

ARMY MOUNTAINEER



The Journal of The Army Mountaineering Association

The Streater Award

John Muir Trail

Pyrenees

JSAM 04

Nepal

Peru



Winter 2005

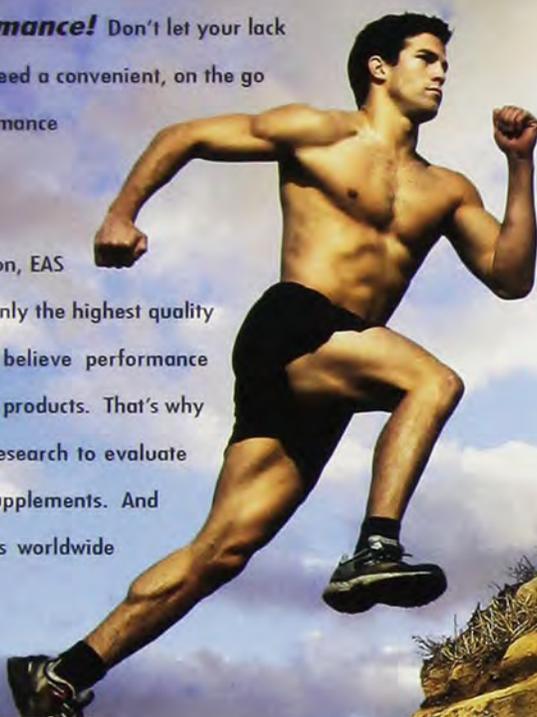
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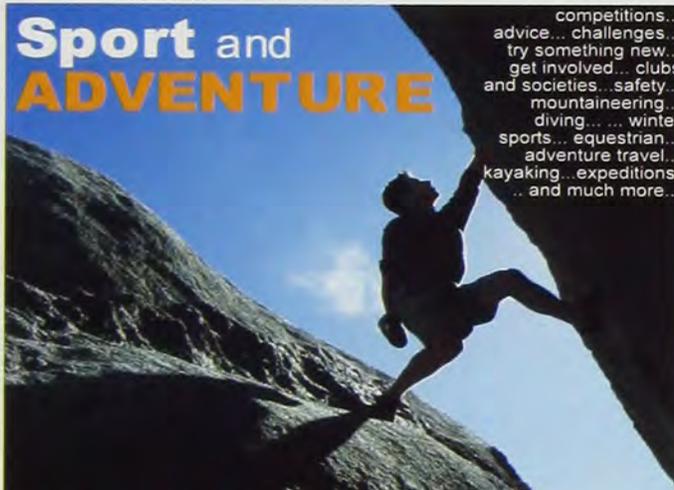
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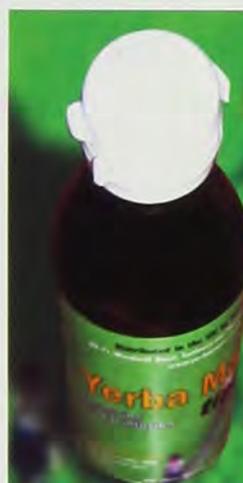
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ARMY MOUNTAINEER



The Journal of The Army Mountaineering Association

Foreword

by Vice-Chairman (Mountaineering)

2005 will be an important year for our Association and this journal illustrates that fact. Inside, as well as articles on expeditions to Wales, Switzerland, the Stubai Alps, the Pyrenees, Peru and Nepal, there is an update on how training for Everest West Ridge is progressing. This training is aimed at ensuring our teams arrive on task as physically and mentally well prepared as possible, in order to maximise our chances of success. Everest West Ridge will be Main Effort for 2006 and will also still be running when we enter our 50th Anniversary year.

Our aim in 2007 is to celebrate the first 50 years of our existence. If you could lead a component part of our 50th year celebrations then please make yourself known. More information to follow.

One of our Honorary Presidents, Meryon Bridges, has kindly penned an article outlining a new award we are instigating in 2005. As Meryon was the driving force behind this award, it seemed only right that he should transmit his enthusiasm direct to the membership. The Streater Award will recognise expeditions displaying high levels of adventure, exploration and commitment. Having had the honour to meet another Honorary Vice President, Sir Chris Bonington, last year, I can confirm that he too brought up the point that our association should try to encourage such expeditions, and this was with no conferring, as Meryon (unfortunately detained by work) was not present.

To try to increase opportunities for our new and younger members, we have appointed WO2 Geordie Taylor as the new Youth and Development Officer. His role will be explained in detail in the next Newsletter and his appointment should be seen as part of our general drive to offer development opportunities. Take up these opportunities if appropriate, and if you can, please offer your assistance to Geordie.

Once again, despite the extremely high tempo of operations, much has been achieved this year, as can be seen from the journal.

Cath Davies

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On the Cover:

Sandhurst Cadets on the summit of Pic du Midi D'Ossau.

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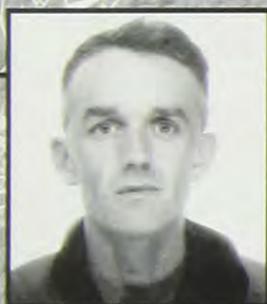
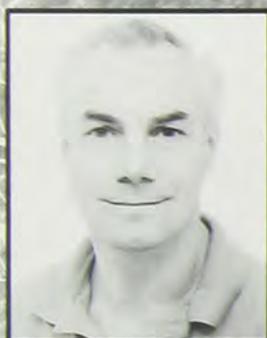
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Editorial

To echo the words of Cath Davies the AMA has again achieved a great deal, despite the current tempo of operations. The Journal which is the visual and verbal record of these achievements aims to celebrate the success of our association, raise our profile amongst those with influence and hopefully provide some stimulus for those verging on the brink of a life in the mountains.

As always you the membership have provided me with some excellent articles and stunning photography. Thank you. With a membership of approximately 1000 a few more articles from non committee members and old faithfuls such as Tania Noakes and Ian Coomber would, however, be welcomed.

You will find that the Newsletter is now included as a "pull out" section of the Journal. Both Summer and Winter journals will now include the Newsletter, with the Spring and Autumn Newsletters still despatched individually. This will hopefully improve efficiency and save the association a fair amount of money. If you have any comments please feel free to address them to either myself or Steve Wilson the Communications Officer.

Cash Prizes

As announced at last year's AGM, cash is now available to award those members who submit the best articles. The rather grandly named Editor's Prize is a sum of £75 for each Journal. In the fashion of true career progression I was tempted to award this edition's awards to the President and Chairman for their excellent articles. But no. Throw caution and career to the winds and many congratulations to Mark Kenyon and Ashley Stevens for their account of the QLR's expedition to Nepal and to Darren Doyle for his record of JSAM.

If Mark, Ashley and Darren could let me know their current address then, as the saying goes – the cheques will be in the post.

Editor's Apology

If you submitted an article for inclusion in this Journal (Rab Blackstock and John Muston plus others?) and it is not printed please accept my sincerest apologies. The joys of living in a service married quarter – fuse boxes arcing, power cuts and surges and quotes from electricians such as "you're lucky you didn't have a fire here luv". Anyway I suffered major computer meltdown a couple of weeks ago and lost everything. I'm now back on line so please resubmit for the Summer Journal.

PS. Surge protectors bought in a well known IT superstore do not work very well.

Enjoy the summer and support your AMA.

Howie Barnes

Journal submission requirements

Deadlines for submission are 1st January and 1st June.

Text should be sent electronically (floppy, CD or e-mail).

Photographs can be prints, slides or digital, where possible, always include captions for your photographs.

Submissions should be sent by post to:

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If you want your discs or photos back please let me know at the time of submission.

Remember that the AMA is a mountaineering club whose members are either serving or have served in the Army; it is not a military organisation. As such try to avoid the use of ranks and military TLAs (three letter abbreviations!) in your articles – you are not writing for your Corps or Regimental Journal.

Try to avoid tables in your articles.

Finally please do not regurgitate your PXR.



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The Army Training Regiment in Lichfield runs basic training for Royal Engineer and Royal Signals recruits. In October 04, 8 members of Permanent Staff from the Regiment deployed on Exercise ANDEAN DRAGON, a Trekking expedition to the Cordillera Huayhuash region of Peru, made famous by Joe Simpson's classic book, and now film, "Touching the Void". The main aim of the expedition was to complete the arduous Huayhuash Circuit trek, circumnavigating some of the highest mountains in South America, and crossing several 5,000m mountain passes - higher than Mont Blanc.

by Nick Francis

On our arrival in Lima we excitedly reported to the British Embassy, expecting to be met by the Ambassador with a plate full of Ferrero Rocher, but instead were ushered to an office on the 23rd floor of a tower block. We were then informed that 2 months previously a group of 6 British trekkers were kidnapped at gunpoint, and that a week ago an Israeli ex Soldier was shot and killed on the route that we were about to undertake, whilst trying to disarm a bandit. So it was back to the hostel to practice our casualty extraction drills and first aid for sucking chest wounds - not quite the start we had hoped for.

After working out our SOPs on bandit attack (cry like babies, hand over all our money and run away) we carried on with our preparations for the trek. This was to be no half baked D of E style expedition, we were walking a long way up big mountains, and for that you need backup, this came in the form of 8 donkeys, a local guide, a cook come butcher, and even a rescue horse!

From Lima we got the overnight bus to the mountain town of Huaraz, and after a couple of days acclimatisation, we set off on the scariest part of the entire expedition, a 3 hour off road white knuckle

ride through the mountain passes of Peru in a ludicrously overloaded and top heavy mini bus, to the start point of our trek.

The donkeys were loaded with bergans and a box of live chickens, and with our day sacks on our backs we set out in high spirits. On arrival at our first camp site we said our final goodbyes to the chickens and we were treated to our first traditional Peruvian meal by our local chef, chicken and chips.

The first few days of trekking were taken at a steady pace, taking in the scenery and getting to know our donkeys. Several members of the group suffered from altitude sickness, but after a couple of days and copious cups of coca tea, the symptoms eased. We were also reassured to bump into a group of armed mountain police hunting for bandits, but they seemed to be struggling just as much as us on the high passes, so we were unlikely to see any high speed police pursuits up here.

On the fourth day of trekking the group crossed the first 5,000m pass, and that is when the Expedition Leader, Guy Couper-Marsh, had his "Touching the Void" experience. Whilst leading the group down a steep gully on the side of Siula Grande the boulder

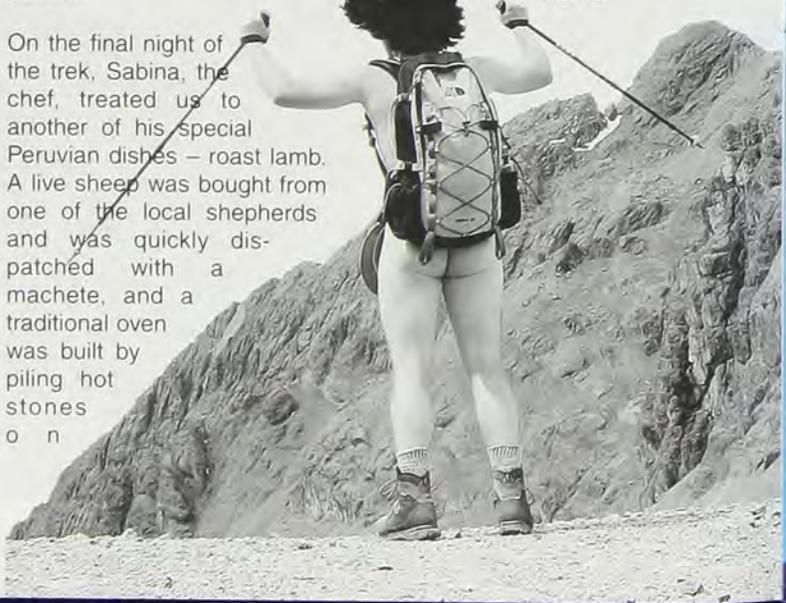


field started to move, and C-M was caught in the rock slide. After a few minutes the rest of the group managed to scramble down to where he was lying, he was in quite a lot of pain, but thankfully he was still conscious and did not seem to have sustained any serious injuries. He was assisted to the edge of the unstable rock field, and was then checked over and given first aid by the team Physiotherapist, Pete Le Feuvre. Two members of the team were then dispatched to fetch the rescue horse, whilst the rest of the team worked their way down to the valley floor. After a couple of nights rest and a day on the rescue horse C-M was fit to continue walking, and was soon blazing a trail over more 5,000m passes.

On the final night of the trek, Sabina, the chef, treated us to another of his special Peruvian dishes - roast lamb. A live sheep was bought from one of the local shepherds and was quickly dispatched with a machete, and a traditional oven was built by piling hot stones

top of the meat, and then wrapping the stones in the donkeys' blankets. Two hours later, and with the sweet smell of boiling donkey sweat in the air, our dinner was ready, and I think it is fair to say that haggard old Andean mountain sheep does not quite taste the same as tender Welsh lamb.

After the main Trek the team completed a couple of days of rock climbing and mountain biking, but after a trip to the hospital and 16 stitches in Willy Wilson's arm it was time to see the rest of the country. The team travelled south through Peru to the Inca town of Cusco, and then by train to Lake Titicaca and the lost city of Machu Picchu, before heading back to Lima for the flight home.





Almost Touching the Void





Exercise Double Edged Dragon, Solu Khumbu, Nepal

During June 2004 eight members of British Gurkhas Nepal took advantage of the fact they lived within a stones throw of the Himalayas to undertake an adventure training expedition into the heart of the Solu Khumbu Region of Nepal. The aim of the trip was that over four weeks both Mera and Island Peaks, (at 6476m and 6189m respectively) would be climbed. To link these two peaks together would require the team to trek up through the Hongku Valley, much of it at 5000m and above and then cross over the Amphu Lapsa Pass, at 5845m the most technical aspect of the trip.

By Andy Gooch

Despite actually being based 'in country' the various aspects of organising the trip caused the usual headaches from the start but due to the perseverance and hard work of the leader, Capt B Howarth QG Sigs and his assistant WO1 M W Colclough REME the trip eventually got under way. To help ease the organisation and admin burden the trip was carried out through an established Nepali Trekking firm, Summit Nepal Trekking.

