

ARMY MOUNTAINEER

The Journal of The Army Mountaineering Association



AMA 50
Hard Rock
Everest Summit
AMA Over the Years



WINTER 2007/08

Thirst for adventure?

SPORT CLIMBING

Handbook of technical skills for climbing without ropes

By Peter HSB SAC



ROCK CLIMBING

ESSENTIAL TECHNICAL SKILLS FOR LEASERS AND BELAYERS

By Peter HSB SAC



CANYONING IN SOUTHERN EUROPE

Classic canyons of Spain, France and Italy

By John Bull



CICERONE POCKET FIRST AID AND WILDERNESS MEDICINE



By John Bull and Peter Gorey

NEW mini-guides
£7.99

Also available.....
Avalanche!
Snow
Navigation

new guides:
Sport Climbing
Rock Climbing

Coming soon:
Canyoning in Southern Europe (Jan)

Recent guides:
First Aid & Wilderness Medicine
Three Peaks, Ten Tors:
16 challenges in Britain

CICERONE
specialist guides for:
walking, trekking
cycling, mountaineering

www.cicerone.co.uk

Join our mailing list!

FREE CATALOGUE
01539 562069

Available from good bookshops, outdoor and cycle shops, or direct from Cicero Press Ltd, 2 Police Square, Milnthorpe, Cumbria, LA7 7PY

the outdoor shop

www.theoutdoorshop.com



Benefits available to A.M.A. members

20% discount off normal SRP prices
Mailorder service to BFPO addresses
Efficient online ordering system

stony stratford >> milton keynes >> tel: 01908 568913

DEMAND

Design & Manufacture for Disability

Do something DEMANDING...

We design and make equipment for children and adults with disabilities, using the skills of our expert designers and craftsmen.

In the UK over 10 million people have disabilities. Help us to help them overcome their challenges.

Run a marathon for us?

We have places in all the World Marathon Majors - London, New York, Chicago, Berlin and Boston. Wherever you are there's a marathon just waiting for you. Go to the How You Can Help section of our website www.demand.org.uk for details and registration.

How about an Adventure Challenge?

Can you see yourself driving a team of huskies across Lapland, climbing Kilimanjaro, following the Inca Trail in Peru, walking the Great Wall of China or trekking in the Atlas Mountains of Morocco?

As well as being a once in a lifetime adventure, some of our challenges involve helping preserve the environment you're trekking through too. Contact us for full colour brochures on each challenge.

Think you're a tough guy?

If you're involved in Adventure Racing or other endurance sport, why not get a team together and do it for DEMAND?

For further information on all events and challenges go to the Events microsite within the How You Can Help section of our website.

For any event or fundraising queries
Call Lesley McGinty on 01923 682400
Email lesley.mcginty@demand.org.uk

www.demand.org.uk

Help us make a difference to the lives of disabled people

ARMY MOUNTAINEER

The Journal of The Army Mountaineering Association



CONTENTS

Foreword	3
Editorial	3
A few words on communication	4
50th Anniversary Expedition – AMA	5
As One approaches middle age	7
Army climbing in the late '60s	8
Himalayan Odyssey 2007	9
The Hard Rock Challenge	12
Medics on a mountain	14
Seven weeks in Tibet	18
The Dhaulagiri IV Expedition 1974	22
Craghoppers	24
Boreal Zenith	26
Oktoberfest	29
Nevada Peaks	31
That's Me	33

On the Cover: Sir Chris Bonnington still going strong on the Hard Rock Challenge.

AMA on-line! Recently Updated

Why not visit our web site at:

www.theama.org.uk

© Copyright: Any opinions expressed in the articles in this magazine are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the policy and views, official or otherwise of the MOD, Army or Association. No part of this publication may be reproduced without the permission of the editor or publisher. No responsibility for the quality of goods or services advertised in this magazine can be accepted by the editor, publishers, Association, Army, MOD or printers and all advertisements are included in good faith.

The Army Mountaineer is published for The Army Mountaineering Association by:
Crest Publications 20 Moulton Office Village, Scirocco Close, Northampton, NN3 6AP
Tel: 01604 495495 Fax: 01604 495465
Email: journals@crestpublications.com www.crestpublications.com

OFFICERS OF THE COMMITTEE



(Hon) President

Lt Col (Retd) RA Streater OBE

(Hon) Vice President

Lt Col (Retd) AJ Muston MBE
Sir Christian Bonington CBE
Col (Retd) M Bridges OBE
Col (Retd) J Peacock
Lt Col MH Bazire MBE

President

Brig JF Watson MBE MA

Chairman

Maj Cath Davies MBE TD

Civil: 0131 624 1265
cathmm_davies@hotmail.com

Vice Chairman

Lt Col Paul Edwards

Mil: 94331 Ext: 2392
Civil: 1264 383101
vicechair@theama.org.uk

General Secretary

Capt Mike Treffry-Kingdom

Mil: 94627 Ext: 2479
Civil: 07795 310074
mikerangokilo@yahoo.co.uk

Expeditions Secretary

Maj Kev Edwards

Mil: 95581 Ext: 7904
Civil: 01248 718304
expeds@theama.org.uk

Communications Officer

Tomo Thompson

amacomms officer@armymail.mod.uk

Need an Instructor AMA FASTRAK

contact membership Secretary for details

Equipment

Capt Malcolm Sperrin
Mob: 07789 647091
Civil: 01367 241771
m_sperrin@hotmail.com

Treasurer

Maj (retd) Mike LAING
Mob: 07784 707599
Civil: 01766 832120
treasurer@theama.org.uk

Sport Climbing Sec

Capt Mike Smith
Mil: 94251 Ext: 2348
Civil: 01483 473424

Publicity Officer

Capt Mick Kayser
Mil: 94342 Ext: 2403
Mob: 07701 077164
publicity@theama.org.uk

Journal Editor

Sven Hassall
Mil: 94475 2149
Mob: 07799 692230
sven@summitmountaineering.com

Membership Secretary

Mrs Ann Davies
Mil: 95581 Ext: 7964
Civil: 01248 718364
membership@theama.org.uk

To join the AMA visit our web site: www.theama.org.uk

APPPOINTMENTS

Foreword

Major Cath Davies MBE TD

Welcome to the 50th Anniversary celebration edition of the Journal. Within it you will find a plethora of articles recounting our origins and the early exploits of our founding members, as well as articles about more recent adventures. The AMA50 project is covered in one, as well as articles on two of the individual expeditions of the project. This displays how successful this part of our celebration has been so far, with the ice climbing trip and the big wall expedition still to come. The expansion of our annual sport climbing competition into the Army Festival of Climbing enabled us to adequately celebrate this more recent strand of our activities and the excellent weather allowed more traditional cragging activities to be carried out concurrently. Our thanks go to Capt Mike Smith for single handedly dreaming up the concept and then executing it brilliantly (including organising the best ever North Wales weather). After 10 years of running sport climbing for the Association, we are due a huge vote of thanks to him and wish him all the best in enjoying all the spare time he will have for himself and his family now!

Capt Mark Stevenson and Richard..... very appropriately celebrated our fiftieth anniversary by climbing the fifty classic climbs in Hard Rock in a month, despite some of the foulest weather possible for an alleged summer. This is a formidable feat not only of climbing, but of logistics, physical endurance and sheer will power. We are very proud of them.

Unit expeditions with AMA members on them have done us proud this year as well. In particular, the 23 SAS trip to Everest

was led by one of our members and three other members were on the team. They all summited, along with the other four expedition members. No other Service has had four of its Mountaineering Association members on the top of the world at the same time and I urge you to read Lt Col Simon Hall's article on this endeavour elsewhere in this Journal.

On the fiftieth anniversary of the first ever Committee meeting of the AMA, we held a dinner in the historic Royal Artillery Barracks at Woolwich. This was a splendid event and much enjoyed by all those who attended, so much so we intend to make it an annual event (though maybe not always at the same venue or on the same date). I hope more members will try to make the effort to attend next year, as it is not a stuffy or hugely formal affair, but enables members to catch up and chat in a convivial atmosphere.

It has been a great honour and pleasure to be your Chairman in this 50th anniversary year and may we look forward to the next fifty years as the biggest, most successful Mountaineering Association in the UK.

Editorial

It is not without some trepidation that I agreed to take over as the editor of 'ARMY MOUNTAINEER' especially during this special edition celebrating 50 years of the Association; Steve Willson has been the editor for over ten years and is leaving some remarkably big boots to fill, he has structured and guided it's evolution from the early single page news sheets through to the professionally produced colour magazine you have in front of you, and every stage in between' keeping YOU the members in touch with what is happening out there and how YOU can get involved.

Climbing has changed significantly in the last fifty years and you will find plenty of examples of that between these covers, in articles from Meryon Bridges and John Muston, two AMA stalwarts whose tales of the early days will make your hair stand on end! You'll also find the report of some top end climbing in a very modern style on the North face of the Eiger from regular contributor Stu Macdonald. Style, ethics and NGB awards, not to mention the dreaded Health and Safety now come up in expeditious conversations almost as much as the mountains themselves; one thing that hasn't changed though is the sense of adventure and the feeling of being on the pointy end – sure, all that modern gear means your not gong to fall so far but believe me it still hurts.

Taking on the role of editor is my opportunity to give a little back to the AMA for the opportunities it has given me and supported me in making and taking over the last three years, not only with expeditions and meets but with the friends I have made; contributing with articles, funnies, gear reviews, pictures, or anything else you want to submit is yours.

I hope that you enjoy this fiftieth and future editions and that at least twice a year it helps to get you out there and chase the adventure, or at least that it keeps you entertained when the weather means you can't.

On behalf of the Association and all those of you out there that enjoy the moment when the magazine lands on your doormat I'd like to thank Steve for his sterling work over the years; I will do my best to keep up the standards, I know that Steve will be scouring through the pages with a keen editorial eye if I don't.

Regards,

Sven
sven@summitmountaineering.com

A few words on communication....

I assumed the position of Communications Officer in the AMA at the last AGM. My brief is "to ensure internal and external communication is effective". Furthermore I am to coordinate the work of the Publicity Officer (Marc Reynolds), the Webmaster (Jonjo Knott) and the Journal Editor (Steve Willson - to be replaced by Sven Hassall).

Communications within the AMA follow several diverse paths, from the daily and weekly emails and telephone calls between the Committee, to the whirlwind of huge media effort surrounding the EWR and Shishpangma expeditions.

Overarchingly it is how the AMA Committee communicates information to you the Membership, and how you the Membership communicate your opinions and information back again that matters most. To do this we effectively have three mediums; the website, the forum and the journal.

The Website is now at www.army.mod.uk/sportandadventure/clubs/AMA/

Jonjo Knott has built the new AMA website and over time this will develop and hold the majority of information for Members. The MOD is currently tightening its grip on all MOD websites with regards to the information that we can and cannot put on them if they remain in the public domain.. The effect on the AMA is that your website will soon have to move within the bounds of ArmyNet, this is the award winning MOD website for serving Army personnel (Regular and Reserve Forces) and their families. Accounts are very easy to open via www.armynet.mod.uk. Furthermore any ArmyNet member can invite up to 3 other friends, colleagues or relatives to hold an account. Our Membership Secretary has her own already !!

Getting information out to the Membership means getting it to Jonjo in the first place. He can be contacted via AMAwebmaster@armymail.mod.uk

The AMA Forum is already inside ArmyNet. Log in, look under Forums, then under Sport and Adventurous Training. Although somewhat primitive at the moment, the forum software is being upgraded in Nov 07. The Forum is yours and you can dictate

the breadth of topics that the threads cover.

If you have any problems getting access to ArmyNet you can contact the team via helpdesk@armymail.mod.uk or telephone 94371 2101 / 01258 482101

The Journal remains a very important part of how the AMA communicates. As well as banging the drum of AMA activities to the entire Membership it is also very well received across the Armed Forces. It is intended that the content becomes more diverse, indeed several elements of the AMA and wider mountaineering community have been asked to start writing articles. Steve Willson has done a sterling job as Editor, and in passing the baton to Sven it is hoped that the high editorial standard is matched by that of the contributors. If you have any suggestions on what should go in the journal please let Sven or myself know.

As we approach the end of the 50th anniversary year of the AMA, technology continues to play an increasing role as the conduit of information. Via the Journal, Website and Forum we are ideally placed to get information to the Membership quickly and accurately from anywhere in the world and to anywhere in the world. Please pass on any content that you may have as soon as possible for Jonjo to upload to the website, use the Forum to air your ideas and opinions, and continue to contribute to the Journal.

Tomo Thompson
AMA Communications Officer
amacommsofficer@armymail.mod.uk



The Website is now at
**[www.army.mod.uk/
sportandadventure/clubs/AMA/](http://www.army.mod.uk/sportandadventure/clubs/AMA/)**

NEPAL, INDIA, NAMIBIA & BRITISH COLUMBIA

Tailormade trekking
and climbing
holidays in
Nepal, India, Namibia and
British Columbia



ATOL Protected 4821

t. 01539 445445

www.bufoventures.co.uk
BUFO VENTURES LTD

50th ANNIVERSARY EXPEDITION — AMA50

by Cath Davies
AMA Chairman and AMA50 Project Leader

The aim of AMA50 is to celebrate 50 years of AMA achievements by showcasing the range of activities undertaken by AMA members, the geographical spread achieved by AMA expeditions and our ability to offer new challenges to our members, no matter at what stage of mountaineering experience they may be.

High Altitude Trekking

The project started well with the highly successful high

altitude trekking expedition to the Atlas Mountains. This gave six Junior Soldiers from AFC Harrogate their first taste of operating in the high mountains and although unseasonably early snowfall denied them their summit, the young soldiers experienced all the adventure that combating the elements and dealing with the novel, both environmentally and culturally, provides. Our thanks go to SSgt Daz Doyle, Capt Jen Robbins and Sgt John Belsham for

organising and leading this expedition. Daz's excellent article about this venture was published in the last Journal.

Big Wall Climbing

Unfortunately, the big wall trip planned for July has had to be postponed due to change of leader and operational commitments, but in order to ensure maximum participation and value for money spent, it was felt better to leave it until July 08. Those of you climbing hard who desire to take the next step to big wall climbing, watch the website for more details!

Exploratory Alpine Mountaineering

The next great adventure was the exploratory alpine mountaineering expedition to North East Greenland, led by WO1 Sam Marshall. His article on the expedition is in this Journal; suffice to say, eight AMA members boldly climbed where no man had climbed before, braving logistic difficulties, 1:250,000 maps surveyed in 1910 with 50m contour

intervals and no accuracy beyond what could be seen from the valley, and numerous dodgy river crossings. They achieved 29 first ascents, ranging from snow plods to face routes, loose rock to black ice and grades from PD to D. Read all about it on page 26.

High Altitude Ski Mountaineering

The biggest expedition of the project (in every way; training group, team, altitude and of course, cost!) was the attempt to make a ski mountaineering ascent of Shisha Pangma, the only 8000m peak that lies wholly within Tibet. This three year project was led by WO2 Geordie Taylor, who must have been particularly devastated by having to make the decision to call off the final summit attempts due to the horrendously dangerous conditions; however, as he was one of the team who had to evacuate the tent at Camp 1 that collapsed due to the heavy snowfall and extreme wind, he at least had the consolation of being at the pointy end when he did it! The Shisha Pangma article is also in this Journal, so read it if you want a flavour of what high altitude mountaineering on a big mountain feels like.

