

# ARMY MOUNTAINEER



The Journal of The Army Mountaineering Association

Sports Climbing  
AMA Meet Reports  
New Zealand "Aoraki"  
Aconcagua 2002  
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Summer 2002



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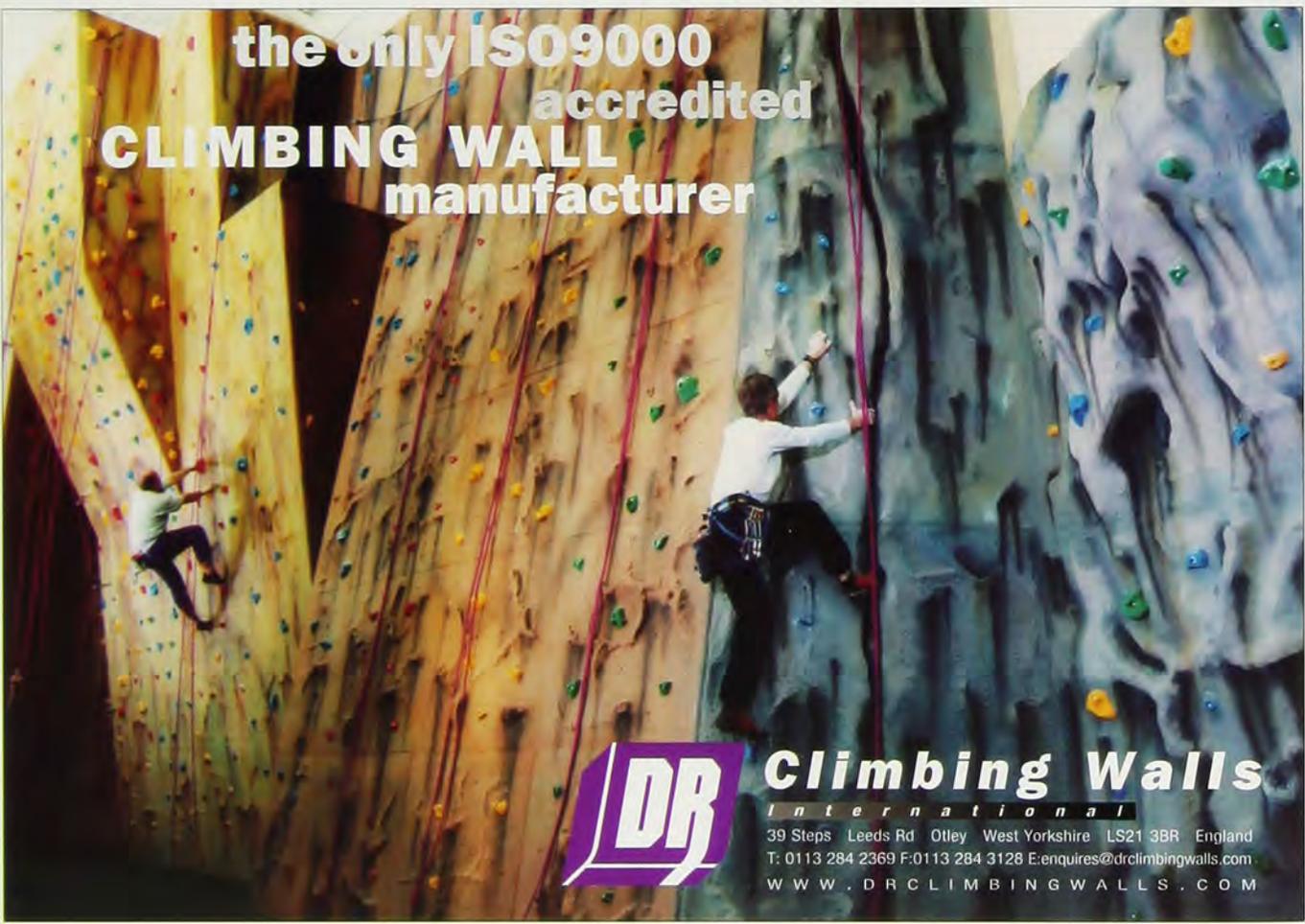
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## Foreword

by the Vice Chairman Major Cath Davies



As a slight departure from tradition, I have been asked to write the foreword for this, another excellent edition of our journal, in order to explain to members some key developments in how the AMA plans to do business in the future. These changes are designed to ensure maximum effectiveness in the delivery of services to members and maximum support in achieving their aspirations.

Currently we use part of the membership fee to give grants to individuals and support to AMA events such as meets and overseas training activities. The aim of this has always been to encourage AMA members to achieve challenging mountaineering and climbing objectives. However, one area in which we seem to be weak is high altitude mountaineering; despite being by far the largest Service mountaineering club, our representation on Joint Service expeditions has been low. To address this, the Committee has developed an AMA Mountaineering Plan. The Plan aims not only to offer progressive development opportunities in a number of mountain disciplines, but will enable us to focus our efforts on a key event each year, advising and supporting the leader of the expedition. This should enable more challenging objectives to be tackled. Amongst these would be some high altitude expeditions, giving AMA members the opportunity to gain the relevant experience necessary to qualify for Joint Service expeditions. However, we realise that many members may have other aspirations, and challenging rock climbing and alpine expeditions will be supported too.

The plan will look ten years ahead, allowing us to budget for annual meets such as JSAM, the AGM, HOT ROCK and ICE MONKEY as well as focus on a key AMA expedition each year. Committee members will all have clearly defined tasks in support of the Plan, enabling concentration of effort to achieve the aim. We are looking to finalise the Plan for presentation at the AGM, so if any member wishes to nominate themselves to lead an AMA expedition in the next decade, now is the time to do it! Seriously, if you have a challenging project that is too big for a unit or group of friends trip but would be achievable with committee support and advice, not to mention guaranteed funding, get in touch with me (my contact details are on the appointments page), or any Committee member.

The second area of improvement is the provision of membership support through the post of Membership Secretary. We have now put this on a formal footing by employing someone part time at Indefatigable to look after purely AMA business. This should ensure forms are processed swiftly and members' queries can be dealt with efficiently. The telephone number remains the same, 9-5581 7964 or 01248 715635 and the Membership Secretary, Sue Hughes, can also supply you with contact details for Committee members.

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*On the Cover: Tony Redfern on the E2 eliminator at this years climbing competition.*

*This edition was edited by Steve and Amy Willson.*

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## AMA Expedition Radio Set and Digital Camera For Hire!



### RADIOS

The AMA owns a set of radio equipment for use by its members and others. The set consists of eight hand held Motorola GP68 VHF sets, one GM350 VHF base station, solar panels, video battery charger and all the ancillaries. This service has been provided by the AMA from the contributions you make as members of the association, therefore the equipment is yours and you should make full use of it. The set has been tested world wide and found to give excellent service in the mountains. The hand sets (5W output) provides a good line of sight service up to 5km and more when used with the base station's 25W output. The set, or part set, is available by booking it through the Publications Editor, Steve Willson, with the following conditions.

1. The radios must be insured by the expedition for the replacement cost, details on request.
2. A hire fee, to cover maintenance and renewal, of between £50, for part of the set, up to £150 for the whole set paid to the AMA on collection.
3. The expedition must book their own frequencies through which ever country they are visiting and then inform the Publications Editor to program the radios prior to collection.

The equipment is very good and it will improve the command and control of any expedition not to mention the increased safety cover.

### DIGITAL CAMERA

The AMA has added a Nikon 990 Coolpix digital camera to it's collection. This is a very high quality professional device that is capable of capturing impressive images that can be used for web pages, presentations or just snaps of your climbing. Any member of the AMA can hire this equipment for £25 (up to a month) or £50 (up to two months) for use on climbing/walking trips. The AMA Journal is also always in need of quality images and the camera will be available at AMA meets to capture the action. This will be at nil cost to the meet organiser.

If you have any questions about the radio set, digital camera or their availability please give the Steve Willson a call on 94256 8351 or 01865 255351 email [stevewillson@msn.com](mailto:stevewillson@msn.com) - Please make use of this kit!

# EDITORIAL

This is a bitter sweat moment, my last AMA Journal as the editor. When I took this job on I did not even contemplate for what term I would be in post because I was driven by a desire to produce a set of AMA publication that reflected the diverse and adventurous nature of the activities our members were involved in. I realised that our image across the Army would be directly connected to the quality of this publication. I hope I have achieved my goal and produced, for you the membership, an interesting and modern magazine that not only keeps you in touch with the association but also inspires you to reach new personal challenges in the mountains and on the crag.

My own personal highs over the past few years were the production of a set of four AMA posters that I think caught the flavour of the association with the punch line 'HIGH TIME FOR A CHALLENGE'. The new membership leaflet has also played a vital role in the recent development of the AMA and finally the Winter 01 / 02 Journal our first full colour issue that contained a wealth of interesting articles thought provoking articles.

This issue is also in that vein and my thanks go out to all those that contributed. It is good to see that in this age of regulation we in the AMA are still able to push ourselves to the limits in the environment we love, whether a rock face in Spain or an ice face in New Zealand.

If you have any contributions for the Winter 02 Journal please send them to me @ OUOTC, Falklands House, Oxpens Road, Oxford, OX1 1RX, and I will forward them to the new editor (on disk and hard copy please).

I take up the post of Equipment Member from September 02 so look out for some hot deals on kit. Enjoy this journal and keep the articles and photos coming in.

**Cheers Steve Willson**

## AMA MOUNTAIN PHOTO COMPETITION

The Photo Competition this year will be held during the AGM weekend during the 27-29 Sept. Photographic entries can either be sent to WO2 (AQMS) Steve Willson (See key addresses for details) or you can bring them to the AMA weekend and submit them on arrival. Entries will then be on show throughout the weekend and then judged at the end of the boulder competition on Sunday. The categories are Best Rock Climbing, Best Mountaineering and Best Black and White. There will be prizes for the first three places in each category.

# VOLCANIC VENTURE!

By Capt Peter Brierley REME

Volcanic Venture was a mountaineering expedition to Ecuador, undertaken by the Arms and Service Directorate of REME – HQ DEME(A). Departing on 01 Jan 02 for 3 weeks (Not the ideal outbound flight date, but availability of flights post the Sept 11 incident was somewhat limited!), the intention was for the 7 man party to acclimatise North of Quito, Ecuador's capital, before heading south to attempt Chimborazo. At 6310m this is the highest peak in Ecuador and has the distinction of being the point on earth furthest from its centre. (Due to the equatorial bulge!) An ambitious venture for a group of novice (less 2) mountaineers, which would, due to circumstances beyond our control, prove too much!

The administration involved in getting to Ecuador proved entertaining, with negotiations over the expense and availability of civilian flights and the political clearance for the expedition only being finalised on

18 Dec 01. The cost of flights accounted for half of the available budget, fortunately it proved possible to exist in Ecuador on the remaining funds. Transport, food and accommodation were all readily available at competitive rates, even when the US \$ (The Ecuador economy is linked to and uses US currency) exchange rate dipped as the Euro began life, in-country cost remained affordable.

Acclimatisation went as planned with Fuya Fuya (4279m) and Cotacachi (4937m) falling to the team during the first week. (The latter despite a spectacular thunderstorm occurring whilst the team clung to a boulder 30m below the summit and the mountain proceeded to disintegrate!) Due to the unseasonably mild weather, the team had to venture to Cayambe (5790m – Ecuador's 3rd highest peak and the highest point through which the equator passes) to find conditions suitable for further practise of snow and ice skills.

Cotacachi was to provide these conditions but high temperatures and rain removed all but a light dusting of snow and ice from the mountain. This made for interesting conditions and ensured that the JSRCI, Lt Col Martin Oakes and JSME(L) Sgt Penny Farthing had their work cut out finding suitable belay anchors during the final 150m of the ascent.

Returning from the north for a rest day in Quito, the party prepared for the move south and the attempt on Chimborazo. It is worth mentioning at this point the quality of equipment and guides available in Ecuador; Equipment; take everything with you – the quality and availability of equipment in Ecuador is limited. Guides; ensure that the English speaking qualified (ASEGIUM registered) guide with whom terms of any contract are agreed, is the guide that arrives to accompany you on any specified venture!

Once shoehorned into our transport we began the journey to Chimborazo, this itself was not without incident and 7 grateful, albeit shaken mountaineers, clambered from the minibus at 4800m, 200m below the Whymper mountain refuge. Conditions at this time were mild and murky, with visibility restricted by cloud cover to approximately 100m.

On arrival at the refuge, it had started to snow heavily but the temperature had not begun to fall. Consternation and conver-



Descending past the Ice Step on Cotopaxi (5600m).

Standing below their recent conquest – Cotopaxi 5897m. (L-R: Maj Paul Dean, Maj Alan Ronson, Lt Col Martin Oakes, Sgt Penny Farthing and Capt Peter Brierley.)



Continuing the descent of Cotopaxi with the lower edge of the summit crater visible.

sation between the guides/JSME(L) and the varying groups within the refuge (approximately 35 climbers in all) led to the consensus that it was unlikely that a serious summit attempt would be possible that night.

All groups decided to continue with the attempt but with the caveat that if the climbing conditions did not improve a prudent course of action would be followed. Consequently with the loss of one of the team (and one of the guides!) at 5200m due to the affects of altitude and the rumble of avalanches above, at 5675m, approximately 100m below the summit ridge, the dejected team turned around and trudged down the hill. Many other teams were passed on the descent and it transpired the following morning that no other team had made the summit and that our turn around point was the highest achieved that night – scant consolation!

After an evening lambasting the weather, the guides, global warming etc. we awoke with renewed vigour and the desire to attempt another peak before our departure 3 days hence. Therefore with time of the essence we swiftly packed and headed to Volcano Cotopaxi, which at 5897m is Ecuador's 2nd highest and most famous and instantly recognisable peak. Two members of the team were unable to make the journey due to fatigue and the lingering effects of altitude sickness.

The resultant 2 and 3-man ropes began the ascent from the José Ribas refuge (4800m) in perfect weather conditions. On a clear, crisp, starlit night the small party made excellent time on the ascent – so good in fact that the summit was gained at 0430hrs, which was earlier than planned. (1hr before sunrise!) Whilst the ambient light afforded those present excellent views of the surrounding vista, the photographic evidence of the views and in particular the impressive crater are disappointing. The temperature and overall condition of the team, fatigue was starting to set in after 2 summit attempts in 3 days, was such that it was necessary to descend straight away rather than wait for sunrise.

The descent was uneventful, with the spectacular ever increasing shadow of the crater peak, growing as the sun rose on the far side of the mountain, pointing the way back down to the refuge. A 9-hour round trip saw the team, tired but elated, safely back at the refuge. Return to Quito followed later that day followed by a well-earned rest day prior to return to the UK. Whilst not achieving our primary aim, as an introduction to high altitude mountaineering, the venture was still a great success, with all participants returning more skilled in mountain craft, fit and well with a healthy respect for life and some of the conditions which mother nature can bestow upon us.

*The campsite at the foot of the unseasonably bare Cotacachi.*



*The team (Maj Paul Dean RLC, Capt Peter Brierley, Lt Col Martin Oakes, Maj Alan Rorison, WO1 (ASM) Lee Thomas, Sgt Penny Farthing RM and Maj Steve Colling.) prior to the ascent of Fuya Fuya on the bank of Mojanda Lake.*



*Snow and Ice Training on the Equator (Cayambe).*



*The view of Cotopaxi on the day of the Ascent from the perspective of the 2 non-participants.*

# THE MATTERHORN

## IN A WEEKEND

By SSgt Philip Maddox APTC with Keith Jenns & John Doyle

On completion of the Haute route (the high-level ski traverse from Chamonix to Zermatt) in the late spring of 2001, we skied the final leg down into Zermatt passing by the impressive mass of the Matterhorn.

We decided there and then that we should make a trip to scale this mountain in the summer via the classic Hornli Ridge.