The weekend before the trip started the team gathered together in Kathmandu, with 6 members being based in Kathmandu, 2 from Pokhara and 2 JSME(L) coming from the UK. During this time there was the inevitable packing and repacking of kit, some basic rope work and numerous briefs on topics ranging from cold weather injury to flora and fauna. We were also lucky enough to visit the CIWEC Clinic here in Kathmandu which is renowned for its advice and treatment for ailments encountered at altitude, (AMS, HACE, HAPE etc.) and the discussion that Dr B Basnat kindly chaired proved very useful and informative.

Anyone who has flown into Lukla will know that the flight is somewhat of a roller coaster with the final approach and landing having been likened to dive bombing American ships at Pearl Harbour. Having taken off once only to turn around 30min into the flight it was about 1000 that we boarded

the small 18 seater plane for our second attempt to get to Lukla. Most were slightly apprehensive, this feeling being heightened by the fact that four days previously the company we were travelling with lost a plane only 6 minutes out from Lukla in poor visibility with the sad loss of all 3 people on board.

All arrived safe and sound and after meeting our Sirdar, climbing sherpas, chef team and porters, (some 25 people) we set out walking south and away from the Himalayas we had come to climb! The reason? Acclimatisation. Although it would be possible to walk straight to Mera Peak in 4 or 5 days it would mean going over a 5000m + pass, the Zetra La so the first 9 days we spent slowly ascending to a height of 5000m by making a long dog leg and then walking up the Hinku Valley. Given the time of year it meant that the monsoon was on its way and that weather during this period was far from ideal with rain arriving most afternoons. Another problem with the rain is it brings out the leeches. Luckily we were only in leech country for a couple of days before climbing above them but sharing your washing water with 3 leeches in the morning is a disturbing experience.

As we climbed up the number of people encountered, none of them tourists, dwindled. There was, however, a meeting with the local Maoists

on day 5 who demanded a donation be made. Initially they demanded 3000 rupees each (approx £25) but after talking to them, explaining the trip was pre paid and we had little money they took 1000 rupees from each of the 'white faces'. It is worth noting here that although the Maoists are present through out the hills and will ask/demand money off trekking groups it should by no means be a reason not to plan trips to Nepal. The amount asked for varies from area to area, depending on the local commanders but can almost invariably be brought down from their first demands. As to their policy, no harm has been done to any tourists and for usually no more than £10 per person a hassle free trip can be had.

After an acclimatisation day at 4300m a further one was carried out at a place called Khare at 4900m. This location was only 200m below the Mera Glacier so it gave the opportunity to get onto the snow and ice and practice various techniques. It must be said that trying to teach people ice axe arrests at 5000m when you're breathing out of your ... is somewhat difficult. It was however at an extremely useful, if not essential day for what was to come. By this time people were starting to get headaches and suffer from other effects of AMS and as a result and to aid acclimatisation a number of team members had started to take a course of diamox tablets. The following day saw all climbing onto the Mera Glacier and over the Mera La in cloud and snow, where in good conditions views of Kachenjunga way to the east are possible. After a night at the base camp we returned the following day to the Mera and Glacier and climbed up to the high camp at around 5850m. The crossing was relatively straight forward with only 4 small crevasses to negotiate. High camp itself is on a small, somewhat desolate

rocky outcrop. You could only begin to imagine how cramped it would be at the height of the season and how fortunate we were to have the mountain to ourselves.

After a short night's rest we were awoken at 0300 with tea and a compo breakfast and by 0415 were heading out into the darkness. One of the team, Nal Gurung had decided to stay behind because he was suffering from a bad headache and feeling the effects of the cold. He was almost joined by Tarquin Shipley, one of the instructors who had slept with his head downhill and was experiencing a thumping headache. However after standing up and allowing the blood to return down the length of his 6' 4" frame he felt better again. As we slowly climbed up the glacier the sun started to rise behind us and every minute the views became more spectacular. The vista behind us spread from Cho Oyu in the West to Kachenjunga in the East taking in amongst other mountains, Everest, Lhotse, Makalu, Baruntse and Chamlang. Climbing up the glacier was straight forward but exhausting. The exception being having to cross a small crevasse on a section of slope that was particularly steep and needed axe work to climb up and across it. After about 5 hours the second rope, having been informed the summit was over an hour away decided to head down since one of its members was suffering from the altitude quite badly. However 30 minutes later the first rope, only 5 minutes ahead reached the summit ridge. This was relayed and the other team turned around and started to ascend again and half an hour later 9 team members were standing just below the summit. The Central Summit of Mera Peak was only 45m above but our way was blocked by a very large crevasse, which had opened up a few years ago. On advice

of the climbing sherpas and the instructors it was decided not to even attempt to cross this as many teams had previously and all to no avail. We therefore took our 'summit' photos at 6437m and then started the trudge down. The descent proved very tiring since the previously firm snow had now softened considerably and at times people were sinking knee or thigh deep into the snow with every step taken. By early afternoon all had descended off the glacier and into the Hongku Valley through which the next 4 days were to be spent trekking north at over 5000m.

It is fair to say that all team members; sherpas, porters and ourselves were pretty knackered after Mera so a rest day was had before heading north again further into the Hongku Valley. The valley is a very desolate place, being above the level of vegetation and either side you are hemmed in through-out by impressive peaks towering above. Not least of which are Chamlang and Baruntse to the east. Unfortunately for much of the time these were hidden by clouds but occasionally Lhotse and the tip of Everest could be seen looming over the Amphu Lapsa Pass at the far end of the valley.

The Amphu Lapsa Pass is a snow covered pass lying at 5845m and was the greatest obstacle of the trip since it blocks the way into the Khumbu Valley. Had a crossing not been possible it would have forced a turn around and the retracing of the route to Lukla. This proved not to be the case and the climb proved the most technical and enjoyable part of the trip. To ascend it is necessary for an early start, to climb up over the glacier to be done before it gets too warm. The climb was straight forward, but exposed at times. Once the top is reached there is a short section of free down climbing before a fixed rope, put in advance by the climbing sherpas, Dorje and Galging is reached. At this point the dokhas were put in a haul bag and launched of the mountain whilst all 'living objects'

proceeded down a two pitch abseil of about 40m. For some of the guys this was their first ever abseil so considerable nerve was needed to launch themselves over a slightly overhanging lip at over 5800m in freezing conditions with the snow and cloud swirling around. Having negotiated the ropes it was necessary for a quick descent down into the valley below since the north side of the pass is a massive boulder strewn face and the longer you hung around the greater the chance of the rock fall from above, (it was in fact likened to the Grand Couloir, below the Gouter Hut in Mt Blanc). Having come over the pass all were very pleased with themselves. However, it must be borne in mind we were kitted up to the nines and the real heroes were the porters and other staff who, with minimal protection carried all the extra kit in dokhas up over the pass with no complaint and heaps of resilience.

The following morning, day 17 out from Lukla it was possible to look North and see the final objective, Island Peak. Saying that, it was difficult to determine where the Island Peak finished and Lhotse started as Lhotse sits immediately behind and completely dwarfs Island Peak as it rises a further 2400m. A further rest day was incorporated at this stage to allow people a better chance to summit Island Peak. Eight team members moved up to high camp which lies at a little over 5500m and is situated on a rocky site beneath a ridge to the west and some 400m way below the snowline. At about 0230 the following morning the scene was set to make an attempt at the summit. Two members had decided to head down suffering from vomiting and head aches and so the numbers ascended consisted of our 2 faithful climbing Sherpas, 5 Brits and 1 Gurkha, Dipk Gurung. Overnight there had been a light sprinkling of snow and as we climbed up through a large rocky gulley we started to encounter ver-glace

which made for a treacherous crossing of the rocks. Having left the gully we crossed up and obtained a ridge with considerable drops on either side which led to a few heart stopping moments where the route required hands and feet to be used. This was relatively short and once crossed the glacier lay before us at about a height of 5900m. At this point I was feeling pretty awful, through dizziness and a headache and as soon as I had geared up and started walking up the glacier I knew it was to be too much for me and to go on would severely hamper the group. Hence, it was decided I should descend. Ignoring the chance for himself to summit, Andy James turned around and helped me down to which I owe a great debt of thanks.

The remaining 4 continued to climb, with the two guides heading into the clouds to break trail. The ascent took a further 3 hours with the team having to cross a number of daunting, bottomless looking crevasses before the final glacier slope was reached. This being the steepest part of the climb meant the use of jummers was necessary to ascend fixed ropes, put in by the Sherpas. Again, the cloud had set in and so the view of the Lhotse face, towering above them was missed. After the obligatory photos, the descent commenced and by 1500, after 13 hours all had safely returned to base camp.

The following three days were spent descending back to Lukla and for the first time in over three weeks we saw other signs of life. It was amazing to compare the difference between the sparsely populated Hingku and non inhabited Hongku Valleys with that of the Khumbu where settlements and Tea Houses are in abundance. That said only 8 other tourists were seen in this time and Namche Bazar, usually a bustling place was deserted. This was the time of year when all the repairs and improvements are done by the communities since tourist traffic is light.

Hence the area although lacking in tourists was alive with the sound of building being carried out. The other problem with this time of year is that Lukla Airport can remain closed for days at a time due to bad weather and so it was when we arrived. It had been closed for 3 days and the fog didn't look like lifting. The same was true the following day and after sitting in a lodge watching the weather clear to a visibility of 100m and then back to 15m again took a lot out of some people and had we had to spend a second day there severe cases of cabin fever would have set in! As it was the second morning the weather was good enough for flights to come in and by mid morning all were once again back in Kathmandu surrounded once more by the familiar chaos, smog, and pollution.

The exercise proved to be a great success and a fantastic experience, all the aims were met and more importantly no serious or lasting injuries were sustained by any of the porters/staff or expedition members. It would not have been possible without the hard work of all team members but even more important was the sterling work done by the porters, chefs and Sherpas. All came back with much admiration for the work these people do. Further to this all members not already qualified were judged to be competent enough to their receive summer mountain proficiency and winter mountain proficiency awards by the two instructors. Before starting the expedition people expressed surprise that we undertaking the trip during what is officially the monsoon and scoffed that we wouldn't see anything but cloud for the duration. To reply to this, yes the weather was far from great for a lot of the time and made for some unpleasant days. We still got to see some incredible views of the mountains but, by far the most memorable fact was that for the whole time we were alone and saw not a soul for weeks at a time. There was no need to get up earlier than other groups on the mountain simply to get to the best camp sites first or other such problems and you had the whole mountain to yourselves. What more can you ask for?



We took the night train to Munchen. Had our breakfast on the train into Innsbruck and were delivered to the middle of the Stubai valley, the Stubaital, ready to go climbing from one of the many alpine mountain huts in the region. The weather looked as promising as the view of the Stubai glaciers, peaks and rock faces glimpsed from the post bus as it drove us to Neustift, the main village in this wonderful valley in the South Tirol of Austria close to the Italian border.

By Maj Gen Nick Cottam, AMA President

We had chosen the Stubaital because it has so much to offer the alpinist. It is accessible yet on heading for the alpine huts you are instantly remote. There is a wonderful hut to hut glacier tour for the novice alpinist. The same route provides some interesting mixed route summits for those a bit more experienced. There are some very serious and long rock routes if you are up to it. There are a few klettersteig, wire assisted scrambles, but unlike in some other parts of the Alps, they are little used and so you are not condemned to a procession. The exception is the Elferspitzer 2499m, but this mountain with its ski lift overlooking Neustift is instead the haunt of an excellent paragliding club for those who prefer not to climb. There is plenty of high level hut to hut walking and scrambling along what is known locally as the alpine hohlenweg.

Down in the valley bottom, particularly around the villages of Meiders, Neustift and Neder there is everything for a family holiday, swimming, cycling, canoeing and summer skiing on two glaciers. The post bus can deliver you to the skiing area above Mutterberg and you can even overnight there in the alpine hut, the Dresdnerhutte.

I have been to the Stubaital both to climb and on a separate family holiday. On each occasion I have arrived by post bus and set off almost immediately for an alpine hut. I have learnt to avoid the British mistake of carrying too much kit. It feels quicker and safer to travel light. Food and accommodation in the alpine huts are good and cheap. Although in Austria all the huts are very well run by the German alpine club. You will seldom hear English or French voices, just German and some Italian. Reliable weather and route information can be obtained from the alpine guides' office in Neustift or from each hutmeister. My brother and I found this very useful when we arrived off the bus aiming to have a busy week up as high as possible. Early the next morning on our first glacier we were feeling less energetic. The view of dawn on the Karwendel Range to our North cheered us, however, and we put in the first of a number of quite long days on the glaciers, cols and peaks of our chosen route around all of the Stubaital glaciers.

Even in relatively good weather we met few people during the day, just one Austrian couple on the first day en route to the summit of the Ruderhofspitze. Then on day three on the Warrenkarscharte 3187m, after we had negotiated the descent of some quite tricky, early morning iced rock, at the bergschrund we met an Austrian climbing club complete with lederhosen and old fashioned alpenstock starting their ascent in two ropes of six occasionally singing as they climbed. We



A Tyrolean peak

The Stubai Alps

thought we were in a time warp and then wondered how the two ladies running the hut to which they were heading, were going to cope with this lot. They clearly looked and sounded as though they were expecting something stronger than lemonade with their supper. We climbed through a wonderful glacier amphitheatre, the sound of rattling rockfall and the hiss of small avalanches somewhere above and, we hoped, behind us in the rising mist. We eventually reached the Hildesheimerhutte. It was Saturday night and quite a few Austrian climbers had arrived to attempt the Zuckerhutl at 3505m the highest peak of the Stubai. We had the same idea and so went to bed early but only after we had been serenaded at supper by well oiled singing from some of the hut guests. Less tuneful but more penetrating was the orchestra of snoring from the over fed and beer laden climbers in our hut bunkroom. Even my earplugs could not keep out the racket. We rose very early to beat any queue on the first awkward fixed rope descent across a steep rock buttress. In the dark I did not notice the spectacular drop below me at this stage—probably a good thing at the start of a long steep day over glaciers and the rather icy, scrambly climb onto the Zuckerhutl. For the first time ever I used my spare ice goggles when on our decent I gave them to a member of a guided party who had lost his sunglasses. He was grateful

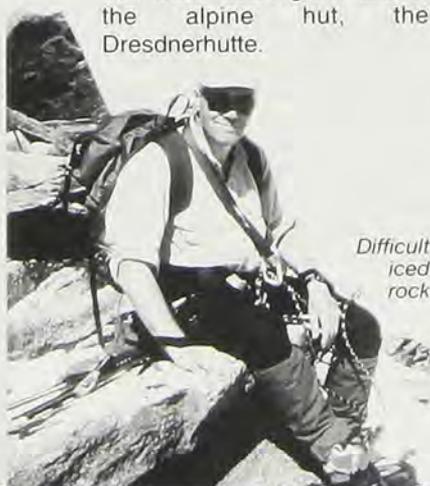
for my spare goggles as he looked sure to suffer snow blindness and it was my last full day's climbing.