Ice Climbing

The ice climbing expedition to Canada, which will give ten AMA members the opportunity to ice climb in the Rockies and a team drawn from them to compete in an ice climbing competition will take place in December. The ice climbing competition forms part of the Canmore International Ice Climbing Festival.

Lessons Learnt

All in all, 56 AMA members, from Junior Soldiers in the first year of their service to Senior Non Commissioned Officers and Officers with many years of mountaineering experience will have participated in AMA50. The expeditions will have encompassed all the activities our members have enjoyed over the past 50 years, from rock climbing to high altitude mountaineering and have taken them all over the world. We will have achieved a number of firsts: first expedition to climb in Andreesland, NE Greenland, 29 first ascents, first time the Army has mounted a ski mountaineering expedition to an 8000m peak and the first time we have competed in an ice climbing competition. And all this has been completed

Colin Legit on
Shishapangma.





Temple face masks in Tibet.

against a background of increasing operational commitments. Some important lessons have been learnt during the planning, organising and fundraising for this massive project (believe me, the climbing is the easy part!).

Planning

The High Risk and Remote category, as defined by the AT system, covers a wide range of our activities, therefore necessitating the development of in depth contingency plans. This is good practise and expedition leaders should look on this process as their 'reality' check, enabling them to expose their plan to a panel of experts who can identify if any areas need further work. The AMA Committee can assist leaders in this process, as many have intimate knowledge of it, either sitting as

Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) or having been through the process themselves.

Organising

As the Army becomes smaller and commitments remain high, it is ever more important to ensure expedition lead times are long enough to enable personnel to organise suitable time off for training and participation. This is especially important for longer expeditions. A crucial part of this is publicising the expedition early and this can best be done via the AMA website, now under new and more effective management, the results of which should be apparent soon as we complete migration to the Army Net. This is accessible to retired members as well, see the article on the website elsewhere in the Journal.

Fundraising

Fundraising can be more complicated when expeditions consist of personnel from more than one unit. The AMA Committee again can assist and we will shortly be publishing a programme of activities, showing what type of expeditions we wish to support in which years and seeking leaders with aspirations in those areas whom we can support. The advantage of this is that we will have forecast these fundraising bids to the appropriate authorities beforehand, thus smoothing the way for fundraising from service sources.

Following the success of commercial fundraising through sponsorship for Shisha Pangma, we are also engaging in a process of building partnerships with commercial

sponsors, who likewise can use our forecast to determine which activities they may wish to support.

The Future

We hope this more strategic approach to planning and funding activities will encourage AMA members to come forward to lead exciting exploratory expeditions, knowing the Committee can assist them in all aspects of preparation. This will ensure we can continue to offer our members these exciting opportunities.

Conclusion

So, we continue in our traditional activities, celebrating 50 years of achievement, but looking forward to exciting new challenges as well. Just as it should be, and let us look forward to the next 50 years of achievement.

So what is the answer? Well, one could just give up but this is an admission of defeat which surely is totally unacceptable to any soldier let alone a soldier mountaineer. Senior officers sometimes turn their attention to sailing usually in boats which are broad in the beam and thus match their own extending waistline. This is not to be totally decried since sailing does require many of those character attributes found in the first paragraph of any adventurous training publication. However it also makes you seasick and who wants to suffer that? Downhill skiing attracts the socially inclined to Val D'Isere and similar locations for a holiday but that cannot compare as an adventurous activity with ski-mountaineering or cross-country skiing. Canoeing is very wet and bumpy, parachuting is 99% hanging around and 1% action and hunting and polo are activities which have not come my way.

Well, surely the answer is to take advantage of mountaineering activities at every opportunity and not fret about pushing one's grade or doing a new route and all that sort of thing. The other thing to remember is that most of us have imperfect bodies for extreme climbing. We lack upper arm strength or coordination or some other attribute. Only those who are the product of a certain muscle factory in the Aldershot area claim total bodily perfection. The rest of us muddle along with what we have got. So where have I muddled? Climbing Popacatapetl in DMS boots with crampons tied on with string comes to mind as does some pottering around on the lower slopes of Everest. Another memory which is still fresh is of a certain RAOC officer while tent-bound in East Greenland carefully shredding 1200 lb paracord. When asked why he explained he was preparing the filling for a lemming's duvet! We have to accept that some mountaineers are a bit odd - but usually fun to be with and is that not a large part of the attraction of the game. It's not just the location but also the people who do it.

As One Approaches Middle Age

By Lt Col (very much retired) John Muston

...all those wonderful climbing ambitions that filled one's mind as a callow youth have to be set on one side. Dreams, fuelled by climbing magazine articles, of climbing E something awful or overhanging 2000 metre faces are just not going to happen. Quite apart from the fact that the Army does require some element of one's time to be devoted to military matters wives (or partners in this modern age) and the almost inevitable children voice their opinion on the amount of time that can be devoted to climbing and thus attempting to reach the level of ability that this standard of climbing seems to require.

So where else have I muddled? Well there was the sandstone outcrop I found (pre-Ghaddafi) in the Libyan desert which occupied me for an hour while I was supposed to be looking for a fuel dump left by a cavalry officer. The location was wrong by ten grid squares so I have never trusted a cavalry officer with a map since - but finding the outcrop almost made up for that. Oh, and then there was the time when, in my official capacity as Commandant JSMTTC(W), I had to follow a party of WRAC Officer Cadets up the Gribin ridge on Snowdon (no, not the one in the Ogwen Valley). It was a hot day and they had all opted to wear shorts.... such was the tedium of life at JSMTTC. Then there was the delight of cross-country skiing though the mountains of Norway in spring. My companions were mainly products of the aforementioned Aldershot muscle factory so inevitably it got a bit competitive and we pounded along at goodness knows how many Ks per hour but the scenery was magnificent.

By now some of you reading this will be wondering when is the old buffer going to get to the point of the article? Well, for various reasons the year did not provide me with my usual month or so expedition in Greenland or some other similarly exciting place and so I had to make do with a number of short trips. Spring has seen some bird-watching in The Gambia and 10 days dog-sledging in East

Greenland but the summer was a bit blank until I remembered via ferratas (klettersteig for the German speakers). These are those routes in the Alps that have been modified with steel hawsers, iron steps etc. I booked up with a company which advertises in the climbing press and had a great time even if my co-climbers lacked a certain military elan. I appreciate that the purists among you are already reaching for their vitriol-filled pens to write and ask 'How could I lower myself' but the truth is that when one has reached the age of - no, that had better remain classified information or my insurer will withdraw my cover - one still takes mountaineering opportunities wherever one can find them. The routes are there, for good or ill, and they take one into superb situations with, in many cases, some dramatic space beneath the heels.

There are a couple of guide books to the area and the routes have been graded 1-5 for difficulty with an additional a-c to indicate overall seriousness in any specific grade. On Grade 4 you will make moves at Severe but with days no longer than about 7 hours. Competent UK scramblers with some modest climbing experience should cope but remember you are at 2-3000 metres and so altitude may affect you. Be warned that Grade 5 will often mean a 9-10 hour day so do not under-estimate the need for fitness. The only climbing kit needed is a helmet, a KISA

(kinetic impact shock absorber), a harness and, if you have delicate hands, a pair of gloves (garden type) with the finger tips cut off. All except the gloves can be hired or bought in the local shops and, inevitably, you can buy 'special' via ferrata gloves if you wish.

Despite being an avid reader of Army Mountaineer I cannot recall seeing any accounts of expeditions specifically to take in some of these routes. Because everyone is, effectively, in the role of a second and the furthest that anyone can fall is to skid a few feet down to the next stanchion holding the hawser larger parties than normal multi-pitch could be led by one instructor. This is very useful when capable leaders are at a premium. Now I have been away from the adventurous training world for a long time and all these acronyms like RCL and RCI mean very little to me; I finished at a time when JSRCI and JSMEL seemed to cover most things up to the top of Everest so I will not dare to suggest what a suitable instructor/student ratio should be but it ought to be better than the multi-pitch ratio.

Mere youngsters (say those under 45) may be amazed to know that there was a time when Army mountaineering had no rules. All I did as a young officer was to catch my CO in a quiet moment (preferably after his fourth gin) and say 'Colonel, I'd like to take some of the lads off moun-

taineering in Scotland next month. Life's a bit quiet trainingwise at the moment'. He would reply 'Capital, my boy, capital. Just what the men need, moral fibre and all that!' (Colonels talked like that in those days). All I did then was book the rail sleepers to Aviemore, borrow some Smocks Windproof

Camouflaged (a single thickness cotton garment) as our shell clothing and fix some rations with the QM. The fact that I once took soldiers hill-walking in Scotland in November perhaps indicates a little naivety on my part but I always brought the same number of soldiers back that I started with. Then in the '60s

Adventurous Training was invented and things began to change. No doubt a modern CO would ask me what my Key Performance Indicators would be for this proposed jolly - sorry, leadership training.

I hope this article may tempt some of you to use via fer-

ratas to get into some superb situations and treat them as another mountaineering opportunity. They are not a doddle, especially in the higher grades which put plenty of air around you and they can offer a lot of excitement and challenge especially to the less experienced.

Army Climbing in the late 60's

By Meryon Bridges OBE

I climbed my first rock route in the Spring of 1968 in the Avon Gorge, while a degree student at RMCS Shrivenham. Responding to a casual invitation to join a friend there one weekend, I found that I really enjoyed it. After five intensive weekends, climbing with an inspired leader called Charles Hebert, I was comfortable on VS routes such as Pink Wall Traverse and ... Buttress. We even did one HVS route, Diamond Groove, but being the sixth route of the day it did seem rather strenuous. In those days we didn't have harnesses, but climbed with a 6ft length of hemp line wound round our waists and tied off, onto which we tied the cable laid nylon rope. Run-outs tended to be long, and belays sometimes provided more psychological than physical security as fixings were primitive. As I had no rock boots, I wore Army PT shoes. Given these limitations, we climbed within that risk envelope.

That year our little group attended Ex Monte Bianco, where we gained our first experience of snow and ice climbing. The drilled out hexagonal nuts (as in "nuts and bolts") that we took with us were the subject of great interest to French and Italian climbers, who had never seen anything like that used before. On the exercise we learned the basics, plus crevasse rescue and gained some elementary knowledge of weather and snow conditions, from an excellent Italian Alpinist instructor who possessed no word of English. Over the next 9 months we continued to climb avidly in Wales, the Lakes and Skye, and the following summer four of us headed for the Alps under our own steam. We bought a battered old Commer van, drove it across France at its maximum speed of 48 miles an hour, and for 6 weeks we climbed everything in sight. Starting in Val Veni on the Italian side of Mont Blanc, we did a host of routes including the Aiguille Noire de Peuterey, Mont Blanc via the Bionnassay Ridge, the Grande Jorasses, and many others. From there we moved on to the Pennine Alps where our best route was the traverse of the entire Mischabel Chain, South to North, and in addition the inevitable Matterhorn and some other 4,000m peaks. We then headed for the Oberland to try the Lauper route on the Eiger, but the weather failed us and after a few frustrating days of waiting for a break, we abandoned it and returned to the UK.

In the course of these climbs we acquired a wealth of practical experience, both from our successes and our mistakes, which was the more ingrained because we did it rather than someone telling us about not doing it. Needless to say, at this point we had no qualifications but we had been given some basic lessons and we had enough common sense to recognise and take action when a dangerous situation occurred, even if we did not always have the knowledge to pre-empt that situation arising.

We underestimated the Aiguille Noire and were on it for 23 hours. Descending in the dark brought its own problems, including a broken abseil point based on some tat left by a guide.

While climbing the Bionnassay ridge we observed a lenticular cloud develop over the summit of Mt Blanc during the morning, and commented how similar it looked to an illustration in a text book entitled "Storm brewing over Mt Blanc". However by afternoon it had gone away and so we decided to ignore it. The storm hit us at 02.00 the next morning, and for two days we

were holed up in the Hut, while the blizzard screamed past. Getting down during a brief break, through waist deep snow, challenged all our navigational and avalanche risk assessment skills.

While on an extended traverse of the ... and the ... we watched the surprisingly rapid growth of lots of puffy little cumulus clouds, which started erupting on thermals all around us. Needless to say, it wasn't long the air started crackling and our hair stood on end and we became acutely aware that this was not a good place to be. Our late afternoon exit off the mountain down a sun rotted snow slope required first trundling a large boulder to clear away the unstable slush from the surface and to form a groove down which we back-climbed, since we considered ourselves far too poor to sacrifice gear for abseil points.

We climbed the Grandes Jorasses almost entirely at night because it started to rain on our bivvy site at around 22.00, and as we only had large plastic bags to bivvy in, moving in the dark was more attractive than staying put in the cold and wet.

And so it went. By the end of the season we'd had some scrapes but we'd got out of them, and we each now possessed a mine of very practical and deeply ingrained Alpine experience. And this was barely 18 months after we had first started climbing.

As I witness today the apparently never ending drive to introduce new qualifications, and the insistence that the acquisition of these pieces of paper is the only legitimate basis on which people may be authorised to go into the hills, I feel obliged to pose the question, "Have we lost the plot?" Whether the authorities accept it or not, the universal imposition of these qualifications creates a barrier to initiative, to learning and to gaining experience. A few years ago I went to the Alps with a friend, and on our first day we met up some young military people who, having arrived late, had missed their main party which was already up the hill and wouldn't be back for a few of days. We took them with us on our first acclimatisation climb up the Eggner. On the basis of their performance that day, they were evidently competent to do some of the shorter climbs on their own, and the weather was good. However, when my friend and I went off on our own, they felt constrained to kick their heels in the valley until their party returned because they were not authorised to go up by themselves. The cancellation of JSAM in 2007 despite the wealth of experience available is a more shameful example of this inhibition of initiative and denial of the value of experience.

The Army is supposed to prepare people for operations in which they must make on the spot life and death decisions on their own initiative, relying on experience and common sense. They are expected to evaluate the risks and balance these against their capability. They don't go to Afghanistan with an Advanced Proficiency Certificate in Insurgency Fighting. Are we serious in pretending that the Adventurous Training regime now in force really helps to prepare them for that, or is it or driven by the authorities' preoccupation with protecting themselves from a corporate manslaughter charge?

Everest with the South East Ridge on the right.

HIMALAYAN ODYSSEY 2007

TERRITORIAL ARMY ON EVEREST

By Simon Hall RM

The world's highest mountain still conjures up a sense of mystery and intrigue - few childhoods pass without some exposure to Everest (8848m) and the mystery of Mallory and Irving - last seen 'going strong for the top.' Fewer people will be aware of the totality of the British obsession with climbing Everest over 4 decades until Lord Hunt's successful expedition in 1953 that summited via the South Col on the Nepalese side, with the news breaking in time to mark the Queen's coronation. Whilst the emergence of commercial expeditions with professional guides has put the summit of Everest within reach of the wealthy enthusiast this has not eroded the sense of challenge and historical intrigue. My own failure to trouble the scorers regarding selection for the last three military Everest expeditions (92, 2003 and 2006), coupled with the periodic fly past of time's winged chariot, suggested self help was the only remaining course of action. On tak-

ing up the reins of a Territorial Army (TA) Command there was no shortage of volunteers to participate in this particular CORGI (Commanding Officer's Really Good Idea) and mid life crisis was temporarily put on hold.