Neither Keith Jenns, nor myself, had ever been up there, so with our friend and 'Guide de Montagne' Andre Bresch we set a date for the last weekend of August to make the ascent.

As the flights had been booked from Liverpool to Geneva via "Go" airways, Andre phoned to inform us that he couldn't make the trip as he had to work for the French Guides in the South of France on that weekend. This was obviously very upsetting as Andre is not only a good friend but, also one of the best French Guides in the system.

Fortunately for us, another friend of ours was in France at this time who, also knows Andre and within minutes John Doyle had phoned me up with a plan. He would pick Keith and myself up from Geneva airport and return us on the Sunday, just as long as we pay for the fuel, (rightly so).

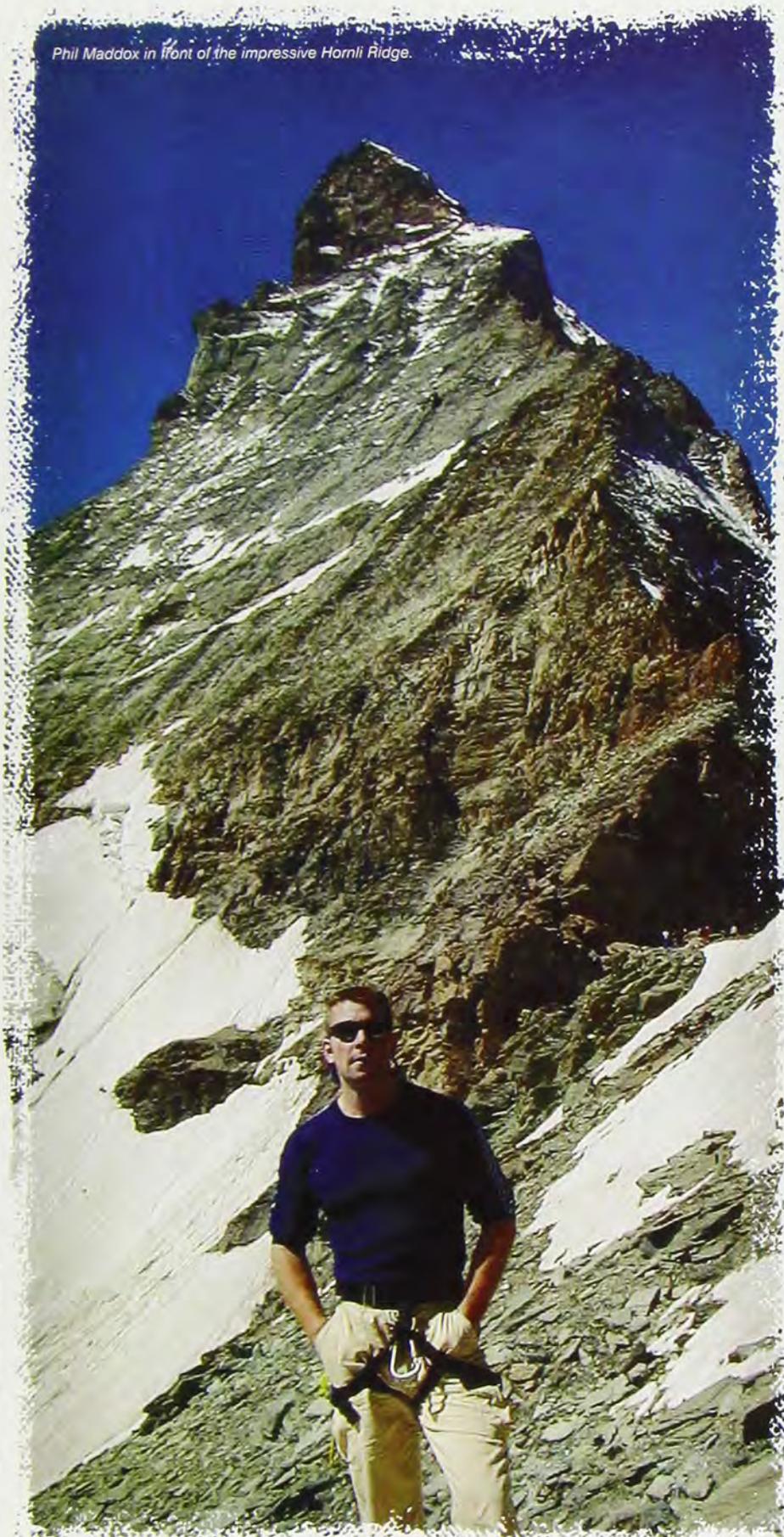
The trip was still on. We set off for the airport at Liverpool and touched down safely at Geneva Thursday evening, John was there already and we set off on the 4 hours or so drive to Tesch. As you can not drive motorised vehicles in Zermatt (only electric buses) we parked up at the big car park in Tesch and caught the train into Zermatt in the morning. We arrived in Tesch at midnight Thursday and got some much-needed sleep immediately.

Once in Zermatt early Friday morning we breakfasted and made up some form of packed lunch and headed for the lift system that would carry us all up to the start of the walk in to the Hornli Hut. The Hornli hut is about 2 and a bit hours walk from the top of the lift, where we had a drink, a bite to eat and then set off at 12 midday for the summit.

The route is fairly straightforward and we only managed to stray slightly before being called back onto the correct path by one of the many Swiss Guides operating there. With two competent members in the group you can move fairly swiftly without the use of a rope for quite some time, however there comes a time when the risk of something catastrophic happening. The rope then has to be deployed for the safety of the whole party.

Just over half way up, there are big thick fixed ropes in "situ" which you can haul yourself up on hand over hand just like in the Gym.

*Phil Maddox in front of the impressive Hornli Ridge.*



Once you reach 4000m, you come to the Solvay Hut, this is an emergency refuge hut. Many folk have stayed in here because they have either ascended/descended too late or as an over night stop, before making an early morning summit approach to beat the crowds.

From here it is approximately another 3 hours, involving fixed ropes and this time the use of an ice axe and crampons, as there is still a fair amount of snow and ice at and above 4000m. Unfortunately for Keith J, his crampons were not as snug fitting as first appeared and he had to stop a few times to re-adjust the straps. As a tip, the new Scarpa M4 four-season boot does not accept just any crampon, it is best to use a step-in, for example Grivel 2F.

At about 1900hrs we had summited with the day light still with us, but not for long. After a couple of photos we headed back down. So far the weather had been the best any one could ask for, not a cloud in sight and that is how it remained well into the following week. I think we were really lucky with our timing of the climb.

The next 5 hours was spent either being lowered or abseiling to the next belay ledge to start all over again. By now the day had turned to night and out came the head torches, we were now making our way down towards the Solvay Refuge, at 0300hrs we arrived there. There is enough space in the hut to sleep up to 8 people fairly comfortable, but you wouldn't want to stay there more than a night.

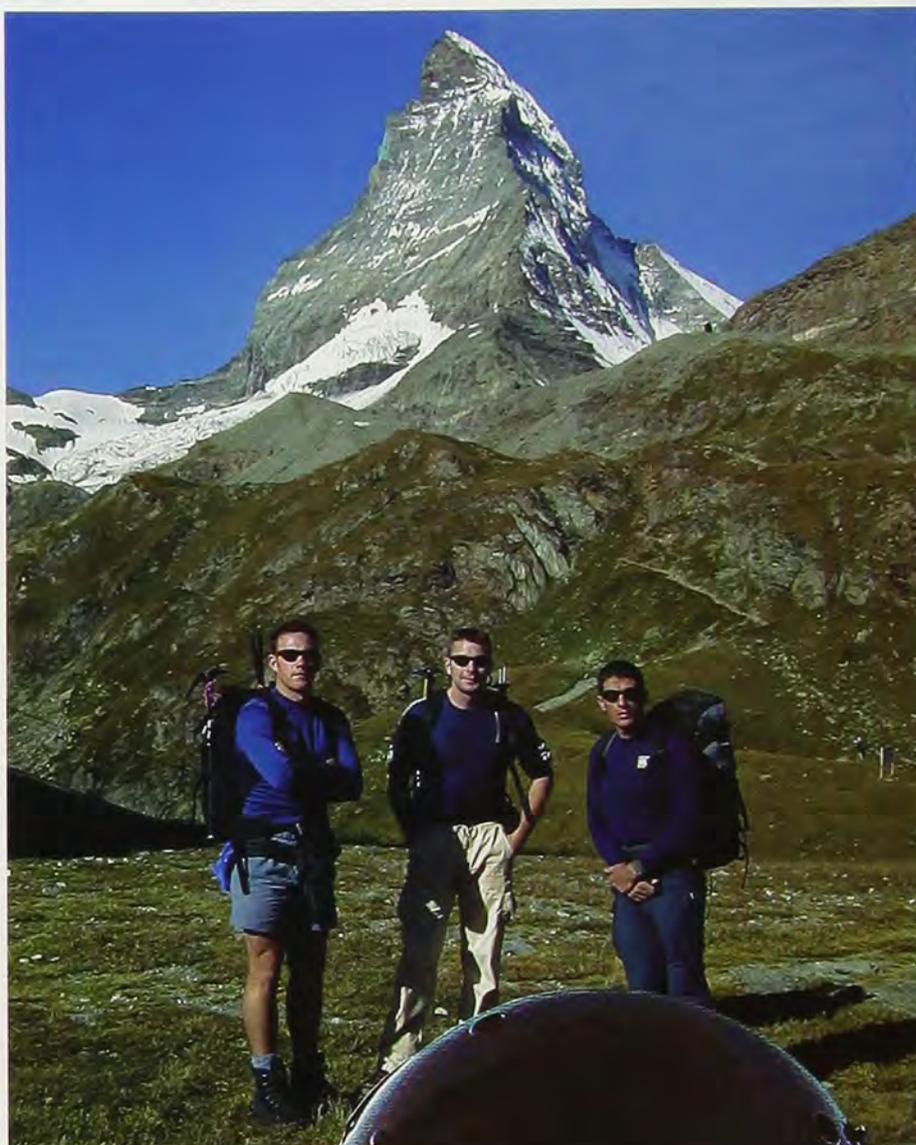
At about 0730hrs we were getting ready to start our descent back to Zermatt, by now there had already been 10-15 guided parties en-route to the summit. They usually set off about 0400hrs from the Hornli Hut to go for the summit so they are back down in Zermatt for the early afternoon.

Three hours of descent saw us all safely back at the Hornli Hut for a well-earned drink. The sun was very hot, about 35°C, which makes for very unpleasant conditions. It can sometimes be just a bit too hot for comfort.

On then to the lift area and back down to Zermatt, a spot of lunch 'Macca D's' and back on the train to Tesch. We then drove to a near by camp ground to clean our bodies and drive back to Geneva. Once in Geneva we had some dinner and relaxed after a successful trip to the Matterhorn.

In all, a very quick, interesting and excellent weekend of mountaineering. We were lucky with the weather, as this plays a really important part in the mountains and the company was also as good as the weather.

It is worth mentioning that if you plan to do a challenge, what ever it is, plan it carefully and just go do it. We only have one life and I'm sure one weekend away from the hectic social calendar will not be too hard to endure.



The team before the climb



# Constructive Criticism, Assumption or Ignorance?

By Mark Hedge

Walk in silence  
Don't walk away, in silence  
See the danger  
Always danger  
Don't walk away.

Ian Curtis.

In the last year several friends, colleagues and I have taken some hefty falls whilst involved in climbing and mountaineering. Many resulting in damage to life and limb. During recuperation and recovery period it was interesting to note the running commentary by various parties on what went wrong during the climbers process phase. However with nigh on every incident no-one actually witnessed the slip/fall and with virtually every incident individuals automatically assumed what had happened. Maybe these comments are due to naivety or a fear of what their peers may think if such an incident is allowed to pass without condemnation. After all the best form of defence is to attack. Who are we to assume? Although this article is based around climbing it could well be geared towards any 'risk activities'. There are many question marks within this text and deliberately so, the intention is to send your mind into overdrive and make you question.

"I can't believe he did that"  
"I reckon he did....."  
"She wasn't wearing a helmet"  
"She didn't put any protection in"  
"Why was he leading that route"

Only true activists (climbers) did not pose any intrusive questions and had genuine concern over the health and well being of the individual. As opposed to how or what happened. Is this because they know and understand the risks, walk the walk and talk the talk? Many non performers (climbers) although 'highly qualified' offered so many schools of thought.

To comment on such incidents one must be able to rely on past experience at the 'sharp end' of a rope. Assumption does not enter

the equation. Is a Mountain Instructor Certificate (MIC) or Single Pitch Award (SPA) holder a subject matter expert? Do we as subject matter experts put ourselves on a pedestal because we have a piece of paper reassuring the world that at the time of our assessment the required standard was achieved? Have we moved with the times, did we really know all that much in the first place?

FOOD FOR THOUGHT- (if we are subject matter experts).

Bouldering -No, not as a warm up in the local wall. A facet of climbing, a sport in its own right.

Q: Could you explain the Hueco or Fontainebleau bouldering grades?

Sport Routes/Wall Grades -These French grades in comparison are two grades higher than the British technical grades.

Q: Are they really?

SAFETY

Always use screwgates when constructing a belay.

Q: Why?

Q: Should you wear a helmet at all times when climbing?

CAN YOU COMMENT? Know all the answers?

Get yourself geared up for a route in the low extreme grade, what kit will you need? All of those wires, cam devices, slings, extenders and krabs. Trousers or shorts, shirt? I must wear a helmet its the law! Pile up all the gear you choose to take, now pick it up. Heavy? Still taking it?

Gear yourself up for a route in the mid to high extreme grade.

CAN YOU STIILL COMMENT?

Have you trained hard for this route, competent against the challenge, dieted so strict that you've had hunger pains in the evenings? Do I use a rope? OK. I'll drag a rope and helmet up the line but only because it's expected of me. However, all that extra weight could and should pile up the odds towards failing off.

WE FALL:

Q: Why did she not put any protection in?

A: Was there any?

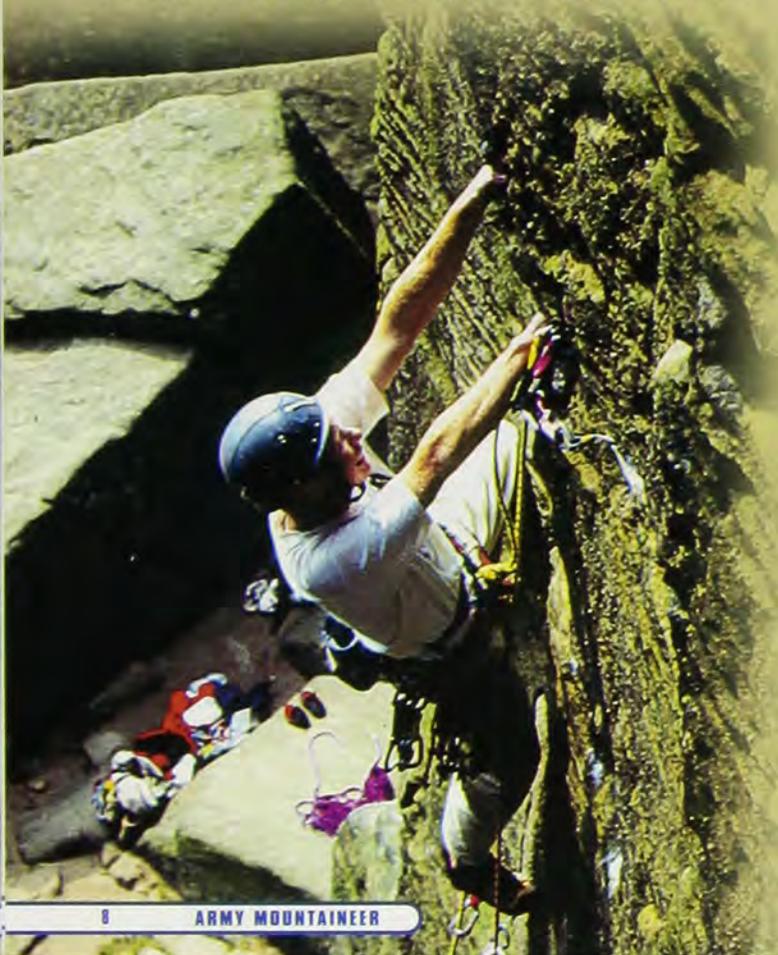
Dispensing with my soapbox for a minute! Does any of the above play on your mind, ring true or have you heard such comments before? This will not prevent individuals thinking or commenting on such incidents but hopefully it will provoke those who have now read the text to promote positive constructive thoughts and speech. Spare a thought for the victim who through error or the pursuit of excellence has sustained damage. Pointing the finger or expressing a retrospective view will not aid recovery. After all we can't hurt ourselves thinking about a climb or by sitting at home constructing a hit list of routes we dream of ascending. You must get out there and do it, play football for your village, the district, semi-professional, county athletics or a higher level?