So if you are thinking of taking a party to the Alps and do not feel up to the biggest routes, yet you want to get onto mixed climbing, then the rock and ice of the Stubai may be the answer. It is an inviting yet relatively little visited area. I know my brother is considering a winter glacier ski tour and I definitely have some unfinished business there myself. Here are the guidebook and map details you will need. It can snow heavily in August so you may truly need them.

Guide book – Hut to Hut in the Stubai Alps by Allan Hartley – Cicerone guide.

Sheet 83 1:50,000 Kompass Wanderkarte –Stubai Alpen: Serleskamm.

Map 18 1:35,000 Stubaital Wander und Tourenkarte.



Difficult iced rock



The Stubai

Joint Service Alpine Meet 2004

The 2004 JSAM took place in the Swiss Alps near the quaint and popular town of Zermatt. The leading service this year was the RAF, with Crossly McEwan heading up the Army Mountaineering Association contingent. The Everest West Ridge [EWR 2006] Development Team, which was headed up by Kev Edwards, was also training concurrently with JSAM. The aim of the expedition was to develop and practice Alpine mountaineering skills by undertaking mountaineering activities in the glaciated mountain region of the Swiss Alps as part of a Joint Service exercise.

Arriving late afternoon on Fri 09 Jul 04 I found myself to be the only member in the campsite. Having read my joining instructions to ensure I was at the right location I found that there was another reporting campsite in Saas Grund. Having done a bit of flapping I found the campsite owner and to my relief he confirmed that I was in the right place!

On the morning of Sat 10 Jul 04, about twenty-five Army climbers had arrived. Once everyone had been reacquainted, kit was unpacked, tents put up and it was time for much needed sleep. The military had taken over the campsite! Later that afternoon, there was a lengthy joint exercise brief given by the RAF representative. After that, all three services had their own briefs to ascertain who would be working with whom and to be given 2 weeks worth of CILOR; thank you very much! The Development Team were still waiting for their intrepid leader, Kev Edwards who was still on route, as Heidi Sparks was having difficulties reaching the pedals of the van!

The sun was out in force on Sunday 11 July as the eager climbers made their way to Zermatt on an attempt on the Breithorn [4164m]. All eight made it to the summit with ease. Haydn Gaukroger and Rob Lawrence made an early attempt on the Weisshorn South West Ridge AD [4506m] but unfortunately it

wasn't meant to be and they did not complete the route. Later that afternoon, Kev and his team; Cath Davies, Mark Hedge and John Doyle and not forgetting Heidi, arrived. The Development Team were then treated to another brief and lots of money from Heidi. Thanks here goes to the assistance from the AMA, Regimental and Corps funds as well as the G3 PAT staff at each Division.

Kev, Cath, Mark and John were the main instructors and leaders for the trip. Phil Scott and myself were also acting as instructors due to the size of the Army contingent. John was the main instructor for the execution of the Alpine Mountain Proficiency Award and revision for those who already held the award. This was much needed, as many had not been on glaciers before and a number had never carried out crevasse rescue. In addition, another instructor Geordie Taylor was on loan from BAC to the RAF to run an Alpine Mountain Proficiency course.

Day 1 was to be a mass gathering with the photographers in tow for EWR 06 on the Triftgletscher Glacier, at the foot of the Weissmies. Much had to be covered in a short time from self and crevasse rescue, belays, roping up and moving together, and ice axe arrests.

The next few days promised stable weather and Kev and John made plans to ensure that this would not be wasted.



By Darren Doyle

John, Mark, Rob and I with our groups headed off to the Almagella Hut in the area off Saas Grund. We had a great few days high up, completing the Portjengrat, an AD+ ridge route with exposed sections and excellent views. Unfortunately Tony Livingstone could not appreciate them as he lost his glasses on route. (Should have gone to Specsavers!). Meanwhile Kev, Cath and Phil's groups headed for the Allalinhorn 4027m. This was to be a thoroughly pleasant PD+ route up the Hohlaubgrat with a cheeky finish just near the summit; however it was a busy route with some elements of queuing. The route was successfully completed by all and for some was their first 4000m peak. A number of other JSAM group members had an early start and headed out to summit the Weissmies PD [4023m]. The route to the summit had some exposure and crevasse dangers, but a well-worn track marked the way.

Once back at the main campsite, it was decided to have a day off after such a long and physical few days, plus the weather wasn't looking promising high up. The hardened mountaineers among us, made plans to ascend the Breithorn PD [4164m], which was conquered. The UOTC group headed for the Lagginhorn 4010m [N East route PD], which was also conquered with ease but visibility was poor. The rest had a visit into

Zermatt to the Guide Centre for information about climbing venues. Armed with a guidebook we made use of the roadside crags in Zermatt and Tasch. Not the best bolted crags around but the easiest to get to without having to walk for miles.

Again the weather dictated our plans for the next few days and the decision was made to head over to the Saas Grund area. John and his group completed a Via Ferrata ascent onto the Jagihorn 3206m. Some of John's group had never been on Via Ferrata before and all had an outstanding day. Meanwhile the rest of us had the Lagginhorn 4010m [PD] in our sights. Due to the late start, time was against us and we were at risk of missing the last cable car back. Owing to the time constraints unfortunately only those who were best acclimatised made it to the summit, however it was an experience for all.

Rain, rain and more rain caused us to push north over Gimselpass to Meringen where we had a fantastic day of climbing on single pitch routes in the baking sun that were all bolted and with abseil chains in situ. There were grades to suit all from 4+ to 6c. Some of the other JSAM groups decided to stay in the Zermatt area to take a chance with the weather. The UOTC group plus a few others [RAF/Navy] headed off for the Dom Hut hoping the weather would clear for the



next day. Luck was on their side as they had a clear window to the summit. Some approached the Dom 4545m via the PD route, which is the glacier ascent from the Festijoch. The more adventurous approached via the Festigrat PD+ with snow and ice up to 50°. As we made it back to the campsite, the forecast for the following day was unstable and the frustration in all of us was obvious.

After another short day of bad weather it was looking promising for the next three to four days. The following day John, Mark, Rob and Alasdair Steele with a small contingent of climbers headed off to the Saas Grund area where they completed a number of big 16 pitch routes on the Jaghorn. At the same time I was on the Via Ferrata route with a small group and we all met at the summit for photos. The remainder attempted the Egginer 3366m from the Felskinn cable car and returned home late, exhausted but exhilarated from their day's adventure.

Kev's Development Team embarked on the long route to the Dom Hutte 2940m, and some cosy sleeping arrangements, with two members from the Navy group. Sadly no cable cars were available to assist our ascent! An early

start for all; John and his group were the first to set off, closely followed by groups headed up by, Kev, myself, Mark and Cath. On reaching the Festijoch, care was needed with rock fall as Mark's group was nearly taken out by a Swiss group above them. Continuing on the North West Ridge for a short distance John had to turn back with two members of his group due to altitude problems. As we continued, the weather was slowly closing in. At this point Mark with his group made a decision to head back. Not long after, Cath and her group followed suit. As the rest of us continued towards the summit, the weather had closed in. Visibility was very poor and the winds were whipping up the freshly fallen snow. Despite this, we were determined to summit and with goggles on and heads down, we succeeded. On return to the hut, we had a short admin break and headed off back to the valley and the campsite for some food and rest [we needed it!] and to reflect on a thoroughly enjoyable fortnight.

The weather forecast for the next few days was not good; however we felt we had accomplished what we had set out to do. It was a shame



that only a handful of the Development Team made it to the summit of the Dom, the climax of the week.

The meet was an excellent opportunity for all at different levels to improve and develop new skills. For the EWR 06 Development Team it was a

fun two weeks and most people left having made friends with other lunatics who are mad for the mountains! Many thanks go to the instructors and RAF for their organisation of the JSAM without whom the meet would not have been possible.

The magnificent Kongga



Towards Wider Horizons The Streater Award

By Meryon Bridges – Honorary Vice President



*The Matterhorn of the
Nyenchentangla*



Basong Lake



The majority of this article is published by kind permission of the Alpine Club. It is based on articles by Mr Tamotsu Nakamura in the 2002 and 2003 AC Journals. Credit for all the photographs is due to Mr Nakamura.

At the AMA Annual General Meeting on 25 Sept the institution of the Streather Award was announced. This award is intended to encourage a broadening of the expedition destinations chosen by AMA expeditions beyond the well documented theatres of Peru, McKinley, and the Nepalese trekking peaks. The aim is to increase the dimension of adventure in AMA expeditions, through inclusion of a slice of "the unknown" into the equation. This article suggests just one venue which offers unlimited scope for expeditions that this award is intended to encourage.

Nyenchentangla Shan is a range of mountains which sweeps north and east of Lhasa, stretching into eastern Tibet. Summits range from 5800m to 6900m. Starting heights are typically around 3500m+, so these peaks come in the "super Alpine" category. Parts of this range have been explored over recent years by parties led by Mr Nakamura. He has written up his explorations in the Alpine Journal 2002 and 2003. The area he covered lies east of Lhasa, bounded by the rivers Yigong Tsanpo and Yalung Tsanpo. It is accessible by road/ jeep from Lhasa, and thereafter on foot/horse supported by Yaks.

Firstly, getting there is potentially adventurous. Mr Nakamura writes:

"Travel to less frequented areas of Tibet is always unpredictable, even these days. The hazards are various, partly to do with having a permit to a restricted area, partly to do with

unstable weather, dangerous roads, dreadful landslides, unpredictable local people and lack of information.

.....An important key to success is the ability to cope with any situation in a flexible manner and to change route without hesitation, depending on the circumstances"

"We crossed the highest pass (4760m) down to the village of Lhatsa (4135m), crossed another pass (4490m) and then entered a wide open riverbed in Puyu valley. After an hour's drive in the mist, one of the Landcruisers became stuck in a stream. It was like a sudden death. Villagers in the vicinity kindly worked till dark to pull out the car from the stream all efforts were in vain. In the morning ten horses and eight porters from Shel Shep village arrived, and leaving the vehicle in the stream, we trekked up the valley. Shel Shep is the last point that foreigners have reached in this direction.On the morning of 1 May the weather was wonderful. The magnificent snow peaks of Kona I, II, and III appeared for the first time above the headwaters of the valley".

If Adventurous Training is to prepare Service personnel for operations, to be self reliant and respond to situations as they arise, could there be a better training ground?

The area is clearly a mass of mouth watering peaks. Space does not permit reproduction of all his pictures, but Mr Nakamura describes a series of encounters with spectacular panoramas of dramatic and virtually unknown peaks.

"On 3rd May we entered the eastern valley travelling up and down yak trails on undulating old moraines. We went up to the glacier end.....to glimpse the magnificent profile of Kongga (6488m). The upper north face of Kongga was beautifully adorned with fluted snow and ice, and the summit ridge was guarded with huge overhanging cornices."

"On 20 October we arrived in Lhasa and three days later we were in the town of Jula. On the morning of 24 October we organised a caravan with three horses for riding, five yaks to ferry loads and five muleteers.....and departed for Nenang. (Nenang, at 6870m, is the highest unclimbed peak in Nyenchentangla East). We followed a yak trailascending in zigzags through steep conifer forest to a small pass. With no prior warning a breathtakingly magnificent panorama of Nenang came into view beyond two glacier lakes. Below the treacherous ridges and the precipitous south face, guarded and beautifully adorned with fluted mixed ice, a harsh wave of glacier icefalls streamed down into the lake in the form of a huge white dragon. The sky was cobalt blue. The muleteer explained that Ne meant a holy thing and Nag meant inside, and therefore Nenang was interpreted as a holy mountain hidden inside of the valley"

The region is also accessible, in that it is possible to drive (avoiding the streams) to the edge of the area, whence treks of no more than a few days are needed to reach the heart of the range.

"Leaving Punkar, we travelled to Xueka and then Lake Basong. Departing from Je in a caravan of eight

horses and four muleteers we progressed to the north end of Basong Lake, passing the village of Zhonggo, before turning north into another valley and finally stopping at the village of Dzonba. Our intention was to search the headwaters of the valley to the west where several high peaks over 6500m with prominent glaciers are concentrated."

"The mountains surrounding Basong Lake are in the Kongpo region of Tibet. The Kongpo is known for the Tibetan folk hero King Gesar of Ling, and for the large circular forts built to protect against invaders: tales also abound of strangers being poisoned. Locals advised us to be wary."

The remainder of Mr Nakamura's narrative contains like descriptions of his journeys through the area and the experiences he encountered. What carries a huge impact in his articles are the photographs of the mountains in the area, many of which are unclimbed and even unnamed. This is still virgin territory, though for how much longer is doubtful. The scope for opening a new chapter in the history of the AMA is huge.

I therefore end with a proposal to further the introduction of the Streather Award – an AMA expedition to this area in 2007, aimed at the reconnaissance and climbing at least three of these peaks. Fag packet estimates suggest that an eight week expedition would permit 5 weeks in the mountains, which could be time enough for the purpose. A team of 10 would provide two climbing parties and a simultaneous recce element. Are there any leaders out there prepared to take up this challenge?

The team taking a break before the final stage of the Hohlraubgrat. The difficult rock band can be seen at the top of the ridge



Resting on the summit of the Lagginhorn

By Ian Co

Getting a team of individuals together this summer for the second Everest training meet was a feat in itself. Coming from diverse Regiments all over the UK and converging on a camp site outside Saas Grund, with some arriving for the first week, some for the second and some for the full tour. Some travelling by air and train, some in personal cars, others in hire cars and minibuses. I was one of the "half-tour merchants" arriving on day one but disappearing at the end of the first week due to work commitments. I found this unusual in itself as I have never felt myself to be militarily indispensable, and have used this excuse to go climbing at every available opportunity over my military career.