Historically, the military have not achieved a high degree of success in climbing the world's fourteen 8000m peaks and there appeared merit in reviewing the tradi-

tional modus operandi. After much liaison with the civilian mountaineering fraternity, two points emerged. Firstly, the advantages of a small cohesive team with a light logistic footprint were compelling. Secondly, a 'high altitude dress rehearsal' would disproportionately increase our chances of success. Cho Oyu, the 'turquoise goddess' which at 8201m is the world's sixth highest mountain seemed an appropriate

objective. Our lightweight approach paid dividends and on the 9 October 2006 all expedition members, which included Lieutenant Andy Wilkinson RMR and the following TA ranks: Sgt Gordon Clark, LCpl James Lancashire and Pte Dom Porter, and myself, reached the summit of Cho Oyu (8201m). This expedition was not without further excitement with the Chinese Army over running Base Camp and engaging Tibetan refugees with small arms fire, the rescue of an Italian Climber at 7300m and rubbing shoulders with Maoists at an Illegal Vehicle Checkpoint on our return to Nepal. We lived to climb another day and the expedition proved that a small team was a viable option for 'mere mortals' with every member being given the opportunity to summit with disproportionate merits regarding team motivation, cohesion and morale.

Armed with the lessons identified from Cho Oyu, we started the process of raising mili-



On the summit 0800 22 May 07 with the Philip Green Memorial Trust flag.



Dom Porter and Trevor Jackson crossing the Yellow Slabs.

tary and commercial funds for an attempt on Everest. Support for the Philip Green Memorial Fund, which helps terminally ill children in Nepal, provided a worthy cause. The expedition comprised the same team for Cho Oyu with the addition of Captain Stuart Macdonald RE, Captain Raj Joshi RAMC (Expedition Doctor) and LCpl Trevor Jackson. The team comprised a spectrum of experience ranging from Stuart Macdonald, an aspirant guide with an Alpine record second to none, to the charismatic Trevor Jackson; an archetypal 'strong man on the mountain'

looking to add a fourth peak to Mont Blanc, Aconcagua and Howgill Fell (the latter is notoriously difficult after a night out in Newcastle!). Overall, six of the team has summited previously on an 8000m peak. A further 16 members of the TA formed a Development Team with the objective of climbing Pokalde (5800m). When the leader had to drop out at short notice Captain 'Molly' Macpherson RM stepped in to take his place with further assistance from Captain Kirk Wadsworth RE. Plans were made and without the burden of any freight we eventually depart-



Trevor Jackson climbing the Geneva Spur.

ed the UK for higher altitudes....

On the 28 March we arrive in Kathmandu and fly to Lukla which hosts what is perhaps the world's most improbable airstrip. From here we trek to Namche Bazar and follow the Tolkienesque mountain paths that wind through the Khumbu. Yaks are used to transport our heavy equipment whilst we trek all day and stay at the many hostels lining the route. Our acclimatisation plan involves ascents of Pokalde (5800m) and Island Peak (6190m) - these are not without technical interest and in addition to enhancing high altitude experience and providing early acclimatisation, reduces the number of potential transits through the dangerous Khumbu Icefall. On the 15 April we arrive at Everest Base Camp at 5200m situated in close proximity to the impressive Khumbu Icefall. After Molly McPherson impresses the TA with a demonstration of Royal Marines cultural peculiarities (!) we bid our farewells to the Development Team who depart to subsequently successfully climb Pokalde prior to returning to the UK.

High altitude climbing is a long and sometimes painful apprenticeship that necessitates incremental exposure to altitude with periods of recovery at lower altitudes prior to making a bid for the summit. Our previous acclimatisation has given us a head start and we opt to miss out Camp 1 (6100m) and move directly to

Camp 2 at 6400m. We are in mixed health as we depart Base Camp at 4 o'clock in the morning to enter the complex and imposing maze of the Khumbu Icefall. The aim is to transit through the icefall in its most tranquil state, before the fierce heat accentuates the glaciers natural movement and triggers serac collapse - sadly this is not an exact science. Several team members retch in the cold morning air and rib shattering coughing disturbs the morning silence. We weave through the glacial scenery with a sense of intrigue and awe. Rapid progress is made and we pass Camp 1 and enter the impressive amphitheatre of the Western Cwm. We reach Camp 2 at 6400m the worse for wear - dehydrated with loss of appetite and sleep is the only demand the body can muster. We remain at Camp 2 for five days and recce the bottom of the steep Lhotse Face - this area is not devoid of objective danger - a Sherpa with another expedition is killed by falling ice. Half of the team are afflicted by the debilitating effects of chest infection and the infamous 'Khumbu cough' and our descent down the Khumbu Icefall resembles the retreat from Moscow! We reach the sanctuary of Base Camp - Everest is no longer a mountain where only others tread and our first acclimatisation cycle is complete.

Despite resting at Base Camp, we still resemble a scene from 'Last of the Summer Wine' and we descend to lower altitudes to recover. On return, a second

acclimatisation cycle is completed reaching a high point of 7100m before we enter the Khumbu Icefall for what we all hope will be the defining journey. Three days later we reach Camp 3, fatigued from the sun's rays reflecting off the Lhotse Face we settle down for a restless night. The next day we don our oxygen equipment for the first time and with muffled communication all eight of us and four Sherpas set off up the imposing upper reaches of the Lhotse Face. We soon reach the distinctive Yellow Band and make an exposed traverse to a steep section of shattered rock. This gives way to the Geneva Spur which comprises a diagonal traverse over a prominent ridge that leads to the South Col. We move in pairs, but maintain frequent radio communication - cohesion is our greatest strength. By midday the first pair, which includes Andy Wilkinson and Don Porter, reaches the South Col at 7900m with the rest of us following at a more gentlemanly pace. We settle into our tents and the painstaking task of rehydrating and attempting to eat commences. Rest is crucial for we will start our summit bid the same evening with a view to summiting at first light. We try to sleep, but remain restless - each team member alone with his thoughts as the great day approaches. The weather is stable - light winds and temperatures of minus 15 degrees - warm by Everest standards.

At nine o'clock in the evening we set off into the night - we have three bottles of oxygen each, just enough to get to the summit and return to the South Col, but the margin for error remains small. There is an air of tension coupled with slight bemusement - our aspiration to get all eight climbers on the summit is now tantalizingly close. These thoughts are soon eroded by the fatigue of the monotonous trudge up the platform shaped feature at 8400m known as the 'bal-

cony'. In 1953 this was Hillary and Tenzing's last camp before their successful summit bid. At 8200m I realize that wearing a down suit is a mistake - despite being on Everest in the middle of the night I am overheating and as a Mountain Leader Officer should know better! I turn up my oxygen, since venting our clothing is not an option on the steep ground. The sound of our exaggerated breathing through our oxygen masks is the only noise to disturb the silence of the night.

We are now over half way and the route becomes more aesthetic as we reach the clearly defined south east ridge - darkness turns to light. The ridge is narrow, but rarely knife-edge and rapid progress is made until we have to make a rising traverse over awkward, shattered rocksteps to avoid a rocky buttress - harder than we had imagined. This gives access to the most striking and aesthetic part of the route. James and I reach the South Summit and the Hillary Step is clearly visible - Andy and Dom are some distance ahead and in the process of negotiating this famous obstacle. The spec-

tafular triangular reflection of Everest's summit can be seen on the horizon making our high altitude pilgrimage even more surreal. There is a true sense of 'walking on top of the world' with Nepal to the left and Tibet to the right as the ridge snakes its way to the summit. On reaching the Hillary Step a few exposed and dynamic moves focus the mind. Excitement mounts as increasingly rapid progress is made along the summit ridge until the ground drops away and there is nowhere else to go and only the breathtaking view of a perfect Himalayan morning coupled with the curvature of the earth for company.

Expedition Leader's Postscript

All eight members of the climbing team and four Sherpas made it to the summit on 22 May 2007.

The team were subsequently involved in the rescue of a Nepalese woman suffering from Acute Mountain Sickness and frostbite during their descent and Andy Wilkinson, Raj Joshi, Gordon Clark and Dom Porter facilitated her safe passage

through the complex Khumbu Icefall - a commendable effort.

Previously only 13 individual ascents have been made of the world's 14 x 8000m peaks by military personnel on authorized military expeditions - 5 of them on Everest. In addition to helping to raise the profile of the Philip Green Memorial Trust, these recent expeditions to Cho Oyu and Everest have doubled the number of military ascents on 8000m peaks and offered a less logistic intense approach to climbing in the Greater Ranges.

All expedition members consider themselves to be amongst the most privileged members of the Armed Forces to have participated in such a venture that culminated in standing on the roof of the world. The team wishes to express their gratitude for support to the Army Mountaineering Association (AMA) in their 50th Year. The team is also grateful to Sir Chris Bonnington and the Duke of Westminster for their patronage of the 7 Summits and all the expedition sponsors for their generosity;

MILITARY SPONSORS:

Nuffield Trust • Ulysses Trust
Berlin Infantry Brigade Memorial Trust Fund
All Regional Reserve Cadet Associations
Adventure Training Group (Army) • HQ 5 Division
Army Mountaineering Association
Royal Navy Royal Marines Mountaineering Club
Royal Navy Sports Lottery

Charities and Commercial Sponsors

Philip Green Memorial Trust
W L Gore Ltd • Fitness First
Ince Law • Hunts Law • Royal Oceanic
Top Out Oxygen • Crux



Andy Wilkinson negotiates a crevasse in the Khumbu Icefall.

Further information about the 7 Summits Project can be obtained on the web by visiting www.project7summits.com

A Very British Summer - The Hard Rock Challenge

By Mark Stevenson

AMA members Mark Stevenson and Rich Mayfield spent 5 weeks this summer climbing every route in Hard Rock, raising over £10,000 for Mountain Rescue in the process. Mark tells us about some of the highs and lows:

Good Ideas

I've heard someone say that the best way to come up with good ideas is to have lots of ideas and the ones you keep returning to will be the good ones. That might be true. However, I've also been reminded that the British weather doesn't care whether anything is a good idea, it'll just please itself regardless and no doubt rain on it.

For the last two years I'd been contemplating whether a 'round' of all the routes in Hard Rock, Ken Wilson's landmark book on British climbing, was possible. The underlying idea of spending the summer on a major climbing road trip around Britain was even older, stemming from my last visit to the Alps in 2003.

I had the normal mixture of alpine highs and lows during 3½ weeks spent in Chamonix. Despite the numerous failures, the abseil retreat in a thunderstorm, the lack of partners, the dashed hopes of climbing the Walker Spur in the best conditions for a decade and the empty wallet, summiting on the Gervasutti Pillar had made up for it all. However, what I kept mulling over was the question of why I was climbing in the Alps when I'd hardly scratched the surface of rock climbing within Britain? I resolved to rectify that omission and following in the footsteps of Brown and Whillans I'd complete my 'apprenticeship' on British crags before returning to the Alps and the Greater Ranges.

In 2005, a wet-weather discussion with fellow climber Rich Mayfield on the feasibility of ticking all of Hard Rock in one trip took place but floun-



dered quickly on the realisation that we'd need to learn to aid climb. That seemed an easier option than the alternative of climbing The Scoop free at E6. However, this was all long forgotten at the start of 2006 when the chance to climb in Yosemite cropped up. The 'glamour' of big-wall climbing won out and the plan for a 'summer of British climbing' was postponed yet again.

The 'eureka' moment came last November. After spending June in Yosemite, I could now aid climb; there was nothing to stop us ticking all of Hard Rock. At least that was how it seemed: historic routes, great moves, classic crags, sound rock, wonderful landscapes, British pubs, sunshine – what could be better? Rich would be up for it, I was sure of that. How could he not be? All we needed to do was persuade his wife, Sam, that a road-trip around Britain would be the perfect way to spend the summer.

Big Plans

It's strange how things take on a life of their own. My plans for a climbing trip visiting loads of new crags and doing

some classic routes rapidly turned into a serious 'climbing challenge'. When we told people our plans, their sceptical responses made us even more determined that it was achievable. The repeated questions of whether this was 'sponsored' resulted in the easy decision that we'd raise some money for Mountain Rescue. It also became the main UK event for AMA 50, helping publicise half a century of military climbing and mountaineering to a wider audience.

My decision to 'sort out' a website was one I rapidly lived to regret as it consumed inordinate amounts of time and effort. Approaching a few companies resulted in a modicum of gear, a pair of rock boots, some DMM cams, fleeces and a few T-shirts from North Face.

Rich and I spent a glorious week climbing together in North Wales in April. By the end of May I'd managed more 'E' points in 2 months than in the previous 2 years. I was averaging 5 days climbing per week and was looking forward to some relaxing mountain

days in the sun on classic HVSSs and E1s.

It then started raining, and rained, and rained. It's now official; it has rained more this summer than at any time since Noah decided to take his family on a sailing holiday.

Rain

On Friday 13th July 2007 after 6 months of planning we were stood at the bottom of Cheddar Gorge being interviewed by an Army news team watching rain clouds gather overhead. Three hours later, our optimistic 'sound bites' were forgotten and Rich was swearing profusely as he teetered up wet rock at the top of the Gorge with the 400-foot drop below him. I was more preoccupied with the rainwater running off my helmet and down the back of my neck.

As some of you may already know, over the next 35 days and 4 hours we racked up over 4,500 miles visiting every major cliff in Britain from Land's End to the Outer Hebrides. Wet limestone, wet granite, wet rhyolite, wet Lewisian gneiss. After this Summer, if I ever climb in the rain again it will be too soon.

Highs and Lows

Day 2 - I open my eyes against the wind and look up. Through the swirling mist, endless sheets of granite sweep away from us. There is no sense of scale. The next gust hits me. Despite my balaclava and my waterproof hood pulled tight over my helmet I shiver as the rope sneaks up slowly, too slowly. I try desperately to keep my mind on the route; 'We're on the twentieth pitch, the wind is up again but we're pushing on up the headwall aiming for the shoulder at

24,000 feet". It proves a colossal effort to believe that I'm not storm-lashed on a granite spire in the Karakoram and this is only a VS on Arran.

Days 5 & 6 – The tiny sliver of brass clings to the crack and I reach up for another piton. I don't hold out much hope. I'm proved correct, again, and the rusted remains fall into space below. I am beginning to get a bit fed up. It is day two on The Scoop and my entire body weight is hanging on the smallest micro-wire ever made. My main distraction from the dizzying exposure and the wet, loose rock is thinking up ever more imaginative ways to curse Ken Wilson. The Scoop's reputation as the 'stopper route' is well deserved. The famous rump on the first pitch is still there, just, as are 2 in-situ sky-hooks higher up, only rust holding them against the cliff. In the course of our ascent over 20 pitons break off at the slightest touch, including two from the belay we used that morning to jumar up to our high point. The crux roof above is desperate with every peg badly rusted and scarce opportunities for other gear. Our salvation by the slimmest of margins proves to be an insitu hammered wire clipped in extremis. After climbing The

Scoop, I think anyone is entitled to the rest of the year off.