A miss timed tackle earns a booking or if you're on the receiving end, a broken leg, versus 80ft off the ground, 40ft above your last abysmal runner on a 6a move. Premiership? Casualty? Inscription on the climbing club memorial board?

FACT:

It must be accepted that climbing/mountaineering is a risk sport. If you push your limits expect to fall at sometime, even to hit the deck.

**That's Climbing!**



# The BMC and Entre Prises Festival of Climbing

By Mike Smith

The BMC & Entre Prises Festival of Climbing (FOC) is a biennial celebration of climbing, hill walking and mountaineering and is staged in the impressive National Indoor Arena in Birmingham. The three-day event hosts a massive array of lectures, films, videos, practical workshops and activities, exhibitions and art, and high performance climbing. Not to mention a retail village with tons of clothing and equipment at give-away prices. The main retailers last year were Snow & Rock, Outside, Mountainshack.com, Entre-Prises, Greenshires and Solo Mountain Sport.

There were a total of six separate competitions over the weekend and I was lucky enough to be involved in the Snow & Rock World Bouldering Cup. I was invited to the event at fairly short notice to judge the qualifiers on the Friday and the finals on the Saturday. Other competitions held over the weekend were the UIAA-ICC Beal & Petzl European Youth Cup, the Snow & Rock International Masters, Outdoor Designs International Dyno Competition, the Cotswold Outdoor Open Bouldering Challenge and the Scouts Climbing Championships (organised by Paul Smith who is an AMA member).

This was a rare but excellent opportunity to get real close to the action and I wasn't disappointed. Over the weekend I judged the female qualifiers and finals and the men's final. The first event was the female qualifiers. It was incredible to see just how good the climbers were. Each climber only had six minutes to complete each problem, most were able to complete on the first attempt, although my problem was one of the easier ones. The female competition was eventually won by Sandrine Levet from France, who was streets ahead of most of the other competitors. The best Brits were Claire Murphy and Katherine Schirmacher who finished 19th and 20th.

With the mens competition there were big hopes for a British qualifier although with the likes of Jerome Meyer FRA, Daniel Andrada ESP, Mauro Calibani ITA, Thomas Oleksy POL and Salavat Rakmetov RUS it was going to be a tough competition. The final included Malcolm Smith who finished fourth but Mauro Calibani went on to win. Christian Core ITA although second, drew on points in the final. The final result was decided on the scores from the qualifying round.

Spectators had a chance to attempt the mens final problems on the Sunday with the Cotswold Outdoor Open Bouldering Challenge. There were also another twenty problems to try. Yours truly attempted and completed about half of the problems but didn't get off the ground with any of the mens final problems.

The event is now outgrowing the NIA and plans are for the FOC to move to the National Exhibition Centre in 2003. The BMC is always looking for volunteers for the event with the perks of free entry, free meals and a chance to shop at the retail village before the queues start. AMA members are encouraged to visit this amazing celebration of British Climbing

All photos by kind permission of Ian Parnell.



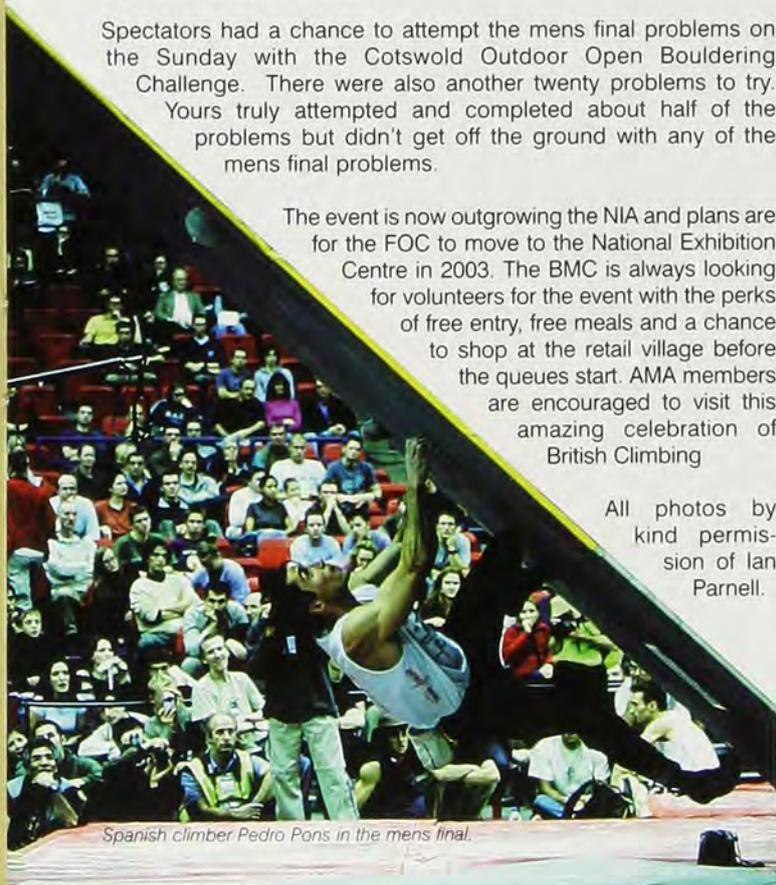
Gareth Parry 14th place.



Mike Smith Judging the female qualifiers. Climber Katherine Schirmacher



Female winner, Sandrine Levet.



Spanish climber Pedro Pons in the mens final.

# No2 GULLY MARCH 1989

By Mark (Gook) Williams

"Crack - whooshhhhhh" That was the moment I realised the snow slab had gone, next it was around my ankles tugging, then around my waist pulling, then ping, ping the two pegs pulled out, from then it just wrenched me off and down!

This all started in January 1989, Steve Willson had just joined 7 (Sphinx) Cdo Bty as one of our vehicle mechanics after our usual Artic deployment and only a few short vertical icefalls under the belt we returned to Arbroath, both of us having Scottish winters as our prime motivation for passing the Commando course.

Steve had recently returned from a successful expedition from the Cassin Ridge on Denali and was probably a bit frustrated with the amount of mountaineering achieved in Norway. As luck would have it the snow conditions on the Ben were still rumoured to be adequate, it was March!

Friday 1300hrs: "Leave here (RM Condor) at 5am Saturday morning Mark?" "Yep, OK Steve where are we off?" "The Ben". "Oh, OK what are we going to do?" "Dunno lets go and have a look" said Steve.

Up until now my winter experience totalled up to the Angus Munros, Green gully and a couple of the Trinity gullies on Snowdon (where I was witness to an horrendous accident which involved crampons and shoulder blades!)

Saturday 1100hrs I found myself looking up from the CIC hut after a nightmare journey in Steve's yellow escort estate, already in shock, looking up at the North corries we can see no further than half way up the Gibson Boulder due to cloud cover, so we make our second mistake of the day and decide to do an easy gully, the first one being our lack of weather report consultation. SAIS was not as comprehensive in 1989 as it is now anyway! No excuse I know.

I'd been up to the Green gully area before so we decided on something easy today, like No2, see what the conditions and our abilities were like then maybe something harder tomorrow.

We ascended up to the cloud base then upwards and onwards, at this point it looked like an easy grade 1 or 2 bumble I checked my altimeter and it was about 950 metres so I knew we were near the top of the gully, the snow was starting to get quite steep and we both stopped and looked up we were just about coming through the clouds, but to my horror and probably Steve's there was this HUGE cornice of about 30 or 40 foot, if you think I am exaggerating you can ponder over the photo on this page.

Now lets remember I'm with Steve Willson here! Bang Bang Whack Whack. "There you go Mark, you just belay of those two pegs and I will tunnel the lowest part of the cornice over the other side" Now I don't pretend or have any aspirations of becoming the new fox of Glencoe but I knew only too well the danger we were in and the more I looked at the situation or more importantly at the HUGE cornice I started to envy Steve's position up front, I said "Steve those pegs look fine but they are on the wrong side of this gully." "Yep OK stick that dead man in the middle of the slope then mate" I don't think Steve even paused with the word DEAD but trust me I did, I noticed as I cut the slot for the DEAD man there was about an inch of wind slab on the surface it didn't seem to important, what could a slab of one inch by 40m by 30m wide do? Yes I can see those of you that have had any thing to do with an avalanche, smiling or frowning!

So now I'm happier, Bergan between the slope and myself then tied into the belay. All was going well Steve made it to the far left of the gully and then placed a snow stake

below the Cornice, he then reached up to start tunnelling, as soon as the first snow from the cornice dropped into the gully that was it!

CRACK - whoosh! That was the moment I realised the snow slab had gone, next it was around my ankles tugging, in seconds its around my waist pulling then, ping, ping the two pegs pulled out, from then it just wrenched me off and down! At first it just wanted to push me off, Dead man holds. After that the gap between the slope and I filled up it started to push me down, only about a foot of snow on top of me, all Steve can do is watch the rope snake away, he thinks the rope has been cut and then the magic moment I'd been lectured about many times the snow settles and I make a move to make space for my breathing, I can tell you that there is that moment between movement and the snow setting. Luckily enough I'm not under too much snow and dig myself out, Steve looks at me and we laugh- nervously. I wait for him to go through and belay me, the cornice is still there and I think to myself if that goes we wont be laughing. I decide to move, by the time Steve is ready and shouting to me I'm through and saying "Poldubh rock climbing tomorrow Steve". "To right." He says!

Steve Willson on a fine highland day.



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# ZEPPELIN - AN ADVENT

By Mike Smith

Loz and I ran down the railway line to try and get warm. The temperature gauge on the car had read 4°C as we drove to the car park, but we knew that by midday it would be at least 20°C. The line of Zeppelin had attracted my interest when I bought the Rock Fax guide for El Chorro several months earlier. The route is the longest in the area and a three star classic. We had carried out a brief recce earlier in the week by traversing the infamous Camino del rey that hangs precariously to the opposite side of the gorge. This had given us a brilliant opportunity to study the line, although at the time we hadn't really thought we were up to it.

The actual approach along the railway line is quite novel, after passing through three tunnels a viaduct is reached. Anyone who has seen Von Ryans Express will know the scene. Although you can abseil off the railings we chose to scramble down the loose almost

vertical bank at the back of the viaduct. This leaves a 10m drop to the base of the viaduct. Fortunately there was a convenient length of plastic coated communication cable with several knots. We climbed down this hand over hand, not the best way to warm up for such a big route. From here it was only fifty meters to the bottom of the route, a total of twenty minutes from the car park.

The first 30m of the route were dispensed with quickly by soloing to a large ledge. From here a line of bolts soar away up the route. Despite the bolts a small rack is required for the few easy pitches. Loz and I had warmed up by the time we started climbing but the temperature was still cold in the bottom of the gorge. I had the honour of the first pitch, supposedly easy slabs, they are not even graded in the guide. In fact I soon found the slabs becoming a wall and a tricky move at 30m of at least 6a. It

made me appreciate that this route would not be a pushover.

Loz soon joined me and set off immediately on pitch two. This was around 4+ and required some traditional gear. By 0915hrs we were beneath the large roof which protects the upper wall. Up to now the climbing had been on brilliant holds and superb friction. The next pitch, at 6c, looked a different proposition. It was my lead so I ditched all excess gear with Loz and moved passed the first two bolts. The holds at the back of the roof looked massive but there was very little for the feet and what was there appeared polished. I cautiously moved up to the first hold, it was massive, I clipped the next bolt and charged across the roof. It was uncomplicated but very strenuous. Approximately 8 moves later I was at the exposed stance on the lip of the roof. After I'd hauled up the rucksack Loz made short work of the roof and we both prepared mentally for the next pitch.

It looked hard and technical. At 6c+ it was the crux of the climb. Loz was understandably apprehensive. The previous day he had climbed several hard routes and was thinking that perhaps he had done too much! The wall above the stance overhung by a few degrees and was sparsely populated by any holds. Loz made a long reach for a poor hold then moved to an improbable looking three finger hold. From this another long reach gained a better edge then an improvement in foot and hand holds. Loz made mincemeat of the first few moves but despite advice to the contrary in the guide he managed to stray left and away from the bolts. He then spent a few fraught minutes

Viewing the route two days earlier from the Camino del rey.



Mike Smith lowering down the plastic cable.



# TUROUS SPORT ROUTE!

trying to sort out an improvised belay. I then had the nightmare job of seconding the pitch with the rucksack. I soon realised that if I did fall off the stretch in rope would drop me below the roof – this was enough incentive to get me through pitch four.

I cranked my way through the crux, which although hard was only a few moves. I immediately spotted the line of bolts to the right that Loz had missed. I climbed across to the correct belay stance. Loz had to carefully reverse over some extremely loose ground to join me on the belay.

Another easy pitch followed which Loz climbed. This meant that I got the next hard pitch. We instantly thought it was an obvious layback corner but on closer inspection it was a much steeper wall and crack off to the right. This proved to be the most technical pitch on the route with a serious barn door potential halfway up. This pitch was graded 6b+ but felt much harder.

This pitch delivered us on the crest of a narrow airy ridge. So that Loz got the next hard pitch I set off on the easy scramble to the bottom of the next 6b pitch. In my excitement I then went off route and managed to find myself on the wrong side of a loose tower looking down on the pitch we were supposed to be climbing next. A line of bolts rose up a smooth wall on the opposite side of the tower. I reversed delicately down the tower and crossed over to the correct belay.

The last difficult pitch was now above and it was Loz's turn. At 6b it ensured the pressure stayed on. We also now had an audience watching us from the Camino Del



*Loz moving through the overhang.*

Rey. It is a shame it has been left to rot as it offers a unique experience.

Loz again climbed brilliantly up the steep wall and arete. The pitch was very sustained and totally different in character to the rest of the climb. The difficulties did not ease up until the last move. By now my arms were aching and the weight of the rucksack carrying our water, fleeces and trad gear, was becoming tiresome. It was also now very hot. Despite this the climbing was amazing as I swung up the fine arete and the last moves to join Loz. Now almost

170m above the gorge and the situation was incredibly exposed and atmospheric.

The climb finished with two easy pitches to the top of the route. This was followed by an easy scramble down to Los Cotos. We ran and walked back along the railway line to El Chorro like two excited school boys, unable to contain our excitement. This had been one of those once in a season climbs, fantastic climbing in an amazing situation and although on bolts it was still a serious and adventurous undertaking.

*Mike Smith just below the roof.*



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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Steve,

I know we don't have a 'letters page' in the AMA Journal, but having read Tania's article (The Death of Adventure Training), I felt I had to write in to strongly support her. I've never met her, but we have closely aligned views! During my time in JSMTTC, which should have been enjoyable and rewarding, I was forever 'pushing rocks uphill' trying to get people to understand that adventurous training must, by its very purpose and definition, contain a real risk of injury or death. Sad to say, some people were never able to grasp that and had the 'HSAW and litigation' cassette well and truly stuck fast. I also felt that the apparent primary purpose of a few officers was to make AT as difficult as possible for the average young officer or NCO!