Military precision was dispensed with as tents were erected in dog-leg lines, ranging from Mountain Hardwear to the obligatory issued Terra Novas. John Doyle and Woody were already established in 'love shack' wagons complete with all mod cons. They are obviously paid far too much. I was limited to the Easyjet 20 kgs rule and looked like a tramp in comparison. Briefings were conducted on the format of the first week, weather, and how to claim for a water rebate.....I am still waiting!!!! Apparently it is easy to get (if you are going to Peru!!) The week would

involve some mandatory safety training, followed by an acclimatisation climb and then splitting into groups to conduct some more ascents around the Saas Fee area. The valley is surrounded by 4,000 metre peaks so targets were easy to plan for, but the one thing that could not be determined was what was going to happen with the weather. This was to be a major factor in limiting the week's activities.

Day one began with a walk through the village of Saas Grund (a collection of postcard shops, supermarkets and pizza restaurants) to the Hohsaas Lift. This took us up past the kiddies play area with its collection of pot bellied pigs, llamas and other assorted hairy creatures (reminding me of several ex girlfriends, although not quite as ugly) and on to the Hohsaas Hut. A short walk took us to the Trift Glacier where we conducted crevasse rescue, belays and ascending rope techniques. We also had a play with some ice climbing techniques, some more successfully than others as Toby landed in front of us in a pretty undignified Jordan-like pose with his feet wrapped around his ears (luckily he had his clothes on) after a brief free-fall from a serac.

Splitting into two groups for ascents of the Weissmies (4017 metres) and the

Everest Team —



Crevasse rescue training on the Trift Glacier

100 metres below the summit of the Allalinhorn with a carpet of cloud below

Doomber

Lagginhorn (4010 metres) for the next day we descended to our huts – the Hohsaas and the Weissmies Huts respectively, which may be a bit confusing as most would assume that the Weissmies Hut would be the natural choice for the ascent of the Weissmies. This was to be the acclimatisation climb so was painful in varying degrees depending on how long you had previously been in the Alps (some had been in the area for 3 weeks beforehand, which I classify as officially cheating). The rest of us struggled to the summit, our group on the Lagginhorn, to be met with a spectacular vista with a layer of cloud thousands of feet below us. Descent was swift, with the alpha males amongst the group deciding to head down on skateboards with handlebars rather than the more sedate (and sensible) cable car. They were obviously missing their Playstations and other collections of boy's toys!

After a rest day, our group headed to the Britannia Hut for an ascent of the Allalinhorn. The original plan had been to bag some summits whilst staying in a mixture of huts and bivvies but the poor weather curtailed this plan. We reached the Britannia Hut in thick mist and high winds to then spend the rest of the day listening to Woody. I decided to read the German

magazines instead, even though I can't understand a word, but it was a bit more exciting! The next day we completed an ascent of the Allalinhorn (4027 metres) via the Hohlaubgrat, which is graded at AD but only had a small section of difficulties near the top. This is an area of loose rock but can be ascended with the use of a fixed rope. Descending by the tourist route, which the local guidebook described as "beingsuitable for a 7 year old" rather reduced our egos, which were further eroded the next day by a period of navigational uncertainty (officer speak). Basically this involved "being lost" (soldier speak) on the Hohlaub Glacier in the dark and mist. Having regained some sense of direction we headed for the Rimpfischhorn for an attempt on the north ridge (AD+) but turned around on conducting a time appreciation and seeing high winds on the summit and poor weather approaching.

We returned to the valley and the comforts of the camp site before embarking on a night off in one of the local pizza restaurants before slipping away to the local disco where we met the cast from the Adams Family. Watching grown men remove their clothes whilst playing air guitar to DJ Otzi signalled to me that it was time to head back to those work commitments. I departed the next day.

Alpine Training

Below the summit of Kala Pattar, Everest and Lhotse behind



Exercise Shabash Lancastrian

By Mark Kenyon and Ashley Stevens

A Level 3 unit expedition to the Solukhumbu region of Nepal conducted by the Queen's Lancashire Regiment between 14 April and 19 May 2004. Following a period of acclimatisation spent trekking along the Everest Base Camp trail, the entire team successfully reached the summits of three peaks; Kala Pattar (5545m), Pokalde (5806m) and Island Peak (6189m).

On 14 April 2004 seven members of the 1st Battalion The Queen's Lancashire Regiment departed Cyprus for Brize Norton on the first leg of the journey to Nepal. Following a day at Regimental Headquarters in Preston during which press and radio interviews were given, the team collected final items of equipment from Bicester and boarded a Qatar Airways flight to Kathmandu. En route we were joined by two other AMA members John Tolan and John Owens who provided the necessary instructor student ratios and a great deal of useful experience.

Exercise Shabash

Lancastrian had been planned during the previous eighteen months by the expedition leader, Mark Kenyon. OP FRESCO, a deployment on OP TELIC and an arms plot to Cyprus had all served to threaten the expedition's survival but fortunately by a dint of good luck and strong regimental support the plans remained intact. The aim was to provide the members with a "once in a lifetime" experience that they could draw on throughout their army career.

The intended itinerary was to steadily acclimatise through a combination of trekking days, rest days and day excursions to higher altitudes to give

expedition members the greatest possible chance of reaching all three summits. As over half the team had little or no experience of mountaineering other than some summer hillwalking, a comprehensive training programme was put in place over the preceding six months. All expedition members attended lectures on High Altitude Medicine, received practical instruction in first aid for mountaineers and completed a minimum of a Winter Mountain Proficiency Course. Full use was made of the loan pool stores from DLO Bicester which in almost all cases proved to be of high quality and fit for purpose. Expedition members supplied their own trekking boots and some personal clothing along with aqua pure water bottles which were purchased from expedition funds.

Upon arrival at Kathmandu we were greeted by rain and a white-knuckle transfer through

rush hour traffic to the Summit Hotel the base of Summit Trekking who would provide us with full logistical support throughout the expedition. The following morning we took the infamous Yeti Airlines flight from Kathmandu to Lukla to meet up with our Sirdar and porters and start the trekking and acclimatisation phase. The flight into Lukla was an interesting experience for many of the team involving a steep approach and then an equally steep uphill landing! Those at the front of the aircraft were soon very much in credit on their 'Scares per day percentages'.

After the first of many cups of lemon tea we met our Sirdar, Dawa Tshiring Sherpa, and started off northwards towards Phakding, through rhododendron lined valleys in temperatures akin to those of Cyprus. The day would set the pattern for the rest of the trek with early starts heralding perhaps 5-6 hours walking

before the tents were pitched for the night. The first week or so followed the path of the Everest Base Camp Trek so there was no shortage of tea houses or evening entertainment. Our plan had been to stick to the recommended 300m limit for the net ascent per day and apart from two days where this was not practicable this worked very well. High levels of physical fitness born of a rigorous Battalion PT regime, a slow pace, Diamox and gallons of garlic soup served to ensure that not one member of the team suffered anything more than a minor headache due to altitude throughout the entire period. As height was gained the temperature began to drop and the landscape became more arid. The scenery was stunning and ever changing. One could experience walking through cultivated fields, boulder fields and glacial moraine all in one day and for three days the diorama was dominated by the pillar of Ama Dablam towering over her neighbours.

We had been expecting the weather to be stable and getting steadily warmer as we were firmly in the pre monsoon window. However the weather was variable to say the least and it was quite usual to find 2-3 inches of snow falling during the day or overnight. It did not last longer than 1-2 days though (at the level of our camps) and caused no real problems apart from frozen washing! In order to ensure the goodwill of the weather gods for the summit days, three sets of prayer flags were purchased at Tengboche monastery to be arrayed on each summit.

After 7 days of walking we reached Gorak Shep, a small village that provides a useful base for climbing Kala Pattar. Although a very straightforward ascent it affords the classic Everest view and at 5545m was a very useful acclimatisation peak in itself. Upon arrival it had no snow lying on it and resembled a rather dull mound of moraine dwarfed by the much more imposing Pumori. Overnight a heavy snow fall and cold temperatures meant that by first light 3-4 inches of snow lay on the ground—however the clag

was down and a view of any sort looked doubtful. Just as we began to zip up sleeping bags or make another brew the weather cleared spectacularly and our observations down towards Periche suggested that we had a window of opportunity. A hurried breakfast and some quick planning saw us off following a stream of other trekkers who all had similar ideas. 3 hours later we reached the summit after a steady plod. Despite the non-technical nature of the ascent, the summit itself was just a little exposed, particularly the final steps to the pray flag which attracted a large number of people. The delicate hand and foot manoeuvres needed whilst observing a severe drop off to the left bore a great resemblance to many a crowded alpine peak.

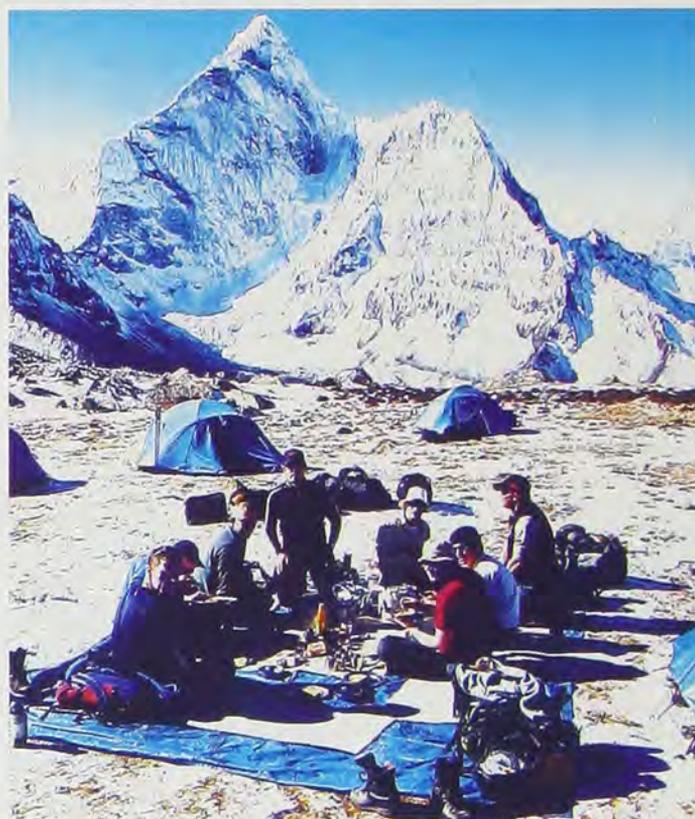
Having successfully ascended Kala Pattar we retraced our steps to Dingboche and after a rest day (with more heavy snowfall) started our approach Pokalde. This involved a Low Camp and then a High Camp before summit day. At Low Camp we were astonished to be greeted by a very friendly dog, with a definite taste for Pringles. She was able to sleep outside in temperatures well below freezing (hence earning her name-Nails) and could leap up snow and ice slopes that took us much panting and scrabbling. Following another cold night the views from Low Camp the following morning were absolutely spectacular with a full side on view of Ama Dablam making us reluctant to leave and instead dawdle over our breakfast. After a short trek to the High Camp, final preparation of kit and a few hours sleep we made an early start for the summit of Poklade. We elected to follow the South Ridge rather than ascend from the Kongma La as suggested by Bill Connor.¹ This involved an ascent up a steep slope to attain a wide couloir followed by a more open slope covered in scree to the bottom of an easily identifiable rock ridge leading to the summit. Heavy snow presented little real problems, as it was generally unconsolidated and required only the use of an ice axe and careful



The team on the Summit of Island Peak



The final Rock ridge on Pokalde



Breakfast at Low Camp on Pokalde

placement of feet. After about three hours we reached the final rock ridge. A 100m scramble along the ridge with a couple of awkward steps and some exposure allowed the summit to be reached. The use of fixed ropes on this final section was a prudent and necessary precaution allowing the team members to enjoy the scrambling and compensate for the breathlessness resulting from the altitude. The views were although only partial due to cloud cover were nonetheless impressive particularly back towards Dingboche and then east where the large bulk of Nuptse could be occasionally glimpsed in the lessening clag.

After lunch and the ubiquitous "hot orange" at the site of High Camp we commenced a long walk out to Chukung in wind and snow flurries. This is a village in the Khumbu valley that provides a useful stepping stone for Island Peak, now clearly visible ahead. We quickly discovered that the lodge there did excellent Hash Browns, which made a welcome, change from our rather monotonous diet of cabbage pizza and vegetable momos.

Following a rest day at Chukung and some practice in rope work and crevasse rescue techniques we advanced our departure by a day in order to avoid an expected break in the weather passed to us by meteorologists fresh from Everest Base Camp. Island Peak is well named, seeming to rise from the glaciers encircling it but has no reliable source of water other than those glaciers. This means that water for the Base Camp and High Camp is frequently carried up 2000 feet plus before it is used. The Base Camp was an extremely cold and windy site and had little to commend it. We were

therefore glad to climb up to the High Camp, about 1000 feet higher which although colder was much less exposed to the wind. Following a fairly sleepless night at around 5000m crammed three to a tent we were wakened at 0300Hrs by the now welcome cry of "Bed Tea". After a quick boil in the bag and some porridge we were off in the darkness, picking our route through the scree with head torches and making our way slowly upto the right of the two ridges that stood above high camp and which led to the glacier above. As dawn broke we reached the narrow snow bridge that linked the rock to the glacier and donned harnesses and crampons for the remainder of the ascent. Roped into two teams we made our way onto the glacier and emerged into a stunning landscape of virgin white snow and ice-capped peaks. Progress was necessarily slow and we soon began to comprehend exactly what high altitude mountaineers mean when they speak of taking no more than two steps to each breath. Clearly visible ahead was the summit and our Sirdar fixing rope up the ice ramp we had to negotiate in order to attain the summit ridge. In blazing sunshine and light winds we continued to make slow and steady progress up to the foot of the fixed rope. This was just the other side of a bergschrund, which made the initial crossing on a snow bridge rather more than interesting. Thus began one of the most physically demanding periods of the expedition. We had about 100m of 45-50° snow/ice to negotiate culminating in a large bulge of hard ice about 3 metres in length that protected the final ridge. As each climber negotiated this in a variety of style not all of which could

exactly be described as textbook before finally flopping down onto the summit ridge and waiting for the other members of the rope. A steep traverse of the summit ridge including a short but steep "step" created by a large bergschrund that has emerged since Connor wrote his book, led to the summit. The vista more than made up for the wait. To the South West our entire approach route was visible, right through to Dingboche and to the east the sacred mountain of Cho Polu with its almost perfectly conically shaped peak. The East side of Lhotse dwarfed us to the West whilst majestically standing in the southern foreground stood Ama Dablam but this time at an altitude not so dissimilar to our own. As the whole team arrived we had the "summit photo" sealed in at least 6 different cameras and even managed to take a video of a 360° vista. Digital cameras our wonderful things even though they consume vast quantities of batteries!