Day 9 – Late in the day on Carnivore, Whillan's direct finish looks damp and desperate. Based on an earlier glance at the topo in Hard Rock we start along the '5a' original finish. Cold and tired, we have a demoralising time, swapping the lead, resorting to a point of aid and even a back rope. Just relieved to be off the cliff we drown our sorrows in the Clachaig; only 11 routes done in 9 days and we are so exhausted we can't even manage a '5a' traverse. The next day we are much relieved to find out our mistake; the pitch, originally an aid traverse, goes free at 6a but even then only in far drier conditions.

Day 11 – The Old Man of Hoy is swathed in swirling clouds of mist. The surrounding cliffs of St John's head look so much like something from 'Jurassic Park' we half expect to see Pterodactyls flying overhead. Despite the mist, we are lucky with the weather. We summit in the dry and the rain holds off until we start the long walk back to the ferry.

Day 13 – We spend over 8 hours sitting in the CIC hut waiting for the rain to stop and the rock to start to dry before we finally set off up Centurion. On the second pitch, after 25 metres of wet and stressful bridging, my motivation flags so I take an early belay. Much to my chagrin (and Rich's amusement) it soon transpires that I was one move short of the good in-cut holds and easy ground. We get 2/3 of the way up before the next band of rain arrives. As I negotiate the exposed traverse leftward in the midst of the downpour, Rich manages to belay completely dry under an overhang. Despite the rain we finish the day in good spirits, and head back down the Allt a' Mhuilinn at a steady run. The next morning halfway up the approach to Aonach Dubh in heavy rain, common sense prevails; we turn back and swiftly abandon Scotland for better weather in Yorkshire and the Peak District.

Day 18 – Finally, we have a perfect day of climbing. With clear skies, sunshine and high

spirits we visit four of the Lake District's most impressive crags and climb Central Buttress, Ichabod, Central Pillar and Gormenghast. I don't think a better days climbing is possible at that grade in Britain. The last route of the day takes us to a total of 30 routes and the halfway point.

Day 19 – Sir Chris Bonington joins us to climb Praying Mantis on Goat Crag. He makes short work of the strenuous crux, 43 years after he made the second ascent of the route. He then proceeds to leaves us standing on the walk-out. It is a pleasure and a privilege to climb with him.

Day 22 – The weather is deteriorating and by midday on Gogarth the wind has risen to a force-7 gale. British climbing champion Gaz Parry has joined us for the afternoon to provide some moral support. Dispelling any thoughts of retreating to the pub, the three of us climb 'A Dream of White Horses' in outlandish conditions. Afterwards, Gaz is sincere in saying he really enjoyed the experience but then, demonstrating he's got some common sense, he rapidly declines to join us for any further routes.

Day 24 – After much debate we are back in Scotland again but we've missed the weather window we were aiming for. We head into the middle of the Cairngorms in heavy mist and rain. Threading The Needle proves another taxing, arduous and stressful battle against the rock and the elements. Two weeks later we are unbearable smug as we receive news that similar weather has forced the BBC to abandon plans to film some of 'the world's top climbers' attempt routes on the same cliff.

Day 29 – We are back in Wales and still have 5 routes to climb on Cloggy. The forecast is 5

days of rain followed by a 'Severe Weather Warning' for most of the UK. Thing are not looking hopeful but the mists lifts late in the day. Unfortunately by 8pm things are not going well. We had unaccountably started climbing White Slab at about 6:30pm. On the arête pitch I miss the guidebook's 'awkward step right' so compensate by making an irreversible move right onto a thin, lichenous crack in the centre of the slab. After making an increasingly tenuous series of moves above uninspiring gear I get back on line and collapse at the belay utterly blown. Not realising how badly off route I was, we can't imagine doing '5c' given the last section was '5a'. With daylight running out and mentally exhausted, we desperately try to lasso the famous spike on the next pitch. Minutes away from having to abandon the climb, I get the rope tenuously hooked over the spike and commit my safety to it. With dusk rapidly approaching I race for the top leading the remaining pitches so hastily and with such scant regard for runners that I might as well be soloing.

Day 31 – We are back at Cloggy after a night of rain, which has left the cliff dripping with water. After several hours of effort by Rich, we abandon our first attempt on Slanting Slab as streaks of water render the bold slab above the peg impassable. Four hours later, after climbing Great-Bow Combination, the cliff is slightly drier but with the weather closing in and more rain forecast we face our final chance on the route. Success or failure of the entire 'challenge' hinges on whether there are enough patches of dry rock for me to climb 20 feet across an unprotected slab.

Day 36 – At 2pm we sit on top of Berry Head in South Devon and I've got the biggest smile on my face as we've finally done it.

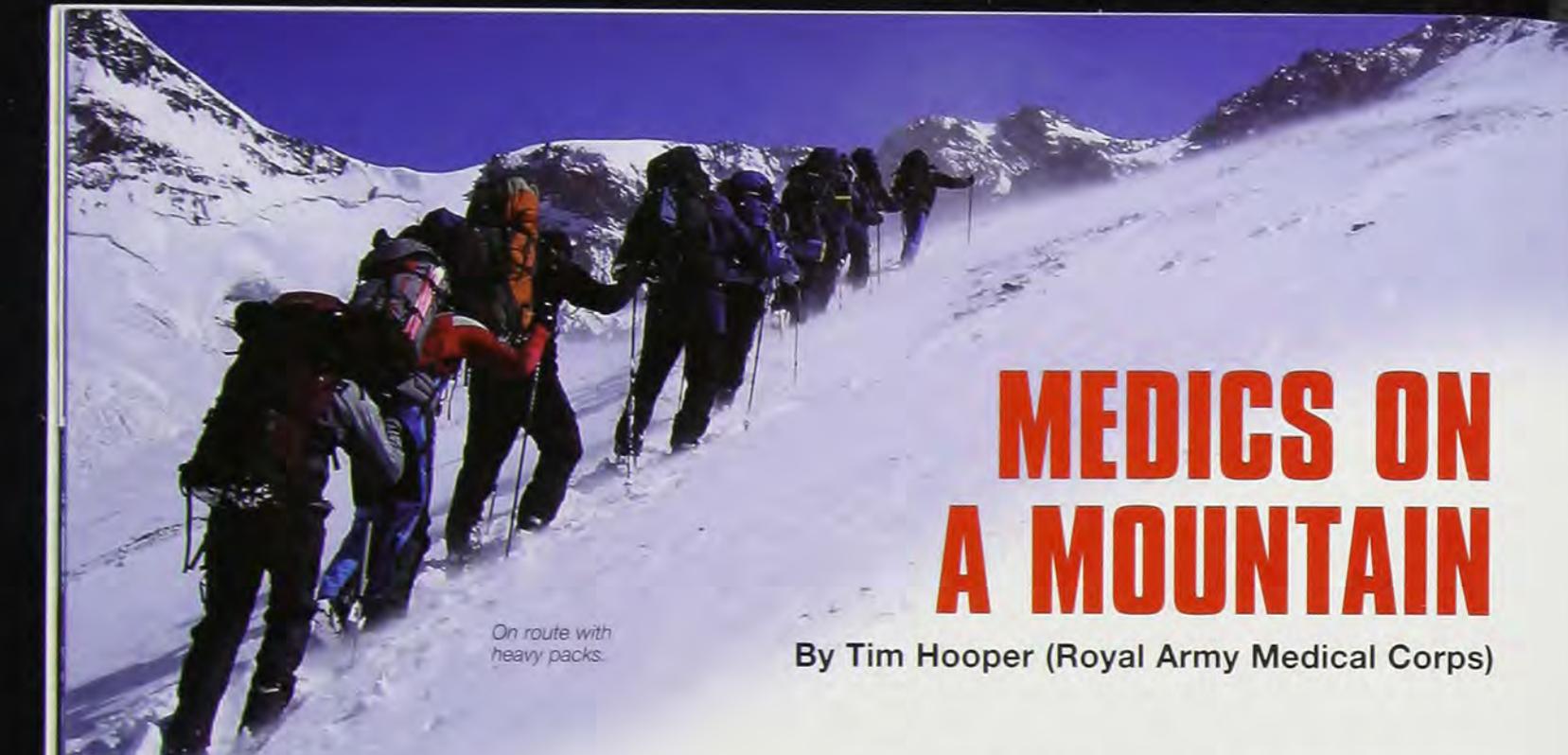


"It's not raining under here!"

To find out more about the Hard Rock Challenge and how you can donate money to Mountain Rescue check out the website

www.hardrockchallenge.org.uk

Rich Mayfield is a full-time climbing instructor and owns The Orange House, which provides a full range of accommodation for climbers in the Costa Blanca - <http://www.theorangehouse.net>



MEDICS ON A MOUNTAIN

By Tim Hooper (Royal Army Medical Corps)

On route with heavy packs.

During January 2007 a 16 strong team of mainly novice mountaineers from a tri-service medical background ventured to Argentina to attempt to summit Aconcagua (6959m) – the highest mountain outside the Himalayas residing in the High Andes on the Argentinean – Chilean border.

This expedition was the brain-child of Adrian Mellor – a keen navy mountaineer – who had been planning such an expedition for many years but due to operational commitments had been unable to fulfil his dream. However on a usual wet and windy weekend in February 2006 a group of like-minded individuals arrived at JSMTIC Indefatigable (the adventurous training establishment in Anglesey, N Wales) for the selection weekend, with the hope we may be selected for the expedition.

After a few months deliberation we eventually found out our fate – a good proportion of the final team had been on the weekend – which was great as we had all got on like a house on fire!

Over 2006 the team had 2 training weekends in the Snowdon area with 6 mem-

bers achieving the Mountain Leader Training Certificate. Although this wasn't much time to get to know each other fully we were already starting to make a strong team that would certainly help on the hills to come.

The eventual team that left for Argentina was made up of; Adrian Mellor (Expedition Leader), Stevan Jackson (Leader), Dave Murphy (Leader), Stuart Jackson (Leader), Rob Wakeford (Food), Baz Lawrence (Photography), Jemma Austin (Medical), Nick Vincent (Equipment), Tom Beckett (PR & Equipment), Tim Hooper (Research), Jason Taylor, Cheryl Lindup, Anil Cheria, Steve Swindells, Hatty Wells and Chrissy Shorrocks.

And so it came to pass that on a very early, incredibly wet, morning on 6th January 2007 the team with nervous anticipation (too much for some as they made numerous toilet stops) gathered at Heathrow. After a mere 2 days travel we eventually arrived clean, sweet smelling and all smiling (?) at our salubrious hotel in Mendoza – with 2 rooms the size of a portaloos to house the 16 of us and our kit. After a few beers we all drifted to sleep, dreaming of mountains and what was to come with the help of Steve Jackson's Snoring Symphony – a treat

we shared with the rest of the hotel and all came to love over the next few weeks!

Inka Expeditions provided our host nation support – a well run, friendly and efficient company that would help us achieve our 2 goals – climb Cerro Vallecitos (5500m) our acclimatization peak and Aconcagua itself.

So after just 1 night in the country we were off to start our acclimatization phase. This would consist of 6 days trekking with the aim to summit Cerro Vallecitos. Mules carried the majority of our kit and we used guides for this phase so we could concentrate on acclimatizing.

This was the first chance for the whole team to trek together and our first real chance to see the mountains and get a feel for what we had let ourselves in for. And what a sight it was – beautiful scenery and with the increasing altitude a clarity you don't normally see at lower levels; interesting wildlife, mountain foxes and condors; and things you don't ever expect to see, like one team member returning from a shovel recce with the human waste bag so full of air it looked more like a pink novelty balloon!

The 6 days trekking provided invaluable experience for the whole team. The days were hard, climbing high, sleeping low and got the team used to

new kit and their plastic boots.

Moral remained high and so on the morning of 13th January under the shroud of darkness and in subzero temperatures we made our summit attempt of Cerro Vallecitos. 15 members attempted the summit (one having returned to lower altitude a few days earlier with AMS). After many hard hours following the persons boots in front we all eventually made the summit – a personal best for many. The last 300m were by far the hardest part of the whole expedition for me and if it hadn't been for the tight knit team we had formed I don't think I would have made it – I remember sitting down with 100m to go and about to jack it in when Rob walked past and said 'get up you t*@t' and with that I got up and made it to the top. The jubilation of reaching the top with spectacular views of the route we had taken was soon overtaken with the realisation that we still had to descend to our 4200m camp. This was a relatively undignified descent – more a stumble than a trek, but we all made it down safely and after a good nights sleep made it to the road head the next day.

The road move to the Aconcagua road head was great with awesome views of the mountains to come, one of the largest and tastiest steaks ever and a chance to

reflect on our success to date. The next 2 days trekking along the generally dry and unshaded Horcones valley floor to Plaza Des Mulas (4200m) was a stark reminder of what we were up against though and unfortunately one of our team members became ill and had to be escorted back.

Plaza Del Mulas was to become our base camp – Inka provided us with a permanent tent arrangement for meals, kit checking etc. The food was great considering the distance it had to travel and many developed a penchant for the caramel spread (made from reduced condensed milk). The Jackson/Murphy/Hooper Banter Sideshow provided some relief from the daunting task that lay ahead – especially considering that from now on we were on our own with no guides, mules etc.

After a rest day at Plaza Del Mulas the team, now 14 strong, set off for our next camp (Nido Des Condores at 5500m). Now having to walk in plastic boots and carrying all our kit it soon became apparent that not all of us were going to make it. 2 returned to base camp and the kit was split between the remaining 12. At Camp Canada (5000m) 4 more team members, through exhaustion returned to base camp. Tents were pitched here and stores

left. The 8 remaining team members continued to Nido Des Condores. En route the weather changed and we finally arrived at Nido having trekked through now thigh deep snow and howling winds. 2 tents were hastily erected and 4 members jumped inside. The rest of us got on our heels and returned to Camp Canada as fast as our tired legs would carry us.

This was the highest I had slept at before and found that I became quite claustrophobic in the tent, caused by the hypoxia we were experiencing. Cooking at the altitude also provided new experiences – melting collected snow for water (now I understand the phrase “don’t eat yellow snow”) and of course making sure you don’t drink from the wrong bottle, because although they may both look similar in nalgene bottles they certainly didn’t smell (or I guess taste) the same!

The next morning the Camp Canada team members started trekking to Nido to meet the others, who by all accounts had had a worse night than us due to high winds and thunder storms, only to find them coming the other way having been advised by the ranger there that worse weather was imminent. So with much reluctance we descended back to base camp.

We waited 4 days at base camp for the weather to improve – with a trip to a nearby hotel for a coke that reminded me very much of the hotel in the film ‘The Shining’ – we were all systems go again. This was lucky as we were running out of time and this would be our only summit attempt as bad weather had been forecast for 3 days time. During this time 6 members of the team returned to Mendoza knowing they were unlikely to be able to make the summit.

On the 23rd January the 9 remaining members of the team set off for Nido des Condores. From here we moved higher than anyone of us had been on the mountain before and reached our high camp (Camp Berlin at 5890m) with relative ease. After a very uncomfortable and sleepless night, due in part to 3 of us being in a 2 man quasar tent, we awoke at 0300 on 25th January for our summit attempt.

We left camp Berlin with silentrepidation at around 0500, most of us lost in our own thoughts of the near 1100m of altitude still left to climb to reach the summit. En route one of our leaders had to return to Camp Berlin due to freezing feet and just 300m below the summit 2 more members descended the hill due to illness.