At the risk of alienating my many friends in the APTC (past and present), my greatest irritation in JSMTTC was the mindset of instructors who used the outdoors, whether water or mountain based, as a set of 'outdoor wall bars' on which to perform to an admiring audience! (I have to say that this was never a problem with either E2 seconded instructors or the civilian staff). This attitude will never be rectified until the APTC stranglehold on AT is broken, and, incidentally, I think Tania hit the nail on the head when she alluded to an apparent plot to ensure that only one Corps had a monopoly on 'high' qualifications.

The requirement to chase paper has spiralled out of control (I can recall genuine discussion over '8000m' qualifications!) and with it has gone the ethos which inspired me to follow in the footsteps of many great military mountaineers, explorers and leaders. Much of my mountaineering and paddling is now done out with 'the system' - with likeminded lunatics sharing a common ethos and sense of shared responsibility (something like the AMA!) - because I don't need paperwork and form filling to ensure that I act in a responsible manner. Heaven help the leader of anyone who has the misfortune to suffer an accident!

Within the Services, adventurous things still happen, but despite 'the system', not because of it. Never mind 'Exercise Lotus Flower Dragon, may she rest in peace', we're already well passed that: AT - RIP!

Your age, Rowland

P.S. Those with a strong sense of irony on this subject should read "Campaigner's" contribution on pages 94-95 of British Army Review No 127!



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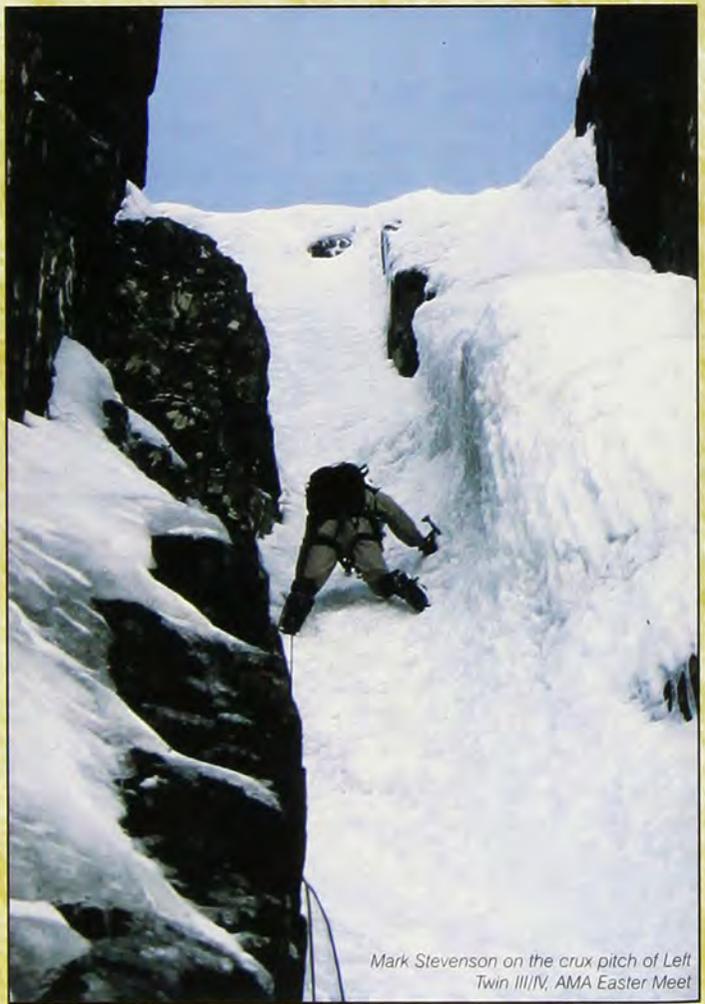
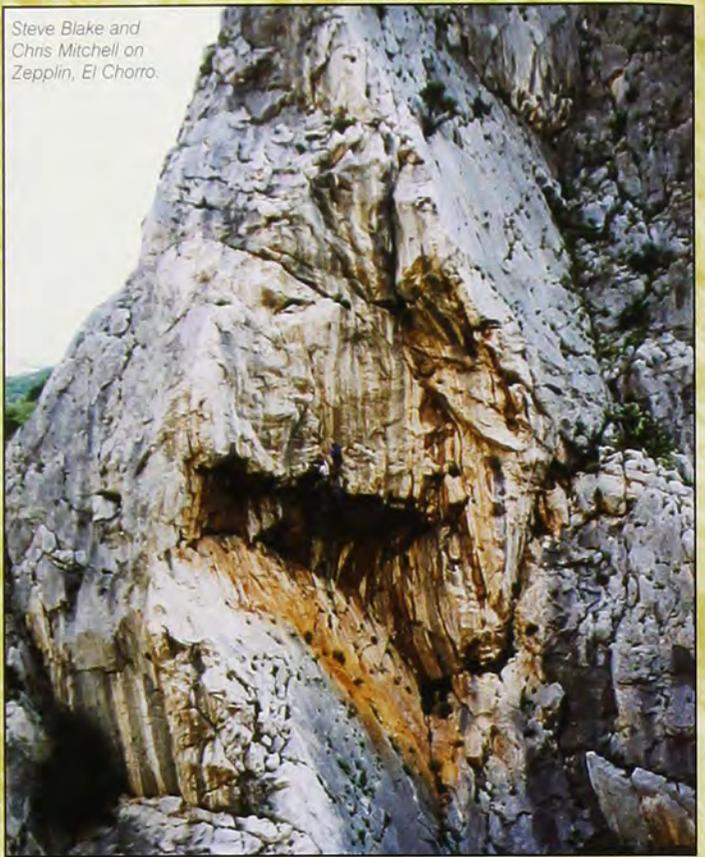


# ICE MONKEY 02



# AMA CLIMB

*Steve Blake and  
Chris Mitchell on  
Zeppelin, El Chorro.*

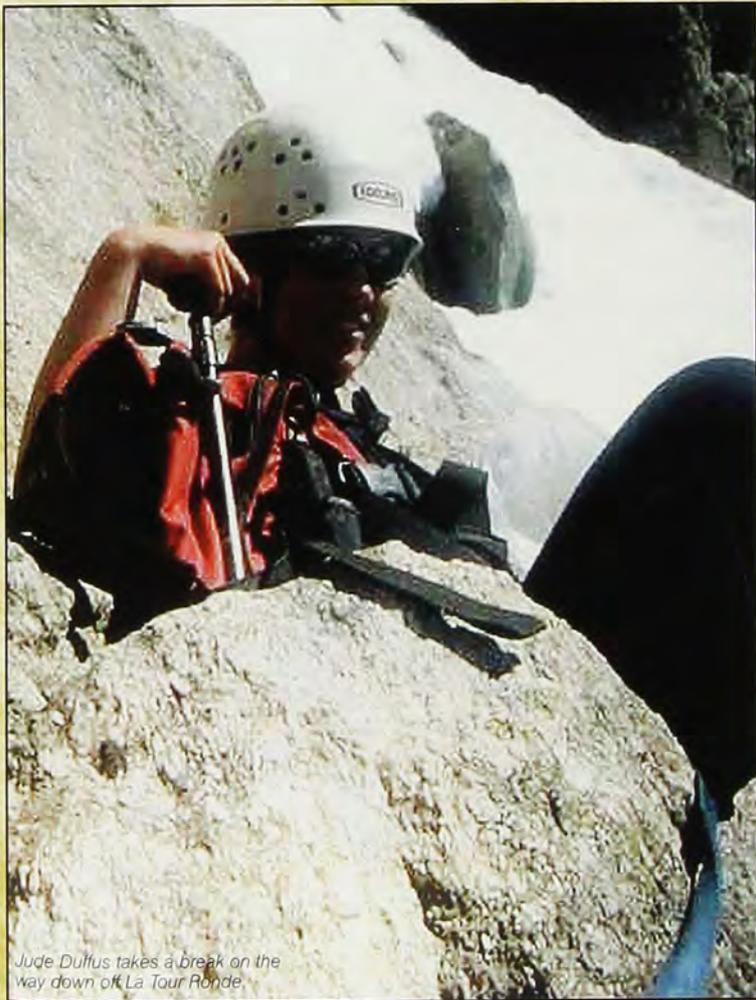


*Mark Stevenson on the crux pitch of Left  
Twin III/IV, AMA Easter Meet*

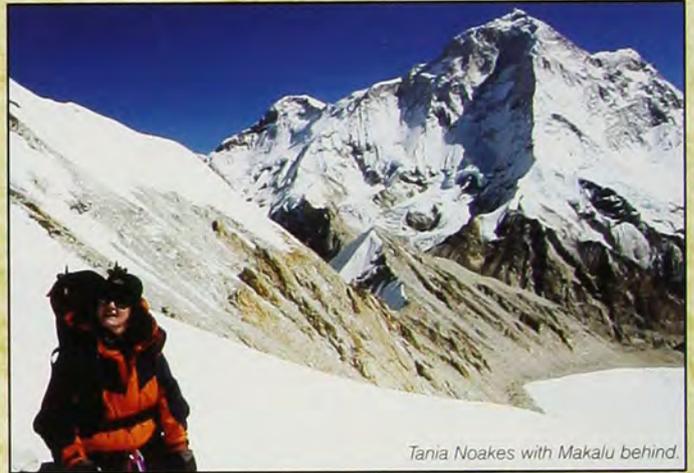
# CLIMBERS IN ACTION



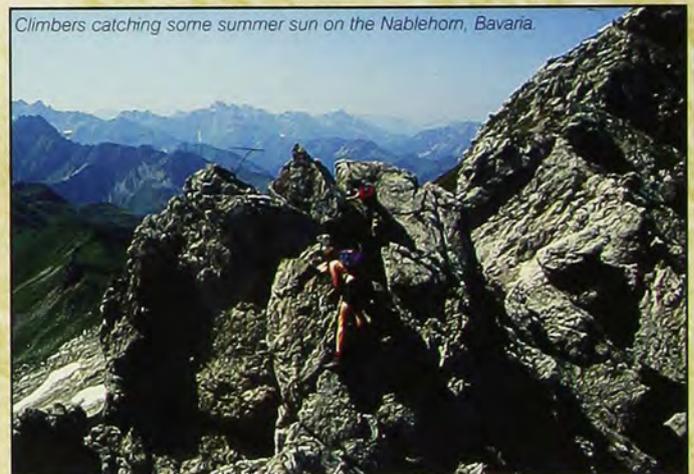
*Mt Cook with the Plateau Hut in the foreground.*



*Jude Duffus takes a break on the way down off La Tour Ronde.*



*Tania Noakes with Makalu behind.*



*Climbers catching some summer sun on the Nablehorn, Bavaria.*

# AMA Easter Meet & Winter Workshop 22-27 March 2002

By Capt K P Edwards APTC (AMA Meets Co-ordinator)

The AMA Easter Meet had been a traditional event in the annual calendar until the mid eighties when it faded out of the programme due to a lack of willing organisers. This year's meet was an attempt to resurrect what had previously been a very popular gathering for some end of season winter mountaineering and ice climbing. The meet had an added attraction of offering advanced skills and refresher training for those personnel who are aspiring towards JSME(L)W or Winter Climbing qualifications. JSMTW Ballachulish hosted the meet with the kind permission and full support of the Commandant JSMTWC.

As a result we were fortunate not only to have access to the resources at the centre but also the expertise of the instructional staff that had volunteered to provide tuition and advice to the group. The chef outdid herself as always as the cuisine was excellent and just what hungry mountaineers needed at the end of a long hard day. 29 personnel convened at the centre during the late hours of Friday and early hours of Saturday morning which given the distance to travel and the busy schedule of work commitments was an outstanding turnout. Saturday commenced with an outline on what the meet hoped to achieve and a safety briefing. The group was then split up into smaller teams based on experience, qualifications and aspirations from the training. Each team disappeared to different locations for a day of refresher training in basic winter mountaineering skills.

The ice climbing pair under the tuition of Capt Peter Kay completed Crowberry Gully Grade III a fine start to their programme. The initial weather forecast had not been particularly favourable and conditions had noticeably waned in the early part of the meet. The advantage of the slightly warmer temperatures was that the avalanche category was very low (category 1) with a stable snow pack of spring snow. As a result when the conditions improved throughout the week it produced wonderful hard neve that in turn created fantastic ice climbing. Throughout the week a great deal of experience was gained to further boost individuals logbooks. The mountaineers spread themselves around the area visiting Creag Megadaih, Cairngorms, Ben a Choarrain, Aonach Mor and of course the mighty Ben Nevis snatching a number of Grade 1 gullies on route. The climbers had to go one route better each day and it was a tough job for the author to think of routes that would top the day before. It started with Forgotten Twin Grade II, Aonach Mor, Tower Scoop Grade III, Ben Nevis and Left Twin Grade III/IV which was a day to remember with clear blue skies and unbroken sunshine.

To complete a memorable meet Capt Kevin Edwards and Lt Mark Stevenson made an ascent of Indicator Wall Grade V, Ben Nevis. The ice was in beautiful condition and just like toffee with first time placements and ice screws in up to the hilt. We finished the 3 pitches right next to the trig point. Everyone who attended the meet agreed that it had been well worthwhile and a tremendous success. The bonus to the training was that 10 personnel qualified as WMP, 7 qualified as WLP, 2 qualified as WCP and after many years waiting the AMA Vice Chair, Major Kath Davies successfully completed her one day reassessment for the JSME(L)W award. WELL DONE KATH!!

The proposed Spring Meet at JSMTW Ripon advertised to take place in May has been postponed in favour of the Peak District Meet, 01-04 June, being organised by Jackie Spong, details in the winter newsletter. The JSMTW Ripon Meet will now be organised for the August Bank Holiday, 24-28 August. The meet will incorporate a workshop on refresher training and advanced rock climbing skills. The meet will also include an opportunity to complete either the MLTB SPA 2 days of training or assessment.

Applications to attend the Ripon Meet are to be sent by fax or letter direct to: OIC JSMTW Ripon, Deverall Bks, Ripon, N Yorks, HG4 2RB, Fax Mil 94 711 4921 Civ 01748 874291

Successful candidates will be informed by joining instructions. Candidates are to include their full contact details, qualifications, brief experience history and aspirations from the training.

Lt Mark Stevenson is organising an AMA meet in Joshua Tree, USA, 08-22 December 2002, details to follow soon.

Do not forget to book early for the gala AMA AGM in September you will not want to miss out!!

Summit Aonach Mor - beware falling climbers!



Topping out on Left Twin III



Dawn light on Mt Tasman viewed from high on Mt Cook. The descent route through the icefalls is just visible on the Linda glacier.

# AORAKI

By Capt Chris Allewell RE

Kia tuohu, Me he maunga teitei, Ko Aoraki anake.

If you must bow your head, then let it be to the lofty mountain Aoraki.

Ice tinkled off Brian's helmet as Rob surmounted the final ice bulge that blocked our route through the summit rocks of Mt Cook. Looking down the 2000m sweep of the East face, the orange glow of dawn had revealed the Tasman glacier snaking away to the north. Shivering on the belay stance, I tucked myself further into the rock to avoid the debris and my mind drifted back 18 months to the Sheffield pub where it all began.

Sat in the bar after a cold grey day on the grit, during the AMA spring meet, the talk had turned to proper mountaineering rather than rock climbing. Sal Ashan was keen on heading out to New Zealand and helped by several pints of Stella everyone agreed it was a great idea. As I had spent some time travelling around New Zealand before joining the Army, I volunteered to help her out. She floated the idea with the AMA committee, gained approval (or at least that was what she told me) and then decided to leave the Army!