The ascent of Island Peak was the culmination of our expedition and it was with a sense of satisfaction tinged with regret that we began our descent, mindful, as we were reminded several times, that this was the phase when accidents were most likely to occur. It is probably true to say that the style of our abseil descent down the summit ridge and then down the ice ramp left a little to be desired but we were safe and everyone descended in a controlled manner. The glacier seemed considerably easier on the way down, our lungs gratefully drawing in the air as it became more enriched with oxygen. Three hours later following a straightforward negotiation of the rock ridge and a short stop at high camp, we reached the base camp, dehydrated, utterly exhausted but

enormously exhilarated at having successfully ventured into true Himalayan Mountaineering. Our Sirdar was as pleased as we were and immediately confirmed his availability for any 7000m peaks we wished to do the following year! Clearly still affected by the altitude we started discussing this as a realistic opportunity but soon the only sound was that of the wind as we all caught up on the sleep we had missed.

Over the next week we retraced our steps through Dingboche, Namche Bazaar and Phakding to the airstrip at Lukla. At Phakding we gave a party to thank our sherpas and porters who had been, without exception, superb. Yeti Airlines and their Twin Otters saw us safely back to Kathmandu where we spent two days before returning to Heathrow and then Cyprus. The Expedition was a great success and for many members completed a 12-month period in which they had served in Canada, on OP FRESCO and OP TELIC 2 and now Nepal. Our success rate was noticeably larger than commercial trekking companies in the SoluKhumbu at the same time who were also attempting similar itineraries. Our view is that this can be attributed to a more detailed yet more flexible planning process, a higher standard of physical fitness and determination to succeed and careful preparation both before and during our time in Nepal. Our thanks is due to many people for enabling us to achieve what was an experience of a lifetime, in particular thanks must go to the G3 PAT Staff at HQ 2 Div and HQ ATG (A), several members of the AMA and a large number of Queen's Lancashires who all supported us in this venture.

1 Trekking Peaks of Nepal, Crowood Press 1989. Chapter 6.

First sight of Island Peak from Dingboche

Mountain Blue

By Douglas Brain

Midnight August 1st, a bleary eyed but excited group of 12 CUOTC officer cadets and 2LTs assembled for their first taste of alpine mountaineering. The aim of the expedition was to develop climbing and alpine mountaineering skills over a 12-day training period, culminating in a 4-day phase during which an attempt on Mont Blanc (4808m) would be made.

Under the watchful eyes of 4 instructors kit was issued and minibuses packed for Chamonix. 10 hours later, we had our first glimpse of the highest peak in Western Europe. A ripple of excitement spread through the lethargic group and tired grumpy faces cracked into broad grins. However, the trip was plagued by one set back after another and our grand hopes of summiting the white dome never realised. Just two days into the trip, one instructor was taken ill and was

advised to fly back to UK, scuppering the provisional training programme.

Day one went ahead as planned, and was an opportunity for the group to develop their ice skills (and learn how to walk again with 12 spikes on each foot). We practiced basic skills such as making ice belays and crevasse rescues, and our first taste of ice climbing.

The group then split into climbing and mountaineering



parties. I was climbing first, and it was fantastic! Having only top roped small routes before, this was my first time on multi-pitch routes, and an experience I will never forget. Climbing in pairs with an instructor we clawed, slid and scraped our way to each summit (I don't think any of the women shall be wearing skirts for a while).

The way down was even more interesting as the rope pulled us into some very cosy positions on each tiny belay point during the stacked abseils. Fortunately mine was a mixed group and our resident Essex girl always volunteered to jump in between the two contented men!

The finest day was not a technical climb but an awesome photo opportunity, the Clocher et Clochetots de Planpraz. Perched 80m above steep scree slopes, we huddled in our group of 3 on the precariously small (and slanted) summit, assuming a crucifix position and waited for the photo. I've never had a problem with heights but as our avid photographer patiently waited for clouds to reveal Mont Blanc for the perfect back drop, I couldn't help but wonder what was taking so bloody long as I stood swaying from side to side on the end of a rather generous sling.

Our second phase was supposed to be in the mountains, but then came another blow to our summit aspirations. A Sandhurst party also on AT in Chamonix had lost a member of their

group, and we were asked to help in the search. 2 days later we had found nothing and things weren't looking good, sadly at the time of writing OCdt Blake Hartley is still missing.

The next two days saw our first phase in the mountains. We had a gentle walk in to the Argentiere hut, with the intention of attempting the nearby L'aguille de Tour Noire. However the weather closed in and at 4.30am the hut was enveloped in fog so it was back to bed for us (I must confess I didn't object too much). We awoke to much finer conditions at 8am and decided to try Col de Tour Noire and peer over into Switzerland. It was by no means a technical climb, just as well considering I had left one of the group ropes 2000m below in Chamonix!

This proved to be our last day in the mountains as weather and group rotation conspired against us. As disappointing as this was, every cloud has a silver lining (no pun intended), and our cragging skills improved dramatically. Everyone achieved RCP, and many were climbing at least a grade harder than when they arrived, some even leading grades they had struggled with earlier in the trip.

Despite set backs and foul weather Mountain Blue proved a very exciting and enjoyable expedition, and although the main objective was not achieved the expedition found success in the huge increase in ability it installed in it's climbers.



Exercise Northern Ascent

Cordillera Blanc, Peru 2004

By Cath Davies, Vice Chairman (Mountaineering)

At Fitzcarrald, on the northern edge of Huaraz, as I gazed at the first colectivo for Caraz (our jump off point for the mountains) I reflected that maybe it was just as well only Will and I had made it on the trip. There certainly wasn't room for more than two inside the colectivo, and there definitely wasn't room for more than two peoples' kit on the roof rack, stacked as it already was with crates of chickens and piles of metre wide plastic wash bowls (so you could trample the laundry with your feet? I wondered). In fact, I wasn't convinced that the addition of our four large packs wouldn't turn the colectivo from an uncomfortably over-crowded vehicle into a top heavy death trap, but the cheerful insouciance of the driver and his mate "No hay problema" and the knowledge that the next colectivo didn't have a roof rack swung the risk assessment and we were off.

What had started as an eight man exped had dwindled down to two as original participants were told they could not be released or were warned for ops. An effort to re-recruit by offering places to newly qualified Mountain Warfare Instructors from my own formation, 52 Infantry Brigade, fell at the hurdle of operational commitments and career courses now overdue because of previous operational commitments! All this meant for my plan, however, was that the time planned for acclimatisation and training would now consist of only the former.

I had climbed with Will Manners before and as befits a previous OC of the Joint Service Mountain Training Centre, he is a vastly experienced mountaineer. I, on the other hand, was the local expert having made two trips to this area previously, one

into the same valley we were now ascending. It was during this trip I had decided to return to try to climb the classic face route on a most beautiful mountain, Artesonraju 6025m, which dominated the valley.

We established ourselves at our base camp with the help of two porters (we had 13 days supply of food and fuel) and began the process of acclimatisation and reconnaissance. Four days later we had established our high camp on the glacier at 4770m and the following day we recced the route through the crevasse field to the foot of the South East face at 5200m. We marked the route with canes.

The next day we carried out an acclimatisation climb on a peak at the head of the valley, Paron, reaching 5405m before turning back due to poor snow conditions. The exped is all going to plan so far. We descend to our base camp overnight, to collect more food and fuel and return to await conditions to climb Artesonraju. What we hadn't planned on was it snowing that night and was still snowing in the morning. However, the altimeter said the pressure was rising, so up we got, re-victualled and set off back to high camp through some very Scottish weather. We dig out the tent and reoccupy it. It is still snowing, in fact it is getting worse and the wind is picking up. We decide that if it peters out overnight, we will give it a go, but if there's too much snow, we'll retreat and wait it out. If it is still snowing in the morning we will descend to base camp.

To add to our difficulties, I have now started a serious toothache and the infection is rendering one side of my face the consistency of wood. It therefore takes me a long time



to get to sleep, a sleep rudely interrupted at 0200 hrs by the boom and crashing of a huge avalanche. By proximity and position, it can only be the SE face! We are camped below the ridge, or arête, between the SE and SW face and arêtes don't avalanche, I hastily calculated. Will sleeps on, having made a considered decision to use earplugs that night, the consideration being there is no use worrying about something you cannot influence. I suppose this must be the nearest you could get in peacetime to being under indirect fire, hoping good positioning and well constructed defences would save you. The only difference was that

although we had the good positioning, a tent does not offer any defence against an avalanche. On cue, this chain of thought was interrupted by an almighty crack and this time, to our left, I listened to the SW face avalanche hugely.

The next morning, it was still snowing, so we packed up and ran away. After getting my toothache sorted in Huaraz, we headed off into another valley and summited on a 5686m peak, Vallunaraju, not quite as beautiful, but with spectacular summit views and some interesting mixed climbing on the way. Artesonraju will have to wait until next time, but that is the one thing about mountains, they are always there.



Exercise Pyrenean Peak Cadet

By Paul Robinson



Andy Richardson Exped Instructor on day four



Group with the Pic du Midi D'Ossau in the background

After 14 weeks of another busy and demanding term at RMAS, nine intrepid adventurers of Gaza Company set off to explore and conquer the French Pyrenees. The expedition took place between 9-16 August and five challenging days of trekking were achieved. Every member of the team completed each day's trekking and gained an invaluable insight into what a well organised and well planned AT Expedition consists of.

To get into France we needed help from the Irish; we flew from Stanstead to Pau by Ryan Air – cheap and cheerful. The expedition didn't get off to a great start. First, at Stanstead Airport it was discovered that Mark Townend had forgotten a tent. Bringing the tents was his sole responsibility and his blunder deserves a mention here. Second, the weather; we left the rain and cloud in the UK and arrived in France to the same. When we signed up for this expedition we were promised sun and blue skies – fortunately after a couple of overcast days we got what was promised, until we returned to the UK a week later that is.

The main effort for the expedition was to climb to the summit of Pic du Midi D'Ossau, some 2884m. The route was recce-ed on the first

day and the peak assaulted on the second. For the ascent we were blessed with gorgeous weather, great scenery, and awesome wildlife – soaring eagles. The climb was arduous but all members agreed that reaching the top was the highlight of the week.

The expedition involved trekking a circular five day route in the Ossau region of the Pyrenees. The first day involved a trek to the Pic D'Saboustie and then onto the refuge D'Pombie – a pleasant mountain hut situated in the shadow of the Pic du Midi D'Ossau, the refuge would be an excellent base for a climbing expedition as there are over 100 climbs on the rocky face of the Pic; some are 400m in height. The second day was the ascent of the Pic itself and then on the third day the group trekked out of the valley, pausing at the Lac de Fabrege before climbing steeply up towards the Lac d'Iurian and an unmanned shelter located there. Here a beautiful sunset was seen combined with low cold hanging in the valley below. On the fourth day the group trekked into the neighbouring valley via some remarkable and remote scenery including hanging valleys and stunning cliff faces. Everyday we exceeded a 500m ascent as well as a similar amount of descent. We endured some real heart and lung pumping phases of

the trek and had to navigate some rather exposed paths; fortunately we had our mountain guru, Andy Richardson, to ensure we remained safe – even the sure-footed(or clumsy) Phil Mhango and Mark Townend.

Throughout the trekking, fellow walkers marvelled with amazement, or stared at the absurdity, of our pace; particularly that of mountain goat Rob Johnstone who continually pushed ahead up the front. Fortunately we had Ben Bobroff, a fluent French speaker, to answer any queries posed to us on our travels.

On the final day's climb up the hills we came upon a stunning and crystal clear lake, 1km long and at a height of 2000m. Mad Scotsman Ian Burns was crazy enough to take a dip in the ice cold water while the rest of us enhanced our tans lakeside. We spent our final night on the hills in a very

rustic refuge on the edge of a very small lake a few hundred metres above the one we'd stopped at earlier. The accommodation was basic but the phenomenal starry night sky on offer was a fitting end to our conquering of the French Pyrenees.

The expedition finished with two days R&R in beautiful Biarritz, the surfing capital of Europe. Plenty of sun, sea, and sand were had by all. However, ginger-haired Stu Jubb struggled to cope with the burning sun and 35°C temperature, while the rest of us revelled in these weather conditions. Biarritz has an idyllic beachfront with art-deco styled buildings lining the promenade. It provided the perfect ending to a great trip and the French even gave us a huge firework display on the beachfront to see us on our way – the festival that was happening that weekend was probably just a coincidence.



Pic du Midi D'Ossau from the refuge D'Pombie

Exercise Haute Finn II

Hasta Bellavista Baby!

By Ian Coomber

Having been posted back to Northern Ireland last summer, the first thing that entered my head was 'Where can I go to get out of Province – and quickly?' Unfortunately I had a bit of work to do as the 3 Brigade Deputy Chief of Staff in the intervening period but immediately put my thoughts to planning a trip to an area that I had never been to, that had sunshine, good travel links.....and most importantly, had large mountains to climb.

Having looked through a Post Exercise Report library in Lisburn, I noticed that one of my potential areas of interest had not been visited. This area was the Engadine in Switzerland and more specifically, the Bernina area. This is a salient that sticks out into Italy in the far south East of Switzerland. So I could combine sophisticated (and expensive) Swiss hospitality with Italian food into one trip. Marvelous!! This is a relatively quiet area with huge sweeping glaciers and some famous peaks such as Piz Palu (you have probably never heard of it but it has had a film made about it - honest!!) The highest summit in the region is however, the Piz Bernina at 4,049 metres. This brings it onto the tick-list of those who quest to summit on all of the alpine giants above 4,000 metres.