The going was generally good with snow and ice covering the cannaletta that had a reputation for being very hard and so at around 1430 on the 25th January 2007 the 6 remaining team members (Adrian Mellor, Tim Hooper, Hatty Wells, Baz Lawrence, Anil Cherian and Stuart Jackson) arrived at the summit. There was just enough time for a celebratory photo shoot before the weather rolled in and we made a ‘speedy’ descent in poor visibility. Back at base camp champagne was opened and went straight to our heads – though it did provide good night sedation!

The walk out gave us all time to reflect on the enormity of what we had achieved as novice mountaineers but also mentally prepare ourselves for the demanding 3 days R&R that lay ahead in Mendoza – especially considering ‘champagne’ was only £4 a bottle!

During our time at altitude we performed some research in conjunction with University College London (The extreme Everest foundation) into acclimatization to altitude. Although not entirely fun at times, stripping down to have your blood pressure taken at -10°C for example, we hope our research, at least in part, will lead to a better understanding of how the body deals with altitude.

On reflection this expedition was a great success, all of us gained valuable experience at altitude and most of us ascended to new heights. For me it was an awesome expedition. At times I wondered why the hell I was doing it but I certainly came away with a real sense of achievement and the drive to do more of it in the future.

A special mention goes to one of our sponsors – The Marcus Stutt Memorial Fund. Marcus was a keen mountaineer who unfortunately died before his time. The fund has recently been set up by his parents in his memory to help likeminded Army doctors take part in demanding expeditions.



High Camp (Camp Berlin).

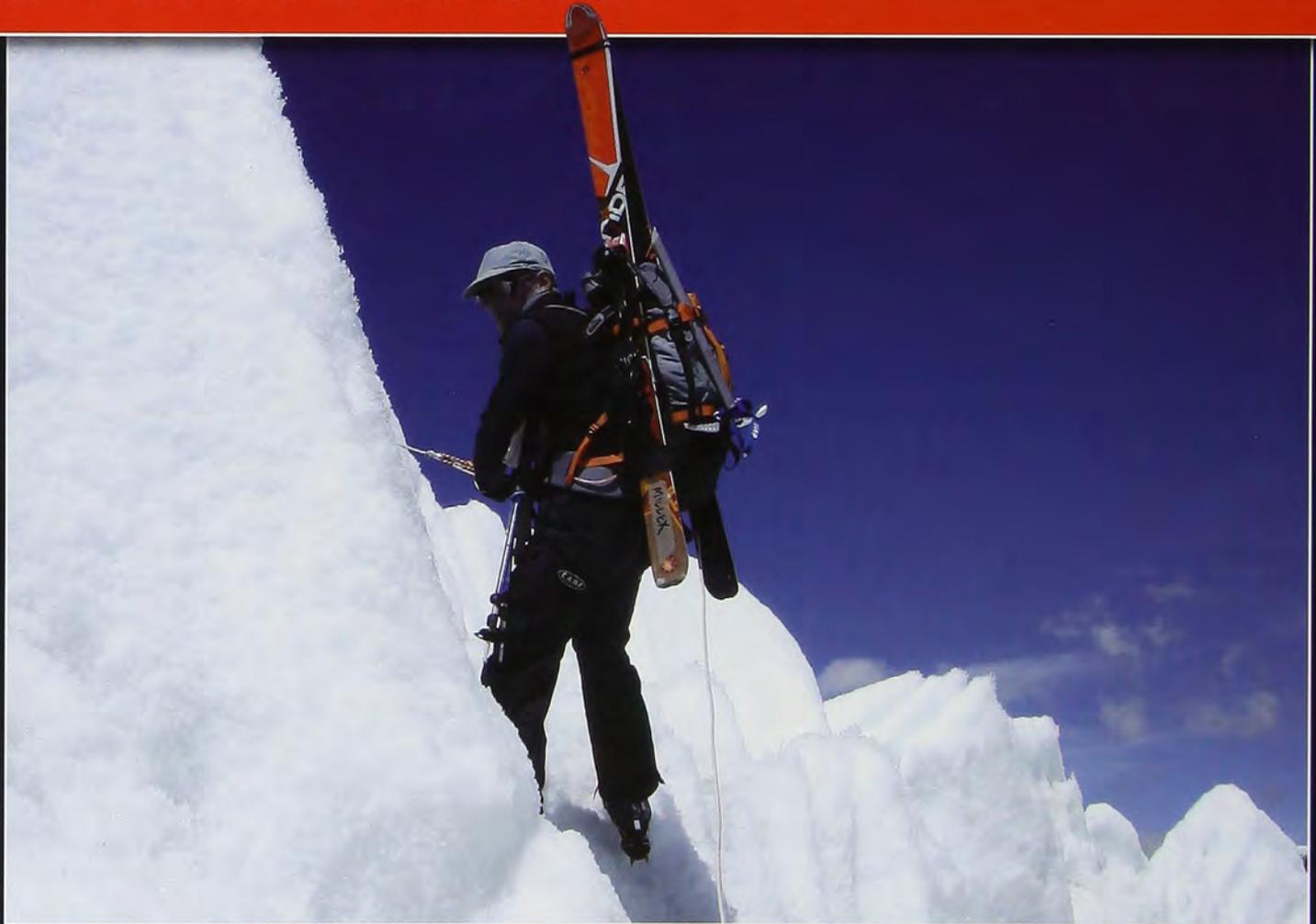


AMA CLIMBER





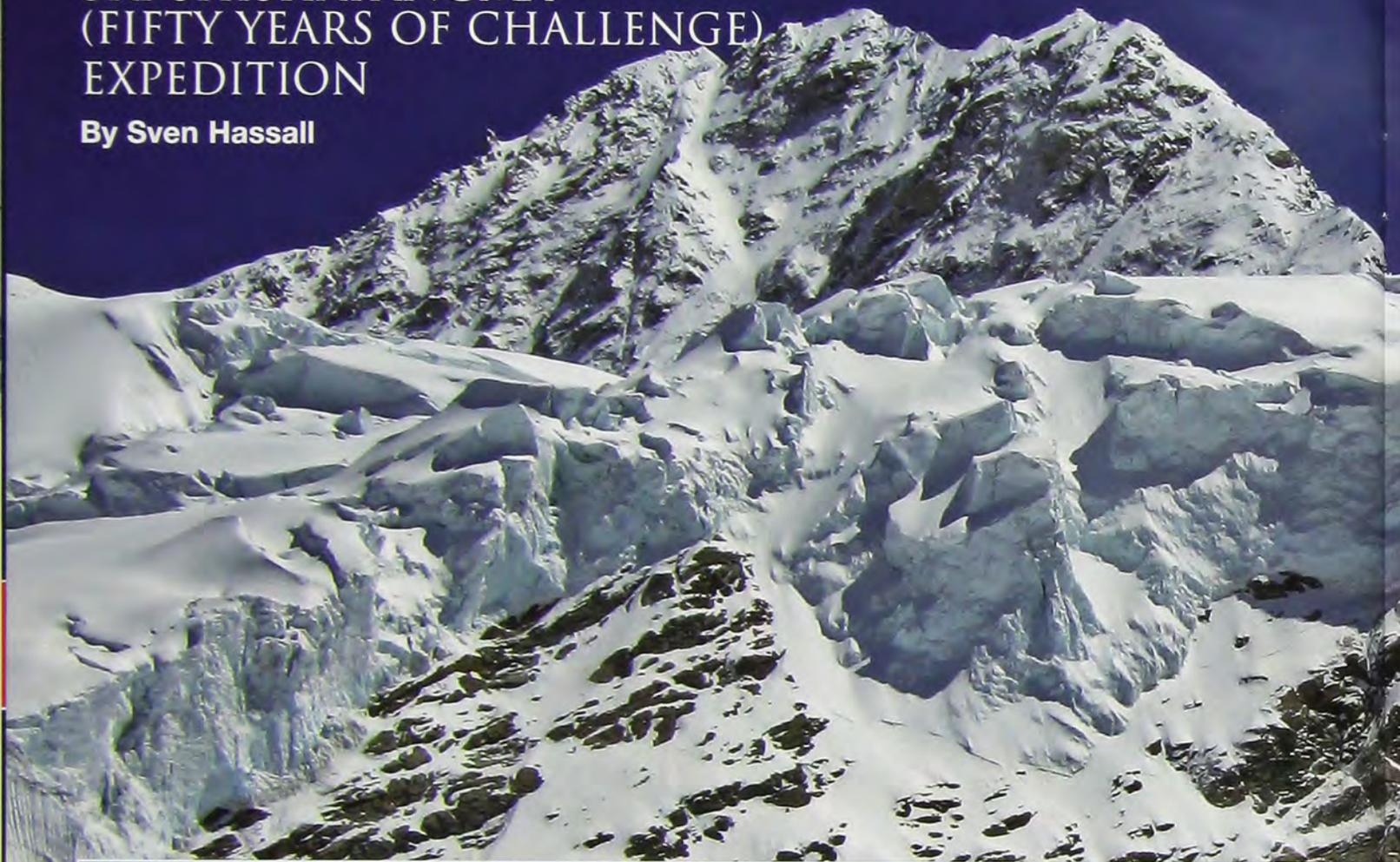
ERS IN ACTION



SEVEN WEEKS IN TIBET

SKI SHISHAPANGMA
(FIFTY YEARS OF CHALLENGE)
EXPEDITION

By Sven Hassall



The team at Advanced Base Camp.

"Dave, what's that noise? Someone, or something is going through the kit and dragging it around."

"Don't worry about it Russ it's only a raven or something."

"Yeah, but the thing it's dragging is an oxygen cylinder!"

"Go back to sleep mate, and stop reading Stephen King before bedtime!"



Approaching camp 1.

The Lonely Planet guide states that Nyalam, a town we passed through on the way back from Chinese Base Camp is known in Tibetan as 'The Gateway to Hell'. I assumed that the reference was to the barren Tibetan plateau beyond, but I

was wrong – Nyalam looks outwards and Hell is the border town of Zhangmu.

Somewhere between a Spaghetti Western, an early Kung Fu movie and Mad Max; it is a town of empty souls, people with no pride or ambi-

tion, they live in squalor in the most beautiful surroundings in the world and we are again stuck here waiting for the border and 'Friendship Bridge' to open.

We dodge the huge Tata trucks and the small 800cc

taxis that hurtle around at breakneck speed and we stare in amazement at the children squatting in the street going to the toilet only metres away from where their parents are plucking chickens and piling them high on the dirty pavement. There is no Health

and Safety Executive here! Only a stark contrast to the beauty we have been surrounded by for the last month or so.

We have spent the last forty days as the dwarfs on the shoulders of giants, walking through Gaston Rebuffat's beautiful canvas. We have had the support of friends, families and sponsors willing to share and support our vision of climbing to the fourteenth highest point on the planet; kept company by the beautiful rivers of snow and ice that dominate Shishapangma's Northern slopes; we have lived our lives at lofty heights from where we have seen things much clearer; we have spent time in the 'hurt locker', suffering injury, altitude sickness, pulmonary oedema, chest infection and fatigue; we have laboured, laden down with down suits, oxygen, tracking devices and food in an attempt to stand atop of her; many of us stumbled and some came short but we have all known the great enthusiasms and devotions that the high mountains invoke deep inside you.

With the mountain fixed and camps established up to 7300m and with a five day good weather window predicted by our forecasters back in the UK we started our summit attempts only to be battered by a ferocious 36 hour storm. At Depot Camp the fabric of our tents now brittle with the extreme cold was ripped to shreds by the wind allowing the spindrift in; we passed twenty four hours there in our little green and snow covered prisons taking pleasure in the large and small and exhausting every topic of conversation available - The women that we love, old friends and of course because many of us are English our favourite topic - what Phil insists is officially known as HAF and LAF - High and Low Altitude Flatulence! You rarely sleep here anyway due to the nausea and fatigue that the height induces; there is only half the atmospheric pressure of home and a greatly reduced amount of oxygen. There is a drug available to us that some choose to take to help acclimatise and to sleep; common-

ly known as Diamox it was originally designed for treating glaucoma, a common eye condition but its use in helping you to adjust to altitude has been well known for years. It does however have a sense of humour - it improves the quality of your sleep but then ensures that you do not get much as you will be going to the loo all night, as this is already exaggerated at altitude anyway, you are set for a very frustrating night!

Down at ABC "Who is your hero?" passes the time, with great names such as Gandhi, Shackleton and Ellen Macarthur coming to the fore. From the climbing world there were offers of Johnny Dawes, Whillans and Joe Brown; then all of a sudden someone fired in Chuck Norris "7 times world karate champion!" That was the end of that one!

While we were all laughing and joking, at 6500m the severity of the storm was such that the team at Camp One were forced to

spend the night digging out their tents in the ferocious wind to prevent them being buried and destroyed, a deadly situation in the temperatures and terrain; the wind did at least mask the sound of the avalanches crashing down the slopes just to their North. Eventually they lost their battle and had to beat the retreat in the darkness, seeking refuge in a neighbouring Slovakian tent and climbing into their freezing sleeping bags after rescuing what equipment they could. The poles on this tent subsequently snapped under the force of the wind and the team were left huddling inside the canvas doing what they could to make it through the night. At this point they were the highest people on the mountain, perhaps even for a while the highest in the world, rescue would not have come easily and the Slovaks were gratefully repaid on their return to base camp with a bottle of the finest whiskey we had.

There was no option but to make a hasty retreat during a break in the

weather when the daylight came; no mean feat in itself when in a white out and not being able to tell the difference between up and down and only seeing the crevasses when inches away from them.

Twenty-four hours later, thankfully with us stuck at Depot and ABC, Camp Two was struck by a series of avalanches that carried away most teams tents and equipment; fortunately they were all unoccupied at the time.

The 'White Death' forms where layers of snow accumulate that have greater gravitational potential than the strength of the bond between them, once this point is reached, the upper layer of snow slides with powerful and dangerous consequences, bringing the mountain alive.

It was this threat on the difficult and dangerous slopes below camp two that eventually stopped us. The snow pack had not had time to settle from previous snowfall and high winds had been compacting the problem by causing the formation of deadly 'wind-slab'. Imagine a child's drawing of a snow flake, a typical 'stellar crystal', tear off all the arms and lay them down in line with no gaps between them in a solid slab - this is the simplest description of wind-slab formation except that the metamorphic agent here is the wind picking up the crystals and smashing them together as they are deposited on leeward slopes. This process forms a very dense hard top layer with very little air gaps that is perched on top of un-bonded snow; a deadly trap that entices the mountaineer to trigger a lethal avalanche below him. This slab was now getting covered with a metre or more of fresh powder. Avalanche threat is measured on a scale of 1 (safe) - 5 (avalanche very likely) and from evidence around us and profiles seen in the snow pack we were certainly well into the fives and it is difficult to imagine a more dangerous situation; the necessary metamorphosis needed to stabilise this ground would now not be taking place for a long time.



Digging out tents at camp 1 the hole is the tent door.



Fighting through the snow.



The quality and tenacity of the team was such that despite the near insurmountable odds many were still discussing the possibility of going on in alpine style on a less avalanche prone but more difficult and possibly unclimbed route, sharing three to a two man tent and balancing their experience and determination against the poor conditions; those who were disinclined due to physical and emotional fatigue were however prepared to support them carrying their loads as high as possible. It is testament to the leadership however that they were not allowed to do so.

