is used by the army, navy and airforce. At 70 feet high it is not only the tallest tower in the UK, but is also the first to allow free abseiling down the centre of the structure, for use in bad weather and to simulate caving conditions. An internal staircase gives access to three additional external abseiling points from two platforms at 20 and 40 feet high, and from the top of the tower. The tower is made of sculpted sprayed concrete to give a rock like climbing surface. It has two vertical sides, an inclined slab and an overhanging bulge on the fourth side which provides an exciting free abseil.

Major Tony James, quartermaster at Warcop, comments: "This new tower greatly enhances our range of climbing and abseiling facilities. With an average of 450 people using the centre every day, it is sure to be in frequent use as part of our training programmes. We are very impressed with its versatility and the way DR Climbing Walls has handled the whole project, from the initial concept to putting the final touches to the installation".

For the second project DR has helped the army to move mountains by creating the country's first mobile climbing towers. The two 'flat pack' towers were designed and built for the Princess of Wales Royal Regiment army youth team and took a record three weeks to produce from brief to delivery. "It usually takes at least six weeks to get a completely new product to a customer", explained Jane Robinson, the newly appointed managing director of DR Climbing Walls. "The DR team is proud to have developed a system which has the potential for opening up a whole new area in climbing, and in such a short period of time".

One of the structures is a free standing 'self assembly' tower which stands 20 feet high and is made up of just 20 aluminium and epoxy resin panels. The other is made to an ingenious design that packs away neatly into a 12 feet by 8 feet trailer. The 16 feet tall tower is assembled around the trailer onto which the bottom panels are bolted, giving extra stability.

"We have kept the number of parts to a minimum to make assembly as simple as possible and have made the panels robust enough to withstand wear and tear yet light enough to be handled easily. And, as safety is of paramount importance, the towers are extremely stable at all stages of erection" explained Jane Robinson. Both towers can be used for climbing and abseiling.

The towers have been delivered to army bases in Chichester and Exeter where they will be used as part of the regiment's display at shows around the region and by members of the public including schoolchildren and students who participate in a range of training courses at the bases. "It's a very good piece of kit which will be used to introduce hundreds of people to climbing and abseiling during the course of a year", comments Sergeant Major Derek Robinson. "The mobile walls are one of many new projects that have come out of DR Climbing Walls in recent months. We have established a reputation for our high quality and imaginative installations and continue to make every wall as different and exciting as possible, supplying both visual impact and stimulating physical challenge tailored to meet the ability range of its target users", says Jane Robinson. "There is massive potential for further growth in the industry and we intend to take advantage of the opportunities that are opening up in both the public and private sector."



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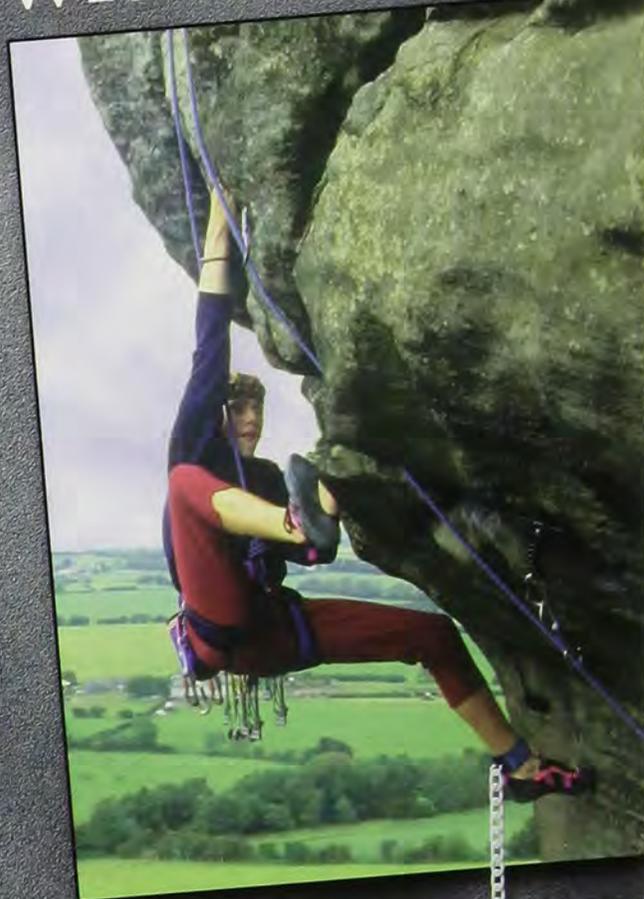
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