My initial difficulties were getting anyone interested. It seems that nowadays to most soldiers Adventure Training involves a morning of mountain biking or pony trekking, followed by lounging around and drinking at campsites. This was further exacerbated by the continuing short-notice trawls for yet more soldiers to go to Iraq. The last one was given two weeks notice to go a fortnight before our departure date. Budget Airlines are great for



Relaxing at the Coaz Hut with the Da La Sella and Roseg Glaciers forming the backdrop

getting cheap deals well I in advance, but name changes make an ever-increasing inroad into expedition funds before you have even departed - this was hugely frustrating. Equipment was indented for, approved with little difficulties (surprisingly!) and fitted (well, nearly!!)

We departed for Luton where we had an overnight stop. Another disadvantage of budget airlines, ensuring that delays do not make us miss our connection. The hotel at Luton Airport was full of holiday makers covered in fake tan (thereby turning them orange) and aircrew (thereby turning it into a rampant homosexual pick-up joint). We retired early – alone! - as we had a dawn start and flew the next morning to Zurich and

the onward train journey to our destination - the town of Pontresina. The trains in Switzerland are comfortable and on time, making them a novelty for British holidaymakers. It took four hours to reach our valley base, through some spectacular scenery (the Bernina Express is on a famous railway line) but was spoilt somewhat by the rain. This did not look good and had not featured in my initial plan (refer back to line 5 regarding weather).

We explored Pontresina which is a quaint town with a mix of old and new architecture. There are a few sports shops, a helpful tourist office and lots of old people. It is on the periphery of St Moritz so I suppose it gets those who want to stay in St Moritz but



Crevasses and ice cliffs make up a typical glacier in the Bernina

do not have a six-figure income. Anyway it proved to be an excellent valley base and we set off the next day on our continuing railway journey to the base of the Diavolezza lift, a cable car that would take us immediately (and rather idly!!) up to 2,600 metres. Once at the top of the lift we fought our way through the hordes of Japanese tourists, clad in the standard issue wide-brimmed sun hats and taking photographs of every thing and nothing, to emerge to a superb vista of the Pers Glacier. This was to be our training ground for the next two days in order to get our skills honed and to make up for cheating the acclimatisation process by catching the cable car.

The weather had also improved and we were to enjoy seven days of constant sunshine on the trip. At the top of the cable car was the Diavolezza Hut, a privately owned hut (although it is probably better described as a restaurant/hotel). This had superb food, television (which is a real novelty for the mountains) and an outside cinema screen for one evening per week. They were showing *Touching the Void* when we were there proving that no matter how far you travel, you cannot evade Joe Simpson! We spent the next couple of days on basic Alpine training including crevasse rescue and ice axe arrest. It is amazing how soldiers attempt to injure themselves by hurling themselves ever faster down a slope in order to perform the best stopping action with an ice axe. We ventured onto the glaciers to remove some of the fear that people have of crevasses, although this was somewhat tempered by the three incidents of people popping through snow bridges. It did show how easy it was to stop somebody from falling below waist deep and did increase



A nice view and also a fairly long drop left and right! On the Spellagrat Ridge of the Piz Bernina (4049 metres) after a successful ascent

confidence (so I am reliably informed).

Our route up to the highest hut in the area began with a gentle slope that quickly formed into a spine-like ridge known as the Fortezza. I could feel the mutinous glares from those on the ropes behind me. You never mentioned this in the brief? The route was iced up and involved some simple (if strenuous) moves over good rock, but with huge drops down to the glacier below. It was at this point that several members of the party confided in me their fear of heights, before I ignored them and implored them to continue. I think it's called leadership? We had a few other tricky moments with some huge crevasses on the Bellavista Terrace, before a snow slope traverse led us to the Marco-e-Rosa Hut at 3597 metres. Into Italy now, the food was excellent, the view from the hut window was like looking over a huge cliff edge (probably because it was built on the edge of a cliff!) and we settled down for the evening awaiting the next nightmare. One of the party had failed to

their pathological fear of enclosed spaces and darkness, thereby ensuring that every night we were awoken by banshee screams akin to being bugged out from a harbour area in a dense forestry block on Sennybridge.

We awoke from our interrupted dreams to attempt the Piz Bernina via the Spellagrat Ridge. This is the easiest route up, and comes in from the opposite side from the Biancograt (this is an even longer and more famous ridge route designed to scare those who felt that the Spellagrat was too easy). We departed as a three (three stayed in the hut for safety reasons) and found some superb rock and a snow ridge with huge drops left and right. The ridge is a man's width of snow and we were glad that it was early morning with firm neve rather than afternoon mush. Having successfully scaled the peak we safely descended via two abseils and learned that many parties had turned back on discovering the exposure and difficulties of the route, even adding people to our rope to ensure a safe descent.

tell us of

Our plan had been to move on to the Marinelli Hut, further into Italian territory and the



The expedition members below some seracs (ice cliffs) on the Bellavista terrace on day 3, en-route to the Marco-e-Rosa Hut



Looking at potential routes across the Roseg Glacier

largest hut in the area. The heat, however, had turned the snow into a mess and we went for Plan B, stay another night at the Marco-e-Rosa Hut. The only problem with this was that it was fully booked and we ended up sleeping on the floor in the dining room, although this did give our nightmare member the ability to thrash around in even more spacious surroundings and hurl cutlery as required! We rapidly moved down an ever-steepening klettersteig (fixed protection) route the next day, which led to more group discontent. The ladders that had been fixed in place were designed to have the rungs slightly out of reach to anyone under 5 feet 10

inches, creating a blind panic amongst those who pushed their foot downwards expecting the confidence of a steel bar but finding the reality of a thousand-foot drop below their Elvis Presley disco-leg impressions.

Having ascended a col back into

Switzerland, our last obstacles were the Da la Sella and Roseg Glaciers. This was a tricky descent, un-tracked through a maze of crevasses and seracs (ice cliffs) and with the addition of a sun that was turning the area into an oven. We arrived, slightly well done, at the Coaz Hut just after lunch and spent the afternoon relaxing. This hut is in a great position and is ideally situated to conduct glacier training, and we had a spell of ice-climbing on the seracs to relax. The footpath up to the Coaz Hut from Pontresina is through a nature reserve and is a haven for Alpine flora and fauna, bordered by a lake that is the catchment zone for huge blocks of ice falling from the Roseg Glacier above. We descended this path the next day, had a bite to eat at the very posh Roseg Glacier Restaurant where the fat clientele regarded us as aliens with two heads having arrived from another world. We did smell a bit though! We had far too much pudding and descended with the fat tourists on a horse and cart down a track and back to the joys of Pontresina. We did not stop at Luton on the way back.

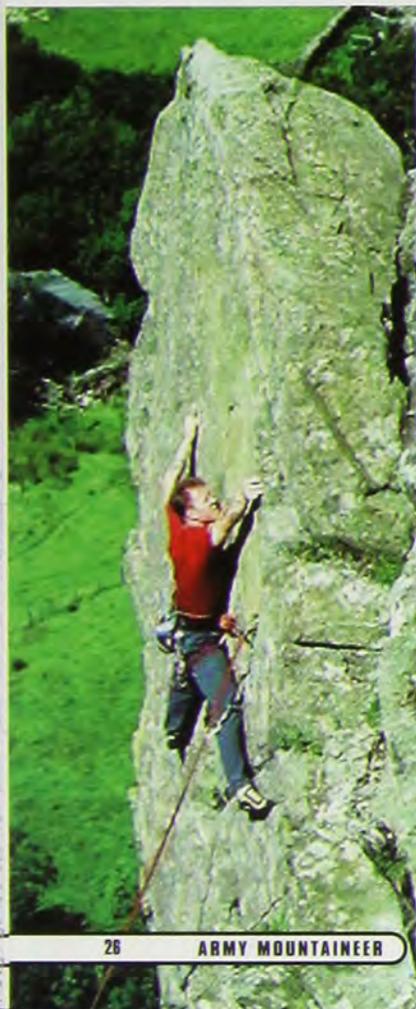
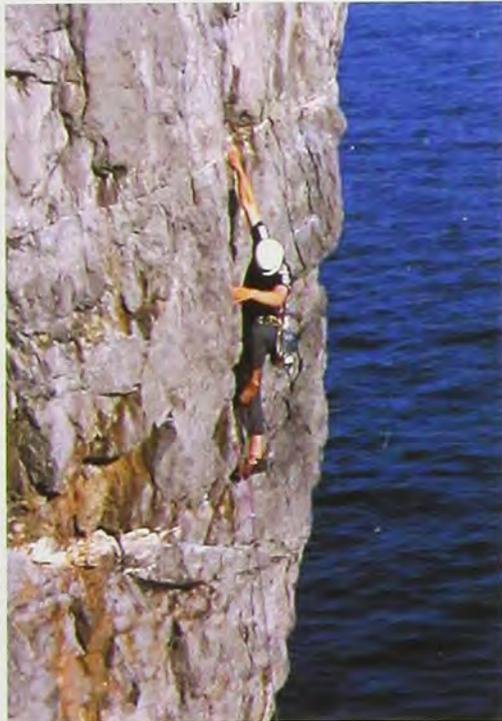
Ex Tasmanian Dragon 7

By Mark Hedge

Exercise *TASMANIAN DRAGON* is to be the most technically competent AMA rock trip to date. A bold statement that!! How can a statement like that be justified?

Applicants were invited to attend a selection weekend armed with climbing CV's, a wish to improve and push their grades. The first weekend presented a variety of cap badges and ability levels. Some personnel were already established in the mid extreme grades and some with the potential to benefit greatly from an expedition of this nature. At present all selected thus far have led a minimum of E2. Over the course of many weekends with more to follow 'Taz Dragon' personnel have been bagging extreme welsh rock routes with the aim of reproducing their hardest lead grade on Tasmanian rock.

A strict training regime was mapped out early in the training programme; a 12-



week cycle was designed for all to reach peak performance on touching down in Hobart. The programme consists of fatburning, aerobic, bouldering, strength, power training utilising campus boards and wall facilities. Folk interested in the same personal programme should attend the Army bouldering championship weekend 28/29 Jan 05.

It is hoped that a documentary of the trip will raise the profile of Army climbers and show the public that we are not light years behind our civilian counterparts. Filming is taking the form of a 'fly on the wall documentary' and is being directed and produced by Mark Reeves of 'Between The Rain' and 'Duty Paid' notoriety. Since the expedition gained clearance ascents (many filmed) include:

The Sun E3, Rhoscolyn;
Electric Blue E4, Rhoscolyn;
Savage Sunbird E2,





Rhoscolyn; The Wild Rover, Rhoscolyn; Right Wall E5, Dinas Cromlech; Vector E2, Tremadog; The Light Spantastic F7a, Gt Orme; Social Loafer F7a+, Gt Orme To date the team consists of: Nick Tarmey, doctor by trade. Nick is also the producer of 'Cutting Loose' and 'Living For The Weekend', two successful climbing films shown at the Kendal Mountain film festival. An accomplished all round climber and mountaineer, has solo'd E5.

Kev Page, REME. Kev has climbed all over the world and is a member of the Army climbing team. An accom-

plished all rounder, has led E5.

Mark Hedge, APTC. Mark specialises in short bold routes and has led E7. Over 60 first ascents featured in guidebooks, UK and abroad.

Will Woodhead, RLC. Last year Woody jumped from F6b+ to F7a+ and is now making the same progress through the traditional grades. Equally as comfortable on ice and in the Alpine environment.

Iain Scott, APTC. Scotty is finding himself steady at E2/3 having consolidated these grades this year. Hoping to progress further still and grab some hard headpoints in Tasmania.

Rob Lawrence, Para. The Inter Service Under 25's climbing champ. Progressing very steadily through the grades deep-water solo'd Electric Blue this year.

Tania Noakes, TA. Tania has climbed extensively all over the world both on crag and the bigger hills. Leads up to E2, has a passion for off width cracks.

Haydn Gaukroger, Para. Also deep-water solo'd the same E4 as Rob this year. Has a

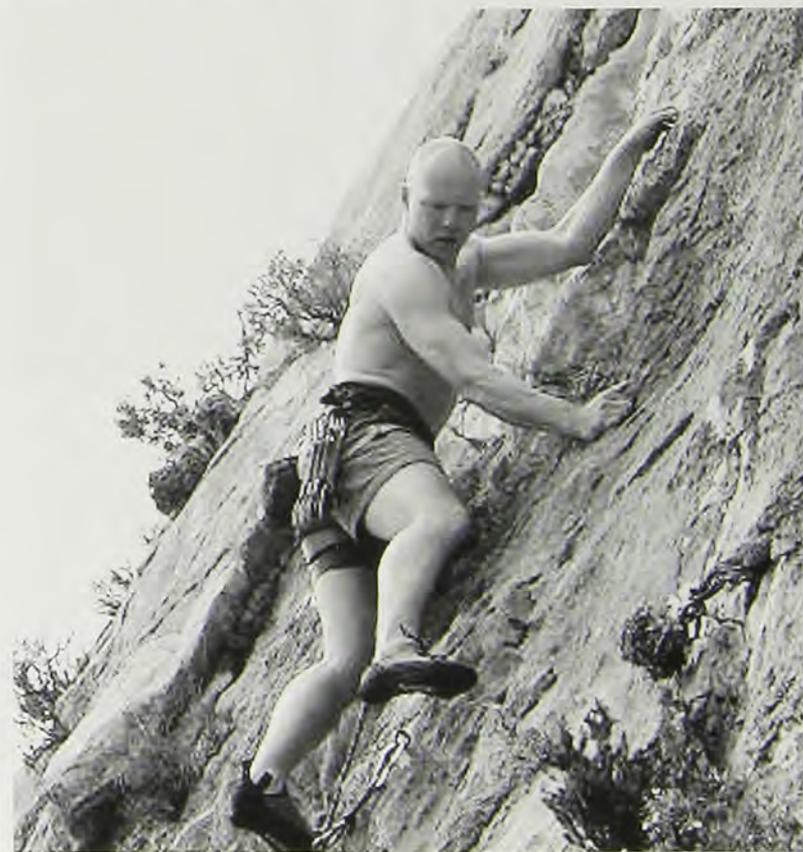


good CV of climbs under his belt with leads up to E4. Also handy in the bigger hills.

Now, a bit about Tasmania.: A small Island to the south east of Australia. Hobart is the capital and looks to be a buzzing little city; this is where we will land either by ferry or plane.