"I could not have wished to attempt such an undertaking without every member of this team at my side and I shall never forget the journey that I have made in their company." Geordie Taylor - Exped Leader.

It is easy to die here gripped by summit fever or the fear of going home a failure, and there had been plenty of opportunities to do so already; we did not feel inclined to experience more. The debate was concluded - our attempt was over.

This is about as far away from cragging at Stanage as you can get; there is no Outside Café to retreat to, no shopping wet weather alternative and no chance to come back next weekend to bag the route you got rained off from. The reality of mountaineering is not about standing on the top, it is certainly not about 'conquering'; it is about harmony, spatial awareness and the journey. We have not stood on the summit but we are not without prizes and reasons to celebrate.

I spent a moment a few nights ago outside of the mess tent with a few friends, enjoying the full moon that would have seen us moving quickly on the summit ridge; it was late and the remainder of the team had gone to bed; we were staring up at the clear sky and mountain declaring what a great experience it had been; our lives are so much richer due to the shared experiences and the beautiful white giant that towered above us, we have all made many close friends, within the team and without and we have also learnt a lot of hard skills such as logistics and emergency medicine; One of us even met his future wife whilst training in Norway.

For those who prefer more tangible results we have also qualified the following number of people in various mountaineering disciplines; the effects of which will echo throughout the rest of the Army for the remainder of our careers:

Ski Tour Proficiency	8
Basic Ski Proficiency	
Alpine	1
Tour Leader Training	9
Ski Tour Leader	1
Advanced Ski Proficiency	
Alpine	12
Joint Services Ski Instructor	
Alpine	2
BASI (A) Foundation	
Course	1
Mountain Leader Training	1
Advanced Joint	
Services ML	1
Alpine Mountain	
Proficiency	15
Mountaineering Instructor	
Award Trg	1
Joint Services Rock	
Climbing Instructor	1

Additionally we have also seen 14 people ski difficult ter-

rain from 7000m, whooping and howling as much as the thin air would allow!

Of course no military activity would be complete without a dose of 'area cleaning' and we organised and conducted a clean up of the Advanced Base Camp area collecting rubbish and debris that has accumulated over the years. The huge ravens that dive-bomb the camp in search of food scraps discarded by less principled teams were not too pleased but we satisfyingly left the place better than when we arrived and were pleased to have the opportunity to give something back to 'Gosanthain'.

The Himalayas - The Abode of the Snows; we will be talking about this trip for the rest of our lives, perhaps for a while and in certain company because of the sheer enormity of the task and the altitude involved, but mainly and enduringly because of the people with whom we shared the experience. This is what climbing is all about and why I could never give it up.

It is not about cranking hard grades. It is not even about getting to the summit (although I readily acknowledge the pleasures of doing so). It is about the journey to get there. It is about having a hard day carrying heavy loads, trying to switch off to the discomfort and physical effort and coming back and feeling like s**t, it is about retiring to your tent and flaking out on your soft down bag and trying to ignore the pumping rhythmic pain in your head; it is about going to the toilet in your pee bottle because you can't face the

effort of putting your clothes back on and going outside again into the cold and wind, and then your tent partner, without asking, takes it straight from your hand and makes the long trek to the base camp latrine to empty it for you; here lies the true pleasures of climbing. It is in the teamwork. The understanding of exactly what your rope or tent partner is going through and piling in there to help because you know that one day it will be you and that without question he will do exactly the same.

I was asked several months ago what would happen if I was stuck in a tent high up on the mountain in bad weather and with frozen hands, knowing the scenario and the consequences very well from a previous epic I was able to reply without hesitation that the remainder of the team would overcome any obstacle necessary to come and get me, and I meant it.

It is about the shared experiences training for a trip. The night climbing epics in the Wye Valley because that was the only time you could squeeze it in between work and family. It is the hysterical laughter of 3 people off-route in North Wales having bitten off more than they could chew, sharing an A4 sized belay ledge knowing that if any should fall they would take the other two and the directional gear with them. It is about the friends you meet and their families and the collective enthusiasm for anything other than the office and resigning oneself to a pointless life, it is about finding out your personal possible and impossible; above all though it is a yardstick that allows you to appreciate all the other things that are not climbing. The warm embrace of a loved one, the smile of a nephew's face when you walk through the door, the comfort of a sofa, the taste of a real ale in an old fashioned country pub listening to the rain hit the misty glass. The mutual appreciation of friends and the changes of colour as the wind blows through long grass. It is perspective and we shall all be taking that home with us, framed by the memory of

an amazing landscape and country.

I struggled for days with how I was going to start this article and how I was going to bring the Himalayas to you; I cannot, it has to be seen.

I look back upon the first time we actually saw the mountain, many of us had worked towards this trip for a long time, some for 3 years and it was an emotional moment; for once a man was safe from derision if he did not have dry eyes and there were not many who did. We hugged and toasted each other, and the mountain from a hip flask of rum.

There is no smog here and barely any moisture in the air, the colours are incredible and we fancied that we could see every crevasse in the ancient glacial ice. What we could see was a huge 'CrownWall' on the peak to the West. This wall remains at the top of a slide where a layer fractures before starting its movement downwards; it remains as evidence of the depth and weight of the slide - this one being thousands and thousands of tons. This particular Crown-Wall could be clearly seen from 30 km away and although the heat of the days



Rich uploading the blog for those back home.

will have softened it, it was still instantly recognizable as the biggest that any of us has ever seen, reaching a depth of 20-30 ft.

Beauty is everywhere and all things are superlative. The sense of space is incredible; grasslands stretch off up the valleys as far as the eye can see; out of the beautiful savannah rise ancient glaciers straining the neck and putting the willies up you as you follow them upwards; In the rocks hide hares the size of dogs whilst huge birds soar above us looking for prey; we stare up in

amazement hoping that we are not it!

Yaks are the only things interrupting the never-ending view to infinity; they are the only traffic here and apart from the wind and the murmur of the bubbling stream, the only noise. A curiosity of nature, they look like huge angry bulls with black matted carpets hanging down both sides nearly reaching the floor. They seem docile enough but reputation has kept us from finding out.

The discomfort too can also be incredible. The soporific lethar-

gy that consumes you making everything an effort both mentally and physically; anyone who is foolish enough not to take things at the slow pace the altitude demands, pays for their mistake with a crippling torturous headache that increases with every heart beat. The body deteriorates too with every day that you spend up high and your chances of summiting lessen; it is no accident that most trips to the high mountains are rarely longer than six weeks.

I am not alone in thinking that despite the hard work and deprivation that it will be a shame to see this epoch come to an end- it has stimulated a period of growth beyond anything that our normal lives would have affected; this is what the giants out there have supported and our sincerest thanks go not only to all our sponsors but also to our families, colleagues and the AMA who have covered our responsibilities during both the trip and the training.

I lied about the seven weeks - it was six, but nowhere near as catchy a title!

As Geordie would say, "bring it on!"

The Dhaulagiri IV Expedition 1974

By Meryon Bridges OBE

In the last 50 years the big mountain expeditions business has become infinitely more sophisticated, and if you want to climb Everest today you have only to ring up Himalayan Kingdoms, or some similar provider, pay your money and turn up on the day. True, you still have to climb the mountain, but all the planning, transport, equipment, rations, in-country logistics, and so on are all taken care of. Even if a team plans on doing their own

thing, as Service expeditions still tend to do, there is still an awful lot that is arranged by the agent. This includes the management of personal documentation, permits, Customs clearances, in-country transport, camp staff, portage, local food, and administration of the journey to base camp.

In 1974 not only were there no such agencies available to do these things for us in advance, but there were few

established procedures within the country for handling them either. Thus on arrival at Khatmandu airport, the first thing that happened was that all the freight was carted off to a Customs warehouse, where it was added to a vast heap of other freight and baggage, and a lot of team effort was required over the ensuing days to obtain clearance and secure its release. In parallel with this other members would be sent off to obtain visa extensions, trekking per-

mits, photography permits, to make arrangements with the in-country agency for Sherpas and porters, and to arrange onward transport. All these processes involved finding one's way around Kathmandu and the relevant departments of the Nepalese government, identifying the appropriate office, arranging meetings, drinking much tea, and expending more patience than a small army of Saints put together could muster. The government administra-

tion was impressively bureaucratic, and in the principal building, the Singha Durba, the corridors were lined with hundreds of scribes sitting at high desks entering information, longhand, into massive ledgers in truly Dickensian style, while piles of these tomes gathered dust in the corner of every office. Nepalese officials were always charming, always helpful, but the man in front of you was never the one who held the Talisman by which a decision could be made. You were eternally referred to someone else, suitably armed with sheafs of signed and stamped forms (in triplicate), but this someone else's office always seemed to have closed for the day - "Please come back tomorrow". Many processes involved two or more different offices on opposite sides of town, which necessitated hiring bicycles to tour the places of government. Then there were the public holidays, which seemed to crop up every couple of days and which brought all activity, if it may be so called, to a halt. Typically it took two weeks to in-process through Kathmandu.

The Dhaulagiri IV expedition of 1974 was RAF sponsored and led by Wing Commander "Dickie" Bird, a distinguished V- Bomber test pilot. Pat Gunson and I were the token Pongo's invited to join the team. We'd been to the Himalaya's once before (in India in 1973), and as such were deemed to be "fairly experienced". On departing Kathmandu we drove to Pokhara in a Landrover, followed by a couple of trucks bringing the expedition freight. On arrival there we met up with the Sirdar, a wonderful man named Ang Phu, and our 8 Sherpas, who had been allocated to us by our in-country trekking agency. A further three days were taken up with re-packing all the stores into porter loads, signing on 250 porters, which required recording all their names in a pay book and issuing an initial allowance to buy food for the road against a thumbprint in lieu of a signature, allocating loads to carriers, and then we were off. With those three days went

three riotous nights of drinking Chang and Rakshi in the seriously unhygienic local "pub", and the good Wing Commander took a very dim view of the raucous singing that announced our return to camp at dead of night.

Because we were to attempt the north face of the mountain, and because the two 18,000ft passes to the east of it would have been impassable in March, we set off on a trek of just under 200 miles, that would take 23 days to complete. From Pokhara we marched west along the front of the Annapurna range, crossed the Khali Gandhaki River, and then marched past the whole of the Dhaulagiri range (there are six of them) before crossing northwards over the western tail of the range via the 14,000+ft Jang La pass to Tarakot. This crossing involved about 20 miles of very steep ground, sometimes through trackless forest. From there we climbed 6,000ft up through a narrow rocky gorge towards the pass with no certainty that snow conditions would allow the porters to cross it, entirely dependent on a local guide. The ability of the porters to carry 60lbs on a head band barefoot across 45 degree slopes or to wade repeatedly (14 times) across a waist deep torrent of ice cold glacier water without complaint was humbling. From Tarakot we marched back east up the Barbung Khola to a little village called Mukut and so to Base camp. During those 23 days the porters went on strike twice, several groups upped and left without notice, forcing us to split the party while a stay behind group recruited replacements and followed on, and all these issues had to be resolved by the team as best we could.

The attempt on the mountain was to be by an incredibly challenging route, and sadly it was cut short by tragedy when a collapsing serac swept down a couloir up which 9 members of the team (4 sahibs and 5 sherpas) were carrying loads for Camp2. Two sherpas died instantly and a third died of his injuries 18 hours later despite the best efforts of our medic to

save him. The decision to abandon the climb was forced on us through the resulting loss of lift capability. The Bhuddist funeral that followed, in which the bodies were burned on a pyre and the remains tipped into the river was a harrowing experience which brought us very close to our remaining Sherpas. (Tragically Ang Phu himself was killed a few years later on the west ridge of Everest).

The journey out was almost as colourful as the journey in. Mukut was located in a side valley off the Barbung Khola. Our route out would take us on up this valley to the first of the high passes. The good men of Mukut thought they saw a unique commercial opportunity as sole source providers of portage back to Pokhara, and offered to provide porters at a highly inflated daily rate. Since they reckoned that we were in a corner they refused to haggle, so we sent a Sherpa down the valley to the village of Tarang at the junction with the Barbung Khola to recruit porters from there. Hearing of this, the Mukut people said they would kill any Tarang porters who came up the valley to steal their jobs. The Tarang people responded by saying they would cut down the bridge over the Barbung Khola (and isolate Mukut) if their porters were attacked. Having inadvertently fomented a local civil war, we then offered to resolve it, at rather more realistic prices. Once we had gathered our small horde of porters, they fell to arguing over who should get which loads, a problem resolved by Geordie Armstrong who played the part of the blind Fates, randomly placing items of porter's clothing on individual loads to allocate them. This was deemed acceptable and in the end everyone was happy, except for some of the good ladies of Mukut. Some of their husbands signed up to carry two, or even three, 60 lb loads, and then co-opted their wives to carry one or two of them. I have picture of some of these tough Tibetan women with 120lbs slung on their head bands.

The journey out took 16 days and brought us through some of the wildest and most remote country I've ever seen. Between the two passes we crossed a plateau over 17,000ft above sea level which was indescribably barren and desolate. It seemed that it supported no life: nothing grew there and even in early summer the temperature remained firmly below zero, while low cloud and freezing rain swept across it. Nothing moved. Further on we encountered high altitude semi desert conditions as we dropped down towards Mustang. We passed villages which clung to barren hill-sides and which had no visible means of support for either their populations or their meagre livestock. They were up to half an hour's walk from the nearest source of water and nothing green was visible anywhere - no firewood, no crops, no grazing. What they subsisted on was a mystery.

We emerged into the valley of the Khali Gandhaki north of Jomosom, and followed that vast valley (at over 12,000 ft the deepest in the world) down past the Nilgiri range and through the gap between Annapurna and Dhaulagiri. Wherever one looked the scenery was spectacular. On the walk from there to Pokhara we fell in with a party of hippies, a really friendly bunch of about a dozen Americans who circulated their stocks of Hash very generously, while some of the girls provided other favours on which it would be tactless to dwell.

Sadly while modern sophistication makes getting to the objective infinitely easier and quicker, much of the adventure and fun of getting there and back that we enjoyed 30 odd years ago has gone. The aim of the Streather Award was to try and restore such experiences by encouraging parties to go to places where this degree of sophistication has not yet impacted on the scope of the adventure. It is a challenge worth taking up if only for fun that can be experienced in going to remoter locations.

Craghoppers

By Mike Smith



"Climb if you will, but remember courage and strength are nought without prudence and a moments negligence may destroy the happiness of a lifetime. Do nothing in haste, look well to every step and from the beginning think what may be the end."

*Edward Whimper,
Scrawled on the wall of the Climbers Café, Henningsvær*

As a flash mob of RMAS officer cadets descended on Heathrow from all sides of the country, our main worry was the airline's baggage allowance: the constraint that hampers all climbers and our first obstacle in reaching the Arctic Circle. Redistribution of kit saw customs overcome with awe and misunderstanding as to what the mass of rope and strange metal objects were that lit-

tered our hand luggage. The best way to get through security at Heathrow, it seems, is through confusion – bread and butter to an officer cadet!

Travelling to the Lofoten Islands of North Norway on a twenty-seater plane to Svolvær, the lack of trees, the crystal clarity of the ocean and the vast mountain vistas made it clear that this was a remote region. We chose a

campsite at the foot of the Gandalfveggen crag, and in the red glow of the lowering sun, ten content climbers squeezed into sleeping room for eight and remember it won't get dark this far North.