The expedition was handed over to me as I started the mind numbing six months of the Army Junior Command and Staff Course. Rather than listen to the characteristics of forward logistic resupply, I worked out if it was possible to climb the big three (Mt's Cook, Tasman and Aspiring) in one expedition and the logistics of doing so. Evenings were spent reading guidebooks rather than textbooks and by the end of the course the expedition was planned!

Assembling the team was slightly more problematical, as one Operation after the other swallowed team members with names changing right up until the month that we flew. On the 31 December the expedition flew from Heathrow through two New Year celebrations and arrived in New Zealand on 2 February. Frantic gas, food and map buying ensued and 24hrs later we were at Mt Cook village waiting for a ski plane to fly us up onto the Tasman glacier. This waiting unfortunately set the tone for the rest of the expedition as we sat looking out at the rain and clouds waiting for the weather to improve. The weather kept us on the ground for two days allowing us to sample Jackie's food (not to be repeated, but worse was to come), the local beer (much better) and a quick practice of some crevasse rescues and prussicking. When the good weather eventually arrived we were almost grounded by bizarre regulations regarding carriage of stove fuel. After a tortuous conversation about whether sealed gas bottles were safe to fly we eventually persuaded a pilot to helicopter us in.

The first two days were spent mainly inside the abundant crevasses as we refreshed our skills prior to our first climb. We climbed the short steep south face of Mt Aylmer before going on to traverse the Hochstetter Dome with its classically beautiful curving snow arete. The complete absence of an ozone layer over New Zealand meant factor 30 cream had the effect of factor 3 and had us raiding the first aid kits for triangular bandages in a desperate attempt not to be fried alive. About this time and contemplating the effects of malnutrition we voted Rob to help out Jackie with the food. When I had asked her initially if she would mind doing the menu's she replied that she only ever cooked baked beans on toast. I had laughed thinking she was joking. She wasn't. So when the other hut occupants were tucking into three course meals with fresh meat and vegetables, we

French Ridge Hut in a very rare moment of good weather. This was where the expedition sat out six days of torrential rain, which caused widespread flooding over the rest of New Zealand. Mt Barff lies behind.



had noodles and onions! The following day the weather turned and as the rest of the hut occupants decided to stay in, the mad Brits popped out for a nice Scottish day on the hills. An AD rock route and a pleasant little grade II gully meant the day was not wasted and another peak was bagged.

The weather had forced all the campers and snowholers in the area to seek refuge in the hut. With well over 30 people in the hut and no good weather forecast for at least five days we hatched our escape plans. Storm force winds and snow halted our 7am start, but when it abated to merely gale force we were off. A mountain guide kindly drew us a sketch map (the real maps just mark it as flat glacier - which it isn't) pronounced us mad and waved us off into the blizzard. In very limited visibility we slowly weaved down the glacier. The warm weather meant that the snow bridges weren't and with a 50lb rucksack every step took you up to your knees in slush. I lost count after the thirty first crevasse I fell down and lost my patience shortly afterwards. Conditions were atrocious, rain became mixed in with the snow and the winds did not abate, gaping crevasses stretched as far as the eye could see and the nearest shelter was a long trudge back up the glacier. The loud thunder of serac falls and avalanches punctuated the

howling wind, but perhaps fortunately they remained only noises in the limited visibility.

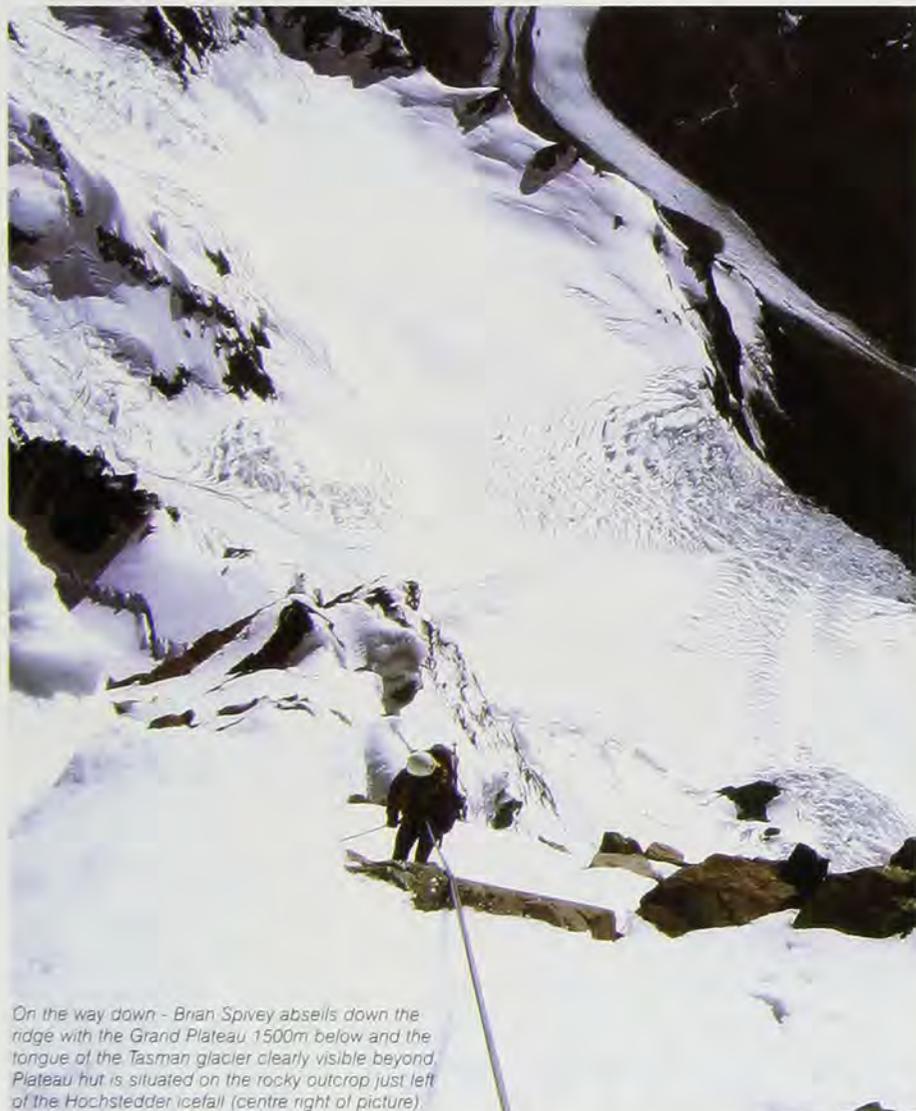
A break in the weather allowed us to assess our progress, which all things considered was remarkably good. We pressed on with renewed vigour picking up speed as we reached the bare ice of the glacier. After 6 hours we were off the glacier ice and onto moraine that had covered the entire glacier with an unstable boulder field. We were beginning to understand why everyone flew out of the area as well as in, but we had gone too far to turn back. After a further five hours of soul destroying slog up and down mini moraine mountains we stood at the base of the exit gully that would take us off the glacier and onto the easier ground on top of a lateral moraine. Despite being the safest place on the moraine wall, the steep 200m gully was full of loose boulders that would occasionally detach themselves without warning and crash noisily to the gully bottom. Slowly we picked our way up when suddenly a scream broke the monotony of our laboured breathing. Jackie had fallen, her heavy rucksack overbalancing her on an unstable rock. She had not fallen far but had landed badly, damaging her leg in the process. Horse living up to his nickname descended, helped her upright and then carried her rucksack up to a flat spot leaving Rob our medic to administer first aid. Jackie was in

enormous pain (we later found out that her femur had punched through her knee cap and broken the top off her tibia) but although unable to put any weight on her leg insisted she could hobble with the aid of an improvised crutch a couple of helpers and some painkillers! The slow process of evacuation began as darkness descended, the scree, was challenging, but eventually led to slightly easier ground. An emergency shelter lay only about a kilometre away, and with GPS assistance, was eventually located. Shortly after midnight we were all safe in the hut with Brian forcing us to drink tea until we were rehydrated. Over the hut radio we explained our problem to the rescue services and after we had politely declined their invitation that we should carry Jackie out agreed to send a helicopter. Weather conspired against us yet again and it was not until 1400 that a helicopter managed to pick Jackie and Rob up whilst the rest of us made for a vehicle RV further down the valley.

Slightly tired after our few days in the hills, and in search of better weather we headed to Wanaka. Unlike Mt Cook village, Wanaka actually had shops and medical facilities so Jacki could convalesce in better surroundings. It was also the jumping off point for Mt Aspiring. After two days rest we heaved enormous rucksacks onto our backs and headed off into the hills. We were carrying enough food for 10 days, with plans to sit out the forecast bad weather in the French Ridge hut. Six days later we had still not seen Mt Aspiring through the cloud, had played every card game imaginable and had read every magazine at least five times. We had bagged one small peak in a blizzard but on the seventh day there was a 12 hour period of good weather forecast. Eagerly we started at 0 100 in light drizzle and trudged through unconsolidated snow to the foot of the route. As conditions were less than favourable we aborted the snow route on the SW face and headed for the rocky NW ridge. This unfortunately meant we had a further two hours on the glacier to the base of the route. Six hours after starting we were on the route which was an airy rock scramble followed by a steep snow ridge. Moving together Horse, Brian, Rob and myself despatched the route in a very respectable time and stood on the summit with a wonderful view of the inside of a cloud.

The return was another glacier nightmare although this time we could at least see for some of the time. We reached the comfort of the hut at about 1700 and were overjoyed to be told that the SW face had been in excellent condition with a temperature inversion occurring 100m above where we changed routes.

We braved the sand flies and river crossings of the return journey and celebrated with venison steaks and a little liquid refreshment two nights later in Wanaka. The weather forecast remained poor. The worst rain for over a hundred years had lashed the islands and caused wide spread flooding in many of the coastal areas of the South Island. With only one week left the prospect of summiting on Mt Cook looked slim. Rather than spend another week sitting in a mountain hut Horse



On the way down - Brian Spivey abseils down the ridge with the Grand Plateau 1500m below and the tongue of the Tasman glacier clearly visible beyond. Plateau hut is situated on the rocky outcrop just left of the Hochstetler icefall (centre right of picture).

and Jim agreed to look after Jackie whilst Rob, Brian and myself headed to Cook. Predictably, we arrived in bad weather and had to wait for a day for a helicopter flight up to the Plateau glacier. On arrival the sun came out and afforded us a magnificent view of the mountain. Unbelievably the evening forecast suggested a good weather window in two days time so plans were made, crampons sharpened and the route examined.

Even with a 0030 start the snow remained unconsolidated. After a short detour into the middle of a crevasse field we established ourselves on the route and spent the next five hours teetering around evil looking seracs and monstrous crevasses. Dawn was breaking as we approached the Linda Shelf, calves burning from front pointing we made the base of the summit rocks in time to see the sun creep slowly over the horizon. Rob, hogging the leads, despatched the tricky pitches in record time and 9 hours after starting we stood on the dangerously corniced summit, taking turns to take the ubiquitous summit photos. The descent was interesting with dodgy anchors and substantial rock fall to keep us on our toes. The surrounding glaciers were now despatching rock fall and seracs almost constantly and we literally ran the gauntlet until safely protected by several enormous crevasses we could pause for food and a rest. We reached the hut at 1500 and spent the next two hours rehydrating.

The following day we marked out the ski plane landing site and waited. The plane arrived but the pilot looked worried. A large crevasse had opened up on the glacier and fully loaded, he was unsure that we would make the take off. Suitably unnerved we loaded the plane and strapped ourselves in. Watching the pilot sweat as he went through his pre-flight checks did not calm our nerves, and I swear we were only 1 m above the ground when the crevasse flashed beneath us. The pilot decided upon a victory loop, although we were not sure if this was to celebrate our successful ascent or missing the crevasse!

Exercise AORAKI TIGER proved to be a great success, although blighted by appalling weather the Expedition climbed all but one of its objectives. New Zealand however is not an alpine area that should be treated lightly. Long approaches followed by long summit days on objectively dangerous routes in fickle weather are the norm. This said, it offers fantastically challenging mountaineering in beautiful and often remote settings. To top it all, the people are the friendliest you will find welcoming you with open arms even if you haven't washed for ten days and have just scratched their car with your crampons!

Postscript - April 02. Jackie Spong is now well on her way to recovery and is reportedly terrorising shopping malls on her electric wheelchair. Tragically Brian Spivey was very seriously injured on a trip to Mt Kenya shortly afterwards. He is still seriously ill in hospital in Birmingham. The thoughts of all the expedition are with him and his wife Carol.



*Mt Aspiring as seen on a postcard. Despite spending seven days at the foot of the mountain and climbing it we did not once actually see the mountain! The route of ascent was the NW ridge (left skyline).*



*More traditional weather with heavy overtones of Scotland. The expedition fights high winds and a white out on the ascent of Mt French.*

*On the way up - Rob Smith leads the final pitch up the summit rocks on Mt Cook.*



# The Alps Are Not Just For Officers!

## Joint Service Alpine Meet (JSAM) 2001

By Andy Stevens

The 2001 JSAM that took place in the French Alps centred on the very popular and attractive town of Chamonix. The lead service last year was the RAF, with Major Andy Stevens heading up the Army Mountaineering Association contingent. The JSAM attracts climbers from across all parts of the Army, both regular and TA units, as well as Officer Cadets from University Officer Training Corps and others at RMCS Shrivenham. It is stressed that the JSAM is not an elitist gathering but an opportunity for any (serving) member of the AMA to gain and develop Alpine mountaineering experience. The aim of the expedition was to develop and practice Alpine mountaineering skills, foster team spirit, physical fitness and enhance leadership skills by undertaking mountaineering activities in the glaciated mountain region of the French Alps as part of a Joint Service exercise. The only pre requisites for JSAM are that you must be a paid up member of the AMA and have previous experience of winter conditions including use of and ice axe and crampons.

On Saturday 28 July twenty nine Army climbers gathered at the Moilliasse campsite on the edge of Chamonix. In amongst this wooded campsite at the foot of the Aiguille du Midi tents were set up, kit unpacked and friendships renewed. In the afternoon there was a joint ex brief given by Squadron Leader Ivor Tyrrell (the RAF Mountaineering Association head representative). An Army briefing followed this and then putting groups together for the first week of activities. Then eager climbers paraded for the distribution of grants, thanks here to the generous assistance from the AMA, Regimental and Corps Associations as well as the G3 PAT staff at each of the Divisional Headquarters.

Maj Andy Stevens, Maj Charlie Francis, Maj Bob Seddon, Capt Stu McDonald and Capt Roger Knox acted as instructors, leaders for the duration of the exercise. The exercise hired an Alpine guide, instructor (Mr Phil Thomas) at the cost of £960, for the novice group during week one. They were taken through the Introduction to Alpine

Mountaineering syllabus, this proved very successful and popular. Assistance from BAC Bavaria (as has happened in previous years) was sadly not available this year.

Bob Seddon and John Adams Forster made an early attempt on Aiguille De Tacul (Voie Normal – PD) from the Requin Hut. They did not complete the route as the approach to SE ridge was heavily crevassed and the couloir required two ice tools. Meanwhile Andy Stevens, Paul Vokes and Jude Duffus started off on the Mer de Glace with a useful training day on a good dry glacier. We then ascended up the metal rungs up to the Couvercle Hut spending a comfortable night in the hut before making an attempt on the Aiguille du Moine (South face PD). This proved to be a difficult climb for all groups with only one of six JSAM ropes on the mountain that day reaching the summit, that being Kenny Ross, Nick Thomas and Roger Knox. There were some interesting climbs up blind alleys both rock and ice pitches. Andy Stevens had to be hauled up one pitch as he couldn't reach into the back of a narrow chimney (or so he claims). The return to the Mer de

Glace by the high route is most entertaining.