Hire vehicles are the order of the day; the Island is of a size that every area could be visited during our stay. On collection of the transport off we go to find our beds. Two base camps for the trip, north

and south of the Island the split coming halfway through our tour. Accommodation will take the form of self-catering lodges allowing the team to prepare thoroughly in the pursuit of excellence. The weather whilst in Tasmania should be the equivalent to a good British summer with the temperature likely to be in the mid 20's. With good high-pressure systems we will take the opportunity to tackle some of the famous sea stacks and sea cliffs many of which start on the sparkling, white, sandy beaches.



Exercise Northern Sierra II

By Tania Noakes

The John Muir Trail traverses the length of the Sierra Nevada Mountains in California. It covers over 260 miles of wild backcountry terrain and crosses ten high mountain passes reaching altitudes of over four thousand metres. It is named after the famous environmentalist of Scottish origin who was largely responsible for setting up the National Parks system in the United States. He often said that they should have been called the 'Range of Light' and once you have visited this magical place it is easy to understand why.

This year Leeds University Officers Training Corps took a group of eleven Officer Cadets and one instructor to trek the length of the trail and a group of four Officer Cadets and two instructors to embark on a rock climbing frenzy in the Backcountry High Sierra. Three Army Mountaineering Club members took part in the climbing part of this expedition, Captain Tania Noakes R Sigs, Lieutenant Robert Lawrence PARA and WOCDt Rachel Taitt LUOTC. I wrote last year about the magic of the trail itself so this year I will tell you about the kind of backcountry granite you dream about!

I wanted the expedition as a whole to finish with an ascent of Half Dome at the head of Yosemite Valley. Walking the trail South to North means that the walking gets easier, prettier and warmer (lower elevation) the further along the trail you go. The downside is that within the first week you have the prospect of climbing Mount Whitney at over 4500m without a great deal of acclimatisation. As a result of this decision the first two weeks of the expedition were without doubt the hardest for both the climbing and trekking groups.

Once we dropped the trekkers off at Cottonwood pass trailhead we had three weeks of climbing to embark on. Our only fixed agenda were the four re-supplies to the trekking

group that we would have to make at roughly five-day intervals. We spent the first five-day period based at Whitney Portal. Our first target Lone Pine Peak by the classic 5.5 North Ridge at 12,944ft. The guide describes it thus "...if the altitude is bugging you or you're too tired or hungover this is a great alternative to Whitney or Russell routes." With this kind of encouragement I thought it would be a great starter route to get some descent acclimatisation. Hmm...

The approach is relatively short, a couple of hours on a descent ranger trail and then climbers backcountry trail. We set off at seven and were at the notch in the ridge and start of the route for nine, out of the shade and into the sunshine. This was around 11,500ft and Rachel Taitt was feeling considerably effected by the altitude so the decision was made that she should descend with Rob Lawrence back to camp. I continued with James Kelly (RLT) and Nicola Chambers (on her first ever outdoor multi-pitch rock route!). We moved together most of the way, making short pitches of any difficult steps and finally reaching the summit at three in the afternoon. A thunderstorm was brewing to the north over the craggy summit of Mount Whitney our next objective. I asked James to sign the summit register, handily stowed in an ammunition box and made preparations to leave. He checked with me where in my rucksack I normally stored my ammunition box. At first puzzled and aware of James sharp wit I suggested back next to the summit calm. We shared a look and both knew the altitude was taking its toll elsewhere. We hurried off the north slopes and a third class descent hastened by the gathering rain and decreasing light. Safe back on the ranger trail a few hours later we picked up Rob on the radio and let base camp know we would be down in less than an hour. Rachel had

recovered quickly on descent and although a little disappointed at having to turn round felt stronger for it. A fantastic peak with stunning views but certainly not one I'd want to contemplate with a hangover. Nicola, Queen of the hill seemed pretty unaffected. Given the highest she had ever been before was Scafell Pike this was pretty good going.

The next day we prepared for a two-night backcountry trip up to Upper Boy Scout Lake under Mount Whitney and Mount Russell the two highest peaks of the area. We aimed to complete a classic route on each of them, the East Buttress route 5.8 on Whitney (because I had heard it is more objectively safe than the East Face route) and the Fishhook Arete 5.9 on Russell. We set off about two in the afternoon from the Whitney Portal trailhead and took the north-fork up to Upper Boy Scout Lake at 11,000ft. The entire group felt strong at this altitude which boded well for our ascent the next day. We were getting fairly regular afternoon thunderstorms breaking about two to three in the afternoon every day that first week. This would clearly effect our timings and approach to the next two climbs. After picking the brains of the local guides also bivvying at Upper Boy Scout Lake we decided on a three am start time for our route on Whitney.

The group was up and off on time and after an interesting scramble up through the cliff-band by headtorch to Iceberg Lake we were at the base of the route as it began to get light. The route took us to the summit in about six main pitches and then half an hour of moving together over gendarmes and lower fifth class terrain. We reached the summit at midday and were well down the mountaineers' route by the time the thunderstorms struck, encountering a degree of snow and iced up rock in the upper stretches

making route selection interesting. Our descent route was first climbed by John Muir himself and is a classic route to the summit in its own right.

Regrouping at Upper Boy Scout Lake we discovered there was a pair of climbers missing on the Fishhook Arete, our next chosen route. They had been caught out in a thunderstorm a couple of days ago and had not been seen since. This together with the fact that the group was still adjusting to the altitude and the route had a more committing approach and descent helped me decide to pull the plug on Russell and head out early. Rob tried hard to contain his enthusiasm at this plan since it meant we could spend the extra day clipping bolts in the famous sport climbers paradise of the Owens River Gorge. In his rush to get there he left his brand new Gore-tex jacket at our cave-bivvi. Perhaps he was taking the advice of a local guide we met too literally. Remember those prophetic words. "Lighter is Righter!"

Two days in Bishop allowed a chance to recover and pick up supplies to take in to the trekking group over Kearsage pass to Charlotte Lake. We set off for the pass after the heat of midday had died down and were established on the shores of Charlotte Lake by dusk four hours later. A chance to catch up with the trekking group and exchange altitude and bear stories was followed by a dawn start for our next objective, the South Face of Charlotte Dome 5.8. This route firmly deserves its place in the book *Fifty Classic Climbs in North America* for it is a great line on a great face. There are nine pitches of fairly consistent 5.7-5.8 climbing but the guide is correct in that you want to be a fairly solid 5.9 leader not to have a drama. The sixth pitch of steep 5.7 face is fairly run out and can turn in to 5.9 climbing depending on the line you take. The summit is a beautifully thin ridge and we were pleasantly

surprised to find a higher proportion of Brits in the summit register than other peaks. Perhaps the walk in puts Americans off?

Our next objective was a route on a mountain called Temple Crag and spurred on by our light is right ethic we decided to climb it alpine-style in a day. My guide described the area as the best high alpine rock climbing in the Sierra. What more encouragement did we need? The setting is stunning and both Rob and I agreed that it is the type of place you could easily spend a week camped up by one of the alpine lakes ticking off the great ridge routes on Temple crag and some of the other routes in the Palisades. We picked one route, Venusian Blind Arete at 5.7 which gave consistent enjoyable and exposed climbing even though the rock was found to be a little less than sound in areas. We passed a group in the darkness on the walk in who said they were suffering a little from 'elevation sickness' and were on their way down, my eyes narrowed and I glanced at Rachel. Feeling much better but easy to talk yourself into feeling symptoms if you believe you are slow to adjust to altitude. She admitted later that at that moment she didn't feel great but later on the route she felt perfectly fine and we completed the route together an hour ahead of our other team. Just going to show how psychologically you can talk yourself into symptoms too. The route finishes about 30 minutes walk from the summit and it is well worth the extra effort for the amazing views of the Palisade mountains to the north and west. From a three am start we were back at the car for six in the evening feeling justifiably proud a great day in the hills.

The next day saw us turn round at the start of our route on Mount Goode due to a pair climbing above and sending considerable debris into the snow slopes below. It gave a chance to regroup and prepare for the North Ridge of Bear Creek Spire a stunning ten pitch 5.8 route to a 13,720ft alpine summit. Again we did this alpine-style with a four am start and five pm finish. The trailhead is actually one of the

highest roads in the sierra but don't be deceived as you have a lot of distance to reach the peak towards the head of the valley. We timed it so that we left the main trail as it got light, and the final approach is such that it would be easy to waste considerable time in the dark if you are unused to the area.

The next day we explored a little peaklet called crystal crag with a ten-metre wide band of pure quartz near the summit and the students led the route. Feeling the strain of long approach walks the team requested that we move to Tuolumne meadows and have a few days of more laid back climbing before our next re-supply with the trekking group. It was about this time that the suggestion surfaced that my selection criteria for the routes had been that the number of rock climbing pitches had to be closely matched to the number of miles covered on the approach. (Denial was futile later on after the 24 pitches of the NW Regular Route on Half Dome was approached by a 23 mile walk in from Tuolumne Meadows.)

About this stage the student climbers were climbing more and more independently from the instructors. James, Rachel and Nicola climbed Cathedral peak by the Southeast buttress 5.6, possibly one of the best routes in Tuolumne and met Rob and me at the summit after we had climbed the Eichorn Pinnacle 5.10b on the other side of the mountain. We then regrouped for the Regular Route on the third pillar of Mount Dana 5.10b. Nicola sat this one out after disturbing tales of falling asleep on the belay ledges the day previous. This climb has possibly the most amazing top pitch of any climb I have ever done. The most solid straight in hand jams interspersed with wild mantles on slightly overhanging terrain, finishing abruptly on the summit plateau. If you are a solid 5.10 climber and you visit Tuolumne this should be at the top of your list of desires.

After a couple of rest days at the Devils Postpile and meeting up with the trekkers we returned to Tuolumne to continue our climbing frenzy. James, Rachel and Nicola scaled the wonderful West

Crack 5.9 on Daff Dome whilst Rob and I sent Crescent Arch 5.10b on the same face. The two classic lines on this dome in a day! This was quickly followed by the students climbing Tenaya peak by the NorthWest Buttress in rapid time allowing them to cool off in the crystal waters of Tenaya lake. Meanwhile Rob selected a fine climb called Oz 5.10d for us to swing leads on and followed it by one of the wildest roof traverses you have ever seen, the Gram traverse 5.10d. Two full rope lengths under a seven metre roof, the first pitch so strenuous that even Rob was grunting his way through the sequence as he figured it out. The second pitch as delicate as the first had been strenuous allowing me to cautiously wobble my way to the finishing jugs. The final pitch to the top of Drug dome is steep pulling on big knobs, nothing that Rob isn't used to in the Parachute Regiment.

With one week left the final phase of the plan kicked in. That of our different ascents of Half Dome. Rob and I walked in to the base of the Northwest face and fixed the first pitch of the classic NW Regular route. Meanwhile Rachel, James and Nicola made sure the trekking group was re-supplied and then drove round to Yosemite Valley. The trekkers were to ascend the cables over the still-steep backside of the dome (possibly the scariest route!) and then walk the happy isles trail to the valley floor. The student climbers would climb the classic 5.7 route Snakedike completely independent from their instructors. Meanwhile Rob and I made as speedy (almost free) ascent of the classic Northwest Regular Route of the front face of Half Dome (5.10cAI). In the end it took us sixteen hours of climbing but due to both of us losing our head torch batteries we spent a cold bivvi curled up together on the great sandy ledges before completing the climb the next day. I was quite distressed in the morning to find we had slept on the platypus and lost one and a half litres of our five-litre water supply in the night. This distressed only deepened when Rob asked whether he could now claim to have slept with Tania Noakes, bringing a

new dimension to the idea of route ticking. We had planned to meet up at the summit, but in the end only the two climbing teams met up at midday at the base of the cables descent route. Understandably the trekkers made a dawn ascent during the coolest and most magical time of the day.

Walking down from half dome into the valley there were mixed feelings within the group. Satisfaction at having taken part and succeeded in such an ambitious and strenuous expedition, excitement at the prospect of seeing San Francisco and having some different food after three and a half weeks on the trail, and heartache at having to leave such a wonderful place.

I am very proud of the fifteen Officer Cadets who took part in this expedition. There is absolutely no doubt that they found it hard. This goes for both the trekking and the climbing groups. At times I feel sure that every one of them asked themselves why they were there. But I also know that they all feel they have achieved something very worthwhile and that they can rightly look forward to their next challenge and feel less daunted by it. All these things, self-belief, determination, the ability to get on in a team, independence of instruction and above all an eye for your next challenge, these things are why we mount adventurous training expeditions in the first place.

Exercise Northern Sierra II was a success in all of these aspects and more. If you have visited the Sierra Nevada Mountains in California you may understand all too well how spiritual this place is and how profound your experiences there can be. Thanks to the hard work and professionalism of the two instructors Mathew Ladbroke and Rob Lawrence and the enthusiasm of the students it was worth all the effort of putting the expedition together. It has even given me a few ideas for next year, since each time I leave with more plans for adventure than I arrived with. If you have never visited... I feel for you, both sorrow and excitement. For what a wealth of opportunity lies before you!

Welsh Wanderings

By Lt Col Martin Bazire, AMA Chairman

Over the AMA Annual Weekend at the end of September 2004, I was able to enjoy three quick forays into the hills. With the aid of digital camera, I thought I would try to provide a short summary.

First, on my way to Indy, I had time to stop at Ogwen to head up Y Garn, aiming for the intriguing East Ridge that skirts Cwm Idwal. It was fun picking a route up the various sections, as good views opened up all round. I found it tricky finding a way round the difficulties higher up. After finally hopping over a distinctive rib, I was able to exit Cwm Clyd to reach the upper slopes of Y Garn. I was soon on the windy top, from where the two photos were taken as reminders of a memorable outing: for a couple of hours I had the whole hill to myself.

Paul Edwards joined me on my second trip, which took us to the Nantlle Ridge. On the drive there via Rhyd-Ddu, the clear weather made the scenery quite stunning. The first photo looks back at Craig y Bera and Mynydd

Mawr, while the second was taken from the ridge above Cwm Silyn looking towards Snowdon. We carried on, making a fine circuit, on which we passed just one other hill-walker.