Our first morning brings glorious weather, and we were soon making the short walk up to Gandalfveggen. A small party hitchhiked to Svolvær, the largest local town, to hire

a car (using the grant provided by the AMA), while others tackle Gandalf (VS 4c), Gollum (VS 4c) and Lost Gandalf (HS 4b), a variation on Old Fox (E1 5b), not in recent guidebooks but locally climbed if not a new route. Later in the day, Guns'n'Roses (HVS 4c) was climbed, led by Mike Smith.

The climbing in the Lofoten Islands is excellent – long





Pianohandler Lunds Rute HS 4c is a good introduction to the area, 5 pitches, best tackled with a large party. OCdt Reg Gentry on pitch one.

crack systems for finger and hand-jamming (Bare Blåbær is highly recommended, and well worth the walk-in), and enormous granite slabs. The rock is almost completely unpolished and exceptionally quick-drying – the frequent morning rainstorms never prevented us from climbing in the largely dry afternoons. And the views are incredible – unbroken chains of mountains rising out of the deep blue Arctic Sea. Most of the climbing is in the grades VS and up, so this isn't necessarily a place for beginners.

That said, Kalle proved ideal for teaching leading and gaining logbook experience, with

at least ten 10m (VDiff) routes covered as well as a pair of 30m (Sev 4a) pitches. More experienced climbers took to Skiløperen, 'the Skier' (E1 5b), on Store Festvågvegg, which is described as, "the best route ever, ever," thus relegating Lys og Skygge, on Pianokrakken, to "best route ever, ever, except for the Skier." Gamle Rev (E1 5b) and Lundeklubben (E1 5b), both on Festvågvegg, also deserve mentioning. An hour's walk-in from Presten leads to Bare Blåbær (VS 4c), which translates as 'Easy Peasy' in Norse slang.

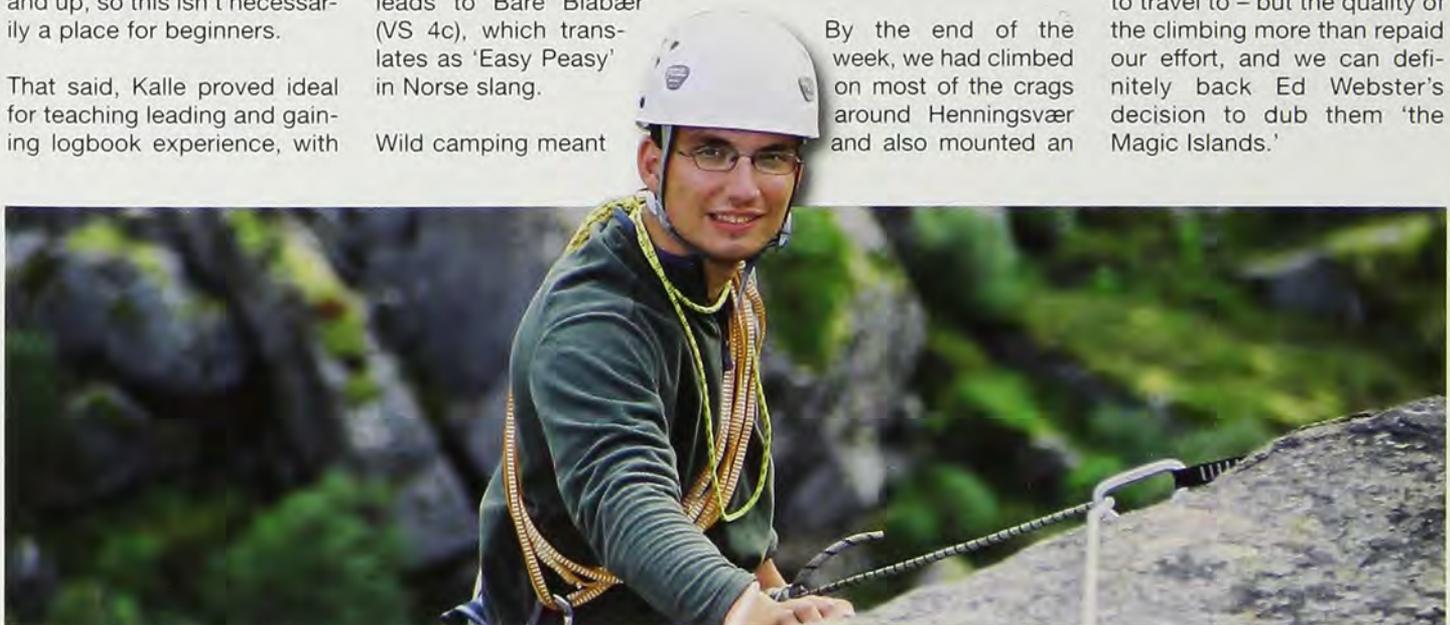
Wild camping meant

limited facilities, and we were grateful for the shower facilities at the Climbers' Café in Henningsvær, which cost 20 NOK to use. This Klatrekafe'en also provided a new routes book, cheap coffee and cake and occasionally shelter from the rain. A small group explored the superb bouldering at Presten about 1km from our campsite, enjoying both the high-quality boulders and the astounding views out to sea.

By the end of the week, we had climbed on most of the crags around Henningsvær and also mounted an

expedition to Svolvær, to climb the iconic "Svolværgeita," or Svolvær Goat, named for its horns. Special mention should go to Lt Cdr Hoather and OCdt Goss, who were filmed by a Norwegian television helicopter while helping down two over-ambitious Norwegians – the first indication that something was wrong was when their leader tied in to our abseil rope!

The Lofoten Islands are remote and take some effort to travel to – but the quality of the climbing more than repaid our effort, and we can definitely back Ed Webster's decision to dub them 'the Magic Islands.'



Exped Leader OCdt John Goss

BOREAL ZENITH –

FIRST ASCENTS IN NORTH EAST GREENLAND

By Sam Marshall

The wing tip of our small plane, dwarfed on all sides by steep sided mountains, seemed to almost scrape the ground. Musk Ox dashed in all directions. We made one final circuit as the pilot scanned the ground, checking it was safe to land, before finally touching down in the Grejsdalen valley. The landing was relatively smooth considering there is no airstrip...

After three years of planning, Exercise BOREAL ZENITH had finally begun. BOREAL ZENITH was one of a series of expeditions, which took place to commemorate fifty years of Army Mountaineering. It aimed to capture the exploratory nature of mountaineering that existed when

the AMA formed. This was to be achieved by visiting a remote and mountainous region that had seen little or no mountaineering activity.

"A tall order" you might say, in this day and age, when almost the entire globe has been explored, mapped and written about. There are, however, still some areas that have had little or no attention. One such area is Andrees Land. At 73035'N, 26000'W and 500 miles North of the

Arctic Circle, inside the North East Greenland National Park, Andrees Land is both mountainous and remote. First visited by mountaineers in 1950 there had been almost no activity in the area, except for some geological surveying. The best mapping of Andrees Land had been drawn with a crayon in 1932 and no other documented evidence of mountaineering visits could be found.



Crossing the river.



Unloading the Twin Otter on arrival in the Grejsdalen valley.

So, with limited information about the area to be visited, I set about planning an expedition and convincing the risk averse powers that be, that visiting an area so remote would be 'safe'. Getting to Andrees Land was the first hurdle to be overcome. The one charter operator capable of getting us there advised me that once we got to Constable Point he would be able to fly us in using his specially adapted Twin Otter. Constable Point is the most northerly commercial airstrip in northeast Greenland and it is possible to fly into it on scheduled flights from Iceland. Based on this and the load capacity of the Twin Otter, I concluded that the trip could accommodate eight

mountaineers for about a month.

The wheels were in motion, a team of eight mountaineers were drawn from the membership and all logistical necessities were forwarded to Constable Point. Everything was in place and on the 3rd July we left Stansted, headed for Reykjavik and then Constable Point. We never arrived at Constable Point. Fridrik, the charter manager, changed the plan at the last minute and we were diverted to Mestersvig. This posed a small problem. All our food, med kit, ice screws etc were in Constable Point which is roughly 100 miles south of Mestersvig in a country where there are no roads. After consultation with Fridrik, an exorbitantly expensive meal in Mestersvig and a few hours waiting around, our stuff turned up, except for all our med kit. Another call to

Fridrik and an extra wait resolved this issue and eventually we were ready to go.

The plane was unloaded and gone before any of us could blink an eye. The scale of the place quickly rushed upon us; everywhere we looked there were mountains, all steep and foreboding. We quickly established a base camp and took stock of our position. There didn't appear to be any easy way to gain the high ground. Steep sided, loose mountains surrounded us and the only breaks were ugly looking glaciers, guarded by huge piles of terminal moraine. To our south the peaks had extra protection in the form of a fast flowing, wide and cold looking glacial melt river.

After a brief conflag, we decided to mount a reconnaissance on the closest glacier, just to the north of our camp. A pleasant walk led to steeper ground and this in turn led to fairly nasty broken moraine. Eventually we gained access to the glacier and made good progress up its centre. No peaks were to be ascended on this day; the exit from this glacier was steep, loose and unappeal-

ing. The next day we crossed the river, it was cold, deep and difficult and no one relished the prospect of the return trip. Gaining the glacier involved crossing the loose rubble that was to become characteristic of the trip. After a straightforward glacier plod, we split into two teams of four and made the first ascent of and the first traverse of the Jøtthorn.

Arriving back at base camp, elated from our first achievement, we wasted no time analysing what went well and came up with a plan that was to set the foundations for a further 32 ascents, 28 of which were first ascents. Our modus operandi was to operate as two independent teams of four. One team undertook long days with a clear mountaineering objective. This saw them climb a number of peaks in the area, spending anything from 15 to 24 hours out on the ground before taking a rest and contemplating the next objective. My team deployed from base camp with up to five days worth of food and established a high camp upon the glacier plateau. From this high camp, it was possible for us to fan out and climb all the



Typical terrain approaching a summit.



On the summit after ascending the face to the left.

peaks in the immediate vicinity, sometimes making up to five first ascents in one day.

The expedition was out on the ground for 28 days and in that time we made a total of 34 ascents, 29 of which were first ascents. The nature of the routes varied enormously, as did the nature of the peaks. Some routes were straightforward PD snow plods summing on rounded snow domes. There were interesting mixed ridges at AD which turned steep gendarmes, ending in small rocky

summits. And a healthy mix of steep north faces and rock routes (VS/HVS and Alpine D) added to the fun. In terms of mountaineering, it was probably one of the hardest, but most rewarding trips I've been fortunate enough to go on. The weather was generally fair, cloudless skies and low winds helped with navigation and exploration as did the 24 hour day light.

BOREAL ZENITH only scratched the surface of what might be possible in an area the size of Andrees Land,

mountains rear up in all directions, the majority unclimbed. The opportunity to climb new routes and make first ascents is not easy to find these days, but with a little imagination and a healthy dose of determination, it is still possible. If anyone out there is interested in planning their own trip to the remote mountains of north east Greenland and would like some advice, feel free to get in touch. Otherwise, keep your eyes on the AMA website for details of the next trip...

Ollie Noakes during the first ascent of 'The Fabulous Bakin'.



OKTOBERFEST

By Stu McDonald

I'd picked up Kath and Pete from Geneva Airport the day before and we'd driven straight there. The forecast was good for three days only. The first train left at 7.10 in the morning and we were now clanking and grinding our way uphill. It was dark, but dawn was close. As the train slowly made its way up the mountainside the first rays of light appeared over the horizon. There above us loomed our objective. It was dark, steep and foreboding. The scale was hard to judge, but I knew it was massive, with a vertical rise of 1800m from the bottom of the face to the top. With vast traverses back and forward across the face the route would involve over 3000m of climbing. This was what I'd been waiting for. This was my dream climb. This was the North Face of the Eiger.

About half an hour after getting off the train we were at the bottom of the face. It was nine in the morning. It was warm, the sky was clear and there was no wind. It was perfect.

Pete took the lead with myself and Kath following on the same rope. Short steep sections of rock were interspersed with bands of scree that seemed to defy gravity. The route wasn't always obvious,

but we were making good progress upwards. As we climbed upwards past the Shattered Pillar a team was visible ahead. They'd come out of the Gallery Window and hence were missing out the initial section of the route. I could see why they'd done that, but somehow it didn't seem right. This was a route on every aspiring alpinist's hit-list, and we wanted to do it in as traditional a way as we could.

As we passed the gallery window things got icy. There were patches of verglance on the rocks and a reasonable amount of snow. After donning crampons we headed onwards, climbing corners and following natural weaknesses. A wild traverse led to the bottom of the Difficult Crack. Some say this is the crux of the route, and I could see why. You would think that the name said it all, but it was not really

much of a crack line. A vertical face marked by the crampon scratches of over 70 years of alpinism. A crack line it was not, but bloody difficult it was!

Pete was doing a good job in the lead, and we moved quickly up a ramp line to the start of the Hinterstoisser Traverse. An in-situ rope marked the route across the steep wall, and Pete was soon across. A perfect layer of neve clung to the wall and provided great placements for axes and crampons. As I climbed onto a small ledge I realised we were at the Swallows Nest Bivouac. It was only 4.30 in the afternoon and we had finished climbing for the day already. The ledges needed some excavation but pretty quickly we had two good platforms for the night. As the sun slowly set on the horizon the mountains were bathed in a red glow.

We were all lost in our own thoughts. It still

hadn't quite registered where we were. As I dozed on my ledge I planned for the next morning when it would be my turn to lead.

The alarm was quickly turned off and in no time my stove was bubbling away. Mint tea was followed by cappuccino for a caffeine hit. After that I was gearing up and packing my things into my 'sack.

"When it comes tight, just start climbing" I shouted as I disappeared into the semi darkness.



Safely down.

The neve was great and I knew I was running out of rope fast. I found a good friend slot and quickly added a Ropeman onto the krab. I pulled all the slack through and set off upwards again. I knew by now that Pete and Kath were moving. We belayed left of the Ice Hose and climbed a steep rock pitch to gain the Second Icefield.

I tried to make a belay but the ice was too thin. After a few minutes looking I had a patch that took one stubby screw and another one tied off.....

The second icefield looked fine. The neve was still good and I was keen to make up some time. We had a long way to go to the Traverse of the Gods where we were planning to spend the night. By clipping in-situ belays and adding Ropemen every 50 meters we made rapid progress up the Icefield and across to below the Flat Iron. Gaining the Flat Iron was tricky with a short mixed section of climbing, but things were still going well overall as I clipped into the belay at the infamous Death Bivouac. It was a large bivvy and we stopped for a few minutes to go to the toilet and to rehydrate. A couple of teams had passed us on the Flat Iron and were powering upwards. Having left the Gallery Window that morning at least one team was aiming to summit the same day!

A long traverse left led to the Ramp which we climbed rapidly to below the Waterfall Chimney. I took a belay below and waited for Pete

and Kath. As I set off again I had a feeling this was going to be a hard pitch. It was a steep corner crack with occasional blobs of ice. There seemed to be a distinct lack of holds, and the climbing was strenuous. Had this been Scotland it would have been a classic pitch, but half way up the Eigerwand, with a big 'sack on it felt horrendous. As I pulled into the couloir above there was nowhere to belay and I was forced to carry on. The next pitch was almost as bad, with the narrow gap between rock and ice making it hard to swing my axes into the ice. Eventually I found a thick piece of ice and arranged a belay. When Pete and Kath got to the belay we all exchanged knowing looks - we were knackered after some pretty tricky climbing.