Stu MacDonald and his team had a great first few days high up completing the following climbs Aiguille Rochfort (AD) great route, but get there early, La Tour Ronde (N Face (D-) this proved to be a quality route but the upper slope had more ice on it than previous years. Dent du Geant, a great but busy route, abseiling down can be a nightmare, it is recommended that two 50 or 60 m ropes be taken per climbing pair or three. Cosmiques Arête (PD+) remains a classic route and is very popular. Frontier Ridge (D) is an excellent route, long and sustained with some magnificent views.

Charlie Sykes and his intrepid team from north of the border began with a day on the Mer de Glace and then moved up to the Argentiere Hut via the North Ridge of the Tour Noir, they reached 3500m and narrowly avoided a substantial rock fall.

A lot of the climbers made use of roadside crags during the JSAM such as those at the Lac



L-R: Kenny Ross, Jude Duffus, Andy Stevens, Roger Knox and Nick Thomas.

de  
Gilland, this  
is an outstanding crag  
just to the South of Chamonix,  
with well-bolted routes, belay  
boulders and abseil chains in  
place. Mark Stevenson made  
the most of these venues in his  
time down in the valley doing  
some horribly high French  
grades. On some days the  
rocks were too hot to climb on  
by 1330hrs.

Paul Vokes, Jude Duffus and  
Andy Stevens had a spell over  
at the Torino Hut on the Italian  
side (as many of the RAF  
element of the JSAM did). On  
the way over Paul Vokes and  
Jude Duffus climbed the classic  
Cosmiques Arête, a truly  
splendid climb finishing on the  
viewing platform of the Aiguille  
du Midi. The team had one day  
storm bound in Torino Hut  
before embarking on La Tour  
Ronde. This was an interesting  
excursion that proved difficult in  
the route finding department.  
There was some delicate  
climbing and on the descent the  
adjacent couloir avalanched  
(very exciting). Paul and Jude  
conquered the Dent Du Geant  
this proved a long route due to

number  
of other parties on it.

Mont Blanc de Tacul (PD) as well  
as Mont Blanc itself (Gouter  
Route PD-) were climbed  
during the meet. Chamonix is  
the most popular location in the  
Alps for Alpine climbing, with  
plenty of routes of all types,  
having the highest mountain in  
Western Europe is an obvious  
draw, along with several other  
accessible 4000m peaks. The  
rock routes on the lower valley  
craggs and on the Aiguille  
Rouge presented a popular  
attraction. The climbing repre-  
sents real challenges and risk

management in  
glaciated Alpine mountains.

The exercise was due to take  
place over the period 27 Jul -11  
Aug 01, however very poor and  
unstable weather conditions  
caused the exercise to be called  
off on Wed 8 Aug 01 with most  
personnel starting return  
journeys on 9/10 Aug 01. The  
JSAM remains an excellent  
opportunity to develop Alpine  
mountaineering skills, foster  
team spirit, physical fitness and  
enhance leadership skills. The  
joint nature of the exercise was  
much more evident in 2001 with  
mixed teams in various huts and  
a mixed campsite.

JSAM is a  
very enjoyable,  
demanding and  
positive exercise  
drawing participants from  
across the Army and repre-  
sents real training value. It is  
important that all AMA  
members consider attending.  
The Alps are for everyone and  
not just Officers!!! Major Andy  
Stevens is the POC for JSAM  
2002 and is the Regt 2IC at 8  
Tpt Regt RLC, Marne Bks,  
Catterick Garrison, North  
Yorkshire DL10 7NP Tel 94731  
5701. It's never too late to get  
your JSAM application in.

Upper slopes of dent du geant.





# CERRO ACONCAGUA, 13-25 February 2002

By Captain (MAA) K P Edwards APTC

In my case it started with a phone call from Capt Graham Carter - "Kevin would you like to join me leading a group on an expedition to Aconcagua". Most good ideas start with either a phone call, a book you happen to be reading, an inspiring article in a climbing magazine or because you happen to be sitting in on a lecture by a mountaineering hero and hope to emulate him by standing on the same summit. The trouble with most good ideas is that it is easy to plan and plot the ascent from the comfort of your armchair and quite different when the reality of what you have committed yourself to suddenly becomes apparent and the memories of the last high altitude exploit flood back into your mind. It is the same dilemma that all mountaineers face every few years - that once life becomes too comfortable we crave adventure and yet when we are in the thick of the expedition we long for those comforts that we willingly cast off. Needless to say I said, "yes" without hesitation. The problem then comes, once you have convinced yourself, you will have to sell it to the people who are going to give you the necessary support in the venture. Now is the time to awaken your innovative imagination, create a plausible reason for going on this expedition and somehow soften the impact of four weeks away. "It's money well invested and no, it is not that dangerous."

Aconcagua at 22,835ft is the highest mountain on the American Continent and is situated in the mid-western side of Argentina, a stones throw away from the border with Chile. The history of mountain travel in this remote area started with Matthias Zurbriegen when he made the first ascent in January 1897. In recent years the mountain has become extremely popular, with visitor numbers increasing to around 5000 per year and many teams successfully summing throughout the season. However it is important to not underestimate the seriousness of an ascent as more than 90 people have lost their lives and many more have suffered from high altitude injuries.

The nearest city is Mendoza, which is the second largest city in Argentina, as well as being one of the most modern cities in the country. It boasts its own international airport and a whole host of services and facilities to support the thriving tourist industry of which mountaineers make up a small percentage. The economic turmoil that was affecting Buenos Aires and most of the general country was not much in evidence in Mendoza and epitomised by the lengthy queues in MacDonalds hamburger bar.

The native translation of Aconcagua would be 'Rock Guardian' although other versions of ancient dialect have translated it to mean 'Snowed Hill'. Originally Aconcagua was thought to be an inactive volcano but this theory was dismissed when a thorough study was conducted on the geology identifying that the underlying layer of sedimentary rock was overlaid by volcanic rock transported from a tectonic over thrust. Aconcagua is housed within a provincial park covering some 71,000 hectares, created in 1990. The park has its own independent National Ranger service providing information, access control and basic paramedic and rescue assistance. Visitors to the park are required to register at the office in Parque San Martin, Mendoza and for a modest park fee they receive a permit that must be presented at the established park ranger stations en route so mountaineers' progress can be monitored. A strict rule of teams cleaning up and extracting their own rubbish is enforced by the park rangers, incurring a \$100 fine if the numbered rubbish bags they issue are not returned to the park entrance.

The team was made up of personnel from both 1 & 2 Royal Anglian Regiments and included a doctor, Capt Jaish Mahon who is a close friend of the Expedition Leader, Lt J P Downes. The remainder of the team was comprised of two young private soldiers, 1 LCpl AGC and 1 Plt Sgt. Capt Graham Carter and I were the technical leaders.

The first time that we all met was when the team assembled at London Heathrow on 10 February to start our great adventure. I shall be brief in my description of the journey to Mendoza, which needless to say was long, tiring and tedious with very little of note that merits more than a few words to describe. The journey commenced on Sunday at 1900hrs GMT and finished at Mendoza on Monday at 1700hrs GMT-3hrs.

After a quick wash, scrub up and refreshing dip in the freezing hotel pool, we hot-footed up to the local outfitters/guides shop, Orviz, to purchase maps, arrange transport to the mountain, mules to carry the expedition baggage to base camp and feeding whilst at base camp. It was then back to the hotel for a sociable drink to accompany a briefing on the administrative arrangements of the next few days as well as the conduct and safe management of the expedition. It was an opportunity to spread out the personal equipment to ensure that it was suitable for the task and all correctly fitted.

The first full day in country was going to be spent focusing on the final finishing touches to the administration and organisation so that we could then wholly concentrate on the mountain we had come to climb. After a leisurely breakfast our initial task was to descend on the local supermarket for man's favourite pastime - food shopping! With our modest CILOR in hand we all bomb burst between the aisles with no clear plan and somehow arrived at the cashout with four trolleys of food. Much of what we had grabbed from the shelves, as suitable high altitude food, was based on guesswork from the picture on the packet, as none of us could understand enough Spanish to translate the ingredients or cooking instructions. Flushed with success we made our way up-town to the National Park office to register and pay for our permits. We picked up some last minute items such as gas canisters for the cookers and then it was back to the hotel to finish packing for the mountain. That night we celebrated with a meal in an 'all you can eat' restaurant as part of the calorie overload diet we knew would be burnt off in the coming weeks.

Following our last wholesome breakfast on day 2, we loaded up the minibus for the four-hour trek through stunning scenery to the heart of the mountain massif and our final destination, Puenta del Inca. This tiny alpine village was the last bastion of civilisation and purely existed as the gateway to the high mountain ranges. It was here that we met the manager of the mule hire company, Rudi Parra, who, we later found out, was one of the founder members of the Argentine Mountain Guides Association. He was also the local 'Del Boy' with fingers in just about every pie in the district. Whatever you needed he could supply at a modest price. However, it was now quite late on in the day and we decided to spend our first night under canvas in the local campsite and make an early start in the morning. At 2700m it would also be a useful beginning to the acclimatisation programme.

Having loaded up the mules with our technical equipment to be deposited at advance base camp we made our way to the park entrance and our first glimpse of the mountain. Needless to say it dominated the skyline, setting our hearts racing at the same time as we reached for our cameras. With lungs full of clean mountain air, the sun at our backs and heavy rucksacks, we commenced the 8km trek to Confluencia, 3368m, where we would stop over for two nights acclimatisation. It was a gentle trek over a well-worn trail, completed in just over four hours.

We arrived in the middle of the day as the temperatures were rising to a high of approximately 30°C - 35°C and we barely warranted a wave from the park ranger. Having familiarised ourselves with the immediate surroundings it was time to select a comfortable plot to erect the tents. Having erected the tents we settled down in any spot that provided us with some shade to have lunch and re-hydrate.

The evening menu consisted of soup, to be followed by steak, chips and fruit.

Day 4 was an acclimatisation day from Confluencia, following a trail alongside the Ventisquera Horcones glacier, presenting us with magnificent views of the south face. Having reached a height of 3900m we stopped for lunch and were not disappointed with the panorama that was being unveiled as the clouds drifted lazily across the face. It warranted at least half a roll of film. Then it was a leisurely stroll back to Confluencia in the spiralling heat to find the elusive shade. Another excellent evening meal was served, topped off with coffee in the open-air conservatory subtly lit with a myriad of stars.

We were not looking forward to Day 5 and the ascent to Plaza de Mulas (base camp), 4230m. It lived up to its reputation every step of the way and turned out to be every bit as hard as the tales of suffering told about this stage of the journey. The trek commenced early after breakfast to make the most of the cool morning temperatures. It began with a stiff, but short lived, ascent from camp up to the level valley floor that stretched into the distance for 16kms. The valley was hemmed in on both sides by impressive rock strata that, although interesting, was oppressive and sucked out the air, turning it into a cauldron of stifling heat. With the sun beating mercilessly on our backs and temperatures well up into the plus 40 degrees we sought out every limited place to rest in the shade. It was not particularly encouraging to learn that the final quarter of the trail we were following was known as Dead Mule path. Having turned to see the bleached white skeleton of the unfortunate beast, we stopped to take on board more water and food lest they rename the path in our memory. The final sting in the tail was the vertical rise up to base camp, which really hurt and was a true test of mettle, reducing our pace to coincide with our increased breathing rate. Base camp was a jumble of tents set out in spaces cleared from the moraine debris but despite its desolate appearance it seemed like an oasis after a very tiring day. We quickly located our base camp support team and relaxed our weary bodies in the comfort of the mess tent, each with our own personal jug of refreshing fruit squash. Time heals all and we eventually emerged to find a comfortable space for our tents. Having slightly recovered from our weary state we surveyed the facilities in this small canvas city. We estimated that there were more than 20 base camp support companies and about 200 people spread out between here and the summit camp with almost every nationality represented. We were amazed to find that you could purchase almost any luxury at a price - American Express? - that will do nicely! There was everything from cheeseburgers and beer to satellite phone booths and solar heated showers. Just what the doctor ordered and well worth every dollar. Not surprisingly we slept incredibly well that night, although my dreams were plagued by the thought of my last resting place being a marker for a mountaineers trail.

Day 6 was earmarked as a well-earned rest day to aid the acclimatisation process and give us time to organise our equipment into manageable loads for the carry up to the higher camps. From this point on we were going to be totally self sufficient in our endeavours. It felt good to have a whole day to just suck in the Os' without



the accompanying exertion. This was also a day to enjoy the fruits of the facilities, a shower, a chance to wash clothes and mentally prepare for the rigours that lay ahead. Later that afternoon we visited the local medical team who spend the season at base camp, paid for by the regional government. The doctor, who rotates every 18 days, takes details on your general health and then conducts a simple O<sub>2</sub> saturation test. If the test results are in an 86% or better saturation, then he gives you the thumbs up to ascend to the summit. It is an extremely useful indicator of your rate of acclimatisation and helps to allay some concerns with the ascent. It is a natural part of the acclimatisation process to suffer from headaches, ranging from the mildly annoying to total debilitation. These are helped greatly by keeping fully hydrated (4 litres a day), staying out of the sun and a handy supply of strong headache tablets.

Jaish, our doctor, did an excellent job of medically monitoring us throughout the expedition and proved to be a great comfort in the times of personal crisis when you convinced yourself that you were dying simply because of a headache that could not be cured instantly. Another factor at altitude is fatigue due to disturbed sleep that can be attributed to either Cheyne Stokes breathing (irregular breathing pattern), constantly waking up due to repeated full bladder syndrome (from the extra intake of fluid or a general weak bladder) or High Altitude Flatulence (HAF), particularly from your tent partner making it unbearable in the confined space and essential to sleep nearest the tent entrance.

Day 7 was programmed as another acclimatisation day, as all days would be up to the summit. The aim was to ascend up to the next high camp, Plaza Canada, erect the spare tent and stash a cache of equipment and food. The actual ascent of the mountain had now begun in earnest. The terrain was going to be steeper, although not technically difficult, but would need to be completed in reasonable bite size chunks. The weather seemed to be reliably stable in the early part of the day with a heavy cloud build up in the late afternoon dissipating under the cold night air. The sun would rise over the ridgeline at about 9 o'clock each morning and when it hit the slopes the temperature rise was instantly noticeable. It was best to start the ascent whilst the slopes were still in the shade. The line of ascent was via a well-worn track through the scree at a pace that would be best described as slow, laborious, deliberate and steady. The whippets moved faster, got tired quicker, rested more often and were generally always caught up by the snails who were able to converse legibly all the time. The ascent was leisurely, with plenty

Kevin and Graham on the Summit - Aconcagua 6959m



The Tam at Berlin Camp, 5800m



of stops to admire the views and take pictures. At Conway Rocks, about midway, there was even time to indulge in some bouldering (un-rope rock climbing low to the ground), which was irresistible to our Army climbing champion, Graham Carter. We made the high camp in a good time of 3hrs. There were plenty of available spaces in this otherwise limited area so we staked our claim, enjoyed a well deserved rest and then ambled back down the track to base camp in about an hour. That night we enjoyed our last home cooked meal of mixed treats as thereafter we would be cooking our own de-hydrated rations. This was not an appetising prospect and a definite recipe for losing weight as the altitude affects the appeal and taste of food. It is a fact that it becomes progressively harder to please the taste buds.

Day 8 and the big push was on. They say that breakfast is the most important meal of the day and it is certainly never truer than when at altitude along with consuming plenty of fluid. In our case it was made particularly special by the local chef who always produced pancakes accompanied by a big tub of condensed milk flavoured spread, sickly sweet but ever so popular amongst the team and so coveted that each of us were reluctant to release the tub for fear of running out. Having packed our tents, we shouldered our heavy sacs and slowly repeated the ascent to Plaza Canada. It was great to be on the move and depart from the distractions at base camp and finally get to grips with tackling the mountain. All that had taken place before was simply to get us to this point. There was no rush to reach the new high camp but we achieved it in a reasonable time and set about settling in. We enjoyed a light lunch and relaxed. The clouds built up with a menacing appearance that eventually unloaded a sizeable dump of snow. This proved to be fairly fortuitous as it provided an easily accessible source of cooking and drinking water rather than an 800 metre trek to an old snow patch. Cooking always occupies most of the time spent in a tent at altitude as the cooker continually purrs, brewing a mixture of drinks and cooking the meals in drawn out stages that amounts to about four hours. In fact the evening meal is one of the highlights of the day, along with time for reading just before lights out. The worst moment comes when you have to extract yourself from a warm, comfortable sleeping bag into the freezing cold morning air – that inevitable moment is delayed for as long as possible.