Sadly, the weather changed for my third outing, but Cath Davies and I headed to Tryfan, where we crossed over the North Ridge to gain Heather Terrace. We found a good scramble up the wet Little and North Gullies, which provided shelter from the wet, westerly wind. As we gained the ridge just as other AMA members were proceeding on the North Ridge traverse: a few moments either way and we would have missed each other. Despite the poor weather (hence no photos), it was another satisfying experience.



These ventures were of limited duration, and each might be questioned as a 'Quality Mountain Day'. However, most of the other criteria were met, especially the last one: the end result is having a sense of achievement and a feeling of satisfaction and enjoyment

on the day. I remember several years ago requesting that this be added to the suggested criteria, and I am delighted to see this in JSP 419.

For me, each hill-climb was different and enjoyable, and I felt I had made the most of a long weekend. I was also able to squeeze in some AMA business!





AMA Newsletter

www.theama.org.uk

Winter 2005

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Keeping you informed of what's happening in the AMA

Communications update

By Steve Wilson
AMA Communications Officer

At the 2004 AGM the Maj Andy Parsons stood down as the Communications Officer after a long tenure that saw the birth of the AMA Web site and the development of the AMA Journal. I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for all his hard work. Now down to the nitty gritty, what has happened to the AMA publication? The answer is that we have allowed too much slippage of publishing dates from those agreed a number of years ago. We have also let the Newsletter adversely effect the Journals distribution in an attempt to save money on postage. The end result of this is that we have not been reliable. As a result of these problems I have now made some changes to the way in which we produce our publication. The new format is as follows:

Journals: Two editions a year to be at the membership by the start of Feb and the start of July. The journal will now incorporate the newsletter for that quarter within its pages. By combining these to publications into a single

document we will eliminate the problems experienced in the past.

Newsletter: The remaining two newsletters will be at the membership by the start of May and the start of November each year. The newsletter will be in its current 4 page format and contain a standard set of up to date and relevant information.

To maintain the standard of our printed publications we must get in-put from you, the membership, otherwise the Journal becomes a collection of PXR's and the Newsletter irrelevant. In the past I have held both the editors jobs and there is nothing more disheartening than having to write vast sections of the publications yourself. So I would ask all of you to make the effort to contribute to the publications. As an incentive to contribute to the journal the editor is now able to offer cash for articles. We are also planning to do some work on the web site to maintain its relevance and look.

FASTRAK

The AMA FASTRAK database is increasing in size by the month and those wishing to be added to the list should submit their application from the AMA web site using the e-form available. Unfortunately enquires for instructors can not be taken at present due to the lack of contactability of the database manager. It is planned that the database is moved to our membership office at Indy in May this year at which time it will become fully functional again. New contact details to follow.

AMA Events List

AMA 50th ANNIVERSARY EXPEDITION – SHISHA PANGMA 2007

The expedition will take place post monsoon 2007 and will be primarily a ski mountaineering expedition. Novice mountaineers, skiers/snowboarders are invited to apply as are experienced mountaineers.

Shisha Pangma is 8046 metres above sea level and it is the only 8000er wholly in Tibet. Distributed training will be high on the agenda for the expedition and successful applicants may well attain, Ski Tour Leader Training, Alpine Mountaineering Proficiency and an Introduction to Winter Mountaineering in the lead up to 2007.

If you are interested then contact:

Maj Huw Jones RLC
21C
27 Regt RLC
Buller Bks
Aldershot.
Tel: 94 222 3774

or
WO2 Geordie Taylor APTC
TWO
ASPT
Queen's Ave
Aldershot.
Tel: 94 222 4011
Email: graemetaylor_2000@yahoo.com

Spring Meet

27 – 31 May 05.
Ambleside Hut.
Climbing and walking on classic Lakeland routes. More details from Darren Doyle on 94731 3904.
E-mail – darrendoyle@ntworld.com

New Year Meet

27 Dec 05 – 08 Jan 06.
Norwegian Lodge.
Snow and ice climbing, winter mountaineering.
More info from John Belsham on 07968 913958

Pre Monsoon 2006 EVEREST WEST RIDGE

In the pre-monsoon period of 2006, the British Army intends to mount a summit bid via the magnificent "West Ridge". This route has yet to yield to a British ascent. First climbed in 1963 by an American team, the "West Ridge" receives few visitors due to the unpalatable weather patterns and logistical difficulties on this lengthy route. The British Army team is drawn to this route not in blind hope, but in the knowledge that with our logistical expertise, and our team of highly skilled and motivated climbers, we can meet the challenge presented by this magnificent ridge.

Essential Connections...

If you plan to be, or are, in the same area why not give the people below a ring. Contact them for essential local mountaineering information, accommodation help or even weather, they might just be able to help. You might never be short of a climbing partner again! The essential connections section is for your personal use. If you are active in your area and can offer info on the climbing and other services to the membership – please contact the Newsletter Editor to update, add or remove your details.

Email: newsletter@theama.org.uk or Tel: 07967019868.

AVON

Mac Mackay - now lives on top of the Avon Gorge. Tel: 0117 968 7962 and his
Email: mac.mackay@virgin.net

Tony Redfern - climbs somewhere in the Avon area at every available opportunity.
Mil: 94251 2742. Email: tony.jane@virgin.net

CHAMONIX

Stuart Macdonald – all info via Email:
stumacdonald312@hotmail.com

EAST ANGLIA

Cpl Grace - now climbs at 53 Sqn, 39 Eng Regt at Waterbeach Mil: 94658 4536.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Mark Stevenson - Now at Aldergrove and out climbing somewhere every week,
Email: mark@climbers.net
Mobile: 0780 1283116

NORTHUMBERLAND

Kimball Newsam – Climbs as much as possible in and around Newcastle. Tel: 07967019868

OXFORD

Stuart Boughtflower - climbs regularly at the wall in oxford.
Tel: 01869 257126.

OMAN

Dave Rieth – Would be more than happy to offer any assistance that he can to anyone in the Oman (Climbing?), Tel: + 968 614181 Home: + 968 693472 Mob + 968 9455901
E-mail: davidreith@hotmail.com

PIRBRIGHT

Mike Smith now climbs regularly at Guildford's new climbing wall, Craggy Island. Contact: 94211 5545.
E-mail: mikesmith@sportclimb.wanadoo.co.uk

SHEFFIELD

Jackie Spong - Tel: 0114 2349842 Mobile: 07974 404877.

STAFFORDSHIRE

Paul Smith - I now live in Cannock and hence climb mainly on Staffordshire Grit at least one night a week in the evenings. Also climbing most weekends anywhere in the country. My contact details are home Tel: 01543 570429 and Mobile (Best): 07968 075793 or Email: paul.j.r.smith@bigfoot.com

YORKSHIRE

Mal Thomas - climbs in N/Yorks and Teeside most weekends and Rock antics in Newton Aycliffe most Wednesdays. Tel: 01748 874606 / 01423 325505.

Sport Climbing Competition Dates

4 Div Sport Climbing Championships

26 Feb 2005 at ASPT Contact Capt Duncan Bailey on Mil: 94271 2324; Civil 01962 887324; Fax 94271 3286.

Army Sport Climbing Championships

12/13 May 2005 at WICC Contact Maj Steve Marsh (94271 2324) or Capt Mike Smith (94211 5545)

Divisional Sport Climbing Comps

See AMA website for up to date info.

Key Addressees

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VICE CHAIRMAN

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Email: cath@mmdavies.freeseerve.co.uk

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PUBLICITY OFFICER

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Email: blair.cunningham929@mod.uk

MEETS CO-ORDINATOR

Maj D Gartland (Damian) Mil (9491) Ext 66722
Civil 02989 2266722
Email: damiangartland@hotmail.com

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Maj K Edwards (Kevin) Mil (95581) Ext 7904 Email: edwards1@denkev.freeseerve.co.uk, expeds@theama.org.uk

SPORT CLIMBING SECRETARY

Capt MI Smith (Mike) REME Mil (94211) Ext 5545
Civil 01483 473424 sportclimb@fsmail.net

EQUIPMENT OFFICER / FASTRACK

WO2 (AQMS) S R Willson (Steve) REME Mil (94731) Ext 5120 Email: equipment@theama.org.uk, stevewillson@msn.com

MEMBERSHIP

SECRETARY

Mrs A Davies, Mil (95581) Ext. 7964 Civil: 01248 222655
Email: membership@theama.org.uk

To get involved with the AMA contact the above or write to Mr M Roberts, JSMTTC, Plas Llanfair, Llanfair, LL61 6NT.

JOURNAL EDITOR AND NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Maj H Barnes (Howie) Warminster mil (94381) Ext 2655
Civil 01985 222655 Email: barnes@waitrose.com. Articles to be submitted by mid Jan and Jul of every year.

New AMA Membership Secretary

The new AMA Membership Secretary, Mrs Ann Davies began work at the AMA Office at JSMTTC Indefatigable before Christmas 2004. As ever, she is available for your AMA queries; changes of address, membership queries, Gift Aid and all other general membership matters.

Ann can be contacted weekday mornings as follows:
Voice/Fax: 95581 ext 7964
Email: membership@theama.org.uk

Additionally, Membership, change of address and Gift Aid forms can also be accessed via the AMA website: www.theama.org.uk

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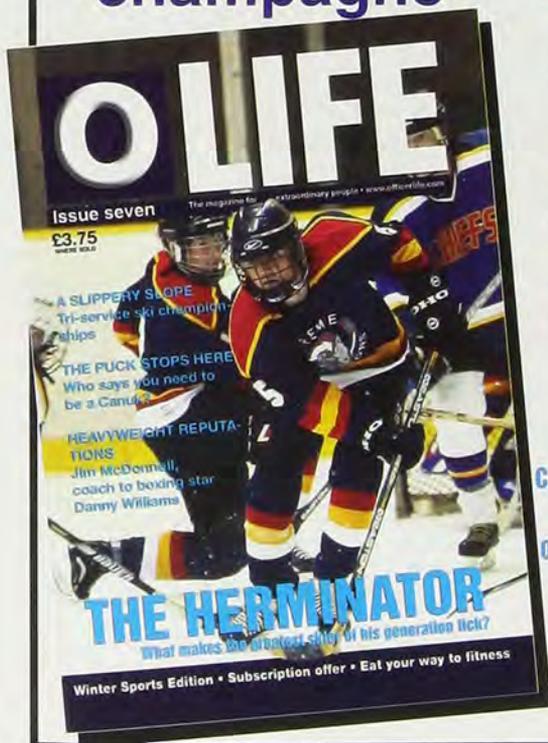
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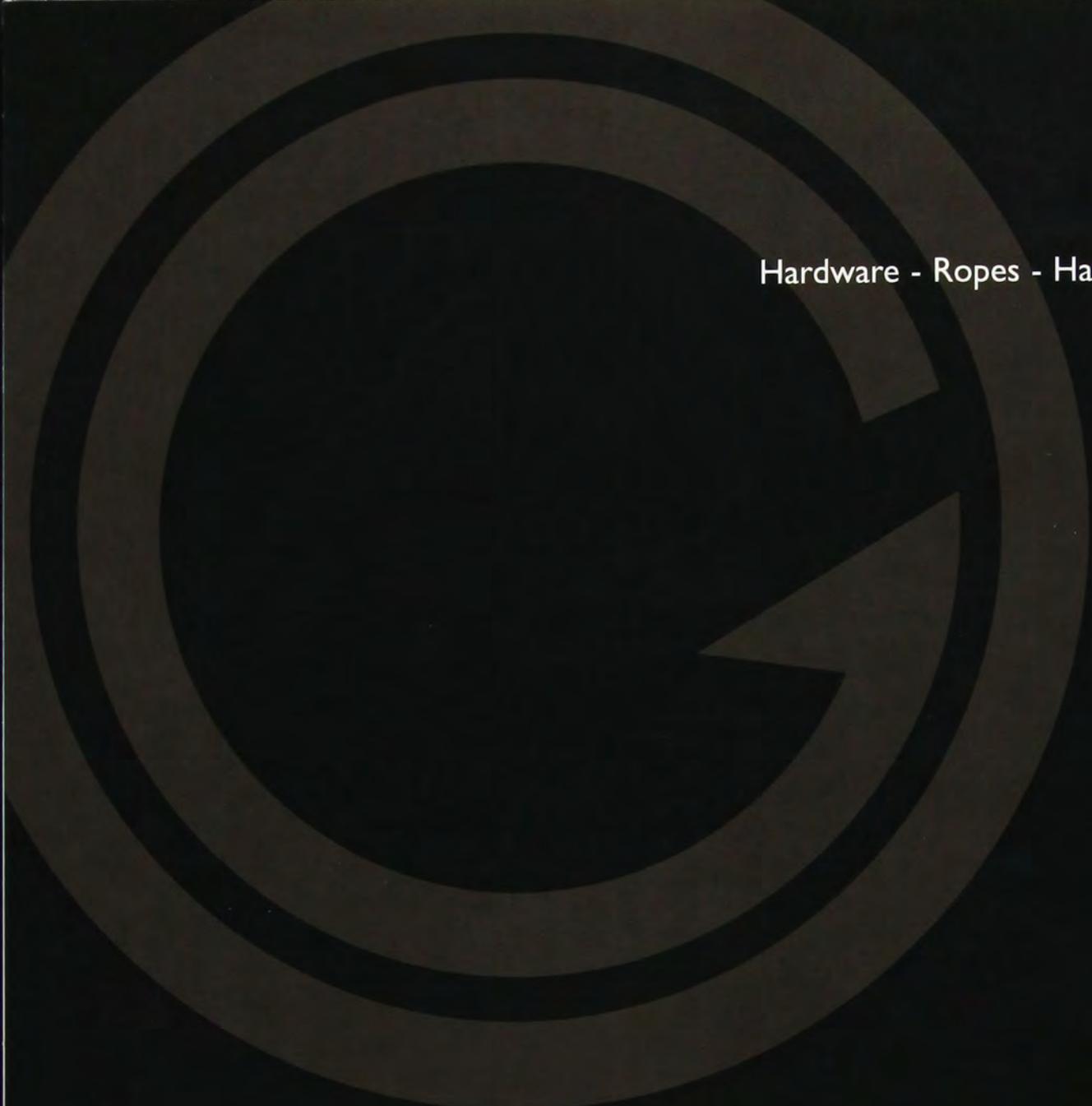
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