I pressed on and ran the next few pitches together to the start of the Brittle Ledges. We stopped for a break and had a chat with a team who were preparing to bivvy on an uncomfortable ledge. It seemed like a poor choice of bivvy spot when we knew there was a better site just two pitches higher. However they said the next site might need digging and they weren't keen. We took our chances with digging and carried on.

The Brittle Ledges were straight-forward, but the Brittle Crack felt hard. The holds were flat and my arms were tired, but I managed to climb it and was pleased when I arrived at the belay by the Bivvy Ledge.

The bivouac was much small-

er than expected, but with a bit of digging it was fine. This part of the face caught the sun in the evening and I sat for a few minutes with my socks off to air my feet. It was a stunning evening and incredibly warm in the sun. It was still only 5.30 and we had an hour and a half before dark. Pete studied the topo and read out the description for the next day:

"Move rightwards across the Traverse of the Gods for 150m. Then climb the White Spider for three pitches to its highest point. From there enter a leftward slanting gully line (The Exit Cracks) and climb this for 150m to the Quartz Crack. Climb this for 20m, then traverse left, past the Corti Bivouac to the base of an obvious rocky chimney (the Exit Chimneys). Climb these for three pitches before passing a bulge on the right. From there climb easily up snow and icefields for 250m to the junction of the North and North East Faces. From here two or three pitches lead to the Mittelegi Ridge which is followed to the summit."

Pete paused for a moment..."Basically there's still a shit load of climbing to do tomorrow". He was right. We were two thirds of the way up, but that still left 600m of ascent to do the last day.

As I settled in for the night, I was starting to feel super-psyched for the next day. "I'm happy to start off tomorrow morning guys, but I might need someone to take over part way"

"No worries mate.." came the reply. Safe inside my sleeping bag I thought of some of the history of the route. The twelve men who died trying before the first ascent in 1938. The epic rescue attempts when Toni Kurz hung from his rope just 200m from the Gallery Window. The euphoria that surrounded the victory of Heckmair, Vörg, Kasperek and Harrer. This was a route with a history unlike any other in the Alps.

The next morning the race was on. We moved together across the Traverse of the Gods and took a belay at the

base of the White Spider. Pete summed up the traverse well when he remarked that he could see Grindelwald between his feet! We climbed up the Spider using occasional runners and ropemen to protect us. A good covering of ice made the Exit Cracks quite straight forward and we moved quickly upwards, stopping to belay below the Quartz Crack. It looked desperate, but turned out to be fantastic mixed climbing. Hidden holds revealed themselves and I was soon at the belay.

The traverse left past the Corti Bivouac was easy and led to the bottom of the Exit Chimneys. I glanced at my watch - 10.20. We were making great time. The Chimneys were bold at first but the climbing soon eased and the gear got better. Three pitches saw us on the final snow slopes where we moved together to the Mittelegi Ridge.

There was a strange silence in the team. The day was going like clockwork. We had climbed the North Face and now just had twenty minutes of AD ridge to the summit. We moved steadily, wary that a slip at that point would mean game over for all of us.

As we stepped onto the summit at 12.40 broad smiles broke out. We stood still for a moment, and then wrapped our arms around each other. It had been an incredible climb, and it was a moment to savour. The most famous Alpine route in the world was ours.

The Team: Stuart Macdonald, Pete Rowlands (JSMTCL) and Kath Bromfield (Ogwen Cottage LEA Centre)

The Route: Eiger North Face, 1938 Route. ED2.

Footnote:

Stuart Macdonald is an Aspirant IFMGA Mountain Guide based in Chamonix, France. He is the AMA Chamonix Rep and is available for advice and guiding. More information can be found at www.stuartmacdonald.net.



Soaking up the history on the Eiger North Face.



NEVADA PEAKS

Definitely not North Wales!

By Sean Dinsdale

Nevada Peaks July 07 was a High Risk and Remote 10 day expedition I organised to take 7 phase 2 trainees and 2 other training staff from 2 Squadron, 11 Signal Regiment to the Sierra Nevada Mountains. The aims of the expedition were four-fold; to trek the 80 mile High Sierra Trail, summit the highest mountain in the lower 48 states of America, Mount Whitney 4,418m, to qualify the trainees with Summer Mountaineering Proficiency and to give the trainees new experiences in an alien environment enhancing their self reliance and endurance.

Training for the expedition began in rainy Wales at the Snowdonia National Park. This was essential as some of the trainees had never been in mountains let alone the wilderness. I and Cpl Whitehead (the expedition JSMELE) had our work cut out trying to teach the trainees all the essential knowledge to cope in the mountains.

We set off for America and flew from Gatwick Airport on

Friday the 13, there was a minus 8 hour time difference in Los Angeles, so it was an extremely long day. We arrived at the Sequoia National Park, California on the following Saturday afternoon after a marathon journey of trains, planes and buses. This was the home of the Giant Sequoia Tree's and our camp site for next few nights, called Lodgepole.

The following day was spent doing a short light trek into the forest to see the largest tree in the world called the 'General Sherman'. This was a truly enormous tree and it dwarfed all the other trees nearby. We spent the rest of the day trekking up to Moro Rock 2049m. This was a great advantage point with amazing views. It gave the group a chance to take a sneaky peek at the terrain at the start of the trail as it twisted into mountains and over the ridgeline into the wilderness.

Trekking Day 1

This was the start of the trekking phase of the High

Sierra Trail. We had a huge bergans on our back due to carrying 10 days food in our packs. Ouch. However the route on the first day was not difficult and spirits were high as we began trekking at last. The route began by contouring along a huge valley wall with amazing views across the valley. This continued all the way to Bearpaw Meadow 11 miles away. This was our first night out in the wilderness and the trainees were performing well.

Trekking Day 2

The next day was a shorter trek to Hamilton lakes. We made excellent time. This campsite was next to an enormous towering rock face called Valhalla, which was overlooking a picturesque blue lake surrounded by mountains. After reaching the campsite so early, we decided to carry on trekking to the next campsite, Big Arroyo Junction. This was a much more demanding leg for the trainees but they soon reached the saddle of Keweah Gap 3,261m, a little out of breath I might add. We

then dropped down the other side of the mountain into a forest on the valley floor to our campsite.

Trekking Day 3

We set off and immediately ascended the side of the valley back up the same height of the Keweah Gap again, however the group felt much better. We descended into the next campsite which was Morain Lake. This was a beauty spot surrounded by forests with high mountain peaks in every direction. This was a nice place for a swim, washing gear and cooking hot curry's.

Trekking Day 4

We began trekking through the forests and meadows, following the trail, till we reached a huge valley. The trail descended into the valley and as we did we felt the heat get more and more intense. Even though the valley floor was at 2050m, it was still very hot. After a couple of kilometres of uncomfortable trekking we arrived at our next campsite called Kern Hot Springs. This

campsite had its own natural hot spring. What a result! We all took turns in bathing in the hot spring bath tub during the late evening and morning. A bit of a rare luxury in the wilderness, that had not to be missed.

Trekking Day 5

A bit of a late start today, it seemed the hot spring had slowed the trainee's camp craft down to leisurely pace. After some swift motivating we were back on the trail and soon heading north along the valley floor to the next campsite, Junction Meadow. We used a satellite phone briefly to let camp know all is well and got our heads down early ready for an early start. Our intended route was up a huge re-entrant to the next campsite, Wallace Creek (3,267m).

Trekking Day 6

We were up before first light cooking breakfast on the campfire. We packed and left camp early. The trainees were on the trail by first light and it was much cooler at this time in the morning. We had climbed most of the day's altitude by the time the sun was directly on us. This was a surprise, as the altitude didn't bother the group thus far, it was the heat. We reached our

planned destination Wallace Creek by 1100hrs. After a short conversation we decided to continue to the next campsite as it was a rather easy leg and the group felt strong. We arrived in good time at Crescent Meadow (3,243m), it wasn't a difficult leg but it was a very hot trek. We also got our permit checked again by a Ranger who was passing by. He was on his way to Junction Meadow and Wallace Creek as a bear had been reported to be helping himself to trekkers' bergans in search of food. It looks like the bear didn't fancy British Army bergans much, as it may have been due to tall 6ft 4 man called Colin Deans strutting around in his green issue thermals all evening that put it off.

Trekking Day 7

It was decided to stay at Crabtree Meadow all day to help with acclimatizing and to get excess food eaten from legs we had doubled up on. It was over 3,000 meters at Crabtree but this is California and the sun was magnificent. A good rest day was had by all, washing gear and sunbathing stints. We planned to leave for the summit trek at last light as the group moved well at night at altitude and we wanted to see the sun rise

on the summit. After eating as much food as we could, leaving only the next day's food and emergency food, our bergans were beginning to feel much lighter, at last. We packed up camp and set off at last light. By midnight we had climbed half of the ascent to the summit. We reached an altitude of 3,700 meters. The group was travelling very slowly but everyone was feeling fine. We had no rush to make the summit and we didn't plan to either.

Trekking Day 8

We arrived at Trail Crest (4,130m) an hour ahead of schedule. We took off our bergans and cached them off the trail. We headed off for the Mount Whitney summit with our pre-prepared summit bags and water. This leg was 1.9 miles to the summit, the trainees had no idea of the views around them as it was still pitch black at 0300hrs. We arrived at the summit in good time before sun rise. The views that appeared were amazing and we were all in good shape considering we were at 4,418 meters. After some picture taking and posing for the camera we headed down the trail to collect our bergans and eat some breakfast.

The route down was long and

twisty. We had an alleged 96 or so switch backs to trek down and 11 miles to cover before we would finish the trek at the Whitney Portal. This was quite hard for the trainees but they kept going well and we reached our final destination at the Portal by 1125 hrs. Almost a full 7 days after stepping off from Creasant Meadow 80 miles away. We had trekked just shy of 20 miles through that night and summited our highest peak of the trek, the group felt very tired and we all ate very heartily at the Portal restaurant.

With all the phases of the expedition over, it was a short stay in a cowboy town called Lone Pine to see what a saloon looked like inside. Then it was off to Los Angeles to see what Hollywood have to offer. We spent a day roaming around the main attractions and the following day at Universal Studios. A good time was had by all especially the young trainees.

I would like to finish with a big thanks to Jason Whitehead (Exped 2IC), Andy Rea (Instructor) and to the seven phase 2 trainee Soldiers: Rhys O'Rourke, Kevin Smith, Liam Ibbetson, Ryan Docherty, Colin Deans, Broc Slinger, and Dan Andrews.



Scaring away the bears at Morain Lake.

"That's me!"

This month ARMY MOUNTAINEER takes a brew break with two AMA entrepreneurs and Army Climbing Team members Ollie Noakes and Rob Laurence.

Why a climbing wall?

Ollie: Fast cars and women and all the things that every climbing bum wants! Only Joking, it's not about the money (there's not much in it!), it's about a sustainable living in the climbing community; how many sports define your life? There are not many people who have the opportunity to make a living out of their hobbies, especially a hobby that can positively influence people's lives; IDwal climbing won't just be a climbing wall it will be leisure facility with a difference - climbing is a fun sociable form of exercise - Who wants to run on a treadmill in front of MTV every night?

IDwal?

Rob: Idwal is actually a Welsh name translating loosely to 'Lord of The Wall' It is also the name of a great climbing crag in Snowdonia where many people get their first lead and where the idea of our partnership was born; unfortunately it nearly ended there too - Ollie and I went to climb Appendicitis E3 5C but found it soaking wet, instead of going home we did the one next door only to find no real gear on the first 5C pitch and a finger thick sapling for a belay; Ollie was not best

I first met Ollie in 2004 at Tremadog; after hearing a howl coming through the trees below, my partner and I rushed down from our belay to find a very unhappy climber, sat down and nursing a twisted and obviously painful broken arm after an unfortunate fall from one of the notoriously slippery boulders. Now along with his business partner and fellow AMA member Rob they have formed IDwal Climbing and in spring 2008 are opening a national competition standard climbing wall in Cardiff, the first in the Welsh capital.

pleased when I shouted, "Do not fall off!" We chose to capitalise the ID so that it reads as an abbreviation of 'InDoor Wall'.

What facilities will there be?

Ollie: The wall is being built in a recently vacated church; this means that it is incredibly high compared to most walls, especially when considering it's city centre location; we are also really pleased that this grade II listed building won't be lost to the public. As well as a competition standard wall there will be a café, a shop, lecture room, physiotherapy suite, dedicated kids climbing area and much more.

Russ Sinclair has also promised to sing if there is a karaoke machine; whether we take him up on the offer is currently up for debate!

When does the wall open?

Rob: We have a grand opening planned for spring 2008; there will be some celebrity visits and lectures by some top climbers and a live broadcast by local radio stations as well as an introduction package open to non-climbers. Watch the AMA website for updates.

What would you say to somebody with a similar idea?

Rob: Speak to us first and we'll talk about a franchise!

Ollie: It has been a long hard year; this project has only been possible because of all the support we have received from friends buying us a beer when skint, maintaining our motivation and putting us in touch with lots of former military contacts now working in industry. Be prepared to make some sacrifice, no one has ever "made it" without; we have both sold our flats, given up on the guides scheme and jobs and now live in a rough estate with a drug dealer opposite, a DJ downstairs and an out of work (pregnant) prostitute upstairs; the locals aren't sure whether we are firemen or police after putting out a cannabis fire across the corridor in our suits!

Where do we find out more?

Rob: We have a website up and running so that people can get an idea of what we are about and view an architect's image of what the wall is



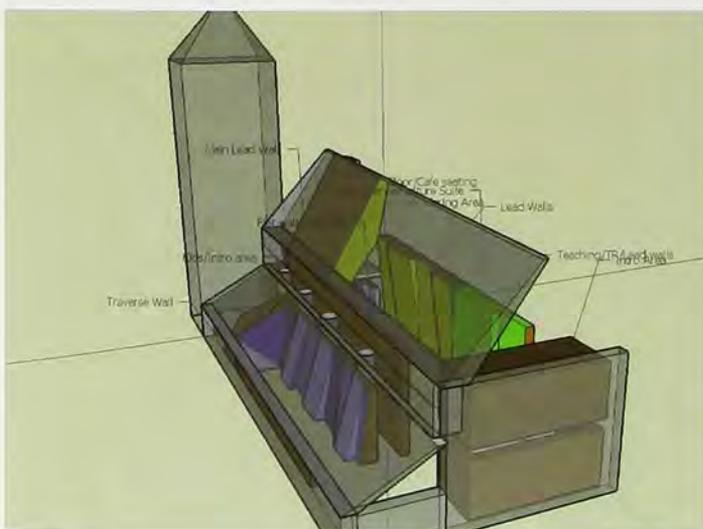
going to be like. Take a look at www.idwalclimbing.com

Top tip for climbing?

Rob: Put your hips in the right place - two grades harder I promise. P.S. I'm straight!

Ollie: Qualifications count for nothing; good judgement only comes from experience.

"Climb when ready!"



Climbing wall.





SAAB

multimat[®]
be comfortable sleep warm

www.**SUMMIT**
MOUNTAINEERING.com

*Thanks
to all the sponsors
that have made this
year's expeditions possible*