There was no need to rush breakfast or emerge early from the tents as Day 9 was just a load carry up to the next high camp, Nido de Condores, 5380m (17,650ft). The day had dawned beautifully although there was a stiff breeze. The uphill trail commenced with a gradual incline that steadily increased, although not particularly steep. The first hour and a half was relatively pleasant but then the wind strength rose, blowing spindrift directly into our faces and required us for the first time to don extra layers, hats and gloves. The last pull up the long snow slope onto the col and the site of our next camp required a lot of effort. In the prevailing conditions this campsite looked very uninviting, exposed as it was to the full force of the elements. We erected the spare tent in the quickest time possible, stashed the spare equipment and beat a hasty retreat back to the lower camp. The experience of this day had raised some minor questions in our plan of attack. However, after a council of war, we decided that perhaps we were overreacting to our misgivings and rallied ourselves to stick to the original programme. Once we had relaxed a little and enjoyed our sumptuous evening meal the concerns seemed to melt away. We were back into a positive frame of mind and slipped off into a deep, easy sleep.

Day 10 heralded perfect weather conditions and we decided to pack up the camp in slow time and utilise the sunshine to dry out our damp equipment. We commenced the ascent in our usual style of each choosing their own pace whilst making sure we all stayed within eyeshot of each other. We split into two groups at the midway point each with a different approach up the final snow slope as to what we considered the line of least resistance. The weather was glorious and so we could afford to have a good look around for what would be the most comfortable site to pitch the tents. As there was no natural shelter we settled for a position requiring the shortest walk to the latrine area but also giving us an area of clean snow for cooking and drinking water. A short team discussion led to the conclusion that we had all earned a period of recovery so a day of rest was ordered. That night was the coldest experienced so far with hoar-frost forming on the inside of the tent from the condensation.

We hit upon the idea of keeping the tent candles burning all night, which negated the problem thus ensuring we did not end up with the ensuing indoor shower when the sun hit the canvas first thing in the morning.

Day 11 was the most enjoyable and peaceful of the whole trip. We woke late, took time to eat breakfast and then wandered over to the edge of the col, gazing out into the mountains afar, absorbing the view and marvelling at nature. It was a special time to take the pictures that would capture the moment, discuss future aspirations or stay quiet in each other's company in serene bliss. What price would people pay for such an opportunity as this? Back at the tents we were witness to some unfolding human dramas. In one incident there was a mountaineer being led off the mountain with snow blindness and in a separate incident we watched as a Japanese mountaineer struggled into camp, quite obviously totally exhausted from his endeavours. As he stood, confused, near a state of collapse I called to Jaish to offer medical assistance and our support in his time of distress. It appeared that he was searching for his tent that had been collapsed by his team colleagues and stashed somewhere in the nearby rocks. We eventually located his tent, which we pitched, gave him some fluids and then watched him crawl inside to emerge two days later. We later learnt that he had made three separate unsuccessful summit bids completely depleting his energy reserves to the extent that he made it back to the lower camp on pure will power. The power of the human spirit is never so strong as when confronted in a struggle against adversity and gave us a topic for deep conversation that night.

Day 12 and we were now gearing into the final phase with a load carry up to our highest camp, Berlin, 5780m (19,000ft). The route lay up a series of zigzag trails on the steepest terrain so far encountered. It was the first time that we had needed crampons, as the line of ascent was on hard snow ice. We were surprised at the ease and speed that it took to cover the ground, as we seemed to arrive at the refuge hut quicker than expected. What did disappoint us was the appearance of this location with litterbags discarded outside the refuge and the obvious indiscriminate fouling of the area with urine and faeces. Spending a night here was not going to be pleasant. We spent some time pitching the tent, storing the gear and then had lunch in the small wooden emergency hut. We descended in less than an hour and were glad to be back in a cleaner, fresher area. It was time to re-site the tents as they had become frozen into the ground during the period we had spent at the col. This would make it easier to pack them in the morning when the ground would be frozen solid and make it difficult to chip them out of the ice. Our thoughts that night were wrapped up in the outcome of the next few days, which meant that sleeping was fitful to say the least.

Day 13 was the last carry-up with loads as hereafter it was a question of holding out in the high camp for the optimum conditions for an ascent to the summit. We regained the ground we had covered the day before in the same quick time. We were justifiably pleased as we felt we were in good shape and going strong. We pitched the tents in the least smelly spots and then occupied our time with constant brewing and filling big black bags with clean snow so that it limited the time we spent outside the tents when the temperature dropped. The sunsets were absolutely magnificent, as the sun seemed to set on several occasions behind the cloud building up in all shapes and sizes transmitting a profusion of colours. Supper that evening was more of an endurance test to keep it down. The team were briefed on the timings and arrangements for the summit day. Sleep did not come easily at this altitude and amounted to no more than a couple of hours. The wind had definitely risen during the night to a tempest that was constantly roaring throughout the hours of darkness.

The alarm went off at 5am and we started the long process of preparation, making sure nothing was forgotten or overlooked before the deadline for departure at 7am. In the event we waited until the early morning light pierced the sky at 7.30am before we set off. It was extremely cold, as the wind had only slightly abated. It had been -17°C in the tent during the night. We were wearing all the protective clothing to combat the harsh climate and yet we were still feeling the effects of the biting cold conditions. We were going to have to closely monitor everyone for signs of frostbite. The ascent started

very cautiously as we were going to have to pace ourselves carefully at this height as it was going to be a long, draining day. There was still 1200m to climb! It was unfortunate that one member of the team had to descend after an hour, despite his valiant efforts but he was just not able to keep pace and would have endangered him and the remaining team personnel. Each snow slope merged into yet another and making headway was both a battle of will and the elements. Our first turn around point was to be the old refuge, Independencia, 6370m (20,900ft). It had taken roughly three hours to get to this point where we took our first serious rest and drink stop. Just another 100ft up the slope was Windy Gap where we would be exposed to the full fury of the wind and cold. Everyone was feeling the strain of the ascent and it would be now left to the individual to decide how far they were willing to push their limits. Getting over Windy Gap presented each person with their own hurdle as the route ahead was now revealed and would require a monumental strength of will to overcome.

The next part of the route was a very long, gently rising traverse that seemed to go on forever. It now became a case of mind over matter, as there was nothing more complicated than simply placing one foot in front of the other. The pace slowed still further but we had time on our side and the weather was holding. Early into the traverse three team members decided that they had pushed themselves as far physically as they could manage. We were all extremely proud of what they achieved for their first attempt at a high altitude peak. They had shown massive courage and huge hearts to get as far as they did. It was now on the shoulders of the remaining four team members to continue the fight for the summit. The traverse was becoming laboriously long but the saving grace was a huge overhanging cave area where we could rest and take on board more fluid before tackling the final section to the top. The four remaining summiteers were slightly spread apart at this point. As one of the leading pair I stepped up into the Canaleta, a 400m gully

system. We were protected from the wind and felt as though we were baking in the combination of the dry air and reflected heat from the sun on the snow. All at once the strength just seemed to drain out of us and our pace dropped to two steps whilst we were left gasping for air. Our conversations were largely incomprehensible but necessary for the moral encouragement it offered otherwise I would have lain down to sleep on the spot. We literally dragged our weary bodies up the slope that led to the final traverse to the summit that never seemed to get any nearer. We had given everything to get this far and it was the sheer thought of not letting the rest of the team down and bloody mindedness that kept us going. We almost crawled the last few feet to the top and sat down at the summit cross with blessed relief that we had made it.

What does it mean when you have achieved a moment in your life such as this? Initially, absolute euphoria as it has been the whole focus of your world from the time you arrived in the country. It is your reason for being in Argentina and something you have planned and schemed over for many months. Secondly, hugely emotional because it becomes a single entity that you have shared with the team and this is the common goal that has bonded you so closely together. We shook hands and hugged to share the celebration of our success. We waited for our other two teammates to join us and revelled with them in their moment of triumph. The skies were totally clear so we enjoyed a full 360° view of this vast range happy in the knowledge that we were standing on the highest mountain on the American continent and we had done it in fine style. We naturally took many photographs and simply savoured the moment with a full hour before commencing our descent, but that is another story.

The pleasure I derived from this expedition was not just from getting to the summit but also from watching the younger team members' marvel in the whole experience and that has its own rewards. Success had been achieved through a total team effort.

## MOUNTAIN RESCUE WITH A DIFFERENCE

What do you get if you build a car park in the seventies at the foot of a popular Scottish mountain and stop publicising any other routes to the summit? Answer: 20,000 people per year using one footpath to the top and turning it into a boggy scar.

This description could apply to many hills in the UK but in this case we are talking about Schiehallion - one of Scotland's best-known landmarks and best loved hills. The John Muir Trust bought East Schiehallion in 1999 and we're now engaged there on our biggest single conservation effort - to 'rescue' the mountain from its eroded state.

The five-year path project is partly funded by a total grant of £580,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Scottish Natural Heritage - our largest single fund-raising success so far. This has allowed us to employ an upland path expert, Chris Cairns to manage the project. Chris took on the challenge in April this year. He will oversee the creation of a new path from the car park, and the gradual restoration of the current eroded line. The new path will be narrow, with an even gradient. It will use locally sourced materials: a free-draining stone base rather than one made from timber or a membrane.

Professionals will do much of the work but we will still need volunteers. If you fancy a weekend helping out in scenic surroundings, look at our website for dates and details. Even better - join the Trust and receive all the latest news and event information regularly. Join online at [www.jmt.org](http://www.jmt.org)

### Run in the London Marathon

The Trust has a few guaranteed places in the London Marathon 2003 (13<sup>th</sup> April).

If you'd like to run for the Trust please contact Katie Jackson, 0131 554 0114 or [promotions@jmt.org](mailto:promotions@jmt.org)

Background: Schiehallion and Loch Rannoch (by John Harrison)

Inset: Volunteers working on Schiehallion. (by Steve Green)





On top of the Island Peak Dorje. L-R: WO2 Jammie Hastley, Capt Phil Jackson, Sgt Matt Kinnesley, Cpl Roger Bannister, LCpl Adam Kennedy.

# ISLAND PEAK

By Adam Kennedy

Exercise Island Peak was planned from September 2000 to take place in November 2001. Ideally we would have gone earlier but the Squadron was due to deploy on Ex SAIF SAREEA 11 and there was no guaranteeing when we would return. Because of the long planning time everything went pretty smoothly. Once again Lt Col. Harrison G3 PAT 4 DIV proved an invaluable source of advice throughout the planning phase.

The biggest concern was money but even that ran quite smoothly. The Berlin Memorial Brigade, Blythe Sappers, The Corps of Royal Engineers, 34 Field Sqn PRI, 39 Engr Regt PRI and 4 Div all made hefty contributions. However, due to the events of September 11 the US dollar/pound sterling exchange rate fell through the floor deeming the trekking agencies fees far more expensive than

previously estimated. Moreover the subsequent insurance hike led to Gulf Air asking for an extra couple of hundred pounds. The previous twelve month's plans were about to fall through! After several pleading phone calls 4 Div, the RE Corps Treasurer and Regimental PRI committed an extra £1000 between them, saving the expedition at the eleventh hour.

The Loan pool was unable to provide gaiters, crampons and salopettes. Capt Kelly's credit card was at the ready just in case but a contract was arranged by Lt Col Harrison and the necessary

equipment was delivered to the barracks the day before departure.

After numerous visits to Cambridge's new Field and Trek Shop, we were ready for the off. The flight to Kathmandu, via Abu Dhabi and Bahrain was good, with only a short delay. We had three or four days in Thamel, Kathmandu, before our trek began. Capt Kelly went for a brief at the British Embassy and was warned off about potential civil unrest because of a Maoist uprising. So we acquainted ourselves with a very popular bar, Tom and Jerry's, and afterwards the Jump Club. Much Tuborg downed and good food from local restaurants, we were set for our weeks ahead in the mountains.

Our first port of call was Lukla, at 2840m. It has a very scary airstrip, literally on the side of a mountain. The plane lands heading into the side of it which means in three weeks we will take off with only a vertical plunge to death at the end of the runway, thankfully they've cleaned away the airplane graveyard now.

After sorting porters to take our climbing gear to Namche Bazar, we set off. We crossed many rickety bridges over fast flowing water and gorges. We stayed one night in Phakding, 2610m,

at a lodge owned by the Aunt of our guide Dorje.

As we round the final corner, there is Namche Bazar, 3440m. It is built up the side of the surrounding hills, and is a thriving village of some size. We had two days here, and we picked up Yak man, and his three sturdy beasts! We collected our rations, and dealt with Tibetans to buy a car battery with which we had to charge a solar panel.

From Namche, we headed for our first peak, Gokyo, this took us five days, four were planned, but Capt Kelly was suffering from AMS, so we stayed low an extra day. We stayed evenings at Kunijung, 3780m, the Lost Valley, Phortse Tenga, 3680m, Dole

4200m, Machherna, 4470m, and finally Gokyo 4790m. Three of our eight man team decided to be at the top for sunrise, Roger Bannister, David Elliott and myself Adam Kennedy set off at 0315 bleary eyed, led by Sangay our climbing guide. We had a slow two hour climb to the top, unfortunately, we arrived early so we had to wait 70 minutes for sunrise and a most impressive mountain range view. The decent was much quicker.

View of Everest from Kala Pattar.



We were soon back in our lodge, having breakfast and waving the rest of the team off as they made to ascent. The first peak was successful, and completed by everyone.

Later that day we had word that the head Lama had predicted an early winter, so it was decided to head straight for Island Peak, which was our main objective. Steady trekking, staying at Phortse 3810m, and Dingboche 4410m, the routes were becoming less populated. Now off the valley paths, a hard couple of hours up to Chhukung 4730m, which was our last stop before Base Camp Island Peak. Two nights here, running through kit checks and practising our knots, and general safety checks. At 1100 hrs, we set off for Base Camp Island Peak, an easy couple of hours getting there, we set up camp. Darkness comes quickly there and the temperature drops to -14C and it's only just after 1800hrs. Kit prepared, noodles and black coffee consumed, we were in bed for 1900hrs. We got up an hour earlier than planned, had more noodles and coffee, dressed, and were ready for the big climb. A very hard climb of four hours up scree covered slopes, slipping and sliding in the dark. A couple of the group are struggling and decide to go no further than the snow line, 5900m.

There's a small ridge just before the snowline, an ideal spot for putting on crampons and tightening up harnesses, the six of us left progress into a snowy world, sticking to the trodden path, to avoid the hidden dangers, we venture on. After a short time we see where the path leads, 250m of vertical climb, broken into three sections the first the greatest. Our two guides head up the first fixing in the ice anchors and ropes, one by one we start climbing. Thirty-fourty minutes and just two more climbs to go, four hours of being above the snowline and I'm the first one of the team climbing over the top. I'm there, seven hours of soul sapping climbing, a most fantastic view. I was shortly followed by Phil Jackson, Jammy Hartly, Matt Kinnersly and Roger Bannister. There were great views of the Nupstse luptse Pass.

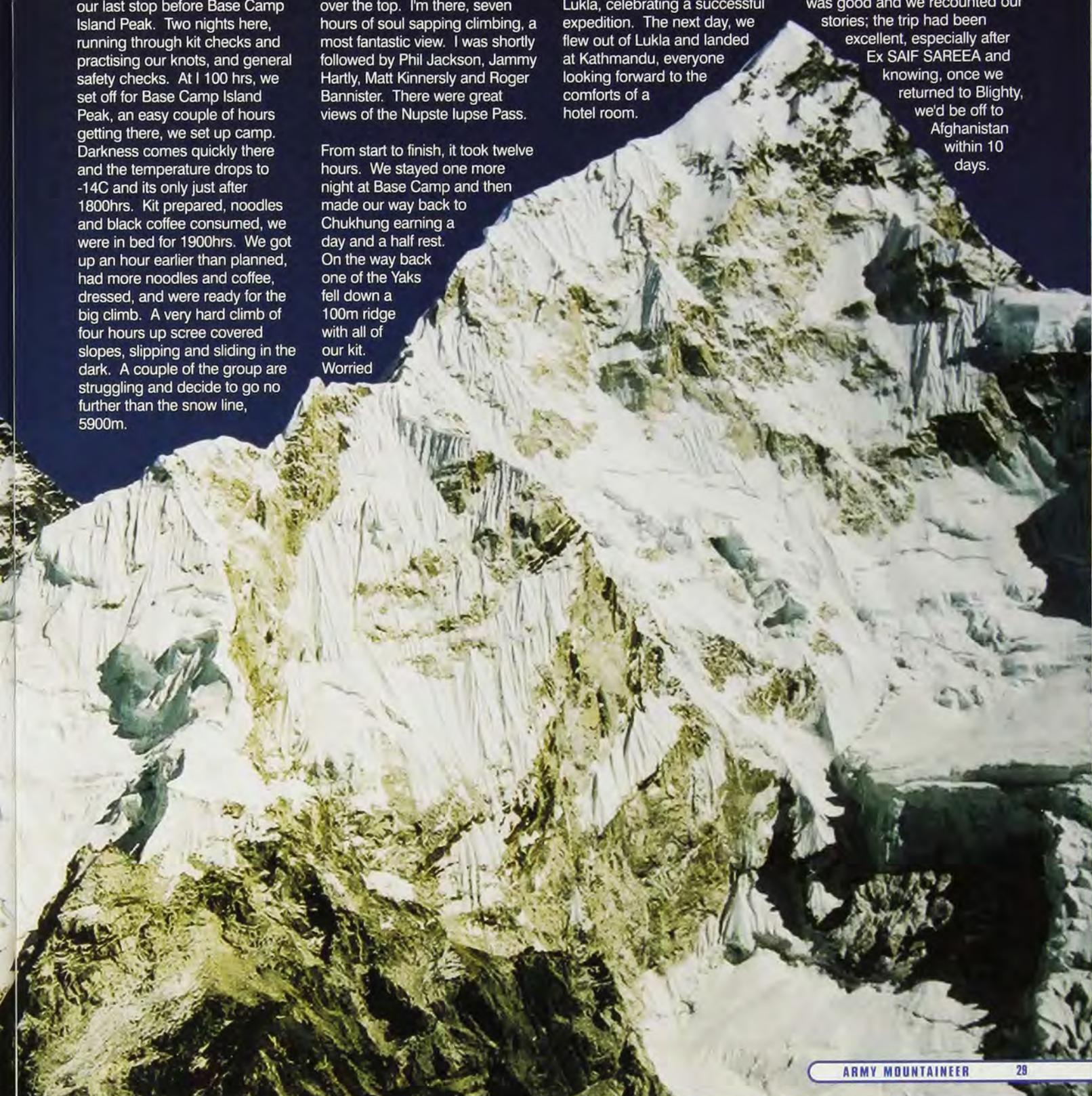
From start to finish, it took twelve hours. We stayed one more night at Base Camp and then made our way back to Chhukung earning a day and a half rest. On the way back one of the Yaks fell down a 100m ridge with all of our kit. Worried

for a split second the commotion actually proved quite comical once we realised everything was OK; the Yak's ensuing rage lasted for a couple of hours and we avoided it for the rest of the day. From Chhukung we took a twelve hour trek over the Kong Ma La Pass to Lobuche, our base to climb Kala Patar. We achieved this the next day - Kala Pattar 5550m, a stroll in the park compared to Island Peak, has an awesome view of Mount Everest, the Khumbu glacier and Khumbu Icefall - the perfect end to our trekking trip.

Four days later and we were at Lukla, celebrating a successful expedition. The next day, we flew out of Lukla and landed at Kathmandu, everyone looking forward to the comforts of a hotel room.

With ten days left of our trip, and all Peaks achieved, it was a tough one to call but we decided to relax, and we spent some time in Pokra, where we stayed with an ex 69 Field Squadron Gurkha Sergeant Major, who fed us with industrial sized bottles of Roxy (local spirit). We also crammed in some fishing and mountain biking.

Moving back to Kathmandu for the last couple of days we saw the sights and took up our old residence in Tom & Jerry's Bar - not so busy this time because of the Maoist uprising and a 2000hrs curfew. But the beer was good and we recounted our stories; the trip had been excellent, especially after Ex SAIF SAREEA and knowing, once we returned to Blighty, we'd be off to Afghanistan within 10 days.



# A Mountaineer's Mating Calendar

By Lt Col (ret'd) John Muston

In general soldiers (and most officers) are a pretty disciplined and organised bunch. Years of training in regimental depots, at Sandhurst etc sow the seeds of this and there are always sergeant majors about to ensure that discipline is never forgotten. All sergeant majors see this as their prime role in life be it concern at the length of a soldier's hair or the improvement of officers' sword drill - very vital in the third millennium.

This military approach is carried over into mountaineering expeditions which are usually well-organised with all the right JSATFAs submitted, diplomatic clearances

obtained, NATO travel orders completed etc. With even more luck the expedition takes some rations and the right sort of hardware for the route. However I have noticed over the years that this planning discipline does not always extend to their PCPs (Protected Copulation Phases) and their UCWs (Unprotected Copulation Windows). Let me explain further and add that, for obvious reasons, this article cannot be illustrated with pictures although viewing almost any television wildlife programme and listening to David Attenborough's breathless lyrics should give you an idea of what is wanted.

Typically a military climber has the following annual calendar. January to March is for skiing and Scottish winter climbing. April through to October is good for UK rock-climbing with, of course, June to September also being the prime alpine season. This leaves November and December as a clear period for an Offspring Production Phase. I am given to understand that in these enlightened times this requires the presence of both the mother and the father. In an earlier era the male involvement was limited to the Pregnancy Initiation Phase - usually half an hour after News at Ten.

So how does this affect your PCPs and UCWs? Very simply. Offspring can only arrive in November and December if there is not to be radical disruption to ones climbing calendar. Now comes the tricky bit - the mathematics. I am reliably informed, by certain ladies of my acquaintance, that the gestation period (what the Gunners might call flash to bang time) for a human is 266 days or about 40 weeks, so extrapolating backwards, which is painful but possible, your UCW is late January to late March in any one year. Those living south of the Equator must make their own six month adjustment to all these figures.

However there is also what might be called, in industrial terms, 'slippage' i.e. the contract date is not met precisely by up to a month beforehand or a fortnight after. Outside these parameters a medical emergency must be accepted. This reduces your UCW to late February to mid March if you want to be quite sure of nil interference with your climbing plans. Happily most military climbers are young and presumably virile so can make the most of this UCW always assuming that their partners can match them. This is not the place for ageing male colonels to have more than a passing eye over nubile blonde twenty year old females. Now in an article of this nature there is a further point to be covered. In the current state of medical science only females can carry (I believe this is the correct term) a foetus. Now some of our mountaineers are female and this carrying business involves an increasingly large abdomen. The Army rightly preaches that the finest form of leadership is by example so how will such climbers tackle a 10 metre layback pitch on one of our harder rock climbs when they are, as they say, 'six months gone'? I understand that the bulge cannot be, as it were, unstrapped during vigorous activity and refastened afterwards. This is a further complication for lady climbers to consider. Ideally the gestation period needs dramatic shortening, say one week instead of 40 to avoid all the problems outlined above but I have to say that medical research does not seem to be active in this field. All I can advise is that as well as calculating the calorific content of your expedition rations you must also pay close attention to your PCPs and UCWs. Failure to do so could seriously affect your mountaineering!





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# WHY SKI MOUNTAINEER?

"When God made the hills He intended them to be climbed and not to be used as glorified toboggan runs."

## Introduction

The above comment, from a member of the Alpine Club in the early 1920s, illustrates the jaundiced perspective with which many mountaineers view the use of skis in a mountaineering environment. This may be because skiers and mountaineers are perceived to have such different values, indeed a whole different relationship with the environment they move amongst. I would say that whilst the stereotypical mountaineer (dour, rollup smoking, self-reliant) and skier (brash, selfish, demanding) can still be found, increasingly there are more and more people who have a passion for both. These passions can be realised simultaneously through ski mountaineering.

An AMA survey in 1996 discovered that ski mountaineering

*Tim Bird ski touring on Cairngorm. By Steve Willson.*

was overwhelmingly the discipline that the membership wished to know more about and to be developed in. Whilst the situation may have changed in the intervening few years the executive committee, meeting on 28 May 02, decided that the opportunity presented by an enthusiast to promote the discipline was worthwhile; as a result I have a year to identify whether mountaineering by ski is AMA business! As the 'Ski Mountaineering Rep' my aim over the next twelve months will be 'to raise awareness of the possibilities offered by ski touring and mountaineering to the AMA membership'.

Specific objectives will be as follows:

*To inform the membership about ski touring and mountaineering*

*To explore suitable links (and possible funding) with other bodies.*

*To promote the gaining of the relevant skills*

*To encourage expeditioning by ski*

*To act as a point of contact and advice*

There is a danger that I am setting myself up as an expert here; that is not the intention. Many reading this will be better qualified than I to address all of these areas – I just happened to volunteer! I will however endeavour to further develop the information base I already possess and develop links with others able to advise more authoritatively.

## What is Ski Mountaineering?

As has been hinted at above I believe it breaks down into two distinct disciplines:

**Ski Touring** This is journeying through a mountainous landscape in full winter conditions. A tour will normally be multi-day, involve carrying all necessary equipment and may include ski ascents of peaks. In a joint service context it is a non-glacial activity.

**Ski Mountaineering** This is all of the above, normally involves crossing glaciers and winter mountaineering with skis carried. It requires full winter equipment and a higher level of both skill and fitness!

Both disciplines tend to use huddled accommodation, although in remoter areas tents etc may be carried or 'pulked'. Both disciplines tend to be extremely demanding.

Over the coming year I intend to discuss these activities in greater detail, along with opportunities to gain training and suitable locations for expeditions. For now I would recommend that readers still reading may wish to check out the courses offered by either JSMTTC (Indefatigable) for touring, or BAC (Bavaria) for touring and mountaineering. I have attended courses at both (the 'Inde' ones are in Norway) and both centres offer superb, well resourced training in beautiful mountain environments.

## Why me?

By this stage in the article I would hope that readers who climb and ski are onside, but what about the climber who can't ski, won't ski? Why should he or she invest their time in this activity? I would argue that this is as exciting as anything comparable in winter. It provides the opportunity to get amongst it relatively quickly and economically (energy wise!), get up the hills with less tortuous trail breaking and get down quickly in a more exciting fashion than on foot (it's also easier on the knees as you get a little older!).

Even for the individual who decides this is not an end in itself, as a means it can still be exploited. The joint service ski scheme offers some of the best winter experience going – and it does so predominantly to piste-skiers!! The opportunity to spend time learning about transceivers, snow holes and shelters, winter navigation etc is combined with the chance to learn or improve on ones skiing. This may be a vital skill when you're applying for that big exped in Alaska or Greenland.

As the mountains get fuller and fuller the drive will increasingly be to get out to really remote places in winter. Even if you charter that Russian Hip it is likely you will still find yourself needing to move around in deep snow when you're dropped off; skis are the answer.

There will be more in the next Journal. Meanwhile please contact me by either of the means listed below if I can help, and if you're even slightly interested then do look into the courses on offer, even if you are just looking for an excuse not to go back to Ballachulish or Glenmore Lodge this coming winter season...

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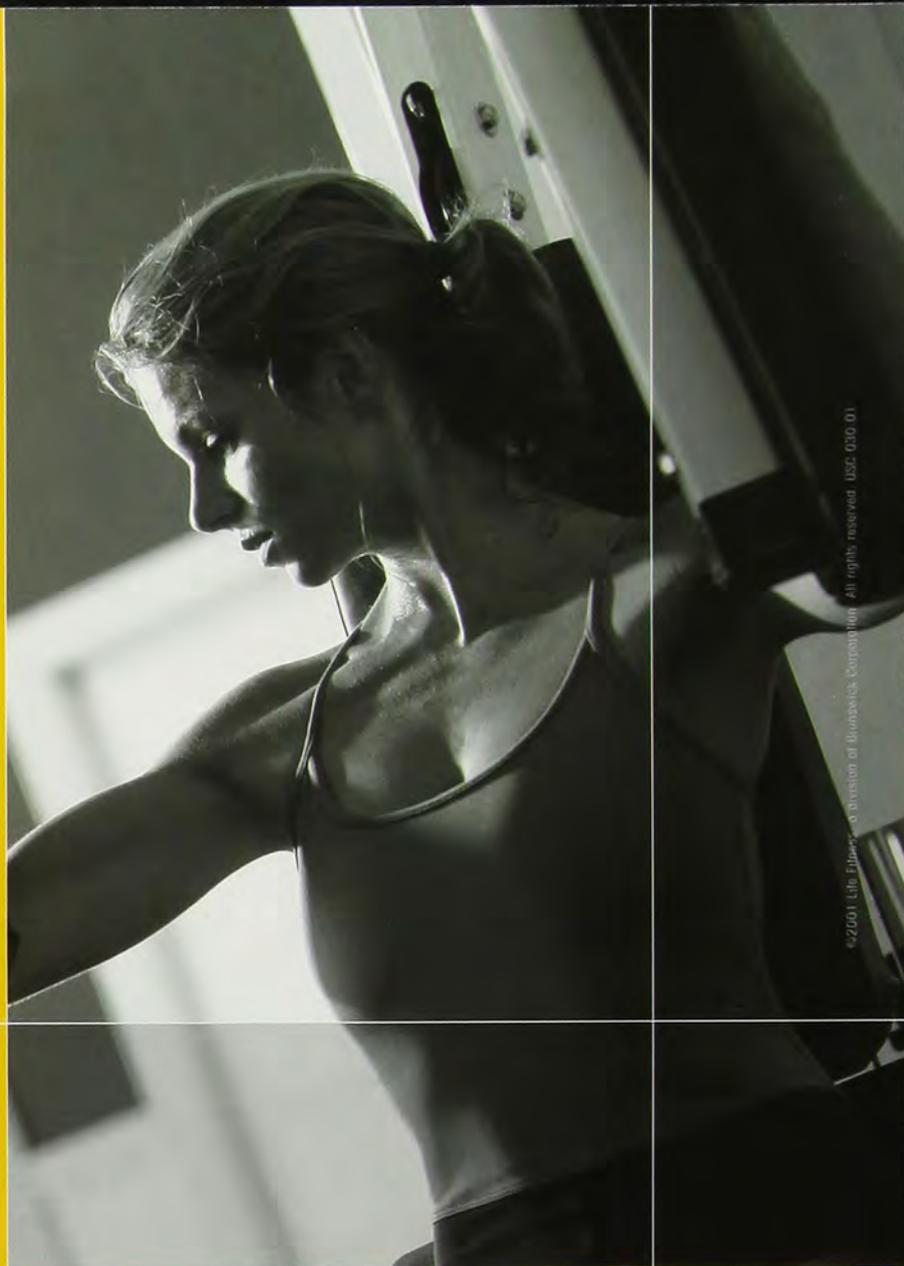
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